

## CHAPTER 5 - EXISTING LAND USE

Livingston Township is basically a rural community. Several subdivided properties, some having a potentially high density, are located in the southern portion of the Township. These are found along the northern boundary of the City of Gaylord and in the Five Lakes area in Sections 29, 30, and 32. A good portion of the community has a more extreme topographic relief where less dense development and open space predominate. **Figure 5** at the end of this chapter depicts the general distribution of land uses within the Township.

Originally, Livingston Township encompassed 36 square miles. However, about one-half square mile was transferred into the City of Gaylord when the City was initially incorporated. A major annexation of Township acreage occurred when over 1,400 acres devoted to a Planned Unit Development (Otsego Club) was transferred to the City under the Conditional Land Transfer Act (Public Act 425 of 1984). Numerous other small parcels have been annexed to the City under Act 425 agreements. According to the 1999 Citizen Survey, residents were generally opposed to further annexations.

Water (inland lakes) encompasses approximately another one-half square mile. The Sturgeon River originates in the Township, flowing in a northerly direction and eventually into Burt Lake in Cheboygan County. Topography is generally undulating, but somewhat more steeply sloped than normally found in the County, varying from 1,417 feet above sea level in the northwestern sections of the Township to 1,047 feet above sea level in the northeastern portions.

### Residential Land Use

According to the 2000 Census, there were 935 total housing units, of which 875 were year round and 60 were seasonal. In 1980 the total number of seasonal home was also 60 units, and in 1990 there were 52 seasonal homes. The Township's seasonal housing rate of 6.4 percent can be compared to 31.2 percent for Otsego County. The percentage of seasonal households in Livingston Township dropped 4.4 percent since 1980. In 2000, owner occupied housing units made up 742 of the total, while only 97 were renter occupied. Renter occupied units increased as a portion of all residences by only 0.6 percent since 1980. This indicates that the growth in rental units is increasing at a relatively consistent rate with the growth of owner occupied housing units in the Township.

The number of total housing units at the end of 2000 was 935 units. The distribution of residential land use within Livingston Township is predominantly in the southern portions of the Township. In 1980 there were 450 households in the Township and 1,703 people in Livingston Township or 3.33 persons per household. In 2000 there were 935 households and 2,339 residents or 2.50 persons per household. This decrease in household density is primarily due to smaller family size and to children maturing and leaving the household, the Township, and even Northern Michigan for employment or secondary education in other areas of Michigan. Another contributing factor is the influx of retirees, who normally have a one or two person residence. Even though households are smaller, many of the homes being constructed in the Township are large estates on large lots or acreage.

There presently are approximately 700 lots in 19 residential development communities in the Township, plus various small tracts. In most cases, these individual parcels are adequate according to health department standards for on-site waste disposal and water supply. In a few cases, however, single-family lots are not adequate enough to meet the minimum lot width

requirements of the health department. In such cases, two or more lots must be combined in order to allow proper septic tank drainage.

Under the current Otsego County Zoning Ordinance, which has jurisdiction within the Township, there are 2,900 acres zoned residential, with a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet (approximately one-half acre). There are also 15,800 acres in the Township on which residences can be built on parcels of two or more acres.

All lots and parcels must comply with Ordinance Number Four of the Livingston Township Subdivision Ordinance, adopted by the Township on May 14, 1976, and revised in 1984. With the continued growth in the Township, there may be a need for additional housing in the future to replace inadequate units, to house increased population, and to accommodate the trend to smaller household size. In 1980 less than eight percent of all the dwellings in the community were renter occupied, as compared to nearly 10 percent for the County. In 2000 only 9.8 percent of the dwellings were renter occupied. Also in 1980 the Township contained a larger percentage of higher priced housing units than the County in general. These trends have continued through 2000 in Livingston Township. **Table 5-1** depicts this trend.

**Table 5-1  
Housing Values, 1990-2000  
Livingston Township and Otsego County**

	Livingston Township		Otsego County	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
# Housing Units	652	935	10,669	13,375
Median Value (owner-occupied)	\$64,700	\$122,000	\$56,000	\$102,500
# Units under \$50,000*	97	0	1,426	247
# Units over \$100,000*	36	371	311	4,820
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000				
* These numbers are based on a sample and are not from a 100% count.				

Housing values have more than doubled between the 1990 Census and the 2000 Census due both to inflation and to new home construction. For example, in 1990 the median value of owner occupied housing units in Otsego County was just \$56,000, as compared to \$102,500 in 2000. The above table indicates the general high quality of housing units within the Township. Under the current zoning ordinance, a minimum allowable lot size of 20,000 square feet is in effect. This low density residential environment, as well as the application of building codes in the Township and the County, will likely continue to encourage construction of relatively high-value housing.

With the projected growth of Otsego County, and the continuing commercial development of Gaylord and the communities adjacent to Gaylord, there is a large possibility that residential development pressures in Livingston Township will increase within the planning period (up to the year 2020). It is important, therefore, to analyze as completely as possible, the various environmental, social, and economic factors that affect and are affected by residential development in the Township in order to properly prepare for the community's future.

## Commercial Land Use

The economic well being of any community is enhanced by the proximity of commercial and industrial operations. Residential activities are closely interrelated with commerce. Usually, business enterprise will follow residential growth. As the amenities of a community increase, and the community becomes attractive to more people, additional housing is needed. This cycle, identified by a close interrelationship between living and working patterns, is the basis for community development.

Politically, Livingston Township is an entity separate from the City of Gaylord. Because of the close geographic proximity of the City to the Township, however, various sections of Livingston Township are identified with the City. Therefore, the commercial growth of Gaylord will tend to affect the residential development of the Township. This situation will tend to increase Township commercial activities. Those commercial enterprises now bordering the municipal boundaries of Gaylord but still located within the Township would, if incorporated within the City, no longer contribute to the Township's property tax base. This could create a critical inability to provide needed services to the Township's residents.

The majority of existing commercial facilities in Livingston Township are located on Old 27 North and M-32 west of Gaylord. These are extensions of the primary commercial activities located in Gaylord. The 1990's saw significant commercial development in the Township. Future commercial land uses in the Township should be located to compliment, and not compete with, services offered within the City of Gaylord. According to the results of the 1999 Citizen Survey, residents are strongly opposed to commercial expansion in the Township.

## Industrial Land Use

Because of the rural, recreational nature of Northern Michigan, the greatest economic resource in the area is tourism and the commercial activities established to service the needs of tourists. However, natural resources based industry has had a substantial and increasing impact on Otsego County in recent years. One of the larger employers in the area is Georgia Pacific Corporation, a producer of particle board and related wood products. Many smaller industries are located south of Gaylord, contributing to the overall economic conditions of the County.

Livingston Township has very little in the way of industry and primarily has commercial development in those areas which had been previously identified in the *Township Comprehensive Plan* as industrial. Since the expansion of the Gaylord Air Industrial Park, the need for industrially zoned property in Livingston Township has been greatly reduced. In addition, based on the *Township's Citizen Survey*, 76.2 percent of those surveyed indicated that they were not in favor of industrial development in the Township.

As the County and the City develop, it is possible that larger industries will study the feasibility of locating in Livingston Township area. Most industries require larger parcels of land for operations. Although an industrial park is situated west of Gaylord and adjacent to the county airport, it is possible the proximity of open space in Livingston Township could attract more industries to the Township in the future. It is important that transportation routes are provided to ensure easy access to future industrial areas in the Township. Additionally, proper location of these land uses will help insure that potential pollution problems do not occur. The optimum distribution of industrial activities is included in future land use of this document. Some gas and oil well exploration is occurring in Livingston Township, but is exempt by State law from local zoning regulations.

## Recreational Land Use

The low density of Livingston Township, with its abundance of private open space, appears to make recreational facilities less critical. However, formal public recreational areas, with on-site equipment and structures, are available throughout the County and in the City of Gaylord.

In Livingston Township, the County Parks and Recreation Department maintains Frank Wilkinson Memorial Park (Irontone Springs), a roadside picnic facility adjacent to Old 27 North. Located elsewhere in the County are the following facilities: Otsego Lake State Park, Otsego Lake County Park, and Libke Memorial baseball diamonds. Recreation sites located in the City include the Sportsplex, community center, picnic park, Mt. Carmel Cultural facilities, and the Gaylord Community School District has playground facilities.

Private enterprise also supplies a variety of recreational opportunities. The Otsego Club Resort in Livingston Township, Gaylord Country Club, Sylvan Resort, and Michaywe offer 18- to 54-hole golf courses, plus downhill skiing at all but Gaylord Country Club. All of these facilities are located in Otsego County and in close proximity to Livingston Township. The most prevalent recreational activities in this portion of the State are golfing, skiing, hunting, and fishing. As the area abounds in deer, elk, rabbit, woodcock, ruffed grouse, and a variety of other small game, it will continue to be attractive to hunters. Several lakes and streams in the County offer trout, bass, pike, walleye, and pan fishing, as well as boating activities.

As residential land is further developed in the Township, serious consideration should be given to providing facilities within easy access to more dense development. Such recreational areas should be designed to serve the more immediate residents of the Township. For example, where a new residential development does not select the open space option offered in the County Zoning Ordinance, the developer should provide recreational facilities (such as playgrounds or parks) proportionally to the size of the development.

If an attempt is made to locate a countywide or regional recreational facility in the Township, an intensive study will have to be undertaken to analyze the total effect of such a facility. This plan attempts to provide for a proper balance between residential and recreational land uses.

## Forests, Agriculture and Open Space

A sizeable proportion of Livingston Township has potential value for agricultural production. However, the hilly terrain makes much of the Township less suitable to modern high-production farming. In addition, residential, recreational, and commercial uses compete for lands which might otherwise be put to agricultural use. Cropland remains the most extensive land use along the 1-75 corridor in the central and northern sections of the Township. Additional farmlands are located at the Township's eastern border, in Sections 13 and 24.

Specific agricultural data for Livingston Township are not available, but 2002 Census of Agriculture data show that Otsego County's 170 farms had an average size of 203 acres. Although the number of farms has increased, the number of acres in farmland has decreased over the years, and the average farm size has decreased. **Table 5-2** illustrates these trends.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines a farm as: “any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year. The definition has changed nine times since it was established in 1850. The current definition was first used for the 1974 Census of Agriculture and has been used in each subsequent agriculture census.”

**Table 5-2  
Number and Size of Farms, Otsego County, 1969-2002**

Year	# of Farms	# of Acres	Average Size
1969	172	46,052	268
1974	132	35,308	267
1978	152	41,500	273
1982	142	41,510	292
1987	133	39,788	299
1992	133	36,272	273
1997	139	34,450	248
2002	170	34,585	203

Source: Michigan Department of Agriculture

Forested areas are abundant within the Township. As there is no Federal or State forest land, these forests are primarily privately owned. The western, southwestern, and northeastern sections of the Township are the major areas for pine trees, while hardwoods such as birch, beech, and maple are concentrated in the northern and central portions of the Township. Those areas adjacent to the Sturgeon River and Mossback Creek in the eastern sectors of Livingston Township are lowland areas subject to flooding. In any future distribution of activities, these areas should be considered as potentially environmentally sensitive. In addition, Michigan wetland laws limit construction in such areas.

In order to retain the rural character of the Township, attention must be given to the human activities which can substantially alter the existing distribution of forest and open space. The environmental integrity of Livingston Township must be understood and preserved especially in light of increased residential activity. **Figure 5** illustrates the general distribution of forests, open space, and agricultural land as they currently exist. Any future land use changes should be made only after their physical, social, and economic impacts upon environmental resources have been considered.

Hold Page for Figure 5  
Existing Land Use Map