

VILLAGE OF DECATUR  
DECATUR TOWNSHIP  
HAMILTON TOWNSHIP

# Joint Comprehensive Plan

2009-2029



Hamilton Township



Village of Decatur



Decatur Township

## Adopted:

*This plan was developed by a joint planning committee with representatives from Decatur Village, Decatur Township and Hamilton Township. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission assisted the committee.*

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## Introduction

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### Overview

The Decatur-Hamilton Area Master Plan is a joint effort by the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township to guide the future growth and development of the area for the benefit of all three communities. The basis for the development of this Master Plan is the desire on the part of the residents, appointed Board and Commission members, and elected officials to ensure that the Decatur-Hamilton area retains the features and characteristics which they treasure and continues to prosper well into the future. The strong agricultural heritage of both townships, the center of commerce found in the Village, and the high quality of life found throughout the entire area are but a few of the attributes which exemplify that which all three communities desire for the future.

The Master Plan is designed to identify and clarify the goals of the communities, develop strategies for land use, and define a clear and concise implementation plan to help each community achieve success. The process that is employed in this undertaking is to gather and analyze pertinent information that yields a “snapshot” of existing conditions as they exist within the community today. This snapshot includes information relative to natural features, socio-economic characteristics, and land use.

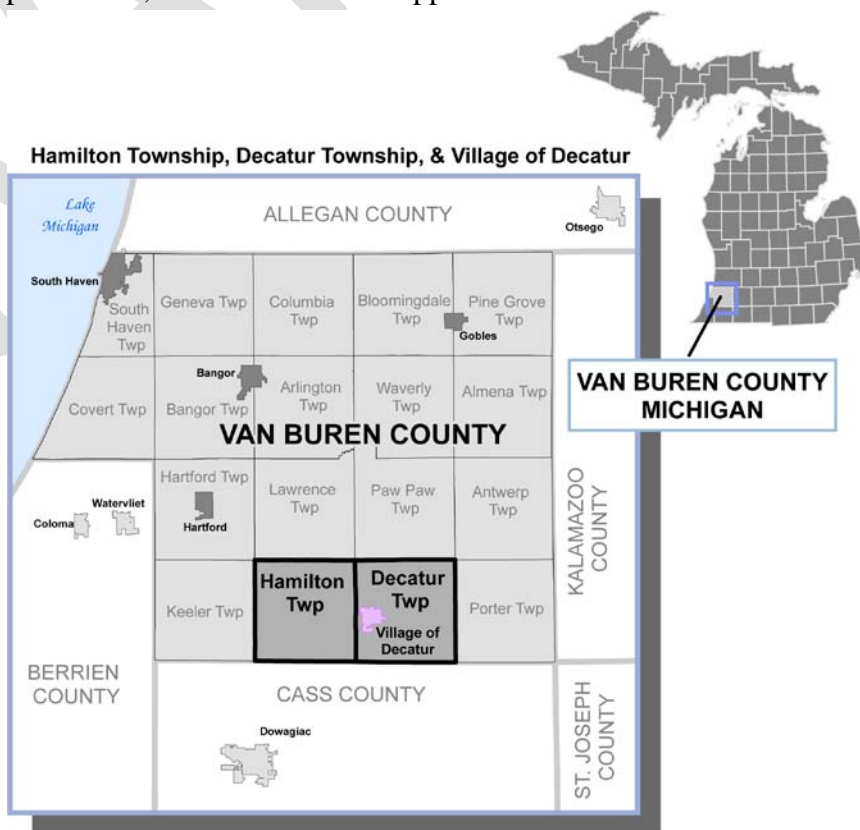
Identification of existing conditions is followed by clarifying the visions and goals of the local communities. This is achieved through the use of community surveys, visioning sessions, and discussions with a wide cross-section of community members. From this step a series of goals are developed that are then combined with the existing conditions to shape alternative responses or strategies for the future growth and development of the community. These alternatives help to clarify how the community will strive to achieve its goals in the areas of residential, commercial, and industrial development, community facilities services, parks and recreation, transportation, natural features, farmland, open space and housing development. The process concludes with an in-depth

identification of the methods that may be employed to implement the identified development alternative. Implementation methods may include education and outreach efforts, public policy and regulatory actions, public facility improvements, and economic development efforts. It is through the successful implementation of the development alternatives that the visions and goals identified by the communities can be achieved over time.

## Regional Context

The Decatur-Hamilton area, which for the purposes of this plan is defined to include the Village of Decatur, Hamilton Township, and Decatur Township, is located in the extreme southern portion of Van Buren County, in the southwestern section of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. The area is located approximately forty miles from Kalamazoo, South Bend, Indiana, and Benton Harbor. Due to the distances from each of these communities, none have historically exerted significant development pressures on the Decatur-Hamilton area, though increasingly they provide opportunities for area residents to seek employment, shopping opportunities, and entertainment opportunities.

The area lies in what is referred to as Michigan’s “Fruit Belt”. The farms in the Decatur-Hamilton area tend to focus on crops including strawberries, cucumbers, peppers and other types of produce. Historically, it is the agricultural activities that have had the greatest influence on the character and development pattern of the Decatur-Hamilton area. Historic and contemporary agricultural activities contributed significantly to the development of the Village of Decatur as a commercial center and to the rural character of both Decatur and Hamilton townships.

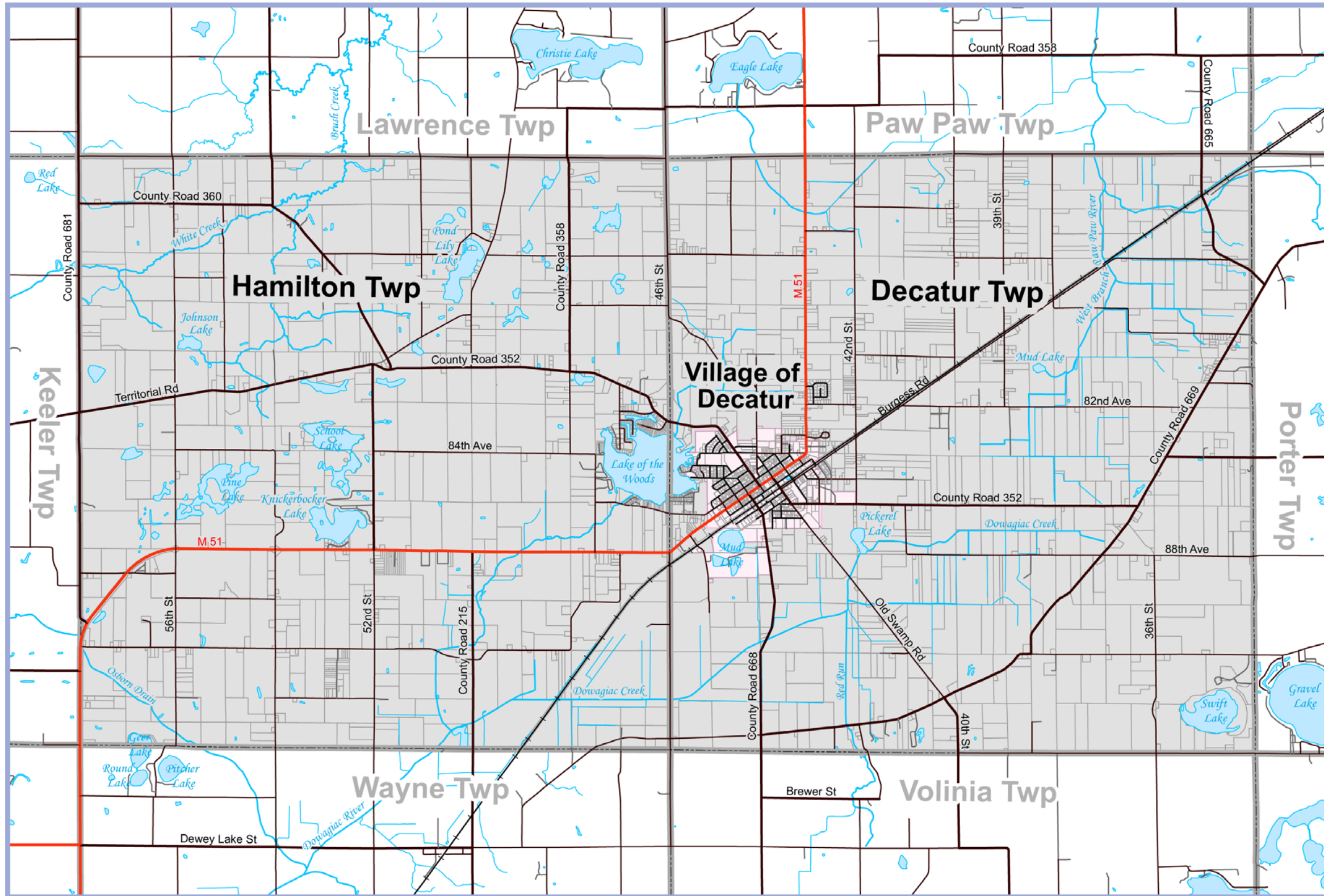


### Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

The Decatur-Hamilton area lies within the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) jurisdictional area. The SWMPC is one of fourteen planning and development regions in the State of Michigan, servicing local communities and private entities within Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties through the provision of technical services, staff support, and information for a variety of Federal, state, and local programs. Economic development planning, grant writing, master planning, and zoning ordinance development are some examples of the range of services provided by SWMPC. For more information about SWMPC visit [www.swmpc.org](http://www.swmpc.org).

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# Hamilton Township, Decatur Township, & the Village of Decatur



**Legend**

- Township
- Parcel

N

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

**Data Sources**  
 Base Map: Michigan Center for Geographic Information  
 Parcel: Van Buren County

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**Van Buren County**

Hamilton Township Decatur Township

MICHIGAN  
 Van Buren County

## Van Buren County

The Van Buren County Planning Commission was established in 1968 under Public Act 282 of 1946, as amended. The Planning Commission is authorized under the Act to develop a County Plan to assist in guiding and accomplishing coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the County. The Van Buren County Planning Commission is responsible for reviewing all zoning ordinance amendments, new and revised master plans, and P.A. 116 agreements in all townships in the County. The Decatur-Hamilton Joint Master Plan will be reviewed by the Van Buren County Planning Commission for consistency with the Van Buren County Comprehensive Plan. The 2006 plan seeks to accomplish this charge by providing a process to help local governments in the County develop specific land use objectives compatible with surrounding areas. The County utilizes the Guiding Principles adopted by the Michigan Society of Planning (MSP). The MSP Community Planning Principles have also been adopted by both the Decatur and Hamilton Township Planning Commissions are included in the Appendix of this plan. The county plan is meant to serve as a guide that facilitates land use decisions in Van Buren County. The plan provides the following guiding statements:

### ***Value Statement***

- Protect rural character
- Promote sustainable development
- Save unique natural features
- Maintain agricultural heritage
- Demonstrate respect for local control
- Ensure future quality of life

### ***Vision Statement***

Van Buren County will have development that meets the needs of the present without compromising resources necessary for future generations.

### ***Mission Statement***

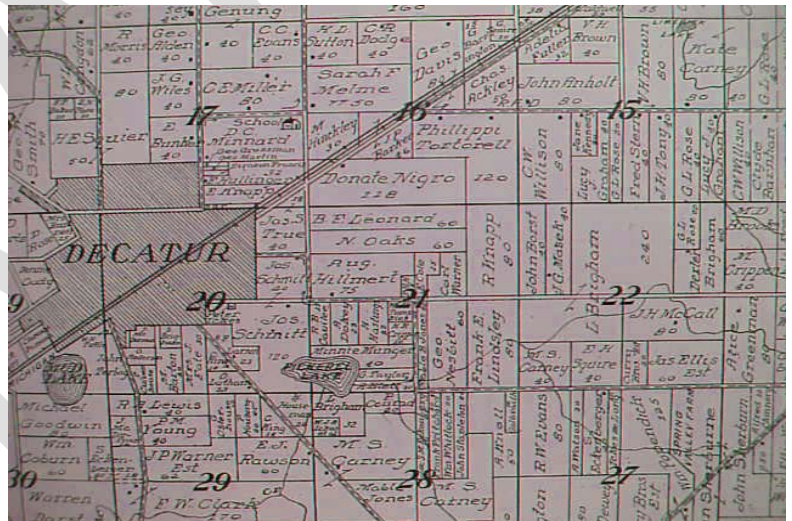
The Mission of the Van Buren County Planning Commission is to facilitate a consistent and sustainable land use pattern in the County.

Primarily, the Van Buren County Planning Commission views its role as serving as an advocate for the guiding principles identified in the plan, through both education and the review of proposed land use plans and ordinances.

Another county plan that is of importance is the Hazard Mitigation Plan developed by the Emergency Preparedness Office of the Sherriff. This plan addresses natural and man-made hazards threatening the county. This county plan must be updated every 5 years and approved by each local unit of government.

### Historical Development

Decatur and Hamilton Townships were both formally organized as townships in 1837. Settlers first arrived in Decatur Township in 1829 and in Hamilton Township in 1833, following occupation by Native Americans for generations. In 1829, the Legislative Council of the Territory authorized the survey and establishment of a road from Detroit to the mouth of the St. Joseph River. This road was named Territorial Road. This road became the stage coach route and the main path of settlers moving west.



Source: 1876 Atlas of Van Buren County

People started settling in Hamilton Township in 1833. In 1836, Robert Nesbitt built a water-powered sawmill on Brush Creek. His mill supplied the lumber to build railroads and many houses and barns. The first cargo of walnut lumber ever shipped around the Cape Horn to California was a product of Hamilton forests and Mr. Nesbitt's mill. In 1837, Henry Coleman built a hotel and general store east of the intersection of Territorial Road and what is now County Road 215. He also

established a post office. This hotel, later known as Brown's Tavern was a main stop on the stage run to St. Joseph. The completion of the Michigan Central Railroad caused the demise of the stage lines. Henry Fritz bought the property in 1890 and built a new store. His store became the telephone and post office. The area was renamed Fritzburg, the store is long gone, but the name still remains on some maps.

The first school known as the Red School House located near Brown's Tavern was opened with 20 students in 1837. This later became known as the Barber School. Other schools including the Nesbitt School and the Corwin School followed. In 1856, Mr. Nesbitt built a flourmill near his sawmill. This mill was later sold to John Wassman and continued in operation until it burned down in 1914.

The Hamilton Grange was started at a meeting in the Red School in 1874. The members built a hall in 1875. This Grange Hall became the social center of the area and was where the township meetings were held until the new township hall was built. The first meeting in the new Hamilton Township Hall was in November of 1999. The grounds around the Grange Hall were the site of the Hamilton (Donnybrook) Fair. The Fair had up to 5000 visitors each season and was active until the County Fair was established in Hartford in 1913.

In 1847, land speculators from New York City acquired a government land grant of 5,000 acres and the town of Decatur was laid out in anticipation of the arrival of the railroad. The Michigan Central Railroad arrived in the area in 1848 and the Village was formally platted in 1849, with incorporation following on October 11, 1859.

By 1880, the population of the Village of Decatur had approached 2,000 persons. In its earliest years, the Decatur-Hamilton area was noted for its wood products which included wood staves and barrels. These industries benefited from the abundant forests that covered a great deal of the Decatur-Hamilton area. Near the latter part of the nineteenth century, most of the forests had been

cut and the businesses that depended on them began to close and move away. With the cleared land and the rich soil that covered much of the area, farmers began to clear the remaining trees and drain the wetlands in the area.

By the turn of the century, the Decatur-Hamilton area was a leader in agricultural production. Large crops of peppermint, celery, grapes, potatoes, and onions were grown throughout the area. The area had become so prosperous and well known that Decatur actively competed with Kalamazoo in trying to lure the Western Michigan Normal School, which would later become Western Michigan University, to the banks of Lake of the Woods. By 1927, more than 11,000 acres of land in the Decatur-Hamilton area were dedicated to the raising of peppermint and grapes, with an additional 5,000 dedicated to raising celery.

This prosperity continued throughout much of the twentieth century. During the 1950 decade, new businesses including a modern grocery store and an automobile dealership were opening businesses in the Village of Decatur. Though agriculture remains a vital component of the local economy, the decades of the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's saw farmers struggle with maintaining an active livelihood in farming. At the same time, the area began to see an increase in the number of new homes, with residents attracted to the rural character of the area and its close proximity to surrounding metropolitan areas.

Increasingly, residents of the Decatur-Hamilton area have pursued their occupations outside of the area. At the same time, the Village business district has experienced a decline in economic activity as people who work outside of the area began to also shop outside of the area. However, due to its strategic location near the metropolitan areas of Kalamazoo, South Bend, and South Haven, its high quality of life, and its strong agricultural base, the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township continue to experience prosperity and a promising future.

## **Strategic Issues**

An evaluation of the Decatur-Hamilton area in terms of its regional location, historic development pattern, economic situation, and natural features begins to reveal several key strategic issues that begin to frame the identification of goals and objectives, the Master Plan, and the Future Land Use Plan. These issues are presented in the following and will be discussed further throughout this plan:

### Land Use Issues

#### ***Protection of Farmland and Open Space***

A significant portion of the Decatur-Hamilton area is comprised of agricultural lands and open space. Agricultural activities continue to account for millions of dollars in local economic activity. Hundreds of residents continue to depend upon agricultural activities for at least a portion of their income. Several large sections of the Decatur-Hamilton area contain soils that are considered prime agricultural land by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and thus represent a significant resource for the local and regional economies.

#### ***Preservation of Rural Character***

As mentioned previously, a significant portion of both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township remains in open lands or is actively farmed. The physical character associated with this historical pattern (open land, very low density residential development, presence of agricultural activities, etc.) constitutes a powerful visual image of the Decatur-Hamilton area.

#### ***Reinforcement of the Village of Decatur as the Economic Center of the Area***

Historically, the Village of Decatur has functioned as the economic center of the Decatur-Hamilton area, which is the location where the majority of economic transactions occurred. The Village remains a classic example of traditional neighborhood development, where homes, businesses, and public institutions are located in close proximity to one another and surrounded by large areas of open space. In recent decades however, Decatur's role as the economic center has begun to diminish, with residents of the Decatur-Hamilton area traveling outside of the area for shopping and employment.

#### ***Preservation of Historic Sites and Features Significant to the Heritage of the Decatur-Hamilton Area***

The Decatur-Hamilton area has a long history of human settlement. Numerous artifacts remain of this history and heritage, ranging from vernacular farmhouses to mill sites. In addition, an artifact museum is housed in the Decatur Township hall. In many ways, these artifacts represent the last links to the past development and land use practices associated with the Decatur-Hamilton area.

#### Economic Issues

##### ***Increase in Shopping Opportunities***

As mentioned previously, the Village of Decatur historically serves as the center for commerce activities for the surrounding area. However as consumer preferences change and mobility increases, the need for additional shopping opportunities has become evident. Currently many of these shopping needs are being met outside of the area in locations such as Paw Paw and Kalamazoo.

##### ***Increase in Employment Opportunities***

Historically, farming represented the primary occupation of residents in the Decatur-Hamilton area. As the economy shifted toward manufacturing and service occupations, the residents in the area followed jobs to locations generally outside of the Decatur-Hamilton area, to locations such as Kalamazoo or South Bend, Indiana.

#### Natural Features

***Protection and Enhancement of Water Quality (wetlands, lakes, streams, groundwater)***The Decatur-Hamilton area's unique position at the upper reaches of the Dowagiac and Paw Paw River watersheds and its continued reliance on groundwater as a drinking water supply, require that greater attention be given to the protection and enhancement of water quality and to those activities or items that contribute positively or negatively to it. Lakes and streams play an integral role in the Decatur-Hamilton area. Several lakes and the Dowagiac River, Brush Creek and The West Branch of the Paw Paw River are surrounded by valuable housing and provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. The lakes, streams, and wetlands also provide valuable wildlife and aquatic plant habitats. Furthermore, each contributes significantly to flood control, improving water quality, and to the area's sense of place or character. Attention should be given to the continued protection and enhancement of these valuable features.

### ***Protection of Open Space***

Large areas of both Decatur and Hamilton Township are currently open space. Much of this land is active agricultural land, though stands of trees, lakes, and wetlands are also found. These open spaces are vulnerable to impacts from development or changes in land use. Attention should be given to the protection of significant areas of open space, particularly relative to the agricultural landscape and to those areas that contribute to the rural character of the townships.

### **Community Facilities and Utilities**

#### ***Expansion of Public Drinking Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment***

Historically, the Decatur-Hamilton area has relied on ground water for its drinking water supply, typically in the form of individual on-site wells. Likewise, residents in the area typically rely upon on-site treatment (septic tanks and drain fields) for wastewater disposal. This remains the case for the vast majority of the area, with only the Village of Decatur utilizing a public water supply and distribution system as well as a community wastewater collection and treatment system. As the population continues to grow, densities intensify, and may compromise the ground water for safe drinking. There may become a need to consider the expansion of public systems for drinking water supply and wastewater treatment.

#### ***Provision of Adequate Recreational Facilities***

Increasingly, communities are recognizing the value of sufficient recreational facilities. Recreational opportunities in the Decatur-Hamilton area are limited and typically are found within the Village. Additional recreational facilities are beginning to be developed in the townships and are designed to complement the offerings found in the Village and include larger scale recreational facilities such as hiking and snowmobile trails.

### **Summary:**

- The Decatur-Hamilton area is located in a region of southwestern Michigan with a strong heritage of agricultural activities.

- Previous regional planning activities have occurred in specific areas and help to facilitate an understanding of the issues surrounding growth management, protection of natural features, and intergovernmental cooperation.
- As land use patterns have changed over time, issues such as farmland preservation, protection of rural character, increasing economic opportunities, and strengthening the Village's position in the area, have increasingly grown in importance.

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# Survey and Analysis

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## Overview

Identifying and analyzing existing resources, facilities, and services is an integral part of gaining knowledge about the existing conditions of a community. It is this base of knowledge that combined with historical development patterns, current and projected trends, and a community's wishes and aspirations that will facilitate the development of alternative development patterns. The following seeks to provide this information base in as comprehensive a manner as possible while retaining a relevancy to the effort being undertaken.



## Land Features

The natural features such as views of active farms and undeveloped open space that are present in and around the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township have for centuries influenced greatly the type and location of development in the area. Natural features remain a significant determinant of the location, quantity, and more often, quality of future development.

## Geology<sup>1</sup> and Topography<sup>2</sup>

The Decatur-Hamilton area is located in Van Buren County in the southwestern portion of Michigan. The landscape of Van Buren County was formed by action of the Lake Michigan Lobe of the Wisconsin glacial ice sheet. This glacial action resulted in five dominant landscape features found in the County; moraines, till plains, outwash plains, lake plains, and drainage ways including areas

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<sup>1</sup> Soil Survey of Van Buren County, USDA

<sup>2</sup> United States Geologic Survey Topographical Quadrangle Maps, Van Buren County

where muck and silt were deposited by ponded water on till plains. Some areas of the moraines have, over time been modified by windblown sand and ponded water. Three major moraines (ridges) traverse the county in a generally northeast-southwest line. The Kalamazoo morainic system is in the southeastern corner of the County and passes through Decatur Township.

Topography in Van Buren County ranges from knobby ridges and basin like depressions in the terminal moraine areas to gentle slopes and flat bottom land on the outwash and river flood plains. The hills of the Kalamazoo moraine rise 160 to 190 feet above the till plain. The internal relief on the moraine is 50 to 75 feet. The basins are 25 feet or more below the outwash level. The hills of the Valparaiso moraine rise as much as 150 feet above the surrounding areas. Relief however, on this moraine, varies considerably across the County. Within Decatur Township and Hamilton Township, there is very little change in topography with the exception of that area south of Valley Road. In this area, it is an example of a terminal moraine rising dramatically above the flat bottom land. The area on top of this ridge is extremely important for groundwater recharge in the area below.

### Soils<sup>3</sup>

The General Soil Classification for the area that includes the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township is primarily the Coloma-Spinks-Oshtemo association. Also present are the Adrian-Edwards-Houghton association, the Gilford association, and the Oshtemo-Kalamazoo association.

The Coloma-Spinks-Oshtemo association represents soils that are nearly level to hilly, somewhat excessively drained and well drained, sandy and loamy soils on outwash plains and moraines. The soils in this association range from well suited to generally unsuited for building site development and septic tank absorption fields, with the nearly level and undulating soils well suited and the slope

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<sup>3</sup> Soil Survey of Van Buren County, USDA

of the gently rolling to hilly soils and sandy soils being a concern.

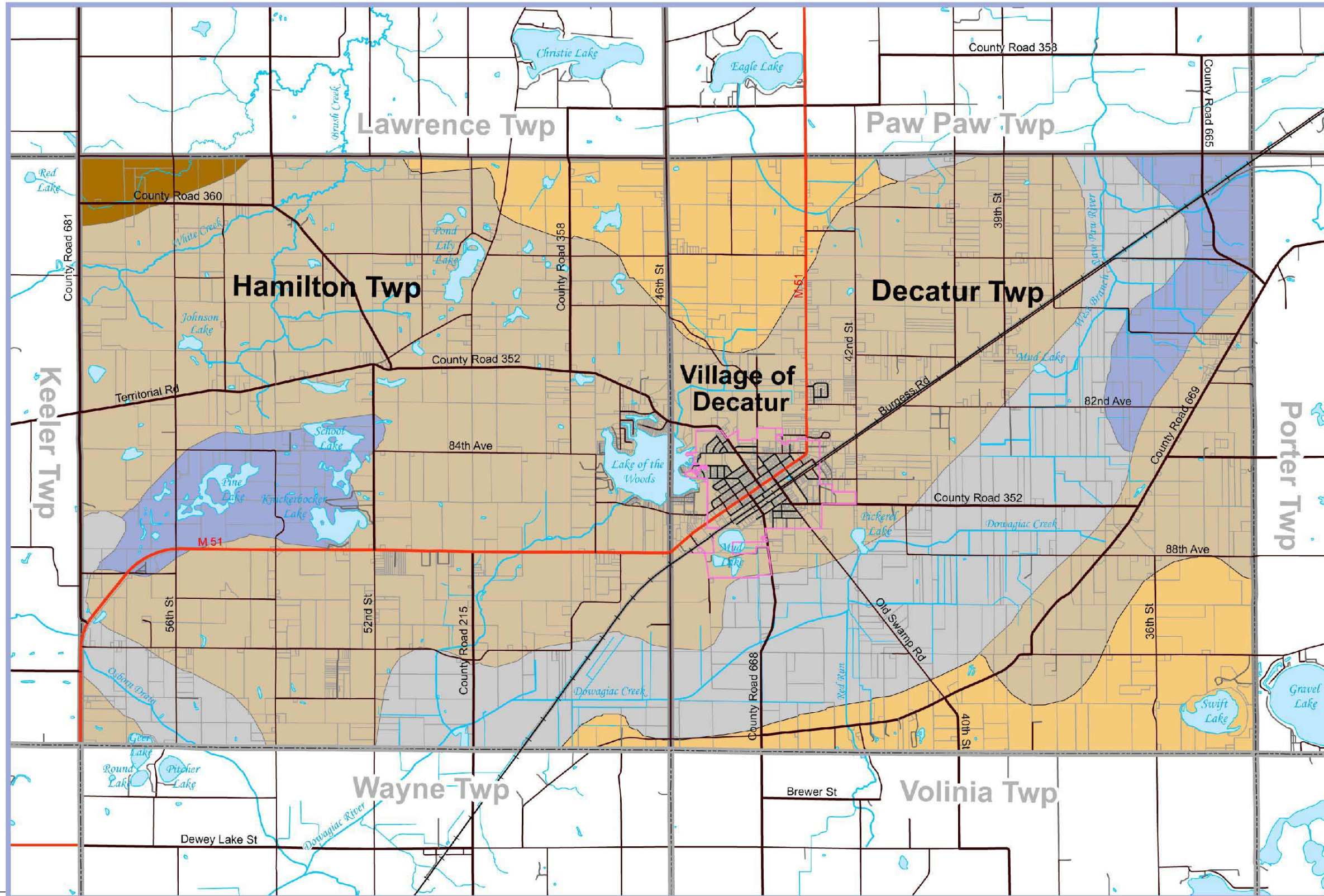
The Adrian-Edwards-Houghton association represents soils that are nearly level, very poorly drained, mucky soils in old glacial lakebeds, on flood plains, and in drainageways. The soils in this association are generally unsuited to building site development and septic tank absorption fields, with water ponding and general wetness being the major concerns. The soils in this association, if drained are well suited for cropland and fairly well suited for woodland.

The Gilford association represents soils that are nearly level, very poorly drained, loamy soils on outwash plains. The soils in this association are generally unsuited to building site development and septic tank absorption fields, with water ponding, poor filtering capacity, and seepage being the major concerns. The soils in this association are generally unsuited to cultivated crops due to the difficulty associated with drainage, though they are generally well suited or fairly well suited for woodland.

The Oshtemo-Kalamazoo association represents soils that are nearly level to gently rolling, well drained, loamy soils on outwash plains. The soils in this association are well suited or fairly well suited to building site development and septic tank absorption fields, with only the slope of the gently rolling soils being of concern. The General Soil Associations map identifies the general soils found in the Decatur-Hamilton area.

The characteristics of soils found within the Decatur-Hamilton area have greatly influenced the historical land use patterns. The characteristics are likely to continue to influence development patterns into the future, though perhaps to less of an extent than in the past. Soils with desirable characteristics for agricultural activities are found throughout Decatur and Hamilton Township. The USDA recommends that communities plan for the efficient use and protection of these valuable lands due to the limited supply of high quality farmland and the development pressures often placed upon them.

# General Soils



**Legend**

- Township
- Parcel

**Soils (General)**

- CAPAC-RIDDLES-SELFRIDGE
- COLOMA-SPINKS-OSHTEMO
- GRANBY-GILFORD-THETFORD
- HOUGHTON-CARLISLE-ADRIAN
- OSHTEMO-KALAMAZOO-HOUGHTON

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

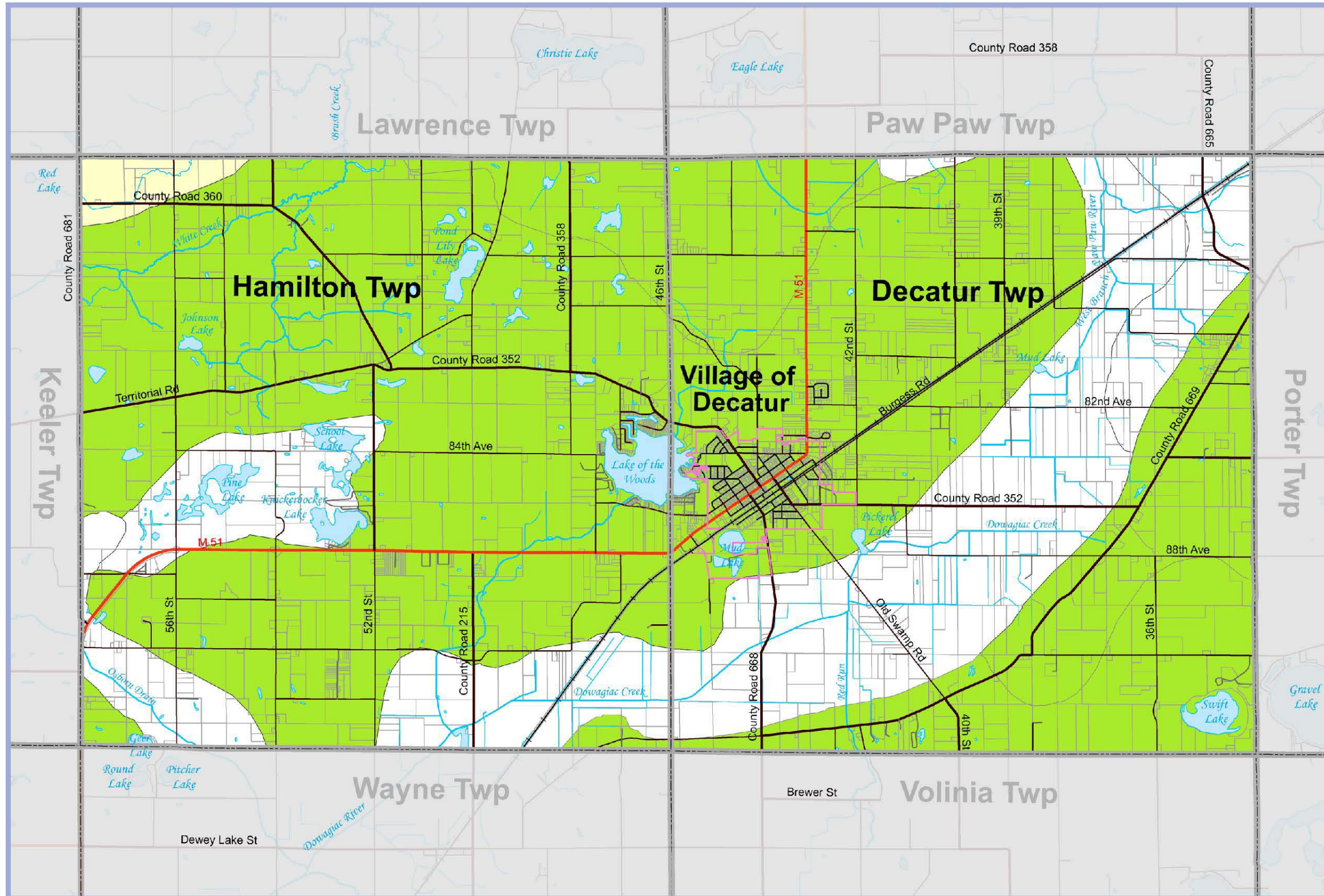
**Data Sources**  
 Base Map and Soil: Michigan Center for Geographic Information  
 Parcel: Van Buren County

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**Van Buren County**

Hamilton Township Decatur Township

# Prime Farmland



**Legend**

- Township
- Parcel

**Prime Farmland**

- Prime Farm
- Prime if Drained
- Not Prime
- Not Shown

N

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

**Data Sources**  
 Base Map and Farmland: Michigan Center for Geographic Information  
 Parcel: Van Buren County

Prepared April 2009  
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**Van Buren County**

Hamilton Township  
 Decatur Township

Soils may also exhibit characteristics which are limiting to intense development. In particular soils which are susceptible to inundation by flood waters or those that are difficult to utilize for waste disposal present significant obstacles to intensive development. In the Decatur-Hamilton area, such soils are found generally along the Dowagiac River, the West Branch of the Paw Paw River, the Lawton Drain, and in the vicinities of Lake of the Woods and Knickerbocker Lake.

## **Water Features**

There is an integral relationship between water resources, water quality, and land use. People use water for everyday uses. People also live by bodies of water for aesthetics and recreational purposes. Farmers use water bodies as part of their farming activities and industry uses water for processing and wastewater discharge. The variety of applications for water means that there is constant pressure from different user groups on how to allocate this valuable resource. Water resources are vital to planning and guiding land use decisions. Certain land uses require access to water; others isolation from it. Individual landowners, whether residential, agricultural, or industrial, are rarely aware of the complexity of water resources or of the effect that their actions may have. This lack of awareness, coupled with the economic and cultural value of water resources, creates a need for action by the community.

Water quality is a term used to describe the chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of water, usually in respect to its suitability for a particular purpose such as drinking, swimming, fishing, etc.

The preservation and conservation of water quality is important for economic development, property values, tourism and recreation, drinking water supplies and plant and animal life. Proactive and effective planning can be a step in the right direction for the future of water quality within a community. A combination of poor soils unsuitable for septic systems, a high water table, and an increasing amount of rural development resulting in increased runoff may begin to threaten the quality of an area's water supplies. Specific local regulations, such as those pertaining to site plan review standards, encouraging open space developments with incentives, increasing water body setbacks, maintaining buffers around streams and wetlands, protecting floodplains, instituting proper

impervious cover standards, using overlay districts to protect natural features and reducing density in areas with soil limitations for septic systems are among the techniques that can assist in protecting surface and ground water quality.

The following table illustrates practices that will protect or improve water quality.

<b>BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OPTIONS FOR PROTECTING WATER QUALITY</b>			
<b>Homeowners</b>	<b>Agriculture Landowners</b>	<b>Developers/Builders</b>	<b>Municipalities</b>
Use native plants in landscaping	Leave vegetated strips along water bodies	Use low impact development techniques	Enact ordinances protecting water and natural resources
Protect special natural features (especially riparian areas)	Use conservation tillage	Use porous pavements	Describe the value of water and natural resources in the master plan
Use porous pavement	Use fertilizer management	Cluster developments and preserve open spaces	Ensure zoning and future land use maps direct development towards existing development and infrastructure
Install rain barrels	Use animal waste management	Minimize impervious areas to allow for infiltration	Direct high density development away from natural areas and unsuitable soils
Reduce or eliminate fertilizer/pesticide use		Use native plants in landscaping	

## Watersheds

The Decatur area is located within a unique area that includes three important watersheds: the Dowagiac River Watershed (located in Hamilton Township, Decatur Township and Decatur Village) and the Paw Paw River Watershed (located in Hamilton Township and Decatur Township). Both the Paw Paw and Dowagiac River Watersheds are part of the larger St. Joseph River Watershed and the Lake Michigan Watershed. The location of these communities affords it a wealth of natural waterways such as rivers, lakes and streams. Watershed Management Plans have been developed for all these watersheds.

A watershed is an area of land that drains to common body of water. Decatur Township, Hamilton Township and the Village of Decatur are part of the Dowagiac River Watershed, Paw Paw River Watershed and the St. Joseph River Watershed. All land in the townships and village eventually drain to Lake Michigan.

## Dowagiac River Watershed Management Plan

The Dowagiac River watershed is located in southwestern Michigan, encompassing a total area of 287 square miles. The Dowagiac River is one of the most heavily groundwater-fed rivers of its size in Michigan. The nature of the groundwater-fed river system provides consistently cold year-round water temperatures and stable water flows. The majority of the Decatur-Hamilton area is located in the upper reaches of the Dowagiac River watershed. In its entirety, the watershed includes parts of three counties (Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties) and contains in whole or in part, sixteen townships, two cities, and two villages.

A watershed management plan was developed for the Dowagiac River by the Cass County Conservation District. The plan promotes cooperative land use decisions and policies that will protect and improve the water quality of the watershed. The watershed management plan was developed with input from a Watershed Stewardship Team made up of local government officials, county drain commissioners, interested citizens, Cass County Conservation District, and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and the Village of Decatur were active participants in the Dowagiac River Watershed Project. The Decatur-Hamilton Area Joint Master Plan has been developed to be consistent with the purpose and intent of the Dowagiac River Watershed Project and Watershed Management Plan.

#### Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plan

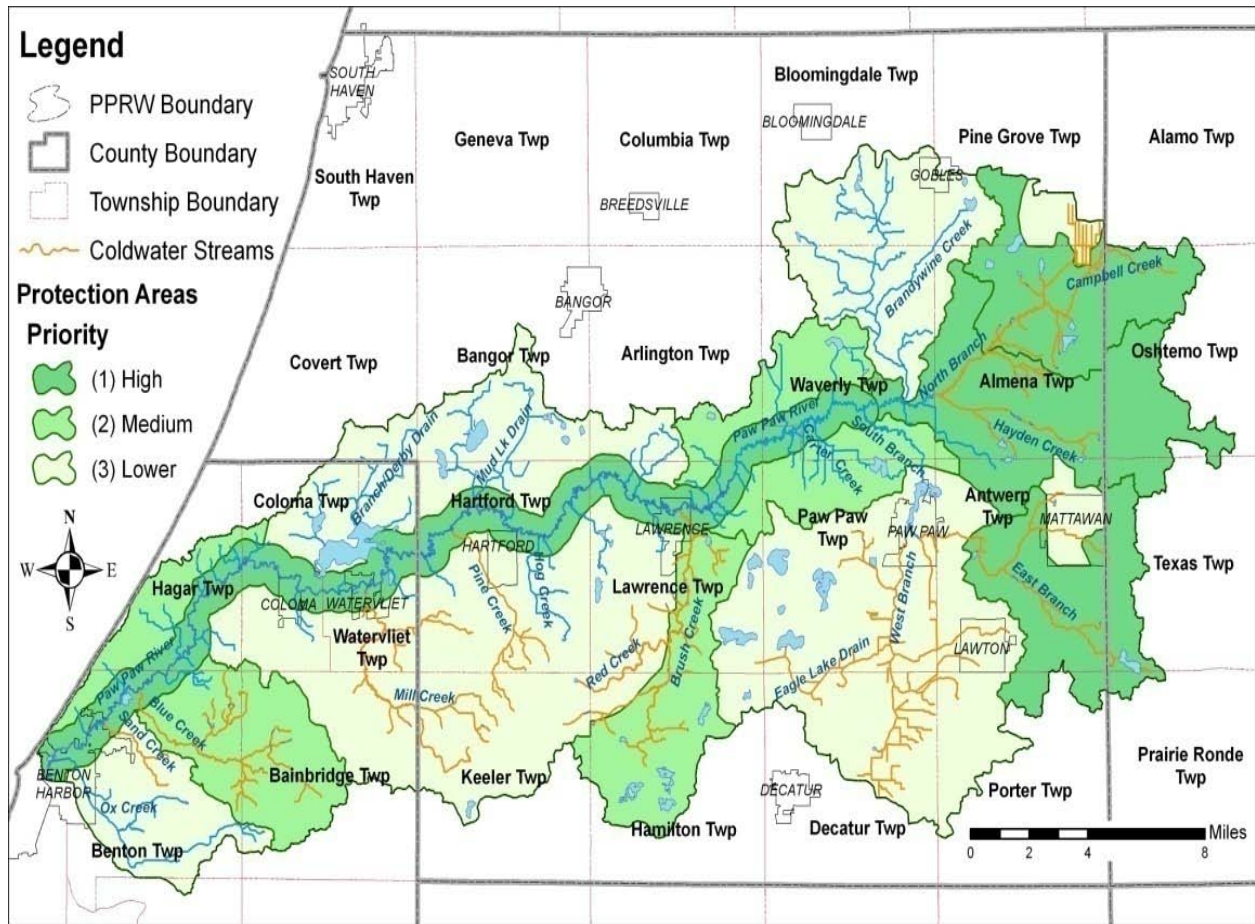
The PPRW encompasses approximately 285,557 acres (446 square miles) in Kalamazoo, Van Buren and Berrien Counties. The largest portion of the watershed lies in Van Buren County, with approximately 203,720 acres. Decatur and Hamilton Township have approximately 4,400 acres within the Paw Paw River Watershed.

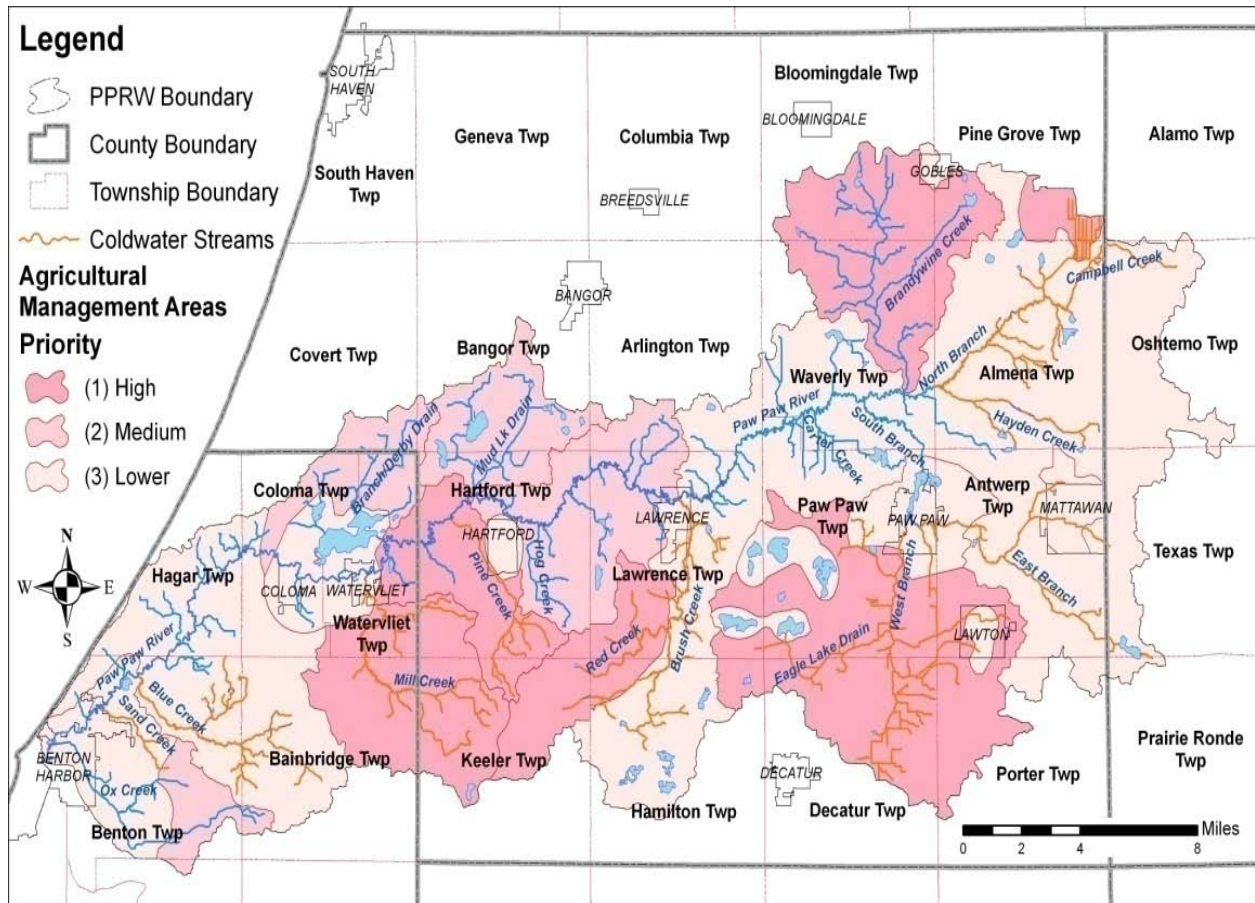
The PPRW is a priority for protection and preservation among southern Michigan watersheds because a relatively high percentage of its natural land cover remains in spite of increasing development pressure throughout the region.

The PPRW Management Plan is intended to guide individuals, businesses, organizations and municipalities working cooperatively to build more environmentally and economically sustainable communities within the PPRW. The plan can be used to educate watershed residents on how they can improve and protect water quality, encourage and direct natural resource protection and preservation, and develop land use planning and zoning that will protect water quality in the future. Implementation of the plan will require stakeholders to work across township, county, and other political boundaries.

The majority of land in Hamilton Township in the PPRW is designated as a medium priority for protection in the PPRW Management Plan. The area around Brush Creek still offers great natural features that are important not only for wildlife, but also for maintaining water quality. The entire area in Decatur Township in the PPRW is designated as a high priority for agricultural management efforts to improve water quality. The streams in this area are heavily impacted by agricultural activities and the implementation of best management practices would improve water quality.

For more on the Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plan visit [www.swmpc.org/pprw.org](http://www.swmpc.org/pprw.org).





**St. Joseph River Watershed Plan**

“The St. Joseph River Watershed, located in the southwest portion of the lower peninsula of Michigan and northwestern portion of Indiana, is the third largest river basin in Michigan. Beginning in Michigan’s Hillsdale County at Baw Beese Lake, it spans the Michigan-Indiana border and empties into Lake Michigan at St. Joseph, Michigan. The watershed drains 4,685 square miles from 15 counties: Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Hillsdale,



Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren in Michigan and De Kalb, Elkhart, Kosciusko, Lagrange, Noble, St. Joseph and Steuben in Indiana. The main stem is 210 miles long.

The watershed includes 3,742 river miles and flows through and near the Kalamazoo-Portage, Elkhart-Goshen, South Bend-Mishawaka, and St. Joseph/Benton Harbor metropolitan areas. Major tributaries include the Prairie, Pigeon, Fawn, Portage, Coldwater, Elkhart, **Dowagiac**, and **Paw Paw** rivers and Nottawa Creek. For more on the St. Joseph River Watershed visit [www.fotsjr.org](http://www.fotsjr.org).

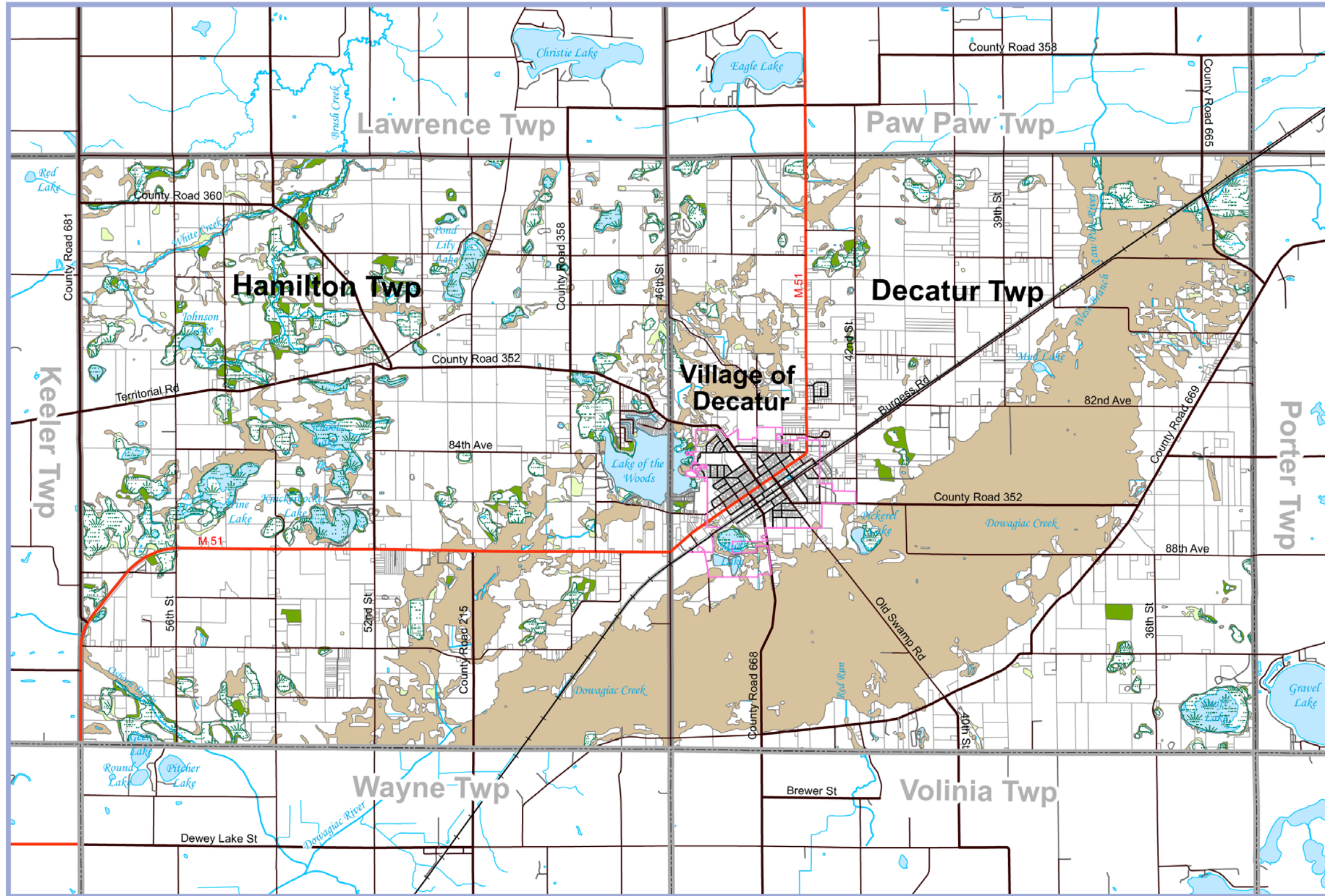
Water Bodies

The lakes in the Decatur area are what draw many people to the community. Decatur and Hamilton Townships have over 280 acres of lakes that contribute to the unique quality of the community. The largest lake in the area is Lake of the Woods located near the Village of Decatur in both Hamilton and Decatur Township. Other sizeable lakes include; Knickerbocker Lake, Swift Lake, Pond Lily Lake, Geer Lake, Johnson Lake, and Mud Lake. Table 1 lists the lakes within the Township and their size.

**Table 1. Area Lakes and Acreage**

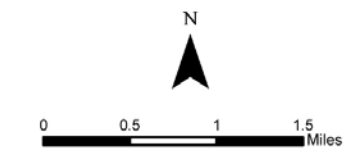
<b>LAKE NAME</b>	<b>ACRES</b>
<b>Dowagiac River Watershed</b>	
Lake of the Woods	
Geer Lake	
Knickerbocker Lake	82
Johnson Lake	16
<b>Paw Paw River Watershed</b>	
Swift Lake	
Pond Lily Lake	66
Mud Lake	
Pickeral Lake	
School Lake	63

# Wetlands



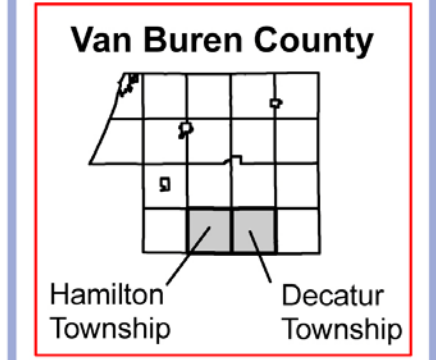
**Legend**

- Township
- Parcel
- Hydic Soils
- Wetlands as Identified by the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI)
- Wetlands as Identified by the 1978 Michigan Resource Inventory System (MIRIS)
- Wetlands as Identified by Hydric Soils, NWI, & MIRIS



**Data Sources**  
 Base Map, Soil, and Wetlands: Michigan Center for Geographic Information  
 Parcel: Van Buren County

Prepared April 2009  
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The most significant drains in the area are the Lake of the Woods Drain and a portion of the Eagle Lake Drain. The **Dowagiac River** headwaters are in both Hamilton and Decatur Townships. Lake of the Woods also feeds into the Dowagiac River by the Lake of the Woods Drain. The **West Branch of the Paw Paw River** and **Eagle Lake Drain** are in Decatur and Hamilton Townships. **Brush, Red and White Creeks** are in Hamilton Township. All of these streams and drains experience water quality problems associated with sediment.

The value of lakes and streams is often taken for granted by those who enjoy them, and many people assume that the value of "clean water" is obvious. Local officials and property owners, who make the bulk of the land-use decisions, which affect water quality, need to understand the value of clean water. The water bodies in the community provide multiple values to the landowners living on them, the visitors to the region and to the local government and economy. Water bodies are magnets for recreation such as boating and fishing. In addition, water bodies and their associated wetlands provide great wildlife habitat. For lakes, the most significant feature which affects people's enjoyment is water clarity. A decline in water clarity can reduce property values by as much as \$200 per frontage foot, representing large losses in property value. Surveys show that water clarity, quality of swimming, and scenic beauty are important to most people when they choose which lake to visit or where to buy property. Because of the significant value that water bodies have in the community, protecting water quality must be at the forefront of all land use decisions.

#### Riparian Buffers

One of the most important things a community or property owner can do to protect water quality is to maintain a vegetated riparian buffer along streams, ditches, rivers, lakes and wetlands. Many stream or lake edges are currently mowed on a periodic basis for a manicured-lawn or park like setting. Although this may be aesthetically pleasing to certain residents, this practice is detrimental to water quality and the fish community. A *riparian buffer* or buffer zone is a corridor of vegetation along rivers, streams, or

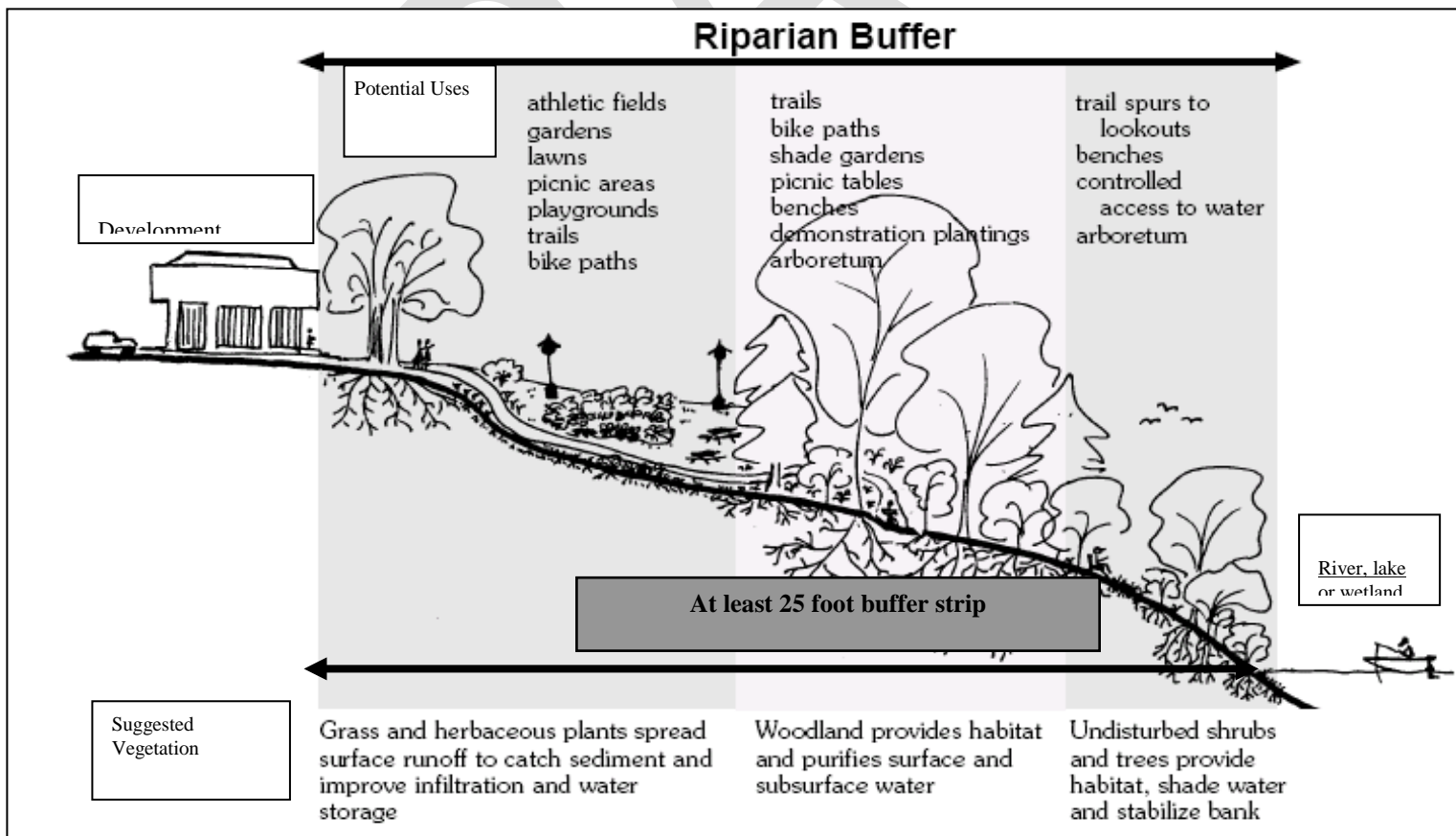
Stream corridors help absorb floodwaters, stabilize streambanks, and filter sediments and polluted runoff. Stream corridors also provide critical habitat for a variety of species. Riparian areas are important for water quality, plant species, wildlife species, and fisheries.

wetlands, which help to protect water quality by providing a transition between upland development and adjoining surface waters. The native vegetation strip should be at least 30 to 100 feet to improve the water quality of runoff. Setbacks of buildings should be at least 100 feet, but may be more if wetlands, floodplains or steep slopes are present along streams, rivers or lakes.

**Benefits of vegetated riparian buffers include:**

- Reduce erosion and stabilize stream banks;
- Encourage infiltration of stormwater runoff and minimize public investment for stormwater management efforts;
- Filter and reduce pollution and sediment;
- Provide storage for floodwaters;
- Shade and cool the water;
- Provide wildlife habitat
- Offer scenic value and recreational opportunities for trails and greenways;
- Filter air and noise pollution; and
- Protect property from flood damage and shoreline erosion hazards.

**Buffers Protect Property**  
 Streamside land is a high-risk area for development even above flood elevation. Using vegetated buffers to set back human developments and land uses from shorelines is cost effective protection against the hazards caused by flooding, shoreline erosion and moving streams.



## Wetlands/Floodplains

Wetlands and floodplains are extremely valuable resources.

Decatur and Hamilton Townships have wetlands that are scattered throughout the area. There is a significant area of

Of the estimated 11 million acres of wetlands that stood in Michigan 150 years ago, only 3 million acres remain.

wetlands in the townships that amount to over 200 acres. Concentrations of wetlands are located throughout the western portion of Hamilton Township, particularly south of Territorial Road. Concentrations in Decatur Township are located in the northwestern and extreme northeastern and southeastern portions of the township.

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA) defines a wetland as “*land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp, or marsh...*” "Wetland" is the collective term for marshes, swamps, bogs, and similar areas often found between open water and upland areas. All wetlands located within five-hundred (500) feet of a lake, stream, or river are regulated by the State of Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, as well as those in excess of five (5) acres in size which are not contiguous or located within five-hundred (500) feet of a lake, stream, or river.

A river, stream, lake, or drain may on occasion overflow onto the surrounding banks and inundate adjacent land areas with floodwater. The land that is inundated by water is defined as a floodplain. In Michigan, the term floodplain has come to mean the land area that will be inundated by the overflow of water resulting from a 100-year flood (a flood which has a 1% chance of occurring any given year).

Wetlands and floodplain hold excess water allowing it to be slowly released into rivers, lakes and seep into groundwater aquifers. Wetlands and floodplains also give time for sediment to settle out, thereby keeping it out of water bodies. Wetlands and floodplains support important wildlife habitat and are frequently used by humans as recreation areas.

In the past, people viewed wetlands and floodplains as wastelands --sources of mosquitoes, flies, and unpleasant odors. They believed wetlands and floodplains should be avoided, or better yet, eliminated. This negative view, combined with the demand for more developable land, resulted in

the destruction of large areas of wetlands and floodplains. Owners and developers drained lands, and converted them to farmland, or filled them for housing developments or industrial facilities.

Attitudes today towards wetlands and floodplains have changed with the discovery that they are valuable natural resources providing many important benefits to people, wildlife and water quality. Acre for acre, wetlands produce more wildlife and plants than any other natural area.

Wetlands and floodplains:

- provide storage areas for water,
- filter pollutants before entering lakes, rivers, and streams
- lessen the impacts of flooding after large rain events
- provide wildlife habitat

How land is developed impacts the quality and quantity of our water. Land uses from any part of the watershed, such as polluted runoff from homes and farms, eventually affect the health of the whole watershed.

As development encroaches upon wetland and floodplain areas, the safety and welfare of residents and visitors are in jeopardy. With increasing development in the floodplain, open spaces, and wetlands, our land has lost the ability to soak up rain. Buildings and pavement that have made the land increasingly impervious are now replacing areas that were once effective sponges storing precipitation. As a result, floods are becoming larger and more frequent. Wetland and floodplain protection is extremely important for the health, safety and welfare of residents.

### Stormwater Management

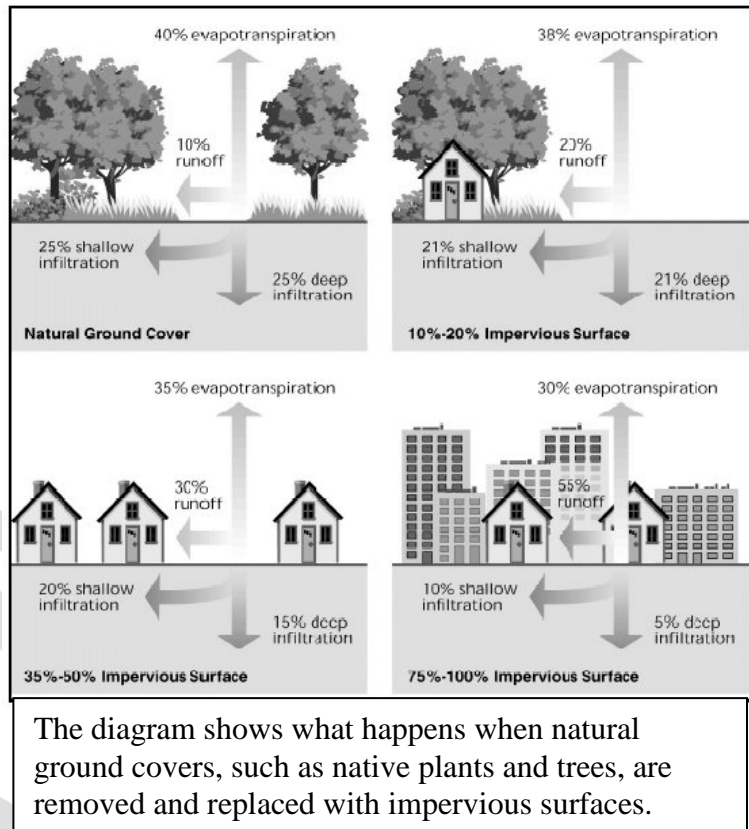
As development and imperviousness increase (due to construction of roads, roof tops and parking lots), the area available for infiltration decreases. Consequently, more rainfall becomes **stormwater runoff**, which can cause erosion of land areas and stream banks and increased flooding. Stormwater runoff can have negative impacts on our water quality. When chemicals, oil, grease, salt, etc.

**Impervious surfaces** are mainly constructed surfaces - rooftops, sidewalks, roads, and parking lots - covered by impenetrable materials such as asphalt, concrete, brick, and stone. These materials seal surfaces, repel water and prevent precipitation and melt water from infiltrating soils. Soils compacted by new construction are also highly impervious.

are carried into our rivers, lakes, and streams, all of these bodies of water become polluted. Pollution of our water may not be immediate, but as the pollutants keep washing into our water, they may

become unusable for fishing, swimming, canoeing, etc. Even drinking water can be affected.

Impervious surfaces may cover anywhere from five to ten percent or more of a site. Smaller sites may have significantly higher coverage, particularly those with commercial and industrial uses with large parking areas. The increase in the amount of paved surfaces leads to a drastic rise in the amount of runoff and a decrease in the amount of deep infiltration that is being infiltrated back into the ground to provide drinking water supplies. With greater runoff, the amount of water that is able to filter down back into our groundwater supply becomes smaller and smaller. Not only quantity, but also quality of runoff from normal precipitation may change considerably, as lawns, roads, and parking lots rinse clean. Other unnatural water sources are added, such as construction cleanup, car washing or lawn watering. This threat to water quality is an issue that directly affects the health, vitality and quality of life of our citizens and businesses.



The diagram shows what happens when natural ground covers, such as native plants and trees, are removed and replaced with impervious surfaces. This threat to water quality is an issue that directly affects the health, vitality and quality of life of our citizens and businesses.

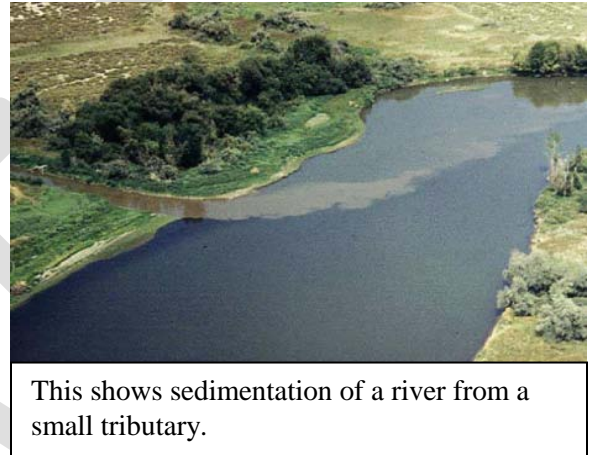
Stormwater management should be concerned with controlling both the quality and quantity of water moving off a developed site. Low Impact Development techniques should be utilized to first protect natural features, natural drainage ways and existing topography. The amount of impervious surfaces in new construction and redevelopment

*Traditional attitudes* about managing stormwater were to move the water off the site as quickly as possible with curbs, gutters, and storm sewers. *Today*, effective stormwater management practices include **decreasing the total amount of stormwater, slowing down the flow of the stormwater and allowing as much of the water to soak naturally into the ground** by using low impact development practices such as native plants, rain gardens, and riparian buffers.

projects should be minimized whenever possible to protect water quality. Second, LID techniques should be used to slow and reduce runoff by maximizing opportunities for filtration and infiltration of water throughout the site. This will decrease the need for large detention or retention. See [www.swmpc.org/lid.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/lid.asp) for information on implementing LID in new and redevelopments.

### Erosion and Sedimentation Control

There is a need to control erosion and sedimentation from entering our bodies of water to protect the quality of water for residents and tourists in the community. Erosion and sedimentation are most widely linked to new development, re-development, and agricultural production. Each type of activity poses unique challenges and threats to water quality that can also threaten public health and safety.



Erosion and sedimentation are closely linked. Erosion occurs when vegetation is removed from the land surface and water washes away the topsoil, and then comes the effects of sedimentation. Sedimentation occurs after the topsoil has been washed into water bodies and begins to build up sediment layers in the bottom of streams, rivers and lakes. We have all seen this happen around our region. A new home is being built or a farm is recently plowed, a heavy rain comes through the area and the loose soil is washed away. You can see the build up of sediment in rivers, lakes and harbors. There are simple measures that residents, developers and municipalities can take to control for erosion and sedimentation.

1. Properly install silt fencing during construction.
2. Ensure all construction and clearing near water bodies has appropriate county and state permits.
3. Limit or phase the clearing of construction sites.
4. Leave existing vegetation and trees on construction sites as much as possible.
5. Leave vegetated buffers along streams, rivers and wetlands.

6. Incorporate native vegetation into the landscape.

## Green Infrastructure

There are features in any community that many residents would readily recognize as important to the character of the area and to their personal quality of life. Some of these features may be cultural, such as a downtown business district, historic buildings, lighthouses, or other similar man-made features. Other features used to connect a community to its residents will be natural resources such as lakes, woods, wildlife, scenic views, and other similar features. How these elements are included in the fabric of a community can have a profound influence on their value. Clearly there are some resources, which, if lost, would significantly detract from the environment and the community as a whole.

Natural features such as native vegetation, woodlands, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors add to the natural features that lure people to the Decatur-Hamilton community. Removing these natural features will not only alter the landscape of a community but it can also lead to water quality issues such as increased runoff, erosion and flooding. Development should be discouraged where significant natural features exist.

Green infrastructure is a connected network of natural areas and other open spaces planned and managed to conserve natural ecosystems and the services that they provide. These lands provide multiple benefits to people and wildlife such as maintaining clean air and water, providing areas for recreation and providing wildlife habitat. Green infrastructure elements can be in urban, suburban and rural areas and may or may not be open to the public. **Green infrastructure is essential to the health, safety and welfare of the area residents.**

Natural resource areas perform important functions such as:

- filtering out water pollutants,
- recharging groundwater supplies
- removing air pollutants
- providing recreational opportunities
- providing wildlife habitat
- enhancing the overall quality of life of a community

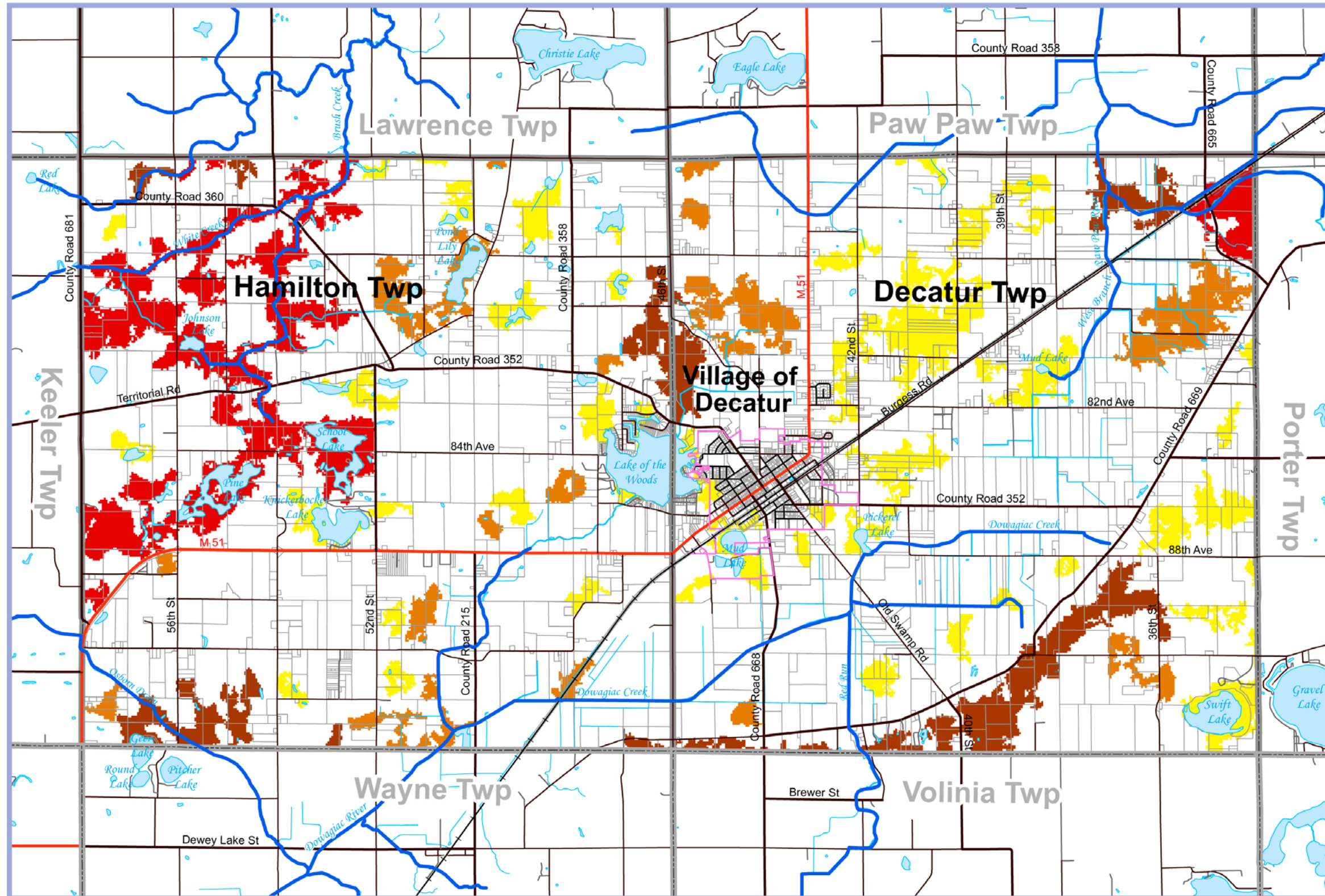
Natural resource conservation is a fundamental component of a community's long-term

environmental and economic health. Communities that incorporate both the built and natural environment into their future land use map or vision will ensure that the areas that provide important natural functions such as filtering drinking water supplies, recreational opportunities for residents and habitats for wildlife, will be protected. In effect, the features that the community has grown to enjoy will be there for generations to come. A community with a clean environment, clean water, green spaces and trails will be the community that has a stable, sustainable future and offers a high quality of life for its residents and visitors. Communities that provide this high quality of life will be able to retain talented workers and attract new residents and businesses.

The Potential Conservation Areas map represents the last remaining remnants of the area's ecosystems and natural plant communities. The map ranks areas where the landscape is dominated by native vegetation that has various levels of potential for harboring high quality natural areas and unique natural features. In addition, these areas provide critical ecological services such as maintaining water quality and quantity, soil development and stabilization, habitat for pollinators of cropland, wildlife travel corridors, stopover sites for migratory birds, sources of genetic diversity and floodwater retention. Consequently, it is to a community's advantage that these sites be carefully integrated into the planning for future development. Striking a balance between development and natural resource conservation and preservation is critical if the Decatur-Hamilton area is to maintain its unique natural heritage.

**Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs)** are defined as places on the landscape dominated by native vegetation that have various levels of potential for harboring high quality natural areas and unique natural features. Scoring criteria to prioritize areas included: total size, size of core area, length of stream corridor, landscape connectivity, restorability of surrounding land, vegetation quality and biological rarity score.

# Potential Conservation Area (PCA)



**Legend**

- Township
- Parcel
- Trout Stream

**PCA Score RANK**

- Highest
- Higher
- High
- Medium

N  
0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

**Data Sources**  
 Base Map and Trout Streams: Michigan Center and Geographic Information  
 PCA: Michigan National Features Inventory  
 Parcel: Van Buren County

Prepared April 2009  
**Southwest Michigan Planning Commission**  
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 Website: [www.swmpc.org](http://www.swmpc.org)

**Van Buren County**

Hamilton Township      Decatur Township

DRAFT

## Native Vegetation

Native vegetation refers to the plant life that exists as a natural part of the landscape. It is increasingly recommended that native plants (vegetation that grows naturally in particular climates or regions) be used because of their performance, site enhancement, and life cycle cost benefits.

Native plants typically cost more initially (depending on local availability); however, they are more cost-effective in the long run because they require less water and fertilizer, and are more resistant to local pests and diseases than non-native ornamentals. Native plants are also known to be very effective in managing storm water because many species have deep root systems which stabilize soil and facilitate the infiltration of storm water runoff. Native plants provide habitat for birds, butterflies and other wildlife, help to buffer noise pollution, filter air pollution and provide us with stunning landscapes.



Native plants can be incorporated into individual home sites, commercial sites, and industrial sites to add water quality recharge benefits as well as aesthetic benefits to the landscape.

## Woodlands

Woodlands are important to the communities' quality of life. Woodlands and agricultural lands comprise approximately 20,000 acres. This is over 31 square miles, a very significant amount given the Townships have 36 square miles! Much of the woodlands within the Townships lie either in small parcels, usually left from agricultural clearing, or in larger areas where farms have not been established and

### **Values of Woodlands**

1. Provide a varied and rich environment for plants and animals.
2. Provide breeding, feeding, and refuge areas for many species of insects, birds, and mammals.
3. Protect watersheds and soils.
4. Moderate the effects of winds and storms, stabilizes and enriches the soil, and slows runoff, allowing the forest floor to filter groundwater.
5. Serve as buffers to the sights, sounds, and odors of civilization.
6. Mute noise from freeways and factories and absorb air pollutants.
7. Provide visual relief along roadways.

where intensive development has not yet occurred. Various species of hardwoods exist, including Ash, Beech, Oak, Elm, Hickory, Maple, Walnut and Pine. These hardwoods are mainly second growth, and found on poorly drained mineral soils that were not well suited for agriculture.

Aesthetically pleasing roadways with natural vegetation tend to be more popular than those with little vegetation or highway clutter. Trees within the public domain should be managed for their aesthetic and critical role that they play in air quality mitigation, cooling of streets and the filtering of air and noise pollution. Mature roadside trees are sometimes considered hazardous, but always seen as attractive and valuable and should be managed and maintained as part of the community identity. To the extent possible, road improvements should respect and maintain these important landmarks, and their contribution to community identity.

#### Wildlife Habitat

A rich variety of wildlife is present in Decatur and Hamilton Townships, providing a truly valuable living classroom of diversity that includes fish, mussels, frogs, rabbits, white-tailed deer, squirrels, bats, pheasants, fox and a variety of waterfowl species. Michigan's wildlife is one of its most precious resources. Surveys consistently show that residents value wildlife as part of their quality of life. In addition, wildlife is valued throughout Michigan for the contribution it makes to tourism, recreation, hunting, and fishing. As a result, there is an increasing appreciation of the role that wildlife contributes to the economy and quality of life of Michigan residents.

A wildlife habitat is an area that offers feeding, roosting, breeding, nesting, and refuge areas for a variety of bird and mammal species native to the southwestern Michigan region.

As with other natural features, it is important to remember that wildlife does not respect jurisdictional boundaries. As a result, it is important to coordinate activities with other local governments on the basis of biological or geographical boundaries rather than on purely political ones. In rural areas, there are significant opportunities for wildlife management, simply because of already existing, abundant wildlife habitat. This makes planning for wildlife habitat protection possible, by identifying areas of high wildlife value and encouraging development elsewhere. Even

with the development of scattered rural areas, large open spaces still may be found throughout the Townships. This means that there is ample opportunity for movement of wildlife among habitat locations. It will require strong coordination of local governments and private landowners to ensure that wildlife considerations are included in the review of development plans.

### Wildlife Corridors

The threat of fragmented habitats, due in part to strong development pressures in natural areas, can act as a motivator for the Townships to establish a framework for the protection of these critical areas. These areas contribute to the Townships' rural setting and community identity. The goal of establishing wildlife corridors is to maintain as nearly a contiguous greenway of native vegetation as possible, averaging 200 feet wide between various habitats. Some interruptions in the corridors are inevitable because of existing roadways interposed between the habitats. Within this limitation, the objective is to locate corridor connectors to minimize the number of road crossings and maximize the green space available for protected wildlife transit. Wherever possible, the corridor should follow natural drainage corridors since this land offers more habitat value, is important for natural stormwater drainage, and is generally more difficult to develop.

#### **Wildlife Corridor**

A wildlife corridor is a continuous natural protected pathway along which native wildlife species can move in relative security between high quality natural wildlife habitats. The land through which wildlife must pass when transiting between these habitats may, at times, consist of platted lots in private ownership and public roads and rights-of-way. Corridors work best when sparsely developed.

Wildlife corridors can also be developed in coordination with construction projects. For example, a utility corridor could be planned to provide a more natural system, rather than a swath of land devoid of natural features. Where it exists, native vegetation should be left undisturbed. In areas with exotic vegetation, undesirable plants should be removed and native trees, shrubs, grasses, etc. (as appropriate), planted and maintained.

### **Agricultural Lands**

Agricultural, Open Space, and Vacant lands make up approximately 84% of the land in the townships. The climate, terrain and variety of soils make several areas in Van Buren County well suited for agriculture. Open space lands including woodlands, wetlands and other environmentally

significant areas are features normally associated with farmlands and agricultural areas. These lands provide unique and economic benefits to the citizens of the Decatur area and are an important part of the community's natural and agricultural heritage. Agriculture also contributes to the local economy in direct sales of agricultural products. Many of the agricultural activities in the area provide the opportunity to harvest locally grown foods to sell at roadside stands, farmers markets and local retail food stores to increase tourism and the economic impact of agriculture.

Agriculture is an important economic activity for Van Buren County (statistics of economic impact at the township level are not available). In 2003, Van Buren County ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in blueberry production, 1<sup>st</sup> in cucumber processing, 2<sup>nd</sup> in grape production, and 3<sup>rd</sup> in apple and asparagus production for the State of Michigan. In 2002, there were 1,160 farms in Van Buren County of these 188 are orchards and 91 are vegetable farms. There were a total of 176,260 acres of land in farms with 10,281 acres in orchards and vineyards, 10,553 acres in vegetables, 31,870 acres in grain corn and 29,321 in soybeans. The average size of a farm in Van Buren County in 2002 was 152 acres and the median size was 70 acres. In 2002, in Van Buren County the average market value of agricultural products sold per farm is \$83,382 with the total market value of agricultural products in the County valued at \$96,724,000.

The Decatur area is very diverse in crop production. The Decatur area is known for its muck soils. Many of the muck soils have been drained and are being used for agricultural production. The Decatur area has a very diverse crop production including vegetable crops, such as onions, radishes, carrots, celery, cabbage, cauliflower, green beans and sweet corn. Pickles and peppers are also important vegetable crops in the area. Grain crops include corn, soybeans, wheat, oats, barley and rye. Alfalfa represents the primary hay crop in the area. Corn is the primary grain grown in the Decatur area. Additionally, there is a large sod farm on County Road 352. The remainder of the agricultural activities in the area consists of various livestock operations, which tend to be mainly hogs, beef cattle and dairy cows. Some sheep and poultry are also raised in the area.

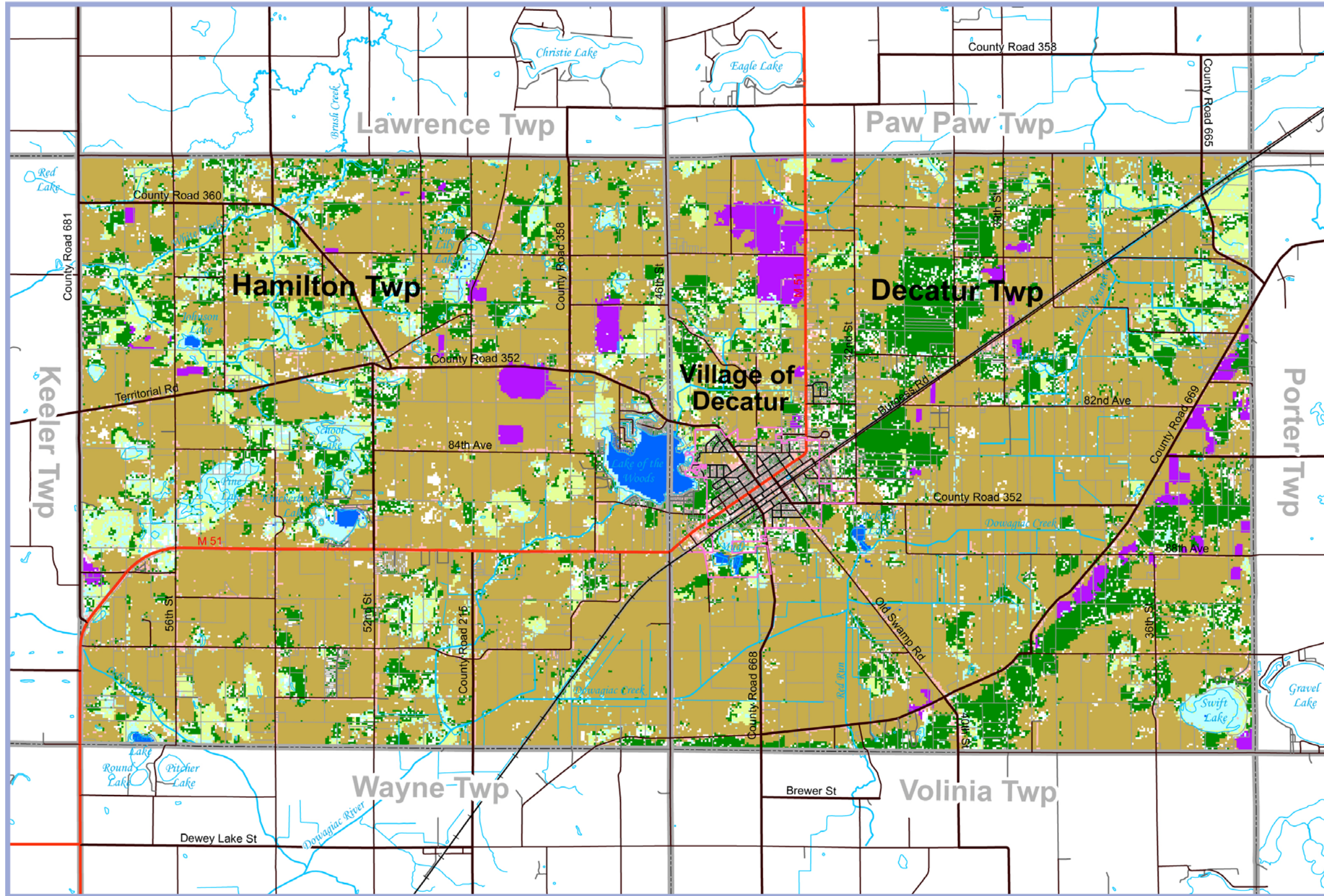
**Table 2. Van Buren County Farmland and Agricultural Statistics, 1987-2002**

	<b>1987</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2002</b>
Total Acres of Farmland	190,251	206,781	189,432	176,260
Acres in Orchards	18,663	19,232	15,480	10,281
Acres in Vegetables	14,853	13,734	12,069	10,553
Acres in Corn (for grain)	35,282	38,255	34,695	31,870
Acres in Soybeans	9,684	23,679	24,702	29,321
Total Number of farms	1,278	1,164	1,217	1,160
Number of Orchards	373	312	256	188
Number of Vegetable Farms	201	158	104	91
Average Size of Farm	149	178	156	152
Median Size of Farm	N	N	73	70
Total Market Value of Agricultural Products (\$)	69,624,000	84,931,000	104,868,000	96,724,000
Average Market Value of Agricultural Products per Farm (\$)	54,479	72,965	86,169	83,382
Hogs and Pigs Inventory (farms)	147	119	68	36
Hogs and Pigs Inventory (number)	56,167	52,055	29,477	24,985
Hogs and Pigs Sold (farms)	152	116	64	41
Hogs and Pigs Sold (number)	84,358	103,464	56,245	67,997

*N-no data Source: US Department of Agriculture, 1987, 1997, 2002 Census of Agriculture*

The 2001 Land Cover map shows the extent of farmland and orchards/vineyards in the Decatur-Hamilton area.

# Land Cover



**Legend**

- Township
- Parcel

**Land Cover**

- Urban
- Farmland
- Orchard/Vineyard/Nursery
- Open Land
- Forest
- Water
- Forested Wetland
- Wetland

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

**Data Sources**  
 Base Map: Michigan Center for Geographic Information  
 Parcel: Van Buren County  
 Land Cover: Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Prepared April 2009  
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**Van Buren County**

Hamilton Township      Decatur Township

### Farmland Protection Benefits

Farming creates jobs, provides a product for sale, and provides vast areas of open space and scenic corridors. Farmland also provides substantial environmental benefits, including floodplain protection, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat. In addition, the tradition of family owned farms has been passed down from generation to generation; supporting a strong social structure focused on community and family.

Based upon agricultural statistics for Van Buren County, agriculture will continue to be a prominent economic force in the region. In evaluating the value of farmland, there must be a basic assumption that farmland is worth saving. The Decatur-Hamilton community recognizes the significance of agriculture in the master plan and the future land use map which seeks to see the loss of farmland reduced to 3-7% over the next twenty years within the community; as opposed to a county farmland loss of 14% from 1992 and 1997 (Census of Agriculture).

### ***Economic Benefits***

- Strengthens the agricultural economy
- Strengthens the total economy through diversification
- Increases the long-term sustainability of farming
- Lowers infrastructure costs to taxpayers
- Increases property values
- Reduces the trade deficit
- Allows growth and development to continue in specified areas
- Maintains or increases tourism related to open space, wildlife and farming
- Local economic development
- Provides a long-term business environment for agriculture
- Less service costs to taxpayers
- Provides opportunities for alternative energy

### ***Environmental Benefits***

- Controls flooding and erosion
- Protects water quality
- Provides wildlife habitat

- Protects drinking water and aquifer recharge areas
- Preserves land, a limited resource
- Provides renewable resource/clean fuel, alternative energy
- Retains natural character

### ***Social Benefits***

- Strengthens and preserves farming communities
- Provides a future for young farmers
- Preserves scenic open space
- Encourages revitalization of cities
- Reduces traffic congestion
- Provides a local fresh food supply
- Provides a safe, high-quality food supply
- Preserves existing urban and rural communities
- Preserves our rural heritage in the state and the nation
- Provides recreational opportunities
- Improves the aesthetic quality of our rural and urban lives; saves beautiful land in rural areas, encourages saving beautiful buildings in cities
- Provides for a higher quality of life in a community
- Encourages a sense of community

### **Implications for Development**

Van Buren County and the Decatur area are experiencing residential development. Historically, many areas in Van Buren County were predominantly farming communities; however, increasing growth pressure is resulting in farmland being developed and fragmented. The fragmentation of farmland will make it increasingly difficult for remaining farming operations to remain viable. The land that is suitable for farming is an irreplaceable natural resource that cannot be regained once it has been lost to development. Farmland is an important part of Van Buren County and the Decatur area history, culture and economic structure.

Several programs and zoning strategies are available to manage growth and preserve farmland. Four options for preserving agricultural lands are: 1) purchase of development rights programs (such as Van Buren County's Purchase of Development Rights Program), 2) right to farm laws, 3) agricultural buffer zoning requirements to protect existing farming operations from residential sprawl, and 4) zoning techniques to reduce fragmentation.

### Land Protection Options

The protection and preservation of prime agricultural lands along with natural features and open spaces within the community will ensure that these important assets and resources remain available to the people of Decatur - Hamilton community. Therefore, tools will be utilized to acquire and protect these resources that can include the following: Transfer of Development Rights, Purchase of Development Rights, Conservation Easements, etc. The townships and village can also utilize open space developments to ensure habitats are left intact. Land Trusts also exist that communities, businesses and individuals can work with such as the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy. Individuals who are interested in protecting their land have several options available to them. A summary of these options can be found in the Appendix 2.

#### **Summary:**

- The primary environmental constraints to development found in the Decatur-Hamilton area are wetlands and poorly drained soils.
- There is little change in topography throughout most of the Decatur-Hamilton area, with the exception of the extreme southeastern portion of Decatur Township, adjoining the Cass County line, where there exists a significant rise in elevation. The top of the ridge is an important area for groundwater recharge.
- Because the Decatur-Hamilton area is at the headwaters of the Dowagiac River and Paw Paw River watersheds, current and future use of land could have significant impact on the water quality of these rivers downstream. Stormwater management must address water quantity and quality.
- The area is blessed with many lakes, streams, wetlands, natural areas and open space which attracts residents and visitors to the area.
- A large portion of the Decatur-Hamilton area contains soils that have been classified by the United States Department of Agriculture as “prime agricultural soils.” Agricultural activities continue to be important to the local economy.

## Population & Housing

Gaining insight to current demographic information pertaining to the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township can help increase understanding of past trends, projected trends, and the impact of both on the growth and development of the communities. In this section a number of variables are estimated and projected and compared to the same for surrounding communities.



### Population Estimates and Projections

In 2000, population estimates were as follows: Village of Decatur - 1,838, Decatur Township – 2,078, and Hamilton Township - 1,797. The current population for Van Buren County is estimated at more than 76,000. The current population estimates indicate a modest growth rate for Decatur Township of almost twelve percent over the past ten years. During the same period, Hamilton Township has increased by more than eighteen percent and the Village of Decatur has increased by more than four percent. These trends compare with Van Buren County which has experienced a growth rate of nearly nine percent over the same time period.

**Table 3. Population Estimates; Village of Decatur and Nearby Municipalities; 1990-2000.**

	<b>Village of Decatur</b>	<b>Village of Lawton</b>	<b>Village of Lawrence</b>	<b>Village of Paw Paw</b>	<b>City of Dowagiac</b>
<b>1990</b>	1,760	1,685	930	3,167	6,409
<b>2000</b>	1,838	1,859	1,059	3,363	6,147
<b>% Change 1990-2000</b>	4.4%	10.3%	13.9%	6.2%	-4.3%

Source: U.S. Census

**Table 4. Population Estimates; Decatur, Hamilton and Surrounding Townships; 1990-2000**

	<b>Decatur Township</b>	<b>Hamilton Township</b>	<b>Keeler Township</b>	<b>Lawrence Township</b>	<b>Paw Paw Township</b>	<b>Porter Township</b>	<b>Volinia Township</b>	<b>Wayne Township</b>
<b>1990</b>	1,856	1,515	2,344	3,031	6,701	2,086	1,032	2,780
<b>2000</b>	2,078	1,797	2,601	3,341	7,091	2,406	1,174	2,861
<b>% Change 1990 -2000</b>	11.9%	18.6%	10.9%	10.2%	5.8%	15.3%	13.8%	2.9%

Source: U.S. Census

**Table 5. Population Estimates; Van Buren, Cass and Berrien County; 1990-2000**

	<b>Van Buren County</b>	<b>Cass County</b>	<b>Berrien County</b>
<b>1990</b>	70,060	49,477	161,378
<b>2000</b>	76,263	51,104	162,453
<b>% Change 1990-2000</b>	8.9%	3.3%	6.7%

Source: U.S. Census

Long term population and household projections provide a sense of scale for future land use requirements as well as associated demand for public services, facilities, and capital improvements.

**Table 6. Population and Household Projections; Planning Area; 2005-2030**

	<b>POPULATION</b>						<b>HOUSEHOLDS</b>					
	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
<b>Village of Decatur</b>	1,889	1,867	1,873	1,890	1,901	1,900	738	738	746	758	768	774
<b>Decatur Township</b>	2,104	2,132	2,192	2,264	2,331	2,382	762	785	815	850	883	911
<b>Hamilton Township</b>	1,892	1,956	2,048	2,153	2,253	2,338	608	638	674	714	753	787
<b>Total</b>	5,885	5,955	6,113	6,307	6,485	6,620	2,108	2,161	2,235	2,322	2,404	2,472

Source: MDOT

Comparison of Age Groups 1990

Consistent with national trends, the percent of the population over age eighteen continued to increase in the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and Van Buren County. The Village of Decatur has nearly three-quarters of the population eighteen years old or older. Hamilton Township had the highest percentage of its population at age 65 or over, with more than 14% of its population falling into that category.

**Table 7. Age Characteristics; Village of Decatur and Nearby Municipalities; 1990**

<b>Community</b>	<b>&lt;5 Yrs. Of Age</b>	<b>5 to 17 Yrs. Of Age</b>	<b>18 to 64 Yrs. Of Age</b>	<b>65&gt; Yrs. Of Age</b>
<b>Village of Decatur</b>	7.6%	21.1%	55.7%	15.5%
<b>Village of Lawton</b>	8.2%	21.8%	50.1%	19.6%
<b>Village of Lawrence</b>	8.7%	20.2%	56.1%	14.9%
<b>Village of Paw Paw</b>	6.2%	18.6%	56.2%	19.1%
<b>City of Dowagiac</b>	6.9%	20.9%	55.6%	16.6%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

**Table 8. Age Characteristics; Decatur, Hamilton and Surrounding Townships: 1990**

<b>Community</b>	<b>&lt; 5 Yrs. Of Age</b>	<b>5 to 17 Yrs. Of Age</b>	<b>18 to 64 Yrs. of Age</b>	<b>65&gt; Yrs. of Age</b>
<b>Decatur Township</b>	7.9%	21.6%	57.6%	12.9%
<b>Hamilton Township</b>	6.6%	21.8%	57.6%	14.1%
<b>Keeler Township</b>	7.6%	20.7%	58.3%	13.4%
<b>Lawrence Township</b>	7.6%	21.3%	55.3%	14.8%
<b>Paw Paw Township</b>	7.2%	18.8%	59.7%	14.3%
<b>Porter Township</b>	6.5%	19.2%	60.2%	14.0%
<b>Volinia Township</b>	7.4%	19.5%	58.1%	15.0%
<b>Wayne Township</b>	6.8%	22.8%	60.7%	9.8%

Source: U.S. Census Claritas, Inc.

**Table 9. Age Characteristics; Van Buren, Cass and Berrien County; 1990**

<b>Community</b>	<b>&lt;5 Yrs. Of Age</b>	<b>5 to 17 Yrs. Of Age</b>	<b>18 to 64 Yrs. Of Age</b>	<b>65&gt; Yrs. Of Age</b>
<b>Van Buren County</b>	7.7%	21.4%	58.3%	12.6%
<b>Cass County</b>	7.1%	19.9%	59.9%	13.1%
<b>Berrien County</b>	7.4%	19.6%	59.3%	13.7%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

### Race

A diverse population exists within the Decatur-Hamilton area. The largest race in 2000 for the Decatur- Hamilton community was white. The next largest group was Hispanic or Latino with 640.

National estimates suggest that the Hispanic or Latino population will become the largest minority group in years to come. “By July 1, 2020, according to middle-series resident-population projections, the nation's Hispanic population is expected to reach 52.7 million (16.3% of the nation's total population). It is projected that Hispanics will surpass non-Hispanic African Americans to become the nation's largest minority group. Estimates indicate that this transition has already occurred among children under 18. On June 1, 1999, there were 11.1 million Hispanic children residing in the United States, outnumbering non-Hispanic African American children by 858,717.”

**Table 10. Population by Race; Planning Area, Van Buren County, Michigan; 2000**

COMMUNITY	WHITE	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKAN NATIVE	ASIAN	NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER	SOME OTHER RACE	TWO OR MORE RACES	HISPANIC OR LATINO (OF ANY RACE)
<b>Village of Decatur</b>	1,611	107	26	5	0	34	55	75
<b>Decatur Township</b>	3,497	181	46	10	4	104	74	195
<b>Hamilton Township</b>	1,594	33	23	1	0	103	43	370
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,702</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>640</b>
<b>Van Buren County</b>	67,051	4,001	705	229	9	2,614	1,654	5,634
<b>Michigan</b>	7,966,053	1,412,742	58,479	176,510	2,692	129,552	192,416	323,877

Source: US Census

### Educational Attainment

Consistent with trends throughout Michigan and the nation, educational attainment has continued to increase in the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Van Buren County. Only Hamilton Township displayed a decline in the percentage of its population holding high school diplomas and attending some college, though the decrease was quite small. Van Buren County as a whole and Decatur Township continued to outpace the Village of Decatur and Hamilton Township in educational attainment as was the case in 1990.

**Table 11. Educational Attainment; Village of Decatur and Surrounding Municipalities; 1990**

Decatur-Hamilton Area  
Joint Comprehensive Plan  
Survey and Analysis

2009-2029

<b>Community</b>	<b>% High School Graduate</b>	<b>% Some College</b>
<b>Village of Decatur</b>	63.4%	23.8%
<b>Village of Lawton</b>	63.5%	34.1%
<b>Village of Lawrence</b>	69.8%	32.1%
<b>Village of Paw Paw</b>	72.9%	40.2%
<b>City of Dowagiac</b>	62.5%	31.8%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

**Table 12. Educational Attainment; Decatur, Hamilton and Surrounding Townships; 1990**

<b>Community</b>	<b>% High School</b>	<b>% Some College</b>
<b>Decatur Township</b>	67.2%	30.6%
<b>Hamilton Township</b>	64.1%	28.5%
<b>Keeler Township</b>	68.4%	35.2%
<b>Lawrence Township</b>	72.5%	36.1%
<b>Paw Paw Township</b>	77.7%	43.4%
<b>Porter Township</b>	79.1%	38.8%
<b>Volinia Township</b>	73.6%	35.2%
<b>Wayne Township</b>	72.4%	32.6%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

**Table 13. Educational Attainment; Van Buren, Cass, and Berrien County; 1990**

<b>Community</b>	<b>% High School Graduate</b>	<b>% Some College</b>
<b>Van Buren County</b>	71.8%	37.1%
<b>Cass County</b>	72.3%	34.3%
<b>Berrien County</b>	74.7%	42.8%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

Total Number of Housing Units

The total number of housing units in the Village of Decatur in 1990 was 711 and in 2000 was 707, in Decatur Township was 772 in 1990 and 819 in 2000, and in Hamilton Township was 870 in 1990 and 723 in 2000. The total number of housing units in Van Buren County in 1990 was 31,530 and 33,975 in 2000.

**Table 14. Housing Units; Village of Decatur and Surrounding Municipalities; 1990 - 2000**

Community	Number of Housing Units		
	1990	2000	% Change 1990-2000
Village of Decatur	711	707	-.01%
Village of Lawton	602	668	10.9%
Village of Lawrence	383	434	13.3%
Village of Paw Paw	1,399	1,511	8.0%
City of Dowagiac	2,624	2,631	0.3%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

**Table 15. Housing Units; Decatur, Hamilton and Surrounding Townships; 1990 - 2000**

Community	Number of Housing Units		
	1990	2000	% Change 1990 - 2000
Decatur Township	772	819	6.1%
Hamilton Township	870	723	-16.9%
Keeler Township	1,544	1,562	1.2%
Lawrence Township	1,451	1,516	4.5%
Paw Paw Township	3,076	3,248	5.6%
Porter Township	1,278	1,380	7.9%
Volinia Township	549	588	7.1%
Wayne Township	1,210	1231	1.7%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

**Table 16. Housing Units; Van Buren, Cass and Berrien County; 1990 -2000**

Community	Number of Housing Units		
	1990	2000	% Change 1990 - 2000
<b>Van Buren County</b>	31,530	33,975	7.8%
<b>Cass County</b>	22,644	23,884	4.7%
<b>Berrien County</b>	69,532	73,445	5.6%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

Tenancy Status of Housing Units

The majority of housing units located in the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and Van Buren County are owner-occupied. In 1990, the percentage of homes that were owner occupied in the Village of Decatur lagged behind both townships and the county, which is quite common in urban communities with an aging housing stock. Hamilton Township, in 1990 had the highest percentage of owner-occupied homes, outpacing the County figure by just fewer than four percent.

**Table 17. Tenancy Status; Planning Area and Van Buren County; 1990**

% of Owner-Occupied Homes	
Community	1990
<b>Village of Decatur</b>	65.7%
<b>Decatur Township</b>	73.8%
<b>Hamilton Township</b>	80.5%
<b>Van Buren County</b>	76.7%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

Housing Values

Similar to the characteristics for the percentage of owner occupied housing, the Village of Decatur has the lowest median home value having experienced an increase of slightly less than 50% between

1990 and 2000. Again, this is quite common in urban areas with an aging housing stock. Comparatively, Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and Van Buren County have experienced varied increases in median home values, with Decatur Township’s median value increasing by more than 60% since 1990. However, the median home value in the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township fall below that for the overall County.

**Table 18. Owner Occupied Median Home Values; Planning Area and Van Buren County; 1990-2000**

<b>Community</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>Village of Decatur</b>	\$32,600	\$48,121
<b>Decatur Township</b>	\$35,200	\$56,674
<b>Hamilton Township</b>	\$45,600	\$69,141
<b>Van Buren County</b>	\$48,000	\$72,554

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

Age of Housing

The Village of Decatur has a higher percentage of homes built in 1939 or earlier. More than 36% of the homes in the Village of Decatur were built in 1939 or earlier. Hamilton Township had the lowest percentage of homes built 1939 or earlier with fewer than one-fourth falling into this category. This is reflected in the percentage of owner-occupied homes and the median home value, both of which are higher in Hamilton Township.

**Table 19. Percentage of Housing Built 1939 or Earlier; Planning Area and Van Buren County; 1990**

<b>Community</b>	<b>1990</b>
<b>Village of Decatur</b>	36.74%
<b>Decatur Township</b>	32.27%
<b>Hamilton Township</b>	24.90%
<b>Van Buren County</b>	26.53%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

### **Village Neighborhood Analysis**

In this section, the existing neighborhoods in the Village are evaluated in terms of their consistency with the principles of good neighborhood development. These principles are based upon the ideas expressed in the neighborhood unit concept, which represents the physical arrangement of many neighborhoods built prior to World War II, and the more recent Traditional Neighborhood Design or New Urbanism movement. Essentially, the principles espoused in these concepts are as follow:

- Recognition of the neighborhood unit as the basic building block of the community
- Neighborhoods should be compact and walkable
- Neighborhoods should have clearly defined edges and be connected to well-defined centers
- Community centers should be typically no more than one-quarter of a mile or five minute walk from the neighborhoods
- Pedestrian access throughout the neighborhood and connecting to the center should be a priority
- Streets should be laid out as an interconnected network to form coherent blocks
- A diverse mix of residences, shops, schools, workplaces, and parks should occur in close proximity to one another
- Open spaces such as parks should be provided in convenient locations throughout each neighborhood
- A wide spectrum of housing options accommodating people of a range of incomes, ages, and family types should be available in each neighborhood

For the purposes of this Master Plan, the individual neighborhoods were defined for the Village of Decatur (see Neighborhood Analysis map), and were then evaluated based upon these principles. Delineation of the neighborhoods was achieved through use of the following methodology:

- Use of previously documented neighborhood delineations, such as that in any previous Master Plans or as devised by the Village for other purposes.
- Identification and recognition of distinct areas that are bounded by recognizable physical edges, such as roads, natural features, substantial changes in land use, etc.
- Consideration of the ultimate maximum size of any area relative to its ability to function as a unified neighborhood.

Each neighborhood was then evaluated against the afore-mentioned principles of traditional neighborhood development and the results are presented in a table below. A brief description of the features follows:

Compactness. Well-defined neighborhoods that have recognizable edges and which are relatively high in density, that is the number of homes per acre help to define a unique sense of place and contribute to interaction among neighbors and contribute to the relative quality of life in the neighborhood.

Walkability. The presence of sidewalks, houses oriented to the street, tree lined streets, and traffic “calmed” by on-street parking are a few of the variables that are considered in this measure. As with compactness, the walkability of a neighborhood can contribute to the neighborhood’s sense of place and contribute to the interaction among neighbors and contribute to the relative quality of life in the neighborhood.

Civic and Institutional Uses. The presence of churches, parks, and government facilities can contribute positively to a neighborhood’s identity and character. Such facilities generally contribute positively to the neighborhood offering opportunities for both formal and informal gathering of neighbors, addressing many of the social needs of the community within walking distance of homes, and serving as a stabilizing factor in the neighborhood.

Commercial Uses. The presence of appropriately scaled business activities in a neighborhood can provide residents with access to convenience shopping goods and services, often within walking distance of their homes. Additionally, neighborhood businesses offer employment opportunities for neighborhood youths and elderly persons who may be unable or unwilling to travel great distances for employment.

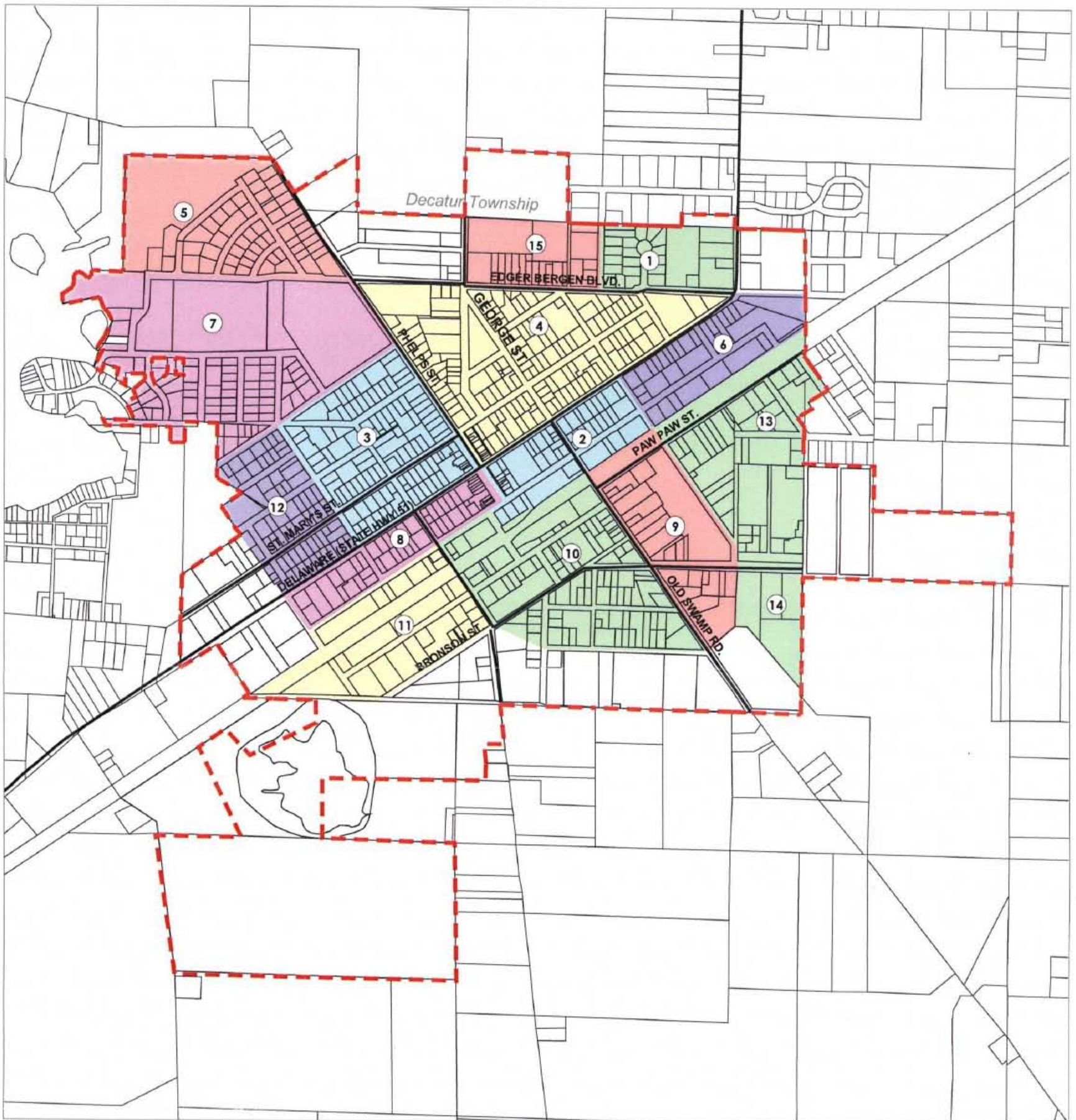
Schools. Schools within walking distance are one of the most beneficial features of traditional neighborhood design. In many communities schools serve as the central location of neighborhood or community activities. Generally, such facilities are used by the surrounding neighborhood throughout the day and evening. Schools located within walking distance contribute significantly to a neighborhood's sense of place and to the positive quality of life for the surrounding residents.

Mixed Uses. The mixing of uses, residential with compatible non-residential and single family with multiple-family can play several vital roles. These roles include providing housing in a single neighborhood for the entire economic and life cycle of local residents, thus enabling first-time home buyers, traditional families, single residents, and the elderly all a place to live within the same neighborhood. As previously discussed, the presence of appropriately scaled non-residential uses in the neighborhood can provide shopping and employment opportunities near where residents live. It is vitally important that uses be limited to those that are compatible and that sound site development standards are in place to ensure that the mix of uses contributes positively to the character of the neighborhood.

Interconnected Streets. Historically, communities were built with a series of interconnected grid streets. These streets facilitated relatively easy movement through cities and villages and helped to limit congestion as many routes to and from homes, businesses, etc. existed. Over time, a preference emerged for living along streets that did not carry through traffic and thus were at least in theory safer for children and pedestrians. Often the introduction of cul-de-sacs, and dead-end streets were a response to the lack of parks, schools, sidewalks, etc in the neighborhood that forced streets to

become the only available location for pedestrian and play activities. Interconnected streets, whether on a grid pattern or some other patterns, are vital features of a strong neighborhood. As in the past, such a street pattern allows ease of movement for automobiles and pedestrians and helps to alleviate congestion in the community.

DRAFT



**--- Municipal Boundary**

**Evaluation of Traditional Neighborhoods**

Basemap Source: Van Buren County, Michigan  
Data Source: McKenna Associates, Inc.



**Table 20. Evaluation of Neighborhoods Based Upon Traditional Neighborhood Features**

Traditional Neighborhood Feature	Evaluation Scoring (1= Weak, 5 = Strong)													
	Neighborhood													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<b>Compactness</b>	4	4	4	5	3	5	3	3	4	4	3	1	1	1
<b>Walkability</b>	4	4	4	4	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	2
<b>Presence of Civic &amp; Institutional Uses</b>	3	3	4	4	3	4	2	2	2	4	3	2	1	3
<b>Concentration of Commercial Uses Nearby</b>	1	1	3	5	4	5	2	2	3	5	3	2	2	2
<b>Schools Within Walking Distance</b>	5	5	3	3	2	5	3	3	2	3	1	1	1	1
<b>Mixed Uses</b>	2	2	3	4	4	4	2	4	3	4	2	2	2	3
<b>Interconnected Streets</b>	4	4	5	5	2	5	3	2	3	4	3	2	1	2

Source: McKA, Inc.

As this analysis reveals, the neighborhoods exhibiting the strongest presence of traditional neighborhoods are generally located in the older platted portions of the Village. However, neighborhood 1 is a good example of newer construction exhibiting several of these features just northwest of the high school. Generally, the most common missing or weak features include walkability, presence of civic, institutional uses, and commercial uses, and the proximity of schools. It is generally advisable that the community takes steps to protect and enhance desirable existing features, expand or improve areas where weaknesses exist, and take steps to ensure that new development incorporates as many of the features as appropriate.

## Economy

In this section, a number of different aspects of the Hamilton-Decatur area's economy is analyzed. Employment within the village and townships is reviewed and compared to the same for surrounding communities and the counties. Household income and expenditure patterns are also reviewed and compared to the surrounding communities. Additionally, a general evaluation of the Central Business District is conducted.

The majority of those employed in the Village of Decatur are employed in blue collar jobs, with more than 40% employed in such occupations. This is followed by those employed in white collar jobs, representing slightly less than 40% of those employed. This characteristic is true in both Decatur Township as well, with 43% of those employed in blue collar occupations. Hamilton Township and Van Buren County, however have more of their population employed in white collar jobs than in blue collar with the percentages being 38% and 46%, respectively.

Within the Decatur-Hamilton area there were as of 1997, 102 business establishments, employing 557 persons, with an annual payroll of more than \$11 million. The majority of the business establishments were in the areas of retail trade, construction, and service businesses. In general, area businesses were small businesses, employing fewer than 10 people.

**Table 21. Occupations for Planning Area and Van Buren County; 2000**

	<b>Village of Decatur</b>	<b>Decatur Township</b>	<b>Hamilton Township</b>	<b>Van Buren County</b>
<b>Executive/ Managerial</b>	6.47%	6.58%	6.17%	9.04%
<b>Professional Specialty</b>	6.89%	8.44%	8.00%	10.12%
<b>Technical Support</b>	2.59%	1.30%	3.67%	3.68%
<b>Sales</b>	6.75%	6.99%	10.00%	9.44%
<b>Administrative Support</b>	13.94%	10.43%	10.00%	13.49%
<b>Service: Private</b>	0.57%	0.27%	0.33%	0.30%

	<b>Village of Decatur</b>	<b>Decatur Township</b>	<b>Hamilton Township</b>	<b>Van Buren County</b>
<b>Household</b>				
<b>Service: Protective</b>	2.01%	1.09%	0.33%	1.16%
<b>Service: Other</b>	16.38%	13.44%	15.17%	12.82%
<b>Farming, Forestry, Fishing</b>	3.88%	6.93%	9.83%	5.14%
<b>Precision Production &amp; Craft</b>	11.78%	18.59%	13.50%	13.36%
<b>Machine Operator</b>	16.67%	17.49%	13.50%	11.76%
<b>Transportation</b>	5.17%	4.66%	4.33%	4.95%
<b>Laborer</b>	6.89%	3.77%	5.17%	4.74%

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

**Table 22. Business Classifications for Decatur-Hamilton Area; 1997**

<b>Business Classification</b>	<b>Total Number of Establishments</b>
Agricultural Services, Forestry, and Fishing	2
Construction	17
Manufacturing	5
Transportation and Public Utilities	6
Wholesale Trade	6
Retail Trade	24
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	5
Services	36
Other	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>

Source: U.S. Census

### Median Household Income

Median household income has continued to increase in all of the areas under consideration. The greatest increases occurring in both Decatur and Hamilton townships, each experiencing a 45% increase between 1990 and 2000. This compares to a 34% increase in the Village of Decatur and nearly a 40% increase for Van Buren County, in its entirety.

**Table 23. Median Household Income; Planning Area and Van Buren County; 1990 - 2000**

<b>Community</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
Village of Decatur	\$19,129	\$26,729
Decatur Township	\$21,604	\$31,304
Hamilton Township	\$21,047	\$30,504
Van Buren County	\$25,491	\$35,579

Source: U.S. Census and Claritas, Inc.

### Central Business District Evaluation

Historically, the central business district or “downtown Decatur” met the shopping needs of most of the area residents. Following World War II, this role began to wane, with businesses located in strips along major roadways gaining prominence. This can be seen in the communities surrounding Decatur with the growth of business districts along state highways and in the vicinity of interstate interchanges. Often, this shift of economic activity left central business districts vacant and underutilized. More recently, central business districts have experienced a resurgence, with the introduction of specialty shopping opportunities and service businesses locating in downtown.

In general, this pattern has been influenced only by the marketplace with little intervention by the local government. The formation of downtown development authorities, establishments of tax increment financing authorities, and the introduction of Main Street programs are recent initiatives by local governmental bodies to balance market influences. The Village of Decatur has had a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) for several years, charged with enhancing and improving

the physical and economic environment of downtown.

Typically, communities seek to accomplish protection and enhancement of the downtown in a variety of ways including maintaining a focus on four areas: Physical Design, Economic Restructuring, Organization and Promotion.

This section evaluates the progress made in these four areas. This section is not intended to be a comprehensive downtown development plan or business development plan, rather it is intended to provide enough data and analysis to assist in developing appropriate responses in the master plan.

### ***Physical Design***

There have been few organized efforts at improving the physical design of downtown. Efforts that have been undertaken have generally included public investment in capital projects such as Phelps Street reconstruction and streetscape improvements including placement of street furniture and period lighting. Additionally, a small pocket park was constructed on Phelps Street across from Village Hall.

Remaining challenges include the continuation of the streetscape improvements, facade renovation and upgrade efforts, improvement in signage in the downtown, creation of site development standards that ensure that new construction or major renovation in the downtown is completed in a manner that enhances the character of the area, improvement of the entrances into downtown, and generation of additional sources of revenue to implement improvement efforts.

### ***Economic Restructuring***

There have been essentially no organized efforts at economic restructuring in the downtown. Typically such efforts include the organized collection and dissemination of relevant market data and providing assistance to local merchants to enable them to reposition themselves to be more competitive and successful. Furthermore, there is a \$100,000 business revolving loan fund available for qualified projects.

Remaining challenges and opportunities include the establishment of a focused and coordinated business development plan, business recruitment and retention efforts, market data collection and distribution, and generation of additional sources of revenue to implement restructuring efforts.

### ***Organization***

There have been very limited efforts at organizing around downtown issues. The establishment of the Downtown Development Authority and the presence of the Chamber of Commerce represent the organizational efforts to date. It is necessary to build upon these existing organizations to increase the focus on downtown.

Remaining challenges and opportunities include the expansion of the DDA to include committees or task forces that are organized around elements essential to the success of downtown, such as physical design, economic restructuring, and promotion. An enhanced level of coordination and cooperation among the various stakeholders in the community is another opportunity that remains to be addressed for downtown Decatur.

### ***Promotion***

There is very little attention paid to the promotion of downtown Decatur as a whole as well as in the joint advertising of businesses located in the downtown. In general marketing is left up to the individual merchant alone. Similarly there are few events and activities that assist in promoting downtown as a destination for visitors and customers.

Remaining challenges and opportunities include expanding the promotional and marketing efforts in Decatur. This should include actively promoting individual business, clusters of similar business, and the community as a whole.

### **Summary:**

- Village of Decatur is experiencing a slow to moderate level of growth.

- Decatur and Hamilton Townships are experiencing levels of growth comparable to that in surrounding communities.
- The Village has a higher percentage of its population with ages 65 or over than both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township, though no greater than in surrounding villages and cities.
- More than two-thirds of the population in the Decatur-Hamilton area has graduated from high school.
- According to the household projects, the plan needs to accommodate at least 20 new housing units in the Village, at least 65 new units in Decatur Township, and at least 76 in Hamilton Township from 2010 to 2020.
- The vast majority of the homes in the Decatur-Hamilton area are owner occupied, with the Village having the lowest percentage.
- The median value of houses in the Decatur-Hamilton area were less than in Van Buren County overall, with the Village being lower than both Townships, at only half the value of the County overall.
- More than one-third of the homes in the Village and Decatur Township were built in 1939 or earlier. Approximately one-fourth of the homes in Hamilton Township were built in 1939 or earlier.
- Several of the neighborhoods located in the Village exhibit many traditional neighborhood features that should be protected and enhanced. Other neighborhoods exhibit such features to a lesser degree and should be considered for either re-development or enhancement.

- The majority of residents in the Decatur-Hamilton area are occupied in Administrative Support, Sales, Machine Operators, and Precision Production & Crafts.
- The majority of business establishments in the Decatur-Hamilton area are in retail trade or service establishments.
- An increased focus on addressing issues and opportunities specific to downtown in the areas of physical design, economic restructuring, organization, and promotion needs to be undertaken to maintain its character and vitality.
- Median household income in the Decatur-Hamilton area lags behind that of Van Buren County overall, with the residents of the Village being one-third less that of the County.

## **Transportation**

An integral and highly visible part of any community’s infrastructure is the transportation system. The condition of the roads, the amount of congestion, and the ease with which one can move around the community are all issues of significant concern to residents, visitors, and businesses.

An examination of the traffic volumes, access points, and conditions of the street network is an integral part of understanding the issues and opportunities that may exist within a community and to formulate goals and strategies relative to transportation improvements. One method of evaluating the existing transportation system is to determine how well each street serves its purpose, intended or otherwise. Streets are generally classified by the function they serve. This is known as “Functional Classification”. This classification is generally broken into the following classifications:

- State Trunkline/Major Arterial
- County Primary/Minor Arterial
- Major Streets/Collectors
- Local Streets

### State Trunkline/Major Arterial

The primary function of the a major arterial is to accommodate longer distance travel between

communities to expressway interchanges and within the village and townships; access to land uses is secondary. Major arterials are usually state trunk lines and the “mile” roads and typically have posted speed limits of 35-45 miles per hour, and 55 mph in rural areas.

Only one major arterial passes through the Village of Decatur and Decatur and Hamilton Townships that is M-51. M-51 provides movement through the village, serves as the primary access for many of the businesses in its business district, and provides a direct link to the surrounding area and to Interstate 94.

#### County Primary/Minor Arterial

The primary function of a minor arterial is to move traffic within the community, rather than connections to other communities or expressway interchanges. Access to adjacent land uses is as important as function, so speeds are usually slower than with a major arterial.

Two minor arterials are located in the Village of Decatur. The minor arterials include County Roads 352 and 668. County Road 352 connects to M-51, serves as a primary access for many of the businesses located in the village’s business district, and provides a connection to Hamilton Township and to the remainder of the western portion of the county. County Road 668 also connects to M-51 and provides access to the southern portion of Van Buren County and into the northern portions of Cass County.

Several minor arterials are located in Decatur Township. The minor arterials include County Roads 352, 669, 665, and 668. County Road 352 provides east-west movement through the township and provides a direct connection to the Village of Decatur. County Roads 669, 665, and 668 generally provide north-south movement through the township with connections to the Village of Decatur and indirectly, Interstate 94.

Several minor arterials are located in Hamilton Township. The minor arterials include County Roads 358, 352, 360, 215, and 681. County Roads 681, 215, and 358 provide north-south movement

through the township and indirect access to Interstate 94 and the surrounding communities. County Roads 352 and 360 provide east-west movement through the township and indirect access to adjoining communities.

### Major Streets/Collectors

The main function of collectors is to collect traffic from nearby local streets and link it with the surrounding arterial street system. Generally, collectors are not intended for through traffic, but may be forced into this role if arterials become congested. Speed limits are usually 25-35 miles per hour; on street-parking may be permitted. Rights of way are typically less than on arterials, but greater than local streets.

Several collectors are located in the Village of Decatur and include the various avenues and numbered streets (i.e., 86<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 44<sup>th</sup> Street). The collectors provide movement throughout the village and connections to the minor and major arterials located within the village.

Numerous collectors are located in Decatur Township. The collectors include the various avenues and numbered streets (i.e., 92<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, 39<sup>th</sup> Street). The collectors provide east-west and north-south movement throughout the community and connections to minor and major arterials located within the township.

Numerous collectors are located in Hamilton Township. The collectors include the various avenues and numbered streets (i.e., 90<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 52<sup>nd</sup> Street). The collectors provide east-west and north-south movement throughout the community and connections to the minor and major arterials located within the township.

### Local Streets

The primary function of local streets is to provide access to adjacent land uses and ensure through traffic is discouraged. The remaining streets in the village and townships function as local streets, providing direct access to adjacent land uses.

## Other Forms of Transportation

### ***Pedestrian***

The majority of the Village of Decatur is served by sidewalks enabling pedestrian movement throughout the residential areas and the business district. Generally, sidewalks are not present in either Decatur Township or Hamilton Township, due to the relatively low density of development found in these areas. There is a newly constructed recreational trail in Hamilton Township adjacent to the Grange Hall or Old Township Hall.

### ***Rail***

An active rail line passes through the Decatur-Hamilton area, in the center of the Village of Decatur. The rail line is owned and operated by Amtrak. Historically, the Decatur-Hamilton area utilized the railroad for both movement of freight and agricultural products grown locally and for passenger service to Benton Harbor, Kalamazoo, Chicago and other locations. There has been a shift from trucks to rail for shipping products in the Village. A rail spur was recently extended to service a commodity barn for agricultural products. The nearest rail passenger service is located in Dowagiac and Kalamazoo.

### ***Air***

The nearest commercial airports are located at Kalamazoo, Michigan and South Bend, Indiana. Service from these airports provides direct connections to Chicago, Illinois, Detroit, Michigan, and Cincinnati, Ohio, where service to points throughout the U.S. and the world can be arranged.

### ***Public Transit***

Public transportation is available from Van Buren Public Transit. Riders must call ahead at least one day in advance to schedule a ride. The service is county-wide. Out of county service is provided, but it is expensive.

### **Summary:**

- All of the roads in the Decatur-Hamilton area can be classified as either a major arterial,

minor arterial, collector, or local street.

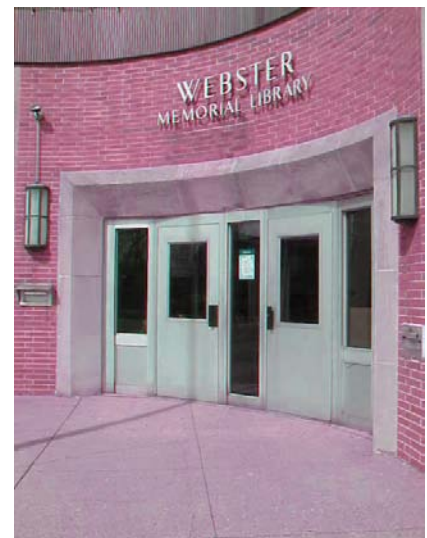
- Most of the roads in Decatur and Hamilton Townships are collectors or minor arterials. Most of the roads in the Village of Decatur are local streets.
- Most of the roads in Decatur and Hamilton Townships are maintained by the County Road Commission. Most of the roads in the Village of Decatur are maintained by the village.
- M-51 is the most heavily traveled in the Decatur-Hamilton area and provides access to Interstate 94 and to Cass County.
- Other forms of transportation are limited in the Decatur-Hamilton area. Public transportation is provided by Van Buren Public Transit in the Decatur-Hamilton area. Pedestrian facilities are generally only present in the Village of Decatur. Railroad use is increasing in the Decatur area. Air service is available in adjoining communities including South Bend, Indiana and Kalamazoo.

## **Community Facilities**

### Schools & Libraries

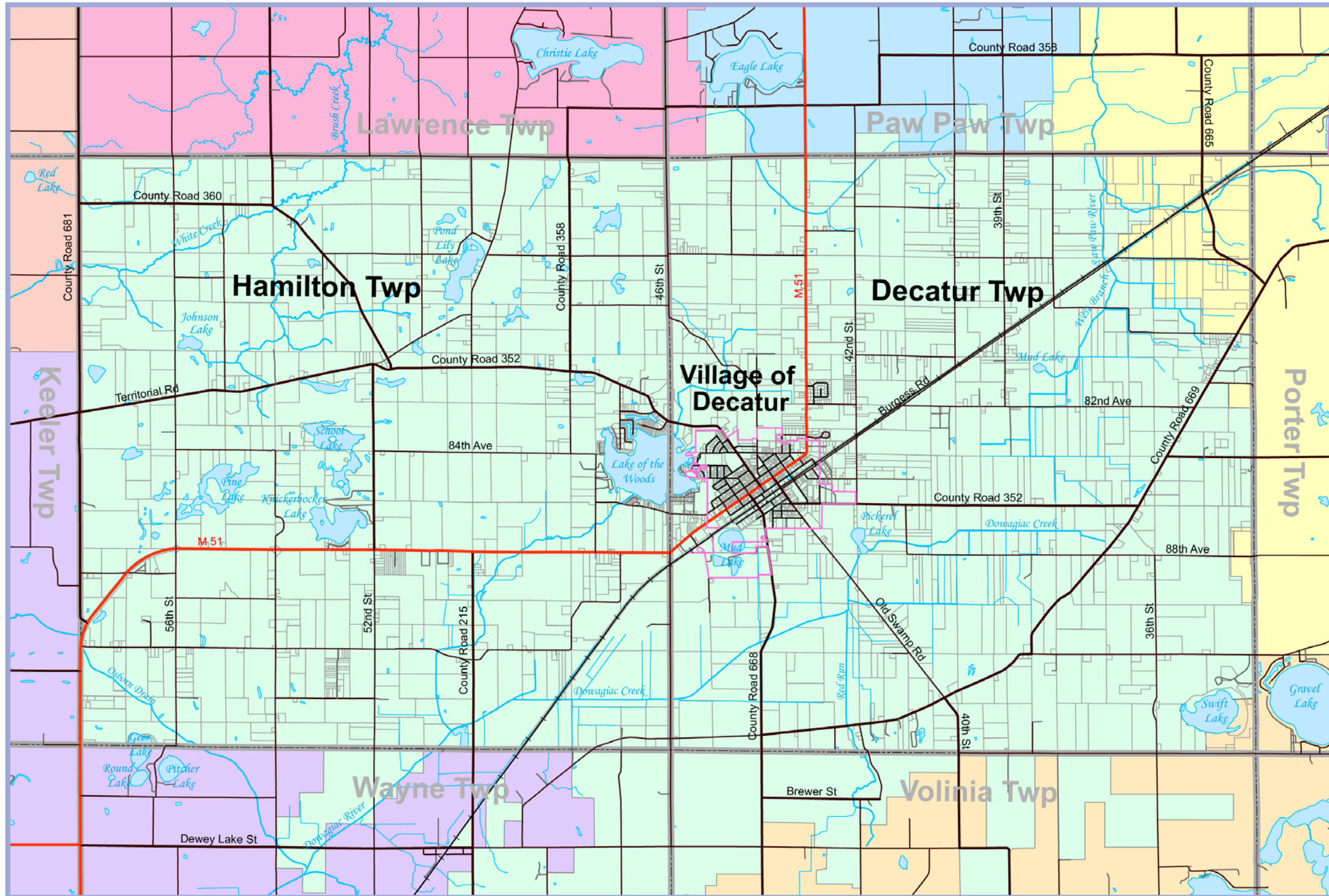
The Decatur-Hamilton area is served by the Decatur, Lawton, Marcellus Public School systems. The Decatur school system includes one elementary school, one middle school and one high school. All Decatur schools are on one campus, located at the western edge of the Village's central business district. There are currently 1,170 students attending the schools within the Decatur Public School System. The area is also served by Southwestern Michigan College in Dowagiac.

The Van Buren District Library headquarters is at the Webster Memorial Library Building in Decatur. A large local history and



genealogy collection is maintained in the Local History Room at the Webster Memorial Library Building in Decatur. The Local History Room contains over 3,000 library items, including local and family history materials for Southwest Michigan and general genealogical items for the United States and some foreign countries. The Bess Britton One-Room Schoolhouse Collection was recently added to these materials, consisting of 20 notebooks of history concerning nearly 600 of Michigan's historic one-room schoolhouses. The collection was donated by Mrs. Bess Britton of rural Decatur Township, Van Buren County. The Local History Room also houses another 600 plus items from the Van Buren Regional Genealogical Society.

# School Districts



**Legend**

- Township
- Parcel

**School Districts**

- Decatur Public
- Dowagiac Union
- Hartford Public
- Lawrence Public
- Lawton Community
- Marcellus Community
- Paw Paw Public

N  
0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

**Data Sources**  
Base Map and Districts: Michigan Center for Geographic Information  
Parcel: Van Buren County

Prepared April 2009  
**Southwest Michigan Planning Commission**  
Tel: 269-925-1137  
Fax: 269-925-0288  
Email: [swmpc@swmpc.org](mailto:swmpc@swmpc.org)  
Website: [www.swmpc.org](http://www.swmpc.org)

**Van Buren County**

Hamilton Township      Decatur Township

### Administrative Buildings

The Village of Decatur operates out of the Village Hall, which is located at 114 North Phelps in the Village of Decatur. The Village Hall provides the offices for the village administrative staff including the Village Manager, the Village Clerk, and the Village Police Department. The Village Hall serves as the meeting location for the various boards and commission formed in the Village. The Village Hall was recently expanded and should adequately serve the needs of the residents for the timeframe covered in this plan.

Decatur Township operates out of the Town Hall located on M-51 in the Village of Decatur. The Town Hall provides the offices for the township elected and appointed staff, including the Township Supervisor. The Town Hall serves as the meeting location for the various boards and commissions formed in the township. The Decatur Township Hall has been in the same location for nearly 100 years and has undergone few renovations since that time. Though, the size of the structure will likely remain sufficient during the timeframe of this plan, continued maintenance must be done to ensure the longevity of the building.

Hamilton Township operates out of a newly built Town Hall located on County Road 352. The Township Hall provides the offices for the township elected and appointed staff including the Township Supervisor. The Town Hall serves as the meeting location for the various boards and commissions formed in the township. With the completion of the new Town Hall, the building should adequately serve the needs of the residents for the time-frame covered in this plan.

### Public Safety Facilities

The Decatur - Hamilton area is served by the Decatur Hamilton Fire Department, which operates out of a fire house located in the southern portion of the Village of Decatur along M-51. Currently there are thirty volunteer fire fighters. Dispatching is provided to the Department by the Van Buren County 911 Central Dispatch.

The Village of Decatur is served by the Village of Decatur Police Department. The department

operates out of the Village Hall and includes a Chief of Police, Police Sergeant, and two Patrolmen. Police dispatching is provided to the village by the Van Buren County 911 Central Dispatch.



Decatur and Hamilton Townships rely on the Van Buren County Sheriff's Department for law enforcement. Currently, the Sheriff's Department provides limited patrols on a daily basis. Police dispatching is provided to the Sheriff's Department by the Van Buren County 911 Central Dispatch.

**Summary:**

- The majority of community services are located in the Village of Decatur.
- Both Hamilton Township and the Village of Decatur are served by relatively new or recently remodeled government offices. Decatur Township is served by a town hall that remains functional, though due to its age and current configuration, may need additional maintenance in the future.

**Parks and Recreational Facilities**

Existing Recreation Facilities

The majority of recreational facilities and services available to residents of the Decatur-Hamilton area are located in the Village of Decatur and either owned and maintained by the village or the Decatur school district. Recreational facilities located in the village include:

***Park next to firehouse***

This park is located adjacent to the fire department on M-51 and consists of approximately two acres. The park includes playground equipment, tennis courts, and a picnic shelter. Parking is provided by a small loop at the entrance to the park and if needed, by adjoining parking areas at a church and at the fire department.

### ***Park on Phelps in Central Business District***

This park is located on a small lot at the corner of Phelps and St. Mary's Street in the central business district. The park was recently constructed by the Downtown Development Authority and is intended to provide green space in the downtown in the vicinity of the Village Hall, the Library, and the surrounding businesses. The park includes flower plantings, a small shelter, and benches. Parking is provided on Phelps Street or on St. Mary's Street, though the majority of users are pedestrians.

### ***Red Woolfe Park***

This park is located on Lake of the Woods and provides public access to the lake. The park includes a beach which is supervised by trained lifeguards, a concession stand, and picnic area.

### ***High School Facilities***

The junior high - senior high school campus includes associated athletic activity areas. These areas include baseball and softball fields, football field, and track. Because of its placement in the center of the village, the track and fields are used frequently by residents in the adjoining neighborhoods.

### ***Elementary Facilities***

The new Decatur Elementary School includes an associated play area. This area includes playground equipment and benches as part of the new school campus. With the placement of the school campus in the fabric of the community, the play area will be used frequently by residents in the adjoining neighborhoods.

### ***Raider Romp***

The Raider Romp is a recently completed park with playground equipment and a shelter with benches. The park is located on the northern edge of the village and was constructed following an extensive and successful community fund-raising effort.

### ***Village Skate Park***

The Village of Decatur created a concrete skate park located on South Williams and Beers Street. In 2009, the Village plans to add a parking lot and sidewalks, meeting all Americans with Disabilities

Act (ADA) requirements. In 2010, the Village plans to add a bathroom, pavilion and basketball court to this park again ensuring that all facilities meet ADA requirements.

### ***Other***

In addition to these facilities there is a recreational trail located adjacent to the Grange Hall in Hamilton Township. It is a 1.6 mile trail on 79 acres which is owned by the Michigan Nature Association. This trail was recently established and is designed for nature walking and exercise. There is also a public boat launch on the west end of Lake of the Woods. The Van Buren Conservation District owns Hayden Woods in Hamilton Township which is open to the public.

There also exists a series of snowmobile trails through both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township that are managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, though they are located on private lands. In total there exist several miles of snowmobile trails in the area that connect to a network of trails providing access to areas throughout southwestern Michigan. Additional recreation opportunities in the surrounding area include those operated and maintained by adjoining local jurisdictions, the State of Michigan, and private interests. These include private campgrounds, state park facilities, and other municipal parks.

### ***Existing Recreation Programs***

Organized recreation programs are limited generally to those programs affiliated with the local school district, private organizations, churches, etc.

### **Analysis of Current Facilities and Programs**

Neither of the townships nor the village currently have a parks and recreation plan to assist in the planning and development of future parks and recreation facilities. However, the village does maintain a current five-year plan. Typically, a parks and recreation plan provides a detailed inventory of existing recreation facilities, an in-depth analysis of any deficiencies that may exist, and an action plan for capital improvements to existing facilities or for the acquisition and construction of new facilities. Currently, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) requires such

a plan be in place and updated every five years for the community to be eligible for grants administered by the MDNR. Such a plan also assists the community in being more responsive to the changing recreation needs of the community.

While a comprehensive parks and recreation plan is beyond the scope of this Master Plan, some basic information can be provided relative to the sufficiency of current facilities and programs. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources suggests that communities strive to provide park land at a ratio of ten acres per each 1,000 persons, in an effort to satisfy all forms of recreation needs. Based on the 2000 populations of the Village and the Townships a total of approximately 75 acres of park land should be available. With the current acreage dedicated to parks and recreational opportunities it appears that the amount is deficient. This deficiency is most pronounced in the townships and was reflected in the community surveys that indicated a desire for additional recreational opportunities.

Based upon the population projections for the Decatur-Hamilton area it can be determined that a demand for an additional five to ten acres may exist by 2020. Again, based on the current parks and recreational offerings, it would appear that the current deficiency will continue into the future, unless additional land is developed for such purposes.

In addition to the quantity of park land, equally important is the location of these facilities. Often the location of such parks can be used to determine how adequately specific neighborhoods are served. Generally, parks should be conveniently located so that they are easily accessible to the residents they are intended to serve. The degree of accessibility is generally a function of the type and purpose of the park. For simplicity, the parks within the Decatur-Hamilton area can be viewed as falling into one of four specific categories. These categories are Community Parks, Neighborhood Parks, Mini-Parks and Special Purpose Parks.

### ***Community Parks***

A community park offers areas of diverse environmental quality and may include areas suited for intense recreation facilities, such as athletic fields and picnic area. A community park may also

feature an area of natural quality for passive recreation, such as sitting and viewing. The athletic fields located at the junior high/high school campus and the Red Woolfe Park is the closest facilities that the Decatur-Hamilton areas have to community parks.

### ***Neighborhood Parks***

These parks are intended to be recreation areas to serve the immediate neighborhoods in which they are located. Neighborhood parks typically offer such recreation activities as field games, court games, playground equipment, and picnicking. They should be easily accessible to residents of the neighborhood, with special consideration given to pedestrian and bicycle safety. Elementary school playgrounds often serve in this capacity. Another example of a neighborhood park is the park adjacent to the fire department.

### ***Mini-Parks***

Mini-parks is small, specialized parks, typically less than one acre in size, generally intended to serve the needs of the residents in the surrounding area. A mini-park may contain a children's play lot, serve as a greenbelt, or provide a sitting area. The park in the central business district functions as a mini-park.

### ***Special-Purpose Parks***

Special purpose parks are generally those that offer a unique feature that often serves a regional population. Examples typically include greenways, boat launches, backpacking trails, etc. Both the trail at the Grange Hall in Hamilton Township and the snowmobile trails function as special purpose parks.

Ideally, each neighborhood located in the village should contain a recreational open space. It is best if this space is located within a five minute walk, where pedestrians would not encounter barriers such as creeks, major roads, or railroads, that inhibit their access to the facility. The neighborhoods that appear to lack access to such facilities are those that are in the southeastern portion of the Village.

Due to their more rural nature and lower population densities, it is neither appropriate nor necessary to expect each neighborhood within Decatur and Hamilton Townships to have direct access to a recreational open space. However, access to such opportunities, within a reasonable distance is necessary. The central location of the village and its facilities addresses many of the recreational needs of the townships, however portions of the townships remain a considerable distance away from any facilities and can only reach them through use of an automobile. Opportunities exist within the townships for the provision of additional special purpose parks or community parks. Specific opportunities include greenway development along creeks, development of a community park in the vicinity of the Hamilton Township Hall, acquisition of land for wildlife viewing, hiking, hunting, etc.

**Summary:**

- The Decatur-Hamilton area could benefit from a comprehensive parks and recreation plan that provides a detailed inventory of facilities, analysis of current facilities, and a five-year action program for capital improvements.
- The analysis provided in this Master Plan indicates that the current acreage of park facilities is deficient for both the current population and the projected population, particularly in the townships.
- The analysis provided in this Master Plan indicates a need for additional parks space in the southeastern portions of the Village, in part due to the barriers that limit accessibility to existing facilities.
- The analysis provided in this Master Plan indicates that it may be appropriate to pursue the development of additional park facilities in the townships, particularly of facilities that take advantage of the natural features present in the townships, but may not be available in the village, such as nature trails, cross country skiing, hunting, and wildlife viewing.

## **Utilities**

### Sewer and Water

Only the Village of Decatur owns and operates a source of public drinking water and wastewater treatment. Residents and businesses in both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township, generally rely upon private wells for drinking water supply and individual on-site wastewater treatment systems (septic tanks) for waste disposal.

The Village owns and operates a public drinking water system which includes three wells with a total capacity of 251,500 gallons of potable water per day. The system also includes a water tower located on Eli Street capable of storing 200,000 gallons of water. The water supply is distributed throughout the Village through a variety of mains ranging in size from 4 inches to 16 inches, with all current 4 inch pipes to be replaced with 6 inch pipes. The current usage of the system is approximately 200,000 gallons per day, yielding an excess capacity of 51,500 gallons per day.

The Village owns and operates a wastewater treatment facility consisting of three treatment lagoons with a treatment capacity of 1.19 million gallons per day. Wastewater is collected throughout the Village through gravity mains and force mains of various sizes. The current usage of the system is 0.15 million gallons per day, yielding an excess capacity of 1.04 million gallons per day. Any extension of utilities should be done in cooperation with the townships.

### Electric and Natural Gas

Homes and businesses in the Decatur-Hamilton area are provided electric and natural gas service by Midwest Energy Cooperative, Consumers Energy and Indiana Michigan Power. The service is generally considered adequate for current and projected residential and business needs.

### Telecommunications

Homes and businesses in the Decatur-Hamilton area are provided telecommunications services by a variety of service providers. Service is provided through transmission lines and telecommunication towers and antennas. Local calls are now available to Dowagiac, Hartford, Lawrence, Lawton,

Marcellus and Paw Paw. The Decatur-Hamilton area does not have affordable high speed Internet options.

**Summary:**

- Water and public sewer facilities are generally only currently available to the residents and businesses in the Village.
- A large amount of excess capacity exists relative to the Village’s water supply and wastewater treatment.
- The Decatur-Hamilton area is generally well served by utilities, except for high speed Internet options.

**Existing Land Use**

General Overview

The Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township are located in the extreme southern portion of Van Buren County. The Village of Decatur has historically served as the area’s economic center containing the majority of the area businesses, industry, and community facilities. Similarly, until recently the village has housed the majority of the area’s population. Decatur Township and Hamilton Township have historically served as an agricultural center, predominantly producing a variety of produce and grain products. Though still quite significant, the role of agriculture has declined in recent decades.

Land Use Classifications

The following section outlines in more detail the location of particular land uses and their characteristics with the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township. Existing land uses were divided into ten different categories in order to analyze the existing pattern of development. This analysis will help to define which characteristics the communities wish to preserve and enhance. Table 24 indicates the acreage covered by each land use category and the

corresponding percentage of the land uses within each community.

**Table 24. Existing Land Use; Planning Area; 2001**

Existing Use Categories	Village of Decatur		Decatur Township		Hamilton Township	
	Area (acres)	% of Total	Area (acres)	% of Total	Area (acres)	% of Total
<b>Agricultural/Vacant</b>	182	25	20,939	92	20,906	91.9
<b>Single Family Residential</b>	231	32	1,177	5.1	1,153	5
<b>Multiple Family Residential</b>	8	.1	0	0	0	0
<b>Manufactured Housing Park</b>	0	0	0	0	32	.1
<b>Commercial</b>	27	4	152	.7	151	.7
<b>Industrial</b>	31	4	99	.4	59	.2
<b>Public/Semi-Public</b>	245	34	41	.2	80	.35
<b>Utility/Transportation/Water</b>	1	.1	358	1.6	358	1.6
<b>Total</b>	725	100	22,766	100	22,739	100

Source: McKA, Inc.

***Agricultural/Vacant Land***

For the purposes of this analysis, agricultural land has been defined as any land that is being used for the raising of field or tree crops or utilized as a resource in raising livestock and practicing animal husbandry. Vacant land is defined as any land with no visible structures or uses present. This includes those lands located behind rural residential uses with no apparent use or activity. Though apparently different land use classifications, agricultural uses and vacant land have been included together to provide an assessment of those areas that characterize the rural and agricultural nature of the Decatur-Hamilton area. These activities occupy approximately 42,027 acres or 91% of the total area. Broken down further, approximately 182 acres in the Village of Decatur, 20,939 acres in

Decatur Township, and 20,946 acres in Hamilton Township.

Approximately 182 acres or 25% of the village is currently vacant. In many instances, this land may have previously been occupied by a use that has since been abandoned or vacated. As of 1997, there were 1,059 operating farms in Van Buren County totaling 177,360 acres. This was a decrease since 1987 of 219 farms and 12,891 acres. The average size for a farm in the county was 167 acres, up from 149 acres in 1987. The market value of agricultural products raised in Van Buren County was more than 100 million dollars in 1997. In 1997, farming was the principal occupation of approximately 50% of the farm operators, equal to the percentage in 1987. Farms are increasing in size to become more efficient.

### ***Single Family Residential***

Occupying approximately 2,528 acres or 5.5% of the Decatur-Hamilton area, single family residential is the second largest land use in the Decatur-Hamilton area, the largest land use in the Village of Decatur. Single family residences are located in the Decatur-Hamilton area in primarily three development patterns. These include; a traditional village pattern within the Village of Decatur, concentrated suburban patterns of development such as that located along Lake of the Woods, and scattered rural residential throughout both townships.

Though a significant portion of the land in both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township remains in agricultural production or vacant, the pattern of development (scattered single family homes fronting the major roadways) gives the area a more suburban character. Single family residential areas occupy 231 acres or 32% of the land area in the Village of Decatur. The vast majority of this use occurs in a traditional residential pattern that includes small lots, high density, a variety of architectural styles, interconnected streets, sidewalks, and close proximity to public facilities and shopping opportunities.

### ***Multiple Family Residential***

Multiple family residential areas are found only in the village and occupy approximately 8 acres or

less than 1% of the Decatur-Hamilton area. These areas are generally newer construction and do not share the same characteristics as the single family residential areas, such as proximity to public facilities and interconnection into the grid street pattern of a neighborhood.

### ***Commercial/Industrial***

Commercial development in the Decatur-Hamilton area is primarily located in the Village of Decatur and along the fringes of the village. Additional commercial uses are found scattered throughout both townships, though they remain few in number. The commercial uses located in the Village of Decatur consist largely of retail operations that cater to the convenience needs of local residents. These include grocery stores, hardware stores, and gas stations. Banks, insurance offices, real estate offices, and restaurants constitute the remainder of the commercial uses in the village. Commercial and industrial land uses occupy approximately 559 acres or 1.2% of the total area.

Commercial uses in the village occupy approximately 27 acres or 4% of the land area. The majority of these uses are concentrated in the central business district or in the area immediately adjoining. Industrial uses in the village occupy approximately 31 acres or 4% of the land area. The majority of these uses occur in the southeastern portion of the village. Several of these areas are currently underutilized and represent a re-development opportunity for the village.

In 2006, there were 90 business establishments in the 49045 Decatur zip code, employing 656 persons. Essentially all of the businesses are small in nature, with 55 of the 90 establishments only employing 1-4 persons. The majority of business enterprises were in retail trade, construction, services and health care and social assistance. In 2006, three firms in the 49045 area code were engaged in manufacturing, five associated with transportation and warehousing, and one with wholesale trade.

### ***Public/Semi-Public***

Any use that is owned or operated to provide services to the general public and citizens of the community was classified as a public or quasi-public use. These include schools, parks, libraries, fire stations, churches, Village Hall, and both Town Halls. Public and semi-public uses occupy approximately 176 acres or less than 1% of the total area.

Public and semi-public land uses occupy a significant portion of the Village of Decatur. Approximately 95 acres or 13% of the land in the village is dedicated to activities that include schools, churches, and cemeteries.

### **Changes in Land Use 1978-2001**

Combining an analysis of land cover maps created in 1978 by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 1996 land use cover maps created by Western Michigan University as part of the Dowagiac River Watershed project, and the 2001 existing land use survey conducted for the purposes of this plan, yields a considerable amount of information regarding how the use of land in the Decatur-Hamilton area has changed over time.

### ***Agricultural/Vacant/Open Space***

Analysis of land use patterns over time yields clear evidence that land dedicated to agricultural activities or land that remains vacant has changed over time. This change has occurred slightly relative to the amount of land dedicated to agricultural activities or remaining vacant and more pronounced in the type of agricultural activities carried out on the land. In 1978, approximately 21,563 acres or 95% of the land area in Hamilton Township was classified as agricultural, vacant, or open space. By 1996, this figure had changed to approximately 20,920 acres or 92% of the townships land area. In 2001, this figure has changed to 20,906 acres. Between 1978 and 1996 the amount of land in Hamilton Township dedicated to pasture had changed from 115 acres to 82 acres, in crop land from 15,214 acres to 14,303 acres, in confined feeding operations from 36 acres to 89 acres, and in orchards from 176 acres to 18 acres.

In 1978, approximately 21,010 acres or 95% of the land area in Decatur Township was classified as

agricultural, vacant, or open space. In 1996, this figure had changed to approximately 20,128 acres or 91% of the township land area. In 2001, this figure had changed to 20,939 acres or 92%. Between 1978 and 1996, the amount of land in Decatur Township dedicated to cropland had changed from 14,111 to 13,413, in confined feeding operations from 52 acres to 29 acres, in orchards from 481 acres to 224 acres, and in pasture from 221 acres to 125 acres.

### ***Residential***

It is immediately evident that residential development has increased in the Decatur-Hamilton area, though generally in a very low density development pattern spread along State and County roads. Indeed, in 1978 approximately 243 acres of Hamilton Township was used for residential purposes. By 1996 this number had increased to 839 acres. In Decatur Township, a similar analysis yields approximately 253 acres in 1978 and 1,055 acres in 1996. By 2001, these numbers had increased even more (approximately 1,153 in Hamilton Township and approximately 1,144 in Decatur Township).

It should be noted that even though the increase in the amount of land dedicated to residential uses within the Decatur-Hamilton area from 1978 to 2001 was up 374% and 352% respectively, the percentage of the total land area within each of the townships dedicated to residential uses represents only approximately 5% of the total land area in each township.

### **Summary:**

- The majority of land in the townships is either vacant or used for agricultural activities.
- The majority of land in the Village is used for residential activities.
- In general, the amount of land used for specific activities in the Decatur-Hamilton area has not changed significantly between 1978 and 2001.
- Land use development patterns for the Decatur-Hamilton area have changed since 1978, primarily with continued expansion of residential activities along the major roadways and

with conversion of specific agricultural activities into other activities.

- Land use in the Village has been fairly stable since 1978, though there has been a reduction in some industrial activities, and increase in residential activities, and an increase in commercial activities, especially along M-51.

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# Goals and Objectives

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## Overview

One of the primary elements of any master plan is the formulation of community goals and objectives. Goal establishment helps to determine the direction that the community seeks to pursue in future growth and development. Objectives are more specific, “action-oriented” items that are intended to assist in the eventual fulfillment of the stated goals. Both goals and objectives are essential to the success of the planning process, in that they provide a significant portion of the framework within which the plan is developed.

This section of the plan summarizes the efforts undertaken to arrive at the stated community goals and objectives for the future physical development of the community. To that end, the goals and objectives identified herein are intended to:

1. reflect the land use priorities of the community,
2. give direction to development and re-development efforts regarding the townships’ and village’s physical environment, and
3. establish stated policies to assist the Planning Commissions, Township and Village staff, and other boards and commissions in assessing the impact of their planning decisions.

The stated community goals and objectives further have the following purposes:

- To guide the Planning Commissions, Village Council and Township Boards when considering requests for changes in zoning. The Planning Commissions, Village Council and Township Boards should reference the plan’s goals and objectives when considering zoning change requests, to ensure consistency with the policies and intents of the land use plan.
- To guide the Village Council and Township Boards and other boards and commission when considering capital improvements. Again, the goals and objectives stated in the Master Plan should be referenced when considering major investment in infrastructure, buildings,

services, etc., to ensure consistency with the policies and intents of the land use plan.

- To assist the Decatur-Hamilton area residents in expressing their local expectations and plans for the future growth and development of the Village and Townships to adjoining municipalities, the county, and the region.

It is important to note that community goals and objectives while never final or complete, they should regularly be reviewed by the Planning Commission to ensure that the intent and purpose of the goals remain current and valid. In such instances, it may again require the Planning Commission to carefully review current circumstances, existing trends, and community perceptions and preferences.

### **Community Surveys**

For the 2000 Master Plan, a community survey was developed for the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township to assist in better understanding the community perceptions and preferences found within the Decatur-Hamilton area. In Decatur and Hamilton Townships the surveys were distributed with the paid property tax receipts and made generally available in the respective Township Halls. In the Village of Decatur the surveys were distributed via mail to each property owner. In total, more than 270 surveys were completed and returned. The results of the surveys can be found in the Appendix 1.

### **Summary/Survey Result Highlights:**

Evaluation of the responses to the community surveys revealed the following key points (survey answers can be found in the Appendix):

- The majority of respondents from both townships and the village have resided in the Decatur-Hamilton area for more than twenty years.
- The majority of respondents from both townships reside either in a home in a residential subdivision or in a home in a rural area where lot sizes exceed one acre in size. The majority of respondents from the village reside in a home in a subdivision or plat.
- Between 13% and 14% of the respondents from the townships are seasonal residents.

- The three aspects of life cited most often as positive by residents of Decatur Township were:
  - Little Traffic Congestion
  - Rural Character
  - Low Crime Rate
  
- The three aspects of life cited most often as positive by residents of Hamilton Township were:
  - Rural Character
  - Farmland and Open Space
  - Little Traffic Congestion
  
- The three aspects of life cited most often as negative by residents of both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township were:
  - Lack of Shopping Opportunities
  - Lack of Employment Opportunities
  - Poor Roads
  
- The questions regarding community planning issues revealed the following relative to Decatur Township:
  - Strong support for regular testing of water quality in area lakes
  - Strong support for efforts aimed at preserving the rural or small town character of the area
  - Strong support for efforts aimed at the preservation of the natural environment in the area
  - Strong support for efforts aimed at increased economic and employment opportunities in the area, including industrial development
  - Mixed opinions about the need for future recreation areas and facilities in the area.
  - Mixed opinions about the size of lots and densities of homes in areas of the Township

- The questions regarding community planning issues revealed the following relative to Hamilton Township:
  - Strong support for efforts aimed at preserving the rural or small town character of the area
  - Strong support for efforts aimed at the preservation of the natural environment in the area
  - Strong support for efforts aimed at increased economic and employment opportunities in the area, including industrial development
  - Strong support for increased code enforcement
  - Mixed opinions about the need for future recreation areas and facilities in the Township
  - Mixed opinions about the need for future neighborhood shopping opportunities in the Township
  
- There was general agreement in both the Townships that the need for natural gas service and electric service were the greatest utility needs in the area, with sewer and water viewed as less significant.
  
- The questions regarding community planning issues revealed the following relative to the village:
  - Support for protection of small town character but only if balanced with the village's economic development efforts.
  - Agreement that more emphasis should be placed on road improvements.
  - Agreement that growth in the village should be managed.
  - Strong agreement that code enforcement and property maintenance enforcement should be a greater priority, especially relative to rental properties.
  - Mixed opinion regarding expansion of village boundaries.
  - Mixed opinion regarding the need for additional parks and recreation facilities.
  - General agreement that there is a lack of clear direction for the future of the village.

- In general, respondents are satisfied with the village services, except the water quality.
- There exists strong agreement that the village should aggressively recruit new industry and retail/commercial businesses.

## **Visioning Sessions**

For the 2000 Master Plan, a set of three Community Visioning Meetings were conducted to elicit ideas regarding the Decatur-Hamilton area that were used in the development of a set of goals and objectives that can be further developed into the land use alternatives and future land use patterns developed later in this Plan. The meetings served as an opportunity for members of the public to voice their opinions, comments, and suggestions on the current status of the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township as well as to provide insight into the community's desired future.

Visioning meetings were held in the morning and evening of March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001 at the VFW Hall in the Village of Decatur and in the evening of March 20<sup>th</sup> in the Village Hall in Decatur. A total of more than fifty people attended the meetings. Those in attendance at the meetings were divided and seated at tables accommodating four to five people. From these individual tables, the participants were able to ask questions and discuss issues as a small group. Each group was asked for a volunteer for note taking and to speak on behalf of the group during the larger "reporting" session.



Each group was then asked to develop a list of assets, limitations, and strategies relative to the Decatur-Hamilton area. Each group reported these findings, at which time each individual present at the meetings was asked to "vote" for the three issues within each category they felt most important. The votes were then tallied and are highlighted elsewhere in this Plan.

The visioning session is a critical step in the process used to develop an effective land use plan. This

section is intended to relate those findings from the visioning sessions that were incorporated into the set of goals and objectives used in the development of the future land use plan contained within this Plan. In addition, the sessions combined with the community surveys represent the primary tools used to include the general public in the discussion regarding future growth and development of the Decatur-Hamilton area.

More significantly, the intent in conducting the visioning sessions was to produce a general consensus on the major issues facing the communities, to generate enthusiasm and support for the planning process and eventual adoption of the village's and townships' future land use plans. Furthermore, the visioning sessions are intended to foster support for the implementation of the Plan's recommendations.

Finally, it is intended that the results of the visioning sessions help to establish an effective mechanism that will help the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township achieve the following:

- Create a sense of “community” among the participants
- Generate participation and interaction between community leaders and citizens
- Facilitate communication and cooperation among community leaders
- Develop a shared “vision” for the community with realistic expectations
- Develop a consensus for future strategies

The following information provides an overview of those issues identified during the Decatur-Hamilton area visioning sessions relative to the assets, opportunities, limitations, threats, future recommendations and strategies, and the level of support generated from the participants for each of the identified issues.

### Assets and Opportunities

The participants in the visioning sessions were asked to identify and discuss those aspects of the Decatur-Hamilton area they felt were assets and thus represented opportunities within the community. In other words, what issues, activities, facilities, or services do the residents of the

communities feel are most important to the quality of life experienced in the Decatur-Hamilton area. After each group completed its list, the findings were reported to the larger group and recorded on a “master list”. Upon completion of the reporting session, each participant was asked to vote for the three items they felt were the most important among those listed. The items considered the most significant assets or strengths in the community were:

- School System
- Parks and Lake of the Woods
- Land Available for Industry
- Local Newspaper
- Open Spaces and Existing Farmland
- Small Town Atmosphere
- Rural Character
- Land Available for Managed Growth

#### Limitations and Threats

The participants were asked to identify and discuss those aspects of the Decatur-Hamilton area they felt were limitations present and thus represented potential threats to continued enjoyment of the current quality of life. In other words, what circumstances, problems, lack of services, or desired improvements to existing services or facilities may exist within the communities. As in the case of assets and opportunities, after each group completed its list the findings were reported to the larger group and recorded on a master list. Each participant was asked to vote for the three items they felt were the most significant among those listed. The items considered the most significant limitations or threats present in the community were:

- Phone Service
- Blight and Lack of Code Enforcement
- Empty Stores
- Lack of Industry and Business Opportunities and Good Wages
- Agricultural Land Property Tax Structure
- Need for Road Improvements
- Loss of Farmland and Open Space
- High Speed Rail and Associated Road Closings

### Strategies and Recommendations

Finally, the participants in the visioning session were asked to identify any strategies that they thought might help capitalize on an asset or strength or that may help overcome a limitation or weakness. The strategies discussed included the following:

- Concentrate new business and industry and new residential development in or near the village. Accomplish both in part through the planned extension of utilities (sewer and water) and by focusing any incentives offered in the areas planned for such growth.
- Take active steps for the protection and preservation of farmland and open spaces, making use of as many tools as possible, while respecting the farmer's property rights and need for flexibility in future land use.
- Actively pursue the enforcement of codes and ordinances and the elimination of blighted conditions. This may be best achieved through the cooperative efforts of all three jurisdictions and a focus on priority areas.
- Take steps to increase awareness in the communities relative to the potential for groundwater contamination. This may be best achieved through aggressive outreach and education efforts and through implementation of the recommendations established in projects such as the Paw Paw, Dowagiac and St. Joseph River Watershed Management Plans.
- Take steps to better understand how the road network is currently used and identify areas where improvements may be appropriate. Then develop a short-range plan (capital improvement program) for road improvements based upon the identified priorities.

### **Community Goals and Objectives**

For the sake of simplicity and to facilitate a better understanding of their intent, the community goals and objectives are presented under the heading of broad categories such as housing development and

community facilities and services. It should be noted however, that many of the goals and objectives touch upon more than one category, thus demonstrating their complexity and interrelatedness regarding the preferred future growth and development of the Decatur-Hamilton area.

#### Natural Features and Open Space

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will be a community that preserves and enhances its natural features.**

Objectives:

- Identify key natural features including local lakes, the Dowagiac River, Brush Creek, West Branch, wetlands, and woodlands, and develop specific strategies to protect and enhance each of these features.
- Utilize land use regulatory measures and development standards that promote the protection and enhancement of key natural features.
- Encourage development techniques that retain large, un-fragmented parcels in the townships for open space and agricultural uses, where appropriate.
- Support the Growing Greener in Southwest Michigan Initiative by helping to educate residents about the important functions that natural systems provide to the residents and the community. ([www.swmpc.org/growgreen.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/growgreen.asp))

**Goal: Decatur-Hamilton Township will seek to increase the use of conservation easements, and other measures to conserve the open space and greenways within the joint community areas.**

Objectives:

- Update zoning ordinance to require open spaces in PUDs to be consolidated into larger contiguous units whenever feasible.
- Utilize the Potential Conservation Area Map to determine which lands should not be zoned for high intensity uses.
- Work with Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy to advise landowners of land protection options (options are detailed in Appendix 2).

#### Water Quality Protection

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will strive to reduce the amount of impervious surface within all residential, commercial and industrial developments.**

Objectives:

- Changes to the Zoning Ordinance should include:
  - Include all impervious surfaces in the calculation of lot coverage (building, pavement, etc).
  - Review and change lot coverage percentages if necessary.
  - Encourage use of native plants in all development types.

- In large parking areas, require parking lot islands that provide for stormwater storage and filtration.
- Allow and encourage alternatives to traditional pavement (such as pervious pavements and gravel) for driveways and parking lots .
- Allow for smaller parking spaces.
- Review and change parking space requirements for multi-family residential, commercial and industrial uses.
- Encourage shared parking whenever feasible.

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will strive to reduce the amount of non-point source pollutants that enter the communities' waterways through best management and stormwater management practices that seek to preserve the natural features and drainage patterns of the area.**

Objectives:

- Changes to the Zoning Ordinance should include
  - Require waterbody setbacks for building and require natural vegetated buffers to be left when new development occurs along waterbodies (streams, drains, rivers, lakes) or wetlands.
  - Prohibit development in floodplain areas.
- Implement Low Impact Development techniques in new and redevelopments ([www.swmpc.org/lid.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/lid.asp)).
- Work with Drain Commissioner to send information to property owners along drains.
- Work with the Drain Commissioner to ensure drain maintenance projects are done in a manner that protects and improves water quality.

#### Farmland Preservation

**Goal: Decatur and Hamilton Townships will continue to be communities with viable agricultural enterprises and working landscapes.**

Objectives:

- Discourage fragmentation of viable agricultural lands through the use of zoning techniques such as exclusive agriculture or sliding scale zoning.
- Participate in the Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Protection Program.
- Require any new housing development abutting agricultural activities to have an adequate setback and a buffer to reduce conflicts.
- Recognize farming as an essential economic activity to the Decatur-Hamilton area and the region.
- Avoid rural-urban land use conflicts by encouraging very low density, dispersed, residential uses, or open space development adjacent to existing rural areas.
- Identify areas that are to be permanently retained as productive agricultural lands.
- Explore the use of various planning programs to preserve existing agricultural lands,

including, the purchase of development rights, and the transfer of development rights, agricultural protection zones, and purchase of conservation easements.

- Explore the use of various economic tools that may be available to preserve and enhance agricultural activities including, tax relief, value added opportunities, and others.

#### Housing Development and Improvement

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will continue to preserve, enhance, and create satisfying living environments throughout the townships and village.**

Objectives:

- Encourage a variety of available housing options to serve a broad spectrum of preferences and income levels which preserve and enhance the area's rural character and existing neighborhoods.
- Seek to ensure that residential densities in the townships continue to reflect the rural character of the community.
- Encourage the use of development techniques for new housing that promote the rational use of land and the preservation of natural features.
- Stabilize and improve the condition of the current housing stock in the Village.
- Provide opportunities to improve streets, street trees, sidewalks, and other public infrastructure to enhance and strengthen existing neighborhood character in the Village.
- Focus higher density residential development opportunities on improvement or re-development of existing residential areas and development on vacant lots currently existing within the village and adjacent to the village limits.
- Coordinate residential development activities to ensure compatibility of land uses.

#### Commercial Development

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will protect and expand a strong diversified retail base with a focus on meeting the consumer needs of area residents.**

Objectives:

- Provide opportunities to strengthen and enhance locally owned businesses and to encourage them to locate in the Central Business District.
- Provide opportunities to retain and attract appropriately-scaled commercial enterprises that draw patrons from areas outside of the village.
- Coordinate commercial development activities to ensure compatibility of land uses.

#### Technological and Energy Innovation

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will encourage advances in technology for communications and energy.**

Objectives:

- Expand high speed Internet service options to the area.
- Explore and promote a variety of energy sources that promote clean and renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, etc.

### Industrial Development

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will create new industrial opportunities where appropriate that will strengthen the area's tax base and provide new employment opportunities for area residents.**

Objectives:

- Strive for balance between the economic benefits of industrial development and the types and locations of industry that are compatible with the stated community goals and that are consistent with the preferred development pattern.
- Seek opportunities to expand industrial activities near existing industrial activities that would not otherwise impose additional negative impacts on established residential neighborhoods.
- Seek opportunities to expand industrial activities that are based upon the current resources and skills present in the community.
- Coordinate industrial development activities to ensure they can be readily served by public utilities and the transportation network and that they will be compatible with adjoining land uses.
- Create the availability for high speed Internet services to the industries in the village and townships.

### Community Facilities & Services

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will maintain and enhance existing public facilities and services with a focus on providing high quality and professional facilities and services in an efficient and cost-effective manner, in recognition of the preferred development pattern.**

Objectives:

- Ensure that the village's water supply and distribution system and wastewater collection and treatment system maintain adequate capacity to serve the residents and businesses located both in the village and in areas contiguous to the village boundaries, planned for development.
- Evaluate the sufficiency of existing public facilities and the feasibility of rehabilitation, expansion, or replacement where appropriate.
- Investigate the feasibility of a joint police department for Decatur Township, Decatur Village and Hamilton Township.

### Transportation

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will maintain and enhance the transportation system in a manner that will effectively serve the community's preferred development pattern and provide residents with safe and efficient linkages within the community and to the broader region.**

Objectives:

- Continue routine maintenance and replacement of streets and sidewalks to ensure they continue to provide safe and efficient linkages to the remainder of the community.
- Carefully manage access (driveways) along major roads, particularly commercial access or

- other generators of high volumes.
- Work with the Van Buren County Road Commission to improve the quality of maintenance on trees bordering roads in the townships.
- Work with the Van Buren County Road Commission in prioritizing improvements to existing roadways, based on safety and availability of funds.
- Prioritize road improvements in the village based on traffic volumes, safety, development pressure, and availability of funds.
- Evaluate alternative transportation methods, including paths, trails, and sidewalks, and pursue their development where appropriate.
- Ensure that new development provide connections (streets, sidewalks, trails, etc) to the existing facilities.
  - Promote use of RideShare Program for school children, carpooling, and use of non-motorized methods of transportation (walking, biking).
  - Promote use of public transportation (Van Buren County Public Transit).

#### Local Government

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will maintain and enhance the communication and coordination between the Townships and the Village and between the Decatur-Hamilton area and the County and region.**

Objectives:

- Continue and enhance the working relationship between the townships and village.
- Strengthen the working relationship with the adjoining townships and the county to better coordinate planning activities.
- Continue to participate in regional initiatives such as the efforts associated with the continued restoration of the Dowagiac River Watershed Project, Paw Paw River Watershed and St. Joseph River Watershed and Meeting the Ecological and Agricultural Needs of the Dowagiac River System (MEANDRS).

#### Community Design and Image

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will continue to protect and enhance the area's unique character with a focus on protecting existing residential neighborhoods, the central business district, and the working landscape found in the rural areas.**

Objectives:

- Increase code enforcement efforts to reduce visual blight in residential and business areas and to encourage a higher level of responsible property maintenance and land use.
- Promote the local foods program to community members and civic leaders to ensure that fresh and local produce is being consumed.
- Ensure that area's unique character is enhanced as new developments and buildings are constructed or as re-development occurs, through good development, site, and building design practices.

- Pursue ideas about hotel/motel, bed and breakfast and additional retail stores.
- Promote compact development near the village limits.
- Cooperate to hire and fund a blight enforcement officer that will work for Decatur Township, Hamilton Township and Decatur Village.
- In the zoning ordinance require Low Impact Development techniques to limit the impacts of development on natural and water resources.
- Continue to increase awareness of the natural features in the area, particularly the farmlands, wetlands and the Dowagiac River and the Paw Paw River Watersheds.
- Provide opportunities to improve the design quality of the business areas of the Village.
- Increase awareness of the historical resources present in the community and their contribution to the character of the area.
- Continue to increase awareness of the natural features in the area, particularly the farmlands, wetlands, and the Dowagiac River.

**Goal: The Village of Decatur will develop, adopt, and enforce land use management tools (e.g., zoning) to implement the policies of its land use plan.**

Objectives:

- Update the Village Zoning Ordinance to include regulations that advance home ownership and reduce absentee ownership.
- Develop zoning regulations which promote the sense of place, neighborhood, and community.

#### Parks and Recreation

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will continue to maintain and enhance the passive and active recreation opportunities in the area with a focus on improved opportunities at existing parks and facilities and additional opportunities in the townships.**

Objectives:

- Develop a joint parks and recreation plan for the area.
- Evaluate the current offerings at the village facilities and investigate the feasibility of rehabilitation, expansion, or replacement, where appropriate.
- Consider creation of a joint parks commission.

#### Diversity

**Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton area will welcome the growing ethnic diversity within the community.**

Objectives:

- Employees and elected officials should attend diversity training on a yearly basis.
- Develop a program in conjunction with the schools that highlights diversity.
- Create a festival that celebrates diversity.

## **Analysis of Alternative Land Use Patterns**

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### **Overview**

To arrive at an idea of how the community would like to see the Decatur-Hamilton area change over time, a preferred development pattern with associated policies and strategies needs to be defined. For the purposes of this plan resources and constraints present in the communities were identified and discussed and three separate and distinct development alternatives were evaluated as part of this process. The following information is presented relative to this process:

### **Resources and Constraints**

The Master Plan and Future Land Use Map for the Decatur-Hamilton area should reflect the patterns of existing uses; in addition this plan must recognize the natural and man-made constraints of the community. Likewise, the Decatur-Hamilton area possesses a number of resources, both natural and man-made which are valuable in a variety of ways including their contribution to the unique character of the communities. The challenge associated with the Master Plan is to identify a development pattern that accomplishes the communities' stated goals and capitalizes on their resources or opportunities in recognition of existing constraints.

#### Resources

##### ***Community Neighborhoods***

The Village of Decatur contains several well-established neighborhoods. The strength of this resource lies in its physical, aesthetic, and economic value. Elements such as well-maintained homes, street trees, connectivity to public facilities and business enterprises, all contribute positively to the character and sense of place associated with the Village of Decatur.

##### ***Rural Residential Areas***

Rural residential areas are located throughout Decatur and Hamilton Townships. These areas range from single family homes on large lots to farmhouses located on active farm operations. The strength of this resource lies in its contribution to the local sense of place and in its provision of an alternative form of housing for the Decatur-Hamilton area. Elements such as large lots, abundance of open space, gravel roads, and low density all contribute positively to the character and sense of place associated with Decatur-Hamilton Townships.

### ***Farmland***

Large portions of Decatur and Hamilton Townships contain prime soils for agricultural activities. The majority of both townships remain active working landscapes where a variety of agricultural products are raised or grown including hogs, cucumbers, and grapes. The strength of this resource lies both in its economic value and in its contribution to the local sense of place. Employment opportunities and the economic value of the products grown or raised along with the abundance of open space, agricultural buildings, and farm houses are all positive contributions to the Decatur-Hamilton area.

### ***Central Business District***

The central business district in the Village of Decatur, though confronted with challenges including competition, high building maintenance costs, etc., continues to contribute strongly to the Decatur-Hamilton area's economy, unique character, and sense of place. The CBD remains a viable business location for many businesses and plays a pivotal role in the provision of goods and services for residents in the surrounding area.

### ***M-51***

M-51 represents a significant resource for the Decatur-Hamilton area. M-51 provides easy access to Interstate 94 and to US 31/33, which enables local residents to commute to Kalamazoo, South Bend, Indiana, and Benton Harbor for employment and shopping opportunities. M-51 also enables easy access for truck traffic to service the industries and businesses located in Decatur-Hamilton area.

### ***Lakes and Wetlands***

The Decatur-Hamilton area contains numerous lakes, the most notable being Lake of the Woods. Large areas of wetlands are also located throughout the area. The lakes provide recreational opportunities and have historically provided attractive residential development potential. Wetlands contribute positively both to the character of the area as well as to the provision of habitat for a variety of wildlife.

### ***Intergovernmental Cooperation***

The Decatur-Hamilton area benefits from a long history of cooperation among the Village and the Townships. This cooperation has resulted in a strong regional school system, strong fire protection, compatible land use policies, and general cooperative spirit. This cooperation contributes significantly to the quality of life both through the provision of practical services such as that mentioned previously and through contribution to a solid sense of community.

### ***Development and Re-development Potential***

An abundance of vacant land, the availability of urban services, and a cooperative spirit between the village and townships, facilitates a variety of opportunities for new development and re-development of existing properties. Specific opportunities include property near the current village boundaries and vacant and underutilized land and buildings in the southeastern portions of the village.

### ***Other Resources***

Other resources of importance in the Decatur-Hamilton area include the local branch of the Van Buren County library, the Decatur-Hamilton School District, and the Village of Decatur Park system.

### **Constraints**

#### ***Loss of farmland***

The loss of farmland either through development or through abandonment is a concern for the Decatur-Hamilton area. Though conversion of some land to non-agricultural activities is expected and appropriate, the loss of prime agricultural lands and family owned and operated farms is disconcerting due to the potential economic impact, loss of future farming opportunities, and a loss of historic development pattern and character. Though the loss of farm land to abandonment does not necessarily result in the loss of open space or the potential for future farming opportunities, it does result in underutilization of an existing resource, which in many cases has taken decades of investment in both time and money to develop.

#### ***Wetlands***

Though wetlands contribute positively to the character of the area and provide habitat for a variety of wildlife, they represent a constraint to development potential. This constraint affects essentially all

forms of land use including agricultural activities, residential development, and non-residential development. The abundance of wetlands and poorly drained soils throughout the Decatur-Hamilton area will continue to constrain the development potential of large portions of the area.

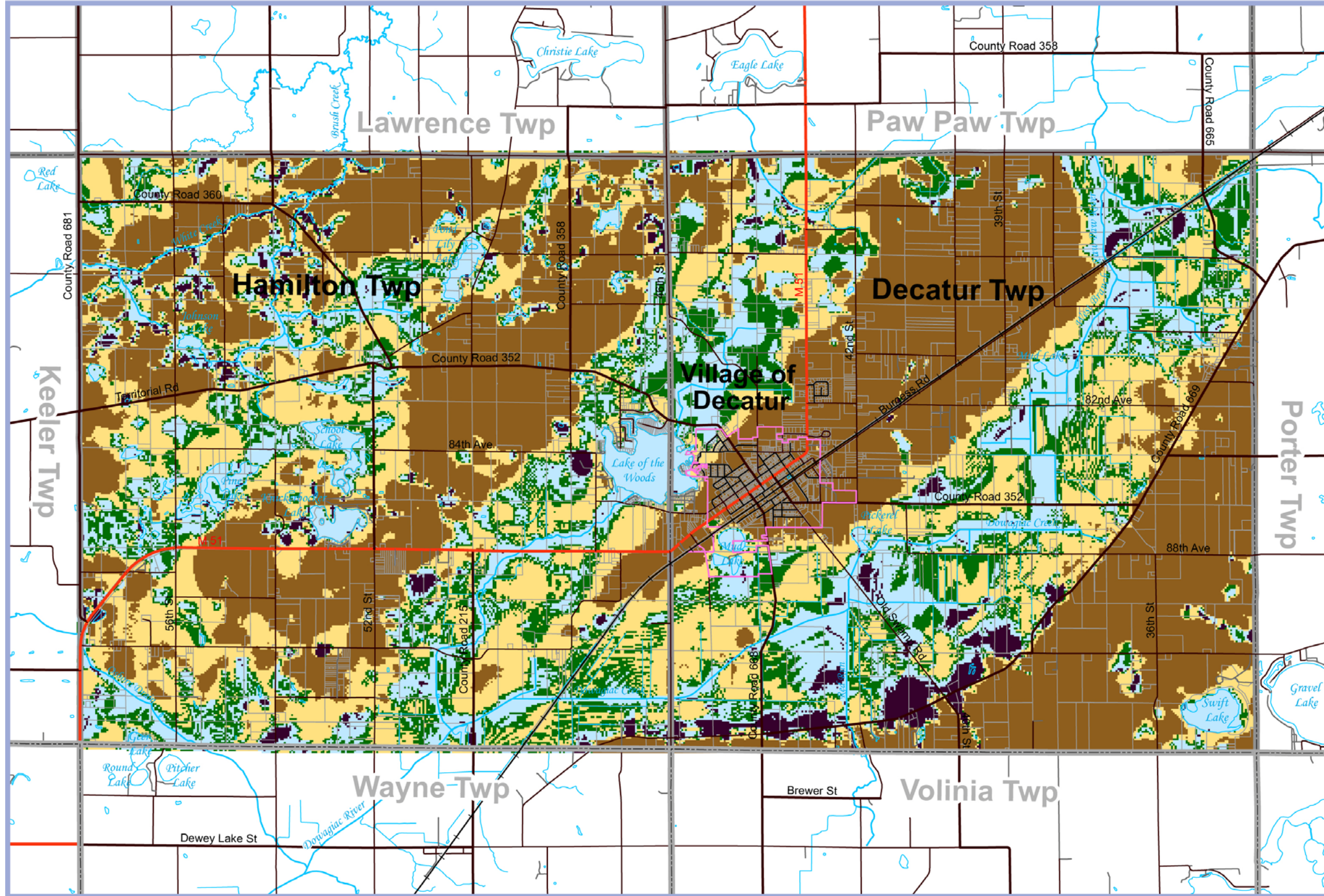
***Presence of Incompatible Uses***

In several locations throughout the area there are land uses adjacent to one another that are not compatible for a variety of reasons, including impact on quality of life and economic value of property. Such incompatible uses may include residential areas adjacent to industrial uses and residential uses adjacent to large farming operations. The Decatur-Hamilton area must address this issue, taking steps to correct previous incidents of such incompatibility and ensuring that future land use does not further such a trend.

***Modest Development Activities***

Many would consider limited development pressure a positive trend. However, if a community ceases to attract new investment and development or re-development, it may suffer. Without such investment, local residents and business people can expect a loss of opportunities, options, and wealth. This new investment need not be in the form of growth and expansion in a manner that results in the loss of open space or the loss of locally owned and operated businesses. Carefully managed growth and development can result in new housing options, increased wealth for area residents, new employment and shopping opportunities, new customer bases for local businesses, and protection of open space and farm land.

# Depth to High Water Table



**Legend**

- Township
- Parcel

**Depth to Water Table**

- No Data
- Water at Surface
- 1 ft from Surface
- 2-6 ft from Surface
- >6 ft from Surface

N

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

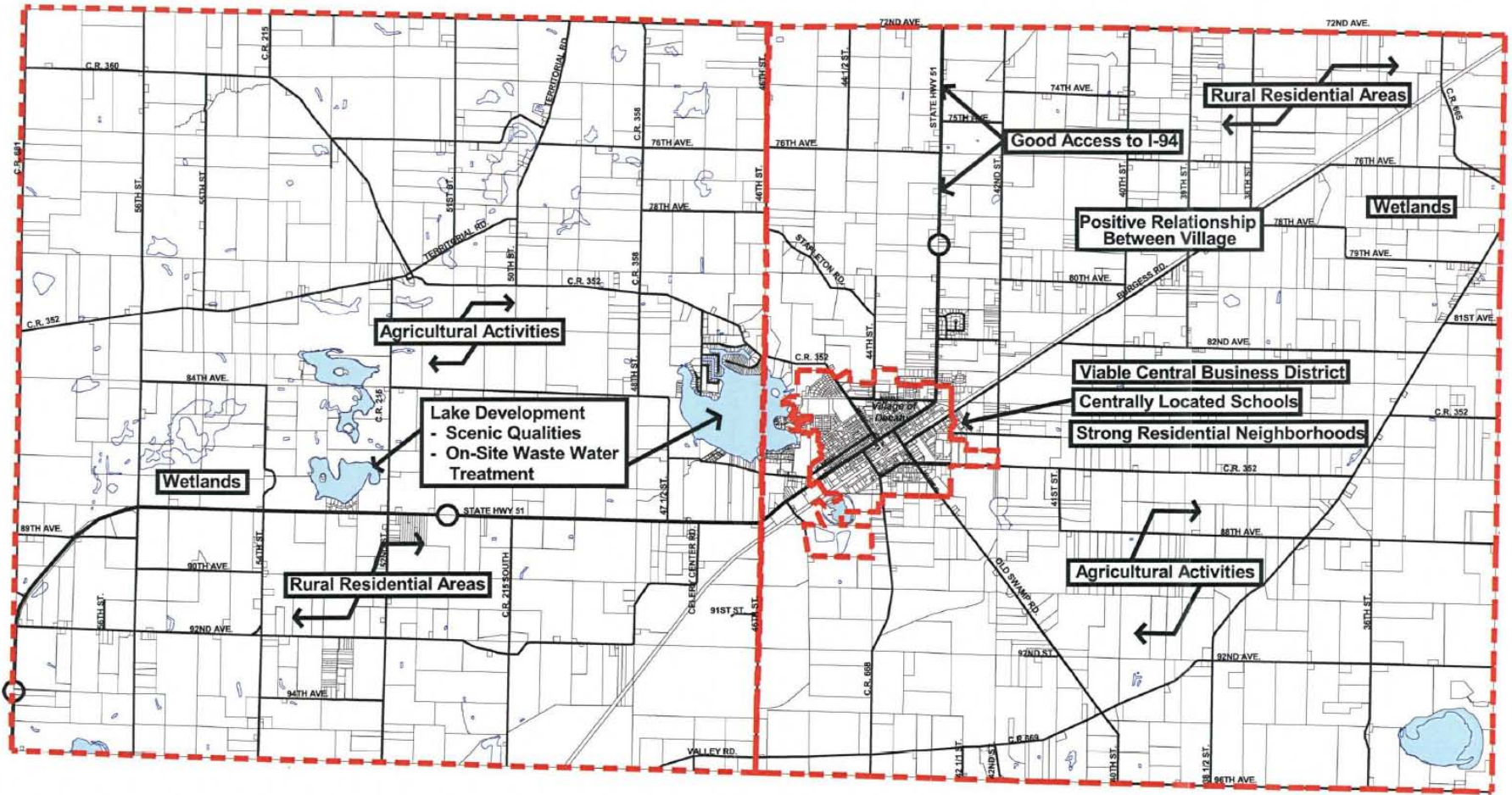
**Data Sources**  
 Base Map and Water Table: Michigan Center for Geographic Information  
 Parcel: Van Buren County

Prepared April 2009  
**Southwest Michigan Planning Commission**  
 Tel: 269-925-1137  
 Fax: 269-925-0288  
 Email: [swmpc@swmpc.org](mailto:swmpc@swmpc.org)  
 Website: [www.swmpc.org](http://www.swmpc.org)

**Van Buren County**

Hamilton Township      Decatur Township

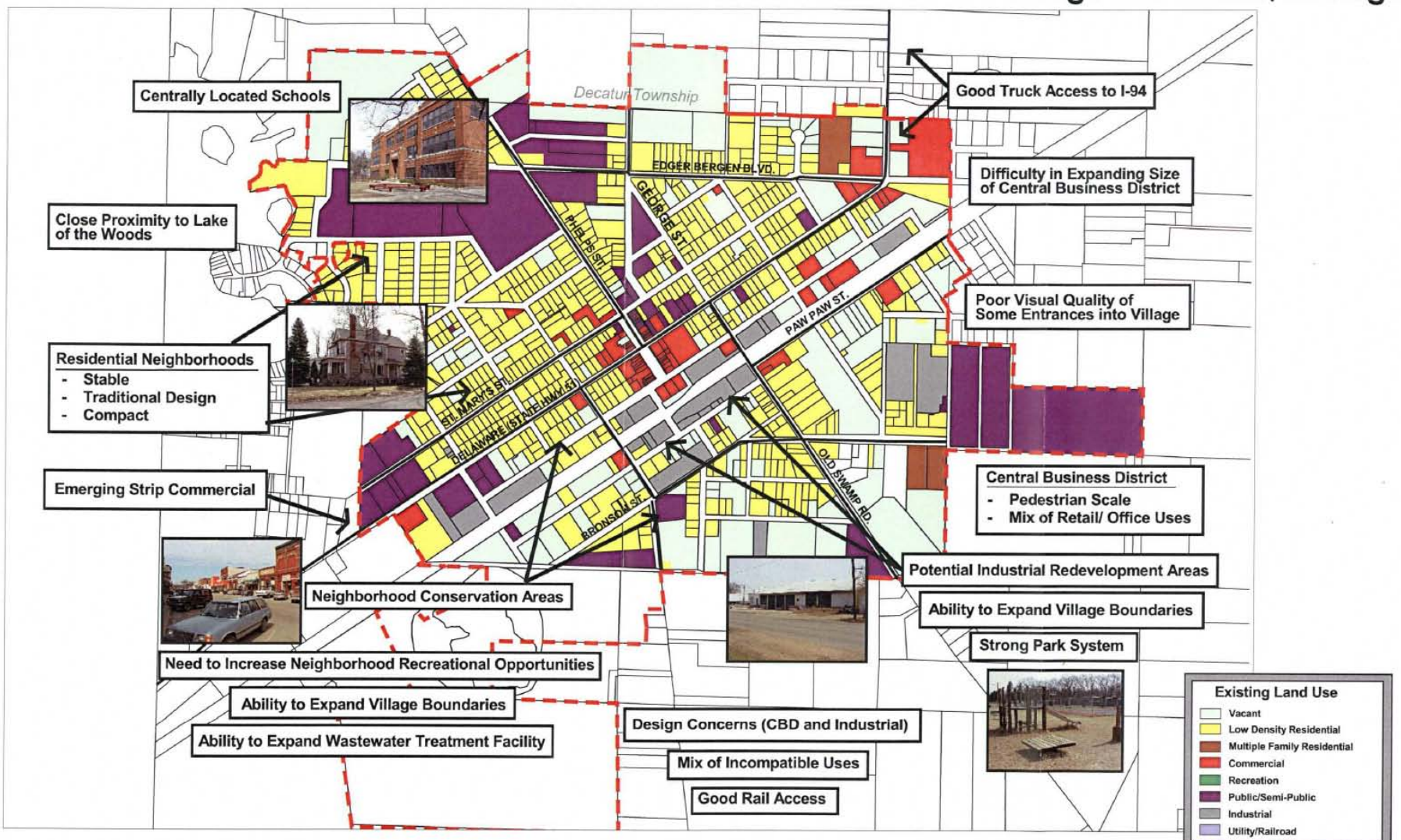
### Hamilton Township, Decatur Township, & Village of Decatur, Michigan



### Resources & Constraints

Source: Hamilton Township, Decatur Township, & Village of Decatur, Michigan  
 0 Ft. 4500 Ft.  
 2250 Ft. 8/2002

### Village of Decatur, Michigan



### Resources and Constraints

Basemap Source: Village of Decatur, Michigan  
 Data Source: McKenna Associates, Inc.  
 0 Ft. 1000 Ft.  
 500 Ft. 7/2001

## **Alternative Development Patterns**

The alternative development patterns analyzed in this plan include development as currently permitted by each community's zoning ordinance, development based on continuation of current trends, and development based on a managed or phased pattern. A build-out analysis was prepared for each of the alternatives, which depicted the ultimate impact associated with each pattern.

The alternatives and the associated build-out analyses were presented to each of the communities to discuss their merits and limitations. A preferred development pattern was identified from this discussion and constitutes the Future Land Use Plan. The following is a brief description of the development alternatives that were considered, their merits and limitations and an overview of the preferred development pattern.

### Zoning Build-Out

The first build-out analysis was based upon the township's and village's current zoning ordinance and corresponding zoning maps. This analysis yields the following information:

#### ***Village of Decatur***

This analysis yields a build-out population of between 2,543 and 5,269, dependent upon the ultimate density of future development. Additionally, the analysis reveals an availability of approximately 3,861,381 square feet or 89 acres of commercial land and 5,555,813 square feet or 128 acres of industrial land.

#### ***Hamilton Township***

This analysis yields a build-out population of approximately 42,279. Additionally, the analysis reveals an availability of approximately 38,250,000 square feet or 878 acres of commercial land and 18,000,000 square feet or 413 acres of industrial land.

#### ***Decatur Township***

This analysis yields a build-out population of between 41,585 and 60,382, dependent upon the ultimate density of future development. Additionally, the analysis reveals an availability of approximately 23,017,978 square feet or 528 acres of commercial land and 17,524,103 square feet or 402 acres of industrial land.

**Summary:**

This development pattern:

- Fails to achieve many of the stated community goals
- Would permit complete development of township as low density residential at full build-out
- Would permit strip commercial development along the entirety of M-51
- Fails to recognize opportunities and constraints present in the community
- Would undermine the village's role as the commercial center for the area
- Would increase the likelihood of land use conflicts
- Would make planned expansion and/or extension of public facilities or services difficult
- Would result in a dramatic change in community character
- Would result in limited restriction on land development

**Current Trends Build-Out**

The second build-out analysis was based upon current development trends in the townships and the village. This analysis yields the following information:

***Village of Decatur***

This analysis yields a population of near 2,000 in 20 years, the availability of 30 to 40 acres of commercial land and 30 to 40 acres of industrial land during the same time period.

***Hamilton Township***

This analysis yields a population of near 2,400 in 20 years, the availability of 150 to 160 acres of commercial land and 100 to 110 acres of industrial land during the same time period.

***Decatur Township***

This analysis yields a population of more than 2,500 in 20 years, the availability of 150 to 160 acres of commercial land and 100 to 110 acres of industrial land during the same time period.

**Summary:**

This development pattern:

- Fails to achieve many of the stated community goals
- Would permit scattered low density single family development throughout the townships
- Would permit scattered commercial activities along M-51
- Fails to recognize opportunities and constraints present in the community
- Would undermine the village's role as the commercial center for the area

- Would increase the likelihood of land use conflicts
- Would make planned expansion and/or extension of public facilities or services difficult
- Would over time, erode the character of the community
- Would result in limited restriction on land development

#### Phased Development Build-Out

The third build-out analysis was based upon a phased development pattern, where future development was both guided and constrained based on natural resource constraints and the extension or lack of public services. This analysis yields the following information:

#### ***Village of Decatur***

This analysis yields a population of between 2,000 and 3,000 in the next 20 years, the availability of 40 acres of commercial land and 80 acres of industrial land during the same time period.

#### ***Hamilton Township***

This analysis yields a population of between 1,800 and 2,500 in the next 20 years, the availability of up to 160 acres of commercial land and up to 110 acres of industrial land during the same time period.

#### ***Decatur Township***

This analysis yields a population of between 2,100 and 3,000 in the next 20 years, the availability of up to 200 acres of commercial land and up to 150 acres of industrial land during the same time period.

#### **Summary:**

This development pattern:

- Would achieve many of the community's stated goals
- Would stimulate managed development and expansion
- Would concentrate new residential development in the Village of Decatur and near its edges
- Would concentrate new commercial development in the Village of Decatur and near its edges
- Acknowledges the opportunities and constraints present in the community
- Strengthens the village's role as the commercial center for the area
- Minimizes the potential for land use conflicts
- Facilitates the planned expansion of public facilities and services

- Reinforces the prevailing character of the area
- Places restrictions on land development

### **Preferred Development Pattern**

Following a thorough review of the alternative development patterns described previously, identifying existing development patterns, recognizing current opportunities and constraints, and developing community goals and objectives a preferred development pattern can be developed and refined. The preferred development pattern that has been identified for the Decatur-Hamilton area contains the following essential elements:

- Future growth and development will be based upon the historical development pattern.
- Intensive development will be focused in the area surrounding the Village of Decatur, on lands with minimal physical constraints and access to public services and utilities.
- The vast majority of lands in Decatur Township and Hamilton Township will remain rural, comprised mainly of active agricultural lands and open space.
- Growth and extension of public utilities will be phased over time in a manner that will encourage a compact development pattern and discourage a sprawling pattern.
- Future growth, economic expansion, and natural resource protection efforts will be stimulated in a managed manner through strategic implementation of development incentives, land use regulations, and capital improvements.

This preferred development pattern is portrayed graphically in the Future Land Use Map and further described in the text accompanying the Map.

## Future Land Use Plan

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### Overview

The Master Plan is intended to assist decision makers in ensuring that the future use of land is consistent with the goals of the communities. The Master Plan should act as a guide in evaluating all future development within the Decatur-Hamilton area. Any future changes to the zoning ordinance text and maps of the communities and capital investments by the same should also be evaluated to ensure consistency with the goals, objectives, and preferred development patterns established in this Master Plan.

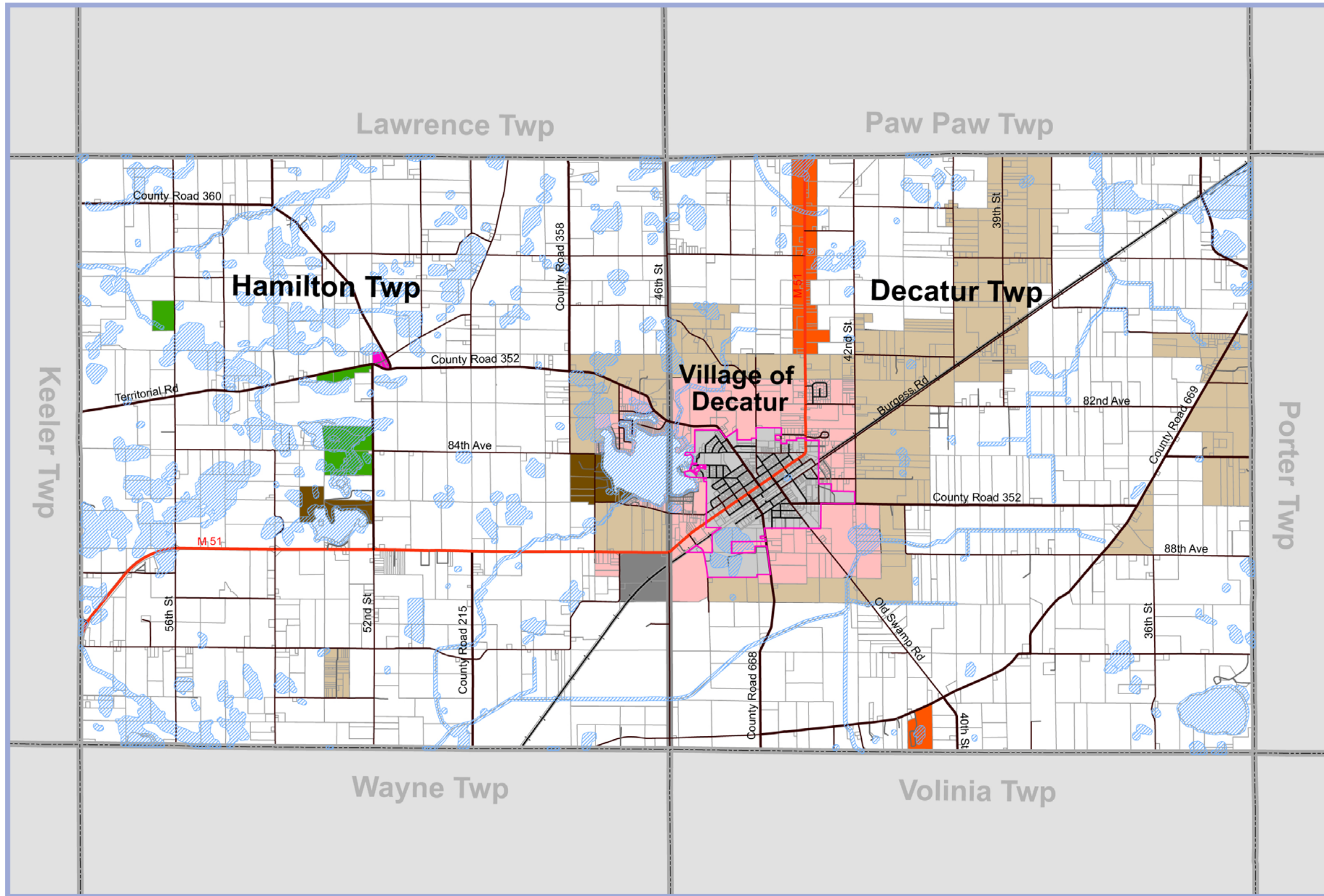
The Future Land Use Plan has two main objectives. First, it is useful as a means of identification of where certain types of land uses are most appropriate. This is largely accomplished by the Future Land Use Map. Second, it also demonstrates how the proposed land uses will be arranged on a specific piece of property.

The Future Land Use Map and the land use design guidelines are based on a firm understanding of the strategic issues present in the Decatur-Hamilton area, identification and analysis of the existing conditions present in the communities, recognition of the opportunities and constraints present in the communities, and an understanding of the stated community goals and objectives.

The Future Land Use Map is intended to represent the ultimate build-out for the Decatur-Hamilton area. In order for the communities to protect their rural character and the economic viability of the Village, it is necessary to define the extent of the intensely developed area which, if not constrained could undermine these fundamental goals for the area. While it will likely take a considerable amount of time for the communities to reach this ultimate build-out, by identifying the extent of development now, tools and techniques can be developed or expanded which will insure any area developed in the future will be utilized in accordance with the Master Plan.

The Future Land Use Plan for the area is comprised of seven land use categories which delineate areas of the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, or Hamilton Township for particular types of land uses. There is also a surface water quality overlay district which lies over the other districts and is meant to provide provisions in these sensitive areas to protect water resources. There is also a more detailed future land use map for the Village. The following section describes the characteristics of each land use designation, the methodology for defining the area, and recommendations for implementation.

# Future Land Use



**Legend**

- Surface Water Protection Overlay
- Township
- Parcel

**Future Land Use**

- Industrial
- Primary Growth Area
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Mixed Use
- Rural Residential
- Campground Resort
- Public Land/Park/Open Space
- Agriculture Protection Area
- Not Shown

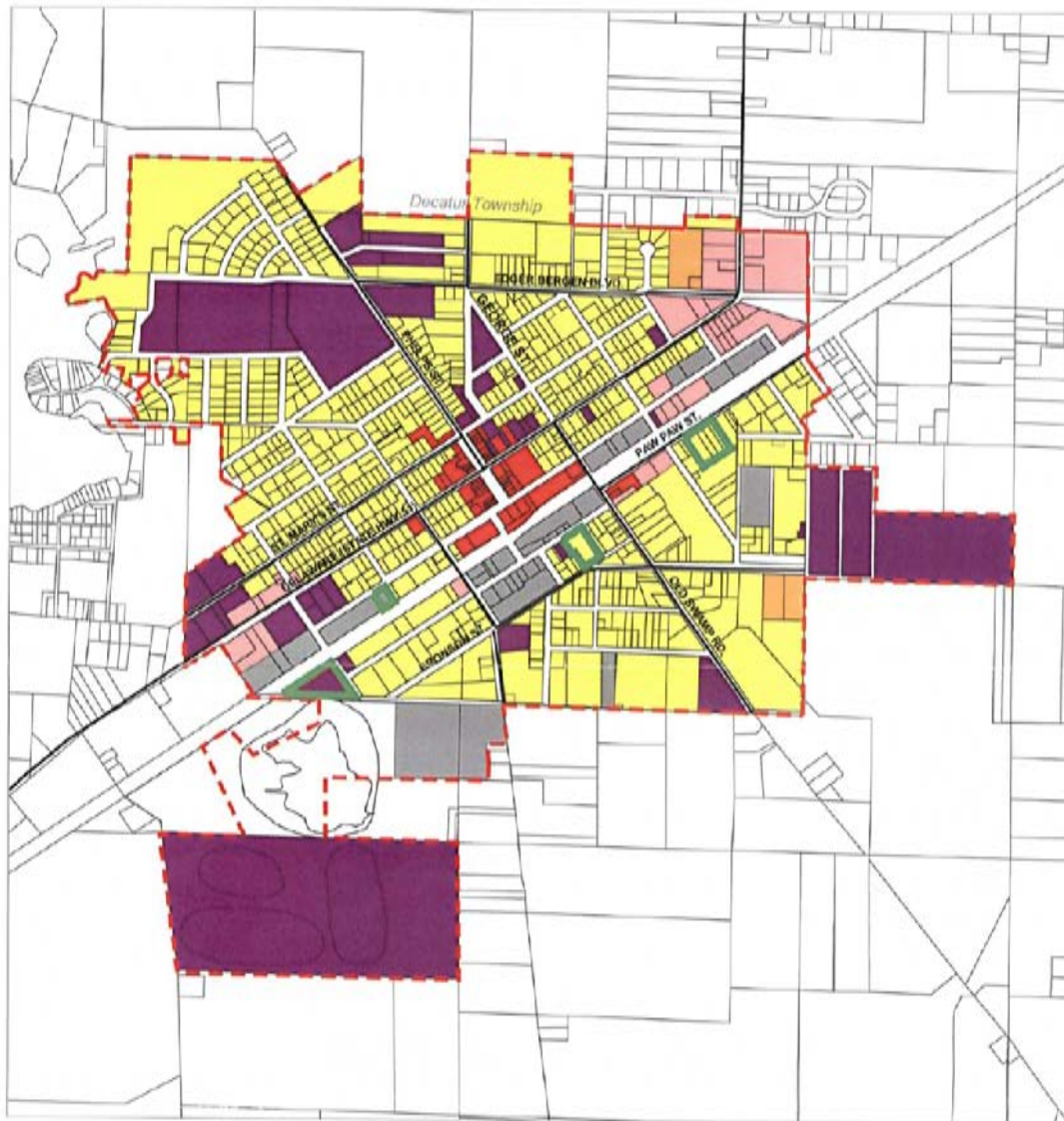
0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

**Data Sources**  
 Base Map: Michigan Center for Geographic Information  
 Parcel and Future Land Use: Van Buren County

Prepared April 2009  
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 Website: [www.swmpc.org](http://www.swmpc.org)

**Van Buren County**

Hamilton Township      Decatur Township



**Future Land Use Map**

Base Map Source: Village of Decatur, Michigan  
GIS Source: McKenna Associates, LLC



## **Agriculture Protection Area**

A major future land use for both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township is agricultural uses, comprising more than \_\_\_% of the total area of Decatur Township and \_\_\_% of the total area of Hamilton Township. Agricultural lands include farming (the production of crops, livestock, and related goods), orchards, nurseries, vineyards, farmsteads, and other activities directly associated with agriculture. Active agricultural land uses are fundamental to the communities' efforts to preserve the viability of the working landscape and the rural character established in the Decatur-Hamilton area.

The desired density within the agricultural land uses is planned for an average of one dwelling unit for every 10 acres, or four persons per 10 acres. This density is necessary to ensure that densities are low enough to accommodate agricultural uses that can be economically viable and to minimize the potential for conflict between active agricultural operations and residential uses. Individual lot sizes will be dependent upon a variety of variables including current farming practices and soil characteristics. However, 10 acre parcels are not encouraged. Open space or cluster zoning can encourage smaller building sites on parts of a farm which are not conducive to production.

These areas were defined using the following methodology:

- Identification of prime agricultural soils and unique farmland as indicated in the soil survey for Van Buren County compiled by the United States Department of Agriculture.
- Recognition of lands with active farming activities. This information was gathered through use of the land use cover maps created by Western Michigan University based on 1996 aerial photography.
- Identification of large parcels. Parcel size and shape have an important influence on the continued viability of agricultural activities. Large parcels with regular shapes lend themselves more readily to farming activities than do parcels that are small or irregular in shape. Generally, parcels that are 20 or more acres in size can accommodate viable commercial farming activities. This value is increased considerably where such parcels are

contiguous to one another to form a “block” of agricultural lands.

- Recognition of lands enrolled in the P.A. 116 Program. In 1974, the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act, P.A. 116, was enacted by the State of Michigan. This Act allows landowners to enter into a developments right agreement with the state, by which they receive specific tax benefits in return for maintaining their land in agricultural or open space purposes for a specified period of time.

Another characteristic within the agricultural land use is the general lack of “urban” infrastructure that is paved roads and centralized sewer and water. Paved roads often can lead to higher speeds and tend to attract additional development thus increasing the traffic volume. This detracts from the general rural character of the area and negatively impacts agricultural operations. Gravel roads; however, tend to reduce speeds and the attractiveness of additional development. Major road improvements should be undertaken in agricultural areas primarily to address safety issues and to ensure access for emergency vehicles. The extension or construction of utilities, particularly water and sewer, has impacts similar to improved roads, which are they tend to attract additional development. Furthermore due to the high costs of building and operating such facilities, the density or total number of homes tends to increase in an effort to spread the costs out among many homeowners. This suburban style development within areas that are currently rural will, overtime erode the existing rural character of the area and make economically viable agriculture more difficult. Water and sewer lines should not be extended into the Agriculture Protection Area unless they are necessary to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the existing residents of the area.

### Implementation Recommendations

As discussed previously in this plan, the prime agricultural areas are intended to foster an environment conducive to viable agricultural enterprises. The area is to be characterized by large, contiguous blocks of productive agricultural land with limited residential development. As such, development densities in these areas should be kept very low, lot sizes should remain quite large and infrastructure such as paved roads or municipal water and sewer should not be extended to these areas. As development does occur in the area, the townships should take steps to ensure that large,

contiguous blocks of productive agricultural lands remain intact and viable. Specific techniques in the zoning ordinance will help to accomplish this. Two zoning options should be considered - exclusive agricultural zoning or sliding scale zoning. In addition, the zoning ordinance should require agricultural buffers between residential and agricultural uses. Further, the Townships should participate in the County’s Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program. For more information on the county’s program visit [www.vbco.org](http://www.vbco.org).

### 1. Exclusive Agriculture Zoning

Exclusive agricultural zoning is an alternative to sliding scale zoning and is useful to limit the amount of non-farm development in agricultural protection areas. This type of zoning avoids the problem of leapfrog development. Development is also kept at a distance limiting potential conflicts between farms and nonfarm neighbors. The goal is to balance the long-term protection of farmland with some nonfarm development. The minimum parcel size in exclusive agricultural zones is usually set at 40 acres. The owners of land in the exclusive agricultural district are allowed to build additional dwelling units that serve as places of residence for owners and employees of farm operation or for family members. Currently Wayne Township in Cass County utilizes exclusive agricultural zoning.

### 2. Sliding Scale Zoning

Sliding scale zoning limits the number of times that a parent parcel (a parcel existing on the date of ordinance adoption) can be split, based on its size, i.e., the larger the parcel the more splits that may occur, up to a maximum number established (as shown on the example chart). A larger minimum parcel size is also established.

Unlike exclusive use zoning, sliding scale zoning allows some non-farm residential development without a special

Sliding Scale (Example)	
Area of Lot of Record	Maximum Additional Lots Permitted
1 to 10 acres	1
10.1 to 20 acres	2
20.1 to 40 acres	3
40.1 to 80 acres	4
80.1 to 160 acres	5
160.1 to 320 acres	6
over 320.1 acres	7

land use or other reviews. Sliding scale zoning can be useful in agricultural areas where there are significant development pressures and land speculation. The use of sliding scale zoning is most effective in areas where a wide range of parcel sizes exist and non-farm residential development has already begun to occur.

Minimum and maximum building lot sizes can be used to encourage the location of non-farm development on less productive farmland and/or in areas where development is more concentrated to direct growth onto already fragmented land. The use of buffer areas (see later discussion) is highly recommended to avoid land use conflicts between new residential development and agriculture fields. Since this method does permit some use of land for non-agricultural uses, it allows communities to more effectively avoid a claim that land has been "taken" without compensation.

### 3. Agriculture Buffers

Balancing the need to continue agricultural practices and the desire to develop land for non-agricultural purposes can be challenging. Buffers between active agricultural areas and other uses, such as residential development, can help reduce land use conflicts, particularly where residential and agricultural conflicts are occurring with greater frequency. The use of buffers can aid in easing land use conflicts and improving the relationship of agricultural uses and new residents. Agricultural buffers should be used with both options - the exclusive agricultural zoning and the sliding scale zoning.

Buffers are generally imposed on residential developments, rather than on farming operations, principally because the farm was probably the first use in place. Buffers should be sufficiently wide to protect the farming operation from lawn fertilizers, playing children, and other conflicts. At the same time, they cannot be so burdensome as to require excessive land commitments from residential property owners.

Buffers are most effective if a "no-disturb" zone is provided between residential properties and

farmland. This requirement should be tied to subdivision, site condominium, planned unit development, or land division approval. It should also be required that the buffer be described in the property deed to alert potential buyers of the need to honor the no-disturb area.

## **Rural Residential**

The rural residential designation for the Decatur-Hamilton area is a low density pattern that is typically planned for areas outside of the village and not part of either the primary growth area or the agriculture protection area. The rural residential land use is planned to occupy approximately \_\_\_% of the total land area in Decatur Township and \_\_\_% of the land area in Hamilton Township.

The desired density within the rural residential area is planned for no more than one dwelling unit for every acre (1DU/Acre). However, some of the soils in the rural residential areas may not be able to sustain an operational septic system. If this is the case, larger parcels may be required. The use of open space developments is highly encouraged in the rural residential areas to maintain the rural character and to preserve the natural features. Further, open space developments could ensure adequate buffers are in place between farming operations and residential areas. Individual lot sizes will be dependent upon a variety of variables including natural features and ability to treat wastewater.

These areas were defined using the following methodology:

- Identification of lands located adjacent to the primary growth areas.
- Identification of transition areas between the agriculture protection areas and primary growth areas.
- Identification of areas where most parcel sizes varied and are already too small to sustain farming operations.

### Implementation Recommendations

The Rural Residential Areas are intended to accommodate development at a low density and in a manner that retains the rural character of the area. As such, those features that contribute to the rural

character of the area must be protected. These features include large areas of open space, wetlands, woodlots, etc. Specific guidelines, requirements, standards, and incentives should be established that will assist in ensuring that these features remain protected through the use of open space developments.

Clustering of home sites and the permanent protection of rural character features is the preferred method of fulfilling the preferred development pattern for these areas. The Townships should take steps to ensure that the rural character remains intact. Further, low impact development techniques should be encouraged to protect water quality and natural features. Rural residential areas will serve as an area of transition between the higher density development located in the Village of Decatur and agriculture protection areas.

### **Campground/Resort**

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_ % of the total land area of the Decatur-Hamilton area is planned for campground/resort. This district is intended to preserve and enhance the water and scenic quality of the lakes and wildlife found in Decatur and Hamilton Townships, the investment in lake property, the quality of lakefront living, and the natural environment.

These areas were defined using the following methodology:

- Existing pockets of this designation were already established on zoning maps

### Implementation Recommendations

These areas should be developed in a manner that protects the natural and water features associated with these developments. Low Impact Development techniques should be utilized to protect water quality and natural features.

### **Public Land/Park/Open Space**

Approximately \_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_% of the total land area of the Decatur-Hamilton are planned for public lands, parks and open space. This designation documents where the area parks/open spaces,

government offices, schools and public facilities are located. This includes active recreational uses such as athletic fields, playgrounds, trails, and swimming as well as areas for more passive activities such as bird and wildlife watching, relaxing and enjoying views. These passive activities also promote the protection of open space, significant views and natural areas.

These areas were defined using the following methodology:

- Identification of areas in public ownership.
- Identification of areas close to high density residential areas to ensure that people of all ages within the planning area have access to this type of land within a short walking or driving distance.
- Identification of large blocks of natural areas to encourage the permanent preservation of these areas.

### Implementation Recommendations

Recreational facilities need not have access to urban infrastructure, indeed in many instances they benefit from a lack of such services, contributing to their natural appeal. However, in instances where active facilities are proposed, they are best located in close proximity to concentrations of the population to accommodate easy access by local residents and to both strengthen the role of the Village and preserve the agricultural character of the rural areas.

Parks should be placed and designed with respect to their intended purpose. For example, neighborhood parks should be intertwined into the fabric of the various neighborhoods in the area. Such parks should be modest in size, accessible on foot or by bicycle, and offer close to home recreational opportunities. Community or regional parks, however may be located on the edge of neighborhoods, should be large enough to accommodate a diversity of uses and features, and may be accessed by pedestrians, on bicycles, or in an automobile.

The steps that the village and townships may consider in further protection of open spaces include:

1. Acquisition by the village or township.

2. Dedication of open space or recreation area by developers.
3. Establishment of development regulations to include incentives for providing recreational areas in a development,
4. Requirements for open space and parks in Planned Unit Developments.
5. Working with landowners and land trusts, such as the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, to place easements on properties with significant natural features.

Due to their more rural nature and lower population densities, it is neither appropriate nor is it necessary to expect each neighborhood within Decatur and Hamilton Townships to have direct access to designated recreational open space. However, access to such opportunities, within a reasonable distance is necessary. The central location of the village and its facilities addresses many of the recreational needs of the townships, however portions of the townships remain a considerable distance away from any facilities and they can only be reached by automobile. Opportunities exist within the townships for the provision of additional special purpose parks or community parks. Specific opportunities include greenway development along creeks, development of a community park in the vicinity of the Hamilton Township Hall, acquisition of land for wildlife viewing, hiking, hunting, etc.

### **Primary Growth Area**

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_% of the total land area of Decatur-Hamilton area is planned for the Primary Growth Area. The Primary Growth Area is intended to accommodate development at urban densities and in a manner that reinforces the traditional development characteristics present in the Village. These characteristics include sidewalks, a grid or interconnected street pattern, street trees, modest lot sizes, a diversity of architectural styles, etc. The primary growth area incorporates residential multiple family residential, manufactured housing communities, neighborhood commercial, central business district, commercial and industrial districts which are described below.

Manufactured housing communities, (previously referred to as mobile home parks) are likely to have densities slightly higher than five units per acre. However, if site characteristics, transportation

accessibility availability of public infrastructure and services, and land use compatibility are found to support such development, it is within the primary growth area that manufactured housing communities could be located. The Plan does not identify particular sites for manufactured housing developments. It provides development guidelines for locating housing developments of a moderately high density.

These areas were defined using the following methodology:

- Identification of lands on the fringe of the Village that are either served or could easily be served by municipal sewer and water.

### Implementation Recommendations

Specific guidelines, requirements, standards, and incentives should be established that will assist in ensuring that the characteristics of traditional neighborhoods are respected and complemented.

The village and townships should take steps to ensure that these characteristics are reinforced. These steps can include:

1. Revision of ordinances to include site plan review, alternative design options (PUD, etc)
2. Adoption of form based zoning codes

#### A. Residential

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_% of the total land area of the Village of Decatur is designated for Residential. It is anticipated that the primary growth areas will accommodate the majority of residences in the Decatur-Hamilton area as well as offer the greatest diversity in housing types and costs. These areas are characterized by a high level of urban infrastructure and services as well as a high level of accessibility to employment and shopping opportunities. Generally, it is favorable to have urban services in these areas, as the potential for failure of on-site wastewater treatment is high as is the potential for contamination of drinking water in areas of such density. Likewise, the overall density often necessitates the presence of paved roadways to accommodate the number of vehicle trips associated with such areas.

The desired density within the growth areas and the Village of Decatur is planned for two to five dwelling units per acre. This density capitalizes on the existing and planned public infrastructure and services, and provides opportunities to offer a variety of housing styles and prices.

Individual lot sizes will be dependent upon a variety of variables including current development pattern, presence of natural features, and adequacy of public infrastructure.

### Implementation Recommendations

These areas should have the following characteristics:

1. Diverse housing options
2. Neighborhoods should be compact and walkable
3. Neighborhoods should have clearly defined edges and be connected to well-defined centers
4. Pedestrian access throughout the neighborhood and connecting to the center should be a priority
5. Use of previously documented neighborhood delineations, such as that in any previous Master Plans or as devised by the Village for other purposes.

### B. Multiple-Family Residential

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_% of the total land area of the Decatur-Hamilton area is planned for multiple-family residential. The principal use is for two-family and multi-family dwellings; single family dwellings are also permitted. Recommended uses within Multi-Family Residential areas include a variety of multiple-family developments such as apartments, loft apartments, duplexes, townhouses, condominiums, stacked condominiums, and elderly and assisted-use housing.

### Implementation Recommendations

These areas should provide a diverse housing stock to meet the needs of various types of housing demands. A wide spectrum of housing options will accommodate people of a range of incomes, ages, and family types in each neighborhood. The majority of Multi-Family Residential sites in the Village have already been developed. Zoning ordinances related to the redevelopment of

these Multi-Family Residential areas should encourage design diversity and modernization while assuring that the building's mass remains relatively in character with the neighborhood's bulk characteristics

### C. Neighborhood Commercial

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_% of the total land area of the Decatur-Hamilton area is planned for neighborhood commercial. There is a small neighborhood commercial area in Hamilton Township at the intersection of Territorial and County Road 215. The principal use is to provide a wide variety of retail opportunities (including those often found in Commercial districts) such as, office space, parking, and personal business services of all kinds typically found in a traditional downtown setting satisfying the needs of residents in the community and outlying areas. Some retail commercial uses typically found in Commercial districts may also be compatible with this classification. This classification allows and encourages the mix of residential and commercial uses. Consideration of pedestrian and non-motorized traffic in these areas is critical in development decisions. The cohesive appearance of buildings in the downtown area and those in outlying commercial areas greatly maximizes the appeal and vitality of the Village as a whole as does the capability for pedestrian connectivity between residential and commercial areas.

### Implementation Recommendations

These areas should provide for small commercial businesses that would fit within a residential setting and be a transition between the centralized business district and the residential areas. The following characteristics should be encouraged in these areas:

- Neighborhoods should be compact and walkable.
- Neighborhoods should have clearly defined edges and be connected to well-defined centers.
- Community centers should be typically no more than one-quarter of a mile or five minute walk from the neighborhoods.
- Pedestrian access throughout the neighborhood and connecting to the center should be a priority.

- A diverse mix of residences, shops, schools, workplaces, and parks should occur in close proximity to one another.

#### E. Central Business District

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_% of the total land area of the Decatur-Hamilton area is planned for the central business district. The Central Business District is intended to promote efficient and livable forms of development in the downtown core of the Village. With attractive and inviting patterns of development along and off of the main streets, higher density residential and commercial uses here allow for a secure and safe living and shopping environment. This land use designation is meant to serve the planning area communities with goods and services while developing in accord with the surrounding residential and residentially mixed neighborhoods. Finally, this district is meant to serve as a social gathering place for area residents, as the Village Hall and the Van Buren District Library are all located here. Access to downtown for residents is provided via connector streets. The key to distinguishing the Central Business District from the other land use classifications in the Village of Decatur is the high-density mixed uses of residential and commercial. Planned uses in this district include, but are not limited to, commercial, office, entertainment, civic, high-density residential, and pocket parks. Industrial uses are to be discouraged in the Central Business District, as they may generate impacts that conflict with the residential, commercial and recreational uses.

The majority of planned commercial uses are located in the Village of Decatur or immediately adjacent to the Village. The majority of the uses are intended to serve the daily shopping needs of local residents. This would include the provision of such items as groceries, pharmacies, restaurants, car washes, Laundromats, department stores and auto repair. These uses are intended to be accommodated in the central business district in the village or are to be accommodated in compact developments near the village. This development pattern is designed to accommodate arrival of patrons either in personal vehicles or on foot and ensuring that the normal associated impacts (traffic generation, noise, etc), are minimized as much as practical.

### Implementation Recommendations

Commercial areas should be designed to interact in a positive manner with both existing and future residential neighborhoods and to reinforce the historic role of the village as the center of commerce for the area. Typical commercial developments create strip development along major roads with unimaginative architecture and a limited life span. Through the encouragement of commercial development that utilizes small building footprints, small gross floor areas, classic architectural details and site placement, the Decatur-Hamilton area can take positive steps toward ensuring that new commercial development adds to the quality and character of the area rather than detracts from it. Commercial development within these areas should also be designed in a manner to enhance the local street network currently in place. As such, connections between existing and future residential areas and commercial areas would reduce the traffic impact that such developments would have as well as increasing accessibility for local residents. Care should also be exercised in the management of access along primary roads, which are intended to carry large volumes of traffic. The use of shared access, access from secondary roads, and limits on the number of curb cuts are but a few techniques that can be exercised to effectively manage access issues.

Uses should be designed to positively contribute to the character and function of the Village, and should be compatible with adjacent land uses. Specific issues include architectural compatibility, access management, shared parking, etc. Specific guidelines, requirements, standards, and incentives should be established that will assist in ensuring that these issues are addressed in a positive manner. The Village could revise ordinances to include site plan review, development standards, performance measures and access management guidelines to accomplish these characteristics.

#### F. Industrial

Industrial land uses are planned for \_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_% of the total land area in the Decatur-Hamilton area. Generally, it is proposed that these uses be located in or near the Village of Decatur to take advantage of available public utilities, the existing street network, and the availability of a work force in close proximity. However, in some instances it may be appropriate to locate agriculturally

related industrial uses, such as processing plants, in the areas designated for agricultural protection uses. Such uses should be located in these areas only if they are necessary due to the proximity of a locally raised or grown product, and should be developed in a way that they do not negatively impact either the ability to continue productive agricultural activities on adjoining properties or adjoining residences.

### Implementation Recommendations

As in the case of commercial development, it is imperative that industrial uses be developed in a manner that contributes to the overall success and livability of the area. This can be achieved by placing limitations on the specific types of industrial activities that are permitted, the provision of sufficient buffering and screening between industrial and residential uses, and management of the issues associated with access to the existing transportation system.

The majority of industrial land uses will continue to be located in the village and should be compatible with adjoining land uses. As such, uses should be designed with sufficient buffering and landscaping, should minimize negative impacts in the area, etc. Specific guidelines, requirements, standards, and incentives should be established that will assist in ensuring that these issues are addressed in a positive manner. The Village could revise ordinances to include site plan review, development standards and performance measures.

### **Mixed Use**

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_ % is of the total land area of the Decatur-Hamilton area is planned for mixed use development. The density of development in this area will be dependent on the soils and the natural features on the property. Development should be encouraged in nodes or centers and not spread along the entire length of a transportation corridor as that will increase congestion and cause traffic safety issues. The purpose of Mixed-Use is to encourage the development of a compatible mixture of land uses which may include residential, retail, offices, recreational, entertainment, create community centers, integrate gathering places, and to promote long-term viability in the established settlement areas.

### Implementation Recommendations

The designation will additionally provide for a land use transition between the settlement areas and the more rural areas of the communities that provide for:

1. A more pedestrian-oriented nonautomotive environment and flexibility in the design of land uses and structures than are provided by single purpose zoning districts, including but not limited to shared parking;
2. The enhancement and preservation of property and structures with historical or architectural merit, unique topographic, landscape or water areas, or other features requiring special treatment or protection;
3. Recreation areas that are most accessible to both the planning area's inhabitants and other residents;
4. Environment that is more conducive to mutual interdependence in terms of living, working, shopping, entertainment and recreation.

Any leap frog development should be discouraged in this district. The development should occur in nodes or centers to create walkable and easily accessible retail/office areas along with residential uses.

### **Transportation**

Local roads, collectors, and arterials will continue to occupy approximately 12% of the total land area in the Decatur-Hamilton area. There are no plans to either build new roads or dramatically increase the width or capacity of existing roads. It is necessary for the village and the townships to regularly monitor the condition of roads in the area. In the Townships, the responsibility of maintaining the roads is with the Michigan Department of Transportation or the Van Buren County Road Commission. The village should continue to provide regular maintenance and upgrades of roads that remain their responsibility.

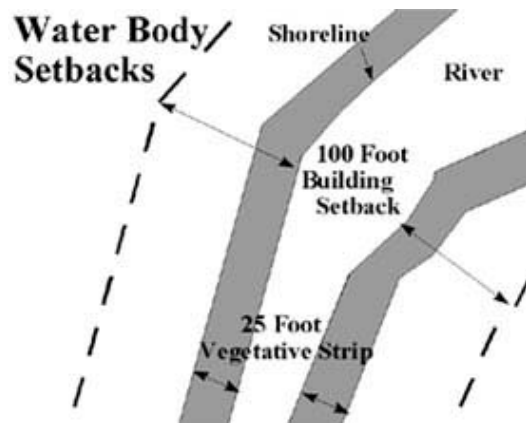
The Village of Decatur has an active railroad that provides extensive shipping of agricultural products for local producers. With so much agricultural production in the surrounding

townships, the railroad provides an affordable way to move products. The current goal is for a new railroad spur to hold 60 cars so that commodity products that can be traded and moved quickly and efficiently using the existing transportation networks. One rail spur is currently open which crosses George Street and may eventually split into 4 spurs.

### **Surface Water Quality Protection Overlay**

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_% of the total land area of the Decatur-Hamilton area is designated as a water quality protection overlay. Overlay zones are special districts that supplement, but do not replace, the existing applicable zoning regulations. Overlay zones can be used for any number of objectives, ranging from commercial corridor improvement to river protection efforts. Overlay zones are especially useful when an area containing unique opportunities or constraints under several different zoning designations.

Water Quality Overlay District should require vegetated greenbelts around waterbodies and setbacks for buildings. Greenbelts or vegetated buffers are an effective way to address soil erosion and reduce the effects of runoff on surface water quality. The attraction of surface water for residential or other land uses often leads to the desire for additional views to the water by clearing vegetation along streambanks and lake shorelines. This clearing contributes to reduced water quality and may lead to the eventual loss of aesthetic value.



These areas were defined using the following methodology:

- Identification of wetlands and a 100 foot buffer area around wetlands
- Identification of 100 foot buffer along waterbodies (lakes, rivers, and major streams and drains)

### Implementation Recommendations

Important elements of overlay zones for natural resources protection include: protection of vegetation and trees; setbacks from sensitive areas such as wetlands and streams; percentage requirements for open space preservation; and avoidance of critical habitat areas.



Zoning ordinances should include water body setbacks from water bodies with a portion of the setback areas reserved for a native vegetative strip to filter pollutants and sediment.

Setbacks from inland lakes and streams can be established through the zoning ordinance. Regulations may specify a minimum 100-foot setback for structures and septic systems from the shoreline. Setbacks will generally mirror the minimum requirements of the Natural Rivers Act, which provides a basis for setbacks.



Setback requirements may include the preservation of at least a 25-foot wide native, un-cleared vegetation buffer strip immediately adjacent to the shoreline. Boat storage and dock facilities may also be regulated.

In general, smaller buffers may be adequate when the buffer is in good condition (e.g. dense native vegetation, undisturbed soils), when the water body or resource is of low functional value (highly disturbed, invaded by non-native species such as purple loosestrife), and the adjacent land use has low impact potential (park land or very low density residential development). Larger buffers will provide water quality protection for high impact land uses such as highly developed commercial areas dominated by large parking lots (highly impervious surfaces).

Example:

Building setback for lots, including all appurtenances and accessory buildings, shall be a minimum of 75 feet from the ordinary high watermark on the main stream, north branch and south branch, and 50 feet on all other designated tributaries. The setback may be decreased 1 foot for every 1 foot rise in bank height to a minimum of 60 feet from the ordinary high watermark on the main stream, north branch and south branch, and to a minimum of 40 feet from the ordinary high watermark on all other designated tributaries. Buildings and appurtenances shall be set back not less than 25 feet from the top of a bluff on the non-cutting edge of a stream and not less than 40 feet from the top of a bluff on the cutting edge of a stream. Building shall not take place on land that is subject to flooding.

## **Implementation Strategies**

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### **Overview**

Implementation strategies are an integral component of any master plan. They determine how the Plan's guidelines and recommendations are to be put into practice and become reality. To implement the goals and objectives provided in this plan and to achieve the preferred development alternative, it will be necessary for leadership of each of the communities to be forward thinking and committed. The following strategies may be used as individual efforts or combined with others to achieve the desired results. Likewise, one community may find a particular strategy more appropriate than another. The key is to define those strategies, which will best implement the master plan at any given time, under specific circumstances, and to then proceed with those strategies.

### **Public Information and Education**

A successful master plan must educate the citizens of the community on both the goals for each of the communities and the individual regulatory and incentive measures that are needed to actually implement the plan and realize the stated goals. An informed and involved citizenry can then offer its support and assistance in working toward the community they desire to have in the future.

An example of appropriate public information and education is in educating the public in the importance of natural features to the preservation of both rural character and a healthy environment. Through such efforts, the local government is far more likely to initiate efforts for wetlands protection, woodlands protection, etc. Offering information to the public concerning the benefits of natural features and ways that they can effectively utilize their property, gives citizens the opportunity to make informed decisions regarding new incentives, regulations, or standards. The following outlines examples of programs that can be undertaken to help inform the public about important land use goals and implementation techniques:

### Condensed Version of the Future Land Use Plan

Few community members will likely take the time to read a large comprehensive document. However, a reduced version of the plan, focusing on the issues, community goals, and the implementation program could make an attractive alternative. This condensed plan could be distributed directly to residents and business owners. Additional copies could be made available at the various community buildings throughout the area.

### Informational Brochures

A series of informational brochures on various topics important to the village and townships could be developed. A starting point could be the development of such brochures relative to the strategic issues identified in the plan. The purpose of these brochures would be to further educate and inform local residents and business owners about a specific topic and about the possible actions relative to that topic. These brochures could be distributed directly to residents and business owners. Additional copies could be made available at the various community buildings throughout the area.

### Programs in the School System Concerning Land Use Issues

A series of informational programs or activities could be developed that introduce land use issues and alternative solutions to area students. Regional and national planning organizations have several programs that would prove valuable in such efforts.

### Regular Informational Sessions Conducted by the Village Council and the Township Boards

The plan should be an active document that is continually reviewed and updated where necessary. An annual joint meeting among the three communities involved in the development of the plan should be held to discuss the progress of the plan and identify any areas where adjustments may need to be made.

### Community Surveys

Each of the communities may wish to conduct regular community surveys that seek to monitor the

community's attitudes and priorities, looking for any changes. These surveys can be conducted in a variety of ways including mail-back surveys sent directly to all residents, telephone surveys, or surveys inserted in the local newspaper.

### **Public Policy and Administrative Action**

A successful master plan identifies the general policies of the community regarding future growth and development. More specific policies and administrative actions must be identified and developed that will ensure implementation of this community vision. Such efforts will serve to move the planning process from the discussion stage to the action stage.

The following outlines examples of policy and administrative actions that can be undertaken in an effort to implement the plan:

#### Continued Cooperation Between Units of Government

A strength that the Decatur-Hamilton area possesses is its willingness for the townships and village to plan and work in a coordinated and cooperative manner. Steps should be taken to ensure that this cooperation is maintained and enhanced. Further, this spirit of cooperation should be broadened to include involvement of county, regional, and state governments and organizations.

#### Establishing Priorities

The Master Plan contains a number of recommendations and policy guidance. Within the Decatur-Hamilton area, there are limited resources in terms of staff, volunteer time, and funds to implement all of the recommendations simultaneously. Consequently, a process for establishing priorities must be established. The Action Program that follows this section sets the groundwork for this effort, but a more detailed process must be undertaken as soon as possible after adoption of the plan. Participants involved in setting priorities should include village and township staff, the planning commissions, village council and township board members, business owners, and other appropriate stakeholders. It is recommended that the priorities be reviewed and updated annually to ensure that progress is made.

### Annexation

Though on occasion, not a popular technique among municipal and township officials, annexation provides an opportunity for the Village to continue to grow and for property owners to receive municipal services including water and sewer. Generally, it is recommended that extension of a municipality's utility be tied directly with a property owners and townships willingness to allow the property in question to be incorporated into the municipality, either through direct annexation or through the establishment of a P.A. 425 agreement.

### P.A. 425 Agreement

Public Act 425 of 1984 deals with intergovernmental land transfer for economic development or other projects, in a much less stringent manner than through annexation. Implementation of Act 425 permits the transfer of property from a township to a village or city on a conditional basis, whereby a written contract is entered into between the township and village or city. The act allows two or more units of government to actually share a given land area and tax revenues.

The sharing may involve public services, taxes, and other generated revenue, as provided for by the contract, rather than the all or nothing approach offered by annexation.

## **Development Controls and Standards**

One of the most influential strategies that can be used to implement a Master Plan is the regulatory measures established by the community to guide future development and land use. These regulations include the zoning ordinance, land division controls, and development standards. However, simply creating and using such regulations is not sufficient to actually implement the master plan. The ordinances must contain specific procedures and techniques that are created to achieve the objectives and eventually the goals, of the future land use plan.

The future land use categories in the Master Plan provide the foundation for evaluating future zoning change requests. Zoning actions that are consistent with the Future Land Use Map usually receive

deferential and favorable review, if legally challenged. The Master Plan should always be the principal source of information in the evaluation of zoning change requests.

The village and townships should critically evaluate all ordinances to determine if they effectively implement the objectives of the master plan in their related areas. Recently the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission reviewed and commented on how well the zoning ordinance protects water quality and natural resources. The following improvements could be made to ensure better protection of the resources in the community.

1. Require naturally vegetated buffers along drainage corridors and wetlands
2. Require water body building setbacks along rivers/drains
3. Enact floodplain protection regulations
4. Require a portion of large parking lots to be planted with vegetation
5. Require stormwater treatment for parking lots
6. Require parking lots islands to be used for retention/infiltration areas
7. Have a maximum on parking space size
8. Have limits on impervious cover and lawn areas in rural areas
9. Require open spaces in PUDs to be consolidated into larger units (contiguous)
10. Implement a zoning technique to limit fragmentation of prime farmland, such as an exclusive agriculture zone
11. Require any new housing development abutting agriculture to put in a landscaping screen and have an adequate setback from agricultural production areas
12. Require the use of native plants in landscaping plans for large developments
13. Require bonds for infrastructure and changes in topography

In addition, the following, in particular should be evaluated to determine their appropriateness for the Decatur-Hamilton area:

#### Subdivision Regulations

Subdivision control ordinances typically require the appropriate design of lots and blocks, subdivision access, and such necessary internal improvements such as streets, drainage, and water and sewer facilities. Such ordinances are possible pursuant to the Land Division Act (Public Act 288 as amended). Though the Act places restrictions on the power of a municipality to approve or reject

plats, indicating that a rejection may not be based on any requirement other than those included in the Act, it is generally believed that the Act gives municipalities much greater authority than that typically exercised.

Both townships should consider pursuing the establishment of subdivision regulations in an effort to increase local review authority and to gain better control over design guidelines. The village should consider amending its current subdivision regulations to better clarify the desired design criteria and standards.

### Zoning Regulations

Zoning is the primary tool used by communities to implement the Master Plan. According to both the City and Village Zoning Act and the zoning ordinance and specific zoning regulations applied to property shall be based upon a plan designed to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the community.

- Rezoning to Implement the Master Plan. The land use classifications on the Future Land Use Map provide the basis for evaluating future changes in zoning. Zoning changes that are consistent with the Future Land Use Map generally receive deferential and favorable judicial review if challenged. The Master Plan should be the principal source of information in the evaluation of all requests to change zoning.
- Performance Zoning. Rather than simply regulate development on the basis of dimensional standards, many communities have established performance standards to regulate development based on the permissible effects or impacts of a proposed use. Performance standards should be used to supplement conventional zoning standards for the purposes of regulating such items as noise, dust, vibration, glare and heat, safety hazards, and environmental impacts. Defined standards can be particularly useful in achieving environmental and resource protection goals. If based on a strong body of research,

standards can be developed that relate to critical natural resources and environmental areas such as floodplains, wetlands, and groundwater recharge areas.

- **Incentive Zoning.** Incentive zoning allows a developer to alter the dimensional limitations in the zoning ordinance if the developer agrees to fulfill conditions stated in the Ordinance. Incentive zoning should be considered to promote innovative land planning techniques. For example, a “density bonus” can be used as an incentive for residential development that includes larger areas of useable open space or that includes specific features associated with traditional neighborhood development.
- **Planned Development.** Planned development involves the use of special zoning requirements and review procedures that provide design and regulatory flexibility, so as to encourage innovation in land use planning and design. Planned developments should achieve a higher quality of development than might otherwise be possible. If applied judiciously, an effective zoning technique to achieve development in accordance with the goals and objectives of the Master Plan. Planned developments can be used to encourage rural open space or cluster developments and to facilitate re-development in and around the central business district. Planned developments typically include an incentive component.
- **Overlay Zoning.** Overlay zoning allows the communities to impose a new set of regulations on a special area within an existing zoning district. In an area where an overlay zone is established, the property is placed simultaneously in two zones, and the property may be developed only under the applicable conditions and requirements of both zones. Overlay zoning has been used in other communities to address special conditions and features, such as historic areas, environmentally sensitive areas, and mixed use corridors, without disrupting the underlying zoning plan.

### Zoning Districts and Permitted Uses

To implement the master plan, it is essential that the placement and regulations within each zoning district (such as permitted uses, setbacks, density, etc) help to further the goals and objectives of the Master Plan. The presence of distinct commercial districts such as central business district, neighborhood business, and general business should be considered to enable location of appropriately scaled business enterprises while limiting the uses and possible conflicts with adjoining uses. Both townships and the village should consider the inclusion of a neighborhood business district to permit small-scale low impact businesses in appropriate areas. Further, the village should consider the creation of a zoning district that permits single-family residences, while prohibiting two-family or multiple family homes, in an effort to strengthen single-family neighborhoods.

Other considerations should include the creation of manufactured housing districts and the addition of less intense industrial zoning districts to allow placement of less intensive operations in appropriate locations, while not introducing heavy industrial uses that may be incompatible with adjoining uses. A similar evaluation should be conducted relative to the specific permitted and special land uses listed for each zoning district to ensure they are compatible with the goals and objectives of the plan and the specific intent of the zoning district.

### **Public Facility Improvements**

The construction and expansion of public facilities can be one of the most powerful influences in future growth and development. Quite often, development will follow public improvement such as roads and sewers. In a similar manner, re-development can often be stimulated through public improvements and investments. Some of the specific programs and techniques that may be utilized include the following:

### Capital Improvements Program

Capital programming influences land development decisions. It is the strategic management of such

investments and the resulting development pattern that forms a cornerstone of this Master Plan. By properly coordinating utility extensions and other capital improvements with the planning and growth management efforts, the village and townships can more directly control the direction and pace of development. Capital programming should be viewed as more than just an administrative task. Using the Master Plan to identify the location and development desired and the Capital Improvements Program to schedule the provision of services, the townships and village can inform developers when and how development or re-development of particular parcels will be encouraged and the type of development that is sought.

### **Continuous Planning**

A primary role of the Planning Commission is to provide planning recommendations to elected officials. This planning function is a continuous process, which does not terminate upon completion of this plan. Communities are in a constant state of evolution and planning should be an on-going process of identification, adjustment, and resolution of identified concerns, problems, and challenges. To pursue this role to its fullest extent the Planning Commissions should review and update this plan on a regular basis. Furthermore, the Planning Commissions may wish to pursue planning efforts with a more specific focus, such as:

#### Open Space, Parks and Recreation Plan

The village has a 2005 parks and recreation plan; however, the Townships do not have a recreation plan. Forming a joint commission to develop a plan has merit. Such a plan can help identify the current and future recreational needs of the community and identify areas where the communities may be deficient in meeting such needs. Further, the plan can be used to secure financial assistance from a variety of agencies, including the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

#### Business Development Plan

Expanding employment and shopping opportunities ranked very high on the community surveys and visioning sessions. Such an undertaking can be furthered through the development of a business development plan that has as its central focus, identification of current market conditions and

recommendations of how the local community can mobilize its resources to fill market voids. This plan can be used to strategically target capital improvements, efforts at marketing and promotion, and guide future decision-making by the downtown development authority among others.

#### Re-development Plans

Several properties that may offer opportunities for re-development and thus economic expansion may contain a variety of contaminants and may face a variety of other challenges. Undertaking a re-development plan can address such issues and offer solutions that will result in the economic re-use of the property. This plan is often required to secure funds under a variety of state and federal programs designed to assist in the cleanup of contaminated sites.

#### Agricultural Preservation

The Master Plan establishes the foundation for agricultural preservation in the community. The goal should be to preserve large contiguous blocks of agricultural lands and should therefore be a coordinated effort with adjoining communities and the county. The Township and Village should ensure that landowners are aware of the County's Purchase of Development Rights program and give guidance on how to participate in the program. The community could consider a dedicated millage to ensure that the local match for the acquisition of easements or fee simple purchases is available.

#### Agricultural Business Development Plan

As in the case of locally owned businesses located within villages and cities on "Main Streets" farmers increasingly face challenges and obstacles in increasing revenue and generating wealth. Such challenges have been met head on in many central business districts with downtown development authorities, tax increment financing, etc. The most successful of these efforts identifies and analyzes its local market, defines market niches, and establishes strategic actions to address these market voids. Similar efforts are often lacking in farming activities. More often local farmers are left "competing" with very large corporate farms, international agribusiness enterprises, and increasingly other farmers located in distant locations elsewhere in the world.

An agricultural business development plan would identify and critically evaluate the capacity of local farms, the products that could be raised, the services that could be offered, the potential markets, and the obstacles to filling apparent market voids. The plan should then establish strategic actions that are to be undertaken by local farmers, organizations positioned to assist farmers, and local units of government. This plan should move beyond conventional solutions and address issues such as agricultural enterprise zones, value added opportunities, community supported agriculture, agricultural tourism, etc. This plan should be viewed as a complement to the other efforts focused on protecting farmland from encroachment by incompatible uses and the preservation of prime agricultural lands for future farming activities.

## **Action Program**

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The following information is provided to assist the communities of Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and the Village of Decatur in their initial implementation efforts. The time frame of this action program is three years. It is anticipated that every year this action plan will be reviewed and updated as needed.

### **Action Plan**

As mentioned previously, it is expected that each year the action program will be reviewed at the annual meeting of the Joint Planning Commission to ensure that the implementation program always continues to look at least three years into the future. The action program should be based on the Master Plan and the results of any subsequent planning efforts. In this manner, the long-range vision and goals are established through the planning process and the short-range implementation activities are guided by the Action Program.

Seizing upon the opportunity to continue to the working relationship established in the development of this plan and in recognition of the need for coordination and cooperation in many of the implementation strategies; it is recommended that a permanent steering committee be established. There are a number of ways in which this committee can be operated. It may simply be an informal group with representatives from each of the Planning Commissions, the Township Boards, and the Village Council or it may be more formalized as a “Council of Governments”.

The primary purpose of such a committee will be to keep a unified focus on regional planning issues and on implementation of the joint Master Plan. This committee will serve as the custodian of the regional viewpoint that is stressed in the Master Plan. It is strongly recommended that agreement be reached on the form of such a committee and consensus on its role and membership be achieved prior to implementing any of the recommendations contained in this plan.

**Table 25. Action Plan**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Organization</b>	<b>Potential Funding</b>	<b>End Product / Performance Measure</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>
Ensure updated master plan is available on each community and the county's website	Planning Commissions	None needed	Publicly accessible master plan.	Year 1 (continually updated as needed)
Publish an article in the newspaper about the master plan (include link to website)	Planning Commissions, Township Boards, and Village Council	None needed	Informed public (include future land use map, describe main goals, compact development, farmland and natural resources preservation and business retention)	Annually
Update Zoning Ordinance (add districts in Master Plan, surface water quality protection overlay district and standards, agricultural zoning technique to reduce fragmentation)	Planning Commissions	General Revenue	Updated Ordinances and Regulations, which are consistent with the Master Plan.	Year 1 and as needed
Hold an annual meeting of joint master plan committee (invite planning commissions, township boards, village council to participate)	Joint Planning Commission	None needed	Evaluate progress, revisit priorities, discuss village boundaries and water/sewer expansion plans, evaluate if the master plan needs to be updated. Consensus on Where, When, and How development will occur	Annually
Develop a Capital Improvement Program	Planning Commissions, Township Boards, Village Council	General Revenue	Capital Improvements to be Implemented for the next 1-3 years	Year 1 (annually review and update)

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Organization</b>	<b>Potential Funding</b>	<b>End Product / Performance Measure</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>
Continue to support agricultural businesses in the community	Village Council, Township Boards, Chamber of Commerce, DDA, Village Manager	General Revenue	Strategies and programs, such as Farmers Market, to Strengthen Local Agricultural Economy	Year 2 (ongoing)
Ensure businesses get support needed and be proactive in business retention	Village Manager, DDA, Chamber of Commerce	General Revenue	Strategies and Programs to Strengthen Downtown Economy	Year 1 (ongoing)
Offer and publicize a suggestion box at the Township and Village Halls	Village Council, Township Boards	General Revenue	Improved communication between public and elected and appointed officials	Year 1
Pursue the attraction and development of the following businesses: hotel, bed and breakfast, and a clothing store.	Village Manger, DDA, Chamber of Commerce, County Economic Development	General Revenue	Program to attract and/or develop key businesses to community.	Year 2
Develop a business incubator or a community kitchen.	Village Manger, DDA, Chamber of Commerce, County Economic Development	General Revenue	Program to encourage small business start ups.	Year 3
Develop a joint code enforcement program for Townships and Village	Village Council, Township Boards	General Revenue	A unified code enforcement program	Year 1 (evaluate after Year 2)
Identify Infrastructure Projects and Pursue Funding such as CDBG Funds	Village Manager, Village Council	General Revenue. Special Assessments CDBG	Adequate infrastructure for business retention and attraction	As needed

<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Organization</b>	<b>Potential Funding</b>	<b>End Product / Performance Measure</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>
Identify Trail Projects and Pursue Funding such as Transportation Enhancement Funds	Village Manager, Village Council	General Revenue, MDOT Enhancement, MDNR Trust Fund	A trail or non-motorized system	As needed
Develop a Joint Parks and Recreation Committee	Village Council, Township Boards	General Revenue	A committee which can discuss a joint recreation plan for the Village and Townships. A plan to maintain, expand and fund parks and recreation for the area.	Year 2
Study Feasibility of Joint Police Department	Village Council, Village Manager, Township Boards, Police Chief, County Sheriff	General Revenue	A determination if a joint police department is feasible and needed to improve service	Year 2
Identify and Pursue Housing Assistance and Rehabilitation Programs	Planning Commissions, Township Boards, Village Council	General Revenue, CDBG, MSHDA	Eligible Housing Assistance Programs	As needed
Consider Establishment of Local Development Financing Authority	Village Council	General Revenue, TIF, Bonds	Identification of Re-Development Opportunities and Re-Use Programs	To Be Determined

Financing options for many of these programs can be found in Appendix 3.

## APPENDIX 1: Community Survey Results

### 1. How many years have you and your family resided in the community?

	Number Responded			% of those Responding		
	Village of Decatur	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township	Village of Decatur	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township
Less than One Year	3	3	8	1.5	2.4	7.5
One to Five Years	33	16	13	16.5	12.9	14.9
Six to Twenty Years	45	24	17	22.5	19.4	15.9
More than Twenty Years	119	81	69	59.5	65.3	64.5

### 2. How would you best describe the type of residence in which you and your family reside?

	Number Responded			% of those Responding		
	Village of Decatur	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township	Village of Decatur	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township
Home in a Residential Subdivision	170	54	37	88.5	44.3	30.6
Apartment	12	1	0	6.3	.8	0
Home on Active Farm	NA	17	30	NA	13.9	24.8
Mobile Home	0	4	3	0	3.3	2.5
Home on More than One Acre	NA	43	51	NA	35.2	42.1
Other	10	3	0	5.2	2.5	0

3. Is your home a second or seasonal home?

	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township
Number Responding Yes	17	15
% of those Responding	13.2	14.0

4a. Most positive aspects of life in the community.

	Number Responding			Number Responding	
	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township		Decatur Township	Hamilton Township
Parks and Recreation	16	8	Township Government	20	20
Small Town Character	NA	NA	Affordable Housing	49	23
Rural Character	75	102	Proximity to Shopping	12	0
Emergency Services	58	32	Farmland and Open Space	61	85
Condition of Roads	18	22	Orderly Growth	13	12
Large Lots	9	19	Low Crime Rate	64	48
Sense of Community	39	49	Proximity to Employment Good	21	13
Good Schools	41	40	Little Traffic Congestion	78	62
Village Government	NA	NA	Other	9	9

**4b. Most negative aspects of life in the community.**

	Number Responding			Number Responding	
	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township		Decatur Township	Hamilton Township
Traffic Congestion	1	2	Lack of Shopping Opportunities	81	97
Unregulated Growth	41	29	Township Government	13	20
Emergency Services	12	16	Poor School System	19	10
Lack of Parks and Recreation	30	40	Crime	17	25
Poor Roads	50	42	Lack of Employment Opportunities	80	64
Lack of Sense of Community	14	14	Village Government	NA	NA
Lack of Affordable Housing	13	9	Other	20	16

**5. Community Planning Issues: 1. (Strongly Agree) 2. (Agree) 3 (No Opinion) 4. (Disagree) 5. (Strongly Disagree)**

	Village of Decatur					Decatur Township					Hamilton Township				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
The community should preserve its rural or small town character	50	54	47	24	16	68	29	7	5	4	85	18	11	2	2
The community should review new planning and regulatory techniques to preserve its character	NA					60	30	15	6	3	64	27	19	1	2
Residential lots of less than one acre should be allowed in those areas deemed most	NA					27	29	35	13	18	36	42	18	4	20

<b>appropriate to receive them</b>															
<b>More emphasis should be placed on road improvements</b>	44	60	57	28	4	NA					NA				
<b>Certain parts of the Township/Village should be designed for growth and other parts should be kept as they are now</b>	49	54	56	12	22	51	35	17	9	6	50	40	24	7	7
<b>A mixture of housing types and densities placed in appropriate locations are needed in the community</b>	NA					33	27	38	8	13	22	44	27	12	14
<b>Code enforcement/property maintenance enforcement should be a greater priority in the community</b>	92	48	31	13	10	55	24	14	8	5	59	23	28	7	3
<b>Neighborhood shopping facilities are currently located conveniently to your home</b>	NA					38	40	16	9	14	25	40	20	26	13
<b>Neighborhood shopping facilities are needed and should be encouraged in appropriate locations within the Decatur-Hamilton area</b>	NA					47	32	21	5	13	41	37	23	13	9
<b>More economic and employment opportunities are needed in the Decatur-Hamilton area</b>	NA					68	23	20	3	3	27	31	15	1	1
<b>Areas should be set aside and promoted for industrial development within the Decatur-Hamilton area</b>	NA					55	37	9	6	9	52	40	16	3	8
<b>Preservation of the natural environment should be a top priority</b>	NA					75	18	12	6	10	82	39	15	2	7
	<b>Village of Decatur</b>					<b>Decatur Township</b>					<b>Hamilton Township</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Existing recreational areas and facilities in the region are adequate to serve the community needs</b>	NA					26	29	25	25	10	21	40	26	16	16
<b>Additional recreation areas and facilities should be created within the community</b>	53	49	36	25	36	28	29	29	13	15	26	35	41	5	14
<b>Arts and Culture are well represented in the Village</b>	12	33	72	48	28	NA					NA				

<b>There is a clear plan and direction for the future within the Village</b>	13	26	76	43	26	NA					NA				
<b>There is a strong community spirit within the Village</b>	36	71	45	22	15	NA					NA				
<b>Regular testing of water quality in area lakes should be conducted</b>						83	23	10	0	0	54	35	13	2	0

**6. Rate your needs for the following utilities.**

	Village of Decatur					Decatur Township					Hamilton Township				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Public Sanitary Sewer</b>	53	49	66	17	9	40	13	25	7	28	20	9	26	10	53
<b>Public Water</b>	14	37	56	33	66	46	9	23	6	30	12	12	27	12	52
<b>Natural Gas</b>	NA					60	21	17	4	10	51	17	24	4	19
<b>Electric Service</b>	NA					77	15	10	1	5	66	11	22	4	12
<b>Village Police Department</b>	62	58	56	12	7	NA					NA				
<b>Village Government</b>	31	55	78	15	13	NA					NA				
<b>Decatur Public School System</b>	30	60	72	17	13	NA					NA				
<b>Village Public Works Department</b>	67	52	51	9	9	NA					NA				
<b>Cable</b>	NA					19	20	25	6	37	7	16	34	6	51

7. Of the following three, Industrial Development, Retail/Commercial Development, and Residential Development, the Village efforts should concentrate on:

	Industrial	Retail/Commercial	Residential
First	72	62	34
Second	43	64	45
Third	37	30	83

8. Please answer yes or no to the following questions:

	Yes	No
I would support a mandatory Village wide trash pickup service, if the costs were significantly lower than what I am currently paying.	167	29
The Village should aggressively recruit new industry and retail/commercial businesses.	165	29
Should the Village consider adopting a rental inspection ordinance?	146	44
Should the Village ever consider chlorinating the water system?	83	97
Preserving the Villages small town character is more important than attracting more businesses.	55	124
The Village's housing stock is adequate..	70	90

## APPENDIX 2. Summary of Conservation Options

### LAND PROTECTION OPTIONS

Land Protection Option	Description	Results	Income Tax Deduction?*	Estate Tax Reduction?*
Conservation easement	Legal agreement between a landowner and a land conservancy or government agency permanently limiting a property's uses.	Important features of the property protected by organization. Owner continues to own, use, and live on land.	Yes	Yes
Outright land donation	Land is donated to the land conservancy.	Organization owns, manages, and protects land.	Yes	Yes
Donation of land by will	Land is specifically designated for donation to the land conservancy.	Organization owns, manages, and protects land.	No	Yes
Donation of remainder interest in land with reserved life estate	Personal residence or farm is donated to the land conservancy, but owner (or others designated) continue to live there, usually until death.	Organization owns remainder interest in the land, but owners (others) continue to live on and manage land during their lifetime subject to a conservation restriction.	Yes	Yes
Bargain sale of land	Land is sold to the land conservancy below fair market value. It provides cash, but may also reduce capital gains tax, and entitle you to an income tax deduction.	Organization owns, manages, and protects land.	Yes	Yes

\*In most cases. The amounts of income tax and estate tax reduction depend on a number of factors. Please consult your own professional tax and/or legal advisor.  
 (Adapted from Conservation Options: A Landowner's Guide, published by the Land Trust Alliance and available at the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, (269) 324-1600)

**LAND MANAGEMENT OPTIONS\*\***

<b>Land Management Option</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Agreement</b>	<b>Landowner reimbursement</b>
Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)	Provides technical and financial assistance to promote wildlife habitat including corridor, riparian buffer and rare species habitat development	Contracts run for a minimum of 5 years and a maximum of 10 years.	Up to 75% of cost of improvements.
Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)	Assists in restoring active agricultural land to natural wetland condition.	Agreements can be 10-year, 30-year or perpetual.	Up to 75% of cost of improvements or 100% for permanent agreements.
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Assists in restoring agricultural land to wildlife habitat.	Agreements can last 2-10 years.	Up to 75% of cost of improvements.

\*\*These are just a few of many examples. For more information contact Van Buren Conservation District office at 269-657-4030 x5.

### **APPENDIX 3. Financing Tools**

Successful implementation of the Master Plan will depend greatly on the ability of the Decatur-Hamilton area to secure necessary financing. Besides the general fund, the following sources of revenue may be available:

#### Dedicated Millage

Special millages can be used to generate revenue for specific purposes, such as acquisition of land or easements for open space protection.

#### Special Assessments

Special assessments are compulsory contributions collected from the owners of property benefited by specific public improvements, such as paving and drainage improvements, to defray the costs of such improvements. Special assessments are apportioned according to the assumed benefits to the property affected.

#### Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA)

The Home Improvement Program provides low interest loans for home improvements through local lending institutions. The Home Improvement Program (HIP) is not targeted to any specific area, and could be utilized throughout the entire planning area. Interest rates are related to income and the property must be twenty years or older or in need of repair. The program is intended to correct items that are hazardous to health and safety or for items related to energy conservation.

- \* Neighborhood Improvement Program. The Neighborhood Improvement Program (NIP) is another home improvement program managed by MSHDA, but is directed toward specific revitalization areas. Loans, with interest rates dependent on income, are made available to homeowners within such areas. The program operates very similarly to the HIP with local lending institutions participating in the program.
  
- \* Rental Rehabilitation Program. The Rental Rehabilitation Program (RRP) provides funds to rental property owners willing to rent to low and moderate income persons.

The funds must be used for renovation and rehabilitation activities and may be used for freestanding residential buildings as well as the second and third stories of commercial buildings. Restrictions include the income of the tenant, a required funding match by the property owner, and a commitment to rent to low and moderate-income tenants for a period of at least five years.

#### Community Development Block Grant Funds (CDBG)

The Community Development Block Grant program is an annual allocation of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to local governments for a wide range of community development activities, including housing rehabilitation, public, and neighborhood improvements and economic development activities which primarily benefit low and moderate income persons.

#### Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA), P.A. 281 of 1986

Act 281 is the primary means of making tax increment financing procedures available to assist industrial development. The LDFA Act is targeted toward individual eligible properties, rather than toward a development district, as in the case of a Downtown Development Authority. The village could establish an LDFA board, which would then have the power to plan, build public facilities, acquire land, clear and redevelop land, along with other development powers.

#### Transportation Efficiency Act (TEA-21)

This program was established to replace the previous federal transportation planning and funding program, Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, generally referred to as ISTEA. A component of TEA-21 is the provision of funds for non-motorized transportation facilities, transportation aesthetics, mitigation of water pollution due to highway runoff, and transportation related historic preservation. Locally, this program is administered through the Michigan Department of Transportation with involvement of the local Metropolitan Planning Organization, Southwestern Michigan Commission.

#### Rehabilitation Act

Public Act 344 of 1945 is the basic Michigan rehabilitation statute. It provides powers and procedures for local governments to acquire, assemble, and finance the redevelopment of blighted areas for general rehabilitation purposes.

#### HUD Section 202/8

This is a federally sponsored program, which provides mortgage financing and rent subsidies for the construction and maintenance of elderly housing. Only non-profit, private organizations (such as churches, unions, fraternal, and other similar organizations) are eligible sponsors, but local governments usually cooperate in the assembly of land, applications, public improvements, and supportive actions. Such projects are tax-exempt, but the state rebates an equivalent amount to local tax jurisdictions.

#### Special Assessments

This technique allows for the financing of public improvements, such as roads or streetlights, through the assessing of property taxes, on an equitable basis, to the benefited property owners in a specific district.

#### Shared Credit Rating Program - Michigan Municipal Bond Authority (MMBA)

This program created under Public Act 227 of 1985 offers municipalities the opportunity to take advantage of the state's improved credit rating. Because the MMBA is authorized to issue bonds to make loans to Michigan municipalities through the purchase of municipal obligations, the Authority allows municipalities to borrow funds for their capital and operating needs without going to the expense or trouble of entering the bond market on their own. Many small communities are at a disadvantage when issuing debt in the bond market because they frequently have no bond ratings and potential investors know little about their finances or economy. In addition, some communities tend to borrow infrequently, and in small amounts. Because such debt issues are not particularly attractive to the financial markets, borrowing costs for such communities can be high.

#### Bond Programs

Bonds are one of the principal financing tools used by communities to pay for capital improvements. General obligation bonds are issued for specific community projects and are paid off by the general public with property tax revenues. Revenue bonds are issued for the construction of projects that generate revenue, such as water and sewer projects. The bonds are then retired using income generated by the project.

#### Tax Increment Financing

The Downtown Development Authority Act and the Local Development Finance Authority Act authorize tax increment financing. When a tax increment district is established, the state equalized value of all properties in the district is recorded. Every year thereafter, the property tax revenue generated by any increase in the total state equalized value is “captured” by the DDA or LDFA to finance the improvements set forth in the development plan. Often revenue bonds are issued to finance the improvements, and the tax increment revenues are used to repay the bonds.