

Chapter 12

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly examines several intergovernmental cooperation issues. First are issues related to the Tri-Communities. Second are issues related to land use policies of jurisdictions abutting Saugatuck Township.

TRI-COMMUNITY INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION ISSUES

This Plan serves to guide the City of Saugatuck, City of the Village of Douglas, and Saugatuck Township in their efforts to manage land, cultural and community resources. All three communities participated in creation of the Plan; all three will benefit by implementing the Plan; and all three communities are responsible for the Plan's implementation. Following are five recommendations to guide implementation.

1. The completion of this second joint Plan recognizes the importance of the milestone in the intergovernmental relations between Saugatuck, Douglas and Saugatuck Township that began with the creation of the first joint Plan in 1989. However, it should also be viewed as only one stage in an ongoing planning process. Constantly changing social and economic trends will require periodic updating or amendments to this Plan, which should be revisited at least every five years. When updated more frequently, the effort is usually not as extensive. Revisions to the Future Land Use Map in Chapter 10 should be made whenever it no longer serves as a useful guide and support for land use decision making. The same is true of the policies portion of the Plan.
2. While the Tri-Community Planning Committee that was set up to develop this Plan expects to disband upon completion of the Plan, it is recommended that a Joint Planning Committee (3 representatives from each community) be established to serve as a coordinating and oversight body to insure that the proposals in this Plan are implemented and that any actions of a single entity contrary to this Plan do not go unchallenged. If special committees such as the joint Harbor and Waterfront Committee are created, they should be formally included in the arrangement; otherwise, their functions should be absorbed by the Joint Planning Committee. The Joint Committee should meet at least quarterly or at the call of the chairperson and report its minutes promptly to the governing body and Planning Commission of each member jurisdiction.
3. This Plan is intended to serve each jurisdiction singly and the three communities together. The credibility of this Plan will depend on whether the subsequent actions of individual local governments are consistent with it. It could and should be modified as necessary upon approval by the planning commission and the governing body proposing modifications relating to provisions affecting future land use, planning, and zoning located within the geographical area of that governmental entity. All amendments and changes of this Plan should be reviewed by the Joint Planning Committee and the individual Planning Commissions to provide input, until such time as a Joint Planning Commission is formed—if the communities do so.

Photo 12-1
The Spirit of Cooperation is Important to the Tri-Communities



Source: Felicia Fairchild, Saugatuck Douglas Visitors and Convention Bureau

In the end however, since the individual communities will carry the primary burden of implementation, it is important to review the basic tools they have to undertake the substantial tasks laid out in this Plan. In addition to regulatory tools, capital facilities, and management tools, there are also a host of funding sources that may be available to assist with particular projects. It is almost always safe to say that joint proposals involving two or more jurisdictions have a greater chance of receiving funding in competitive grant situations than any one of the communities alone. As a result, the Tri-Communities are encouraged to work together in their efforts to secure financial assistance to implement the proposals in this Plan.

4. Three separate jurisdictions control land use in the Tri-Community area and now that it is legal to create a Joint Planning Commission (PA 226 of 2003, MCL 125.131 et seq.) this Plan recommends seriously exploring the pros and cons of creating a Joint Planning Commission and single Zoning Ordinance for the Tri-Communities. Until this is thoroughly examined, there will only be supposition and conjecture to guide discussion on this important topic. Perhaps there will be cost and time efficiencies to both communities and applicants, perhaps there won't, perhaps there will be no loss of "local control," perhaps there will. These are important issues that deserve a careful examination as one of the first steps in implementing this Plan.

5. The public opinion survey revealed a slight majority would favor creation of a single consolidated unit of government if there were demonstrable fiscal benefits. This is up considerably from public opinion fifteen years ago. Without a formal study, the issue will always lie just below the surface and may prevent taking advantage of important opportunities that could come along in the future. Similarly, it may reveal a dearth of practical benefits and the idea may be put to bed. But without a formal analysis, the pros and cons will never be known.

ADJOINING JURISDICTION ISSUES

In addition to cooperation among the Tri-Communities, there will need to be continued cooperation with adjoining jurisdictions. The Tri-Communities are surrounded by Laketown Township to the north, Manlius Township to the east and Ganges Township to the south. Filmore Township is diagonally northeast of Saugatuck Township and Clyde

Township diagonally to the southeast. Lake Michigan is to the west of the Tri-Communities. The above-mentioned communities were each asked to provide master plans and zoning ordinances at the start of the Plan update process and the documents provided were reviewed for content that might affect the Tri-Communities. Future Land Use Plans from the communities that provided them date from the early 1990s. Filmore Township and Ganges Township did not provide copies of their plans or zoning ordinances. A composite Allegan County zoning map prepared by the Allegan County Geographic Information System (GIS) Department was used to evaluate the potential for land development in those communities.

All of the surrounding townships are relatively undeveloped and rural, especially in the border areas. All of the plans provided by neighboring jurisdictions cite the preservation of rural character as a primary goal, which is also a goal of the Tri-Communities. The adjacent communities state in their plans that they intend to accomplish this goal through zoning to limit residential density to a range of from about 1 dwelling unit per acre to 1 dwelling unit per nearly 40 acres, and by strictly limiting the amount of commercial and industrial development permitted. The adjacent community plans generally express the belief that commercial and industrial land uses do not contribute to rural character, do not protect environmental quality, and that existing and planned infrastructure could not accommodate it. Unfortunately, full development at 1 dwelling unit per acre also does not retain the degree of naturalness that residents of surrounding townships describe as rural character, and so dramatic change can occur around Saugatuck Township with the settlement of large areas at a higher-than-envisioned density. This will also place further public service demands on the Tri-Communities as those populations travel to or through Saugatuck/Douglas for shopping and recreation, and will further diminish the natural regional landscape character residents of the Tri-Communities favor. Adjacent communities may want to follow the lead of Saugatuck Township in performing a buildout analysis to examine the relationship between existing zoning and the likely as opposed to desired ultimate population of the community. This may lead to further refinement of zoning and related policy that does result in greater preservation of rural character. Alternatively, they may wish to encourage landowners in their community to participate in Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) or Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs, or other conservation easement programs.

The preservation of agriculture as an economic activity was also a goal of several of the surrounding communities. It is uncertain if, in the years since the plans were prepared, preservation of agricultural activity remains as important. In Saugatuck Township, public sentiment appears to be shifting from the protection of agriculture to the protection of open space, whether or not that includes agricultural activity. It is possible that residents in adjoining jurisdictions may also have shifted their preference in a similar direction, although perhaps to a lesser degree as agriculture appears to remain more active in the adjacent communities. Agricultural activity needs to be examined in the larger regional context, as Allegan County is an important agricultural producer in Michigan.

Portions of the Allegan State Game Area lie about a mile east from Saugatuck Township, and about two miles south, with the remainder of it extending up to a dozen miles beyond to the east and southeast. The Game Area is protected, undeveloped land in public ownership, managed for public recreation, including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and hiking. The Kalamazoo River passes through the Game Area before reaching the Tri-Communities. The Game Area is an important regional open space that also serves the Tri-Communities, and could be a valuable part of a regional greenspace

system and a popular destination for trail connections. As the Tri-Communities plan for greenspaces and bicycle trails they should consider links to the Game Area.

While surrounding communities generally discourage industrial and commercial uses, there are a few industrial sites adjacent to Saugatuck Township. One is in Section 12 of Manlius Township and the other is along M-89 in Ganges Township. Immediately across M-89 from Saugatuck Township in Ganges Township, there is significant road frontage zoned industrial and commercial, which could, if fully developed as zoned, impact the land in the southern portion of Saugatuck Township that is zoned very low density residential. Saugatuck Township should encourage Ganges Township to guide development of those properties in a manner that lessens the impact on Saugatuck Township, or to reduce the area zoned industrial and commercial. As zoned, a strip of industrial and commercial uses could develop, which could create traffic safety and congestion problems along M-89. Clustered commercial and industrial development, with managed access could result in development of that area of Ganges Township with fewer negative impacts on both communities.

Just to the south of Saugatuck Township is Hutchins Lake, which straddles the border between Ganges and Clyde Townships. While a small lake, it has substantial residential development surrounding it, and there is concern about nutrient pollution entering the lake. A portion of the Hutchins Lake watershed lies in Saugatuck Township and Clyde Township states in its plan that Saugatuck Township should participate in a Hutchins Lake watershed overlay zone to protect water quality. Saugatuck Township is interested in coordinating protection activities with Clyde Township for Hutchins Lake.

Photo 12-2
Kalamazoo River Water Quality is a Shared Responsibility of the Tri-Communities and Other Adjacent Jurisdictions



Source: Aaron Sheridan

The Kalamazoo Lake Water and Sewer Authority has an agreement with Laketown Township to provide public water service in excess of what it currently receives. While water lines extend only a short distance into Laketown Township, the water capacity available to Laketown Township could result in a greater amount or density of development just across the boundary from northern Saugatuck Township than would be possible without this service. The Tri-Communities, all members of the KLWSA need to

work together with Laketown Township to make sure that the capacity available to Laketown is used in ways that compliment land uses in the northern end of Saugatuck Township.

The Kalamazoo River flows into the Tri-Communities from Manlius Township and many other communities upstream. Activities in the Kalamazoo River watershed influence the quality of river water when it reaches Saugatuck and Douglas. While parts of the Kalamazoo River are designated as Natural River, and sections flow through the Allegan State Game Area, both of which provide some degree of protection for the River, past activities and a lack of clean-up of polluted sediments lowers the water quality of the River in the Tri-Communities. The Tri-Communities should take an active role in continuing to push for proper clean-up of the upper reaches of the Kalamazoo River, as well as working with those communities to implement best management practices that would help prevent sedimentation of the River and other types of pollution. The Tri-Communities may also want to seek the reestablishment of a water quality monitoring station in Kalamazoo Lake. Since a lack of funding for such a station is likely why it was removed, the Tri-Communities may want to consider funding their own monitoring station in order to keep track of potential contaminates that come from upstream.

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