

Master Plan for the Charter Township of Filer



CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF FILER

2505 Filer City Road • Manistee, MI 49660

August 2009

This Master Plan was prepared by

The Planning Commission of the
Charter Township of Filer

with assistance from

Mead & Hunt, Inc.



www.meadhunt.com

August 2009

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Thanks and Credits

This document is an update to the Master Plan adopted in April 2004, and was prepared by the Planning Commission of the Charter Township of Filer with assistance from Mead & Hunt, Inc. Many thanks go to the members of the Planning Commission who worked steadily to guide this change to the planning direction of the township:

Jennifer Williams, Chair
David Rhodea
Shirley Ball, Township Board Representative
Richard Mark
Gerald Peterson
Terry Lindeman
John Hanson, Secretary

Special thanks and recognition goes to Lynn Kooyers, Zoning Administrator, who provided time, knowledge and background documents in a timely and efficient manner.

Thanks also to the members of the Township Board of Trustees. Members participated in meetings as this plan was written, and will be an important part of implementation. Jim Espvik, Township Supervisor, and Shirley Ball, Township Clerk, have been leaders through the process.

Additional thanks go to the members of the Downtown Development Authority who also invested time and talent in the development of this plan and who will also be in a position to encourage implementation through their actions.

The 2004 Master Plan document, prepared with assistance from Gosling Czubak Engineering Sciences, Inc., provided a solid starting point for this document and some of the text remains intact without modification.

Vision Statement (A statement of ideal conditions)

Residents of the Charter Township of Filer, hereinafter “Filer Township,” are proud of the community’s rich history. The community celebrates the co-location of the Lakefront Industrial Area and the adjacent Filer City and Oak Hill neighborhoods as a reminder of the original lumber mill and associated community established in the second half of the nineteenth century, and a statement of the success of industry. The neighborhoods are a desirable place to live: compact, walkable and well maintained in a traditional neighborhood design pattern. The neighborhood includes a civic center resource for local services and recreation.

The Lakefront Industrial Area activity is dynamic! The community supports the Lakefront Industrial Area which has been able to adapt to the changing economy, improve its environmental footprint, communicate effectively with the local community and employ hundreds of people in secure and well-paid positions. Aesthetic improvements in the public right-of-way have improved the appearance of the area.

The commercial corridor along US-31 is full of businesses which offer a variety of retail, service and entertainment opportunities to the region. Retail choices include a variety of price points and include local artisan shops. Buildings are attractive and well-landscaped, reflecting the rural, wooded character of the area. Businesses are served with a full complement of public services including sewer. Highway traffic moves efficiently and safely along the corridor. Regional recreational attractions and resources strengthen the local economy. A well-marked route brings snowmobilers safely to the commercial corridor from the nearby trail system. Pedestrian and bicycle connections are completed to both Filer City and into the City of Manistee.

Most of the township remains rural with low density residential development served by connecting, public roads. Residential development is carefully designed and located to preserve the natural environment and rural atmosphere on individual sites and in larger, planned developments.

Filer Township is a healthy, active community with sidewalks and trail connections between population centers, employment centers and recreation resources. There are several attractive and well-maintained township parks in Filer Township. In addition, Filer Township partners effectively with other recreation providers including the school district, the City of Manistee, Manistee County and the state and national parks to support regional recreation efforts.

Filer Township operates efficiently and fairly. Staff and volunteers are well-trained and supported. When possible, technology is used to help the staff operate efficiently without the loss of personal service. There is a high level of community involvement in regional and local boards, commissions and committees with lists of people waiting to serve.

Mission Statement (What you do and why)

We embrace our community history in order to:

- 1) Preserve our heritage / remember our past
- 2) Celebrate those things that make us special
- 3) Strengthen our sense of community

We plan proactively in order to:

- 1) Make informed, objective and thoughtful decisions
- 2) Use planning tools to guide the township toward a chosen future
- 3) Be an effective, cooperative partner in joint / regional activities

We make smart and sustainable choices in land use planning in order to:

- 1) Protect limited and irreplaceable natural resources
- 2) Create a community where people can live, work and play
- 3) Make wise use of human resources and public tax dollars
- 4) Balance the variety of needs in the community



CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF FILER

Purpose and Authority to Plan

The Charter Township of Filer is authorized to prepare a Master Plan pursuant to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008, P.A. 33 of 2008, as amended (MCL 125.3801 et seq.). This statute enables a township to prepare a plan to promote local planning and otherwise carry out the purposes of the act. These purposes include planning for development that is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient and economical; considering the character of the planning jurisdiction and its suitability for particular uses, judged in terms of such factors as trends in land and population development; and promoting public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare. It also includes adequate provision for any or all of the following: a system of transportation to lessen congestion on streets, safety from fire and other dangers, light and air, healthful and convenient distribution of population, good civic design and arrangement, and wise and efficient expenditure of public funds.

The Master Plan is no more and no less than a statement of public policy based on a vision of the future as embodied in the statement of township goals. Goals are a statement of how the township wants to look and function in the future. The Land Use Plan, consisting of guiding principles and policies, is the vehicle by which the vision will be attained. The Guiding Principles are especially important because they comprise the basic rules or standards against which all decisions will be measured.

The Master Plan is intended to be general but not too general; specific, but not too specific. It establishes concepts, relationships and patterns of development and circulation in broad-brush fashion rather than legal descriptions so it can be more broadly interpreted than, and can give meaning to, zoning.

To remain viable, the plan must be flexible and dynamic, not static. It will have to respond to change as well as guide it. It will need to be evaluated and amended periodically to keep it fresh and current but each change must be evaluated on its merits.

The Master Plan is the Planning Commission's plan and it alone is charged with interpreting, evaluating, amending and keeping the Plan current. If it becomes stale and outdated, or is ignored, it will not further the vision of the township. If it is used only when convenient, it will not withstand the challenges of law, which demand consistency in its application. It is important to note that plans do not implement themselves; Planning Commissions and Township Boards implement plans.

Finally, all public decisions relating to land use, transportation, and major capital improvements, that can be interpreted to influence the vision, must first be reviewed and acted upon by the Planning Commission. While the Township Board can take action contrary to the Planning Commission's recommendations, the Commission has the authority, according to state law, to evaluate such proposals regarding their consistency with the Master Plan. This gives the Commission the enormous responsibility of making sure that the Master Plan is current and generally consistent with what the public and the Board wants the township to be in the future.

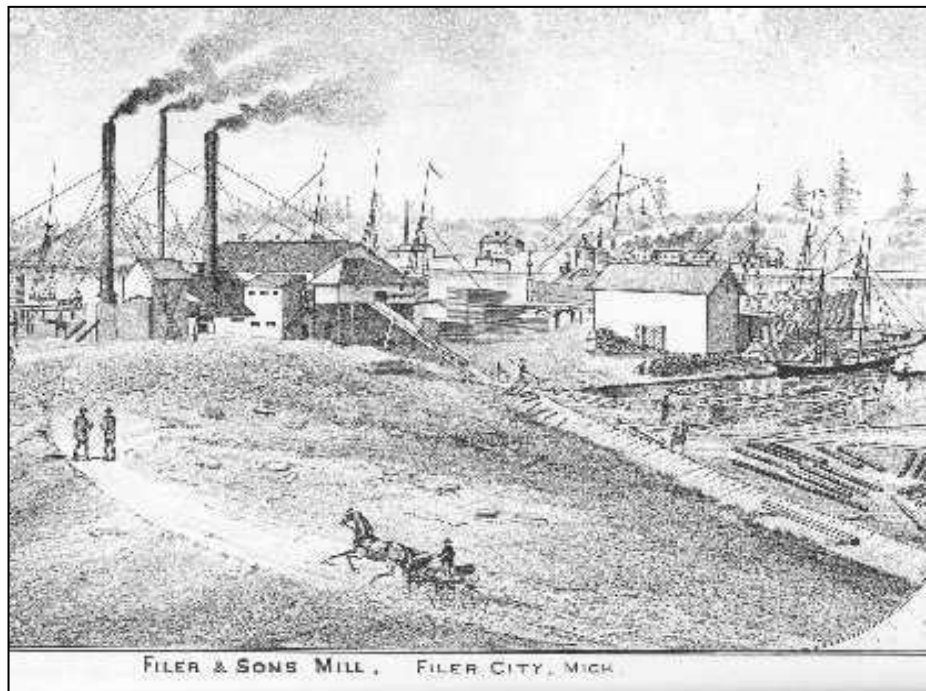
Regional and Historical Setting

The Charter Township of Filer is located on Lake Michigan in Manistee County's southwestern corner, just south of the City of Manistee. The township consists of 16.5 square miles and approximately four miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. The Charter Township of Filer also boasts of almost two miles of Manistee Lake shoreline. It is bordered on the north by the City of Manistee and on the east by Stronach Township. Mason County is to the south and Lake Michigan is to the west.

Lumbering activity began in the area now known as the Charter Township of Filer with the settlement of the Stronach family nearby in 1841. The lumbermen who came to Manistee County around this time were the first purchasers of the majority of land in Filer Township. Major activity commenced in 1867 when the Filer family, at the time one of the largest lumbering operators in Manistee County, moved to today's Filer City area. They built a large mill, platted a village, and commenced to log all the nearby land. About the same time, two other mills were built on Manistee Lake in today's Oak Hill area. With all of this activity, the Township established its own local government in 1868.

Industrial activity has continued to be centered in Filer City. The Filer and Sons mill operated until about 1914. This was replaced in 1917 by a pulp mill. Over the years, this plant has been sold and expanded into a large industrial center.

The Charter Township of Filer provides residents with a quasi-rural lifestyle and offers a high quality of life with a varied four-season recreational climate. The Township's Lake Michigan and Manistee Lake shorelines, as well as its inland lakes and streams provide some of the finest fresh water recreation opportunities in northwestern Michigan.



Urban Form

The Charter Township of Filer is a community with two distinct personalities. The old Company Town, Filer City, and to a lesser degree, Oak Hill, compose an urban place with narrow streets, small lots, and land uses that intermix businesses, industries, and shops with homes. These are compact and walkable neighborhoods because they were developed prior to the advent of the automobile when walking was a necessity and industrial Manistee Lake, one of the township's truly defining elements, was its highway. Auto parking in these areas does not dominate the landscape, instead, parking occupies street edges and small, shared parking lots.

Both Filer City and Oak Hill are historic neighborhoods with historical street patterns and buildings that portray a unique character and identity. These neighborhoods feel like places that have a physical, visual and social character based on the interrelationships of buildings and uses. While Oak Hill has been able to maintain its wonderful residential character, it has always been difficult for Filer City because of the dominance of heavy and obtrusive industry immediately next door. Nonetheless, these are very urban places that were developed more in the character and period of the City of Manistee.

The new township form reveals a contrast between Filer City and Oak Hill. In fact, the memory of Filer City, the growing awareness of public health and the influx of a seasonal population are likely the primary reasons for this change in land use patterns. The result has been very low-density development that generally stretches along road frontages and clearly separates residential uses from commercial and industrial uses. Furthermore, this contemporary pattern of development employs a one-building/one site approach and does not consider how development might relate to another use located next door. This pattern separates even similar and complementary uses to "protect" them from whatever might be located on an adjacent site.

While residential uses are generally tucked into wooded sites and are, therefore, not highly visible from road frontages, commercial development along US-31 exemplifies this one-building/one site approach. Each site accommodates a freestanding commercial use and each use has its own access to the highway, and overly generous parking located immediately in front of the building. This means that more parking is available than is actually needed, greater traffic conflict potential exists and the need to widen the highway is increased. And, there is no provision for walking, except in driving aisles. While commercial development in the township tends to be suburban in character, residential development in the more contemporary areas of the township is very low in density and emulates a rural character, which is probably why the residents elected to live here in the first place.

There is nothing inherently right or wrong about having two distinct community personalities, so long as the servicing implications of this dichotomy are understood and equitably addressed by the township's plans.

Population, Housing and Economic Profile

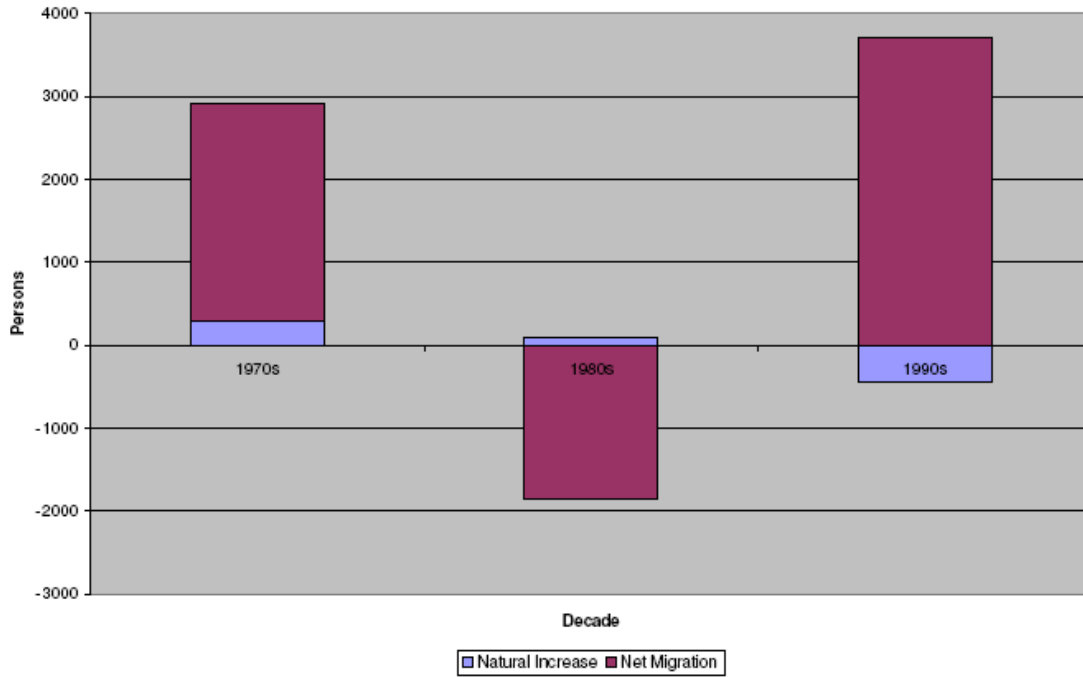
Population and Housing Trends

Population data and projections are available from both the US Census Bureau and the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments (NWMCOG). The US Census 2006 Population Estimate report compiled by the NWMCOG predicts that between 2000 and 2006, the population of Manistee County grew by a total of 540 people or at a rate of 2.2%. The same report estimates that the population in Filer Township increased by six (6) people over the same six-year period. Population in Filer Township has actually declined since 2003 according to the report.

A population projection for Manistee County prepared by the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations at the University of Michigan for the Michigan Department of Transportation in 2007, estimates that the total population of Manistee County will increase from 24,641 in 2000 to 24,827 in 2035. Overall, this is an increase of 186 people in the county over 35 years. The projection estimates a peak population in 2005 of 25,131 followed by a decrease to 24,428 in 2015 and then another period of increase until 2035. These projections suggest that the population in Filer Township will experience a limited amount of population increase in the coming decades.

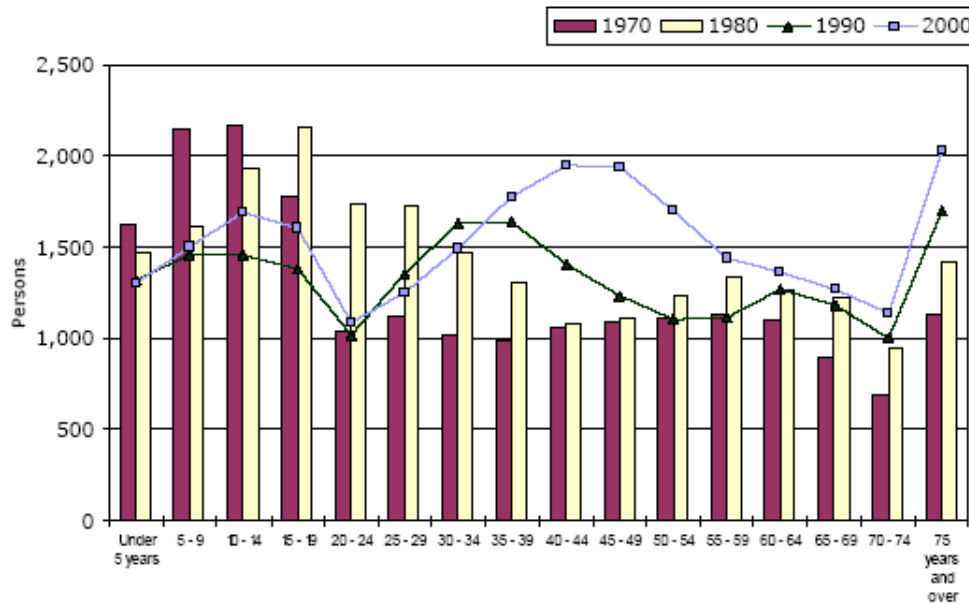
Looking at a thirty (30) year history, Filer Township's population grew in the 1970s by 11.6%, dropped in the 1980s by 8.3% and grew again in the 1990s by 12.3%. The overall result between 1970 and 2000 is a net increase of 287 people or just under 10 people per year. The trend at the county level was similar with an increase in the 1970s of 14.6%, a drop in the 1980s of 7.6% and growth again in the 1990s of 15.3%. Within these blocks of change, a very small percentage was due to natural migration within the existing population (births and deaths). Most of the change was due to net migration of people moving in and out of the county (table 1).

Table 1: Components of Growth in Manistee County 1970 to 2000



The population migration has changed the demographic profile of the county. There are significantly more people in the age groups from 35-54 years in 2000 than there were in any of the three decades before. This suggests that people are coming to Manistee County while they are part of the labor force and are coming to work in the area. The 55-75 population has increased only slightly. The population level in the 20-24 age group remains a constant. The categories from 10-19 have all increased between 1990 and 2000.

Table 2: Population by Age Group in Manistee County



Source: Manistee County, Michigan 2000 Profile
 Prepared by the NWMCOG from the US Bureau of the Census data

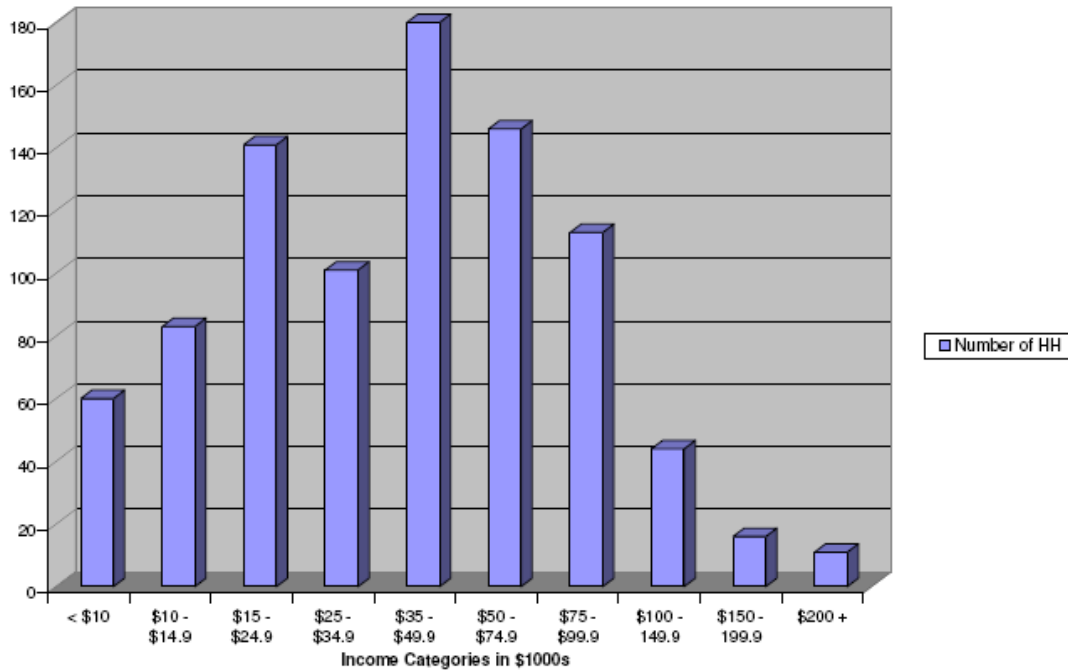
While population was up and down in the thirty years leading up to the 2000 US Census, the number of households and building structures increased annually at both the county and township level. In Filer Township, the number of housing units went from 623 (1970) to 786 (1980) to 885 (1990) to 996 (2000). In Manistee County, even during the population drop of the 1980s, the overall number of households increased by 1% with the highest increase being in one person households. The number of married couple families as a percent of total households decreased during each decade from 70% of total households to 55% in 2000 at the county level.

The household trends in Filer Township did not follow those of the county in the 1990s. The increase in households during the 1990s included an increase in the number of family households, married couple households and non-family households – all by 15-17%. At the same time, there was a small increase (3%) in the number of households with children under the age of 18.

The income of residents of Filer Township also increased. There was a drop in the number of households in income categories below \$35,000 and an increase in the number of households in the income categories over \$35,000. Most significantly, the number of households included in the income category \$75,000-\$99,999 increased by 528% in the 1990s. Overall, the median household income increased from \$27,031 in 1990 to \$40,972 in 2000. Even when the measurement was made in 1999 dollars, the increase in median household income was almost 17%. The township’s median income was only 92% of the state’s median household income number (\$44,667), yet it was notably higher than the county’s median income of \$34,208. After the changes, however, the range of incomes was still a fairly balanced curve with the largest number of households in the income category \$35,000-\$49,999 (table 3).

It is also important to note that while the trend showed a reduction in the number of households in lower income brackets and an increase in the number of households in the higher income levels during the 1990s, the 2000 US Census still counted 30 families and 161 individuals (including 28 senior citizens and 44 children) in Filer Township living below the poverty level. The number of people in each of these categories represented an increase since the 1990 US Census count of the same groups.

Table 3: Households (HH) per Income Category in 2000, Filer Township, Manistee Co.

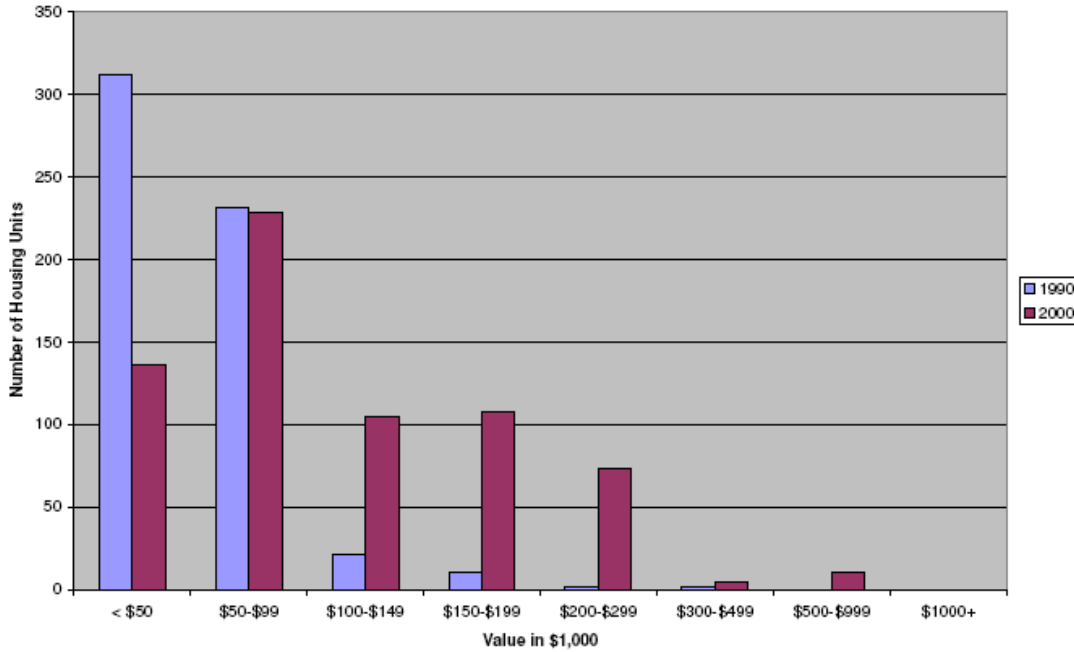


Source: Manistee County, Michigan 2000 Profile
 Prepared by the NWMCOG from the US Bureau of the Census data

The US Census notes the number of housing units that are used seasonally, occasionally or for recreational use. In 1980, 1990 and 2000, these units were counted in Filer Township and accounted for 5%-6% of the total number of housing units in each count. As the rate of housing units increased overall, the number of seasonal housing units increased proportionally. According to the 2000 US Census, the total number of seasonal housing units in the township was 64 out of 996 or 6.4%. Although the seasonal population is part of the overall housing picture, it is a small percentage and growing at a rate equal to the overall housing growth.

Although the percentage of seasonal housing is not changing significantly, there is a notable change in the cost of the new homes being built in the township.

Table 4: Value of Owner Occupied Housing Units: 1990 and 2000



Source: Manistee County, Michigan 2000 Profile
 Prepared by the NWMCOG from the US Bureau of the Census data

The median value of owner-occupied housing units increased from \$48,400 in 1990 to \$87,700 in 2000. When compared in constant 2000 dollars, the increase measured 41.8%. Increases in the number of homes valued from \$100,000 to \$300,000 were significant. The housing stock valued at less than \$50,000 dropped by more than half. Some of the same units likely increased in value and simply changed categories based on value. There was very little increase in renter-occupied housing units during that time, indicating very few conversions from owner- to renter-occupied units. New housing units were likely in the higher value range.

The market and social forces in the region have caused a demographic shift in the profile of Filer Township. Income and housing data indicates an overall shift to higher incomes and more valuable housing units. At the same time, there is a balanced range of incomes represented in the community. The township's land use decisions have a direct impact on the opportunity to provide for a range of housing options for residents.

Employment and the Economy

Manistee County lost almost 500 people from its labor force during the 1990s, which included a reduction in the number of people employed and unemployed. The size of the labor force grew from 1990-2000 by 21.5%, the number of people employed increased by 28% and the number of people unemployed dropped by 33%. The average annual unemployment rate in 2000 was 6.1% which was down from 12.5% in 1980 and 11% in 1990. Specific township data is available through the 2000 US Census report. That report shows the unemployment rate was lower in Filer Township than the county in both 1990 (3.7%) and 2000 (2.6%).

The 2000 Census Worker Flow Report provides data about where Filer Township's residents work. The report shows that 75% of Filer Township's workforce is employed in these three locations: the City of Manistee (36.4%), Filer Township (23.6%) and Manistee Township (14%). Stronach Township is fourth on the list at 3.6%. The average travel time to work was 15.8 minutes. Of the total number employed, almost 10% reported carpooling to work and 19 people reported walking to work. The concentration of workers near their place of employment suggests the opportunity for non-motorized and group-transit transportation options to work.

The 1997 Economic Census summarized by the NWMCOG indicates that there were 31 manufacturing establishments with 1,300 employees and an annual payroll of \$48,416,000 in Manistee County. The second largest category for number of employees was in the category of retail trade with 947 people spread across 116 establishments with an annual payroll of \$16,272,000. The third largest employer by number was the category of accommodations & food services with 671 people employed in 73 establishments and an annual average payroll of \$5,221,000. These numbers result in an average annual income of \$37,243 in manufacturing, \$17,182 in retail trade and \$7,781 in accommodations and food services.

Although there are conditions within each industry that can affect the specific calculations, the overall trend shows that people who are joining the Manistee County workforce are finding the largest number of jobs in the manufacturing industry with an income that is more than double the next largest employment sector.

If the trends at the county level are applied to the township, an impact from Filer Township's Lakefront Industrial Area activity is anticipated on several different levels. The local industry provides a significant number of jobs with statistically higher wages to employees and also provides tax payments to the township. A conversion of this activity to green space over time would likely be felt in several ways: loss of jobs, loss of wages and loss of public revenue from tax payments. None of these would be a desirable outcome.

Industry owners have chosen to locate in the Manistee area, including Filer Township, for 150 years because of natural resources and transportation systems. The availability of water and rail transportation systems, including the deep water port, is a key factor in locating heavy industrial operations. The forest resources initially attracted lumber mills to the area in the mid-1800s.

Water and mineral resources including salt or brine beneath the earth's surface now attract industry to the area. Economic factors and regional resources drive business decisions to locate in the area. Local land use decisions and availability of an appropriate workforce are other factors that contribute to the business operations but are not key factors in the decision to locate in the region.

Many ideas have been raised during community input sessions (focus groups) that would improve the residential areas of Filer City and Oak Hill. They include improvements to the physical appearance of the area through streetscapes, landscaping and identification signs. They also include the addition or improvement of neighborhood amenities such as sidewalks and pathways, parks and a civic center resource. No comments were made to indicate a desire to close the Lakefront Industrial Area operations.

Based on the data available from US Census reports and economic studies combined with the input received from the public during this process, this plan amendment proposes a change of policy direction regarding the Lakefront Industrial Area.

During the twenty (20) year planning horizon of this Master Plan, the Lakefront Industrial Area will be a part of the community. The plan will identify opportunities to improve the physical appearance of the area and also to improve the relationship between the residential and industrial neighbors. For some this may be expressed as a celebration and support of the Lakefront Industrial Area activity as a part of the community's history and economic success. For others it may be viewed as a more pragmatic approach that accepts the Lakefront Industrial Area activity as an inevitable part of the community over the twenty (20) year life of this plan. Regardless of personal opinion, the goals, policies and action statements included here are revised to reflect the policy change.

Postulated Goal Statements

The following statement of goals was derived from two discussions with the Charter Township of Filer Planning Commission on May 3 and June 7, 2000 and revised after a public open house on April 29, 2008. They are based on the principle that the township has two distinct characters or parts, one rural, the other urban, and that maintaining the character of both are essential to the future well being of the community.

Quality of Life

To protect and enhance the quality of life in Filer Township which is defined by a variety of attributes including historic preservation, natural resource protection, attractiveness both in its natural beauty and in its built environment, a rural atmosphere, a range of housing options, an efficient transportation system, a healthy commercial and industrial economy and a healthy community.

Growth

To provide opportunities for good design, mixed-use, place making and flexibility to drive the growth of the township.

Rural Character

To promote development patterns that preserve the township's rural landscape and appearance by preserving open space, wildlife corridors, viewsheds and opportunities for farming.

Urban Form

To establish consistent relationships between buildings and roads that create a sense of place and a meaningful urban character. Also, to encourage compact, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods within the township that provide opportunities for residents to work, shop and play.

US-31 Corridor Visual Character

To maintain the gateway appearance of the US-31 corridor in areas that are currently rural and undeveloped.

Housing

To encourage a variety of housing, including affordable housing, to satisfy the lifecycle needs of township residents.

Urban Services

To provide the full complement of urban services to the north US - 31 shopping district, Oak Hill and Filer City in the interests of protecting the health, welfare and safety of the most urban parts of the township. Also, to maintain a level of services elsewhere in the township commensurate with the demands of density.

Civic Space

To promote the establishment of a historically significant public space that is the focus of civic life in the township.

Economic Development

To encourage and support a healthy, diverse and sustainable local economy through the efficient provision of urban services (including joint service arrangements), cooperation and communication with local businesses, support for local and start-up businesses in commercial areas and coordination and participation in regional economic initiatives.

Heritage/Culture

To protect and build on the historical, archeological and cultural character of the township.

Open Space Preservation

To encourage the development of planned communities within the township that preserve and incorporate natural features and maintain natural patterns and connections while protecting permanent open space.

Agricultural Land Preservation

To maintain opportunities for farming while preserving the rural character and appearance of the township.

Transportation

To preserve and enhance a complete transportation system which includes the safe and efficient movement of motorized vehicles, the provision of non-motorized transportation options, the maintenance of rail service and connections to regional recreation networks.

Industrial Activity

To recognize and support the existing industrial activity in the township as part of the area's history and as a contributor to the area's economy. Work cooperatively with industrial businesses to maximize public safety and the compatibility of land uses and maintain an open line of communication between local government and industry leaders.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

To emphatically endorse and encourage the practice of working cooperatively with other units of government including the City of Manistee, the communities around Manistee Lake, Manistee County and other service agencies including the Manistee County Road Commission, the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Alliance for Economic Success and the Manistee Area Schools.

Guiding Principles and Policies for Community Planning and Design

When we look at the most beautiful towns and cities of the past, we are always impressed by a feeling that they are somehow organic...Each of these towns grew as a whole, under its own laws of wholeness...and we can feel this wholeness, not only at the largest scale, but in every detail: in the restaurants, in the sidewalks, in the houses, shops, markets, roads, parks, gardens, and walls. Even in the balconies and ornaments.

Christopher Alexander,
A New Theory of Urban Design

The following are the planning principles and policies of the Charter Township of Filer.

1. Consider every development as part of the larger neighborhood and community.

Contemporary community development is often planned and developed independent from neighboring sites and the larger community. Site development preferences expressed through site development regulations can dictate that every site function as an independent entity. Each site is required to provide its own parking, resulting in more land being used than is collectively needed. Each site has direct access to the public road creating less efficient and more dangerous streets. Each site has its own unused yards. Each building can look as though it has no relationship, either architecturally or functionally, to buildings on adjacent sites.

Require each development to demonstrate how it relates to and is part of the larger neighborhood and community and how it will become part of the development and natural patterns on adjacent sites.

Encourage the integration of new development with existing development so that everything is connected and a part of something else.

Restrict “leap frog” development patterns through appropriate use of zoning regulations and timing of utility extensions.

2. Make things connect. Recognizing that natural systems most always extend beyond the limits of a single site, these features should be connected and employed as the framework for future development.

Connect the valuable resources that define the township and give it character including lakes, wetlands, stream corridors, viewsheds, parks, and historical features.

Require the connection of and protection of natural environmental corridors as the organizing structure, as greenway infrastructure, for future development.

Insure that greenways are sufficiently wide to serve as wildlife corridors.

Wherever possible interconnect activity centers and natural and historical elements with pedestrian walkways and bike paths.

Interconnect new projects with existing development, via roads, shared drives and pedestrian accesses, wherever possible, as means to facilitate emergency access and minimize the number of direct access points to major roads and Highways.

3. Create a “sense of place.” Make things look like you want them to look. A few communities understand why they are great places. Others haven’t a clue about what makes them unique and memorable. In still others, they don’t value place making because they are just a place to sleep. Why do we have to give any thought to looking like an identifiable and memorable place? Unfortunately, most communities are more concerned about how they will be affected by traffic than how things will appear from the vantage point of the road.

Require that development plans define and reflect the natural, historical and cultural characteristics that make the community unique.

Establish a physical design framework, a look, which guides developers and the public in the planning and design of buildings and sites so they look like they belong to the larger whole.

Identify, preserve and restore the township’s heritage, wherever possible.

Protect and incorporate valuable natural resources as elements of all development plans.

Create a community or civic focus as the social center for the township.

Develop and refurbish places to live in urban service areas using traditional neighborhood design principles that create identifiable neighborhood places.

Minimize the visual impacts created by wireless communications facilities from road and residential vantage points by encouraging the use of existing structures, collocation of antennas and the use of colors and materials that camouflage towers.

4. Create land use patterns that foster convenience and safety and result in the least demand for supporting services and infrastructure. Land use patterns dictate the type, scale and nature of public services and facilities. The more development is spread out, the more cost is associated with serving it.

Create development patterns that tightly mix uses for the sake of convenience and reductions in travel demand.

Confine pure commercial uses to areas already zoned commercial or to infill commercial sites and accommodate new commercial development in areas requiring rezoning to be part of mixed use developments.

Establish increasingly compact districts rather than allowing development to strip along roadways.

5. Maintain the rural character and appearance of the highway and road corridors. With the exception of the commercial district, the highway and road environs are rural in appearance. This quality will change if not controlled and managed with the understanding of what is to be achieved. Commercial districts, on the other hand, tend to feature parking lots as their visual roadside focus. Buildings are set far back into the site as a backdrop.

Insure that the development of road and highway frontages incorporates and protects the existing rural character of rural road frontages.

Establish a pattern for commercial development that features buildings as the primary roadside image and narrows the distances between buildings on either side of the road.

6. Keep streets and highways from becoming barriers. Wide streets and highways often create barriers for pedestrians, causing residents to become increasingly dependent on the automobile for mobility or being isolated if the auto is not a transit option. The young and elderly are especially disenfranchised where the auto is the only form of mobility. While cars will continue to have a significant presence in the community, they should neither dictate how people live nor restrict mobility. Moreover, street width is directly related to the number of access points to them. The more private driveway access points there are, the more street width is required to both carry traffic and accommodate turning movements. More and narrower streets with good access control have proven to carry more traffic with the least amount of impact on neighborhoods and loss of accessibility. And, land use and access can be planned to minimize road width, thus making friendlier pedestrian places.

Generally limit local road width in urban and rural areas to two lanes plus single turn lanes at intersections.

Wherever possible, employ or encourage on-road parking on both sides of neighborhood streets and other devices to slow traffic.

Except for roads that intersect the highway, require short intersection curb radii in urban service areas to facilitate pedestrian accessibility.

Establish patterns of land use and access that optimize the spacing and number of direct access points to allow for the maintenance of the present highway width throughout the US-31 corridor.

Limit direct access to the highway to well-spaced, public or private streets as a means to reduce congestion, minimize crashes, maintain capacity, minimize surface width and improve traffic safety.

Always encourage the use of alternative accesses in lieu of direct access to the highway.

Where direct highway access cannot be avoided, require an access management plan that calls for well-spaced, shared access points and future compliance with access standards.

7. Establish transportation choices. The township has virtually no place for pedestrians to walk and limited transit options.

Require sidewalks and/or bikeways on at least one side of all roads in urban service areas.

Cooperate with MDOT in developing a regional trail within the US-31 corridor.

Explore improvements in public transportation in cooperation with the City of Manistee and the school district to facilitate public transit choice and accessibility throughout the region.

Encourage the maintenance of rail service and all rights-of-way for future transportation use.

8. Provide the full complement of housing. Certainly, not everyone will wish to live in the same house for as long as they live in Filer Township and then elect to move away from familiar surroundings when their housing needs change. Likewise, business and industry need employees who in turn need to live somewhere nearby. Also, demographic changes indicate that households are becoming smaller which creates a new demand for one- and two-person households. A range of land use densities will allow for a range of housing options. Aging in place, workforce housing, limiting land consumption and choices in housing prices and styles are all reasons to provide a full complement of housing. Filer Township can provide the foundation for housing options by providing a range of housing densities and by providing the infrastructure that is necessary for small lot and multi-family residential housing options.

Provide opportunities for a wide range of housing types to satisfy the lifecycle needs of township residents of all income levels.

Consider a range of quality, affordable housing types that cater to the needs of the regional workforce.

When municipal water and sewer services are provided for the US-31 commercial corridor, consider design and capacity issues for future residential service as well.

Review the Future Land Use map annually to assure that there is land designated for future small lot residential and multiple family residential developments in areas near commercial and employment centers with access to transportation options.

9. Think regionally, act locally. Some decisions are just too big to be made exclusively by local governments. Virtually every decision will have at least some effect on the larger region but some such decisions must be made by local units. All decisions should be made to serve the best interests of the larger region as well as the township.

Always consider the regional implications of local decisions, no matter how small decisions may seem, and act responsibly in the region's and township's best interest.

Cooperate with municipal neighbors, the county and state in discussions regarding the US-31 corridor including the implementation of recommendations of the US-31 Corridor Management Plan dated February 2004.

10. Engage the public in planning. While the tendency is for communities to plan for stuff like buildings, roads, parks and the like, the real purpose of planning is to plan for people and how and where they will live, shop, work and play. Thus, people having a stake in the community should be continuously and productively engaged in its planning.

Program and design public involvement (not just public hearings) as a regular component of all decision making.

11. Provide urban services that represent the best value for residents and businesses and reflect the demands of density. Public water is already available to the urban portions of the township and sewer service is needed. Great care must be taken to objectively evaluate alternative methods of sewage service/treatment to insure that the approach employed represents the best value for the ultimate users of the service, in balance with environmental effects, whether provided by the township or some other entity.

Cooperate with neighboring municipalities to objectively evaluate alternative public service delivery options.

Use public utilities (sewer and water) as tools to encourage development within urban service areas.

Require all local and collector roads in urban service areas to be paved with bituminous or similar hard surfaces and, with the exception of arterial roads, require gravel surfaces in areas designated as rural service areas.

12. Maintain the character of rural and agricultural areas. While much of the rural area of the township has been divided into large residential lots and is no longer farmed, the character of these areas has not yet been significantly altered. The character of these areas should be protected for as long as possible.

Encourage the clustering of development as a means to preserve valuable natural resources and open space.

Create incentives to encourage the incorporation of desirable views and vistas, woodlands, farmlands and the protection of ridgelines into development plans.

Encourage development in areas furthest from the urban service area to be delayed for as long as possible by requiring large lot developments.

13. Recognize the Lakefront Industrial Area as an integral part of the history and economy of Filer Township; and balance the needs of industry with the needs of the adjacent community residents for health, safety and quality of life.

Work cooperatively with industrial businesses. Maintain an open line of communication between local government and industry leaders.

Maximize public safety and the compatibility of land uses.

Improve the physical appearance of the area through improvements in the public right-of-way.

14. Protect the public from industrial hazards. The township harbors an industry that processes and transports sour gas and oil containing high levels of hydrogen sulfide. Unless responsibly and prudently regulated, these activities could represent a significant public health hazard.

Establish and enforce responsible standards for the release of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) at wellheads, processing facilities and pipelines.

Establish and maintain separation distances between wellheads, processing facilities, pipelines and residential areas and places where the public congregates, that minimize the potential for hazards.

Future Land Use

The Future Land Use Map is a graphic representation of the desired future land use development pattern in the township twenty years or more in the future. It is not intended to match the current zoning classifications or land use pattern. Instead it is developed as a guide for making decisions related to changes in township zoning regulations and public infrastructure investments over time.

A Park/Public/Tax Exempt map is also provided to identify properties that are currently publicly-owned or tax exempt. This includes properties owned by the township and the school district. It is intended to be used as a planning reference tool.

The following descriptions represent the land use intent within the areas designated on the Future Land Use Map:

Urban Residential – Areas designated urban residential correlate with the older residential areas of the township and are intended to accommodate a variety of housing types ranging from attached and detached single-family to multiple-family housing. These richly historical areas are urban in nature with a distinct character that reinforces the feeling of neighborhood cohesion rather than a collection of unrelated houses. They are intended to infill with development of the same character as Oak Hill and Filer City with smaller lots; sidewalks; narrow, paved streets with tree lawns built on a fine grid street pattern; alleys; on-street parking; and garages located in the rear yards, making buildings the prominent features of neighborhood streets. Public water service is currently available in this area. Public sanitary sewer service is not available and is not anticipated in this area in the next ten years. It may be necessary in the future for public health reasons if on-site systems fail.

Allowable densities in these areas are intended to range from a low of three units per acre for single-family housing to a high of 10 units per acre for multiple-family housing with flexibility allowed within these parameters by special use permit and PUD. Public and institutional uses including parks, churches, schools, historical features and essential services are intended to be allowed in urban residential areas, provided they are compatible and in scale with surrounding residential development.

The existing housing stock in Filer City should be maintained. There may be financial opportunities and incentives to improve or rehabilitate the housing stock and strengthen the general character of the neighborhood. In any case, this area needs to be protected from the effects of heavy industry by insuring that any future industrial expansions are sensitive to, compatible with and buffered from the residential neighborhood to minimize visual access and other potentially adverse effects.

Residential – Areas designated residential consist of low-density detached single-family housing that does not offer the full complement of urban services. These areas are intended to have on-site septic systems, private wells and rural roads with improved surfaces, shoulders and ditch sections. These areas are not intended to have publicly maintained parks but should have access to the township's park system via an interconnecting trail network. Here, the rural appearance is intended to be perpetuated and tract subdivisions stretched along roadways are to be avoided by the creative placement of structures and

appropriate screening to minimize the appearance of homes from road frontages. Public and institutional uses that can be accommodated with on-site utilities and essential services are intended to support the needs of residential neighborhoods.

Densities are intended to range from not more than two residential units per gross acre for standard subdivisions, condominiums and land divisions to three units per gross acre where clustering is employed, provided such developments have approved waste disposal systems and at least 40% of the land area is maintained as open space correlating with valuable natural features such as wetlands, steep slopes, mature trees and shorelines. Where clustering is employed, lot sizes are intended to be based on the capability of the soils to accommodate on-site wastewater treatment. The intent is to preserve larger tracts of interconnected open space in residential areas. Such open space is not intended to be used or maintained as public land unless it exceeds an area of 10 contiguous acres. These areas are intended to be usable by residents of the development and to be connected to other existing or potential open space preservation areas. Connected open space preservation areas are intended to be protected by conservation easements or other appropriate measures.

Forest Residential – Forest residential areas are rural in nature and have a very low density of one residential unit per 10 acres. They are intended for detached single-family housing that is serviced by on-site sewer and water utilities and rural road sections and the keeping of limited domestic livestock such as fowl and horses. Larger areas of inter-connected open space, and especially trees, are intended to be preserved by the clustering and positioning of housing. A 20% density bonus is intended as an incentive to preserve open space and natural features provided developments have approved wastewater disposal systems and valuable natural features are preserved that interconnect with larger tracts of open space. Community or cluster residential wastewater treatment systems are not intended to be employed in these areas. With the exception of essential services, forest and game preserves and golf courses, uses that require public maintenance like parks are not intended to be located in forest residential areas.

Commercial – Commercial areas generally correlate with the existing retail development located along US-31 and within the urban residential neighborhood area around Filer City.

Along the US-31 corridor, the commercial area is intended to accommodate commercial uses that augment the shopping center character of the corridor while incorporating an attractive, rural appearance to the development design. The corridor commercial area is also intended to have limited and/or well-spaced access to US-31 to minimize traffic conflicts and the need for highway widening. This area is served by public water and is intended to be served by public sewer service in the near future. Growth within this district is expected to occur in an orderly fashion as public services become available.

Generally, this area is expected to contain regional shopping center type uses that cater to the shopping needs of the greater Manistee community. However, in order to promote a healthy, local economy; a unique, rural atmosphere; and a broad choice of price points and retail choices for consumers along the corridor, Filer Township will promote opportunities for local artisans, restaurants and start-up businesses along the US-31 commercial corridor.

It may also contain high density, multi-family residential developments such as senior housing or apartment complexes either as an exclusively residential development or as part of a planned, mixed-use development. The co-location of high density residential uses and commercial activity offers the availability of public services and may reduce the traffic impact on the corridor through proximity to commercial services and job centers as well as direct access to transit routes.

Commercial development in and around the urban residential area is intended to provide neighborhood goods and services and commercial activities that do not require locations with high visibility and high traffic volumes. The uses will be compatible with the residential neighborhood environment. Here also, Filer Township will actively support initiatives to encourage local artisans, restaurants and start-up businesses.

Limited Industrial – The Limited Industrial area is an area intended to complement the adjacent Lakefront Industry area with light industrial uses that do not need direct access to the waterfront or rail service. It may also, over time, contain an incidental amount of office and commercial development. Because this area is adjacent to the urban residential and residential areas, the uses in this area must be designed to be compatible both aesthetically and functionally with the adjacent residential uses. These areas are intended to accommodate clean industries, support facilities that have a quality appearance from the road and meet high-level environmental performance standards. Such areas are intended to be serviced by public sewer and water utilities, when available.

Lakefront Industry – The Lakefront Industrial area correlates with the existing industrial land and buildings located on the shores of Manistee Lake. This area is intended to accommodate larger employers that depend on the lake or rail to satisfy their transportation needs. This area is intended to be serviced by public utilities.

Heavy industry was the catalyst for the original settlements of Filer City and Oak Hill and it continues to have a significant and growing presence in the township. As is the case throughout the entire township, the future of lakefront property uses should be determined based upon the best long-term interests of the township with regard to its economic well-being and quality of life. In the event that industrial land becomes vacant, the township should consider options and opportunities, including industrial and manufacturing developments, clean industry, office, residential, institutional and expansions that are consistent with the long-term health and vitality of the township.

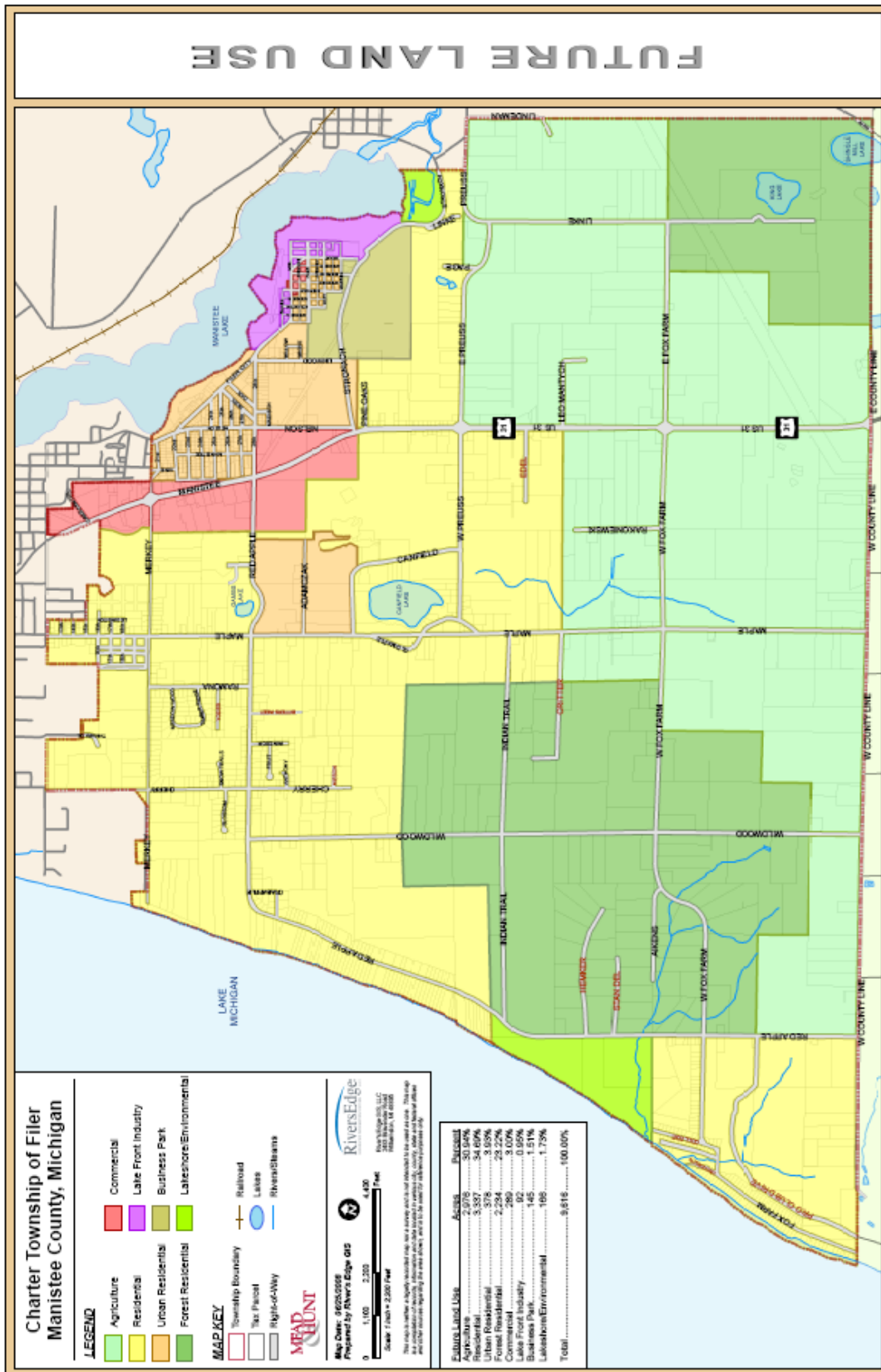
Agriculture – Though only a few operations remain, farming is intended to be encouraged for as long as possible with minimum conflicts from residential uses. In order to minimize conflicts, the residential density in agricultural areas is intended to be one unit per five acres and farming operations are intended to be small, providing for such limited agricultural uses as the raising of farm animals, the production and sale of agricultural crops such as fruits, grain, vegetables, greenhouse plants, trees and nursery plants, related farming activities, roadside stands and home-based businesses.

In agricultural areas, rural road sections are intended, and the clustering of housing is encouraged, provided residential units have access to an improved road (limited access allowed to US-31, however)

and approved on-site wastewater treatment is provided. Clustering is encouraged both to protect natural resources and to provide for the continuation of farming. With the exception of essential services, and privately owned golf courses, uses requiring public maintenance such as public parks and institutional buildings are not intended to be permitted in agricultural areas. Community or cluster residential wastewater treatment facilities are not intended to be employed in agricultural areas.

Lakeshore/Environment – These areas are essentially lakeshore protection areas that are either owned by the township or are wetlands that need protection. These are high amenity areas that will remain as permanent open space and view sites. The only improvements that are intended to be allowed in these areas are to be recreational in nature.

Figure 1: Future Land Use Map



Zoning Plan

Relationship to the Master Plan

The Filer Township Master Plan sets forth the Goals, Policies and Implementation plans for growth and development in Filer Township over the next twenty (20) years. It includes specific goals and guiding principles in land use as it relates to open space preservation, housing, commercial development and industrial activity. It also establishes a guide for the township's role in providing public services such as municipal infrastructure and recreation facilities. The Master Plan will be reviewed every five years or more frequently if significant changes prompt earlier consideration. This chapter is intended to provide a specific connection between the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance and provide guidance with regard to future changes to the Zoning Ordinance.

Districts and Dimensional Standards

Following are five general categories within which the eight zoning districts in Filer Township are organized. The general purposes of each of these categories are also indicated while the specific details can be found in the Filer Township Zoning Ordinance. Specific references are provided to facilitate the connection.

Rural Residential Districts

The following zoning districts are considered "rural districts":

- Article 37—Agricultural Residential District (AR)
- Article 35—Forest Recreational Residential (FR)

These districts are designed to allow for low density residential development in areas of the township while preserving opportunities for agriculture, significant areas of forested land, the preservation of open space and environmental features. Agriculture and limited recreational activities are permitted in addition to single family residential dwelling units which are permitted on a minimum of five (AR) or ten (FR) acres. The land zoned within these districts is generally aligned with the areas designated "Agriculture" or "Forest Residential" on the Future Land Use Map.

Residential Districts

- Article 45—High Density Residential (R-1)
- Article 40—Medium Density Residential (R-2)

These districts are designed to allow for more dense, single-family residential development in certain areas of the township. Multiple-family dwellings and structures are also permitted through a special use permit. Municipal and institutional uses are also permitted with a special use permit including churches and schools. Both districts have a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet or 15,000 square feet if public sewer and water service is provided. The land zoned within these districts is generally aligned with the areas designated "Residential" (R-2) or "Urban Residential" (R-1) on the Future Land Use Map.

Commercial District

Article 55—General Commercial District (C)

This single commercial district is designed to accommodate a broad range of retail and general commercial activities—both regional commercial activities and neighborhood services. There are no uses other than accessory uses permitted by right in the commercial district. All uses require a special use permit. Included within this district is also the use category “Planned Elderly Community for persons 55 years of age or older.” There is no minimum lot size but a minimum building area of 800 square feet with front and back setback requirements. The land zoned within this district is generally aligned with the areas designated “Commercial” on the Future Land Use Map which includes a large area along US-31 and a smaller area in the Filer City neighborhood.

Industrial Districts

Article 60—Limited Industrial District (LI)

Article 67—Lakefront Industrial District (LKI)

The basic purpose of these industrial districts are to provide a location on and near Manistee Lake and the existing rail line for the location of manufacturing, transportation, oil and gas processing and wholesale trade operations. Minimum lot size ranges from two to two and one-half acres with setbacks required from the Manistee Lake shoreline and from the adjacent Wetland Conservation District boundary. The land zoned within these districts is generally the same as the land designated “Lake Front Industry” and “Limited Industrial” on the Future Land Use Map.

Conservation District

Article 25—Wetland Conservation District (WC)

The basic purpose of this district is to protect wetlands adjacent and contiguous to Manistee Lake. Uses in this district are limited to game areas and open space. Boat launch and recreation parks may be permitted through a special use permit. There is no minimum lot size requirement but a note is made that the land area must be large enough to accommodate the proposed use and be under single ownership. The land zoned within this district is generally the same as the land designated “Lakeshore/Environmental” on the Future Land Use Map.

Table 5: Dimensional Standards

	Minimum Lot Area	Minimum Lot Width	Minimum Yards: Front (F) Side (S) Rear (R)	Maximum Building Height	Maximum Ground Floor Coverage
WC Wetland Conservation	None ¹	none	none	none	none
R1 High Density Residential	20,000 sq/ft ¹	100'	35' (F) 10' (S) ² 35' (R)	35' or two (2) stories	Minimum= 720 sq. ft.
R2 Medium Density Residential	20,000 sq/ft ³	100'	35' (F) 10' (S) ² 35' (R)	35' or two (2) stories	Minimum= 720 sq. ft.
AR Agricultural-Residential	5 acres	208'	50' (F) 20' (S) ⁴ 50' (R)	40' or three (3) stories	Minimum= 720 sq. ft.
FR Forest Recreational	10 acres	297'	50' (F) ⁵ 30' (S) ⁴ 50' (R)	40' or three (3) stories	Minimum= 720 sq. ft.
C Commercial	none	30'	35'(F) 5'(S) ⁶ 20'(R)	35'	Minimum= 800 sq. ft.
LI Limited Industrial	2 acres	200'	35'(F) 20'(S) 35'(R)	45'	none
LKI Lakefront Industrial	2.5 acres	200'	45'(F) ⁷ 20'(S) 45'(R)	none	none

¹ 31.25.2504(E): Minimum land area for the use is large enough, and under one ownership, to accommodate the proposed uses and structures without endangering or compromising the intent and purpose of this district.

² Corner lot requires 35' from the side yard on the road.

³ or 15,000 sq./ft. if public water service is available.

⁴ Corner lot requires 50' from the side yard on the road.

⁵ A waterfront yard of not less than 100' measured from the normal high water line is required.

⁶ May be reduced to zero with appropriate fire construction provisions.

⁷ Fifty (50) lineal feet setback from the water's edge of the Manistee Lake shoreline is required. A 200' setback from the boundary is required from the WC district if the parcel is contiguous.

Transportation Plan – Functional Classification

The transportation plan consists of one major arterial road (US-31), urban and rural collector roads, and urban and rural local roads. The plan also advocates the employment of access management to minimize the amount of future roadway needed to satisfy travel demands.

Principal Arterial

US-31 is classified as a Principal Arterial under the National Functional Classification System. It is also on both the National Highways of Significance System and the Priority Commercial Network.

US-31 is the only Principal Arterial in the system. Its primary function is to carry relatively high volumes of traffic, medium to long distances, to and through the township. It is intended that arterial roads offer only very limited direct land access, primarily at road intersections and shared commercial driveways, that accesses be well spaced or alternative access be provided, that major intersections be signalized, and that no on-street parking be allowed. Arterials are primarily intended to carry through traffic, not to provide direct access to individual homes and businesses. Limiting the number and type of direct access points will provide for less conflict and safer travel if the road width remains as narrow as possible, except at intersections where turning lanes may be warranted to facilitate traffic movement.

US-31 Corridor Management Plan, February 2004

The US-31 Corridor Management Plan, completed in February 2004, was prepared for Filer Township, the City of Manistee, Manistee Township, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, the Manistee County Road Commission, Manistee County, the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments and the Michigan Department of Transportation. Filer Township supports the Corridor Management Plan as a tool to improve safety and preserve efficiency along the US-31 corridor. It contains both specific recommendations for individual properties and general recommendations for a number of areas along the corridor. The technical provisions of the document support the policy goals of this master plan. It includes a model US-31 overlay zoning district which is expected to be placed over the existing zoning regulations for all parcels within 350 feet of the US-31 right-of-way.

Collector Roads

Urban collectors such as Merkey Road and 28th Street are intended to carry moderate volumes of traffic relatively short distances, collecting traffic from urban local streets and distributing it to other collectors and arterials. These are intended to be built to an urban standard with paved surfaces, curb and gutter, piped storm drainage rather than ditches, and associated sidewalks, bikeways or trails. Urban collector roads are intended to be two to four lanes in width providing for two moving lanes of traffic plus on-street parking. Turning lanes are warranted at major intersections. Access points are intended to be adequately spaced to maintain traffic capacity. Wherever possible direct access points to collectors should be limited to roads and shared driveways. Design practices and features are encouraged that slow traffic to less than 35 miles per hour.

Rural collectors are intended to carry relatively low volumes of traffic longer distances in areas of the township where rural residential development exists. Improved rural collectors are two lane roads with

paved surfaces, shoulders and ditches. Rural collector roads with minimum improvements are also two lane roads with graveled or paved surfaces, shoulders and ditches. Direct access from homes and businesses to rural collectors is intended to be permitted but developments having two or more buildings are intended to share driveways and roads. All collectors are intended to be public roads and have a minimum surface width of 24 feet where on-street parking is not allowed.

Local Roads and Streets

Urban local streets are primarily intended to carry neighborhood traffic short distances to and from homes and businesses to collector roads. These are intended to have two moving traffic lanes with paved surfaces, curb and gutter, short curb radii, piped storm drainage, sidewalks, and on-street parking. Street design and improvements are encouraged that slow traffic to less than 30 miles per hour.

Rural local roads are intended to have paved surfaces with ditch sections, or, at the discretion of developers and residents, private roads with paved surfaces. These are intended to be either public or private roads and have a minimum surface width of 24 feet where on-street parking is not allowed. The minimum width for local roads with parking on both sides shall comply with the standards of the Manistee County Road Commission.

Implementation Plan

The Zoning Ordinance

The Zoning Ordinance is a direct implementation tool of the Master Plan. The Zoning Ordinance performs a regulatory function which should result in development design reflective of the Goals and Policies of the Master Plan. Where there are inconsistencies between the two documents, a revision of one or the other is in order. An update to the Master Plan may result in policy changes which prompt a revision to the Zoning Ordinance.

Areas of the Zoning Ordinance to be considered for revision or addition are:

The Zoning Map

The zoning map found in the zoning ordinance is titled “Filer Township Zoning Map” and is a part of the Zoning Ordinance for the Charter Township of Filer. The connection between zoning districts and land use categories found on the Future Land Use Map is included in a previous section. The current zoning map includes roads and section numbers but does not include parcel data.

One proposed change to the zoning ordinance is the adoption of a zoning map created on the parcel base map. This provides the ability to create zoning district boundaries that respect parcel boundaries and allows for clarification of zoning district lines.

Commercial Districts

The urban form proposed by the Master Plan for urban residential areas and areas along the US-31 commercial corridor is not addressed by the current Zoning Ordinance. Additions of site design, architectural and landscape standards for these areas are needed in order to realize the desired development.

The area along US-31 between Red Apple Road/28th Street and Stronach Road is largely undeveloped and does not have sewer service. Although the FLU map and the DDA district boundary are clear in defining the area as commercial in the future and this document includes the discussion of timing and orderly development, the current commercial designation could face the issue of “leap frog” development patterns. Consider additional zoning language to encourage orderly development patterns along the corridor. Once sewer service is provided in this area, consider requiring sewer service for all new commercial development along the US-31 commercial corridor.

Many of the undeveloped commercial lots along US-31 between Red Apple Road/28th Street and Stronach Road remain forested. While the trees have a current value for lumber (which may prompt the removal of trees), some trees may also have a future value for commercial landscaping. Consider the addition of landscaping provisions in the site plan review section that offer incentives where mature trees are preserved and incorporated into the landscape plan.

Consider allowing high density, multi-family residential housing either as stand alone developments or as a part of mixed-use developments in the commercial area along US-31 in addition to the senior housing that is already permitted.

Residential Districts

The medium density and high density residential development categories (R-1 and R-2) are essentially identical. This makes every lot in the Filer City / Oak Hill neighborhoods non-conforming and limits the ability to create higher density development. Consider reducing the minimum lot size and increasing the multiple family residential density levels in the R-1 high density residential district either now or at a future time if sewer service is available.

An area for future high density residential development has been designated on the Future Land Use Map which is currently zoned R-2 medium density residential. The rezoning is not intended to take place until sometime in the future when sewer service is made available to the area.

Administrative changes resulting from the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) and Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 12 of 2008)

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) and the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA) both became law in early 2008 and have provisions which must be addressed by July 1, 2011. The goal was to consolidate the Municipal Planning Act, the County Planning Act and the Township Planning Act into a single law. All major stakeholders agreed to make no substantive changes unless everyone agreed. However, some changes occurred during the process which will need to be addressed by Filer Township.

First, all planning commissions must be created by ordinance. Sometime before July 1, 2011, Filer Township should adopt an ordinance creating a planning commission (1) if it was originally created by resolution or (2) if the ordinance creating the planning commission does not comply with all of the requirements of the MPEA. After adoption, a notice must be sent to the county planning commission within 14 days.

There are new provisions for membership on the planning commission, conflict of interest and removal of planning commissioners, officers and procedures. Each of these should be addressed in the ordinance creating the planning commission or may, in some instances, be addressed in the planning commission by laws.

Review the Zoning Ordinance for consistency with the requirements of the MPEA and MZEA changes. Areas affected by the changes to the MZEA include public notice and delivery requirements, provisions for a hearing if requested by an interested property owner, and zoning board of appeals membership. Additional changes to the MPEA include the process for adopting or revising a Master Plan and the role of the planning commission related to a subdivision ordinance and review of plats.

Public Utilities

At each of the four focus groups held in 2008, a strong desire was expressed from citizens and the local business community to provide sewer to service the existing commercial district of the US-31 corridor.

Sewer was viewed as an important part of encouraging new commercial development along the corridor. From a planning perspective, it would be wise to plan for potential future service needs at the same time.

Filer Township has investigated different opportunities to provide sewer service for more than a decade and has most recently determined that a connection to the Manistee City system is the best option. Discussions commenced again in 2007 with the City and both parties have repeatedly expressed an interest in reaching an agreement. Input at focus groups indicated broad community support for sewer development.

Negotiating a sewer service agreement is not a simple task. It requires time and professional expertise. A professional engineering consultant as well as legal counsel can help move the process forward in an efficient manner and assure that the resulting arrangement is in the best interest of Filer Township.

US-31 Improvements—Access Management

Enhanced public safety and the efficient movement of traffic along US-31 are both positive outcomes of access management techniques. The US-31 Corridor Management Plan, completed in 2004, contains model ordinance language to address access management along US-31 as it relates to commercial properties. This language should be adopted into the Zoning Ordinance.

Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

Article IV of the new Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) requires that township planning commissions annually prepare a capital improvements program of public structures and improvements when the municipality owns or operates a water supply or sewage disposal system. This requirement, then, applies to Filer Township. The planning commission may be exempted by charter from this duty if it is assigned to the legislative body (the Township Board of Trustees) and the legislative body may assign the duty to the chief elected official or a non-elected administrative official. The CIP must prioritize the projects which are deemed to be needed or desirable within the next six (6) years. Filer Township will need to decide who will be responsible for the annual CIP development, establish an appropriate operational system and begin to adopt an annual CIP.

There is an associated section in Article IV which requires the Planning Commission to provide a report and advice on projects for the construction of a public street or public structure. The Planning Commission has 35 days to respond to project proposals or it is considered approved. This is a fairly short window for a planning commission with monthly meetings. The Planning Commission may choose to express a position that all items included in the CIP are approved and only consider projects that were not included in the CIP.

Design Guidelines

Through previous planning documents, the Small Town Design Initiative and current focus group input, citizens have made it clear that there are things about Filer Township that make it a special place. Some initial steps have been taken to describe or define the community’s special sense of place. Some of the terms that came out of focus groups stressed the value of trees, the rural atmosphere and the historic aspects of the community. Appearance was noted in terms of specific buildings, landscape examples and signs that were attractive.

The establishment of design guidelines can take many forms. On one end, they can be basic, simple requirements in the Zoning Ordinance as it addresses site plan review, signs, lights and landscaping. On the other end, they can be a more elaborate, independent guidebook with an appearance review subcommittee. The specifics of the decision will depend on resources and the ability of the staff and planning commission to administer the results. Regardless of the outcome, the process should begin to explore additional site design, landscaping and architectural, sign and lighting standards.

Sub-Area Plans / Overlay Districts

The Filer City / Oak Hill area and the US-31 commercial corridor area (the DDA District) both have development patterns which are denser than other areas of the township. Focus groups had many detailed suggestions including access road plans, non-motorized pathways, new commercial activity areas, artisan shops and local business incubators, landscaping/streetscape improvements and public signage. In both areas, a sub-area plan and the creation of development standards within the respective zoning district provisions could help to further define the community's vision for the future development of these areas. Overlay zoning districts could also be used if the area to be addressed crosses zoning district boundaries (i.e. the urban residential zone and the commercial zone within the neighborhood).

Affordable Housing

In order to support and achieve the affordable housing goal statements, there will need to be areas available for high density residential development in the township. This means making land available for smaller starter homes, apartments, senior housing, and townhomes for moderate-income, working families and other types of development that cannot occur at a density of two homes per acre.

Also, the provisions of Article 45—High Density Residential—in the zoning ordinance should be revisited to make sure that the provisions are in place to accommodate these different types of housing options and that the density is reasonable to encourage their development.

Parks and Recreation

Focus group input indicated that Filer Township residents have an interest in preserving and enhancing existing parks and increasing the recreation system through non-motorized connections. The establishment of a non-motorized committee and the creation of an initial non-motorized plan are a good start in this direction. When Filer Township begins to think about undertaking new park initiatives, an update to the current Parks and Recreation Plan should be considered. This will allow the township to plan for recreation in an organized manner and be in a position to seek grant funding for priority projects. The last adopted plan was dated February 2002, and the five-year time frame carried through 2006.

Public Involvement

Public involvement continues to be an important theme in the planning activities of Filer Township. Many of the ideas and suggestions from focus group activities can be implemented by creating or strengthening communication connections between Filer Township and staff people, and boards and committees in other municipalities. A communication line is also important between local government and the business community including businesses in the DDA, the Manistee Manufacturer's Council and the Alliance for Economic Success.

In order for Filer Township to implement many of the ideas put forward by the public and reflected in general terms in this document, the public will need to be involved and informed. The proposed creation of a township website is a first step in giving more people easier access to township information. From there, a local email blast system could further inform residents of meetings and events. The concept of actively recruiting new volunteers into township activities is another means of widening the circle of influence. Regular communication with local media is another way to encourage public involvement. Newspaper, local access television, local news programs and radio are all venues for communication with the public.