



**HAMILTON
TOWNSHIP**
VAN BUREN COUNTY
ESTABLISHED 1839



**DECATUR
TOWNSHIP**



Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025 Update

Adopted:

Decatur Village, MI – February 3, 2025

Decatur Township, MI – February 13, 2025

Hamilton Township, MI – January 16, 2025

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Introduction

Overview

The Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 Community 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 today. This snapshot includes information relative to natural features, socio-economic characteristics, and land use.

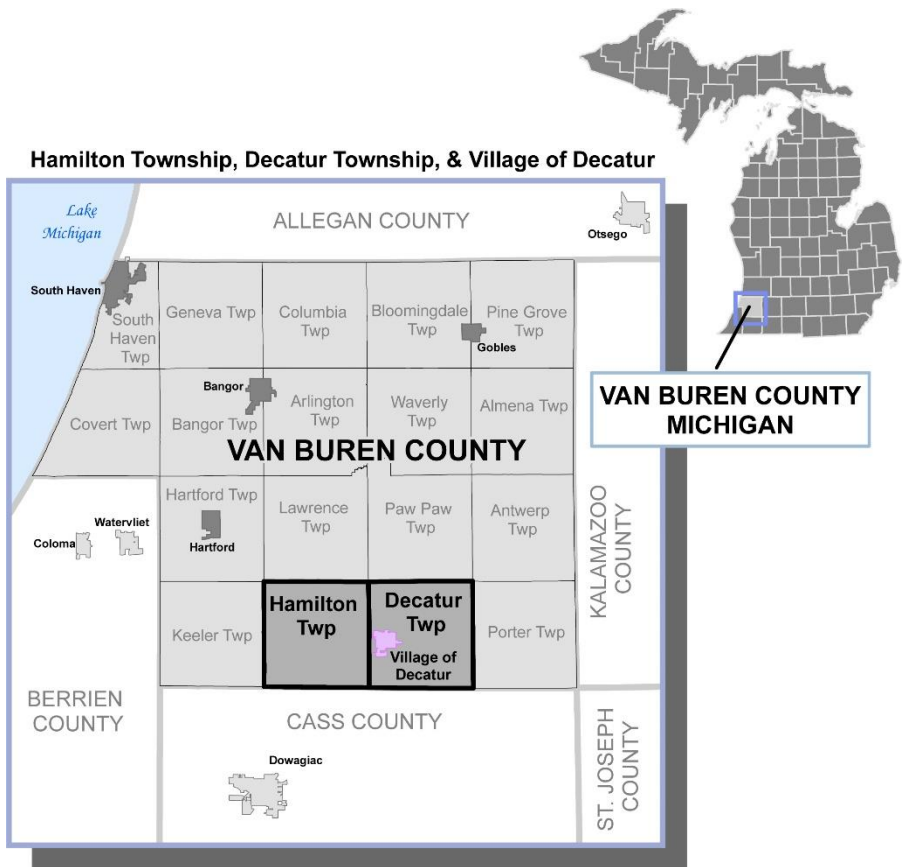
Identification of existing conditions is followed by clarifying the visions and goals of the local communities. This is achieved using community surveys, visioning sessions, and discussions with a wide cross-section of community members. From this step a series of goals are developed that are then combined 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 and open space preservation. 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

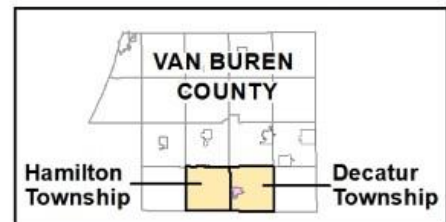
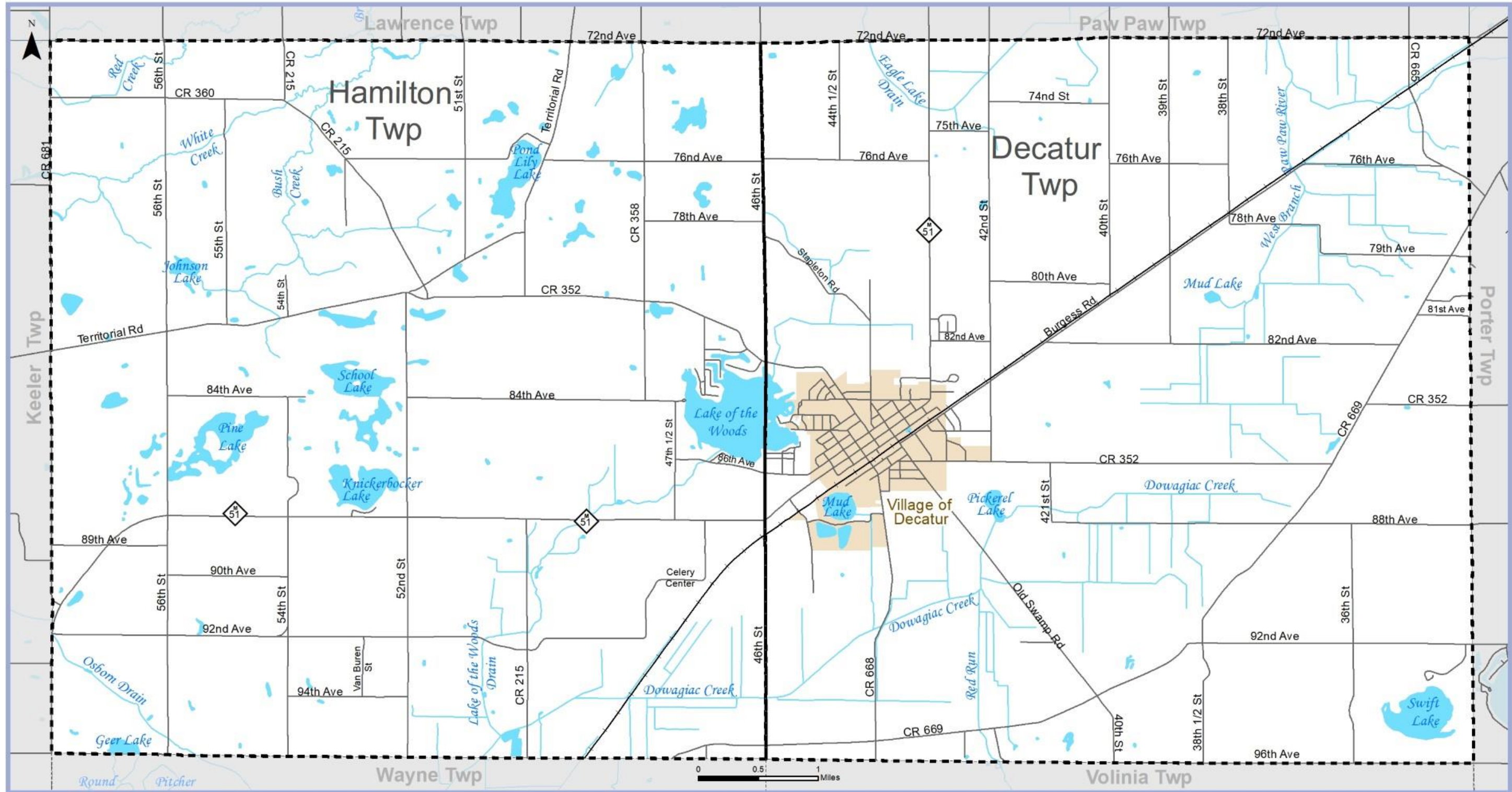
The Decatur-Hamilton Community, which for the purposes of this plan is defined to include the Village of Decatur, Hamilton Township, and Decatur Township, is located in the extreme southern portion of Van Buren County, in the southwestern section of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. The area is located approximately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

The Decatur-Hamilton Community lies in what is referred to as Michigan’s “Fruit Belt”. The farms in the area tend to focus on crops such as 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 Community. Historic and contemporary agricultural activities contributed significantly to the development of the Village of Decatur, known as Celery City, as a commercial center and to the rural character of both Decatur and Hamilton Townships.



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

The Decatur-Hamilton Community lies within the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) service 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. Transportation planning, economic development planning, grant writing, and community (master plans, recreation plans, hazard mitigation) planning are some examples of the range of services provided by SWMPC. For more information about SWMPC visit www.swmpc.org.



- Legend**
- Township
 - Village
 - Water
 - Road
 - Railroad

Decatur & Hamilton Township Village of Decatur

Data Sources
 Base Map: MGF 17v
 Roads: SWMPC 2023

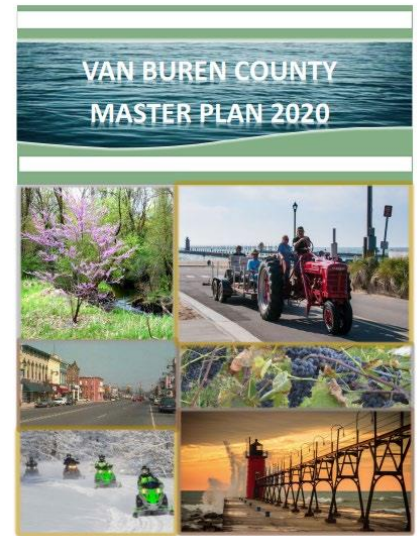
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
www.swmpc.org
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 October 11, 2024 Fig06_Twp_Base

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 Master Plan. The county's plan provides context necessary to help local governments in the County develop and apply land use objectives and strategies compatible with surrounding areas. The County Plan was developed based on the Guiding Principles adopted by the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP). The MAP Community Planning Principles have also been adopted by both the Decatur and Hamilton Township Planning Commissions. The county plan is meant to serve as a guide that facilitates land use decisions in Van Buren County and used by the County Planning Commission as a tool in its advisory role. The plan is structured into the following eight Areas of Focus and value statements:

- Focus Area 1: Agricultural Character/Rural Living: Van Buren County's rural character and agricultural landscapes are treasures that need to be protected, promoted and preserved.
- Focus Area 2: Housing Needs: Van Buren County values a diverse mix of housing types that fit into existing neighborhoods and small towns, as well as preservation of the rural housing landscape.
- Focus Area 3: Recreational Destination: Van Vuren County values recreation as a key source of local tourism and an economic driver for the community.
- Focus Area 4: Small Towns and High-Density Areas: Van Buren County values concentrated, walkable community nodes that offer economic and housing options and create a strong sense of place within the County.

- Focus Area 5: Transportation, Infrastructure, and Corridors: Maintaining community infrastructure and providing safe and effective transportation linkages to key area-wide destinations is a top priority for the County.
- Focus Area 6: Natural Assets: Van Buren County values its natural features, open spaces and landscapes that provide the basis for the health of the local economy and quality of life for its residents.
- Focus Area 7: Development Standards: Van Buren County values the protection of its key resources and investment in existing areas of development.
- Focus Area 8: Collaborative Leadership/Role in Region: Van Buren County values the creation of opportunities for local units, the grass-roots decision-makers, to collaborate with each other and other potential partners on land use issues of interest and common impact.



Further, the Van Buren County Hazard Mitigation Plan developed by the Emergency Preparedness Office of the Sherriff addresses natural and man-made hazards threatening the county. Many mitigation strategies involve local land use planning, zoning and decision making. This county plan must be updated every 5 years and approved by each local unit of government.

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 people. In its earliest years, the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 Community. 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.

By the turn of the century, the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 Community 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 Community 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, Benton Harbor/St. Joseph and South Haven, high quality of life, and strong agricultural base, the area thrives as a prosperous rural community and area of residential growth.

Survey and Analysis

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.

Geology¹ and Topography²

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 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.

¹ Soil Survey of Van Buren County, USDA

² United States Geologic Survey Topographical Quadrangle Maps, Van Buren County

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. Within Decatur Township and Hamilton Township, there is very little change in topography except for 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.

Soils³

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 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

³ Soil Survey of Van Buren County, USDA

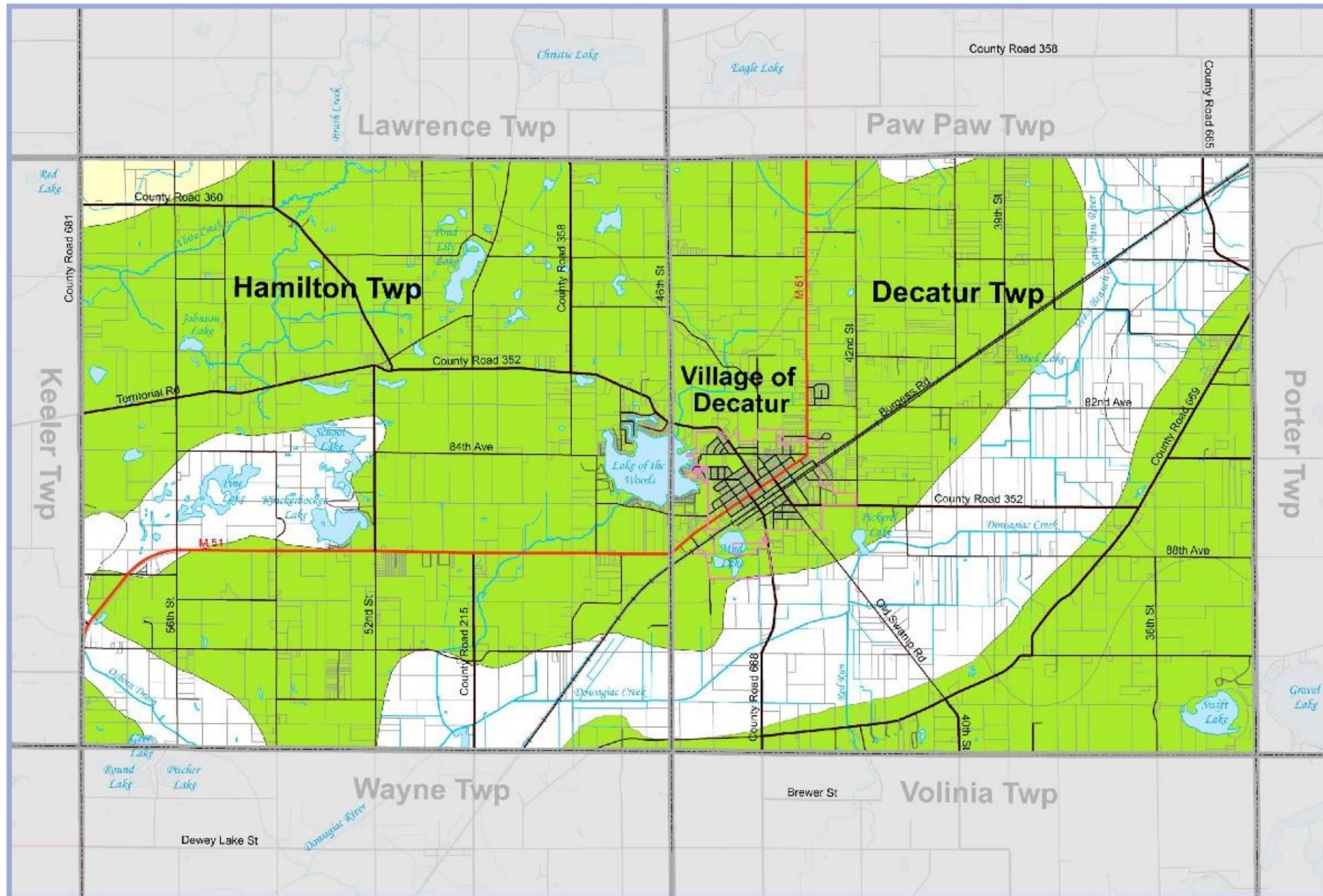
and septic tank absorption fields, with water ponding, poor filtering capacity, and seepage being the major concerns. The soils in this association are generally unsuited to cultivated crops due to the difficulty associated with drainage, though they are generally well suited or fairly well suited for 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 Community.

The characteristics of soils found within the Decatur-Hamilton Community have greatly influenced the historical land use patterns and are likely to continue to influence development patterns into the future. 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.

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 Community, 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.

Prime Farmland



Legend

- Township
- Parcel
- Prime Farmland**
 - Prime Farm
 - Prime if Drained
 - Not Prime
 - Not Shown

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

Water Features

There is an integral relationship between water resources, water quality, and land use. People need and use water for everyday life. People also live by bodies of water for aesthetics and recreational purposes. Farmers use water 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.

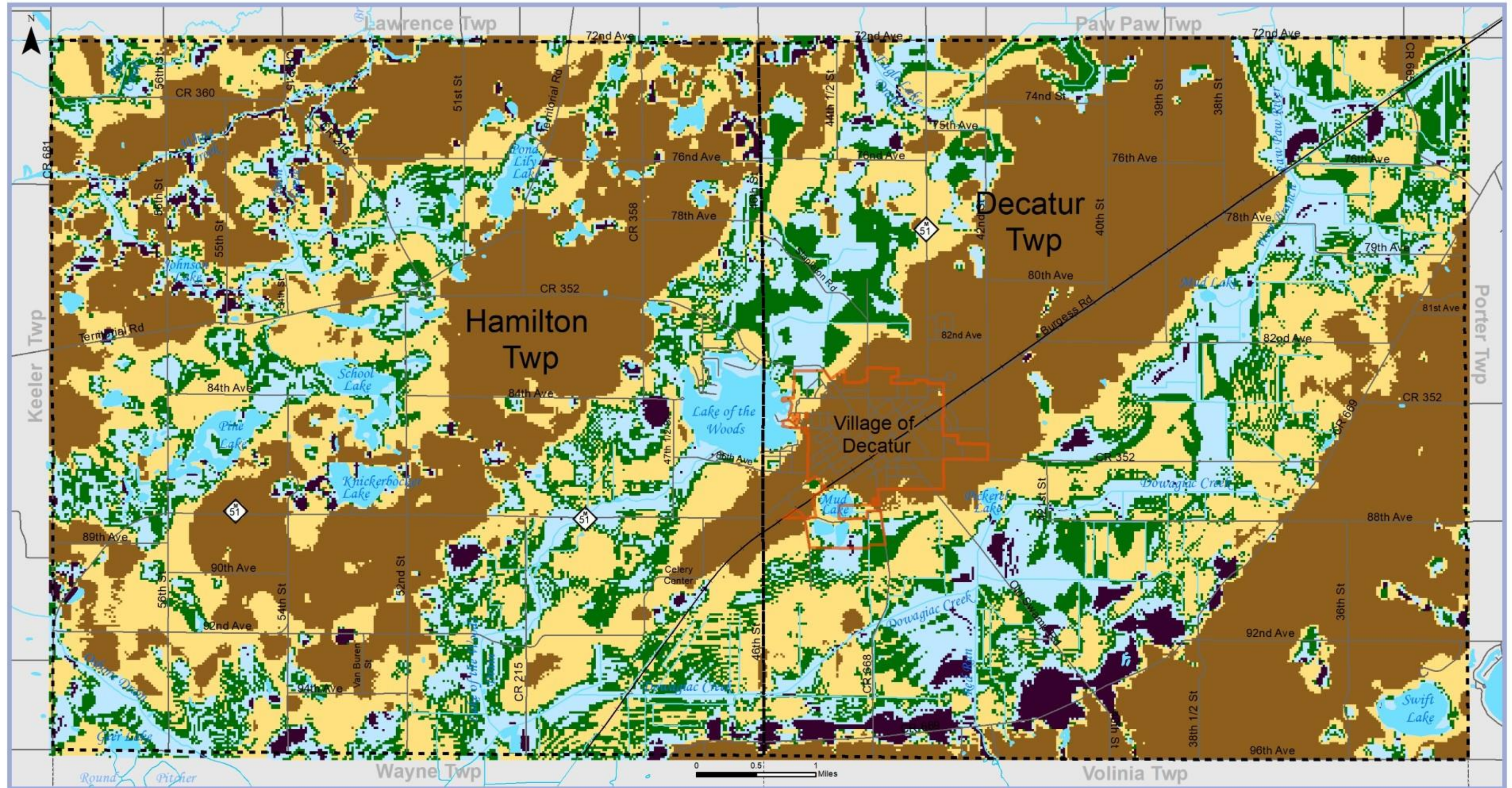
Water quality is a term used to describe the chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of water, usually in respect to its suitability for a particular purpose such as drinking, swimming, fishing, etc.

Water resources are vital to planning and guiding land use decisions. Certain land uses require access to water; others require 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.

The preservation and conservation of surface and groundwater 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 surface and groundwater 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 groundwater quality.

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

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR PROTECTING WATER QUALITY			
Homeowners	Agriculture Landowners	Developers/Builders	Municipalities
Use native plants in landscaping	Leave vegetated strips along water bodies	Use low impact development techniques	Enact ordinances protecting water and natural resources
Establish and maintain natural vegetation along drains, creeks, rivers and lakes	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 and rain gardens	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	



Base Layers

- Township
- Village
- Water
- Road
- Railroad

Depth to Water Table

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

Depth to High Water Table Decatur & Hamilton Township Village of Decatur

Data Sources

Base Map: MGF 17v
 Roads: SWMPC 2023
 Depth to Water Table: Groundwater
 Inventory & Mapping Project, MGF 2005

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
www.swmpc.org

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October 11, 2024

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Watersheds

The Decatur-Hamilton Community is located within a unique area that includes two 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). Additionally, both the Paw Paw and Dowagiac River Watersheds are part of the larger St. Joseph River Watershed and the Lake Michigan Watershed. 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 encompasses 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 Community is 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, the 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 Community 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

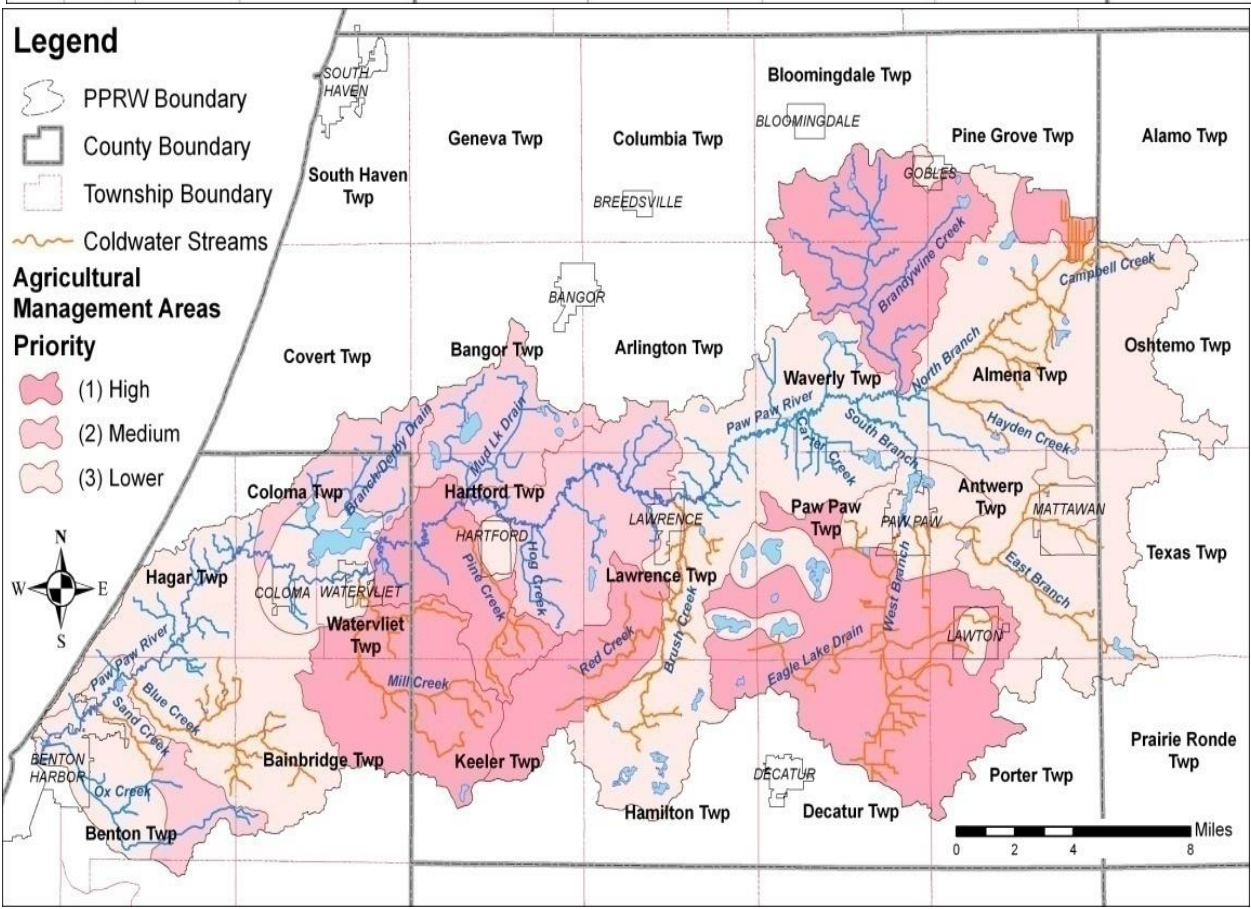
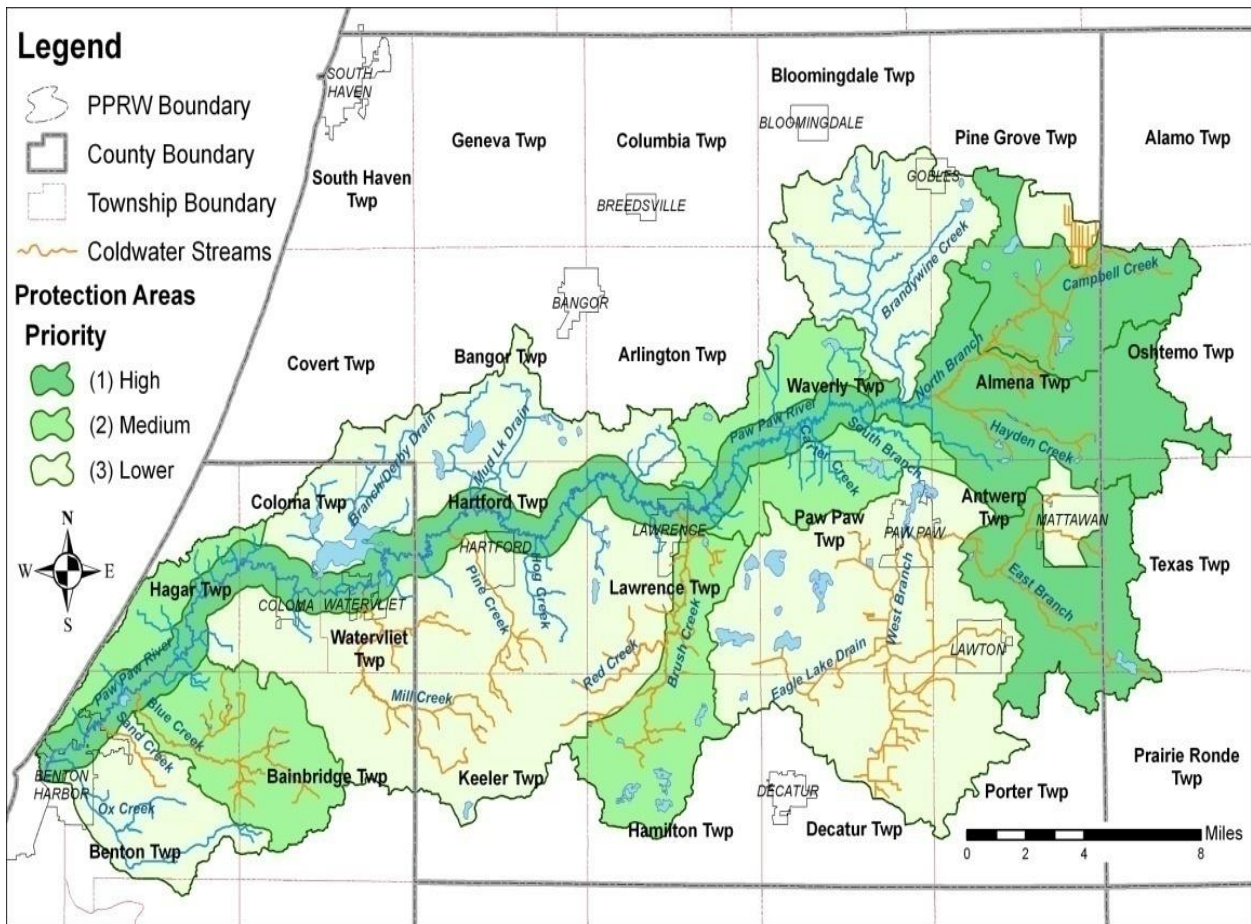
The PPRW encompasses approximately 285,557 acres (446 square miles) in Kalamazoo, Van Buren and Berrien Counties. The largest portion of the watershed lies in Van Buren County, with approximately 203,720 acres. Decatur and Hamilton Township have approximately 4,400 acres within the Paw Paw River Watershed.

The PPRW is a priority for protection and preservation among southern Michigan watersheds because a relatively high percentage of its natural land cover remains despite 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/water.asp.



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.

Water Bodies

The lakes in the Decatur-Hamilton Community are what draw many people to the area. 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 Townships. Other sizeable lakes include; Knickerbocker Lake, Swift Lake, Pond Lily Lake, Mud Lake and School Lake. Table 1 lists the lakes within the Townships and their size.

Table 1. Area Lakes and Acreage

LAKE NAME	ACRES
Dowagiac River Watershed	
Lake of the Woods	300
Geer Lake	15
Knickerbocker Lake	82
Johnson Lake	16
Paw Paw River Watershed	
Swift Lake	106
Pond Lily Lake	66
Mud Lake	30
Pickeral Lake	16
School Lake	63

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.

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.

Natural Shorelines are a key component of a healthy lake, stream, drain or river. The conversion of shorelines to turf grass and/or seawalls is the most destructive action for lake

ecosystems. Turf grass provides little habitat (except for geese) and has shorter and weaker roots systems compared to native plants. The short roots of turf grass provide less protection from eroding forces of wave and ice action.

Below are some tips from the Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership. You can find more information at <http://www.mishorelinepartnership.org/>.

Protecting the Shoreline

Prevention:

- 1) Site your house a minimum of 100 ft away from the lake (if building new)
- 2) For reconstruction - keep the footprint of the house the same.
- 3) Minimize impervious areas (hard surfaces).
- 2) Keep it natural! Do not remove the trees, shrubs and other vegetation to put in a lawn.
- 3) Keep stormwater from running directly into the lake.
- 4) Keep some woody branches in the lake to provide habitat.
- 5) Keep the native plants in the lake or only remove a limited amount for boating access or swimming.
- 6) Don't put in a seawall - *there are alternatives.*

Restoration:

- 1) Replace as much turf grass as you can with native vegetation. You can have fun and create some beautiful landscapes
- 2) Control Erosion: Different sites require different solutions. The lower the wave energy at your site generally the easier and less complex the solution. Some sites will only need to have the plants restored some will require more complex techniques using a system of coir fiber logs and plants and some will require the use of rock as well.
- 3) Restore the near shore areas (littoral zone): Share the space with the plants and provide safe havens for frogs, turtles and fish. Plants in the water along the shore help protect the shoreline by absorbing wave energy as waves come into the shore.

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

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.

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 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

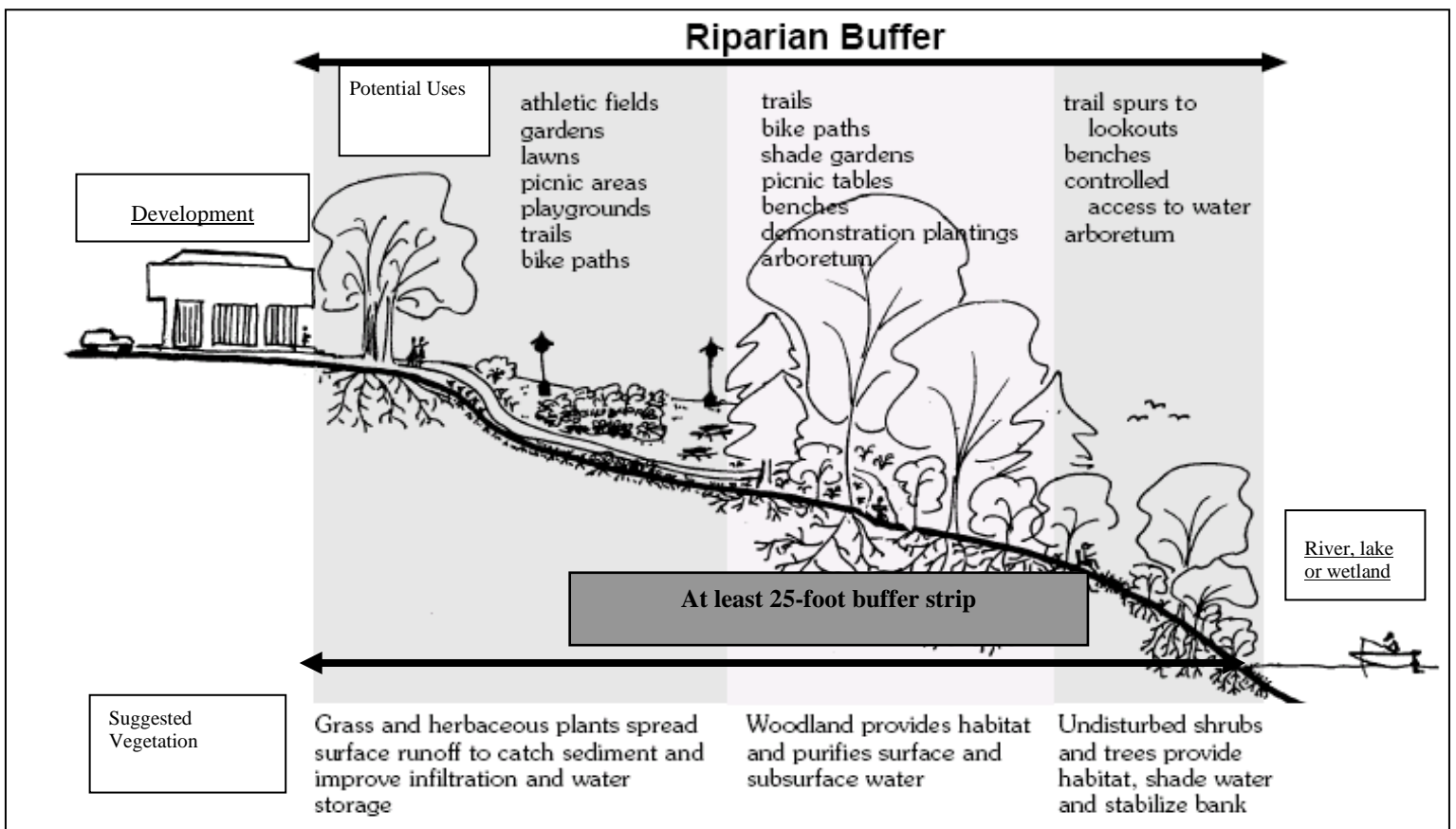
feet wide to improve the water quality of runoff. The setbacks of buildings should be at least 100 feet, but may be more if wetlands, floodplains or steep slopes are present along streams, rivers or lakes.

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 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 in the northwestern and extreme northeastern and southeastern portions of the Township.

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

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 Environment, Great Lakes and Energy 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 these 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.

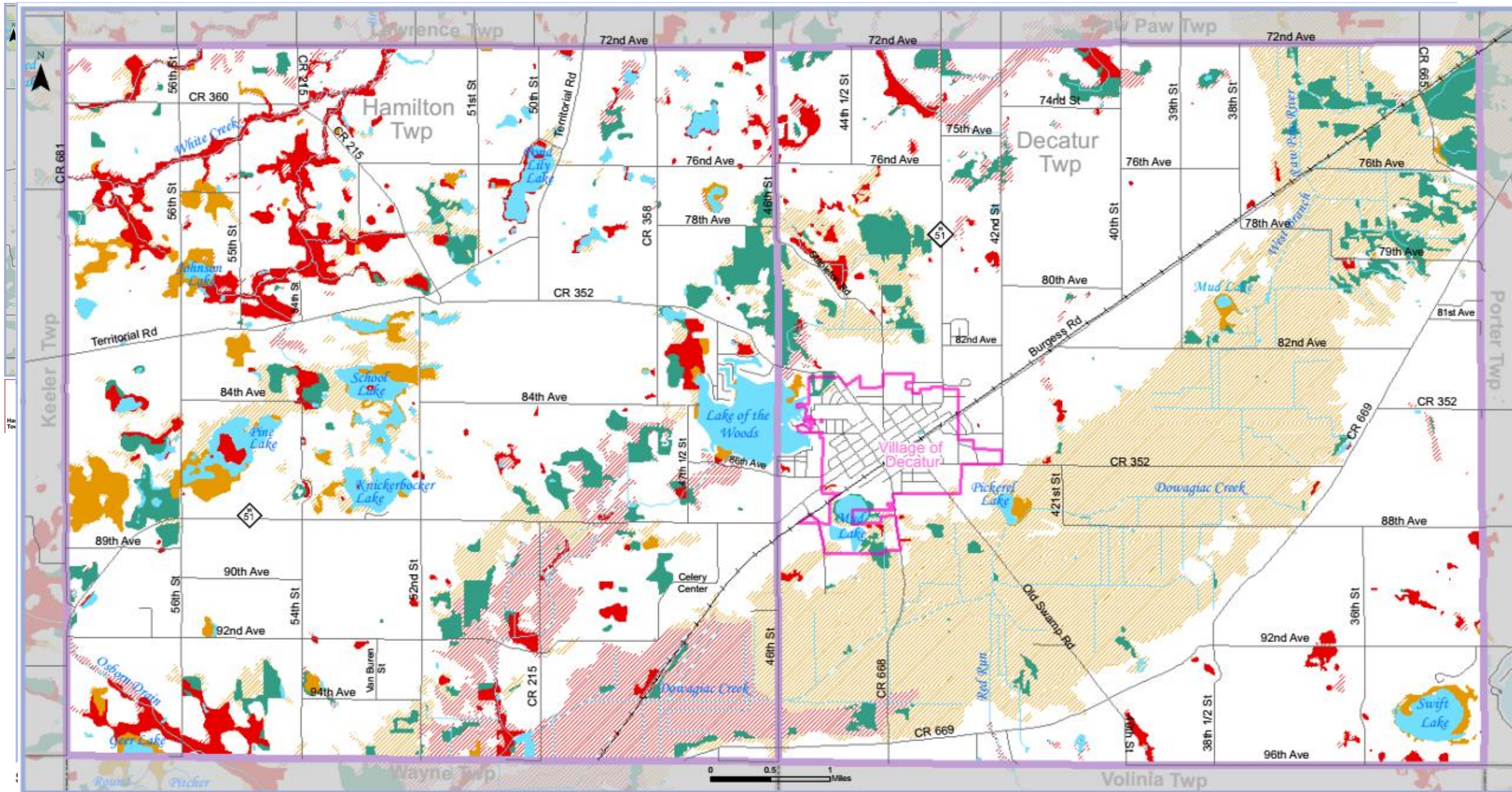
Wetland and floodplain protection is extremely important for the health, safety and welfare of residents. Especially because so many wetlands have been lost since pre-settlement times, with Hamilton Township at 55%, Decatur Township at 85% and Decatur Village at 47%. This loss of wetlands has had severe negative effects on the water quality and the ability to mitigate flooding.

Table 2. Wetlands

WETLANDS			
	HAMILTON TWP	DECATUR TWP	DECATUR VILLAGE
Existing Wetland Acres (2010)	3,010.28	1,435.81	54.53
Lost Wetland Acres (since pre-settlement)	3,630.15	7,958.04	48.16
Total Wetlands	6,640.43	9,393.85	102.69
Percent Loss Since Pre-settlement	55%	85%	47%

The following maps show the lost and existing wetlands and which wetlands are and were significant for filtering sediment and nutrients (that cause algae and nuisance weed growth in the

lakes) and for mitigating flooding. With this much loss of wetland acres and wetland functions, additional wetland loss will be extremely detrimental in these communities causing increased water pollution and more flooding.



Wetland Functional Assessment*
FLOOD WATER RETENTION
 Decatur & Hamilton Township
 Village of Decatur

*Wetland Functional Assessment rates wetlands according to its ability to perform specific ecological functions. Shown on this map are wetlands that function at higher levels to retain flood water.
 December 08, 2015

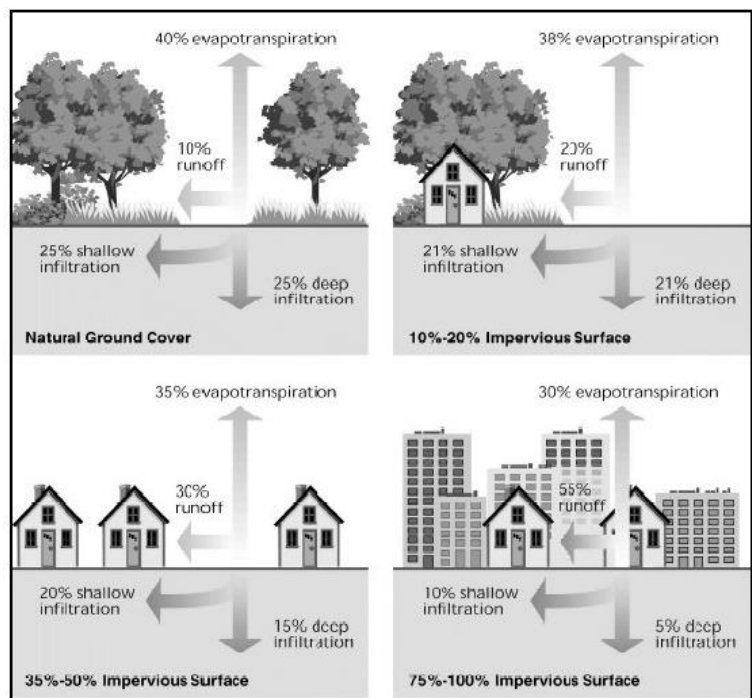
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
www.swmpc.org
 The use of this map is for general reference purposes. It is not a legal document.
 Data Sources:
 Base Map: MCGI14v
 Wetland: MDEQ, 2012

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 also have negative impacts on our water quality. When chemicals, oil, grease, salt, etc. 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 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.

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 can filter down back into the 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



The diagram shows what happens when natural ground covers, such as native plants and trees, are removed and replaced with impervious surfaces.

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.

Stormwater management should be concerned with controlling both the quality and quantity of water moving off a developed site. First, Low Impact Development techniques to protect natural features, natural drainage ways and existing topography should be utilized. Then the amount of impervious surfaces in new construction and redevelopment 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 areas. See www.swmpc.org/lid.asp for information on implementing LID in new and redevelopments.

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.

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.



This shows sedimentation of a river from a small tributary.

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 buildup of sediment in rivers, lakes and harbors. There are simple measures that residents, developers and municipalities can take to control 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.

The natural features such as native vegetation, woodlands, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors 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.

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

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

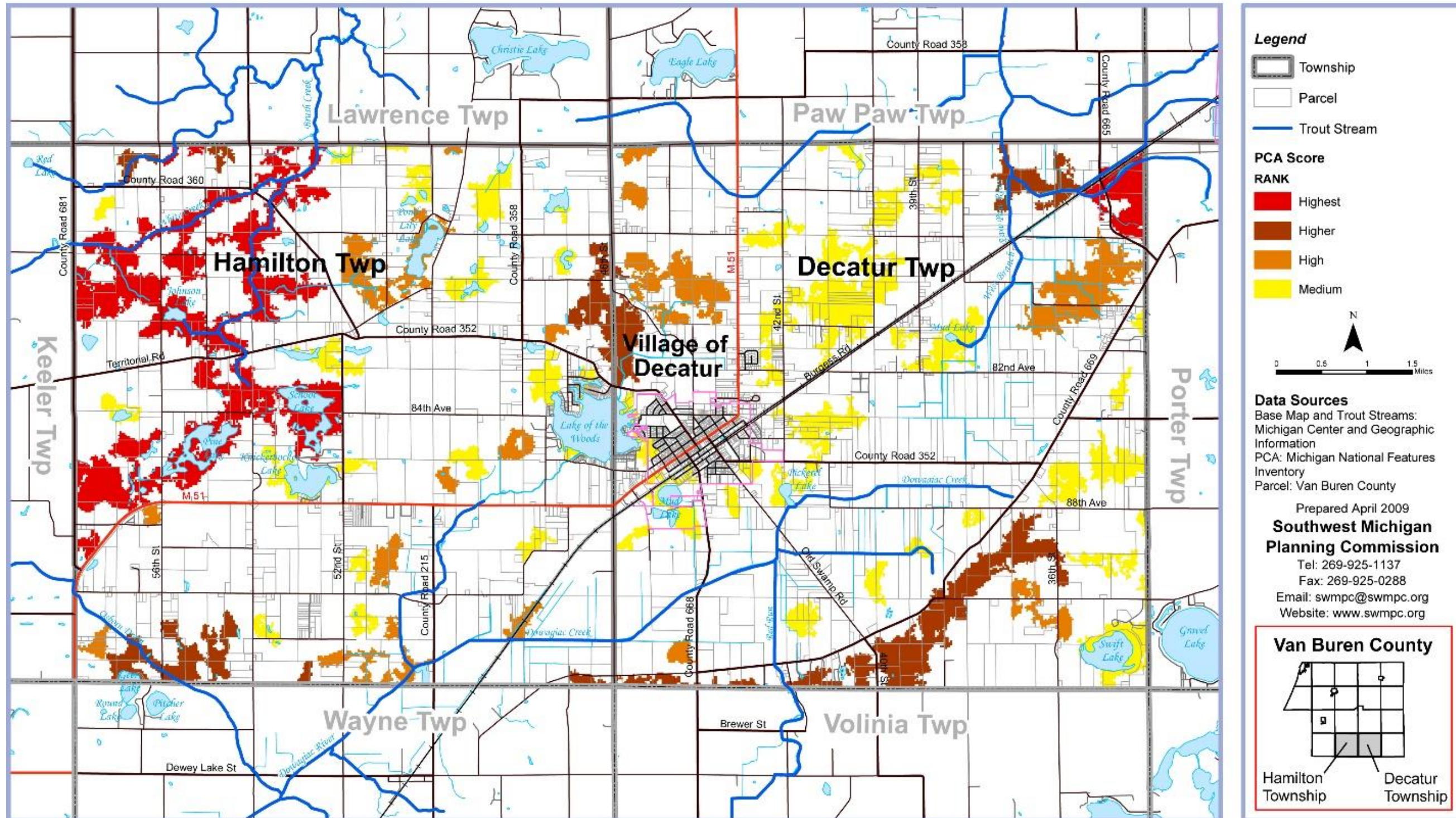
wildlife habitat. Green infrastructure elements can be in urban, suburban and rural areas and may or may not be open to the public. **Green infrastructure is essential to the health, safety and welfare of the area residents.**

Natural resource 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 have 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 Community 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)



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 each Township consists of 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 where intensive development

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.

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, foxes 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 based on 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 habitats. 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 the 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 in width 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 67% of the land in the Townships and Village. 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 2017, Van Buren County ranked statewide 1st in fruits, tree nuts and berries, 4th in cultivated Christmas trees and 5th in vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes. In 2017, there were 953 farms in Van Buren County of these 158 were orchards and 98 were vegetable farms. There was a total of 151,784 acres of land in farms with 6,833 acres in orchards, 8,190 acres in vegetables, 40,307 acres in grain corn and 28,063 in soybeans. The average size of a farm in Van Buren County in 2017 was 159 acres. In 2017, in Van Buren County the average market value of agricultural products sold per farm was \$215,686 with the total market value of agricultural products in the County valued at \$205,549,000.

The Decatur-Hamilton area is known for its muck soil, many of which 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 3. Van Buren County Farmland and Agricultural Statistics, 1987-2017

Categories	1987	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012	2017	2012-2017 percent change
Total Acres of Farmland	190,251	206,781	189,432	176,260	185,343	175,121	151,784	-13%
Acres in Orchards	18,663	19,232	15,480	10,281	10,312	9,480	6,833	-28%
Acres in Vegetables	14,853	13,734	12,069	10,553	8,509	7,242	8,190	13%
Acres in Corn (for grain)	35,282	38,255	34,695	31,870	44,259	55,362	40,307	-27%
Acres in Soybeans	9,684	23,679	24,702	29,321	26,843	18,730	28,063	50%
Total Number of farms	1,278	1,164	1,217	1,160	1,232	1,113	953	-14%
Number of Orchards	373	312	256	188	177	158	141	-11%
Number of Vegetable Farms	201	158	104	91	85	98	67	-32%
Average Size of Farm	149	178	156	152	150	157	159	1%
Median Size of Farm	N	N	73	70	N	N	45	
Total Market Value of Agricultural Products (\$)	69,624,000	84,931,000	104,868,000	96,724,000	173,472,000	194,664,000	205,549,000	6%

Categories	1987	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012	2017	2012-2017 percent change
Average Market Value of Agricultural Products per Farm (\$)	54,479	72,965	86,169	83,382	140,805	174,900	215,686	23%
Hogs and Pigs Inventory (farms)	147	119	68	36	45	21	29	38%
Hogs and Pigs Inventory (number)	56,167	52,055	29,477	24,985	20,075	4,655	10,509	126%
Hogs and Pigs Sold (farms)	152	116	64	41	51	33	44	33%
Hogs and Pigs Sold (number)	84,358	103,464	56,245	67,997	50,275	(D)*	60,122	

N-no data Source: US Department of Agriculture, 1987, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022 Census of Agriculture

**(D)- Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual farms.*

The 2022 Crop Data map from USDA shows the different crops being grown in the area.

Table 4. Cropland Data 2022 – Total for Townships and Village

Type	Acres	Percent	Percent Change 2010-2022
Developed	3476	7.6%	23%
Corn/Soybean/Grains	2,1380	47.0%	5%
Vegetable	979	2.2%	95%
Pasture/Hay/Grassland	2,338	5.1%	-60%
Orchards/Vineyard/Berries	2,825	6.2%	1%
Wetland	6,519	14.3%	32%
Forests	7,216	15.9%	-3%
Water	494	1.1%	-6%
Developed Open Space	251	0.6%	-23%
TOTAL ACRES	45,482		

Table 5. Cropland Data 2022 –Hamilton Township

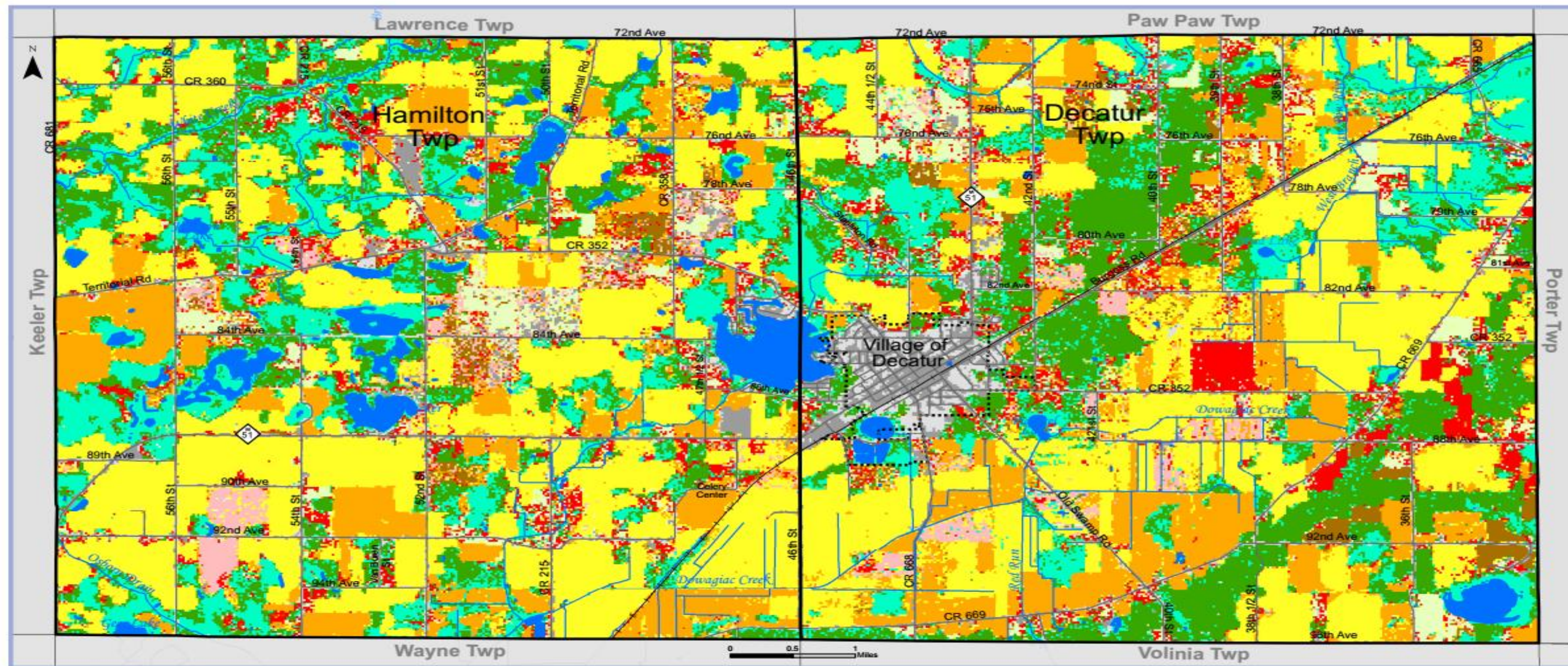
Type	Acres	Percent	Percent Change 2010-2022
Developed	1,575	6.9%	32%
Corn/Soybean/Grains	11,054	48.6%	9%
Vegetable	542	2.4%	140%
Pasture/Hay/Grassland	1,098	4.8%	-65%
Orchards/Vineyard/Berries	1,212	5.3%	-10%
Wetland	3,837	16.9%	26%
Forests	3,042	13.4%	-6%
Water	368	1.6%	6%
TOTAL ACRES	22,727		

Table 6. Cropland Data 2022 –Decatur Township

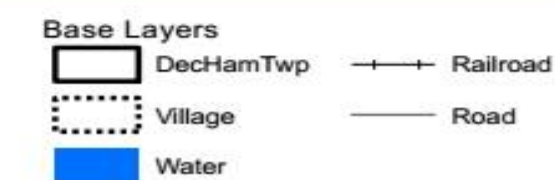
Type	Acres	Percent	Percent Change 2010-2022
Developed	1,501	6.66%	15%
Corn/Soybean/Grains	10296	45.66%	1%
Vegetable	434	1.99%	59%
Pasture/Hay/Grassland	1,225	5.61%	-52%
Orchards/Vineyard/Berries	1,580	7.24%	12%
Wetland	2,613	11.97%	41%
Forests	4,082	18.70%	0%
Water	103	0.47%	-36%
Developed Open Space	719	3.29%	
TOTAL ACRES	22,552		

Table 7. Cropland Data 2022 – Decatur Village

Type	Acres	Percent	Percent Change 2010-2022
Developed	400	43.44%	23.02%
Corn/Soybean/Grains	30	3.26%	-44.67%
Vegetable	3	0.39%	-0.05%
Pasture/Hay/Grassland	16	1.81%	-52.53%
Orchards/Vineyard/Berries	33	3.62%	19.05%
Wetland	69	7.55%	144.50%
Forests	92	10.06%	-11.84%
Water	24	2.63%	15.93%
Developed Open Space	251	27.26%	-22.87%
TOTAL ACRES	922		



CROPLAND
Decatur & Hamilton Township
Village of Decatur



Data Sources: Base Map: MGF 17v
Cropland: USDA 2022
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
The use of this map is for general reference purposes. It is not a legal document.
November 27, 2023 2338_Fig02CDL

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 their Joint Comprehensive Plan realizing the following benefits from farming:

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. Statistically, there was a 6% loss of farmland in Van Buren County from 2007-2012 (Census of Agriculture). 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 the Decatur - Hamilton community. The following tools will be utilized to acquire

and protect these resource: Transfer of Development Rights, Purchase of Development Rights and Conservation Easement. The Townships and Village can also utilize open space developments to ensure habitats are left intact. Land Conservancies, such as the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and Michigan Nature Association, provide additional options for communities, businesses and individuals to protect lands. A summary of these options can be found in the Appendix.

Summary:

- The primary environmental constraints to development found in the Decatur-Hamilton Community are wetlands and poorly drained soils.
- There is little change in topography throughout most of the Decatur-Hamilton Community, except for 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 Community 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 shoreline, natural areas and open space which attract residents and visitors to the area. It will be important to encourage natural shorelines to protect these waterbodies.
- A large portion of the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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.
- Agriculture is an important asset to the community and its preservation is critical.

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 2020, populations are as follows: Village of Decatur - 1,651, Decatur Township – 3,575, and Hamilton Township - 1,370. The current population in 2020 for Van Buren County is 75,587. Population estimates reveal a four percent decline in population in Decatur Township over the past ten years. During the same period, Hamilton Township decreased in population by more than eight percent and the Village of Decatur has decreased by ten percent. These trends differ with Van Buren County which has experienced a small decline in population of less than one percent.

Table 8. Population; Village of Decatur and Nearby Municipalities; 2000-2020

Year	Village of Decatur	Village of Lawton	Village of Lawrence	Village of Paw Paw	City of Dowagiac
2000	1,838	1,859	1,059	3,363	6,147
2010	1,819	1,900	996	3,534	5,879
2020	1,651	1,850	964	3,362	5,721
% Change 2010-2020	-10.18%	-2.70%	-3.32%	-5.12%	-2.76%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 9. Population; Decatur, Hamilton and Surrounding Townships; 2000-2020

Year	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township	Keeler Township	Lawrence Township	Paw Paw Township	Porter Township	Volinia Township	Wayne Township
2000	3,916	1,797	2,601	3,341	7,091	2,406	1,174	2,861
2010	3,726	1,489	2,169	3,259	7,041	2,466	1,112	2,654
2020	3,575	1,370	1,968	3,289	6,881	2,568	1,096	2,576
% Change 2010-2020	-4.22%	-8.69%	-10.21%	0.91%	-2.33%	3.97%	-1.46%	-3.03%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 10. Population; Van Buren, Cass and Berrien County; 2000-2020

	Van Buren County	Cass County	Berrien County
2000	76,263	51,104	162,453
2010	76,258	52,293	156,813
2020	75,587	51,589	154,316
% Change 2010 - 2020	-0.89%	-1.36%	-1.62%

Source: U.S. Census

Comparison of Age Groups

Consistent with national trends, the percent of the population over age twenty (20) continued to increase in the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and Van Buren County. The Village of Decatur has nearly seventy-five percent (75%) of the population twenty (20) years old or older. The Village of Lawton had the highest percentage of its population at age 65 or over, with more than 21.2 percent of its population falling into that category.

Table 11. Age Characteristics; Village of Decatur and Nearby Municipalities; 2020

Community	<5 Yrs. Of Age	5 to 19 Yrs. Of Age	20 to 64 Yrs. Of Age	65> Yrs. Of Age
Village of Decatur	6.1%	19.3%	57.8%	16.7%
Village of Lawton	5.6%	19.6%	53.6%	21.2%
Village of Lawrence	8.1%	21.7%	55.6%	14.6%
Village of Paw Paw	5.0%	18.2%	58.2%	18.6%
City of Dowagiac	7.1%	22.5%	54.7%	15.6%

Source: 2020 U.S. Census.

Table 12. Age Characteristics; Decatur, Hamilton and Surrounding Townships: 2020

Community	<5 Yrs. Of Age	5 to 19 Yrs. Of Age	20 to 64 Yrs. Of Age	65> Yrs. Of Age
Decatur Township	6.0%	19.0%	57.3%	17.7%
Hamilton Township	4.7%	17.6%	56.4%	21.3%
Keeler Township	5.5%	19.1%	54.6%	20.8%
Lawrence Township	6.7%	19.1%	54.9%	19.3%
Paw Paw Township	4.9%	17.6%	56.0%	21.5%
Porter Township	4.0%	17.8%	54.5%	23.7%
Volinia Township	5.7%	18.8%	54.6%	20.9%
Wayne Township	4.8%	15.5%	52.4%	27.3%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 13. Age Characteristics; Van Buren, Cass and Berrien County; 2020

Community	<5 Yrs. Of Age	5 to 19 Yrs. Of Age	20 to 64 Yrs. Of Age	65> Yrs. Of Age
Van Buren County	5.7%	19.7%	55.3%	19.2%
Cass County	4.9%	19.0%	55.0%	21.1%
Berrien County	5.3%	18.7%	55.1%	20.9%

Source: U.S. Census

Race

A diverse population exists within the Decatur-Hamilton Community. In 2020, the racial group with the largest percentage of the population (79%) in the Decatur- Hamilton Community was white. The next largest percentage was Hispanic or Latino with 12% of the population. National estimates suggest that the Hispanic or Latino population will become the largest minority group in years to come.

Table 14. Population by Race; Planning Area, Van Buren County, Michigan; 2020

Community	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	Some Other Race	Two or More Races	Hispanic or Latino (any race)
Decatur Township	2,849	53	42	18	0	16	204	393
Hamilton Township	1,056	15	23	5	0	3	46	222
Village of Decatur	1,281	34	27	2	0	7	97	203
<i>Total</i>	5,186	102	92	25	0	26	347	818
Van Buren County	59,400	2,348	552	384	27	285	3,625	8,966
Michigan	7,295,651	1,358,458	47,406	332,288	2,603	37,183	439,320	564,422

Source: US Census

Educational Attainment

Consistent with trends throughout Michigan and the nation, the educational attainment of the area’s population is high, with nearly 88% of Van Buren County residents being high school graduates and 20% earning a bachelor’s degree. In 2021, Van Buren County as a whole and Hamilton Township outpaced the Village of Decatur and Decatur Township in High School educational attainment, while Van Buren County surpassed Decatur Township, Village of Decatur and Hamilton Township in bachelor’s degree attainment by a significant margin.

Table 15. Educational Attainment Estimates; Village of Decatur and Surrounding Municipalities; 2021

Percent	High School graduate or higher	Margin of Error	Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	Margin of Error
Decatur Village	82.5%	12.5%	12.9%	6.2%
Dowagiac city	83.3%	9.2%	13.3%	4.3%
Lawrence Village	78.2%	18.6%	15.4%	7.5%
Lawton Village	87.1%	15.0%	14.0%	5.1%
Paw Paw Village	90.7%	9.3%	9.7%	5.3%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Table 16. Educational Attainment Estimates; Decatur, Hamilton and Surrounding Townships; 2021

Percent	High School graduate or higher	Margin of Error	Bachelor’s degree or Higher	Margin of Error
Volinia Township	84.9%	16.6%	16.9%	6.2%
Wayne Township	79.9%	11.9%	12.8%	5.2%
Decatur Township	86.3%	7.8%	13.8%	4.8%
Hamilton Township	90.3%	13.4%	13.2%	4.4%
Keeler Township	89.7%	12.4%	28.8%	8.5%
Lawrence Township	82.8%	10.6%	12.4%	4.1%
Paw Paw Township	90.0%	8.6%	15.9%	4.8%
Porter Township	95.5%	6.1%	26.0%	5.9%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Table 17. Educational Attainment Estimates; Van Buren, Cass, and Berrien County; 2021

Percent	High School graduate or higher	Margin of Error	Bachelor's degree or Higher	Margin of Error
Berrien	90.2%	0.9%	26.8%	1.1%
Cass	88.7%	1.4%	19.5%	1.4%
Van Buren	87.7%	1.2%	19.8%	1.5%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Housing Units

The total number of housing units in the Village of Decatur decreased from 781 units in 2010 to 764 units in 2021, a reduction of 17 units (22% decrease). In Decatur Township, the number of housing units dropped from 1,623 in 2010 to 1,581 in 2021, a loss of 42 unites (26%). A similar loss of housing units occurred in Hamilton Township with a decrease from 728 units in 2010 to 702 units in 2021, a loss of 26 units (36%). Conversely, the total number of housing units in Van Buren County grew from 36,785 in 2010 to 36,948 in 2021, representing a 0.5% increase.

Table 18. Housing Units; Village of Decatur and Surrounding Municipalities; 2000-2021

Community	2000	2010	2021	% Change 2010-2021
Village of Decatur	707	781	764	-2.18%
Village of Lawton	668	788	764	-3.05%
Village of Lawrence	434	436	428	-1.83%
Village of Paw Paw	1,511	1,674	1,664	-0.60%
City of Dowagiac	2,631	2,674	2,599	-2.80%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 19. Housing Units; Decatur, Hamilton and Surrounding Townships; 2000 – 2021

Community	2000	2010	2021	% Change 2010-2021
Decatur Township	1,611	1,623	1,581	-2.59%
Hamilton Township	723	728	702	-3.57%
Keeler Township	1,562	1,629	1,537	-5.65%
Lawrence Township	1,516	1,588	1,571	-1.07%
Paw Paw Township	3,248	3,505	3,496	-0.26%
Porter Township	1,380	1,424	1,487	4.42%
Volinia Township	588	614	563	-8.31%
Wayne Township	1,231	1,311	1,259	-3.97%

Source: U.S. Census

Table 20. Housing Units; Van Buren, Cass and Berrien County; 2000-2021

Community	2000	2010	2021	% Change 2010-2021
Cass County	23,884	25,887	25,291	-2.3%
Van Buren County	33,975	36,785	36,948	0.44%
Berrien County	73,445	76,922	76,821	-0.13%

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

Tenancy Status of Housing Units

Most housing units located in the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and Van Buren County are owner-occupied. In 2021, 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 2021 had the highest percentage of owner-occupied homes, outpacing the County figure by nearly nine percent.

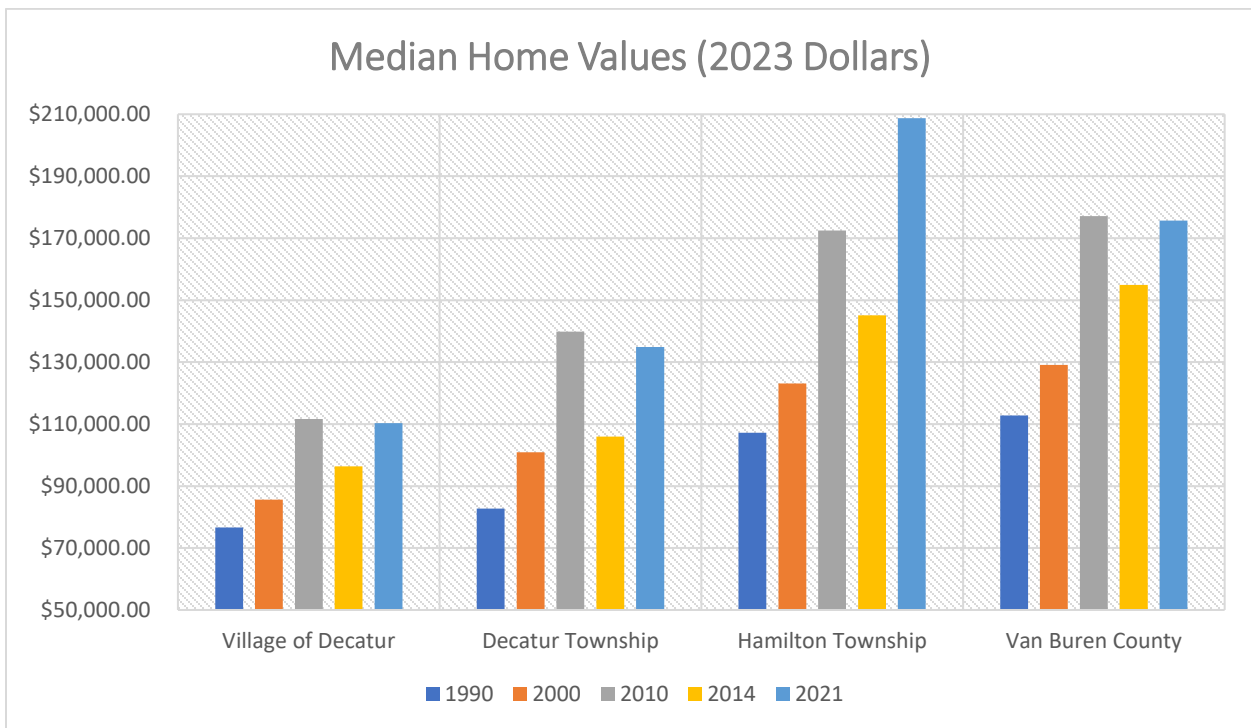
Table 21. Tenancy Status; Planning Area and Van Buren County; 2021

% of Owner-Occupied Homes	
Community	2021
Village of Decatur	63.5%
Decatur Township	72.1%
Hamilton Township	86.1%
Van Buren County	77.8%

Source: U.S. Census

Housing Values

Between the years of 2010 and 2021, home values declined across all localities, and are almost back to their value in 2010. Hamilton Township is the only area which has surpassed its 2010 value in 2021, increasing by twenty-one percent (21%).



Source: U.S. Census and U.S. Census 2010-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Table 22. Owner Occupied Median Home Values Estimates; Planning Area and Van Buren County; 1990-2021 (Dollars in 2023 equivalencies)

Community	1990	2000	2010	2014	2021
Village of Decatur	\$76,610.00	\$85,655.38	\$111,672 (+/--\$4,742)	\$96,330 (+/--\$6,937)	\$ 110,288 (+/--\$8,832)
Decatur Township	\$82,720.00	\$100,879.72	\$139,872 (+/--\$10,949)	\$105,950 (+/- \$17,482)	\$ 134,922 (+/--\$14,934)
Hamilton Township	\$107,160.00	\$123,070.98	\$172,443 (+/--\$18,692)	\$145,080 (+/- \$12,072)	\$ 208,711 (+/--\$25,477)
Van Buren County	\$112,800.00	\$129,146.12	\$177,096 (+/- \$5,526)	\$154,960 (+/--\$3,961)	\$ 175,715 (+/--\$3,852)

Source: U.S. Census 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Table 23, Planning Area Housing Value Estimates; 2021

	Decatur Township		Hamilton Township		Decatur Village	
	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Total	1,238	100.00%	520	100.0%	615	100.0%
Less than \$50,000	81	6.54%	56	10.8%	81	13.2%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	355	28.68%	60	11.5%	244	39.7%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	314	25.36%	54	10.4%	199	32.4%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	305	24.64%	120	23.1%	48	7.8%
\$200,000 - \$299,999	45	3.63%	160	30.8%	17	2.8%
\$300,000 - \$499,999	108	8.72%	61	11.7%	7	1.1%
\$500,000 - \$999,999	30	2.42%	7	1.3%	19	3.1%
Over \$1,000,000	0	0.00%	2	0.4%	0	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Table 24, Van Buren County Housing Value Estimates; 2021

Van Buren County	Estimate	Percent
Total	23,011	100.0%
Less than \$50,000	2,349	10.2%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	4,040	17.6%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	4,453	19.4%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	4,489	19.5%
\$200,000 - \$299,999	3,847	16.7%
\$300,000 - \$499,999	2,690	11.7%
\$500,000 - \$999,999	981	4.3%
Over \$1,000,000	162	0.7%

Source: U.S. Census 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Age of Housing

The Village of Decatur has a higher percentage of homes built in 1939 or earlier. More than 39% of the homes in the Village of Decatur were built in 1939 or earlier. Hamilton Township had the lowest percentage of homes built in 1939 or earlier with less 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 25. Percentage of Housing Built 1939 or Earlier Estimates; Planning Area and Van Buren County; 2021

Community	2021
Village of Decatur	39.5% (+/-7.8)
Decatur Township	37.9% (+/-7.8)
Hamilton Township	15.7% (+/-8.1)
Van Buren County	16.4% (+/-1.1)

Source: U.S. Census 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Village Neighborhood Analysis

In this section, the existing neighborhoods within the Village are evaluated in terms of their consistency with the principles of good neighborhood design. 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 follows:

- 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 near 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, where 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, the interaction among neighbors and the relative quality of life in the neighborhood.

Civic and Institutional Uses. The presence of churches, parks, and government facilities can

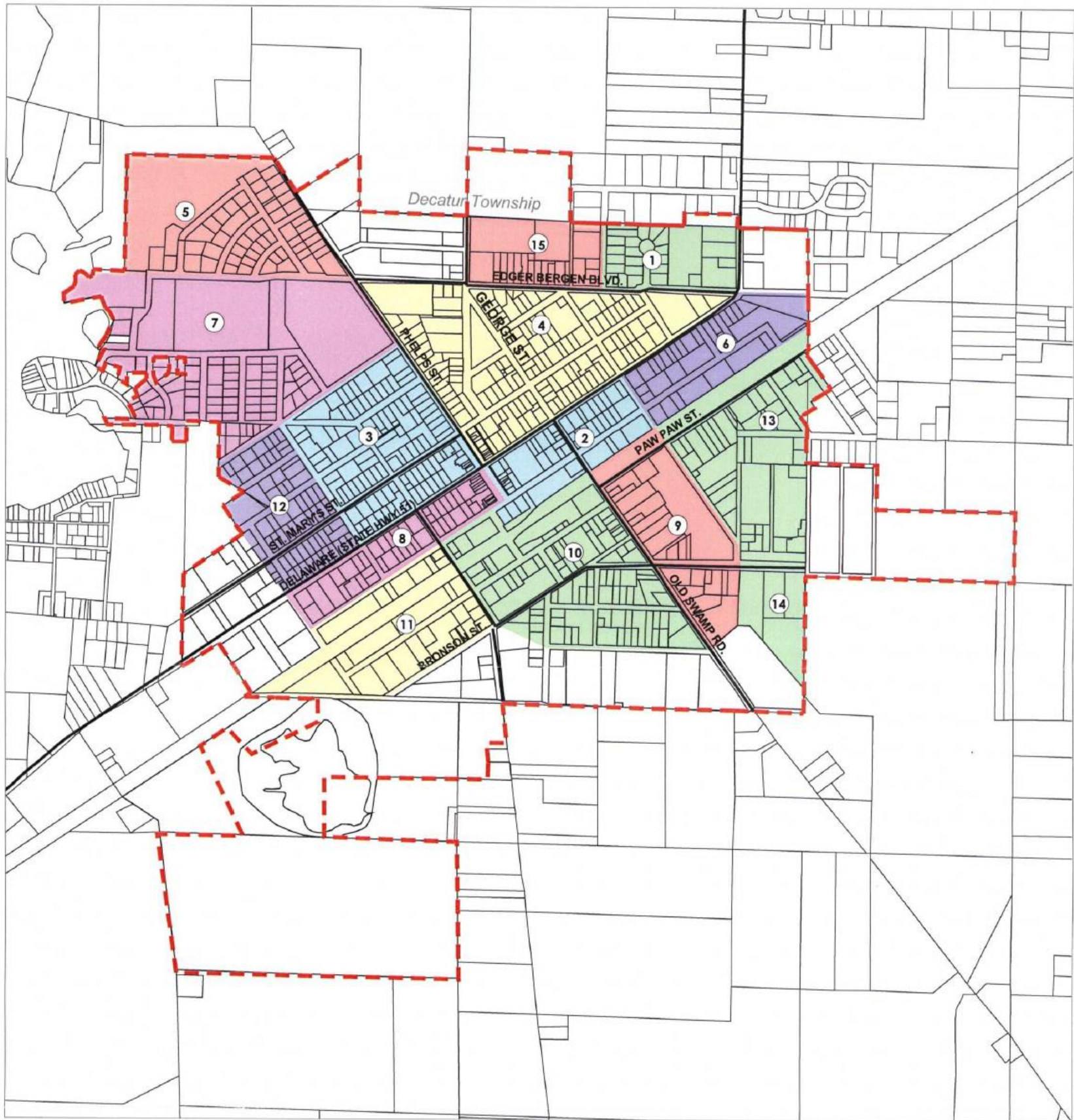
contribute positively to a neighborhood's identity and character. Such facilities generally contribute positively to the neighborhood offering opportunities for both formal and informal gathering of neighbors, addressing many of the social needs of the community within walking distance of homes, and 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. Since Decatur Village is small almost the entire population can walk to a school; however, it is key to know if that walk can be done safely. Are improvements needed such as street crossing upgrades?

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 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.

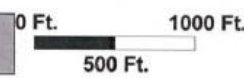
Interconnected Streets. Historically, communities were built with a series of interconnected grid streets. These streets facilitated relatively easy movement through cities and villages and helped to limit congestion as many routes to and from homes, businesses, etc. existed. Over time, a preference 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.



--- Municipal Boundary

Evaluation of Traditional Neighborhoods

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



8/2002

Table 26. Evaluation of Neighborhoods - Traditional Neighborhood Features, 2017

Traditional Neighborhood Feature	Evaluation Scoring (1= Weak, 5 = Strong)													
	Neighborhood													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Compactness	4	4	4	5	3	5	3	3	4	4	3	1	1	1
Walkability	4	4	4	2	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	2
Presence of Civic & Institutional Uses	3	3	4	4	3	4	2	2	2	4	3	2	1	3
Concentration of Commercial Uses Nearby	1	1	3	5	4	5	2	2	3	5	3	2	2	2
Safe Walk to School	5	5	3	3	2	5	3	3	2	3	1	1	1	1
Mixed Uses	2	2	3	4	4	4	2	4	3	4	2	2	2	3
Interconnected Streets	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, located just northwest of the high school, 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 and institutional uses, nearby 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 act to ensure that new development incorporates as many of the features as appropriate.

Economy

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

An estimated 29% of those employed in the Village of Decatur are employed in production, transportation, and material moving occupations. This is followed by sales and office occupations, representing 22% of those employed. This is a change from 2010, where management, business, science, and arts occupations accounted for 25% of all jobs in the Village of Decatur. Now it represents less than 19% of occupations. Management, business, science, and arts occupations represent the plurality of occupations in Decatur Township and Van Buren County, making up 29% and 30.5% of occupations respectively. Hamilton Township has the highest concentration of those employed in sales and office occupations, which makes up 28.6% of all occupations.

Table 27. Occupations for Planning Area and Van Buren County estimated number of employees; 2021

	Van Buren	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township	Decatur Village
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	34286	1762	679	876
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	10447	515	159	163
Service occupations	5822	266	88	171
Sales and office occupations	6715	380	194	197
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	4306	181	80	90
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	6996	420	158	255

Source: U.S. Census (American Community Survey 5-year estimates)

Median Household Income

Real median household income has rebounded after declining between 2000 and 2010 in all the areas under consideration. The greatest increase occurs in Decatur Township where a 27% increase was experienced between 2010 and 2021. This compares to a 21% increase in the Village of Decatur, with only an 8% increase in Hamilton Township, and an 11 % increase for Van Buren County, in its entirety.

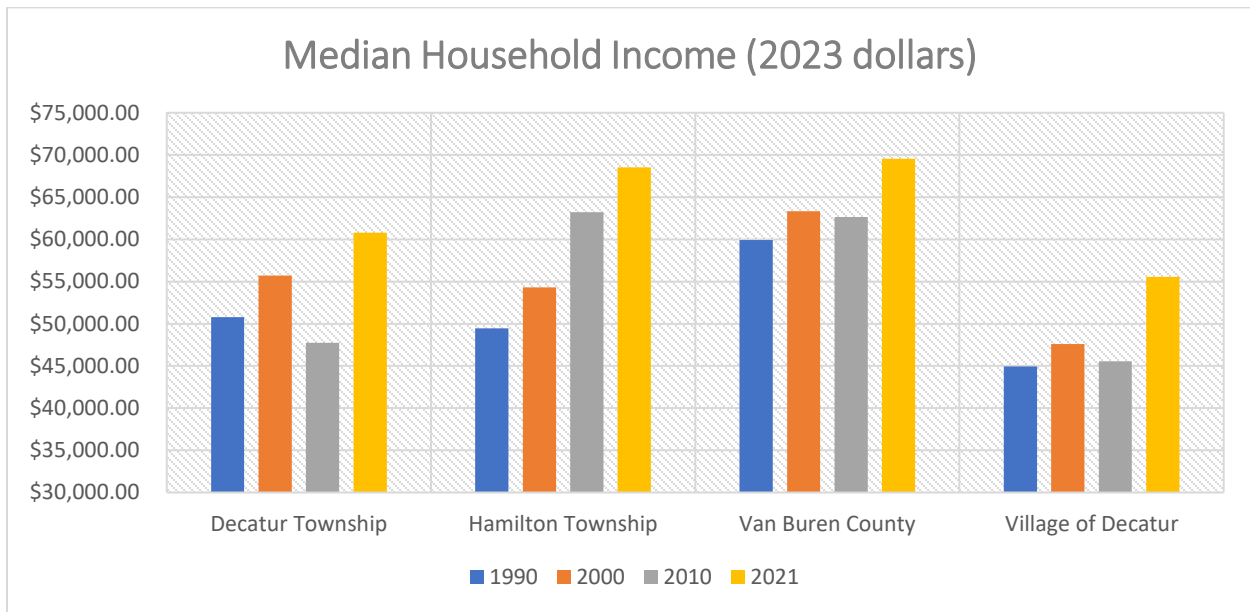


Table 28. Median Household Income; Planning Area and Van Buren County; 1990 – 2021 (Dollars adjusted to 2023 equivalencies)

Community	1990	2000	2010	2021
Village of Decatur	\$44,953.15	\$47,577.62	\$45,548.64	\$55,542.89
Decatur Township	\$50,769.40	\$55,721.12	\$47,741.19	\$60,798.52
Hamilton Township	\$49,460.45	\$54,297.12	\$63,230.04	\$68,543.54
Van Buren County	\$59,903.85	\$63,330.62	\$62,653.35	\$69,550.37

Source: U.S. Census.

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, however, central business districts have experienced a resurgence, with the introduction of specialty shopping opportunities and service businesses locating 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. The DDA Plan adopted in 2023 establishes the DDA as a Tax Increment Financing Authority and identifies four areas of focus: Economic Repositioning, Placemaking and Design, Infrastructure and Transportation and Organization and Partnerships.

The 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.

Economic Repositioning

There are currently several projects taking place and many planned projects to reposition the downtown district in Decatur. A renewed focus on marketing, business attraction and retention and providing technical assistance to property owners aims to reinvigorate the downtown area. Remaining challenges and opportunities include business recruitment and retention efforts, market data collection and distribution and generation of additional sources of revenue to implement restructuring efforts.

Placemaking and Design

The Village is beginning to implement its Downtown Improvement Plan to improve the physical design of downtown. Efforts to date 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. New emphasis on increasing housing stock and availability has been prioritized in the 2023 Downtown Development Plan

The Downtown Development Plan addresses remaining challenges including the continuation of streetscape improvements, facade renovation and upgrade efforts, improvement in signage in the downtown and the installation of public art and outdoor seating and dining. There is also a need for 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.

Infrastructure and Transportation

The Downtown Development Plan has identified the need for additional infrastructure to improve transportation within downtown. Pedestrian facilities, bike facilities, and regional connections have been identified as priorities within the DDA area.

Organization and Partnerships

Downtown organization partnerships have been growing in recent years with collaborations between the Village Parks and Recreation Committee, local businesses and the DDA routinely occurring. The Downtown Development Plan also recognizes the desire to work with economic development agencies, county programs such as the Van Buren County Brownfield Authority and volunteers.

Remaining opportunities include the expansion of the DDA to include committees or task forces that are organized around the areas of focus. An enhanced level of coordination and cooperation

among stakeholders in the community and working with external agencies are additional opportunities that have the potential for impacting the success of the downtown.

Summary:

- The Village of Decatur has experienced a large decrease in population from 2010 to 2020.
- Decatur and Hamilton Townships have also experienced decreases in population from 2010 to 2020, as have most surrounding townships.
- Hamilton Township has a slightly higher percentage of its population with ages 65 or over than either the Village of Decatur and Decatur Township, though no greater than in surrounding villages and cities.
- More than four-fifths of the population in the Decatur-Hamilton Community has graduated from high school.
- Most of the homes in the Decatur-Hamilton Community are owner occupied, with the Village having the lowest percentage.
- The median value of houses in the Village of Decatur and Decatur Township were less than in Van Buren County overall, while Hamilton Township had a higher median value than in Van Buren County overall. Hamilton Township had the largest increase in value almost doubling in the past 10 years.
- More than one-third of the homes in the Village of Decatur and in Decatur Township were built in 1939 or earlier. Approximately 16% of the homes in Hamilton Township were built in 1939 or earlier.
- Several of the neighborhoods located in the Village of Decatur 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.
- Most residents in the Decatur-Hamilton Community are employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations or production, transportation, and material moving occupations.
- Most business establishments in the Decatur-Hamilton Community are retail trade or

service establishments.

- An increased focus on addressing issues and opportunities specific to downtown in the areas of economic repositioning, placemaking and design, infrastructure and transportation, and organization and partnerships need to be undertaken to maintain its character and vitality.
- Median household income in the Village of Decatur and Decatur Township lags behind that of Van Buren County overall. While Hamilton Township has a similar median household income to the county.

Transportation/Mobility

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.

Highway System

The transportation system serving the community is designated as rural and functions at a much lesser capacity than an urbanized area. This is because the rural road system has a limited ability to support large traffic volumes since it is intended to serve comparatively low traffic volumes generated by a smaller and more dispersed population than urbanized areas. The road and highway system includes an interstate highway, numbered state highways, county and local roads. 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" and is generally broken into the following classifications: State Trunkline/Major Arterial, County Primary/Minor Arterial, Major Streets/Collectors and Local Streets.

State Trunkline/Major Arterial

The primary function of 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.

M-51 is the only major arterial and it extends through the Village of Decatur and Decatur and Hamilton Townships. M-51 provides movement through the Village, serves as the primary access for many of the businesses 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 on a major arterial.

Two minor arterials are in the Village of Decatur, County Roads 352 and 668. County Road 352 connects to M-51, serves as 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 Van Buren 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.

The minor arterials that extend through Decatur Township include County Roads 352, 669, 665, and 668. County Road 352 provides an 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.

The minor arterials that extend through Hamilton Township 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

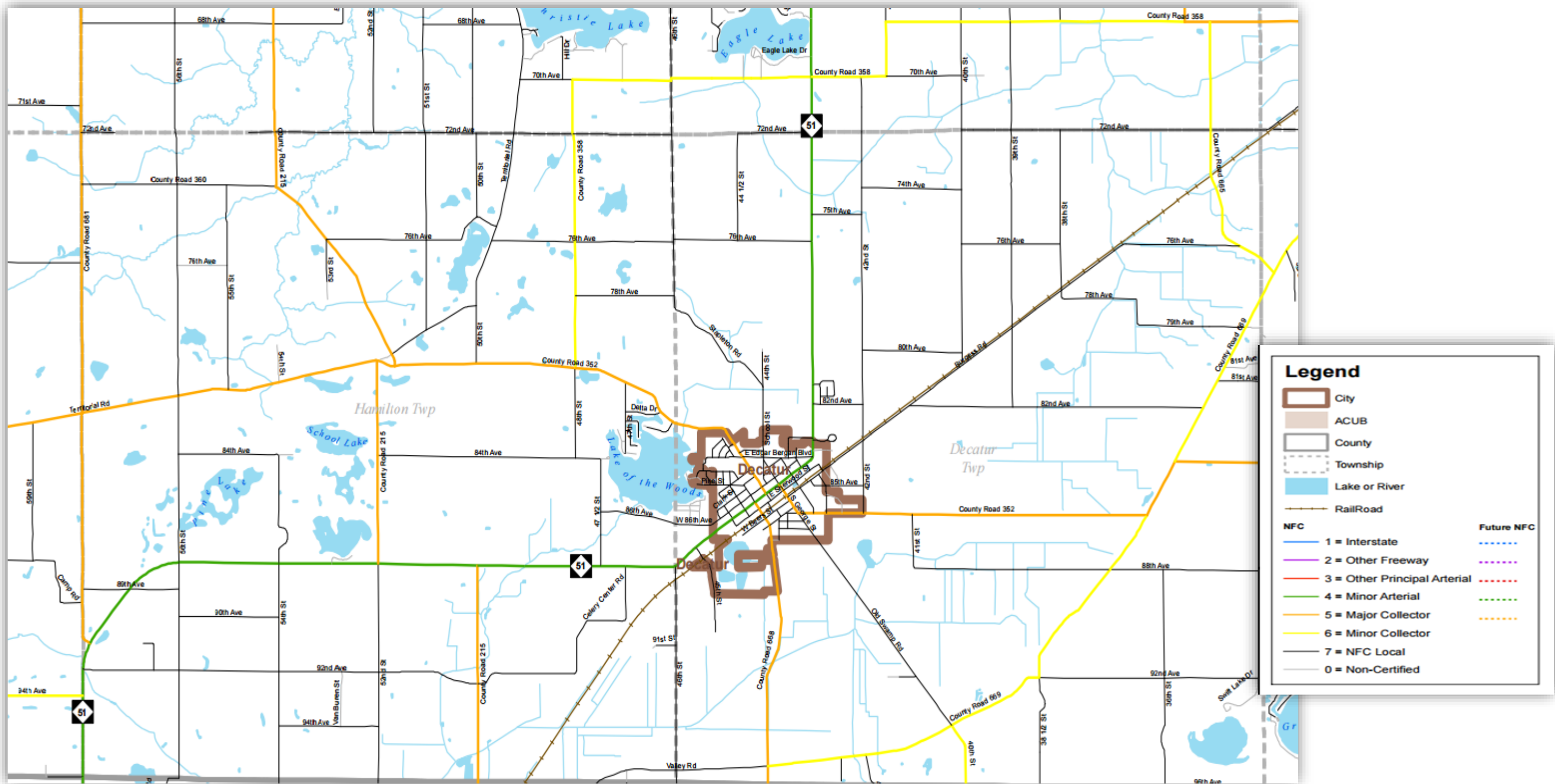
The main function of collectors is to collect traffic from nearby local streets and link it with the surrounding arterial street system. Generally, collectors are not intended for through traffic but may be forced into this role if arterials become congested. Speed limits are usually 25-35 miles per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

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

Numerous collectors are in Decatur and Hamilton Townships and include the various avenues and numbered streets (e.g., 92nd Avenue, 90th Avenue, 39th Street, 52nd Street). The collectors provide east-west and north-south movement throughout the community and connections to 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.

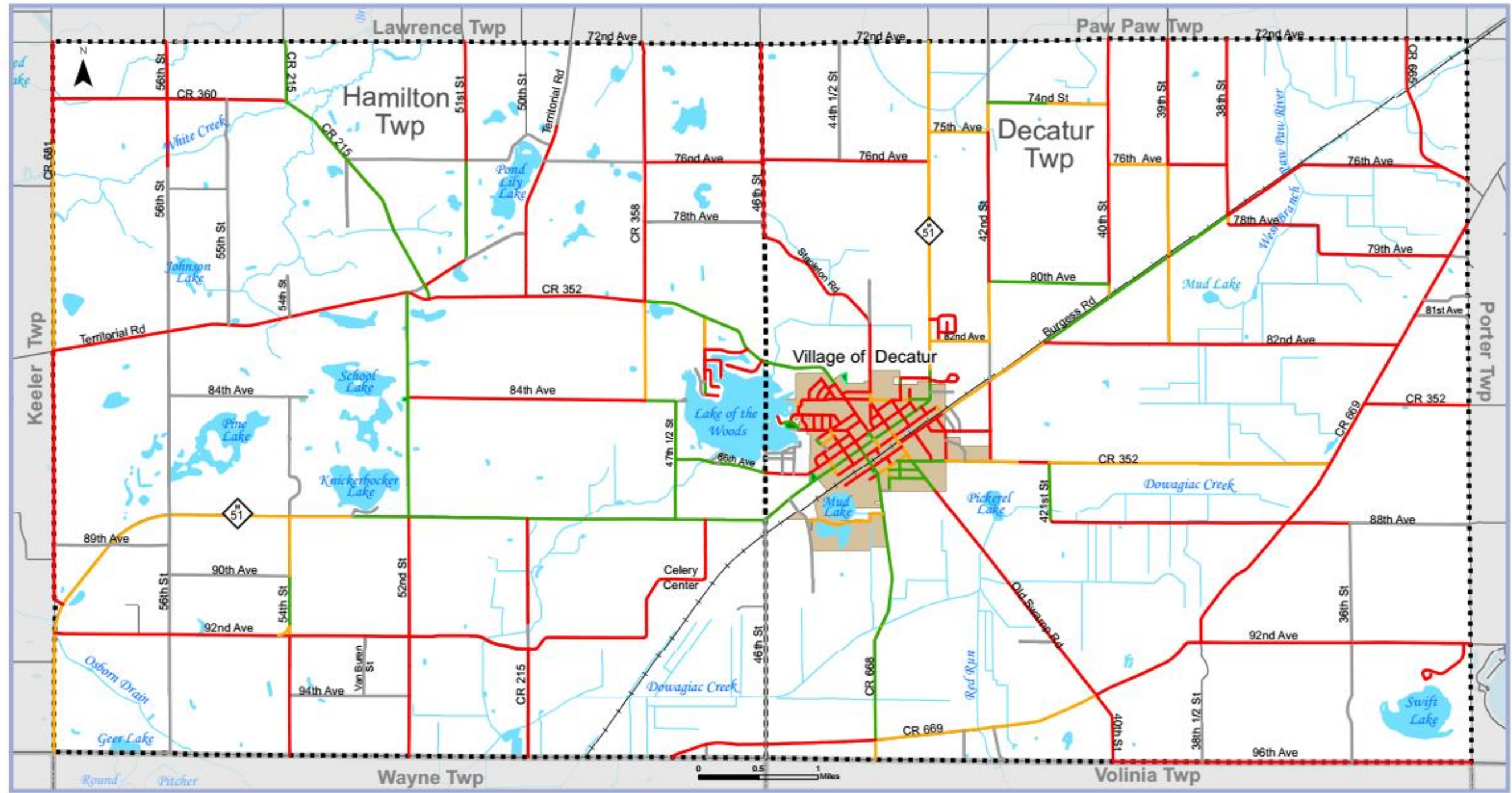


Maintenance of Roadways

The federal aid eligible roadways are monitored on a semi- annual basis through a PASER rating system. The results of this monitoring are reported to the Asset Management Council on an annual basis. Within the study area there are a mix of Federal Aid Eligible roads that are in poor to fair condition. A small portion of County Road 665 and 88th Street are classified as good. The Village of Decatur has an asset management plan in place for their roadways. The remaining roads are managed by the Van Buren County Road Commission except for M51 which is maintained by the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Pedestrian Facilities

The majority of the Village of Decatur is served by sidewalks enabling safe 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 recreational trail in Hamilton Township adjacent to the Grange Hall or Old Township Hall.



PASER

— Good — Poor
— Fair — Not Rated

Base Layers

Township Water
 Village

Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating

PASER

Decatur & Hamilton Township
Village of Decatur

Data Sources
 Base Map: Michigan Center for Geographic Information Framework17v
 PASER: SWMPC, 2023

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
www.swmpc.org
 The use of this map is for general reference purposes. It is not a legal document.
 November 22, 2023 2338_Fig01PASER

Road Funding

There are several sources of funding for roads depending on the classification and geographic location of the roadway. Many roadways qualify for multiple sources of funding. The table below outlines the various funding sources available to road infrastructure projects.

Table 29. Funding for Roads

	Local Roads	Federal Aid Eligible	All Season Roads
Van Buren County Road Millage Funds	X	X (Match)	X
Act 51 State Funding	X		
State Category D Funding		X	X
STP-R Funding		X	
CMAQ Funding		X	
TAP Funding		X	
Safe Routes to School Funding	X	X	X

Millage funds can be used to leverage Federal and State funds to do larger, more expensive road and bridge projects. Projects that qualify for Federal and/or State Aid are typically paid at the rate of 90% state/federal funds and 10% Local funds. By taking advantage of this funding, when available, the Road Commission can accomplish many projects it would, more than likely, never accomplish without county-wide millage funds. Millage funds are also used to accomplish many other annual improvements and upgrades to the county-wide road system through a selection process that takes into consideration asset management, budget constraints, traffic volumes and township priorities.

Act 51 Funding:

Act 51 authorizes designation of jurisdictional road networks: county roads and city and village streets. These “legal systems” establish which road is under which agency’s jurisdiction and determine funding. The Act sets criteria for those designations and allows for the transfer of mileage between systems. Act 51 assigns responsibility for maintenance, construction, and improvement of those roads to the various governmental bodies. Maintenance includes snow removal, cleaning, patching, signing, and marking, in addition to preservation, reconstruction, resurfacing, restoration and rehabilitation.

State Category D Funding:

Category D Funding is intended to support transportation projects which complement the existing state trunkline system with improvements on connecting local routes that have high commercial traffic. Eligible applicants are county, city, or village road agencies and transit agencies in counties with a population of less than 400,000. To be eligible for Category D funding:

- The project must be essential to the creation of an all-season road system
- The project must be located on a rural primary road or major street in a small city or village (population of 5,000 or less) in counties with a population of less than 400,000
- Unless waived by the Rural Task Force, the project must be eligible for federal-aid and must be for road improvements on existing hard surface roads
- The project must meet all-season standards
- Projects will be coordinated with TEDF-Category F projects to establish all-season system continuity within cities and villages
- Priority routes must begin and end at an existing all-season road or highway or a point-of-loading origin

STP-R Funding:

The STP-Rural Program provides funding to improve roads and streets in rural areas functionally classified as principal arterial, minor arterial or major collector. A special Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Transportation Act (MAP-21) rule allows states to use up to 15 percent of funds sub-allocated for areas with a population of 5,000 or less on rural minor collectors at state discretion. The Region 4 Rural Task Force manages these funds for Van Buren County. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission provides administrative support for this task force.

CMAQ Funding:

The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program provides a flexible funding source for transportation projects and programs that help improve air quality and reduce congestion. State and local governments can use CMAQ funds to support efforts to meet National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) under the Clean Air Act in both

nonattainment and maintenance areas for carbon monoxide, ozone, and particulate matter.

- *Nonattainment areas* are those where air pollution levels exceed NAAQS.
- *Maintenance areas* are those that were out of compliance with NAAQS for these pollutants but now meet the standards.

TAP Funding:

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a competitive grant program that funds projects like bike paths, streetscapes, and historic preservation of transportation facilities that enhance Michigan’s intermodal transportation system and provide safe alternative transportation options. These investments support place-based economic development by offering transportation choices, promoting walkability, and improving the quality of life.

Safe Routes to School Funding:

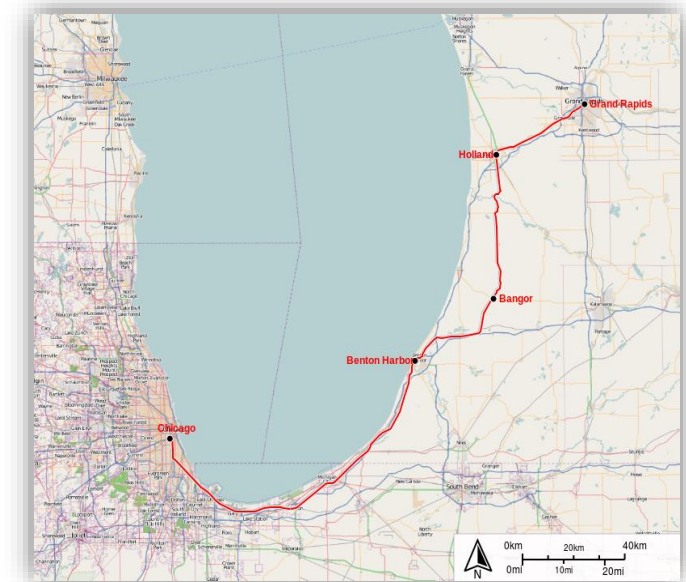
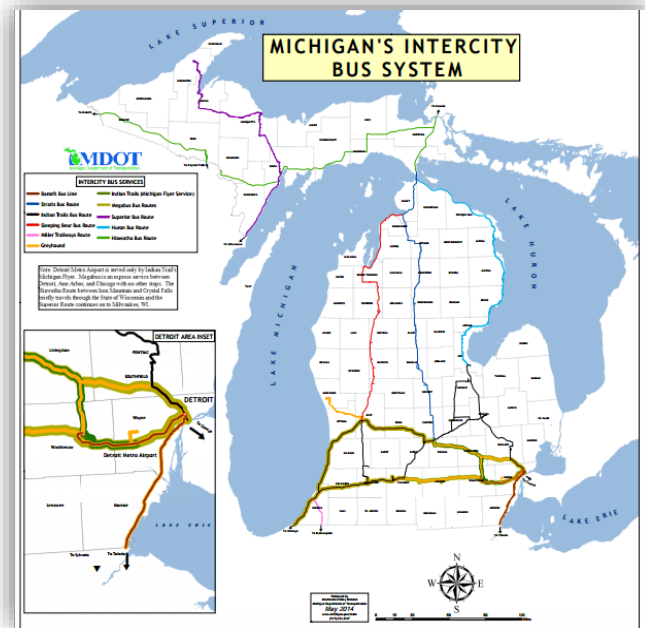
Federal law provides funding for infrastructure projects, law enforcement, education, and encouragement activities aimed at enabling and encouraging children to walk and bike to school. This encourages a healthy and active lifestyle at an early age, and improves safety, as well as reducing traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of elementary and middle schools. Schools serving children in grades K-8 are eligible for SRTS funding, which is available on a competitive grant basis.

Intercity Bus Service

There is one intercity bus provider that serves the area. Greyhound has scheduled stops in the Village of Paw Paw with a bus station downtown at 217 Michigan Avenue. From this location people have access to daily service to larger urban destinations that include Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Chicago.

Passenger Rail

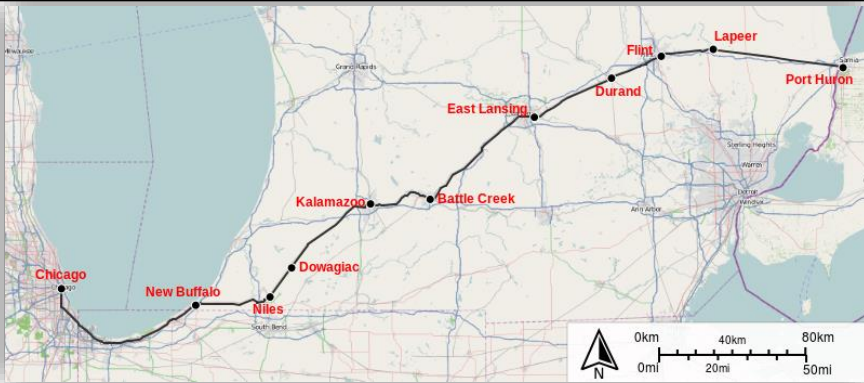
Within a 30-minute drive from Hamilton and Decatur Townships Amtrak provides daily service from Bangor in Van Buren County and Dowagiac in Cass County. The **Pere Marquette** runs once daily between Grand Rapids and Chicago with five stops including one in Bangor. The **Wolverine Service** runs three times daily with service between Chicago and Pontiac with 16 stops, including one in Dowagiac. **Blue Water Service** runs once daily between Chicago and Port Huron and has 11 stops, including one in Dowagiac.



Pere Marquette Amtrak Service, Map Source: Amtrak



Wolverine Amtrak Service, Map Source: Amtrak



Blue Water Amtrak Service, Map Source: Amtrak

Public Transit

Van Buren Public Transit provides countywide curb-to-curb, advance reservation transportation as well as very limited transportation to medical facilities outside the County including to Kalamazoo and Battle Creek. Travel within the County requires a minimum 24-hour advance reservation. The closest activity center is the Village of Paw Paw which is home to larger big box stores, hospital and medical facilities, Van Buren County Mental Health and various other human service agencies. Van Buren Public Transit offers an affordable flex route in the Village of Paw Paw.

Senior Transportation

Van Buren County Senior Services coordinates countywide transportation with Van Buren Public Transit for rides to and from the central and satellite locations. Transportation is also available if an older adult desires to attend programs at meal sites throughout the county. Van

Buren Senior Services currently offers lunch and activities on Wednesdays at New Hope Church in Decatur. The Van Buren Senior Services also provides qualifying seniors with transportation to and from medical care appointments by connecting seniors with volunteer drivers or handicap-accessible rides through Van Buren Emergency Medical Services and Van Buren Public Transit, as funds allow.

There are very few affordable accessible private transportation options for people using a wheelchair who must travel out of county or the state. There are several non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) providers that have accessible vehicles; however, often the cost for this service is not affordable for people on a fixed income or for someone that must use the service on a regular basis. People can often have a 40–100-mile round trip commute to access specialized medical care in Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids or Battle Creek. The costs for a 100-mile round trip can be as much as \$150.00. Van Buren Public Transit and the Disabled American Veterans offer limited transportation to Kalamazoo and Battle Creek.

Shared Ride Programs

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission manages the Go! RideShare program which includes a secure free on-line commuter matching service available to anyone who lives in Berrien, Cass or Van Buren Counties who is interested in sharing the ride to work. Commuters who register with Go! RideShare sends an email once a match is found of people or co-workers who are going the same direction at approximately the same time of day.

Passenger Air

Within a 30-minute drive of Decatur, Kalamazoo Battle Creek Airport offers daily service to Chicago and Detroit where passengers can connect to destinations around the world. Within a one-hour drive, South Bend International Airport offers non-stop service to many destinations and connections.

Summary:

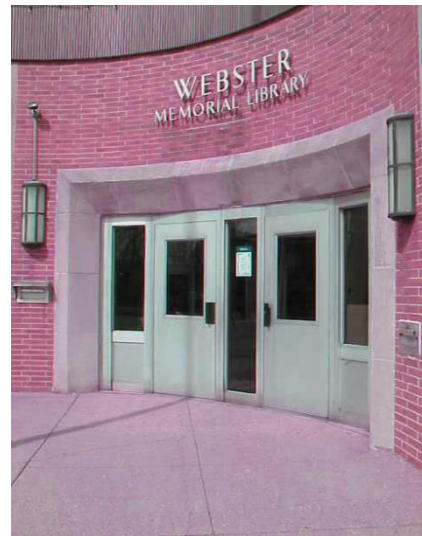
- All the roads in the Decatur-Hamilton Community can be classified as either a major arterial, minor arterial, collector, or local street.
- Most roads in Decatur and Hamilton Townships are collectors or minor arterials. Most of the roads in the Village of Decatur are local streets.
- Most roads in 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 route in the Decatur-Hamilton Community and provides access to Interstate 94 and to Cass County.
- Public transit is offered by Van Buren Public Transit, but options are limited in the Decatur-Hamilton Community.
- Pedestrian facilities are generally only present in the Village of Decatur.
- Air service is available in adjoining communities including South Bend, Indiana and Kalamazoo.

Community Facilities

Schools & Libraries

The Decatur-Hamilton Community is served by the Decatur, Lawton and 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. 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



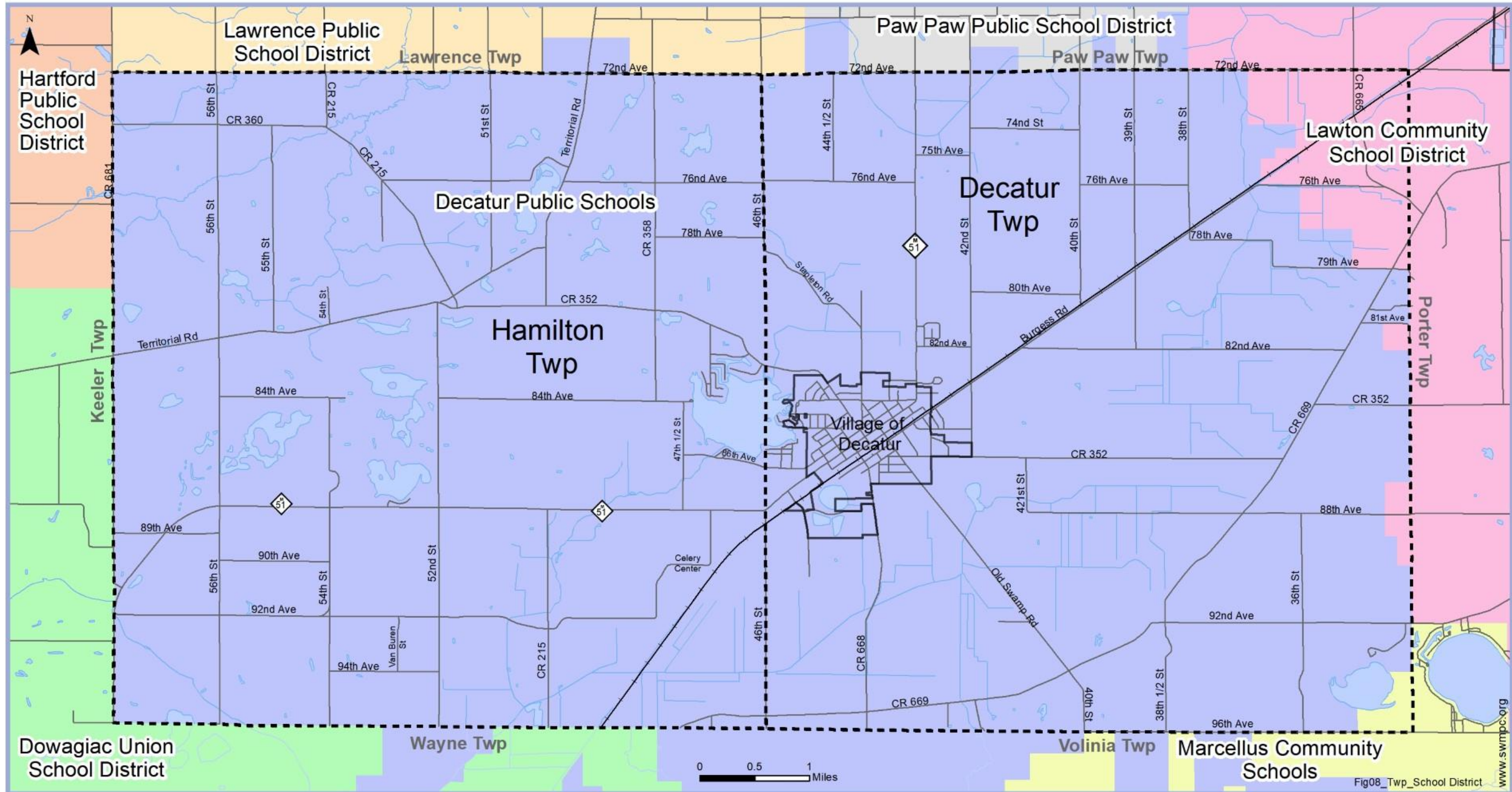
genealogical items for the United States and some foreign countries. The Bess Britton One-Room Schoolhouse Collection was added to these materials, consisting of 20 notebooks of history concerning nearly 600 of Michigan's historic one-room schoolhouses. The collection was donated by Mrs. Bess Britton of rural Decatur Township, Van Buren County. The Local History Room also houses another 600 plus items from the Van Buren Regional Genealogical Society.

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 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 expanded several years ago. A recent building assessment (2022) of the village hall and police department indicated that existing facilities are adequately serving the needs of the residents.

Decatur Township Hall is located on M-51 in the Village of Decatur and provides the offices for elected and appointed staff, including the Township Supervisor. The Township Hall serves as the meeting location for the various boards and commissions and has been in the same location for nearly 100 years. The Township invested \$50,000 to make the facility handicap accessible with a ramp, electric door, new restroom, and raising the floor in the foyer to make the two offices handicap accessible. The exterior brick work was tuck pointed and sealed. The Township received a \$15,000 grant from Help America Vote to fund the improvements along with the Township Hall restoration/improvement reserved funds.

Hamilton Township Hall is located on County Road 352 and provides the offices for the elected and appointed staff including the Township Supervisor. The Township Hall serves as the meeting location for the various boards and commissions. With the completion of the new Township Hall, the building adequately serves the needs of the residents.








School Districts

 Decatur Public Schools	 Lawton Community School District
 Dowagiac Union School District	 Marcellus Community Schools
 Hartford Public School District	 Paw Paw Public School District
 Lawrence Public School District	

School Districts

Decatur & Hamilton Township Village of Decatur

Base Layers

 Township	 Road
 Village	 Railroad
 Water	

October 11, 2024

Data Sources
 Base Map: MGF 17v
 School Districts: MGF 17v
 Roads: SWMPC 2023

Public Safety Facilities

The Decatur - Hamilton Community 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-five 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, School Resource Officer (SRO), and four 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 daily. Police dispatching is provided to the Sheriff's Department by the Van Buren County 911 Central Dispatch.

Materials Management

The Van Buren Conservation District in partnership with Hamilton Township, Decatur Township and Decatur Village has secured a grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy to develop a year-round recycling drop off center in Decatur. The center will also offer tire and Styrofoam recycling and will be located at 300 W Beers Road, Decatur.

Summary:

- Most community services are in the Village of Decatur.
- Hamilton Township is served by relatively new government offices. Decatur Township and the Village of Decatur continue to update their offices to accommodate needs.
- There are discussions about offering more coordinated services such as police and blight enforcement.

Parks and Recreational Facilities

Existing Recreation Facilities

Most recreational facilities and services available to residents of the Decatur-Hamilton Community are in the Village and either owned and maintained by the Village or the Decatur school district. The Village operates and maintains five parks including Red Woolfe Park, Raider Romp Park, Southside Skate Park, DDA Downtown Park and Fire Station Park. For more information on Village parks, see the Community Parks and Recreation Plan. Decatur Public Schools also offer recreational facilities, such as playground and athletic fields and courts.

Hamilton Township offers some additional recreational amenities such as a 1.6-mile recreational trail located on 79 acres owned by the Michigan Natural Association adjacent to the Grange Hall. This trail was designed for nature walking and exercise. Hamilton Township in partnership with the Van Buren Conservation District and the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service is restoring 12.5 acres of oak prairie at its Hamilton Township Park adjacent to the Township Hall. A trail and walkway system will be designed and installed including educational signage detailing the ecology of the oak savanna and history of the land.

There is also a MDNR public boat launch on the west end of Lake of the Woods. The Van Buren Conservation District owns Hayden Woods in Hamilton Township (44 acres) which is open to the public for passive recreational activities. It is located off 56th Street between County Roads 360 and 352.

There are also a series of snowmobile trails that extend through both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township 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.

Analysis of Current Facilities and Programs

In 2020 Hamilton Township, Decatur Township, and Decatur Village created a joint community parks and recreation plan to assist in the planning and development of future parks and recreation facilities. The 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. The MDNR suggests that communities strive to provide park land at a ratio of ten acres per 1,000 persons to satisfy all forms of recreation needs. Based on the 2020 populations of the Village and the Townships a total of approximately 66 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.

Summary:

- 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 facility. 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 public drinking water system includes three wells with a total capacity of 259,200 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. The current usage of the system is approximately 200,000 gallons per day, yielding an excess capacity of 59,500 gallons per day. The Village of Decatur's Water Quality Report can be found on the Village [website](#).

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. The Village of Decatur is committed to the extension of public utilities with the cooperation of the surrounding townships, including the Lake of Woods surrounding neighborhoods.

Electric and Natural Gas

Homes and businesses in the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 Community are provided telecommunications services by a variety of service providers. Service is provided through transmission lines and telecommunication towers and antennas. The Decatur-Hamilton Community is currently expanding affordable high speed Internet coverage and options.

Summary:

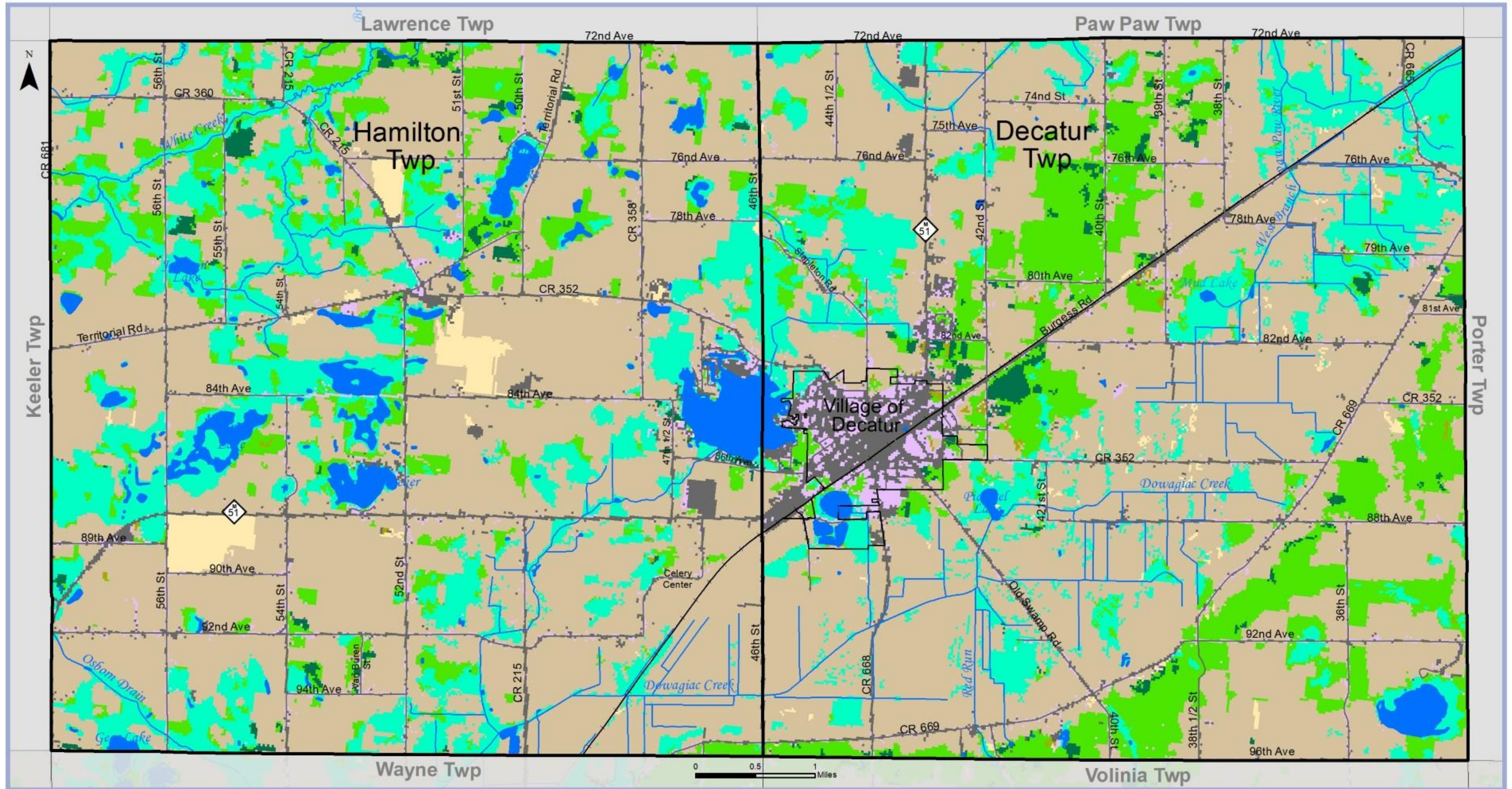
- Public water and sewer facilities are generally only currently available to the residents and businesses in the Village.
- There is excess capacity relative to the Village's water public supply and wastewater treatment facility.
- The Decatur-Hamilton Community is generally well served by public utilities with efforts to improve broadband coverage and expand high-speed Internet options in progress.
- There may be a need to assist with equitable access to broadband and high-speed Internet options.

Existing Land Use/CoverGeneral Overview

The Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township are in the extreme southern portion of Van Buren County. The Village of Decatur has historically served as the area's economic center containing most of the area businesses, industry, and community facilities. Similarly, until recently the Village has housed most of the area's population. The Decatur - Hamilton Community has historically served as an agricultural center producing a variety of products.

Land Use Classifications

The following section outlines in more detail the location and characteristics of particular land cover and uses within the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, and Hamilton Township. Existing land cover gives an indication of the amount of land that is agricultural, open or natural. Only about 3% of the planning area (Village of Decatur, Decatur and Hamilton Townships) is classified as 'developed.' The remaining lands are agricultural, open space, natural areas and water.



Land Cover/Land Use

- | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--|----------------------------|--|-------------|
| | Cultivated Crops | | Forest, Deciduous | | Pasture/Hay |
| | Developed | | Forests, Evergreen & Mixed | | Water |
| | Developed, Open Space | | Grassland/Herbaceous | | Wetland |

Land Cover/Land Use

Decatur & Hamilton Township
Village of Decatur

Base Layers

- | | | | |
|--|----------|--|----------|
| | Township | | Railroad |
| | Village | | Road |

Sources: Base Map: MGF 17v
Land Cover/Land Use: NLCD, USGS 2021

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
The use of this map is for general reference purposes. It is not a legal document.

July 10, 2024

2338_Fig04NLCD

Table 30. Land Use/Cover by Municipality; 2021

Class	Hamilton Township		Decatur Township		Village of Decatur		Hamilton Twp, Decatur Twp and Village of Decatur	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
Open Water	314.5	1.4%	83.0	0.4%	24.7	2.7%	422.1	0.9%
Developed, Open Space	690.5	3.0%	736.3	3.4%	248.2	26.8%	1,675.1	3.7%
Developed	798.6	3.5%	810.5	3.7%	403.8	43.7%	2,012.9	4.4%
Forest	2,197.7	9.7%	3,605.4	16.5%	63.6	6.9%	5,866.7	12.9%
Herbaceous	24.5	0.1%	36.7	0.2%	6.7	0.7%	67.8	0.1%
Cultivated Crops	14,230.1	62.5%	13,420.6	61.4%	93.4	10.1%	27,744.2	60.9%
Wetland	4,501.9	19.8%	3,155.8	14.4%	84.5	9.1%	7,742.2	17.0%
Total Acres	22,757.9		21,848.35		924.8		45,531.0	

National Land Cover Data (NLCD) USGS 2021 - As classes in data except Barren Land was added to Medium Developed (its usually developed) and Village of Decatur acres were subtracted from Decatur Township

Agricultural (Cropland/Pasture/Hay/Grassland)

For the purposes of this analysis, agricultural land has been defined as any land that is being used for cropland or pasture/hay/grassland. These activities occupy approximately 27,744 acres or 60.9% of the planning area. Broken down further, there are approximately 93 acres in the Village of Decatur, 13,420 acres in Decatur Township, and 14,230 acres in Hamilton Township in this class.

Developed (High, Medium and Low Intensity Developed and Developed Open Space)

Single Family Residential

Single family residential is the second most prevalent land use in the Decatur-Hamilton Community and the largest in the Village of Decatur. Single family residences in the Decatur-Hamilton Community are in primarily three development patterns. These include a traditional village pattern within the Village of Decatur, concentrated suburban patterns of development such as those 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. The pattern of development of scattered single-family homes fronting the major roadways gives the area a more rural-residential character. The homes are usually on large lots served by private wells and septic systems. Village and waterfront residential patterns have more of a traditional neighborhood feel with small lots, high density, a variety of architectural styles, interconnected streets, sidewalks and proximity to public facilities and shopping opportunities.

Multiple Family Residential

Multiple family residential areas are found only in the Village. 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 Community is primarily located in the Village of Decatur central business district, but also along the fringes of the Village. Additional commercial uses are found scattered throughout both Townships, though they remain few. The commercial uses located in the Village of Decatur consist largely of retail operations that cater to the convenience needs of 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. Most industrial 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.

Public/Semi-Public

Any use that is owned or operated to provide services to the public and citizens of the community is considered public or quasi-public use. These include schools, parks, libraries, fire stations, churches, Village Hall, and both Township 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.

Natural (Forest, Wetland, Water)

The Village and Townships have over 14,000 acres of natural lands representing about 31% of the planning area. These natural lands combined with the agricultural lands contribute to the rural character of the area that so many residents cherish and even base their decision to live in this area. Decatur Township has 6,761 acres of forest and wetlands which account for 31% of the Township. This is a very significant amount of natural land, most of which is un-fragmented. These lands are an incredible resource for area wildlife and for protecting water quality. Decatur Township has 6,844 acres of natural lands which is 31%, Hamilton Township has 7,014 acres of natural lands at 31% of its area and Decatur Village has 172 acres of natural lands at 19%.

Summary:

- Most of the land in the townships is used for agricultural activities.
- There are significant intact natural lands and significant forested lands in Decatur Township.
- Most of the land in the Village is used for residential activities.
- Land use development patterns for the Decatur-Hamilton Community have changed since 1978, primarily with continued expansion of residential activities along the major roadways and with the conversion of agricultural areas into other uses.
- Land use in the Village has been stable since 1978, though there has been a reduction in some industrial activities, with an increase in residential and commercial activities, especially along M-51.

Public Engagement

Several methods of public engagement were utilized in updating the master plan. Southwest Michigan Planning Commission engaged Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and Decatur village in public meetings to discuss the Plan and needed updates. The Decatur Downtown Development Authority (DDA) survey results were also reviewed. Below are results from three relevant questions from the DDA survey. For further information on the DDA survey, please refer to the 2023 Decatur DDA Plan's appendix E. Lastly, a public review opportunity was available along with a public hearing before plan adoption.

Question 19 of Decatur's DDA survey asked respondents what they liked the most about Downtown Decatur. Respondents were encouraged to select all options that applied. The following answers are summarized as follows:

- 55.2% liked the walkability.
- 42.7% liked the shopping and dining opportunities.
- 40.6% liked the historic architecture and unique building character
- 14.6% liked the open/green space for recreation, while 12.5% like the open/green space for gathering.
- 4.2% liked the house or apartment rental opportunities.
- 4.2% liked the tourism opportunities
- 1.0% like the office space opportunities.

Question 20 asked respondents to rank potential improvements to Downtown Decatur by priority. Responses were as follows:

- Economic development is the highest priority.
- Recreation improvements is the second highest priority.
- Physical improvements are the third highest priority.
- Housing improvements are the third lowest priority.
- Transportation improvements are the second lowest priority.
- Identify improvements are the lowest priority.

Question 21 asked what respondents think needs to be created in Downtown Decatur. Respondents were encouraged to select all answers that were applicable. Results of these responses are summarized below.

- 57.6% think Downtown needs more entertainment opportunities.
- 54.7% think Downtown needs more outdoor seating and dining
- 53.7% think Downtown needs more community events and programs.
- 32.1% think Downtown needs more parks and open spaces.

- 26.4% think Downtown needs more bike trails and bike lanes.
- 22.6% think Downtown needs more housing.
- 16.0% think Downtown needs more crosswalks and sidewalks.
- 12.3% think Downtown needs more wayfinding signs.
- 10.4% think Downtown needs more public parking lots.
- 2.8% think Downtown needs more office space.
- 18.8% responded other. These responses include suggestions such as: fast-food restaurants, general restaurants, public transportation, and more recreation offerings.

Strategic Issues

An evaluation of the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 Community 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 Community 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 Community.

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 Community, which is the location where most economic transactions occurred. The Village remains a classic example of traditional neighborhood development, where homes, businesses, and public institutions are near 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 Community traveling outside of the area for shopping and employment.

Preservation of Historic Sites and Features Significant to the Decatur-Hamilton Community

The Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 Community.

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. There is a desire for Decatur to continue offering small local business shopping opportunities downtown.

Increase in Employment Opportunities

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

Support Alternative Energy

Nationwide interest in diverse energy generation has ballooned in recent years. Decatur wants to support alternative energy and identify potential locations for alternative energy sources within the Decatur/Hamilton Community.

Support Mineral Extraction

The Decatur/Hamilton Community would like to support the growth and sustainability of mineral extraction.

Support Broadband

The Covid 19 Pandemic proved that access to high-speed internet is a key component to work and education in the 21st century. The community wants to support increased access and affordability of broadband to enable work from home capability, educational attainment and other economic development and social endeavors.

Natural Features

Protection and Enhancement of Water Quality (wetlands, lakes, streams, groundwater)

The Decatur-Hamilton Community'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 Community. 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. It will be important to encourage landowners to develop/maintain natural shorelines along these lakes to ensure water and habitat quality are optimal. There is increasing concern that sanitary sewer is needed around Lake of the Woods to protect the water quality of the lake. Van Buren County has released intent to test the Lake of the Woods for E. coli in 2025, underscoring this concern. 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 driven by the results of testing.

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

Improve Public Drinking Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment

The Village of Decatur is served by a public water supply and distribution system and a community wastewater collection and treatment system. The Townships rely on individual wells and septic systems. There has been dissatisfaction in the community with the quality of the drinking water in the Village. Even though it meets the standards for safety, many residents feel that the quality is not sufficient. The need to expand sanitary sewers to properties around Lake of the Woods may be needed to protect the water quality of the lake and for public safety. The Van Buren /Cass Health Department will be testing for E. coli in Lake of the Woods to determine if actions need to be taken. Engaging in a high-quality asset management program is also a priority for Decatur. Residents should be encouraged to maintain and pump out septic systems regularly. The Village has a wellhead protection program to protect drinking water supplies.

Provision of Adequate Recreational Facilities

Increasingly, communities are recognizing the value of sufficient recreational facilities. Recreational opportunities in the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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. The major issue is maintaining and upgrading current facilities. The Village has a current Recreation Plan that guides the provision of recreation facilities in the Village.

Summary:

- The Decatur-Hamilton Community is 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 Community's position in the area, have increasingly grown in importance.

Goals and Objectives

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 and implemented.

The goals and objectives identified herein are generally 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,
3. provide the foundation for specific land use related policies, and
4. 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 community goals and objectives have the following more specific 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 goals and objectives when considering amendments to their zoning ordinances and/or zoning maps to ensure consistency with the policies and intents of the Plan.
- To guide the Village Council and Township Boards and other boards and commission when considering capital improvements. 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 Plan.
- To express 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, should regularly be reviewed by the planning commissions of the Village and Townships to ensure that the intent and purpose of the goals remain current and valid. In such instances, it may also require a careful review of current circumstances, existing trends and community perceptions and preferences.

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 Community.

Natural Features and Open Space

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community will preserve and enhance its natural features.

Objectives:

- Identify key natural features including local lakes, the Dowagiac River, Brush Creek, West Branch, wetlands, and woodlands, and develop specific policies and strategies to protect and enhance each of these features.
- Encourage natural shorelines along lakes, rivers and streams.
- Adopt and apply land use regulatory measures and development standards such as natural feature setback requirements, overlay protection zones, and clear-cutting standards that promote the protection and enhancement of key natural features.
- Encourage land development and division techniques that retain large, un-fragmented parcels in the townships for open space and agricultural uses, where appropriate.

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community will seek to increase the understanding and use of conservation easements, and other open space preservation measures to effectively conserve meaningful open space and greenway corridors.

Objectives:

- Update zoning ordinance to require that open spaces in PUDs 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 educate and advise landowners of available land protection options (options are detailed in the Appendix).

Water Quality Protection

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

Objectives:

- Update zoning ordinances to include provisions that:
 - Include all impervious surfaces in the calculation of lot coverage (building, pavement, etc).
 - Reflect lot coverage standards that are consistent with the Plan's goals and objectives related to stormwater management and open space preservation.
 - Encourage use of native plants in all development types.
 - Require parking lot islands that provide for stormwater storage and filtration in large parking areas.
 - Allow and encourage alternatives to traditional pavement (such as pervious pavements and gravel) for driveways and parking lots .
 - Allow for smaller parking spaces and narrower drive aisles.
 - Reflect parking space requirements for multi-family residential, commercial and industrial uses that are based on accurate parking needs/trends.
 - Encourage shared parking whenever feasible.

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

Objectives:

- Update zoning ordinance to include provisions that:
 - Establish waterfront and natural feature building setbacks and require natural vegetated buffers to be left when new development occurs along waterbodies (streams, drains, rivers, lakes) and wetlands.
 - Prohibit development in designated floodplain areas.
- Implement Low Impact Development techniques in new and redevelopments (www.swmpc.org/lid.asp).
- Work with the Drain Commissioner to send information to property owners along County drains.
- Work with the Drain Commissioner and the Village Public Works Department 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 with 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 Community 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.

Residential Development

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community will continue to preserve, enhance and create satisfying living environments throughout the Townships and Village.

Objectives:

- Allow for a variety of housing types to serve a broad spectrum of preferences and income levels which preserve and enhance the area's rural character and existing neighborhoods.
- Increase moderate-priced housing stock for middle income earners and households.
- Close gaps in housing stock in the Decatur/Hamilton Community
- Maintain residential densities in the Townships that continue to reflect the rural character of the Community.
- Encourage the use of development techniques for new housing that promote the nonconsumptive use of land and the preservation of natural features.
- Stabilize and improve the condition of the current housing stock in the Village.
- Improve and maintain streets, street trees, sidewalks, and other public infrastructure to enhance and strengthen existing neighborhood character in the Village.
- Direct residential development to vacant lots within existing residential areas (infill development) and areas immediately adjacent to the Village limits and accessible to Village infrastructure.
- Evaluate safety for pedestrians and implement solutions where needed to increase safety.
- Encourage investment in senior living facilities.

Commercial Development

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community will encourage 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 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.

- Market the Decatur-Hamilton Community to potential businesses and individuals.
- Coordinate commercial development activities to ensure compatibility of land uses.

Technological and Energy Innovation

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

Objectives:

- Explore and promote a variety of energy sources that promote clean and renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, etc.
- Identify suitable locations for renewable energy sources.
- Ensure equity to broadband access.

Industrial Development

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community will encourage industrial development 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 consistent with the preferred development pattern.
- Direct the expansion of 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 Community 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, that is responsive to 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 growth.
- Ensure high-quality drinking water.

- Evaluate the sufficiency of existing public facilities and the feasibility of rehabilitation, expansion, or replacement where appropriate.
- Explore opportunities to consolidate community services.
- Investigate the feasibility of a joint public safety and code enforcement department for Decatur Township, Decatur Village and Hamilton Township.
- Continue to support a mutual aid agreement for fire safety services.

Transportation

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 provide safe and efficient linkages within the community.
- Manage access (driveways) along major roads, particularly commercial access or other generators of high volumes.
- Utilize zoning ordinance and site plan review to implement access management standards for new developments.
- Work with the Van Buren County Road Commission to improve the quality of maintenance on trees bordering roads in the Townships.
- Nominate Township roadways with natural beauty and rural character as Natural Beauty Roads to protect the character as roads are improved.
- 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, availability of funds and asset management plans.
- Evaluate alternative/nonmotorized transportation methods, including paths, trails, and sidewalks, and pursue their development where appropriate, to support a "complete streets" approach to infrastructure planning within the Community.
- Increase accessibility to existing facilities with handicap-related transportation options.
- Investigate with Van Buren County Public Transit to determine if a route for healthcare would be feasible.
- Ensure that new development provides connections (streets, sidewalks, trails, etc) to the existing facilities.
 - Promote walking and biking for school children and investigate participating in Safe Routes to School Program.
 - Promote the use of carpooling.
 - Promote use of public transportation (Van Buren County Public Transit).

Local Government

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community will maintain and enhance the communication and coordination between the Decatur-Hamilton Community, 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).
- Investigate opportunities for old high school facilities redevelopment.
- Increase coordination on issues pertaining to housing, senior services, veterans, county recycling, and materials management.

Community Design and Image

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community 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.
- Ensure the area's unique character is enhanced as new developments and buildings are constructed or as re-development occurs, with sound land use planning principles and best practices for site and building design.
- Pursue ideas about hotel/motel, bed and breakfast and additional retail stores.
- Promote compact development within and in proximity of the village limits.
- 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.
- Market the community for its unique historical and developing character.
- Emphasize the character of the Community by focusing on local parks and civics buildings.
- Allow multi-use development within the Village to provide additional housing and business opportunities.
- Continue to increase awareness of the natural features in the area, particularly the farmlands, wetlands and the Dowagiac River.
- Investigate impacts of short-term rentals and determine what, if any, policy actions should be taken.

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:

- Develop zoning regulations which promote the sense of place, neighborhood and community.

Parks and Recreation

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community 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:

- Maintain the 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 the creation of a joint parks commission and/or a recreation authority.

Diversity and Inclusion

Goal: The Decatur-Hamilton Community will continue to support equitable access to utilities, services, resources and opportunities for all residents.

Analysis of Alternative Land Use Patterns

Overview

To arrive at an idea of how residents would like to see the Decatur-Hamilton Community change over time, a preferred development pattern with associated policies and strategies needs to be defined. 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 Community considers patterns of existing uses; in addition, this Plan recognizes the natural and man-made constraints of the community. The Decatur-Hamilton Community possesses several 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, and 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. The land use in 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 Community. 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. Most 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 farmhouses are all positive contributions to the Decatur-Hamilton Community.

Central Business District

The central business district in the Village of Decatur, though confronted with challenges, such as competition, high building maintenance costs, continues to contribute strongly to the Decatur-Hamilton Community's economy, historical 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 Community. M-51 provides easy access to Interstate 94 and to US 31/33, which enables 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 the Decatur-Hamilton Community.

Lakes and Wetlands

The Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 Community 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 those mentioned previously and through contribution to a solid sense of community.

Development and Redevelopment 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 the downtown area, the industrial park and along M-51.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

The Decatur-Hamilton Community benefits from a long history of cooperation among the Village and the Townships. This cooperation has resulted in a strong regional school system, cost-effective fire protection, compatible land use policies, a shared approach to parks/recreation planning and general cooperative spirit. This cooperation contributes significantly to the quality of life both through the practical provision of services and a solid sense of community.

Other Resources

Other resources of importance in the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 Community. 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 farmland 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, are critical for maintaining water quality and mitigating flooding and provide habitat for a variety of wildlife, they represent a constraint to development potential. With significant wetland loss already, any remaining wetlands are invaluable. This constraint affects essentially all forms of land use including agricultural activities, residential development, and non-residential development, including alternative energy land uses. The abundance of wetlands and poorly drained soils throughout the Decatur-Hamilton Community will continue to constrain the development potential of large portions of the area.

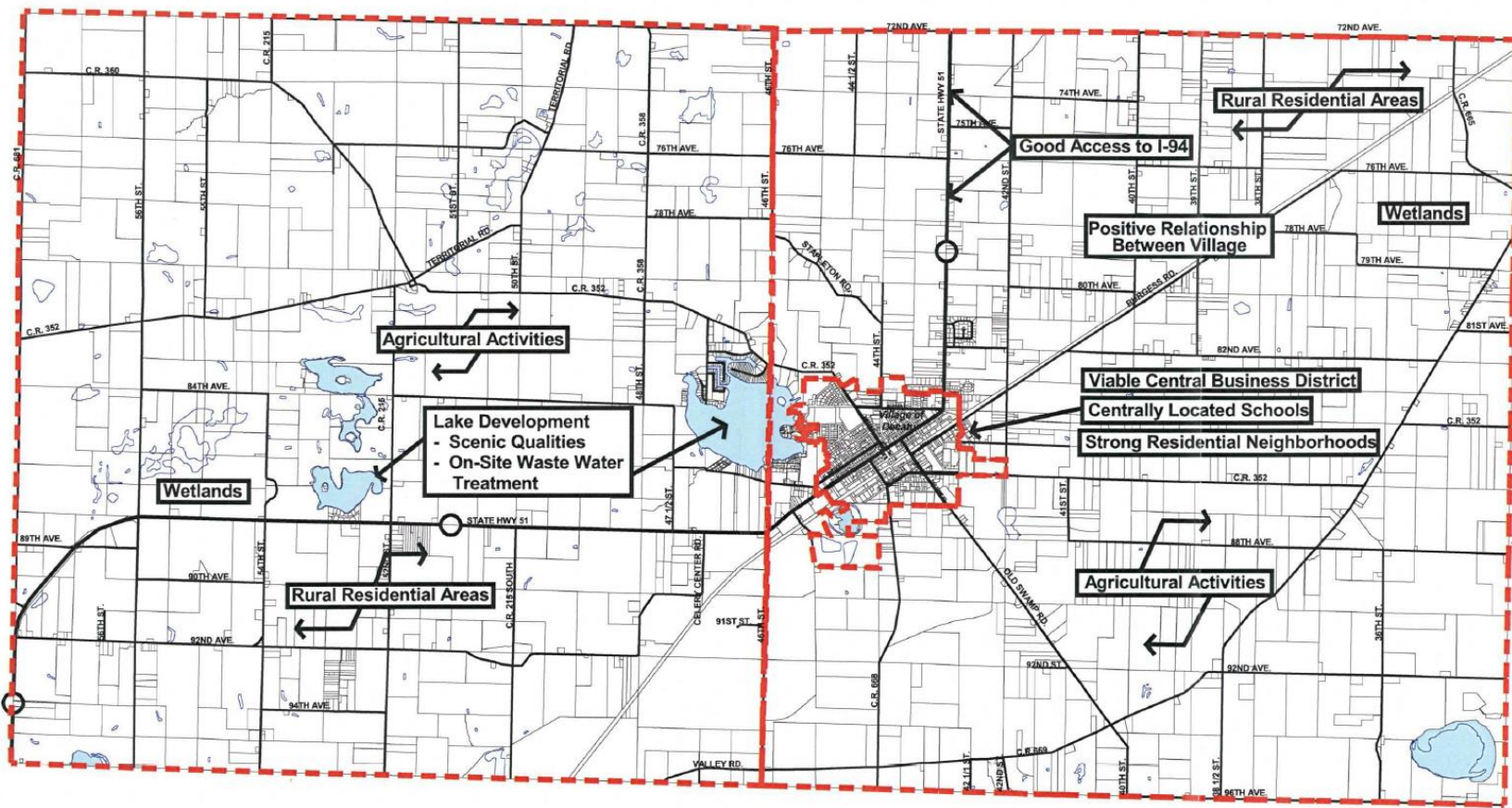
Presence of Incompatible Uses

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 Community 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

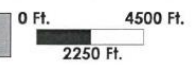
Many would consider limited development pressure a positive trend. However, if a community ceases to attract new investment and development or re-development, it may suffer. Without such investment, residents and businesses can expect a loss of opportunities, options, and wealth. New investment need not be in the form of growth and expansion 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 infill development, new housing options, new land uses within existing developed areas that result in employment opportunities, new customer bases for local businesses and increased wealth for residents.

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



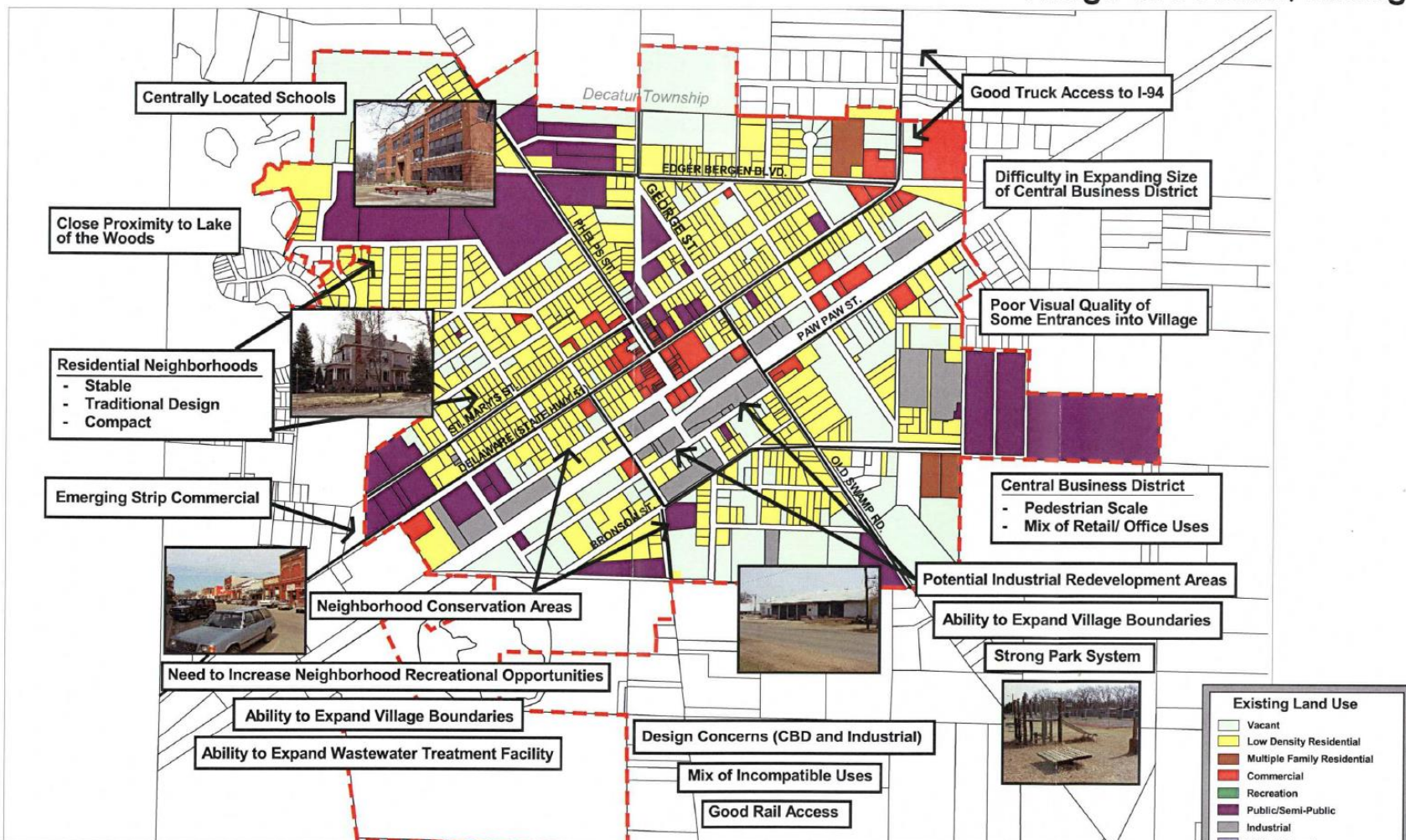
Resources & Constraints

Source: Hamilton Township, Decatur Township, & Village of Decatur, Michigan



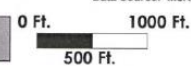
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Village of Decatur, Michigan



Resources and Constraints

Basemap Source: Village of Decatur, Michigan
Data Source: McKenna Associates, Inc.



7/2001

Alternative Development Patterns

The alternative development patterns analyzed include 1) development as currently allowed by each community's zoning ordinance, 2) development based on continuation of current trends, and 3) development based on a managed or phased pattern, where future development is both guided and constrained based on natural resource constraints and the availability of public services. A build-out analysis was prepared for each of the alternatives and depicts 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.

Alternative 1: Zoning Build-Out

Village of Decatur

This analysis yields a build-out population 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 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 would:

- Fail to achieve many of the stated community goals
- Permit complete development of the townships as low density residential at full build-out
- Permit strip commercial development along the entirety of M-51
- Fail to recognize constraints on resources present in the Community
- Undermine the village's role as the commercial center for the area
- Increase the likelihood of land use conflicts
- Likely make planned expansion and/or extension of public facilities or services necessary
- Result in a dramatic change in community character

Alternative 2: Current Trends Build-Out***Village of Decatur***

This analysis yields a build-out population of nearly 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 period.

Hamilton Township

This analysis yields a build-out population of nearly 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 period.

Decatur Township

This analysis yields a build-out 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 period.

Summary:

This development pattern would:

- Fail to achieve many of the stated community goals
- Permit scattered low-density single-family development throughout the townships
- Permit scattered commercial activities along M-51
- Fail to recognize constraints or capitalize on resources present in the Community
- Undermine the Village's role as the commercial center for the area
- Increase the likelihood of land use conflicts
- Likely make planned expansion and/or extension of public facilities or services necessary
- Over time, erode the character of the community

Alternative 3: Phased Development Build-Out

Village of Decatur

This analysis yields a build-out population 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 build-out population 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 period.

Decatur Township

This analysis yields a build-out population 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 period.

Summary:

This development pattern would:

- Achieve many of the Community's stated goals
- Stimulate managed development and expansion
- Concentrate new residential development in the Village of Decatur and near its edges
- Concentrate new commercial development in the Village of Decatur and near its edges
- Acknowledge the opportunities and constraints present in the community
- Strengthen the village's role as the commercial center for the area
- Minimize the potential for land use conflicts
- Facilitate the planned expansion of public facilities and services
- Reinforce the prevailing character of the area
- Place restrictions on land development

Preferred Development Pattern

Following a review and understanding of the strategic issues present in the Decatur-Hamilton Community; the identification and analysis of existing development patterns, the recognition of current resources and constraints, the development of community goals and objectives, a preferred development pattern has been selected and refined. The preferred development pattern that has

been identified for the Decatur-Hamilton Community contains the following essential elements:

- Future growth and development will be directed 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 reasonable access to public services and utilities.
- Most 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 sprawl.
- 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 Future Land Use Classifications descriptions.

Future Land Use Plan

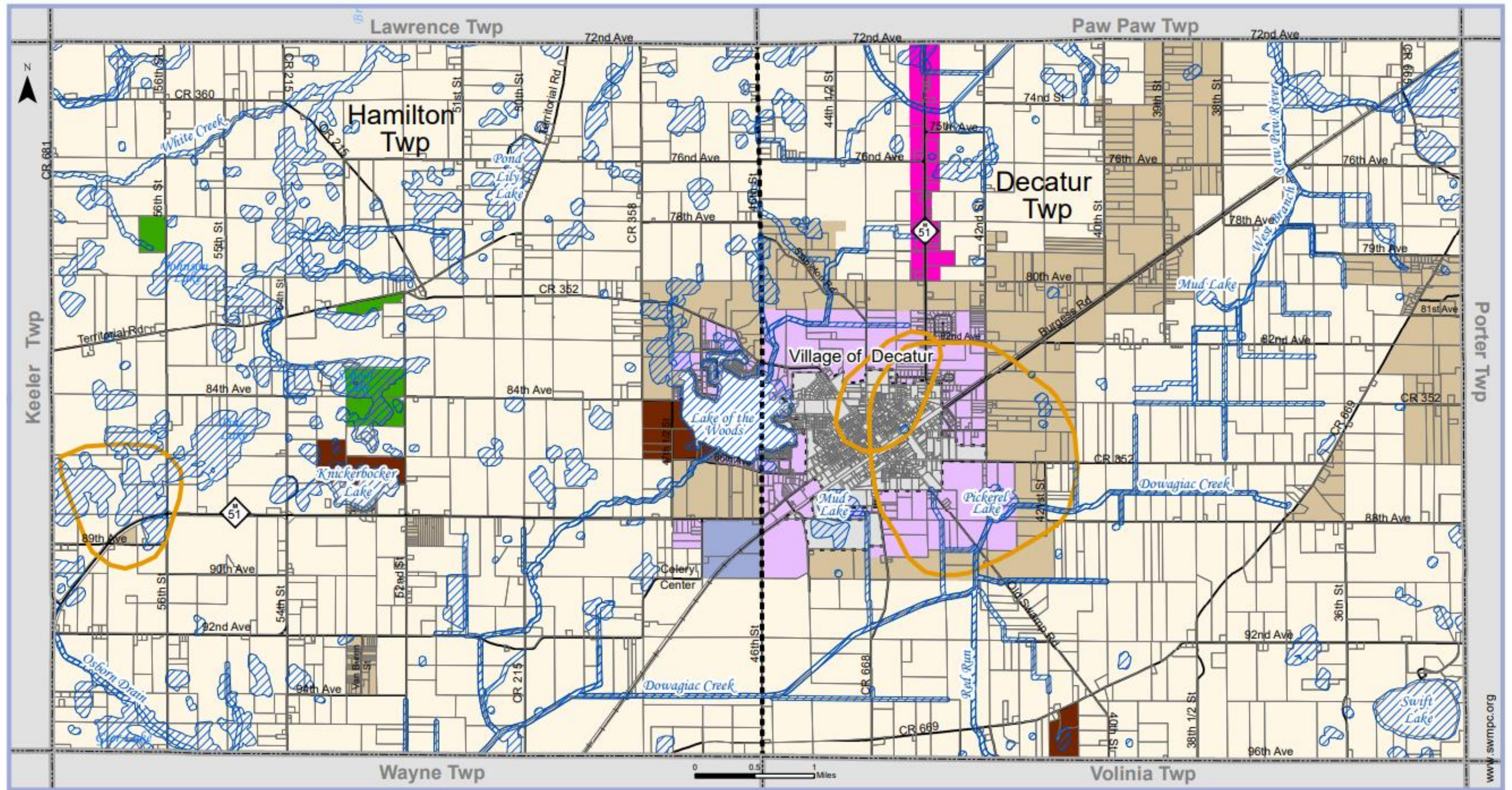
Overview

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

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 can be best accomplished.

The Future Land Use Map is intended to represent the completion of the selected build-out alternative for the Decatur-Hamilton Community. 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 ensure 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 future land use categories which delineate areas of the Village of Decatur, Decatur Township and Hamilton Township for types of land uses. There is also a proposed surface water quality overlay district which lies over all the other classifications and is meant to provide zoning ordinance 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 future land use classification, the methodology for defining the area and recommendations for implementation.



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

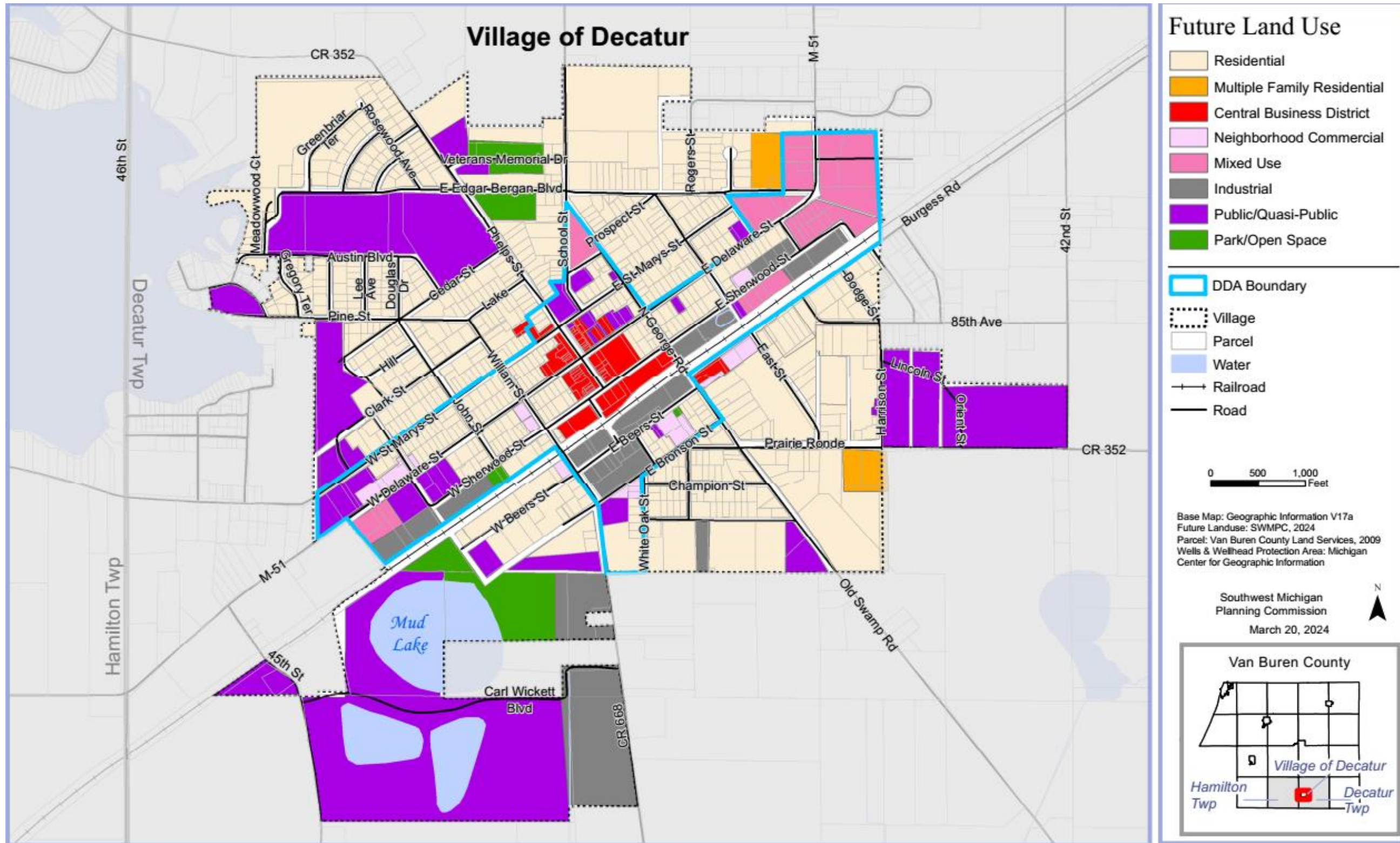
- Protected Areas**
- Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA)
 - Surface Water Protection Overlay

Future Land Use
Decatur & Hamilton Township

- Base Layers**
- Township
 - Parcels
 - Road
 - ++ Railroad

Sources
 Base Layers: Michigan Center for Geographic Information Framework17v
 Parcel: Van Buren County Land Services, 2024
 Water Protection Overlay: SWMPC, 2024
 Future Land Use: SWMPC, 2024
 WHPA: MDEQ, 2021

October 10, 2024



Decatur-Hamilton Community Joint Comprehensive Plan
 Future Land Use Plan

Agriculture Protection Area

A major planned future land use for both Decatur Township and Hamilton Township is agricultural protection, comprising about 73% of the total area of Decatur Township and 93% of the total area of Hamilton Township. Agricultural land use includes farming (the production of crops, livestock, and related goods), orchards, nurseries, vineyards, farmsteads, and other activities directly associated with agriculture. Active agricultural land use is fundamental to the communities' efforts to preserve the viability of the working landscape and the rural character present in the Decatur-Hamilton Community.

Density within the Agricultural Protection Area classification 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 be used to achieve smaller building sites on parts of a farm which are not conducive to production.

Agricultural Protection Areas were defined using the following criteria:

- 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 development 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.
- The general lack of “urban” infrastructure such as 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, 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 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

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 could be considered - exclusive agricultural zoning or

sliding scale zoning. In addition, the zoning ordinance should require agricultural buffers between residential and agricultural uses. The Townships should participate in the County’s Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program.

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.

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.

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

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

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 agricultural 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 future land use classification promotes a low-density land use 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 or the Agricultural Protection Area. The Rural Residential classification occupies approximately 18% of the total land area of Decatur Township and 3% of the total land area of Hamilton Township.

Density within the Rural Residential classification is planned for no more than one dwelling unit for every acre. However, some of the soils within the area classified as Rural Residential may not be able to sustain an operational septic system on a single acre. If this is the case, larger parcels may be required. The use of open space developments is highly encouraged to maintain the rural character and to preserve natural features. Further, open space developments can 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 criteria:

- Identification of lands located adjacent to the primary growth areas.
- Identification of transition areas between Agriculture Protection 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. 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. Specific guidelines, requirements, standards and incentives should be established through open space zoning to ensure that these features remain protected with open space developments. Further, the use of low impact development techniques should also be encouraged to protect water quality and natural features. The Rural Residential classification will be applied to establish a transition between the higher density development located in the Village of Decatur and Agriculture Protection Areas.

Campground/Resort

Approximately 233 acres or 1% of the total land area of Hamilton Township and 67.1 acres within Decatur Township (0.3%) is designated as Campground/Resort future land use classification. This

classification is intended to preserve and enhance the water and scenic quality of the lakes and wildlife, the investment in lake property, the quality of lakefront living and the natural environment.

These areas were defined using the following criteria:

- Where current campground or resort operations already exist.

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.

Primary Growth Area

Approximately 1,650 acres (7%) of the total land area of Decatur Township and 231 acres (1%) of the total land area of Hamilton Township is planned as a Primary Growth Area. The Primary Growth Area is intended to accommodate higher density development within the Village and on its fringes 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 building styles and housing types. The Primary Growth Area classification includes residential, multiple family residential, neighborhood commercial, central business district and industrial districts which are described below.

These areas were defined using the following criteria:

- Identification of lands on the fringe of the Village that are either served or could easily be served by municipal sewer and water.
- Identification of lands within the Village not in public ownership or in use as parkland or open space, or not otherwise planned for mixed use development.

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.

A. Residential

Approximately 380 acres or 49.5% of the total land area of the Village of Decatur is classified as Residential. It is anticipated that the Primary Growth Areas will accommodate most of the residential growth in the Decatur-Hamilton Community as will offer 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 sanitary sewer and public water 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. Further, the overall density often necessitates the presence of paved roadways to accommodate the number of vehicle trips associated with such areas.

The planned density within the Primary Growth Areas is at least 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 9 acres or 1.2% of the total land area of the Village is classified as Multiple-

Family Residential to encourage a variety of multiple-family housing types, such as apartments, lofts, duplexes, attached single-family, condominiums, stacked condominiums and senior and assisted-use housing.

Implementation Recommendations

These areas are intended to accommodate a wide spectrum of moderate to high density housing options to serve a range of incomes, ages, lifestyles and family types. Most planned Multi-Family Residential areas in the Village have already been developed so zoning standards should relate to the redevelopment of these areas and support and/or incentivize design diversity and modernization while assuring that building mass remains in character with the neighborhood's bulk characteristics

C. Neighborhood Commercial

Approximately 9.9 acres (1.3%) of the total land area of the Village is classified as Neighborhood Commercial. The intent of this future land use classification is to accommodate the limited establishment of small neighborhood commercial centers designed to provide convenient services to surrounding residential areas. Further it intends to introduce limited and compatible commercial development into existing neighborhood areas without competing with the downtown as the economic core. 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 does the capability for pedestrian connectivity between residential and commercial areas.

Implementation Recommendations

These areas should provide for small convenience businesses that fit in terms of scale and impact within a residential setting. An overlay zoning approach could be used to establish standards and ensure compatibility with nearby residential properties. 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 near one another.

D. Central Business District

Approximately 17 acres or 2.2% of the total land area of the Village is classified as Central Business District. The Central Business District future land use classification is intended to promote efficient and livable forms of development in the downtown core of the Village. An attractive and inviting pattern and scale of residential and commercial development along and off the main streets of the Village core allow for a secure and safe living and shopping environment, developed in accord with the surrounding residential and resident/commercial mixed neighborhoods. This classification is meant to serve as a social gathering place for area residents and has several community civic buildings such as the Village Hall, Decatur Township Hall and the Van Buren District Library. Access to downtown for residents is provided via connector streets. The key to distinguishing the Central Business District from the other future land use classifications in the Village of Decatur is the high-density mix of residential and commercial uses. Planned uses in this district include, but are not limited to, commercial, office, entertainment, civic, high-density residential, and pocket parks. While residential elements are encouraged in the Central Business District, industrial uses are to be discouraged, as they may generate impacts that conflict with the residential and public/social uses.

The Central Business District is largely targeted toward the cores of the Village and uses are intended to serve the daily shopping needs of the residents. This would include the provision of such items as groceries, pharmacies, restaurants, car washes, Laundromats and retail sales. These uses are intended to be accommodated in the central business district in the Village with a

development pattern designed to accommodate initial arrival of patrons to the area in personal vehicles and then with predominantly pedestrian movement within the area.

Implementation Recommendations

The Central Business District is intended 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. Through commercial development standards that require small building footprints, small gross floor areas, classic architectural details and site placement, the Village can take positive steps toward ensuring that new commercial development adds to the quality and character of the core rather than detracts from it. Development within these areas should also be designed in a manner to enhance the local street and pedestrian network and parking patterns currently in place.

Uses and buildings should be designed to positively contribute to the character and function of the Village core. Specific issues include architectural compatibility, access management, shared parking, streetscaping, signage and lighting. The Village should revise the zoning ordinance to include building form guidelines, site design requirements, use standards and incentives to maintain the characteristics of the Central Business District.

E. Industrial

Industrial land uses are planned for 159 acres (0.7%) of the total land area of Hamilton Township and 59.6 acres (7.7%) of the Village. Generally, Industrial future land use classification is found in or near the Village of Decatur to take advantage of available public utilities, the existing street network and the proximity of available work force. However, in some instances it may be appropriate to locate agriculturally related industrial uses, such as food processing facilities, in areas designated for agricultural protection. 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

It is important 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.

Most Industrial land uses will continue to be in the Village and should be compatible with adjoining land uses. As such, uses should be designed with sufficient buffering and landscaping and be situated to minimize negative impacts in the area. The Village should revise the zoning ordinance to include operational guidelines, development standards, development standards, performance measures and incentives to ensure compatibility with surrounding uses.

Mixed-Use

Approximately 33.2 acres or 4.3% of the total land area of the Village of Decatur and 321 acres of Decatur Township (1.5%) is classified as Mixed-Use. The Mixed-Use future land use classification is largely situated at the east and west entrances to the Village along Delaware Street (M-51) and in Decatur Township north of the Village along M-51. The intent is not for Mixed-Uses to be spread along the entire corridor along M-51 in the Township, but to be developed in clusters along the highway. This classification is characterized by a compatible mixture of land uses which may include residential (including multi-family), retail, offices, recreational and entertainment; within a planned development approach that creates a community gathering place and presents an attractive and vibrant entrance to the Village. These areas are considered ‘gateways’ to the Village Central Business District and should include streetscape improvements such as lighting and signage that are compatible to those employed within the downtown and announce to the traveler that they have entered a special place.

Implementation Recommendations

A Mixed-Use development approach should 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. An environment that is more conducive to mutual interdependence in terms of living, working, shopping, entertainment and recreation.
 5. Site design and building standards that reflect an appropriate transition towards downtown.

Public Land/Park/Open Space

Approximately 234 acres or about 1% of the total land area of Hamilton Township and 260 acres of Decatur Village (about 33% of the total Village land area) is classified for public facilities, parks and open space. The Public Land/Open Space future land use classification essentially documents where existing 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 criteria:

- Identification of areas in public ownership.
- Identification of areas close to high density residential areas to ensure that people of all ages 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 near concentrations of the population to accommodate easy access by residents. This serves 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 areas by developers.
3. Establishment of development regulations to include incentives for providing recreational areas in a development,
4. Requirements for open space or 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.

The central location of the Village and its facilities addresses many of the recreational needs of the Townships; however, portions of the Townships' population are a considerable distance away from any facilities and they can only be reached by automobile. Unique opportunities exist within the Townships for the provision of additional special purpose parks or conservation areas. Specific opportunities include greenways along creeks and surrounding wetlands, a community park in the vicinity of the Hamilton Township Hall and acquisition of habitat corridors for wildlife viewing, hiking and hunting.

Transportation

There are no plans to either build new roads or dramatically increase the width or capacity of

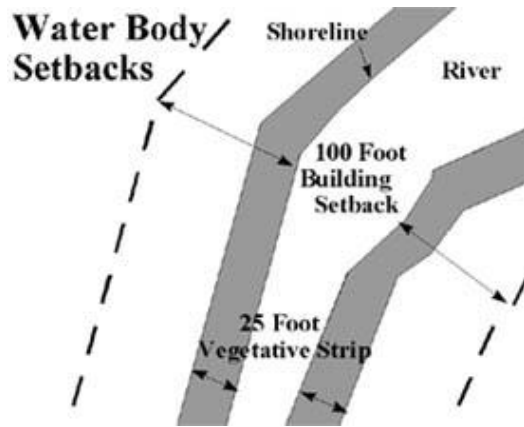
existing roads. It is necessary for the Village and the Townships to regularly monitor the condition of roads in the area. In the Townships, the responsibility of maintaining the roads is with the Michigan Department of Transportation or the Van Buren County Road Commission. The Village will continue 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 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 four spurs.

Surface Water Protection Overlay

Approximately 3,826 acres in Hamilton Township, 1,585 acres in Decatur Township and 70 acres in the Village of Decatur are within the Surface Water Protection Overlay classification. Development and land use activities in these areas can directly impact the quality of water resources. Overlay classifications or zones are special districts that supplement, but do not replace, the existing applicable underlying zoning regulations. Overlay zones can be used to achieve different objectives, ranging from commercial corridor improvement to river protection efforts. Overlay zones are especially useful when an area contains unique opportunities or constraints under several different zoning designations.

Surface Water Protection 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 criteria:

- 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

An overlay future land use classification is best implemented through the adoption of a corresponding overlay zoning district. 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.



The zoning ordinance 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, uncleared 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 mainstream, 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 mainstream, 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.

Wellhead Protection Areas

The Village of Decatur and the Townships rely exclusively on groundwater as their drinking water source. In response to the concern over safety of public water supplies, the Village

adopted a Wellhead Protection Program (WHPP) in 2015. WHPPs develop long-term strategies aimed at protecting community drinking water supplies. The purpose of developing a WHPP is to identify the Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA) and develop long-term strategies aimed at safeguarding the area from contamination. A WHPA is defined as the surface and subsurface areas surrounding a water well or well field, which supplies a public water system, and through which contaminants are reasonably likely to move toward and reach the water well or well field within a 10-year time-of-travel. The State of Michigan requires communities to identify seven elements to be included in the WHPP. These elements are described below.

- **Roles and Responsibilities** – Identify individuals responsible for the development, implementation, and long-term maintenance of the local WHPP.
- **WHPA Delineation** – Determine that area which contributes groundwater to the public water supply wells.
- **Contaminant Source Inventory** – Identify known and potential sites of contamination within the WHPA and include in a contaminant source inventory list and map.
- **Management Strategies** – Provide mechanisms which will reduce the risk of existing and potential sources of contamination from reaching the public water supply wells or well field.
- **Contingency Planning** – Develop an effective contingency plan in case of a water supply emergency.
- **Siting of New Wells** – Provide information on existing groundwater availability, the ability of the PWSS to meet present and future demands and the vulnerability of the existing wells to contamination.
- **Public Education and Outreach** – Generate community awareness in the WHPP by focusing on public education and the dissemination of WHPP information.

It is the intent of this Plan to recognize the importance of groundwater protection within the Village of Decatur and the Townships and to encourage protection of the Village’s public water supply wells through the establishment of a Wellhead Protection Zoning Ordinance. Within the ordinance, zoning regulations will limit land uses and practices that may degrade groundwater quality within and outside the WHPA.

The most significant sources of water supply contamination are landfills, surface impoundment areas, subsurface percolation from septic tanks and cesspools, open dumps,

uncapped or improperly capped abandoned wells, injection wells and underground storage tanks. These uses represent both *point* and *non-point* contamination sources. Point source is the term used to describe contaminants, which originate in the immediate area of the well or tap. All of the above, if located in close proximity to the water supply source, are examples of potential point source polluters. Contaminants from these uses may seep directly down through the soil to the water source.

Non-point source contamination is much more difficult to control because the cause of the problem may be located a considerable distance from the well. This type of contamination is caused by pollutants that filter into an underground aquifer and then migrate slowly through the groundwater aquifer to off-site wells and water sources. Prevention of this type of contamination must involve a collective effort on the part of property owners and local officials from a large geographic area. It is the recommendation of this Plan that all existing and future wells be protected from both point and non-point source contamination to the greatest degree possible. It is also the intent of this Plan to recognize the importance of groundwater protection within the Village of Decatur and the Townships.

The goals from the 2015 Wellhead Protection Plan are as follows:

- Provide the local governmental framework, such as regulations and policies, to prevent groundwater contamination from occurring at businesses and industries which store, use or generate quantities of hazardous wastes in the WHPA.
- Provide for the protection of Decatur's drinking water supply through comprehensive planning provisions for the Village.
- Enhance communication and coordination between local and state agencies on pollution incidents to assure adequate cleanup for natural resource and public health protection.
- Work with local, state and federal agencies to ensure identified contamination sites do not impact groundwater resources.
- Implement a public education program to inform residents, businesses and farmers on the importance of groundwater protection and what they can do to protect their drinking water.
- Establish a WHPA based on the 10 year capture zone identified in the delineation process when new wells are developed (if necessary). The Village will first plan to work with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to develop a provisional WHPA.
- Update the inventory and mapping of all potential sources of contamination within the WHPA every six years.

- Monitor existing and future activities within the WHPA that have been identified as potential sources of contamination.
- Maintain an up-to-date emergency response plan for alternative drinking water supplies to help mitigate contamination of the current water supply.
- Site new wells properly to maximize yield and minimize potential contamination.
- Educate property owners within the WHPA to assure that land uses on their property do not threaten the drinking water supply.

Zoning Plan

The Michigan Planning enabling Act requires that a Master Plan include a Zoning Plan, which includes an explanation of how the land use classifications set forth on the Future Land Use Map relate to the districts on the zoning map. The Zoning Plan sets forth the future land use classifications and identifies the corresponding zoning districts from the Village and Township Zoning Ordinances. Recommendations regarding the implementation of the Master Plan through the regulations of the Zoning Ordinance are set forth in the detailed future land use classification descriptions.

FLU Classifications	Corresponding Zoning Districts		
	Village of Decatur	Decatur Township	Hamilton Township
Agriculture Protection Area		Agriculture Residential	Agricultural
Rural Residential		R1 - Low Density (Rural) Residential	R1 - Low Density (Rural) Residential
Campground Resort		Needs to be developed	C1 – Resort Mixed Use
Primary Growth Area		R-2 – Medium Density Residential, R-3 – Manufactured Housing Park, R-4 – Lake Residential, C-2 – General Commercial	R-2 – Medium Density Residential, R-3 – Manufactured Housing Park, R-4 – Lake Residential, C-2 – General Commercial
Residential Multiple-Family Residential Neighborhood Commercial Central Business District	R1– One & Two Family Residential R2 – Multiple Family Needs to be Developed B1 – Central Business		
Mixed Use	Needs to be developed	C-1 Mixed Use	
Industrial	I – Industrial	L-1 – Light Industrial, M - Manufacturing	L-1 – Light Industrial, M - Manufacturing
Public Land/Park/Open Space	Needs to be developed		Open Space Overlay

Implementation Strategies

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 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 important topics 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 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 to implement the Plan:

Continued Cooperation Between Units of Government

A strength that the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 several recommendations and policy guidance. Within the Decatur-Hamilton Community, there are limited resources in terms of staff, volunteer time, and funds to implement all 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 not a popular technique among municipal and township officials, on occasion, annexation provides an opportunity for a 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 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 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 waterfront 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, should be evaluated to determine their appropriateness for the Decatur-Hamilton Community:

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 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 Michigan Zoning Enabling Act and the zoning ordinance, specific zoning regulations applied to property shall be based upon a plan designed to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the community. The following are zoning ordinance updates to consider:

- **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 based on 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 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 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 commercial 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, 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

The 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 and Townships created a joint recreation plan in 2020 which needs to be updated every

5 years. Forming a joint commission or even a recreation authority to develop and implement a plan has merit. The plan will 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.

Redevelopment Plans

Several properties that may offer opportunities for redevelopment and thus economic expansion may contain a variety of contaminants and may face a variety of other challenges. Undertaking a redevelopment 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. The Village of Decatur is becoming a redevelopment-ready community and will focus efforts on downtown, the industrial park and along M-51. See this document for best practices

<https://www.miplace.org/4a714c/globalassets/documents/rrc/rrc-best-practices.pdf>.

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

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 program 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 several 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 31. Action Plan

Action	Lead Organization	Potential Funding	End Product / Performance Measure	Occurrence
Ensure updated master plan is available on each community and the county's website	Staff	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 plan) and announce an annual joint meeting about the master plan (invite planning commissions, boards/councils)	Planning Commissions, Township Boards, and Village Council	None needed	<p>Informed public (include future land use map, describe main goals, compact development, farmland and natural resources preservation and business retention)</p> <p>Evaluate progress, revisit priorities, discuss village boundaries and water/sewer expansion plans, evaluate if the master plan needs to be updated</p> <p>Consensus on Where, When, and How development will occur.</p>	Annually (along with joint board meeting in June)
<p>Conduct a technical review of the Zoning Ordinance (identify provisions that inhibit implementation of the Plan; identify amendments needed to implement the Plan)</p> <p>Create a Zoning Amendment Work Plan & Schedule</p>	Planning Commissions	General Revenue	Updated Ordinances and Regulations, which are consistent with the Master Plan	Year 1 and as needed

Action	Lead Organization	Potential Funding	End Product / Performance Measure	Occurrence
Proceed with the Zoning Amendment Work Plan	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)
Continue to support agricultural businesses in the community and continue to participate in the county's preservation program.	Village Council, Township Boards, Chamber of Commerce, DDA, Village Manager	General Revenue	Strategies and programs, such as Farmers Market, to Strengthen Local Agricultural Economy	On-going
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	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	On-going
Pursue the attraction and development of businesses.	Village Manger, DDA, Chamber of Commerce, County Economic Development	General Revenue	Program to attract and/or develop key businesses to community.	On-going
Develop a business incubator.	Village Manger, DDA, Chamber of Commerce, County Economic Development	General Revenue	Program to encourage small business startups	Year 3

Action	Lead Organization	Potential Funding	End Product / Performance Measure	Occurrence
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
Update the Joint Parks and Recreation Plan every 5 years and form a joint Committee or Authority (investigate trail projects)	Village Council, Township Boards	General Revenue	A committee which can develop and implement a joint recreation plan for the Village and Townships A plan to maintain, expand and fund parks and recreation for the area	As soon as possible
Study feasibility of joint services such as a Joint Public Safety and Code Enforcement Department/Program	Village Council, Village Manager, Township Boards, Police Chief, County Sheriff	General Revenue	A determination if a joint department is feasible and will 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
Investigate funding options for treatment of wastewater for residents around Lake of Woods	Village Council and Township Boards	General Revenue	Funding opportunities identified	To Be Determined
Ensure the Village is redevelopment ready and implement the public participation plan	Village Manager and Council	General Revenue, DDA	Listed as a Redevelopment Ready Community by the State of Michigan*	As soon as possible

Action	Lead Organization	Potential Funding	End Product / Performance Measure	Occurrence
Improve formatting and visual quality of plans when being updated.	Village Manager, Township Supervisors	General Revenue	Plans that are attractive and easy to read	As needed
Investigate impacts of short-term rentals and determine what, if any, policy actions should be taken	Village Manager, Township Supervisors	General Revenue	Report on Impacts Example Policies	As soon as possible
Host education session on topics related to identified Work Plan Items	Planning Commissions	General Revenue	Secure informational material; promote public education; encourage partnerships	Ongoing
Receive training to build site plan review skills	Planning Commissions and ZBAs	General Revenue	Obtain skills to effectively apply site design requirements and realize the objectives of the standards	Year 2

*Redevelopment Ready Community Fact Sheets <http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/files/fact-sheets/redevelopmentreadycommunitiesprogram.pdf?rnd=1464922786730>

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

APPENDIX 1: 2015 Community Survey Results

Decatur Village, Decatur Township and Hamilton Township Community Survey

We want your opinions for updating the joint master plan for Decatur Village, Decatur Township and Hamilton Township. Please complete and return this survey by AUGUST 1, 2015. You can also take this survey on-line at www.surveymonkey.com/s/DDHCommunitysurvey.

I live/own property in ___ Decatur Township; ___ Decatur Village; ___ Hamilton Township

I work in ___ Decatur Township; ___ Decatur Village; ___ Hamilton Township; ___ other

I own a business in ___ Decatur Township; ___ Decatur Village; ___ Hamilton Township

How many years have you and your family resided/owned property in the community? ___

How much do you agree or disagree with the following Statements (circle one answer):

1. Concentrate new business, industry and residential development in or near the village.
1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
2. Focus on encouraging additional shopping opportunities in the Village.
1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
3. Focus on encouraging additional employment opportunities in the area.
1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
4. Recognize farming as an essential economic activity and support voluntary preservation of farmland and open space.
1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
5. Keep residential densities low in the Township to maintain rural character.
1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
6. Limit the expansion of municipal sewer and water services to serve only the areas surrounding the Village.
1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
7. Provide more effective enforcement of codes and ordinances to eliminate blight.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

8. Develop a short and long range plan to prioritize road improvements.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

9. Improve roads to provide bike lanes or paved shoulders for pedestrians and bicyclists.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

10. Ensure neighborhoods in the Village have adequate sidewalks and pedestrian access to downtown, schools and parks.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

11. Develop standards for new development that will protect wetlands, rivers, streams and lakes by reducing polluted runoff.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

12. Expand high speed internet options to the area.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

13. Establish a joint police department that serves Decatur Village, Decatur Township and Hamilton Township.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

14. Improve the signage and landscaping at the entrances to the Village.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

15. Improve the quality of the drinking water supplied by the Village.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= No Opinion 4= Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

List specific improvements you would like to see at area parks:

Firehouse Park on M-51 _____

DDA Park at Phelps and St. Mary's Street _____

Red Woolfe Park _____

Raider Romp _____

Village Skate Park _____

Grange Hall, Hamilton Township _____
 Other Parks/ Recreation Improvements _____

General Comments: _____

SURVEY RESULTS

Total Responses 152

I live/own property in:

Decatur Township 62 | Hamilton Township 57 | Decatur Village 36 | No answer 2

I work in:

Decatur Township 7 | Hamilton Township 10 | Decatur Village 17 | No answer 122

I own a business in:

Decatur Township 5 | Hamilton Township 8 | Decatur Village 7 | No answer 132

How many years have you and your family resided /owned property in the community?

less than a year 3 | 1-5 years 11 | 6-20 years 26 | more than 20 years 105 | No answer 7

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	1 strongly agree	2 agree	3 no opinion	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree	No answer
11. Develop standards for new development that will protect wetlands, rivers, streams and lakes by reducing polluted runoff.	67	52	16	9	2	6
4. Recognize farming as an essential economic activity and support voluntary preservation of farmland and open space.	66	61	19	0	1	5
3. Focus on encouraging additional employment opportunities in the area.	61	65	16	2	3	5
12. Expand high speed internet options to the area.	61	47	32	5	1	6
7. Provide more effective enforcement of codes and ordinances to eliminate blight.	61	44	32	5	5	5
8. Develop a short and long range plan to prioritize road improvements.	53	76	10	3	4	6

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	1 strongly agree	2 agree	3 no opinion	4 disagree	5 strongly disagree	No answer
2. Focus on encouraging additional shopping opportunities in the Village.	45	68	28	3	3	5
1. Concentrate new business, industry and residential development in or near the village.	45	62	29	7	4	5
10. Ensure neighborhoods in the Village have adequate sidewalks and pedestrian access to downtown, schools and parks.	41	73	22	6	5	5
15. Improve the quality of the drinking water supplied by the Village.	42	43	52	7	2	6
5. Keep residential densities low in the Township to maintain rural character.	34	44	40	23	5	6
13. Establish a joint police department that serves Decatur Village, Decatur Township and Hamilton Township.	32	45	33	22	14	6
6. Limit the expansion of municipal sewer and water services to serve only the areas surrounding the Village.	29	40	41	24	12	6
9. Improve roads to provide bike lanes or paved shoulders for pedestrians and bicyclists.	28	33	46	16	24	5
14. Improve the signage and landscaping at the entrances to the Village.	20	49	55	17	6	5

Survey Comments Regarding Parks

Firehouse Park on M-51

- 7 - no improvements needed
- 4 - fix tennis courts
- 1 - fix tennis courts or take them out
- 1 - take out tennis/basketball courts
- 2 - improve playground (more swings, more equipment)

Other Comments

It could use some work.

Landscaping
no opinion
children friendly
Add trees to block the storage buildings

DDA Park at Phelps and St. Mary's Street

6 - no improvements needed

Other Comments

It could use some work.
Keep it cleaned and well maintained
Need less trees
no opinion
more welcoming
Agree
Improved pavilion

Red Woolfe Park

6- no improvements needed

Other Comments

Could be made more attractive
upgrade and keep nice ; put some fill so it will not flood with every rain
make it more user friendly/policed
get some one to run concession stand with ice cream. Otherwise its very nice needs up keep.
This one should look the best of any of them. Its where visitors come to enjoy a day at the lake
More updated playground equipment, larger beach area
Remove cannon to VFW or downtown park
Get rid of the fence
no opinion
supervision-hangout-strange men right now
I would like improvements to this park.
New concession and restrooms

Raider Romp

6 - no improvements needed

Other Comments

It could use some work.

keep it cleaned and well maintained

Needs upgrade

Upkeep Clean Bathrooms

Additional Cleanup

no opinion

just for toddlers right now

wish the bathrooms could be open more

Needs shade so playground equipment is not too hot to use during the day

Village Skate Park

7 - no improvements needed

2- eliminate

3- waste of money/mistake

Other Comments

Landscape

no opinion

Grange Hall, Hamilton Township

4 - no improvements needed

Other Comments

It could use some work

make it more useful

Already restored open it up free to residents for family gatherings with deposit to leave it clean as they found it.

Development of Stage

Yes

Plow parking area for winter access

This is improving but needs more

no opinion

Develop old race track into a walking/running track

Other Parks/ Recreation Improvements

5 - no improvements needed

3 - maintenance needed

Other Comments

I do not use the parks so am not aware of what may be needed.

Roads and sewers are more important

I appreciate seeing tree and grassy areas

limit the number of parks to two

No tax hikes, try to fun the parks through fundraising

remove big rocks at Lake of the Woods P.A.

Assure there are bikes racks at every park.

General Comments

- I don't live here i just own the property.
- I will not be returning to Mich.
- Need a volunteer structured program to assist residents to maintain their homes for limited income/disabilities/aging they provide volunteer time in trade for labor if able to.
- The grain elevators in the downtown sky-line is terrible mistake-not charming! Letting the old school stop falling into disrepair.
- Landlords to be more aware of what is happening at their properties and better upkeep.
- In reference to question #4 about focusing on additional employment opportunities in the area: focus on economic development encourage only "triple bottom line" businesses that address environmental, social justice and economics.
- In reference to question #5 encourage small family farms - discourage agribusiness, diversity, decentralize, & localize.
- In reference to question #9 maintenance vs expansion - avoid unnecessary removal of trees and rural character- CR 352.
- Eliminate topless bar.
- Created strict dog regulations and enforce them. Example: fenced/leashed with strong penalties for loose dogs so citizens are safe to walk and bike. Local police should be able to pick up loose dogs.
- Sewer system around Lake of the Woods to improve lake quality and values very important now!
- Get some people in office who care about Decatur Area. Ones who will spend the funds wisely and make the best of the situation at hand. Leave Decatur the rural community it already is.

- When a creek clean up is assess the taxpayers don't maintain if property then it has to be done again. Utilize the jail program of free help.
- * You were out-of-line to send survey with taxes then expect the tax payers to spend 49 cents to mail it back
- In reference to #8 short & long range plan to prioritize road improvements: people in charge need to spend funds wisely .
- In reference to #10 adequate sidewalks and pedestrian access: The ones in place are not kept up... why add more.
- In reference to #12 expand high speed internet options to the area: the ones in place don't work well...
- In reference to #13 establish a joint police department: never seen them doing a lot!!
- In reference to # 14 improve signage and landscaping: What for? People come to Decatur when they need to. There are not "sights" to see.
- In reference to #15 Improve the quality of drinking water: It is what it is.
- Do more active controlling of drug use and dealings in & around community no matter who's toes get stepped on. Lets not be know as SW Mich drug capitol.
- In reference to #13 about establish a joint police department: They don't do much enforcement work now not easily accessible or bold to handle actual crimes.
- In reference to #14 about improved the signage and landscaping: Perhaps these monies could be used more proficiently.
- Need sewers around lake of the woods.
- Have the air quality in Decatur Tested/monitored. It has been bad since the corn silos/dryer were constructed.
- Water and its quality are of utmost importance. Requires better filtering systems on them.
- In regards to Question #1 on only environmentally safe company's.
- In regards to question # 15 eliminate the rust in the water supply.
- Decatur Township is rural. But don't try & take away good farming will take care of itself. Voluntary protection is fine as long as the tax payers don't subsidize preservation.
No restrictions open space non farm ground, we don't have a problem. Don't put restrictions on building sites.
- On question # 1 Industrial and business yes but not residential development.
- On question #5 depends how low perhaps minimal lot size = 1.5 acres.
- A location for the disposal of leaves, grass clippings, and other yard waste in the fall for Decatur township residents.
- Plating of trees when take out which was wrong.
- I would like to see less development where trees are torn down. Widening of roads by tearing down trees and developing wooded lots ruins the country atmosphere and the natural beauty.
- Everything seems in good shape.
- Protect lake of the woods install sewers

- The county is moving fast on the internet
- We need a sewer around the lake of the woods
- More Eateries
- The police need to stop the harassment specifically
- We need road improvements more than we need a bike or pedestrian path
- Encourage more restaurants
- I don't use the parks at all so I can't help you with that.
- I believe village and township leadership are doing a good job!
- Already paying too high of taxes for poor drinking water, had to buy bottled. Won't even give my pets the water here.
- Need large clear signs directing semis to Midwest Fasteners
- I Wendall Tyler don't own this property, I just pay the taxes
- My taxes have been raised every year
- Fire permits exemption for those without violations
- Being an absentee land owner affects my answers.
- All need to be maintained and cleaned-especially restrooms regularly.
- Everything seems ok!
- This is such a nice area, we need to focus on sales
- Blight is getting out of hand.
- Try to keep the cost down
- Eliminate blight issues in Decatur & Hamilton Townships.
- It would be nice to have a sidewalk from around the lake to town walking on Territorial & Phelps isn't too safe!
- #7 should be enforced to a greater degree the corner lot next to our property has been an eyesore for years but nothing is done about it.
 - Roadside litter along the southern must end of C.R. 681 is horrible. Can this be cleaned up?
 - Keep the sewer lines in the township
 - Clean up run-down areas in town
 - No other lake within 60 miles closes for 2/3 of the year!!! That park should be usable 365 days. What is with this town & fences??
 - #3 Encourage only "triple bottom-line" business that address environment, social justice, & economics.
 - #4 encourage small family farms discourage agribusinesses.

- #8 Maintenance good, expansion back avoid unnecessary removal of trees & rural character (CR 352) Small businesses locals want.
- A few of these I have no opinions one way or the other. I know in Marquette where I am at the moment. They get lots of grants from blight and other things and I am wondering why Decatur can't get more grants and help that is available.
- In reference to question #18 They carry the standards too far for water protection when they say we can't clean a ditch on our own farm.
- Question #6 is confusing- does surrounding the village include Hamilton Township if so, we strongly agree.
- The Lake of the Woods is one Decatur best assets. How about a sewer around the lake? Our lake is slowly dying because of all of the septic systems that are leaching into the lake. Don't wait until it is too lake to recover.
- Decatur/Hamilton Township need to improve time of response for ambulance/EMT arrivals at emergency situations neighbor died hat to wait 40 minutes to get ambulance to the scene **unacceptable horrible service.
- In reference to question #7 enforce what codes and ordinances we have.
- The lakes need a sewer system around in reference to question #6
- In reference to question #10 only if grants are there to support sidewalk and pedestrian access to downtown, schools, and parks.
- In reference to question #12 expand high speed inter options to the area only if a grant pays for it.
- We have a great need for a sewer system.
- Make this a clean environment and rural community that has the best internet options to attract the work from home movement.
- Work on drainage after big rain from farm fields and to grow with out chemicals.
- I would like to see sewers on lakeview drive. Also, more Stores in town.
- Provide sidewalks on John Street to school. It is a major car and pedestrian route but there are no sidewalks.
- You must realize that improvements to infrastructure require initial and forever capital in the form of increased taxes forever. Leave it all alone and keep it simple. Please.
- Sorry, but being new to the area and not having children, my husband and I have yet to see any of the parks Decatur has to offer.
- Let low income people know by mail that they are eligible for commodities, etc . I know many people that done even know and read about it in the paper the following week about how great human services of Decatur is.
- Make paper bags available for leaf pickup
- Enforcement of care of rental homes within the Village and Township has got to improve or our areas (Village & townships) are not going to attract potential homeowners & grow in population of productive citizens. People are not encouraged to buy

homes within the Village/Township when they see the disrepair, unkept homes as potential neighbors. It is sad for those of us who have nice homes, yards, and continually improve our homes to be surrounded by slum lord homes which we have to call the Village Office to report issues continually. The fact the rental homes only need to be inspected once every 3 years is really ridiculous. We have a beautiful downtown and so many great things happening in comparison to other Villages our size in the county, let's show our pride by cleaning up the rental homes!

- Village of Decatur should become more bike friendly and look for opportunities to create a more healthy community.
- Eliminate the multitude of 100-125 decibel sirens in the Independence Day Parade.
- Why has old cars been sitting in a yard on Parkhurst for so long?
- The Village sewer system needs to add the Lake of the Woods properties around the lake. This will help preserve one of the key attractions to the area. The recent flooding highlights the need to minimize septic system runoff into the lake. The current sewer system is more than adequate to add lake properties. In fact, the Village population has declined in the last 10 years.



Visioning Sessions

For the 2000 Master Plan, a set of three Community Visioning Meetings were conducted to elicit ideas regarding the Decatur-Hamilton Community 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 20th, 2001, at the VFW Hall in the Village of Decatur and in the evening of March 20th 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 Community. 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 Community.

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 Community 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 Community 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 Community. 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 Community 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.

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**

Land Management Option	Description	Agreement	Landowner reimbursement
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 Community 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 Alternatives Program (TAP)

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a competitive grant program that uses federal transportation funds designated by Congress for specific activities that enhance the intermodal transportation system and provide safe alternative transportation options. Locally, this program is administered through the Michigan Department of Transportation with involvement of the local Metropolitan Planning Organization, Southwest Michigan Planning 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.

APPENDIX 4 – Public Notices and Adoption Resolutions

Notice of Intent to Plan



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

To: The Planning Commissions of Cass County, Van Buren County, Wayne Township, Volinia Township, Keeler Township, Lawrence Township, Paw Paw Township, Porter Township

From: Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (on behalf of Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, Village of Decatur (Van Buren County))

Date: December 13, 2023

Re: Notice of Intent to Plan

Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and the Village of Decatur are updating their Joint Master Plan. A **Joint Master Plan** is a long range-planning tool used to define the three municipalities' joint vision, goals, and policies. An effective plan accurately communicates citizen needs and desires about their communities and recommends specific strategies to achieve those values.

Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and the Village of Decatur will welcome your cooperation and comments. As required by law, you will receive a copy of the proposed plan for review and comment. The proposed plan will be provided in electronic format, unless otherwise requested.

Sincerely,

Marcy Hamilton

Senior Planner

Distribution Letter



To: The Planning Commissions of Cass County, Van Buren County, Wayne Township, Volinia Township, Keeler Township, Lawrence Township, Paw Paw Township, Porter Township

From: Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (on behalf of Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, Village of Decatur (Van Buren County))

Date: September 24, 2024

Re: Distribution of Joint Master Plan DRAFT for review

Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and the Village of Decatur are updating their Joint Master Plan that outlines the community's vision, goals, future land use and action plan.

Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and the Village of Decatur have produced a proposed plan for review by the public and by neighboring jurisdictions. Decatur Township, Hamilton Township, and the Village of Decatur will welcome your comments on this draft plan. The initial letter sent at the beginning of the planning process indicated that the plan would be sent in electronic format unless otherwise requested. Since no requests were received, the plan can be viewed here:

https://www.swmpc.org/media/assets/proj/media/decatur_hamilton_2024_finaldraftforcomment.pdf.

To request a paper copy of the proposed plan, please email (hamiltonm@swmpc.org) or call Marcy at 269-925-1137 x 1525.

Municipalities have 65 days to review and send comments. Municipalities should send comments to the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), attn: Marcy Hamilton, 376 W. Main St, Ste 130, Benton Harbor, MI 49022 or to hamiltonm@swmpc.org. Counties have between the 75th and 95th day after submission to submit comments to SWMPC, attn: Marcy Hamilton at the email or mailing address above.

Sincerely,

Marcy Hamilton

Marcy Hamilton
Deputy Executive Director

AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

State of Michigan
County of Van Buren

R. Michael Wilcox, being duly sworn, says he is one of the principal clerks of the Courier-Leader, a weekly newspaper published and circulated in said counties. The annexed is a printed copy of a notice which was published in said newspaper on the following date(s), to wit: 12/19

R. Michael Wilcox
R. Michael Wilcox

Subscribed and sworn to before me this

20 day of December A.D. 2024

Arteria C. Taylor
Arteria C. Taylor

Notary Public, State of Michigan,
County of Saint Joseph

My commission expires 05/11/2030

WILCOX NEWSPAPERS, LLC
DBA WILCOX NEWSPAPERS
P.O. Box 189, Allegan, MI 49010 - (269) 657-5080

NOTICE OF PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD AND PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE FOR JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

The Planning Commissions for Decatur Village, Decatur Township and Hamilton Township will hold a public comment period ending with a public hearing at 4:00 PM on January 16, 2025 at Decatur Village Hall, 114 N. Phelps Street, Decatur, MI 49045.

The purpose of the comment period and public hearing is to invite and hear comments on the Proposed Joint Comprehensive Plan Update for Decatur Village, Decatur Township and Hamilton Township. At the hearing, all interested parties will be given an opportunity to be heard.

If you cannot attend the public hearing, written comments can be sent to hamiltonm@swmpc.org or mailed to Decatur Village, 114 N. Phelps Street, Decatur, MI 49045 and must be received before January 16, 2025.

The proposed plan can be reviewed at the Decatur Village Hall, Decatur Township Hall, Hamilton Township Hall and at the Webster Memorial Library during business hours. The plan can also be reviewed online at <https://www.swmpc.org/decham.asp>.

Decatur Township Planning Commission
Hamilton Township Planning Commission
Village of Decatur Planning Commission

Village of Decatur, Decatur Township, Hamilton Township
Planning Commission Joint Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 16, 2025, at 4:00 PM
Village Hall, 114 N. Phelps Street
Decatur, MI 49045

1. **Call to Order**

Moelaart called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM

2. **Pledge of Allegiance**

3. **Roll Call/ Attendance**

Village of Decatur- Chairman Blaine Rex (excused), Janet Moelaart, Cindy Pachner, Victoria Coe, Michele Gateley, Christopher Tapper (Village Manager), Shantel Pentland (Administrative Assistant), Rebecca Harvey (Village Planner), Mary Hamilton (SWMPC)

Decatur Township- Kevin Kusmack (Township Supervisor), Tim Martin, Ryan Rarick, Sandy Athey, Nick Siskaninetz

Hamilton Township- Rich Conway (Township Supervisor), Sandy Hanson, John Young, Bill Lawson, Steve Peterson, Sherry DeLoach, Karen Makay

4. **Public Comments**

Let the record show no public comment was offered.

5. **Approval of Consent Agenda Items**

5A.1 Gateley made a motion with support from Pachner to approve the Joint Meeting Agenda for January 16, 2025, carried unanimously 16-0.

6. **Communications- Presentations & Guests**

6A.1 – Marcy Hamilton, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission congratulated the Joint Boards on the huge accomplishment of updating the Joint Comprehensive Plan. All recommended changes and feedback to the prior version have been updated and are included in this Plan from all three communities.

7. **Public Hearing**

7A.1 – Moelaart made a motion to exit the Joint Meeting and enter the Public Hearing to receive public comments on the Joint Comprehensive Plan at 4:10 PM,

supported by Pachner, carried unanimously 16-0.

Let the record show no public comment was given.

Coe made a motion to exit the Public Hearing and re-enter the Joint Meeting at 4:11 PM, supported by Pachner, carried unanimously 16-0.

8. **Unfinished Business**

None

9. **New Business**

9A.1 – Coe made a motion to recommend the approval of Resolution 2025-001, adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Master Plan, to the Village Council at the February 3, 2025 Regular Meeting, with support from Gateley, carried unanimously 4-0.

9A.2 – Athey made a motion that the Decatur Township Planning Commission recommends the Decatur Township Board adopt the Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025, with support from Rarick, carried unanimously 4-0.

9A.3 – Makay made a motion that the Hamilton Township Board adopt the Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025, with support from Hanson, carried unanimously 7-0.

10. **Public Comments- Second Opportunity**

Marcy Hamilton, SWMPC once again congratulated the three communities on this accomplishment. She also shared that the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission annually gives an award, and she believes we should apply as this Joint Plan is unique for our area. Village Manager Tapper thanked the three communities for their collective hard work to create this vision for the Decatur Community.

11. **Commission Comments**

Moelaart stated all of the Planning Commission Members should be proud of this accomplishment. Peterson thanked Marcy Hamilton for her hard work in assisting with the Plan update.

12. **Adjournment**

Coe made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:15 PM, with support from Pachner, carried unanimously 16-0.

Minutes submitted by: Shantel Pentland, Administrative Assistant

Resolution
Decatur Township Planning Commission Recommends Township Board Adopts
VILLAGE OF DECATUR; DECATUR TOWNSHIP; HAMILTON TOWNSHIP
JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2025

WHEREAS, Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended provides for a Township Planning Commission to prepare and recommend adoption of a master plan for the physical development of the Township; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Township Board and Planning Commission in cooperation with Hamilton Township and Decatur Village has prepared a plan update in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Township Board has passed a resolution asserting the Board's right to adopt the Master Plan and all elements and updates of that plan, as allowed by Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended; and,

WHEREAS, Decatur Township distributed the draft plan update to the county planning commission and the planning commissions of surrounding units of government, and all other relevant agencies for review and comment in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Township Planning Commission held a properly noticed public hearing on the draft plan update on January 16, 2025, in accordance with the requirements of Act 33 and other applicable statutes; and,

WHEREAS, at the public hearing held on January 16, 2025, the citizens of Decatur Township were afforded the opportunity to provide oral and written comments on the draft plan update, which comments the Planning Commission has taken into consideration; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Decatur Township Planning Commission recommends that Decatur Township Board adopts the **Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025**.

Offered By: Sandy Athey
Supported By: Ryan Rarick
Yeas: 4
Nays: 0

Resolution
Decatur Village Planning Commission Recommends Village Council Adopts
VILLAGE OF DECATUR; DECATUR TOWNSHIP; HAMILTON TOWNSHIP
JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2025

WHEREAS, Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended provides for a Village Planning Commission to prepare and recommend adoption of a master plan for the physical development of the Village; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Village Council and Planning Commission in cooperation with Hamilton Township and Decatur Township has prepared a plan update in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Village Council has passed a resolution asserting the Council's right to adopt the Master Plan and all elements and updates of that plan, as allowed by Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended; and,

WHEREAS, Decatur Village distributed the draft plan update to the county planning commission and the planning commissions of surrounding units of government, and all other relevant agencies for review and comment in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Village Planning Commission held a properly noticed public hearing on the draft plan update on January 16, 2025, in accordance with the requirements of Act 33 and other applicable statutes; and,

WHEREAS, at the public hearing held on January 16, 2025, the citizens of Decatur Village were afforded the opportunity to provide oral and written comments on the draft plan update, which comments the Planning Commission has taken into consideration; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Decatur Village Planning Commission recommends that Decatur Village Council adopts the **Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025**.

Offered By: *Coe*
Supported By: *Gateley*
Yeas: *Coe, Gateley, Moelbart, Pachner*
Nays: *None*
Absent: *Rex*

Resolution
Hamilton Township Planning Commission Recommends Township Board
Adopts VILLAGE OF DECATUR; DECATUR TOWNSHIP; HAMILTON
TOWNSHIP JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2025

WHEREAS, Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended provides for a Township Planning Commission to prepare and recommend adoption of a master plan for the physical development of the Township; and,

WHEREAS, the Hamilton Township Board and Planning Commission in cooperation with Decatur Township and Decatur Village has prepared a plan update in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Hamilton Township Board has passed a resolution asserting the Board's right to adopt the Master Plan and all elements and updates of that plan, as allowed by Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended; and,

WHEREAS, Hamilton Township distributed the draft plan update to the county planning commission and the planning commissions of surrounding units of government, and all other relevant agencies for review and comment in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Hamilton Township Planning Commission held a properly noticed public hearing on the draft plan update on January 16, 2025, in accordance with the requirements of Act 33 and other applicable statutes; and,

WHEREAS, at the public hearing held on January 16, 2025, the citizens of Hamilton Township were afforded the opportunity to provide oral and written comments on the draft plan update, which comments the Planning Commission has taken into consideration; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Hamilton Township Planning Commission recommends that Hamilton Township Board adopts the **Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025**.

Offered By: Sherry Deloach
Supported By: Steve Petersen
Yeas: Deloach, Petersen, Young+Lawson
Nays: N/A
Absent: Klein

Resolution of Adoption 2025-2

Decatur Township, Van Buren County, MI

VILLAGE OF DECATUR; DECATUR TOWNSHIP; HAMILTON TOWNSHIP
JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2025

WHEREAS, Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended provides for a Township Planning Commission to prepare and recommend adoption of a master plan for the physical development of the Township; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Township Board and Planning Commission in cooperation with Hamilton Township and Decatur Village has prepared a Master Plan Update in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Township Board has passed a resolution asserting the Board's right to adopt the Master Plan and all elements and updates of that plan, as allowed by Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended; and,

WHEREAS, Decatur Township distributed the draft Master Plan Update to the county planning commission and the planning commissions of surrounding units of government, and all other relevant agencies for review and comment in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Township Planning Commission held a properly noticed public hearing on the draft Master Plan Update on January 16, 2025, in accordance with the requirements of Act 33 and other applicable statutes; and,

WHEREAS, at the public hearing held on January 16, 2025, the citizens of Decatur Township were afforded the opportunity to provide oral and written comments on the draft Master Plan Update, which comments the Planning Commission has taken into consideration; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Township Planning Commission has adopted a resolution by majority vote of its membership recommending adoption of the Master Plan Update 2025 to the Township Board;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Decatur Township Board does hereby adopt the **Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025**.

Certification of Adoption: 02/13/2025

Offered By: Julie McKee

Supported By: Katelin Makay

Yeas: Kevin Kusmack, Julie McKee, Katelin Makay, Zach Polomcalk

Nays: Josh Hunsberger

Absent: Ø

VILLAGE OF DECATUR

COUNTY OF VAN BUREN

STATE OF MICHIGAN

**RESOLUTION 2025-001: A RESOLUTION TO ADOPT THE JOINT VILLAGE OF DECATUR, DECATUR TOWNSHIP,
HAMILTON TOWNSHIP JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

WHEREAS, Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended provides for a Village Planning Commission to prepare and recommend the adoption of a master plan for the physical development of the Village; and,

WHEREAS, the Village Council and Planning Commission in cooperation with Decatur and Hamilton Townships has prepared a Master Plan Update in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Village Council has passed a resolution asserting the Council's right to adopt the Master Plan and all elements and updates of that plan, as allowed by Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended; and,

WHEREAS, Decatur Village distributed the draft Master Plan Update to the county planning commission and the planning commissions of surrounding units of government, and all other relevant agencies for review and comment in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Village Planning Commission held a properly noticed public hearing on the draft Master Plan Update on January 16, 2025, in accordance with the requirements of Act 33 and other applicable statutes; and,

WHEREAS, at the public hearing held on January 16, 2025, the citizens of Decatur Village were afforded the opportunity to provide oral and written comments on the draft Master Plan Update, which comments the Planning Commission has taken into consideration; and,

WHEREAS, the Decatur Village Planning Commission has adopted a resolution by a majority vote of its membership recommending the adoption of the Master Plan Update 2025 to the Village Council;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE VILLAGE COUNCIL OF THE VILLAGE OF DECATUR, VAN BUREN COUNTY MICHIGAN, THAT:

The Decatur Village Council hereby adopts the Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025.

AYES: *Jackson, Pachner, Beute, Mead, Janssen, Peltrey, Elwaer*

NAYS: *None*

ABSENT: *None*

ABSTAINING: *None*

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED

Resolved this 3rd day of February 2025.

Ali Elwaer, Village President
Megan Duncan, Village Clerk & Treasurer

Ali Elwaer
Megan Duncan

CERTIFICATION OF RESOLUTION

I, Megan Duncan, Clerk & Treasurer of the Village of Decatur, Van Buren County, Michigan do hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution is a true and complete copy of the resolution duly adopted by the Village Council of the Village of Decatur, Michigan, at a Regular Meeting held February 3, 2025.

Megan Duncan, Village Clerk & Treasurer

Megan Duncan

Resolution of Adoption

Hamilton Township, Van Buren County, MI

**VILLAGE OF DECATUR; DECATUR TOWNSHIP; HAMILTON TOWNSHIP
JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2025**

WHEREAS, Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended provides for a Township Planning Commission to prepare and recommend adoption of a master plan for the physical development of the Township; and,

WHEREAS, the Hamilton Township Board and Planning Commission in cooperation with Decatur Township and Decatur Village has prepared a Master Plan Update in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Hamilton Township Board has passed a resolution asserting the Board's right to adopt the Master Plan and all elements and updates of that plan, as allowed by Act 33, Public Acts of Michigan 2008, as amended; and,

WHEREAS, Hamilton Township distributed the draft Master Plan Update to the county planning commission and the planning commissions of surrounding units of government, and all other relevant agencies for review and comment in compliance with Act 33; and,

WHEREAS, the Hamilton Township Planning Commission held a properly noticed public hearing on the draft Master Plan Update on January 16, 2025, in accordance with the requirements of Act 33 and other applicable statutes; and,

WHEREAS, at the public hearing held on January 16, 2025, the citizens of Hamilton Township were afforded the opportunity to provide oral and written comments on the draft Master Plan Update, which comments the Planning Commission has taken into consideration; and,

WHEREAS, the Hamilton Township Planning Commission has adopted a resolution by majority vote of its membership recommending adoption of the Master Plan Update 2025 to the Township Board;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Hamilton Township Board does hereby adopt the **Joint Comprehensive Plan 2025**.

Certification of Adoption:

Offered By: Karen Makay

Supported By: Sandra Hanson

Yeas: 3

Nays: 0

Absent: Justin Klein
Becky Mott