

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

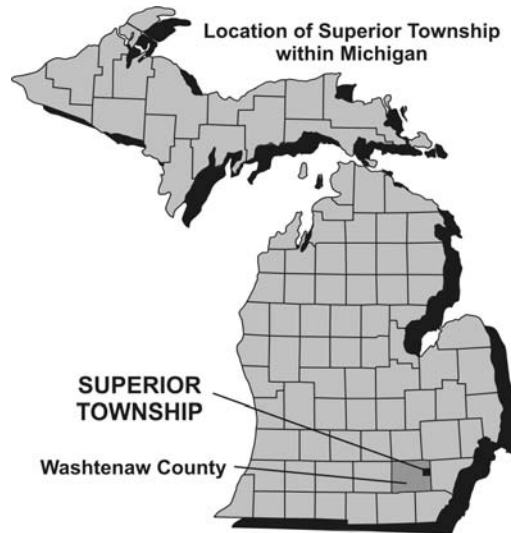
Following a brief geographic description of Superior Charter Township is an overview of the elements of this Growth Management Plan, a brief history of the Township, and observations about the future of the Township. These materials provide a context for the balance of the Plan.

LOCATION

Location and Neighboring Jurisdictions

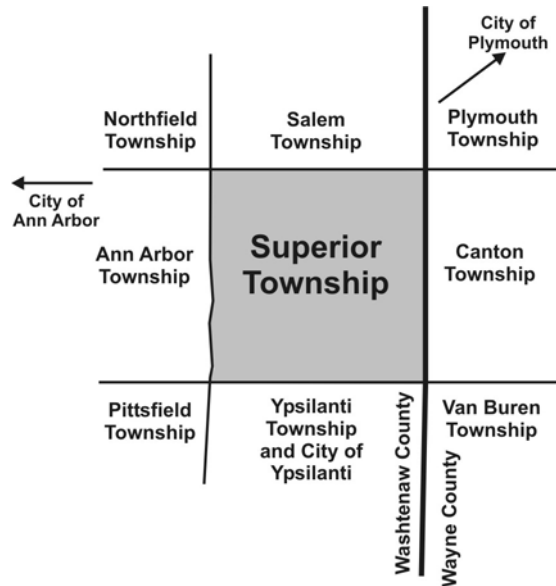
Superior Charter Township is 35.5 square miles located along the eastern edge of Washtenaw County in southeastern Michigan (see Map 1-1). It shares boundaries with eight other jurisdictions (see Map 1-2) in one of the most rapidly growing parts of the state.

Map 1-1 Location of Superior Charter Township in Michigan



Superior Charter Township is a carefully planned mix of urban and rural neighborhoods, interspersed with many square miles of farmland, woods, wetlands, and other natural open spaces. In addition, the rural settlement of Dixboro in the northwest corner of the Township provides a unique historic dimension.

Map 1-2 Location of Superior Township and Adjacent Communities



Map representative and not to scale.

Superior Township pledges to coordinate with and cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions, the County, region and state in the adoption of updates to this Plan, and in the review and comment on draft Plans of other jurisdictions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN

Relation to the 1982 and 1992 Plans

The Township's previous Growth Management Plan was adopted in 1992 as a successor to the General Development Plan adopted in 1982. Most of the 1992 Plan remains pertinent today, and has been retained. Conditions within and affecting Superior Township have changed enough, however, to warrant an update of strategies and policies with respect to natural resources, recreation, growth, development, and land uses. (See Chapter 2: Demographics and Chapter 3: Existing Conditions.) Just as importantly, increased awareness of development pressures on the Township, the relationship of land use in communities adjacent to Superior Township, the increased use of roads within the Township for regional commuting, the firm desire of Township residents to preserve natural scenic character, and increased knowledge of environmental concerns warrant an increased emphasis on these issues within the Plan. (See Chapter 4: Major Issues.) This Plan remains guided by a common vision of the future, which is detailed through a series of goals, objectives, and policies. (See Chapter 5: Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Policies.) The specific elements of the growth management strategy are

detailed along with a list of changes needed in the Zoning Ordinance to effectively implement this Plan. (See Chapter 6: Growth Management Strategy and Chapter 7: Zoning Plan.) The Plan concludes with a list of proposed implementation steps. (See Chapter 8: Implementation.) This planning document will, upon adoption by the Planning Commission and Township Board, update and replace the Growth Management Plan adopted in 1992.

Background Data and Analysis

In 1989, the Superior Charter Township Board established the Citizen Design Review Committee (CDRC), a group of residents from throughout the Township, to review the 1982 General Development Plan and make recommendations for revision. The CDRC presented its findings and recommendations to the Board and Planning Commission through a series of meetings in 1989-90. A proposed draft of the new plan was presented to the Planning Commission, which held work sessions throughout 1991 to analyze the extensive data and formulate the new plan. (This background data has been assembled in a separate document.) Throughout the process, continued public input was solicited. A comprehensive Township-wide resident survey conducted in 1990 was successful in giving the Commission a statistically valid report on residents' priorities and goals for the Township. The Plan was adopted by the Planning Commission in 1992.

Principal Features of the Plan

Through application of both the 1982 and 1992 plans, the Planning Commission gained a comprehensive understanding of land use trends, both within the Township and in adjacent communities, the Plan's strengths and weaknesses, which issues could or should be addressed in greater detail, and which land uses did not occur as anticipated. The 1982 Plan and 1992 plans were strategy/policy plans. That is, each Plan described the Planning Commission's strategies regarding future growth and development of the Township and the policies which were intended to implement them. The 1992 Plan and this Plan have been somewhat expanded, and can be described as a vision-based plan. The vision describes what residents of Superior Charter Township want the Township to be like in twenty years. (See Chapter 5: Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Policies.) The policies seek to address the fundamental issues which the Planning Commission and Township Board expect the Township to face within the foreseeable future. These basic issues are those which will have enduring effects on the Township, and which will affect the physical character of the Township in the years ahead.

Because the Plan concentrates on goals, objectives, policies, and strategies, it follows that the Plan is, for the most part, general in nature. That is, the Plan shows various issues the Planning Commission and

Township Board will consider and the approaches that will be followed. The Plan does not, however, prescribe or predict uses of specific parcels of land, except those in public ownership or in a private, permanent protection program. Instead, it describes the intended use(s) of general areas. The Plan also provides guidance for Township officials to use in the future in order to direct private development and public infrastructure decisions in the Township in a manner that reflects the vision of this Plan.

The Plan provides guidelines for making decisions or recommendations for individual parcels of land, specific public improvements, and similar questions that might arise in the future. The Plan provides the framework for Planning Commission recommendations and Township Board decisions. It is not the intent of the Plan that the designation of any area for a specific use entitle a property owner within that area to a zoning change consistent with the use designation (especially where the infrastructure or public services necessary for such development are not present). In both cases, the decision will be made on a case-by-case basis at the time the question arises, and within the context of the Plan, applicable zoning, and any other applicable development regulations.

The Plan recognizes that the future is uncertain and cannot be predicted, and that current perceptions of future conditions will change. The major issues may change over time, and strategies and policies appropriate to respond to them will have to be modified or replaced. The Planning Commission intends to review (at least once each five years), refine, add to, or otherwise modify the Plan as necessary. The Plan may be amended if analysis indicates an amendment is appropriate. Detailed policies for specific areas of the Township may also be appropriate, or required, in the form of sub-area plans. (See Chapter 6 for a fuller description of this issue.)

HISTORY OF SUPERIOR TOWNSHIP

"The Township of Superior is particularly an agricultural district...unsurpassed in the fertility of its soil or the advantages of its water-courses;...'Superior' is stamped upon its lands and is said to extend itself to the people and their homes." This description appeared in the 1881 History of Washtenaw County, Michigan and probably expressed the sentiments of the residents of Superior Township at that time and before, back to the time when the Township was first settled.

The first lands were sold to settlers in the early 1820's by the Federal government. At that time, the present Superior Township was part of a larger Township known as Ypsilanti. In 1829, the Township of Panama, which consisted of the present-day Superior Township (south) and Salem Township (north) was divided from Ypsilanti Township by the Legislative Council. The present day Townships of Superior and Salem were created from the Township of Panama by a legislative act in 1831.



Photo 1-1: Superior Charter Township was settled as a farming community.

Superior Charter Township was settled by farmers, and the Township remained a farming community for many years. The Township did not have permanent concentrated settlements, other than the settlement of Dixboro, because it lacked the principal requirements of permanent settlements in the early 19th century: a regional road and a river or major stream to provide access and hydropower. Dixboro had hydropower from Fleming Creek and a transportation route in South Territorial Road (now Plymouth Road). Other small settlements occurred: there were eight saw mills and three flour mills in the Township at

various times, as well as the small Frain's Lake community. Only the Dixboro settlement has persisted as a "village" settlement.

The 25 acres of Dixboro were purchased in 1824 by Captain John Dix, who platted the land into 64 lots and a village green (public square) in 1826. The settlement grew slowly over the next 100 years, primarily as a residential settlement with some business services. With the advent of electricity, automobiles, and the paving of Plymouth Road, the village began to expand. By the time Dixboro Heights was constructed and occupied in the early 1950's, the population of Dixboro had more than doubled. The construction of new subdivisions during the 1980's and early 1990's (e.g., Tanglewood, Tanglewood Hills, Creekside) resulted in dramatic growth in Dixboro's population.

Dixboro Church, built in 1858, still functions as an active church for the area. The village green, owned by the church since 1953, was the site of the original school, but is now used as a neighborhood playground and for church activities. Several houses date back to the late 1830's and 40's, and descendants of several of the original families still live in the area.



Photo 1-2: A Dixboro settlement.

The Township as a whole remained a quiet agricultural community until the beginning of World War II. In the decades prior to the war the Township's population fluctuated, and reached a low point of 778 people in 1920.

In 1941, construction of the Willow Run Bomber Plant and the Willow Run Airport began. The plant and airport were located in Ypsilanti

Township, but Willow Village, a housing complex to serve the employees of the plant, was constructed spanning Ypsilanti and Superior Townships. The impact of the entire Willow Village/Willow Run complex transcended municipal boundaries and affected all of Superior Township. What had been a boys' camp (owned by Henry Ford) for 65 boys in 1939 became a vast manufacturing complex employing over 42,000 people in the war effort in 1943. The employees and their families were attracted from all over the United States, with most coming from outside the southeast Michigan area. Willow Village was created to house and service 15,000 to 20,000 people, and was complete with commercial and community facilities. The influx of this large number of workers and their families created tremendous strains for the area, strains which were only partially alleviated by the public programs and facilities provided through Willow Village.

Following cessation of the war, production of the planes stopped and employment quickly declined. By December, 1945, less than 600 families lived in Willow Village. Not everyone left the area, however. Some people remained to work, and these formed the nucleus of a skilled and semi-skilled labor force which was absorbed into local employment, particularly the auto industry.

Because of the housing shortage which followed the war, Willow Village was not torn down immediately as was originally planned. The Federal government sold the Willow Village properties to Ypsilanti Township in 1954. Through written agreement with Superior Township, Ypsilanti Township supervised the demolition of the Willow Village housing and sold some of the large non-residential buildings to the Willow Run School District. Most of the Village's land located in Superior Township was sold to the Globe Development Company, and is the site of much of the Township's existing urban residential development.

The Willow Village area could not, of course, return to its pre-1941 condition, and the farmland could not be reclaimed. The basis had been established for substantial permanent employment and population growth in Ypsilanti Township and the southern part of Superior Township. The infrastructure for urban growth, such as sanitary sewer and water lines, drainage facilities, improved roads, and public schools, was present. The Woodland Acres single-family subdivisions (Washington Square and Oakbrook) were started in the mid-1960's and the apartment and condominium complexes were begun in the early 1970's. The growth of the Township—a 127 % increase between 1960 and 1980—occurred primarily in the area south of Geddes Road, in or adjacent to the old Willow Village area.

The portions of Superior Township north of Geddes Road also experienced significant post-war change as the non-farm, rural residential population increased, and as major highways were built. The interstate freeway system, followed by the connecting freeways such as M-14, served the scattered, low density residences and provided access to employment centers.

The continued increase in the efficiency of agricultural production resulted in less and less concern over the loss of productive farmland to the spread of development into the countryside. As was the case with many other changes, this too was a national occurrence, but it was particularly applicable to Superior Township in the post-war years. In the 1980's and early 1990's, however, the increasing, irreversible loss of agricultural lands has been recognized as a serious problem in many areas, including portions of southeast Michigan.

In 1979, Superior became a charter township. Increased population created increased demand for services, particularly in the urban areas. The need for additional police coverage has been met through contractual agreements with the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department. The Township's Fire Department has expanded and upgraded its fire fighting and emergency medical response vehicles and equipment. In 1989, coordinated refuse collection was established in the subdivisions south of Geddes Road through a special assessment district. In 1991, coordinated refuse collection was expanded into the remaining areas of the Township, and curbside recycling services were made available to all residents. Emergency 911 dialing services went into effect in Washtenaw County, including Superior Township, in 1991. Throughout the 1990's and start of the 21st century, substantial development occurred in the urbanized part of the Township south of Geddes Road. The Township also took its first steps to support permanent farmland and open space conservation. These efforts were largely led by a local land conservancy and individual actions of farmers in the Township.



Photo 1-3: The original Superior Charter Township Hall.

FUTURE OF SUPERIOR TOWNSHIP

The history of Superior Township helps us to understand where we are and how we got here. We can use our knowledge of the Township's evolution over the past 180 years to help determine what characteristics we would like to protect and enhance, and to help evaluate the probability of success in doing so. In addition, we can, with some degree of confidence, state the following conclusions regarding our future prospects:

- Superior Township will never again be the tranquil, rural/agricultural community that it was during the first 100 years of its existence. The transition from that community was made during and immediately following World War II, and is irreversible.
- The Township has developed into three distinct areas: the urban residential south, the rural residential north, and the agricultural center. It is certainly reasonable to expect that these patterns of development may continue, and that the Township will continue to be faced with the challenge of creating a sense of community among the three types of areas, and distributing services equitably among them.
- The high quality, agriculturally productive soil for which the Township is named is still, for the most part, available for agricultural use. The type of agricultural activities might well change, i.e., more intensive or

specialty types of agriculture, and value-added agriculture may become more dominant, but agriculture is still feasible.

- Population growth trends over the past 20 years show a moderate rate of growth, but a more rapid rate in surrounding communities. A similar rate of growth in the next 20 years will put greater pressure on farmers to sell land for conversion to rural residential development. However, many of the farmers appear willing to consider sale of development rights, or sale of the land to land conservancies, in order to permanently protect farmland and open space in the Township.
- The Township has developed as a residential and agricultural community. With the exception of the St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in the southwest corner of the Township, the Township does not have concentrations of commercial or industrial land uses. However, a proposal for a large manufacturing/technology center at Geddes and LeForge Roads was initiated by Township officials in the early 1980's and was addressed in the 1982 Plan, and a portion of that land will soon begin development for an American Technical Center for Hyundai, a South Korean motor vehicle manufacturer. The location poses difficulties as a major employment center as originally proposed, and significant expenditures for infrastructure improvements will be required.
- Decisions made in Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor Township, Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Township, Salem Township, and Canton Township will continue to have an impact upon Superior Township and the quality of life experienced by Township residents. This interrelationship emphasizes the need for interjurisdictional cooperation and coordination.
- Change usually appears to be gradual, but can be dramatic. Thus far, Superior Township's development has been slower than that of some surrounding communities. This can be attributed to several factors, including the soil types, which are largely unsuitable for sanitary septic systems; large land holdings by farmers; the relative lack of demand for intensive land uses; and supporting infrastructure that exists at opposite ends of the Township rather than in conjunction. This moderate growth over the past 30 years has given Superior Township an opportunity to learn from the experiences of other communities that grew quickly, without cohesive plans, and are now attempting to cope with the aftermath of rapid growth. Superior Township is fortunate to have many outstanding natural features still intact which enhance our community and can continue to do so with proper protective measures and planning.

- The history and the conclusions in this section set the stage for the planning process, and establish a general framework for the Growth Management Plan. An understanding of our historical base helps provide a sense of continuity and community. The conclusions help guide us into a plan that addresses, as fully as possible, the issues we will face in the future.



Photo 1-4: A recent rural residential home.

As of 2004, Superior Charter Township has evolved into a community with a great variety of characteristics. The Township's population is socially, economically, and racially diverse. For all its diversity, however, Superior Township's residents are remarkably consistent in their vision of the Township: a community that retains its unique character and natural beauty. This vision is not incompatible with the growth we will inevitably experience. With careful attention to the goals and objectives expressed in Chapter 5, and through the implementation of its policies and strategies, Superior Charter Township truly has the opportunity to plan for a community which incorporates the best characteristics of the 21st century, respects our heritage, and protects our natural environment.