



Donald N. Pennington *Land Use Planning And Consulting*

5427 Pine View Drive Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

734/485-1445 Fax 734/485-0212

Manchester Area Joint Master Plan Report

Freedom Township Planning Commission

Agricultural Section Review Report

January 8, 2009

1. Purpose:

- 1.01** The purpose of this memo is to outline changes in policies, objectives, or goals suggested in the Draft Manchester Area Joint Master Plan dated 2009. The following sections point out areas for the draft that need further understanding.
- 1.02** The Draft Sections reviewed are Community Facilities, and items from the Agricultural Section.

2. Community Facilities Section:

2.01 Public Services Objectives

A. Consider adoption of an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) consistent across all MCJPC jurisdictions to assure against over-building public services.

The use of ALL in this context means that Freedom Township would have to consider a Capital Improvement Plan for infrastructure in order to create a baseline for the minimum standards to “assure against over-building public services”. Additionally, the use of the word “Adequate” is arbitrary and should not be used in this context. Who would establish the adequacy of utility design, the MCJPC or each municipality, and additionally how would this be enforced in an Ordinance for this area because of the inherent differences between Manchester Village and the Townships.

B. Seek opportunities for shared services among MCJPC communities, with Washtenaw County and with the Manchester School District.

This statement should be evaluated closely because of the need for specificity. If services are going to be shared then they should be defined in order to make sure the Township does not become a shared payment donor for services they will not use. This is an open-ended statement that will lead to a payment request for a “fair share” of unspecified services.

C. Develop strategic intergovernmental agreements among MCJPC communities to meet the goals of this joint master plan, including, but not limited to, 425 Agreements.

Public Services should be developed by proper planning practices based on sound and defensible planning policies. The concern is that these agreements have a very defined scope based on a utility need that is shared by each agency. At this time, what are the shared needs that Freedom has with its neighbors? When or if the Township considers a Capital Improvement Plan and agreements are needed then this statement could be utilized but it should be clarified to account for transition timing. The statement as written could lead the Township into developing documents sooner than later.

2.02 **Strom Water Management Objectives**

- A. Landscape open drainage courses to enhance the open space or landscape scheme of the site or area, or design them to function as natural wetlands (although existing wetlands should not be incorporated into site drainage systems).**

The concept here is to try and give a visual landscape consistent with creating a vegetative buffer zone after development happens. This statement should be expanded to include the use of native species consistent with the best management practices designed by the Michigan State Extension Service or other Governmental Agencies. This would protect the current open space design and keep the local character for this region.

- B. Prohibit extensive clearing of vegetation which buffers the wetlands from erosion and filters sediments and pollution from run-off.**

Although I agree with this statement, it should be limited to future development projects and not limit agricultural uses. This was the wish of the Freedom Township Planning Commission during the development of the last Freedom Master Plan Draft. In the region we should narrow the focus of this statement for a better understanding how we can protect a buffer area and not limit agricultural practices.

2.03 **Planned Growth Objectives**

- A. Establish a Growth Transition Area around villages and hamlets, and restrict more intensive development to within those areas.**

Urban Limit Lines, Urban Services Areas, Growth Transition Areas, and other planning words are based on infrastructure development in order to prevent sprawl or unnecessary growth. This statement implies all hamlets and villages. The Township should not include the Lake Area or Fredonia Hamlet until they are ready to do so, and it should not be implied in any document that this area could be open for infrastructure development before the Township has made this decision. One lesson that has been learned by using these planning techniques, was that there becomes an expected benefit and an unexpected developer speculation based on this area. Timelines and speculation drive the development not proper planning techniques. So when establishing these areas they should be limited to only those areas that can currently serve the community and not to imply all villages and hamlets.

- B. Require the Village and MCJPC townships to jointly review and approve new developments within the Growth Transition Area using identical PUD requirements.**

Common ordinances should be required within growth zones, but they may not be compatible with Township Policy. This may create inconsistency with other Township Ordinances and surely require special sections of design guidelines, and ordinance restrictions specialized for this area.

- C. Ensure that the Village and MCJPC Townships cooperate in the development of a coordinated planning and zoning program aimed at guiding growth in a sustainable pattern, utilizing the Growth Transition Area as the locus of most growth.**

This one statement mandates a "coordinated planning and zoning program". In order to make this happen the region would have to recognize a shift that the Village would offer all of the services needed by the residents of the MCJPC members. The belief that the regional commercial goals of the Zeeb Road Corridor or the regional shopping center Briarwood services our community well, but when creating a Growth Transition Area and focusing a planning and zoning program to sustainability for the MCJPC, it should be sustainable for all of its residents. A developer could identify this area for the next regional center based on this statement, and although this does give protections are the MCJPC member communities ready for such development?

D. Consider the Hamlet of Bridgewater as a second, smaller Growth Transition Area, limited by the capacity of the sewer system and Township zoning ordinances.

The same concerns expressed above should be expressed here, does Bridgewater understand the implications or future requirements from neighboring communities to become a regional service center. Additionally, what area would be next for inclusion as a regional service provider? The availability of sewer or water should not dictate a Growth Transition Area, because a community should look a sustainable development before focusing intense development into any region. Calling out certain areas within the MCJPC should not be done because this could place an undo expectation on future areas that develop infrastructure.

2.04 Infrastructure Objectives

A. Provide recreational facilities that meet the needs of all components of the population.

This means the expansion of soccer fields, baseball fields, ice arenas, and other sports complexes from current areas. In most cases these areas would be treated as a commercial establishment because of the lighting, traffic, food or pro shop, and facility size needed to support these establishments. This statement requires all communities to potentially grant a recreational facility in order to provide this service to all residents in the region. This was not a goal of Freedom Township.

B. Encourage cooperation with the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission/ Natural Areas Preservation Program (NAPP), Manchester Community School District, Manchester District Library, civic organizations, sports leagues, the business community, and other non-profit groups in providing recreational facilities and programs.

Again this statement suggests that the MCJPC Area will accommodate all uses for these groups. The focus should be of listing the available existing opportunities not opening the door for future development of lands to support these organizations. In order to have a sustainable community the use of recreational activities are important, but they need to be supported and grown in a systematic way not opening the door by obligation.

2.05 Community Facilities Policies

A. The Manchester community maintains a unique visual and social identity that reinforces its traditions and heritage and differentiates itself from neighboring communities.

Based on the development goals in the Public Services Section, and others above this seems as a contradiction. In order to achieve sustained growth and maintain unique its identity, then it must set itself apart from neighboring communities. This means that the other communities may supply the services required by the population, but that is not what is being called out in this draft. The MCJPC must decide the vision of what the region will support, and then write the policies before goals. Goals should not suggest anything different than how to reach policies. This Policy statement is not supported by any of the goals stated above, and should be clarified in order to protect the long-term vision of the Manchester Experience.

3. **Agriculture:**

3.01 **Introduction**

- A. **This agricultural region is primarily a feed and grain corn/soybean/livestock/dairy/agricultural region with some specialty crops and the raising of sheep (primarily Southwest Washtenaw County). (Page 109)**

This sentence should be rewritten for clarity. Additionally the following sentence should be rewritten because this region is either the northern part of the "Corn Belt and "grain Belt" or it is not, but it should be defined.

- B. **The preservation of farmland will contribute to sustaining the Manchester area agricultural sector and its quality of life. (Page 109)**

This sentence is the last sentence that was crossed out on page 109, and should be included in the plan. This ensures the long-term protections for the Agricultural Belt as a sustainable planning tool to help defend unwanted development within the agricultural districts.

- C. **"apparent declining agricultural trends" (page 110)**

If the Plan is to protect agriculture and make sure that it is a sustainable land use, than this statement should not be appear anywhere in the Plan. This statement opens the door for a developer to argue that long-term agriculture is not sustainable in this area.

- D. **Encourage preservation of these large tracts will help preserve agriculture overall in the area. (Page 110)**

This sentence should include a statement of the long-term sustainability of the region instead of help preserve the region. Agriculture is a vital part of this region, both from a business perspective and a character perspective, so we should make sure that this is protected as part of the long-term sustainability of the region.

3.02 **Water Quality Section (page 112)**

- A. Why is this section included? The incorporation of a "Water Resource Preservation" section should be included but it should not be written from the perspective that Agriculture degrades water quality. This is another opportunity to argue against the long-term sustainability of agriculture. This section should be reduced to a Best Management Section as outlined by other governmental and non-profit agencies.

3.03 **Development and its effects on agriculture (page 114)**

- A. **Lot splits often result in the lots being too small to be viable agricultural operations.**
This sentence should be expanded to include smaller agri-business operations. A large tract of land may be divided into smaller scale lots but still be a usable agri-business contributor to the region, such as 4-H horse boarding area, U-Pick Stands, and other hobby farm situations.

4. **Conclusions:**

- A. The Township of Freedom should agree to the requirements or potential obligations that have been prescribed in the Community Facilities Section.

- B.** If the Township is ready for a Capital Improvements Plan then the Township should establish a Township Future Land Use Map in order to base infrastructure projects. The Township should not rely on the implementations of a Transition Zone without sound fundamental planning supported by Freedom Township Studies.
- C.** There seems to be some inconsistency of how to protect agriculture in this plan. The protection of Agriculture should be consistent from section to section with a clear vision. The Manchester Experience is based on the fundamental idea that open space, large farmsteads, and woodlots are vital to this experience. If this is the case then the Agricultural Section should support this by including the long-term sustainability of this land use for many years to come.
- D.** The limiting factor of how this area will grow will be the use of Transition Zones and how these areas may lead to property speculation. A Plan that gives clear direction based on character and sound development orientation is defensible and does not lead to unwanted sprawl based on speculation.

Thank you for your time,

Donald N. Pennington
William De Groot
Planning Consultants