

Master Plan Update, 2005-2006  
Clearwater Township

**Introduction**

The Township Rural Zoning Act of the State of Michigan requires that zoning districts established by townships be based on a plan to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare; to encourage the use of the lands in accordance with their character and adaptability and to limit the improper use of land; and (among other recited objectives) to assure that uses of the land be situated in appropriate locations and relationships, and to avoid the overcrowding of the population.

Clearwater Township schedules the review and update of its Future Use Plan, or Master Plan, every five years. The most recent update was in 1999-2000.

**Population Characteristics**

Between a quarter and a third of our total population is of school age (17 and under). This has decreased slightly in the last two censuses: 1980 – 33%, 1990 – 30%, 2000 – 24%. During the same period, the percent of our population over 65 has remained steady at 13%, and the age group of 18 to 64 has risen as a percent of population (54%, 57%, and 63%).

Table I.

Selected Population Characteristics of Clearwater Township

	1980 Census	1990 Census	2000 Census
Total Population	1531	1959	2382
age 17 and under	500 (33%)	584 (30%)	583 (24%)
age 18 to 64	834 (54%)	1120 (57%)	1501 (63%)
age 65 and over	197 (13%)	255 (13%)	298 (13%)
Number of Households	549	738	944
Persons per Household	2.79	2.65	2.52

Our population has changed most significantly in the 18 to 64 sector, and more precisely, in the 45 to 54 sector (increased by 85%). Ours is a very stable family-based community, with many highly skilled individuals. The attractive surroundings, especially our beautiful lake and rivers, is luring ever increasing numbers of active retirees into our township.

# Land Use Trends

## A. Housing Additions

We are adding housing units to our township at a steady pace, averaging nearly 32 units per year. Table II and Chart II show what kinds of units are being built. Chart III shows how those new homes are distributed among the sections of our township.

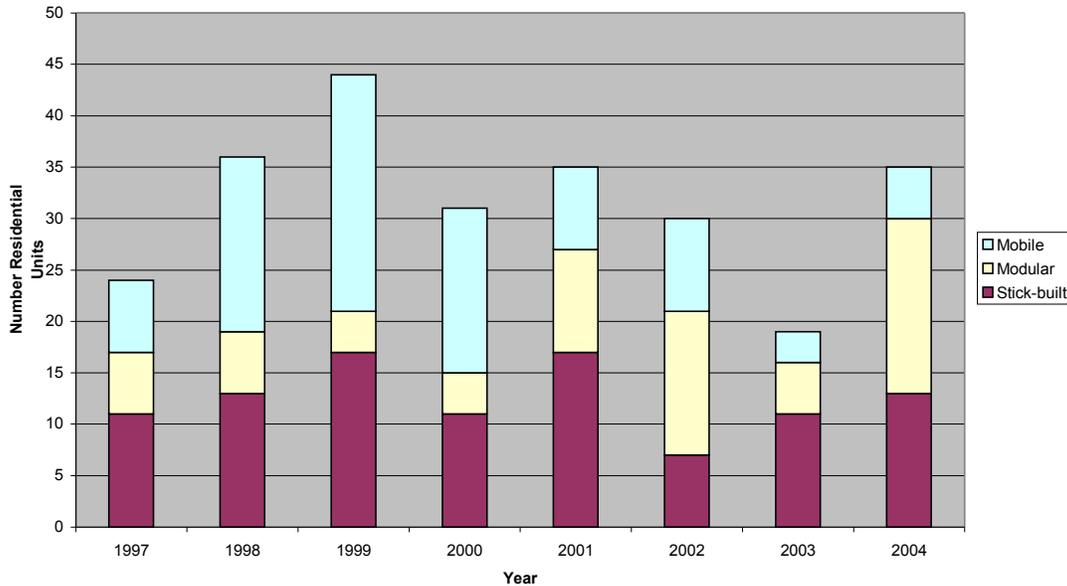
Table II

### by Style and Year

Year	Stick-built	Modular	Mobile	Total
1997	11	6	7	24
1998	13	6	17	36
1999	17	4	23	44
2000	11	4	16	31
2001	17	10	8	35
2002	7	14	9	30
2003	11	5	3	19
2004	13	17	5	35
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>Ave/Year</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>8.25</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>31.75</b>

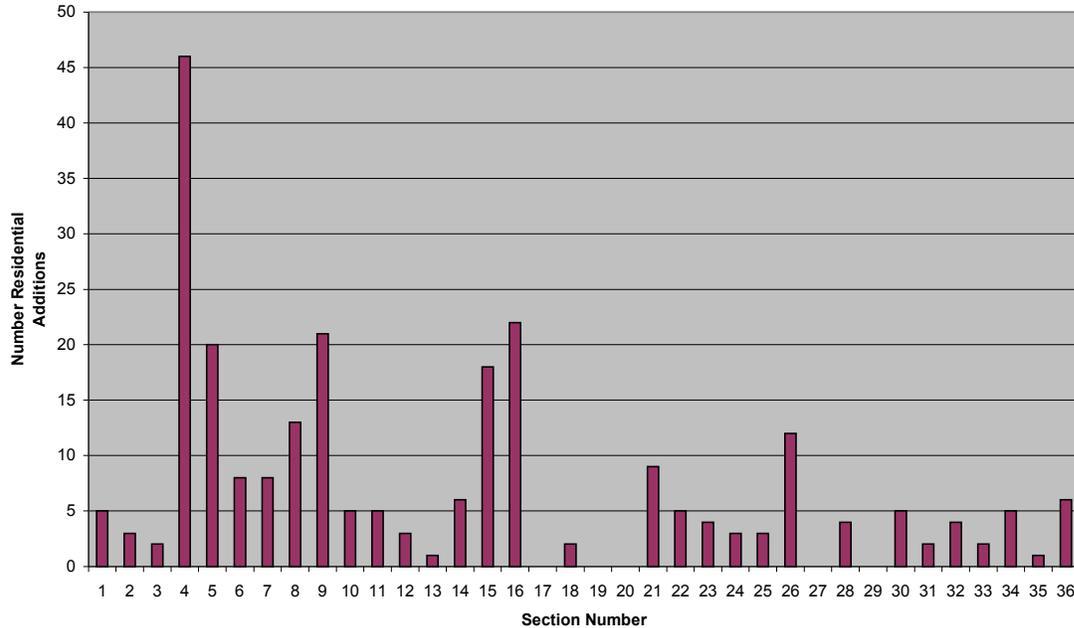
Chart II

Clearwater Township  
1997-2004 Residential Additions  
by Style and Year



### Chart III

Clearwater Township  
1997-2004 Residential Additions by Section



#### **B. Commercial Additions**

We continue to see new businesses coming into our community. There is a growing variety of small businesses in our village center, and the established businesses are doing well. Growth has been strong in the trades, storage services, and home occupations.

#### **C. Industrial Additions**

There has been no heavy industry in the Township for many years, unless one considers gravel mining/hauling in that category. The Industrial Zone south of Rapid City has filled primarily with businesses that might just as well be considered commercial units as light industry. The absence of municipal water and sewer, and of a rail line or commercial airport, makes the Township a less attractive industrial location than some others in the region.

#### **D. Agricultural/Timber Resource Uses**

At the beginning of the subject period, a few farms remained active in the Township. Most of the land is poorly suited to cropping or fruit culture. Considerable stands of second growth timber remain in the area, and some are subject to selective cutting. Cutover timberland is not regularly put to agricultural use, but rather allowed to regrow or converted to residential use.

## **E. Recreational Land Uses**

In addition to the predominantly residential and modest commercial use of land in the Township, a significant portion (about 22% of the surface area) is set aside for public recreational use, either as a State Forest or as a Nature Conservancy. Nearly 7 sections of State land bordering Lake Skegemog and lower Torch River harbor a sizeable deer herd and a broad collection of small game animals and waterfowl. These sections are extensively hunted, as are some of the heavily wooded upland areas, some of which have seasonal deer camps. Lake Skegemog was for a long time the best fishery in the lower Chain of Lakes with respect to muskie, northern pike, small-mouth bass, and rock bass. Skegemog Swamp, with its reptile population (including the Massasauga rattlesnake) and wetland birds and wildflowers, is popular with hikers and nature observers. A conservancy protects about half of the Skegemog shoreline from future development, and another will protect three hundred acres at "Seven Bridges" (Rickers' Dam) on Rapid River, long a favorite nature trail area with local residents and visitors. Long stretches of Rapid River waterfront are also zoned "Recreational" to help protect this valuable resource from the risks of high density residential development.

The preservation of these natural scenic resources has been one of the objectives of the Township since the original Future Use Plan was laid out in 1973. To a degree, the ownership by the State of some of the lands protects against structural development in fragile areas. The protection against water and soil contamination and fire, and the general preservation of the fish and game habitat is, however, largely in the hands of the users and nearby landowners. Because of the explosive increase in "day boaters" over the past decade, the threat to water quality and the fisheries has increased to a much greater extent than the increase in local population. Since much of the Township drains into Lake Skegemog by one route or another, the possibility of contamination by land runoff and percolate adds to the risk.

## **Roads and Traffic**

The major improvement in the Township road network during the five-year period was the 1995 Federally-funded widening of Rapid City Road. In 1992, some streets within Rapid City and at Torch Bridge Court had black-top improvements. Other than the blacktopping of Manley Road during 1996, there has been no significant change in the outlying road system during the past 10 years. During the period, MDOT has not yet made firm plans to convert US131 to a four lane freeway within a few years. One option for interchange placement would be in the general area of Valley Road and Titus Road. A considerable increase in transient traffic entering the Township can be expected if this exit option is elected and completed. Increased exposure to the downstate public may well lead to increased land use demand.

## **Schools**

The modernization of the Rapid City elementary school has contributed to the attractiveness of the township for families with younger children. Kalkaska County has begun to recover from the financial difficulties it experienced during the 1990's. The reinstatement of our school busing program through the sound fiscal efforts of our new school district superintendent, enhances the appeal of our township as a good place to settle down for young families. These improvements, we believe, will vitalize our school enrollment. Recent enrollment numbers are shown in Table III below.

Table III

Year	1986	1991	1996	2005
Clearwater kids enrolled elsewhere	226	276	150	193
Mancelona				85
Elk Rapids				108
Enrolled in Rapid City Elementary School	214	214	150	130

## Fire, Police and Emergency Medical Services

Police protection was improved, beginning in 1994, by the assignment of a County Sheriff's Deputy to a local patrol, with an office in the Township Hall. This program was financed by a Federal grant.

The emphasis of the Fire Department in the subject period has been upon modernization of equipment, including rolling stock, communications devices, and building maintenance. Training has also been emphasized. Members have served, until recently, without compensation in order to provide maximum funds for the upgrading of the mechanical means of operation.

The near-doubling of the Township population over the past two decades, and the prospect of further increasing population density in the southern sections of the Township, brings with it some serious implications regarding the expanding requirements for police, fire, and emergency medical services.

## Other Pertinent Trends

Boat traffic on Torch River and Torch Lake has increased markedly during the past 5 years. Parking from the DNR launch site on Aarwood Trail spills over into the road on holiday weekends. Boat anchoring on "The Sandbar" at Torch Lake numbers over 100 on warm weekends and holidays. Water quality and the Torch River/Skegemog fishery may be at risk.

A similar increase in use has occurred in the public swimming accesses on Torch Lake, and parking spills over on to Crystal Beach Road.

The overnight mooring of transient boats offshore from the Township public swimming accesses on Torch Lake has increased.

Recreation opportunities for youngsters are being greatly improved, because of the redevelopment of the Clearwater Township Athletic Complex, which includes a softball/Little League field, a regulation baseball field, a soccer field, a year-round hockey rink, a measured half-mile walking trail, picnic pavilion, and future concession stand. This project demonstrates the township's commitment to its youth.

Senior lunches and senior exercises at the Township Hall have been well-attended and much appreciated. The addition of "The Little Red Schoolhouse" will enhance the senior program.

The appearance of "downtown" Rapid City has become more attractive to visitors and prospective residents through the road widening program, enhanced by the efforts of the township residents who have provided and watered flower tubs and gardens. At the same time, there are sections of the village that remain blighted in appearance owing to the presence of

poorly maintained premises. In some areas, the presence of run-down units has been of such severity that the Township has initiated remedial litigation.

## **Future Land Use Plans – The Master Plan “Vision Statement”**

The Goals and Objectives established by prior township Zoning Boards have served the township well. In general, we retain and reaffirm the Goals and Objectives of the 1992 Master Plan update, and use them as headings for the sub-sections of our land use plan. Because the population of the township has more than doubled since the original “Comprehensive Plan” was published in 1974, and because a continuation of this trend will bring new pressures and create new opportunities for the township, we must plan afresh for these expected changes. Therefore, we attempt in this update, to provide more specific information to assist members of future Zoning and Township Boards and the citizenry of the township.

### ***Objective 1. Protect the unique scenic and natural features of the township, including water quality***

The scenic features of Clearwater Township are, in large part, a reason for the significant increase in both residential and vacation population over recent years. Increases in local employment and business income have resulted from the population increase. It is important, both from the standpoint of quality of life for our residents and visitors, and from the economic benefit that these people bring to our community, that we preserve the woodland, waterland, and farmland nature of the township. There are lengthy stretches of roadway that present our best features to the public, and that we believe should be faithfully preserved. These include the township’s share of M-72, Rapid City Road between the DNR Swamp trailhead and Townline Road, and Valley Road between Dundas and Wilhelm Roads. Low density single family homesites, farmsteads, woodland residences and recreation appear to be the best long term uses of the lands that visually adjoin these roadways. Nearby land conservancies and state forests complement these land uses for a combined “North Country outlook” that appeals to residents and would-be residents alike.

The wooded upland of the township, which represents about half of the township’s land mass, is the current target of development (now that the waterways have been almost fully developed). Numerous “country residences” have been settled in the past twenty years, and with a number of large woodland parcels having been recently split into 10 acre lots and sold, this residential development trend can be expected to continue. The original standards of Ordinance #9, which required a maximum density of 5 acres per dwelling site in Recreational and Agricultural Districts, have helped preserve the values of these uplands. We believe that this 5 acre minimum should be continued, whether in individual lots or as part of site condominiums or planned unit developments. And, while the wooded upland is likely to be the earlier development target, we also believe that remaining farmland and wooded lowlands should not, in the future, have a density greater than one dwelling per 5 acres, except in areas specifically designated as higher density residential districts for single family dwellings, multiple-family dwellings, or mobile home park use.

The roads adjoining Torch Lake, Torch River, lower Rapid River, and Skegemog Lake have seen extensive residential development since the original Comprehensive Plan was adopted, in many stretches on the land side of the road, in addition to the water side. These areas tend toward fairly shallow static ground water levels, and the ground water has only a short filter distance

before it mingles with the surface water of the lakes and streams. Past planners have recognized the attractiveness of these locations and provided for zoning at high residential densities. A continuation of these high densities may place both the ground and nearby surface waters at increased risk of contamination, and current planners see a need to selectively reduce the potential residential density of the nearby (now lightly developed) lands before the potential problem becomes a reality.

In addition to the areas just mentioned, there are other areas in the township where the static water level is close to the surface, where aquifer pressures may produce flowing wells or springs, where there are wetlands, or where the surface soils are impermeable clays. Any of these conditions may present risk of water contamination by automotive waste runoff, lawn chemicals, commercial chemicals, or septic wastes. It will continue to be important for township officials to be aware that these risks are increased in proportion to residential or commercial building density, parking lot use, underground tank use, industrial chemical use, and food waste use. The zoning decisions of the township will need to be even more closely coordinated with the site regulations of the Health Department and the DEQ as the township residential population grows and commercial/light industry uses increase.

Another potential source of water supply contamination is aging septic fields. For the foreseeable future, there is little likelihood that municipal waste treatment will be affordable in this township, and therefore we will continue to be dependent upon individual septic tank/field disposal. To minimize the risk from aging fields, it may become useful to require inspection of septic systems as a part of change of ownership of land that utilizes that method of waste disposal.

## ***Objective 2. Provide for adequate public open space, access to water, and community services***

Clearwater Township is blessed with an extensive system of Pere Marquette State Forest land (which occupies about 1/6 of the township), the Skegemog Nature Conservancy, the Seven Bridges Conservancy, Freedom Park, the Birch and Cedar Street parks, two Little League fields, and seven public water access sites on Torch Lake and Torch River. The township does not lack outdoor recreational space, but certain areas (the public water accesses in particular) have individual problems of seasonal over-crowding. It will be important for Zoning Boards to consider the effects of their nearby residential density decisions, and their permitted use decisions relative to campgrounds and motels and other tourist accommodations, on the continued accessibility of the water, especially to township residents.

The township continues to update its fire and emergency medical service equipment. For emergencies on the main roads and near the fire barn, response time can be short. It will be remembered that some townships that have increased residential or commercial building densities at extended distances from their fire stations have faced the prospect of having to add a fire substation or employ fulltime personnel at considerable cost. High densities or commercial activities distant from Rapid City should be viewed with caution.

Township meeting facilities have been improved with the completion of remodeling of the Little Red Schoolhouse.

### ***Objective 3. Provide for a range of development types through appropriate land use distribution***

Rapid City, a boom and bust town a hundred years ago, has begun a period of regrowth. The Commercial/Light Industry zoning on the south side of town has permitted the establishment there of a number of service-oriented businesses that benefit the economy. Their establishment has been facilitated by the zoning of unplatted land depths of 300-450 feet, relatively free of existing residences, and available at reasonable prices. Much of this zoned land has been developed, and a quarter mile of new Commercial zone was approved in 1998 (west side of Rapid City Road from Schneider Road south to the DNR trailhead). It is foreseen that a small increase in the amount of land devoted to a "Light Industry Park" in an area contiguous with the present zone and separated from village residences could enhance community development. Additional Commercial Zoning along Rapid City Road to the north of town, continues to be a controversial question. The Zoning Board is leaning toward zoning the portion of that road, from Plum Valley Road north to the county line, on both sides of the road, on the east side of the road to a depth of 500 feet or to the rear lot line, whichever is less, and on the west side of the road to the western edge of the abandoned C&O Railroad right-of-way.

In the "village proper," since the original Commercial zoning, there has been the expansion of numerous retail businesses.

Just as it was necessary to create multiple Commercial zone standards to accommodate the differing conditions inside and outside of the village proper, it will be useful to continue developing multiple zone standards for Residential use. With the already crowded conditions on and near the township's watercourses, our planning foresees the need to slow the increase in residential density there, and multifamily dwellings are therefore inappropriate in those locations. On the other hand, township residents need affordable housing, and certain areas devoted to multifamily dwellings and/or mobile home parks are the usual means of providing such housing. Further, areas of town houses, condominium communities, or apartments, could be attractive to seniors and retirees. A community poised for growth will need to revise its historic zoning practices in order to provide accommodations for a broad spectrum of people in larger numbers. It is likely that such revisions will best serve the community if the denser population specifications are focused in the vicinity of Rapid City, where seniors will have easy access to services and children will be near the Rapid City Elementary School.

It has been an important aspect of our zoning ordinances to permit the practice of home occupations, roadside sale of farm goods, harvesting and conversion of forest products, and certain recreational uses of our countryside. We are a community that "lives off our land," and preservation of that tradition has always been a part of our planning. As we enter a new planning cycle, we need to revisit our ordinance to ensure that it permits appropriate entrepreneurial practices in Residential, Agricultural, and Recreational districts alike, while at the same time assuring that the tenets of Objectives #1 and #3 are not infringed.

### ***Objective 4. Provide a safe and suitable transportation network for residents and visitors***

The recent widening of Rapid City Road has made this major county artery safer and more useful, not only to township residents, but to the many Antrim County residents who travel regularly to Traverse City. This road regularly moves 4,000 vehicles per day, and peak

movements near 7,000 have been counted. Township planners and administrators must be continually alert to the effect that their zoning decisions may have on traffic safety, particularly as to the interaction of speed limits and the frequency of vehicle exits and entrances. Crystal Beach Road has recently been resurfaced and its shoulders paved during 1999 to more safely carry its heavy traffic load. High residential density there is compounded by the usage of that road as a link between the two arms of Antrim County, and the same cautions to township officials about traffic safety there are appropriate.

**Summary:** Planning and zoning ordinance updating can provide a framework for protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the community, and promoting orderly growth. Support by the members of the community is imperative to maintaining its attractiveness and growth. Our growth and quality of life depend on, more than anything else, the efforts of the citizens of the township.

