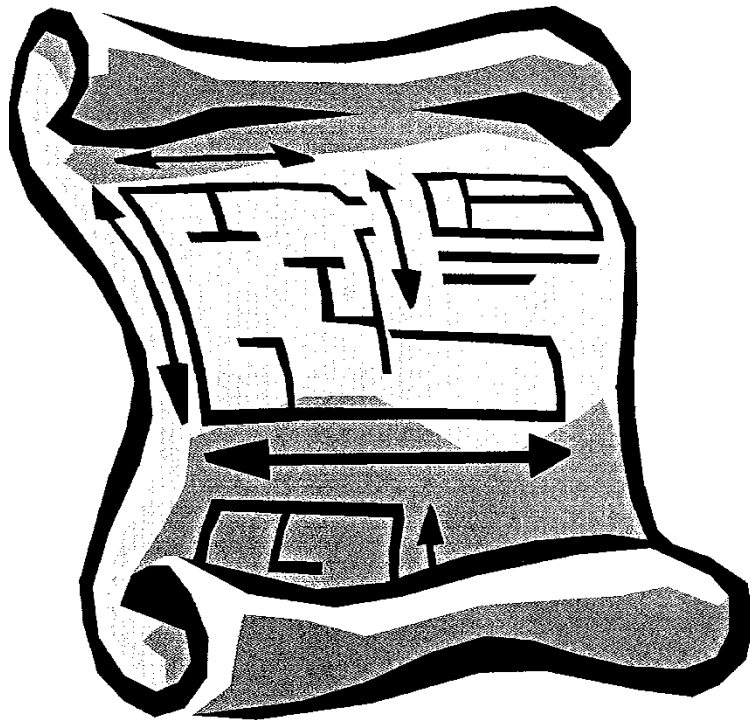


*OTISCO TOWNSHIP  
(Amended)  
MASTER PLAN*



Township Approved: July 21, 2020

*Otisco Township Planning Commission*

**RESOLUTION  
TOWNSHIP OF OTISCO  
COUNTY OF IONIA, MICHIGAN**

**OTISCO TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
RESOLUTION TO ADOPT MASTER PLAN**

**WHEREAS**, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare a Master Plan for the use, development and preservation of all lands in the Township; and

**WHEREAS**, the Otisco Township Planning Commission prepared a proposed new Master Plan and submitted the plan to the Township Board for review and comment; and

**WHEREAS**, the Otisco Township Planning Commission made the necessary inquiries, investigations, and surveys of the appropriate resources of the Township, and considered the character of the Township and its suitability for particular uses judged in terms of such factors as the trend in land and population development; and

**WHEREAS**, the Master Plan, as proposed, will promote public health, safety and general welfare; will encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability; will avoid the overcrowding of land by buildings or people; will lessen congestion on public roads and streets; and will facilitate provision for a system of transportation, sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, recreation and other public improvements; and

**WHEREAS**, the Master Plan, as proposed, includes the material described in the following Table of Contents, Appendices, and Maps:

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Chapter1Introduction .....	1
Chapter2 CurrentPlanningIssues .....	3
Chapter3 RegionalSettingand History.....	7
Chapter4Existing Conditions .....	11
Chapter5LandUse Plan & Master Plan Map.....	23
Chapter6Transportation Plan .....	38
Chapter7ImplementationRecommendations.....	43
Appendix.....	48

**APPENDICES**

- Appendix A –Soils Map
- Appendix B – Environmental Limitations Map
- Appendix C – Transportation Map
- Appendix D –Zoning Map (2019)
- Appendix E – Master Plan Map

**WHEREAS**, on February 11, 2020, the Otisco Township Board reviewed the proposed Master Plan prepared by the Planning Commission and authorized distribution of the Master Plan to surrounding municipalities and regional planning organizations as identified in the MPEA; and

**WHEREAS**, notice was provided to the surrounding municipalities and regional planning organizations as provided in the Michigan Planning Enabling Act; and

**WHEREAS**, the Otisco Township Planning Commission held a public hearing on June 17, 2020 to consider public comment on the proposed amended Master Plan, and to further review and comment on the proposed Master Plan; and

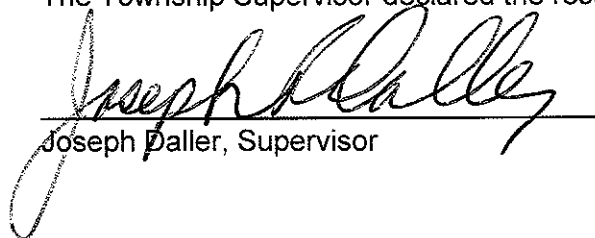
**WHEREAS**, the Planning Commission finds that the proposed amended Master Plan is desirable and proper and furthers the use, preservation, and development goals and strategies of the Township

**WHEREAS**, the Planning Commission voted at their June 17, 2020 meeting to recommend that the Otisco Township Board of Trustees adopt the amended Master Plan as presented for their July 14, 2020 Board meeting

**NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS RESOLVED**, that the Otisco Township Board of Trustees adopts the Master Plan, as presented in a public hearing on June 17, 2020 and as considered by the Board of Trustees on July 21, 2020.

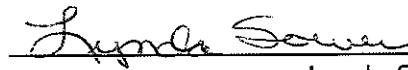
The following resolution was offered by Treasurer Johnson; second offered by Supervisor Daller. Upon roll call vote the following voted: "Aye": Daller, Johnson, Sower, Zeigler, Oatley. "Nay": None

The Township Supervisor declared the resolution adopted.

  
Joseph Daller, Supervisor

**CERTIFICATE**

I, the undersigned, the Clerk of the Township of Otisco, Ionia County, Michigan, certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of a resolution adopted by the Otisco Township Board of Trustees at a regular meeting held on the 21<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2020. I further certify that a public notice of said meeting was given pursuant to and in full compliance with Michigan Act 267 of 1976, as amended, and that the minutes of said meeting were kept and will be or have been made available as required by the Act.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lynda Sower, Clerk

**OTISCO TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN**  
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	<u>PAGE</u>
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 Current Planning Issues .....	3
Quality of Life .....	3
Agricultural Preservation .....	3
Growth Pressures .....	4
Land Use Compatibilities .....	4
Employment .....	4
Industry .....	5
Intergovernmental Cooperation .....	5
Environment .....	5
Recreation .....	5
Transportation .....	6
Utilities .....	6
Chapter 3 Regional Setting and History .....	7
Regional Setting .....	7
Communities .....	7
Historical Perspective .....	7
Chapter 4 Existing Conditions .....	11
Geography .....	11
Natural Features .....	11
Environmental Limitations .....	15
Existing Land Use .....	15
Transportation .....	18
Public Utilities .....	19
Population, Housing, and Income .....	19
Chapter 5 Land Use Plan & Master Plan Map .....	23
Goals and Policies .....	23
Community Character Goals .....	23

	<b><u>PAGE</u></b>
Cooperation and Coordination between Units of Government Goals .....	25
Infrastructure Goals.....	26
Land Use Classification Goals .....	28
Future Land Use .....	31
Zoning Plan.....	35
Chapter 6 Transportation Plan .....	38
Smyrna Area .....	38
Remainder of Otisco Township .....	39
Improved North / South Roads.....	39
Improved East / West Roads.....	40
Pedestrian / Bike Paths .....	40
Public and Private Transportation.....	41
Recommendations.....	41
Chapter 7 Implementation Recommendations .....	43
Zoning Ordinance .....	43
Transportation .....	44
Subdivision / Land Division Ordinance .....	44
Site Plan Review .....	45
Escrow Policy .....	46
Recreation .....	46
Capital Improvements Programming .....	46
Ongoing Planning .....	46
Appendix .....	48
Appendix A – Soils Map .....	49
Appendix B – Environmental Limitations Map .....	51
Appendix C – Transportation Map .....	53
Appendix D – Zoning Map (2019).....	55
Appendix E – Master Plan Map .....	57

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Otisco Township has changed considerably from its early days of settlement. While it is easy to recognize these changes, it is also obvious that Otisco Township still retains a high rural quality of life that is valued by many. The residents of Otisco Township know the importance of change and what change can mean to improving the community in terms of social and economic well-being. Township residents also know that unchecked change can erode the very things that people value most about where they live.

Land use planning is an exercise by local government to anticipate change and to control or direct development in a way that benefits the entire community. Otisco Township (the "Township") has been involved in a land use planning program since forming a Planning Commission in 1977. In 1978, the Township adopted its first zoning ordinance to regulate land uses within only a portion of the Township. While that initial zoning ordinance served as an effective development tool for those areas immediately surrounding the Flat River, by 1983, several Township residents and officials realized the need to provide better planning direction for all areas within the Township. In 1985, the Otisco Township Planning Commission adopted the first Township-wide Land Use Plan.

In 1997, the Township realized that the 1985 Land Use Plan needed to be revisited and updated to reflect current development trends in the area. A subcommittee of Planning Commissioners, Township Board members, citizens, and a planning consultant worked for several months to prepare a new, more dynamic Land Use Plan. This current Land Use Plan is an updated version of the 1997 Land Use Plan. This plan is based on issues and concerns currently facing the Township and is intended to serve the following purposes:

1. To conserve and protect property values by preventing incompatible land uses from locating adjacent to each other.
2. To protect and preserve the natural resources, unique character, and environmental quality of the community.
3. To set goals and establish policies for change and improvement.
4. To promote an orderly development process by which public officials and citizens are given an opportunity to monitor change and review proposed development.
5. To provide information from which to gain a better understanding of the community and base land use decisions.

This Land Use Plan identifies the issues facing the Township, describes the Township as it exists today, establishes specific goals and policies, and makes recommendations for change. In particular, the plan recommends a future pattern of land development. Unlike a zoning ordinance or other regulations adopted by the Township Board, the Land Use Plan does not have the force of law. The Land Use Plan is a long-range planning document that can be implemented by a variety of development regulations such as a zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance, land division ordinance, and other means as appropriate.



## **CHAPTER 2 CURRENT PLANNING ISSUES**

The Planning Commission sometimes referred to herein as the "Commission" has maintained an observant look around the community. Members of the Commission have listened with interest to various discussions concerning planning issues, existing land uses in the Township, population growth and development. As a Commission, it has identified various local issues of land use, which are believed to have an implication for the Township as a whole. These local issues support the need for land use planning.

### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Many of the residents of Otisco Township have chosen to live in the Township because of its quality of life. These citizens enjoy the beauty of the open, rolling, low density landscape of the area and the ability to travel to nearby metropolitan areas for cultural and entertainment purposes. The Township also boasts many recreational and natural resource opportunities, including golfing, camping, boating, fishing, hunting and many other outdoor activities. Other attractions to the area include a quality school system and a variety of religious institutions. Newer residents to the Township have had to realize and accept that agriculture is an active land use. Farmers want to make sure that they can continue their agricultural practices and not feel threatened by continuing development. It will be necessary to strike a balance between these two interests so that they can co-exist while each can enjoy the quality of life of the area.

### **AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION**

The past decade has shown that residential development has continued to increase in the Township, while slowing the past few years due to the economic downturn. Some of the attractions prompting such development are the same as for prime agricultural use - good soils, open land, and rolling hills.

If the Township intends to continue to allow or encourage development, it should take care in the locating of this development so that it does not occur on or adjacent to properties that are prime and unique farmlands which tend to enhance quality of life issues in the Township.

### **GROWTH PRESSURES**

The Township is continuing to feel growth pressures from two directions. There is pressure from the City of Belding to expand the corporate limits in those areas that are more developed or commercial and industrial in nature. The availability of public utilities in these areas is a big factor in that growth trend. A second growth pressure is the desire of people to live in the Township in order to enjoy the rural quality of life while being employed in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. These pressures have created demands on the Township's roads, services, and schools. The Township must consider these external growth pressures while continuing to address the concerns of the Township's longtime residents, farmers, and landowners.

### **LAND USE COMPATIBILITIES**

An increasingly important planning issue that the Township must address is the compatibility of adjacent land uses. How can the active farmer and adjacent residential homeowner peacefully co-exist in the Township? Certain measures need to be developed to assure that this can occur. There must also be compatibility in the commercial, industrial, and higher density areas of the Township. What types of controls can be developed to address these issues? The Township must also consider the compatibility of land uses with the City of Belding and the surrounding townships.

### **EMPLOYMENT**

The Township has realized that it is not a major job producing area (with the exception of agriculture), but acts more in a service or supporting role for the immediate needs of its residents. Most residents are employed in the region as opposed to within the Township itself.

The Township must develop and adapt its policies accordingly. Another employment-related issue is the fact that more and more people are working from their homes. Does the Township need to develop policies and procedures to further address this trend?

### **INDUSTRY**

The Township has an industrial area along M-91 that contains existing businesses and some vacant land. Should the Township encourage industrial development in this area adjacent to the City of Belding or should it depend on the surrounding metropolitan area to provide industry?

### **INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION**

The Township realizes that it cannot operate within a vacuum when dealing with land use planning issues. Many issues, such as roads, emergency services and the environment, are interrelated with county, state, and other municipal agencies. It will be critical for the Township to develop strategies to work cooperatively with these other agencies to address issues of regional significance.

### **ENVIRONMENT**

The Township realizes that there are attractive environmental resources within the Township which it should consider within the framework of the Land Use Plan. There is an increasing attraction to waterfront properties for development. There is also a need to protect vital environmental resources such as wetlands and prime agricultural soils. Steps need to be taken to assure that these resources can continue to be preserved, function, be attractive, and still be valuable visual and recreational assets to the Township.

### **RECREATION**

With an increasing population, there is a demand for the Township to provide additional recreational opportunities for its residents and visitors. These may take the form of additional access to the Flat River, new parks and playgrounds, or the construction of pedestrian paths

along major roadways. The Township must also work with other public agencies, such as the schools, and private developments to help satisfy recreational needs.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

An important issue that affects every resident is the transportation system within the Township. There are ever-increasing amounts of traffic on the Townships roads. Is the current road network designed and constructed to handle this increase? Are there improvements that need to be considered in certain areas? Are alignments of intersections functioning properly? The Township needs to work cooperatively with state and county road agencies to develop improvement strategies if they are deemed necessary.

## **UTILITIES**

The Township does not currently provide public water or sewer service to its residents. Most residents rely on individual well and septic systems for water and wastewater functions. Does the Township need to work with the City of Belding to extend these services to Township residents or should the Township wait for the City of Belding to annex properties as the city extends the city utility system? Utilities play a vital role in the location and future development of commercial, industrial, and higher density residential development. Should the Township enter into some type of shared arrangement with the City of Belding for these services, such as an Act 425 agreement? The provision of other private utilities (such as fiber optic and cable lines) will become more important as an increasing number of residents move to the area and work from their homes. This provides a current list of the major planning issues facing Otisco Township. The Planning Commission and Township Board, through the use of various techniques, strategies, policies, and goals, will address these land use concerns. This plan provides a framework to accomplish this important task.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **REGIONAL SETTING AND HISTORY**

#### **REGIONAL SETTING**

Otisco Township is primarily a rural, agricultural, and residential community situated in the northwest corner of Ionia County in Michigan's Lower Peninsula. It lies 25 miles from Grand Rapids, 45 miles from Lansing, and 12 miles from the county seat of Ionia. Highway travel times are approximately 40 minutes from Grand Rapids, one hour and 15 minutes from Lansing, and 25 minutes to Ionia. To Otisco's north is Montcalm County's Eureka Township and to the west is Kent County's Grattan Township. Keene and Orleans Townships are situated to the south and east, respectively.

The Township is comprised of 36 sections and is designated as Town 8 North, Range 8 West. Out of this, the City of Belding (situated within what was the northeast corner of the Township) incorporates approximately 3,000 acres. This Land Use Plan addresses the remainder of the unincorporated land which constitutes Otisco Township (approximately 21,000 acres).

#### **COMMUNITIES**

- Belding is an incorporated city situated within the northeast corner of the Township.
- Cooks Corners is the location of an early settlement in the Township at the junction of M-44 and M-91 just west of Belding.
- Smyrna is an unincorporated community a few miles southwest of Belding near the mouth of Seeley Creek on the Flat River.

#### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Ionia County was organized in 1837 and the first election was held in April of that year. The county, at that time, comprised but two townships, Ionia and Maple. Otisco Township was organized on March 61 1838. It came from the survey of townships 7 and 8 north in range 8 of the

Michigan Survey. Otisco Township was H Township 8". "Township T as carved off as Keene Township on February 16, 1842. The Township was named after Otisco, a community in Oswego County in New York. The first Township government meeting was held at the home of Robert W. Davis.

The first white settlement in the area was where Dickinson Creek flows into the Flat River northeast of Belding. George W. Dickinson, in company with Thomas Cornell, both of New York, built a saw mill there in 1836. The settlement became known as Dickinsonville, though when a post office was opened in June 1838, it was named "Otisco", after the Township. Dickinson sold the mill to James M. Kidd in 1845, who platted the village as Kiddville and a post reopened there with that same name in February 1855. The Kidville Post Office closed in June 1894.

Cooks Corners was an important early settlement. In 1829, Rufus R. Cook led a group of men from New York to this area looking for lands to purchase. He returned in 1837 with his family. The post office in Dickinsonville was transferred to Cooks Corners in 1839, with Cook as the first postmaster. He built a tavern there in 1846, which proved to be a popular area attraction and a general store in 1850. The tavern was later a stop on the stage line between Ionia and Greenville. Cook platted the village as Cooks Corners in May 1856.

Charles Broas became a settler in the area in 1839. Broas later sold his property and mill to Hiram Belding who, to help pay for his purchase, sold silk goods on commission. Belding eventually established a silk making business. It flourished and led to the naming of the town in 1871. Belding was incorporated as a city in 1893.

Although Munson Seely had settled at what is now Smyrna soon after Dickinson had arrived, Seely moved on to Muskegon County a few years later, though his name remains in Seely Creek. After Seely, the next area settler was Calvin Smith in 1843. Soon thereafter,

George Dickinson, seeking to expand his business, purchased land in the area to build a gristmill at the mouth of Seely Creek.

In 1848, Dr. William Fisher obtained a rural post office named, at his suggestion, "Smyrna" (Ionia County was named after an ancient Greek province and Smyrna was a Grecian city). According to postal regulations, the community was too close to Cooks Corners to have a separate post office, but on his application for the office, Fisher had given Section 32 as the location, just far enough to qualify for an office (even though it was over a mile away from the community). In September 18531 Dickinson platted the village as Mount Vernon, named after Mount Vernon, Virginia, the home of the first U.S. President, George Washington. The village was also called "Mount Vernon Mills, but the post office was always called Smyrna.

A significant number of German immigrants settled in the southern portion of the Township, centered around Section 33. A Roman Catholic Church was built in 1850 and was replaced by a larger structure in 1872.

The fertile lands in "Otisco Plains" became populated with many new settlers, and by 1870, the population of Otisco Township had risen to 1,578. Thriving businesses at that time included Deitz and Company, manufacturers of wagons, carriages, and sleighs, located at Cook's Corners, and at least two sawmills located in Smyrna.

Early twentieth century growth concentrated on the City of Belding and by 1940, the population of the city had increased to 4,089. The population of Otisco Township stood at 949 at that time. However, since 1940, the proportion of the area's population residing in the rural areas around Belding (such as Otisco Township) has steadily increased. A comparison of rural and urban population figures for the area underscores this point. In 1940, the City of Belding accounted for 81.3 percent of the area's population. Otisco Township accounted for only 18.8 percent. By 1980, the trend toward more people living in the rural areas increased Otisco's share

of the area's total population to 24.2 percent. This trend has continued which demonstrates the Township's need for development controls that will not only accommodate new growth, but also direct it in an orderly, efficient, and desirable manner.



## **CHAPTER 4 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **GEOGRAPHY**

According to the United States Census Bureau, the Township has a total area of 32.0 square miles, of which 31.6 square miles of it is land and 0.4 square miles of it is water.

### **NATURAL FEATURES**

Otisco Township's natural features and land resources are the end result of a complex and fragile interaction of a number of environmental factors. While humanity has the ability to alter the environment and utilize land resources in a multitude of ways, it also has an obligation to do so in a wise manner. The identification of the area's natural features and resources and their interaction with human activities is, therefore, important if a community is to institute wise policies regarding land use.

The predominant natural features of the Township involve the Flat River and its drainage network. The Flat River flows into the Township from the northeast and meanders diagonally to the southwest. It bisects nine sections and the City of Belding and leaves the Township through Section 32. The two major tributaries of the Flat River are Dickerson Creek and Seeley Creek. Dickerson Creek enters the Township from the east and converges with the Flat River in Section 1. Seeley Creek enters the Township in the west and terminates at the Flat River near Smyrna in the center of the Township.

The Flat River valley is primarily wooded and contained by bluffs that rise 50 to 70 feet in many locations. In some places, these bluffs border directly on the banks of the river while in other areas, the bluff and banks are separated by a wide floodplain.

In the north, upstream of their confluence, the Flat River and Dickerson Creek are separated by a gently rising but well drained divide.

On either side of this divide, both the Flat River and Dickerson Creek flow through areas of wetland. Several oxbow lakes, which are the remains of an abandoned river course, are found in the area directly north of Dickerson Creek along the Township's northern border.

South and west of this area, local relief increases and upland drainage becomes better defined. As a result, numerous cuts and several deep gullies mark the bluffs that define the Flat River valley. Intermittent streams and lesser tributaries occupy many of the gullies.

Seeley Creek drains much of the west central portion of the Township. The bluffs and valley of this stream are primarily wooded and its floodplain contains areas of wetland. Like those associated with the Flat River, the bluffs are also characterized by gullies. The gullies contain drainage-ways originating in the high areas of the northwest and south-central portions of the Township.

The low-lying extreme southeast corner of the Township is the only area that is not drained by the Flat River or its tributaries. Drainage is provided here by several small county drains. These flow southeasterly and ultimately into the Grand River by way of Bellamy Creek.

A few minor lakes and impoundments are also found in the Township. The most significant of these are located in Sections 3, 14, and 20. Numerous small wetland depressions are also scattered throughout the Township.

The general soils map, available in the Appendix, shows the soil associations within Otisco Township. An analysis of these associations is useful for gaining insight into the general topographical and geological differences of the area. The map can be used to categorize large tracts of lands with regards to general suitability for certain types of uses. In the case of Otisco Township, existing land uses generally reflect these suitability's.

McBride-Lapeer-Coral Association: This association is the largest in extent of all the associations in Otisco Township. It covers the approximate west one-third of the Township and is also found in the southeast corner in a wide band running southwest to northeast. Both areas are characterized by rolling hills, steep ravines, and poorly drained depressions the soils are generally loamy and underlain by loamy sand. They have medium natural fertility.

Most of the well-drained upland surfaces are cultivated. Corn, wheat, oats, beans, and hay are the predominant crops. Fruit orchards are also an important feature in this association. They are generally located on the highest elevations where air drainage is good. The major areas of orchard growth within this association occur in Section 6 in the extreme northwest corner of the Township, in Sections 20 and 29 in the west central area and in scattered parcels in the southwest one-third of the Township.

The major limitations to development that occur are the steep slopes that are found throughout the area and the high water tables associated with drainage ways and depressions. These limitations combine to form areas of considerable special extent and warrant attention when attempting to locate structures and on-site sewage disposal facilities.

*Mance/Iona-Fox-Boyer Association:* This association is found running diagonally through the center of the Township on either side of the Flat River and around most of Seeley Creek. It consists of well-drained shallow loamy soils underlain by sand and gravel. The area includes gently sloping to strongly sloping knobs, ridges and terraces, valley walls and nearly level to sloping stream terraces adjacent to valley walls. While some agriculture production is carried out in this area, major problems with stoniness and draughtiness have limited the extent of farming practices.

Except for the steep slopes and high water tables associated with the Flat River and Seeley Creek, this area imposes few restrictions on development. Within this area are found the

soils with the greatest ability to handle on-site septic systems. Soil features conducive to building foundations and other construction practices are also commonly found. The importance of these factors with regard to development is witnessed by the fact that much development has taken place on soils within this association. The City of Belding, Smyrna, and Cooks Corners are all located in this area of soils.

*Grayling-Spinks-Montcalm Association:* This area is located primarily in the extreme north-central and northwest portions of the Township and in a narrow band in the east central portion. Both areas are rolling to hilly and well drained to moderately well drained. Both areas consist primarily of draughty sands with a low natural fertility. Deep cuts and narrow drainage ways are the major landforms. The steep slopes and high water tables associated with the cuts and drainage-ways are the major limitations on development. Soil features on the uplands pose few restrictions.

*Miami-Celina-Marlette Association:* This association is found in the southeast corner of the Township. It is comprised of level to gently undulating, moderately well drained loamy soils. Most of the area is farmed with corn, wheat, and beans being the most common crops. The area has moderately high fertility. Excess wetness is a limitation and results from a high water table. This seasonal high water table also imposes major limitations on development. The high water table occurs throughout much of this area.

*Carlisle-Cohoctah-Sloan Association:* In Otisco Township, the soils in this association are limited primarily to the eastern two thirds of Section 36. This area is level, poorly drained, and comprised of organic soils. The soils were formed by woody and fibrous material deposited on the floodplain of an ancient postglacial river. The soils are primarily less than 42 inches in depth and underlain by sand, loam, clay, and marl. While most of the area is farmed, there are some areas of second growth forest in the un-drained or very sandy and swampy depressions. The area is moderately fertile and ideally suited to growing onions and other truck crops as well as corn and

hay. Excess wetness and a high susceptibility to wind erosion are the major limitations with regard to farming. A high water table and the unstable nature of organic material make the area highly unsuitable for most types of development, especially with regards to building foundations, road construction, and on-site septic systems.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITATIONS**

The map entitled "Environmental Limitations", available in the Appendix, illustrates those areas within the Township that due to slope and/or nearness to the surface of ground water are likely to impose restrictions on development. Those areas of the Township having a slope of greater than 12 percent have been mapped. The rationale for mapping slopes of this degree (or greater) lies in the fact that construction activities taking place on these slopes generally require special care and increased maintenance to prevent severe erosion. Construction costs are also greater since extensive cutting and filling is often needed. The slopes also pose restrictions for on-site disposal systems by raising the risk of pollution to water supplies and the surfacing of effluent. Areas that have a seasonal or permanent high water table have also been mapped. The limitation imposed within these areas may include periodic flooding, high potential for contamination of ground water by on-site sewage systems, and hazards to subsurface construction such as basements, foundations) and plumbing.

### **EXISTING LAND USE**

A large portion of Otisco Township is under cultivation. In total, agricultural land occupies approximately 60 percent of the Township's area. Various areas of the Township contain land that qualifies under the U.S. Department of Agriculture definition of prime and unique farmlands. Prime farmland has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. Such lands have the soil

quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality and/or high yields of specific crops.

In Otisco Township, lands being used for fruit and vegetable farming are considered unique. Together, prime and unique farmlands constitute approximately 50 percent of the land area in the Township. Forests and uncommitted areas such as grassland, scrubland, and fields lying fallow are also of considerable spatial extent and importance to the Township. Together with agricultural lands and surface waters, the undeveloped lands of the Township comprise nearly 85 percent of the Township's total area.

Land that is devoted to more intensive use is also of great importance but of considerably less spatial significance. Residential, commercial, and light industrial uses are found scattered throughout the Township. Most of these activities occur near Cooks Corners and around Smyrna. These are the more historical centers of development in the area located outside of the City of Belding.

There are several patterns of development that have also emerged in recent years. These include:

- A mixture of "strip" development east and west of the City of Belding along M-44.
- Commercial, industrial, and institutional development along M-91 north of M-44.
- The lateral expansion of residential and light industrial development along Whites Bridge Road between Cooks Corners and Smyrna.
- The subdividing or splitting of larger parcels of property throughout the Township into smaller sites for the construction of single-family homes. Many of these larger parcels were once active farms.

An observation of these development trends throughout the Township shows that the parceling of single large lots has been utilized in lieu of plats, subdivisions, or site condominium

developments. No new plats have occurred outside of the original platted villages of Cooks Corners, Smyrna, and Kiddville.

In spite of the historical and emerging development patterns mentioned above, the total percentage of land committed to intensive nonfarm, non-transportation use is approximately 15 percent.

Table 1 shows the existing land use in Otisco Township by assessment classification. The largest land use category is Agriculture Improved, totaling just over 30% of the total land area in the township. When added to the Agricultural Vacant land, the area equals 49% of the total land in the township.

This large percentage indicates a rural community, focused on agriculture. Residential Improved land use is the next greatest land area in the township, with the smallest land use category being Industrial Improved land.

Table 1: Land Use in Otisco Township

Land Use Category	Acres	% of Total Land Area
Agriculture Improved	5,945.11	30.21%
Agriculture Vacant	3,675.39	18.68%
DNR	1,222.80	6.21%
Commercial Improved	359.56	1.83%
Commercial Vacant	76.07	0.39%
Industrial Improved	33.67	0.17%
Industrial Vacant	84.83	0.43%
Residential Improved	5,177.62	26.31%
Residential Vacant	3,102.35	15.77%
TOTAL	19,677.40	100%

Source: Otisco Township Assessor and Ionia County

## **TRANSPORTATION**

The "Transportation System" map, available in the Appendix, illustrates the road network within the Township. From this map, it can be seen that the Township is generally well served by a road network consisting of two-lane paved and gravel roads. This network consists of nearly 68 miles of roads, of which approximately 22 miles are paved. There are 9 miles of all-weather State trunk lines (which include M-91 and M-44).

The Flat River acts as somewhat of a natural barrier to movement within the Township in that only two bridge crossings are provided. These are, however, strategically located and are in good-to-excellent condition. Both the Button Road Bridge and the Long Lake Road Bridge are capable of supporting maximum year-round loads. The Ingalls Road Bridge used to exist as a one-lane bridge and had a posted load limit. In July 2001, the Ionia County Road Commission (now known as the Ionia County Road Department) approved the sale of this bridge, and on October 9, 2001, the bridge was removed. Subsequently, this bridge location has since been removed from the National Bridge Registry. Long Lake Road Bridge over the Flat River is being replaced at this time.

Most other bridges in the Township are also in good repair and are capable of accommodating normal highway loads. In 1999, the Dumon Road Bridge over Seeley Creek was replaced, and the road in that area was widened and paved.

The Mid-Michigan Railroad rail line, the other major transportation feature in the Township, has recently been abandoned. It generally parallels the Flat River and previously served communities and industry between Greenville and Grand Rapids. Currently, the West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition (WMTGC) is in the process of land acquisition and trail development, for a proposed 37.5-mile-long trail that would link Greenville (through Belding) to Lowell and Lowell (through Saranac) to Ionia. The WMTGC is a nonprofit group of like minded



donors, organizations, and volunteers who are dedicated to developing non-motorized trails and greenways into a linked system that connects wilderness areas, parks, historic landmarks and cultural sites throughout Michigan.

**PUBLIC UTILITIES**

There is presently no public water or sanitary sewer systems servicing the residents of Otisco Township. Both services terminate within the city limits of Belding. Electrical and telephone service are available to all homes and businesses in the Township, and natural gas and cable television are available to some properties.

**POPULATION, HOUSING, AND INCOME**

The population in Otisco Township in the year 2000 was 2,243 persons, which increased slightly to 2,282 by the year 2010. If we apply this projection of 1.7% to the decade from 2010 to 2020, Otisco Township would have a total population of 2,320. The slow rate of growth during the decade from 2000 to 2010 has likely been affected by the economic downturn of recent years; that rate would not necessarily be expected to continue.

Table 2: Population Increase Otisco Township

Year	Population	% change over decade
2000	2,243	
2010	2,282	1.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

As seen in Table 3, the population increased in all communities between 2000 and 2010 except in the City of Belding. Belding experienced a population loss of 2%. The largest increase was seen in Eureka Township (Montcalm County), which saw an increase in population of 21%. Otisco Township, Orleans Township, and Ionia County each saw a relatively small increase in population, but did continue to grow.

Table 3: Population Change:

Area	2000 Population	2010 Population	% Change 2000 To 2010
Otisco Township	2,243	2,282	1.7%
City of Belding	5,877	5,757	-2.0%
Orleans Township	2,736	2,743	.25%
Eureka Township	3,271	3,959	21%
Ionia County	61,518	63,905	3.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

Table 4 represents the number of new homes that were constructed between the years 2009 and 2013. This table shows only the new construction. It does not include modifications or additions. The table also includes HUD home constructions. The year with the newest development was 2009, and the year with the least was 2012. This can probably be attributed to the depressed economy at the time.

Table 4: New Home Construction 2009-2013

Year	Number of Homes Constructed
2009	5
2010	2
2011	3
2012	1
2013	3
TOTAL	14

Source: Ionia County Building Department

The total number of people, households, and families all increased from 2000 to 2010. The total households in Otisco Township rose from 779 to 832, which is a 6.8% change. The total number of families in the area also increased from 603 to 644, which is a 6.7% increase.

Table 5: Households 2000-2010

	2000	2010
Total Persons	2,243	2,282
Total Households	779	832
Persons Per Household	2.88	2.90
Total Families	603	644

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

Looking at Table 6, both the median household income and median family income rose between the years 2000 and 2010. The per capita income however fell. Per capita income is a mean or average value, and is calculated by taking a measure of all sources of income in the aggregate and dividing it by the total population. Median income is the middle value, with as many incomes above the median value as below it. However, the actual value of incomes in Otisco Township below the median has decreased over the past decade, resulting in a lower income per capita.

Table 6: Township Household Income Characteristics 2000-2010

	2000	2010
Median Household Income	\$45,042	\$54,318
Median Family Income	\$55,446	\$59,250
Per Capita Income	\$21,674	\$17,482

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey.

Ages of persons living in Otisco Township are shown in Table 7. The largest cohort is people ages 45-64 years old, with 739 people in that category. That equals 32% of the population in Otisco Township. The smallest cohort are those 85 years and older, with only 24 people in this category.

Table 7: Population by Age and Gender 2010

Age	Male	Female	Total
Under 20	288	339	627
20-29 years	123	94	217
30-44 years	229	222	451
45-64 years	397	342	739
65-84 years	117	107	224
85 years & over	7	17	24
Total	1,161	1,121	2,282

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

## CHAPTER 5

### LAND USE PLAN & MASTER PLAN MAP

The findings and assumptions made from the analysis of Otisco Township's existing conditions and discussions relating to the various issues facing the Township provide the background information for formulating the proposed Land Use Plan and Master Plan Map.

As proposed, the Land Use Plan is, in one aspect, a statement of goals and policies. In another aspect, the Master Plan Map entails the allocation of land uses to geographic areas according to various natural and man-made features. As a whole, the plan attempts to strike a balance between the need and desire to protect and preserve the Township's valuable resources and rural character with the need and desire to accommodate and promote new growth and development.

The following sections highlight the goals and policies set forth for the Township and describe the general land use categories. The proposed Master Plan Map illustrates the general pattern of land use that development is encouraged to follow in Otisco Township.

#### **GOALS AND POLICIES**

Planning goals are statements that express the community's long-range desires and serve to provide direction for related planning activities. Each goal's associated policies reflect the general strategy that the community will pursue to attain its goals. Following are a set of twelve goals and related policy statements that have been developed in response to the land use issues facing Otisco Township.

## **COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOALS**

### **GOAL #1 - QUALITY OF LIFE**

Maintain and promote land uses that enhance the quality of life within the community.

#### **Policies:**

1. Adopt regulations necessary to promote good quality housing units.
2. Adopt regulations necessary to prevent blight and the outdoor storage of household equipment, household goods, and other materials, where objectionable. It is also recommended that the township consider adopting a dangerous and dilapidated buildings ordinance to further minimize the negative effects of blight and to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of Otisco Township.
3. Adopt regulations requiring the adequate siting and screening of those land uses that tend to have a blighting or negative influence on the community.
4. Provide necessary resources and expertise to enforce the provisions of the zoning ordinance, building codes, and other ordinances of the Otisco Township relating to land uses.
5. Encourage separation between conflicting adjacent land uses.
6. Adopt regulations that help preserve the rural nature of the Otisco Township.

### **GOAL #2 - THE ENVIRONMENT**

To ensure that new development takes place in an environmentally consistent and sound manner, thereby protecting natural resources, preserving scenic, open spaces and environmental quality.

#### **Policies:**

1. Maintain special land use restrictions along the Flat River pursuant to the Natural Rivers

Act, P.A. 231 of 1970, as amended.

2. Through zoning and site plan review, encourage approaches to land development that take natural features (such as soils, topography, steep slopes, hydrology, and natural vegetation) into account during the process of site design.
3. Encourage the preservation of scenic and open spaces in developments through the use of Planned Unit Development rezoning.

### **GOAL #3 - RECREATION**

Encourage diverse recreational opportunities within the community.

#### Policies:

1. Develop a recreation plan that identifies the recreational needs of the community and sets forth a strategy for the acquisition and development of recreational facilities.
2. Cooperate with the City of Belding, the Belding Area School District, and the Ionia County Park Commission in providing area-wide recreational facilities that will serve the residents of Otisco Township.
3. Work with the Department of Natural Resources to expand and improve public access to the Flat River.

## **COOPERATION AND COORDINATION BETWEEN UNITS OF GOVERNMENT GOALS**

### **GOAL #4 - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Maintain and encourage job opportunities within the community.

Policies:

1. Cooperate with the City of Belding, Ionia County, and the adjacent townships to promote economic development in the region.
2. Reserve land within the Otisco Township for new commercial development.
3. Reserve land within the Otisco Township for new industrial development.
4. Provide for the reasonable development of home occupations.

**GOAL #5 - LAND USE COMPATIBILITIES**

Promote the development of land uses that are, or could be, compatible with each other and surrounding communities.

Policies:

1. Encourage rural residential and agricultural uses to develop harmoniously within Otisco Township.
2. In areas of higher density, provide for the separation between conflicting land uses by designating suitable transitional districts or requiring greenbelt or buffer areas.
3. Review the land use plans and zoning ordinances of the surrounding communities and try to avoid incompatible land uses across governmental boundaries.
4. Have periodic meetings with the adjacent communities to exchange information on development issues in the area.
5. Work with the adjacent communities to share resources where economically feasible and politically acceptable.



## **INFRASTRUCTURE GOALS**

### **GOAL #6 - TRAFFIC AND CIRCULATION**

Make provisions for transportation improvements to maximize efficiency, safety, and ease of maintenance.

#### **Policies:**

1. Cooperate with the Ionia County Road Department in prioritizing and scheduling road improvements.
2. Limit the number of driveways along major highway arterials by encouraging the shared use of driveways by commercial and industrial establishments through site plan review and ordinance requirements.
3. Encourage the development of local streets and adopt minimum road standards.
4. Adopt regulations that limit the number of driveways per parcel of property and require the spacing of driveways along major highway arterials.
5. Require that the location of driveways be a certain distance from a corner or intersection and require driveways to be aligned with those on the opposite side of the street where possible.

### **GOAL #7 – UTILITIES**

#### **Policies:**

1. If public utilities become available, then coordinate the provision of such public utility services with land use policies, so that utility service availability supports and reinforces the desired land use pattern in the Township.
2. Encourage "infill" development of areas already serviceable by public utilities, prior to

extension of utilities to new areas.

3. Require those who benefit from the extension of utilities to finance their construction.
4. Cooperate with the City of Belding in serving those Township properties adjacent to the city limits with public utilities.
5. Plan with the City of Belding for an "ultimate service area" boundary within which public utilities will be expanded in the future.
6. Coordinate the erection, construction, and maintenance of essential public services.

### **GOAL # 8 - PUBLIC FACILITIES**

Ensure the adequacy and convenient location of public facilities.

#### Policies:

1. Develop a capital improvements plan for Otisco Township that provides locations for future public facilities such as cemeteries, parks, fire stations, etc.
2. Cooperate with the Belding School District, City of Belding and other neighboring communities where possible to share public facilities and services.

### **LAND USE CLASSIFICATION GOALS**

#### **GOAL #9 - AGRICULTURE**

To conserve the agricultural land uses of Otisco Township.

#### Policies:

1. Support the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act, P.A. 116 of 1974 (as amended) by encouraging the use of preservation agreements by area farmers and approving such agreements that are consistent with the land use plan and Master Plan Map.

2. Manage non-farm development in agricultural areas.
3. Through zoning regulations, make lands which are less suitable for agriculture use more attractive for development.
4. Encourage the use of Planned Unit Development zoning techniques to develop projects that are sensitive to the area in which they are developed while allowing for creativity in project design.
5. Support the Right to Farm Act, Public Act 93 of 1981 as amended, to avoid conflict between agricultural and neighboring uses.
6. Support and enforce any and all laws, acts, and ordinances that will provide well managed resources and quality of living for both farm and non-farm land uses.

#### **GOAL #10 - RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Encourage a pattern of residential development consistent with the character of the area involved.

##### Policies:

1. Provide a wide range of housing opportunities within Otisco Township.
2. Establish density standards that are consistent with the natural capability of soils to handle on-site septic systems and which promote the preservation of the Township's rural and agrarian qualities.
3. Encouraging higher densities of development in locations where future public utilities and services can be most economically and efficiently provided.
4. Permit construction of single-family homes, placement of contemporary quality manufactured homes and construction of multiple family housing at appropriate

locations and acceptable densities.

5. Adopt subdivision regulations in support of land use goals.
6. Adopt regulations that allow local review of driveway locations.

## **GOAL #11-COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Promote the basic service and shopping needs of the community by allowing commercial development to take place in suitable areas.

### Policies:

1. Limit commercial development to a few concentrated areas.
2. Guide major concentrations of commercial development that may require public utilities and services to those areas in which it can be most economically and efficiently provided.
3. Encourage the clustering of commercial uses and limit the number and spacing of driveways.
4. Promote high quality commercial development through local site plan review.
5. Reserve land within the Township for new commercial development.
6. Discourage "strip" development along highway corridors.
7. Provide adequate buffer areas between commercial uses and other neighboring land uses.
8. Through reasonable measures and requirements, seek to upgrade the aesthetic appearance of existing developed commercial areas.

## **GOAL #12 - INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Promote the growth of light industrial development in suitable areas.

### Policies:

1. Establish and reserve a site for future light industrial purposes.
2. Promote high quality light industrial development through local site plan review.
3. Provide adequate buffer areas between industrial uses and other neighboring land uses.
4. Through reasonable measures and requirements, seek to upgrade the aesthetic appearance of existing developed industrial areas.

## **FUTURE LAND USE**

The recommended land use pattern is comprised of several general categories with each category representing broad types and varying intensities of use. Each classified district is intended to illustrate the general locations for which the various types of land use and intensities would be permitted.

### ***Waterfront***

The waterfront district is that area comprised of the Flat River and its major tributaries within the Township, its floodplains, and all lands lying within 300 feet of the ordinary high water mark. The objectives of this district are to prevent economic and environmental damages due to flooding or intensive development patterns; to preserve the value and character of the Flat River and its tributaries; to protect local flood retention and runoff capability, fish and wildlife, water quality, and scenic and aesthetic qualities; to retain historical and recreational value and to protect individuals from buying lands which, because of environmental hazards, are unsuited but intended for intense development.

Development in this area, if it occurs, should be restricted to primarily low-density residential use. Through site plan review by the Planning Commission, certain residential housing types and some non-residential activities such as farming, campgrounds, rental cabins and certain commercial water-based uses may be allowed by special use permit.

### ***Agricultural and Rural Conservation***

The agricultural and rural conservation districts include those rural portions of the Township that contain prime and unique farmlands, other areas under cultivation, and areas of the Township that contain large expanses of forest lands and areas with steep slopes, wetlands and high water tables. This area gives the Township much of its rural and scenic character and provides valuable benefits in terms of agricultural production, natural drainage, aesthetics, and natural wildlife habitat.

The objectives of the agricultural and rural conservation districts are to allow the continuation and preservation of existing agricultural uses and operations; to provide for limited and low density single-family residential development while maintaining and protecting the natural rural character of the Township; to maintain a predominantly rural environment, as free as possible from urban encroachment; to minimize conflicts between existing farms and agricultural operations versus new residential or other development; to protect agricultural and undeveloped lands from urban encroachment; and to minimize the potential for environmental degradation that could occur should intensive development be allowed in areas requiring extensive earthwork or on soils with a limited ability to handle on-site septic systems. While the use of land for agricultural purposes is highly valued and encouraged in these districts, low density residential uses are regarded as generally compatible and may be located in the rural conservation district, and certain areas of the agricultural conservation district as long as the site is specifically shown to be suitable

for on-site septic systems, and the proposed residential use is compatible with the adjacent property uses.

Use of home site clustering and open space dedication alternatives available under the Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning provisions is encouraged as a means of designing new development in a way which minimizes conflict between residential use and nearby agricultural lands. Buffer areas will be required between differing land uses to lessen the impacts on adjacent properties. Parcels meeting certain location and character criteria may be suitable for development at a density no greater than one dwelling unit per acre.

### ***Low Density Residential***

This low-density residential classification is applied to several areas within the Township and is intended to accommodate new residential development and growth in a rural setting. These areas have soils generally amenable to slightly higher densities of development and are located primarily along major improved roads. Most of this area has witnessed development pressure over the past decade.

The intent of this district is to provide a buffer between lands designated for higher or lower intensities of use and to support development that would otherwise locate in even more rural areas of the Township. The desired form of development is rural and single family in character, with an allowable density of one dwelling unit per acre.

### ***Medium to High Density Residential***

The medium to high density residential classification encompasses those areas of the Township having the soils best suited for higher densities of development and which are generally poorly suited for agricultural purposes. It includes areas experiencing some moderate growth, as well as the two historical centers of development (Smyrna and Cooks Corners). This district is intended to permit and encourage the establishment of residential subdivisions, site condominium

developments, and mobile home parks. Such development should be located on a paved street adjacent to or along a major thoroughfare and other existing community services. Provisions should be made within each development for on-site sewer facilities, unless public municipal sewer or water facilities can be extended from the City of Belding. The district is also intended to act as a transitional area between commercial and industrial land uses and more rural and agricultural areas.

If public or community sewer or water facilities are provided for within a project, development could occur at up to 5 units per acre. Without such facilities, development should be limited to 3.5 units per acre. Areas within this district which are previously platted would be permitted to develop as designed in the plat depending upon provisions for water and waste treatment, and upon approval from the Ionia County Health Department regarding well and septic tank locations.

### ***Commercial District***

This district is intended to provide adequate land to meet the expected need for future commercial development. Such new development should occur along M-44 and M-91, where some amount of commercial development already exists.

Specific steps should be taken to prevent the negative impacts that excessive strip commercial development can cause. Access management techniques should be utilized where possible to help address traffic impacts. Other types of regulations should also be implemented to govern the aesthetics of commercial development; including implementing an Access Management Plan or a Corridor Overlay District for certain locations along M-44 and M-91, in accordance with Michigan Department of Transportation rules and regulations.



### ***Industrial District***

This district is intended to provide and reserve adequate land for future industrial development. Such land should be located on major transportation corridors, be close where public municipal utilities may be extended, and be adequately separated from residential uses and districts. Some property designated as industrial may be viewed as desirable commercial property as well. The land within the industrial district should be reserved for uses such as manufacturing, warehousing, agricultural processing, and research facilities which provide significant additions to the community's economy and tax base.

### **RELATIONSHIP OF MASTER PLAN CLASSIFICATIONS TO ZONING DISTRICTS (ZONING PLAN)**

Complementing the text of the Land Use Plan is the Master Plan Map, which identifies land use classifications by which the Township organizes and intends future improvements and uses. These classification terms are intentionally general in nature so as to not necessarily be specific to one use or type of use permitted by the Zoning Ordinance and its map.

In other words, while the land use classifications are related to the Zoning Districts identified on the Zoning Ordinance map (available in the Appendix), as shown in the table below, specific future uses are determined by numerous natural and manmade features of the landscape, such as topography, soils, road improvements, surrounding uses, existing densities, etcetera, as well as other planning considerations such as compatibility, public safety, and access. Consequently, while the land use classifications of the Master Plan Map are designed to serve as a guide for future uses, they are not considered to be a mandate for immediate improvements, public, private, or otherwise.

Ultimately, while the Master Plan Map identifies areas for future uses, the feasibility of a use is determined by the consistency of the proposal with the map and text of the Land Use Plan;

the compatibility with surrounding uses and infrastructure, and the Zoning Ordinance, including its regulations regarding lot size, height, area, bulk, location, etcetera for each of its Districts; and, the capability of the property supporting the use related to the Zoning Ordinance.

***Terminology***

**Table of Master Plan Terms & Zoning Ordinance Map District Terms**

<b>Master Plan Map Terms</b>	<b>Zoning Ordinance Map Districts</b>
Agricultural Conservation	Agricultural Conservation (A-C)
Rural Conservation	Rural Conservation (R-C)
Low Density Residential	Low Density Residential (R-1)
Manufactured Housing Community	Manufactured Housing Community (MHC)
Medium to High Density Residential	Medium to High Density Residential (R-2); Planned Unit Development (PUD)
Commercial	Commercial (C-1)
Industrial	Industrial (I-1)
Waterfront Conservation	Waterfront (W-C)

***Relationship of Master Plan Map Terms to Master Plan Chapters***

Several Chapters of this Land Use Plan identify the goals and policies regarding future land use in the Township. While the goals and policies will likely always evolve, the intended uses related to the chapter titles will remain the same. Those chapter titles can generally be related to the Master Plan Map terms as provided in the table below.

<b>Master Plan Map Terms</b>	<b>Land Use Plan Chapters</b>
Agricultural Conservation	Existing Conditions (Existing Land Use) & Land Use Plan (Future Land Use)
Rural Conservation	Existing Conditions (Existing Land Use) & Land Use Plan (Future Land Use)
Low Density Residential	Existing Conditions (Existing Land Use) & Land Use Plan (Future Land Use)
Manufactured Housing Community	Existing Conditions (Existing Land Use) & Land Use Plan (Future Land Use)
Medium to High Density Residential	Existing Conditions (Existing Land Use) & Land Use Plan (Future Land Use)
Commercial	Existing Conditions (Existing Land Use) & Land Use Plan (Future Land Use)
Industrial	Existing Conditions (Existing Land Use) & Land Use Plan (Future Land Use)
Waterfront Conservation	Existing Conditions (Existing Land Use) & Land Use Plan (Future Land Use)

***Master Plan Map***

The map entitled "Master Plan Map 2019", available in the Appendix, graphically displays the proposed land use districts.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

In August of 2010, PA 33 of 2008 (the Michigan Planning Enabling Act) was amended to require that local master plans include consideration of additional elements related to transportation. These elements include safe and efficient movement of people and goods by not only motor vehicles but also by bicycles, pedestrian, and other legal users including users who may have disabilities. Additionally, the amended Act defines street as “a street, avenue, boulevard, highway, road, lane, alley, viaduct, or other public way intended for use by motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other legal users.”

In December of 2010, PA 33 was further amended to require that local master plans also take into consideration the location, character, and extent of public transit routes and public transportation facilities in the preparation of the master plan, and to coordinate with public transportation agencies in the planning process.

In Otisco Township, an analysis was done of existing transportation facilities, with specific analysis of the settlement of Smyrna, and recommendations were developed to insure adequate transportation for all users.

#### **SMYRNA AREA**

The settlement of Smyrna is located at the intersection of Whites Bridge Road and Button Road. The settlement includes a small area of grid-pattern streets, which are under the jurisdiction of the Ionia County Road Department.

Parking in Smyrna consists of areas that are not curbed but are at grade with the street, primarily in front of stores and businesses. These parking areas are additionally at grade with

adjacent parking areas, which enables pedestrian, assisted pedestrian, and bicycle movement between businesses.

Two sections of sidewalk exist in Smyrna; one is located along the north side of Button Road, east of Whites Bridge Road, and the other is on the south side of Button Road, along the east side of Whites Bridge Road. Each sidewalk is approximately two feet in width, and runs for approximately two blocks. Neither sidewalk connects with the business district, and thus curb ramps at the street do not exist. The sidewalks are in poor to average condition.

Road improvements to Button Road resulted in curbing at the northwest corner of the intersection; in addition, a curb ramp from the parking area of the business on the northwest corner to the street has resulted, enabling easier road access and street crossing for pedestrians, assisted pedestrians, and bicycles.

### **REMAINDER OF OTISCO TOWNSHIP**

Otisco Township is a rural community comprised primarily of Ionia County primary and local roads. Bikeways and pedestrian pathways do not exist along these roadways; striped, paved shoulders exist in some locations, particularly along M-44 and M-91.

### **IMPROVED NORTH / SOUTH ROADS**

The Planning Commission realizes that there are a number of people who live in, or pass through, the Township to travel to the Grand Rapids metropolitan area for employment. Many commuters travel along M-44, but there are increasing numbers of commuters who travel on the rural, local roads to reach their destinations. This has put a strain on roads that were never designed or constructed to handle this increased traffic. The Township feels there is a need to improve certain north - south roads in the center of the Township, such as Whites Bridge and Dumon Roads to a condition that can support the additional traffic. Such

improvements may include upgrading such roads to be all-season roads, providing shoulders on roads} paving or rebuilding roads, or even constructing new road segments.

### **IMPROVED EAST / WEST ROADS**

Like the demands mentioned above for the north-south roads, there are similar needs for the east-west road system in the Township. Fisk Road was recently improved to an all-weather road to help accommodate the trucking needs of various agricultural users. An east west road segment that should be maintained is Palmer road from the East township border west to Zahm Road. This township is provided with emergency services from Orleans Township, in the event additional support is needed. This is the alternate road that can be used by emergency vehicles to reach most areas of Otisco Township. Another east-west road segment that should be reviewed is Button Road from Smyrna to the west Township line. This road carries a large amount of traffic as it extends into Kent County's Grattan Township to the west. A final east-west road segment that bears discussion is a proposed new Fish Road extension that would run between Whites Bridge and Dumon Roads. This new segment would serve an area of the Township that is planned for more dense residential development and that has experienced a large amount of growth during the past ten years.

### **PEDESTRIAN / BIKE PATHS**

#### ***Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail***

The Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail is a recreational facility that follows the former C&O Railway through Otisco Township. The trail, which was improved from crushed stone to asphalt in 2019, links the cities of Lowell, Belding and Greenville in Kent, Ionia and Montcalm counties, respectively. The former railroad corridor, which travels primarily through dense woodlands, previously was not accessible to all legal users due to the rough surface.

Improving the trail to a smooth surface has made it an asset to the entire community. The trail is open to non-motorized use, biking, hiking, and cross-country skiing.

### **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSPORTATION**

While no public bus routes exist in Otisco Township (with the exception of school bus routes), the Ionia County Commission on Aging offers limited Medical Transportation Services which is provided by volunteers or paid staff to transport seniors (and handicapped persons under the age of 60) to medical appointments, both inside and outside Ionia County.

The City of Belding operates the Belding Area Dial-A-Ride services weekdays and Saturdays, and provides routes between the cities of Belding, Greenville, Ionia, and the Village of Orleans. Costs are minimal. Dial-A-Ride maintains five lift-equipped busses for customers with special needs; those riders in wheelchairs or with other disabilities may be accompanied by an aide at no cost to the aide.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations to assist Otisco Township in moving toward the goal of increased use of transportation facilities for all users are as follows:

1. Maintain and improve existing sidewalks in the settlement of Smyrna; complete existing sidewalks so that they connect with the commercial area; continue sidewalk segments on the north side of Button Road to Chase Street. Include curb ramps at street intersections.
2. Construct sidewalks along those portions in the Smyrna area where none exist, such as on the west side of Whites Bridge Road, and the south side of Button Road.
3. As part of site plan review, consider requiring sidewalks or easements for future sidewalks for development within residential and commercial developments.

4. Consider extending sidewalks in the Township when the opportunity to connect to sidewalks occurs adjacent to the City of Belding.
5. Prepare a non-motorized trail plan for Otisco Township that seeks to provide safe recreational opportunities for all users; coordinate this with the preparation of a Recreation Plan.
6. Plan for connections of sidewalks or other non-motorized pathways to the Fred Meijer Flat River Valley Rail Trail.



## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

With respect to the overall planning process, the adoption of a land use plan and Master Plan Map is not the end product. Simply stated, the plan is an ongoing statement of Township policy that is intended to serve as a guide for local decision-makers regarding development.

Upon adoption of the Land Use Plan and Master Plan Map, the next task involves putting the plan and its goals and policies to work. This involves the enactment of local laws and ordinances and the adoption and commitment of various land use policies. Collectively, they will serve as the tools for implementing the plan.

The following are some tools and other recommendations which the Township may consider as methods for implementing the Otisco Township Land Use Plan and Master Plan map.

#### **ZONING ORDINANCE**

A township zoning ordinance presently exists in Otisco Township pursuant to Public Act 110 of 2006, as amended (the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act). Because the zoning ordinance should be based upon a land use plan and Master Plan Map, it should be revised and updated to reflect the Land Use Plan's goals and policies. All formerly mapped zoning districts and provisions should be reviewed and adjusted accordingly. Amendments to the zoning ordinance may include:

1. Reviewing the zoning map's AC and RC zoning districts to determine if they need to be adjusted.
2. The development of criteria on which to judge future residential development within the agriculture and rural conservation master-planned areas. The Planning

Commission will use these criteria when it considers granting any Special Use Permit for a new residence in the AC zoning district. In the RC district, it is intended that residential uses will be permitted by right if they satisfy certain location criteria. Some of these criteria may include maximum and/or minimum lot size land cover, nearby land uses, setbacks from property lines, shared access, and number of homes or lots.

3. The zoning ordinance should be reviewed and adjusted to help ease the conflict between residential and agricultural land uses. This may include the use of Planned Unit Development zoning.
4. Nonconformities, such as parcels, structures, and uses within every zoning district should be identified, inventoried, and reviewed to determine if any additional planning or adjustments within the zoning ordinance are required.
5. Sign regulations within various zoning districts should be reviewed.
6. Access management regulations for commercial areas along state highways should be established.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

The Township should continue to work with the Ionia County Road Department and Michigan Department of Transportation to address the transportation needs of the community. Ranking and prioritizing future road improvements will help to guide and channel future development to areas that have been identified in the Land Use Plan and Master Plan Map. It will also help to serve as an aid in the capital budgeting process of the Township Board.

## **SUBDIVISION / LAND DIVISION ORDINANCE**

Townships are given the authority to regulate and control the division and subdivision of land within their jurisdiction pursuant to Public Act 288 of 1967, as amended, otherwise known as the Subdivision Control Act. This Act was updated in 1997 and is now known as the Land Division Act. The overall purpose of this Act is to promote and secure the public health, safety, and general welfare of the community. With a local subdivision ordinance, townships can have a voice in the physical design and layout of subdivisions, as well as set specific uniform standards for streets utilities and other improvements. The subdivision ordinance would require conformance of plats with the zoning ordinance, and allow additional controls to assure that development occurs in an orderly manner. Site condominiums should be subject to either the subdivision ordinance or similar ordinance.

This Act also requires the Township to review all applications to split or divide any parcels of land that are not part of an approved subdivision. Although this may be a burden to some communities, it also provides the local government with the ability to more closely regulate and review land divisions that were once not considered for compliance with local ordinances.

In addition, the Township should adopt regulations regarding site condominiums.

## **SITE PLAN REVIEW**

This is a procedure commonly used in combination with a zoning ordinance whereby applicants for zoning approval must show conformance with the bulk and dimensional regulations (yards, setbacks, etc.) by submitting a site plan for review or approval. The Planning Commission or Zoning Administrator then reviews the site plan for compliance and also for impact upon the community. An approved site plan is usually filed as an official document.

It is recommended that all commercial and industrial development, as well as subdivisions, site condominiums, multiple family housing, planned unit developments, and all other development must undergo site plan review by the Planning Commission. It is also recommended that the site plan review process include consideration of environmental impacts.

### **ESCROW POLICY**

In an effort to adequately review a development proposal, the Township should continue to administer its escrow policy to cover the costs associated with the review. This requires a developer to pay all of the review costs, including any professional fees that may be incurred.

The Township should also periodically review its current fixed fee schedule and make adjustments as necessary to more accurately reflect the actual costs of the development review.

### **RECREATION**

It is recommended that the Township prepare a recreation plan to identify the recreational needs and opportunities of its residents and set forth the strategy for filling those needs.

### **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAMMING**

Although not urgently needed in Otisco Township, when the time comes that major public improvements are necessary in the higher density areas, the Township should consider a capital budgeting program. Such a program would enable scheduling improvements over time and according to priorities. More importantly, the program would be set within the fiscal capabilities of the Township.

### **ONGOING PLANNING**

The land use plan may in time need to be revised, updated, and modified as major changes occur. For this reason, planning should be a continuing process so that the plan and its

goals and policies can remain current and realistic. It is recommended that the Land Use Plan be reviewed by the Planning Commission on an annual basis, and that the plan and Master Plan Map be reviewed (and potentially updated) at least once every five years.

## **APPENDIX**

Available within this appendix is the following data:

- Appendix A –Soils Map
- Appendix B – Environmental Limitations Map
- Appendix C – Transportation Map
- Appendix D – Zoning Map (2019)
- Appendix E – Master Plan Map

## APPENDIX A – SOILS MAP









## APPENDIX B – ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITATIONS MAP

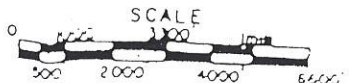


CITY OF BELDING

MAP 3  
OTISCO TOWNSHIP

ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITATIONS

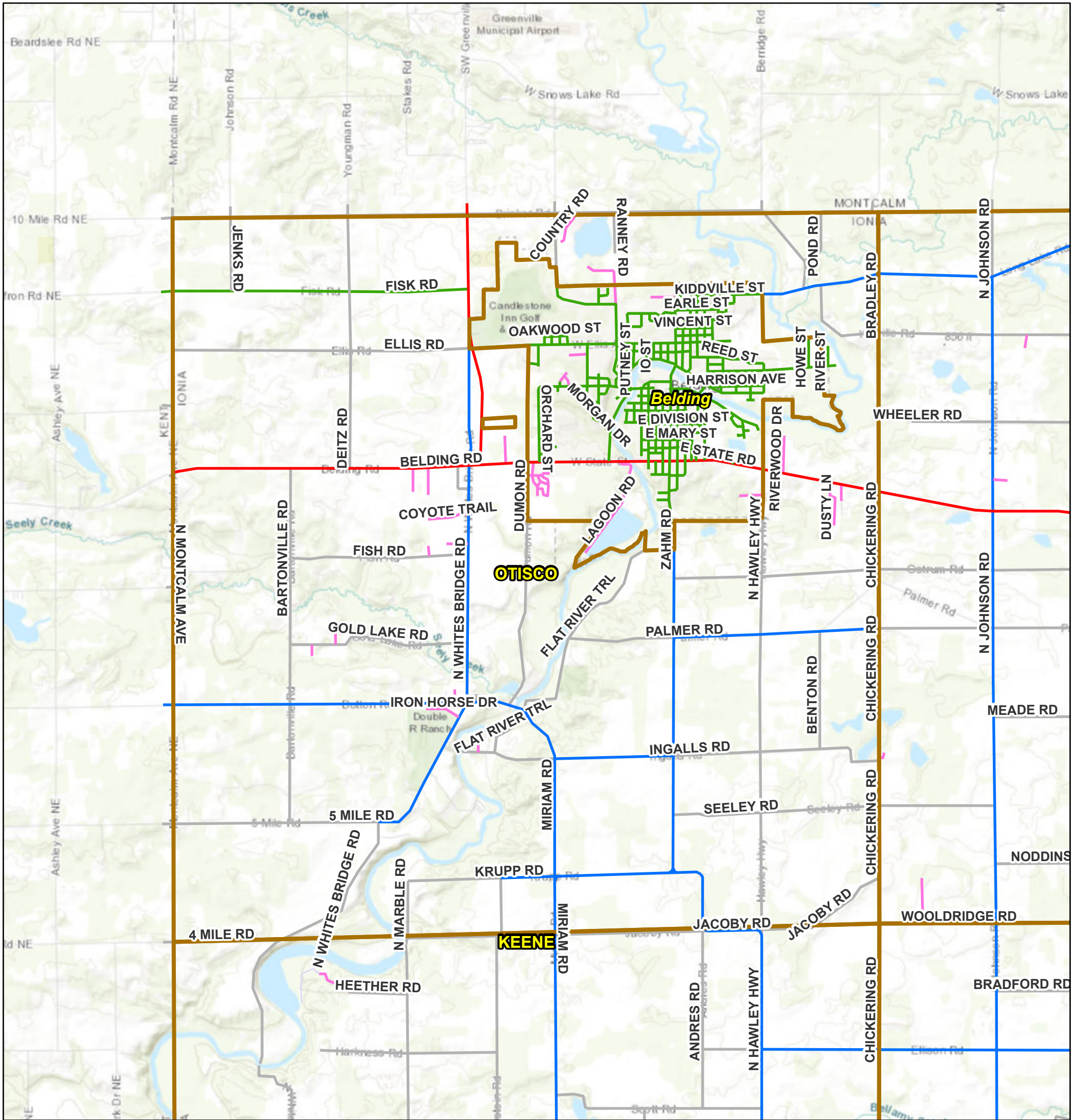
-  Greatest Limitations: Slopes of greater than 10% and/or areas with a permanent high water table
-  Moderate Restrictions: Areas with a seasonal high water table



**APPENDIX C – TRANSPORTATION MAP**



# Transportation Map



12/5/2019, 9:36:11 AM

1:72,224

Cities and Villages

Townships

## Roads

All Season

Gravel

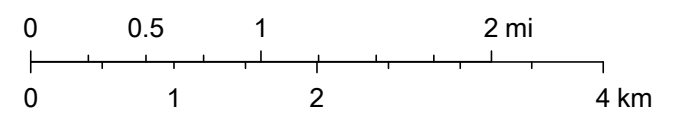
Paved

Private

State Hwy

Street

Driveway

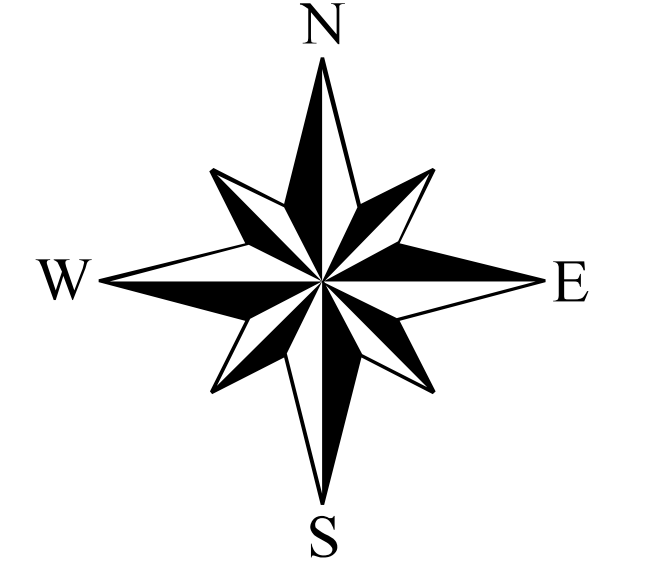


Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

**APPENDIX D – ZONING MAP (2019)**



# Otisco Township Zoning Map



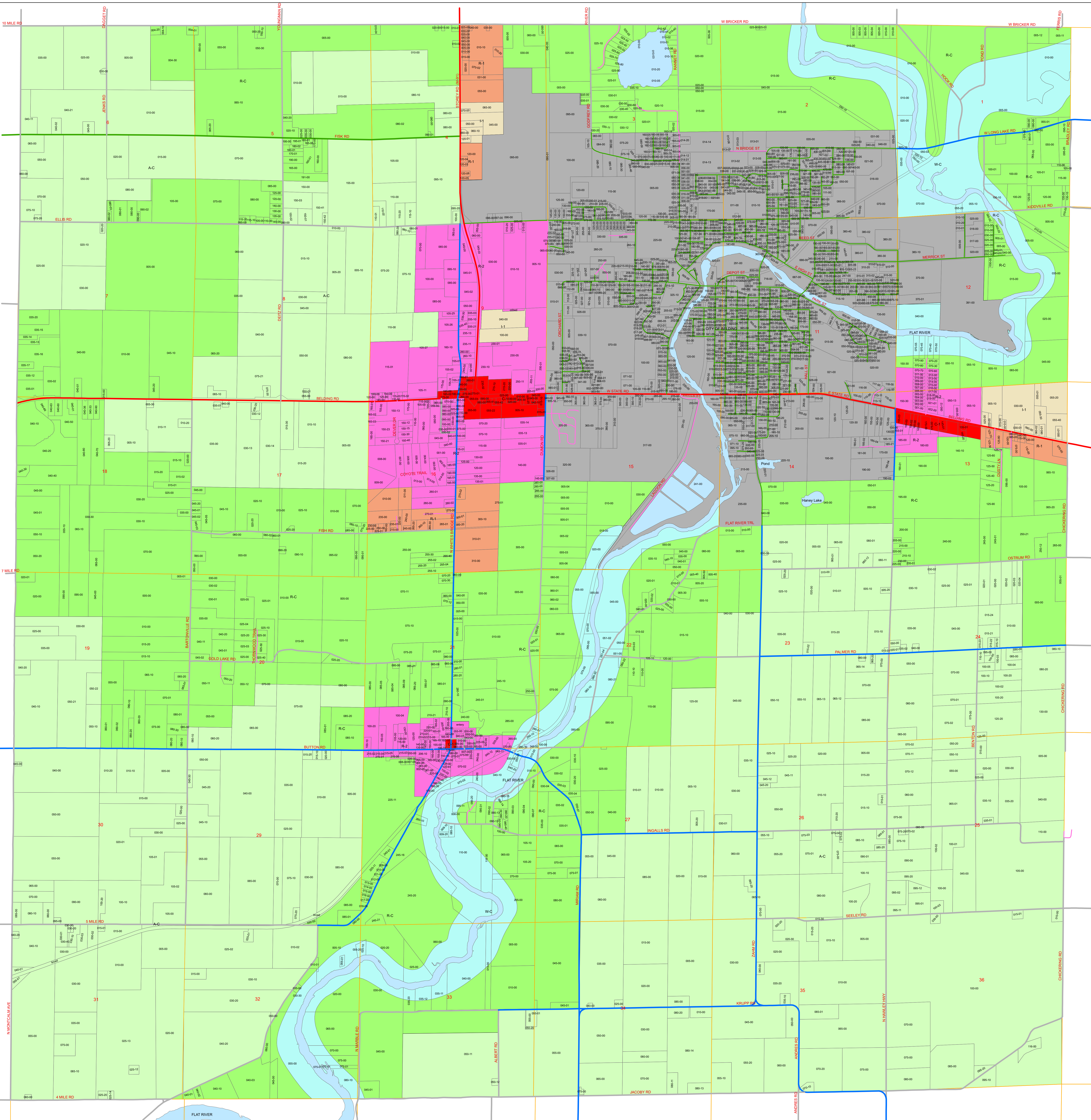
1 inch = 1,000 feet

- Zoning Districts**
- A-C Agriculture
  - R-1 Low Density Residential District
  - R-2 Medium to High Density Residential District
  - R-C Rural Conservation District
  - C-1 Commercial District
  - I-1 Industrial District
  - W-C Waterfront District
  - Belding City

- Legend**
- Roads**
- Type**
- AllSeason
  - Gravel
  - Paved
  - Private
  - StateHwy
  - Street
  - Driveway
  - Section\_Lines

**IONIA COUNTY MAPPING & GIS**  
(616) 527-5376

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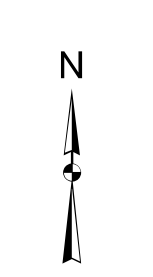




**APPENDIX E – MASTER PLAN MAP**



OTISCO TOWNSHIP  
PROPOSED  
LAND USE PLAN



1 inch = 1,000 feet

- Legend**
- Rail\_Road
  - Otisco\_Landuse**
  - Landuse**
  - A-C AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION
  - CITY OF BELDING
  - C-1 COMMERCIAL
  - I-1 INDUSTRIAL
  - R-1 LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
  - MHC MANUFACTURED HOUSING COMMUNITY
  - R-2 MEDIUM TO HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
  - R-C RURAL CONSERVATION
  - W-C WATERFRONT CONSERVATION

- State Highway
- All Season
- Paved
- Gravel
- Street
- Private
- Drive Way

