

Goal 1

Preserve the County's quality rural character

*Keep productive farms, beautiful natural features,
and a healthy environment*

Objective 1.1: Direct growth towards existing urban areas

Strategies

1. Apply and uphold agricultural preservation zoning by limiting non-farm uses in agricultural districts
2. Work multi-jurisdictionally to establish clear growth boundaries around existing urban areas

Objective 1.2: Support the ability of farmers to continue to actively engage in farming and sustainable agricultural practices

Strategies

1. Coordinate and market farmer's markets throughout the County
2. Actively recruit agribusiness to do business in the County
3. Develop a local-food promotion program
4. Work with local officials to maintain and improve quality of primary roads used for agricultural transport and infrastructure needed to support farming practices
5. Address water quality issues including excess use and waste disposal
6. Update the zoning ordinance to allow for appropriate sized agricultural use in non-agricultural districts

Objective 1.3: Protect natural features and foster a healthier environment

Strategies:

1. Develop ordinances that protect the County's key and unique natural features
2. Work to modify high intensity farming regulations to achieve a balance between successful operations and minimizing the negative impacts on the environment and people's health
3. Continue special efforts and utilize best practices to clean the Pine River, reservoirs, and other key natural assets
4. Clean contaminated sites through brownfield redevelopment and other programs

5. Develop a strategy to address problematic, unhealthy on-site sewage disposal systems, which includes an education program for property owners with on-site sewage system
6. Strengthen coordination between local and state environmental regulations
7. Pursue existing funding opportunities and create incentives for large farms to utilize, maintain, and create green energy
8. Provide adequate funds for county-wide soil conservation service
9. Consider piloting County-wide biodigestion or anaerobic digestion program to serve as a state-wide model
10. Address recycling program gaps by creating a county-wide recycling program
11. Address any ongoing contamination issues associated with the Gratiot County Landfill

Goal 2

Strengthen the existing cities, villages, and hamlets

“Placemake” Gratiot’s downtowns to ensure that they serve as quality community centers

Objective 2.1: Make Gratiot County's downtowns destinations

Strategies:

1. Engage in a coordinated branding effort for the County's downtowns, which can be applied to gateways, signage, and marketing materials
2. Develop or revise local downtown plans to identify key redevelopment areas
3. Protect and enhance historic and unique downtown architecture through regulatory techniques, such as form-based codes
4. Actively engage with various downtown enhancement groups and programs, such as Michigan Main Street Program and the Michigan Downtown Association
5. Streetscape key downtown corridors
6. Form a committee to coordinate and promote local social events, such as festivals, fundraisers, and other community happenings
7. Work to attract quality business that encourage people to spend more time in the downtown, such as sit-down restaurants and entertainment venues
8. Install wayfinding throughout the downtowns

Objective 2.2: Stabilize and enhance existing neighborhoods in and around downtowns

Strategies:

1. Identify potential redevelopment areas for both multi- and single-family developments
2. Identify gaps in desired neighborhood amenities, such as sidewalks and parks, parking, and develop plans to address these gaps
3. Form a land bank to manage vacant, foreclosed, and blighted properties across the County
4. Emphasize enforcing current ordinances and building codes within the residential and business districts

5. Encourage the development of rental properties in and around downtowns
6. Address the need for housing for the County's aging population
7. Continue the conversion of vacant space downtown to second and third story lofts
8. Introduce municipal blight ordinances appropriate to each community and/or more strongly enforce existing ordinances

Goal 3

Provide and maintain quality public services and infrastructure

*Carefully coordinate and plan services to ensure
quality and cost effectiveness*

Objective 3.1: Maintain existing infrastructure

Strategies:

1. Develop phased plans to repair and replace aging sewer, water, road, and non-motorized infrastructure
2. Establish urban service districts (i.e., growth boundaries, see strategy 1.1.2) to help direct growth towards existing infrastructure and reduce the need for expansion
3. Coordinate a strategy to obtain money in aiding maintenance and repair costs

Objectives 3.2: Provide high quality public health and safety services

Strategies:

1. Maintain and improve current mutual aid agreements for emergency, firefighting and police
2. Continuously upgrade emergency medical services
3. Evaluate Countywide Fire Department services and districts to determine necessary improvements or adjustments
4. Identify jurisdictional needs in terms of public safety and create service and infrastructure coverage agreements between jurisdictions
5. Work with the hospital and health department to strengthen mental health services

Objective 3.3: Provide a variety of mobility options

Strategies:

1. Adopt and implement Complete Streets policies
2. Support efforts to improve rail transportation service
3. Work with bus companies to increase service and connections between Gratiot County and Lansing, Grand Rapids, Saginaw and other significant hubs
4. Increase transit services within Gratiot County to help provide better access to necessary services and employment

5. Continue the development of non-motorized paths to increase connectivity between communities in the County
6. Expand membership and funding of the Airport Authority
7. Build a comprehensive senior transit program that serves the entire County

Goal 4

Generate and sustain economic opportunities

Retain, attract and grow quality employers and workforce

Objective 4.1: Promote development and redevelopment of vacant commercial/industrial properties

Strategies:

1. Increase efforts to work with eligible businesses to take advantage of available tax abatement programs
2. Identify, develop conceptual plans, and market key development/redevelopment areas
3. Specifically in Ithaca and Alma, expand existing industrial sites, as well as develop a County-wide industrial park suitable to include a dairy-processing plant
4. Develop or reinstate previous common zoning districts terminology between jurisdictions within County
5. Enhance public utilities to support future industrial growth

Objective 4.2: Help residents develop the skills necessary for employment opportunities

Strategies:

1. Support early childhood initiatives to build literacy and math skills
2. Develop a community college in Gratiot County
3. Continue and expand mentoring/leadership programs
4. Address business trends along with generational changes in the downtown
5. Promote S.T.E.M. education and identify funding opportunities in order to strengthen these subjects
6. Develop business and school partnerships to provide trade school experience
7. Expand on vocational and co-op opportunities
8. Work with hospital and health department to expand prevention efforts to help support a healthy workforce

Objective 4.3: Build and capitalize on Gratiot County's assets to attract economic activity

Strategies:

1. Develop agro-tourism and recreation tourism marketing campaigns

2. Continue to pursue alternative energy companies, market the County as an alternative energy industry hub
3. Build on existing recreational assets and improve connectivity to cities and villages throughout the County
4. Expand and promote food trucks
5. Promote the existing urban farms and farmer's markets
6. Enhance the county's natural corridors, with special attention paid to the green corridors along the Pine River
7. Work with providers to expand wireless/internet services

Goal 5

Provide premier cultural and recreational resources

Develop Gratiot as a cultural and recreational destination that serves people of all generations

Objective 5.1: Provide more public access to the waterfront

Strategies:

1. Acquire additional land to expand the riverwalks and trails
2. Through easements, preserve areas for public access to the river in future riverfront developments
3. Install signage to help direct people to public waterfront parks and trails
4. Continue efforts to address downed trees in the Pine River to allow for use of canoes and kayaks
5. Connect and extend riverwalks throughout the County

Objective 5.2: Provide a robust system of parks, trailways, and other recreational opportunities

Strategies:

1. Create a County-wide recreation authority and community education program administrator, possibly through Gratiot-Isabella RESD
2. Coordinate recreation plans to complement and connect with one another and the Master Plan
3. Explore opportunities to increase the number of parks in northern part of County
4. Continue the expansion of the non-motorized trailway system, become a Michigan "Trail-Town"
5. Support the Healthy Pine River Group in their efforts to develop a plan that comprehensively addresses contamination in the river
6. Enhance natural corridors, such as rivers and trails
7. Develop a strategy to encourage residents to spend recreation time and dollars locally
8. Expand flexibility and use of County parks and recreation millage funds
9. Diversify public recreational opportunities, such as creating dog or water parks
10. Reduce current restrictions on off road vehicle (ORV) use and develop an ORV trail system to help direct this use to appropriate areas

Goal 6

Continue and Increase Good Governance and Inter-Jurisdictional Collaboration

Cultivate strong leadership and County-wide cooperation

Objective 6.1: Retain and attract quality local officials and committee members

Strategies:

1. Implement a public servant mentorship program
2. Engage in trainings provided by entities such as the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and MSU Extension

Objective 6.2: Ensure ongoing collaboration between jurisdictions

Strategies:

1. Form inter-jurisdictional committees to help implement this plan