

# CITY OF ALMA MASTER PLAN



**FINAL DRAFT  
OCTOBER 2002**

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# **INTRODUCTION**

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Once adopted, the Master Land Use Plan is the official policy guide to be used by the City Commission and Planning Commission to solve the existing and anticipated community development problems identified in this document. Through the text and maps, the Plan illustrates the attitude and desire of the community toward future growth and development. Further, the Plan also promotes continuity in development policy as appointments to the Planning Commission and City Commission change over the years.

This document represents the up-date of the City of Alma Master Plan, adopted in 1986. The City has undergone many changes since 1986, and much planning has occurred of the City recently. Various studies have been completed over recent years that support the need for an updated Master Plan. These studies relate to waterfront brownfield redevelopment, parks and recreation, downtown economic enhancement, and a capital improvements program. To ensure that land use and development policies reflect current conditions in the City and complement other studies completed, it is essential that the Master Plan is periodically evaluated and kept current.

## **What is Planning?**

Planning is a process which involves the conscious selection of policy choices relating to land use, growth and development in the community. The Master Plan is the primary official City document which sets forth growth and development policies for the future of the community. The City derived its authority for the preparation of a Master Plan from the Municipal Planning Act P.A. 285 of 1931. Section 6 of the Act states, in part:

*The commission shall make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the municipality, including any areas outside of its boundaries which, in the commission's judgment, bear relation to the planning of the municipality. The plan, with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive matter shall show the commission's recommendations for the development of the territory, including, among other things, the general location, character, and extent of streets, viaducts, subways.*

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## How is the Plan to be Used?

The plan serves many functions and is to be used in a variety of ways:

- 1) The Plan is a general statement of the City's goals and policies and provides a single, comprehensive view of the community's desire for the future.
- 2) The Plan serves as an aid in daily decision-making. The goals and policies outlined in the Plan guide the Planning Commission and City Commission in their deliberations on zoning, subdivision, capital improvements and other matters relating to land use and development. This provides a stable, long-term basis for decision-making.
- 3) A third function the plan serves is providing the statutory basis upon which zoning decisions are based. The City and Village Zoning Act (P.A. 207 of 1921, as amended) requires that the zoning ordinance be in accordance with a plan designed to meet the residents' need for natural resources, places of residence, recreation, industry, trade, service, and other uses, and to insure they are situated in appropriate locations. However, it is important to note that the Master Plan and accompanying maps do not replace other City Ordinances, specifically the Zoning Ordinance and Map. Zoning is only one of the many legal devices used to implement the Master Plan.
- 4) The Plan attempts to coordinate public improvements and private development. For example, public investments such as road improvements should be located in areas identified in the Plan as having the greatest benefit to the City and its residents.
- 5) Finally, the plan serves as an educational tool and gives citizens, property owners, developers, and adjacent communities a clear indication of the City's direction for the future.

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In summary, the City Master Plan is the only officially adopted document which sets forth an agenda for the achievement of land use goals and policies. The plan is not a panacea for the numerous conflicting desires of citizens and City officials. It is a long range statement of general goals and policies aimed at unified and coordinated development of the City. As such, it provides the basis upon which zoning and land use decisions are made.

### **How was Public Input Obtained?**

Citizen input is the core of any planning effort. In order for the goals of the plan to be achievable, general consensus regarding the vital issues to the community must be reached. One tool used to facilitate the gathering of citizen input was a Visioning Workshop. The goal of conducting Visioning Workshops is to attempt to gather citizen input on a variety of topics and to encourage conceptualization of a desired future for the community. The visioning process provides a vehicle for people of diverse viewpoints to identify and agree upon the common dreams they have for their community, and encourages people to express with words a desired future.

On March 25, 2002, The City of Alma Planning Commission sponsored a community visioning workshop to identify current and future development needs and issues that must be addressed to shape and serve the City of Alma. Local residents, Planning Commissioners, City Commission members, DDA representatives, ZBA members and other public officials were encouraged to attend to provide ideas on such issues as community image, residential land uses, commercial and industrial revitalization, transportation and traffic, natural and historic resources, downtown development, and use of vacant and transitional land. The vision statements gathered from this workshop were then used to develop the planning goals, land use strategies, and policies for this update of the City of Alma Master Plan. A complete report containing the results of the Visioning Workshop has been included as an Appendix of this document.

### **How is the Plan Organized?**

The City of Alma Master Plan is comprised of three basic sections. The BACKGROUND STUDIES section discusses current demographics, land uses, historical trends and projections, illustrating the point from which planning must begin. The GOALS AND POLICIES section

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outlines policies that provide a framework for a final plan. The LAND USE PLAN is the end result, in which the community's vision for the future is imposed upon the present scenario. While the starting point is unalterable, the end result can be changed according to the policies applied.

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# **BACKGROUND STUDIES**

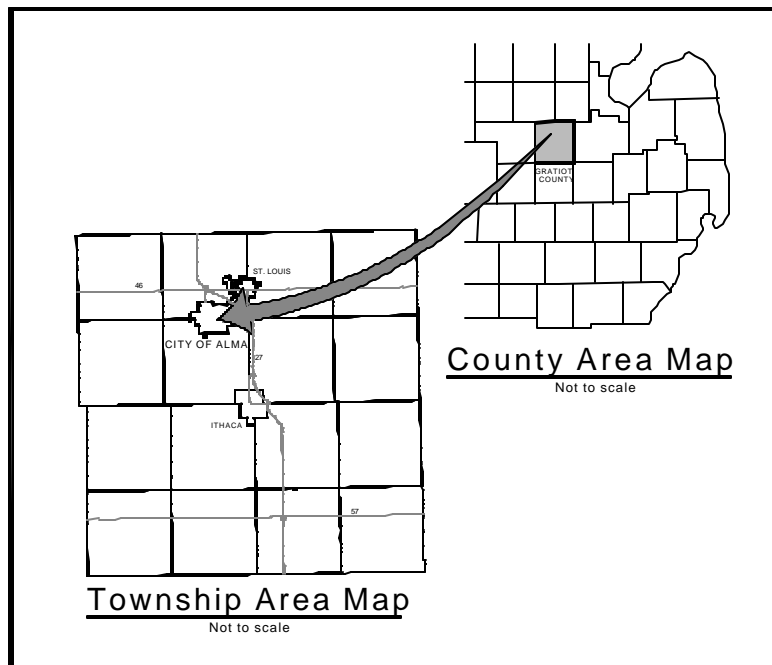
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# LOCATION AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

## Location

Alma is located in the heart of lower Michigan along the picturesque Pine River (See Map 1). The City is comprised of approximately six square miles and is surrounded by Arcada and Pine River Townships, in Gratiot County. The City of St Louis is in close proximity to the northeast. The communities of Ithaca, Mt. Pleasant, Midland and St. Johns are all within 35 miles. Alma is less than two hours driving time from all major Michigan market areas such as Detroit, Grand Rapids, Saginaw, and the State Capitol, Lansing. Major out state cities such as Chicago Cleveland and Indianapolis are within 350 miles. It is centered in one of the prime agricultural areas in Michigan but is only a few miles from the popular recreational area of Northern Michigan.

**MAP 1  
REGIONAL SETTING**



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## **Regional Context**

Alma is influenced by what is occurring outside of the City in adjacent urban areas such as the cities of St. Louis and Ithaca, as well as by the greater rural Gratiot County. The following is a brief description of the local governmental units in the vicinity of the City.

### **City of St. Louis**

The City of St. Louis is two miles to the northeast along M-46. The community has about half the population of Alma with a small but vigorous downtown. St. Louis has been dealing with major environmental problems in the Pine River, and with the clean up of the Pine River sediments, activities are expected to be refocused. A number of penal institutions have been located in and around the City of St. Louis, and much of its recent growth can be attributed to this development. Michigan Avenue is the main connection between Alma and St. Louis. The scene as one drives between the two communities is one of older industrial development and lower income housing with some scattered commercial development.

### **Pine River Township**

Pine River Township is on the northern edge of Alma and is bisected by M-46. Commercial development is extensive along this highway from the western edge of St. Louis to Luce Road. Pine River Township also has commercial establishments along Wright Avenue from US-127 to the northern City limits. Garr Tool is the major manufacturing unit found in the Township. The north half is still predominantly agricultural with some rural residential development. Forest Hill is the only rural community located in Pine River Township.

### **Arcada Township**

Arcada Township, to the south of Alma, remains predominately agricultural but has experienced some rural residential development. The Township's major resources are its rich agricultural soils. Rural residential development is clustered along the Pine River and provides a significant tax base for the Township.

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## **Gratiot County**

Gratiot County is the geographical center of the Lower Peninsula. Most of the County is well suited to agriculture and it is among the top ten counties in Michigan's agricultural production. With over 80% of its land in farms, agriculture is the principle enterprise. Major crops are corn, various beans and wheat. It is one of the nation's leaders in the production of beans. About fifteen (15) percent of the population lives on farms. Much of the land is naturally wet, swampy and poorly drained thus many fields have been tilled and drainage ditches developed. The County Seat is located in Ithaca and other communities such as Riverdale, Breckenridge, and Middleton support the agricultural orientation. Each year some of the agricultural land is converted to urban uses but wetness is a major limitation especially on the lake plains in the eastern half of the county. Other areas have a poor potential for urban development because of shrink-swell problems. The western half of the county has good potential for recreational development with rolling countryside. About eight percent of the county is wooded.

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## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The history of Alma begins with the settlement of Ralph Ely and others in Arcada Township. Alma, originally called Elyton, was platted April 28, 1858. In January of 1872, the Village of Alma was incorporated. At that time, the population was 425 people. The first election was held February 2, 1872.

Early settlers harvested timber which leads to the uncovering of some of the most fertile soil in the State. Alma's early industry included a saw mill, sugar beet manufacturing plant, and a flour mill.

Although lumbering was one of Alma's earliest industries, the invention of the automobile lead to a more expanded and diversified industrial base. Education and health services, retail, die casting and auto-related manufacturing have become Alma's economic base. Alma is also the medical center of Gratiot County. The Gratiot Community Hospital and the Gratiot Mental Health Clinic are all located in Alma. Alma is also the home of Alma College, which was founded in 1886 by the United Presbyterian Church. In recent decades, Alma has become known as "Scotland USA," due to its hosting of the Highland Festival, a gathering of Scottish clans.

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# PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

## Geology

The existing terrain in and around the City of Alma was created by the Wisconsin ice sheet, which retreated from the region about 13,000 years ago. The hillier portions of the City are associated with the Gladwin morainic system, which is comprised of loamy and sandy till with a clay base in some areas. The flatter, sandier areas in and around the City of Alma are associated with outwash sediments from the melting of the great ice sheets. Just to the east of Alma are the extremely flat lakebeds of Glacial Lake Saginaw. Glacial Drift thickness obscures any influence of the underlying sedimentary bedrock. The Pine River flows through Alma to the east. Elevations range from a low of 720 feet along the river to over 785 feet. Minima dissection has occurred as a result of stream activity. The resulting countryside has few limitations to limit land development as to slope. Drainage in some of the finer textured soils may however limit some types of development.

## Soils

Three soil associations are mapped in the Gratiot County Soil Survey for the City of Alma. The well drained to somewhat poorly drained Perrington–Ithaca association is found on the western and northern uplands. The Capac–Parkhill–Metamora association occupies most of Alma’s eastern portions. These soils, formed in glacial till, are very poorly to somewhat poorly drained. The Vestaburg–Tedrow–Boyer association possessing mostly glacial outwash sands borders the Pine River. Most of the soils have been modified to some degree by human activity and could now be classified as Urban land soils. The main concern associated with the soils is wetness.

The dominant soil mapping units are the Perrington bam with two to six percent slopes, the Ithaca loam with zero to three percent slopes and the Tedrow loamy sand with zero to two percent slopes. There are approximately twenty different mapping units within the City limits. This is typical of an area this size developed on a glacial landscape.

**TABLE 1**  
**SOIL MAPPING UNITS**

Symbol	Name	Major Management Problem
<b>Ad</b>	Adrian Muck	Wetness
<b>Be</b>	Belleville loamy sand	Wetness
<b>CaA</b>	Capac loam, 0 to 3 % slopes	Wetness
<b>Ch</b>	Cohoctah fine sandy loam, gravelly substratum	Wetness
<b>Co</b>	Cohoctah-Ceresco fine sandy loams, gravelly substratum	Wetness
<b>ItA</b>	Ithaca loam, 0 to 3 % slopes	Wetness
<b>Ke</b>	Kingsville loamy sand	Wetness
<b>Le</b>	Lenawee clay loam	Wetness
<b>MaB</b>	Marlette sandy loam, 2 to 6 % slopes	Erosion
<b>Mc</b>	Martisco muck	Wetness
<b>MtB</b>	Metea loamy sand, 0 to 6 % slopes	Shallow
<b>OaB</b>	Oakville fine sand, 0 to 6 % slopes	Wetness
<b>Ph</b>	Parkhill loam	Wetness
<b>PkB</b>	Perrington loam, 2 to 6 % slopes	Erosion
<b>PkC</b>	Perrington loam, 6 to 12 % slopes	Erosion
<b>Ps</b>	Pits	No soil
<b>PtB</b>	Plainfield loamy sand, 0 to 6 % slopes	Shallow
<b>RdA</b>	Riverdale loamy sand, 0 to 2 % slopes	Wetness
<b>SeA</b>	Selfridge loamy sand, 0 to 2 % slopes	Wetness
<b>SpB</b>	Spinks loamy sand, 0 to 6 % slopes	Shallow
<b>TeA</b>	Tedrow loamy sand, loamy substratum, 0 to 2 % slopes	Wetness

Source: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Gratiot County Soil Survey

The major limitation presented by the soils in the City of Alma is wetness, which results in problems with construction sites and infrastructure especially on the southwest side of town and south of the river. The water table is near the surface for good portions of the year in these areas as well. Other problems such as frost action or shrink and swell can play havoc with such things as local streets and driveways.

## **Vegetation**

Alma is situated in the ecotonal region between the northern coniferous forests and the southern deciduous forests. Thus many species are at the extreme edge of their natural range. Several significant deciduous tree species commonly found in southern Michigan such as the black oak or tulip tree are not found naturally in Alma. Mesic Beech Maple woodlots are common around

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Alma and drier sites are usually occupied by Oaks and their associates. Typical hydric species found in wetlands and along the floodplains include red and silver maples, cottonwoods and elms. Humans have modified much of the vegetation within the City limits and many exotics have been introduced into the community plantings. The natural habitat has changed significantly but many urban loving fauna have proliferated such as rabbits, raccoons and skunks.

## **Water Resources**

The lazily meandering Pine River is the major surface water resource in the vicinity. It has been dammed at the State Street Bridge and a millpond has been created upstream to the west. A public greenway/riverwalk corridor follows portions of the river with parks and water-related recreational activities available. The river also winds through residential and industrial areas. It is recognized as a prime asset to the community and the community has recognized the need for protection. Currently it provides the main source of raw water for municipal needs. The Pine River does have the potential to flood large portions of the City as evidenced by the 100-year flood of September 1986.

A first order stream is found at the southern edge of the community and several other similar streams are found just outside the City limits. No natural lakes of any significance are within walking distance.

Upon determining that revised federal drinking water standards would be difficult to attain using inland lake and streams as a municipal water source, the City began investigating the use of groundwater sources to satisfy all of the City's water demands. Currently groundwater supplies are clean and usable but are easily polluted and hard to clean when polluted. Movement of groundwater is very slow and no sunlight is available to facilitate cleansing. Groundwater recharge areas are found to the west and north of town with flow towards the Pine River. There is the potential for agricultural pollution in rural areas; therefore wellhead protection will need to be considered, especially if groundwater becomes the primary municipal water source.

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## **Drainage**

Many impervious surfaces have been developed with urban expansion over the past few years and there are some minor localized problems. Care should be taken that these are not exacerbated. Problems may arise during spring melt or summer thunderstorm activity on streets and in local depressions where development has taken place. Significant runoff from adjacent agricultural lands is minimal but still has the potential to be a localized problem. Much of the City has adequate storm water drainage. The few problem spots are on the near north side and some isolated stretches south of the river.

## **Topography**

Topographic influence on human usage is minimal with limited areas greater than 6 percent slope. Some swales contain wet sites and there are a few areas where minor drops to the Pine River occur.

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# **POPULATION & HOUSING**

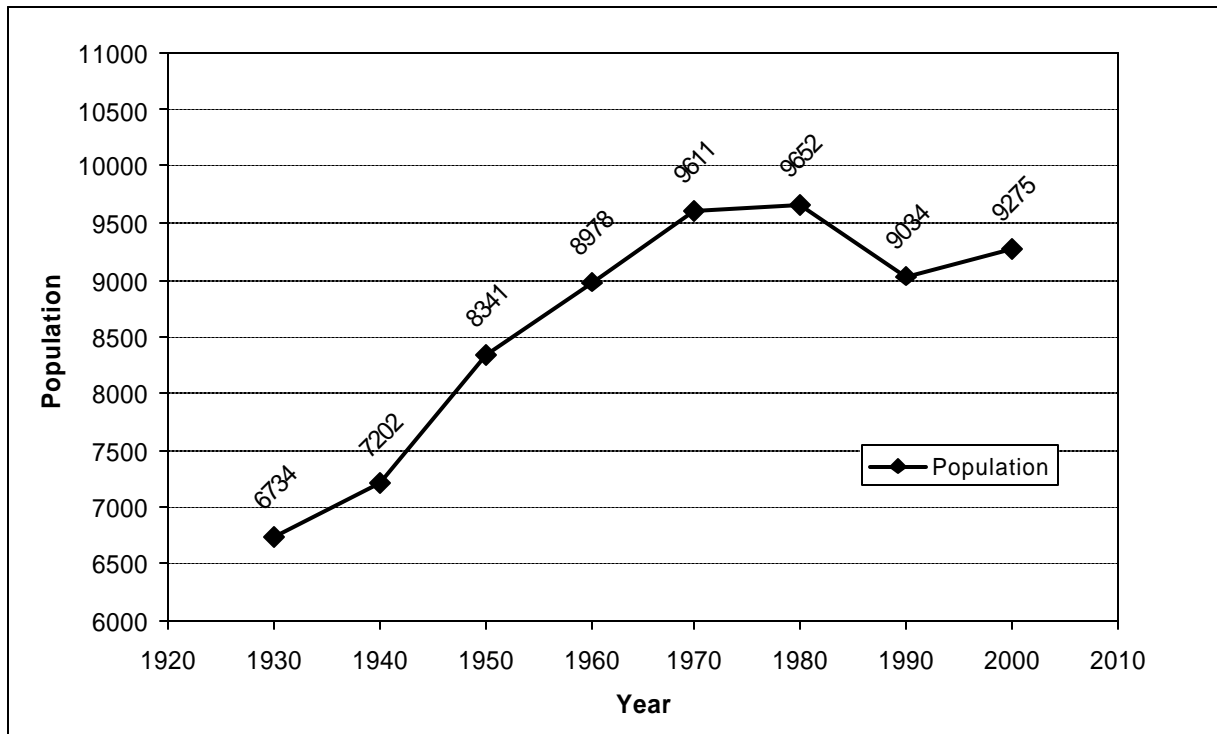
## **Inventory and Analysis**

As part of the initial planning activities undertaken, which are preparatory to the formation of the City of Alma's Master Plan, population characteristics and related demographics were compiled and analyzed. Familiarity with this information is essential to recognizing and ultimately addressing demographic and physical development trends, including land use patterns and infrastructure, community facilities, and housing needs. The primary sources used in compiling this data include the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Censuses, as well as the Michigan Department of Career Development (MDCD) and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC).

## **Population Trends and Growth**

In 1900, the City of Alma's population was slightly above two thousand. Between 1900 and 1950, Alma added over 125 people per year. The 1960 U.S. Census calculated a population of just fewer than nine thousand. Alma's population has remained relatively steady in the subsequent forty years, with the 2000 Census placing the City's population at 9,275. Figure 1, below, illustrates the population trends of the City of Alma over the past seventy years. Most of the population growth took place prior to 1950, when the City reached a population figure of 8,341. The population of Alma reached its peak in the 1980 Census with 9,652, which was followed by a 6.4% decrease to 9,034 in the 1990 Census. The 2000 Census now shows a reversal in this trend, with a 2.7% increase to 9,275. With significant annexations and redevelopment on the horizon, significant population growth is likely to occur within the planning period of this document – approximately the next five to ten years.

**FIGURE 1  
POPULATION TRENDS, 1930-2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1930-2000

**TABLE 2  
POPULATION COMPARISON, 1980-2000**

	1980	1990	Change		2000	Change	
			No.	%		#	%
<b>City of Alma</b>	9,652	9,034	-618	-6.4%	9,275	241	2.7%
<b>Arcada Township</b>	1,784	1,660	-124	-7.0%	1,708	48	2.9%
<b>Pine River Township</b>	1,939	2,064	125	6.4%	2,451	387	18.8%
<b>Gratiot County</b>	40,448	38,982	-1,466	-3.6%	42,285	3,303	8.5%
<b>State of Michigan</b>	9,262,044	9,295,297	33,253	0.4%	9,938,444	643,147	6.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980, 1990, 2000

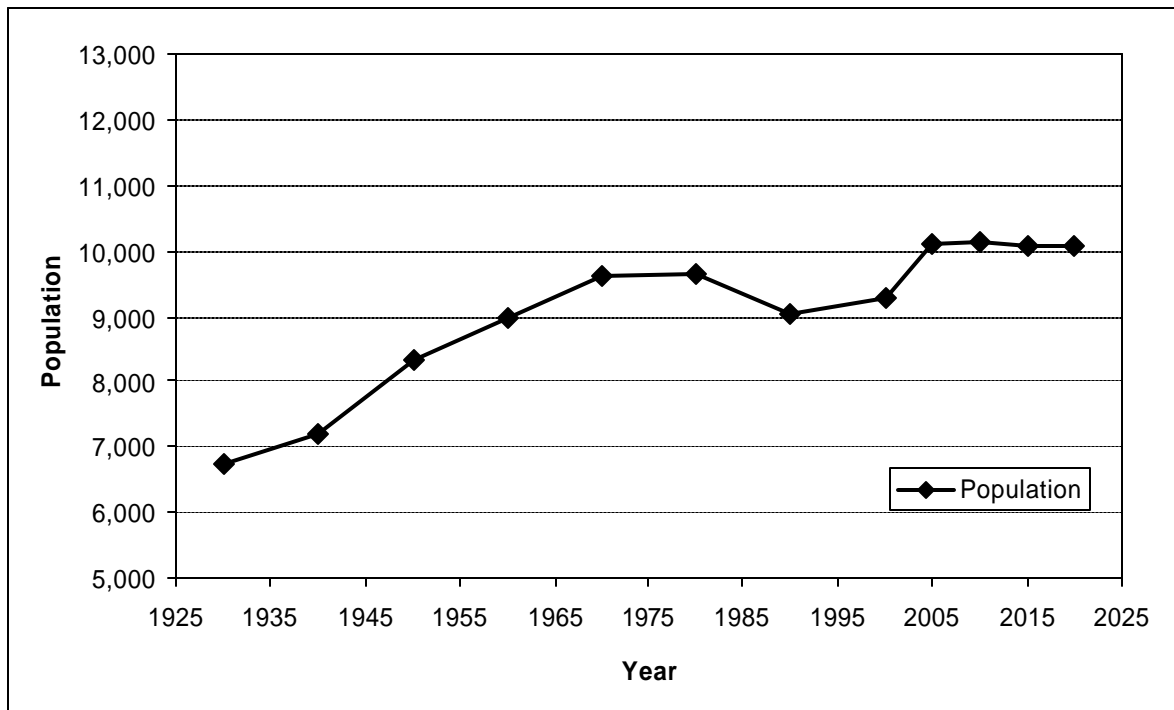
Table 2 offers a comparison of recent population trends of the City of Alma with its neighboring Townships, Gratiot County, and the State of Michigan. Arcada Township, to the south, and Gratiot County as a whole, have shared the population trends experienced by the City, showing population declines through the eighties and modest increases through the nineties. Pine River Township to the north, on the other hand, has experienced continued population growth over the last twenty years, showing an 18.8% increase in the 1990's alone.

Gratiot County has shown a slowing growth rate over the last forty years, increasing 9 percent between 1960 and 1980 but only 5 percent between 1980 and 2000. The County did exhibit greater population growth than the State of Michigan did as a whole in the 1990's, increasing 8.5 percent while Michigan increased only 6.9 percent. Some of that population growth, however, can be attributed to an increasing prison population in the City of St. Louis.

## Population Projections

No population projections have been prepared by Gratiot County or the East Central Region for the City of Alma, so the following population projections (Figure 2) have been prepared for this document using simple linear regression. Discussions with City staff, however, suggest that reaching the projected 10,000 residents by 2005 is unlikely given the mature, largely built-out nature of the City. Because these projections depict a strict mathematical projection of the historic growth trends experienced by the City of Alma, they are not able to take into account the effect of build-out conditions on population growth, nor the effect of annexations, economic fluctuations, and the like, which could also have significant and unforeseen impacts on the future population of Alma.

**FIGURE 2  
POPULATION PROJECTIONS, 2000-2020**



Source: Carlisle/Wortman Associates, Inc., 2002

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## Population Characteristics

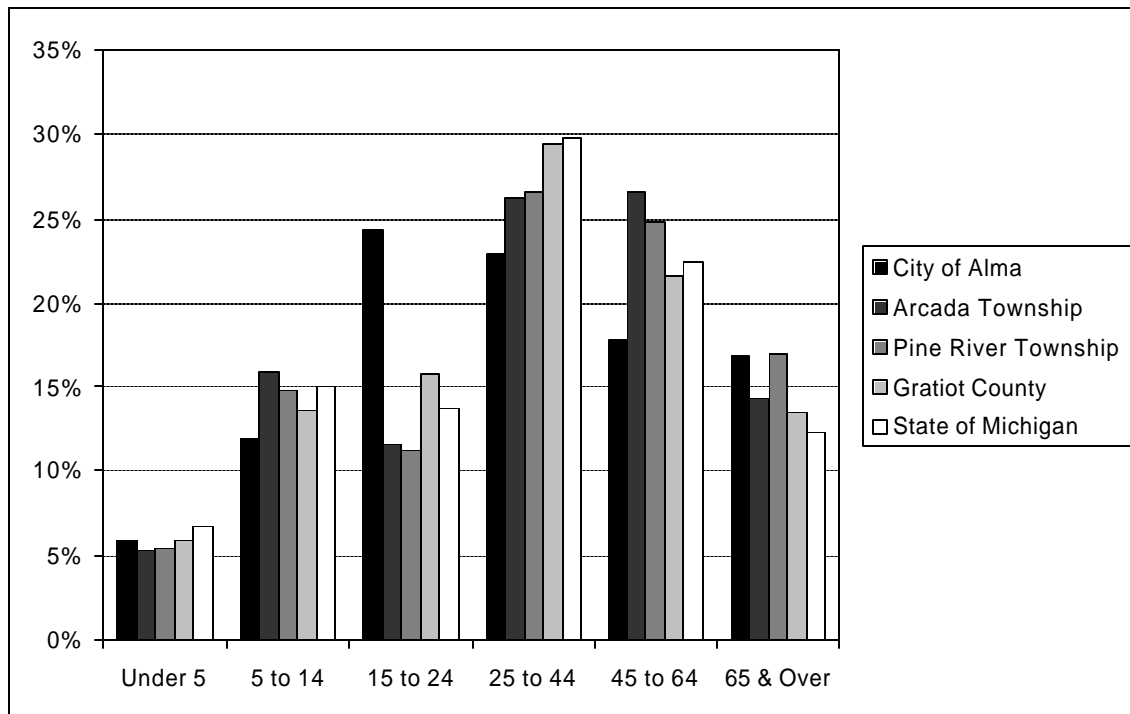
### Gender

Females outnumber males in Alma at a rate of 55 to 45. No significant change has occurred in this ratio over the last twenty years. This is an appreciably higher proportion than the State of Michigan (51 to 49). In Gratiot County, males outnumber females by 52 to 48.

### Age

The median age in the City of Alma is 32.5, which represents a significant increase since 1980 when the figure was computed to be 26.3. Despite the significant increase over the past twenty years, this figure remains substantially lower than Gratiot County, at 35.6, and the State of Michigan at 35.5. This discrepancy is common of college towns such as Alma, whose median ages are skewed by the large proportion of 18 to 24 year-old students. Both Arcada Township (39years) and Pine River Township (40years) exhibit much higher median ages. Figure 3 compares the City of Alma's age distribution to adjacent townships, the County, and the State.

**FIGURE 3  
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION BY AGE, 2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

**TABLE 3  
SUMMARY OF AGE, 2000**

	5 to 17		18 to 64		65 & Over		Median Age
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
<b>City of Alma</b>	1,484	16.0%	5,676	61.2%	1,572	16.9%	32.5
<b>Arcada Township</b>	361	21.1%	1,013	59.3%	244	14.3%	39.0
<b>Pine River Township</b>	479	19.5%	1,422	58.0%	418	17.1%	40.0
<b>Gratiot County</b>	7,559	17.9%	26,504	62.7%	5,723	13.5%	35.6
<b>State of Michigan</b>	1,923,762	19.4%	6,123,659	61.6%	1,219,018	12.3%	35.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the number of school-age children, adults, and seniors in the City of Alma, its neighboring townships, Gratiot County, and the State of Michigan. The proportion of school-age children in the City of Alma (16.0%) is somewhat lower than the County and State averages (17.9% and 19.4%, respectively). As is the trend across the nation, the number of seniors in the City is on the rise. The percentage of seniors in the City of Alma is especially high (16.9%) due in part the presence of the Masonic Pathways facility.

**Race**

The City of Alma, like Gratiot County as a whole, is predominantly white (95.6%). The City has far fewer black and Asian residents than the State of Michigan, however, almost twice as many of Alma’s residents are of Hispanic origin (6.2%) than the State average (3.3%). Table 4, below, provides a comparison of the racial composition of the City of Alma to it’s neighboring townships, Gratiot County, and the State of Michigan.

**TABLE 4  
COMPARISON OF RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN, 2000\***

	White	Black	Native American	Asian	Pacific Islander	Other	Hispanic Origin
<b>City of Alma</b>	95.6%	0.9%	1.3%	0.9%	0.0%	3.4%	6.2%
<b>Arcada Township</b>	98.1%	0.2%	1.0%	0.5%	0.0%	2.2%	4.6%
<b>Pine River Township</b>	97.3%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.1%	2.0%	3.3%
<b>Gratiot County</b>	93.4%	4.1%	1.2%	0.5%	0.0%	2.4%	4.4%
<b>State of Michigan</b>	81.8%	14.8%	1.3%	2.1%	0.1%	2.0%	3.3%

\* The U.S. Census allows multiple racial designations to be indicated on an individual questionnaire. As a result, entries for each geographic area are likely to exceed 100% .

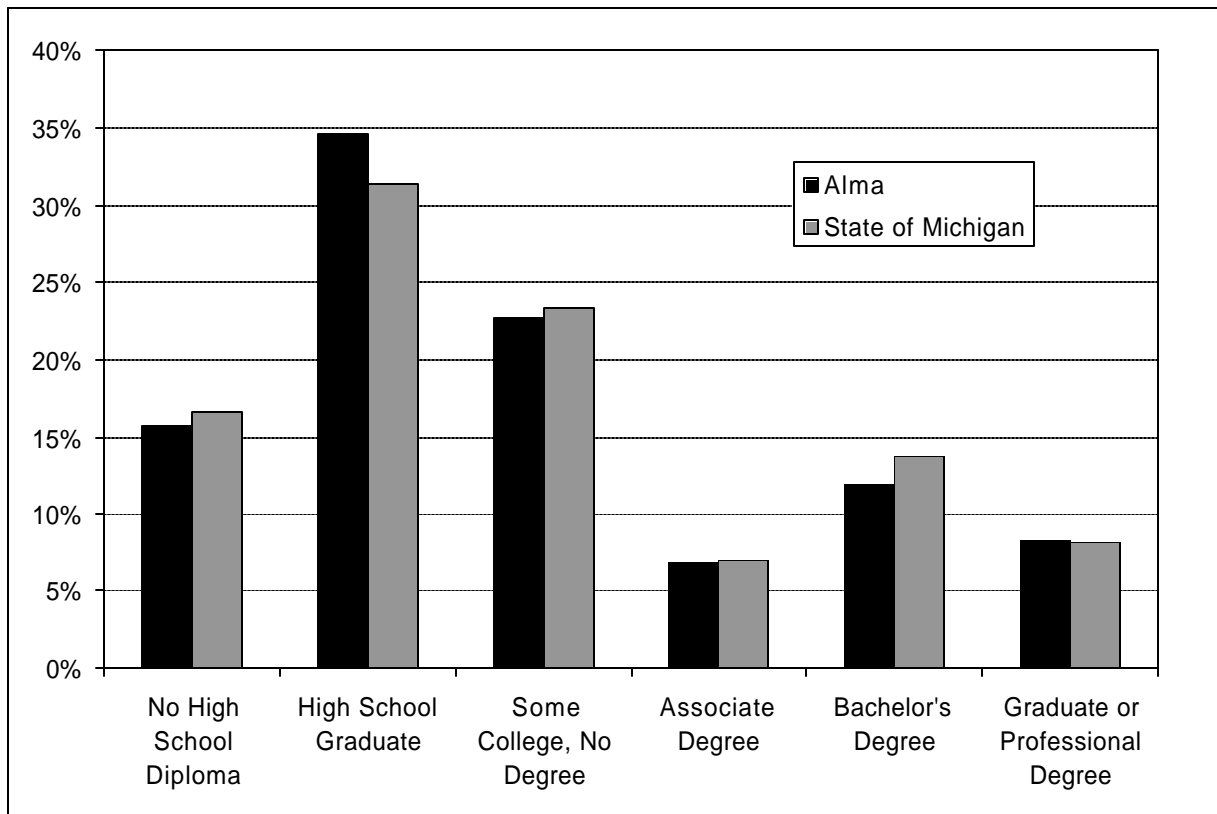
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

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## **Education**

Figure 4 illustrates a comparison of the educational attainment of individuals age 25 and over in the City of Alma and the State of Michigan. As would be expected of a college town, the City of Alma exhibits a greater percentage of individuals having a high school diploma (34.6%) than the State of Michigan (31.3%). With the presence of Alma College and the Gratiot Community Hospital, the City of Alma's population for 2000 exhibited percentages of degree-holding residents similar to those of the State of Michigan.

**FIGURE 4  
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT COMPARISON, 2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

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## Economic Characteristics

### Labor Force and Employment

Alma has the largest labor force in Gratiot County with approximately one-fourth of the total employed work force. Since 1970, the total labor force in Alma has increased by approximately 12%, which lags behind the County's increase of 24%. Historically, the unemployment rate has been lower than the County average. Unemployment percentages dropped significantly from the 1980's to an average unemployment rate of 4.5% in 2000 and 4.9% in 2001. Recent business closures and a general economic slowdown across the nation have caused a rise in the City of Alma's unemployment rate to 7.5% in January of 2002, which is consistent with Gratiot County and State of Michigan. Besides employment in Alma, a number of Alma residents commute to Midland, Saginaw, Lansing and other surrounding communities for employment.

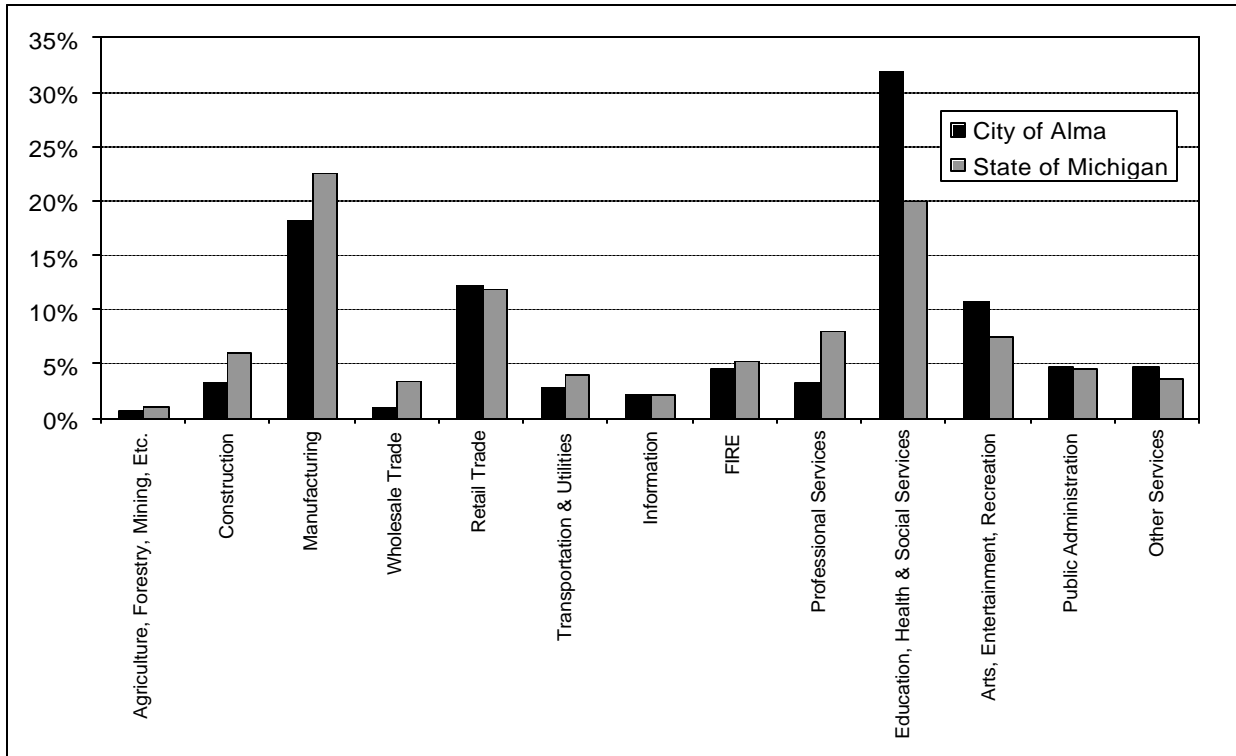
**TABLE 5  
LABOR FORCE AND  
UNEMPLOYMENT TRENDS, 1980-2002**

	City of Alma Labor Force	Unemployment Rate		
		City of Alma	Gratiot County	State of Michigan
<b>Jan. 1980</b>	3,900	12.5%	11.3%	10.4%
<b>Jan. 1990</b>	4,275	11.8%	12.1%	9.1%
<b>Jan. 2000</b>	4,700	5.7%	5.9%	4.1%
<b>Jan. 2001</b>	4,725	5.7%	5.9%	5.2%
<b>Jan. 2002</b>	4,700	7.5%	7.7%	7.4%

Source: Michigan Career Development Council, 2002

Major occupations in the City include administrative support personnel, professional specialty, and service occupations. The City's major industries providing employment are education, health services, manufacturing, and retail trade. Figure 5, below, illustrates a comparison of employment by industry between the City of Alma and the State of Michigan.

**FIGURE 5  
EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY COMPARISON, 2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

The largest manufacturing employers in Alma are Alma Products and Oxford Automotive. One of the major employers in Alma over the last half-century, the Total-UDS (Leonard) Refinery, is no longer in operation. With the loss of the Total (Leonard) Refinery operated by several corporations over the last few years, Alma citizens and governmental units are faced with major economic readjustments. Large non-manufacturing employers in Alma include Gratiot Community Hospital, Michigan Masonic Pathways and Alma College. Table 6, below, lists the City of Alma’s major employers.

**TABLE 6  
MAJOR EMPLOYERS LOCATED IN ALMA**

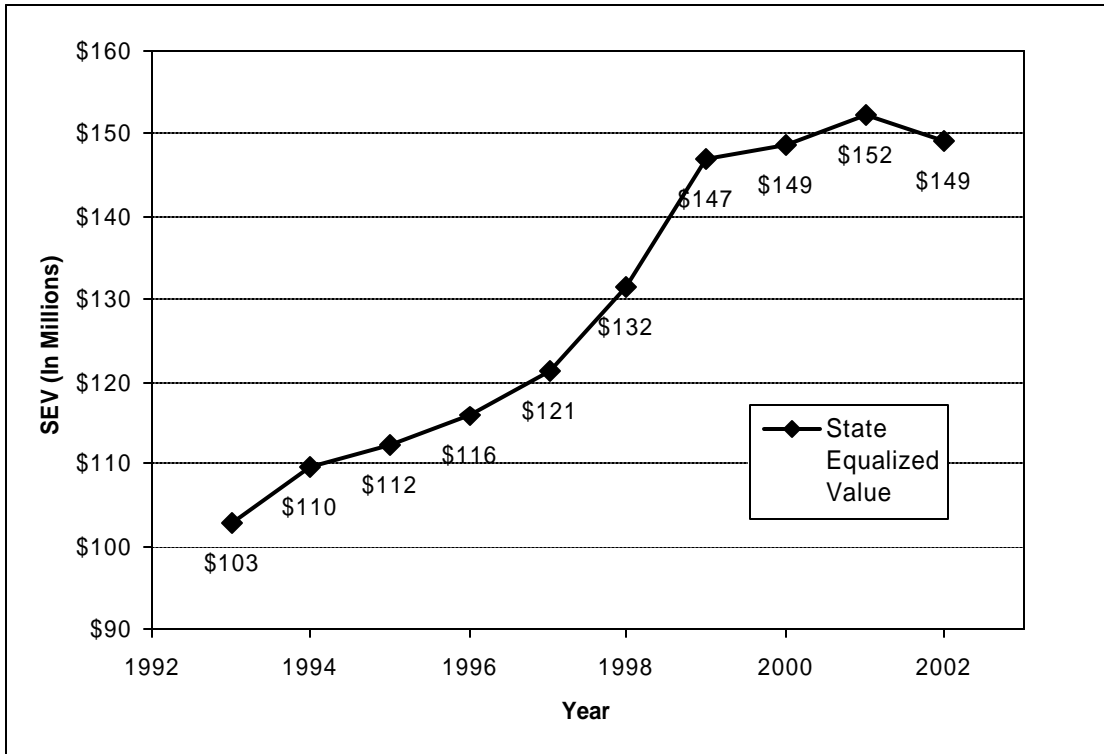
Employer	Number of Employees
Gratiot Community Hospital	850
Alma Products	628
Michigan Masonic Pathways	450
Oxford Automotive	366
Alma College	276
Lear Corporation	216
Contech	180
Consumers Energy Co.	144
Verizon	135
Playbouy Pontoon	101
Liquid Transport, Inc.	89

Source: Greater Gratiot Development, Inc., 2002

**State Equalized Value**

The State Equalized Value (SEV) calculated for the City of Alma from 1993 through 2002 is illustrated below in Figure 6. The City experienced a steady incline in SEV from 1993 (\$102,796,300) through 2001 (\$152,337,400), reflecting the development and investment that took place within the City during that period. From 2001 to 2002, however, the City experienced a slight decrease (2.1%) in SEV. This reduction is largely due to depreciation and the removal of significant assets associated with the former Total/UDS refinery.

**FIGURE 6  
STATE EQUALIZED VALUE (SEV), 1993-2002**

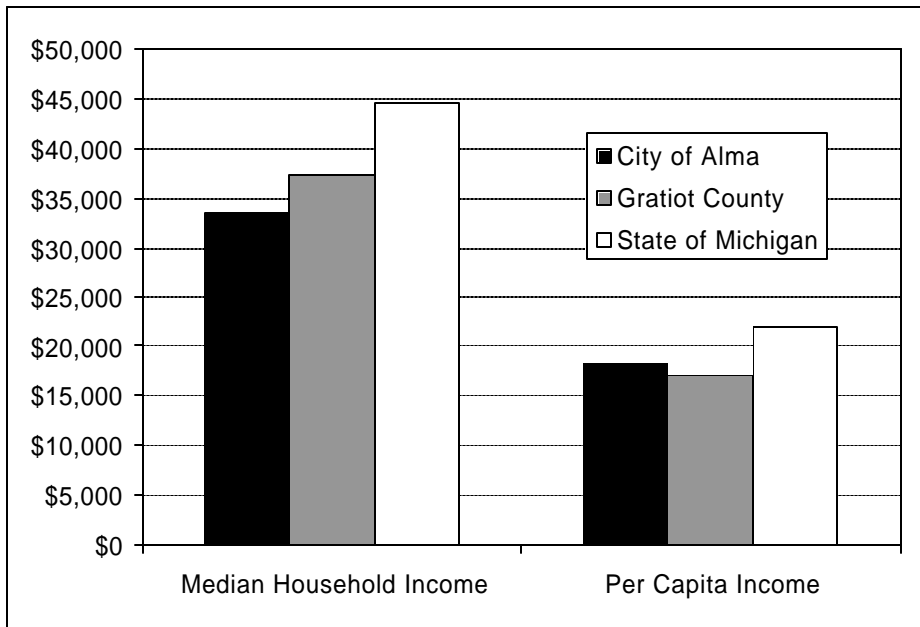


Source: City of Alma Assessing Department, 2002

**Income and Poverty**

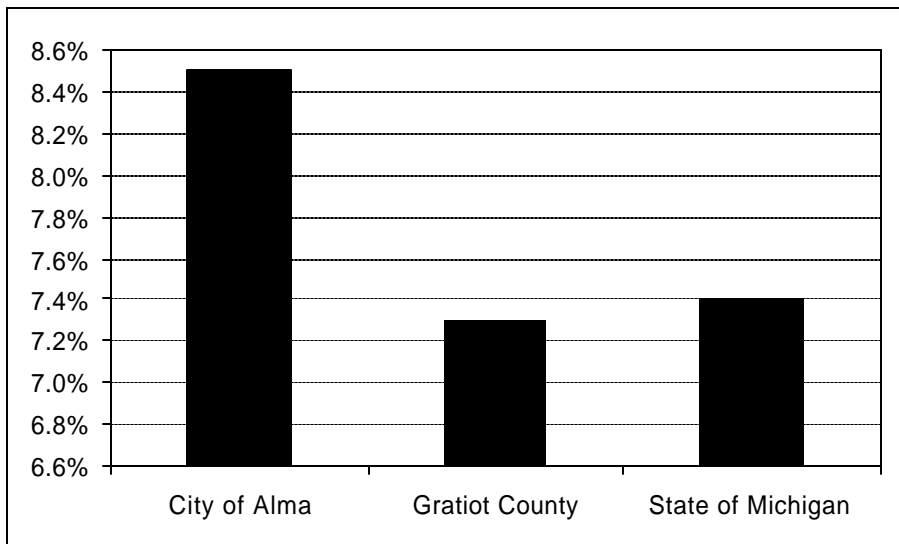
Median household income in the City of Alma was \$33,536 in 2000, and the per capita income was \$18,218. As illustrated in Figure 7, below, median household income in the City of Alma is somewhat lower than Gratiot County as a whole, which itself is significantly less than the average for the State of Michigan. Similarly, the City of Alma exhibits a significantly higher number of families living below the poverty line. Figure 8 compares the percentages of families living below the poverty line in the City of Alma with Gratiot County and the State of Michigan.

**FIGURE 7  
INCOME LEVEL COMPARISON, 2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

**FIGURE 8  
PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES  
BELOW POVERTY LEVEL, 2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

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## Households and Housing Characteristics

### Households

The City has a total of 3,220 occupied households, as indicated in Table 7, below. The presence of Alma College's student population has an appreciable effect on the overall household composition of the City. The City of Alma has a comparatively higher percentage of non-family households (37.2%) than the State of Michigan (32%), and an average number of persons per household (2.39) that is significantly lower than the State average (2.56). Both of these characteristics are typical of a college town, where the number of individuals living on their own or rooming with classmates drives down the proportion of family households as well as average household size.

**TABLE 7  
HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS, 2000**

	<b>City of Alma</b>	<b>State of Michigan</b>
<b>Number of Households</b>	3,220	3,785,661
<b>% Family</b>	62.8%	68.0%
<b>% Non-Family</b>	37.2%	32.0%
<b>Average Household Size</b>	2.39	2.56
<b>Average Family Size</b>	2.98	3.10

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

The tenure of householders in the City of Alma is illustrated below in Table 8. Compared to the State of Michigan, the statistics suggest that the City's population is relatively more transient. This is reasonable in light of the City's substantial student population.

**TABLE 8  
TENURE OF HOUSEHOLDER BY YEAR MOVED IN, 2000**

	City of Alma	State of Michigan
<b>1999 to March, 2000</b>	24.8%	17.5%
<b>1995 to 1998</b>	26.1%	27.8%
<b>1990 to 1994</b>	16.2%	16.3%
<b>1980 to 1989</b>	15.8%	16.2%
<b>1970 to 1979</b>	6.9%	11.0%
<b>1969 or earlier</b>	10.2%	11.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

**Housing Units**

As shown in Table 9, Alma has a total of 3,476 housing units as of the 2000 Census with 3,220, or 92.6%, occupied. Of these, only 57.7% are owner-occupied, which is substantially lower than the average for the State of Michigan (66.0%). Renter occupied housing units comprised 42.3% of the total, a reasonable figure for a small college town.

**TABLE 9  
HOUSING RELATED DEMOGRAPHICS, 2000**

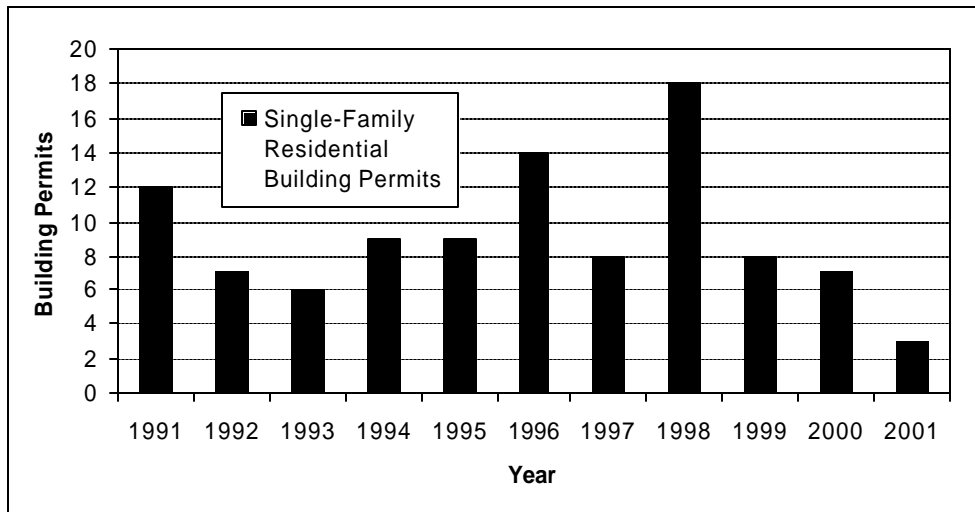
	City of Alma	State of Michigan
<b>Number of Housing Units</b>	3,476	4,234,279
<b>Percent Occupied</b>	92.6%	89.4%
<b>Percent Owner-Occupied</b>	57.7%	66.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Analysis of the number of residential building permits issued can offer insight into the demand for residential development in the community. Figure 9, below, displays the number of residential building permits issued on an annual basis from 1991 through 2001. While no clear trend appears to exist over the past eleven years, recent years have seen very low numbers of building permits issued for new single-family residential construction, with only three issued in 2001. At no point over the past eleven years have more than 18 permits been issued. Until the recent execution of P.A. 425 agreements with the adjacent townships, the City's residential areas had essentially been built-out, which resulted in the low number of residential permits shown in

Figure 9. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests that increased residential development may occur if suitable locations for such development existed.

**FIGURE 9  
NEW SINGLE-FAMILY  
RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS, 1991-2001**



Source: City of Alma Building Department, 2002

Twenty-eight percent of the City’s housing units were built prior to 1940 and 34.5% were built after 1970. Alma has a number of new homes built to today’s building standards, as well as a number of stately older homes in proximity to downtown. However, a number of the older homes, as may be expected, need updating and modernizing. A comparison of the City of Alma’s housing stock with that of the State of Michigan is provided below in Table 10.

**TABLE 10  
AGE OF HOUSING STOCK BY YEAR BUILT, 2000**

	City of Alma	State of Michigan
<b>1999 to March, 2000</b>	1.4%	2.2%
<b>1995 to 1998</b>	3.7%	6.4%
<b>1990 to 1994</b>	5.0%	6.1%
<b>1980 to 1989</b>	8.3%	10.5%
<b>1970 to 1979</b>	16.1%	17.1%
<b>1960 to 1969</b>	12.6%	14.2%
<b>1950 to 1959</b>	24.2%	26.5%
<b>1939 or earlier</b>	28.8%	16.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Of 1,815 owner-occupied housing units in the City of Alma, 34.3% did not have a mortgage on their home as of the 2000 Census, shown below in Table 11. Median housing value for owner occupied units in the City was \$72,500 in 1990, less than two-thirds that of the State of Michigan (\$115,600). Median monthly housing costs for homeowners with a mortgage was \$706, while those without a mortgage paid \$239 monthly. Median monthly rent was \$408; 29.8% of renters paid over \$500 per month.

**TABLE 11  
HOUSING COST, 2000**

	City of Alma	State of Michigan
<b>Median Value, Owner-Occupied</b>	\$72,500	\$115,600
<b>Median Rent, Renter-Occupied</b>	\$408	\$546

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

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## **COMMUNITY SERVICES**

The City of Alma, governed by a Mayor and City Commissioners under a Council-Manager form of government, provides a variety of community services.

### **Fire and Police Services**

Fire service in the City is provided by a volunteer fire department with twenty-three volunteer firefighters. Protection services are provided to four surrounding townships, and the fire district covers approximately one hundred square miles. Police protection is provided within the City limits by fourteen (14) sworn officers and 1 civilian personnel.

### **Utilities**

Consumer's energy provides both electric power and natural gas to the City. Telephone service is supplied by Verizon and Winn Telecommunications. Alma provides both water and sewer to the vast majority of the community. Wastewater capacity is two million five hundred thousand gallons per day (2,500,000 g/d) with the present load at seventy five percent (75%) of capacity or one million eight hundred and eighty thousand gallons per day (1,880,000g/d). The municipal water supply comes mainly from the Pine River (70%), with a plant capacity of four million (4,000,000) gallons per day. Daily consumption is only at 50% of plant capacity at maximum consumption, but usage generally runs between one third and one half of plant capacity. The City is currently investigating to conversion to well water for the sole source of municipal water in response to revise water quality standards associated with inland lakes and streams.

### **Schools**

The Alma School District is comprised of approximately 2,300 students and employs 302 people, with 141 of those holding teaching positions. The District encompasses all of the City of Alma, as well as the portion of Pine Township west of U. S. 127, all of Seville Township, the northern two-thirds of Sumner and Arcada Townships, the western edge of Emerson Township and the extreme eastern edges of Richland and Ferris Townships in Montcalm County. The area contained is slightly over 100 square miles.

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The school district currently operates one early five's program, three elementary schools (grades K – 4), one middle school (grades 5-8), and one high school.

Alma College, a private institution, has about one thousand three hundred and fifty students matriculated and employs approximately 280 people.

The City contains one parochial school, St. Mary's that enrolls one hundred and seventy students in first through sixth grades. Currently there are no charter schools in Alma.

## **Parks and Recreation**

The City of Alma is provided with a wealth of all-season recreational resources. Within the City limits there are twelve public parks, five public school facilities, and a number of quasi-public facilities such as Alma College and the golf course on the west side of the City. The preservation and enhancement of these resources is an integral part of the future of Alma. To this end, a complete Community Parks and Recreation Plan was completed in 2001.

### **State Parks**

The nearest Michigan State Parks are outside of Gratiot County, near Harrison to the North and St Johns to the south. Within Gratiot County is the Maple River State Game Area, which is comprised of primarily wetland throughout its 4,000 acres.

### **County Parks**

The entire Gratiot County Park system was disbanded in December of 2000 in response to the economic condition of Gratiot County.

### **City Parks**

Within the City limits are seven neighborhood parks (Riverside, King, Hampton, Scottish Heights, Holiday, Mill Street Park, and West Park) and four City-wide parks (Wright Park, Pine River Park, Euclid Ball Fields, and Washington Avenue).

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### **Golf Courses**

The Pine River Country Club is a private golf course having 18 holes. It is located in Alma on Superior Street. Located in Pine River Township between Alma and St. Louis, Hidden Oaks Golf Course offers 18 holes plus a driving range. Other golf courses within the County include the North Star Golf Course, Overbrook Golf Course and Gratiot Country Club.

### **Community Education and Recreation Opportunities**

The Alma School District has set up a variety of educational programs and recreational activities. Such activities as karate, tennis, kid's wrestling, swimming, barbershop singing and softball are available. Other recreation classes such as quilting, painting, dog training and more are also offered.

The City is currently involved in an effort to establish a multi-jurisdictional recreational authority comprised of cities, villages, and school districts throughout the County, for the provision of recreational programming opportunities. Public entities are presently involved in deliberations to join the proposed Authority.

### **School Facilities**

The Alma School System provides facilities and program opportunities for recreation. Outdoor recreation is available at Alma Schools on an individual basis. All of the school structures have multi-use gymnasiums and the high school has a swimming pool and auditorium that provide many types of organized school programs, as well as general programmed activities for the residents of the City.

**TABLE 12  
SCHOOL RECREATION AREAS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>
Luce Road Early Childhood Learning Center	11.02
Pine Avenue Elementary	10
Hillcrest Elementary	6.3
Republic School Site	4.1
Alma Middle School	15.8
Alma High School	68.4

Source: City of Alma Parks and Recreation Plan, 2001

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## **Community Center**

The Community Center located along the Pine River at Superior Street has a playground area and picnic facilities, as well as an outdoor pavilion, a dance floor area and a stage area. The Community Center building is open to the public, and the building can be rented for various activities. Senior citizens and other groups use the building on a regular basis for activities such as luncheons, dances and other functions. Until recently, the building had been used during the day by the latchkey and young fives programs run by the school system. However, based upon the recently approved grade configuration adopted by the Alma Public Schools, the community center will likely not be used by the school system in the fall of 2002, and the facility will be returned to the City of Alma. A decision on the future use of the facility will need to be considered by the City of Alma.

## **Alma College**

Alma College, located on a hundred acre campus in the City of Alma, offers a wide range of activities to the students, staff and community members. The indoor facilities include a swimming pool and two gymnasiums. Tennis courts are the only outdoor facilities available for public use. Spectator sports are also available in season. The College also operates the Alan Stone Recreation Center, a new facility that offers a limited number of public memberships.

Alma College provides a wide variety of performing arts programming at the Heritage Center. These events feature Alma students, faculty and touring professionals in art exhibits, dance and theatre performances, as well as local symphony and vocal concerts. A number of noted speakers appear annually.

## **Libraries**

The City of Alma and the Library Board provide library services to the community. The library has recently added internet service to the various other media formats available to its patrons. Juvenile story hours, class visitations and summer reading club programs are made available to the young community citizens. Additionally, the Alma College Library is available to the public.

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## **Special Events**

The City of Alma is home to the Highland Festival, an annual meeting of various Scottish clans, for which the City has gained a fair amount of notoriety (the Highland Festival highlights the City's Scottish heritage). As a result of the festival, Alma has come to be known as "Scotland USA." Alma College has also adopted the Scots as their mascot.

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# ROADWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

## Roadways

### Regional Road Network

US-127 (a limited access highway) is the main mid-state north-south route and abuts Alma on the north and east. There are two interchanges that provide the City access to this highway. The US-127 Business Route is the connector between these interchanges and commences a mile from the east City limits, it traverses Superior Street, turns north, west of downtown, and continues north on Wright Avenue returning to the freeway approximately one-half mile north of the City limits. Lansing is 50 miles to the south along US-127 and from here one may continue south to Jackson or head east to the Detroit metropolitan area along Interstate 96. Heading north, US-127 merges with I-75 and leads to the Upper Peninsula and Canada. Plans to convert the stretch of US-127 from Ithaca to St. Johns to a limited access highway are currently being finalized.

The east-west highway M-46 passes just north of the City limits and intersects with US-27 B.R. at Wright Ave. The two-lane highway is the main route to Saginaw and I75 to the east. Following M-46 west passes through a number of small communities and connects to the limited access highway US-31, which runs from Traverse City to Grand Rapids and points south.

Several Gratiot County roads lead from Alma such as Begole Road and Luce Road to serve the smaller surrounding communities and rural residents of the area.

### National Functional Classification

National Functional Classification (NFC) is a planning tool which federal, state and local transportation agencies have used since the late 1960's. All public roads are classified according to function - this allows roads to be studied and compared across different regions of the state or the entire country. National Functional Classification is also used to determine which roads are eligible to receive federal funds for improvements. National Functional Classification may be abbreviated as NFC.

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- **Principal arterials** are at the top of the NFC hierarchal system. Principal arterials generally carry long distance, through-travel movements. They also provide access to important traffic generators, such as major airports or regional shopping centers. Examples of primary arterials include Interstate and other freeways; other state routes between large cities; and important surface streets in large cities.
  - **Minor arterials** are similar in function to principal arterials, except they carry trips of shorter distance and to lesser traffic generators. Examples of minor arterials include State routes between smaller cities; surface streets of medium importance in large cities; and important surface streets in smaller cities.
  - **Collectors** tend to provide more access to property than do arterials. Collectors also funnel traffic from residential or rural areas to arterials. Examples of collectors include County, farm-to-market roads; and various connecting streets in large and small cities.
  - **Local** roads primarily provide access to property. Examples of these include residential streets and lightly-traveled county roads.

All public streets, roads and highways in Michigan have an NFC designation. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and local officials work cooperatively to functionally classify roads. The results of this joint process are submitted to FHWA for final approval. Map1 illustrates the City's road network, as well as the National Functional Classification of those roads. US-127 Business Route, including Wright Avenue from the northern corporate limits south to Superior, the downtown one-way loop, and Superior Street from the loop to the eastern corporate limits forms the only primary arterial through the City.

### **Traffic Counts**

The most recent traffic counts prepared for the City of Alma were conducted in the early 1990's. These have been consolidated and shown in Table 13, below.

**TABLE 13  
TRAFFIC COUNTS**

<b>Roadway</b>	<b>Between</b>	<b>And</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Two-Way, 24 hour Count</b>
Allen Ave.	Marshall St.	Ely St.	1990	1,288
Bridge Ave.	Superior St.	Michigan Ave.	May-92	2,661
Bridge Ave.	Washington St.	Corp. Limits	1990	6,450
Bridge Ave.	Washington St.	Ferris St.	Apr-91	6,472
Bridge Ave.	Washington St.	Ferris St.	May-92	5,241
Bridge Ave.	Michigan Ave.	Ferris St.	1990	3,700
Center St.	Westview Dr.	Pineview Dr.	Apr-92	1,332
Center St.	Cedar Ave.	Grant Ave.	Apr-92	668
Center St.	Lincoln Ave.	Prospect Ave.	Mar-91	7,489
Center St.	Gratiot Ave.	Pine Ave.	Jul-91	9,274
Charles Rd.	Superior St.	Wellesley St.	1990	1,470
Court Ave.	Ely St.	Mid Mich. RR	1990	3,250
East End St.	State St.	Gratiot Ave.	1990	2,230
Elwell St.	Wright Ave.	Second Ave.	1990	1,500
Ely St.	State St.	Allen Ave.	Apr-91	5,256
Ely St.	Windsor Ave.	Grover Ave.	Jul-91	4,455
Euclid Ave.	Superior St.	Mid Mich. RR	1990	350
Euclid Ave.	Superior St.	Downie St.	1990	200
Fairlane Dr.	Superior St.	Woodmere St.	1990	255
Fairlane Dr.	Woodmere St.	Charles Ave.	1990	420
Falkirk Rd.	Renfrew Rd.	Iowa Rd.	1990	400
Flemming Dr.	Center St.	Mill St.	1990	215
Grafton Ave.	Elizabeth St.	Marshall Ave.	1990	1,225
Grant St.	Center St.	Mechan St.	1990	440
Gratiot Ave.	Downie St.	Hasting St.	1990	640
Gratiot Ave.	Hasting St.	Walnut St.	1990	430
Grove Ave.	Eastward St.	Superior St.	1990	550
Grover Ave.	Hampton St.	Tuscola & Sag. Bay RR	1990	1,700
Grover Ave.	Bostwick St.	Sunset St.	Jul-91	3,670
Grover Ave.	Sunset St.	Superior St.	May-92	4,119
Harvard Ave.	Superior St.	Wellesley St.	1990	1,380
Hasting St.	State St.	Woodworth	1990	235
Highland Ave.	Michigan Ave.	Cherry St.	1990	370
Iowa Rd.	Charles Rd.	Glencoe Rd.	1990	665
Lincoln St.	Van Buren Rd.	Hillcrest St.	May-91	4,262
Mechan St.	Maple Ave.	Lincoln Ave.	1990	1,220
Mechan St.	Lincoln Ave.	State St.	Apr-91	1,550
Michigan Ave.	Jerome Rd.	Redman Dr.	1990	5,145
Michigan Ave.	Republic Ave.	Pennsylvania St.	1990	6,200
Michigan Ave.	Hayes Ave.	Republic Ave.	Apr-91	6,616
Michigan Ave.	Superior St.	Bridge Ave.	1990	6,170
Mill St.	Flemming Dr.	Pineview Dr.	1990	77

Mill St.	Philadelphia Ave.	Cedar Ave.	1990	80
Orchard St.	Wright Ave.	Second Ave.	1990	675
Philadelphia Ave.	Center St.	Superior St.	Apr-92	1,523
Philadelphia Ave.	Mill St.	Center St.	Apr-92	1,036
Pine Ave.	Washington St.	Liberty St.	Jul-91	6,419
Pine Ave.	Warwick Dr.	Chatterton St.	May-91	5,766
Republic Ave.	Superior St.	Plum St.	Feb-91	1,323
Republic Ave.	Hickory St.	Plum St.	1990	1,250
Richmond St.	Pine Ave.	River Ave.	1990	350
Riverside Dr.	Marshall St.	Custer St.	Mar-91	2,794
Riverside Dr.	Custer St.	State St.	Apr-91	4,033
Rosedale	Grover Ave.	Williamette Ave.	1990	1,200
State St.	Marshall St.	Riverside Dr.	Apr-91	1,020
State St.	Mechan St.	Superior St.	Apr-93	5,225
Superior St.	Luce Rd.	Fairlane Dr.	1990	8,650
Superior St.	Charles Rd.	Harvard Ave.	Apr-92	8,579
Superior St.	Maple Ave.	Wright Ave.	Mar-91	9,329
Superior St.	Lincoln Ave.	Prospect Ave.	Mar-91	10,010
Superior St.	Gratiot Ave.	Pine Ave.	Jul-91	8,253
Superior St.	Pine Ave.	Court Ave.	Apr-91	13,308
Superior St.	Elmwood Ave.	Jerome Rd.	1990	8,200
Walnut St.	Pine Ave.	River Ave.	1990	680
Walnut St.	State St.	Woodworth	1990	570
Warwick Dr.	at Pine Ave.	--	Jul-91	6,009
Warwick Dr.	at Wright Ave.	--	Mar-92	8,059
Washington St.	Euclid Ave.	Bridge Ave.	1990	4,000
West End St.	Wright Ave.	Second Ave.	1990	500
Woodworth Ave.	Ely St.	Center St.	May-94	2,991
Woodworth Ave.	Center St.	Superior St.	1990	3,620
Wright Ave.	Warwick Dr.	Heather St.	1990	19,800
Wright Ave.	Warwick Dr.	Elwell St.	1990	14,450
Wright Ave.	Orchard St.	Downie St.	Mar-91	5,288
Yale Ave.	Superior St.	Vassar St.	1990	235

Source: City of Alma Dept. of Public Services

The above traffic counts, while somewhat dated upon drafting this Master Plan update, offer a picture of where the majority of traffic flow occurs in the City. With few exceptions, major traffic flows are accommodated by the City's primary and minor arterials. Warwick Drive and Pine Avenue, though only classified as urban collectors, have registered traffic volumes greater than some of the City's minor arterials. As further development occurs in and around Alma, it may be reasonable to seek reclassification of these roads.

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## **Transportation Improvement Projects**

Having recently completed the extensions of Warwick Drive and Heather Lane westward to access one of the larger pieces of undeveloped land in the City, attention will be turned to other transportation improvement projects. With the execution of a P.A. 425 Conditional Land Transfer Agreement with Pine River Township in which the City will acquire approximately 200 acres, work toward the extension of Pine Avenue to the north will begin. Additional road construction will be necessary through the development of a proposed 180 acre residential development on land acquired through a P.A. 425 agreement with Arcada Township to the south of the City.

Also, in anticipation of the expected relocation of Alma Iron & Metal from its current riverfront location to the Alma Sugar Beet refinery property, the City currently plans to extend Adams Avenue north to Superior Street to create a site suitable for the industry's new location. Coupled with this project will be the closure of Grover Avenue at Superior, intended to eliminate poor intersection geometrics in conjunction with the Mid-Michigan Railroad Superior Street crossing. Map 1 shows the location of the traffic improvements described in this section.

## **Transit Services**

Alma's DART system provides a means of transporting citizens who would otherwise be without a reliable means of transportation. The majority of riders consist of three consumer groups comprised of senior citizens, disabled individuals and juniors. Alma's transit system has historically provided curb-to-curb public transit service within the corporate boundaries of the City of Alma and to and fro the Gratiot community airport. The service territory was expanded in 1999 to include the City of St. Louis. Hours of operation have been expanded also from 5:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. on weekdays. There were nine DART busses as of 2001 carrying 78,350 passengers a total of 114,654 miles.

## **Railroads**

The local privately owned Tuscola and Saginaw Bay railroad traverses town as the main north south rail line running from Durand to Cadillac with connections to points beyond. Going east from Alma is the Mid-Michigan short run rail line to Saginaw. This is part of Rail America, the largest owner of short line rails in the country.

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## **Airports**

The Gratiot Community Airport (AMN) is three miles southwest of town, has two runways (3200, and 5000 feet) and is lighted, offering jet and charter services. The nearest commercial airport facilities are at Midland-Bay City-Saginaw (MBS) and Lansing (LAN). The Grand Rapids (GRR) airport is also within easy distance. Private airfields or landing strips are located in the surrounding area. These three airports provide those in need of air transport easy access to the rest of the world through a number of commercial carriers.

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**Insert Roadway Classification/Traffic Improvement Map**

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## EXISTING LAND USE

In March of 2002, City staff conducted an existing land use survey for use in the preparation of the updated Master Plan. The identified land uses can be generally defined as follows:

**Single Family Residential:** Parcels having only one dwelling unit in predominately residential use. These areas are located throughout the City, and comprise 19.9% of its land area. Conversion to multi-unit rental housing to serve the student population and impacts from existing and future industrial development are some of the issues single family residential uses face in the City.

**Two Family Residential:** Parcels having two dwelling units per building in predominately residential use. Two-family residential uses, also called duplexes, are scattered throughout the City's neighborhoods, and occupy only 0.5% of the City's total land area.

**Multiple Family Residential:** Parcels having three or more units per building in predominantly residential use, including apartments, condominiums, row houses, and terraces plus any streets, service drives, and community areas such as yards, clubhouses and pools. Multiple family residential uses are located primarily on the north side of town, and scattered throughout the City's neighborhoods, particularly adjacent to the downtown and Alma College, and make up 1.9% of the City's total land area. Hotels, motels, campgrounds, and mobile home parks are excluded from this category.

**Mobile Home Park (Manufactured Housing Community):** Parcels having multiple mobile home structures that are in the nature of a community or "mobile home park" plus any streets, service drives, and community area such as yards, clubhouses, and pools. The City currently contains two manufactured housing communities, the larger of which is located on the east side of Grover Avenue, and the smaller is located on the south side of Superior off of Linwood. This land use occupies less than 1% of the City's land area. An additional community is anticipated as part of the annexation planned to the south of town on the east side of Alger Road. A single mobile home structure on a parcel is not classified as a mobile home, but "Single Family Residential".

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**Downtown:** Parcels located in the Central Business District of the City of Alma, comprising 1.3% of the City's total land area. The downtown is the historical center of business in the community. The careful monitoring of uses proposed in the downtown is necessary in order to cultivate a successful balance of retail, service, entertainment, residential and office uses. The encroachment of excessive professional services and non-commercial uses pose concern for the continued success of the City's downtown.

**Professional Services:** Parcels used for professional office or service operations. Most of the professional services land uses are located to the north of the downtown and in proximity to the Gratiot Community Hospital. These uses make up 1.1% of the City's land area. In recent years, many of these uses have been taken over by the hospital, making them tax-exempt institutional uses.

**Commercial:** Parcels used for wholesale, retail, entertainment, or services, including those uses predominately at street level on multi-functional structures, plus related contiguous accessory uses such as parking areas and service drives. The majority of the commercial land area not located within the downtown can be found to the north of town along Wright Avenue, the Warwick Drive/Heather Lane corridor, and in scattered locations along Michigan Avenue, comprising 2.0% of the City's land area.

**Industrial:** Parcels used predominately for manufacturing or on which materials or articles are processed or semi-processed, but not retailed, including related storage areas, and warehousing. Parcels used for commercial waste disposal sites, landfill operations, and junk yards are shown as industrial. These land uses exist primarily on the east side of town, and occupy 10.2% of the City's land area. A few of the City's industrial areas are current brownfield sites.

**Quasi-Public:** Parcels and facilities that are held in the public interest and are usually exempt from real property taxation plus any service drives or roads inside the actual parcel. Examples of uses in this category include various churches, the Gratiot Community Hospital, Alma College, and Masonic Pathways. Given the significant size of the college, the hospital and Masonic Home, this land use category accounts for a total of 5.8% of the total land area in the City.

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**Public Buildings:** Municipally-owned parcels and buildings plus any service drives or roads inside the actual parcel. Examples of this category are municipal buildings, libraries, etc. Because the former airport property is included in this category, these uses account for 4.9% of the City's total land area. Schools and public recreation areas are excluded from this category.

**Public Recreation:** Parcels for which the primary purpose is for public outdoor recreation. This category includes City-owned parks and public fairgrounds, which comprise 3.8% of the City's land area.

**Private Recreation:** Parcels for which the primary purpose is private outdoor recreation. This category includes private parks and golf courses, and exists on a total of 3.4% of the City's land area.

**Schools:** Parcels upon which school facilities are located, excluding Alma College. This property accounts for a total of 2.7% of the City's land area. Redevelopment options for the middle school property should be considered, in the event that it is relocated from the downtown.

**Utilities:** Parcels containing above or below-ground utility or communication facilities, including electric and gas generating plants, transmission lines, booster and transformer stations, etc. In addition, buildings related to utility companies, wastewater treatment plants, and water works are also included in this category. Utility facilities constitute only 0.5% of the City's land area.

**Vacant, Roads, Agriculture and Water Bodies:** This is a catch-all category of all land uses and land covers not already accounted for in one of the above definitions. These could be non-improved areas not in a committed use, areas that are predominantly used for vehicular or railroad transportation, areas used as cultivated farmland, orchards, or for livestock activity, or areas that are predominantly and ordinarily covered by water.

The results of the existing land use survey are displayed in Map 2. Table 14, below, shows each identified land use as percentage of the City's total land area, which is currently 3,870.94 acres.

**TABLE 14  
EXISTING LAND USES, 2002**

Land Use	Acreage	Percent
Single Family	769.6	19.9%
Two Family	17.8	0.5%
Multiple Family	73.8	1.9%
Mobile Home Park	30.2	0.8%
Downtown	49	1.3%
Professional Services	41.3	1.1%
Commercial	77.9	2.0%
Industrial	394.7	10.2%
Quasi-Public	224.7	5.8%
Public Buildings	190.4	4.9%
Public Recreation	147	3.8%
Private Recreation	132.9	3.4%
Schools	105.7	2.7%
Utilities	20.9	0.5%
Vacant, Roads, Agricultural, Water Bodies	1,595.0	41.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,870.9</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

While the miscellaneous category of vacant and agricultural land, roads, and water bodies is clearly the single largest occupier of land in Alma, Single Family residential land use remains the largest single land use present in the City. Industrial land uses cover the next greatest amount of land in the City, however, the redevelopment of brownfield industrial areas into other uses could stand to lower this amount if new industrial land is not added.

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**Insert Existing Land Use Map**

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## **PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the preceding discussion of the current scenario in the City of Alma, the following conclusions related to land use planning can be made:

### **Natural Resources**

- Because the Pine River is the primary natural feature in the community and is viewed as a prime asset, future land uses and development policies must be sensitive to its protection, as well as the protection of its tributaries.
- The City should continue to utilize the Pine River as a major recreation and urban design resource, involving trails, waterfront access, downtown redevelopment, etc.
- As the City considers shifting to a groundwater-based municipal water system, protection of wellhead and recharge areas must be taken into account in future land use decisions and development policies.

### **Population Characteristics**

- Despite the significant population decline shown through the eighties, the nineties saw a modest population growth. Demand for additional residential uses in the community will increase if this trend continues.
- As the City's population continues to age, demand for senior housing and services will increase.
- Given the spectrum of educational attainment levels of Alma residents, future commercial and industrial development should bring a variety of job opportunities.

### **Economic Characteristics**

- To reverse recent increases in the unemployment rate, particular attention must be given to business retention, as well as incentives to attract new business and industry. Land for future industrial development should also be considered to facilitate these objectives.
- A diversity of industries and company sizes should be sought in future industrial development, to lessen the economic impact caused by slowdowns in specific industrial sectors and individual business closures.

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- Emphasis on business attraction and retention is of even greater significance given recent decreases in the SEV of the City.
  - Given the relatively higher rate of families living below the poverty line in Alma, consideration should be given to the adequacy of affordable housing and social services in the City.

### **Housing**

- The addition of more residential areas through recent P.A. 425 agreements will reverse the essentially built-out condition that the City's residential areas have experienced over recent years, allowing greater residential development in Alma.
- Given City's aging housing stock, its considerable student population and the significant rate of renter-occupancy, housing code compliance and property maintenance should be addressed in the City's development policies.
- The City's affordable cost of housing represents an opportunity for new homeowners moving to the area.

### **Community Facilities and Services**

- Future expansion of residential, commercial and industrial land use areas will generate increased demand on police and fire services.
- Although current wastewater treatment facilities are adequate to serve the City's current users, future land uses and residential densities may necessitate additional wastewater treatment capacity. Municipal water supplies should be sufficient to handle current and future users.
- Expanded residential areas and population increases will place additional demands on the City's parks and recreation facilities.

### **Transportation**

- Efficient development of vacant areas in and around the City will require expansion of the City's road network. Given the age of current traffic counts, future assessment of roads in transitional areas of the City will be necessary as they develop.

- 
- As the City's land uses and associated traffic patterns evolve, reclassification of certain roads may be necessary.
  - New roads must be developed to comply with the City's adopted On-Street Parking Control Policy related with required street widths.

### **Land Use**

- Provision of housing for the College's student population while maintaining the integrity of the City's established single-family residential neighborhoods should be addressed.
- Given the proximity of some residential areas to intense non-residential uses, strategies to buffer such residential areas should be explored.
- Development standards should prescribe policies governing requests for additional manufactured housing community.
- The mix of land uses in the downtown must be carefully managed to ensure continued success.
- Development policies should address the mix of uses provided in the downtown, in order to insure the downtown's continued vitality.
- The City's vacant and brownfield industrial sites represent underdeveloped opportunities. Therefore, a priority should be placed on their redevelopment in order to meet the City's economic objectives.
- Redevelopment of the Alma Iron & Metal property along the Pine River represents an opportunity to extend and enhance the downtown area to include the waterfront, which would be well-suited to mixed-use development.
- Due to its large size and waterfront location, the City's former airport property represents a significant redevelopment opportunity. Careful consideration should be given to the future use of this property to insure maximum benefit to the community.
- The City's development policies should address the future development of the middle school site, in the event that the school is relocated outside of the downtown area, as this would represent a major change of land use.

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# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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Goals and objectives formulated by the City of Alma establish the framework for public and private decision-making. While goals and objectives tend to be general in nature, strategies set forth a particular approach or position to be taken when resolving a planning issue. Strategies are specific actions aimed at achieving particular goals and objectives. Clearly defined statements of strategy can go far to minimize arbitrary decisions and substantiate intelligent, objective decisions. The following goals, objectives, and strategy statements provide the basis for wise and consistent public decisions for future development proposals in the City of Alma.

These goals and objectives were derived from community input through a review of the existing conditions of the City, future trends, and the results of the visioning workshop held in March of 2002 (Appendix A).

## **GOALS**

The following statements reflect the primary goals of the City. These are followed by more detailed objectives and strategies on the subsequent pages.

- Cultivate and advertise the City of Alma's image as a progressive, vibrant, safe and affordable small town, underscoring the "Scotland USA" identity brought to the City by the Annual Highland Festival and Games as well as Alma College.
- Protect the integrity of existing residential areas, and develop additional residential uses to meet the needs of the City's current and future residents.
- Maintain and enhance the health of the City's viable commercial areas.
- Protect and enhance the vitality of the downtown.
- Maintain the City's existing industry while expanding the industrial tax base with diverse, clean, and high-tech small industries.
- Protect the environment in and around the City of Alma, particularly its groundwater and surface water resources.
- Develop the riverfront with a mix of commercial, residential, and recreational uses, maintaining public access that is pedestrian-friendly.
- Capitalize on the diverse collection of institutions, governmental units, and businesses in and around the City of Alma for the mutual benefit of all.

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- Provide the highest quality public facilities and services possible to the residents of Alma.
  - Provide quality infrastructure to safely and effectively service the residents of the City of Alma.
  - Maintain a safe and efficient transportation system throughout the City, for vehicular as well as pedestrian and non-motorized circulation.

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# COMMUNITY IDENTITY

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**Goal: Cultivate and advertise the City of Alma’s image as a progressive, vibrant, safe and affordable small town, underscoring the “Scotland USA” identity brought to the City by the Annual Highland Festival and Games as well as Alma College.**

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## ***OBJECTIVE I***

*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. Consider the establishment of a historic district to identify and manage the City’s historic resources.

## ***OBJECTIVE II***

*Market the community’s assets to the region as well as the community itself, to attract tourism, industry, and residents.*

### STRATEGIES

1. Develop and execute a marketing campaign that underscores the variety of Alma’s positive attributes, including its progressive college-town atmosphere, safe and affordable neighborhoods, technology-driven business atmosphere and opportunities, and Alma Scots heritage, in order to bolster community image and “market Alma to Alma.”
2. Coordinate efforts aimed at attracting tourism and business with the DDA, Chamber of Commerce and Greater Gratiot Development.

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***OBJECTIVE III***

***Improve the physical appearance of the City to enhance community image.***

**STRATEGIES**

1. Establish gateway districts at all major entrances to the City to improve the visitor's first visual impression of the City, and create a unified "look."
2. Update municipal signage to be aesthetically pleasing, uniform, and in character with the City of Alma.
3. Facilitate the demolition and removal of the former refinery equipment north of Superior Street to improve the appearance of the City when entering from US-127, with the ultimate goal of redeveloping the site to replace lost jobs and tax base.
4. Enhance the waterfront and central business districts through continued progress on the Alma Iron & Metal brownfield redevelopment project.

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## RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

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**Goal: Protect the integrity of existing residential areas, and develop additional residential uses to meet the needs of the City's current and future residents.**

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### ***OBJECTIVE I***

***Maintain and enhance existing neighborhoods.***

#### STRATEGIES

1. Provide adequate areas in the vicinity of the Alma College campus for multiple family and student housing.
2. Minimize the encroachment of multiple-family and student housing units into established one- and two-family neighborhoods.
3. Prohibit the encroachment of commercial and industrial development into established one- and two-family neighborhoods.
4. Residential areas should be separated from high density commercial and industrial areas by functional elements such as open space, parkland, landscaped streets, or similar special separation.
5. Install sidewalks, street trees, parks and other amenities in neighborhoods, as needed, with a sidewalk on at least one side of every street.
6. Enforce Building and Property Maintenance Codes to maintain housing stock.
7. Consider the establishment of a Historic District identifying the City's historic structures.
8. Encourage the development of housing in the Central Business District.

### ***OBJECTIVE II***

***Provide adequate high-quality housing to meet all housing needs in the City of Alma.***

#### STRATEGIES

1. Develop additional residential areas to provide a mix of housing types that addresses the housing needs of all Alma residents, with respect to size, expense, and location.

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2. Employ neo-traditional neighborhood design concepts in new housing development, emphasizing pedestrian circulation, public open spaces, quality architectural design, etc.
  3. Develop new housing only where it can be adequately served by schools, parks and open space, streets, emergency services, storm drainage and utilities.
  4. Consider annexation of land and/or P.A. 425 Agreements for additional residential areas.
  5. Coordinate new senior housing with Masonic Pathways.
  6. Consider riverfront locations for new residential development, as available.

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## COMMERCIAL LAND USE

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**Goal: Maintain and enhance the health of the City's viable commercial areas.**

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### ***OBJECTIVE I***

***Promote the well-planned development and redevelopment of vacant commercial property with high-quality uses that expand the commercial options available to the residents of Alma.***

#### STRATEGIES

1. The Alma DDA and Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce should assist in the marketing of the City's vacant commercial property.
2. Commercial and office development should include pedestrian circulation facilities, landscaping, appropriate setbacks along major streets, well designed signage, adequate parking, and other amenities affording an aesthetically attractive shopping environment.
3. Minimize strip commercial development and encourage new commercial developments to integrate with existing neighborhoods, especially in the vicinity of the Warwick Drive and Heather Lane extensions.
4. Where strip development exists or cannot be avoided due to existing land use patterns, remedial measures should be instituted such as: minimizing the number and spacing of access points, maximizing curb radii, parallel access drives, landscaping, control of sign size and number, and careful placement of traffic control devices.
5. Consider amending the City's current landscaping standards for parking lot areas.
6. Encourage the establishment of additional restaurants, with an emphasis on providing more upscale dining opportunities.

### ***OBJECTIVE II***

***Protect and enhance existing commercial development.***

#### STRATEGIES

1. Improve the image of the Wright Avenue and Superior Street through signage controls and landscaping.

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2. Apply for federal Transportation Enhancement Grant funding for streetscape improvements to enhance the aesthetics of the City's major commercial corridors (primarily Wright Avenue and Superior Street).
  3. Develop and enforce commercial development standards addressing access management, signage, landscaping, lighting, parking, setbacks, etc., for new and redeveloped/infill commercial uses.

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# DOWNTOWN

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**Goal: Protect and enhance the vitality of the downtown.**

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## ***OBJECTIVE I***

***Maximize the utilization of downtown buildings.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Encourage the utilization of the second story of downtown buildings through zoning standards, tax incentives, and marketing.
2. Relocate the middle school outside of the downtown.
3. Assuming Alma Public Schools builds a new middle school, redevelopment alternatives should be considered for the future use of the building and/or property of the existing middle school.

## ***OBJECTIVE II***

***Increase pedestrian activity in the downtown.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Improve/enhance pedestrian connection to the riverfront from the downtown area.
2. Encourage the development of additional residential units on the downtown, such as second-story loft apartments.

## ***OBJECTIVE III***

***Improve the downtown streetscape.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Seek funding through federal grant programs for transportation and streetscape improvements.
2. Consider the restoration of two-way streets throughout the downtown.
3. Install landscaping, street furniture, way finding signage, and other amenities where necessary to enhance the downtown streetscape.

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**OBJECTIVE IV**

*Protect the vitality of the downtown by maintaining an appropriate mix of downtown uses.*

STRATEGIES

1. The City should monitor the retail mix present in the downtown, and encourage targeted business opportunities to insure the viability of downtown.
2. Overall, the downtown should remain the primary retail trade and service center for the City of Alma.
3. Additional commercial zoning should be limited outside of the downtown.
4. Encourage the development of additional residential units on the downtown, such as second-story loft apartments.
5. Encourage the establishment of additional restaurants in the downtown.

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## INDUSTRIAL LAND USE

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**Goal: Maintain the City’s existing industry while expanding the industrial tax base with diverse, clean, and high-tech small industries.**

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### ***OBJECTIVE I***

***Retain existing industrial tax base.***

#### STRATEGIES

1. Continue efforts to work with eligible businesses and industries to take advantage of available tax abatement programs.
2. Provide the technological infrastructure necessary for modern, high-tech industry, such as broadband and wireless connectivity. To further this effort, continue the City’s participation in the multi-county Link Michigan Telecommunications Planning Effort.
3. Prohibit the encroachment of non-industrial uses into established or planned industrial areas.
4. Investigate and utilize available grant programs aimed at industry retention and attraction.

### ***OBJECTIVE II***

***Promote the expansion of the industrial tax base with a variety of small, clean, high-tech industries.***

#### STRATEGIES

1. Identify optimal locations and assemble land for future industrial development and establish additional industrial parks.
2. Provide the technological infrastructure necessary for modern, high-tech industry, such as broadband and wireless connectivity.
3. Solicit high-tech/medical research users to establish a technology park or “smart park.”
4. Maintain and consider additional incentives to desired industrial firms wishing to locate within the City, such as tax abatements for clean high-tech industry.

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5. Redevelop existing brownfield sites, such as the Alma Iron & Metal site and the former Midwest Refinery site on Bridge Avenue.
  6. Redevelop the former Total/UDS refinery property north of Superior for industrial use. Market the City's industrial properties with the assistance of the Greater Gratiot Development.
  7. Coordinate the plans and programs of the DDA, Chamber of Commerce, and other economic development agencies with the City's Master Plan and the Planning Commission.

### ***OBJECTIVE III***

***Minimize and/or mitigate the impact of the City's 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 the City's existing brownfield areas.
3. Tailor zoning regulations to promote clean industrial uses, and discourage large, heavy industrial uses in inappropriate locations in areas adjacent to residential uses, schools, the downtown, and the waterfront.
4. Enforce regulations controlling industrial nuisances such as noise, odor, dust, vibration, outdoor storage, and intensive truck impacts, and revise or improve regulations when deemed necessary.
5. Separate industrial development from residential uses by open space and landscaped buffers and/or other transitional land use.

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# ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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**Goal: Protect the environment in and around the City of Alma, particularly its groundwater and surface water resources.**

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## ***OBJECTIVE I***

***Promote sound environmental stewardship in City projects and operational activities.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Conduct an environmental audit of the City's operational activities.
2. Consider alternatives to road salting.
3. Evaluate the potential benefit of more frequent catch basin cleaning and street sweeping programs for environmental efficacy.
4. Continue the City's weekly recycling and hazardous household waste collection program.

## ***OBJECTIVE II***

***Protect the City's surface and groundwater resources.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Continue to acquire riverfront properties and/or easements to expand the Riverwalk system along the Pine River.
2. Work with existing special interest groups to educate the public on water quality issues.
3. Implement structural and non-structural "best management practices" for stormwater management.
4. Identify and eliminate illicit discharges to the Pine River.
5. In coordination with the Fire Department, implement a spill prevention program among hazardous materials users in the City.
6. Consider regulation of the amount of pesticides and fertilizers applied by residents to lawns in the vicinity of the Pine River.

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# RIVERFRONT

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**Goal: Develop the riverfront with a mix of commercial, residential, and recreational uses, maintaining public access that is pedestrian-friendly.**

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## ***OBJECTIVE I***

***Replace existing industrial/brownfield sites along the waterfront with a mix of residential, commercial, office and recreational uses.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Pursue additional funding and tax programs to encourage brownfield mitigation along the riverfront.
2. Prepare a waterfront redevelopment plan to determine the most appropriate mix and location of new residential, commercial, and recreational uses along the river.
3. Establish a riverfront development zoning district that encourages environmentally-sound mixed-use development in reclaimed areas along the Pine River.

## ***OBJECTIVE II***

***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. Maintain public ownership of riverfront areas associated with the former airport property if redevelopment opportunities are pursued.
3. Preserve an area for public access to the river in future riverfront developments.

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## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS/COLLABORATION

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**Goal: Capitalize on the diverse collection of institutions, governmental units, and businesses in and around the City of Alma for the mutual benefit of the Community.**

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### ***OBJECTIVE I***

*Enhance the relationship between the City, Alma College and the Alma Public School system to maximize the quality and efficiency of facilities and services provided.*

#### STRATEGIES

1. Coordinate parks and recreation facilities and programming through the proposed Gratiot Area Recreation Authority.

### ***OBJECTIVE II***

*Coordinate facilities, services, and land use decisions with adjacent governmental units and on a regional basis where appropriate.*

#### STRATEGIES

1. Establish proposed regional recreation authority.
2. Participate in environmental initiatives at the watershed level.
3. Establish an Urban Growth Area in coordination with adjacent townships to determine the most appropriate locations for future development and potential P.A. 425 agreements along common borders, as outlined in the December, 2001, P.A. 425 agreement with Arcada Township

### ***OBJECTIVE III***

*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 business.
2. Consider the establishment of a campus zoning district.
3. Collaborate with local business on commercial and industrial marketing efforts.

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4. Collaborate with the hospital, Masonic Pathways, and Alma College to develop a regional medical center.
  5. Capitalize on off-season conferences and meetings held at Alma College, for the benefit of area businesses.

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## COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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**Goal: Provide the highest quality public facilities and services possible at an affordable rate for the residents of Alma.**

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### *OBJECTIVE I*

*Provide a system of parks and recreational opportunities that meets the needs of all segments of the City of Alma's 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. Work with existing groups or the proposed Gratiot Area Recreational Authority to provide more recreational activities for youth and teens, especially after school.
4. Continue to expand the technology available at library facilities.
5. Take advantage of the Pine River by developing recreational opportunities and programming on the river.
6. Coordinate parks and recreation facilities and programming with Alma College and the Alma Public schools, and possibly through the proposed Gratiot Area Recreation Authority.
7. Establish a regional recreation authority to coordinate recreation programming and facilities county-wide.
8. Maintain a current Parks and Recreation Plan, with approval from the MDNR to qualify the City for recreation grant funding.
9. Apply for public and private grants to purchase open space and recreational land along the Pine River and throughout the City.

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**OBJECTIVE II**

***Maintain and enhance the quality of the Alma Public Schools for the continued success of the community.***

STRATEGIES

1. Hold semi-annual meetings of the City Commission and School Board to discuss community issues of mutual interest.
2. Investigate educational opportunities that the City 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 Alma Public Schools facilities.

**OBJECTIVE III**

***Coordinate the provision of public facilities and services with adjacent townships, nearby communities, and on a County-wide basis.***

STRATEGIES

1. Coordinate provision of emergency services with adjacent communities.
2. Establish a Gratiot Area Recreation Authority to coordinate recreation programming and facilities county-wide.

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# COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

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**Goal: Provide quality infrastructure to safely and effectively service the residents of the City of Alma.**

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## ***OBJECTIVE I***

***Provide utilities adequate to service existing and future development in Alma.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Provide water, sanitary sewer and storm drainage facilities sufficient to service existing development and projected future development areas.
2. Explore the provision of municipal water service to the City of St. Louis in response to their concerns with iron removal and hardness.
3. Place all power, telephone, cable, and broadband lines underground where physically and financially feasible. Utilities in all new development should be placed underground.

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# TRANSPORTATION

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**Goal: Maintain a safe and efficient transportation system throughout the City, for vehicular as well as pedestrian and non-motorized circulation.**

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## ***OBJECTIVE I***

***Maintain and expand the City's road network for safe and efficient vehicular circulation.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Decisions to extend or improve roadways should be based upon present road conditions, present and projected traffic volumes, and consideration of adjacent land access issues.
2. The City's road network should be designed to prevent through traffic on local roads.
3. Access management techniques, wherever possible, should be employed to improve vehicular circulation.
4. Complete the Pine Avenue extension.
5. Two-way streets should be considered for the downtown.
6. Expand DART services, with emphasis on DART vehicular needs in new commercial, office and medical developments.

## ***OBJECTIVE II***

***Enhance the walkability of the City of Alma.***

### STRATEGIES

1. Pedestrian and non-motorized transportation paths should be provided throughout the City to link homes, schools, recreation areas, and downtown and other shopping areas.
2. Strengthen pedestrian access to the riverfront.
3. Sidewalks should be maintained to provide and safe and convenient pedestrian and non-motorized transportation.
4. Provide sidewalks on both sides of the street in all new developments.

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5. Promote a pedestrian-friendly and barrier-free environment through the use of crosswalks and ramps.
  6. Promote the construction of sidewalks on at least one side of every street in the City of Alma.

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# LAND USE PLAN

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The Master Land Use Plan presented on the following pages illustrates the proposed physical arrangement of land uses within the City of Alma. The Master Land Use Plan offers a narrative and graphic illustration of the community goals and objectives articulated in the previous chapter. It is based largely upon the existing land use, current zoning, and input from City officials and the public.

The plan is prepared to serve as a policy for the City regarding land use issues and decisions, investments in public improvements and future zoning decisions. The plan is intended to be a working document which will provide for the orderly development of the City, assist the community in its effort to maintain and enhance a pleasant living environment, while fostering development and redevelopment where needed.

The Master Land Use Plan is based in large part upon comments and opinions gathered during the planning process, including input from citizens and public officials received at a visioning session held for that purpose. In addition to this input, the Master Land Use Plan is also based upon a number of other elements, including:

- Community Goals, Objectives and Strategies
- Existing Land Use
- Existing Zoning
- Existing Plans & Studies
- Population Projections and Characteristics
- Economic Outlooks
- Socio-Economic Considerations
- Traffic and Circulation
- Environmental Considerations
- Utilities
- Compatible Uses

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## **Future Land Use Categories**

In order to guide the development of future land uses throughout the City, distinct land use categories are established. By prescribing the various land use categories to specific areas of the City, a useful long term plan for the development and redevelopment of the City of Alma can be developed. The following provides a brief description of the planned land use categories which are proposed for the City of Alma Master Land Use Plan.

### **Residential Low Density**

The Residential Low Density land use category is intended to provide for existing and future single-family detached residential neighborhoods with individual lots sizes of 6,000 square feet or greater, as well as typical support uses (such as schools, churches, parks, etc.). The zoning district that most closely corresponds with this land use category is the R-1 district.

### **Residential Medium Density**

The Residential Medium Density land use category is intended to provide for existing and future single-family detached residential neighborhoods with individual lots sizes of 4,000 square feet or greater, as well as typical support uses (such as schools, churches, parks, etc.). This area includes much of the center city area that has smaller lot sizes. The zoning district that most closely corresponds with this land use category is the R-1A district.

### **Residential High Density**

The Residential High Density land use category is intended to provide for existing and future duplexes, attached single-family townhomes and multi-family apartments having a density of eight (8) units per acre or greater. This land use category shall also serve as a transition between nonresidential land uses and lower-density residential areas. The zoning districts that most closely correspond with this land use category are the R-2 and R-3 districts.

### **Manufactured Housing Community**

The Manufactured Housing Community land use category is intended to provide for existing and future manufactured housing communities within the City. This area includes the existing community on the east side of Grover Avenue, as well as the area anticipated for such

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development in the proposed annexation to the south. The MHP zoning district is intended to implement this land use category.

### **General Commercial**

The General Commercial land use category is intended to provide for existing and future commercial development of a convenience or shopping center nature. These commercial areas are intended to meet the day-to-day shopping needs of the City's residents; however, the specific uses sought for these areas should limit competition with the Central Business District.

### **Central Business District**

This land area is intended to be the commercial core of the City. The "CBD" typically contains a mix of retail, entertainment, restaurant, office, governmental, institutional and residential uses, which are characteristically concentrated along the street frontage. This area should be maintained and/or developed to promote a pedestrian-oriented environment, with retail, restaurants and entertainment at street level, streetscape amenities, and control of signage. Development of residential uses in the upper floors of buildings located in the CBD is encouraged. Where off-street parking is provided, it should be located to the rear of the buildings. The B-1 zoning district most closely corresponds with the Central Business District.

### **Waterfront**

This land use category is intended to guide the redevelopment of the riverfront area south of the Central Business District. The Alma Iron & Metal site forms the majority of this area, for which brownfield redevelopment opportunities are currently being sought. The Waterfront land use category is to provide for a mix of residential, commercial and recreational land uses, emphasizing pedestrian circulation, environmental protection and waterfront access. Recreational use of Waterfront areas should take full advantage of the Pine River, through the use of boardwalks as well as water-oriented recreational activities. Public access to the Pine River should also be secured as this area is redeveloped. As no zoning district currently exists to implement this land use category, one should be adopted in advance of redevelopment activities.

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### **Business & Multiple Family Residential**

The Business & Multiple Family Residential land use category involves a mix of office and other low-intensity business/service uses along with townhome and multiple family residential uses. This land use category is primarily intended to serve as a transition between higher-intensity commercial areas and residential neighborhoods. The BMR zoning district is intended to implement this land use category.

### **Professional Services**

The Professional Services land use category is meant to provide areas in the City solely for office and professional service uses, including, but not limited to, executive, administrative, clerical, accounting, engineering, architecture and medical functions. The OS zoning district most closely corresponds with this land use category.

### **Office-Research-Technology**

The Office-Research-Technology land use category is meant to allow low-intensity light industrial and office uses that area oriented toward research, design, prototype development, and technical training. Related retail and service uses may also be allowed in “ORT” land use areas. The development of ORT areas should be of a campus-style character, with a pedestrian focus and attention to landscaping and environmental protection. As no zoning district currently exists to implement the ORT land use category, one should be adopted.

### **Light Industrial**

This area is intended to accommodate primarily lighter industrial activities that pose minimal environmental impacts upon surrounding areas and uses. This designation is intended to permit warehousing and storage; wholesale establishments; tool, die and machine shops; manufacturing; and limited processing of materials. Outside storage in these areas is intended to be screened from the public right-of-way and from adjacent non-industrial uses. The LI, light Industrial, zoning district is intended to implement the Light Industrial land use category.

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### **General Industrial**

This area is intended to provide locations for general or heavy industrial activities such as those which involve the use of heavy machinery, regular traffic by larger trucks, extensive amounts of contiguous land, service by railroad lines or major thoroughfares, processing of chemicals or raw materials, assembly, generation of industrial waste, noise, odor, or traffic problems. Given their potential environmental impacts, screening and buffering these uses from adjacent less-intensive uses is a key concern.

### **Campus**

Due to the specific nature of the Alma College campus, the Campus land use category has been developed to include all Alma College facilities. Only those residential and commercial uses associated with the College (i.e. dormitories, book stores, cafeterias, etc.) are permitted in the Campus land use area, in addition to other typical college facilities. As no zoning district currently exists that is specifically intended to implement the Campus land use category, the development of one should be considered. In the absence of such a district, the R-3, BMR, OS and PUD zoning districts are currently most appropriate for the development of Campus areas.

### **School**

The School land use category contains all of the Alma Public Schools high school, middle school and elementary school facilities.

### **Neighborhood Park**

Land included in the Neighborhood Park category is meant to provide recreational opportunities at the neighborhood level, as opposed to large, more specialized parks meant for community-wide use.

### **Community-Wide Park**

Community-Wide Park land uses are meant to provide large-scale or specialized recreational opportunities meant for use by the entire community. These facilities may be either public or private. As well as some of the City's larger recreational facilities, this category includes existing and future segments of the City's Riverwalk, a linear greenbelt and pathway following the Pine River. The most significant riverfront preservation opportunity presented in this Plan is associated with the former airport property. The subject property's significant length of river

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frontage currently in public ownership offers a unique opportunity to both protect the river and provide recreational opportunities along it. As the City looks to redevelop the former airport property, public ownership of the immediate waterfront areas should be retained to preserve this continuous greenway. For this reason, the Community-Wide Park designation has been given to the entire waterfront area of the property.

### **Public Facilities**

The Public Facilities land use category is meant to contain all publicly-owned facilities, with the exception of parks and Alma Public Schools facilities. This land use category includes the City's municipal offices, the City's wastewater and water treatment plants, the public works garage, the library, the community center, the post office, the cemetery, the Gratiot County Fairgrounds, and other public property.

### **Institutional**

The Institutional land use category is meant to contain all of the City's quasi-public and private institutional uses, with the exception of Alma College. These include Gratiot Community Hospital, Masonic Home, and Sisters of Mercy facilities, as well as area churches.

### **Utilities**

The Utilities land use category is meant to contain all property solely devoted to utilities, including, but not limited to, power generation facilities, electrical infrastructure and switching terminals, and cellular or other wireless communication facilities

### **Urban Growth Area**

The designation of the proposed Urban Growth Area (UGA) around the City of Alma is a concept that derived from a December 2001 P.A. 425 Conditional Land Transfer Agreement between Alma and Arcada Township. The subject agreement contemplated the designation of an UGA in order to eliminate the need to negotiate terms and conditions for subsequent P.A. 425 Agreements for future developments requiring municipal utility services within the Township that are categorized within certain functional classifications. Issues that need to be finalized in conjunction with the UGA involve the identification of specific properties that should be included in the UGA boundaries, the definition of the nature of developments (e.g. industrial,

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commercial, etc.) that would result in a transfer to the City of Alma, the specific density of future residential developments that would remain in the Township versus being transferred to the City, the resolution of terms associated with providing limited residential water service to selected areas outside the corporate boundaries of the City and other related municipal service issues.

Under a comprehensive UGA, the Township and City would agree to enter future P.A. 425 Agreements under pre-arranged terms and conditions for selected types of developments that occur within the defined UGA boundaries. In return, the City would agree to provide municipal water at pre-arranged terms and conditions to identified service areas of the Township. The approach would provide certainty to the development community regarding the availability of traditional municipal services based upon the nature of the proposed development without the need to engage in negotiations that can become lengthy and expensive for participants. Although the UGA concept was developed in the course of negotiations with Arcada Township, the City would likewise desire to establish a similar arrangement with Pine River Township which also borders the City's corporate limits. The proposed UGA boundaries reflected in this Master Plan represent the Planning Commission's initial identification of parcels anticipated to be developed with the benefit of municipal services in the foreseeable future, and will serve as a starting point for UGA discussions with Arcada and Pine River Townships.

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**Insert Future Land Use Map**

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# IMPLEMENTATION

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The Master Plan is essentially a statement of policies, objectives, and goals designed to accommodate future growth and redevelopment. The Plan forms the philosophical basis for the more technical and specific implementation measures. It must be recognized that development and change will occur either with or without planning and that the Plan will have little effect upon future development unless adequate implementation programs are established. This section identifies actions and programs which will be useful if the plan is to be followed. An implementation program for zoning adjustments is also presented.

A variety of programs or administrative "tools" are available to help the plan succeed. These include:

### **Zoning Requirements**

Zoning is the development control that has been most closely associated with planning. Originally, zoning was intended to inhibit nuisances and protect property values. However, zoning should also serve the following additional purposes:

- 1) To promote orderly growth in a manner consistent with land use policies and the Master Plan.
- 2) To promote attractiveness in the City's physical environment by providing variation in lot sizes, etc., and appropriate land uses.
- 3) To accommodate special, complex or unique uses through such mechanisms as planned unit developments, overlay districts, or special use permits.
- 4) To guide development to prevent future conflicting land uses (i.e. industrial uses adjacent to residential areas).
- 5) To preserve and protect existing land uses until such time as they may change in accordance with the Master Plan.
- 6) To promote the positive redevelopment of underutilized areas of the City.

The zoning ordinance and official map, in themselves, should not be considered as the major long range planning policy of the City. Rather, the Master Plan should be regarded as a statement of planning policy and zoning should be used to assist in implementing that policy. Future rezoning requests should be evaluated against the goals and objectives and arrangement of land uses specified in the Master Plan.

### Existing Zoning and Relationship with Proposed Land Use

The following table depicts the existing zoning districts, and the corresponding land use designations.

**TABLE 15  
PROPOSED LAND USES  
AND CORRESPONDING ZONING**

PROPOSED LAND USE DESIGNATIONS	CORRESPONDING ZONING DISTRICTS
Residential Low Density	R-1
Residential Medium Density	R-1A
Residential High Density	R-2, R-3
Manufactured Housing Community	MHP
General Commercial	B-2
Central Business District	B-1
Waterfront	<b>District Needed</b>
Business and Multiple-Family Residential	BMR
Professional Services	OS
Office-Research-Technology	<b>District Needed</b>
Light Industrial	LI
General Industrial	GI
Campus	R-1, R-1A, R-2, R-3, BMR <b>(Potential District Needed)</b>
School	R-1, R-1A, R-2, R-3, BMR
Neighborhood Park	R-1, R-1A, R-2, MHP, BMR
Community-Wide Park	R-1, R-1A, R-2, MHP, BMR
Public Facilities	R-1, R-1A, R-2, R-3, BMR, LI, GI
Institutional	R-1, R-1A, R-2, R-3, BMR, B-2
Utilities	LI, GI

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In reviewing the City's Land Use Plan versus the City's existing zoning map, certain inconsistencies can be identified. Part of the implementation program of the Master Plan will be for the Planning Commission to analyze areas of inconsistency and determine if re-zonings would be appropriate.

## **Funding**

A variety of funding mechanisms are available for the City to implement the goals and policies of the Master Plan. Some of the mechanisms available are listed below.

### **TEA-21 – Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act**

The City can take advantage of this Act to attempt to gain funding for transportation enhancement activities. Possible grant monies include a wide variety of efforts from historic preservation related projects to landscaping and beautification projects such as a streetscape plan. MDOT makes decisions after a local and regional screening process is conducted.

### **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funding**

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is authorized under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, Public Law 93-383, as amended. It is administered through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and is meant to fund projects that revitalize neighborhoods, expand affordable housing and economic opportunities, and improve community facilities and services. Grant funding may be available through this program for infrastructure, corridor, community “gateway,” and streetscape improvements.

### **Special Assessment**

This method facilitates the funding of public improvement projects through individual assessments of properties on an equitable basis for benefiting property owners in a defined district. This technique is common when funding road and utility improvement projects.

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### **Tax Increment Financing, Public Act 450 of 1980**

Tax increment financing is a means of funding infrastructure improvements such as roads, sewers, etc. which are needed for development. Bonds are issued by the community to pay for the needed improvements and then paid off by capturing the resulting increases in property taxes spawned by the improvements.

### **Brownfield Redevelopment Act Financing, Public Act 381 of 1996**

The brownfield acts allow communities to use tax increment financing in order to finance analysis and clean-up of sites where environmental contamination limits redevelopment.

### **Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Public Act 197 of 1975**

The DDA Act provides for the establishment of a downtown development authority that may utilize tax increment financing to promote growth as well as correct and prevent deterioration in business districts. The City has an established DDA, which will continue the implementation of P.A. 197 for downtown improvements.

### **Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA), Public Act 281 or 1986**

The LDFA Act provides for the establishment of local development finance authorities that may, through the development and implementation of plans, use tax increment financing to fund projects that will create jobs and promote economic growth.

### **Redevelopment of Shopping Areas Act, Public Act 120 of 1961, as amended by Act 260 of 1984**

This Act basically authorizes municipalities to utilize the special assessment district financing mechanism for the maintenance of commercial areas. Funds can be utilized for a variety of activities including redevelopment, maintenance, and promotional efforts. The act also calls for a creation of a board to direct the various improvement efforts.

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## **Capital Improvements Program**

Capital improvements programs consider the funding and timing of all municipally related capital needs including such items as roadways, utilities, parks and recreation, City Hall expansions etc. The City currently follows an orderly procedure for planning and financing such facilities through the adoption of a Capital Improvements Program (CIP) as part of the annual budgeting process. The CIP is a schedule of projects and contains estimated costs and sources of funding. The Land Use Plan should be used as a key reference document in the preparation of the CIP to ensure that public dollars are spent where the most benefit will be received.

## **Housing Code**

This is of primary importance in maintaining existing dwelling units as safe and comfortable places to live. The Housing Code establishes minimum requirements for basic equipment and facilities which each dwelling unit must contain, establishes procedures for notifying owners of code violations, and a penalty system which encourages the correction of violations. Enforcement of the Housing Code and rental ordinance is of particular importance in light of the substantial number of rental properties found in the City.

## **Ordinance Enforcement**

One of the most essential tools for implementing the Master Plan is the enforcement of existing ordinances. While the Master Plan embodies the desires of the community for an improved living environment, the Zoning Ordinance and other general ordinances establish minimum standards designed to protect the public health, safety, and welfare.

## **Plan Education**

Citizen involvement and support will be necessary as the Plan is implemented. Local officials should constantly strive to develop procedures which make citizens more aware of the planning process and the day to day decision making which affects implementation of the Plan. A continuous program of discussion, education and participation will be extremely important as the City moves toward realization of the goals and objectives contained within the Master Plan.

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## **Plan Updates**

The Plan should not become a static document. The City Planning Commission should attempt to re-evaluate and update portions of it on a periodic basis. The land use portion should be updated at least once every three to five years, and the Planning Commission should set goals for the review of various sections of this Plan on a yearly program. The Master Plan should also be coordinated with the Community Recreation Plan in order to provide proper long-range planning for recreation improvements.

Once adopted, the Master Land Use Plan is the official policy guide to be used by the City Commission and Planning Commission to solve the existing and anticipated community development problems identified in this document. Through the text and maps, the Plan illustrates the attitude and desire of the community toward future growth and development. Further, the Plan also promotes continuity in development policy as appointments to the Planning Commission and City Commission change over the years.



# **APPENDIX**

# **CITY OF ALMA PLANNING COMMISSION**

## **MASTER PLAN VISIONING WORKSHOP**

Report to the City of Alma Planning Commission on the  
Results of the Master Plan Visioning Workshop

Prepared by:  
Carlisle/Wortman Associates, Inc.

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## Introduction

On March 25, 2002, The City of Alma Planning Commission sponsored a community visioning workshop to identify current and future development needs and issues that must be addressed to shape and serve the City of Alma. Local residents, Planning Commissioners, City Commission members, DDA representatives, ZBA members and other public officials were encouraged to attend to provide ideas on such issues as community image, residential land uses, commercial and industrial revitalization, transportation and traffic, natural and historic resources, downtown development, and use of vacant and transitional land. The vision statements gathered from this workshop will be used to develop community planning goals, land use programs, and policies for the update of the City of Alma Master Plan.

This report is a summary of the process and outcomes of the community visioning workshop. Priority vision statements and ideas for the improvement of the City were generated from this session and will help define community planning goals and objectives for the Planning Commission. The meeting notice, agenda, attendance lists, and prioritized vision statements from this workshop are included in the Appendix.

## What is Community Visioning?

Successful communities decide the future is something they can create. These communities take the time to produce a vision of the future they want and employ a process that helps them achieve their goals. Successful communities are focusing on ways in which business, government, organizations, and citizens work together.

One way of achieving these goals is through *community visioning*. Such a process brings together all sectors of a community to identify problems, evaluate changing conditions, and build collective approaches to improve the quality of life in the community.

In reviewing successful community visioning processes in other municipalities, the efforts contained the following elements:

- The definition of a community must be defined by the participants. Some workshops define their community as a neighborhood, City, Township or combined municipal area.
- People with varied interests and perspectives participated throughout the process and contributed to the outcomes, lending credibility to the results.
- Traditional "power brokers" empowered participants and treated them as peers.
- Individual agendas and baggage were set aside, so the focus remained on common issues and goals.

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- Strong leadership came from all sectors and interests.
  - All participants took personal responsibility for the process and its outcomes.
  - The group produced detailed recommendations for community improvements, design ideas, and improvement strategies.
  - Individuals broke down economic and sectoral barriers and developed effective strategies for municipal improvement.
  - The group gained a consensus on project goals and objectives to reach desired outcomes.

These ingredients make up the essence of collaboration itself. True collaboration brings together organizations, public officials, and individuals to define problems, create options, develop strategies, and implement solutions. Because they typically involve larger groups, collaborative efforts help organizations rethink how they work, how they relate to the rest of the community, and what role they can play in carrying out a common strategy. Often no single organization has the resources or mandate to effectively address a particular issue alone. A group effort can help mobilize the necessary resources and community will.

Effective collaboration requires that decisions be made by consensus. Though a consensus-based decision-making process takes more time, it can save time during the implementation phase of a visioning project, where blocking ordinarily occurs. If citizens are provided a forum in which their ideas and opinions are heard, seriously considered, and perhaps incorporated into the action plan, they will be less inclined to resist or ignore new initiatives.

Community "ownership" of a plan and willingness to help in its accomplishment often corresponds directly with the public's level of participation in the plan's development. As a result, projects can be completed in timely fashion through the consensus-building process.

## **Workshop Planning and Format**

Carlisle /Wortman Associates, Inc., and the City of Alma Staff and Planning Commission began planning for this visioning workshop in December of 2001. City Staff were consulted to:

- Identify and reserve an accessible meeting location.
- Identify key community leaders and stakeholders for specific invitation
- Disseminate a press release and flyers for the workshops.
- Coordinate with Planning Commissioners and others who would serve as facilitators.

The process of visioning was used to actively describe the preferred future for the City of Alma. Visioning describes a mental image and provides a picture in words. The visioning workshop format attempts to produce positive statements that guide and motivate change. The visioning process also integrates successful group dynamic interaction which spawns the following positive results:

- 
- Encourages equal sharing and participation
  - Encourages "hitchhiking" on others ideas
  - Depersonalizes ideas
  - Tolerates conflicting ideas
  - Reinforces concentration through seeing and hearing ideas
  - Clarifies ideas
  - Provides focus on important issues
  - Forces equality in choices
  - Avoids dominance by strong group members
  - Encourages minority opinions
  - Promotes "attacking" ideas on walls – not people
  - Provides preparation for decision
  - Forces independent judgment
  - Promotes a sense of accomplishment
  - Motivates involvement in future phases of planning & problem-solving

The technique was developed to assure that group members are not excluded from active participation. Sometimes, a group discussion can be monopolized by a few group members so that the outcome of a meeting does not reflect the consensus or opinion of the entire group. A structured workshop technique like the one used in the City of Alma Community Visioning Workshop, encourages participation by all members.

The workshop began with a brief introduction to the visioning process and the purpose of the workshop. Participants in the visioning process were divided into small groups of approximately ten to fifteen people led by a facilitator. Each group was directed to discuss their visions for the City of Alma on a variety of topics, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Community image,
- Residential land uses,
- Commercial and industrial revitalization,
- Transportation and traffic,
- Natural and historic resources,
- Downtown development, and,
- Use of vacant and transitional land.

The small group discussions were carried out in the following manner:

- Round robin listing of ideas
- Discussion and clarification of ideas
- Voting

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The groups were asked to identify a prioritized list of issues that warranted concern. Prioritization was accomplished by individual voting. Each participant was given five colored self-stick dot labels as a method of voting on specific issues. After the round of voting and identification of the top vision statements, the workshop attendees were reconvened to hear a brief presentation by the facilitator of each small group. Common issues among the various groups were identified as each group's facilitators presented.

## Major Findings / Workshop Results

Nearly 250 vision statements were generated by the five small groups. Using the original words recorded on flip charts, a summary list of statements was prepared. The following pages provide the "top ranking" vision concepts which were rated top priority by a simple majority of participants.

Several strong, central themes emerged from the vision workshop. These are listed as follows:

- The need to maintain the integrity of the existing residential neighborhoods, and develop new single family and senior residential areas.
- Maintaining quality public schools for the continued success of the community.
- The need to coordinate recreational facilities and programs on a regional basis, and provide more opportunities for the youth of the community.
- The opportunity to develop the river and waterfront for recreational, commercial and residential uses.
- The need to increase the City's industrial tax base by attracting diverse, clean, small, high-tech industrial uses.
- The need to enhance the downtown by utilizing the second floors, increasing pedestrian traffic, attracting quality eating establishments, implementing two-way streets, and improving the streetscape.
- The opportunity to capitalize on the quality institutions located in the community, including Alma College, Masonic Home, the hospital, etc.
- The opportunity to enhance the relationship between community stakeholders (City, College, school system, neighboring townships, local business, etc.) for the mutual benefit of all.
- The need to cultivate an image for the community that reflects the City of Alma's assets, in order to "market" Alma to business and tourism.
- The need to promote good environmental stewardship (including the air, river/waterfront, and groundwater), and clean up contaminated property in the City.

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Overall, participants in the Visioning Workshop expressed vision statements which reflected a desire to cultivate an image for the community and capitalize on the large number and variety of groups and institutions present in the City. It is also clear that Alma residents place a high value on the quality of the City's residential areas; that they see the success of the downtown as important; and that they are concerned for the development of appropriate industrial uses that will help the City thrive.

# **TABULATION OF**

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# VISION STATEMENTS

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**Group 1****Number of Votes**

1.	New residential areas – single family	3
2.	Lacking quality rental – upscale condos	2
3.	Develop upstairs downtown	1
4.	Upgrade school facilities	11
5.	Two-way traffic downtown	
6.	Industrial development = heavy + light	
7.	Need more industrial property	5
8.	Area wide recreation	7
9.	Recreation facilities	1
	* pool	
	* ice rink	
10.	Attract pedestrian traffic downtown	2
11.	Market Commercial properties	2
12.	Capitalize on medical community – regional medical center	4
13.	motel w/ meeting rooms	
14.	Upscale restaurants	6
15.	re-develop old airport	2
16.	Coordinate college growth	
17.	Capitalize on City-College relationship year round	5
18.	Image –	4
	a. progressive college town	
	b. technology driven businesses	
	c. downtown streetscape	
	d. affordable housing	
	e. safe environment	
19.	Good bar	
20.	Secure parking to encourage downtown residential development	

**Group 2**

-	more taxable prop.	5
-	variety of housing	
-	moving mid-school from downtown	2
	* vehicle traffic (safety)	
	* lack of school rec. areas	
-	Develop waterfronts	6
	* restaurants (anchor)	
	* shops	
	* old Giantway – parking farmers market	
-	Coordination with Townships (already started)	5

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especially commercial	
- sensitive to Township neighbors	5
- recognize agricultural needs of area – attend to ideas of urban sprawl	
- School / City collaborate	2
* recreational programs	
* transportation	
* sharing services	
- Area / community shared services	1
- Open new subdivisions – residential / industrial	2
- Complete Pine Ave.extension	3
* enhance commercial & residential	
* create south beltline	
- Beautify Alma (downtown)	
* theme	
* facades (period development)	
* similar motifs	
- Maintain tree city	
- Attractive Website to attract tourist	
- Sr. or other housing downtown (upstairs)	1
- condos rowhouses (by river)	2
- Maintain rental housing to enhance neighborhood	2
- More attractive inviting signs	1
* creative community spirit	
* attract \$\$\$\$\$\$	
- youth center – recreational	
* skate park	
* sports	
* hockey	
- Recruit industry – small industry – diversify	4
- Reclaim total areas	1
- Enhance / restore historical district	
- Attract tourists	4
* microbrew pub	
* restaurants	
* shops	
- Recreation on river	1
* canoe	
* boating	
- Complete & extend rails to Trails	
- Coordinate with Fairgrounds – recreation	2
- Expand library facilities to incorporate technology	6



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### Group 3

#### Community Image

-	Where are we going?	
-	Are we agricultural?	
-	Good cultural climate	2
-	Need clean industries	5
-	Future of railroads	1
-	Good schools	5
-	Grow the City area	8
-	Middle Income housing	
-	Need white collar jobs	1
-	Detention centers	1
-	Equitable tax (land) distribution	2
-	Recreational Facilities	2
-	Good relationship with community partners	2
*	Masonic	
*	College	
*	Business	
-	Recreation on the river	2
-	Maintain integrity of neighborhoods	6
-	Re-open community center / pool	
-	Enlarge industrial park	1
-	Improve visual entrance to community	5
-	Public eating facilities – upscale	
-	Youth recreation facilities	2
-	Underground utilities	3
-	Promotional programs	
-	Market Alma to Alma	6
-	Find a “brand” for Alma	5
-	Alternate retirement centers	

#### Revitalize downtown

-	develop Center St. for commercial use	1
-	older neighborhoods need to discourage run-down housing or tear them down – 2 <sup>nd</sup> street	1
-	need more upscale apartment options or condos especially for seniors	1
-	utilities need continual upgrade & future planning	
-	re-use old properties – eg Leonard Oil	1
*	clean-out old concrete, etc.	
-	stop cutting down trees, plant new ones	1

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- DART doing well – expand it as needed	
- Two-way Superior Street – traffic goes to fast	2
- Keep downtown businesses open evenings	
- traffic control on Wright Ave. is better now	
- Impact of Pine Ave. on traffic to relieve Wright Ave.	
- senior housing & amenities, Sr. Center, etc.	1
- Get a Casnio Yes No	
- Develop partnership (community services w/ other government and institutional (hospital, college, Masonic home, etc) units	2
- Better marketing of our assets	3
* hospital, college, Masonic home etc.	
* community image needs clarification	
* increase voluntarism	
- Summer use of schools for recreation use – also college	1
- Better recreation opportunities for children of all ages	3
- Shames: (problem areas)	
* State Road & Lincoln	
* refinery	
* ASAP on E. Superior	1
* all of E. Superior (but A bolt)	
* clean up access to Riverfront Develop.	
- revitalize downtown	
- two-way streets	2
- more user friendly – small parks	1
- open spaces	
- need new industry – more aggressive marketing Alma	4
• population	
• renaissance zones	
- Riverfront development – Alma Iron/metal site	5
* restaurants	
* condos	
* parks	
* access for all	
- protect / develop natural resources	2
* air	
* water	
* riverfront	
* groundwater	
- cleanout refinery site, attractive access to A	5
- New residential areas need rest-pocket parks with trees, bike trails	4

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- feasibility of Woloham property for Community recreation center – use of schools in summer/college 2
  - better schools – teachers & computers 1
  - 1<sup>st</sup> class restaurants 1
  - City should help business start-ups
  - improve residential streets
  - get a renaissance zone for Alma
  - get more traffic on Michigan Ave.
  - get a interchange on 27 & MI Ave.
  - get lights in commuter parking lots at 27
  - finish limited access on 27 south of Ithaca
  - need more, better downtown parking

#### **Group 4**

- More industry 6
- Attractive schools 7
- Good environmental stewardship 8
- more arts
- better roads
- tourist stop / spot 1
- recreation
- more intergovernmental activity
- single family housing 2
- known for college
- arts center 6
- more people
- need available space for housing
- River clean 2
- Tech center 4
  - \* High Tech ind.
  - \* Medical
- River assessible
- great place to raise family
- Catch eye from Us – 127
  - \* Improve drive-in 1
- Improve first impression
- Signage
- Clean up exit 2
- Wright house – fix up – ZONING
- Too hard to change zoning 1
- Motel at exit

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-	Marketing systems for empty buildings	
-	Fine dining	3
-	Clean refinery	4
-	Build on theme – SCOTS	2

## Group 5

### Visions

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 1.  | Seniors & Condos  | 5 |
|     | * Near river, views, wildlife view  |   |
| 2.  | Bring in families   |   |
| 3.  | Schools   | 5 |
|     | * Vocational Education  |   |
|     | * good school   |   |
|     | * teacher pay goals   |   |
| 4.  | Recreations   |   |
|     | * Skate – activites for whole   | 4 |
|     | * Art center – focus on good quality  | 2 |
|     | * use of river for parks  | 2 |
| 5.  | Hi-tech Industry  | 4 |
| 6.  | Airport – use for industry – improve facility                                   | 3 |
| 7.  | Create more walkable downtown   |   |
|     | * Recruit more use for buildings downtown -<br>use of 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor     | 2 |
| 8.  | Grant money for establishing businesses   |   |
|     | * Getting more families to stay   |   |
| 9.  | Improve streets, parking lots, walkways   |   |
| 10. | Rid 2 hour parking  | 1 |
| 11. | Find successful community (downtown) and copy,<br>study their plans             |   |
|     | Working together  |   |
|     | • Warwick Area, Masonic Home Area, College                                      |   |
|     | • Need for rentals  |   |
| -   | Area for mid-income   |   |
| -   | Tax incentive for home improvements   |   |
| -   | Good eating place(s)  | 5 |
|     | Place to go after concerts (later hours)  |   |
| -   | Need for renovation downtown  | 1 |
|     | * revamp older bldgs  |   |
|     | * Corner of State   |   |
|     | * need loafers glory type places  |   |
| -   | Work closer with college for Community collaboration:<br>Schools, College, City | 5 |
| -   | Support Highland festival – hold community together                             | 1 |
| -   | Need to wake people up to our community = image                                 | 1 |
| -   | Vision of an awake, vibrant, safe small town                                    | 3 |
| -   | Safety afterschool for teens Arts, sports, etc.                                 | 5 |

### Downtown

- 
- River area: High end things such as:  
Shops, activity 3
  - No more low income housing or plan  
careful where it is located 2
  - Need an anchor store with park, boat rental 3
  - Emphasis on existing businesses – keep what we have.

# **APPENDIX**

- **FLYER**
- **PRESS RELEASE**
- **AGENDA**



- **SIGN-IN SHEET**

**CITY OF ALMA  
ON STREET PARKING PROCEDURES**

**I. Introduction:**

All existing or proposed curbed streets within the City of Alma are subject to an evaluation of on-street parking restrictions from time to time based upon engineering standards, public safety concerns or citizen requests.

The purpose of this procedure is to establish criteria for the removal or placement of on-street parking restrictions.

**II. Street width standards - new curb construction:**

The following minimum curbed street widths shall be established for the placement of on-street parking:

	<u>Parking one side</u>	<u>Parking both sides</u>
MAJOR STREET	8 feet*	16 feet*
LOCAL STREET	25 feet	32 feet

\*Available width exceeding 12 feet wide traffic lanes

The City of Alma residential curbed street width standard is 28 feet unless available right-of-way or physical features limit compliance with standard. All incremental costs to construct curbed streets wider than standard shall be funded 100% by special assessment to the adjoining property owners.

**III. Public Opinion**

Prior to the removal or placement of on-street parking, public opinion shall be solicited from all adjoining property owners as follows:

Provide written notice to all adjoining property owners along effected streets describing the proposed on-street parking change. Included with the notice shall be a postage paid response card for property owners to submit their views. The results of the returned opinion cards shall be submitted along with any pertinent staff recommendations for official parking change approval. The city staff may elect to abandon a parking change proposal if unfavorable public opinion is received. Parties have the right to appeal the recommendation developed by staff pursuant to this process to the City Commission.

**IV. Parking changes - Existing Streets**

All parking changes proposed for existing curbed and un-curbed streets within the City of Alma are subject to approval of the Alma City Commission via traffic control order. The criteria for the approval of on-street parking changes shall be based upon established engineering standards, public safety concerns and public opinion. The on-street parking standards established herein for new curbed streets shall be used as a guide for any on-street parking changes proposed along all existing curbed and uncurbed streets within the City of Alma.