

CHAPTER 4

EXISTING LAND USE

Pattern of Land Divisions

As development occurs, larger tracts of land are generally broken down into smaller parcels. Therefore, studying the existing pattern of land divisions is one way to analyze the status of land use and development. Land division patterns for Elmira Township are discussed below.

The largest undivided parcel in Elmira Township is the State of Michigan owned property in the northwestern corner of the Township. The remaining large tracts of undivided land in the Township are primarily in use as forested agriculture and field agricultural.

Other land divisions are occurring as larger parcels along the roads are split into smaller parcels. In terms of land division patterns, it is worth noting that some of the newer residential developments in Elmira Township are being created as site condominiums rather than traditional subdivisions. A site condominium does not actually create lots by land division. Therefore, a site condominium project may continue to appear as a large, undivided tract when it has already been converted to relatively dense residential use.

Existing Land Use Statistics and Characteristics

According to the 1990 Census, Elmira Township's land area is 35.7 square miles. Elmira is bordered on the north by Hudson Township in Charlevoix County and on the west by Warner Township in Antrim County. The Township is bordered on the south by Hayes Township and on the east by Livingston Township, both in Otsego County.

Two mapping methods were utilized to illustrate the current distribution of land uses within the Township. Method "A", used in Figure 4-1, maps the Township based on the predominate land cover and land use. For example, if a residence is located on a ten acre parcel with eight acres of the land remaining forested, the map shows the eight acres as forested, and the remaining two acres as residential. Method "B" used in Figure 4-2, maps the Township based on land use and parcel size. For example, if a residence is located on a ten acre parcel, the entire parcel is mapped as residential.

The land use mapping from the Otsego County Comprehensive Plan was utilized as a starting point for the Township mapping, then updated using Michigan Department of Natural Resources 1998 aerial photographs, and field checking. The updated information was then computerized to produce the existing land use statistics. Table 4-1 presents the percentage of Elmira Township currently in each land use category, from largest to smallest. Each of the land use categories is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Table 4-1: Existing Land Use – 2003 Elmira Township				
Land Use Category	Mapping Method “A”		Mapping Method “B”	
	Acreage	Percent	Acreage	Percent
Forested	14,106	60.6%	12,318	52.9%
Agricultural	3,507	15.1%	3,409	14.6%
Nonforest	3,103	13.3%	2,459	10.6%
Residential	1,509	6.5%	4,039	17.4%
Water	358	1.5%	358	1.5%
Recreation/Institutional	307	1.3%	307	1.3%
Industrial/Extractive/Util.	202	0.9%	202	0.9%
Gas Wells	115	0.5%	115	0.5%
Wetlands	38	0.2%	38	0.2%
Commercial	28	0.1%	28	0.1%
TOTAL	23,273	100%	23,273	100%
Note: Due to rounding, the total percentages of land uses do not equal 100 percent.				
Source: Michigan Resource Information System and MC Planning & Design Field Verification and Map Updating.				

Forests and Wetlands

Forests, which include upland hardwoods and conifers, account for 60.6 percent of Township land area using Method “A” and 52.9 percent using Method “B” in 2003. Heavily wooded areas are found throughout the Township, as can be seen in Figures 4-1 and 4-2. A decrease in forested land is directly attributable to development, primarily residential development.

Wetlands include land that has sufficient water at, or near, the surface to support wetland or aquatic vegetation. These areas are commonly referred to as swamps, marshes, or bogs. Wetland areas may also include land that supports lowland hardwoods and conifers. Wetland information was not verified by field inspection when these maps were compiled. Thus, the areas shown as wetlands by the Michigan Resource Information System (MIRIS) may not meet State and Federal criteria for legally regulated wetlands.

Wetland areas comprise less than one percent of the Township. As illustrated in Figures 4-1 and 4-2, the main wetland area in the Township is along the western edge of Township adjacent to the railroad track.

Agricultural

Agricultural use is the second most prominent land use in Elmira Township. As shown in Table 4-1, agricultural lands occupied between 15.1 percent (Method “A”) and 14.6 percent (Method “B”) of Township land area in 2003. As is illustrated in Figure 4-1 and 4-2, the agricultural lands are well dispersed across the Township.

The agricultural classification also includes agricultural lands that have been placed in the Conservation Reserve Program. This program pays farmers to remove certain erodible lands from agricultural production. However, as of April 2004, none of the agricultural acreage in the Township is enrolled in this program.

Nonforested

The nonforested land category consists of herbaceous open and shrub land. As shown in Table 4-1, the percent of nonforested land in the Township is 13.3 percent using Method “A” and 10.6 percent using Method “B”. Nonforested lands are scattered throughout the Township, as shown in Figures 4-1 and 4-2.

Residential

As can be seen from Table 4-1, the amount of land being used for residential purposes ranges from 6.5 percent to 17.4 percent depending on the mapping method.

Method “A” more accurately portrays the land cover in terms of how areas are actually being used. While Method “B” illustrates the likely impact of development and resource management, with entire 10-acre parcels shown as residential after being split for residential development.

The pattern of residential development within Elmira Township is shown in Figures 4-1 and 4-2. Residential use has been primarily located along lakeshores and road frontage. Recent residential growth has primarily occurred in new subdivisions and site condominium developments.

Recreation and Institutional

Recreation and institutional lands in the Township comprise 1.3 percent regardless of mapping method, as shown in Table 4-1. Detailed information regarding the individual recreation sites is presented in **Chapter 5 - Community Facilities**. The largest recreation lands mapped in Elmira Township are the Gaylord Country Club golf course, Camp Sancta Maria and Lost Valley Bible Camp.

Figures 4-1 and 4-2 illustrate the locations of recreation and open space lands in the Township.

Industrial/Extractive

Elmira Township's industrial properties are shown in Figures 4-1 and 4-2. Table 4-1 shows a combined percent for industrial and extractive uses of 0.9 percent, with an additional 0.5 percent for gas wells in the Township.

Water

Open water comprises 1.5 percent of the Township area. Figures 4-1 and 4-2 illustrate the locations of the lakes.

Commercial

Table 4-1 shows a limited amount of land in commercial use in Elmira Township, less than 0.1 percent of the land in Elmira Township is in commercial use. As apparent in Figures 4-1 and 4-2, the commercially used properties are primarily concentrated along M-32 in downtown Elmira and the southeastern corner of the Township, allowing for easy access to north-south transportation corridors.