

## CHAPTER ONE

### MASTER PLAN SUMMARY

#### INTRODUCTION

The Soo Township Master Plan is a policy document which identifies how future growth, and associated land development and public services, should be guided to best ensure the welfare of the community.

The Master Plan has the following characteristics:

**FUTURE ORIENTED:** The plan is focused on short term and long-range planning in guiding growth, land development, and public services. It is a picture of the township, as it currently exists and a guide for community evolution over the next three years as well as long term growth for the next ten years.

**GENERAL:** The Plan establishes broad principles and policies to address future growth, land use and public services.

**COMPREHENSIVE:** The Plan addresses all types of land use and the geographic boundaries of each.

**A POLICY PLAN:** The Plan is a document which consists of both text and maps, a key portion of which presents the Township's policies regarding its future land use pattern and delivery of public services.

**DYNAMIC:** The Plan is intended to be a continually changing document, responsive to the wishes of local residents, changing conditions, and new strategies to manage growth, land use and public services.

The Soo Township Master Plan was prepared by the Soo Township Planning Commission; under the authority of the Michigan Township Planning Act, P.A. 168 of 1959. The Act provides for the creation of a planning commission to prepare a plan, or plans, whose purpose is:

“To promote public health, safety, and general welfare; to encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability; to avoid overcrowding of land by buildings or people; to lessen congestion on public roads and streets... and to consider the character of each Township and its suitability for particular uses judged in terms of such factors as the trend in land and population development.”

The Master Plan is a policy plan which provides the foundation upon which the Township will adopt regulations to implement the policies incorporated in this plan. The Master Plan will serve as the basis for updating provision in the Soo Township Zoning Ordinance, which is a regulatory document.

The Township Zoning Act stipulates that “the zoning ordinance shall be based upon a plan...” The Master Plan has been prepared to meet this statutory requirement, to provide a guide for

future development and provision of services and to maintain a strong legal foundation for the Townships zoning regulations.

### Components of the Master Plan

The Soo Township Master Plan consists of four major components:

1. An overview of the Township as it currently exists and major planning issues. (Chapter Two)
2. Goals and objectives to define the proposed future character of the Township and provide a strategy for future land use development and the provision of public services. (Chapter Three)
3. The Future land use patter for the Township. (Chapter Four)
4. The planned delivery of future public services in the Township. (Chapter Five)
5. Maps used in making planning decisions.

### IMPORTANCE & APPLICATION OF THE MASTER PLAN

The importance and application of the Soo Township Master Plan is reflected in both the long term interests of the Township and the day-to-day administration of the Township's planning and zoning program.

#### Long Term Interests

As indicated by recent survey results and planning commission meetings, there are a number of interests shared by residents and officials of Soo Township that can be expected to continue for years to come. Some of the key interests include:

- Planning, zoning, and zoning enforcement that will assure appropriate land use and adequate services to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of Township residents and visitors.
- Preservation of quiet, uncrowded rural nature of the Township
- Improved Traffic enforcement, signage, and lighting
- Adequate groundwater protection throughout the Township
- Elimination of open storage of junk

The Soo Township Master Plan supports these long term interests of the local residents and officials through the provision of a future-oriented strategy which seeks to protect theses interest. Intensive development without adequate public services to meet the demands of such development, as well as development which places excess demands upon the Townships nature resources (on-site septic systems and wells, continued growth of extractive industries, etc.) can lead the Township into a future of social and environmental risks which will seriously threaten the public's health, safety, and welfare. Chapters Four and Five establish specific future land use and public services strategies intended to address the long-term interests noted above and others.

#### Day-To-Day Administration

The Soo Township Master Plan plays an equally vital important role in the day-to-day planning and zoning efforts of the Township:

- **Advisory Policies:** The Soo Township Master Plan is an official advisory policy document which should be readily shared with existing and prospective landowners and developers to inform such persons and organizations about the long term intentions of the Township regarding land use and public services and thus, more closely integrate development proposal in the policies of the plan.
- **Zoning Ordinance Basis:** The Plan established a practical and legal basis for the Township to revise, update, or otherwise prepare regulatory programs, including zoning ordinance, to assure the policies of the Plan are implemented.
- **Review of the Rezoning or Variance Requests:** Chapter Three includes a list of Township goals and objectives which should be reviewed in light of future proposed rezoning or variance request to further establish a record upon which these can be evaluated. Just as important, chapters Four and Five define policies regarding the planned future land use pattern and public services in the Township which provide valuable reference upon which such rezoning or variance requests should be evaluated.
- **Public Services Improvements:** The cost-effective uses of Soo Township's tax dollars requires the identification of a planned future land use pattern in order to pinpoint future population centers and areas planned for commercial and/or industrial growth. Which infrastructure, such as road and fire protection, population centers and commercial/industrial areas typically require higher levels of public services. This plan provides the Township with the ability to plan ahead and better identify areas of future need.
- **Intergovernmental Coordination:** This plan provides the basis for Soo Township to communicate effectively with its neighbors regarding both the impact of neighboring in the areas of land use and public services.

#### PREPARATION OF THE MASTER PLAN

In the mid 1990's, Soo Township officials were indicated concerns about the increasing growth in the community and of their ability properly manage future growth and development.

In 1999, the Township entered into a contract with the Eastern U.P. Regional Planning Commission to assist the Planning Commission in the revision of the Township Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

The first phase of the Master Plan revision was the preparation and distribution of a survey of township property owners. (The surveys were mailed to one-third of all property owners who were selected by picking every third name on a list obtained from the County Equalization Department.) The purpose of this survey was to determine what residents and the property owners liked and disliked about the Township as it is now, their major concerns and how they would like the township to be in the future.

The survey results, the analysis of comments made at a public meeting to discuss the survey, and the analysis of data showing the potential and limitations for future growth were the primary

factors in the development of the Goals and Objectives and the Future Land Use map encompassed in this Plan.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SOO TOWNSHIP: OVERVIEW AND MAJOR PLANNING ISSUES

#### INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this plan is to establish a basis upon which Soo Township can accommodate future growth and development and plan for the needs of its future residents regarding land use and public services. In developing a strategy to address the future land use and public services needs of the Township, it is important to establish a record of existing condition in the Township and critical planning issues facing the Township. This chapter provides an overview of the Townships, as it exists today, and important planning issues facing the Township.

Soo Township is a municipality of two separate tracts of land, one on the mainland of the Upper Peninsula and the other an island in the St. Mary's River.

The mainland portion is a narrow strip of land, 3 miles wide and ranging from 8 miles to 11 miles long, located immediately south of the city of Sault Ste. Marie, the longest urban center in the region, in the north-east part of Chippewa County. It is bordered by the City of Sault Ste. Marie on the north; the upper St. Mary's Rive and Bay Mills Township on the West; Bay Mills, Dafter and Bruce Township on the south; and the lower St. Mary's River on the East.

Neebish Island is the island portion of Soo Township. It is located in the St. Mary's River, it's nearest point over 6 miles from the southern boundary of the mainland sector of the Township. (See Map #1 – Location Map)

The land area of Soo Township is about 45 square miles: 27 square miles on the mainland, and 18 square miles on the island.

For many years, the Township was primarily a farming community with a few pockets of moderate density residential development. In the mid 1970's changes started to occur that would greatly affect the nature of growth of this municipality.

Local farmers were cutting back to part time operations or discontinuing operations completely in the 70's because small-scale farming was no longer a profitable venture. At the same time, new commercial and residential development in neighboring Sault Ste. Marie was occurring on its south side. A significant amount of commercial and residential development was actually crossing over the city limits into Soo Township because of the substantially lower taxes and rural environment it could offer.

The new growth in the city has been occurring primarily in its south side, along the I-75 Business Spur for over 20 years. Three-mile road forms the southern boundary of the Sault and the northern boundary of Soo Township. It is also the southern portion of the city's business spur.

Around 1990, Sault Ste. Marie's retail business center moved to a large parcel of land along 3 Mile Road in close proximity to I-75 with the construction of Cascade Crossings, the Sault's largest shopping mall. This development has further escalated commercial development along the townships' property bordering the 3-mile road as well as along two other major intersecting highways, the Mackinac Trail and M-129. (See Map #2 – Commercial Businesses.) In-home businesses have also increase dramatically over the past decade. They are scattered throughout the Township.

Soo Township has experience the greatest percentage increase in population of any municipality in Chippewa County since 1990 and this trend is expected to continue. Its population was 1,617 in 1960, 1,775 in 1970, 2,179 in 1980, 2,165 in 1990, and 2,622 in 1998.

According to the 1990 US Census, the Township's per capita income was \$12,688, as compared with Chippewa County's at \$10, 829 and Michigan's at \$17,987. The Townships median family income (\$34,957) is considerably higher than the County's (\$25,384) but slightly below the State's (\$36,652).

The value of Township property has more than doubled since 1991 to almost \$61 million, much greater than any other township in the Eastern U.P.

The median age of Township residents was 34.8 in 1990, which is slightly older than the County (32.2) and the State (32.6).

In 1990, there were 1,073 housing units in the Township, of which 804 were occupied, 118 were rented occupied, and 214 were seasonal or recreational dwellings. Eight of the housing structures had 2-4 units and 33 had 10 or more. Mobile homes made up 124 of the housing units.

Neebish Island was the location of 45 of the total occupied year-round housing units in the Township, and 134 of the seasonal dwellings in 1990. It also had 3 commercial resort facilities.

There were 89 commercial businesses in the Township in 1999. Most are located along 3 Mile Road from I-75 to the M-129 intersection, along M-129 and the Mackinac Trail between 3 Mile and 4 Mile Roads, and along Riverside Drive. The remaining 36 Businesses are scattered through the Township. (See Map #2-Commerical Businesses)

#### Recreation Facilities

No recreation facilities are owned or operated by the township and no state or Federal parks of campgrounds are located with the community. Various segments of the Eastern U.P. Snowmobile Trail System run through the township. Soo Township Elementary School, a part of the Sault Area School System, provides limited indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Soo Township owns one small parcel of land that is used for recreation. Harmony Beach, located at the East End of 4 Mile Road on the St. Mary's River, is a bathing beach/passive recreation area with a depth of 120 feet and 60 feet of beach footage.

#### Public Services

The Soo Township Volunteer Fire Department serves the community with fire protection services. When major fires occur, fire departments from neighboring municipalities provide assistance.

Police protection is provided by the Chippewa County Sheriff's Department and the Michigan State Police, out of its Sault Ste. Marie post.

Sault Ste. Marie's Water and sewer system has been established into Soo Township in a few relatively small areas. It was extended into and adjacent to the former Radar Base along Radar Road in the early 1990's when ground water tests detected significant contamination problems. Two businesses on the township side of 3 Mile Road have also been connected to the City's water and sewer system.

Solid waste pickup and disposal is provided by Waste Management, Inc. by means of individual contracts. Recyclable materials can be deposited at the Chippewa County Recycling Center in Sault Ste. Marie. Electric services are provided by Edison Sault Electric and Cleveland Electric Company.

An analysis of the preceding information paints the picture of Soo Township as a community that:

- Has a fairly strong economic base in the value of its land and the earning power of its residents, much of which is largely dependent upon that of the City of Sault Ste. Marie.
- Is formed primarily of residences throughout its land area and a substantial number of small commercial businesses along the segments of the three major streets and highways that are in close proximity to the city.
- Has a population whose median age is slightly older than the county and state and has a relatively conservative outlook.
- Has experienced growing pains during the past decade and is concerned that this trend will continue for a number of years.
- Is formed primarily of residents who choose to live here because of quiet, peaceful, spacious country atmosphere it provides.
- Has a number of sand and gravel quarry operations, some of which have been expanding recently and causing significant problems and concerns.
- Has developed a real concern for traffic safety over the last decade: Has a problem with the open storage of junk, which is destroying the aesthetic beauty of some areas.
- Has a growing concern of groundwater pollution in areas where extensive new development is occurring and is likely to occur.
- Has a considerable amount of vacant land that is no longer being farmed.

- Has long stretches of fragile waterfront property along the east and west sectors of the mainland and along the entire perimeter of the island.

## Major Planning Issues

A number of key planning considerations became apparent in light of the existing trends and condition in the Township. These considerations vary in scope but, in most cases, are dependent upon one another. The future quality of life in Soo Township and the future character of the Township will be shaped largely by the manner in which the Township's strategy for future land use and public services responds to these issues. Below is a review of these important planning consideration.

### Accommodating Future Growth and Development

The Township has experience unprecedented increase in population, commercial businesses and land value over the past two decades. This trend is expected continue. The result has been an increasing number of growth issues that continue to confront township officials and a lightened concern among township residents that this growth must be better controlled or the unique rural character they desire will soon be destroyed.

No municipality is permitted to adopt a zoning ordinance or make a zoning decision that will totally prohibit a legal land use where a local or regional need for such a land use can be demonstrated – unless there are no appropriate location in the community for the land use.

With this in mind, recommendations in the Plan must squarely addresses the growth and development issues facing the Township. The Plan must provide a strategy that will effectively guide future growth in a legally defensible manner that is consistent with the wishes of the Township's residents and the opportunities and limitations presented by these municipality's natural and cultural characteristics.

### Residential Development

It is apparent that a number of individuals and developers are interesting in building housing units in various location in the Township. A community is significantly impacted by the intensity and location of future residential development. Densities that qualify as "Urban Development" typically require water and sewer systems, increase police and fire protection and improved road systems. Developments and improvement of this nature place substantially higher financial demands upon the Township.

Future residential development should be based upon a specific strategy that correlates development with cost-effective expansion of public services. It should also be based upon the ability of the soils and other natural conditions to support the planned residential densities where public sewer is not available.

### Commercial Development

Commercial development in Soo Township has not followed a plan or strategy. As a result, there is no clearly defined commercial district. This undermines the sense of community as well

as the Township's efforts to strengthen its economic base. There is also very limited site landscaping to make the commercial areas visually attractive and also very limited site landscaping to make the commercial areas visually attractive and appealing as a place regarding the future location of commercial development, commercial expansion areas, and minimum requirements regarding the character of commercial areas including vehicle and pedestrian access and site amenities. Future commercial development should also be based upon a strategy that correlates development densities with cost-effective expansion of public services.

#### Protection of Rural Character

Protection of the Township's rural character is very important to the residents of Soo Township. "Rural Character" is a subjective term and, with this in mind, the Plan recognizes that people typically associate "rural character" with an overall perception of expansive open spaces of natural landscapes, including woodlands, wetlands, meadows, farmland, spacious residential lots and limited urban development. These features play a vital role in shaping the character of the Township as well as important environmental roles, including; the protection of wildlife habitat, groundwater and surface water quality, and groundwater recharge, air quality and flood control.

Protection of "rural character" does not prohibit future growth and development. The purpose of this is to effectively guide growth and development to assure it is accomplished in a manner that is totally compatible with the Township's rural character and natural resources.

#### Farmland

Agricultural lands, nation-wide, are being consumed by residential, commercial, and industrial development at an alarming rate. Many factors account for the sub-dividing and sale of farmland – most of which involve potential economic gain. Soo Township has many acres of land that are still labeled agricultural. However, a small portion of this property is actually being formed.

It is important that the struggles faced by the local farming community are recognized in the Plan's recommendations. Recommendations regarding future land use patterns should not place unreasonable limitations on the future use of existing agricultural parcels, although they should encourage the continuation of farming operations as long as there is interest among local farmers.

#### Road Network

Soo Township's network of roads and highways on the mainland, is fairly extensive and well developed for a rural municipality. However, Neebish Island has only 2 ¾ miles of paved roads. (See Map #3, Transportation Network)

Recommendations regarding a future land use pattern for the Township should recognize the presence of all season paved roads, major highways, and other paved and unpaved roads and guides more intensive growth and development toward those areas that have, or are planned to have, road improvements and infrastructure capable of accommodating the increase traffic demands.

#### Public Services



Tax revenues dictate, in large part, the extent and quality of public services. Though any new development is expected increase the Township's tax base, it will also place additional demands on public services available to Township residents and businesses.

Recent research has shown that new development does not usually pay its own way. The lack of local support for tax increases should encourage development patterns that minimize new public costs. With this in mind, it is important, whenever possible, to local higher density and intensity development near areas currently being serviced with the level of public services that can adequately handle the increased demands.

### Compatibility Among Land Uses

Individual properties and land uses do not exist as islands. Individual properties and land uses exist within a network of adjoining and nearby properties and land uses. The Plan should provide for a township-wide land use pattern which assures compatibility between nearby and neighboring land uses through recommendations regarding land use type, land use intensity, and buffering. If compatibility among land uses is to be achieved, the planned future land use pattern must also take into consideration adjacent land uses in neighboring communities as well. The city of Sault Ste. Marie is an urban community, while the other adjoining municipalities are similar in character to Soo Township in that vast areas of these communities are devoted to public lands and other open space and the majority of residential development is of a low density character.

### Protection of Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

Soo Township government functions to provide for the health, safety, and welfare of the residents within the municipality. The development of a new Master Plan is an extension of that function and as such, the Plan should provide for a foundation upon which the future health, safety, and welfare of the Township and its residents can be better assured. The Plan should take steps to satisfy fundamental health, safety, and welfare concerns including the avoidance of intensive development in environmentally sensitive areas and/or areas unsuitable for structural development. In addition, it should assure the provision of adequate public facilities to serve new land uses and development at the time they become functional, as well as the protection of property values and the Townships economic stability.

## CHAPTER THREE

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

#### INTRODUCTION

With the decision to prepare this Plan, Soo Township took the position that it wanted to be actively involved in guiding and shaping future growth and development in the Township and establish its future character. A fundamental question that must be asked in this regard is "What should Soo Township be like in the future?" This question must be answered if the Plan is to develop a sound strategy for future land use and public services. To effectively plan for the Township's well-being with regard to future land use and public services; it is necessary to

clearly establish the goals and objectives of the Township. Planning goals are statements that express the Township's long range desires. Each goal has accompanying objectives which are the general approaches that the Township supports to attain the specified goal.

This Chapter presents the goals and objectives established for the Township regarding land use and public services during the preparation of this plan. The goals and objectives are important for several reasons:

- They provide current and future residents of Soo Township with an overview of the desired character of the Township.
- They identify and outline the basic actions, which should be taken in guiding future land use and public services in the Township.
- They serve as references upon which future zoning and land development decision can be evaluated.

The goals and objectives are divided into the following major categories:

- Growth Management
- Rural Character and the Environment
- Residential Development
- Commercial Development
- Industrial Development
- Transportation and Roads
- Public Facilities and Services

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### Growth Management

Goal: Guide Future development in a manner which is consistent with the natural limitations of the land, the preservation of open spaces, natural resources, and rural character, and the planned provision of necessary public facilities and services.

Objective: Encourage development in locations which are consistent with the capacity of existing and planned public services and facilities, and are cost effective in relation to service extensions.

Objective: Wherever legally permissible, local regulations should require new development to pay for the direct and indirect Township costs associated with that development. These costs should not be imposed on existing residents. Exceptions should be made where public interests and benefits may be at stake.

Objective: Discourage the expansion of public facilities and services (water and sewer extensions, for example) except where the intensity of development requires such services or where the public health, safety or welfare is at risk.

Objective: Discourage new growth and development that requires levels of public facilities and services currently unavailable in the Township, until the time such levels of services become available.

Objective: Continually provide regular opportunities for public input on growth and development issues facing the Township and the future character of the township.

Objective: Develop and maintain a communication network with area municipalities and county agencies to discuss local and area-wide public facilities and service's needs, land use conditions and trends, planning issues, and strategies to address short and longer term needs and issues in a mutually beneficial manner.

### Rural Character and the Environment

Goal: Preserve the quiet and rural character of Soo Township and its environmental integrity.

Objective: Encourage residential, commercial, and industrial development which does not adversely impact environmentally sensitive areas, open spaces, and the landscapes natural features.

Objective: Limit development that could adversely affect the Township's prevailing rural character by limiting the future locations within which new or expanded commercial and industrial development may occur.

Objective: Ensure that the quantity and quality of new development does not create harmful increase in air, noise, land, and water pollution, and that all development and land uses be in compliance with applicable local, county, state, and federal regulations.

Objective: Recognize that the Township's open spaces, including woodlands, fields, and farmland, are a fundamental component of the Township's rural character and should be preserved.

Objective: Preserve the Township's environmentally sensitive areas, such as steep slopes, wetlands and stream corridors, and land not suitable for development because of soil and/or topographic limitations.

Objective: Encourage the use of programs and tools designed to preserve open spaces, including the use of conservation easements and land trusts.

Objective: Educate the public regarding the Township's strong reliance upon groundwater resource for potable water supplies and the potential detrimental effects of irresponsible land development and land use.

Objective: To the extent that residential development is permitted to occur in agricultural areas, encourage such development to be sited on less productive farmland.

Objective: Adopt zoning regulations designed to protect farming activities in designated agricultural areas from the nuisances (destruction of crops, complaints about legitimate day-to-day farming operations, etc.) associated with incompatible adjacent uses.

Objective: Ensure, through site planning and other innovative planning techniques, that new development minimizes disturbances to, and premature destruction of, farmland areas.

### Residential Development

GOAL: Provide for a broad range of housing opportunities which: 1.) Respond to the varying economic and lifestyle needs of the Townships. 2.) Encourage a quality and attractive housing stock, and 3.) Are sensitive to the rural character of the community.

Objective: Encourage the continuation of single family housing as the principal housing option in the Township and identify land areas, through land use planning and zoning, most appropriate for single family housing.

Objective: Seek to assure additional housing alternative to address the varied lifestyles and age characteristics of new residents and the future generations of existing Township families.

Objective: Encourage innovative residential development which incorporates the preservation of natural resource systems and open spaces within the site planning process and the preservation of the Township's rural character.

Objective: Prohibit residential development densities in areas where public services and/or natural conditions are inadequate to support the proposed density of development.

Objective: Encourage the maintenance and up-keep of residential yards and neighborhoods through zoning regulations intended to protect property values and neighborhood stability.

Objective: Encourage the rehabilitation and use of existing unoccupied dwelling units to assist in meeting future housing needs.

### Commercial Development

GOAL: Provide opportunities for the expansion of commercial land uses in a manner that minimizes impacts upon adjacent land uses, responds to the rural character of the community, and assure adequate services to meet the needs of these land uses.

Objective: Avoid separate parking lots for each business where feasible and encourage centrally placed parking lots which serve multiple businesses.

Objective: Improve the quality, vitality, and value of retail areas through sign regulations which control the design and location of signs.

Objective: Encourage new commercial development to incorporate site amenities to create more safe and visually appealing retail center, including sidewalks, landscape areas, and unified signage.

Objective: Ensure that commercial land uses have adequate provisions for sewage disposal, storm water management, potable water, and other critical public health and welfare concerns.

Objective: Ensure that elements for preservation of the Township's rural character are incorporated into new commercial developments by establishing appropriate site design and building standards, including screening and protection of natural resources.

Objective: Prevent the premature conversion of land to uses other than their planned use for future commercial development to ensure their long term availability.

Objective: Ensure the proper maintenance and up keep of commercial properties by means of the adoption and enforcement of appropriate zoning regulations.

Objective: Ensure that new commercial development does not adversely impact the normal adjoining land uses through appropriate buffering and other techniques.

Objective: Provide opportunities for home based occupations within residential dwelling units in appropriate areas of the Township and under conditions which will not negatively impact the residential character, appearance, and quality of life experience by surrounding residential properties and neighborhoods.

## Industrial

## Development

GOAL: Provide the opportunity of the location of non-polluting light industry in a manner which will ensure that adjoining land uses will not be negatively impacted and that local roads, utilities, and other public services will not be overburdened.

Objective: Ensure that industrial development does not adversely impact the normal use and enjoyment of adjoining land uses through appropriate buffering and other techniques.

Objective: Ensure that industrial land uses have adequate provisions for sewerage disposal, storm water management, potable water, and other critical public health and welfare concerns.

Objective: Ensure the proper maintenance and up keep of industrial properties through enactment and enforcement of appropriate zoning regulations.

Objective: Limit land division and access along major roads to prevent industrial strip development.

Objective: Require the separation of industrial sites from residential areas through buffers comprised of parking areas, commercial uses, parks, parkways, or open space.

GOAL: Prevent the uncontrolled expansion and new development of sand and gravel quarry operations.

Objective: Establish new zoning provisions that will ensure that no new or expanded quarry operations can occur without appropriate review approval by the Township Board.

## Transportation and Roads

**GOAL:** Maintain and enhance a transportation network throughout the Township which provides safe and efficient flow, utilizes road segments specifically designed to accommodate higher traffic flows where higher traffic demand is being generated, and is consistent with the land uses goals and policies of this plan.

**Objective:** Identify priority road segments for maintenance and improvement, based upon the planned future land use pattern for the Township and existing traffic patterns, and work with the County Road Commission systematically undertake these projects.

**Objective:** Discourage land uses and development patterns which generate high traffic flow patterns along the Township's unpaved road until the time when such roads have been improved to accommodate such development.

**Objective:** Provide improved traffic signage which will ensure a safer environment for Township residents and visitors through the development of a specific communication process involving the Township, County Road Commission and Michigan Department of Transportation.

**Objective:** Adopt land use and/or other regulations which minimize the potential for traffic congestion and safety hazards along adjacent roadways, including limitations on the number, size, and shape of new land division along primary roads, and the prevention of "strip" development.

**Objective:** Develop plans to expand alternative transportation facilities, including walkways and bicycle trails, in coordination with public recreation areas, neighboring municipalities and regional efforts.

**Objective:** Prepare a capital improvements program to schedule and prioritize transportation improvement projects.

#### Public Facilities and Services

**GOAL:** Expand the Township's public facilities and services only as necessary for maintenance of the public health, safety and welfare, provided such improvements are consistent with the Master Plan's proposed future and use pattern and do not encourage excessive growth over vast areas of the Township.

**Objective:** Identify those areas of the Township which, due to existing conditions and the planned future and use pattern of the Township, may be in need or be in need improved public service including police and fire protection services, sewage disposal, potable water, and storm water management.

**Objective:** All improvements to Township public service and facilities should be planned so that tax dollars are spent wisely and efficiently and any increase in local taxes minimized.

**Objective:** Develop and maintain a regular meaningful communications program with adjoining municipalities and regional agencies to discuss and investigate public facilities and services' needs, opportunities for shared facilities and services, and alternative strategies for contracted services versus Township operated services.

Objective: Maintain a current Township-wide recreation plan which responds to the concerns and needs of area residents.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FUTURE LAND USE STRATEGY

#### INTRODUCTION

Soo Township's principal planning components are embodied in the Master Plan's Future Land Use Strategy, as discussed in this Chapter, and the Public Services Strategy discussed in Chapter 5. The Future Land Use Strategy identifies the desired pattern of land use and development throughout the Township. The Public Services Strategy specifies recommendations to assure future public services are coordinated with the planned future land use pattern, and the achievement of the Plan's goals and objectives.

The Future Land Use Strategy concerns itself with policies regarding future land use and development in the Township. Implementation of these policies rests with regulatory tools of the Township – most importantly the Soo Township Zoning Ordinance. The Soo Township Zoning Ordinance will be the primary implementation tool of the Master Plan as it generally regulates the type, location, density, and intensity of land development throughout the Township.

The Township may also adopt other supporting regulatory tools to further the implementation of the policies of the Master Plan. Land division and private road regulations are very important as a means to further implement the Master Plan and the Future Land Use Strategy present within. Land division regulations are intended to assure efficient land division patterns, establishes the avoidance of non-buildable lots, and adequate public access to public roads. Private road regulations are intended to provide opportunities for road circulation network restricted from general public use, in response to the local housing market, while at the same time assuring such road are built and maintained in accordance with minimum public safety and welfare standards. Related ordinances and a capital improvement program, may from time to time, be adopted or amended to further carry out this plan.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE FUTURE LAND USE STRATEGY

The Future Land Use Strategy establishes the planned future land use pattern throughout the Township for the next 10 years. However, no new land uses should be established, or land rezoned, unless adequate public facilities and service are available to meet the needs of the proposed uses and such development does not outpace the Township's ability to effectively manage the rate of development.

The future land use pattern was established upon an analysis of the Township's natural and cultural characteristics including community attitudes, existing roadway network, and conditions, existing any nearby public infrastructure, environmentally sensitive areas, and neighboring municipal land use conditions. The opportunities and constraints presented by these

characteristics were evaluated within the context of the goals and objective of Chapter 3 to arrive at a planned future land use pattern. (See Future Land Use Strategy at the end of this chapter)

## INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS OF THE FUTURE LAND USE STRATEGY

Following is a review of the principal components of the Future Land Use Strategy. These individual components collectively formulate the planned future land use pattern in the Township and their approximate geographic limits are illustrated in the Future capital land Use map at the end of this chapter.

### Forest/Recreation Area

The Future Land Use Strategy establishes a Forest/Recreation Area which includes lands primarily characterized by areas of wetlands and forest lands. These natural resources are prevalent in the western part of the mainland, over 80% of the island and in smaller parcels throughout the Township. In addition to presenting severe limitations toward development, they provide important environmental benefits including habitats for wildlife, flood control, groundwater recharge and discharge, and surface water purification. The wetlands and forest lands provide special opportunities for passive recreation and contribute the Township's overall rural character.

In light of the critical roles which the Township's wetland/forest land areas play, the severe limitations the wetlands present toward development, and the importance of the public resource management and recreation areas in the Township, the Forest//Recreation Area provides for the protection of these resources and their long term viability by strongly discouraging the introduction of new land uses into these areas which are not of a similar character. Development in close proximity to these sensitive resources and a similar character. Development in close proximity to these sensitive resources and public lands will threaten the quality and quantity of these assets as well as increase public safety concerns between hunting activities and neighboring land uses. Future use and development of land in the Forest/Recreation Area would be predominately limited to open-space and natural resource based land uses. Residential development should be permitted at only very low density, such as 1 dwelling unit or less per 10 acres. Alteration of the natural landscape and development of new roads should be avoided to the greatest extent feasible, and no development should occur within these areas without receipt of appropriate Township and/or state or federal permits. Where only a portion of a single parcel falls within a Forest/Recreation Area, future development should occur only on those portions not characterized by wetland habitats.

### Agricultural – Rural Residential Area

The Agricultural – Rural Residential Area is intended to provide opportunities for, and encourage the continuation of, agricultural operations in the Township. This area is also intended to provide opportunities or rural residential lifestyles of comparatively low development density. The Agricultural – Rural Residential Area is characterized by the principle agricultural areas in the Township not otherwise included in the Forest/Recreation Area. The Agricultural – Rural Residential Area discourages indiscriminate encroachment of residential



land uses into particularly productive farmland areas in order to more effectively preserve these important agricultural resources. At the same time, it is recognized that the ability of a farmland owner to split off residential lots from the farm acreage, from time to time or multiple splits in a short period of time, is important for both economic gain and assuring the continued operation of the farm.

Farmland owners should not be required to give up unnecessary farmland acreage in order to limit the amount of future residential development in this Area. For example, one 10 acre residential lot split from a 40 acre farm parcel is far more destructive to the long term viability of that farming operation than four 1 acre lot splits from the same parcel. New residential development should be located on less productive portions of agricultural acreage where feasible. Agricultural buffer setbacks which require new residences to be a minimum distance from adjacent agricultural operations to lessen associated conflicts should also be considered.

Potential new resident in the Agricultural – Rural Residential Area should be aware that the traditional smells, noises, pesticides applications, and generally recognized agricultural activities associated with farming may continue on a longer term basis, and local developers and real estate agents should agree to disclose this information to prospective buyers of land in this Area.

#### Commercial Area

Substantial commercial growth is expected to continue in the Township for the next ten years, or more. This plan recommends that all new commercial development be confined to the three primary commercial corridors as indicated in the Future Land Use Map. The primary commercial corridors include: 3 Mile Road from I-75 to approximately ½ mile east of M-129, Mackinac Trail from 3 Mile Road south to 4 ½ Mile Road, and M-129 from 3 Mile Road south to 5 Mile Road. Appropriate recreation-oriented commercial development should also be allowed to continue along the segments of Riverside drive and Nicolet Road that border the St. Mary's River as well as along the perimeter of Neebish Island. The Mackinac Trail and M-129 Commercial Corridors are broken up by residential areas along specific segments (See Map #8, Future Land Use Map, pages 4-7)

All future commercial developments should be required to employ measures to minimize negative impacts on nearby properties, include; screening or other buffer techniques, proper site development design, landscaping, and setbacks.

All future commercial development proposals that require the extension of existing water and sewer systems or significant road improvements should be discouraged until such time that the demands of township residents warrant the costs of providing these services.

#### Industrial Area

Current industrial development consists of sand and gravel excavations along both sides of I-75, between 3 mile road and 4 ½ mile road. The Plan recommends that future industrial development, including any further expansion of the existing sand and gravel operations, be limited to the industrial areas shown on the Future Land Use Map. It is further recommended

that future industrial development or expansion projects be required to take appropriate measures to ensure minimal potential negative impacts upon adjacent land uses.

#### Residential Area

The Residential Area is intended to accommodate residential development at relatively low to moderate densities. It includes privately owned lands other than those included in the Forest-Recreation, Agricultural-Residential, or Rural-Residential Areas that allow various forms of low-density residential development.

In view of the lack of public water and sewer within the Residential area and the predominance of soil conditions that present severe limitations to on-site septic systems, development densities or no more than one housing unit per acre are recommended. Substantially lower development densities are advised in areas where; soil and/or topographic conditions warrant it, access to emergency services is limited due to distances from such services, or where road infrastructure is inadequate to support moderate to high traffic flow year-round.

This Plan recognizes the existence of some developed properties within the Residential Area which are not of a residential character and some which are not of residential character and some which are essentially in home businesses. The Plan generally supports the continuation of these uses as they currently operate, but strongly advises that a stringent and comprehensive review process is implemented to carefully analyze the impact of such future proposed developments in the Residential Area.

#### Waterfront Area

A strip of land, no less than 500 feet in depth, of all properties bordering the St. Mary's River should be established as a Waterfront District. The Waterfront Area includes the entire perimeter of Neebish Island, the entire eastern side of the mainland and about 70% of the Western side of the mainland.

Waterfront properties are extremely fragile and any proposed future development projects in this area should be required to go through a "Site Plan Review" approval process before any construction is allowed. In addition, no future development should be allowed on any waterfront property within the first 100 feet from the high water mark of the St. Mary's River.

Low-density development should be encouraged on most of the properties in the Waterfront District. However, some portions of the mainland along the lower St. Mary's River and some parts of the Neebish Island Waterfront are suitable for medium density development.

#### SPECIAL LAND USES

The previous pages' present recommendation regarding the planned future land use pattern for the Township during the coming ten years. It is not the intent of this Plan to identify the specific land uses which should be permitted in each of the Areas. This Plan makes broad-based recommendations regarding the dominant land uses intended to be accommodated in each of the Areas. Specific permitted land uses will be determined by the zoning provision of the Township. The Township recognizes that some land uses may be considered generally compatible with the

intent of a particular zoning district, yet may not necessarily be appropriate on a particular parcel in that district due to unique or special conditions. These unique or special circumstances may be a result of traffic, noise, or visual or operational characteristics, which could result in significant public or private nuisance. Such uses are typically referred to as special land uses in the community zoning ordinances. They should be permitted only after a special review has determined that the land and associated site development proposal meets special standards to assure its compatibility with surrounding land uses, other permitted uses in the district, public facilities and services, and other community features. Special land uses often induce (but are not limited to) mineral extraction pits, commercial kennels, service stations, high traffic generating uses, and certain industrial projects.

Special land uses should be permitted in appropriate locations pursuant to specific standards and review procedures established in the Township's zoning ordinance. Approval should not be indiscriminate and conditions should be imposed to minimize the impacts on surrounding lands. These standards should accomplish the following:

- 1) Assure that the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of land uses are compatible with the character of adjacent property and the surrounding area.
- 2) Avoid inappropriate changes to the essential character of the surrounding area.
- 3) Avoid interference with the general enjoyment of adjacent property.
- 4) Improve the use or character of the property under consideration and the surrounding area in general, yet also be in keeping with the natural environment on the site.
- 5) Avoid negative impacts upon adjacent property or conditions which will be detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of persons or party through the excessive production of traffic, noise, smoke, odor, fumes, or glare.
- 6) Assure the availability of adequate essential public facilities and services, or evidence that the person responsible for the proposed special land use will be able to continually provide for the services and facilities deemed essential to the special land use under consideration.
- 7) Avoid demands on public services and facilities in excess of current capacity.

This Plan strongly discourages the issuance of special land uses permits for disruptive commercial or industrial uses in residential areas, under the guise of "home occupations." These uses undermine the residential neighborhood and quality of life for current and future residents.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PUBLIC SERVICES STRATEGY

#### INTRODUCTION

The Future Land Use Strategy discussed in Chapter 4 describes the planned pattern of land use throughout the Township. The Public Services Strategy described in this chapter identifies the manner and degree to which public infrastructure and services are to be provided within the Township to support the planned future land use pattern. Public services and related infrastructure include sewage disposal and potable water, roads and highways, police and fire

protection, recreation, and general government services. As the character and feasibility of land development is directly impacted by the extent to which public services are available, the Public Services Strategy works hand in hand with the Future Land Use Strategy and is a critical element of the Township's efforts to control and guide future growth and development.

An important principle of the Public Services Strategy is that no new development will occur in the Township unless public services are adequate to meet the needs of that new development. The Public Services Strategy consists of recommendations regarding improvements to the Township's delivery of individual public services. These policies determine the manner and conditions upon which future public service improvements are to be made.

## PUBLIC SERVICE COMPONENTS

### ROADWAY NETWORK

**ISSUES:** As new residential and non-residential land uses are introduced in the Township, demands upon the roadway network will increase. The expected growth in commercial and residential development will result in higher traffic levels. This increased traffic may eventually overburden the capacity some of the Township's roads currently provide. Conversely, it is important to realize that improvements can be expected to attract new development, which, in turn, will place additional demand on the roadway network. The Roadway Network component of the Public Services Strategy seeks to assure that land development does not sacrifice the public health, safety, and welfare due to inadequate roadway infrastructure, nor prematurely encourage changes in land uses due to improved conditions.

The Township's roadway infrastructure currently meets local traffic flow demands fairly well. This is due, in large part, to the concentration of the Township's population where the infrastructure is substantial and accommodates the vast majority of the traffic flow. However, some of the roads in the Township initially designed for flow traffic flow can be expected to require significant improvements to meet the greater demands placed upon them by growing population.

**Recommendations:** The following recommendations are intended to serve as a guide regarding improvements to the Township's roadway network.

- 1) Soo Township will attempt to improve the Township roadway network, as financial resources become available, based upon the following guidelines:
  - a) Greatest opportunity for road improvements will be assigned to those road segments whose current conditions present imminent danger to the public health and safety of Township residents.
  - b) Functional classification of roads shall dictate the priority of improvements when all other conditions are generally equal. The functional importance of the various roads in the Township, from highest to lowest, is as follows: 1) county primary, 2) county local, excluding public roads in a platted subdivision or similar neighborhood

- development, and 3) minor roads, such as local neighborhood roads in platted subdivisions.
- c) Where imminent danger is not a factor, county local gravel roads shall only be paved based upon the following considerations: 1) there is general consensus among residents living along the road segment for such paving, and 2) the costs to maintain a gravel road become excessive compared to the long term cost of paving a road, undermining the financial stability of the Township, and Township residents are unwell to pay additional taxes to cover the maintenance costs.
  - 2) The Township will strive to obtain and maintain current traffic counts and, upon the development of a Township wide traffic county profile, establish a level of service rating for each road segment to assist in the identification of priority improvements.
  - 3) The Township will work closely with the Chippewa County Road Commission to identify needed improvements and the perceived relative priority of such improvements.
  - 4) Proposed land uses and site development projects larger than a single family home on an individual lot will be analyzed in regard to traffic impacts and roadway improvements.
  - 5) The Township will develop standards to regulate new development along roadway corridors to minimize negative impacts including, but not limited to, poorly sited and/or designed access, and too many points of access.
  - 6) Subdivisions platted according to PA 288 of 1967 must be built to county Road commission standards. Private roads must be built to meet minimum design standards to assure adequate means of access, including emergency vehicle access. All roads shall provide adequate right of way or easement widths to assure ease of maintenance, improvements, and installation of utilities.

### Sewage Disposal and Potable Water

Issues: The vast majority of the Township residents rely on on-site sewage disposal and potable water. The number of residences relying on on-site facilities may increase considerably in future years, depending upon population growth rates and land development patterns. The fact that many of the Township soils present severe or moderate limitations to on-site sewage disposal highlight the critical relationship between land use, development densities, and on-site sewage disposal and potable water. Improperly operating septic systems can contaminate potable groundwater resources, inland lakes and streams, and pose public health threats to those using the contaminated resources. As land development densities increase, so does the need for public sewer and water. Industrial, commercial, and higher density residential land uses generally have greater sewage disposal and potable water needs than can often be met by traditional on site facilities. Failure to provide adequate sewer and water facilities to these land uses can lead to severe health and environmental consequences, while the premature provision of these services can lead to accelerated and unmanaged growth and development. The primary objective of the Disposal and Potable Water component is to assure adequate provision to meet future sewage disposal and potable water needs.

Recommendations: The following recommendations are to assure adequate sewage disposal and potable water in the Township during the next 10 years:

- 1) All onsite sewage disposal and potable water facilities shall be constructed and maintained in accordance with the requirements and standards of the Chippewa County Public Health Department and Michigan Public Health Department as well as those of other applicable local, county, state, or federal agencies.
- 2) No land uses or land development projects will be permitted if any applicable regulations regarding onsite sewage disposal and potable water facilities cannot be met and public sewer and water services are not available.
- 3) Any extension of public sewer and water services into Township areas should be limited to locations where the public welfare is threatened due to anticipated or development of a character typically requiring such services.
- 4) Any extension of a sewer and/or water services area, and associated infrastructure, should be established in a phased manner to ensure the Township's ability to effectively manage the rate of growth and development.
- 5) All land uses and land development project should be serviced by public sewer and water infrastructure if the infrastructure adducts the property in question.

### Storm Water Management

Issues: As the land surface is increasingly covered by buildings, parking lots and other impermeable surface associated with new development, the quantity of storm water runoff increases. The vegetated landscape that previously absorbed and slowed much of the water associated with storms is replaced by urban surfaces. Unless specific preventive measures are taken, this condition encourages flooding, soil erosion, sedimentation and pollution of area water resources. Though these conditions originate from site specific circumstances, their impact can extend to adjacent properties and more regional areas including other communities within the same watershed. Storm Water management aims to minimize flood conditions, and assure the quality of run off which is collected and ultimately discharged into the watershed system (streams, rivers, wetlands, lakes, etc.) is adequate.

Recommendations: The following recommendations will guide the Township in assuring the availability of emergency services and adequate government facilities for administrative activities:

- 1) The Township will require the provision of fire protection infrastructure (wells, water line, etc.) for all new developments which are such assize and density that onsite infrastructure is considered critical. Onsite fire protection infrastructure is generally considered critical for platted subdivisions and condominium subdivisions which approach 15 or more building sites of two acres or less in size.
- 2) The Township will continually monitor police and fire protection needs and service, and emergency medical care needs and service, and explore improvement service levels in response to identified deficiencies through both expanding services with neighboring municipalities and the establishment of additional emergency facilities within the Township.

- 3) The Township will continue to meet the basic government service needs of its citizens in the Township Hall facility until a demonstrated need for improved service and/or facilities is identified and adequate financial resources are available to meet that need. Should a demonstrated need be identified, alternative solution will be examined.

## Recreation

Issues: Soo Township recognized that the health of its residents is, in part, impacted by the quality of opportunities available for spending leisure time. The Township further recognizes that a critical consideration in the is regard is the type of recreational facilities nearby and available to residents of the Township. Demands for recreational opportunities increase with population growth, and available land resources for recreation decrease as residential and other land uses consume greater amounts of what was previously open space and potential outdoor recreation land. Recreational lands must be purposefully pursued and planned for if these uses are to be appropriately located within the community and provide services in demand. The Recreation component of the Public Services Strategy is a plan for identifying and addressing the recreation needs of the Township.

The extent to which Township residents are satisfied with available recreational opportunities in the Township is not clearly understood at this time. Up to this time, a survey of resident attitudes specifically addressing recreation issues in the Township has not been pursued.

Recommendations: The following recommendations will guide the Township in its pursuit of an improved recreational environment.

- 1) The Township will determine, approximately every five years, the extent to which area residents are satisfied with recreation opportunities in the Township through the use of surveys, public meetings, and/or interviews with residents.
- 2) The Township will pursue the development of a Township Recreation Plan; the primary component of which is a MDNR-approved five-year action plan aimed at providing needed Township facilities. The Recreation Plan enables the Township to compete for state and federal recreation government monies.
- 3) The Township will attempt to provide recreation facilities and services to meet the particular recreation needs expressed by its residents and consistent with the recreation standards of the MDNR.
- 4) The Township will adopt incentives to encourage the provision of open space and recreation areas within future development projects.