

Big Rapids Charter Township Master Plan

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**Big Rapids Charter Township
14212 Northland Drive
Big Rapids, MI 49307**

Phone: 231-796-3603

Email: supervisor@bigrapidstowshipmi.gov

www.bigrapidstowshipmi.gov

VISION STATEMENT

The Vision Statement is meant to provide an overriding view of Big Rapids Township's preferred future. Since this plan extends to 2035, the Vision Statement provides a look at the Township, its residents, and other features in 2035.

Vision for 2035

In 2035 Big Rapids Township, which surrounds the City of Big Rapids and Ferris State University (FSU), has maintained much of its rural quality - while developing a recognizable suburban character in the areas between the City of Big Rapids and US-131, and in areas south of the City. A variety of medium and high-density housing types exist to serve the needs of residents, who now include an increasing number of people commuting to employment in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. The increased interest in condominium type housing, and the growth in student apartment living have been supported through effective planning and zoning. Prudent land use planning has been instrumental in maintaining open space within the Township, with the land west of US-131, many areas east of the Muskegon River, and areas in the south and northeast directed at low density residential and agricultural uses including hobby farming and equestrian uses.

The Township's strategic location along US-131 has encouraged the expansion of the commercial and retail center, as well as important growth in the area's industrial parks. The ongoing development of FSU as a significant educational and cultural resource, the development of downtown Big Rapids, and the Muskegon River have been instrumental in making the Big Rapids area, including Big Rapids Township, an attractive area for tourism and recreation. A good working relationship between the Township, the City, the University, and surrounding governmental units has fostered effective planning and problem solving. Compatible zoning, land use, and increased sharing of local sewer and water systems have been a result. The development of an alternate north-south township route has helped to reduce traffic and congestion on State Street through the City, however the lack of an alternative east/west traffic route continues to negatively impact traffic flow through the city, access to FSU's campus and access for emergency services.

A township population of approximately 5,500, a median household income above the regional average, and an increase in taxable property values has made it possible to expand township services and the personnel needed to manage those services. Active community support and involvement reinforce effective Township government. Character, location, amenities, and affordability all contribute to the quality of life in Big Rapids Township, making it a desirable place in which to live, work and visit.

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

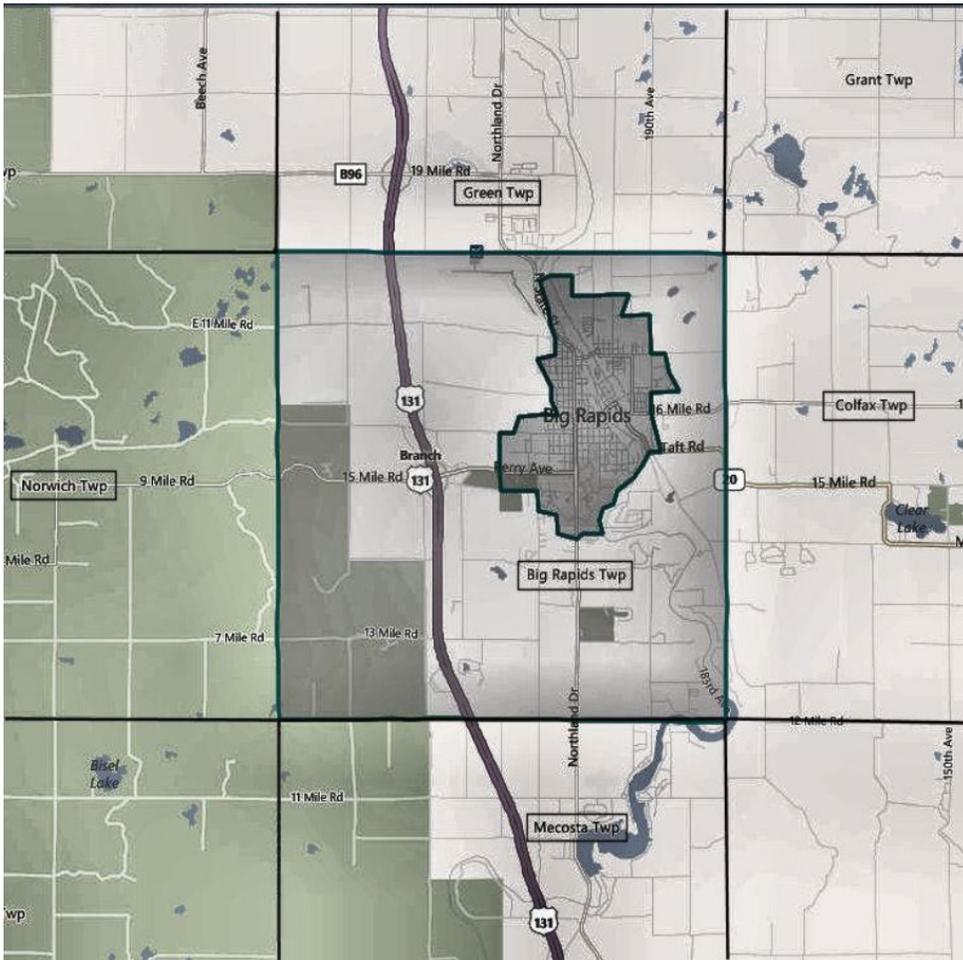
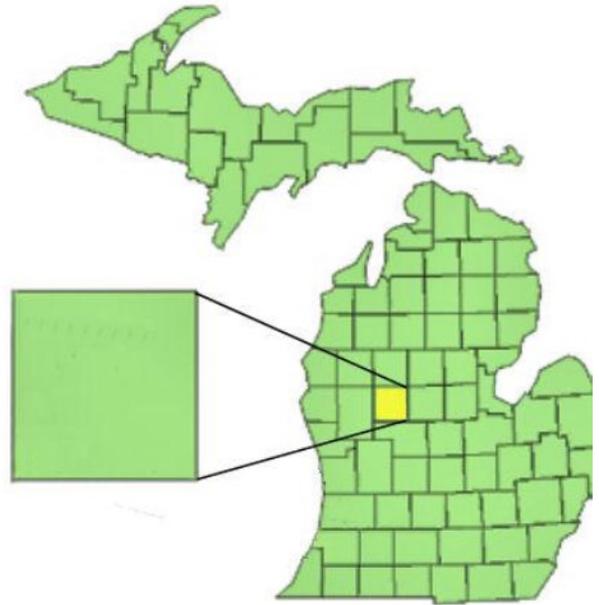
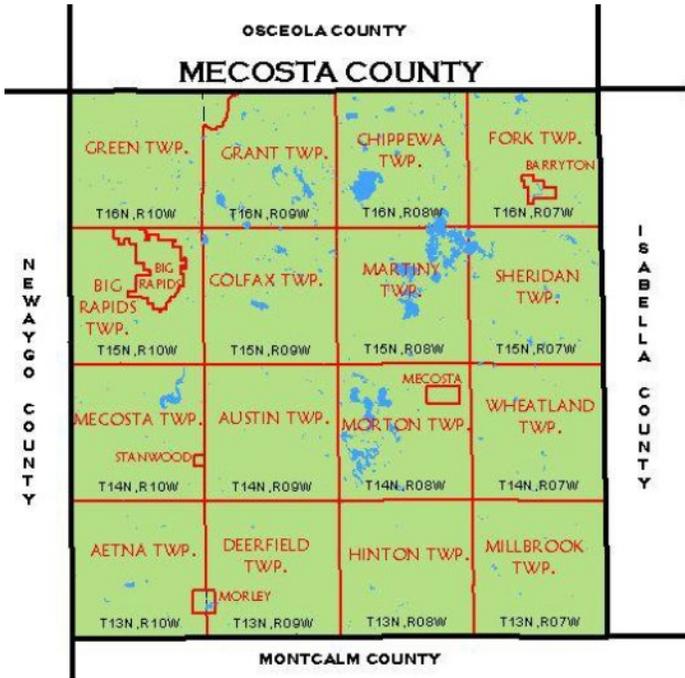
History and Location

Big Rapids Township covers 29 square miles and is bounded by Green, Colfax, and Mecosta townships in Mecosta County and Norwich Township in Newaygo County (see fig. 1). The Township surrounds the City of Big Rapids, which is the county seat of Mecosta County and the home of Ferris State University. Grand Rapids, a major commercial and industrial center, is 56 miles south and serves the Big Rapids Community as a commuter and employment base. Ferris State University is also developing expanding educational facilities in Grand Rapids.

Permanent settlement of Big Rapids Township dates back to the mid 1800's. Dairy and crop farming were practiced in the early years. An abundance of forestland, however, made lumber the primary economy for more than 30 years. A number of logging mills were established along the banks of the Muskegon River, which was used to transport the cut logs to Muskegon for shipment elsewhere.

As the pine forests were cleared, logging operations were replaced with the business of education. Woodbridge Ferris opened Ferris Industrial School in 1884 to provide technical training. The school became Ferris State College in 1963 and attained university status in 1987. Ferris State University continues to be the largest employer in the area, and its presence is felt both demographically and economically.

Big Rapids Township conducted governmental business for the entire 36 sections of the Township until the incorporation of the City of Big Rapids in 1869. In 2000, Big Rapids Charter Township returned to charter status. The Township increased its size in 1991 as a result of a detachment vote that returned 1,200 acres of property and 255 people from the western portion of the City of Big Rapids to the Township. As a result of this vote, the Roben-Hood Airport, the County Fairgrounds and the Highland View Cemetery are now within the Township's jurisdiction.



Construction of the north-south U.S. 131 expressway in the early 1980's and growth in student enrollment at Ferris State University have impacted local traffic patterns and surrounding land uses. Demand for goods and services has caused an increase in retail development, especially along sections of Perry Avenue and Northland Drive. Additionally, the Township has begun to experience increased residential development as the population spreads outside the City.

Natural Features

The Muskegon River, a key natural resource, flows southward through the eastern side of the township. US-131, a major highway, carries north/south traffic and separates the central township area from township lands to the west. The central portion of the Township, between the river and the highway, has become the major growth area, particularly for commercial and industrial uses. Lands to the east of the Muskegon River and to the west of the highway have remained essentially rural in nature, while the bulk of the Township's area, the central portion, has taken on a suburban character, particularly the areas nearest the City of Big Rapids.

The City of Big Rapids is essentially a built city with little remaining room for development. Expansion, therefore, particularly within the commercial sector, is occurring primarily within the Township. The Big Rapids area is becoming a regional commercial center with a premium on siting available in the township, particularly those which have available water and sewer utilities.

The central portion of the township contains the Township Offices and the former Township Fire Department and accessible water and sewer facilities, as well as available land for development. The lands to the east of the river present a challenge with respect to fire protection, as well as facilitating development, due to the existence of only two bridge crossings, both in the City of Big Rapids. Expeditious travel from the fire station to the east side is further complicated by the existence of only one north-south route through the City leading to the eastern side of the Township. The Township land west of the highway has adequate vehicle access across US-131, and it offers limited commercial development immediately adjoining the Perry Street interchange to US-131. Otherwise, the area is rural in nature. The barrier to extensive development west of the highway is one of utility extension. The recent construction of Waldron Way, by Meijers Corporation as a part of their development, provides north-south access to the western portions of the Township adequate for fire protection needs.

Climate

Big Rapids Township experiences a range of temperatures and weather throughout an average year. January is typically the coldest month, with an average temperature of 19.8°F. July is typically the warmest month of the year, with an average temperature of 69°F. September is usually the wettest month of the year, with an average of 3.95 inches of precipitation. February, with 1.72 inches, is typically the month with the least precipitation. Annually, the area receives nearly 37 inches of precipitation. Snowfall generally occurs in seven months of a year, with the heaviest snowfall occurring in January - an average of 17.6 inches fall. Annually, there is an average of over 60 inches of snow. (See Table 1)

Table 1: Climate Information (City of Big Rapids Water Plant) - NCDC 1981-2010 Monthly Normals													
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
Mean Max. Temperature (F)	28.2	31.8	41.8	55.6	68	77	81.2	78.6	70.7	57.6	43.8	32.2	55.6
Mean Temperature (F)	19.8	21.9	30.4	43.2	55	65	69	66.5	58.4	46.4	35.3	24.9	44.8
Mean Min. Temperature (F)	11.4	12	19.1	30.8	43	52	56.9	54.5	46	35.2	26.8	17.5	33.9
Mean Precipitation (in.)	2.11	1.72	2.43	3.28	3.5	3.3	3.35	4.04	3.95	3.4	3.2	2.41	36.6
Mean Snowfall (in)	17.6	12.6	8.3	1.8	0	0	0	0	0	0.3	4.1	16.4	61.1
Heating Deg Days (base 65 deg F)	1401	1207	1071	655	324	93	27	52	225	578	891	1245	7768
Cooling Deg Days (base 65 deg F)	0	0	0	1	19	82	152	100	25	2	0	0	381
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration - www.ncdc.noaa.gov													

Surface Water and Groundwater

The Muskegon River flows south through Big Rapids Township. The water quality of the river is favorable for a growing sport fishing environment. Historically significant in the settlement and economy of the area, the Muskegon River continues to provide economic potential in the form of recreational opportunities. Additionally, the area is water-rich due to its plentiful deep-water aquifers.

Tributaries of the Muskegon River traverse Big Rapids Township and provide drainage to the surrounding area. Mitchell Creek extends from the river to the northwest quadrant of the Township, Winter Creek and Cold Spring Creek flow through the southern half of the Township, and Ryan Creek extends northeast into the Townline Lake area bordering Colfax Township. Grass Lake, Nehmer Lake, and Hunts Lake are other natural lakes located in Big Rapids Township. Land adjacent to these streams and lakes frequently sustains wetland habitats that serve as organic filtration systems.

Although the Muskegon River is a major asset to the Township, seasonal flooding can occur in a few areas along its path with varying degrees of severity.

Topography and Soils

The topography of Big Rapids Township includes a two to three-mile wide plain that is now the Muskegon River basin. The [Soil Survey of Mecosta County Michigan](#) indicates the following soil associations within the Township.

- *Mecosta* — This soil association borders the Muskegon River. Mecosta soils are level to gently rolling, somewhat excessively Perrington-Coloma-Ithaca — The primary association in the Township is characterized by nearly level to steep, well drained, somewhat excessively drained, and somewhat poorly drained, loamy and sandy soils that formed in glacial till or outwash deposits.
- *Coloma* — This soil association occurs in the southwest corner of the Township and is nearly level to steep, somewhat excessively drained, sandy soils that formed in glacial till or outwash deposits. Woodlands predominate on soils of this association.
- Drained, sandy soils that formed in outwash deposits or glacial till. These soils are generally suited to construction and septic tank absorption, but slope and inadequate filtering capacity may be a factor to certain types of development.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Big Rapids Township provides a habitat to a variety of native vegetation and wildlife. There are many low-lying marshes that are home to several species of waterfowl. Broadleaf deciduous trees and needle leaf evergreens dominate this local landscape. Forest cover of this type is a native habitat to whitetail deer, upland mammals, and game birds. The abundance of natural wildlife makes the area a popular recreational destination for hunting and fishing activities. Natural areas to observe vegetation and wildlife can be found at the nearby Manistee National Forest, Pere Marquette State Forest and the Haymarsh State Game Area that border the Township. In addition to existing aquatic species of smallmouth bass, northern pike and walleye, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources stocks the Muskegon River with both brown and rainbow trout in an ongoing program to create an urban fishery.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Synopsis

- In 2010 the Township's population was 4,208 and has grown at a much faster rate (29.5% since 2000) than City and County areas. (Table 2)
- The median age of residents in Big Rapids Township was 42.9 yrs, considerably higher than that in the City and County areas. (Table 3)
- In 2010, Big Rapids Township's proportion of family households is much higher than the city and is somewhat lower than Mecosta County and Michigan. (Table 4)
- 38.6% of the Township's residents over 25 have a Bachelor's degree or higher and --- 12.9% have a Graduate or Professional degree, higher than City County or State. (Table 4).
- The Township has a high percentage of owner-occupied housing (70.4%) twice as high as the City (34.8%) and comparable to the County and State (73%). (Table 5)
- A greater percentage of housing units have been built in the Township since 2000 (26.8%), than in the City (6.7%), County(12.9%) or State(9.8%). (Table 5)

- The Township's median value of owner-occupied housing (\$151,400) is significantly higher than the City or the County. (Table 5)
- The Township and County's unemployment was somewhat above State and National averages. (Table 6)
- A high percentage (36.1%) of the Township's residents is employed in the "Educational services, health care, and social assistance" category. (Table 6)

Trends	1980	1990	2000	2010	% Change	Projections	
					2000-2010	2020	2030
Mecosta County	36,961	37,317	40,553	42,798	5.5%	47,285	51,772
Big Rapids Township	2,471	3,100	3,249	4,208	29.5%	5,117	6,026
City of Big Rapids	14,361	12,603	10,849	10,601	-2.3%	10,293	10,139
Michigan	9,262,078	9,295,277	9,938,444	9,883,640	-0.6%	10,695,993	10,964,172

Source: West Michigan Regional Planning Commission; U.S. Census Bureau Population Figures

Table 3 - Population by age, sex and race

Subject	Big Rapids Twp.		City of Big Rapids		Mecosta County		Michigan	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
Total population	4,124		10,655		42,817		9,920,621	
Male	1,934	46.90%	5,638	52.90%	21,638	50.50%	4,867,629	49.10%
Female	2,190	53.10%	5,017	47.10%	21,179	49.50%	5,052,992	50.90%
Median age (years)	42.9		21.6		33.3		38.5	
18 years and over	3,488	84.60%	9,283	87.10%	34,159	79.80%	7,542,469	76.00%
21 years and over	3,212	77.90%	6,024	56.50%	29,743	69.50%	7,083,277	71.40%
62 years and over	879	21.30%	821	7.70%	7,852	18.30%	1,649,571	16.60%
65 years and over	666	16.10%	697	6.50%	6,434	15.00%	1,341,522	13.50%
Population by Race								
White	4,048	98.20%	9,463	88.80%	40,941	95.60%	8,066,065	81.30%
Black or African American	122	3.00%	955	9.00%	1,590	3.70%	1,502,959	15.10%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0	0.00%	191	1.80%	622	1.50%	138,133	1.40%
Asian	0	0.00%	293	2.70%	422	1.00%	285,137	2.90%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	9	0.20%	18	0.20%	55	0.10%	7,303	0.10%
Some other race	0	0.00%	71	0.70%	217	0.50%	159,836	1.60%
Population by Ethnicity								
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	46	1.10%	269	2.50%	779	1.80%	432,043	4.40%
Not Hispanic or Latino	4,078	98.90%	10,386	97.50%	42,038	98.20%	9,488,578	95.60%
Total housing units	2,073		3,487		21,157		4,532,215	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 4 – Household and Education data.

Subject	Big Rapids Twp.		City of Big Rapids		Mecosta County		Michigan	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE								
Total households	1,876		3,084		15,842		3,825,182	
Family households (families)	1,048	55.90%	1,203	39.00%	10,020	63.20%	2,534,769	66.30%
Nonfamily households	828	44.10%	1,881	61.00%	5,822	36.80%	1,290,413	33.70%
Average household size	2.15		2.28		2.46		2.53	
Average family size	2.63		2.89		2.92		3.12	
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT								
Population 3 years and over enrolled in school	1,452		7,076		15,264		2,743,564	
Elementary school (grades 1-8)	310	21.30%	385	5.40%	3,763	24.70%	1,059,425	38.60%
High school (grades 9-12)	184	12.70%	338	4.80%	1,949	12.80%	599,406	21.80%
College or graduate school	891	61.40%	6,177	87.30%	8,535	55.90%	803,150	29.30%
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT								
Population 25 years and over	2,567		3,421		25,109		6,566,864	
Less than 9th grade	42	1.60%	45	1.30%	742	3.00%	229,079	2.90%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	92	3.60%	320	9.40%	2,095	8.30%	534,231	8.10%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	786	30.60%	924	27.00%	9,213	36.70%	2,041,868	31.10%
Some college, no degree	333	13.00%	799	23.40%	5,609	22.30%	1,561,637	23.80%
Associate's degree	324	12.60%	372	10.90%	2,027	8.10%	540,517	8.20%
Bachelor's degree	660	25.70%	596	17.40%	3,434	13.70%	1,021,486	15.60%
Graduate or professional degree	330	12.90%	365	10.70%	1,989	7.90%	638,046	9.70%
Percent high school graduate or higher		94.80%		89.30%		88.70%		88.40%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher		38.60%		28.10%		21.60%		25.30%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Subject	Big Rapids Twp.		City of Big Rapids		Mecosta County		Michigan	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
HOUSING OCCUPANCY								
Total housing units	2,073		3,487		21,157		4,532,215	
Occupied housing units	1,876	90.50%	3,084	88.40%	15,842	74.90%	3,825,182	84.40%
Owner-occupied	1,321	70.40%	1,072	34.80%	11,583	73.10%	2,812,607	73.50%
Renter-occupied	555	29.60%	2,012	65.20%	4,259	26.90%	1,012,575	26.50%
Vacant housing units	197	9.50%	403	11.60%	5,315	25.10%	707,033	15.60%
Homeowner vacancy rate		0.00%		0.00%		2.60%		3.00%
Rental vacancy rate		12.90%		6.30%		7.80%		9.00%
UNITS IN STRUCTURE								
Total housing units	2,073		3,487		21,157		4,532,215	
1-unit, detached	1,363	65.80%	1,444	41.40%	15,136	71.50%	3,255,189	71.80%
1-unit, attached	34	1.60%	116	3.30%	236	1.10%	205,859	4.50%
2 units	0	0.00%	239	6.90%	304	1.40%	124,969	2.80%
3 or 4 units	25	1.20%	471	13.50%	536	2.50%	116,979	2.60%
5 to 9 units	181	8.70%	434	12.40%	620	2.90%	191,190	4.20%
10 to 19 units	215	10.40%	409	11.70%	674	3.20%	163,977	3.60%
20 or more units	41	2.00%	175	5.00%	240	1.10%	222,131	4.90%
Mobile home	214	10.30%	190	5.40%	3,395	16.00%	250,991	5.50%
YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT								
Total housing units	2,073		3,487		21,157		4,532,215	
2000 or later	554	26.80%	233	6.70%	2,744	12.90%	444,964	9.80%
1980-2000	690	33.30%	598	17.20%	6,451	30.50%	1,032,059	22.80%
1960-1980	486	23.40%	1010	28.90%	6,280	29.70%	1,254,100	27.70%
1960 or earlier	343	16.60%	1,646	47.20%	5,682	26.90%	1,801,092	39.70%
VALUE								
Owner-occupied units	1,321		1,072		11,583		2,812,607	
Median (dollars)	151,400		95,900		117,500		137,300	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 6 - 2007-2011 Employment Statistics

	Big Rapids Twp		Big Rapids City		Mecosta County		State of Michigan	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
EMPLOYMENT STATUS								
Population 16 years and over	3,595		9,567		35,277		7,840,533	
In labor force	2,113	58.8%	5,590	58.4%	20,192	57.2%	4,913,677	62.7%
Not in labor force	1,482	41.2%	3,977	41.6%	15,085	42.8%	2,926,876	37.3%
Percent in labor force unemployed	296	8.2%	1,245	13.0%	3,080	8.7%	601,515	7.7%
OCCUPATION								
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	1,817		4,345		17,112		4,306,814	
Management, business, science, and arts	712	39.2%	1,175	27.0%	4,884	28.5%	1,464,239	34.0%
Service	455	25.0%	990	22.8%	3,459	20.2%	783,864	18.2%
Sales and office	394	21.7%	1,471	33.9%	4,308	25.2%	1,071,655	24.9%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	113	6.2%	215	4.9%	1,556	9.1%	348,178	8.1%
Production, transportation and material moving	143	7.9%	494	11.4%	2,905	17.0%	638,878	14.8%
INDUSTRY								
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	1,817		4,345		17,112		4,306,814	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining	43	2.4%	4	0.1%	536	3.1%	58,255	1.4%
Construction	157	8.6%	86	2.0%	1,025	6.0%	214,781	5.0%
Manufacturing	162	8.9%	191	4.4%	2,154	12.6%	743,025	17.3%
Wholesale trade	15	0.8%	-	0.0%	257	1.5%	114,672	2.7%
Retail trade	139	7.6%	613	14.1%	2,696	15.8%	501,762	11.7%
Transportation, warehousing, utilities	64	3.5%	14	0.3%	621	3.6%	180,595	4.2%
Information	-	0.0%	77	1.8%	188	1.1%	77,567	1.8%
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing	145	8.0%	168	3.9%	620	3.6%	241,092	5.6%
Professional, scientific, management	27	1.5%	247	5.7%	990	5.8%	384,845	8.9%
Educational services, health care, social assistance	656	36.1%	1,560	35.9%	4,971	29.0%	1,020,087	23.7%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, food services	307	16.9%	613	14.1%	1,914	11.2%	399,452	9.3%
Other services except public administration	76	4.2%	142	3.3%	716	4.2%	206,281	4.8%
Public administration	26	1.4%	21	0.5%	424	2.5%	164,400	3.8%
INCOME (INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)								
Median household income (dollars)	37,538		21,883		37,677		48,669	
Mean household income (dollars)	57,450		35,481		49,852		64,478	
Per capita income (dollars)	26,817		12,581		19,320		25,482	
Family households	1,048		1,203		10,020		2,534,769	
Median family income (dollars)	68,243		42,054		50,155		60,895	
Mean family income (dollars)	82,826		56,747		61,587		76,467	
Nonfamily households	828		1,881		5,822		1,290,413	
Median nonfamily income (dollars)	20,091		17,696		22,144		28,472	
Mean nonfamily income (dollars)	25,331		20,709		28,162		38,854	
PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES AND PEOPLE WHOSE INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS IS BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL								
All families		5.9%		29.1%		12.8%		11.1%
All people		18.8%		48.1%		23.6%		15.7%
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates								

The Future

It is difficult to predict future demographics in light of today's economic and social issues. However, it is safe to say that the area's population will continue to increase, although probably at a slower rate than in recent years. Major impacts on growth and direction will come from the development within Ferris State University, Michigan's economic recovery, Big Rapids City's successes and failures, and the direction chosen by Township residents and officials.

The goals and objectives voiced in this document and the desires and opinions of Township residents recorded in earlier surveys and interviews indicate a future not greatly different from the present context. Economic growth and the maintenance of a rural character will remain important factors.

Big Rapids Township Facilities

Township Schools

Big Rapids Public Schools – The Big Rapids Public School System is a Class B District consisting of seven separate facilities located in the City of Big Rapids and Big Rapids Township. Big Rapids High School had an enrollment of 656 in 2013. Other facilities include Big Rapids Middle School, Brookside Elementary, Riverview Elementary and the Eastwood Early Childhood Center. Total system enrollment for 2013 was 1883 students, with a staff of 196 professionals and support personnel.

Crossroads Charter Academy is located within the Big Rapids School District, consisting of K through 12, with an enrollment of 687 in 2013. There are 2 parochial schools located within the Big Rapids District, each offering pre-primary through eighth grade. St Mary Catholic School had a 2013 enrollment of 140. St. Peter's Lutheran School had a 2013 enrollment of 101.

Morley-Stanwood Community Schools – A portion of the Morley-Stanwood School District covers the southeast section of Big Rapids Township. The district had a 2013 enrollment of 1209. Elementary, Middle and High School facilities are located in Mecosta County's Aetna Township.

Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District – Big Rapids Township borders on the facilities of the Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District, which provides vocational and specialized education to the two-county area, with six school districts participating. The MOISD Career Center offers vocational and occupational education in many varied fields. The Education Center provides various programs for a large range of special needs students.

Township Buildings

Big Rapids Township Hall, located at 14212 Northland Drive, houses the township offices and the Big Rapids Township Fire Department is located in a separate, adjacent building at the same address.

Transportation

A major north-south expressway, US-131, crosses the western part of the township. Highway access is centrally located at the M-20/Perry Street interchange, linking Big Rapids Township to Grand Rapids to the south and Cadillac to the north. State Highway M-20 is the primary east-west corridor through the township and runs through the center of the City of Big Rapids. There are two Muskegon River crossings in the proximity of Big Rapids Township, both located within the city of Big Rapids. The Baldwin Street Bridge was removed for replacement in the fall of 2015, and the new span is slated to reopen in the fall of 2016. Traffic within the township has grown as the population of the area has increased and as the amount of commercial and leisure traffic on US-131 has increased. Big Rapids Township is served by two publicly owned transit services, Dial-A-Ride, operated by the City of Big Rapids, and the Mecosta Osceola Transit Authority. The City of Big Rapids also owns Roben-Hood Airport, which is operated by an independent contractor, Colt Aviation. The airport is located in the northern portion of Big Rapids Township bordered by Northland Drive and 18 Mile Road.

Health and Safety Services

Corewell Health (formerly Spectrum Health) Big Rapids Hospital, located at 605 Oak Street in Big Rapids (formerly Mecosta County Medical Center) serves the local community and is directly affiliated with all Corewell Health (formerly Spectrum Health) facilities in West Michigan. This merger provided for increased local services and integrated access to specialty care in the Corewell Health (formerly Spectrum Health) system.

Emergency Medical Services are dispatched by Meceola Consolidated Central Dispatch, which provides emergency and non-emergency dispatch services for all public safety agencies in Mecosta and Osceola Counties. Easy access to the system is provided by calling the national emergency access number, 911. Mecosta County EMS units are stationed in Big Rapids Township, the Village of Altona, and on M-66 between Remus and Barryton.

For many years, the Big Rapids Township Fire Department provided fire protection, medical first responder and rescue services as a paid on-call department with mutual-aid agreements in place for all neighboring departments. In 2025, by Board resolution, the City of Big Rapids took over the aforementioned emergency response services for Big Rapids Charter Township, including the use of the Township fire building and emergency response equipment within.

Police protection for Big Rapids Township is provided by the Mecosta County Sheriff's Office, located in the City of Big Rapids and the Michigan State Police, Mt. Pleasant Post. Ferris State University and the City of Big Rapids provide their own police protection, and the city operates a combination (full time and part-paid) fire department which also covers the FSU Campus. All police agencies operate within a mutual aid agreement, and all provide police services within the Big Rapids Charter Township, as needed.

Utility Services

Water – The majority of Township residents obtain water from individual groundwater wells. A few households that border the City of Big Rapids remain connected to the municipal city water system and there are several large commercial and housing developments that are connected to municipal water. In 2015, the City of Big Rapids approved an extension along Northland Drive from the Big Value Center to Gilbert Street then west on Gilbert to service a proposed 154-unit apartment complex. The township does operate a small water treatment and distribution facility that serves the airport industrial park.

Wastewater – Most household wastewater is managed through private septic systems. The Township does operate a sewer system that provides service along Northland Drive north of the city to the airport industrial park and south of the city to 14 Mile Road, including the Housing developments on 14 Mile Road and Gilbert Drive, Perry Street from the City limits to the US-131 expressway and then south along 215th Avenue to the commercial developments including a senior housing project and the Big Rapids High School. The wastewater collected by the Township system is delivered to the City of Big Rapids for processing by their wastewater treatment plant.

Industrial Parks

The Big Rapids area has two designated industrial parks, the Big Rapids Airport Industrial Park in Big Rapids Township and the Big Rapids Industrial Park in the City of Big Rapids.

The Airport Industrial Park is on 111 acres of land under private/public ownership and is classified as a Renaissance zone until 2017. This park is located near US-131 access and adjacent to Roben-Hood Airport. Water and sewer services are provided by Big Rapids Township. The Big Rapids Industrial Park is under private ownership and runs under lease arrangements. The City of Big Rapids provides water and sewer services to this park.

Cemeteries

Four cemeteries are located in Big Rapids Township:

1. Highland View Cemetery – owned and operated by the Township
2. West Union/VanGilder Cemetery – family owned, partially maintained by the Township
3. Pine Plains Cemetery – owned and operated by Colfax Township (partly in Big Rapids Township)
4. Mt. Carmel Cemetery – owned and operated by St. Mary and St. Paul Parish

Recreation Areas

The Big Rapids area has many recreational opportunities. The Township maintains High Banks Park located south of the City on the Muskegon River. The park offers a half mile of river frontage featuring water-related recreation options. Currently the 23-acre park has improved restrooms, a picnic area, ball field, pavilion and wildlife habitat. It is frequently utilized as the termination point for river-tubing trips on the Muskegon River.

The City of Big Rapids maintains 215 acres in 16 parks within the city limits, which provide hiking, tennis, basketball, softball, soccer, fishing, picnic area, playgrounds, swimming, ice-skating, pavilion rentals, a dog park and Riverwalk .

White Pine Trail Linear State Park is the longest rail-to-trail corridor in Michigan. It runs from Comstock Park in Kent County to Cadillac in Wexford County. Several portions are paved, including the segment between Big Rapids and Reed City. The trail offers hiking, biking, in-line skating, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. Portions of the trail pass through Big Rapids Township.

There are several golf courses in the area, including two public courses located in the Township. Falcon Head Golf Course is privately operated and located on Northland Drive, less than 2 miles south of the City. Katke Golf Course is owned and operated by Ferris State University in conjunction with the Professional Golf Management program at FSU.

Library System

The Big Rapids Community Library has recently undergone a major renovation project which was completed in the summer of 2014. Upgrades in furnishings and technology have made this facility much more user friendly. The Library is located in Big Rapids and serves the residents of the city and the surrounding townships under contract. Ferris State University's main reference library (FLITE) is also available to members of the local community.

Ferris State University

Ferris State University is a state-funded institution with 14,715 students enrolled for the fall semester, 2015, including 10,216 located on the Big Rapids Campus. Originally founded in 1884 by Woodbridge N. Ferris, later governor of the state, the University has evolved into a modern 880-acre local campus, with a significant physical presence in Grand Rapids, Michigan, 50 miles to the south. Undergraduate and graduate programs, including Master's and Doctorate Degrees are offered in more than 170 educational specialties through 10 colleges encompassing 31 Departments. In 2014, the university employed 1514 full time and 619 part time individuals across all employment categories, 64.1 % designated as faculty and 35.9 % as administrative and support staff, for a total of 2133 employees, making it Mecosta County's largest employer.

FUTURE LAND USE GOALS

The Natural Environment

Preserve the Muskegon River and other Township lakes, rivers and streams as a resource for recreation and enjoyment.

Land Use and Township Character

Maintain the rural pace and comfort of a rural lifestyle for township residents.

Residential Growth and Development

Provide for orderly residential growth within the township that provides value and variety in housing while maintaining environmental quality.

Commercial and Industrial Growth and Development

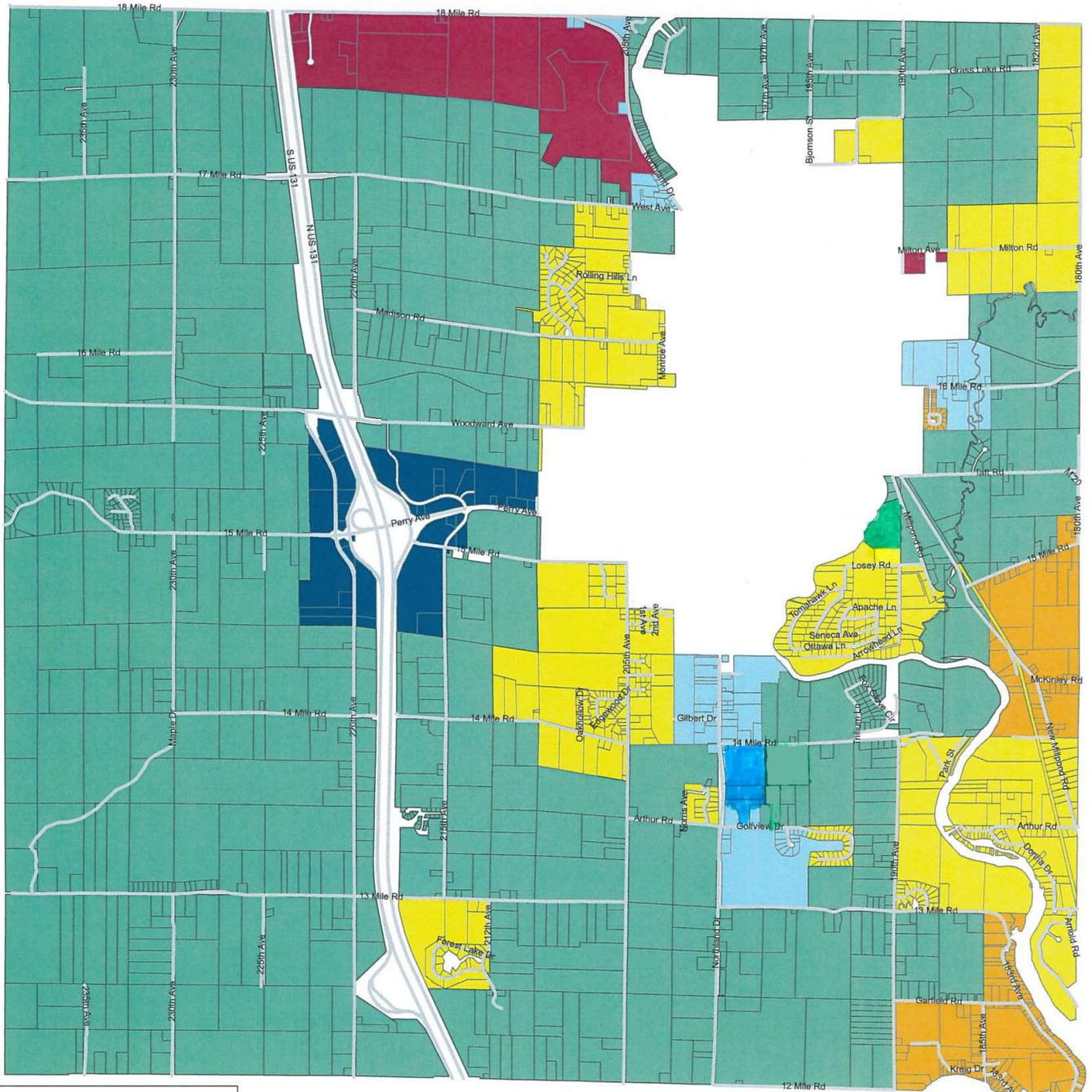
Promote the area's primary commercial and industrial centers, while avoiding unnecessary sprawl into rural township locations.

Public Services and Infrastructure

Provide appropriate services and infrastructure for existing and planned development without unnecessary and costly extensions.

Quality of Life

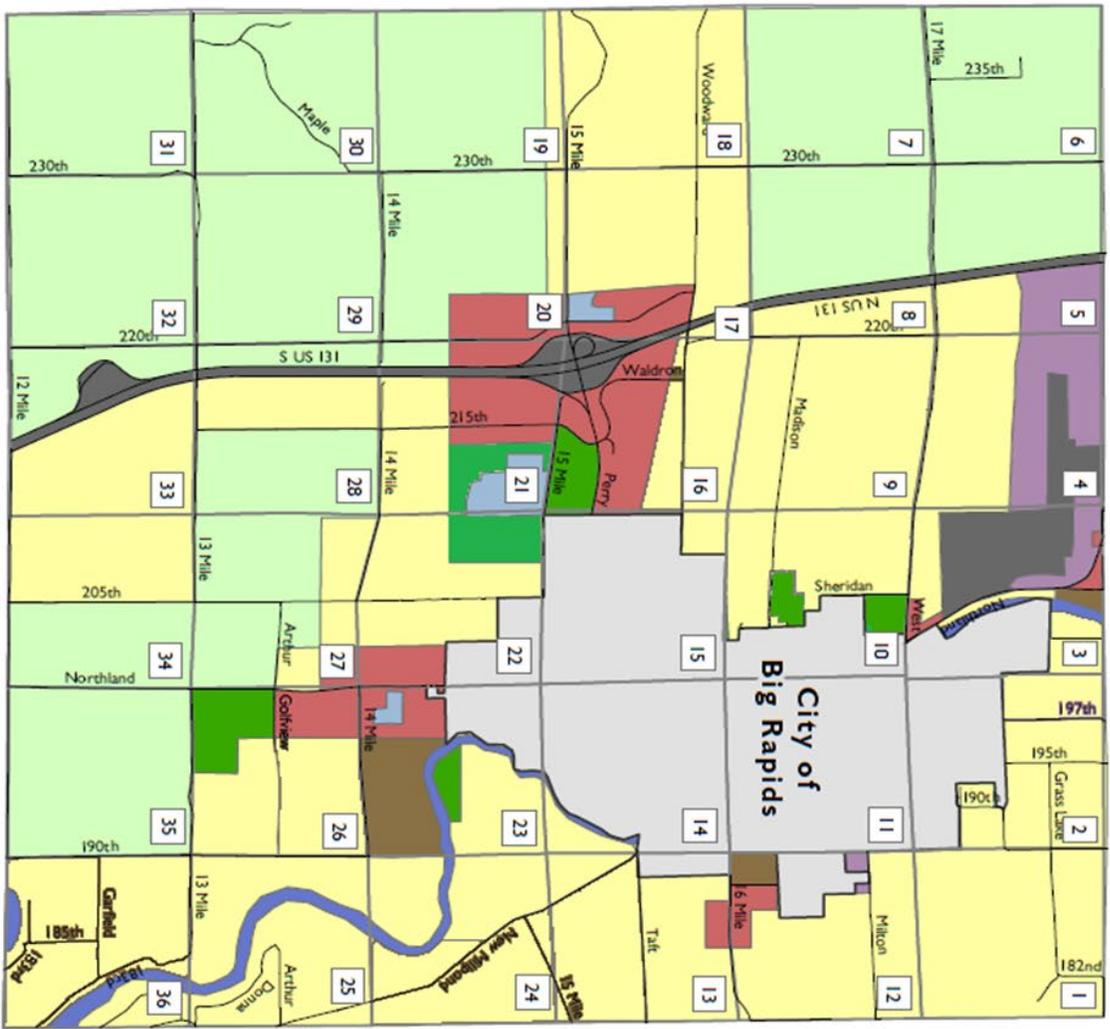
Promote a high quality of life in Big Rapids Township through planning and zoning with healthy, balanced and appropriate land uses. See figures 2 and 3, Big Rapids Township Zoning Map and Future Land Use Map.



Legend	
Parcels	COM
zoning	HI
A-RES	IND
AG	MULTI
B-RES	

Big Rapids Charter Township Zoning Map, October 13, 2015

Big Rapids Township Future Land Use/ Land Cover



Township Sections	
Land Use / Land Cover Selected Categories	
 Single Family Residential (Low Density)	 Industrial
 Multi-Family Residential (Medium Density)	 Utility and Transportation
 Commercial	 Outdoor Recreation
 Institutional	 Open Space/Vacant Agriculture, Wetlands, and Rural Residential

