

EDWARDS TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN 2019

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Edwards Township prepared this Master Plan in 2004 and updated it in 2013 and then in 2019 to address the future physical development of the community. Through the process of writing this Plan, it became evident that residents are keenly interested in maintaining the high quality of rural life presently available. The quality of life in Edwards Township is defined by elements such as: the natural beauty of the rural landscape and active farms; the rolling topography, including forests and farms; numerous lakes, streams and creeks - and access to them; the ability to see a dark night sky; and friendliness, safety, peace and quiet. The challenge presented is growth: the fact that the Township's population has grown continuously in the past two decades and that this growth trend is expected to continue. Secondary challenges include land and resource consumption, and demand for public services are also expected to continue to grow as the population increases.



Edwards Township Hall, summer 2019

The Edwards Township Board of Trustees passed a resolution on January 13, 2003 to request that the Edwards Township Planning Commission work with the Board to begin to prepare a comprehensive or “master” plan for the Township. The Edwards Township Planning Commission audited the Master Plan and began Master Plan revision and update in August of 2011. Master Plan revisions were completed in January of 2012 and July of 2019.

The Master Plan identifies planning goals to direct the future of Edwards Township over the next 20 years. Similar to a good roadmap, this Master Plan defines a community vision and preferred direction outlining what the residents want the Township to be in the future, and by identifying options to get there. The goals are meant to be flexible. There may be more than one route to get to the desired destination. This Plan outlines examples of actions that public officials, landowners, business owners, residents, and others can take in order to cooperatively fulfill the community's goals.

This Plan is not designed to promote or prevent growth, but rather to *guide* growth to protect and promote public health, safety, and general welfare. The intent is to provide a way for growth to occur while still preserving the existing high quality of life found within Edwards Township. In so doing, individual interests and private property rights must be balanced with the interests of the community at large when public decisions are made.

During public participation sessions conducted for this Plan, residents repeatedly expressed their desire for the Township to retain its existing rural character – including its friendly and peaceful atmosphere, and to protect its environmental resources such as its productive farms and forests. Reaching these goals is only possible if decisions made by the Edwards Township Planning Commission and other public bodies respect the ideas stated in this Plan.

The Edwards Township Master Plan is meant to be a proactive and highly participatory approach to land use planning. It is to be used as a guiding tool for decision-makers regarding land use questions. It defines the community’s vision of the future and lays the framework for growth, development, and resource protection for the next 20 years and is to be reviewed every five years in accordance with Michigan law. This Plan has been written with democratic principles and community/environmental sustainability in mind, so that future generations will have an equal or better quality of life than that enjoyed by today’s Township residents.

Legal Basis for the Master Plan

This Master Plan was prepared from February of 2003 to July of 2004, and audited and updated from August 2011 to January 2012, and December 2018 to July 2019. Edwards Township formally created a Planning Commission by resolution of the Township Board on August 14, 1973 in accordance with the Township Planning Act 168 of 1959, as amended. The Edwards Township Planning Commission held its first meeting on August 15, 1973.¹ With the formation of an official Planning Commission, the Township may prepare and adopt a Master Plan.

During the original preparation of this Plan, Public Act (P.A.) 168 of 1959 was amended to P.A. 263 of 2002, the Township Coordinated Planning Act [MCL 125.32, et seq.]. The Edwards Township Planning Commission followed the directives of the Coordinated Planning Act in the preparation and updating of this Master Plan. It is with a spirit of cooperation and coordination between governmental jurisdictions and interested community groups that this Plan has been prepared.

Planning Process

The process of writing the first Master Plan began in earnest in February of 2003. The original process of revising and updating the Master Plan, including a public hearing on January 16, 2012, began in August of 2011. The Edwards Township Planning Commission then adopted that updated Master Plan on April 15, 2013.

¹ Members of Edwards Township’s first Planning Commission included Ken Zettel, Tom Scott, Roger Remilong, Carol Curtis, and Don Dunn.

This process of updating the Master Plan, including a public hearing on May 6, 2019, began in December of 2019. The Edwards Township Planning Commission adopted the updated Master Plan on July 22, 2019. Planning consultants from Grobbel Environmental & Planning Associates were hired to assist the Township in this planning process. During Master Planning, there were many opportunities for residents to provide input. One of the more formal methods used was a written survey of all property owners—distributed in the summer of 2003. The results overwhelmingly indicated that the respondents place a high level of importance on the protection of the Township’s existing rural character (i.e., nearly 90% feel is very important to important) and scenic views (i.e., nearly 84% feel very important to important); the need to improve road construction, safety, and maintenance; the conservation natural resources, including groundwater/drinking water (i.e., 95% very important to important), lakes and stream quality (i.e., over 93% very important to important), streams, forests (i.e., nearly 88%), and wildlife habitat (i.e., nearly 97%). Concerning other related planning questions, the survey results from respondents are similar:

- On the subject of community image, a significant proportion of respondents feel that the Township’s rural character is being deteriorated by junk and other “blights,” and such nuisances are an existing land use problem for the Township to solve.
- Many Township landowners feel that existing roads within Township should be improved by paving (nearly 52% of respondents), and that visibility and intersection safety need to be addressed by Ogemaw County and Township officials and residents (i.e., nearly 50%, with 46% considering it “not a problem”).
- A significant proportion of landowners (i.e., nearly 85% very important to important) feel that voluntary options for farmland preservation should be sought to allow landowners to earn a reasonable return of farmland by staying in active agriculture.

Importantly, when asked directly, nearly 64% of survey respondents feel that Edwards Township should continue to plan and zone at the township level to advance the community’s vision for the future.² Please refer to Appendix A for a complete review of the survey results.

A first Town Hall meeting was held on June 25, 2003. Existing community demographic, land uses, land ownership, and the resource base were addressed. Existing zoning, previous developments, and other uses allowed under the present zoning were also discussed. Significant land use changes and zoning action requests within the past few years were also reviewed.

A second Town Hall public input session meeting was held July 21, 2003 to identify planning

² When asked, “In Michigan planning and zoning are chosen by local units of government, and not all communities plan and/or have zoning regulations. Edwards Township should continue to plan and zone, rather than relying on county land use regulations,” respondents said strongly agree (38.5%); agree (25.0%); undecided (7.5%); disagree (1.25%); strongly disagree (0.0%); and no answer (27.5%).

issues, goals and actions for future land use planning in Edwards Township.³ Four questions were asked of participants, including: 1) what do you like best about Edwards Township; 2) what resources are most important to protect; 3) what are the main issues the Master Plan must address; and 4) what projects would you support to address Master Plan issues? Each participant provided answers to each question, and answers were summarized by the facilitator and presented to the meeting as a whole. Participants were then allowed to prioritize all responses by silently “voting” on each statement.

Residents in attendance indicated that they love the beauty of the Township’s natural resources and rolling topography, and the friendliness of its residents. It is evident people live in Edwards Township because of the rural character, and proximity to but sufficient distance from the influences of bigger city life. Specific features residents enjoy most are: farm and forest lands; wildlife; safety, peace, and quiet; open space, clean water, and rural history. A full summary of responses given at the first Town Hall meeting are located in Appendix C.

The planning process then shifted to the Planning Commissions visioning activities regarding what residents want to see happen with respect to land use in the future. A number of residents said they welcomed the opportunity to be proactive. Some ideas for the future included: an over-riding need to preserve the best of what Edward’s Township has to offer, i.e., productive farms and forests and high environmental quality; a need to regulate junk areas; a need to improve private road development and maintenance processes; a need for additional appropriate commercial development in the area of Lehman Road and M-30 Highway, and the strengthening the existing commercial uses; and the need for services for people and a variety of housing types.

In addition, the Planning Commission met at least bi-monthly from October 2018 to July 2019 to prepare this revised Master Plan, as well as work on current zoning issues. The meetings were advertised and the public invited in accordance with the requirements of the Open Meetings Act, P.A. 267 of 1976 [MCL 15.261 *et seq.*].

The Edwards Township Planning Commission directed the audit and revision of Chapter 1: Introduction; and Chapter 8: Future Land Use Plan, Policies, Goals and Actions during the 2018-2019 Master Plan review and updating process.

³ Sixteen residents attended this meeting facilitated by Christopher Grobbel, PhD, Planner, Grobbel Environmental & Planning Associates.