

ST. JOSEPH CHARTER TOWNSHIP MASTER LAND USE PLAN UPDATE

Michigan law requires every municipality that provides zoning to have a comprehensive land use plan (master plan) and to review it at least every five years. Although St. Joseph Charter Township's plan has been reviewed from time to time, the last complete revision was done in 1993. To address changes since then and to prepare for the future, the township hired Wightman & Associates to assist in preparing a new master plan. Members of the Wightman staff are working with a steering committee of township residents, employees and officers to identify current concerns and future possibilities for land use. The end result will be a new master plan that includes extensive data on land, roads & transportation, utilities, businesses, housing, employment, environmental concerns and anything else that will have an impact on future zoning decisions. The report will also include recommendations for the next five to twenty years, including proposed zoning revisions and a plan for capital investment. The new master plan will guide future land use and development decisions throughout the township.

We are currently in the community engagement phase where input from local residents and our consultants' expertise is combined to review existing conditions and influences affecting land use. The outcome will be a vision and a set of goals for township development.

From a community-wide workshop last year, some major themes were developed. They include the following:

St. Joseph Charter Township is a community of great beauty, service and convenience. The assets and culture that support these conclusions need to be preserved & enhanced. The township adjoins Benton Harbor and St. Joseph cities, Shoreham Village, and Royalton, Lincoln and Benton Townships.

St. Joseph Charter Township has physical barriers that separate residents and it lacks a strong identity.

1. The St. Joseph River and Hickory Creek Ravine divide the township.
2. There is no clear identity or sense of arrival.
3. Housing lacks diversity. Some neighborhoods are aging. There is little rental housing.
4. There is a shortage of pedestrian & bicycle paths and reachable destinations (food, culture.)
5. The township is served by three public schools systems.
6. The St. Joseph River offers undeveloped opportunities.
7. The township needs more employment.
8. No public transportation is available.

The next phase will produce possible plans for specific areas within the community. We will try to answer questions like: What makes St. Joseph Charter Township a desirable place to live? Is it a good place to run a business? Do we have adequate recreational opportunities? Do we have good transportation options, including non-motorized options? Do we have the kinds of housing that new residents are looking for? What changes could be made to make the township a better place to live and work? How well are we relating to our neighbors: St. Joseph & Benton Harbor cities, Lincoln, Royalton & Benton townships & Shoreham Village?

We plan to continue community engagement by having resources for interaction at summer events. Look for township representatives and signage at township parks. Study and planning will continue through August. In September, there will be a workshop to present the results of feedback and analysis. Residents will be invited to review and comment. Master Plan development will continue into the fall.

As the process moves forward, you will be able to review information through links at the township's web site: www.sjct.org.

