

**Goal 1: Preserve the County’s quality rural character, which includes productive farms, healthy natural features, and vibrant downtowns that maintain “small town” charm.**

**Objective 1.1:** Direct residential growth in a way that minimizes the negative impact on the County’s rural character and natural resources.

**Strategies**

1. Adopt planned unit development and cluster housing provisions to permit harmonious development with important natural features
2. Through zoning, discourage strip frontage residential development along major roads and encourage medium to high density housing development in areas where it will fit with the existing residential character, and where infrastructure exists to support these uses
3. Require that suitable and adequate transition areas or buffers be established between high intensity and low intensity development areas to maintain property values and physical attractiveness

**Objective 1.2:** Preserve lands that are best suited to productive agriculture and protect the ability of farmers to continue to actively engage in farming

**Strategies**

1. Revise zoning ordinances to discourage new residential and other non-farm related development in prime farmland areas
2. Develop a water and sewer expansion plan that will limit the expansion of these services into productive agriculture areas
3. Explore the feasibility of farmland protection programs, such as Purchase of Development Rights (PDR), and the potential for implementing such programs in the County
4. Create and continue farmers’ markets throughout the County to provide a venue for local agricultural product sales
5. Develop a shelter for the Farmers’ Market and Arts and Crafts display area in the Alma downtown area.
6. Coordinate market efforts among community farmers’ markets
7. Coordinate with farming groups and agencies to promote an understanding and appreciation of the importance of farming to the State’s population and the Gratiot County economy
8. Work with farming groups to recruit agribusinesses and encourage them to locate in the County.

9. Develop a program that encourages business to carry locally produced farm products

**Objective 1.3:** Protect features that comprise the natural character of Gratiot County, including: woods, wetlands, open space, views, and wildlife habitats

**Strategies**

1. Identify key and unique natural areas that should be preserved
2. Adopt regulations to uniformly provide preservation guidelines for future use of land throughout the County
3. Create buffer zones around sensitive features to minimize negative impacts of future development
4. Discourage development within the 100 year flood plain of the Pine, Maple and Bad Rivers
5. Seek ways to have new or expanded businesses contribute to the cost of mitigating impacts created by those businesses
6. Work with local conservation organizations and/or Michigan Department of Natural Resources to preserve and enhance those resources for public observation or use
7. Provide and encourage input to state's Right to Farm Committee to modify high intensity farming regulations

**Objective 1.4:** Protect the quality and quantity of the County's ground water and surface water

**Strategies**

1. Work with the County Health Department to determine appropriate locations for on-site sewage disposal systems and minimum acceptable lot sizes to reduce the potential impact on ground water supplies
2. Do not permit uses and activities which might contribute pollution to rivers, to locate nearby, or require developers to take measures to prevent point or non-point source pollution from entering the river
3. Seek opportunities to improve the water quality of the community rivers and reclaim it as a recreational resource and natural amenity
4. Continue special efforts to clean the Pine River
5. Develop a regional approach to storm water management.
6. Develop a wellhead protection plan.

**Objective 1.5:** Remove existing blighted conditions and prevent the creation of new ones

**Strategies**

1. Adopt a uniform blight ordinance to address the aesthetic, health, and safety considerations associated with such conditions
2. Develop a multi-jurisdictional blight ordinance enforcement program

**Objective 1.6:** Increase energy conservation practices among government, businesses and residents

**Strategies**

1. Institute, evaluate and upgrade any necessary, energy conservation measures with government facilities and equipment
2. Promote energy conservation among commercial and industrial businesses

## **Goal 2: Strengthen the existing cities, villages and hamlets to serve as quality community centers for living, working, and recreating.**

**Objective 2.1:** Improve the physical appearance of the Gratiot County downtowns and business districts to enhance community image.

### **Strategies**

1. Establish gateway districts at all major entrances to the cities and shopping districts to improve the visitor's first visual impression of the cities, especially the east and north entrances to Alma
2. Update municipal signage to be aesthetically pleasing, uniform, and in character of each city
3. Enhance the waterfront and central business districts through continued projects on the Riverfront Brownfield redevelopment project
4. Commission an updated market analysis for the riverfront project
5. Pursue additional funding and tax programs to encourage Brownfield mitigation along riverfront
6. Develop or revise local downtown plans to address specific improvements (e.g. streetscaping, landscaping, façade enhancement, etc.) and follow the plan's recommendations
7. Develop ideas to preserve and enhance the historic character of the downtown buildings
8. Through the zoning ordinance and incentive programs, encourage the creation of second floor loft apartments in the downtown
9. Work with Greater Gratiot Development, Inc., local DDA's, and Chambers of Commerce to market and promote County-wide downtowns to shoppers and potential developers/new businesses
10. Work with Greater Gratiot Development, Inc., local DDA's, and Chambers of Commerce to recruit of small businesses into the County's downtowns
11. Work with Greater Gratiot Development, Inc., local DDA's, Chambers of Commerce, and volunteer professional to develop and implement a a professional design assistance program to downtown property owners/retailers that helps identify specific cost-effective building improvements that fit within the community's character
12. Clean and redevelop former Velsicol plant site for reuse

**Objective 2.2:** Maintain and enhance existing neighborhoods

### **Strategies**

Provide adequate areas in the vicinity of the Alma College campus for multiple family and student housing while minimizing the encroachment of multiple-family and student housing units into established one and two-family neighborhoods

1. Prohibit the encroachment of large commercial and industrial development into establish one and two-family neighborhoods through the zoning ordinance and the requirement of adequate buffers
2. Install sidewalks, street trees, parks and other amenities in neighborhoods, as needed, with a sidewalk on at least one side of every street
3. Identify historic structures in the community and consider the establishment of historic districts
4. Identify redevelopment areas within neighborhoods and take appropriate actions to remove and replace dilapidated housing
5. Work with local housing agencies to identify and implement appropriate housing programs for rehabilitation of single-family homes
6. Through zoning and incentive programs, encourage infill development of vacant lots within neighborhoods that fit well with the existing character
7. Ensure that infrastructure to support existing neighborhoods is maintained and improved, especially by paving residential streets and continuing the sidewalk replacement program
8. Continue and enhance local tree planting and landscaping programs
9. Continue MDOT Enhancement Grant program to connect key areas of cities, including downtown, parks, Historical Society, library, etc.
10. Develop additional residential areas to provide a mix of housing types that addresses the housing needs of all residents, with respect to size, expense and location.
11. Employ neo-traditional neighborhood design concepts in new housing development, emphasizing pedestrian circulation, public open spaces, quality architectural design, etc.
12. Develop new housing only where it can be adequately served by schools, parks and open space, streets, emergency services, storm drainage and utilities.
13. Work with neighboring townships to annex or enter into P.A. 425 Agreements for additional residential areas.
14. Coordinate new senior housing with Masonic Pathways.
15. Consider riverfront locations for new residential development, as available.

16. Develop former airport on Bridge Avenue in Alma into residential sites with full city services.

**Objective 2.3:** Provide more recreation options and places of interest within cities

**Strategies**

1. Encourage further development and construction of the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail and develop a trail head for the trail in downtown Alma
2. Include the Pine River in recreational plans
3. Explore opportunities to partner with other groups, such as libraries, schools, and local recreation groups to find ways to program activities and entertainment for residents of all ages
4. Create pedestrian and non-motorized linkages from the neighborhoods to recreational facilities
5. Develop a teen recreation park featuring a skate park.

**Objective 2.4:** Encourage the development of a variety of housing types

**Strategies**

1. Through zoning and incentive programs, promote residential development that includes a mix of new homes that are affordable to all income levels and household types
2. Through zoning and incentive programs, encourage the development of suitable housing for the elderly population near the downtowns

**Objective 2.5:** Concentrate intense development such as residential subdivisions, commerce, and industry in and around urban centers where similar activities are available and/or the infrastructure (public water and sewer, roads, and other services) is already in place or can be expanded cost effectively

**Strategies**

1. Do not establish commercial, industrial, and intense residential zoning districts in areas where public water and sanitary sewer are unavailable or cannot be reasonably extended from an existing source

**Goal 3: Provide quality public services, such as water, sewer, public safety, and transportation network, in the most cost effective manner.**

**Objective 3.1:** Provide utilities adequate to service existing and future development

**Strategies**

1. Develop a plan to begin replacing or repairing aging sewer infrastructure
2. Develop a plan that outlines if, when, and where water and sewer infrastructure will be extended and how the ongoing costs of these services will be covered (e.g. tax sharing agreement)
3. Encourage developers to place all power, telephone, cable, and broadband lines underground where physically and financially feasible
4. Survey residents and businesses about existing local public facilities and services and develop a capital improvements program that reflects the most desired facilities and public's willingness to pay for them
5. Reduce infiltration and inflow into the sanitary sewer system

**Objective 3.2:** Maintain and expand the road network for safe and effective vehicular circulation

**Strategies**

1. Work with the County Road Commission to prevent through traffic on local roads with designated truck routes
2. Encourage developers to employ access management techniques, wherever possible, to improve vehicular circulation
3. Expand DART services, with emphasis on DART vehicular needs in new commercial, office and medical developments
4. Cooperate with the Gratiot County Road Commission and the Michigan Department of Transportation to ensure that a proper relationship exists between planned road improvements and the jurisdiction's desired future land use pattern
5. Provide a transportation system that recognizes the need for both auto and truck traffic and eliminates as many points of conflict between the two as possible
6. Increase safety by providing opportunities for non-motorized circulation along existing and planned road systems

7. Encourage the development of service drives along significant commercial corridors such as Alger Road in order to facilitate safe and efficient vehicular turning movements
8. Require that private road be built to public road standards
9. Work with MDOT to complete US-127

**Objective 3.3:** Provide high quality public safety services throughout Gratiot County

**Strategies**

1. Maintain the current mutual aid agreements for firefighting and police while researching ways to improve current mutual aid agreements
2. Maintain the current private emergency medical service
3. Continuously upgrade emergency medical services within a cost-effective framework that focuses on local needs
4. Encourage, through local health care providers, preventative health programs (dietary education, exercise) to local residents

**Objective 3.4:** Provide public transit services within and connecting to the County

**Strategies**

1. Seek opportunities to improve transportation access to those sectors of the population in need, such as the elderly and handicapped, as technology advances and funding becomes available
2. Support opportunities to improve rail transportation service as technology advances and funding becomes available
3. Work with bus companies to increase bus service that connects Gratiot County to Lansing, Grand Rapids, Saginaw, and other significant hubs

**Objective 3.5:** Ensure that adequate land is reserved for public facilities such as fire stations and other facilities

**Strategies**

1. Plan for possible relocation of Police Department in cooperation with the needs of Fire Department
2. Zone all sites appropriately
3. Reevaluate needs on a regular basis

**Objective 3.7:** Provide non-motorized facilities to increase transportation opportunities

**Strategies**

1. Install sidewalks on at least one side of all city streets
2. Establish a sidewalk replacement/repair policy that is cost-effective to both the cities and residents
3. Develop non-motorized paths to connect the communities in Gratiot County.

**Objective 3.8:** Develop a county-wide recycling program

**Objective 3.9:** Work with high-speed internet carriers to provide service throughout the County

**Objective 3.10:** Improve and maintain the Gratiot Community Airport

**Strategies**

1. Expand membership of the airport authority.
2. Develop a stable funding source for the airport.

## **Goal 4: Provide and sustain economic opportunities by retaining, attracting and growing quality employers, including those within the agriculture, industrial and commercial sectors**

**Objective 4.1:** Promote the well-planned development and redevelopment of vacant commercial property with high-quality uses that expand the commercial options

### **Strategies**

1. Collaborate with Greater Gratiot Development, Inc., DDAs and the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce to assist in the marketing of vacant commercial properties
2. Develop electronic marketing brochure to entice retail and professional services to the downtown area
3. Through zoning and the site plan review process institute measures that promote effective circulation in commercial areas, such as: minimizing the number and spacing of access points, maximizing curb radii, parallel access drives, landscaping, control of sign size and number, pedestrian facilities, and careful placement of traffic control devices
4. Encourage the establishment of additional restaurants, with an emphasis on providing more upscale dining opportunities
5. Promote the development an energy park on the former oil refinery site
6. Install new planting system for the Alma downtown and north town area.
7. Develop common zoning district terminology within Gratiot County.
8. Work with Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. to promote the Renaissance Zone as an ideal place for additional commercial development

**Objective 4.2:** Retain and enhance existing commercial development

### **Strategies**

1. Improve the image of key commercial corridors through signage controls, landscaping, and streetscaping
2. Work with the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth to access any incentive programs that can strengthen local commercial and industrial operations and help retain local jobs

3. Review zoning parking requirements for commercial and industrial districts.
4. Review height restrictions in zoning ordinance with an eye towards permitting more intensive development in select areas.
5. Develop a more secure and stable funding source the economic development efforts in Gratiot County.

**Objective 4.3:** Preserve and enhance the vitality of the County's downtowns

**Strategies**

1. Limit commercial zoning outside of the downtowns while allowing for some home-based business incubator opportunities
2. Encourage the development of additional residential units in the downtowns, such as second-story loft apartments
3. Encourage the establishment of additional restaurants in the downtowns
4. Complete a market study to determine what businesses can be supported in the downtown areas
5. Work with Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. to recruit business that will be supported and fit into the downtown areas
6. Identify and establish a mechanism for financing recruitment efforts
7. Establish community-wide and downtown events and promotional campaigns
8. Institute a close working relationship between DDAs, merchants and Police Departments to establish a long-range comprehensive program to deter crime within the DDA district
9. Develop advertising and promotional campaigns that emphasize the downtown as a safe, comfortable and leisurely place to shop
10. Add bicycle racks to more locations in the downtown.
11. Make better interconnections between the downtown, the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail, and the Riverwalk through paths and signage.
12. Seek funding through federal grant programs for transportation and streetscape improvements
13. Install landscaping, street furniture, way finding signage, and other amenities where necessary to enhance the downtown streetscape

**Objective 4.4:** Retain and promote the expansion of the industrial tax base with a variety of small, clean, high-tech industries

### **Strategies**

1. Continue efforts to work with eligible businesses and industries to take advantage of available tax abatement programs
2. Maintain and consider additional incentives to desired industrial firms wishing to locate with the community, such as tax abatements for clean high-tech industry
3. Provide the technological infrastructure necessary for modern, high-tech industry, such as broadband and wireless connectivity. To further this effort, continue participation in the multi-county Link Michigan Telecommunications Planning Effort.
4. Utilize state and federal grants to assist in the development of infrastructure needed for new or expanded businesses in industrial parks
5. Investigate and utilize available grant programs aimed at industry retention and attraction
6. Identify optimal locations and assemble land for future industrial development and establish additional industrial parks
7. Solicit high-tech/medical research users to establish a technology park or “smart park”
8. Redevelop existing Brownfield sites, such as Alma Iron & Metal site and the former Midwest Refinery site on Bridge Avenue
9. Redevelop the former Total/UDS refinery property north of Superior for industrial uses. Market the community’s industrial properties with the assistance of the Greater Gratiot Development
10. Encourage the development of new types of industries, especially those that are economically associated with the existing industrial base and compatible with the environment and existing land use pattern
11. Provide industry at locations which can be readily serviced by public utilities and which are easily accessible to the existing transportation network
12. Preserve and rehabilitate appropriate industrial areas by removing incompatible uses, consolidating land, and removing vacant and substandard buildings, as well as giving particular attention to landscaping, buffer strips, off-street parking, and other design matters
13. Seek a means of attracting and assisting existing industries to expand their operations to enhance the community

**Objective 4.5:** Minimize and/or mitigate the impact of existing and future industrial land uses on the environment and non-compatible uses

**Strategies**

1. Consider the development of new industrial parks in designated areas away from the waterfront and other incompatible uses, but with access to highways, adequate utilities, and technological infrastructure. Support the relocation of any remaining industries away from the waterfront to industrially-zoned properties
2. Continue mitigation efforts on existing Brownfield areas
3. Tailor zoning regulations to promote clean industrial uses, and discourage large, heavy industrial uses in inappropriate locations such as adjacent to residential uses, schools, the downtown, and the waterfront
4. Revise or improve regulation when necessary to help lessen the impact of industrial nuisances such as noise, odor, dust, vibration, outdoor storage, and intensive truck operations.
5. Separate industrial development from residential uses by open space and landscaped buffers and/or other transitional land use
6. Promote well-designed and landscaped industrial buildings with adequate environmental performance standards

**Objective 4.6:** Establish visitor and recreation-oriented businesses where appropriate

**Strategies**

1. Encourage and promote agri-tourism type businesses, such as the development of a Historic Farmstead
2. Encourage businesses that help people enjoy and connect to area-wide natural resources, such as rivers

**Goal 5: Provide high quality of life opportunities, such as premier cultural and recreational resources, for the enjoyment of people of all generations.**

**Objective 5.1:** Provide public access to the waterfront

**Strategies**

1. Acquire additional land to expand the Riverwalk, including potential extensions westward into Arcada Township and eastward into Pine River Township and the City of St. Louis
2. Preserve an area for public access to the river in future riverfront developments

**Objective 5.2:** Provide a system of parks and recreational opportunities that meets the needs of all segments of the population

**Strategies**

1. Develop a community recreational center to offer recreation activities for all ages
2. Consider the development of an art center for youth and adult art activities
3. Consider the creation of a Gratiot Area Recreational Authority to coordinate and improve county-wide recreational assets and programming
4. Work with existing groups or the proposed Gratiot Area Recreational Authority to provide more recreational activities for youth and teens, especially after school
5. Continue to expand the technology available at library facilities
6. Develop recreational opportunities and programming on the Pine and Maple rivers
7. Coordinate parks and recreation facilities and programming with Alma College and public schools, and possibly through the proposed Gratiot Area Recreation Authority
8. Maintain a current Parks and Recreation Plan, with approval from the MDNR to qualify the Gratiot County communities for recreation grant funding
9. Apply for public and private grants to purchase open space and recreational land along rivers and within cities

10. Cooperate with the State of Michigan and adjoining communities in the development of recreation and community facilities

**Objective 5.3:** Enhance the walkability of the cities

**Strategies**

1. Provide pedestrian and non-motorized transportation facilities throughout the county and cities to link homes, schools, recreation areas, and downtown and other shopping areas
2. Strengthen pedestrian access to the riverfront
3. Maintain sidewalks to provide a safe and convenient pedestrian and non-motorized transportation
4. Within the cities, provide sidewalks on both sides of the street in all new developments

**Objective 5.4:** Ensure that adequate land is reserved for parks, open space and connecting trails

**Strategies**

1. Work with existing recreation plans and implement the plans
2. Include the development or improvement of specific recreational sites, such as the W.T. Morris Memorial Swimming Pool, the Smith Farm site, the proposed St. Louis Historic Park, and a Michigan Avenue boat launch, in local recreation plans
3. Create a specific plan for the trail system, including connections to cities and other community hubs
4. Encourage developers to include parks in the overall development plan
5. Progress with replacing and adding trees and improving landscaping in all park areas

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## **Goal 6: Provide quality educational opportunities that prepare residents for local jobs and cutting edge industries**

**Objective 6.1:** Maintain and enhance the quality of the Public Schools for the continued success of the community

### **Strategies**

1. Hold semi-annual meetings with the School Board to discuss community issues of mutual interest
2. Investigate educational opportunities that jurisdictions and community organizations could offer to supplement school curriculum
3. Keep the school district abreast of development plans that may impact school enrollment
4. Recognize increasing age of existing school facilities

**Objective 6.2:** Ensure that adequate land is reserved for public facilities such as schools, libraries, fire stations, community centers and other facilities

### **Strategies**

1. Work closely with the schools and the Department Heads to determine future public space requirements
2. Acquire land needed for public facilities
3. Work with schools to identify school sites

**Objective 6.3:** Develop a skilled labor force that is productive, efficient and possesses state-of-the-art technical and professional skills

### **Strategies**

1. Form a coalition among local industries, educational institutions and to a limited extent the Jobs Commission or other state agency to provide state-of-the-art technical training for existing and potential employees
2. Develop a community college in Gratiot County
3. Increase vocational educational opportunities
4. Promote the involvement of citizens in continuous education programs
5. Develop a program that helps support and mentor new entrepreneurs

**Goal 7: Continue and strengthen quality community collaboration to promote sustainable planning practices and elevate Gratiot County as a whole.**

**Objective 7.1:** Develop and nurture community involvement, community pride and community awareness

**Strategies**

1. Continue to celebrate the Annual Highland Festival and Games
2. In coordination with Alma College and the Public Schools, organize and publicize cultural, civic, and educational events open to the public
3. Encourage quality local attractions and community events that will promote citizen and business participation
4. Work with service groups to fix-up and clean-up residential, commercial and industrial areas to increase community pride
5. Encourage coordinated community and nonprofit volunteer programs and ensure volunteers are rewarded and/or appreciated
6. Redesign and promote the community calendar

**Objective 7.2:** Enhance the relationship with educational systems to maximize the quality and efficiency of recreational facilities and services provided

**Strategies**

1. Coordinate parks and recreation facilities and programming through the proposed Gratiot Area Recreation Authority
2. Hold quarterly meetings strictly to monitor recreational activities and goals from both parties concerned
3. Include in quarterly newsletter information about recreational objectives and goals
4. Design and send out a follow-up community survey on the recreational status of the area

**Objective 7.3:** Coordinate facilities, services, and land use decisions with adjacent governmental units and on a county-wide basis

**Strategies**

1. Participate in environmental initiatives at the watershed level

2. Establish an Urban Growth Area in coordination with adjacent jurisdictions to determine the most appropriate locations for future development and potential P.A. 425 agreements along common borders
3. Coordinate provision of emergency services with adjacent communities
4. Coordinate planning and zoning between adjacent communities and on a county-wide basis

**Objective 7.4:** Foster a positive relationship with local institutions and businesses for the economic and social benefit of all

**Strategies**

1. Coordinate cultural and civic events with Alma College and local businesses
2. Collaborate with local business on commercial and industrial marketing efforts
3. Collaborate with the hospital, Masonic Pathways, and Alma College to develop a regional medical center
4. Capitalize on off-season conferences and meetings held at Alma College, for the benefit of area businesses
5. Establish community improvement programs that facilitate and utilize public and private sector partnerships