

Introduction

Historically, Plain Township was a place separate and distinct from the cities of Canton, North Canton, and other smaller nearby towns and villages. Plain Township has a history of milling and rural life. People who lived in the Township held themselves differently than city dwellers, as their life was distinct from life in the city. People from Plain Township may have gone to the city for shopping, entertainment, or business, but they always returned to their homes in the countryside. Life was maybe a little slower there than in the city. Maybe it was quieter, more neighborly, more rural and tied to the land. Maybe some people lived there because their families always did and that continuity was important. Raising a family where you yourself were raised is important. In any event, life in Plain Township was something valued by the people who called the countryside home.

Today, that situation is dramatically different. Anyone who has lived in the Township for the last ten years, thirty years, or an entire lifetime can count the changes. Some have been for the better—some have not. These changes can be summed up in an erosion of Plain Township physically and in character. Annexations from Canton and North Canton have consumed significant swaths of what was formerly Township land. Future annexations seem likely, further reducing the physical land in the Township and its tax base.

Beyond annexations, Canton and North Canton have left their mark on Plain Township through suburban sprawl. Residential subdivisions, commercial shopping centers, and other suburban land uses are beginning to stretch across Plain Township with little regard to preserving what was once special about this place—the rural character, the separate distinctive lifestyle, and the natural beauty. In many areas, the reality is that Plain Township, Canton, and North Canton are indistinguishable from each other.

The challenge before the Township leadership, and the challenge this Comprehensive Plan takes up, is how to best manage future growth and change. Undeveloped land, farms, floodplain and stream corridors, natural resources, and environmentally sensitive properties all still remain in play today. Development is not sweeping through Plain Township, but the pressure is steady and constant. As the supply of open property becomes scarce, areas that once were not attractive for development because of environmental constraints, poor road access, or utility concerns suddenly can be the next item on the planning commission's agenda.

Plain Township hired Pflum, Klausmeier & Gehrum Consultants, Inc. (PKG) to prepare this Comprehensive Mini Master Plan. Beginning in 2001, PKG conducted inventory and base data collection and analysis with the help of Township staff. In order to prepare the vision, goals, and objectives of this plan, a citizens Steering Committee was formed and began meeting in January 2001 and early 2002. The Steering Committee also served as the working group to discuss and prepare recommendations for the four main elements of this plan: Zoning and Development Regulations, Parks and Open Space, Transportation Planning, and Capital Improvements.

In addition to working with the Steering Committee, PKG conducted Key Person Interviews and public workshops to further gather community input and ideas, and to engage citizens in planning for the future of Plain Township.

What results from this process is this plan which establishes a framework for Plain Township to use for future decisions and programs regarding land use, transportation, and capital improvements. This plan does not describe detailed action steps or develop implementation programs. Instead, it describes, through the vision, goals, objectives, and supporting development policies, the general course the Township should take in order to become the place its residents most want it to be.

It must be emphasized that a comprehensive plan cannot remain relevant and effective if it is treated as a static, unchanging document. Circumstances and trends change over time. Plain Township will need to change its policies and strategies to meet these changes. For this reason, generally a comprehensive plan should be evaluated and revised every five years, and overhauled every ten years.

Vision, Goals, and Objectives

The Steering Committee, during its many meetings, established an agenda for the future of Plain Township. This agenda is articulated by defining a long-range vision along with specific goals and objectives, which will guide decisions by elected Township officials.

Vision Statement

Plain Township should be a safe, convenient, affordable place offering good schools, services, recreation, transportation, and an excellent quality of life.

Land Use Planning Goals

1. Preserve and protect the natural resources of Plain Township including riparian corridors and wetlands.
2. Establish and maintain a sound revenue base for Plain Township through an appropriate balance of land uses.
3. Establish an interconnected and integrated public park and recreation system throughout Plain Township.
4. Require new development to provide or demonstrate ample public facilities to provide service.
5. Encourage a variety of housing types, densities, and values.
6. Encourage development patterns that include dedication of quality open space.
7. Upgrade design regulations and development requirements for storm water management.
8. Encourage development patterns and design that protects aquifer recharge areas and groundwater wellfields.

Capital Improvement Goals

1. Coordinate sanitary sewer and water projects with the City of Canton and the Stark County Sewer District to continue phasing out package treatment plants and septic systems.
2. Coordinate (City) water projects with Canton and North Canton to continue phasing out private wells.
3. Establish a physical focal point for Plain Township in conjunction with public school construction and improvements.
4. Continue funding options for storm water projects through OPWC.
5. Create a proactive effort to promote and sell Plain Township.
6. Continue with routine traffic control projects and road improvements.

Service Goals

1. Explore expanding Fire/EMS operations to four full-time stations.
2. Implement mutual response agreements with other departments.
3. Provide detective position through Stark County Sheriff's Office for Plain Township.
4. Research benefits of a Stark County Sheriff's Office substation in Plain Township.
5. Establish a stronger community identity with Plain Township's Police Forces.
6. Begin dialogue with adjacent communities to create partnerships to evaluate the potential benefits of regionalization of safety and maintenance services.
7. Work with Stark County and make recommendations for Storm Water Utilities.
8. Coordinate growth and development with expansion of Township services in order to maintain service levels. This should include funding, personnel, equipment, and facility location.
9. Create and implement Plain Township's Exterior Property Maintenance Code.