

This plan updates the 2008 Comprehensive Plan and uses City Council's Vision 2025 as its foundation for goals and recommendations.

A. What is the Purpose of a Comprehensive Plan?

The comprehensive plan is a policy document created by the City of Portage Planning Commission to guide the future growth and development of the city. A sound master plan helps ensure that Portage remains a highly desirable place to live, work, or visit. This can be accomplished by preserving and enhancing the qualities of the city that the residents, businesses, and property owners consider important. The plan also allows the city to respond to new trends and approaches.

The comprehensive plan identifies and analyzes the city's physical elements to create a set of goals, objectives, and recommendations to direct decisions regarding future land use, neighborhood and transportation improvements, and special strategies for key areas in the city. Because the plan offers a balance between the interests and rights of private property owners with those of the entire community, it effectively assists city leaders in making substantive, thoughtful decisions for the community while considering long-term implications.

The authority to adopt a new Comprehensive Plan or amend an existing Plan is permitted under Michigan law, PA 33 of 2008, as amended. This law authorizes the Planning Commission to prepare and adopt a Comprehensive Plan which best promotes health, safety, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare. The Plan considers efficiency and economy in the process of development; including providing for the following:

- Adequate provisions for traffic
- Healthful and convenient distribution of population
- Good civic design and arrangement
- Wise and efficient expenditure of public funds
- Adequate provisions for public utilities and other public services

Public Act 33 also requires the Planning Commission to review the Plan every five years and determine whether to a) amend the plan, b) adopt a new plan, or c) leave the plan as is. In 2008, the Planning Commission concluded that each chapter of the 2002 Comprehensive Plan should be reviewed and amended, where necessary, to address new issues, consider new ideas and confirm or revise existing goals and objectives. Changes included technical details such as updated demographics, public infrastructure, existing land use patterns and future land use. This update includes similar amendments, however this plan reorganizes the 2008 Plan into more concise chapters with the separately published Community Snapshot Existing Conditions and Public Involvement summaries adopted as appendices. This way, the Plan focuses on how to build on current opportunities through easy-to-read recommendations for the future.

The Differences between a Comprehensive Plan and a Zoning Ordinance

The comprehensive plan provides a general direction for future development, and while it does not change the zoning of or any zoning regulations applying to any property, one way the plan is implemented may be through zoning ordinance and/or map amendments. A comprehensive plan is flexible in order to respond to changing conditions and it is not a binding legal document. The Comprehensive Plan shows how land is to be used in the

future; while the Zoning Ordinance regulates the use of land at a particular point in time. The Zoning Plan (required by state law and included in the Implementation chapter) ties the Comprehensive Plan to the zoning ordinance by outlining how future land use categories relate to zoning districts.

Some of the differences between the master plan and the zoning ordinance are listed below.

Comprehensive Plan	Zoning Ordinance
Provides general policies, a guide	Provides specific regulations, the law
Describes what should happen in the future – recommended land use for the next 20 years, not necessarily the recommended use for today	Describes what is and what is not allowed today, based on existing conditions
Includes recommendations that involve other agencies and groups	Deals only with development-related issues under City control
Flexible to respond to changing conditions	Fairly rigid, requires formal amendment to change

B. Overview of Process

Involvement of city officials and the public was obtained through a series of meetings with the Planning Commission and public input sessions. A public open house was held on October 2, 2013 to gain opinions and ideas related to the existing goals and objectives, the three Plan topic areas (Community and Quality of Life, Transportation, and Land Use and Character), and the Lake Center subarea. An additional input opportunity for the Lake Center area was given at a December 12, 2013 focus group meeting. Several opportunities were provided to react to the draft plan at Planning Commission meetings as well. These public input sessions allowed those interested to share their ideas and reaction to information presented in the Plan before the official public hearing was conducted. Public input was documented, and all comments were considered before the Plan was adopted. A complete summary of public involvement is included in the separately published appendix.

C. How to use the Comprehensive Plan

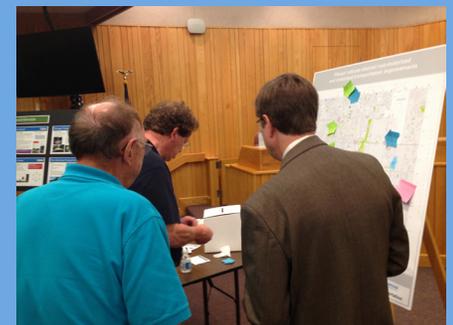
The Comprehensive Plan is the guiding tool and provides the framework for land use decisions in the City of Portage. It should also serve as a basis for capital improvement decisions and programming, as funds are allocated for yearly work programs and tasks with outside sources of funds, such as grants, are sought for local enhancement and development activities. The following guidelines should be followed consistently for best use of the Comprehensive Plan:

Refer to the Comprehensive Plan in all zoning decisions

Use of the Comprehensive Plan ensures that the desires of the community regarding future development are translated into action...one special land use permit, site plan approval, variance, or rezoning at a time. Those everyday decisions, collectively dictate the future of Portage. Specifically, **Appendix D**, Development Guidelines should be utilized when evaluating development proposals.

New in 2014:

- reorganized document with concise, forward-thinking plan document and separate appendix of existing conditions
- revised transportation chapter reinforcing the City's commitment to Complete Streets
- Lake Center District subarea plan
- Zoning Plan in the Implementation chapter
- updated Future Land Use map
- revised goals, objectives, and recommendations



Recent Accomplishments since the last plan:

- Adoption of the City Centre Area Plan
- Construction activity rebounding since the recession
- Portage Public Schools bond millage resulted in several new school buildings
- South Westnedge/I-94 interchange improvements
- New Eliason Nature Preserve
- Several ordinance amendments to address issues from the last set of planning efforts

2014 Community-wide Issues and Opportunities

The following list of community wide issues were identified through the public input process, including a public open house and Youth Advisory Committee meeting, as well as through city staff and consultant analysis. These issues are addressed in the following plan chapters as identified below.

	Plan Chapters		
	Community	Transportation	Land Use
Continue the investment to expand and/or enhance city parks, bikeways and multi-use trails with emphasis on connecting areas not served to the central/existing system.	✓	✓	
Utilize Eliason Nature Reserve to its fullest potential and create connecting non-motorized links	✓	✓	
Enhance gateways to the city, fully utilizing the new city brand "A Natural Place to Move" to contribute to a strong sense of community	✓		
Create a complete streets policy that addresses multi-modal transportation elements including sidewalks, shared shoulder bike lanes, multi-use trails and connections to public transit		✓	
Continue to improve non-motorized connections throughout the city that appeal to varied skill levels of existing and potential bicyclists through additional bike ways and trail connections		✓	
Retain South Westnedge as a regional business anchor but continue efforts to improve traffic flow and safety		✓	✓
Provide transportation guidance for locations identified as challenging such as intersections/crossings at Centre/Old Centre, Vincent/Oakland, among others		✓	
Encourage more mixed use developments, especially in the City Centre Area.			✓
Focus on maintaining and/or improving residential neighborhoods, especially older areas, by addressing vacant/foreclosed housing, property maintenance and building code compliance.			✓
Lake Center Area: Enhance Portage Road to be a vibrant, commercial corridor that is walkable and safe.		✓	✓
Define boundaries of the core South Westnedge commercial area and develop strategies to buffer from adjacent residences			✓
Create aging in place opportunities to ensure Portage residents can maintain an active lifestyle throughout their lifecycle and by providing a variety of housing types to accommodate a variety of age groups, with a special focus on seniors.	✓		✓
Identify opportunities for commercial and industrial development at vacant parcels along Portage Road and Shaver Road			✓
Form a strategy for conversion of greenhouses if transition to other uses occur.			✓

Encourage other decision-making bodies to use the Comprehensive Plan

Decision-making efforts of other agencies and adjacent communities can also be influenced through the Comprehensive Plan. Transportation policies and recommendations in this Plan can be used by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) during evaluation of potential changes along state highways. The Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study (KATS), the agency designated by the state and federal government for area-wide long range transportation planning, can use the findings to help project future traffic, needs and funding. Other agencies, such as the school district, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and economic development groups, can reference this Plan during their planning and funding decisions. These agencies, to varying degrees, all have a role in the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Keep the Comprehensive Plan current

Comprehensive Plan recommendations and policies should be reviewed and evaluated annually by the Planning Commission to determine the level of program achievement. Appropriate amendments to the Comprehensive Plan should be made if circumstances in the community change.

Amend the Zoning Ordinance, Zoning Map and other city codes to implement the Plan

Recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan can be implemented through amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, Zoning Map and other city codes. Care must be taken, however, to fully review and consider all ramifications of such actions. In some cases, recommendations in this Plan are long range, with the idea that implementation will be gradual. In other cases, recommendations focus on issues today and change may be more immediate.

This plan is used by the City to guide policy related to the following:

- *Zoning Ordinance*
- *Zoning Map*
- *Reviewing development proposals*
- *Capital Improvements Plans*

Vision

Why?



Goal/Objective

What?



Tool

How?



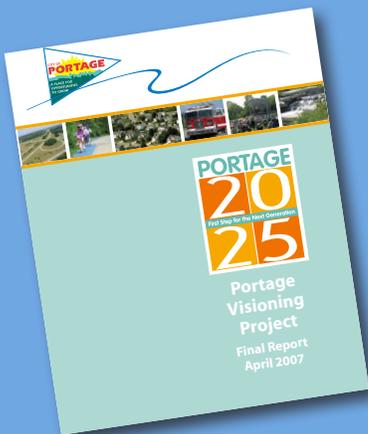
Implementation Strategy

Who? When?

Vision 2025

The vision and goals of this plan were guided by the City's Vision 2025 process, first completed in 2007.

City Council has regularly reviewed its vision every few years, which will continue to inform future updates to the Comprehensive Plan.



Goal



Throughout the plan, goals are highlighted in green. For more detail on how to achieve the goals, see Chapter 7: Implementation

D. Plan Vision

The City of Portage will be a world class community providing high quality city facilities and services, a range of housing options for all ages and incomes, a strong employment base, and vibrant commercial centers building on current assets for a sustainable future.

The following statements provide a vision for each of this plan's topic chapters. These statements provide a long-term overall vision that are further supported by more specific goals and objectives. The vision statements, goals, and objectives are meant to be used together, collectively outlining Portage's future guiding principles. Each of the following chapters elaborates on each topic, providing the tools and strategies to achieve the vision.

Community and Quality of Life Vision:

Provide for the health, safety and welfare of Portage residents, employees, and visitors and maintain high quality community facilities to meet projected changing needs, demographics and life styles, enhance the quality of life and promote a strong community identity.

Transportation Vision:

Create a safe, balanced, coordinated, and efficient multi-modal transportation system adequate to accommodate current and future needs in Portage.

Land Use Vision:

Maintain a well organized, balanced and efficient use of land at densities that

- *meets the current and future needs of the public,*
- *ensures compatibility and harmony among land uses,*
- *protects key natural and historic resources,*
- *complements the existing and planned capacity of streets and infrastructure, and*
- *sustains prosperity to support desired public facilities and services.*