

# Clearwater Township



## Master Plan

Adopted December 2024

TOWNSHIP OF CLEARWATER  
COUNTY OF KALKASKA, MICHIGAN

Resolution No. 11 of 2024

TOWNSHIP BOARD RESOLUTION TO ADOPT MASTER PLAN

WHEREAS, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA) authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare a Master Plan for the use, development and preservation of all lands in the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission prepared a proposed new Master Plan and submitted the plan to the Township Board for review and comment; and

WHEREAS, on September 19, 2024, the Clearwater Township Board received and reviewed the proposed Master Plan prepared by the Planning Commission and authorized distribution of the Master Plan to the Notice Group entities identified in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, notice was provided to the Notice Group entities as provided in the MPEA; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on December 2, 2024 to consider public comment on the proposed new Master Plan, and to further review and comment on the proposed new Master Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Township Board finds that the proposed new Master Plan is desirable and proper and furthers the use, preservation, and development goals and strategies of the Township; and

WHEREAS, the MPEA authorizes the Township Board to assert by resolution its right to approve or reject the proposed Master Plan;

THEREFORE BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

**1. Adoption of 2024 Master Plan.** The Township Board hereby approves and adopts the proposed 2024 Master Plan, including all of the chapters, figures, maps and tables contained therein. Pursuant to MCL 125.3843 the Township Board has asserted by resolution its right to approve or reject the proposed Master Plan and therefore the approval granted herein is the final step for adoption of the plan as provided in MCL 125.3843 and therefore the plan is effective as of December 19, 2024.

**2. Distribution to Notice Group.** The Township Board approves distribution of the adopted plan to the Notice Group.

**3. Findings of Fact.** The Township Board has made the foregoing determination based on a review of existing land uses in the Township, a review of the existing Master Plan provisions and maps,

input received from the Planning Commission and public hearing, and with the assistance of a professional planning group, and finds that the new Master Plan will accurately reflect and implement the Township's goals and strategies for the use, preservation, and development of lands in Clearwater Township.

4. **Effective Date.** The Master Plan shall be effective as of the date of adoption of this resolution.


The foregoing resolution offered by Board Member JIM LEFFEW.

Second offered by Board Member CHRISTINE JOHNSON.

Upon roll call vote, the following voted "Aye" Leffew, Jackson,  
Underhill, Koss, Johnson

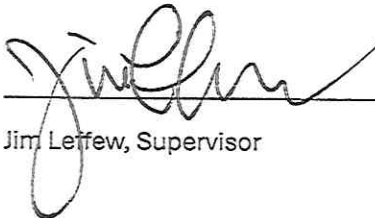
Nay": None

The Supervisor declared the resolution adopted.



Christine Johnson, Clerk

12/19/24  
Date



Jim Leffew, Supervisor

12/19/2024  
Date

This master plan was approved and adopted by the Clearwater Township Board at its regular meeting on Thursday, December 19, 2024.

Signed by: 

Christine Johnson  
Clerk of Clearwater Township

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## I. Introduction

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Public Act 110 of 2006), section 203(1) calls for the development of a “plan designed to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare,” to wit:

Sec. 203. (1) A zoning ordinance shall be based upon a plan designed to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare, to encourage the use of lands in accordance with their character and adaptability, to limit the improper use of land, to conserve natural resources and energy, to meet the needs of the state's residents for food, fiber, and other natural resources, places of residence, recreation, industry, trade, service, and other uses of land, to ensure that uses of the land shall be situated in appropriate locations and relationships, to avoid the overcrowding of population, to provide adequate light and air, to lessen congestion on the public roads and streets, to reduce hazards to life and property, to facilitate adequate provision for a system of transportation including, subject to subsection (5), public transportation, sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, education, recreation, and other public requirements, and to conserve the expenditure of funds for public improvements and services to conform with the most advantageous uses of land, resources, and properties. A zoning ordinance shall be made with reasonable consideration of the character of each district, its peculiar suitability for particular uses, the conservation of property values and natural resources, and the general and appropriate trend and character of land, building, and population development.

That “plan” is the Master Plan for the community, upon which the specifics of the Zoning Ordinance are to be based. Clearwater Township schedules the review and update of its Master Plan approximately every five years.

Clearwater Township recognizes that when people live in community with one another, they mutually agree to accept certain limits on their individual natural rights, so as to be able to live in harmony. Nonetheless, Clearwater Township holds ardently to the principles declared in the Declaration of Independence, and strives to protect the rights of its citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States and its Amendments, as well as by the Constitution of the State of Michigan and its Amendments.

Demographic and housing data referenced in this plan are derived from the Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the United States Census Bureau. While both data sets are useful to planners it is important to understand their differences and limitations. The U.S. Census is conducted every 10 years, counts all people living in U.S. states and territories, and asks a limited set of questions relating to personal demographics and home ownership. The ACS is a continuous survey sent to representative samples of the total population and asks a broader set of questions including education, employment, and internet access. Since ACS data are derived from sampling there exists a margin of error in the reports while the U.S. Census is subject to nonresponse bias.



## II. Community Description

Clearwater Township is a predominantly residential community located in the northwest corner of Kalkaska County and occupies an area of extraordinarily beautiful topography and is known regionally as the “Gateway to the Chain of Lakes.” The township is bounded by Torch Lake to the north and Torch River and Lake Skegemog to the east while the Rapid River runs through the heart of the Township. Clearwater Township is advantageously positioned along major waterways of the Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed. This chain of lakes drains fourteen (14) lakes, and their interconnecting rivers, in a 500 square mile area of land across Antrim, Charlevoix, Grand Traverse and Kalkaska Counties. These waters eventually reach the mouth of Elk River in Elk Rapids, where they flow into East Grand Traverse Bay/Lake Michigan.

In addition to these high-quality water features, nearly 22% of the Township’s acreage is set aside for public recreational use. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources owns the largest portion of those public acres, either as State Forest, Wildlife Area or Natural Area where visitors can enjoy outdoor activities like hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing and hunting. Combined, the natural features of Clearwater Township make the area a destination for enjoying outdoor recreation and underscore the importance of protecting those features.

## III. Population Characteristics

It is useful to consider the characteristics of our township’s population. Our total population, per the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Population Estimate was 2,495. The school age range, which formerly was considered to be 17 or younger, is defined in the 2010 Census and beyond as 19 and under. Of our 2,495-population total, 509 are aged 19 years or under, 680 are aged 65 or over, and 1306 are in the age range of 20 to 64. The median age in Clearwater Township is 50.2 years compared to Kalkaska County at 43.4 years and the state of Michigan at 39.8 years. The following table shows the actual population figures, and their percentages of the total, for the last three Censuses, and the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimate.

Table I.  
Population Characteristics of Clearwater Township

	2000 Census	2010 Census	2020 Census	2022 ACS Est.
Total Population	2,382	2,444	2,483	2,495
age 17 and under	583 (24%)	*583 (24%)	* 523 (21%)	* 509 (20%)
age 18 to 64	1501 (63%)	1433(59%)	1312 (53%)	1306 (52%)
age 65 and over	298 (13%)	428 (18%)	648 (26%)	680 (27%)

\* indicates new age range of 19 and under.

Our population has changed over time. The school age range, formerly 17 and under, but now 19 and under, has diminished over the last 3 censuses from 24% of our population to 21%. The 18 to 64 age group has also declined from 63% to 52%. Our population 65 and older has increased from 13% to 27%. Ours is a very stable family-based community, with many highly skilled individuals. The attractive surroundings, especially our beautiful lakes and rivers, are luring ever increasing numbers of active retirees into our township, as indicated by the rise in the 65 and over age group.

We desire to attract families with school-aged children to our community as a foundation for a thriving future population while at the same time addressing the needs of our increasing residents of retirement age. Housing availability and infrastructure that supports an active lifestyle will need to be a foundation for this goal.

It is assumed that the information provided by the U.S. Census above is useful, together with other data, for Township planning purposes. Clearwater Township's proximity to Torch Lake and Lake Skegemog along with its natural resource base will continue to attract seasonal/recreational visitors. It is a fair assumption that the numerous high quality water resources in the region will continue to be a major attraction for the residents and visitors alike, and that the demand for seasonal and permanent dwellings will continue to increase.

## IV. Land Use Trends

### a. Housing

Residential growth in the Township is slow but steady; at the time of the last Master Plan update in 2019, the American Community Survey estimated there were 1,464 housing units within Clearwater Township. The same survey indicated an estimate of 1,448 and 1,485 housing units in 2021 and 2022, respectively. The 2010 U.S. Census showed a total of 1,492 housing units (1,013 occupied, 479 vacant) while the 2020 U.S. Census reported a minor decrease in the number of housing units down to 1,484 (1,061 occupied, 423 vacant).

The above data addresses housing units, which are structures designed for persons to occupy. The following table shows the number of township households, which is defined as 1 or more persons living together in a housing unit. Despite a decrease in the total available housing units in the Township between Censuses, a higher number of occupied dwellings is an encouraging trend.

Table II  
Household Characteristics of Clearwater Township

	2000 Census	2010 Census	2020 Census	2022 ACS est.
Number of Households	944	1013	1048	1073
Persons per Household	2.52	2.41	2.39	2.31



## **b. Commercial**

There continues to be a slowly 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. The community would benefit from increased diversification of businesses with an emphasis on developing opportunities for visitors to stop and patronize local establishments within the village-commercial and commercial districts. Additionally, the township should complete the process to resurvey and re-plat portions of the village proper (see Objective 5, page 15). Once complete this re-platting will make the village much more attractive to commercial and retail businesses.

## **c. Industrial**

Clearwater Township zoning does not provide for a separate industrial zone and therefore no heavy industry has developed in the Township for many years. This lack of development is further explained by the absence of municipal water and sewer, and transportation options favored by this type of use including railways or airports. With the removal of a heavy industry zone, the Commercial-Light-Industry zone was created with the intent of providing areas for personal and professional services associated with commercial and business centers. The Commercial-Light-Industry zone does allow, through a special use permit, some moderate intensity industrial uses provided they create no negative impact to the air, land, or water of the Township. This plan maintains that heavy industrial activities are not compatible with the high-quality land and water resources within the township nor the character of its community.

## **d. Agricultural/Timber Resources**

Very few farms remain active in the Township, although there are several small family operations still active. Most of the land within the Township is poorly suited to commercial-level cropping. Given the lack of agricultural viability of land within the agricultural zone, it is likely that other uses of these areas may need to be considered. It will be important to thoroughly consider the impact of those decisions in order to retain the essential characteristics of that zone.

Considerable stands of second growth timber remain in the area and some are subject to selective cutting. Much of the State-owned forest lands are managed by the DNR and are harvested on a rotational basis. Harvested stands are typically allowed to regrow or are converted to residential use.

## **e. Recreational Land**

Clearwater Township is fortunate to have in excess of 20% of its total area set aside for public recreation. Nearly 7 sections of State land border Lake Skegemog, lower Torch River and its associated upland areas. Hunting of white-tailed deer, small game and waterfowl occurs on public and private lands throughout the township. Our lakes and rivers, particularly Lake Skegemog, offer quality fishing opportunities. Hiking trails offer residents and visitors the opportunity to enjoy our beautiful natural areas and the chance to see native flora and fauna including the federally threatened eastern massasauga rattlesnake.

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 addition of more biking and hiking opportunities is to be encouraged – perhaps by constructing near roadway trails and using available portions of the abandoned railroad right-of-way. Providing access to the Rapid River should be a priority for the Township when seeking to improve recreational opportunities.

The preservation of these natural 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 vacation visitors and “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.

## **V. Roads and Traffic**

Several improvements have been completed within the township's road system in recent years, including the overlay resurfacing of Pine Circle, Aarwood Trail, Hahn Circle as well as Gillet Road, which included extensive construction of new road base, and the creation of a spillway to reduce flooding in adjacent properties. Currently the Kalkaska County Road Commission has completed the awarding of funds to complete the resurfacing of Rapid City Road by seal coating, followed by tar and chipping it in its entirety to be completed by the Fall of 2025. The road commission also secured an EGLE Grant to allow for the replacement of severely weight restricted bridge spans crossing the Rapid River on Underhill Road, and additionally, this failing road is scheduled to be resurfaced, with completion to take place in winter 2024.

The voters of Clearwater Township have been very receptive to approving millage requests for roads, and in 2023 they passed a two-mil millage for a period of four years. The township board approved the creation of a Roads Committee, and authorized the creation of a road project prioritization list, which was completed and approved in early 2023. The committee also researched and procured 4 radar traffic speed signs in the community, significantly reducing speeds in several high pedestrian areas. The committee introduced a proposal to the township to obtain a short-term installment loan using a portion of approved road millage for repayment that would fund the construction and repair of two of the township's most broken and unsafe roads, Zimmerman Road, and Hoiles Drive. This, and the township's encouragement to create a gravel road maintenance and upkeep improvement plan, combined with the voters' 2 mil approval, will well service the township's roads in the near future.

Under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, every Master Plan must include a Master Street Plan with a "Complete Streets" section. The Complete Streets policy does not mandate projects but offers information and incentives for multi-modal and pedestrian-friendly transportation options.

Michigan’s Complete Streets policy highlights the need for safer, more inclusive street designs. Many streets and roads currently lack safe areas for walking, biking, or public transit access, posing risks especially to pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles. Streets and roads should be designed and built with the safety of these users in mind.

## VI. Schools

Clearwater Township exists within the Kalkaska Public school district and near the Elk Rapids Public school district as well as the Mancelona Public school district. In the 2022 ACS, there were about 509 school-aged children in the Township. This indicates a decline in the number of families with school-aged children within the Township, as summarized in Table III below.

Table II  
School-aged Children in Clearwater Township 2010/2022

	2010 Census	2020 Census	2022 ACS	Number Change 2010/2022	Percent Change 2010/2022
Up to 9 yrs old	352	302	267	-85	-24.1%
Ages 10- 14	195	126	165	-30	-15.4%
Ages 15- 19	200	122	77	-123	-61.5%
Total	747	550	509	-224	-29.9%

U.S. Census ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates Survey 2010, 2020 and 2022.

The number of high-school aged children in Clearwater Township decreased between 2010 and 2022 with a significant decrease in children ages 15 to 19 years old. Overall, there has been a decline in school-aged children in the township over the past 11 years. With the proportion of elementary students within the school district decreasing over this decade, these data suggest a continuing, general trend in the overall increase in average population age within the school district.

## VII. Fire, Police and Emergency Medical Services

Clearwater Twp. Fire Department Station 5

5-year Master Plan 2024-2029

### a. Achievements

Underlined items are new items or tactics to the department that increases firefighter safety or enhances the department's operational ability.

- Lowered our ISO rating from a 9 to an 8B. Which can lower the insurance rate for homeowners.
- Continue to upgrade and maintain the station building.
- LED lighting is used when replacing or replacing lighting.
- All the bottom seals and weather stripping on the 6 overhead doors were replaced or repaired.
- South apparatus bay floor refinished
- Placed into service a new 2022 IHC/Spencer Engine Tanker equipped with a 1500 gallon per minute pump with foam capabilities and a 2800-gallon water tank. The main function of the truck is to operate as a tanker but also has the ability to operate as an attack engine if need be. The department now has the capability to arrive at a fire scene with 4100 gallons of water with only two trucks.
- Upgraded 5 Engine attack package (hoses and nozzles) from high pressure to low-pressure. Enhancing firefighter safety and allowing more water applied to the fire with reduced effort.
- Purchased replacement Excretion/wildland gear for the entire department.
- Purchased replacement turn out gear for the entire department.
- Purchased 10 new 4500 psi Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) with enhanced firefighter safety features. 4 with build TICs. Plus, Bluetooth connection to their handheld radio.
- Purchased replacement handheld Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC)
- Purchased personal TIC for 5 Firefighters
- Purchased flow and pressure measuring equipment to aid in firefighter training.
- Purchased 1000 feet of large diameter supply hose (LDH).
- Purchased and trained on the Turbo Draft device. Which allows us to access water from up to a distance of 200 feet.
- Converted radios and pagers to 800 mhz.
- Clearwater Twp FD and South Torch Lake FD have paired their paging system so both departments are paged out for fires by either Antrim County Central Dispatch or Kalkaska County Central Dispatch, reducing by as much as 3 minutes time to get the next closest department notified.
- Installed cameras in all department trucks, back, forward facing and cab interior cameras that record and download to the server automatically.
- Installed security cameras at the station
- Trained and implemented nurse tanker operations allowing the department to operate efficiently with the manpower available. Have trained with our mutual aid partners with this tactic and many departments are following suit.
- Established a retention and longevity plan.

### **b. Going Forward 2024-2029**

- Continue to train on new tactics and invest in new technology that enhance firefighter safety and operational efficiency.
- Continue to provide fire and rescue training to meet Federal and State requirements.
- Continue to work on lowering our ISO rating so homeowner insurance rates will be reduced.
- Upgrade the fire attack package on 5 Engine/Tanker to low pressure from high pressure. (Handline Hoses and Nozzles)
- Maintain and improve Mutual Aid agreements and coordinate mutual aid training.
- Install signage at water/drafting access points.
- Have 5 water/drafting points certified.
- Research construction and cost of adding a second high flow water well (300 gallon per minute).
- Recruit and train 2 new firefighters per year.
- Review and update or create standard operating guidelines to enhance firefighter safety and operational efficiency.
- Adopt the National Fire Code so commercial fire inspections may be conducted and enforced.
- Develop and maintain a commercial (STR) occupancy fire inspection/pre plan program throughout the Township.
- Research and financing of a four-bay addition to the station and repurposing of existing bays.

### **c. Over the Horizon View**

- 2030 5 Engine will be at its 20-year replacement mark estimated replacement cost \$800,000.00.
- 2032 5 Squad/Brush will be at its 20-year replacement mark estimated replacement cost \$300,000.00
- Just about everything we carry or use on our firetrucks has a manufacturer life span of ten years which carries a high price of continued replacement.

## **VIII. Other Pertinent Trends**

### **a. Waterways**

Boat traffic on Torch River, Torch Lake, and Lake Skegemog continues to increase, threatening shoreline and water quality as well as local fisheries. The spread of golden-brown algae in recent years along with an increase in invasive species in our waterways suggests a degradation in overall water quality.

Regulation and patrols are essential to control the increasing boat traffic and anchoring, especially on "The Sandbar" and along Torch River. Implementing stricter regulations and increasing patrols can help mitigate environmental degradation. Providing more trash bins and porta-potties will help address waste management issues. Many residents assist by regularly collecting trash from roads and waterways. Additionally, public awareness campaigns about the impact of pollution on water quality and fisheries may foster more responsible behavior.

## **b. Parking Issues**

Parking overflow from the DNR launch site and public swimming accesses is a significant and growing concern. Requiring shuttle services from off-site boat and watercraft rental businesses and offering shuttles from designated parking areas to the lake can reduce congestion and improve accessibility.

## **c. Short-Term Rentals and Housing Availability**

The growth of short-term rentals presents both challenges and opportunities. Available housing in our prime residential areas is a concern; enforcing meaningful regulations on short-term rentals can help balance economic benefits with the necessity to preserve the residential character of our neighborhoods. The Township should seek opportunities to facilitate dialogue between residents and rental property owners to address concerns with the goal of finding mutually beneficial solutions.

Demand for vacant land and affordable housing is also a concern. Waterfront property is near its developmental capacity. Consideration for higher density housing near the village of Rapid City including tiny houses less than the minimum of 800 square feet should be a factor in future land use decisions.

## **d. Youth Recreation**

The Clearwater Township Athletic Complex has significantly improved recreation opportunities for youth. Continuing to invest in this facility, including the planned concession stand and permanent restroom facilities, will further enhance these opportunities. Expanding organized sports and recreational programs can increase youth engagement and community involvement. Improvements in non-motorized travel options, such as paved trails and shoulders along connecting roads, will provide youth with safer options for transportation around the community.

## **e. Senior Programs**

Senior programs, such as lunches and public exercises at the Township Hall, are well-attended and appreciated. Expanding services by introducing more varied programs and health services can further support the senior community. Collaborating with local health providers to offer more clinics and health checks will improve senior well-being.

## **f. Community Appearance**

The appearance of downtown Rapid City has improved through updated street lights and beautification projects, but some areas remain blighted. Implementing community-driven initiatives to address these blighted areas can involve residents in maintaining and improving their surroundings. Encouraging local artists and volunteers to continue beautification projects will enhance the village's aesthetic appeal.

## **g. Engagement and Volunteerism**

Organizing community events for clean-ups, beautification, entertainment and recreational activities can strengthen community bonds. Acknowledging and rewarding volunteers' efforts will encourage continued participation and foster a sense of pride in the community.

By addressing these challenges with balanced strategies that consider both the needs of residents and the pressures of increasing tourism and development, our community can continue to thrive and maintain its unique character.

## **IX. Future Land Use Plans**

The goal of Clearwater Township's Master Plan and the Objectives established by prior township Zoning Boards and Planning Commissions (former Zoning Board abolished and current Planning Commission established per the requirements of Public Acts 110 of 2006 and 33 of 2008), have served the township well. The population of the township has more than doubled since the original "Comprehensive Plan" was published in 1974, and an expected continuation of this trend will bring new challenges and create new opportunities for the township. Therefore, we attempt in this update to provide more specific information to assist members of future Planning Commissions and Township Boards as well as the citizenry of the township.

This plan emphasizes Clearwater Township's dedication to preserving its high quality of rural life and water resources. The community values its pristine lakes and shorelines, natural beauty, active farms, rolling topography with forests and farmland, small town charm. Residents cherish the ability to see a dark night sky and enjoy the friendliness, safety, peace, and quiet of the area.

The township faces challenges due to continuous population growth over the past two decades, especially among residents aged 65 and older. In recent years we have experienced a dramatic increase in vacation visitors. These trends are expected to continue. Additionally, maintaining water quality, managing land and resource consumption, and meeting the increasing demand for public services as the population ages are significant concerns.

Therefore, it will become increasingly important that thoughtful zoning and policy decisions in the future will need to consider the importance of protecting the character and resource quality of our community.

### **a. 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 from the standpoint of quality of life for our residents and visitors that we preserve and protect the woodland, wetland, and farmland nature of the township. We must also particularly focus on maintaining and improving the water quality and rural character that is so much a part of who we are.

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 portion of M-72 that runs through the township, Rapid City Road between the DNR owned Skegemog Lake Wildlife Area 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 protected land and state



forests complement these lands and appeal to residents and would-be residents alike.

Now that the waterways have been almost fully developed, the wooded upland of the township which represents about half of the township's land mass is the current target of development. 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 standards of Ordinance #22, which require a maximum density of 5 acres per dwelling site in Recreational and Agricultural Districts, have helped preserve the values of these uplands. We prefer 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. These areas tend toward fairly shallow static groundwater levels; water and contaminants have only a short filter distance before interfacing with groundwater and surface water of the lakes and streams. Past planners have recognized the attractiveness of these locations and allowed for zoning at high residential densities. A continuation of these high densities may place both the groundwater and nearby surface waters at increased risk of contamination, and current planners see a need to not increase the residential density of the nearby lands to mitigate additional impacts on our water resources.

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 Egle as the township residential population grows and commercial and 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 on-site sewage disposal systems (septic tanks and distribution fields). Some of our highest density housing is in areas of near-surface water tables, threatening not only the quality of our source of household water but the health of aquatic ecosystems in the region. A required septic system evaluation will be useful in locating and correcting faulty and failing systems in these areas. For the above reasons, the Township should begin looking at the feasibility of a municipal waste system to serve the near water, high density residential areas as well as the village proper and commercial districts.

In order to maintain an environment conducive to wildlife nesting, fishing and the peaceful observance of nature the township should continue working with the Sheriff's department to ensure increased marine patrols along Torch River and Rapid River throughout the summer months and requesting strict enforcement of no wake laws, excessive noise and adherence to "no trespassing" signs on private property.

Steps should be taken to curb the effects that continued growth, both residential and commercial, have on our rural character. Landscaping of commercial properties can have a dramatic effect on their appearance from the road. Plans to accomplish this should be included in any new site plan applications through a landscaping plan. Current commercial properties should be encouraged to pursue good landscaping practices. To help maintain and improve the experience that our township provides, a dark sky policy should be developed that addresses such things as security lighting, digital and lighted signs and light trespass from one property to the next would minimize the loss of view of the night sky. Lighting that is lower on the Kelvin scale, motion sensor lights, timers, night mode dimming and shielded light sources that direct light down and away from adjacent properties will be beneficial at little to no added expense to both commercial and residential owners.

#### **b. 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 Lake Wildlife Area, the Seven Bridges Natural Area, Freedom Park, Heritage Park, the Birch and Cedar Street parks, two Little League fields, and nine public water access sites on Torch Lake and Torch River. The township does not lack outdoor recreational space, but certain areas are currently underutilized and have potential for additional uses. Public water access sites in the Township have problems of seasonal overcrowding. It is important for Planning Commissions 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 and enjoyment of the water, especially to township residents.

The township continues to update its fire and emergency medical service equipment, including the addition of living quarters for 24/7 EMS. For emergencies on the main roads and near the fire barn, response time can be very short. It should be considered 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 full time personnel at considerable cost. High densities or commercial activities distant from Rapid City should be viewed with caution.

Continued upgrades to Township facilities are planned with the intent to increase accessibility and services to the community.

#### **c. Objective 3: Provide for a Range of Development Types Through Appropriate Land Use Distribution**

Rapid City, a boom-and-bust town more than 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 to depths of 300-450 feet, relatively free of existing residences, and available at reasonable prices. It is foreseen that a small increase in the amount of land devoted to a “Commercial-Light Industry Park” in an area contiguous with the present zone and separated from village residences could enhance community development. The Planning Commission recognizes the need for additional commercial zoning along Rapid City Road with possible extension of Commercial-Light-Industry south of the village and Village-Commercial to the north which continues to be a controversial subject.

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 and properties are therefore inappropriate in those locations. The benefit to the community of short-term rentals will have to be weighed against the benefit of permanent or seasonal residents in our Residential 1 zone.

Township residents need affordable housing and certain areas devoted to multifamily dwellings, mobile home parks, and tiny houses should be considered for providing such housing. Further, areas of town houses, condominium communities, or apartments, could be attractive to seniors and retirees and young adults. A community poised for growth will need to revise its historic zoning practices in order to provide accommodations for a broad spectrum of residents 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 nearer to emergency services, 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.

The Planning Commission should continue to review Township land use with the objective of ensuring zoning is responsive to the needs of the community.

#### **d. Objective 4: Provide a Safe and Suitable Transportation Network**

The widening of Rapid City Road has made this major county artery safer and more useful, not only to township residents, but to the many neighboring 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 aware of 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. High residential density is

compounded by the usage of that Crystal Beach Road as a link between the two arms of Antrim County, and the same cautions there are extended to township officials about traffic safety throughout the township going forward.

Any road projects in the future must take into consideration the State of Michigan's Complete Streets policy in regard to available and safe routes for pedestrians and non-motorized modes of transportation. It is important to plan for a safe means of travel throughout the township by integrating Complete Streets principles into road and road right-of-way projects.

#### **e. Objective 5: Restore the Village Center to Fundamental Economic Health**

The original plats for the Rapid City village center include alleyways and streets that have never been opened. These bits of township land are actually occupied by residents, businesses, and the school, making the current-day reality at odds with the official records, and depriving current property owners of clear title to the land they use and care for.

In a resolution by the Clearwater Township Planning Commission, dated February 18, 2013, the following rationale for action was presented to the Clearwater Township Board:

The Township ownership of certain and several closed streets and alleyways prohibits the commercial and economic growth of the community; prevents the appreciation of private properties and thus the tax base; and presents a clear obstacle to the transfer of ownership of the properties adjacent thereto. In addition, any future decisions concerning rezoning are impacted, which renders the Master Plan ineffective and impractical at present.

Therefore, in the interests of the community and the taxpaying public, the Planning Commission recommends the Township Board move to divest itself of the closed alleyways and streets indicated on the attached documentation to facilitate the execution of the Township Master Plan.

\* \* \*

**Replatting Update:** This resolution, although not carried through to completion, is still valid and necessary. A committee should be formed to research and pursue the resolution of transferring ownership of the closed streets and alleyways within the Village of Rapid City. The original petition and court proceedings of 1971 vacated the Township properties located within the original Rankin Plat of 1898. This original administrative process will be pursued to completion under the requirements of the "Plat Act" (MCL 560) and serve as the model for completion and redrawing of the other five plats included within the Village limits.

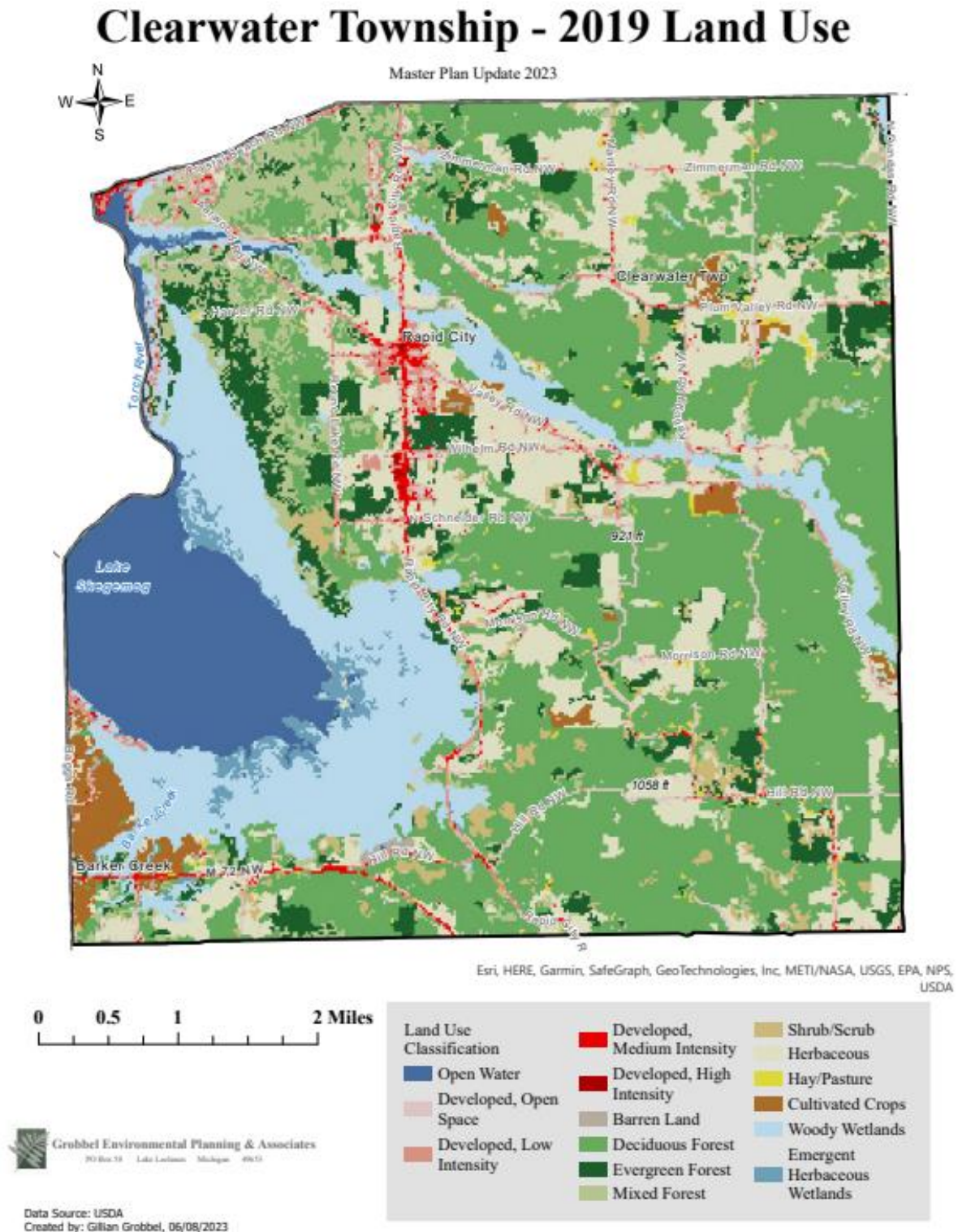
\* \* \*

**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 and involvement of the citizens of the township.

The Clearwater Township Master Plan is meant to be a proactive approach to land use planning. It is to be used as a guiding tool for decision-makers regarding land use questions. It defines the

community's vision of the future and lays the framework for growth, development, and resource protection for the next 20 years and is to be reviewed every five years in accordance with Michigan law. This Master Plan has been written with democratic principles and community/environmental sustainability in mind, so that future generations will have an equal or better quality of life than that enjoyed by today's Township residents.

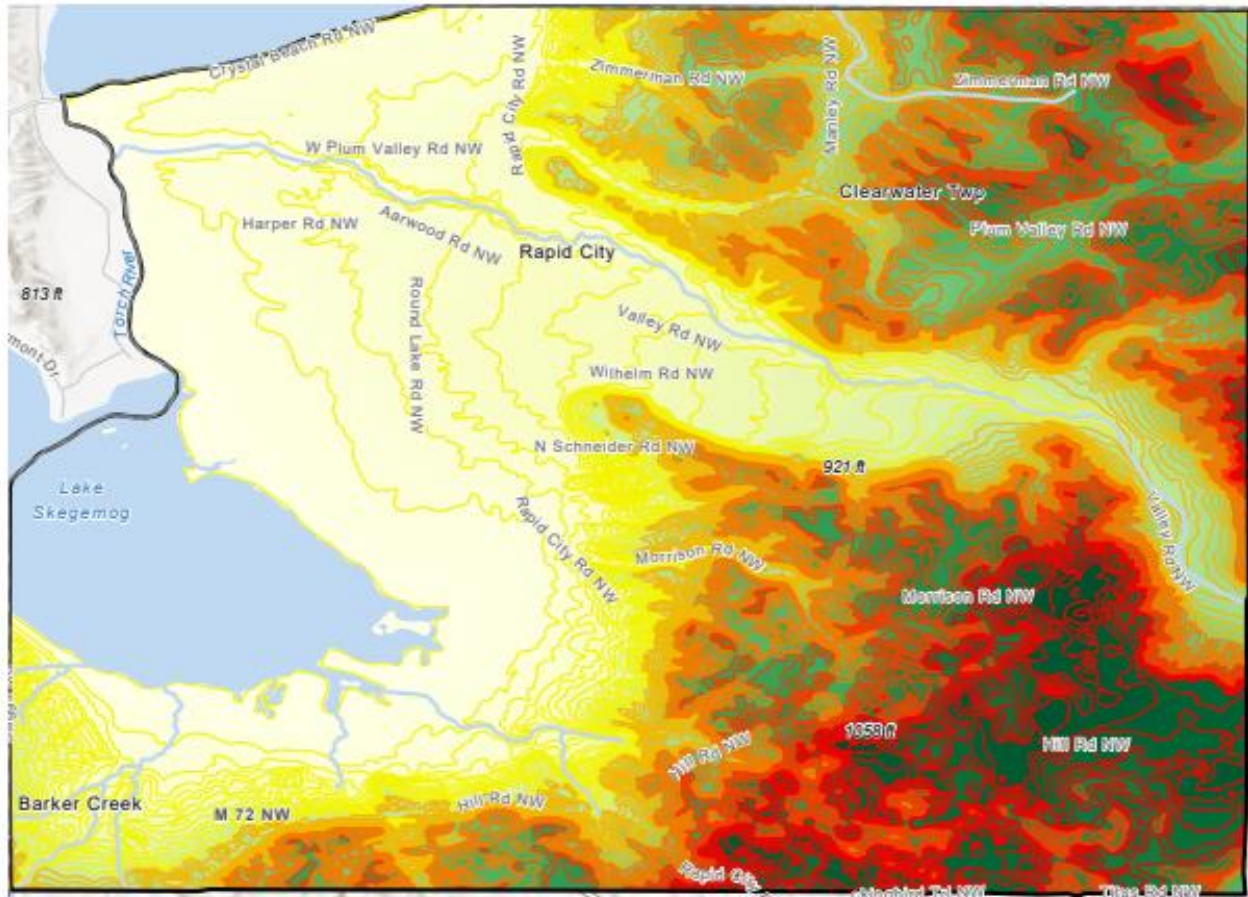
# Appendix A: Clearwater Township Maps



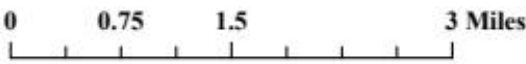


# Clearwater Township - Topography

Master Plan Update 2023

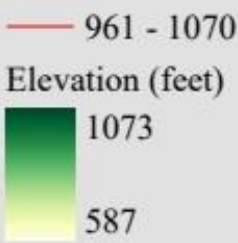


Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA



**Contours (feet)**

- 590 - 720
- 721 - 810
- 811 - 890
- 891 - 960

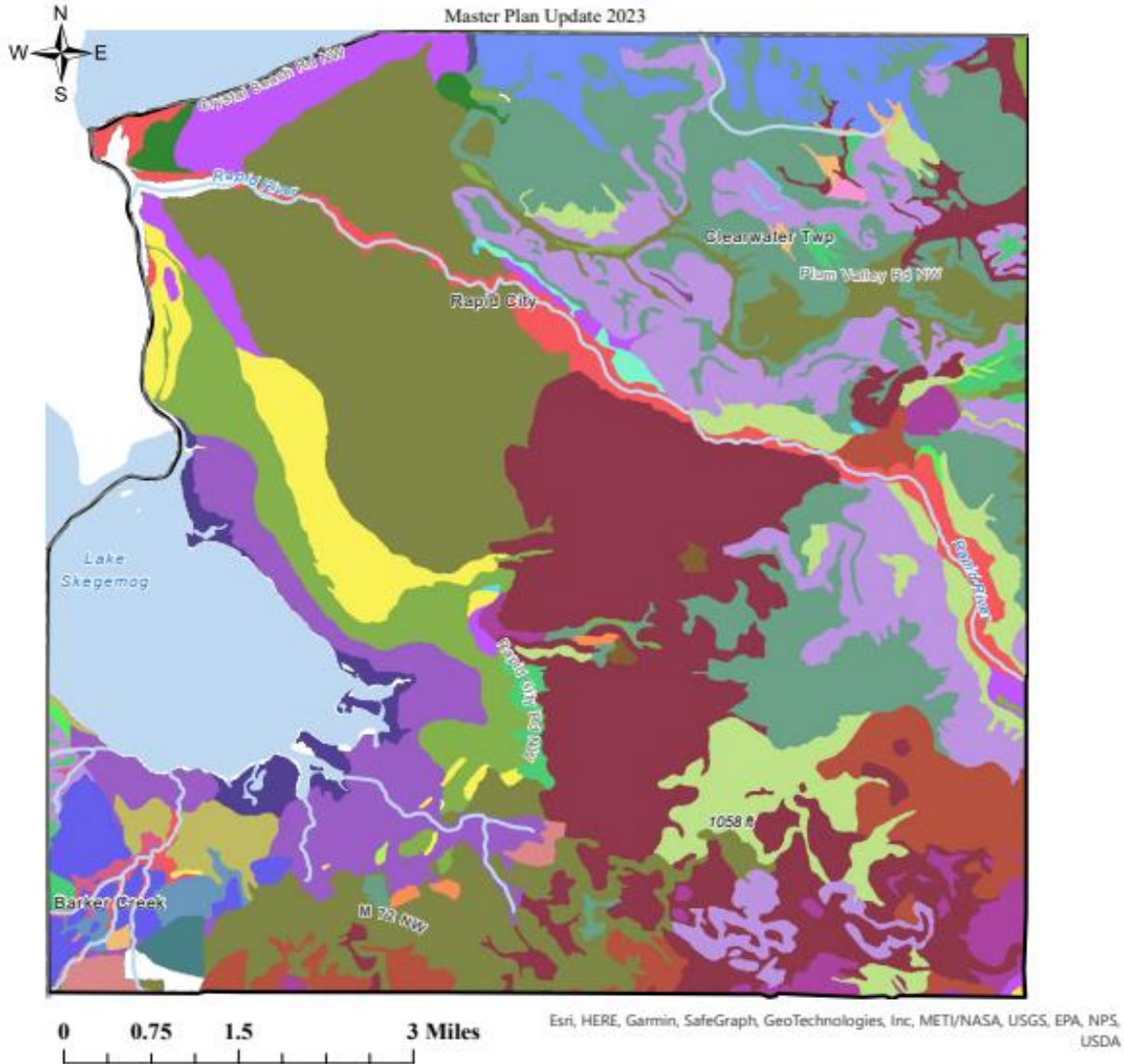


 **Grobbel Environmental Planning & Associates**  
PO Box 58 Lake Leelanau Michigan 49653



# Clearwater Township - Soil Series

Master Plan Update 2023

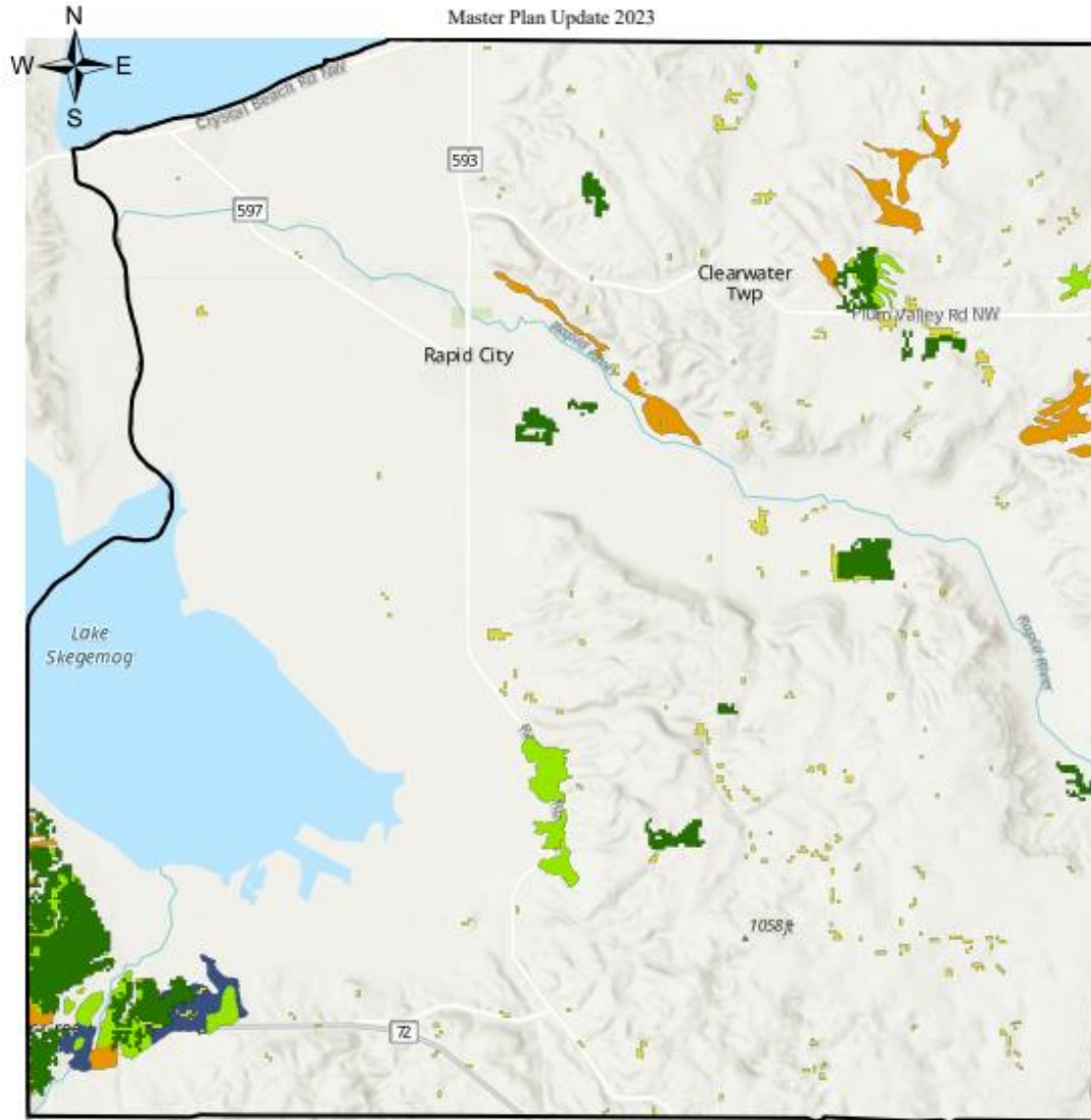


## Soil Type

Algonquin silt loam	Gladwin loamy sand	Kalkaska sand	Negwagon silt loam	Springport silt loam
Au Gres sand	Halfaday loamy sand	Kalkaska-Blue Lake sands	Pits, borrow	Tawas and Lupton mucks
Ausable-Bowstring mucks	Histosols and Aquents	Leafriver muck	Roscommon mucky sand	Tawas-Leafriver mucks
Croswell sand	Ingalls-Burleigh loamy sands	Lindquist sand	Rubicon sand	Tawas-Roscommon-Cathro
Croswell-Au Gres sands	Islandlake loamy sand	Mancelona-Blue Lake complex	Southwells-Mancelona-Dighton complex	Wakeley muck
Cublake sand	Islandlake-Blue Lake complex	Morganlake, sandy substratum-Woodman-Blue Lake complex	Springlake sand	
East Lake sand	Islandlake-Southwells complex		Springlake-Kalkaska sands	

# Clearwater Township - Farmland

Master Plan Update 2023



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA

0 0.75 1.5 3 Miles



Grobhel Environmental Planning & Associates  
PO Box 58 Lake Lelanau Michigan 49653

## Farmland Classification

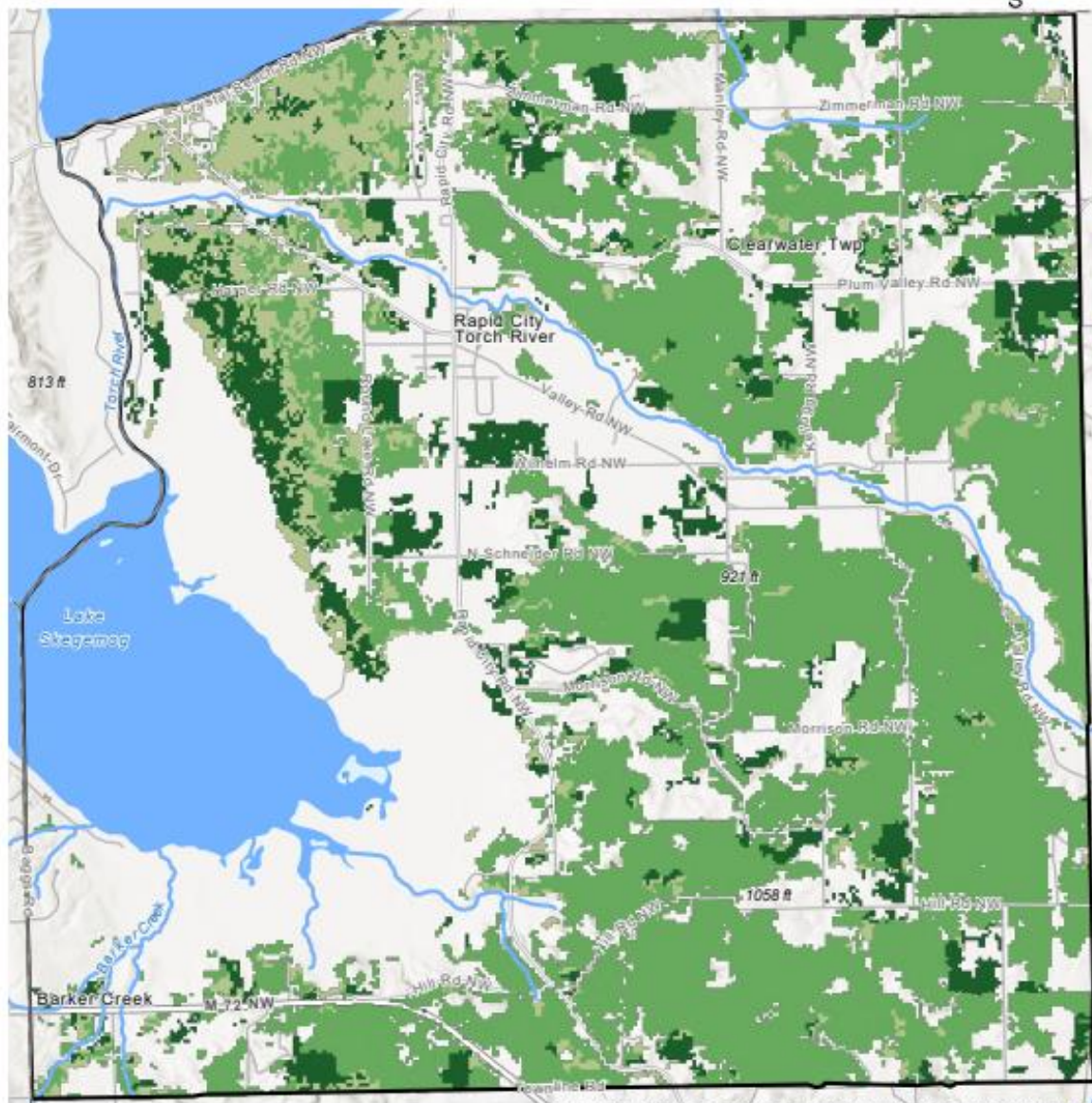
Current Hay/  
Pasture  
Current Cultivated  
Crops

All areas are prime  
farmland  
Farmland of local  
importance  
Prime farmland if  
drained



# Clearwater Township - Woodlands

Master Plan Update 2023



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, MET/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA

0 0.5 1 2 Miles



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PO Box 58 Lake Linden Michigan 49853

Woodlands  
Classification

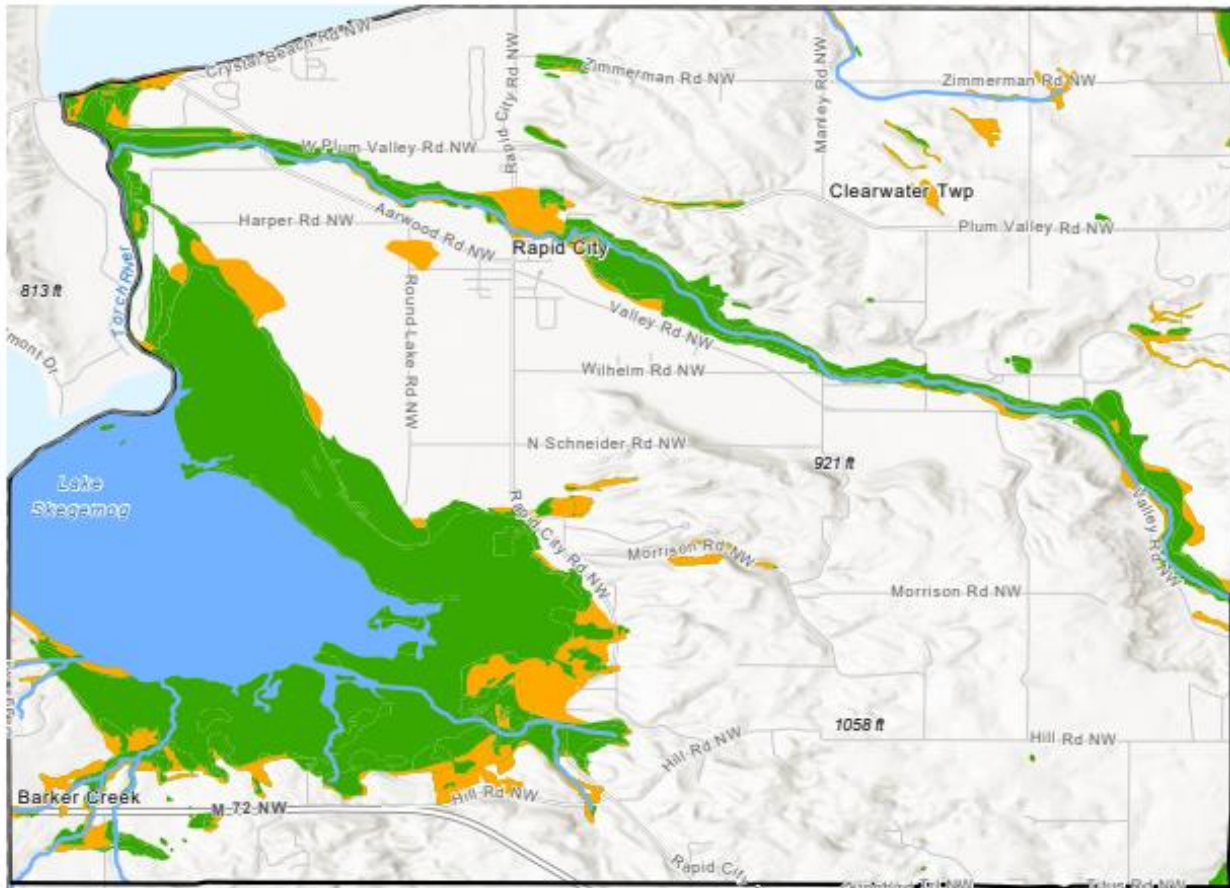
Deciduous  
Forest

Evergreen  
Forest

Mixed Forest

# Clearwater Township - 2022 Wetlands and Hydrology

Master Plan Update 2023



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnology Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USD

0 0.75 1.5 3 Miles



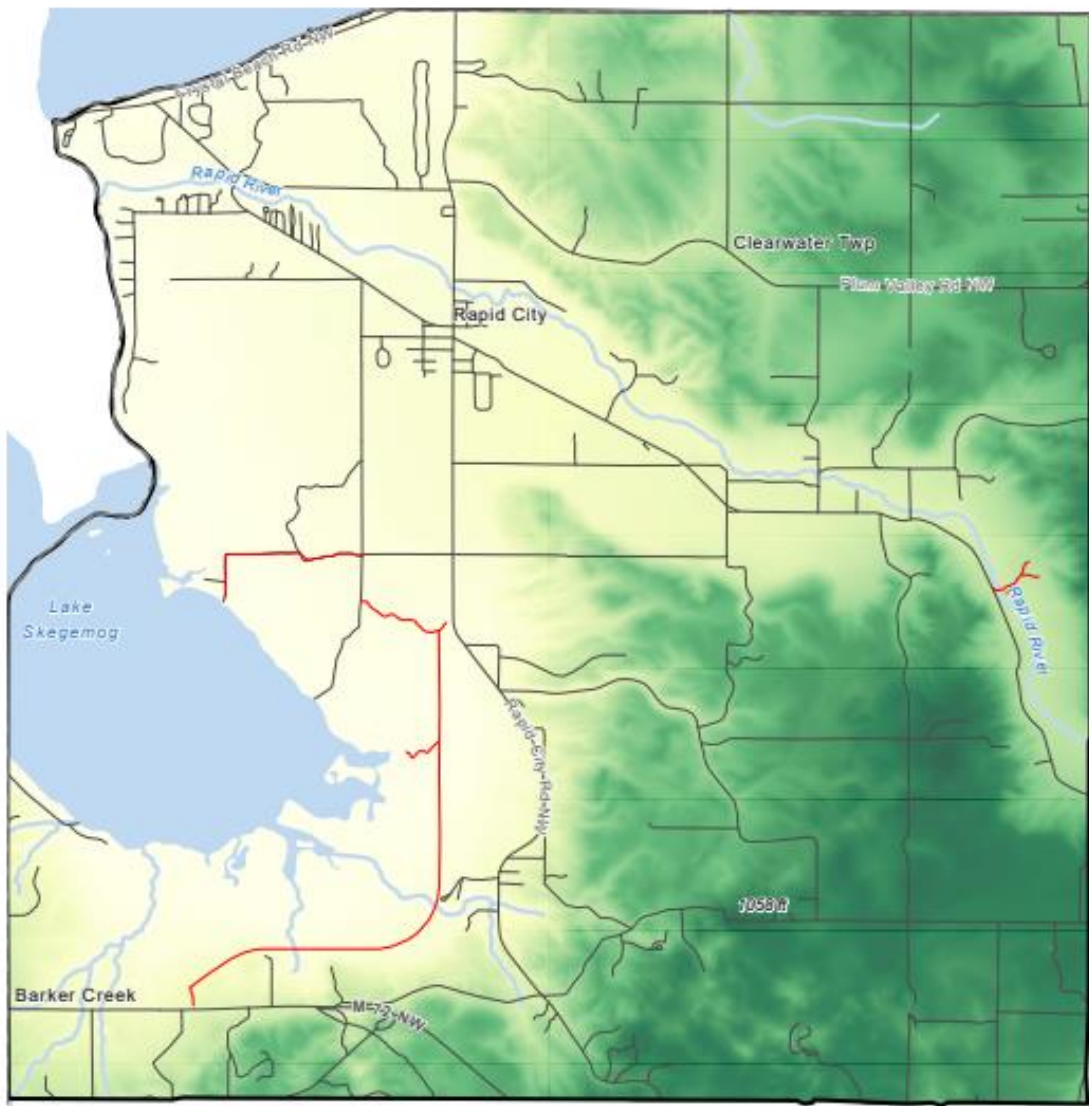
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Streams and Rivers	Inland Lakes
Potential Hydric Soils	State Regulated Wetlands

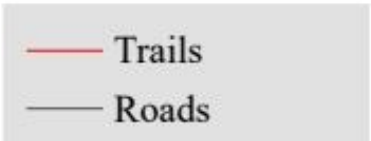
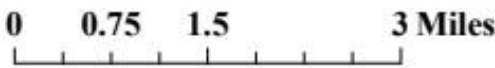


# Clearwater Township - Transportation

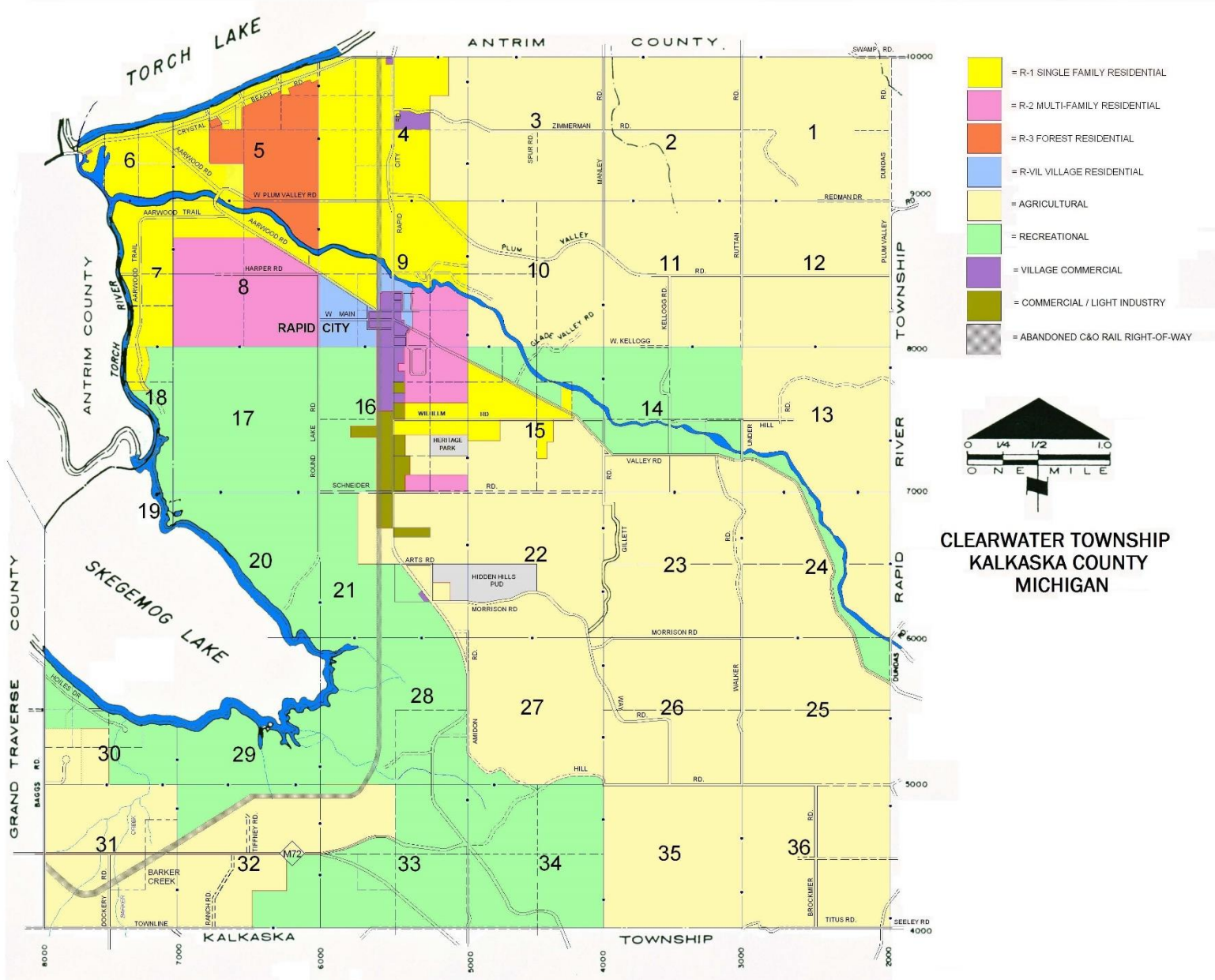
Master Plan Update 2023



Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA



# Clearwater Township – Future Land Use



# Appendix B: Parks and Recreation Master Plan

The Five Year Parks & Recreation Master Plan 2022-2026, adopted by the Clearwater Township Board on July 21, 2022, is intended to guide present and future recreational resource development within the township, including park land, park facilities, recreational programs, and public open spaces.

In addition to serving as a guide for recreation facilities and program development, it's prepared to satisfy the requirements set forth by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Recreation plans are required by the MDNR for state and federal grant eligibility.

For more information, please refer to the Clearwater Township [Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2022-2026](#).