

Paw Paw Township 2026 Master Plan

March 10, 2026
Final Draft



Paw Paw Township 2026

Master Plan



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Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Welcome to Paw Paw Township

The Paw Paw Township Master Plan is a statement of the community's future vision and the goals and principles on which it stands.

Community-Guided Vision

- Paw Paw Township will preserve its farmland, forests, and water resources by promoting sustainable land use policies that protect rural character and limit over-development.
- Growth will be carefully managed to ensure that new housing and commercial development fit the Township's scale and infrastructure capacity.
- Public investments will focus on maintaining roads, enhancing safety, and supporting high-quality passive recreation amenities, such as trails and open space preserves, while adhering to a fiscally responsible approach that prioritizes essential services and long-term value.
- A diverse local economy will be encouraged by attracting family-friendly businesses, retail, and job-creating industries, while supporting small businesses and tourism.
- All future development will be guided by a commitment to public input, rural integrity, and long-term resilience.

Master Planning

The plan was developed under the authority of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008. This Master Plan is intended to set a direction for Paw Paw Township to follow over the next twenty years.

A Master Plan is a statement of the community's future vision and its goals and principles. A Master Plan is required by the State's Planning Enabling Act. The plan:

- Guides future decisions concerning redevelopment, land use, and preservation.
- Assesses the needs of the community.
- Serves as the basis for the zoning ordinance, zoning map, and development regulations.
- Establishes a strategy for implementing capital improvements and guides public expenditures.

The Master Plan is a living document that serves as the basis for decision-making and provides an annual work plan for implementation. Through public input and deliberation by the Planning Commission and the Township Board, goals, planning principles, and implementation actions were developed to guide decisions concerning growth, preservation, and investment within the Township.

Process

The Paw Paw Township Master Plan update was a collaborative planning effort that gathered input from residents, stakeholders, and local officials to guide future land use and development decisions. The process included public engagement activities, discussions on housing and community priorities, and regular coordination with the Planning Commission. Key components included data analysis, mapping, and policy development to support housing affordability, natural resource protection, and preservation of the Township’s rural character. The final plan was prepared in accordance with state planning requirements and reflected the goals and values expressed by the community throughout the process.

Organization

The Master Plan is organized by major themes, by chapter, with most beginning with a goal and ending with principles and actions related to the theme. Toward the end of the Master Plan, the future land use plan, future land use map, and implementation strategies are included.



How Do We Use the Master Plan for Development Application Review?

- **Zoning Decisions:** The master plan is consulted to determine the appropriate zoning of land, whether through a township-initiated rezoning or a request by a private landowner.
- **Special Land Use Requests:** When reviewing special land use applications, the plan provides guidance to ensure that proposed uses and operations are consistent with the community's long-term vision and goals.
- **Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and Larger-Scale Projects:** The plan serves as a reference during the review of PUDs or other significant developments that require discretionary approval by the Planning Commission and Township Board.
- **Zoning Text Amendments:** The master plan is used to evaluate proposed zoning text changes, considering how they may affect future development patterns and whether they support land preservation and character protection objectives.
- **Public Infrastructure and Community Facilities:** The plan guides decisions on upgrades and extensions of essential infrastructure, such as road repairs, park improvements, public buildings, sidewalks, trails, pathways, and water and sewer systems.

Why is it Important to Residents and Business Owners?

A Master Plan strives to improve the overall livability of a community. The plan covers many important issues and concerns that impact residents, visitors, and business owners.

- The Master Plan is your vision for the Township.
- The plan is consulted before major decisions are made by the Planning Commission and Township Board.
- The plan identifies appropriate locations for farmland and environmental protection, residential dwellings, commercial businesses, and industrial development.

History

Founded in 1835 and originally named Lafayette, Paw Paw Township was renamed in 1867. The Village began developing in 1832, with early settlers establishing mills, stores, and civic institutions. The Territorial Road and Paw Paw River played significant roles in the area's early economic development. Prospect Hill Cemetery and its 19th-century observatory marked the area as a local landmark. The community is known for its legacy of wineries and the annual Wine & Harvest Festival.

Location

Paw Paw Township and the Village of Paw Paw together form a 37-square-mile community in east-central Van Buren County, approximately 20 miles west of Kalamazoo. The Township encompasses 34 square miles, with the Village occupying 2.8 square miles. A portion of Waverly Township is also carved out of the northern boundary of the Township along the Paw Paw River for geographic convenience (see **Map 1**).

The community is well-connected via M-40, M-51, and Red Arrow Highway, offering direct access to I-94 and US-131. Its location supports residential living, tourism, and agriculture, with proximity to South Haven, Kalamazoo, and several inland lakes.



Chapter 2. Our Community

The people and their perspectives and input are the most important assets to the community

Overview

Understanding community demographics and local insights is a vital part of the planning process. Demographic data provides a clear picture of who lives in the community, how the population is changing, and what future needs may arise. Combining this data with the community survey responses and local insight ensures that planning decisions are practical, equitable, and responsive to the community.

This information helps planners identify trends, tailor services and policies to specific groups, and make informed decisions about land use, housing, transportation, and economic development. This chapter provides a general summary of population trends and public input. Additional demographic data related to housing and the economy is presented in the chapters that follow.

Population

Overall Count

According to the 2023 ACS 5-year estimates, the Township has a population of 6,886 residents. Spanning an area of 35 square miles, it has a population density of approximately 196.6 people per square mile.

Age Groups

The median age in Paw Paw Township is 36.7, younger than both Van Buren County (41.2) and Michigan (40.1). The largest age group in Paw Paw is 20-29-year-olds (16%), followed by 0-9 and 50-59-year-olds. This suggests a relatively youthful population with a strong presence of young adults and families. Paw Paw has a slightly higher proportion of children under 18 (24.1%) compared to the county and state.

Age

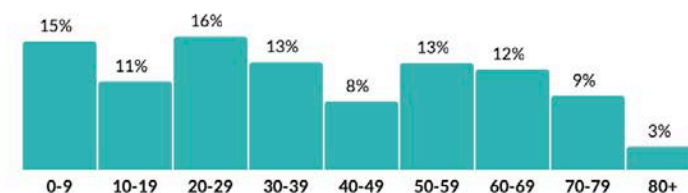
36.7

Median age

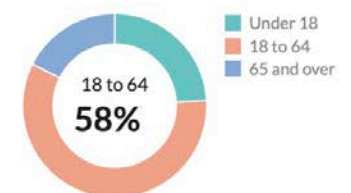
about 90 percent of the figure in Van Buren County: 41.2

about 90 percent of the figure in Michigan: 40.1

Population by age range



Population by age category



Population by age category

	Paw Paw	Van Buren County	Michigan
Under 18	24.1% 1,661	23.2% 17,523	21.4% 2,154,793
18 to 64	58.3% 4,015	57.5% 43,495	60.4% 6,071,895
65 and over	17.6% 1,210	19.4% 14,663	18.2% 1,824,907

Related to three main age categories: under 18 (children), 18 to 64 (adults), and 65 and over (seniors), the majority (58.3%) of residents fall in the adult category (18 to 64), followed by children (24.1%) and seniors (17.6%). Compared to Van Buren County and Michigan, Paw Paw has a slightly higher share of youth and fewer seniors, reinforcing the community's younger demographic profile.

Gender Distribution

The gender distribution in Paw Paw Township is close to even, with males making up 51.3% of the population and females 48.7%. This is a relatively balanced ratio and aligns closely with general national and state trends, offering no major demographic skew based on gender.

Racial and Ethnic Composition

Concerning racial and ethnic composition, Paw Paw Township and Van Buren County have a higher percentage of White residents (83.9% and 79.1%, respectively) than the state average (73%). Paw Paw shows slightly lower diversity compared to both the county and state. The Hispanic population in Paw Paw is 6.9%, which is slightly above Michigan's 5.7%, but well below Van Buren County's 12.2%. Other racial groups (Black, Asian, Native, etc.) make up relatively small portions of the local population.

Households & Household Types

Paw Paw Township has 2,760 households, with an average of 2.4 persons per household—matching state and county averages. A majority (55%) of households consist of married couples, while 24.5% are female-led households without a spouse present, which is notably higher than both the county and state averages. Non-family households represent 13.3% in Paw Paw, slightly below Michigan's 19%, indicating a stronger family-oriented community structure.

Households

2,760

Number of households

Van Buren County: 30,101

Michigan: 4,040,168

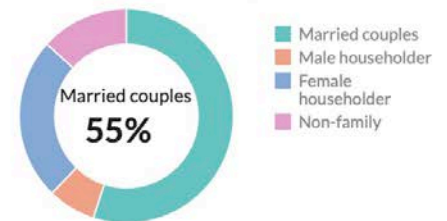
2.4

Persons per household

about the same as the figure in Van Buren County: 2.5

about the same as the figure in Michigan: 2.4

Population by household type



Population by household type

	Paw Paw		Van Buren County		Michigan	
Married couples	55%	3,692	62.5%	46,582	59.1%	5,813,278
Male householder	7.2%	485	6.5%	4,873	6.4%	625,467
Female householder	24.5%	1,641	16%	11,926	15.6%	1,531,608

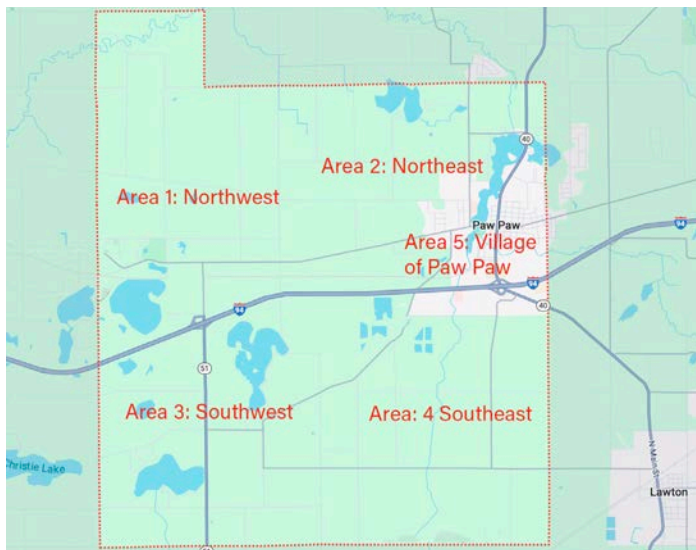
Community Survey

Overview

Paw Paw Township launched a community survey as part of its Master Plan update to gather meaningful input from residents on a variety of topics that will shape the Township’s future. The survey was designed to better understand public priorities related to land use, growth management, housing, natural resource protection, economic development, infrastructure, and overall quality of life. Community participation was essential to ensure that the updated Master Plan reflects the values, needs, and long-term vision of those who live and work in the Township. The feedback collected will help guide policy decisions, identify investment opportunities, and establish clear goals for growth and preservation.

Participants

Survey responses show that 35% of participants lived in the northwest quadrant of Paw Paw Township, followed by 25% in the southwest quadrant. The northeast and southeast quadrants had lower representation, with 10% and 6% of participants, respectively. Additionally, 10% of respondents lived within the Village of Paw Paw, and 13% lived outside both the Township and the Village.



The majority of survey participants were older adults, with 55% aged 65 and older, and an additional 22% between the ages of 55 and 64. The remaining 23% of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 54.

Additionally, 9% of respondents indicated they own a business in Paw Paw Township, while 6% reported being employed by a business located within the Township.

Priorities

Survey participants emphasized the importance of farmland preservation and maintaining the community’s rural character, identifying these as top priorities. Additionally, 60% of respondents indicated that environmental protection is the most important issue to them. Other topics, such as road improvements (41%), parks and recreation (35%), and property maintenance (31%), were viewed as less critical by comparison. Overall, the results demonstrate a clear community preference for prioritizing farmland preservation, rural character, and environmental protection in the development of master plan goals and objectives.

Topic Area Input

Additional survey responses related to specific topic areas and public sentiment are included throughout the following chapters of the Master Plan. These responses are intended to demonstrate how community input has directly influenced the development of the plan and helped justify its recommendations. Each chapter begins with a “What We Heard” summary that highlights key feedback from residents, and relevant survey data is incorporated throughout the text to provide context and support for the Township’s goals, principles, and action strategies.

Open House Event and Public Hearing

Public Outreach

Following completion of the draft Master Plan on November 4, 2025, the Township undertook a comprehensive public outreach effort to ensure residents and stakeholders were informed of the plan and provided meaningful opportunities to participate. Mailers were sent to all households within the Township announcing a public open house held on December 16, 2025. To further increase visibility and awareness, more than 20 yard signs were placed at key locations throughout the Township advertising both the open house and public hearing opportunities. More than 50 people participated in each event.



COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Paw Paw Township Master Plan Update

December 16, 2025

Open house from 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm. Presentation and questions/answers from 6:30 pm to 7:00 pm.

January 20, 2026

Open house from 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm. Presentation and official public hearing at 6:30 pm.

Please attend to learn about the Future Land Use Map and the plan's goals, principles, and recommendations.

Information:

<https://pawpawtownshipmi.gov/paw-paw-township-master-plan/> or contact Township Hall at 269-657-4340

Events

The December 16, 2025, open house was structured as a one-hour drop-in period that allowed for informal, one-on-one discussions with Township representatives and the planning team, followed by a formal presentation and a question-and-answer session to provide additional context and clarity on the draft plan.

The January 20, 2026, public hearing was also advertised through the same mailed notices and followed a similar format to encourage broad participation. The first hour was reserved for an open house and informal discussion, after which a formal presentation and the public hearing commenced at 6:30 p.m.

In addition to direct public outreach, the draft plan was distributed to adjacent jurisdictions and other relevant agencies in accordance with the 63-day notice and review requirements of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. Collectively, these efforts resulted in valuable public input and constructive interaction during both the open house and the public hearing. Comments and feedback received through these processes were carefully reviewed and incorporated, where appropriate, into the final draft of the Master Plan.

Input

In December and January, participants provided focused input on environmental protection, land use designations, and the overall direction of future growth. Significant emphasis was placed on safeguarding water quality, with concerns raised about runoff, fill, and development impacts, in particular from numerous landowners around Lake Cora.

Strong concerns were expressed regarding the potential scale and intensity of commercial development along County Road 671 between Interstate 94 and Red Arrow Highway. Participants urged the Township to assess commercial designations, particularly where they overlap with wetlands or environmentally sensitive areas, and to clearly articulate and document its long-term intent for small-scale, locally oriented commercial uses.

The hearing included opposition to battery energy storage systems and data centers, as well as concern with solar and wind installations and compatibility with agricultural lands. There was also strong support for an Agricultural Residential future land use designation south of the Village and aligning the Zoning Map with the proposed Future Land Use Map. Additional comments focused on preserving rural character and addressing potential conflicts between new residential development, land divisions, and ongoing farming operations.

Changes Based on Input

- Adjusted the waterfront designation on the west side of Three Mile Lake to reflect wetlands and a working farm property.
- Added a summary of public hearing comments to Chapter 2.
- Included intent statements for all commercial and industrial categories on the Future Land Use Map.
- Included a recommendations regarding a zoning district aligned with the Mixed Business Commercial designation that limits higher-impact uses.
- Included concerns regarding battery energy storage systems.
- Revised solar and wind energy language to acknowledge the local authority limited by Public Act 233 and striking a balance between these facilities and farmland preservation.
- Added zoning recommendations to limit data centers by scale and restrict them to industrial districts.
- Included an action for Township-initiated rezoning in priority areas, such as south of the Village.
- Clarified recommendations in Chapter 3, including the 1-unit-per-10-acre policy and limited smaller-lot allowances.





Chapter 3.

Farming and Nature

Preserve the Township's farmland, forests, and water quality through policies and incentives that protect rural character, maintain environmental sustainability, and balance growth with conservation.

Overview

This chapter focuses on the Township's natural resources, including farmland, forests, and water systems, which are central to Paw Paw Township's rural identity and environmental health. Community input strongly reflects a shared commitment to protecting these resources. Survey participants overwhelmingly supported efforts to preserve farmland and working farms, safeguard water quality, and explore additional protections for forested areas. These priorities underscore the importance of proactive planning and policy development to maintain the Township's rural character, support local agriculture, and ensure long-term environmental sustainability.

Agriculture

Farm Data

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, Van Buren County had 838 farms, down from 850 in 2017. The average farm size was 157 acres. Crop production represented 71% of sales, while livestock and related products made up 29%. The primary crops were corn and soybeans.

What We Heard

- **92% of participants supported the township investigating regulations and policies to further protect farmland.**
- **91% agreed the township should investigate policies to protect water quality, including groundwater, lakes, streams, and wetlands.**
- **87% felt it is very important to preserve working farms in the township.**
- **87% supported the township exploring additional protections for forested land.**

Conditions and Challenges

Paw Paw Township has historically benefited from its sandy loam soils, which are especially well-suited for fruit production. Apples, cherries, and grapes were once common and economically viable crops, particularly in areas of higher elevation. Today, the agricultural landscape has shifted, with corn and soybeans becoming more prevalent, especially in the southern portion of the Township. Prime farmland in Paw Paw Township is shown on **Map 2**.

However, the agricultural sector faces growing challenges. Economic pressures, including fluctuating market prices, have made fruit production less viable. In addition, climate-related impacts, such as increased freeze-thaw cycles, have further limited the reliability and profitability of fruit crops. As a result, farmland is increasingly vulnerable to development pressure, particularly when land values are low. These trends threaten the Township’s long-term agricultural potential and the rural character it helps define.

High-priority agricultural management areas are concentrated in the southern part of the Township. These areas are linked to many of the agricultural pollutants affecting water quality in the Paw Paw River Watershed.

Opportunities

Despite current economic conditions, preserving farmland remains a critical priority. Global markets and regional demand may shift over time, and it is essential to ensure that prime agricultural land, especially fruit-growing areas on higher ground, remains available for future cultivation. Preservation efforts must also respect property rights, recognizing that farmers should retain the flexibility to sell or develop their land as they see fit. A balanced approach to farmland protection will help ensure that agriculture remains a viable option for future generations while accommodating individual landowner needs.

Land Use and Growth Considerations

Future land use planning must align with the realities of infrastructure availability. High-density residential or commercial development is not feasible without access to public water and sewer systems. Accordingly, the Township should direct growth to areas where this infrastructure already exists or is planned and funded—primarily near the Village limits. Areas designated for higher-intensity uses in previous

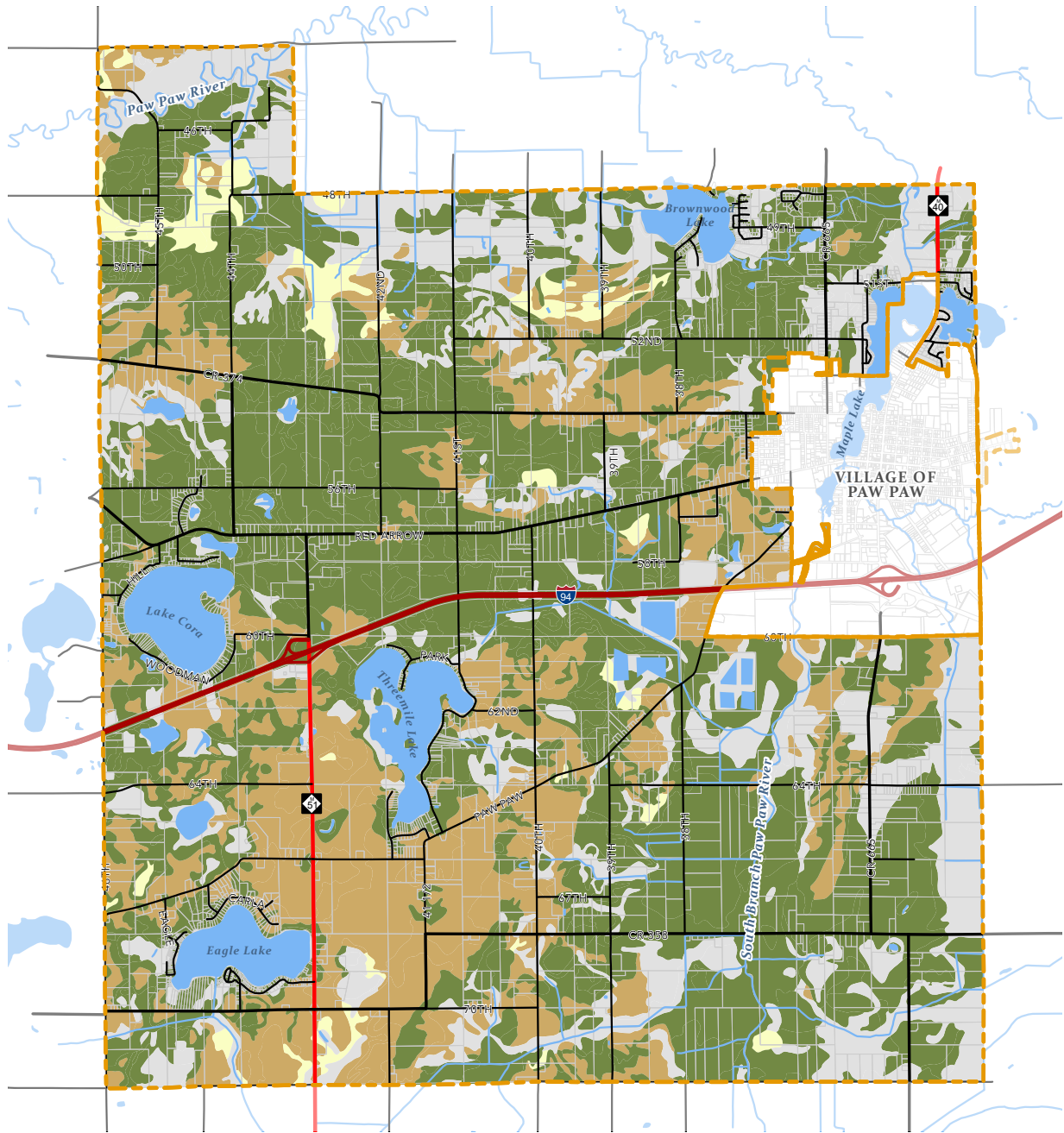
plans should be reconsidered if utility expansion is not likely.

Additionally, current zoning regulations, such as the 10-acre minimum lot size, present challenges for sustainable development. Allowing for smaller lot splits, such as one- to two-acre parcels, may offer a more practical approach, supporting modest rural development while reducing pressure on large agricultural tracts. Future growth strategies should reflect a balance between preserving farmland, managing infrastructure costs, and supporting land use patterns that align with the Township’s long-term goals.

“Agricultural Residential” areas noted on **Map 11 Future Land Use** are intended to provide limited opportunities for residential land division while preserving large, contiguous areas of farmland and maintaining the long-term viability of agricultural operations. This approach allows a minimal number of approximately one-acre land divisions to enable farmers or large landowners to split off house lots without impacting extensive swaths of productive farmland, while avoiding the creation of larger residential lots that may be incompatible with adjacent farming activities.

Overall residential density in Agricultural Residential areas is intended to remain low and should average approximately one dwelling unit per ten acres. This framework is specifically designed to avoid the historic practice of widespread ten-acre splits that gradually remove farmland from production or encourage encroachment into active agricultural areas. A limited number of smaller lots may be considered only where the overall density objective is met and agricultural preservation goals continue to be maintained.

Map 2. Paw Paw Township Prime Farmland



Prime Farmland

- All areas are prime farmland
- Prime farmland if drained
- Farmland of local importance
- Not prime farmland



0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Paw Paw Township
Van Buren County, MI

Water Resources

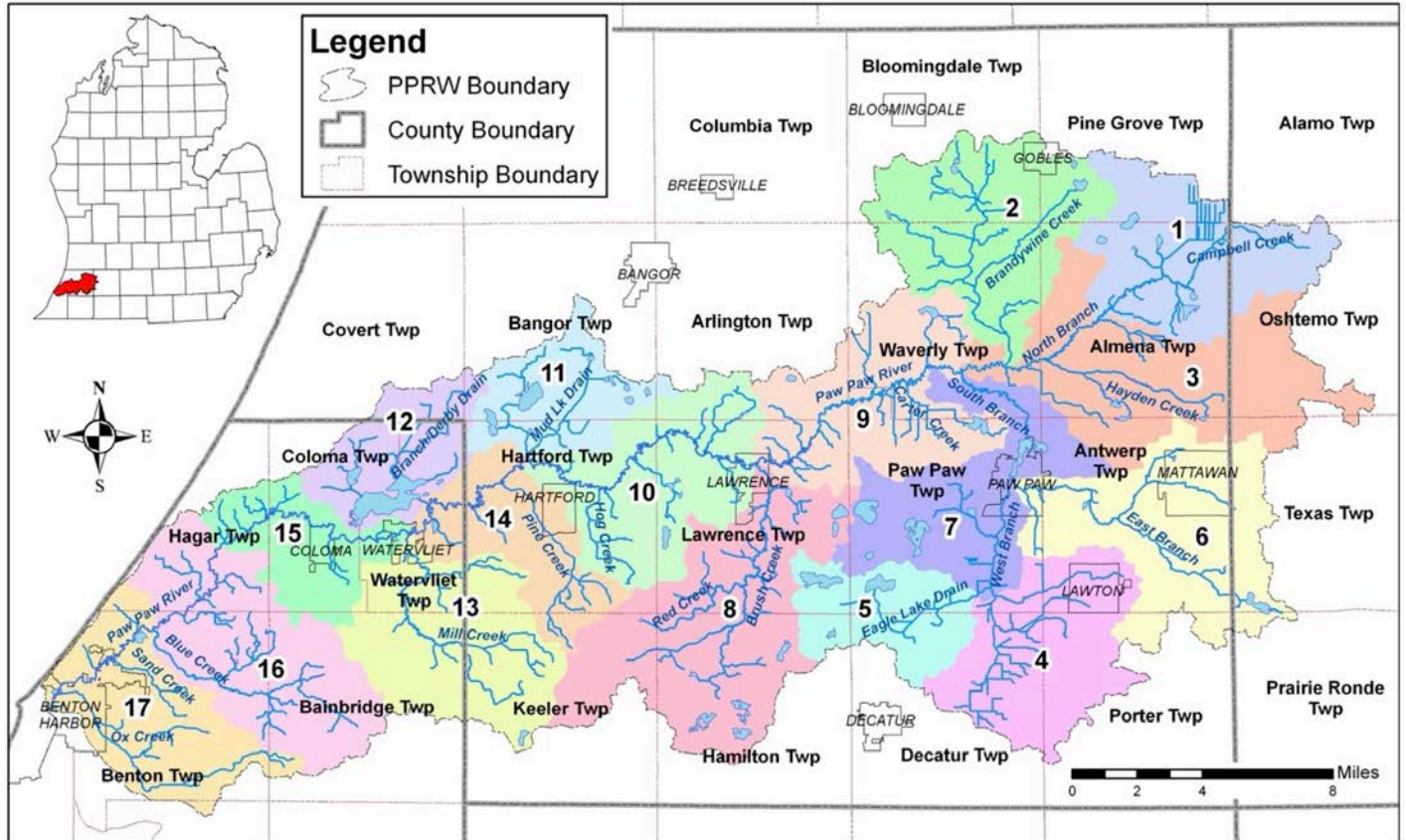
Paw Paw River Watershed

Paw Paw Township lies entirely within the Paw Paw River Watershed and includes approximately 9.1 miles of river and 1,131 acres of lakes and ponds—the largest surface water area of any jurisdiction within the watershed. The watershed is a priority for protection and preservation among southern Michigan watersheds due to the relatively high percentage of natural land cover that remains despite increasing development pressure throughout the region. The Paw Paw River flows through the township’s northwest corner.

Three subwatersheds, Maple Lake and South Branch, Carter Creek, Mainstem, and West Branch, are located in the Township. The southern portion drains into Eagle Lake Drain, Lawton Drain, and West Branch, which feed into Maple Lake and the South Branch subwatershed. Over two-thirds of this subwatershed lies within the Township, making it the largest within the local boundary (see **Map 3**).

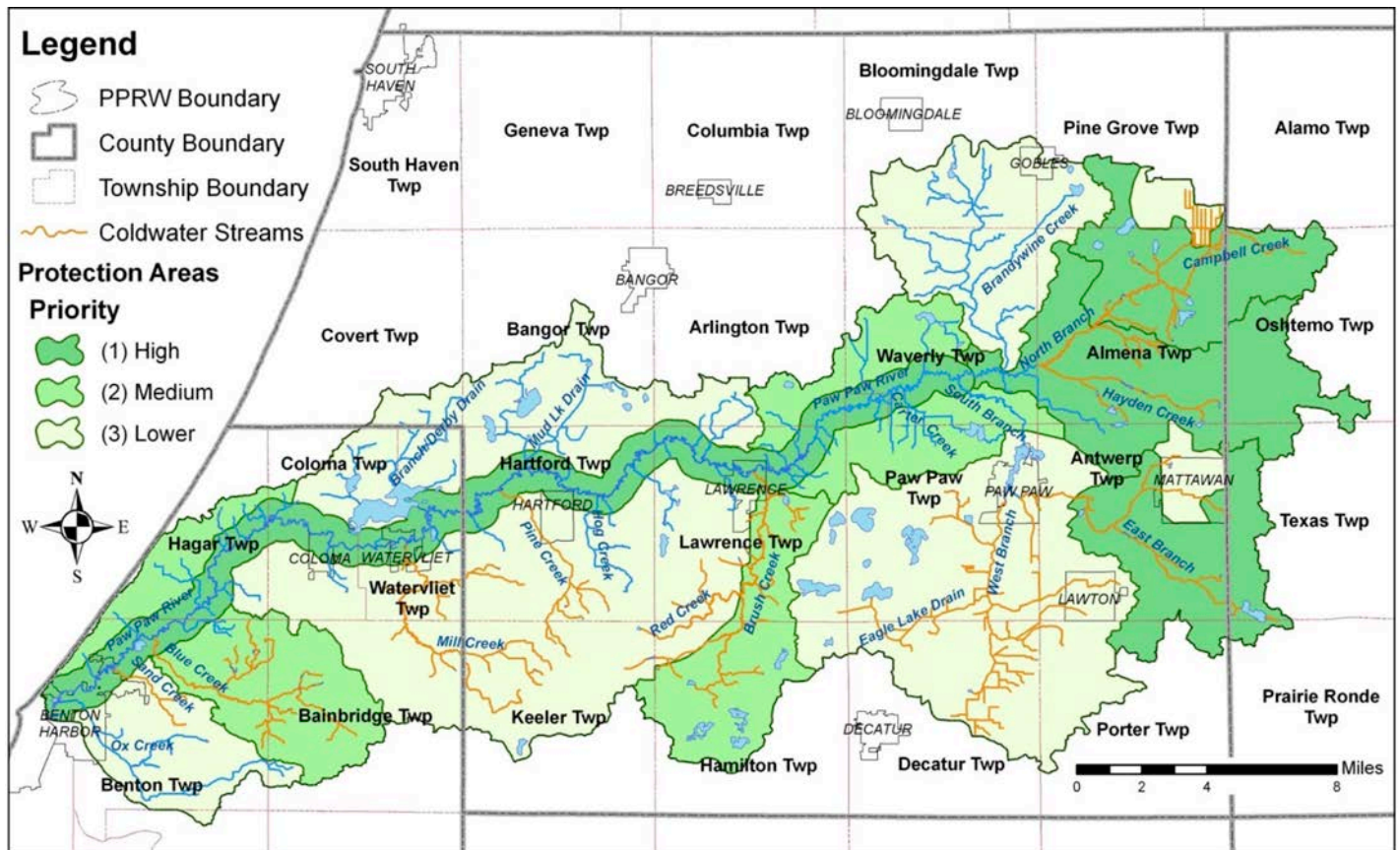
The West Branch of the river flows north into Maple Lake, then into the South Branch, and eventually connects with the mainstem in Waverly Township.

Map 3. Paw Paw River Subwatersheds



Source: Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plan, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC)

Map 4. Paw Paw Township Watershed Protection Areas



Source: Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plan, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC)

The northern part of the Township drains into the Carter Creek and Mainstem subwatersheds, which are considered high- and medium-priority areas for watershed protection. Other parts of the Township are of lower priority (see **Map 4**).

Lakes

Paw Paw Township contains several major lakes, each with unique characteristics and water flow patterns (see **Map 5**):

- **Lake Cora:** 234 acres, elevation 751 ft, bidirectional flow, 60 ft max depth, public access, no sewer.
- **Eagle Lake:** 196 acres, elevation 755 ft, outflow, 60 ft max depth, public access, no sewer.
- **Threemile Lake:** 258 acres, elevation 754 ft, bidirectional flow, 40 ft max depth, public access, no sewer.
- **Brownwood Lake:** 124 acres, elevation 696 ft, throughflow, 44 ft max depth, public access, sewer service.
- **Maple Lake:** 166 acres, elevation unknown, throughflow, 15 ft max depth, sewer service; public access uncertain.

Outflow refers to a condition where water flows out of a water body without receiving inflow from another source. Throughflow describes water movement through a water body, typically originating from a stream or uphill source. Bidirectional flow occurs when both inflow and outflow are present, with patterns that vary depending on the rise and fall of lake or reservoir levels.

Sewer access is limited, with only Brownwood and Maple Lakes currently served.

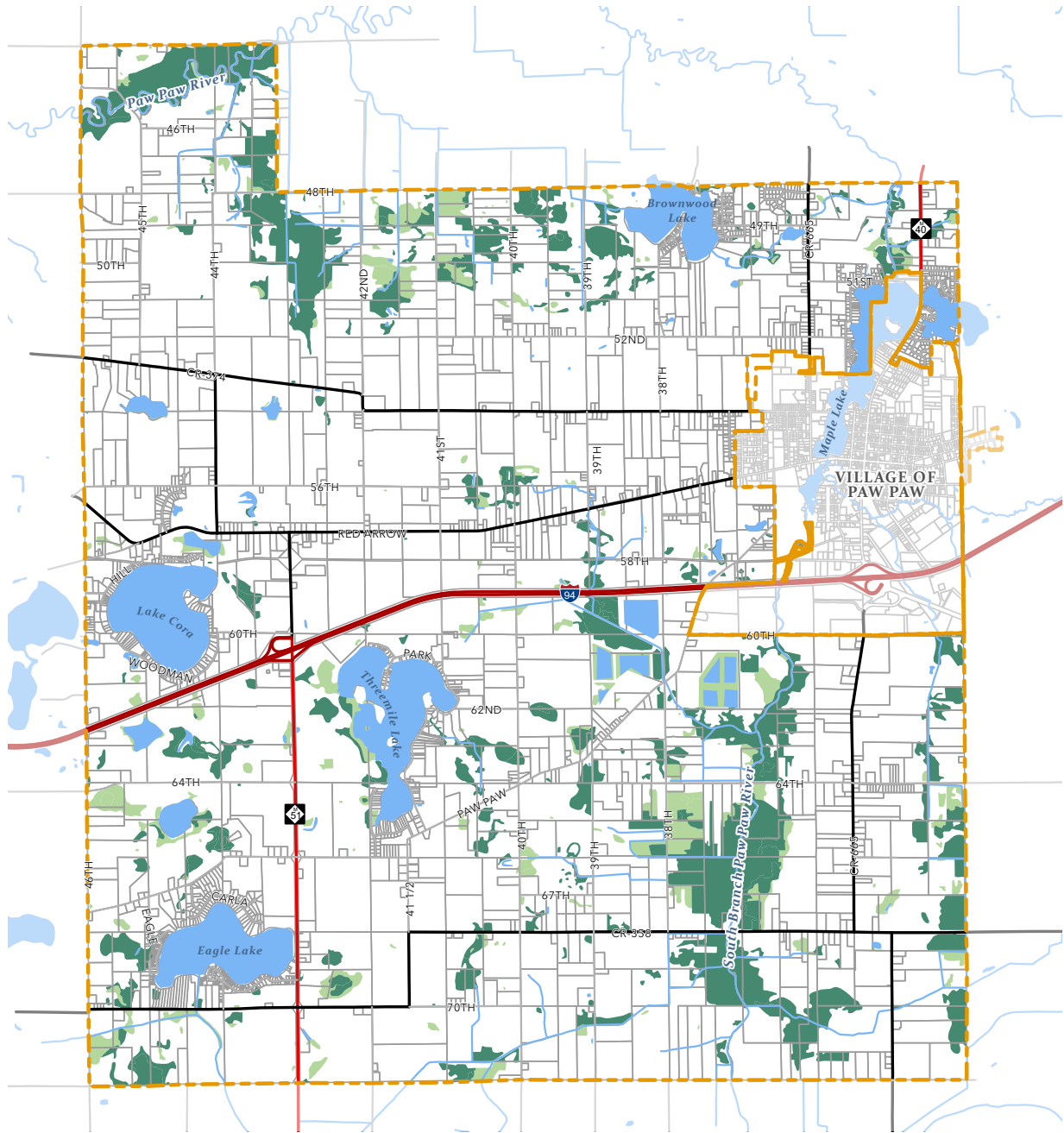
Wetlands

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) states that wetlands are important features in the landscape that provide numerous beneficial services for people, fish, and wildlife, including protecting and improving water quality, providing fish and wildlife habitats, storing floodwaters, and maintaining surface water flow during dry periods. **Map 5** shows freshwater emergent and freshwater forested/shrub wetlands in Paw Paw Township.

Since settlement, nearly 50% of the watershed's wetlands in the Paw Paw River Watershed have been lost due to ditching, agriculture, and drainage. Wetlands of "high significance" are primarily located in the southeast portion of the Township along the West Branch of the Paw Paw River. These wetlands are classified as significant due to three key functions: flood water storage, nutrient transformation, and sediment retention.

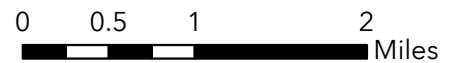
- **Floodwater Storage:** Wetlands help reduce flood risks by storing excess water during storm events, minimizing damage to roads and nearby properties.
- **Nutrient Transformation:** Wetlands enhance water quality by naturally processing and breaking down nutrients before they enter streams and other water bodies.
- **Sediment and Particulate Retention:** Acting as natural filters, wetlands trap sediment and pollutants, improving the quality of both surface and groundwater.

Map 5. Paw Paw Township Water Resources



Water Resources

- Freshwater Emergent Wetland
- Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland
- Lakes
- Stream and Rivers



Paw Paw Township
Van Buren County, MI

Wetlands in Michigan are regulated by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), under specific criteria, including size, connectivity to surface waters, and ecological importance.

- Connected to one of the Great Lakes.
- Located within 1,000 feet of one of the Great Lakes.
- Connected to an inland lake, pond, river, or stream.
- Located within 500 feet of an inland lake, pond, river, or stream.
- Not connected to one of the Great Lakes or an inland lake, pond, stream, or river, but are more than 5 acres in size.
- Not connected to one of the Great Lakes, or an inland lake, pond, stream, or river, and less than 5 acres in size, but are determined that these wetlands are essential to the preservation of the state's natural resources and has notified the property owner.

Although few jurisdictions in Michigan have adopted wetland protection ordinances, many protect wetlands with setback and buffer requirements.

Groundwater

Groundwater contamination risks vary by land use. In urban settings, threats include waste disposal, road salting, and hazardous materials. In rural areas, threats include animal waste, septic system failure, and overuse of fertilizers and pesticides.

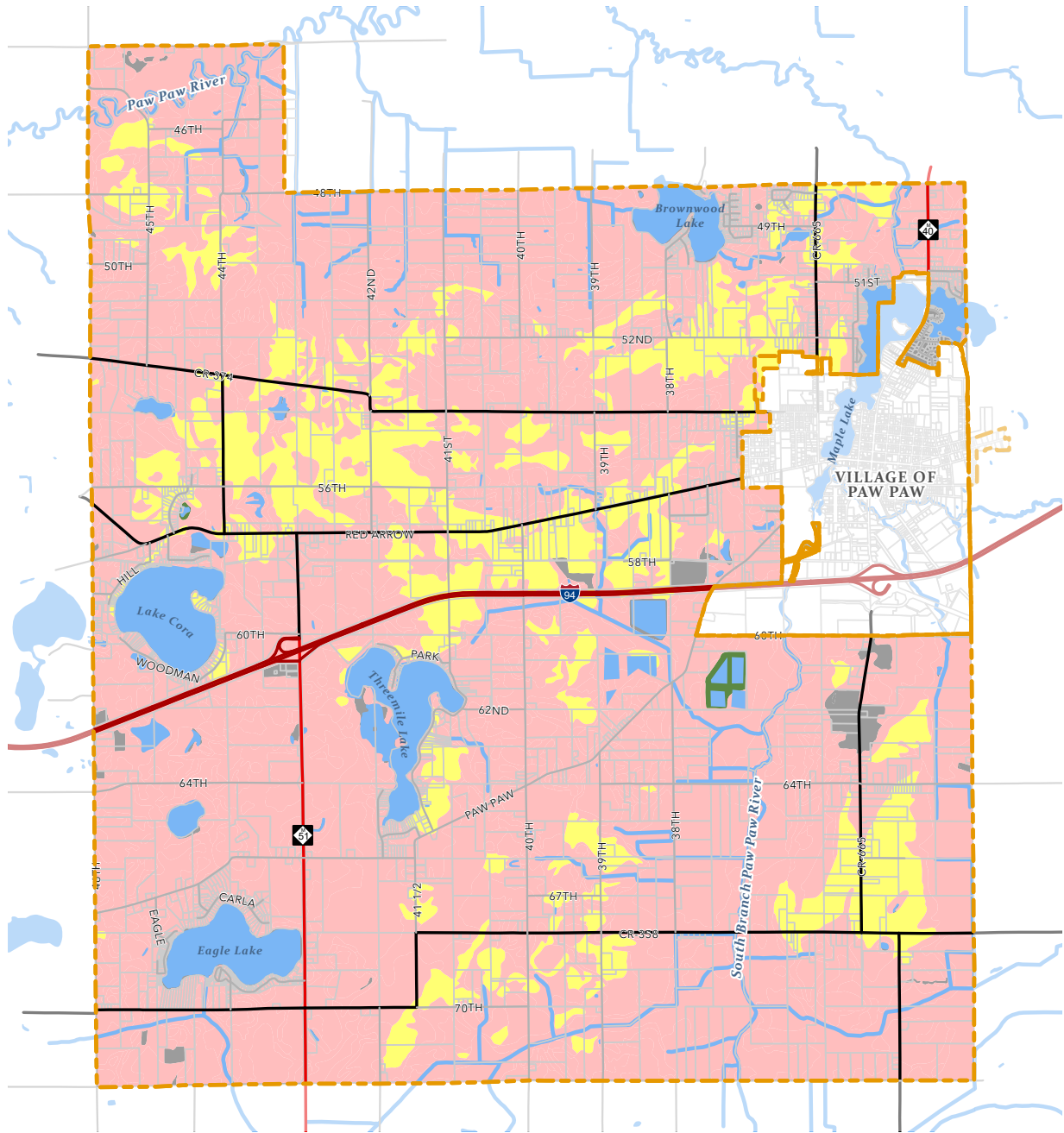
The State of Michigan's Wellhead Protection Program identifies and safeguards areas that contribute water to public supply wells. The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) has designated four wellhead protection areas in the Township. In cooperation with the Village of Paw Paw, the Township should consider a wellhead protection ordinance to protect groundwater and public supply wells.

Stormwater Drainage

The Van Buren County Drain Commissioner is responsible for managing and maintaining the county's stormwater drainage systems to protect public health, safety, and welfare while serving as a steward of natural and financial resources. Guided by Michigan's Drain Code (Act 40 of 1956), the office oversees more than 550 county drains, including open ditches, streams, underground pipes, retention ponds, and swales, as well as 11 regulated lake levels. Duties include reviewing and approving stormwater systems for new developments, administering the Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Program, and coordinating lake-level inspections every three years. The office plays a vital role in flood prevention, stormwater management, and environmental protection, using both proactive maintenance programs and public processes to ensure the county's drainage infrastructure remains effective and sustainable.

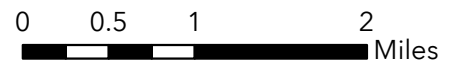
Protecting Paw Paw Township's water resources is critical to sustaining the community's natural environment and quality of life. Stormwater runoff is a major source of water pollution, eroding streambanks, degrading wildlife habitat, and negatively affecting local lakes, rivers, and wetlands.

Map 6. Paw Paw Township Septic Suitability



Septic Suitability

- Not rated
- Not limited
- Somewhat limited
- Very limited



Paw Paw Township
Van Buren County, MI

Low Impact Development (LID) offers a sustainable way to address these issues by managing rainwater where it falls, rather than relying solely on traditional drainage systems. By incorporating techniques such as infiltration, filtration, storage, and evaporation, LID helps to mimic the natural water cycle that existed before land development. These strategies can be tailored to local site conditions and regulations, making them flexible for different development scenarios.

Soils

Hydrologic Soil Groups

Hydrologic soil groups help identify areas critical for groundwater recharge. The upper and middle portions of the Paw Paw River Watershed consist predominantly of Group A soils, which are sandy and loamy with high infiltration rates and low runoff potential. These soil types facilitate groundwater recharge and support moderate groundwater inputs into the Paw Paw River system. These inputs are essential for regulating stream temperatures and sustaining flow.

Hydric Soils

Another important characteristic of soils is whether they are considered hydric. Hydric soils are defined as poorly or somewhat poorly drained soils. These soils are one of the indicators of wetlands, but many have been drained for building or agricultural purposes. Although wetland regulations do not apply to

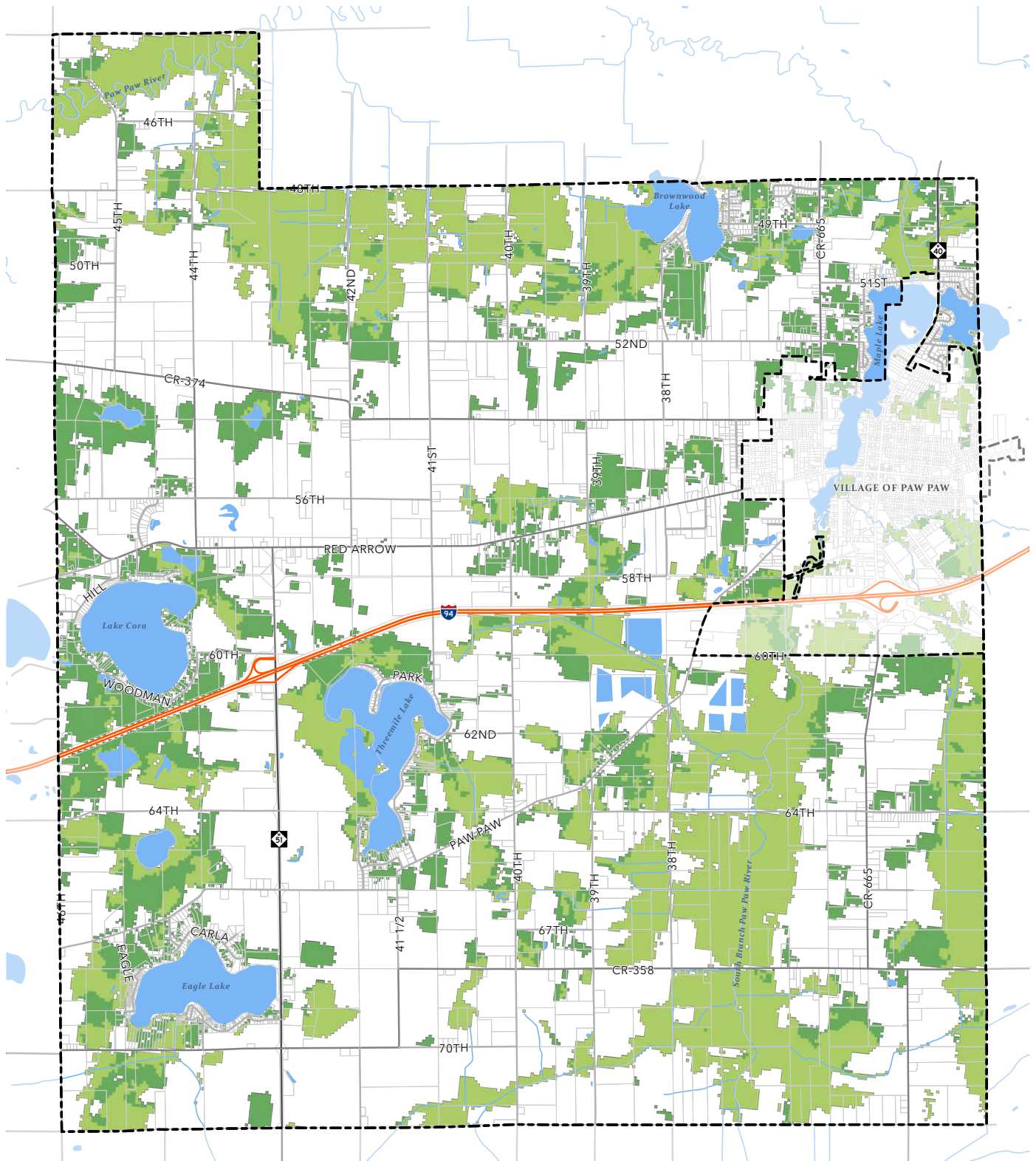
all hydric soil areas, they are poorly suited for development, especially for septic fields. Septic systems installed in areas with unsuitable soils are prone to failure, which can lead to nutrient and bacteria pollution of groundwater and surface water.

According to soil maps, most of Paw Paw Township is not well-suited for septic systems. Proper maintenance of existing septic systems is important to prevent contamination of both surface and groundwater resources (see **Map 6**).

Forests

Forestlands help regulate water flow, stabilize hydrology, and support biodiversity. Tree canopy and forest soils reduce runoff and promote infiltration. The most intact forested areas are near streams, rivers, and the Paw Paw River's headwaters. Forests are composed of species such as beech, sugar maple, red oak, basswood, tulip tree, black cherry, and hickory. Upland forests tend to contain oak-hickory associations on drier soils. See **Map 7** for primary forested areas.

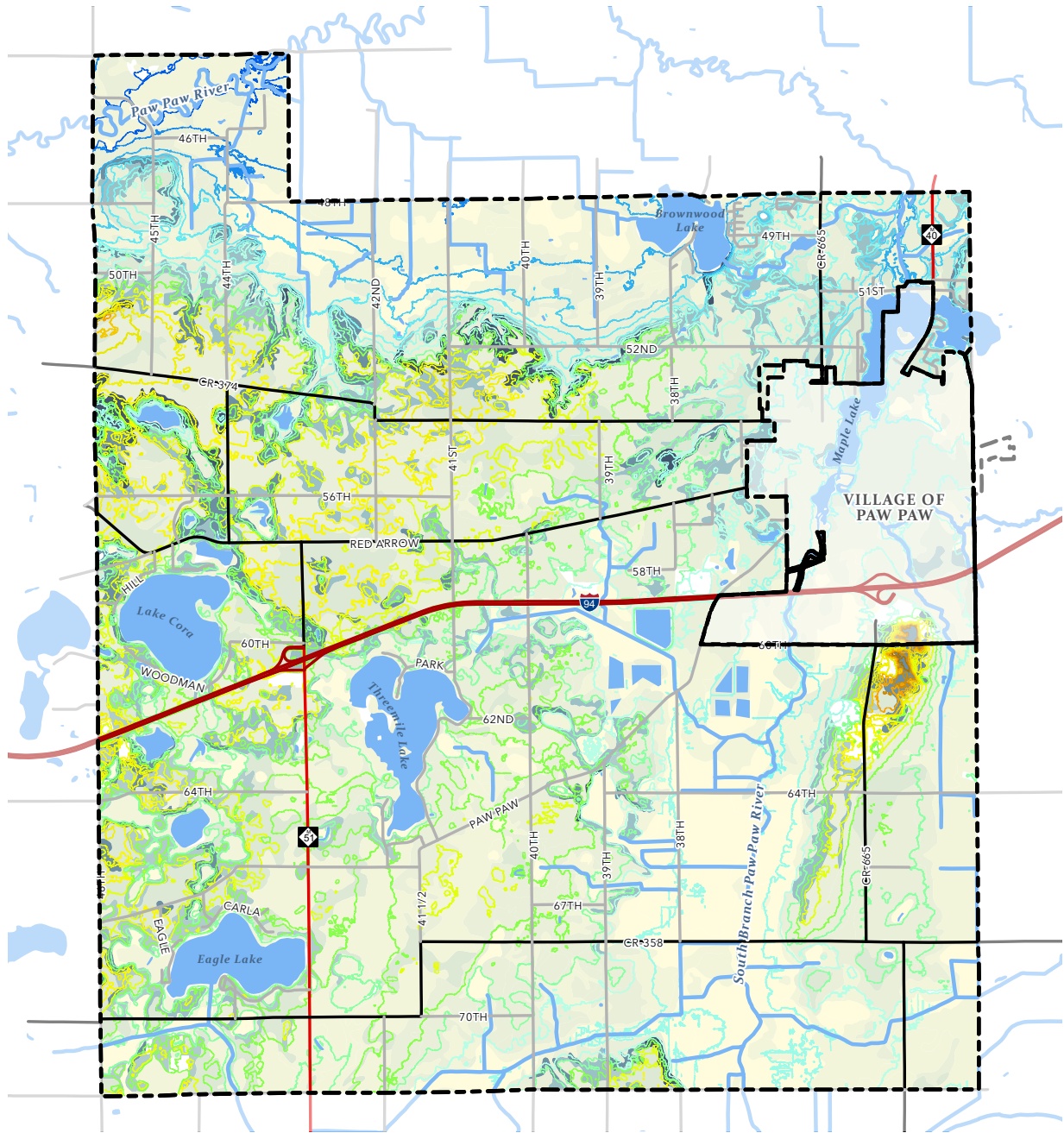
Map 7. Paw Paw Township Forest Land



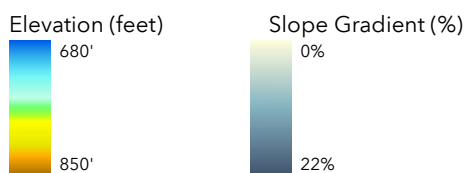
- Township Boundary
- Lakes and Streams
- Parcels
- Forest Lands
- Interstate Highway
- Wooded Wetlands



Map 8. Paw Paw Township Elevation & Topography



Elevation & Topography



Paw Paw Township
 Van Buren County, MI

Topography

Understanding elevation, slope, and topography is crucial in the Master Plan process because these physical features directly shape where and how a community can grow and thrive. Topographic maps allow planners to visualize elevation changes and drainage patterns, helping identify areas prone to flooding, erosion, or unstable soils.

This information guides decisions on where to place infrastructure like roads, bridges, utilities, and green spaces in a way that aligns with the natural landscape. High slopes or uneven terrain can significantly increase construction and maintenance costs, so mapping these features early helps direct development to more suitable locations. Incorporating topographic analysis into planning ensures safer, more sustainable, and cost-effective outcomes while protecting the environment. See **Map 8** for elevation, topography, and slope gradient.

Farming and Nature Principles

- 1. *Protect and Preserve Prime Farmland:*** Protect the Township's high-quality agricultural soils and prime farmland to ensure the future viability of specialty crops and traditional farming. Guide development away from prime farmland and high-priority agricultural management areas, especially in the southern portion of the Township. Discourage development practices that fragment, isolate, or threaten the viability of working farms. Prioritize clustering housing away from farms when possible. Encourage and support the preservation of farmland through the State of Michigan's Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program.
- 2. *Balance Agricultural Viability with Landowner Rights:*** Support farmland preservation while respecting the rights of farmers to make decisions about their land, recognizing the need for a balanced, voluntary approach. Promote and participate in local, regional, and state farmland preservation initiatives.
- 3. *Direct Growth to Areas with Existing or Planned Infrastructure.*** Focus higher-density residential and commercial development near the Village limits or in areas with available or planned water and sewer service to reduce pressure on farmland and rural areas.

4. **Safeguard Water Resources and Watershed Health:** Protect the Paw Paw River Watershed, including its subwatersheds, lakes, streams, and tributaries, by prioritizing water quality in all land use, development, and infrastructure decisions. Emphasize the protection of lakes and nearshore environments from runoff, erosion, and nutrient pollution to preserve ecological health, recreational value, and community identity.
5. **Preserve and Restore Wetlands for Ecosystem Services:** Recognize the critical role wetlands play in flood mitigation, nutrient filtration, and water quality.
6. **Protect Groundwater and Public Water Supply:** Prevent contamination of groundwater and promote best practices for septic system use and maintenance, especially in areas with hydric or poorly drained soils.
7. **Protect and Connect Forested and Natural Areas:** Preserve large forest tracts, riparian corridors, and wetlands to maintain biodiversity, water quality, and climate resilience. Prioritize land use decisions that support habitat connectivity and limit fragmentation. Encourage conservation-oriented development and protect forestlands near rivers and streams to promote ecosystem health and watershed stability.

8. **Consider Soils in Land Use Planning:** Recognize the limitations of hydric soils for septic systems and avoid development in areas prone to septic failure and groundwater contamination.
9. **Incorporate Topographic Constraints into Land Use Planning:** Use elevation, slope, and drainage information to guide development to suitable locations and avoid erosion, flooding, and costly infrastructure challenges.

Recommendations

1. **Farmland Preservation Zoning:** Implement farmland preservation strategies for the Agricultural Farmland Preservation Zoning District. This should include, but not be limited to, amendments to minimum lot areas, dimensions, and other standards that support long-term agricultural use.
2. **Update Conservation and Open Space Provisions:** Remove the existing Conservation/Open Space zoning district and develop new zoning strategies, development standards, and subdivision regulations that prioritize the preservation of natural resources and open space. Encourage clustering of development in areas most suitable for building while protecting priority lands.
3. **Low-Impact Development (LID) Practices:** Review, evaluate, and integrate LID strategies into the development review process to balance reasonable land development with the environmental goals established in the Master Plan.



4. Watershed and Riparian Protection:

Explore the creation of an environmental protection overlay district or a riparian/wetland protection ordinance to safeguard the Paw Paw River and its tributaries. Control land use intensity in this area.

5. Wellhead Protection: Assess and consider establishing a wellhead protection overlay district to protect groundwater resources serving community wells.

6. Landscaping and Tree Preservation Standards: Update the landscaping requirements for buffer areas, parking lots, and yards. Prioritize the preservation of healthy, mature trees while supplementing with new plantings in front yards and buffer areas. Include provisions for landscaped islands and peninsulas to break up large parking areas and maintain habitat value.

7. Farmland and Natural Resource Information Hub:

Serve as a central resource for information and guidance related to farmland preservation and natural resource protection programs.



Chapter 4.

Housing

Encourage a variety of housing options, including affordable and senior housing, to meet the needs of workers, families, and retirees while ensuring development aligns with the Township's rural identity and infrastructure capacity.

Overview

Housing in Paw Paw Township plays a key role in shaping community character, supporting quality of life, and guiding future growth. Community input highlighted the need to focus residential development near existing infrastructure and the Village limits, preserve rural and agricultural lands, and provide a mix of housing options that meet changing demographic needs. This chapter outlines policies to manage growth responsibly, maintain rural identity, and ensure housing remains accessible and diverse for all residents.

What We Heard

- *82% of participants felt the Township is somewhat affordable compared to neighboring jurisdictions.*
- *Only 11% felt the township is not affordable, while 7% considered it very affordable.*
- *60% of respondents believed there is enough housing for workers, growing families, and others seeking to live in the township.*
- *40% felt there is not enough housing for these groups or for existing residents wishing to relocate within the Township.*
- *69% indicated that single-family homes are the most needed housing type.*
- *Other housing types with notable support included:*
 - *Senior housing (31%)*
 - *Apartments (26%)*
 - *Townhouses (25%)*
 - *Minimal support was shown for accessory dwellings, live-work units, duplexes, nursing homes, manufactured home communities, and RV parks.*

Data

Overall Count

Paw Paw has 3,313 housing units, with 83% occupancy and a 66% owner-occupancy rate. Most homes are single-unit structures (73%), and approximately a quarter are mobile or multi-unit homes. Occupancy and ownership rates align closely with regional trends. The majority of residents moved in between 2010 and 2020, showing housing stability and moderate recent growth.

Moves

This chart displays the percentage of residents in Paw Paw Township, Van Buren County, and Michigan based on when they moved into their current homes. In Paw Paw, the largest groups moved in during 2010-2017 (27.4%) and 2018-2020 (27.3%), reflecting a recent wave of residential mobility. Only 5.1% of residents have moved in since 2021. Compared to broader trends, Paw Paw has slightly fewer long-term residents (before 1990) and a higher percentage of people who moved in during the past decade.

Units & Occupancy

3,313

Number of housing units

Van Buren County: 37,243

Michigan: 4,599,683

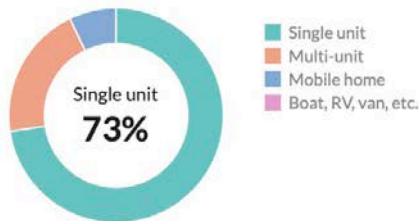
Occupied vs. Vacant



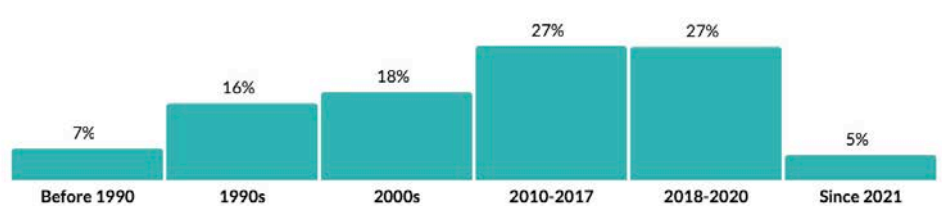
Ownership of occupied units



Types of structure



Year moved in, by percentage of population



Geographic Mobility

This geographic mobility chart shows that 91.1% of Paw Paw residents lived in the same house one year ago, suggesting a stable population. Mobility is lower than both Van Buren County (90.6%) and Michigan (88.4%). Only small percentages of residents moved from the same county (2.5%), a different county (4.1%), a different state (1.7%), or abroad (0.7%), indicating relatively limited population turnover.

Geographical mobility

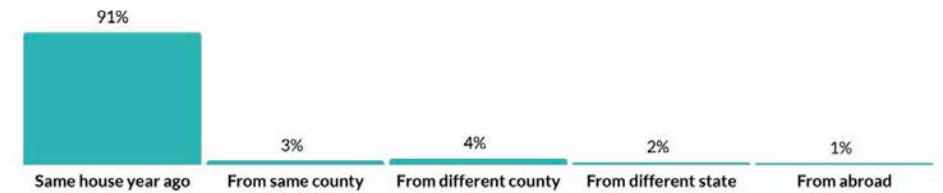
8.9%

Moved since previous year

a little less than the rate in Van Buren County:
9.4%

about three-quarters of the rate in Michigan:
11.6%

Population migration since previous year



Population migration since previous year

	Paw Paw		Van Buren County		Michigan	
Same house year ago	91.1%	6,256	90.6%	67,875	88.4%	8,792,192
From same county	2.5%	172	3.9%	2,948	6.3%	628,282
From different county	4.1%	282	3.5%	2,595	3.5%	348,607
From different state	1.7%	114	1.8%	1,379	1.4%	140,451
From abroad	0.7%	45	0.2%	119	0.4%	39,847

Value

The median home value in Paw Paw is \$180,900—slightly lower than Van Buren County (\$189,900) and notably lower than Michigan (\$217,600). Most homes fall within the \$100K-\$200K range (41.5%), with fewer higher-end properties. These numbers suggest that Paw Paw has relatively affordable housing compared to broader regional markets.

Value

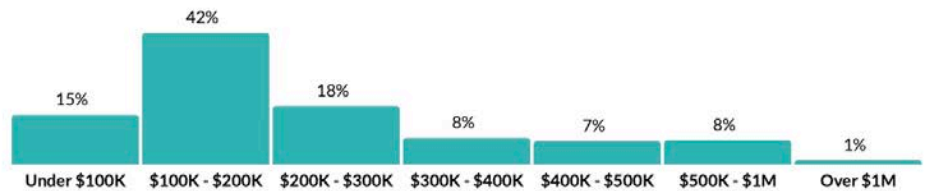
\$180,900

Median value of owner-occupied housing units

a little less than the amount in Van Buren County:
\$189,900

about 80 percent of the amount in Michigan:
\$217,600

Value of owner-occupied housing units



Value of owner-occupied housing units

	Paw Paw		Van Buren County		Michigan	
Under \$100K	15.5%	284	20.7%	5,013	18.2%	536,066
\$100K - \$200K	41.5%	761	33.1%	8,009	27%	796,290
\$200K - \$300K	18.4%	337	21.8%	5,286	24.3%	716,676
\$300K - \$400K	8.3%	152	11.2%	2,708	13.5%	397,750
\$400K - \$500K	7.4%	136	5.6%	1,348	7.5%	220,226
\$500K - \$1M	7.6%	140	6.5%	1,570	8%	236,374
Over \$1M	1.3%	23	0.5%	128	0.9%	25,685

State of Michigan Housing Priorities

Michigan's inaugural 2022 Statewide Housing Plan addresses the complex challenges of housing affordability, accessibility, and equity. Developed through extensive collaboration with thousands of residents and hundreds of organizations, the plan outlines five statewide housing targets, eight priority areas, 37 goals, and 134 suggested strategies. Key objectives include creating or rehabilitating over 75,000 housing units, stabilizing housing for more than 100,000 households, reducing equity gaps in homeownership and homelessness, and enhancing home energy efficiency for over 15,000 households.

The plan emphasizes equity and racial justice, aims to prevent and end homelessness, and seeks to strengthen Michigan's housing ecosystem. Implementation will involve statewide and regional partnerships and local government involvement.

Consistent with the state efforts, the Township has committed to the adoption of land use policies, master plan updates, zoning text amendments, and similar actions to encourage increasing housing supply and affordability. However, the Township's strategy is measured and managed, meaning that denser residential developments are planned on the boundaries of the Village of Paw Paw where they are closer to public utilities and infrastructure. A limited and incremental approach to residential growth is anticipated by this plan. Housing strategies must align with the Township's vision and goals related to agricultural preservation and environmental protection.

Conservation Subdivisions and Cluster Development

Conservation Subdivisions

Conservation subdivisions are residential developments that incorporate preserved farmland and natural areas as fundamental parts of the design. They feature smaller residential lots arranged to provide access to shared open space, working farms, gardens, or natural habitat. These developments often include opportunities for community interaction with the land through agricultural activity, environmental education, or local food production. Their intent is to maintain rural character and establish a direct connection between residents and the surrounding landscape.

Cluster Development

Cluster development is a land use approach that groups homes on smaller lots to preserve a larger portion of the site as open space. This design reduces the extent of infrastructure while retaining undeveloped land that may include fields, woodlands, or common open space. Unlike conservation subdivisions, cluster development does not require agricultural use or community programming on preserved land.

Michigan Zoning Enabling Act

Michigan's Zoning Enabling Act includes a form of cluster development by allowing landowners to develop residential property with the same number of dwelling units on a reduced portion of the land (not more than half of the land area). A local ordinance must permit this option so long as the total units do not exceed what would otherwise be allowed on the full parcel under existing regulations.

While the Zoning Enabling Act provides a basic mechanism for cluster development, the Township may consider other approaches that go beyond this right. These may include conservation subdivisions or other land preservation techniques that incorporate agriculture, natural resource protection, or broader rural character objectives.

Housing Principles

- 1. Guide Housing Growth with Infrastructure:** Focus higher-density and multifamily housing in areas served by public water and sewer systems. Direct growth where infrastructure already exists or is nearby to avoid costly extensions and ensure efficient service delivery.
- 2. Encourage Development Near the Village:** Promote residential development near the Village of Paw Paw and other already developed areas to support compact, efficient growth patterns and reduce pressure on rural and agricultural lands.
- 3. Maintain Rural Character While Accommodating Growth:** Allow for a range of housing options that meet community needs while preserving the Township's natural resources, farmland, and open space. Balance new development with long-term land stewardship.
- 4. Plan for Long-Term Housing Needs:** Monitor changing demographics and housing trends to ensure future policies address the evolving needs of residents, including younger households, seniors, and workforce populations. Coordinate housing planning with transportation, parks, and community services.
- 5. Promote Conservation and Cluster-Based Rural Residential Design:** Encourage residential development patterns that preserve meaningful open space, farmland, and natural features by allowing homes to be grouped on smaller lots in exchange for permanent land preservation. Support approaches such as conservation subdivisions that incorporate agriculture, natural resource protection, and rural character to foster a stronger connection between residents and the landscape.

Recommendations

- 1. Residential Dimensional Standards:** Review, evaluate, and update dimensional requirements for all residential zoning districts. Ensure that lot size, width, and setback standards are calibrated to reflect existing conditions and support desired development patterns.
- 2. Housing Supply Flexibility:** Review and revise requirements for principal and accessory dwelling units to reduce barriers and allow for reasonable increases in housing supply.
- 3. Streamlined Review Processes:** Evaluate and revise zoning review procedures to remove unnecessary steps, streamline processes, and reduce regulatory inefficiencies.
- 4. Cluster-Based Rural Residential Design:** Review zoning options, and if appropriate, adopt new provisions for conservation subdivision and cluster development designs.



Chapter 5.

Community Facilities

Improve roads, enhance pedestrian safety, and invest in parks, trails, and recreational amenities to support a high quality of life.

Overview

The quality of life in Paw Paw Township is supported by a range of community facilities and services, many of which are shared with or provided by the Village of Paw Paw. While the Township does not operate its own parks or public utilities, residents benefit from access to natural recreation areas, Village-maintained facilities, and regional service providers. This chapter provides an overview of parks and recreation opportunities, public utilities and services, transportation infrastructure, alternative energy considerations, and intergovernmental partnerships. Together, these elements form the backbone of community function and livability, shaping how residents access essential services, move through the Township, and enjoy its natural and built environments.

Parks

While the Township does not operate its own parks, residents utilize Village-operated facilities and enjoy abundant natural recreational opportunities. Canoeing, kayaking, and lake activities are popular on Lake Cora, Eagle Lake, and Three Mile Lake, which also offer access points, beaches, and fishing areas.

What We Heard

- *Most participants felt their recreational needs are currently being met within the township and nearby communities.*
- *79% of respondents supported the idea of the township investigating the development of trails and parks.*
- *Participants favored preserved open space and natural trails, which require minimal capital investment and ongoing maintenance.*
- *There was limited interest in active recreation facilities (e.g., ball fields and picnic areas), with stronger support for passive recreation and land preservation.*
- *47% of respondents were not concerned about the lack of public water and sewer services in the township.*
- *28% were unsure about the issue of water and sewer availability.*
- *Only 25% expressed concern, primarily related to water quality.*
- *A majority (58%) felt the township should not pursue water and sewer service extensions.*

Emergency Services

Fire protection is handled by the volunteer-based Paw Paw Fire Department. The department services all of Paw Paw Township, the Village of Paw Paw and portions of Antwerp, Almena and Waverly Townships covering a total of 88 square miles.

Law enforcement is provided by the Van Buren County Sheriff's Department, with support from the Village police.

Public Water and Sewer Service

The Village of Paw Paw provides public water and sewer service within its limits and to a limited number of areas in the Township. The remainder of the Township relies on private systems. At this time, the Village's system does not have the capacity to accept additional township properties for service. Even if a specific project warranted an extension, there is currently no capacity to serve additional properties. The future planning scenarios considered in this master plan update acknowledge that water and sewer infrastructure will not be extended further into the Township for the foreseeable future.

However, increased densities and development intensities are still planned near the periphery of the Village of Paw Paw, reflecting incremental and logical growth outward from the Village limits over time. Should public water and sewer expansion become feasible or studied in the future, the master plan and future land use plan should be reevaluated. In all cases, the theme of incremental and logical growth from the Village should be maintained to preserve the Township's overall rural character and vision. Further, this plan does not support public water and sewer service in areas aside from those planned for High Density Residential, Mixed Business Commercial (abutting Village limits), and Industrial Commercial.

Utilities

Utilities are delivered through Consumers Energy, Midwest Energy Cooperative, and Indiana Michigan Power, with broadband provided by Charter Communications.

Solid Waste and Recycling

Paw Paw Township provides a comprehensive solid waste and recycling program through its centrally located Waste & Recycling Center. The facility offers free single-stream recycling for paper, cardboard, plastics, metal, and glass, as well as drop-off options for scrap metal, concrete, tires, electronics, and yard waste. In partnership with the Van Buren Conservation District, the program assists residents in responsibly disposing of a wide range of materials, promoting environmental sustainability and reducing landfill use for both township and village communities.

Schools

Paw Paw Public Schools serves approximately 2,200 students from the Village of Paw Paw and surrounding areas in Van Buren County. The district includes facilities for early childhood through adult education, with all buildings either newly constructed or fully renovated since 1998. Schools include an Early and Later Elementary, Middle School, High School, and the Cedar Street Community and Family Center, which offers preschool, alternative education, and the Aspire Academy. The district provides diverse academic opportunities, including dual enrollment, Early/Middle College programs, and vocational training through the Van Buren Technology Center in nearby Lawrence. Paw Paw High School features a 950-seat Performing Arts Center, supporting strong music and theater programs. Students also participate in a wide range of athletic programs as part of the Wolverine Conference.



Cemeteries

Paw Paw Township operates three cemeteries: Cuddeback, Prospect Hill, and Wildey. Burial plots are currently available at both Wildey and Cuddeback cemeteries.

Transportation and Traffic

The Township is primarily served by I-94, Red Arrow Highway, and M-40. Local roads make up the remainder of the network. Passenger rail service is available in Kalamazoo and Battle Creek, and airports are nearby in Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. Public transit is not currently available.

County Roads

The Van Buren County Road Commission (VBCRC) maintains and improves the primary road system. Because of funding constraints, many needed road projects cannot be covered within the VBCRC's budget alone. To address these gaps, the Township plays a critical role by funding nearly all local road improvements and often contributing to primary road projects as well.

The VBCRC uses specific criteria to determine which road projects are addressed first. These include:

1. PASER Ratings - Evaluating the condition of road surfaces.
2. Traffic Counts - Considering the volume of vehicles using the roadway.
3. Connectivity/Arterial Routes - Assessing how the road links to key routes and destinations.
4. Funding - Factoring in the availability of financial resources to complete the project.

In recent years, the VBCRC has made significant investments in key corridors. Notably, various improvements were completed along Red Arrow Highway in both 2022 and 2023. These upgrades focused on improving safety, road conditions, and traffic flow, enhancing this critical route for local travel and regional connectivity.

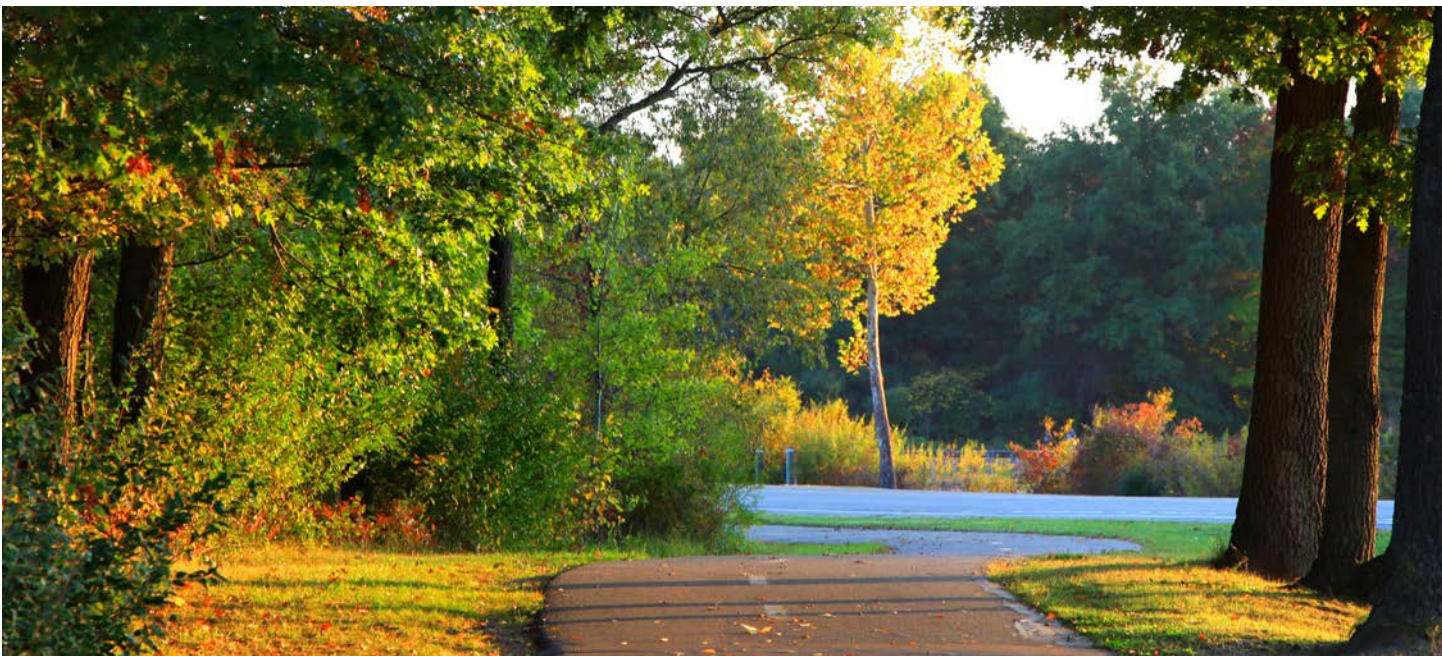
Locally, Paw Paw Township works closely with the VBCRC to identify and prioritize repairs and improvements to secondary roads. Funding for these projects comes primarily from the township’s dedicated road millage, a 1-mill levy approved by voters in August 2024 that will remain in effect through December 2027, as well as the township’s general fund. Each year, the township evaluates road conditions, primarily through inspections and PASER ratings, to set priorities and determine how to allocate funds. The Township then contracts with the VBCRC to carry out the necessary work.

In addition to road repairs and improvements, the Township’s general fund supports routine maintenance activities such as boom mowing, berm maintenance, and dust control on gravel roads through the application of calcium chloride. This coordinated approach ensures that limited resources are used effectively to maintain safe, reliable, and well-functioning local roads while complementing regional efforts led by the VBCRC.

Traffic

Traffic volumes across Paw Paw Township vary significantly depending on the type and location of the roadway. The highest traffic levels are found along Interstate 94, which bisects the township east-west and carries an average annual daily traffic (AADT) of 46,275 vehicles. Red Arrow Highway, another major east-west route through the township, sees varying traffic levels, with 10,641 AADT on its eastern portion and 5,008 AADT on its western portion.

North-south trunkline routes also experience steady traffic flows. M-40, north of the Village of Paw Paw, carries 6,664 AADT, while M-51, south of I-94, records 6,326 AADT. Other county roads see more moderate use, including County Road 665 west of the Village at 3,467 AADT, CR 665 south of the Village at 820 AADT, and CR 671 north of I-94 at 3,843 AADT. Lower-volume roads, such as County Road 374 west of the Village, handle lighter traffic with 525 AADT.

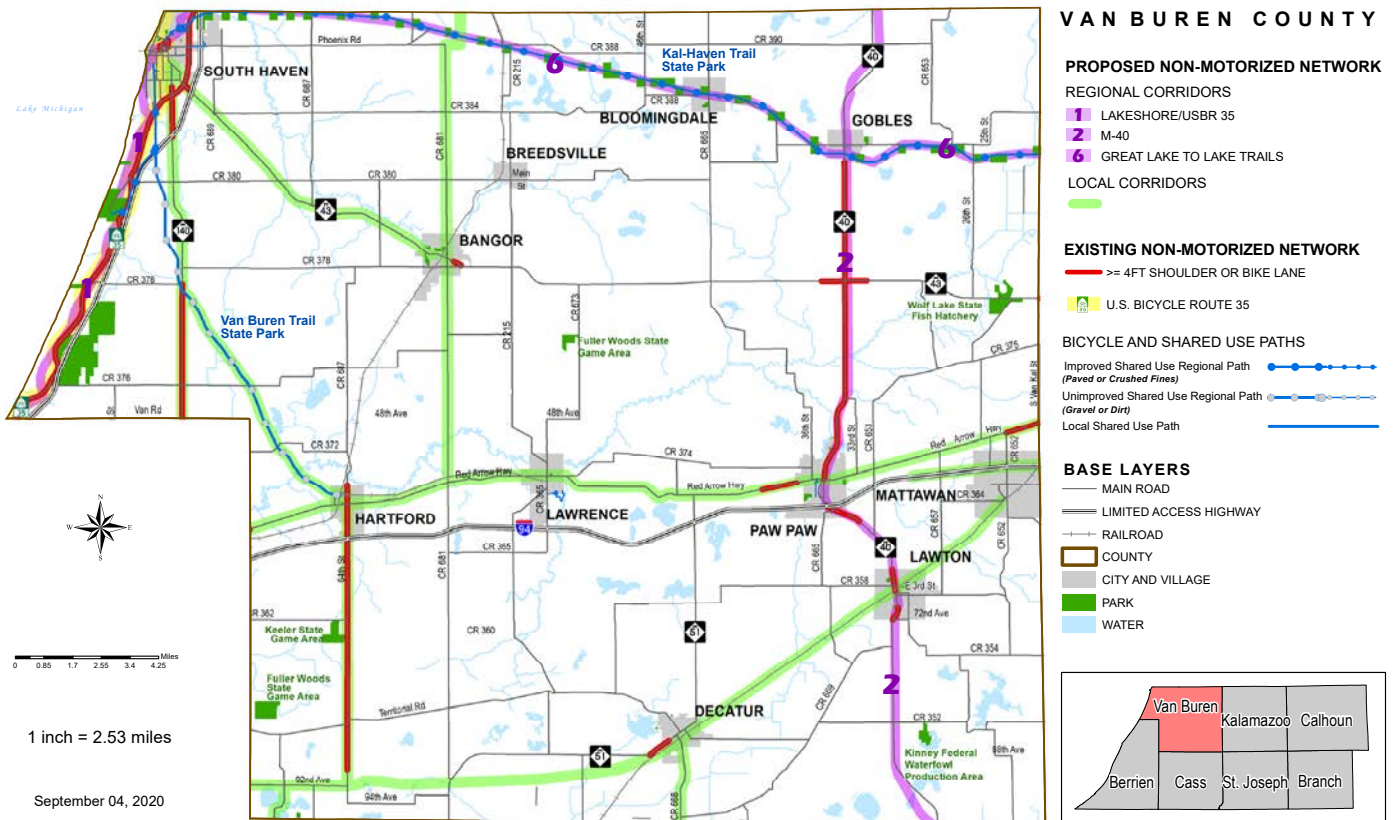


Nonmotorized Transportation

Nonmotorized transportation is recognized as a critical part of a transportation system, offering numerous benefits such as improved mobility, reduced traffic congestion and pollution, enhanced public health through active lifestyles, and an overall improved quality of life. The 2020 Southwest Michigan Region Nonmotorized Transportation Plan establishes a long-term vision for a connected network of nonmotorized transportation facilities across MDOT's Southwest Region and identifies five major north-south corridors and three east-west corridors that form the backbone of the regional network. These corridors aim to connect communities, small towns, and rural areas with the larger regional trail system.

For Paw Paw Township, this plan provides a framework to integrate local nonmotorized improvements into the broader regional network, particularly along the M-40 corridor, which is one of the major north-south regional corridors. Red Arrow Highway is also considered a priority local connector. By coordinating with MDOT, neighboring communities, and regional planning agencies, the Township can enhance connectivity, access to recreational opportunities, and promote safer travel for cyclists and pedestrians. These efforts align with state priorities and increase the likelihood of securing funding for future projects.

Map 9. Van Buren County Nonmotorized Network Plan



Source: Southwest Michigan Regional Nonmotorized Transportation Plan

Typical facilities in a rural context include the following:

- Shared Use Paths/Trails - Separate, multi-use facilities for pedestrians, cyclists, and other nonmotorized users, typically 10 feet wide and surfaced with asphalt or concrete.
- Separated Bike Lanes - Physically separated lanes providing additional safety by using barriers, curbs, or on-street parking as buffer.
- Paved Shoulders - Minimum 4-foot shoulders on roadways to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians, with wider shoulders in higher-traffic areas.

Funding agencies often prioritize projects that are part of or connected to a regional network, making coordinated planning efforts essential. Additionally, Michigan law allows and encourages nonmotorized improvements such as bike lanes and wider shoulders to be incorporated into roadway projects.

Alternative Energy

Advancements in solar and wind energy technologies have increased the potential for renewable energy development across Michigan. As interest grows among residents, business owners, and commercial providers, Paw Paw Township recognizes the need to carefully manage this growth to protect its rural character and agricultural economy. While renewable energy offers environmental and economic benefits, the Township remains committed to ensuring that productive farmland is not removed from agricultural use to accommodate large-scale energy installations. Land use decisions must strike a balance between supporting alternative energy and preserving the Township's agricultural base.

Paw Paw Township has prepared a "workable" solar ordinance related to PA 233 of 2023 to strike a balance between the rural character of the Township and the need to consider alternative energy technologies. Wind energy is not considered to be viable in the region at this time.



Battery Energy Storage Systems

Given expressed concerns regarding battery energy storage systems (BESS), the Township should develop a clear policy stating the its intent to oppose or significantly restrict such facilities. This policy should be grounded in documented local considerations, including the limited capacity of emergency services, particularly the fire department, to respond to major catastrophic events, potential environmental risks, and the Township's extensive areas of prime farmland that it intends to preserve and protect. Establishing this policy direction provides clear guidance for future land use decisions and reflects the Township's commitment to public safety, environmental stewardship, and long-term agricultural preservation.

Data Centers

Data centers are an emerging land use characterized by large, highly specialized facilities that house networked computers, servers, storage systems, and supporting infrastructure, including cooling systems and backup power supplies, within secure and controlled environments. These facilities support computing operations, data storage, and network connectivity, and typically operate continuously with substantial infrastructure requirements.

Due to their unique operational characteristics, including high electrical demand, significant cooling needs, and the potential for noise and vibration from mechanical and power-related equipment, the Township recognizes that data centers present planning considerations distinct from traditional industrial or commercial uses. The potential scale of these facilities heightens the importance of careful siting and intensity controls to ensure compatibility with surrounding land uses. The intent of this plan is to guide future data center development at a limited,

appropriate scale, align with the Township's long-term land-use vision, and protect public health, safety, infrastructure capacity, and community character.

Village Partnership

The Township and Village share key assets, including transportation corridors, lakes, recreation areas, and community gateways. Collaboration on issues such as residential density, stormwater management, trail networks, and design standards is recognized as essential to shared economic success.

Fiscal Responsibility and Community Investment

Survey responses reflected widespread concern about the cost of living in Paw Paw Township, with many participants citing high property taxes as a significant issue. Residents expressed frustration over increasing tax burdens and a desire to avoid further hikes, especially in connection with new community facilities or services. While the survey did not include detailed suggestions for alternative funding, this feedback highlights the need for a fiscally responsible approach to planning. The Township should consider seeking grants, partnerships, and other non-local revenue sources to reduce financial impacts on residents while pursuing community priorities.

Community Facilities Principles

- 1. Plan for Accessible, Connected Recreational Opportunities:** Expand recreational options by improving existing facilities and supporting the development of passive recreation parks, regional trails, and bike lanes. Enhance access to parks, lakes, and open spaces to serve residents and attract visitors, while coordinating with the Village of Paw Paw and nearby townships to expand shared recreational resources.
- 2. Guide Development with Infrastructure and Strengthen Local Services:** Use the availability of public water and sewer to guide growth—higher-density development should be directed to areas where infrastructure already exists or is planned. Protect water quality by promoting the proper use and maintenance of private wells and septic systems. Continue to improve Township services and facilities to best serve residents, landowners, and businesses.
- 3. Prioritize Road Improvements for Safe Travel and Connectivity:** Maintain and improve local and regional roads with a focus on safety, traffic flow, and pedestrian-friendly design. Plan for future mobility needs by expanding sidewalks, bike routes, and trail networks that link neighborhoods, the Village, and major destinations.
- 4. Ensure that Renewable Energy Development is Compatible with Agricultural Lands:** Ensure that solar and wind energy installations are designed to preserve farmland, protect rural views, and minimize impacts on neighbors and the natural environment.
- 5. Coordinate Planning and Investment with the Village:** Work closely with the Village of Paw Paw to align land use, infrastructure, recreation, and economic development decisions. Collaboration will help protect shared resources, strengthen community identity, and ensure orderly, cost-effective growth.
- 6. Leverage Grants and Partnerships:** Support needed infrastructure and community improvements without raising local taxes by actively pursuing grants, intergovernmental partnerships, and other external funding sources. Focus public investment in areas that provide the greatest benefit for residents and long-term community goals.

Recommendations

1. Road Improvements Collaboration:

Continue annual coordination with the Van Buren County Road Commission to rank and prioritize road improvement projects based on local needs and funding opportunities.

2. Parkland Acquisition:

Consider opportunities, as they arise, to acquire land for passive park and recreational uses that enhance community access to natural areas.

3. Nonmotorized Transportation Planning:

Develop a nonmotorized transportation plan as part of the parks and recreation plan to prioritize regional and local connections for bicyclists and pedestrians. Establish a strategy for advocating for these improvements in state and county road projects and identify potential grant funding sources, partnerships, and other resource-leveraging opportunities.

4. Alternative Energy Regulations:

Continue to assess and refine regulations for solar and wind energy to balance competing perspectives, maintain local permitting control, and ensure enforceable decommissioning plans and guarantees. Establish clear zoning standards to ensure that both residential- and commercial-scale systems are appropriately located and scaled.

5. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS):

Prepare a formal position and strategy regarding BESS development based on the Township's vast amount of prime farmland, concerns with community character, emergency service capacity, and environmental impacts.

6. Data Center Location and Scale:

Limit the scale and intensity of data center development and direct such facilities only to locations where infrastructure demands and operational impacts can be effectively managed. Emphasize responsible resource use, including water conservation; disclosure of projected water demand, coordination with electric utilities to ensure adequate service capacity and appropriate cost allocation; and mitigation of noise and vibration to protect adjacent land uses.

7. Village of Paw Paw Coordination:

Maintain regular collaboration with the Village of Paw Paw on shared services, facilities, and feasibility studies related to infrastructure, parks, and public services

8. Public Information and Engagement:

Expand public access to information on land use, zoning, and development applications through public outreach events and improved website functionality and content.



Chapter 6.

Economy

Diversify the local economy by attracting a wider range of businesses, including family-friendly restaurants, retail, and job-creating industries, while supporting small businesses and tourism-driven opportunities.

Overview

The Township's economy reflects its rural character and proximity to regional markets. Community input emphasized the need for more diverse businesses, local services, and family-oriented amenities, along with support for appropriate employment opportunities. This chapter summarizes key economic goals based on public feedback and provides an overview of income, education, and poverty conditions to inform future land use and development decisions.

Regional Context

Van Buren County combines the charm of small-town living with the convenience of being near several major cities. Its location places it just over two hours from Chicago, about an hour from Grand Rapids, and an hour from South Bend, making it ideal for those who want access to urban amenities while enjoying a rural lifestyle. Travel to and from the area is made simple with multiple airports less than an hour away. The county is part of the Kalamazoo-Portage metropolitan area, benefiting from the region's economic and cultural connections.

What We Heard

- *52% of participants felt there are enough commercial businesses in Paw Paw Township, including retail, restaurants, offices, and services.*
- *45% felt there are not enough commercial options in the township.*
- *Only 3% felt there are too many commercial businesses.*
- *65% of respondents felt there are enough industrial businesses, such as manufacturing, contracting, warehousing, and trucking.*
- *26% felt there are not enough industrial businesses.*
- *9% felt there are too many industrial uses in the township.*

Local Context

The local economy is diverse, with manufacturing serving as a cornerstone. This sector employs more than 3,600 residents and produces over \$400 million annually. Scientific research and development is another strong economic driver, with nearly 2,000 jobs contributing approximately \$219 million in activity each year.

Agriculture remains a defining feature of Van Buren County, with 838 farms and around 2,100 workers employed in the industry. This level of agricultural employment is over six times higher than the national average for a community of similar size. The county is especially well known for grape production, ranking second in Michigan for total vineyard acreage. Its wine industry alone supports nearly 200 jobs and generated close to \$30 million in sales in 2024, showcasing the county’s balance between a strong industrial base and its agricultural roots.

Economic Data

Employment

Paw Paw Township has a civilian employed population of 2,933 residents. The largest employment sectors include manufacturing (589 workers), retail trade (582), and education, health care, and social services (519). Other notable sectors are professional and management services (286), other services excluding public administration (204), finance and real estate (158), construction (152), and arts, entertainment, recreation, and food services (121). Smaller but important sectors include agriculture and natural resources (83), transportation and utilities (85), wholesale trade (90), public administration (56), and information (8).

Income

\$31,155

Per capita income

a little less than the amount in Van Buren County: \$33,243

about 80 percent of the amount in Michigan: \$39,538

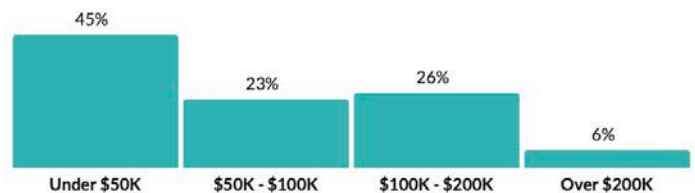
\$59,390

Median household income

about 90 percent of the amount in Van Buren County: \$66,902

about 80 percent of the amount in Michigan: \$71,149

Household income



Household income

	Paw Paw	Van Buren County	Michigan
Under \$50K	45.1% 1,244	38% 11,451	35.4% 1,431,777
\$50K - \$100K	23.3% 643	31.2% 9,386	30.3% 1,225,754
\$100K - \$200K	25.6% 706	25.4% 7,655	25.2% 1,019,474

This mix of industries reflects a local economy with strong ties to manufacturing and retail, a significant presence in education and health care, and a balance of professional, service-based, and agricultural employment. Together, these industries support the township’s role as a hub within Van Buren County’s broader economic landscape.

Income

Paw Paw’s per capita income is \$31,155, and the median household income is \$59,390—both lower than Van Buren County and Michigan. The largest share of households (45.1%) earn under \$50,000 annually, and only 6.1% earn over \$200,000. Compared to state averages, income levels in Paw Paw are below average, and the income distribution skews toward lower and middle-income brackets.

Education Attainment

Most of the Township is served by the Paw Paw Public School District, which includes multiple school facilities and a performing arts center. The southeastern portion of the Township is within the Lawton Community School District.

Approximately 90.3% of Paw Paw adults (25+) have a high school diploma or higher, aligning with both Van Buren County and Michigan’s rates. However, only 18.7% hold a bachelor’s degree or higher—below the county average (22.9%) and significantly below Michigan (31.8%). The largest segments have either a high school diploma (35.7%) or some college (35.9%), indicating a moderately educated workforce but with fewer residents holding advanced degrees.

Educational attainment

90.3%

High school grad or higher

about the same as the rate in Van Buren County: 88.8%

about the same as the rate in Michigan: 91.9%

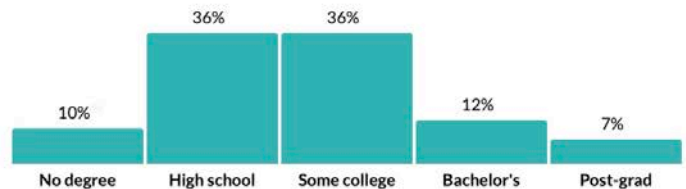
18.7%

Bachelor’s degree or higher

about 80 percent of the rate in Van Buren County: 22.9%

about three-fifths of the rate in Michigan: 31.8%

Population by highest level of education



* Universe: Population 25 years and over

Population by highest level of education

	Paw Paw		Van Buren County		Michigan	
No degree	9.7%	452	11.2%	5,868	8.1%	564,902
High school	35.7%	1,667	33.4%	17,553	28.2%	1,964,538
Some college	35.9%	1,673	32.5%	17,101	31.9%	2,224,908
Bachelor's	11.9%	555	14.4%	7,564	19.3%	1,343,511
Post-grad	6.8%	319	8.5%	4,460	12.5%	869,593

Poverty

Paw Paw Township's poverty rate stands at 13.6%, roughly equal to Van Buren County (13.8%) and slightly above Michigan (13.1%). 21.5% of children live below the poverty line, which is higher than both Van Buren County (17.3%) and the state (17.5%). This suggests that childhood poverty is a particular concern for the Township. Senior poverty in Paw Paw is at 12.1%, similar to Van Buren County (11.5%) but significantly higher than Michigan's senior poverty rate (9.3%).

Poverty

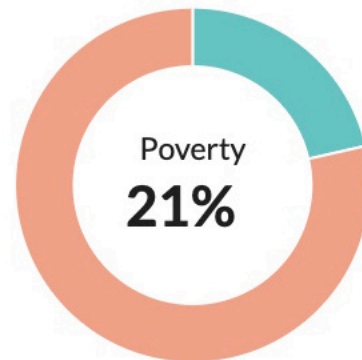
13.6%

Persons below poverty line

about the same as the rate in Van Buren County:
13.8%

a little higher than the rate in Michigan: 13.1%

Children (Under 18)



■ Poverty
■ Non-poverty

Seniors (65 and over)



■ Poverty
■ Non-poverty

Desired Business and Services

Survey participants provided a wide range of open-ended responses highlighting gaps and preferences in local business and service offerings. Participants would like to see more diverse, high-quality, and family-oriented businesses, support local employment, and enhance the character of Paw Paw Township.

- **Restaurants and Dining Options:** A strong desire for more sit-down restaurants, family-friendly diners, upscale options, affordable dining, and non-fast-food alternatives. Specific mentions included soup/salad cafes, bakeries, and ice cream parlors.
- **Retail and Everyday Services:** Requests included general retail stores, clothing stores, gift shops, home improvement stores (e.g., Menards or Home Depot), shoe stores, and craft shops. Some participants emphasized the need for moderate-cost retail options rather than low-end or luxury.
- **Recreation and Entertainment:** Many expressed interest in recreational amenities like bowling alleys, arcades, indoor golf, YMCA facilities, public swimming pools, and community event venues. There was strong support for more passive recreation and family entertainment.
- **Professional and Support Services:** Desired services included handyman services, quality landscapers, daycare centers, and affordable office space for small or creative businesses.
- **Limitations on Certain Uses:** Several participants voiced concerns about the oversaturation of auto parts stores, marijuana dispensaries, and storage facilities, suggesting a need for a more balanced mix of commercial uses.
- **Industrial and Employment-Oriented Uses:** A few respondents recommended attracting light manufacturing, distribution centers, or contractor services to boost employment and economic development—one even proposed courting Amazon for a regional distribution hub.
- **Community and Infrastructure:** Some comments went beyond business types, noting the need for traffic management, downtown parking, and planning for quality housing development that avoids over-development or sprawl.

Based on community input, future planning in Paw Paw Township should focus on expanding and diversifying local business and service offerings while maintaining the township's rural character. There is strong interest in more family-friendly restaurants, everyday retail options, and small-scale specialty businesses that enhance the local economy and meet residents' daily needs.

Residents also expressed a desire for increased recreational and entertainment opportunities, particularly those that support families and improve quality of life. While there is support for some industrial and employment-based development, concerns were raised about the concentration of certain uses, such as auto parts stores and marijuana dispensaries.

Infrastructure improvements, especially related to traffic management and parking, should be considered to support future growth. Overall, planning efforts should promote balanced economic development that aligns with community values and preserves the Township's identity.

Development Review Processes

The Township's development review policies and procedures should also be reviewed to determine how effectively they promote clarity, consistency, and efficiency in the review process. Complicated steps, vague requirements, or inconsistent practices can increase project costs, cause delays, and create uncertainty for applicants. To support a welcoming environment for responsible development that is consistent with the Master Plan, the Township should aim to streamline its review process by eliminating unnecessary steps, improving communication, and ensuring that internal procedures are clearly defined and consistently applied. A well-organized and transparent process is essential to encouraging investment and achieving the goals of the Master Plan.

Economy Principles

- 1. Support Diverse and Family-Friendly Businesses:** Encourage a broader range of restaurants, shops, and everyday services that serve residents of all ages and support family life. Prioritize small-scale, high-quality businesses such as sit-down restaurants, bakeries, cafes, and specialty retail that reflect the Township's community character.
- 2. Promote Local Services and Employment:** Support the growth of local service providers and small businesses that create jobs and meet everyday needs, including childcare, landscaping, handyman services, and office space for creative or home-based enterprises. Facilitate opportunities for entrepreneurship and local economic self-sufficiency.
- 3. Enhance Recreation and Entertainment Options:** Plan for new recreational and entertainment businesses such as bowling alleys, arcades, indoor sports facilities, and event spaces. Focus on uses that improve quality of life, support families, and complement outdoor recreation in the Township.
- 4. Support Balanced Industrial Growth:** Encourage light industrial and employment-oriented uses such as contractor services, distribution centers, or small-scale manufacturing that provide quality jobs without compromising rural character. Direct these uses to appropriate areas with existing infrastructure and roadway access.

5. **Ensure a Mix of Commercial Uses:** Guide commercial development to maintain a balanced mix of businesses and avoid over-concentration of specific uses such as auto parts stores, dispensaries, or storage facilities. Zoning and land use decisions should promote variety and reflect the Township’s economic goals.

3. **Home-Based Business Support:** Review and update regulations for home-based businesses to encourage their role as business incubators or long-term employment opportunities. Ensure that operational standards balance economic activity with the character and livability of surrounding residential areas.

4. **Commercial and Industrial Design Standards: Establish and refine building and material** requirements for commercial and industrial developments to promote high-quality, visually appealing structures, particularly along priority travel corridors.

5. **Agricultural and Wine Country Zoning:** Explore zoning strategies that strengthen the agricultural economy and support agricultural tourism, including opportunities for active, working farms to diversify and expand their operations.

Recommendations

1. **Economic Development Partnerships:** Collaborate with organizations such as Market One to identify economic development opportunities and prioritize sites for development and redevelopment. Explore state, county, and local programs that offer financial incentives to support these efforts.

2. **Streamlined Review Processes:** Evaluate and revise zoning ordinance procedures to eliminate unnecessary steps, reduce regulatory barriers, and streamline the development review process.





Chapter 7.

Land Use

Promote thoughtful land use planning that directs growth to appropriate areas, prevents over-development, and ensures new development complements existing neighborhoods, farmland, and natural resources.

Overview

The Land Use Chapter includes a framework for future land use distinctions and includes maps that illustrate prescribed land uses at specific locations. The future land use plan for Paw Paw Township serves as a guide to assist local officials with decisions regarding day-to-day planning, zoning, land subdivision, and public improvement issues.

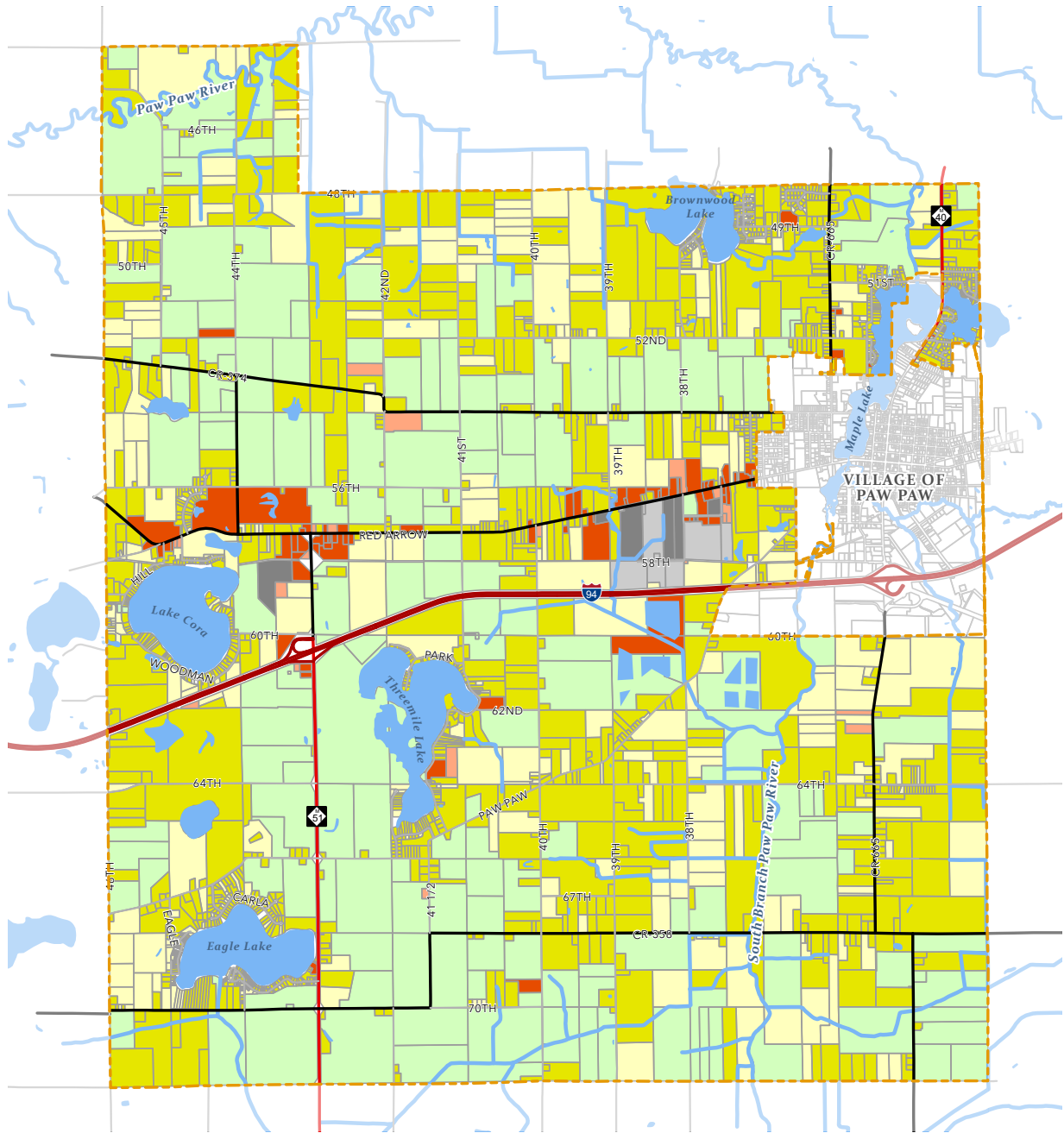
General Growth Framework

The general future land use strategy is to focus higher-intensity commercial land uses near public infrastructure, such as along major roadways and interchanges, as well as in close proximity to the Village limits and public water and sewer availability. These areas are considered to be more appropriate and feasible from an environmental, development, and utility feasibility perspective. Away from these areas, the Township's general policy is to encourage the conservation of agricultural lands and the preservation and protection of natural areas.

What We Heard

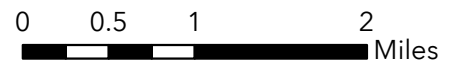
- **Agricultural and Open Space:** The majority of respondents expressed strong environmental values, with 87% stating that farmland preservation is very important, 92% supporting the adoption of farmland protection policies, 87% favoring policies to protect forested land, and 91% supporting water quality protections for groundwater, lakes, and streams.
- **Residential Land Use:** High demand for single-family housing: 69% identified single-family homes as the most needed housing type.
- **Commercial Land Use:** Split opinion on current commercial supply: 45% believe there are not enough commercial businesses, while 52% think it is adequate.
- **Industrial Land Use:** Most feel there is enough industrial development: 65% said there is enough; only 26% felt more was needed.

Map 10. Paw Paw Township Existing Land Use



Existing Land Use

- | | |
|---|--|
| Agricultural | Commercial-Improved |
| Residential-Improved | Commercial-Vacant |
| Residential-Vacant;
Residential or Common Element | Industrial-Improved |
| | Industrial-Vacant |



Paw Paw Township
Van Buren County, MI

Existing Land Use

Paw Paw Township is made up primarily of agricultural lands, forested areas, lakes, rivers and wetlands, and single-family residential homes. Analysis of the existing land use is included on the Paw Paw Township Existing Land Use Map (**Map 10**). This map is based on property tax classifications from the Assessor's office.

Future Land Use

Intent

The future land use plan is general in scope. It is not, in most cases, intended to establish precise boundaries of land use or exact locations of future uses in the same way as the Township's Zoning Map.

The following section outlines seven future land use categories that will guide long-term planning and development decisions in Paw Paw Township. Each category includes a general intent statement, a description of the types of land uses and development patterns that are appropriate, and key design considerations to maintain the Township's character and support its planning goals.

These categories are not zoning districts but serve as a framework for future zoning decisions, infrastructure planning, and land use policies. The content for each category includes the types of uses permitted, typical lot sizes or development densities, appropriate building forms, and guidance on site design and compatibility. The structure and detail of each category generally offer a consistent approach for describing land use expectations throughout the Township.

The following **Map 11** is the Township Future Land Use Map and details on each future land use category follow.

Zoning Plan

A Zoning Plan is a comparison between future land use categories and corresponding zoning districts. This table summarizes the information included in the Future Land Use descriptions.

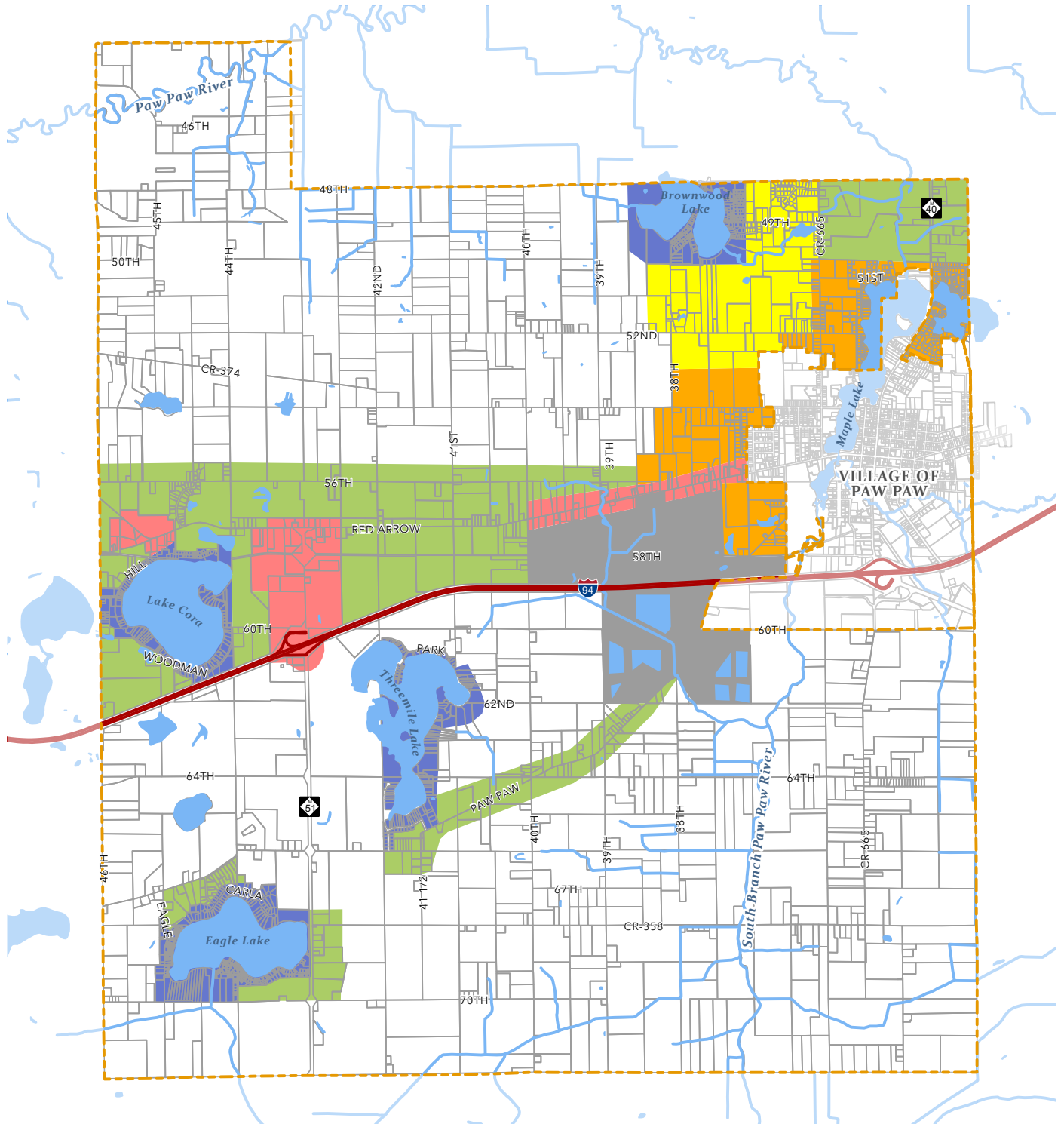
Timing and Appropriateness

A future land use designation shown on a map does not mean that a rezoning of land to a compatible district is appropriate at the time of an application. The Master Plan is a long-term vision, and certain land use decisions will depend on site-specific conditions at the time an application is received. Additionally, new zoning districts may be required to be drafted and adopted prior to rezoning land.








The timing and appropriateness of zoning amendments are dependent upon many factors, such as availability of public utilities, provisions for adequate roadways, environmental sensitivity, natural and physical site constraints, traffic conditions and congestion, impacts on public services, and the demand for a particular land use as determined by market forces. Many additional case and site-specific factors must be considered when reviewing a request for rezoning a parcel of land, aside from Future Land Use Map consistency.

The key to this section is that there is an important relationship between land use planning and zoning. Planning is guiding land uses 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 administration of a zoning ordinance in a community.

Map 11. Paw Paw Township Future Land Use



Future Land Use

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Agricultural Residential |  Waterfront Residential |
|  Rural Residential |  Mixed Business Commercial |
|  Medium Density Residential |  Industrial Commercial |
|  High Density Residential |  Lakes and Streams |



Paw Paw Township
Van Buren County, MI

Agricultural Residential



Intent

To preserve the rural and agricultural character of the area by supporting active farming operations, very low-density housing, and compatible rural enterprises. The primary purpose is to maintain open spaces, agricultural productivity, and rural lifestyles and to reduce infrastructure demands through lower residential densities.

Primary Land Uses

- Traditional farming operations
- Single-family homes with an overall average density of 1 unit per 10 acres

Secondary Land Uses

- Boutique farms and hobby farms
- Farm stands, equestrian facilities, barns, and outbuildings
- Agritourism (e.g. corn mazes, pumpkin patches, farm tours)
- Limited-scale home-based businesses
- Civic and institutional uses
- Accessory dwelling units

Design Considerations

- Avoid the historic practice of 10-acre splits that remove farmland from production or allow encroachment into agricultural lands. Also allow a limited number of smaller lots only when overall density goals are met.
- Support conservation or cluster subdivisions only when they result in meaningful preservation of open space, farmland, rural character, and natural resources.
- Provide buffers between agricultural operations and incompatible uses.
- Preserve key view corridors and prominent rural landscapes.
- Design structures to reflect traditional agricultural or rural architectural styles.

Corresponding Zoning

The Agricultural Residential future land use category corresponds to the Agricultural Farmland Preservation (AGR) zoning district.



Rural Residential



Intent

To protect the existing rural character and pattern of development by allowing limited residential growth that respects the landscape and agricultural heritage. This category accommodates homes on large lots and clustered subdivisions that conserve open space.

Primary Land Uses

- Single-family homes on lots averaging 3 acres
- If a conservation subdivision or cluster development is considered, the overall gross density can be applied to the smaller developed area.

Secondary Land Uses

- Boutique farms and hobby farms
- Farm stands, equestrian facilities, barns, and outbuildings
- Limited-scale home-based businesses
- Civic and institutional uses
- Accessory dwelling units

Design Considerations

- Support conservation or cluster subdivisions only when they result in meaningful preservation of open space, farmland, rural character, and natural resources.
- Provide buffers between agricultural operations and incompatible uses.
- Preserve key view corridors and prominent rural landscapes.
- Design structures to reflect traditional agricultural or rural architectural styles.
- Integrate natural features like floodplains and woodlands into the site layout.

Corresponding Zoning

The Rural Residential future land use category corresponds to the Agricultural Rural Residential (ARR) zoning district.



Medium Density Residential



Intent

To provide for neighborhoods with moderate residential density and compatible infill development, creating opportunities for diverse household types in a semi-rural or suburban environment.

Primary Land Uses

- Single-family homes on lots averaging 1 acre
- If a conservation subdivision or cluster development is considered, the overall gross density can be applied to the smaller developed area.

Secondary Land Uses

- Limited-scale home-based businesses
- Civic and institutional uses
- Accessory dwelling units

Design Considerations

- Support conservation or cluster subdivisions that incorporate shared green space as a defining element of neighborhood design.

- Require neighborhood-scale street layouts that prioritize pedestrian safety, connectivity, and walkability.
- Incorporate green infrastructure practices to manage stormwater and protect natural systems.
- Encourage shared community amenities such as playgrounds, greenways, or common open spaces.
- Provide parks and small neighborhood gathering areas that enhance local recreation and social interaction.
- Encourage design elements that promote a strong sense of neighborhood identity and cohesion.

Corresponding Zoning

The Medium Density Residential future land use category corresponds to the Low Density Residential (LDR) zoning district. This district should be renamed accordingly.



High Density Residential



Intent

To create walkable, mixed-type residential neighborhoods that support a range of housing options for all age groups and income levels, including workforce and attainable housing, while maximizing infrastructure efficiencies.

Primary Land Uses

- Single-family homes at a density of 1-3 units per acre
- Two-family residences, townhomes, row houses, and small-scale apartment buildings served by common or community septic systems or by the Village utilities

Secondary Land Uses

- Home offices
- Civic and institutional uses
- Accessory dwelling units

Design Considerations

- Require neighborhood-scale street layouts that prioritize pedestrian safety, connectivity, and walkability.

- Incorporate green infrastructure practices to manage stormwater and protect natural systems.
- Encourage shared community amenities such as playgrounds, greenways, or common open spaces.
- Provide parks and small neighborhood gathering areas that enhance local recreation and social interaction.
- Encourage design elements that promote a strong sense of neighborhood identity and cohesion.
- Plan for compact block structure and pedestrian-scale street design.
- Ensure architectural variety and compatible scale with surroundings.

Corresponding Zoning

The Medium Density Residential future land use category generally corresponds to the Village Edge (VE) zoning district.



Waterfront Residential



Intent

To protect the natural and visual quality of Paw Paw Township’s lakefronts by allowing continued low-impact residential use while avoiding over-development and preserving sensitive environmental resources.

Primary Land Uses

- Single-family homes

Secondary Land Uses

- Limited accessory buildings and docks
- Passive recreation and conservation
- Home offices
- Civic and institutional uses
- Accessory dwelling units

Design Considerations

- Use low-impact site design with native vegetation buffers to protect natural systems.
- Apply shoreline protection standards and erosion control measures to maintain water quality and stability.

- Implement stormwater best practices to reduce runoff and prevent pollution of water bodies.
- Set structures back adequately from the water to safeguard ecological function and scenic quality.
- Limit large-scale development to preserve low-intensity waterfront character.
- Preserve visual integrity of the lakefront from public viewpoints and scenic corridors.

Corresponding Zoning

The Waterfront Residential future land use category generally corresponds to the Waterfront Area (WFR) zoning district.



Mixed Business Commercial



Intent

To support a diverse mix of locally-oriented retail, service, and hospitality uses that serve both residents and visitors, while maintaining the Township's rural character and avoiding high-impact commercial sprawl.

Primary Land Uses

- Small retail and service businesses
- Restaurants and cafes
- Farm markets and stands
- Offices and professional services
- Lodging and hospitality
- Indoor recreation
- Self-storage
- Contractor's facilities
- Civic and institutional uses

Design Considerations

- Orient buildings and design signage to enhance the streetscape and create a cohesive frontage.
- Screen and limit outdoor storage areas to minimize visual impacts.

- Provide pedestrian connections between sites to improve access and walkability.
- Encourage rural-themed design and architectural elements that reflect local character.
- Use landscaping and setbacks to buffer adjacent residential uses and reduce conflicts.
- Maintain dark skies by limiting lighting intensity and preventing glare or spillover.
- Limit site disturbance and require low impact development (LID) practices when located near sensitive natural and water resources and residential areas.

Corresponding Zoning

The Mixed Business Commercial future land use category generally corresponds to a new district that will incorporate Neighborhood Convenience Commercial (NCC), General Commercial (GC), Heavy Commercial Industrial (HCI), and Highway Service Commercial (HSC).



Industrial Commercial



Intent

To accommodate regional-serving industrial and commercial activities that require outdoor storage, shipping access, and infrastructure capacity, while mitigating their impact on surrounding uses through appropriate location and design.

Primary Land Uses

- Light and heavy manufacturing
- Warehousing and distribution
- Repair and maintenance shops
- Research and development facilities
- Wholesale businesses
- Trucking operations and logistics
- Indoor recreation
- Self-storage

Design Considerations

- Use landscaping and setbacks to buffer adjacent residential uses and reduce conflicts.
- Maintain dark skies by limiting lighting intensity and preventing glare or spillover.
- Limit site disturbance and require low impact development (LID) practices when located near sensitive natural and water resources and residential areas.

Corresponding Zoning

The Industrial Commercial future land use category generally corresponds to the Heavy Commercial Industrial (HCI) zoning district.



Deviations from the Future Land Use Map

The following list includes factors that may be used to determine if deviations from the Future Land Use Chapter should be considered during zoning decisions.

- Have any conditions changed in the area since the plan was adopted which may justify this change?
- Will there be any community impacts that should be considered, such as increased traffic or others that might create a need for additional services or improvements?
- Are there any environmental considerations or constraints?
- Are the qualities of the area different from those that are described in the plan?
- Will there be any adverse effects on adjacent properties as a result of the proposed land use change?
- What will the impacts be on the public health, safety, and welfare?

Re-Evaluation of the Future Land Use Map

Five-Year Review

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that the Master Plan be reviewed at least every five years to determine if the plan remains relevant and if changes are necessary. Over time, conditions inevitably change, and a reevaluation of goals may be needed.

Considerations for Amending the Future Land Use Map

While the Michigan Planning Enabling Act does not provide specific guidance for the five-year plan review, the Township will use the following criteria for considering amendments to the Future Land Use Map and applicable land use policies:

- Redevelopment opportunities of vacant, abandoned, or underused land.
- Amount and capacity of undeveloped commercial and industrial land.
- Population projections and housing need.
- Present and planned sewer capacity and water availability.
- Road and sidewalk system conditions.
- Public input.
- Environmental constraints and consideration of general impacts.

Alternative Considerations

As conditions change, the Township may also consider other strategies to accommodate the need for housing and commercial and industrial growth. These include, but are not limited to:

- Amending zoning regulations to allow denser development, such as lessening building setbacks or increasing height.
- Assessing innovative stormwater management strategies to lessen the acreage necessary for retention while maintaining water quality and increasing development capacity.
- Providing incentives to encourage the redevelopment of abandoned or underutilized development sites.
- Implementing other strategies to maximize the use of land to accommodate job growth and to provide goods and services to an increasingly permanent and visiting population.

Commercial and Industrial Development Framework

Overall Framework

Collectively, the following three planned commercial nodes and corridors establish a deliberate transition in development intensity, with the most intensive commercial and industrial uses located closest to the Village of Paw Paw, a mid-intensity commercial corridor along County Road 671, and lower-intensity, neighborhood-serving commercial uses along Red Arrow Highway to the west. This graduated approach reflects infrastructure availability, environmental considerations, and compatibility with surrounding land uses, while supporting a diverse and appropriately scaled economic base within the Township.

Western Mixed Business Commercial Area (Red Arrow Highway)

The westernmost area designated as Mixed Business Commercial along Red Arrow Highway is intended to recognize and accommodate existing small-scale, community-serving businesses that are located in close proximity to residential land uses. Development in this area is planned to remain limited in scale and intensity, emphasizing compatibility with nearby neighborhoods, reliance upon on-site septic and well systems, and a form and character that supports local services rather than large or regionally oriented commercial activity.

*Central Commercial / Mixed Business
Commercial Area (I-94 to Red Arrow Highway
along County Road 671)*

The Mixed Business Commercial area, extending from I-94 along County Road 671 to Red Arrow Highway, is intended to accommodate a moderate level of commercial activity, more intense than the western designation but still limited in overall scale. This area is planned to serve both the local community and select larger, regionally oriented businesses, while maintaining a careful balance between environmental constraints and commercial development potential. Reliance upon on-site septic and well systems is expected to naturally limit development intensity and encourage thoughtful site design that responds to surrounding natural features.

*Eastern Commercial and Industrial Area (West
of Village of Paw Paw)*

The easternmost commercial and industrial area, located immediately west of the Village of Paw Paw limits, is intended to accommodate the Township's highest-intensity non-residential uses. This area includes light industrial, heavy industrial, warehousing, logistics, transportation-related uses, and general commercial opportunities along Red Arrow Highway. Partial availability of public utilities supports higher development intensity in this location. This area is planned to function as the Township's primary employment and industrial center, providing a transition from village-scale development to broader regional economic activity while minimizing impacts on lower-intensity commercial and residential areas to the west.

Zoning Ordinance

Zoning Requirements

The Zoning Ordinance should be evaluated based on how well it supports the Township's goals, promotes the intended form and type of development, and integrates modern zoning practices. As a primary tool for implementing the Master Plan, zoning must align with current community objectives to be effective. Outdated or overly restrictive regulations can delay or deter development, discourage investment, and result in frequent rezoning or variance requests that increase costs and uncertainty. To ensure consistency with the Township's vision, zoning standards should be updated and streamlined to allow for the type of development the community seeks, rather than unintentionally obstructing it.

Land Use Principles

1. **Use the Future Land Use Plan to Guide Decisions:** Ensure that all land use and development decisions align with the Future Land Use Map and associated planning goals to promote consistency, predictability, and coordinated growth.
2. **Follow Clear Criteria When Considering Changes:** Allow for deviations from the Future Land Use Map only when consistent with the guidelines established in the Land Use chapter, ensuring thoughtful and transparent re-evaluation when conditions warrant.

Recommendations

1. **Commercial Zoning Consolidation:** Consolidate the Neighborhood Convenience Commercial, General Commercial, and Highway Service Commercial zoning districts into a single district. Review and update land use regulations and dimensional standards as needed. Consider location-specific requirements for certain land uses, particularly those near existing infrastructure or the I-94 interchange.
2. **Mobile Home Zoning Update:** Eliminate the Mobile Home Residential zoning district and identify an appropriate zoning district where mobile home communities may be permitted as a special land use.
3. **Zoning Map Alignment:** Develop a strategy to update the zoning map to reflect the vision and guidance of the future land use plan and map.



Chapter 8.

Implementation

Establish a realistic and achievable work plan that prioritizes implementation strategies aligned with the goals of the Master Plan, ensuring that actions are carried out in a timely manner, make efficient use of capacity, and reflect a responsible and transparent use of public resources.

Overview

Achievable Implementation Actions

An achievable master plan provides a clear framework for action by outlining specific goals, implementation steps, timelines, and responsible parties. These actions serve as a practical work plan to guide the Township over the next five years, until the next scheduled review of the Master Plan. While much of the plan establishes guiding policies that inform day-to-day decision-making, certain goals require defined tasks to be carried out in order to be fully realized. To remain relevant and responsive, this work plan should be reviewed and updated annually. Only those actions that the Planning Commission and Township Board intend to actively pursue are included in this chapter, ensuring the plan remains focused, realistic, and results-driven.

Key to the Implementation Table

- **Action:** The specific recommended action.
- **Related Chapter:** The justification for the action.
- **Type:** Program, Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment, Capital Improvement, Partnership
- **Priority:** High, Medium, Low
- **Timing:** Short-Term (1 year), Mid-Term (2-3 years), and Long-Term (4-5 years)
- **Responsibility:** Township Board, Planning Commission, Staff, Officials

Action	Related Chapter	Type	Priority	Timeframe	Responsible Party
1. Farmland Preservation Zoning: Implement farmland preservation strategies for the Agricultural Farmland Preservation Zoning District. This should include, but not be limited to, amendments to minimum lot areas, dimensions, and other standards that support long-term agricultural use.	Farming and Nature	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	High	Year 1	Planning Commission
2. Update Conservation and Open Space Provisions: Remove the existing Conservation/Open Space zoning district and develop new zoning strategies, development standards, and subdivision regulations that prioritize the preservation of natural resources and open space. Encourage clustering of development in areas most suitable for building while protecting priority lands.	Farming and Nature	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	High	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
3. Low-Impact Development (LID) Practices: Review, evaluate, and integrate LID strategies into the development review process to balance reasonable land development with the environmental goals established in the Master Plan.	Farming and Nature	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
4. Watershed and Riparian Protection: Explore the creation of an environmental protection overlay district or a riparian/wetland protection ordinance to safeguard the Paw Paw River and its tributaries. Control land use intensity in this area.	Farming and Nature	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	High	Year 2-3	Planning Commission

Action	Related Chapter	Type	Priority	Timeframe	Responsible Party
5. Wellhead Protection: Assess and consider establishing a wellhead protection overlay district to protect groundwater resources serving community wells.	Farming and Nature	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
6. Landscaping and Tree Preservation Standards: Update the landscaping requirements for buffer areas, parking lots, and yards. Prioritize the preservation of healthy, mature trees while supplementing with new plantings in front yards and buffer areas. Include provisions for landscaped islands and peninsulas to break up large parking areas and maintain habitat value.	Farming and Nature	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
7. Farmland and Natural Resource Information Hub: Serve as a central resource for information and guidance related to farmland preservation and natural resource protection programs.	Farming and Nature	Program	High	Year 1	Staff and Officials
8. Residential Dimensional Standards: Review, evaluate, and update dimensional requirements for all residential zoning districts. Ensure that lot size, width, and setback standards are calibrated to reflect existing conditions and support desired development patterns.	Housing	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	High	Year 1	Planning Commission

Action	Related Chapter	Type	Priority	Timeframe	Responsible Party
9. Housing Supply Flexibility: review and revise requirements for principal and accessory dwelling units to reduce barriers and allow for reasonable increases in housing supply.	Housing	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	High	Year 1	Planning Commission
10. Streamlined Review Processes: Evaluate and revise zoning review procedures to remove unnecessary steps, streamline processes, and reduce regulatory inefficiencies.	Housing and Economy	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	High	Year 1	Planning Commission
11. Cluster-Based Rural Residential Design: Review zoning options, and if appropriate, adopt new provisions for conservation subdivision and cluster development designs.	Housing and Farming and Nature	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
12. Road Improvements Collaboration: Continue annual coordination with the Van Buren County Road Commission to rank and prioritize road improvement projects based on local needs and funding opportunities.	Community Facilities	Partnership, Program	High	Year 1	Staff and Officials
13. Parkland Acquisition: Consider opportunities, as they arise, to acquire land for passive park and recreational uses that enhance community access to natural areas.	Community Facilities	Plan, Program, Capital Improve.	Low	Year 4-5	Township Board

Action	Related Chapter	Type	Priority	Timeframe	Responsible Party
14. Nonmotorized Transportation Planning: Develop a nonmotorized transportation plan as part of the parks and recreation plan to prioritize regional and local connections for bicyclists and pedestrians. Establish a strategy for advocating for these improvements in state and county road projects and identify potential grant funding sources, partnerships, and other resource-leveraging opportunities.	Community Facilities	Plan, Program	Low	Year 4-5	Township Board, Planning Commission, Staff, Officials
15. Village of Paw Paw Coordination: Maintain regular collaboration with the Village of Paw Paw on shared services, facilities, and feasibility studies related to infrastructure, parks, and public services.	Community Facilities	Partnership, Program	Medium	Year 2-3	Staff and Officials
16. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS): Evaluate zoning strategies to ensure battery energy storage systems are sited in appropriate locations with minimal impact on residents and neighboring properties. Require comprehensive and enforceable decommissioning plans and financial guarantees.	Community Facilities	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	High	Year 1	Planning Commission

Action	Related Chapter	Type	Priority	Timeframe	Responsible Party
17. Alternative Energy Regulations: Continue to assess and refine regulations for solar and wind energy to balance competing perspectives, maintain local permitting control, and ensure enforceable decommissioning plans and guarantees. Establish clear zoning standards to ensure that both residential and commercial scale systems are appropriately located and scaled.	Community Facilities	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
18. Public Information and Engagement: Expand public access to information on land use, zoning, and development applications through public outreach events and improved website functionality and content.	Community Facilities	Program	High	Year 1	Staff and Officials
19. Economic Development Partnerships: Collaborate with organizations such as Market One to identify economic development opportunities and prioritize sites for development and redevelopment. Explore state, county, and local programs that offer financial incentives to support these efforts.	Economy	Partnership, Program	Medium	Year 2-3	Staff and officials

Action	Related Chapter	Type	Priority	Timeframe	Responsible Party
20. Home-Based Business Support: Review and update regulations for home-based businesses to encourage their role as business incubators or long-term employment opportunities. Ensure that operational standards balance economic activity with the character and livability of surrounding residential areas.	Economy	Program, Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
21. Commercial and Industrial Design Standards: Establish and refine building and material requirements for commercial and industrial developments to promote high-quality, visually appealing structures, particularly along priority travel corridors.	Economy	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
22. Agricultural and Wine Country Zoning: Explore zoning strategies that strengthen the agricultural economy and support agricultural tourism, including opportunities for active, working farms to diversify and expand their operations.	Economy	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission

Action	Related Chapter	Type	Priority	Timeframe	Responsible Party
<p>23. Commercial Zoning Consolidation: Consolidate the Neighborhood Convenience Commercial, General Commercial, and Highway Service Commercial zoning districts into a single district. Review and update land use regulations and dimensional standards as needed. Consider location-specific requirements for certain land uses, particularly those near existing infrastructure or the I-94 interchange.</p>	Future Land Use Plan	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission
<p>24. Mobile Home Zoning Update: Eliminate the Mobile Home Residential zoning district and identify an appropriate zoning district where mobile home communities may be permitted as a special land use.</p>	Future Land Use Plan	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Low	Year 4-5	Planning Commission
<p>25. Zoning Map Alignment: Develop a strategy to update the zoning map to reflect the vision and guidance of the future land use plan and map.</p>	Future Land Use Plan	Zoning Map or Ordinance Amendment	Medium	Year 2-3	Planning Commission

**PAW PAW
TOWNSHIP
HALL**



Exhibit 1. Public Hearing Notice

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING PAW PAW TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION 2026 MASTER PLAN UPDATE

The Paw Paw Township Planning Commission will hold a public hearing regarding the 2026 Paw Paw Township Master Plan Update. This long-range plan will guide growth, preservation, investment, and future land use decisions in Paw Paw Township. The public is invited to learn about the plan and comment on the matter.

- Location: Paw Paw Township Hall, 114 N. Gremps St., Paw Paw, MI, 49079
- Date: Tuesday, January 20, 2026
- Time: Open house from 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm. Presentation and official public hearing at 6:30 pm.
- Hearing and project information: call 269-657-4340 or email clerk@pawpawtownship.org

The draft plan is available at the Township office and can also be accessed here:
<https://pawpawtownshipmi.gov/paw-paw-township-master-plan/>

Those unable to attend the public hearing are invited to submit written comments to the attention of the Planning Commission Chair at the Township Hall address listed above by 4:00 PM on the meeting date. If any individual has a physical disability that may limit their participation in the hearing, please notify the Township at least five (5) days prior to the hearing so that reasonable accommodations may be made.

Exhibit 2. Planning Commission Resolution

VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN

At a meeting of the Paw Paw Township Planning Commission held on March 17, 2026,
at 6:30 PM.

PRESENT:

ABSENT:

The following preamble and resolution were offered by ____ and supported by ____.

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE 2026 PAW PAW TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN AND TO RECOMMEND FINAL APPROVAL BY THE PAW PAW TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES

WHEREAS, the Paw Paw Township Planning Commission has prepared the 2026 Paw
Paw Township Master Plan Update, being an update to the version last revised in 2016; and

WHEREAS, on October 21, 2025, the Planning Commission approved the tentative text
of the Master Plan and requested that the Paw Paw Township Board of Trustees authorize the
distribution of the draft Master Plan to the contiguous municipalities and the governmental and
other agencies entitled to receive the draft for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, on November 10, 2025, the Paw Paw Township Board of Trustees approved
the distribution of the draft Master Plan and asserted its right to give final approval or rejection
of the Plan; and

WHEREAS, the required period of public comment on the draft Master Plan has expired;
and

WHEREAS, the Paw Paw Township Planning Commission held a public hearing on the
proposed master plan on January 20, 2026, with the required notice.

IT IS, THEREFORE, RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

1. The Paw Paw Township Planning Commission approves the 2026 Paw Paw Township Master Plan, dated March 10, 2026, contingent upon the following changes:

- a. _____.
- b. _____.
- c. _____.
- d. _____.
- e. _____.
- f. _____.
- g. _____.

2. The Paw Paw Township Planning Commission recommends that the Paw Paw Township Board of Trustees give final approval of the Master Plan; and

3. The Secretary of the Planning Commission is requested to forward this resolution and the approved draft of the 2026 Paw Paw Township Master Plan to the Township Clerk for submission to the Paw Paw Township Board of Trustees.

AYES:

NAYS:

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

Kip Kerby
Planning Commission Chair

Exhibit 3. Township Board Resolution

VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN

At a meeting of the Paw Paw Township Board of Trustees held on _____ 2026, at _____ PM.

PRESENT:

ABSENT:

The following preamble and resolution were offered by _____ and supported by _____.

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE 2026 PAW PAW TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN

WHEREAS, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act provides for the preparation and adoption of master plans and amendments therein for the use, development, and preservation of lands in the Township;

WHEREAS, the Paw Paw Township Planning Commission has prepared the 2026 Paw Paw Township Master Plan, being an update to the version last revised in 2016; and

WHEREAS, on January 20, 2026, the Paw Paw Township Planning Commission held a public hearing on the proposed Master Plan following the distribution of the tentative draft of the Master Plan to the contiguous municipalities and other relevant planning and governmental entities, and following public notice as required by law; and

WHEREAS, on March 10, 2026, the Paw Paw Township Planning Commission adopted a resolution approving the 2026 Paw Paw Township Master Plan and recommending that the Paw Paw Township Board of Trustees grant final approval.

IT IS, THEREFORE, RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

1. Paw Paw Township Board of Trustees hereby approves the 2026 Paw Paw Township Master Plan prepared by the Paw Paw Township Planning Commission, dated March 10, 2026.

2. The Township Clerk is requested to distribute copies of the 2026 Paw Paw Township Master Plan to the contiguous municipalities and the other governmental bodies and planning agencies entitled by law to receive copies of the approved Master Plan.

AYES:

NAYS:

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

Rebecca Payne
Paw Paw Township Clerk