

Chapter 7: Goals, Strategies and Implementation Measures

In order for the Master Plan to be implemented successfully it must be guided by specific goals, objectives and strategies. In basic terms, community goals represent a sort of “wish list” and take the form of broad directives, which are carried out through the realization of more specific strategies. The development of goals and strategies is an interpretive process that is designed to take stated community desires and distill them into a program of action which is recorded in this Plan. The Plan must point to attainable implementation measures if the stated goals are to have a realistic expectation of being accomplished. The goals and strategies presented in this section of the Plan establish the guiding principles and priorities that will allow community decision makers to achieve Almena Township’s community vision.

Goals: overall aims, desired end situations or ideals for achievement. A goal is typically broad and long-range.

Objectives: specific targets intended to achieve the Plan’s goals and ultimately the community vision, over the Master Plan’s planning horizon.

Strategies: task-oriented steps to address objectives.

COMMUNITY VISION

Public meetings (visioning), work sessions and the community-wide survey reflected that Almena residents and landowners place a great deal of value on the rural nature of the Township. For example, when asked what the most important issue facing the Township was, the top-ranked response was “*division of farmland and large parcels for development.*” Survey results and public forums indicated that the protection of rural character, open space and natural amenities were also very strong priorities. The following vision is a synthesis of the messages planners heard from community input efforts:

Almena Township should remain an uncongested, slow-paced, rural community where residents are surrounded by peaceful elements of the natural environment. Future development should blend with the character of the natural environment rather than overpower it. Agricultural land uses should remain economically viable because they are accommodated in development design, and not overtaken by it. Intensive commercial and industrial development are not elements of Almena’s future character since many neighboring communities have the facilities and services to accommodate these forms of land use. A few well-defined and conveniently located commercial nodes will provide local commercial needs for Township residents. Strip commercial development along major roads is strictly controlled. Large complexes of multi-family developments are not appropriate for the Township but rather small-scale multiple family housing will be integrated with civic and recreational development in the Almena settlement area. Major suburban infrastructure is neither needed nor anticipated in this planning cycle, but it is recognized that at some point in the next several decades, water and sewer services may be required in areas planned for residential growth.

GOAL CATEGORIES

The following goal categories were developed to help foster and implement Almena's vision:

1. Agricultural / Open Space Preservation
2. Natural Features and the Environment
3. Residential Growth and Development
4. Commercial and Industrial Growth and Development
5. Almena Settlement Area
6. Transportation
7. State Highway M-40 and M-43 Corridors
8. Parks and Recreation

1. Agricultural/Open Space Preservation

Goal: Help protect agricultural land, open spaces and natural features from encroachment and the negative affects of development.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Separate higher density development and consumptive land uses from agricultural land and sensitive natural areas.
 - Create a hierarchy of residential zoning districts which have alternative density limits.
 - Create an agricultural preservation district.
 - Devise design guidelines that create buffers to protect agricultural lands and natural features from encroachment.
- b. Promote clustering of development, design flexibility and innovation that protects natural amenities and open space.
 - Develop zoning incentives to promote rural clustering and creative design in residential developments. Bonus densities should be provided for such things as additional open space, private recreational opportunities, or providing connections to adjacent greenways.
 - Provide zoning options for land divisions that allow smaller lot splits in exchange for preserving larger tracts of parent parcels for agriculture and open space preservation.
 - Streamline the approval process for cluster developments to make them an attractive option to developers.

- Implement zoning techniques that prevent a proliferation of subdivisions in areas ill-suited for suburban densities.
 - Consider developing a sliding scale zoning district in areas that still have active farming and in existing rural areas with low densities to prevent the development of subdivisions in areas ill-suited for them.
- c. Support the desires of large acreage property owners who wish to keep their land in agricultural production or as natural areas.
- Support programs that promote and facilitate the transfer or donation of development rights.
 - Provide buffer areas around active agricultural operations to prevent conflicts with surrounding land uses and minimize the development of conflicting land uses in adjoining areas.
- d. Permit use flexibility for active farms to help keep them economically viable.
- Provide zoning options for land divisions that allow smaller lot splits in exchange for preserving larger tracts of parent parcels for agriculture and open space preservation.
 - Advocate and participate in a County-based “purchase of development rights” (PDR) program.
 - Proactively work with property owners to help educate them about development alternatives so they are aware of preferred development choices should they contemplate development.
 - Institute zoning regulations that permit farm-based tourism (markets, processing, etc.) and home-based occupations to help keep farms economically viable.
- e. Promote a Township-wide network of greenways, non-motorized trails and open space areas.
- Work with area conservation groups to educate large property owners about non-regulatory incentives for preserving wildlife habitat and open spaces (including conservation easements).
 - Help develop greenways throughout the Township by coordinating the interconnection of open spaces between parcels in development reviews.
 - Inventory in more detail the natural features, prime agricultural lands and public lands within the Township for reference by property owners and developers.

- f. Inventory and recognize productive or prime agricultural lands and natural features as a first step in any development.
 - Amend the zoning ordinance to require a natural features inventory as part of the site plan review process.

2. Natural Features and the Environment

Goal: Protect and preserve sensitive natural resources and the natural features that are important components of the Township's rural character.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Protect surface and groundwater quality in the Township.
 - Amend the subdivision control ordinance to include innovative design standards that protect natural features and site amenities.
 - Encourage the re-establishment of wetlands as opportunities arise.
 - Adopt groundwater protection standards to implement via the site plan review process.
- b. Promote special consideration of natural features such as flood plains, wetlands, slopes, wood lots, water features, in development proposals.
 - Inventory the Township's natural resource features.
 - Enact zoning ordinance regulations that prohibit the clearing or grading of land without proper zoning approvals.
 - Augment site plan review, planned unit development, and other design review criteria of the zoning ordinance to specifically address the protection of natural features such as woodlands, landmark trees, rolling topography, wetlands, etc.
 - Amend and update the subdivision control ordinance to include design standards that protect natural features and site amenities.
- c. Identify and regulate land uses and development practices that have the potential to contaminate surface water and groundwater.
 - Enact storm water management standards that prevent direct discharge of storm or melt water into surface water.
 - Limit the amount of impermeable surface in new developments by:

- Placing limits on the amount of a site that can be covered by impermeable surfaces.
 - Providing buffers between paved areas and wetlands or surface waters.
 - Permitting deferred parking.
 - Instituting maximum parking standards.
 - Encouraging the use of alternative parking lot surfaces.
- Enact anti-keyholing or funneling regulations along water bodies.
 - Require the establishment of water and sewer special assessment districts as part of any new development.
 - Investigate septic maintenance standards (e.g., point of sale inspections).
 - Promote the use of non-phosphorus fertilizers for waterfront properties.
- d. Decrease development densities to levels consistent with the loading capabilities of area soils.
- Designate areas with a high water table and poor permeability for low density, low intensity development.
- e. Require development designs that recognize and complement rural character.
- Augment site plan review, planned unit development, and other design review criteria of the zoning ordinance to specifically address the protection of natural features like woodlands, landmark trees, rolling topography, wetlands, etc.
 - Amend and update the subdivision control ordinance to include design standards which protect natural features and site amenities.
- f. Help identify and protect sensitive wildlife habitat.
- Create buffer areas adjacent to Township streams in which physical disruptions are limited.
 - Encourage the re-establishment of wetlands as opportunities arise.
 - Consider wildlife travel corridors while evaluating development proposals.
 - Develop beautification routes along Township roads.
 - Map sensitive wetland areas with more specificity and develop an overlay zoning district that provides additional protective measures for these areas (e.g., increased setbacks to buffer such areas).

3. Residential Growth and Development

Goal: Guide and direct residential development to appropriate locations within the Township at appropriate densities and using design considerations that preserve rural character and agricultural lands.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Determine optimal locations for future residential development giving special consideration to agricultural preservation, environmental protection, and open space preservation.
 - Start a capital improvement investment fund for future infrastructure needs.
 - Proactively educate and provide technical support to large acreage property owners to educate them with respect to preferred development designs.
 - Restrict higher density residential development (over ten units per acre) to areas likely to eventually have sewer service.
 - Institute zoning regulations that promote rural clustering, open space developments and conservation easements that help preserve large tracts of open space or active agricultural lands.
- b. Provide for residential districts with variable densities to prevent subdivisions in areas not well suited for them.
 - Provide zoning districts with variable lot sizes.
 - Consider maximum lot sizes in various areas of the Township to prevent the consumption of land marked for higher levels of development.
 - Limit higher density residential development (over 2 units per acre) to areas adjacent to similar developments already in the Township or encourage it outside the Township where infrastructure already exists to support it.
 - Promote mixed land uses in the Almena settlement area by permitting second floor apartments in small-scale commercial and service buildings.
 - Maintain an understanding of emerging septic system technology and group-system technology that could impact the placement and maintenance of development on sites with limited soil suitability for traditional septic fields.
- c. Encourage residential development that is of a scale and design that blends well with adjacent land use and existing natural features.

- Consider a maximum lot size in areas where agricultural and open space preservation is most critical.
- Institute zoning regulations that encourage rural clustering, open space developments and conservation easements which help preserve large tracts of open space or active agricultural land.
- Promote limited multi-family development (2-4 unit residential dwellings or apartments over small storefronts) in or immediately adjacent to the Almena settlement area.
- Prevent inefficient land divisions that can preempt thoughtful design or limit future development options with specific ordinance standard and public education.

4. Commercial and Industrial Growth and Development

Goal: Consider commercial development at appropriate locations within the Township. For the term of this plan direct the location of industrial land use demand to existing areas of industrial growth in surrounding communities that have the necessary infrastructure to support it.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Utilize the “node location concept” to provide appropriate land for commercial development and to consolidate existing commercial development along State Highways M-40 and M-43.
 - Direct commercial land uses toward planned commercial nodes near the intersection of M-40 and M-43 to avoid strip-commercial sprawl along Township corridors.
 - Rezone commercial properties along M-43 in total or in part when such properties are determined to contain wetland or floodplain areas in order to protect environmentally sensitive areas contained on such properties (e.g., rezone to an agricultural or wetland overlay district).
- b. Permit an appropriate amount of commercial land use deemed necessary to support the current and projected population within the immediate Almena settlement area.
 - Promote mixed land uses by permitting appropriately sized commercial development and the location for other public and private neighborhood service providers.
- c. Establish design standards for new commercial developments that address elements of rural character.

- Require new commercial development design to reflect the rural character of the Township. Provide for:
 - buildings and parking areas of limited size
 - parking at the rear of sites,
 - “build to” lines for building front setbacks.
 - limited signage and controlled lighting.

- d. In the near term encourage the location of industrial development outside the Township where adequate public infrastructure, utilities and close proximity to major transportation routes (US-131 and I-94) are provided.
 - In order to evaluate inclusion of specific industrial zoning districts within the Township as part of the next Master Plan update, begin the study of public infrastructure that would be necessary to support them.
 - Enact design standards that address signs, lighting, parking and loading, access management, screening and landscaping.
 - Ensure that commercial uses in consolidated nodes are properly buffered from adjacent residential uses.
 - Incorporate performance guarantees into zoning approvals to ensure development meets design standards.

5. Almena Settlement Area

Goal: Promote the historic Almena settlement area as an important part of the Township’s identity.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Permit a small urban complex that presents a unique character of rural scale and origin.
 - Adopt design standards for the Almena settlement area that promote a rural community character.
 - Devise an overlay or settlement district which permits mixed uses in a Village setting that would allow residential options, small service- and retail-oriented businesses, and rural-based cultural and recreational activities.

- b. Develop the Almena settlement as a focal point within the Township.
 - Develop facilities that promote the area as a place to gather.
 - Provide programming for recreational activities.

- Make the Township Hall, Historic Town Hall and associated recreational area a place for civic and social activities.
- c. Preserve the area's vitality and function as the Township's historical center.
- Develop facilities that promote the area as a place to gather.
 - Develop design standards for structures and the streetscape to promote the Village design concept.
- d. Promote the functional integration of the Almena settlement area with surrounding land uses and existing street networks.
- Develop facilities that promote the area as a place to gather.
 - Promote pedestrian access throughout the settlement area to functionally connect development.
 - Provide traffic-calming designs to promote non-vehicular travel in the settlement area including reduced traffic speeds, cross walks and streetscape guidelines.

6. Transportation

Goal: Control access, land use options, and development densities along corridors to prevent congested strip development that undermines the traffic-carrying function of the Township's roadways.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Provide convenient neighborhood commercial nodes of up to fifteen acres per node that serve the needs of the Township but do not serve a regional population.
- Develop a gateway concept to define commercial areas in the Township.
 - Ensure compatibility between intensities of land use and ability of the individual thoroughfares to support anticipated traffic flows and access patterns.
- b. Work with the County Road Commission to develop a street improvement plan to coordinate projects with the existing street system and ensure that road improvements and access management efforts are coordinated.
- c. Promote cross connections among commercial and mixed-use properties along Township roads to prevent traffic congestion and preserve the function of the township roadways.
- Identify areas where traffic calming mechanisms should be employed, including policies not to pave existing gravel roads.

- Limit curb cuts along the Almena settlement area to control vehicular access.
- d. Re-evaluate private road standards to prevent future problems with providing public services and connecting street networks.
- Require connections between properties to prevent a series of dead-end roads that cause circulation problems, public service issues, and public safety concerns.

7. State Highway M-40 and M-43 Corridors

Goal: Create attractive and uncongested corridors that maintain their primary function of efficiently and safely moving relatively large amounts of traffic.

- a. Prohibit “strip” commercial development. Strip commercial development is lined along a street. Properties are not connected to neighboring businesses and each has its own separate driveway onto a busy road. This development pattern is associated with congested and inconvenient development.
- Enact access management regulations that address such issues as drive spacing, shared parking, and parallel- or rear-access drives.
 - Predetermine appropriate curb cut areas for shared driveways and require that access be shared among properties.
 - Increase setback requirements for properties fronting M-40 and M-43 to allow for the development of parallel access drives in order to prevent having to enter the major roadway to patronize a neighboring business.
- b. Re-evaluate commercial zoning along the central area of M-43. This area is not well suited for commercial uses because of a high water table and woodlot areas.
- c. Enhance the aesthetics of both corridors by protecting woodlots, natural topography and views.
- d. Require substantial landscaping and buffer areas along the roadway to prevent the development of a suburban character.
- e. Increase the setbacks along these corridors to provide adequate areas for parallel access drives and landscape buffers.
- f. Accentuate township entry points along M-40 and M-43 as community gateways.

8. Parks and Recreation

Goal: Plan for and develop active and passive outdoor recreational facilities to meet the needs of existing and future Township residents.

Objectives and Strategies:

- a. Develop a *Parks and Recreation Plan* to provide an organizational structure, planning and funding framework for appropriate recreational amenities in the township.
 - Incorporate a trail and greenways scheme (with map) that connects designated open space and public lands or recreational facilities.
 - Identify township resources and recreational needs.
- b. Work with residential developers to set aside suitable portions of land for neighborhood parks and road easements for pedestrian/bicycle paths as development occurs.
 - Amend the zoning ordinance and land subdivision ordinance to enable set-aside requirements for residential development proposals.
 - Work with property owners to obtain easements for greenway development (some for wildlife and some for non-motorized trails).
- c. Augment open spaces and trail ways with appropriate public amenities.
 - Develop a system of historic and natural interpretive plaques throughout public lands and greenways.
 - Develop the Almena Township land at 28th Avenue into a wildlife/recreation park.
 - Develop appropriate public access points to area streams including in the area of old M-43 and the north branch of the Paw Paw River.