



West Branch
T O W N S H I P

MASTER PLAN

FOR

LAND USE

Goals and Objectives for Growth Management

2023

July 6, 2023

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**West Branch Township
Resolution to Approve
West Branch Township Master Plan**

Resolution # 05-10-2023 MPL

WHEREAS, the West Branch Township Planning commission has made inquiries, investigations, assembled and analyzed data and information regarding geography, population and resources of the township; and

WHEREAS, the West Branch Township Planning Commission has formulated a Master Plan determining the most advantageous designation of lands and future uses of the various sections of West Branch Township; and

WHEREAS, the West Branch Township Planning Commission has provided a draft of the proposed Master Plan for review to the surrounding townships; Ogemaw County, and other interested parties and has reviewed and incorporated appropriate information in this proposed Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, the West Branch Township board has reviewed the draft of the Master Plan for West Branch Township and comments from residents and property owners of West Branch Township and has received the recommendation of the West Branch Township Planning commission for this Master Plan.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the West Branch Township Board hereby adopts the updated West Branch Township Master Plan for land use in West Branch Township, Ogemaw County, Michigan.

Resolution offered by: HICKMOTT

Resolution seconded by: SELINSKI

Roll Call Votes: Yea: SELINSKI, DURFEE, PHILBRICK, HICKMOTT, MORRIS

Nay: NONE

Absent: NONE

Supervisor declared the Resolution: APPROVED

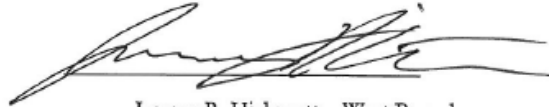
This Resolution has been adopted by a Majority of the West Branch Township Board of Ogemaw County.

Dated: May 10th 2023

James Morris – West Branch
Township Supervisor

CERTIFICATION

I, Jeremy R. Hickmott, Clerk of the West Branch Township Board of Ogemaw County, hereby certify that the foregoing resolution is a true copy of the resolution duly adopted by the West Branch Township Board of Ogemaw County at a Regular Meeting held May 10th 2023, as appears from the records of the minutes of the meeting in my possession.



Jeremy R. Hickmott – West Branch
Township Clerk

WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP BOARD

James Morris	Supervisor
Jeremy Hickmott	Clerk
Diane Philbrick	Treasurer
Michael Selinski	Trustee
Michael Durfee	Trustee

WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

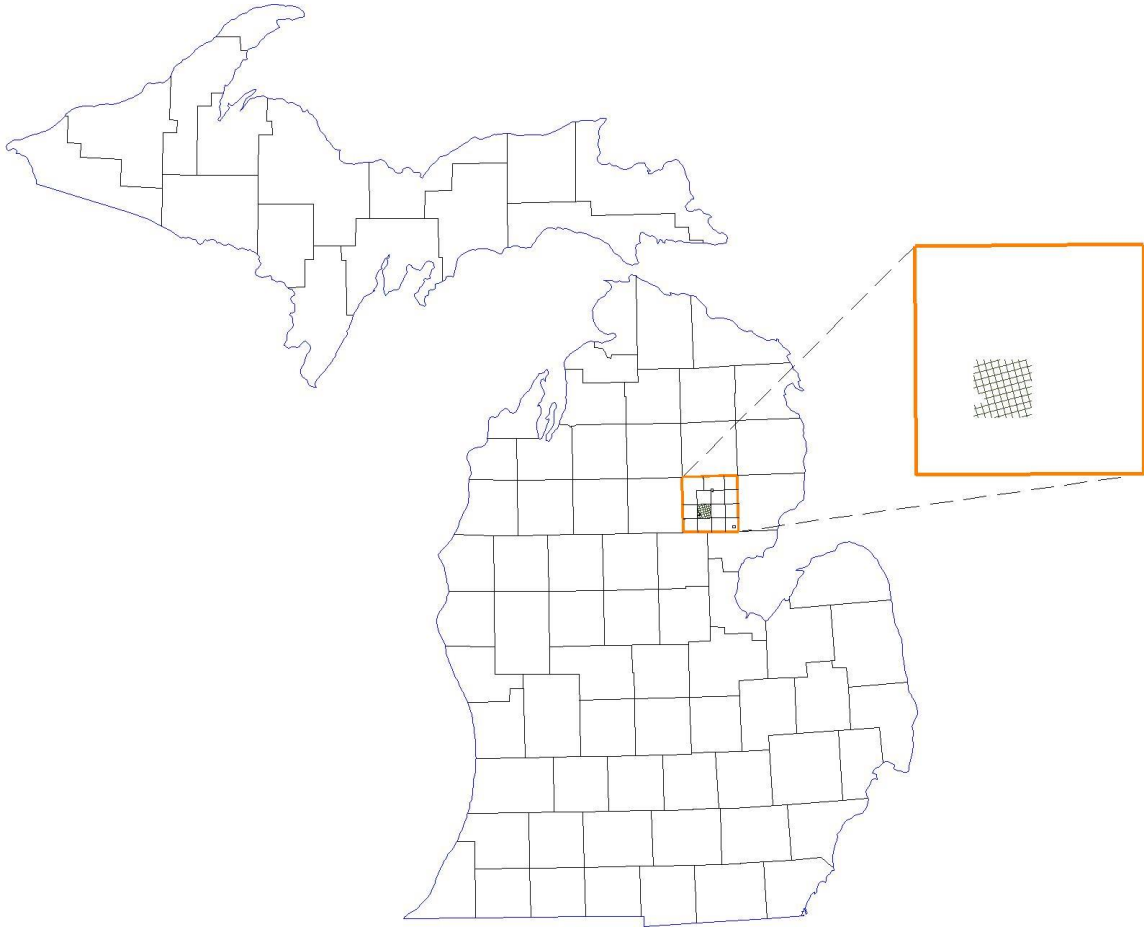
Scott Bell	Chairman
Mark Dantzer	Vice Chair
Al Evans	Secretary
Andrew Bak	Member
Michael Selinski	Member
Jeremy Hickmott	Zoning Administrator

CONSULTANTS

Don Hamilton, A.I.C.P.
Scott Bell, A.I.C.P.

Clare West Branch





LOCATION MAP

WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP, OGEMAW COUNTY, MICHIGAN

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INTRODUCTION

Land use planning deals with the complex interrelationship of two basic resources: land resources and human resources. The land is a fixed, irreplaceable, non-expandable resource. Population is a flexible and mobile resource. Our society is faced with the challenge of accommodating more people on a fixed amount of land.

Man's relationship to land resources is one of both dependence and dominance. Man depends on land and associated environmental systems for all the necessities that sustain life. At the same time, human society has developed to a high degree the ability to dominate the land's resources. Land use planning is an attempt to establish and maintain a balance between the use and preservation of land resources in order to provide satisfying lives for both present and future generations.

Styles and social values change rapidly in our fast-paced culture. Individually and socially, we need a method not only to anticipate change but also to effectively meet the resulting demands of change. Planning has achieved a measure of success in helping people anticipate the future and provide for its needs. Planning represents systematic analyses and methods to achieve a degree of order and harmony from the many seemingly unrelated forces of our world. Therefore, the intent of the West Branch Township Land Use Master Plan is twofold: 1) the study and analysis of the township's physical and human resources; and 2) policies to guide future public decisions relative to West Branch Township's development and land use.

The Mission of the West Branch Township Planning Commission is to plan for and to guide the use and development of the land and other resources of the Township in a manner that will assure opportunities for a sustained high quality of living, including agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, utilities and other uses of the land.

VISION

The Planning Commission sees West Branch Township continuing to grow much as it has in the past with most of the township devoted to agriculture and low-density residences in a beautiful environment of preserved natural resources, open spaces, and green areas. Adjacent to the City of West Branch, and especially along the Business Route 175 corridor, the Commission sees continued development filling in gaps along the corridor with more commercial development, and diversified housing.

SECTION ONE

HISTORY

West Branch Township is a general law Township within the confines of Ogemaw County. Thus, the history of West Branch Township closely parallels that of Ogemaw County. According to Scientific Publication No. 1, *Report of Earthworks of Ogemaw County, Michigan*, (Cranbrook Institute of Science, Fred Dustin, 1930), researchers discovered that “mound dwellers” or “mound builders” lived in the Rifle River area 11,000 to 15,000 years ago. In 1931, anthropologists working in the Selkirk area uncovered three Indian mound formations. These and other mounds discovered in Ogemaw County confirm that ancient mound dwellers were inhabitants of the area long before Christopher Columbus discovered America.

The abundance of wild game and fertile soils for berries and planted crops drew Chippewa Native Americans to the West Branch area and the first Europeans in the area were traders, clergymen, and soldiers. For nearly 150 years, little contact between Native Americans and the new European settlers took place in this interior of northern Lower Michigan. Forts, outposts, and other settlements stayed near the shores of the Great Lakes.

After 150 years, Europeans by force of guns, germs, whiskey, and a disposition toward growth and development came to dominate mid-Michigan. The heavy influx of settlers began after the Erie Canal opened in 1825 making migration through the Great Lakes as easy, or easier than, the Ohio River route which had led to the settlement of the lower Midwest much sooner than Michigan. This new immigration from the northeast is evident by the numbers of New Englanders and New Yorkers who were early settlers of the area.

Ogemaw County is one of eighty-three (83) counties in the Great State of Michigan. In Colonial times, Michigan was a part of the Virginia Land, granted from the king of England, stretching west to the Mississippi River and north to Canada.

The magnificent White Pines that graced the land in West Branch stood untouched until 1871. But having felled the forests further south, lumbermen began their trek north from the Bay City and Saginaw areas. Their progress was closely linked to the building of railroads. Railroads were seen as necessity since inland waterways were neither deep nor wide enough to provide dependable transportation to move logs to ports and sawmills. The railroad was built through West Branch Township between 1871 and 1872. One of the largest lumbering operations in the area was located at the junction of M-55 and M-33. This area was called

“Slabtown” because of the huge mounds of slabs from the sawmills. During the most productive years of Slabtown, it became a town with houses and stores.

In the 1880’s, E. Wright & Company and Hauptmann owned 3,760 acres of timber in West Branch Township. Once the pine was harvested, they sold the land to farmers. The hardwood forests still existed, and the land was a good buy because the value of the harvested hardwood timber then equaled the price of the farm.

The end of the lumbering era was around 1910 when catastrophic forest fires broke out during the dry summer. The fires were fed by dry-as-tinder brush and slashings left from the earlier lumbering. The fires were the end of the remaining old growth timber.

Farming started in Ogemaw County almost as soon as lumbering began. Although a large variety of crops have been grown over the years, experience has shown that certain crops are the most stable and dependable. Hay has always been a reliable crop, and in the lumbering days, the farmers raised hay and potatoes to sell to lumber camps at \$20.00 a ton for the hay and \$1.00 per bushel for potatoes, it did not take a large acreage to make a comfortable living. Of course, as the forests were cut, this market soon declined, and farmers began to raise wheat, oats, barley, rye, peas, corn, and various kinds of fruit. Wheat has proved a good crop thanks to the rolling land and the snowy winters. Fruit has always grown well, especially apples, plums, and pears. At one time, there were plans for a processing plant in the area and the farmers were encouraged to plant apple orchards. Remains of many of these can still be seen. The plant never materialized, yet commercial crops were grown, but they have never become a major factor in agricultural production in the area.

The most economically dependable and stable agricultural enterprise in this county has been livestock farming. Cattle, horses, and sheep have always been raised. Of these, only cattle raising has been a major industry. West Branch Township leads the other Ogemaw County Townships, as it always has, in the number of operating farms. Agricultural maps of the United States do not include Ogemaw County as suitable for farming; however, it would be difficult to convince the inhabitants of this area that it is not suitable for our types of agriculture.

There is one historical site in West Branch Township: The Holy Family Cemetery on Campbell Road. This is the site of the first Roman Catholic Mass in this area. In 1879, Mass was held at the home of the family of William Mier and was celebrated by Father Francis K.

Shulak, a Jesuit missionary. The West Branch Township Hall is a stately stone structure building and has been in use since 1932.

The geographic boundaries of West Branch Township have not changed in the past century. From 1875 until 1969, each Township in the county was represented on a County Board of Supervisors by its own supervisor. On January 1, 1969, this system was changed to a District System, with ten County Commissioners elected by districts of approximately similar populations. On January 1, 1973, the base for representation was changed again when the County was divided into six districts. In 2012 the number of districts in West Branch Township was changed back to five and the township became part of the 2nd and 4th Districts.

In the early 1970's, the construction of I-75 through the southwest corner of the township and the exit ramp at Cook Road changed West Branch Township with the commercial development of restaurants, and convenience stores/ gas stations. Since that time, the I-75 Business Loop from Exit 212 to 215, which passes through downtown City of West Branch, became a thriving commercial area with businesses being established along the corridor. The outlet mall and hotels developed at Exit 212 provided the opportunity for the township to expand municipal services of water and sewer which in turn prompted further commercial development.

GENERAL GEOGRAPHY

West Branch Township (T22N, R2E) is one of fourteen townships in Ogemaw County and is located on the I-75 corridor in northeast Lower Michigan. State Highway M-55, which runs from East Tawas and Tawas City on Lake Huron to Manistee on Lake Michigan, bisects Ogemaw County and West Branch Township on an east-west line. West Branch Township is a “regular” township, six miles on a side except that along its western side the home rule City of West Branch is carved out.

The western boundary of the Township is Dow Road, M-30, and the West Branch City Limits. Along much of the Township's north side, there is undeveloped state forest land extending nearly to the top of “Long Hill”. The eastern part of the northern boundary follows Peters Road. The Township's eastern boundary is M-33, and its southern boundary is Airport Road. Surrounding townships include Ogemaw to the west, Foster to the northwest, Klacking to the north, Cumming to the northeast, Churchill to the east, Mills to the southeast, Horton to the south and Edwards to the southwest. Within its 36 square miles are located the City

of West Branch (the county seat and the largest municipality in Ogemaw County), a small section of I-75, a two-mile stretch of the I-75 Business Loop in its southwest section, and the West Branch Township Downtown Development Authority (D.D.A.) (an area of rapidly expanding business, industrial, and highway services), again, located in the southwest quadrant.

The combination of these, the City of West Branch, the I-75 Business Loop, and the D.D.A. provides West Branch Township with many valuable assets. These include business and commercial enterprises: motels, service stations, fast food and other chain restaurants, real estate offices, as well as several other enterprises, and significant oil extraction and mining operations. Township lands also include a number of medical facilities serving Ogemaw and adjacent counties.

The climate in Ogemaw County is typical of northern mid-Michigan with cold winters and fairly mild summers. The growing season is about 126 days, average annual rainfall about 29 inches with about 60 inches of snow per year.

The Township has seven lakes and several streams and rivers, all providing excellent fishing of all kinds. The hills and forests are used by citizens for cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, ATV, and motor biking, as well as providing great hunting throughout the year and a quiet natural area for the abundant wildlife that populates the Township. The Township is blessed with numerous artesian wells and springs scattered throughout the countryside, forming lush wetlands and surface water sources. Visitors from within the state, and throughout the Midwest and elsewhere (including Canada), vacation in our area, witnessing our four distinct seasons of natural resource bounty.

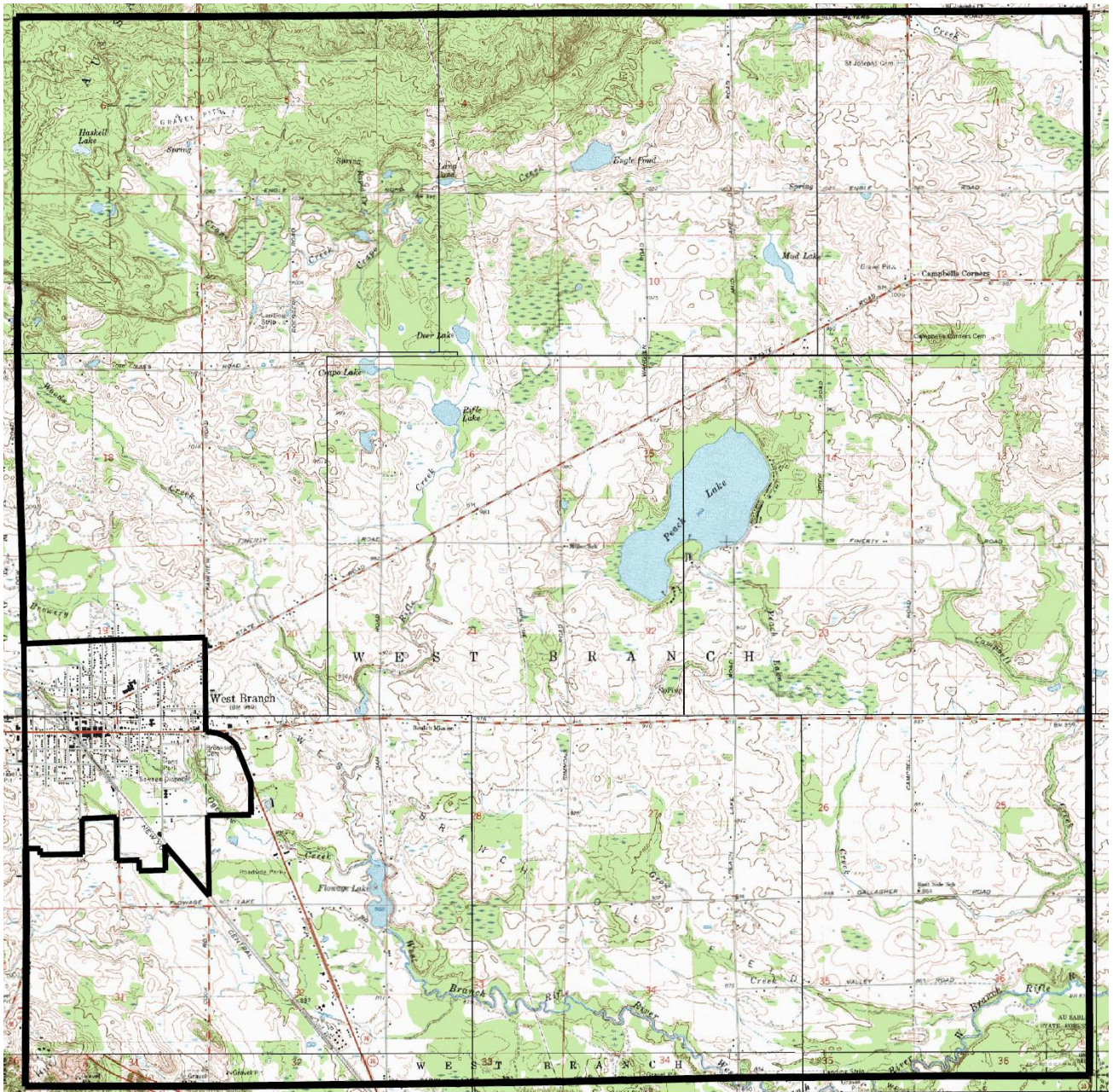
TOPOGRAPHY

The entire Township is within the Rifle River Watershed and slopes generally from northwest to southeast. Elevation varies from a high of 1,350 feet along the north side of Sections 4 and 5, to a low of about 820 feet where the Rifle River crosses M-33 near the southeastern corner of the Township.

The most dramatic relief is in the seven sections of land in the northwestern corner of the Township. This is part of the West Branch-Port Huron Moraine, locally known as “Long Hill” (or by some old-timers as “The Half Mile Hill”), seen most dramatically as one comes southward into the Township on Fairview Road.

The West Branch-Port Huron Moraine is the end moraine formed by the Saginaw Bay lobe of the last glacial advance. It can be traced almost continuously all the way around the prehistoric Saginaw Bay from northeast of West Branch, north of Clare, west of Mt. Pleasant, and on around to the Port Huron area in the south. This moraine is a rich source of gravel in many areas including West Branch Township.

Other areas of significant relief are along Campbell Road, Engel Road, and the southwestern corner of the Township bordering Edwards Hills. Other than the topography formed by glacial and recent river valleys, the southeastern portion of the Township is quite flat. This area is comprised of outwash plains and glacial lake bottom and shoreline features, mostly sandy, but of different origin than the sandy outwash “plains” above the big hill. Between the sand and gravel deposits of the high elevation moraine and outwash plains to the northwest and the low-lying lake plains in the southeastern part of the Township, there is an extensive area of relatively fertile ground moraine characterized by rolling hills and valleys and productive farmlands. Elevations in this “till plain” zone vary from about 850 to 1,050 feet.



USGS QUADRANGLE MAP OF WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP

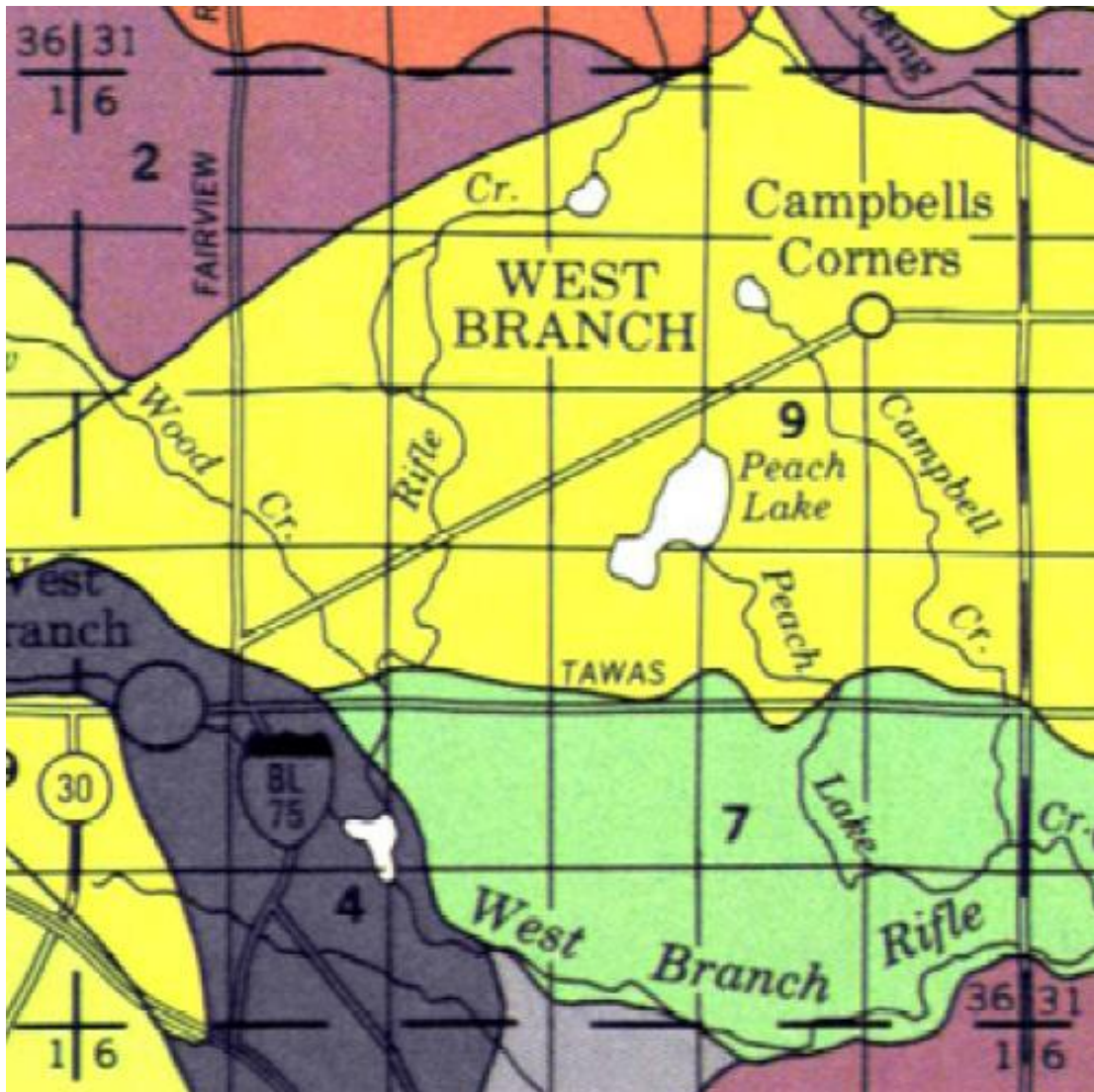
SOILS

There are four general soil types occurring in West Branch Township. The most prevalent being the Nester-Kawkawlin Association. These soils are nearly level to steep with slope ranges from 0 to 35 percent, well drained and somewhat poorly drained, loamy soils on knolls, plains, and ridgetops and in broad, low areas and depressions in the uplands. This association is used mainly as crop land or pasture. A few areas are woodlands. The major management concerns are water erosion and soil blowing. The Nester soils are moderately well suited to building site development whereas the Kawkawlin soils are poorly suited to building site development because of wetness and a moderate shrink-swell potential.

The Township also has Nester-Menominee-Kawkawlin Association soils. These soils are nearly level to rolling with slope ranges from 0 to 18 percent. They are somewhat poorly drained, sandy, and loamy soils. This association is used mainly as crop land or pasture, though the rating varies from well suited, moderately well suited, to poorly suited for these uses. The Kawkawlin soils in this association are poorly suited for development; however, the Menominee and Nester soils are well suited to moderately well suited for building site development. The slope may be a limitation in some areas.

The Rubicon-AuGres-Roscommon Association is located at the northwest, northeast, and southeast corners of the Township. Most areas of this association are used for woodland, recreation, or wildlife habitat. Some areas are used as crop land or pasture. Like the Nester soils, the Rubicon soils are well suited for building site development, while the Au Gres and Roscommon soils are poorly suited to this use because of wetness and ponding.

Finally, the Au Gres-Wheatly-Gladwin Association is located in the southwest region of the Township. This soil is nearly level, somewhat poorly drained and poorly drained, sandy soils on outwash plains. The slope ranges from 0 to 3 percent. Most areas of this association have a cover of native vegetation, commonly trees. This soil is used mainly for wildlife habitat and urban uses. They are moderately well suited, poorly suited, or generally unsuited to use as crop land because of wetness and soil blowing. The main management concerns are seasonal wetness and draught. This association is poorly suited to building site development because of wetness and ponding.



West Branch Township General Soils Map

- 2** Graycalm-Rubicon-Mancelona Association: Nearly level to very steep, somewhat excessively drained and excessively drained, sandy soils on moraines and outwash plains
- 4** Au Gres-Wheatley-Gladwin Association: Nearly level, somewhat poorly drained and poorly drained, sandy soils on outwash plains
- 7** Nester-Menominee-Kawkawlin Association: Nearly level to rolling, well drained and somewhat poorly drained, sandy and loamy soils on moraines and till plains
- 6** Graycalm-Montcalm-Klacking Association: Nearly level to steep, somewhat excessively drained and well drained, sandy soils on moraines and outwash plains
- 9** Nester-Kawkawlin Association: Nearly level to steep, well drained and somewhat poorly drained, loamy soils on moraines and till plains
- 10** Mancelona-Nester-Manistee Association: Nearly level to steep, somewhat excessively drained and well drained, sandy and loamy soils on moraines

[WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP SOILS MAP](#)

GEOLOGY

The geologic history and character of the Township sets the tone for every other resource and land use. The geologic processes that gave rise to the land of the Township, provided its elevations, shaped its contours, deposited its ancient deep underground deposits of oil and gas, formed its hills, carved its river valleys, and laid down the parent materials for its soils. Rich gravel deposits along the face of the large West Branch-Port Huron Moraine bless the Township with extractable resources but burdens it with the ever-growing scars caused by that extraction, diminishing scenic and natural qualities of the surface. Geology is divided into bedrock and surface geology.

BEDROCK GEOLOGY

The bedrock geology of West Branch Township is that of the Michigan Basin: sedimentary rock of limestone, dolomite, shale, and sandstone laid down in ancient seas of Paleozoic Age up to 500 million years ago. Beneath these sedimentary rock deposits is an ancient igneous rock, and above them is a thick layer of glacial drift varying in thickness and type, extending 1500 feet below ground surface. Several strata of the sedimentary rock deposits beneath the Township are rich in hydrocarbons: oil, gas, and other petrol-chemicals.

Some of the earliest oil developments in the state occurred in the local, relatively shallow Dundee formation during the 1930's. This field, and one in Oil City, Michigan, east of Mt. Pleasant, provided much of the initial fuel for the early expansion of Michigan's auto industry. Many of the wells in the Dundee formation yield crude oil and "sour gas" hydrogen sulfide or "rotten egg" gas. This is not only foul smelling, highly toxic, and can be dangerous when concentrated. In many places in the Township, the gases associated with hydrocarbons, collectively known as mercaptans, often lend a tell-tale "oil field" smell to summer air.

Many of the primary oil reserves of the Dundee formation have been depleted. For the past few decades, much of the activity in this field has been in secondary and tertiary recovery, including cleaning the old wells, injecting water to purge the remaining oil and related activities. Development of separation facilities to separate brine and water from gas and oil was a major activity during the past 20 years, but this has proved to be a marginal enterprise and is not expected to be a major aspect of hydrocarbon development and utilization in the future.

During the late 1950's, deeper deposits of more valuable natural gas were discovered in Niagaran Reef formations. The subterranean faults and folds in the deep sedimentary rock formation serve to trap and concentrate both gas and oil. These have been extensively studied by the tools of seismology, and while some exploration continues, most of the patterns of potentially rich deposits and concentration are quite well known and are being actively extracted.

Pipelines, storage tanks, and well sites are apparent throughout much of the Township. Both local and large capacity pipelines traverse the Township in many areas. Oil and gas remain a major industry; however, from a planning point of view there is sometimes a negative legacy left by this industry from its earlier days. The most notable instance is the abandoned refinery site located at the southern border of the Township along Old M-76 that has been re-developed into a mulch manufacturing facility. In addition, throughout the Township, there has been the long-term impact of leaking wells, sludge pits, sour gas flares, abandoned sites, service roads, and a host of other hydrocarbon-related activities which, in former years, were allowed that the lands of the Township have continued to be basically healthy in the face of these historic uses, attests to the resiliency of men and Mother Nature. Assuring responsible cleanup and better regulation in the future is one of the significant planning issues we face today. One of our most valuable resources for the future is the immense supply of fresh groundwater available in the Township. Protection of this resource from subsurface contamination is a high priority.

A related issue is the severance of mineral rights from surface ownership of land parcels. Because of the value of the oil and gas that may lie beneath any given parcel of land, numerous land transactions have occurred in which the surface ownership was sold, but the mineral rights were reserved.

SURFACE GEOLOGY

The surface geology of the Township is glacial in origin. Because of its unique position relative to the ice front that carved the Saginaw Bay, the pattern of glacial deposits within the Township contrasts sharply from the northwest corner of the Township to the southeast corner. In general, this pattern can be divided into three broad zones: The West Branch-Port Huron Moraine, the Rolling Till Plain and the flat deposits of the prehistoric Saginaw Lake Plain.

GROUNDWATER HYDROLOGY

A fortuitous and fortunate consequence of the manner in which the glacial deposits were laid down is the cause of the abundant supply of fresh water in West Branch Township. The sandy soils above “Long Hill” receive a constant replenishment of water from melting snow and rainfall. The highly porous soil allows the water to infiltrate, recharging the underground aquifer with clean water filtered through hundreds of feet of pure sand and gravel. Layers of clay and silt bedded within the glacial deposition formed by the pattern of ice movement and melting, cap this rich aquifer and create the conditions for springs and artesian wells wherever the clay cap is penetrated. Wetlands, headwater seeps and springs, ponds and artesian wells abound along the base of the moraine, extending southward even beyond West Branch in some places.

Because the glacial drift contains limestone and other mineral-rich rock, like iron, calcium, and magnesium, the Township’s groundwater is often referred to as hardwater. Other than Peach Lake and the cluster of small lakes in the upper reaches of the Rifle River’s west branch watershed (Little Rifle Lake, Crapo Lake, and Deer Lake), there are no significant lakes in the Township, although wetlands including marshes, swamps, and river features, as well as constructed ponds (e.g., Engel Pond, Lang Pond) abound.

It is probable that some of the streams that originate in the Township are recharged by infiltration over a more extensive area than the political boundaries of the Township. Some of the headwater streams of the Rifle River system have been shown to have a greater base flow output than the surface input to their watershed area (MDEQ, Geological Survey Division). The only way this is possible is for the underground recharge area to extend beyond the boundaries of the surface watershed. Because of impermeable layers of clay sloping southward and southeastward from beyond the top of “long hill”, it is highly probable that

West Branch Township gets groundwater from surrounding areas of Klacking, Foster, and Ogemaw Townships. One consequence of this is highly stable base flows and a relative lack of flood surges in the streams of the Township, particularly Crapo Creek, Rifle Creek and Klacking Creek, all of which support populations of brook and brown trout.

Contamination of groundwater is a problem in a few locations within the Township, and a potential threat in other areas. The abandoned Osceola Refinery site at the southern border of the Township was a known contaminated site that has been cleaned. The Township was involved in reclamation of that site through its Brownfield Redevelopment Authority. Another known site of contamination is the Foster Oil site at the junction of M-55 and Dam Road. Other sites and sources of potential groundwater contamination include the numerous well and storage sites of the extensive historical development of hydrocarbon wells in the Township, abandoned water and hydrocarbon wells, and surface/near surface sources such as the two old dump sites within the Township. At the time these dumps were in operation, there was little or no control over what went into them. Both were abandoned without proper capping or the installation of monitoring wells and, to date, there has not been any testing or monitoring at either site.

The M-55 corridor is known to have old, abandoned oil pipelines from the former Osceola refinery. During construction along this corridor, old pipelines have been excavated and leaks from this pipeline have been cleaned up where discovered during infrastructure installation by the township. However, it is likely that many more leaks are present along this pipeline and care should be taken when working within these areas.

A second potential future threat to groundwater is the loss of recharge of local aquifers due to increasing impermeable surfaces associated with land development (paved roads, rooftops, parking lots, etc.). Increased runoff could particularly be a problem in the Downtown Development Authority. area. However, because of the extensive recharge area, including lands to the north which lie outside the Township, stream base flow is expected to remain relatively stable and the groundwater supply ample for the foreseeable future.

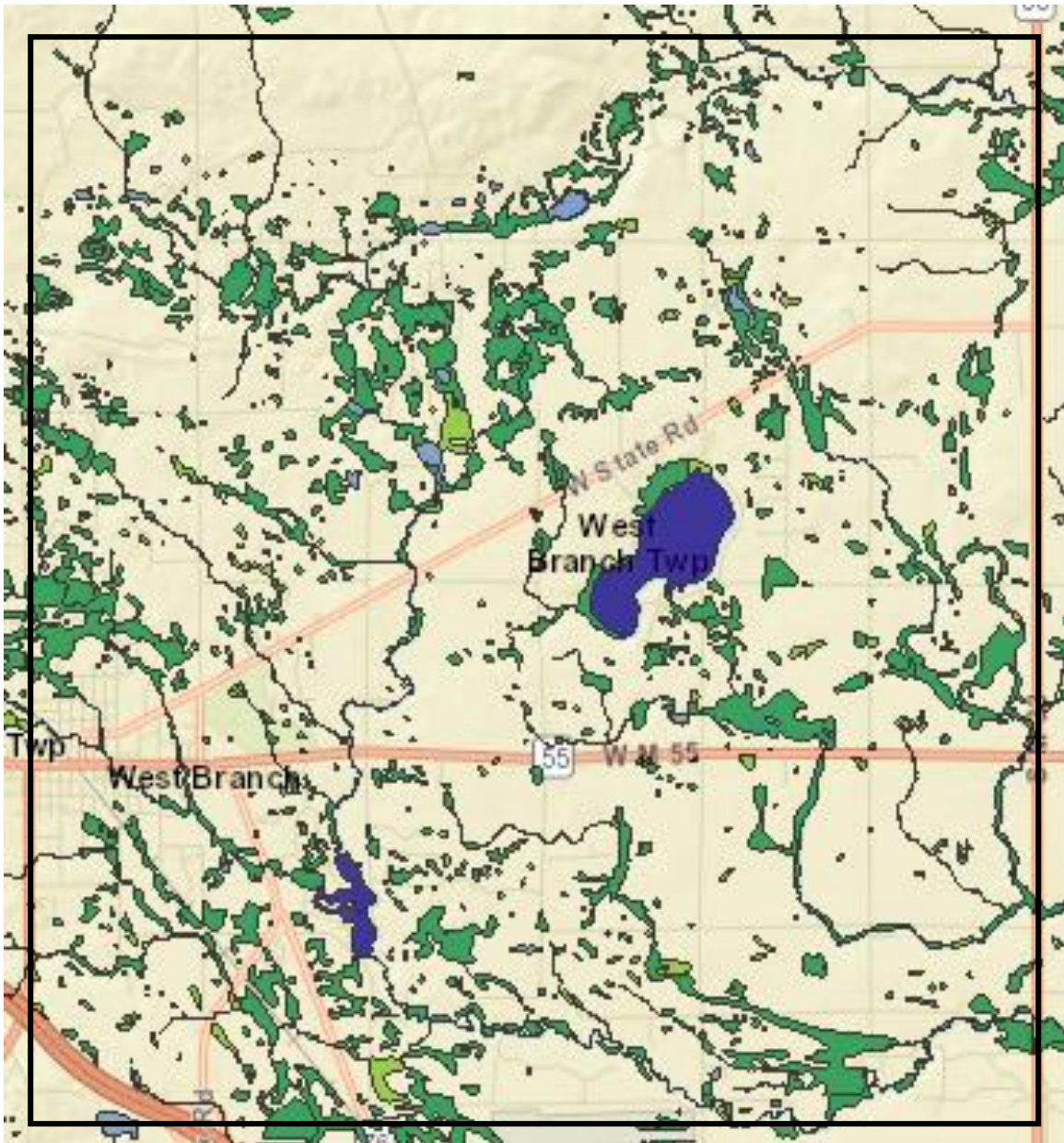
SURFACE WATER HYDROLOGY

The slightly-over 500 feet of topographic fall from the northwest corner of the Township to its southeast corner, sets up the overall surface water gradient. Several streams originate, or are substantially fed, within the Township: namely, Crane Creek, Rapid Creek, Crapo Creek,

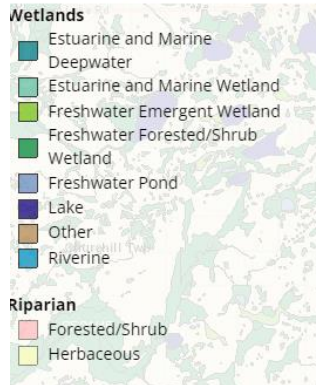
Klacking Creek, Little Klacking Creek, Rifle Creek, Peach Lake Creek, Campbell Creek, Grape Creek, Ogemaw Creek, South Eddy Creek, and Wood Creek. All eventually flow into the Rifle River, the mainstream of the west branch which begins in the Township and is the source of the name of both the City of West Branch and West Branch Township. In addition to the breakdown of watershed areas, the Planning Commission has delineated small watersheds or drainage areas on the 1:24,000 scale USGS topography map, down to the finest scale at which topography could be differentiated (approximately 20-acre ultimate units).

Although there are some “perched”, or “pocketed” wetlands in the Township, most have developed drainage patterns and are contiguous to a lake, pond, or stream and are, therefore, regulated under state and federal wetlands protection law. Wetlands occur along streams throughout the Township but are most extensive near the center of the Township as marshes and swamps in Sections 9, 10, 11, 14, 15 and 16. Wetlands have been lost within the Township since settlement due to the tiling and drainage and to the filling of wetlands for a variety of reasons. In the 1950’s, the Federal Government paid farmers to fill wetland “potholes” on their land, and this program was widely employed in West Branch Township. In recent decades, abandonment of marginal farmland kept clear and drained in production agriculture through the period of World War II and then allowed to revert to a more natural state has probably tipped the balance back to an actual increase in the extent of wetlands. Regulation of activities in wetlands, particularly filling or draining of wetlands, became effective in the late 1980’s, and has resulted in protection of remaining wetlands of the Township.

The Soil Survey of Ogemaw County maps all soil types that occur in the Township (as well as throughout the County. See soils map on page 1-12). Each mapped unit is classified as to whether it is, or is not, a “hydric” soil. Soil mapping units described as “poorly drained” or “very poorly drained” are hydric soils. All hydric soils meet the soil criteria for classification of the land as wetlands. National Wetland Inventory maps have been created using the soil survey maps and aerial maps and provide a reliable estimate of wetlands that can be ground verified.



LEGEND



WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP WETLAND MAP

EXISTING LAND COVER AND USES

West Branch Township has changed over the years from a lumbering area, to one of primarily farming with growing hydrocarbon exploration and extraction, to its present very diverse and maturing settlement conditions. Surrounding the City of West Branch, the Township is becoming a truly sustainable community because of its balancing sectors of residential, commercial, industrial, and natural resource-based activities and land uses.

AGRICULTURAL

With the exceptions of the City of West Branch, the I-75 Business Loop, and the D.D.A. area in the southwest quadrant, the Township remains largely agricultural and rural-residential. Interspersed among large and small farming operations are residential tracts, oil company operations, and large tracts of privately-owned woods and open fields.

COMMERCIAL

While three quadrants of West Branch Township are rural and have been utilized for agricultural purposes for many years, the fourth, the southwest quadrant including the City of West Branch, the I-75 Business Loop, and the West Branch Township D.D.A., has the bulk of the Township's commercial development.

INDUSTRIAL

The commercial quadrant of the Township also has most of the Township's industrial sites. An additional industrial site is located just north of the City of West Branch at the north end of Third Street.

The Griffin Beverage Company headquarters is located in West Branch Township. The company distributes beers, wines, mixers, and snacks from the Upper Peninsula down to the Saginaw area. Its warehouse in West Branch Township covers over 144,000 square feet and the company employs over 120 people making it one of the townships largest employers. As discussed, prior, the Township still has active oil producing sites as well as a number of abandoned and inactive drill sites. There are also active sand and gravel extraction operations which dominate their immediate landscapes.

RECREATIONAL

Peach Lake is located in the center of West Branch Township. It is a 200-acre lake with a concentration of year-round and seasonal residences as well as a public access site.

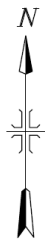
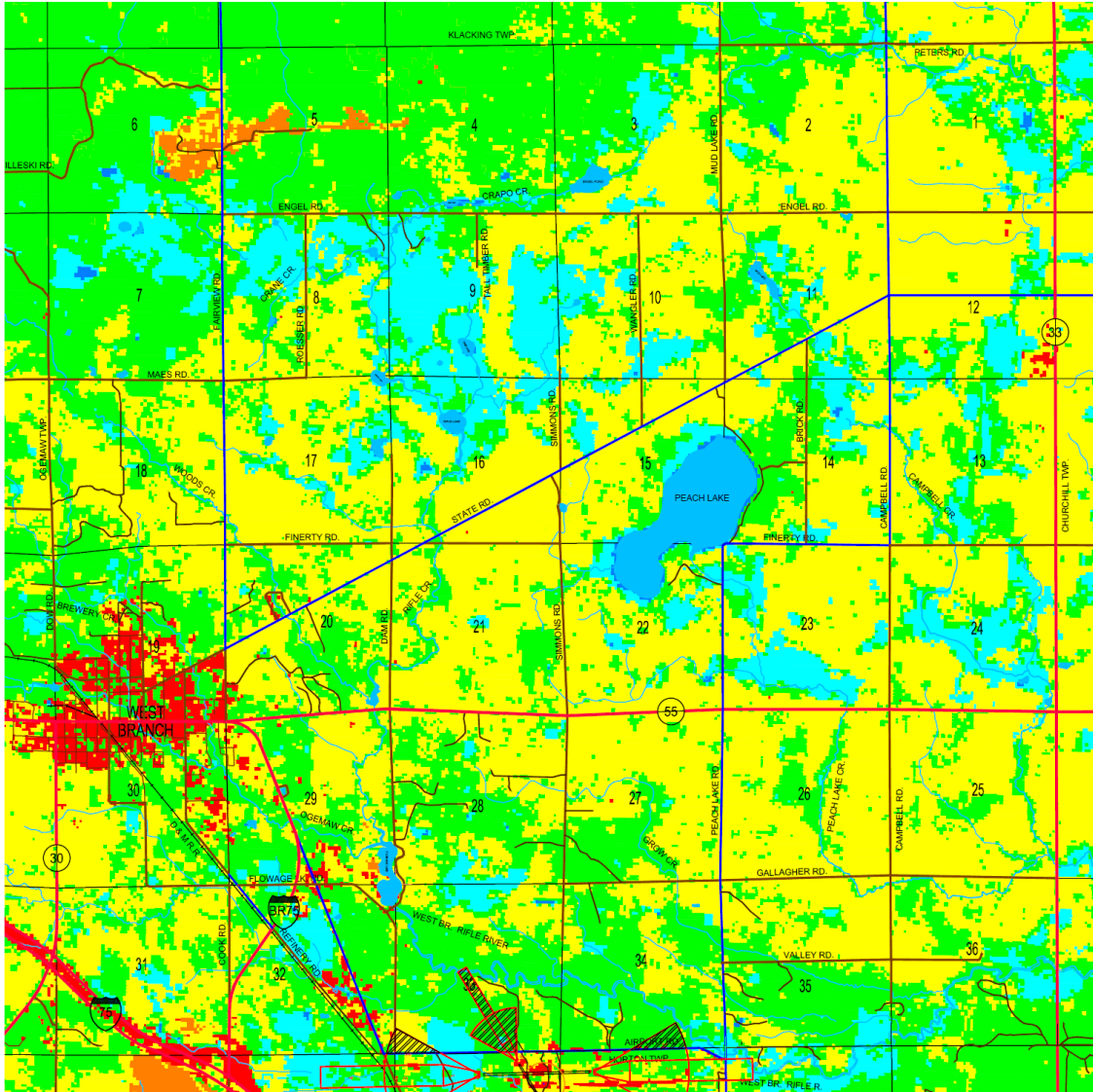
West Branch Township has approximately one square mile of state-owned land situated in the far northwest corner of the Township in portions of Sections 5, 6 and 7. The recreational facilities of the township include one 18-hole golf course, the Ogemaw Hills Recreation Park, and the West Branch RV Park.

RESIDENTIAL

Surrounding the City of West Branch and scattered throughout the Township are pockets of residential dwellings. With the adoption of the Land Division Act, more of the large parcels that once populated the countryside have been reduced to three-to-five-acre parcels to accommodate northward urban migration from within the state and elsewhere. Larger parcels, especially along waterways and lakes, are being subdivided for full-time residences instead of the formerly seasonal cottages and other part-time dwellings.

The plat maps that follow show the changes in land ownership over the years and indicate the trends discussed above.

EXISTING LAND COVER AND USES
WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP



SCALE: 1" = 5000'±

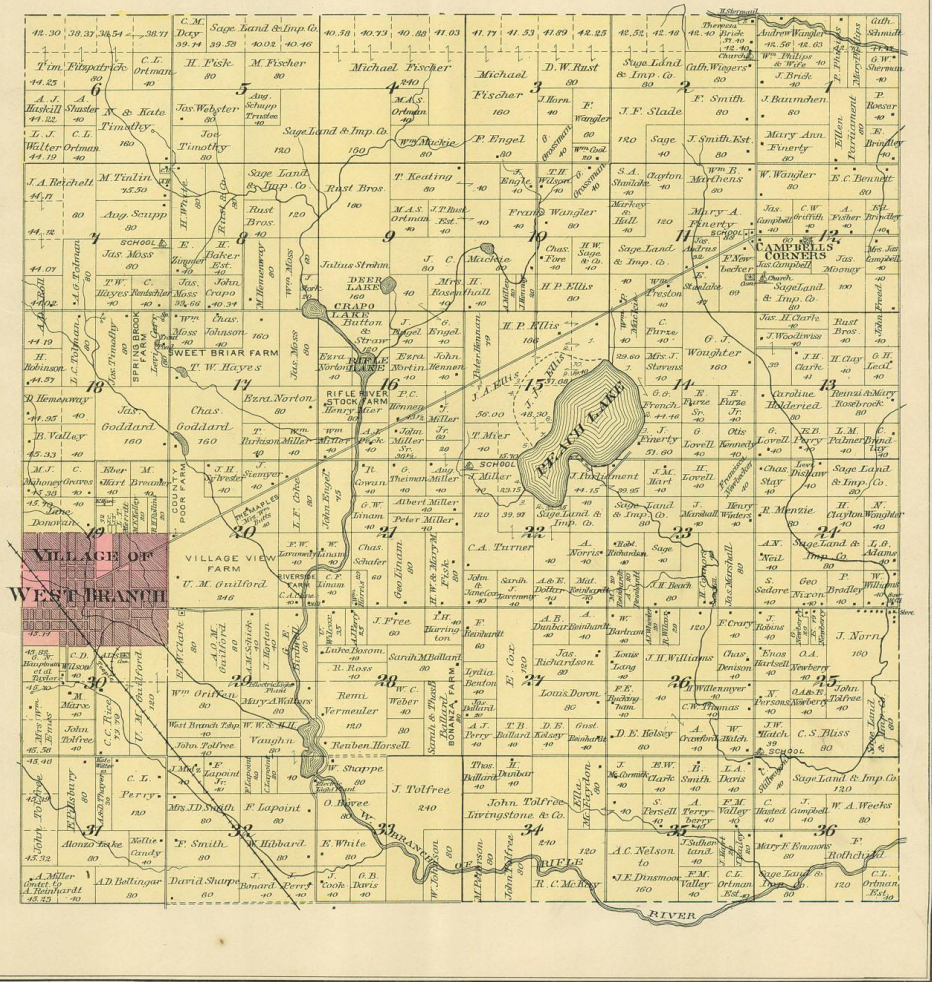


- Open Water
- Low Intensity Residential
- High Intensity Residential
- Commercial / Industrial
- Bare Rock / Sand
- Quarries / Mines/ Gravel Pits
- Transitional
- Deciduous Forest
- Evergreen Forest
- Mixed Forest
- Shrubland
- Orchards / Vineyards
- Grasslands
- Pasture
- Row Crops
- Small Grains
- Urban / Recreational Grasses
- Wooded Wetlands
- Emergent Wetlands

PLAT OF WEST BRANCH

Township 22 North, Range 2 East
of the Michigan Meridian.

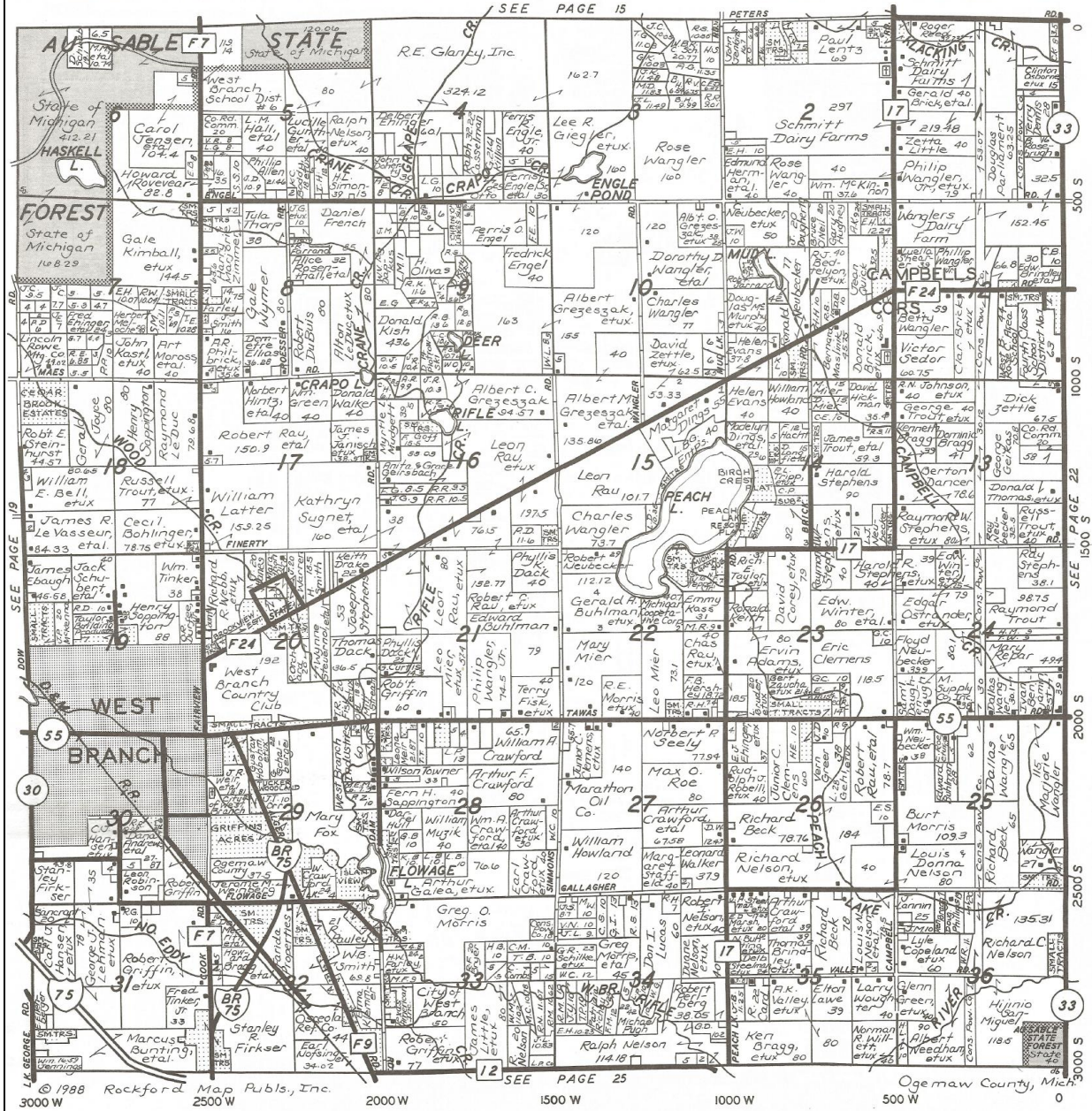
Scale: 2 inches to the Mile.



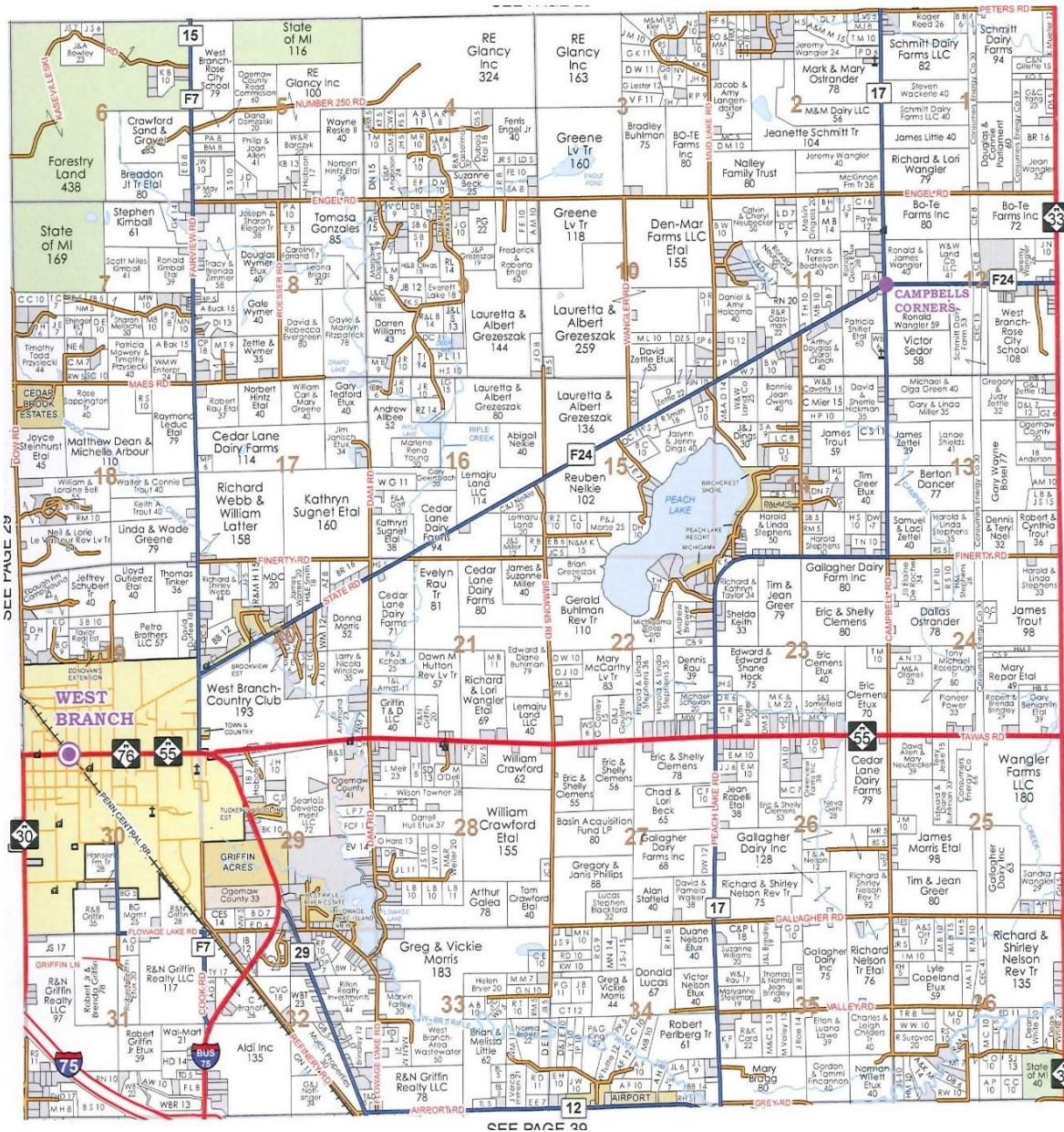
1903 PLAT MAP OF WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP

WEST BRANCH

T.22N.-R. 2 E.



1988 WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP PLAT MAP



2020 WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP PLAT MAP

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following are problems and specific sites that the Planning Commission has identified and are identified in the State of Michigan database of contaminated sites.

BLIGHT AREAS

There are unsightly conditions including rundown properties and contamination in the following areas of the Township.

Section 1: Peters and Campbell Roads; old, burned-down gas station/store with possible oil contamination. The Township has demolished the structure. However, contamination may still be present.

Section 12: Southwest corner M-33 and State Road; old gas station with remaining fuel tanks in ground.

Section 19: Located north of the City of West Branch. Taylor Building Products has been used as a manufacturing facility for twenty years; monitoring wells have been placed on the west side of the property.

Section 24: Northwest corner intersection M-55 and M-33 (Ivan's); long time existing gas station.

Section 28: Southeast corner intersection M-55 and Dam Road; contaminated with P.O.L. (petroleum, oil and lubricants).

Section 29: P.O.L. pollution; Intersection M-55 and Business Loop I-75; currently Sunrise Convenience Store/Marathon gas station previously used as automobile dealership with car repair.

Superflight gas station had leaking underground storage tanks with gasoline released in 1990 and 1999.

The former West Branch Steel site is on the State's Contaminated Sites List. The State reports that the site has PCB's, lead, zinc, and benzene contaminants. West Branch Township purchased this site several years ago at a tax sale and is planning to develop the area as a gathering destination, "The West Branch Commons." Testing continues to be done on the site and the results show contaminants decreasing in their extent and quantity.

DUMP SITES

Section 5: Fairview Road; old Township landfill has been converted to a Solid Waste Transfer Station.

Section 19: North end of First Street outside City Limits; old City Dump and old oil drilling equipment storage area currently filled in and abandoned.

South Old M-76 Corridor: M-76 south of Flowage Lake Road.

The Township has enacted several ordinances over the past decade to address conditions that threaten health, safety, and welfare of the community. These ordinances include a Blight Ordinance passed in 1998; Noxious Weeds Ordinance in 2021; and Dangerous Buildings Ordinance in 2021. Continual enforcement of these ordinances and efforts to promote clean-up and economic development will help in the reduction of blight and improve property values in these areas.

BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

On May 27, 1998, the West Branch Township Board created a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority with the boundaries including the entire township. The Township has successfully returned two properties back into functional uses. The former Osceola Refinery has been developed into a mulch processing facility and the B.J. Smith property has been cleaned up and developed into a scrap metal and recycling facility.

Taylor Building Products, Inc. is now an employee-owned company and is located in the township, just north of the City of West Branch. This facility has been used as a manufacturing facility for twenty years. The company currently produces residential and commercial doors and is positioning itself to become the first source for replacement doors throughout the nation. The owners of the site have been working to clean up this property since July 27, 1992.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The West Branch Township population has seen a minimal decline over the last 20 years from 2,628 to 2,567, a 2.3% overall decrease. There has been a similar decline throughout the region surrounding West Branch Township, apart from Ogemaw Township and the State of Michigan where there has been minimal growth.

West Branch Township residents, like most of the region, are almost all white (approximately 98%) with predominantly German and English heritage. There are slightly more females than males. The population contains 1,279 females versus 1,233 males. Around 84% of residents are homeowners and nearly 72% of those are families of three. Approximately 63% of families are comprised of children aged 6-17. About 75% of the residents in the township are between the ages of 18 and 65 with the median age in the township around 43.6 years compared to the county at 50.6 or the State of Michigan at 39.8 years of age.

POPULATION TRENDS

	2000	2010	2020	20-year Change
West Branch Township	2,628	2,593	2,567	-2.3%
Ogemaw Township	1,118	1,223	1,154	+3.1%
Churchill Township	1,603	1,713	1,543	-3.7%
Edwards Township	1,390	1,413	1,361	-2.1%
Klacking Township	617	614	572	-7.3%
Ogemaw County	21,645	21,699	20,770	-4.0%
Gladwin County	26,023	25,692	25,386	-2.4%
Roscommon County	25,469	24,449	23,459	-7.9%
State of Michigan	9,938,444	9,883,640	10,077,331	+1.4%

Data Source: U.S. Census 2000, 2010 and 2020

An indication of the changing profile of the township may also be seen in the comparison of the growth of total housing versus that of seasonal housing (vacation and second homes, etc.). New housing and the conversion of existing seasonal homes is evident. From 2010 to 2020 total housing in West Branch Township increased slightly by 0.16% and seasonal housing increased by 1.1%. This secondary and occasional use housing represents 16.2% of the township housing yet is much lower than many surrounding townships and the county as a whole, (see chart below).

Incomes have been steadily rising for county residents, but they still lag well behind state and national averages and poverty rates are relatively high (see below).

HOUSING TRENDS

	Total Housing Units		% Change	Seasonal Housing Units		% Change
	2010	2020		2010	2020	
West Branch Township	1,252	1,254	+0.16%	18.2%	16.2%	-2.0%
Ogemaw Township	601	572	-4.8%	21.8%	21.1%	-0.7%
Churchill Township	1,115	1,066	-4.4%	36.1%	36.4%	+0.3%
Edwards Township	764	709	-7.2%	27.0%	20.3%	-6.7%
Klacking Township	443	435	-1.8%	41.8%	41.4%	-0.4%
Ogemaw County	16,047	15,246	-1.1%	42.2%	39.6%	-2.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2010 & 2020 Census

HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION

	Ogemaw County	State of Michigan
2020 Average Household Size	2.21	2.45
2020 Median Household Income (Dollars)	\$41,752	\$59,234
2020 Median Home Value	\$106,200	\$174,800

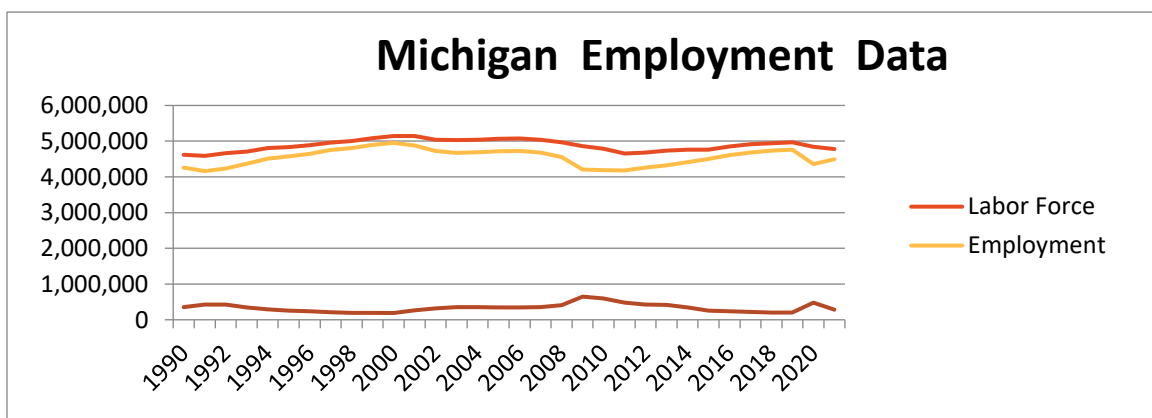
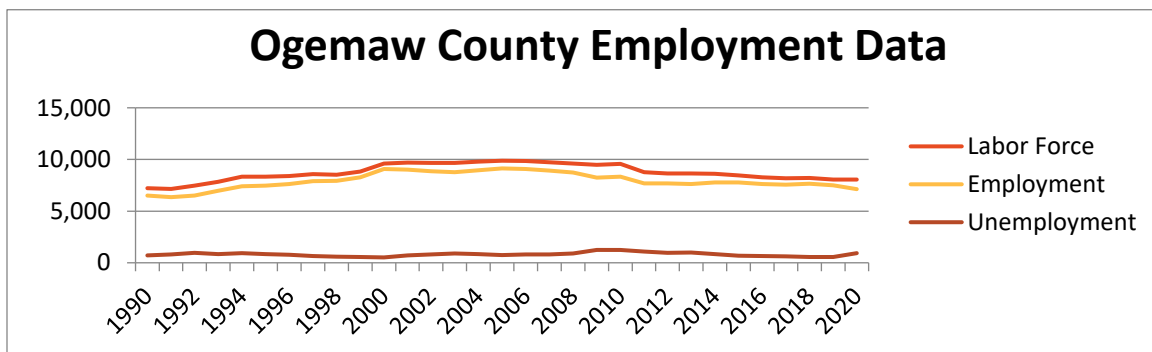
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

COUNTY ECONOMIC PROFILE

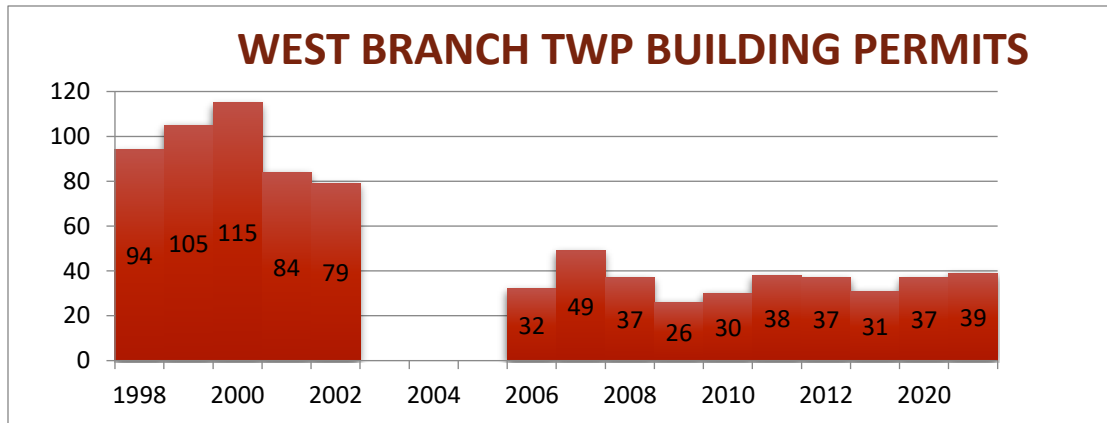
Ogemaw County relies greatly upon tourism for its economic base although government, farming, health care, manufacturing, and extraction play parts in its diversity and strength.

The largest economic sectors in Ogemaw County currently are Service, Retail Trade and Government. The Service industry provides more than one-third of the employment in the county, and the Retail Trade provides more than one-quarter of the employment in the county. Over the past decade Ogemaw County's manufacturing employment has decreased by over 60%, taking with it many of the county's higher paying jobs. Major employers are the County of Ogemaw, Griffin Beverage Company, Villa at West Branch, Walmart, Meijer; West Branch Outlet Shops, West Branch Regional Medical Center, and West Branch-Rose City School District.

Unemployment in Ogemaw County, similarly to the State of Michigan, reached a low in 2000 and rose steadily until 2010. The current unemployment rate is 6.9% in Ogemaw County versus 4.1% for Michigan and 3.8% for the United States as a whole.



The economy had grown healthily over the last decade of the last millennium. The establishment of the D.D.A., the industrial park, and a revitalized city center had contributed to this increased growth. Since the turn of the century, the economy flattened and even declined slightly. Employment and development have declined since the 1990's.



TRENDS/BUILDING PERMITS

In an effort to document growth in West Branch Township during the initial creation of this Master Plan, research into building permits issued from January 1, 1995, through December 2002 was performed. The Township, after adopting the West Branch Township Zoning Ordinance, began issuing zoning permits. The permits issued by the Zoning Administrator are depicted in the table above beginning in 1998 and reflect the continual decline in building permits compared to the 1990's. Zoning permits have remained stable over the last three years with a balanced mix of residential and commercial activity.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY AREA (D.D.A.)

The West Branch Township D.D.A. was formed in 1992. In 2010 it was renewed for an additional twenty (20) years, and in 2020 was extended until December 31, 2045. The D.D.A. allows for the use of taxes collected through a Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA) to be spent within the D.D.A. district for various improvements. At the end of the D.D.A.'s charter, all projects will be paid in full and any excess captured tax dollars will then be returned to all taxing entities.

The first project the D.D.A. successfully completed was the construction of the water tower located near the I-75 Exit 212 junction. This tower was constructed to service the area locally known as "Hamburger Hill" with its multiple fast-food restaurants and gas stations.

Subsequently, two hotels with a conference center erected, as well as the Tanger Outlet Mall. Since then, the development of the area has continued to include the construction of Walmart, Aldi's, a multi-unit plaza, marijuana dispensary, Home Depot, and several more fast-food franchises.

A municipal water main was constructed along the business loop and, eventually, cross connected with the City of West Branch's water system. This allowed each municipality the utilization of resources of the other as a back-up for each water system.

Other projects the D.D.A. has completed are extensions of the sanitary sewer system, water distribution system and the development of recreational facilities and road improvements.

In 2012 the DDA coordinated with MDOT and its reconstruction of the I-75 Business Loop from Exit 212 to the City of West Branch. The DDA has implemented sidewalks, decorative streetlights and a pathway including two timber bridges that connect the City of West Branch with the Exit 212 business district in an effort to provide safe pedestrian and bicycle traffic along the loop.

Over the last years, the DDA has continued to install corridor lighting and water and sewer within its district. It has also implemented the West Branch Wayfinding System and various market efforts. Its current efforts involve the West Branch Commons Project to be located on the former West Branch Steel site. The proposed project includes an artisan market pavilion, an open-air pavilion. These buildings would house a farmers' market and a gathering location for seasonal events.

The "Commons" would include a large plaza area with a fire pit and large parking lot surrounding an existing building that would have restrooms, office and storage areas, retail spaces and possibly a coffee shop. The site is intended to serve as a gathering point and will provide connectivity within the community via the existing DDA non-motorized pathway.

UTILITIES

The following utilities service the residents and businesses in West Branch Township:

- 1) Public Water Facilities - West Branch Township and the City of West Branch.
- 2) Public Sewer Facilities – West Branch Township and the City of West Branch.

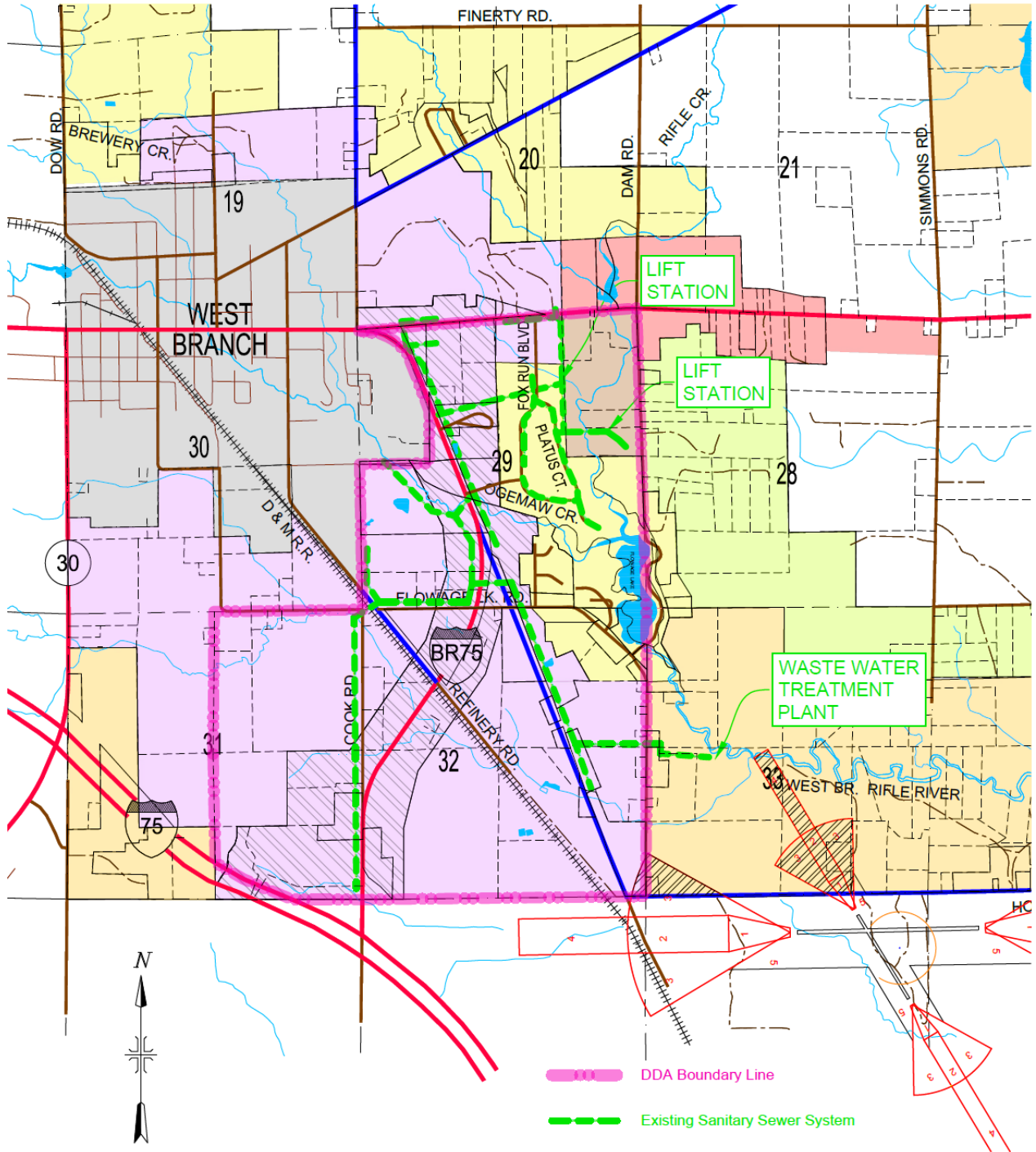
- 3) Telephone and other Electronic Data Services – SBC Ameritech, Mid-Michigan, AT&T, MCI, Sprint, Verizon, NPI Wireless, M-33 Access, and Charter Communications in selected areas.
- 4) Electric – Consumers Energy
Electric transmission lines (including one north-south 345 KV. line).
- 5) Natural Gas – DTE- Primary Transmission Line (East to West)
- 6) Main Fuel Transmission Line- Enbridge (North to South)

The Township Board has defined an Urban Services Area within which public water and sewer may be installed in the foreseeable future. (See p. 45 for Urban Services Area Maps).

LAW ENFORCEMENT

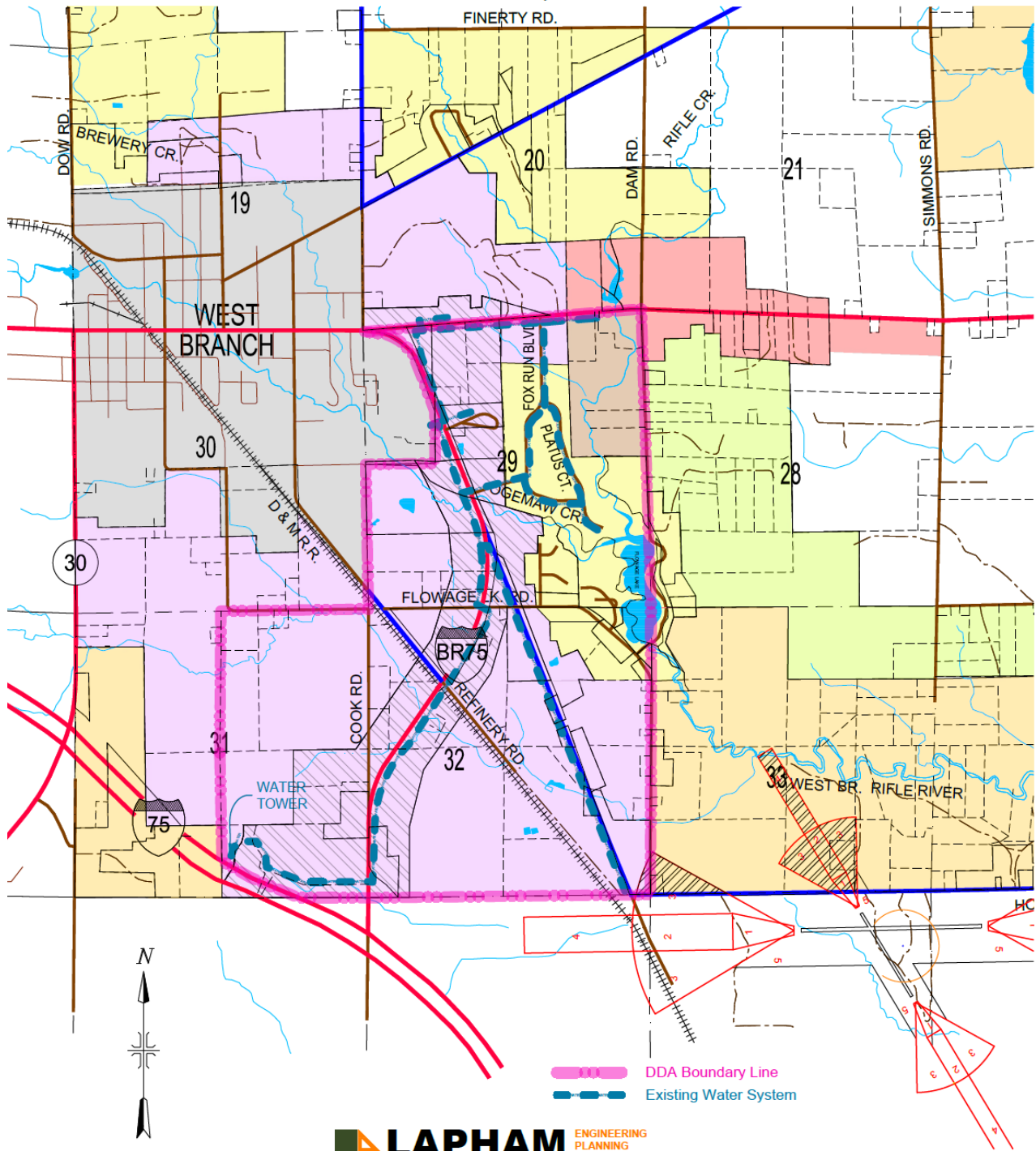
Police protection in West Branch Township is currently provided by two separate entities: the Michigan State Police and the Ogemaw County Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Department is in the City of West Branch and the State Police have a newly constructed post located on M-55 east of the city of West Branch.

DDA Sanitary Sewer System Map
WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP
 1705 S. FAIRVIEW
 WEST BRANCH, MI 48661



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DDA Water System Map
WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP
 1705 S. FAIRVIEW
 WEST BRANCH, MI 48661



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 PLANNING
 ENVIRONMENTAL
 SURVEYING

TRANSPORTATION, PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

West Branch Township has a complete set of transportation modes. West Branch Community Airport borders the Township to the south and offers a one-mile-long airstrip. United Parcel Service has a package hub located in the Industrial Park of the city and is a major user of the airport. The Lake State Railroad runs through the Township and there are possibilities for sidings in the DDA area.

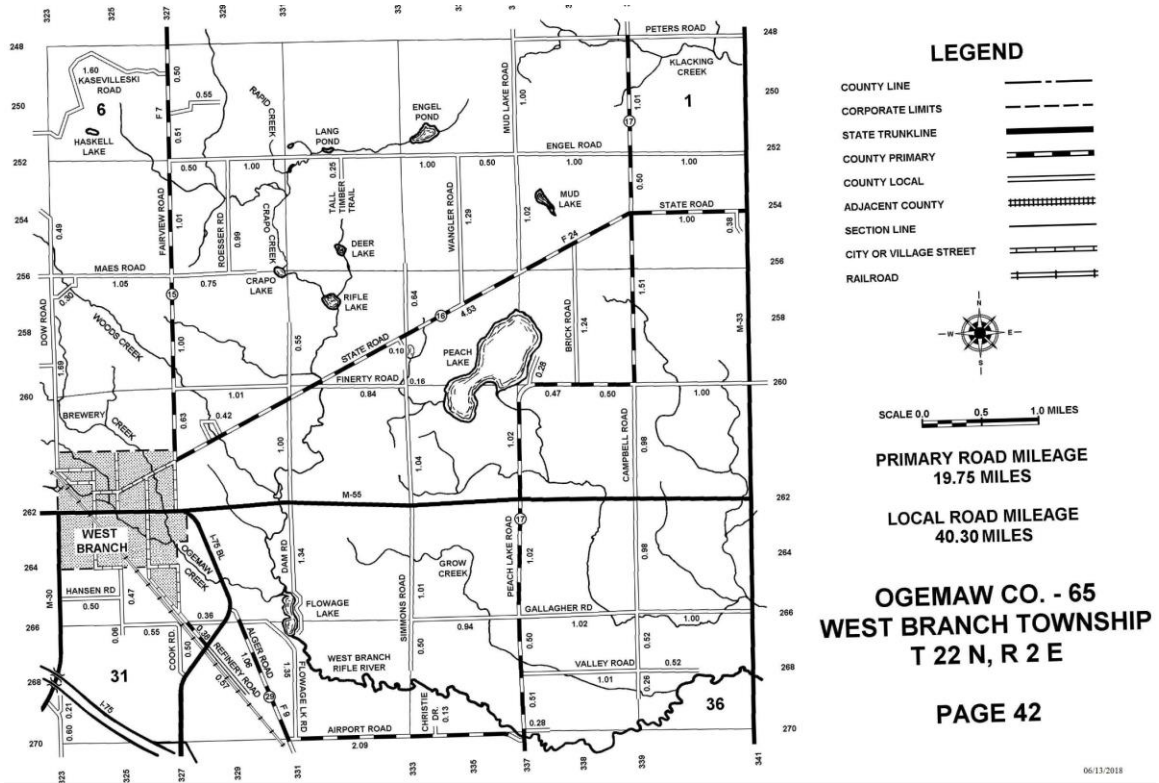
The most significant roadway in the Township is Interstate 75 which cuts northwest to southeast across the southwest corner. Exit 212 occurs at the southern boundary of the Township routing traffic from I-75 and West Branch Township into the City of West Branch. Other major arteries are M-55, connecting with Houghton Lake and Cadillac; Old M-76, and M-33. Originating in West Branch, M-30 runs southward along the western boundary of the Township, connecting to Gladwin and Midland. The Business Loop of I-75 merges into Old M-76 about one mile south of the City of West Branch and follows the M-76/M-55 corridor through town and onto Exit 215 to the west. Other significant traffic corridors are State Road, Campbell Road, Fairview Road, Dow Road, Peach Lake Road, Maes Road, and Engel Road.

The Lake State Central Railroad cuts northwest to southeast across the southwest corner of the Township and runs roughly parallel to I-75. The railroad provides freight service throughout the state and internationally to Canada.

TRANSPORTATION DATA

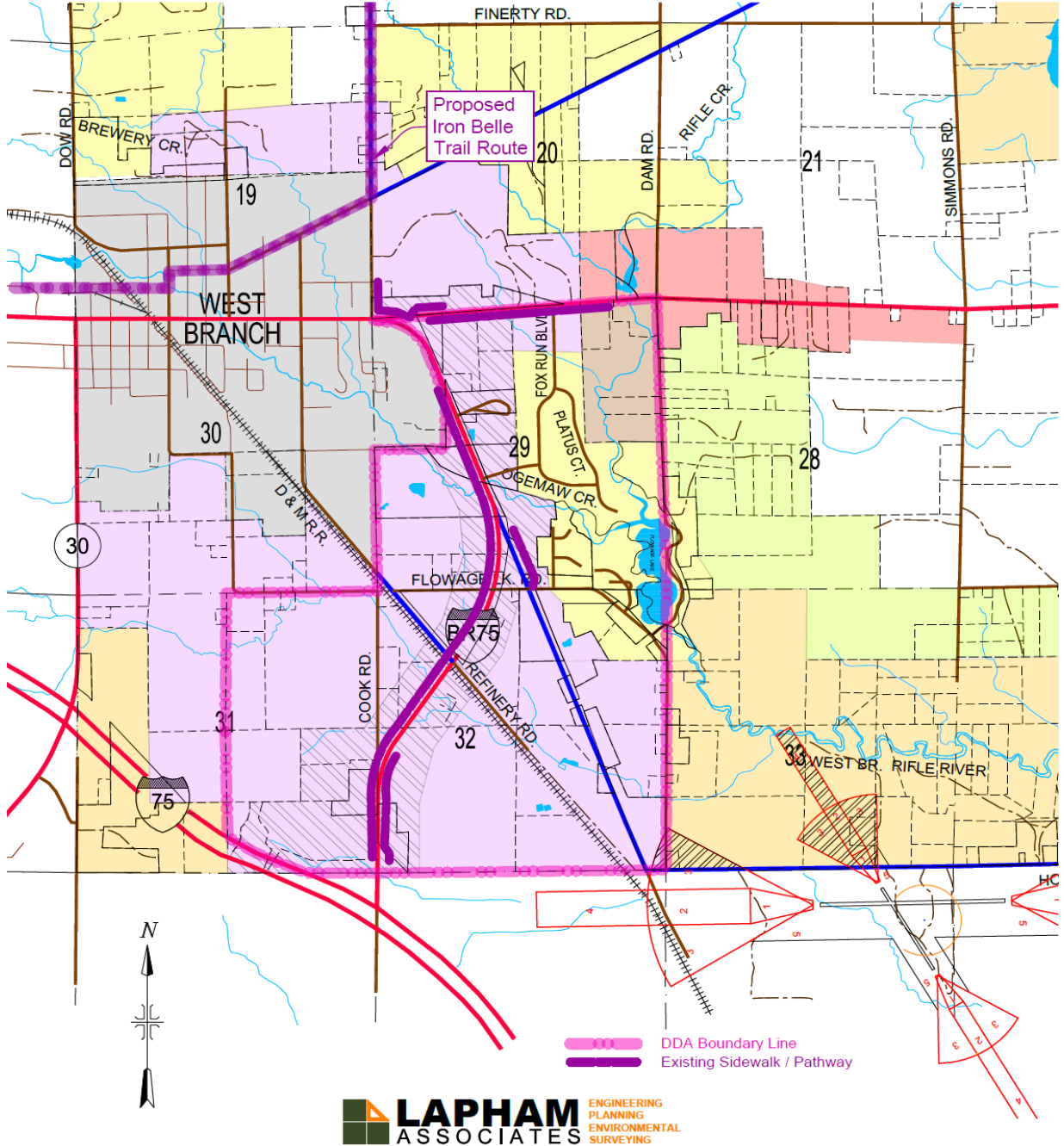
Primary Roads	19.75 miles
Local Roads.....	40.30 miles
Highways	7.94 miles
Interstate.....	1.99 miles
Railroad	1.96 mile

WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP COUNTY ROAD MAP



WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP PATHWAYS MAP

DDA Non Motorized Pathways System Map
WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP
1705 S. FAIRVIEW
WEST BRANCH, MI 48661



LAPHAM ASSOCIATES ENGINEERING
PLANNING
ENVIRONMENTAL
SURVEYING

SECTION TWO

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Until the recession of 2008 West Branch Township and the region of northern lower Michigan experienced rapid population and development growth. Migration within Michigan from the southeast continued at a rapid pace with many former seasonal dwellings being converted to full-time residences. This period of rapid growth has ceased, and population declines are occurring in many communities including West Branch Township. Unemployment has decreased steadily since 2010 to a current rate of 6.9%. Every industry has lost jobs except Agriculture, Service, Health Care, and Social Assistance. Given the unstable economic conditions, nationally and internationally, it is unlikely West Branch Township will see the growth it saw in the late 1900's.

West Branch Township and the City of West Branch have been successful in making their communities into a regional destination commercial shopping area. Small manufacturers as well as regional health facilities have been adding to the depth and strength of the growing regional economy. The beauty of the area and the recreational opportunities provided by large areas of state and federal forest lands, as well as rich deposits of sand and gravel and still productive oil and gas wells, add to the dynamics of the economy to draw people to the township.

In addition to the slower economy, other constraints to growth and development of the township are the few areas of the township where past actions have left blighted or polluted conditions. These areas have been identified for remedial actions to be taken.

MASTER PLAN AND ZONING ORDINANCE COMPARISON

TOWNSHIP 5 YEAR MASTER PLAN	TOWNSHIP ZONING ORDINANCE
Provides General Policies / information; Future Guide	Provides specific Township zoning Regulations; the law.
Describes what should be planned for in the future. Recommend land use for the Next 15 to 20 years, not necessarily the recommended uses for today’s environment.	Describes what is and what is not allowed today, based on current conditions of the community.
Includes recommendations that involve agencies and groups, and community partners.	Deals only with development-related issues and uses under Township Control.
Flexible to respond to changing community and economic conditions.	Fairly rigid, requires formal amendments to the document to change.

In April 2023, the Board of Trustees submitted the Draft Master Plan to all neighboring jurisdictions and to Ogemaw County as required by the Planning Enabling Act. In May 2023 the Township Planning Commission held a public Hearing on the Master Plan, required by the Planning Enabling Act. This provided an additional opportunity for public input into the Master Plan for the Township. The Finalized Master Plan was adopted in May 2023 by the West Branch Township Board by way of Resolution.

MASTER PLAN AND ZONING ORDINANCES

Often Master Plans and Zoning Ordinances are thought of as the same documents. However, a more accurate description would be that they are two different sets of tools that the Township Planning Commission and Township Board use in conjunction with one another, and work toward the same purpose and goals. Even though the documents are working toward the same goals, they are different.

The zoning ordinance is the law, and it regulates the use and development of land as it exists in the present. The Master Plan is a policy and should therefore be used as a guide to the future land and overall development in the Township. While the Master Plan outlines a community’s vision for the future, the Zoning Ordinance contains the rules that govern the present.

The Michigan zoning enabling act requires that a Zoning Ordinance be based on an adopted Master Plan. Often, once a community has updated their Master Plan, it will also review the Zoning Ordinance to ensure it aligns with the goals of the Master Plan.

USING THE MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan will be used primarily by the Township Board of Trustees, the Planning Commission, and the zoning board of appeals as a guide in making land use decisions. Applicants seeking approval from any of these bodies will also find the Master Plan to be a valuable tool for understanding the long-term goals of West Branch Township. Likewise, the Master Plan can be used by other citizen committees like the Downtown Development Authority, Parks and Recreation, and Economic development Corporation to assist them in the review of land-use related issues and planning for future projects.

The Master Plan also acts as the starting point for all Zoning Ordinance updates and amendments. Michigan State Law requires that the Zoning Ordinance and zoning amendments are based upon a Master Plan. The Master Plan gives a legal basis for zoning and identifies how the community is protecting the health, safety, and general welfare of the community's population. In the event that either the Zoning Ordinance or a decision of either the Zoning Administrator or the Planning Commission is challenged in court, the Master Plan will help provide the planning rationale to support land use regulation.

- The Board of Trustees, Planning Commission, and the public should continuously reference the Master Plan in order to:
- Review development proposals – to confirm any given proposal meets all goals and objectives of the Master Plan
- Review Zoning Requests – to confirm that the request is consistent with the goals and policies of the Master Plan, and potential impacts on the Township.
- Provide a basis for amendments to the Zoning Ordinance and the Zoning Map – to help realize and enforce plan goals.
- Understand expectations for the future land use patterns and desired land use types in the community – to inform potential residents and business development about West Branch Township and its planned future.
- Identify and recommend physical improvements – to provide direction for provision of roadways, entryways, non-motorized paths, parks, and community facilities.
- Provide specific design standards related to buildings, landscaping, and other site improvements – to guide development and redevelopment through the Community.

ACTION PLAN

Under the direction of the planning commission, with citizen and stakeholder input, West Branch Township has identified seven overarching goals, each with a series of actions. Although the recommendations embodied in the Future Land Use map may take twenty to thirty years to achieve, the Action Plan is focused on short-term attainable actions that Township can take to bring about noticeable change.

The five-year time frame is used to correspond to the Planning Commission's role to re-evaluate the Master Plan every five years under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008). The Action Plan table outlines a planned implementation schedule for each action and includes a general timeframe for implementation, the party responsible for implementing, priority, and anticipated funding source.

Action Plan task items using a five-year timeframe (2023 - 2028) as a way to establish priorities. The year identified in the schedule should be referred to as the probable "kick-off" date when the work will begin. Several of the tasks are recurring and the term "Annual" is used to denote their timing. The Action Plan schedule should be used by the Planning Commission to prepare their Annual Report (MCL 125.3819 (2)) to the Board of Trustees outlining their annual work effort and budget. This process also helps to establish a realistic measure of Planning Commission performance.

GOAL ONE - Economics of Place Making

HOW: Create an environment where residents, development, and businesses can be successful.

WHY: Since the Great Recession, a variety of economic assessments have concluded that communities that have a strong sense of place fare well economically. This sense of place, referred to as the economics of place, is achieved through a variety of elements, including having a vibrant business district, a range of housing types, access to recreation and open space, walkable and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods and streets, and attractive public areas. When you create a community where people want to live and visit, invest; jobs follow.

REVISING ZONING ORDINANCE – 2023-2024

Responsibility of Township Planning Commission / Zoning Administrator / Township Board

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

- Expanding zoning amendments for Multi-Use Buildings in Commercial Zone districts
- Zoning Amendments for Outdoor Seating provisions – continues development of the township Social District
- Reviewing zoning sections to expand Solar Development in township zone districts.

Downtown Development Plan – 2023-2024

Responsibility of the Downtown Development Authority & Planning Commission

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

- Prepare a Physical Design Plans for the Business District along the I-75 Business Loop between the I-75 Exit 212 and East side of the City of West Branch limits.
- Implementing Complete Street elements into the business district including enhancing non-motorized pathways and crosswalk markings.
- Enhancing Marketing and branding elements into the business district

M-76 Corridor Improvement Area – 2024-2028

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

Responsibility of the Downtown Development Authority / Planning Commission / Township Board

- Prepare a Physical Design Plans for M-76 from the I-75 Business Loop down to Airport Road.
- Incorporate pedestrian elements and crossings.
- Define Growth & Investment Areas based on availability of infrastructure, and proximity to I-75 Exits and current uses.
- Evaluate and select sites within the M-76 area that are redevelopment ready.

GOAL TWO – KEEPING CHARACTER

HOW: Market the community to prospective businesses, residents, and tourists

WHY: West Branch Township is blessed with a variety of natural resources and open spaces; places where people like to work, visit and vacation, but with major employers they indicated jobs, but fall short on recruiting talented help. West Branch Township needs to tell its story outside of Ogemaw County. In response to this information the Township engaged in “Project Rising Tide”, a team of consultants, to develop a branding and in 2020 the Township DDA branded the Township, “West Branch Township Where the Farm Meets the City”

Marketing Campaign – 2023-2028

Responsibility of Township Planning Commission / Township Board / Downtown Development Authority

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

- Develop and implement an external market and advertising plan.
- Revise website and social media to incorporate the same brand information and messaging.
- Undertake an inventory of underutilized/ vacant sites that would be acceptable for redevelopment and business occupancy.

GOAL THREE – HOUSING DIVERSITY

HOW: Create more housing options for existing and prospective residents

WHY: There is not much diversity in West Branch Township’s housing stock. According to several housing models and national trends, the mix of housing will shift more toward apartments, townhomes, and other non-owner-occupied housing types. In many markets, baby boomers and millennials are competing for the same housing type. Baby boomers want to discard the responsibilities for home maintenance and upkeep, and millennials do not want to get tied down with home ownership. In addition, as employment opportunities become more fluid and transient more demand is placed to find quality rental properties.

Housing Strategy – 2023-2025

Responsibility of Township Planning Commission / Township Board / Downtown Development Authority

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

- Conduct a Housing Study that forecasts future housing demand and identifies housing typology.
- Based on the Housing Study align the Zoning Ordinance to accommodate the housing mix recommended.
- Encourage residential development in walkable proximity to business districts.

GOAL FOUR – GROWTH FOR THE FUTURE

HOW: Grow the number of residents, businesses, tourists, and developers in the township.

WHY: William S. Burroughs is credited with the quote, “When you stop growing you start dying.” Lou Holtz said. “In this world you’re either growing or you’re dying, so get in motion and grow.” Planned growth is good for a community. Planned growth brings new residents, additional jobs, increased wealth, and more disposable income to support the local business community. The key word is “planned growth.” So, what is planned growth? Planned growth is a community strategy of knowing what you need, where to get it, and how to accommodate it. It’s achieved by having your ducks in order

Development Marketing – 2023-2028 (Annual Projects)

Responsibility of Township Planning Commission / Township Board / Downtown Development Authority /
Local EDC and Chamber of Commerce

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

- Coordinate with Chamber, Economic Development Commission an external market and advertising plan
- Create “stakeholders and major employers” meetings.
- Host a developer open house to introduce them to the West Branch Township community and real estate opportunities.
- Convene and implement a Calendar of Township Community Events focused on bringing people to the community.

GOALS AND ACTIONS

BUSINESS AND ECONOMY

GOAL

To have existing businesses prosper and to provide the best conditions for new enterprises to establish businesses in the township.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

- Ensure ordinances and procedures for expanding or commencing businesses are as streamlined as possible while still protecting the natural environment and cherished residential areas.
 - Continue to attract new businesses to market the district’s existing businesses.
 - Utilize the “branding” established during the “rising tide” initiative and work together with other municipalities and organizations to create a unified brand.
 - Continue to implement the marketing plan (with the county, city, and other townships) to encourage tourism and commercial activity and to draw entrepreneurs to the township and the county.
 - Continue to install “wayfinding signage” with City of West Branch and Ogemaw Township to direct tourists, visitors, health service seekers to their destinations, to businesses, and to the area’s features and attractions.
 - Determine the potential for new business development in underdeveloped market segments, i.e. offices, research and development, and agribusinesses.
- Work collectively with the city and county to strengthen the economy in the whole region. Explore possibilities for Northeast Michigan economic development that would benefit West Branch Township.
 - Continue to establish West Branch at the center of its region as a hub for commerce, health services, tourism, manufacturing and as a product distribution center for northeast Michigan.
 - Continue to make streetscape improvements to affirm the progressive and positive identity of West Branch, and to increase access and mobility for residents and visitors.
 - Continue the implementation of the Redevelopment Ready Community program.
 - Support the development of a Social District and the expansion of outdoor pedestrian friendly type uses in the Exit 212 area.
 - Develop and implement appropriate zoning regulations for marijuana facilities as necessitated by township ordinances.
 - Continue to encourage development along the Business Loop and update the “West Branch Community, Michigan I-75 Business Loop Market Strategy” plan to further encourage development within the Township.

COMMUNITY AND HOUSING

GOALS

- Ensure the conditions for a diversity of types, sizes, and values of housing in the township and surrounding communities. Maintain the quality and orderliness of the community in order to keep and attract new residents.
- Foster new business development and the expansion and improvements of existing businesses to enable job growth for residents and to attract potential new residents.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

- Provide for all housing types in the zoning ordinance; make preferred development models simple and easy to gain approvals.
- Provide thorough and efficient site plan review for high quality but quick analysis and approvals.
- Maintain high housing standards and conditions by enforcing zoning and other blight reducing ordinances.
- Market the township and area to attract new residents and businesses.
- Support tax abatement programs and other incentives to encourage quality residential housing development

LAND USE PATTERNS AND ZONING

GOAL

Maintain the land use districts as they are currently designated changing only those parcels or areas where the patterns of development influenced by market demand and property owner preferences and community needs warrant changes.

OBJECTIVES & ACTIONS

- Continuously analyze demands and influences upon the township such as expanded oil exploration and wind energy developments, change designations of zoning if advantageous and worthy for the community.
- Review and change properties in the industrial district to mixed use to accommodate existing land use patterns and to enable financing and changes to residential dwellings and other structures in this area.

- Enforce zoning and blight ordinances to ensure the maintenance of existing and new residences and businesses.
- Assess new development proposals to ensure contributions to the quality of the community and the expansion of jobs and the financial resources of the township.
- Continue the requirements for landscaping, connected parking lots, limited driveways, and other standards that maintain and enhance the appearance and proper functioning of the township.
- Continue to correct pollution conditions at identified sites and prevent any further ones by a thorough site plan review process.
- Review the existing zoning in the Peach Lake area and address the current problem with the non-conforming lots and future construction within this area.

THE NATURAL AND MANMADE LANDSCAPE

GOALS

- Do everything possible to maintain and protect the township and region's natural resources.
- Continue to improve the business areas of the township and promote existing establishments and foster new enterprises compatible with maintaining its natural resources.
- Protect and maintain residential areas to continue the high quality of housing and encourage more housing in appropriate areas.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

- Protect all the natural resources of the township by keeping high density or high intensity uses where they may be serviced by municipal sewer, water, and storm water infrastructure and by scrutinizing thoroughly development proposals to the township to ensure no harm will befall the natural environment because of new development.
- Continue to clean up blighted areas for reuse.
- Encourage low density or cluster type development that preserves large areas of undeveloped land within development boundaries.

- Develop a Wellhead Protection Program and institute it.
- Preserve and protect existing trees and woodlands.
- Encourage and require landscaping with native varieties of trees and other plants in development projects.
- Plant streets and park trees wherever possible. Replace diseased trees or dying trees and have those trees removed during construction replaced as part of the new site plan.
- Continue to support local agriculture as a valuable part of the landscape.
- Create a recreation plan that provides opportunities and access to the township's natural resources. This should include trails, parks, and other active recreational pursuits. The township should continue to support the Ogemaw Hills Recreation Department Inc. and to investigate additional joint efforts with the city and county.
- Work with local and regional groups such as the Resource Conservation and Development Council Huron Pines to protect natural resources and develop businesses that utilize those resources to create jobs.

TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE

GOALS

- Continue to provide the best roads possible within current and future budgets.
- Develop a trail system that will provide pedestrian and bicycle travel throughout the township and connect to city and regional trailways.
- Support the local airport and railroad that provide services required for maintenance and expansion of businesses in the area.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

- Work with local and regional groups to build a pedestrian/bicycle trail system in the township that connects city and regional trails.
- Potential DDA actions in DDA District:

- Provide funds to upgrade local roads within the district to improve commerce and tourism traffic.
- Continue streetscape improvements within the district: Street trees, sidewalks, trails, and develop small parks along corridor and connect these to longer pathways.
- Add all-weather roads in DDA District.
- Analyze and develop a plan for connecting streets and providing crosstown truck traffic.
- Continue to support the Ogemaw County Road Commission to keep all township roads in good condition, including frequent crack filling, patching, and sealing where needed.
- Continue to promote joint driveways, shared access, and connected parking areas. Limit road cuts to a safe minimum.
- Assess the need for long distance bus service and act to gain a carrier stop if indicated

COMPLETE STREETS ELEMENTS IN ROAD DEVELOPMENT

- Joint effort of the Township/DDA/MDOT/Road Commission to enhance crosswalk safety including crosswalk-markings and pedestrian signals.
- Creating pathway for pedestrians and bicycles
- Developing protected bicycle lanes on current and future township developed roads.
- Monitoring by the Township and DDA of Crosswalk conditions including markings and safety measures.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

A Capital Improvement Plan has been prepared as part of this Master Plan. The West Branch Township DDA is continually assessing and planning for infrastructure and transportation needs within the district. The township planning commission and board should continue to coordinate with and encourage the DDA in its pursuits. The revenues of the district have remained stable and provide a good base of funds for maintenance and improvements within the district.

Outside the DDA district, as indicated in this plan, the township should determine its needs for parks and recreation, road improvements, and other infrastructure and leverage its resources with grants or use special assessments to accomplish these requirements.

PLANNED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS INCLUDE:

- West Branch Commons Project
- Campbell Cemetery Improvements- Fencing/Mapping/Marking
- Lighting Maintained and Repairs
- Business Loop Sewer Expansion
- Cook Road Infrastructure and Pathway
- Pathway Connections West Side Business Loop
- State Road/M-55 Broadband Expansion
- M-76 Lighting and Pathway
- Ogemaw Hills Recreation Facility- Feasibility/Acquisition/Improvements
- M-55 Pathway Lighting Expansion
- Transfer Station Improvements
- Secret Campground and Recreation Center Trail
- Secret Campground Mini Park
- Griffin Road and Little League Park Trail
- First Street Infrastructure
- Road Paving Improvements
- Peach Lake Infrastructure

PARKS AND RECREATION

The township is pursuing the acquisition of the existing Ogemaw Hills Recreation Complex at M-55 & Dam Road. With this acquisition it is necessary to form a Parks & Recreation Commission to oversee the operations of the parks and pursue recreational opportunities for the Township. A 5-year Recreation Plan should be prepared and filed with Michigan DNR Grants Division for grant opportunities and coordination of recreation facilities within the region. Currently, the West Branch Township Recreation Plan is being drafted and participation of the planning commission should be encouraged.

Currently the township has a grant from the USDA to develop plans for a community center at the former West Branch Steel site. The project has been coined as the “West Branch Commons” and includes recreational elements for a gathering spot and event venue as well renovation of the existing building. Connection with the DDA’s pathway and proximity to the Secrete Campground make this project an excellent addition to the township and will provide tool for community promotion and tourism.

Development of non-motorized trails throughout the downtown helps provide connectivity of the community and further investment into these pathways should be encouraged. Inclusion of the Iron Belle Trail through the township may offer funding opportunities and provide expansion beyond just West Branch. Environmental and health benefits of nonmotorized modes of transportation are great effects of a good trail system. Potential trail routes should be planned around the future land uses proposed within this plan and coordinated with the recreation plan to leverage MDNR grant funding where possible.

FUTURE LAND USE

The Future Land Use Map that follows reflects the findings and conclusions presented in this plan. Higher intensity uses including commercial, multi-family, and other high-density residential uses are situated in areas adjacent to the City of West Branch with two areas for specific industrial development, east and south of the city. Areas for medium-density residential development surround these areas with proposed minimum lot sizes from 10,000 square feet to one-half acre. To the north of the medium-density district, along the West Branch of the Rifle River and surrounding Peach Lake is a lower density residential district with minimum lots of one acre. Beyond these districts is the Country Estate district where the minimum lot sizes are five acres.

Highway commercial has been designated along M-55 going east from town and at the crossroads of M-55 and M-33 where businesses providing goods and services needed by both travelers and residents may be established. Residences, although discouraged, are also to be allowed in these areas. Future land uses in this area will be more likely to be commercial or institutional uses. Changes in along M-55 in Sections 21, 22, 23, 26 and 27 as well as along M-33 in Sections 12, 13 and 24 are likely to be needed. A separate district or overlay district may be necessary to establish specific design standards for more rural and highway services type commercial uses. Limited access and setbacks along highway corridors are critical design elements that should be considered.

State land in the northwest section of the Township has been designated as a Forested Residential Rural area. The balance of the Township is designated farm and rural preservation prescribing two-acre minimum lots. Rural businesses and other rural activities could be allowed in these areas as special uses. Preservation of larger parcels with minimal development should be promoted in this region to protect the natural resources and public use within that area.

A solution to address the non-conforming lots and setback problems that are prohibiting the development of small additions, porches or possible new residential construction in the Peach Lake area is needed. Further studies and examinations must be conducted, and a final determination be made as to how this problem can be best resolved. Restricting further dense residential development around Peach Lake should be pursued. Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23 should limit density of future land uses and encourage preservation of natural features that are intended to buffer the lake's watershed. Agricultural uses in that area should be careful to prevent runoff

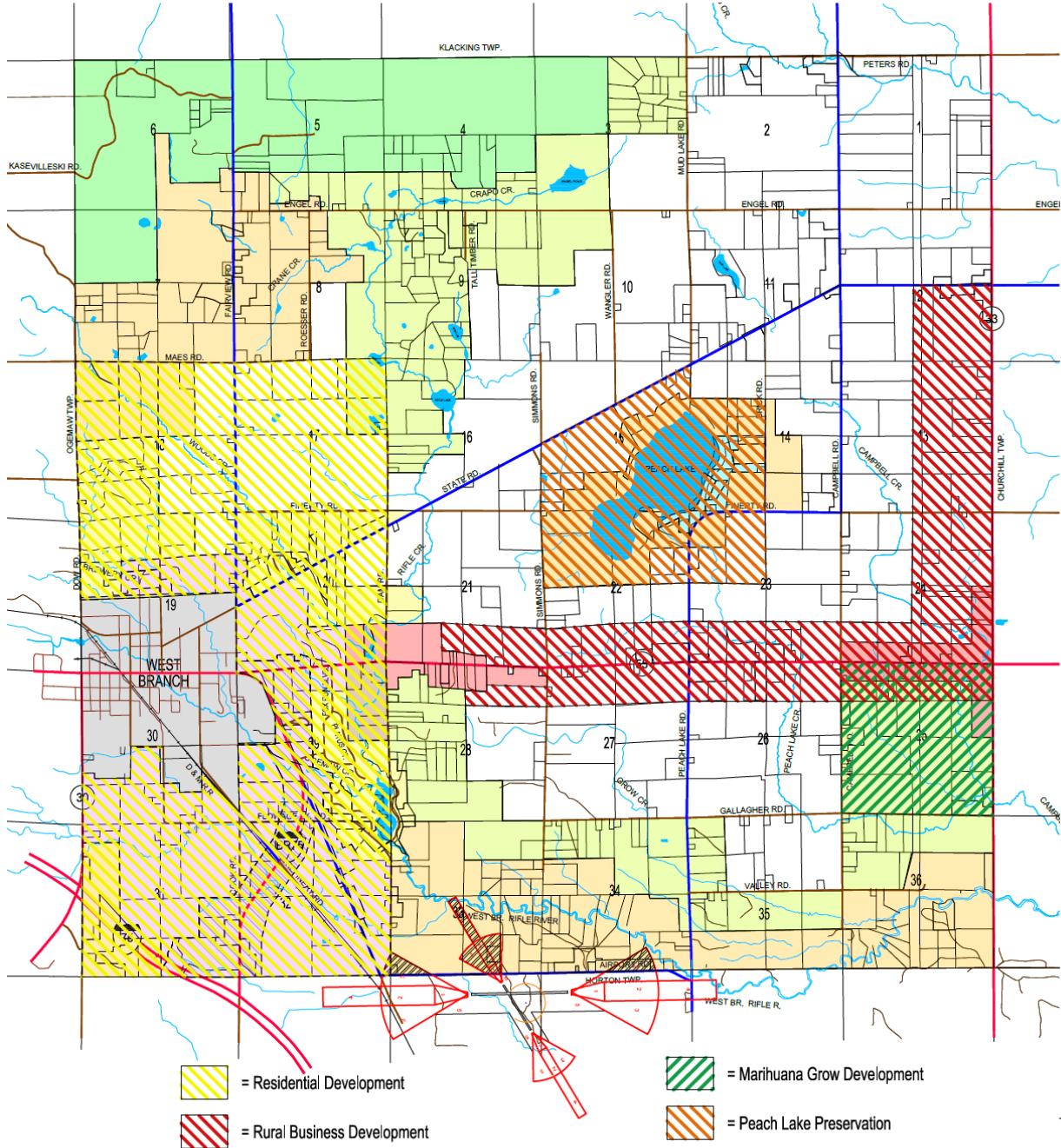
of waste or nutrients. Commercial uses should be restricted in the area to reduce impacts of runoff off and waste.

The township's marihuana ordinance currently allows for provisioning centers and quality control facilities to be located within the Business Overlay District. Further expansion of the ordinance to allow for grow facilities has been explored and ordinance revisions have been drafted to create a new overlay district for marihuana grow facilities to be allowed within Section 25 bounded on the North by M-55; the East by M-33; the South by Gallagher Road; and the West by Campbell Road. Currently the planning commission has not moved on these changes until further need is demonstrated.

The need for housing for working-class families has become an issue as demonstrated in the Rising Tide's housing study. Provisions for new apartment or townhome developments should be examined and developments of this type should be encouraged. Currently the ordinance allows for these types of developments in the Urban Mixed-Use District or in a planned development. Multi-family developments should be allowed in certain districts and provisions for parking and landscaping should be defined for these types of multi-family developments. More densely developed residential sites will typically be located where municipal water and sewer are available, and walkability to shopping and restaurants is desirable. This type of development would likely fall around the Business Loop Area and the City of West Branch. Generally, Sections 17, 18, 19, 20, 29, 30, 31 and 32 are where this development should be considered.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

**Future Land Use Map
WEST BRANCH TOWNSHIP
1705 S. FAIRVIEW
WEST BRANCH, MI 48661**



SCALE: 1" = 5000'±

