

Executive Summary

This Plan was adopted pursuant to the authority of the Township Rural Planning Act, PA 168 of 1959, as amended. The Act provides for the preparation and periodic review of a "basic plan" to promote community health, safety, and welfare through provisions for the use of land and resources and the assurance of adequate public facilities and services. The Planning Act spells out the process for developing, adopting, and amending a plan to ensure a certain level of public participation.

The Almena Township Master Plan is such a "basic plan". It is prepared as a foundation for the Township's zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and capital improvement program, and depends primarily upon these documents for its implementation. Although this Plan includes specific land use policies and proposes specific land use arrangements, it has no regulatory power. It provides the basis and impetus, however, for future regulations.

This Plan is the product of a lengthy process that relied heavily upon community input made via printed surveys and discussion at focus group and other public meetings. It is also an extension of the previous Master Plan effort of 1995. This Plan differs somewhat from the previous Plan due to changes in not only the township landscape but also community attitudes. For example, Almena Township has experienced significant population increases and development pressure since its last planning cycle and Township officials and residents alike have become more concerned about what land divisions and new construction are doing to community character. A once predominantly rural area, the Township is experiencing development density levels (in some areas) that are more suburban than rural in nature. Key issues which emerged from the Township-wide attitude survey and public forums were "the division of farmlands and large parcels of land for development" and "the township looking like the suburbs." These and other concerns highlighted the community's desire to retain the rural character of the Township.

Other strong policy statements that emerged from the Master Plan revision process included:

- The Township need not promote industrial development since more urbanized areas to the east have ample land and infrastructure already devoted to such land uses.
- The Township should provide an appropriate amount of land for future commercial development that is adequately sized to meet the shopping needs of current and future Township residents. Such development should be sited in concentrated and appropriate locations along State Highways M-40 and M-43 as opposed to an indiscriminate pattern of disconnected strip development along road frontages.
- An appropriate mix of commercial and other "village-center"-type development should be provided in and around the Almena settlement area.
- For this planning period promotion of a suburban level of services (e.g., public water, sewer and road paving) is inappropriate especially since providing such services would promote additional development pressure.
- Protection of open space and natural amenities like wetlands, woodlots, and wildlife

habitat is increasingly of interest. The majority of survey responses reinforced this concept in that residents supported open space preservation even if it “meant more regulations.”

- A strong desire exists to promote residential cluster developments focusing on designs that preserve the natural landscape rather than traditional subdivisions that tend to redefine the landscape.
- Recognition and protection of existing agricultural areas is important.

This Plan is designed to be more concise than the previous version in order that it will be more widely used as a resource by both decision makers as well the public. If the principles outlined herein form the basis for each land use and development decision, Alma Township will realize its vision for the future.