

**Otsego Lake Township**  
*Strategic Planning Report*



Prepared by the  
*Otsego Lake Township Planning Commission*

With Planning Assistance Provided by:

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*Adopted:* \_\_\_\_\_

# **Otsego Lake Township** *Strategic Planning Report*

## ***Introduction***

In the summer of 2004, the Otsego Lake Township Planning Commission embarked on a Strategic Planning process to better plan for the Township's future.

*"The purpose of planning is not to decide what should be done in the future, but to decide what should be done now to make desired things happen in an uncertain future."--Edger Stoesz.*

The process started with the collecting and compiling of much existing data regarding the current conditions in the Township. A summary of the background data is presented in following pages of this report.

Following the data collection and compilation phase of this planning process, the Planning Commission identified key issues to be explored and then conducted two Strategic Planning Public Input Sessions to gather input from the Township residents and business owners on the identified issues and any other topics raised by the participants. A copy of the presentation from the *Strategic Planning Public Input Sessions* is included in Appendix A, of this document.



## *Otsego Lake Township History*

Otsego Lake was settled in 1872, located at the Southern tip of Otsego Lake, the village was noted to have been the former county seat situated on Old State Road leading to Mancelona and Elk Rapids.

Prior to the village settlement, around the year 1851, David Ward, a young enterprising fellow, gave up his career as surveyor, timber looker, and school teacher to become an early timber baron and began lumbering the vast thousands of acres of pine timber that he had laid claim to. As a part of his discoveries, in 1854, it was said that he had discovered the largest stand of Cork Pine in Michigan.

By 1877, a village had been established, deserted and re-established three times. The names changed from Bradford or Bradford Lake originally, finally to Waters. At that time the Wright-Wells Lumber Co came to town. With the operation of their mills, the construction of a large general store and a hotel, the village with a population of 75 residents, began to grow. The next 10 years showed tremendous growth and Waters became a bustling town. However, once the big timber had been harvested, residents moved North with the mills and by 1890 only one store and post office combination remained.

Henry Stephens, Sr. formerly of St. Helens in Roscommon County moved his operations here in 1891 and once again the village was booming. By 1905 the population rose to over 300, but dwindled to approximately 50 people by 1912.

After the remaining timber was stripped from the area, Henry Stephens<sup>1</sup>, Jr. decided to make Waters his permanent residence in between his worldwide travels. When his father died in 1884, Henry Stephens, Jr. inherited his father's lumbering fortune which allowed him to build a large two story, frame house on the back of his lot, along with several other out buildings, including a large dairy barn. In 1914, he conceived the concept of a glass bottle fence as a monument to the roaring hard-drinking lumber jacks of the past lumbering era.

Stephans offered local children a penny each for bottles and hired a cement contractor to erect the fence. Work on the fence progressed according to the supply of bottles. In their eagerness to earn money from the project, Waters children robbed their relatives' pantries, dumped contents of canning jars and bottles, and probably emptied the contents of their father's liquid refreshment cache, according to the number of whiskey and beer bottles used in the fence. Old timers tell of boys who sold bottles to Stephens during the day and would sneak back at night to pilfer the supply, and then resell them to him the following day. Stephens was well liked by everyone and purchased the same bottles over again with a chuckle.

When completed, the fence with a wrought iron gate in the center spanned two city blocks and bordered the main street that eventually became US-27. The shoulder high fence, capped with concrete slabs, was then finished off with letters two feet high that spelled out the owner's name. HENRY STEPHANS.

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<sup>1</sup> The name Stephens had several spellings. Henry, Sr. used "Stephens" the original spelling. Old timers and residents often spelled it "Stevens", and Henry, Jr. spelled it "Stephans".

Stephans left Waters about 1917 in failing health. Within a short time the village that once covered an area of 40-acres and boasted several streets lined with business places and homes, became deserted once again.

In 1927 Mrs. Edna Schotte, the matriarch of Waters and postmaster from 1930 to 1946, and her late husband, purchased 1,800 acres, including the village. The Schotte's re-established the post office and when liquor was legalized in 1936, Mrs. Schotte and her husband were the first in the county to receive a tavern license. They built the "Glass Bottle Fence Gardens" tavern. In 1970 this old landmark fell victim to fire. After the old depot was razed, a lumberyard and warehouse did business on the site. These buildings now stand empty. Mrs. Schotte said they set up a sawmill on the lake where they salvaged hundreds of deadheads (sunken logs) and made them into lumber.

In the early 1920's the Heart Lake Club, a group of land speculators, bought the old Stephans dairy barn on the edge of town and converted it into a hotel, lounge and dining room. The enterprise closed during the depression and remained vacant for several years. With the start of the tourist boom in the 1940's, the hotel was reopened as the "Wassir Hoff" and became known statewide.

With the deterioration of the old bottle fence due to vandalism, and the construction of the expressway that bypassed the town, tourism for the area decreased as evidenced by the old hotel standing empty again for several years until late 1970 when it was again purchased and opened for business.

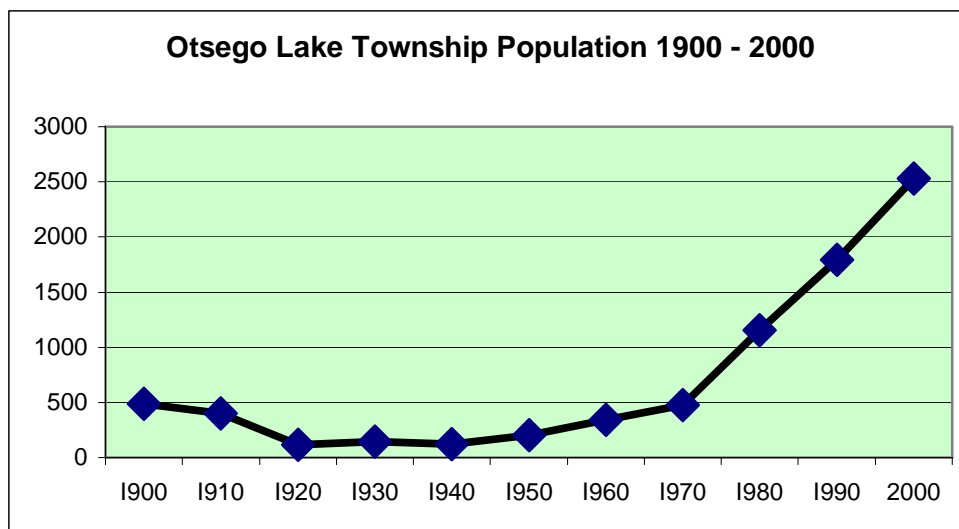
During reconstruction, the hotel fell victim to suspected wiring problems, and was completely destroyed in a fire in 1972. The loss of the Waters Inn (the old dairy barn), antique organ, and hand-pump fire wagon was also a loss of some of the local history.

In 1935 the old Stephan home, then occupied by Harley Kennedy, was destroyed by fire. Most of the other buildings suffered the same fate over the years.

Today, many resorts exist in the area and once more there are about a dozen business places in the village. Mrs. Schotte donated the site of the old Stephan home and the glass bottle fence to Otsego Lake Township for use as a fire hall and community building with the stipulation that the old bottle fence be restored. Unfortunately the bottle fence fell in to such a state of disrepair, that it was deemed not restorable. However, in order to preserve the history, the Township created the historical display located at the Township Hall.



# *Otsego Lake Township Population Changes*



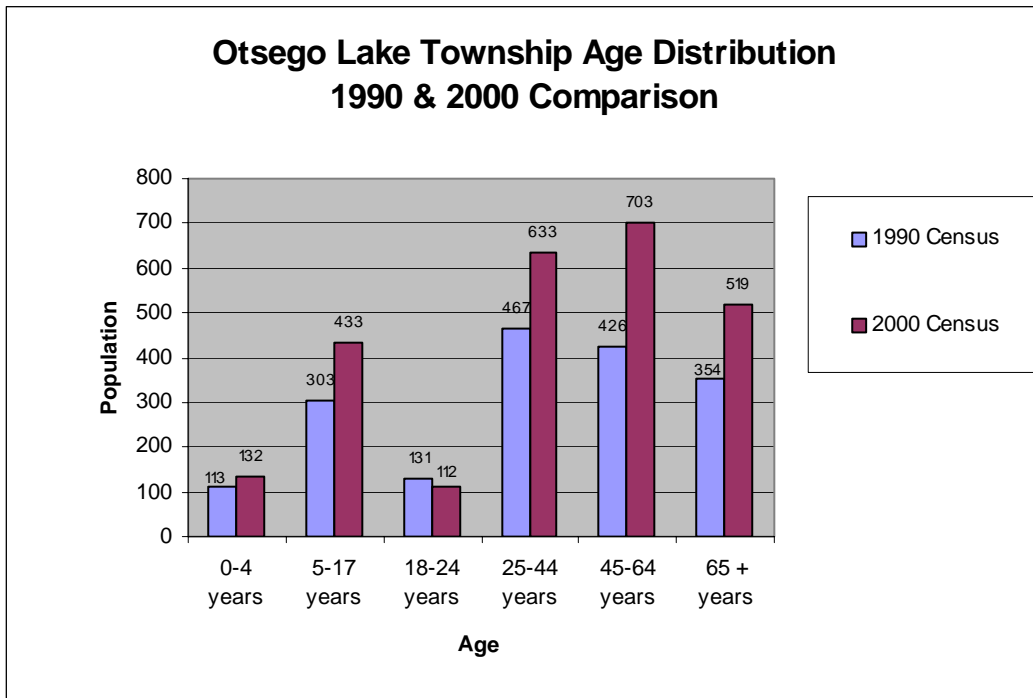
Since 1940 the population of Otsego Lake Township has been increasing, and as is apparent from the chart above, the rate of growth has been much greater during the past three decades.

<b>Age Distribution Otsego Lake Township – 1990 and 2000</b>					
<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Otsego Lake Township</b>				
	<b>1990 Census</b>		<b>2000 Census</b>		<b>% Change</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>1990-2000</b>
0-4 years	113	6.3%	132	5.2%	16.8%
5-17 years	303	16.9%	433	17.1%	42.9%
18-24 years	131	7.3%	112	4.4%	-14.5%
25-44 years	467	26.0%	633	25.0%	35.5%
45-64 years	426	23.7%	703	27.8%	65.0%
65 + years	354	19.7%	519	20.5%	46.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,794</b>	<b>99.9%</b>	<b>2,532</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>41.1%</b>

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add to 100 percent.  
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000

The young adult age group (18-24 years of age) is the only age group for Otsego Lake Township that decreased between 1990 and 2000.

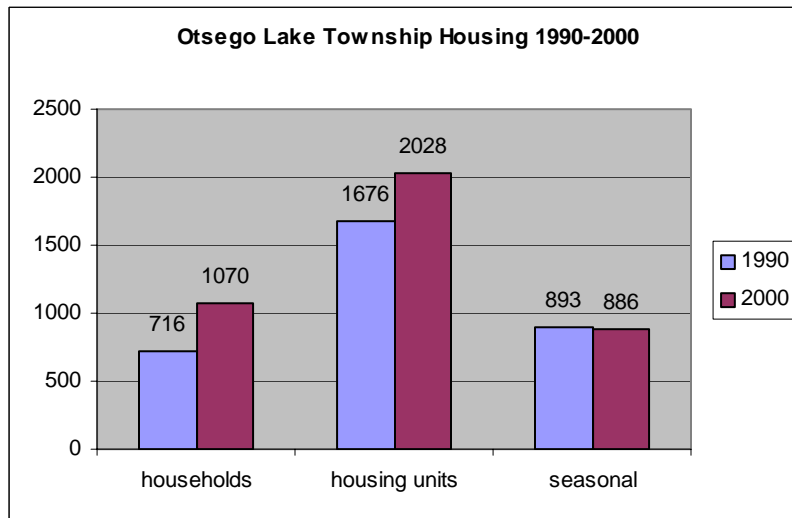
The median age in Otsego Lake Township, according to the 2000 Census, is 43.6 years, compared to 37.7 for Otsego County as a whole and 35.5 Statewide.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000

## *Otsego Lake Township Housing*

The township housing needs have increased with the increase in population. The chart below illustrates an increase of over 350 households and corresponding housing units between 1990 and 2000, which represents a twenty-one percent (21%) increase in housing units.



As of 2000 Census, the housing stock in Otsego Lake Township consisted of 2,028 housing units, of which the vast majority, 85% (1,747) are one unit-detached housing units (commonly known as single family dwellings), 13% (260) are mobile homes, and 2% (46) are attached units (duplexes, apartments or condominiums).

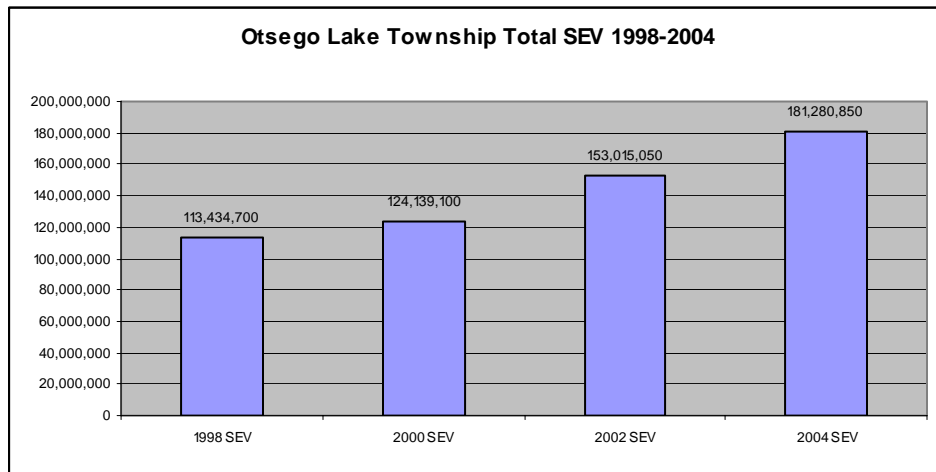
While the seasonal homes comprise approximately 44% of the housing stock (886 dwelling units), the number has remained essentially stable over the last ten years.

***Property Value changes***

<b>State Equalized Valuation by Property Class</b>								
Otsego Lake Township								
Class	1998		2000		2002		2004	
	SEV	% Total	SEV	% Total	SEV	% Total	SEV	% Total
Agriculture	115,800	0.1	119,900	0.1	265,900	0.2	287,300	0.2
Commercial	4,513,800	4.0	4,694,000	3.8	5,256,400	3.4	6,660,100	3.7
Industrial	0		0		0		0	
Residential	97,012,200	85.5	110,316,800	88.9	138,600,800	90.6	164,935,300	91.0
Timber Cutover	0		0		0		0	
Developmental	0		0		0		0	
<b>Total Real Property</b>	<b>101,641,800</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>115,130,700</b>	<b>92.7</b>	<b>144,123,100</b>	<b>94.2</b>	<b>171,882,700</b>	<b>94.8</b>
Personal Property	11,792,900	10.4	9,008,400	7.3	8,891,950	5.8	9,398,150	5.2
<b>Total SEV</b>	<b>113,434,700</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>124,139,100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>153,015,050</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>181,280,850</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Otsego County Equalization Department and Office of Planning and Zoning.

The percent of total SEV in each property class has remained quite constant; with the greatest change being approximately a five percent (5 %) increase in the Residential property class and corresponding five percent (5%) decrease in the personal property, between 1998 and 2004.

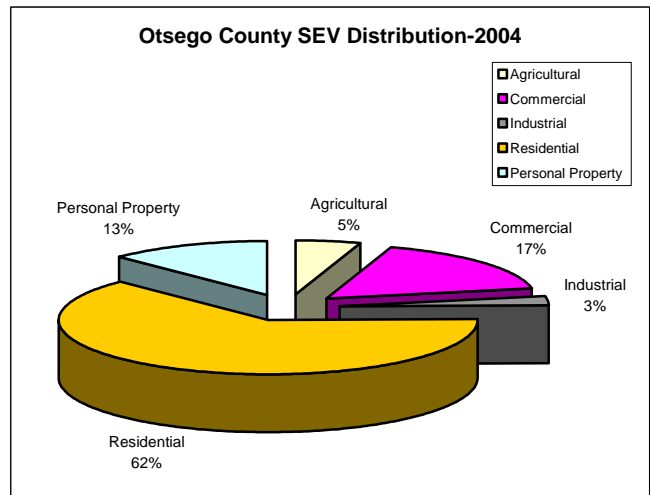
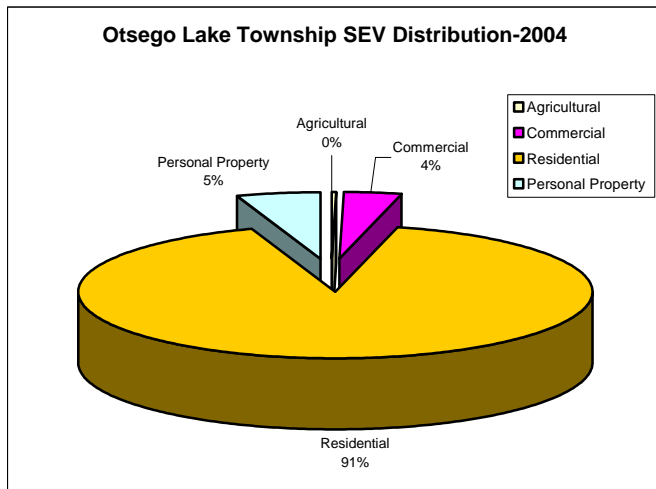


The Township’s total State Equalized Value has increased by 59.8% between 1998 and 2004.

<b>SEV Distribution Comparison</b> Otsego Lake Township and Otsego County - 2004				
<b>Real Property:</b>	<b>Otsego Lake Township</b>		<b>Otsego County</b>	
	Amount	% of total	Amount	% of total
Agricultural	287,300	0.2	74,506,300	5.1
Commercial	6,660,100	3.7	246,900,789	16.9
Industrial	0		37,604,600	2.6
Residential	164,935,300	91.0	918,173,943	62.8
Timber Cutover	0		0	
Developmental	0		0	
<b>Total Real Property</b>	<b>171,882,700</b>	<b>94.8</b>	<b>1,277,185,632</b>	<b>87.4</b>
Personal Property	9,398,150	5.2	183,999,850	12.6
<b>Total SEV</b>	<b>181,280,850</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,461,185,482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Otsego County Equalization Department.

The charts below graphically depict the SEV distribution for the Township as compared to that of Otsego County for 2004.





## *Otsego Lake Township Roads*

### Otsego Lake Township Road System

Otsego Lake Township has an 80 mile Road System (see Otsego Lake Township Roads Map on following page)

- 20 miles of primary paved roads (excluding I-75)
- 40 miles of local paved roads
- 20 miles of local unpaved roads

This entire road system is operated and maintained by the Otsego County Road Commission using gas tax and license plate funds from the State of Michigan.

Unfortunately, revenues from these sources are no longer adequate to properly maintain our road system. Some Townships including Dover and Charlton, in Otsego County, have utilized a special Road Improvement assessment to help fund necessary road repairs.

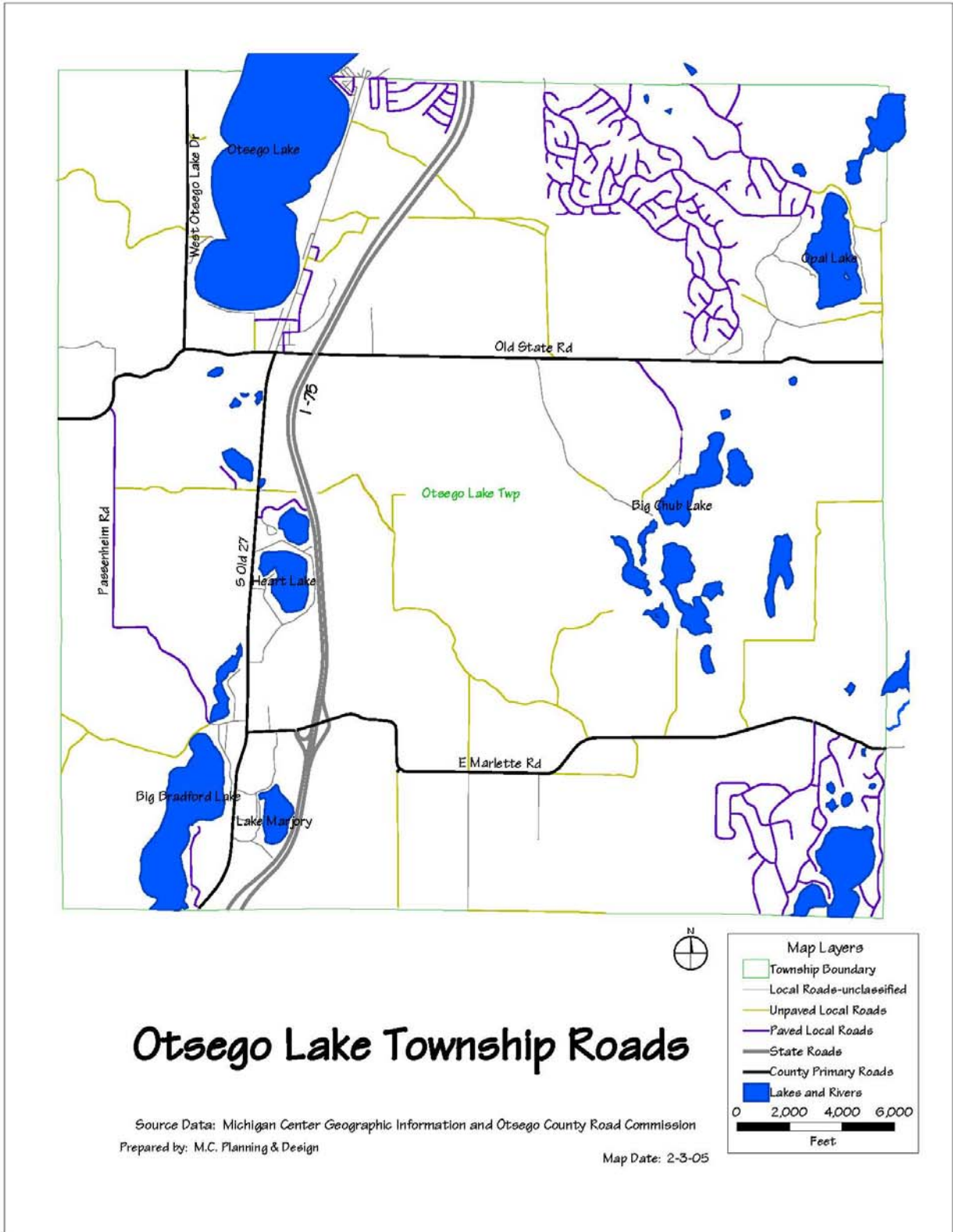
Currently Otsego Lake Township has 7 miles of primary paved roads and 14.5 miles of local paved roads in need of extensive work. The identified roads in need of repair are mapped on page 11. A list of priority road improvements and associated costs is located in Appendix B. Five years from now, several additional miles of roads will require extensive work.

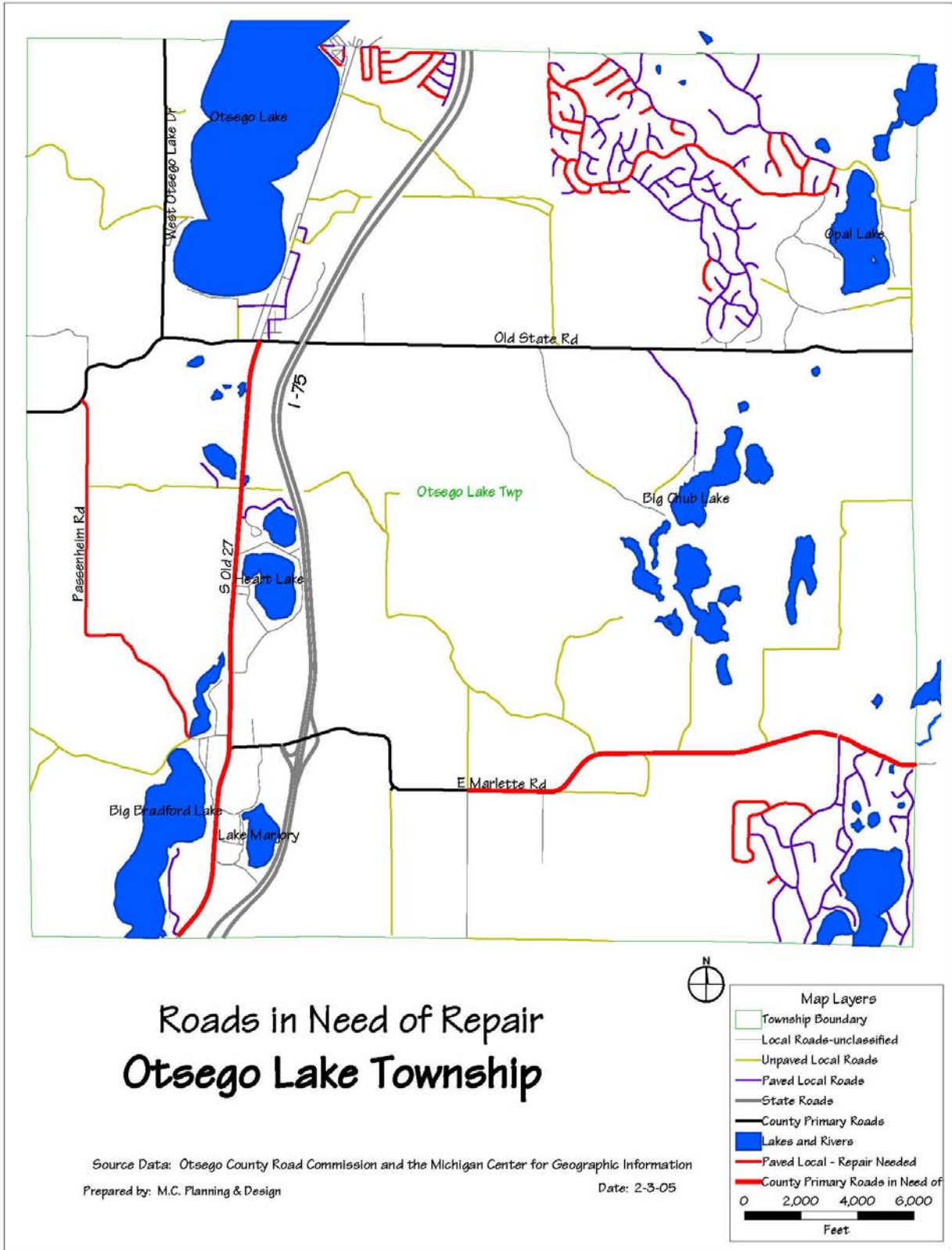
In past years, Otsego Lake Township has allocated approximately \$50,000 to road improvements from the general fund. The Otsego County Road Commission has usually allocated an additional \$50,000 to Otsego Lake Township for extensive road improvements. In addition, State of Michigan funds are available for primary road improvement through grant application; however, these monies are limited, and not available for local road improvements.

Since roads are deteriorating faster than these funds can accommodate, additional monies are required if we are to restore township roads to good condition.

Some options are:

- A. 2 mill assessment for 5 years (Home worth \$100,000 will pay \$100/yr.)
- B. 1.5 mill assessment for 7 years (Home worth \$100,000 will pay \$75/yr.)
- C. Continue current funding and review as more roads fail. (No increase in cost)





## ***Otsego Lake Township Fire Department***

The Otsego Lake Fire Department is a volunteer fire department. The Fire Chief is the only salaried employee. There is also an assistant chief, four captains, and an Emergency Medical System (EMS) coordinator. Currently the department is staffed by approximately 25 volunteer firefighters. The Otsego Lake Township Rescue (EMS), consists of an EMS coordinator and 4 EMS volunteers (all of whom are also firefighters.)

A 911 call goes to the county dispatcher and they page all of the volunteers with the type and location of the emergency if it is within our area. A fire emergency requires all of the volunteers to report to the Fire Department in Waters. As volunteers report, they dress in their personal safety uniforms, and when at least three are ready, a truck is staffed and head to the fire scene. As additional volunteers arrive, additional trucks are dispatched. The pumper is the first to respond followed by tankers. The ranking officer coordinates the run.

An EMS emergency requires the EMS volunteers to also report to the Fire Department in Waters. When two crewmembers arrive they drive the Fire/Rescue truck to the emergency. If a volunteer passes the scene of the emergency or near to it on his or her way to the Fire Department in Waters, he or she would go directly to the emergency and offer assistance before the truck arrives. All volunteers carry first aid kits in their personal vehicles. The Otsego Lake Township Rescue cannot currently transport patients to the hospital, but only provide assistance until the Otsego County EMS arrives to transport patients to the hospital or administer any medications. Otsego Lake Township Rescue personnel are also trained to use a defibrillator.

The chart below lists major equipment of the department.

<u>Equipment</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Truck</u>	<u>Description</u>
Tanker	2003	International	Shuttle water – 2100 gal.
EMS Rescue	1994	International	EMS Fire/Rescue
Pumper	1985	Ford	Pumps water on fire – 1000 gal.
Mini-pumper	1980	Chevrolet	Fills tankers at water source
Brush Truck	1983	International	Shuttle water – 1000 gal.

All equipment has a 20-year life. The most recently purchased piece of equipment is the 2003 Tanker that was purchased new for a cost of \$172,477 in 2003.



## *Otsego Lake Township Recreation Opportunities*

The Remi and Edna Scotte Memorial Park, also known as the Otsego Lake Township Park, is located on Memorial Drive, which is near the Veterans Memorial on Old 27 just north of Waters. It consists of 24.8 acres, which includes a nature trail located on the south side of the road across from the Pavilion. There is a covered Pavilion, which is available for public and private use. The use of the park for a particular event is coordinated with the Township Clerk. For residents of the township and non-profit organizations there is no charge for the use of the park. Businesses pay a \$25.00 fee and anyone who wants to use the electric, there is an additional \$5.00 charge. Due to the existing older recreation equipment, a safety review program should be established to ensure equipment is maintained in a safe manner and periodically updated as needed. The current facilities include a children's play area, a baseball diamond and restroom facilities are on the premises. The Disabled American Veterans memorial is also part of the township park. Some thought has been made to place a sign indicating the location of the park and some use of the land behind the memorial for a walking path, tennis or basketball courts.



**Pavilion at Remi and Edna Schotte Park**

The Otsego Lake State Park is also located within Otsego Lake Township. The Park consists of 62 acres with a large amount of water frontage. There are provisions for 155 campsites all of which have electric hookup available at a cost of \$19.00 a day. Water is also available at the entrance of the park for campers and travel trailers along with a waste disposal site. There is also 1 cabin available for use for \$37.00 a night.

There is also a boat launch, picnic area and fishing pier for those so inclined along with a good place to swim or wade. The location is about 4 miles north of Waters on Old 27. All persons must have a pass to enter the park, the cost is \$6.00 a day or an annual pass for \$24.00, which is good in all State Parks in the State of Michigan.

## ***Recommendations***

Based on the current existing conditions, information compiled and review for this Strategic Planning process and the public input received, the Planning Commission has developed the following recommendations regarding Housing, Township Services, Community Image/Township Regulations and Growth Management. Much of the cited supporting information is based on the survey findings, which are included in Appendix C.

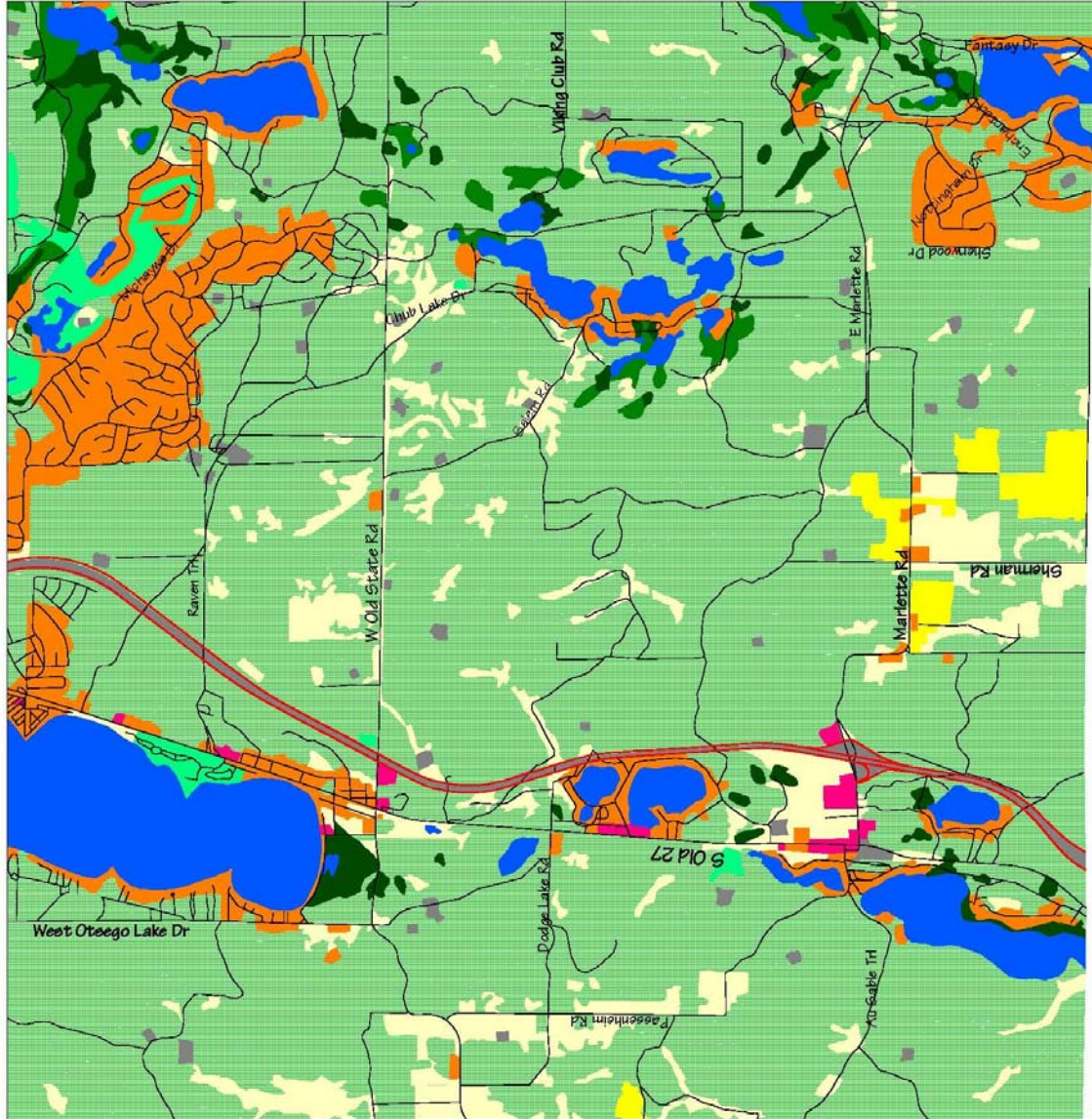
### ***Growth Management***

Otsego Lake Township Planning Commission is interested in working with Otsego County regarding land use and zoning issues as they pertain to the Township. To this end, as part of the Strategic Planning effort, the Planning Commission gathered public input on the types of commercial and residential development participants would like to see in the Township. Currently, most of the growth is in the form of single-family homes in Michaywe.

#### **Growth Management Recommendations**

- Survey responses regarding the types of commercial and residential growth desired by survey respondents should be provided to the County for consideration in updating the Comprehensive or Master Plan.
- The Township Planning Commission will review the 1997 Existing and Future Land Use Map (see following pages) prepare an updated map depicting where new commercial and residential growth should be directed within Otego Lake Township and will provide the map and recommendations to the County Planning Commission.
  - The following types of commercial development were indicated as desired (listed in rank order)
    - Retail
    - Office
    - Manufacturing
    - Storage/Distribution
    - Wholesale
  - The following types of residential development are desired (listed in rank order)
    - Single-family
    - Two-family
    - Multiple-family
    - Manufactured home developments
- Continue to explore the viability of a sewer around Otsego Lake within the Township (Coordinated with Bagley Township) and consider acquisition of property for a water treatment plant.
- The updated County Plan should reflect the need for sewer especially around Otsego Lake.

**Otsego Lake Township  
Existing Land Cover/Use**



**Legend**

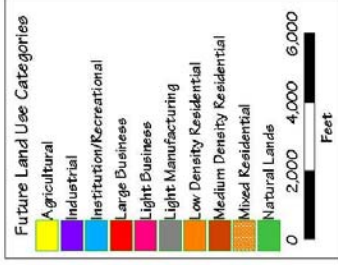
- Residential
- Commercial
- Transportation/Utilities
- Recreation
- Agricultural
- Non-forested Uplands
- Upland Forest
- Lowland Forest
- Wetlands
- Water

0    2,000    4,000    6,000  
Feet

Source:  
**Otsego County  
Comprehensive Plan**  
1997

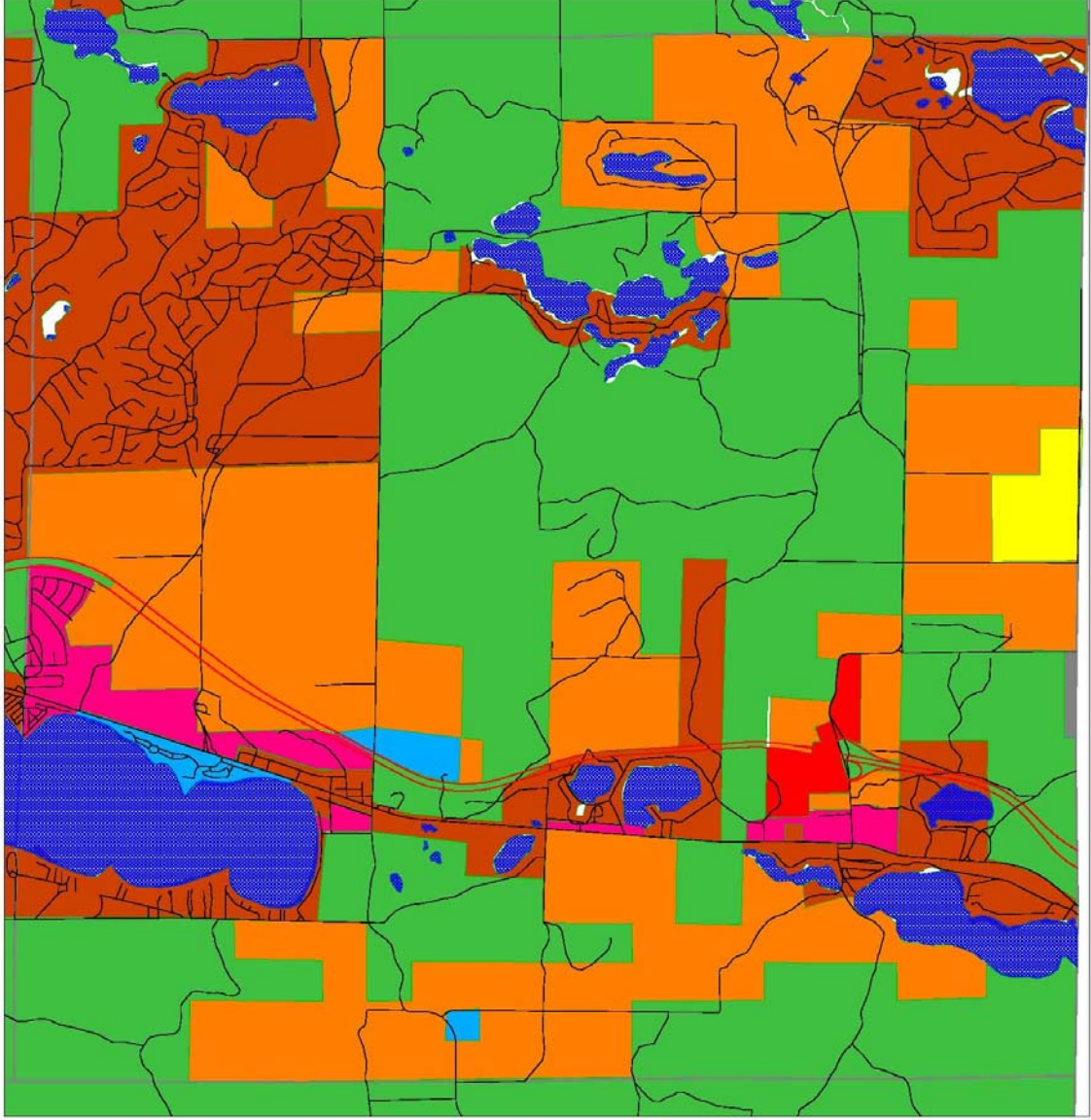
Data files: NEMCOG

# Otsego Lake Township Future Land Use



Source:  
Otsego County  
Comprehensive Plan  
1997

Data Source: NEMCOG





## ***Housing***

While the County Comprehensive Plan will address housing issues, the Township Planning Commission has examined the current statistics regarding types and numbers of housing units within Otsego Lake Township. Otsego Lake Township has experienced significant growth in number of housing units needed due to the increasing population, thus the community needs to consider where such residential growth should occur, and what form it should take.

Currently, the type of housing available in the Township is primarily demand-driven. The survey findings indicate support for the current mix of housing. Specifics regarding types and density of housing units allowed in various parts of Otsego Lake Township are governed by the Otsego County Zoning Ordinance, but the Township can certainly provide input and/or propose changes to ensure the residential growth occurs where and how it is desired.

<b>Housing Recommendations</b>
➤ No changes are recommended at this time, see growth recommendations above.
<b>Supporting Information - Housing</b>
➤ The majority of survey respondents indicated that the mix of housing in the Township meets the diverse needs of residents.
➤ The survey findings were essentially evenly split (3 ways) between agreement, disagreement and neutral concerning the desirability of cluster housing.

## ***Township Services***

Otsego Lake Township provides a variety of services to residents and property owners with the Township. One of the services currently being provided in the Township is Residential Trash pick-up. In the interest of better serving the Township taxpayers and residents, the Planning Commission and Township Board asked survey respondents their opinions regarding other currently provided services and level of interest and/or potential financial support for services and/or expanded services such as road improvements.

Recommendations are presented below for a number of services including: Township-level Fire/Police/EMS; Recreation; Cemetery; Township Hall Rental; Township Communications; and Road Improvements.

<b>Township Fire/Police/EMS Recommendations</b>
➤ A strong local presence is important for fire protection services, so the Township should keep the local Volunteer Department. Continue to monitor the issue of adequate available personnel.
➤ If personnel becomes an issue, explore the possibility of merging with Gaylord/Otsego County Fire Department and keeping a station in Waters.
➤ Recommended providing a sub-station for a Sheriff's deputy, if there are adequate personnel to staff such a facility
➤ EMS – continue Medical First Responders, and when/if run volume warrants, explore the need to upgrade service to provide Basic Life Support (BLS) service to be able to transport.

<b>Supporting Information – Fire/Police/EMS</b>
➤ Nearly half of survey respondents indicate the fire protection services are adequate (but approximately 1/3 disagree).
➤ Most survey respondents want to keep Fire & EMS services as township services.
➤ Nearly half of survey respondents indicate police services are adequate.

<b>Township Recreation Recommendations</b>
➤ Pursue the development of a Recreation Plan to improve and expand recreational opportunities in the Township.
➤ The facility/equipment needs upgrading, including the implementation of a regular safety review program.
<b>Supporting Information - Recreation</b>
➤ The existing park is utilized or well used primarily on the weekends.
➤ The expansion, improvement and/or upgrading, as well as repair and maintenance of the recreational facilities were recommended by survey respondents.
➤ Other recreational needs/facilities were identified in the comments received, such as bike paths and recreational opportunities for teens.

<b>Township Cemetery Recommendations</b>
➤ Annual review of cemetery maintenance and improvement needs.
<b>Supporting Information - Cemetery</b>
➤ The existing cemetery is adequate, with numerous plots still available.



<b>Township Hall Recommendations</b>
➤ The Township Board should continue the excellent oversight and management of the Township Hall needs.
<b>Supporting Information – Township Hall</b>
➤ The existing township hall is well used and that facility is adequate.
➤ The township hall is designated as an emergency shelter.

<b>Township Communications Recommendations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue Township newsletter</li> <li>➤ Increase use of Website for posting information</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Information - Communications</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Vast majority of survey respondents indicate the Township newsletter is informative</li> <li>➤ 6 people wrote in comments they want more information posted on the website</li> </ul>

<b>Township Improvement of Roads Recommendations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Road Millage should be pursued including a public education campaign</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Information - Roads</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Vast majority of the survey respondents indicated they would support a road millage</li> <li>➤ The support expressed by survey respondents was much greater for 1.5 mills for 7 years than for the option of 2 mills for 5 years</li> <li>➤ Marlette, W. Otsego Lake and Arbutus Beach were the roads most frequently cited as in need of repair</li> </ul>

***Community Image /Township-level Regulations***

Currently Otsego Lake Township does not have Township-level regulations regarding blight or public nuisance, signs or billboards.

Concern has been expressed regarding elements that detract from the Township’s image such as deteriorated/unsafe-abandoned buildings, accumulation of junk and/or inoperable vehicles. Consequently, the Township Planning Commission requested public input during the Strategic Planning process to determine the level of concern and/or support for increased Township regulations.

<b>Community Image/Township-level Regulations Recommendations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pursue development of Township Ordinances and enforcement mechanisms in the following order of priority: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Public Nuisance Regulations</li> <li>○ Sign/Billboard Regulations</li> <li>○ Noise Regulations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Information - Community Image/Township-level Regulations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Vast majority of survey respondents agree there should be public nuisance regulations in the Township</li> <li>➤ More than 2/3 of survey respondents agree that there should be stricter sign/billboard regulations</li> <li>➤ More than half of survey respondents agree there should be noise regulations</li> </ul>

## ***Conclusion***

Overall, Otsego Lake Township has much of which to be proud. It was clear from the public input received Otsego Lake Township is a pleasant place to live and is concerned with maintaining the aspects that contribute to this. This strategic planning process was focused primarily on the review of services, facilities, land use issues and potential township regulations. Part of the strategic planning process was designed to identify and explore issues as well as set forth some recommendations to address identified concerns. It is the intent of the Otsego Township is to use this information both at the Township-level and in the on-going dialog with the County Planning Commission for the updating of the County Comprehensive Plan, especially as it pertains to Otsego Lake Township.

### Acknowledgements:

The following are the current and past Planning Commission members who dedicated significant time and effort to this Strategic Planning process.

#### ***Current Planning Commission Members:***

*John Preniczky, Chairperson*  
*John P. Markovich, Vice-Chairperson*  
*Randy Stults, Secretary*  
*Philip J. Alexander*  
*Erma Backenstose*  
*Leonard Fritz*  
*Tim Baker, Township Board Representative*  
*Margaret Black, Alternate Member*  
*Nora Corfis, Alternate Member*

#### ***Past Planning Commission Members:***

*Ed Doss*  
*Terry Stiles*

The following are the Township Board of Trustee Members who adopted the plan.

#### ***Township Board of Trustees***

*Thomas Wagar, Supervisor*  
*Lorraine Markovich, Clerk*  
*Suzanne Whyte, Treasurer*  
*Tim Baker, Trustee*  
*Mary Brown, Trustee*