

# **The City of White Cloud**

## **Master Plan**

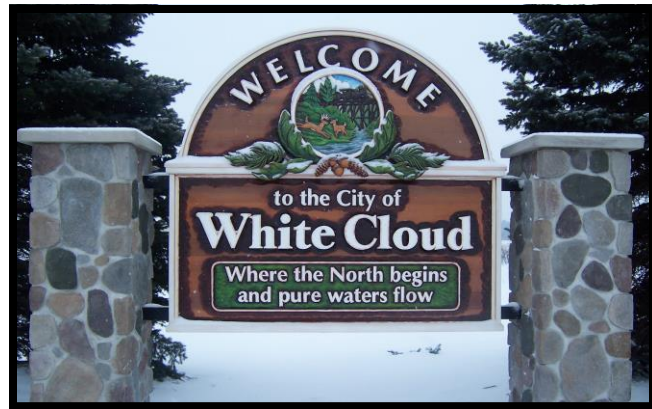


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# Master Land Use Plan

## City of White Cloud



**MARCH 2010 - Reviewed June 2014**

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction & Plan Purpose**

This Master Plan is developed under the Authority of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008. The Plan represents a vision for how the City of White Cloud will develop and redevelop in the future. It was developed through an investigation of demographic and land use trends and the vision that local citizens have for the City. The basic purpose of the Plan is to manage the intensity and configuration of land use in a manner that supports economically viable, environmentally sound and visually pleasing growth.

The Plan will help ensure that the City of White Cloud remains a highly desirable community by enabling residents, business owners and developers to make investments with a reasonable expectation of the future. In essence, the Plan is intended to balance the sometimes competing interests of individual land ownership and overall community interests.

### **Plan Elements**

This Master Plan consists of several components, including:

- Public input, which is an essential part of the planning process. It is critical to have an understanding of what City stakeholders think of the issues.
- Background research regarding housing, population and other current conditions within the City.
- A survey of existing land use that summarizes the current land use trends.
- Development of goals and strategies that define how the City will address identified concerns and trends.
- A Land Use section, that describes the types of development that would be most appropriate within the community and suitable locations for that development.
- The Future Land Use map, which is an illustration of the long-range land use pattern proposed for the City.
- Implementation strategies that should be evaluated on an annual basis.

When the above components are combined, a picture is created that will serve as a guide for the City as it faces important decisions, now and years from now.



These decisions may include policy changes, budget allocations and the more day-to-day issues, such as site plan reviews, special land use approvals, and rezoning requests.

## **Planning Framework**

Overall, the Master Plan is based upon a number of City characteristics, each of which must be considered by the Planning Commission and City Council as the Plan is implemented and updated. These characteristics include:

Community Character: The character desired by the community's residents determines the Plan's goals. A strong emphasis placed on maintaining small town character, for example, would be reflected in the Future Land Use goals and any subsequent design standards enacted in the zoning ordinance.

Capability of Land: Environmental constraints must also be considered. Is the land itself able to accommodate planned uses?

Community Needs: What types of land uses are needed in the community? For example, if a shortage of market rate housing were determined to be a community concern, the provision of suitable land uses in desirable locations would be an appropriate response.

Available Services: Through issue and goal identification, as well as data collection, information is obtained about the status of community services. Are existing services capable of handling planned development? What kind of strain will new residential development place on the ability to provide adequate fire protection or public water and sewer service? What road improvements may be required?

Existing Development: How will the planned land uses affect existing uses? For example, are there some areas that are currently residential that the City would like to see become industrial in the future? How will planned uses affect nearby existing uses?

Regional Planning: The City does not exist in a vacuum. There are other regional issues such as transportation, watershed management, environmental protection, and utility plans that must be considered as well. Sharing copies of the Plan and communicating about it with neighboring township, county and regional planners as well as other appropriate entities will facilitate regional planning and coordination efforts.

## Implementation

The Planning Commission and City Council should continuously strive to ensure effective use of this document. Although the tie between decision-making and land use policy is not always abundantly clear, most land use and design decisions can be guided by the vision, goals and strategies provided in this Plan. In the most general terms, if the City's vision drives all decisions, community leaders will be implementing the Plan. Following are additional practices that will ensure Plan implementation:

### *Refer To the Master Plan in All Zoning Decisions*

One of the principal benefits of having an adopted Master Plan is the foundation it provides for sound zoning decisions. Just as the Plan is the policy guide for land use, zoning is the principal legal enforcement tool. The two should work together to provide adequate justification for land use decisions.

### *Encourage Other Decision Making Bodies to Use the Master Plan*

The Master Plan should help guide everyday decisions, from the capacity of improved roads to new schools. The Newaygo County Road Commission, school districts, and adjacent communities as well as other parties that can impact land use patterns within the City, can work together with the City of White Cloud in the implementation of the Master Plan.

### *Keep the Plan Current*

The vision outlined in the Plan will not occur overnight. The Master Plan is an outline for the future that guides day-to-day decisions. However, even with this in mind, the Plan should not be applied or used rigidly. Changing conditions that can affect the original intentions of the Master Plan should be acknowledged and the Plan amended, if necessary.

City decisions can be weakened by an outdated Plan or one that is not in constant use as a reference. The Planning Commission should conduct an annual review of the Plan to ensure that the Plan is kept current. The State Planning Enabling Act requires that the Master Plan be reviewed every five years. While this does not mandate that the Plan be changed, it at least encourages a thorough review to determine if the directions set forward are still valid. Any amendments to the Plan can be done at that time to keep it up to date and consistent with City philosophies.

On the other hand, while the Plan needs to be a flexible instrument, its recommendations should not be taken lightly. Adjustments should be made only as necessary, and justified based upon changing conditions or shifts in community philosophy.

## The Master Plan & the Zoning Ordinance

The relationship of the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance is often misunderstood. Stated concisely, the Master Plan is a *guide* for land use for the future; the Zoning Ordinance *regulates* the use of land in the present. The Master Plan is not a binding legal document; the Zoning Ordinance is a law that must be followed by the City and its residents. However, the Master Plan is the foundation upon which the regulations are built.

Adopting or changing a Master Plan does not directly affect the zoning for any property. However, future changes to the zoning map are intended to be reflective of the planned uses shown by the Master Plan.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires a Master Plan to include a “Zoning Plan” that describes how the land use designations on the Future Land Use Map correspond to the zoning district boundaries on the Zoning Map. The Zoning Plan is an important tool for implementation of the Master Plan.

## Evaluation of Land Use Changes

Changing the land use or zoning designation for any property can have far-reaching consequences: physically, environmentally, financially, and legally. Therefore, a careful evaluation of proposed rezoning is essential. As with any land use decision, the use of standards is essential to reaching fair and consistent decisions. The following evaluation measures are included in the Plan to permit their use by the City when rezoning or Master Plan and Future Land Use Map changes are contemplated. The zoning district intents and rezoning criteria provided in the zoning ordinance must also be considered during the evaluation process.

### *Standard 1 - Consistency with the Community Vision and Plan Strategies*

If conditions (such as economic factors, demographic shifts, new utility lines, changing traffic conditions, etc.) upon which the Master Plan was developed have changed significantly since the Plan was adopted, the Planning Commission and City Council should incorporate these conditions into their deliberations to ensure that the Plan is current. Particular attention should be paid to the vision and goals to ensure that they remain valid, and that the proposed rezoning or land use change does not impair their intent.

### *Standard 2 - Compatibility with adjacent uses and districts.*

All of the uses allowed in a proposed district should be compatible with the conditions present on the site and in the immediate vicinity of the site, especially in terms of density, character, traffic, aesthetics, and property values.

The Plan provides several guidelines, as noted above, which should be considered when determining whether the proposed district is compatible with the neighborhood and the City as a whole.

*Standard 3 - Capability of being used as already zoned.*

It is the right of every property owner to receive a reasonable return on the investment placed on property. This does not mean that zoning is a slave to the "highest and best use," (which is not a zoning term, but rather a real estate term). It does mean that there should be a reasonable use available within the zone district. But if the property is capable of being used as zoned, there should be a compelling reason to change the zoning. Such reasons may be related to the first two standards of consistency and compatibility.

Site plans will not be considered as part of a rezoning request. The Planning Commission and/or City Council should not be influenced by what is proposed by the petitioner. Instead, the City will make a specific finding that ALL of the uses permitted in the proposed district are appropriate for the site and area, not just the one shown on a proposed site plan.

*Standard 4 - It is critical that the Master Plan be read in its entirety.*

Rather than attempting to isolate individual statements that may appear to support one position or another regarding the Future Land Use for the City, the Planning Commission must consider the intent of the Plan as a whole. This requires a careful reading of the Plan to ensure that all of the Plan's considerations are included in the evaluation of any change.



## Chapter 2

### Community Overview

#### Historic and Regional Context

The City of White Cloud is centrally located in Newaygo County and is the county's seat. The community encompasses about two square miles. The White River, a gorgeous,



State designated Natural River and trout stream begins in White Cloud with the confluence of Five Mile and Flinton Creeks with the south branch of the White River. Mill Pond, an impoundment of the White River, is located at the southeast edge of town and provides beautiful setting with a swimming area and picnic facilities.

When asked, most residents say they love the city because it is small, friendly, manageable and relaxed. People have memories of school, church, community events and recreation that tie them to the area.

In the early 1870s Sextus Wilcox and Lester Morgan purchased what is now White Cloud for \$1,575.60. These two lumber barons built the first train station in 1873. The Village of Morgan was platted on November 13, 1874. Lots are bought and sold today using those original lot numbers. Due to the numerous train stations named after Lester Morgan, the U.S. Postal Service requested a name change. White Cloud was incorporated in 1879. White Cloud built a three story, brick city hall in 1909. In the 1910 election, the county seat was moved from Newaygo to White Cloud being that White Cloud is located in the center of the county.



M-37 traverses north/south and nearly bisects the City. M-20 comes into the City from the east off of U.S. 131. The highway exit off of U.S. 131 onto M-20 is about 17 miles from town. M-37 has traditionally been a route north as travelers from Grand Rapids and other points south headed north to recreate. The City motto "*Where the north begins and pure waters flow*" has greeted travelers at the city limits for decades and still rings true.

The city's pure waters originated from an Artesian well which sprung from TNT blow



holes blasted in Alleyton. In 1926, local undertaker Reed began installing fountains in the park. Two of the three fountains have been restored.

The Traffic counts for M-37 have averaged around 5,000 vehicle trips per day for approximately 30 years. The following table presents Department of Transportation traffic counts over time on M-37.

**M-37 Traffic Counts**

1989	1992	1996	2002	2008
5,800	4,800	4,800	4,800	5,800

Michigan Department of Transportation Annual 24 hour Traffic Volume Reports

White Cloud is about 50 miles north of Grand Rapids and about 23 miles southwest of Big Rapids. Many Newaygo County residents commute to employment centers in Big Rapids, Grand Rapids and Muskegon. These areas also serve as a source of tourists who can easily get to the area for day or weekend trips. Additionally, several attractions are in close proximity to the city including:

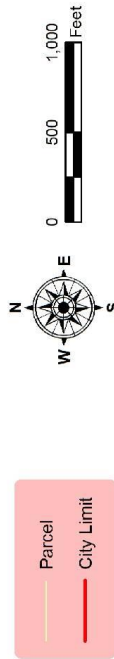
- Large tracts of the Manistee National Forest
- Extensive trail systems for snowmobiling, mountain bikes, hiking and horseback riding
- Croton/Hardy hydroelectric dams
- Several public campgrounds and private lodges and campgrounds
- Loda Lake Wildflower Sanctuary
- Diamond, Robinson, Long Lake and Crystal Lakes
- Bigelow Creek; another trout stream.
- Flowing wells
- The White River Trail





# City of White Cloud Newaygo County, MI

City Limits



Sources: Michigan Center for Shared Solutions  
& Technology Partnerships, Newaygo County GIS  
October 5, 2009

Map created by Newaygo County MSU Extension Land Use Educator.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Public Services**

The City operates under the council/manager form of government. Policy-making and legislative authority rest with the City Council. Various committees, including the Planning Commission and Downtown Development Authority, are appointed by the mayor with approval from the City Council with liaisons from the Council on each body. General management and day to day operations are the city manager's responsibility.

The City has a full complement of staff. The City's public works employees perform maintenance for public infrastructure, including the parks system. Other City staff members are involved in various aspects of the City programming on an assigned or as-needed basis.

#### **Funding**

The City of White Cloud utilizes several sources of revenue: general fund revenues, fees for service, grants, and various financing tools. Specialized programs like downtown development can utilize tax capturing to focus redevelopment efforts. Programs like Recreation rely on general funds, user fees and donations of funds or services.

#### **Public Safety**

Police protection is provided by the White Cloud Police Department, staffed by 2 full time and 3 part time officers, all of whom embrace a community policing philosophy. It is not unusual for an officer to stop traffic for children crossing the street during a special event. Fire protection service is provided by a volunteer Fire Department consisting of the City and four surrounding townships (Wilcox, Everett, Lincoln and Sherman). Emergency Medical Services are county-wide, provided by contract, and located within the city. Gerber Hospital is the closest hospital, located in Fremont.

#### **Public Institutions**

City Hall is located on M-37. The post office and library are located downtown on Wilcox Avenue. The library has 60,000 items available for circulation in various formats. These facilities are centrally located and generate activity for downtown merchants.

In addition to the County complex, the Commission on Aging, Veteran Services and Family Independence Agency are important fixtures in the community.

The City can boast several service organizations including the VFW, Eagles, Rotary, Lions, Scouts, Stage Door Players, and an active Chamber of Commerce. These groups are tremendous resources and help with several community events including a Santa fly-in breakfast, Mill Pond kayak poker run, antique tractor rides, horse carriage rides,



Halloween parade, Winter Carnival, Homecoming Days, and Santa by Train.

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA), formed under state law has the authority to capture tax increments for investment within the DDA boundaries. The County has formed a Brownfield Authority which can serve the City if the need arises. Additionally, the City's state of Michigan "Distressed Community" status (due to job losses, etc.) permits a 100% tax abatement on personal property and 50% property tax abatement for up to 12 years.

## Schools

The City of White Cloud is served by the White Cloud Area Public School District. The District's facilities are located within the City, providing recreational opportunities to residents. The District has a proud Quiz Bowl and NJROTC tradition that adds strength to community ties. Athletic fields and open spaces of the schools are available but are generally not within easy walking



distance of neighborhoods due to the lack of sidewalks or trails for access. Stronger non-motorized trail ties should be made between neighborhoods and the school campus.

## Utilities



The City is served by municipal water, sewer and storm sewer systems and has been diligent with system upgrades as resources permit. For example, there are two new wells and two water towers serving the City. The Sewer Authority, which manages a 1.1 million gallon per year facility; includes the City and Sherman Township. The treatment facility is located just west of town and has a 276,000 gallon per day capacity.

## Other Services

Building, mechanical, plumbing and electrical inspection services are provided to the city on a contractual basis and inspectors serve as needed. A certified zoning administrator also provides service on a contractual basis to the community. These arrangements allow the City to provide responsive, professional services on a very cost effective basis.



There are several high speed internet providers available in the City.

Rail service runs through the City, into the industrial park as well as in older industrial areas, twice daily, from Ludington to Grand Rapids. With increasing concerns over fossil fuel consumption and the rising cost of gasoline, these trains could once again provide passenger service. Further, White Cloud could benefit from the Grand Rapids/Ludington tourist connection via rail.

Transit service by appointment is also available in the City



Transit service by appointment is also available in the City Senior Center.





## Chapter 4 Population

In order to adequately plan for its future, a community needs to understand trends occurring in its population. Questions regarding the sources of development pressures, the types of households in the City, and the kinds of housing in demand are relevant to public officials making community service decisions. For example, a young family in a single-family home has different needs than a single senior citizen in an apartment. This chapter provides an overview of basic descriptive statistics (including housing, employment and income levels) to provide a frame of reference regarding area demographics. Note that most of the data in this section was derived from the 2000 Federal Census. While the data is older, it still provides a good relative snapshot of the community.

### Population

White Cloud's population grew steadily between 1960 and 2000.

**White Cloud Historic Population**

1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
1,001	1,044	1,101	1,147	1,420

It appears that for the first time in decades, the City is experiencing a decrease in its population (about 30 persons). The City of Newaygo also experienced a decrease, but note that surrounding townships still had a modest increases in population.

**Area Population Changes**

Unit	2000 pop.	2008 Pop. Est.
City White Cloud	1,420	1,390
City of Newaygo	1,670	1,626
Everett Twp.	1,985	2,004
Wilcox Twp.	1,145	1,173
Sherman Twp.	2,159	2,254
Lincoln Twp.	1,338	1,348

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Generally, the residents of White Cloud are of modest means. Housing values and income levels are lower than that of the county, and poverty levels are higher than the general population. However, this is generally the case in cities because the housing stock is more affordable and services are convenient, so people with less disposable income tend to live there.

Nationally, many people are also choosing to relocate to cities because they like the feel of a closer knit community rather than being isolated in the countryside.

Several key variables (as reported in the 2000 Census) to keep in mind while planning for the City's future includes:

- Of the 494 housing units in the City, 42% of them were rental units. This figure did not change between 1990 and 2000.
- Students are dwindling from the area due to their family's out-migration for jobs.
- Almost half (47%) of the housing stock was built before 1940. Some of these homes are distinctive historic homes. Many homes are in need of significant rehabilitation, or perhaps demolition. An additional 31% of the housing stock was built between 1960 and 1980.
- Median housing value as estimated by home owners was \$67,100.
- The bulk of housing units (61%) were single family; 95 of which were mobile homes. Many of these units are well past their useful life and should be replaced.
- Over one-quarter of the population was under 18 years of age (27%), close to the 1990 proportion of 28%.
- The proportion of senior citizens fell. About 13.4% of the population was over 65 years of age in 2000, compared to 15.7% in 1990.
- About 17% of all family households are single parent.
- There were 152 single person households in the City—most of those were females.
- The poverty rate was about 22% of all individuals.
- Median family income in 2000 (\$24,313) was about 65% of the county median and about 54% of the state median.
- The population seems transient in that 51% of all persons over 5 years old had lived in a different house at the time of the Census than they did in 1995.
- About 14% of the population (198 individuals) was residing in institutional housing.
- About 21% of all workers work outside the county, so the majority of the City's

work force is employed within the county.

- For those who commute to work about 38% drive over 30 minutes to work and about 14% drive over 1 hour to work. It is suspected that Big Rapids and Grand Rapids are big commuter destinations, as is Fremont.
- The occupations of employed persons in the City included
  - 0.5% - Fishing, farming and forestry
  - 12.9% - Construction, extraction and maintenance
  - 19.4% - Service related
  - 19.9% - Sales and office
  - 22.6% - Managerial and professional specialty
  - 24.7% - Production, transportation and material moving
- About 11% of the population is non-white; the majority of which are African American (7.3%) or mixed race. Only about 1% is Native American.
- Nearly 5% if the population is of Hispanic origin. Note that "Hispanic origin" is not race.

## Existing Land Use

By far, the most dominant land use in the city is institutional—the county campus, city campground, public schools, and airport. Large blocks of land are also vacant, most notably in the northwest quadrant of the city and the northeast quadrant of the city. The northwest area is a beautiful setting for residential uses. The city’s industrial park accounts for most of the vacant land in the northeast quadrant although there are still large parcels of land available for thoughtful residential development.



Multi-family development in the form of apartment complexes are isolated along Lester Street. Additional multi-family development is scattered throughout the city as duplexes, primarily in converted single family homes. The conversion of single family homes into multi-family units should be strictly monitored and discouraged.

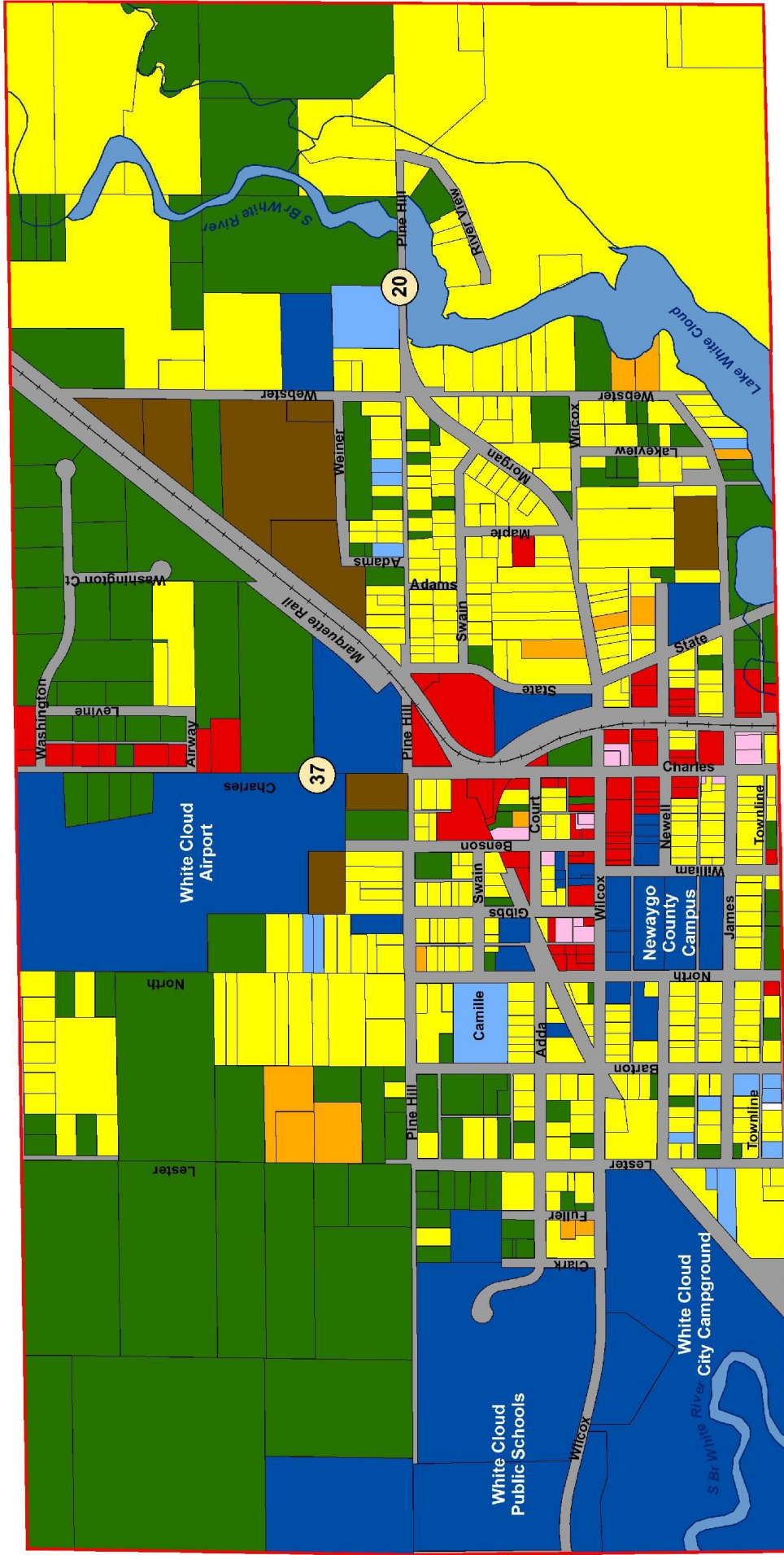


Surprisingly, there are numerous large parcels with single family homes in the city. This is an inherently inefficient land use pattern because public water and sewer are being provided to a relatively small number of homes, which increases the per unit cost for public service.

Single family housing is another predominant use in the city, with several large parcels accommodating only one home. These areas should be considered for thoughtful housing developments when owners decide to develop the remainder of their parcels.

Commercial uses are primarily located along M-37 and Wilcox (M-20). See the Existing Land Use Map following.



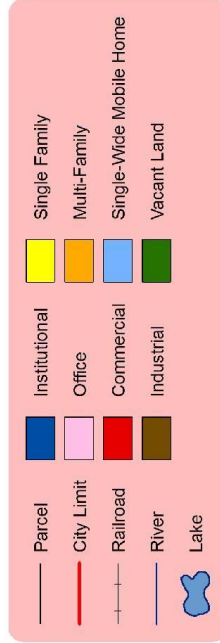
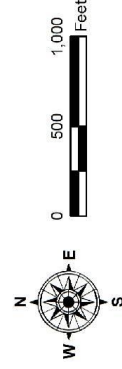


# City of White Cloud Newaygo County, MI

## Existing Land Use

Sources: Michigan Center for Shared Solutions  
& Technology Partnerships; Newaygo County GIS  
October 5, 2009

Map created by Newaygo County MSU Extension Land Use Educator.





## **Chapter 5**

### **Vision, Goals, Strategies and Future Land Use**

#### **A Sense of Direction**

In order to meaningfully plan for its future, a community must think strategically, and fully understand its strengths and weaknesses. First, key issues are identified so limited community resources can be devoted to those things of most concern to the citizenry. Second, key opportunities, or community strengths, must be built upon so positive aspects of the community can remain that way. It is always more difficult to change a negative situation than to carry on with a positive one. Fortunately, City residents and City leadership have demonstrated a strong sense of determination to maintain a focus on key issues while not losing sight of important values that are clearly rooted in White Cloud.

#### **An Understanding of Assets and Challenges**

The City has several advantages and assets that make it a unique and beautiful place to live, including:

1. A compact design and grid network of roads that enable easy access across the community, with or without a vehicle.
2. A strong sense of community.
3. A downtown with long-standing businesses and anchors that draw people to town.
4. County seat status. This employment center accounts for some 250 daytime workers in the City.
5. Mill Pond and the White River, a state designated Natural River.
6. The White River Campground, a full service, 89 site facility.
7. White Cloud School District facilities, which employs about 100 individuals.
8. A 40-acre, 13 parcel industrial park available for development.
9. A municipal airport.
10. Railroad access.
11. M-37 and M-20 accounting for thousands of vehicle trips per day.
12. Active community groups who host a variety of community functions.
13. Historic structures that tie the community to previous generations, including an 1880s railroad trestle.

The City also has several challenges to address to keep itself viable and in a position to provide key city services, including:

1. A county complex that consumes a large portion of the core city, taking up 4 square blocks, which does not yield tax revenue to support community services.
2. Other services like the school system and several non-profit social support institutions which also do not contribute to the property tax base.

3. Older portions of the housing stock that need rehabilitation.
4. Obsolete commercial structures that do not portray a vibrant image.
5. Concerns with the visual quality of the community (i.e. blight).
6. Empty commercial businesses.
7. The “pass-through” nature of the M-37 corridor.

Since a sluggish economy seems to be a reality for all Michigan communities over the short term, this is an opportunity for White Cloud to reassert the important features of the community that need to be protected and explore new opportunities for community enhancement.



## Community Vision

A clear community vision is an essential rally point for community residents. The vision can become a frame of reference for land use, community investment, and human resource decisions. If widely accepted, businesses and institutions can also invest themselves to fit into the community vision. In effect, it becomes a uniting mission for everyone within the city limits. Following is a vision developed from both observing the community and listening to a cross section of its citizens. This vision drives the goals and objectives of this section.

## Future Vision

*In the years ahead, White Cloud continues to be successful in fostering a strong sense of community through maintaining its small town character. The historic fabric of existing structures is preserved. New development meshes well with the City's small town urban character, rather than inappropriately imposing suburban features on the landscape. Because growth and redevelopment is thoughtfully considered and each development meets City site and building design standards, a level of quality emerges that keeps neighborhood and business areas attractive and healthy for decades to come.*

*Water resources and non-motorized trails are an important tie among neighborhoods and the downtown. City residents from across the community are able to safely travel from their homes on a sidewalk and trail system into the downtown by bicycle or on foot.*

*Community amenities like benches, lovely landscaping, and other design features are strategically set throughout the City. This eye for attractive details promotes a high level of community interaction.*

*Strong single-family neighborhoods and proud institutions underpin the community's pride. Homes are affordable and local institutions are accessible. The housing stock is strong, and well-maintained. A healthy cross-section of young adults, senior citizens, and maturing families live in appreciation of one another. Community ties are strong and people work together to make and keep the City a special place.*

*Additional higher density residential development is located above main street shops and immediately adjacent to the downtown to promote easy access to community services in the downtown.*

*Commercial development is limited to the M-37 corridor and the downtown, with three commercial districts having purposefully distinct characters. Those commercial uses along M-37 are to include fast food, gas stations, and convenience shopping for the traveling public. Even though business establishment may be national chains, they respect the character of White Cloud as a small town destination, meeting design criteria appropriate for the community.*

*Although M-37 is a travel route to the north, its design and character will provide features that calm traffic and invite a stop to relax and refresh.*

*The downtown district provides a niche for specialty tourist business that is also supported by the seasonal and year-round population, promoting a leisurely and unique pedestrian shopping experience. A vibrant and attractive downtown becomes the backdrop for several local events, which foster neighborly interaction.*

White Cloud has a distinct advantage as a small, closely knit community to make a significant impact when its citizens collectively put their minds to a task. Because of this ability and desire to keep White Cloud a very special place to live, this section of the plan goes beyond land use, but also touches on community and economic development. The City already engages in many special events and programs that provide a strong sense of community—perhaps without even realizing the importance of “the small things.” However, it is a whole host of the “small things” that make a community special and strong; thus their inclusion in many of the following strategies.

This portion of the plan is designed to be action oriented. There is also a realization that, because of limited human and fiscal resources, strategies should be prioritized so those viewed as most important by the community get attention first. As a follow-up to adopting these strategies, a prioritized work strategy should be put forth as an annual work plan.



## Goals and Strategies

While a vision is a broad statement of a desired state of existence, goals and strategies hone in on a more detailed plan for future action to attain the vision. Following are goals and strategic statements for the City. These statements come from:

- City leadership;
- Interviews with people in the community;
- Results of the recent community survey;
- Review of existing documents (e.g. the previous master plan, Recreation Plan, and DDA plan), and;
- Observations by the planning consultant.

**Goal: Promote a strong, diverse economy in line with the nature of the community.**

### *Strategies:*

1. More heavily market White Cloud in the Big Rapids, Muskegon and Grand Rapids metro areas as a great day trip or weekend get-away, particularly around special events.
2. Market the area to kayakers who can more easily travel the White River than canoeists.
3. More fully utilize the public space on Mill Pond as a “rest stop” for travelers or setting for special events.



4. Collaborate with key recreational facilities to offer events, services and amenities that enhance visitor's stay (e.g. various resorts and campgrounds).

5. Consider an overlay zone on a portion of the White River on a limited basis to promote dependent, recreational business.
6. Work with other small cities/villages to promote a "Sister Town Jaunt" program where tourists are given scenic routes to drive to each community and experience their unique spots. The City of Newaygo is about 10 miles south, and the Village of Hesperia is about 16 miles west and Baldwin is about 30 miles north. Each of these communities could benefit from such a program.

In White Cloud, for example, the Mill Pond could become a spot where paddle boats are rented and the White River provides a short kayak run between the Mill Pond and the campground. A stop at the hardware (which is practically its own museum) and the bakery for a home-made snack are great, lazy day, afternoon activities.

7. Develop a historic interpretive trail around the city and link this with other historic sites. Preferably the tour should conclude in White Cloud so visitors linger in town and patronize shops.
8. Continue community events and work to more widely promote them with weekend lodging packages, or event specials in local stores.
9. Encourage the Chamber to develop an email list of visitors who routinely get information on special community events.
10. Devise a city map highlighting points of interest in town and in close proximity to town.
11. Explore, with state and county officials, opportunities to promote meaningful alternative energy.
12. Develop a business retention program that includes annual visits to local industries to discuss topics of mutual concern.
13. Identify key specialty businesses that can reasonably be recruited to the downtown.



14. Consider redeveloping of vacant, obsolete properties on M-37 for a small scale Inn with an upscale restaurant.
15. Develop a formal and inviting entranceway to Wilcox Avenue to invite travelers to turn west and explore unique local color.



16. Work with Chamber to develop a “shop local” campaign.
17. Investigate fees and penalties for property owners who leave their buildings vacant.
18. Promote the airport for recreational fly-ins tapping into small plane pilot groups.
19. Develop a hospitality training program for service business and City employees to train them regarding community events and area attractions. The idea is that the people that most residents and tourists come in contact with can make their experience special by offering great service and telling them about the community. It also helps businesses cross-promote one another.
20. Enact site plan review standards that enable the Planning Commission to require certain site amenities of developers, including such things as sidewalks, trail linkages, deceleration lanes and bike racks.
21. Require street trees and sidewalks as part of any new development.
22. Encourage the protection and rehabilitate existing historic buildings and consider the use of historic tax credits.
23. Build on the theme of being the gateway to “up north”.

24. Develop a façade improvement program for existing structures and institute strong design standards for property owners receiving the assistance.
25. Engage in a business beautification campaign.
26. Develop informational kiosks and station them in strategic locations within the City.
27. Foster local “specialty home grown” businesses to infill the downtown.
28. Promote infill that mimics classic Main Street design.
29. Link the City’s campground with the North Country Trail.
30. Amend the City of White Cloud zoning map and zoning ordinance to include a Commercial C-3 district to retain, expand and accommodate new businesses along the M-37 corridor within the City, including fast food and auto-related services.



Public spaces could accommodate more seating, formal gardens, bike racks and other amenities to enhance the city's core. Residents and visitors alike can enjoy the expanse of public property in town if it is well designed.







Existing green spaces could be greatly enhanced with additional trees, rain gardens and pedestrian amenities.







Existing streets around county campus are wide and could easily be reconfigured for on-street angled parking—freeing county campus space for building expansions and other, more attractive functions.



**Goal: Continue building a vibrant downtown that serves as a hub of community activity, providing a unique and beautiful backdrop for area events, social interaction, and commerce.**

*Strategies:*

1. Limit the area of the county campus and encourage multi-story buildings and the development of a parking deck (not ramp) instead of surface parking.
2. Assist in redesigning county parking areas because they are not laid out as efficiently as they could be.
3. Enact zoning regulations that promote and permit outdoor cafes in the downtown as a means of increasing community vibrancy.
4. Develop “cottage industries” in the downtown whereby craftsmen or artists can share space to develop their small businesses.
5. Work with local businesses to help them broaden their offerings (e.g., an army surplus component to the existing Carhartt distributor, or the hardware having a greenhouse and artistic outdoor garden display).
6. Relocate select businesses on M-37 that have cramped conditions and limited parking to Wilcox Street to create a collective draw to pull travelers off of M-37. For example the bakery could become a fixture along Wilcox, with on-street parking, outdoor seating in closer proximity to the county complex. At its current location, travelers heading north may miss the facility and decide not to take a left-hand turn because parking areas are small and not easily maneuvered. (**see Appendix A**)
7. Promote the downtown for special businesses and promote M-37, for automotive dependent businesses (such as fast food and auto-dependent services). Auto-dependent businesses should respect the character of the area.



8. Actively recruit and develop small local businesses to infill downtown areas. "Grow" local businesses by promoting entrepreneurship in youth, homemakers, senior citizens and others.
9. Promote visually unifying measures in the downtown. Tactics could include unified sign designs (e.g., with similar materials and colors) for businesses, similar parking lot screening measures, and an expanded streetscape theme. **(see Appendix B)**
10. Consider establishing basic design criteria in the zoning ordinance (e.g. for certain building materials) for downtown commercial and multi-family developments to prevent wholly inappropriate design.
11. Permit more mixed uses in the downtown by developing a mixed use district for the central business area. "Mixed uses" include traditional Main Street offerings like office, service, retail, entertainment and residential uses. However, it is imperative that the street level (first floor) of any building is an active business. Residential uses should be regimented to the upper floors or rear portions of structures because street level business activity is essential for a vibrant downtown.
12. Permit wall signs and limited ground signs in the downtown, and allow only ground signs through the remainder of the city (i.e. no pole signs within the community).
13. Work to maintain the existing downtown businesses as anchors in the community that need to remain competitive.
14. Provide annual beautification awards to residents and businesses and have the winners showcased at community events.
15. As funds become available, install new sidewalks in the core community and along major roads.
16. Protect and augment street trees. Maintain the public tree inventory and management plan utilize citizen or student groups to oversee this program.
17. Review and enhance landscaping and screening standards in the city and provide flexibility for small lots or cramped properties. For example: Provide for low level walls or wrought iron fencing and piers as a screen between parking lots and sidewalks, (particularly in the downtown) rather than greenbelts in areas with limited space.

18. Build upon the streetscape program with the Chamber of Commerce. Irrigated window boxes, hanging baskets and planters, additional street trees, seating areas, historic plaques, tracks painted on the sidewalk and perennial flower plantings should all be considered as part of the effort.
19. Engage students in the community by putting the Master Plan, Zoning Ordinance and other public documents in school libraries. Encourage teachers to make learning about these documents part of the school curriculum.
20. Work with the schools and/or jail and consider using a greenhouse to propagate flowers and vegetable plants for community gardens.
21. Start a community nursery program to propagate street trees. The school campus has ample area to rear nursery trees.
22. Promote collaborative efforts between the schools and area civic and church groups to promote neighborhood-based activities.
23. Consider forming neighborhood associations.
24. Use public facilities like the library and County grounds to host art fairs, community garage sales, craft lessons, road rallies, scavenger hunts and various other events to generate downtown activity.

### **Goal: Maintain a strong and diverse housing stock.**

#### *Strategies:*

1. Use Michigan State Housing Authority programs to promote the development of apartments over storefronts as a means to augment property owner income, increase downtown area security and activity, and to diversify housing choices.
2. Actively promote multi-story buildings in the downtown, including adding a second story to existing one-story facilities.
3. Direct citizens to local banks to use low interest home improvement loans and home ownership programs offered through banks by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.
4. Develop and promote an information library regarding simple home maintenance and weatherization efforts. This may be as simple as collecting existing brochures on the topic from entities like the Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service.





The City has a wide range of housing styles including several single wide mobile homes in town.





5. Continue anti-blight enforcement and consider enacting stronger regulations in problems areas.



6. Foster a housing infill program. Infill homes should match the character of homes in the neighborhood.
7. Investigate the feasibility of a small-scale multi-family housing development behind the existing grocery.
8. Permit low density, small scale apartments for individuals reentering society after serving their sentence at the community jail. This transitional housing may be well suited for Lester Avenue, near the library and business district, but not in the heart of a traditionally single family neighborhood.



9. Consider the redevelopment deep and relatively narrow single family lots along Morgan Street, west of Maple into market rate townhouses or condominiums. The structures should be setback well off the road for appropriate buffers and landscaping.
10. Work with the owner of the existing mobile home park to redevelop the facility into a senior cottage development, replacing aged and dilapidated mobile homes with modern, shorter and smaller cottage-like units.
11. Protect against the conversion of single family homes to apartments in traditional neighborhoods.
12. Carefully evaluate housing development in the northwest quadrant of the city: it should tie into the traditional street grid, not be excessively large lot, and protect natural amenities. For example, providing sewer service to 5 lots, 200 feet wide is much more expensive per resident than providing service to 10 lots 100 feet wide. Consider pre-zoning these areas for planned unit developments and pre-designating future street locations.





The northwest quadrant of the City is almost rural in nature. The design of future development must tie into the community grid.

13. Promote homes on the fringe of Mill Pond Park and thoughtfully develop areas adjacent to the river to promote “up-scale” single family homes. These areas could be zoned Planned Unit Development with basic design conditions already determined (e.g. driveway points and trail connections).
14. Enact a rental registration program with annual inspections.
15. Send out educational pieces to citizens about property maintenance standards.

**Goal: Showcase a park and trail system that is laced through the community and recognized as a gem of the City.**

*Strategies:*

1. Develop way-finding signs to direct people to points of interest, including trails, parks and public institutions, especially the Mill Pond.
2. Developing a strong trail and sidewalk system to connect schools and parks with neighborhoods, the campground and the downtown.
3. Mark “neighborhood walks” in designated areas to promote community walking.
4. Expand use of interpretive plaques throughout the community to tell the story of White Cloud. Plaques could be placed throughout the business district, along trails, and even in neighborhoods or at the school campus.
5. Develop more facilities in existing parks to increase activity within them, and to the extent possible, tie the activities to downtown businesses promotions.

**Goal: Maintain White Cloud’s unique small-town character**

*Strategies:*

1. Maintain strong neighborhoods and promote home ownership.
2. Limit the scale of multi-family developments by limiting the number of units that can go into any one building or development.

3. Develop access management standards for the zoning ordinance, which are applied during site plan review for the M-20 and M-37 corridor.
4. Limit the use of dead-end streets in new development; connect new housing areas with the existing city grid, especially around Lester and Pine Hill Avenues.
5. Avoid the development of large lot homes which consume land and cost more to provide city services to. New lots should have frontages of between 50-100 feet. Larger lots are more rural in nature and not advisable for a city setting.
6. Consider traffic calming measures as opportunities arise, particularly in neighborhoods and downtown.
7. Prepare a short and long term capital improvement programs covering major infrastructure and facility needs.
8. Update the City Zoning Ordinance to comply with the recommendations of the Master Plan.
9. Coordinate with civic groups, the school system and churches, promoting shared resources, to support diverse recreational, cultural, youth and family activities.
10. Keep area youth involved in productive activities.
11. Establish contests to promote community pride, such as a holiday decorating competition, for both the business community and citizens.
12. Continue the city newsletter and website development to stay in contact with the citizenry.
13. Develop and home and garden tour to attract residents, tourists and citizens from surrounding communities to the City.
14. Limit the use of electronic message boards in the City.



**Goal: Protect natural resources within the City and enhance its natural setting.**

*Strategies:*

1. Maintain close contact with the White River Watershed Partnership ([www.wrwp.org](http://www.wrwp.org)) who can provide technical assistance and potentially, collaboration for grants to enhance and protect the White River area.
2. Use on-site, low impact storm water management techniques like rain gardens and sunken landscape islands rather than sending storm water as a direct discharge into the White River.
3. Promote regional detention as a means to reduce storm water system inputs into the White River
4. Consider developing a storm water management ordinance.
5. Work with the Soil Conservation District to augment wildlife habitat areas with native species, e.g., in parks and along the river.
6. Continue to promote and use the county recycling program.

**Goal: Encourage City Government and City residents to become a "green" community by participating in recycling and environmental programs.**

*Strategies:*

1. Promote use of alternative energy technologies in homes and businesses.
2. To serve as an example for private development, pursue LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification for all new and expanded City and County facilities.
3. Encourage all new development, both public and private, to be constructed in a sustainable and environmentally-sensitive manner.
4. Develop a well marked non-motorized trail network through the community which may or may not include existing sidewalks. The trails should include way finding signs and other special markings to distinguish them from neighborhood routes.

5. Heavily promote weatherization and energy efficiency for existing homes in the community. As part of the rental program, require a certain efficiency level for all rental units in the community.
6. Continue to work with the school district to enhance and maintain the White River campground as a natural area.
7. Promote carpooling with employment centers and among the citizenry.

**Goal: Promote teambuilding within the City's leadership and a philosophy of intergovernmental cooperation in the area to maximize public resources.**

*Strategies:*

1. Annually, conduct a combined workshop of the City Council, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals to review matters of planning and development and to assist in the prioritization of program activities.
2. Pursue an ongoing program of intergovernmental coordination and planning among area communities and with the county.
3. Work with both Everett and Wilcox Townships to discuss land use and access policy along M-37 and M-20.
4. Explore an urban growth boundary with surrounding communities to keep the City a compact service and employment center.
5. Limit commercial development along M-20 to what currently exists. Promoting strip commercial development along that corridor will greatly damage the downtown.
6. Maintain a sound working relationship with the county.



## **Future Land Use**     See also *Future Land Use Map* following

The following future land use categories are outlined to implement the vision of this plan:

Single Family residential (R-1): This zoning district will account for the bulk of the city's land use. It is intended to only permit single family residential uses on moderately sized lots. The conversion of single family homes will be prohibited. Customary institutional uses like churches and day care facilities that commingle with the character of single family uses will be permitted under special land use provided they do not unduly impose upon neighborhoods with expansive parking areas and activities. This district is not intended for governmental uses.

Mixed Residential (R-2): This zoning district is intended to permit a variety of multi-unit housing styles including duplexes, townhouses, apartments and condominiums. It will also permit high density single family uses. Design standards will be an important component of this district and will include high quality landscaping, outdoor space, screening and amenities for residents. Various institutional uses that serve public needs may be permitted as special land uses in this district. This may include medical clinics and other human service entities. This district is not intended for governmental uses.

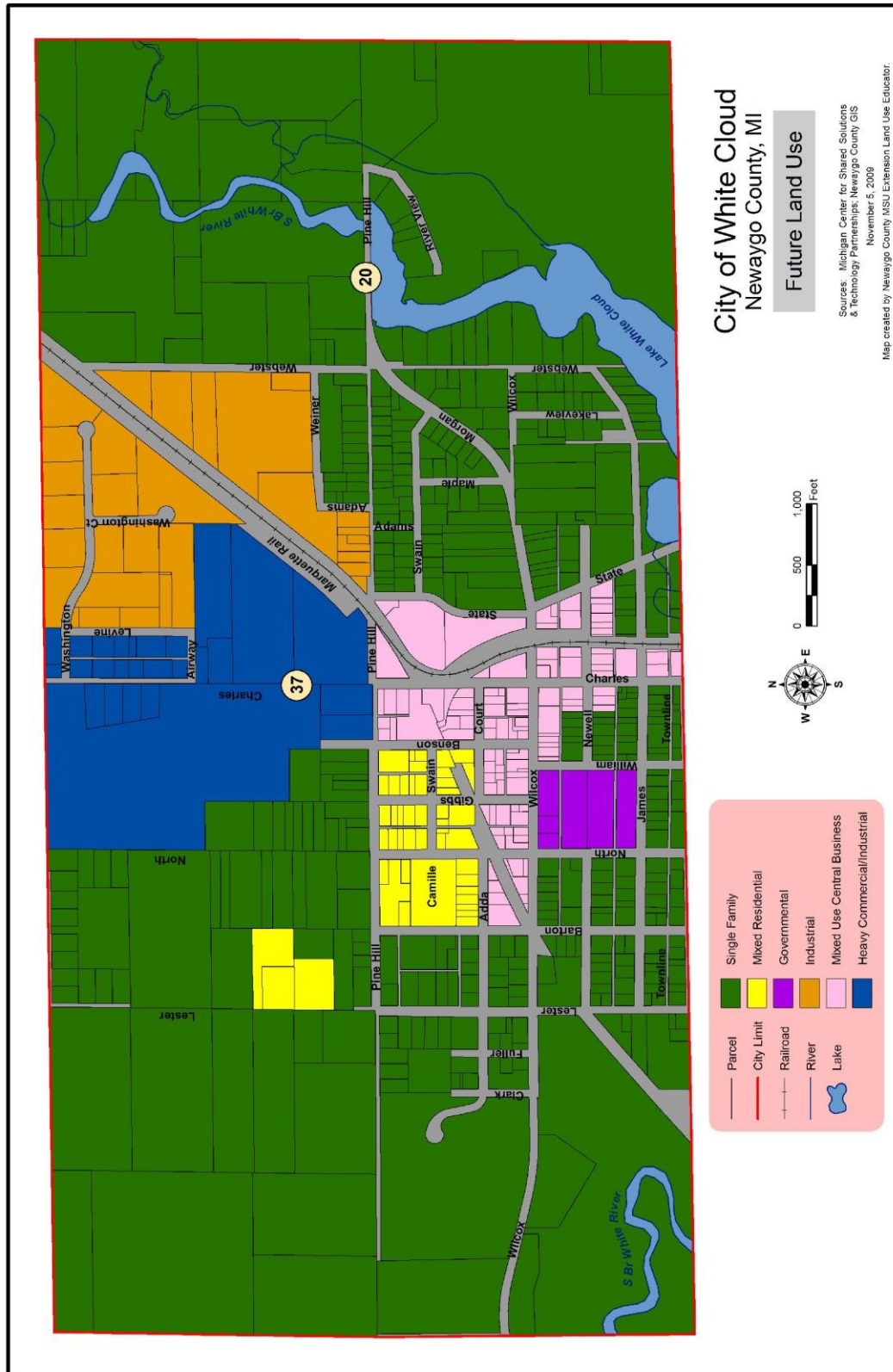
Governmental (GV): This zoning district is slated for the exclusive use of governmental services. Single family, commercial or other land uses not associated with the provision of governmental services will not be permitted in this district.

Mixed Use Central Business (MUCB): This zoning district is intended to be applied to promote high quality, central business district uses including office, service and retail uses. It will also permit residential uses in upper levels of commercial buildings. In order to maintain a consistent theme and high quality development, design standards for new and refurbished structures will be part of the criteria of this district. The zone will be isolated generally south of Pine Hill, along M-37 and along Wilcox.

Heavy Commercial & Industrial: This zoning district will encompass lands along M-37, north of Pine Hill, including the airport. It will permit heavy commercial uses that are not well suited for the mixed use Central Business District. Heavy commercial uses include drive-through restaurant facilities, gas stations, vehicle repair and businesses requiring outdoor storage like lumber yards, car sales and RV sales. Industrial uses will also be permitted if proximity to M-37 and the airport are important. Retail uses will be restricted in this district, but service uses will be permitted under certain conditions.

Industrial: This zoning district is for the exclusive use of manufacturing facilities and includes areas adjacent to the railroad right-of way and the city's industrial park.

# White Cloud Master Zoning Map (Amended 12/8/2018)





## **Appendix A**

### **M-37 Observations**

## **Appendix B**

### **Wilcox/Downtown Observations**

## **Appendix C**

### **Adoption Record**

## **Amendment to the Master Plan Complete Streets**

### **I Purpose and Statement**

Complete Streets provide streets that have facilities for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and motorists, to the extent, appropriate for the land use or the context of the street. Under the complete Streets framework, minimizing traffic delay for private motor vehicle transportation should not be the only goal of the roadway and could be undesirable depending on the surrounding land use and need of other roadway users.

Providing Complete Streets includes improvements in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility guidelines, such as handicapped accessible ramps at intersections with detectable warning surfaces for the visually impaired. Other characteristics of Complete Streets are features that create a multimodal/friendly environment, such as narrowing or removing traffic lanes (“lane diets” and “road diets”), adding median refuges, providing road re-striping to include bicycle lanes, reconfiguring parking, and installing curb extensions such as “bulb outs”.

Like many small cities, most areas of White Cloud were designed for automobile transportation, and lack facilities such as sidewalks, bus shelters, and bicycle lanes. As demand for walking, bicycling, and transit facility grows, safe and accessible transportation accommodations for all modes become even more necessary. Additional modal choices can also help in improving air quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by reducing private motor vehicle trips and miles traveled. In addition, White Cloud is committed to serving its residents – children, elderly, and persons with disabilities – by providing safe and accessible transportation facilities in the public right-of-way.

Complete Streets concepts have already been articulated in some of White Cloud’s plans and policies. The intent of White Cloud’s Complete Streets concept is to bring all of these goals together and address their mutual concerns. These concepts, while not mandated, shall be reviewed and considered when feasible.

### **II Policy Statement**

The complete Streets policy of White Cloud is developed to provide guidance for its residents, decision makers, planners and designers to ensure that multimodal elements are incorporated into all transportation improvement projects.

New construction and reconstruction roadway projects in the city should be designed to accommodate users of all ages and abilities including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, motorists and adjacent land users.

Roadway projects should adhere to the most recently approved:

- Comprehensive Master Plan
- Standard and details for construction
- Guidelines for neighborhood traffic management
- Pedestrian policies
- Comprehensive Transportation review
- Sidewalk prioritization policy and other applicable transportation policies

Roadway projects shall respect the character of the community they are serving and respect the environment, scenic, aesthetic, and historic resources of the area.

Roadway projects should include a project description that provides information about the city right-of-way, public support for the improvement, and the potential environmental impacts of improvements.

Roadway projects should follow an open and transparent public engagement process during the planning, design and development of Complete Streets projects.

Roadway projects should be funded thru a combination of local contribution, revenue sharing (Act 51 state revenue), and thru federal and state grants.

Exception to the policy or exemptions shall be approved by the City Council and must be documented with supporting data that indicates the basis for the decision.

### **III Implementation**

To ensure Complete Streets are successfully implemented in White Cloud, roadway projects should be prioritized by gauging the latent multimodal demand and the following criteria:

- Priority
- Streets linking neighborhoods to schools
- Streets linking to walking/hiking trails
- Streets linking neighborhoods to parks
- Streets linking to the community center

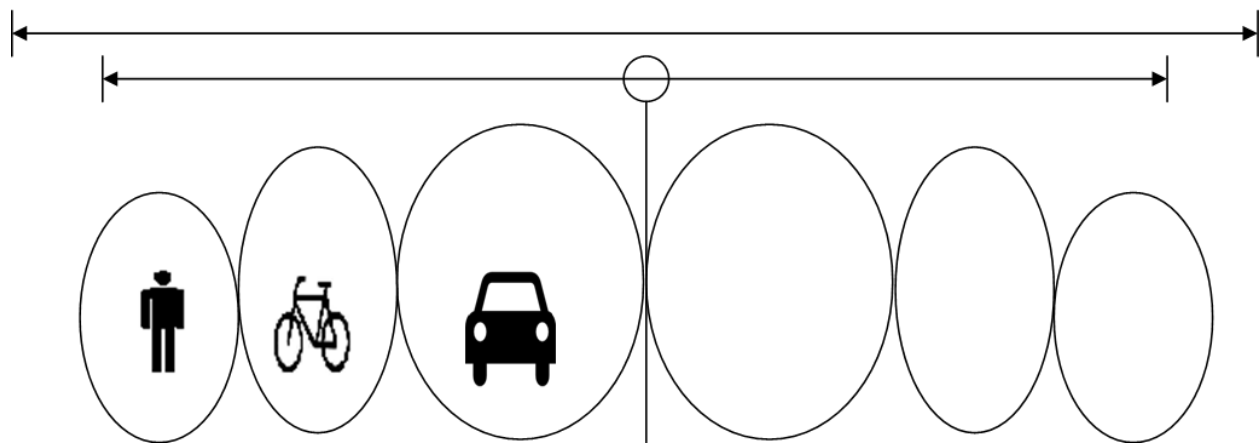


When balancing competing interests, design decisions should be made to provide the safe, convenient and comfortable choices for all users. The objectives while making the design decisions are (1) to develop a transportation infrastructure that provides access for all appropriate modes of transportation and safety and equal measure for each mode of travel and (2) to ensure that transportation facilities fit their physical setting and preserve scenic, historic, aesthetic, community and environmental resources to the greatest extent possible.

In some cases, these design objectives can be achieved within the available right-of-way. In other cases, the cost-benefit of acquiring additional right-of-way needs to be analyzed. Sometimes, trade off in user accommodations need to be made to preserve environmental or community resources located within or adjacent to the right-of-way. In these situations, the challenge is to provide access and safety for each mode of travel. In other situations, it may be necessary to modify environmental characteristics in order to provide a safe and accommodating facility.

#### IV Potential Outcomes

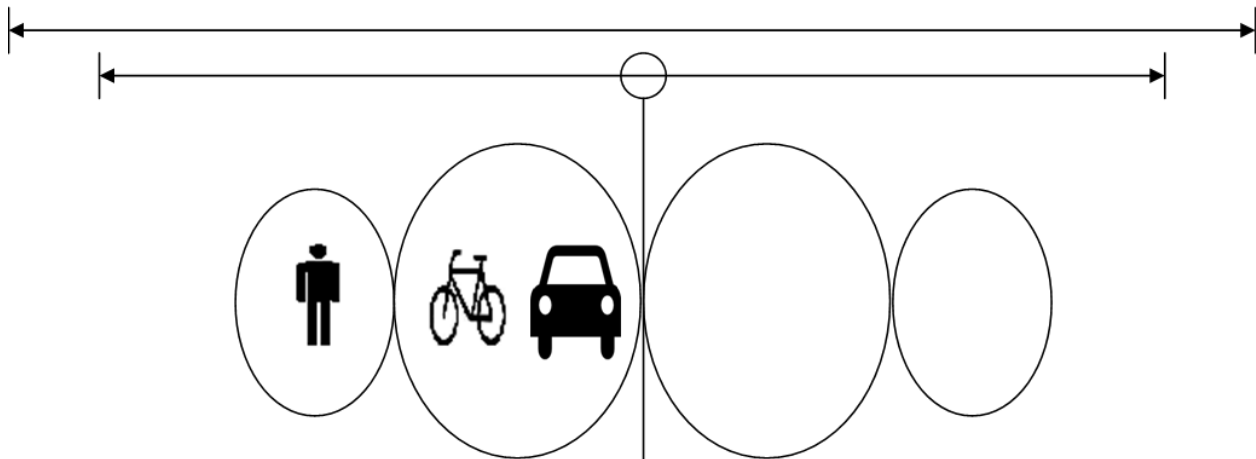
##### Case 1. Separate Accommodation for All Users (example only)



This example provides the maximum separate accommodation for all modes of travel. This is often the preferred option in terms of providing safe, convenient, and comfortable travel for all users. It is usually found in areas of moderate to high density with curbed roadways. It usually requires the most width. This may be achieved by reallocating space within the roadway, thus eliminating potential impacts to the road-side environment. Pedestrians are provided with a sidewalk separated from the roadway by a raised curb and preferably a landscaped buffer. The clear width of the sidewalk should be sufficient to allow pedestrians or wheelchair users to pass without interfering with each other's movement (preferred 5 feet sidewalk and utility poles). In

certain circumstances where 5 feet is not available, the City would refer to the American's with Disabilities Act guidelines. Sidewalks should be provided on both sides of the street unless there is a condition that suggests that a sidewalk is not needed on one side of the street. This might happen, for example, if there is a physical impediment that would preclude development on one side of the street, such as a stream or mature old trees. Provision of a striped bicycle lane or shoulder suitable for bicycle use (5 feet preferred) encourages cyclists to use the roadway. The bicycle lane/shoulder also provides for additional separation between motor vehicle traffic and pedestrians. If on street parking is present the bicycle lane should be at least 5 feet wide so that the cyclist is provided with an additional buffer along the parked cars. Motor vehicles are accommodated within travel lanes wide enough to eliminate encroachment by wider vehicles on either the adjacent bicycle lane or on the opposing motor vehicle travel lane. In addition to providing space for bicycles, shoulders also accommodate emergency stopping, maneuvering, and other functions. Where on-street parking is provided, shoulders or bicycle lanes should be maintained between on-street parking and the travel lane.

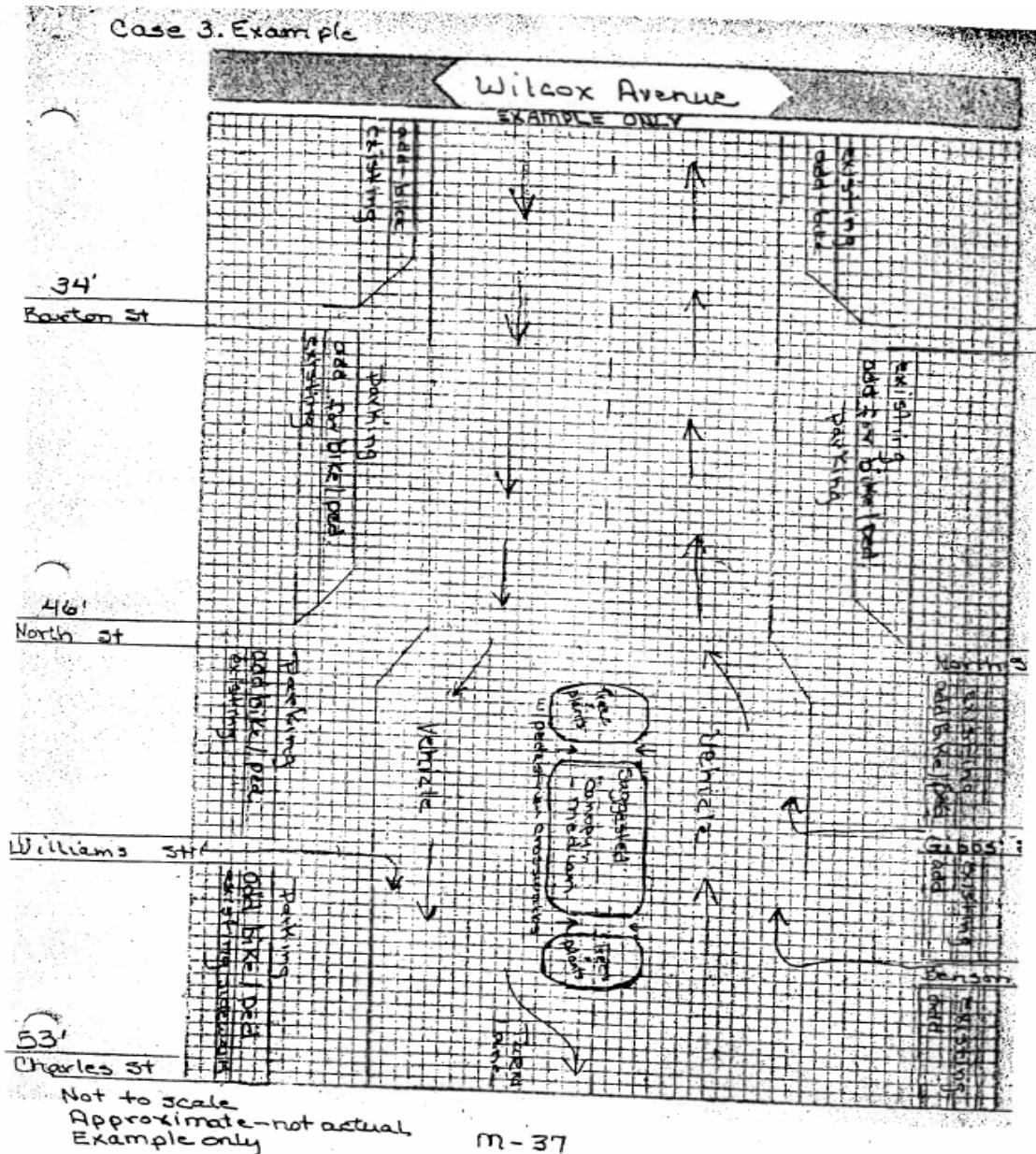
**Case 2. Shared Bicycle/Motor Vehicle Accommodation (example only)**



This is an example of bicycle and motor vehicle right of way being shared and a separate pedestrian accommodation is maintained. This is most likely to be found in the most densely developed areas where right-of-way is most constrained. It is also applicable to most residential streets where speeds and traffic volumes are low. Pedestrians are provided with a sidewalk separated from the roadway by a raised curb and preferably a landscaped buffer, increasing the safety and comfort of walking along this roadway. The clear width of the sidewalk should be sufficient to allow pedestrians or wheel chair users to pass without interfering with each other movement (5 feet preferred excluding the curb and sidewalk clear of other roadside obstructions). One lane is provided for joint use by motor vehicles and bicycles. This type of

accommodation is used in the following conditions: areas with low to moderate motor vehicle traffic volumes; low motor vehicle speeds; and areas of severe right-of-way constraint where only a minimum pavement section is feasible. Signs and pavement markings indicating that the roadway is shared between cyclists and motor vehicles should be provided. On street-parking may be provided on these roadways, if separate shoulders or bicycle lanes are not available.

**Case 3. Shared Bicycle/Pedestrian Accommodation (example only)**



This is an example for more rural areas or small towns, where bicycle/pedestrian shared accommodation can encourage citizens to be more connected to their community. Many small towns have State highways running thru them with faster traffic speed limits or a wide main street that does not have traffic signal-lights. These situations diminish bicycle/pedestrian safety. On Wilcox Avenue the span between Charles Street West to North Street is an example of a wide, small town street in the central business district. As a suggestion it might be well to consider widening the sidewalk from the present curb of the existing sidewalk 3-5 feet (8 feet is the

minimum recommendation) to accommodate bicycle/pedestrian activity. Vehicle parking (which is presently allowed) could be 6 feet wide from the curb of the bicycle/pedestrian accommodation, leaving space for two (2) well marked traffic lanes, one (1) going East and one (1) going West, divided by a tree canopied median where bicycle/pedestrian participants can cross the street safely. The median refuge would also slow the traffic speed and encourage more activity in the business district. Another suggestion on Wilcox Avenue where the Avenue narrows between North Street West to Barton Street where parking is allowed, would be to use the same suggestion as stated above without a tree canopied median. A further suggestion might be, from Barton West, where street parking is not allowed on Wilcox Avenue and where the Avenue heads out of town, would be to use the same suggestion as above for bicycle/pedestrian and vehicle accommodation.