

Chapter 7

INTERJURISDICTIONAL COORDINATION & PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

INTRODUCTION

As important a benchmark as this General Plan represents, the initiatives proposed in this Plan will not implement themselves. It will take the concerted efforts of citizens, elected officials and local and county administrative officials to bring this Plan from concept into reality. It will take continued support and commitment for many years. However, the goals of this Plan and the strategies proposed to implement it offer the promise of a much better future than that likely to occur if recent trends continue unchanged.

Benefits to all groups will be numerous and most visible in terms of an increased quality of life that can attract new businesses and jobs, and greater satisfaction of residents. An increased quality of life comes from new jobs, an enhanced agricultural sector, creation of more distinctive residential neighborhoods and commercial areas and retention of the rural scenic character of the landscape. Many indirect benefits will also occur. These include improved access to information needed for decision-making and better cooperation among units of government.

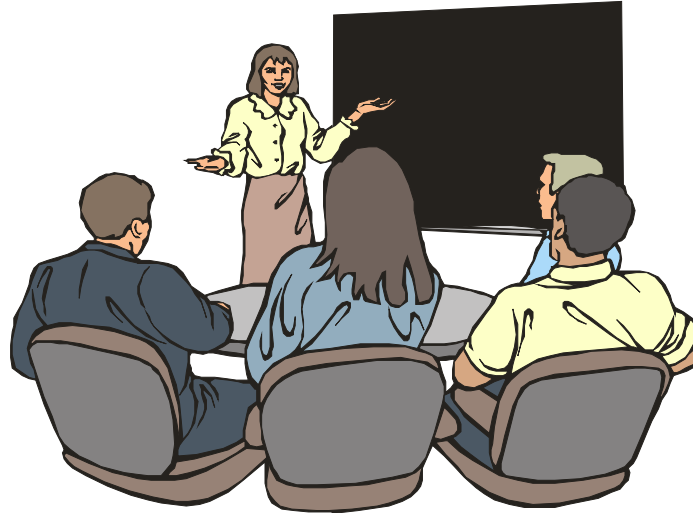
The central ingredients to successful Plan implementation will be:

- Commitment by the County Planning Commission, the County Board of Commissioners, citizens and support from local units of government. Implementation of the General Plan will require the county and local governments, businesses and citizens to drop some old habits and adopt some new approaches. This is not always easy to do. However, the desired vision will not be reached without commitment by all involved.
- A better educated citizenry and local officials. While many citizens and officials want trends to change, they lack the knowledge to make them change or do not understand the cause and effect link of actions they take on an ongoing basis. Information about more appropriate residential development patterns, the fiscal and land use constraints of extending urban services, modern farming and forestry methods, scenery and open space preservation, natural resource protection and other tools to sustain the quality of life in Montcalm County need to reach citizens and officials or they will not understand why and how local decision-making must change. The Montcalm County Fact Book, the internet based Community Information System and this Plan are important first steps in helping to improve future land use decision making. See Figure 7-1.

FOCUSING ON PRIORITIES

It is easy for a Planning Commission at either the county or local level to become distracted with ongoing tasks or ad hoc, controversial issues. Still, the Commission needs to prioritize its tasks. Time needs to be set aside for high priority items. These include the preparation of an annual report and work program for the next year, and when appropriate, the five-year Plan update. These are discussed below.

Figure 7-1
Education is the Top Implementation Priority of the
Montcalm County General Plan



Annual Tasks

An annual report on all activities undertaken by the County Planning Commission with a special focus on actions taken to implement the Plan should be made to the County Board of Commissioners. A proposed work program that identifies priorities and projected expenses for the next year should also be prepared and submitted in time to be included in the annual budget process. The Planning Commission should begin reviewing all proposed new public facilities in the county for consistency with the Plan. Periodically, and at least once each five years, the General Plan should be thoroughly reviewed and updated by the County Planning Commission.

Top Priorities

The Planning Commission can not be expected to accomplish all of the strategies listed in the goals, objectives and strategies. Many of these can only be accomplished by other agencies or groups. It is important that discussions begin with those groups so that they understand the goals, find agreeable common ground where there are differences and obtain a commitment to the action.

One approach to establishing priorities is to use the following standards:

- Make a high priority of those actions that are the precursor to other steps. One example is the recommendation in Chapter 4 to develop a 5-year countywide strategic economic development plan.
- Those actions that are assigned to a particular group are a high priority.
- A lower priority may be those actions that are not assigned to a group or that broadly identify the "county," as the responsible party.
- If an action does not list a responsible party, it remains a lower priority until a group or agency steps forward to take ownership of it.

The following activities should be the key priorities of the Planning Commission for the next five years:

- Educate all local units of government in the county about the vision, goals, objectives and strategies of the County General Plan and provide technical assistance in the integration of these elements into local plans and zoning decisions.
- Educate all citizens about the vision, goals, objectives and strategies of the updated County General Plan and provide technical assistance in the integration of these elements into property owner development and redevelopment efforts.
- Directly use this Plan in the analysis and review of proposed rezonings, zoning text amendments, and new or amended master plans submitted to the County Planning Commission for statutory review and approval. This means recommending approval for actions consistent with the Plan and denial or modification for actions inconsistent with this Plan.
- Exercise review authority in ways to improve local decisions by guiding decisions toward integrated and coordinated solutions based on the core objectives and strategies in this Plan.
- Provide training and technical assistance to local governments on general planning, zoning and capital improvement programming. Many County Planning Commissions in Michigan host an annual one day conference for local governments in the County, others offer periodic workshops on key topics. Both are great ways to meet the local planning commission education needs in the land use arena.
- Monitor local and county agency decisions and periodically inform local governments and the County Board of Commissioners on the status of efforts to improve land use decision making in Montcalm County.
- Strongly advocate that the county budget and provide for digital air photos of all the land in the county. These photos should be taken during flights in 2010 (to correspond to the next Census).
- Strongly advocate that FEMA complete mapping of floodplains throughout the county.
- Join efforts with others outside the county to modernize planning and zoning enabling legislation and to authorize new tools to better manage growth and preserve open space.
- Update the Montcalm County Data Book online on at least an annual basis and major updates to hard copy consistent with the next update to the Plan in late 2010 and 2011 when new Census data is available.

The County Planning Commission should also be involved with others and champion the preparation of the following additional plans in the county:

- A county transportation plan
- A county strategic economic development plan
- Access management plans for M-57, M-66, M-46 and M-91.
- An agricultural protection plan in conjunction with townships with zoning, so that farmers in the county are eligible to participate in the state PDR program.
- Watershed management plans of each river watershed and major lake watersheds.
- A greenspace plan for a linked system of greenspaces throughout the county.
- Periodic updates to the Montcalm County Recreational Plan. The number of county parks should be expanded per the Montcalm County Recreational Plan, but special attention should be given to establishment of new county parks in the parts of the county without any.

ADDRESSING ISSUES OF GREATER THAN LOCAL CONCERN

Local jurisdictions frequently face issues that have implications beyond the jurisdiction (both intra-county and inter-county). Public interests that are broader than simply local interests include (but are not limited to) those in Table 7-1. Examples of common issues of greater than local concern are illustrated in Figure 7-2.

Figure 7-2
Examples of Issues of Greater than Local Concern

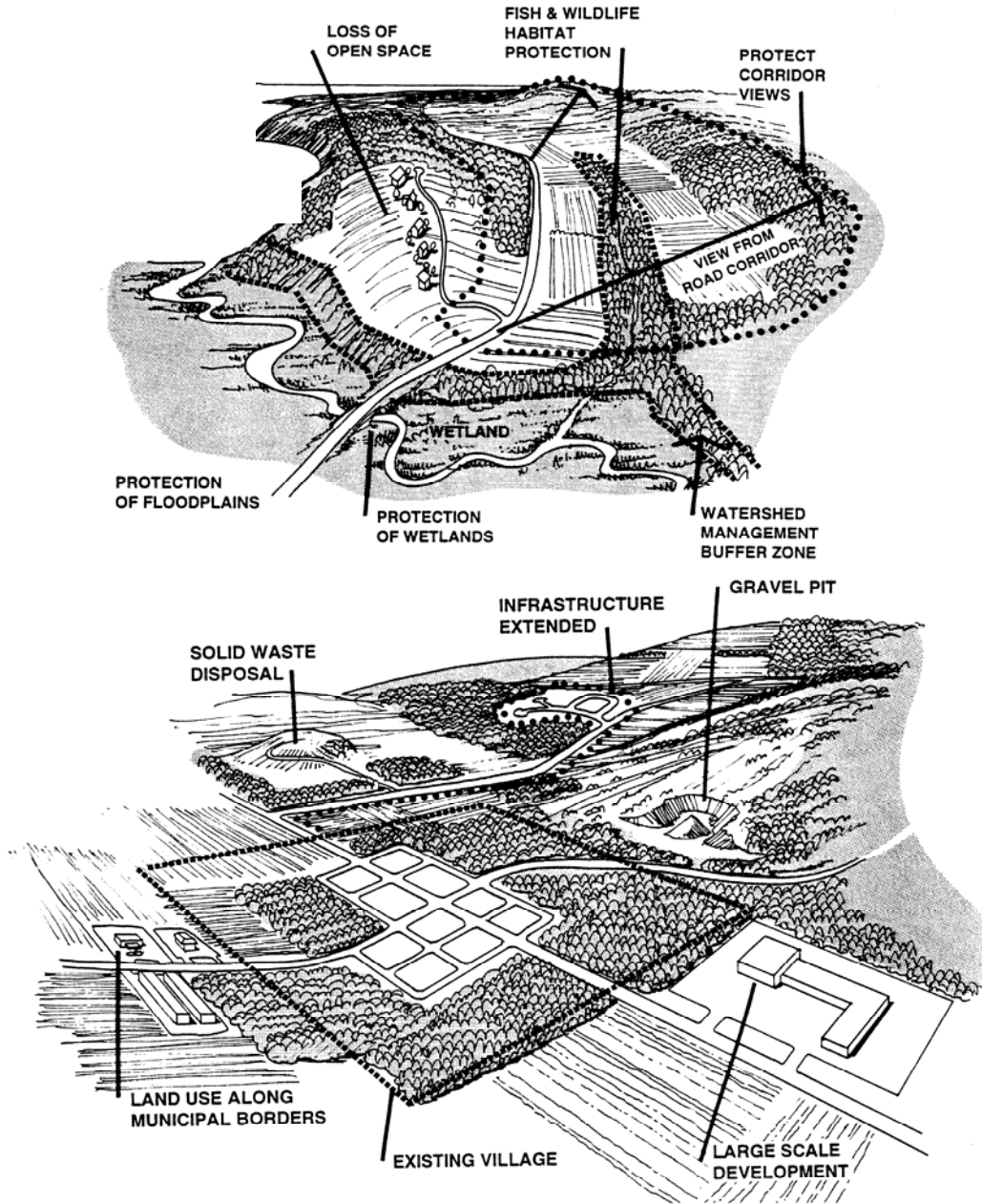


Table 7-1 Issues of Greater than Local Concern

Protecting the Environment and Natural Resources

- Watersheds and water quality
- Wetlands protection
- Floodplain protection
- Land pollution (contaminated sites)
- Soil conservation and stormwater pollution
- Air pollution
- Groundwater pollution
- Oil and gas pollution
- Noise pollution
- Water pollution of inland lakes, rivers and streams
- Protection of areas with steep slopes
- Wildlife corridors and fish and wildlife habitat protection
- Protection of unique and endangered species
- Protection of agricultural land
- Sustainability of privately owned forest land
- Water surfaces that are under control of multiple local jurisdictions, especially as relates to keyhole development
- Use of public access sites
- Maintaining a “sense of place” where that sense is the major attraction for tourists and the service sector economy.

Siting Public Facilities or Providing New Public Services

- Solid waste and recycling
- Emergency services (fire, ambulance, police) – to achieve greater efficiency
- Transportation/roads
- Public transportation
- Trails (siting of) – federal, state, local, and property owners
- "Regional" park facilities
- District library and district boundaries for libraries
- Mental and other health facilities
- Provision of senior services – location of facilities, including handicapped services
- Extension of sewer and water utilities
- Schools (especially if a new school, or consolidation of schools is considered)

Maintaining a Sustainable Economy and Promoting Economic Development

- Real (livable) wages, job opportunities for young adults and families with children
- Adequate lifelong educational opportunities for all citizens: health of the Montcalm Community College
- Adequate affordable housing for middle and low income persons.

Table 7-1 (Continued) Issues of Greater than Local Concern

Land Use

- LULU's (locally unwanted land uses that meet a regional need), such as gravel pits, junk yards, landfills, communication towers, electric generating windmills, etc.
- Large scale development (shopping center, airports, etc.)
- Zoned density in some rural areas while low, is too high to cost effectively service
- Compact settlement pattern vs. dispersed settlement pattern and the associated impacts on infrastructure extensions or establishment of infrastructure
- Siting affordable housing—especially mobile home parks
- Lack of similar regulations and uneven enforcement across jurisdiction boundaries
- Compatibility of land uses along jurisdiction boundaries regarding zoning and land use issues
- Loss of rural open space—especially along roads in the county
- Regional focus on open space preservation and farmland preservation
- Protecting important viewsheds and rural corridor views.

Other

- Interjurisdictional equity issues
- Intergenerational equity issues
- Sustainability.

In many instances, these issues of greater than local concern revolve around common environmental features (which do not respect municipal boundaries), or infrastructure, economic development and the needs of special populations.

It takes a basic change of attitude toward other jurisdictions to effectively deal with issues of greater than local concern. It takes recognition that all the citizens are in the same boat together. In the aggregate, they all face the same potential loss or gain. It takes acceptance that the other jurisdictions are not in competition or opposition, at least not on every aspect of the issue. It takes the ability to exercise mutual respect in areas of overlapping responsibilities and mutual support where responsibilities are separate, but compatible in pursuit of common goals and a common vision of the county. By jointly engaging the issues, common ground can usually be found. It is the common ground that is most often used as the basis for effective interjurisdictional cooperation.

ROLE OF KEY PLAYERS

It will take the efforts of many different groups to implement the Montcalm General Plan. Key among them are the local planning commissions and governing boards, the County Board of Commissioners and the County Planning Commission.

The framed text on Table 7-2 on the next three pages lists the traditional roles and responsibilities of local planning commissions, local governing bodies, the County Board of Commissioners and the County Planning Commission. These traditional roles are proposed to be continued.

Table 7-2
Traditional Responsibilities of The Local Government Decision-makers

County Board of Commissioners

The County Board of Commissioners must take the lead in order to support continued planning in Montcalm County. Its basic statutory and administrative responsibilities are as follows (not all of these are currently being performed):

- Adopt the County General Plan
- Periodically hold a joint meeting with the County Planning Commission to go over issues of common interest.
- Approve funding for the planning/zoning program each year including funds for training and continuing education of commissioners and staff, and for public and local official education on planning and zoning.
- Approve hiring of consultants as recommended by the County Planning Commission and pursuant to an approved work program and budget.
- Ask the Planning Commission to prepare an annual report of activities and a proposed work program for the next year, in enough time to be considered in the budget process.
- Ask the Planning Commission to review proposed capital improvements for consistency with the Plan prior to the County Board or other public agency action.
- Initiate and coordinate activities with representatives of other units of government on various issues of greater than local concern.
- Support efforts by the Planning Commission to educate citizens and local officials on a wide variety of land use and Smart Growth issues.

County Planning Commission

The County Planning Commission was created by the County Board of Commissioners on September 8, 2003 pursuant to the requirements of the County Planning Act, PA 282 of 1945. Currently, the County Planning Commission is responsible for:

- Preparing and maintaining a plan for the development and protection of the County. It will be the first to adopt the General Plan.
- Making recommendations on proposed Township plans and/or rezoning or text amendments.
- Attempting to prevent incompatible planning and zoning along governmental boundaries.
- Reviewing and commenting on proposed new public lands, facilities or improvements for consistency with the General Plan.
- Review and comment on proposed PA 116 Farmland and Open Space Enrollments.
- Periodically reviewing and/or preparing various state or federal grant applications.
- Receiving, storing and sharing data from the Michigan Resource Inventory Program and helping to keep the County Community Information System filled with valuable and contemporary information.
- Providing information and education services for the U.S. Bureau of the Census.
- Receiving citizen comments on local planning and zoning issues and acting upon or referring those comments as appropriate.
- Educating citizens and representatives of local units of government on various county planning and Smart Growth development issues.
- Learning about and staying up-to-date on the responsibilities of the Planning Commission and on various tools available to implement local plans.
- Coordinating planning and associated development regulations with other governmental units and public agencies.

Table 7-2 (Continued)
Traditional Responsibilities of the Local Government Decision-makers

Local Governing Bodies

Local city or village councils and township boards of trustees also have specific planning and zoning responsibilities. These include:

- Appointment of qualified persons to serve as members of the local Planning Commission/Zoning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals.
- Adoption of ordinances recommended by the Planning Commission for implementation of the local future land use plan, including when supported by the governing body, a zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.
- Providing an adequate budget for the Planning Commission to carry out its responsibilities including keeping the Plan and Zoning Ordinance current, and receiving proper training on their roles, responsibilities and new tools and techniques for improving the community.
- Providing adequate staff and financial resources (including setting fee levels) for proper enforcement of adopted regulations.
- Conducting required public hearings prior to acting on zoning, subdivision or infrastructure development matters.
- Receiving and acting upon citizen complaints related to planning and zoning issues and as appropriate, referring matters to the Planning Commission for action.
- Coordinating actions with representatives of other units of government on issues of greater than local concern.

Local Planning Commissions

Planning commissions in cities and villages in the county are organized under the Municipal Planning Act, PA 285 of 1931. Township planning commissions are organized under PA 168 of 1959. Some of their principal responsibilities include:

- Creating, adopting and maintaining a local comprehensive (or master) plan to guide future land use change and to serve as the legal basis for the local zoning ordinance.
- Creating, maintaining and administering responsibilities under the local zoning ordinance (for those municipalities with local zoning) adopted pursuant to the City-Village Zoning Act, PA 207 of 1921 or the Township Zoning Act, PA 184 of 1943.
- Advising the local governing body on proposed rezonings, text amendments, plats, land divisions, capital improvements and related planning and zoning decisions.
- Responding to the recommendations of the County Planning Commission on planning and zoning issues.
- Making recommendations on special projects or delegated responsibilities (e.g. zoning ordinance enforcement).
- Working with property owners in order to try and achieve good development (or redevelopment).
- Educating citizens on the values and benefits of planning.
- Receiving citizen comments on local planning and zoning issues and acting upon or referring those comments as appropriate.
- Learning about and staying up-to-date on the responsibilities of the Planning Commission and on various tools available to implement local plans.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

This General Plan represents hundreds of hours of input by the County Planning Commission, citizens and local government officials in Montcalm County over the past year. The circumstances it is intended to address did not occur overnight and they will not be resolved overnight. However, this Plan sets forth another option to a future that will occur if existing trends and uncoordinated decisions continue. Existing trends are fueled to a very great extent by existing plans, regulations and institutional relationships. To create a future different from existing trends, then current plans, policies, regulations and institutional relationships must also be changed.

Perhaps the catalyst for that change is for the preferred vision of Montcalm County, and what it takes to get to that vision, to be part of the "story" of Montcalm County that every resident, of every age, knows by heart. So, for example, if all Montcalm County residents know by heart that clustering, conservation subdivisions, community service districts, and farmland preservation are necessary for Montcalm County to remain largely rural, prosperous and continue to have a high quality of life, there is a greater chance that Montcalm County will have these characteristics. It is up to the County Planning Commission with support of the County Board of Commissioners to achieve this level of citizen understanding of and support for this vision and this Plan.