



# Master Plan

**NEWFIELD TOWNSHIP, OCEANA COUNTY, MICHIGAN**

Adopted by Township Board November 19, 2024

Prepared with the assistance of:



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# Acknowledgments

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## Chapter 1.

# Introduction

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The Newfield Township Master Plan is the culmination of efforts of the Township Planning Commission, Township Board of Trustees, and residents of Newfield Township. They joined together in order to update the previous Master Plan for the community's growth and development and make better use of the existing Zoning Ordinance.

Newfield Township is located in east-central Oceana County. The county is situated about 25-minute drive to the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. The Township is located approximately halfway between Traverse City, Michigan and the Michigan/Indiana border. The history of Newfield Township is closely connected to Hesperia, White River, and Michigan's Lumber Era-roughly from 1860-1910.

Besides the Hesperia Dam, which provides the Hesperia area with quality sport fishing, there are several popular lakes within Newfield Township. The township maintains a boat launch at Hightower Lake, and a popular hidden gem of a riverside park at Oxbow Park off M-20. The township also operates and cares for two cemeteries within the Township's borders. The parks and cemeteries are overseen by the Newfield Township Sexton.

The Township is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees who serve four-year elected terms; The Supervisor, Clerk, and Treasurer as well as two trustees. Their meetings are generally held on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm at the Newfield Township Hall.

# Newfield Township 2024 Master Plan

The 2024 Newfield Township Master Plan has been developed to serve as a set of general policies to guide decision makers within the community and direct the future growth and development of the Township over the next ten to fifteen years. The Master Plan is intended to provide a suitable development pattern for the Township that will promote future economic stability and quality of life to residents of Newfield Township.

In accordance with this objective, the Master Plan defines issues that are most important to the community. Resident and community input was encouraged through a visioning meeting, Planning Commission meetings, and a public hearing. An analysis of the existing features of the Township was conducted to illustrate some of its defining characteristics. The analysis includes a survey of the existing land uses in the Township; population, economic and housing statistics; and a description of the physical constraints, natural resources, and circulation patterns within the community.

Based on all gathered information and with input from citizens, goals and objectives were developed which outline the growth and development patterns for the community over the next ten to fifteen years. This plan and the goals and objectives contained within it should be the guide for all significant land use decisions made by the Township for the next ten to fifteen years. As conditions change over time, the Township may find that the Master Plan needs to change as well. Amendments are likely as it is impossible to perfectly predict exactly what will happen in the near future. Keeping the Master Plan up to date will ensure that it stays relevant and useful and will keep it from simply collecting dust on a shelf.

## Purpose and Intent

This document is intended to fulfill the State of Michigan requirements and provide the functions of a Master Plan. The Township Master Plan is a crucial planning document for a community as it not only provides important information about the current conditions and trends in the community, but also presents a vision for the future of the Township with a plan for accomplishing that vision.

A Master Plan is used for a variety of purposes. At the most basic level, a Master Plan is the basis for a community's zoning ordinance. One of the legal tests of validity for a zoning ordinance is that the ordinance must be based on a comprehensive plan for the development of the jurisdiction. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (P.A. 110 of 2006, as amended) requires that zoning ordinances are based on a plan.

A fundamental part of the master planning process is the public involvement that identifies the community's desires for its future and its long-term vision for growth and development. The goals and objectives are the heart of the Master Plan and present the vision and the manner in which it will be achieved.

## Document Contents

The Newfield Township Master Plan is organized into several chapters describing existing conditions, trends, projections, and their implications; the Township’s vision, goals, and objectives; master planned future land use, transportation, recreation, and community development; and proposed actions for making the Plans into reality.

- » **Community Profile** is an analysis of Newfield Township with regard to its population and other demographic characteristics. Based on numerical data, this section gives an overview of the trends in the Township and projections for the future.
- » **Existing Conditions** presents the existing land uses, transportation, public facilities, wetlands, floodplain, prime farmland and soils, and other physical characteristics of Newfield Township, including maps, pictures, and text. Its purpose is to present the Township as it exists today.
- » **Goals and Objectives** outline the path that the Township intends to follow, including the vision for the economic, social, and physical future of the community.
- » **The Future Land Use Plan** combines the information, analysis, and input from the above chapters into a coherent plan for Newfield Township’s future. This chapter is related to the goals and objectives, Township enhancements, sustainability considerations, and future land use and transportation recommendations.
- » **The Action Plan** answers the “how” of the Master Plan. With specific programs, ideas, and regulations, it provides guidance for Township officials to shape the Township’s future. The chapter includes specific action-oriented implementation steps, as well as for economic development, land use and zoning regulations, and capital improvements.



## Chapter 2.

# Newfield Township Today

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## Regional Context

Newfield Township is located in Oceana County, Michigan approximately 35 miles northeast of the City of Muskegon, and approximately 60 miles northwest of the City of Grand Rapids.

The Township is approximately 35.7 square miles in size. Land makes up about 35.1 square miles of the township and water makes up about .6 square miles. The township is largely comprised of undeveloped agricultural land and rural residential homes on large lots. Approximately half of the Village of Hesperia, a separate municipality, sits in the southeast corner of Newfield Township. The other half sits in Denver Township, immediately east of Newfield Township.

Newfield Township is located on the eastern edge of Oceana County on the Lake Michigan shore of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Leavitt Township is located just north of the Township, Ferry Township is located just west, and Greenwood Township is located just south. Newfield Township shares a border to the east with Newago County's Denver Township.

The Township is located roughly equidistant from several communities with job centers. In addition to being close to Muskegon, Newfield Township is in the geographic middle of the cities of Fremont, Whitehall, Rothbury, Hart, Shelby, and White Cloud. There are several local and regional foundations in the Newfield Township region that provide funding for community projects. The Community Foundation for Oceana County is the main foundation source of funding for Newfield Township. The foundation funds economic development projects, early childhood literacy, and helping with urgent needs.

**Map 1: Regional Location**

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The purpose of a demographic profile is to understand the past, present, and future population and demographic characteristics of Newfield Township and to analyze housing options and stock.

Population, demographics, education, and housing characteristics are compared with Oceana County and surrounding Townships, and in some instances the State of Michigan, to gain a regional perspective. The following paragraphs and tables will give the reader some insight as to what the future may hold for Newfield Township.

## POPULATION

The population of Newfield Township was 2,078 persons, based on data obtained from the United States Census Bureau via the 2022 American Community Survey Estimates. Oceana County had an estimated total population of 26,707 persons based on the 2022 Community Survey. Newfield Township accounts for an estimated 8.7% of the entire population of the county.

In comparison to surrounding communities, as depicted in the table below, Newfield Township has one of the highest populations in the County. Newfield Township lost several people between 2010 and 2020. The population in 2010 was 2,401, which is slightly more than the 2020 population of 2,329.

**Table 1: Population Comparison of Surrounding Communities**

|            | Newfield Twp | Elbridge Twp | Leavitt Twp | Ferry Twp | Otto Twp |
|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Population | 2,329        | 999          | 911         | 1,271     | 858      |

Source: American Decennial Census, 2020

## RACE & ETHNICITY

The population of Newfield Township is relatively homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity. In the 2020 census, 90.4% of the total population reported being White/Caucasian, 0.6% African American, 0.5% American Indian, and 0.2% Asian. 2.1% reported being another race not listed. The below table shows the race breakdown within the Township. It is also noted that 140 residents reported being of a mixed race – two or more race compositions.

**Table 2: Race and Ethnicity, Newfield Township**

| Race and Ethnicity                      | Population | Percentage |
|---|------------|------------|
| Population of one race:                 | 2,189      | 94.0%      |
| White alone                             | 2,107      | 90.4%      |
| Black or African American alone         | 15         | 0.6%       |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone | 12         | 0.5%       |
| Asian alone                             | 5          | 0.2%       |
| Some Other Race alone                   | 50         | 2.1%       |
| Population of two or more races:        | 140        | 6.0%       |

Source: American Decennial Census, 2020

## AGE STRUCTURE

Based on 2022 American Community Survey data, the median age of Township residents was 44.7 years, compared to Oceana County, which has a median age of 43.8 years. This higher median age could be a factor of an aging population. The below table shows the population percentage based on the census age range.

The largest population group in Newfield Township is the 65–74-year age range, representing 12.8% of the residents in the Township. The second largest age group are those between the ages of 45 to 54 years, representing 11.7% of the population of the Township. The third largest age group was 25 to 34 years old, representing 11.6%. A complete breakdown of age groups in Newfield Township is in the table below.

**Table 3: Age Structure, Newfield Township**

| Age Range         | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------|--------|------------|
| Total population  | 2,327  | 100%       |
| Under 5 years     | 128    | 5.5%       |
| 5 to 9 years      | 220    | 9.5%       |
| 10 to 14 years    | 149    | 6.4%       |
| 15 to 19 years    | 80     | 3.4%       |
| 20 to 24 years    | 106    | 4.6%       |
| 25 to 29 years    | 114    | 4.9%       |
| 30 to 34 years    | 156    | 6.7%       |
| 35 to 39 years    | 93     | 4.0%       |
| 40 to 44 years    | 123    | 5.3%       |
| 45 to 49 years    | 171    | 7.3%       |
| 50 to 54 years    | 101    | 4.3%       |
| 55 to 59 years    | 208    | 8.9%       |
| 60 to 64 years    | 219    | 9.4%       |
| 65 to 69 years    | 143    | 6.1%       |
| 70 to 74 years    | 155    | 6.7%       |
| 75 to 79 years    | 80     | 3.4%       |
| 80 to 84 years    | 40     | 1.7%       |
| 85 years and over | 41     | 1.8%       |

Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2022

The next table provides a comparison of age demographics between Township residents and Oceana County as a whole.

**Table 4: Age Demographics Comparison, Newfield Township vs Oceana County**

| Newfield Township         |             |     | Oceana County             |             |     |
|---------------------------|-------------|-----|---------------------------|-------------|-----|
| Total population          | 2,327       | %   | Total population          | 26,707      | %   |
| Under 5 years             | 128         | 5.1 | Under 5 years             | 1,356       | 5.5 |
| 5 to 9 years              | 220         | 6.5 | 5 to 9 years              | 1,749       | 9.5 |
| 10 to 14 years            | 149         | 6.1 | 10 to 14 years            | 1,639       | 6.4 |
| 15 to 19 years            | 80          | 6.3 | 15 to 19 years            | 1,690       | 3.4 |
| 20 to 24 years            | 106         | 5.5 | 20 to 24 years            | 1,473       | 4.6 |
| 25 to 29 years            | 114         | 5.3 | 25 to 29 years            | 1,425       | 4.9 |
| 30 to 34 years            | 156         | 5.4 | 30 to 34 years            | 1,429       | 6.7 |
| 35 to 39 years            | 93          | 5.3 | 35 to 39 years            | 1,417       | 4.0 |
| 40 to 44 years            | 123         | 5.8 | 40 to 44 years            | 1,561       | 5.3 |
| 45 to 49 years            | 171         | 5.2 | 45 to 49 years            | 1,400       | 7.3 |
| 50 to 54 years            | 101         | 6.2 | 50 to 54 years            | 1,648       | 4.3 |
| 55 to 59 years            | 208         | 7.5 | 55 to 59 years            | 1,992       | 8.9 |
| 60 to 64 years            | 219         | 8.4 | 60 to 64 years            | 2,250       | 9.4 |
| 65 to 69 years            | 143         | 7.5 | 65 to 69 years            | 1,995       | 6.1 |
| 70 to 74 years            | 155         | 5.4 | 70 to 74 years            | 1,440       | 6.7 |
| 75 to 79 years            | 80          | 4.0 | 75 to 79 years            | 1,058       | 3.4 |
| 80 to 84 years            | 40          | 2.7 | 80 to 84 years            | 714         | 1.7 |
| 85 years and over         | 41          | 1.8 | 85 years and over         | 471         | 1.8 |
| <b>Median age (years)</b> | <b>44.7</b> |     | <b>Median age (years)</b> | <b>43.8</b> |     |

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

The educational attainment for persons 25 years and older within Newfield Township is depicted in the table below. Within the Township, an estimated 93% of residents have a high school degree or higher.

24.2% of residents have completed some college but did not receive a degree. 10.9% of Township residents have earned an Associate's degree. 7.1% of Township residents have earned a Bachelor's degree, while 4.0% have earned a graduate or professional degree.

For comparison, Oceana County has 19.6% of county residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher. Regarding regional comparisons, the State of Michigan educational attainment for persons 25 years and older is 31.1% for a Bachelor's degree, while the national estimate is 34.3% for a Bachelor's degree.

**Table 5: Educational Attainment, Newfield Township**

| Educational Attainment              | Number of Population | Percent Population |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| High School or equivalent           | 800                  | 48.7%              |
| Some college, no degree             | 398                  | 24.2%              |
| Associate's degree                  | 179                  | 10.9%              |
| Bachelor's degree                   | 116                  | 7.1%               |
| Graduate or professional            | 65                   | 4.0%               |
| <b>High School Degree or higher</b> | <b>1,558</b>         | <b>94.8%</b>       |

Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2022

Additionally, the surrounding communities' educational attainment with a Bachelor's degree or higher is listed in the following table. As stated previously, the State of Michigan educational attainment with a Bachelor's degree is 31.1%. Newfield Township and the surrounding communities fall below the state median for educational attainment.

**Table 6: Educational Attainment of Surrounding Communities**

|                             | Newfield Twp | Elbridge Twp | Leavitt Twp | Ferry Twp | Otto Twp |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Bachelor's degree or higher | 11.0%        | 13.6%        | 9.3%        | 16.4%     | 14.7%    |

Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2022

**ECONOMIC PROFILE**

Understanding the employment sectors Newfield Township residents work in highlights the types of jobs available in and near the Township. The below table provides the industries that employees residing in Newfield Township work in. It is important to note that these industries may not necessarily be present in the Township, as the Census surveys residents of Newfield Township, not employees.

**Table 7: Employment by Industry, Newfield Township**

| Industry   | Count | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| Total civilian employed population 16 years and over                               | 1,820 | 100.0%  |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining                             | 41    | 4.3%    |
| Construction   | 10    | 1.1%    |
| Manufacturing  | 207   | 21.8%   |
| Wholesale trade  | 10    | 1.1%    |
| Retail trade   | 110   | 11.6%   |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities                                      | 63    | 6.6%    |
| Information  | 4     | 0.4%    |
| Finance and insurance, real estate and rental and leasing                          | 31    | 3.3%    |
| Professional, scientific, management, and administrative waste management services | 134   | 14.1%   |
| Educational services, and health care and social assistance                        | 202   | 21.2%   |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services           | 55    | 5.8%    |
| Other services, except public administration                                       | 57    | 6.0%    |
| Public administration  | 27    | 2.8%    |

Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2022

The three largest employment industries for Newfield Township residents include educational services, and health care and social assistance (21.2%), Manufacturing (21.8%), and Professional, scientific, management, and administrative waste management services (14.1%). Manufacturing may employ a higher number of residents in Newfield Township because of the proximity of light manufacturing and propane suppliers within or near the Township. The higher proportion of retail employment corresponds to some of the commercial and retail activity occurring along M-20, as well as in other locations near the Township.

**Table 8: Median Household Income of Surrounding Communities**

|                                   | Newfield Twp | Elbridge Twp | Leavitt Twp | Ferry Twp | Otto Twp |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Median household income (dollars) | \$60,000     | \$66,477     | \$44,833    | \$52,010  | \$67,500 |

Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2022

Knowledge of residents’ median household income is necessary for the Township to adequately plan for residents’ public service, housing, and infrastructure needs. Newfield Township has a median household income of exactly \$60,000, in the middle of the range of median incomes seen in communities within Oceana County. Given this median income, it is important that a multitude of housing options that are affordable for this income range are available.

## Housing Review

The quality, affordability, and availability of a community’s housing stock has a significant impact on overall community vitality. The following review of Census Data relating to the number of housing units, age of housing units, amount of owner-occupied and rental units, and monthly rent and mortgage values helps evaluate the health of the Township’s housing stock.

As of the 2022 American Community Survey Estimates, Newfield Township had an approximate total of 1,219 housing units. Of these, an estimated 818 (67.1%) were occupied, with 401 (32.9%) being classified as vacant/second homes/cottages. It should be noted that Newfield Township is an outdoor recreation paradise and many homes in the area are vacation homes for people who live elsewhere. It is highly likely that any homes listed as “vacant” are owned as vacation homes for individuals who don’t live in Newfield Township as their primary residence.

Below is a comparison of surrounding townships related to households and housing units. Newfield Township had the highest number of housing units, along with the highest number of households.

Ferry Township had the second highest number of housing units, with a total of 553, and a total number of households of 460.

**Table 7: Housing Units vs Households Comparison of Surrounding Communities**

|               | Newfield Twp | Elbridge Twp | Leavitt Twp | Ferry Twp | Otto Twp |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Housing Units | 1,219        | 473          | 468         | 553       | 351      |
| Households    | 818          | 351          | 332         | 460       | 264      |

Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2022

### AGE OF HOUSING

The age of the housing stock can provide important insights for a community, as the conditions of the housing stock may be related to its age. Older housing stock can also provide the community with a sense of character. Traditionally, major repairs or rehabilitation is needed when housing reaches an age of 30 years.

Communities in which a substantial proportion of the housing stock is more than 30 years old typically initiate programs to encourage reinvestment in the homes and properties on which they sit. Furthermore, beginning in the 1980s, the desire and requirements from homeowners for more energy efficient houses and additional amenities have increased. Older homes tend to lack the desired features that support barrier free access and may be unsuitable for aging in place without enhanced retrofits or other significant reinvestments.

As shown in the below table, a majority of the housing stock (81.7%) within Newfield Township was constructed prior to the turn of the century (2000). A small percentage of the housing stock within the Township has been constructed within the past 14 years. Due to the significant number of older housing units, the Township should encourage reinvestment in the older housing stock to better serve residents and to preserve the historic character of the community.

**Table 8: Age of Housing**

| Year Structure Built | Housing Stock | Percentage |
|----------------------|---------------|------------|
| 2020 or later        | 0             | 0.0%       |
| 2010 to 2019         | 36            | 3.0%       |
| 2000 to 2009         | 187           | 15.3%      |
| 1990 to 1999         | 203           | 16.7%      |
| 1980 to 1989         | 110           | 9.0%       |
| 1970 to 1979         | 198           | 16.2%      |
| 1960 to 1969         | 128           | 10.5%      |
| 1950 to 1959         | 104           | 8.5%       |
| 1940 to 1949         | 123           | 10.1%      |
| 1939 or earlier      | 130           | 10.7%      |
| Estimated Total      | 1,219         | 100%       |

Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2022

## HOUSING COSTS

Monthly housing costs in Newfield Township are one measure of community quality of life and the overall health of the economy. The median gross rent for occupied housing units in the Township was \$918 per month per the 2022 American Community Survey Estimates data. Oceana County had a monthly gross rent median of \$796. The table below provides further visualization of monthly housing costs within the Township.

**Table 9: Monthly Housing Costs, Newfield Township**

| Monthly Rent       | Number of Households |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Less than \$500    | 24                   |
| \$500 to \$999     | 31                   |
| \$1,000 to \$1,499 | 32                   |
| \$1,500 to \$1,999 | 5                    |
| \$2,000 to \$2,499 | 0                    |
| \$2,500 to \$2,999 | 0                    |
| \$3,000 or more    | 0                    |
| No cash rent       | 12                   |
| Median (dollars)   | \$918.00             |

Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2022

# Community Facilities

A primary purpose of municipal government is the delivery of services for the health, safety, and welfare of the local population. The responsibility of providing public services to the residents of the Newfield Township is shared by several public entities, including the Township itself, Oceana County, and other agencies.

## PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES

Newfield Township is served by the Hesperia Community School District, comprised of Patricia St. Clair Elementary School (Kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade), Hesperia Middle School (6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade) and Hesperia High School (7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade). Hesperia Community School District offers several programs for students, including savings accounts with the Fremont Area Community Foundation and classes at the Newaygo County Career-Tech Center.

The Hesperia Community School District serves an estimated 818 students, based on 2023-2024 school enrollment data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Student enrollment has slightly declined in recent years, potentially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and an aging population.

## PUBLIC RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The Township offers public recreational facilities to allow residents and visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of the Township's rural setting. There are six different public access sites on the four lakes located within the Township: Hightower Lake, Blodgett Lake, McLaren Lake, and Campbell Lake.

There are also parks within the Village of Hesperia, including Weaver Park and Vida Weaver Park. Those are available for Township residents but are not maintained by the Township. There are also numerous parks within the Village of Hesperia, including Weaver Park, Webster Park, the Municipal Ball Fields, and the Hesperia Swimming Hole. These recreational amenities serve the residents of Hesperia and Newfield Township.

## PUBLIC UTILITIES

Like many rural Townships, Newfield Township does not provide public water and/or sewer service to all its residents. Therefore, Township residents are served by residential well and septic facilities. Impact on public utility capacity is an important consideration for future development opportunities for the Township.

The Oceana County Road Commission is responsible for the repairs and maintenance of County roads within the Township.

There are multiple drainage districts managed by the Oceana County Drain Commissioner's Office in Newfield Township. Drainage districts help protect water resources by managing drainage within an area with a common drainage destination. These districts can be found in the northeastern and southwestern portions of the Township.

Consumers Energy and Great Lakes Energy provide electrical services and DTE Energy provides gas services for Township residents.

## EMERGENCY SERVICE FACILITIES

Newfield Township is served by the Hesperia Fire Department for fire and first responder services. Police protection in the Village of Hesperia is provided by the Oceana County Sheriff's Office under a joint agreement with Newaygo County. The remainder of Newfield Township is served by the County. Ambulance and EMS services are provided by Oceana County.

## TOWNSHIP HALL

Newfield Township Hall is located at 3890 S. 198<sup>th</sup> Street in Hesperia. All public meetings for the Township Board and the Planning Commission meetings are held at Township Hall.

# Natural Features and Resources

A thorough consideration of environmental conditions must be completed to make decisions regarding future land uses as stewards of the land and water within the Township.

Federal environmental legislation enacted in the 1970's raised public awareness of the importance of environmental protection. Although many states, including Michigan, strengthened federal environmental laws with state laws and programs designed to correct environmental problems and prevent future contamination of air, land, and water, trends during the 1980's reduced enforcement of these laws, making them a low priority. During the 1990's and early 2000's, environmental protection resurfaced as a serious concern.

The natural features of Newfield Township, such as the topography, surface waters, wetlands, groundwater, woodlands, and soils are important features of the community. Although Newfield Township is predominately natural or rural in character, concern for the environment is as critical as in urban communities that must deal with brownfields and air pollution. Newfield Township is well known for its many lakes, streams, and rivers, which are sensitive features that are negatively impacted by climate change and pollution. Additionally, as a rural township, many residents rely on water wells and septic systems for their water and sewer needs. These systems rely on clean water for their continued use. The relationship between existing natural features and existing infrastructure in the Township is key in making land use decisions that protect these natural features while supporting the needs of current and future residents.

Several natural features of Newfield Township are examined below.

## TOPOGRAPHY

As with much of the State of Michigan, Newfield Township is characterized by relatively flat land interspersed with rolling hills. A majority of the flat land in the Township is at lower elevations in basins known geographically as "outwash plains" which were created as a result of glacial melt. This glacial melt also contributed to the prominence of lakes, rivers, streams, and creeks in Newfield Township.

## SURFACE WATERS

Newfield Township contains several surface water features, which include above-ground water features such as lakes, rivers, and streams. McLaren Lake is the largest body of water in the Township and is located in the northwest corner of the Township. The White River is another important surface water feature and was key in the Township's development in the State's lumber era. Two branches of the White River – White River and the North Branch White River – run in the southwest and northern parts of the Township, respectively. The Township also has several minor lakes scattered across the area:

- » **Newell Lake** north of East Pierce Road and immediately west of South 192nd Avenue.
- » **Butternut Lake** is immediately west of McLaren Lake and north of Buchanan Road.
- » **Darlington Lake** south of East Pierce Road and east of 186th Ave.
- » **Winters Lake** is located directly south of Darlington Lake and east of 186th Avenue.
- » **Blodgett Lake** west of South 176th Avenue and north of Zimmer Road.
- » **Hightower Lake** along Hightower Lake Road and west of South Lakeview Drive
- » **Mud Lake** east of South 176th Avenue and south of Loop Road.

- » **Campbell Lake** is located in both Newfield and Leavitt Townships. The southern portion of the lake falls in Newfield Township.

Much of the surface water in the Township drains into the North Branch of the White River Watershed, while the southwest corner of the Township drains into the South Branch of the White River Watershed. Small parts of the northern boundary of the Township drain into the Big South Branch of the Pere Marquette River Watershed.

## **WETLANDS AND WOODLANDS**

Newfield Township has a multitude of wetland areas within its boundaries. The largest wetlands in the Township are concentrated around McLaren Lake, Mud Lake and M-20, and the White River. According to the National Wetlands Inventory, nearly all the existing wetlands in the Township are classified as “Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetlands,” which are part of the Palustrine System and defined as “all nontidal wetlands dominated by trees, shrubs, persistent emergent, emergent mosses or lichens”. Freshwater Forested/Shrub wetlands typically have woody vegetation at least 6 meters tall. Some of the most common names for the Palustrine System include marsh, swamp, pond, bog, and fen. Wetlands are important environmental resources that support groundwater recharge, are the habitat for many species of plants and animals, and flood protection.

## **GROUNDWATER**

Newfield Township depends heavily on clean groundwater as a source of water for many land uses. It is thus vital to plan appropriately for development in order to protect this key natural resource from possible contamination. Such contamination can occur:

- » Through non-point sources of pollution from chemicals and effluence associated with commerce, industry and farming;
- » Through chemicals filtering into groundwater from septic fields, oil tanks and waste disposal sites;
- » Through everyday residential activities. In many instances, these pollutants reach lakes and streams through groundwater supplies. Pollutants may also affect well water located near septic fields.

Groundwater protection must also address the operational features of land uses. Potential sources of groundwater pollution in Newfield Township include leaking septic systems, runoff from residential activities (such as lawn care) improper storage of hazardous substances, leaking underground storage tanks, above ground spills, car and road usage, condensation from air emissions, and improper waste disposal. For future proposed developments, many of these avenues of contamination can be addressed as part of the site plan review process. Discouraging development in wetland areas in the Township is also a necessary step to preserving groundwater for its residents.

## **SOILS**

Quality soils have impacts on drainage, flooding, and farming potential, making soil composition an important natural feature to consider when planning for future development and growth. According to a 1995 soil survey of Oceana County, the majority of the soil in Newfield Township is considered excessively drained and well-drained soil. There are also sizable areas of moderately well drained and poorly drained soil. Poorly drained soils may be difficult for agricultural uses because excessive water can damage crops. Similarly, soils that are too poorly drained or too well-drained are not suited for septic systems, as it can lead to the release of toxins and pollutants into the groundwater resources. In that light, development should be steered away from those areas as well.

## **PRIME FOREST AND RURAL LAND**

Newfield Township is largely made up of forested areas that provide tree cover and habitat for many species and provides recreational opportunities for the residents of the Township. Much of the forested area in the Township can be classified as prime timberland, which is defined by the USDA as “land that has soil capable of growing wood at the rate of 85 cubic feet or more/acre/year (at culmination of mean annual increment) in natural stands and is not in urban or built-up land uses or water”. The Huron-Manistee National Forest is one of these prominent prime timberlands in the Township, covering several acres of the western portion of the Township. Development near areas of prime timberland should be limited, as it can lead to increased pollution of forested areas and increase the impact of disasters like wildfires on nearby residents.

Agricultural production plays a role in the landscape of the eastern portion of Newfield Township and contributes to the economy, character, and identity of the community. The preservation of agricultural land can provide environmental, aesthetic, recreational and historic benefits to the community. Open farmland also assists in the replenishment and maintenance of groundwater supplies.

**Map 2: Existing Land Use**

# Existing Land Use

Knowledge of current land use furnishes a basis by which compatibility of new land development can be considered. It is a valuable reference tool for considering the day-to-day issues associated with land management and the provision of public services.

## LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

The following section outlines, in more detail, the location of current land uses and their characteristics within Newfield Township. Existing land uses are divided into several different categories to analyze current patterns of development. These land uses differ from those listed in the zoning ordinance in that they reflect the general character of land use in the area rather than specific zoning. This analysis will help to define which geographic characteristics the Township would like to preserve and enhance throughout the duration of this Plan.

### Agriculture

Agricultural land is defined as any land that is predominately or wholly used for the raising of field or tree crops, as a principal resource in animal husbandry, or maintained as rural open space. While the majority of land in the Township is forested, a sizeable portion of land in the Township is currently used for agricultural purposes. This promotes the Township's desire to preserve the rural character of the geography, ecosystem, and lifestyles of Newfield Township.

Agricultural land uses are generally characterized by large lots of at least two acres located on arterial County roads. On land utilized for agriculture, some lots may include accompanying residential uses along with secondary uses such as roadside farm stands. Often times, operational farms will include multiple accessory buildings incidental to agricultural businesses.

### Low-Density Residential

Much of the residential landscape of Newfield Township is low-density. Single-family residential is sometimes present on agricultural land uses, creating a typology of "rural estates" residential – lots of a minimum of 2 acres featuring agricultural parcels and single-family homes. Clusters of more suburban residential land use exist in the southeast corner of the Township, in the areas surrounding the Village of Hesperia, and the lakes. While the Township allows for some medium-density cluster housing and manufactured housing in selected areas, it represents the minority of existing housing opportunities.

### Commercial

Commercial uses include retail, office, and other similar uses that serve nearby residential areas. The existing commercial land is located near the Village of Hesperia and along M-20. The form of commercial areas consists of lot sizes of a minimum of one acre and aims to promote the clustering of retail and commercial buildings to enhance walkability and service access.

## **Public/Public Access**

Newfield Township dedicates areas near many of its lakes to parks and public access to promote conservation of these important water features and provide recreational opportunities for its residents. These public access points are concentrated in the northern half of the Township. This existing land use also includes civic spaces like Newfield Township Hall.

**Map 3: Natural Features**

# Township Utilities

## BROADBAND/DSL CONNECTIVITY

Broadband and DSL internet, with their fast download speeds and consistent connectivity, help connect residents and businesses to the online world. As more and more economic and social activity moves online (especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic), communities without connectivity risk being left behind. As shown on the map below from the Federal Communications Commission, Newfield Township has broadband and DSL internet service of speeds of at least 100 megabits per second download and 20 megabits per second upload that covers much of the Township.

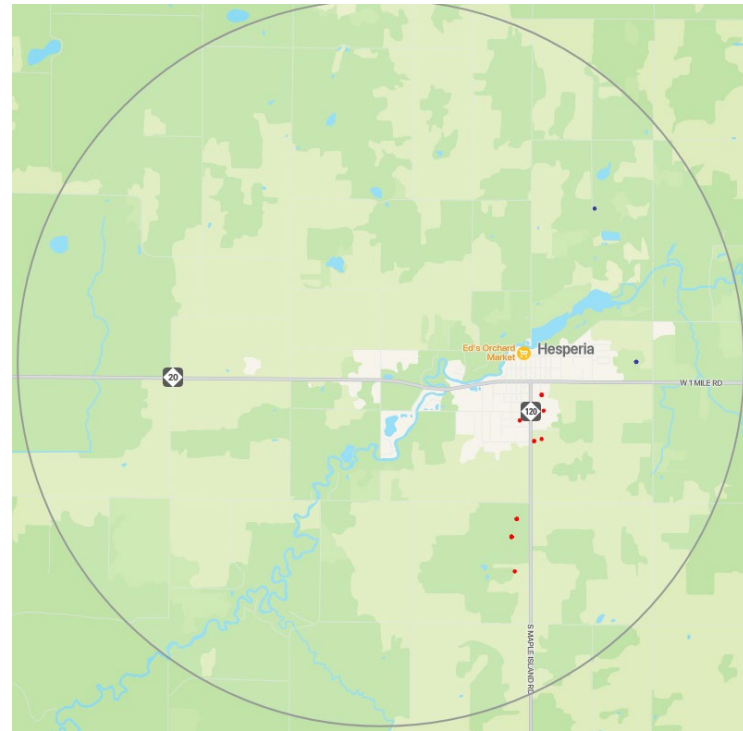
Map 4: Broadband Coverage



Source: Federal Communications Commission

According to the map, high speed, reliable internet is largely concentrated in the Eastern half of the Township. However, southern portions of the Township, including near the Village of Hesperia, are lacking coverage.

In 2022, the Township approved fiber network services with Great Lakes Energy as one way to improve broadband infrastructure in this area. However, barriers to further expanding broadband and DSL internet service in the Township exist. These barriers include inaccurate data on the availability of broadband and DSL internet, broadband infrastructure gaps in rural communities, and digital gaps in communities with larger aging populations. The State and Federal governments have introduced funding opportunities to help communities experiencing these types of barriers with expanding broadband internet access. Michigan received around \$1.5 billion in Federal funding through the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program to increase broadband access in rural areas, which could create an opportunity for some new buildout in Newfield Township.



## WIRELESS CONNECTIVITY

Wireless voice and data service is also an important part of the modern economy and lifestyle, but Newfield lacks adequate service in many parts of the Township. Wireless providers consider detailed coverage data proprietary, so the exact number and location of wireless telecommunications transmitters is not certain. An analysis of the cell coverage within Newfield Township was completed for this Master Plan. The analysis used antennasearch.com to geolocate cellphone infrastructure in the Township. The results from antennasearch.com confirm that there are no currently active cell towers within the Township limits. However, this does not mean that Newfield Township does not receive any cellular coverage. The nearby Village of Hesperia contains multiple cell towers that are positioned just outside of Township borders. These nearby towers provide adequate coverage to a majority of Township residents in conjunction with cell towers in other nearby townships.

Improved wireless service may come to the Township in the form of “small cell” technology. Small cells, which are generally located on poles 40 feet in height or lower, are less expensive to install and less of an aesthetic blight on the landscape than traditional cell towers (which are usually 150-200 feet tall). The State of Michigan has already enacted legislation (including an amendment to the Zoning Enabling Act) to speed the roll out of small cells, which may hasten their installation in Newfield Township and similar communities. As new and more affordable technologies like “small cells” are produced, Newfield Township could enhance the cell coverage that is offered to residents.

The map above, from antennasearch.com, shows that there are currently no wireless towers in Newfield Township boundaries. This contributes to “dead zones” for wireless service. However, there are a few towers located near Hesperia in Newaygo County. They are shown as small blue dots. The red dots indicate radio and TV towers in the area.

# Transportation System

A community's transportation system functions much like the circulation system in the human body. Roads and rights-of-way throughout the Township act like veins and arteries that pulse across the land. They carry the life of the community: its energy and its day-to-day activity.

Roads provide a means for people to get from one place to another, primarily by automobile, but also by bike, foot, and other means. These stretches of public ground serve other purposes as well. Roads and road rights-of-way provide locations for public utilities such as gas, electricity, and telephone lines. Roads provide the means to deliver emergency and public services to residents. Finally, roads provide access to parcels of land, thereby increasing the utilization potential of both vacant and agricultural lands.

The road network also functions much like the skeletal system providing the basic form of the Township. Most rights-of-way are dedicated at the edges of properties. Therefore, boundaries between homes, sections, parcels, homesteads, and other pieces of land are often contiguous with roads.

Because of the many functions of the road system, transportation has a significant impact on the economy, environmental quality, energy consumption, land development and the general character of the Township. Therefore, it is important that land use planning and the transportation system be coordinated to manage the Township's existing and future growth.

## REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Newfield Township is part of a vast road network that circulates activity throughout West Michigan. M-20 is one of the major roads that crosses through Newfield Township and provides access to US-31 and communities such as Shelby, New Era, and Rothbury to the west. M-120 also makes up the eastern boundary of Newfield Township and runs through the Village of Hesperia.

## TOWNSHIP ROAD NETWORK

Roads in Newfield Township are under the jurisdiction of two agencies: the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Oceana County Road Commission. MDOT has jurisdiction over M-20 as a state highway and minor arterial road, while the Oceana County Road Commission has jurisdiction over all other public roads in the Township. Roads and streets in the Village of Hesperia are maintained by the Village Public Works Division.

In Newfield Township, public roads can all be categorized into several classifications. These classifications are known as the National Functional Classification (NFC) determined by state road agencies. The NFC classifications in Newfield Township include the following:

- » Minor Arterial
- » Major Collector
- » Local Roads

Newfield Township is also home to a number of private roads. The current Newfield Township Zoning Ordinance does not regulate private roads. The Township may wish to consider how it wants to manage private roads in the future.

## **MINOR ARTERIAL**

Roads that are classified as Minor Arterials in a rural context such as Newfield Township consist of a connected network of rural contiguous roads. These roads typically serve corridor movement having a trip length and travel density characteristics indicative of substantial statewide or interstate travel. According to MDOT, Minor Arterial roads typically are characterized by less traffic and are more local in nature than other main roads. These roads are also eligible for federal aid.

Additionally, Minor Arterial roads typically provide an integrated network without stub connections. The only Minor Arterial Road in Newfield Township is M-20 which runs through Hesperia.

## **MAJOR COLLECTOR**

In Newfield Township, Major Collector roads are described as serving primarily intra-county travel. These roads are less traveled than Minor Arterial roads and the distances are typically shorter. On average, Major Collector roads have moderate speed limits. Additionally, these roads provide service to larger towns not directly served by higher systems. Major Collector roads link places such as parks and consolidated schools within nearby towns or cities. In Newfield Township, roads classified as Major Collectors include E. Garfield Rd., 192<sup>nd</sup> Ave., and Loop Rd.

According to MDOT, Major Collector routes funnel traffic from local and minor roads to arterial routes. These roads typically directly serve schools, businesses, and other important public functions. Major Collector roads are eligible for federal aid.

## **LOCAL ROADS**

Within rural areas, Local Roads should serve primarily to provide access to adjacent land and are typically utilized to travel relatively short distances. Within Newfield Township, Local Roads include, but are not limited to:

- » E. Baseline Road;
- » E. Buchanan Road;
- » Gale Road;
- » E. Pierce Road;
- » Yonker Road;
- » Baker Road;
- » E. Fish Road;
- » 176<sup>th</sup> Avenue;
- » 186<sup>th</sup> Avenue;
- » E. Woodrow Avenue; and
- » Sections of Loop Road.

Local Roads are predominately traveled by motorists accessing their property, such as rural farms, residential dwellings, and clusters of residential housing. Local Roads are not eligible for federal aid.

## COUNTY AND REGIONAL ROAD AGENCIES

In Newfield Township, the Oceana County Road Commission has jurisdiction over the majority of the roads, with the exception of M-20. The Oceana County Road Commission is responsible for the following services in Newfield Township:

- » Crack sealing
- » Ditch and drainage improvements
- » Brush and tree removals
- » Patching potholes
- » Guardrail repair
- » Gravel road grading
- » Seal coat surfacing
- » Shoulder grading and repair
- » Asphalt paving
- » Snow removal and ice control
- » Bridge maintenance and replacement
- » Signing and traffic control
- » Road design, inspections, and surveying
- » Road planning
- » Contract services
- » Equipment maintenance and repairs

The Township and the County Road Department keep a consistent line of communication open to ensure that roads within Newfield are safe and well-maintained. The Oceana County Road Commission undertook multiple road projects in Newfield Township in 2023, including on 176<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Baker Road, and 186<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

In addition to the Oceana County Road Commission, Newfield Township is also served by the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission. The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that is dedicated to serving 120 local governments in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana Counties. MPOs are public regional planning agencies designed to implement and coordinate regional transportation planning processes. MPOs are required to represent local units of government in areas with populations over 50,000 people. Additionally, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission offers services pertaining to economic and community development, environmental sustainability, and mapping.

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is also responsible for producing both short-range and long-range transportation improvement schedules. These schedules outline and designate specific road improvement and enhancement projects to be completed within a 3-year time period and a 25-year time period.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

As a rural township, Newfield Township currently has limited public transportation infrastructure. The Oceana County Council on Aging (OCCOA) offers a bus transportation program for Newfield Township residents of all ages, although senior and disabled residents receive first priority for these services. Township seniors can also use OCCOA's volunteer driver program to schedule transportation to out-of-county medical appointments.

## **NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION**

Non-motorized transportation refers to the use of bicycles, scooters, walking, and other similar modes of transportation. Newfield Township's non-motorized transportation network primarily consists of a wooded trail system in the Manistee National Forest, present throughout the western portion of the Township. The Hart-Montague bike trail which runs between the two cities, can be accessed in Hart, just 25 miles to the west of Newfield Township. Newfield Township is also close to the Fremont Town and Country bike path. This 6-mile paved pathway takes riders on a scenic tour through ravines and wooded areas, over bridges, past farms fields and ponds, connecting several parks, schools, commercial districts and the beach at Fremont Lake. Most of the pathway is off-road with a 10-foot-wide asphalt surface. The Fremont Towns and Country bike path is a great way to explore this historic town. Riders can find local lodging, camping on Fremont Lake, and several good places to eat and unwind. Fremont and the Town and Country bike trail are about 25-minutes away from Newfield Township.

In addition, Newaygo County, directly to the east of Newfield Township, has completed the first 6 miles of "The Edge: Newaygo County Pathways" from Croton Dam to Hardy Dam along the Muskegon River in the fall of 2013. This first "dam-to-dam" section is part of a county-wide project to build over 80 miles of connected, paved pathways for walkers, runners and cyclists. Newaygo County is known for its hilly terrain and lush valleys surrounding the Muskegon and White rivers and its many lakes, wetlands and streams. When completed, the pathways will connect 12 townships and the communities of Fremont, Grant, Hesperia, Newaygo and White Cloud.

**Map 5: Transportation Network**



## Chapter 3.

# Newfield Township Tomorrow

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The Newfield Township Master Plan envisions the future of the community, as articulated by its residents and officials. In general, Newfield strives to preserve its rural character while providing a good quality of life for all its residents. As a result, Newfield Township has developed community-wide goals for the community. Those goals are listed below.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT**

Strive to preserve and protect the unique quality of natural resources and environmental assets found in Newfield Township.

### **LOCAL ECONOMY**

Promote economic development that encourages employment opportunities, business attraction, workforce training, and entrepreneurialism within the area.

### **AREA INFRASTRUCTURE**

Continually strive to improve the area's infrastructure.

### **SERVICES, SAFETY, & QUALITY OF LIFE**

Maintain a strong sense of community and high quality of life in Newfield Township.

### **RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Encourage and promote the abundant recreational opportunities found in Newfield Township.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT & CIVIC INVOLVEMENT**

Strive to sustain a strong proactive and community-oriented township government structure.

## Community Vision and Goals

During the 2024 Master Plan update process, Newfield Township residents and stakeholders shared their visions for the future of the township. Newfield Township residents see themselves as a rural, family-oriented community that strives for managed growth with proper supporting infrastructure within a framework of a vibrant agricultural base and a small-town feel.

The community's values, as expressed through various community input processes, were the basis for the goals and objectives that were chosen. The community goals and objectives are aspirational descriptions of what the community would like itself to be in the future. Goals are intended to provide a basic framework upon which long-term development decisions may be made as well as day-to-day decisions made by public and private entities. Objectives describe the specific actions that must be taken to work towards achieving the goals.

# Rural Character

- O1** Maintain the rural character of Newfield Township by encouraging Farmland and Open Space Preservation.



## OBJECTIVES

- 1) Identify areas of the Township that should be preserved and not developed.
  - » Manistee National Forest
  - » Existing woodlands
  - » Prime or Valuable Farmland
- 2) Analyze current lot splits and sizes for waterfront lots and lots in close proximity to the Village of Hesperia. The Township has reduced lot splits to 2-acres.
- 3) Advocate links between local farm products and local consumers.
  - » Analyze and update permitted and special uses in the “A, Agricultural” zoning district to allow increased economic use of farmland and farm buildings for agri-tourism.
  - » Allow farm markets and farm stands in Newfield Township.
  - » Publicize local farm markets on Newfield Township social media.
  - » Continue to monitor local farmer priorities and concerns-survey the farming community.
  - » Hold discussion meetings with farmers by type of operations and products.
  - » Review Newfield Township farmland preservation policy and zoning ordinances.
  - » Buffer working farms from residential development.
- 4) Use REGIS to increase understanding of the Newfield Township local soils and topography, past and present land use & cover, and watershed management.
- 5) Monitor State of Michigan farmland legislation and support and implement when appropriate.
  - » Remain active with MTA (Michigan Township Assoc.) on farm legislation.
  - » Support the Michigan Right to Farm Act (PA 93 of 1981).
- 6) Analyze and update permitted and special uses in the “A, Agricultural” zoning district to allow increased economic use of farmland and farm buildings for agri-tourism.

# Housing

**02** Plan for safe, creative, and desirable residential neighborhoods that are suitable for people of varying ages, lifestyles, and incomes.



## OBJECTIVES

- 1) Analyze present and future housing needs based on Census data and best-available demographic analyses and projections.
- 2) Plan for traditional subdivision densities and attached housing units only where public utilities are available or can be reasonably extended.
- 3) Encourage the creative development of new residential areas when and where appropriate through the use of planned unit developments (PUD's)
  - » Adopt ordinance standards for sidewalks, trails, linked and usable open spaces and natural feature preservation.
  - » Adopt ordinances which allow flexibility regarding lot size and area, building setbacks, and design and dwelling unit types within a single unified development.
  - » Ensure that PUD ordinances apply to a range of housing densities, not just traditional subdivisions.
- 4) Allow senior housing developments and related medical care facilities in close proximity to shopping, houses of worship, parks, medical offices, sidewalks, and public transit in a variety of zoning districts.
  - » Adopt zoning ordinance regulations to allow senior housing and related medical care facilities in residential, office and commercial zoning districts by special land use.
  - » Survey seniors for input and ideas.
  - » Implement policies or programs that allow residents to age in place, such as increasing non-motorized transportation connections.
- 5) Maintain values of existing single-family and multiple-family homes and neighborhoods
  - » Consider the adoption of a Township-wide Property Maintenance Code and enforce the standards of the code.
  - » Demolish abandoned, dilapidated, and unsafe homes.
- 6) Explore options for applying for USDA Rural Development grants to enhance Newfield Township's housing offerings.



# Transportation

**03** Maintain and plan for a safe, efficient, and functional transportation system for all users, both motorized and non-motorized.



## OBJECTIVES

- 1) Consider creating an M-20 corridor plan with Hesperia and Denver Township;
  - » Research similar community plans as reference materials.
  - » Partner with MDOT and OCRC to help enact and enforce the plan.
  - » Require traffic impact studies for new development projects.
  - » Periodically update access management link in zoning ordinance, including maps.
- 2) Identify potential “truck routes” in Newfield Township and direct heavy truck traffic to use those roads and avoid residential areas, natural areas, and downtown Hesperia.
- 3) Develop a Township-wide non-motorized transportation plan and seek ways to adapt for future needs;
  - » Form a committee to develop the Township’s non-motorized transportation plan.
  - » Assess budget implications of developing non-motorized transportation infrastructure.
  - » Identify priority areas of the Township where future pedestrian infrastructure is needed and rank projects in order of importance or impact.
  - » Develop zoning ordinance regulations to implement master plan future non-motorized transportation facilities.
- 4) Where planned for and contextually appropriate, provide for complete streets that emphasize safe, attractive and comfortable access and travel to all users of roadways;
  - » Identify areas of Newfield Township where sidewalks, paved shoulder bicycle lanes/paths, and other appropriate elements make sense or are needed.
  - » Make non-motorized connections from residential areas and activity centers to Downtown Hesperia.
  - » Develop zoning ordinance regulations to implement master plan future sidewalk infrastructure.
- 5) Explore options for applying for Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) grants to enhance Newfield Township’s non-motorized transportation offerings.

# Utilities

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## 04

Maintain and plan for efficient, functional, and fiscally sound utility systems.

### OBJECTIVES

- 1) Explore options for conducting a municipal well feasibility study.
- 2) Explore options for installing a municipal well for Township residents.
- 3) Explore options for combined water and sewer systems in waterfront areas.
- 4) Continue to partner with the Oceana County Drain Commission regarding drainage issues.
- 5) Explore options for applying for grants for infrastructure needs like water, sewer, roads, Broadband, and cellphone infrastructure.
  - » Explore options for additional water and sewer infrastructure like new municipal wells.
  - » Explore options for additional Broadband connectivity.
  - » Explore options for additional cellphone infrastructure.

## Economic Development

**05** Encourage dynamic commercial and industrial districts.



### OBJECTIVES

- 1) Adapt the Newfield Township Zoning Ordinance to allow for and regulate creative rural commercial offerings like farm markets, farm stands, event barns, and other agri-tourism businesses.
- 2) Periodically review and update commercial and industrial zoning ordinances to meet the needs of local business owners.
- 3) Create gateway treatments like monumental welcome signs identifying the Township at key entrance locations.
- 4) Promote the redevelopment, rehabilitation, and adaptive re-use of existing commercial or industrial sites and buildings within existing commercial or industrial areas.
- 5) Explore options for applying for Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) grants to enhance Newfield Township's commercial offerings.

# Parks and Community Resources

**06** Maintain and expand natural, recreational, and cultural resource assets.



## OBJECTIVES

- 1) Periodically review and update the Newfield Township Community Recreation Plan;
- 2) Develop a future park plan for Oxbow Park that includes trails, activities, and services;
- 3) Seek parkland acquisition within master planned enhancement areas; (DNR Boat Launch, others)
- 4) Identify ways to enhance Township parks with new recreation equipment and facilities.
- 5) Explore options for applying for Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) grants to enhance Newfield Township's park and recreation offerings.

# Relationships

07

Maintain and expand regional and inter-governmental cooperation and relationships.

## OBJECTIVES

- 1) Seek ways to connect Newfield Township residents with their Township representatives using social events and social media.
- 2) Seek ways to build relationships between Township residents and the police, fire, and EMS employees in the Township.
- 3) Examine additional ways to partner with Village of Hesperia and Denver Township regarding traffic on the M-20 corridor, public water and sewer systems, and other land use issues.
- 4) Continue to develop regional relationships with Oceana County, Village of Hesperia, City of Fremont, Denver Township, and others for public infrastructure needs and services.
- 5) Participate in West Michigan based regional economic development initiatives.
- 6) Develop relationships with state and regional entities to identify environmental contamination and develop remediation strategies.
- 7) Continue to partner with the Oceana County Drain Commission regarding drainage issues.
- 8) Continue to partner with the Oceana County Road Commission regarding transportation issues.
- 9) Participate in Michigan-based associations like the Michigan Township Association and others.

# Public Engagement Summary

Many of the future land use goals and objectives decisions are derived from the public engagement process. Throughout the course of this Plan, the Township sought input from the public in a variety of ways that included three public open houses and a survey that was open through August and September of 2023 and sent to all residents of Newfield Township. The Township received 171 total responses to the online survey, with about 105 respondents fully completing the survey. The results of these public engagement efforts included the following:

## PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES

To gather insight from a multitude of residents, the Township held three public open houses. Each public open house offered four public engagement exercises: a “Big Idea” board, a housing preference activity, a commercial preference activity, and a table-sized map of the Township.

### Big Idea Board

The Big Idea Board asked residents to use sticky notes to express their “big idea” for Newfield Township. This exercise allowed residents to voice their ideas that may not fit well into the other engagement activities present at these public open houses.

Many of these big ideas related to improvements in the Township’s infrastructure and services, including:

- More paved roads and improved road repair
- More predictable cell phone service
- More local job options
- Improved education options
- Adding/extending natural gas out to 192<sup>nd</sup> Road and Garfield Road
- A community or recreation center
- Provide annual water testing to Township residents
- Combined sewer system for lake homes
- Introduction of seasonal or vacation rentals
- Concerns about blight, refuse, and dilapidated properties
- Allowing farm stands and farmers markets in the agricultural district
- Developing sustainable, fixed income housing

Other big ideas expressed current concerns they had in Newfield Township, including:

- » Speeding, specifically on Hawley Road
- » Loud noise from trucks and motorcycles
- » Concerns about changes to the Master Plan
- » Township response to clogged drain culverts on public right of ways

## Housing Preferences

For this activity, residents were shown a variety of different housing types and asked to place a sticker next to the housing type they would like to see more of in Newfield Township. Through this activity, it was learned that rural, single-family housing with garages were the most preferred housing type. With regards to higher-density housing options, participants supported rural townhomes, and on a smaller scale, supported duplexes and apartment buildings.

## Commercial Preferences

This exercise asked residents to place a sticker next to their preferred style of commercial corridor. Participants expressed the most interest in walkable, less car-oriented commercial corridor styles, with cottage commercial and commercial gateways with wide, tree-lined sidewalks representing the most popular commercial options.

## Township Map

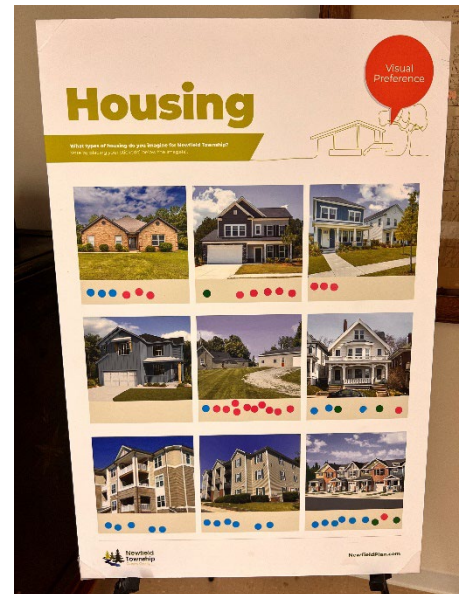
The last activity offered was a table-sized map of the Township where residents could place a numbered sticker. Next to their number, the resident wrote what they pictured in the Township in the place where they put their sticker. Participants offered diverse ideas as to what they wanted to see in particular areas of the Township. Some of these ideas included:

- » More small businesses downtown – bakery, diner, B&B.
- » Turn the 26 acres of DNR property on 192<sup>nd</sup> Avenue north of Garfield Road into a park.
- » Community dirt bike track.
- » More opportunities for kids – recreation, quality childcare.
- » Collaborative effort between the Village and the Township to utilize the dam. Make the waterways accessible, install walking paths, a small pavilion, picnic tables, playground, and encourage family time. Utilize the natural resources that are here.

This activity also asked participants to select areas of the Township they would like to see preserved, or unchanged, enhanced, or improved but not drastically changed, or grown. These responses are listed below:

## Preserve

- » Preserve open land. Preserve open spaces, water, farmland, forests, pristine places to hunt/fish.
- » Preserve the history— old houses in Hesperia.
- » Preserve: Upgrade and use existing buildings. A restaurant at M-120 and 20. Preserve the small-town feel.
- » Preserve: Keep our waters clean and accessible for water sports.
- » The rural atmosphere and natural resources.
- » The fresh air.
- » Natural resources.
- » Heritage agricultural resources.



## Enhance

- » Enhance: continue to maintain and upgrade parks.
- » Enhance: Public transportation for the Village and beyond.
- » Enhance: More biking areas (e-bikes).
- » Outdoor recreation access.
- » Oxbow Park – improved maintenance, clear the river of dead trees, install tube, canoe, kayak launch.

## Grow

- » Grow more housing, especially senior housing.
- » Grow recreational opportunities – bike trails, canoe/kayak rental, senior housing, gym with access to therapy, apartment complex.
- » Grow traditional plants/crops. Grow a diversity of agricultural products to encourage more consumer products available.
- » A family-friendly environment.
- » Farm Co-Ops.

## SURVEY RESULTS

The following information is a summary of the survey results received between August and September 2023, when the survey link was closed to the public:

### Economic Development

Respondents were asked if they would be in support of the Township encouraging economic development and job creation opportunities. 75% of respondents were supportive of the Township encouraging economic development and job creation. Furthermore, 71% of respondents were supportive of identifying growth areas where commercial businesses and new housing could be encouraged.

Specific areas that residents felt would be suitable for commercial growth included along M-20 and within historic Hesperia.

Additionally, residents supported allowing agri-tourism-related commercial options, such as farmers markets, and event venues such as wedding barns, to offer commercial opportunities that support their position as a rural township.

### Housing

The survey asked multiple questions focused on housing options in the Township and how the Township should plan for housing growth.

With regards to alternative housing options and planning for housing growth, respondents supported:

Encouraging and enabling affordable homes for first-time homebuyers (63%) Encouraging new housing developments in specific areas to protect the surrounding rural character, agriculture, and natural beauty (55%) Build out unfinished sub-divisions with vacant lots available (46%) Infrastructure and Utilities

These questions centered on the availability and reliability of infrastructure and utilities in the Township. Infrastructure and utilities covered included cell phone reception, water and sewer, and utility-scale solar energy. With regards to cell phone reception, residents were closely split on their access to reception, with 37% saying, yes, the cell phone reception meets their needs, 32% saying their cell phone reception is spotty, and 32% saying, no, cell phone reception does not meet their needs.

Residents appeared to be more satisfied with their water and sewer services, and 45% of respondents wanted individual homeowners to be able to decide their water and sewer needs. Other respondents (37%) supported building out water and sewer infrastructure in areas where density requires it.

Respondents expressed mixed opinions on utility-scale solar energy projects in the Township. 33% of residents wanted to target natural features such as lakes and wetlands for protection against utility-scale solar projects. 32% of respondents wanted to control the potential construction of utility-scale solar energy. Lastly, 25% of respondents wanted to allow landowners broad freedom to construct utility-scale solar projects.

### **Parks, Recreation, and Natural Areas**

This section of the survey asked respondents about parks, open space, and recreational opportunities in the Township. Survey respondents were supportive of utilizing current state law to protect natural resources and allowing landowners broad freedom to design their properties based on these laws (38%). Residents expressed overall satisfaction with the parks and recreation opportunities in the Township, and wanted to enhance the publicly owned areas it already has (63%). Residents also felt that bike infrastructure was adequate for existing Township needs (33%), but a similar number of residents (32%) supported constructing separate bike lanes along major roads. Similar to bike lanes and other parks and recreation infrastructure, around 40% of respondents felt off-road vehicle (ORV) infrastructure, like trails, was adequate for the Township.

### **Newfield Township Overall**

This section asked overall questions about Newfield Township and its services. The first question in this section asked respondents to identify a service in the Township that they would enhance if they were given \$100. While responses were varied, the top responses to this question included the following:

- » Police enforcement (27%) Fire and EMS (13%) Recreational programming for children and youth (10%) Better cell phone reception (10%)
- » The police department (43%) and ambulance and EMS (31%) were also selected by respondents as services that should be prioritized even if it came with a small increase in taxes. Finally, when asked if the Township should enforce the zoning ordinance, residents largely wanted it to be enforced when violations are brought to the Township's attention (54%).

### **Respondent Demographics**

These questions asked each respondent about their age, residency status, and length of residency in Newfield Township. The largest age group was 45 to 64 years old (39%), followed by those 65 years and older (36%). While the 45 to 65 years old age group appears to be slightly overrepresented in this survey, the response breakdown largely corresponds with existing Township demographics.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of respondents were Newfield Township residents (89%), while only 10% were not. Of the residents, over half (58%) had been a resident for 11 years or more, highlighting the strong connection residents feel towards the Township.



## Chapter 4.

# Future Land Use

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The Future Land Use Plan provides a framework for the community's vision for land preservation and development over the next 10 to 15 years.

The Future Land Use Plan is based on an analysis of land use pressures facing Newfield Township, existing land uses and other conditions, demographic and housing statistics, physical constraints and resources, existing and planned transportation network, and the Master Plan's overarching goals and objectives.

Traditionally, a Future Land Use Plan constitutes the development policy of a community. As a community grows, the Future Land Use Plan should be reviewed and updated to address how growth has impacted infrastructure and other existing conditions.

## A Framework for Newfield Township

As a means to drive the Future Land Use Plan, each area in the Township has been characterized into one of three categories: **preserve**, **enhance**, and **grow**. In doing this, the Township can pin-point and prioritize land use and zoning decisions to address and identify the existing strengths in the Township and opportunities for improvements.

### **PRESERVE**

Newfield Township is committed to not only maintaining the Township's high-quality neighborhoods and businesses, but also to identify areas in which the Township's important natural agricultural lands can be preserved into the future even as the Township continues to Thrive.

Some of the main reasons why specific areas in the Township have been categorized as preserve include:

- » To preserve natural features and watersheds.
- » To encourage development in target areas to prevent further sprawl.
- » To work alongside the agricultural community to save prime agricultural land as farmland areas continues to diminish nationwide.
- » To find zoning tools to protect forested areas while allowing for the rights of property owners.
- » To maintain and expand the Township's high-quality parkland.
- » To maintain the Township's rural character.

## ENHANCE

Similar to preserve, areas within the Township that have been identified as ‘enhance’ are anticipated to remain within the same general land uses in the future. In the Township framework, the ‘enhance’ areas are typically located in the more urbanized areas, including the M-20 corridor, west of Hesperia and the south M-120 corridor. In this context, enhance has been utilized as more of a general term to describe certain improvements that can be made to make the existing conditions better or updated. Enhancements would generate increased activity within these areas, while still maintaining the overall character. These improvements can include:

- » Redevelopment and infill development within built-out areas.
- » Improving or implementing non-motorized infrastructure in neighborhoods.
- » Adding sewer or water infrastructure to protect natural features.
- » Improving communications infrastructure.
- » Implementing beautification elements such as landscaping, tree planting, or public art.
- » Increasing connectivity and efficiency of road networks, including potentially paving or redesigning roadways.
- » Explore options for increasing trail and non-motorized connectivity to regional trail systems.
- » Investment in parks and recreation.
- » Improving the appearance of existing buildings or structures.

## GROW

Large vacant and never-been-developed areas within the Township that have been identified as prime locations for future development opportunities have been categorized as “Grow”. Many of these areas are located along the M-20 and M-120 corridors in the southeastern portion of the Township. Other places where pockets of suburban development already exist like the McLaren Lake area and the intersection of 192<sup>nd</sup> Ave. and Yorker Rd. are also listed as thrive. The goal of this framework category is to identify future land uses that fit with the surrounding character of specific areas as well as to help steer the Township into a thriving and vibrant future through targeted development. By targeting Growth specific areas that have existing infrastructure and other key attributes, the Township can preserve its overall rural and agricultural character. Growth could occur in:

- » New residential neighborhoods
- » New “hamlet commercial” overlays near existing residential clusters.
- » New walkable, mixed use “town centers” near Hesperia.
- » New industrial or business parks.
- » New ORV or mountain bike staging areas.

The categories, as well as their locations on the Framework Map, were developed through an analysis of the Root Findings from the preceding chapters of the plan. The Root Findings are summarized below and color-coded by Framework Category.

PRESERVE

ENHANCE

GROW

## GEOGRAPHY

Newfield Township is located in close proximity to West Michigan’s largest metropolitan regions, but it retains a strong rural and agricultural character.

The abundance of preserved public lands and inland lakes and waterbodies makes the Township an attractive place to live and recreate in.

Most Newfield Township residents can commute to any of three major job centers (Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Big Rapids) in approximately one hour.

The combination of natural beauty, recreational amenities, and reasonable commutes to a number of job centers makes Newfield Township an ideal “recreation area.”

Residents seek out large lots and natural settings, and the beauty of the community must be preserved to retain that appeal.

## PLACES

Agriculture and recreation-oriented areas remain the Township’s primary land uses. This plan’s top priority is to keep the Township’s natural beauty and recreational amenities.

Without zoning guidelines, Newfield Township could experience extensive suburban development, especially in the southeastern part of the Township.

Due to its abundance of inland lakes and waterways, Newfield Township features a high number of lakefront residential areas.

Many Newfield Township residents work and shop outside of the Township.

While many lakefront residences may be used as summer cottages or vacation homes, increasing remote work policies may result in people using these houses as year-round residences.

As the Township faces growth pressures, concentrating growth in appropriate areas can alleviate traffic demands while encouraging local shopping and other amenities.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

The defining characteristics of the Township are the abundance of farmland, forest, water and rolling terrain.

Newfield Township has several lakes throughout the Township. McLaren Lake is the Township’s largest lake and continues to provide recreation amenities for the region, and it is an economic driver for the area.

The Township has one major watershed. Several streams feed into the North Branch of the White River Watershed and many smaller streams flow into the South Branch of the White River Watershed. A few streams flow into the

Ground and water pollution from fertilizers applied to crops and homes, construction of impervious surfaces, and seepage from septic tank systems could all threaten the Township’s watersheds.

Wetlands exist throughout the Township and are important in protecting watersheds and habitats.

Prime timberland is a prominent asset in the western portion of the Township with the presence of the Manistee National Forest. Farmland is a major land use in the eastern portion of the Township.

The White River stretches from east to west across the Township and is dammed in Hesperia. The river runs through the southeast corner of the Township, providing important habitat for several species of plants and animals.

## PEOPLE

Newfield Township has experienced fluctuations in population since 1990.

The natural atmosphere and abundance of rivers and lakes means that Newfield Township will continue to be an attractive place to locate, and the population will continue to grow.

Some housing developments that have been constructed in the Township have not been completely built out and have capacity for additional residents.

Newfield Township's average age is 39, the same as the national average.

Many residents are employed in education, health care, and manufacturing industries. The Township's area median income is in the middle range of those seen in Oceana County.

The Township's existing housing stock is composed mostly of older rural single-family residences and newly built suburban style developments.

The majority of housing in the Township was built before 2000.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Water and sewer service is primarily received through individual wells and septic systems.

As a rural, low-density area, Newfield Township does not suffer from traffic congestion, but many residents complain of excessive speeding. Many Newfield residents commute long distances.

Unpaved roads are common, especially in the Township's rural areas. In some places, but not all, these roads are sufficient for local use, and do not need to be paved.

Internet and cellular connectivity have become a vital component of infrastructure. Resources are available for the continued buildout of broadband and cellular communication infrastructure in the Township.

Newfield Township is in proximity to regional bike trails. Connecting a trail system from Newfield Township to these trails could serve an important recreation and transportation function, while enhancing Newfield's rural character.

Residents are currently not served by regional non-motorized infrastructure.

The Township operates two public access sites on two lakes.

## ECONOMY

Newfield Township is a rural recreation community where residents choose to live among natural beauty, and commute to other areas for jobs and retail.

Nearby urban centers provide more jobs and amenities that can be consumed by their populations. Newfield Township residents can fill those gaps.

The market demand for housing, industry, and commerce is small but apparent. Residents are asking for more housing choices, commercial options, and employment options.

Newfield Township can preserve its rural character and beauty and be responsive to the market demands of its growing region.

If Newfield Township plans to stay rural, while allowing for strategic pockets of development to accommodate economic growth, it can maintain a fiscally responsible land use pattern.

Local Economic Development is critical for the Township to be able to provide services like a professional fire department. Professional fire fighters are expensive and would require an increase in taxes.

## VISIONS

Growth should be encouraged in planned areas. Identify specific areas to target for growth.

Choice of housing type and location (rural, neighborhood, apartments) and price points.

Make waterfront standards the same across jurisdictions.

Protect farmland and natural areas from development.

Expanding broadband coverage and high-speed Internet.

Developing/improving bike lanes and trails, and ORV and equestrian trails.

Carefully regulate utility-scale wind and solar, while allowing residents and businesses to build green energy facilities on their properties with minimal red tape.

**Map 6: Framework Plan**

## PLANNING PRINCIPLES

Land use planning principles are used as a guide in evaluating development alternatives and public policy decisions. The following are general planning principles that should be applied to all land use categories:

- » **Consistency with the Plan.** Development should be reviewed for general consistency with the intent of the master plan as well as other regional plans. In addition, other governing bodies, such as the State or County, should be encouraged to use the Master Plan in considering programming for Newfield Township.
- » **Concurrence and Compactness.** Growth should generally be compact and in most cases directed to areas that maximize the use of the existing public investment in capital improvements. Development should occur concurrently with the provisions for infrastructure. Development should occur in a pragmatic and meaningful way to discourage incompatible adjacent land uses.
- » **Sustainability and Natural Systems.** Special consideration should be given when development is proposed in environmentally sensitive areas, particularly around the Township's natural beauty corridors, scenic agricultural areas, and natural waterways.
- » **Human Scale.** The community should be designed on a human scale with a land use pattern balanced around activity centers such as the lakes, schools, community facilities, parks, or other similar sites.

## FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES

The land use categories are graphically displayed on the Future Land Use Map and are described in this section of the Master Plan on the following pages.

**Map 7: Future Land Use**

## Rural

### General Characteristics

Outside of the Growth Boundary, the predominant Future Land Use category is Agricultural. This future land use designation encompasses active farmland and large-lot single-family residential land uses. Residential densities in this land use category should be under one (1) unit per acre. Lots themselves should be a minimum of one (1) acre.

### Appropriate Land Uses

Appropriate land uses include farms with associated accessory buildings and rural residential dwelling units matching the character and density of the surrounding area, agri-businesses, and parks.

Land-intensive uses such as utility-scale wind energy systems and solar farms, and potentially hazardous uses such as junk yards and mineral mining, should be limited to areas where they can be operated in strict compliance with the Township's Zoning Ordinance, while meeting the goals and objectives of this plan.

### Roads and Transportation

Roads within the Agriculture/Rural Residential Future Land Use designation are typically higher in speed and under the jurisdiction of the County Road Commission. These roads should be easily accessible and able to accommodate heavier vehicle traffic.

### Building and Site Design

New homes and accessory structures should be designed with quality materials and be consistent with surrounding homes in terms of scale, massing, and site design. Homes and any accessory structures (used for agricultural or residential purposes) should have a large front yard setback and be constructed further away from the road.

### Appropriate Zoning Districts

AR Agricultural-Recreational, R-1 Residential, Lakes, and Streams



## Neighborhood Residential

### General Characteristics

In order to preserve rural character, residential developments with densities higher than one unit per acre should only be permitted where public water and sewer allow construction. Within these areas, neighborhoods may be constructed to meet housing demand for the Newfield community.

Some areas in this category are greenfield, agricultural, or undeveloped sites, while others are low density neighborhoods where infill is desirable— provided neighborhood character is maintained.

### Appropriate Land Uses

The appropriate land uses for Neighborhood Residential areas are single-family homes, and two-family homes up to 4 units per acre. Small apartment buildings may also be appropriate along major corridors, where public water and sewer allow construction.

Parks, schools, churches, and preserved rural/open space are also appropriate to support a high quality of life in the residential areas.

### Roads and Transportation

Roadways in these areas are typically low-speed and low-volume. Street patterns should include high connectivity with accessible sidewalks on both sides of the street and bicycle infrastructure where appropriate. On-street parking should be provided where it can be designed safely.

Major thoroughfares should be designed for travel speeds that do not pose a noise or safety threat to surrounding residents and should feature sidewalks or bike paths to allow for non-motorized travel.

### Building and Site Design

Sites should be designed to maintain a human scale and promote social interaction without negatively impacting existing nearby residential development. Buildings should be designed with quality materials and be consistent with the architectural styles common in the greater Newfield area. Alternative architectural styles may be appropriate in some areas, provided that the unique design enhances the general character of the area. New construction or major renovations should be consistent with the existing residential character in terms of setbacks, height, architecture, and function.

### Appropriate Districts

R-1: Residential, Lakes, & Streams



## Rural Residential



### **General Characteristics**

Homes in this character are rural residential homesteads but are not actively farmed. Homes here are on large, rural lots and often have barns and sheds or other accessory buildings. Large-lot rural residential is appropriate for residential development that is not tied to agriculture. However, the Township must take care to ensure that rural character is maintained. Thus, the Rural Residential land use category should not contain lots under one acre in area.

### **Appropriate Land Uses**

The appropriate land uses for Rural Residential areas are single-family homes at one unit per acre or greater.

Parks, schools, churches, and preserved rural/open space are also appropriate to support a high quality of life and preserve rural character.

### **Roads and Transportation**

Roadways should maintain a rural character, with major thoroughfares paved. Paved shoulders or bike paths should be included where planned by a Newfield Township Non-Motorized Plan or where otherwise deemed appropriate.

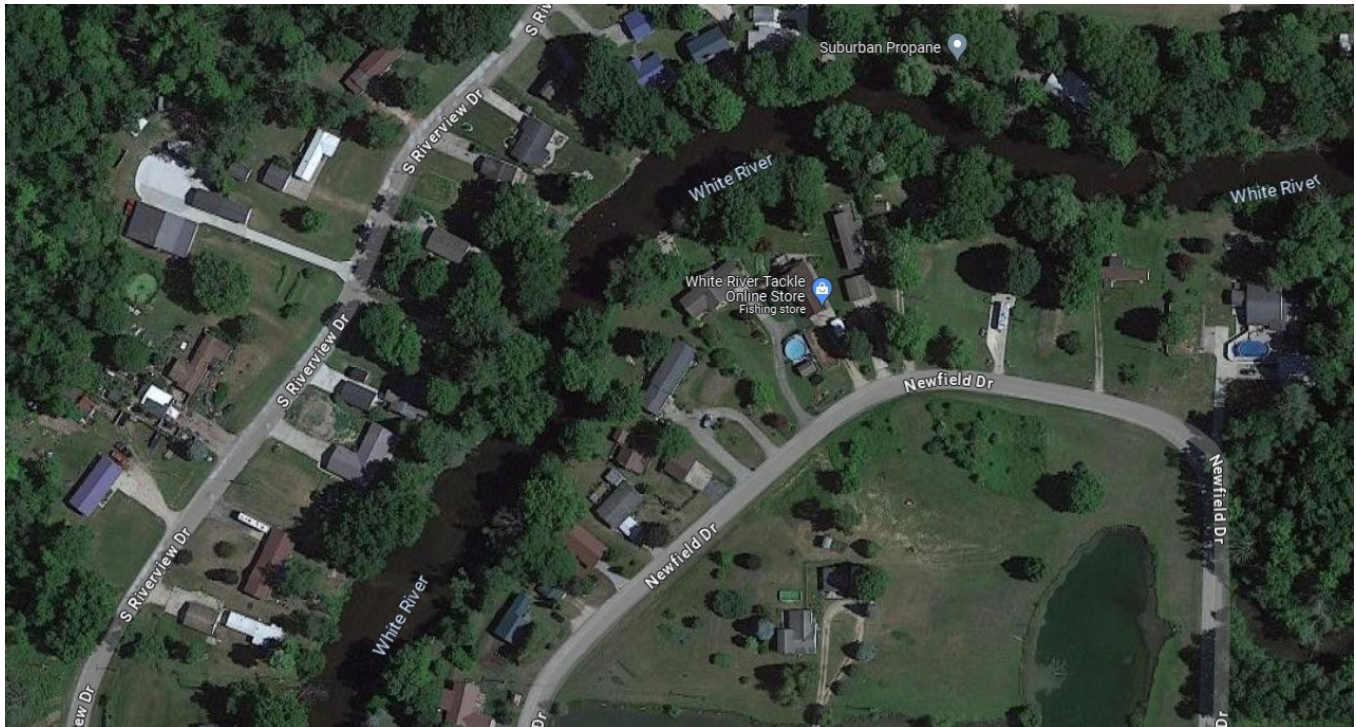
### **Building and Site Design**

Sites should be designed to preserve the natural environment and rural character for the enjoyment of the residents. This is not an agricultural category, but small-scale home agricultural activities, such as chicken coops, horse runs, small cultivation areas, and 4-H animal husbandry are encouraged.

### **Appropriate Districts**

RR Rural Residential

## Cluster Housing



### General Characteristics

The purpose of the Cluster Housing category is to provide housing and preserve the wetlands, lakes, floodplains, forests, and other sensitive areas in the Township. In order to protect these natural features, this category encourages more intensive development, with land uses limited to public water and sewer availability. Building houses in cluster developments can preserve open spaces into the future.

### Appropriate Land Uses

This category encourages small-lot residential. However, parks, community facilities, and houses of worship can all be acceptable uses in this area.

### Roads and Transportation

Roadways should maintain a rural character. Paved shoulders or bike paths should be included where planned for by a Newfield Township Non-Motorized Plan or where otherwise deemed appropriate.

### Building and Site Design

Buildings—including accessory buildings—should be as small and unobtrusive as possible, and sites should be designed to preserve as much of the natural environment as possible—including going above and beyond zoning requirements and state regulations.

### Appropriate Districts

C-3 Cluster Housing

## Commercial

### General Characteristics

In general, in order to preserve rural character, commercial developments should be clustered on N. Maple Island Rd., near Hesperia, and in Hamlet Commercial zones at key intersections, as shown on the Future Land Use Map:

- » E. Loop Rd. and S. 164<sup>th</sup> Ave.
- » S. 192<sup>nd</sup> Ave. and Yorker Rd.
- » S. 200<sup>th</sup> Ave. and E. Pierce Rd.

### Appropriate Land Uses

Typical land uses in these areas include retail stores, personal services, offices, medical clinics, and restaurants. Residential uses may be incorporated into mixed use developments, especially near the Downtown Hesperia. Schools, civic buildings, parks, and churches should also be encouraged. The intensity of development, and the degree to which it is automobile or pedestrian focused, should be flexible based on the proximity to major corridors, residential areas, and the Village of Hesperia.

### Roads and Transportation

Commercial development should be concentrated near the Village of Hesperia and at the intersections of major corridors to give sufficient access to the businesses from all corners of the community. In the immediate vicinity of the businesses, safe and efficient access should be prioritized, including left turn lanes and appropriately spaced driveways. Sidewalks should also be encouraged in business districts.

### Building and Site Design

Buildings should be built with durable materials and be architecturally compatible with the surrounding historic neighborhoods. Buildings with a connection to the street, designed with attractive front facades, entrances, and patios are encouraged.

Parking areas may be located in the front, side, or rear yards of buildings. Large areas of parking should be broken up with landscaped islands and trees.

### Appropriate Districts

C-1 Commercial



## Light Industrial

### General Characteristics

The Industrial Future Land Use designation is designed to encompass existing industrial development that does not have the capacity to expand into a broader mix of uses, and therefore does not belong in the Commercial category.

### Appropriate Land Uses

Appropriate uses include agricultural processing, grain elevators, and any other smaller rural industrial uses that may be considered compatible with them.

### Roads and Transportation

Roadways should be sufficient to handle maintenance vehicles and emergency vehicles that may need to access industrial areas, without negative impacts on the surrounding area.

### Building and Site Design

Buildings should be industrial in nature but should be designed to the highest standards of safety and durability.

### Appropriate Districts

I Industrial



## Public/Institutional

### General Characteristics

This Future Land Use designation is a combination of publicly owned lands and facilities.

This zoning district is intended for the Newfield Township offices and properties, schools, infrastructure and utilities, and other governmental properties.

Developments should be designed and operated to be respectful of their surroundings, with pedestrian amenities like sidewalks and bike racks, ample parking, and an inviting atmosphere and architectural design.

### Appropriate Land Uses

Appropriate uses include properties and structures that are owned and operated by Newfield Township, Village of Hesperia, Oceana County, the State of Michigan, and the U.S. government.

### Roads and Transportation

Roads should be designed in a pattern that allows maximum access from adjacent areas.

### Building and Site Design

Buildings should be constructed of high-quality materials which wrap around the entire building and feature attractive signage. Robust landscaping should be installed throughout the site, especially adjacent to residential areas.

Depending on their need, public and institutional buildings should be supported by sufficient, but not overly excessive parking areas. Parking areas may be located in the front, side, or rear yards of buildings. Large areas of parking should be broken up with landscaped islands and trees.

### Appropriate Districts

P Public and Institutional



## Conservation/National Forest

### General Characteristics

A large portion of the land in Newfield Township is in the Huron-Manistee National Forest. This area can be used for motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities year-round, including camping, hiking, and fishing.

### Appropriate Land Uses

The Huron-Manistee National Forest is a national conservation area that encompasses nearly 1 million acres of land. The only appropriate use of the land is the continued conservation and recreation uses that it currently provides.

### Streets and Transportation

The few roadways that run through the Huron-Manistee National Forest should be adequately maintained and cleared so as not to obstruct the paths of travel for both humans and animals.

### Building and Site Design

Few new buildings should be created within this district, as the use is intended for conservation rather than development.

Site design should, however, encourage pedestrian activity and recreation, while ensuring that the natural environment is protected from any negative impacts posed by recreational uses. Parking lots should be minimized or eliminated, buildings should be human-scale, and lighting and landscaping should be designed with the environment in mind.

### Appropriate Districts

AR-1 – Agricultural and Recreational  
CV – Conservation District



## Chapter 5.

# Zoning Plan: Impact on Zoning Decisions

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The table on the following page shows the Newfield Township Zoning Districts that would appropriately implement the vision of the Framework and Future Land Use Categories. Special Land Use requests should be reviewed against this table to determine whether the requested district is supported by this Plan.

## Framework vs Future Land Use

The Framework Map and the Future Land Use Map were designed to provide guidance on special land use decisions in Newfield Township. Special land use requests are made in Newfield Township when a landowner desires to use the land in a way that is not permitted in the parcel's current zoning jurisdiction. Framework categories should be considered "hard edges." A special land use should only be approved within a given Framework category if the district is listed as appropriate for that category in the following table. The purpose of this hard edge is to preserve the Township's rural and small-town character. If an area is designated for preservation or enhancement, the zoning districts should reflect that and should not allow development that dramatically changes the character in this Master Plan period.

With the large geography of the Township and vast areas of undeveloped land, it is possible that a detailed evaluation of a zoning proposal determines that a given site is more appropriate for Business Growth than Residential Growth, or the other way around, even if that is contrary to the Future Land Use Map. It is also possible that additional locations for hamlets made up of clusters of houses, or new commercial areas may be identified.

Within the Preserve and Enhance framework categories, the Future Land Use categories can be considered even more fluid. There may be important natural features in an otherwise agricultural area, for instance, or a neighborhood near a lake may require a zoning district other than R-1 to preserve its character. In those instances, and others like them, a special land use request to a district that is not listed within the Future Land Use category, but is listed within the Framework category, would be appropriate.

## Impact on Local Zoning Decisions

The Framework and Future Land Use Maps are designed to be compatible with local planning and zoning. Therefore, it is anticipated that zoning decisions will be compatible with the Master Plan. However, in instances where this is not possible, the Township Planning Commission should use the Framework and Future Land Use Maps in the manner described above to guide their recommendation.

| Future Land Use Category | Appropriate Zoning Districts  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Agricultural             | AR – Agricultural-Residential   |
| Rural Residential        | RR – Rural Residential  |
| Resource Development     | RD – Resource Development   |
| Neighborhood Residential | LDR – Low Density Residential<br>MFD – Multiple Family Residential (along major roads – see below)<br>CH – Cluster Housing  |
| Industrial               | I – Industrial  |
| Enterprise               | CSC – Community Service Commercial<br>HSC – Heavy Service Commercial<br>I – Industrial<br>New Enterprise Zoning District  |
| Mixed Use                | PUD – Planned Unit Development<br>LDR – Low Density Residential<br>MFD – Multiple Family Residential<br>CSC – Community Service Commercial<br>New Mixed Use Zoning District |

As can be seen in the above table, with the exception of Agricultural, Rural Residential, Resource Development, and Industrial, each Future Land Use Category has a certain degree of built-in flexibility whereby the Planning Commission may— at its discretion—choose the appropriate zoning district from a range of available districts, each with its own requirements. The purpose of this flexibility in zoning is to allow for the appropriate level of intensity in land use given the proposed district, surrounding land uses, and market conditions. Such an approach is also critical to maintaining local control over land use decisions and for local zoning to remain responsive to market pressures.

## ZONING DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS BY FUTURE LAND USE

### AGRICULTURAL (DISTRICTS AR, RR, & RD)

- » Establish ORV areas in the Manistee National Forest and formally allow their use.
- » Reevaluate lot size requirements for both open space and agricultural uses to determine if they are sufficient to protect existing agricultural uses.
- » Adopt new regulations on utility-scale solar farms and wind turbines to further the Township’s goals for renewable energy generation.
- » Use the zoning ordinance to allow and encourage recreational events, activities, and businesses in Newfield Township.

### NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL (DISTRICTS LDR, MFD, & MHR)

- » Encourage infill development to build out partially developed neighborhoods.
- » Encourage cluster housing and open space development that encourages preservation of open space.
- » Divide residential uses into separate sections for each district: Low Density Residential (LDR) and Multiple- Family Residential (MFD), respectively.
  - Clarify minimum lot and building requirements for each district and add a table to the zoning ordinance.

### COMMERCIAL (DISTRICTS CSC & HSC)

- » Use the zoning ordinance to encourage recreational businesses, agri-tourism, and eco-tourism.
- » Consider adding a second commercial district that allows heavy commercial and light-industrial uses in some areas as appropriate (see ENTERPRISE below).

### ENTERPRISE (DISTRICTS CSC, HSC, & I)

- » Consider combining certain sections of existing CSC, HSC, and/or I districts into a new “Enterprise” flexible zoning district. Such a district would function as a transition district between the existing districts.
- » Use the zoning ordinance to encourage recreational businesses, agri-tourism, and eco-tourism.
- » Consider adding a second commercial district that allows heavy commercial and light-industrial uses in some areas as appropriate (see ENTERPRISE below).

### MIXED USE (DISTRICTS PUD, LDR, MFD, & CSC)

- » Consider creating a Mixed-Use Zoning District to implement the vision of the Mixed-Use District.
- » Evaluate the Planned Unit Development process and regulations to ensure they can successfully implement the vision of the Mixed-Use District.

## Action Plan

Implementation strategies are a key component of any community's Master Plan. They determine how the Plan's guidelines and recommendations become reality. The Newfield Township Master Plan should not be viewed as a finished product, but a live document that can be adapted over time to fit the current needs of the Township. As events alter conditions within the community or the needs of Township residents' change, various adjustments or additions will need to be made to the Plan. It is not anticipated that the Plan's major goals and objectives will require change, but rather, as the Plan is interpreted and implemented, certain aspects will require periodic adjustment.

The following section presents tools and techniques that community leaders, the Planning Commission, and the Township Board can use to implement the Future Land Use Plan. These techniques can be used individually or in tandem to achieve the objectives and eventually the overall goals of this Master Plan. While the direct impact of some of the techniques cannot be immediately assessed, over time these procedures can effectively guide land use decisions and development within Newfield Township.

### PLAN FOR NATURAL AREAS

The natural features - the woodlands, wetlands, streams, and prime soils - are an essential component to life in Newfield Township. They establish the rural character, attract people to live and work here, and help drive the local economy. It is vitally important that these resources are protected.

In order to protect them effectively, one must know if they are being harmed. Water quality studies should be conducted regularly and reported Newfield Township residents, especially for all major lakes. Surveys of woodlands and wetlands should be conducted, even if on a simplified level, at regular intervals, to determine if these resources are being lost to development. Similarly, analyses of soil samples should be conducted regularly to see if the quality of the soil remains at the high level it is today.

### LAND DIVISION REGULATION

Local zoning and land division regulation, under the Michigan Land Division Act (P.A. 288 of 1967, as amended through P.A. 591 of 1996) are tools for the implementation of this Plan. While zoning deals with land use on a site-by-site basis and activities in selected areas, land division standards are concerned with the process of dividing land and maintaining the quality of individual developments.

The Township has adopted a Land Division Ordinance regulating lot splits. The Township should review the current Land Division Ordinance to ensure that it remains consistent with the goals and objectives of this Plan. The Township should also make sure that the Ordinance conforms to all the changes that were recently made to the State law by the Michigan Legislature and Governor. Some concerns remain over the changes that were made at the State level, so the Planning Commission must remain alert to future changes in this area of regulation to assure that the standards and requirements are consistent with the authorizing legislation.

### OPEN SPACE DEVELOPMENT

Rural open space development is an alternative to conventional site development and is intended to promote the preservation of Newfield Township's rural character. Conventional site development often results in residential sprawl that consumes large amounts of land and divides open spaces into fragments on individual home sites. It does not contribute to a rural appearance and is not conducive to agriculture, wildlife habitat, or other rural open space uses.

Conventional site development places lots on every available acre of the site. Open space development (also known as cluster development) on the other hand, allows for the grouping of dwellings onto part of the site, and a permanent easement covers the remainder preserving it as open space. The cluster of dwellings can be placed either within woodlands, to preserve agricultural land, or on the agricultural land, preserving the woodlands and other existing natural features. The development also typically has a large setback from the road and limited access points in order to preserve the rural views and limit the corridor development effect. Cluster housing often allows lower per unit densities than traditional neighborhood development but preserves open spaces. The images below show a traditional housing neighborhood with lots taking up nearly all of the development space and comparing those to cluster housing that maximizes shared open spaces.



*Conventional Residential Development*

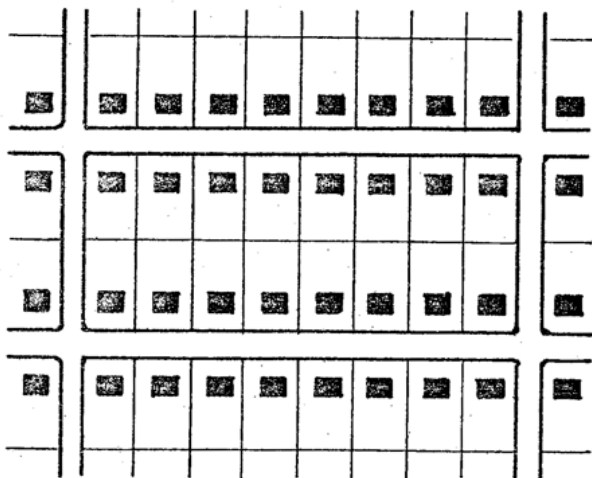


Figure 1a

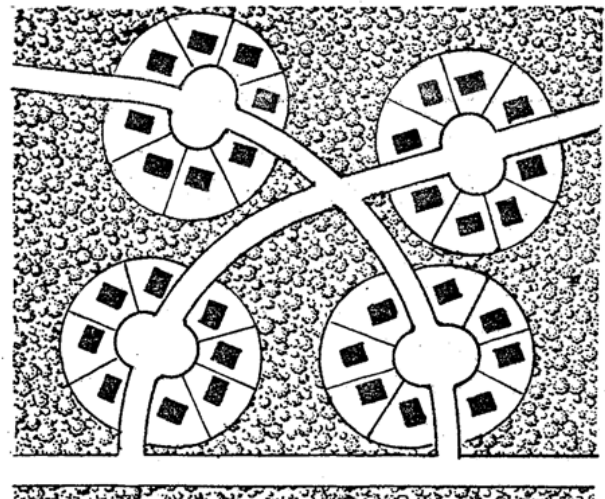


Figure 1b

Township Zoning Ordinance requirements must be revised to be no more difficult for rural open space development than for conventional residential development. This development alternative is most effective when the Township offers a small incentive for open space development—one or two bonus lots—thereby encouraging developers to use this option. A density bonus is contingent upon the developer preserving a sufficient amount of natural features and open space as well as providing appropriate infrastructure for the dwellings with limited impact on the surrounding area.

## **MUNICIPAL ACQUISITION FOR OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION**

A complementary strategy for the preservation of open space and the development of new park land is the municipal acquisition of private land for the purpose creating new public parks. The Future Land Use Map has an additional land use category of "Parks and Open Space". Specifically, the State Boat Launch area located at the southern edge of the Township north of E. Garfield Rd. and west of 192<sup>nd</sup> Ave. is one which the Newfield Township leadership has noted as being appropriate for potential future acquisition and designation as a Newfield Township public park.

## **RIGHT TO FARM ACT**

Michigan enacted a Right-to-Farm Act (P.A. 93 of 1981) to provide farmers with protection against nuisance suits for standard farming practices. New amendments to this law prohibit local governments from passing laws that are more restrictive than Michigan's Right-to-Farm Act. The existence of such laws is important in areas where residential development and agricultural farm uses meet. Often new residents to these areas object to agricultural uses which involve the spraying of chemicals, industrial-like harvesting of crops, and odorous animal wastes. Newcomers to rural areas have been influential in having nuisance ordinances passed and pressing nuisance suits against farmers to limit their operating practices. The Right-to-Farm laws do not exempt farmers from state and federal laws relating to pollution and safety. They do, however, serve to underscore the legitimacy of farm uses, even the primacy of farm uses, above other land uses that may develop in agricultural districts.

Farmers should be aware that they are covered by the Right-to-Farm laws only in the event of a lawsuit. The Right-to-Farm Act in Michigan requires that farmers abide by the GAAMP (Generally Accepted Agriculture Management Practices) in order to receive legal protection from nuisance lawsuits. Township land use regulators will recognize the provisions of the Michigan Right-to-Farm Act, however, restrictions will be established on animal units and Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) consistent with the GAAMPs to control environmental and nuisance impacts that can be generated by these uses.

## **PLANNING COMMISSION**

A stable and knowledgeable Planning Commission is critical to the success of the zoning process. The Commission's responsibilities include long-range plan formulation and the drafting of appropriate, reasonable zoning ordinance regulations designed to implement the Master Plan's goals and objectives. Adoption of the Zoning Ordinance by the Township Board then provides the legal basis for enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance's provisions. The ultimate effectiveness of the various ordinance requirements, however, is dependent upon the overall quality of ordinance administration and enforcement. If the administration procedures are lax or handled in a sporadic, inconsistent manner, the results will be unsatisfactory at best; conversely, fair and efficient administration generates a quality built and natural landscape.

Another role of the Planning Commission is to provide planning recommendations to the Township Board. This planning function is a continuous process which does not terminate with the completion of this Plan. Both the rural and lakefront areas are in constant change, and planning is an ongoing process of identification, adjustment, and resolution of problems. In order to sustain the planning process and generate positive results, maintain momentum, and respond to

change, the Plan should be reviewed and updated regularly. As stated earlier, the State enabling legislation requires reviews and updates to the plan at least every five (5) years to maintain the validity of its data and relevance as a policy document. The Implementation section should be reviewed annually to monitor progress, budgetary assignments, and project goals for the coming years.

The Planning Commission recognizes the possibility of change and the fluidity of this document. It recognizes that it must be regularly reviewed and updated to assure the overall regulatory framework is supported. The Planning Commission shall review the document at least once every five (5) years, as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, to ensure that the Plan continues to represent the goals and objectives of the Township's residents. The Plan will be updated or revised, as needed, in order to continue to provide a firm foundation for land use planning and regulation.



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