



VILLAGE OF
LAWTON

MASTER PLAN

Adopted XX XX, 2023

FINAL DRAFT

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Statement of Thanks:

This plan was developed through hard work and coordination with Village Staff, Planning Commission, Village Council, the DDA, and (most importantly!) its residents. We are deeply grateful for their thoughtful direction, constant engagement, and commitment to the Village of Lawton's future.

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RESOLUTION OF ADOPTION

Copy of resolution to be included on this page once the plan is adopted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Village of Lawton 2023 Master Plan was created to guide the village toward a future that our residents, property and building owners, developers, and other stakeholders want to see emerge. Community surveys and input from local leaders have identified a desire for growth and change while also valuing the village's existing small-town character and community-minded culture.

Our village is a tight-knit, family-centered community. Our goals for the future of Lawton are reflected in this plan. Of utmost importance during the planning process, we desired to achieve a balance between capitalizing on Lawton's roots and existing character, while also advancing the "right" change and growth for our built environment. We've explored people-centric options by interacting with community members and leaders to tailor solutions that will enhance Lawton as a great place to live, work, and play.

This plan would not have been possible without many contributing voices. Together, we've crafted a vision to enhance the quality of life for all and embrace an action-oriented path forward. Over the course of two public engagement events, a community survey, and six steering committee meetings, the input and feedback received were analyzed to craft five guiding themes that serve as the backbone of this document. These themes encompass the overarching goals that community members share, with the aim to enhance Lawton as it moves into the future. These guiding themes are Growth, Enhance, Invest, Sustain, and Unique.

Truly believing the Mahatma Gandhi quote, "The Future depends on what you do today", within this document, we've developed a framework for a thoughtful, forward-looking journey that includes an introduction to the village, a more detailed account of our process and the resulting vision, action-oriented goals and associated objectives, the Future Land Use Map, and an accompanying Zoning Plan.

VISION:

Building on a strong sense of community and our unique character, Lawton will proactively adapt to change, enhance its assets, and facilitate strategic, positive growth to benefit all people in our village.



INTRODUCTION

What is a Master Plan?

The Master Plan is a policy guide. It is intended to create a framework for land use, capital improvements, and capital investment decisions over a long-range period (10 to 20 years).

The Master Plan reflects various core elements, including the Vision, Goals, and Guiding Principles (or Themes) representative of the community. These give the plan direction and provide recommendations for land use, redevelopment, maintaining community character, driving economic and community development, and action items designed to guide future decisions.

In contrast, the Zoning Ordinance is a legal guide including specific, current regulations within a jurisdiction. It contains clear, enforceable local rules detailing how land within different zones can be utilized. The strict rules of the Zoning Ordinance serve as the primary tool to achieve the vision of the Master Plan over time.

MASTER PLAN	ZONING ORDINANCE
Provides general policies and is a guide.	Provides specific regulations; the law.
Describes what should happen in the future – recommended land use for the next 20 years, not necessarily the recommended use for today.	Defines how land can be used today.
Includes recommendations that involve other agencies and groups.	Deals only with development-related issues under Village control.
Flexible to respond to changing conditions.	Fairly rigid and requires formal amendment to change.

USING THE MASTER PLAN

- Evaluate development proposals against the goals of the Master Plan
- Review Zoning Changes for consistency with the Plan's Future Land Use Map
- Reference as a basis for the Zoning Ordinance to support Master Plan Goals
- Determine how land is to be developed or redeveloped in the future
- Identify physical improvements proposed to achieve the vision and goals (ie: streets, sidewalks, parks, utilities, public facilities)
- Consider design standards for development and redevelopment throughout the Village

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VILLAGE OVERVIEW

History + Existing Conditions

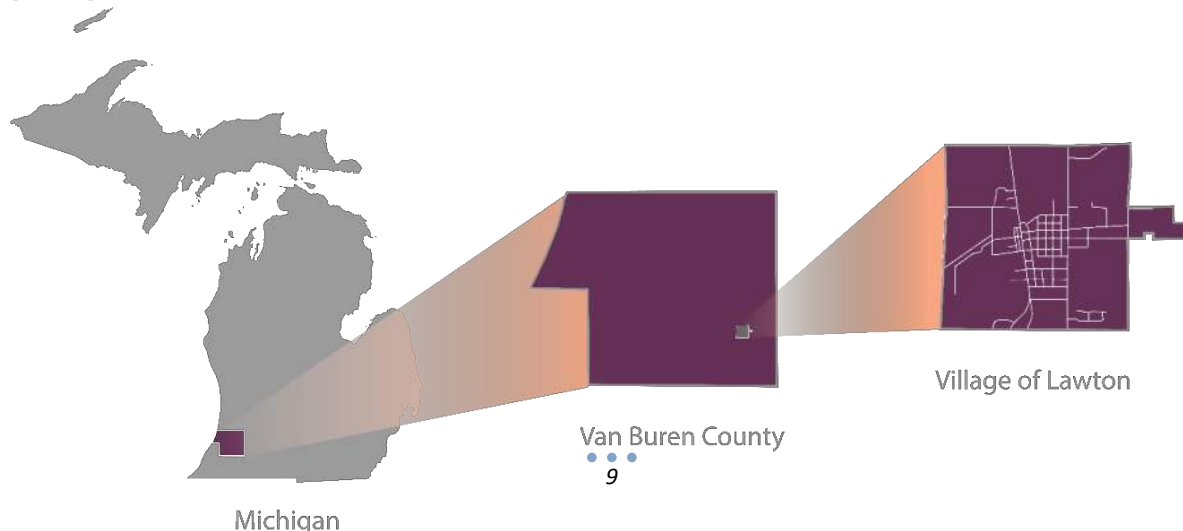
The Village of Lawton was established by Nathan Lawton in 1853. A train station was established in Lawton in 1848, which made the founding of the Central Iron Company possible in 1867. As time progressed, Lawton's nutrient rich soils quickly proved beneficial as the area began to make a name for itself as a fruit harvesting center, specifically of grape vineyards. This trend has persisted, as Lawton is currently home to Welch's Foods and Honee Bear Canning.

The Lawton Heritage Museum is located within the village, in the Lawton Lions Heritage Community Center, which is the state's oldest standing winery building. The village is characterized by its small-town charm and a warm, friendly community atmosphere.

Lawton is the birthplace of the Michigan grape and wine industry, with the first grapes being planted shortly after the Civil War when A. B. Jones planted the area's first grape vines. In 1903, the Lawton Vineyard Company constructed the first winery at 646 North Nursery. Several years later, the Houppert family purchased the site and expanded into the Houppert Winery Complex that was later owned by Michigan Wineries, Inc. and Warner Vineyards. The Lawton Heritage Community Center currently occupies the complex, is designated as a Michigan State Historic Site and is placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Just over 2.3 square miles, Lawton's downtown forms the center of activity and connection within the community. Known throughout Michigan for its local eateries and small-town charm, the village is frequented by guests coming to enjoy a variety of outdoor activities and beautiful natural settings. Lawton is well-networked and easily accessible. Located on state highway M-40, which runs north and south, the village is only three miles south of I-94 (a major federal highway) and is within thirty minutes of the nearby hub of Kalamazoo. Chicago and Grand Rapids can be accessed from Lawton within two hours. The village's central location provides a great opportunity to reside and/or work in a family-centered atmosphere while also being close to larger attractions and amenities.

LOCATION MAP



COMMUNITY PRIDE

Residents have a warranted sense of pride in their naturally beautiful surroundings, vibrant locally owned eateries, the established school system and associated athletic programs, community-minded activism, and numerous well-attended events. In many ways, the village of Lawton is the best-kept secret in Southwest Michigan.



VILLAGE COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Memorial Day Parade / Veteran's Memorial Service at Cemetery / Family BBQ
- Summerfest Celebration including 5K and Fireworks
- Best of Michigan Wine Tasting Event - Lion's Club
- Veteran's Day Salute - VFW
- Fall Escapade Golf Cart Parade
- Christmas Parade and Tree Lighting



INFRASTRUCTURE

Lawton's utility systems, both water and sewer are oversized for current needs. The Village has an excellent water source consisting of 4 groundwater wells. The water is stored in a 500,00-gallon elevated storage tank, and distributed through approximately 11 miles of water main. Our water is pumped fresh from the wells and no treatment is utilized at this time. Wells #4, #8, #9, and #10 are all located south of town in Chancy Lewis Park and the wells vary in depth from 110 ft. to 155 ft. The wells are situated in a sandy till to poorly bedded cobbly-sand formation, known as the Kalamazoo Moraine. In 2021 these wells pumped 168,518,000 gallons of water for Lawton's residents, businesses, and industries.

It is estimated that the Village has substantial excess capacity of 3,500 +/- REU's (Residential Equivalent Units) where 1 REU is equivalent to 250 gallons per day (GPD) and assumes a person uses 200 gallons with an average household of 2.5 persons (7,500 gallons per month). One new home would therefore equal 1 REU. Our water system's large excess capacity gives the Village flexibility to pursue additional industrial partners that have high water consumption needs, as well as the potential for more housing within the Village. Lawton's wastewater treatment plan is designed for 250,000 gallons per day, while the system's maximum use for the year 2021 ranged from 70,000 to 140,000 gallons per day. Similarly, this excess capacity for water treatment gives us the flexibility to pursue additional industrial partners as well as support additional housing development. Using the standard 250 REU (Residential Equivalent Unit) per household. Lawton's sanitary sewer system could support an additional 400 households.

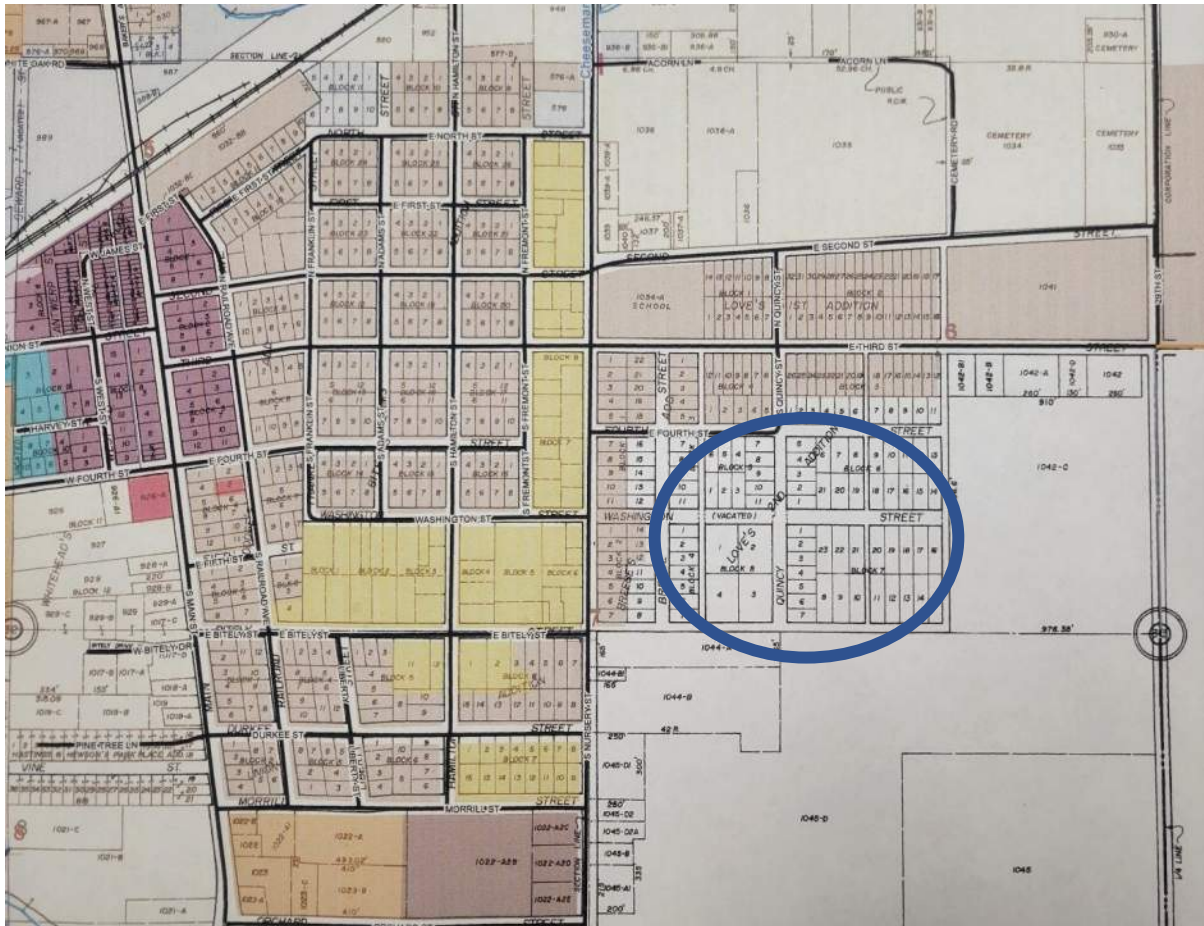


STREET NETWORK

The majority of Lawton's street network is laid out in a traditional grid pattern. A grid allows for a variety of different ways to travel through the village. This design promotes walkability because buildings and homes are placed on short, interconnected blocks. This is different than the use of cul-de-sacs, which are not connected to one another and place all traffic on a major road. Pedestrians must then walk along major roads because residential streets become dead-ends.

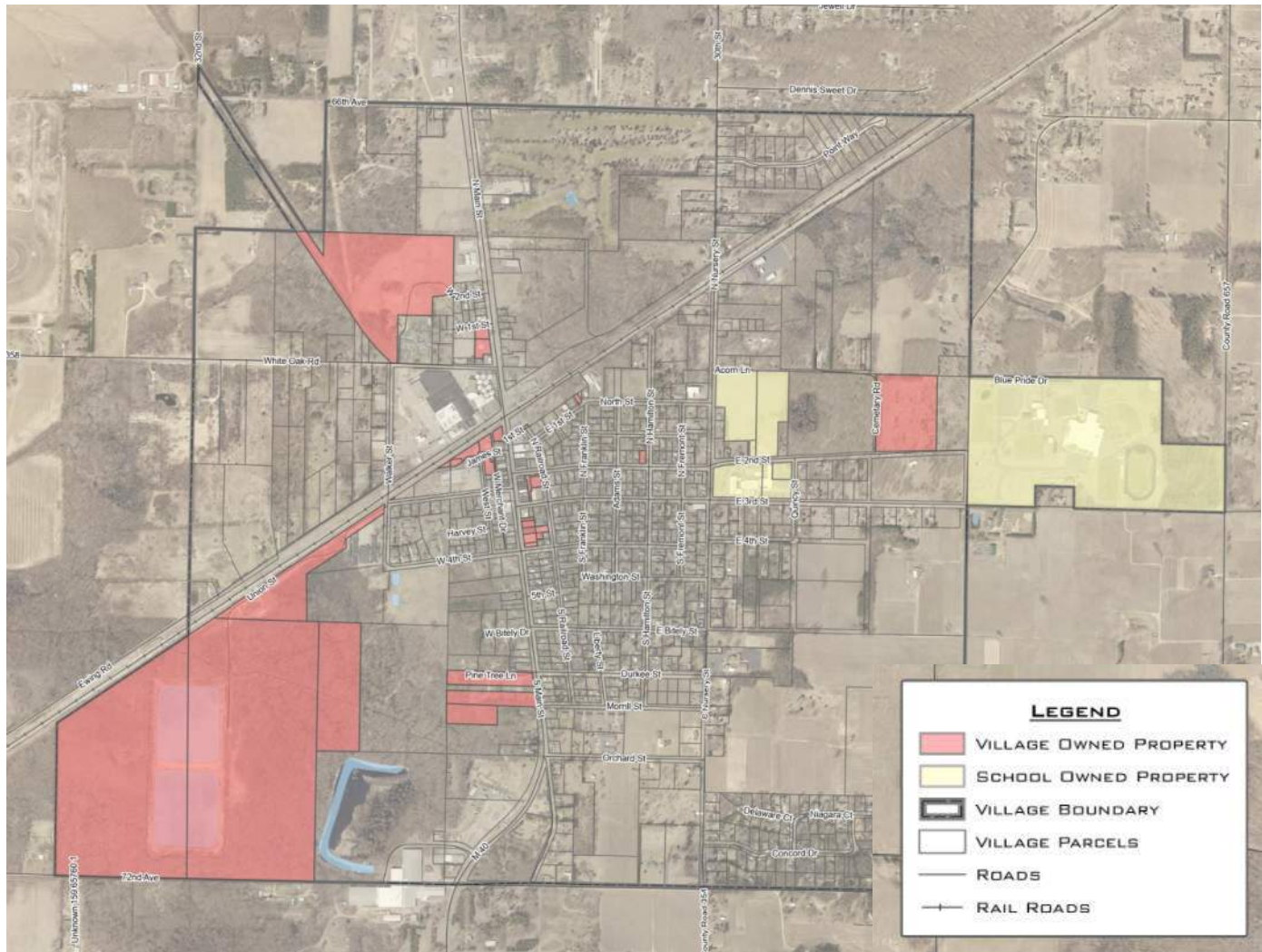
Continued development of the village's traditional street grid system is important to ensure that a variety of different routes can be used by residents to access their homes, businesses, schools, and other amenities. Portions of the village have "paper streets" – streets that appear on paper that have been platted, but never built – many of which are located to the East of Nursery Street (see below image). As development occurs, there is the opportunity to expand the grid network.

Some right-of-way areas exist, but adjoining neighbors have assumed the right-of-way to be a portion of their yard. The Village of Lawton does not derive any additional tax revenue from these larger lots.



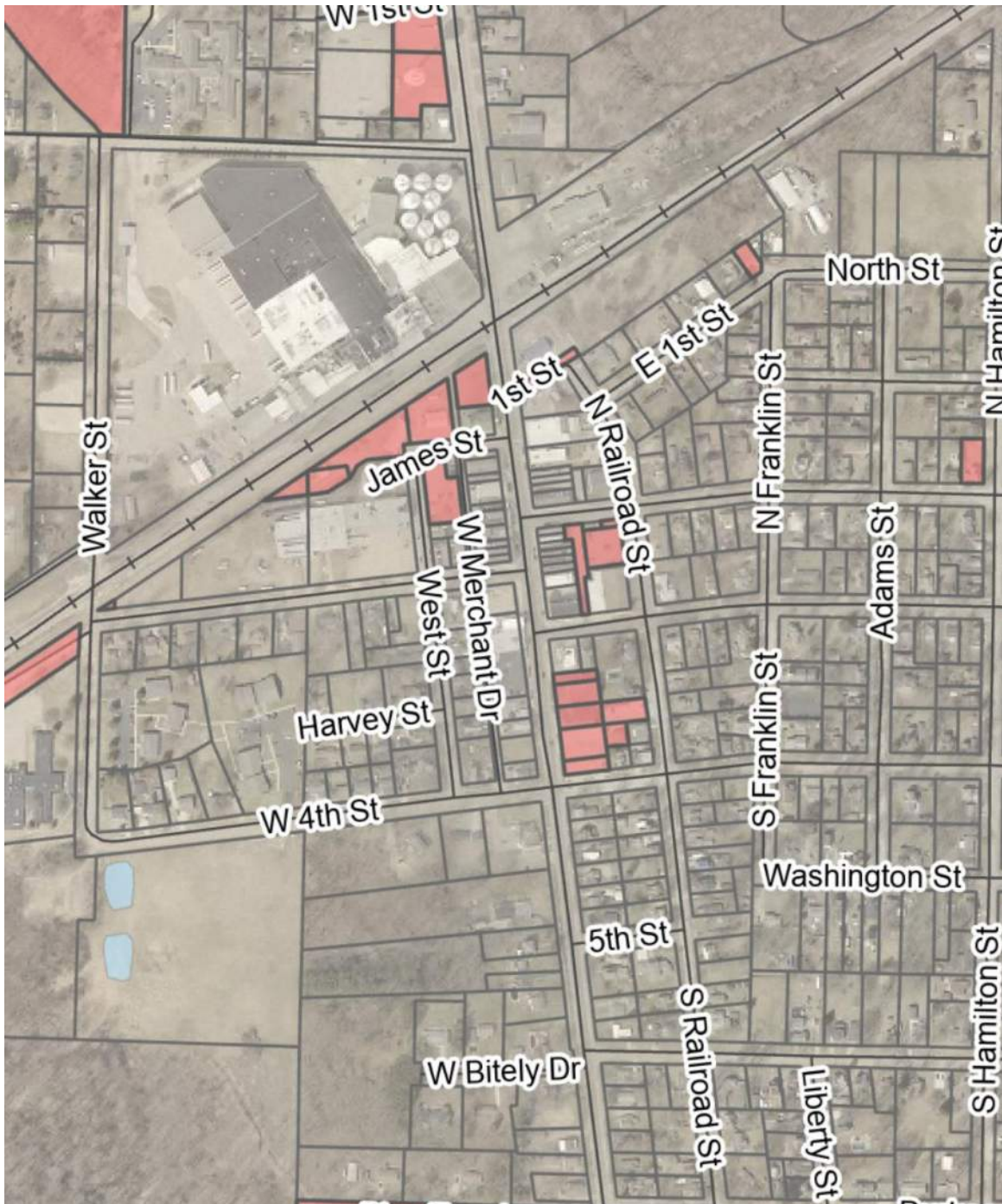
Lawton's streets are laid out in a grid pattern, with some that have been platted but not constructed.

Below is a map of parcels owned by the Village of Lawton. The Village has approximately 30 parcels of land under its ownership. Totaling approximately 358.24 acres, the Village is open to plans for development that align with the Master Plan and the community's vision for the future. Additional private parcels are underutilized and/or vacant and offer additional opportunities for substantial investment. The following page has an enlarged map of the Downtown area for clarity.



Existing Average Parcel Size:

- B-1 parcel: 21,901 square feet*
- B-2 parcel: 16,359 square feet*
- Central Business District: 5,665 square feet*



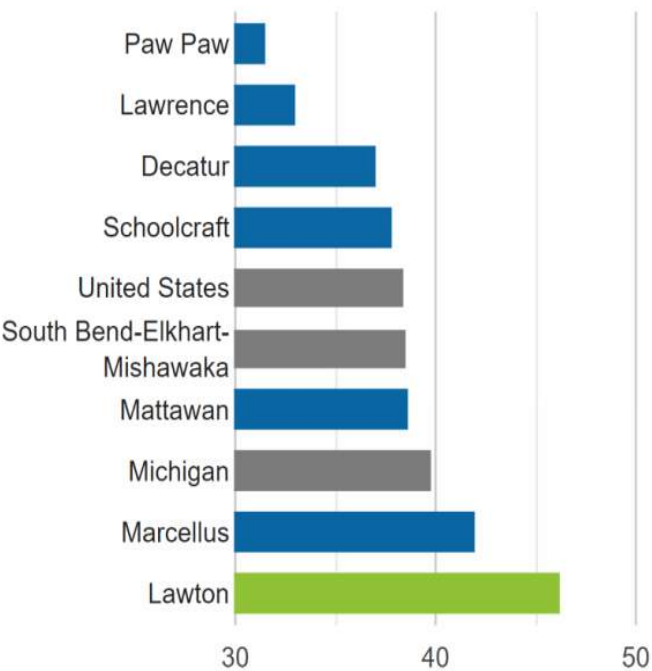
Enlarged excerpt of Village + School-owned Properties

Demographics and Quality of Life

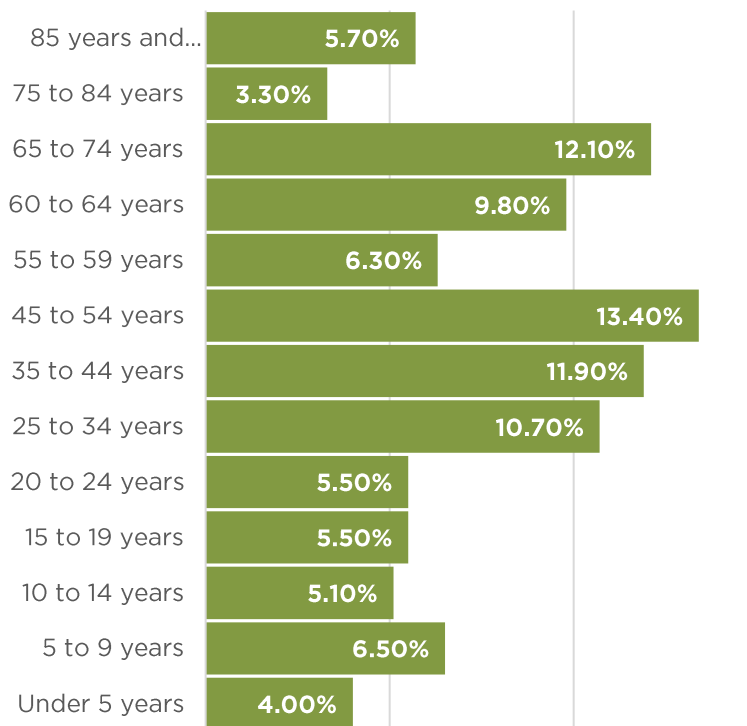
According to the 2022 American Community Survey, the total population in the Village of Lawton is 1,805. Lawton has seen a decrease in population by 95 people (5%) since 2010. Nearby Schoolcraft and Paw Paw also lost population during this time, with Schoolcraft experiencing a 14.8% loss and Paw Paw a 4.1% loss in population. Conversely, Mattawan saw a substantial increase of 24.2% of new residents.

The median age of the Village of Lawton’s residents differs substantially from neighboring communities. In 2021, the median age in the village was 46.2 years, a 7.3-year increase from 2010. Paw Paw’s median age is 31.5 years, Schoolcraft is 37.8 years, and Mattawan is 38.6 years. There is an interesting difference between the median ages of men and women in Lawton; 39.1 years for men versus 51.3 years for women, even though the population is nearly evenly split.

MEDIAN AGE in LAWTON



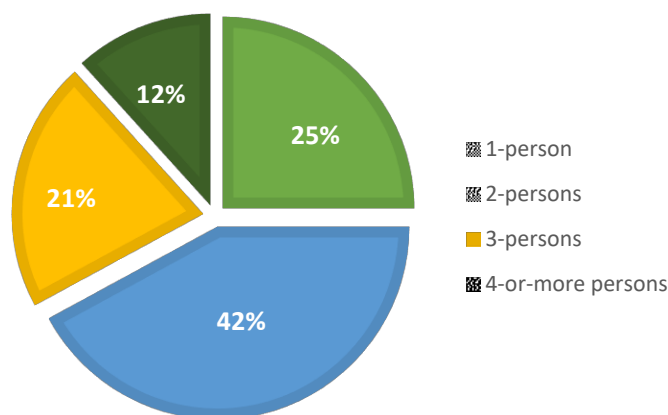
AGE DISTRIBUTION



The age distribution chart shows the large number of persons who are aging in the community. One in every 5 persons is over the age of 65 in Lawton.

Lawton has the smallest average family size in the region, with 2.8 persons per household. This is below the average size in Paw Paw as well as the State of Michigan at 3.2. This coincides with the average household size. In Lawton, this is 2.3 persons per household; a number that is slightly less than neighboring communities with household sizes of 2.5 in Paw Paw all the way up to 2.8 persons per household in Lawrence. This provides us with an idea of how many people are living in the average household. Local, state, and national trends have seen a downward decline in the number of persons per household that has been ongoing for 4 decades. Correspondingly, there has been a rise in the number of one-and two-person households.

PERSONS PER HOUSEHOLD



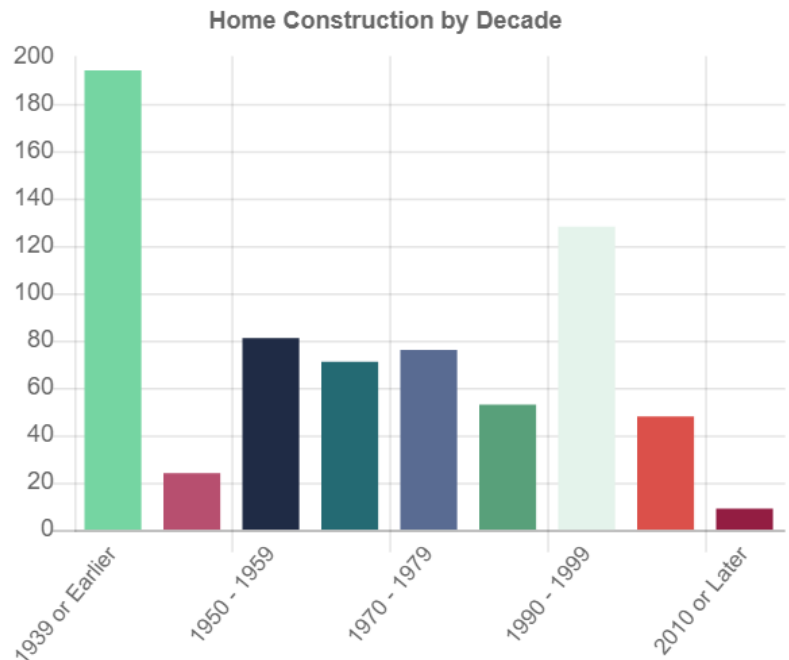
One-quarter of Lawton's households are comprised of one-person, while 42% of its households are two persons; equating to 2/3rds of all households in the village. The remaining one-third of households have three or more persons in them.

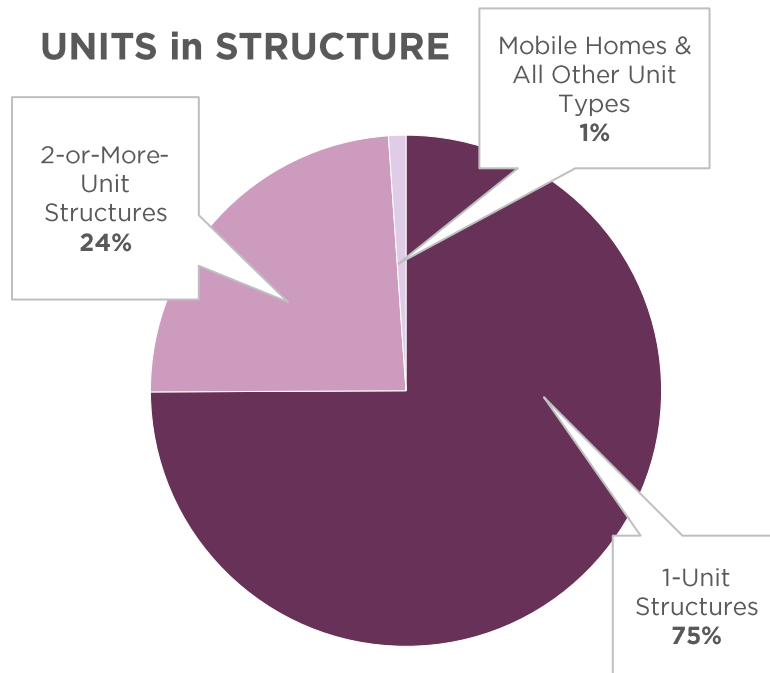
Seventy percent (70%) of Lawton's households contain no children under the age of 18. Given the aging population, it is unsurprising that nearly half (48.1%) of all of Lawton's occupied housing units have persons who are over the age of 55 living in them. This can raise questions and concerns about aging in place. Most persons do not desire to move out of their neighborhood or community. Yet, 1 out of every 3 people over the age of 65 will suffer some

from sort of disability as they age. To understand if Lawton's housing stock is able to an aging population, it is important to look at the age of structures because most older homes have stairs and were not designed for persons with mobility challenges. Homes may also be too large and become difficult to maintain for older individuals. This can result in an increasing need for code compliance and home repair assistance.

HOUSING

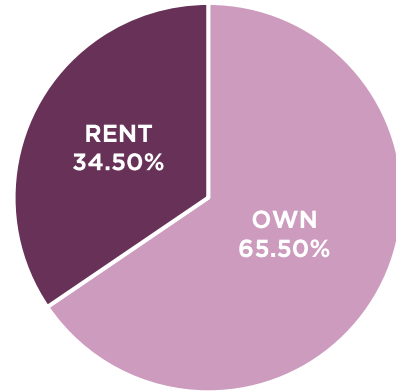
The Village of Lawton's housing units were primarily built pre-1939, with a second wave of residential construction happening in the 1990s. About 75 new housing units were constructed every decade before the Great Recession. Since 2009, however, Census data shows that only 8 new housing units have been built in Lawton. This finding aligns with statewide and national trends. Housing production has not kept up with demand.





There are 764 housing units in Lawton, according to the 2021 American Community Survey. An estimated 711 of which are occupied, with values of \$50,000 - \$199,999. Three-fourths of Lawton's housing stock is comprised of detached single-unit structures. Just under 11% of the housing stock is a one-bedroom or efficiency. Seventy percent (70%) of the homes have 2 or 3 bedrooms, and 18% have 4 or more bedrooms. Because of Lawton's aging population, there is an opportunity for additional dwelling spaces to be incorporated within the existing framework of Lawton's neighborhoods in the form of "gentle density" with the construction of accessory dwelling units (granny flats), as well as an expressed need for various housing types of smaller sizes, such as cottage courts (small bunagalo houses around a common greenspace) or efficiencies.

Most of the units are owner occupied (65.53%), with a lesser extent of renter occupation (34.47%). Per the Census, the average home in Lawton is valued at \$111,800, with an average median resident income of \$48,008. Roughly 26% of owner-occupied homes are owned without a mortgage, and just over 40% of homeowners spend less than 20% of their monthly income on home-ownership costs (ranging from \$500-\$990). Typical monthly rent cost are comparable to a mortgage payment, constituting roughly 30% of gross renter income. This makes Lawton an affordable place to live.



PARKS AND RECREATION

The Village of Lawton currently has five public parks, a privately owned golf course, and several public-school facilities. With the successful construction of the splash pad in Chancy Lewis Park, the use of Village park facilities increased. Energized by the community's enthusiasm, the Village Council adopted Lawton's first Parks and Recreation Master Plan in 2021.

In addition to local parks, there are a number of nearby hiking/biking and snowmobile trails, nature preserves, and State parks. Former rail corridors have been repurposed for non-motorized and snowmobile activities. The Village of Lawton's restaurants serve as a draw for recreational users to come to Lawton in the region.

VILLAGE OF LAWTON PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES MAP



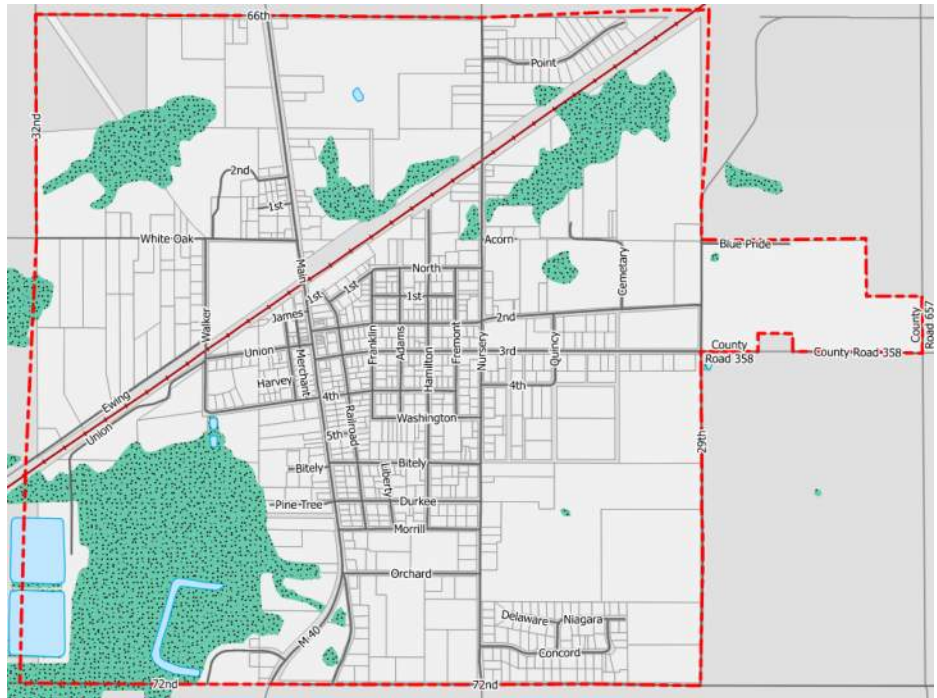
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Cannon Park | 5. Rocket Football Fields |
| 2. Chancy Lewis Park | 6. Lawton Community Schools |
| 3. Village Conservation Area | 7. Lawton Golf Club |
| 4. Stephayn Sports Complex | 8. Reid's Square (future) |

NATURAL FEATURES

Lawton is composed of rolling fields and an assortment of wetlands. Its topographic features, rich soils, and climate allow for the growing of grapes, among other fruits, which has historically shaped the village.

The village is a short trip away from many inland lakes and prime agricultural lands. Village leaders seek to establish an extensive trail network to encourage multi-modal travel options within the area. The 2021-2025 Village of Lawton 5-Year Parks & Recreation Master Plan further outlines the many opportunities for the enjoyment of Lawton's natural features.

Currently, underway is an evaluation of some properties by a consultant hired by the Village of Lawton. This assessment will identify if this land is buildable, should be preserved and what/how the current environmental factors influence this land.



VILLAGE WETLAND AREAS
Currently being evaluated

Planning Process

Community planning is an art, as much as a science, presenting choices and options, even in smaller communities. Every community, regardless of size, is different with respect to character, philosophies, and resources. Therefore, it is essential that any plan respects the unique conditions in the community, the character of the land, and the interests, desires, and values of the people.

Throughout the Lawton planning process, residents, business owners, school district representatives, Village staff, property owners, service providers, and elected and appointed officials were engaged to identify issues, share ideas, and to craft a common vision. Interviews, small group discussions, open houses, and surveys were employed to elicit input from all sectors of the community. Beginning in December of 2021, a Holiday Open House was held to kick-off the planning process. Initiating a year-long theme of engagements, the December event was organized in conjunction with the Village's holiday parade and tree lighting. We discussed both the "naughty" (dislikes) and "nice" (likes) elements in Lawton, learning from both the large dreams expressed in the activity, collected survey answers, and detailed improvements from conversations.

Utilizing this information, we presented initial Master Plan Themes, derived from common threads within the feedback collected from the community. These findings were paired with a demographic overview and lively discussions around what's best for the future of Lawton.

After our established themes were calibrated, we set to work on establishing resulting goals. These goals are written statements of intent, action-oriented statements with a purpose of implementation. These themes and goals were presented again to the community at an engagement event in mid-April. Easter



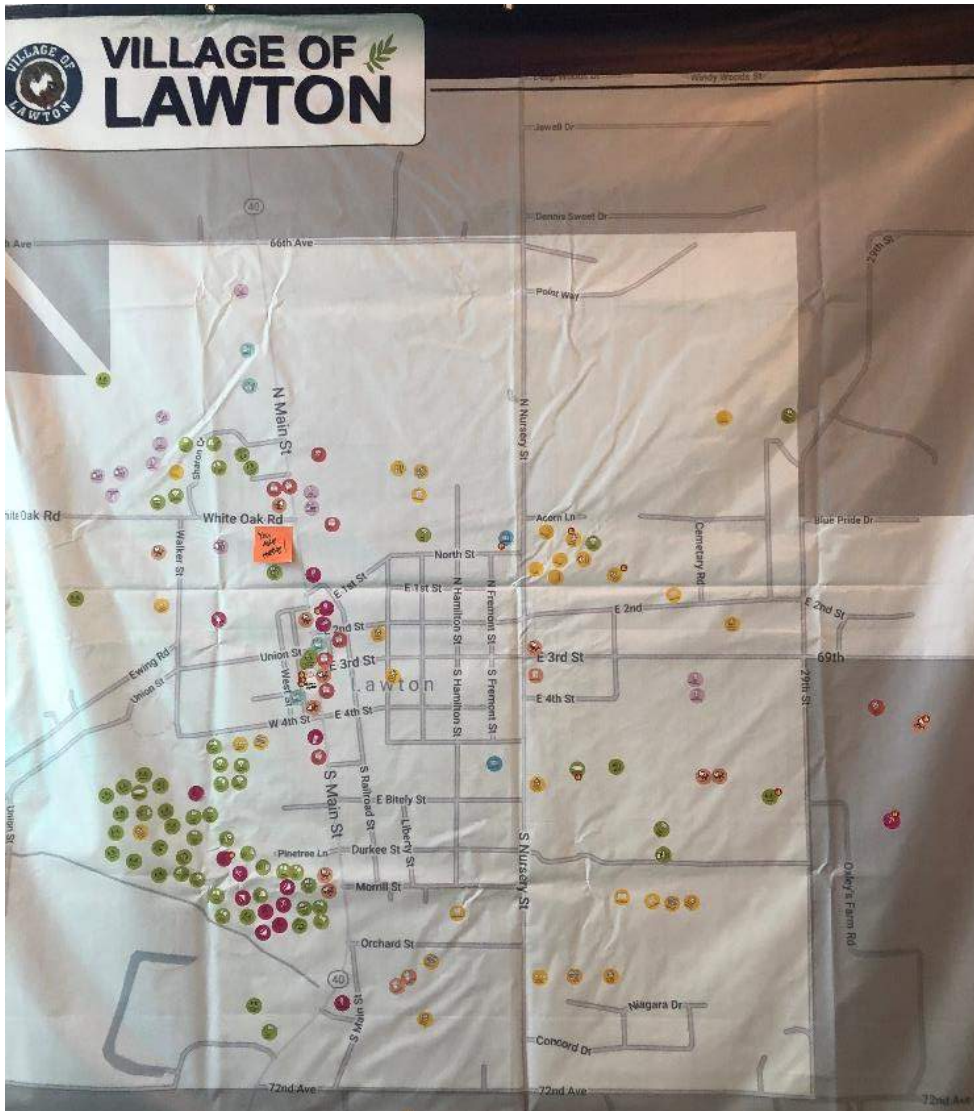
HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE
Community Engagement Event
December 2021



SPRING FLING EVENT
Community Engagement Event
April 2022

holiday themed, we had four activities to interact with, along with a kid-friendly egg hunt and an aspect of the mapping activity that was specifically designed for children. Our engagements asked for a review of the feedback we had received thus far, an evaluation of our proposed guiding themes, and a review of our proposed goals.

The image below is of the interactive map from the at the engagement event in April of 2022. This enlarged map allowed the residents to place specific uses and components where they would like to see them take place in the Village. Uses such as retail, mixed-use, various types of housing, greenspace and park amenities and placemaking elements were identified with custom stickers for participants to place at their desired location. This feedback was invaluable when creating the Future Land Use Map and directing where uses should be envisioned.



Throughout the process, the community identified the Village of Lawton as a highly desirable community both currently and in the future. In effect, the guiding themes defined the resident's concept for a high-quality, people-focused community. The guiding themes also provided criteria for summarizing key characteristics of future developments. While future development is a key interest of the community, the desire to remain true to Lawton's character, family-focused environments and small-town feel were overwhelming responses.

It is understood that improving the quality of development increases property values and therefore increases tax revenues as a result. A variety of housing choices available to the changing population of

Lawton can also increase property values and household income. The housing stock in Lawton is aging and there is a significant lack of "middle" housing, as well as options for the aging population. Ideas for increasing property values and attracting diverse households to the Village of Lawton could reduce the revenue gap between other development scenarios, while still advancing the principles voiced by residents for a high-quality, sustainable community.

Community Input:

The following is a synthesis of recommendations and input from our engagement work completed as a part of the Village of Lawton's Master Plan vision for the future. The outreach yielded a range of issues, opportunities and visions for the village, which were captured as part of our planning process. Several key themes developed, and helped shape the plan with extensive discussion, further informing of projects, policies, and recommendations. The content within this section is intended to characterize and organize the input received from the participants in this work.

ALTERNATIVE MOBILITY OPTIONS: While the village is a relatively small geographic area, concern was expressed throughout the process regarding a lack of connectivity. A desire for a larger, more consistent sidewalk network for pedestrians was indicated and increasing the ability to walk to downtown was expressed. A variety of modes are used for transportation currently (bicycles, golf carts, snowmobiles). A larger network of trails to and through Lawton was discussed as a priority to make connections between key destinations in the village, as well externally to adjacent communities and their trail networks.

RESIDENTIAL OPTIONS: Most of the residential options within the village are single-family homes (75%). As the average resident age increases in Lawton, the availability and choices for persons who wish to down-size is limited. As we look and plan for economic growth, the replacement of aging housing stock, and the current size of households (2/3rds of Lawton's population is 1- and 2- person households and 70% of resident households have no children under the age of 18) there will be a need to provide more housing choices and price points.

GATHERING PLACES: The pride and energy within the village is contagious, and a common frustration of residents is not having a place to gather and celebrate their identity and unity as a community. Specifically indicated as being desired in the downtown area, an effort is being realized with the current downtown streetscape (see later [section](#)) and the recent donation of Reid's Square to the community.

CHARACTER + IDENTITY: Maintaining the overall character of the downtown and the village is a top priority. Along M40, the more urban center is well regarded, apart from a handful of vacancies. A desire was expressed to keep the village unique with a preference for locally owned and operated businesses and restaurants.



UNDERUTILIZED PROPERTIES: There are a number of underutilized and vacant parcels in the village that would benefit from additional investment. Concerns heard during engagement efforts centered around deferred maintenance and upkeep of buildings that may or may not be occupied. As was noted in the demographics section, 1 in 5 residents are senior citizens and Lawton's housing stock has had little new construction so upkeep of properties may be an issue. Redevelopment and/or the establishment of Local Standards were discussed as opportunities to improve downtown.

INFRASTRUCTURE: Participants are aware of the discrepancy between the need for, and capacity of, their current system. There is a strong desire to attract an industrial partner or develop further housing to capitalize on this excess. Mention of utility updates, extensions where needed, and public internet connection were discussed as integral parts of future planning.



VISION

VISION STATEMENT

Building on a strong sense of community and our unique character, Lawton will proactively adapt to change, enhance its assets, and facilitate strategic, positive growth to benefit all people in our village.

Guiding Themes

During our community planning events, participants identified features that are integral to the Village of Lawton. These features (how to protect, grow and showcase them) became our foundational framework, guiding the vision for this Master Plan document. The resulting five Themes were identified as the organizing elements for the Village's plan for the future. Our Guiding Themes are:





GROW in a balanced way, with a responsibility to the village's values and character.

The Village of Lawton will provide an admirable quality of life, well suited to the needs of its citizens and businesses. This includes great schools, efficient services, proactive leadership and government, significant open spaces, and the programs to support them. We are committed to preserving our identity and diversity.

- Encourage development that enhances the quality of the village's natural beauty and small-town atmosphere;
- Preserve the character of Lawton's downtown;
- Attract development and support entrepreneurship that expands the economic, cultural and civic purposes of the Village of Lawton;
- Focus development and redevelopment into areas best suited to support it;
- Ensure that Lawton has access to high-quality infrastructure, including high-speed internet;
- Provide support for enhancing existing homes and businesses and aggressively maintain existing shared resources.
- Promote residential expansion and improvement of existing housing within the community.



Adjacent are the word map responses to our survey question:

“What are your favorite things about Lawton?”

What makes it unique?”





ENHANCE *community character and quality of life for residents and guests.*

One of Lawton's strengths is its abundant small-town charm. This character is what brought families and businesses to Lawton, and what keeps them here. The emphasis should be on maintaining these attributes and expanding the community's ability to provide services to its residents and businesses that are affordable, efficient and consistent.

- Promote Lawton's historic and cultural assets as leverage for economic and community development.
- Provide a variety of housing options for a variety of incomes, ages (including aging-in-place), abilities, family sizes, and needs.
- Enhance mobility and accessibility through increased safety, maximizing transit/bicycle/pedestrian/golf cart access and other modes of active transportation and connection.
- Develop and implement a strong program for establishing the unique character and identity and community branding for the Village of Lawton.
- Be a destination for families, businesses, and visitors that want to share who we are and what we continue to aspire to be.



"It would be great to have a safe trail to ride my bike or golf cart into town. Part of it what makes this area great is that we are all surrounded by nature!"

- Community Member



INVEST and identify opportunities for positive change and development.

The Village of Lawton effectively builds on its strengths by providing and leveraging community services and infrastructure to encourage positive change. The community's capital investments will continue to be forward-looking and of enduring quality, in keeping with the character and values of the people, businesses and places in Lawton.

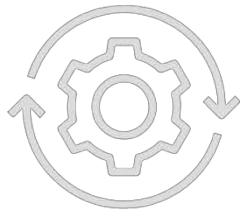
- Ensure that the Village of Lawton's neighborhoods, commercial areas, and infrastructure are developed in harmony with its natural resources and heritage;
- Treasure, maintain, and expand our public parks, trails, and recreation areas and enhance walkable streetscapes;
- Create and maintain lovable places for all residents to connect, meet, play and grow;
- Continue to be proactive in driving positive change for the Village of Lawton;
- Invest in green infrastructure to ensure a healthy and prosperous future;
- Support investments that enhance quality of life;
- Increase safe and efficient access/transportation/circulation choices for the people and businesses of Lawton.

Below are some highlighted responses to the survey question: "What would you change about Lawton? Where are our opportunities for improvement?"

"I would like to see more opportunities for attracting new businesses to the area while maintaining the friendly/small town vibe. Perhaps improvements to "curb appeal" throughout the Village may assist in this area

"We'd like to have a place where the community could gather on a Friday or Saturday night in the summer and just have a good time."

"I would like to see more parks or improvements to existing parks, walking trails and road Improvements that connect residential areas with the businesses throughout the Village."



SUSTAIN *the long-term viability and vitality of the Village of Lawton.*

The Village of Lawton makes sure that our practices, investments, developments and redevelopments are true to our values, sensitive to our environment, and are crafted for longevity. Lawton will change holistically and incrementally, with a focus on the redevelopment of underutilized parcels. Streets, sidewalks, and community spaces will serve as an interconnected network of resources that supports and provides recreational linkages, and serve as opportunities for community interaction and economic development.

- Lawton will use sustainable planning and engineering practices to manage our natural and built environments;
- We will be good stewards of the natural and built environments so that we can adapt to climate change, be resilient to natural disasters and thrive in times of uncertainty;
- Our development approval processes will clear, consistent, and predictable to attract appropriate forms of development in the village;
- Lawton will use these principles to promote a healthy and sustainable quality of life and business environment;
- The community will foster and pursue mutually beneficial relationships between its organizations, promoting public health and well-being.





UNIQUE *destination experiences will be enhanced and curated to showcase the village.*

The Village of Lawton will continue to do what it does best – make Lawton a special place for the people and businesses of the community. Lawton will continue to excel as it advances its quality of life for all residents through high-quality and efficient public services, an excellent and expanding educational system, and diverse opportunities for citizens of all ages.

- Focus the redevelopment of the Downtown District (DD) as the “Heart of Lawton;”
- Further establish and promote the DD as a focused activity node within the community that showcases its unique character and charm;
- Encourage and celebrate community gathering opportunities in our parks, Main Street, and Reid’s Square;
- Focus on local products and services that will improve the tax base, promote economic vitality, and increase the economic capacity of local enterprises.



“The Village is a Hallmark town. Family-oriented with community events. It’s a place where everyone helps their neighbors...”

- Community Member

LAND USE PLANNING

Overview

Communities employ land use planning as the primary tool to define sustainable and supportive land use arrangements and minimize or correct conflicts. By clearly articulating distinct character differences and communicating them in advance, property owners, developers, and investors will have a much better understanding of the kind of community the Village of Lawton wants to be. This will facilitate the review and approval of future development and redevelopment projects.

The Future Land Use Map represents the desired land use pattern for the village to achieve the community vision, goals and guiding principles articulated in this plan. Subsequent pages in this chapter describe the individual character and land use categories.

General Development Framework + Future Land Use Map

The Village's scenario planning exercise illustrated that land use planning involves choices and options. Clearly, there is no one "right" way to develop a community. By considering the many options and evaluating the implications of each based on the long-range vision, goals and guiding principles of this plan, a desired course was defined that not only achieves the functional, environmental, and quality of life goals of the plan, but is fiscally responsible as well.

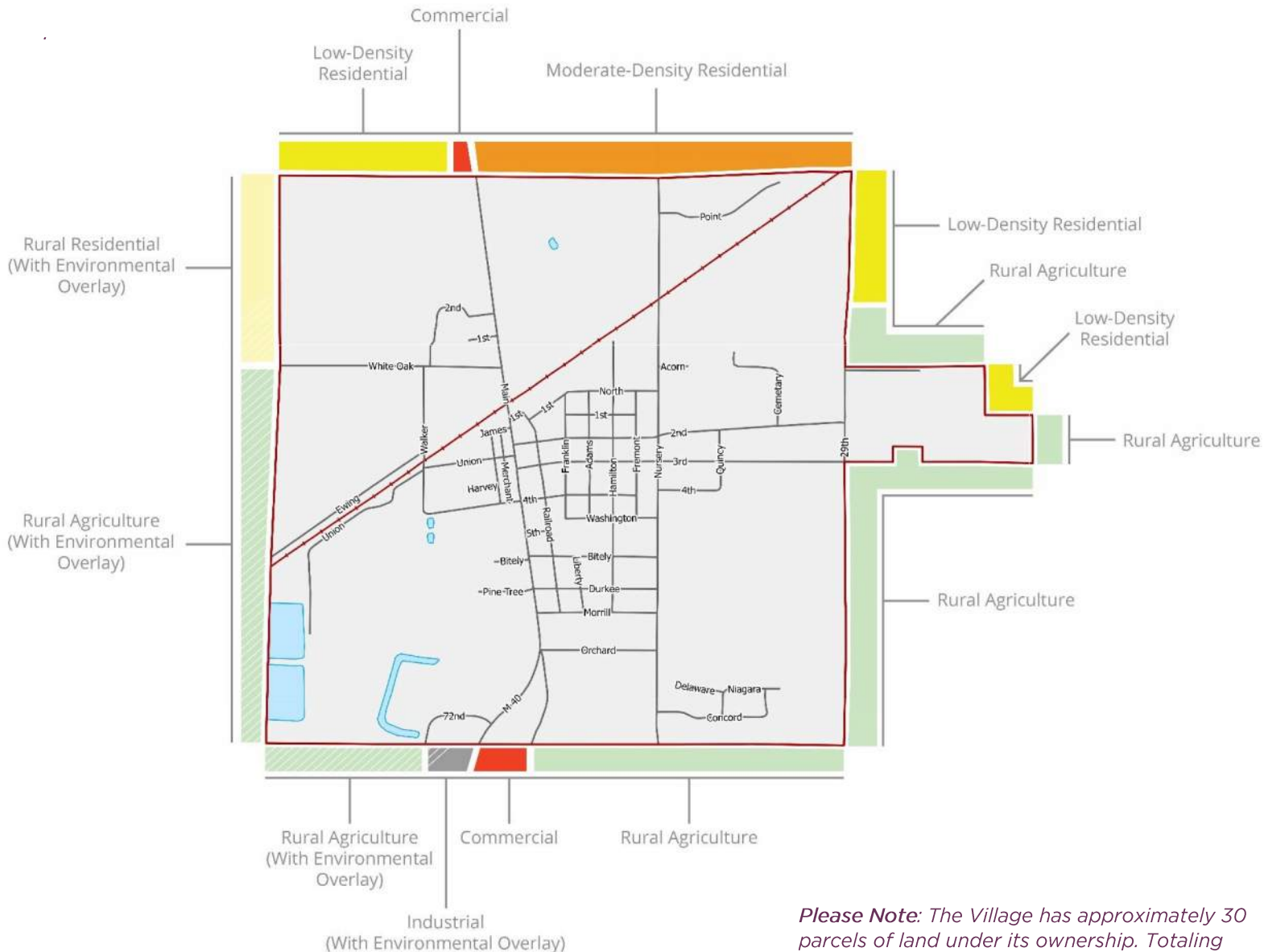
Our scenario proposes a more concentrated development pattern in specific locations. This creates higher property values, more population in a centralized area, and will have less demand for new services. The distinct character of Lawton's village as a mixed-use center should be enhanced, surrounded by strong neighborhoods that provide a variety of housing choices. New development should be located where existing services are provided. While some areas are intended to be more intense, other areas of the village are proposed to retain a lower-density, single-detached residential pattern.

The attractiveness of the General Development Framework is found in its balance. It supports the Plan's vision, goals, and guiding principles without sacrificing the established character of the community. Yet, it introduces important desired elements – a focused activity center, housing variety, and employment opportunities – some features which are not currently found in the established land use pattern or allowed in zoning.

These recommendations support the needs of Lawton residents and leverages the Village's infrastructure. The population of Lawton is changing, and a variety of different housing types are needed to enable "lifecycle" neighborhoods where people can age in place and young people can return to make Lawton their home. Additional development will assist in defraying expensive legacy costs associated with the Village's ownership of the water and sewer systems, and its streets.

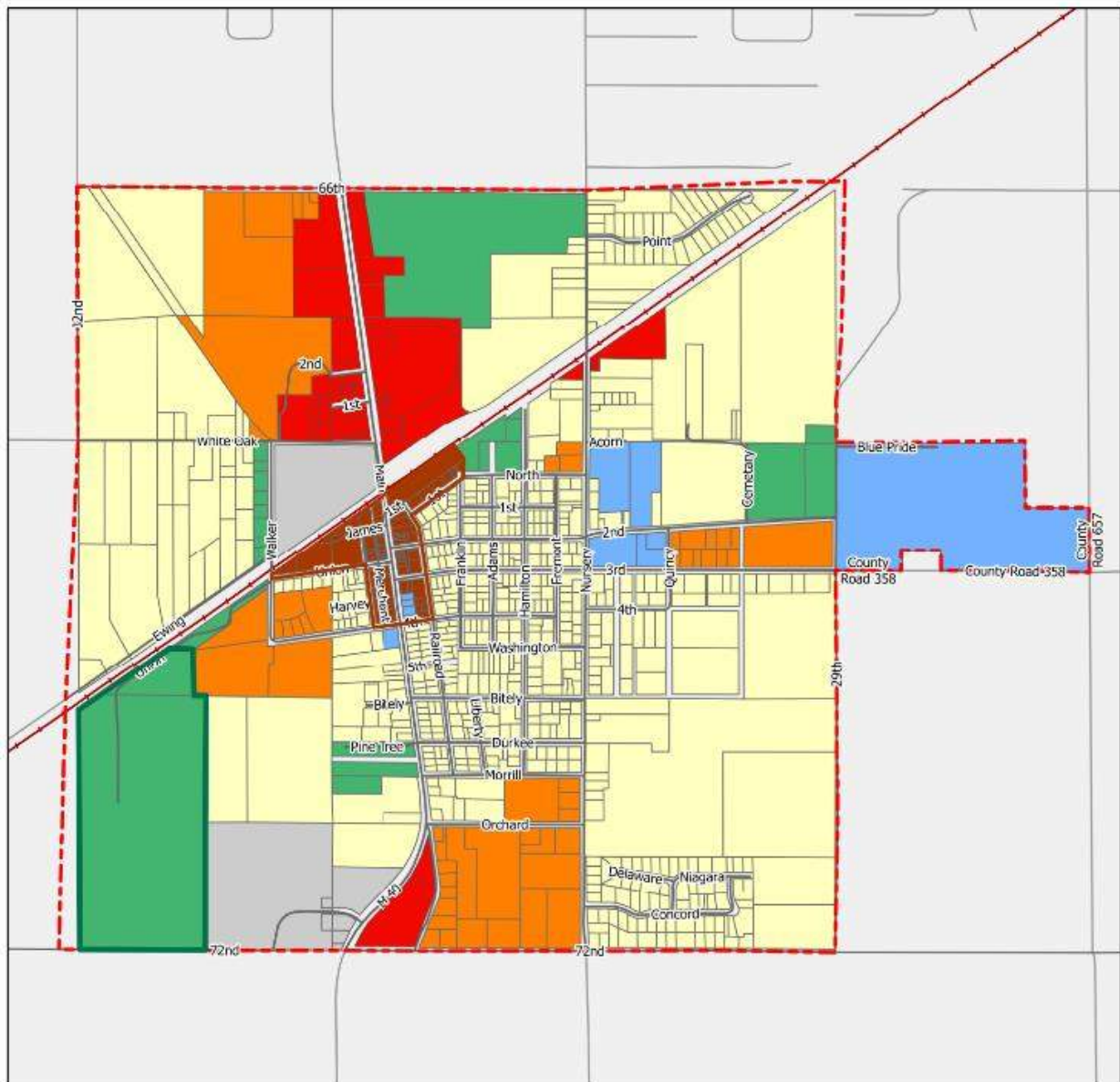
SURROUNDING LAND USES

The following map displays the context of the areas surrounding the Village of Lawton. These surrounding uses have the potential to influence and contribute to future land uses within the Village and if considered accordingly, will benefit those living in and around the subject area. As previously mentioned in this document, much of the land surrounding the Village is used largely for agriculture. As the Village of Lawton continues to modernize and diversify from its initial agricultural roots, the surrounding townships will remain as its farming-centric counterpart.



***Please Note:** The Village has approximately 30 parcels of land under its ownership. Totalling approximately 358.24 acres, the Village is open to plans for development that align with the Master Plan and the community's vision for the future. See also Development Opportunities.*

FUTURE LAND USE MAP



Future Land Use Map

Village of Lawton, Van Buren County, Michigan

LEGEND

- Downtown (D)
- Village Residential (VR)
- Residential (R)
- Commercial / Light Industrial (CI)
- Industrial (I)
- Connection / Open Space (CO)
- Public / Institutional (P)

0 0.25 0.5
Miles

Data Source: Van Buren County GIS, 2022. Michigan Geographic Data Library, 2022. Progressive AE, 2022.

progressive | ae

The Village of Lawton relies exclusively on groundwater for its drinking water source. In response to the concern over safety of public water supplies, the Village has instituted a Wellhead Protection Program (WHPP). WHPPs develop long-term strategies aimed at protecting community drinking water supplies. The purpose of developing a WHPP is to identify the Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA) and develop long-term strategies aimed at safeguarding the area from contamination. A WHPA is defined as the surface and subsurface areas surrounding a water well or well field, which supplies a public water system, and through which contaminants are reasonably likely to move toward and reach the water well or well field within a 10-year time-of-travel. The State of Michigan requires communities to identify seven elements to be included in the WHPP. These elements along with a brief description are below.

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

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

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

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

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The General Development Framework includes: a concentrated, mixed-use activity center in Lawton's existing downtown center; walkable neighborhoods with a mix of housing types and choices for new/existing residents; public space for community events; expansion of utilities, especially high-speed internet; thriving industrial uses, and transportation investments that support varying travel modes. The General Development Framework will also consider the preservation of the historic character of Lawton as a resource by focusing on the design and character qualities of future development (i.e., building architecture and site design).

Classifications

To regulate the character and performance of the built environment and to achieve the coordinated development and growth visions adopted as part of the Village of Lawton Master Plan, the Village is divided into the following future land use categories, which are shown by the district boundaries on the Future Land Use Map. The categories include:

- Downtown (D)
- Village Residential (VR)
- Residential (R)
- Commercial and Light Industrial (CI)
- Industrial (I)
- Connection and Open Space (CO), and
- Public/Institutional (P)

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D

DOWNTOWN

Downtown Lawton is the *Heart of Lawton*. The Downtown (D) serves as an anchor for the future redevelopment as a walkable village center. A mixture of retail, restaurants, upper floor housing, Reid's Square, and civic functions contribute to the place as a dynamic and vibrant center of Lawton.

Buildings in the D district typically stand one to two stories in height with the potential for greater building heights (up to 4 stories) that include residential units or offices above the storefronts on upper floors. Parking is satisfied using on-street parking and shared rear-lot parking with pass-throughs between buildings when available. Pass-throughs should be pleasant spaces with plantings and seating areas. Large blank walls should feature murals or vertical landscaping.

Location:

The Downtown (D) is in the *Heart of Lawton* along both sides of Main Street

Strategies:

- Build upon existing civic uses by strengthening adjacent commercial areas
- Develop Reid's Square as an opportunity for community activities, gatherings, public programming, green space
- Widen sidewalks
- Introduce tactical urbanism into the DD to promote pedestrian-friendly activity
- Maximize the opportunity for window shopping in the Downtown
- Integrate "softscape" (landscape plantings) into the Downtown as much as possible
- Provide for mid-block crossings (on-demand) on Main Street

Key Best Practice Tools:

- Pedestrian-friendly/walkable streetscape
- Destination, first-floor retail, and services (grocery, pharmacy)
- Pedestrian-scaled building design, including expression lines, visible entries, façade transparency
- Placemaking tactics such as tactical urbanism, unified signage/banners/flags, seating
- Encourage mixed-use (upper-story residential)
- Program public/civic activities
- Provide public open space and street trees
- Connectivity between the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods

Parking:

- Shared parking in the rear and short-term parking on Main Street
- Rear-loaded parking, no drive-throughs
- Provide bicycle parking racks and designated parking areas for micro-mobility options

Primary Uses:

- Sit down restaurant/pub
- Community-serving retail
- Professional offices (residential located on upper floors)
- Civic buildings (Village building, library, etc.)
- Office and businesses

Secondary Uses:

- Farmers market/community garden
- Places of public assembly (churches, event halls)
- Residential (upper floor)
- Bank/Financial institutions



The Village-Residential (VR) areas of Lawton will experience infill development in existing, built portions of the village and new development in undeveloped areas. The VR areas are characterized by a variety of different housing types that accommodate the needs of Lawton's households. This area is served by existing infrastructure.

These neighborhoods promote a range of housing choices: townhouses, cottage courts, smaller-lot single-family units, duplexes, senior/aging-in-place units, and accessory dwelling units that reflect a traditional development pattern typical of a village as a small urban center. Development is characteristic of "gentle density" missing middle housing types that integrate well into the existing context. Large apartment buildings should be discouraged. Streets should be laid out in a street-grid pattern. Limited home occupations that require minimal parking may be allowed.

Location:

The majority of the VR areas are served by existing public water and sewer, can accommodate a street grid network, and are connected by sidewalks to the downtown.

Strategies:

- Smaller lots and/or properly scaled buildings with multiple dwelling units
- Traditional design typical of mixed housing types found in a village
- Cluster or pocket neighborhood development typologies
- Sidewalks
- ADU (Accessory Dwelling Units) and live/work units are allowed
- Affordable comfort

Key Best Practice Tools:

- Provide a mix of housing types to accommodate a wider range of household needs in different stages of life and household arrangements (single, 2-person, single-parent, disability etc)
- Promote high-quality housing types that respect the character of existing neighborhoods and supports the existing village context
- Pedestrian-friendly/walkable streetscape
- Diverse housing types/design
- Shared open space
- Connectivity, including maintaining grid streets

Parking:

- Associated with the individual units or at the periphery of the development
- Shared between uses based on time-of-day usage (e.g. office in day and residential in evening)
- Reduced parking provisions when located near to downtown

Primary Uses:

- Variety of different residential housing types and price points
- Aging-in-place/senior housing
- Townhomes/attached housing
- Pocket neighborhoods/cottage courts
- In-home offices are allowed

Secondary (Special) Uses:

- Live/work units
- Home-based businesses
- Churches and schools
- Natural/conservation areas
- Pocket parks and recreation areas

Housing Choice and Gentle Density

Missing middle formats can be used to gently integrate more housing choice into an existing context while maintaining the existing character. For example, accessory dwelling units which are contained entirely within the residential structure are undetectable from the street, as are well-designed detached units. A duplex with two small households may function identically to a single-dwelling unit with a large household, and a cottage court of four bungalows housing retirees may generate less traffic and noise than a large single household. Adjusting these districts to permit new household configurations in structures that align with the existing pattern can provide more housing choice for residents.



R

RESIDENTIAL

The Residential areas of Lawton are less intense neighborhoods than the Village Residential areas and are characterized primarily by existing residential structures. Housing units may have attached, or detached garages, and may be located on lots in a range of sizes and widths. These neighborhoods are generally developed with single-family, detached homes that range from farmhouses to modest ranches. There are some structures that have been divided into multiple units. Limited commercial activity can be found in these neighborhoods.

Homes will be located centrally on individual sites. New construction should infill or abut existing development, radiating from the existing village center. Homes will be connected to public infrastructure and be laid out in a consistent grid pattern where topography and natural features will allow. There may be landscaping or fences that provide separation from adjoining residential development. Development should be of similar character to nearby structures. Any secondary uses will be of similar character to those of the residential units. Sidewalks are expected; where not present, attempts should be made to install them. Trees and landscaping are important features.

This is a dominant area in the village, with existing and new residential development.

Strategies:

- Sidewalks
- Traditional single-detached housing units
- Lots in a variety of different sizes
- In-home occupations are allowed if excessive traffic is not generated
- ADU (Accessory Dwelling Units)
- Infill and new housing that meets the needs of Lawton residents



OPPORTUNITIES FOR GREEN SOLUTIONS

- ❶ Energy efficient furnace + appliances
- ❷ Energy Star rated structure
- ❸ High R insulation
- ❹ Insulated windows + doors
- ❺ Shade Trees
- ❻ Downspout disconnect/rain barrel
- ❼ Rain garden/bioswale
- ❽ Permeable paving

Key Best Practice Tools:

- Provide a mix of housing types to accommodate a wider range of household makeups and people in different stages of life
- Promote high-quality housing types that respect the character of existing neighborhoods
- Pedestrian-friendly/walkable streetscape
- Shared open space
- Pedestrian-friendly connectivity

Parking:

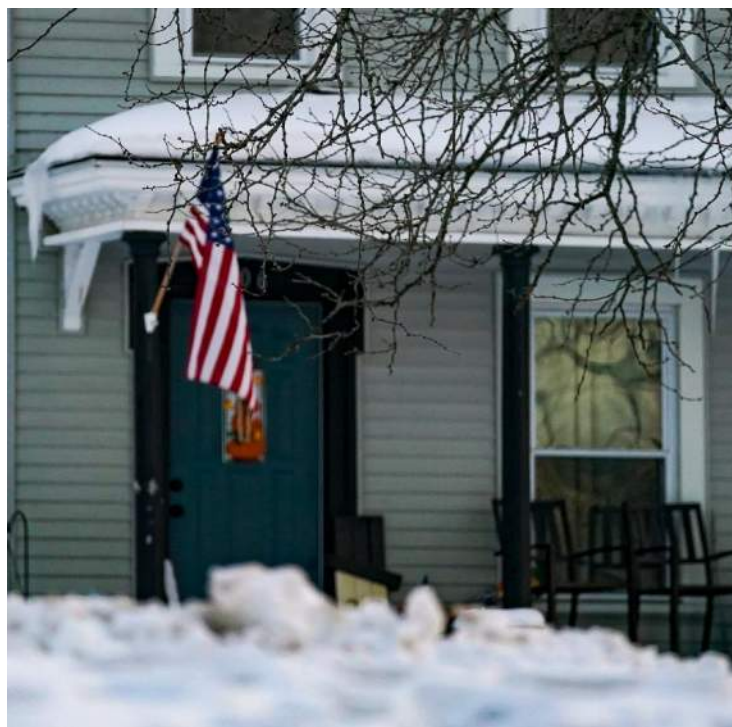
Associated with the individual units. On-street parking is allowed but will not interfere with sidewalks or bike lanes.

Primary Uses:

- Detached single units and cottage courts
- In-character, aging-in-place/senior housing
- In-character, townhomes/attached housing
- In-home offices are allowed

Secondary (Special) Uses:

- Church
- Schools
- Natural/Conservation areas
- Pocket parks
- Recreation areas



The Commercial and Light Industrial areas of Lawton include many of the areas that have grown out of the expansion of local entrepreneurship in the community. Many of these developments are local businesses taking advantage of an idea and the creative reuse of existing lots and buildings. Many of these investments fill a need for other industrial facilities, or needs of commercial, retail, and even residential clients. These businesses are often mixed-use in nature: light manufacturing, fabrication, and/or service providers with office support and some associated “showroom retail.” Many of these uses will require truck access with shipping/receiving capabilities.

The Commercial and Light Industrial areas do not demand high visibility but do need easy access to arterial circulation. The CI will expect a level of flexibility in size and structure regulations that match the creative combination of their business functions. These uses are prime candidates for alternative energy and stormwater management functions. Landscaped front yards with parking located to the side or rear is expected.

Future consideration for this District could be satisfied through the development of an “Eco-Industrial Park,” that brings together multiple, but compatible businesses to co-locate with each other to efficiently, effectively, environmentally, and economically utilize resources.

Location: Currently, these are somewhat dispersed locations but could become a more concentrated District.

Strategies:

- Hard to develop lots and buildings being put to productive use
- Potential for entrepreneurial support
- Potential as a commercial/industrial land bank for future development
- Site remediation
- Adaptive reuse

Key Best Practice Tools:

- Integrate green infrastructure
- Green roofs
- Support the needs of existing businesses and residents
- Eco-industrial development/industrial ecology

Parking: On-site parking is encouraged with integration of green stormwater management.

Primary Uses:

- Light manufacturing, industrial, fabrication
- Product development/processing
- Shipping/receiving/warehousing
- Showroom display
- Office

Secondary Uses:

- Hotel/motel
- Self-storage
- Auto/RV/motorcycle sales
- Auto repair
- Churches

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The Industrial areas of Lawton consists of both light and heavy industrial districts located within Lawton. Currently, primary industrial activities are associated with food processing and packaging. The I classification is characterized primarily by food processing facilities, with supportive shipping, receiving, and storage areas. The current facilities vary in size and scope, but all are characterized by frequent large truck traffic and worker traffic associated with shift-change times. These are located at the northern and southern ends of Main Street. Desired future industrial activities include food-related industries or other businesses that require abundant water and sanitary sewer capacity. Businesses, particularly those that receive any local or State subsidies, should be job-dense to provide employment opportunities.

Clusters of uses that support one another are encouraged to locate near the industrial centers. These industrial centers provide opportunities to concentrate employment on normal workdays. Ancillary uses that support industrial activities and their employees are allowed, such as office uses, laboratories, company outlet stores, daycare/senior care, and coffee shops.

Location:

The I classification includes light and heavy industrial uses in the village, typically located at Lawton's northern and southern edges along, or just off of, Main Street.

Strategies:

- Concentrated industrial activities
- Generally self-contained activities
- Manage traffic, especially at shift change
- Integrate better visual and noise features
- Buffering on-site
- Integrate with Village economic and community development strategies

Key Best Practice Tools:

- Visual and noise buffering
- Traffic management
- Shared impact reduction responsibilities
- Environmentally conscious waste control systems

Parking: On-site.

Primary Uses:

- Light and heavy industrial
- Job-dense businesses (not storage)



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This description is for the different types of roads, streets, alleys, trails, sidewalks, parking, etc. that are in use within the village. The primary goal of this category is to provide safe, efficient means of providing access, and connecting all the people and businesses of Lawton to each other, and to/from the surrounding area(s). *Active Transportation*, which includes pedestrian-friendly and bicycle-friendly modes of transportation that complement the vehicular-oriented modes of transportation, access, and circulation should be most considered.

Lawton's parks and open areas provide not only land expressly dedicated for recreation and conservation but are a resource for community resilience and education. There are several areas within the Village of Lawton that have been identified as parks, recreational areas and open spaces. In several cases these features serve as buffers between incompatible land uses and provide opportunities for both passive and active recreation. These areas are often most sensitive to natural disasters and are often the areas least suitable for development. Wetlands, woodlots, and similar areas within the Village of Lawton are important for enhancing the Village's resilience to flooding and similar phenomena.

Strategies:

- Develop and implement a *Complete Streets*® program in Lawton
- Size the streets and roads to best match their needs
- Integrate active transportation as much as possible
- Facilitate commercial and industrial logistics to be the safest and most efficient possible
- Facilitate pedestrian-friendly access
- Make the access/circulation system aesthetically pleasing to enhance the general quality of life of Lawton
- Facilitate parking to provide maximum access while being environmentally friendly

Key Best Practice Tools:

- Minimize pedestrian/vehicular conflicts
- Facilitate mid-block crossings and pedestrian-friendly crossings, especially in the DD
- Provide off-street parking in the DD as well as sidewalks and bike lanes throughout Lawton
- Connect to local, regional and extra-regional trail systems
- Mid-block connections
- Connect active and passive greenspace with trails, greenways and Safe-Routes-to-Schools®
- Connect to local, regional, and extra-regional trail systems
- Preservation/Conservation of unbuildable areas
- Floodplain management

Primary Uses/Components:

- Sidewalks + Bike lanes throughout Lawton
- Develop safe and pleasant connections between rear-loaded parking and Main Street
- Environmental education programs in conjunction with schools and conservation organizations
- Active recreation such as splash parks and recreation fields
- Passive recreation such as wetlands and woodlots
- Wildlife corridors/migratory layovers
- Stormwater retention/detention
- Civic gathering

Secondary Uses/Components:

- Bike parking racks and golf cart parking in the DD
- Develop pedestrian-activated crossings in the DD
- Wildlife observation
- Greenway(s)



ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Zoning Ordinance is a key mechanism for achieving the desired land use pattern and quality of development advocated in the Plan. This section provides a useful guide relative to the inconsistencies between current zoning patterns and proposed future land use and character designations.

Because the Future Land Use Plan is a long-range vision of the village and should evolve over time, it should not be confused with the Village's Zoning Map, which is a current (short-term) mechanism for regulating development. Therefore, some properties may follow an incremental development strategy and should not be immediately rezoned to correspond with the Plan. The Future Land Use Plan is intended to serve as a guide for land use decisions over a longer period of time (5 to 20 years).

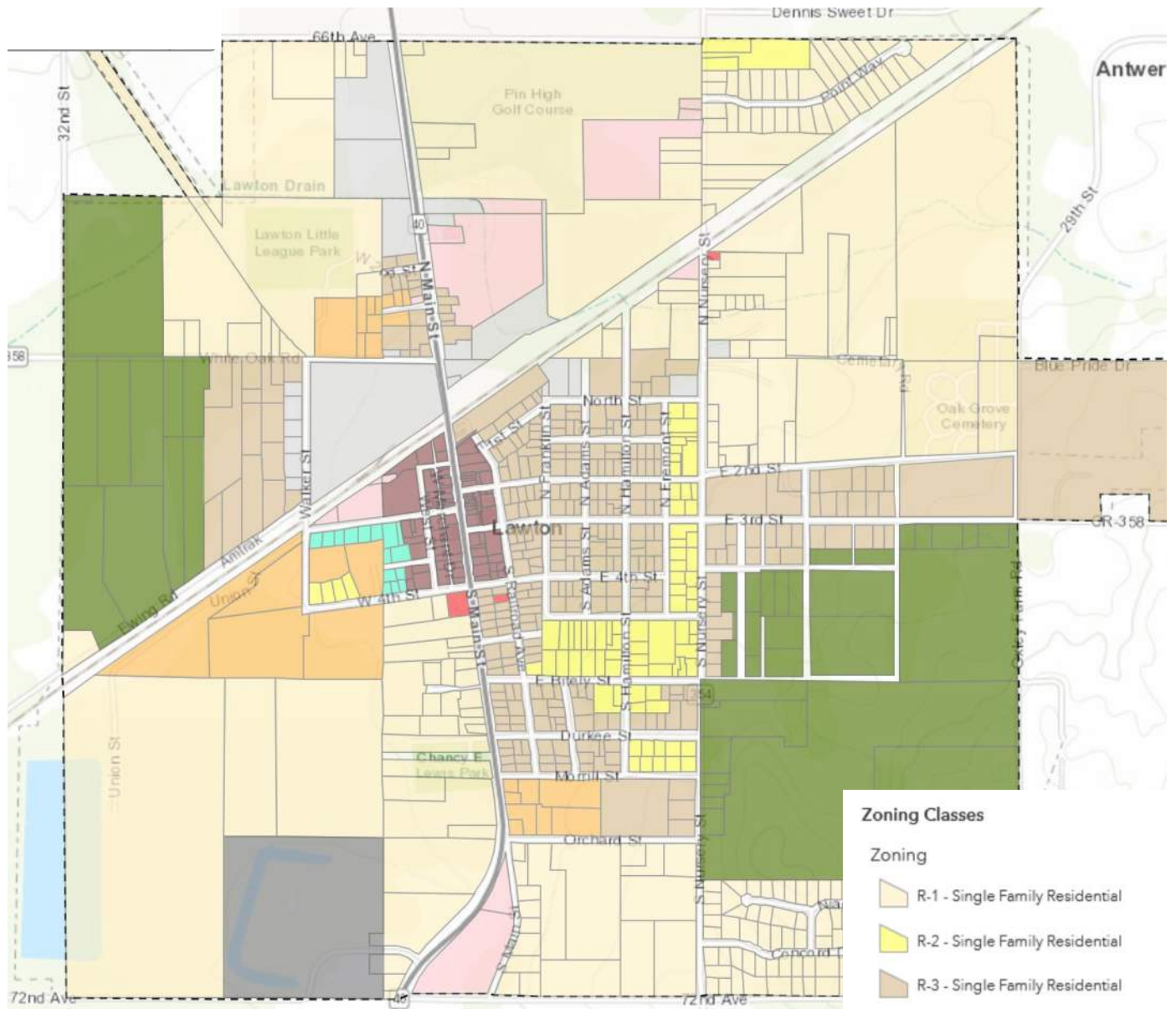
Realizing the desired future land use pattern will be gradual, particularly because established businesses and homes are in areas that might be better suited for other types of uses in the long term. In addition, the Future Land Use Map is generalized. More detailed evaluation would be required as part of any rezoning consideration.

The Village of Lawton has chosen to participate in the Michigan Redevelopment Ready Communities® program. Integrated into this process are the RRC Best Practices. These Best Practices should serve as a checklist of “to do” items within the Zoning Ordinance.

Zoning changes in accordance with the Plan can be made gradually so that change can be managed with minimal disruption to the normal life of Lawton. The Future Land Use Map and the Plan's goals and recommendations should be consulted to judge the merits of a rezoning request. In review of rezoning and development proposals, the Village should consider the following sequencing standards:

- *Any rezoning or development proposal must be compatible with the Master Plan as a whole and be able to stand, and function on its own without harm to the quality of surrounding land uses.*
 - *There must be sufficient public infrastructure to accommodate any proposed development or the types of uses that would be allowed under the requested zoning change. This must include sufficient sewer and water capacity, a transportation system to support impacts, and a stormwater system to limit impacts.*
- Current Village of Lawton Zoning Map, 2017*
- *For sites near natural features and areas best suited for conservation and community resilience, the environmental conditions of the site should be capable of accommodating the types of development or potential uses allowed with a zoning change. The impact to natural features should be minimized to the greatest extent practical.*

This Chapter should be referred to when considering potential changes to the Zoning Ordinance. Additional dialogue and analysis is recommended prior to adopting ordinance amendments to ensure that an abundance of nonconformities are not created and that there is synchronicity between other ordinance provisions. The Future Land Use categories and Themes described in the preceding chapters serve as the foundation for suggested ordinance creation.



Zoning Classes

Zoning

- R-1 - Single Family Residential
- R-2 - Single Family Residential
- R-3 - Single Family Residential
- R-M - Multi-Family Residential
- RMH - Residential Mobile Home Park
- B-1 - Local Business District
- B-2 - Community Business District
- CBD - Central Business District
- I-1 - Light Industrial District
- I-2 - General Industrial District
- OS1 - Office Service District
- A-G - Agriculture

Given that development regulations are among the most effective regulatory tools that can be used by the Village to help implement the vision, goals, and design concepts in this Plan, it makes sense to reconsider the zone districts that currently exist and how they align with the goals of the Master Plan. The Village of Lawton's Zoning Ordinance is currently comprised of:

- Six (6) residential zone districts (R-1, R-2, R-3, RT, RM-1, and RM-H)
- One (1) zone district for agricultural operations (AG)
- Four (4) commercial business districts (OS-1, B-1, B-2, and B-3)
- Two (2) districts that address industrial and intense land uses (I-1 and I-2)
- One (1) parking zone district (P-1)

In some cases, zone districts that are listed in the ordinance are not designated in any location on the zoning map. In other instances, there is very little distinction between zone districts that make it worth having a unique designation. To that end, the following items should be considered regarding the organization of the Village's Zoning Ordinance:

- Keep the AG district to align with existing uses and allow for the timing of appropriate development in future for residential uses as the village center grows outward;
- Consider collapsing and simplifying the residential zone districts to align with the future land use categories of Village Residential (VR) and Residential (R), including thoughtful consideration of different housing types using the Special Land Use process and/or performance standards;
- Evaluate the uses in the commercial business district categories to determine which uses are most compatible and supportive of downtown and those that would be suitable for other locations in the village that would not compete or draw away from downtown's vibrancy;
- Consider collapsing the commercial districts into two districts – one for downtown and the other where commercial, office/service and/or light industrial activities would be acceptable;
- Introduce performance-based and/or design regulations for uses and buildings to insure compatibility within the same zone district; and
- Eliminate the parking zone district and simply reference parking standards and requirements as a section in the zoning ordinance.

There are a number of approaches that could apply to each suggestion for consideration. In addition to the above-listed zoning recommendations, the Goals/Objectives/Actions section of this Master Plan identifies more recommended zoning changes as they align with the priorities set by the community. The Planning Commission will need to engage in its own process to consider text and map amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, as required by State law, and then provide a recommendation to the Village Council.

SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

The Village of Lawton's Master Plan was developed through a highly interactive process that engaged the community in defining a preferred future. Through this collaborative effort, the Village, community leaders, and the public have contributed both resources and personal time to formulate a useful, exciting, and visionary blueprint for the coming decades. This level of participation signals Lawton's commitment as a community to seek creative solutions to its challenges. The Plan will position Lawton to manage future development, redevelopment, capital improvements, collaborative partnerships, and programs on a solid foundation of fiscal, social, and environmental sustainability.



This Plan is intended to be a policy guide for moving the Village of Lawton forward, guiding decisions about physical, community, and economic development. But the Plan is more than just a policy guide for Village officials and staff. With the commitment of resources to this planning effort comes the high expectation that the recommendations will be implemented, some soon, others over a longer period, some by the Village on its own, some with the help of the *Redevelopment Ready Communities*[®] program of the State of Michigan.

STEERING COMMITTEE
Workshop in March, 2022

The success of this Plan and its accompanying ordinances will help move the Village's goals into reality and will require a long-term commitment and political consensus. These documents are meant to be used, reviewed, and placed into ACTION. The Plan is designed to be a road map for incorporating strategies, specific projects, and programs that will achieve the desired results. This chapter synthesizes the many Plan recommendations and identifies the actions and timing needed to transform the Plan's vision into reality.

Commitment

While the input received through varied activities of the Master Plan process provided a foundation to help achieve the Village's vision, community support and involvement must continue. Successful Plan implementation will be directly related to a committed Village leadership (not limited to its elected and appointed officials and staff). While elected and appointed officials (Village Manager, Village Council, and Planning Commission) will have a strong leadership role, many others (Village department directors, staff, and leaders from the community's institutions and organizations) will also be instrumental in supporting and implementing the Plan and its many parts. However, commitment reaches beyond just these individuals and includes individuals with an interest and stake in the future. Citizens, landowners, developers, and business owners who will impact how the Village of Lawton changes must unite toward the Plan's common vision. Momentum and enthusiasm from the constituency engaged in the planning process must be sustained to guarantee the Plan will remain the important action-oriented document it is intended to be.

Continued Community Involvement

Citizen involvement was the cornerstone of this planning process, and continued involvement by the public is essential to ensure the Plan's success. Adoption of the Plan marks the end of the initial phase of the process, but it is only the beginning of the evolutionary process to focus on the Plan's vision and recommendations and to promote community participation in making the Plan a reality.

Guidance for Development Decisions

This plan is designed for routine use and should be consistently employed during any process affecting the Village of Lawton's future. Private investment decisions by developers, corporations, and landowners should consider the plan's direction. Other planning efforts for neighborhoods, corridors, and community facilities should be in harmony with the Master Plan. Finally, the plan should be used as a key criterion when reviewing development proposals and be referenced in related reports and studies.



Integrate with Capital Improvements

Village officials and departments must embrace the Plan, applying its recommendations to help shape annual budgets, work programs, and the design of capital improvements. For example, the Village's engineering partner can support implementation through infrastructure improvements, streets, and storm systems designed consistently with Plan policies and recommendations. The Village will have a direct connection through site plan review and other zoning decisions. Each department, staff person, and elected official should find it a benefit, if not an obligation, to reference the Plan when making decisions and setting priorities.

Partnerships

Ideally, this Plan will be endorsed by the many organizations in the Village as a “shared vision,” the foundation of future efforts. Entities such as the Lawton Public Schools, Van Buren County, MDOT, MSU Cooperative Extension, Southwest Michigan First, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Market VanBuren, Cornerstone Alliance, local and multi-national businesses, and many others have something to contribute relative to their role in Lawton's future. Partnerships may range from sharing information to funding and shared promotions or services. What can these partnerships do that the Village cannot do alone?

- ***Solve Larger Issues:*** Many issues are beyond the control of individual jurisdictions and require cooperation, including major infrastructure improvements, nonmotorized and other transit options, and economic development.
- ***Improve the Vitality of Each Entity:*** Working together, community leaders can become more acquainted with Village's vision and the role each has to offer, working toward more cooperative, rather than competitive, relationships. A vibrant urban core and unified, attractive corridors will benefit not only the Village of Lawton, but its suburbs and the region as a whole.
- ***Meeting Expectations for Public Services:*** Economic conditions make it more difficult for individual communities to meet resident's needs and expectations. More sharing of resources and eliminating duplicative efforts may result in more cost-effective ways of providing essential community services.
- ***Maximize Investments:*** Village government and many organizations and institutions have all made significant investments in the community, publicly and privately. Ongoing relationships can help ensure those contributions continue to attain a high rate of return in terms of financial and social capital.



Evaluation + Monitoring

This Plan has been developed with a degree of flexibility, allowing nimble responses to emerging conditions, challenges, and opportunities. To help ensure the Plan stays fresh and useful, periodic reviews are essential and amendments should be made when needed. This will ensure Plan goals, objectives, and recommendations reflect changing community conditions, needs, expectations, and financial realities. The Plan should be reviewed annually, ideally by the Planning Commission and Village Council, to keep it fresh and remind those involved of the importance of the document. The Planning Commission will review the Master Plan yearly to review the status of the Plan's implementation, discuss funding opportunities, refine priorities, involve new implementors and participants to ensure all organizations and key players remain committed. This report will be sent to the Village Council with the recommendations.

Roles of Village Officials

The Lawton Village Council must be firmly engaged in the process of implementing the Plan. Their responsibilities will be to prioritize various action items and establish timeframes by which each action must be initiated and completed. They must also consider and weigh the funding commitments necessary to realize the Village's vision, whether involving capital improvements, facility design, municipal services, targeted studies, or changes to development regulations, such as municipal codes, the Zoning Ordinance and procedures.

The Planning Commission is charged with overseeing Plan implementation and is empowered to make ongoing land use decisions. As such, it has great influence on how sustainable the Village of Lawton will be. As an example, the Planning Commission is charged with preparing studies, ordinances, and certain programmatic initiatives before they are submitted to the Village Council. In other instances, the Village Manager and the Planning Commission play a strong role as "Plan Facilitators," overseeing the process and monitoring its progress and results. Together, Village staff and the Planning Commission must be held accountable, ensuring the Village's Master Plan impacts daily decisions and actions by its many stakeholders.



GOALS, OBJECTIVES + ACTIONS

The following goals, objectives and actions establish next steps by which the Village can begin to plan, implement, and continue its momentum to affect positive change in Lawton. These strategies are intended to ensure the Master Plan is integrated with day-to-day planning and policy decisions for the village and its residents. Further, they assist with implementing core recommendations and impactful projects over the life of the Plan.

This Master Plan includes several recommended policies, projects and strategies. The following matrix identifies the key actions that can be undertaken to achieve the community's vision. The Village should use the matrix to assign tasks, explore strategic partnerships, and identify funding sources relevant to each action. As actions are completed, and the Plan is updated, the matrix should be revised to prioritize the remaining actions and add new ones as needed.

Organized by key development priorities, these tables encompass a variety of actions related to our established vision and goals. For ease of access and clarity of direction, the goals and actions have been tied back to these key priorities (ie, residential, economic, public, circulation, and regulatory).



PRIORITY	
Most Important	A
Very Important	B
Important	C

TIMEFRAME	
1-5 Years	1
6-10 Years	2
Ongoing	3
As Available	4

ECONOMIC VITALITY			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawton will preserve the character of Lawton's downtown. • Lawton will promote its historic and cultural assets as leverage for economic and community development. • Lawton will attract and encourage development that supports entrepreneurship and expands the economic, cultural, and civic aspects of the community. • Lawton will promote a healthy and sustainable quality of life and business development. • Lawton will implement new branding to promote its unique character & identity to attract families, businesses and visitors that want to share who we are and who we continue to be. • Lawton will target economic development toward existing and compatible activities, small-scale entrepreneurial endeavors, and local value-added processing. • Lawton will encourage development that enhances the quality of life of the Village's natural beauty, small-town atmosphere and sense of belonging. 			
PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME
GOAL 1: PROMOTE A BALANCED, MIXED-USE DOWNTOWN			
1	Redevelop Village owned parking lots in conjunction with privately owned parking lots to balance the needs of residents, employees, and visitors.	C	1
2	Provide for adequate bicycle, golf cart and snowmobile parking facilities.	B	1
3	Develop well-screened, shared waste receptacles for downtown businesses.	A	1
4	Encourage small to medium scale retail storefronts associated with on-site production and manufacturing	B	4

5	Create a sign and graphics system for wayfinding that highlights the historical, cultural and natural features of the community.	A	1
6	Incorporate art into the downtown.	A	1
7	Actively promote the DDA's facade improvement program	A	3
8	Update signage and storefront design standards and codes to meet or exceed generally accepted industry standards	B	2
9	Develop vacant lots and restore / adaptively reuse historic structures.	B	4
GOAL 2: UNIQUELY MARKET, GROW, AND SUSTAIN			
1	Identify opportunities to sell Village-owned properties for development to increase tax base	B	1
2	Explore opportunities for public/private partnerships that advance efforts to invest in and redevelop high priority sites.	A	1
3	Promote Lawton to prospective employers and families based upon its livability, high quality of life, quality schools, and strong sense of place.	A	3
4	Expand/develop an indoor/outdoor Lawton Community Market locally produced food, flowers, crafts/art, etc. to serve as a small business incubator	C	2
5	Develop a community kitchen/processing facility (small business incubator) to facilitate garden/farm-to-table retail activities.	C	2
6	Enhance Village gateways by implementing placemaking strategies like signage, wayfinding, and streetscape upgrades	B	4
7	Establish branding and design standards for signage; include in signage guidelines in the Zoning Ordinance.	A	1
8	Develop, promote, and market Lawton products and activities.	B	3
9	Foster stronger relationships between the public schools, local government, student groups, and community groups.	A	3
10	Collaborate with nearby government entities and local organizations to improve regional collaboration.	B	3
11	Consider creating a sinking fund from the sale of Village property to provide financial resources to acquire property for parks and trails	C	2

12	Promote and install solar and green technologies as cost-effective alternatives and as potential business/job focus	B	4
GOAL 3: SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY AND HELP SMALL BUSINESSES THRIVE			
1	Create a retail attraction strategy to sustain a healthy and diverse local business community	B	1
2	Support the development of entrepreneurship networks and assistance to startup firms.	C	4
3	Identify pilot projects for placemaking in targeted areas.	B	3

RESIDENTIAL – HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

- Lawton will be a place that attracts people “to” our Village.
- Lawton will provide a variety of housing options for a variety of incomes, ages (including aging-in-place) abilities, family sizes and needs.
- Lawton will focus on development and redevelopment in areas supported by or near existing infrastructure.

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME
GOAL 1: PURSUE AND ENCOURAGE NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES.			
1	Perform a Housing Target Market Analysis (TMA) to inventory available housing and conduct analysis of conditions and gaps in market.	B	1
2	Identify areas with excess capacity and/or those that would complement adjoining properties as Targeted Redevelopment Areas (TRA's). Find a developer	A	1
3	Use the revised Zoning Ordinance to encourage increases in housing density in the Targeted Redevelopment Areas and to encourage affordable and agefriendly housing.	A	1
4	Provide infrastructure support for housing in Targeted Redevelopment Areas.	A	4
5	Create design guidelines for “small lot” infill housing.	A	1
6	Integrate more housing options Downtown.	B	4
7	Provide incentives for incorporating “silver living” options (barrier-free, independent living, cottage clusters, etc.) in new development and the construction of housing units that implement universal housing design.	A	4
8	Provide incentives for affordable housing development / redevelopment.	A	4
GOAL 2: PROMOTE NEIGHBORHOODS AND EXPAND LOCAL CAPACITY			
1	Revise the Zoning Ordinance and development guidelines to provide diversified housing options at reasonable densities.	A	1
2	Encourage pocket neighborhoods (A pocket neighborhood is a type of planned community that consists of a grouping of smaller residences, often around a courtyard or common garden, designed to promote a close-knit sense of community)	C	4

3	Allow ADU's (Accessory Dwelling Unit's, "granny flats", and "mother-in-law" apartments (attached is preferred, but detached units are allowed if they meet specifications) in all residential districts.	A	1
4	Permit a balanced mix of housing types within neighborhoods, provided high standards of architectural and site design characteristics are maintained throughout, including duplex, triplex and quadplex architecture, include stone and brick facades, usable open spaces, distinctive features, decorative landscaping and sidewalks	B	1
5	Promote and facilitate universal design in housing construction	B	2
6	Prohibit "cookie-cutter" development by requiring ample variations in building architecture, materials and colors	A	1
7	Incentivize conservation-based design principles in the Zoning Ordinance and promote conservation-based design in general	C	2
8	Promote neighborhood amenities, such as parks, schools, and other quality of life elements.	B	3
GOAL 3: SUPPORT EXISTING RESIDENTS AND PRESERVE THE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK.			
1	Enforce the Village Zoning Ordinance and International Property Maintenance Code to ensure that the existing housing stock is maintained	B	1
2	Develop and implement a rental housing inspection/license program.	C	1
3	Permit properties in the Residential District to include limited, small scale, mixed-density development that complements the surrounding residential character and epitomizes Lawton's small-town charm, which abide by the zoning requirements for signage, fencing, screening, storage and parking	C	1
4	Provide support for homeowners to update and remodel their homes and properties.	B	4
5	Assist residents in need with maintenance and repairs.	B	4
GOAL 4: EXPAND HOUSING SERVICES FOR HOMEOWNERS, RENTERS, AND LANDLORDS.			
1	Promote Lawton as a great place to live	A	3
2	Support new landlords and renters with "Welcome to Lawton" resources.	B	1

PLACEMAKING

- Lawton will treasure, maintain and expand our public parks, trails, and recreation areas and enhance walkable streetscapes.
- Lawton will invest in green infrastructure to ensure a healthy and prosperous future for its citizens and businesses.
- Lawton will use sustainable planning and engineering practices to manage both natural and built resources.
- Lawton will ensure that its residents have access to high-quality infrastructure.
- Revise Zoning Ordinance to encourage development, streamline requirements and promote Lawton as an inviting, walkable, and vibrant community.

PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME
GOAL 1: IMPROVE EXISTING PARKS, RECREATION FACILITIES, AND OPEN SPACE.			
1	Repair and replace worn out and damaged equipment and amenities as necessary, beginning with the Kid's Dream Playground.	A	1
2	Continue to review and expand a proactive inspection and maintenance program to keep the parks and facilities aesthetically appealing.	B	3
3	Improve barrier-free access to parks and recreation amenities	B	4
4	Consider creation of an "Adopt-A-Park" program for all Village parks	C	1
5	Promote the installation of public art, especially by local artists/craftspeople in public and private places and use existing community spaces as venues.	B	4
6	Update the Parks and Recreation Plan every five years and continue to implement the Plan.	A	1
7	Seek grant funding and other financial assistance to help acquire and develop Village recreational facilities.	A	3
8	Develop a comprehensive park identification program to provide consistent, uniform park signage with additional instructional / directional, watershed, educational, and wayfinding signage.	B	1
GOAL 2: PURSUE LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW PUBLIC SPACES.			
1	Construct a public space on the empty lot in the middle of the Downtown that offers opportunities for community gathering and activities, establishes a strong sense of place, and fosters	A	1

	social interaction and community pride: "Reid's Corner"		
2	Establish a Parks and Recreation Board to help develop and program common spaces, parks, playgrounds, trails, and recreation areas in partnership with the schools and surrounding townships.	C	1
3	Seek opportunities to share facilities with other public agencies (school district / townships / county) and non-profit organizations, and institutions, first targeting the development of new baseball fields.	A	3
4	Work cooperatively to create a network of parks and non-motorized routes around Lawton and between neighboring communities.	A	3
5	Engage in public/private partnerships to secure funding for recreation facilities.	B	4
GOAL 3: MAINTAIN QUALITY VILLAGE SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES WITH FISCALLY-RESPONSIBLE STRATEGIC GROWTH			
1	Repair, replace, and expand infrastructure in order to properly service the community with advanced, state-of-the-art Infrastructure and materials, including the most advanced communications technology.	A	4
2	Maintain a 6-year forward-looking, realistic Capital Improvement Plans (CIP), balancing community and economic development goals with infrastructure and social capacity.	A	3
3	Incorporate a public building and facility rehabilitation plan in to the comprehensive CIP, prioritizing Village Hall and Department of Public Works.	B	1
4	Identify a new location for a community well to provide redundant infrastructure to source the Village's water supply.	B	1
5	Establish a facility maintenance fund with yearly contributions to fund future necessary public facility improvements.	C	4
6	Continue and expand collaboration with surrounding communities and the County to provide public services.	A	3

GOAL 4: IMPROVE COMMUNICATION RESOURCES			
1	Locate a digital message sign in new development of Reid's Square to share community information.	B	1
2	Improve communication efforts to residents, businesses, and visitors to promote events, recent achievements, and Lawton's best assets.	A	3
3	Improve the user experience of the Village's website to be an efficient resource for information, transparency, and basic functions.	B	3
4	Develop a comprehensive social media strategy.	C	1
5	Create an on-line and hard cover "welcome package" that highlights community information, events, organizations, activities and other community attractions for perspective residents and entrepreneurs.	B	1
6	Upgrade records keeping, data management, and sharing between Village departments.	B	3
GOAL 5: IMPLEMENT AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY DESIGN AND RAISE AWARENESS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.			
1	Create promotional materials for residents and businesses describing sustainable practices	B	3
2	investigate contract with single hauler for refuse and recycling, Increasing recycling options	B	1
3	Increase business recycling through code requirements and/or incentive programs.	C	1
4	Work with Van Buren County Conservation District to offer additional collection programs for less common recycling items.	B	3
5	Convert street lighting and public facility lighting to LED.	C	2
6	Develop zoning incentives to integrating natural drainage and green stormwater infrastructure into development projects.	C	2
7	Encourage the development and installation of green roofs, solar, and other green technologies within Lawton.	B	1
8	Integrate green stormwater infrastructure into parks	C	2
9	Promote the use of permeable pavement and other options for limiting the amount of stormwater runoff.	C	1

**GOAL 6:
LAWTON WILL CONTINUE TO BE A DYNAMIC MIX OF HOUSING, BUSINESSES AND
ACTIVITIES DESIGNED TO BE ATTRACTIVE TO A VARIETY OF
DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS.**

1	Rewrite Zoning Ordinance.	A	1
2	Simplify the Zoning Ordinance to address appropriate uses, dimensional requirements, design and connectivity between properties.	A	1
3	Incorporate Smart Growth principles into Village planning processes, regulations and ordinances.	B	3
4	Control development densities and locations through updated zoning districts and regulations based on the future land use plan.	B	3
5	Establish site and building design guidelines to ensure that new development is of a high quality, both in appearance and function.	B	1
6	Provide an appropriate mix of businesses, including industrial, commercial, and office uses that provide employment opportunities and a sound tax base for the Village.	A	3
7	Clearly lay out the process for site plan review, special land use, rezoning, variances, and text amendments with clearly defined review standards and expectations.	A	1
8	Update and implement the most current building codes available for the State of Michigan.	A	1
9	Create a fee schedule that is easily found and reviewed at least annually.	A	3

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

- Lawton will enhance mobility and accessibility through increased safety, maximizing transit/bicycle/pedestrian access, and other modes of active transportation and connection access, and other modes of active transportation and connection.
- Lawton will encourage alternative modes of transportation (including pedestrian, bicycle, ride sharing), where practical, and design that promotes, rather than prevents, their use.
- Promote Lawton as a walkable community

PROJECT		PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME
GOAL 1: IMPROVE MOBILITY			
1	Reconstruct M-40/Main St	A	1
2	Develop and implement a Safe-Routes-to-School program	B	1
3	Adopt a Complete Streets Policy	B	1
4	Ensure that all streets in Lawton, especially Downtown, are pedestrian friendly	B	4
5	Adopt access management standards/requirements for all new development and major redevelopment projects, especially along main street (M-40)	B	1
6	Integrate access and circulation (connectivity) standards into all land use, zoning and development ordinances as a part of the plan/development review process for all development and redevelopment proposals	A	1
GOAL 2: IMPROVE CONDITIONS			
1	Complete a Village-wide sidewalk assessment and develop a prioritized list of needed improvements, prioritizing areas existing within the Village without sidewalks.	B	1
2	Require the installation of sidewalks in all new commercial and residential developments, as well as the maintenance of current sidewalks through a sidewalk improvement and maintenance program	B	1
3	Provide a safe and efficient non-motorized pathway and sidewalk system that provides connectivity, access and mobility to various land uses, including parks and recreation, civic institutions, commercial and residential developments	B	1
4	Tie non-motorized pathway system into the regional trail system	C	4

GOAL 3: IMPROVE STREETSCAPE

1	Install enhanced streetscape along M-40 in Downtown.	A	1
2	Install bike racks on Main Street as part of new streetscape program	A	1



TACTICAL URBANISM TOOLS

Tactical Urbanism is an approach to building neighborhoods and communities that utilizes short-term, low-cost and scalable interventions and policies to initiate long-term change.

Using a variety of tools and readily available resources, we can advance future goals as related to street safety, public space and more! The following list is a starting point for ideas to continue Place-making in the Village of Lawton:

BARRIER ELEMENTS - Objects used for physical or visual separations between motor vehicles and people. Items could include (but are not limited to):
Traffic cones/barricades, cardboard cylinders, plastic barriers, Wooden crates, tire planters, straw wattle, and relocated parking stops

SURFACE TREATMENTS - Colorful applied markings help define spaces and enhance aesthetic appeal. Great for volunteer projects, consider the following list of materials as application options:
Duct and traffic tape, floor mats, spray paint, sidewalk chalk, and stencils

SIGNS - Wayfinding can be used for cohesive branding, help communities understand how to use spaces, and are easy to come by!

LANDSCAPE + FURNITURE - Street amenities are crucial to lingering, sitting and interaction within any environment. Opt for comfort, and don't be afraid to keep it simple!

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan tables summarize the recommendations from throughout the Plan into specific categories, outlining individual tasks to be accomplished within the 20-year planning period. This format serves as a useful checklist to track accomplishments and reassign priorities. It also serves as a checklist to facilitate annual reviews of the Plan. The Long-term/Ongoing recommendations should be evaluated annually for progress with the actions set to “expire” that year.

REGULATORY

Recommendations are provided for amending Village ordinances to better support Plan proposals. Most of these actions could be implemented as part of an update to the Zoning Ordinance and other Village regulations related to land use, streets, and infrastructure and the Village is the primary responsible party.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Streets, trails, utilities, parks, and municipal buildings are the integral framework that supports quality development. Two key objectives are that

- 1) design must complement the context of the surrounding area; and
- 2) sustainable materials and practices should be employed to the degree practical.

PARTNERSHIPS

Intergovernmental cooperation has become more important as each jurisdiction struggles with increased service demands and limited resources. Shared concerns cut across jurisdictional boundaries and affect many communities and the metro area overall. Frequently, the actions, or inactions, of one jurisdiction can have a tremendous impact on others. Increasingly, public and local officials are becoming more aware of the widespread, rather than localized, ramifications of individual community decisions on finances, service delivery, and quality of life. Watersheds and ecosystems, economic development efforts, housing, infrastructure, and transportation improvements all cross community borders, impacting not only Lawton, but the county, and the surrounding region.

PROMOTION/PROGRAMMATIC

Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC): The Village of Lawton has chosen to participate in the Michigan Redevelopment Ready Communities® program. Integrated into this process are the RRC Best Practices. The RRC program was developed by experts in the public and private sector and are the best practices to achieve certification. They're also designed to create a predictable and straightforward experience for investors, businesses, and residents working within a community. These best practices challenge the Village of Lawton to be flexible while seeking quality development that supports a sense of place.

A driving force in Lawton's planning efforts is to be more vibrant and competitive, which means it must be ready for development. To this end, the Village of Lawton has used this planning process to attract new investment and reinvestment, identify assets and opportunities, and focusing limited resources. Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® attract and retain businesses, balance growth, offer superior customer service and have a streamlined development approval process making pertinent information available for anyone to view. These are the foundations of this process.

Economic Incentives: Economic development initiatives can be created or refined to achieve specific implementation goals. For example, incentives could encourage employers or businesses to locate on targeted redevelopment sites. Preferred infill and redevelopment sites should include areas that can be most efficiently served by existing infrastructure and have the greatest potential to stimulate investment on nearby properties.

Funding: Plan implementation will require adequate funding from current revenue sources, state and federal grants, or public/private sector partnerships. Annual appropriations and capital improvement funds should rely on the Plan recommendations as a guide for setting priorities.



APPENDICES

Citation + Credits

Special thanks for photography included: Chloe Schulz, Bill Dolak, Chris McComis
<https://www.facebook.com/LawtonFarmMarket/>

Trail Town information, with thanks to : https://michigantrails.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/trail_town_manual_1.pdf

Precedent photography from the following sources:
<https://www.southhaven.org/experience/trails-town>
<https://gowightman.com/projects/moso-village>
<https://smartgrowth.org/main-street-holland-michigan/>

Stock Photography via Pexels, by Jopwell and Lum3n

Tactical Urbanism Toolkit, <https://www.translink.ca/-/media/translink/documents/rider-guide/travelsmart/tactical-urbanism-toolkit.pdf>

Tactical Urbanist's Guide, <http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/>

Downtown Streetscape Sub-Area Plan

5 Year Parks and Recreation Plan

Community Input

Survey comments

Engagement boards

DOWNTOWN STREETSCAPE

STREETSCAPE VISION: *The Village of Lawton will be a vibrant small town that is inviting, beautiful and safe.*

CHARRETTE GOALS:

- Build a consensus-based vision for Downtown Lawton
- Define streetscape functions and elements that will create vibrancy
- Create momentum to revitalize downtown
- Establish implementation and phasing priorities
- Identify community champions

As an example of the Master Plan in action, included here is a re-imagined vision of the village downtown, soon to be implemented. On August 11, 2020, a community charrette was held at the Village of Lawton Fire House to define and create a vision for the main thoroughfare through the Village of Lawton. A survey was sent out before the event to solicit input from the community. This information, as well as a walk-through of M-40/Main Street helped inform the discussion.

The resulting plan design, vision, and goals were shared with key stakeholders who were unable to participate in the charrette in a series of one-on-one meetings. Business owners that may be affected by the proposed design were also consulted. MDOT review and comment were sought to ensure the streetscape design was feasible. The Downtown Development Authority, Planning Commission, and Village Council reviewed the plan. The Village Council adopted the plan on January 12, 2021 (excerpts in the following pages).



VIBRANT

Downtown is the heart of our community. We work together to create an amazing people-centered place with thriving businesses. Main Street is our public space where we come to meet our daily needs as well as our neighbors; and we celebrate holidays, special events, and our cultural heritage.

- Downtown will be walkable with ample sidewalks, shade trees, places to rest, and interesting storefronts.
- There will be an increase in the number of daily outdoor activities in downtown (Main Street and side streets) with added tables and chairs, benches, and retail displays.
- New infill development and the rehabilitation of existing structures will be done in a manner that reinforces the village's traditional character and pedestrian orientation.
- Auto-oriented land uses will be carefully controlled.
- On-street parking and shared parking lots will be used to reduce the number of single-use parking spaces that do not serve the entire downtown.
- Downtown Lawton will be a 4-season destination that celebrates the flag on the 4th of July just as much as the first big snowfall for snowmobiles.
- New, local businesses will be attracted to Downtown because of Village and DDA investment in infrastructure and street amenities.
- Update the Zoning Ordinance to reflect Master Plan recommendations more accurately.

Outdoor Dining

- Serving pedestrians is the first purpose of a sidewalk. A minimum 6-foot wide zone should be maintained.
- The pedestrian path should be consistent and straight; not interrupted by obstacles.
- Rail, fence, or planters may be used to define dining space and protect the pedestrian zone.
- Movable heaters and blankets for laps on cool days can extend the outdoor dining season.
- An encroachment agreement will be used with property and/or business owners that place private property in the public right-of-way (e.g. outdoor seating).

Building Facades

- Infill buildings should maintain the traditional existing building setback line of downtown blocks.
- Scale and proportion of new construction should respect existing structures.

- Ground level facades with street frontage should be active and not have blank walls.
- Windows should be clear (non-reflective/tinted/free of signs) between 2' and 7'.
- Operable building entrances should face the sidewalk.
- Building facades should have a base, expression line, body and top.
- Buildings will be pedestrian-scaled and made with durable, high-quality materials.

Community Events and Venues

- Invest in holiday decorations to increase community pride.
- Install power outlets in new street infrastructure for events and holiday lighting.
- Visually connect the center of downtown and public parking areas with signage and common streetscape elements to provide intuitive wayfinding.
- Connect downtown to regional trails and recreational amenities.
- Explore the idea of an art festival.
- Celebrate Lawton's history and community pride through events and/or art.

Farmer's Market/Reid's Square

- Relocate the Farmer's Market to the highly visible corner of Main Street and Union and create a multi-use space.
- A downtown community gathering space can be used for both public as well as private events to support local businesses, generate activity and energy, and provide additional parking for the district.
- In addition to the market structure/canopy, include numerous elements that allow for many year-round programming and activity options, such as:
- Live music and movies (using the north wall of Wagoner's)
 - Light poles for festoon lighting
 - Food trucks and beer garden seating
 - Cornhole and other yard games on synthetic turf
 - Swinging tables or clear plastic "igloos" and heaters
 - Additional parking off west alley, which could flex as additional food truck space or farmer's market setup

BEAUTIFUL

We will work to update our storefronts, plant trees and flowers, and encourage the creation of art to transform our downtown into a beautiful place. This will attract new customers and businesses.

- Business and property owner cooperation will help to advance the community's vision and facilitate new investment.
- Parking lots will be screened to soften the views of cars.
- Street trees will provide shade for pedestrians and outdoor dining.
- The DDA will continue to invest in efforts to plant flowers and other greenery.
- A façade improvement program will assist business and property owners to improve storefronts.
- A land and building maintenance ordinance that includes monthly monitoring (and fees) of structures and property will be created to reduce property nuisance and maintenance issues.
- Compatible building facades, storefronts, and signs to create a cohesive image for the downtown business district will be encouraged.
- Art programming that encourages the use of murals, street art, and other formats will be developed.
- Banners and/or flags will be installed on light poles and buildings to add color and movement.

Art

- Add art to vacant storefronts to enliven and activate the street.
- Paint murals on blank walls with high visibility along Main Street.
- Install supergraphics on the juice tanks at Welch's plant.
- Create a policy that allows for street murals that do not conflict with crosswalk markings.
- Consider a mini-grant program to sponsor local artists.
- The placement and design of public art should not block any portion of the street or sidewalk or be distracting to drivers.
- Community involvement is an integral piece of the public art process. Residents, business owners, and customers should be involved in the installation of public art projects.

Pots and Planters

- Provide curbed planters at selected street “bump outs”
- Plant deciduous and evergreen shrubs, perennials, and ornamental grasses 30-inches and shorter to maintain clear vision
- Irrigate the planters and use loosely compacted planting soil
- Provide duplex GFCI outlets for potential holiday decorations and/or special activities where power would be needed at the walkway level
- Use freestanding pots, approximately 36 to 42 inches in diameter and 24 to 30 inches high
- Use Landscape Forms “Rosa” planter, Tournesol Siteworks “Village” planter or similar
- Plant annuals and ornamental grasses, consider 4-season displays
- Use self-watering planter inserts, “adoption” of planters by business owners (with an agreement), and/or regular contractor watering supported by the DDA

Street Trees

- Space canopy trees approximately 44 feet on-center
- Install a continuous planting trench between trees, 3-feet deep for a healthy root system
- Use planting medium options in hardscape zones (CU Structural soil or GreenBlue Urban soil cells with planting soil) underneath reinforced concrete spans
- Irrigate tree pits and use PorousPave surfacing to provide a permeable surface in the tree pit
- At least 20-gallons of water should be provided to each tree immediately following planting
- Suggested minimum soil volumes: small tree (250 cubic ft); medium tree (500 cubic ft); and large tree (750 cubic ft)
- Street trees should have a two-year warranty period, including a maintenance contract providing tree care for the first two years following installation

INVITING

People of all ages and abilities will feel welcome in the Village of Lawton. Our community will be known for being friendly, happy, clean, and comfortable to everyone who comes here to live, work, shop, and play.

- People we know, as well as those we do not, will be greeted with a smile.
- Main Street will have a strong curb appeal that attracts residents, businesses, and visitors with art, outdoor dining, public seating, and shade that encourages lingering and spending.
- M-40/Main Street will be transformed from being a barrier to a “seam” that joins the two sides of the street together.
- Our community gateways will represent the Village of Lawton with pride.
- Parks and greenspaces will connect to dining and entertainment options.
- Pedestrian connections between surrounding neighborhoods and downtown will be enhanced. Dwellings above storefronts and behind businesses will be encouraged to increase housing for customers and employees.
- The visibility of public parking areas will be improved with signage.
- Shared public parking (car, bicycle, golf cart and snowmobile) will be provided that encourages a “park once” philosophy reinforced with Downtown’s walkable streetscapes. Electric charging stations will be installed.
- Financial assistance to improve building accessibility for persons with disabilities should be considered, perhaps in conjunction with the façade improvement program.

Site Furniture

- Site furniture will assist in creating a comfortable user experience. Furnishings should be constructed from long-lasting and durable materials and finishes:
- Landscape Forms “Plainwell” bench and litter receptacle with metal slats
- CycleSafe “U” bike loop with Village logo or similar recommended
- Where possible, seating areas should be located next to trees for shade.
- Monitoring bicycle rack occupancy can help determine when additional racks are needed.
- Waste receptacles should be placed in locations accessible for curbside pickup.
- Seating should be regularly inspected for damage to ensure it is safe and comfortable for all.

Maintenance

- Continuous, safe and accessible pedestrian walkways should be maintained, and kept free of snow and ice.
- Sidewalk ramps should be designed to avoid water ponding at the base of the ramp.
- Crosswalk markings should be refreshed at regular intervals.
- Street sweeping should occur at regular intervals due to the number of large trucks that travel through Downtown Lawton.
- Agreements should be in place between the Village and private entities that donate items, volunteer, or conduct business in the public right-of-way to ensure promises are met.

Happiness

Being aware of the level of happiness and quality of life that the people of Lawton experience is important for them to be “inviting” toward others. Buildings, Main Street, and outdoor spaces provide the context for people to meet one another. Other items mentioned in this Road Map that contribute to the quality of life include:

- Farmers Market, art, and events
- Community interactions
- Nature (trees, flowers)
- Measures that increase a sense of community well-being should be considered in determining DDA and Village funding priorities.

Marketing

- Proactive messaging strategies will be created to inform customers and travelers about how to access downtown businesses during the reconstruction of M-40.
- Road reconstruction will provide the opportunity to pilot the use of directional signage for customers, businesses, and parking areas.
- A long-term marketing plan will be developed that raises awareness in the community and the region about the businesses and activities that are in Downtown Lawton and Lawton’s rich history in the grape industry.

INVITING

M-40 will be transformed from a highway that goes through the Village of Lawton to Main Street - a street that leads to the Village of Lawton's vibrant downtown.

- Main Street is the main artery of our community. The street will be rebalanced so that it serves the residents and businesses of the Village of Lawton.
- Traffic will slow down as vehicles travel through downtown. Eighty five percent of vehicles will travel 30 miles per hour or less due to the use of self-enforcing design principles.
- Pedestrian crossing distance will be reduced by 25% at intersections.
- The walking distance between marked crosswalks will be reduced with the addition of new crossing locations.
- Outdoor lighting for pedestrians will improve visibility and feelings of safety and security.
- Storefront facades will provide visibility of patrons inside the building and of persons on the street to increase the number of "eyes on the street".
- Bicycles will be encouraged to access downtown using side streets to avoid mixing with large-haul trucks.
- Gateway median treatments will provide visual cues to drivers that they need to slow down.
- The heart of downtown will be identifiable with curb extensions, outdoor seating areas, landscape planters, benches, crosswalks, and connections to public parking.

Gateways

- Signage has been installed at the periphery of village limits to alert motorists that they are entering into the community.
- Landscaped medians are proposed at either end of downtown to alert motorists that they are entering the Village of Lawton's downtown business district.
- Visual cues assist in slowing down traffic and making motorists aware that they are likely to see people walking around the downtown and crossing the street.
- Other key gateways, such as the park entrance to Lewis Park and splash pad, may require additional signage to improve driver awareness and increase pedestrian safety.

Lighting

New lighting will improve the visibility of pedestrians and contribute to creating a strong downtown identity. In addition, trees and light poles add vertical elements that have a natural traffic calming effect.

- Lights will be an ornamental metal fluted pole with an acorn-style globe
- Light poles with ~15-18-foot standards will be spaced approximately 80-90 feet on-center
- LED fixtures will be used for energy efficiency and longevity, and fixtures will be cut-off or shielded to limit light trespass

Opportunities will be provided on new lighting fixtures for holiday decorations and other place-making elements.

- Duplex outlets will be included that are integral to the pole design for holiday decorations and special activities
- Arms for banners and possibly for hanging baskets

Bulb Outs

Bulb outs (also known as curb extensions) are illustrated on the other side of this Road Map. They are a key component of the new design for Main Street. Bulb outs serve several functions:

- Pedestrian crossing distance will be shortened.
- It is easier for drivers to see pedestrians crossing at key locations.
- Planters in bulb-outs direct pedestrians to proper crossing locations.
- Bulb-outs make the road appear to be narrower, thereby reducing travel speed due to driver perception.
- Parking areas are protected and defined as being distinct areas from travel.
- Parking areas are protected and defined as being distinct areas from travel lanes.

VILLAGE OF LAWTON

5 year Parks & Recreation Master Plan



2021 - 2025

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Introduction

The 2021 – 2025 Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a guide for the future development of parks and recreation facilities, operations, and maintenance in the Village. The Village recognizes the significant role that recreation plays in providing a high quality of life and improved physical health of its citizens, so this effort to create the Village of Lawton's first Parks and Recreation Master Plan was undertaken to guide the orderly development of such facilities and programs.

This plan provides the data and direction to ensure that parks and recreation offerings are aligned with the community needs and values. The plan addresses current recreation issues and identifies and prioritizes future needs of the community and the means for meeting those needs over the upcoming five-year period. This plan will form the basis for future applications for recreation grant funding from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and other granting agencies. The Plan was prepared in accordance with the MDNR's Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plans.

The foundation for the development of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to develop a strategy to further enhance the health and recreational opportunities within the village and to provide a common direction for future development and enhancements to parks, trails, and routes. The intent of this plan is to develop parks, recreational opportunities, and trail systems (non-motorized) to provide safe facilities and more choices for healthier lifestyles.

Village of Lawton staff has taken on the duties of drafting this document. To gather information regarding programming and park development, the Village utilized the online services of Survey Monkey to collect public opinion. The plan represents the best interpretation of the desires of the clients being served. This plan will provide a road map that staff and elected officials will use to guide these services for the next five years.

Community Description

Historically, Lawton was first identified as a village in 1853 when Nathan Lawton filed a description of a plat of land in the office of the County Clerk of Cayuga County New York. It was officially incorporated on November 3, 1858. Its wonderfully rich soils made it perfect for

growing grains and fruits, making Lawton renowned for its vineyards and harvests. Today, Lawton is home to the oldest standing winery and remains a premier grape growing area in the Midwest.

The Village of Lawton is a General Law Village incorporated within Antwerp Township on three sides, with Porter Township boarding to the south. Lawton is in Van Buren County, which is bordered by Allegan County, Kalamazoo County, Cass County, Berrien County, and Lake Michigan. Located in Southwest Michigan, Lawton is home to approximately 1,852 residents (based on the 2010 US Census).

Lawton is a desirable place to live with historic small-town charm. The Downtown District is the heart of the community. It is regionally known for its fine dining establishments and a premier microbrewery. In addition to outstanding dining options, downtown is home to several service industries and some shopping. Welch's Foods is a large industrial grape cooperative, producing tens of thousands of gallons of sparkling juices each year in downtown Lawton.

Lawton is located on M-40, a State Highway that runs North/South. It is three miles south of I-94 a federal Highway. These two main transportation arteries give Lawton easy access to more populated urban amenities while maintaining its individual small-town identity.

Many visitors come to the greater Lawton area during the summer to enjoy outdoor recreational opportunities such as boating, fishing, and swimming. Wintertime activities include ice-fishing and snowmobiling.

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

The Village of Lawton's Parks and Recreation facilities not only serve the Village residents but also residents of the Greater Lawton Area. While the Village of Lawton is located in the Township of Antwerp, Van Buren County, the greater Lawton Area is comprised of the Village of Lawton, Antwerp Township, and neighboring Porter Township. The population swells in the warm weather months as summer residents and visitors flock to the area.

The table below shows the population of each Census since 1980 for the three municipalities as well as Van Buren County. As of the 2010 Census, the Village of Lawton had a total population of 1,900 people. While this was a small increase from the population at the 2000 Census, it still represents a 22% increase since 1980.

Population Trends - 1980 to 2010					
	1980	1990	2000	2010	% change since 1980
Village of Lawton	1,558	1,685	1,859	1,900	22%
Antwerp Township	7,744	9,293	10,813	12,182	57%
Porter Township	3,857	3,857	2,406	3,798	-2%
Van Buren County	66,814	70,060	76,263	76,258	14%
Totals	79,973	84,895	91,341	94,138	18%

In 2010, the median age in the village was 38.9 years. 25.4% of residents were under the age of 18; 7.6% were between the ages of 18 and 24; 24.5% were from 25 to 44; 23.1% were from 45 to 64; and 19.2% were 65 years of age or older.

The gender makeup of the village was 45.1% male and 54.9% female. The spread of population based on age is important to take account of because each age group has different recreational needs and it is important to provide an opportunity for all ages, especially in a community in which all age groups are near equally represented.

The 2010 Census revealed that there were 730 households, of which 35.2% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 40.8% were married couples living together, 16.4% had a female householder with no spouse present, 5.3% had a male householder with no wife present, and 37.4% were non-families.

The median property value in Lawton, MI was \$101,000 in 2018, which is 44% smaller than the national average of \$229,700. Between 2017 and 2018 the median property value increased from \$98,100 to \$101,000, a 2.96% increase.

People in Lawton, MI have an average commute time of 22.2 minutes, and they commute by driving alone. Car ownership in Lawton, MI is approximately the same as the national average, with an average of 2 cars per household.

Within the Village of Lawton, over 33% of households are renter occupied. Renters often have less of an opportunity to provide their families with recreation as they are limited in the amount of household improvements they can make. It is important for those who are in rental situations to be provided with adequate opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Communities with high instances of poverty is one that should have a focus on creating low-cost recreation opportunities for families. While Van Buren County has an estimated 19% of the population living below the poverty level (based on the 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate), in Lawton 10.1% of persons are below the poverty level, and that rises to 12% for children under 18.

NATURAL FEATURES

Lawton enjoys a picturesque hilly topography that is characteristic of vineyards. The slopes of the hills are gently rolling and are very inviting for outdoor activities like hiking or snowmobiling.

Lawton is surrounded by many lakes which are a draw for in state and out of state visitors who enjoy these waters for fishing, swimming, and skiing. Lawton is one of the few communities in Michigan that allow snowmobiles to drive on local streets.

ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

Lawton is a bedroom community. Most people use their personal vehicle to drive to and from work. People can easily commute to larger metropolitan areas for work and still have a lifestyle that is not available in larger employment centers.

The Village of Lawton is comprised of many different types of building and land uses. Housing is primarily single- or two-family homes with a multi-unit apartment complex that is subsidized and provides affordable housing as well as a subsidized senior apartment complex.

The greater Lawton Area and Van Buren County are home to many regional tourism destinations such as wineries, breweries and micro-breweries, lakes, resorts, auto racing and snowmobiling. There are over 3,000 homes held for seasonal or vacation uses. Many out of state residents own summer houses in the lakes area surrounding Lawton.

Due to its unique soils, the greater Lawton area is home to numerous vineyards, fruit farms and other agriculturally based businesses. Grape/fruit processing and vegetable preservation and canning are important industries and provide many jobs and a large tax base for the community.

Administrative Structure

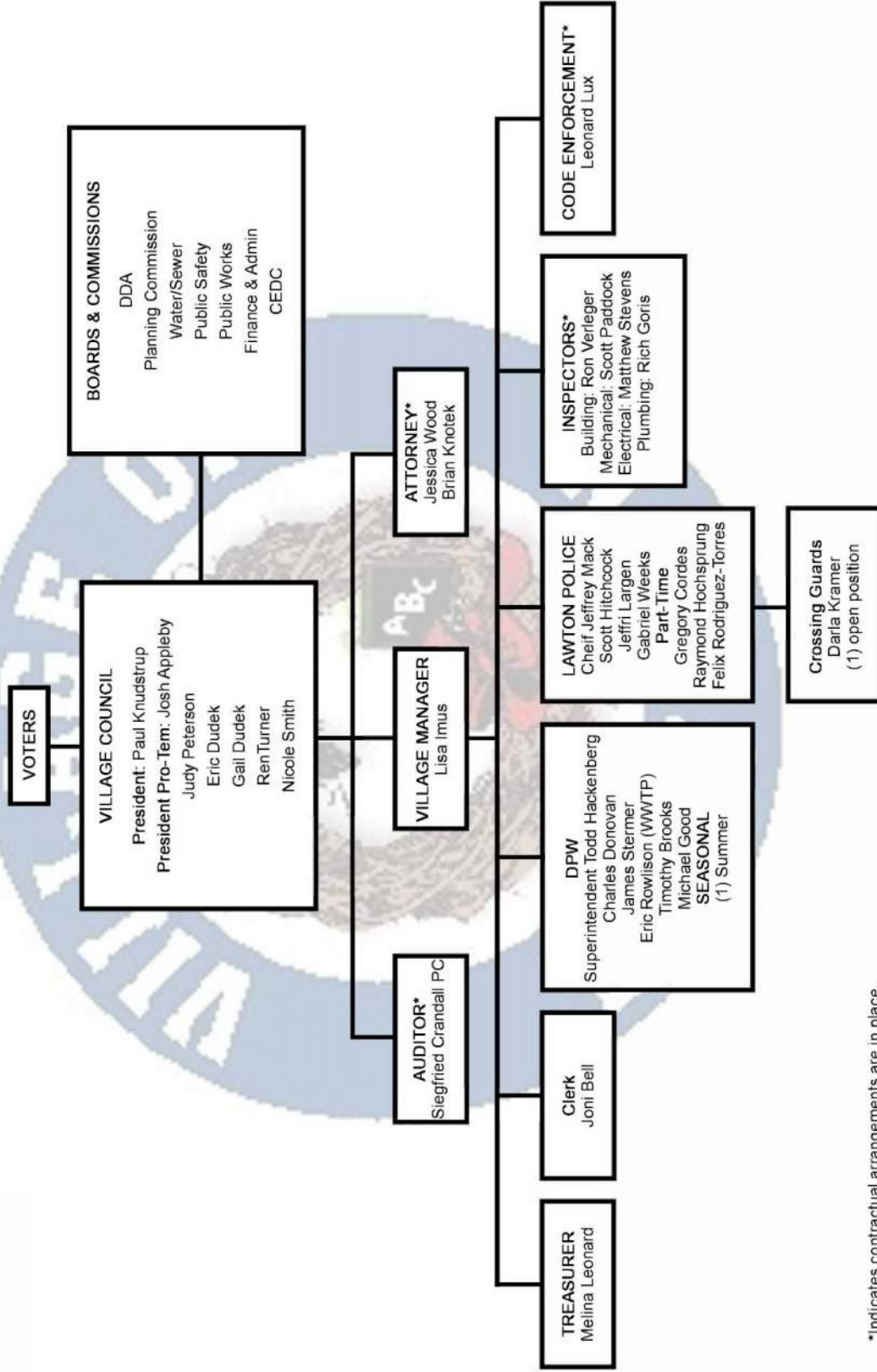
The Village of Lawton is a General Law Village, governed by a Village Council which consists of six Trustees and one Village President. These positions are elected to four-year terms by the residents. The Village operates under a Council/Manager form of government, hiring a Village Manager to oversee all village departments. The Village currently employs twelve full-time employees, several seasonal employees, two crossing-guards during the school year, and one part-time employee.

The Village does not have a special commission responsible for parks and recreation but utilizes an "ad-hoc" Village Council Committee to develop plans and goals for municipal recreation sites. The committee, however, has no direct authority to implement any proposal or expense.

Daily operations and maintenance of Lawton's parks and recreation facilities are the responsibility of the Department of Public Works (DPW). The DPW is responsible for the maintenance of the parks, streets, the municipal water/sewer system, and consists of a staff of five full time individuals as well as seasonal staff as needed. As with most small communities, the Village relies on volunteers to organize and maintain most of the recreation programs and events provided within the Village limits.



VILLAGE OF LAWTON ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



*Indicates contractual arrangements are in place.

PROJECTED BUDGET

The Village Council is responsible for determining the operating budget and capital improvements for the parks and recreation programs for Village facilities. They are also responsible for appointing the Village Manager, serving on various committees, approving projects and grants, appointing community members to Board and Commissions, and approving the purchase or sale of land.

Funding for the Village of Lawton Parks and Recreation comes from Village tax dollars distributed through the General Fund.

	2019-20 AMENDED BUDGET	2020-21 AMENDED BUDGET	2021-22 PROPOSED BUDGET
PARKS DEPARTMENT			
FICA	1,250	1,500	1,650
DEFERRED COMPENSATION	700	700	770
M.E.S.C.	250	250	275
OPERATING SUPPLIES	2,500	2,500	3,000
ELECTRIC	2,000	3,000	3,000
EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE	1,000	1,000	1,100
VEHICLE RENT	10,000	10,000	11,000
KID'S DREAM IMPROVEMENTS	2,000	2,000	2,200
PARKS TOTAL:	33,700	37,950	41,745

During fiscal year 2020-2021 the Parks and Recreation budget was \$37,950. Maintenance of the parks was the largest expense. For the previous five years, this has been the Villages' practice with budgeted expenses relatively flat in the General Fund.

During the 2019 – 20 Fiscal year, the Downtown Development Authority began raising funds to construct a splash pad at the Chancy Lewis Park. The success of these efforts resulted in an MEDC Patronicity matching grant for \$40,000. In total, \$142,000 was raised to construct the new Splash Pad. It officially opened in June of 2020 and came in under-budget at \$116,000. The remaining DDA fundraising revenue is being reserved for additional park and recreation improvements in Chancy Lewis Park.

CURRENT FUNDING HISTORY

The Village has not previously received any grant funding from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).

VOLUNTEERS IN THE PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAM

The Village of Lawton often utilizes volunteers in maintenance and beautification roles in Village Parks and downtown. DDA Board members volunteer to plant and maintain flower beds and planters in the Downtown District, Cannon Park, and the North and South gateways to the Village. Clubs and teams (football, basketball, baseball/softball, National Honor Society) from the high school often volunteer for special events and park “clean-up” days.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH NON-PROFIT AND OTHER PUBLIC AGENCIES

Lawton Youth Baseball and Softball is the organization that arranges and operates the youth baseball program within the Stephayn Sports Complex on property owned by the Village. Approximately 200 participants are involved from the region, including a portion residing outside of the Village of Lawton. The Lawton Rocket Football organization runs and manages the Village’s rocket football fields on the corner of E First Street and Hamilton.

Senior citizen activities are coordinated through Senior Services of Van Buren County and include but are not limited to Adult Day-care services, counseling, health and fitness, Meals on Wheels, congregate meals and transportation.

A local Farmer’s Market is held weekly at Chancy Lewis Park from July through October.

The Village of Lawton Museum is a volunteer organization that is available year-round by appointment.

The Lawton Lions Heritage Community Center & Grape and Wine Museum is a regionally renowned facility that hosts large events such as weddings. The museum portion is nestled in the huge former wine cellars of the complex. The center itself is a unique architectural structure of cobblestone located in the heart of the “Fruit Belt” of southwest Michigan. The 1903 structure, a state and national historic

site, is the state's oldest standing winery building which makes it a most appropriate setting for the Museum.

Other programs that occur during the year include:

- Easter Egg Hunt – organized by a local church and volunteer group
- Memorial Day Parade – a parade through the Village ending with a ceremony at the Oak Grove Cemetery
- Ride for Wishes – A fundraising bike ride for terminally ill children – usually in June
- Summerfest – A 4th of July Celebration with a one-day street festival with parade, concerts, craft fair and fireworks.
- Veteran's Day Remembrance Ceremony at Oak Grove Cemetery
- Fall Homecoming Parade – a tradition provided by the Lawton Community School District in honor of Lawton Alumni
- Christmas Parade – A winter evening parade featuring lights and sounds of the season that winds through downtown



Recreation Inventory

In order to plan for parks and recreation in the future, the types of facilities that currently exist in the Village need to be examined. It is also helpful to compare these existing facilities to various standards as one measure of the adequacy of the parks and recreation facilities in the area.

PARK CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The Recommended Classification System for Local and Regional Open Space from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)

defines various types of parks. Five of these are applicable to and found within the parks owned and operated by the Village of Lawton.

They include:

- ✓ A Mini-Park is less than one acre in size and is less than 1/4 mile from a residential setting. It is used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs.
- ✓ School-Parks can combine parks with school sites to help meet the recreational space needs for the community.
- ✓ Community Parks serve a broader purpose to an area. They have more amenities and usually serve two or more neighborhoods within 1/2 to three miles and are generally 30 - 50 acres in size.
- ✓ A Special Use facility is oriented toward single-purpose use, such as a football complex.
- ✓ A Natural Resource Area is land that is set aside for the preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space, and visual aesthetics or buffering.

COMPARISON TO STANDARDS

Comparison to Standards – Park Acreage				
	Recommended Acres Per 1,000 Population	Existing Acreage	Recommended for Lawton	
			Population 1,852	Deficiency
Entire Park System	5 to 20	243.0	9.3 to 37	none
Community Parks	5 to 8	7.2	9.3 to 14.8	none
Mini-Parks	.25 to .5	0.3	.5 to 1	slight
Natural Resource Areas	Variable	173.0	1.9 to 3.7	none
Special Use Facilities	Variable	32.6	Variable	none
School Facilities	Variable	30	Variable	none

The Village of Lawton has approximately 243 acres of total park space for its 2010 population of 1,852 residents. General industry standards would suggest 5 to 20 acres of total park space per 1,000 citizens, or Approximately 10 to 37 acres of total park land for the Village of Lawton.

From this standpoint, the Village exceeds standards in each of its categories of parks and recreational facilities, except for one. Mini parks should be at .5 acres and is slightly under at .3 acres. In general, the centrally located school playground and other open space make up for that deficiency. (See the table below) One area for growth may be in Lawton's trail facilities and senior activities.

As discussed later in the public input section, there is high support in Lawton to begin a formal trail network and interest in providing increased pedestrian access.

The satisfactory amount of existing open space should not inhibit the Village from seeking new recreational lands when conditions are appropriate.

ACCESSIBILITY

Creating a park system that is safe, accessible, and usable to all individuals, including those with disabilities, is essential. A grading system has been developed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) to simply and effectively rate park facilities based on their ease of use and accessibility for handicapped residents, based on the American Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. Each park facility was evaluated and compared to the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design by Village staff.



Included in the Recreation Inventory is an accessibility of each park. The accessibility grading system uses a five-point system ranging from one (none of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines), to five (the entire park was developed/renovated using the principles of universal design).

MDNR Accessibility Grading System for Parks and Recreational Facilities	
Accessibility Grade	Definition
1	None of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines.
2	Some of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines.
3	Most of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines.
4	The entire park meets accessibility guidelines.
5	The entire park was developed/renovated using the principles of universal design.

The Village of Lawton is dedicated to increasing accessibility at each of its parks when improvements are made. This includes accessible parking, paths, restrooms, activity areas, amenities, and signage. As noted in the inventory listing, Lawton's parks do not meet all criteria for accessibility to the disabled. The Village of Lawton is committed to improving the accessibility of its facilities and is considering a variety of options to make this possible at its varied park and recreational facility locations.

PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES INVENTORY

The Village of Lawton currently has five public parks, a privately owned golf club, and several public-school facilities scattered throughout the Village. On the following page is a Park Facilities Chart providing an inventory of recreational opportunities. A map with park and school locations follows on the next page.

Village of Lawton

Parks and Recreation Facilities

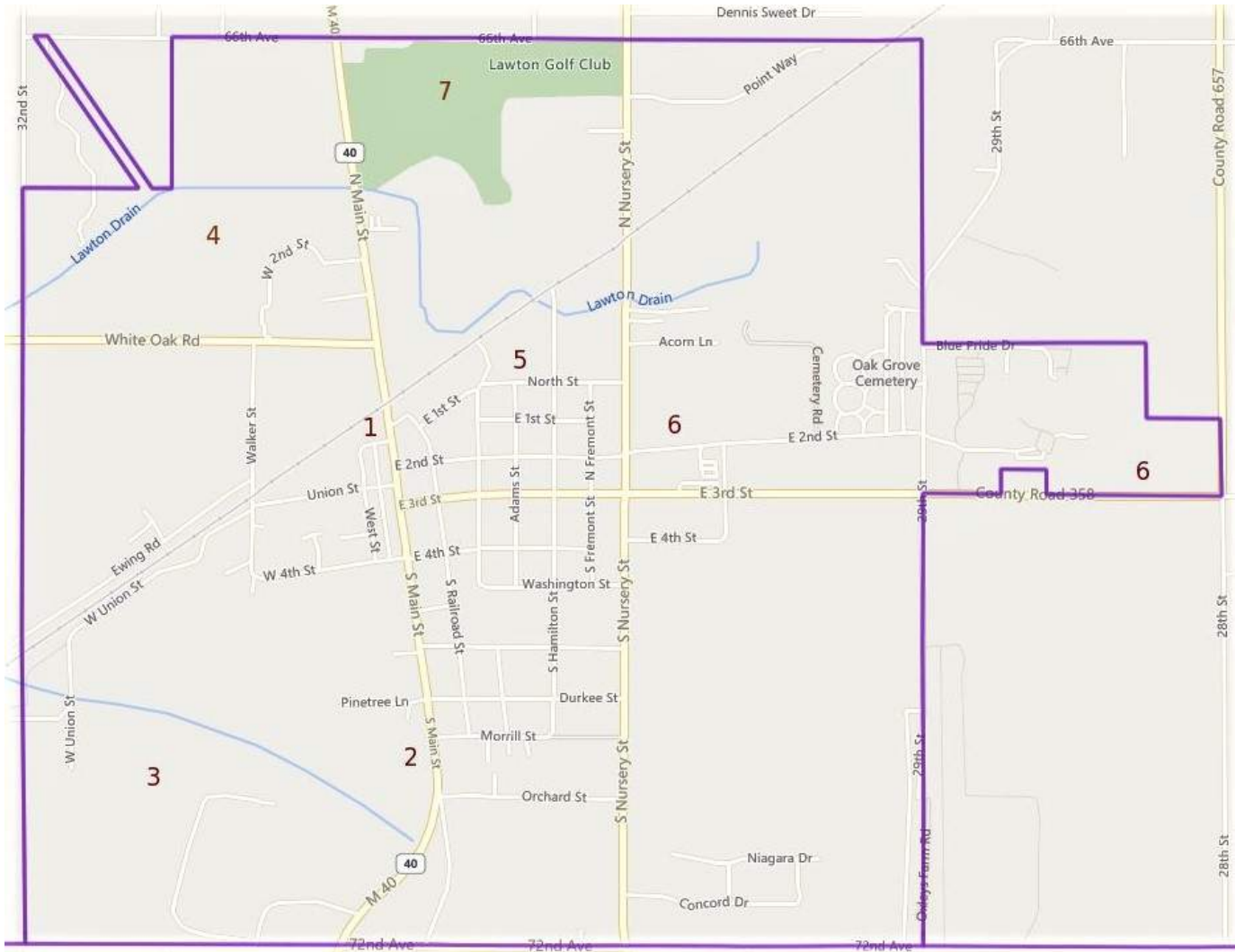
Inventory

Village of Lawton Parks and Recreation Facilities Inventory						
	Cannon Park	Chancy Lewis Park	Village Conservation Area	Stephayn Sports Complex	Rocket Football Fields	Lawton Community School Facilities
Accessibility	3	2	1	1	1	3
Park Type*	MP	CP	NRA	SUF	SUF	SP
Area (Acres)	0.3	7.2	173.0	30.0	2.6	30.0
Water Access	No	No	No	No	No	No
Service Area	Village	Community	Community	School District	School District	School District
Ball Diamonds				7		2
Pavilion		2				
Basketball Court		4				2
Benches	1	5		2	2	
Bike Rack		2				
Bleachers		4		4		Various
Concession Area				1		2
Disc Golf Course						9 holes
Football Field					1	1
Grill		4				
Horseshoe Pits		4				
Park Sign	1	1		1		
Parking		Yes		Yes		Yes
Picnic Tables		22				
Playground		1				1
Restrooms	**	1		1	**	Various
Soccer Field				1		1
Splash Pad		1				
Storage Area		1		2		Various
Tennis Courts		1				
Volleyball						2
Water Access						
Other	Veteran's Memorial					
*Park Type: MP=Mini Park; CP=Community Park; NRA=Natural Recourse Area; SUF=Special Use Facility; SP=School Park ** = Portable Restroom.						

VILLAGE OF LAWTON

PARKS AND RECREATION

FACILITIES MAP



PARKS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES: DESCRIPTIONS

Lawton offers its residents 5 recreational facilities with a variety of capacities for active and passive recreation. Below is a description of each facility, which includes a brief description of its amenities.

Cannon Park

Type of Park: Mini-Park

Accessibility Rating: 3/5

Area (acres): 0.3

Cannon Park is a mini park that features Lawton's Veteran's Memorial at the northern gateway to downtown. Holiday displays are created in the park for the summer, fall, and Christmas seasons. It also serves as a snowmobile trailhead in the winter, which is maintained by the Southwest Michigan Snow-stompers.

Chancy Lewis Park

Type of Park: Community Park

Accessibility Rating: 2/5

Area (acres): 7.2

Chancy Lewis Park is situated at the southern edge of the Village. The park was the site of Lawton's first baseball park in the late 1800's and continued with that use until the 1950's. During the 70's the location was used for showing outdoor movies and had an ice-skating rink until the 1980's when it fell into disrepair and was removed.



The Park now offers two covered pavilions with picnic tables, a large 'community built' play structure, horseshoe pits, a tennis court, and 3 half-court basketball courts.

During the summer of 2020, a splash pad was constructed. The park also offers picnic tables, grills, and several large open space fields for

various recreational uses. There is a heated barrier free bathroom that is available year-round. The Farmer's Market is also held in the park July through October, and snowmobilers use portions of the park for parking during the winter.

Village Conservation Area

Type of Park: Natural Resource Area

Accessibility Rating: 1/5

Area (acres): 173

This property is a large, wooded area along the west side of the Village. Local residents often hike here to relax, bird watch and view wildlife in their natural habitat. While the area is not maintained by the Village, many traversable paths have been carved over the years.

Stephayn Sports Complex

Type of Park: Special Use Facility

Accessibility Rating: 1/5

Area (acres): 30

The Lawton Youth Baseball and Softball organization manages and maintains the Stephayn Sports Complex. The park has 7 ball fields and a soccer field. It also has a concessions and restroom facility and a storage area.

Rocket Football Field

Type of Park: Special Use Facility

Accessibility Rating: 1/5

Area (acres): 2.6

The Rocket football Field is a Special Use Facility that is primarily used in the fall for rocket football and cheerleading practices and games. The rocket football organization owns and maintains the fields.

Lawton Community Schools

Type of Park: School Park

Accessibility Rating: 3/5

Area (acres): 30

There are two primary areas for recreation offered by Lawton Community Schools. A large playground is located to the north of the elementary building. This is open for neighborhood use when school is not in session. A soccer field is located at the Middle School, and there is a Disc Golf on both the Middle School and High School grounds. The High School also offers 4 Gymnasiums (3 for competitions, 1 for community events such as youth sports), 1 multipurpose room (available to rent), a Weight Room, space for vocal and instrumental music, the Owen Bray Auditorium (seats 400), 4 baseball and softball fields, and Packer Stadium for football, soccer, and track (seats 1200).

Public Facilities Outside of Lawton

Huzzy Lake, Bankson Lake, Bankson Lake, Cedar Lake, Gravel Lake, Eagle Lake, and Three Mile Lake – all within five miles of Lawton Village - have public access for fishing and boating. Maple Lake has a public access for fishing and swimming

Private Facilities in or near Lawton

Pin High Golf Course is a nine-hole golf course located within the Village limits.

Lake Cora Golf Course is an eighteen-hole public golf course that is within ten miles of the Village limits.

Copper Grille has a banquet facility specializing in weddings and other private parties located downtown in the historic Village Hall.

Staff affiliated with the local Lions Club operate the regionally renowned Lawton Community Center that annually host wedding receptions, Wine-Tasting festivals and many other events. The Lions make the facility available for community sponsored events at no charge.

A snowmobile trail runs through Lawton that annually attracts thousands of snowmobilers; Lawton is one of the few communities in Michigan that allow snow mobiles on the public side streets.

There are numerous grape vineyards and fruit farms that offer roadside markets and u-pick opportunities for those interested in agritourism.

Community Input

With the successful construction of the Splash Pad in Chancy Lewis Park, use of Village park facilities has soared. The Village Council has since decided to increase emphasis on parks and recreation and initiate its first Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This Plan will provide the basis for public policy decisions and technical coordination in recreational development within the Village.

One of the most important aspects of a community's Recreation Plan is the inclusion of resident's opinions about how they view the future of their parks and recreation system. To comply with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation Open Space and Greenway Plans, the Village of Lawton offered two opportunities for public input, along with a 30-day period for review and comment on the draft Recreation Plan.

An online community input survey was offered to the community for three weeks during December 2020. The survey was publicized in a variety of methods, including Facebook sharing and advertisements, community flyers with QR code link to the survey, the Village Newsletter mailed with water bills, an article in local newspaper, as an item on the DDA, Planning Commission and Council Agendas, and an Email blitz to City contacts.

The survey gathered information about the community's priorities with regard to the Village's park and recreation system and received 333 responses.

A second means of input was provided during the required public review period of the draft from December 23rd, 2020 to January 26, 2021. A third opportunity for public input was made available at a public hearing on January 26th, 2021.

SURVEY

In order to have an understanding of the demographics and geographic qualities of the respondents, the survey asked respondents several general questions about themselves. Over 93% of the respondents identified themselves as residents from either the Village or two surrounding townships (115 from Village of Lawton, 106 from Porter Township, and 75 from Antwerp Township.) The survey was well represented by older adults (83% were over 35 years of age), and the Village will continue to seek input from younger adults and youth

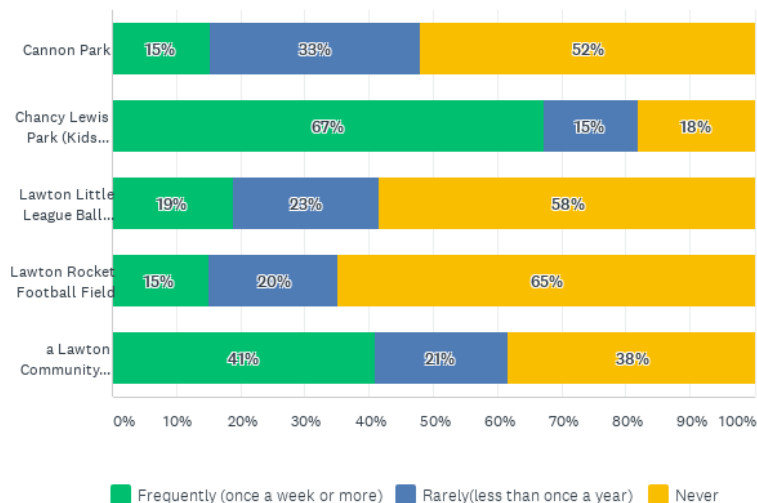
in the planning and development of our Parks and Recreation endeavors.

When asked how important parks, trails and open space were as a factor to their household's quality of life, 94% indicated it was important to them.

Of primary concern to the Village Council was parks accessibility. In answer to the question "have you noticed any physical (or other) obstacles to accessing or enjoying the parks?", a majority of the respondents collectively said "no", or 271 of the 315 who chose to answer the question. Of the 30 people who commented on specific items, 10 mentioned unruly teens; 8 commented on maintenance and the remaining 12 comments were related to various safety concerns.

The Village of Lawton has six park and recreation facilities. The Conservation Area is large and rural, two are at the gateway to our downtown - Cannon Park to the north and Chancy Lewis Park to the south. The other three are special use facilities (football and baseball fields) and the Lawton Community Schools facilities. This is how often respondents visit each park:

Q8 How often do you and your family use the following parks and recreation facilities?



Perhaps not unexpected, Chancy Lewis Park with the splash pad and large playground was the most popular, with the Lawton Community Schools facilities being the second most visited park. More than 150 respondents said they did not visit the baseball/softball fields at the

Stephayn Sports Complex or the Rocket Football Field at all. A fair number of people---over 100---said they visited Cannon Park a few times per year.

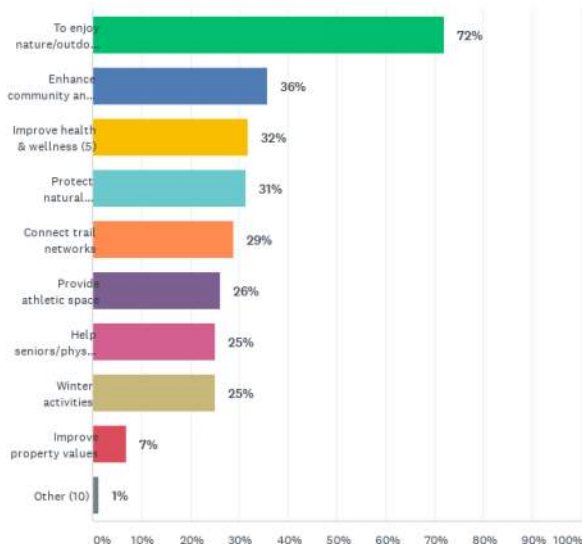
Most of the respondents typically use the Village parks for the playgrounds (173), and 132 people said they frequent the new Splash Pad. Many people use the parks to walk/bike/run (103) or just visit the parks for relaxation (192). Following those activities is use of the Special Use Facilities (Baseball/Softball/Football). Forty-three people said they used parks for "other" reasons.

The Village Council also asked what types of parks and recreation amenities the community thought were important. The survey listed 10 items, including "other". Respondents could pick and prioritize all, some or none of the listed amenities.

By far, the highest response overall was to enjoy nature and outdoors (72%).

Most of the remaining categories all ranged from 36% to 25% and were (in order) Enhance Community and Sense of Place; Improve Health and Wellness;

Q9 Which of the following of parks and recreation amenities are the most important to you?



Protect the Natural Environment and Wildlife; Connect to Regional Trail Networks; Provide Athletic Space and Opportunities; Help Seniors and Physically Challenged Individuals remain Active; and Provide Winter Activities. Improve Property Values only received 7% of the votes. Several "Other" responses included ATV trails.

Next, the Village Council asked what the community's preferences were to improve the parks and recreation system. The survey listed 11 items, including "other", and asked people to list the items according

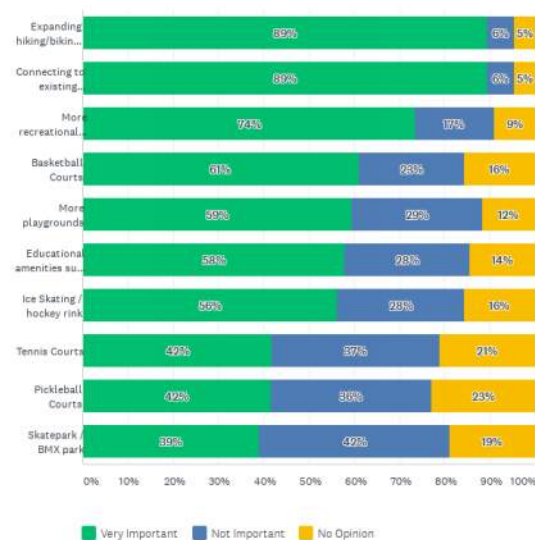
to priorities from: Very Important, Somewhat Important, Important, Not Important and No Opinion. Respondents could pick and prioritize all, some or none of the listed amenities.

The highest response overall was a tie between “expanding Hiking/biking trail network” and “connecting to existing hiking/biking trail networks. The second highest responses were to “expand availability of recreational equipment such as shuffleboard, playground equipment, etc.”. Respondents listed the Skate Park and Tennis Courts as their lowest priority, however due to the low number of youths responding to the survey, the Council will revisit the demand for a Skate Park. Other popular responses supported improving/adding basketball courts and more playgrounds.

Another way to determine priorities for the Village's parks system was to ask respondents to select goals that were most important to them and their families.

Maintaining existing parks and facilities was ranked the highest priority, and close behind was preserving natural areas. The community also felt strong about emphasizing the development of a multi-use trail system, followed by the need for new parks and recreation facilities as well as acquiring land for future parks.

Q7 Indicate your preferences to improve our parks and recreation system.



The final question of the survey was open-ended so that respondents could add general comments about parks in the Village. There was a wide range of discussion topics, some indirectly related to parks, such as concerns about the speed on M40 and the ability to cross the street and unruly teens. Notably, the most common comment was the need for additional hiking/biking trails and to connect them regionally (20 mentions). Additionally, Pickleball Courts, ATV accommodations, an ice rink, and a dog park were requested multiple times.

Goals and Objectives

Developing goals and objectives is an important part of the recreation planning process. The overall goal of a parks and recreation department is to provide recreation opportunities for the community it serves. More specific goals must be based on the demographic characteristics of the population served, the physical and environmental characteristics of the area, and the input of the community.

Goals provide overarching and general ideas of the desires and needs of community members in relation to their parks. Objectives carry out the purpose of these goals. The action plan is the most specific level of planning and it identifies specific projects and programs. These can include organizational, staffing, programming, public information, and operation and maintenance actions.

An overall guide for the recreation goals for the Village of Lawton will be to focus efforts on developing additional programs and recreational opportunities within the community; leveraging development and maintenance efforts by pursuing partnerships, grant funding, and volunteer efforts when appropriate.

The goals and objectives were developed through the Village Council and Administration and incorporate recreation planning best practices and the results of the public input process. The following goals and objectives are numbered for identification purposes only. Each goal is considered to carry an equal degree of importance.

Goal 1: Take advantage of economic development opportunities presented by downtown and commercial development in order to enhance and further parks and recreation objectives.

Parks and recreational facilities are viable economic development tools contributing to an increased quality of life in a community and inspire community pride. Parks and recreational facilities attract visitors to a community to spend money at local businesses.

Objectives

- Develop public access and strong connections to downtown.
- Target development of multi-functional parks and recreational facilities
- Upgrade deteriorating facilities

- Continue to add amenities to park facilities based upon community input and need.

Goal 2: Provide non-motorized trails and bicycle routes for recreational and transportation use.

Trails and bike routes are especially important for the residents of Lawton. They were mentioned frequently by survey respondents as an improvement they would like expanded in the Village. This is a component of a parks system that can be used by people of all ages and abilities.

Objectives

- Expand walking trails and multi-use paths within existing parks.
- Develop a walking and biking trail network across the Village to connect all parks, schools and downtown.
- Improve path surfaces when appropriate.
- Work with neighboring and regional governmental and non-profit entities to develop regional trail network.

Goal 3: Provide multi-generational recreational opportunities and quality leisure time activities with special consideration for activities that improve health and fitness and appeal to all ages within the village.

Health and well-being are an important component of one's quality of life. Lawton can use its parks and recreation facilities to offer activities and programs that will improve the health and fitness of its citizens.

Objectives

- Develop programs and facilities for multi-generational uses.
- Provide both passive and active programming for a variety of ages and abilities of the population.
- Continue to evaluate unmet recreation needs and recommend various programs in line with current trends.
- Provide recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Ensure that improvements and upgrades to park facilities are handicapped-accessible, where feasible.
- Look at new amenities to satisfy various age groups.
- Ensure public parks are safe.

Goal 4: Create community awareness of Lawton recreational opportunities and promote them to citizens and visitors.

Communicating with the public is an important component of any municipal parks and recreation organization. As our population increasingly relies on the Internet for information, the Village needs to take advantage of online opportunities to communicate and interact with citizens.

Objectives

- Work with local education, arts and culture, and civic organizations to provide unique programming opportunities at the Village's recreational sites and other venues.
- Work to enhance social media, web site, and other online opportunities to communicate with the public about Lawton park facilities and events.

Action Plan

ACTION PLAN LIST		
Land Acquisition Priorities		
Chancy Lewis Entrance to expand driveway		
Downtown property for recreational facility expansion		
Project Priorities		
High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Cannon Park		
New benches and trash receptacles	Construct Gazebo	
Chancy Lewis Park		
Pickleball Courts	Investigate ways to improve safety and security	
Fence along M-40 sidewalk	Sight lighting	
Improve restroom facilities	Increase parking	
Tree Trimming		
Expand driveway entrance to improve safety	Create user fees and other revenue sources from park rentals	
Village Conservation Area		
Improve/Create trails	Create regional trail connections	
Stephayn Sports Complex		
Upgrade facilities / consider relocation to downtown	Create regional trail connections	
Pathways / Trails		
Establish a Committee to Master Plan Community Trail Project	Create regional trail connections	
Other Needs & Desires		
Downtown Common Space, a year-round flexible space that will allow for passive recreation, music events, dining, and public gathering		
Facilitate participation in regional park and recreation projects		
Upgrade all park facilities to meet barrier free accessibility requirements, using universal design principals where possible.		

Conclusion

In an effort to provide quality recreational opportunities for its citizens, the Village of Lawton has developed this recreation plan as a tool to guide the development of park and recreational facilities over the next five years. This plan represents the ongoing commitment by the Village to establish recreational goals and objectives for the community. The Plan will also provide the Village of Lawton eligibility for grants from the Department of Natural Resources to assist the community in reaching its recreational goals.

Community input was collected via an online survey conducted in December of 2020. Goals and objectives for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan were then identified based on existing priorities and from the input collected through the survey. From there, Action Plan items were developed and prioritized.

The Village Manager completed the draft Recreation Master Plan document, and it was made available for review at the Village Hall and on the Lawton Village website beginning on December 23, 2020.

The opportunity to review the draft plan and the notice of the public hearing were advertised in the *Courier Leader*, on the Village Website, and in the Village Newsletter. The final opportunity for community input occurred at the advertised public meeting during a Village Council Meeting held prior to adoption of the plan on January 26, 2021. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, this meeting took place virtually from the Lawton Village Hall.

On January 26, 2021, the Lawton Village Council passed a resolution adopting the 2021 – 2025 Village of Lawton Parks and Recreation Master Plan.