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## CHAPTER IV MASTER PLAN

Understanding the history, demographics, natural resources and development of Crystal Falls Township and integrating with the vision, goal and objectives equips the planning commission to produce an effective master plan. In addition, though, the planning commission has to be prepared to lead beyond this background and move in a direction that residents had not contemplated. The result is a plan that has a good technical background, resident direction and flexibility combined with the ingenuity and creativity of planning commissioners and other community leaders.

### PLAN CONCEPT

The vision of the community, the location of Crystal Falls Township and the planning commission's view of planning elements broadly sets the concept for the master plan. The result in the township is a recognition of the inter-relationships and mutual dependency with the City of Crystal Falls. Even if the policy differs, those facts remain essential. In addition, Crystal Falls Township inevitably leads many of the future development plans for the area. This is partly true because the available land for new development – particularly larger scale development – exists primarily in the township. In addition, residents in the area, like people everywhere, have changed their lifestyles dramatically. Now strip malls, “big-box” retailers, generous free parking lots, more interest in leisure pursuits, ever stronger seasonal housing for Wisconsin and Illinois residents, new styles of year-round housing and myriad other changes are difficult to achieve in many city environments because of space limitations and consumer convenience. They may not always be seen desirable for the Crystal Falls area, but they represent a major part of consumers attitude.

Another factor is the location of Crystal Falls Township: it is at the intersection of north-south US-141 and east-west US-2 giving it the most favorable highway location in Iron County. This includes all the necessary infrastructure for development towards both the Keweenaw Peninsula and Ironwood. Capitalizing on this location can allow more commercial and quasi-public development near that intersection such as the current MDNR and MDOT facilities and the county medical care facility.

Finally, the advantages of the largely unspoiled pattern of animal and plant life, woods, water, waterfalls and hills are recognized as a positive element to focus tourism and nature appreciation. That means strong protection needs to be ensured for those natural features as well as increased access to selected examples of those features.

Accordingly the general concept for the township involves the following elements:

- Focusing more intensive development on US-2 east of the US-141 intersection and limited extensions to the west. This includes new retail centers, some state and regional governmental and quasi-public facilities such as a commuter-oriented higher-education, multiple family housing and related facilities.



- Establishing a smaller commercial node of professional office/restaurant on US-2 between Crystal Falls and Iron River at the former Westwood Restaurant area. The existing retail area east of US-141 on US-2 can also be extended to the Iron County Medical Care Facility after leapfrogging several state-owned properties. By establishing limited development at this location, most of the corridor of US-2 between Iron River and Crystal Falls can maintain its natural, aesthetic appearance. This also limits the number of traffic conflicts that could otherwise develop on US-2.
- Development of a township industrial park(s) with covenants to ensure that industry develops near the US-2 and US-141 intersection and also allow expansion of private industrial sites/park at Industrial Road near Gilbert Lake and old US-141.
- Improving access to some of the especially interesting and aesthetic features of the area landscape such as waterfalls (though only one is in the township), unique forest or hill vistas and selected lakes.
- Maintaining and further strengthening of the natural features in the vast wilderness and woodlands area of the township. These areas are to be protected from intensive development and designed to keep the north woods appeal strong and permanent. This explicitly limits development to southeast and east of the City and generally north of the Gibson Lake area.
- Consideration of a manmade landmark to identify the township. This could be an aesthetic tower, statue or similar highly visible and attractive feature. The Township Hall located at US-141 and US-2 may be a good location. Such a feature can be part of township identity and promotion as well as giving residents a greater sense of community.



These concepts are designed to provide for future growth in specific and limited locations in Crystal Falls Township while still preserving the northwood's and environmental features that are assets to the community. It is intended to meet year-round and seasonal residents' desire for protecting certain elements from growth and yet allow growth to occur where it is appropriate and reasonable. Because of past growth patterns, it is not expected that rapid growth will outstrip existing infrastructure and public facilities. Most of the existing facilities will not be affected by the modest, steady and well-planned growth anticipated.

## MASTER PLAN DETAILS

### Rural Environment and Natural Feature Policies

The master plan for Crystal Falls Township is intended to preserve the rural environment of the township. A goal to limit development includes an Objective to preserve the wilderness areas, which should be done by controlling the location and the pace of development. A Quality of Life Goal also makes it a high priority to maintain the important northern, rural atmosphere. The major aspects of the



rural character needing preservation include the following:

- Keeping more intensive development principally in areas next to the City of Crystal Falls where sanitary sewers are or can be made available. Specifically commercial and industrial should be focused west of the City to an area just west of the US-141 turnoff and Tobin-Alpha Road.
- Emphasize seasonal and year-round residential development along the lakes in an area west to the township boundary and north to the Hematite Township boundary. Lots should maintain a 150 foot width and a 100 foot front yard setback from the lake and have a backyard sufficient for an on-site septic field. Limited seasonal developments may be allowed in the northern part of the township, with Deer Lake and its public road the only exception to the seasonal-only growth.
- Maintain trees and forests as much as practical in all development to help maintain the idyllic north woodlands atmosphere as well as keep a healthy logging environment. The possible consolidation, permitted uses and size of the Multiple Use Forest District and Prime Forestlands District should be explored as part of zoning ordinance review to make sure they meet township desires.
- Preserve the wetlands of the township for preservation of biota habitat as well as keeping the northern atmosphere. The State of Michigan also has jurisdiction of certain wetlands. Michigan regulation of wetlands applies when the wetland is:
  1. Connected to one of the Great Lakes or Lake St. Clair (not applicable to Crystal Falls Township).
  2. Located within 1,000 feet of one of the Great Lakes or Lake St. Clair (not applicable to Crystal Falls Township).
  3. Connected to an inland lake, pond, river or stream.
  4. Located within 500 feet of an inland lake, river or stream.
  5. Not connected to one of the Great Lakes or Lake St. Clair, or an inland lake, pond, stream or river, but are more than five acres in size and located in counties with a population of more than 100,000 people (not applicable to Crystal Falls Township).
  6. Not connected to one of the Great Lakes or Lake St. Clair, or an inland lake, pond, stream or river, and is less than five acres in size, but the DEQ has determined that these wetlands are essential to the preservation of the state's natural resources and has notified the property owner of such.
- Large lot development in rural areas to avoid noise, traffic, light and activity of intensive activity.
- Protection of environmental conditions is possible in the planning process and related zoning. By limiting development and therefore preserving the natural habitat of plants and animals the existing varieties are more likely to be robust. This action particularly helps Threatened or Endangered Species.



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## LONG-RANGE LAND USE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

The land use policies have a significant impact on the location, scale, pace and character of future development in the Community. Thus it is a key development of any long-range community plan. In most cases – as in Crystal Falls Township – the principal policy is the future land use plan.

### Limits for Development

An objective of this policy is to keep intense development away from pipelines that could disrupt any activity in their corridor and to avoid development over suspected stopes from underground mining that could cause hazards to property and life. For example, no home or human activity should occur on or near proximity to an underground pipeline or near a suspected underground mining stopes. Surveys or drilling cores can identify probable areas for such limits to development. Implementation will require modification of the zoning ordinance.

### Residential Development

*Intensive:* New housing development for multi-family and high density condominiums is limited by the multi-family Residential Objective in the previous Chapter. Specifically, intensive uses such as senior citizen apartments, assisted living facility or intensive condominiums and apartments are specifically planned for sanitary service areas close to the City of Crystal Falls or the Iron County Medical Care Facility. This more intensive residential development is not expected to encompass a great deal of space because of community life styles and the relatively low market demand.

*Single Family/Low Density:* Single family is also part of the sanitary sewer service area. Where such sewer is available smaller lots can be used. But most development will probably be rural sites in wooded areas, along rivers and streams or on lakes. Essentially the same pattern needs to be required for seasonal homes as well as year-round homes.

*Manufactured and/or Mobile Housing:* Manufactured or mobile home park development is appropriate in Crystal Falls Township as long as no such developments exceed 15% of the Township's total year-round housing. It should be built primarily on vacant or minimally forested land where intensive development does not clear an area of trees and destroy the wooded environment and – if possible – in areas that can be served by sanitary sewers and public water. A greenbelt will also soften the manufactured housing transition to traffic on public roads and adjacent conventional residential land uses.

To implement these goals, objectives and policies, residential land use on the following map specifically portrays land around the City as intensive, with single family near the southern portion of the township and manufactured home parks in the southern part of the township with particular emphasis on access to sanitary sewers.

### Commercial Development

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The goal for commercial development specifically encourages retail and service development from the City of Crystal Falls to east of US-141 and Tobin-Alpha Road and northerly on US-141 for approximately 1/4 mile. In addition, some land use extensions and strategic nodes of retail and/or service uses are planned for the area west of the US-2/US-141 intersection where existing development currently exists. This policy may be implemented by a new zoning district of Office-Services that should be considered in the zoning ordinance.



### **Industrial Development**

The goal for industrial development is to develop a Township industrial park and limit future industrial development to that area. The recommended site is in Township-owned property immediately north of the Township Office Building/Hall at the northwest quadrant of the US-2 and US-141 intersection. That site would be in addition to possible expansion of the current private industrial park on Old US-141 and Industrial Road near Gilbert Lake. In both cases, particular care must be made to acquire or buffer existing residential.

### **Parks and Recreation Activities**

Parks and recreation development is shown on the master plan map only conceptually and is subject to the Township Board of Trustees finding appropriate land and having Township or other resources to develop such land. The goal is to provide a base for community facilities, tourist attractions and seasonal activities in both parks and multiple use trails. It is possible this could include developing the Township's only waterfall as an attractive tourist site, utilizing or promoting state multiple use trails for hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snow-shoeing or other possible uses. A lake parks site is also desirable along with programs with the state to restock fish and reduce pollutants.



Future Land Use South Half



Future Land Use Developed Areas



Future Land Use Industrial Area



Future Land Use North Half



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## TRANSPORTATION LONG-RANGE PLANS

Transportation in Crystal Falls Township will continue to be automobiles and trucks on the road network. Accordingly most plans are for limited improvements to that system.

### State and Federal Highways

Minimal new development is expected on state and federal highways administered by the Michigan Department of Transportation. State route M-69 is anticipated to be adequate in the Township as relatively little additional development is expected in this eastern area. M-69 is an important corridor in Crystal Falls Township because it provides access to a large forest-related employer east of the township in Sagola and south on M-95.

As US-2 is developed for commercial and industrial activities west of the City to just beyond US-141, it should be monitored for possible expansion. An improved intersection at US-141 north is important on a short-term basis and an eventual five-lane roadway west of there is a long-range expectation as the area develops.

US-141 should be considered for eventual turning lanes and intersection improvements at US-2, Old US-141 and Industrial Roads.

### County Roads

The only year-round county primary roads are Old US-141 and Industrial Road near Gilbert Lake. These serve the private industrial park. They should be monitored with the state for possible peak hour intersection improvements on new US-141.



There are other seasonal county primary roads in the Township. These additional major Roads are all paved and most have pavement markings. They are shown on the transportation and utilities map. No major improvements are suggested for those roads, but intersections at US-2 need occasional review for possible widening as traffic increases.

The township should consider linking existing roads to make road a parallel to US-2 as commercial or intensive residential development proceeds from the City to US-141 and the Township industrial park beyond there. This provides local access away from US-2/141 and traffic relief for US-2/141. The road can be built by developers as the area develops.

### Railroad Improvements

No specific rail improvements are expected, but if the private industrial park near Gilbert Lakes grows and needs rail access, a spur to the industrial park can be developed.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Economic development, and specifically additional employment, is desired by most residents as expressed in the Goals and Objectives. That employment should be concentrated in the previously discussed areas. Because the existing City industrial park is being filled, planning for expansion should start soon. This will allow preservation of the woodland-water-hill environment in other areas of the Township. Targeted areas of development are best concentrated in these areas:

- Industrial development is expected to focus on maintenance and expansion of existing facilities that are in outmoded or in cramped facilities or industries needing a new site. As part of the industrial parks, a package of financial incentives should be available through tax advantages offered by the state and regional job training programs. As well as assisting local business growth, this could help attract new, moderate-sized businesses to the area.
- High-tech, computer-oriented businesses represent another small, but important long-term prospect. By use of expected expansion of computer capability through broad band access in that area, Crystal Falls Township can provide information technology assistance such as software or processing for businesses. It may also develop a mail-order business as is enjoyed by some rural New England areas.
- Tourism has considerable potential in the immediate area and represents a seasonal opportunity. In fact, it can be multi-seasonal with winter, fall and summer activities approximating full-time employment. Areas of interest could be the local waterfall, hilltop vistas, a smaller resort/conference center, lake access for people, boats, fishing, swimming and nature trails and winter activity for snowmobiles, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing or other recreational activities that may combine private, state, county and township activities. Perhaps the conference center and lake access/recreational opportunities can be combined in a largely undeveloped area so that residents are not adversely affected by any intensive development.
- Additional commercial activities such as retail, personal services, restaurants and business services could be expanded as other slow but steady growth is realized. In addition, more chain retail outlets are looking at smaller communities as the major urban centers are increasingly filled with retail.

The residents of the township are not in favor of large, rapid economic growth, but rather slower and steady growth in areas that preserve the rural character of the rest of the township. Fortunately Crystal Falls Township has the opportunity to blend those seemingly contradictory visions for the community. It can foster growth within six or seven miles west and north of the City of Crystal Falls but emphasize limited growth and preservation north of that area.



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## FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Crystal Falls Township will examine its public infrastructure for expansion and improvements as part of this Master Plan process. The improvements that may need to be expanded include:

- *Parks & Recreation:* Parks and recreation has two dimensions for the community. One is to provide opportunities for seasonal and year-round residents. Many current residents have enough land or an appropriate location for most of their own recreation. Additionally, some residents need access to a community site.
- The second parks and recreation need is to increase the area's attractiveness for tourists. The Bewabic State Park meets many of those needs, but there are some additional activities that visitors want. One is access to local waterfalls. Only one waterfall is in the Township and it is in private ownership on the Chicagon Slough near Long Lake. Good access and support facilities at that waterfall would make it attractive for tourists. Fortunately it is relatively near US-2 and only several miles northwest of Bewabic State Park. That site deserves review of public consideration because waterfalls are an understated tourism asset of the area.
- *Public or Private Meeting Rooms:* A modest local demand for meeting rooms is probably deferred to local motels in areas distant from Crystal Falls. But there may be a modest demand for attractive conference meeting rooms for local needs in an attractive, natural setting. It may well be a private facility with food service associated with local motels.
- *Public Industrial Park:* The most immediate need may be for a Township-sponsored industrial park as described in the land use section. The parks should have covenants assuring its principal use is for light industrial development.
- *Sanitary Sewer Availability:* Sewers do not require wholesale expansion. Incremental extensions of sanitary sewers – principally for new commercial west of the City – only needs to be added as new development projects are built.
- *Water Distribution:* Crystal Falls Township has a fine water system in place at this time. Expansion for that system may be needed, but it should be tied to financial feasibility with new customers. Improvements to the existing water system are now being implemented with



financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Act. The plan will replace, improve, construct and upgrade existing water lines and system components for both the North and South (Lind) Districts of the water system.

## OTHER PLAN ELEMENTS

The residents also directed the planning effort in other ways including these elements:

- Encourage intergovernmental cooperation on such common interests as sanitary sewers, electrical distribution systems, fire-fighting, ambulance service and other opportunities that may develop. The Upper Peninsula communities need to maximize cooperation to provide more efficient services, higher quality services and even additional services. Parochial activities can seriously limit opportunities and present a negative image to the surrounding areas.
- Although not a specific goal, the planning commission feels strongly that a newsletter should be sent to seasonal and year-round residents on the status of current planning activities and soliciting continuing input.
- Crystal Falls Township should review its zoning ordinances for changes to update pursuant to law changes, judicial decisions, life style changes and Township changes. Examples would be consideration of new Office Service Commercial and Industrial zoning districts.
- Additional regulation should be provided to strengthen the land use policies. These regulations and opportunities are most prominently in the zoning ordinance but can include other land use regulations, economic development incentives with grants (particularly from the USDA) and taxation alternatives from various state laws.
- Grants should be continually explored for economic development options, for parks and recreation, road improvements and for other grant opportunities.
- This agenda will keep Crystal Falls Township Planning Commission focused on the community's key needs and most attractive opportunities for the next five years. The State of Michigan requires – and it is a very important activity anyhow – to reexamine the master plan for needs five years hence. The planning commission must now focus its efforts to realize the intent



of the master plan.

The Township of Crystal Falls Master Plan will not happen without the commitment, fortitude and diligent work of Township leaders. But with such effort, the plan will meet the vision and goals of the residents as well as leaders of the Township.