

# LIVONIA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Brief History.....	5
Railroad and Education Influenced by the Bean Family.....	5
Agriculture and Farming.....	6
Government.....	6
Telephone Service Begins.....	6
Background Information.....	8
Observation #1: Livonia has a relatively Young Population.....	8
Observation #2: Livonia residents tend to have higher incomes.....	8
Observation #3 Livonia residents tend to own larger homes and drive more.....	8
Observation #4: a large percentage of Livonia residents are employed in secondary industries with low levels of overall education.....	9
Conclusion and Summary.....	10
Goals and Strategies.....	11
Goal 1: Maintain the rural atmosphere and lifestyle enjoyed by the residents of Livonia Township.....	11

Goal 2: New development should complement and enhance the beauty and character of the natural landscape. ....	11
Goal 3: Protect the water resources within the Township from pollution and degradation. ....	11
Pattern of Development .....	11
The Desired Pattern of Development .....	12
Future Development Pressure .....	13
Implementation Strategies .....	13
Goal 4: Support efforts to acquire significant natural areas and provide recreational opportunities in Livonia and the surrounding areas for the use and enjoyment of Township residents. ....	14
Implementation Strategies .....	14
Goal 5: Maintain a modest level of taxation in the Township .....	15
Goal 6: Plan and budget for future road maintenance expenses to ensure quality infrastructure and stable property taxes. ....	15
Rate of Taxation .....	15
Reducing Service Costs .....	17
Growing the Tax Base .....	19
Implementation Strategies .....	20
Goal 7: Seek ways to work cooperatively with the City of Zimmerman, to the advantage of both City and Township. ....	21
Goal 8: Discourage unilateral annexations while working with adjacent municipalities to make intelligent annexation decisions. ....	21
Goal 9: Work to establish a strong sense of community amongst the residents of Livonia Township aND Zimmerman. ....	21
Working Cooperatively .....	21
Annexation.....	22
Sense of Community.....	22
Implementation Strategies .....	23
Goal 10: Empower the citizens of Livonia Township to have influence over land use decisions. ....	24
Goal 11: Increase the level of influence that Livonia Township has on land-use related decisions made by Sherburne County.....	24
Goal 12: Strengthen the working relationship with Sherburne County in matters of land use and zoning.....	24
Implementation Strategies .....	26
Goal 13: Create an economic environment that encourages job retention and creation as well as opportunity for business growth.....	27
Goal 14: As a Township, cooperatively seek to grow jobs in the local area for the benefit of everyone, but do not compete with neighboring cities for commercial and industrial tax base. ....	27

Create Jobs .....	27
Grow the Tax Base .....	28
The Value of Competition .....	29
The Role of the Township .....	30
Home-based businesses .....	30
Implementation Strategies .....	30
Goal 15: Provide for aggregate mining that accesses the revenue potential of the resource while protecting the character, environment and future land uses within the Township. ....	31
Implementation Strategies .....	31
Implementation Schedule .....	33
Priorities for 2010/2011 .....	33
Priorities for 2012 .....	35
Priorities for 2013 .....	36
Priorities for 2014 .....	37
Priorities for 2015 .....	37

## INTRODUCTION

Until now, Livonia Township has not had its own formal, community plan, despite efforts to create one. There have been many reasons for this, but largely it has been difficult to understand and articulate the complex – and often contradictory – beliefs and values of the community.

People move to Livonia for the rural character and lifestyle, but that act in itself degrades the rural character and lifestyle that existed prior to their move. This nearly irresolvable contradiction has dominated the discussion for years. Should policies encourage more growth? Should they allow less? In an area that appreciates the limits of government intervention as much as it appreciates its farms and wide open spaces, this has been a difficult debate.

Changes in the overall economy have “helped” in this conversation. By severely dampening the demand for exurban housing, the current recession has changed the debate. Since a return to robust new growth in the pattern that predominated in recent decades does not seem likely in the foreseeable future, a different conversation has evolved.

This new conversation has completely different questions. How do we best create good employment opportunities for residents? How do we continue to have a high quality of life in Livonia Township? How do we afford to maintain the systems we have built without ever-increasing rates of growth? How do we work together to do more with less?

The conversations to answer these questions have been difficult, yes, but they have also begun the process of reestablishing the high value that was traditionally placed on “community” in rural areas like Livonia Township.

The community is seeking to express in this plan that, while Livonia Township is a remarkable place to live, its charm will not be maintained without positive action by its residents. This plan outlines our goals and gives detailed action steps that need to be taken to make these goals reality.

For Livonia Township to be strong – physically, financially and socially – public officials, and the people they represent, will need to be thoughtful and deliberate about the choices they make in the coming years. This plan is designed to help them do so.

## BRIEF HISTORY

Livonia Township, formerly a part of Elk River, was settled in 1856 and organized as a township in 1866. Swedish, Norwegian, German, and English speaking families mainly settled the area. The first settlers in this township were J.H. Felch of Maine, and J. F. Bean of New Hampshire, who settled on section five in 1856. Samuel Hayden located on section nine as well in 1856. These were the first of what has since been know as the Lake Fremont Settlement, just north of the current City of Zimmerman.

Livonia Township then formed into three separate areas of settlement: Lake Fremont, Spencer Settlement and Meadow Vale. Lake Fremont and the southeastern area called the Spencer Settlement were first settled in the mid-1850s, while farmers moved into the Meadow Vale area in the later 1870s. A partial list of the first town officers clearly shows the presence of these men. Supervisors were: B.N. Spencer (Chair) and A. C. Whitney; Clerk, Cyrus Calkins; Justice of the Peace and also Town Clerk, A. T. Lougee; W. Wagner became the Assessor. Later in 1908, when a post office was built in town, Ina Bean was appointed postmistress.

The origin of the name Livonia is said to have been given the Christian name of the wife of Benjamin Spencer. Spencer settled in this township in 1864 and acted as the probate judge of the county for two terms. Lake Fremont was named after the western explorer, John C. Fremont. Lake Fremont originally received its name in 1856, when John Charles Fremont was the Republican candidate for president of the United States. Fremont was the assistant of Nicollet who did surveying and mapping of the upper Mississippi region including Minnesota. Lake Fremont was also given the name of Zimmerman by the Railway Company in honor of Moses Zimmerman who sold the land to the Great Northern Railroad for the rail lines and what later came to be known as the Town of Zimmerman.

Lake Fremont, or Zimmerman, was incorporated in 1912. Meadow Vale has no known historical reference for its name.

## RAILROAD AND EDUCATION INFLUENCED BY THE BEAN FAMILY

When the first stagecoach line was established between Elk River and Princeton, it came over the hill of the present village of Zimmerman, and past the Bean home. The "Road to Princeton" as it came to be called, ran through the township and continued north. A major stopping place for the stagecoaches along this route was the Bean family farm just north of what is now Zimmerman. Travelers could stop, rest their stock, eat and even sleep overnight at the Bean's homestead. A reprint of the family's ledger logs some of the visits, "Oct. 19, 1879, there were five men, three yoke oxen, dinner, \$1.50". Eventually the Great Northern tracks ran parallel to the road.

Back in the stagecoach days, the Bean home was a drop-off point for the mail as well. Joseph Bean was appointed the first postmaster. Later, when the railroad went through, someone from the Bean Family would meet the train at 5:00 a.m. for the mail.

The first school taught in Livonia, in 1859, was in the house of J.F. Bean. By 1881, the township had divided in four districts. Bessie Bean organized the first Sherburne County School on February 25, 1856. In 1859 she began teaching children at her home, which was also the rest stop for travelers along the “Road to Princeton”.

The Bean family farm was clearly an asset to the township and helped shape the area. As mentioned above, the Joe F. Bean Family farm was the site of the first school for the township, an early post office for the area, and a stopping place for travelers in the late 1800s. The Original Bean family farm remains in the family today and is owned by Joe Bean, Jr. and is also now the location of the North Forty Christmas Tree Farm. The site was designated a Century Farm by the Sherburne County Historical Society in November 1989.

## AGRICULTURE AND FARMING

Early settlers of the Township were farmers who developed mixed crop farms. The land in 1881 was described as “somewhat undulating” according to accounts in a book titled, *History of the Upper Mississippi Valley*. The eastern part being covered with a good growth of timber. The southwestern portion contained some good timber, but was mostly brush land. The northwestern part had a scattering growth of burr oak, and the soil was “somewhat sandy”.

In the Town of Zimmerman, the usual mix of consumer related businesses flourished with a thriving local trade. A livery stable, the creamery, a small bank, several general stores, and a lumberyard prospered in the community. According to *History of the Upper Mississippi Valley*, the agricultural report for 1880 shows the following products in Livonia: Wheat, 11,252 bushels; oats, 5,711 bushels; corn, 8,533 bushels; rye, 1,008 bushels; potatoes, 1,995 bushels; beans, 112 bushels; sugar cane, 641 gallons; cultivated hay, 1,166 tons; apples, 114 bushels; wool, 195 pounds; butter, 10,475 pounds; and honey, 160 pounds.

## GOVERNMENT

Minnesota has 1,793 townships. Typically, the geographical area consists of a six by six mile section of land. Livonia Township was formerly a part of Elk River, but organized as Livonia Township in 1866. The City of Zimmerman lies entirely within Livonia Township. The population of Livonia Township in 1900 was 501. The village of Lake Fremont, or Zimmerman, was unincorporated so the population was counted as Township residents. In 1950, the population was 455 for the Township and 169 in Zimmerman. By 1997, the numbers were 3,605 for Livonia, and 2,330 for the City of Zimmerman. The 2000 census reports 4,391 for a total population for Livonia Township.

## TELEPHONE SERVICE BEGINS

Telephone service began about 1903 between Elk River and Zimmerman. The Meadow Vale Rural Telephone Company was maintained by Anton Hanson during the early days, and later by the shareholders of the company. They all helped to maintain the line with little pay. Later, Melvin

Westberg and Wilbur Taylor were left to care for the line until Bell Telephone took over the line. Some early shareholders included Sandusky, Frank Sellon, Harry Mickelson, Fred Keasling, A.B. Carson and Elmer Taylor. Originally, there were only two phones in Zimmerman, one at Hanson Hardware and the other was at the William and Maggie Swanson's General Store. If there was an emergency in the area, one long general ring alerted the community to help.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Historical information taken from the Baldwin Township website, [baldwintownship.govoffice.com](http://baldwintownship.govoffice.com), which excerpts from *Historically Speaking, Taste of Livonia's History*, Volume 16, Fall 2001.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As part of the planning process, it is critical that there be an understanding of the general demographic trends impacting the area. This section is not meant to be an exhaustive dissertation on all the data collected and analyzed as part of assembling the plan, but instead a highlight of the most significant factors that are shaping Livonia's future.

In general, Livonia Township is home to a population that is younger, has higher incomes, owns larger homes, has more people living at home, has more debt, and has less education than the population of Minnesota as a whole. This is based on some key observations taken from demographic data.

### OBSERVATION #1: LIVONIA HAS A RELATIVELY YOUNG POPULATION

Exurban areas like Livonia Township tend to be populated by young families seeking a larger home for the investment. They also are generally seeking a higher standard of living than they perceive is available in the inner or outer suburbs. This seems to hold true in Livonia Township.

The median age of Livonia residents (32.7 for males and 32.5 for females) is slightly below the state median of 35.4. While Livonia residents are, at the median, younger than the average Minnesotan, they also live in households that are typically larger (3.2 people) than the median (2.5 people). This is indicative of the large number of families that have moved to the area in recent years.

Many residents moved to Livonia Township to buy a house. The rate of home ownership is tremendously high at 97%, which is significantly greater than the state average of 75%. Most of these families are relatively new homeowners, with a full 90% still having debt on their homes and carrying a mortgage of some type.

### OBSERVATION #2: LIVONIA RESIDENTS TEND TO HAVE HIGHER INCOMES

Due to a younger age, many households in Livonia Township are double-income families. This shows up in income statistics, which estimate that the median household income in Livonia was \$77,072 in 2008, compared to just \$57,288 in Minnesota at large. Only 1.8% of Livonia residents lived with income below the poverty rate in 2008 compared to 7.9% throughout Minnesota.

A higher income level has provided Livonia residents with the financial flexibility to purchase more expensive homes. The median house value in Livonia in 2008 was \$306,997 compared to a Minnesota median of \$213,800. It should be noted that 2008 was the peak of the housing bubble, an economic trend that raised housing values in exurban areas to very high levels. The gap between Livonia and the rest of the state has likely narrowed significantly since.

### OBSERVATION #3 LIVONIA RESIDENTS TEND TO OWN LARGER HOMES AND DRIVE MORE

The more expensive housing stock is also relatively newer and larger than most of Minnesota. From 1970 on, Livonia Township has outpaced the average Minnesota town in the total number of new



homes. These homes have been bigger too, with nearly 50% more homes in Livonia than in the average Minnesota town reporting “nine rooms or more”. People have sought out Livonia Township as a place to have a larger home, which, until recently, has both increased demand and housing values.

In a sense, Livonia residents have largely swapped a higher quality of life (measured in a larger home and more property) for a longer commute. The average commute time is 33 minutes, which exceeds national and state averages. Despite the long drive, 88% of commuters indicated in 2008 that they drive alone to work.

Car ownership is nearly a requirement for living in Livonia Township. Less than one half of one percent of Livonia households indicated they did not own a car, while 41% of households own more than two vehicles.

#### OBSERVATION #4: A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF LIVONIA RESIDENTS ARE EMPLOYED IN SECONDARY INDUSTRIES WITH LOW LEVELS OF OVERALL EDUCATION

The most common jobs for male workers in Livonia Township are in “secondary” industries, that is, industries that benefit and support the growth and health of other “primary” industries. Jobs in secondary industries are impacted by changes in the primary industries that serve the area and in the broader market. In 2008, the most common industries for males to work in were:

- Construction (21%)
- Machinery (8%)
- Metal and metal products (5%)
- Repair and maintenance (5%)
- Computer and electronic products (4%)

In contrast, the most common jobs for female workers in 2008 tended to be in primary industries, although the jobs were more diffuse across the market than for males, which had a high concentration in construction. The most common industries for females to work in were:

- Health care (11%)
- Educational services (8%)
- Finance and insurance (8%)
- Public administration (6%)

Historically, the economy of Livonia Township was based on agriculture. Over time, this shifted to growth and the industries that support growth such as construction. Obviously, this makes the population and the economy of Livonia Township vulnerable to a long slowdown in the economy or a shift in consumer preference away from exurban living.

Unfortunately, while Livonia Township has higher rates of high school graduation than the rest of the state, its population has lower levels of secondary education than the average Minnesota city. Livonia ranks below the state norms in levels of attainment of associates, bachelors and masters degrees.<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The statistics validate what many members of the public have indicated; they moved to Livonia Township for what they perceived to be a higher standard of living. This higher standard of living included a nice house, good mobility and quality educational opportunities for school age children. The burdens of a long commute to a job were offset by the quality of the work -- including good compensation -- and the lifestyle enjoyed in the time away from work. The fact that, up until recently, home values were rising dramatically also helped with finances and validated the choice to locate to Livonia. The fantastic thing is that this was attainable by a population that did not need a high level of education for success.

The housing crisis that began in 2007, combined with the short interval of very high gas prices, the high rise in unemployment and the collapse of the construction industry, will alter the statistics in Livonia dramatically. The transformation taking place in the larger economy is going to impact the residents of Livonia Township more quickly and dramatically than most other parts of the state.

Exurban living has historically required a robust economy, cheap energy, continual Federal and State investments in transportation and further investments in growth. Those factors existed prior to 2008, but the conditions have changed dramatically since and nearly every one of the support systems for exurban living has been threatened.

Nobody is certain how long the current economic downturn will last or what the transformation in our economy will ultimately bring for places like Livonia. The challenge for Township residents is to use its assets – largely its people and their hard-working ethic – to not only establish a viable local economy, but to bring about a renewed definition of what constitutes a “high quality-of-life” in a remote, rural setting.

The remainder of this plan outlines Livonia resident’s vision for the future, the goals of the community and the steps we will all take together to accomplish those goals.

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<sup>2</sup> The data in this section comes from the U.S. Census, the Minnesota State Demographer and the web site [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com).

## GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Participants in the planning process met over a number of months to develop goals for the Township. The goals set a course of action that Township Officials should work towards through the next generation. They were established with the broad, unanimous consensus of all of those involved in preparing the plan and validated by a public survey. Future updates of this plan should affirm these goals, but change them only where a similar, broad consensus indicates need for a change.

Once the community's goals were established, near-term implementation strategies were developed. While these strategies have general consensus amongst plan participants as well, they are only meant to set a near-term course of action. At least annually, Township Officials should review these strategies and choose priorities for action in the coming year. Periodically, the public should be engaged again to review progress, measure results against the stated goals and develop new strategies for implementing the Township's vision.

**GOAL 1: MAINTAIN THE RURAL ATMOSPHERE AND LIFESTYLE ENJOYED BY THE RESIDENTS OF LIVONIA TOWNSHIP.**

**GOAL 2: NEW DEVELOPMENT SHOULD COMPLEMENT AND ENHANCE THE BEAUTY AND CHARACTER OF THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE.**

**GOAL 3: PROTECT THE WATER RESOURCES WITHIN THE TOWNSHIP FROM POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION.**

Livonia Township a beautiful place to live. One of the primary attractions of living in the township is being surrounded by the natural beauty. Of course, the rural atmosphere that makes Livonia Township a wonderful place to be is threatened by the very people that move there to enjoy it. There is a constant balancing act between the rights of property owners to make greater use of their property through development and the rights of property owners to retain the value – both perceived and real – that comes from living in natural isolation.

The goals of the township require that the value of the rural atmosphere be retained. While new development should be allowed, they must be done in such a way that it adds value to the community. This can be accomplished where the pattern of development maintains and strengthens the rural character and protects the natural environment from damage.

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### PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT

There is no question that the residents of Livonia Township value the rural landscape. Every respondent to a community survey supported a goal to “maintain the rural atmosphere,” with a majority indicating this was a high priority. A primary reason why people moved to Livonia in large numbers over the recent decades is the rural setting.

Where there is debate, however, is over the pattern of new development. Should that pattern reflect the historic framework of larger tracts and farmsteads connected by rural roads? Should the pattern continue the relatively recent approach of exurban-style lots in the 2½ to 5 acre size range with the standard suburban style of road hierarchy<sup>3</sup>? Or should the pattern reflect a more urbanizing approach with more commercial and industrial development?

For many, this is really a question of what we desire (farmsteads), what we will sometimes tolerate (exurban lots) and what we moved to Livonia to avoid (intense development). The unedited comments on this subject from survey respondents show the underlying tension (see appendix).

The debate over the pattern of development is a natural byproduct of the way in which Livonia Township has developed. When people choose to purchase a home in the township, they are valuing a number of different aspects beyond purchase price. They are also calculating the time and expense of their commute, the schools their children will attend, the quality of the shops, restaurants, churches and other gathering places in and near the community as well as the quality of the community they will live in.

For Livonia residents, this means that the farm fields, pastures and forests that make up the majority of the landscape have value that they include – right or wrong - in the value of their home. There is some obvious irony to this since their home was likely built in a field, pasture or forest that was equally valued by someone else. This reality – the perceived value of the landscape around us – is not unique to Livonia Township, but it is real. Understanding that, this plan can pose and answer the following question:

*Is there a pattern of development Livonia Township can adopt that will add to the overall value of the landscape?*

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## THE DESIRED PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT

The character of Livonia Township, and the desired development pattern, is that of a rural township. This would include predominantly large tracts of land, farmsteads and croplands. The more this development pattern is reinforced, the more the rural atmosphere of the township is preserved and enhanced.

The atmosphere of the township is further enhanced by an increase in the urban character of the City of Zimmerman. Where Zimmerman grows out into the township, the rural atmosphere is degraded. If Zimmerman instead grows through infill and vertical expansion, jobs and economic opportunity are added without a corresponding compromise in character. This same approach would apply to the neighboring city of Elk River.

A static landscape does not address the desire of some property owners to further develop their property or the need to close the gap between the long-term maintenance liabilities of the township and the corresponding tax base. For the rural character of the township to be maintained and the small-town character of Zimmerman (and, to a lesser extent, Elk River) be enhanced over the long-term, these two issues must be addressed.

For farmers and holders of large tracts, the depressed market for their property in the near term will keep them from developing. Until the vacant lots in existing subdivisions are sold and developed, there is not

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<sup>3</sup> A suburban-style road hierarchy classifies roads as local, collector and arterial. Local roads feed traffic to collector roads. Collector roads feed traffic to arterial roads. This creates a funneling of automobiles to key transportation corridors.

likely to be much pressure to subdivide additional tracts. To go along with this reality, the values of these properties need to be adjusted to reflect agricultural worth, not development potential.

To address the financial disparities in existing developments, both for the township and for the individual property owners, some flexibility needs to be provided. More modest street sections and other strategies to reduce long-term service costs are a critical first step. Flexibility for property owners needing additional revenue to stay in their homes can also help increase values by incorporating duplex sites, accessory dwelling units and compatible home occupations.

If and when development pressure returns to Livonia Township, the Township needs to be set up to direct that development to maturing subdivisions instead of the large, rural tracts and to the urban areas of Zimmerman. Zoning can be combined with more advanced concepts like transfer-of-development-rights to ensure that the entire community benefits from future growth.

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## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE

For better or worse, the landscape in Livonia Township will likely remain static in the near future, and perhaps longer. The recent downturn in the housing market has had the greatest impact on exurban areas, like Livonia. In 2009, more people moved out of the exurban areas of the Minneapolis/St. Paul region than moved in, the first time this has ever happened<sup>4</sup>.

Once the economy picks up, it is not clear that there will be a return to robust growth in places like Livonia Township. This gives residents time to examine their development pattern and decide exactly how they desire to grow. It will also likely afford them an opportunity to take future development at a less feverish pace.

On the other hand, the lack of demand may also create some desperation on behalf of those that planned on their land as their retirement. Having a clear vision of the future development pattern is going to help town officials when they have to make difficult decisions in those situations.

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## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

To meet these goals, Livonia Township will seek to implement the following strategies:

- Work with the Minnesota Land Trust to develop a policy to encourage landowners to place their land into a permanent conservation easement.
- Establish a Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) monitoring program to ensure ongoing inspection and monitoring of sewage treatment systems.
- Establish a limited set of land use codes to create a local process for regulating subdivisions, limited infill of existing subdivisions, the placement of towers, aggregating mining operations and other significant land use requests that may negatively impact the quality of life in the Township.
- Require that large tracts of land that are developed through the platting process be subdivided using conservation design principles.
- Develop a memorandum of understanding with Sherburne County that would reserve day-to-day land use decision making with the county and delegate decision making authority to the Township for subdivisions and other complex land use requests.

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<sup>4</sup> *Reverse migration: Flight to the exurbs stops cold*, Star Tribune, April 12, 2010

- Designate a Town Planner/Architect to review subdivision and infill proposals for consistency with the Town's codes and plans.
- Lobby for a taxation system that accurately values agricultural land based on the value related to agricultural returns. Support efforts to repeal taxation approaches that assess agricultural lands at values that assume imminent development. Support reasonable efforts to recoup lost tax revenue from agricultural properties that do develop.
- Meet with area legislatures to advocate for changes in property tax policy.
- Research options for establishing a Transfer of Development Rights program in coordination with the city of Zimmerman. In such an arrangement, targeted preservation areas of Livonia Township would generally be sending areas and targeted growth areas of Zimmerman would generally be receiving areas.

**GOAL 4: SUPPORT EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE SIGNIFICANT NATURAL AREAS AND PROVIDE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN LIVONIA AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS FOR THE USE AND ENJOYMENT OF TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS.**

One of the reasons Livonia Township residents generally live in the township is because they enjoy the rural lifestyle, including a close interaction with the natural environment. With properties being generously-sized, there is not a huge demand for formal park space the way there would be in an urban setting.

Parks in Livonia Township are quite different than those found in a city. There are no tennis courts or balls fields. Instead, large tracts of land and open spaces are the norm. Ideally these would be connected by a system of trails so that the lands could provide both open space and recreational value to residents.

Residents indicated that they generally supported trail connections and modest improvements to existing parks and open spaces within the town. Amid other budget concerns, there is a reluctance to take on a larger project or commit to the long-term maintenance of recreational infrastructure without an outside partner. Despite this, the Township needs to be open to acquiring more park land and open space and for preservation if the right opportunity presents itself.

The City of Zimmerman provides formal park amenities that are utilized by township residents. Livonia Township needs to work with Zimmerman to improve these facilities for the use and enjoyment of city and township residents alike.

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**IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

To meet these goals, Livonia Township will seek to implement the following strategies:

- Meet with the City of Zimmerman to discuss parks and ways in which Livonia Township may support a long-term parks and recreation strategy.
- Continue to require that all new developments take potential trail connections into account as part of their design.
- Continue to pursue grants for park and trail planning and construction.

- Provide opportunities for residents to donate land as well as time and money for the acquisition and improvement of local parks.

GOAL 5: MAINTAIN A MODEST LEVEL OF TAXATION IN THE TOWNSHIP.

GOAL 6: PLAN AND BUDGET FOR FUTURE ROAD MAINTENANCE EXPENSES TO ENSURE QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND STABLE PROPERTY TAXES.

This goal received unanimous support from the respondents of the community survey and was a higher priority for respondents than any other goal. While many have indicated that the level of taxation is, indeed, modest, others have a different interpretation. Some of the written comments provided by the public include:

- *I consider the taxation to be more than "modest".*
- *We all pay way too much in taxes.*
- *My house has lost 30% value in the last 2 years yet my taxes have gone up 33% does this seem right to you? Not to me.*
- *We pay a bit more if we have to drive into the Twin Cities for work, we should not have to keep increasing taxes, especially now.*
- *Just stick to the basic needs of the twp, nothing fancy.*
- *Live within our means and don't rely on a constant stream of state funding. Obviously the state cannot live within theirs and are not a reliable source.*
- *That's one of the reasons [modest level of taxation] many people have moved out to rural areas.*
- *spend less = less taxes<sup>5</sup>*

The last comment, that spending less will equate to less taxes, may be true in a simplistic sense but has many implications relating to the other goals in this plan. If maintaining a modest level of taxation is the highest priority of the township, our approach to our other core values need to be reevaluated. This is a healthy part of the planning process that this plan tries to address.

Implementing strategies to maintain a modest level of taxation requires an understanding of how taxation levels are determined.

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## RATE OF TAXATION

The amount of taxes paid and collected are primarily a function of four different variables<sup>6</sup>. For this analysis we will call them:

- Property value (the assessed value of a property),

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<sup>5</sup> Taken from results of the Community Survey, November 2009

<sup>6</sup> One-time grants, user fees and other minor sources of income are also available to the Township, but these are not significant or stable revenue streams.

- Property tax classification rate (the rate of taxation based on the use of the property, eg. Residential homestead, Residential non-homestead, Commercial),
- Township tax rate (the rate of taxation set by the township), and
- Spending (the amount of revenue needed by the township to balance the town’s budget).

These values relate to each other through the following equation:

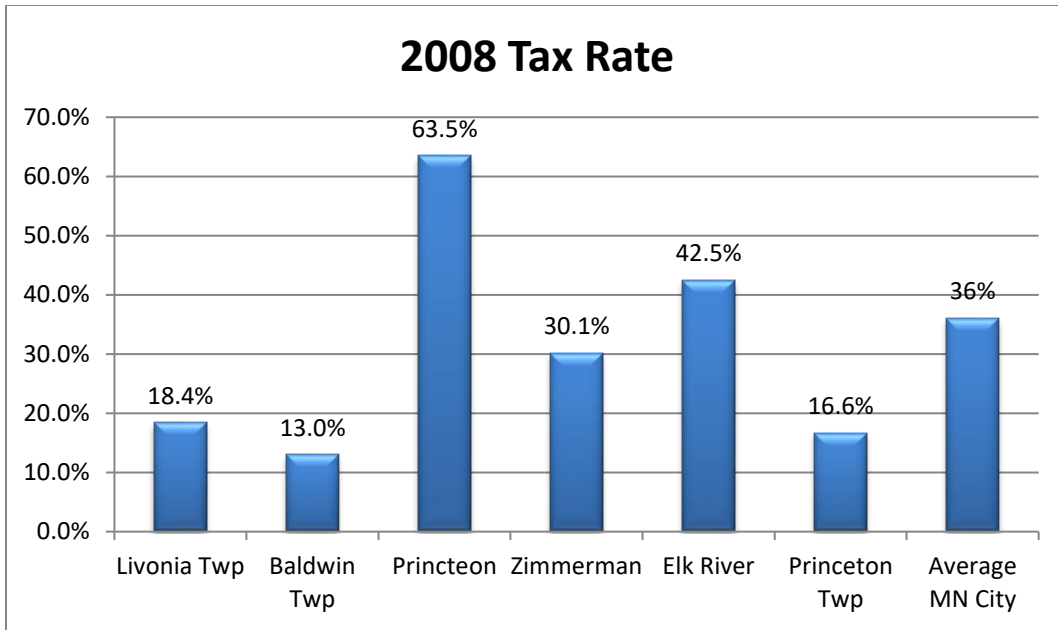
$$(\text{Property value}) \times (\text{Property tax classification rate}) \times (\text{Township tax rate}) = \text{Spending}$$

The township has direct control over two of these variables: the township tax rate and the total amount of spending. Property values are set by the County Assessor and the property tax classification rate is established by the Legislature. Since tax classification rates are fairly stable for most properties, the following three scenarios outline possible responses for property value fluctuations.

- **Rising Property Values.** With rising property values, the township is in a strong position. If spending is held steady, the overall rate of taxation decreases. Spending can even increase so long as it does not increase as fast as values are rising. Property values have been rising steadily from the mid-1990’s through 2007, so this is a condition the township is familiar with.
- **Declining Property Values.** Declining property values represent the most difficult challenge. Even if spending is held steady, the township tax rate would need to increase. Holding the rate steady would necessitate a decrease in spending. This is an extremely difficult position for the township because costs continue to climb and certain obligations must ultimately be met. This forces higher tax rates on property owners that are, at the same time, losing value. Starting in 2008, many properties in Livonia Township have declined in value.
- **Stagnant Property Values.** If property values are holding steady, it still creates a difficult position for the Township. While costs continue to rise, the value is not rising accordingly. Higher rates of taxation then must apply to maintain service levels or there must be cuts in service. In the current economy, many are simply hoping for housing price stability in the near-term.

The “modest” rate of taxation indicated in this goal correlates to the fact that tax rates in Livonia Township are half of the state average city and generally lower than neighboring governments.





The rate of taxation has remained relatively stable in Livonia in recent years as both the tax base and the amount of spending has risen. Between 2003 and 2008, the tax capacity of the township increased 101% while the levy increased 120%. In other words, while the property values grew, the rate of spending grew more quickly.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Taxable Tax Capacity</b>	\$2,733,587	\$3,244,614	\$3,905,167	\$4,455,058	\$5,193,792	\$5,496,304
<b>Net Tax Levy</b>	\$459,161	\$538,995	\$591,086	\$711,740	\$815,373	\$1,011,540
<b>Tax Rate</b>	16.8%	16.6%	15.1%	16.0%	15.7%	18.4%

If the Township is going to maintain or decrease current levels of taxation over the long term, then the cost of providing services needs to decline, the tax base needs to grow, or both.

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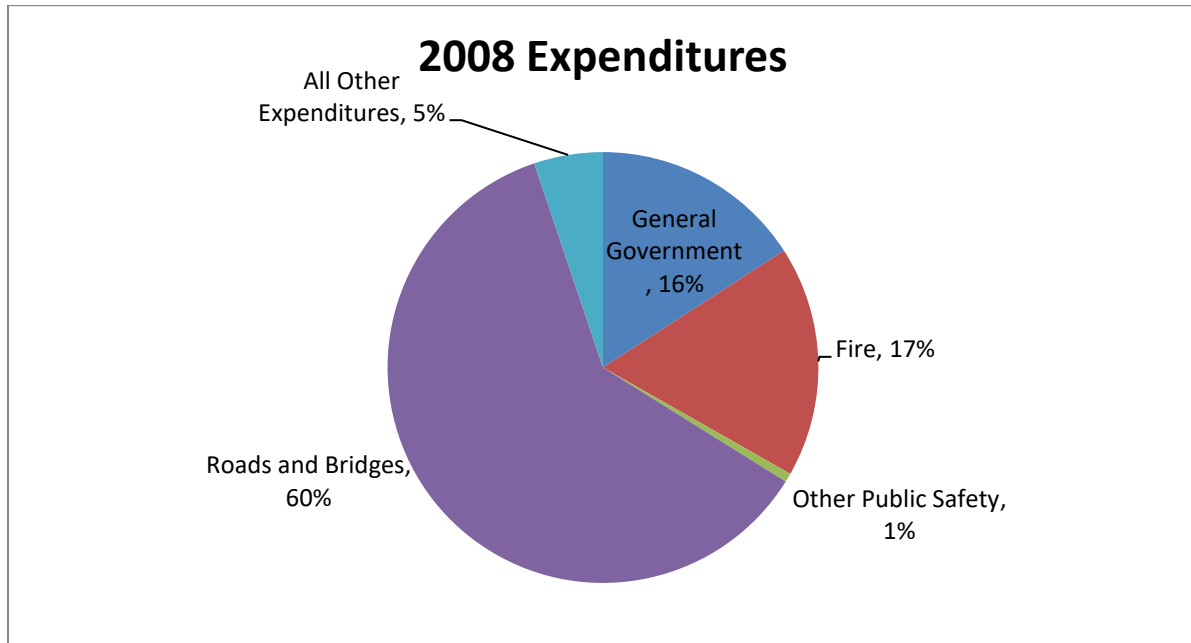
#### REDUCING SERVICE COSTS

The budget of Livonia Township, like a typical Minnesota town, consists of three principle expenditures:

1. General government
2. Public safety
3. Road maintenance

For Livonia, by far the greatest expense in the budget is for road maintenance. In 2008, a full sixty percent of the budget went to transportation improvements. Through intensive maintenance, Livonia

Township is extending the life of its roadways from a typical 20 to 25 years to between 40 and 60 years. The Township's Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) tracks the condition of each road segment and projects costs and a timetable for future maintenance.

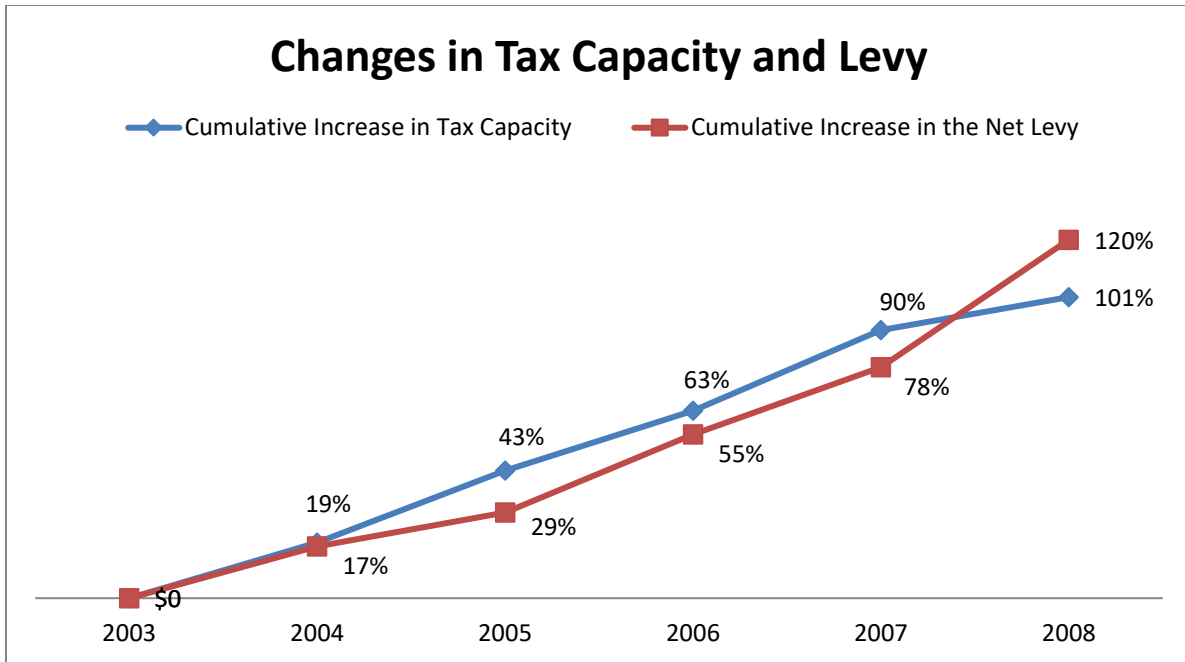


While it is certainly possible that reduction could be made in the General Government and Public Safety budgets, the reality is that Livonia Township operates in a fairly low-cost, efficient way and there are not many alternatives for providing for public safety. If spending must be reduced to maintain a modest rate of taxation, that will inevitably mean reductions in the road budget.

There are two aspects of the township's approach to roads that will impact potential budget cuts. First, the township already budgets for and performs aggressive maintenance on its roads. This focus on maintenance – basically maximizing the return on prior large capital investments – is one key strategy to controlling costs, and the township is already doing it.

Second, the infrastructure in much of the township is generally new and in decent shape. A lot of it has been built by developers, with private money, and then the maintenance has been turned over to the township. This has meant increased tax base without much in the way of increased costs. As this infrastructure ages and requires more maintenance there will be a budget shortfall.

In reality, this effect has already started to happen. While the tax base grew in recent years, spending has grown at an even faster pace. The allocation has also shifted to roads, a trend that will likely continue as roads age. Maintaining a modest tax rate through reductions in spending will mean dramatically slowing the rate of growth.



#### GROWING THE TAX BASE

Since 2003, the township was able to dramatically increase the net levy without impacting the rate of taxation because the tax base was also growing rapidly. That is no longer the case. In the current economic crisis, the tax base is in decline in Livonia as well as in other exurban areas. Housing prices are declining and new development has ceased.

A strategy to growth the town tax base would be risky. First, it assumes that the township is capable of inducing new growth. In reality, the township has few unique tools that it can use in that regard. It also assumes that any new growth that would happen would generate more in tax base than they would require in services. That would be a departure from the current development pattern. As one survey respondent indicated:

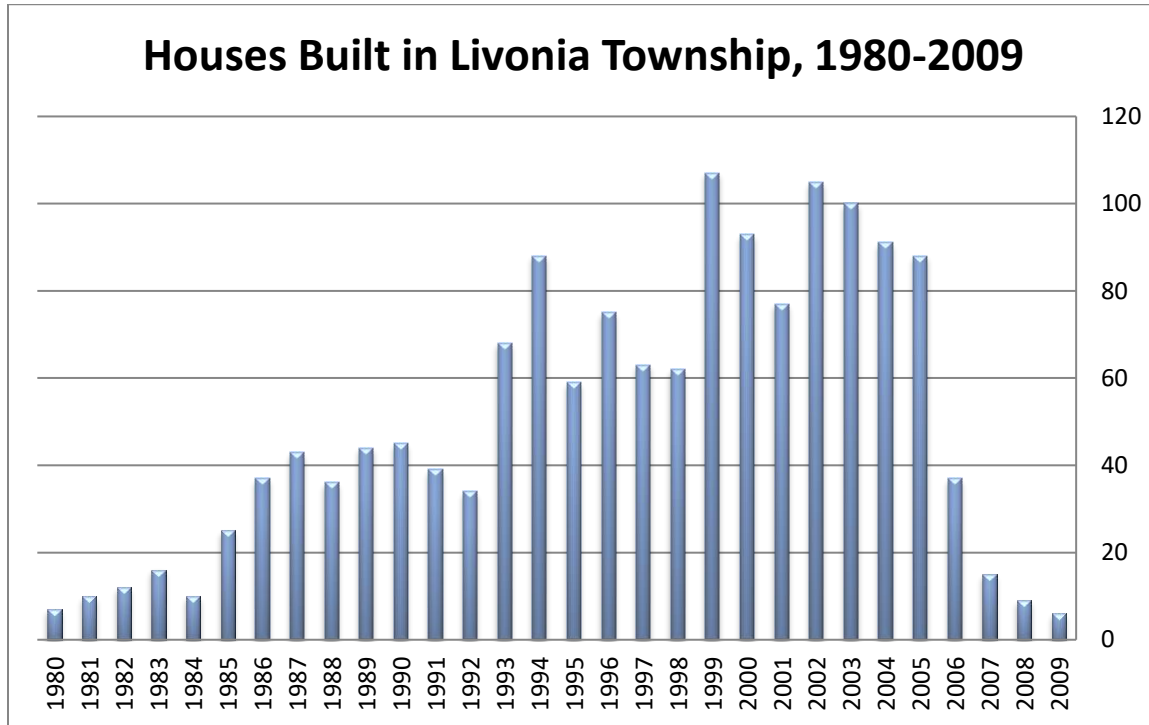
*We need to bring in enough taxes to maintain roads. However, encouraging business growth to try and pay for this is not the answer. In fact, businesses tend to use the roads more which leads to more maintenance. Zimmerman residents were fed this line that bringing in more business would lower their taxes. Just the opposite has happened.*

If the township were to invest money to grow the tax base, it is not clear it would be successful. However, without a financial investment, the township would be at the mercy of the same market forces that are negatively impacting the tax base of other exurban areas. There are many downward pressures that have to be overcome to restart the pattern of growth. Those include:

1. Continued high unemployment, which drives down home prices.
2. The eventual end of low interest rates.
3. Reduction in government aid and transfer payments to local units of government.

4. A reduction in money spent on highway expansion projects.
5. Reduced borrowing capacity amongst governments and individuals.
6. Volatility in fuel prices.

The following graph of new houses built indicates that Livonia Township has returned to 1980's (pre-boom) levels.



It is likely that, no matter what the township may do to try and induce new construction, the rate of growth is going to remain slow. The Township needs to anticipate and plan for more modest levels of growth in the future.

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#### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

To meet these goals, Livonia Township will seek to implement the following strategies:

- Develop a policy for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of new growth.
- Evaluate the use of *subordinate service districts* as a mechanism to cover long-term maintenance costs.
- Update the Township's road standards to ensure that a cost-effective standard is being utilized.
- Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of vacating low-volume segments of the Township road system.
- Establish a committee to work with Zimmerman on identifying vacant commercial space for new businesses to locate.
- Develop an assessment policy for local roads.

- ❑ Evaluate alternatives for coordinating garbage collection service with the City of Zimmerman to reduce wear on roads from multiple service providers.
- ❑ Continue to have the supervisors annually tour each road and review and update the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP).
- ❑ Distribute the CIP to residents through the township web site.
- ❑ Use the Capital Improvements Plan to make a 10-year budget projection for the Township's annual meeting.
- ❑ Schedule time at each annual meeting to show photographs of projects that have been completed in the Township over the past year.
- ❑ Develop and enforce standards for right-of-way encroachments.
- ❑ Use the township's newsletter to inform people on taxes, budgets and projects.

GOAL 7: SEEK WAYS TO WORK COOPERATIVELY WITH THE CITY OF ZIMMERMAN, TO THE ADVANTAGE OF BOTH CITY AND TOWNSHIP.

GOAL 8: DISCOURAGE UNILATERAL ANNEXATIONS WHILE WORKING WITH ADJACENT MUNICIPALITIES TO MAKE INTELLIGENT ANNEXATION DECISIONS.

GOAL 9: WORK TO ESTABLISH A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONGST THE RESIDENTS OF LIVONIA TOWNSHIP AND ZIMMERMAN.

The people of Livonia Township understand that their ability to work cooperatively together is a key to future prosperity. This includes its relationship with the neighboring cities of Zimmerman and Elk River as well as simply working together as a community. In an age of diminishing public resources, getting the most out of local knowledge and capital is going to be an advantage for everyone.

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#### WORKING COOPERATIVELY

Livonia Township surrounds the City of Zimmerman. This creates a natural interaction between the residents of the town and the city. It is not a stretch to say that a healthy and vibrant Zimmerman would benefit the Township, while conversely a city that struggles will negatively impact Town residents.

While many Livonia Township residents travel outside of the immediate area to work, shop and recreate, there is a consensus that there would be a benefit to being able to do these things locally. This is especially true if there is another spike in gasoline prices, as there was in 2008 when prices floated above four dollars per gallon.

A cooperative working relationship between the Township and the City could lower costs for everyone. A partnership can give Zimmerman added confidence to make long-term investments in the community. By assisting the City in leveraging the area's assets, Livonia Township can improve its own prosperity.

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## ANNEXATION

Unilateral annexation is a threat to a healthy relationship. Cities, whether it is Zimmerman or Elk River, that annex property as a way to quickly add tax base may experience a near-term advantage but ultimately these transactions almost always bring more liability and expense than they generate in revenue.

The same principles apply to Livonia Township. Where townships seek to “act like cities” and add commercial and industrial enterprises that depend on proximity to the urban commercial areas and/or public services, the gains are short-term while there are significant long-term expenses. This type of development pattern in a township often induces annexation requests.

An ongoing conversation with neighboring cities will allow everyone to plan for the future. If the cities of Zimmerman and Elk River know and understand the intentions of Livonia Township, they can confidently make the large capital investments in infrastructure necessary to sustain their communities. Likewise, if Livonia Township residents know and understand the future development pattern of the adjacent cities, they can plan accordingly and anticipate the reaction of the cities to actions the township may take.

Everyone would benefit from long-term, orderly annexation agreements that codify the positive relationships that exist between Livonia Township and the adjacent cities of Zimmerman and Elk River.

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## SENSE OF COMMUNITY

It is difficult to establish a “sense of community” in an exurban area like Livonia Township. There are a number of physical barriers that add to the inherent social factors. A sense-of-community is something that arises from a collective culture, shared experiences or a common lifestyle. It is not something can be imposed, but it can be understood and, over time, it can be enhanced.

In a physical sense, the residents of Livonia Township live a lifestyle that is disconnected from each other. This is by design. Many residents moved to the township for more space, for more independence and to have a degree of solitude. If they wanted to be actively connected to everyone around them, they would have moved to an urban area. The large lots connected by wide roads allow people to pass through each day without any involuntary interaction with the others that live in the neighborhood.

This is not unique to modern times. Rural areas have long held a certain majesty for those seeking to escape and live a more independent, rugged existence. What is unique to modern times is the transportation system and how our use of highways, roads and streets have changed the character of the natural gathering places that used to be part of life in a small town.

Prior to the highway era (1950’s), small towns maintained their historic structure, which was essentially a dense grid centered around a railroad stop. Commercial and residential areas were largely mixed in walkable neighborhoods, with some concentrations of each where forces of agglomeration dictated. This dense “town” (urban area) would be surrounded by a low-density rural area, mostly farmsteads.

In this setting there were a number of natural gathering spots. The coffee shop, the local restaurant, the corner grocer, the churches, the school and the town hall all existed in a pedestrian-oriented environment. For those in town, they were close, as was their job and other stops they would need to make throughout a day. For those in the rural surroundings, coming to town meant immersion in the local, connected culture. At a minimum, this would happen at least every Sunday morning.

Contrast a trip along country roads by a car or by foot in the 1940's with a typical modern trip to town. In the latter, one would get into a car in the garage. The auto-opener would lift the door and allow the car to move out into the local road without even leaving the car. The road, a high-capacity section designed for speed and efficiency of movement, makes the trip quick. There is typically no interaction with a fellow-resident, except maybe a quick wave in passing an oncoming vehicle. Once the destination is reached, one would park (unless there is a drive-through), enter the store and complete the transaction, and then return to the vehicle for a return trip home. Again, there is not even a need to get out of the car until securely in the garage.

The lack of a sense-of community in Livonia Township has little to do with the character of the people that now live here. It has everything to do with the physical layout of the community we live in. With Zimmerman continuing to evolve into an auto-centric community, the natural gathering places that used to exist are going away. Forced gathering places – social events, regular meeting, etc... - still bring people together, but in a more formal, less spontaneous way.

Creating a sense of community will require the residents of Livonia Township and Zimmerman to work together to reconnect the bonds that made the “town” of Zimmerman a focal-point for community life.

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## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

To meet these goals, Livonia Township will seek to implement the following strategies:

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- Continue to coordinate with the cities of Zimmerman and Elk River to share snowplowing on roads that run across jurisdictions.
- Evaluate alternatives for coordinating garbage collection service with the City of Zimmerman.
- Have liaisons (city to township, township to city) attend each other's meetings on a regular basis (every 2 months for example).
- Hold periodic joint meetings between the Town Board and the Zimmerman City Council. Share a summary of meeting minutes with each other.
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- Work with Zimmerman to periodically reexamine whether or not a full-time fire chief is needed or whether these duties can be handled with a part-time position.
- Support actions by the Minnesota Association of Townships to change state statutes in regards to annexation with the following principles:
  - State should not favor cities over townships.
  - Townships and cities should be required to pass separate referendums in contested case annexations.

- Cities need to justify the "need" for annexation; should not be based on short-term economics.
- Promised improvements need to be completed within an agreed-upon timeframe.
- Develop an online mechanism for residents to receive information and provide input and feedback on key issues.
- Update the Township's road standards to ensure that local streets retain a neighborhood context, including narrow widths and increased vegetation.

GOAL 10: EMPOWER THE CITIZENS OF LIVONIA TOWNSHIP TO HAVE INFLUENCE OVER LAND USE DECISIONS.

GOAL 11: INCREASE THE LEVEL OF INFLUENCE THAT LIVONIA TOWNSHIP HAS ON LAND-USE RELATED DECISIONS MADE BY SHERBURNE COUNTY.

GOAL 12: STRENGTHEN THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH SHERBURNE COUNTY IN MATTERS OF LAND USE AND ZONING.

The State of Minnesota has legislated to empower both counties (Chapter 394 of State statutes) and cities (Chapter 462 of State Statutes) to have direct control over land use regulation. If exercised, cities have nearly exclusive control over land use within their limits<sup>7</sup> while counties would have default control, and in some instances an obligation, over all areas not covered by cities. Cities are not required to be at-least-as-restrictive as counties in most instances, as is sometimes thought.

The authorities that townships have in regards to land use are much more complicated and ambiguous. Chapter 394 of State Statutes gives townships the right to enact land use regulations that are not,

*inconsistent with or less restrictive than the standards prescribed in the official controls adopted by the board.*<sup>8</sup>

This same section indicates that townships may adopt controls that are more restrictive than the county.

*Nothing in this section shall limit any town's power to adopt official controls, including shoreland regulations which are more restrictive than provided in the controls adopted by the county.*<sup>9</sup>

These provisions further provide for further mechanisms whereby townships may have the authority of a municipality<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Cities must follow state guidelines and must meet other mandates, some of which may come from the county, such as regulations over stormwater runoff or sewage treatment system regulations.

<sup>8</sup> Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 394.33, Subdivision 1

<sup>9</sup> Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 394.33, Subdivision 1

<sup>10</sup> Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 394.33, Subdivision 2



The ambiguity arises in the inherent conflict that townships are allowed the authority of a municipality (which is exclusive of the county) but are restrained to be at least as restrictive and consistent with the county (a restraint municipalities do not have). There are disagreements, and has even been litigation, in regards to the authorities of townships in relation to counties.

Livonia Township has maintained good relations with Sherburne County and intends to continue in that regard. The goals of the township, as developed and supported by the residents, would have Town officials work within that relationship to exert more influence over local land use policy and decisions.

For the sake of this planning effort, Livonia Township assumes the following authorities exist within state statutes:

1. Sherburne County has default control over all land use and subdivision regulations within the township.
2. Where Livonia Township would choose to adopt a regulation that would be more restrictive than Sherburne County's regulations, the township would be required to administer and enforce that provision, unless Sherburne County agreed to adopt it and administer it. This would not automatically preclude Sherburne County from administering their less-restrictive standard.
3. Livonia Township may enact regulations that would be less restrictive than Sherburne County, but that would not supersede the regulatory authority of the county, nor would it preclude property owners from having the meet, through a county permitting process, the county's more rigorous standard.
4. Where Livonia Township would seek to have joint or exclusive authority for regulations that are overlapping, that would need to be accomplished through a joint agreement or a memorandum of understanding between Livonia Township and Sherburne County.<sup>11</sup>

Today, Sherburne County staff handles all permit processing and administrative approvals for land use requests within the township. County-appointed officials review subdivision requests, variances and special use requests made on properties within the township.

Most of the time this system works well. The county has levels of expertise, a permanency of staff and the institutional memory needed to develop and administer regulations. However, having major decisions involving Livonia Township made by people who do not live anywhere near the township, which is a case with the majority of the County Board, Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment, can sometimes create conflict. As written by one resident in response to a community survey question,

*"I'm not sure I understand this but I know that what is good for Sherburne County is not necessarily good for us as a rural township. We do need to have our own say above the larger bodies of government sometimes."*

Controlling land use exclusively at the county level can have other, unintended consequences. A standard approach, where one set of uniform regulations is administered over the entire county, has

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<sup>11</sup> This list is not intended to be an exclusive listing of rights and authorities, or to even be a legally binding representation of what rights and authorities may exist. It is not a legal position. This list is simply a statement of principles that Livonia Township seeks to use to communicate cooperatively with Sherburne County.

created a homogeneous development pattern that makes the county vulnerable to market changes, like the current housing correction and economic slowdown. A lack of diversity in the style of development and the type of housing has put the county at risk and is forcing it to absorb a disproportionate share of the current hardship.

A key to the future prosperity of Livonia Township is the ability to exert greater influence and, at key points, direct control over the land use pattern within the township. This necessarily requires the township to work closely with Sherburne County in a way that adds to the county's overall effectiveness and increases their understanding of Livonia Township. It may require that some regulations be strengthened, while it will certainly necessitate that added flexibility be provided in other areas of the Code. It will also require a degree of coordination between land use planning and transportation planning activities that does not currently exist.

To be successful, Livonia Township needs to understand and strive to meet Sherburne County's priorities and objectives. In our current system, it is only by working cooperatively that the best of both systems can be fully leveraged, to the benefit of all.

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## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

To meet these goals, Livonia Township will seek to implement the following strategies:

- ❑ Establish a limited set of land use codes to create a local process for regulating subdivisions, limited infill of existing subdivisions, the placement of towers, aggregating mining operations and other significant land use requests that may negatively impact the quality of life in the Township.
- ❑ Require that large tracts of land that are developed through the platting process be subdivided using conservation design principles.
- ❑ Develop a memorandum of understanding with Sherburne County that would reserve day-to-day land use decision making with the county and delegate decision making authority to the Township for subdivisions and other complex land use requests.
- ❑ Add an open forum opportunity to Town Board meetings.
- ❑ Continue to expand communication opportunities using technology such as social media (Facebook and Twitter) and online distribution of information.
- ❑ Hold a community get-together, such as a picnic, annually as a way to bring people together.
- ❑ Utilize the town hall for regular gatherings on a diverse range of topics. Designate an organizer to bring in speakers and arrange discussions on topics impacting township residents.
- ❑ Empower committees of interested residents to generate ideas and oversee implementation of Comprehensive Plan items.
- ❑ Hold annual policy input sessions to review implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.
- ❑ Schedule open forum meetings using a roundtable discussion format that includes public officials from Zimmerman and Sherburne County.
- ❑ Establish a more formal process for exchanging minutes and agendas with Zimmerman and Sherburne County and providing timely input to both on issues of mutual concern.
- ❑ Have a representative of Livonia Township periodically brief the Sherburne County Board on township plans and accomplishments.
- ❑ Establish standards for commercial roadside signage, such as billboards.

GOAL 13: CREATE AN ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES JOB RETENTION AND CREATION AS WELL AS OPPORTUNITY FOR BUSINESS GROWTH.

GOAL 14: AS A TOWNSHIP, COOPERATIVELY SEEK TO GROW JOBS IN THE LOCAL AREA FOR THE BENEFIT OF EVERYONE, BUT DO NOT COMPETE WITH NEIGHBORING CITIES FOR COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL TAX BASE.

There are two main reasons that residents give for wanting additional business growth. One is the desire to create jobs. The other is to improve the tax base under the assumption that the additional tax base will keep overall taxes down. While these two objectives sometimes go together, they can also work against each other.

Retaining and creating jobs along with growing the tax base are powerful concepts that motivate many towns and cities across the nation to embrace commercial and industrial development by up-zoning<sup>12</sup> property, investing in infrastructure, offering business subsidies and relaxing regulations, when necessary. While Livonia Township seeks to retain jobs, grow jobs and enhance the tax base, there is an understanding that there are many layers of complexity involved. The standard approaches to growth are not the answer.

Livonia Township seeks solutions that create quality, stable jobs for the residents of the township. These jobs can be, but do not have to be, in Livonia Township.

The Township is also working to build resiliency in the tax structure, which not only includes sustainable growth in the tax base but a long-term commitment to reducing spending liabilities. Growth must be strategically accomplished so as to provide more long-term benefit for the community than it creates in expense.

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## CREATE JOBS

The ideal job that can be created for Livonia Township residents would have a few specific traits:

- It would pay a good wage or salary.
- It would be stable, having limited chance of being relocated.
- It would be easily accessible by a Livonia Township resident.
- It would be in the private sector.
- It would create a demand for other goods or services that could be obtained locally.

Not all jobs will be ideal, but focusing on these characteristics illuminates some of the shortcomings of the standard approach to attracting business development. If the township were to try and attract a large employer to town, they may be able to provide well-paying jobs, but now the township is attached to one large employer. There is a certain amount of risk associated with that outcome, particularly if it is

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<sup>12</sup> Up-zoning is the idea of taking property that is zoned for agricultural or low-density residential use and changing the zoning to a classification that allows for more intensive use, such as commercial or industrial.

a business that could be relocated. Additionally, there is nothing to say those jobs would be reserved for township residents. It is just as likely that someone outside the community would commute – even long distances – for a well-paying job. A large employer is also likely to be connected to professional services outside the community, thus their accounting, legal work, printing, etc., would be performed somewhere else, not in the Livonia area. These are not bad or unwanted jobs, but the lack of spinoff to the overall community and the high risk involved makes them less than ideal.

The standard approach seeks to entice one business that would create fifty new jobs. An approach more in tune with Livonia Township’s desires and needs would seek to take fifty existing businesses and grow one new job in each. That is the same number of jobs, but with dramatically different implications.

A diversity of the jobs would make the overall economic situation less risky. While the wages may or may not be as good as the one large employer, the mix provides opportunity for people to grow and change employment within the community. Most importantly, by growing local businesses, the demand for local goods and services grows. This is especially true when those businesses are connected to each other and located so interaction, and commerce, is convenient.

By focusing on capturing local demand within the community – an approach called “import-replacement”<sup>13</sup>, the community can incrementally create jobs over time that each adds to the overall stability and resiliency of the town.

The key to a successful import-replacement strategy is to have a high degree of connectivity between local business owners. This would occur most naturally in parts of Zimmerman already developed for business growth, where businesses are located in close proximity to each other and there is naturally a higher degree of interaction. Townships like Livonia struggle to do import-replacement because the physical layout of the town tends to isolate individual businesses on their own lot.

To have good job prospects for its residents, Livonia Township needs to work with the City of Zimmerman to identify the land use strategy, public investments and community initiatives necessary to identify and create import-replacement opportunities.

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## GROW THE TAX BASE

The ideal business for growing the tax base is also easy to identify. It would be one that would provide significant additional tax base without the need for any additional publicly-maintained infrastructure. Even in this ideal situation, however, commercial and industrial development does not always provide the anticipated benefits.

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<sup>13</sup> An import-replacement strategy would have local businesses seek to expand to offer as many supporting goods and services as there is local demand. That way businesses are not going outside of the community to “import” those goods or services, but instead of obtaining them locally. Import-replacement is more than simply “Buy Local”. It is not a strategy that asks people to overpay to support a local market, but one that connects businesses so that they can competitively provide goods and services to each other.

Cities and townships across the state are enticed by the prospect of commercial development. The main reason is that a commercial property will pay double the property tax that a homesteaded residential property of the same value would pay. The logic from the municipality's standpoint is that the higher rate of taxation will translate into more revenue and thus lower taxes, more spending money or both.

Unfortunately, the recent economic downturn has hit commercial properties hard. Since January of 2008, nationwide commercial real estate has lost 45% of its value<sup>14</sup>. It is suspected that, like housing values, the decline has been steeper in exurban areas like Livonia Township. The Federal Reserve is spending hundreds of billions of dollars assisting banks that invested in commercial real estate.

Even if residents strongly desired to open up Livonia Township to commercial and industrial development to improve the tax base (and many have indicated that they do not<sup>15</sup>), economically it is not a viable strategy. And with the glut of commercial properties available in the region, it likely will not be a workable strategy for some time.

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## THE VALUE OF COMPETITION

People do not move to Livonia Township to live a collective lifestyle. Rugged individualism and a spirit of competition are strong components of the local psyche. A number of residents that support an import-replacement strategy and a de-emphasis on attracting a large, commercial tax base, are appalled by the notion that Livonia Township would not seek to compete for its share of growth.

There are two reasons why it is important for Livonia Township to be supportive of the local cities in this regard. The first has already been mentioned in regards to import-replacement. This strategy requires an agglomeration of interconnected businesses that each grow, over time, to meet the needs of the others. The relative isolation of development patterns in the township do not lend themselves well to an import-replacement strategy.

But second, and perhaps most critically, is that area communities – particularly Zimmerman – need to make significant, strategic investments if there is to be robust job creation locally. These are not investments that can be made in a competitive market but more in the vein of a well-run utility. With the specter of aggressive competition from just outside its boundaries, Zimmerman is less likely to be able to do what it takes to ensure a prosperous local economy.

Competition is healthy, but the local competitive environment in terms of economic development is really between Zimmerman, Princeton and Elk River. Livonia Township's interest in that competition is in being on Team Zimmerman.

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<sup>14</sup> Statistic provided by an organization called Redfields to Greenfields. They can be found online at [www.rftgf.org](http://www.rftgf.org).

<sup>15</sup> See responses to community survey included in Appendix A.

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## THE ROLE OF THE TOWNSHIP

The role of Livonia Township in matters of economic development and job creation is limited, but critical. The township needs to actively support, inform and react to the economic development efforts of Zimmerman and Sherburne County. Great clout can be obtained by being partners in the endeavor of local job creation.

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## HOME-BASED BUSINESSES

Home-based businesses are the perfect fit for Livonia Township residents. In nearly every instance, they are compatible with the neighborhood they are in, non-polluting, do not generate additional traffic and pay competitive compensation. They are also great, low-cost incubators for businesses that will hopefully grow into a more traditional business location.

Livonia Township needs to embrace the idea of home-based businesses and seek ways to make them more successful and integrated into the local economy.

Livonia Township also needs to embrace value-added activities around farming operations. Regulations should not prevent farmers from selling to a local market, nor should they be overly restrictive on the types of processing that can take place as part of a farming operation. In a corporate-farming system, farmers receive only pennies of every dollar spent by consumers on food. The rest goes to transport, processing, storing, packaging and marketing costs. The more of these value-added operations that can be retained the local economy, the higher the local return and the more opportunity that will be available for area residents.

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## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

To meet these goals, Livonia Township will seek to implement the following strategies:

- ❑ Meet with officials from Zimmerman to discuss economic development, job creation and the principles contained in this plan.
- ❑ In coordination with the City of Zimmerman, adopt an economic development strategy of import-replacement that seeks to grow existing businesses by capturing local demand within the community.
- ❑ Support development policies in Zimmerman that encourage a higher use of existing infrastructure investments instead of horizontal expansion.
- ❑ Meet with economic development officials from Sherburne County to brief them on the Township's approach and ask for their support in strengthening an import-replacement strategy that relies primarily on job creation within the city of Zimmerman.
- ❑ Work with Sherburne County to create additional flexibility in the land use regulations for home-based businesses.
- ❑ Work with Sherburne County to expand the allowable farm-based commercial uses that would be accessory to existing agricultural operations.
- ❑ Resist requests to change zoning classifications to accommodate new commercial or industrial development if that new enterprise could locate in the city of Zimmerman.

**GOAL 15: PROVIDE FOR AGGREGATE MINING THAT ACCESSES THE REVENUE POTENTIAL OF THE RESOURCE WHILE PROTECTING THE CHARACTER, ENVIRONMENT AND FUTURE LAND USES WITHIN THE TOWNSHIP.**

There is an ongoing and significant need for aggregate resources, both in Sherburne County and statewide. Quality aggregate is needed for road construction and as a foundational material for other building projects. Unfortunately, mining aggregate can be an unpleasant process for residential areas with dust, noise and heavy, commercial traffic intruding on otherwise tranquil neighborhoods.

The inherent conflict between residential development and aggregate mining has caused the Minnesota Legislature to require counties to plan for the mining of aggregate materials prior to the development of the underlying property<sup>16</sup>. Ideally, before the land is subdivided, the aggregate would be extracted and the site restored to a condition that makes it conducive to building homes or commercial properties.

In places like Livonia Township where there is already a substantial amount of development, avoiding land use conflicts is difficult. An extractive use that goes in is likely to impact an existing home or neighborhood negatively.

Additionally, implied in the State mandate for extraction prior to development is an assumption that all land will ultimately be developed. While this may be true for an inner-ring suburb, it would take Livonia Township decades to reach a “build-out” condition, even if the town returned to the vigorous growth rate of 2004/2005. A prohibition on development prior to extraction would leave many properties in limbo awaiting a use that may not happen.

Livonia Township seeks to provide for mining of aggregate resources that is consistent with the overall character of the community. To reduce land use conflicts, permits for aggregate extraction should be tied to a specific project so that nuisance impacts of dust, noise and additional traffic are temporary and minimized.

Additionally, it is critical that a closure plan be in place for all mining operations. The township needs to be involved in this process, either as the permit authority or as a formal part of the enforcement of the closure plan, so that Township officials can ensure that standards are being met.

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## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

To meet these goals, Livonia Township will seek to implement the following strategies:

- Establish an overlay district that designates the areas available for aggregate extraction. Such areas should have a high value as an aggregate resource, should not be environmentally sensitive and should not adversely impact existing neighborhoods. Before properties in these areas are zoned more intensively, the aggregate resource should be extracted.

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<sup>16</sup> This only impacts lands where there is a significant deposit of quality aggregate.

- Develop a local ordinance and permitting process for aggregate extraction that supplements the regulations of Sherburne County.
- Investigate a fast-approval process for aggregate companies that pre-purchase a mining option from property owners. The concept would be to exchange an expedited approval process at the time of mining for a longer, more thorough planning process and a guarantee that there will not be a conflict between mining and development interests.



## IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The planning process has value in that it generates a greater understanding of the community and a common vision the direction it should take in the future. The core sections of this plan details the goals and policies of the community as well as strategies for implementation.

To provide a more detailed roadmap for implementation, the following pages present a year-by-year checklist for plan implementation. It lists each task, what section(s) of the plan it comes from and who is expected to lead the effort to complete the task.

This checklist should be used by public officials to focus efforts and resources and to monitor progress on plan implementation.

PRIORITIES FOR 2010/2011		
Completed (X)	Specific Implementation Task	Who will get this done.
	Update the Township's road standards to ensure that a cost-effective standard is being utilized.	
	Continue to have the supervisors annually tour each road and review and update the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP).	
	Use the township's newsletter to inform people on taxes, budgets and projects.	
	Have liaisons (city to township, township to city) attend each other's meetings on a regular basis (every 2 months for example).	
	Hold periodic joint meetings between the Town Board and the Zimmerman City Council. Share a summary of meeting minutes with each other.	
	Establish standards for commercial roadside signage, such as billboards.	
	Support actions by the Minnesota Association of Townships to change state statutes in regards to annexation with the following principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ State should not favor cities over townships.</li> <li>○ Townships and cities should be required to pass separate referendums in contested case annexations.</li> <li>○ Cities need to justify the "need" for annexation; should not be based on short-term economics.</li> <li>○ Promised improvements need to be completed within an agreed-upon timeframe.</li> </ul>	
	Update the Township's road standards to ensure that local streets retain a neighborhood context, including narrow widths and increased vegetation.	

<p>Establish a limited set of land use codes to create a local process for regulating subdivisions, limited infill of existing subdivisions, the placement of towers, aggregating mining operations and other significant land use requests that may negatively impact the quality of life in the Township.</p>
<p>Develop a memorandum of understanding with Sherburne County that would reserve day-to-day land use decision making with the county and delegate decision making authority to the Township for subdivisions and other complex land use requests.</p>
<p>Add an open forum opportunity to Town Board meetings.</p>
<p>Hold a community get-together, such as a picnic, annually as a way to bring people together.</p>
<p>Empower committees of interested residents to generate ideas and oversee implementation of Comprehensive Plan items.</p>
<p>Hold annual policy input sessions to review implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.</p>
<p>Establish a more formal process for exchanging minutes and agendas with Zimmerman and Sherburne County and providing timely input to both on issues of mutual concern.</p>
<p>Meet with officials from Zimmerman to discuss economic development, job creation and the principles contained in this plan.</p>
<p>Work with Sherburne County to create additional flexibility in the land use regulations for home-based businesses.</p>
<p>Work with Sherburne County to expand the allowable farm-based commercial uses that would be accessory to existing agricultural operations.</p>
<p>Resist requests to change zoning classifications to accommodate new commercial or industrial development if that new enterprise could locate in the city of Zimmerman.</p>
<p>Establish an overlay district that designates the areas available for aggregate extraction. Such areas should have a high value as an aggregate resource, should not be environmentally sensitive and should not adversely impact existing neighborhoods. Before properties in these areas are zoned more intensively, the aggregate resource should be extracted.</p>
<p>Develop a local ordinance and permitting process for aggregate extraction that supplements the regulations of Sherburne County.</p>

PRIORITIES FOR 2012

Completed (X)	Specific Implementation Task	Who will get this done.
	Develop a policy for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of new growth.	
	Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of vacating low-volume segments of the Township road system.	
	Develop an assessment policy for local roads.	
	Distribute the CIP to residents through the township web site.	
	Use the Capital Improvements Plan to make a 10-year budget projection for the Township's annual meeting.	
	Schedule time at each annual meeting to show photographs of projects that have been completed in the Township over the past year.	
	Coordinate with the cities of Zimmerman and Elk River to share snowplowing on roads that run across jurisdictions.	
	Work with Zimmerman to reexamine whether or not a full-time fire chief is needed or whether these duties can be handled with a part-time position.	
	Develop an online mechanism for residents to receive information and provide input and feedback on key issues.	
	Designate a Town Planner/Architect to review subdivision and infill proposals for consistency with the Town's codes and plans.	
	Meet with area legislatures to advocate for changes in property tax policy.	
	Continue to expand communication opportunities using technology such as social media (Facebook and Twitter) and online distribution of information.	
	Utilize the town hall for regular gatherings on a diverse range of topics. Designate an organizer to bring in speakers and arrange discussions on topics impacting township residents.	
	Schedule open forum meetings using a roundtable discussion format that includes public officials from Zimmerman and Sherburne County.	
	Have a representative of Livonia Township periodically brief the representative to the Sherburne County Board on township plans and accomplishments.	

Support development policies in Zimmerman that encourage a higher use of existing infrastructure investments instead of horizontal expansion.
Meet with economic development officials from Sherburne County to brief them on the Township’s approach and ask for their support in strengthening an import-replacement strategy that relies primarily on job creation within the city of Zimmerman.
Meet with the City of Zimmerman to discuss parks and ways in which Livonia Township may support a long-terms parks and recreation strategy.

PRIORITIES FOR 2013		
Completed (X)	Specific Implementation Task	Who will get this done.
	Establish a committee to work with Zimmerman on identifying vacant commercial space for new businesses to locate.	
	Develop and enforce standards for right-of-way encroachments.	
	Require that large tracts of land that are developed through the platting process be subdivided using conservation design principles.	
	Lobby for a taxation system that accurately values agricultural land based on the value related to agricultural returns. Support efforts to repeal taxation approaches that assess agricultural lands at values that assume imminent development. Support reasonable efforts to recoup lost tax revenue from agricultural properties that do develop.	
	In coordination with the City of Zimmerman, adopt an economic development strategy of import-replacement that seeks to grow existing businesses by capturing local demand within the community.	
	Require that all new developments take potential trail connections into account as part of their design.	

PRIORITIES FOR 2014

Completed (X)	Specific Implementation Task	Who will get this done.
	Evaluate the use of <i>subordinate service districts</i> as a mechanism to cover long-term maintenance costs.	
	Evaluate alternatives for coordinating garbage collection service with the City of Zimmerman to reduce wear on roads from multiple service providers.	
	Evaluate alternatives for coordinating garbage collection service with the City of Zimmerman.	
	Establish a Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) monitoring program to ensure ongoing inspection and monitoring of sewage treatment systems.	
	Research options for establishing a Transfer of Development Rights program in coordination with the city of Zimmerman. In such an arrangement, targeted preservation areas of Livonia Township would generally be sending areas and targeted growth areas of Zimmerman would generally be receiving areas.	
	Investigate a fast-approval process for aggregate companies that pre-purchase a mining option from property owners. The concept would be to exchange an expedited approval process at the time of mining for a longer, more thorough planning process and a guarantee that there will not be a conflict between mining and development interests.	

PRIORITIES FOR 2015

Completed (X)	Specific Implementation Task	Who will get this done.
	Establish wells throughout the township for refilling so the fire department does not have to go back to the city to fill.	
	Work with the Minnesota Land Trust to develop a policy to encourage landowners to place their land into a permanent conservation easement.	