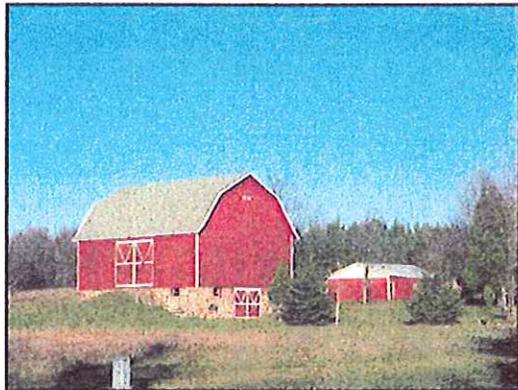
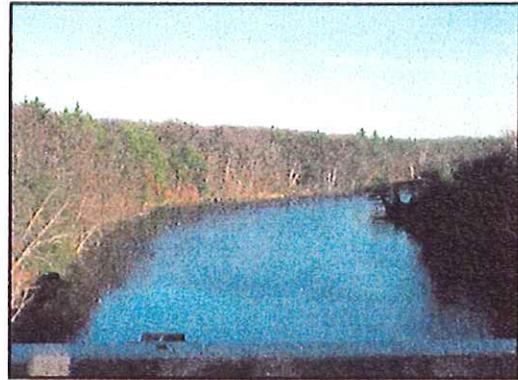


Mecosta County Master Plan



INTRODUCTION

The Mecosta County Master Plan is intended to guide the future growth and development of Mecosta County and its associated townships and municipalities over the next ten (10) to fifteen (15) years. The primary impetus for the development of this plan is the County's desire to ensure that the community continues to be a place which exemplifies all of the desired characteristics associated with a rural and agriculturally based lifestyle while simultaneously providing for measured growth and economic development. Mecosta County's agricultural history, abundant lake and river resources, recreational opportunities and existing natural features are some of the attributes which must be preserved and protected in the development of this plan.

The Master Plan will first define these issues most important to a community. An analysis of the existing features and defining characteristics of the County will be identified. The analysis will include a survey of existing land uses in Mecosta County, population, economic, and housing statistics, a description of the physical constraints and resources and circulation patterns of the community. Based on all gathered information and with input from citizens, goals and objectives will be created which outline the growth and development patterns of the community over the next ten (10) to fifteen (15) years. These goals and objectives will help create the future land use plan and circulation plan for the County. Finally, the implementation section will present some key strategies the County can use to meet its master plan goals and objectives.

By providing an outline for the development of Mecosta County, the citizens are attempting to preserve, protect and enhance the desirable attributes of the community for the future residents of the County.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Much information is available about the population of Mecosta County. The most comprehensive source of data is the U.S. Census. Updated 2010 Census figures, estimates and projections were available relative to several facets of the Mecosta County population. Where possible, this updated information is used to supplement the 1990 and/or 2000 Census data presented in the profile.

POPULATION TRENDS

In 2010, the population of Mecosta County was found to be 42,798. Of that amount, 33.1% (14,241) lived in urban areas (i.e. Big Rapids) and 66.5% (28,557) lived in rural areas of the County. The County saw the greatest amount of growth between 1970 and 1980, a 32% increase in population. Since that time growth has varied from less than a 1% increase up to 8.7%. In 2010 the population increased 5.5% from 2000.

Table 1: Mecosta County Population Estimates

1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	% Change 2000- 2010	2020	% Change 2010-2020
27,992	36,961	37,308	40,553	42,798	5.5%	45,152	5.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010

The 1990 through 2010 Census information also points to the fact that people are migrating to Mecosta County, primarily from other locations in the State of Michigan. This migration pattern is common in areas like Mecosta County that have abundant natural resources and amenities (i.e. lakes, rivers, streams, forests, etc.). These features make the community attractive to those persons seeking a high quality of living with abundant recreational opportunities. Mecosta County has become a desirable location for those wishing to retire, own a second home or recreational property, or locate away from the downstate urban areas.

It is also interesting to note that there are more males (21,487/50.2%) living in Mecosta County than females (21,311/49.8%) according to the 2010 U.S. census. This is somewhat unusual, but can be attributed to the fact that more males are attending Ferris State University than females. Most communities have slightly more female residents than male residents, which is commonly attributed to the fact that females tend to live longer than males.

Average household size for Mecosta County equaled 2.45 persons per household in 2010. This represents a slight reduction in household size from the 2000 Census, which reported an average household size of 2.49 persons per household and a 1970 Census figure of 3.06 persons per household. This mirrors the State and National trends in the overall reduction of the average size of a household.

It should be noted that as identified by the County’s 1980 Interim Land Use Plan, total population for Mecosta County was projected to be in excess of 47,000 persons by 1990. The anticipated double-digit growth in population during the 1980’s was not realized as evident by the 2010 Census population figures noted in Table 1.

REGIONAL POPULATION TRENDS

It is often beneficial to compare a community’s demographics with those of surrounding jurisdictions. Though geographically smaller than all but Osceola of the adjacent counties, how Mecosta County compares in context to its neighboring counties can assist planners and public officials in policy and land use decisions.

Table 2: Mecosta County Population Projections

County	1990 Population	2000 Population	2010 Population	% Change from 2000 to 2010	2020 Population (projected)
Mecosta	37,308	40,533	42,798	5.5%	45,152
Montcalm	53,059	61,266	63,342	3.4%	65,496
Newaygo	38,200	47,874	48,460	1.2%	49,042
Osceola	20,146	23,197	23,528	1.5%	23,881
Isabella	54,624	63,351	70,311	11.0%	78,045

Source: U.S. Census Bureau/Population projections based on most current population changes from 2000 to 2010

As Table 2 shows, Mecosta was the 2nd fastest growing County within the five County region and the second smallest in population second only to Osceola County. In 2010 Mecosta County ranked 40th out of 83 counties in the State of Michigan relative to total population.

AGE CHARACTERISTICS

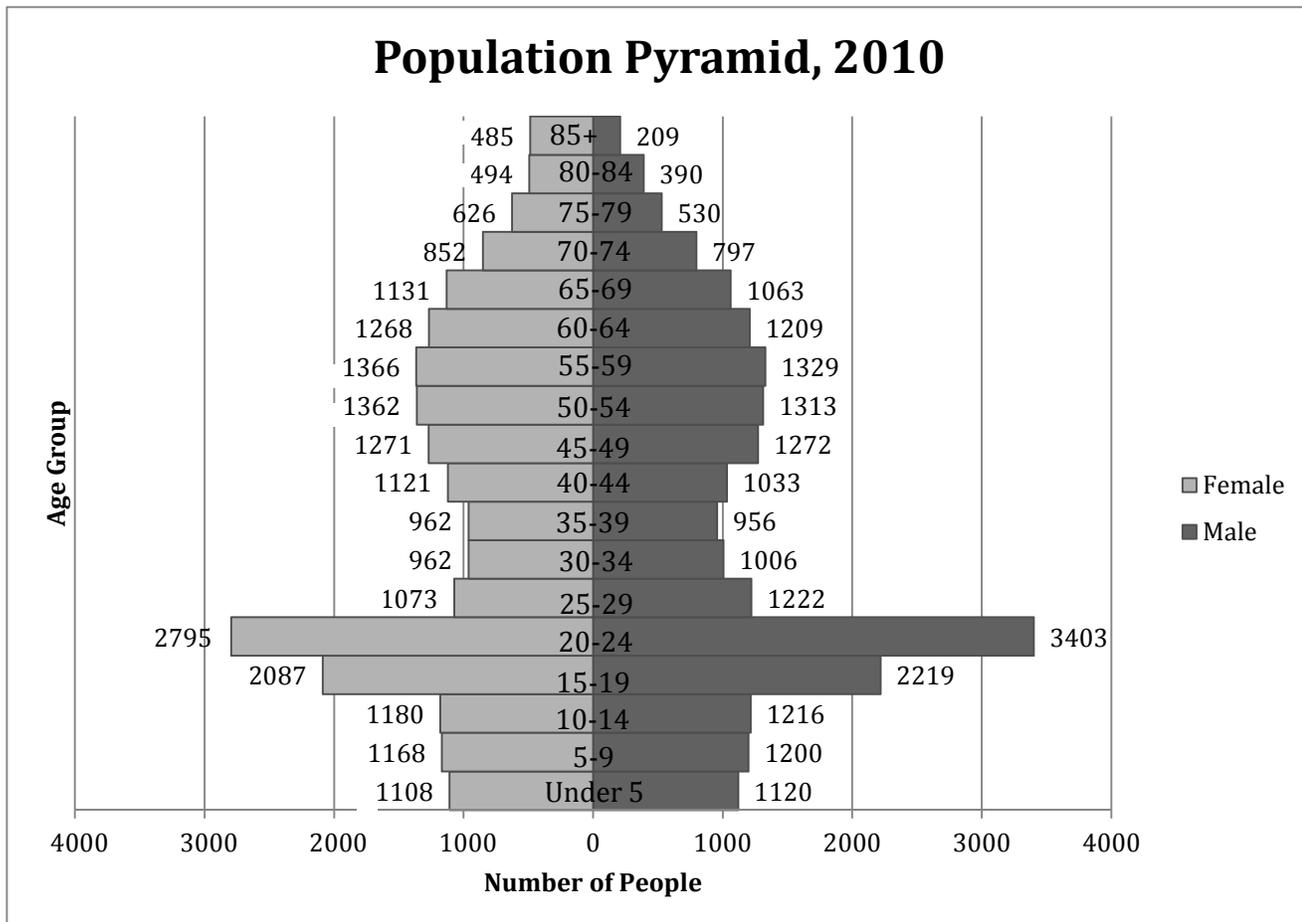
To better understand the population of Mecosta County it is necessary to examine the age breakdown of the population. This information is useful in predicting future community needs related to services like education, housing, and cultural amenities.

From the 2010 U.S. Census information, it is known that nearly 26.4% (11,928) of the population was under the age of twenty. Additionally, approximately 15.4% (6,577) of the population was 65 years of age and over according to the 2010 Census. The median age for the County was 30.0 years of age. This information indicates that Mecosta County is a fairly young community. However, it must be noted that Ferris State University accounts for a significant number of individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 that live in Mecosta County. Therefore, many of the services and amenities demanded by this younger population segment are provided in Big Rapids and not demanded throughout the County.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Ferris State University, with a 2013 enrollment of 14,707 students, is Michigan’s fastest-growing public university. Enrollment includes students on the main campus, the Kendall Art and Design College, and 16 additional off-campus centers. Ferris State University’s main campus in Big Rapids has a 2010 enrollment of 10,849 students. Students enrolled at Ferris State University represent a special population group and comprise approximately 25% of the total population of Mecosta County. This is the same percentage of the total population as reported in the County’s 1980 Interim Land Use Plan. Minority enrollment at Ferris was 15.14% in 2014 with an African-American enrollment of 7%. International enrollment was 3% of the student population in 2012. Ferris students represent every county in Michigan, nearly every state in the U.S., and dozens of countries worldwide.

In addition, the elderly population of Mecosta County is increasing as a percentage of the total population of the County. The median age of the County has steadily increased from 22.7 (1970), to 23.0 (1980), to 25.6 in 1990 to 30 years of age in 2010. This is further evident in the total population figures for persons over the age of 60 in 1980 (4,858), 1990 (5,702), and as estimated for 9,054 persons in 2010.



Source: US Census 2010

Finally, Mecosta County is home of one of the largest and most conservative Amish communities in the State of Michigan. Approximately 120 families reside in or near Stanwood and Morley. The Amish lifestyle precludes the ownership of electricity, telephones, or automobiles. The Amish support themselves through farming, sawmills, woodworking, contract services, and the production of crafts and baked goods. The Amish operate nine schools educating children through the eighth grade. Upon the completion of the eighth grade, the male children are taught farming skills and the female children learn homemaking skills. The Amish help support a feed elevator in Stanwood. This Stanwood feed elevator is the second of two elevators located in the County. The primary feed elevator is located in Big Rapids. New to the Amish community in the spring of 2010 was the Stanwood Produce Wholesale Auction, L.L.C. The addition of this to the community allows local Amish farmers to auction their produce locally.

Table 3 identifies the County's population by jurisdiction over the past forty (40) years.

Table 3: Mecosta County's Population By Jurisdiction					
Total Population (by community)	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Aetna Township	1002	1351	1622	2044	2,299
Morley Village (Aetna twp. portion)	297	312	328	310	306
Austin Township	509	898	1102	1415	1,561
Big Rapids, City	11995	14361	12603	10849	10,601
Big Rapids Charter Township	1687	2471	3100	3249	4,208
Chippewa Township	765	1009	1035	1239	1,212
Colfax Township	1267	1885	1915	1975	1,933
Deerfield Township	817	1032	1231	1630	1,816
Morley Village (Deerfield Twp. portion)	184	195	197	185	187
Fork Township	1094	1348	1395	1678	1,604
Barryton Village (Fork Twp. portion)	368	422	393	381	355
Grant Township	476	642	644	680	686
Green Charter Township	1808	2847	2833	3209	3,292
Hinton Township	725	855	995	1035	1,126
Martiny Township	756	1210	1348	1606	1,625
Mecosta Township	1444	1885	1966	2435	2,615
Stanwood Village (Mecosta Twp. portion)	241	209	174	204	211
Millbrook Township	819	947	1012	1081	1,113
Morton Township	998	1789	2122	3597	4,311
Mecosta Village (Morton Twp. portion)	396	428	393	440	457
Sheridan Township	616	1007	1020	1357	1,393
Wheatland Township	1214	1424	1365	1474	1,403
Total for Mecosta County	27,992	36,961	37,308	40,553	42,798

Source: U.S. Census 2010

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The population of Mecosta County is very well educated. 83.8% of Mecosta County residents over the age of 25 were classified as high school graduates or higher in terms of educational attainment in 2010. An additional 19.1% of Mecosta County residents held a bachelor's degree or higher in 2010. This information is relevant because it is indicative of the quality of the school system as well as the income of residents of Mecosta County. The relatively high level of educational attainment is quite likely also influenced by Ferris State University which is located in the City of Big Rapids.

CULTURAL MAKEUP

The vast majority of Mecosta County residents classified themselves as white in the 2010 U.S. Census. In fact, 93.7% or 40,095 individuals were classified this way. The most common first ancestries reported in 2010 for Mecosta County, by percentage were: German (26%), English (11%), U.S. or American (10%), Irish (9%), Polish (5%), Dutch (4%) and French (except Basque) (4%). The most prevalent ancestry claimed by residents in 1990 was German (13,205) followed by English (7,015) and Irish (5,734). The remaining 4% of individuals were classified as African American (978), American Indian (258), Asian-Pacific Islander (187) and other ethnic background (146). The ethnic heritage of the community was consistent with the racial composition as seen in the 1990 Census.

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

It is important to examine the housing stock in Mecosta County because it serves as an indicator of the quality of life for residents living in the community. Furthermore, housing information also acts as an economic gauge for the community and surrounding area.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

In 2012, there were 21,159 housing units in Mecosta County. Of this amount 15,695 units (76.2%) were occupied and the remaining 5,464 units (24.8%) were vacant. Higher owner occupancy is generally desirable as it suggests a stable population base, viable neighborhoods, and sufficient tax base. Mecosta County has a very high owner occupancy rate with relatively few rental units for the size of the County's population. In addition, many of the County's vacant units can be attributed to unoccupied second and vacation homes empty at the time of the 2010 Census.

Table 4 provides information about the age of the available housing stock

Year Structure Built	Number of Units
2010+	71
2000 to 2009	2929
1990 to 1999	3773
1980 to 1989	2675
1970 to 1979	3888
1960 to 1969	2229
1950 to 1959	1705
1940 to 1949	932
1939 or earlier	2957

Source: U.S. Census 2010

The housing units available in Mecosta County include mostly three bedrooms (43.4%). It is interesting to note that approximately 44% of the homes built between 1990 and 1999 were single wide premanufactured homes. Another 20% of the homes built during this period were double wide premanufactured homes. Relative to age, approximately 22% of the housing units in the County were built before 1950. Another 22.5% of the housing units in the County were built between 1950 and 1970. Housing construction dropped sharply during the 1980's due in part to a poor State and National economy and stagnant population growth, but saw a surge in the 1990's, which was similar to the rest of the U.S. This information is relevant when making subsequent recommendations in the County's final Master Plan.

HOUSING VALUE AND RENTS

The median rent in 2012 was \$668. In 2012, the median property value for owner occupied homes was \$112,500. Nearly half of the housing units in Mecosta County (43.2%) are valued between \$0 and \$99,999. Another 50.1% of housing units in the County are valued at between \$100,000 and \$300,000.

OTHER ASSOCIATED HOUSING RELATED INFORMATION

The majority of the housing units in the County (72.6%) are owner occupied and nearly as many (71.6%) are single family detached units (1). This is at the lower range of the desired ratio of single-family homes to rental units within the County. The County should strive to maintain a ratio of single-family dwellings to rental units of between two thirds (2/3) and three fourths (3/4) single-family units to ensure a stable population base. However, it should be noted that the majority of the rental housing in the County is concentrated in the City of Big Rapids and Big Rapids Township due to their urbanized nature and the location of Ferris State University area. Finally, approximately 74.2% of the housing units in the County are currently occupied. The remaining 25.8% are currently vacant. It is common to have in the neighborhood of 20% of a community's population migrate in any given year. A higher percentage of Mecosta County can be attributed to the transitory nature of the university's student population and related segments of the overall population.

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS

It is estimated that the number of households within the County has increased by 7.9% percent since 2000 from 14,915 households to approximately 16,101 households in 2010. This rate of growth is slightly less than the 10.7% realized nationally over the same period of time. Household growth is expected to continue increasing at a rate of 8% which out paces the expected national rate of 5.5%. This is due in part to increased population growth in the County, the continued decline in the number of persons per household, and the County's status as a recreational and retirement destination.

(1) U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

ECONOMIC PROFILE

BACKGROUND

Mecosta County's economic birth was established as the result of the growing lumbering industry. The Muskegon River was the catalyst to support the success of this industry. Today, the lumbering era has passed. In its place are manufacturing, industrial enterprises, and productive farming operations which help to sustain the economy. A major focus of economic development in Mecosta County in the last 10-15 years has been tourism and resort business.

EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The Mecosta County labor force consists of approximately 17,063 workers. According to the 2008-2012 Economic Census Mecosta County has:

- 36 – Manufacturing Establishments
- 16 – Wholesale Establishments
- 147 – Retail Establishments
- 369 – Service Establishments

The principal employers in Mecosta County are listed in Table 5. This table also indicates the type of product or service of each employer as well as the number of employees.

Table 5: Principle Employers In Mecosta County 2010

Firm	Employees	Product/Service
Ferris State University, Big Rapids	2112	Higher Education
Wolverine World Wide, Big Rapids	425	Safety and Military Footwear
Haworth	280	Office Furniture
Big Rapids Public School District	230	K-12 Public Education
Fluid Routing Solutions	320	Automotive Parts
Chippewa Hills School District	245	K-12 Public Education
Spectrum Health Big Rapids Hospital	550	Health Care
Morley Stanwood School District	132	Public Education
Federal Screw Works	130	Cold Formed Bolts
County of Mecosta	161	County Government
Leprino Foods	152	Mozzarella String Cheese
Simonds International	71	Wood Cutting Knives/Industrial Blades
Big Rapids Products	350	Metal Stamping
Pioneer Group	106	Newspapers/Phone Directories

Table 5: Principle Employers In Mecosta County 2010

Firm	Employees	Product/Service
City of Big Rapids	90	Government and Public Services/City Government
DTE/Michigan Consolidated Gas	68	Natural Gas Utility
MOARC Industries, Paris	206	Misc. Plastic & Metal Manufacturing
Consumers Energy, Big Rapids	51	Electrical Utility Company
Benedict Manufacturing	51	CNC Machining
Hanchett Manufacturing	10	Knife Grinding & Saw Sharpening Equipment
ANR Pipeline, Big Rapids	42	Gas Transitions/Storage
Flex Cable & Furnace Products	40	Welding Resistance Cables
United State Marble, Remus	70	Cast Synthetic Marble Products
Wal-Mart	310	Retail Department Store
Meijer	350	Retail Department Store
Ice Mountain	275	Bottled Water
Altercare of Big Rapids	130	Nursing Home
Metron	93	Nursing Home
Reith-Riley	80	Asphalt Paving
Trelan Manufacturing/Strong's	16	Tree Chippers
Big Rapids Box Company	10	Pallets
L.C. Concrete Products	6	Concrete
Lowe's	120	Home Improvement Retail
Hamtech	4	Metal Cutting Job Shop
Acme Propellers	7	Specialty Boat Propellers
Crossroads Schools	192	K-12 Charter School
NOCTI	33	
Crossword Schools	192	Charter K-12 School
Sacket Potatoes	40	
Aldi	12	Grocery Store

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

The Mecosta County unemployment rate has steadily gone down during the 1990’s. Despite this overall improvement, the unemployment rate has remained higher in Mecosta County than the State of Michigan in almost every year. This indicates that economy in Mecosta County is not quite as strong as the Michigan economy in general but remains at or below the national average. The following table compares the unemployment rates of Mecosta County, the State of Michigan and the Nation as a whole over the past ten years. Unemployment rose significantly from 2000 and 2010 and is much higher than the national average due to major recessions in Michigan and the United States.

Table 6: Unemployment Rate 1990-2010

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2010
Mecosta	8.3	9.5	8.5	6.8	6.3	5.4	5.3	4.7	4.1	4.1	3.7	12.2
MI	7.6	9.3	8.9	7.1	5.9	5.4	4.9	4.2	3.9	3.8	3.4	11.1
USA	5.5	6.7	7.4	6.8	6.1	5.7	5.3	4.9	4.5	4.2	4.1	9.1

Source: U.S. Census 2010

Table 7 identifies those persons in Mecosta County 16 years of age and older and the profession in which they were employed.

Table 7: 2012 Employment

Industry Sector of Employment	Number of Persons	% of Employment Persons Mecosta/Michigan	
		Mecosta	Michigan
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and mining	565	3.3	1.3%
Construction	834989	5.58%	4.9%
Manufacturing	2,0752,449	13.74	14.4% 24.616.9%
Communications and other Public Utilities	303	2%	2.1%
Transportation	363	2.4%	3.3%
Wholesale Trade	278276	1.86%	4.02.6%
Retail Trade Occupations	3,2292,429	21.39	14.2% 18.011.7%
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	566	3.7%	5.4%
Business and Repair Services	428	2.8%	4.7%
Personal Services	341	2.26%	2.7%
Entertainment and Recreating Services, Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodations & Food Services	2632041	1.74	12.0% 1.29.4%
Health and Educational Services and Social Assistance Services	9464952	6.26%	29.0% 8.9%24.0%
Educational Services	3,607	23.89%	8.6%
Public Administration	444375	2.94%	2.2% 3.8%3.8%

Table 7: 2012 Employment

Industry Sector of Employment	Number of Persons	% of Employment Persons Mecosta/Michigan	
Transportation & Warehousing & Utilities	586	3.4%	4.2%
Information	169	1.0%	1.7%
Finance & Insurance, Real estate & Renting & Leasing	565	3.3%	5.5%
Professional, Scientific, & Management & Administrative & Waste Management Services	955	5.6%	9.1%

Source: U.S. Census 2010

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

50% of the workers in Mecosta County have “white collar” occupations while 26.8% of workers in the County had “blue collar” occupations and the remaining 22.8% had other, predominantly service sector oriented occupations (2). The high percentage of “white collar” can be attributed in part to the location of Ferris State University within the County as well as the numerous governmental agencies such as the hospital, County government, and the Big Rapids government.

With the recent location of new industrial manufacturers to the Big Rapids industrial park and new retail centers such as Wal-Mart and Meijer entering the market over the past 15 years, the percentage of service industry and manufacturing “blue collar” workers will grow as a percentage of the total employment. Correspondingly, the percentage of “white collar” jobs will be reduced as a percentage of total employment even though the total number of “white collar” jobs will continue to grow. This is due to the relocation of executives and management professionals associated with new business and industry and the continued growth of Ferris State University.

INCOME AND POVERTY STATUS

In 2012, Mecosta County had a per capita (per person) personal income (PCPI) of \$19,184. This PCPI was seventy-five (75%) percent of the State average of \$25,547, and sixty-eight (68%) percent of the national average of \$28,051. The 2012 PCPI reflected an increase of 17.18 percent from 2000. The 2000-2012 State change was 15.65 percent and the national change was 29.94 percent. Therefore, even though the PCPI in Mecosta County is increasing, it is not maintaining pace with the nation as a whole, but is growing faster than the state, most likely due to the auto decline during the recent recession. The slower increase compared to the nation is due in part to the high concentration of university students who are traditionally classified as lower income students.

In 2012 it was estimated that there were 8,992 individuals living in poverty in Mecosta County according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This figure translates into 22.9% of the total population. For people under the age of 18, the incidence of poverty rose to 29.79%. Only 7.2% of those persons over the age of 65 are living in poverty. This is a reflection of the County’s status as a retirement and resort community with senior citizens having sufficient income for their later years. In 2012, the median income is estimated at \$38,332 (per household).

It should be noted that average income for Mecosta County is greatly influenced by the salaries of educational professionals employed by Ferris State University as well as the eight public school districts which serve residents of Mecosta County.

[2] Claritas Report, 2000

[3] Claritas Report, 2000

PHYSICAL CHARACTER – NATURAL FEATURES

The physical elements which make up Mecosta County are its natural resources. They include the geology, soil, topography, wetlands, water bodies, farm and forested lands as well as other characteristics of the County. An analysis of these resources is basic to planning, because each of these resources provide both the opportunities and constraints on land use development. To understand these resources and to use and manage them wisely, is the key to sound land use planning it is the intent of this section to provide that understanding by reviewing the characteristics of the County's natural resources (4).

GEOLOGY

Mecosta County was completely covered by a series of glaciers during the Pleistocene Epoch. These glaciers left deposits 450 to 825 feet thick on the original bedrock of shale and limestone. The present topography and soil material resulted primarily from the glacial deposits of the Wisconsin Glacier, which was the last glacier to cover this area and which melted approximately 12,000 years ago.

The Wisconsin Glacier had two lobes which affected Mecosta County. The Saginaw Lobe to the east and the Lake Michigan Lobe to the west came together where the Muskegon River is today. As the two lobes melted, they left undulating to sloping moraines throughout most of the County. The water flowing from these lobes formed an outwash plain about 2-3 miles wide. The Muskegon River now flows through this outwash plain. A second outwash plain was formed by water from the Saginaw Lobe. The Little Muskegon River and Chippewa River are now located in this 1 to 6 mile wide plain (5).

In addition, sand and gravel deposits were left behind by receding glaciers throughout the County more specifically in Green, Big Rapids, Aetna, Hinton, Morton, and Martiny Townships. In the eastern portions of the County, glacial Till Plain deposits were left as well as in Austin and Deerfield Townships. Glacial Moraine deposits created the line of hills, valleys and rolling lands found in central Mecosta County. Finally, large sections of ice which had broken away from the glaciers later formed the lakes existing currently in Chippewa, Martiny, and Morton Townships.

The high concentration and abundant availability of gravel deposits make Mecosta County an attractive location for mining and mineral extraction operations. As available deposits and mining decreases in other counties across the state, Mecosta County will experience increased pressure to tap this valuable natural resource. As mining and mineral extraction increases, the County should take precautions in the permitting and operating of these facilities to minimize detrimental effects to adjacent property and protect the area's environmental quality. Furthermore, the County must require appropriate reclamation of mined sites so as to return it to an attractive and functional property.

(4) 1980 Mecosta County Interim Land Use Plan

(5) 1996 Big Rapids Comprehensive Development Plan

CLIMATE VARIABLES

Mecosta County enjoys a relatively moderate climate. The County seldom experiences prolonged periods of either hot or humid weather during the summer or extremely cold weather during the winter. The County's growing season, important to its agriculturally based economy, typically lasts 128 days on average.

During the summer, the average minimum temperature is 56 degrees F and the average maximum daily temperature is 82 degrees F. Though extremely hot days are rare, the County does generally record eight (8) days above 90 degrees each year. Average rainfall during the year is about 35 inches with 18.6 inches, or 58% of this amount distributed during the typical crop season of May or October. Finally, thunderstorms occur on average 36 days each year, primarily during the months of June and July.

During the winter, the average minimum temperature is 11 degrees and the average maximum daily temperature is 28 degrees. In fact, 90% of the minimum temperatures between November and March fall below 32 degrees. The average snowfall during the winter is 65 inches. The County generally records on average 16 days where temperatures fall below 0 degrees F. In addition, due to the County's proximity to Lake Michigan, Mecosta County experiences occasional lake effect snow occurrences when the winds are out of the northwest.

The sun shines sixty-four (64%) of the time possible in the summer and twenty-one (21%) percent of the time possible in the winter. The prevailing wind is from the southwest and averages ten (10) mph.

SOIL TYPES

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has mapped the location of the various soil types found throughout the County and has created the Soil Survey of Mecosta County, Michigan. This book is a valuable resource for identifying the general characteristics of the soils found throughout the County. Features include the descriptions of the various soil classifications, yields per acre of crop, woodland management and productivity, sanitary facilities and physical and chemical properties of the soils are identified.

The survey is a general overview of the soil types and is intended for planning purposes. Site specific and construction purposes would require a specific scientific site analysis. The soil survey also groups various soils with similar statistics into associations. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has recently updated the soil classification for Mecosta County and has developed a digital database of this information. An updated computer digitized soils data map has been created as a component of this land use plan. In addition, the various county soil classifications have been grouped into eight soil associations in accordance to the Mecosta County Soil Survey for general reference.

SOIL ASSOCIATIONS

Perrington-Coloma-Ithaca
association:

Nearly level to steep, well drained, somewhat excessively
drained, and somewhat poorly drained, loamy and sandy soils

	that formed in glacial till or outwash deposits
Coloma Association:	Nearly level to steep, somewhat excessively drained, sandy soils that formed in glacial till or outwash deposits.
Remus-Spinks-Meta Association	Nearly level to rolling, well-drained, loamy and sandy soils that formed in glacial till deposits.
Marlette Association:	Undulating to rolling moderately well drained and well drained, loamy soils that formed in glacial till.
Mecosta Association:	Nearly level to gently rolling, somewhat excessively drained, sandy soils that formed in outwash deposits or glacial till.
Coloma-Covert-Thetford Association:	Nearly level to rolling, somewhat excessively drained, moderately well drained, and somewhat poorly drained, sandy soils that formed in outwash deposits or glacial till.
Wauseon-Arkona Association:	Nearly level or undulating, very poorly drained and somewhat poorly drained, loamy and sandy soils that formed in outwash deposits or glacial till.
Houghton-Adrian Association:	Nearly level very poorly drained, much soils that formed in organic material over outwash deposits.

WETLANDS & FLOOD PLAIN AREAS

There are an estimated 51,922 acres of wetlands in Mecosta County. Approximately 29,960 acres of the wetland area in the County is forested. In addition, 9,442 acres are covered with shrubs and 7,303 acres with other various vegetation. Approximately 5,490 acres of the wetland area is not covered in vegetation. A portion of the 52,000 acres of wetlands in the County have been artificially created as manmade flooding areas for recreational and environmental purposes. These include the Haymarsh State Game Area, Canadian Lakes and Martiny Lakes flooding projects. The latter two projects have attracted permanent and retirement residential development to the County. Other significant County wetland areas include those located in Austin, Morton, Sheridan, Grant, Colfax, and Big Rapids townships. The remainder of the wetland areas are primarily located in the flood plain areas and adjacent to the many lakes, rivers, and streams located within the County.

Wetlands, although viewed from a development and agricultural standpoint are generally considered as unproductive, useless, or wasted areas. Wetlands are actually extremely important to the County's environment. The various bogs, marshes, potholes and ponds serve as natural systems for pollution mitigation from agricultural runoff and urban development. In addition, wetlands serve as the primary

means of groundwater aquifer recharge. This is important due to the fact that the majority of the population of Mecosta County gets their drinking water from underground wells. Furthermore, wetlands provide necessary habitat for a diverse array of wildlife which are essential for breeding, nesting, feeding and providing protective cover. Finally, wetlands serve as an ecosystem’s regulator of surface water by absorbing water during very wet periods of the year and releasing water during dry periods. Wetlands over five (5) acres in size are protected by law and regulated by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. Smaller sized wetlands should also be protected through appropriate land management, site design, site plan review, and environmentally sensitive development.

Flood plains are located adjacent to rivers, streams, creeks, and lakes and are areas that are inundated with water during times of heavy rains or annual snow melt runoff. Flood plains serve as natural protection against flooding and are natural safety valves for the collection and removal of storm water and excess surface water within a watershed. Development in flood plains should be discouraged or prohibited if at all possible in order to minimize potential property damage and loss. Development within a flood plain will result in the further displacement of water and compound the flooding problem. Flood plains should be maintained as natural open space or utilized for low impact development such as parks, golf courses and other similar uses not incorporated substantial physical structures that would be subject to damage or displace water further. The National Flood Insurance Program identifies areas designated as potential flood prone areas and maintained a program in which property owners may purchase flood insurance if their property is located within a 100 year or 500 year flood plain. Mecosta County is greatly affected by flood plains based on the vast system of rivers, streams, creeks, and abundant lakes located within the County. The County should protect these areas from further encroachment by development in order to minimize property loss and the degradation of natural areas. Recent storms over the last few years have reinforced the importance of floodplain management. FEMA, DEQ and local jurisdictions are currently updating the floodplain maps and township ordinances where needed. The maps and ordinances should go into effect within the next year.

FOREST & WOODLAND RESOURCES

Virgin forest once covered almost all of the land in Mecosta County, but the trees have since been cleared from the land most suitable for cultivation and farming. In those areas remaining woodland, the soils are too wet, too sandy, or too steep for agricultural purposes. Woodland coverage currently occupies approximately 160,000 acres, or about 44% of the County. Maps #1-4 indicate that land use cover for Mecosta County including that land which is forested, wetland, farmed, or urban.

The following table outlines the general land cover by natural land use classification as identified by the Michigan State University’s Department of Forestry and Extensive Service as a result of a land cover survey completed in 1993.

Table 8: Natural Land Use Classification		
Land Use Classification (1993)	Thousands of Acres	Percentage of Total
Non-Forest Land	190.4	52.10%

Table 8: Natural Land Use Classification

Land Use Classification (1993)	Thousands of Acres	Percentage of Total
Timberland	163.4	44.70%
Reserved Timberland	0.0	0.0%
Other Forest Land	0.0	0.0%
Water	11.7	3.20%
Total Land & Water Area	365.5	100%

Source: Mecosta County MSU Extension

Table 9: Timberland Forest Type

Tree Species	Thousand Acres	Percent of Total
Jack Pine	4.3	2.65%
Red Pine	5.5	3.36%
White Pine	1.2	0.73%
Paper Birch	1.6	0.98%
Aspen	36.8	22.52%
Maple - Birch	71.5	43.76%
Elm – Ash – Soft Maple	23.9	14.63%
Oak-Hickory	13.5	8.26%
Northern White Cedar	3.8	2.32%
White Spruce	1.3	0.79%
Total	163.4	100%

Source: Mecosta County MSU Extension

The above table identifies the various species of trees located within Mecosta County. Forested areas are an important recreational, visual, economic, and cultural component of life in Mecosta County. Understanding the types of trees growing in the County, where they are located, how they are owned and managed will assist the County in preserving this important natural resource. Of the identified timberland located in Mecosta County, the following table outlines the ownership in which these wooded areas are held.

Table 10: Timberland Ownership

Timberland Ownership (1993)	Thousands of Acres	Percentage of Total
Private Individuals	128.6	78.70%
State of Michigan	20.7	12.67%
County or Municipal Ownership	7.1	4.34%

Table 10: Timberland Ownership		
Timberland Ownership (1993)	Thousands of Acres	Percentage of Total
Private Corporation	5.8	3.55%
Farmers	1.2	0.74%
Forest Industry	0.0	0.0%
National Forest	0.0	0.0%
Misc. Federal Owners	0.0	0.0%
Total	163.4	100%

Source: Mecosta County MSU Extension

As identified above, the vast majority (nearly 79%) of forested land within Mecosta County is held in private ownership by individual property owners. The second largest forestland holder is the State of Michigan with its various recreational and State Forest areas. This information assists the County Planning Commission and the Mecosta County Conservation District in its efforts to appropriately manage land use and development within the County. A reflection of the health of the County's forest and timber resources can be reflected in the amount of timber that is harvested on an annual basis. The following table describes the average annual harvested amounts by timber type in Mecosta County.

Table 11: Annual Net Average Removal of Timber 1980-1993		
Timber Type	Growing Stock Thousand Cubic Feet	Saw Timber Thousand Board Feet
Pine	0	0
Other Softwoods	25	135
Soft Hardwoods	767	1,872
Hard Hardwoods	131	242
Total	923	2,249

Source: Mecosta County MSU Extension

SURFACE AND GROUND WATER RESOURCES

Approximately 2% of the surface area of the County is covered with water in the form of lakes, rivers, ponds, streams, and creeks. This percentage increases to approximately 16% if wetlands and flooded areas are included in the calculation. This basic statistic has not changed significantly from the analysis of the 1980 land use plan. Major water resources are located throughout the County with the primary concentrations in the central (Canadian Lakes), northern (Martiny and Haymarsh Flooding Projects), and western (Muskegon River), areas of the County.

According to the MSU Extension Office, there are 399 lakes and ponds of various sizes located in Mecosta. The major lakes located within the County include Chippewa Lake, the Canadian Lakes chain, Mecosta, Blue and Round Lakes, School Section Lake, Horsehead Lake, and the Martiny Township lake chain including Tubbs, Evans, Lost, and Boom lakes among others. The combined area of all natural and

artificial lakes and ponds is estimated at approximately 8,827 acres. In addition, there are approximately 484 miles of rivers and streams meandering through the County. Major rivers systems within the County include the Muskegon River, Little Muskegon River, and Chippewa River. In addition, the County is located within three major wetlands. They are the Muskegon River Basin, Tittabawassee River Basin, and the Grand River Basin. From these three major watershed basins extends thirty-four (34) sub-basins within the County. The locating of Nestle Ice Mountain Water Bottling Facility in Mecosta County highlights the fact that the County has an abundant source of quality groundwater. In fact, though the City of Big Rapids has historically drawn its supply of municipal drinking water from the Muskegon River, it now draws from a new groundwater aquifer well field to serve the residents and customers of the Big Rapids municipal water system. Those County residents not otherwise customers of a municipal water system draw their water from wells, further tapping the County's abundant and clean source of groundwater. There has also been an increase in the number of Agricultural wells throughout the County.

Though generally abundant, care must be observed in the management and development of land within the County. The potential for surface and ground water pollution increases as development, particularly commercial, industrial, agricultural runoff, or animal feeding operations are expanded and new sites developed.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

MECOSTA COUNTY BUILDING

Located at 400 Elm Street in the City of Big Rapids, the current Courthouse and Administration building was constructed in 1970. The Mecosta County Building provides office space for a variety of governmental functions. The Mecosta County Board of Commissioners has its offices and conducts its meetings in this building. In addition, the Circuit Court, District Court, and Probate have court rooms and office space in the facility. Furthermore, the County Jail and Sheriff's offices, also constructed in 1970, are adjacent to the County Building. The jail and sheriff's office were renovated and expanded in 2000-2001 by approximately 1/3 in size to accommodate additional inmate capacity. Finally, the County Building also houses the offices of the County Clerk, Register of Deeds, Treasurer, and Equalization.

COUNTY SERVICES BUILDING

Completed in 1995, the Mecosta County Services Building houses the County Building and Zoning Department, Drain Commissioner, RSVP, Veterans Affairs, MSU Cooperative Extension Office, Emergency Management, District #10 Health Department, and facilities for the County's EMS ambulance services. The facility is located at 14485 Northland Drive in Big Rapids.

MECOSTA COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The office of the County Conservation District is located at 18260 Northland Drive in Big Rapids. The Conservation District works to protect and improve the environmental quality of Mecosta County through sound land use management practices by working with the agricultural community in soil conservation and farming practices and with communities and other local organizations devoted to protecting the County's water quality, forestry and wildlife resources.

OLD MECOSTA COUNTY JAIL AND SHERIFF'S RESIDENCE

Built in 1893, this historic structured was saved from demolition in 1975. The Old Jail is a public building restored and operated by the Big Rapids Historic Preservation Commission. Meeting rooms are available by reservation to individuals and community groups.

MECOSTA COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION GARAGE/OFFICES

The Mecosta County Road Commission operates an office and service facility located at 120 DeKrafft, in Big Rapids. The Road Commission also maintains garages north of Remus to service the east side of the County and near Morley to serve the south-central areas of the County. The Road Commission has jurisdiction over and maintains 1156.11 miles of primary and local County roads along with maintaining 301 Miles of State Trunkline for MDOT. The Road Commission is also responsible for the maintenance of the County bridges, culverts, and adjacent public road right-of-ways. The Road Commission has 38 employees and has an annual budget for all expenditures in 2014 of \$7,081,842.

MECOSTA COUNTY COMMISSION OF AGING / SENIOR CENTER

The Mecosta County Commission on Aging is a County supported agency providing various activities, programs, and assistance to senior residents of Mecosta County 60 years of age or older. The agency is located in the Senior Center facility located at 12954 80th Avenue. The agency's goal is to provide support for seniors in their effort to remain in their own homes, maintaining independence, health, dignity and self-respect. The agency provides home delivered meals, medical transportation, homemaker aides, respite staff, home maintenance workers, a public dining room, exercise classes and numerous other support services. The Commission on Aging and Senior Center has served over 800 clients in 2013.

The Senior Center provides a location at which residents can maintain healthy lifestyles by participating in recreational, educational, and leisure activities. The Senior Center and Commission on Aging encourages the community to share their skills while at the same time enriching their own lives through increased knowledge and volunteer experience. The Senior Center was visited by over 16,000 people in 2013.

MECOSTA COUNTY DRAIN COMMISSIONER

The Mecosta County Drain Commissioner's office is located in the Mecosta County Services Building, 14485 Northland Drive, Room 105, Big Rapids, MI 49307 and is open Monday-Friday; 8:30 a.m to 5:00 p.m.

The Drain Commissioner's office has jurisdiction for the maintenance of thirty-nine (39) County Drains and seven (7) lake levels. The Drain Commissioner's office is also responsible for enforcing the Michigan Drain Code of 1956, the construction, maintenance and inspection of all County drains, establishing drainage districts and the determination an assignment of drain assessments. In addition, the Drain Commissioner secures right- of- way and easements for County drains, represents the County drainage districts in court proceedings and reviews and approves all plats for subdivisions, manufactured home developments and site condominium projects in Mecosta County.

The Drain Commissioner's office has established a set of goals from which it seeks to improve its service to the residents of Mecosta County. These include inspecting all county drains, maintain and improve drainage to the best of our ability, assist County residents experiencing flooding problems and educate the community of the importance and responsibilities of the Mecosta County Drain Commissioner's office. Mecosta County Drain Commissioner's office is the County Certified Enforcement Agency (CEA) to administer Part 91 of PA 451, The Environmental Protection Act. We have been the enforcing agency since 2001. All employees in the Drain Commissioner's office are certified to issue Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control (SESC) permits and inspect projects.

The Drain Commissioner's office also oversees storm water management on commercial and industrial projects that are within a county drainage district or drain right-of-way. We also have the authority to review storm water if asked by a township that reviews and approves commercial and industrial sites.

The Drain Commissioner would like everyone to know that permits are necessary when proposing a crossing over a County drain right-of-way and occasionally when constructing within a drainage district. It is advisable for property owners to contact the Drain Commissioner's office when building in or adjacent to a County drain or drainage district.

SPECTRUM HEALTH BIG RAPIDS HOSPITAL

Located in the City of Big Rapids, Spectrum Health Big Rapids Hospital is a progressive 53 bed acute care facility licensed by the State of Michigan and accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. 38 physicians are on active staff plus 73 specialized physicians on courtesy staff. Approximately 500 people are employed both full and part time by the hospital. Inpatient areas include medical/surgical/pediatrics, critical care, inpatient rehabilitation, and obstetrics. In 2013, 2,807 people were admitted for inpatient treatment and services. In addition, there were over 650 births at Spectrum Health Big Rapids Hospital in 2013. There were also 14,468 home care visits and 23,837 emergency department visits.

There were approximately 460,000 outpatient visits including, laboratory, x-ray, ultrasound, nuclear medicine, physical therapy and ambulatory surgery services in 2013. There are regularly scheduled specialty clinics for audiology, cardiology, dermatology, neurology, oncology, orthopedics, otolaryngology (ear, nose and throat), sleep medicine and urology.

Educational opportunities abound for the community from C.P.R. classes, prenatal classes, diabetes education classes, nutritional counseling and many support groups. Numerous hospital personnel are available to speak to community groups and organizations. Spectrum Health Big Rapids Hospital works closely with the community, businesses and industry to provide quality health care services. Spectrum Health takes great pride in its mission to improve the health of the communities we serve. [6]

BIG RAPIDS CITY HALL

Big Rapids City Hall is located at 226 North Michigan Avenue, which houses the administrative offices of the City, including: City Manager, Clerk, Treasurer, Public Services, Assessing, Transportation, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services. The Police and Fire departments are located at 435 N. Michigan Avenue.

TOWNSHIP HALLS

Each of the sixteen (16) townships maintains a township hall at which they conduct and hold their monthly meetings. Big Rapids, Mecosta, and Morton Townships provide their own building and zoning services. Many of the townships offer clean-up days, which allow citizens an opportunity to remove large items, scrap, and household goods at a low cost.

(6) Information provided by Spectrum Health Big Rapids

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Mecosta County is serviced by seven different public school districts. However, the three school districts with facilities located within Mecosta County serve over 90% of the children in the County.

CHIPPEWA HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT

The largest of the three school districts in Mecosta County is the Chippewa Hills School District. A consolidation of smaller districts, Chippewa Hills covers the north-central and eastern sections of Mecosta County. Chippewa Hills has an enrollment of 2,181 students and employs 318 people. The school district does not have readily available information relative to the number of students who reside outside of Mecosta County.

BIG RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The second largest district in the County is that of Big Rapids Public Schools. The Big Rapids District employs 361 people and has an enrollment of approximately 1,946 children from the City of Big Rapids and surrounding townships in the northwestern corner of Mecosta and northeast Newaygo Counties. Big Rapids does not track how many students are enrolled from outside of Mecosta County. Recently the district has added a virtual high school to provide another avenue and resource for students to receive their high school diploma.

MORLEY STANWOOD COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Morley-Stanwood Community School District serves 1,203 students in the south-central and western Townships of Mecosta County and the Villages of Stanwood and Morley. The school district employs 197 people.

LAKEVIEW COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Lakeview Community School District is located in the City of Lakeview in Montcalm County and its service area includes parcels located in southeastern Mecosta County. Lakeview Community Schools employ 242 people and has an enrollment of approximately 1,268 K-12 grade students.

MONTABELLA COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Montabella Community Schools are located south of Mecosta County in Montcalm County. The Montabella School District serves some southern property owners of Mecosta County. Montabella Community Schools employ 214 people and has an enrollment of approximately 830.

REED CITY AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Reed City Area Public Schools are located in Reed City, which is located in Osceola County directly north of Mecosta County. The district employs 283 people and has an enrollment of approximately 1,514 students. Though specific numbers are unavailable, students attend Reed City Area Schools while residing in Osceola, Lake, Mecosta and Newaygo Counties.

EVART PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Evert Public School District is also located in Osceola County and has a K-12 enrollment of 923 students. The Evert School District employs 169 people. The school district does not disseminate between Osceola and Mecosta County students.

CROSSROADS CHARTER ACADEMY

Crossroads Academy is a Charter School located in the City of Big Rapids. It has 678 total students and employs 192 people. The School offers K-12 enrollment.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The remainder of the County's children are serviced by five private K-8 elementary schools, and one K-12 private school. In addition, the County is home to seven Amish K-8 schools, mostly located in Southern Mecosta County.

INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

The four Mecosta County based school districts belong to the Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District which operates a Career Center within Mecosta County providing 14 career and technical programs to high school juniors and seniors. The intermediate school districts were created to provide specialized instruction on a regional level that could not otherwise be provided by an individual school district. These services include instructional opportunities for gifted and disabled children, early childhood programs, vocational and career related skills.

LIBRARY SYSTEM

The Big Rapids Community Library is located at 426 S. Michigan Ave. in the City of Big Rapids. The library serves a city population of approximately 10,601 people. The library also has library service contracts to serve 9,424 residents of Big Rapids, Colfax, Grant, and Green Townships in Mecosta County as well as Barton and Norwich Townships in Newaygo County. This results in a total service population of 20,025, classifying the Big Rapids Community Library as a class four library by the State of Michigan. This service population number does not include Ferris State University community, which accounts for about 5% of the library's annual circulation.

The Big Rapids Community Library participates in the Michigan Electronic Library Catalog (Mel Cat) program. This program allows city and township residents to order materials from libraries across the state of Michigan at no cost. The library is also a part of the Ferrisnet Organization. This membership enables the Big Rapids Community Library cardholder to make use of the materials at the Ferris State University Library, and for FSU faculty, staff, alumni, emeriti, and students to use their Ferris I.D. to borrow materials at the Big Rapids Community Library.

The materials collection available at the library contains approximately 55,000 items. This includes books, eBooks, audio and video materials as well as magazines, microfilm, and microfiche. On average, the Big Rapids Community Library adds 2,500 items to its collection each year.

Services that the library offers include:

- The Homebound Delivery Program- the library delivers books, audio books, movies and magazines to individuals who are homebound due to injury, physical disability, or age.

- Summer Reading Program- the library offers programs between the months of June and August to Mecosta County residents to promote literacy. The library also provides community enriching programs for adults and children throughout the rest of the year.

- Internet Services- the library offers free wireless internet access and public computers, as well as faxing, scanning, and copying services at a low cost.

Library usage statistics indicate that nearly 70,000 people visit the library each year. The library also circulates about 80,000 items each year.

The Big Rapids Community Library is a place that can transform lives. Through the services available at the library, individuals can learn new skills, become educated about a specific subject, apply for a job online, help children with homework, save money, and improve their quality of life.

In addition to the Big Rapids Community Library, other independent libraries that exist in Mecosta County include Barryton Public Library in Barryton, Wheatland Township Library in Remus, Morton Township Library in Mecosta, as well as the Walton-Erickson Library in Morley, each of these libraries service their respective communities.

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1884 by Michigan Educator and statesman Woodbridge N. Ferris, the University has developed a modern, 600 acre campus in the City of Big Rapids and Big Rapids Township. The University has successfully lobbied for state and private funding for a great deal of construction and improvement over the last several years, including The East Campus Apartments and the Jim Crow Museum. The university has also done demolition for future growth projects and upgrades to existing buildings, infrastructure and grounds, spending approximately \$20 million per year for the last five years.. Ferris offers more than 170 educational programs, including associates, bachelors and masters degrees, and doctorates from its highly regarded College of Pharmacy and Michigan College of Optometry.

Ferris State University is home to the National Elastomer Center, which combines more than 30 years of plastics experience with the nation's first rubber technology program. The best known and only university based bachelor's degree program in HVACR (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration) is found at Ferris, as well as outstanding programs in such diverse areas as criminal justice, professional golf management and surveying engineering. In January 2001, a merger between Ferris and the Kendall College of Art and Design became official, giving the University strong expertise in the fine arts, as well as industrial, interior, and furniture design. Furthermore, in the fall of 2001, Ferris began offering its first ever Bachelor of Arts degrees in English, History, and Sociology.

Ferris State University employs approximately 2,103 full and part-time employees and 2,000 student employees. The University ranks as the largest employer in Mecosta County with a total payroll in excess of \$60 million dollars each year. In addition, Ferris' more than 200 registered student organizations devote hundreds of hours of community service with such activities as painting homes, helping build affordable housing, organizing holiday food and gift drives and raising money for charitable organizations.

MECOSTA COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM

The Mecosta County Park Commission operates five parks within the County offering a variety of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. The Park Commission has developed a five year plan for park and recreation improvements that was adopted in the winter of 2013 as the Mecosta County Park Commission Recreation Master Plan for 2014-2018.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Brower Park | Located four miles west of Stanwood (ten miles south of Big Rapids) on the Muskegon River, Brower Park provides access to 18 miles of navigable waterways along the backwaters of the Hardy Dam. The park is in excess of 200 acres and includes almost 8000 ft. of frontage on the Muskegon River. The park provides 230 campsites, 10 camp-n-cabins, fishing, swimming, and boating access. |
| School Section Lake Veteran's Park | Located two miles west of M-20 at the intersection of 9 Mile Rd. and 90th Avenue, School Section Lake Park provides 86 acres of recreational activities. The park includes 167 modern campsites and five camping cabins along with a large picnic area with shelters and a sandy beach. The park also has a Family Group Camp with six rustic cabins and a main lodge housing a kitchen and dining area. The park is approximately 6 miles west of the Village of Remus and is centrally located within Mecosta County. |
| Paris Park | Located on old US-131 six miles north of Big Rapids, Paris Park is the former site of the Old Paris State Fish Hatchery. The park has 40 wooded acres and is located adjacent to the Muskegon River. The park includes 68 campsites, picnic areas, three camp-n-cabins and two canoe or small boat launches. |
| Merrill-Gorrel | Located 3 miles north of Barryton off of M-66, approximately five miles south of US- |

Campground	10. Merrill-Gorrel Campground offers frontage on two lakes and has 147 campsites on 90 acres. The park includes two beaches, two play areas, four picnic shelters, four camp-n-cabins and two boat launches.
Tubbs Lake & Haymarsh Campgrounds	These are primitive campgrounds located adjacent to the State Game Area and provide rustic camping, hunting and fishing opportunities.
DNR Boat Launches	There are fifteen (15) public access sites along the Muskegon River and inland lakes providing boating access and fishing opportunities.

WHITE PINE TRAIL STATE PARK

White Pine Trail State Park is the longest rail-to-trail corridor in Michigan. Comstock Park is the southern terminus in Kent County and Cadillac is the northern terminus in Wexford County. The trail extends for 41 miles between Big Rapids and Cadillac and the Big Rapids to Reed City portion is paved. The trail traverses a five County area (Kent, Montcalm, Mecosta, and Wexford) and ranges in width from thirty-six (36) to two hundred (200) feet wide with an average width of one hundred (100) feet. The trail has fourteen (14) open deck bridges with the largest (White's Bridge) spanning 319 feet long over the Muskegon River, just one mile north of the City of Big Rapids. White Pine Trail offers year round recreational opportunities with snowmobile and cross-country skiing in the winter months and biking, hiking and in-line skating the remainder of the year. The trail is barrier-free and the surface is either asphalt or natural ballast and gravel depending on the location.

WASTE MANAGEMENT FACILITIES

The Mecosta County Solid Waste Management Plan was adopted in 2001 and relies entirely on transporting the County's waste to outside landfills. The 1980 Interim Land Use Plan for Mecosta County references a 40 acre landfill located near Rodney along M-20 which has since ceased operating. The County still owns the former municipal land fill site.

Currently, solid waste generated in Mecosta County is transported to either a disposal site in Harrison in Clare County or in Pierson in Montcalm County. Hazardous materials are transported to a hazardous materials waste site located in Coopersville in Kent County. Finally, Recycle Mecosta provides a recycling service for paper, glass, styrofoam, metal, and plastic at its facility located in Big Rapids. In 2011 the residents of Mecosta County recycled 890 tons.

UTILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

ELECTRIC

Consumers Energy provide electrical service to Mecosta, Fork, Green, Deerfield, Colfax, Hinton, Aetna, Millbrook, Morton, Austin, Sheridan, Wheatland, and Martiny Townships.

Great Lakes Energy provides electrical services to the City of Big Rapids, Big Rapids Township, Austin, Chippewa Townships and portions of Aetna, Deerfield and Mecosta Townships.

Consumers Energy and Tri-County Electric provides services in the City of Big Rapids, and Sheridan, Chippewa, Aetna, Morton, Millbrook, Austin, Fork, Martiny, Green, Colfax, Grant, Deerfield, Wheatland, and Mecosta Townships.

NATURAL GAS

Consumers Energy and DTE Energy (formerly Michigan Consolidation Gas and Detroit Edison) all provide natural gas service to communities within Mecosta County with coverage and service to most of the County's Cities and villages. Many of the rural residents rely on individual propane tanks, woodstoves, boilers, or some other form of alternative heat.

COMMUNICATIONS

TELEPHONE

Frontier Communications (formerly GTE & Verizon), SBC (formerly Ameritech), Blanchard Telephone and Century Tel are among the various providers of local telephone service in Mecosta County. With the deregulation of long distance telephone service, many different national carriers service Mecosta County for long distance telephone service.

WIRELESS COMMUNICATION TOWERS

Currently there are 22 wireless towers located in Mecosta County. These towers provide both internet and cell phone support. With the growing reliance on cell phones and internet it will be important for Mecosta County to continue to support, where appropriate, this vital infrastructure in the future. This will help to encourage economic growth in our rural areas.

TRANSPORTATION

ROBEN-HOOD AIRPORT

Located in the Northwest corner of the County along Business US-131 and 18 Mile Rd., Roben-Hood Airport is a Class A commercial airport owned and operated by the City of Big Rapids. The airport has

two runways. The primary east/west runway is a 4,300 foot concrete runway. Though the airport currently does not offer passenger service, the airport does service daily flights from national freight companies as well as corporate, charter and recreational flights (10).

The City has long range plans to add a passenger terminal at the airport and to extend the east/west runway to 5,300 feet to accommodate larger aircrafts. Facilities for corporate and general aviation hanger are also planned.

Additional private air strips are located in Morton and Mecosta Townships and the Village of Mecosta.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Two publicly owned bus systems operate in the County.

The Mecosta Osceola Transit Authority (MOTA) has operated since 1978 and provides modified fixed-route, contract, and demand-response curb-to-curb public transportation throughout Mecosta and Osceola Counties. In FY2013, the system provided over 66,000 one-way trips within the service area, with over 3,400 trips provided for senior citizens, and almost 49,000 trips provided for individuals with disabilities. MOTA operates from 5:00 AM to 6:00 PM Monday through Friday utilizing a fleet of ten (10) lift-equipped vehicles.

The City of Big Rapids' Dial-A-Ride Public Transit System provides "demand response" curb-to-curb bus service within the city Monday through Friday 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM, and on Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Dial-A-Ride also offers contract bus services to groups or organizations in the Big Rapids community that might have special transit needs. Since 1976, over two million passengers have used Dial-A-Ride as their means of public transportation.

PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES

MECOSTA/OSCEOLA CENTRAL DISPATCH (EMERGENCY 911) SYSTEM

A Central dispatch system for Mecosta and Osceola Counties is located on Northland Drive north of the City of Big Rapids in the unincorporated Village of Paris and is operated by a full time director and staff providing central dispatching of all law enforcement, fire, and medical services within the two counties.

Meceola Central Dispatch employs 18 full time and 1 part time people. Dispatch routinely answers over 35,000 911 emergency calls per year, and over 150,000 non-emergency calls per year.

MECOSTA COUNTY EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE

The Mecosta County Emergency Medical Service operates from the Mecosta County Services building located on Northland Drive in Big Rapids Township. Mecosta EMS also maintains ambulance dispatch facilities at two satellite facilities, one on M-66 between Remus and the Village of Barryton and the second on 5 Mile Road near the community of Altona. The department maintains a fleet of three full time and two spare ambulance vehicles, which responded to over 4,416 runs in 2013. The department employs 34 employees and administers the Medical First Responder program covering seven agencies across Mecosta County. Also housed in this office is the Medical Examiner for the County and Emergency Management, which is charged with preparing and responding to emergency situations.

MECOSTA COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENTS

BIG RAPIDS FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Big Rapids Fire Division is made up of 9 full time fire fighters and 15 paid-on-call fire fighters. The full time fire fighters are assigned to three 3 person shifts. All full time fire fighters are trained and certified as Medical First Responders. The Fire Division covers the entire City of Big Rapids, Ferris State University, Green Township in Mecosta County, and Barton and Norwich Townships in Newaygo County including parts of the Manistee National Forest covering a total of over 100 square miles.

TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENTS

Barryton Fire Department	Located in the Village of Barryton, the Barryton Fire Department serves the Village, Fork Twp. and the northern half of Sheridan Twp. with two engines, one tender, and two grass rigs manned by a staff of volunteers.
Big Rapids Twp. Fire Dept.	With a single station located south of the City of Big Rapids on Northland Drive, the Big Rapids Fire Department serves the residents of Big Rapids Township and portions of Mecosta and Colfax Townships. The Big Rapids Township Fire Department is manned by a staff of volunteers who are responsible for maintaining the

department's two pumpers, one tender, rescue unit and grass rig. The department responds to over two hundred calls a year.

- Chippewa/Martiny Fire Dept. Located in the unincorporated Village of Chippewa, the Chippewa/Martiny Fire Department serves Chippewa and Martiny Townships with a volunteer staff and single station.
- Colfax Fire Department With its station located at the intersection of M-20 and McKinley Roads, the Colfax Fire Department serves both Colfax and Grant Townships.
- Lakeview Fire Department The Lakeview Fire Department is based in the City of Lakeview which is located south of Mecosta County in Montcalm County but provides fire services to the residents of Hinton Twp. in Mecosta County.
- Mecosta/Austin Fire Dept. With a facility recently built in 1998, the Mecosta-Austin Fire Department serves the residents of Mecosta and Austin Townships with a volunteer force.
- Millbrook/Rolland Fire Dept. The Millbrook/Rolland Fire Department has stations in both Isabella and Mecosta County. The fire department dispatches from the central dispatch center of Isabella County and serves the residents of Millbrook Township. The Millbrook Fire Station is located in the unincorporated Village of Millbrook in Mecosta County and is staffed by a contingent of volunteer fire fighters.
- Morley Fire Department The Morley Fire Department operates from a single station located in the Village of Morley and is operated by a staff of volunteer fire fighters. The department maintains a fleet of two engines, one tender, one light rescue vehicle and two grass rigs. The Morley Fire Department serves the Village, Aetna Twp. and Deerfield Twp.
- Morton Twp. Fire Dept. With a single station located at the intersection of 100th Avenue and Buchanan Road, the Morton Township Fire Department serves the residents of Morton Township including the majority of the Canadian Lakes Resort community.
- Wheatland Twp. Fire Dept. The Wheatland Township Fire Department operates from a single station located in the central business district of the unincorporated Village of Remus. This volunteer organization serves the residents of Wheatland Township and the Southern half of Sheridan Township.

MECOSTA COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

BIG RAPIDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Big Rapids Police Department is a division of the city's Public Safety Department and employs seventeen (17) police officers among its ranks. In addition to law enforcement activities, the department offers programs such as the Neighborhood Officer Program, Student Explorer Program, School Liaison Program, and Service Officer Program. The offices of the Police Department are located at 435 N. Michigan Avenue in Big Rapids.

MECOSTA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

The Sheriff's Department has the following mission statement: "The Mecosta County Sheriff's Office is committed to preserving, promoting, and securing a feeling of safety and security for all our citizens through the delivery of the highest quality of law enforcement services."

The Sheriff's Office provides such services as:

A County Jail: The County jail houses up to 97 inmates with a staff of 4 Sergeants and 16 full time Correctional Officers. For the past several years the jail has received the highest rating by the State of Michigan Dept. of Corrections on its annual inspections.

Law Enforcement Division: This unit consists of 20 State certified Law Enforcement Officers who are trained to respond, investigate, and prepare for prosecution of all crimes committed in Mecosta County. 4 Sergeants, and 16 Patrol Deputies with most Deputies specially trained in areas such as Crash Investigation, Fire Investigation, School Liaison, Crime Scene Investigation, Neighborhood Watch Coordination, Civil Process, and 2 Sergeants assigned exclusively to the Detective Division.

Marine Division: This Division is staffed by up to 12-14 part-time Deputies that patrol 10 major lakes and the Muskegon River with 3 boats and 2 personal watercrafts. Funding for this unit is provided by a Federal Grant administered by the MDNR. The Marine Division also hosts 4 Boater Safety courses throughout the summer in the Mecosta County Parks.

Community Corrections: Programs offered through this program include: residential services, jail work crews, community service placement, intensive day reporting, Livescan fingerprinting, and court ordered tether monitoring. Community Corrections is staffed by 1 full-time and 1 part-time employee.

Animal Control: 1 full-time Animal Control Deputy covers the entire County of Mecosta. The Animal Control Officer is responsible to respond to dog complaints and dangerous major animal complaints.

Posse: The greatest resource any community can have is its volunteers. The Posse assists both the Sheriff's Office and community with support for special events and emergency services.

Dive and Hovercraft Teams: The Dive Team consists of both Deputies and Officers from Big Rapids Department of Public Safety. They respond to calls for emergency and recovery in the county and assist other counties when requested. The Hovercraft Team is comprised of volunteers from most of the Township Fire Departments that respond to emergencies such as major flooding, ice covered and open water emergencies.

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENT

Ferris State's Department of Public Safety employs fourteen (14) police officers, certified by the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards. Public Safety is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Public Safety is located at 800 Ferris Drive, Big Rapids, Michigan 49307. Ferris State University also employs approximately 75 students including booth attendants, dispatchers, service officers, foot patrol, traffic control, and special events security.

MICHIGAN STATE POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Michigan State Police operate out of a detachment center in Morton Township. The County is also served by two posts in very close proximity. The Reed City post is located a short distance north of the Mecosta County/Osceola County line near US-131 in Reed City. A second post is located in the City of Lakeview just south of Mecosta County in Montcalm County. Additional posts are located in Mt/ Pleasant to the east in Isabella County in the City of Newaygo to the west in Newaygo County.

CIRCULATION PLAN

Perhaps the most significant effort relative to transportation planning since the completion of the previous County master plan has been the construction and completion of the US-131 Expressway through Mecosta County. Completed in 1986 through the entire County, the US-131 Expressway provides a direct link to Grand Rapids to the south which is the second largest metropolitan area in the State of Michigan and the City of Cadillac to the north. The increased accessibility and improved travel ties have made travel easier for residents to access adjacent metropolitan areas and for visitors to travel to Mecosta County.

This section summarizes the existing traffic conditions and data, identifies current roadway improvement plans and outlines traffic related guidelines the County should consider that will help maintain an efficient and safe roadway system in the future.

ROAD CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

As part of the planning process, it is important to identify the function of the roadways that make up the County's system. Identification of road classifications assists in the determination of providing recommendations for appropriate land uses and zoning code standards along the various routes. Implementation of capacity and access management standards help preserve the public investment and maintain an efficient vehicular transportation system. The functional classifications of roadways within Mecosta County are briefly noted below.

FREEWAYS

The function of this type of roadway is to facilitate the through movement of traffic on a regional basis between communities and other major activity centers. Expressways of this type are designed to provide the highest level of mobility, usually traveling at speeds ranging from 55-70 mph. Since mobility to through traffic is its primary function, access to this type of roadway is limited. Four interchanges are provided in the County for access to US-131 which runs North and South along the far western side of Mecosta County. No other expressways or freeways are planned for Mecosta County. US-131 is under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

STATE TRUNK LINES

These major routes are also under the jurisdiction of MDOT and are primarily for the movement of regional traffic between communities but also provide limited direct access to adjacent properties. M-20 and M-66 are at the at-grade state highways that provide the through route road system in the County. M-20 runs East and West through the County and connects the City of Big Rapids with the unincorporated community of Remus running through the village of Mecosta. M-66 runs North and South through the far eastern quarter of the County through the incorporated Village of Barryton and the unincorporated community of Remus. Old US-131 runs North and South parallel to Highway US-131 and directly connects the Villages of Morley, Stanwood, the City of Big Rapids, and Paris.

COUNTY PRIMARY ROADS (CLASS A OR B)

County primary roads are those that serve longer trips within urban areas to link adjacent population centers and major arterials. County primaries are designed to accommodate moderate to large traffic volumes dependent upon their overall design and construction. Speeds on these roadways are usually in the 35-55 mph range. Access to adjacent development is usually provided although some constraints regarding the design of a particular road may affect the extent of available access. Primary roads are designated as either Class A (all weather or seasonal) or Class B (seasonal) roads. Examples of County Primary roads include 23 Mile Rd., Hoover Rd., 21 Mile Road, 20 Mile Rd., 16 Mile Rd., 5 Mile Rd., Pierce Rd. and Jefferson Rd., which all run East and West. In addition, 160th Ave., 150th Ave., 100th Ave., 90th Ave., and sections of 80th and 70th Avenues which run North and South are also County primary roads. The Mecosta County Road Commission maintains 277 miles of County Primary roads.

COUNTY LOCAL ROADS

These roads collect and distribute traffic to and from higher classification roads. Traffic mobility is impeded through the allowance of additional curb cuts or access points to adjacent properties. These paved or gravel roadways are typically designed for speed limits in the 35-45 mph range. The Mecosta County Road Commission maintains approximately 879 miles of local County roads.

OTHER ROADS

The City of Big Rapids maintains a system of approximately 42 miles of roadways within its own classification system. In addition, streets serving subdivision development and private access roadways are classified separately.

County Circulation Map- Map #5 on page 32, shows the circulation and road classifications for Mecosta County. 24-hour traffic volumes have been superimposed on major transportation arteries.

STATE HIGHWAYS

Traffic volume counts are a numeric tabulation based upon usage of a particular segment of roadway. Traffic volume counts are tools used to determine if roads are meeting or exceeding their designed capacity. The Mecosta County Road Commission maintains traffic volume counts for primary County roads, and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) maintains data for state highways and interstates. These 24-hour traffic counts, commonly referred to as Average Daily Trips (ADT), can help identify where the volumes may be approaching or exceeding the design capacity of the road. Traffic counts are not consistently collected for major and local streets under a municipality's or County's jurisdiction but when taken do provide a "snapshot" of the current capacity and efficiency of the road and trends in vehicle travel.

TRAFFIC COUNT STATISTICS

According to MDOT, the annual average 24-hour traffic volume for US-131 in 1998 ranges from 18,800 vehicles per day between the Morley (Jefferson Rd.) and Stanwood (Old 131) exits to approximately 12,000 vehicles per day through the rest of the County. M-20 between Big Rapids and Remus accommodated between 2,700 and 2,900 vehicles per day with larger volumes of approximately 6,000 vehicles per day experienced adjacent to the Remus area and further east toward Mt. Pleasant. M-66 carried approximately 2,500 vehicles per day north of Barryton, between 3,900 and 4,600 vehicles between Barryton and Remus, and 3,300 vehicles per day between Remus and the southern County line.

Along County roads, primary north and south travel routes include 230th Avenue, 150th Avenue, 120th Avenue, 70th Avenue, and M-66. Each of these roads experiences between 1,000 and 2,500 vehicles per day. Traveling east and west, McKinley Rd., and Mill Pond Rd. each accommodate over 2,500 vehicles per day. Finally, 165th and 160th Avenue traveling north from 16 Mile Rd. has become a primary traffic corridor and accommodates over 2,500 vehicles per day.

IDENTIFIED CIRCULATION PROBLEMS

East-West Routes: With the completion of Highway US-131 and the pre-existing Old 131 in western Mecosta County and M-66 in eastern Mecosta County, it is relatively easy to travel north and south through the County. However, it is more difficult to travel a direct route east and west through the County. The Planning Commission has identified this concern and has approached both the Mecosta County Road Commission and Michigan Department of Transportation in an attempt to facilitate better east-west travel across the County.

State Highway M-20: As the primary corridor between Big Rapids, Remus, and further east into Mount Pleasant, M-20 handles a high volume of both local and commercial traffic. M-20 from Big Rapids to Remus has been resurfaced over the past few years as The Mecosta County Planning Commission and the community in general had identified this stretch of roadway as possibly the worst in the County and in need of replacement. As referenced earlier in this chapter, M-20 is the primary east-west arterial within the County. However, due to the natural characteristics of the County (location of lakes and rivers in particular) and the location of various villages along the route, M-20 takes a meandering course northwest through the County from Remus to Big Rapids.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

Mecosta County Road Commission – The County road commission has instituted and continues to use an Asset Management Plan for the repair and maintenance of the County Road System. The Asset Management Plan can be viewed on the Road Commission Website at www.mecostaroads.org.

The road commission has a 5 year plan for the utilization of Federal Funding through the FHWA and MDOT for continued improvement of the county's federal aid system for improved traveling of routes North and South and East and West through the County.

Current plans are for the continued working relationship with the Townships for their participation in the improvements of preventive maintenance measures to resurfacing work on County roads within the sixteen townships.

Michigan Department of Transportation – MDOT had investigated the possibilities of relocating M-20 through the County and had acquired various right-of-ways for the project, but there are no plans to pursue the relocation and reconstruction of M-20 at this time. However, MDOT did relocate a portion of West M-20 which runs from the City of Big Rapids directly west to County Line to the new location running for the City of Big Rapids South on US-131 Expressway to the 8 Mile Road Interchange then west across the Muskegon River to the County Line. In 2014 MDOT will be utilizing a new technology in the State of Michigan for a Slide in Bridge Replacement on the 3 Mile Road overpass on the US-131 Expressway. This will be the first one built with this technology in the State of Michigan. There are also resurfacing projects on the remaining portions of US-131 from North to South to complete a multi-year repair/replace/resurface program on the Expressway along with repairs to the Big Muskegon River Bridge North of 8 Mile Road on the North and South Bound lanes.

The State’s Build Michigan III program had identified the construction of a “Passing Relief Lane” on M-66 within Mecosta County. The location of the passing lane was located just north of the intersection of Arthur Road in the vicinity of the Chippewa Hills High School and Middle School. No other major improvement projects are contemplated for M-66. In addition, M-20 is scheduled for an intersection repair at the 4 way stop at Clear Lake.

EXISTING LAND USES

LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

The following section outlines in more detail the location of particular land uses and their characteristics within Mecosta County. Existing land uses were divided into 8 different categories in order to analyze the existing pattern of development. This analysis will help to define which characteristics the County would like to preserve and enhance.

AGRICULTURAL

For the purpose of this land use analysis, agricultural land is defined as any land that is used for raising of field or tree crops or utilized as a resource in animal husbandry. Approximately 123,005 acres of the County is devoted to agricultural production. Agricultural land uses represent the single largest land use within the County.

According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture, there are approximately 779 farms located in Mecosta County. As noted above, these farms occupy 123,005 acres of land. The average size for farming operations is 158 acres. Of the 779 farms within the County, 123 of them are operating dairy farms. In 2009, Mecosta County's market value of Agricultural production was \$72,652,000 and was ranked 1st in the State in hogs and pigs, 3rd in potatoes, and 4th in dairy farms.

FORESTED LAND/VACANT LAND

Approximately 44.7% of Mecosta County is forested. This equates to 163,391.46 acres of forested land in the County. While some of this land is included in the Manistee National Forest and the Pere Marquette State Forest, much of it is held in private ownership. A detailed explanation of the County's forestry resources has been described in the Natural Features chapter of this plan. Vacant land is defined as any land with no visible structures or uses. This includes the land located behind single-family residents that is not visibly being used for any type of use.

RESIDENTIAL

Though the vast majority of the County is forested or agriculturally used, much of the remainder that has developed is predominately residential dwellings. The highest concentration of which is located in and around the City of Big Rapids. A variety of single and multi-family dwellings can be found in the City of Big Rapids including college dormitories operated by Ferris State University and other apartment complexes for students. Suburban style single-family residential development has taken place in townships around the Big Rapids urban area. These include Green Township, Big Rapids Township, and to a lesser extent Colfax and Grant Townships. Densely developed small lot single-family development has taken place around the majority of the major lake and river systems in the County. Chippewa Lake in Chippewa Township, the Muskegon River in Big Rapids, Green and Grant Townships, the Hardy Pond area in Mecosta Township, and the Canadian Lakes development in Austin and Morton Townships are

examples of lake and river front development. The housing varies from year around houses to cottages and weekend getaways.

Additional clusters of residential development have taken place in the Villages of Barryton, Morley, Stanwood, and Mecosta. Small residential development has existed in the historical settlements of Paris in Green Township, Millbrook in Millbrook Township, Altona and Sylvester in Hinton Township, Remus in Wheatland Township and Chippewa in Chippewa Township.

The remainder of the County is characterized by strip residential development along the primary and secondary road frontages throughout the County and rural residential and farmstead located in all of the County's sixteen townships.

CANADIAN LAKES RESORT COMMUNITY

Canadian Lakes is a planned resort community located in central Mecosta County in Morton and Austin Townships that encompasses approximately 7,000 acres. There are approximately 2,000 housing units located within the area identified as Canadian Lakes. Canadian Lakes is a privately developed residential and resort community with its own property owners corporation that manages the property and a development company which markets parcels for housing and recreational development. A small commercial corridor has also developed with supporting retail and service business providing for the areas residents. Additional information and further detail may be obtained from a master plan completed by the Canadian Lakes Property Owner's Association, which was completed in 2000.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial activity takes place throughout the County but is primarily centered around the larger population centers of the City of Big Rapids, Big Rapids Township and the Villages of Mecosta, Stanwood, Morley, Barryton and the unincorporated area known as Remus. Each of these communities has a central business district with associated retail, professional, and service businesses.

In addition to the various downtown Central Business District (CBD) commercial areas, the completion of US-131 has spurred commercial growth along M-20 (Business US-131) between Big Rapids and the highway interchange. This area has seen growth since the interchange opened, attracting national retailers, restaurants, and hotel establishments. There has also been an infill of gas stations, convenient stores, and smaller retail establishments. With public infrastructure improvement this area has seen the most growth, with new improvements to include an Aldi and assisted living complex.

In addition, scattered commercial activity has taken place along the major transportation routes within the County adjacent to M-66, M-20 and Old 131. Secondly, commercial activity supporting the County's recreation industry can be found in and around the popular lake and resort communities and campgrounds. Finally, it is important to note that three of the four highway interchanges adjacent to US-131 have little or no commercial development currently. Care should be taken in the planning of these

areas as population growth and development pressures make these areas more desirable for future commercial development.

INDUSTRIAL

Manufacturing comprises a small part of the Mecosta County economy, with approximately fourteen (14%) percent of the work force engaged in manufacturing. The majority of the land devoted to industrial activity is centered in and around the City of Big Rapids including a new park planned by the City of Big Rapids and Big Rapids Township located adjacent to Roben-Hood Airport. In addition, smaller industrial facilities are located in Remus, Morley, and Paris.

RECREATIONAL

Mecosta County Park System - As outlined elsewhere in this plan, the Mecosta County Park Commission, under the supervision of the County Board of Commissioners, operates a system of five County parks located throughout the County. These include Tubbs Lake State Forest Campground, Paris County Park, Merrill Lake County Park, School Section Lake Park, and Brower County Park. A more detailed description of each of these parks is located in the Community Facilities chapter of this plan.

City of Big Rapids - The City of Big Rapids maintains 16 parks offering a wide range of activities including a public swimming pool, athletic fields, playgrounds, picnic areas and restroom facilities.

Township Parks - There are three township operated parks located in Mecosta County. Highbanks Park in Big Rapids Township provides picnicking, playground, restrooms, a shelter, athletic field and trails. The park also provides access to the Muskegon River and is popular with canoes, kayaks, and tubing. Wheatland Park located in Wheatland Township provides picnicking, playgrounds, shelter, court games and trails. Finally, Chippewa Park is in the Village of Chippewa Lake in Chippewa Township and offers picnicking, shelter, playgrounds, an athletic field, and trails.

Village Parks - Each of the four villages in Mecosta County operate at least one park for their residents. Latimer and Clyde Park are located in Morley and offer picnicking and Boat launch facilities. Bromley Park in the Village of Mecosta offers picnicking, playgrounds, a shelter, restrooms and court games. Buffalo Park in the Village of Stanwood offers picnicking, restrooms, and an athletic field. Finally, Barryton Park in the Village of Barryton offers picnicking, fishing, playgrounds, shelter, boat launch site, and court games. In addition, Altona Park, a privately maintained but public park is located in Hinton Township and offers picnicking and fishing opportunities.

Golf Courses - There are seven golf courses located in Mecosta County with an eighth one currently under construction. Three of the existing seven courses are open to the public and the new course will add the fourth public course in the County. The name and location of each of the golf courses is as follows: Katke Golf Course, located in Big Rapids, is open to the public and is owned and operated by Ferris State University. Katke is recognized as the location of the first Professional Golf Management program in the United States.

Falcon Head Golf Course is located south of Big Rapids on Old 131, and is open to the public.

St. Ives Golf Course is located near the Canadian Lake Resort Community and is open to the public. St. Ives has been recognized as one of the top ten public golf courses in the Country.

Royal, Pines, and Highlands golf courses are private facilities requiring membership and are located in the Canadian Lakes region of the County.

The Mecosta County Club operates a semi-private golf course east of Big Rapids located on Clear Lake. The Tullymore Golf Course is a public course built by the Canadian Lakes Development Corporation, and is located south of the Canadian Lakes resort area.

Private Camp Grounds - No less than fifteen (15) privately operated camp grounds are in business in Mecosta County. All of the campgrounds are located adjacent to or in close proximity to an inland lake or river. Each of the campgrounds provides picnicking, swimming, fishing, and restroom facilities. Many of the campgrounds provide playgrounds, nature areas, trails, and boat launch facilities. A more detailed description of each of the privately operated campgrounds and the facilities that they provide may be found in the Mecosta County Parks and Recreation Plan, which is updated regularly.

Canadian Lakes Development Recreational Facilities The Canadian Lakes Development provides 54 holes of golf as identified above, two swimming pools (1 indoor and 1 outdoor), outdoor tennis/pickleball courts, three basketball courts, nine beaches, three picnic pavilions, 300 private camp sites, as well as fishing, biking, and nature trail walking opportunities. The development's common areas and parks are designed to accommodate baseball, football, soccer, and other field sports.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

In establishing a Land Use Plan, one of the primary components is the formulation of a community's goals and objectives. Establishing goals determines the destination toward which the community's planning efforts are directed. Objectives are more specific action oriented activities that are intended to lead the fulfillment of the stated goals. Both are necessary components of the planning process as they provide the framework within which the plan is developed and the basis for determining future courses of action toward the physical development of the County.

This chapter of the County's Master Plan states general development goals and objectives for the future physical development of the community. The goals and objectives identified herein are intended to reflect the land use priorities of the community, give direction to land developers regarding the County's physical environment, and establish a stated policy to assist the planning commission, county staff and other boards and committees in assessing the impact of their planning decisions.

There are some intentional overlap in the stated goals and objectives. This allows the Planning Commission to utilize the goals and objectives of a particular category without referring to the entire section and reiterates the importance of the identified policy. In addition, occasionally the objectives may appear to be in conflict. For example, economic development goals may conflict with environmental protection goals. Therefore, in these instances, it is the Planning Commission who will need to balance the importance of the conflicting objectives. The following goals and objectives have several purposes:

To guide the Planning Commission when considering rezoning requests. The Planning Commission should reference the plan's goals and objectives to ensure compliance with the policies and intent of the master plan.

To guide the Planning Commission when considering and reviewing township master plans and zoning ordinances. The Planning Commission should compare the goals and objectives of the township plans with those of the County plan to assure coordination and compatibility or identify differences for discussion.

To assist townships in coordinating their goals with the overall goals of the County as expressed in this plan.

Finally, a community's goal and objectives are not stagnant. They should be reviewed periodically by the Planning Commission to ensure that the intent and purpose of the goals remain current.

LAND USE

Goal: To promote efficient and balanced land use patterns which are consistent with the rural and agricultural character of the County, the carrying capacity of the land, and the fiscal capability of public infrastructure and services.

Objectives:

- Encourage a mixture of development projects including single and multiple family dwellings, neighborhood scale commercial uses, office and light industrial facilities in communities with available public infrastructure and services.
- Promote the viability and sustainability of the various established city and village central business districts by discouraging new commercial districts outside of established communities, eliminate “spot zoning” actions, and discourage the conversion of AG and AF property to commercial uses.
- Encourage clustered, rather than linear, areas of commercial development to minimize congestion, unsightly and undesirable development in particular along M-20, M-66, and Old US-131.
- Promote industrial development (which provides employment opportunities and is a source of tax revenue) to areas with adequate utility services and road access. Where improvements are needed, developers should be responsible for the cost.
- The design and scale of commercial and industrial sites should contribute to community aesthetics through landscaping and other appropriate site planning.
- Develop solid waste management practices to reduce reliance on landfill disposal.
- Support existing agricultural land uses and family farms through innovative and protective zoning practices, open space preservation, and transfer of development right alternatives.
- Promote Best Management Practices for large “commercial” agricultural operations such as concentrated animal feeding operations and large farming operations to protect the environment and prevent nuisances such as odor, noise or blight.
- Promote and direct housing development away from prime agricultural, scenic, or unsuitable farming and natural areas.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal: Promote residential, commercial, and industrial development and employment creation for the residents of Mecosta County while maintaining sensitivity and quality of life.

Objectives:

- Support the growth of resort community development through appropriate land use controls and delivery of County services.
- Agricultural production and spinoff employment should be recognized as an economic asset. Economic development activities should include addressing the retention and expansion of the County's agricultural resources.
- Company attraction and expansion efforts should focus on diversifying the County's local economy.
- Company attraction and expansion efforts should encourage locating in the area outside of Big Rapids where infrastructure and transportation access is available.
- Traffic safety and transportation efficiency issues along M-20 need to be addressed to aid economic development efforts.
- Training and educational support should be provided to train or retain workers for employment opportunities.
- Support the development of the Big Rapids Municipal Industrial Park adjacent to Roben-Hood Airport as a County wide economic development generator.
- Discourage unplanned, scattered, spot or strip commercial or industrial development (as proposed in the 1980 County plan)
- Support and encourage the revitalization, rehabilitation, and development of the Big Rapids Downtown Business District.
- Require carefully planned development for the County's four freeway (US-131) interchanges.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES:

Goal: Maintain a high quality of life through the delivery of quality and cost effective public facilities, County services, parks, recreation, social services and programming for all population groups.

Objectives:

- Support the recommendations of the Mecosta County Parks Commission as outlined in the Mecosta County Comprehensive Recreation Plan and encourage the updating of the plan every five years.
- Coordinate Mecosta County Road Commission and Michigan Department of Transportation road construction and maintenance priorities with local and county land use policies.
- Locate fire, police, and other emergency services to efficiently service the greatest number of County residents, particularly in the areas furthest away from the Big Rapids urban area.
- Coordinate location and delivery of public services (i.e.: senior citizen services, community parks, medical facilities, and other services) in existing rural population centers and the Big Rapids urban area to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.
- Promote increased awareness and availability of public and private community resources and assistance.
- Require new development to pay for public infrastructure improvements for public facilities directly affected by the new development.
- Monitor road maintenance and traffic efficiency through periodic traffic studies and inventories.
- Develop a County wide Capital Improvements Program with the intent to coordinate expenditures between County departments, Townships, MDOT (transportation funding) and the DNR (recreation funding).

HOUSING

Goal: Provide a variety of suitable housing alternatives for the County's residents, which promotes stability within existing neighborhoods, provides effective guidance to new residential development, and preserves Mecosta County's rural character.

Objectives:

- Promote a pattern of development that will not obscure the rural character of the County.
- Encourage development of a wide variety of housing styles, types, and price ranges.
- Maintain and expand the County's housing rehabilitation program for low and moderate income homeowners in the County.
- Accommodate innovative housing, such as cluster/open space housing, neo-traditional communities and planned unit developments through local zoning ordinances.
- Promote affordable housing alternatives by allowing creative site design, private roads, and through the reduction of infrastructure costs.
- Recognize physical limitations of the land and environment when planning new residential development to avoid unsuitable development locations.
- Ensure that the full public and private costs of development are borne by those directly benefiting from the development.
- Allow future residential development within those areas of Mecosta County where residential development has already been established and where soil conditions are adaptable to on-site septic and water systems.
- Recognize manufactured housing as an affordable and viable housing alternative and provide suitable locations within Mecosta County for the development of manufactured home parks.
- Encourage alternative housing development for elderly Mecosta County residents including, nursing homes, senior apartments, retirement communities and exploring options for "granny flats" or attached apartments.

LAKE AREAS

Goal: Encourage the efficient use and enjoyment of the County's numerous lakes and waterways through promoting environmental protection, encouraging appropriate supportive commercial development, regulating residential construction, and maintaining the lakes, rivers, and streams, as an attractive public natural resource.

Objectives:

- Encourage sanitary sewer developments to protect surface water quality of residential and recreational waterfront areas.
- Promote allowances for marine related commercial development and uses in close proximity to lake communities (marine sales & services, restaurants, convenience stores, boat storage facilities, etc.).
- Protect lake "view sheds" through appropriate building setbacks adjacent to waterfront property.
- Discourage over development of lakes and waterfront through appropriate zoning protections such as residential setbacks, lot coverage ratios, and minimum lot area requirements.
- Promote appropriate storm water management practices for new development and existing drainage systems to mitigate potential surface water runoff and pollution into the County's lakes and streams.
- Develop lake area provisions within the zoning ordinance to facilitate appropriate and orderly development including regulations pertaining to accessory structures, lot coverage for new homes and commercial activities around lakes.
- Promote the expansion of public parks, fishing and boating sites to promote use, increase accessibility and to alleviate potential overuse of the County's current public recreational and natural sites.

TRANSPORTATION

Goal: Provide an efficient, safe, well maintained and cost effective Countywide transportation system.

Objectives:

- Continue to maintain and improve the County's existing road system.
- Prioritize improvements to existing roadways based on traffic volumes, safety, development pressure, and availability of funds.
- Promote and coordinate the reconstruction and resurfacing of M-20 from Remus west to Big Rapids with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).
- Encourage the County Road Commission to continue roadway improvements that facilitate more direct East-West travel through the County.
- Encourage the continued maintenance and expansion of the Big Rapids Roben-Hood Municipal Airport to maintain air related transportation services within Mecosta County.
- Promote the use and expansion of the County's on-call bus service.
- Promote sign regulation along major transportation corridors to reduce visual clutter, ensure safety, and protect the County's rural agricultural character.
- Carefully regulate access management (driveways, intersections) along arterial and primary roads to minimize conflicts and increase efficiency and safety.
- Promote reasonable private road requirements to insure a minimum level of construction and maintenance standards for efficient access and safety.
- Encourage coordination of the County's planning, road commission, and economic development agencies to avoid potential duplication of efforts and to provide appropriate time for future transportation system improvements.
- Periodically update traffic count data and annually update road condition inventories.

FUTURE LAND USE

The Future Land Use Plan is intended to guide decisions regarding the future development pattern of Mecosta County. The County's plan covers all the communities and townships with the exception of the City of Big Rapids, Big Rapids Township, Mecosta Township, and Morton Township. In addition, the Canadian Lakes Department located in Austin and Morton Townships of Mecosta County has developed its own regional master land use plan for its residential and recreational facilities.

The future land use map is intended to illustrate the general development pattern envisioned for Mecosta County. The land use plan corresponds to the goals and objectives listed in this plan. The plan recognizes that growth and development are occurring in and around the City of Big Rapids, in the Canadian Lakes area, and along the southern border townships near US-131 where development pressures moving north from suburban Grand Rapids are being noticed. However, the plan proposes retaining the agricultural character of the County while providing viable development alternatives in appropriate locations within the County. It is the rural atmosphere and natural features of the County which has attracted many of the current residents to the County. Prime farm land and agricultural uses, in particular, should be preserved and protected. Approximately seventy-two million (\$72,650,000) dollars in income is generated annually from agriculture in the County. The plan also encourages townships to consider the preservation of important natural features in writing ordinances and when approving development. With the exception of Green and Big Rapids Townships which border the City of Big Rapids in the Northwest corner of the County, few changes to the existing development patterns are expected in the northern section of the County.

The plan proposes most of the county remaining in agricultural use. Furthermore, residential development permitted in agricultural areas should be directed away from prime agricultural lands. The division (splitting) of large tracts of agricultural parcels should be carefully controlled and otherwise discouraged. In addition, the County should exercise caution in allowing small lots with direct access to major roadways such as M-20, M-66, and Old US-131. Specifically, residential development along these corridors should have deeper setbacks and/or access from internal side streets. Access management techniques and tools should be incorporated in the Mecosta County zoning ordinance to minimize the location and number of new driveways, and newly dedicated public roads in larger developments in which to access their developments in order to minimize and control traffic and reduce the number of proposed driveways and intersections along existing roadways.

From a residential perspective, the primary locations for new and continued residential development will include the Canadian Lakes Resort area, along the various lakes and waterways, and in growing Townships such as Mecosta, Big Rapids, Green and Morton Townships. In addition, new residential development should be directed toward the existing population centers of Big Rapids and the various villages located in the County where infrastructure already exists and the delivery of public services is more readily available and more efficiently provided.

The plan further directs commercial development along major thoroughfares into clusters. Property adjacent to M-66, M-20, and Old US-131 should be zoned in such a way as to cluster commercial activity at major intersections, in or adjacent to US-131 highway interchanges.

Finally, the plan suggests that the primary location for industrial development should and will occur in and adjacent to the City of Big Rapids due to the availability of utilities, the presence of the University, and concentration of roughly a third (33%) of the County's population. However, additional industrial development should be encouraged in a planned manner in locations serviced by utilities and to diversify the economic development of the County in such communities as Remus, Morley, Stanwood, Mecosta, and Barryton.

AGRICULTURAL/FOREST

One of the primary goals of the County is to maintain the rural and resort character of the County and to preserve and protect existing farming and agricultural land uses. As a result, the primary land use classification for Mecosta County is that of Agricultural and Agricultural Forested designation. Agricultural land uses include farming (production of crops, livestock, and related goods), orchards, nurseries, farmsteads, public and private forested lands and other activities directly related to agricultural operations. Agricultural land uses are fundamental to the County's efforts to preserve the rural character of Mecosta County as the rural character provides the purpose for many of the residents for choosing Mecosta County in which to live.

Approximately 277,177.4 acres or 80.54% of the County is classified for agricultural activities and land uses. Agricultural land uses are planned for the majority of the eastern and southern sections of the County. In addition, the area west of the US-131 highway, physically separated by the highway from the rest of the County is also designated for agricultural uses. The northwest corner of the County including the City of Big Rapids, Big Rapids Township, Ferris State University, and Green Township are the only locations where agricultural uses are not predominant.

The desired density within agriculturally designated districts is planned for one dwelling unit per every 40 acres of land. This density is necessary to ensure that parcels are large enough to contain an agricultural use which can be self-sustaining and economically viable. Typically, it is very difficult to operate an economically viable agricultural use on parcels of less than 40 acres in size. While it may be desirable and sometimes necessary for financial purposes to create individual lots for residences, it is important for the preservation of the rural character of the County to not exceed the overall planned density in this category.

Another characteristic and sometimes controversial issue within the agriculturally designated areas is the lack of urban infrastructure. Paved roads can lead to higher speeds and increased traffic volumes, detracting from the rural character of the area. Gravel roads reduce speeds and minimize total vehicle trips to primarily residents of the immediate area. Road improvements should be coordinated with the County Road Commission and not conducted in agricultural areas where they are not necessary unless

the existing road system ceases to provide adequate access for emergency vehicles and access to residents of existing farms, homes, and other agricultural uses.

The extension of utilities, particularly water and sewer services increases the development potential for higher densities within agricultural areas. Without needing larger areas for septic systems, and with a desire to obtain the highest available yield of developable lots on a site, developers attempt to create higher density development in areas which have traditionally been of a lower density, residential or agricultural land use.

Therefore, water and sewer lines should not be extended into planned agricultural areas unless they are necessary to protect the health, safety and welfare of existing County residents.

LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

This is the primary single-family residential classification of the County. Approximately 43,739.13 acres or 12.68% of the County has been planned for this use. This classification is intended for detached single-family dwellings with a range in density of between one and four units per acre. Higher density areas should be closer to existing settlements and should require public infrastructure. As can be seen from the Future Land Use Plan Map, this classification of use can be found throughout the County.

Rural residential development should also be included as a type of low density residential development. This zoning district is typically characterized by single-family homes and their accessory structures which are generally found in rural areas. Characteristics include larger home sizes, multiple accessory structures, and minimum lot sizes of one acre in size or larger. The planned density will act as a transitional area between the rural agricultural areas of the County and the suburban residential development of the low and medium-density residential land use areas. Urban infrastructure is preferred but not required in rural residential areas. Adequate utility services to parcels of the planned size may be provided on site with appropriate planning and facility maintenance.

The abundant water and recreational resources of Mecosta County has resulted in the extensive development of residential and commercial uses adjacent to the many lakes, rivers, streams, and natural areas located within the County. Therefore, the County has established a Lake/Resort Residential zoning district that establishes appropriate land use controls and development regulation on those areas directly adjacent and in close proximity to these important natural resources. This zoning district is appropriate in both low density and medium density land use categories dependent on the type of development and degree of infrastructure available.

The intent of this zoning district is to provide for the use and enjoyment of the many natural resources of the County, provide for housing opportunities adjacent to these natural resources, and to provide for related and appropriate supporting commercial activities in this district. Approximately 6,374.04 acres or 1.85% of the County has been classified as Lake/Resort Residential. Land uses characteristic within this district are single family residential, marinas, campgrounds, hotels and motels, small retail stores,

bait shops and similar resort oriented commercial activities, and multi-family residential developments of various styles.

The extension of public infrastructure, if not already present, should be encouraged to protect the health and viability of the adjacent natural resource. Though public infrastructure provides for a more dense development pattern, it also provides the appropriate disposal of sewage, thus protecting the water resource. In addition, the reliance on wells, often shallow adjacent to bodies of water, negatively affects the nearby water body. The extension of public water facilities around lakes and rivers provides safe drinking water while maintaining the areas classified as Lake/Resort Residential including those lands adjacent to the Muskegon and Little Muskegon River, Chippewa Lake, and the many other lakes and rivers located throughout the County.

MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

This classification has been established for the siting of densely developed single-family residences, such as clustered housing or smaller homes, apartment developments, townhomes, and manufactured home park developments. Medium density residential is planned for the areas adjacent to the City of Big Rapids, Green and Big Rapids Township and in those areas suitable for higher density residential development in and around Barryton, Morley, and Remus. Medium density residential is also found around the lakes and river area of Mecosta County which has already been developed (see description above under low density residential). Approximately 10,963.51 acres, or 3.18% of the County has been recommended for medium density land uses.

Medium density residential developments are planned for a density in the range of between three (3) and ten (10) dwelling units per acre. This type of land use is more intensive than the low density in terms of density, vehicle trips per day and infrastructure demands. They are located in close proximity to land uses with similar land uses characteristics such as neighborhood commercial areas, and are buffered from agricultural and rural residential land uses by the low-density residential areas.

Manufactured home park developments are recognized by the Mecosta County Planning Commission as a legitimate and affordable housing alternative for residents of the County. However, the density and design of manufactured home parks necessitate that this land use be sited in appropriate locations. Therefore, manufactured developments are considered a medium density residential land use. Specific locations for manufactured home parks have been recommended in the individual township descriptive narratives. However, in general, it is recommended that manufactured home park developments be located in close proximity to existing urban and rural population centers, have either public or private sanitary and water systems, and be accessible to paved County primary road systems. The availability and proximity of public services such as police and fire protection, refuse removal, snow removal, and special services are further determining factors in appropriately locating new manufactured home developments.

Municipal infrastructure is required to support the planned density in most of this land use category. Although it is possible to serve developments of this size and planned density with a community septic

field, it is the intent of the County not to promote the use of these intensive land uses until the planned areas are adequately serviced by a suitable public sanitary sewer system. The uses of community septic fields have the potential to detrimentally affect the natural features and the public health safety and welfare of the community if not meticulously maintained.

URBAN CITIES

The City of Big Rapids is the sole incorporated city in Mecosta County. Big Rapids serves as the economic, governmental and cultural center of the County. As the County seat, many of the County facilities including the Sheriff's Department and Courthouse are located in Big Rapids. In addition, the Health Department, MSU Extension Office, Building and Zoning and EMS are located in Big Rapids Township just south of the City of Big Rapids. The city and surrounding Big Rapids Township also serve as the primary commercial center for the County with a strong downtown central business district as well as additional commercial development along M-20 just East of US-131. Ferris State University (enrollment of approximately 8,500) is located in Big Rapids and serves as the cultural anchor of the County providing educational, recreational, sports, and entertainment activities to the community. The City of Big Rapids has recently developed a Comprehensive Plan, which outlines its intentions relative to community development over the next ten years. In addition, Big Rapids Township has developed a master plan and administers its own zoning ordinance. This County plan, while acknowledging and coordinating with the community's existing plans, does not provide specific recommendations for these areas of the County. Finally, approximately 1,351.75 acres or land area are currently occupied by urban (city or villages) in Mecosta County.

TRADITIONAL VILLAGES

The four incorporated villages (Mecosta, Barryton, Morley, and Stanwood) in the County are included in this category as well as the unincorporated areas of Chippewa Lake, Paris, and Remus. Other small village-like commercial clusters in Altona, Rodney, and Sylvester are not included. These villages typically include a small downtown cluster of businesses, churches, and municipal buildings surrounded by homes on small to moderate sized lots. Many of the villages have their own facilities and services such as a fire station, water and or sanitary sewer. Some villages also include additional public facilities including parks and cemeteries as well as small scale industrial activities. A variety of uses should be encouraged in each of these locations to promote economic vitality as well as to maintain an overall sense of individual identity and place. The county should focus growth opportunities around the already existing centers.

COMMERCIAL

This category is intended to allow a variety of retail, office, and service uses in the County. Intended uses include automobile related businesses, general retail, grocery, professional offices, banks, and restaurants. In general, commercial districts are intended to complement the existing downtown or central business districts (CBD) of the various communities in the County. The commercial districts are intended for uses which require more land than is available in CBD's and those which are more

dependent upon the relatively high traffic volumes along road frontages such as M-20 and M-66. Commercial zoning districts have been clustered adjacent to US-131 interchanges, existing cities and villages, and at major intersections along primary travel corridors. The current practice of zoning individual parcels for commercial purposes should be discontinued as it may represent “spot” zoning (which is legal) and does not promote good land use or corridor planning. Though primary County roads and state highways are appropriate locations and together in coherent commercial districts to prevent commercial uses from locating anywhere along the corridor. Unplanned and linear (sprawl) commercial development along primary County corridors should be discouraged and prohibited. Finally, whenever commercial uses are proposed, the County should require appropriate buffers from less intensive uses such as residential and agricultural activities. Buffers may include wider setbacks, walls, fences, landscaping and berms. 3,088.06 acres of land are designated commercial.

INDUSTRIAL

Approximately 1,570 acres of area, or less than one percent (1.0%) of Mecosta County, are planned for industrial land uses. Industrial land uses involve the manufacture of products from parts or raw materials. Storage may be needed on the outside of the building for the materials or finished products. Warehousing and storage of materials is also a typical use found in this district. Industrial uses are planned in those areas of the County served by public water and sewer systems including an area adjacent to Roben-Hood Airport in Green and Big Rapids Townships. The City of Big Rapids Master Plan establishes industrial growth as an identified goal within their community.

RECREATIONAL

Recreational opportunities abound in Mecosta County as previously noted in the existing land use section of this plan. The Mecosta County Recreation Plan identifies over 500 acres of land that are currently managed by the Mecosta County Park Commission. As identified by the plan, this is a sufficient amount of passive and active recreational area for the current and planned population of Mecosta County. Therefore, the plan emphasizes the improvement and redevelopment of existing facilities over the purchase and development of new park areas with one exception. A new County park with a size sufficient to serve not only Mecosta County but the region as well is desired for lands adjacent to the Muskegon River. Additional waterfront access, particularly to the Muskegon River, was identified as a goal of the recreation plan. The Mecosta County Master Land Use Plan supports the goals and objectives outlined in the Mecosta County Recreation Plan as developed by the Mecosta County Parks Commission. This land use plan therefore, does not further detail the recreational components of the County as they have been previously inventoried by the recreation plan. Furthermore, future land use and development activity specific to the County park system has been identified in the recreation plan and detailed by specific park action plans.

TOWNSHIP DESCRIPTIONS AND ACTION PLANS

AETNA TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Aetna Township is a rural township located in the far southwest corner of Mecosta County. The township has small concentrations of residential development primarily occurring adjacent to Brady Lake, the Little Muskegon River, and the Village of Morley. Much of the township is forested with a substantial area of the township located in the Manistee National Forest. Since the adoption of the previous land use plan in 1980, the U.S. 131 highway has been completed and bisects the township just west of 200th Avenue. The first interchange in Mecosta County for those traveling north on U.S. 131 is located in Aetna Township at Jefferson Road. Jefferson Road provides the primary east-west route through the township and provides the Village of Morley with direct access to the highway located approximately two miles to the west. The Village of Morley is located in the far southeast corner of the township and straddles both Aetna and Deerfield Townships.

RESIDENTIAL

Due to its location and abundant natural resources, Aetna Township is a desirable location for residential development. Existing residential areas have grown up around Brady Lake, Little Muskegon River, and in and around the Village of Morley. In addition, pockets of residential development have occurred:

- along Jefferson Road west of the highway,
- at the intersection of 230th Avenue and 3 Mile Road,
- between Jefferson Road and 2 Mile Road west of 230th Avenue,
- at the intersection of 190th Avenue and 3 Mile Road
- the area between Jefferson Road and Washington Road from 190th Avenue west to the highway.
- near the intersection of 4 Mile Road and 230th Avenue

The township encourages additional low density development in areas where larger parcels of property have been split. This will help to focus growth for the community while also protecting the existing agricultural areas.

New residential development and growth is recommended for those parcels directly north and south of the Village of Morley and also extending west on Jefferson Road. The southwest corner of the intersection of 180th Avenue (Northland Drive) and 5 Mile Rd. is also recommended for low-density housing development or neighborhood commercial uses.

Any multiple family residential developments (apartments or condos) proposed for the township should be encouraged to locate in or adjacent to the Village of Morley. The proximity of school facilities, employment centers, commercial activities, and public infrastructure make the Village the desirable location for higher density residential development.

COMMERCIAL

Existing commercial activity takes place in the Village of Morley and at no less than six (6) parcels scattered throughout the township that have been “spot” zoned for commercial purposes. In the future, the zoning of individual parcels for commercial purposes scattered throughout the township should be highly discouraged.

New commercial activity should be limited in Aetna Township to areas expressed as interest for growth. The township has expressed interest in commercial growth around the US 131 interchange and the area south of 5 Mile Road on Northland Drive. Some thought should be given to commercial need with the building of the Hardy Pond Trail.

Any further new commercial activity should be directed in or adjacent to the Village of Morley. Doing so will encourage the redevelopment of the Village commercial district and provide for the concentration and centralization of commercial activity.

INDUSTRIAL

Industrial activity is confined to those companies operating from and located in the Village of Morley. Any new industrial development in this area should be planned in or adjacent to the Village of Morley or north and west of the US 131 interchange where larger properties can accommodate the needs of larger facilities.

TRANSPORTATION

To encourage the redevelopment and growth of the Village of Morley, an emphasis should be placed on improving the roads and street systems located throughout the township with priorities being 4 Mile Road, 230th Avenue, 200th Avenue, Jefferson Road, and Old US 131 as these are the main thoroughfares within the township. The township should also consider making 1 Mile Road from 220th to 230th a locally maintained road as there has been growth in the area north of 1 Mile to Jefferson on the east side of 230th. Additional directional signage should be placed at the interchange to direct traffic to commercial establishments. Aside from existing County road maintenance, no other substantial transportation improvements are recommended at this time.

HARDY POND TRAIL

A 30 mile hiking and mountain biking trail is currently under design and development around Hardy Pond in Newaygo County and Mecosta County. According to an MSU Extension Economic Impact Analysis, it is expected that the trail will have 104,893 visits, 54,087 of which should be from nonlocal visits. As part of the trail is located in Mecosta County, it is expected to have a positive economic impact

on neighboring communities, including Morley and Stanwood. The US 131 interchange located in Aetna Township will be the closest interchange to the trail area.

AUSTIN TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Primarily undeveloped, Austin Twp. is experiencing extremes in land use from the gas fields and related facilities in the north-central section development associated with the Canadian Lakes resort development on the east side of the Township. Substantially wooded, the township is home to portions of the Chippewa River State Forest. Austin Township is located approximately five (5) miles southeast of the City of Big Rapids in the southwestern quarter of the County.

AGRICULTURAL

The primary land use consideration in Austin Township is farming. Prime agricultural land exists in the southern and central sections of the Township. It is the Township's desire to encourage the expansion of existing agricultural activities and preserve the rural atmosphere of the Township.

RESIDENTIAL

The majority of the current residential development is taking place in the far eastern sections of the Township adjacent to or in affiliation with the Canadian Lakes resort community. Additional scattered residential activity has taken place along major County roads including Pierce Road, Buchanan Road, and 8 Mile Road.

Future residential development in Austin Township is proposed for the far eastern section of the township adjacent to and in close proximity of the Canadian Lakes development. Residential development should also be encouraged around the Village of Stanwood.

COMMERCIAL

Existing spotted commercial activity is currently taking place south of the Village of Stanwood along Old U.S. 131. In addition, a commercial center has developed along Buchanan Rd. just east of Austin Twp. in neighboring Morton Twp. in conjunction with the Canadian Lakes resort development. New commercial activity should be limited to those areas currently developing as commercial corridors. Future commercial development should be directed toward existing infrastructure in the Village of Stanwood to the west and within the Canadian Lakes development to the east. Each of which would be in very close proximity to the residents of Austin Township.

INDUSTRIAL

The lone industrial area in the township is devoted to Michigan Gas Storage and is the location of their natural gas storage fields. These fields are located in the north-central section of the township adjacent to 150th Avenue. Associated with the gas fields is the Austin Gas Field monitoring facility, which is one of the primary industrial facilities located in Mecosta County. New industrial development should be

directed to the existing industrial park in adjacent Morton Township and to the north in the City of Big Rapids. No new industrial development is contemplated for Austin Township.

TRANSPORTATION

Austin Township is easily accessible from the US-131 highway, which is located approximately two miles west of the township in adjacent Mecosta Township.

The Michigan Department of Transportation has studied the feasibility of relocating state highway M-20 through Austin Township along the Buchanan and 8 Mile Road corridors. The relocation would create a direct east-west link through the County and run between the community of Remus and the U.S. 131 highway. However, both the township and the adjacent community of Canadian Lakes have expressed opposition to the project and would discourage the State from pursuing the project. Though the State has purchased some right-of-way for the project, there are no plans to pursue the relocation at this time.

Relative to the transportation improvements, maintenance and upgrading of the various County primary roads in the township are the greatest priority.

BIG RAPIDS TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Big Rapids Township is located in the northwest quadrant of Mecosta County, and it surrounds the City of Big Rapids, which has limited areas of expansion. This results in growth pressure for commercial, residential and industrial uses within the Township. The dominant natural feature in the Township is the Muskegon River, which flows through the eastern third of the Township. A notable man-made feature is the location of the U.S. 131 Expressway, which runs north and south through the western third of the Township and provides an excellent transportation access for the community's commercial and industrial interests. The completion of U.S. 131 in the 1980's effectively divided the Township between the rural and agricultural atmosphere of the Township west of the highway, and the more urban and suburban development adjacent to the city east of the highway. Aside from the influence of the City of Big Rapids on Township growth, the presence of Ferris State University in the City of Big Rapids also plays a large role in the development occurring in the township. In addition, the Mecosta County Fairgrounds and Roben-Hood Municipal Airport are located in north-central Big Rapids Township. Residential and recreational opportunities are enhanced with High Banks Park which takes advantage of and is located on the Muskegon River on the east side of the Township.

AGRICULTURAL

As recently as 1980, over half of the township was devoted to agricultural land uses. However, this is quickly changing as pressure for expanded residential and commercial development is now being experienced elsewhere in the Township. While a significant amount of land is currently zoned for agricultural use, the Township's Future Land Use Map (1996) suggests that only those lands west of the U.S. 131 expressway and in the south-central sections of the Township will be preserved for agricultural use.

RESIDENTIAL

Existing residential development has occurred primarily south and east of the City of Big Rapids. Pressure for expanded residential and commercial development is not being experienced elsewhere in the Township. More recently, west of the highway, additional development has taken place south of the City along 205th Avenue and north of the City on either side of Madison Avenue. Secluded subdivisions have been developed on 15 Mile Road east of 230th, on 14 Mile Road west of 190th Avenue, and on the east side of the river south of Arthur Road in Section 36.

Substantial new residential development is anticipated and accommodated in the Township's Master Plan. New residential growth is anticipated in the entire northeast quarter of the Township as well as the majority of the southeast quarter of the Township in the proximity of the Muskegon River. Sections 16 and 21 are proposed for future residential growth as are sections 9 and 10.

COMMERCIAL

Existing commercial activity has developed along Northland Drive both north and south of the City of Big Rapids as well along 16 Mile Road directly east of the City. Recently, Perry Avenue (M-20) has developed into a regional shopping district with the location of national retail establishments, home improvement stores, restaurants, and two strip developments among other individual commercial parcels.

New commercial development is restricted to these existing commercial corridors where vacant parcels and space are still available. Additional land planned for commercial development exists on both sides of the U.S. 131 and Perry Street (M-20) interchange. Additional commercial development potential exists in the existing Northland Drive corridor south of the City. Finally, limited commercial development is expected east of the City on 16 Mile Rd. and north of the City of Big Rapids on Northland Drive.

INDUSTRIAL

Existing industrial activity within Big Rapids Township is related to a number of gravel operations scattered throughout the Township, a concrete manufacturing operation, a junk yard north-east of the City of Big Rapids, and Roben-Hood Municipal Airport.

New industrial development is planned for an area directly west of the Roben-Hood airport. This area also corresponds to an industrial area planned directly north in adjacent Green Charter Township. The City's utility system is accessible from this location and provides a centralized industrial park for Big Rapids Township, The City of Big Rapids, and Green Township. The proximity of this area to the municipal airport, U.S. 131 expressway, and Ferris State University are also beneficial to the location of industrial uses. This industrial area incorporating these three jurisdictions will serve as the predominate industrial development area in Mecosta County.

TRANSPORTATION

With its completion in the early 1980's, the U.S. 131 expressway provides the primary means of direct north and south travel through the Township. Access between the eastern part of the Township and the remainder of the Township is dependent on the Maple Street and Baldwin Street bridges which pose a need for at least one additional river crossing south of the city. As a secondary means of traveling through the Township from east to west, 12 Mile Road, 13 Mile Road, Woodward Avenue, and 17 Mile Road all cross the U.S. 131 Expressway effectively connecting the two sides of the Township. Commercial development currently underway in the area between the western City limits and the U.S. 131 Expressway have opened the door to the possibility of a second north-south routing west of the City limits.

CHIPPEWA TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Chippewa Township's dominant natural feature is Chippewa Lake located in the southwest quadrant of the Township. The area outside of the lake area is primarily rural. All of the commercial activity and the majority of the residential development have occurred adjacent to or in close proximity of Chippewa Lake and the associated unincorporated Village of Chippewa Lake. The remainder of the Township is in agricultural use with some wooded lands in central Chippewa Township and in the Chippewa and Martiny Lake areas. Growth should continue to be encouraged around Chippewa Lake because of the availability of a public sewer system.

RESIDENTIAL

Residential development has primarily taken place adjacent to natural features such as Chippewa Lake and the other lakes and streams within the Township. Small lot high density residential development is predominant along the shores of Chippewa Lake with larger rural residential lots having developed along Twenty-three Mile Rd., 100th Avenue, and Twenty-one Mile Road among others. No additional land or new areas are proposed for future residential development than is already provided for through current zoning regulations. One recommendation proposed on the future land use map for the Township has identified the area north of Twenty Mile Road currently designated for RR-2, rural residential development, to LR lake and resort classification (these designations are from the 1983 Zoning Ordinance/Map). This would increase the density of homes permitted just east of Chippewa Lake and would further provide a limited number of nonresidential land uses to develop in support of the nearby lake population.

COMMERCIAL

There is currently one commercial district in Chippewa Township. This district is located directly south of Chippewa Lake on either side of 105th Avenue. This commerce center serves the local lake population and the settlement (unincorporated village) of Chippewa Lake. For future land use considerations, no additional areas within the Township are planned for commercial activity. It is the intent of the Township to support and encourage reinvestment by requiring commercial development to occur in the existing established commercial district.

INDUSTRIAL

There is currently no industrially zoned land or industrial land uses located in Chippewa Township. One area has been designated on the future land use map for future industrial activity. The Township has provided for new industrial development to increase its tax base and provide for local employment opportunities by considering a parcel of land east of 105th Avenue and north of Nineteen Mile Road for industrial development. This is the only area within Chippewa Township that should be considered for industrial land uses.

TRANSPORTATION

A number of County primary roads provide good east-west access through the Township. These include Nineteen Mile Rd., Twenty Mile Rd., Twenty-Two Mile Rd., and Twenty-Three Mile Rd. 90th Avenue provides the primary north-south access within the Township as it bisects the Township evenly east and west. 80th Avenue and 100th Avenue also provide access north and south through various sections of the Township. Relative to transportation improvements, it is the Township's desire to promote the continued maintenance and improvements of the existing County road system. Additional new roads and the conversion of existing gravel roads to pavement are not encouraged, as they would promote the further development of the Township. Maintaining gravel roads provides for a continued rural atmosphere and discourages large-scale residential development.

COLFAX TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

As noted in the 1980 Land Use Plan and evident today, Colfax Township is continuing to develop into a suburbanized township. Located directly east of the City of Big Rapids and Big Rapids Township, Colfax Township is on the eastern edge of the Big Rapids urbanized area and in the north-central section of Mecosta County. The eastern half of the township is primarily undeveloped and generally designated for agricultural purposes.

As an area of growth, it is important to reiterate the County's desire to protect prime agricultural lands. Due to its location in the County, Colfax Township is experiencing developmental pressures from neighboring Big Rapids Township and the City of Big Rapids. However, efforts must be made to discourage the conversion of prime agricultural lands to residential uses by carefully evaluating rezoning requests and development proposals.

RESIDENTIAL

A great deal of residential development is taking place in the township. The proximity of three lakes, numerous ponds and streams, and open land have made Colfax township a desirable location for those wishing to work in urban Big Rapids and live in a more rural residential atmosphere. Residential activity is taking place along McKinley Road west of M-20, along M-20 (15 Mile Rd.), 175th Avenue, and 16 Mile Road. Older small lot development is located in the Village of Rodney. New small lot development is taking place around the three primary lakes (Clear Lk., Hillsvieview Lk., and Townline Lk.) located within the township.

New residential development should be directed to those areas adjacent to already developed residential districts. In particular, south of 15 mile Rd. and west of 165th Avenue, adjacent to McKinley Avenue and adjacent to the 16 Mile Rd. and 175th Avenue intersection. New and existing road patterns should relate to each other. Greater densities of housing development would make public utility availability more economically feasible. The rezoning of land for residential purposes should be discouraged in the eastern half of the township. In fact, it is recommended that the area currently zoned RR-1 (Zoning District within the 1983 Zoning Ordinance) at the intersection of 130th Avenue and 16 Mile Rd. be rezoned to AF Agriculture/Forestry to protect these parcels from development. In addition, development in the northwest corner of the township north of 16 Mile Rd. should be discouraged in areas not already zoned for rural residential development.

In addition, the close proximity to the City of Big Rapids, availability of public utilities and infrastructure, available land along major thoroughfares, and the location of adjacent residential activity would make Colfax Township a reasonable location for a manufactured home park development. Such a development should be restricted to the western sections of the Township, adjacent to higher density residential areas in Colfax and neighboring Big Rapids Township.

COMMERCIAL

The only existing commercial activity taking place in Colfax Township is located in Rodney. Colfax Township is located in close proximity to the commercial areas of the City of Big Rapids and Big Rapids Township. New commercial activity should be encouraged for Downtown Big Rapids and the Perry Street commercial district in Big Rapids Township. The Township should discourage the encroachment of commercial activity extending east from Big Rapids Township along 16 Mile Rd. Finally, though it currently is not a problem in the Colfax Township, scattered commercial activity along M-20 or other major County roads should be discouraged if not strictly prohibited through strict zoning provisions and by avoiding the tendency to rezone parcels for individual commercial use outside of an established commercial area. Small neighborhood commercial uses should also be encouraged in Rodney.

INDUSTRIAL

There are currently no industrial facilities located within Colfax Township. Furthermore, with the township's close proximity to industrial areas in the City of Big Rapids (3 miles west), Big Rapids Township (adjacent to the west), and Green Township, the necessity for locating an industrial facility in this area is minimal. Therefore, it is recommended that new industrial facilities be directed toward those existing areas previously referenced and away from the primarily residential and agricultural nature of Colfax Township.

TRANSPORTATION

State Highway M-20 runs east-west through the township from the settlement of Rodney on the east side of the Township. M-20 runs along McKinley and 15 Mile Roads. 16 Mile Road is the only alternate east-west route through the Township. 120th Avenue provides the only north-south route in or adjacent to the township as it separated Colfax Township from Martiny Township to the east. Though no other road provides uninterrupted travel north and south through the township, a number of primary County roads including 160th Avenue, 140th Avenue, and 130th Avenue provide significant vehicular access to most areas of the township.

DEERFIELD TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Deerfield Township is an agricultural township located in the southwestern quarter of Mecosta County. Deerfield Township shares its southern border with Montcalm County. Aside from agricultural land uses and the occasional woodlot, the only natural features in the township are the Little Muskegon River, which traverses the township from east to west, and the Morley Pond which is an impoundment of the Little Muskegon River. The Village of Morley is located in the southwestern corner of the township and serves as the primary residential, business, and employment center in the area. In general, the recommendation of the future land use plan for Deerfield Township is to promote the redevelopment and growth of the Village of Morley and to protect the primarily rural township for agricultural land uses and farming activities. In addition, larger undeveloped parcels currently located in the Township that are zoned RR-2 (Zoning District within the 1983 Zoning Ordinance) are recommended for rezoning to AF Agricultural to facilitate the protection and preservation of farm land and open space.

RESIDENTIAL

The Village of Morley has the only concentrated housing development in the township. Additional residential development has taken place along the Little Muskegon River and stretched along the township's primary roads including Monroe Road, 170th Avenue, 3 Mile Road, and 4 Mile Road. New residential development should be restricted to the east side of the Village of Morley and on large parcels within the township to protect and encourage continued agricultural land uses. A manufactured home development would be suitable for the east or north side of the Village of Morley.

COMMERCIAL

Existing commercial activity is located almost exclusively in the Village of Morley. The lack of a population concentration and the primarily agricultural nature of the township will limit the necessity of any further commercial development in the township. Future commercial development should be located in the Village of Morley to encourage the redevelopment of the Village and establish a concentrated commercial district to serve not only Deerfield Township, but also Aetna Township and northern Montcalm County. Scattered commercial activity on individual parcels which are "spot" zoned for commercial use should be discouraged.

INDUSTRIAL

Industrial activity is confined to those companies operating from and located in the Village of Morley. No further industrial activity or proposed rezoning of land for industrial use is recommended for Deerfield Township in the Mecosta County Master Plan. Any new industrial development in this area should be planned in or adjacent to the Village of Morley.

TRANSPORTATION

To encourage the redevelopment and growth of the Village of Morley, an emphasis should be placed on improving the roads and street systems located within the Village. In addition, 180th Avenue and Jefferson Road should also be priorities as they are the major thoroughfares leading in and out of Morley. Aside from existing County road maintenance, no other substantial transportation improvements are recommended at this time. 5 Mile is also a major east/west transportation corridor for locals.

FORK TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Similar to the adjacent townships of Chippewa, Sheridan, and Martiny, Fork Township is primarily rural and agricultural with scattered residential and resort/recreational development. There is one settlement, the Village of Barryton, located in the south-central section of the Township. The Village is located on the Chippewa River, which meanders through the Township from the northwest corner south into Isabella County.

The Village of Barryton enforces its own zoning ordinance and maintains a zoning map regulating land uses within the Village. The Village serves as the commercial, employment, and activity center for Fork and surrounding Townships. The Village of Barryton has a unique main street for a downtown, with park facilities, an elementary school and public water system. All these advantages make it an attractive location for growth.

As noted in the 1980 Land Use Plan, Fork Township is primarily agricultural with over half the township's land in agricultural use, however, only a small percentage is in actual crop production. Wood lots are scattered throughout the township with concentrated wooded areas being located adjacent to Chippewa River and its tributaries.

RESIDENTIAL

The current zoning of Fork Township has substantial areas devoted to rural residential use. This is counterproductive to the intent of the County's efforts to preserve agricultural activities, farmland and open spaces. In addition, there is no basis from a population or growth perspective to suggest that this much land should be devoted to residential use and taken out of agricultural production or remain as open space.

Therefore, substantial areas of land zoned for rural residential use are recommended for rezoning to one of the County's agricultural designations. These areas should remain as large parcels devoted to agricultural production or allowed to remain as undeveloped open space. Single-family homes permitted in this area should be scattered on large tracts that do not interfere with the ability to farm adjoining lands.

However, one area designated for future residential development is around Merrill Lake. Existing dense residential development and a County Park located off of M-66 make this area a desirable location for future residential growth. With the exception of this area around Merrill Lake, no development, residential or otherwise, should be planned or encouraged north of Hoover Road. This action will directly serve to preserve the northern third of the township.

Finally, the proximity of the Village of Barryton and available large parcels in close proximity to the Village would provide for an appropriate location for a manufactured home development. The township

and village should work together to designate a suitable location for a manufactured home park. The development should be accessible to M-66 or suitable collector road to provide access to the site.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial development has taken place both north and south of the Village limits along M-66. In addition, a commercial center of activity has developed at the intersection of Hoover Road and M-66. Commercial uses have developed at the intersection of M-66 and Evergreen Road as well. The scattered development of commercial business along M-66 north of Hoover Road and south of 19 Mile Rd. should be discouraged if not strictly prohibited.

New commercial development should be encouraged to locate in the existing Village commercial district. A secondary location for new commercial development is recommended at the intersection of Hoover Road and M-66. Already zoned for this purpose, this area could be strengthened as a commercial node. Its central proximity in the township provides for an alternate location for those uses not otherwise suitable for the village business district. Finally, the Township has identified the area along M-66 from 20 Mile Rd. north to Hoover Road as a potential commercial corridor. No additional commercial growth is anticipated or proposed outside of these designated areas.

INDUSTRIAL

There is no land devoted to or zoned for industrial activity in the township. As existing gravel mining operations and LP gas storage facility are located north of 22 Mile Rd. along M-66. Any new industrial activity should be located in or adjacent to existing developed areas of the Village of Barryton to take advantage of the infrastructure available.

TRANSPORTATION

M-66 (30th Avenue) provides the primary transportation route north and south through the township. 10th Avenue and 80th Avenue also serve as north/south transportation routes. 18 Mile Rd., 19 Mile Rd., 20 Mile Rd., and Hoover Rd. all traverse the entire width of the township and provide the primary east-west access for area residents.

GRANT TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Grant Township is located along the northern tier of townships in Mecosta County in the northwest quadrant adjacent to Green Township on the west, Chippewa Township on the east and Hersey Township in Osceola County to the north. Over one quarter of the gross land area in Grant Township is owned by the State of Michigan and dedicated as part of the Haymarsh Lake State Game Area which is the result of a major flooding project in the southeast section of the township. Hunting, camping, and fishing are permitted recreational activities in the game area.

RESIDENTIAL

There are no formal settlements located in the township. In addition, very little land has been zoned for subdivision development. Existing residential areas are located adjacent to the Muskegon River in the northwest corner of the township and in the extreme southwest corner of the township. New residential development is anticipated in the southwestern corner of the Township as population shifts outward from the Big Rapids and Big Rapids Township urban area. However, the majority of the township should be protected from extensive residential development. The Haymarsh Recreation Area, Muskegon River, prime agricultural land, and unique topography provide opportunities to maintain a rural and recreational focus of the township.

COMMERCIAL

There are currently no properties in the township zoned for commercial use. Commercial uses have existed at the intersection of 22 Mile Rd and 150th Avenue in the past. However, commercial development at this location should be discouraged. The township's close proximity to Big Rapids, Green Township, and Big Rapids Township suggest that commercial development is not necessary for this area. Commercial development should not be directed to the existing commercial areas of Big Rapids and Big Rapids Township or the resort and recreational commercial areas located near Chippewa Lake in Chippewa Township and recreational areas in Martiny Township.

INDUSTRIAL

There is currently no industrial activity taking place or land zoned for industrial use in Grant Township. It is recommended that new industrial development be directed toward existing industrial parks in Green Township, Big Rapids Township, and the City of Big Rapids.

TRANSPORTATION

There are a few major transportation routes located in Grant Township. 160th Avenue is the only County primary road that traverses the township north and south. In addition 21 Mile Rd. provides the only east-west corridor through the township. The location of the Muskegon River in the northwest corner of

the township and the Haymarsh State Game Area in the southeast quarter of the township restrict direct traffic corridors from developing.

GREEN CHARTER TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Green Township is located in the extreme northwest corner of Mecosta County and is located north of Big Rapids Township and the City of Big Rapids. The Township is experiencing development pressures as it serves as an attractive location for those working in the Big Rapids area. The area's good soil conditions make the Township an attractive and suitable location for both agricultural production and development. Farming is the predominate land use in the Township as approximately 60% of the land area in the Township is in agricultural production (1980 County Master Plan/1999 Township Master Plan). In addition, approximately 22% of the Township is wooded according to the 1999 Green Township Master Plan.

AGRICULTURAL

As noted above, the predominate land use in Green Township is in agricultural or farming activity. The Township, as noted in the Master Plan and confirmed by a community survey, has identified the preservation of prime agricultural lands and the ambient rural atmosphere and open space associated with rural areas as the primary goal of the plan. As recommended in the 1999 Master Plan, "Green Charter Township should focus its strongest efforts to conserve land where continued agricultural is most likely."

The future land use plan recommends that existing areas designated for agricultural use be preserved and protected from the encroachment of any proposed development. As further noted in the Township's Master Plan "agricultural areas are intended for active agriculture, low density single family dwellings and specialized rural areas that would require large land. Open space areas, woodlands and scenic views area to be preserved as important features of this area." Public utility extension and land subdivisions' should be avoided in agricultural districts.

RESIDENTIAL

Existing residential development is concentrated in the community of Paris east and west of Northland Drive and directly north of Big Rapids Township between Northland Drive and 200th Avenue. Additional development has taken place adjacent to the Muskegon River as it traverses through the Township.

The Green Township Master Plan analyzes the need for various residential land uses and bases its assumptions on a projected population of approximately 3,500 persons by the year 2010. As a result the Township has provided suitable locations for a variety of residential land uses. Low density residential is planned for the areas adjacent to the Muskegon River. Higher density residential is projected for currently vacant parcels east and west of Northland Drive between 18 Mile Road and 19 Mile Road. These areas will serve as transitional development between the commercial activities of the sites. As proposed, the areas would be suitable for higher density single family subdivisions, manufactured home

parks, and multiple family dwellings. This area is suitable for higher density due to its close proximity to the City of Big Rapids and availability of public sewer service.

A second higher density residential area is planned for the community of Paris itself. The area between Northland Drive and the Muskegon River as well as the area directly west of the commercial strip along Northland Drive are planned for higher density residential development.

Rural residential development is incorporated in the agricultural classifications in the Township Master Plan. The Township has attempted to group all other uses within the Township in order to protect and promote a rural residential and agricultural atmosphere within the community. The Green Township Master Plan was adopted in 1999 and provides further detail into residential recommendations.

COMMERCIAL

Existing commercial development has developed along Northland Drive from 18 Mile Road through the community of Paris north to 23 Mile Road. Approximately 55 acres of land are currently used for commercial purposes along this corridor according to the Township's Master Plan.

New commercial development is proposed in two locations. The primary commercial corridor should remain along Northland Drive. This area has remaining vacant land suitable for commercial growth and should be targeted for the local and neighborhood commercial needs of the Township's residential population. Secondly, though currently undeveloped, the area adjacent to the interchange of U.S. 131 and 19 Mile Road has been recommended for development into a highway service commercial area. This area, from both sides of the interchange east to 210th Avenue (Northland Dr.) is proposed for higher intensity commercial uses catering specifically to the highway traveler and those businesses drawing customers from a regional service area.

Finally, as in other townships within Mecosta County, the use or rezoning of land outside of these designated areas for commercial activities should be strictly discouraged. Scattered commercial development and "spot" zoning of individual parcels for commercial use is detrimental to the health and development of the Township and the designated commercial corridors. Those persons seeking to operate a commercial business should locate in designated or planned commercial areas.

INDUSTRIAL

According to the Township Master Plan, the township currently has approximately 40 acres of land devoted to industrial uses with business scattered throughout the Township. Existing industrial development is located along 18 Mile Road in section 31 of the Township and along 19 Mile and Coolidge Road in Section 27 of the Township. These areas are not accessible to public utilities and further development for industrial purposes in these areas is highly discouraged.

The Township has identified new light industrial development as a primary goal within the Master Plan and has recommended that any new development take place along 18 Mile Road between 220th Avenue

and Northland Drive. This location provides convenient access to Roben-Hood Municipal Airport, the City of Big Rapids, and accessibility to public sewer service. In addition, this area is in close proximity to the U.S. 131 expressway and coincides with the Big Rapids Township plan for industrial development directly south of the parcels in Green Township.

TRANSPORTATION

The U.S. 131 freeway traverses north/south through the western third of the township and provides the primary access for residents traveling through the Township to the population centers of Big Rapids to the south and Cadillac to the north. Local north-south traffic is accommodated by 230th Avenue west of U.S. 131 and 220th Avenue, Northland Drive, 190th Avenue east of U.S. 131. East-west traffic is restricted by the Muskegon River which runs north and south through the center and eastern third of the Township. Primary east-west travel routes include 18 Mile Road, 19 Mile Road, 22 Mile Road to Hawkins, and 23 Mile Road. Hoover Road in Paris also provides access across the Muskegon River to the eastern portion of the county.

The Township has established a goal within its Master Plan to work closely with the Mecosta County Road Commission to continue improvements to existing roadways. No new major roadways are currently planned or anticipated in the future. The Township is interested in studying existing travel patterns to target improvements to the current road system to address maintenance and circulation problems.

HINTON TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

The majority of the township is in the agricultural production. This is the predominant land use throughout the township and includes some of the most productive agricultural land in the County. Therefore, it is the intent and recommendation of this plan that the agricultural uses located in the County be protected through minimal land use changes.

AGRICULTURAL

In addition to the above statement, the township is interested in preserving non-tillable lands for recreational and open space activities. Therefore, the future land use plan recommends the substantial rezoning of designated large parcels from AG Prime Agricultural to AF Agricultural Forestry to provide additional alternatives for potential land uses and encourage hunting and other recreational activities on land not suitable for farming.

RESIDENTIAL

There are two residential settlements in the township. Altona and Sylvester are located along Five Mile Rd. approximately 2.5 miles apart.

Low density residential development is recommended adjacent to currently settled areas around Altona and along the north side of Sylvester. In addition, the residential area along 95th Avenue between Eisenhower road and One Mile road is planned for additional low density residential development. This area would serve those persons commuting to the Lakeview (Montcalm Co.) area. New residential development is proposed along 100th Avenue between Three Mile road and Four Mile Road. This would include low density single family residential development as currently allowed in the R-1 District zoning classification. Those parcels currently zoned R-1 along 100th Avenue should remain as identified for small lot residential use.

The location of a manufactured home park development in Hinton Township is not recommended. The lack of appropriate road access, proximity to other residential areas, preservation of farmland, lack of commercial and public services are determining factors in recommending against the location of manufactured home development in Hinton Township.

COMMERCIAL

Two small commercial centers currently exist in the township. One each is the settlements of Altona and Sylvester. In fact, Sylvester is famous for a popular ice cream parlor frequented by the residents of Mecosta County.

Two commercially zoned parcels exist within the Township. The first is located on 110th Avenue south of Jefferson Road. This location is currently unused and would be an opportunity for the Township and County to work to eliminate the structures and zone correctly. The second parcel is located on 70th Avenue south of 6 Mile Road where a used car lot and auto body repair facility operated. The rezoning of these parcels equates to “spot” zoning and should generally be discouraged.

It is recommended that any future commercial development be located in the existing commercial districts of Altona and Sylvester. This would not only strengthen the viability of these commercial areas, but would also locate any new commercial development in closer proximity to existing residential and customer bases not only in the two township settlements but also the Canadian Lakes development in adjacent Morton Township. No new commercial districts are recommended or proposed for Hinton Township at this time.

INDUSTRIAL

There are currently two semi-industrial uses located in Hinton Township. The first being the Cole Tire recycling facility and the second being a peat moss processing facility. There are currently no manufacture facilities located within the Township. As noted above, Hinton Township is a predominately agriculturally based economy and workforce. Those residents of the Township who are not involved in agricultural employment are in close proximity to industrial employers in Remus, Morton Twp. and the City of Lakeview in Montcalm County. There are no major transportation routes through the Township other than the County road system. However, residents have expressed concerns that Five Mile Road is utilized by commercial truck traffic as a corridor between Mt. Pleasant and US-131.

MARTINY TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Martiny Township is developing into a major resort community with its numerous lakes and recreational areas. Martiny Township is located in the north central section of Mecosta County and does not include any organized settlements or villages. However, substantial residential development has taken place around the lakes and a number of public campgrounds are located within the township. The northeast corner of the township is predominately owned by the State of Michigan as it was originally developed as the Martiny Lakes Flooding Project.

RESIDENTIAL

Previous residential development has taken place along the shores of the various lakes in the township on small lots in those areas with suitable soil conditions. Those areas undeveloped adjacent to the lakes in this area have poor soils, are wetlands, or have other problems which make them unsuitable for development. Lower density housing development has been scattered throughout the township and also located in close proximity to the lake and recreational areas of the township.

New low density residential development is recommended for areas south, west and east of Horsehead Lake. These include parcels located east of 95th Avenue north of Arthur Rd., and west of 75th Avenue from Taft Road south to Arthur Road. Additional residential development is proposed for west of 60th Avenue from 14 Mile rd. south to one-half mile south of 13 Mile Road. This area corresponds to a similarly planned area in west Sheridan Township.

Finally, the residentially zoned area on 120th Avenue stretching from 13 Mile Rd. to 16 Mile Rd. should be rezoned agricultural use. This area does not correspond to a residential area in Colfax Township and only facilitates the scattering of residential uses along 120th Avenue as opposed to providing planned residential areas in closer proximity to each other.

COMMERCIAL

Scattered commercial development has taken place around the township to serve the local and recreational populations living around and utilizing the various lakes and recreational campgrounds in the area. The primary commercial area for Martiny Township is currently located at the intersection of 75th Avenue and Taft Road.

New commercial development should be concentrated adjacent to the existing commercial area noted above. Taft Road between 80th Avenue and 75th Avenue is a centralized location for the lake and resort communities and provides additional commercial development opportunities.

INDUSTRIAL

The lone industrial activity currently located in the township is a sand and gravel operation on 75th Avenue south of Taft Road. The residential and recreational atmosphere of the township does not lend itself to the location of numerous industrial activities or intensive land uses.

The future land use plan recommends the zoning of additional land for the potential expansion of the gravel operation across from the current location on the west side of 75th Avenue. Aside from this provision, no additional land is recommended for industrial land use in the township.

MIXED USE AREA

An area on the south side of Taft Road between 80th Avenue and 75th Avenue has been designated for mixed use development. The proximity of the lakes, potential residential development, commercial growth, and recreational nature of the area presents an opportunity to think creatively concerning the potential development of these parcels. This area would also serve as a transition area as it backs up to the proposed expansion of the gravel operation in the township. Future development proposals for these parcels should include a mixture of both residential and commercial uses with an emphasis on creative layout and attractive design.

MECOSTA TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Mecosta Township is located in the southwest quadrant of Mecosta County and is one of the more diversified townships in the County. Mecosta Township is the location of the Rogers Dam, an electrical generation facility for Consumers Energy. The village of Stanwood is located in the southeast corner of the Township. Mecosta Township benefits from the location of an interchange at 8 Mile Rd. and US-131.

AGRICULTURAL

The residents of Mecosta Township have expressed an interest in maintaining the rural atmosphere and agricultural land uses of the Township and have recommended that large tracts of land which are currently zoned for low density residential use (RR-2, under the 1983 Zoning Ordinance) be rezoned to an agricultural land use classification. As they are undeveloped and in agricultural production, the rezoning of these parcels would return the zoning district designation to coincide with the current agricultural land uses and protect the parcels from substantial development into the future. The areas proposed to be returned to agricultural designation include those southwest and southeast of the 8 Mile Road/US-131 Interchange, parcels located southwest of the Village of Stanwood currently used for agricultural purposes, large tracts on the east side of 205th Avenue west of Rogers Heights, and parcels located on the west side of 180th Avenue on either side of 11 Mile Rd. These are parcels currently farmed, many by the local Amish population, that are proposed for protection from potential residential development.

RESIDENTIAL

Substantial areas within the Township have been devoted to or planned for rural and resort residential development. Small parcel residential areas exist adjacent to Rogers Pond and along the banks of the Muskegon River. Additional residential development is scattered along County roads throughout the Township.

More recent residential development is taking place along 11 Mile rd. east of Northland Dr. (220th Ave.) New residential development is recommended for those areas of the Township currently zoned RR-2 (under the 1983 Zoning Ordinance) west of the Village of Stanwood, northwest and southwest of the 8 Mile Rd./US-131 Interchange, and east of the Muskegon River between 11 Mile Rd. south to Northland Drive.

As a housing alternative, manufactured home developments require careful consideration when reviewing suitable and reasonable locations for their placement and development. In Mecosta Township, the planning commission is recommending an area west of the Village of Stanwood and east of the US-131 Interchange along 8 Mile Rd. In addition the area west of Northland Drive and Rogers Heights, east of the US-131 between 10 Mile Rd. and 11 Mile Rd. is recommended for the possible location of a manufactured home park.

Finally, the area west of the US-131 highway in Mecosta Township is proposed for predominantly rural residential and agricultural uses. This land is wooded and rolling with a number of recreational and residential uses. Consumers Energy Company has major holdings in this area and will remain primarily undeveloped. The zoning of land west of US 131 in Mecosta Township should be restricted to rural residential and agricultural classifications to limit development and preserve farmland and natural areas.

COMMERCIAL

An existing commercial district has developed along Northland Drive (Old US-31) to serve the Rogers Heights area. In addition, commercial areas have developed adjacent to the 8 Mile Road/US-131 Interchange as well as both north and south of the Village of Stanwood along Northland Drive.

New commercial development is recommended to locate in close proximity to the 8 Mile road/US-131 Interchange. This commercial area should be devoted to servicing the highway traveler and be limited in size and permitted uses. Strip commercial development is not recommended along 8 Mile Road east of US-131. Commercial areas are recommended to be clustered in the Village of Stanwood, adjacent to the highway interchange, and clustered along Northland Drive at the 11 Mild Rd. intersection in Rogers Heights. The individual rezoning of parcels for commercial uses in areas not designated for commercial developed should be discouraged if not prohibited entirely.

INDUSTRIAL

There are no parcels currently zoned for industrial use within the township. Industrial activity, if proposed, should be located as close to the Village of Stanwood as possible. (As noted elsewhere in this plan, industrial development on a County wide basis is recommended or organized industrial parks and population centers where public infrastructure and utilities are generally available.) The City of Big Rapids, Big Rapids Township, Green Township, Morton and Wheatland Townships are recommended locations for industrial growth and development in Mecosta County. The remaining townships, villages, and population centers will serve as residential and commercial centers for their communities.

MILLBROOK TOWNSHIP

The description from the 1980 Mecosta County Land Use Plan could very well be used for the 2000 Mecosta County Master Plan. Millbrook Township has not changed substantially from that of twenty years ago. The Village of Millbrook in the extreme northeast corner of the township is still the primary residential settlement with a secondary residential area referred to as West Millbrook along 10th Avenue. Millbrook Township is located in the southeast corner of Mecosta County as is in the heart of the County's prime agricultural production area.

The existing pattern of agricultural and rural residential land uses within the township will continue to be encouraged and will be the predominant land uses in the future. It is the intent of this plan to protect the existing agricultural and farming activities located in Millbrook Township and to discourage development and direct suburban residential, commercial and industrial activity away from Millbrook Township.

RESIDENTIAL

Very little residential development has taken place in the township during the past twenty years. As noted above, existing residential activity is centered in the Village of Millbrook and West Millbrook. New residential development is recommended for the area east of 10th Avenue between West Millbrook and the Village of Millbrook. Scattered residential development will continue to take place throughout the township on individual parcels that meet the required zoning and Land Division Act requirements.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial development has been limited to individual parcels rezoned for commercial purposes along major thoroughfares within the township. Four commercial properties exist along M-66 (30th Avenue). Individual commercial activity is taking place on 5 Mile Road west of 10th Avenue, on Jackson road east of 10th Avenue (taxidermy and fur dressing) and a small commercial center in the Village of Millbrook.

It is recommended that any additional commercial development in the Township be located at the intersection of M-66 and Monroe Rd. or within the existing village commercial district. In addition, a second commercial district is recommended for Jackson Road from 10th Avenue east to Blanchard (County line). Intermittent or "spot" zoning of parcels for commercial purposes as has taken place along M-66 and elsewhere in the township should be discouraged if not strictly prohibited.

INDUSTRIAL

There are currently no parcels located within Millbrook Township that are zoned for industrial use. With population centers north of Millbrook in Wheatland Township (Remus area) and south of the township in Montcalm County (Lakeview area), no additional industrial development is proposed for Millbrook Township.

MORTON TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Morton Township is located in the southeast quarter of Mecosta County and is one of the fastest growing townships in the County. Morton Township is home to three resort and recreational areas targeting retirees and recreational enthusiasts alike. These include the Canadian Lakes development, School Section Lake area, and the Tri-Lakes (Blue, Mecosta & Round Lakes) area. These natural and recreational areas including the associated residential development in each of these areas dominate the western half of the Township. The Village of Mecosta is located in sections 11 and 12 (northeast corner) of Morton Township where state highway M-20 crosses the east branch of the Little Muskegon River. Morton Township has been pro-active in land use planning. The Township has previously developed a Master Land Use Plan and administers its own zoning ordinance separate from that of Mecosta County's. Morton Township should continue this pro-active approach to planning by coordinating their efforts with those of the Mecosta County Planning Commission and the surrounding property owners association.

AGRICULTURE

Though not nearly as predominate as in other townships, agricultural activity occupies approximately one-third of the land area within the township and the majority of this activity is located in the southeastern quarter of the township. Morton Township has identified as a primary goal the preservation of this land and has designated the southeast corner of the Township for strictly agricultural (farming) land uses. This area is bounded by 9 Mile Road on the north, 90th Avenue on the west, 6 Mile Road on the south, and 60th Avenue on the east. As prime agricultural land, this area is proposed for little or no development including ribbon or spot residential development along major County roads.

RESIDENTIAL

Residential land uses have developed in two primary locations. The first is east and south of the business district of the Village of Mecosta. The second are the resort areas and subdivisions adjoining the various lakes within the western half of Morton Township. In fact, the Canadian Lakes development accounts for over half of the residentially developed lots in Morton Township.

New residential development is proposed to continue within the Canadian Lakes development as well as in the other lake and resort communities of the Township. Nearly the entire western half of the Township is proposed for residential and recreational use. In addition, residential development is limited north and south of the Village of Mecosta as a result of the location of State owned land and numerous wetlands in the area.

COMMERCIAL

Existing commercial activity is centered in the Village of Mecosta. An additional commercial district has developed at the northwest corner of the intersection of 9 Mile Road and 70th Avenue just north of the

Township industrial park. A retail area has also developed on Buchanan road as a part of the Canadian Lakes development.

Existing and future commercial activity is centered around five (5) locations: (1) the Village of Mecosta, (2) the northwest corner of the intersection of 9 Mile Road and 70th Ave, just north of the Township industrial/commercial park, (3) the area surrounding the intersection of 90th Avenue and 11 Mile, (4) the commercial center at the intersection of Buchanan Road and 100th Avenue, and (5) the future development of a neighborhood commercial center along Pierce Road (included in the Tullymore PUD).. Scattered or “spot” commercial activity is discouraged along major County roads and located only in the previously mentioned districts.

INDUSTRIAL

There is currently one industrial park located within Morton Township. This area is located on 9 Mile road directly west of highway M-20. This location provides suitable transportation access to the state highway and is arranged in a park like setting. The Morton Township Master Plan references the importance of industrial development to the community’s tax base and provides this area for future industrial development as existing sites are still available. The Township recognizes the need for additional commercial locations in the area and has designated some of the lots in the park for commercial development.

TRANSPORTATION

State Highway M-20 traverses through the northern third of the Township including the Village of Mecosta where it has developed as the Village main street. M-20 serves as the primary east-west corridor through the Township. However, Buchanan Road and 7 Mile Road to Pierce Road also serve as east-west transportation corridors through the central and southern sections of the Township. 70th Avenue is the only road which runs the entire length north and south through the Township. It is the recommendation of the Morton Township Economic Development Committee that future planning should focus on creating a “Class A” road connecting M-20 to 9 Mile road to the intersection of 100th Avenue and Buchanan road providing and creating an East/West “Class A” Road corridor through Morton Township. For future transportation planning, Morton Township supports the repair and resurfacing of the existing M-20 highway corridor as opposed to the relocation of the highway further south along Buchanan road as previously proposed. In addition, the Mecosta County Road Commission is encouraged to continue its efforts relative to the maintenance and resurfacing of County primary roads located in the Township.

PARKS & RECREATION

See Morton Township Park and Recreation Ordinance.

SHERIDAN TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Sheridan Township is predominately rural and agricultural township. Its proximity to the Martiny Lakes resort area in Martiny Township and the Martiny Lakes Flooding Project provide recreational and unique housing opportunities to the township residents. Approximately half of the township is devoted to agricultural land use. In addition, substantial forested areas are scattered throughout the township. The State of Michigan has substantial holdings in the northwest corner of the township in conjunction with the Martiny Lakes Flooding Project. Sheridan Township originally developed a Land Use Plan in 1979.

RESIDENTIAL

Existing residential development is currently located in two distinct areas of Sheridan Township. The first is located on privately held parcels located within the Martiny Lakes Flooding Project and Diamond Lake in the far northwestern section of the township. This area is typified by small lot development along the lake and river resources that are not otherwise owned by the State of Michigan. The second experiencing residential activity is that area in and around the intersection of Arthur Rd. and M-66. This area includes the Chippewa Hills High School, property owned by the Mecosta County road Commission and surrounding area zoned for rural residential use.

New or increased residential development is proposed for the area in the southwestern section of the Township between 60th and 55th Avenue both north and south of 13 Mile Rd. This area is adjacent to an area in Martiny Township proposed for future residential development. In general, residential development should be concentrated through open space planning and small lot development along major transportation corridors.

An existing manufactured home park development is located in the Township approximately a mile north of Chippewa Hills High School. In addition, the property located directly north of the high school property would be suitable for a manufactured home park or higher density residential development. This land is physically suitable for development, adjacent to a major thoroughfare, buffered by agricultural and governmental land uses, and within reasonable commuting distance to the population centers of Big Rapids and Mt. Pleasant. However, there is no public sewer or water available, which limits the density available.

COMMERCIAL

Established commercial centers exist two miles north of the township in the Village of Barryton (Fork Twp.) and three miles south of the township in the community of Remus (Wheatland Twp.). Scattered commercial uses exist in the township at the intersection of 18 Mile Rd. and M-66, at the intersection of Taft Rd. and M-66, at the intersection of Arthur Road and M-66, and in the Martiny Lakes resort area on Madison and Harding Roads.

The commercially zoned area extending south from 18 Mile Rd. and M-66 intersection should be discouraged from developing and eventually rezoned to less intensive uses. The commercially zoned district on the north side of Taft Rd. at the intersection with M-66 should be expanded to include the southwest and southeast corners of the intersection. This area, two and one-half miles south of the 18 Mile Rd./M-66 intersection, provides a more centralized location for commercial growth within Sheridan Township. In addition, it provides separation between the commercial activity in the Village of Barryton in Fork Township, and that which is planned in Sheridan Township. The establishment of predetermined commercial nodes is intended to discourage scattered strip commercial development located along M-66. The fact that M-66 is a State Highway should not suggest that commercial activity would be allowed along its entire length. New commercial development should be located in clusters at major intersections within the township. The primary commercial intersection should be that at the intersection of Taft Rd. and M-66. Furthermore, the individual rezoning of parcels for commercial purposes elsewhere in the township should be discouraged in all of but the most unique circumstances.

INDUSTRIAL

There is currently one area designated or zoned for industrial land use in Sheridan Township, at the intersection of 16 Mile and M-66. Closest employment centers, other than this, are those businesses and industries located in the Village of Barryton and in Remus. Future land uses for industrial purpose should be located at this same intersection within Sheridan Township.

TRANSPORTATION

M-66 (30th Avenue) is the primary north-south access route through the township bisecting the township evenly into east and west halves. 12 Mile road along the south township border and 18 Mile Rd. along the north township border are the primary east-west routes. Taft Road and Arthur road also serve as primary east-west corridors within the township.

WHEATLAND TOWNSHIP

OVERVIEW

Wheatland Township, an important agricultural township in Mecosta County, has the majority of its land devoted to agricultural activities. Pasture lands, crop production, and livestock operations dominate the township's land area. Located in the southeast quarter of the County, Wheatland is one of the primary agricultural areas within the County, and because of its importance, deliberate efforts should be made to preserve and retain the existing agricultural lands within the township.

An unincorporated area known as Remus is located at the intersection of M-66 and M-20 in central Wheatland Township. Remus is the largest concentration of population and community in eastern Mecosta County. It also has a sewer system, which will be an asset in future growth and expansions. Remus has a commercial district located along Sheridan Avenue (M-20) primarily west of M-66. Remus is home to various retail and service businesses, banks, service stations, and restaurants. Wheatland Township hall is located in Remus as is a recreation complex.

INFRASTRUCTURE/PUBLIC SERVICES

Though sanitary sewer service exists within the unincorporated area of Remus, a public water system does not. The community is investigating the potential feasibility and costs associated with creating a public water distribution system. With the concentration of residences and businesses in the area, a public water system would greatly benefit the community and would position the area for future growth and development.

In addition to utility services, the community's transportation system requires improvements. The State Highway, M-66, intersecting M-20 in Remus, requires physical upgrades. Curb, gutter, sidewalk, road surface, and streetscape improvements should be pursued for the first half mile of M-66 from the intersection in Remus outward in each direction. M-20, the east-west highway through Remus has been updated. In addition, the remainder of M-20 west of Remus is recommended for widening and repaving. The existing roadway is in poor condition and the road and shoulder width is not in accordance with current State highway construction standards for two lane highways.

Finally, the lack of medical services on the east side of the County has been identified as a primary concern. Discussions have resulted in Mecosta County General Hospital locating a medical clinic facility in Morton Township within the Canadian Lakes resort development. The facility should assist the hospital in serving the eastern residents of the County living in Remus, Canadian Lakes, and the outlying Townships.

AGRICULTURAL

The Township recommended a rezoning of a number of large parcels in the northeast corner of the Township from AF Agricultural Forestry to AG Prime Agricultural to further protect these large parcels

and preserve them for farming and agricultural uses. These parcels are located west of 10th Avenue and north and south of Eleven Mile Rd.

RESIDENTIAL

Existing residential development is located primarily in the Remus area with additional low density residential development located in the northwest corner of the township adjacent to a lake. Rural residential development and farmsteads are located throughout the township.

For new residential development, it is recommended that the area in the northwest corner of the township be encouraged to expand for low density residential use. This area is bordered by Eleven Mile Rd. on the south and Twelve Mile Rd. on the north and 60th Avenue on the west and 50th Avenue (M-66) and along 40th Avenue north and south of Seven Mile Rd. Finally, low density residential is also proposed at the southwest corners of the intersection of 10 Mile Road and 50th Avenue and 10 Mile road and 60th Avenue.

Medium or higher density residential development is proposed for the north side of Nine Mile Rd. east of the commercial district and in the southwest side of Remus west of 30th Avenue and south of Nine Mile Rd.

COMMERCIAL

As referenced throughout this plan, rural townships (particularly those with state highways) are subject to spotted locations of commercial development. The sporadic rezoning of individual parcels for commercial purposes should be discouraged. As noted in the 1980 Land Use Plan, "this type of development does not encourage the best use of our land resources, nor is it economically efficient." Commercial development in Wheatland Township should be concentrated along M-20 and M-66 in and adjacent to the Remus area. This will not only prevent possible land use conflicts, but strengthen the economic viability of the Remus commercial business district.

INDUSTRIAL

There are two existing industrial areas within Wheatland Township. The first is located on the east side of M-66 north of Remus adjacent to the wastewater treatment plant. The second is located along the eastern County line on 8 Mile Rd. east of 10th Avenue.

Wheatland Township has been identified within this plan as a potential location for further industrial development. New or expanded industrial activity is recommended adjacent to existing industrially zoned land. These areas include north of Remus between 20th Avenue and 30th Avenue and north and south of 8 Mile Rd east of 10th Avenue adjacent to the Mecosta County line.

Implementation Action Plan

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Implementation strategies are a key component of any community master plan. They determine how the Plan's guidelines and recommendations become reality. To implement the goals and objectives provided in this plan, it will be necessary for the planning commission to be flexible and pro-active. As events alter conditions within the County or the needs of the residents change, various adjustments or additions will need to be made to the plan. Furthermore, all of the possible implementation tools available to the commission should be studied and discussed before approving any changes. Therefore, while generally helpful, suggestions for the implementation of goals and policies of the County are to be considered and used where possible, but are subject to further change. Every effort should be taken to keep the plan current.

ZONING ORDINANCE INTEGRATION WITH MASTER PLAN

The County Zoning Ordinance is a principal tool for the implementation of the plan. Substantial revisions are recommended to make the current zoning ordinance reflect the recommendations of this Plan and vision of the community. A zoning ordinance revision is under contract following the adoption of this plan.

Zoning is the division of a community into districts for the purpose of regulating the use of land and buildings, their height and bulk, the proportion of lot that may be covered by them, and the density of development. Zoning is enacted under the police power of the state for the purpose of promoting the health, safety, and general welfare and has long been supported constitutionally by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The zoning ordinance needs to incorporate appropriate zoning tools such as planned unit development, site plan review, County design standards, site condominium, cellular tower and landscaping requirements if the concepts of the Master Land Use Plan are to be implemented. The zoning map should necessarily reflect the rural character of the County with the Land Use Plan map used as a guide in decisions involving zoning changes.

Depending on the rate of development and change and requests for change to the zoning map, an annual appraisal of the zoning maps should be anticipated. It is generally accepted practice to provide zoning on a basis of a five year land use projection, whereas the Plan is ten (10) to fifteen (15) year projection.

COORDINATION WITH EXISTING PLANS

Master plans currently exist in the communities of Green Township, Big Rapids Township, Morton Township, Mecosta Township and the City of Big Rapids. In addition, the Canadian Lakes residential community has completed its own master land use plan for the residential and resort development. Each of these documents were reviewed for consistency with the overall goals of the Mecosta county Master

Plan. Finally, the County plan was presented and reviewed by the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission for comments and consistency with regional planning objectives.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROLS AND STANDARDS

The most influential technique to implement the future land use plan is the regulations established by the County to control and guide development and land use. These regulations include the zoning ordinance (as discussed above), subdivision control ordinance, condominium ordinance, land division ordinance and ordinances for the preservation of natural features. However, the creation of new ordinances is not sufficient. The ordinances must contain specific procedures and techniques that are created to achieve the objectives, and eventually goals, of the future land use plan. Whether a community promotes home occupations or excludes them, whether it encourages creative development or requires developers to adhere to rigid regulations, are just some examples of how the community can use ordinance to regulate land uses in the community.

PUBLIC UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT

The necessity of citizen participation and understanding of the planning process and the Plan cannot be over-emphasized. A carefully organized public education program is needed to organize and identify public support in any community development plan. The lack of citizen understanding and support can seriously limit implementation of the plan's recommendations and proposals. Public misunderstanding of a community's long range plan and desired objectives can result in the failure to support needed public improvements, proposed zoning amendments, necessary bond issues, and the election of responsible or progressive officials to lead the community.

In order to organize public support most effectively, the County must emphasize the reasons for planning, the processes involved, and encourage citizen participation in the adoption of the plan and the continuing planning process. Public awareness and education can be achieved through a number of different means including public presentations at commission and board meetings, articles written in the local newspaper or distributed in a newsletter, and with the advent of the Internet, through the development of a County website. The willingness by residents to participate on County boards and commissions, attend informational meetings, or volunteer with various civic organizations is evidence of a population's community involvement.

The following list outlines additional programs that can be undertaken to inform the public about important land use goals and regulatory implementation techniques:

- A condensed future land use plan highlighting the goals and objectives of the plan
- Informational brochures on various topics important to rural communities
- School programs concerning land use issues
- Informational sessions held by the County Board and Planning Commission

Finally, a periodic community opinion survey should be considered as another means by which the County government can gauge changing attitudes and priorities.

CONTINUOUS PLANNING

One of the primary roles of the Planning Commission is to provide planning recommendations to the County Board of Commissioners. This planning function is a continuous process which does not terminate with the completion of the Plan. Communities are in a constant state of evolution and planning is an on-going process of identification, adjustment and resolution of identified concerns, problems, and new challenges. To appropriately sustain the planning process, maintain interest and momentum, and generate the community's intended positive outcomes the Plan should be reviewed and updated periodically.

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