Texas Charter Township
Strategic Plan Final Report

October 2014

Facilitated by
Susan S. Radwan, MEd, SMP, ARM
Leading Edge Mentoring
Grand Ledge, Michigan

Introduction

In May, 2014, the Texas Charter Township Board of Trustees approved the pursuit of developing a strategic plan under the facilitation of Susan S. Radwan, MEd, SMP, ARM, owner of Leading Edge Mentoring, Grand Ledge, Michigan.

The process design for this exploration involved two separate groups of people, with most recommendations coming from the Board of Trustees and the invitations extended by Superintendent Julie VanderWiere. The two groups included the Core Planning Group, 15 people including the Board of Trustees, who attended three planning meetings in June, July, and August, as well as a Validation Team, consisting of 23 Township citizens, invited to review the work of the core team and give comment through surveys constructed by the facilitator.

Each of the three Planning Meetings involved a specific focus.

The first meeting was focused on defining the Township's Preferred Future targeted at 2025. This process involved exploration of relevant economic development reports, a review of the Master Plan updates, exposure to six elements critical to prosperity in the 21st century in the context of the economic development reports, and placemaking, a concept that is geared to the marketing of the township.

The second meeting focused on the 3-5 year development toward the long term preferred future, reviewing critical infrastructure concerns of the township in relation to the agreed upon preferred future. The group reviewed the current status of water and sewer, public safety, interjurisdictional issues, internet access, trailways and bicycle paths, development of the 65 acres at 6th Street, and the sense of community.

The third meeting focused on prioritizing strategies and broad goal setting and key action steps for the strategies defined.

Following each meeting, the facilitator developed an electronic survey that went to both the Core Planning Team and the Validation Team. The content of the surveys summarized the critical decisions made during the prior meeting and asked for individual validation from both teams. The results of those surveys was shared with the Core Planning Team to process whether there was alignment between the two groups. Some decisions were modified based on the comparative values and comments shared.

The fourth and final review of the strategies and action plan surveys was done by the Township Board of Trustees at its September 22 meeting. This review paved way for the development of this final report.

The process designed was intended to be inclusive of a wide spectrum of the community so as not to be perceived that the results of this planning process were driven by personal agendas. Representation in this process included residents, business people, volunteers, leadership from Kalamazoo Valley Community College, developers, and current and former elected township officials and employees.

The following pages present the shared vision of the core planning team, affirmed by the Validation Team.

Vision 2025

Preferred Future for Texas Charter Township

Texas Township is a financially strong township that operates from a shared Preferred Future for community life. The shared Preferred Future stems from regular community conversations and greater diversity on township boards and committees.

The Texas Township environment is a balance of rural and suburban culture set against a background of rolling hills, flatlands, vineyards, and open farmlands ...a family-oriented residential community of the greater Kalamazoo area. To preserve the balance, the township must protect the farmland, rural areas, and parks as well as add green space to every development project.

The perception of Texas Township is "families with a vibrant lifestyle". The quality of life is supported by outdoor recreation opportunities, including safe biking paths and walking trails throughout the township. These trails connect neighborhoods to each other as well as to rural pathways. Township energy is placed on opportunities for "healthy" living, including locally grown fresh foods available at the Farmer's Market, gathering spaces in township parks for family picnics and activities, as well as occasional organized community events.

The commercial interests of the township are thriving. Corners Business District is a neighborhood commercial district, offering residents convenient shopping with full occupancy of boutique retail shops, family-owned businesses and desirable office space. The 9th Street Corridor accommodates national chains with interstate access.

Neighborhoods have easy access to convenient shopping for amenities. The township actively attracts new and diverse businesses to the area and assures local ordinances support entrepreneurial commerce.

Texas Township is home to Kalamazoo Valley Community College and convenient to Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College, and Davenport University. These institutions support lifelong learning and support local businesses, commercial and industrial interests in workforce development, evolving professional skills and high tech training.

Texas Township has an effective public safety effort that assures low crime rates, 24/7 guaranteed response for emergency services, and maximizes the safety and security of the residents as they enjoy the public spaces.

Strategic Priorities 2015-2018

#1. Launch an Economic Development Task Force to enable development activity and partnerships
#2. Install sidewalks on Q & 8th Streets
#3. Redesign website, using an RFP and contract award process.
#4. Explore the cost/benefit for technology enhancement.
#5. Contract with an event planner for a one year experiment in using the Farmer's Market Pavilion for community activities and building a sense of community.
#6. Encourage senior housing developments
#7. Enhance cemetery conditions; assess future needs
#8. In order to assure sustained efforts on this plan and prevent unnecessary turnover, assure staff salaries are competitive.

It should be noted that the parks and recreation development with its relevant trailways as well as issues about fire department expansion were a high priority discussions. However, because there was significant planning and activity happening for these concerns in the *current* budget cycle, these two items were not prioritized as *future* items for development.

Strategic Priorities Detailed with Critical Action Steps

#1. Launch an Economic Development Task Force to enable development activity and partnerships

Action Steps

1. Appoint an Economic Development Task Force
2. Meet with SW Michigan First to explore, share and understand
3. Be more aggressive in gaining the attention of SW Michigan First
4. Host a town hall inviting commercial and residential developers to solicit input on what Texas Township can do to attract various developments to the area, including 9th St; DDA, senior housing, and young professionals
5. Create an environment friendly to economic development
6. Study the 9th Street Corridor Enhancement Study (Winter 2014-15)

#2. Install sidewalks on Q & 8th Streets

Actions Needed:

1. Define where the money will come from to maintain the sidewalks
2. Create a fund to cover maintenance of sidewalks
2. Revisit sidewalk ordinances
3. Get support from businesses prior to installation
4. Assure funding from multiple sources
5. Start at the core and go out to the corners on both sides of the street.

#3. Redesign website, using an RFP and contract award process.

Actions Needed

1. Create a budget (sooner than later)
2. Identify attractive websites as a model
3. Develop RFP using an inclusive process to develop the scope of work
4. Identify personnel approach to keeping the site updated
5. Award the project

#4. Explore the cost/benefit for technology enhancement

Actions Needed:

1. Obtain a CTS analysis and proposal
2. Determine further actions

#5. Contract with an event planner for a one year experiment in using the Farmer's Market Pavilion for community activities and building a sense of community.

Actions Needed:

1. Board budget to outsource the function of Community Outreach Coordinator to an external event manager/planner
2. Establish policy for use: hours of operation, limitations, and private party rental fees
3. Choose an external event manager (use an objective process, e.g. RFP)
4. Involve the DDA and other civic entities
5. Evaluate results after one year experiment

#6. Encourage senior housing developments

Actions Needed:

1. Refer this priority to the Planning Commission

#7. Enhance cemetery conditions; assess future needs

Actions Needed:

1. Appoint a committee to evaluate current conditions and future needs as well as research purchasing additional land for a second cemetery.

#8. In order to assure sustained efforts on this plan and prevent unnecessary turnover, assure staff salaries and HR practices are competitive.

Actions Needed:

1. Study compensation and benefits in other townships of similar size and complexity.
2. Develop a township philosophy around competitive and fair compensation across all employee and contractual positions.
3. Adjust compensation in accordance with the established philosophy.

Final Note: As mentioned previously, parks and recreation was given considerable focus in the Core Planning Team discussions. The following two items were not prioritized for action, but did have a philosophy attached.

1. Sport field and sport programs may only be pursued if they are low maintenance projects and must be grant funded.
2. Expansion of the biking/walking pathways needs to be integrated into development projects.