

Chapter 6

General Development Plan

A. Introduction

The Merrill-Jonesfield Community Master Plan is a general guide for future development. It is intended to direct future land use in both Jonesfield Township and the Village of Merrill in ways that will result in a development pattern that is logical, economical, visually pleasing, and environmentally sound. A basic concept that has guided the plan's development is the desire to retain the rural character, small town amenities, and natural features that make the Merrill-Jonesfield area an attractive place to live while, at the same time, adequately providing for future development and employment opportunities for residents.

This plan is designed to accommodate a reasonable amount of growth in a flexible manner. However, any such development that occurs must also be done in accordance with sound land use controls, and it must be consistent with the community's character and values.

This Master Plan update has been prepared as a cooperative endeavor between Jonesfield Township and

the Village of Merrill. In many respects, the resulting land use plan envisions a unified development pattern for the entire community. For clarity and ease of discussion, however, the development plans for the Township and the Village are presented separately in the remainder of this chapter.

B. Jonesfield Township Plan Concepts

The major concepts that form the basis for Jonesfield Township's plan are summarized below:

1. Jonesfield Township wishes to remain a predominantly rural residential and agricultural community. The Township's farmlands and natural features will continue to dominate the character of the community.
2. In all future development, the plan advocates retaining the Township's natural features, farmlands and open space areas to the greatest extent possible.
3. The plan also discourages the conversion of the Township's most productive farmlands to non-agricultural uses.

4. In general, additional residential development can be accommodated under the plan in a manner that is attractive, environmentally sound, and compatible with other land uses.

5. The plan anticipates further rural residential development at very low densities. This type of development will occur in locations where public utilities (such as water and sewer) will not be available or required in the foreseeable future.

6. The plan also envisions residential development that may occur at moderate densities. This type of development should occur only in locations that are adjacent to the current Village boundaries. These areas are places where future utility extensions to provide public water and sewer might be economically and technically feasible in the future.

7. Provisions should also be made for the development of additional small-scale retail and service business establishments. These types of development should be directed into designated business areas, and not randomly scattered throughout the Township.

8. Industrial growth should occur in planned locations that are served by the necessary public utilities and other infrastructure. These locations are generally

expected to be within the Village of Merrill.

9. In all cases, future development must not create demands for public services that exceed the Township's capabilities to provide such services.

C. Major Township Land Uses

Beyond the general concepts previously listed, it is necessary to describe the major land use categories that are recommended and to identify appropriate locations for these uses. The major land uses envisioned by this plan are outlined in the following discussion.

Also, it is important to note that any discussion of lot sizes or other dimensional requirements are for illustration only. Minimum lot sizes and other specific land use standards are regulated by the Township Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance is a separate legal document that is always subject to review and modification by the Township.

Agricultural District

This planning district includes those portions of the Township that are sparsely developed. These areas will be used predominantly for agriculture, farm dwellings, conservation and recreational areas,

and other uses that are compatible with a rural setting. Accessory uses such as home occupations should also be permitted when in compliance with permitted uses as defined by the Zoning Ordinance.

This planning district contains a major proportion of the existing farmlands in the Township. It is the plan's intent that current farmlands and other large tracts of land should be conserved for agricultural pursuits and related purposes. In terms of current zoning regulations, the Agricultural plan district corresponds to the A-1 zoning district.

It is also the plan's intent to discourage urban development in these areas and to preserve their rural character. These areas will not require major public services such as water and sewer.

Within this planning district, residents who desire rural living can have that option, but not at the expense of farmland or farming operations. Non-farm uses will need to coexist with agriculture within this district.

Agriculture and Residential District

This planning district is intended for agriculture and low-density residential development on lots that are one acre or more in area. These areas correspond to the current A-2 zoning district. The areas designated for rural residential development are

mainly located along the Township's western boundary and its northeast corner, and south of M-46.

Low Density Residential District

This land use category is intended to primarily provide for development of single family homes on large lots of one acre or more in area. The areas included in this planning district consist of lots that have been established east of Chapin Road and west of Fenmore Road near M-46 and the railroad. These areas are not contiguous to the Village. In terms of infrastructure planning, these areas could be served by a public water system, but not sewer, in the future.

Medium Density Residential District

This district is intended to allow for more compact residential development, such as subdivisions, on lots that could be less than one acre if they are served by public water and sewer. Areas included in this district are contiguous to the Village and could be logically served by public utilities in the future.

Commercial Area: General Business District

This planning district is designed to provide for some development of general retail and service businesses in the Township to serve both the day-to-day needs of residents and customers from outside the immediate area. Appropriate uses

include general retail businesses and service establishments.

As a general principle, random commercial development scattered throughout the Township should be avoided in the future. Instead, the plan encourages the development of commercial centers or clusters with shared parking and access where possible.

This plan also encourages the continuation of a traditional, pedestrian-oriented downtown business district in Merrill, as discussed in the section on the Village plan. In contrast, the Township commercial area is expected to be geared more toward automobile traffic, with off-street parking for customers and employees provided on the same site as each business, or immediately adjacent to the site. Access management techniques to achieve smooth traffic flow and safety should also be encouraged.

Industrial Development

The Future Land Use Map shows only limited industrial development in the Township. The lagoons that are part of the Merrill wastewater treatment system, located just northwest of the Village, are in this category. Future industrial development should be directed to designated areas in the Village where supporting infrastructure is available. However, the Township should remain involved in the siting

of industrial development in the community. It should work cooperatively with the Village to promote the retention and expansion of existing industries, and to attract new industries to the area.

D. Merrill Village Plan Concepts

Like the Township component of the Master Plan, the Village of Merrill's development plan is designed to accommodate a reasonable amount of new development in a flexible manner. Future development must be done in accordance with sound land use controls, and it must be consistent with the community's character and values. Several major concepts that form the basis for Merrill's plan are summarized as follows:

1. Merrill is expected to retain a predominantly single-family residential character.
2. The plan envisions that the Village will experience additional residential growth at a range of different densities that will accommodate a variety of housing choices.
3. The plan encourages innovation in residential site design through conservation development approaches that will conserve open space and natural features.

4. The plan designates a traditional central business district that would be concentrated along Saginaw and Midland streets. General retail and service businesses should continue to locate in this area. Future commercial development should not be allowed to spread randomly into other areas of the Village.

5. The plan includes the designation of areas for additional industrial development in appropriate locations.

E. Major Village Land Uses

It is necessary to describe the major land use categories that are recommended and to identify appropriate locations in the Village for these uses. The major land uses envisioned by this plan are outlined in the following discussion.

Also, it is important to note that any discussion of lot sizes or other dimensional requirements are for illustration only. Minimum lot sizes and other specific land use standards are regulated by the Village Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance is a separate legal document that is always subject to review and modification by the Village.

Agriculture / Transitional District

This planning district includes undeveloped lands within the Village that are still in agricultural use or vacant. These areas have the potential for additional low-density residential development in the future.

Low Density Residential District

This category includes the Village's older single-family neighborhoods as well as undeveloped areas that would be suitable for additional residential development in the future. Typical lot sizes are 11,000 square feet. However, there are older platted lots that are considerably smaller. In some cases, these small lots, which probably date back to the original plat of the Village, are only about 8,700 square feet (0.2 acre) in area.

Medium Density Residential District

This designation includes single-family residential development, but also allows for a variety of other housing types, such as duplexes and apartments. Under the Master Plan's concepts, most housing in Merrill will continue to be single-family in nature. Therefore, the areas that are devoted to medium density housing are expected to be quite limited in the future.

Commercial Area: Central Business District

This district is designed to preserve and enhance Merrill's traditional downtown area in its current location. Appropriate uses include a broad range of general retail and service businesses to meet the needs of residents and surrounding areas.

The Central Business District is meant to be a pedestrian-oriented business area that permits patrons to easily walk from one establishment to another. Vehicle parking will be provided in public lots and at the curb.

Under the Master Plan, efforts should be directed toward downtown revitalization through the attraction of new businesses and redevelopment of vacant properties.

Industrial District

This district is intended to accommodate a broad range of industries as well as some more intensive ("heavy") commercial uses. Appropriate industries include enterprises that are conducted within enclosed buildings such as assembly, packaging, and machine shop operations. Commercial uses might include warehousing and distribution, agricultural service businesses, storage and shipment of agricultural products, and vehicle and equipment service facilities.

Parks, Recreation and Open Space

This category includes the Merrill Community Park property and the ball fields located between South Midland and South Johnson Streets.

Public and Quasi-Public

This land use category represents major community institutions, including the Merrill Schools, various churches, the Village and Township offices, public parking lots, and the Community Library.

F. Future Land Use Maps

The recommended locations for the planning districts are shown on the Future Land Use Maps for the Township and the Village (Figures 6-1 and 6-2). It is important to note that the Future Land Use Maps are *NOT* Zoning Maps. Instead, the maps are intended to serve as guidelines for shaping the long-range land use and development pattern of the Merrill – Jonesfield community. The maps are also intended to guide zoning and other land use decisions as development occurs.

The Future Land Use Maps portray recommended land use patterns for Jonesfield Township and the Village of Merrill as the community develops over an extended period of time (such as 15 to 20 years). This means that achieving the land use pattern shown on the map will likely

be a very gradual process. The relationship of this long-range concept to short-term land use decisions (especially zoning) is discussed further in the ***Action Program*** (Chapter 7) for carrying out the Master Plan.