

A scenic sunset over a lake with silhouetted trees in the foreground. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, red, and purple, with the sun low on the horizon. The water reflects the colors of the sky. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of several trees are visible against the bright background.

# ELK RAPIDS TOWNSHIP

ANTRIM COUNTY, MICHIGAN

# MASTER PLAN



# ELK RAPIDS TOWNSHIP

ANTRIM COUNTY

MICHIGAN

## MASTER PLAN

Adopted With Amendments  
through \_\_\_\_\_, 2024

Elk Rapids Township Planning Commission

Elk Rapids, Michigan

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To access the Master Plan on the Township website

Enter: [www.elkrapids.com](http://www.elkrapids.com)

Under HOME, scroll down and click on: [Review...TWP Master Plan](#)



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*Cover photo provided by Dana Vannoy of Lewis & Clark Explorations*



## SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

### PLAN PURPOSE

**State law requires that a plan be reviewed and updated as necessary at least once every 5 years**

The purpose of this Master Plan is to enable Elk Rapids Township to evaluate current trends and conditions and to plan for the future. The Master Plan represents a foundation policy statement about what a community is, what its residents value, and what those residents hope the community will become. It outlines a preferred future for Elk Rapids Township and a comprehensive plan to realize it.

Constant social, economic, land use, and other changes justify periodic review and maintenance of a land use plan, so the plan reflects current trends, objectives, and challenges. In addition, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Act 33 of 2008, as amended, stipulates that a comprehensive master plan or land use plan be reviewed at least once every five years and revised accordingly as needed.

**The communities determined it to be in the best interest to implement their future**

Prior to the adoption of this Plan, Elk Rapids Township had implemented its own Plans independently since 1997, except in 2013 and 2018 when the Master Plans were jointly implemented in collaboration with the Village of Elk Rapids. In 2022 the Planning Commissions and governing bodies of each jurisdiction determined to implement their Master Plans independently.

### PLANNING PROCESS

Planning is 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 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, aesthetics, convenience, fire protection, community character, facilitating the adequate and efficient provision of transportation and utility services, walkability, recreation, and conservation of natural resources within the community.

Zoning is one of the instruments, along with capital improvements programming and the administration of local subdivision regulations and other ordinances, which implements the goals and policies of a 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 plan.

**This plan may be  
viewed as a  
revision of past  
plans**

As part of completing this plan, the Planning Commission utilized past studies to analyze trends in the Township. The implications of this information helped to form the policy framework of the plan. In addition, as part of the effort to craft past plans, the Planning Commission promulgated a community opinion survey to residents of both the Township and Village of Elk Rapids. The Planning Commission contemplated the results of these processes in rewriting past plans. Studies respondents indicated strong desires to:

- Preserve the natural environment and significant natural features; and
- Provide for economic opportunity, in terms of light industry and small business ownership, while protecting natural resources and rural character.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The process to prepare this plan has involved community residents as well as public officials. The following individuals have provided key input and their contributions are gratefully acknowledged:

### **Township Planning Commission**

Shen B. Smith, Chairman  
Zachery J. Amos, Vice Chairman  
James A. Lundy, Secretary  
Emile S. Sabty, Assistant Secretary  
Thomas L. Crandall  
Garry L. Pepler  
Matt D. Soper

### **Township Board**

Dorance M. Amos, Supervisor  
Shelley R. Boisvert, Clerk  
Michael Weber, Treasurer  
Richard Hults, Trustee  
Matt D. Soper, Trustee

### **Township Zoning Administrator & Planning Consultant**

Larry Nix, PCP

### **Documents and Maps**

Williams & Works

## TOWNSHIP BACKGROUND

Elk Rapids Township is located approximately 15 miles north of Traverse City and just over 30 miles south of Charlevoix, in Antrim County, Michigan. The Township is bounded to the west by the East Arm of the Grand Traverse Bay, and borders a portion of Elk Lake to the east. Elk Lake is part of the Chain of Lakes of Antrim County, a 78-mile system of navigable waterways. The Elk Rapids harbor connects these waters to Lake Michigan, the other Great Lakes, and their tributaries via the Elk River. The “Power Dam” comes between the river and the harbor. Map 1 depicts the Township in its regional context.

**The abundance of natural beauty and water-related recreational opportunities attracts the residents of Elk Rapids and draws tourists to the area**

The Village of Elk Rapids physically divides the Township into two noncontiguous sections. The northern section includes most of Bass Lake and Birch Lake within its area, and contains many forests and wetlands. Much of the southern portion of the Township is currently used for agriculture. The township is slightly greater than 7 square miles in land area.

The character of the Elk Rapids community is gradually changing. The past manufacturing base has evolved to more of a service-oriented economy. While growth in a service-oriented economy may be partially attributed to state and national economic trends, it may also be reflective of the growing local retiree and tourist populations. The abundance of natural beauty and water-related recreational opportunities attracts the residents of Elk Rapids and draws tourists to the area.

## VIEW CORRIDORS

### US-31 Corridor

The US-31 corridor is a highly visible and significant thoroughfare in the Township, Map 3, as it connects the Elk Rapids community to the larger Traverse City region and beyond. As such, the Township seeks to preserve existing scenic views along the corridor and where growth is appropriate, implement standards to ensure safe traffic movements and attractive development sensitive to the character of Elk Rapids. It is the Township’s intent to minimize curb-cuts onto US-31 through consolidated access; require greater front yard setbacks and landscaping to foster a natural appearance; restrict signage and site lighting; buffer parking; encourage coordinated developments; and to enact other improvements.

The Township finds that agricultural lands adjoining the roadway should be preserved and protected from encroaching development, and that

more intensive development should be concentrated in or near the Village. In addition, this Master Plan anticipates those portions of the corridor appropriate for growth to be comprised of mixed-use development as permitted by the Township Zoning Ordinance.

**The Township seeks to preserve existing scenic views along the corridor**

The Township has conducted a Corridor Study which illustrates the preferred future for the US-31 corridor and the Planning Commission has a continuing interest to refine and implement the recommendations of that study. It is recognized that the Township will need to work collaboratively with the Michigan Department of Transportation on any major future improvements. It is also recognized that cooperation with Acme Township, Milton Township, the Village, and the Antrim County Road Commission would be helpful in preserving a safe and aesthetically pleasant US-31 corridor.

In the implementation of the Corridor Study, the Township has had success in requiring deeper setbacks and encouraging mixed-use development. The Planning Commission anticipates crafting a US-31 Overlay Zone to continue the realization of the values and visions expressed in the Corridor Study and throughout the planning process. Further, the Township will actively pursue any available grant dollars applicable to the roadway.

### **Elk Lake Road Corridor**

The Elk Lake Road corridor, Map 3, contains significant scenic features and agricultural resources. These attributes include productive, rolling orchard lands; large, mature trees that in some areas provide a unique, wooded canopy over the roadway; and homesteads; and acreage homesites that contribute to the rural character that helps define the community. The Township seeks to preserve the existing scenic views along the corridor, and where growth is appropriate, implement standards to ensure safe traffic movements and attractive development that is sensitive to the character of Elk Rapids. The Township anticipates working collaboratively with the Michigan Department of Transportation and Antrim County Road Commission on any significant future road developments.

Any future development adjacent to Elk Lake Road should respect the Township's desire to:

- Preserve rural viewsheds along roadways.
- Incorporate deep setbacks from the road right-of-way to accommodate a natural landscape, maple trees, and if appropriate, a bike path.

- Utilize existing access drives rather than create new curb- cuts along Elk Lake Road to the extent possible.

This Plan supports interconnection where any future developments abut. Connectivity may allow for more meaningful pedestrian connections, may improve traffic flow and reduce congestion, and may provide increased access in cases of emergency.

## Water Resources

**The most important natural resource in the community is water.**

The most important natural resource in the community is water. The community is bounded to the west by the East Arm of the Grand Traverse Bay and borders a portion of Elk Lake to the east. Elk Lake is part of the Chain of Lakes in Antrim County, a 78-mile system of navigable waterways. The Elk Rapids harbor in the Village connects these waters to Lake Michigan, the other Great Lakes and their tributaries via Elk River. The Power Dam comes between the river and the harbor.

Elk River flows from the southeast to the northwest portion of the Village, dividing the Village and creating two peninsulas. Similarly, the Village divides the Township into two noncontiguous sections. The northern section of the Township includes most of Bass Lake and Birch Lake within its area and contains many forests and wetlands.

The Elk Rapids area location between Elk Lake and the Grand Traverse Bay help to define the community's character and make the area attractive to tourists. The preservation of the high-quality lakes, rivers, wetlands, and the recreational opportunities they provide is paramount to the sustainability of the community. The fishing, swimming and boating activities made possible by the presence of the water features are significant contributors to local quality of life and to the economy. Both locals and tourists enjoy pristine beaches, lakeside parks and harbors affording access to these wonderful recreation opportunities.

## Natural Areas and Agriculture

**This Master Plan seeks to encourage the protection and continuation of agricultural land uses.**

The Township's most prominent characteristics include shorelines, rolling orchards, and fields, as well as forests and lakes. The Township cherishes these features and has crafted this plan to help protect scenic views, water resources, and forestlands. In addition, agriculture is a central component to Elk Rapids Township's heritage and this Master Plan seeks to encourage, as much as possible, the protection and continuation of agricultural land uses.

As the population of Elk Rapids Township continues to grow, natural

resources will be impacted. The groundwater supplies in the Township can be affected as more area becomes impervious and with greater demand placed on groundwater supplies. Wetlands play a critical role in regulating the movement of water within watersheds; they help maintain the level of the water table and may serve as filters for sediments and organic matter. It is the intent of the Township to foster the preservation of critical water resources in the Township; to sustain water quality; to potentially help minimize any flooding; and protect habitat for specialized plants and animals. Wetlands are delineated on Map 2.

A goal of the Township is to promote open space development, often referred to as “clustering,” to facilitate the preservation of open space during the development process. To that end, during the past five years, the Township successfully extended the Village sewer system to two (2) shoreline areas servicing approximately 120 properties in the Maple Harbor Sewer District and neighboring Cairn HWY/Spirea Drive Sewer District. It is the Township’s goal to work with the Village of Elk Rapids on extending public sewers to the remaining lakeshore and adjacent Township properties, to help preserve groundwater and surface water resources. See Map 4. These elements are discussed further in Section II of the plan.

## Economic Development

Past community opinion surveys conducted for the Master Plan preparation, indicated that residents would like development that protects natural features and resources; provides employment in light industry; and promotes the establishment and cultivation of small businesses. This plan will attempt to achieve the expressed citizen desires, planning for small commercial and home-based occupations in appropriate locations.

**This plan will attempt to balance economic development needs of the community with the preservation of rural character and natural features.**

The Township and Village conducted a joint study in 2015 to determine the logical location of intensive development. It was concluded that intensive development should occur in and around the Village, near existing development and public utilities. The small-town character of the Village and the rural character of the Township should be preserved to the extent possible.

This plan will attempt to balance economic development needs of the community with the preservation of rural character and natural features.



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## SECTION II. CURRENT TRENDS & FUTURE LAND USE

The following six chapters briefly describe current conditions in the Township as they relate to land use planning and extend the community's vision into the future. In addition to broad policy statements on which this plan is formed, each chapter includes a general description of future land uses or improvements and a course of action to bring that preferred future to fruition.

The subject areas include:

- Chapter 1. Natural Resources & Agricultural Lands
- Chapter 2. Residential Land Use & Housing
- Chapter 3. Commercial & Manufacturing Land Use
- Chapter 4. Transportation
- Chapter 5. Utilities & Public Services
- Chapter 6. Public Facilities
- Chapter 7. Zoning Plan

Map 5, Future Land Use, provides a graphic summary of how the Township desires to develop and be preserved over the next twenty years or so. This map is supported by narrative future land use descriptions in the following chapters.





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## CHAPTER 1. NATURAL RESOURCES & AGRICULTURAL LANDS

### OVERVIEW

As stated in the introduction to this plan, a defining characteristic of Elk Rapids Township is the abundance of natural resources that enhance the quality of life for residents and offer recreational opportunities for visitors. Elk Lake, the East Arm of the Grand Traverse Bay, Bass Lake, Birch Lake, the forests and wetland areas in the northern portion of the Township, and the rolling fruit orchards in the southern portion of the Township are examples of resources that this plan seeks to preserve for future generations. Some of these features are outlined on Map 3, Community Facilities and Resources.

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The following goal statements are intentionally general but are supported by more specific objectives that may be regarded as milestones in the journey to achieve the broader goal. These goal statements are the policy foundation for this Master Plan and they define the values of the Township in connection to natural resources and agriculture.

**Goal 1. The preservation of large tracts of interconnected woodlands and wildlife habitat corridors will be realized throughout the Township as any future development occurs.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Create a detailed inventory of key natural features and utilize the inventory via regulatory structures to preserve natural features.
- b. Develop and implement feasible approaches to acquire and/or protect important natural areas. Such approaches may include concerted efforts to raise funds from public and private sources, universities, and conservancies.
- c. Develop and adopt a forest protection ordinance to minimize land clearing and mass grading within proposed development to preserve natural terrain, and to require tree planting within proposed development.

**Goal 2. Existing and future development in the Township will be integrated with natural and open areas in harmony with, and connected to, permanently preserved natural features coordinated with plans for greater, contiguous greenways.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Adjust the Zoning Ordinance to provide for open space development as the preferred use by right with conventional subdivisions to be treated as special uses, in specified and appropriate portions of the Township. New zoning provisions should stipulate that a bulk of the preserved open space shall be adjacent to the roadway, for corridor viewshed protection.

**Goal 3. Water features in and abutting Elk Rapids Township will be clean, healthy and will support a balance of native plant and wildlife communities and a sustainable level of human use.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Evaluate the effectiveness of Section 2.11 of the Township Zoning Ordinance, "Restrictions Applicable to Property Abutting Lakes, Rivers or Streams," and develop new regulations, as appropriate.
- b. Define the environmental carrying capacity of the inland lakes in the Township and employ the resulting analysis to guide land use decisions and utility policy.
- c. Inventory wetlands and identify groundwater recharge areas, and evaluate and implement appropriate standards to protect wetland areas of less than five acres and recharge areas.
- d. Educate property owners on the effects of fertilizer use and encourage property owners to limit fertilizer application on lands directly adjacent to waterfront properties, to help prevent pollution and eutrophication.

**Goal 4. Elk Rapids Township will have profitable and sustainable farming operations.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Avoid policies that artificially inflate land prices or may have other detrimental effects on farming establishments, which may encourage growth and development to encroach into prime agricultural areas. This will be done while protecting natural resources and quality of life for citizens.
- b. Explore the feasibility of a Purchase of Development Rights and/or Transfer of Development Rights (upon enabling legislation adopted by the State legislature) program.
- c. Explore mechanisms for, and the feasibility and extent of, small farms advocacy that would encourage and support the continuation of independent agricultural enterprises, including farms and related support businesses.

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## FUTURE LAND USE

Preservation of natural resources and agricultural activities are the preferred land use in the areas delineated as Significant Natural Areas and Agricultural on Map 5, Future Land Use. Those lands contain sensitive environmental attributes, park/nature areas, or known development limitations. Permitted uses in those areas are described in the Township Zoning Ordinance under Agricultural Zone and Environmental Zone. A defining characteristic of Elk Rapids Township is the abundance of natural resources that enhance the quality of life for residents and offer recreational opportunities for visitors. Moreover, the Significant Natural Areas designation reflects large areas of woodlands, wetlands, and other features that should be protected or observed as any future development occurs.

Agricultural and residential land uses have historically coexisted in the Elk Rapids community and the Township anticipates that compatibility to continue into the future.

Agricultural operations are a primary land use in the Township. Public input studies 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 Agricultural areas should be mindful of these considerations.

The Agricultural land use designation is meant to accommodate farming activities and to recognize the desire of residents to maintain the Township's farmland and rural character. Agriculture and the right to farm is an important component of the heritage of Elk Rapids Township and the region. This Master Plan recognizes this fact and the Agricultural designation is therefore crafted to encourage farmers to continue operating in the Township. As such, non-farm development should be limited. Agricultural and residential land uses have historically coexisted in the Elk Rapids community and the Township anticipates that compatibility to continue into the future.

Agricultural uses are encouraged, as well as associated farm homesteads. Future extension of public water and sewer into these areas is not contemplated over the life of this Plan; densities should therefore be relatively low.



## CHAPTER 2. RESIDENTIAL LAND USE & HOUSING

### OVERVIEW

**The Elk Rapids community, including the Township and Village, is blessed with a wide range of high-quality housing**

The natural features of the Township offer stunning visual interest and residential environments. The Elk Rapids community is blessed with a wide range of high-quality housing, offering a variety of opportunities for current and future residents. This plan intends to continue that diversity while preserving the rural character of the Township.

The following figures, appearing in the 2020 United States Census, offer a “snapshot” of the Township:

- The 2020 Census shows the Township population is 2,591 which is slightly below that of the previous census.
- The median home value reported for a single-family owner-occupied home was \$245,700.
- Approximately 20% of housing units in the Township are reported as renter-occupied, which likely reflects seasonal residential units.

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The overall intent of this plan with regard to residential land uses and housing is to foster the preservation of the Township’s cherished rural character, even as any future development occurs. The following goals represent what the Township hopes to accomplish within the next twenty years or so, and the objectives present an approach to achieve those respective goals.

**Goal 1. New development will be designed in a manner that maximizes the retention of the rural character of the Township.**

#### **Objectives:**

- a. Develop and adopt a forest protection ordinance to minimize land clearing and mass grading within proposed development to preserve natural terrain, and to require tree planting within proposed development. (repeated from Chapter 1)
- b. Adjust the Zoning Ordinance to provide for open space development as the preferred use by right with conventional subdivisions to be treated as special uses, in specified and appropriate portions of the Township. New zoning provisions should stipulate that a bulk of the preserved open space shall be adjacent to the roadway, for corridor viewshed protection. (repeated from Chapter 1)
- c. In appropriate and specified locations, explore the effectiveness

**The overall intent of this Plan with regard to residential land uses and housing is to foster the preservation of the Township’s cherished rural character**

of increasing setbacks from major roadways to preserve the community's natural character along heavily traveled roadways.

**Goal 2. Neighborhoods in Elk Rapids Township will include housing for the entire spectrum of our community.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Identify impediments to the location of affordable housing and housing to serve elderly residents and develop mechanisms to encourage facilities that allow aging residents to remain in the community in suitable locations, including the Village.
- b. Avoid policies that concentrate multiple-family or high-density development in the Township. Work with the Village to ensure that high-density land uses occur in and adjacent to the Village, where necessary utilities and services exist.
- c. Review and expand, as appropriate, zoning and land division ordinances to incorporate standards for such common facilities as play areas, community buildings, and walking paths throughout open space developments.

## **SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS**

### **Population Change**

The recently published 2020 Census figures enabled the community to review overall trends in population change. Population and demographic changes are among the most important measures to express growth or decline and their likely impact on existing and planned land uses in a community.

Elk Rapids Township experienced a slight reduction in population in comparison to neighboring areas. Some of the population change in the community may be attributed to a shift in housing ownership from year-round residents to vacationers, as the northwest Michigan region is well-known as a seasonal vacation destination. Moreover, Census figures likely do not account for the swell in seasonal summer residents, and their effect on Census counts.

### **Housing**

Despite a lower overall population, the number of housing units in the Elk Rapids community did increase including vacant seasonal units. This reinforces the notion that Elk Rapids is increasingly a tourist destination or seasonal community.

## Age Distribution

Within the Elk Rapids Community approximately 34% of the population falls in the 30-59 middle age group and 37% fall in the over 60 years old age group. Information on age distribution within a community can assist in matching public services to community characteristics and in determining what, if any, special needs specific resident groups may have.

## Income

The following table compares median household income from 2000-2020 among the Township, Village, County, and State. As depicted in the table, the Township experienced slightly higher incomes in 2010 and 2020 than the other three jurisdictions.

Median Household Income			
	2000	2010	2020
Village of Elk Rapids	\$31,382	\$40,301	\$57,452
Elk Rapids Township	\$36,250	\$47,202	\$60,000
Antrim County	\$38,107	\$40,878	\$57,256
State of Michigan	\$44,667	\$45,413	\$63,498

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

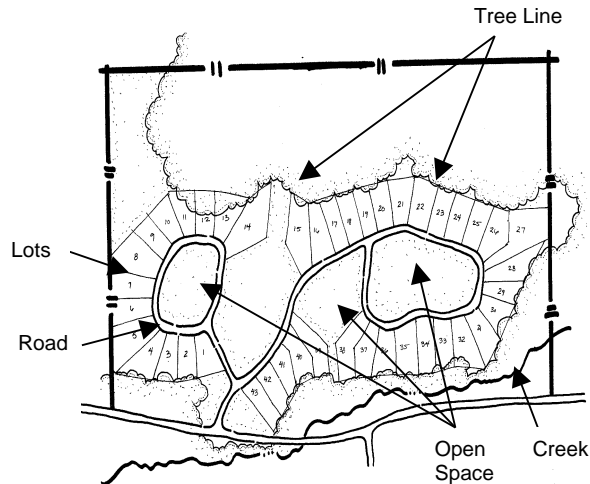
## FUTURE LAND USE

Many lands in the residential future land use designation shown on Map 5 host unique wildlife and ecological areas, scenic hills, and dramatic vistas. A central goal of this plan is the practical protection of those lands that serve as a habitat for wildlife and provide extraordinary open space and lake views for residents.

As any future development occurs, it is expected that prime environmental features – such as forest stands, water features, upland openings, ridgelines or hilly topography, and views toward water bodies – will be preserved.

This plan will not specifically address density and type of residential development, as the Township Zoning Ordinance will regulate these aspects of residential land use. Uses in these areas may include single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, and multiple-family dwellings, as determined by the Zoning Ordinance. Resource conservation and natural resource-based recreational uses are also encouraged. In addition, environmentally friendly agricultural activities

that do not permanently and negatively modify the natural landscape of the area may be encouraged.



**An example of an Open Space Subdivision, which has been specifically designed to preserve the site's woodlands**

It is anticipated that any residential development that may materialize in an agricultural area will comply with the regulations of the Agricultural Zone of the Township Zoning Ordinance. Master planning agricultural lands for agricultural use corresponds with the goals of the community to preserve farmland and open space.

Every five years this plan should be reviewed and evaluated in accordance with State law. At that time, the Township can assess the demand for residential uses in the Elk Rapids community. If at that time the Township determines there is a lack of available land for residential development, it may be appropriate to shift recommended future land use from agriculture to open space residential in certain areas suitable for such uses.

Should this occur, this plan encourages open space subdivision principles, with a minimum of 40% of a development site being preserved as open space, with the bulk of that space being adjacent to the main road to provide a buffer between homes and motor vehicles and to maintain rural aesthetics along roads. Further, any future residential development should be designed and planned to connect to adjacent lands. The Township Zoning Ordinance should be amended at that future time to accommodate such development.



## CHAPTER 3. COMMERCIAL & MANUFACTURING LAND USE

### OVERVIEW

In earlier studies, survey respondents have expressed a desire for the Township to protect natural features and resources while providing the opportunity for employment and the development of small commercial and home-based occupations. Moreover, the Township and Village have historically agreed that intensive development should occur in and around the Village, near existing development and public utilities. The Village and the Traverse City region meet most daily service and employment needs of residents and visitors, and large-scale commercial and manufacturing development is not anticipated in the Township.

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

With regard to commercial and manufacturing land use, it is the overall intent of this plan to promote economic development opportunities in suitable locations in Elk Rapids. The Township hopes to realize the following goals by accomplishing the respective objectives.

**Goal 1. Viable, attractive, community and environmentally-friendly businesses and manufacturing facilities will be located in proximity to appropriate infrastructure and services.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Evaluate and, as necessary, adjust the Zoning Ordinance to regulate architecture, site utilization, landscaping, fenestration (window coverage), access, and other elements, so new buildings integrate well with existing buildings, neighboring properties, and the natural environment.
- b. Analyze the feasibility of adding a square footage limitation to the Zoning Ordinance to preclude big box retail and regional shopping centers.

**Goal 2. Elk Rapids Township will be home to a diverse mix of businesses and manufacturing facilities, attractively developed and maintained and providing meaningful employment opportunities.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Contemplate and implement policies that would encourage innovative manufacturing uses to locate in the Township, as appropriate.

**It is the intent of this Plan to promote economic development opportunities in suitable locations.**

- b. Work with the Village Downtown Development Authority, Elk Rapids Chamber of Commerce and the local business community to provide needed services to Elk Rapids residents to foster local ownership and entrepreneurship.
- c. Evaluate the need for additional home occupation/home-based business zoning regulations which would balance the economic development and entrepreneurship aspirations of the community with the desire to maintain the dominant, rural residential character.

## FUTURE LAND USE

The Township Zoning Ordinance specifies uses within the Manufacturing/Commercial future land use designations shown on Map 5. Generally, these include professional offices, light manufacturing and research facilities, and retail businesses. These uses will not be disruptive to residents and natural resources under this Master Plan.

The Township intends to balance the realities of the marketplace with the Township's desire to preserve its unique identity and rural character. As such, any future development occurring within the commercial and manufacturing areas identified on the Future Land Use map should be planned and designed to reflect Elk Rapids' heritage. This plan encourages architectural elements that deviate from conventional brand archetypes and developments that utilize site design approaches that hide parking lots behind buildings and landscaping.

In addition, parking areas should include landscape islands and shade trees to soften the development presentation and minimize the appearance of large expanses of concrete. Where visible from a roadway or neighboring residential uses, building facades should be constructed with high-quality elements such as stone, brick, wood, and other natural materials. Efficient pedestrian circulation patterns, ground-mounted signage, and restricted site illumination are contemplated.

Access will be coordinated with neighboring uses to minimize traffic conflicts and foster safe vehicular movements. This may be accomplished with shared access and service drives, and by requiring relatively large distances between street intersections and non-residential driveways.

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## CHAPTER 4. TRANSPORTATION

### OVERVIEW

Generally, the existing network of roadways in the Township is sufficient to meet the needs of residents. To conserve sustainable traffic movements, high-density development and uses that generate significant traffic should be located in or near the Village near essential facilities, infrastructure, and services to lessen vehicle miles traveled, which may help protect air quality and lessen wear on roads.

Mean travel time to work improved over that reported in the previous Township Census; it is approximately 20 minutes, indicating that many residents find employment outside the community.

### GOAL & OBJECTIVES

The Township hopes to bring the following goals and objectives to fruition over the life of this Master Plan.

**Goal 1. A safe, efficient, aesthetically attractive, and well-maintained system of roadways will serve the businesses and residents of Elk Rapids Township, providing effective linkages between and among dwellings, services, and employment areas and within the larger Northern Michigan region.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Develop and implement access control regulations that would encourage shared access and access drives and limit curb-cuts along primary roadways. The new standards may also encourage greater front yard setbacks and increased landscaping; limited exterior illumination and signage; and screened parking areas.
- b. Build and strengthen the relationship with the Antrim County Road Commission to facilitate cooperative approaches to transportation improvements and design.
- c. Develop and implement standards to preserve the rural road aesthetics of key roadways. New provisions may require the preservation of natural areas adjacent to roadways and increased front yard setbacks, and buffering requirements so that new development is screened from public view.
- d. Complete an analysis of the viability of a land use and setback regulatory structure based on posted speed. Implement if feasible.

- e. Actively seek grant dollars for streetscape improvements, including replanting maple trees along both sides of Elk Lake Road.
- f. Evaluate private road standards and modify, if necessary, to permit flexibility in road design and construction to minimize impact on natural features and topography.
- g. Assess the feasibility of a bike path parallel and adjacent to Elk Lake Road, U.S. 31, and coordinate the efforts for its construction, if desirable.

## FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Any future development along the US-31 Corridor and the Elk Lake Road Corridor should implement the recommendations that appear in “Section 1. Introduction,” sub-section, “Township Background, View Corridors.”

Earlier, the Township conducted a Corridor Study with the Village which illustrated the preferred future for the US-31 corridor. The Township has an ongoing desire to evaluate the recommendations of that study, and to implement those recommendations through a new Overlay Zone. Any future considerations would include:

- Consolidate access and minimize curb-cuts;
- Respect a greater front yard setback and preserve natural features adjacent to the road; and
- Screen parking areas from public view by landscaping or by placing parking to the side or rear of the building.

**Any future development  
Adjacent to Elk Lake  
Road Should respect the  
Township’s Desire to  
preserve rural  
Viewsheds along  
roadways**

The Elk Lake Road corridor contains significant scenic features and agricultural resources. These attributes include productive, rolling orchard lands; large, mature trees that in some areas provide a unique, wooded canopy over the roadway; and homesteads; and acreage home sites that contribute to the rural character that helps define the community.

Finally, this plan supports interconnection where any future developments abut. Connectivity may allow for more meaningful pedestrian connections, may improve traffic flow and reduce congestion, and may provide increased access in cases of emergency. All new roads to serve new developments will need to be fully funded with private funds due to limited public funds for new roads.

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## CHAPTER 5. UTILITIES & PUBLIC SERVICES

### OVERVIEW

Since Elk Rapids Township is generally a rural, sparsely populated community, it provides few services and utility infrastructure facilities. Police and safety services, social services, and most recreation facilities are maintained by instrumentalities of Antrim County.

Two exceptions are the Township's local volunteer fire department, which serves the Township and Village; and the Township's emergency ambulance service, which assists residents of the Township, Village, and Milton Township.

A majority of the Township's population utilizes on-site individual septic tank and drain field systems and individual household wells. However, the Village of Elk Rapids owns and maintains public sewer facilities that serve limited portions of the Township, as shown on Map 4.

During the past five years, the Township successfully extended the Village sewer system to approximately 120 properties in the Maple Harbor Sewer District and neighboring Cairn HWY/Spirea Drive Sewer District. The Township's goal is to work with the Village of Elk Rapids on extending public sewer to lakeshore and adjacent Township properties (see Map 4) to help preserve groundwater and surface water resources.

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The following objectives may be regarded as steps to achieve the broader goal.

**Goal 1. Utility services in Elk Rapids Township, including water and wastewater services will be extended strategically to encourage development patterns consistent with the preferred future land uses expressed in this plan. The community will be served with abundant clean water, power, emergency services, and fuel and communication linkages to support the requirements of a prosperous community.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Work with the Village of Elk Rapids to expand cooperative and coordinated utility policies to assure that public utilities may be readily available in areas of the Township of more intense land

uses, and to prevent utility improvements that foster intense growth where it is not planned.

- b. Analyze the opportunity to extend water and sewer to developed areas adjacent to waterfront properties.
- c. In conjunction with Antrim County, establish a program of septic system and water well inspections.
- d. Initiate discussions with the Antrim County Sheriff Department to explore the possibility of a full-time satellite office in Elk Rapids to lessen the response time to local emergencies.

**Goal 2. Storm water will be effectively managed through advanced techniques that are sensitive to environmental impacts and offer aesthetic amenities to the community.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Develop and implement standards that recognize detention and retention facilities as an amenity; and encourage innovative and improved engineering such as pond enhancement, landscaping, stream restoration, and green roof systems, to mitigate the effects of impervious surface runoff.
- b. Explore the possibility of shared stormwater systems coordinated among neighboring developments.

## FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Utility systems have the potential to aid in growth management by enabling higher densities in selected locations. Public utility systems give the community the ability to provide effective stewardship over such important natural features as groundwater and surface water.

Water and sewer facilities should be part of the equation when determining future land uses. If such infrastructure is available to a particular site or area, a variety of development options can be contemplated. Therefore, if the Township decides that an area should be reasonably preserved for agriculture, it may be counterproductive to encourage the extension of water and/or sewer into this designated area.

However, this plan intends to foster the extension of public water and sewer into existing residential areas abutting water bodies to protect the lakes and associated groundwater and tributaries from effluent pollution, see Map 4. The predominant intent of the Township with regard to utilities and public services is to prevent groundwater and surface water contamination and to ensure a safe drinking water supply

**The predominant intent of this Plan is to prevent water contamination and ensure safe drinking water.**

for the community. Even with these proposed extensions, this plan anticipates that high-density or intense development will not occur in areas not designated for such development in the plan.





## CHAPTER 6. PUBLIC FACILITIES

### OVERVIEW

**Recreational opportunities are quality of life indicators and such facilities characterize Elk Rapids Township.**

Public facilities play an elemental role in augmenting civic engagement, sponsoring cultural events, and promoting community pride. Recreational opportunities are quality of life indicators and such facilities characterize Elk Rapids Township and the greater region.

In addition to the myriad regional or destination facilities that make Northwest Michigan a desirable tourist destination, recreational facilities located in the Township or Village include:

1. Veterans Memorial Park, which offers a beach, 3 tennis courts, 2 basketball courts, picnic areas, and a playground.
2. Dam Beach and Old Bathing Beach
3. Elk Rapids Day Park, owned by Antrim County that includes a beach, playground, picnic area, and sculpture park.
4. Lake access sites to Elk Lake, Elk River, Bass Lake, Birch Lake, and Grand Traverse Bay.
5. Senior Services at Sacred Heart Church.
6. Elk Rapids Golf Course, which offers 9 holes.
7. Edward C. Grace Memorial Harbor – Upper and Lower Harbors, providing 263 boat slips.
8. Rotary Park.
9. Island House property.
10. Wilcox-Palmer Nature Preserve.
11. Elk Rapids Community Government Center.
12. Historic Elk Rapids Town Hall Association.
13. Elk Rapids Area Historical Society and Museum.
14. Church-sponsored religious and community events.
15. Elk Rapids Community Gardens

In addition, The Elk Rapids School District operates five school facilities, all of which provide a variety of services and resources to the community. These include recreational opportunities, recognized educational services, and an abundance of community activities. Elk Rapids High, Sunrise Academy, Cherryland Middle, Lakeland Elementary, and Mill Creek Elementary all serve as hubs of the Elk

Rapids community. All facilities except Mill Creek Elementary are located in the Village. Facilities include Lakeland Elementary's playground, and Elk Rapids High and Cherryland Middle athletic and physical education facilities, such as two basketball courts, a baseball diamond, softball diamond, track, football field, soccer field, and tennis courts.

Elk Rapids schools received their authorization as Northern Michigan's first International Baccalaureate (IB) World School for the Middle Years Program (MYP) in 2013. Both Lakeland and Mill Creek are now IB World Schools too.

The following summarizes recent academic year enrollment figures for the District:

2010/2011	2011/2012	2013/2014	2015/2016	2017/2018	2019/2020	2021/2022	2022/2023
1,464	1,429	1,367	1,301	1,309	1,259	1,208	1,226

## GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The following framework is intended to preserve and augment existing recreational opportunities, and to explore the potential for additional facilities.

**Goal 1. Local public parks and recreational facilities will be conveniently located, safe, and well-maintained.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Contemplate the establishment of a Recreation Commission to oversee facility planning and maintenance, grant administration, and the development of a recreation plan.
- b. Assess the feasibility of a bike path parallel and adjacent to Elk Lake Road, U.S. 31, and coordinate the efforts for its construction, if desirable. (Repeated from Chapter 4)
- c. Evaluate lake access facilities and as needed, install appropriate signage and implement a maintenance program.

**Goal 2. The residents of Elk Rapids Township will enjoy a meaningful network of trails and pathways and inviting, non-intrusive connections to local and regional natural areas and recreation facilities.**

**Objectives:**

- a. Establish a detailed trails and greenways plan which coordinates non-motorized pedestrian and bike trails, and snowmobile or other motorized recreational uses, with existing and proposed public and private open space areas.
- b. Seek grant dollars for the above-described plan and its suggested improvements and to develop trailhead staging areas as trailways are constructed.

**Goal 3. The Township's plans for public facility improvements will be coordinated with the plans of other public entities and other Township plans.****Objectives:**

- a. Explore the feasibility and necessity of a joint recreation plan between the Township, the Village, and the Elk Rapids School District.
- b. As appropriate, work with the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, Antrim County, the Village, and surrounding townships to coordinate any future plans to ensure sufficient facilities to serve a growing regional residential and tourist population.
- c. Foster collaboration with the Elk Rapids School District regarding facility placement and site design for any future school facility that may be proposed in the Township.

**FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS**

The Township recognizes that the health and leisure benefits of accessible recreational facilities extend beyond the Township and that such facilities provide local and regional spaces for interaction and the cultivation of a sense of community. This plan anticipates that future public facility improvements will be the result of joint effort among various stakeholders.



## CHAPTER 7. 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 Zoning Ordinance. The following tables relates the more general future land use categories for the Township with the zoning districts of the Township Zoning Ordinance and discusses features and factors to be considered in reviewing requests to rezone lands consistent with this Plan. The table is presented on the following page.

In considering a request to rezone property, the Planning Commission must consider the future land use map and the future land use descriptive narrative of this plan. The table below should 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 should 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 should 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.

<b>Table 8. Township Zoning Plan</b>			
<b>Future Land Use Categories</b>	<b>Supporting and Compatible Zoning Districts</b>	<b>Additional Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts</b>	<b>Evaluation Factors and Features to Determine Eligibility for Additional Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts</b>
Agricultural	A, Agricultural Zone	None	
Low Density Residential	R-1, Residential – One-Family Zone	None	
Medium Density Residential	R-2, Residential – One-Family and Two-Family zone	None	
High Density Residential	R-3, Residential – Multiple Family Apartment Zone	None	
Manufacturing / Commercial	C, Commercial Zone	M, Manufacturing Zone	If located at the northwest corner of Cairn Highway and Herman Road or if located along the north side of Herman Road east of the Elk Rapids wastewater facility
Significant Natural Areas	E, Environmental Zone	None	