

**Almira Township Master Plan
Update
12/18/2023 Public Comment Draft**



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SECRET



WELCOME
RANSOM LAKE
NATURAL AREA

ALBANY
TOWNSHIP
LAND
GTRLC.org

PROPERTY DETAILS
Ransom Lake Natural Area features 1,200 acres of forest, wetlands, and open fields. It is a unique landscape with a mix of natural resources. The area is managed by the Albany Township Land Commission and the GTRLC. The signpost is located near the entrance to the natural area.

ABOUT GTRLC
GTRLC is the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy. It is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works to protect and preserve natural resources. GTRLC is a member of the National Trust for Public Land. For more information, visit GTRLC.org.

RULES & REMINDERS
Please, when hiking this natural area, keep your dogs on a leash. Do not litter. Stay on designated trails. Do not feed wildlife. Do not enter restricted areas. Do not use ATVs or off-road vehicles. Do not use firearms. Do not use drones. Do not use drones. Do not use drones.

HUNTING RULES
Hunting is allowed in some areas of the natural area. Hunters must be at least 18 years old and have a valid hunting license. Hunters must follow all state and federal hunting regulations. Hunters must not hunt on private property without the owner's permission. Hunters must not hunt on roads or near roads. Hunters must not hunt in wetlands or other sensitive areas. Hunters must not hunt during nesting season. Hunters must not hunt during migration season. Hunters must not hunt during winter. Hunters must not hunt during summer. Hunters must not hunt during fall. Hunters must not hunt during spring.

PEFS
All dogs must be on a leash. Leashes must be no longer than 6 feet. Dogs must be under the control of their owner at all times. Dogs must not be allowed to enter restricted areas. Dogs must not be allowed to enter wetlands or other sensitive areas. Dogs must not be allowed to enter roads or near roads. Dogs must not be allowed to enter during nesting season. Dogs must not be allowed to enter during migration season. Dogs must not be allowed to enter during winter. Dogs must not be allowed to enter during summer. Dogs must not be allowed to enter during fall. Dogs must not be allowed to enter during spring.

WHAT CAN I DO HERE?
Hiking, birdwatching, photography, and nature study are encouraged. Picnicking is allowed in designated areas. Hunting is allowed in some areas. Fishing is allowed in some areas. Camping is not allowed. Off-road vehicles are not allowed. Drones are not allowed. Firearms are not allowed. Alcohol is not allowed. Glass is not allowed. Litter is not allowed. Pets are not allowed. Horses are not allowed.

NO HORSES ALLOWED

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Almira Township Master Plan

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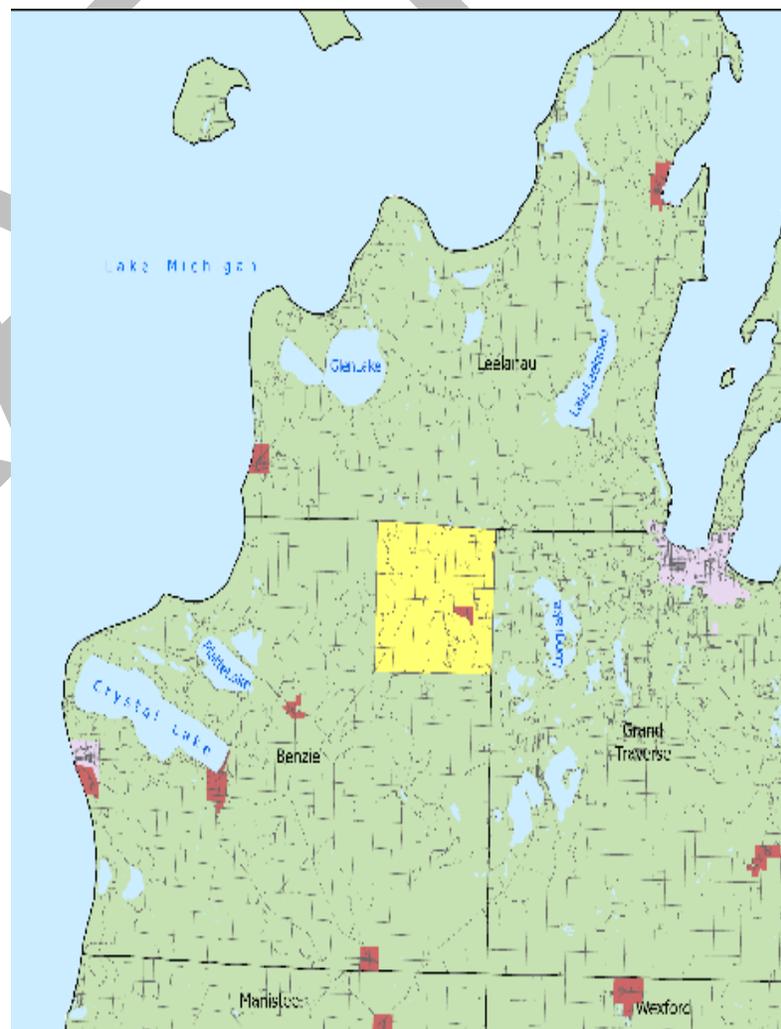
Chapter 1: Introduction

Almira Township lies in the northeastern part of Benzie County, which is situated in the northwest region of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Almira Township is comprised of one government-surveyed township, or 36 sections. The Township land area of 33.8 square miles is slightly less than the standard 36 square miles for a standard geographic township. A number of sections of the Township on the northern border (sections 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6) are less than the standard one square mile in size.

Almira Township borders on Grand Traverse County to the east and Leelanau County to the north. The Township is approximately 15 miles from Traverse City, which provides many of the employment, shopping and cultural amenities not available in the Township. To the West approximately fifteen (15) miles is Lake Michigan, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and the bulk of Benzie County.

Purpose and Planning Process

The purpose of the Almira Township Master Plan is to provide guidelines for future development while protecting the water resources, other natural resources, and rural character of the Township. This plan presents extensive background information for Almira Township and the surrounding area, including socio-economic data, description and mapping of natural resources, and inventory of existing community facilities. The background information is analyzed to identify important characteristics, changes, and trends occurring in Almira Township. Community concerns are identified based on citizen participation in Master Plan meetings, New Designs for Growth Community workshops, Township citizen surveys, findings from visioning sessions, County planning studies and extensive efforts by the Planning Commission. Community developed goals and policies are presented to guide future development based on the background studies, key land use trends and community issues. These goals, along with a detailed map of existing land use, provided the basis for the Future Land Use Map that specifies the extent and location of where various types of future development can be accommodated within the Township. This plan also provides suggestions for implementation of the identified goals and policies. The guidance provided by this Master Plan will be utilized in updating the Township Zoning Ordinance and other measures the Township is authorized to take.



Historical Context

Native Americans originally inhabited this area. There were many signs of Native Americans in this vicinity in our early days. Arrowheads were frequently found in this township, as well as other artifacts including a stone nursing bottle. Well-developed apple trees were found in Almira's forests and a burial ground was discovered on the Platte River. Regrettably, large and bright beads were taken from those graves.

The first pioneers of Almira Township came mostly from eastern New York State. These people were confronted in every public place in the East with advertisements telling of the great West. These ads all boasted of how a large family could live and thrive and just how much 40 acres could produce. People also drove to the West at the beginning of the Civil War in the hopes that their boys could remain home and care for their family.

Almira Township was first platted and surveyed by government surveyors about 1860 and it was in the next five years that people began moving here. Those who moved here had to live on the government-surveyed property for five years. If they "proved up" (as the attempt of living in this wilderness was called), they were given a government deed to their farm.

The first settlers in Almira were believed to be John and Alec Heather who came from Canada in 1862. The first family to make a house in Almira Township was the Burrell family. Andrew Burrell and his wife, Almira - the township's namesake - lived on the North side of Sanrainte Creek. The next family was the Addison "A. P." Wheelock family who settled on Ann Lake, the lake being named "Ann" after his estimable wife.

A. P. Wheelock was an influential man. He spoke five different languages. Because of this unique ability, and the coincidence that many foreign people were settling in Traverse at this time, he was given a position in Hannah Lay's old store. He left his family at the edge of Ann Lake to "prove up" on his homestead. Wheelock was also the first sheriff of Benzie County.

Other settlers arrived quickly and made an earnest effort to make themselves a home here. An unbroken and heavily timbered wilderness challenged the settlers, who were content to live in crudely constructed

hovels, many of which were often covered with bark stripped from trees. It took many years of hard toil before the land held out promise of any material returns.

The first couple who were married here was Susan Pettis and Judson Pratt who went to live on a farm near the corner of Pratt Road and County Road 669. The ceremony was performed by the first Justice of Peace, William Rosa. The first white child born here was William Rosa, Junior.

The Shirtliff brothers came from Chicago and built Almira's first road, which was called State Road. They were paid in government land, but much of it was swampland and worthless at that time. State Road ran from Manistee through Benzonia and this township to Traverse City. All other roads were mere trails through the wilderness that were beaten into paths and finally roads, paying little attention to section lines.

The residents recognized the importance of religion and education and took early measures to establish institutions reflecting their values. Mrs. Elihu Linkletter (nee Burnett) taught the first term of school, which was held in a primitive log house, about 12x16 feet inside. These were temporary quarters while the township built a schoolhouse in its first school district—School District No. 1—formed in 1862 and called the Black School. It was situated where the Lake Ann Cemetery is now located. Its first teacher was Mr. Duryea. The next schoolhouse was District No. 2, which was first taught by Alice Spafford in a barn near the corner of County Road 669 and Almira Road. During the lumber era later in the century, Almira Township boasted six school districts. Of the 356-resident population of 1880, 121 were school children.

The first church was established by the Rev. George Thompson in 1864; it was composed of Christians of several denominations and was practically Congregational in character, although it did not assume that name at its organization. It was simply called the First Church of Almira.

The Township, with more than 30 bodies of water, was formally established in 1864. The first township meeting was held at A. P. Wheelock's home at which Harrison Abbe was elected as supervisor, Andrew Rosa as clerk, and A. P. Wheelock as treasurer. One

point of business at that first meeting was to dedicate the first schoolhouse.

Dr. Wilson was Almira Township's first physician, although when he first came to this country, he hid his identity. When it was discovered, he was kept galloping on horseback as needed from one homestead to another.

A Native American brought mail on the back of an Indian pony in summer and on snowshoes in winter once every week. The Post Office was in a building on Ransom Creek by Lake Ann Road. Later the Post Office was moved to Almira Corners, which is the corner of Fowler Road and Ole White Drive. The first grocery store was owned by Matt Burnett on the A. J. White farm at the corner of Ole White Drive and Fowler Road, also called Almira Corners.

In terms of social activities, there were barn-raising, sugaring-off parties, logging bees, and get-togethers to husk corn. Any help one neighbor could give another was freely and gladly given. Lake Ann grew into a thriving lumber town. R. J. Ransom owned a saw and gristmill at Ransom Creek. In 1892, the first railroad (the Manistee & Northeastern) threaded its way through the eastern part of the township and the village of Lake Ann sprang up. Lake Ann was organized and incorporated on October 10, 1892. In a few years it had more than 800 residents and 100 buildings. By 1897, Lake Ann consisted of a general store, restaurant, hotel, drug store, meat market, saloon, livery barn and a depot. Activities centered around the Habbeler sawmill on the lakeshore (which employed 125 men) and the MNE railroad. The Grand Traverse Illustrated described Lake Ann as "a bright little town. Many chances are yet open and money is waiting to roll into the pockets of some more who get there quick. The people of the little burg are wide awake and energetic."

Timbering and agriculture were the economic base of the Township for the first fifty years. After the collapse of the timber industry, many of the offspring of the early settlers were forced to leave the community to find employment and for the next fifty years or so very little recruitment occurred.

Lake Ann Village was virtually destroyed by fire, at least three times. The first fire occurred on July 4,

1897, when Lake Ann was in competition with Traverse City as the metropolis of this area of Michigan with 1,000 inhabitants. It is not known whether the fire began in the engine room of William Habbeler's sawmill or by a spark from a tug anchored near the shore. The local firefighting equipment and water supply were inadequate and Traverse City was summoned by telegraph. Fifty-four minutes and two water stops later (they came by rail), and the Traverse City Fire Department was on the scene. Over a dozen businesses, freight and flatcar, the depot, endless homes and nearly a half-mile of track were all destroyed. Many of the businesses rebuilt only to be wiped out again by another fire in 1914. The third fire erupted in 1918; it was almost too much for the Village and Lake Ann was never rebuilt to its former status.

The history of the area is relatively sparse for more recent years. One of the locally noteworthy periods during the last seventy-five years was during prohibition when some prominent Chicago families operated whiskey distilleries in the Township. Some known "gangster" families had property at Harris Point and at what is now the Lake Ann Camp during this period.

Lake Ann is now a tiny, beautiful resort town with 292 residents. Almira Township, a resort and farming area with a population of approximately 4,240 persons (including the Village), continues to be the fastest growing township in Benzie County, due largely to its proximity to Traverse City.



Additional historical information on Almira Township and the Village of Lake Ann can be found at the [Almira Historical Society](#).

Government

Almira Township was formally organized in 1864. At that time the Township was in the “Grand Traverse District” for judicial purposes. When Benzie County was established in 1867 Almira Township became the northeastern corner of the County.

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s the economic base of the region, which includes Benzie, Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties, began to change from primarily agriculture and seasonal tourism. Industrial development and retail sales became important additions to the economic base of Northwestern Michigan.

These changes created new jobs and provided a more stable income. These factors were the harbinger of change in the Township government. As more year-round work was available more of the community’s young people were able to stay in the area. This created a demand for housing and community services, such as fire protection, ambulance service, and more and larger schools.

This demand for increased services led to the need for increasing revenues to provide the services. The growth in housing both increased the tax base but also increased the cost of administering the assessing services. The work volume and complexity increased until Township officers were no longer able to adequately serve the public while working out of their homes and the current Township office building was constructed in 1989.

The increase in housing needs and an ever mobile and prosperous population also resulted in increased pressure on the resources of the Township both in terms of the geographic ability to house people and with increased interaction between people who were living increasingly close to each other. These pressures were focused on the Township government as the first level of administration available to hear complaints.

As a general law township Almira has specific duties and authorities stemming from the Michigan State constitution, by acts of the State legislature, and by

case law in the court system. Among those duties is that of enacting zoning (authorized by the Township Rural Zoning Act), and through the Township Planning Act which allows creation of a Planning Commission whose duties include preparing a master plan to guide the development of the Township.

In the early 1970’s a few far-sighted people recognized the need for a Township zoning ordinance as the way to bring a semblance of order in this time of rapid change. The Township’s first zoning ordinance was adopted in 1972 and, with revisions and amendments, is still in effect.

The growth which created the need for a zoning board and zoning ordinance continued through the 1980’s and 1990’s until there was concern in the community that the characteristics which made this a desirable community were in danger of being lost.

The Almira Township Board created the Almira Planning Commission in 1995. Prior to the establishment of the Planning Commission, the Township zoning matters were addressed by the Zoning Board that was established in 1972 and was dissolved when the Planning Commission was established.

Currently, the Almira Township Planning Commission operates under, and complies with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. Governor Jennifer Granholm signed it into law on March 13, 2008. The statute took effect September 1, 2008.

Chapter 2: Socio-Economic Profile

Population and household characteristics are essential components to consider in the development of any Master Plan. An analysis of a community’s existing and future population and household characteristics provides a foundation upon which a major portion of a master plan is based. While an evaluation of a community’s current characteristics provides insight to immediate needs and deficiencies, population projections provide a basis for determining future land use requirements, public facility needs, and essential services.

The following examples illustrate this point. A younger population may demand more school facilities and active recreation opportunities, while an older population may require medical support, property maintenance assistance and prefer higher density residential development. Also, persons characterized as low income typically generate a higher demand for publicly provided facilities than persons in higher income categories who have greater access to private facilities. [In addition, as retirees move North, they want, and are willing to pay for some of the services they had downstate.] As shown by these examples, analysis of a community’s demographic base is essential to the preparation of a community master plan.

This section of the Plan examines several elements, which are central to understanding a community’s population and housing characteristics. These items include population growth patterns, age/gender breakdowns, and household size.

Population

The Decennial Census results from the 2020 Census have been delayed due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. Therefore, Almira Township examined socio-economic data that was compiled by ESRI (Environmental Systems Research Institute) because it only releases projections that it has a high confidence level in, where as other projections may have high margins of errors on data.

According to the ESRI Almira Township Community Profile, the population of Almira Township was 4,240, which includes the 292 residents of the Village

of Lake Ann. This also represents nearly a quarter of the 18,397 residents in Benzie County. As seen on Figure 1: Population Trends (1990 to Projected 2026), the Township has seen positive growth over the past 30 years, which also aligned with positive growth that occurred in the 1970’s and 1980s (130% and 34.4%, respectively).

In regards to the population, it is important to note that the total population figures do not account for residents who may be considered snow birds or vacation home owners. It can be reasonably expected that the summer months total population increases. An

Figure 1: Population Trends (1990 to Projected 2026)

	1990	2000	1990 to 2000 Change	2010	2000 to 2010 Change	2021 (ESRI)	2010 to 2021 Change	Project-ed 2026 (ESRI)	2021 to Project-ed 2026 Change
Almira Township	1,232	2,774	56%	3,645	24%	3,948	8%	4,083	3.3%
Village of Lake Ann	217	202	-7%	268	25%	292	8%	302	3.3%
Benzie County	12,200	15,998	24%	17,525	9%	18,397	5%	18,788	2.1%
10 County Region	230,962	281,468	18%	297,912	6%	315,339	6%	332,647	5.2%
State of Michigan	9,295,297	9,938,444	6%	9,883,640	-1%	10,105,078	2%	10,211,228	1.0%

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Figure 2: Age Distribution (2010 and 2021)

Almira Township			Village of Lake Ann			Benzie County			
	2010	2021	Change	2010	2021	Change	2010	2021	Change
Total Population	3,645	3,948	303	268	292	24	17,525	18,397	872
0 to 4	7.9%	6.2%	-1.7%	5.2%	6.5%	1.3%	5.3%	4.5%	-0.8%
5 to 9	7.7%	6.5%	-1.2%	3.7%	6.5%	2.8%	6.0%	5.0%	-1.0%
10 to 14	6.7%	7.2%	0.5%	3.4%	7.2%	3.8%	6.0%	5.6%	-0.4%
15 to 24	9.8%	11.1%	1.3%	12.3%	11.3%	-1.0%	9.7%	9.1%	-0.6%
25 to 34	12.8%	10.6%	-2.2%	10.8%	10.6%	-0.2%	9.3%	9.7%	0.4%
35 to 44	15.1%	12.5%	-2.6%	7.8%	13.0%	5.2%	11.8%	10.5%	-1.3%
45 to 54	16.4%	13.6%	-2.8%	21.3%	13.7%	-7.6%	16.2%	12.3%	-3.9%
55 to 64	12.8%	15.8%	3.0%	16.8%	15.1%	-1.7%	15.0%	16.9%	1.9%
65 to 74	6.6%	11.3%	4.7%	11.2%	11.0%	-0.2%	11.7%	15.8%	4.1%
75 to 84	3.5%	4.1%	0.6%	6.3%	4.1%	-2.2%	6.4%	7.8%	1.4%
85 & Over	0.9%	1.1%	0.2%	1.1%	1.0%	-0.1%	2.5%	2.9%	0.4%
Male	1,817	1,934	117	129	143	14	8,701	9,163	462
Female	1,828	2,013	185	139	149	10	8,824	9,234	410
Median Ages	38.7	41.9	3.2	48	41.3	-6.7	46.2	49.9	3.7

indicator of this is that 35% of homes are considered vacant, which we know to not be true.

Information on age distribution within a population can assist the community in matching public services to community characteristics, by determining the special needs of specific resident groups. Figure 2: 2010 and 2021 Age Distributions illustrate the changes in age between the 2010 Census and 2021 ESRI data.

The 25-44 age brackets cover an age span of 19 years, when that population is considered to be in their working years and likely to have school-age children or considering family planning. This makes up 23.1 percent of the Township’s population and 23.6 percent of the Village of Lake Ann’s population.

For the sake of comparison, younger and older age categories are combined to consider two additional 19 year age spans for the Township population. An age bracket from 5-24 years of age incorporates the school age population and young working population, and makes up 24.8 percent of the Township population. The age bracket 45-64 years of age is considered to be the older working years and is typically considered

to be the ‘empty nester’ cohort where the children have moved out of the household. This segment of the population has remained steady between 2010 and 2021, rising from 29.2 percent to 29.4 percent of the Township’s population.

The 65 and over age group does not cover a specific number of years, but is typically considered the retirement stage of life. In 2010, 11 percent of Township residents fell under this group. This number has grown to 16.5 percent in 2021. In comparison, the Village of Lake Ann decreased from 18.6 percent to 16.1 percent.

Between 2010 and 2021, the median age in Almira Township rose from 38.7 to 41.9, which was similar to the change in Benzie County. However, the Village of Lake Ann decreased from a median age of 48 to 41.3.

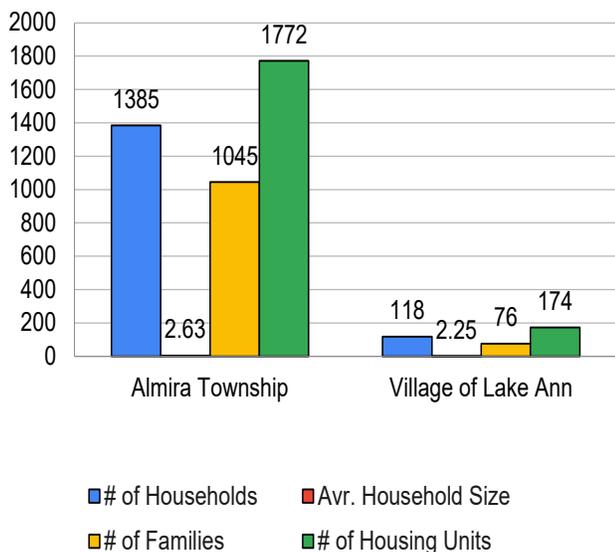
Population Projections

ESRI projections, shown on Figure 1, project the Township and Village both having a 3.3 percent increase from 2021 to 2026. Almira Township is projected to rise to 4,083 residents, while the Village of Lake Ann is projected to increase to 302 residents. In

comparison, Benzie County is projected to increase by 2.1 percent or to 18,788 residents.

ESRI projections are made using various data such as mail carrier routes, new residential construction, and current events and past trends. ESRI notes that a stable rate of growth is easier to anticipate than rapid growth or decline. ESRI projections are also revised annually to draw on the most recent data available.

Figure 3: 2010 Households and Families

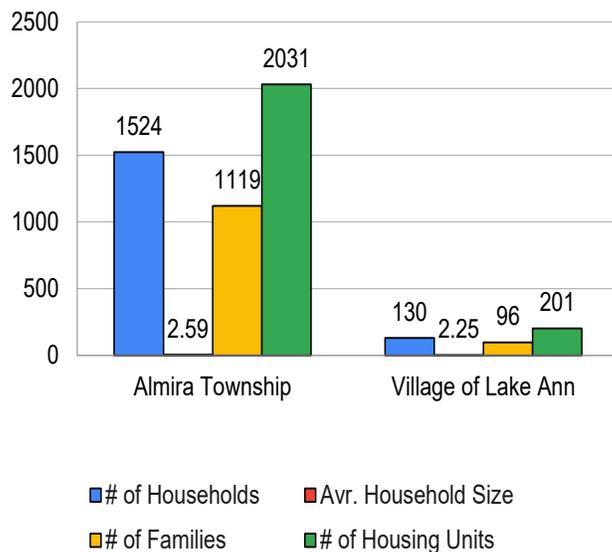


Housing

Figure 2-3 through Figure 2-6 show data related to households in Almira Township, Village of Lake Ann, and Benzie County. In 2010, Almira Township’s number of households rose from 1,385 to 1,524 in 2021. It is also projected that the Township will increase by 67 households to 1,581 in 2026.

In terms of housing units, the Township saw an increase to 2,031 housing units in 2021, which is projected to increase by 105 units by 2026. Like Almira Township, Benzie County and the Village of Lake Ann have increased household sizes, number of families, and housing units and are projected to continue growth into 2026. In contrast to this growth, the average family size in the Township, Village, and County have all seen a small decrease between 2010 and projected into 2026.

Figure 4: 2021 Households and Families



An evaluation of the property values can also be beneficial in determining community characteristics and housing needs. The median home value in Almira Township was \$190,848 in 2021 and is projected to increase to \$207,003 in 2026, and the Village of Lake Ann sits at \$190,625 and is projected to increase to \$205,556. Benzie County home values were \$207,035 and projected to increase to \$236,434 in 2026, while the State of Michigan was projected to increase from \$188,958 to \$223,569. The home values have all increased from the 2010 Census from the Township’s home value of \$165,500 (includes Village of Lake Ann), \$153,600 in Village of Lake Ann, \$162,700 in Benzie County and \$147,500.

Figure 5: Projected 2026 Households and Families

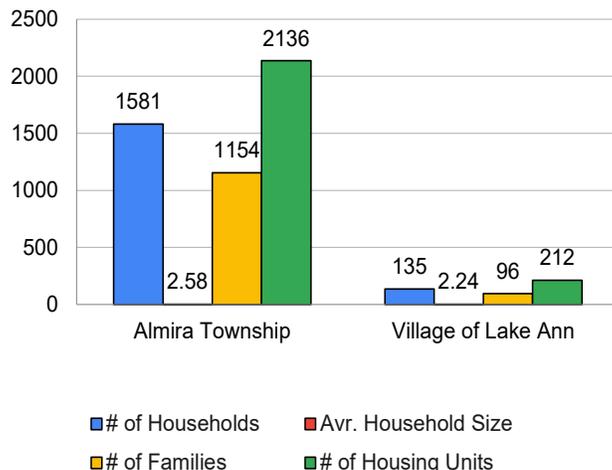
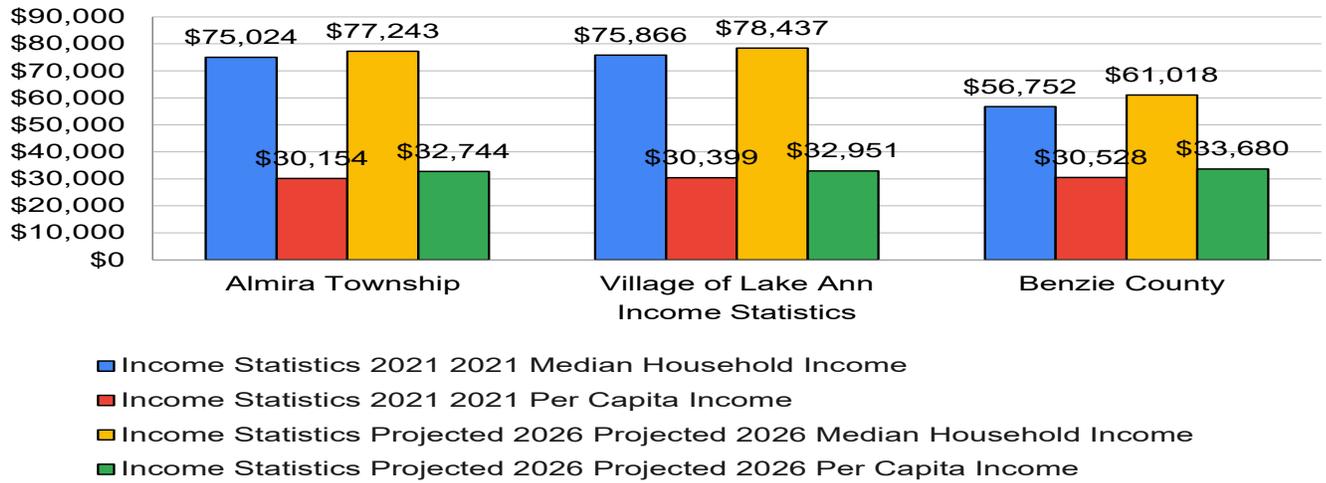


Figure 7: Income Statistics



Income, Education and Employment

Income, education and employment statistics were also derived from ESRI. The 2021 State of Michigan median household income is \$56,537 which is projected to increase to \$64,549. In comparison, Benzie County’s median income is slightly less than the State whereas both Almira Township and Village of Lake Ann have significantly higher median household incomes, but similar per capita income numbers.

Employment data for ages 16 and up are displayed by Industry and by Occupation on Figure 2-7 through 2-9 for Almira Township, Village of Lake Ann, and Benzie County. In line with the County and Village, the Township’s most popular industry was services. White Collar jobs make up a large portion of the Occupations, which is further expounded upon on Figure 9.

State Equalized Values

Property values can also be analyzed by reviewing State Equalized Value (SEV) figures. By law, SEV, which constitutes a community’s tax base, is equal to approximately one-half of the true market value of real property and certain taxable personal properties. Figure 2-10 shows SEV by property class for the Township (including the Village of Lake Ann) in 2010, 2015, and 2021. As indicated in the table, the majority of the Township’s tax base is derived from residential property.

Education is one important factor in analyzing the capabilities of the local work force. The data from 2021 for ages 25 and up in Almira Township show 96.5 percent of residents have a high school education or higher. This compared to the Village of Lake Ann at 97 percent and Benzie County at 93.7 percent. The Township also saw an increase of residents with a bachelors degree or higher increased to 32.5 percent of residents.

Figure 8: Education Statistics (Aged 25+)

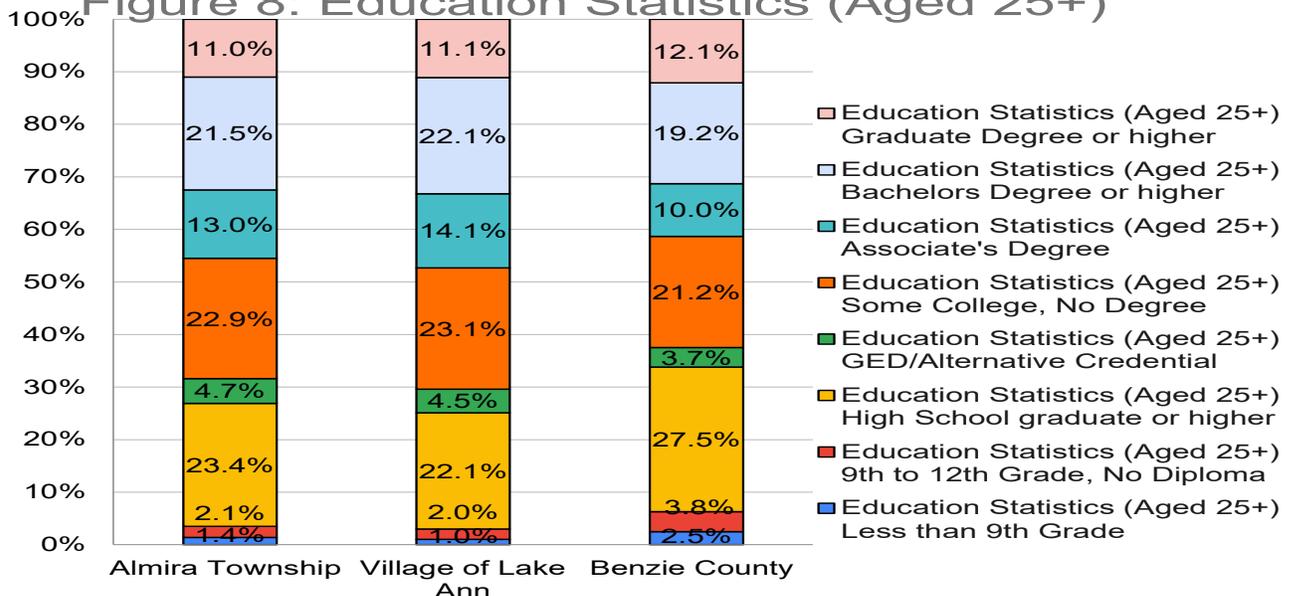


Figure 10: Assessed State Equalized Values

	2010	2015	%	Projected 2022	%
Agriculture	3,864,400	2,997,400	-28.9%	4,605,900	34.9%
Commercial	3,081,900	2,456,200	-25.5%	3,211,700	23.5%
Industrial	45,000	37,500	-20.0%	166,900	77.5%
Residential	166,371,600	162,809,500	-2.2%	265,069,000	38.6%
Timber Cut Over	0	0	-%	0	-%
Development	0	0	-%	0	-%
Total Real Property	173,362,900	168,300,600	-3.0%	273,053,500	38.4%
Personal Property	3,021,800	2,964,300	-1.9%	3,562,700	16.8%
TOTAL SEV	176,384,700	171,264,900	-3.0%	276,616,200	38.1%

Figure 6: Benzie County Households and Families

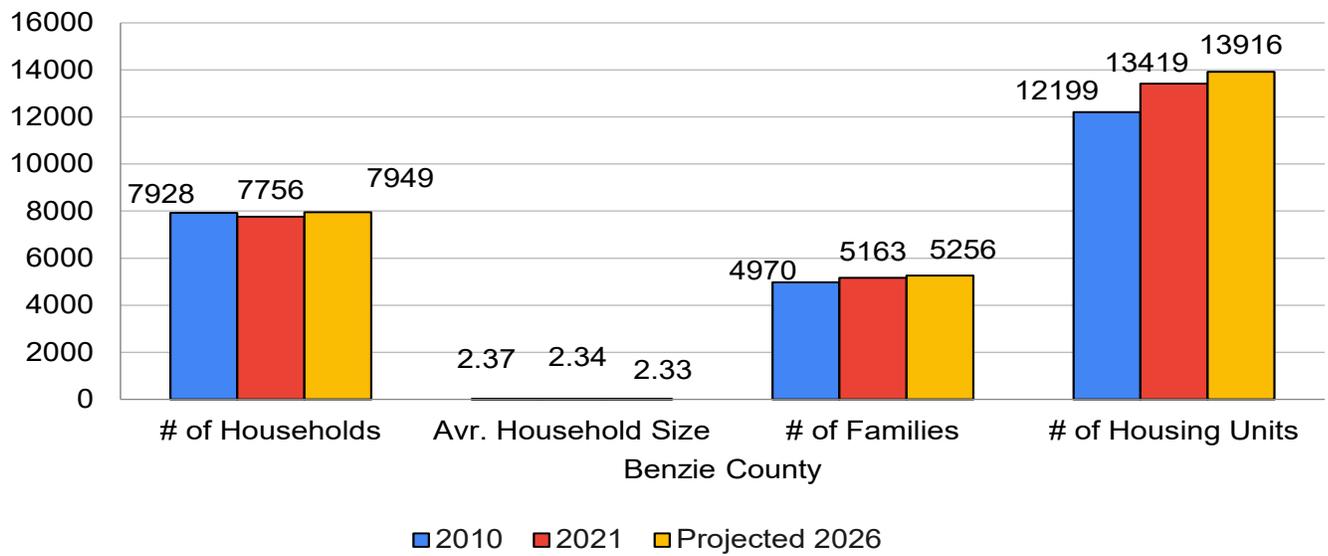
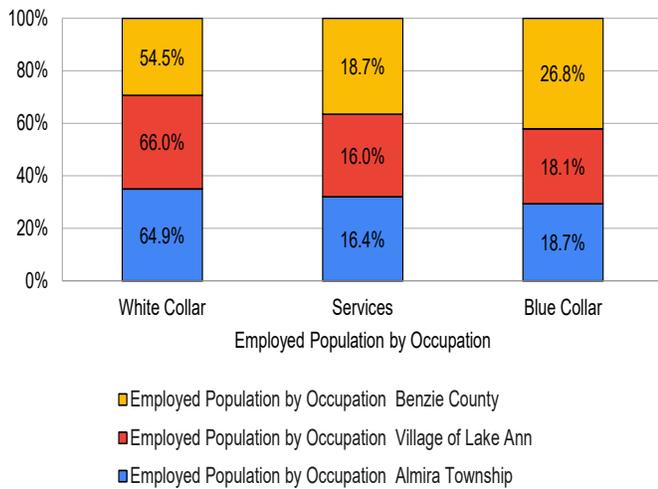


Figure 9: Employed Population by Occupation (Aged 16+)



Seasonal Population

In 2022, Networks Northwest released the Seasonal Population in Northwest Michigan. The report examined the seasonal population in the 10 Northwest Michigan Counties, which is important to planning with the population increases seen throughout Northwest Michigan. Particularly for Almira Township, the information related to Benzie County is important.

Figure 11, below, shows the population increase estimates with overnight visitors broke into accommodations (campgrounds, motels, hotels, etc.) and short-term rentals. During the peak summer months, Benzie County becomes the 3rd most populous County in the Northwest Michigan region.

Figure 11: Seasonal Population Estimates - Benzie County

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Avg.
Permanent Population	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970	17,970
Second-home Population	1,338	1,338	2,008	2,008	2,008	10,708	10,708	10,708	3,012	3,012	3,012	3,012	4,406
Overnight Visitors	8,804	8,226	8,755	8,845	29,251	30,600	32,227	32,136	29,513	29,713	8,409	8,717	19,600
Accommodations	7,227	6,530	7,204	7,196	25,994	26,340	27,687	27,487	25,836	26,270	7,066	7,244	16,840
Short-term rentals	1,577	1,696	1,551	1,649	3,256	4,259	4,539	4,648	3,677	3,443	1,344	1,473	2,759
Total	28,112	27,535	28,733	28,823	49,228	59,278	60,904	60,814	50,495	50,694	29,391	29,699	41,975

Figure 12: Employment Population by Industry (Aged 16+)

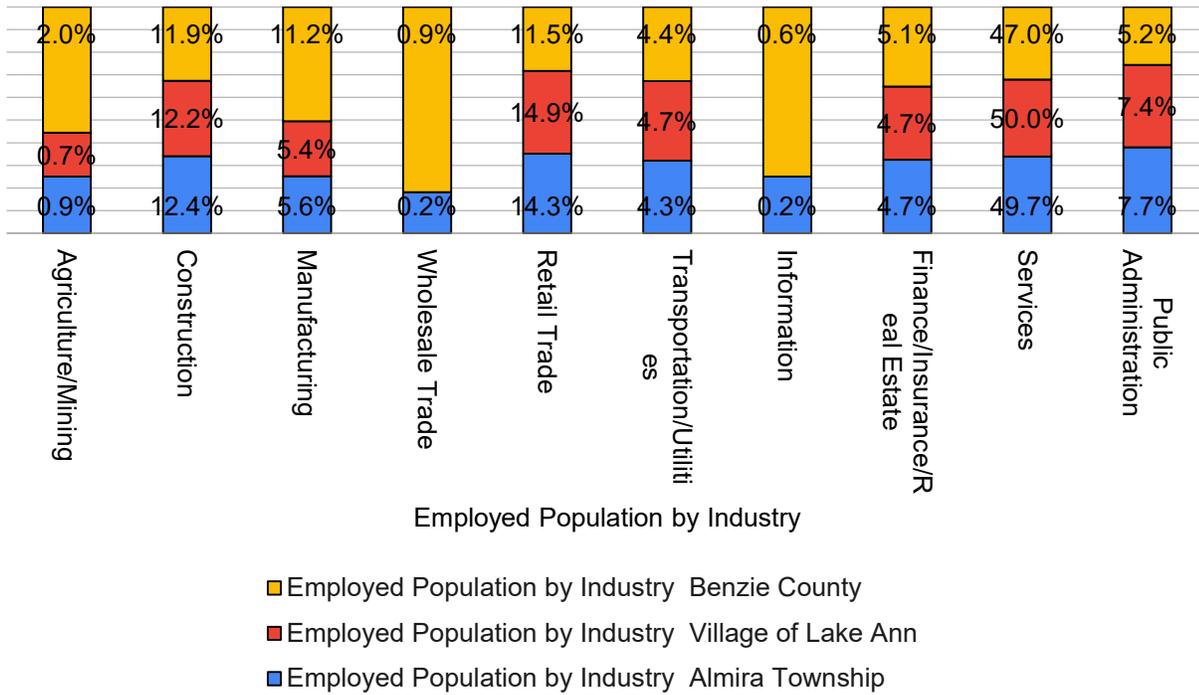
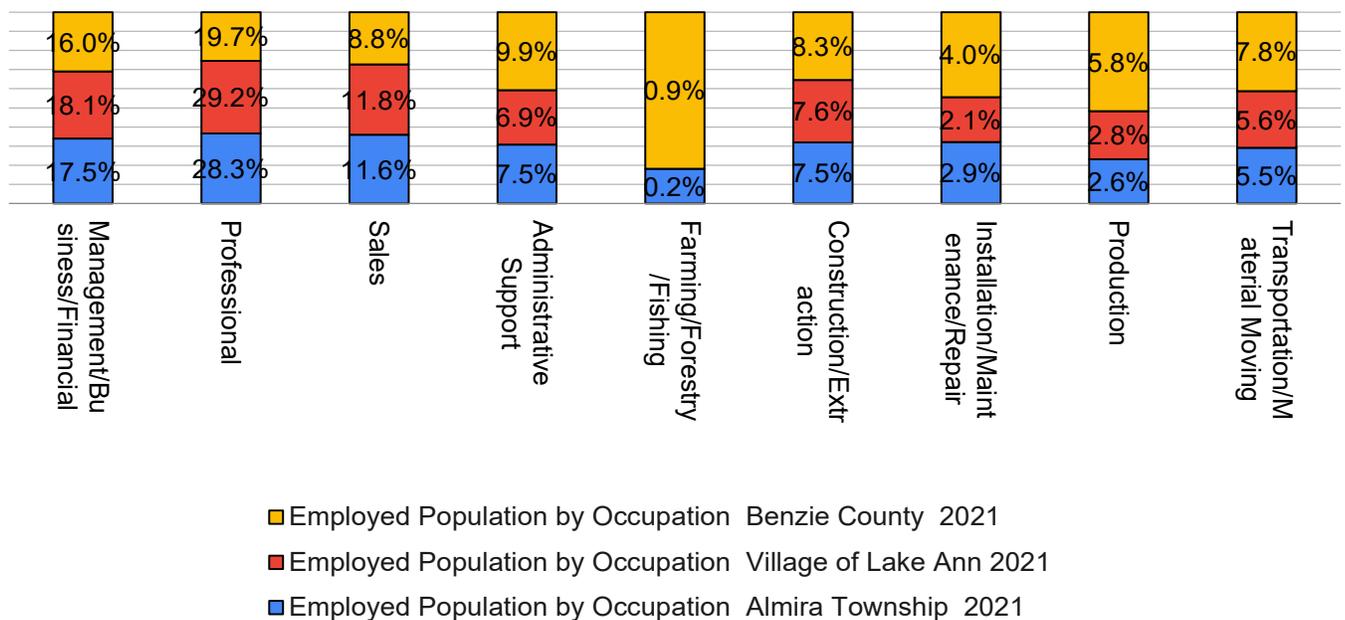


Figure 13: Employed Population by Occupation (Aged 16+)



Chapter 3: Natural Resources

Natural Resources

One of the greatest attractions for residents and visitors to the Almira Township area is the natural environment, most notably the water resources. The natural environment that attracts people to the area also imposes constraints on the use of the land. Often the alteration of sensitive environments creates problems that cannot be corrected easily. For example, the combination of increasing impervious surfaces and the filling of wetlands will result in increased volumes of storm water runoff while reducing the natural storm water retention areas. It is essential that any future development consider the varied characteristics of the natural environment in order to preserve the character of Almira Township.

An analysis of Almira Township’s physical environment can assist government officials in planning for future use. Natural resources addressed in this chapter include climate, geology, topography, soils, water, wetlands, woodlands, and fish and wildlife.

Climate

The Township’s climatic conditions are similar to those across northern Lower Michigan: long, cold winters, and moderate, warm summers. However, the proximity to Lake Michigan serves to moderate temperature extremes as compared to more inland communities of northwestern Michigan. The average date when temperatures drop to freezing is in the fall and is typically several weeks later than the areas further inland, with the first frost in the township occurring as late as the middle or end of October. Lake Ann is in a ‘snowbelt’. Snow accumulations of 1”/hour are common, with accumulations occasionally accumulating 24” a day. The data on Figure 14 illustrates average weather data for Benzie County, including Almira Township, averaged between 2015-2021.

Figure 14: Weather Data

January Average Min. Temperature (Fahrenheit)	18.4
January Average Max. Temperature (Fahrenheit)	28.1
July Average Min. Temperature (Fahrenheit)	53.5
July Average Max. Temperature (Fahrenheit)	72.5
Average Annual Rainfall (2015-2021)	34
Average Annual Snowfall (2015-2021)	65.2

Geology

According to geologists, the bedrock underlying Almira Township was laid down during the Devonian age of the Paleozoic Era. The bedrock in the Township consists of Antrim Shale in the northwest portion and Ellsworth Shale in the remainder of the Township.

The surface geology of the Township was formed 10,000 to 12,000 years ago by glacial activity. Numerous advances and retreats by the glaciers resulted in the locally complex pattern of erosion and deposition. The Township’s surface geology consists primarily of glacial pale brown to pale reddish brown fine to coarse sand, alternating with layers of mixed small gravel/heavy cobbles, and is three to 65 feet in thickness. A narrow strip north of Lake Ann to the north-central Township boundary is made up of gray, grayish brown or reddish brown, non-sorted coarse textured glacial till, and is 30 to 90 feet in thickness.



In the northwestern portion of the Township, the outwash landform is pitted with ice-block depressions. These depressions are frost pockets. Some of the largest ice-block depressions in the outwash are seasonally or permanently flooded.

Topography

Almira Township is characterized by a diversity of topography from relatively flat expanses to gently rolling to steep slopes. A relatively flat area extends north-south in the western portion of the Township with much of the remainder of the township rolling. Steeply sloped areas are scattered across the Township, often in proximity to one of the lakes. The lowest point in the Township is in the southeast near Sanford Lake, at 803 feet above sea level. The highest points are Varney Hill and Warner Hill in the north-central portion of the Township at approximately 1,122 feet above sea level.

Soils

One important determinant of land use is the soil's suitability for development. The physical and engineering properties of a soil type should be considered before development occurs.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service has mapped the soils in Benzie County. The mapping of the soils provides significant information regarding various limitations posed by the particular soil types in a given area. The soil survey information identifies which soil types have limitations for locating septic

systems, or have building construction limitations. Since water and sewer do not presently serve the Township, more detailed analysis of the soils by the District Health Department will determine suitability of the site for a septic system (state law requires District Health Department approval). Additionally the soils are grouped by slope, so areas with steep slopes can be identified. Hydric or wetland soil types are also identifiable from the soil survey. Soil type limitations do not preclude the development of specific sites. However, the Township and developers should realize that construction on some soils might be more costly. Soil mapping for the Township is pertinent information for consideration in the planning process.

The Soils and Farmland Map shows important details related to soil including calling out areas with hydric soils, farmland with local importance and farmland with unique importance. The NRCS defines farmland with unique importance as land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops. Farmland with local importance is defined as land for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops, that is not identified as national or state-wide importance.

Water Resources

One of the most valuable natural resources in Almira Township is water. The Township is located within the Leelanau and Platte watersheds, see the Watershed Basins map for more specific information. Both groundwater and surface water are vital for Almira Township. Because there is no central water distribu-



tion system, residents must rely on individual wells for household water. Surface waters in the lakes and creeks of the Township are an important resource for scenic, recreational, fish and wildlife habitat, and groundwater recharge. Therefore, it is important that water resources, both groundwater and surface water, be protected and managed in a manner which will ensure their quality.

Surface Water

The largest body of surface water, Pearl Lake, with approximately 543 acres in surface area is located in the northwest quarter of the Township. Ann Lake, the second largest lake in Almira Township at 527 acres, is located in the southeast quarter. Approximately 30 other smaller lakes can be found in the Township. These lakes and their associated streams and creeks offer scenic and recreational amenities to Township residents and visitors. It is extremely important that the quality of these surface waters be protected from the negative impacts of development, such as non-point source pollution and loss of scenic views to open water.

To protect the public's right to recreate and enjoy inland lakes, the State regulates construction activities adjacent to inland waters under the Inland Lakes and Streams Act,

Public Act of 1972. This statute applies to any natural or artificial lake or pond greater than five acres and any stream or creek with defined banks and continued flow or regular occurrence of flow. A permit is required for the following activities:

- Construction and/or operation of a marina.
- Creation or modification of an inland lake or stream.
- Interference with the natural flow of a stream or lake.
- Dredging or filling of a stream or lake.

Installation of seasonal, noncommercial docks and the reasonable sanding of beaches are allowed without a permit. The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, Public Act 451 of 1994, as amended, protects lakes and streams from sedimentation. The Act requires a permit for any new construction within 500 feet of a lake or stream, or construction that will open up more than one acre of land. In Benzie County the Act is administered by outside sources as

contracted with County.

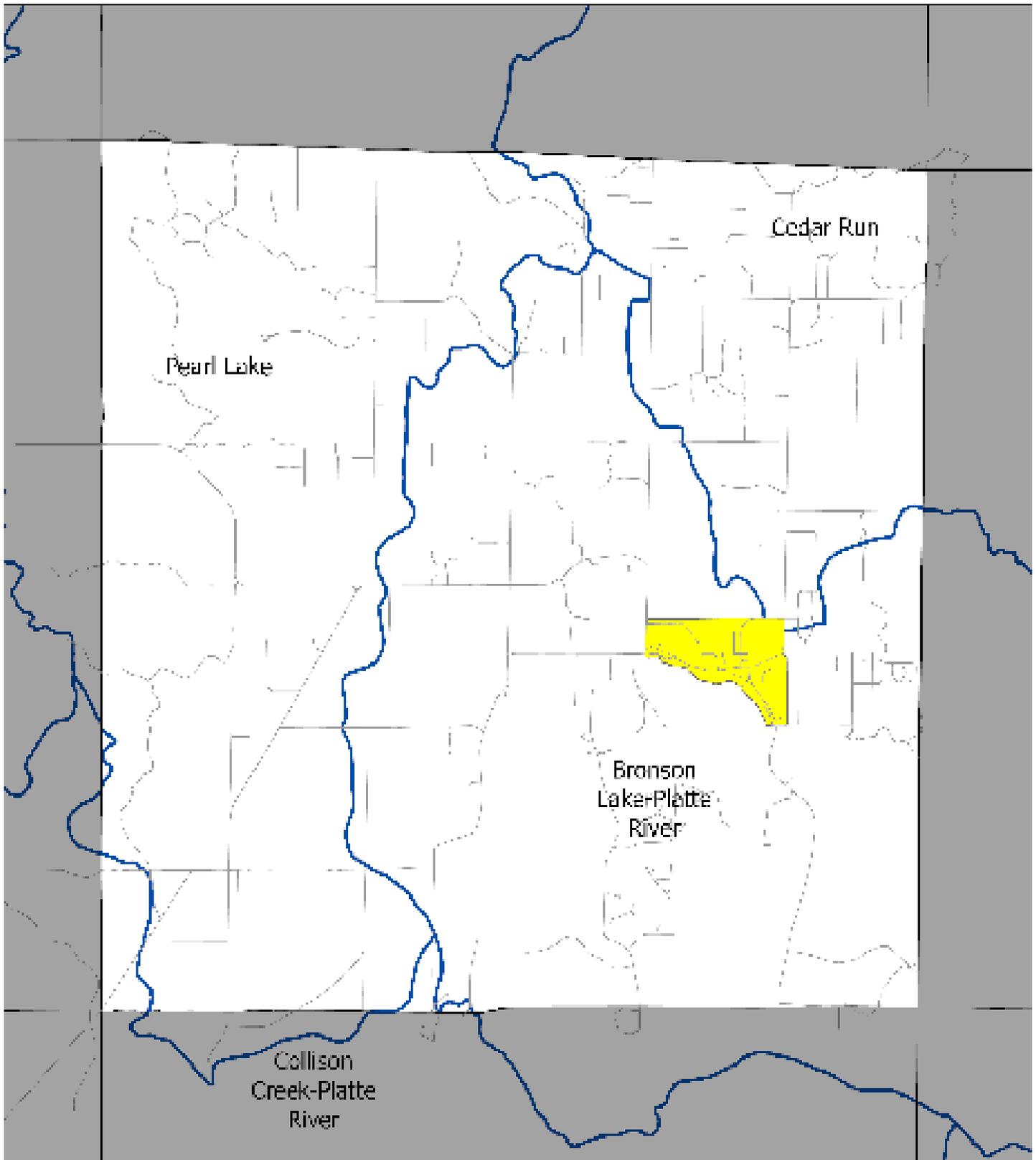
Groundwater

Since there is no municipal water system, the entire Township relies on groundwater from individual wells. Important factors in the evaluation of groundwater are the quantity and quality of water. The geologic and hydrologic features of the Township provide residents with sufficient water quantities. Water availability will not likely be a factor in limiting growth. However, the potential for water quality problems is more a limiting factor. While water hardness, iron content and salinity are of little or no concern, the potential for contamination of wells and other water bodies due to septic system failure is of concern. Substandard wells and septic systems constructed prior to current sanitary codes can still be found throughout the Township.

The 'Aquifer Vulnerability to Surface Contamination in Michigan' map, prepared by the Center for Remote Sensing and Department of Geography at Michigan State University, reveals the Township is located in an area where the vulnerability of drinking water aquifers to surface contamination is high, due to highly permeable soils over highly sensitive drift lithology.

Benzie County has taken steps to protect groundwater by adopting a septic system maintenance ordinance. This ordinance requires substandard septic systems be upgraded at the time of sale or transfer of property ownership. There is growing concern regarding the cumulative impact of septic systems especially those located in close proximity to lakes or wetlands.

The threat of water pollution from point sources is not a significant issue in the Township, but non-point sources can be a major concern. Proper land use management can help control water quality conditions in the Township. Some methods to curb pollution include runoff control measures, additional storm water management, and proper maintenance of septic systems. Lakes, creeks and wetlands are important for surface drainage, groundwater recharge and wildlife habitat. Alterations to the water features can contribute to flooding, poor water quality, and loss of valuable fish and wildlife habitat.



Watershed Basins

-  Water
-  Roads
-  Lake Ann
-  Township Boundaries
-  Watershed Boundary



0 0.5 1 Miles



Wetlands

Wetlands are unique and diverse ecosystems where water is found, either on the surface or near the surface, at various times during the year. These areas often contain poorly drained soils which support water-loving vegetation. Wetlands are also referred to as marshes, swamps, or bogs.

Residents of Michigan are becoming increasingly more aware of the value of wetlands. Beyond their aesthetic value, wetlands protect the water quality of lakes and streams by filtering polluting nutrients, organic chemicals and toxic heavy metals. Wetlands are closely related to high groundwater tables and serve to discharge or recharge aquifers. They serve a critical role in storm water management, by providing temporary flood or storm water storage areas. Wetlands support wildlife, and wetland vegetation protects shorelines from erosion. Wetlands areas are found primarily where mucky soils and low elevation occur simultaneously in the Township. Wetland areas are mapped on the Existing Land Use Map, Figure 4-1.

Michigan's Wetland Protection Act defines wetlands as "land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life, and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp or marsh." The Act further specifies State jurisdiction depends on proximity to lake, stream, pond, or Great Lake, and/or having a direct hydrological relationship with it. Wetlands that meet the statute criteria are considered regulated and require a permit before draining, filling, dredging or construction.

Woodlands

"The nicest forest I ever worked in was just south of Lake Ann." Lloyd Bates, early 20th century lumberjack

In addition to the scenic characteristics of woodlands, forested areas provide habitat for wildlife, protect soil from erosion, and buffer noise. The distribution of forested lands within the Township is shown on the Existing Land Use Map, (Figure 4-1). The forestland is divided into two categories, upland forestlands and the lowland forestlands.

The dominant forest associations in the upland forest

category within Almira Township are northern hardwoods (maple, beech and basswood). Pine and aspen are also included in the upland category and found within the Township. The lowland forest lands are typically forested wetlands, therefore these forested areas are distinguished from the upland forests. The common lowland hardwood species found in the Township include oak, ash, elm and red maple. The common lowland coniferous associations are cedar and tamarack.

Fish and Wildlife

Sport fishing is popular on several inland lakes in Almira Township. The Fisheries Department of Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) conducts periodic fish inventories at selected lakes.

The most recent inventory in the Township was conducted in 2004 on Ann Lake. Twenty-one species of fish were collected, with the most prevalent being Rock Bass, Bluegill, Sunfish, Common Shiner, Yellow Perch, both Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass, and Northern Pike. Snapping and painted turtles are also abundant in Ann Lake.

A fish inventory of Sanford Lake was conducted at eight Sanford Lake sites in 1989. Species collected included bluegill, largemouth bass, green sunfish, rock bass, white sucker, yellow bullhead and brown bullhead. Painted and snapping turtles and bullfrogs were observed along the shoreline. Based on the results of that survey, albeit dated, it appears that Sanford Lake contains one of the best bluegill populations in the area.

The most current fish inventory for Pearl Lake was conducted at 12 sites in 1983. Species collected were: northern pike, bluegill, rock bass, perch, largemouth bass, and assorted pan fish. Turtles and clams were also evident.

The wetlands, lakeshores and forests within the Township provide habitat for populations of songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, muskrat, mink and raccoon. Predominant mammal species found in the Township's forests and wetlands are squirrel, rabbit, fox, coyote, raccoon, bear, skunk, and deer.

Sites of Environmental Contamination

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, Act 451 of 1994, is an act that regulates facilities of environmental contamination in Michigan. This is done through many components, including Part 201: Sites of

Environmental Contamination and Part 213:Leaking Underground Storage Tanks. The Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) maintains an Environmental Mapper which displays various layers of data relating to the environment and land.

A site of environmental contamination is “a location at which contamination of soil, ground water, surface water, air or other environmental resource is confirmed, or where there is potential for contamination of resources due to site conditions, site use or management practices.” The agency publishes an annual list of environmentally contaminated sites by county, showing the sites by name, Site Assessment Model score, pollutant(s) and site status.

The most recent data, accessed in March 2022, identified one Site of Environmental Contamination in Almira Township and two sites in the Village of Lake Ann. The Environmental Mapper also identified one site as a Leaking Underground Storage Tank (Closed Part 213) in Almira Township. There was one Leaking Underground Storage Tank (Open Part 213) in the Village of Lake Ann. This site is the B & M Party Store which has been working on completing corrective actions. As a note, in the late 1960’s, oil and gas companies helped remote home owners by installing in-ground gasoline tanks, as heating with fuel oil was also common. Because of this, the number and location of these buried tanks is unknown.

Surface Water Discharge Permits

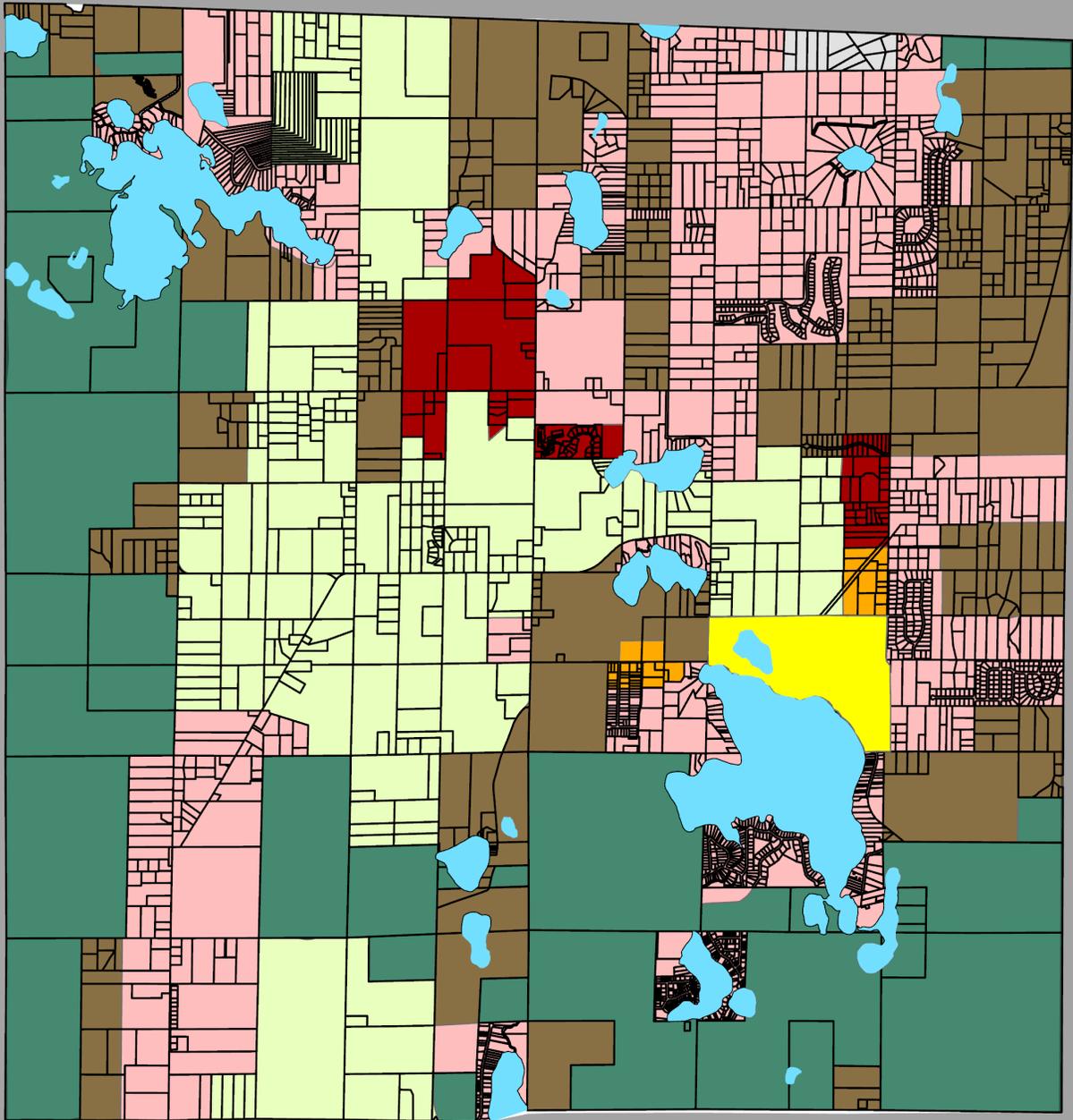
All point source discharges into surface waters are required to obtain a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit which the Michigan Water Resources Commission upon recommendation by EGLE, Surface Water Quality Division issues. Permit requirements generally address discharge limitations, effluent characteristics, monitoring and reporting requirements, along with facility management requirements. Currently there are seven sites with active permits in Benzie County, none of which are within Almira Township or the Village of Lake Ann.

Air Quality

The Air Quality Division of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE, formerly known as Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)) monitors air quality. Standards

have been established as acceptable levels of discharge for any of the following air pollutants: particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, lead, and trace metals. These pollutants are monitored on a continuing basis at selected locations around the state. Monitoring in recent years has shown the level of pollutants in the region to be within the established acceptable standards.

Air discharge permits are required for businesses discharging more than the acceptable level of any of the regulated air pollutants. There are currently no known permits issued to businesses located in Almira Township.



- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
|  Water | Existing Land Use |  Mixed Residential |  Forest Recreation |
|  Parcels |  Agriculture |  Commercial |  State Forest |
|  Lake Ann |  Low Density Residential |  Light Industrial |  Lake Ann |



Chapter 4: Existing Land Use

Existing Land Use Background

The 2020 Census shows Almira Township’s land area is 33.8 square miles. The Almira Township Existing Land Use map was developed using land use/use classification categories found from the 1998 Michigan Resource Inventory System. The original MIRIS mapping was developed in 1978, updated with aerial photographs in 1987, and underwent extensive field checks in 1998. That information was then digitized into the existing map.

Figure 15 Existing Land Use Statistics for Almira Township. Each of the land use categories are discussed further in this chapter.

Figure 15: Existing Land Use Statistics		
Land Use	# of Acres	
Upland Forest	12,393.4	54%
Non-forested/ Undeveloped/ Open	4,511.4	20%
Wetlands/Low- land Forest	1,464.1	6%
Water	1,421.1	6%
Residential	1,324.2	6%
Agricultural	1,227.8	5%
Institutional/ Recreation	327.0	1%
Village of Lake Ann	276.7	1%
Industrial/ Extractive/Util- ities	52.9	0%
Commercial	37.9	0%
TOTAL	23,036.5	100%

Land Division Patterns

As development occurs, larger tracts of land are generally broken down into smaller parcels. Therefore, studying the existing pattern of land divisions is one way to analyze the status of land use and development. Land division patterns for Almira Township are discussed below.

State owned, large undivided parcels are located in the forested lands of the Pere Marquette State Forest. These properties are found in the southern and western regions of the Township in Sections 6, 7, 18, 19, 25-31 and 33-36. Privately owned large tracts can be found in nearly every section of the Township and are typically non-forested open fields, upland forest, or wetlands. The category of non-forested land is simply open field, grassland or shrub land, not being used for agriculture or any other active use. Generally speaking, these were first forests, then cut over land, then homesteads with gardens, then orchards and potato farms. Sometimes, these became vineyards or hops farms.

Parcels of ten acres or less are found throughout the Township in nearly every section. Small tracts and small lot residential subdivisions have developed in many areas, primarily located on the east side of the Township. Hardwood Acres was one of the initial subdivisions in the Township, located in Section 24. Some of the other residential subdivision areas include areas adjacent to Pearl Lake in Sections 5 and 6, Lake View in Section 15, Sunnysdale in Section 22, Samara Woods in Section 12, Bronson Lake in Section 33, and Sanford Lake in Sections 34 and 35. In addition, several plats and small tracts are noted adjacent to Ann Lake and in the Village of Lake Ann.

Upland Forest

The forested lands are the most predominant land cover in the Township and account for 53.8 percent, or 12,393 acres. Of the forested lands, northern hardwoods comprise approximately three quarters of the upland forested lands, with pine as the second most common upland forest type, followed by aspen-birch associations. Large upland forested areas are noted along the southern and western regions where state forestland exists. Mapped woodlands include such tree types as beech, oak, maple, aspen, birch, white pine and red pine.

Non-forested/Undeveloped/Open

Non-forested land consists of herbaceous open and

shrub land. As shown in Table 4-1, more than 19 percent of the Township is non-forested. Non-forested areas are scattered throughout the Township and are found in nearly all sections of the Township, except Sections 26 and 27.

Wetlands/Lowland Forest

Wetlands include land that has sufficient water at, or near, the surface to support wetland or aquatic vegetation. These areas are commonly referred to as swamps, marshes and bogs. The identified wetlands include areas that support lowland hardwoods and conifers, such as northern white cedar, willow and aspen species, as well as lowland brush and grasses. Wetlands and lowland forests comprise 6.4 percent of the Township area. Due to past draining and development this amount is much reduced from what would have originally been classified as wetland. The majority of the wetland areas can be noted on the Existing Land Use Map in the southwest portion of the Township, in the vicinity of Ann Lake and many of the other smaller lakes and streams in that portion of the Township (Sections 21, 22, 24-28, 31 and 35 of the Township). A few additional wetland areas are clustered in the northeast portion of the Township (Section 1, 11-13).

Water

Open water comprises over six percent of Almira Township. Included in this category are Ann Lake, Pearl Lake and approximately 30 other smaller inland lakes. For a full discussion of the importance of surface water, see Chapter 3, Natural Resources.

Residential

As can be seen on the Existing Use Map and table, residential use ranks fifth in the amount of land currently in this use. Residential use occupies more than five percent (1,324 acres) of the land in the Township. Residential development on various size parcels is distributed throughout the Township and in the platted subdivisions mentioned earlier in the chapter. This category would also include multiple family housing, although none was identified during the field checking.

Agricultural

Agricultural lands currently comprise approximately 1,227 acres or 5.8 percent of the Township. The agricultural land is clustered in the central and north central portion of the Township with a few scattered

parcels located in the southwest portion of the Township.

Institutional / Recreation

This category includes both institutional and recreation lands category, which cover 1.4 percent of the Township's land area. Included in this category are Township offices, parks, campgrounds, public access sites, cemeteries, the Lake Ann Camp and Retreat Center, Eastern Michigan University's The Parsons Center for Arts and Sciences, and the Mistwood Golf Course. These sites are shown on the Existing Land Use Map.

Industrial/Extractive/Transportation

Land in this use category covers less than one percent of the Township and includes the landing strip in Section 32, just off Maple City Highway. Additionally, two other areas are mapped as this land use, a sand and gravel excavation operation off Almira Road, (east of Maple City Highway) and a sawmill south of Almira Road.

Commercial

A small commercial area is located on Maple Street, which includes an automotive shop, a restaurant, a self-storage facility and other businesses. Additionally, two resorts and the ultra light airstrip are mapped as commercial. Although not mapped, limited commercial activities are located in the Village of Lake Ann. For most shopping needs, residents travel to larger regional commercial areas, such as Traverse City. Lands used for commercial purposes comprise less than one percent of the Township's area.

Chapter 5: Community Profile

Water & Sewage Disposal System

Almira Township does not have a public water system. Instead, Township residents rely on on-site private wells for domestic water. All private water wells are regulated by the Benzie- Leelanau District Health Department. Likewise there is no public sewage disposal system operated by the Township. Local residents rely primarily on private on-site septic systems that are regulated by the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department. The District Health Department requires an inspection [and upgrades, if needed] of the septic system prior to any property transfer.

Two important determinants for siting a septic system are soil suitability and depth to bedrock. Chapter 3, Natural Resources, discusses the Township's geology and soils. A lack of Municipal sewer and water prevents the township from being eligible for FHA, HUD, etc. type loans.

Storm Water

Storm water management is an important issue throughout the region as development occurs and the amount of impervious surface increases. From the previous Master Plan, there were believed to be 2 or 4 drains in the Township/Village of Lake Ann. The Benzie County Drain Commissioner noted that there are no County designated drains in Almira Township and the number was unable to be confirmed. It was also noted that existing culverts or ditches would be the responsibility of the owner (municipality, County Road Commission, private owner/condominium associations).

The Benzie County Road Commission has been placing rip rap at many road/stream crossings as necessary. There may be others in various subdivisions, as many homeowners have built storm drains for their driveways, because of the hilly terrain of many lots.

Solid Waste

Residential and commercial rubbish pick-up is offered within the Township only by several private haulers. There are three different waste haulers that are contracted with by the homeowners. Oftentimes, all three companies drive through the same neighborhoods every week. In addition, the Lake Ann Grocery store accepts

bagged trash for a fee.

No waste transfer station is located within the Township. Since there are no landfills located in Benzie County, the solid waste collected in Almira Township is taken to Grand Traverse County, Wexford County or Manistee County, depending on the hauler.

A Benzie County drop-off recycling site is located within the Almira Township Park off Ole White Drive. The county recycling program is single stream and accepts glass, paper, cardboard, certain plastics, plastic bags, and tin in the same roll off container. The county also coordinates a household hazardous waste collection program, in which the Township may participate one day in the spring of the year.

Other Public Utilities

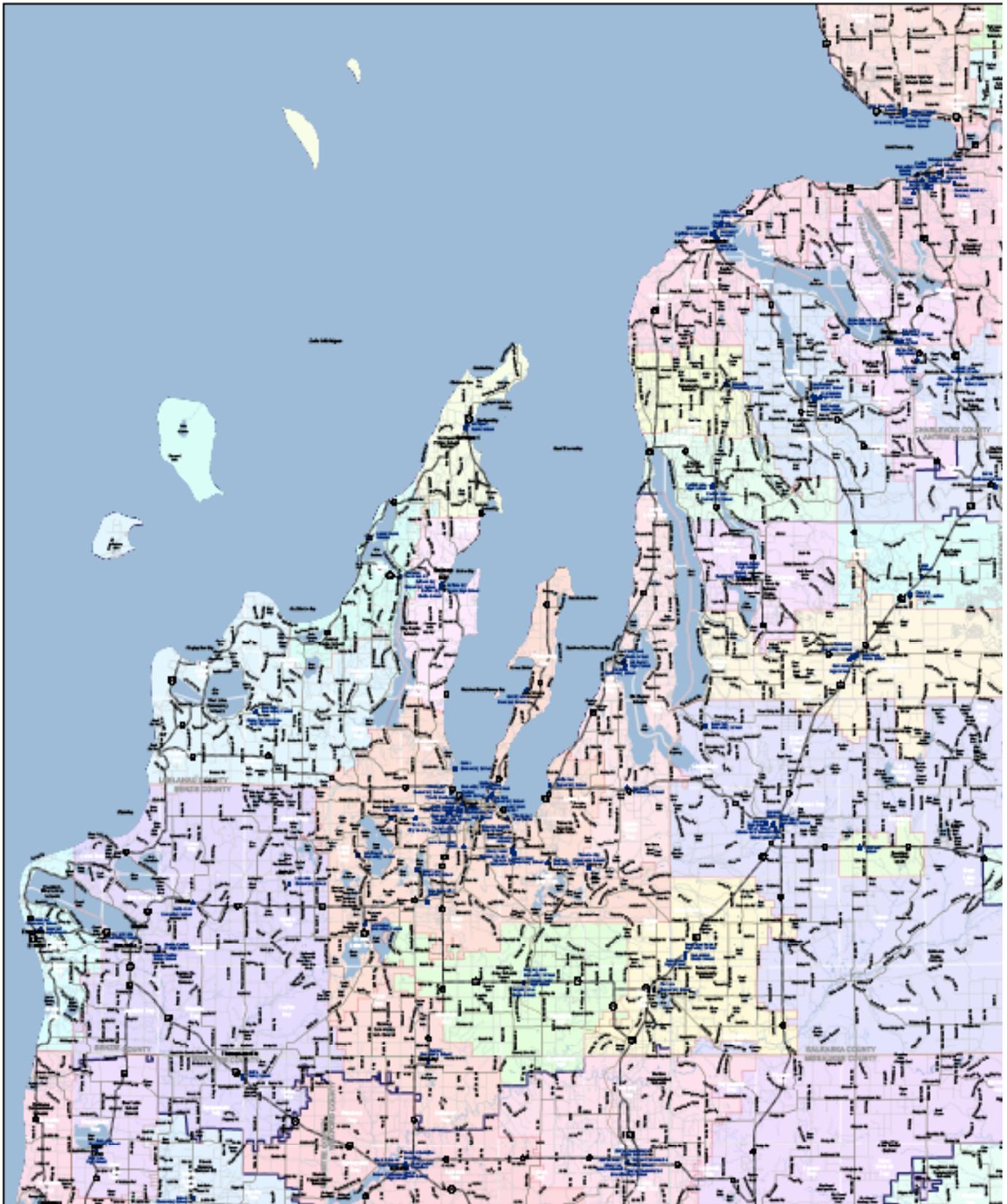
Cherryland Rural Electrical Cooperative and Consumers Power each have designated service areas for electric power within the Township. A substation owned by Wolverine Power is located off Ole White Drive at Barber Road. An additional substation was constructed by Wolverine Power and Cherryland Electric to create a wire "loop" that is easier to repair when outages occur.

Natural gas service, provided by DTE Energy Co., is limited to primarily the eastern portion of Almira. The remainder of the Township must rely on propane, provided by various vendors. Century Telephone (CenturyLink) provides local phone service in the Township, while a variety of long distance carriers are available.

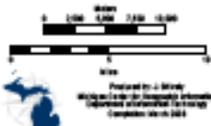
Emergency Services

Almira Township Fire & EMS Department is a combined department with 15-20 firefighters and 3 paid full time EMT/Firefighters. The department provides primary service to all of Almira Township and by mutual aid agreements to other neighboring departments and agencies. The department is equipped with a fire engine with 1,250 gallons per minute (gpm) capabilities, a 3,000 gallon capacity water tanker and a brush fire pumper, as well as equipment for vehicle extrication. The Township's ISO rating for hazard insurance

Traverse Bay Area ISD



Legend for symbols and colors used on the map.



Legend for symbols and colors used on the map.

	Water		Major Road
	City		County Boundary
	Unincorporated Area		Waterway
	Forest		Minor Road
	Waterway		Interstate

For more information, please contact the GIS Center at 517.335.8571.

risk is 9. The Department also owns and operates two ambulances that are licensed as basic life support. Benzie County EMS provides advanced life support.

Almira Township has enhanced 911 service that dispatches the Township fire and ambulance services, as well as law enforcement from the Benzie County Sheriff's Department in Beulah. Almira Township does not have a local police force. Law enforcement is provided by the County Sheriff's Department in Beulah and the State Police from both the substation in Honor and the Traverse City post.

Schools and Library

Almira Township is served by two different school districts: the Benzie County Central Schools (BCCS) and the Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS). As can be seen on Figure 5-1, the majority of the Township is in the BCCS district. The BCCS district covers an area of 364 square miles, of which approximately 29 square miles are in Almira Township. Approximately five square miles of the Township are within the TCAPS district. BCCS elementary students attend Lake Ann Elementary on Bronson Lake Road in Inland Township. TCAPS elementary students attend Westwoods Elementary on Fisher Road in Long Lake Township. The middle schools and high schools are located in Benzonia and Traverse City areas.

A vital component of 16 different school districts, including the BCCS and TCAPS school districts, is the Northwest Education Services (NES). NES is available as a resource and provides a variety of services including general education programs, special education and alternative programs, a regional education media center, a math, science and technology center, and administrative services. The programs offered by the NES are conducted either at the individual schools or at the NES offices centrally located in Traverse City.

The Almira Township Library is located in the Village of Lake Ann. While cozy and with limited hours, it offers residents and visitors access to a collection of books and periodicals for both children and adults, as well as two on-site computers and free WIFI within the vicinity.

Recreational Facilities

The Almira Township Recreational Resources Committee serves as an advisory committee to the

Township Board. The Almira Township Recreational Development Plan was adopted and approved by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) through the year 2016. Consequently specific projects are eligible to apply for recreation grant funds from the state.

The Almira Township Park, located adjacent to the Township office, includes 3 ball/soccer fields, a full-size basketball court, a paved walking trail, 2 tennis courts, a sand volleyball court, playground equipment, covered pavilions, disc golf course, and restrooms. This Township property is approximately 58 acres in size, with space available for additional recreation facilities.

The Township also owns and operates the Almira Township Lakefront Park in the Village of Lake Ann on Lake Ann. The 1.65 acre park has two pavilions, a flush toilet, and a swimming area, open year round for the public. There is also an accessible path which leads down to the water from the parking lot.

Almira Township also owns the Ransom Lake Natural Area. This property is 220 acres, including 3,500 feet of frontage surrounding Ransom Lake. There is an entrance drive and parking area at the east end of Nofsger Road, and another along Lake Ann Road. The latter entrance affords barrier free parking and restrooms, and a handicap accessible trail along Ransom Creek to a deck overlooking the lake. Another hiking trail circles the lake. The property may be used for hiking, wildlife observation, fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, or snowmobiling.

There is also a state-owned and operated rustic campground facility located on Ann Lake. The property includes the Lake Ann Pathway which has several miles of hiking/skiing trails, is open to hunting and mushrooming, and a public boat launch upgraded by the DNR with a dock. The MDNR maintains boat launch access sites on many of the lakes in the Township, including Pearl Lake, Davis Lake, Stevens Lake and Herendeene Lake.

Eastern Michigan University also operates The Parsons Center for Arts and Sciences. The interdisciplinary, education center and natural area is located on 86 acres. Eastern Michigan University offers credit courses, primarily art courses, to students with lodging at

the Parsons Center. Students also utilize and enjoy the use of the on-site studio/lab/dining hall.

The privately owned and operated Lake Ann Camp & Retreat Center covers approximately 300 acres. While primarily utilized for youth camp and church activities in the summer, the facility is available for conferences and retreats year around.

Township residents also have access to Burnett Park in the Village of Lake Ann that includes a public playground, a half-court basketball court, picnic facilities and a restroom (portajohn). This has also been enthusiastically supported by taxpayers, and used by many.

Municipal, State and Federal Facilities

All Almira Township administrative offices are located at 7276 Ole White Drive, along with the Fire & EMS facility. The various township committees and boards, including Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Commission and Township Board of Trustees are held at the Almira Townhall located at 19639 Maple Street in the Village of Lake Ann. There are no county, state or federal facilities located in the Township, with the exception of state forest land described above under Recreation Facilities.

Civic Organizations

Although private civic organizations are not affiliated with any governmental unit, they are listed in this chapter because of the important services they provide to the community residents. Organizations presently active in Almira Township include:

- Lions Clubs
- Almira Historical Society
- Ann Lake Property Owners Association
- Pearl Lake Association
- Sanford Lake Association
- Platte River Watershed Group

Churches

- Lake Ann United Methodist Church
- Woodside Wesleyan Church
- Advent Lutheran Church

Transportation and Road Maintenance

There are approximately 40 miles of paved roads and 65 miles of gravel roads within the Township, of which approximately 30 miles are county roads. There

is no state highway. The Benzie County Road Commission is responsible for maintenance of the public roads, although the Township does provide funding assistance for road improvements.

While there are no designated State or Federal Highways in Almira Township, M 72 and US 31 are major East/West two lane highways, just North and South, respectively of Almira Township. In Almira Township, County Road 669 and Reynolds Road are both heavily used by North / South traffic. The Benzie County Road Commission certifies 23.93 miles of Primary Road and 63.32 miles of Local Road in Almira Township and is responsible for maintenance of the public roads. The Township provides funding, in some cases.

In the past few years, the Benzie County Road Commission has completed some notable major and minor improvements. The Benzie County Road Commission and funding partners, Almira Township, The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS), and the Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA) provided funds for stream crossing work, such as culvert replacement and has rip rapped a number of river crossings with stone. By controlling the storm water runoff, maintenance costs are reduced, soil erosion is better controlled, and stream and water quality improve, as does fish habitat.

Two very visible major projects that the Road Commission completed are the wooden bridges over the Platte River, and Burnt Mill Road. Replacing the undersized metal culverts with these bridges restores the natural riverbed, providing improved water quality and habitat for fish. Funding Partners with the Road Commission were; The CRA, NCRS, and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. Another noteworthy project was improving the crossing, and replacing the culvert at the unnamed tributary to Cedar Creek/Tucker Road crossing. Funding Partners were the Benzie County Road Commission, Almira Township, and the Property owner.

Public transportation for Almira Township is provided by the 'Benzie Bus,' operated by the Benzie Transportation Authority. Their on demand Dial a Ride service is available from 7:00AM until 7:30PM, and reservations can be made by phone or online. The Benzie Bus Flex Line Route operates hourly between Lake Ann Village, Frankfort and Thompson-

ville with a dozen stops each way. The Flex routes will deviate up to a quarter mile off the route for scheduled pickups.

The TC Express (TCX) Route has had six regularly scheduled daily (reservations required) stops in the Village of Lake Ann since 2014. Three go to Frankfort in the western part of Benzie County. Three go to Traverse City in Grand Traverse County.

In 2016, The Benzie Transportation Authority built a bus shelter in Burnett Park, adjacent to the basketball courts in the Village of Lake Ann. The Benzie Bus has connecting transit service with Manistee, Leelanau, and Grand Traverse Counties. It offers free rides to Medicaid clients to medical appointments. In addition, it's centrally located Terminal, near Honor is a designated Emergency Warming Shelter, in times of severe weather.

In January, 2007, when Benzie Transit Authority took over operation of the Council on Aging's bus fleet, the ridership grew from 40,000 annually to 72,000 in 2015. Taxpayers support 1/3 of the Benzie Transit Authority's annual budget. Typically voters support millage requests by a 3 to 1 margin.

The only airport in the Township is located on County Road 669, between Hooker and Oakley Roads. The Michigan Department of Transportation classifies it as a Basic Utility Airport. It is open to the public. It has a 2600 ft. grass East/West runway that is suitable for single engine light aircraft. There is also a North/South runway that is used by ultralight aircraft and light sport aircraft. This is an Airport/Condo development in a 'taxi to your hanger at your house' type of development.

Commercial Air Transportation is available at Traverse City's Cherry Capitol Airport and Manistee's Blacker Airport.



Chapter 6: Community Goals and Action Plan

Community Goals

The purpose of this chapter is to set forth the Township's goals and policies to guide future development. Community participation and input is a critical component in the development of these goals. In analyzing the data compiled from census reports, it is clear that Almira Township is located in an environmentally sensitive area. Uncontrolled development could dramatically alter the character of the Township. By encouraging new development to conform to community based standards and guidelines, both the rural character and the natural resources of the Township can be preserved to the fullest extent possible.

Community Survey

The 2021 Almira Township Master Plan Survey was open for response from July 12, 2021 to September 20, 2021. Notice of the survey availability was done through notice in the Township Newsletter which was included in the summer tax bills. Additional notice was done through a press release sent to local news organizations, social media, and word of mouth. 66 responses provided an email address to receive a copy of the drafted Master Plan for review. Full survey results can be found in Appendix X.

181 responses were received, with nearly 75% being permanent residents, followed by seasonal/part-time residents, property owners, and Village of Lake Ann residents (8.9%, 7.2%, and 6.7%). In regards to responding Township resident ages, 37.8% fell into 20-44 years old, followed by 45-64 (32.8%) and 65-74 (25.6%). 5 responses came from over 75 years old, and 2 came from under 19 years old.

Residents were asked what type of housing would best serve the Township's future needs and single-family homes between 1 - 5 acres was most selected (58.4%). This was followed by single-family homes, less than an acre, affordable housing options, single family homes, more than 5 acres, and housing options for the elderly. When asked what the biggest threat to the viability of the township, there were three answers with the same response rate; no threats, blighted properties, and

short-term rentals.

The survey also asked what would help bring businesses to the Township. While there was a wide spread of answers, broadband growth (51.5%), home-based businesses (35%), and more stores and offices to serve residents (30.7%) were most selected. In terms of protecting the natural environment, the survey showed preserving lakes, streams, and wetlands (86%) was most selected. Responses also showed preserving natural areas, working with land conservancies and private groups to preserve significant areas, preserving farmland and woodlots, and preserving open, undeveloped spaces were selected 50% of the time or more.

Over half of respondents felt that the Township roads should include paved shoulders for bike use and be kept as two-lane roads (59.7%, 57.4%). There were many comments, in addition to 39.8% felt the roads should be upgraded and improved.

Most respondents felt there was no need to expand on play fields, playgrounds, or basketball courts. However, it was much closer split between ice skating rink and picnic areas. Many responses were in favor of bicycle paths, public beaches, and non-motorized trails. Most responses did not want or did not know about motorized trails. Survey responses felt the Township should offer or sponsor recreation activities such as youth programming (68.5%), senior programming (59.6%), and adult programming (51.4%). While under 50%, there was some support for baseball/softball leagues, tennis/pickleball leagues, and soccer leagues.

40% of respondents answered maybe to the Township purchasing more parkland, while 30.9% supported additional purchase and 26.3% said no. When asked about the Township and Village of Lake Ann consolidated similar functions, 59.5% supported, 26% said maybe, and 11% said no.

When asked what the top 3 priorities the Master Plan should focus on improving or preserving, 53.1%

marked natural environment, 48.7% marked parks and open space, and 28.8% marked downtown area. These were all followed by neighborhoods, community beautification, historic preservation, and redevelopment of vacant and/or underutilized properties.

Community Input Public Event

On June 23, 2022, the Almira Township Planning Commission held a public input event at the Township Hall in the Village of Lake Ann. At this event, the public was able to comment on the drafted goals and objectives and future land use map. These items are important to guiding the Township’s land use policies. Full analysis of the public input event can be found in the appendix.

Goals and Policies

In developing community goals and policies, it is important to analyze existing community conditions, as described in the earlier plan sections including the Socioeconomic Profile, Natural Resources, Existing Land Use and Community Facilities sections. In addition to examining existing characteristics, another important tool in the development of community goals and policies is to identify community assets and problem areas. By combining the outcomes of the working session discussions, the citizen survey, and Master plan research efforts, the Planning Commission was able to develop the following set of goals and policies:

General Goals
PRESERVE THE UNIQUE BEAUTY OF ALMIRA TOWNSHIP-- by protecting the waterfront setting, small town/rural character, and maintaining an overall clean, healthy and well maintained living environment.
PROTECT THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE of Township residents by coordinating the land use so that efficient public services are provided.
Promote and maintain a centralized business area.
Protect and PRESERVE HISTORIC areas, sites, buildings, structures and features.
Recognize the importance of the tourist industry to the local economy.

Planning and Development

Goal: Maintain a balance between human activities and the natural environment.
Policies:
1. Encourage site designs and plans that preserve and protect natural assets and the rural character of the township.
2. Require planning review of the following types of public projects, including:
a. The opening, closing, vacating, widening, or extension of roads.
b. The acquisition or enlargement of any park, playground or public open space.
c. The construction, acquisition, or authorization of public buildings or structures.
3. Encourage roadside and open space buffer strips of vegetation, both to enhance the visual image of the Township and to protect the land uses adjacent to the roadway from traffic noise, dirt and glare.
4. Encourage buffers (e.g., berms or vegetative screening) to shield residential properties from adjacent non-residential development.
5. Encourage general public, civic organizations and all commissions to provide input for Township decisions.
6. Encourage the preservation, maintenance and restoration of historic sites, structures and features.
7. Periodically review and revise both the Zoning Ordinance and this Master Plan to be easily understood and to conform to the character of the Township and the prevailing priorities of its residents.

Housing
Goal: Allow for suitable housing opportunities for all income levels and age groups.
Policies:
1. Consider the development of housing to meet the needs of all household types and income groups, including affordable single family housing and housing options for seniors.
2. Encourage the maintenance of the existing housing and residential neighborhoods in good repair, appearance, usefulness and safety.
3. Protect the residential neighborhoods from intrusion of incompatible uses.

4. Encourage the development option of clustered single-family housing in buildable portions of the Township, to protect open space.

5. Recognize farmland as contributing to the scenic and rural character of the Township.

Natural Environment

Goal: Protect and preserve natural resources.

Policies:

1. Encourage a land use pattern that respects the natural features and water resources of the area. Promote the protection of sensitive features including wildlife habitat, wildlife corridors, wetlands, lakes, streams, steep slopes and wooded areas.
2. Evaluate the environmental impact of all new development.
3. Protect land resources and water quality related to our lakes, streams and wetlands, including shorelines.
4. Encourage the continued natural use of wetlands as groundwater recharge and stormwater holding areas.
5. Utilize Best Management Practices (BMP) to regulate and minimize direct stormwater discharge into lakes and rivers.
6. Identify and protect desirable open space areas, scenic vistas and environmentally sensitive lands.
7. Collaborate with conservation agencies and private groups to preserve natural areas.

Agricultural Lands

Goals: Recognize the importance of agricultural lands within Almira Township

Policies:

1. Maintain and provide for the preservation of agricultural farmland where feasible, including tree farming and specialty crop farms.
2. Allow for and encourage farmland protection through the “transfer of development rights” and “purchase of development rights”. Encourage clustering of non-farm development to minimize agricultural land consumption.
3. Support legislative reform measures to assist in retaining farmland.
4. Discourage the conversion of farmland into other more intensive uses.

Recreation and Public Lands

Goals: To preserve, protect and maintain environmentally sensitive areas, open space and public parks for the enjoyment of residents, visitors and future generations

Maintain and improve the current high level of recreational facilities.

Policies:

1. Preserve and maintain our state land, public parks, access sites and natural areas.
2. Preserve environmentally sensitive lands for open space and passive recreational purposes.
3. Encourage creative design and planning techniques for all new development so as to produce visual harmony, preserve special features and protect vital natural resources.
4. Evaluate, periodically, the need for public acquisition of environmentally sensitive and available properties located in the Township.
5. Preserve and maintain existing active recreation areas, especially the Township Park.
6. Continue efforts to provide seasonal outdoor recreational opportunities.
7. Support cooperative recreational planning and development with the Village of Lake Ann, the surrounding townships and the schools.
8. Expand, improve or develop recreational facilities, especially playgrounds, bike paths, picnic areas and a public beach.
9. Provide more recreational activities, such as youth programs, baseball/softball, soccer, swimming lessons and senior programs.
10. Pursue outside funding sources, such as grants for land acquisition and/or recreational development either passive or active.

Commercial Areas and Activities

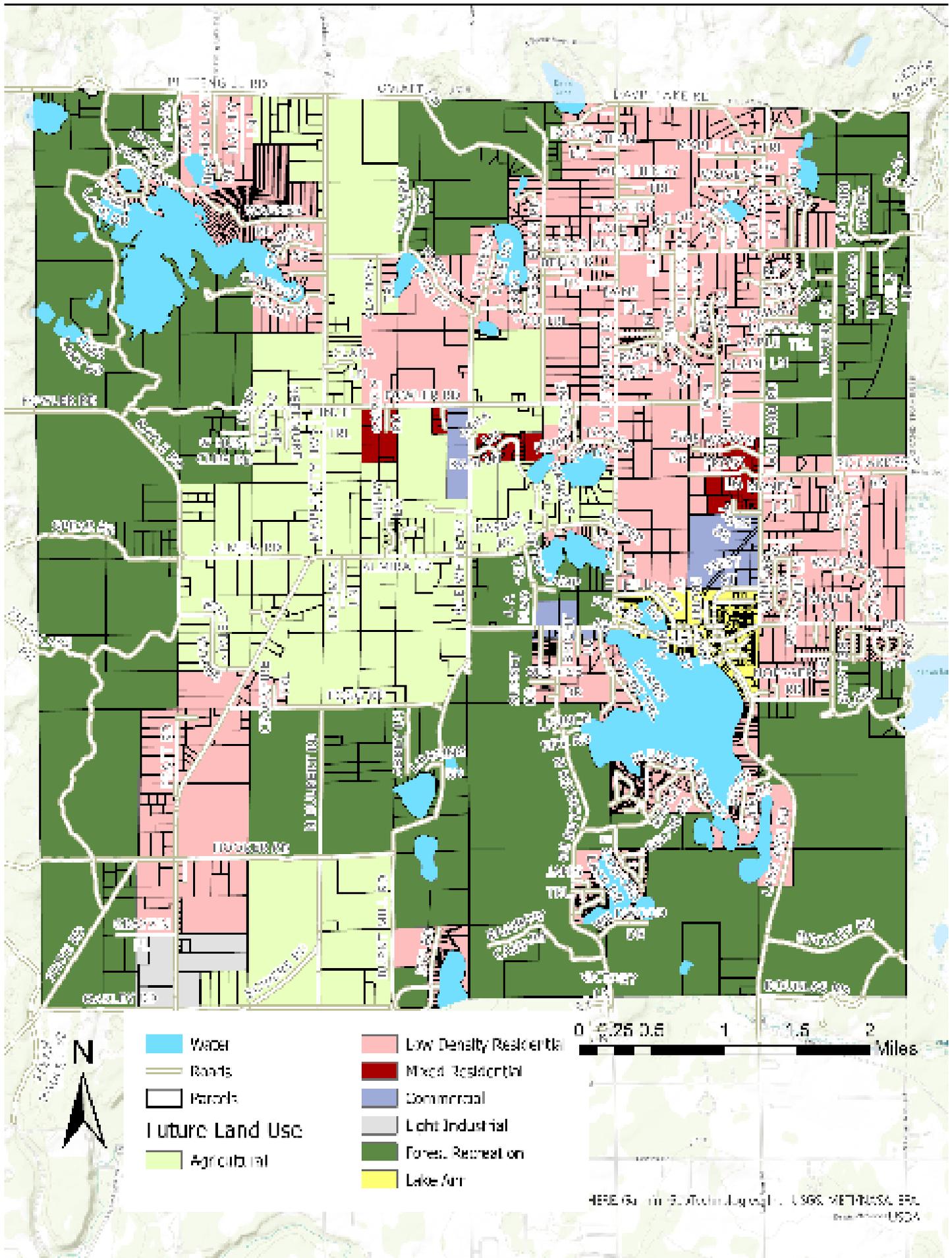
Goal: Promote a varied business environment to serve the needs of residents and visitors while preserving the natural environment and small town appeal.
Policies:
1. Encourage development of stores and small businesses such as professional offices.
2. Provide areas for future commercial development adjacent to already existing commercial zones, i.e. Village of Lake Ann.
3. Encourage zoning techniques such as clustering and/or shared parking.
4. Promote safety by controlling the size, number, illumination and configuration of signs.
5. Encourage the re-use of existing facilities where appropriate and consistent with existing zoning.
6. Encourage home occupations compatible with existing residential areas.
7. Ensure developments occur in a sensitive manner and are harmonious with the existing community.
8. Encourage light industries that do not pollute the air, soil or water nor offend because of noise, odor or visual impact to locate in designated industrial park areas.
9. Promote greenbelt buffers and landscape regulations.
10. Foster cooperation with businesses in the Township.

Infrastructure and Public Facilities
Goal: Maintain and improve the Township's transportation systems, community facilities, programs and public utilities to accommodate the needs of residents and visitors.
Policies:
1. Encourage the efficient use and maintenance of existing roadways and infrastructure.
2. Maintain 2-lane roads where ever feasible for controlling speed and maintaining the rural character.
3. Plan for safe access and movement of vehicles as well as pedestrians.
4. Support the development of bicycle paths and pedestrian walkways.
5. Encourage the placement of utilities underground.

6. Plan utility improvements to coincide with development, where possible.
7. Encourage cooperative Township and Village planning for public utilities, such as water and sewer systems.
8. Require fire hydrants or necessary fire protection systems to be installed as development occurs with the costs borne by the developer.

Government
Goal: Provide services in an efficient, environmentally responsible and caring manner to meet the needs of the residents, property owners, business people and visitors.
Policies:
1. Promote intergovernmental and regional cooperation on issues of mutual concern.
2. Ensure a responsible fiscal policy and budget process to finance the Township government.
3. Promote the involvement of volunteers in the government process.
4. Utilize the proactive master planning process as a check and balance on decision- making.

Education and Training
Goal: Provide access to quality education, training and community facilities for all residents.
Policies:
1. Continue to work with the schools to present information programs about the community to school classes and other groups
2. Promote quality education and training opportunities for all residents.
3. Support and expand the public library.



Chapter 7: Future Land Use Plan

At present, Almira Township is primarily a rural residential and agricultural community. Lakeshore living is available along the shores of Ann Lake, Pearl Lake and the many additional lakes in the Township. While active agricultural uses have declined from historic levels, the 2021 Almira Township Master Plan Survey showed over half of respondents identify “Preserve farmlands and woodlands” as helpful to protect the natural environment.

Through land use planning and land use controls, Almira Township intends to ensure that existing rural residential, agricultural, and recreational uses can continue, and reasonable growth can be accommodated with minimal land use conflicts or negative environmental impacts. Based on the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the Township, six general categories of land use have been identified to serve existing and future development needs. These categories are listed below:

- Forest/Recreation
- Agricultural
- Low Density Residential
- Mixed Residential
- Commercial
- Light Industrial

Forest/ Recreation

Forest/Recreation areas are primarily intended to accommodate park and recreational lands and uses including all existing state forest lands, Township owned parks, and other forested or environmentally sensitive lands. These lands are not intended to undergo intense development pressures due to existing public ownership or easement status. Consequently, only environmental preservation and low intensity recreation are anticipated on these public properties. It is intended that these lands be designated for continued conservation and recreational use. Low density residential and agricultural uses are anticipated for privately owned properties though resort or camp type uses are also intended to be accommodated, owing to the attraction of Almira Township as a seasonal and recreational home community.

The maximum density residential is intended to be one unit per five acres. It is also intended to preserve large areas of permanent open space consisting of woodlands, wetlands, steep slopes, lakeshore, view sheds, and similar natural resources, by clustering and employing Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). The Township encourages the establishment and preservation of larger areas of contiguous and permanent open space including prime, unique and valuable farm lands; wetlands; woodlands; steep slopes; and ravine habitats, as scenic, recreation and wildlife corridors. The preservation tools intended to be employed include donations, acquisition, and cooperative efforts with other units of government and landowners, conservation easements, deed restrictions, and zoning ordinance provisions that support the use of sound open space conservation practices.

Agricultural

An Agricultural land use category has been designated consistent with the Township’s goal to continue agricultural production. Almira Township recognizes that the presence of agricultural activity contributes significantly to the scenic and rural character valued by Township residents. The Agricultural land use designation is primarily intended to encourage the continued agricultural use of areas on prime, unique or locally important agricultural soils. The designated area is primarily located in the north central portion of the Township, as shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Farm dwellings and customarily accessory uses and buildings are to be encouraged, including crop production and the raising of livestock normally associated with farming activities but excluding intensive farming or feedlot operations. Non-farm dwellings and home occupations are also intended to be permitted as a matter of right, along with, plant nurseries and greenhouses, churches, tourist home/bed & breakfast, riding stables and roadside stands selling farm products. Other uses such as golf courses and campgrounds may also be allowed with special conditions where they are found to be compatible with surrounding land uses.

The Township intends to encourage methods that accommodate the preservation of farmlands, farming activity, open space, natural resources, and the rural character of the Township, and at the same time accommodate landowners who want to reduce or discontinue farming. The methods include innovative zoning provisions that allow for the preservation and conservation of essential natural resources, farmland, and open space by providing opportunities for the clustering of development. Some methods which other communities have employed to help protect and preserve agricultural land while protecting a landowner's desire for a larger economic gain include the purchase of development rights (PDR); transfer of development rights (TDR), which has not yet been enabled by state law; open space community zoning provisions for non-agricultural uses and density incentives to encourage clustering. These alternatives should be investigated for possible application to Almira Township, as a way to balance private property rights with agricultural and open space preservation goals.

The agricultural land use is primarily intended to provide for the continuation of farming activities while limiting encroachment by other uses. This land use category is intended to have a low base density of one unit per five acres. In an effort to recognize that some of this land will be developed with non-agricultural uses, the intent is to promote cluster residential development on relatively small lots that are sufficient in size to support on-site utilities, either along road corridors or in accessible areas that are not suitable for agricultural activities, as a means to minimize the overall loss of agricultural land and encourage the continuation of farming activities. This can be accomplished by the employment of Planned Unit Development (PUD). The most important criteria include the permanent preservation of agricultural land by means of irrevocable conveyance and the preservation of the rural character of the area as viewed from the road. The most serious challenge will be to preserve the rural appearance where homes are built with full visibility from the road.

Low Density Residential

The Low Density Residential category is designed to provide for very limited and low intensity residential development, while allowing for the protection of privately owned environmentally sensitive areas. This

land use category allows for residential use at a low density of not more than one dwelling unit per two acres. Provisions in the Zoning Ordinance encourage a cluster development pattern to be utilized to avoid or minimize development impacts on environmentally sensitive areas, forests, or farmland. The Low Density Residential land use category is consistent with the Township's resource policy to "promote the protection of sensitive features including wildlife habitat, wildlife corridors, wetlands, lakes, streams, steep slopes and wooded areas," as well as promote the preservation of productive agricultural lands. Development in this category is intended to be limited due to environmental conditions.

Several areas with unique or fragile environmental characteristics were identified during the planning process. Areas intended to be protected from potential high-density development have been proposed as Low Density Residential. These areas have already experienced some residential development, and are designated as low density residential to allow new development in a manner, which respects these resources. The Low Density Residential lands are dispersed throughout the Township, with the largest area located in the northeast portion of the township.

Mixed Residential

The Mixed Residential land use category is primarily intended to accommodate existing residential development, where land has already been subdivided into smaller lots, and to direct future residential growth of a more urban nature to areas of the Township that are more accessible by and in need of public services. In addition to areas identified for residential development on the future land use map, this plan recognizes that residential development has occurred and will continue to occur in locations near the Village of Lake Ann, as shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Mixed Residential development is intended to accommodate a variety of dwelling types on a range of lot sizes including attached and detached single-family, apartment, and condominium units at an average density of one unit per acre. It is also intended to accommodate such other residential, community, and institutional uses as parks, churches, schools, libraries, cemeteries, campgrounds, assisted living and convalescent facilities, golf courses, resorts, if designed to be compatible with the residential setting. Home-oc-

cupations are also encouraged in areas where mixed residential uses occur, provided the residential character of the area is preserved.

Due to the lack of public water and sewer services, the location of higher density residential uses, such as apartments, townhouses, condominiums, and manufactured home developments should be restricted to areas where soils are capable of supporting adequately engineered community wastewater disposal systems and areas where public utilities might be made available at a future date.

Commercial

While much of the commercial services for Almira Township are met by facilities located in Lake Ann and regionally in Traverse City, the Township wishes to designate certain areas for local convenience commercial uses, generally adjacent to and within close proximity to the Village of Lake Ann. This future land use plan recognizes that a few existing commercial businesses in outlying areas are operating in areas surrounded by non-commercial uses. This plan further recognizes that these businesses provide important services to nearby residents. The plan is not intended to infringe upon the continuation or expansion of such services or facilities.

Uses intended to be accommodated within commercial areas designated on the future land use map include: retail stores, business and personal services, professional offices, food service, lodging facilities and similar uses. The Future Land Use Map shows two general areas for commercial uses in the vicinity of the intersection of Ole White Drive and Fowler Road, and additionally an area adjacent to the Village of Lake Ann (near Lake Ann Road and First Street).

Light Industrial

Consistent with the 2009 Survey findings, which support the establishment of light industrial uses in an industrial park and the Township goal to promote a varied business environment, a light industrial area has been designated in the area of Maple City Highway and US 31, the Township's south boundary.

Primarily, uses such as the following are intended for the proposed light industrial area: light industrial manufacturing or assembling establishment, wholesale commercial businesses, machine shops, sawmills

or wood products industries, transportation facilities, storage facilities, utility facilities and similar uses.

Industrial operations are subject to performance standards to minimize impacts on the Township. This district is compatible with a business district, but not compatible with residential districts without a buffer. Housing and commercial activities compatible with an industrial setting are also intended to be accommodated in light industrial development areas. As in commercial development areas, this plan does not advocate the interference with existing industrial activities that may be operating in outlying areas, which are surrounded by other predominant land uses.

Chapter 8: Plan Implementation

A comprehensive plan or master plan is developed to provide a vision of the community's future. It is designed to serve as a tool for decision-making on future development proposals. A master plan will also act as a guide for future public investment and service decisions, such as the local budget, grant applications and administration of utilities and services.

According to the Township Zoning Act, comprehensive or master planning is the legal basis for the development of a zoning ordinance. Section Three of the Act states: "The zoning ordinance shall be based upon a plan designed to promote the public health, safety and general welfare; to encourage the use of lands in accordance with their character and adaptability, and to limit the improper use of land; to conserve natural resources and energy; to meet the needs of the State's residents for food, fiber, and other natural resources, places to reside, recreation, industry, trade, service and other uses of land; to insure that uses of the land shall be situated in appropriate locations and relationships; to avoid the overcrowding of population; to provide adequate light and air; to lessen congestion of the public roads and streets; to reduce hazards to life and property; facilitate adequate provision for a system of transportation, sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, education, recreation and other public requirements and services to conform with the most advantageous use of land resources, and properties."

With this legal basis in mind, Almira Township intends to revise and update the zoning ordinance based on this master plan. The zoning ordinance is the most important tool for implementing the comprehensive plan. Zoning is the authority to regulate private use of land by creating land use zones and applying development standards in various zoning districts.

The zoning ordinance defines zoning districts and specifies the boundaries of these districts on a zoning map. The zoning districts should be closely related to the land use categories identified in the Chapter 7, Future Land Use, of this master plan.

Each district should define what uses are generally permitted and what uses can be permitted under certain circumstances. Zoning standards are established for each district, which set forth the rules governing each district. Some common standards include: rules governing the height, bulk and location of structures; off street parking and loading requirements; sign regulations; and regulations for accessory structures and uses. The standards in the zoning ordinance will be based in part on the goals and policies set forth in Chapter 6 of this Master Plan. The zoning ordinance also needs to address nonconforming uses. A nonconforming use is defined as a use that was in existence when the ordinance (or amendment) was enacted and which does not conform to zoning standards of the district in which it is located.

One of the most influential tools often included in the zoning ordinance is site plan review. Michigan law permits the zoning ordinance to require site plan review as part of the approval process for a project. The site plan review process provides the Planning Commission the opportunity to review a project to assure compliance with local, state and federal laws. The site plan review process and criteria for approval must be clearly defined in the zoning ordinance, including the conditions under which a plan may be reviewed; who must review the plan and approve or deny the proposed project; the procedures and standards for site plan review. Site plan review is not a type of "contract zoning" where the particular arrangements are negotiated. The zoning statute requires the ordinance specify what is required for site plan approval. If those conditions are met, the community government is obligated to approve the plan and if the project does not meet the standards, it must be denied.

Zoning ordinances are local laws. The adoption of the zoning ordinance (and any subsequent amendments) must follow specifically defined procedures in order to be an enforceable law. In Almira Township, the Planning Commission is responsible for the initial development of the zoning ordinance, but the Township Board of Trustees must adopt the ordinance before it is legally enforceable.

The administration of the ordinance must be carefully considered and specified in the ordinance to ensure a successful implementation of Township zoning. Administration of the ordinance includes the specification of procedures and establishment of a fee schedule for various activities such as rezoning, special approval uses or site plan review. Township personnel need to be identified to handle the day to day operations including providing copies of the ordinance, answering zoning questions, providing rezoning applications and accepting site plan review requests.

Grants and Capital Improvements Investments

A master plan can also be used as a guide for future public investment and service decisions, such as the local budget, grant applications and administration of utilities and services. Many communities find it beneficial to prioritize and budget for capital improvement projects, (such as infrastructure improvements, park improvements, etc). A Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is one tool that is often used to establish a prioritized schedule for all anticipated capital improvement projects in the community. A CIP includes cost estimates and sources for financing for each project, therefore can serve as both a budgetary and policy document to aid in the implementation of a community's goals defined in the Master Plan.

Recreation Plan

A recreation plan is one way to implement important recreation related goals defined in the Master Plan. The Almira Township Recreation Development Plan 2011-2016 is consistent with the Master Plan but not considered an active plan by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). An updated and MDNR approved recreation plan should be maintained to ensure Almira Township recreation projects are grant eligible. When the recreation plan is updated it should be reviewed to ensure it remains consistent with the Township goals and the Master Plan. Grant funds should be pursued for recreation projects identified in the Recreation Development Plan, and consistent with the Township recreation goals.

Summary

The Almira Township Master Plan is designed to aid in the protection of the health, safety and general

welfare of the Township residents. The future land use plan establishes land use categories in consideration of the social and economic characteristics of the Township, the natural resources of the area, the compatibility of adjacent land uses and the Township goals. This plan should serve as the base in updating the Township zoning ordinance and be used to help guide future development in Almira Township.

Chapter 9: Zoning Plan and Matrix

Zone Plan

The Almira Township future land use districts directly line up with the current land use districts in the Almira Township Zoning Ordinance. As described in the Future Land Use chapter, Almira Township "...intends to ensure that existing rural residential, agricultural, and recreational uses can continue, and reasonable growth can be accommodated with minimal land use conflicts or negative environmental impacts."

Through Planning Commission meetings, Master Plan subcommittee meetings, Almira Township Master Plan Survey and Public Input event referenced earlier, the Township Zoning continues to meet the current needs and the future desire of the residents. Therefore the following Zone Plan primarily maintains what is existing in the districts. As noted in the Future Land Use chapter, the Township does not intend to interfere with existing commercial or light industrial uses within the Township.

Agricultural District

The Agricultural District intends to conserve and promote the continuance of agriculture and rural character and uses. The Agricultural District permits uses such as single-family dwellings, agricultural uses, accessory buildings, amongst other uses. Special uses in the district include cluster residential development, planned unit developments, migrant worker facilities, and more.

The future land use Agricultural District seeks to maintain these uses and encourages agricultural uses such as crop production and animal farming, while also allowing for residential uses, both allowed by right or by permit. The survey also noted that residents see the preservation of farmlands and woodlands as a way to protect the natural environment.

Forest/ Recreation

The intent of the Forest/ Recreation District is to promote the proper use, enjoyment and conservation of natural resources, while allowing other uses in the district. Permitted uses include single-family dwellings, Tourist Home/Bed and Breakfast, and public or

noncommercial private parks.

The future land use Forest/ Recreation District contains all parkland and other forested or environmentally sensitive lands. This assists with keeping the lands in the district low impact, as well as low density residential and agricultural uses on private property. It is noted that this district should have a maximum density requirement of one (1) unit per five (5) acres.

Low Density Residential

Low Density Residential District seeks to provide low density residential structures on individual lots along with other residential facilities to serve residents in the district. Permitted uses include single-family dwellings, family day care homes, and home occupations.

The future land use Low Density Residential District provides for low intensity residential development, noted at one (1) unit per two (2) acres. This will assist with protecting environmentally sensitive or agricultural lands from high density development, while still allowing for some development.

Mixed Residential

The Mixed Residential District provides the Township with a mixture of densities and housing types, including alternatives to single family residential housing. The permitted uses include single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, and accessory dwelling units.

The Mixed Residential future land use district notes the district exists where smaller lots already exist, as well as areas where residential development occurs near the Village of Lake Ann. The noted density requirement is one (1) unit per one (1) acre, which may be development such as single family dwellings or condominiums/apartments. Additional high density uses are hampered by the lack of public water or sewer services, but if areas with soils can support community wastewater and have public utilities, higher density development, such as apartments, townhomes, or manufactured home developments should be considered.

Commercial

The Commercial District's intent is to provide compatible mixture of commercial and residential uses for families and small commercial business. Permitted uses include single-family dwellings, retail sales (within an enclosed building), and business and personal services, among others.

The future land use Commercial District takes note that many commercial services are met by facilities in the Village of Lake Ann and Traverse City. Therefore, the preferred placement of commercial uses should be within close proximity of the Village of Lake Ann. Continued commercial uses such as professional offices, food service, or lodging facilities should be allowed in the district.

Light Industrial

The Light Industrial District intends to provide for manufacturing and light industrial uses in the Township with access to all-weather highways. Permitted uses include building materials sales, machine shops, and sand and gravel excavation.

The Future Land Use Light Industrial District notes possible uses such as light industrial manufacturing, wholesale commercial business, or sawmills or wood production industries. It also identifies that residential uses and industrial uses are not compatible without a buffer.

Zoning Plan Elements

The following Zone Plan elements are ...

Planned Unit Development (PUD): A lot or lots developed under a single development plan which permits upon review and approval flexibility of design and land use not available under normal zoning district requirements.

Dwelling, Single-Family: A detached building containing not more than one dwelling unit designed for residential use.

Dwelling, Multiple-Family: A building containing three or more dwelling units designed for residential use.

Parking Space: An area of definite length and width exclusive of drives, aisles, or entrances, giving access

thereto, and fully accessible for the storage or parking of permitted vehicles.

Home Occupation: Any activity which is clearly secondary to residential use, carried out for economical gain. Home occupations are regulated by Section 4.11.A of the Almira Township Zoning Ordinance, as amended.

Family Day Care Home: A private home in which one (1) but fewer than seven (7) minor children are received for care and supervision for periods of less than twenty-four (24) hours a day, unattended by a parent or legal guardian, except children related to an adult member of the family by blood, marriage, or adoption. Family Day Care Home includes a home in which care is given to an unrelated minor child for more than four (4) weeks during a calendar year.

Accessory Dwelling: Means a secondary home on the same lot or parcel as a principal dwelling. Accessory dwellings are independently habitable and provide the basic requirements of shelter, heating, cooking, and sanitation. May be in an adjacent building such as a converted accessory structure, or may be a part of the principal dwelling.

Lighting: All outdoor lighting, whether for illuminating sites, parking areas, buildings, docks, signs and/or other structures shall be shielded, shaded, designed and/or directed away from all adjacent properties, and further shall not glare upon or interfere with persons and vehicles using public streets.

Buffer (Screening): Vegetated buffering should be maintained/required in districts where commercial/industrial abut residential uses, as found within the Almira Township Zoning Ordinance, as amended.

Sign: A structure, including its base, foundation and erection supports upon which is displayed any words, letters, figures, emblems, symbols, designs, or trademarks by which any message or image is afforded public visibility from out of doors on behalf of and for the benefit of any product, place, activity, individual, firm, corporation, institution, profession, association, business or organization.

Landscaping: Landscaping requirements should be maintained as found within the Almira Township

Zoning Ordinance, as amended.

Height Requirements : Landscaping requirements should be maintained as found within the Almira Township Zoning Ordinance, as amended.

Density Limitations: Landscaping requirements should be maintained as found within the Almira Township Zoning Ordinance, as amended.

Solar/Alternative Energy: Solar and alternative energy should be maintained as found within the Almira Township Zoning Ordinance, as amended.

Zoning Matrix

The zoning matrix provides a concise method of displaying which regulatory measures and/or uses should be applied within a specific land use district. Check marks within the boxes of the matrix identify what districts and uses should be applied. Boxes which are empty are implied to not warrant those specific standards or uses.

This matrix does not identify whether uses should be permitted or special, nor the specifications of the standards. This matrix is not meant to be all inclusive of every regulatory standard or use that should be placed within the zoning ordinance.

Figure 16: Zoning Matrix

Land Use District	Zoning Regulation														
	Solar/ Alternative Energy	Density Limitations	Height Requirements	Landscaping	Signage Buffer (Screening)	Lighting (Dark Sky) Accessory Dwelling Unit	Family Day Care Home	Home Occupation	Public Facilities (parks, etc.)	Parking Standards	Multi-Family	Single-Family Planned Unit Development			
Agricultural (A)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Forest/Recreation (F/R)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Low Density Residential (R-1)				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mixed Residential (R-2)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Commercial District (C)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Light Industrial (I)	X			X		X				X	X	X	X	X	