

CHAPTER 8 – FUTURE LAND USE

Future Land Use

The form and vitality of any community is defined largely by how its citizens see the way land is used and how that use relates to their daily life. As a result, the way the land is used is linked directly to the quality of life within Solon Township. As growth continues, the Township will have to address difficult zoning issues brought on by the pace and increasing complexity of development plans by residents and property owners. The need to provide flexibility, coupled with Solon Township's desire to maintain some degree of control, may create the need for modifications to zoning and other land development regulations.

The Community Attitude Survey was also used, in part, to make decisions regarding future land uses. For example, issues regarding growth had the following responses:

- ◆ An overwhelming 81% of residents support increased controls on development to protect water quality in rivers and streams.
- ◆ 69% would like to see accessory buildings limited according to lot size.
- ◆ 65% responded that their preference for future residential development is having large wooded lots.
- ◆ 65% of residents would like to see a senior citizen retirement community in the Township.
- ◆ 58% indicated that new single-family housing should be on lots of between 1 and 5 acres.
- ◆ 55% felt that preserving open space using clustering was not a promising idea.

Limitations to higher density residential development – Figure 8 illustrates the factors that contribute to the difficulty of higher density residential development.

Proposed Residential Development – Residential development should provide a range of housing choices and parcel sizes, as well as varied living arrangements. Therefore, the plan is to maintain a relatively low density throughout most of the Township by increasing the minimum lot size in the AR Agricultural District from one acre to two acres. However, where subdivisions, site condominiums and open space developments currently exist the one-acre minimum in the R-1 District can be maintained as shown on the Future Land Use Map. Closer

to Cedar Springs where potential utilities may be available in the future higher density housing such as apartments and senior housing could be provided. As noted it is proposed that the Agricultural and Residential areas generally be maintained at no less than 2-acre parcel sizes except for certain more developed areas where 1-acre minimum lot sizes reflect existing land use trends.

Proposed Commercial Development - By its very nature, Neighborhood Commercial areas may be appropriate within neighborhood areas, not simply in the areas designated on the Future Land Use Map. Small areas of Neighborhood commercial which serve a community may be appropriate in several areas of the township, whether shown on the future land use map or not.

Many residents of Solon Township consider the Algoma Avenue/17 Mile Road (M-46) intersection, the center of the Township but depend on Cedar Springs, Rockford, and Grand Rapids for shopping and social experiences. The issue confronting the community is how 17 Mile Road (M-46) will be developed. The Master Plan addresses the use of frontage along these corridors.

The purpose of the HC Highway Commercial District is to provide shopping areas, business and service establishments and commercial uses that serve the local community and travelers along US-131. 17 Mile (M-46) is experiencing increased development to the west of US-131 as a commercial area. To accommodate this growth, the HC Highway Commercial District should be expanded all the way from US-131 to Algoma Avenue along 17 Mile (M-46), especially to the north of 17 Mile, as shown on the Future Land Use Map.

In addition, the Township has been experiencing a need for increased light industrial areas. The area west of US-131 to Algoma Avenue south of 17 Mile should be rezoned to the LI Light Industrial District as shown on the Future Land Use Map.

17 Mile Road (M-46) west of Algoma Avenue has frontages and areas appropriate for limited commercial uses, in addition to the existing residential uses. For this reason, the area along 17 Mile west of Algoma Avenue to the Township border should be transitioned to the NC Neighborhood Commercial District as shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Because there are many existing single-family dwellings in the areas identified for Highway Commercial, Light Industrial, and Neighborhood Commercial rezoning along 17 Mile, the regulations for those districts may also need to be modified to accommodate existing residential uses with the new commercial/industrial zoning designations.

Commercial development at the US-131 and 17 Mile Road (M-46) intersection would be considered the primary gateway to the Township. Thus, this commercial area should be managed with design guidelines focusing on building materials, signage (ground and projecting), landscaping, rear and side parking lots, pedestrian walkways and amenities. The variety of uses allowed here would include restaurants (sit down and drive-through), fuel stations, banks, convenience centers, retail and service businesses, and professional services. Elimination of objectionable uses and strict regulation of uses such as outdoor storage and aggregate stockpiling should be immediate priorities. Implementation of the commercial node concept may benefit from a change in zoning to provide land development and comprehensive building design guidelines.

Well defined commercial nodes can become the cornerstone for mixed-use walkable community centers. Proposed mixed-use areas could include higher density residential (5-7 dwellings per acre) developments supplemented with parks, community facilities, such as schools, and commercial areas. In some communities, the development of “lifestyle” centers assume this role. However, the retail element in these developments can exceed several hundred thousand square feet of leasable area and are occupied by national retail chains. The proposed mixed-use areas for Solon Township envision less of an integrated development and more of a collection of independent developments constructed under a consistent set of land and building regulations. This combination of land uses linked together with design and land development standards will establish a definable place. Commercial nodes should be considered pedestrian- oriented commercial districts reflecting the scale and diversity often associated with downtown areas. Buildings would be located near the property lines with parking preferably in the rear or along the side of the buildings using pedestrian scale streetscapes. Commercial areas outside of the nodes would be vehicular-oriented commercial districts accommodating banks, dry-cleaners, auto related businesses, professional offices, and errand-based service businesses.

Land Use Relationships

The development character for areas planned for highway service are to a large part automobile oriented, however, high density residential uses are planned to surround uses within this land use

category. While access management is important to the overall utilization of the sub-area it is important that planned uses respect residential areas that develop behind them.

Commercial Development Guidelines

Access Management

Along with the high traffic volumes and increased intensity of uses within the commercial land use categories is the need to manage access to these sites. Uses should be allowed only if they work towards the achievement of access management through the utilization of such things as shared driveways, frontage roads, cross access between parking lots, rear service drives, alignment or appropriate spacing of drives on the same and opposing sides of 17 Mile Road (M-46) and contributing to the installation of new streets at key locations.

(For further discussion of access management, see the City of Cedar Springs/Solon Township 425 Plan and the Management Recommendations in this Plan.)

Site Design Sites should utilize design practices that shield unsightly areas from adjacent residentially planned properties. Pedestrian access should also be created and encouraged by installing such things as pedestrian walkway lighting, canopy trees and benches along connections to residential areas. Pedestrian walkways that transverse automobile areas should be well marked and directed to allow convenient access of pedestrians to the commercial site(s). Building design should be sympathetic to the area and incorporate a theme or general image that fits into Solon Township. Streetscapes should also be recognized as important, along with automobile access, pedestrian design and building design issues. A lack of a unified streetscape can result in a disjointed image of the community along the roadway. Overall, streetscapes can provide a unifying element to uses that develop along the corridor (i.e. street trees, grass front yard and similar sign designs) creating an aesthetically pleasing visual environment and character. One unifying method is to provide a “build-to” line for main buildings along the street. Parking is then provided either in side or rear yards. This has the added effect of slowing traffic as the sight lines for drives is restricted to a narrower space. Unifying design elements should be repeated from site to site, such as decorative light fixtures with or without community related banners, and attractive building designs and/or materials. Environmentally Sensitive Areas The Environmentally Sensitive category is intended to recognize areas of the Township that contain natural features such as lakes, streams and wetlands. These areas are

intended to be protected from encroachment. Large areas of Environmentally Sensitive land are located within the northeast and southwest portions of the township, surrounding two groups of lakes. Other areas are linear in shape following the banks of creeks that transverse the township. Development that does occur should be designed to minimize negative impacts upon the environment and natural features. Land uses within these areas should emphasize low density residential uses, including the use of open space or cluster development to offer protection of environmentally sensitive features. While protection of these features should be a priority, opportunity exists to utilize these areas for recreational purposes such as natural trails and environmental education for area schools and the public. It is the intent of this land use category to allow for reasonable development that preserves the character and environmental quality of these environmentally sensitive areas. Techniques to preserve their quality, such as utilization of natural vegetation buffer strips at the edge of waterbodies and utilization of small scale water control measures for run-off from impermeable surfaces such as roofs and pavement, should be utilized in development proposals. Future Land Use Categories Solon Township has been divided into Future Land Use categories intended to guide future development decisions, which include zoning. As a guide, the Future Land Use categories are not to be viewed by themselves as complete recommendations. It is necessary to also review the Township's vision, goals and objectives, Future Land Use Map and Future Land Use Character Map to gain a complete understanding of the expectations for future development. The categories are described on the following pages and include:

1. Agriculture/Residential 2 ac.
2. Agriculture/Residential 1 ac.
3. Lake Front Residential
4. High Density Residential
5. Neighborhood Commercial
6. Highway Commercial
7. Commercial/Light Industrial Mixed Use
8. Environmentally Sensitive