

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Planning Process

The purpose of the Elmira Township Master Plan is to provide guidelines for future development, while protecting the natural resources and rural character of the Township. This plan presents extensive background information including socio-economic data on the Township; description and mapping of natural resources; and inventory of existing community facilities. The background information is analyzed to identify important characteristics, changes, and trends occurring in Elmira Township. Community concerns were identified based on a citizen survey conducted in 2001, previous planning efforts, and input from a Master Plan working group. Goals and policies were developed to guide future development based on the background studies, key land use trends and community issues. These goals, along with a detailed map of existing land use, provided the basis for the Future Land Use Map which specifies where the various types of future development ideally will be located in the Township. This plan also provides suggestions for implementation of the identified goals and policies. The guidance provided by this Master Plan can be utilized influencing changes to the County Zoning Ordinance or implementing Township zoning if desired, as well as other measures the Township is authorized to take.

Location and Regional Setting

Elmira Township is located in the northwest portion of Otsego County, which is situated in the north central part of northern Michigan's lower peninsula. Elmira Township is one standard geographic township in area (approximately 36 square miles).

Otsego County is located on the I-75 corridor which receives extensive tourist traffic from the lower, more populated regions of the state. Centrally located in the northern region, Otsego County is 60 miles east of Lake Michigan, 55 miles south of the Straits of Mackinac, and 70 miles from Lake Huron to the east.

Elmira Township is bounded on the north by Hudson Township in Charlevoix County, on the west by Warner Township in Antrim County, and on the east by Livingston Township and on the south by Hayes Township, both in Otsego County. The City of Gaylord is approximately two and a half miles east of the Elmira Township border. Figure 1-1 illustrates the Township's proximity to a number of other communities in Michigan.

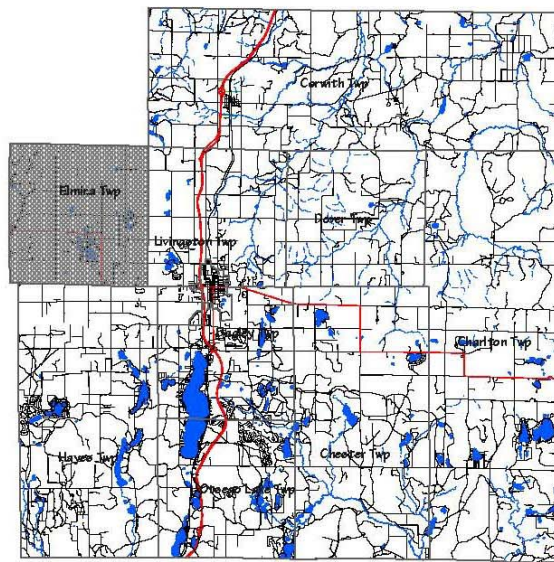
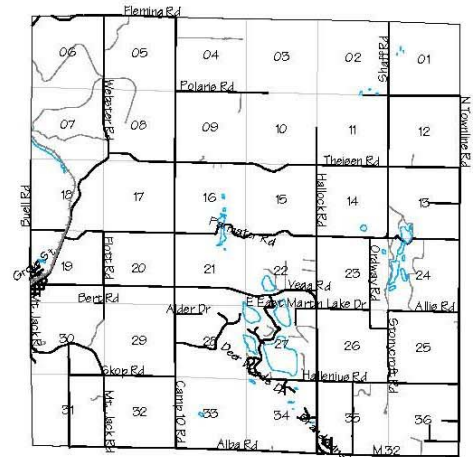
Historical Context

The town of Elmira, from which the Township took its name, was platted in 1883, but was already a booming lumber town. By 1892, the town had a population of approximately 400 people and supported two hotels, five stores, a church, post office, school and town hall. The Grand Rapids & Indiana train began stopping at the town daily in the early 1870s. By 1910, sometimes as many as 100 trains passed through the town each day. Steam engines were able to refuel with coal and take on water, and there was a roundhouse for repairing train cars and locomotives.

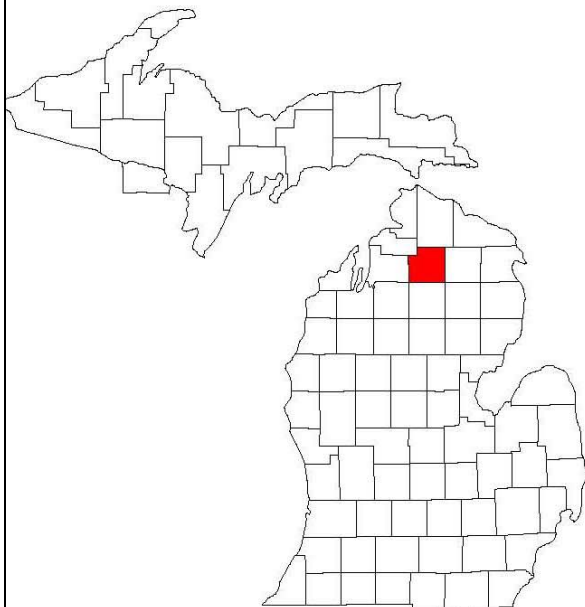
Elmira Township

Location Map

Figure 1-1



Otsego County



State of Michigan

The Status of Planning and Zoning in Elmira Township

Elmira Township is currently covered under County-wide planning and the Otsego County Zoning Ordinance. Otsego County has engaged in formal land use planning since at least 1939 and enacted county-wide zoning in 1975, when the nine townships agreed to conduct planning and zoning together. The first master plan was written in 1939 with the purpose to establish a land use policy which would increase the permanent values of the county. In 1966, a comprehensive plan was undertaken, with its primary purpose to guide growth. At that time, the County Planning Commission was also created. Comprehensive planning was again undertaken in 1981, with the adoption of the Otsego County Comprehensive Plan.

Zoning is the principal means of land use controls in the County. Land use is regulated under the Otsego County Zoning Ordinance except within the city limits of the City of Gaylord or the Village of Vanderbilt which enforce their own zoning ordinances. Planning and zoning was separated from the Building Department in 1996 and was staffed by a full-time zoning administrator for the first time. More than 30 zoning map changes have been made since it was adopted in 1975. There have been two substantial revisions to the ordinance, one in 1993, and the other in 1996.

Elmira Township established a Planning Commission in 2001; however, a planning committee existed prior to the formal establishment of the Planning Commission. In cooperation with Otsego County, the Planning Commission has reviewed local zoning issues and development proposals in the Township and made recommendations to the County. However, the Township's recommendations on zoning and development, while under the jurisdiction of the County Zoning Ordinance, have no legal standing. Updated zoning ordinances supported by up-to-date comprehensive land use plans are considered the main tool Michigan communities have at their command to control land use patterns and development pressures. To exert local control over future development, Elmira Township has developed this Township Master Plan.