

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Following this introduction and a brief overview of the elements of this Master Plan is a geographic description and brief history of Bridgewater Township, along with observations about the future of the Township. These materials provide a context for the balance of the Plan.

AUTHORITY TO PLAN UNDER STATE STATUTES

Michigan Planning Enabling Act

On March 13, 2008, the Governor signed into law Public Act 33, which is the new Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA). This Act replaced the former Township Planning Act (as well as the municipal and county planning acts) and became effective September 1, 2008. The new MPEA consolidated and updated planning provisions from all three existing Michigan planning enabling acts.

Michigan Zoning Enabling Act

In addition to serving as the Master Plan for the Township, this is also intended to be the plan referred to in the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (Public Act 110 of 2006, as amended) as the basis for and foundation of the Bridgewater Township Zoning Ordinance. The required zoning plan elements are found in the "Zoning Plan" chapter of the Master Plan, and the following separate special plan elements and sub-area plans are also part of this plan:

- Bridgewater Hamlet Area Plan

WHY HAVE A MASTER PLAN FOR THE TOWNSHIP?

This Master Plan is intended to be a policy blueprint for the future of Bridgewater Township. It includes both a clear statement of the community's vision of the future, and plans to achieve that vision. Per Section 7 of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, the purpose of the Master Plan is to guide decision-making of the Planning Commission and Township Board related to land use, community development, and capital improvement projects, and to help create a land use pattern that:

- Is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical.
- 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.
- Will, in accordance with present and future needs, best promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare.
- Includes, among other things, promotion of one or more of the following:
 - System of transportation to lessen congestion on streets.
 - Safety from fire and other dangers.
 - Light and air.
 - Healthful and convenient distribution of population.
 - Good civic design, and wise and efficient expenditure of public funds.
 - Public utilities such as sewage disposal, water supply, and other improvements.
 - Recreation, and the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability."

It is a comprehensive document, long-range in its view, and intended to guide development in the Township over the next ten to twenty years. The Master Plan identifies specific goals and objectives, and establishes detailed public policy recommendations regarding land use and future growth. The information and concepts presented in the Master Plan are intended to guide local decisions on both public and private uses of land, as well as the provision of public facilities.

It is not the intent of this plan to entitle a property owner to a zoning change consistent with a future land use designation in this plan, especially where the infrastructure or public services necessary for such development are not present. Such decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis at the time the question arises, and within the context of this plan, applicable zoning ordinance provisions, and other applicable regulations.

Relationship to Past Plans and Changing Conditions

This Master Plan builds on the foundations of previous Township plans, including the "general development plan" adopted in 1992, and the most recent master plan adopted in 2001 and amended in 2006. Much of the 2001 Plan remains pertinent today, and has been retained.

The Planning Commission recognizes that the future remains uncertain, and that current perceptions of future conditions will change. The major issues of concern raised in this plan may also change over time, requiring strategies and policies appropriate to respond to them to be modified or replaced. The Commission intends to review this plan regularly, and to refine, add to or otherwise modify the Master Plan as necessary to meet changing conditions in the future.

PLANNING AREA

Location

Bridgewater Township is 35.6 square miles located near the southwest corner of Washtenaw County (see Map 1). It is located between the City of Saline to the east, Village of Manchester to the west, and the Village of Clinton to the south. The north-south M-52 corridor is located just to the west, and US-12 cuts across the southeast quarter of the Township. The River Raisin runs through the western part of the Township, while the Saline River has its headwaters in Columbia Lake and Joslin Lake in the northeast of the Township.

There are three school districts within the boundaries of Bridgewater Township: Clinton Community Schools, Manchester Community Schools and Saline Area Schools. The Clinton and Manchester volunteer fire departments serve the residents of the Township. Three libraries (Clinton, Manchester and Saline) also serve the community.

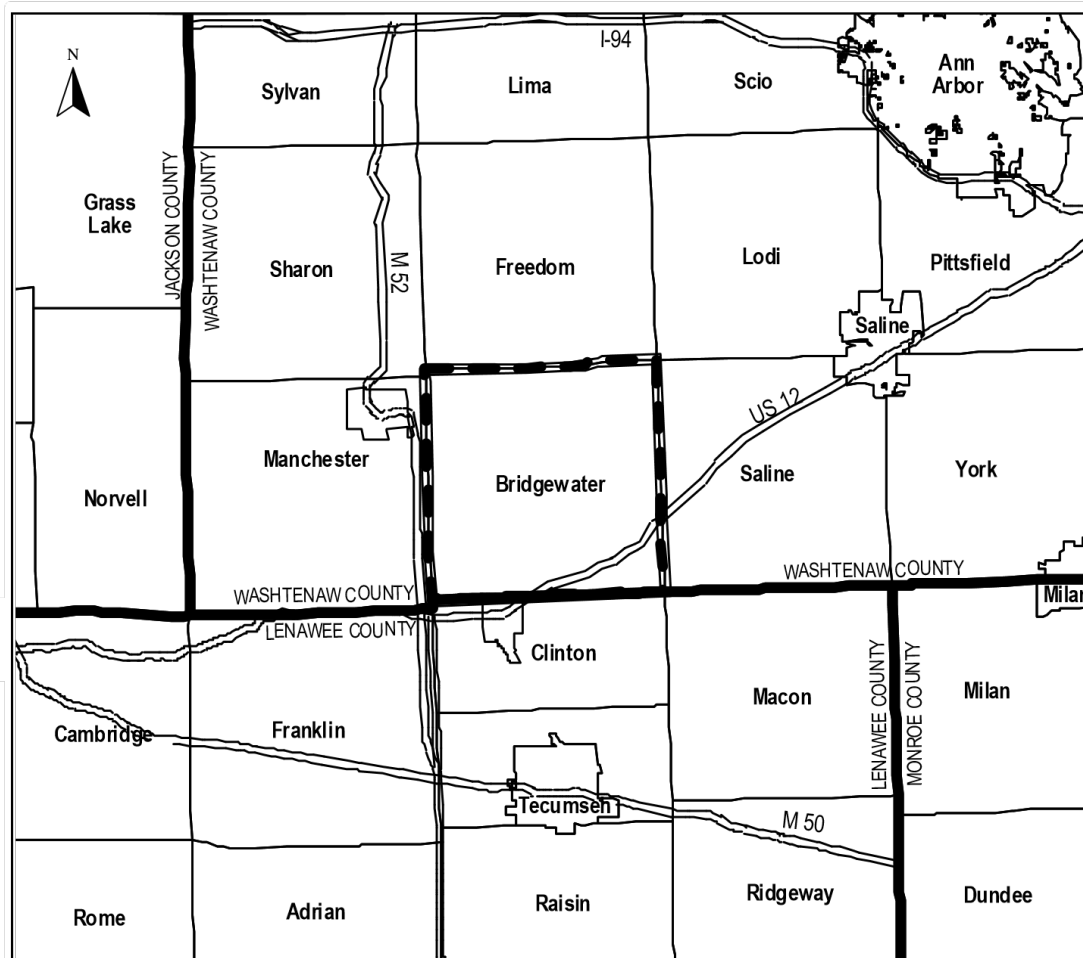
The Hamlet of Bridgewater is a historic railroad settlement consisting today of a mix of businesses and residents. The Hamlet is located on Austin Road, a main east-west route, in the northeast quarter of the Township a few miles west of the City of Saline.

Coordination with Neighboring Jurisdictions

Bridgewater Township shares boundaries with nine (9) other jurisdictions in Washtenaw and Lenawee counties, and pledges to coordinate with and cooperate with neighboring

jurisdictions and other outside agencies with jurisdiction in the preparation and updating of this Master Plan, and in the review and comment on draft plans of other jurisdictions.

Map 1 Location of Bridgewater Township and Adjacent Communities



Map representative and not to scale.

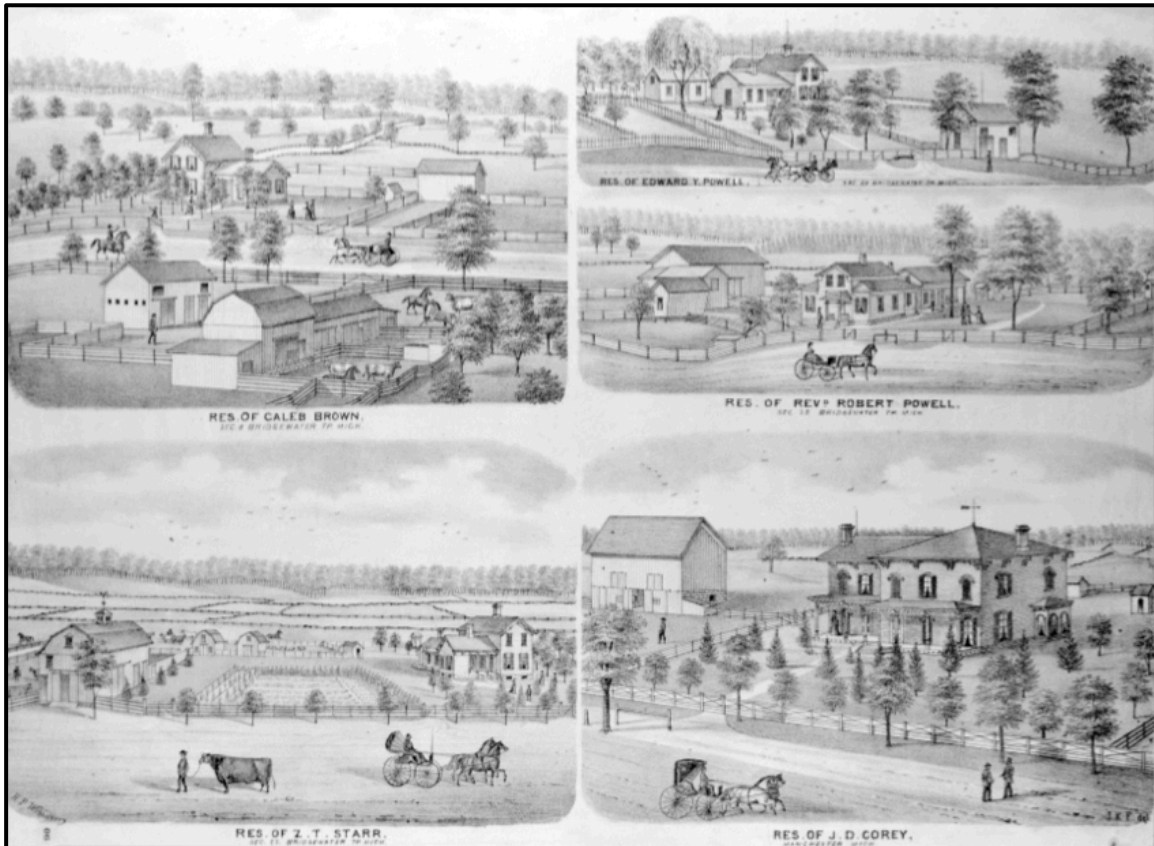
HISTORY OF BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP

“Bridgewater is a country of gentle farmland, beautiful rivers and streams and picturesque lakes – Joslin Lake, Columbus Lake, the expansion of the Raisin River and Iron Creek run through the area. It has a wealth of agricultural resources and 90 percent of the township is devoted to farming.” (“Manchester’s First Hundred Years (1867-1967)” by Marie A. Schneider. Manchester Area Historical Society, pg. 53)

The township was originally named “Hixon Township,” after Daniel Hixon who had settled in the area in 1829. In 1832, Hixon Township divided into what would become Bridgewater and Manchester townships. An 1819 survey available in the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor shows the area that would become Bridgewater Township in 36 sections totaling 22,997.67 acres. Its first Supervisor, George Howe, named the township in honor of a village of the same name in Oneida County, New York.

"The first birth (in Bridgewater Township) was that of Henrietta Hixon. The first marriage was that of Dennis Lancaster and Harriet Frederick. It was Daniel Hixon who built the first house of log and the first frame house was built by Daniel Brooks.

"Normal Conklin was the first school teacher in the first district school built in 1834, and Jacob Gilbert erected the first sawmill on the 'East Bend' of the Raisin in the same year. The first grist mill (in the township) was built by Wm. W. Aunin in 1857." (Ibid., pg. 53)



By 1850 there were two settlements, River Raisin and Bridgewater. Each had a railroad station and a post office. The River Raisin community no longer exists.

"The German Lutherans erected the first church (in Bridgewater) with Rev. Mr. Foltz the pastor. The Taylor and the Morris saw-mills existed up to 1870, when a fire destroyed both. A shoddy mill was established; but because of the difficulty in obtaining rags it was discontinued." (Ibid., pg. 53)

In 1856 the first town hall opened at on the site at 10990 Clinton Road, Clinton, Michigan. It was used for "moral and scientific lectures and for funerals." (Ibid., pg. 53) The present hall was built in 1882 and appears on the Michigan Register of Historic Sites. It has been in continuous use as the site of township meetings, elections and social functions since that time.

"In the early days (the Hamlet of) Bridgewater was a station on the Detroit, Hillsdale, and Indiana Railroad (which was) completed through Washtenaw County in 1870. That

route began in Ypsilanti and ran through Saline, Bridgewater and Manchester and on to Hillsdale.” (Ibid., pp. 11, 54) Both passenger and freight service were available, with additional passenger rail service to Tecumseh, Jackson and other stops along the Lakeshore and Michigan Southern railroad were available from neighboring Manchester Village. The tracks were removed during the 1960s.

Past industrial activities in Bridgewater included the Luther and Erwin Klager Hatchery on Austin Road, which was in operation by 1927. By 1967, it was “the largest producer of egg type baby chicks in Michigan (with) 11 full-time and several part-time employees.” At that time, the Klager Hatchery’s four incubators had “a capacity of 210,000 eggs—50,000 chicks a week. Pullet chicks supplied replacement pullets to egg production farms in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.” (Ibid., pg. 69).

Also located in Bridgewater was Regis Manufacturing Co., which manufactured fixtures for automobile manufacturing plants, employing 15 to 20 men in 1967. Neither operation exists in the Township today, although evidence of the railroad and the Township’s industrial history can still be seen in and around the Bridgewater Hamlet.

BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP’S FUTURE

The history of Bridgewater Township helps us to understand where we are and how we got here. We can use our knowledge of the Township's past to help determine what characteristics we would like to protect and enhance, and to help evaluate the probability of success in doing so. In addition, we can, with some degree of confidence, state the following conclusions regarding our future prospects:

- Decisions made in Lansing and Ann Arbor, as well as in nearby Saline, Clinton, and Manchester, will continue to have an impact on Bridgewater Township. This emphasizes the need for inter-jurisdictional cooperation and coordination.
- Bridgewater Township is fortunate to have many outstanding natural features that enhance our community and can continue to do so with proper protective measures and planning.
- Future population growth may put pressure on farmers to sell land for rural residential development.
- An aging population of farmers may cause locally-owned family farms to transition into a corporate farming model as agricultural land is consolidated into large corporate land holdings ultimately managed by outside entities that are less reliant on agricultural support services in the local area.
- However, agriculturally productive soils and large undivided landholdings in the Township, along with access to nearby agricultural support services, ensure that commercial agriculture and its associated rural economy will remain an important part of the community.

