

CITY OF

West Branch

M I C H I G A N

UP NORTH. DOWN HOME.



# Master Plan



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# West Branch Master Plan

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## West Branch City Council & Administration

Paul Frechette – Mayor  
Cathy Zimmerman – Council Member  
Michael Jackson – Council Member  
Lois Bergquist - Council Member  
Carol Adair - Council Member  
Ellen Pugh - Council Member  
Rusty Showalter - Council Member  
John Dantzer – City Manager  
Michelle Frechette – Treasurer  
Lori Ann Clover – Clerk

## Planning Commission

Corine Lucynski – Chair  
Robert David – Vice Chair  
Michael Jackson  
Yvonne DeRosa  
Joshua Erickson  
Kara Faching  
Rusty Showalter  
John Dantzer – Secretary/Zoning Administrator

## Consultants

2014 Master Plan: Lapham Associates  
2019 Master Plan Update: NEMCOG (Northeast Michigan Council of Governments)  
2024 Master Plan Update: NEMCOG (Northeast Michigan Council of Governments)





# CHAPTER

# 1

# PLANNING PROCESS



City of West Branch Master Plan

A Master Plan is an advisory guide that municipalities use to analyze the current state of the community and to plan for the future growth, development, and needs of the community. This document attempts to address this process by detailing the City of West Branch's current conditions and looks to plan for the future growth, development, and needs of this community.

The authority to develop the master plan is provided through the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, as amended. Public Act 33 of 2008 requires the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing before the final adoption of a master plan as well as when the Planning Commission alters, amends, or expands the scope of its master plan after its original adoption.

A master plan needs to be periodically evaluated and as necessary, updated to reflect significant changes in the village, development trends, and the public's desire for change. Updating this plan as things change or goals are accomplished should not be regarded as a weakness in this plan or planning effort. A master plan is a "living" document that needs to be used and modified regularly.

The master plan planning process gathers input from the public and various governmental entities to assist in addressing significant changes in the village that may result in modifications to previous planning efforts or to determine progress toward implementing the goals and policies outlined in previous planning efforts.

A Master Plan can generally be described by the following key characteristics:

- Future Oriented: The Plan concerns itself with long-range planning in guiding growth and land use needs. The plan is not only a picture of the community today, but a guide to how the community should evolve over the next five to ten years in response to growth.
- General: The plan establishes broad principles and policies to address future growth and land use needs.
- Comprehensive: The plan addresses all types of land uses and the practical geographic boundaries of each.
- A Plan: The land use plan is a tangible document, which consists of both text and maps, with maps typically illustrating the policies set forth within the text.

The purposes of the Master Plan are intended to preserve and create a community that is best for its residents and its neighbors. To achieve this, the Plan is written as an analysis of what the community has and a guide regarding how to use it when making land use decisions.

Master Plans serve to:

- Seek citizen input on needs and services.
- Provide an overall perspective of the land, how it is being used, and how it should be used in the future.
- Create a general statement of the goals and objectives of the community.
- Preserve the quality of life in the community.
- Promote public health, safety, and welfare for the region's citizens.
- Guide the use of limited resources and preservation in the most effective manner possible through clear and logical zoning decisions.

Master Plans do not have the force of law. As guides, they are intended to be referenced and kept current. The Future Land Use Plan is the key feature of the plan when making zoning decisions, capital improvement decisions, utility expansions, land divisions, and all decisions with neighboring communities. It is important to remember however, that as a guide, as opposed to an engineering tool, the maps contained in this document are not intended to be used to scale property lines, be a definitive source for tax purposes, or determine the exact boundaries of flood plains or wetlands, for example.

The Plan only has value if it is used, and it has value that is more ongoing if it is used in conjunction with all the other planning efforts that are going on in the City of West Branch and the surrounding communities. Coordinated planning helps each group leverage their individual funds, knowledge, and momentum toward an outcome.

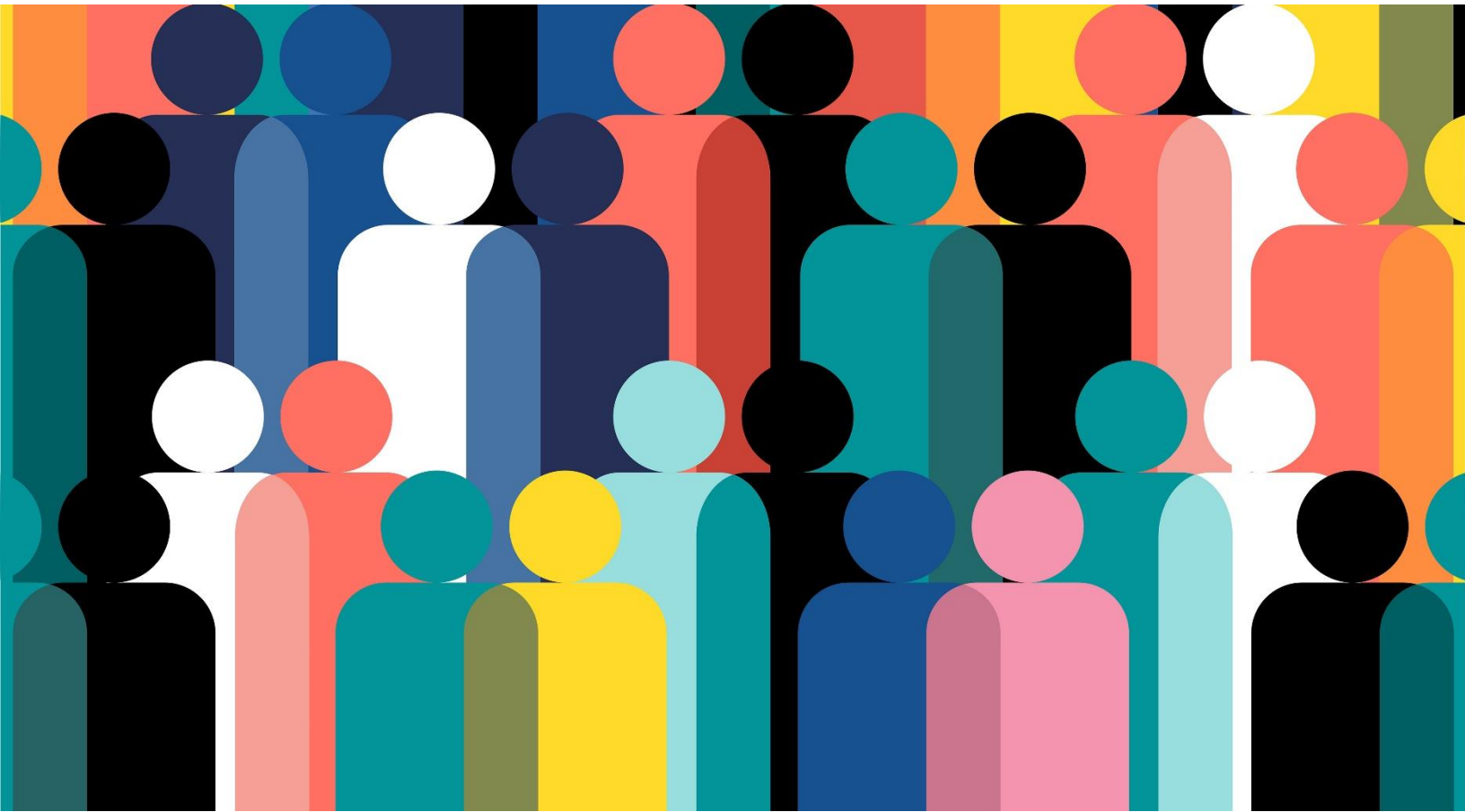
Some of these efforts are:

- West Branch Downtown Development Authority Plan
- Growth Analysis Planning Group
- The Ogemaw Economic Development Corporation
- The Brownfield Authority
- Redevelopment Ready Community

CHAPTER

2

# COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION



City of West Branch Master Plan

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## History

According to Scientific Publication No. 1, Report of Earthworks of Ogemaw County, Michigan, (Cranbrook Institute of Science, Fred Dustin, 1930), researchers discovered that “mound dwellers” or “mound builders” lived in the Rifle River area 11,000 to 15,000 years ago. In 1931, anthropologists working in the Selkirk area uncovered three Indian mound formations. These and other mounds discovered in Ogemaw County confirm that ancient mound dwellers were inhabitants of the area long before Christopher Columbus discovered America.



The abundance of wild game and fertile soils for berries and planted crops drew Chippewa Native Americans to the West Branch area and the first Europeans in the area were traders, clergymen, and soldiers. For nearly 150 years, little contact between Native Americans and the new European settlers took place in this interior of northern Lower Michigan. Forts, outposts, and other settlements stayed near the shores of the Great Lakes.

After 150 years, Europeans, by the benefit of guns, germs, whiskey, and sheer numbers came to dominate mid-Michigan. The heavy influx of settlers began after the Erie Canal opened in 1825 making migration to the Great Lakes area as easy, or easier than, the Ohio River route which had led to the settlement of the lower Midwest much sooner than Michigan. This new immigration from the Northeast is evident in the numbers of New Englanders and New Yorkers who were early settlers in the area.

The magnificent white pines that graced the land in West Branch stood untouched until 1871. However, having felled the forests further south, lumbermen began their trek north from the Bay City and Saginaw areas. Their progress was closely linked to the building of railroads. Railroads were a necessity since inland waterways were neither deep nor wide enough to provide dependable transportation. The railroad was built through West Branch between 1871 and 1872. The end of the lumbering era was around 1910 when catastrophic forest fires broke out during the dry summer. The fires were fed by dry-as-tinder brush and slashings left from the earlier lumbering activities. The fires were the end of the remaining old-growth timber.





### Ogemaw County Historic Timetable

- 1791 ~ part of Knox County
- 1803 ~ part of Wayne County, Indiana Territory
- 1810 ~ part of Michigan Territory
- 1818 ~ part of Michi Mackinac Territory
- 1819 ~ part of Oakland County
- 1852 ~ part of Mackinac County
- 1856 ~ part of Cheboygan County
- 1860 ~ part of Midland County
- 1867 ~ part of Iosco County
- 1875 ~ Ogemaw County is established
- 1885 ~ Village of West Branch is established

Originally called Springvale, the City of West Branch was eventually renamed to reflect its location – on the west branch of the Rifle River. West Branch had its beginnings in the early 1870s when the Jackson, Lansing, and Saginaw Railroad built a line to the area for transporting lumber. In 1873, the City was given a US Post Office. By 1874 the area had added a school, hotel, houses, train depot, and a doctor and lawyer. The hotel, originally called the Weidmans and Wright Hotel, was renamed the West Branch Hotel. Also in 1874, Edward Washington opened a general store. It was in his honor that Houghton Avenue was called Washington Avenue for a time. By 1884, the village included several stores, a bank, a mill, and a

newspaper. West Branch was formally organized as a village in 1885 and was reorganized as a fourth-class City in 1905. By 1920, 1,105 people living in the City of West Branch.



### Location

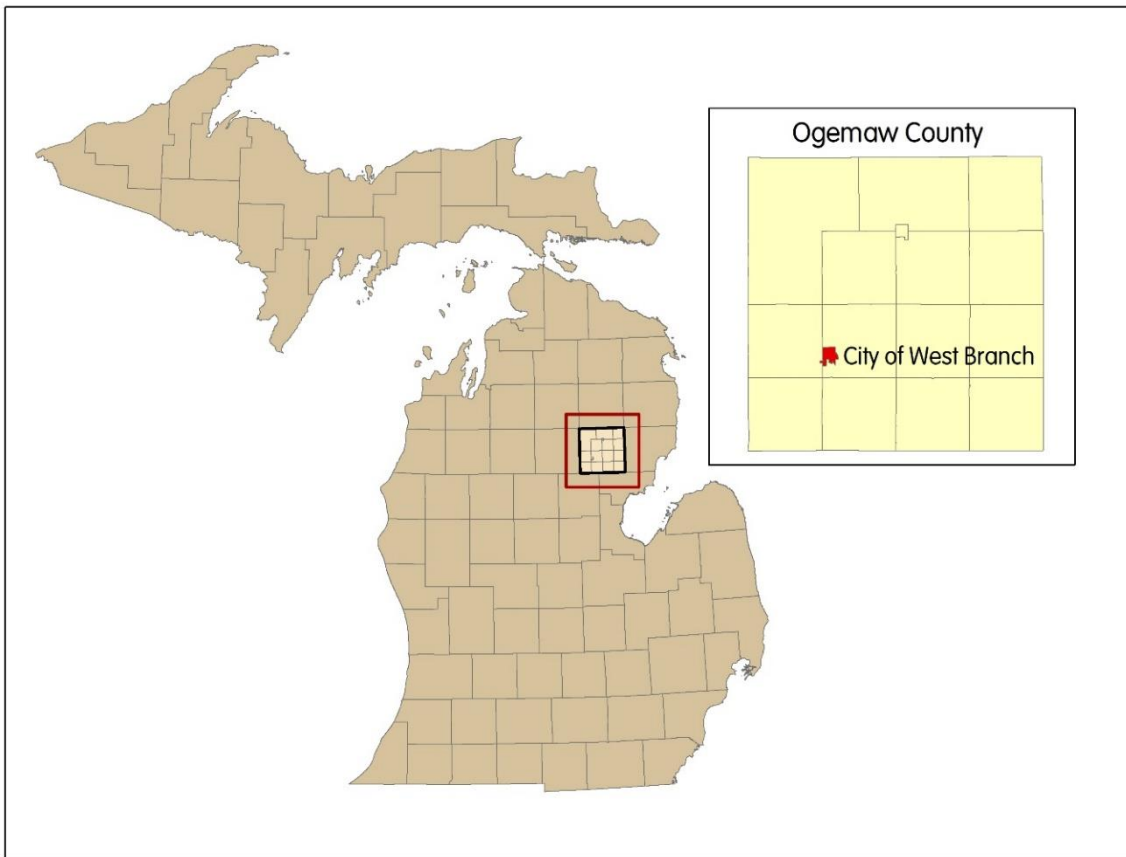
The City of West Branch is located at the junction of M-55 and M-30 in Ogemaw County and is the largest city in the county. It is the county seat and encompasses approximately 1.3 square miles. The northern edge of the City is bounded by Willow Street, Court Street runs along the western city limits, and Fairview Street along the east. The southern boundaries are irregular.

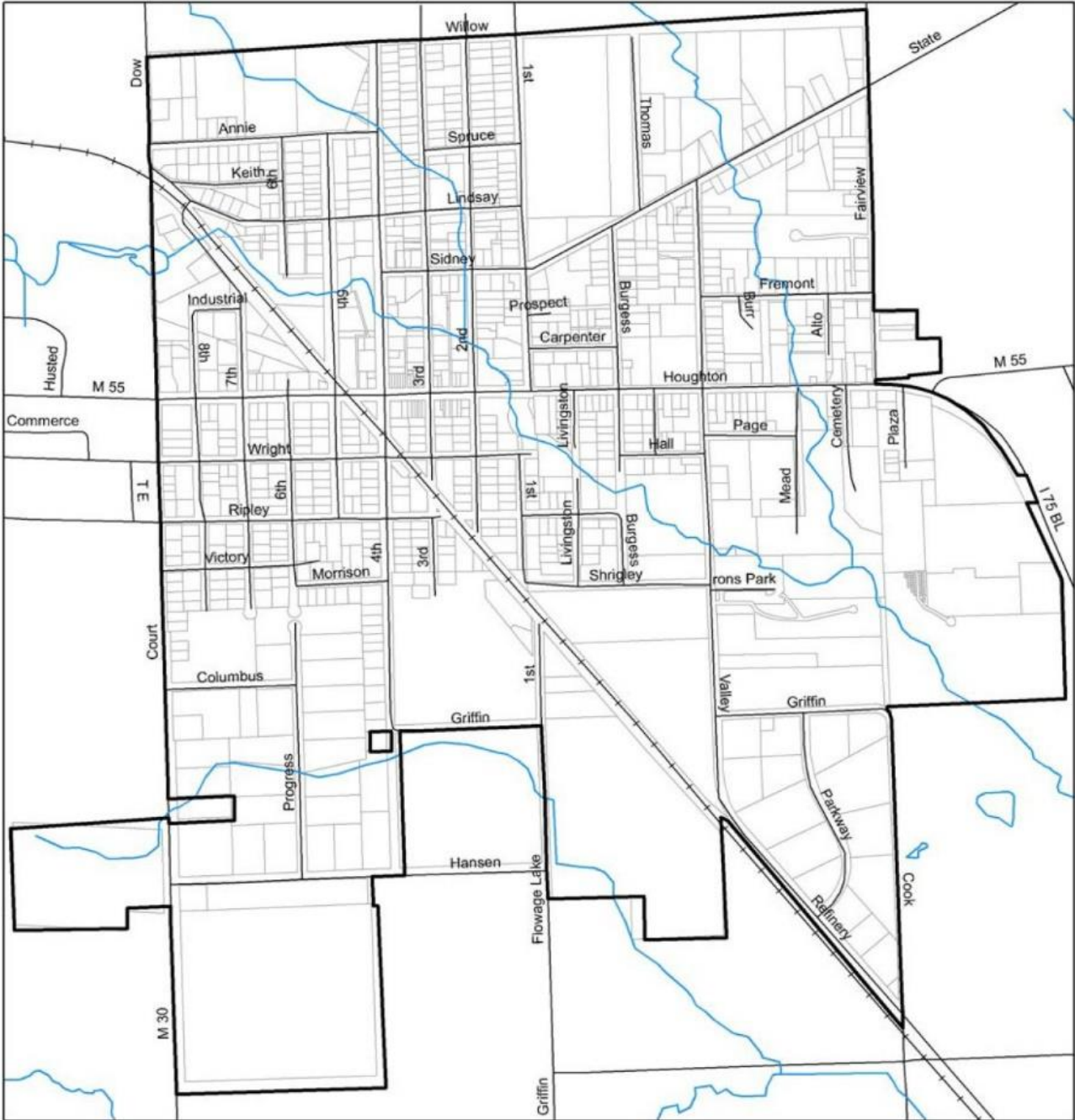
There are several smaller cities within 20 miles of West Branch. The distances to these and other larger Michigan cities are listed in the table on the right.

City	Distance from West Branch
Rose City	13.1 miles
St. Helen	13.8 miles
Skidway Lake	14.7 miles
Prescott	21.8 miles
Sterling	22.5 miles
Gladwin	26.6 miles
Mio	27.2 miles
Standish	27.9 miles
Saginaw	62.3 miles
Detroit	152.1 miles
Mackinaw Bridge	126.2 miles

### Transportation Routes

Interstate 75 Business Loop (BL I-75) runs east-west through the center of West Branch on M-55 (Houghton Ave). The loop uses a portion of the former M-76 and the current M-55. M-30 (Court St.) runs along the western border of the City, north-south. Two I-75 interchanges provide access to the City of West Branch, Exits 212 and 215.





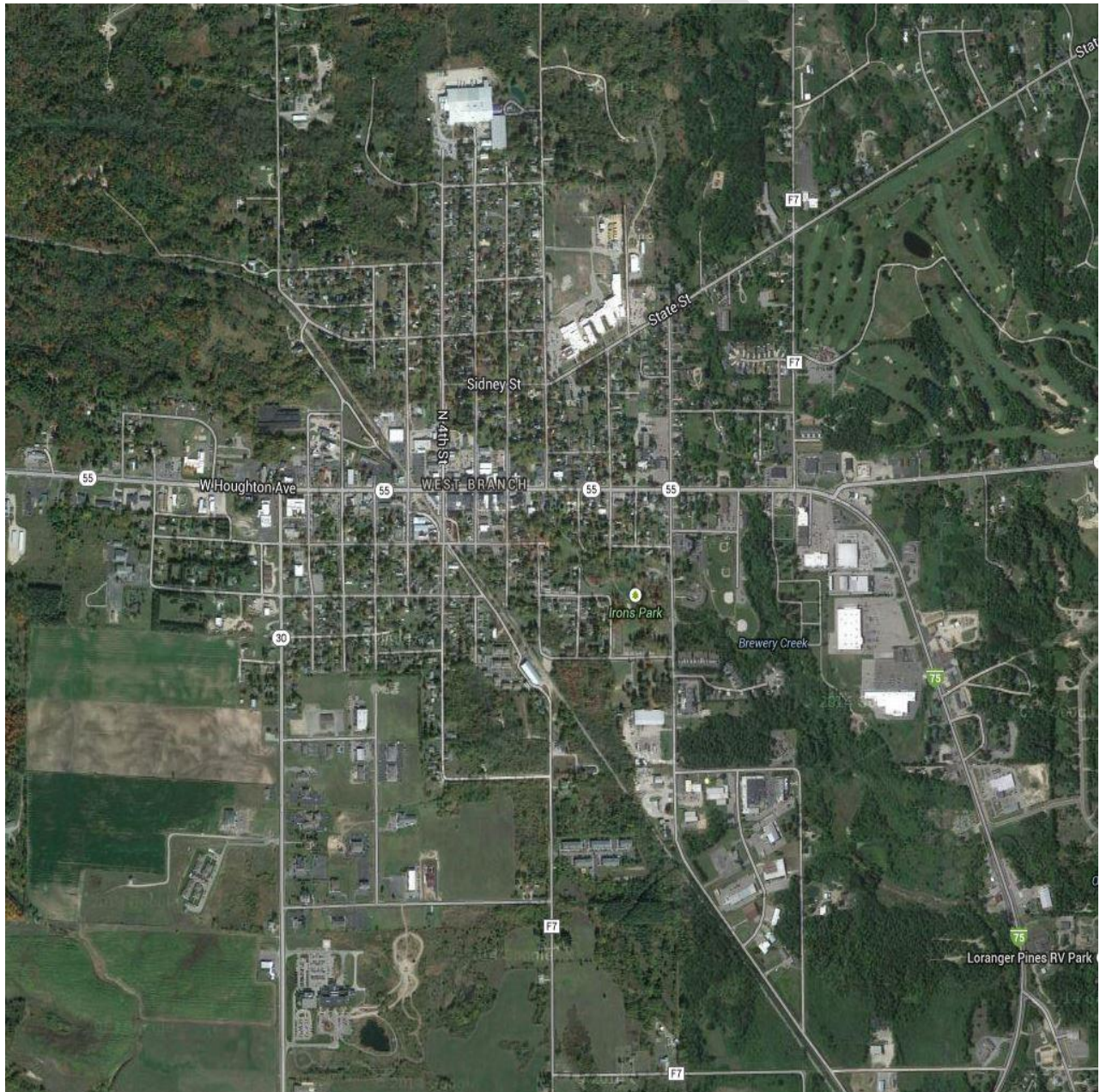
Most of the roads within the city limits are paved. There remain, however, a few dirt roads, the east end of Willow Street for example. Both Houghton (M-55) and Court (M-30) carry substantial amounts of traffic.

The I-75 Business Loop Market Study and Plan Transportation Review and Report has identified average daily traffic volumes, crash statistics, and road capacities and speed limits through West Branch and the corridor. While it is not necessary to repeat this work here, it is worth noting that the MDOT 2018 Annual Average Daily Traffic Report estimates counts of 13,442 between the westerly city limits to Fifth Street



and 15,204 from Fifth Street to easterly city limits. Commercial traffic on M-55 from the western to eastern city limits is 1,154 vehicles per day. Traffic volumes on Court Street total 5,674 vehicles per day from the hospital north to M-55.

The Corridor Plan has isolated vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic issues to study. Of these concerns, many access management, vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic-related recommendations emerged and are detailed as part of that study. Those that impact the City of West Branch most are expressed in goals in this plan.



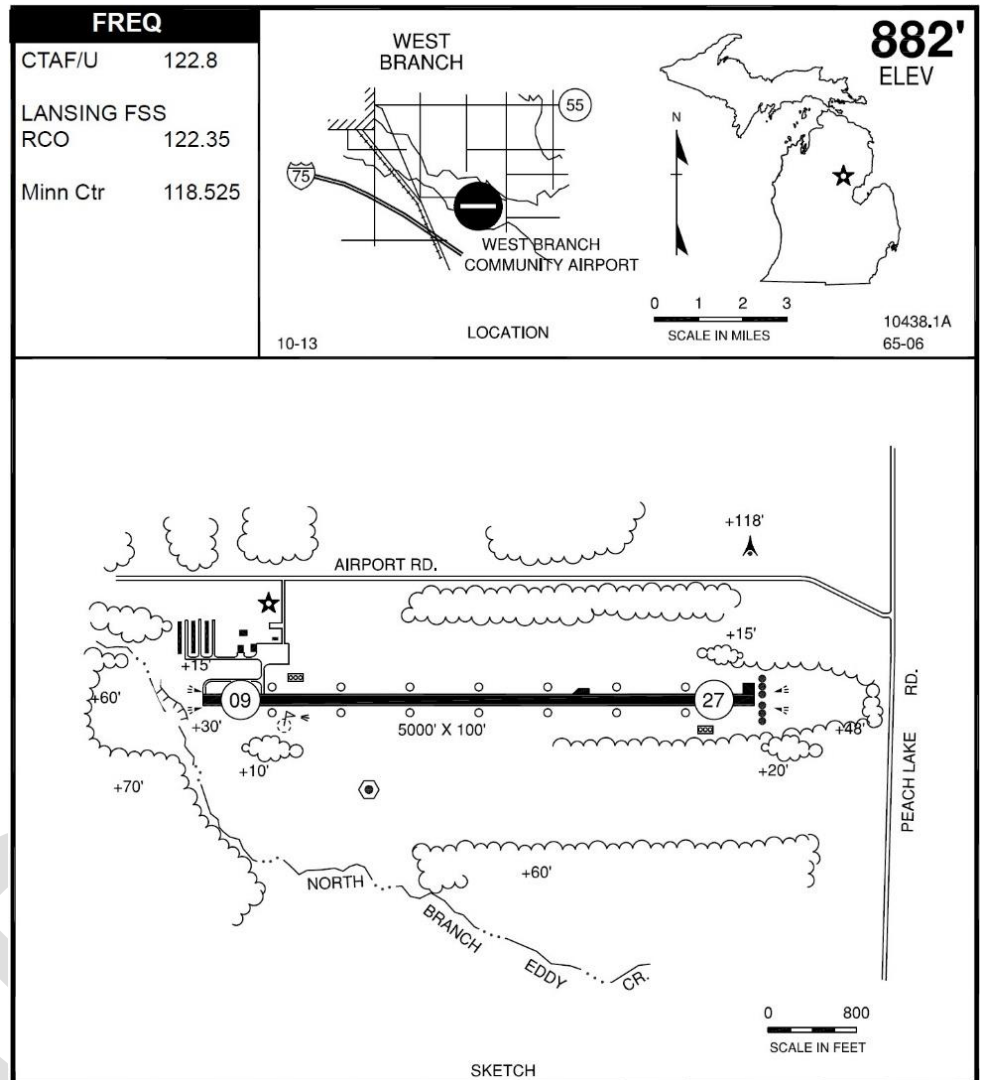
A community airport, three miles southeast of the City, serves private airplanes. The airport has a lighted 5,000-foot asphalt runway and offers fuel, hangars, and tie-downs. The airport has an attendant during normal business hours and by appointment during non-business hours. An airport terminal building offers visitors additional airport services. Bus service by Ogemaw Public Transit Organization serves the area with a demand/response for the City. Additionally, the area is served by freight shipping, especially as there is a United Parcel Shipping service office in the Industrial Park.

The City is bisected by the old Jackson, Lansing, and Saginaw Railroad line running from the

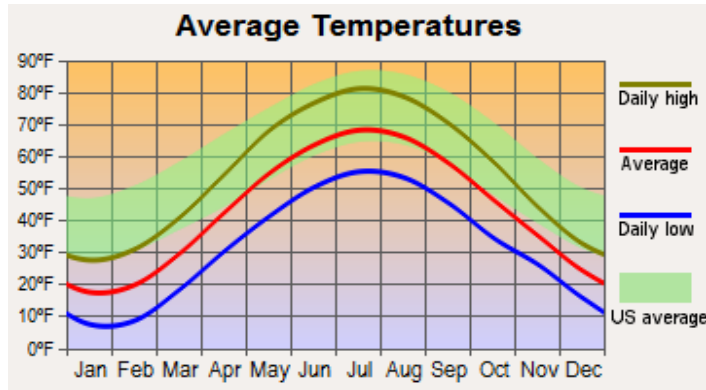
southeast corner to the northwest corner of the City. This rail line runs from Gaylord to the north to Bay City and from there connects with railway lines across the southern part of the state. Lake State Railway freight trains use this rail several times a week.

### Utilities

The City is served by a municipal water and sewer system. Concerns over water contamination led to the need to construct additional treatment facilities and modify some aspects of the distribution network. Currently, there is one water tower in the City, the famous smiley face, and there are plans to begin construction on a second tower in late 2024 – early 2025. The City also has full cable and cellular service provided by private companies.

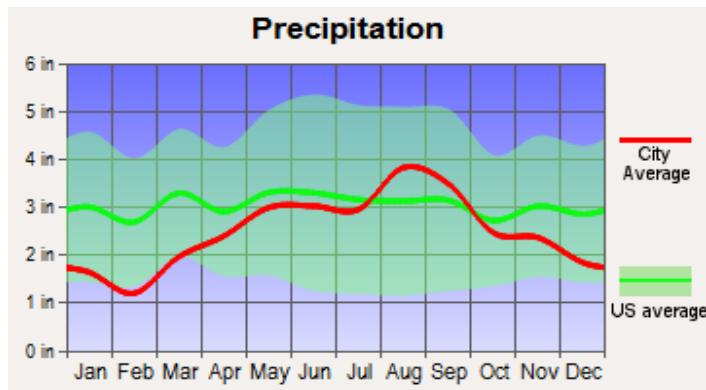




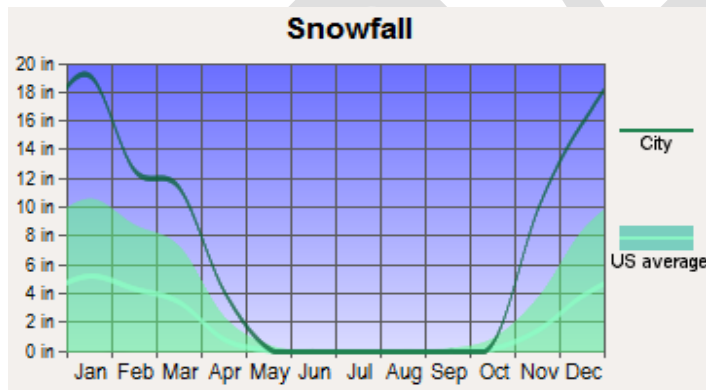


## Climate

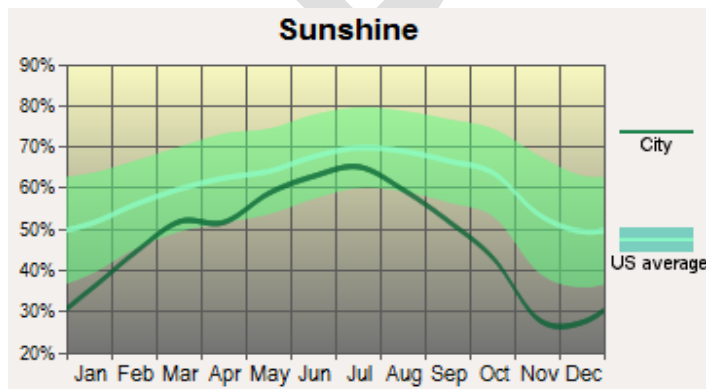
The temperature in West Branch ranges from a daily maximum of 28°F in January to 81.5°F in July. The lowest daily minimum temperature of the year is usually recorded in January and is 8°F. The average annual temperature for the area is 55.6°F.



Total annual rainfall is just over 30 inches. August tends to have the highest amount of rainfall with an average of almost 4 inches. However, May, June, July, and September have mean rainfall amounts of approximately 3 inches or more each month.



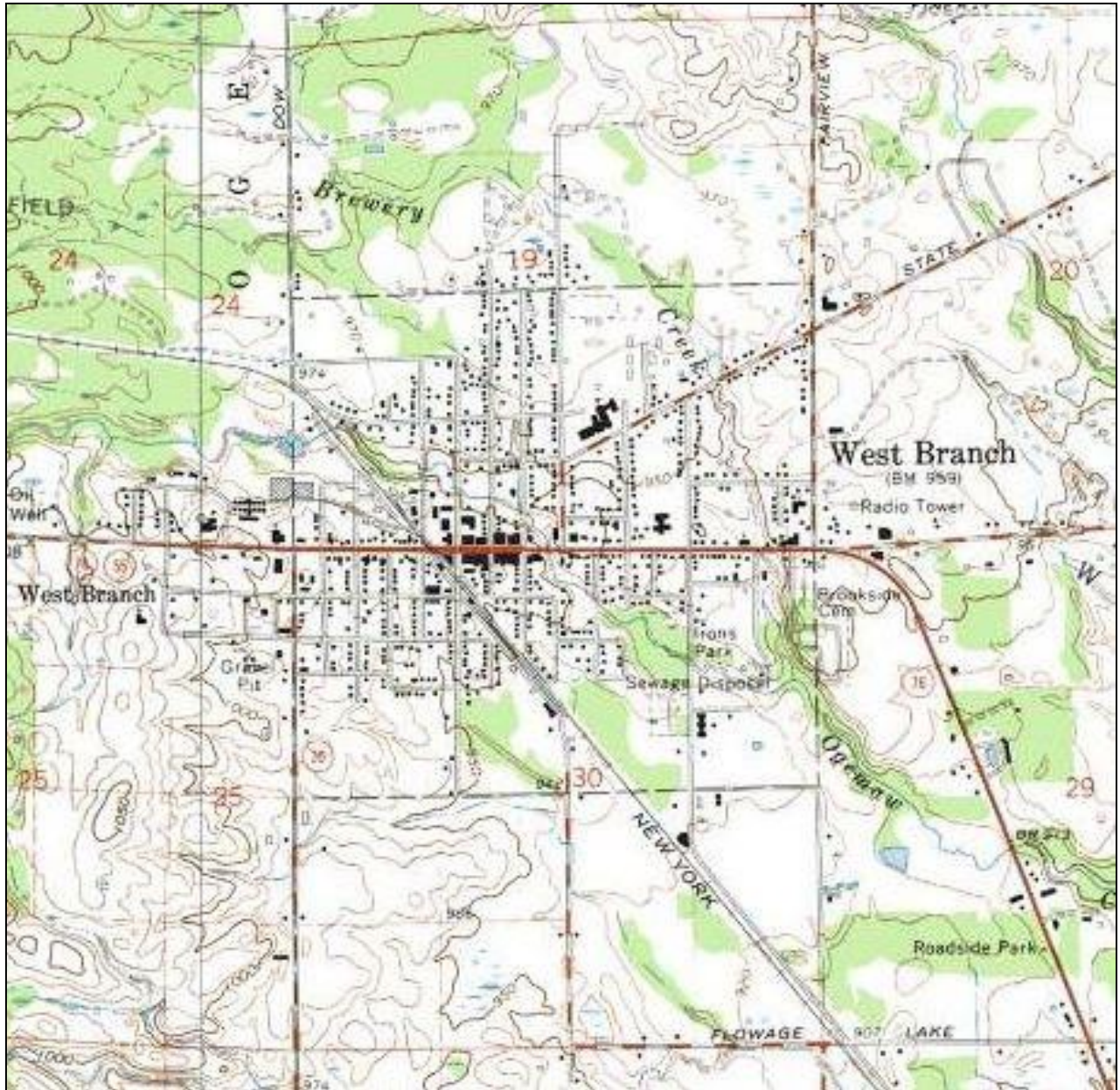
The variation in climate and four distinct seasons make West Branch and the region desirable for water, biking, and other summer sports as well as snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing in the winter. These activities draw tourists and visitors to the area, accounting for much of the seasonal fluctuations in population in the City and the increase in the number of workers associated with the Accommodation and Service industries.



Normally, January has the most amount of snowfall with an average of 13.2 inches. The next highest snowfall month is December with 11 inches. Both January and February have the highest amount of snow cover with average depths of 7 and 8 inches, respectively. The total annual snowfall is almost 50 inches.

## Topography

The average elevation of the City of West Branch is 955 ft. There is little elevation change in the City with several sections at 950 ft. while there are portions at the northwest, northeast, and southwest corners that are 970-980 ft. above sea level.

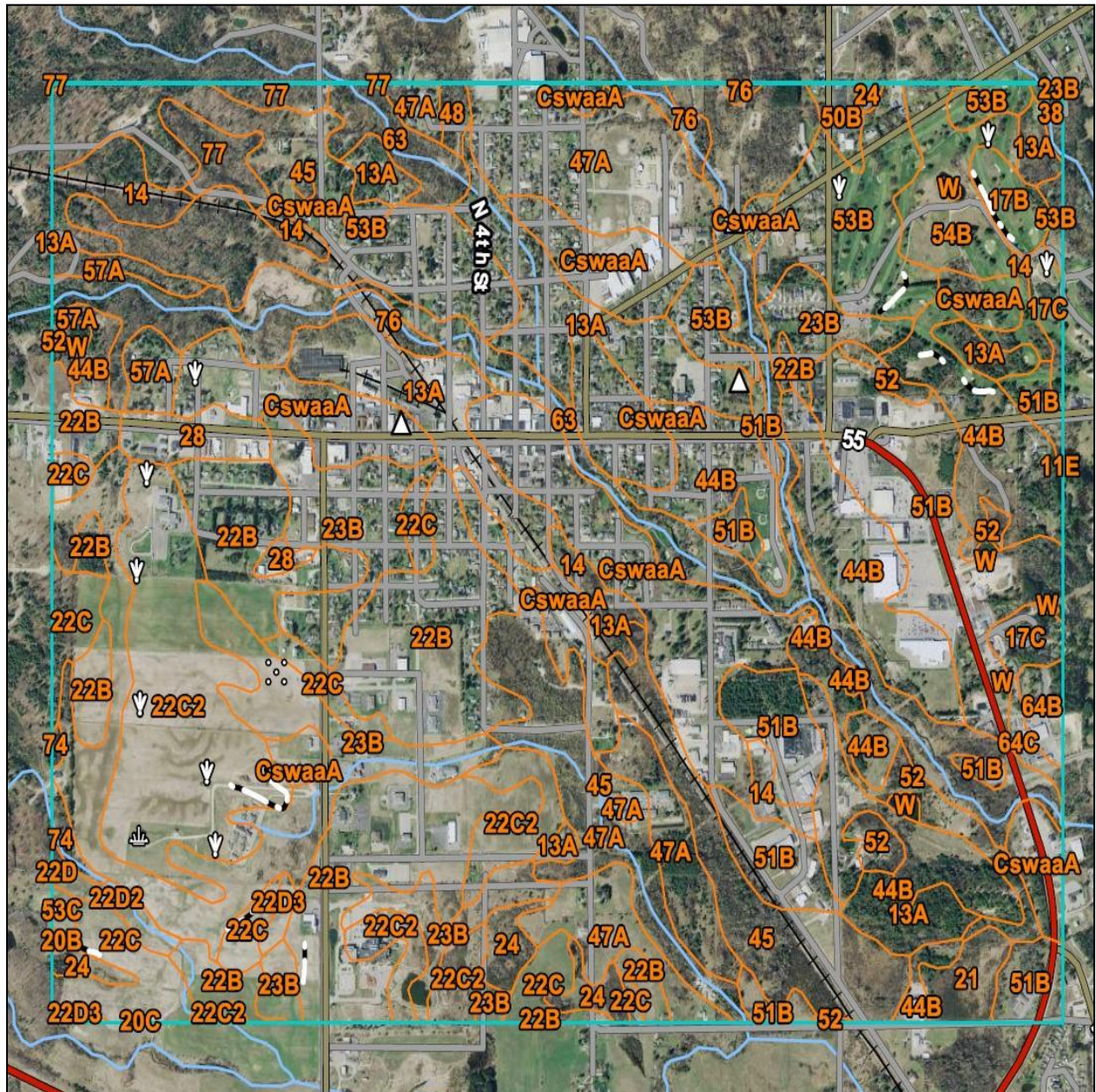


USGS Quad



### Soils

Approximately 56% of the soils in the City of West Branch are considered to be some type of sand and therefore percolate well and have low runoff potential. Sandy loam comprises 34%, which gives these areas a moderate run-off potential. The southwest corner of the City has a very high run-off potential in the areas where the soils are mostly loam. Run-off classifications by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are based on assessments of soils, slope, climate, and vegetation cover.



Ogemaw County, Michigan (MI129)			
Map Unit Symbol	Map Unit Name	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
11E	Rubicon sand, 18 to 35 percent slopes	0.2	0.0%
13A	Au Gres sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	127.9	6.3%
14	Roscommon mucky sand	36.5	1.8%
17B	Graycalm sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	10.8	0.5%
17C	Grayclam sand, 0 to 18 percent slopes	15.1	0.7%
20B	Montcalm loamy sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	0.9	0.0%
20C	Montcalm loamy sand, 6 to 18 percent slopes	0.0	0.0%
21	Histosols and Aquents, ponded	12.0	0.6%
22B	Nester fine sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes	194.0	9.5%
22C	Nester fine sandy loam, 6 to 12 percent slopes	62.7	3.1%
22C2	Nester loam, 6 to 12 percent slopes, eroded	7.2	0.4%
22D	Nester fine sandy loam, 12 to 18 percent slopes	0.5	0.0%
22D2	Nester loam, 12 to 18 percent slopes, eroded	7.2	0.4%
22D3	Nester clay loam, 12 to 25 percent slopes, severely eroded	4.6	0.2%
23B	Kawkawlin loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	177.6	8.7%
24	Sims loam	18.4	0.9%
28	Udorthents, loamy, nearly level	17.6	0.9%
38	Tonkey sandy loam	3.1	0.2%
44B	Croswell sand, loamy substratum, 0 to 3 percent slopes	163.9	8.1%
45	Wheatley mucky loamy sand	106.5	5.2%
47A	Gladwin sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	113.8	5.6%
48	Epoufette mucky sand	3.8	0.2%
50B	Menominee sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	6.4	0.3%
51B	Iosco sand, 0 to 4 percent slopes	145.8	7.2%
52	Brevort mucky loamy sand	32.9	1.6%
53B	Manistee loamy sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	74.4	3.7%
53C	Manistee loamy sand, 6 to 12 percent slopes	2.0	0.1%
54B	Allendale loamy sand, 0 to 4 percent slopes	32.2	1.6%
57A	Belding sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes	16.6	0.8%
63	Evert sand	156.2	7.7%
64B	Melita sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	7.8	0.4%
64C	Melita sand, 6 to 18 percent slopes	4.2	0.2%
74	Cathro muck	4.5	0.2%
76	Lupton muck, 0 to 1 percent slopes	12.5	0.6%
77	Tawas mucky peat	17.5	0.9%
CswaaA	Croswell sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	311.1	15.3%
W	Water	5.1	0.3%
<b>Totals for Area of Interest</b>		<b>2,035.2</b>	<b>100%</b>

Soil composition and drainage are important considerations for the construction of basements for houses. In West Branch, 85% of the soils are unfavorable for basements without major soil reclamation or special design required. The remaining soils are moderately favorable for basement use with special planning or design. These soils are located in the southwest corner of the City.

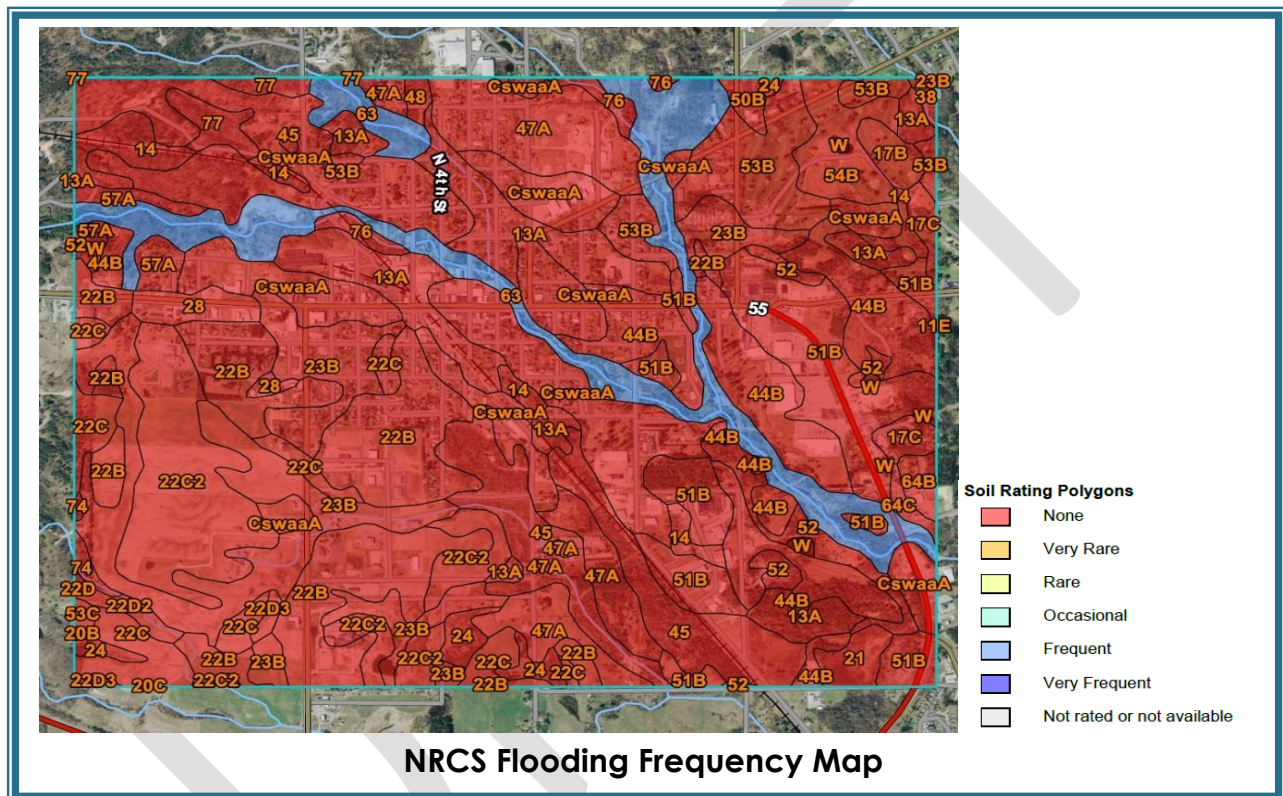
Ponding is defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as standing water in a closed depression. Unless a drainage system is installed, water is removed only by percolation, transpiration,



or evaporation. “Frequent” ponding means that it occurs in the area more than once in two years. Areas considered to have frequent ponding are located in the southeast and northeast quadrants.

The river and creeks are banked by Evart sand and are considered to be areas of frequent flooding. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) “frequent” means that flooding is likely to occur often under normal weather conditions. This means the chance of flooding is more than 50% in any year but less than 50% in all months of any year.

The rest of the areas in the City are not considered to be flood-prone. The chance of flooding in these areas is near 0 percent in any year, with flooding occurring less than once in 500 years.



The Federal Emergency Management Administration has not mapped the City of West Branch so no federally produced flood maps are available. Soil analysis is being used in this Master Plan to discuss flood-prone areas.

## Geology

The geologic history and character of the City sets the tone for every other resource and land use issue. The geologic processes that gave rise to the land of the City, provided its elevations, shaped its contours, deposited its ancient deep underground deposits of oil and gas, formed its hills, carved its river valleys, and laid down the parent materials for its soils. Rich gravel deposits along the face of the large West Branch-Port Huron Moraine bless the region with extractable resources but also leave scars caused by that extraction. Geology is divided into bedrock and surface geology.



### Bedrock Geology

The bedrock geology of the City of West Branch is that of the Michigan Basin: sedimentary rock of limestone, dolomite, shale, and sandstone laid down in ancient seas of the Paleozoic Age up to 500 million years ago. Beneath these sedimentary rock deposits is an ancient igneous rock and above them is a thick layer of glacial drift, varying in thickness and type, extending 1,500 feet below ground surface. Several strata of the sedimentary rock deposits beneath the City are rich in hydrocarbons: oil, gas, and other petrochemicals.

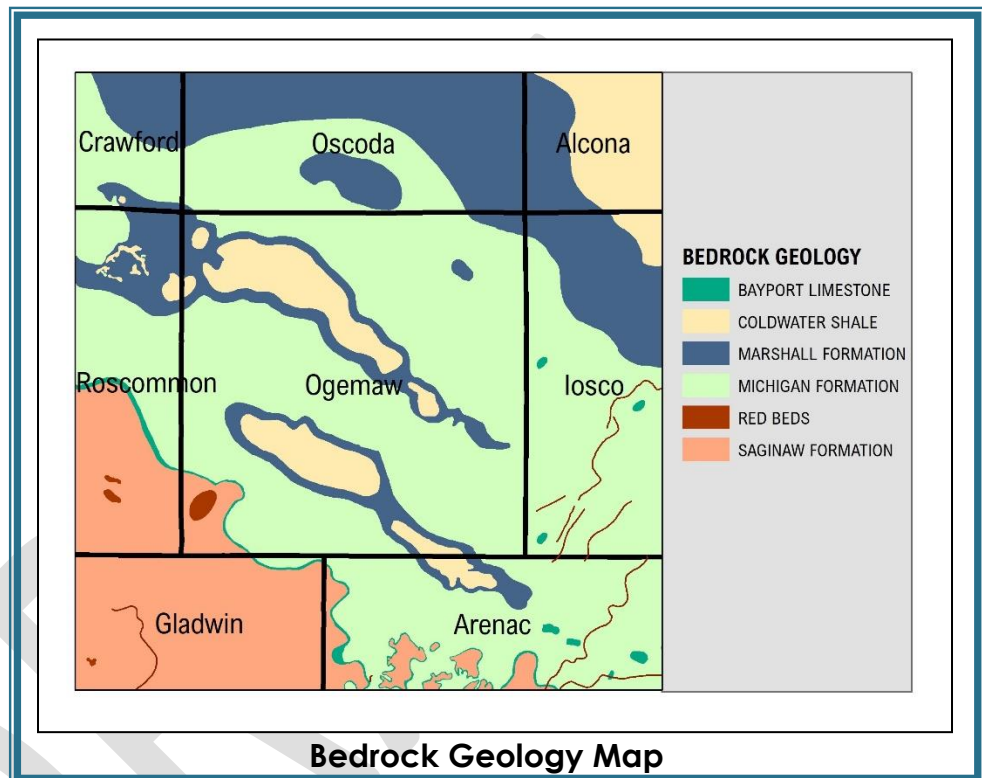
Some of the earliest oil developments in the state occurred in the local, relatively shallow Dundee formation during the 1930's. This field, and one in Oil City, Michigan, east of Mt. Pleasant, provided much of the initial fuel for the early expansion of Michigan's auto industry. Many of the wells in the Dundee Formation yield crude oil and "sour gas" hydrogen sulfide. This is not only foul-smelling but highly toxic and can be

dangerous when concentrated. In many places in the region, the gases associated with hydrocarbon mercaptans often lend a tell-tale "oil field" smell to the local still, summer air.

Many of the primary oil reserves of the Dundee Formation have been depleted. For the past few decades, much of the activity in this field has been in secondary and tertiary recovery, including cleaning old wells, injecting water to purge the remaining oil and related activities. The development of facilities to separate brine and water from gas and oil was a major activity during the past 20 years, but this has proved to be a marginal enterprise and is not expected to be a major aspect of hydrocarbon development and utilization in the future.

During the late 1950s, deeper deposits of more valuable natural gas were discovered in the Niagran reef formations. The subterranean faults and folds in the deep sedimentary rock formation serve to trap and concentrate both gas and oil. These have been extensively studied by the tools of seismology, and while some exploration continues, most of the patterns of potentially rich deposits and concentration are quite well-known and are being actively extracted.

Pipelines, storage tanks, and well sites are apparent throughout much of the region. Both local and

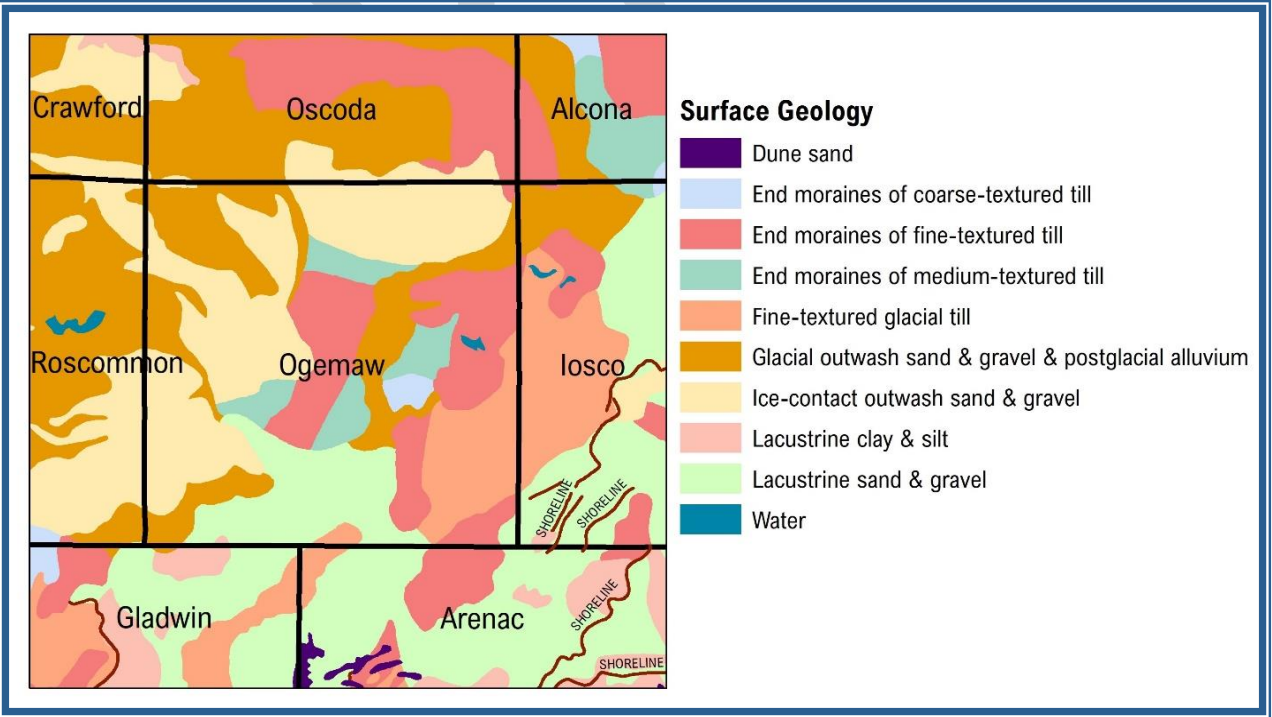


large-capacity pipelines traverse the region in many areas. Oil and gas remain a major industry; however, from a planning point of view, there is often a negative legacy left by this industry from its earlier days. A most notable instance is the abandoned refinery site located southeast of the City along Old M-76 which has been rehabilitated into the Manufactured Mulch operation. In addition, throughout the region, there has been the long-term impact of leaking wells, sludge pits, sour gas flares, abandoned sites, service roads, and a host of other hydrocarbon-related activities. The lands of the region have continued to be basically healthy in the face of these historic uses that attest to the resiliency of Mother Nature. Assuring responsible cleanup and better regulation in the future is a significant planning issue.

One of our most valuable resources for the future is the immense supply of fresh groundwater available in the region. Protection of this resource from subsurface contamination is a high priority. A related issue is the severance of mineral rights from surface ownership of land parcels. Because of the value of the oil and gas that may lie beneath any given parcel of land, numerous land transactions have occurred in which the surface ownership was sold but the mineral rights were owned by parties interested in developing the resources. This is a common practice in many places including West Branch.

**Surface Geology**

The surface geology of the City is glacial in origin. The depth of the “till plain” zone varies from about 850 to 1050 feet. This more fertile and gently rolling landscape was overridden by glacial ice. The deposits are the “bed load” of the glacier, a mixture of all sizes of soil components from clay to boulders. This type of deposit is called a “till plain.” Because glacial meltwaters did not wash out the finer, more fertile soils, these soils are inherently fertile and have a high capacity to absorb and hold nutrients (cation-exchange capacity) for productive agriculture. Drainage can be a problem in lower areas, but with tilling, the till-plain areas can be highly productive. These are also pleasant areas for low-density rural residential development.

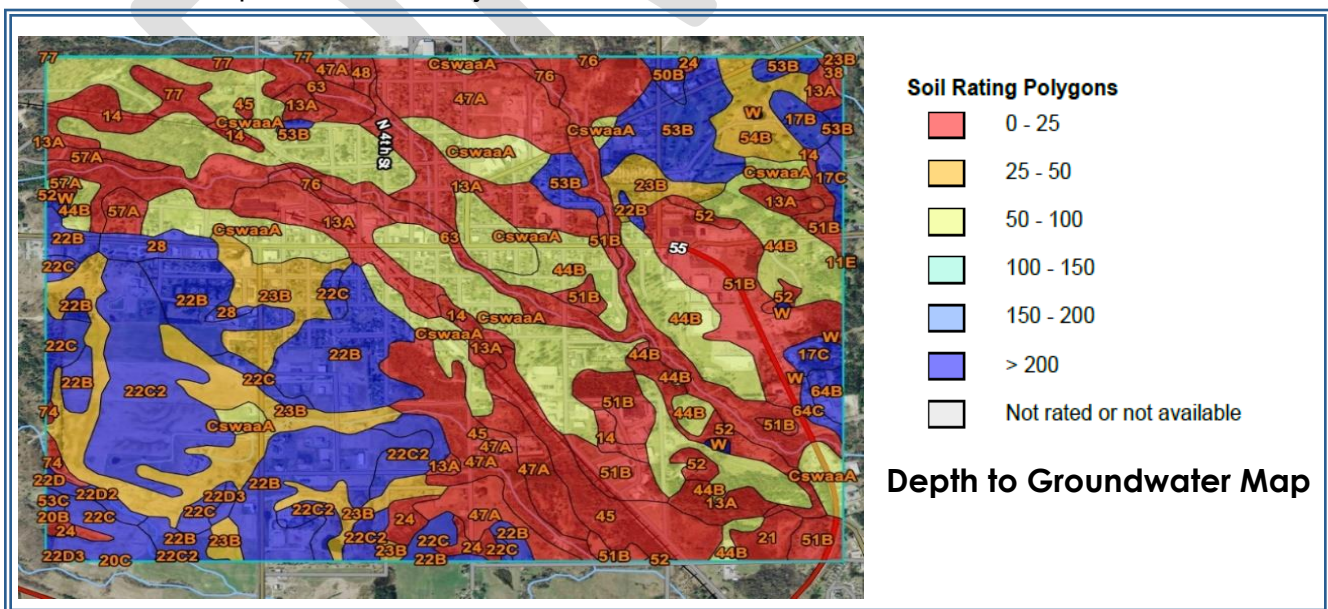


## Surface Water and Groundwater

The manner in which the glacial deposits were laid down has resulted in an abundant supply of fresh water for the City of West Branch. The sandy soils above “Long Hill” receive a constant replenishment of water from melting snow and rainfall. This highly porous soil allows the water to infiltrate, recharging the underground aquifer with clean water filtered through hundreds of feet of pure sand and gravel. Layers of clay and silt bedded within the glacial deposition formed by the pattern of ice movement and melting cap this rich aquifer and create the conditions for springs and artesian wells wherever the clay cap is penetrated. Wetlands, headwater seeps and springs, ponds, and artesian wells abound along the base of the moraine, extending southward even beyond the City of West Branch. Because the glacial drift contains limestone and other mineral-rich rock, the City’s groundwater tends to be “hard” and somewhat high in iron.

Some of the streams that originate in nearby townships are recharged by infiltration over a more extensive area than the political boundaries of the City. Some of the headwater streams of the Rifle River system have been shown to have a greater base flow output than the surface input to their watershed area (MDEQ, Geological Survey Division). The only way this is possible is for the underground recharge area to extend beyond the boundaries of the surface watershed. Because of impermeable layers of clay sloping southward and southeastward from beyond the top of Ogemaw Hills, it is highly probable that the City gets groundwater from the surrounding areas of Klacking, Foster, West Branch, and Ogemaw Townships.

The City of West Branch is in the Au Gres–Rifle River Water Shed. The west branch of the Rifle River runs through the City from the northwest corner to the southeast corner. Ogemaw Creek joins the main river in the northwest quadrant of the City. Other small branches enter off the main river. Approximately 18% of the City’s land borders waterways. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) defines a water table as a saturated zone in the soil that lasts for more than a month. The majority of the City’s land is between 50 and 100 cm above the water table; while 20% of the land, notably in the northeast and southwest quadrants of the City is more than 200 cm from the water table.





## Wetlands

The National Wetland Inventory classifies several areas in the City of West Branch as wetlands. These areas are designated on the adjoining map. Most of these wetlands are categorized as Freshwater Forested Shrub and are predominately along the riverbanks toward the edges of the City, most notably in the southeast, northwest, and northeast corners. (Note, not all of the river/creek banks in the City are considered to be wetlands.) Additionally, there are wetlands close to the southeastern section of the railroad tracks and a large area just north of Griffin Road bounded by First and Fourth Streets.



## Community Services

### Police

The West Branch City Police Department is comprised of 1 Chief and 4 patrolmen. The Department covers just over 1 square mile of area. West Branch is the county seat of Ogemaw County, there is a large influx of people coming into the City every day. The Department makes every attempt to utilize the latest equipment and technology to provide the citizens of West Branch with the best protection and service possible.

The City Police Office is located at 130 Page Street, adjacent to the West Branch Little League Complex. Phone: 989-345-2627, Fax: 989-345-0083. The office is open Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. For convenience, if no one is at the office, a phone is located just outside the door in a red box. By picking up the phone you will be connected directly to Central Dispatch. They will contact a City Officer for you and have them respond to your location.

### Fire

The Ogemaw County on-call Fire Department serves five townships within Ogemaw County, including the City of West Branch. The department also provides mutual aid throughout the entire county. Their commitment to preserving life and property is unwavering, as they tackle fires, provide medical assistance, and execute rescue missions.

### Emergency Medical Services

The City of West Branch benefits from Ambulance services provided by the Ogemaw County EMS Authority. This esteemed organization operates four full-time Advanced Life Support Ambulances across Ogemaw County, stationed strategically at three locations: West Branch, Rose City, and Mills Township. Annually, the Authority responds to approximately 5800 calls, ranging from emergency

911 responses to interfacility transfers and event standbys.

The West Branch center, situated within the city limits at 2872 Hansen Rd, serves as a vital operational hub, ensuring prompt and professional emergency medical assistance to the residents of West Branch and surrounding areas. In addition to emergency response, the Ogemaw County EMS Authority is dedicated to ongoing education for both staff and the public, furthering their commitment to enhancing community health and safety.

## Medical Centers

The City of West Branch presents a range of options for accessing medical services. MyMichigan Medical Center of West Branch, affiliated with Michigan Medicine, the academic medical center of the University of Michigan, is conveniently located at 2463 South M-30. This facility, boasting 88 beds, offers a comprehensive suite of services including a fully equipped Emergency Department and Obstetrics Birthing Center.

Furthermore, MyMichigan Health Park, situated at 335 East Hought Avenue, provides general medical services and Urgent Care facilities, operating seven days a week to accommodate the needs of patients.

In cases of emergency medical requirements, McLaren West Branch Emergency Department operated as a division of McLaren Bay Region, is positioned at 2110 M-76. Equipped with 10 fully private patient treatment rooms, this facility stands ready to address urgent medical situations with efficiency and professionalism.

## Schools

### West Branch-Rose City Area Schools

The City of West Branch is part of the West Branch – Rose City Area School District. Within the district, there are a total of five schools, each playing a vital role in shaping the educational landscape. Notably, within the city limits of West Branch, two prominent institutions stand: Surline Elementary School and Surline Middle School, both situated at 147 State Street. Surline Elementary School caters to students from kindergarten to 4th grade, while Surline Middle School accommodates students from 5th to 8th grade, with the inclusion of 6th to 8th grade students from Rose City.

In addition to these city-based institutions, Rose City hosts its own elementary school, offering education from kindergarten to 5th grade, located at 960 South M33. Notably, bridging the communities of West Branch and Rose City, Ogemaw Heights High School stands as a beacon of secondary education, serving students from 9th to 12th grade, situated at 960 South M33.

Outside the immediate confines of West Branch, yet within the jurisdiction of the school district, lies the Alternative Education Academy of Ogemaw County, located at 2479 M-76. This institution caters to students in grades 6 through 12, providing an online forum tailored to individuals for whom traditional classroom settings may not be conducive to optimal learning.

Collectively, these educational establishments underscore the commitment of the West Branch – Rose City Area School district to providing diverse and comprehensive educational opportunities to its student populace, fostering academic excellence and personal growth within the community.



# Demographics

## Population and Age Distribution

The population of the City of West Branch has changed little for almost eight decades. In 1940, the population was 1,962 and, in 2022, the population was 2,198, a 12% increase over the 82 years.

When compared to the population of Ogemaw County during the 1900s, West Branch seems to have matched a similar growth pattern up until the 1960s. From the 1970s through 2000, Ogemaw County’s rate of growth was ahead of the City of West Branch. Predictions of substantial population growth from the 1970s, based on an anticipated influx of people from the Detroit area, have not been realized. Additionally, there was a 6.6% drop in population from the 1970s to the 1980s. This drop was attributed to the economic recession of the times. By the 1990s, the population was back up to 1,914 and has been increasing slightly since that time.

Ogemaw County Population				
Municipality	2000 Population	2010 Population	2016 Population	2022 Population
<b>City of West Branch</b>	<b>1,926</b>	<b>2,139</b>	<b>2,269</b>	<b>2,198</b>
Churchill Township	1,603	1,713	1,495	1,660
Cumming Township	796	698	689	731
Edwards Township	1,390	1,413	1,443	1,367
Foster Township	821	843	790	817
Goodar Township	493	398	393	445
Hill Township	1,584	1,361	1,364	1,253
Horton Township	997	927	1,022	775
Klacking Township	617	614	588	685
Logan Township	581	551	532	538
Mills Township	4,005	4,291	4,172	4,003
Ogemaw Township	1,118	1,223	1,080	1,103
Richland Township	956	914	1,021	962
Rose Township	1,409	1,368	1,206	1,135
Rose City	721	653	612	573
West Branch Township	2,628	2,593	2,427	2,575
Ogemaw County	21,645	21,699	21,103	20,820

*Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*

Age Distribution		
Age	Total	Sum
Under 5 years	3.9%	20.9%
5 to 9 years	4.3%	
10 to 14 years	7.0%	
15 to 19 years	5.7%	
20 to 24 years	8.1%	33.6%
25 to 29 years	6.1%	
30 to 34 years	5.6%	
35 to 39 years	9.6%	
40 to 44 years	4.2%	
45 to 49 years	6.4%	18.7%
50 to 54 years	4.0%	
55 to 59 years	3.4%	
60 to 64 years	4.9%	
65 to 69 years	7.3%	26.7%
70 to 74 years	5.9%	
75 to 79 years	4.2%	
80 to 84 years	3.1%	
85 years and over	6.2%	

*US Census Bureau 2017-2022 5-Year American Community Survey Estimates*

According to the 2022 ACS 5-year estimates, 46.8% of the City’s residents are male, and 53.2% are female. The age distribution of residents has remained almost the same from 1990 until the most current surveys. In general, the community seems quite balanced with 25.5% of the residents between the ages of 25 and 44, 20.9% under the age of 19, and 26.7% over the age of 65. In 1970, the median age for residents was 31.9 years, while the median age for Michigan was 26.3 years. By 2022, the median West Branch resident age was 39.8 years, closely matching the State median age of 39.9 years.

Almost all of the residents are of the white race 90.4%. The remaining 9.6% are Black, Asian, American Indian, or two or more races. One-third of the population comes from German origins. Other top ancestral nationalities are English, Irish, Dutch, Polish, and French.

# Social Characteristics

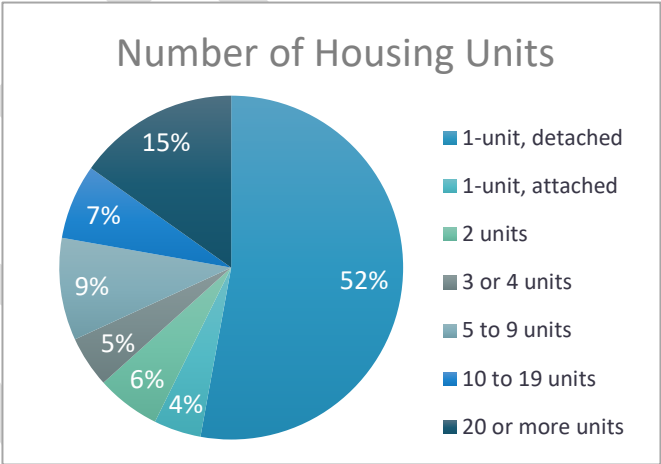
## Households

There were 978 households estimated in the 2022 ACS 5-Year estimates in the City of West Branch. Of these 978 households, 498 (50.9%) consider themselves family units. Family households are composed of married couples, both with and without children; single parents with children; and other related individuals. Nonfamilies are people who live alone or with people who are unrelated.

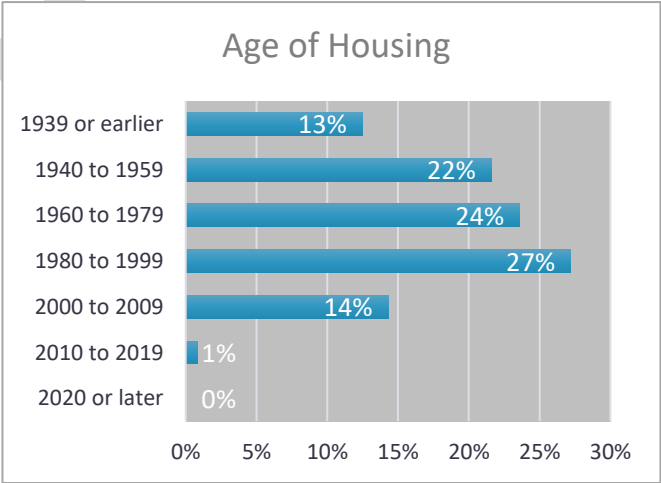
In 2022, 25.7% of households had children under the age of 18. Households with one or more people aged 60 and over totaled 46.3%. In 2022, the average household size was 2.06 persons. This is down from the 1970 average of 3.13 and the 1990 average of 2.34.

## Housing Units

In 2022, there were 1,136 housing units. Of these, 978 were occupied, and 158 (13.9%) were vacant. Owner-occupied housing accounted for 40.1% of the available housing units. Renters have a median monthly rent, including utilities and fuel costs (gross rent), of \$792 and account for approximately 59.9% of occupied housing. In the State overall, the percentage of rental-occupied housing units is 27.5%. The City of West Branch has two senior citizen apartment buildings. Single units account for 77.4% of the occupied housing units while multi-family units comprise 22.7%.



The median year the City’s housing units were built was 1980. That means that half of the City’s units were built before 1980, and 12.5% were built before 1940. There were 148 units built from 2000 to 2022. More evident are the condominiums on the east side of the City on Victorian Court and on Fairview close to Houghton. This change in the characteristics of newer housing units is representative of a constant, but aging, population, and smaller family size. Additionally, more people are choosing lifestyles and living units that require less maintenance.



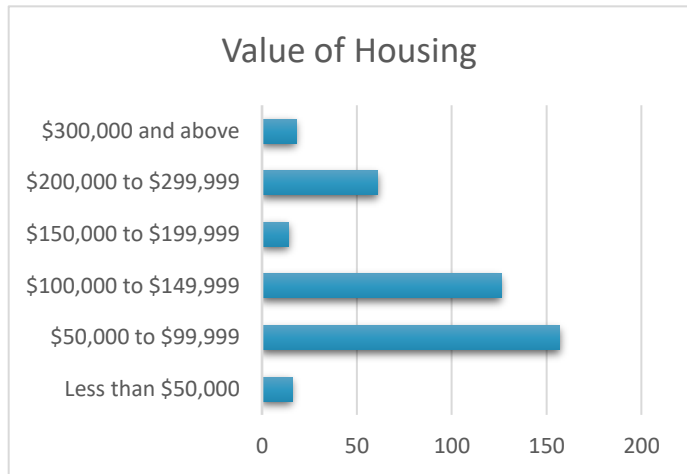
The median number of rooms for housing units in the City is 5.0. Only 15.3% of the housing has 3 rooms or less, while 43.3% of the housing has 4 or 5 rooms, and 41.4% has 6 or more rooms. Of the occupied housing, 98.8% have one occupant or less per room.

12 of the occupied housing units are estimated to be lacking complete kitchen facilities in 2020 and 10

are estimated not to have telephone service. This statistic is likely to indicate the growing trend toward people having only cellular phone service and wireless internet service instead of landlines, but this is not able to be substantiated by the 2022 ACS information.

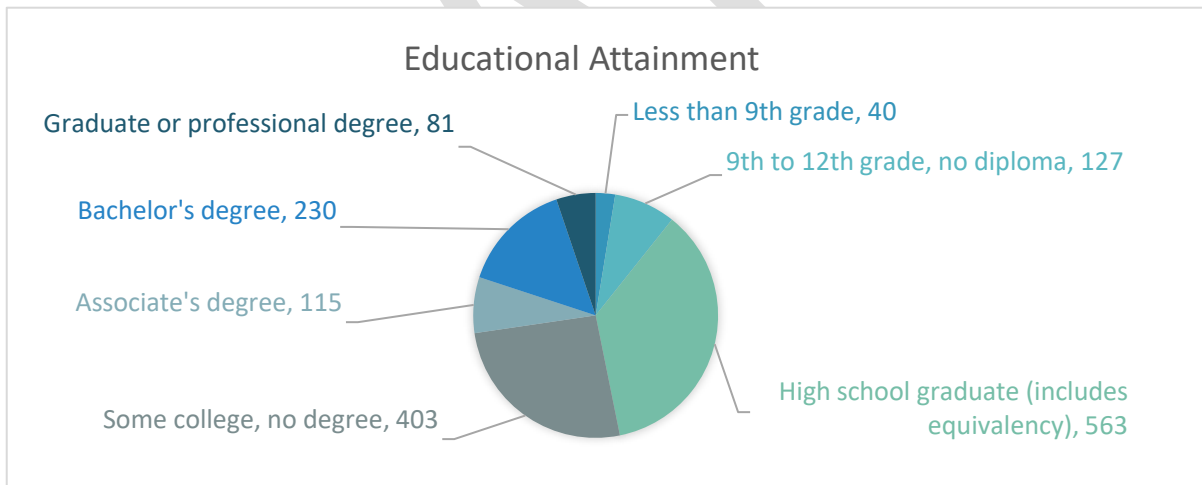
Homes are generally heated with utility gas (78.3%), while electricity, fuel oil, wood, propane, and other fuel sources account for the remaining homes. The City of West Branch provides water and sewer systems to all but a few residents who remain on wells for water supply.

The median house value in 2000 was \$67,200. It has been estimated that the median value in 2022 was \$107,700. The State median house value for 2022 was \$201,100.



## Education Levels

There was a dramatic increase in the education level from 1990 to 2022. Approximately 53.2% of residents over the age of 25 have some college education. This compares with 33% for 1990.

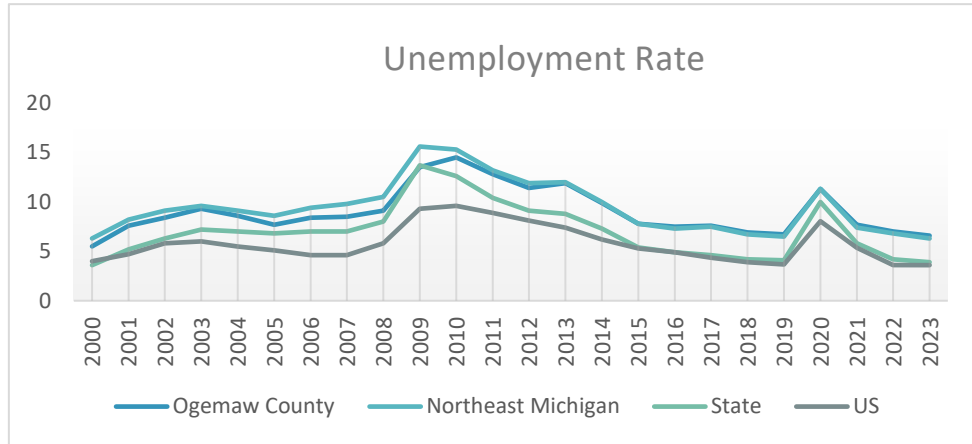


## Economics

### Employment

Of the 1,856 residents 16 years and over in 2022, 804 (43.3%) were part of the labor force. People considered in the labor force are those who are employed or actively looking for work. Of these, 750 (40.4%) were employed, and 54 (2.9%) were unemployed. In 1990, the comparable unemployment rate was 10.2% and, in 1970, the rate was 8.6%. What is notable, however, is that, in 1970, more than 90% of those eligible to work were part of the labor force – either employed or unemployed. By 1980, this had dropped to just over 53%, and in 2000, 64% of those over 16 years old were considered part of the labor force. In Ogemaw County, 52.2% of the population over 16 years was part of the labor force in 2000. Of the County’s labor force, 8.5% were unemployed.

The figure below shows unemployment rates for Ogemaw County, Northeast Michigan, Michigan, and the United States. Ogemaw County unemployment rates, while higher than the State and the U.S., have been slightly lower than the Northeast Michigan region. However, in 2013, Ogemaw County and Northeast Michigan had a similar rate. The rate has fallen from a high in 2009. Overall, unemployment rates for all four have mirrored each other in trend.



In 2000, 31% of those employed were part of the management/professional occupation group. This sector showed the largest increase from 1990. There are very few of the City’s residents employed in farming, fishing, or forestry. Additionally, the number of those employed in the construction industry has decreased since the 1990s. Almost 80% of the workforce was employed in management/professional, sales/office, or service occupations in 2000. This compares with 68% for those employed in these occupations in Ogemaw County. In 2022, the two largest subgroups of industries were educational services and healthcare and social assistance (25.4%) as well as retail trade (15.1%).

Industry of Civilian Labor Force		
	#	%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	300	3.9
Construction	573	7.4
Manufacturing	944	12.3
Wholesale trade	185	2.4
Retail trade	1,166	15.1
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	440	5.7
Information	27	0.4
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	243	3.2
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	426	5.5
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	1,958	25.4
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	868	11.3
Other services, except public administration	239	3.1
Public administration	328	4.3

Source: US Census Bureau 2017-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



An economic sector showing growth from the 1990s is the Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food services sector. In 1990, this sector accounted for 2% of the employment, while in 2012 more than 22.5% of the labor force worked in this industry. In 2016, this number continued to grow to 23.8%. The Service Industry, of which these occupations are a part, is growing statewide as well. Ogemaw County is a recreational area and tourism accounts for substantial income to the communities in the county, as is evidenced by the employment data.

General classification by occupation of the civilian labor force in the City of West Branch shows that 16.9% were in sales and office occupations, 19.4% in service occupations, and over 39.7% in management, business, science, and arts occupations.

<b>Occupation of Civilian Labor Force – West Branch</b>		
<b><i>Management, business, science, and arts occupations:</i></b>	<b>202</b>	<b>39.7%</b>
Management, business, and financial occupations:	78	
Management occupations	54	
Business and financial operations occupations	24	
Education, legal, community service, arts, and media occupations:	44	
Community and social services occupations	28	
Legal occupations	0	
Education, training, and library occupations	16	
Healthcare practitioner and technical occupations:	71	
Health diagnosing and treating practitioners and other technical occupations	50	
Health technologists and technicians	21	
<b><i>Service occupations:</i></b>	<b>99</b>	<b>19.4%</b>
Healthcare support occupations	50	
Food preparation and serving related occupations	13	
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	4	
Personal care and service occupations	6	
<b><i>Sales and office occupations:</i></b>	<b>86</b>	<b>16.9%</b>
Sales and related occupations	57	
Office and administrative support occupations	29	
<b><i>Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations:</i></b>	<b>54</b>	<b>10.6%</b>
Construction and extraction occupations		
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations	54	
<b><i>Production, transportation, and material moving occupations:</i></b>	<b>68</b>	<b>13.4%</b>
Production occupations	57	
Transportation occupations	0	
Material moving occupations	11	
<i>Source: US Census Bureau 2017-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates</i>		

In terms of commuting to work, 6.4% of the civilian labor force has no access to a vehicle, however, 39.4% had two vehicles available and 30.5% had three or more vehicles available. Over 45.6% of workers in the City of West Branch are within 10 minutes of their job. The mean travel time for all workers was 22.2 minutes.

The 2022 Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages shows that, in terms of average employment, Retail Trade and Health Care and Social Assistance employ the largest numbers of people. The highest average weekly wage is in the Transportation and Warehousing Industry and State Government.

Employment – Ogemaw County			
Industry	Number of Establishments	Average Employment	Average weekly wage (\$)
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	28	185	631
Mining	7	27	1,244
Construction	78	261	893
Manufacturing	35	384	879
Wholesale Trade	19	341	990
Retail Trade	96	1560	596
Transportation and Warehousing	22	330	1,573
Information	9	75	929
Finance and Insurance	21	109	1,043
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	13	40	912
Professional and Technical Services	28	73	887
Administrative and Waste Services	23	74	632
Health Care and Social Assistance	63	1,021	846
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	11	63	334
Accommodation and Food Services	63	670	348
Other Services (except Public Administration)	49	238	555
Federal Government	9	62	1,079
State Government	9	100	1,553
Local Government	23	562	744

*Source: 2022 Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages – Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget.*

The labor force inflow/outflow table (2021) below shows that, while there are approximately 1,927 people employed in West Branch, only 161 of those people also live in West Branch. Of the total labor force living in the City of West Branch, 80% are employed outside of the City. There is an influx of 1,766 people into West Branch daily for employment.

Labor Force Inflow/Outflow - 2021		
<b>Selection Area Labor Market Size (All Jobs)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Share</b>
Employed in West Branch	2,318	100.0%
Living in West Branch	849	36.6%
Net Job Inflow (+) or Outflow (-)	1,116	-
<b>In-Area Labor Force Efficiency (All Jobs)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Share</b>
Living in West Branch	849	100.0%
Living and Employed in West Branch	198	23.3%
Living in West Branch but Employed Outside	651	76.7%
<b>In-Area Employment Efficiency (All Jobs)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Share</b>
Employed in West Branch	2,318	100.0%
Employed and Living in West Branch	198	8.5%
Employed in West Branch but Living Outside	2,120	91.5%
<b>Outflow Job Characteristics (All Jobs)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Share</b>
External Jobs Filled by Residents	651	100.0%
Workers Aged 29 or younger	170	26.1%
Workers Aged 30 to 54	320	49.2%
Workers Aged 55 or older	161	24.7%
Workers Earning \$1,250 per month or less	162	24.9%
Workers Earning \$1,251 to \$3,333 per month	221	33.9%
Workers Earning More than \$3,333 per month	268	41.2%
Workers in the "Goods Producing" Industry Class	107	16.4%
Workers in the "Trade, Transportation, and Utilities" Industry Class	193	29.6%
Workers in the "All Other Services" Industry Class	351	53.9%
<b>Inflow Job Characteristics (All Jobs)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Share</b>
Internal Jobs Filled by Outside Workers	2,120	100.0%
Workers Aged 29 or younger	419	19.8%
Workers Aged 30 to 54	1,101	51.9%
Workers Aged 55 or older	600	28.3%
Workers Earning \$1,250 per month or less	463	21.8%
Workers Earning \$1,251 to \$3,333 per month	794	37.5%
Workers Earning More than \$3,333 per month	863	40.7%
Workers in the "Goods Producing" Industry Class	185	8.7%
Workers in the "Trade, Transportation, and Utilities" Industry Class	318	15.0%
Workers in the "All Other Services" Industry Class	1,617	76.3%
<b>Interior Flow Job Characteristics (All Jobs)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Share</b>
Internal Jobs Filled by Residents	198	100.0%
Workers Aged 29 or younger	54	27.3%
Workers Aged 30 to 54	90	45.5%
Workers Aged 55 or older	54	27.3%
Workers Earning \$1,250 per month or less	66	33.3%
Workers Earning \$1,251 to \$3,333 per month	64	32.3%
Workers Earning More than \$3,333 per month	68	34.3%
Workers in the "Goods Producing" Industry Class	26	13.1%
Workers in the "Trade, Transportation, and Utilities" Industry Class	12	6.1%
Workers in the "All Other Services" Industry Class	160	80.8%

Source: 2021 US Census Bureau "On the Map"



### Income and Poverty

The median household income for West Branch in 2022 was \$41,741. In Ogemaw County, the median was \$50,377 and in Michigan, it was \$68,505. Almost 21% of the City’s families were considered to be in poverty in 1990. By 2000, this number had fallen to less than 10%, just under the 11% number for Ogemaw County. The 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates indicate that number for the City has risen to 19.7% in contrast to Ogemaw County at 17.1% and the State of Michigan at 13.1%.

Household Income Levels	
Income	Percent
Less than \$10,000	2.0%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	9.7%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	23.2%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	8.4%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	16.4%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	22.4%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	8.6%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	7.1%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2.2%
\$200,000 or more	0.0%
Median Income Levels	
City of West Branch	\$41,741
Ogemaw County	\$50,377
State of Michigan	\$68,505
United States	\$75,149
<i>US Census Bureau 2017-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates</i>	

### State Equalized Value (SEV)

Another measure of community wealth is land value. Real and personal property is an important part of a community’s tax base. The tax base, in turn, can provide income to support local government, including law enforcement, emergency services, education, health and social services, land use controls, environmental protection, and public administration.

West Branch Assessed Value 2015-2023					
	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property	Real + Personal Property
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
2023	40,055,200	33,039,700	4,466,000	3,633,650	81,194,550
2021	30,493,200	35,873,100	2,663,600	4,489,400	73,519,300
2019	26,372,400	35,553,600	2,660,200	8,997,900	73,584,100
2017	26,761,400	35,879,600	2,911,900	9,696,900	75,249,800
2015	24,548,500	34,461,500	2,789,700	9,113,400	70,913,100
<i>Source: Michigan Department of Treasury</i>					

CHAPTER

3

**EXISTING  
LAND**



City of West Branch Master Plan

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## Existing Land Use

Prior to determining future land uses and developing a future land use map, a community must have an accurate assessment of existing land uses. This chapter presents information on the types and locations of existing land uses. The map was created using the tax roll and legal descriptions of parcels.

### Existing Land Use Classifications

#### Residential – Single Family

This classification is for areas with single-family dwellings and accessory structures.

#### Residential – Multiple Family

This classification is used for multiple-family dwellings and accessory structures.

#### Commercial

This category includes all parcels containing commercial facilities, offices, and medical facilities.

#### Industrial

Included in this category is land used for processing, extractive, manufacturing, fabrication, assembling materials, utilities, or for the outside storage of equipment and materials.

#### Institutional/Governmental/Utility

This classification is used for public and government buildings, churches, cemeteries, and utilities. Schools – public and private – are also added to this classification.

#### Recreational

This classification is used for parks and other recreational facilities such as ball fields.

#### Vacant/Undeveloped

All existing vacant or undeveloped parcels are included in this category including forested areas and wetlands.

## Land Use Analysis

#### Residential Single Family

Residential land is located in the northern two-thirds of the City. Low-density residential land comprises 208 acres or about 27% of all land area in the City. This is the largest use of land in the City and it is interspersed with some commercial, office, and multi-family uses.

#### Residential Multiple Family

Multi-family housing totals 117 acres (approximately 15% of all land area) and is located in the southern half and the northeast portion of the City. Survey results indicate that there is more demand for multi-family housing including apartments and townhomes.



**Commercial**

Commercial land uses are located in the downtown area along Houghton (M-55), on the I-75 business loop on the east side of town, and at the medical complex on the southwest corner of the City. Office commercial uses are also located throughout the community in homes. Commercial uses vary in type from independently owned shops in historic structures to typical franchise developments. Commercial uses are located on 180 acres and makeup about 23% of the land area.

**Industrial**

There are 74 acres of industrial land which is almost 10% of the entire City. About half of the industrial land is undeveloped. Industrial uses are located in an industrial park at the southeast corner of the City that abuts the rail line, near the northwest corner of the City, also on the rail line, and on Thomas Street across from the school complex on the northern edge of town. Some of these uses are original rail-related uses such as the grain elevator but the majority of uses are distribution-related due to West Branch’s location on highways I-75, M-30, and M-55.

**Institutional/Governmental/Utility**

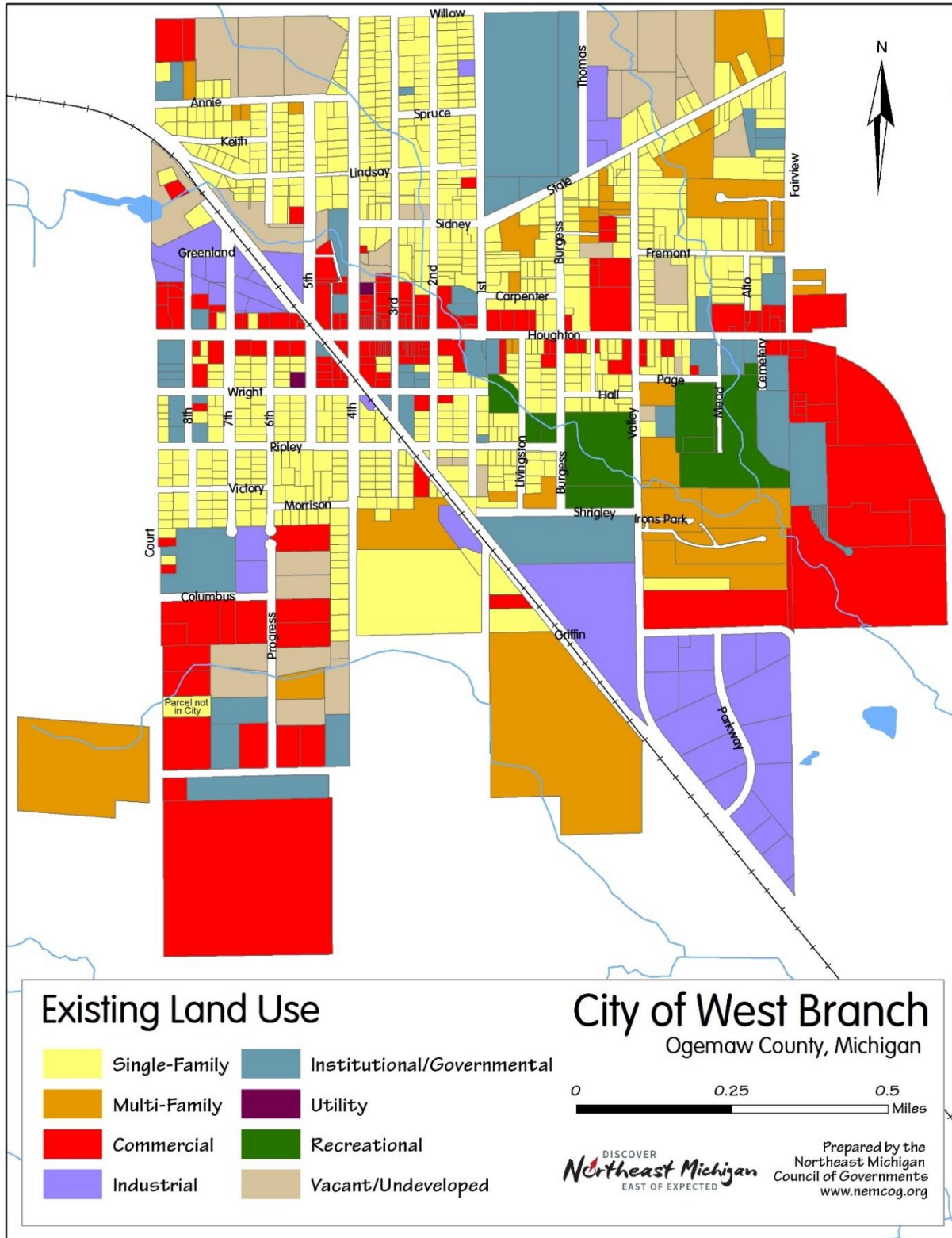
92 acres of land are classified as Institutional/Governmental/Utility. In the City of West Branch, this includes all the land for schools, churches, government/publicly owned offices, and utility buildings and sites. These uses are located throughout the City and use about 12% of the land area.

**Vacant/Undeveloped**

Vacant land is the fourth largest land use in the City with over 74 acres and 10% of land area. This is a deceiving figure from the view of a driving survey since it appears that the City of West Branch is almost fully developed. However, there are large tracts of undeveloped land near the borders of the City on the north and south sides. Some of this land is wooded or overgrown so it is not apparent that it is actually within the City’s boundaries.

Existing Land Use Table		
Land Use	Acres	Percent
Residential Single-Family	208	26.9%
Residential Multi-Family	117	15.1%
Commercial	180	23.3%
Industrial	74	9.6%
Institutional/Governmental/Utility	92	11.9%
Recreational	29	3.7%
Vacant/Undeveloped	74	9.6%
<b>Total (not including rights-of-way)</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>---</b>
Right-of-Way	169	---
<b>TOTAL (including rights-of-way)</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>100%</b>

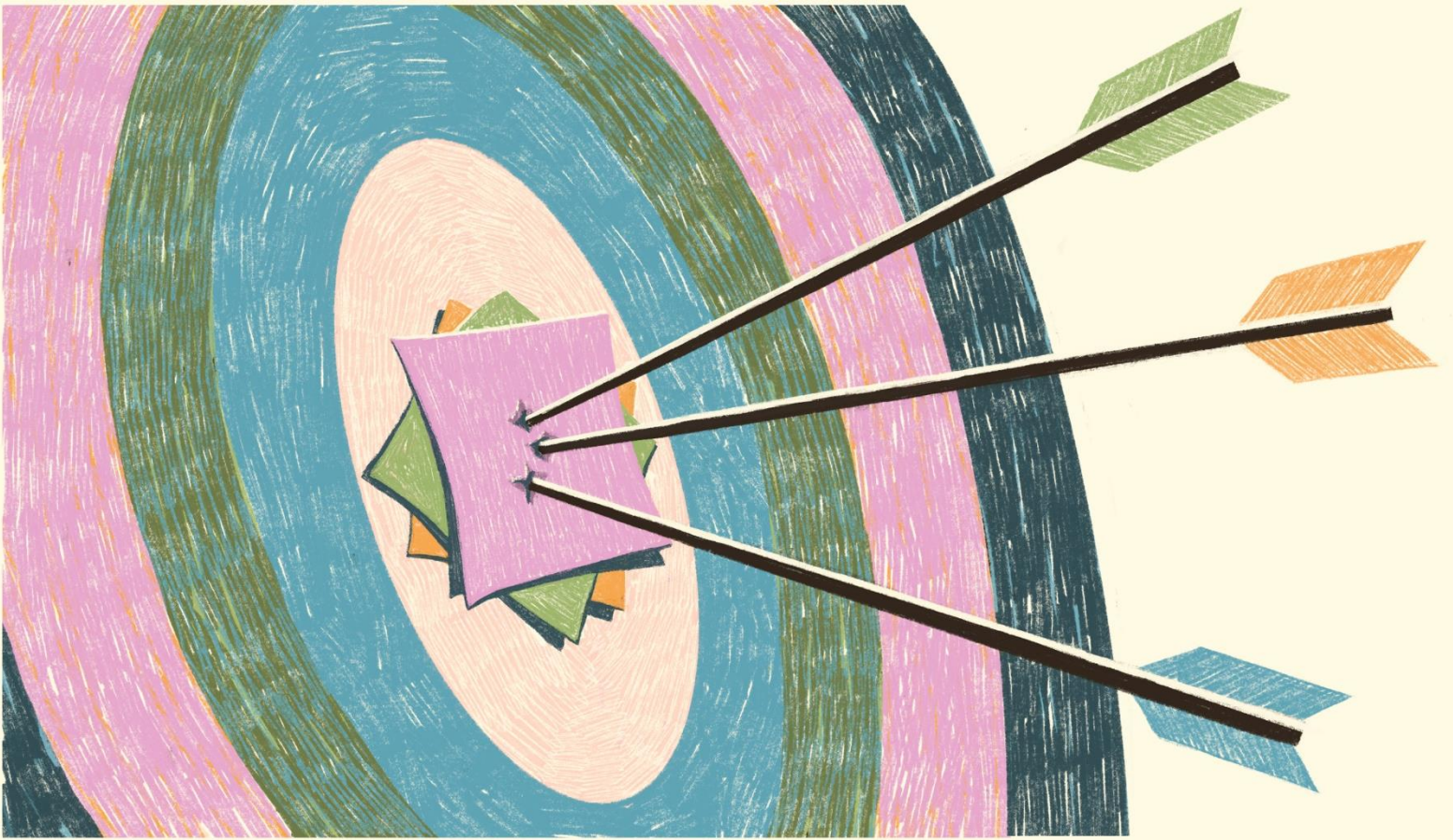
*Source: NEMCOG*



CHAPTER

4

# COMMUNITY & OBJECTIVES



City of West Branch Master Plan

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## Community Input

To ensure that the City's Master Plan reflects the goals of the community, a survey was prepared to gather input from residents. During April and May 2018, the City of West Branch posted a community survey on its website and made printed copies available at City Hall. Input was requested on several major issues including Housing, Land Use, Government Services, Transportation, Recreation, Blight, and General Community Development. The survey was promoted in the Ogemaw County Herald and on social media. Public input was also welcomed at all Planning Commission and City Council meetings.

A total of 146 surveys were completed - 138 via the website and 8 were handwritten.

### General Respondent Profile

- 70% of the respondents were homeowners in West Branch.
- More than 50% of the respondents have lived in the City of West Branch for over 10 years. 23% of respondents have only lived in the City for five years or less. 13% of respondents do not live in the City.
- Approximately 87% were over the age of 30.
- 38% of respondents were in the "professional/managerial" field, 14% were self-employed, and 24% were retired.
- 47% work in the City of West Branch and 33% work outside of Ogemaw County.

### The City Overall

Common responses given for the biggest assets of the City of West Branch include friendliness, quiet small-town atmosphere, downtown, sense of community, parks, safety, community involvement, and shopping.

When asked about the biggest problems in the City of West Branch, there were varied responses. Included were traffic, roads/sidewalks, blight, empty stores downtown, water/sewer costs, taxes, parking, jobs, lack of businesses, and lack of entertainment.

Fifty-six percent viewed the current economic state of the City as "stable" with 22% viewing it as "bad." Forty-nine percent perceived the real estate market as "weaker" with 30% perceiving it as "stable." Seventy-six percent felt there were not adequate job opportunities in the City. When asked if they would locate a business in the City of West Branch today, 39% stated that they would while 26% stated that they would not. Sixty-four percent support the use of partial tax abatements to attract and retain new jobs and businesses. Ninety-one percent felt that the City should continue to improve the downtown business district.

When asked whether the downtown should continue the Victorian theme, 46% said yes while 31% that responded said no. Twenty-eight percent think that the current Victorian theme is a hindrance to business owners while 37% think it is not.

### Housing

Forty-eight percent of respondents felt the quality and range of housing options was moderate with 24% rating it as poor. Fifty-six percent felt that the City should allow more attached housing

options (apartments, townhouses). 51% felt that there should be more low-cost housing for senior citizens. Fifty-three percent support the development of “tiny houses” within the City. Fifty-seven percent support the encouragement of accessory dwelling units.

## Land Use

Respondents were asked what type of commercial development they would like to see in the City. More retail options was a common response but other responses included artisan businesses, medical facilities, breweries/distilleries, daycare, clean energy establishments, health food, sports outfitters, and food shops. Forty-eight percent do not support the idea of neighborhood businesses locating in residential areas (29% support the idea). Seventy-eight percent support the addition of a second industrial park or an expansion to the existing industrial park.

## Services within the City

Eighty-five percent of respondents were satisfied with snow removal services in the City. Seventy-five percent felt that the City should continue its current sidewalk repair/replacement program. Seventy-five percent are satisfied with solid waste disposal methods available in the City. Forty-six percent would be willing to pay extra for curbside recycling while 54% would not.

## Transportation

Most respondents (57%) did not feel that truck traffic was a problem. However, 34% did think that truck traffic caused a problem.

## Recreation

An overwhelming majority (96%) felt that the City should continue to maintain and improve its park system while 65% felt the City should expand its park system.

## Discussion

The Planning Commission has reviewed and analyzed the various elements that may propel or slow down development in the City of West Branch. The slowing of migration northward in Michigan since 2000, much affected by the recession of 2007-8, is a primary factor. The slowing of the economy nationwide and globally has had a notable effect on local economic activity. And although it appears the economy is improving, it is debatable whether we have seen the end of the consequences of the recession. Even though the City’s population has a good balance of age cohorts, in the county and elsewhere in our northern region, the population is aging significantly. Despite the City of West Branch having better than average employment opportunities, the region loses many of its younger generation to other areas of the state and nation where opportunities are much greater, and wages and salaries are much higher. And the City has a disproportion of poor residents. All of these conditions have reduced housing and commercial property values and lessened the motivation for new development in and around the City.

Demographic changes in the county as a whole also affect the City of West Branch and are reflected in the plan. People are living longer, delaying marriage and childbearing, and birthrates have sunk to almost non-replacement levels. More housing choices for retirees and childless couples and individuals, more job opportunities for all ages, and a vibrant mixed-use, walkable

downtown are called for. The City needs to offer entrepreneurial and job opportunities to keep and attract young talent. By continuing to provide the kinds of social and cultural activities that it is carrying on now, the City and its neighbors can attract and hold residents of all ages -- Boomers, Millennials, and younger citizens -- as well as generate increased economic activity.

## Vision

The City of West Branch Planning Commission sets forth this vision for the City of West Branch:

*The City of West Branch will be a hometown and a destination for visitors that is neat, trim, and friendly. It will be a town with a vibrant commercial downtown that provides diverse retail shops and services. The downtown will be pedestrian-friendly with low-speed traffic. Offerings for residents and guests will include special events, parks, arts, and culture, as well as a variety of culinary choices in its restaurants.*

*The city is located within a region rich in natural resources, forests, lakes, and rivers that will provide wide-ranging outdoor activities including hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, skiing, and many others.*

*The West Branch region will continue to be a hub for large box retail, outlet retail, medical, and distribution businesses. It will continue to have a diverse range of retail, services, and manufacturing establishments, all providing significant employment opportunities.*

## Primary Goal and Objectives

The primary goal of this plan is to maintain and foster the growth and advancement of the City of West Branch as a place of order, enjoyment, and opportunity for all its citizens. To do so the following objectives are put forward:

- **Citizen Involvement** - Involve West Branch citizens in activities of the City that will advance the primary goal of this plan.
- **Housing** - Maintain the City's high-quality residential neighborhoods and encourage new appropriate development.
- **City Services and Infrastructure** - Maintain and improve City services and infrastructure.
- **Economic 1 (Sustainability)** - Promote and support existing businesses in the City and region to thrive and grow.
- **Economic 2 (Attraction)** - Market the City and the region to attract additional commercial and industrial enterprises.
- **Tourism** - Market the City and its environment to draw visitors and tourists to support local businesses and the local economy.

## Action Items

The following table contains strategies for implementing the primary goal and objectives found in the six focus areas listed above. It is important to note that, while responsible parties are listed, the City will make every effort to collaborate with partner organizations, other local units of government, and members of the public to ensure that the correct mix of stakeholders are involved in each item.



## TIMEFRAMES

**SHORT:** Low cost, easy implementation, directly addressing top priorities, or critical to the advancement of other strategies, and to be implemented within the next 1-5 years.

**MEDIUM:** Important actions that have some level of significant cost and can be implemented within the next 5-10 years.

**LONG:** Actions that often require significant amounts of funding that must be planned for overtime or require other strategies to be completed prior to their implementation.

**ON-GOING:** Actions that have no beginning and end period, but which are continuously ongoing in the City.

## RESPONSIBLE PARTY

City Staff = CS

City Council = CC

Planning Commission = PC

County Housing Department = CHD

Ogemaw County = OC

Downtown Development Authority = DDA

Community Development Board = CDB

Chamber of Commerce = Chamber

Tourism Bureau = TB

Ogemaw County EDC = OCEDC

Surrounding Townships = STWP

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES			
OBJECTIVE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
<b>1</b> Citizen Involvement	Involve West Branch citizens in activities of the City that will advance the primary goal of this plan.		
	1. Use the City website to provide meeting agenda and minutes of all council, committee, commission, and other bodies as well as to explicate issues and matters of importance before these boards.	ON-GOING	CS
	2. Include as many interested citizens as possible on committees on other boards. Encourage members of various boards to participate with other boards to increase communication among all the City government divisions. These boards may also include county and regional groups.	ON-GOING	CS, CC, PC
	3. Follow the West Branch Public Participation Plan to maximize citizen involvement.	ON-GOING	CS, CC, PC
<b>2</b> Housing	Maintain the City’s high-quality residential neighborhoods and encourage new appropriate development.		
	1. Ensure that the City zoning ordinance provides for sufficient areas for the construction of high-quality dwellings, multi-family, townhouse, single-family, and two-family, of varying densities and types including tiny homes and accessory dwelling units.	ON-GOING	PC
	2. Enforce the blight ordinances to eliminate conditions that discourage the upkeep of existing housing and the construction of new high-quality developments.	ON-GOING	CS
	3. Continue and promote the housing rehabilitation program to improve existing housing stock. Identify funding sources available for residential improvements and make property owners aware of such rehabilitation programs.	ON-GOING	CS, CHD
	4. Partner with realtors/builders to attract developers who can construct desired housing developments.	SHORT	CS, PC
	5. Ensure the zoning ordinance allows for areas of mixed-use development, where appropriate.	ONGOING	PC
	6. Consider the necessity of a rental inspection program.	MEDIUM	CC

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES			
OBJECTIVE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b> City Services &amp; Infrastructure</p>	Maintain and improve City services and infrastructure.		
	1. Continue to provide quality police and fire protection services to residents.	ON-GOING	CC, CS
	2. Continue to maintain, improve, and plan expansion of water, sewage, and stormwater facilities, if needed.	ON-GOING	CC, CS
	3. Provide for adequate streets, and the maintenance thereof, that ensure safety while facilitating orderly growth.	ON-GOING	CC, CS
	4. Continue sound budgeting by departments with a goal toward fiscal responsibility to the residents.	ON-GOING	CC, CS
	5. Ensure infrastructure is in place for desired development.	ON-GOING	CC, CS
	6. Maintain the sidewalk repair/replacement program.	ON-GOING	CC, CS
	7. Explore options (i.e. tax abatements) that would further assist with business recruitment. Encourage City Staff to participate in programs, seminars, and conferences which educate on available opportunities.	ON-GOING	CC, CS
	8. Incorporate Complete Streets design concepts into the City's planning efforts and into the zoning ordinance to ensure all forms of transportation are adequately provided for.	SHORT	PC
	9. Revise zoning to require sidewalks and standards for pedestrian connections to all new developments, and work to connect all existing developments along the corridor with sidewalks.	SHORT	PC
	10. Designate neighborhood areas and create a neighborhood betterment plan pursuant to the Neighborhood Area Improvements Act (PA 208 or 1949).	LONG	City Council Planning Commission City Staff
	11. Continue to make the downtown area "pedestrian friendly" and attractive by continuing to install streetscaping features including streetlights, trees where appropriate, benches, wayfinding signage, parks, and well-maintained sidewalks/paths.	ON-GOING	CC, DDA, PC
	12. Ensure pedestrian connections exist throughout the City to connect residential neighborhoods to commercial and recreational areas.	ON-GOING	CC, DDA, PC
	13. Continue to investigate, with MDOT, an alternative parking strategy in the downtown area.	LONG	CC, CS, PC, MDOT
14. Have installed traffic controls along the I75 Business Loop (Dunham's Plaza area, M-30 and Bailey Street areas). Include signage for the service drive in this area.	LONG	CC, CS, PC, MDOT	

<b>3</b> <b>City Services &amp; Infrastructure</b>	15. Fill the gap between the City and the West Branch Township pedestrian and bicycle trails at the former Kmart property.	<b>SHORT</b>	CC, PC, CS, MDOT
	16. Consider developing access management standards for M-55 and other high-traffic city streets.	<b>LONG</b>	CC, PC, CS, MDOT
	17. Participate in the Community Development Board.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CBD

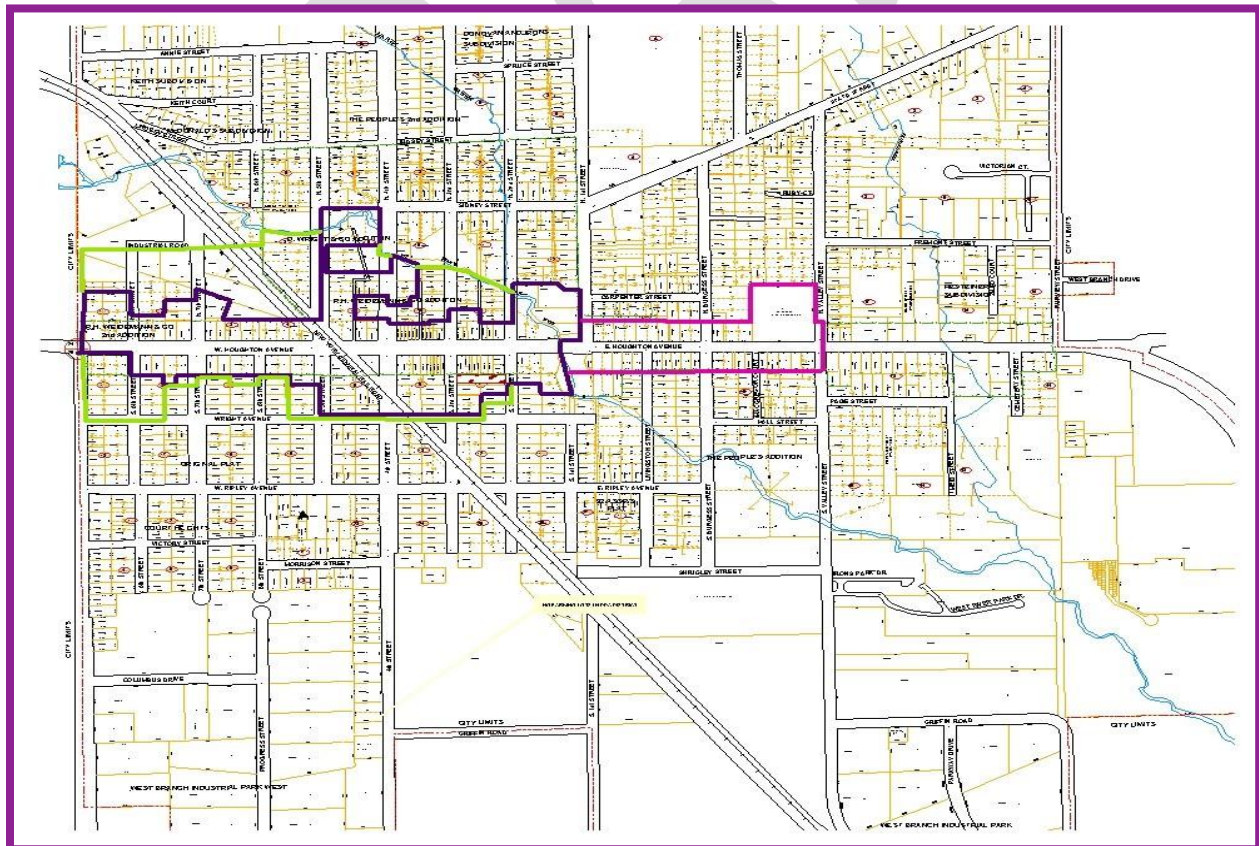
MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES			
OBJECTIVE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
<b>4</b> <b>Economic 1 (Sustainability)</b>	Promote and support existing businesses in the City and region to thrive and grow.		
	1. Continue to support tax incentives for industrial expansions.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CC
	2. Establish guidelines for landscaping, including screening standards.	<b>SHORT</b>	PC
	3. Develop downtown design standards to achieve a collective identity of the downtown.	<b>SHORT</b>	PC, DDA
	4. Work with the DDA to implement strategies contained within the current downtown plan.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	PC, DDA, CC, CS, STWP
	5. Continue programs to enhance façades and rear entrances of buildings, including potentially the MEDC/CDBG grant program.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	PC, DDA



MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES			
OBJECTIVE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>5</b> Economic 2 (Attraction)</p>	Market the City and the region to attract additional commercial and industrial enterprises.		
	1. Work toward development of the priority redevelopment and infill development areas.	<b>LONG</b>	PC, CS
	2. Inventory with local realtor’s available buildings and properties and their conditions for sale or lease (utilize City and other websites to portray). Develop a database that contains specific information pertaining to each commercial/industrial property that can be used as a marketing tool for redevelopment.	<b>MEDIUM</b>	CS, PC, Local Realtors
	3. Market redevelopment ready properties through the RRC program with assistance from the State.	<b>SHORT</b>	Pc, cs
	4. Determine the best mix of businesses needed in the downtown and identify needs and market to them.	<b>MEDIUM</b>	CS, DDA
	5. Support and monitor programs for rehabilitation by the DDA and Ogemaw County (Façade Improvements Program, Brownfields, etc.).	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CS, DDA, OC
	6. Support and monitor marketing of the downtown with regional partners.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CS, DDA, CC, PC, STWP, OCEDC, Chamber, TB, Other Partners
	7. Ensure a strong marketing message is created and displayed on the City’s website and other local websites.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	
	8. Create a marketing pamphlet.	<b>SHORT</b>	
	9. Consider the expansion of the industrial park or a second industrial park, if needed.	<b>LONG</b>	City Council
	10. Ensure development approval processes are easy to follow, seamless, and predictable.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	PC, CS
11. Implement and maintain the practices outlined by the MEDC Redevelopment Ready Communities Program.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CC, PC, CS	

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES			
OBJECTIVE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
<p><b>6</b> Tourism</p>	Market the City and its environs to draw visitors and tourists to support local businesses and the local economy.		
	1. Continue special events that entertain residents and bring visitors to the City.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CC, DDA, Chamber
	2. Continue to work with neighboring townships to market the downtown and adjoining commercial areas with the current brand of the community.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CS, West Branch Chamber, West Branch TB, DDA
	3. Develop and install wayfinding signage that will direct visitors to the West Branch Downtown and other special sites in the City and elsewhere.	<b>MEDIUM</b>	CS, CC, MDOT DDA
	4. Continue to cooperate with the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Corp., and neighboring DDAs to promote the City and its attractions	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CS, Chamber, TB OCEDC, STWP
	5. Maintain and improve City recreational facilities and expand where needed.	<b>ON-GOING</b>	CS, CC, PC

DDA District Map



## Supplemental Planning Information

### Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

The City of West Branch has established a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) which provides the business district with the tools to improve its economic growth. The DDA is authorized by PA 197 of 1975, which permits the creation of an authority to assist business districts with their financial growth by using tax increment financing (TIF). Tax increment financing provides communities with the ability to fund current projects by using future gains in taxes caused by increasing the value of properties. No new taxes are levied but instead, tax revenues are increased and invested back into the community.

The City of West Branch established the Downtown Development Authority on December 17, 1979, via Ordinance 154. In creating and establishing the DDA, the City found that the DDA was necessary for the best interests of the public to halt property value deterioration and increase property tax valuation, where possible, in the City's business district to eliminate the causes of said deterioration and to promote economic growth. The boundaries of the DDA were amended on November 17, 1986 (Ordinance 184). The minutes of the Council meeting indicate that this was done to correct an incomplete property description in Ordinance 154. The DDA district was expanded and extended again in November 2010 by Ordinance 10-9. At this time the development plan was also updated.

The West Branch DDA's first Development Plan/TIF plan, known as "Project Pride," was adopted in 1986. Tax capture took place from 1986 to 2001. Bonds issued for projects in this TIF plan were retired in May 2002. On May 5, 2003, the City Council approved an amendment/extension of the DDA TIF Plan (Ordinance 03-05). This plan extended and amended the 2003 TIF Plan/Development Plan. Projects that the DDA has provided funding for over the years include:

- Downtown streetscape improvements including sidewalks, planter boxes, landscaping, trash receptacles
- A revolving loan fund for façade improvements
- Railroad track crossing improvements
- Alley work
- Street improvements
- Funding for activities of the Retail Merchants Association, including Fabulous Fridays.

### Wellhead Protection Plan

The City of West Branch has an approved Wellhead Protection Plan (WHPP) which will assist the community in developing long-term strategies to ensure safe drinking water for their residents. The City of West Branch relies exclusively on groundwater. WHPPs develop long-term strategies aimed at protecting community drinking water supplies. The purpose of developing a WHPP is to identify the Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA) and develop long-term strategies aimed at safeguarding the area from contamination. A WHPA is defined as the surface and subsurface areas surrounding a water well or well field which supplies a public water system and through which contaminants are reasonably likely to move toward and reach the water well or well field within a 10-year time of travel. The State of Michigan requires communities to identify seven elements to

be included in the WHPP. These elements along with a brief description are below.

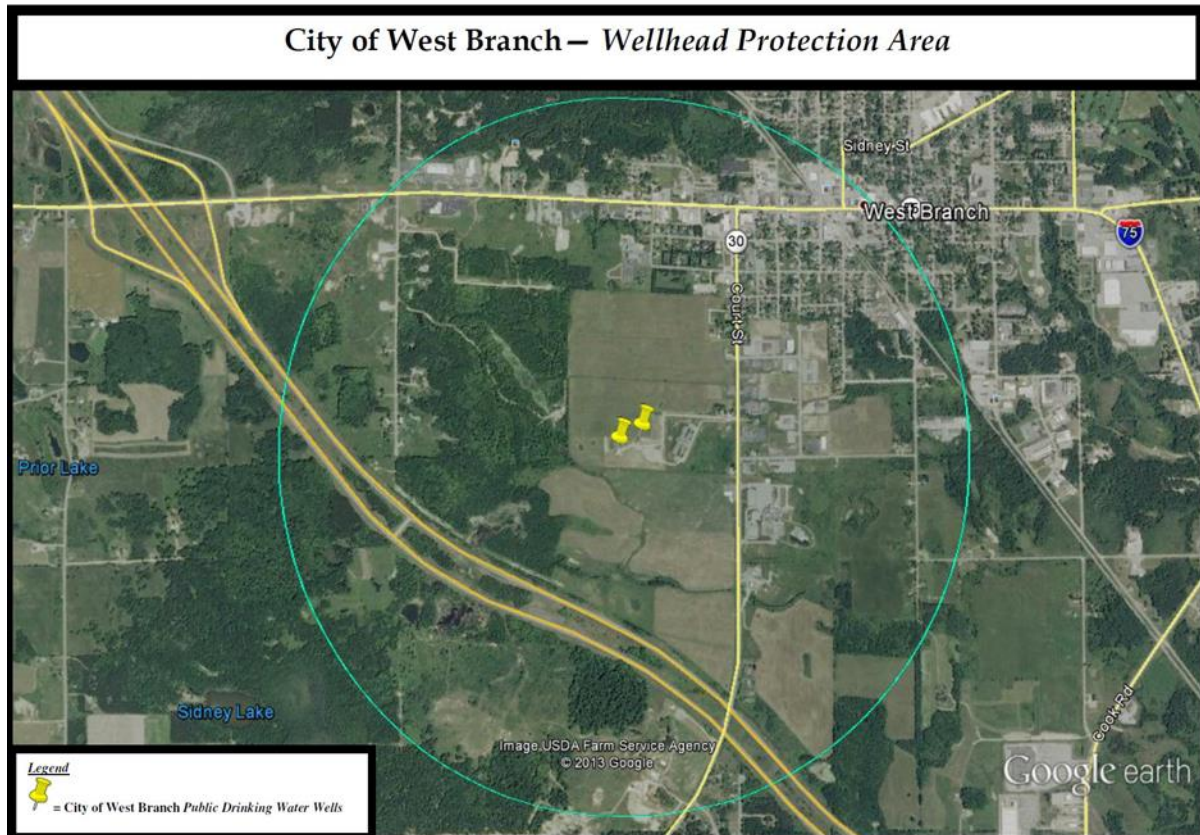
- Roles and Responsibilities – Identify individuals responsible for the development, implementation, and long-term maintenance of the local WHPP.
- WHPA Delineation – Determine the area that contributes groundwater to the public water supply wells.
- Contaminant Source Inventory – Identify known and potential sites of contamination within the WHPA and include them in a contaminant source inventory list and map.
- Management Strategies – Provide mechanisms that will reduce the risk of existing and potential sources of contamination from reaching the public water supply wells or well fields.
- Contingency Planning – Develop an effective contingency plan in case of a water supply emergency.
- Siting of New Wells – Provide information on existing groundwater availability, the ability of the PWSS to meet present and future demands, and the vulnerability of the existing wells to contamination.
- Public Education and Outreach – Generate community awareness in the WHPP by focusing on public education and the dissemination of WHPP information.

It is the intent of this Master Plan to encourage the protection of the City's public water supply wells through the establishment of a Wellhead Protection Zoning Ordinance. Within the ordinance, zoning regulations will limit land uses and practices that may degrade groundwater quality within and outside the WHPA.

The most significant sources of water supply contamination are landfills, surface impoundment areas, subsurface percolation from septic tanks and cesspools, open dumps, uncapped or improperly capped abandoned wells, injection wells, and underground storage tanks. These uses represent both point and non-point contamination sources. Point source is the term used to describe contaminants, which originate in the immediate area of the well or tap. All of the above, if located close to the water supply source, are examples of potential point source polluters. Contaminants from these uses may seep directly down through the soil to the water source.

Non-point source contamination is much more difficult to control because the cause of the problem may actually be located a considerable distance from the well. This type of contamination is caused by pollutants that filter into an underground aquifer and then migrate slowly through the groundwater aquifer to off-site wells and water sources. Prevention of this type of contamination must involve a collective effort on the part of property owners and local officials from a large geographic area. It is the intent of this Plan to recognize the importance of groundwater protection within the City of West Branch. All existing and future wells must be protected from both point and non-point source contamination to the greatest degree possible. It is also the intent of this Plan to recognize the importance of groundwater protection within the City of West Branch.





#### City of West Branch WHPP Mission Statement

- To ensure a safe drinking source for residents and businesses by identifying past, present, and future threats to the public water supply.
- To work with other governmental and private agencies to promote a cooperative effort to protect and maintain our water sources.
- To educate residents, businesses, and children on how to preserve our drinking water.
- To develop a plan of procedures in the event that a harmful substance threatens the drinking water.

Wellhead Protection Goals	
Goal	Ideas to accomplish goal
Prevent the pollution of surface and ground water	-Plan and develop land uses that will not threaten the water supply. -Educate the public on the effects pesticides have on the water supply. - Evaluate current land issues and identify threats to the surface and ground water.
Promote intergovernmental cooperation to ensure protection of water sources	-Include other governmental agencies in the planning of the Wellhead Protection Program. -Ask for assistance in the planning and development of land uses from other government agencies.
Promote residential and commercial cooperation to protect surface water	-Include people from both sectors in the planning, development, and implementation of the Wellhead Protection Plan. -Educate the public on the effects pesticides, oils, paints, etc. have on the surface and ground water.
Develop and implement planning provisions to protect groundwater and surface water	-Work with the Planning Commission to develop and implement planning documents aimed at groundwater protection.
Educate the public on the need to protect groundwater and surface water	- Coordinate educational efforts with the school. -Produce or purchase educational material to be distributed through special events. -Send information to residents and businesses via the quarterly newsletter.
Plan and prepare for water supply emergencies	-Set up a plan and update it annually, which sets forth guidelines to follow in the event of an emergency.
Protect the public health	-Ask all involved to watch and inform City Hall of any potential problems. -Provide educational materials to residents and businesses. -Have an emergency plan. -Revisit abandoned well management in the WHPA to determine if further action is needed to inventory and properly abandon wells.

## Sites of Environmental Contamination (201 Sites)

There was one Part 201 site of environmental contamination within the City of West Branch WHPA (Part 201 Site List).

- The Bicycle Factory, 201 N. 8th Street (Pollutants: PB, VCs, Xylenes, Paint Sludge, Paint Waste, Solvents)

## Underground Storage Tank Sites

There are six active Underground Storage Tank (UST) sites within the WHPA (Storage Tank Information Center).

- Chemical Bank, 700 W. Houghton Avenue
- Forwards West Branch Mini Plaza, 600 W. Houghton Avenue (1 UST)
- Mobil, 411 West Houghton Avenue

- Schmitt Tire & Gas, 624 W. Houghton Avenue (1 UST)
- The Lazy Oil Company, 116 S. Third Street (1 UST)
- West Branch Regional Medical Center, 2463 S. M 30 (1 UST)

There are six closed USTs within the WHPA (Storage Tank Information Center).

- First Bank, 520 W. Houghton Avenue
- Lahti Fabrication, 651 Columbus Drive
- Ogemaw County Correctional Facility, 912 W. Houghton Avenue
- Ogemaw County Sheriff's Department, 806 W. Wright Street
- The Bicycle Factory, 201 N. 8th Street
- West Branch Diesel, 305 Court Street

### **Leaking Underground Storage Tank Sites**

There are two open Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST) sites located within the City of West Branch WHPA (Storage Tank Information Center).

- Chemical Bank, 700 W. Houghton Avenue
- Schmitt Tire & Gas, 624 W. Houghton Avenue

There are four closed LUST sites located within the City of West Branch WHPA (Storage Tank Information Center).

- First Bank, 520 W. Houghton Avenue
- Forwards West Branch Mini Plaza, 600 W. Houghton Avenue
- Lahti Fabrication, 651 Columbus Drive
- Ogemaw County Sheriff's Department, 806 W. Wright Street

### **Oil and Gas Contamination Sites**

City staff surveyed the Wellhead Protection Area to determine that there are no oil and gas wells located within the WHPA.

### **Hazardous Waste Generators**

There are nineteen Hazardous Waste Generator sites located within the WHPA (Michigan Hazardous Waste Treatment, Storage and Disposal Facilities Directory and WHMD WDS Web Inquiry System).

- Agricultural Property, 2292 S. M-30
- Agricultural Property, 2512 S. First Street
- Agricultural Property, 2699 S. First Street
- Ameritech Corporation, 141 S. 5th Street
- City of West Branch Department of Public Works, 403 S. 1st Street
- County of Ogemaw, 806 W. Houghton Avenue
- Forward Corporation, 600 W. Houghton Avenue
- Lahti Fabrication., 651 Columbus Drive
- Michigan Department of Transportation, I-75 Northbound and Northbound over M-30
- Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency, 630 Progress Street
- Schmitt Tire & Gas, 624 W. Houghton Avenue



- Selly's Cleaners, 135 N. 4th Street
- Village Quik Lube, 3149 W. Houghton Avenue
- West Branch Collision Inc., 2515 S. M-30
- West Branch Medical Center, 2463 S. M-30
- West Branch Recycling Center, 153 N. 4th Street
- West Branch Tire and Automotive Services Inc., 962 W. Houghton Avenue
- Whiting Oil and Gas Corporation, Oil lines located throughout the WHPA
- Zettels Collision, 3091 W. Houghton Avenue

### **Groundwater Discharge Permits**

According to the State of Michigan, there are no groundwater discharge permit facilities located within the WHPA.

### **Landfill/Solid Waste Disposal Site List**

There are no Solid Waste Disposal sites located within the WHPA (WHMD WDS Web Inquiry System).

### **Federal National Priority Sites**

There are no federal national priority list sites located within the WHPA (National Priorities List).

### **Other Sites of Concern**

Several sites were included in the previous WHPP Plan but are not included on the lists from the State of Michigan. They are:

- Dore Store, 411 W. Houghton Avenue
- Charles Wangler—Wangler Implement, 114 S. 4th Street
- Dean Arbor Ford Jeep Eagle, 3382 W. M-55
- Evergreen Clinic, 611 Court Street
- Maxi Muffler, 930 W. Houghton Avenue
- Railroad, City of West Branch, Throughout the WHPA
- Tri City Line X, 155 N. 4th Street
- West Branch Automotive, 623 W. Houghton Avenue
- West Branch Farmers Coop, 105 N. 7th Street
- West Branch Greenhouse, 166 N. 5th Street
- Wash It, 137 N. 4th Street
- West Branch Tank & Trailer, 129 N. 5th Street

### **Site Plan Review Criteria**

The City of West Branch has incorporated groundwater protection standards into its Zoning Ordinance and intends to continue applying this criterion in the process of reviewing site plans.

### **Environmental Permits Checklist**

The City of West Branch will also investigate incorporating the Environmental Permits Checklist into its site plan review process. West Branch Township and Ogemaw Township are also interested in receiving the Environmental Permits Checklist.

## **Storm Water Management**

The City of West Branch has installed two rain gardens in Iron's Park. Huron Pines worked with the Nature Conservancy and local students to install the rain gardens. In addition, the City has put in a stormwater retention basin in South Valley near the Rifle River. This year, it is putting in another basin on South Burgess Street. Although these sites are located outside of the WHPA, the City would like to continue looking for areas within the WHPA to improve stormwater management efforts.

## **Abandoned Well Management**

Although the City did a search for abandoned wells and plugged several of them, it will still educate the public about the danger of abandoned wells. The MRWA has provided information that can be included on the City's website and at City Offices.

DRAFT

CHAPTER

5

FUTURE  
LAND USE



City of West Branch Master Plan

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## Future Land Use

The future land use plan illustrates the proposed physical arrangements of land use within the City of West Branch. It identifies and defines the major future land use categories as well as the approximate locations for each use. The boundaries reflected on the map are meant to portray a general land use arrangement which may be refined as the community develops. The plan is prepared to serve as a guide for the City regarding current issues, land use decisions, investments, public improvements, and zoning decisions. The plan is also intended to be a working document which will provide for the orderly development of the City, assist the City in its efforts to maintain and enhance a pleasant living environment and foster economic development and redevelopment.

## Residential

**Single-Family Residential:** Areas designated as future single-family residential are found primarily in large blocks in the central and northwestern portion of West Branch. In addition, an area of proposed single-family is found along Valley and Fremont. Within this category, other related and compatible uses should be encouraged which serve the residents of the area without hampering the single-family environment.

**Multi-Family Residential:** Multiple-family residential areas are intended primarily for a range of residential uses that would be allowed at a higher density than single-family areas. In addition, areas designated as multi-family would allow two or more housing units to be located on a single land area. Related and compatible uses would also be situated in multiple-family areas. The City of West Branch has a large number of multiple-family units per capita for a community of its size. West Branch also has a large population of senior citizens living in the multiple family units in the City. This population is generally considered the most stable type of renter, meaning they move less frequently than other age groups. Areas designated as future multi-family residential are found throughout the City due to the fact that citizens have indicated a desire for an increased range of attached housing options. A large portion of the northeastern quadrant of the City is designated as future multi-family along with large blocks of land in the extreme northwestern quadrant, near Irons Park in the southeast, along the railroad tracks in the south, and on the west side of Court along the western edge of the City.

## Mixed Use

The City of West Branch wishes to encourage mixed-use development in several areas of the City including along the Houghton Avenue corridor from 1st Street to Fairview Road. Allowing mixed-use developments along this corridor may assist in revitalizing the downtown area by attracting entrepreneurs and young professionals by providing more opportunities for mixed business and housing opportunities adjacent to downtown. In addition, a small mixed-use area is designated along Wright Street (between 4th Street and 2nd Street) as well as in the northwest quadrant of the City along the railroad tracks. The goal is to encourage development by permitting a greater variety of uses than would be permitted under conventional zoning. Uses allowed within this mixed-use category are not limited and could include a mix of residential, commercial, light industrial (in appropriate areas), office, and public/institutional uses. This land use category could



result in a mix of uses on a lot-by-lot basis (i.e. residential lots next to commercial lots), a mix of uses utilizing different buildings on a single parcel of land, or a mix of uses within the same building.

## Commercial and Office

**Downtown Commercial:** The downtown commercial area provides for development that is pedestrian-oriented and offers a mix of uses within a central core. Downtowns provide convenient, safe access to shopping, restaurants, cultural events, and services for the local community and visitors. Streets, designed to provide efficient traffic flow, as well as centralized parking are critical to accommodating a population orientated to automobiles. At the same time, the City must continue to focus on a walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment. Upper-story apartments and condominiums over first-floor retail and office space, in conjunction with healthy adjacent residential and mixed-use neighborhoods, provide additional housing options. The future downtown commercial area extends along Houghton Avenue from 1st Street to Court Street. In addition, it takes in full blocks of property between 2nd Street and 5th Street to the river.

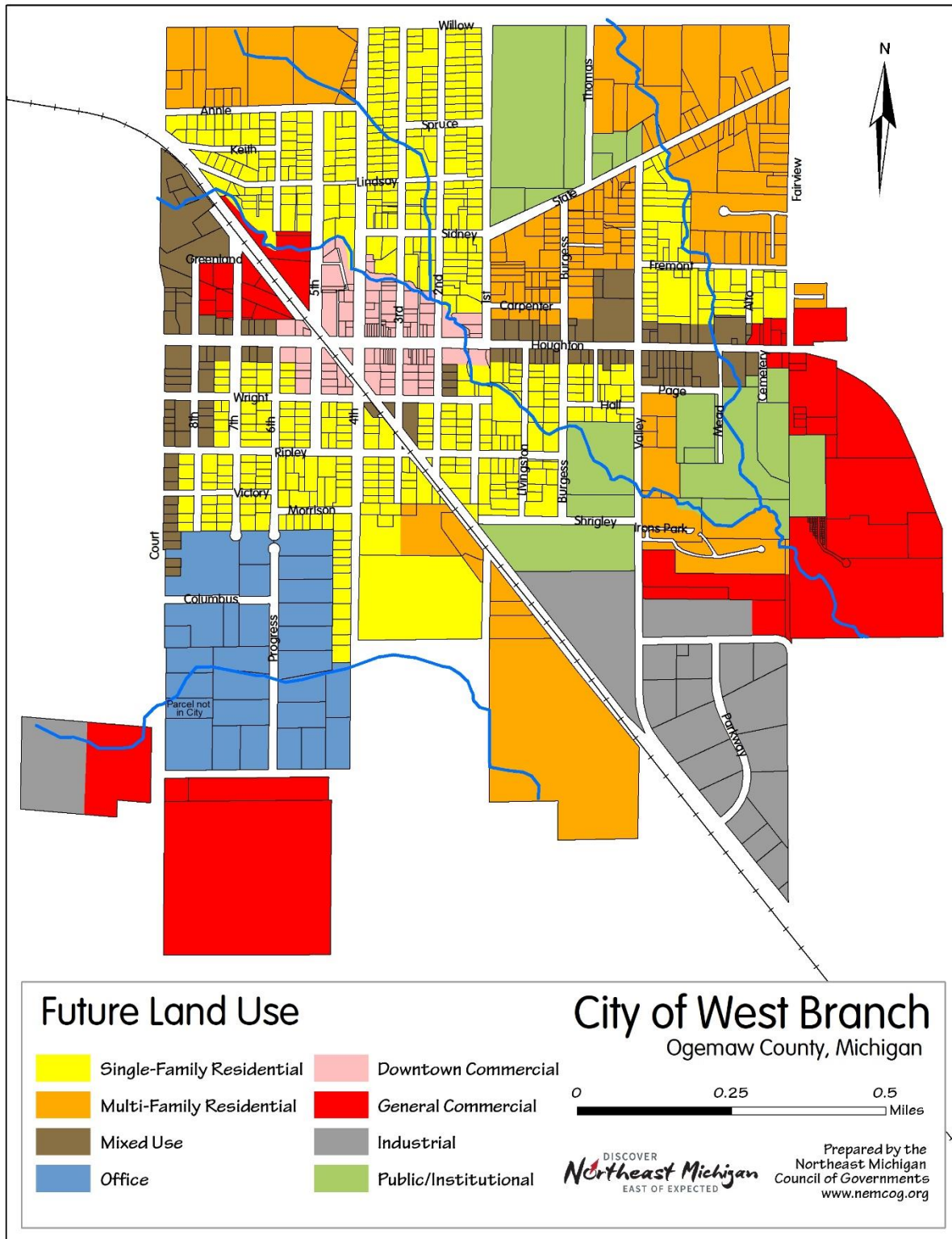
**General Commercial:** This area is intended for the widest and most intensive variety of retail and service businesses. Businesses that meet the commercial needs of the automobile-dependent public are typically associated with roadways having high traffic volumes. Typical uses in this district include drive-through restaurants, auto service establishments, and commercial uses serving a regional clientele. The uses within this district benefit from the exposure of high-traffic volume roads. At the same time, the City will work towards providing safe pedestrian access to these establishments. The general commercial area is found in three locations in the City: Along M-55 in the east, along the railroad tracks in the northwestern quadrant, and in the southwestern quadrant. The location of the current hospital is classified as general business. Commercial uses that support the hospital are typically located in these areas.

**Office:** The areas designated as offices are intended to provide for the professional and medical office needs of the area. The designation could include privately owned facilities as well as public or quasi-public institutions. The future office area is also intended to serve as a transition area between commercial and residential areas.

**Industrial:** The industrial area is located along the railroad tracks in the southeastern portion of the City. The Industrial category is intended to accommodate and attract new manufacturing, processing, warehousing, and other industrial uses.

## Public/Institutional

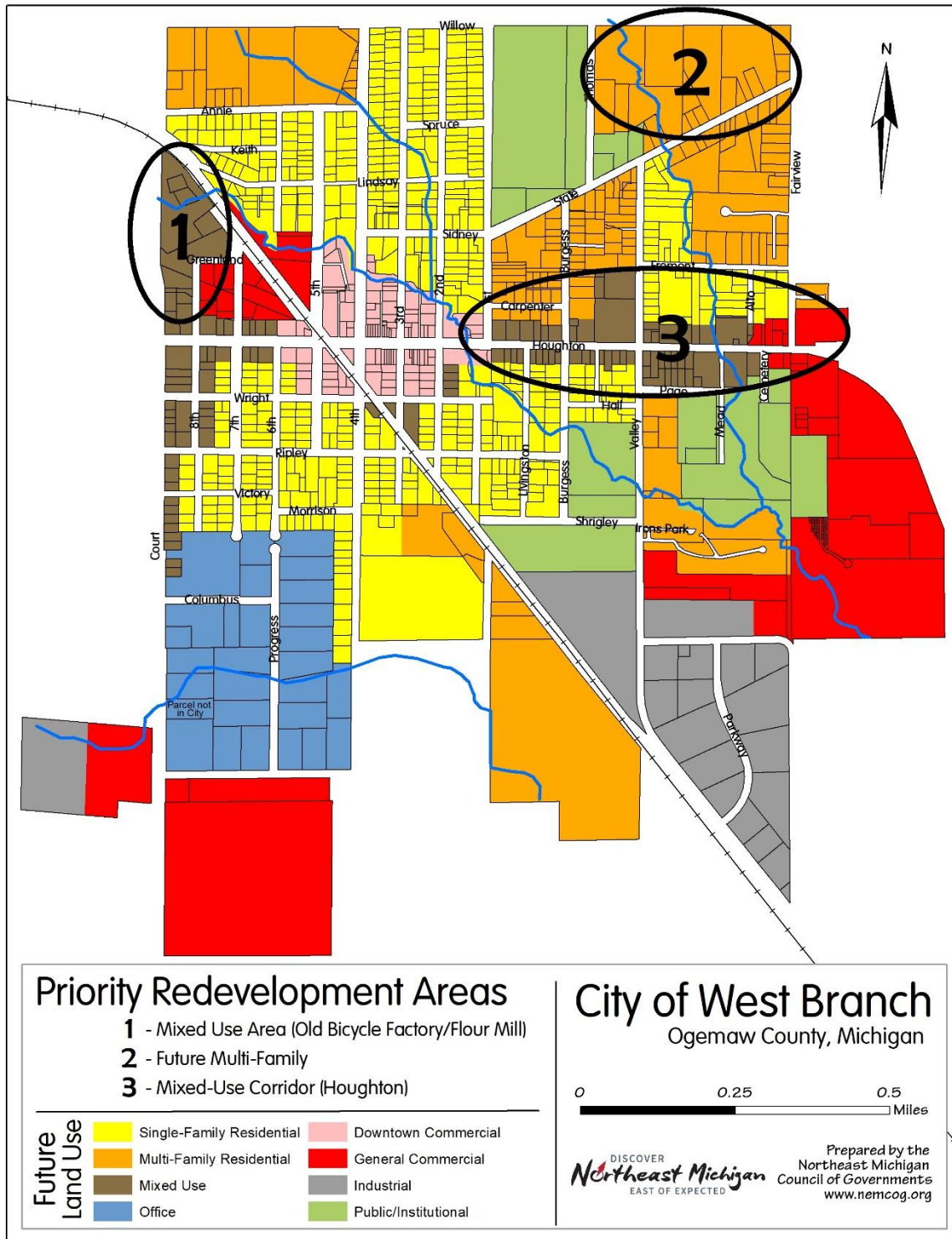
This category includes parks, churches, public facilities, cemeteries, schools, municipal facilities, utilities, and other institutional uses. Portrayal on the map implies a desire to include only those types of uses on a parcel. However, not all publicly owned facilities are included in the public/institutional category. These types of uses can also occur in the general commercial, office, and downtown business categories which allow a greater variety of uses.



## Priority Redevelopment Areas

The City of West Branch intends to participate in the MEDC Redevelopment Ready Communities program. As part of this program, the City will identify and prioritize redevelopment sites. For the purposes of this plan, the City is designating general areas of desired redevelopment. These areas and the priority sites, once specific sites are designated and prioritized, will be reviewed annually, and may change throughout the year as circumstances in the community change and as new information becomes available. The inclusion of these general areas of redevelopment in this Master Plan is not meant to preclude alternate areas of redevelopment in the City if the opportunity for redevelopment becomes available. The following general areas are possible redevelopment sites (also included below overlain on the Future Land Use Map). The areas are not listed in order of importance.

1. Old Bicycle Factory/Flour Mill site that has been designated as future Mixed use.
2. Area in the northeastern portion of the City that has been designated as future Multi-Family.
3. Houghton Avenue corridor from 1st Street to Fairview Road that has been designated as Mixed Use.





## Zoning Plan

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) requires that the Master Plan contain a zoning plan which includes an explanation of how the land use categories on the Future Land Use Map relate to the zoning districts. A chart is provided below which includes a listing of the future land use plan categories and the equivalent zoning districts. After the adoption of this Master Plan, the City should review the Zoning Ordinance for compatibility with the goals, objectives, action items, and future land uses listed within the Master Plan. The City should review all current zoning districts to ensure that a full range of compatible and desired uses are provided in each district. The Zoning Ordinance should also be reviewed for specific development standards for each district (including architectural and buffering standards), approval procedures, review standards, and general provisions. In general, the Zoning Ordinance should provide enough flexibility to allow the desired development pattern to occur.

Future Land Use Plan/Zoning Equivalency		
Future Land Use Categories	Current Equivalent Zoning	Possible Future Equivalent Zoning
Single-Family Residential	R-1 Single-Family Residential R-M Multi-Family Residential MU: Mixed Use	R-1 Single-Family Residential R-M Multi-Family Residential MU: Mixed Use
Multiple-Family Residential	R-M Multi-Family Residential CBD: Central Business District (above commercial establishments)	R-M Multi-Family Residential CBD: Central Business District (above commercial establishments) MU: Mixed Use
Mixed Use	MU: Mixed Use	MU: Mixed Use
Office	O-S Office Service CBD: Central Business District G-B: General Business MU: Mixed Use	O-S Office Service CBD: Central Business District G-B: General Business MU: Mixed Use
Downtown Commercial	CBD: Central Business District MU: Mixed Use	CBD: Central Business District MU: Mixed Use
General Commercial	G-B: General Business MU: Mixed Use	G-B: General Business MU: Mixed Use
Industrial	IND: Industrial	IND: Industrial MU: Mixed Use
Public/Institutional	P: Parks R-1 Single-Family Residential R-M Multi-Family Residential MU Mixed Use O-S Office Service CBD: Central Business District G-B: General Business IND: Industrial	P: Parks R-1 Single-Family Residential R-M Multi-Family Residential MU Mixed Use O-S Office Service CBD: Central Business District G-B: General Business IND: Industrial

**Single-Family Residential:** Single-family residential land uses can be accommodated within the current R-1 (Single-Family Residential), R-M (Multi-Family Residential), and MU (Mixed Use) zoning districts. The planned expansion of the Mixed-Use category to the Houghton Avenue

corridor from 1st Street to Fairview Road will expand the allowable areas for higher-density single-family residential. Setbacks will be evaluated in the Mixed-Use District to accommodate structure placement and design that are compatible adjacent to a traditional downtown setting.

**Multi-Family Residential:** Multi-family residential land uses can be accommodated within the current R-M (Multi-Family Residential) District and CBD (Central Business) District (as dwelling units above commercial establishments). In addition, multi-family residential will be evaluated to be added as an allowable use in the Mixed-Use District to encourage duplexes, apartments, and townhouses along the Houghton Avenue corridor.

**Mixed Use:** Mixed uses, consisting of single-family residential, commercial, office, and institutional uses, are currently allowed in the MU (Mixed Use) District. However, uses that are allowed within the CBD and G-B Districts are only allowed by right if they consist of up to 50% of the uses in the district. When a CBD or G-B District use would cause the district to become less than 50% single-family, then those uses must undergo a special use permit process. The City intends to assess whether multi-family uses and very light industrial uses should also be allowed in the Mixed-Use District. Light industrial uses would be most appropriate in the Mixed-Use Future Land Use area located in Priority Development Area 1. This could be accomplished by an overlay district within the Mixed-Use District.

**General Commercial:** The uses included within the General Commercial Future Land Use category are currently accommodated within the G-B (General Business) Zoning District. This district should be reviewed to ensure all appropriate uses are accommodated.

**Office:** Office uses are currently accommodated by the O-S (Office Service) District. This district should be reviewed to ensure other support and community services are also allowed. In addition, office uses are allowed in the G-B (General Business) District, MU (Mixed Use) District, and CBD (Central Business) District.

**Industrial:** Industrial uses are accommodated by the Industrial zoning district. However, this district should be reviewed to ensure that all appropriate and compatible industrial and heavy commercial uses are accommodated. In addition, as stated above, light industrial uses could also be allowed in the Mixed-Use District as an overlay in Priority Development Area 1.

**Public/Institutional:** Public and institutional uses are currently allowed within all zoning districts in the City. The many types of public and institutional uses should be evaluated in detail to determine if all uses within this category are provided for.

**Implementation:** The Zoning Ordinance is a tool through which the Master Plan can be implemented. As development and redevelopment continue, this tool will help to provide compatible land-use relationships between uses and encourage quality site design. This can be accomplished through the site plan review process.

For the plan to be truly effective, however, the Planning Commission and City Council must actively pursue the goals of the plan. This will require revisions to the Zoning Ordinance or other ordinances affecting land use decisions. Additionally, the Planning Commission may wish to actively pursue the implementation of recommended improvements noted throughout the Master Plan document.

