



NILES
CHARTER
TOWNSHIP

MASTER PLAN 2018

This page intentionally left blank.

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF NILES

MASTER PLAN

JANUARY 2018

TOWNSHIP BOARD

Jim Stover, Supervisor

Terry Eull, Clerk
Richard Cooper, Trustee
Daniel C. Pulaski Jr., Trustee

Jim Ringler, Treasurer
Herschel Hoese, Trustee
Chris Vella, Trustee

PLANNING COMMISSION

Dan Smothermon - Chairperson

Gary Conover
Charles Durm
Dave Spurlock

Richard Cooper
John McNelis
Dale Streffling

PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT

Dave Swanstrom
Building Official

Peg Hartman
Zoning Administrator

Prepared with the assistance of the professional planners at

williams&works
engineers | surveyors | planners

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

Why Was This Plan Prepared?
What is the Difference Between the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance?
Lawful Zoning Ordinances Need a Master Plan
How Does the Master Plan Affect You as a Resident or a Landowner?
Refer to the Master Plan in all Zoning Decisions
Encourage Other Decision Making Bodies to Use the Master Plan
Keep the Plan Current
The Master Plan is a "Living Document"
Conclusion

Chapter 2. Community Profile5

Trends in Population Change
Population Projections
Population Characteristics
Housing
Labor Force
Traffic Network

Chapter 3. Existing Land Use..... 17

Single and Two Family Residential
Multiple Family Residential
Manufactured Housing Community
Commercial
Industrial
Public/Quasi-Public Uses
Lakes, Rivers & Streams
Forest
Wetlands
Agriculture
Open/Vacant
Urban/Rural Character
Future Trends
Redevelopment Opportunities

Chapter 4. Natural Environment 27

The Value of Natural Resources
Geology
Soils
Topography and Drainage
Water Features

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Wetlands | |
| Groundwater | |
| Drainage | |
| Woodlands | |
| Sustainability | |
| A New Awareness | |
| Chapter 5. Goals and Objectives | 41 |
| Chapter 6. Future Land Use | 47 |
| Zoning Plan | 55 |
| Chapter 7. Plan Implementation | 59 |
| Appendix. | |
| Resolutions of Adoption | |

Index of Tables, Figures, & Maps

Tables

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1 - Most Populous Communities in Berrien County | 5 |
| Table 2 - Population Change in Adjacent Communities | 7 |
| Table 3 - Regional Population Change..... | 7 |
| Table 4 - New Residential Building Permits | 9 |
| Table 5 - Median Age Comparison..... | 10 |
| Table 6 - Major Employment Sectors..... | 12 |
| Table 7 -Land Use Change, 1978 - 2016 | 18 |

Figures

| | |
|---|---|
| Figure 1 -Population Change | 6 |
| Figure 2 - Comparison of Percentage Population Change | 6 |

Maps

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Map 1 - Location Map..... | 5 |
| Map 2 - Traffic Counts | 15 |
| Map 3 - 1978 Land Use | 23 |
| Map 4 - 2016 Land Use..... | 25 |
| Map 5 - Soils | 31 |
| Map 6 - Natural Features..... | 37 |
| Map 7 - Topography..... | 39 |
| Map 8 - Future Land Use | 53 |

This page intentionally left blank.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This plan is intended to serve as a guide or a compass with which to protect and enhance the quality of life in Niles Charter Township.

Niles Charter Township is at a crossroads. Looking back, we can see what has been gained and what has been lost. Looking ahead, we can imagine a future shaped by choices made today.

Niles Charter Township's Master Plan presents a vision for land use and development for the next five to ten years. It helps to prepare the area for growth, and provides a reliable basis for public and private investment. This plan is intended to serve as a guide or a compass with which to protect and enhance the quality of life in Niles Charter Township. It accomplishes this by fostering orderly, manageable, and cost effective growth and establishing a framework for future decisions. This will enable the residents to truly enjoy the qualities that make Niles Charter Township a great place to live.

The plan is intended to serve as a policy guide for public and private decision makers.

One of the challenging issues facing the Township today is its ability to balance the positive aspects of land preservation with the economic benefits of development. The ability to maintain a unique yet comfortable community environment will depend heavily on cooperative efforts with surrounding townships and the City of Niles.

In serving as a guide, the Master Plan is both visionary and strategic. It outlines goals and objectives for the future and is the principal guide directing land use policy. The plan is intended to serve as a tool for public and private decision makers including the Township administration, boards and commissions, as well as businesses, community groups, the development community, non-profit organizations, and individuals. The Plan is designed to decrease uncertainty about the Township's direction. The Plan is a policy framework, not law, and should be viewed as such.

Master Plans are authorized by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008. This Act describes the basic purposes and requirements of Master Plans including the need to:

- Promote the public health, safety, and general welfare;
- Encourage the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability;
- Avoid the overcrowding of land by buildings or people;
- Lessen congestion on public roads and streets;
- Facilitate provisions for a system of transportation,
- Sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, recreation and other public improvements; and
- Consider the character of each township and its suitability for particular uses, and
- Population development.

Why Was This Plan Prepared?

The reasons Master Plans are adopted vary from community to community. Niles Charter Township officials have recognized the need to preserve the character of the community that first drew them, and others, here. This Master Plan is a powerful expression of Niles Charter Township's intentions for the future and will be used to guide Planning Commission and Township Board decisions regarding issues which affect the use of land. Additionally, State statute requires that a local Zoning Ordinance be based on the foundation of a Master Plan; and because Niles Charter Township has zoning jurisdiction over the properties within its jurisdictional boundaries, preparing a Master Plan is appropriate.

What is the Difference Between the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance?

The relationship of the Master Plan and 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 Township and its residents.

Lawful Zoning Ordinances Need a Master Plan

The legal defensibility of a zoning ordinance will be greatly strengthened by the adoption and consistent use of a well conceived Master Plan.

How Does the Master Plan Affect You as a Resident or a Landowner?

How the Master Plan affects you depends on your particular situation. If you are a property owner you may have several interests, including not only your property but properties that are in a similar land use category. As a homeowner, you will be interested in the properties in your immediate neighborhood. You may wish to know what uses are proposed for vacant land in your area. As an owner of vacant property you will want to know what land uses are proposed for your property.

Township residents will be interested in the overall concepts of the Plan, as expressed in the Goals and Objectives Chapter. These statements will articulate the Planning Commission's view of the Township now, and in the future. Over the life of the Plan, growth likely will occur slowly at times, more rapidly at others and in somewhat different patterns and sequences than is currently foreseen. Even the best plan can be no more than an educated guess about future land uses and trends. An effective plan must be flexible enough to succeed within a range of likely conditions and be adjusted as those conditions are monitored and evaluated, while maintaining a steady aim at the ultimate goals and while striving to achieve the policy objectives and future land use framework.

Refer to the Master Plan in all Zoning Decisions

Use of the Master Plan ensures that the Township's desires regarding future development are translated into action; one rezoning, site plan review, special land use approval, and variance at a time. It is those every day decisions that, when added together, will create the future land use pattern for Niles Charter Township.

Encourage Other Decision Making Bodies to Use the Master Plan

The Master Plan should assist in guiding the decision making efforts of others. The planning and development programs of other agencies such as the County Road Commission and MDOT, County Public Works Department, and adjacent Townships, can help Niles Charter Township in the implementation of its Master Plan.

Keep the Plan Current

The Planning Commission should conduct an annual review of the Plan to ensure that the Plan is kept current. Any amendments to the Plan can be done at that time to keep it up to date and consistent with changing community philosophies and needs. At a minimum, however, the Plan must be updated every five years, as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.

The Master Plan is a "Living Document"

For the vision presented in this plan to become a reality, however, other steps must follow its adoption. These include:

- Development of a capital budget and program to outline long-term funding needs and commitments;
- Development of area-specific plans, programs and policies to offer more detailed and site-specific strategies for selected parts of the area;
- Ongoing evaluation of plans, policies and programs; and
- Continuing community involvement in the planning and governing process.

This Master Plan must be considered a "living document" and not placed on a shelf until the next revisions are needed.

This Master Plan must be considered a "living document" and not placed on a shelf until the next revisions are needed. It must be continually reviewed, modified and expanded as necessary to reflect changing circumstances and opportunities. The Planning Commission and Township Board may consider specific amendments to this Master Plan to better serve the public interests of the community and the desires of private property owners.

Conclusion

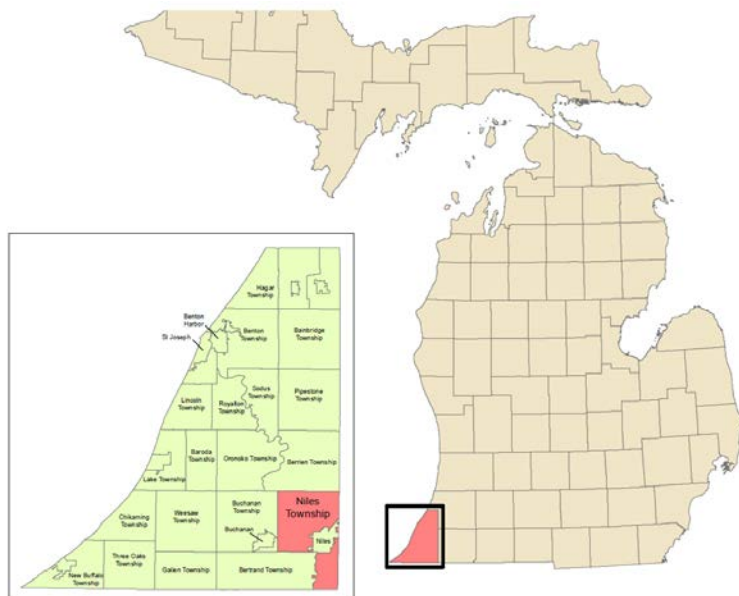
The Niles Charter Township Master Plan serves as a guide for the Township's future physical development and for implementing policies to reach community goals. On a smaller scale, the Plan also serves as an information source. In short, the Master Plan provides a picture of where the Township has been, where it is now, and where it is going, providing a "Compass" to guide future development.

The value of the Master Plan is directly related to the level of Township commitment to follow its course, and diligence in keeping the plan current and relevant to today's conditions. It is hard work; but the rewards make the effort worthwhile.

This page intentionally left blank.

CHAPTER 2. COMMUNITY PROFILE

Map 1. Location Map



Niles Charter Township, approximately 37 square miles in size, is located in Southwest Michigan's Berrien County. Conveniently located just north of the Indiana State line, Niles Charter Township is within 10 miles of South Bend, Indiana, 95 miles east of Chicago, Illinois and 60 miles southwest of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

The physical, social and economic characteristics of an area shape the community and influence its future. This community profile looks at historical and recent socio-economic characteristics for the purpose of establishing baseline trends. By analyzing those trends and existing conditions, Township officials can begin to understand why and how land use patterns have changed over time and the ways in which the Township can better serve the needs of its residents.

Trends in Population Change

Niles Charter Township is the third most populous community in Berrien County, as indicated in Table 1.¹

| Table 1 | |
|---|-----------------|
| Most Populous Communities in Berrien County | |
| Community | 2010 Population |
| Benton Charter Township | 14,749 |
| Lincoln Charter Township | 14,691 |
| Niles Charter Township | 14,164 |
| City of Niles | 11,599 |
| City of Benton Harbor | 10,038 |
| St. Joseph Charter Township | 10,028 |

These modest fluctuations in population trends indicate that the community has not experienced rapid change and remains fairly steady.

A historical look at the population of Niles Charter Township shows a relatively stable community from the 1960s to present. While the population declined slightly from 1970 to 1990 due to annexations by the City of Niles, growth in subsequent decades has taken the population to its historic high in 2010. Other than decline due to annexations, population growth has been steady, but moderate from decade to decade, as shown in Figure 1. Between 1990 and 2000, the 2000 Census showed an increase of about 500 people, or 3.9%.

¹ Demographic information in this Master Plan reflects 2010 Census and American Community Survey figures, unless otherwise noted.

The 2006 mid-decade Census estimate indicated the Township's population had grown to 13,373 people since 2000, an increase of 48 people. Although the 2009 Census estimates indicated a slight population decline to 13,239, by the 2010 census, a slight increase was actually reflected. These modest fluctuations in population trends indicate that the community has not experienced rapid change and remains fairly stable.

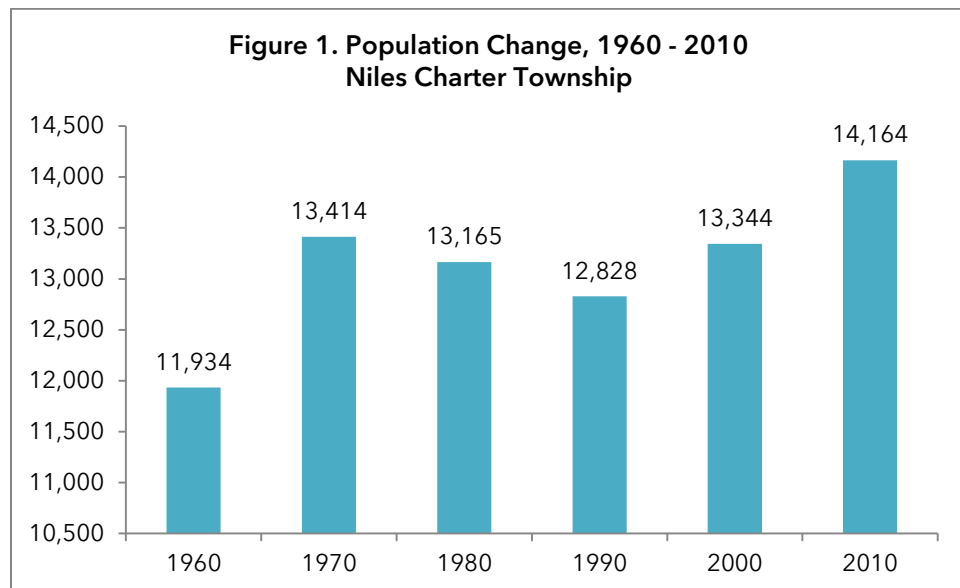


Figure 2 compares population change in Niles Charter Township to change in the broader County. From 1960 through 2000, the direction of population growth or loss in the County was reflected in the Township (with the exception of the 1970s, again due to annexations). However, in the first decade of the 21st Century, the Township continued to grow even as the overall County lost some population.

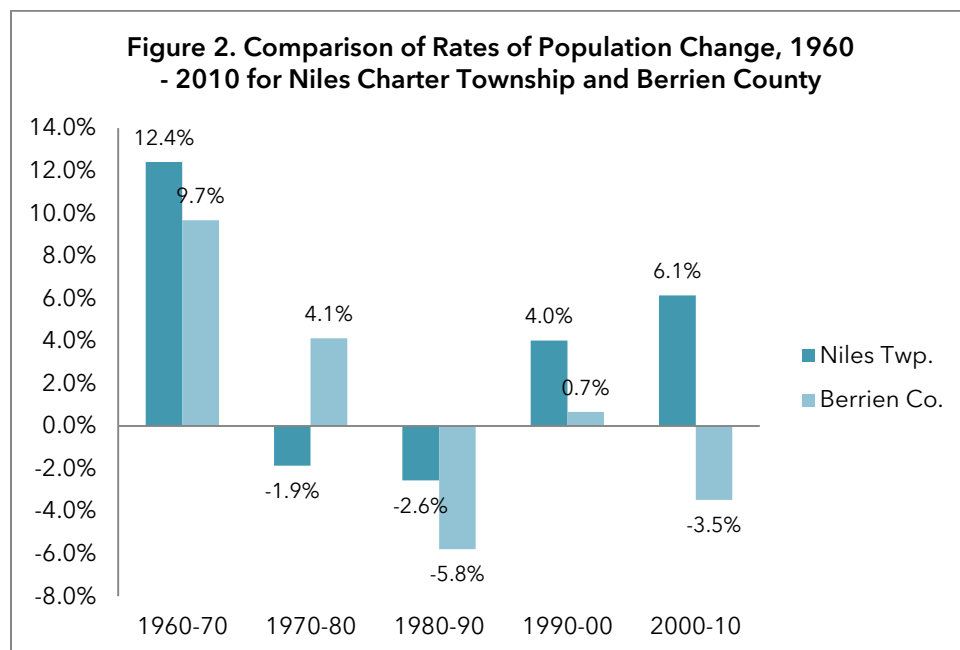


Table 2 compares change in Niles Charter Township to change in adjacent communities. Of communities contiguous to Niles Charter Township, the City of Niles experienced the largest decline in population between 2000 and 2010 at -4.9%, followed by Howard Township's -1.6%. Milton and Bertrand townships saw the greatest influx of population during this same period, likely attributable to growth from the South Bend, Indiana region. Between 2000 and 2010, Niles Charter Township experienced a modest population increase relative to many neighboring municipalities.

Between 2000 and 2010,
Niles Charter Township
experienced a modest
population increase
relative to many
neighboring

| Table 2 | | | |
|---|--------|--------|----------|
| Population Change in Adjacent Communities | | | |
| Community | 2000 | 2010 | % Change |
| Niles Charter Township | 13,325 | 14,164 | 6.3% |
| Milton Township | 2,646 | 3,878 | 46.6% |
| Howard Township | 6,309 | 6,207 | -1.6% |
| Buchanan Township | 3,510 | 3,523 | 0.4% |
| Bertrand Township | 2,380 | 2,657 | 11.6% |
| Berrien Township | 5,075 | 5,084 | 0.2% |
| City of Niles | 12,201 | 11,599 | -4.9% |

Table 3 compares the rate of population change of southwest Michigan counties to the Township's rate of change between 2000 and 2010. Although Cass County grew by 2.3%, Berrien County experienced a slight decline and Van Buren County's was virtually unchanged. The combined population of the three counties in 2000 was 289,820 and in 2010 it was 285,364, equating to a rate of loss of -1.5%. By comparison, Niles Charter Township's population grew by more than 6% over this timeframe.

| Table 3 | | | |
|----------------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| Regional Population Change | | | |
| Community | 2000 | 2010 | % Change |
| Niles Charter Township | 13,325 | 14,164 | 6.3% |
| Berrien County | 162,455 | 156,813 | -3.5% |
| Cass County | 51,102 | 52,293 | 2.3% |
| Van Buren County | 76,263 | 76,258 | -0.007% |

Population Projections

Statistical averaging techniques were employed to project the Township's likely population growth to the year 2030. These approaches are intended to provide a general sense of growth in the future. In communities such as the Berrien County region that may have experienced varying rates of growth over time, future growth trends may not parallel historical trends, especially since developable acreage has been consumed over time. The following generalizations are limited in scope and are based on past trends documented by the United States Census Bureau and Township data.

These projections have implications regarding future land use necessities, the demand for various public services and capital improvements, and they help to understand the future position of the Township in terms of growth and total population. The following describes the projection techniques.

The Constant Proportion (or ratio) Method of projecting population assumes that Niles Charter Township will continue to represent the same percentage of Berrien County's projected population in the years 2010, 2020, and 2030 that it represents today. In 2010, the Township comprised about 9.03% of Berrien County's total population. Using the population projections for Berrien County as estimated by REMI for the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission², and extending those trends through 2030, the following illustrates the results of the constant proportion method for Niles Charter Township.

Constant Proportion Method

| | <u>2010</u> | <u>2020</u> | <u>2030</u> |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Berrien County | 156,813 | 156,512 | 156,054 |
| Niles Twp | 14,164 | 14,133 | 14,092 |

The Growth Rate (or geometric) Method projects future population growth or decline based on the rate of change in the Township in the past. Using the growth rate method, the following assumes that growth in the future will occur at the same average rate as has occurred annually since 1970. The Township's population declined between 1970 and 1990, but increased from 1990 to 2010. Using the 2010 census population, the Township's population experienced an overall compounded annual rate of change of 0.136% since 1970.

Growth Rate Method

**Compounded Annual
Growth Rate**

| | <u>1970-2010</u> | <u>2010</u> | <u>2020</u> | <u>2030</u> |
|-----------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Niles Twp | 0.136% | 14,164 | 14,358 | 14,554 |

The Arithmetic Method is similar to the growth rate method in that population projections are based on growth that occurred in preceding decades. This method, however, bases population growth on the overall average change in the number of persons per year, rather than on rate of change. The following projections are based on the average net decrease of 188 persons per decade between 1970 and 2010, in Niles Charter Township, based on U.S. Census figures.

Arithmetic Method

| | <u>Average Change Each Decade (Number of Persons)</u> | <u>2010 Population</u> | <u>2020</u> | <u>2030</u> |
|-----------|---|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Niles Twp | 188 | 14,164 | 14,352 | 14,540 |

² Southwest Michigan Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. REMI Population Projections Published by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission. 2012.

The following table summarizes the preceding information. By averaging the results of these methods, it is reasonable to predict that the population of Niles Charter Township will grow slowly to about 14,377 persons by 2020 and then hold steady or decline slightly by 2030. The projections summarized here assume that past trends will continue into the future, and are limited in scope by such a supposition.

Population Projection Summary

| | <u>2010</u> | <u>2020</u> | <u>2030</u> |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Constant Proportion | 14,164 | 14,421 | 14,045 |
| Growth Rate | 14,164 | 14,358 | 14,544 |
| Arithmetic | 14,164 | 14,352 | 14,540 |
| Average | 14,164 | 14,377 | 14,376 |

Building Permits

| Table 4 | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| New Residential Building Permits | |
| Year | No. Res. Permits |
| 2006 | 66 |
| 2007 | 55 |
| 2008 | 37 |
| 2009 | 11 |
| 2010 | 14 |
| 2011 | 14 |
| 2012 | 8 |
| 2013 | 7 |
| 2014 | 19 |
| 2015 | 16 |
| 2016 | 22 |

These population projections should be compared to actual residential building permit activity over the past decade. Projecting population change using building permit data tends to be a more reliable approach compared to the methods above because it is based on the actual number of permits issued by the Township; however, it does not take into account residents moving out of existing structures. Between 2006 and October of 2016, the Township issued 269 residential building permits; an average of about 24 permits per year. According to the 2010 US Census, a typical household in the Township includes 2.46 persons, and by comparing new residential building permits issued, a further impression of population growth is obtained. Extrapolating these figures into the future may project future population change, assuming growth trends remain the same. This method projects that the Township will grow by about 59 people per year.

Of course, like the other extrapolation techniques, this approach assumes broad past trends will continue and it is clear from Table 4 that the rate of new home construction in the Township has declined precipitously in recent years. In addition, these figures reflect gross new home construction, ignoring demolitions. Subtracting the 78 demolitions of existing dwellings in the Township that took place between 2006 and 2016 from the total number of new permits issued in that same period, a difference of 191 new dwellings equates to growth of about 43 people per year on average.

Population Characteristics

Age

The age profile of the community has changed slightly since 2000. The number of school age children and the number of adults between 25 and 44 (commonly thought of as the family forming years), comprised nearly 50% of the population. Both of these groups declined since 2000 as a percent of the total population. More specifically, in 2010 the age group between 45 and 64 (baby boomer generation) had increased to nearly 30% of the population, while the 65 and over group comprised more than 17% of the population.

This trend is similar to the national trend of the aging of America. The post-World War II baby boom is entering retirement age and, by the year 2030, all baby boomers will be over age 65. Given that nearly 30% of the population in the Township is comprised of baby boomers, if current trends continue, more than one-third of the population may be 65 or older by 2030.

The median age of Berrien County and Cass County is notably higher than the State overall.

The current age of many in the Township should provide a boon to the local economy, because middle age represents the peak earning years in most occupations. However, an older population also presents a skewed labor market with a shortage of labor force entrants and an increased demand for health services. The aging population will also lead to slower rates of population growth in the future, as more and more people leave child-bearing years behind. The population will be moving from nurseries to nursing homes, with shifts in demand for social services. As the numbers of empty-nesters and smaller households increasingly dominate the housing market, shifts toward smaller, easier to maintain, and, perhaps, more affordable housing units can be expected.

| Table 5 | | | |
|------------------------|------|------|----------------|
| Median Age Comparisons | | | |
| Community | 2000 | 2010 | Percent Change |
| Niles Charter Township | 38.7 | 41.9 | 8.3% |
| Berrien County | 37.4 | 41.0 | 9.6% |
| Cass County | 38.5 | 42.6 | 10.6% |
| Michigan | 35.5 | 38.5 | 8.5% |

In order to gain some perspective, it is appropriate to compare the median age of Niles Charter Township to the median age of the County and State. Table 5 illustrates that the median age of Berrien County and Cass County is higher than the State overall, which may indicate that southwest Michigan is an attractive place to retire or that young people chose to live elsewhere. The median age for the Township is consistent with that of the aforementioned two counties.

Ethnicity

The Township's racial composition has changed very little over the past several decades and is largely homogeneous. However, between 2000 and 2010, the community did become marginally more diverse. According to the 2010 Census, 12,753 or 90% of the residents of Niles Charter Township classify themselves as White. The Hispanic or Latino population comprises the next largest category, but at only 4.5% (642 residents) of the community. The Black

or African American population is third, at 3.7% of the population (517 residents). The Asian population is fourth at 0.7% (104 residents) followed by the American Indian and Alaska Native population at 0.7% (102 people).

Housing

About 80% of dwellings
are occupied by
homeowners, indicating a
fairly stable population.

According to the 2010 Census, the majority of the housing in the Township is owner-occupied. About 80% of dwellings are occupied by homeowners, indicating a fairly stable population. In 2000, only 1.7% of owner-occupied dwellings were vacant; however, the number of vacant housing units increased to 9% in 2010, likely due to the national housing market decline during this time period. This is less than Berrien County (18%) and the State of Michigan (14.6%); however, some of the vacancies in these two geographies can be attributed to seasonal or recreational second homes.

The 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) shows 41% of all the Township's housing units were built before 1960. It is not uncommon within communities with older housing to have housing-related maintenance issues and deterioration. Field observations made during the course of preparing this Plan revealed signs of such deterioration due to neglect and age, especially in the more urbanized sector, south of the City of Niles.

While the majority of housing units (75.8%) in Niles Charter Township are single family detached dwellings, the ACS revealed that many structures contain two or more units (10.8%) and there is an equal ratio of manufactured housing units (11.3%). In total, the 2010 American Community Survey reported 659 multi-family and 686 manufactured housing units in the Township.

As of 2010, the median value of single-family owner-occupied dwellings in the Township was \$103,400. This compares to \$88,400 in the City of Niles and \$135,600 in Berrien County.

Future Housing Need

As stated above, the population projections may be limited because they are based on the assumption that past trends will continue into the future. Moreover, residential building permit data reveals that the housing market and new housing starts are still recovering in the Township and have not reached prerecessionary levels, making it difficult to predict new housing need. Extrapolating building permit trends reveals an average influx of 43 people per year; however, the unique circumstances surrounding the housing market during the last decade increases the ambiguity to any projection of future housing need.

Based on the current mix of housing in the Township, it appears that a wide range of options are currently available. The percentage of single family dwellings (75.8%), however, should not significantly change. In addition, the age of the single family housing stock may suggest a need for replacement housing or policies which encourage rehabilitation. Therefore, future housing development should focus on expanding single family home redevelopment opportunities within the Township.

Labor Force

A majority of the Township's labor force in 2014 was employed in manufacturing, education and health services, and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services. This is not surprising when compared to the regional employment trends. A traditionally strong industrial presence, not only in the City but in the Township as well, gives these numbers their significance.

The two-income family is becoming increasingly common, in part due to social trends but also as an adaptation to the wage structure of the economy, both locally and nationally. Average per capita income for the Township in 2014 was \$21,170. In the City of Niles, average per capita income was \$17,259 and in the County overall, average per capita income was \$24,304.

Following is a listing of major employment sectors in Niles Charter Township, according to the 2014 American Community Survey:

| Table 6 | | |
|--|-------|------|
| Major Employment Sectors | | |
| Employed population 16 years and over | Total | % |
| | 6,925 | 100 |
| Occupation Sector | | |
| Management, professional, and related occupations | 1,421 | 23.4 |
| Service occupations | 1,233 | 20.3 |
| Sales and office occupations | 1,364 | 22.5 |
| Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations | 618 | 10.2 |
| Production, transportation, and material moving occupations | 1,430 | 23.6 |

Primary economic base employers in Berrien County include:³

| | Employees |
|--|-----------|
| Whirlpool Corporation | 4,000 |
| Lakeland Regional Health Systems | 3,826 |
| Andrews University..... | 2,104 |
| Four Winds Casino | 1,800 |
| Indiana Michigan Power | 1,200 |
| Leco Corporation | 650 |
| Berrien County Government..... | 635 |
| Lake Michigan College | 472 |
| Modineer | 455 |
| Benton Harbor Area Schools | 375 |

³ Berrien County Government, 2016

According to the 2014 American Community Survey, just less than two-thirds (60.4%) of the population aged 16 and over were in the labor force. Of those 16 and over, 6,066 (52.9%) were employed and 859 (7.5%) were unemployed, compared to 6.4% unemployment in Berrien County overall. While many areas of the County have recovered from the Great Recession, large employment losses and firm closures during this time, coupled with advances in manufacturing technology, have resulted in a longer term loss of traditional industrial employment. In 2014, Berrien County ranked 27th for the highest unemployment in the State of Michigan, out of 83 counties.⁴

Traffic Network

A transportation network links activities within a community to those in surrounding municipalities, and the larger region as a whole. Transportation plays a critical role in determining the nature and intensities of land uses that occur throughout a community. Niles Charter Township has a wide variety of land uses and prevailing natural features which establish a diverse transportation network, providing its residents with a mixture of transit experiences from quaint rural roads to moderately congested commercial areas.

Rolling topography and natural features including the St. Joseph and Dowagiac Rivers in Niles Charter Township mean that there are few straight north-to-south or east-to-west roadways in the community. Most major roads are routed around natural features or through the more congested segments of the City. Vehicular circulation within the Township might be viewed as incontinuous, hampered by the presence of two rivers and steep terrain. In addition, with the City of Niles lying in the midst of the Township and separating it into two distinct areas, traffic is forced to funnel through busy, disjointed streets to go from one end of the Township to the other.

A primary challenge for accessibility and interconnections within Niles Charter Township are the many natural barriers.

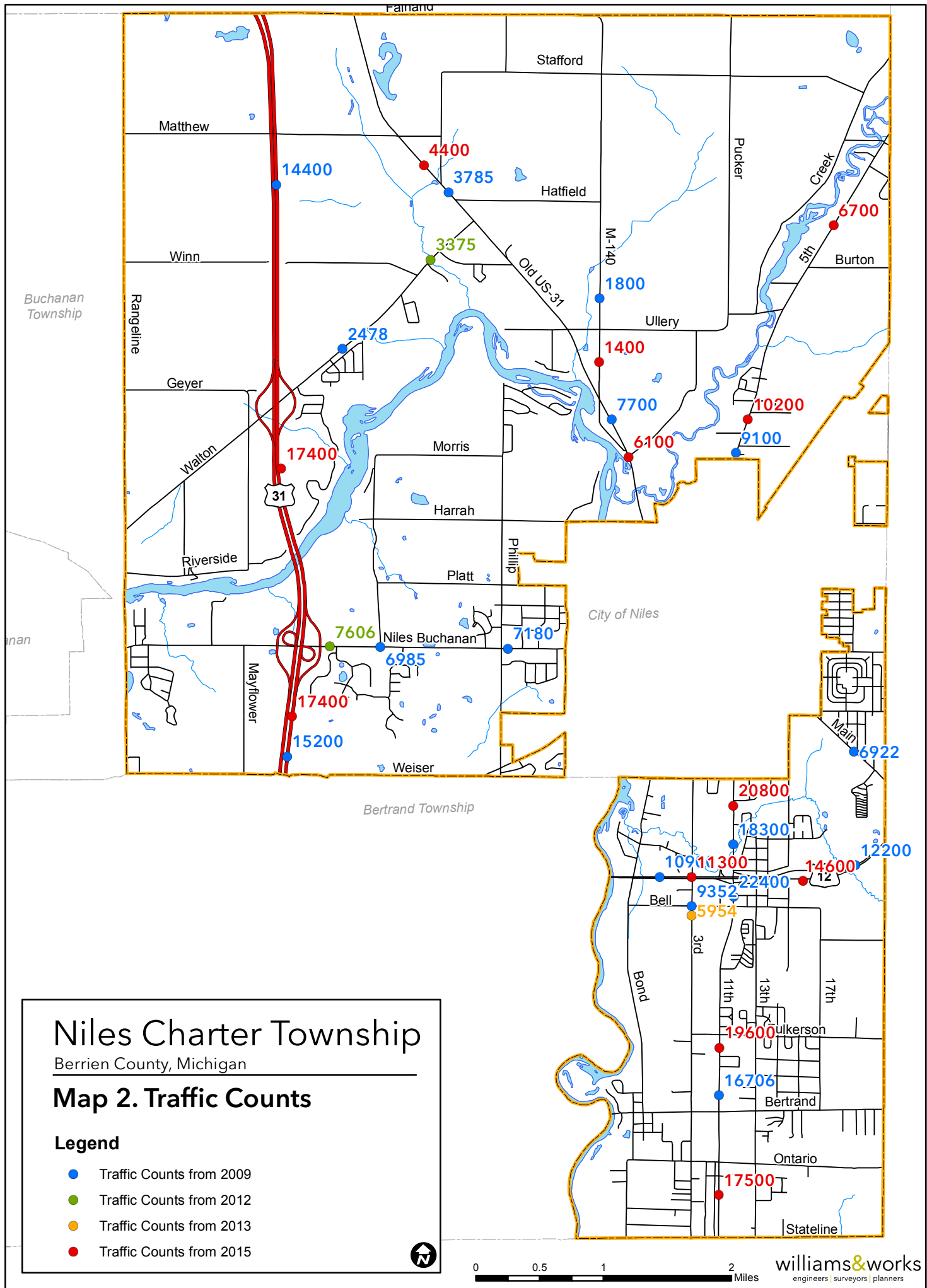
Generally, north/south movement is accommodated relatively well via the U.S.31 freeway on the Township's west side and M - 51 on the Township's east side. However, M - 51 traffic must move through the City in order to get across the Township. Old U.S. 31 also cuts diagonally across the north half of the Township, affording good alternate access.

Crossing Niles Charter Township east to west is not as easy to accomplish, especially in the rural north. Niles/Buchanan Road is the only continuous east/west street north of the U.S. 12 bypass. Walton Road angles in a general northeast/southwest direction but ends near the center of the Township at its intersection with Old U.S. 31. Other streets stop and start, jog and meander, in relation to a combination of topographic features, lakes, and the serpentine rivers.

A primary challenge for accessibility and interconnections within Niles Charter Township are the many natural barriers. New bridges over rivers supported by new roadway connections might improve access, but such facilities are resource intensive, costly, and often a challenge to build. In addition, expanded roadway connections can promote low-density sprawling development patterns that can undermine other local priorities. It will be

⁴ Berrien County Master Plan, 2015

imperative for the Township to cooperate with the County Road Commission, the City of Niles and other adjacent communities, MDOT and other agencies in working to resolve these connectivity and access issues.



This page intentionally left blank.

CHAPTER 3. EXISTING LAND USE

Existing land use patterns within Niles Charter Township reveal a relatively slow growing community that has experienced measured land use change in the last several decades.

A map of Niles Charter Township’s existing land use is like a bird’s eye view of the pattern of human activity on the land surface. An eagle soaring over Niles Charter Township would see a patchwork of different land uses. Some land within its view would be in agriculture, some forests or water, and yet more would be roof tops.

Understanding how the land is currently used is necessary in order to estimate future needs and services, and to identify patterns of activity to plan for the future. For the purposes of this document, the existing land uses are depicted on a map and classified as follows:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Single & Two Family Residential | Wetlands |
| Multiple Family Residential | Agricultural |
| Manufactured Housing Community | Public/Recreational |
| Commercial | Open/Rangeland |
| Industrial | Lakes, Rivers & Streams |
| Forests | |

Existing land use patterns within Niles Charter Township reveal a relatively slow growing community that has experienced measured land use change in the last several decades. The following paragraphs describe the inventory of existing land uses in Niles Charter Township. This information has been culled from a variety of sources, including a windshield survey originally conducted in March of 2002 and updated in 2010 and 2016, respectively, verifying the land use information.

The land use map and resulting information constitute a valuable public record, making it possible to determine at a glance whether a parcel of land is used for residential, commercial, industrial, public, or agricultural use. Such a map is of vital importance to all planning and zoning discussions.

The reasons that land has developed to this point in time vary widely. Some uses of land predate zoning; others were approved by previous planning commissions and legislative bodies with or without the benefit of a master plan. Many areas have stable, active uses that are thriving economically and socially. Others are occupied by uses that sometimes conflict with one another. Still others have seen their best days pass by and are in need of attention.

Present land use patterns can tell us what Niles Charter Township is, where development has occurred, what resources are potentially threatened by development, and where incompatibilities exist. Table 7 includes a breakdown of acreages for the distinct land use categories in the Township.

Table 7 Land Use Change, 1978-2016

| | 1978 | | 2002 | | 2016 | | Change 1978-2016 | |
|------------------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|---------------------|--------|
| | Acres | % of Twp | Acres | % of Twp | Acres | % of Twp | Acres | % |
| Residential | 3,220 | 13.2% | 3,264 | 13.5% | 4,237 | 17.3% | 1,017 | 31.6% |
| Commercial | 299 | 1.2% | 306 | 1.3% | 413 | 1.7% | 114 | 38.1% |
| Industrial | 332 | 1.4% | 335 | 1.8% | 341 | 1.4% | 9 | 2.7% |
| Public/Recreation | 577 | 2.4% | 380 | 1.6% | 766 | 3.1% | 189 | 32.8% |
| Forest | 4,748 | 19.4% | 4,690 | 19.4% | 4,835 | 19.8% | 87 | 1.8% |
| Wetlands | 373 | 1.5% | 373 | 1.5% | 365 | 1.5% | -8 | -2.1% |
| Open Water | 438 | 1.8% | 559 | 2.3% | 489 | 2.0% | 51 | 11.6% |
| Agriculture | 11,712 | 48.0% | 11,702 | 48.4% | 10,351 | 43.4% | -1,361 | -11.6% |
| Open Land/Rangeland | 2,626 | 10.8% | 2,466 | 10.2% | 2,448 | 10.0% | -178 | -6.8% |
| Extractive/Mining | 91 | 0.4% | N/A | N/A | 184 | 0.8% | 93 | 102.2% |

Single and Two Family Residential

All residential land use occupies roughly 4,237 acres or about 17% of the Township. This is an increase of nearly 1,000 acres since the 2002 plan. The largest concentration of single and two family units is found in the southeast corner of the Township, while random housing sites are scattered throughout the remaining areas of the community. The Township is somewhat unique in that it possesses a wide range of housing options from very urban to very rural.

The type and condition of housing varies significantly within the Township. The earliest neighborhoods are located nearest the City of Niles. These areas are generally characterized by small lots and older homes, some of which are in need of improvements. Nevertheless, many older residential areas contain well-maintained homes on attractive tree-lined streets. A significant number of large older farm homes are also found in the rural agricultural areas, adding a distinctive quality to the Township.

Several areas of newer residential development are scattered around the Township in no particular order. Many farm properties already have lots carved out of their peripheries. As each home is constructed, more demands will be placed on the infrastructure needs and public service needs of Niles Charter Township.

Multiple Family Residential

Like the single and two family residences, many of the Township's multiple family residential uses are found south of the City of Niles where public water and sewer services are available, along with highway access and retail/service opportunities.

Manufactured Housing Community

Over 700 manufactured housing units are found in Niles Charter Township within several manufactured housing communities. Like the multiple family development, these uses are also found mainly in the southern part of the Township where utilities, access, employment, and shopping opportunities are available.

Commercial

Approximately 413 acres (1.7 %) of the total land area in Niles Charter Township is devoted to commercial use. Most of the major shopping is performed outside the Township, predominantly in the City of Niles or South Bend. Most of the national chain stores are located along the South 11th Street/M - 51 corridor. This is a typical aging commercial "strip" containing several franchise restaurants, "big box" retailers, and other assorted auto-oriented uses. Additionally, limited agricultural-based commercial activities are found in the northern portion of the Township, reflecting the rural farming character of that part of the Township.

Industrial

Industrial land use constitutes 341 acres (1.4 %) of the Township's total land area. The industrial areas are somewhat scattered, although most of the Township's industry is found on either side of U.S. 12, south of the City. The largest concentration of industrial is the "tank farm" located along 3rd Street, south of U.S. 12. While predominantly industrial, the area contains a mix of older single family homes and even some commercial uses.

Public/Quasi-Public/Recreation Uses

Public/quasi-public/recreation uses are scattered throughout the Township and occupy approximately 766 acres (3.1 percent). This land use category includes schools, churches, institutional lands, fire and police stations, government offices, wastewater treatment plant, landfills, cemeteries, golf courses, and utilities. Parks and public open space, whether used for passive or active recreation, are also included in this land use category.

Lakes, Rivers & Streams

Approximately 489 acres (2%) of the Township consist of water bodies.

Forest

Forests continue to be a significant land use category in Niles Charter Township. Large tracts of woodlands exist in the northern portion of the Township. Most of the forest types are a northern hardwood mix with much of the lowland wetlands having Tamarack and White Cedar as the dominate species. These features comprise an important environmental resource occupying approximately 4,835 acres of the Township's area (19.8% of the land area).

Wetlands

There are streams and rivers throughout the community, so it should be no surprise that there are also a number of associated wetlands. Approximately 365 acres (1.5 %) of the Township is considered wetland, according to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Agriculture

Although it has declined by over 1,300 acres since 2002, open field agriculture remains the largest single use of land in the Township. Agriculture has provided Niles Charter Township with a great deal of its present identity as a rural agricultural community. Over 16 square miles (10,351 acres), or 42.4 percent of the Township's land area, are devoted to this use. As noted in the discussion of single family residential land uses, some agricultural areas are dotted with small lot development created as farmers parcel off their land adjacent to roads, lot by lot. This is a potentially harmful practice, due to the resultant haphazard development and the high cost of supplying public services to the outlying strip development areas as the non-farm population grows. Despite the intrusion of non-farm homes in portions of the agricultural community, large expanses of the Township remain exclusively agricultural.

Open Land/Pasture/Rangeland

This land use is used to classify land with no use assigned to it. The land may be fallow agricultural land, pasture, or undeveloped properties. This category comprises approximately 2,448 acres of land in the Township (10.0%).

Urban/Rural Character

Niles Charter Township contains two distinct communities, divided by the City of Niles. To the north and west of the City, the Township is mostly rural, exhibiting large farms, vast stretches of rolling terrain, and some scattered homes. While to the south, the Township is a virtually unbroken continuation of the City's urban development.

In spite of its dense urban character south of the City, about 20 percent of the Township's land area is actually developed. The remaining 80 percent is occupied by farms, wetlands, forests, lakes, and vacant land. This land use dynamic is particularly evident if you drive through the Township from north to south. However, as one drives within the Township, particularly along major corridors, the perception is that of increased development and loss of precious natural features.

Future Trends

The area to the west of the City of Niles is slowly becoming an urbanized extension of the City, due to its proximity to existing development and the availability of public sewer. With the opening of the U.S. 31 freeway in the late 1990s and early 2000s, new opportunities for growth have emerged at the Niles-Buchanan Road and Walton Road interchanges. The area north and northwest of the City of Niles, however, remains primarily single family residential and agricultural. Given the good quality soils that predominate and the absence of public utilities, agriculture is likely to remain the primary use.

Interestingly, the Township's population growth has been minimal (and recently declining) and yet the area of the Township devoted to residential land use has increased by about 1,000 acres since 2002. This points to a continued, broader national trend toward large-lot suburban development and to an overall reduction in household size (i.e., the number of persons per household). This trend is not unique to Niles Charter Township, but it does indicate a tendency toward inefficient, low-density development that will require greater reliance on private automobile travel. Nevertheless, this trend

is being reversed in some places, with “empty nesters” and millennials opting for smaller homes on smaller, urban lots in cities and towns.

Redevelopment and Development Opportunities

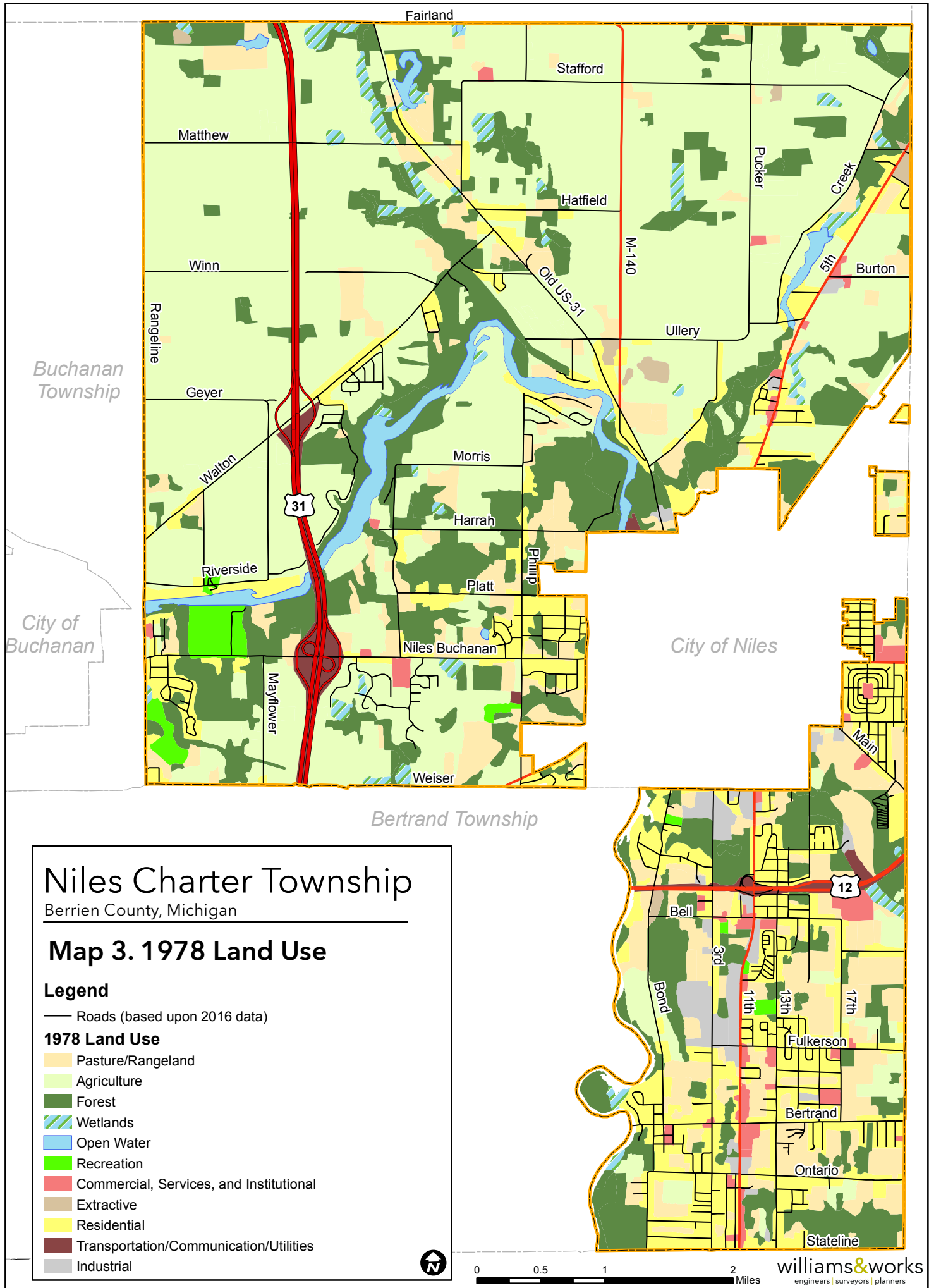
The analysis of existing land use revealed locations where land is underutilized or showing signs of neglect. In some locations the land use analysis found incompatibilities between adjoining uses. These circumstances present opportunities for redevelopment to make more beneficial use of the land, eliminate incompatibilities, increase the tax base, and achieve other development goals of the Township. The most prominent redevelopment opportunities that were identified during the existing land use analysis are along the M-51 corridor (11th Street).

The thoroughfare provides a convenient route linking Michigan and Indiana and is frequently used by college students, tourists, employees and shoppers. Understanding the importance of this corridor to the community, the Township, the City of Niles, the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Land Information Access Association and the Southwestern Michigan Economic Growth Alliance partnered to develop the 11th Street Corridor Plan which was completed in 2012. The plan establishes a framework for the future development and redevelopment of the 11th Street Corridor through a variety of development options and action plans. According to the Introduction Chapter of the Plan, it is intended to take a long-range view of the Corridor – guiding future development and improvements while providing flexibility to respond to changing conditions, funding opportunities, innovations, business needs, citizen inquiries and new information.

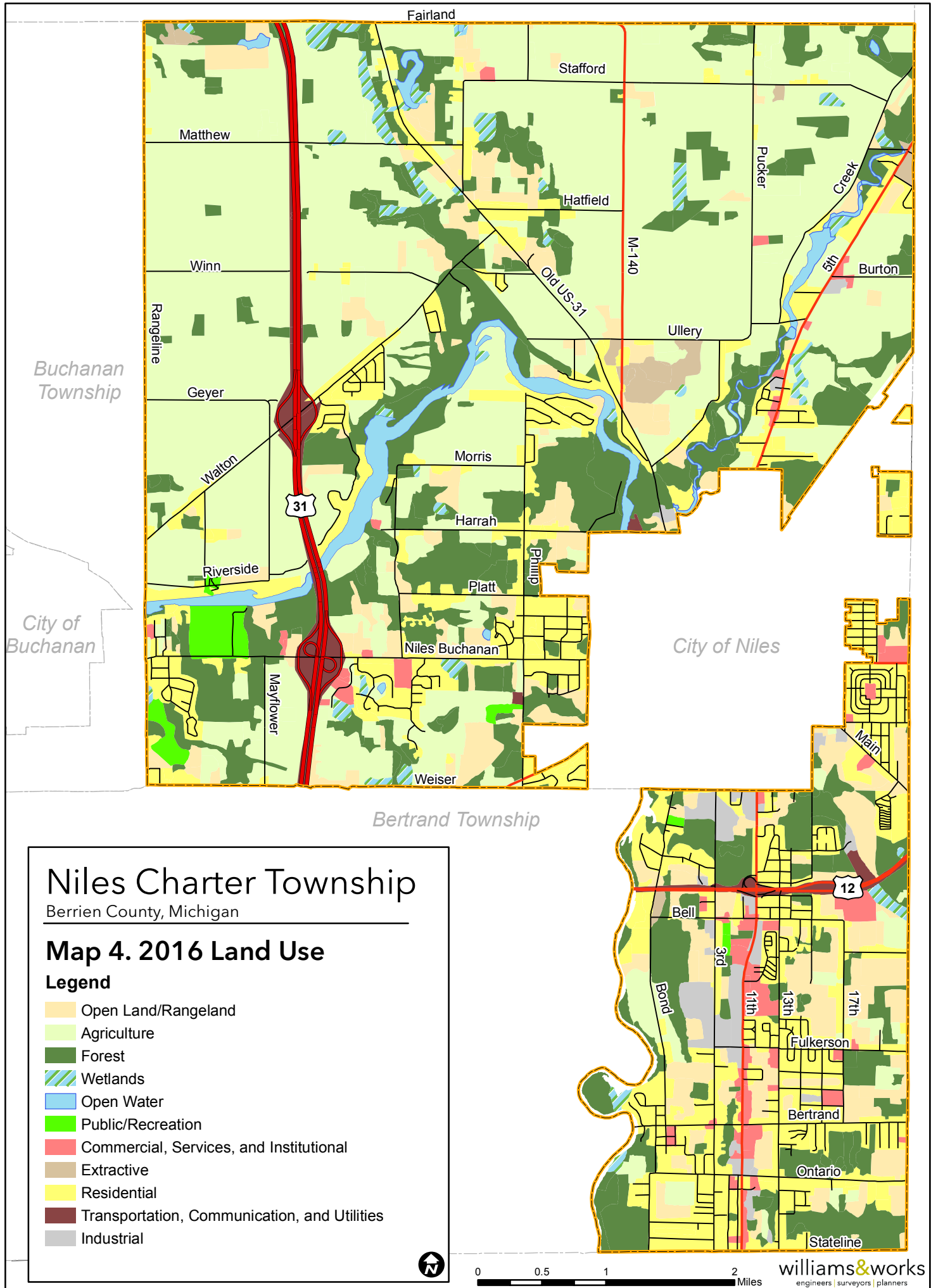
Future development opportunities are likely to present themselves at the US-31 interchange located at Niles-Buchanan Road. The significant traffic on the highway together with the good visibility of these interchanges may create demand for commercial or higher intensity uses. This land use plan and subsequent planning activities will address that potential in keeping with the larger growth and development strategies of the Township.

Within the 3rd Street industrial corridor, a few residential properties remain. As opportunities arise, the Township should eliminate the relatively few single family homes in this area and create a more cohesive industrial district. A combination of zoning, street vacations, and public improvements could be used to create a more homogeneous industrial complex.

This page intentionally left blank.



This page intentionally left blank.



This page intentionally left blank.

CHAPTER 4. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Niles Charter Township's most significant legacy is its natural environment — rolling farmland, pockets of dense forests, exceptional water resources, and unique natural areas.

Niles Charter Township's most significant legacy is its natural environment — rolling farmland, pockets of dense forests, exceptional water resources, and unique natural areas. These are the qualities that attract residents and give the Township a "sense of place". Most of the land area of Niles Charter Township is still in a rural and natural setting. Retention of these rural/natural resources is a high priority to many Township residents.

The Value of Natural Resources

Natural features provide an essential element which both enhances and protects the quality of life in Niles Charter Township. In addition to the aesthetic and recreational value of the natural features, these resources provide other benefits, such as:

- Clean water supplies for homes served by wells
- Wildlife habitats
- Groundwater recharge and purification, flood control, pollution protection and the support of unique plant and animal life
- Aesthetics (views, serenity, rural nature, etc.)
- Outstanding agricultural land.

The following is an overview of some of the major natural features prevalent throughout the Township. As development occurs, the protection of these features should be considered, in addition to other site specific conditions.

Geology

Similar to the rest of Michigan, Niles Charter Township was formed by a series of major continental glacial periods. The land forms created by the advance and retreat of these glaciers at different times in history left glacial moraine ridges and sloping outwash plains. The Township's rivers and associated wetlands or marshes are of relatively recent geological formation created by the retreating glaciers and uplifting of the bedrock.

Geology and soils in the Township consist mainly of hills of glacially deposited sand and gravel and till plains comprised of mixed soil materials. This surface geology was formed 10,000 to 12,000 years ago when glacial activity deposited rock, soil and large blocks of ice. The glacial drift is a very thick layer of soil material that has been deposited by the Wisconsin glacier during the last ice age. The ice blocks that broke off the glacier were embedded within the soil and eventually melted, leaving depressions which today are lakes.

Soils

Construction costs and risks to the environment can be minimized by developing in areas that have suitable soils. Unsuitable soils present problems such as poor foundation stability and septic limitations. Many times these problems may not be readily apparent in new development, but ultimately will surface over time.

The major characteristics considered in determining soil suitability are drainage, foundation stability, and septic suitability.

Unsuitable soils present problems such as poor foundation stability and septic limitations.

- **Drainage:** Development on poorly drained soils increases development costs, maintenance costs, and may lead to sanitary problems. Development costs are increased due to additional foundation, road and septic preparation. Maintenance costs and problems will be associated with septic field failures, flooded basements and impact to roads from frost action.
- **Foundation Stability:** Soil types that do not provide stable foundations may experience shifting building foundations, cracked walls and cracked pavement and roadways. These problems often result in increased development and maintenance costs or, in extreme cases, structural failure.
- **Septic Suitability:** Because there are many areas of Niles Charter Township that rely on individual septic systems, locating such on-site sewage systems on proper soils is extremely important. Septic field failures are often the result of poor soil permeability, high water table or excessive slope. Soils such as compacted clays and silts will not allow wastewater to percolate; a high water table prohibits adequate filtering; and excessive slope does not provide opportunity for adequate percolation.

Soils well-suited for development generally include areas sufficiently above the groundwater table, loamy and sandy soils and gentle to moderate slopes. Soils poorly suited for development will generally include the following characteristics:

- Areas with little topographic relief that do not allow proper drainage.
- Areas with excessive slopes which are susceptible to erosion and don't afford adequate level ground for septic fields.
- Mucks or soils with high organic materials; and silts and clays.
- Areas with high water tables and soils generally found along lakes, creeks and wetlands.

Soil suitability is also critical for identifying productivity for agriculture and timberlands. Within Niles Charter Township there are four major soil combinations as identified by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality/USDA. The four major soil combinations are:

- **Brady-Macomb-Sebawa:** this soil combination is only found in the northeastern part of the Township, between the Dowagiac River and City of Niles.
- **Coloma-Spinks-Oshtemo:** makes up most of the southeast quadrant of the Township, south of the City of Niles.
- **Oshtemo-Kalamazoo-Houghton:** a very small area is comprised of this soil combination. It is found between the east border of the Township and the Niles city limits. Another very small area is located near the northeast corner of the Township.
- **Riddles-Crosier-Oshtemo:** the predominate soil combination in the Township. This grouping covers nearly the entire Township north of Weiser Road.

The individual soil characteristics of these combinations are described as:

Brady: consists of very steep, somewhat poorly drained soils found in loamy outwash plains, valley trains, terraces, and lake plains. Slopes range from 0 to 6 percent and permeability is moderately rapid.

Coloma: consists of very deep, somewhat excessively drained soils formed in sandy drift on moraines and outwash plains. Permeability is rapid in the Bw and E parts and moderately rapid or rapid in the lamellae. Slopes range from 0 to 70 percent.

Crosier: consists of moderately deep to dense till, somewhat poorly drained soils that formed in glacial till on till plains and moraines. Permeability is moderate in the upper part of the subsoil, moderately slow in the lower part, and slow in the substratum. These soils are moderately deep over dense till. Slope ranges from 0 to 4 percent.

Houghton: consists of very deep, very poorly drained soils formed in herbaceous organic deposits more than 51 inches thick in depressions on lake plains, outwash plains, ground and end moraines and on flood plains. These soils have moderately slow to moderately rapid permeability. Slopes range from 0 to 2 percent.

Kalamazoo: consists of very deep, well drained soils formed in loamy outwash overlying sand, loamy sand, or sand and gravel outwash on outwash plains, terraces, valley trains, and low lying moraines. These soils have moderate permeability in the upper loamy materials and rapid permeability in the lower sandy materials. Slopes range from 0 to 18 percent.

Macomb: consists of deep, somewhat poorly drained soils formed in glacial outwash and the underlying till on lake plains and till plains. Permeability is moderately slow. Slopes range from 0 to 2 percent.

Oshtemo: consists of very deep, well drained soils that formed in stratified, loamy and sandy deposits on outwash plains, valley trains, moraines, and beach ridges. Permeability is moderately rapid in the upper loamy material and very rapid in the lower sandy materials. Slopes range from 0 to 55 percent.

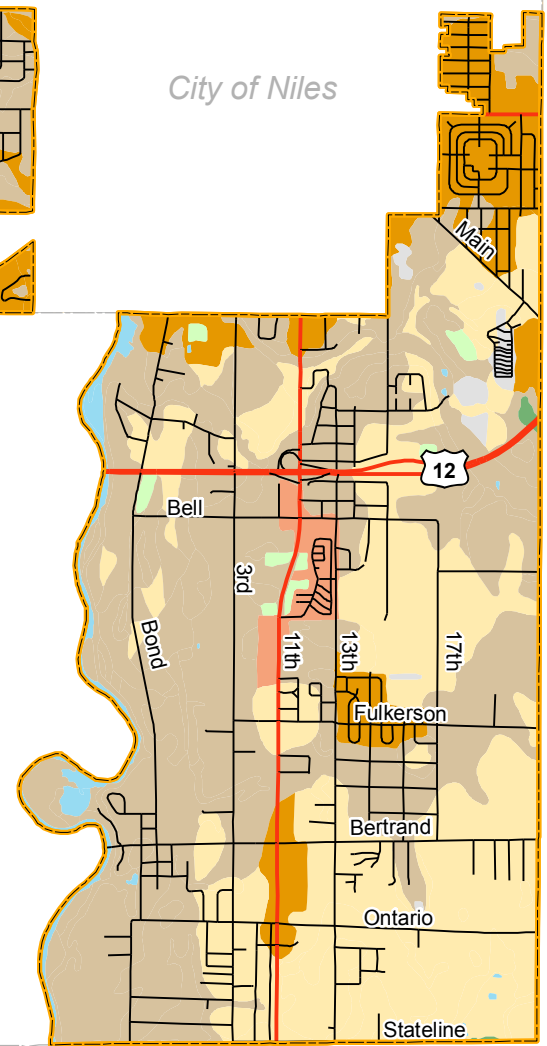
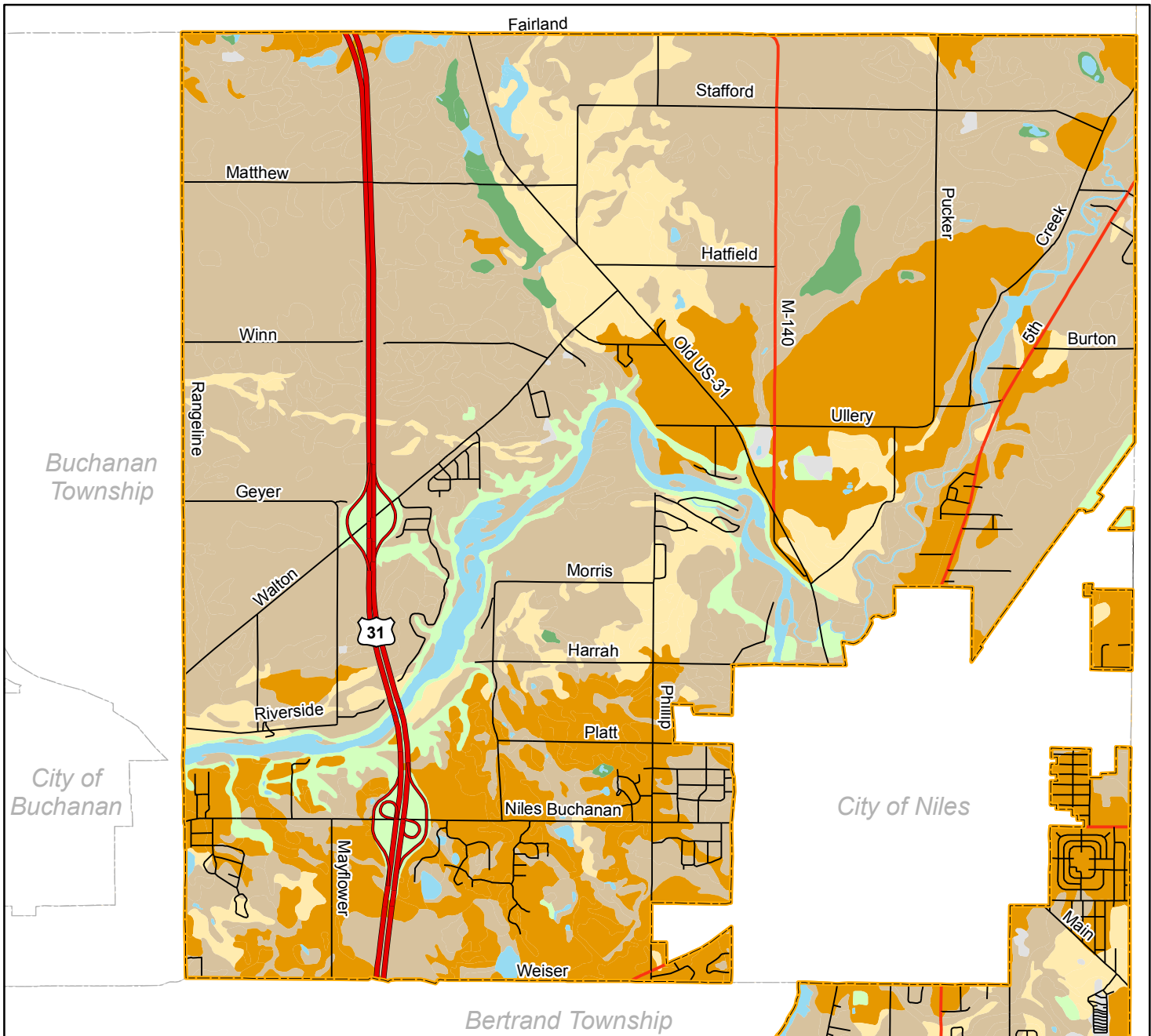
Riddles: consists of very deep, well drained soils that formed in loamy and sandy till on moraines of Wisconsinan Age. Permeability is moderate. Slopes range from 0 to 35 percent.

Sebewa: consists of very deep, poorly drained and very poorly drained soils formed in loamy outwash and the underlying gravelly sand or sand outwash on outwash plains, valley trains, and stream terraces in terrace landscapes. Permeability is moderate in the upper loamy materials and rapid or very rapid in the underlying sandy materials. Slopes range from 0 to 3 percent.

Spinks: consists of very deep, well drained soils formed in sandy eolian or outwash material. They are on dunes, and on foot slopes of moraines, till plains, outwash plains, beach ridges and lake plains. These soils have moderately rapid permeability. Slopes range from 0 to 60 percent.

As detailed by the following map, the Township's soils are typically found in various soil combinations. Some soil types are better than others for

development and improvements. Site specific soil surveys should be required for individual projects.



Niles Charter Township

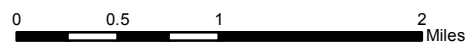
Berrien County, Michigan

Map 5. Soils

Legend

Texture

- Loamy
- Mucky
- Ponded
- Sandy
- Complex
- Pits
- Udipsammments and Udorthents
- Urban land



This page intentionally left blank.

Topography and Drainage

The topographic features of the Township are varied. Irregular land forms such as rolling hills, low broad valleys, marshlands, and small lakes, are characteristic of glacial terrains and are found throughout the Township. The Township's topographic character ranges from low river valleys to rugged hills. The elevation difference between highest and lowest points is 200 feet. Land along the St. Joseph River is low and relatively flat, creating a wide flood plain across the middle of the Township. However, west of the City of Niles, the land rises sharply and continues in a pattern of rugged hills, between Niles-Buchanan Road and Weiser Road, all the way to the Township's westernmost boundary. Other lands scattered throughout the Township exhibit gentler relief. These are found in the extreme northwest corner (sections 6 & 7), north central (sections 2,3,4, & 9), and the southeast (sections 12 & 13) part of the Township.

Water Features

Much of Niles Charter Township is dotted with lakes and ponds. In addition, there are two rivers (St. Joseph and Dowagiac), several miles of tributary streams, and a number of wetlands. These water resources provide a wide variety of functions including:

- Recreational opportunities for fishing, swimming, and boating;
- Immeasurable aesthetic and educational value;
- Fish and wildlife habitats;
- A recharge area of groundwater during dry times of the year; and
- Water retention and flood control.

Natural features,
including the St. Joseph
and Dowagiac Rivers,
help to define the natural
character of the
Township.

Wetlands

Wetlands are transitional areas between the aquatic ecosystems and the surrounding upland areas. They are low areas that are intermittently covered with shallow water and underlined by saturated soils.

Vegetation which is adapted to wet soil conditions, fluctuation in water levels and periodic flooding can be found in wetlands. Wetlands are linked with the hydrologic system, and as a result, wetland systems are vital to the environmental quality of Niles Charter Township.

Wetlands serve a variety of important functions which not only benefit the natural environment but also the community.

- Mitigate flooding by detaining surface runoff;
- Control soil erosion and sedimentation loading in rivers and lakes;
- Provide links with groundwater;
- Improve water quality which is degraded by nutrients and chemicals resulting from urban activities;
- Control erosion and sedimentation resulting from agricultural and construction activities;
- Function as highly productive ecosystems in terms of wildlife habitat and vegetation; and

- Serve a variety of aesthetic and recreational functions.

Wetland areas are valuable as natural buffers between residential and other land uses. They contribute significantly to the aesthetic character of the community. By incorporating wetlands as part of the future development, they will continue to maintain open and green space as well as contribute to retaining the rural setting. Any wetlands greater than five acres in size or contiguous with a waterway are regulated by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) through the Goemaere-Anderson Wetland Protection Act, Public Act 203, as amended.

Groundwater

Important factors in the evaluation of groundwater are the quantity and quality of the water. Quantity or yield standards for a typical residential or commercial use range from 7 gallons per minute to 20 gallons per minute. Water is generally available in sufficient quantity and will not likely be a factor in limiting growth.

Drainage

Upland areas drain to the low lying wetlands, lakes, rivers, and streams that pass through the Township. Soil permeability of most upland areas is moderate to moderately rapid. If these areas become developed, the amount of water infiltrating the surface will decrease and the surface runoff will increase. This will be caused by clearing of natural vegetation, addition of impervious material to the land (buildings and pavement) and installation of storm drains. This would have the cumulative effect of increasing the peak discharge to the area's drains, rivers, streams and lakes while reducing the amount of water infiltrating to ground water. Minimization of these impacts may involve protecting native vegetation, on-site storm water retention and clustered development.

Woodlands

While the Township has been experiencing moderate development, there remain many significant areas of natural woodlands. These are mainly found along the Township's two major rivers and their tributaries.

Woodlands provide the following community benefits:

- Quality of life: The abundant woodlands and trees help create the peaceful, rural atmosphere. Trees provide a visual barrier between individual properties and neighboring properties, an essential factor for preserving the rural atmosphere and property values.
- Influence on micro-climate: Woodlands play an important role in moderating ground-level temperatures. Tree canopies buffer the ground surface from the sun's heat and wind. Temperature extremes during winter months can also be moderated with the help of trees.
- Reduction in air pollution: Woodlands absorb carbon dioxide and return oxygen to the air. Tree leaves filter pollutants from the air, removing ozone, chlorine, hydrogen fluoride, sulfur dioxide and other pollutants. Large and dense stands of trees serve as a noise buffer, as well.
- Reduction in soil erosion: Woodlands and other vegetation stabilize soils and help prevent erosion. The vegetation absorbs the energy of

falling rain and the web of roots of all types help hold soil particles in place. Tree leaves reduce the impact of raindrops on the soil surface and give soil a chance to absorb water. Fallen leaves minimize the loss of soil moisture, help prevent erosion and enrich the soil to support later plant growth. Wooded wetlands provide the additional benefit of trapping and holding storm water runoff. Dense vegetation can also help slow flood surges and flows.

- Wild life habitat: Woodlands provide essential shelter and food for deer, raccoon, rabbits, pheasants and other birds and animals. The opportunity to observe wildlife in a natural setting has educational benefits for Township residents.
- Township's natural character: Woodlands located near roadways contribute to a natural/rural atmosphere in a number of ways. There is also a significant amount of vegetation along most lakes, rivers, and streams throughout the area.

Sustainability

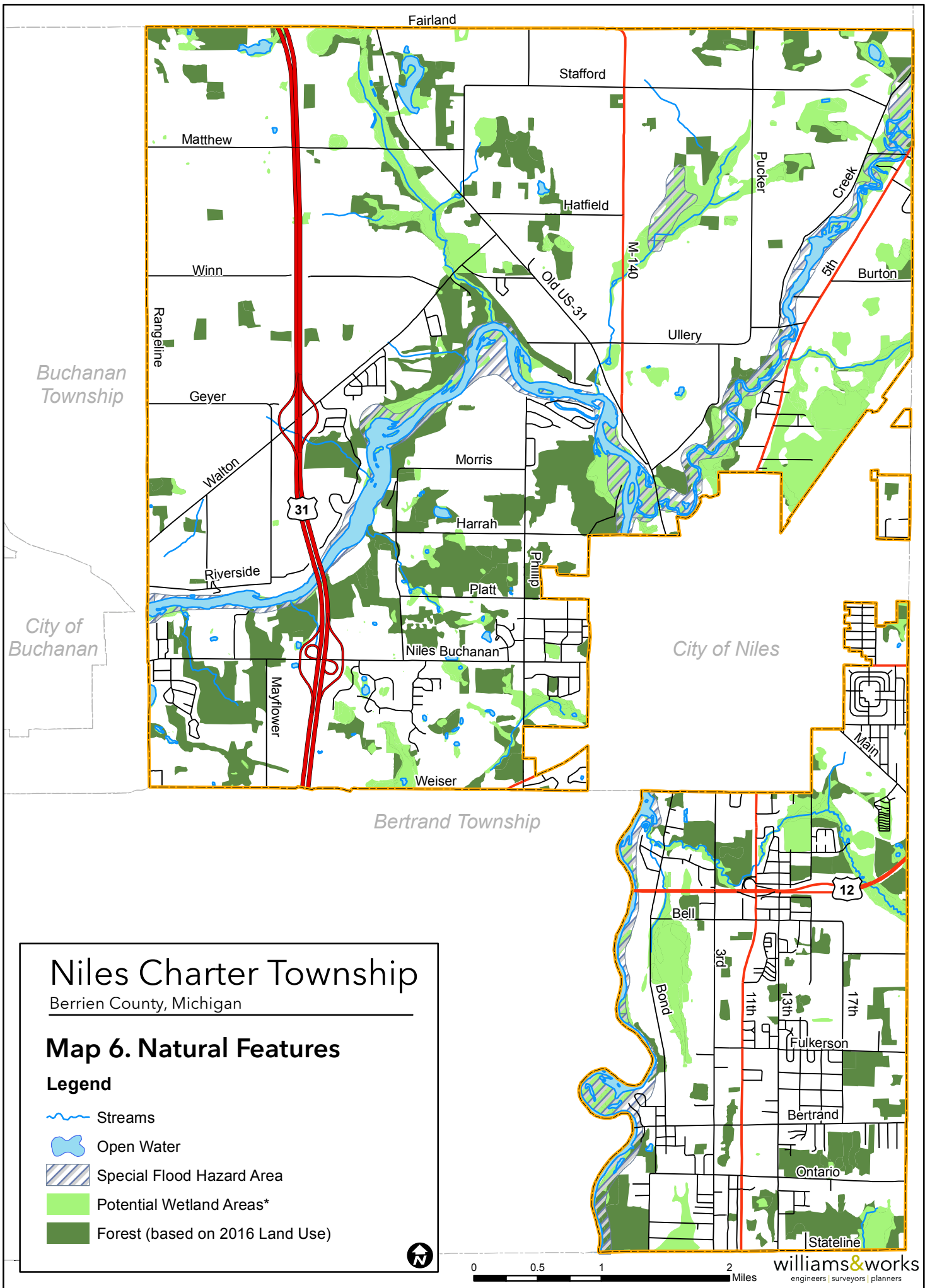
Sustainable development in Niles Charter Township begins with a respect and understanding of the natural systems that provide the resources necessary to grow, and that support the outstanding natural environment. These include basic functions such as clean air and water, but also include stable and fertile soils and irreplaceable natural communities. These resources and natural systems not only provide drinking water, breathable air, habitats and agricultural opportunities, but also serve as the cornerstone to enhancing the overall quality of life, offering numerous recreational opportunities and enhancing the area's competitive advantage for future growth and prosperity.

A Continued Awareness

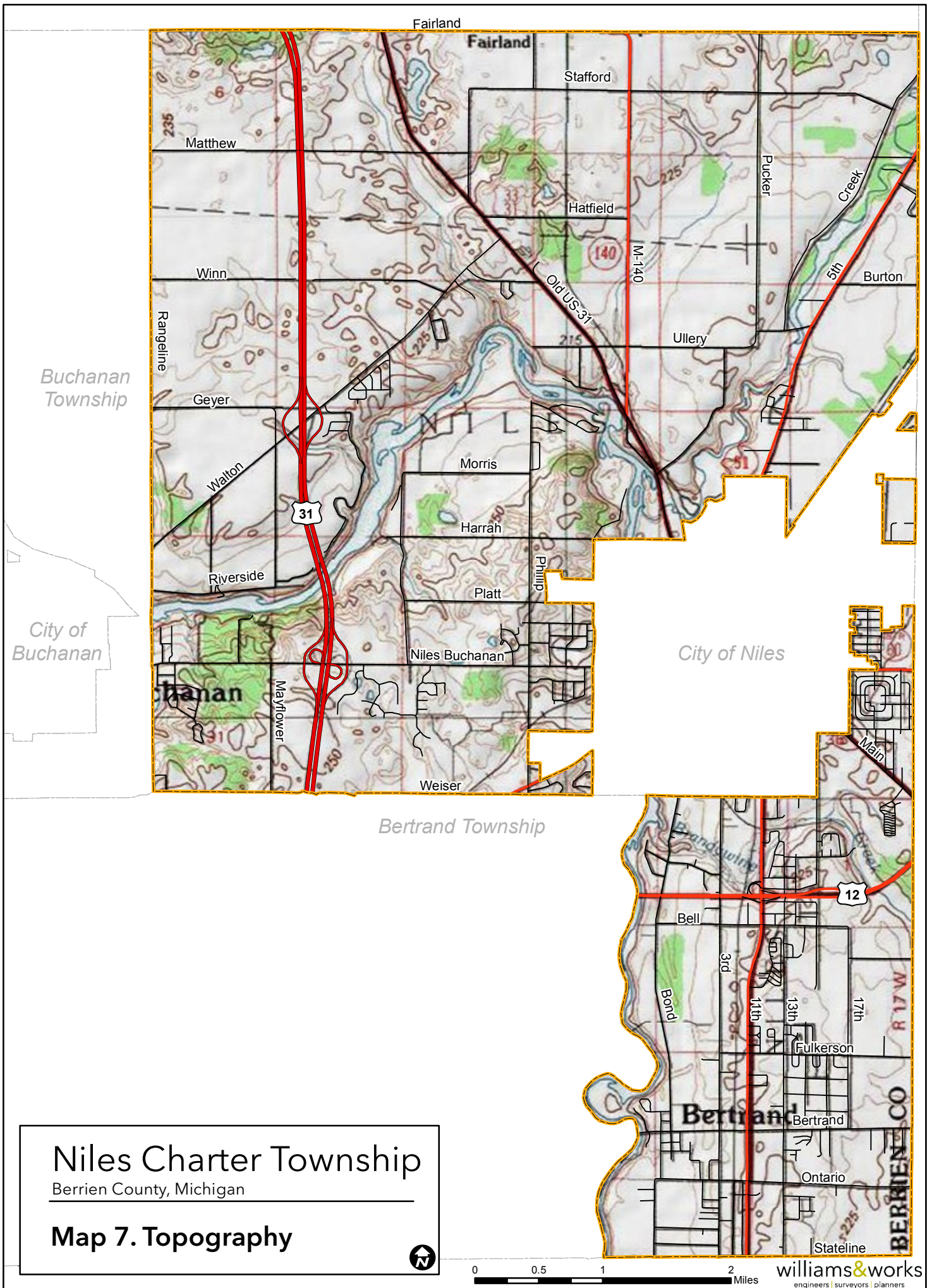
The rural character of Niles Charter Township is reflected in its natural features, such as lakes, rivers and streams, the rolling hillsides of the southern and western areas, farmlands, wetlands, and open space. Previous recognition of the importance of these features was recurrent throughout the planning process.

The natural environment helps define the quality base of any community. Niles Charter Township is favorably endowed with desirable natural features. Citizens in the area are acutely aware of the quality of the environment, and appear to support strong policies in favor of protecting environmental qualities. This attitude reflects a new realization that development activities which destroy natural features carry greater costs in terms of public safety, water quality, wildlife preservation, and overall quality of life, among others.

This page intentionally left blank.



This page intentionally left blank.



Niles Charter Township

Berrien County, Michigan

Map 7. Topography



0 0.5 1 2 Miles

williams&works
engineers | surveyors | planners

This page intentionally left blank.

CHAPTER 5. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As a community matures, a direction for future development and redevelopment is needed to ensure that its desires regarding growth are translated into action. The intent of this Master Plan is to provide the means by which Niles Charter Township may look forward to the years ahead. In order to set a direction for this period, the Planning Commission established a series of Goals and Objectives covering the primary elements of the Master Plan.

To produce these goals and objectives the Planning Commission took into account other planning policies which have evolved from Planning Commission actions, and a number of current and emerging issues which they were able to identify.

Overarching Principles

The overriding philosophy that should guide the future development of Niles Charter Township is "**sustainability**." Sustainable development is future-oriented; where the needs of today can be adequately met without undermining the needs of future generations.

Elements of a "sustainable community" include:

- **Ecological Integrity:** including satisfying basic human needs such as clean air and water; protecting ecosystems and biodiversity; and, pollution prevention strategies.
- **Economic Security:** including local reinvestment; meaningful employment opportunities; local business ownership; and, job training and education.
- **Empowerment and Responsibility:** including respect and tolerance for diverse views and values; a viable non-government sector; equal opportunity to participate in decision-making; and, access to government.
- **Social Well-Being:** including a reliable local food supply; quality health services, housing and education; creative expression through the arts; safety from crime and aggression; respect for public spaces and historic resources.

If Niles Charter Township is to have a sustainable community, future development within the Township must further the following principles:

- *Support and strengthen existing developed areas.*
- *Concentrate development around the City of Niles.*
- *Utilize mixed-use development and multi-use structures.*
- *Lessen the dependence on the automobile.*
- *Respect for the area's history and natural systems.*
- *Support long-term solutions.*
- *Promote cooperation through working partnerships.*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals and Objectives provide specific direction for the future of Niles Charter Township, and serve as the backbone of the Master Plan. Goals and Objectives are similar in that they are both actions that the Township should strive to take; however, they differ in definition, timing, and specificity.

For a goal to be most useful, it should to meet the following criteria:

- **Define a Desired End.** A goal statement should describe a desired end state, outcome or result. The statement may be worded in either the present or future tense, but if the future tense is used, it should be stated as a prediction, rather than a hope.
- **State in Positive Terms:** For a goal to be effective, it should state a positive outcome, as opposed to avoidance of an undesirable result. It is tempting to state goals as the reversal of an undesirable trend, such as “Niles Charter Township will not approve development that might negatively affect the natural environment or destroy prime agricultural land.” This statement, however, does not address the idea of preservation, nor does it address the underlying issue: Protection of agricultural lands and natural amenities for the benefit of future generations.
- **Bold, but Realistic:** For a statement to be meaningful, it needs to require effort to be achieved. Goals that will be achieved without effort are simply statements of current trends. On the other hand, a goal also needs to be realistic. Goals that are impossible to achieve will languish, resulting in community frustration and acrimony.
- **Reflect a Consensus:** Most importantly for goal setting, the goal must reflect a community consensus on a particular issue. Since implementation of these goals will require broad community support, the goals need to reflect community ideas and values. A statement that does not reflect the ideas and values of a broad section of the community is doomed to failure.

Goals must reflect a community consensus on a particular issue.

An objective is intended to support the broader goal and may be thought of as a milestone or a key accomplishment that is a necessary prerequisite to achieving the goal.

The following goals and objectives have been developed as the policy foundation of this Master Plan to be achieved, or at least approached, over the period of 2018 through 2038. These are presented in seven land use topic areas to aid in tracking the progress the community achieves in implementing this Master Plan.

Natural Environment. Niles Charter Township’s rich cultural heritage and its future are rooted in its wealth of natural resources. Thus, dedicated protection of this unique combination of high quality natural resources is important to maintaining and sustaining the area’s economic vitality and physical integrity.

Goal #1. The protection of important natural features and the conservation and sustainable use of the natural environment will guide all land use and development decisions in the Township such that future generations will be able to enjoy a healthy and sustainable natural environment.

Objective 1a. The Township will continue to maintain and update a natural features inventory that identifies and characterizes defining or unique

features and to rank such features in terms of importance to regional habitat and the aesthetic characteristics of the community, as completed in the Niles Charter Township Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan.

Objective 1b. The Township will routinely review, evaluate, and amend existing incentives that enable the protection or conservation of open space and important natural features while enabling appropriate development and use of nearby lands.

Objective 1c. The Township will take a leadership role with surrounding communities and county and regional entities in protecting important features with larger than local importance, such as the St. Joseph and Dowagiac Rivers.

Objective 1d. The Township will acquire and/or protect property in areas which have been identified as Potential Conservation Areas (PACs) by the Niles Charter Township Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan.

Agriculture and Open Space. Farmlands, and open space are important components defining the character of Niles Charter Township and should be preserved.

Goal #2. The Township will work with farmland owners to protect active agriculture areas from the encroachment of development by guiding intense growth to areas best suited and able to handle development impacts and limiting development in rural and agricultural areas to low densities with the least impact on viable farming activity.

Objective 2a. The Township will continue to identify areas where lands currently being farmed may be appropriate for future residential development due to poor soils, incompatible surrounding character, low productivity, smaller acreage, and similar factors, encouraging the development of those areas instead of prime farmlands.

Objective 2b. The Township will develop policies and ordinance standards that recognize and cooperate with Michigan and Berrien County farmland preservation efforts, including the Farmland Tax Credit and the purchase of development rights programs, where voluntarily embraced by farmland owners.

Objective 2c. The Township will continue to develop programs or incentives to enable the protection or conservation of quality farmlands and open space while enabling appropriate development and use of nearby lands.

Objective 2d. The Township will prepare and adopt development standards for rural areas that preserve the rural aspect of its natural area roadways by promoting deeper setbacks and natural feature easements along the roadway, while adjusting lot sizes to retain development yield.

Objective 2e. The Township will continue to develop appropriate zoning standards that encourage land uses that are compatible with a rural community, such as farm markets, agri-tourism and hobby farms, while discouraging uses that undermine the rural character of these portions of the community.

Residential Growth and Development. At the heart of a community are its people. The residents of Niles Charter Township have invested in its future success, and residential areas add vitality and spirit that encourages economic development, and sustains a higher quality of life.

Goal #3. The residential neighborhoods of Niles Charter Township will include a broad range of attractive residential types and neighborhood amenities intended to serve the entire spectrum of local residents from “8 to 80.”

Objective 3a. The Township will continue to develop policies and regulations to assure that residential development is carried out in keeping with the existing and planned utility and community facility infrastructure.

Objective 3b. The Township will develop design standards for residential neighborhoods that require attractive design amenities and encourage healthy lifestyles and interconnection between and among uses.

Objective 3c. The Township will routinely review, evaluate, and amend existing incentives that enable the protection or conservation of open space and important natural features while enabling appropriate development and use of nearby lands. (Duplicates objective 1b.)

Objective 3d. The Township will support and develop housing policies and regulations which encourage residents to “age-in-place” by continuing to permit accessory dwellings such as “granny flats” and allowing higher density senior housing in a mixed-use, walkable, and accessible context.

Objective 3e. The Township will protect residential neighborhoods and transitional areas adjacent to commercial properties from intense commercial development pressure by strictly adhering to the Future Land Use map when considering rezoning requests.

Commercial Growth and Development. Healthy communities include a range of land uses to meet the shopping and service needs of local residents and residents of neighboring communities. The close interdependence between the Township and neighboring communities demands a regional perspective on a number of issues related to land use and economic development.

Goal #4. The commercial areas of Niles Charter Township will be characterized by inviting design, attractive amenities and a mix of commercial and service uses that meet the needs of community residents and visitors to the Township.

Objective 4a. The Township will be an active participant in continued planning for, implementation, and ultimately the redevelopment of the 11th Street corridor in cooperation with affected property owners and businesses, the City of Niles, Michigan Department of Transportation, and regional planning authorities under the direction of the 11th Street Corridor Plan.

Objective 4b. The Township will continue to evaluate zoning standards to identify approaches to improve site design in commercial areas for the purpose of creating vibrant and inviting commercial areas to serve the community.

Objective 4c. The Township will complete a subarea planning effort focusing on the US-31 interchanges to identify the most appropriate land uses and design characteristics that protect the community’s character while capitalizing on high traffic volumes in a reasonable and sustainable manner.

Objective 4d. The Township will recognize the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail as an economic development opportunity, providing and encouraging non-motorized connections between the trail and commercial uses which may serve trail users.

Industrial Development. The most sustainable communities include provision for employment and the economic needs of its residents. Lands devoted to industry and related uses are key to economic vitality and, if properly designed and maintained, need not undermine other important community values.

Goal #5. Industrial and job-creating land uses in the Township will balance the needs of business for efficient operations with community values for environmental sustainability and aesthetic design and such well-designed and managed uses will be an important and welcome part of the community.

Objective 5a. The Township will evaluate zoning standards to identify approaches to improve site design in industrial areas for the purpose of attractive and sustainable business facilities that can meet the evolving needs of local industry.

Objective 5b. The Township will work with land owners in the 3rd Street corridor to evaluate existing and proposed land use and zoning standards to build on current viable uses and create new opportunities for investment.

Objective 5c. The Township will direct industrial growth and expansion adjacent to existing industrial development where public utilities currently exist.

Objective 5d. The Township will direct industrial growth and expansion away from sensitive natural features such as the St. Joseph and Dowagiac Rivers in order to protect water quality.

Community Facilities. The infrastructure and facilities of a community should work in support of its growth management policies while providing residents and businesses with the services and facilities needed for a desirable quality of life.

Goal #6. Niles Charter Township will provide its residents and businesses with a range of community facilities, infrastructure, and services appropriately balanced to support inclusive long term growth management strategies of the community.

Objective 6a. The Township will establish utility extension policies and standards that support a rational and sequential expansion of systems in keeping with the future land use plan.

Objective 6b. The Township will promote a coordinated approach among local communities for the planning, provision and expansion of public water and sanitary systems.

Objective 6c. The Township will work with Berrien County Public Transportation to continue to provide and improve Township resident access to public transit.

Objective 6d. The Township will continue to ensure that residents of all ages and abilities have access to parks and recreation facilities by regularly updating the Niles Charter Township Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan and actively applying for grant funding.

Objective 6e. The Township will support the “Safe Routes to School” program by working with the Michigan Department of Transportation and both Brandywine and Niles Community Schools on safe routing and sidewalk installation connecting housing to schools.

Objective 6f. The Township will increase non-motorized connectivity between residential neighborhoods and nearby non-motorized trails to connect residents to recreation, commercial areas, and employment.

Community Identity. Human beings have an innate tendency to identify with place. Place has the ability to offer a sense of pride, connection, attraction, and feeling of ownership. When the identity of a place is cohesive and significant, it provides a distinct relationship between its residents, businesses, and visitors.

Goal #7. Niles Charter Township will have a relatable, distinguished identity known throughout the region that emphasizes the Township’s distinctive location, unique natural resources, and diverse neighborhoods.

Objective 7a. The Township will develop a brand for the community and create a Township logo which will be used consistently on the Township website, letterhead, social media, online resources, signage, and wayfinding.

Objective 7b. The Township will identify destinations, amenities, and connections for the traveling public by installing wayfinding elements which provides navigation for visitors, trail users, and recreation enthusiasts.

Objective 7c. The Township will determine and improve the primary gateways to the Township by adding decorative, consistent Township signage which provides a notable sense of place.

CHAPTER 6. FUTURE LAND USE

The purpose of a Master Plan is to provide a community with a guide for future development. The following future land use districts are intended to retain and enhance the character of Niles Charter Township by providing a general guide for the Planning Commission and Township Board as they review development proposals for the community.

Future land use districts are described on the following pages and are based on:

- **Existing land use**
- **Soils**
- **The probable extent of future utilities**
- **Accommodating the needs of residents**
- **Protecting the natural environment**
- **Vision and goals of the Plan**

The land use categories used in the Plan and the accompanying Future Land Use Map are described below. It is important to note that these do not always correspond to zoning districts. Zoning regulations and district boundaries should, indeed, reflect the Plan recommendations. But while the Plan is long-range in its scope, the zoning ordinance is short-term and will not immediately reflect the same patterns as the Master Plan. The Zoning Plan, presented on pages 54 - 56, provides the explicit link between the policies of this Plan and the day-to-day implementation of the Township's Zoning Ordinance.

Agriculture

Farming has played a major role in the history of Niles Charter Township and is an important part of its economy and culture. Intensive development clearly threatens farming and related agricultural uses. The purpose of this designation is to preserve the Township's agricultural lands for continued farming activities during the planning period. These lands are predominantly active agriculture, with the minor exception of scattered wetlands and woodlots. Parcels, for the most part, remain relatively large and encroachment by non-farm, single family homes is minimal. Future residential development should be limited to scattered home sites, at an overall maximum density of one unit per five acres, with zoning standards maintained and expanded to accommodate both farm dwellings and non-farm dwellings in a manner consistent with these policies.

In order to further the Township's efforts to preserve farmland, zoning regulations should be routinely reviewed and updated to emphasize the important public purpose of protecting food and fiber production and to minimize the extent to which potentially incompatible non-farm development will be permitted to encroach into these designated areas. Any new residential development should be limited and designed to minimize conflicts between agricultural and residential uses and to help preserve the most important farmland in the Township.

Rural Estate

Some of the land in this category has begun to experience parcel splits and accompanying single family home development scattered along the main roads. This designation is intended to maintain the rural character of portions of the Township. Areas planned as Rural Estate remain primarily rural, containing some farmland, pockets of single family residential developments, and natural features such as the St. Joseph River, Dowagiac River, and areas of woodlands.

Recognizing the desirability of this area for residential use, the Plan recommends a density of no greater than one unit per acre. Preferably, future residential development should be clustered to minimize the disruption to the rural landscape.

Conservation Area

In addition to the need to maintain a balance between development and preservation of the rural character of much of the Township, this Plan identifies particularly sensitive areas primarily along the St. Joseph and Dowagiac Rivers for Conservation. These lands are largely flood plains or wetlands and should be protected from structural intrusions that will inhibit the flow of flood waters; be susceptible to flood damage; or detract from the natural beauty of the rivers. This land use designation is also intended to indicate existing/planned parks and open space within the Township. Regulations should be adopted to ensure that this area is protected from encroachment in the future.

Suburban Residential

The Suburban Residential category provides for suburban scale residential development in areas that are developing at lower densities and have the potential of being or are currently served by public sanitary sewer. Development in these areas tends to be single family homes in platted subdivisions or site condos. This category provides for a transition between more intense residential or non-residential uses and the rural and agricultural areas of the Township. Recommended densities should not exceed four units per acre where public sewer is available and two units per acre where it is unavailable.

Urban Residential

Much of the established development in the Township is designated as Urban Residential, reflecting the small lot single family south of the City of Niles and immediately north along M - 51. These areas are served by public sanitary sewer and some also have public water available. While this is currently dominated by single family and two family residential uses, other forms of residential land use (senior citizen housing, condominiums, manufactured home communities, etc.) may be possible within the recommended density limits of not more than six units per acre.

Multi-Unit Residential

The purpose of this category is to ensure the availability within the Township of alternate forms of housing such as multiple family complexes and manufactured home communities. This provides a range of housing choices within the community and maintains an aspect of affordability, as

well. Densities within this category should not exceed 12 units per acre.

Professional Office and Services

An area of the Township specifically designated for office development is found in the vicinity of the Niles-Buchanan Road and US-31 interchange. The intent of this designation is to provide for professional offices and service uses with convenient highway access in proximity to residential development. Uses may include offices, institutional uses and potentially mixed office, service, and residential development. It is not the intent to allow this location to become further developed in commercial uses that are planned under the Highway Commercial land use designation.

Neighborhood Commercial

Small, isolated commercial locations are identified to acknowledge some existing commercial concentrations within the Township and to promote their continued presence as convenience centers for surrounding residential development. Uses in the Neighborhood Commercial areas should be confined to convenience retail and personal service establishments, but may also include small-scale mixed residential components to support live-work establishments. Further, they should not be allowed to expand beyond the relatively modest areas shown on the Future Land Use map.

Community Commercial

This is intended to be the general commercial heart of the Township, serving the needs of not only the Niles Charter Township residents, but the surrounding communities, as well. Uses permitted in such an area are fairly broad, including so-called "big box" retailers, shopping centers, offices, and a wide range of uses catering to the motoring public. The CC designation essentially follows 11th Street/M - 51. While this "strip" is proposed for commercial development, many areas of the corridor are in need of redevelopment. This is discussed elsewhere in the Plan in the context of the 11th Street Corridor Plan. Redevelopment may include mixed-use components where more dense walkable development may be desired, particularly near the City of Niles.

Highway Commercial

Those locations designated as Highway Commercial are adjacent to freeway interchanges and are intended to accommodate business uses primarily serving the highway traveler. Specifically, uses such as gas stations, convenience stores, and drive-in restaurants would be consistent with this purpose. Some offices may also be appropriate. General retail activity, however, should not be permitted. The US-31 interchange with Niles-Buchanan Road is the optimum location for this land use and a sub-area plan to include design standards is recommended.

Industrial

Several locations are designated for industrial development. These are areas where industrial uses already exist, utilities are available, freeway access is relatively close, and/or rail service is accessible. As indicated below, the 3rd Street corridor abuts the 11th Street Corridor Plan planning

area and the implementation of the Plan may impact the long-term approach taken in this area to strengthen industrial uses.

The area along 3rd Street south of Bell is committed to fairly intense industrial activity; yet tank farms and manufacturing plants are interspersed among single family homes and commercial establishments. This area should be committed to industrial use. Non-conforming and incompatible uses should be phased out as part of an overall redevelopment of this area as an industrial district. Street vacations and new interior access routes may be considered to consolidate disjointed properties and provide a more desirable industrial park setting.

North of US-12 to Fort Street, the area along 3rd Street is more varied. Brandywine Creek crosses this area in a wooded ravine and a mix of residential, commercial and industrial uses are found. The creek and woods are attractive amenities for some residential development, but nearby industrial development limits the expansion of those land uses. This area, too, is proximate to the 11th Street corridor and may be impacted by the continued implementation of the 11th Street Corridor Plan. North of the creek ravine, are several sizeable industrial or service commercial uses. This is a viable use of the area, as more industrial and service commercial uses are found along Fort Street to the north in the City of Niles. Nevertheless, any large scale expansion of those land uses will be constrained by topography and limited land area. Thus, while the future land use of the area north of the creek ravine is reflected as Industrial, the nature of the land uses may include service commercial businesses, such as contractor yards and show rooms along with small-scale manufacturing, warehousing and assembly operations. To appropriately plan for and regulate such a mix of uses, the Township will consider zoning standards for a Service Commercial/Industrial district which is reflective of current conditions in the area.

An area of industrial expansion is envisioned to the east of 5th Street and south of Burton Road along the jurisdictional boundary with the City of Niles and Howard Township. Rail service and the presence of the City of Niles Industrial Park to the south create the potential for industrial expansion into Niles Township across the rail corridor. Industrial uses in this area which abut residential uses and zoning districts should be sufficiently buffered with appropriate screening and landscaping. Facilities in this area will be developed with appropriate utility and transportation connections and in harmony with surrounding uses.

M - 51 Commercial Corridor

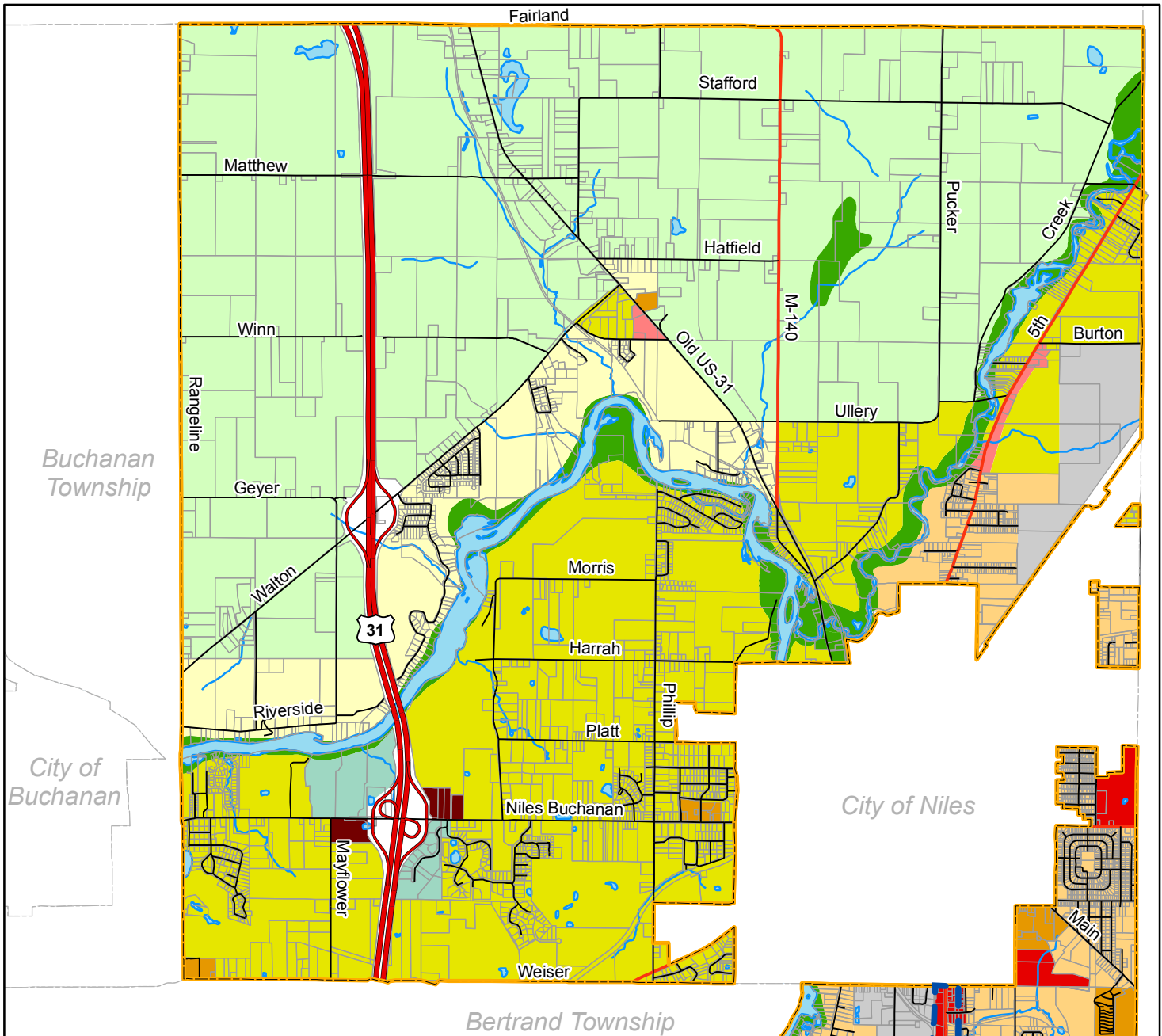
Many of the uses and developments along the M-51 corridor south of the City of Niles predated zoning regulation and sound land use planning. The conditions found along the corridor are common to mature strips and highway commercial areas. Among these are a proliferation of driveways, lack of landscaping, gaudy signs, unappealing architecture, poor maintenance, and expansive parking.

The Township worked with the City of Niles, the Southwestern Michigan Economic Growth Alliance, and the Michigan Department of Transportation in a planning effort coined the 11th Street Corridor Plan to improve the image and function of the corridor. The Plan, coupled with

prior planning efforts at the Township, have resulted in an updated Zoning Ordinance with increased landscaping requirements, improved access management standards, and a corridor overlay district, aimed at the improvement of this area over time. As uses change or expand, the Township should seize the chance to require improvements such as landscaping, reduction in curb-cuts, and similar physical changes which cumulatively will alter the function and character of the corridor. Additionally, the Township should routinely review and adjust the overlay district standards as the corridor redevelops.

Likewise, the corridor north of the City of Niles should receive specific attention. Commercial activity should be less intense, with a neighborhood orientation. The appearance of existing buildings and properties should be improved. Future business development should be strictly limited to the areas designated for such uses.

This page intentionally left blank.



Niles Charter Township

Berrien County, Michigan

Map 8. Future Land Use

Legend

Future Land Use

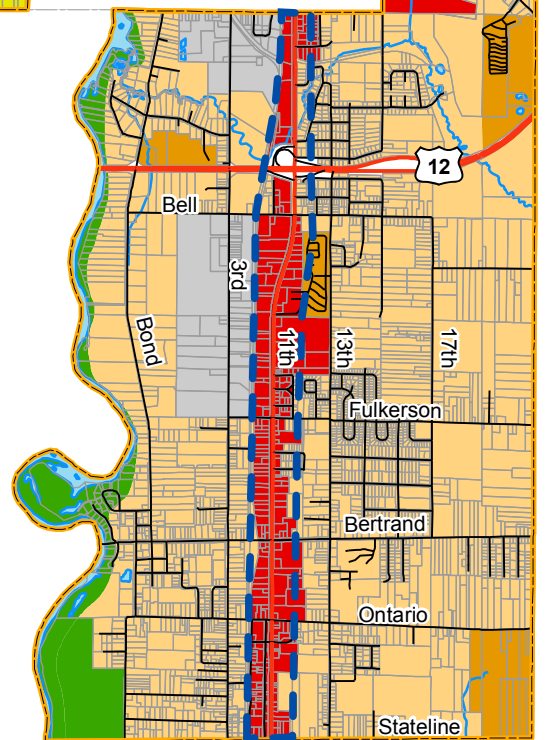
- Conservation Area
- Agriculture
- Rural Estate
- Suburban Residential
- Urban Residential
- Multi-Unit Residential
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Community Commercial
- Highway Commercial
- Professional Office Service
- Industrial

11th Street Corridor Plan



0 0.5 1 2 Miles

williams&works
engineers | surveyors | planners



This page intentionally left blank.

Zoning Plan

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

| 1. Future Land Use Categories | 2. Supporting and Compatible Zoning Districts | 3. Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts* | 4. Evaluation Factors and Features* |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Conservation Area | No Districts are Directly Supportive of this Category | Any District | In those portions of the Township adjoining and near the St. Joseph and Dowagiac Rivers or in area characterized by wetlands or other sensitive areas, land uses permitted in any of the Township's districts may be considered, if planned, and foremost protect the Rivers or other sensitive natural areas. |
| Agriculture | Agricultural Preservation | Rural Preservation | In limited areas where commercial agriculture is encumbered by existing development patterns, topography or natural features, low density residential patterns may be considered under the Rural Preserve district if measures are included to strengthen and protect agriculture in the area. |
| Rural Estate | Rural Preservation Agricultural Preservation | Low Density Residential | In limited areas east of the US-31/Walton interchange, existing low density residential areas may expand, if consistent with existing patterns. |
| Suburban Residential | Low Density Residential Rural Preservation | Local Business | Small pockets of Local Business zoning located along local arterial streets could be consistent with Low Density Residential future land use if limited to only a few parcels that are planned to serve the immediate needs of local residents. |

| 1. Future Land Use Categories | 2. Supporting and Compatible Zoning Districts | 3. Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts* | 4. Evaluation Factors and Features* |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Urban Residential | Medium Density Residential Low Density Residential | Local Business | Small pockets of Local Business zoning located along local arterial streets could be consistent with Urban Residential future land use if limited to only a few parcels that are planned to serve the immediate needs of local residents. |
| Multi-Unit Residential | High Density Residential Medium Density Residential Manufactured Housing Community | Local Business General Business | In the eastern portion of the Township adjoining the City of Niles, Local or General Business zoning may be appropriate where compatible designs are considered to buffer impacts on nearby multi-unit residential development |
| Neighborhood Commercial | Local Business | Office Service | Areas planned for neighborhood commercial may also support office services uses where modest-scale developments are proposed with good connections to nearby neighborhoods |
| Community Commercial | General Business | Local Business | Areas adjacent to the M-51/Eleventh Street corridor must also comply with the 11 th Street Overlay District. |

| 1. Future Land Use Categories | 2. Supporting and Compatible Zoning Districts | 3. Potentially Compatible Zoning Districts* | 4. Evaluation Factors and Features* |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Highway Commercial | Highway Business | None | |
| Professional Office and Services | Office Service | Local Business | Areas planned for office services that are located adjacent to residential areas may also support small scale local business uses where they are well connected and support nearby offices and residential neighborhoods. Local business uses in these areas should not result in a strip commercial setting. |
| Industrial | Industrial | None | Areas adjacent to the M-51/Eleventh Street corridor must also comply with the 11 th Street Overlay District. |

* In considering a request to rezone property in Niles Charter Township, the Planning Commission shall consider the future land use map (Map 8) and the future land use descriptive narrative of this plan. The foregoing table shall be used to evaluate the degree to which the proposed rezoning is, or may be, consistent with this plan together with an evaluation of the specific request. If the future land use category in Column 1 matches with the listed compatible zoning district in Column 2, the rezoning request may be considered consistent with this Master Plan. If the proposed zoning district is listed as potentially compatible (Column 3) with the future land use category, the Planning Commission and Township Board will refer to the evaluation factors and features presented in Column 4 to guide a decision on the request. In addition, the Township will also evaluate the proposed rezoning to consider whether the site may be reasonably used as it is currently zoned, whether the proposed site is an appropriate location any and all of the land uses that might be permitted within the requested zoning district, whether there may be other locations in the community that are better suited to accommodate such uses and any potential detrimental impact on the surrounding property that could result from the proposed rezoning.

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

This page intentionally left blank.

CHAPTER 7. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The vision of a Master Plan will languish without proactive steps to achieve it. This plan avoids this by outlining specific implementation strategies.

In order for the Master Plan to be more than an academic exercise, steps must be taken to realize its vision for the community. An effective Master Plan must provide not only a vision for future development, it must also outline strategic activities to be undertaken to achieve that vision.

To accomplish this for Niles Charter Township, this plan includes the following strategies to implement the goals and objectives and land use recommendations set forth in these pages. Many strategies are long-term in nature and some will require the cooperation and support of other outside entities to fully implement the Plan. In some cases, the Township's role is that of facilitator for some of the strategies outlined.

It is important to recognize that, while implementation of this plan and the following strategies will be important, they must be addressed in the context of the broader priorities of the Township and may, at times, take subordinate importance to more immediate demands.

1. **Routine Zoning Ordinance Evaluation and Audit.** The Zoning Ordinance offers a vitally important set of tools, regulations and policies to implement the Master Plan. Therefore, it is important that the intent statements and district standards of the ordinance be routinely evaluated to assure they are fully compatible with the Plan. Detailed design standards for subdivisions and site condos, lot area adjustments to enable green area set-asides, and inter-connectivity standards are some of the tools that could be considered. The result of a routine audit would be a narrative report that considers the existing Zoning Ordinance in the context of the Plan and changing conditions and recommends a series of amendments to further the Plan's objectives.
2. **Strategic Zoning Ordinance Amendments.** When routine audits are completed, the Planning Commission should establish priorities for strategic amendments to the document. This activity would consist of the necessary amendments to assure the Township has the tools and standards that are appropriate to move the Plan forward. These could be implemented one at a time, or in a comprehensive amendment, as appropriate.
3. **11th Street/M-51 Corridor.** The subarea planning activity which was completed in 2012 contains recommendations and implementation strategies. The Township was an integral part of that planning activity and is committed to

following through on recommendations resulting from that activity to the extent they support the overall development and land use goals of the community. Thus, this implementation strategy is explicit in furthering that commitment even while it is relatively general in content. Future implementation strategies should include the routine review and appropriate amendment of the 11th Street Overlay District when deemed necessary.

The Township will be equipped with sufficient information to accurately evaluate and guide development to protect features where possible.

4. **Natural Features Inventory.** This strategy is called for in the goals and objectives (see objective 1a), and it is important to protecting the most significant natural features. The purpose of the inventory would be to identify and map areas of significant wildlife habitat, healthy and scenic woodlands and wetlands, historic features or areas, important viewsheds, etc. These features should be described in detail and mapped as part of the inventory. Then when proposals come forward proposing development in their vicinity, the Planning Commission may use the inventory to minimize negative impact on features. This need not mean that no development will occur in or around important natural areas, but it does mean that the Township will be equipped with sufficient information to accurately evaluate and guide development to protect features where possible. It also can be useful to developers as they study a site informed by the detailed analysis in such an inventory.
5. **Third Street Sub-Area Plan.** This area of the Township is committed to fairly intense industrial activity; tank farms and manufacturing plants are interspersed among single family homes and commercial establishments. This area should be committed to industrial use but an effective and detailed future land use plan would help the needed transition. Non-conforming and incompatible uses should be phased out as part of an overall redevelopment of this area as an industrial district. Street vacations and new interior access routes may be considered to consolidate disjointed properties and provide a more desirable industrial park setting. At the same time, effective standards of design should be incorporated to result in an attractive and efficient locale for new industrial and heavy commercial investment.

Appendix:

**NILES CHARTER TOWNSHIP
BERRIEN COUNTY, MICHIGAN**

(Resolution No. 18-01)

At a regular meeting of the Niles Charter Township Board held on January 16, 2018, at the Township Hall, 320 Bell Road, Niles, Michigan, the following Resolution was offered for adoption by Board Member Cooper and was seconded by Board Member Ringler:

**A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE PROPOSED
NILES CHARTER TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN**

WHEREAS, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, MCL 125.3801 *et seq.* ("MPEA") authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare a Master Plan for the use, development and preservation of all lands in the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission prepared an amended Master Plan and submitted such plan to the Township Board for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, on August 21, 2017, the Niles Charter Township Board received and reviewed the proposed Master Plan prepared by the Planning Commission and authorized distribution of the Master Plan to the Notice Group entities identified in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, notice was provided to the Notice Group entities as provided in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on December 12, 2017 to consider public comment on the proposed Master Plan, and to further review and comment on the proposed Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, after the public hearing was held, the Planning Commission voted to approve the updated Master Plan on January 9, 2018, and recommended approval of the proposed Master Plan to the Township Board; and

WHEREAS, the Township Board finds that the proposed Master Plan is desirable, proper, and reasonable and furthers the use, preservation, and development goals and strategies of the Township;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

1. ***Adoption of 2018 Master Plan Update.*** The Niles Charter Township Board hereby approves and adopts the proposed Master Plan Update, including all of the chapters, figures, descriptive matters, maps and tables contained therein.

2. ***Distribution to Notice Group.*** Pursuant to MCL 125.3843, the Township Board approves distribution of the amended Master Plan to the Notice Group.

3. ***Findings of Fact.*** The Township Board has made the foregoing determination based on a review of existing land uses in the Township, a review of the existing Master Plan provisions and maps, and input received from the Planning Commission and the public, as well as the assistance of a professional planner. The Township Board also finds that the amended Master Plan will accurately reflect and implement the Township's goals and strategies for the use, preservation, and development of lands within the Niles Charter Township.

4. ***Effective Date; Repeal.*** The amended Master Plan shall become effective on the adoption date of this resolution. The prior Master Plan is hereby repealed upon the Master Plan becoming effective.

YEAS: Hoese, Ringler, Vella, Stover, Cooper, Eull

NAYS: None.

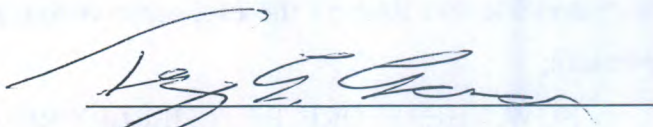
ABSENT/ABSTAIN: Pulaski Absent

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of a resolution adopted by the Niles Charter Township Board of Trustees at the time, date, and place specified above pursuant to the required statutory procedures.

Date: January 16, 2018


Terry Eull
Township Clerk

**NILES CHARTER TOWNSHIP
BERRIEN COUNTY, MICHIGAN
PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION**

At a regular meeting of the Niles Charter Township Planning Commission held on January 9, 2018 at the Niles Township Hall, 320 Bell Road, Niles, Michigan, the following Resolution was offered for adoption by Commission Member Cooper, supported by Commission Member Spivlock:

**A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE UPDATED NILES CHARTER
TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN AND TO RECOMMEND ADOPTION BY
THE TOWNSHIP BOARD**

WHEREAS, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, MCL 125.3801 *et seq.* ("MPEA") authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare and periodically update a Master Plan for the use, development and preservation of all lands in the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission prepared an updated Master Plan and submitted such plan to the Township Board for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, on August 21, 2017, the Niles Charter Township Board received and reviewed the proposed Master Plan update prepared by the Planning Commission and authorized distribution of the updated Master Plan to the Notice Group entities identified in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, notice was provided to the Notice Group entities as provided in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on December 12, 2017 to consider public comment on the proposed Master Plan update, and to further review and comment on the proposed Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds that the proposed Master Plan update is desirable, proper, and reasonable and furthers the use, preservation, and development goals and strategies of the Township;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

The Niles Charter Planning Commission hereby approves the proposed Master Plan update, including all of the chapters, figures, descriptive matters, maps and tables contained therein, and recommends adoption of said plan by the Township Board.

YEAS: Conover, Shofeung, Spaulock, Cooper, McNelis

NAYS: _____

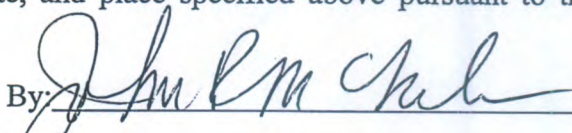
ABSENT/ABSTAIN: Smothermon, Durm

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of a resolution adopted by the Niles Charter Township Planning Commission at the time, date, and place specified above pursuant to the required statutory procedures.

Dated: 1-9-18

By: 
Planning Commission Secretary