

# **BARK RIVER**

**TOWNSHIP**  
**DELTA COUNTY, MICHIGAN**

## **MASTER PLAN 2045**



Prepared By:  
BARK RIVER TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
&  
TOWNSHIP BOARD



THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY BLANK

DRAFT





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Plan could not have been developed without the members of the Planning Commission, Township administration, and the citizens of Bark River Township.

### Bark River Township Planning Commission

Mark Kwarciany, Chair  
Randy Gorecki, Board Liaison  
Mike Zawada  
Julie Liss  
Matt Stenberg

Jennifer Stenberg, Recording Secretary

### Bark River Township Board of Trustees

Matt Hanson, Supervisor  
Mark Ray, Clerk  
Judith Davis, Treasurer  
Randy Gorecki, Trustee  
Ken Knauf, Trustee

Funding for this Plan was provided by an award of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The Housing Readiness Incentive program promotes the adoption of land use policies, master plans, zoning ordinances, and similar actions to encourage increasing housing supply and affordability.

[www.michigan.gov/mshda](http://www.michigan.gov/mshda)



**PREPARED BY:**  
**CENTRAL UPPER PENINSULA PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**  
**2950 COLLEGE AVE**  
**ESCANABA, MI 49829**

[WWW.CUPPAD.ORG](http://WWW.CUPPAD.ORG)



# RESOLUTION OF ADOPTION

---



TOWNSHIP  
BOARD

DRAFT



**PLANNING  
COMMISSION**

**DRAFT**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---



<b>INTRODUCTION</b> _____	<b>1</b>
<b>COMMUNITY DATA</b> _____	<b>3</b>
<b>HOUSING</b> _____	<b>10</b>
<b>FACILITES+SERVICES</b> _____	<b>14</b>
<b>NATURAL FEATURES</b> _____	<b>22</b>
<b>GOALS</b> _____	<b>28</b>
<b>FUTURE LAND USE PLAN</b> _____	<b>30</b>

## APPENDICES

<b>CITIZEN SURVEY DATA</b> _____	<b>A</b>
<b>MAPS</b> _____	<b>B</b>
<b>GOALS AND ACTIONS</b> _____	<b>C</b>



# INTRODUCTION+HISTORY



Bark River Township is situated in western Delta County in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The Township's position as a bridge between Delta and Menominee Counties has long been the source of its settlement and industry. Prior to European settlement, the area was used by Native American Tribes of the Ojibwe. After removals farther south in the early 19th Century, members of the Potawatomi nation began settling in the Big Cedar River and Bark River watersheds in the 1830s-50s, establishing the Hannahville Community later. The Hannahville Indian Reservation has a small portion in Bark River but is mostly in adjacent Harris Township, and the three communities remain well-connected by similar characteristics.

The unincorporated village of Bark River was settled in 1871 after the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad constructed lines connecting the ports of Menominee and Escanaba to the logging industry and Menominee Iron Range in later Dickinson and Iron Counties. The community of Schaffer on the Felch branch spur came soon after. The villages became supply depots for the hardwood and charcoal fuel needed for the railroads and industry, and the clearing of timber opened up land for farming. The higher drumlins and ridges above the more swampy lands to the south and east made workable farmland, and the proximity to the railroad and local markets made it profitable.

In the 1930s, US-2 was paved in concrete and brought increased automobile traffic through the village of Bark River. As automobiles and trucking, and the decline of the UP iron industry, replaced the use of the railroads, Bark River continued as an important transportation and farming community



*Photo: Bark River Township Sesquicentennial Book*

and the town area remains the primary area of residential commercial, and industrial activity. Today the railroad, highways, and off-road vehicle trails still cross the Township, and farming and logging remain an active presence. Rural residential growth from employment in and around the city of Escanaba has also shaped the Township in recent years.

The preparation of this Master Plan represents many months of study, analysis, and review by the Bark River Township Planning Commission, with technical assistance from Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development (CUPPAD). The Planning Commission's authority to prepare a Master Plan is established by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, and authority for zoning through the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act. Together these help the Township protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community. The Master Plan is not the zoning ordinance, but is a tool to set long-range policy and decision-making

\*For further information on Bark River Township history, see "Bark River Centennial, 1871-1971" or the "Bark River Area Sesquicentennial Book (1871-2021)" at the Escanaba Public Library.

# INTRODUCTION+HISTORY



for the Township. The zoning ordinance more specifically regulates development and the manner by which individual properties are used.

As the Township's initial Master Plan under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008, this Plan seeks to set forth local goals, objectives, and policies for economic development, land use, infrastructure, and redevelopment for the next 20 years. In addition, this plan sets the basis for zoning ordinance updates under the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act of 2006, which requires that zoning regulations protecting the public health, safety, and welfare of the Township and its residents be laid out in a Master Plan.

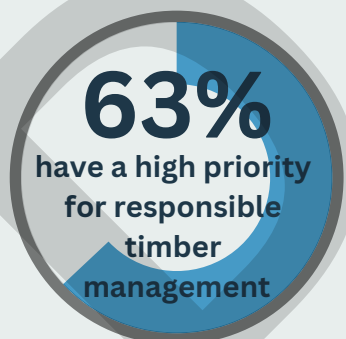
Throughout the development process of this Plan, citizen participation was incorporated from Township Board and Planning Commission meetings and through a Citizen Survey.

Further public input was solicited at regular meetings and public comment periods as part of the Master Plan process.

Several other preceding local and regional plans were incorporated into this Master Plan. These include various Delta County and surrounding municipal and organizational plans as well as statistical information and other documents that are referenced throughout. Surrounding community plans and development goals have been considered, and the township supports achieving similar and shared goals with other communities.

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

In early 2025, the Bark River Township Planning Commission developed and distributed a public input survey for residents, business leaders, and local officials to gather input for the Master Plan. 166 respondents provided feedback and gave priorities for various types of land use, infrastructure and economic development issues affecting the Township. A detailed description of responses is included as an Appendix to this document.



“Thinking about infrastructure and land use, what are your priorities for the following: Responsible timber management, protecting the natural beauty and economic value of forested lands.”

63% rated “high priority”  
26% rated “moderate priority”  
8% rated “low priority”  
3% rated “not a priority”

Survey responses towards various issues have been included in the Plan's text in charts similar to the one shown on the left. These have been rounded to whole number values for readability; for detailed responses, see the Appendix.

In addition to the survey process, residents had the opportunity to participate in the development of the Plan through regular meetings of Planning Commission and the Township Board. The Planning Commission

also presented the Plan for a public comment period, and held a public hearing as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. As a result of these methods, comments from the public were received and incorporated into the final plan document.

# COMMUNITY DATA



## Population

The characteristics of a community's population are a reflection of its development needs. Housing, education, recreation, health care, transportation, and economic development are all affected by changes in the local population. The residents also make or effect change by their actions. Understanding the population issues of a community also means understanding them in context with the larger area, and how they are shaped by macro issues at a regional, state, and national level. Residents also do not carry out their lives inside their single community; they may work or shop or recreate in surrounding localities and influence development in those areas as well.

Data from the Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS) estimates provided by the US Census Bureau is used throughout this Master Plan. While the Census is used primarily to count residents for congressional apportionment, it also collects statistics on social and economic characteristics of the population. Analyzing trends in these statistics over time allows for the identification of issues and opportunities. However, due to the way that this data is accumulated, there can be some margin of error. ACS data is collected each month using a random sampling method and aligned to the previous Census; with small sample sizes in smaller communities and townships there is a moderate margin of error. This analysis should be viewed as a snapshot of conditions at the time of writing, and be updated accordingly as new data is available.

Population Change, Local Municipalities 2000-2020

Unit of Government	Population				Percent Change	
	2000	2010	2020	2023 est.	2000-2010	2010-2020
Bark River Township	1,650	1,577	1,595	1,598	-4%	+1%
City of Escanaba	13,119	12,604	12,450	12,374	-4%	-1%
City of Gladstone	5,065	4,945	5,257	5,240	-2%	+6%
Escanaba Township	3,511	3,477	3,496	3,503	-1%	+1%
Ford River Township	2,225	2,055	2,019	1,973	-8%	-2%
Wells Township	5,155	4,884	4,876	4,865	-5%	0%
Harris Township	1,895	1,968	2,113	1,858	+4%	+7%
Spalding Township	1,761	1,674	1,599	1,711	-5%	-4%
Delta County	38,542	37,049	35,612	36,829	-4%	-4%
Upper Peninsula	317,616	311,361	301,608	302,689	-2%	-3%
Michigan	9,938,444	9,883,640	10,077,331	10,051,595	-1%	+2%

US Decennial Census, ACS Estimates

# COMMUNITY DATA



Population and Proportion of Township/County, 1940-2020

Population	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Bark River Township	1,377	1,287	1,361	1,299	1,571	1,548	1,650	1,577	1,595
% Bark River/Delta	4.0%	3.9%	4.0%	3.6%	4.0%	4.1%	4.3%	4.3%	4.5%

US Census

Over the past 20 years, Bark River Township has lost approximately 3% of its residents since the population peaked in the 2000 Census. Net gains and losses have been relatively stable over the past several decades. Some minor growth has been experienced in more recent years, and the proportion of Bark River Township residents in Delta County has increased, contrary to losses in other small townships and the cities. The Upper Peninsula has seen regional average losses of -3% over each decade. However, more recent ACS estimates since the 2020 Census have shown minor gains across the UP. These may reflect changing lifestyles and priorities resulting from the Coronavirus Pandemic.

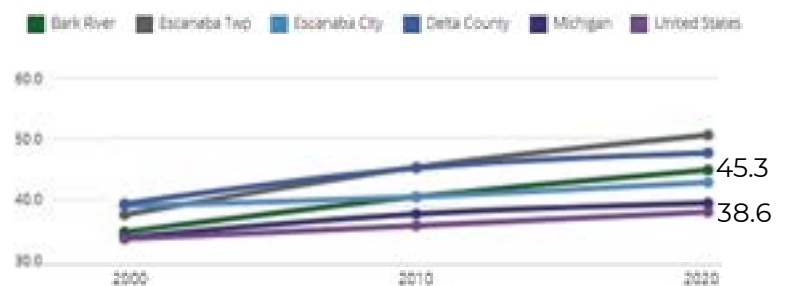
Bark River, Wells, and Escanaba Townships, and Harris Township in Menominee County, have experience either flat or minor growth, suggesting there may be a shift in residential growth toward the more rural or “suburban” areas between the economic drivers of Escanaba and the Hannahville Indian Community.

Rural population recovery in the wake of COVID-19 has been affected by: rising home prices nationally, with lower median home values present in the UP and its more rural areas; increased remote work opportunities, and the expansion of sufficient internet connections to allow it to occur in rural areas; and geography and quality of life drawing people to areas with abundant

natural amenities and outdoor recreation. All of these factors have been present in Bark River Township over the past several years, and it is expected that further population growth could continue.

While population numbers have be stable, the township’s residents are aging. An analysis of a community’s age structure can reveal the needs of different cohorts. The proportion of the population representing those of retirement age, 65 years and over, is expected to increase as the Baby Boomer generation ages into retirement. Currently, those age 65 and older represent over 22% of the township’s residents, with that number expected to rise to greater than 30% in the next five to ten years. Median age in the township is currently 45.3 years, lower than other rural townships in Delta County, but higher than the cities, Michigan, and the United States as a whole. Median age has continued to increase in the township with the aging population and loss of younger residents.

Median Age, 2000-2020



US Census

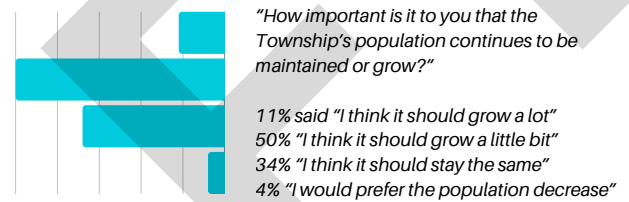
# COMMUNITY DATA



Population pyramids, which show the number of persons of a particular cohort and gender grouped, show stability in a population when represented as a similar pillar-like shape across all cohorts. In both the township and Delta County, the population pyramid is over-represented towards the top with smaller proportions of younger cohorts, representing probable population loss over time. The township has noticeable losses in the 20-39 five-year cohorts, reflecting the movement of young persons away from the area possibly due to a lack of educational, employment, and housing opportunities. The proportion of school age children is also decreasing, reflecting macro trends of smaller families and lower birth rates.

and services. A decline in working age residents will continue to tighten the labor market, causing hardships for local businesses. An increase in retirees puts higher demands on social services, medical facilities, and specialty care providers. Without intervention, these trends are expected to last into the 2050s.

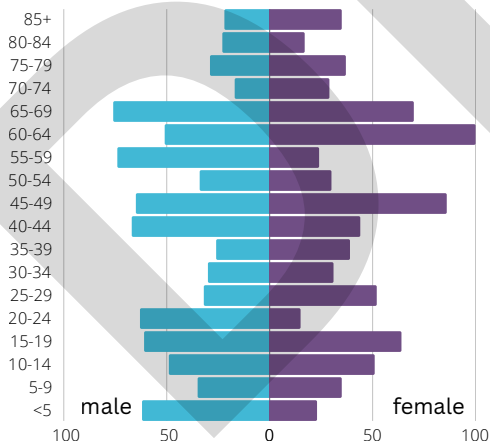
## Citizen Survey



See Appendix for details

Demographic aging trends represent a primary factor in determining a community's economic health and social well-being. A declining birth rate and increasing out-migration can lead to fewer school age children seeking educational opportunities, leading to reduced funding

Bark River Township  
Population Pyramid, 2023



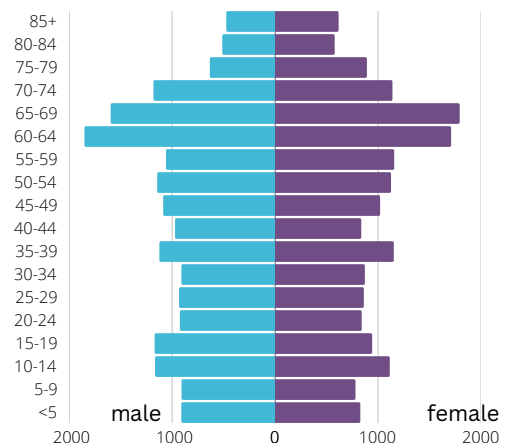
Retirement  
Age

Established  
Families

Early Career

School Age

Delta County  
Population Pyramid, 2023



US Census, 2023 Five-year ACS Estimates

# COMMUNITY DATA



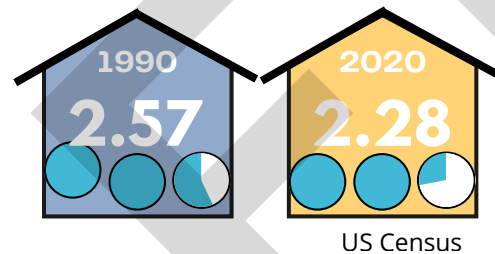
## Households

Household characteristics in a community are related to population trends, and can reflect larger changes in social values and economic conditions. Households are the fundamental units of housing demand, and their composition can influence the type and quantity of housing required in the community.

There were 655 total full-time resident households recorded in the 2020 Census. These households represent approximately 83% of housing in the township, a steady proportion over the past decade. Using the American Community Survey estimates, this represents a gain of near 60 full-time resident households over the past decade. Over the past 30 years, average household size in Delta County has decreased from 2.57 to 2.28 persons, aligning with the aging of the population and the movement of children to adult households of their own. However, Bark River has sustained a slightly higher household size, indicating that there may be more homes with children present than in other areas. Household size and occupancy likely indicate a relatively stable housing environment, with fewer units being used as seasonal housing, and a steady presence of families.

With almost one-third of householders in Bark River Township identified in the Census as living alone, there may be a need to “right-size” the available housing types and sizes to allow for more market mobility.

## Average Household Size, Delta County



## Household Income

Median household income, also referred to as the Area Median Income (AMI), is the midpoint of an area's income distribution- half of households in the area earn more, and half earn less. Median household income in Bark River Township is estimated at \$62,083, comparable to the other surrounding townships apart from Escanaba Township, which benefits from its suburban proximity to both the cities of Escanaba and Gladstone. Median household income in Bark River is slightly higher than the county and slightly lower than the statewide median income. Mean household income, the

## Selected Housing Characteristics

Bark River Township Household Types	2015		2020		2023	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Family Households	420	74%	485	71%	451	71%
Married Couples	252	60%	430	89%	398	88%
No Spouse Present	58	14%	55	11%	53	12%
Householder Living Alone	131	23%	183	27%	172	27%
Total Households	569	-	684	-	634	-
Average Household Size	2.58		2.37		2.47	

US Census, ACS Estimates

# COMMUNITY DATA



average, is \$15,000 higher than median, indicating that high-income earners are more prevalent than low-income earners. Over the last ten years, the share of households earning \$150,000 and up has risen 14%, outpacing wage increases, likely indicating that high-income earners are moving into the township from other areas. From 2013-2023 median household income increases have not been on par with inflation, leaving a 10% difference between actual income and purchasing power.

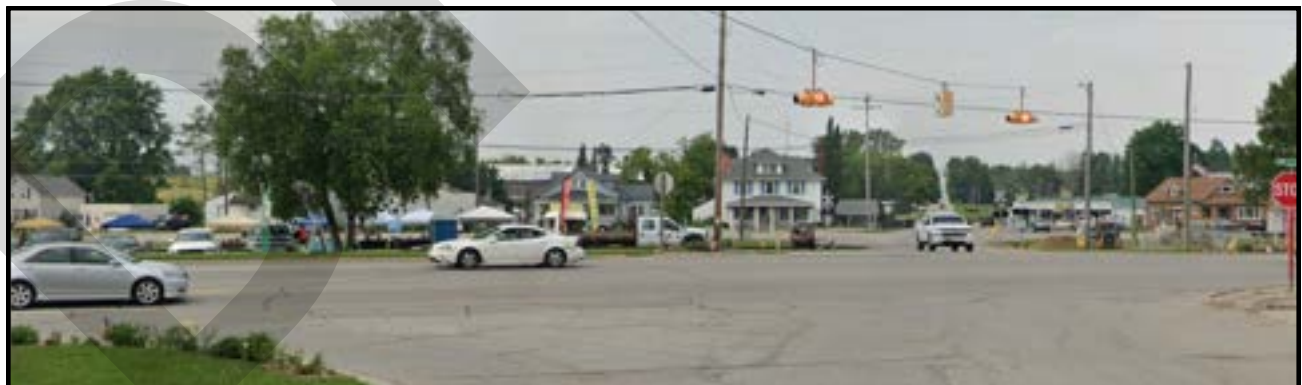
Roughly 13% of Michigan households are below the poverty line, and 11.5% nationally. 6% of Bark River Township residents are living below the poverty line; the majority of these persons are retirees. The United Way uses a metric called ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) that represents households that earn more than the federal poverty level, but less than the basic cost of living. In Bark River Township, 37% of households in 2022 were considered to be below the ALICE threshold (poverty + ALICE proportion of households), meaning that they may struggle with meeting their everyday basic needs.

## Household Income and ALICE

Unit of Government	Median Household Income, 2022	% ALICE Households, 2022*
Bark River Township	\$62,083	37%
City of Escanaba	\$38,457	59%
City of Gladstone	\$59,133	43%
Escanaba Township	\$86,000	29%
Ford River Township	\$65,119	34%
Wells Township	\$69,013	33%
Harris Township	\$58,875	40%
Spalding Township	\$58,839	41%
Delta County	\$59,176	30%
Michigan	\$66,986	28%

US Census, United Way

Households below the ALICE threshold may struggle to afford the essentials (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and communications). Under 2022 ALICE guidelines, households with one adult living alone earning under \$26,784, and households with two adults and two children earning under \$61,992, were considered under the ALICE threshold.



Bark River downtown during the Farmer's Market

\* (2025) Michigan County Reports 2022. United Way of Northern New Jersey. [www.unitedforalice.org](http://www.unitedforalice.org)



## Education

Educational and workforce training requirements have been increasing over the past several decades. Employers are now looking for employees with post-high school education, primarily due to the complexity of equipment and methods being used in the modern workplace. A highly trained, educated workforce is an asset in attracting employers to a community. 97% of Bark River residents have graduated high school; a 3% increase from ten years prior. 19.9% of residents have gone on to pursue a bachelor's degree or higher, a 4% increase from the decade prior. Approximately 65% of residents have pursued some form of higher education.

The Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget predicts that almost three-quarters of all U.P. jobs will require some sort of post-high school on-the-job, certificate, or associate's level training program, particularly in skilled trades.\* Students in the area can pursue these types of training through Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District, which offers students vocational education opportunities. Bay College offers middle college, vocational, certificate, associate, and bachelor degree programs. Northern Michigan University, Michigan Technological University, and Lake Superior State University offer university-level higher education programs throughout the Upper Peninsula. Residents also have the opportunity to pursue education with workforce development agencies like UP Michigan Works!

Despite enrollment declines and the pressures of school of choice, staffing, and post-pandemic education, local schools are well-positioned to continue to offer premier educational opportunities. Students attending Bark River-Harris Public Schools, or any of the surrounding districts, have diversified educational opportunities and workforce development partnerships that have increased the ability of residents to develop new skills in the communities in which they live, keeping people from having to leave the community for education and skilled employment.

## Employment Trends

The labor force participation rate is an estimate of the number of people age 16 and older engaged in the workforce. The American Community Survey estimates that 60.2% of eligible township residents were engaged in the workforce in 2023. This is nearly 10% higher than the average in Delta County, and comparable to the national rate of 62.7% calculated by the Federal Reserve.

Tourism and recreation continue to be major and growing industries in the Township and across the region. Once primarily limited to the summer season, increases in the popularity of "fall color tours", winter sports, and short-term rental options have made the area a year-round destination. Retail trade, manufacturing, and healthcare jobs are the major sectors of the economy in Delta County, but have minor physical presences in Bark River Township. Despite this, the top three employment areas in the township are:

\*(2024) Michigan Labor Market Information. Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget.

# COMMUNITY DATA



## Industry Area Employment

Industry Area	Bark River Township		Delta County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting and Mining	36	5%	374	3%
Construction	80	10%	1,003	7%
Manufacturing	138	18%	2,516	17%
Wholesale Trade	19	2%	299	2%
Retail Trade	65	8%	1,996	13%
Transportation, Warehousing and Utilities	85	11%	846	6%
Information	2	0%	170	1%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, Rentals and Leasing	18	2%	942	6%
Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative Services	22	3%	513	3%
Educational, Health and Social Services	159	21%	3,045	20%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation and Food Services	104	13%	1,750	12%
Other Services	24	3%	725	5%
Public Administration	23	3%	775	5%

US Census, ACS Estimates

education, health, and social services; manufacturing; and arts, entertainment, recreation, and food service. These employment areas have a slightly outsize presence than the county average, due to the position of the Township between Escanaba and the Hannahville Indian Community. Escanaba draws manufacturing, health care, and educational employment to the east, while the Island Resort and Casino, Bark River-Harris Schools, and Hannahville draw employment to the west.

Based on Census estimates, approximately 200 people are employed and work within the township, while nearly 600 commute out of the township to work elsewhere. One-third of these commuters work within the city of Escanaba, with Gladstone, Marquette, Powers, and Iron Mountain as secondary locales. The average employee's commute time is approximately 24 minutes, roughly the time it takes to travel from Bark River to

large employers in the Escanaba-Gladstone area.

The township has a variety of small and medium-size businesses supporting residents and local industries. Specialty agriculture, including local produce and winemaking, have become burgeoning businesses in recent years. The area's amenities and access to high-speed internet make it attractive for remote work, broadening the workforce and strengthening economic resiliency should a downturn come. Additional employment in the township is likely to be located along the highway trunklines where supporting infrastructure is more readily available.

# HOUSING



## Housing

Housing is a key factor in planning for a community’s future. Where people want to live and the style of housing they desire reflects on the need for infrastructure and community services, employment, and land use. Housing characteristics can also reveal information about a community’s history and its economic and social situation. The cost of housing and types available are typically determined by market factors and local zoning control. Local governments can have an impact on the housing in a community through policy, the availability of infrastructure and public services, tax incentives, and quality of life amenities.

Over the past several years, record-high home prices and record-low inventory, combined with fluctuating interest rates, have increased competition in the housing

market. Coming out of the COVID-19 Pandemic, employment flexibility and remote work options have led to the purchase of primary or secondary homes from more buyers outside of the community, leading to additional competition. Increases in rental prices and economic uncertainty have also led renters to seek housing opportunities in more affordable communities.

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) has outlined a goal of creating over 75,000 new or rehabilitated housing units in the state by 2027 through its Statewide Housing Plan. At a regional level, the Central UP Regional Housing Partnership Action Plan is a direct local outcome of the statewide plan, providing support for locally identified priorities: continuing to build the housing support ecosystem to provide capacity for local

From the trends in the preceding section, housing in Bark River Township may be impacted by:

Trend	Potential Impact to Housing
Population numbers have been stable despite demographic trends, indicating in-migration of new households.	New housing units may be more likely to be built on land previously used for other activities, like timber and farmland.
The township’s population is aging, with over 30% of residents expected to be age 65 or older by 2030.	Housing should be of a character and condition to allow residents to “age in place” with services and amenities readily accessible by different means.
There are fewer young people remaining in the Township, while the presence of local schools may be an attractant to young families.	A diverse housing stock catering to affordability levels and needs at different points in life could attract and retain a more resilient population.
Almost one-third of residents are living alone in their homes.	There may be a need to “right-size” housing by enabling smaller units. This would help market availability and affordability by opening additional housing to residents.
A higher number of residents than average are employed, and the majority commute elsewhere for work.	While the township’s characteristic as a bedroom community may be an attractant, additional economic opportunities within the township could attract further housing development.

# HOUSING

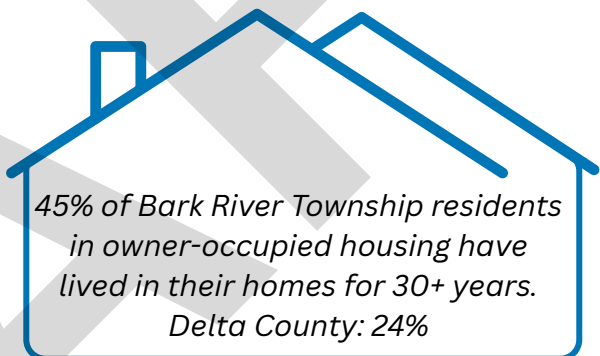


governments, community organizations, and developers to realize projects; increasing the supply and variety of the housing stock, and rehabilitating existing properties; and providing support to renters by making housing assistance resources more accessible and available. Communities can help support this action plan by applying directly for funding or updating community master plans and zoning ordinances to create additional opportunities for other organizations.

The American Community Survey estimates that Bark River Township has approximately 712 housing units, of which 89% are occupied by full-time residents. Another 89% of those full-time housing units are owner-occupied, with roughly 73 rental units available. The national homeownership rate is 64.8%, and Delta County's is 78.6%, revealing that the township has fewer rental properties and more home owners than average.

The average home in the township is a single-family detached house with three-bedrooms built before 1980 consistent with national averages. Housing growth in the township began in the town areas of Bark River and Schaffer, with the surrounding countryside dotted with farmsteads. Just over half of the township's housing was built between 1960-2000, as people moved out of the cities and onto larger rural lots. The pattern of this development has followed the paved system of roads, providing ready access to the transportation system for commuters, commercial businesses, and social interests.

One-third of the township's housing was built before the adoption of the state Construction Code Act of 1974, which created stricter rules for buildings, electrical, mechanical systems, and plumbing. Older homes are less likely to have kept pace with modern infrastructure upgrades and may be out of sync with housing needs and trends. Un-updated homes are also likely to have lower market value, and may raise health and safety concerns due to the present of lead and asbestos in building materials.

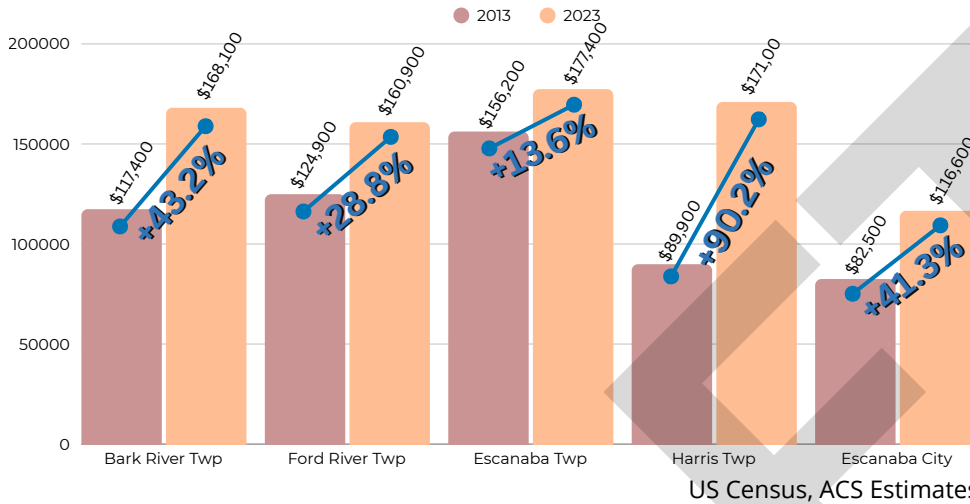


The duration of residents' tenure in their homes can provide insight into housing turnover. 45% of residents in owner-occupied housing have lived in their homes for more than 30 years; these households have likely finished typical mortgage terms. This statistic is almost double when compared to Delta County as a whole. For householders with and without mortgages, those with are likely to be under 55 years in age, while those without are more likely to be older. One-third of households are headed by someone of retirement age. These show that a large proportion of the township's housing market is likely to turn over in the next decade or two as older residents may look to downsize or require alternative living arrangements.

# HOUSING



## Median Home Value, 2013-2023



The median home value of owner-occupied units in Bark River Township increased by 43.2% to \$168,100 from 2013 to 2023. This is above the median value of Delta County (\$146,800), but below the statewide median (\$217,600). Comparably, the median value is similar to the surrounding townships, but has grown in value at a faster rate except for in Harris Township. Home value is driven by market demand, indicating that the township's available housing may be more desirable to buyers than in other areas.

spend 30% or more of their income on housing costs, meaning that their current situation may be deemed unaffordable. For home buyers, using the standard affordability metric of a home price of 2.5 times household income reveals that median incomes and home values are roughly corresponding. However, this also means that affordability may be a concern for the bottom 50% of households looking to purchase a home.

Housing affordability is threatened when there is a gap between a rate of change in housing prices and the rate of change in incomes. Median household income in the township increased 18% from 2013-2023, less than the rate of inflation. At the same time, median housing values increased 43.2% over the same period, indicating that housing prices are rising faster than wages.

The median household of Bark River Township uses approximately 16% of their monthly income on housing costs. An estimated one-quarter of all households

### HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

**Affordable:** Households spend less than 30% of income on housing

**Unaffordable:** Households spend 30%-50% of income on housing

**Severely Unaffordable:** Households spend greater than 50% of income on housing

**Attainable:** Housing that is affordable for households earning between 80-120% of the area's median income

MSHDA

# HOUSING



There are few rental properties and attached housing units in the Township, representing less than 10% of the housing. In broader Delta County, approximately 36% of renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs, and the majority of those households are headed by someone over 65 years old. Those households also have incomes less than the area median. These figures lend to an assumption that the County's average rent-burdened households are headed by retirees on fixed or limited incomes. A limited rental market in both availability and price has created great difficulties in attracting and maintaining people within Delta County. Employers have trouble attracting people with specific skills to move into the community, young people have difficulty establishing their independence, and older residents have limited options for alternatives to their current homes.

There is a need to provide a diverse, affordable housing stock that caters to people at different points in their life and supports access to transportation and amenities. As a rural community lacking sufficient infrastructure for density, supporting housing in Bark River Township may focus on rehabilitation and modernization of existing homes, expanding the permitted use of housing types like accessible dwelling units and small multifamily dwellings, and concentrating any additional density along US-2 where there may be services to accommodate it. To ensure that many residents can continue to “age in place” recreation and transportation services that support active and healthy living will be important amenities.

For those wishing to “age in place” and stay in their homes and communities as they age, planning for the future, staying healthy, building connections, and providing transitions to alternative living arrangements support those goals. To plan for the future, individuals should establish if their home will be sufficient to meet their needs and ability as they age. With older homes in rural communities, this may mean marketing programs that can rehabilitate homes to meet the needs of aging occupants and mitigate cost burdens to income-constrained households. Adding accessible fixtures like railings, lighting, and mobility features can help prepare for eventual changes in health. One story dwellings or townhomes, with minimal outdoor maintenance requirements may likely become more desirable.

Housing development throughout the township is expected to remain dispersed, due to the scattered nature of private property available among larger parcels. The rural nature of the township means that housing related infrastructure like municipal water and sewer, residential sidewalks, and other services are unlikely to be implemented widely. The township should keep these considerations in mind when establishing where a wider variety of housing typologies and areas may be suitable for new development. Redevelopment or rehabilitation of existing properties may present additional opportunities to support housing needs.

\*(2022) Aging in Place, Aging in Community. Michigan Commission on Services to the Aging.

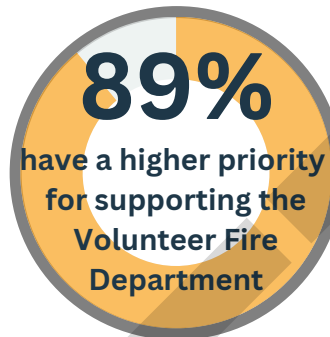


## Township Facilities

Bark River Township provides community facilities and additional services that meet the needs of its residents and the general public. The administration of the Township and these services is located at the Township Hall in Bark River. The Township Hall also serves as the local Senior Center, Community Building, and recreation complex. Local government meetings, community, and private events are held in the space, which has ample kitchens and amenities to accommodate large groups. While no major renovations are expected, the building is modern and the township continues to look for ways that it can continue to serve the community and support the needs of residents.

The Bark River Township Volunteer Fire Department is located next to the Township Hall. Established in 1924, 20 volunteers maintain a high level of fire service and equipment that is important to protecting the safety of residents and visitors. The Township maintains a millage for fire operations that makes sure this service is adequately funded. A large amount of forested land also makes wildfires a significant concern. The DNR and US Forest

### Citizen Survey



*"Thinking about infrastructure and land use, what are your priorities for the following: Ensuring appropriate staffing and equipment on the Volunteer Fire Department."*

89% said "higher priority"  
5% "lower priority"  
4% "not a priority"

**See Appendix for details**

Service maintain trained staff and firefighting equipment in Gladstone and Rapid River for mutual assistance calls. All of the fire departments in the area also participate in the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS), which can facilitate assistance from other agencies in the event of a large fire or emergency.

The Township also maintains the Bark River Township Cemetery. The 6.5 acre cemetery is well maintained and overseen by the Township Sexton.



*Bark River Township Hall and Senior Center*

# FACILITIES + SERVICES



## Recreation

Bark River Township has several community spaces where residents and visitors can gather to recreate. The Schaffer Baseball Fields were donated to the Township in the 1950s, and have hosted Little League activities for nearly 70 years. The Bark River Township Recreation Complex at the Senior Center hosts baseball fields, basketball, tennis, and pickleball courts, a large playground, and an enclosed community pavilion. This space has been the outdoor community gathering space for the township, and was created through volunteer work and grants in the mid-1980s. The Senior Center has been the community's indoor gathering space, hosting community meals, programs and events. The small Bark River Downtown Playground has some play equipment at the center of town area.

In 2024, a project to include accessible and updated playground equipment at the Recreation Complex was achieved through Michigan Economic Development Corporation and Hannahville Indian Community 2% grants through the partnership of the Township and the Heart of the North Lions Club. The Downtown Playground was also upgraded with new

and donated equipment with the help of community partners and volunteers. In addition to new equipment, new benches, signage, tables, and parking have updated the spaces for the community.

Bark River Township does not currently maintain a regular five-year Recreation Plan for MDNR grant programs. An updated Recreation Plan would be used as a tool to identify community priorities and opportunities for grants and further investment in recreation activities. The Township has been proactive in encouraging collaboration between recreation stakeholders to meet the needs of residents, with an emphasis on improving accessibility at Township facilities to ensure that those of all ages and abilities can participate.



Bark River Township Recreation Complex



## Infrastructure and Services

Critical community infrastructure systems and services include transportation, water, wastewater, energy, food, public safety, public health, solid waste, and recreation. It is particularly important to plan for long-term resiliency in community systems so that a failure in one aspect does not cascade into others, and that growth and maintenance are managed accordingly. Local governments face internal and external challenges when managing infrastructure systems. Declining revenues, rising expenses, and aging infrastructure are issues across the Upper Peninsula, and these impact the ability of the Township to provide essential services to residents.

Electrical service within the Township is provided by Upper Peninsula Power Company (UPPCO) and Upper Michigan Energy Resources (A division of Wisconsin Public Service). The service areas roughly split the township in half from just north of US-2/41. These companies own and operate the distribution systems throughout the area.

Natural gas service is provided by DTE Energy in the vicinity of Bark River and along US-2/41. A major natural gas transmission pipeline from Powers to Gladstone owned by DTE roughly parallels the highway about a half-mile to the north. Further expansion of natural gas service is unlikely due to the low density of potential customers compared to construction costs. A large number of homes use on-site propane tanks delivered by private companies.

High-speed internet service is an almost ubiquitous need to participate in the current digital economy, with reliable uninterrupted connections desired by businesses and remote workers. The current accepted need for internet speed in households is “broadband” or 100 megabytes per second (Mbps) download/10 Mbps upload. Communications and internet services are provided through the township by Highline Internet, Charter Communications, and various satellite providers. Northern Michigan University’s Educational Access Network provides wireless broadband from a node in Bark River. Much of the township currently has broadband quality service available, however there may be “last mile” homes in rural areas still underserved or unserved.

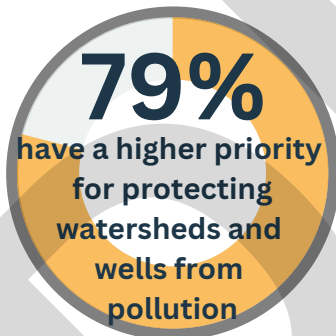
Homes and businesses in the township rely on private well systems using groundwater sources for their drinking water. The most significant sources of water supply contamination are landfills, surface impoundment areas, subsurface percolation from septic tanks and cesspools, open dumps, uncapped or improperly capped abandoned wells, injection wells, and underground storage tanks. The static water level for many wells is relatively close to the surface, with deeper wells drilled into the limestone aquifer close below ground level. The shallow depth to water and the aquifer below can mean that surface runoff and pollution are more readily able to enter the water stream.

# FACILITIES + SERVICES



Point source is the term used to describe contaminants, which originate in the immediate area of the well or water source. Contaminants from pollution sources may seep directly down through the soil to the water source. Non-point source contamination is much more difficult to control because the cause of the problem may be located a considerable distance from the well. This type of contamination is caused by pollutants that filter into an underground aquifer and then migrate slowly through the groundwater. Agricultural runoff from livestock and cropping is a known source of potential non-point pollution. Prevention of this type of contamination must involve a collective effort on the part of property owners and local officials from a large geographic area. Documented bacterial and nitrate contamination of groundwater wells from failing septic systems was the impetus for exploring the installation of a wastewater system in the Bark River town area in the early 2000s.

## Citizen Survey



*"Thinking about infrastructure and land use, what are your priorities for the following: Protecting watersheds and wells from pollution and contamination."*

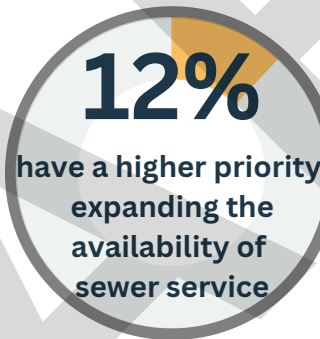
79% said "higher priority"  
15% "lower priority"  
4% "not a priority"

See Appendix for details

The majority of houses and commercial operations in the township rely on on-site septic systems. The requirements of these systems are regulated by Public Health of Delta and Menominee County, and are based on the Superior Environmental

Health Code. The combination of onsite wells and wastewater systems necessitates larger lot sizes to meet construction regulations and reduce potential contamination. The typical spacing for septic and private wells requires at least three-quarters of an acre. Additional restrictions exist when a system is within proximity to surface water. The Township should continue to consider these regulations when discussing the density of development.

## Citizen Survey



*"Thinking about infrastructure and land use, what are your priorities for the following: Expanding the availability of sewer service to a wider area."*

12% said "higher priority"  
29% "lower priority"  
45% "not a priority"

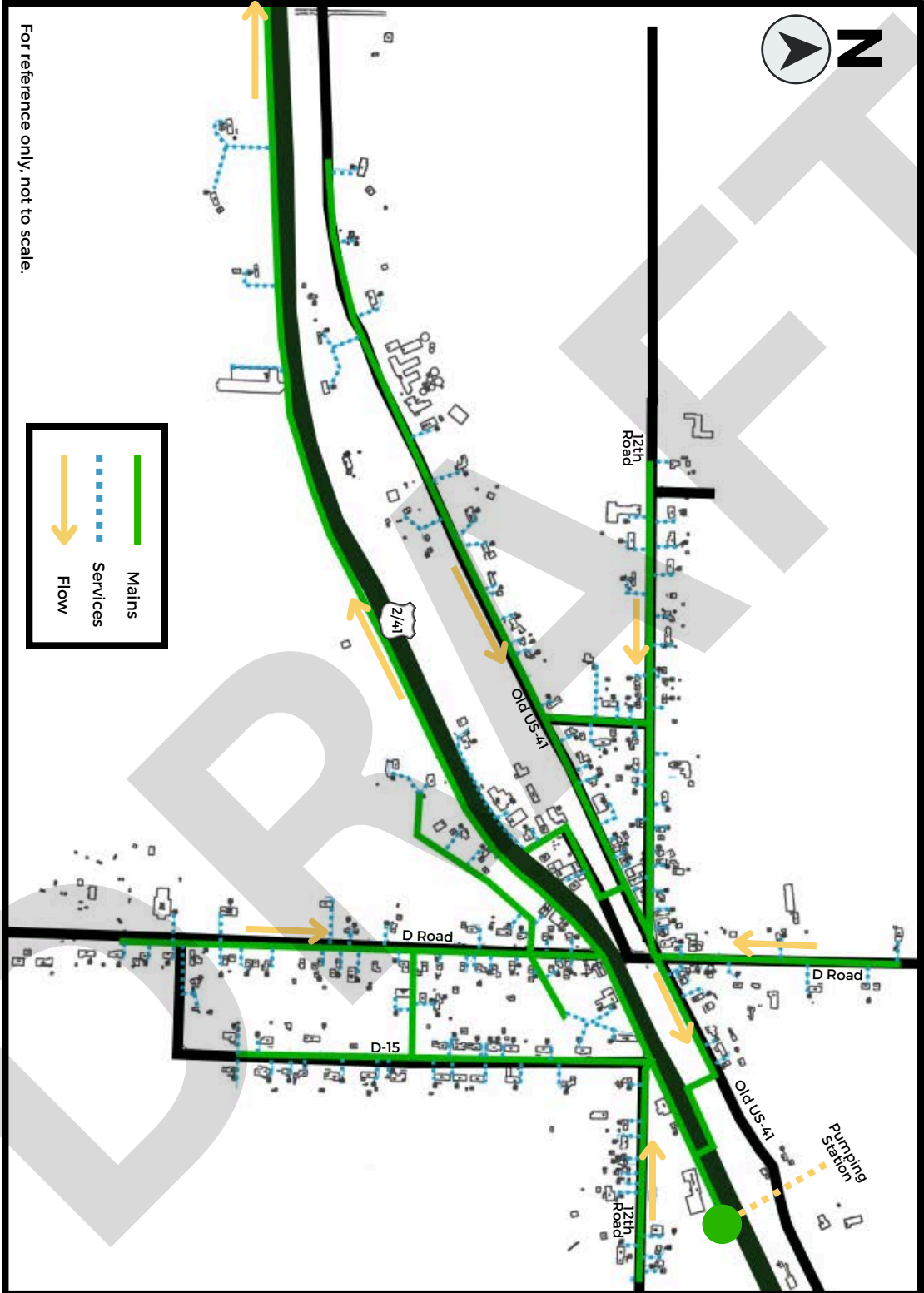
See Appendix for details

Wastewater service is provided in a small area around the town of Bark River. The density of development and contamination concerns created the need for service. In the 1980s, sewer systems discharging into storm water ways and contamination of wells had become known issues affecting water quality in the Bark River basin. The Township partnered with the Hannahville Indian Community to install a 12,000-foot force main connection to the Hannahville Wastewater Treatment Plant. The construction of the current sewer system was facilitated by grants, primarily from USDA Rural Development. A gravity wastewater system collection system serving the town area collects material at a pumping station on the east side of Bark River, before pumping it west to the

# FACILITIES + SERVICES



## WASTEWATER SERVICE AREA



# FACILITIES + SERVICES



treatment plant. Bark River Township contracts with the Hannahville Indian Community to provide the service and determine utility rates.

Low-lying areas of the town of Bark River have experienced storm water infiltration of basements and septic systems, leading to losses and further contamination concerns. During heavy rain events or snowmelts, excess ground and storm water can enter into the wastewater system, causing sewage overflows and basement backups. Additional issues have been identified along roadways in the Township, where deferred maintenance and vegetation in ditches have created opportunity for excess water to affect homes and roadway conditions.

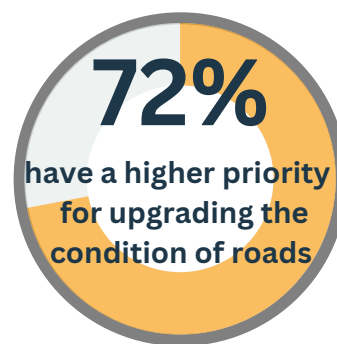
## Transportation

Land use affects transportation choices and transportation opportunities impact land use decisions. Where people live, work, recreate, and use land, in addition to the physical characteristics of an area, determine where roads and other transportation facilities are sited. Efficient and safe movement is the primary objective of any transportation system. The Delta County Road Commission is responsible for the majority of public roads in the Township, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) responsible for US-2/41 and M-69, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) responsible for the system of forest access roads to State land. The Road Commission maintains maintenance contracts and some revenue for work on roads under these other jurisdictions. County Roads are

classified as either “primary roads” that facilitate movement from place to place, or “local roads” that provide access to homes and businesses. A number of private roads also exist throughout the Township, with maintenance and sufficient access to services the responsibility of property owners.

There are approximately 66 miles of public roads throughout the township: 9 miles of state trunkline, 19 miles of primary county roads, and 38 miles of county local roads. Funding for road improvements is dependent on jurisdiction, road classification, and available revenues; the Township works to identify funding for road projects in coordination with the Road Commission. Local funds are mainly used for maintenance and matching state and federal sources when possible. Declining state and federal revenues and funding created through fuel taxes, along with rising construction costs, mean that fewer roads are able to be resurfaced each year. Surface condition of primary roads is rated on a regular schedule using the PASER system for evaluating “good”, “fair”, and “poor” conditions.

### Citizen Survey



*“Thinking about infrastructure and land use, what are your priorities for the following: Upgrading the condition of roads throughout the township.”*

72% said “higher priority”  
19% “lower priority”  
5% “not a priority”

See Appendix for details

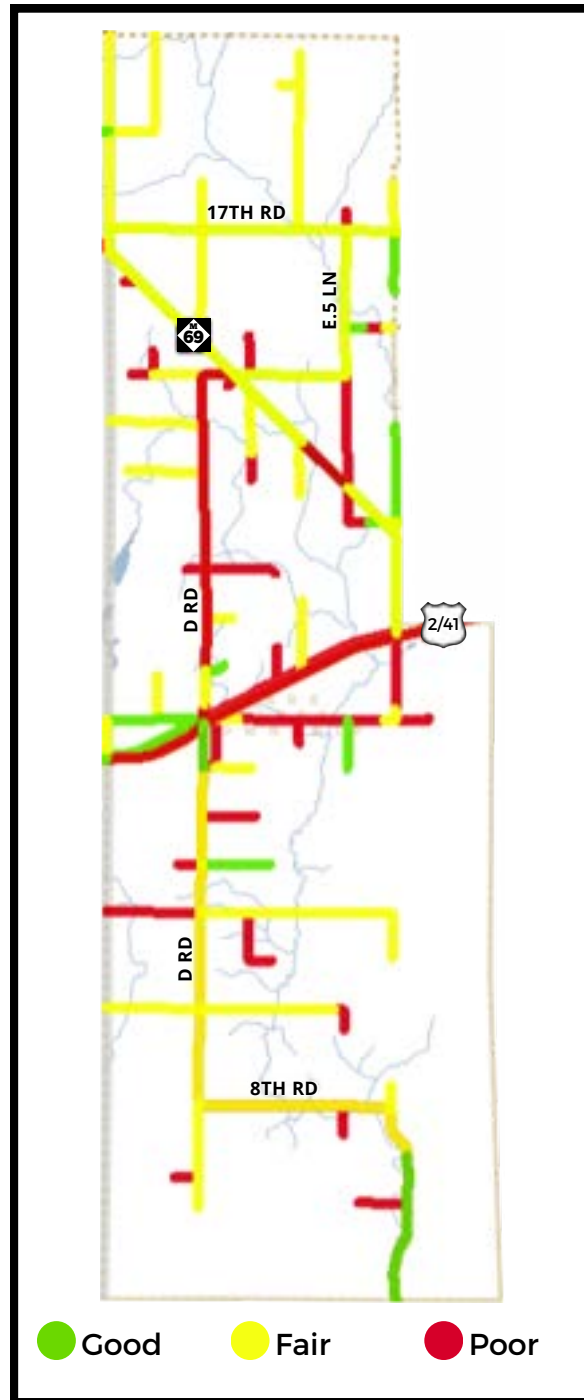
# FACILITIES + SERVICES



Active, or nonmotorized transportation, generally consisting of walking or bicycling activity has increased in response to public interest over the past few years. No sidewalks currently exist in the township, so the majority of use occurs on on-road shared facilities with motor vehicles. Active transportation is made safer by creating dedicated facilities that provide separation from traffic; however, because of the rural nature of the township and availability of low-volume county roads, separated facilities may be unlikely. US Bicycle Route 10 and the Michigan Iron Belle Trail follow US-2/41 through the township. USBR-10 travels over 1,000 miles from St. Ignace west to Anacortes, Washington, while the Iron Belle travels from Belle Isle in Detroit to Ironwood.

While sidewalks may not be feasible in residential areas of the township due to their low density, side paths to allow pedestrians to travel in higher-traffic areas may be desirable. A side path may be paved or unpaved, and is separated from the roadway by a grass or landscaped strip by 4 or more feet. A side path on D Road connecting residences and amenities and allowing for a cross-highway pedestrian connection would improve community connections and promote additional health and safety. In pursuing adding this type of infrastructure to the township, it will be important to involve resident participation and feedback to ensure it meets the needs of users and property owners along the route.

## COMBINED 2021-24 PASER RATINGS



\* (2025) Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council (TAMC) [www.michigan.gov/mic/tamc](http://www.michigan.gov/mic/tamc).

# FACILITIES + SERVICES



Off-road powersports, including ORVs, dirtbikes, and snowmobiles continue to grow in popularity in the Upper Peninsula, particularly for tourism. The annual Bark River Off Road Races are held every year in August at the Bark River International Raceway. Off-road vehicles have a variety of dedicated trails and state and federal forest roads to utilize throughout the region. Local clubs maintain many of these routes through collaboration with the MDNR. Two east-west rail trails start in Escanaba and cross in the township near Schaffer. The Felch Grade Rail Trail parallels M-69 as it travels to the old mining town of Felch in Dickinson County. The Escanaba-Hermansville Rail Trail travels to the small community of Hermansville in Menominee County. The Forest Island ORV trails have a trailhead off of F Road in the south, connecting the state forest trail network to Cedarville. Delta County also allows for use of ORVs and snowmobiles along county road rights of way, creating opportunities to connect with popular destinations within the township and along the routes.

## Public Transit

With the changing demographics of the township towards an aging population, along with changing social norms and employment patterns, increased utilization of public transit services can be expected. Increased capacity for public transit service would help to allow residents access businesses, services, and medical appointments more readily, and also allow for them and others to visit destinations within the township that are less feasibly accessible by walking or bicycling.

Bark River Township currently participates in a millage assessed for Delta Area Transit Authority (DATA) to provide on-demand ride service to residents. Residents can request rides from the service to areas around the county. As a residential area between trip generators in Escanaba and Harris, Bark River residents may benefit from increasing the availability and efficiency of transit services.



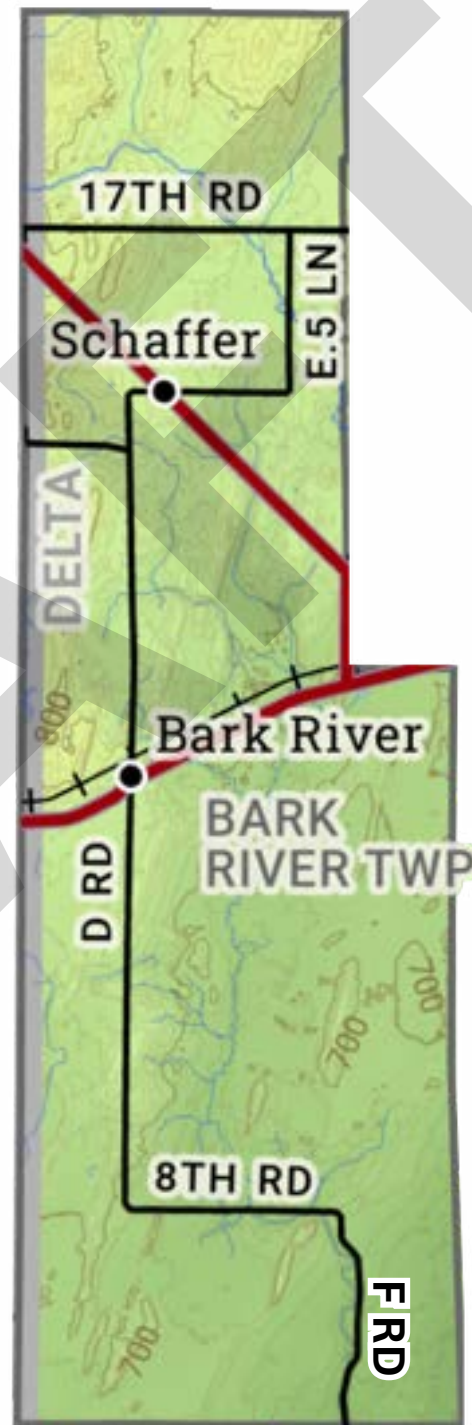
*Bark River International Raceway*



## Natural Features

Natural features, including soils, geology, topography, water features and other natural resources, not only enhance the aesthetic quality of the area but also have a profound effect on a community's development. These physical features directly or indirectly constrain or encourage growth. Natural resources which occur in certain areas (timber, minerals, water sources) are often a primary factor in the establishment and growth (or decline) of communities. Development in Delta County has historically been dependent on natural resources and logistics. Bark River Township followed this pattern, with lumbering and farming along railway lines supporting mining operations farther west and shipping ports to the east.

The underground and surface geology and topography of the landscape provide an area with its own unique character. The township's terrain ranges from open fields, forests, wetlands, and hilly areas. The topography slopes upward from low wetlands in the southeast, rising 150 feet to high hills in the northwest. The Bark River's watershed covers the majority of the township, with feeder creeks bringing water to the practically centered river as it flows south from the Schaffer area to Ford River Township along F Road, before entering Green Bay. Forests were the primary historic landcover before logging, and then agriculture. Forested lands still comprise roughly 60% of the township's land cover.



# NATURAL FEATURES+LAND USE



Underlying bedrock tends to be shallow with sandy, loamy soils on top. These soils are generally poorly draining, but offer productive matrix for agricultural activities. The bedrock is of a sedimentary nature, mostly sandstones, shales, and limestones, that have the ability to hold sufficient amounts of groundwater for onsite wells. Surface geology is primarily the result of past glacial activity, with rolling hills and valleys the result of ice and water erosion.

Construction activities of all types are affected by the depth to bedrock. In most instances where bedrock is at or near the surface, building are constructed without basements, and on-site septic system placement is limited. Site preparation, utility installation, and street construction are all more costly in areas with low depth to the water table and/or bedrock. Much of the land in the township is within these lower-lying areas, which can reduce its ability to host certain types of developments or intensities.

Wetlands both create potential limitations to development and mitigate the impact of natural hazards. A wetland area may be referred to as a swamp, bog, or marsh and often form a link between water bodies and upland features. State regulations for wetlands are triggered when filling or

removing soils in wetlands, constructing or maintaining use and development in proximity, or draining surface water.

Well managed woodlands provide clean air, clean water, natural habitat, recreation space, and wildfire mitigation in addition to their economic benefit. A small portion of the township's south is designated as part of the Escanaba State Forest, with few properties used as Commercial Forest. While less area of the township is used for commercial timber harvesting, many residents work in or support the timber industry. The MDNR and private landowners actively manage these lands for timber growth, harvesting, and recreational opportunities. Local governments receive a payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) for these lands, while the timber industry benefits from sales, and the public benefits from access. Several landowners grow Christmas trees commercially in addition to orchards and vineyards.

## Citizen Survey

*"Thinking about infrastructure and land use, what are your priorities for the following: Responsible timber management, protecting the natural beauty and economic value of forested lands."*

**63%** of residents

have a higher priority for addressing this issue

*See Appendix for details*



*Christmas Tree Farming*



## Natural Hazards

Hazards are events that threaten public safety and property and can be caused by a variety of natural and human activities. Natural hazards include wildfires, flooding, severe storms, and other events that are uncontrolled, but their impacts can be mitigated. The Delta County Hazard Mitigation Plan\* identifies local hazards and outlines mitigation actions that can be used by municipalities and responding agencies to seek additional funding and support.

The majority of natural hazard events in Delta County are related to winter weather and its effects. Winter weather can close major transportation routes, businesses, and schools several times per year. Effective removal of snow is generally up to the County Road Commission on public roads and individual property owners elsewhere. Emergency preparedness, cold-hardened infrastructure, and effective communication methods are all important mitigation actions for these kinds of events. Bark River Township is one of the only jurisdictions in Delta County that does not participate in the National Flood Insurance Program; the inland area and higher elevation, along with agricultural tile installation have mitigated much of the potentially floodable area. Issues with storm water in the aftermath of heavy rain events have locally affected properties in the Bark River town area, and along roadways due to deferred culvert maintenance.

With the township moderately forested, wildfire presents a significant risk to persons and property. Ensuring proper first responder staffing and mutual aid communication channels are paramount to responding to events in rural areas. With few major roads, the Township should continue to ensure that roads to residential structures have adequate access and egress routes for vehicles for emergency response.

While the township is not at risk for many types of natural hazard events, severe weather and community resiliency in the aftermath of events remains important to ensure that their impact is mitigated upon residents. The opportunity exists for emergency service agencies to further educate the public on techniques and methods to mitigate natural hazards, such as preventing wildfires and flooding, as well as suitable locations in the event of a tornado or other severe weather event.

Climate change impacts have already been felt in the area through more frequent and intense storm events, hotter and drier summers, and significant fluctuations of Great Lakes water levels. Climate-resilient and low-impact development solutions can be used to reduce risks by limiting development intensity in hazard-prone areas, hardening built structures and infrastructure, preserving natural areas that buffer against storm effects, and installing “green” infrastructure that uses natural systems to mitigate temperature and storm water.

\* (2023). Delta County Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2023-2028.

# NATURAL FEATURES+LAND USE



## Sustainability

Climate change impacts have already been felt in the area through more frequent and intense storm events, hotter and drier summers, and significant fluctuations of Great Lakes water levels. Through its MI Healthy Climate Plan, Michigan has identified that climate resiliency can also create economic opportunity, providing infrastructure improvements, job opportunities, and lower costs for consumers. To meet the goals outlined in the plan, the state will need to increase the adoption of wind and solar generation, increase energy waste reduction and identify energy efficiency programs, and invest in additional infrastructure. These investments also create additional opportunities to protect land and water resources and develop additional recreation and greenspace. Climate-resilient and low-impact development solutions can also result in savings for additional infrastructure and energy needs.

Through proactive land use planning, local governments can increase their resilience to major climate changes and ensure that people and property are more resilient to impacts. Planning and zoning tools that can be used to reduce risks include vulnerability mapping and outlining potential future

conditions. These can be mitigated through limited development intensity in hazard-prone areas, hardening built structures and infrastructure, preserving natural areas that buffer against storm effects, and installing “green” infrastructure that uses natural systems to mitigate temperature and stormwater.

The preservation of the Township’s natural beauty and character has co-benefits in the expansion of protected natural areas, increased recreational opportunities, beneficial health and wellbeing effects, and preservation of biodiversity. The Township should continue to embrace ways to incorporate sustainable development that aligns with this character, and communicate these benefits to residents and visitors.



*Horses in a wooded pasture*

From 1951-2017 in the Great Lakes Region:



*GLISA/University of Michigan*

\* (2024). Summary Climate Information. GLISA/University of Michigan. [www.glisa.umich.edu](http://www.glisa.umich.edu)

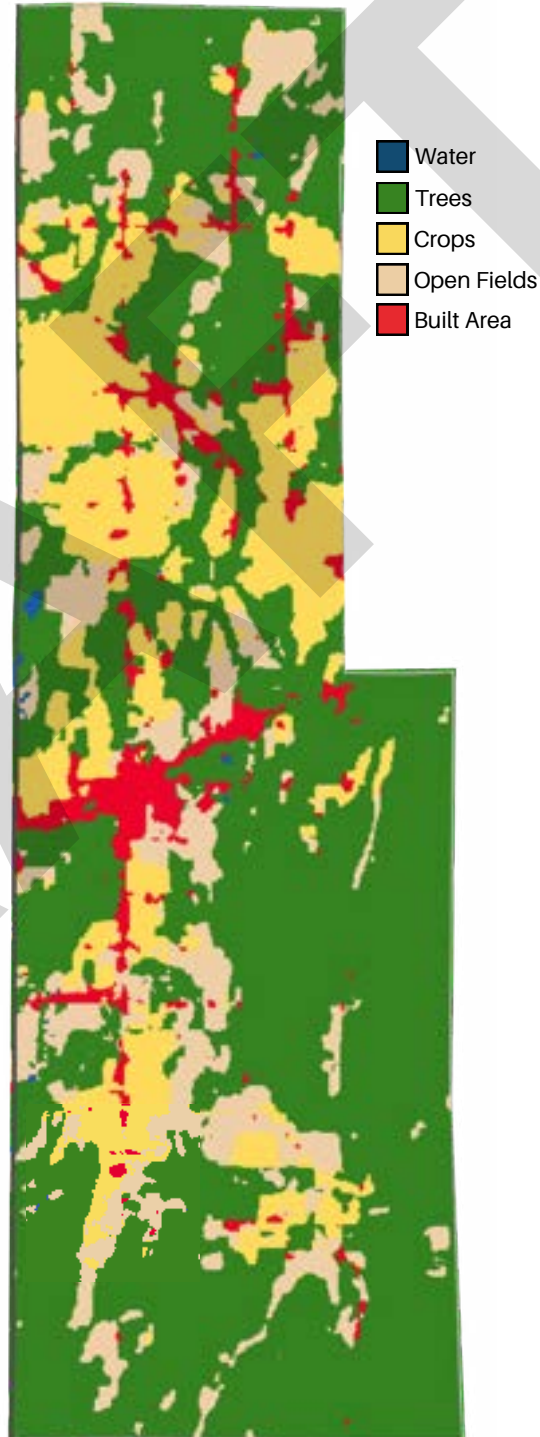


## Land Use

The pattern of land use in the township has evolved from historic economic activity. The economy was firmly linked to trade and industry routes that followed natural features, and communities grew up near active points of commercial activity. Today, those historic land use patterns still concentrate people and commercial activities into small areas while greater transportation choice, technology, and social norms have broadened residential and recreational mobility to the wider area. Natural features, like rugged terrain and wetlands, continue to affect where activities are placed. Changes in land use have been the result of various and compounding decisions made by individuals, families, businesses, and governmental agencies. Local planning efforts seek to define the most desirable and appropriate uses for various parts of a community to anticipate growth and guide long-term decision-making.

The majority of the township's residential development is concentrated on or in close proximity to the major transportation corridors along highways and primary county roads. These roadways facilitated access to timberland, and subsequently cleared farmland that continued this pattern of development to the present. The northern portion of the township saw greater land clearing due to its higher elevation, while lower wetlands in the southern portion are still timber covered. Forested lands make up the majority of land use, but public and commercial forest land is limited.

## LAND USE/ LAND COVER



Sentinel-2 Land Use/Land Cover Time Series, 2024.  
ArcGIS Online





## Overview

Throughout this Master Plan, detailed information has outlined the historical trends and current situation in Bark River Township. Public input was received through the Citizen Survey and public comment at Township meetings. This background information has helped the Planning Commission gain an understanding of the forces that have shaped development and land use. These goals and recommendations are a guide in projecting a long term vision and to realize implementation. These must remain flexible enough to respond to changing needs and conditions throughout the life of this document as needs arise.

In order for a community to have a sound plan for growth and development, it is essential to set goals that outline desired future conditions and that are based on the information given in the previous chapters. More specific actions can then be developed to meet these goals as more information becomes available or opportunities arise. Plan implementation will continue following these goals and the resulting actions identified. The Planning Commission and Township Board, together with other groups, organizations, and individuals can use this plan as a dynamic decision making tool, and should assure that the plan is referred to frequently and updated periodically.

In furtherance of the information presented in this plan and the needs and desires of Bark River Township's residents, a vision statement and goals on the following page are outlined:

*Looking to 2045, Bark River Township will be a place where families, businesses, and nature can thrive- balancing new opportunities for housing and economic growth with the preservation of our rural landscapes and small town way of life.*

The Planning Commission should reference this vision and the Master Plan's goals when considering requests for land use development in the township, and in support of activities that protect and enhance the public health, safety, and welfare of Bark River Township residents and visitors.

# GOALS



**Goal:** Encourage opportunities to retain and grow the current population by responding to demographic changes and understanding community needs.

**Goal:** Provide housing options that are affordable for all members of the community, and reflect a diversity of types and forms.

**Goal:** Recognize that the population of the Township is aging, and prioritize projects that promote accessibility and community to allow people to age in place in their homes.

**Goal:** Provide reasonable opportunities to establish commercial and light industrial uses which meet the needs of Township residents and provide gainful employment.

**Goal:** Continue to enhance the physical appearance of the community by explore reuse of vacant or underutilized property, remediating nuisances, and protecting viewsheds.

**Goal:** Support public-private partnerships with groups, businesses, and organizations in the greater Bark River area to realize shared visions and goals.

**Goal:** Provide, maintain, and continuously improve the efficiency and quality of community facilities and services in a cost-effective manner.

**Goal:** Increase community resiliency by identifying and mitigating hazards, and participate in the Delta County Hazard Mitigation Plan.

**Goal:** Encourage land use and development that does not adversely affect public health, safety, and welfare.

To achieve these goals, the Planning Commission has developed the future land use plan in the following chapter, and has been presented with an Action Table that is included in this plan as an Appendix. These should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that the Township's goals continue to be expressed and achieved.

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## Introduction

The land use and zoning plan is one of the most integral elements of a master plan. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008 specifically requires the plan to address land use issues and recommendations for the physical development of the community 20 years into the future or more. As proposals for development are considered, the Planning Commission, Township Board, and Administration should refer to this section to ensure that the vision, principles, and the intent of zoning districts are followed as closely as possible or amended when a new direction is determined to be necessary.

Land use is described the master plan, and details how the existing land is currently being used. Future land use is a vision of development over time and may not line up with current regulations or existing uses in the Township's zoning ordinance. Zoning districts are described in the current zoning ordinance and illustrated on the zoning map; these state the current rules and standards for development within an area. The plan for future land use in the master plan is intended to guide the creation and alteration of these zoning districts, and the approval of certain types of development.

The Future Land Use Map, along with its associated descriptions for future land use classifications make up the Future Land Use Plan. The map serves as a guide for making decisions on the rezoning of land. However, the Planning Commission and Township Board should consider the map to be one of the many tools available to help them in

making land use decisions and addressing rezoning requests. The information presented on the map should be complemented by site-specific information as considered necessary by Township officials prior to any final decisions.

Future land use classifications are the not the current zoning. They are a described vision of land use in anticipation of changes to the zoning ordinance. Future land use classifications are described with intended uses and character in order to relate them to the current zoning districts and areas on the Future Land Use Map. In many cases, future land use districts may remain unchanged from the current zoning; in others, districts may be created, combined, or split to accommodate new uses and development trends.

This chapter is intended to:

- Describe the intent and character of the Township's current zoning;
- Identify trends in land use that may be better accommodated through updates to the zoning ordinance;
- Establish goals for future land use;
- Predict any changes to the schedule of regulations for lot sizes, setbacks, heights, etc.; and
- Outline a Zoning Plan on which to base updates to the ordinance on.

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## Existing Zoning

*The following districts and intents are taken directly from the current Bark River Township Zoning Ordinance.*

### District R1 (Residential One)

*Intent: To establish and preserve quiet single-family home neighborhoods as desired by large numbers of people, free from other uses excepts those that are both compatible and convenient to the residents of such a district.*

### District R2 (Residential Two)

*Intent: To establish and preserve neighborhoods for medium density residential uses, free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents of such a district.*

### District R3 (Residential Three) [Unmapped]

*Intent: To establish and preserve neighborhoods for medium density residential uses, and to allow for the placement of a mobile home park. The uses permitted in the district are to be both compatible with and convenient to the residents of the district.*

### District RR (Rural Residential)

*Intent: To establish and maintain an alternative residential environment in accessible rural areas.*

### District C1 (Commercial)

*Intent: To establish and preserve a compact business district suited to the needs of travelers, tourists, and vacationers.*

### District I (Industrial)

*Intent: To establish and preserve areas for necessary industrial and related uses of such nature that they require isolation from other kinds of land uses.*

### District AP (Agricultural Production)

*Intent: To establish and maintain for low intensity use those areas which because of their location, accessibility, and natural characteristics, are suitable for a wide range of forestry, agricultural, and recreational uses.*

### District Public Land [Unmapped]

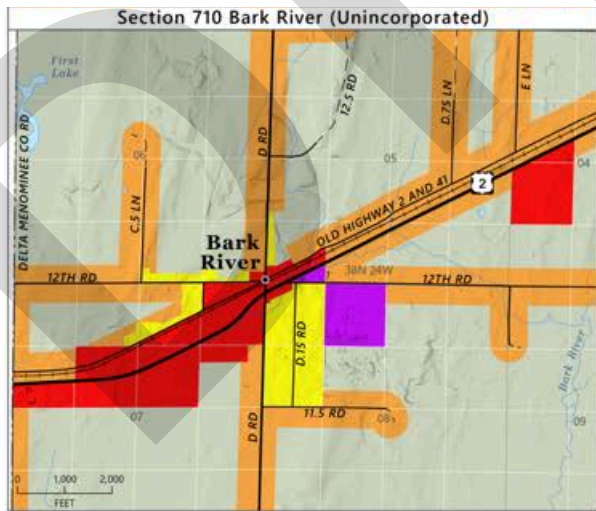
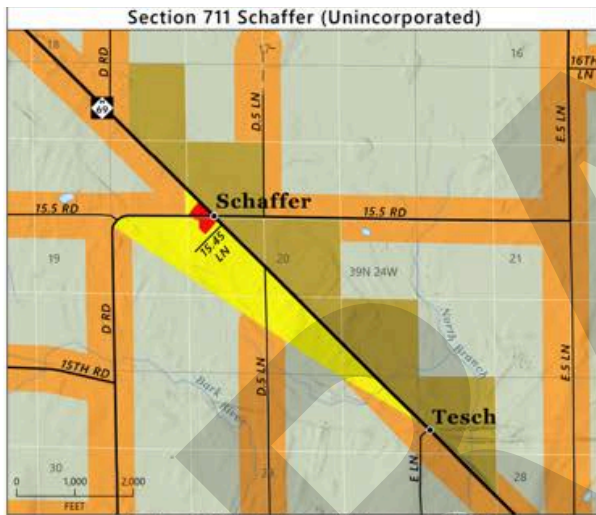
*Intent: To establish and preserve areas for certain public purposes. Provisions are made to allow for certain types of commercial or nonprofit use within the area.*

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## Existing Zoning

- Zoning Districts
- Agricultural Production
  - Commercial One
  - Industrial
  - Residential One
  - Residential Two
  - Rural Residential





## Land Use Trends

Bark River Township's zoning was originally enacted in the late 1970s as several Townships took zoning responsibility from Delta County. The initial zoning pattern sought to protect the various agricultural, timber, and mineral production areas present, while allowing for additional residential growth. Residential land use has continued to intensify in proximity to the primary transportation routes. In the early 2000s, work by the Planning Commission resulted in the existing zoning pattern, creating a residential district pattern focused on roadways where development has been most likely to occur.

Growth in the Bark River town area necessitated the development of a wastewater system due to concerns with groundwater contamination. Further development of all kinds has not yet been of the intensity to require the installation or expansion of public infrastructure services. If development of that density comes to the Township, it is likely to be privately initiated, utilizing community systems where households or commercial site utilize community systems sharing a single well or septic. Concerns with water quality in both the Bark River and Schaffer areas may someday require further mitigation with infrastructure. Storm water infiltration of homes and septic systems during heavy rain events has caused further issues, and compounded by a lack of culvert maintenance have affected roadways.

Zoning requests over the past decade have mainly been concerned with permitted residential development, and few issues have come before the Planning Commission for consideration. New land use types including alternative energy generation and diverse home-based occupations have created the need to carefully consider the pros and cons of each use type relative to the impact it will have on the community. The Township must consider development strategies that maximize the efficient use of space while retaining the compatibility of neighborhoods and peaceful enjoyment of the area. Opportunities to redevelop existing properties are not presented often, and have occasionally been associated with remediation of other issues like blight. A continuation of current trends may see additional smaller parcels used for a variety of mixed residential, commercial, and recreational development.

With a variety of semi-rural and rural residential area surrounded by agricultural and timber resource production lands, zoning districts in the Township may need to consider a hierarchy of primary uses, while using lot sizes and coverage areas to regulate the intensity of development. Roadways are anticipated to be in close proximity to future development, and should seek maintain a rural character with trees and well-maintained green stormwater infrastructure. These roadways should be wide enough to support recreational use or active transportation needs in a safe manner. Timberlands, farmlands, and open spaces should be preserved to a great extent in order to respect natural features and preserve their quality and quantity.

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## Future Land Use

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act of 2006 provides the authority for communities in Michigan to use zoning as a tool for the regulation of land. The law states that zoning regulations in a community must be based upon a plan, and a zoning plan describes the ways in which the current existing land use may change in the future. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008 describes that the community's Master Plan contains the zoning plan. The zoning plan is the legal basis for the zoning ordinance, which means any decisions contrary to what is stated in the plan could lack legal defensibility. The zoning plan is intended to guide all future rezoning activities and discretionary land use decisions in the community and should be consulted when these are under consideration.

The Future Land Use Map, along with its associated descriptions for future land use classifications make up the Future Land Use Plan. The Future Land Use Map serves as a guide for making decisions on the rezoning of land. However, the Planning Commission and Township Board should consider the map to be one of the many tools available to help them in making land use decisions, recommendations and addressing rezoning requests. The information presented on the map should be complemented by site-specific information as considered necessary by Township officials prior to any final decisions.

## Future Land Use Classifications

Future land use classifications are not the current zoning. They are a vision of land use that can be used as a goal in anticipation of changes to the zoning ordinance. Future land use classifications are described with intended uses and character in order to relate them to the current zoning districts and describe areas on the Future Land Use Map. In many cases, future land use districts may remain unchanged from the current zoning; in others, districts may be created, combined, or split to accommodate new uses and development trends.

Future Land Use Classifications and Associated Zoning Districts	
Current Zoning Districts	Future Land Use Classifications
R1 (Residential One)	Bark River Town District
R2 (Residential Two)	Bark River Residential District
R3 (Residential Three)	Schaffer District
RR (Rural Residential)	Countryside Rural
C1 (Commercial)	Bark River Town District
I (Industrial)	Manufacturing
AP (Agricultural Production)	Resource Production
Public Land	

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## Bark River Town District

*Intent:* The Bark River Town District is intended to provide for residential, retail, and service establishments that are compatible with a small-town setting. This district is designed for unincorporated town-like areas where a mix of residential and retail is in accord with the established patterns of land use and the needs of nearby residents. Wastewater infrastructure may be available in this district, allowing for some intensive development. This area has a wider variety of uses and a more intensive pattern of development to support maintaining the small town atmosphere.

## Bark River Residential District

*Intent:* The Bark River Residential District is intended to provide a transition zone between the more dense and mixed uses of the town area with the clustered residential and less developed neighborhoods and agricultural areas surrounding. These areas are primarily residential neighborhoods of single-family and two-family dwellings free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents in this district. Wastewater infrastructure may not be readily available in this district, limiting more intensive development.

## Schaffer District

*Intent:* The Schaffer District is intended to provide for a transition zone between the historic uses and residential pattern of the area, and the more sparsely developed rural, agricultural, and forested areas surrounding. The District is intended for the establishment and preservation of quiet neighborhoods for single-family and two-family dwellings free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents in this district.

## Countryside Rural

*Intent:* The Countryside Rural District is intended to provide for more sparsely developed rural residential, agricultural, and forestry uses accessible by all-season roads. The District is designed to provide residential opportunities for those who are willing to assume the cost of providing their own services on larger lots at a low intensity. It is designed to be a flexible, transitional area where commercial, business and residential land uses may all be present, including light manufacturing, repair and assembly processes. A slightly higher level of activity and development is envisioned for properties adjacent to roadways.

## Manufacturing

*Intent:* The Manufacturing District is designed to accommodate manufacturing, assembly, fabrication, processing, and storage activities that may also produce noise or generate heavy traffic, and require larger sites and isolation from other kinds of land uses. The District is also intended to make provisions for uses necessary to service the immediate needs of these types of activities.

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## Resource Production

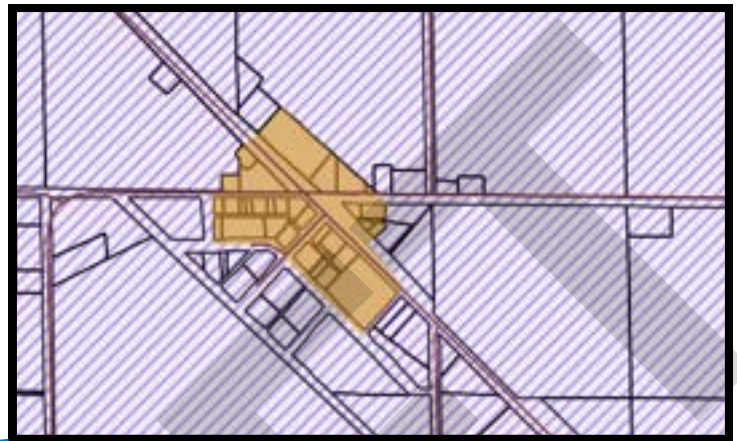
*Intent:* The Resource Production District is established to maintain low-density rural areas, which because of their rural character and locations, accessibility, and natural characteristics, are suitable for a range of forestry, agricultural, natural resource extraction, and recreational uses. Some low-density residential activity is expected, but the primary uses will be resource production and open space preservation.

Future Land Use Categories	Single Family Residential	Multi-Family Residential	Retail and Services	Restaurants	Community Facilities	Light Industrial/Manufacturing	Heavy Industrial/Manufacturing	Agricultural Operations	Utility Scale Power	Timber Harvesting
Bark River Town District	D	D	D	D	D	A	X	X	X	X
Bark River Residential District	D	A	A	A	D	A	X	A	X	A
Schaffer District	D	D	D	A	D	A	X	A	X	A
Countryside Rural District	D	A	A	A	A	A	A	D	X	D
Manufacturing District	X	X	A	X	X	D	D	X	A	X
Resource Production District	A	X	X	X	X	X	X	A	A	D



D- Desirable  
 A- Allowable  
 X- Deterred

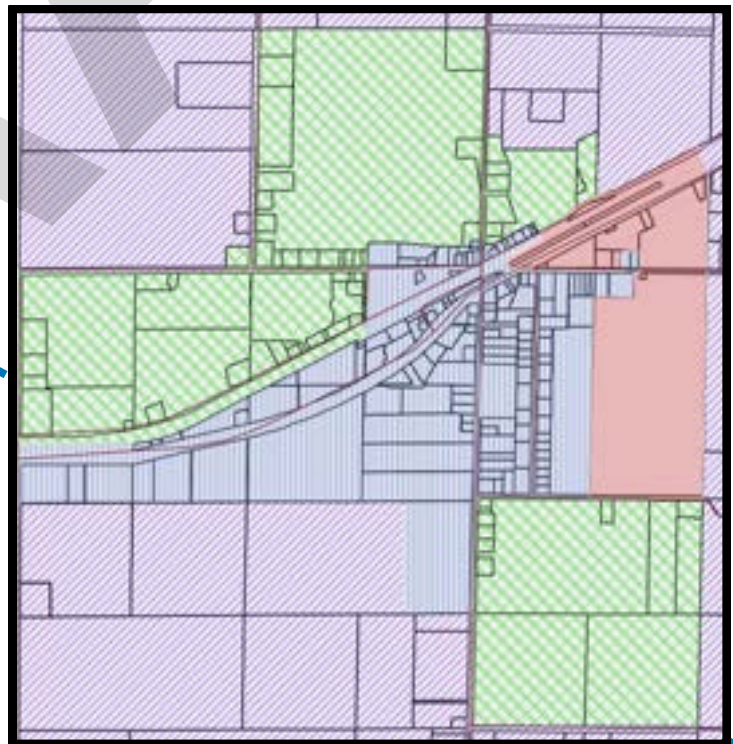
In the figure above, broad categories of uses are used to reflect a character and intent of each of the envisioned future land use districts. “Desirable” means a use may likely be regulated as “permitted”, while “allowable” may mean that it be allowed if it meets additional requirements or conditions. “Deterred” uses are those that may not be as appropriate in a given district. Zoning regulations will recognize that different standards may apply to a given type of use within a specific district, in order to minimize areas of land use conflict.

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## Bark River Township Future Land Use Map

-  Bark River Town District
-  Bark River Residential District
-  Schaffer District
-  Countryside Rural
-  Manufacturing
-  Resource Production





## District Changes and Zoning Plan

As discussed throughout the Master Plan, zoning must be based on a plan. The plan is the guide for all zoning decisions along with the Future Land Use Map, and the existing conditions present in the area. The main purpose of zoning is to improve and protect the health, safety, and welfare of the population and to direct land use towards the implementation of the goals of the Master Plan. Through land use planning and regulation, including zoning, Bark River Township intends to allow for reasonable growth with minimal land use conflict or negative environmental impact.

The Zoning Plan seeks to simplify the existing zoning of the Township to focus on the residential pattern on development, provide flexibility in the intensity of development, and protect the agriculture, timber, and resource production that has long been the character of the area. The Planning Commission envisions a hierarchy of uses in each district with some being more flexible to different types of development, while other types are discouraged. Respondents to the public input survey indicated an importance for the township's zoning to protect residents from the impacts of intensive development. The Township also realizes that past development has resulted in a sporadic distribution of use types and areas.

The Countryside Rural District is intended to comprise the majority of the area of the township, and also contain the widest variety of uses, so that prior uses and structures can come into more conformity with the zoning ordinance. This includes uses like single-family residential, light manufacturing, agricultural processing, and automotive repair. Meanwhile, the Manufacturing District is envisioned to contain the most intensive uses, and maintain additional requirements for their development near residential properties. The Resource Production District is intended to have the least variety and intensity of uses, and preserve its more natural characteristics. The current Public Land District in the zoning ordinance would be retired as it has not been in use and represents uses that are typically exempt from zoning requirements.

The Township's residential land uses include single-family, multi-family, and manufactured homes in a low to moderate density pattern. The development of additional housing and housing types should reflect the existing character of the area in which they are proposed, and be accommodated by the appropriate infrastructure, likely at the developer's expense. Rural residential growth has typically occurred on allowable lot splits and land divisions along existing road systems, and is anticipated to continue in the areas identified as Countryside Rural. The Bark River Town, Residential, and Schaffer Districts may be appropriate for a wider variety of housing types and residential developments, where services and infrastructure may be more available to accommodate the additional use. Concentrating more intensive development in these areas would benefit mobility, retain their sense of place, and leverage the existing infrastructure available.

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



Commercial development will continue to be encouraged along the major transportation routes and be most desirable in the Bark River Town District. The mixed uses of this district are intended to be compatible with the historic residential, retail, and services developed in the Town area and create opportunity for additional methods to maintain the area's sense of place. Commercial development throughout the township should be context-sensitive to maintain the character of the area in which it is proposed. Larger commercial developments along the highway corridor should incorporate lighting and traffic safety elements that minimize hazards.

Manufacturing businesses are a key component of the economy of Delta County and provide many jobs to area residents. Scattered industrial development will be discouraged in favor of designated areas to ensure other industrial sites do not develop in areas which are designed for less intensive uses. Expansion of the Manufacturing District should receive a higher level of scrutiny to ensure that the use makes sense for the community, and that there are characteristics that mitigate the impact of development by providing sufficient setbacks and buffering in proximity to residential uses. It is intended that if more manufacturing uses are proposed in the Township, that they are more desirable near US-41 where there are more likely to be services available to accommodate it.

To the greatest extent possible, zoning performance standards for the development of alternative energy resources and storage methods will be based on the protection of single-family dwellings from noise, vibration, safety, and environmental impact issues. Their potential development has not yet been identified, but is most appropriate to the Manufacturing and Resource Production Districts. If developed in the Resource Production District, care should be taken to mitigate any identified environmental impacts and minimize the conversion of prime agricultural and forested land. Zoning ordinance regulations for home scale and community scale alternative energy sources should be considered with appropriateness for the neighborhood and separation between the installation and residential uses.

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



Schedule of Regulations						
District	Minimum Lot Size	Minimum Lot Width	Minimum Setback			Maximum Height
			Front	Side	Rear	
R1	12,000 sqft.	80 feet	25	7	25	30
R2	18,000 sqft.	120 feet	25	7	25	30
R3	18,000 sqft.	120 feet	25	7	25	30
RR	1 acre	200 feet	25	15	50	30
C1	None	None	25	5	20	30
I	None	None	25	2	20	50
AP	10 acres	None	25	15	50	50

An updated schedule of zoning regulations has been proposed to address nonconformities and allow for more flexible standards for development on lots of record, which are those that have existed prior to the implementation of the standards of the zoning ordinance. As district changes may be expected to be proposed in future updates, the Planning Commission will review the schedule of regulations associated with the particular district and revise requirements as necessary. The Planning Commission intends to continue their review of the zoning ordinance text, and has established the following priority areas to incorporate into a revision:

### Standardize and Modernize the Ordinance and Definitions

The Planning Commission recognizes the need for an update of the zoning ordinance to include a review of the definitions of terms to fit amended statutes and standards. In addition, several uses and regulations require readers to jump between sections for specific regulations, and others would be better served by inclusion in more relevant sections. A comprehensive update to the ordinance may include recodification and clearer formatting to increase readability.

### Address Nonconforming Structures and Uses

Based on the historic use and character of the Bark River town area, the Planning Commission will seek to incorporate more lenient nonconforming structure regulations (for older structures that do not meet the current zoning regulations). These more flexible standards would allow existing nonconformities to be modified if the proposal would not otherwise be contrary to the public health, safety, and welfare, or depress the value of nearby properties.

### Development Review Procedures and Processes

As the Planning Commission explores revisions and opportunities to modernize policy, clear procedures to review site plans, conditional use approvals, apply variances, and to amend the ordinance text and map should be thorough and well-understood to reduce controversy or concerns.

# FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## Zoning Enforcement Process

To ensure the Township Zoning Ordinance is being followed thoroughly and equitably, the enforcement process for violations of the ordinance will be reviewed, and a demonstrable procedure will be incorporated into the ordinance text and as Township policy. A violation of the zoning ordinance is a municipal civil infraction, a process enforced by the Zoning Administrator or the Township Board's designee, and subject to the collection of evidence and remedial fines before being referred to District Court.

## **Implementation and Plan Review**

Planning is intended to guide development in ways that encourage desirable outcomes while protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the community. Development of this Master Plan took the effort of the Planning Commission, township staff, and residents. As the creators and most frequent users of this document, the Planning Commission should ensure that this Master Plan is used as a basis for decision-making, and should continue to communicate its goals long after the Plan is adopted. The Planning Commission should also incorporate the Master Plan and its review into its annual reporting requirements. Michigan law states that the Master Plan shall be reviewed at least every five years to determine if updating is necessary; however, a regular review schedule will ensure that the Plan is relevant to community needs, and up to date with the characteristics of the community.