



# 2022 HIGGINS TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN



**PREPARED FOR:**

Higgins Township

Adopted: XXXX, 2022

**DRAFT - Dec 1, 2022**

**For PC Review**



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# HIGGINS TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS

## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Bill Curnalia – Supervisor  
Maggie Borgula – Clerk  
Sheri Sullivan – Treasurer  
Ron Peters – Trustee  
Tom Jennette – Trustee

## **BUILDING INSPECTOR/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR**

James Letts

## **PLANNING COMMISSION**

James Smith – Chair  
Tom Jennette  
Mary Alice McKindles  
Laurie Granlund  
Julie Peters

## **MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE**

James Smith – Chair  
Tom Jennette – Higgins Township Trustee and Planning Commission Representative  
Matt Jernigan – Business Representative  
Skeeter Kiepert – Resident  
Mary Alice McKindles – Planning Commission Representative  
Tammy Menghini – Village of Roscommon  
Ed Stern – Roscommon County Sheriff  
Sheri Sullivan – Higgins Township Treasurer



# ABOUT THIS MASTER PLAN



**Constant changes in development over a period of time requires a constant effort to keep land use planning up to date.**

This Master Plan for Land Use is an effort on the part of the Planning Commissioners of Higgins Township to both plan for the future land use development of the Township and also to develop the plan in such a manner that it will form the basis for updating the current Township Zoning Ordinance. A Master Plan Steering Committee was named to guide the development and drafting of the update to the 2001 Master Plan. Once the draft was completed, the Steering Committee recommended to the Planning Commission that it was ready for their review and formal public input as required under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008.

In 1988, the former Township Zoning Board, now replaced by the Township Planning Commission prepared a Zoning Ordinance based upon land use; population and economic base trends, studies and inventories of the natural environment and resources. This draft zoning ordinance was adopted by the Township Board on October 22, 1988.

In June 2001, Robert B. Hotaling, PCP & AICP prepared Master Plan for Land Use – Higgins Township, which is serving as a basis for this current update.

Wade Trim, Associates, a municipal services consulting firm, was hired by Higgins Township to update its 2001 Master Plan and to bring the Township's Master Plan into alignment with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, which replaced PA 168 of 1959 – Michigan Township Planning Act.

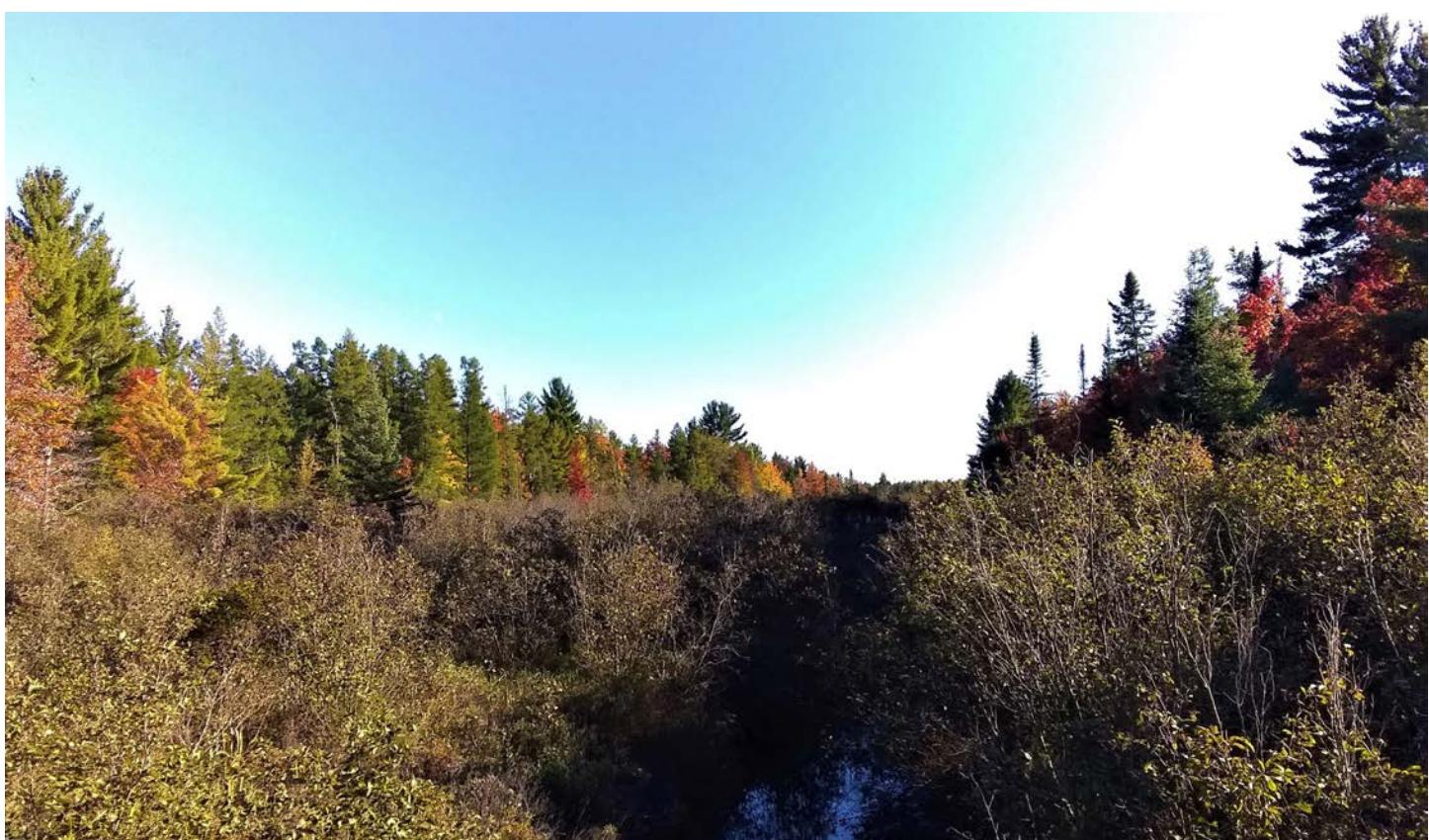


An important reminder for a community with a large amount of State Forests within it.

To be able to regulate private property through the application of zoning, the State and Federal courts have made numerous determinations that it is only legally possible when a well considered master plan is prepared that guides the regulations found within the master plan. Under Michigan law, the master plan must:

- A.** Is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical.
- B.** Considers the character of the planning jurisdiction and its suitability for particular uses, judged in terms of such factors as trends in land and population development.
- C.** Will, in accordance with present and future needs, best promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare.
- D.** Includes, among other things, promotion of or adequate provision for 1 or more of the following:
  - E.** A system of transportation to lessen congestion on streets and provide for safe and efficient movement of people and goods by motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other legal users.
    - I.** Safety from fire and other dangers.
    - II.** Light and air.
    - III.** Healthful and convenient distribution of population.
    - IV.** Good civic design and arrangement and wise and efficient expenditure of public funds.
    - V.** Public utilities such as sewage disposal and water supply and other public improvements.
  - VI.** Recreation.
  - VII.** The use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability.

Land Use Planning is concerned with the longer term – up to 20 years - while Zoning is considered to be immediate and current that is subject to frequent and timely changes as needed, provided the Zoning changes are consistently changed in the direction of the Master Plan for Land Use.



*Idyllic stream near the Fireman's Memorial*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By envisioning a community that leverages its rural and outdoor assets, the 2022 Higgins Township Master Plan provides a clear vision for the community over the next two decades.

## SHAKING IT UP

At the request of the Township, the 2022 Higgins Township Master Plan has been designed to place its recommendations at the beginning of the document followed by the analysis portion of the plan.

In Michigan, the order of community master plans are rather standardized. Traditionally, they begin with the analysis portion of the document followed by the visionary portion of the document; however, the Township desired to focus the plan on its visionary future portion.

With the Township's analysis information relatively stable from the 2001 plan, this approach focused on:

### Community Goals

### Future Land use Plan & Map

### Zoning Plan

### Action Plan

The Analysis portion of the plan is the detailed information that supports the vision and goals of the plan by providing details about:

#### A. History of the Township & Region -

sets the stage for the Township today

#### B. Demographics -

describes the residents of the Township and how they're changing by population, age, racial composition

#### C. Housing -

describes the typical house size, type of tenancy, vacancy rate/ seasonality, age, value, household size, and type of household (single, single mom, older couples)

#### D. Education and Employment -

reviews the educational attainment of the workforce (what jobs can be supported by the population), income, poverty status employment details, and commute time

#### E. Community Services and Facilities

- describes what types of services are available to the residents including

public services, schools, recreation facilities, public utilities,

**F. Transportation** - describes the Township's transportation network and what services are available within the Township and within relatively close proximity

**G. Natural Features** - identifies important features to protect and where development may occur with more limited impacts upon rare or poor lands

**H. Existing Land Use Map** - graphically depicts where development has occurred and where vacant property is available for development.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This plan ensured the community had the opportunity to share its vision with the Master Plan Steering Committee.

Over fifty people completed the public survey, which was open from July 30, 2021 to September 10, 2021. The survey results confirmed the direction and goals of the Steering Committee with many respondents concerned about retaining the rural character and outdoor lifestyle. Concerns included lack of shopping/dining options, limited success in business development, and blight.

An open house was held at Township Hall on November 10, 2021 with the attendees supporting the goals as presented with an interest in ensuring new development supports the aesthetic character of the community.

A public hearing was held on \_\_\_\_\_

## PLAN ADOPTED

This plan was adopted by the Planning Commission on \_\_\_\_\_.



# OUR GOALS



**At the Master Plan Kick-off meeting on April 15, 2021, the Steering Committee was asked to identify and discuss what where the most important goals that should be addressed during the writing of this update to the Township's Master Plan. A set of preliminary goals were discussed and expanded upon during subsequent Master Plan Steering Committee meetings that were held throughout the summer**



The finalized six Master Plan Goals were presented to the public at the Open House on November 10, 2021 for their review and comment:

## **1. RETAINING DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE VILLAGE**

Support and direct new intensive commercial development to locate within the core of the Village and not to locate within the Township.

## **2. GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

Develop planning tools to direct development to already built-up areas and limit new development to rural parts of the Township and along entry routes into the Village.

## **3. ENHANCE COOPERATION**

Continue and expand cooperation between the Village and Township so that desired services are provided in the most cost effective manner while working together on cross-border concerns.

## **4. REDUCE BLIGHT AND IMPROVE AESTHETICS**

Ensure that sufficient resources are available to enforce blight rules while implementing buffering/landscaping

standards designed to limit impacts of intensive/obtrusive uses on adjacent properties.

## **5. IMPROVE APPEARANCE OF M-18 AND OLD-76**

Take actions to amend the Township's Zoning Ordinance to require quality commercial architecture while increasing landscaping controls for development along M-18 and Old 76 so that standardized suburban development does not form within the Township.

## **6. RETAIN RURAL CHARACTER**

Ensure commercial and industrial development is located in areas where services and access are appropriate and limit development to the area surrounding Roscommon while ensuring that commercial and residential development supports the community's up north aesthetic.

The attendees selected Retaining Development within the Village as the most desired goal with Growth Management and Enhance Cooperation tying for second place as the goals that the attendees were most interested in seeing the Master Plan address.



*Managing new development is an important aspect of this plan.*

These goals are a significant departure from the 2001 Master Plan, which had focused on encouraging development and growth throughout most of the plan. The 2001 Master Plan envisioned development in the area nearest the Village to be developed on  $\frac{1}{2}$  to one-acre parcels with sewer and water while rural properties with no services to be located on two acres or more. Two acre parcels may measure just over 200 feet wide by 400 feet deep or 150 feet wide by 600 feet deep, which would give the Township a subdivision feel to it. The old plan envisioned encouraging as much residential development to be accommodated on each possible parcel as permitted by utilities/lack thereof. The plan also envisioned multiple family developments at up to eight units per acre with PUDs having even more units

per acre.

The 2001 Master Plan also envisioned significant new commercial development at the intersection of I-75 and M-18 plus new commercial development along Old 76 southeast of the Village.

This Master Plan focuses on ensuring that the “up north” character of the Township is protected for the current and future generations by recommending actions that will limit suburban sprawl-style development from making inroads into the Township. This plan is predicated on the belief that the residents enjoy the rural condition of the Township. The plan is also predicated on the belief that the undeveloped rural aesthetic of the Township is the basis of the tourist economy, which supports a significant portion of the regional economy.



*The railroad played an important role in the early development of the Township.*



# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Future Land Use Plan serves as a guide for the Planning Commission and others in making land use decisions including regarding interpretation of the Township's Zoning Ordinance. The Master Plan will also provide guidance to the Board of Trustees regarding its own land use decisions and the Township's capital improvement planning activities.

Key to the Future Land Use Plan is the Township's Future Land Use Map. This map illustrates where the community would like to direct new development and how to utilize its resources to support this development. Any future rezonings that do not agree with the Future Land Use Map may be overturned by the Courts due to the appearance of spot zoning.

Each land use category should take into account existing land uses and estimate potential growth and expansion of these uses, so that sufficient land is available within each land use category for the anticipated need. Like any planning process, as development occurs over time, a review of each of the areas will be in order and any changes noted. If necessary, boundaries should be adjusted and addition or deletion of appropriate land uses made, which will in effect, bring the Master Plan for Land Use up to date at that future time, as determined by Planning Commission. Currently, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires this review to be made every five years.

Higgins Township's Future Land Use Map designates seven land uses.

## **FOREST AND FOREST RECREATION (F&FR)**

This land use designation includes State

Forest lands, the Backus State Game Area, and large lot residential uses over 40 acres in size with intended forestry and/or recreational uses intended for public lands

## **RURAL RESIDENTIAL (RR)**

This land use designation includes larger lot residential uses on sites greater than five (5) acres in size.

## **URBAN RESIDENTIAL (UR)**

This land use designation is intended for smaller lot residential uses, on one acre or larger sites, in large-lot subdivisions

## **MANUFACTURED HOUSING RESIDENTIAL (MHR)**

This land use designation permits single-family homes in mobile home parks that meet the requirements found in the Township's Zoning Ordinance or the Michigan Mobile Home Commission Act or any subsequent legislation controlling the construction and operation of mobile home parks in the State.

## **COMMERCIAL (C)**

This land use designation permits the development of commercial, retail, and service uses on parcels located along



*Single-family homes in the Airport Subdivision - Urban Residential categorized land.*

main public streets leading into the Village of Roscommon, at sites best located to serve the local public as well as travelers, tourists, visitors, and vacationers.

## INSTITUTIONAL (INS)

This land use designation allows for the siting of public uses that includes

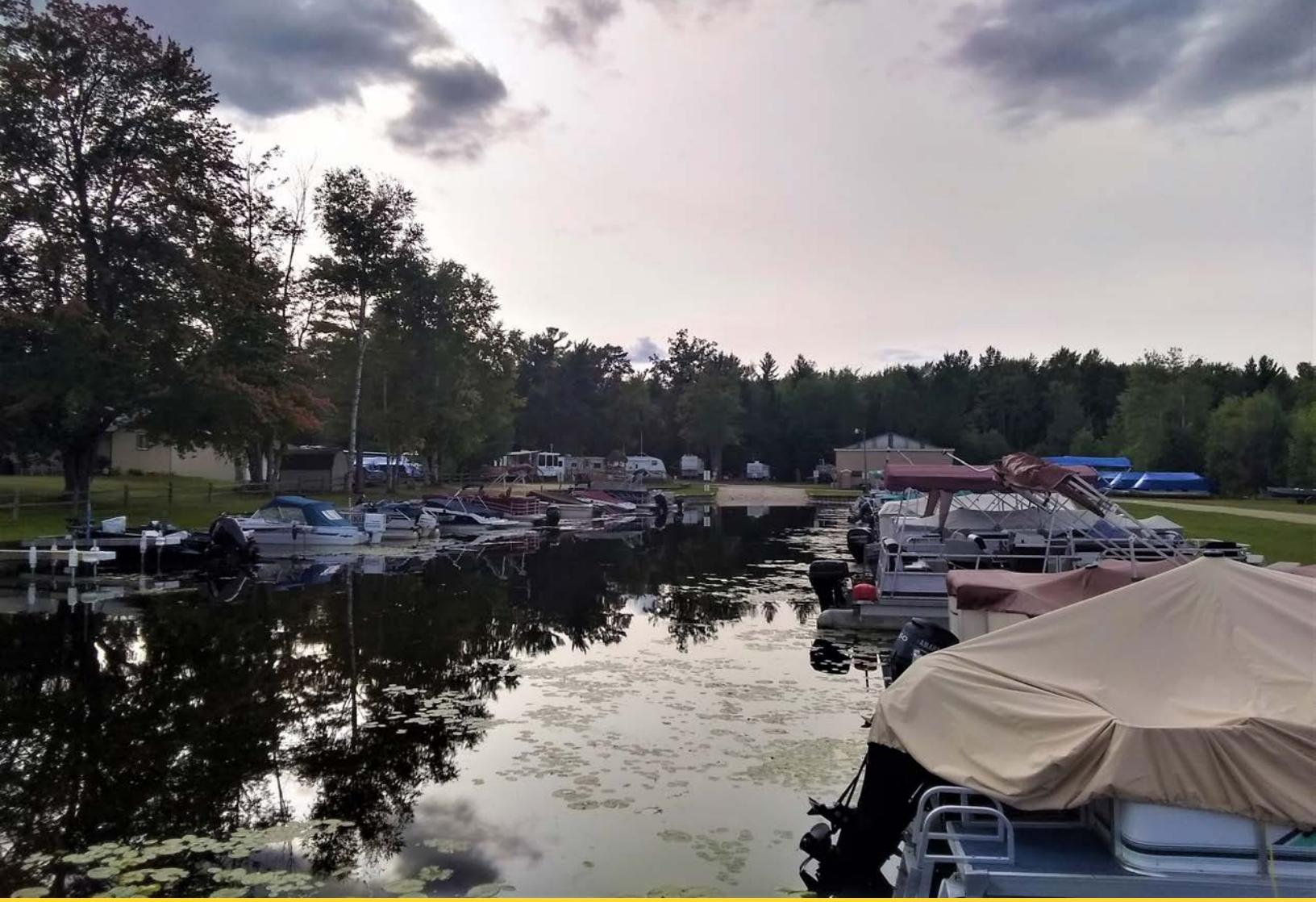
schools, parks, cemeteries, public facilities, and hospitals.

## INDUSTRIAL (I)

This land use designation permits uses related to the manufacture or production of goods, storage uses, or material handling operations.



The Michigan Fireman's Memorial statute was dedicated on September 20, 1980 to honor the Michigan firefighter who died in the line of duty. The public park was completed in June 1984.



# ZONING PLAN



**Per the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, all community master plans must. This Zoning Plan is to depict the various zoning districts and their uses as well as standards of height, bulk, location, and use of the building and premise.**



To ensure that there is a nexus between the community's Master Plan and its Zoning Ordinance, the 2008 revision to the State's enabling act enforces a formal connection between the land use Master Plan policy document and the local regulatory Zoning Ordinance.

Many court cases at the State and Federal levels have upheld the right for communities to engage in zoning, which significantly restrains private property rights through property regulation, as long as the zoning ordinance is tied to a well-considered land use master plan. Per Public Act 33 of 2008, Master Plans should:

- 1.** Ensure new development is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical
- 2.** Describe the community's present and future needs
- 3.** Promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare
- 4.** Consider a transportation system to lessen congestion while providing for safe and efficient movement of people and goods by motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other legal means
- 5.** Increase safety from fire and other dangers
- 6.** Ensure sufficient provision of light and air

- 7.** Ensure healthful and convenient distribution of residents
- 8.** Encourage good civic design and plan for the wise and efficient expenditure of public funds
- 9.** Prepare/ensure for the provision of public utilities
- 10.** Plan for recreation.

The courts have determined that because a master plan supports the provision of many of these public goods that the local unit of government may then use its police power to regulate private property on the behalf of all of the community's residents.

To ensure proper correlation between the two documents, the following section will formalize the linkage between the Township's future land use designations and the Township's specific zoning districts.

## RURAL

The Master Plan identifies the Forest and Forest Recreation (F&FR) land use for forestry, recreation, and large lot residential uses on lots of 40 acres or more. The F&FE land use designation correlates to the Township's F&FR Resource Development and F&FR Agricultural Residential Land Use zoning districts. Certain Institutional land uses may be permitted in these zoning districts including parks and



*Retaining rural character and access to recreational options is an important community asset.*

nature areas, cemeteries, and golf courses and private recreational clubs.

## RESIDENTIAL

The Master Plan identifies four residential land uses, which include Forest/Forest Residential (F&FR), Rural Residential (RR), Urban Residential (UR), and Manufactured Housing Residential (MHR) designations. These four designations correlate with housing of increased intensity. F&FR districts have residential parcels of at least 40 acres. RR districts have residential parcels measuring five acres or larger while UR districts may have lots as narrow as 66 feet where utilities are present while lots must be one acre in size where public utilities are not available. The Multiple Family Residential (MFR) zoning district envisions residential densities of up to eight units per acre. Due to the lack of public utilities within the Township and the goal to enhance and preserve the community's rural character, this zoning district is proposed to be eliminated. Manufactured Housing Residential land use envisions the construction of mobile home parks on lots measuring between one  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre. It is recommended that the Zoning Ordinance regulations be revised to allow manufactured housing parks meeting the State of Michigan requirements. To support the increase in the minimum lot size in the RR from the current one acre to five acres, the plan recommends that the Township evaluate changes be made to the Zoning Ordinance that may include a mixture of housing options that support splits of varying sizes that average at least five acres per unit. This may be accomplished by allowing clustering, private drives serving multiple houses, or smaller

lot splits while retaining larger parent parcels. Certain Institutional land uses including public buildings, recreational, religious, educational institutional uses may be located within residential zoning districts.

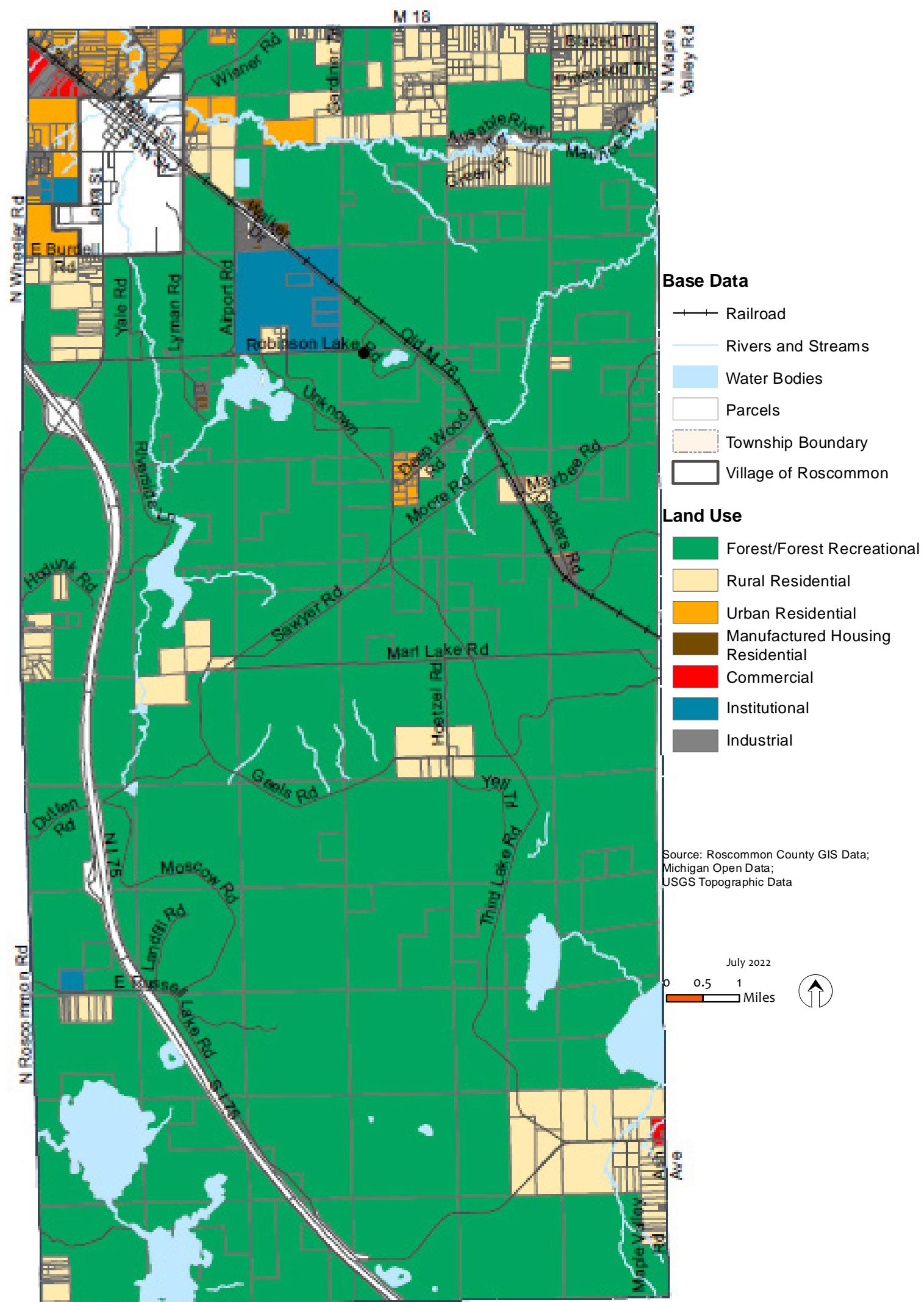
## COMMERCIAL

The Master Plan envisions one commercial land use designation where all commercial land uses would be permitted while the Zoning Ordinance designates four districts ranging in intensity from Office Service Commercial as the lowest in intensity to Neighborhood Service Commercial to General Service Commercial to Heavy Commercial as the most intensive commercial district. With this plan's interest to retain the community's rural charm, it is recommended that the four commercial districts be consolidated into two districts. It is recommended that the OSC Office Service Commercial and HSC Highway Service Commercial Districts be eliminated with the OSC uses being incorporated into the other commercial districts. Educational institutional uses, public, religious, and recreational institutional uses may be located within specific commercial zoning districts.

## INDUSTRIAL

The master plan and zoning ordinance both only envision one industrial land use/district. Both documents agree that heavy industries should not have off-site impacts. Certain institutional uses including health care and educational facilities are permitted within the industrial zoning district.

# FUTURE LAND USE MAP



MAP 1 - The 2022 Future Land Use Map for Higgins Township.

## SPECIFIC ZONING ORDINANCE CHANGES

To assist in the implementation of the changes recommended in the Master Plan, the following Zoning Ordinance changes should be undertaken upon the successful adoption of the Master Plan.

- Complete a Zoning Audit of the Township's Zoning Ordinance
- Implement the recommendations of the Zoning Audit
- Eliminate the MFR Zoning District as the Master Plan doesn't envision this level of residential intensity within the Township
- Complete amendments to the official Zoning Map so that it agrees with the Township's 2022 Future Land Use Map
- Evaluate the existing four commercial land uses for consolidation
- Explore adopting zoning ordinance regulations designed to support the development of work-force housing options including accessory dwelling units, co-housing, and micro-housing units that expand options beyond traditional single-family only dwellings while ensuring a rural character with larger lots in the rural residential.



*Township Hall*

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# ACTION PLAN



This section outlines the most effective and direct approach towards successful implementation of the Master Plan. In many communities, a long list of options and opportunities are presented in this portion of the document that are often beyond the capacity of the community to implement or outside of the scope of land use actions.

These types of extensive listings of projects overwhelms the Planning Commission, the legislative body, and the local administration, often leading to the plan not being reviewed or looked toward implementation steps until the time to update the plan.

To avoid this scenario, a short set of work items has been identified. This Action Plan is built on the premise that these goals should be interlocking and mutually supportive. To assist in the implementation, the list does separate the priorities into Next Steps, Intermediate Steps, and Long Range Steps.

## NEXT STEPS

- Conduct Zoning Audit and implement recommendations
- Implement the recommendations of the Zoning Plan
- Adopt a Complete Streets resolution

## INTERMEDIATE STEPS

- Increase training for the Planning Commission members
- Review appropriate Growth Management options for the Township and implement those that are appropriate for the community
- Evaluation of Master Plan goals to determine order of implementation and changes necessary to Township's General Ordinances that will support development of the rural "up north" atmosphere
- Conduct an annual review of the Action Plan to determine which items should be on the Planning Commission's agenda for the following year

- Review blight issues within the Township, reallocate resources to address these issues, and consider amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that support options for residents to address their blight issues on their own properties through buffering, landscape features, and other means

## LONG RANGE

- Conduct a review of the development review procedures to improve processes
- Continue to foster collaboration between the Village, Township, neighboring Townships, and the County
- Support the development of non-motorized transportation options.

# DATA AND ASSESSMENT

# HISTORY OF HIGGINS TOWNSHIP AND REGION

All of what is known as America's "Midwest" was part of the original "Ordinance of 1787" that established the government for the Northwest Territory and outlined the process for admitting new States into the United States. The Northwest Territory included all of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio and part of Minnesota. In fact the whole State of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and part of North Dakota, were a part of the 1801 Indiana Territory which boasted of having one County in it--Wayne County. In 1837, Michigan was the last state extrapolated from the Territory and made a State.

Around 1500, the Potawatomi peoples lived in an area that covered much of the Lower Peninsula excluding the southeastern corner of the State. First contact with Westerners on the East Coast and Canada had ripple effects on tribes all the way west into Michigan and the Midwest. Disease, trade, and dislocation had far-reaching impacts into the territory that would eventually become Michigan.

Higgins Township was ceded by the Indians in two treaties. The Treaty of Saginaw in 1819 ceded the southeastern corner of the Township while the 1836 Treaty of Washington D.C. ceded the remainder of the Township. In the earlier treaty, the Ojibwe (Chippewa) were the principle party with the Odawa (Ottawa) and Potawatomi as signatories while the latter treaty, the Odawa and Ojibwe tribes ceded the northwestern part of the Lower Peninsula and the eastern half of the Upper Peninsula

In 1840, the Michigan Legislature established Mikenauk County, named for Chief Mikenauk, a member of the Odawa tribe who was a signatory of the Treaty of Washington (1836). At the urging of State Representative Charles O'Malley, the county was renamed Roscommon County in 1843, after County Roscommon in Ireland where he was from. From 1840 to 1875, the county was successively administered by Michilimackinac (Mackinac), Cheboygan, and Midland Counties before it formally organized in 1875.

The initial economic driver for the area was logging the extensive pine forests, and this wealth helped to drive Michigan's economy into the 20th Century and the wealth it generated help to support the advent of the automobile industry in Southeastern Michigan.

After the logging era ended in 1925, many 25 foot x 100 foot lots, particularly on the lake shores and along river banks were established within Roscommon County were sold. Five (5) to ten (10) acre tracts were also popular. This was the beginning of land division and pioneer settlement in the area.

With the organization of Roscommon County, the rail station at Roscommon Station was designated at the County seat. The following year, George O. Robinson, a Detroit attorney, recorded a plat for the Village of Roscommon. In 1882, the village was formally incorporated. Excursions were by horse and buggy between the railroad, the plats, and small farms. An early resort was located on the eastern shores of the Higgins Lake during this area. Hunting was also an attraction to the area. Organized clubs assembled large tracts of land, including many 640 acre sections, for member's enjoyment.

The early construction of US-27, M-76, M-18, and M-55 provided excellent access to the area from the heavily populated areas of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. The opportunities

of tourism and vacationing expanded. Vacationers first traveled by train, but with the advent of distance automobile travel, automobile-related industries were established in the Roscommon village and Prudenville areas.

Starting in 1929, the Great Depression led to high local taxes and the loss of property at tax sales, which resulted in over 4,500,000 acres being deeded from private ownership to the State of Michigan. In Higgins Township, significant tax foreclosure occurred because of the lack of money by private owners to either retain property, lack of private demand, or the owners simply no longer wanted the land and abandoned the property. The tax default land became known as the “Land Nobody Wanted”.

Much of the land south of the South Branch of the Au Sable River in the Township is in state ownership and is managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources as Au Sable State Forest lands with some private parcels interspersed throughout this large part of the Township. There is a large area of private ownership west of Lake St. Helen comprising over 2,900 acres located in Sections 13, 14, 23, 24 and 29 in the southeastern part of the Township.

In the southwestern corner of Higgins Township and in adjoining Backus Township, the Backus Creek State Game Area was established in 1954. Originally funded with federal funds through the Pitman-Robertson program that directed funds raised through the sale of arms and ammunition for wildlife population and habitat management and restoration. The game area now measures over 4,378 acres in the two townships.

The extensive State of Michigan ownership of land in Higgins Township significantly limits development in the Township, except along the south side of the M 18 corridor southerly to the Au Sable River and areas adjacent to the Village. Development within all of the Township is restrained due to extensive wetlands and high water table it.

The last passenger train ran in 1959, but automobile transportation has transformed the Township in the latter half of the 20th Century. Easy access has aided development in the Higgins Township area with the construction of the limited access I-75 and US-27. The first segments of I-75 opened in southern Michigan in 1957, and the last segment in the State to open was the segment from Alger to Roscommon in 1973. These modern highways greatly reduced the travel time further into Ohio and Indiana as well as making the Township even more conveniently accessible to Michiganders to get to and from the area. The first canoe livery on the South Branch of the Au Sable River was opened by Lauren Dean in 1947, and by 1968, four other liveries had opened.

The Township saw continuous growth through the end of the 20th Century with a large increase in the last decade of the century, likely comprised of a large number of downstate residents retiring into the community. Since that time, the growth rate has stagnated while the average age within the community has declined.

The lasting impacts of Michigan's single state recession at the beginning of 21st Century were still being felt when the global COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. The real estate market across Michigan changed significantly with demand for housing and property increasing throughout all parts of the State. These changes will likely continue to be felt throughout the term of this Master Plan.

With the tourism and recreational land uses drive much of the economic development within the Township and the interest to preserve the rural character of the Township, this Master Plan does not support intensive future development of Higgins Township, including establishing its own public sanitary sewer and water distribution systems or expansion of the Village's services into the Township. Extension of the Village's water or sewer system should only be contemplated in rare instances for economic development opportunities within the Township that are adjacent to the Village and indicated within areas identified within this Plan's Future Land Use Map for commercial or industrial development.

Due to the presence of a high water table that limits placement and function of septic systems and lack of public utilities, the Township has developed with lots varying in size from an acre mostly near the Village and large lot developments in the remainder of the Township

## DEMOGRAPHICS

From 1970 to 2000, Higgins Township, the Village of Roscommon, and Roscommon County all saw significant population increases with the County seeing the greatest percentage growth. Though the County saw a higher growth rate than the Township, in that 30-year period, the Township's population grew by 33.6% over that period.

This time frame saw rather even growth across most of Michigan's communities, including rural Michigan that was being fueled in part by retirees moving from the larger cities in the Lower Peninsula to retirement homes in Northern Michigan.

All three municipalities saw modest declines in population in the first decade of the 21st Century, which were likely a result of Michigan's single state recession that lasted much of the Aughts (due to the decline of the U.S. automobile industry) and the impact of the Great Recession.

**TABLE 1: HIGGINS TOWNSHIP AND VILLAGE OF ROSCOMMON POPULATION TRENDS  
1970-2045**

Population Trends							
	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2019	2045
Higgins Township	1,360	1,581	1,685	2,047	1,981	2,043	2,332**
Village of Roscommon	810	834	858	1,133	1,075	1,050	1,110**
Roscommon County	9,892	16,374	19,776	25,469	24,449	23,851	25,234***
Michigan	8,875,083	9,262,070	9,295,297	9,938,444	9,952,687	9,965,265	10,550,000

Source: US Census Bureau

\* US American Community Survey – 2015-2019

\*\*Utilized the same population ratio of community to county-wide percentage as found in 2019 ACS Data

\*\*\*2045 County Projections from U of M Institute for Research on Labor, Employment, and Economy – “The Economic and Demographic Outlook for Michigan Through 2045”

As illustrated in the previous Master Plan, most traditional demographic models illustrated continued growth across most of the United States while the last 20 years have actually shown stagnation and population decline for parts of the country including much of rural Michigan.

Illustrative of these changes, the Michigan Department of Transportation and U of M Institute for Research on Labor, Employment, and the Economy (IRLEE) is now projecting that Roscommon County will experience very modest growth --from 23,648 residents in 2020 to 24,077 residents in 2035 – with continued modest growth to 25,234 residents by 2045. This dataset is not broken down below the county level however. In Table 1, to create the municipal projections, we've used the existing 2019 ACS ratio of residents between the Village, Township, and Roscommon County to project the growth in 2045. Each jurisdiction is only to see modest growth between the writing of this plan and 2045.

These projections should be tempered to a degree. Providing accurate population projections in Michigan has been difficult over the last 40 years due to several macro-economic forces that has been impacting the State's economy and its residents, including: major shifts in the auto industry; reduction in the manufacturing and construction sectors; younger adults desiring to live in vibrant urban destinations; and substantial National demographic shifts from the American Midwest to the South and Southwest.

There are several external factors beyond the Michigan situation including ongoing globalization, impacts of technology, spread of broadband, impacts of climate change, continued decline in the U.S. family size, and changes to U.S. immigration policy that are not factored into these projections.

With the demographic projections showing only modest growth in the Township, Village, and County, the use of a conservative growth model of the Future Land Use map is appropriate for the community.

**TABLE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION**

Age Distribution			
	Higgins Township	Roscommon County	Michigan
0 - 4 Years Old	96	874	571,094
5 - 19 Years Old	445	3,108	1,875,898
20 - 44 Years Old	583	4,677	3,137,938
45 - 64 Years Old	536	7,575	2,713,992
65 Years and Older	383	7,617	1,666,343

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 2 illustrates that Higgins Township has a population that is younger than Roscommon County by a relatively large margin. For 5-19 year olds and 20-44 year olds, the Township has 21.8% and 28.5% age groups while the County has 13.0% and 19.6% respectively. Higgins Township has significantly more families living in the Township than the County. The median age of the residents also reflects this situation (see Table 3).

**TABLE 3: MEDIAN AGE**

Median Age			
	Higgins Township	Roscommon County	Michigan
2010	48	51.8	38.1
2019	41.4	56.2	39.7

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

During the same time period, racial diversity has increased slightly within the Township. Table 4 illustrates that the American Community Survey estimated modest growth of African Americans, significant growth of Asians, and loss of Native Americans in the Township within the last ten years. In reviewing these projections, it should be understood that this demographic information taken from the American Community Survey will be more volatile for communities of the size of Higgins Township versus communities with larger populations. The national trend towards increased diversity makes it likely that the trend occurred in Higgins Township from 2010 to 2019, but specifics should be considered in cases like this information.

**TABLE 4: RACIAL DISTRIBUTION**

Racial Distribution		
Higgins Township		
	2010	2019
White	1,879	1,783
Black or African American	3	23
Asian	7	110
American Indian and Alaska Native	10	0
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	0	0
Some Other Race	1	2
Two or More Races	32	125
Hispanic or Latino, Any Race	12	37

Source: 2006-2010 and 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## HOUSING PROFILE

Having an understanding of the housing market is important in the general land use planning for a community. Key determinants include having an understanding of the existing population demographics, covered in the previous section, and an understanding of the housing market. Housing is a key driver in most American communities and Higgins Township is typical in this respect. Much of the Township's land is state forest lands or low density rural residential with only a small portion of the Township near the Village of Roscommon developed with commercial or industrial uses. To appropriately understand the development forces within the community, this section will explore the Township's housing market.

The number and type of housing units is one of the primary determinants of a community's housing profiles. Table 5 illustrates the number of housing units in the Township (1,292 units), and it breaks it down by number of housing units within a structure or development.

**TABLE 5: HOUSING STOCK**

Total Housing Stock					
	1-Unit	2-4 Units	5 or More Units	Mobile Home or Trailer Units	Total
Higgins Township	994	49	145	0	1,292
Richfield Township	3,447	0	54	0	3,764
Village of Roscommon	355	49	137	0	544
Roscommon County	21,777	164	568	2,029	24,538

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

This information assists in understanding the type of structures that are within a community. A community with a higher number of multi-unit residential units will have a different land use pattern than a community that is predominately single-family units. The housing density is often much higher in communities comprised of multi-unit housing stock.

Housing tenure information is another key metric in understanding a community's housing market and how it may impact land use and land use patterns. Table 6 illustrates the type of housing tenure that a community has by recording the percentage of owner-

occupied homes versus renter-occupied homes.

**TABLE 6: HOUSEHOLD TENURE**

Household Tenure		
	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied
Higgins Township	66.7%	33.3%
Richfield Township	85.1%	14.9%
Village of Roscommon	42.0%	58.0%
Roscommon County	82.0%	18.0%

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Communities with high home-ownership rates tend to have residents who remain in the community longer while communities with higher renter-occupied housing will tend to have more transient population. In addition, landlords often do not maintain their properties to the same standards as homes with owners onsite. Issues of blight, either contributed to by the renter or by the landlord, are often found in communities with higher non-owner-occupied properties. As shown in Table 6, Higgins Township has two-thirds of the households living in owner-occupied housing units. This rate is lower than the County or State.

One measure of the strength of the local housing market is to review the occupancy status within a community. A high vacancy rate means that there is a surplus of units available in the market, which can lead to lower housing prices or rents, while a low vacancy rate can lead to inflation of housing sales costs or apartment rental rates. For owner-occupied homes, a desirable rate is two percent while for apartments, the rate is between five and seven percent. Table 7 shows illustrates the Township's occupancy status.

**TABLE 7: OCCUPANCY STATUS**

Occupancy Status			
	Occupied	Vacant	Seasonally Vacant
Higgins Township	805	487	343
Richfield Township	1,668	2,096	1,831
Village of Roscommon	405	139	43
Roscommon County	11,139	13,399	12,191

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

During the Great Recession, the vacancy rates in many communities increased significantly while the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the housing occupancy rates is still unknown at this time.

In communities with high numbers of seasonal cottages, hunting cabins, and other seasonal units, it is important to evaluate the number of seasonally vacant housing units within the housing market. This calculation will help to determine if there is a vacancy issue in the housing market or if a large number of units remain vacant for a majority of the year due to occasional use. In Higgins Township, almost 27% of all of the housing units within the Township are seasonally vacant. This number is also important to understand as it helps to describe the number of absentee property owners who do not live within the Township. These residents do pay taxes, but they do not send children to area schools or vote in local elections; however, due to their seasonal nature, their demand for local services is also lower than year-round residents.

Age of the structure is an important metric than is used to evaluate a community's housing market. Older homes will often have higher maintenance and operating costs when compared with newer more efficiently constructed houses. Also, the various

systems of an older house may also be at the point of requiring replacement, frequently break down, or exterior systems are showing significant signs of wear and tear that impact the appearance of a community. Densely populated municipalities with neighborhoods of varying ages may also want to take structural age into consideration when comparing the needs of one neighborhood with another within the same community. Table 8 illustrates the years in which housing structures were constructed.

**TABLE 8: AGE OF STRUCTURE**

	Year Structure Built				
	1949 or Earlier	1950 to 1969	1970 to 1989	1990 to 2009	2010 or Later
Higgins Township	223	332	445	292	0
Richfield Township	146	1,654	1,412	480	72
Village of Roscommon	153	155	171	65	0
Roscommon County	2,008	7,396	8,817	5,930	387

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Almost 35% of the Township's structures that have housing units were constructed between 1970 and 1989 with over 57% of the housing stock being located in structures that are approximately 50 years old or newer. Due to age, the oldest of these structures will begin to require significant investments in their systems or maintenance costs will begin to climb.

Another important housing market metric is home value. Low values are often an indicator of poverty while high housing values impact housing affordability. Table 9 shows the median home value for the Township.

**TABLE 9: MEDIAN HOME VALUE**

Median Home Value	
Higgins Township	\$80,800
Richfield Township	\$64,500
Village of Roscommon	\$62,300
Roscommon County	\$108,200

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Data refers to only owner-occupied units

Higgins Township's median home value is \$80,800 which is significantly higher than Richfield Township and the Village but lower than Roscommon County. The lakefront homes found around Higgins Lake, Houghton Lake, Lake Saint Helen, and other lakes in the county likely contribute to the higher county median value.

Household size in the United States has been steadily declining for the last fifty years as the number of children that families have has declined, increases in the number of single headed households, non-traditional households, and couples delaying or deciding not to have children. Table 10 and Table 11 generally illustrate that household size in Roscommon County and Higgins Township is following this trend over the last ten years.

**TABLE 10: HOUSEHOLD SIZE 2010**

Household Size - 2010							
	1 Person		2 Persons		3 Persons		4 or More
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Higgins Township	292	34.43%	310	36.56%	109	12.85%	137
Richfield Township	716	37.53%	831	43.55%	126	6.60%	235
Village of Roscommon	166	38.34%	143	33.03%	54	12.47%	70
Roscommon County	3,553	31.03%	5,228	45.66%	1,131	9.88%	1,537

Source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

**TABLE 11 HOUSEHOLD SIZE 2019**

Household Size - 2019								
	1 Person		2 Persons		3 Persons		4 or More Persons	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	
Higgins Township	300	37.27%	287	35.65%	104	12.92%	114	14.16%
Richfield Township	539	32.31%	837	50.18%	124	7.43%	168	10.07%
Village of Roscommon	180	44.44%	109	26.91%	56	13.83%	60	14.81%
Roscommon County	3,790	34.02%	5,149	46.22%	1,127	10.12%	1,073	9.63%

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

In certain instances, the results within a specific size of household within one of the communities show increases over decreases, but these changes would generally be attributed to the smaller samples sizes within the communities that would likely account for these fluctuations from the overall trends.

Table 12 illustrates that make-up of households. Except for the Village, Higgins Township has a higher rate of nonfamily households (householders living alone or living with unrelated persons) than the other highlighted communities, female headed households, and households with related children under 18 years of age. This illustrates that there is a higher prevalence of non-traditional households raising families within both Higgins Township and the Village.

**TABLE 12: HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS**

Household Characteristics (%)			
	Married-Couple Family (householder 35 years and older)	Nonfamily Households	Households with related children under 18 years
Higgins Township	31.50%	41.50%	28.00%
Richfield Township	43.10%	39.20%	13.20%
Village of Roscommon	18.30%	46.40%	35.80%
Roscommon County	44.70%	38.90%	16.10%

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

To further understand a community, it is important to understand the economic conditions including the employment market and workforce capabilities. Multiple research studies draw a correlation between educational attainment and an individual's earning capacity. Those individuals with higher educational levels will tend to have higher overall lifetime earnings compared to those individuals with lower educational achievement. For communities, educational attainment is a reasonable indicator of economic capacity of a community.

In today's New Economy, which is built upon service and technology, jobs will often tend to follow worker. This is in comparison to the Old Economy that was focused on manufacturing and production of goods, which was the economic standard for much of the 19th and 20th Centuries. To thrive in the New Economy, educational attainment of the workforce is a key determinate to the strength of a local economy.

Table 13 illustrates that the Township and its surrounding communities have similar educational rates with the Township having the highest rates of residents with Bachelor's or Graduate/Professional degrees and the second highest with Associates degrees.

**TABLE 13: HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS**

	Educational Attainment (%)						
	Less than 9th Grade	9th to 12th Grade, no diploma	High School Graduate (includes equivalency)	Some College, no degree	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate or Professional Degree
Higgins Township	4.40%	7.30%	26.60%	28.20%	13.60%	13.10%	6.90%
Richfield Township	4.80%	11.90%	46.60%	22.10%	9.00%	4.80%	0.80%
Village of Roscommon	3.40%	7.30%	25.40%	36.60%	14.50%	10.50%	2.30%
Roscommon County	2.40%	7.70%	38.40%	26.70%	9.40%	9.00%	6.50%

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

A metric of the employment sector is wages, and median household income is a demographer's method to track income within a community. Median household income includes the income of all members of the household over 15 years of age with the median splitting the entire number of households into equal parts with  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the households above and  $\frac{1}{2}$  below, which controls for high-wealth households that may skew the results significantly higher for a community. Table 14 illustrates the median household income for Higgins Township and its surrounding communities.

**TABLE 14: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

Median Household Income	
Higgins Township	\$37,399
Richfield Township	\$34,853
Village of Roscommon	\$35,163
Roscommon County	\$42,054

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Higgins Township residents have a higher median family income as compared to Village of Roscommon and Richfield Township but a lower income than the County at large.

An important metric of evaluating the general health of a community is the percentage of residents who are living in poverty. In 2019, the U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was \$12,880 for a single individual and \$25,750 for a family of four. Those earning less than those amounts are considered to be impoverished. Individuals falling below the poverty line will have difficulty having enough money to provide food and shelter. To qualify for many Federal subsidy programs, individuals or families are often means tested again the poverty definition, but some Federal programs including Section 8 Housing Vouchers, some portions of Medicaid, Supplement Social Security, Earned Income Tax Credit, and public housing do not use a person/households poverty determination as a means-testing for program qualification.

Table 15 provides the poverty level for Higgins Township and its surroundings.

**TABLE 15: POPULATION IN POVERTY**

Poverty Status (%)		
	Total Population Below Poverty Level	65 Years & Over Below Poverty Level
Higgins Township	26.3%	10.2%
Richfield Township	22.5%	13.5%
Village of Roscommon	37.7%	13.9%
Roscommon County	16.7%	7.4%

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

More residents of Higgins Township fall below the Federal poverty level than the overall residents of Roscommon County. Almost ten percent (10%) more residents in Higgins Township fall below the Federal poverty line compared to Roscommon County. This percentage includes households with children while nearly three percent (3%) more of those over 65 years of age live in poverty as compared to the broader County.

Having an understanding of the employment market is important so that trends in employment may be understood. It is also important to understand if a community or region is over-dependent upon a single employer or sector. Over-reliance upon a specific industry or employer is a concern if there is a disruption within that sector or with a major employer within the sector. Employment by industry and employment by sector findings are two key tools to evaluate a community's employment market.

Table 16 breaks down Higgins Township's employment by 13 industries.

**TABLE 16: EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY**

Employment by Industry				
	Higgins Township	Richfield Township	Village of Roscommon	
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining	7	18	4	
Construction	18	129	0	
Manufacturing	117	131	70	
Wholesale Trade	14	17	7	
Retail Trade	54	171	21	
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	51	47	14	
Information	11	6	5	
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate/Rental/Leasing	25	22	15	
Professional, Scientific, and Management, and administrative and waste management services	9	24	5	
Educational Services, and Health Care and Assistance	159	302	67	
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services	64	161	30	
Other Services, except Public Administration	21	45	13	
Public Administration	61	45	17	

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Data refers to civilian employed population 15 years and older

Residents in Higgins Township are most predominately employed in the Educational Services, Health Care & Assistance and Manufacturing industries with the fewest employed in the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, & Mining and Professional, Scientific, & Management and Administrative & Waste Management Services industries.

Table 17 looks breaks down the employees into being employed in five employment sectors.

**TABLE 17: EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR**

Employment by Sector				
	Higgins Township	Richfield Township	Village of Roscommon	Roscommon County
Management, Business, Science, and Arts Occupations	169	226	68	2094
Service Occupations	123	307	62	1670
Sales and Office Occupations	131	198	47	2098
Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance Occupations	31	168	2	867
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations	157	219	89	1,215

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Data refers to civilian employed population 15 years and older

Residents of Higgins Township work in the Management, Business, Science, & Arts Occupations and Production, Transportation, & Material Moving Occupations while the least number of employees work in Natural Resources, Construction, & Maintenance Occupations.

The employment rate and employment status provide important information about the health of the labor market in a community and labor participation. Table 18 provides information about both the unemployment rate and the labor participation rate.

**TABLE 18: EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

		Employment Status		
		Higgins Township	Richfield Township	Village of Roscommon
<b>Employed</b>	<b>611</b>	1,118	268	
<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>110</b>	129	56	
<b>Not in Labor Force</b>	<b>878</b>	2,016	472	
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	<b>15.30%</b>	10.30%	17.30%	

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

The unemployment rate is the second highest at 15.3% in Higgins Township, which is relatively high for the State of Michigan in 2019 almost a decade after the recovery began from the Great Recession. Rural Michigan has not seen the economic recovery that much of the remainder of the State was experiencing prior to the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in March of 2020. Not in the Labor Force means those individuals not looking for work, which may be retirees, youth over 16 in school and not working, individuals providing uncompensated family healthcare work. It is also important to note that there is a high number of individuals not in the labor force, which some of these may be attributable to a higher number of retirees living in the Township.

Ready access to work is also a key determinate of employment. Commuting time to a job has an impact on job retention and job satisfaction. Long commutes add an additional burden to working as it reduces time to be home and available to the family or able to easily engage in community activities. Table 19 illustrates the travel time it takes for workers to get to their place of employment.

**TABLE 19: TRAVEL TIME TO WORK**

Travel Time to Work					
	Less than 10 minutes	10 - 29 Minutes	30 - 59 Minutes	60 Minutes or More	Mean Travel Time to Work (minutes)
<b>Higgins Township</b>	<b>33.40%</b>	<b>47.40%</b>	<b>16.20%</b>	<b>3.00%</b>	<b>16.9</b>
Richfield Township	19.60%	43.40%	28.00%	9.10%	26
Village of Roscommon	45.60%	35.10%	15.70%	3.60%	16.1
Roscommon County	22.30%	49.80%	17.80%	10.10%	24.9

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

The average Higgins Township commuter spends 16.9 minutes traveling to work each day, which is the second lowest of the study group with over 47% of the commuters spending between 10-29 minutes each direction to work. Job accessibility is an important factor in evaluating the employment market, and less than 17 minutes is a relatively short commute time for Michiganders.

## Commuting Distance from Higgins Township –

Based upon a 30-mile radius from Higgins Township, the following cities, towns, and incorporated and unincorporated villages, which provide employment opportunities to Higgins Township residents are:

- Fairview (unincorporated community)
- City of Gladwin
- City of Grayling
- City of Harrison
- Houghton Lake (census-designated place)
- Lewiston (census-designated place)
- City of Lake City
- City of Mio
- Prudenville (census-designated place)
- Village of Rose City
- St. Helen (census-designated place)
- City of West Branch

# COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES



Roscommon Area District Library

## HIGGINS TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT

- **Board of Trustees**

The Township's Board of Trustees governs and administers the business of the Township, which is comprised of the Township Supervisor, Clerk, Treasurer, and two Trustees. Meetings of the Board are held at on the first Monday of each month.

- **Planning Commission**

The Higgins Township Planning Commission has five members that is appointed by the Supervisor. The commission meets quarterly the first Wednesday of the month. They review special land use approvals and site plans, and when requested, they provide guidance to the Township Board of Trustees on land use issues.

## SCHOOLS

- **Roscommon Area Public Schools**

For over 145 years, the Roscommon Area Public Schools, officially known as the Gerrish-Higgins School District, has been providing the residents of the Village of Roscommon and Higgins Township along with Au Sable, Gerrish, Lyon and north half of Richfield Township in Roscommon County, and South Branch Township and the eastern half of Beaver Creek Township in Crawford County schooling with schooling. The district covers 350 square miles and has its elementary, middle, and high schools all located just west of the Village in Gerrish Township along the south side of Sunset Drive. These facilities have all received upgrades since 2008.

The Charlton Heston Academy, a non-profit charter academy of Lake Superior State University, is located in St. Helen. This school has grown significantly since its founding with its enrollment having an impact area public school districts including the Roscommon Area Public Schools, by pulling students and their associated School Aid Fund dollars from the public districts.

## PUBLIC UTILITIES

- **Water and Sewer**

Higgins Township does not provide water or sewer services. Residents have to rely upon individual water wells for water and individual septic systems. The Village does operate both water and sanitary sewer systems that have excess capacity within the Village.

- **Gas and Electric**

DTE Gas provides natural gas within the Township. Consumers Energy provides electrical service in the Township.

- **Internet**

At the time of the writing of this plan, according to Connected Nation's Michigan Broadband Map, nearly all of the land within the Township has access to internet with speeds rated at 10 Mbps Download/1 Mbps Upload, which is below the current high-speed standard of 25 Mbps Download/3 Mbps Upload, but these connection speeds are fast enough to support movie downloads and conduct online conference calls. The most populated portions of the Township, near Roscommon and St. Helen do have access to the 25/3 speeds, which meet the current high-speed internet standards.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Police**

The Roscommon County Sheriff's Department provides policing services within Higgins Township and the Village of Roscommon. The Sheriff's Department is located on Lake Street in the Village.

- **Police Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services**

The Higgins Township Fire & EMS operates out of a 1994 fire hall that is located at 606 South Fifth Street. This all-volunteer department provide fire service to over 72 square miles including the Township and Village of Roscommon and over ten miles of I-75 that passes through the Township.

## RECREATION

- **Roscommon Area Recreation Authority**

The Roscommon Area Recreation Authority (RARA) provides recreational services to the residents of the Village of Roscommon and Higgins Township. The organization was founded as the Roscommon Metropolitan Recreation Authority in 1969. Since its founding, the RARA has developed several facilities within and adjacent to the Village:

- 1) Metro Park - a 15.4 acre park contains three baseball diamonds, pavilion, and restrooms
- 2) CRAF – this facility has both a large and small gymnasiums, meeting rooms, weight room, cardio room, and “loft” training room {formerly called the Community Recreation Activities and Fitness Center}
- 3) Au Sable River Center – located on the South Branch of the Au Sable River, this facility includes meeting rooms and displays

4) Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve – a 60-acre teaching forest, located just southeast of the Village offers nature trails with interpretive stations. Now operated by the RARA, the facility continues the legacy of naturalist Marguerite Gahagan.

In late 2019, the Roscommon Metropolitan Recreation Authority was reorganized under the Recreational Authorities Act, PA 321 of 2000, and the reorganized organization is adjusting its structure and services to better serve the residents of Roscommon and Higgins Township and the adjacent residents in neighboring townships and the into southern Crawford County.

- **Tisdale Triangle Pathway**

Tisdale Triangle Pathway is a six-mile loop pathway that is open to hikers, trail riders, cross-country skiing, and horseback riders. The trail is located just east of Roscommon on Au Sable State Forest Land. The RARA grooms the trails in winter for cross-country skiing.

- **ORV-ATV & Snowmobiling**

The Geels ORV Trail is located in the central portion of the Township on State-owned land, west of Third Lake Road. There is also a Geels to Roscommon Route, which connects the Village of Roscommon with the Geels ORV Trail. The trail route follows along the western side of Old M-76 south of Roscommon before crossing near Deep Wood Road. It continues along the eastern side of Old M-76 until it intersects with the Geels ORV trail near Geels Road.

The Roscommon County Snowmobile Trails connects the Village of Roscommon with St. Helen, traveling on the west side of Old M-76 to just north of Deep Wood Road where it crosses over to the east side of Old M-76 where it continues into St. Helen.

- **Iron Belle Trail**

The Iron Belle Trail – Biking Route is proposed to follow the Old M-76 from St. Helen northwest to Roscommon where it will turn directly west and follow Sunset Drive west to Higgins Lake. The Iron Belle Trail is a cross-state trail effort that is developing a hiking and separate biking trail from Belle Isle Park in Detroit to Iron Mountain in the western Upper Peninsula. The biking route will be passing through the Township from St. Helen.

- **Canoeing**

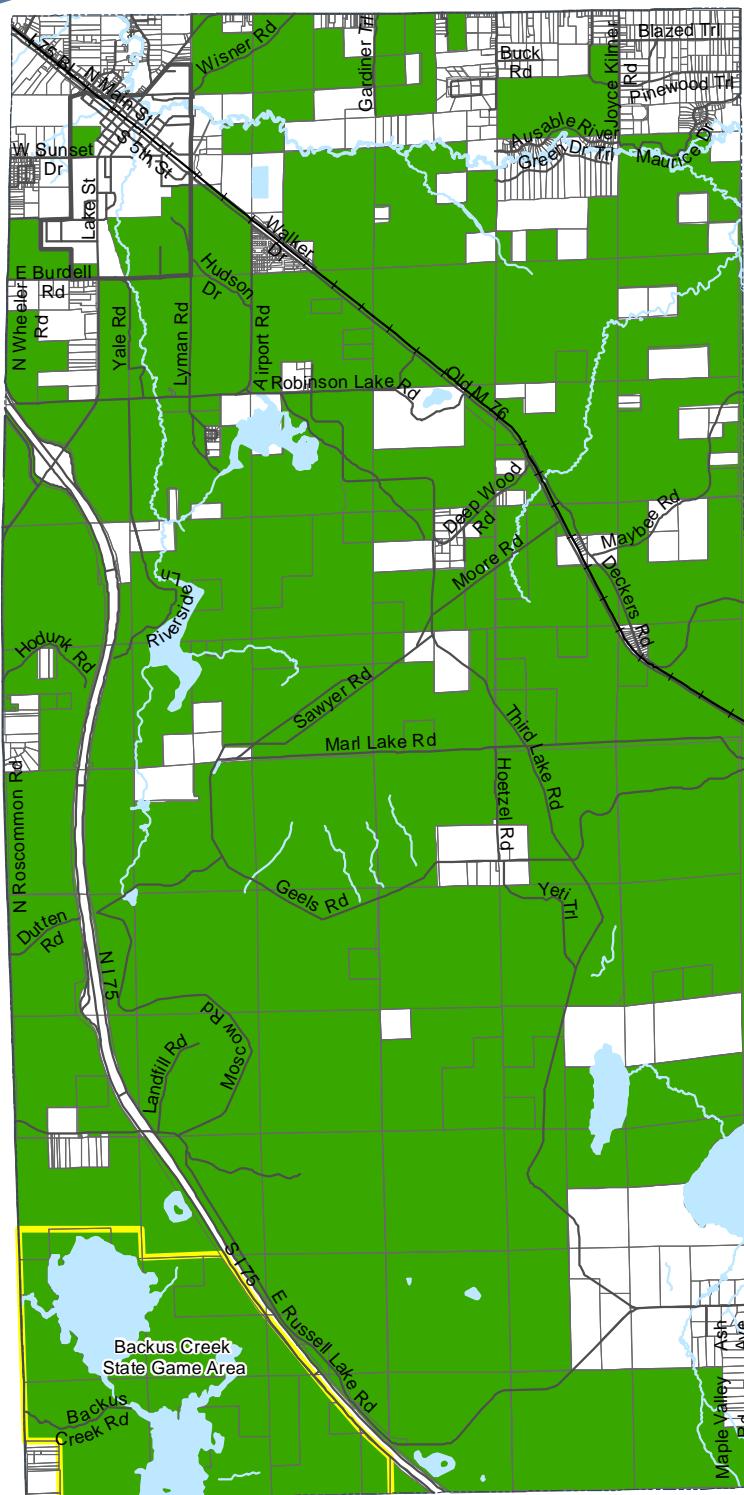
Canoe rentals are available for canoe, kayak, and inner-tube float trips on the south branch of the Au Sable starting in the Village of Roscommon at Lake Street on the South Branch of the Au Sable River.

- **Fireman's Memorial Park**

The Fireman's Memorial includes the names of the firemen that have died in the line of duty in Michigan. The park hosts an annual festival. An Eastpointe sculptor Edward Chesney designed the statue of a 19th Century fireman holding a baby and a lantern, which is the centerpiece of the memorial. The site was donated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, adjacent to the DNR's Forest Fire Experiment Station.

# State-Owned Land

Map 2



## Base Data

- Roads
- Railroad
- Rivers and Streams
- Water Bodies
- Parcels
- Township Boundary
- Village of Roscommon

## State-Owned Land

- State Forest
- Backus Creek State Game Area

Source: Roscommon County GIS Data;  
Michigan Open Data;  
NLCD Land Cover 2019;  
Accessed August 2021.

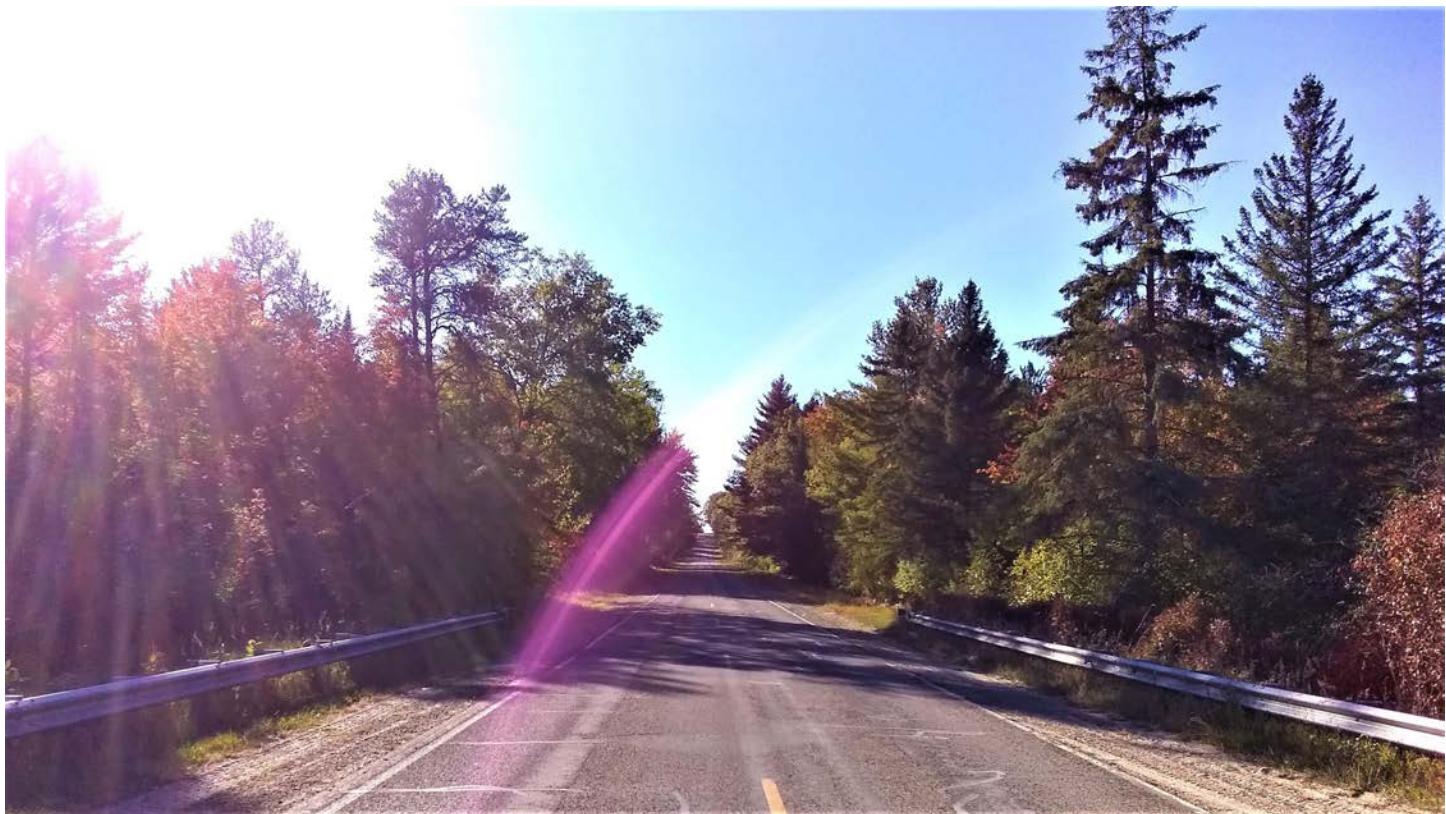
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## Higgins Township Master Plan Update

 WADE TRIM

MAP 2 - State-Forest and State Game Area lands within the Township.

# TRANSPORTATION



The effectiveness, efficiency, and safety of a local transportation network is vital to the development and economic vitality of a community. The transportation network is one of the most important parts of a community's infrastructure as the network is necessary for the transportation of goods and the delivery of services.

In Higgins Township, the transportation network is predominately comprised of a roadway network overseen by the Roscommon County Road Commission. As a Township, the local government does not own or maintain roads like in villages and cities in Michigan. I-75 is maintained and operated by the State of Michigan while all of the other public roads including Old M-76 and M-18 are operated by the Roscommon County

**TABLE 20: FEDERAL ROADWAY CLASSIFICATION FOR TOWNSHIP ROADS**

Federal Roadway Classification	
National Functional Classification (NFC)	Road
Interstate	I-75
Principal Arterial	None
Minor Arterial	M-18
Major Collector	Old M-76/Fifth Street, Airport Road,
Minor Collector	None
Local Streets	All other public streets within the Township

Source: Michigan Department of Transportation

## Federal Functional Classifications

- Interstates and Other Freeways and Expressways: are the prominent road type in the NFC hierarchy intended to carry the major portion of trips entering and leaving urban areas, as well as a majority of the trips bypassing the area. Principal arterials have planned rights-of-ways of 120 feet or greater, and provide high speed, uninterrupted

travel with limited access or restricted access to regionally important urban areas and amenities, such as airports. This system is a major source for interstate travel and fall under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). I-75 is classified as an interstate in Higgins Township.

- Principal Arterials: serve major metropolitan centers focusing on providing a high degree of mobility and may also serve rural areas. These roadway provide both through and local traffic, and they do provide access to abutting land uses. No road in Higgins Township is classified as a Principal Arterial.
- Minor Arterials: serve a similar in function to principal arterials, but they generally carry less traffic and connect to smaller urban centers. The minor arterial system interconnects with and augments the principal arterial system by providing for trips of moderate length with less traffic mobility. Accessibility is greater but stops are more frequent due to signalized intersections. Minor arterial streets are generally spaced from 1/8 – 1/2 mile in the central business district to 2 – 3 miles apart in the suburban fringes, but are normally not more than 1 mile apart in fully developed areas. Minor arterial planned rights-of-ways are usually 120 feet wide and fall under the jurisdiction of the Roscommon County Road Commission. M-18 is classified as a Minor Arterial.
- Major Collectors: provide access and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods, commercial and industrial areas. These streets differ from the arterials in that they usually enter neighborhood areas to distribute residents throughout the entire system to and from their destinations. Collector streets also collect traffic from local streets and channel them into the arterial system. Major collectors are important intra-county travel corridors and provide service to county seats not on an arterial route, to larger towns not directly served by the higher systems, and to other traffic generators of equivalent intra-county importance. Major collectors planned rights-of-ways are generally 120 feet wide. Old M-76/Fifth Street, Airport Road, Robinson Lake Road, and Sunset Drive are classified as Major Collectors.
- Minor Collectors: Minor collectors are identified to collect traffic from local roads and private property and bring all developed areas within a reasonable distance of a major collector or arterial road. These roads are generally spaced on half section lines. No roads in Higgins Township are designated as Minor Collectors.
- Local Streets: comprises all streets and roadways not identified in one of the higher systems. Local streets primarily provide direct access to abutting land and to minor collector streets. Movement of through traffic is usually discouraged on local streets. All of the remaining public roads in the Township are designated as Local Roads. In the Township, private roads may also provide access to some properties and/or subdivisions.

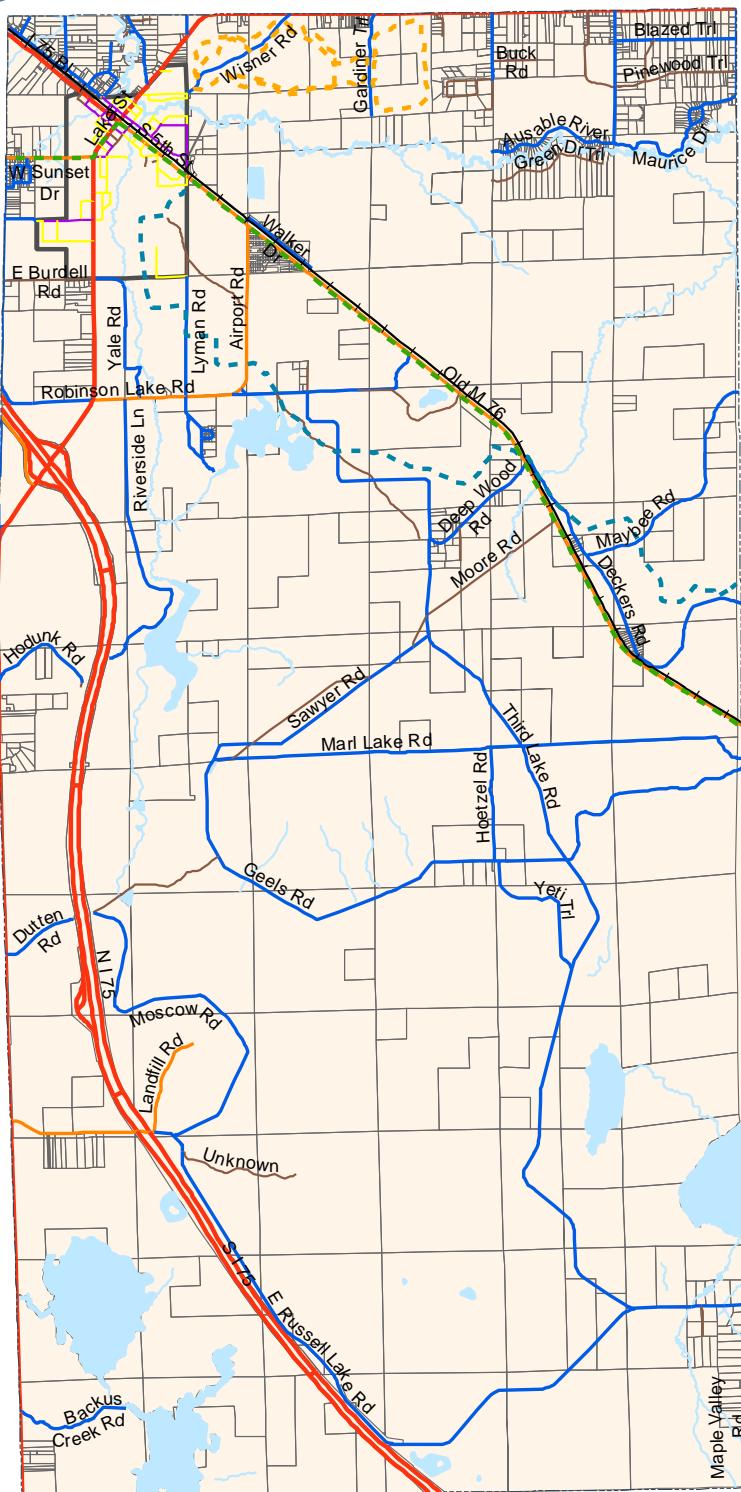
### State of Michigan Act 51 Classifications

Michigan's Public Act 51, PA of 1951, as amended, is the mechanism under which the State of Michigan shares state gas tax revenues for road maintenance with its municipalities. Eligible units of government are awarded funds based on the mileage of roadway within their boundaries. Higgins Township does not have jurisdiction over its roads as the Roscommon County Road Commission maintains all of the non-State highways within the township.

The State of Michigan retains a portion of the gas tax revenues, which are allocated to MDOT for maintenance and upgrading of the interstate highways and state trunk-

# Transportation Network

# Map 3



## Base Data

- Railroad
  - Rivers and Streams
  - Water Bodies
  - Parcels
  - Township Boundary
  - Village of Roscommon

# Road Classifications

- Non Act 51 Certified
  - State Trunkline
  - County Primary
  - County Local
  - City Major
  - City Minor

## **Nonmotorized/Recreation Trails**

- - - Iron Belle Trail
  - - - Snowmobile Trail
  - - - Au Sable Tisdale Trail

Source: Roscommon County GIS Data;  
Michigan Open Data

August 2021

# Higgins Township Master Plan Update



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lines within the local jurisdictions. The remaining funds are allocated to local units of government by a set formula, and ultimately, the allocation depends upon the length of roadway in each classification.

Under Act 51, Michigan's roads are divided into five categories – State Trunkline Highways, County Primary Roads, County Local Roads, City Major Streets and Local Streets. In regard to State funding and responsibility, the Roscommon County Road Commission is only directly concerned with the middle two categories – County Primary

and County Local. M-18 is a State Trunkline that passes through the Township as well as I-75 BR north of the Village, and they are maintained by the Michigan Department of Transportation. County Primary Roads in the Township include C-105/Landfill Road, Old M-76, C-100, and C-103. There are 13.28 miles of County Primary roads and 68.55 miles of County Local roads in Higgins Township. The last two designations, for streets, are for cities and villages. Designed to carry higher volumes and heavier weighted vehicles at greater speeds, City Major Streets receive more funding per mile than Local Streets which typically serve only residential areas.

Higgins Township also includes local county seasonal roads that provide access to private properties located throughout the State Forest. Under Public Act 51, county road commissions are authorized to develop a system of seasonal roads. The commissions do not have to provide maintenance from November to April on these roads, and they may also limit access during these months if they so choose to limit damage to the unmaintained road or to prevent unwarranted access to private vacation homes along these roads.

### Railroad Transportation

The Lake State Railway now operates the former D& M.R.R. (Detroit and Mackinac/New York Central Railroad). The railroad traverses the township in a northwesterly-southeasterly direction, passing through the Village of Roscommon on through Grayling, terminating in Gaylord. To the southeast it passes through Standish, Bay City, Saginaw to the north side of Flint where it interconnects with the CSX Railroad.

The Lake State Railway intersects M-18 in the Village of Roscommon and parallels Old M 76 completely all the way through Higgins Township and the Village.

### Air Travel

Roscommon Conservation Airport is located in Section 16, southeast of the Village of Roscommon. The airport has a 75' wide by 3,552' long paved east-west runway 10/28 while the north-south runway is 100' wide by 2,160' long grass runway 18/36. Besides a single hanger, there are no facilities at the airport. Its call sign is 3RC.

Other nearby general commercial aviation airports include:

1. Roscommon County-Blodgett Memorial Airport; 5 - 11 miles from Higgins Township.
2. Crawford County Air Terminal at Grayling Army Air Force Base; 18 - 24 miles from Higgins Township.
3. West Branch Airport; 25 - 30 miles from Higgins Township.
4. Gladwin Airport; 40 - 45 miles from Higgins Township.
5. Clare Airport; 60 - 65 miles from Higgins Township.
6. Standish Airport; 60 - 65 miles from Higgins Township.

Major feeder commercial service airports are located at the Traverse City, Midland-Saginaw Bay City, and Flint Airports. The closest full service commercial airline service is provided at Detroit Metropolitan and Grand Rapids International airports.

## **Bus Service**

Intercity bus service travels north-south on US-127 through the western part of Roscommon County. Nearby bus stops for the Straits bus route are located in Grayling and Houghton Lake.

Local bus service is provided by the Roscommon County Transportation Authority (RCTA). The RCTA provides dial-a-ride services within Roscommon County and will connect into adjacent counties as necessary. All buses have either a lift or a ramp for riders who require mobility assistance. In August 2021, the RCTA provided 5,555 rides including regular, disabled, and senior passengers.

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## NATURAL FEATURES



### Topography

The southern two-thirds of Higgins Township is comprised of a few mound-like small hills surrounded by swampy land that would meet the definition of a wetlands by Public Act 203 of 1979, the Goemaere-Anderson Wetland Protection Act.

The northern one-third of the Township includes generally higher rolling lands where most of the development has occurred in the Village of Roscommon, adjacent land in Higgins Township, land around the I-75-M-18 interchange extending northerly into the Village and lands located south of M 18 and extending south to the Au Sable River.

The topography of the Township otherwise is generally at the same level due to the interconnecting swamp/wetland areas. A gentle slope of the Township from its most southerly part to the north causes a general flow of surface drainage north towards the Au Sable River. The Robinson Creek flows north from the Robinson Creek Flooding area and Robinson Lake. The Au Sable River flows in a westerly direction to the very northern part of the Township, then in the Village of Roscommon it flows in a northeasterly direction until it meets up with the main branch of the Au Sable River north of M-72 in Crawford County.

### Watercourses

There are several main watercourses within Higgins Township with the majority flow from south to north; however, the southwestern corner of the Township, which includes the Backus Creek State Game Area, drains westerly into Houghton Lake through the Cut River.

In the southeastern corner of the Township, Russell Lake flows east into Lake Saint Helen. The water flowing out of Lake Saint Helen is the South Branch of the Au Sable River. The South Branch generally flows northward through Richfield and Au Sable Township. Close to the Crawford County southern border, the river turns west and flows westerly until it reaches the Village of Roscommon, where it turns northerly and flows into Crawford County, meeting up with the Main Branch of the Au Sable River west of the intersection of M-18 and M-72.

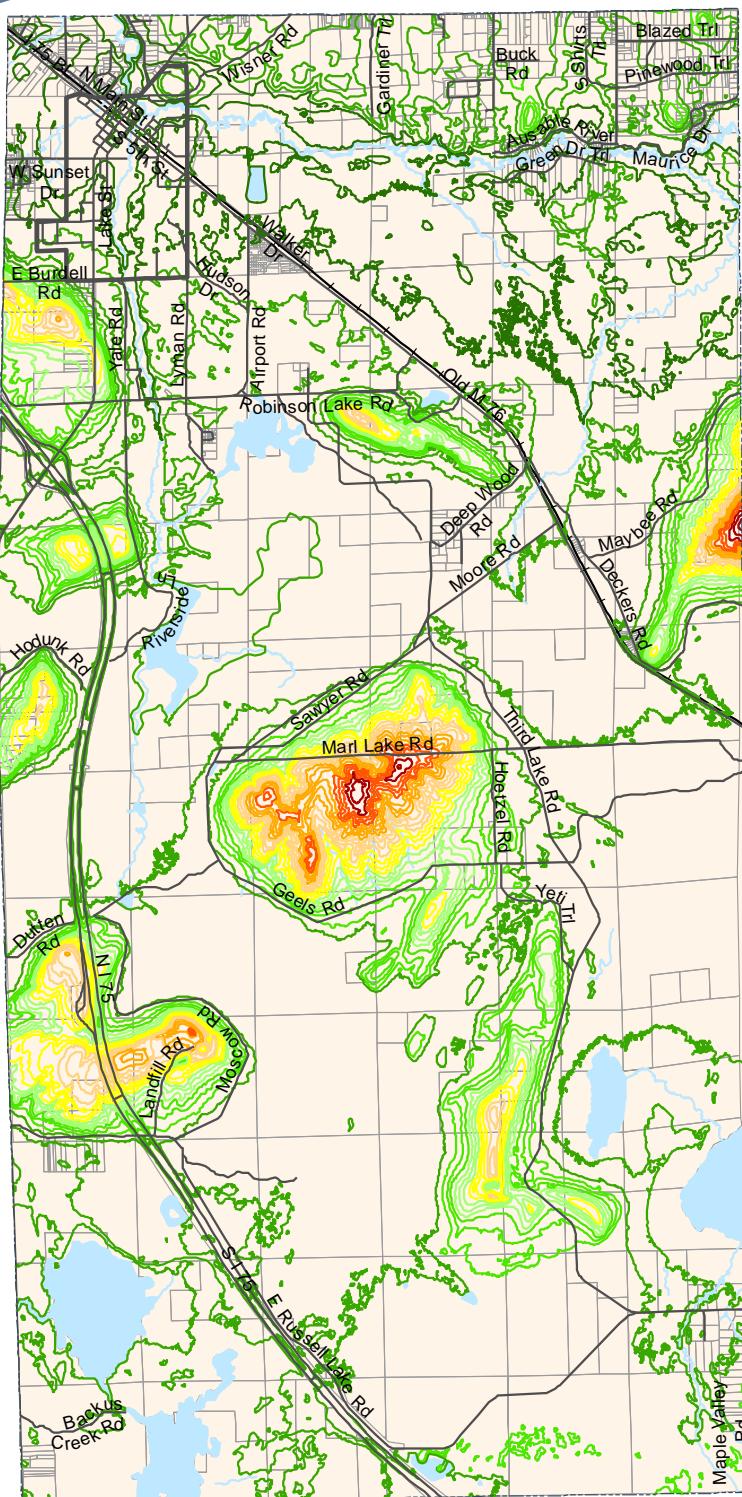
The central portion of the Township east of I-75 drains northward along Robinson Creek, which drains Robinson Lake and the Robinson Creek Flooding Area. The Robinson Creek meets the South Branch of the Au Sable River in the Village just upstream of the Campbell's Canoe Livery on Lake Street.

Hudson Creek drains the northeastern portion of the Township. It flows northerly before meeting the South Branch of the Au Sable River near the Au Sable Township border. A small creek also drains the northeastern portion of the Township, north of Old M-76, but it flows in a northwesterly direction meeting up with the South Branch, approximately two miles east of the Village.

There are two small tributaries of the South Branch of the Au Sable River that drain the area to the west of the Village and meet the South Branch either just a couple blocks north of Lake Street or north near the Crawford County line.

According to the Roscommon County Drain Commissioner, there are limited controlled county drains within Higgins Township. This lack of drainage districts is likely due to the limited agricultural lands, abundant wetlands, and hilly nature of the Township.

County drains were established in Michigan to assist farmers in draining fields. Due to suburbanization of formerly rural lands adjacent to cities and towns, county drains may be found in Michigan's suburbanized areas as well. A special assessment district process is utilized by county drain commissions to fund major improvements and repair work to County drains. Properties within drainage area of the drain to be repaired are identified and the costs for the repair work are spread across those property owners.

**Base Data**

- Roads
- Railroad
- Rivers and Streams
- Water Bodies
- Parcels
- Township Boundary
- Village of Roscommon

**Elevation Contours (10 foot)**

- 1,120' - 1,140'
- 1,150' - 1,170'
- 1,180' - 1,200'
- 1,210' - 1,230'
- 1,240' - 1,260'
- 1,270' - 1,290'
- 1,300' - 1,320'
- 1,330' - 1,350'
- 1,360' - 1,380'

Source: Roscommon County GIS Data;  
Michigan Open Data;  
USGS Topographic Data

August 2021  
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## Higgins Township Master Plan Update



MAP 4 - Higgins Township Topographic Features

## **Wetlands**

Approximately 50% of the Township is comprised of emergent and forested wetlands, which are regulated under the Goemaere-Anderson Wetland Protection Act. Over 70 percent of Michigan's wetlands have been lost to agriculture or development since European settlement, and this act was established in 1979 to preserve as much of the remaining wetlands as possible. See the Natural Features map for the general locations of wetlands in the Township.

Wetlands are a valuable resource as they have both aesthetic and functional benefits. Wetlands are defined as land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does support wetland vegetation and aquatic life. Typical wetlands include bogs, swamps, marshes, and hydric soils that are saturated or flooded. Areas may include low-lying scrub or forested plants. Wetlands provide important habitat for a range of mammals and migratory birds.

## **Forests**

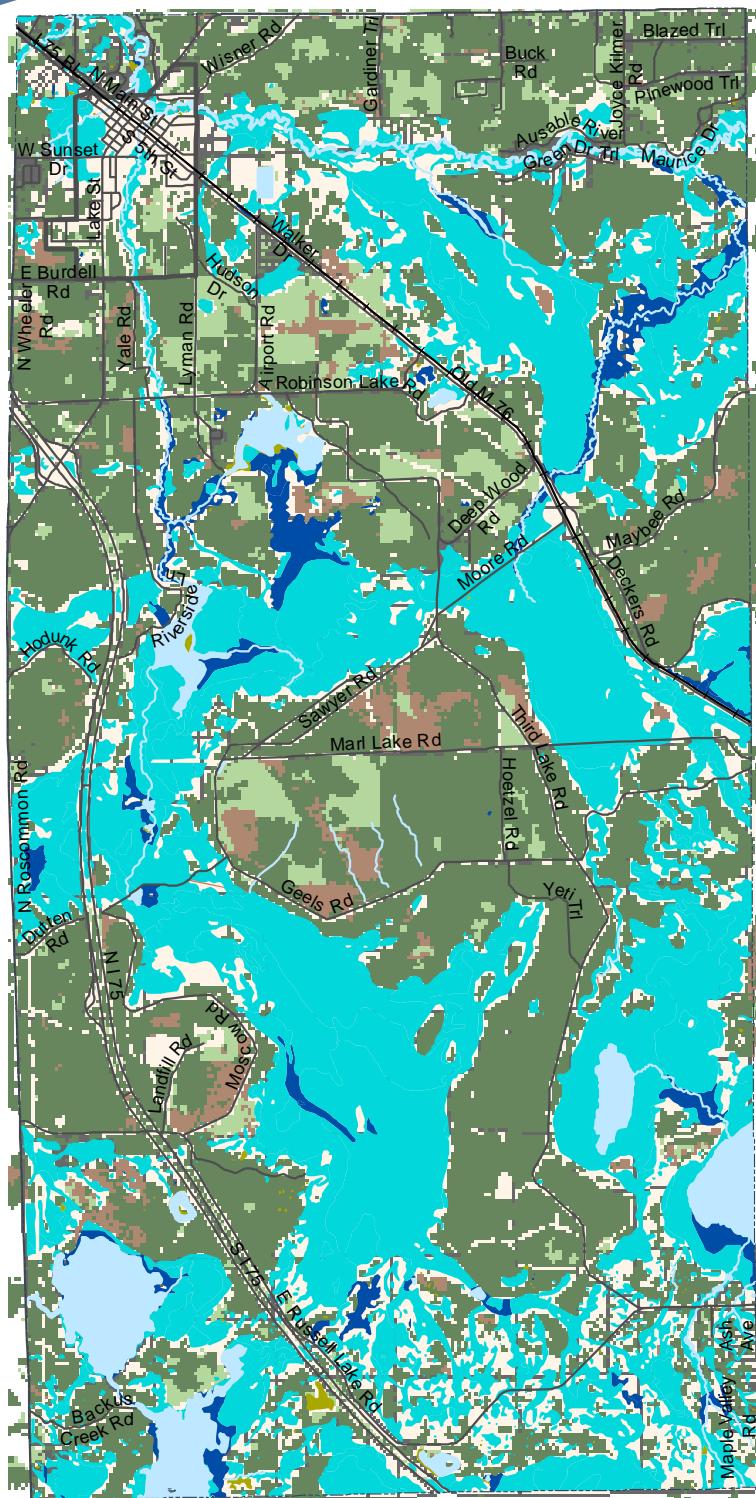
Most of the land in Higgins Township historically was forested and continues to be forested, except for some of the wetland areas. Most of the forested lands are in the State owned Au Sable Forest, also known as the Roscommon Unit of the Michigan State Forest. Large portions of the land was originally logged in the 19th Century, burned over by large forest fires in the early 20th Century, and planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.

Forested lands are valuable for the forest products which can be produced from them and for the natural vegetation and wildlife that live in them. State forest land also is an important recreational resource for the Township.

The Roscommon Unit Compartment Review identifies duties of the forestry staff including wildfire suppression, forestry, land management, pathways management, administration of the ORV and snowmobile trails as well as the state forest campgrounds within the 275,000 acres of state land within Roscommon and Ogemaw Counties. The Geels ORV and snowmobile trail are located in the Township. Fishing and hunting occur widely on State Forest lands throughout the Township.

# Natural Features

Map 5



## Base Data

- Roads
- Railroad
- Rivers and Streams
- Water Bodies
- Parcels
- Township Boundary
- Village of Roscommon

## Natural Features

- Emergent Wetland
- Forested/Shrub Wetland
- Freshwater Pond
- Forested Land
- Shrub/Scrub
- Grassland Herbaceous

Source: Roscommon County GIS Data;  
Michigan Open Data;  
NLCD Land Cover 2019;  
National Wetlands Inventory, accessed August 2021.

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## Higgins Township Master Plan Update

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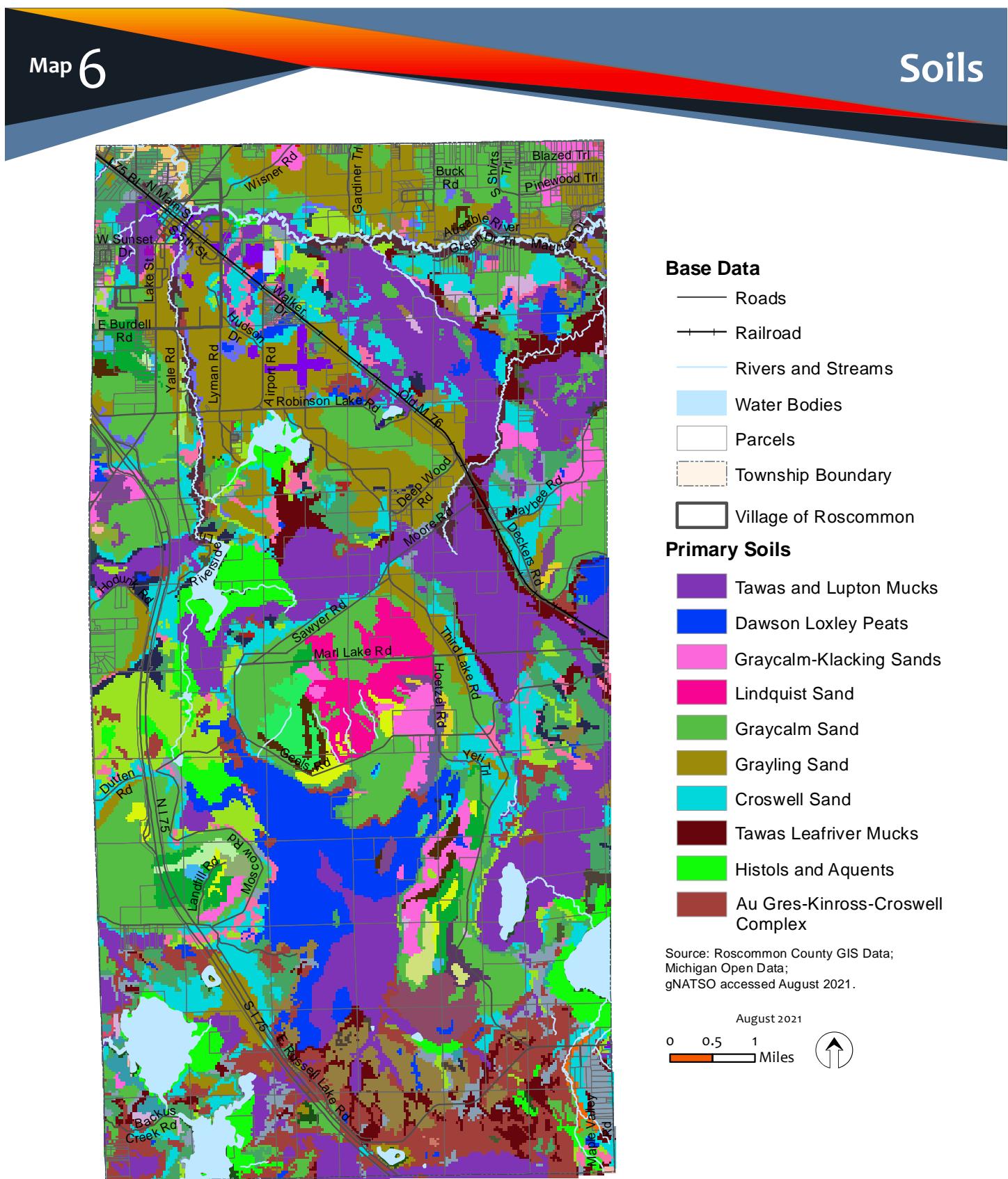
MAP 5 - Higgins Township Woodlands and Wetlands

## Soils

According to Roscommon County GIS data with information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there are ten primary soil types located within Higgins Township. The soil types could be broken down into three main types:

- 1) Low-laying wetlands soils including Tawas and Lupton Mucks, Dawson Loxley Peats, Au Gres-Kinross-Croswell Complex, Croswell Sand, and Histols and Aquent
- 2) Hill-top soils including Graycalm-Klacking Sands, Graycalm Sand, and Linquist Sand
- 3) Higher rolling lands including Grayling Sand and Graycalm Sand

The extensive forests and wetlands found in the County and more specifically in Higgins Township indicate extensive areas of sandy soil in the upland areas and organic soils in the wetland areas.



## EXISTING LAND USE



An important component of the master planning process is having an understanding of the community's existing conditions and the current relationships between land uses. A base map illustrating municipal boundaries, water bodies, roads, railroad, and parcels with the existing land uses illustrated provides a significant amount of detail that allows for the generalized assessment of the community's current condition.

This information is utilized to evaluate where future residential, commercial, industrial, and public land uses should be considered. The Existing Land Uses Map serves as the foundation for the future vision of the community. It is through an understanding gained about the existing land uses and land use conflicts that provides the framework for the development of the Future Land Use Map. The Future Land Use Map sets the community's vision for itself and serves as the bridge between the current development conditions as detailed in the Existing Land Use Map and the goals outlined in the Master Plan and its Future Land Use Map.

An existing land use survey was conducted in the summer of 2021 identifying the existing land uses currently found within the Township. High resolution aerial images and County parcel data was reviewed to draft a preliminary Existing Land Use Map in July 2021. The Township's 2001 Existing Land Use Map was not able to be found. This map was originally produced in a large-format hard copy with the only copy being kept at Township Hall, so a correlation between the 2001 and 2021 Existing Land Use Maps was unable to be made.

The existing land uses were broken down into eight generalized categories. Efforts were taken to ensure that the overwhelming majority of land uses within close proximity to a specific location would be accurately reflected by the land use shown on the map; however, pinpoint accuracy is not expected or required with this exercise. As master planning is more generalized in nature in comparison with site-specific zoning

of individual parcels, variations will exist between individual parcels and the land use identified for the parcel and possibly its immediate surroundings.

The Higgins Township Existing Land Use Map identifies the eight following land uses with the predominate characteristics described in each:

**FOREST AND FOREST RECREATION (F&FR)** – This land use designation includes State Forest lands, the Backus State Game Area, and large lot residential uses over 40 acres in size with intended forestry and/or recreational uses intended for public lands.

**RURAL RESIDENTIAL (RR)** – This land use designation includes larger lot residential uses on sites greater than five (5) acres in size.

**URBAN RESIDENTIAL (UR)** – This land use designation includes smaller lot residential uses, on one acre or larger parcels, in large-lot subdivisions that do not have access to public utilities. Smaller lots located near the Village may be found.

**MANUFACTURED HOUSING RESIDENTIAL (MHR)** – This land use designation includes the Township's developed mobile home parks.

**COMMERCIAL (C)** – This land use designation identifies locations that have commercial, retail, and service uses on parcels that are often located along main public streets leading into the Village of Roscommon.

**INSTITUTIONAL (INS)** – This land use designation identifies locations where public uses may be found, which includes schools, parks, cemeteries, public facilities, and hospitals.

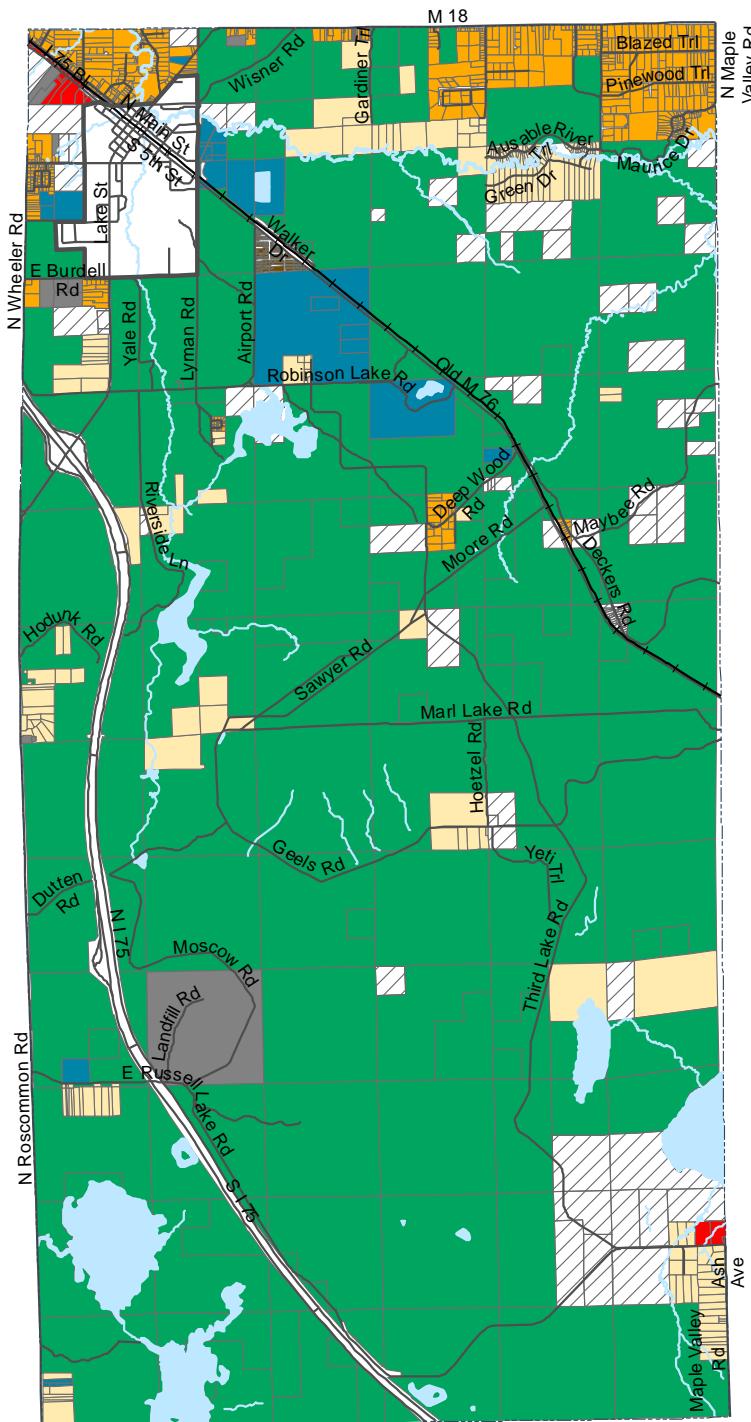
**INDUSTRIAL (I)** – This designation includes lands where manufacturing or production of goods is occurring or it is where storage and material handling operations are located.

**VACANT (V)** – Unimproved private lands without any dwelling or permanent structures are identified as vacant.

The Master Plan Steering Committee reviewed the July 2021 draft Existing Land Use Map at its August 13, 2021 meeting. Corrections to the map were made with the final draft map being presented at the November 10, 2021 Master Plan Open House held at Township Hall.

# Existing Land Use

Map 7



## Base Data

- Railroad
- Rivers and Streams
- Water Bodies
- Parcels
- Township Boundary
- Village of Roscommon

## Land Use

- Forest/Forest Recreational
- Rural Residential
- Urban Residential
- Manufactured Housing Residential
- Commercial
- Institutional
- Industrial
- Vacant

Source: Roscommon County GIS Data;  
Michigan Open Data;  
USGS Topographic Data

November 2021  
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## Higgins Township Master Plan Update

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MAP 7 - Existing Land Uses within the Township - November 2021