

# Ontwa Township

Cass County, Michigan



**DRAFT**  
July 2011

## MASTER PLAN

Approved by the Planning Commission Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Adopted by the Township Board Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Master Plan Update Visioning Report

## INTRODUCTION

Ontwa Township is a rural community located in the southwest corner of Michigan's Cass County along its border with Indiana. The State of Indiana thus makes up the Township's southern boundary, while the communities of Jefferson Township, Mason Township, and Milton Township lie to the north, east and west, respectively. The Village of Edwardsburg is located within the Township.

Many Ontwa Township residents commute to jobs in the State of Indiana. Located a short distance away in Indiana are the cities of Elkhart, Granger, Mishawaka, and South Bend. Over time, urban growth has pushed northward from Indiana. This has led to residential and commercial development, especially in the southwest portion of the Township.

The Township's close proximity to jobs, malls, and medical facilities, coupled with Michigan's property tax structure and Edwardsburg Public Schools, makes the rural setting of Ontwa Township attractive to developers and homebuyers. This in turn brings in new business and industry. These factors can be beneficial to the community, if planned and managed properly.

Until 1995, the Township directed growth based on a "Goal Formulation Plan" (Master Plan) developed in the early 1970's. In early 1995, however, in response to expected growth pressures, Township officials felt it was time to update the Master Plan. On January 23, 1996, the Ontwa Township Board approved the revised Master Land Use Plan. In late 2003, following the preliminary approval of three residential subdivisions that would contain over 300 new single-family dwellings when completed, the Township Planning Commission initiated another review of the Master Plan.

This Master Plan represents the culmination of over twelve months' work by numerous local residents and local officials. It reflects the community's deep concern for the rural character of the Township and a strong commitment to retain and strengthen local quality of life. It outlines the preferred future for the community and a comprehensive plan to realize it. The Plan is appropriately general, recognizing that planning for the future is a delicate blend of art and science and that sufficient flexibility will be needed to respond to the challenges of the future.

The fundamental purpose of the Master Plan is to enable the Township to establish a future direction for the Township's physical development. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, as amended, specifically gives a Township Planning Commission the authority to prepare and officially adopt a plan. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, Public Act 110 of 2006, as amended, authorizes communities to adopt and enforce zoning ordinances based upon a plan for the community. Once prepared, officially adopted and maintained, this Plan will serve as an advisory guide for the physical conservation of certain areas and for the development of other areas.

Because of constant change in our social, political and economic structure, the Plan must be maintained through periodic review and revision so that it reflects contemporary trends while maintaining long range goals. The Plan will be effective to the degree that it:

- ◆ Reflects the needs and desires of the citizens of Ontwa Township;
- ◆ Realistically interprets and reflects the conditions, trends and the dynamic economic and social pressures that are brought about by change; and
- ◆ Inspires consensus and cooperation among the various public agencies, developers, and the citizens of the Township toward achieving common goals.

**The Purpose of the Master Plan**

When Ontwa Township began the plan preparation process, it had several objectives. First, it was important to achieve an understanding of the scale and scope of growth and development and the likely future trends in the community. Secondly, the Township sought to clearly define community priorities with regard to growth and development and land use. Thirdly, the planning process was seen as an opportunity to build and strengthen a community consensus about the future land use patterns in the Township. Finally, the Township sought realistic and effective mechanisms to achieve the plan’s objectives.

This Township Master Plan accomplishes all these objectives. More specifically, this Plan will serve the Township in the following ways:

1. It provides a comprehensive means of integrating proposals that look years ahead to meet future needs regarding general aspects of physical conservation and development throughout the Township;
2. It serves as the official advisory policy statement to encourage orderly and efficient use of the land for agriculture, residences, businesses and industry, and to coordinate these uses of land with each other, with streets and highways, and other public facilities and services;
3. It creates a logical basis for zoning, subdivision design, public improvement plans, and to facilitate and guide the work of the Township Planning Commission, the Township Board, and other public and private endeavors dealing with the physical conservation and development of the Township;
4. It provides a means for private organizations and individuals to determine how they may relate their building and development projects to official Township planning policies; and
5. It offers a means of relating the plans of Ontwa Township to the plans of other communities in the region.

## CHAPTER I POPULATION AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

This section presents a collection and analysis of basic factors relating to the Township's social and economic characteristics. By comparing the available data, it is possible to identify trends in population and housing, as well as the economic and labor force composition of the Township. Viewed in an historic perspective and in relation to surrounding communities and the region, these trends give valuable insights for potential future conditions and serve as a basis for projections of future population, housing and economic conditions.

### Population Characteristics

Table 1 illustrates the population change during 1970 to 2010 for Ontwa Township, adjacent communities, and Cass County. From 1970 to 1980 the U.S. Census indicated that Ontwa Township experienced a moderate increase in population at a rate similar to that of Cass County, which equates to an increase of just over one-percent annually during that decade. In comparison, population growth in most adjacent communities listed in Table 1 witnessed significant increases. Specifically, Mason Township increased by over forty percent between 1970 and 1980.

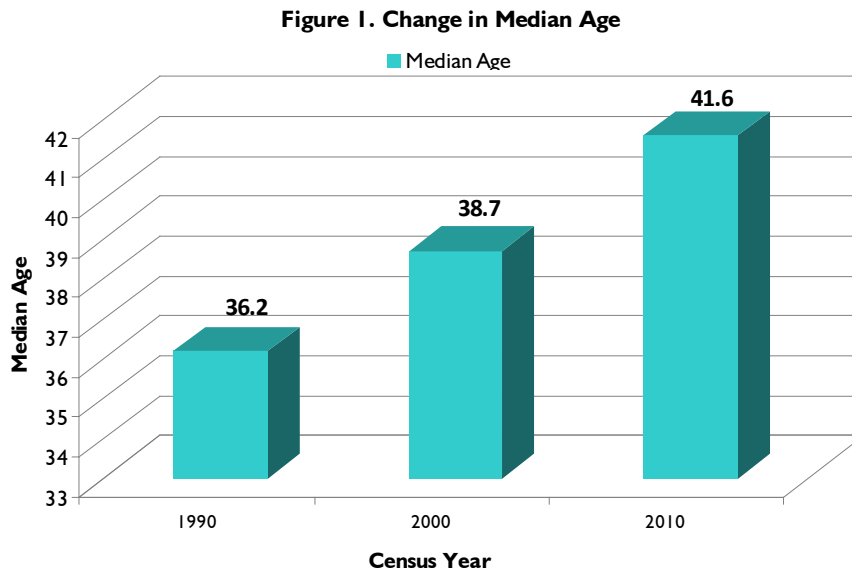
Interestingly, the decade between 1980 and 1990 produced an opposite position on population growth as many of the communities adjacent to Ontwa Township grew at a moderate pace while a few, including Ontwa, decreased in population. Ontwa Township, with a population of 5,787 persons in 1980, lost almost 200 persons by 1990. Similarly, Cass County as a whole experienced a slight decline in population. By 2000, Cass County showed an increase of 1,582 people (3.2%) and Ontwa Township increased by 268 people (6.0%).

The 2010 Census reveals that two area communities - Howard Township and Calvin Township - experienced population declines between 2000 and 2010. In addition, Milton Township saw the greatest percentage and absolute increase in residents during this decade. Ontwa Township and the Village of Edwardsburg experienced an above-average influx of residents; only Milton and Mason townships had larger percentage increases.

**Table 1. Historical Population Change**

Community				Percent change	Absolute change				Percent change	Absolute change			Percent Change	Absolute Change
	1970	1980	1990	80-90	80-90	2000	90-00	90-00	2010	00-10	00-10	00-10	00-10	00-10
Ontwa Twp w/o Edw.	4,117	4,652	4,450	-4.3%	-202	4,718	6.0%	268	5,290	12.1%	572			
Ontwa Twp	5,224	5,787	5,592	-3.4%	-195	5,865	4.9%	273	6,549	11.6%	684			
Edwardsburg	1,107	1,135	1,142	0.6%	7	1,147	.4%	5	1,259	9.8%	112			
Calvin Twp	1,347	1,643	1,813	10.3%	170	2,041	12.6%	228	2,037	-0.2%	-4			
Howard Twp	5,497	6,524	6,378	-2.2%	-146	6,309	-1.1%	-69	6,207	-1.6%	-102			
Jefferson Twp	1,718	1,963	2,057	6.8%	134	2,401	14.5%	304	2,541	5.8%	140			
Mason Twp	1,519	2,132	2,450	14.9%	318	2,514	2.6%	64	2,945	17.1%	431			
Milton Twp	1,727	2,235	2,284	2.2%	49	2,646	15.8%	362	3,878	46.6%	1,232			
Cass County	43,312	49,499	49,453	-0.1%	-46	51,035	3.2%	1,582	52,293	2.3%	1,258			

Figure 1 illustrates that the median age of Ontwa Township residents is steadily rising. Between 2000 and 2010, the median age in Ontwa Township increased by about 7.4%, or 2.9 years, from 38.7 to 41.6 years. In comparison, the median age for Cass County overall is 42.6 years, while the median age for Michigan is 38.9 years.



However, the number of people under the age of 25 has increased. In 1990, 1,842 persons were under the age of 25 years while in 2000 it was almost the same with 1,833. In 2010, the number of people under 25 increased to 2,057, representing 31% of the Township’s population. That segment of the population over 65 years of age has also increased.

In 1990, there were 686 persons 65 years of age or older while in 2000 that number increased to 842. In 2010, that number increased to 1,036 people, or 15.8% of the Township’s population. The age of local residents is an important consideration in determining the types and levels of public facilities and recreational programs, need for schools, and transportation services.

Table 2 shows slight shifts in the age of the population. Minor increases in the 45-54, 55-59, 60-64, 75-84, and 85+ age cohorts, and minor declines in the percentage of the Township’s population falling in the 10-14, 15-19, 25-34, and 35-44 age cohorts likely contributed to the jump in the Township’s median age.

TABLE 2

Age Distribution and Median Age  
Ontwa Township 2000 and 2010

Age	2000 Total	% of Total	Age	2010 Total	% of Total
Under 5	330	5.6%	Under 5	368	5.6%
5-9	402	6.9%	5-9	506	7.7%
10-14	451	7.7%	10-14	473	7.2%
15-19	419	7.1%	15-19	453	6.9%
20-24	231	3.9%	20-24	257	3.9%
25-34	692	11.8%	25-34	629	9.6%
35-44	1,034	17.6%	35-44	888	13.5%
45-54	848	14.5%	45-54	1,054	16.1%
55-59	327	5.6%	55-59	459	7%
60-64	289	4.9%	60-64	426	6.5%
65-74	523	8.9%	65-74	573	8.8%
75-84	249	4.2%	75-84	359	5.5%
85+	70	1.2%	85+	104	1.6%
Total	5,865		Total	6,549	
	Median Age 38.7 years			Median Age 41.6 years	

**Housing Characteristics**

The number of housing units has increased in the Township, as might be expected given the population increase. The 1990 Census indicated that there were 2,404 housing units in Ontwa Township, and the 2000 Census showed a total of 2,653 housing units, an increase of 249 units or 10.4%. The 2010 Census indicates that 2,984 housing units exist in the Township, an increase of 331 units, or an increase of 12.4%.

The average household size in 1980 was 2.47 persons while in 1990 it decreased to 2.33 persons. The 2000 Census showed an increase to 2.45 persons, which is similar to 1980. The average household size in 2010 increased to 2.50 persons, which departs from the national trend of shrinking households.

Renter-occupied homes accounted for 317 units or 13.3% in 2000. The rental vacancy rate was 5.9% in 2000. The 2010 Census reveals a renter-occupied housing unit vacancy rate of 8.9%, a fairly substantial increase. The 2010 Census also indicates that there are 485 rented units in the Township, representing 18.5% of housing in the community. Owner-occupied homes accounted for 2,075 units or 86.7% in 2000; and the homeowner vacancy was only 2.2% at that time. The

2010 Census indicates that there are 2,130 owner-occupied housing units, or that 81.5% of units in the Township are owner-occupied. The vacancy rate for owner-occupied dwellings is 2.8%.

There has only been a slight change in Housing Characteristics from 1990-2000. The most significant change has been in the total number of units—an increase of 249.

**TABLE 3**

**Housing Units by Type  
Ontwa Township**

**2000**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1-Unit	2,107	79.6%
2-4 Units	58	2.2%
5-9 Units	9	0.3%
10 or more	55	2.1%
Mobile Homes	419	15.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,648</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census Data  
 2000 Table DP-1  
 2000 Table DP-4



**Building Permits**

Table 4 provides the number of residential building permits issued in Ontwa Township from 1997 to 2010. The Township experienced a high rate of development from 2003 to 2007; however new home construction has markedly declined in the last two years. Ontwa Township is a desirable place to locate with the rural atmosphere, outstanding schools and several lakes and streams providing scenic and recreational qualities, therefore some level of new residential growth can be anticipated. Although it appears residential growth to the levels of 2003-2007 are not likely to be replicated in the near future if the current economic conditions prevail, the Township issued 15 building permits for new homes in 2010, a 66% increase over the number of permits issued in 2009.

**TABLE 4**  
**Residential Building Permits for New Homes**  
**Ontwa Township**  
**1997-2010**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Permits</b>
1997	33
1998	35
1999	27
2000	27
2001	28
2002	24
2003	39
2004	47
2005	49
2006	40
2007	41
2008	30
2009	9
2010	15

Source: Ontwa Township  
Building Permit Records

The age of the Township's housing stock and the number of houses built during past decades is shown in Table 5. The number of homes built from 1950-1980 increased steadily but dropped off significantly during the 1980's. Since 1990, it has once again risen significantly. While the greatest number of homes are older, they can be considered valuable assets to a community if they reflect the heritage of the area or help define the character or identity of the locality.

**TABLE 5**

**Housing Units by Year Structure Built  
Ontwa Township**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Number of Units</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
2000 to 2009	280	9.5
1990 to March 2000	457	15.6
1980 to 1989	235	8.0
1970 to 1979	441	15.1
1960 to 1969	429	14.7
1959 or earlier	1,086	<u>37.1</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,928</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Table DP-4

2000 to 2009 Data from Ontwa Township Building Department Records

**Economic Characteristics**

In 1990, the per capita income for Ontwa Township was \$13,763, which represented a 79.3 percent increase from 1980. In 2000, the per capita income was \$21,691, which represented a 57.6 percent increase from 1990.

The median earnings for a male working full time, year-round was \$36,601; while for females it was \$28,265. The median family income was \$50,364.

**Occupations**

Table 6 lists the occupations of Township residents 16 years of age and over who were employed in 2000. The leading occupation group was production, transportation and material moving, at 28.5%, followed closely by sales and office occupations at 26.3%, and management, professional and related occupations at 22.6%.

**TABLE 6**

**Occupation of Residents  
2000  
Township of Ontwa**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number of Workers</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
Management, professional and related occupations	699	22.6
Service occupations	357	11.5
Sales and office occupations	815	26.3
Farming, fishing and forestry occupations	12	0.4
Construction, extraction and maintenance occupations	330	10.7
Production, transportation and material moving occupations	880	28.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,093</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The number and percent of Township residents employed in various industries during 2000 is presented in Table 7. While the employment of Township residents is diverse, over a third were employed in manufacturing. Educational, health and social services was the second largest group, providing employment for almost 15 percent of Township residents. Retail trade at 12.7 percent was next with the remaining groups all at less than 7 percent each.

**TABLE 7**

**Residents Employed by Industry  
2000 Ontwa Township**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Number of Workers</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	36	1.2%
Construction	185	6.0%
Manufacturing	1,043	33.7%
Wholesale trade	138	4.5%
Retail trade	392	12.7%
Transportation and warehousing, and Utilities Information	171 26	5.5% 0.8%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	149	4.8%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	103	3.3%
Educational, health and social services	459	14.8%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	198	6.4%
Other services (except public admin.)	142	4.6%
Public administration	51	1.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,093</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Data Table DP-3

In 2000, 84.5 percent of Ontwa Township's employed residents used private vehicles to travel alone to work, while 10.2 percent of the work force car-pooled. While some individuals worked at home, others commuted to work using public transportation, walking or other means. The average travel time to work was 22.8 minutes.

## CHAPTER II NATURAL FEATURES

The natural environment has had a significant influence on the development of land use patterns in Ontwa Township, helping to shape what the community is today. Natural features, in general, can present both constraints to and inducements for various types of land uses. While failure to acknowledge environmental constraints can lead to costly problems, integration of natural features into an overall Master Land Use Plan can enhance the quality of life for residents and help preserve the character of the Township. At the same time, it is important to recognize that there are land areas which serve a vital function in terms of cultivation, drainage, and wildlife habitat which may never be suitable for urban development.

Following is a discussion of the natural features in Ontwa Township as they pertain to broad planning considerations.

### **Climate**

Located a short distance from Lake Michigan, approximately 30 miles, the climate of Ontwa Township is somewhat affected by the Lake. Because of Ontwa's proximity to Lake Michigan, spring and early summer temperatures can be cooler than further inland locations, while fall and winter temperatures can be milder. According to data from the weather station in the City of Dowagiac, the average daily temperature in winter is 25.9 degrees and the average daily temperature in summer is 70 degrees. The average seasonal snowfall in Dowagiac is 74.0 inches, while the total annual precipitation is 21.66 inches.

The sun shines 62 percent of the time in the summer and 31 percent in the winter. The prevailing wind is from the south-southwest.

### **Topography**

The topography in Ontwa Township varies from nearly level to somewhat hilly. Only a few slopes exceed 12 percent and therefore topography generally does not pose a major constraint to development.

### **Soils**

The soils in Ontwa Township range from well drained and moderately well drained loams and clays to poorly drained organic soils. While much of the Township is, or will be, hooked up to the Elkhart Municipal Sewage system, many residents and undeveloped areas must rely on septic fields for the disposal of wastewater. The location of these various soil types is an important consideration for future development and infrastructure for the Township.

The Environmental Limitations Map (Map 1) shows the location of soils within the township which present severe limitations to both building construction and septic fields. Such soils are generally located in the easternmost portion of the Township along Christiana Creek and around Brandy Creek located in the southwest corner of the township. Map 1 was prepared from information provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The map takes into consideration soil permeability, wetness, filter qualities, shrink-swell properties, and slope.

Map 1 is general in nature and is not, however, intended as a substitute for on-site investigation or detailed engineering studies. The map does generally define those areas in which intensive development without improved infrastructure can lead to environmental degradation and health hazards.

**Prime Farmland**

The resource value of soils lies mainly in agriculture. Map 2 illustrates general locations of locally important prime farmland as indicated in the Cass County Soil Survey. Prime farmland, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is the land that is best suited to food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. The soils qualities, growing season, and moisture supply are those needed for a well managed soil to produce a sustained high yield of crops in an economic manner. Prime farmland produces highest yields with minimal expenditure of energy and economic resources, and farming it results in the least damage to the environment.

**Wetlands**

Map 3 indicates the areas which are considered as wetlands within the Township. Wetlands usually refer to swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas often found between open water and higher elevated areas. These wetlands are valuable natural resources that provide many important benefits to the natural environment such as helping to improve the water quality and reduce flood and storm drainage. They also provide important fish and wildlife habitat. In Ontwa, there are several pockets of wetlands throughout the Township with the largest pocket located along the west portion of Christiana Lake.

Although on-site analyses are needed to verify the specific boundaries of wetlands, most are protected by the Michigan's wetland statute, Part 303, Wetlands Protection, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended. This Act places strict limits on the type of development which may take place. The areas encompassed as wetlands on Map 3 were derived from the National Wetlands Inventory (U.S. Department of the Interior). In Ontwa Township, wetlands are regulated by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

**Wildlife**

The brush, woodlands, wetlands, native grasslands, agricultural crops and waterways in Ontwa Township provide good habitat for wildlife.

Wildlife in Ontwa Township includes white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, raccoons, squirrels, coyotes, red and gray fox, muskrat, mink, opossum, skunk, various songbirds and waterfowl, ruffed grouse, sandhill cranes, turkey and woodcocks. The Township's abundance of lakes, waterways, and associated wetlands provide excellent fishing with various pan fish, pike and bass being the most common species.

**Lakes and Streams**

Located entirely within Ontwa Township are five named lakes: Christiana, Cobert, Eagle, Garver and Pleasant. A portion of Juno Lake also lies within the boundaries of Ontwa Township. Christiana Creek flows to Elkhart, Indiana and a small stream flows from Cobert Lake to Garver Lake and then south to Indiana. Brande Creek is in the southwest portion of the Township and also flows to Indiana. Ontwa Township lakes and streams are important natural resources. Besides offering recreation like fishing, swimming, and boating, the area lakes provide habitat for fish and wildlife. As places of beauty, the township lakes offer aesthetic enjoyment. Some of the lakes have large wetland areas which also provide wildlife habitat, prevent shoreline erosion, filter runoff, and protect against floods. The greatest population densities are the areas adjacent to the lakes in the township and along the streams. Over the years many of the former cottages have been converted to year-round homes which now represent the majority of lakeside housing. The developable areas adjacent to the lakes have acted as magnets for residential growth and are substantially developed. Future development on the lakes may be the result of demolition of existing homes and construction of new homes.



**Eagle Lake**





## Environmental Limitations

**Ontwa Township  
Cass County, Michigan**

Source: Cass County Soil Survey - 1995

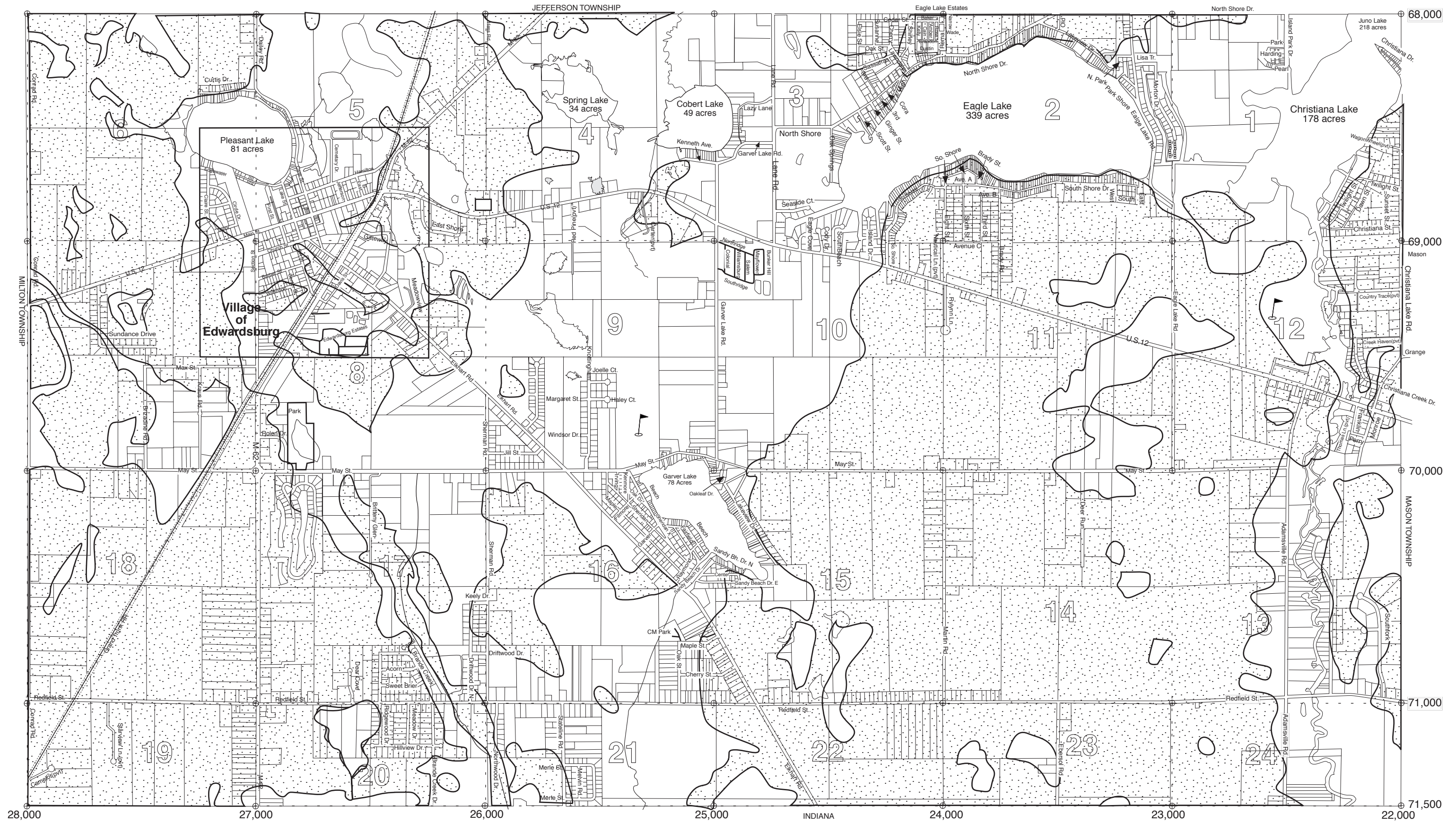
 **Severe Limitations**

Areas with soils unsuitable for development without public sanitary sewers or other engineered sewage systems.

 **Extreme Limitations**

Areas exhibiting severe limitations on development due to periodic flooding, ponding, slopes in excess of 15% and/or poor bearing properties of soils.





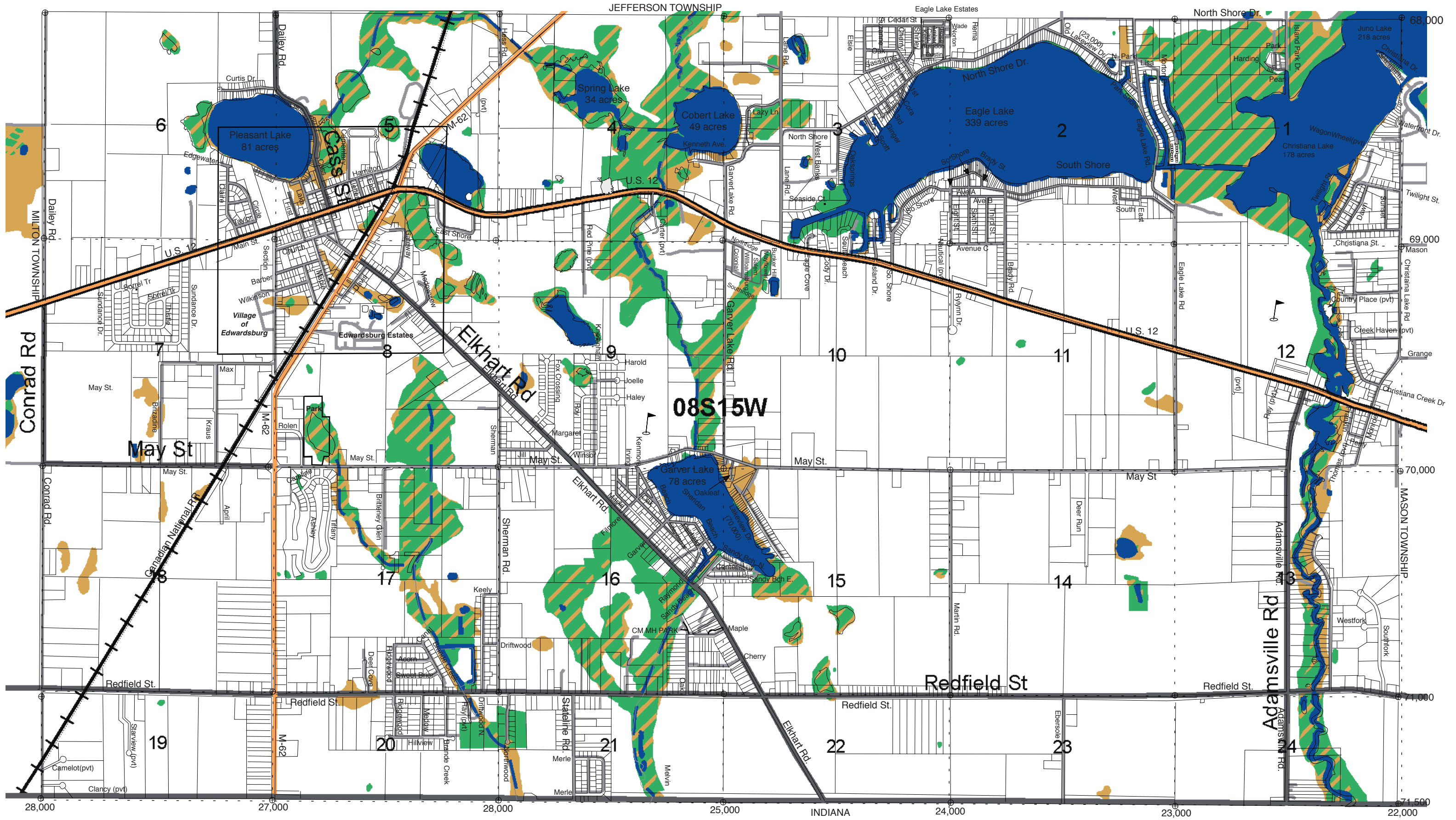
# Prime Farmland Soils

**Ontwa Township  
Cass County, Michigan**

Source: Cass County Soil Survey - U.S. Department of Agriculture - 1995

 **Prime Farmland**





# Ontwa Township & Michigan DEQ Wetland Inventory

Overlay compiled by DEQ-LWMD on December 15, 2006

Ontwa Township, Cass County, Michigan

Source: Ontwa Township & Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

- Open Water
- Wetlands as identified on MWI and MIRIS maps
- Soil areas which include wetland soils
- Wetlands as identified on MWI and MIRIS maps and soil areas which include wetland soils



## CHAPTER III COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The Township's community facilities provide tangible services to its residents and enhance the local quality of life. As the Township's population grows, the demand for these services will also grow. This will translate into the need to expand existing community facilities; build more roads, sewers, and bridges; and hire additional public service personnel. As a basis for planning for these future needs, below is a description of existing community facilities within the Township.

### **Township Hall**

The Ontwa Township hall is located at 26225 U.S. 12 E, just east of M62. The hall currently houses the offices of the Supervisor, Clerk, Treasurer, Assessor, Zoning Administrator, Building Official, and Sewer Commission. The township hall also houses the ambulance service.

### **Police Protection**

The Township provides police protection through the Ontwa/Edwardsburg Police Department, located at 26296 U.S. 12 E. This facility also serves as the Village Hall for Edwardsburg. According to the Police Chief, the Department employs several full-time officers, including the police chief. The Police Department has three patrol cars. Funding for this service is a combination of a special millage for the Township and Village plus general fund dollars.

Cass County participates in a "911" emergency notification system for County residents. In Ontwa Township, the police department is dispatched directly from 911 dispatchers for calls that originate from township residents. According to the Police Chief, the level of service as well as the response time to emergencies is currently adequate. Immediate assistance for the Department is provided by the Cass County Sheriff's Department.

### **Fire Protection**

The Township maintains one fire station located adjacent to M-62 on the west side of the street, north of May Street. The Fire Department is governed by the Joint Fire Board which is made up of two representatives from each of the townships of Ontwa, Milton and Jefferson and the Village of Edwardsburg. According to the Fire Chief, the fire department consists of thirty-four volunteers.



**Fire Station**

The fire department's service area includes the entire township of Ontwa and the majority portions of Milton, and Jefferson Townships. Similar to the response procedure of the police department, the fire department is dispatched by the Cass County "911" emergency notification system. Funding for this service is a combination of a special fire and ambulance millage for the

Township and Village plus revenue generated from actual runs. According to the Fire Chief, the fire department is well equipped to meet the needs of the Township residents.

**Ambulance Service**

Edwardsburg Ambulance Service has been in operation since 1968, making it one of the oldest EMS services in Cass County. It started out as a fully volunteer service.

In the late 1990's, the service started providing the community with a full-time staff. At that time, the service was still a Basic Life Support unit. In 2000, the service upgraded its services to the Limited Advanced Life Support.

Currently, there are 23 employees at Edwardsburg Ambulance Service, five of them being Paramedics. The service is in the process of getting all of the paperwork and necessary approvals to provide Advanced Life Support on a 24/7 basis. The service operates two ambulances, one full time and the other at an "on-call" basis.

Edwardsburg Ambulance Service currently serves all of Ontwa Township, the Village of Edwardsburg and Milton Township.

**Libraries**

The Township is served by one public library located at 26745 Church Street in the Village of Edwardsburg. The Edwardsburg Public Library is one of three branch libraries of the Cass District Library system. The main library of the system is located in Cassopolis, the county seat.

According to library staff, the library provides community programs such as spring/fall/winter story hours for preschoolers and summer reading programs for sixth through eighth graders. Funding for library services is derived from a tax millage.

**Schools**

Ontwa Township residents are within the Edwardsburg School District. School facilities include a primary school, an elementary school, an intermediate school, a middle school and a high school. In addition, the district has a separate administration building as well as a maintenance building.

According to school officials, the school system had 2,579 students enrolled as of February 2009 and 2,700 students as of February 2011. Despite the documentation of statewide population declines, as well as Department of Health statistics showing a decrease in birth rates, enrollment has increased by about 450 students since 2003.

The school system has achieved many honors over the past several years. In addition to receiving a National Exemplary Blue Ribbon Award from both the Michigan Department of Education and the United States Department of Education, it has also been awarded the Governor's Cup and a

Golden Apple Award. The Primary, Elementary, Intermediate, Middle and High schools have each received Blue Ribbon Awards. Some of the criteria considered for these awards are leadership, curriculum, teaching environment, organizational vitality and community/parent support.

**Cemetery**

One cemetery, Adamsville Cemetery, exists in the township. Located along May Street, west of Adamsville Road, the cemetery is maintained and operated by a sexton. Although the Township does not directly maintain the cemetery, the Township does donate a portion of the funding for the cemetery's operation.

It should be noted that another cemetery is located in the Village of Edwardsburg along Hamilton Street.

**Solid Waste Disposal**

Ontwa Township does not contract with any solid waste disposal contractors. Instead, township residents may contract with any private solid waste business desired. According to Township officials, there are no plans to change the existing system.

**Public Transportation**

Presently, the Township is not served by a local transit service or public transportation system. However the Cass County Council on Aging provides limited transportation services to senior citizens.

**Road System**

All public roads within the Township are under the jurisdiction of the Cass County Road Commission. Roads designated as primary roads by the County include:

- Elkhart Road
- Redfield Road
- Dailey Road
- Adamsville Road
- May Street (west of M-62)
- Conrad Road (between May St. and U.S. 12)



**Public roads are under the jurisdiction of the Cass County Road Commission**

With the exception of federal route U.S.12, and state trunkline M-62, the remaining roads are designated as county local roads.

For planning purposes, it is useful to recognize that the various roads within Ontwa Township can have different functions. An understanding of these functions can lead to decisions as to the desirable use of each road segment, road right-of-way widths, building setbacks, and adjoining land use. Below is a brief description of five road types which are important to consider in Ontwa Township.

**Major Access Routes (State and Federal)** - These facilities are devoted entirely to the movement of large volumes of traffic at high speeds over relatively long distances. These roads are intended to provide little or no direct access to individual properties adjoining the roads. Federal Route U.S.12 is a two-lane road traveling east-west through the center (generally) of the Township. This highway accounts for a sizable load of local traffic as well as for residents of southern-most Michigan traveling east-west through the State. Located approximately thirty miles to the west, U.S. 12 connects with Interstate 94 (I-94).

State trunkline M-62 also travels through Ontwa Township. Specifically, M-62 runs north-south through the township as it passes through the center of the Village of Edwardsburg where it intersects U.S. 12. M-62 is the main transportation facility for persons traveling to and from the State of Indiana. As M-62 enters Indiana, it becomes Indiana State Road 23 which runs southwest towards Granger, Mishawaka and South Bend.

**Major Arterial Roads (County Primaries)** - The major function of these roads is to move a fair volume of traffic within and through a community. A secondary function is to provide access to adjacent properties. In Ontwa Township, the major arterials are the county primary roads which are listed above. Many residents use these roads when traveling to and from the Township.

**Minor Arterial Roads (County Locals)** - These roads provide for internal traffic movement within a community and connect local land areas with the major arterial road system. Providing direct access to adjacent properties is an important function of these roads. The majority of the roads in Ontwa Township fall under this classification. Examples of such roads include May Street (east of M-62), Garver Lake Road, and North Shore Road. Over time, as development in the Township increases, traffic along minor arterials will also increase. Some minor arterial streets eventually become major arterial roads.

**Local Collector Roads** - The sole function of local roads is to provide access to adjoining properties. In many cases, through-traffic is discouraged. Examples of such roads in Ontwa include Island Park Drive and Fillmore Drive.

**Local Feeder Roads** - These roads provide for internal traffic movement within a specific area, such as a residential subdivision, serving to funnel traffic from local collector roads to arterial roads. Feeder roads are typically wider than other local roads and may have amenities such as sidewalks and lighting, and could be public or private.

## **Wastewater Facilities**

Wastewater facilities were first installed in the Township in 1999 which included three districts, nine lift stations and approximately eight hundred ninety two customers. Those Districts were Eagle Lake, Garver Lake, and the Industrial Park. There are now five districts and seventeen lift stations with the addition of PJC [Juno Lake (Mason Township) and Christiana Lake], and the Village of Edwardsburg including the north side of Pleasant Lake. The Township now has one thousand seven hundred and forty eight customers.

Connection to the system is mandatory if the following rules apply. If a single-family home is two hundred feet or less from the wastewater system it has to be connected, unless it has water frontage then there is no maximum footage. For a subdivision the rule is one hundred feet per lot. Example, if the subdivision has ten lots and the subdivision is one thousand feet or less from the system they would be required to connect.

All wastewater from the districts is pumped to the City of Elkhart for treatment. The maximum the township can pump to Elkhart is nine hundred gallons a minute. The Township for the calendar year of 2009 average 9,922,921 gallons a month.

## **Recreation Facilities**

There are a number of recreation facilities in the Ontwa Township area. These include parks, playgrounds, lake access sites and golf courses. The location of these facilities can be found on Map 4, Community Facilities. Of note is the emerging Edwardsburg Sports Complex. This facility is located west of the Village and on the north side of US-12. When this complex is completed it will consist of soccer fields, softball and baseball diamonds, football fields, little league baseball diamonds and walking trails.

## **Area History**

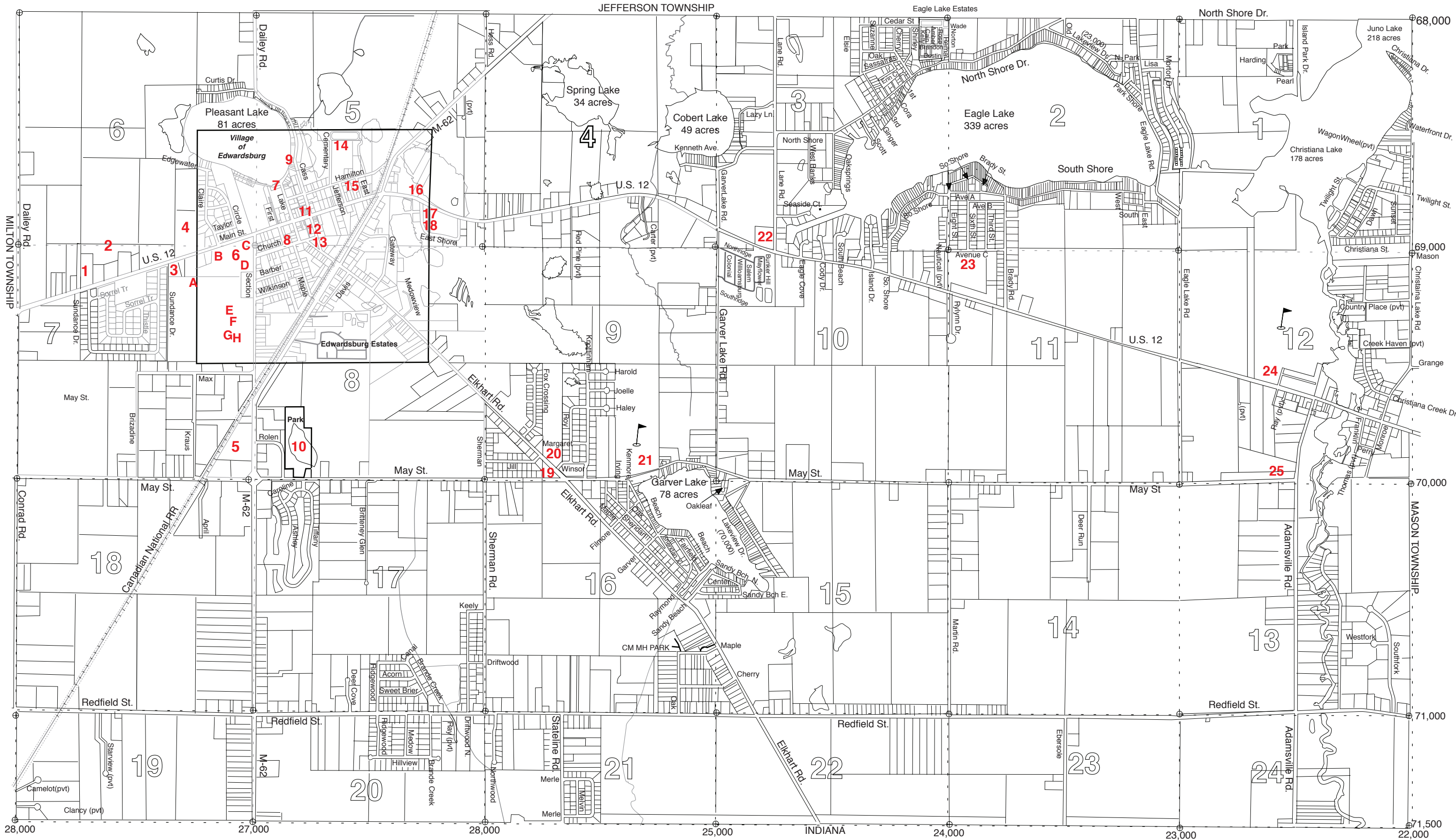
From the day that Ezra Beardsley stopped to gaze at pretty Pleasant Lake and visualize his future along its shore, lakes have been a focal point for development of Ontwa Township and Edwardsburg. The area was originally called Beardsley's Prairie, after the first settler in this charming village close to the Indiana state line. The native prairie grasses and wildflowers were a beautiful sight to view.

Edwardsburg was the location of several important historical events. Where the village now stands was the camping grounds of Indian tribes and they held their councils of war and peace within a stone's throw of the place where a survey party took their observations to establish a base line for the survey of Southwestern Michigan land. Cass County's first court session and the first Board of Supervisors' meeting were held in this village. The village was platted in 1831 by Alexander A. Edwards and named for Thomas Edwards. Ontwa was named for an Indian girl employed by Thomas Edwards, the first clerk of the township.



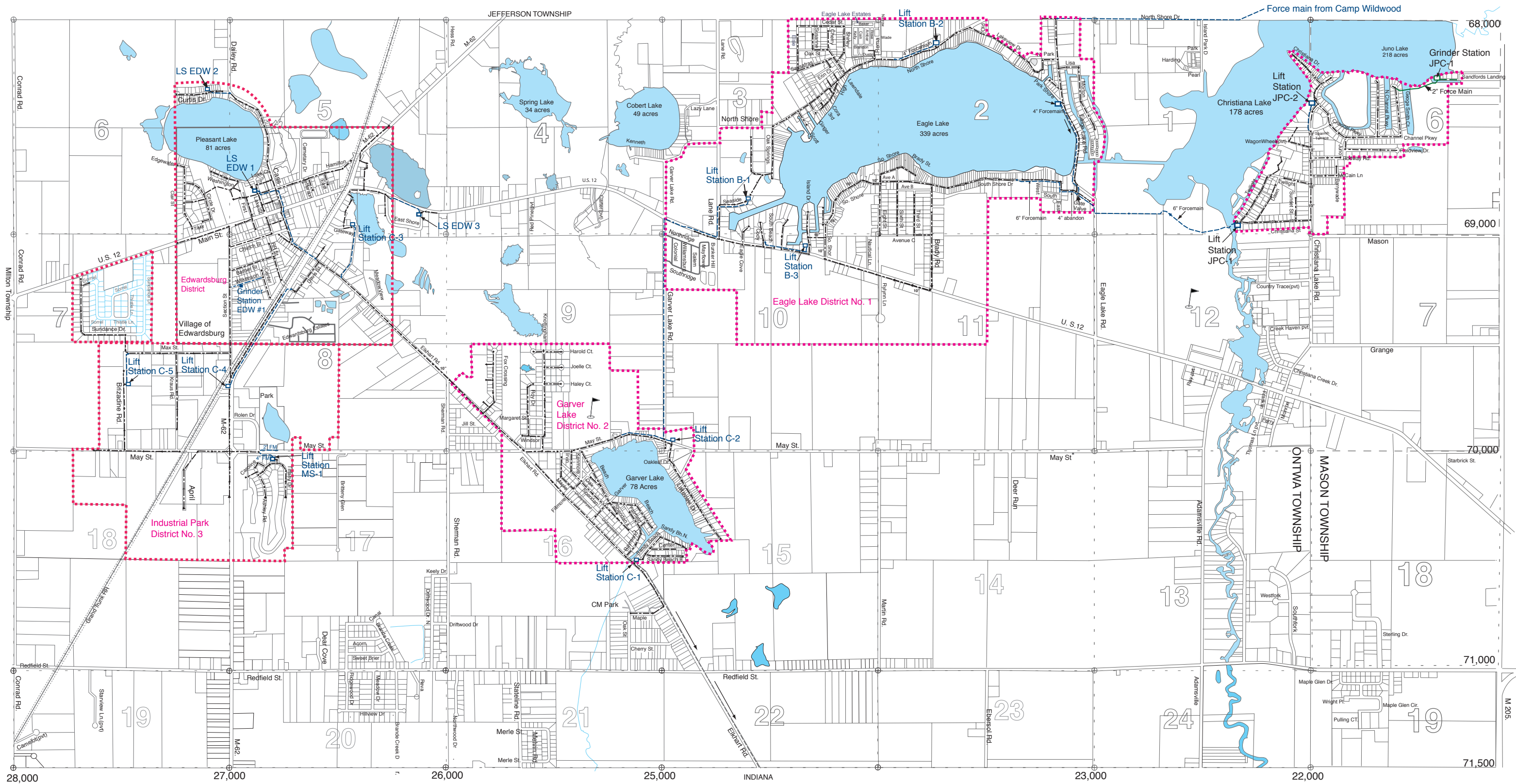
The village grew rapidly until the 1850s when the Michigan Southern Railway went to Elkhart, Indiana and the Michigan Central to Niles. In the 1870s the Peninsular Railroad (now the Grand Trunk) was constructed through the village.

The Edwardsburg Museum proudly displays local history and is partially lodged in the boarding house connected to the Sherman Hotel. A replica of the hotel was reconstructed in 2006 to expand the Museum which features special displays and programs on a monthly basis between May and November.



**Community Facilities**  
 Township of Ontwa,  
 Village of Edwardsburg,  
 Cass County, Michigan

- |   |  |                                   |  |  |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>1 - Seventh Day Adventist Church</b>     | <b>6 - Edwardsburg Public Schools</b>        | <b>7 - Gunn Park</b>              | <b>14 - Edwardsburg Cemetary</b>                 | <b>19 - Ontwa Baptist Church</b>                 |
| <b>2 - Future Edw. Sports Complex</b>       | <b>A - Intermediate School</b>               | <b>8 - Presbyterian Church</b>    | <b>15 - First Church of God</b>                  | <b>20 - Hope United Methodist Church</b>         |
| <b>3 - Edw. United Pentecostal Church</b>   | <b>B - Administration Building</b>           | <b>9 - Linburgh Park</b>          | <b>16 - Edw. Village Hall &amp; Police Dept.</b> | <b>21 - Garver Lake Golf Course</b>              |
| <b>4 - Future United Pentecostal Church</b> | <b>C - Maintenance &amp; Learning Center</b> | <b>10 - Kraus Park</b>            | <b>Uptown Improvement Association</b>            | <b>22 - Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church</b> |
| <b>5 - Fire Station</b>                     | <b>D - Primary School</b>                    | <b>11 - Edw. Museum</b>           | <b>Corridor Improvement Authority</b>            | <b>23 - Eagle Lake Elementary School</b>         |
|   | <b>E - Middle School</b>                     | <b>12 - Post Office</b>           | <b>17 - Ontwa Township Hall &amp; Ambulance</b>  | <b>24 - Four Lakes Golf Course</b>               |
|   | <b>F - Performing Arts Center</b>            | <b>13 - Cass District Library</b> | <b>18 - Chamber of Commerce</b>                  | <b>25 - Adamsville Cemetary</b>                  |
|   | <b>G - Gym H - High School</b>               |                                   |  |  |



**Waste Water Treatment  
Districts, Lift Stations and Lines  
Ontwa Township, Mason Township,  
& The Village of Edwardsburg,  
Cass County, Michigan**



- Waste Water District
- Underground Sanitary Line and direction
- Manhole and direction
- Underground Force Main

## CHAPTER IV EXISTING LAND USE

Map 6 illustrates the existing land use in Ontwa Township as of the early 1990's. The map is based on data collected from Cass County plat maps and aerial photography maps, with verifications of data by the Township Planning Commission.

Ontwa Township is rural in character, with the majority of its land acreage considered agricultural or vacant/unused. Residential is the second most prevalent use. Homes are scattered throughout the Township. The highest concentration of residential use exists along the shorelines of Eagle, Christiana, and Garver Lakes, including the few subdivisions relatively close to the lakeshore. Additionally, a few subdivisions exist in the southwest portion of the Township.

Commercial and industrial land uses in the Township are moderate in number. The Township has commercial corridors located along U.S. 12; one located just east of the Village and the other near the eastern border of the Township. A third area is along M-62 south of the Village of Edwardsburg.

Other land uses, such as public and semi-public uses, including golf courses, Township Hall, fire station, parks, and churches are located at various locations throughout the Township.

Following is a description of the specific land uses in the Township.

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

As can be seen on Map 6, the Township has several large tracts throughout the Township. While several of these large tracts include a residential use, many are also utilized for agricultural purposes. These large tracts may also include woodlands and low-lying wetlands which are not under cultivation. The Township's abundance of large tracts of land used for agricultural wetlands, and PA 116 enrolled land are shown on Maps 2, 3 and 7, respectively.

The major agricultural crops produced in Ontwa Township include corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay. Map 2 found in Chapter II, Natural Features, provides the location of prime farmland as indicated in the Cass County Soil Survey.

### **P.A. 116 Enrolled Lands**

There is some land in the Township enrolled in the P.A. 116 Farmland Open Space Preservation Program (Map 7 and Table 9). Under this program, property owners agree to relinquish development rights to their land for a minimum enrollment period of ten years in exchange for tax credits. Given the level of participation by area farmers, it appears that P.A. 116 has helped to keep large portions of the Township devoted to farming or open space; however, the level of participation has wained in the last decade and may need to be promoted again in the near future.

Many of the farming areas contain lands which are naturally endowed with the soil quality, growing season, and moisture content necessary to sustain high crop yields under average farming practices. Farming such land is feasible with minimal input of energy and economic resources, and results in the least damage to the environment.

**TABLE 8**

P.A. 116 Enrolled Lands (in acres)

As of February, 2010

Application Number(s)	Section Numbers(s)	Total Acres Enrolled	Expiration Date
1	10	100	12/31/11
2	14	86	12/31/13
3	13	78	12/31/15

As illustrated on Map 7 there are a few remaining properties designated as P.A. 116 agricultural lands in Ontwa Township. Specifically, the active concentration exists in the southeast quarter of the Township. Although several acres enrolled in the program have reached expiration, the properties are eligible to re-enroll.

**Residential Land Use**

This category includes detached single-family homes, mobile home parks, and seasonal homes. The most common of these residential land uses found in Ontwa Township is the detached single-family home. As stated earlier, most of the residentially developed land is concentrated along or near Eagle, Christiana and Garver Lakes.

In addition, the Township has a few residential corridors in the southwest quarter of the Township, near the state line. Specifically, residential corridors are located along Redfield Street, Sherman and State Line roads. Other existing residential land uses can be found spread throughout the Township, some of which are associated with agricultural uses or are non-farm dwelling units in the agricultural district.

There are four mobile home parks within the Township. A mobile home park is located along North Shore Drive, east of Shirley Lane, in the northeast corner of the Township, another is located just southeast of the U.S. 12/Garver Lake Road intersection. The third is located north of Redfield Road near Elkhart Road, and the fourth is located at the southern Village limits.

The Township's Zoning Ordinance provides for agricultural, low to medium density, and lake shore single-family residential districts as well as for multi-family residential and mobile home parks. In the single-family residential districts, single-family homes and institutional uses (churches, schools, parks) are the general uses permitted.

**Commercial Land Use**

The commercial land uses identified within the Township include retail, service, and office types of facilities. Commercial land use within the Township is most predominantly located adjacent to U.S.12, just east of the Village limits and sporadically along the remaining portion of U.S.12. This area contains retail facilities which attract local business with some "passerby" business. Township residents are also served by commercial uses located within the Village of Edwardsburg. Other commercial uses which exist in the Township are generally located near the M-62/Redfield Street intersection. The vast majority of businesses in the area are locally owned and operated.

The Township's Zoning Ordinance provides for commercial development. The Commercial District is intended for retail businesses or service establishments which supply commodities or perform services which meet the daily needs of a community.

**Industrial Land Use**

Industrial development within the Township is concentrated north and south of May Street, just west of M-62. The Township Zoning Ordinance provides two industrial districts; one district is intended for light industrial uses such as wholesale activities, warehouses and industrial operations and the other district is intended for industrial activities such as manufacturing, assembling and fabrication activities including a large scale and specialized industrial operations.

**Public and Semi-Public Use**

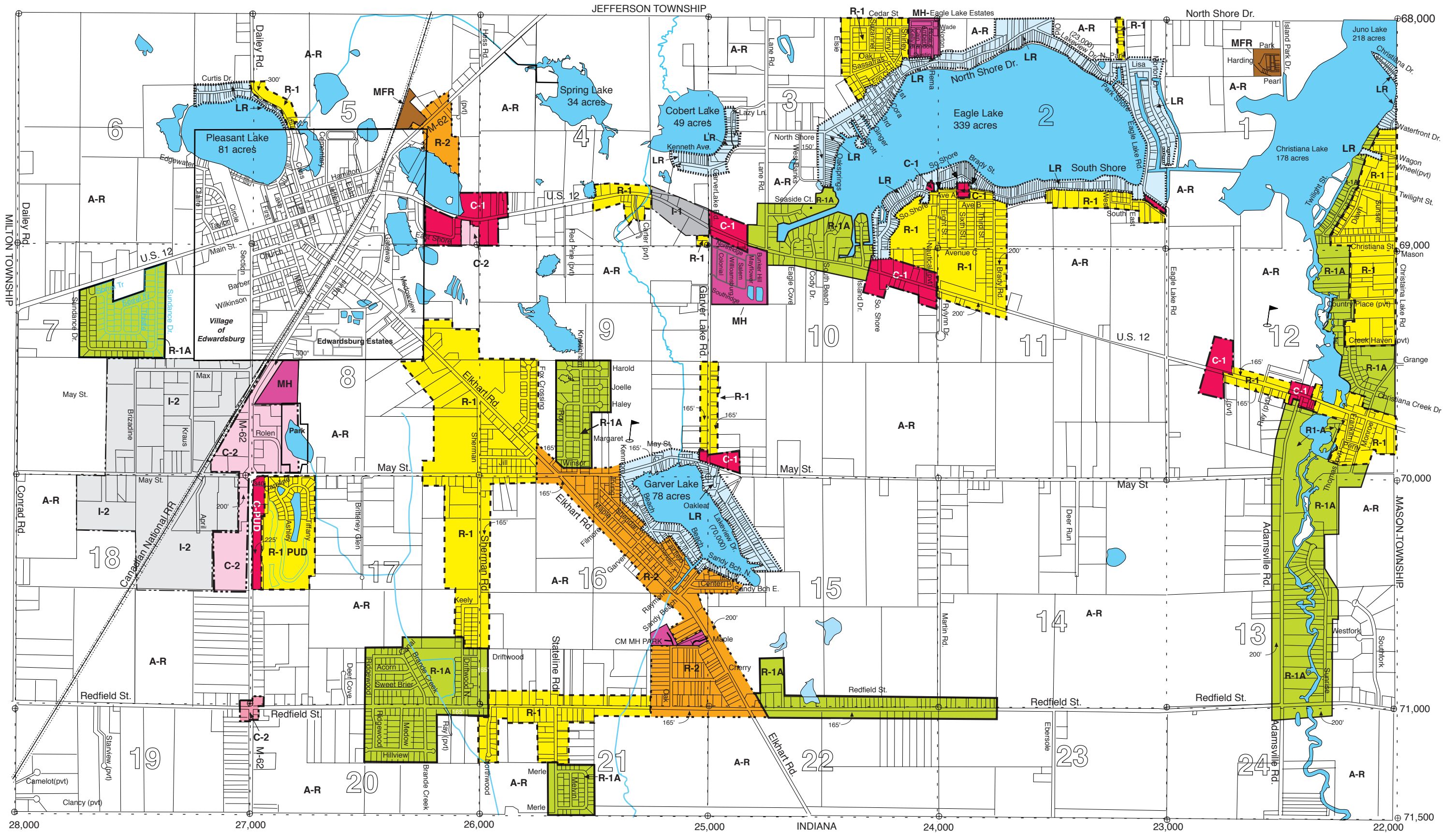
The public and semi-public land uses indicated on the existing land use map include land and facilities available for use by the general public or specific interest groups. Typically included in this land use category are public parks and Township facilities. In Ontwa Township, these lands are scattered throughout the Township. However, most of the public and semi-public facilities serving Township residents, such as the Township Hall and schools, are located within the Village of Edwardsburg or nearby. These land uses are described at more length in the "Community Facilities" section.

**Ground Water Protection Area**

Ontwa Township has enacted an ordinance to:

- Preserve and maintain existing and potential ground water supplies, aquifers, and ground water recharge areas of the Township, and protect them from adverse development or land use practices
- Preserve and protect present and potential sources of drinking water supply for public health and safety
- Conserve the natural resources of the Township
- Protect the financial investment of the Township in its drinking water supply system and to meet state requirements for wellhead protection
- Assure that state regulations that help protect ground water are implemented consistently when new or expanded development proposals are reviewed

Map 8 illustrates the general location of the water wells in the Village and the groundwater protection area in the Township. This joint effort by the Township and Village serves the residents of both communities to protect this valuable resource.

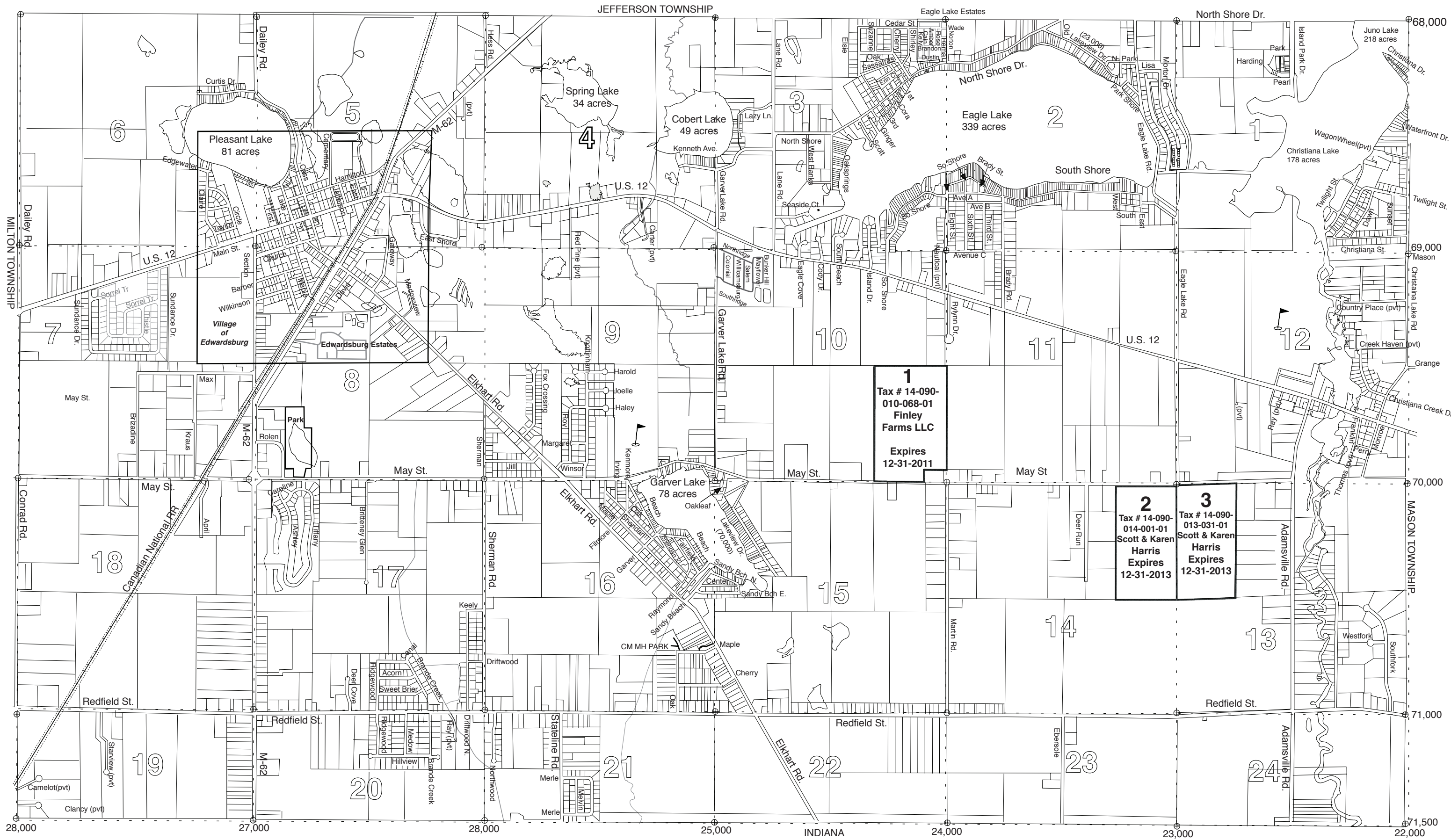


**Existing Land Use**  
**Ontwa Township**  
**Cass County, Michigan**  
 ADOPTED DECEMBER, 1996  
 LAST REVISED: DECEMBER, 2009

	Agricultural Residential <b>A-R</b>	Residential <b>R-1A</b>	Residential <b>R-1</b>	Lake Residential <b>LR</b>	Residential <b>R-2</b>	MH Park <b>MH</b>	Multi-Family Residential <b>MFR</b>	Commercial <b>C-1</b>	Commercial <b>C-2</b>	Light Industrial <b>I-1</b>	Heavy Industrial <b>I-2</b>
Minimum Lot Area	60,000	20,000	15,000	12,000	12,000	-	43,560	-	-	21,780	21,780
Minimum Lot Width	200	125	100	80	80	-	125	-	-	150	150
Minimum Lot Area (sewer)	(48,000)	(16,000)	(12,000)	(9,600)	(9,600)	-	(35,000)	-	-	-	-
Front Yard	35	35	35	35	30	-	35	75	75	35	35
Side Yard	50-20	40-15	25-10	20-6	20-6	-	20	25	-	20-20	20-20
Rear Yard	30	30	30	30	30	-	20	20	20	25	25
Floor Area	1000	1500	1200	1000	1000	-	-	-	-	-	-







**1**  
 Tax # 14-090-010-068-01  
 Finley Farms LLC  
 Expires 12-31-2011

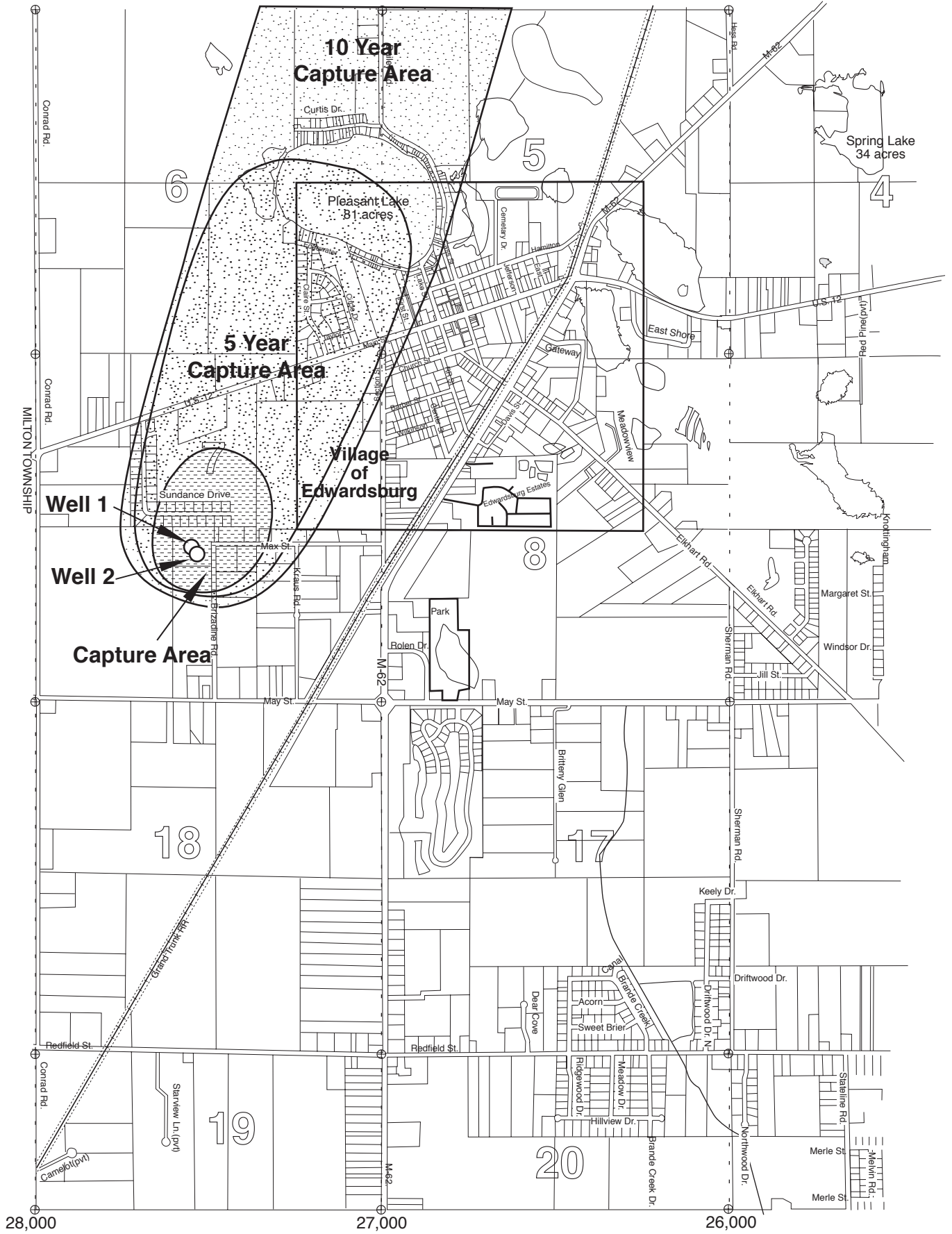
**2**  
 Tax # 14-090-014-001-01  
 Scott & Karen Harris  
 Expires 12-31-2013

**3**  
 Tax # 14-090-013-031-01  
 Scott & Karen Harris  
 Expires 12-31-2013

**PA-116 Agreements**  
 Ontwa Township, Cass County, Michigan

# = Application Number (see table)





**Village of Edwardsburg Ground Water Production Wells and Ontwa Township Ground Water Protection Area**



## CHAPTER V PLANNING ANALYSIS

This section of the plan examines the various components which have previously been described and undertakes an analysis of planning indicators and growth trends. This analysis will provide an understanding on how the Township has developed and with this knowledge the goals and objectives for future development can be established.

By looking at population projections, the existing land use mix, and basic planning assumptions, the guidelines for determining the various land use needs can be accomplished. Through this process the Township Board and the Planning Commission will know if it is reasonable to plan for the development of several thousand acres or a few acres for a specific type of land use.

### **Population Projections**

Projections of future population growth provide the bridge between the present and the future in the comprehensive planning process. These projections help determine future land use requirements as well as the demand for various public services and capital improvements.

Projections of future population growth need to consider the growth of the larger geographic region of which the community is a part. For Ontwa Township, this involves considering future population growth within the Township as it relates to the growth characteristics of Cass County, as well as the State of Indiana border area. The growth of each of these geographic areas will influence the population growth of Ontwa Township.

The techniques used in the past to project future population growth included the Constant Proportion Method, the Growth Rate Method and the Arithmetic Method. Due to the rapidly changing demographics of the area, all three methods underestimated the total population in the year 2000, and are deemed inadequate at this time for future predictions.

According to the mid-decade US Census Bureau population estimates, Ontwa Township had an estimated population of 5,871 in 2008, which is an increase of .10% from the 2000 Census population figure of 5,865. Cass County experienced an estimated -1.6% decrease in population during the same time period. Woods & Poole Economics' population estimates show less than a one percent decline from 2000 to 2010 for Cass County; however, a 5% increase is projected each decade between 2010 and 2040 for the County. If the Township were to continue to experience slightly more rapid population growth than the county overall, similar percentage increases in population could be assumed for the Township. Nevertheless, these projections would be contingent on future economic conditions within the region. While it is difficult to predict the future, it should be noted that the number of Building Permits issued in 2005 peaked at 49, and since that year, the number of permits has decreased substantially to 9 permits in 2009, although

an increase in 2010 has been noted. This trend is generally reflective of a weakened local housing market and national economy.

Nonetheless, the 2010 Census revealed that Ontwa Township did grow between 2000 and 2010, and at a rate more rapid than in previous decades. Much of this growth may be attributed to the high growth years earlier on in the decade, and to the community's high quality neighborhoods and desirable school district. It will be important to balance the Census figures for the past decade with the fact that building permits and development activity have declined since about 2005.

## CHAPTER VI GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Planning goals are statements that express the community's long-range desires and serve to provide direction for related planning activities. The following goals and objectives have been developed by the Planning Commission as a foundation in establishing future direction. The goals are presented by major topic areas and are a result of the public input received throughout the process to update this plan.

A goal is generally defined as a desired end state or condition the Township is striving to achieve. It should be fairly long-term in nature and yet within the reach of the community to attain. The goal statement should be reflective of the values and attitudes of the community; and, therefore, it should enjoy broad-based support. Generally, a goal statement should be stated assertively and in positive terms. An objective statement is a milestone in the journey to achieve the goal. Objectives are more specific than goals and should have some measurable aspect so that progress toward the goal may be evaluated.

### **Goal: Agriculture and Open Space**

Ontwa Township will feature productive and economically-viable agricultural lands for years to come and the encroachment of non-agricultural uses into prime farming areas will be minimized.

#### *Objectives*

- Explore alternative planning and transitional zoning techniques, such as fixed area ratio zoning, sliding-scale zoning and other approaches, that discourage or reduce spot zoning and the encroachment of non-farm development into prime farm areas.<sup>1</sup>
- Encourage the use of P.A. 116 of 1974 preservation agreements by area farmers that are consistent with the overall land development needs of the area.
- Investigate enacting a local transfer of development rights program, possibly with a multi-jurisdictional structure, which would preserve designated agricultural land and open space while facilitating development in certain pre-defined areas of the community, which may include the Village.
- Identify areas that are presently zoned for agricultural use which, due to their location and the encroachment of non-farm development, should be planned and zoned for an alternative long-range use.

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<sup>1</sup> Fixed area ratio zoning allows one dwelling at a density standard, with a maximum lot area to reduce the fragmentation of farmland; while sliding-scale zoning would allow comparatively more nonfarm dwellings to be subdivided from smaller farm parcels than larger farm parcels.

## **Goal: The Environment**

A defining characteristic of Ontwa Township will be its woodlands, open lands, drainage network, healthy wetlands and lakes, natural character, and wildlife habitat.

### *Objectives*

- Institute land use plans, policies and regulations intended to minimize or avoid impacts on air and water quality.
- Amend the zoning ordinance to provide for open space development patterns, where development is planned, as the preferred use by right with conventional development patterns processed as special land uses.
- Develop zoning standards to promote non-contiguous planned unit developments as a means to promote open space protection.
- Implement more stringent zoning and related development review tools that encourage land developers to take natural features such as soils, topography, hydrology, and natural vegetation into account in the process of site design.
- Promote soil conservation and wise use of fertilizers and pesticides.
- Establish landscape guidelines for new commercial, industrial, and residential developments which will offset the loss of natural vegetation caused by development.
- Determine the feasibility of establishing a Township recycling program/center.
- Create a detailed inventory of key natural resources and features that can be used as a preservation guide, and possibly a regulatory tool, for the Township and developers.

## **Goal: Water Resources**

The surface waters of Ontwa Township, including its many lakes and streams, will be clean, attractive and healthy, supporting a balance of native wildlife communities and a sustainable level of human use.

### *Objectives*

- Evaluate and revise, as necessary, zoning or other regulations pertaining to filter or buffer requirements along water bodies, including wetlands. Develop techniques to ensure development is adequately set back from significant features and that runoff is minimized.

- Expand and strengthen storm water management standards to reduce the quantity and velocity of runoff and to reduce pollutants.
- Implement a program of surface water quality monitoring to develop a trend line data for analysis and to serve as a basis for intelligent surface water regulation.
- Define the environmental carrying capacity of Ontwa Township lakes and employ the resulting analysis to guide land use decisions in the vicinity of water features.
- Explore mechanisms to ensure safe public access to the lakes at a reasonable level and minimize conflicts between motorized watercraft and swimmers.

### **Goal: Residential Land Use and Housing**

Ontwa Township will feature stable, high-quality and welcoming neighborhoods that accommodate a variety of housing opportunities to maintain affordability for a wide range of income levels.

#### *Objectives*

- Make improvements to local residential streets to ensure safe access to neighborhoods.
- Encourage the maintenance and preservation of the existing housing stock through proper zoning and housing code enforcement.
- Maintain efficient police, ambulance and fire service to the neighborhoods.
- Implement zoning standards better equipped to influence the location and design of mobile home parks.
- Protect residential areas from commercial and industrial land uses by requiring open space, landscaping, and buffered thoroughfares and encouraging transitional land uses.
- New developments should include amenities such as open space, sidewalks, bike and foot paths with multiple connections, street trees, and pedestrian linkages to commercial centers and parks.

### **Goal: Commercial Development**

Areas of Ontwa Township and the Village of Edwardsburg providing shopping and services will be quaint and vibrant; and will boast attractive streetscapes and will serve as a destination hub of social and retailing activity.

### *Objectives*

- Implement regulations that encourage the shared use of commercial driveways and control the number and spacing of driveways, especially along U.S. 12 and M-62.
- Implement policies and regulations that promote family-oriented neighborhood convenience centers sited to promote walkability.
- Work with the local business community to encourage and maintain a desired mix of commercial and service opportunities available to Township residents.
- Develop more stringent landscaping, sign, and building appearance guidelines or ordinances to promote aesthetics and the vitality of the commercial districts.
- Explore methods to give preference to utilization of existing commercial properties over greenfield development in outlying areas.
- Partner with the Village in completion of a market study to determine which businesses the community can support.

### **Goal: Industrial Development**

Ontwa Township and the Village of Edwardsburg will be balanced with a varied mix of businesses and industries, attractively developed and maintained and providing meaningful employment opportunities.

### *Objectives*

- Preserve land for future industrial purposes in and around areas which provide easy access to major arteries such as M-62.
- Work with the Village in mutually-beneficial efforts dedicated to researching and recommending development incentives and other measures to attract private investment.
- Explore methods to give preference to utilization of existing industrial properties over greenfield development in outlying areas.
- Promote high quality industrial development through the use of local site plan review regulations.
- Develop zoning regulations that separate residential areas from industrial areas with appropriate buffer strips, open space or other transitional land uses.



- Use zoning to prevent incompatible uses from intruding into industrial areas, and vice-versa.

### **Goal: Transportation**

Ontwa Township will feature aesthetically attractive and well-maintained transportation routes that will complement balanced, orderly growth and ensure convenience and safety for residents and workers.

#### *Objectives*

- Give priority to roads in areas intended to support the highest concentrations of development.
- Continue to work with the Cass County Road Commission to improve maintenance on existing roadways and to address traffic controls, sight restrictions, drainage and ditching.
- Maintain solid communication with Cass County Road Commission personnel to promote road improvement policies consistent with the goals of the Township.

### **Goal: Public Safety**

Public safety and public services will be enhanced.

#### *Objectives*

- Expand the capabilities of the Edwardsburg/Ontwa Police and Ambulance Departments to match a standard ratio relating to the size of the Township's population as needed.
- Provide street lighting in identified residential areas and at key street intersections where necessary.

### **Goal: Trails, Parks and Recreation, and Community Facilities**

The residents and visitors of Ontwa Township will enjoy a network of trails and safe and inviting non-motorized connections to local and regional natural areas and recreational facilities.

#### *Objectives*

- Acquire land areas for development of future parks – including open spaces for developed play areas and preserves along the lakes for passive recreation.
- Develop neighborhood park facilities to provide economical and convenient recreational opportunities.

- Work with developers to set aside land for parks and obtain easements for pedestrian/bicycle paths. Amend the zoning ordinance to require the inclusion of pathways throughout new development and along streets to promote pedestrian connections and to begin to build a non-motorized network.
- Develop a recreation plan that identifies future desired park and trail locations; based on likely emerging growth areas, existing and proposed regional trails, natural feature destinations, sports complexes, cultural venues, etc.
- Explore possible trail funding opportunities or general resource partners, including the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, the Cass County Parks Department, the Land & Water Conservation Fund, and the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance.
- Support the Edwardsburg Sports Complex.

**Goal: Cooperative Planning with the Village and Adjacent Communities**

Ontwa Township will benefit from coordination of services and cooperative land use planning with neighboring communities and within the larger region.

*Objectives*

- Continue and strengthen the consistent means of communicating with the Village of Edwardsburg Council and Planning Commission.
- Coordinate consistent and compatible land use decisions along the Township’s borders with adjacent municipalities.
- Maintain cooperative programs, including emergency services.
- Support efforts of the joint Corridor Improvement Authority to improve and beautify the M-62 area.

## CHAPTER VII FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Future Land Use Plan is a compilation of descriptions, recommendations, and justifications for future land use in Ontwa Township. It serves as an overall framework for the management and regulation of future development and also serves as the basis for evaluating rezoning requests.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, as amended, specifically gives a Township Planning Commission the authority to prepare and officially adopt a Plan. When prepared, officially adopted, and maintained, the Plan should provide an advisory guide for the physical conservation of certain areas and for the development of other areas into the best possible living environment for present and future township residents.

Because of the constant change in our social and economic structure and activities, the Plan must be maintained through periodic review and revision so that it reflects contemporary trends while maintaining long-range goals. General planning practice suggests, and the Planning Enabling Act requires, that Master Plans be reviewed every five years to keep them current. The former 2005 Plan reflected many current conditions and trends, so the effort to update it in 2009 enabled the community to focus on particular challenges rather than restrict the effort to a more general overview.

The Master Plan is general in scope. In addition, there is no schedule to implement the land use recommendations contained here. The timing of a particular land use is dependent upon a number of factors such as availability of public utilities, provisions for adequate roadways, effect on public services, and the demand for a particular land use versus the available land zoned for this use.

### **The Relationship of Planning to Zoning**

The relationship between land use planning and zoning is an important one. Planning is basically the act of planning the uses of land within a community for the future from a policy standpoint, while zoning is the act of regulating the use of these lands by law or ordinance. The laws of the State of Michigan require that a community engage in land use planning activities, including the preparation of a comprehensive plan or Master Plan, prior to the initiation of a zoning ordinance in a community.

Land use planning is the process of guiding the future growth and development of a community. Generally, a document known as the Master Plan is prepared, which addresses the various factors relating to the growth of a community. Through the processes of land use planning, it is intended that a community can preserve, promote, protect, and improve public health, safety, and general welfare. Additional considerations include: comfort, good order, appearance, convenience, law enforcement and fire protection, preventing the overcrowding of land to avoid undue concentration of population, facilitating the adequate and efficient provision of transportation,

water, sewage requirements and services, and conservation, development, utilization and protection of natural resources within the community.

Zoning is one of the instruments, along with capital improvements programming and the administration of local subdivision regulations, which implements the goals and policies of a Master Plan. The enactment and administration of the zoning ordinance are legislative and administrative processes conducted by local units of government relating to the implementation of the goals and policies of the Master Plan.

### **Plan Assumptions and Themes**

The goals and policies previously outlined, and analysis of the Township's physical, social and economic makeup have allowed the formulation of broad assumptions or themes that were used in the development of the future land use plan. These include:

1. The use of public water and sewers continues to expand in the Township. Most of the developing areas around Edwardsburg are able to utilize both while many other areas are able to hook up to the present sewer system. This is especially true around the lake areas of Eagle, Christiana and Garver. Areas not served or likely to be served in the near future that are currently undeveloped should not be planned for intense land uses.
2. Widening or other capacity improvements to major thoroughfares in the Township, such as M-62 and U.S.12, are not expected in the near future.
3. At the time the 2005 Plan was prepared, population growth was expected to increase over the next decade at a significant rate. However, it is important to note that growth has significantly slowed in all communities in the region in the few years leading up to 2011, when this Plan update was prepared; attributable to a weakened housing market and other external economic factors. And while predicting growth or future housing need is therefore difficult at this time, this Plan provides for reasonable and logical expansion of residential neighborhoods to provide continuity of land use and in areas where public utilities are present or likely to be extended in the foreseeable future.
4. The visioning workshop, conducted in May 2010, revealed a general preference for redeveloping existing built parts of the community over expanding into undeveloped areas. The maintenance of rural character was a common theme. "Rural character" can be an elusive concept to grasp or define, but residents agree that the character of Ontwa Township should be maintained. The Township is set apart by its wide open spaces, rolling topography, desirable lakefronts, quality homes, small-scale commercial areas, and scenic farm fields. Residents want Township leaders and policy makers to continue this character into the future through proper planning.
5. Redevelopment of existing commercial and industrial areas is recognized as a more economically and environmentally sustainable alternative to greenfield development of

outlying areas of the Township. In addition, downtown Edwardsburg is embraced as the center of the community and planning for large areas of commercial development away from the Village would undermine the redevelopment potential of downtown.

6. Commercial and industrial land uses need to be buffered from residential areas through open space, landscaping and screening.
7. The Township has experienced the encroachment of non-farm development into areas zoned for agricultural use. While growth and development has slowed, the encroachment of development into agricultural areas impinges on the desires of many citizens as expressed at the visioning workshop. Policies should therefore be included in the Master Plan which seek to support agricultural activity, and should be balanced with realities in the private marketplace and the rights of property owners. The future land use framework has been developed to discourage intense development in agricultural areas.

### **Land Use Categories**

The Future Land Use Map recommends a number of different land use classifications. The following descriptions of these future land use classifications explain the intended uses and location characteristics for each classification. The locations of these classifications is provided on Map 9, Future Land Use Map.

#### *Agricultural Residential*

Agricultural operations are a primary land use in Ontwa Township. The visioning workshop revealed that these operations are viewed positively, as farms establish a strong rural character and help to define the community. It is well documented that farms and non-farm uses can conflict with each other, for a variety of reasons. It is further recognized that non-farm development in transitional agricultural areas tends to have a domino effect, undermining the economies of scale in agricultural production that is afforded with relative size and contiguity of highly productive or unique soil classifications. Land use decisions in the Agricultural Residential areas should be mindful of these considerations.

The Agricultural Residential future land use designation is intended to accommodate farming activities and agricultural support services and to recognize the desire of residents to maintain the Township's farmland and rural character. Agriculture is an important piece of the heritage of Ontwa Township and the broader region. The Master Plan recognizes this and the Agricultural Residential designation is therefore designed to encourage farmers to continue operating in the Township. As such, non-farm development should be limited in these areas. Agricultural uses and limited low-density residential uses are the predominant land uses in these areas.

Future extension of public sanitary sewer infrastructure into these areas is not contemplated over the life of this Plan; and densities should therefore be low to accommodate private septic systems. Densities in the Agricultural Residential areas should be about one dwelling unit per two acres.

The Agricultural Residential classification recognizes the desire of homeowners for a rural environment relatively close to urban amenities. At the same time, this land category is intended to encourage the preservation of wetlands, woodlands, and open spaces which are useful as water retention and ground water discharge areas, provide valuable habitat for wildlife, and have important aesthetic and scenic values. Lands in the Agricultural Residential designation host unique ecological areas and dramatic vistas. A central goal of this Plan is the maintenance of these features while also encouraging continued agricultural operations.

The boundaries and extent of the Agricultural Residential planning areas have been designed with the following considerations in mind: areas not serviced with public sewer should not be developed intensely; areas of PA 116 Lands should be protected from the encroachment of development; areas with soils that are generally unsuitable to support intensive development due to substantial rolling topography or septic system limitations should not be planned for intensive future growth; and areas considered suitable for long term farming investment, including areas with modest land fragmentation, should be set aside for the continuation of agricultural use.

*Low-Density Residential*

This Master Plan is intended to preserve the rural and agricultural character of the community, but must be balanced with realities in the marketplace. The Low-Density Residential designation has been prepared in recognition of existing development patterns and the probable long-term future demand for family-oriented, single-family neighborhoods. It is anticipated that new development in these areas will result in attractive and inviting single-family communities of lasting value.

New development should be mindful of natural features, such as large expanses of woodlands, scenic vistas, water features, and ridgelines. This Plan encourages new developments to be designed as open space communities, with single-family lots gathered around large expanses of green space. Open space communities can protect valuable environmental and aesthetic features which support the rural character of the Township. Additionally, new development should provide an internal walking trail or sidewalk system to promote pedestrian safety, walkability and interconnection between neighboring developments. This Plan supports open space developments as a use permitted by right within Low-Density Residential areas and non-contiguous planned unit developments that permanently protect uninterrupted expanses of open space and help to establish a network of greenways.

Low-Density Residential areas have been planned adjacent to existing development, and are located in areas currently served with public sewer or in areas where public sewer may potentially be extended in the foreseeable future. Moreover, Low-Density Residential areas are primarily planned for lands not currently being farmed or areas not considered prime farmland, and located within a sewer district.

The predominant land use in the Low-Density Residential land use designation will be single-family dwellings at a density of approximately two to three dwelling units per acre, with a slight increase in density possible when public sewer is provided.

### *High-Density Residential*

A primary goal of this Master Plan is the preservation of the Township's natural features balanced with high quality and aesthetic forms of development that offer a very attractive living environment for residents. The High-Density Residential designation is key to this goal. The primary purpose of this designation is to offer the potential for a variety of residential options for a variety of age and income levels. In addition, these areas are intended to serve as receptors for senior living environments and care services. A long-term objective for this designation is the creation of high-density areas that are designed and located to create human scale, walkable neighborhoods in close proximity to commercial services and recreational amenities with high-quality design that works with the area's natural features.

Natural vegetative buffers around development in this land use category are encouraged to help protect less intense land uses and will be designed to retain significant natural features and the Township's rural character. In addition, greater road frontage setbacks are encouraged to keep country roads scenic.

Single-family dwellings and two-family dwellings are the predominant land use in the High-Density Residential designation. Ontwa Township has recognized the need to provide for limited areas of affordable, low-maintenance and high-quality housing for young professionals, the elderly and young families. As such, existing areas of more intense development can be found within the High-Density Residential designation, but new or expanded condominium, apartment, or manufactured housing developments are not encouraged unless served with public sewer and compatible with adjacent land uses. Moreover, these higher density uses may be considered where the effects of that density on natural features, infrastructure and surrounding properties can be mitigated. For example, a senior housing development may be considered if it can be demonstrated that impacts such as traffic, storm water runoff, community character and service demands would be consistent with that generated by a less intense development.

Conservation design techniques will be encouraged, where appropriate, to establish small pockets of natural lands within this relatively intense development form. Overall residential densities of three to four dwelling units per acre will be achieved.

### *Waterfront Residential*

The inland lakes located in Ontwa Township are substantial recreational amenities and enhance the appeal of the community as a prime residential area within the region. Additionally, the water bodies and the surrounding land are valued for ecological significance and treasured for aesthetic value. As such, waterfront residential areas will warrant special planning attention when implementing this Master Plan.

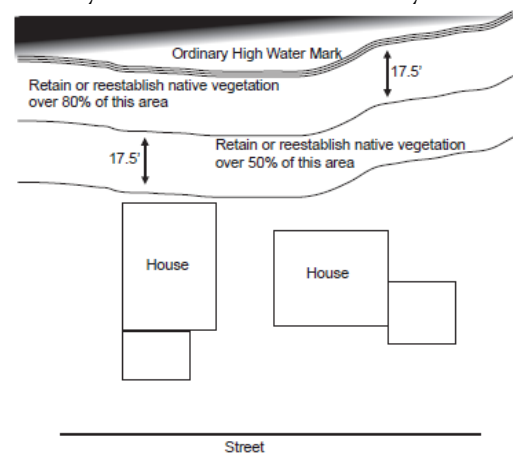
Some of the Township’s lakes have acted as magnets for residential development and will remain attractive places for residential uses and recreation activity. Conversely, several smaller lakes and streams retain a pristine and relatively untouched character and have not attracted much development or have remained relatively low-density over time. In the former case, development regulations should recognize existing development patterns while applying realistic standards that support the long-term viability of the lake. In the latter case, wetlands and other natural features have generally foreclosed the prospect of development, and pre-settlement characteristics of the water body and surrounding land should be preserved.

The established pattern in most Waterfront Residential areas includes single-family homes at a density of up to three to four dwelling units per acre in accessible waterfront areas. Lands classified as Waterfront Residential that are currently unplatted and therefore have no established, developed density pattern should utilize a lower density or open space development patterns which preserve natural vegetation along the shoreline.

In addition, while several existing non-residential land uses complement existing lakeside neighborhoods, they should not encroach further into residential areas and additional non-residential uses are not desired; to protect the integrity and cohesiveness of the neighborhoods and to protect lake quality by minimizing high-impact development. These uses include Eagle Lake Marine, Stacy’s Food and Spirits, and a yacht club.

A significant portion of the existing lakefront areas in the Township are developed in relatively high-density patterns to take advantage of the lake amenity. In some cases, the scale of nearby development may impact lake water quality. Development within the Waterfront Residential designation should be scaled appropriately to the particular body of water to minimize any adverse effects on natural features. Additionally, impervious surface limitations and other policies that reduce the quantity and velocity of runoff and increase the quality of runoff will be encouraged.

Moreover, site design and landscaping techniques that result in the retention of native vegetation along the shore and discourage artificial fertilization will be promoted. Implementation of increased setback distances between dwellings and the ordinary high water mark or increased lot widths will be difficult because many areas are already developed. However, it is possible to foster the reestablishment of native vegetation along the shoreline to reduce fertilizer runoff that can lead to eutrophication. Eutrophication is an aging process resulting from increasing levels of dissolved nutrients, such as phosphates, in surface water. While this process occurs naturally, it can be accelerated through pollution and other impacts of human settlement around water bodies.



**Policies that limit impervious surfaces and preserve or restore native vegetation buffers are encouraged in Waterfront Residential areas.**



Increasing vegetation to promote natural filtration of runoff and to reduce impervious surfaces can greatly benefit water quality.

### *Commercial*

The Commercial future land use label represents the desire to reuse and enhance existing commercial properties, in areas that may currently be served with public utilities and that are experiencing relatively high traffic counts. The limited expansion of areas planned for new commercial development is premised on the policy that downtown Edwardsburg, in the Village, is the commercial center and heart of the community. As such, the Township does not wish to provide excessive opportunities for competing suburban commercial developments; and rather, would like to support the redevelopment and improvement of downtown and existing Township commercial areas.

The purpose of the Commercial future land use designation is to perpetuate accommodation of establishments offering goods and services to residents. Desired uses include retail, personal service establishments, restaurants, financial institutions, professional offices and similar uses. The more automobile-oriented uses, such as drive-through businesses, are not encouraged throughout the Township and should be limited to the area around May Street and M-62. Uses in other Commercial areas should be of a smaller scale with more design orientation focused on pedestrians, with amenities including substantial window coverage, sitting benches, and sidewalks.

In addition, architectural details are paramount in the Commercial areas. New development and redevelopment should be designed to deviate from conventional corporate architecture with carnival-like colors and “box” styling, to maintain the community’s unique rural character and to avoid a strip commercial, “Anyplace USA” appearance. Building facades should be constructed of high-quality materials to portray an aesthetic of permanence, and facades should be pleasantly broken up to evade monotonous storefronts. Meaningful pedestrian circulation patterns, ground-mounted signage, and efficient site illumination are encouraged; as well as enhanced landscaping.

Furthermore, large expanses of front yard parking area should be avoided, with some parking placed to the side or rear of buildings. Site access should be coordinated with neighboring properties to minimize traffic conflict points and to foster a safe environment for vehicular turning movements. This may be accomplished with shared access and connected parking lots and by requiring relatively large distances between street intersections and commercial driveways.

### *Industrial*

The Industrial future land use designation reflects the Township’s desire to promote existing industrial areas as generators of employment for area residents. Industrial areas will be characterized by low-impact land uses, such as high-tech research and development, office, light manufacturing, warehousing, and shipping centers.

Vacant land zoned for industrial use in the Edwardsburg Industrial Park should be developed before additional lands in the Township are designated for such development. In addition, the Industrial area along US-12 should be kept relatively small-scale, with low-impact land uses and generous landscaping conducive to the location within proximity to residential neighborhoods.

Further, any Industrial areas adjacent to residential uses should include buffer areas to protect the residential uses from any potential adverse effects. Buffer areas should include substantial setbacks, landscaping and possible fencing.

*Parks and Recreation*

The Township seeks to provide continued recreational opportunities to its residents and visitors. As such, this Plan has contemplated a Parks and Recreation designation to ensure the preservation of Kraus Park, the Township-owned and maintained park. Additionally, the designation includes several private recreational facilities, such as the Four Lakes Country Club, the Garver Lake Golf Course and the Edwardsburg Sports Complex. The Vernon and Velma Radebaugh Memorial, a 3-acre natural area preserved by the Michigan Nature Association, is also designated Parks and Recreation. These facilities are designated Parks and Recreation in recognition of the significant contribution to quality of life they offer to Township residents.

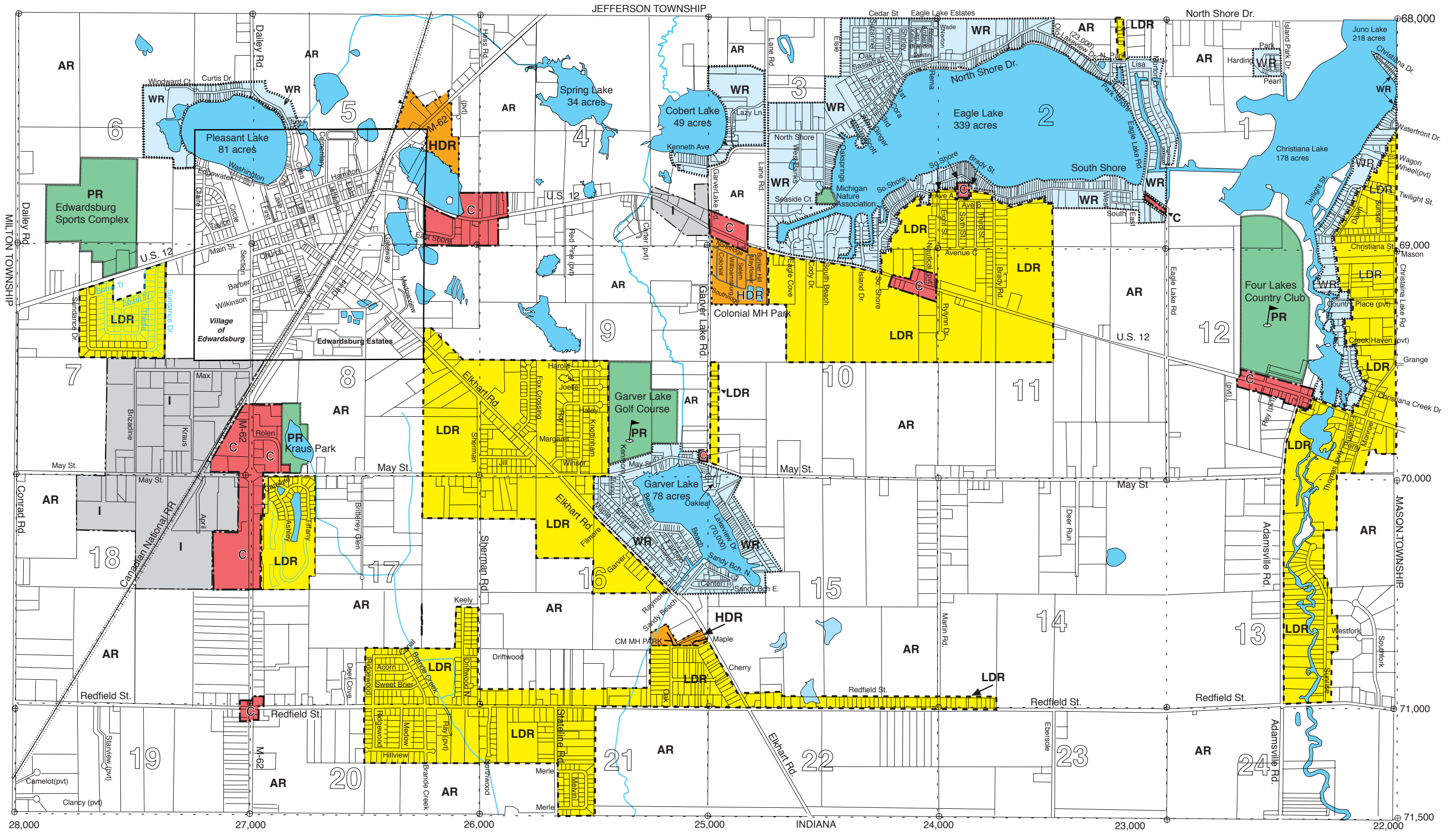
**Zoning Plan**

Section 33, (2), (d), of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2008) requires that Master Plans adopted after September 1, 2008 include a Zoning Plan to explain how the future land use categories in this Plan relate to the zoning districts incorporated in the Township’s Zoning Ordinance. The following table relates the more general future land use categories with the zoning districts and discusses features and factors to be considered in reviewing requests to rezone lands in the Township consistent with this plan.

Future Land Use Categories	Supporting and Compatible Zoning Districts	Additional Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts	Evaluation Factors and Features to Determine Eligibility for Additional Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts
Agricultural Residential	A-R, Agricultural Residential	None	
Low-Density Residential	R-1A, Residential, and R-1, Residential	None	
High-Density Residential	R-2, Residential	M-H, Mobile Home Park MFR, Multi-Family Residential	If public sewer is provided and new development includes open space and pedestrian amenities and is formed into a walkable community; and if compatible with adjacent land uses
Waterfront Residential	L-R, Lake Residential	None	
Commercial	C-1, Commercial/Service	C-2, General Commercial	If abutting M-62 generally within one-half mile of its intersection with May Street and if compatible with adjacent land uses
Industrial	I-1, Light Industrial	I-2, Heavy Industrial	If located within the Edwardsburg Industrial Park
Parks and Recreation	None, but a new district may be established in the future	The Township’s intent is that recreation facilities stay in recreational use, but if development were to occur, it should meet the intent of the utility, land use, and rural preservation policies of the Plan and follow the predominant future land use designation surrounding the property	

In considering a request to rezone property in Ontwa Township, the Planning Commission shall consider the future land use map and the future land use descriptive narrative of this plan. The foregoing table shall be used to evaluate the degree to which the proposed rezoning is, or may be, consistent with this plan together with an evaluation of the specific request. The proposed rezoning decision shall also consider whether the proposed site may be reasonably used as it is currently zoned, whether the proposed site is an appropriate location for any and all of the land uses that might be permitted within the requested zoning district, whether there may be other locations in the community that are better suited to accommodate such uses and any potential detrimental impact on the surrounding property that could result from the proposed rezoning.

In all cases, this Zoning Plan shall be applied as a guideline for the Planning Commission subject to the appropriate application of the discretionary authority permitted to the Planning Commission and Township Board by statute, case law and good planning practice. Nothing in this Zoning Plan will preclude the Planning Commission and Township Board from considering amendments to this Master Plan to better serve the public interests of the community.



**Future Land Use Plan**  
**ONTWA TOWNSHIP**  
**CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN**  
 March, 2011

- |  |                                |  |                             |  |                           |
|--|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------|
|  | Agricultural Residential (AR)  |  | Waterfront Residential (WR) |  | Parks and Recreation (PR) |
|  | Low-Density Residential (LDR)  |  | Commercial (C)              |  | Industrial (I)            |
|  | High-Density Residential (HDR) |  |                             |  |                           |

## CHAPTER VIII IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

In order for the Master Plan to serve as an effective guide for the continued development of Ontwa Township, it must be implemented. Primary responsibility for implementing the Plan rests with the Ontwa Township Board, the Planning Commission, and the Township staff. This is done through a number of methods. These include ordinances, programs, and administrative procedures which are described in this chapter.

It is important to note that the Master Plan itself has no legal authority to regulate development in order to implement the recommendations of the Plan. This implementation must come from the decisions of the Township Board and Planning Commission to provide needed public improvements and to administer and establish regulatory measures relative to the use of the land. Cooperation between the Township and adjacent municipalities and Cass County is also essential.

The private sector, including individual home and land owners, is also involved in fulfilling the recommendations of the Master Plan by the actual physical development of land uses and through the rezoning of land. The authority for this, however, comes from the Township. Cooperation between the public and private sectors is therefore important in successful implementation of the Master Plan.

Previous elements of the Plan set forth Goals and Objectives and Land Use Plan recommendations which serve to guide the future development of Ontwa Township. Many of the specific implementation recommendations of this chapter are taken from these objectives.

The following sections summarize many of the major activities which the Ontwa Township Planning Commission should pursue in order to be pro-active in the implementation of this Master Plan.

### **Zoning Ordinance Amendments**

The Zoning Ordinance will be the primary implementation mechanism to achieve the land use goals of the Plan. This implementation item contemplates a comprehensive evaluation of the entire Zoning Ordinance, and other ordinances that influence the physical environment, in connection with the goals, objectives and future land use plan. This may include revisions to the Zoning Map to better support the future land use map, likely over time as requests are made by property owners; and a revision of some zoning district classifications to better conform to the future land use descriptions presented in the preceding chapter. The following summarizes many of the changes that may need to be contemplated, although other amendments to the Zoning Ordinance may also be necessary. The following recommendations, at a minimum, should be explored:

1. The residential zoning districts should be modified to permit open space developments by right, with general standards that define, guide and encourage the use of such a development

form. Conventional residential development can be permitted as a special land use, with standards in place that require a specific amount of open space be kept free from development along the roadway to maintain a natural vegetative buffer. Standards should encourage developers to take vegetation, topography and other features into consideration during site layout.

2. The Zoning Ordinance should be revised to allow approval of a planned unit development with open space that is non-contiguous with the rest of the planned unit development. This flexibility can result in larger areas of protected open land.
3. Ordinances governing subdivisions, site condominiums and possibly other forms of development, should be amended to require installation of sidewalks and street trees, to enhance walkability, aesthetics, and pedestrian safety.
4. Design guidelines should be applied to commercial areas, and possibly other areas. Although the Plan does not contemplate strict form-based regulations that dictate minor architectural details, it is the intent of this Plan to promote development that is consistent with the small-town character and aesthetic of Ontwa Township and Edwardsburg. Enhanced aesthetics can act to promote a commercial area and reflect vitality. Zoning standards should therefore relate to better landscaping and preservation of natural features within a development site, less intrusive signage, landscape buffering between land uses, night-sky friendly outdoor lighting, and design principles that can preserve rural character. Such principles may include pitched roofs, parking located to the side or rear of buildings, mixed-uses at specific nodes, and high-quality building materials that lend an appearance of permanence.
5. Access management regulations can help avoid haphazard and unsafe driveways in commercial areas. Standards should be incorporated into the ordinance that regulate distance between access points and intersections, consolidation of driveways, and other features to help ensure proper traffic flow and safe traffic movements.
6. The Zoning Ordinance should be amended to include revised standards for setbacks from lakes and wetlands. In addition, requirements for preservation or restoration of native vegetation along waterfronts should be added to the ordinance.
7. The Township should explore zoning tools that result in farmland preservation, such as fixed area ratio zoning and sliding-scale zoning, as described under the first goal in Chapter VI.

### **Farmland and Open Space**

The Michigan Department of Agriculture's Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program includes several instruments that the Township can help to promote. The program also authorizes the Township to participate in several methods to encourage agricultural operations. Following are tools that should be endorsed and advertised by the Township, to the extent possible:

1. Purchase of Development Rights. This is a permanent, voluntary restriction on the land between the property owner and the State that preserves the land for farming in exchange for a cash payment. This State program is currently not funded, but may be in the future.
2. Farmland Development Rights Agreements. This is a temporary, voluntary restriction on the land between the property owner and the State; which protects the agricultural use of the land in return for tax benefits and special assessment exemptions. This tool is commonly known as P.A. 116.
3. Local Open Space Easement. These are also voluntary and temporary, but represent an agreement between the landowner and the Township; where certain tax benefits and exemptions from various assessments are made possible.
4. Conservation Easement Donation. Conservation Easement Donations are permanent restrictions voluntarily entered into by the landowner between the same and the State; preserving the land for either farmland or open space.
5. Designated Open Space Easement. This is a temporary, voluntary restriction on the land between the property owner and the State; which maintains the land as open space in return for tax benefits and special assessment exemptions.
6. Transfer of Development Rights. Legal authority to establish a transfer of development rights program is unclear, as State enabling legislation has not been enacted. The Township may work with legislators to craft such legislation to promote transfer of development rights as an effective and viable means to preserve open space and farmland. As the Township explores the possibility of creating a program, procedures and regulations that govern the transfer of rights should be aligned to meet local objectives.

## **Complete Streets**

This Plan supports complete streets policy. Complete streets are thoroughfares that are planned, designed and constructed to allow access to all legal users safely and efficiently, without any one user taking priority over another. Users in Ontwa Township include pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, users of assistive devices, and truck-drivers. Complete streets can result in increased safety for non-motorized users, improved public health, a cleaner environment, mobility equity and enhanced quality of life through increased modal choices and more inviting streets.

In addition, another key motivation to enact complete streets policies is that Michigan law encourages MDOT to give additional consideration to enhancement grant applicants with such policies. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act has also been amended to stipulate that transportation improvements be respectful of the surrounding context, further ensuring that more equitable and attractive streets become reality.

The Township's objective will be to work jointly with surrounding communities to promote healthy lifestyles for people of all abilities through the development of a non-motorized network. Suggested design elements may include sidewalks on both sides of a roadway or street; adequate lighting; pedestrian signals and signage; bike lanes; multi-use trails; and other features. Even though Ontwa Township is a rural community, these elements are feasible in certain areas of the Township. More urban pedestrian features, like raised pedestrian bridges or transit service, are not likely to occur in the community at this time.

Some features may be accomplished through simple road restriping and the addition of signage. Other projects may be more involved and may only be practicable when coordinated with major roadway reconstruction. The Township should work with neighboring communities, the road commission, and other pertinent agencies in implementation of complete streets policy.

## **Trails**

Trails encourage health and wellness, enhance quality of life, and promote sense of community. Trails also can improve non-motorized system safety and support a complete streets program. Ontwa Township residents indicated a need for trails in the community. While the routes of future trails would need to be determined, a priority preliminary connection has been identified by the public: the lakes area population cluster in the northeast portion of the Township to downtown Edwardsburg and continuing to the new sports complex.

Several entities can provide assistance with trail funding, planning or information. These include the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, the Safe Routes to School Program, the Bikes Belong Coalition, the Southwestern Michigan Commission, the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission, county parks departments in Indiana and Michigan, and the two DNR programs described below. In addition, MDOT may provide funding for numerous types of projects that encourage safe, accessible and efficient forms of multi-modal transport, including non-motorized facilities and other improvements related to transportation.

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund can provide assistance for the Township's outdoor recreation projects, including land acquisition, trails and physical development of park facilities. Additionally, the Land and Water Conservation Fund is similar to the Trust Fund grant. Natural feature preservation has historically been the primary award criteria; and as such, this opportunity should especially be taken into account when planning for new passive recreation facilities. However, the LWCF now places emphasis on trails, "green" technology in outdoor recreation, universal design and coordination among recreation providers.

Most recreation grants will stipulate a minimum required local match. It is possible to be awarded grant dollars from multiple funding sources, and use the monies leveraged from one source as the match for another. An example might be a local trail project, where the community uses MDOT funds as the match for a DNR grant. This can help save local government resources, is usually permitted by grant programs, and is encouraged.



Moreover, grant application guidelines often include a provision for regional coordination and cooperation. The Township will generally receive more “points” for a grant application if it can demonstrate that the proposed project is the result of collaboration with an adjacent community, regional entity or multiple units of government. The Township should therefore keep this concept in mind, especially when planning for future trail connections that may traverse more than one community.

One requirement of State grant programs is that the Township have an up-to-date recreation plan. The DNR requires that recreation plans be reviewed and updated every five years to keep them current. Following the DNR’s guidelines in plan preparation establishes the Township’s eligibility to apply for grant funds that would otherwise be unavailable.

### **Water Quality**

Several significant lakes and wetland areas exist within Ontwa Township and Township residents have expressed an interest in maintaining the natural functions of the water features. The unique beauty and significant recreational value of these features is also critical to maintaining quality of life for many Township residents. The Township should commission a process to evaluate the condition of water features and prioritize resource protection needs, and can seek to establish an EPA Nine Elements approved watershed management plan.

Such a watershed management plan would involve working with neighboring communities, as appropriate, to follow the technical requirements of the EPA. Essentially, the planning process sets goals for water quality and identifies a process to meet them. Section 319, Nonpoint Source Management Program, of the Clean Water Act, can help provide funding through the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality for watershed planning and technical assistance.

On a more local scale, the Township could employ its own analysis of individual lakes to define carrying capacity, or the number of boats or other watercraft that can be on the lake without being destructive to water quality and boater safety. This threshold is related to many factors, including the size of the lake, its depth, its shape, bottom soils and bank characteristics, the number of homes on the lake and the extent of impervious surfaces, the degree of public access, and the number of visitors attracted to the lake.

The Township should define the carrying capacity of lakes to determine future policies. Township residents wish to preserve carrying capacity and prevent excessive boating from degrading lake quality. An analysis of carrying capacity is a likely first step in evaluating current lake access policies. The process may include several steps, including an analysis of physical characteristics, development intensity and land uses, mooring activity, definition of the net traversable acreage of the lake, and a build-out analysis.

In addition, the Township should evaluate the effectiveness of existing stormwater control mechanisms and contemplate additional or more innovative methods to manage stormwater. The way stormwater is handled can affect water quality. Stormwater standards may be strengthened

with requirements or incentives that promote conservation and use of existing natural site features in stormwater system design to reduce the quantity and velocity of runoff and to reduce pollutants. Best practices may include bio-retention swales, rain gardens, vegetated rooftops, rain barrels, and permeable pavements; that process stormwater as a resource. New standards can require that natural features be preserved or recreated and impervious surfaces be minimized to the extent possible, to help ensure that runoff is reduced and processed naturally.

### **Planning Commission Work Program**

The Plan recommends that the Planning Commission prepare a work program in January of each year. This work program would set forth the tasks or goals which the Planning Commission determines to accomplish for the upcoming year. This will allow the Commission to stay focused on important tasks and help to implement the goals and objectives identified with this Plan.

The Planning Commission should also partake in a joint meeting with the Village of Edwardsburg Planning Commission on an annual basis to create a consistent means of communication and land use decisions.

### **Planning Education**

Planning commissioners should attend planning seminars to keep themselves informed of planning issues and learn how to better carry out their duties and responsibilities as Planning commissioners. These seminars are regularly sponsored by the Michigan Association of Planning and the Michigan Township Association (MTA) and are a valuable resource for Planning Commissions. There are also several planning publications which are a useful information tool for Planning commissioners. The main publications are *Planning and Zoning News* and *Michigan Planner Magazine*.

### **Adhere to the Future Land Use Plan**

The Township should strive to make decisions that are in harmony with the future land use plan. Nevertheless, the policies of this Master Plan should be viewed as flexible, and they should be revised as the character of the community changes over time. The Plan should be reviewed and periodically updated at least once every five years to remain current and to meet statutory provisions. As stated in the description of the Zoning Plan on page 48, proposed land uses should be consistent with the future land use designations. However, the Planning Commission may determine that a proposed land use would not be consistent with the applicable future land use designation, but would not be incompatible with the underlying policies of the Plan, and would represent a logical extension of land use. It may therefore be a preferred alternative to the Plan, and the Plan may be amended accordingly.