

OTSEGO COUNTY 2009 MASTER PLAN *Executive Summary*



Adopted: June 9, 2009

Otsego County Board of Commissioners

Clark Bates
Paul Beachnau
Paul Liss
Robert Harkness
Erma Backenstose
Ken Glasser, Chairman
Douglas Johnson
Michael Hyde
Bruce Brown

Otsego County Planning Commission

Ken Arndt
Erma Backenstose
Ken Borton
Mick Colosimo
John Ernst
Jim Hilgendorf
Judith Jarecki
Chuck Klee
Mike Mang
Francis Nowak
Randy Stults, Chairperson

What is a Master Plan and why we have one?

A Master Plan is often referred to as the blueprint for the community's future.

A Master Plan is an official document that guides decisions on development and public capital improvements. It helps shape the physical and social development of our community and serves as the basis for our County Zoning Ordinance.

Much of the background information used to prepare the 2009 Master Plan is contained in The Otsego County Fact Book. This comprehensive reference guide is available on-line at the web address listed on page 7 of this executive summary.

Our Master Plan identifies and evaluates existing conditions and trends. It makes projections for the future, establishes goals, and provides recommendations for the physical, social, economic, and environmental development of Otsego County. Community members from throughout the county participated in the planning process by sharing their opinions, concerns, and hopes for an even better tomorrow. It all begins with our collective vision for the future as described in following Vision Statement.

2009 Otsego County Master Plan Vision Statement

Collectively, Otsego County residents envision their rural, northern Michigan community to be a place where housing is affordable, in attractive, safe neighborhoods. Students can attend neighborhood schools and can participate in afterschool activities that stimulate their minds and/or bodies. Residents have the possibilities of meaningful employment opportunities locally and they can enjoy the region's cultural and recreational activities after work. Through proactive planning and zoning enforcement, the aesthetic appeal and unique environmental quality of the county will be protected. In-fill and adaptive-reuse developments will compliment the traditional feel of the pedestrian friendly downtown commercial areas. The option for clustered residential will help to preserve agricultural lands and open space. Landscaping provisions will enhance community streetscapes and add to the distinct character of Gaylord, Vanderbilt and the Town Centers of Elmira, Johannesburg, and Waters. Otsego County residents desire to preserve its natural resources while protecting its residents' property rights. In doing so, Otsego County will remain an enjoyable place to residents and visitors alike.

Source: "One County – One Vision: A Report from the Community". 2004

Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives aggressively plan for the most reasonable and sustainable growth and support that growth with necessary infrastructure.

I. Agriculture & Forestry

- A. Agriculture
- B. Forestry

II. Community Services

- A. Transportation
- B. Utilities
- C. Waste Management
- D. Public Safety
- E. Health Services
- F. Educational & Cultural
- G. Recreation
- H. Social Services

III. Economic & Housing

- A. Commercial Centers
- B. Economic Development
- C. Housing
- D. Growth & Development
- E. Natural Resources

IV. Town Centers (Mixed Use)

- A. Planning & Development
- B. Government
- C. Commercial Land Uses
- D. Transportation
- E. Residential & Housing
- F. Urban Growth

I. Agriculture & Forestry

A. Agriculture

1. Encourage and facilitate feasible options for continued agricultural uses of active prime farmland
2. Ensure that land designated for agricultural activities is accurately identified through the presence of prime soils or locally important agricultural soils and/or the land has been used historically for agricultural uses.
3. Research and share information on the economic role of Agriculture in Otsego County.
4. Allow agricultural property owners to create smaller tracts of land for residential or farming Purposes

B. Forestry

1. Promote re-forestation and sound forestry management practices in areas with suitable, productive soils
2. Research and share information on the economic role of Forestry in Otsego County.

II. Community Services

A. Transportation

1. Improve and maintain the transportation systems to reduce traffic congestion to accommodate the needs of residents, visitors, and commercial enterprises
2. Provide for an adequate transportation system that will facilitate balanced, orderly growth and ensure the safety and well-being of Otsego County residents
3. Provide and/or maintain safe and efficient routes in and through Otsego County while respecting the rural character
4. Work with state agencies to formulate solutions to long-term interstate, highway, and local transportation issues, including access to I-75 and M-32
5. Work with Gaylord Regional Airport officials to anticipate and plan for expansion of commercial air passenger service to and from the Gaylord area; address planning issues that may develop in response to airport expansion
6. Work with the local railroad and state officials to plan and improve rail service to Otsego County
7. Review public transportation services and consider possible ways of making and/or maintaining public transportation as a viable alternative for county residents
8. Provide design guidelines for communities within Otsego County to promote a pedestrian, bicycle, and neighborhood electric vehicles oriented community

B. Utilities

1. Provide for the improvement and maintenance of public utilities to accommodate the needs of residents, visitors, and commercial enterprises
2. Encourage appropriate, new development in areas consistent with proposed and projected improvements to public utilities
3. Encourage the use of green building techniques
4. Encourage the use of proactive storm water management practices
5. Improve Otsego County residents' access to communication technologies
6. Encourage the use of alternative sources of energy

C. Waste Management

1. Study the feasibility of establishing a county wide recycling and garbage pickup service
2. Encourage the provision of services in an efficient, environmentally respectful, fiscally responsible manner to meet the needs of the residents, property owners, business people and visitors
3. Conduct solid waste and landfill development planning on a county and regional basis
4. Educate elected and appointed officials and community members on landfill, sewer, and water Expansion

D. Public Safety

1. Incorporate the needs of the local emergency services including fire, EMS, and law enforcement in county planning
2. Encourage the protection and maintain an awareness of ground water quality

E. Health Services

1. Encourage facilities for senior and special needs citizens, including a continuum of care facilities, and elder friendly housing within close proximity to neighborhood shopping facilities, pedestrian walkways, and parks and recreation facilities
2. Ensure that health facilities, programs, and systems are consistent with the community's needs and determine ways to finance expansion if necessary

F. Educational & Cultural

1. Encourage age-appropriate after-school/summer opportunities for area youth by utilizing senior groups, professional, volunteer, and faith-based organizations to provide supplemental educational services (e.g. tutoring and mentoring) and enrichment activities beneficial to the entire community
2. Explore the creation of additional civic events within the county for the enjoyment of residents and tourists
3. Encourage development of childcare facilities in appropriate areas
4. Support educational and cultural services for residents
5. Encourage the review of methods for improving Otsego County schools' cultural and educational facilities for today and as growth occurs
6. Encourage the development of alternative educational opportunities
7. Encourage further development of the M-Tec/University Center. Encourage the establishment of additional education opportunities
8. Protect and enhance the cultural and historical assets of Otsego County
 - a. Work with existing organizations such as Otsego Historical Society and Gaylord Area Council of the Arts to identify and inventory the county's cultural and historical assets and resources
 - b. Encourage preservation of historic buildings and sites in Otsego County
 - c. Promote and increase public awareness of the county's cultural and historic sources as a means of enhancing the overall quality of life

G. Recreation

1. Facilitate the improvement of recreation in Otsego County
2. Develop a complete system of trails and pathways with safe access to businesses and services
3. Promote sustainable tourist activities in specific areas while maintaining the attractiveness of the natural environment
4. Encourage the creation of additional recreational events within the county for the enjoyment of residents and tourists

H. Social Services

1. Encourage the development of quality housing for all income levels and lifestyles
2. Encourage the implementation of the existing 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Otsego County. The plan can be reviewed at www.otsego.org/homelessness
3. Encourage community programs that contribute to the welfare of our children

III. Economics & Housing

A. Commercial Centers

1. Support the focus and continuation of commercial Town Centers
2. Ensure that the architecture, landscaping, and signage associated with commercial establishments are compatible with local character
3. Improve blighted areas in the commercial districts
4. Coordinate planning efforts with local units of government, Downtown Development Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Tourism Bureaus, and other organizations
5. Encourage economically healthy and vibrant commercial districts

B. Economic Development

1. Support the continued focus that the economic health of Otsego County is enhanced by a great diversity of resources and activities. Some major contributors to our economic well being include but are not limited to:
 - a. Recreation / Tourism: Continue efforts to promote Northern Michigan as a recreation and tourism destination
 - b. Sales and Distribution: Retain and expand existing base industry with coordinated local efforts
 - c. Light Manufacturing: Assist local business to remain competitive, maintain a diverse employment base and promote living wage jobs, build necessary infrastructure for community development
 - d. Industrial: Promote local development and new base industries
 - e. Oil and Gas: Support efforts for a clean environmentally sound development
 - f. Agriculture: Preserve agriculture property and local markets for products
 - g. Retirement: Support Otsego County as a retirement destination
 - g. Education: Continue to a strong education system at all levels
 - i. Health Care: Support maintaining and enhancing Otsego County's health care facilities
2. Develop scenarios to plan for potential impacts on local employment, tax revenues, and land use resulting from the departure of oil and gas companies'

C. Housing

1. Encourage safe, sanitary, and well maintained housing that is income appropriate
2. Preserve and encourage the elements of residential neighborhoods which result in desirable living environments for permanent and seasonal residents

D. Growth and Development

1. Coordinate development in Otsego County through updating and enforcing a clear, consistent zoning ordinance.

E. Natural Resources

1. Provide for the enhancement and protection of Otsego County's surface and ground water quality

2. Ensure that development or re-development takes place in an environmentally sound manner by minimizing the potential for soil erosion
3. Protect, as much as possible, the existing natural environment
4. Encourage land use in a manner which recognizes the importance of forests to the overall character of the county and to the quality of life and economic well-being of its citizens. Recognize forests as sources of economic revenue, protectors of water quality, providers of recreation, and providers of habitat for wildlife
5. Recognize the importance of wildlife to the overall character of the county and to the quality of life and economic well-being of its citizens and encourage land uses which facilitate wildlife protection
6. Recognize the unique roles of natural resources -- such as oil, gas, mineral, sand, gravel, and water -- in terms of location, scarcity, and state laws

IV. Town Centers (Mixed-Use)

A. Planning & Development

1. Develop zoning districts for small businesses and revitalize and expand residential neighborhoods to support the existing Town Centers of Elmira, Johannesburg, and Waters
2. Work with the Town Centers to identify those structures and areas in Town Centers that are of historical significance; encourage the preservation and improvement of those sites
3. Guide new development in a manner that preserves community character and environmentally important resources yet meets the long-term needs of the community
4. Encourage the opportunity for mixed-use development within and adjacent to the existing Town Centers thereby allowing expansion of the Town Centers. For example, a commerce park with businesses such as professional offices, automotive repair, etc. located off the main thoroughfare

B. Government

1. Work with the Town Centers to promote programs and policies designed to develop and strengthen a sense of “community” within the Town Centers

C. Commercial Land Uses

1. Work with the Town Centers to determine the infrastructure needs necessary for new commercial growth to be clustered in concentrated areas
2. Preserve and enhance those elements of Town Centers which contribute to small town atmosphere, economic vitality, and positive community character
3. Provide reasonable opportunities for the establishment of commercial uses that meet the needs of area residents

D. Transportation

1. Provide design guidelines to promote walkable and bicycle friendly communities in Otsego County’s Town Centers
2. Encourage the establishment of new residential development with densities that will be consistent with proposed improvements to public utilities and transportation facilities

3. Encourage a mix of commercial uses at planned locations which are aesthetically pleasing and create safe and efficient traffic patterns
4. Identify high growth areas both within and beyond community limits where public service needs are likely to be of highest priority

E. Residential & Housing

1. Encourage innovative design and a mixture of housing types in residential developments; residential buildings within each neighborhood should be compatible, and transitions should be provided where different types occur in close proximity

F. Urban Growth

1. Identify and maintain those attributes within the City of Gaylord and the surrounding area that contribute to small town character
2. Provide infrastructure that is appropriate for projected growth within the City of Gaylord and in the surrounding area
3. Continue to coordinate planning efforts among Bagley Township, Livingston Township, the City of Gaylord and Otsego County

Endnotes

The complete Otsego County 2009 Master Plan is available at:
<http://www.otsegocountymi.gov/uploads/Master-Plan-w-Resolution.pdf>

The Otsego County Fact Book is available at:
<http://www.partnershipsforchange.cc/otsego/otsego5670167.asp>

Contact Joseph Ferrigan, Otsego County Land Use Services Director; 1066 Cross Street, Gaylord; telephone 989-731-7400; email jferrigan@otsegocountymi.gov