

February 9, 2017

Board of Trustees and Planning Commission
Northfield Township
8350 Main Street – P.O. Box 576
Whitmore Lake, MI 48189

Subject: Proposed 2017 Community Development Work Plan for Northfield Township

Dear members of the Board of Trustees and Planning Commission:

In early 2016, Northfield Township selected McKenna through a competitive process to serve as its community planning consultant. Over the last year, we have served the Township Board of Trustees, Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Downtown Planning Group on the following projects:

- Defending the Master Plan by preparing an analysis and recommendation of the Biltmore proposal to amend the Plan.
- Assisting the Downtown Planning Group in the preparation of the Northfield Community Park Master Plan, including public participation, design, and market analysis.
- Working with the Planning Commission to draft Zoning Ordinance amendments to revise commercial land use regulations and improve screening regulations for outdoor storage.
- Writing waterfront regulations for the Zoning Ordinance, which have been adopted.
- Monthly advisory assistance to the Planning Commission (site plan review, rezonings, and conditional land uses).
- Zoning Administrator assistance, including permit reviews, phone calls with applicants, attendance at ZBA meetings, and preparing ZBA reviews.

As Northfield Township begins 2017, we would like to recommend the following projects based on feedback received from the DPG and Planning Commission, as well as our analysis of the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

- 1. McKenna Attendance at DPG Meetings and Other Ongoing Assistance.** As the DPG concludes the Northfield Community Park Master Plan, the DPG plans to keep momentum by encouraging activities and development in the downtown.
- 2. Master Plan Update.** The current Northfield Township Master Plan was originally adopted in 2012. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires a municipality to review its master plan at least once every 5 years to determine if revisions are needed. The current Master Plan is strong and provides a clear vision for many of the community's goals with respect to future growth and preservation. At the same time, there are areas of the Master Plan that would benefit from additional policies, including:
 - a. Northfield Community Park Master Plan.** With the upcoming completion of the Northfield Community Park Master Plan, we recommend incorporating it into the Master Plan as an additional step toward supporting downtown recreation and development.

- b. Details of Nonmotorized Transportation Plan.** With the adoption of Complete Streets legislation in Michigan, it is important for Northfield Township to plan for the appropriate interconnectivity of its current and future nonmotorized and motorized transportation systems. While the Master Plan supports a non-motorized (e.g., pedestrian and bicycle) transportation system in the township and includes a map from the 2006 Non-Motorized Plan for Washtenaw County developed by the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS), the Master Plan should include a nonmotorized inventory (including sidewalks) and include specific policies for how that nonmotorized network will be developed in the coming years. There are major considerations for a non-motorized system, which include the locations of high priority corridors and the opportunities to link to existing systems in adjacent communities. McKenna has assisted Hamburg Township and Lyon Township in the development of their nonmotorized systems, so we are familiar with the local nonmotorized transportation systems and plans.
- c. Agricultural Production and Preservation.** The Master Plan includes goals for preserving farmland, which include promoting agricultural tourism. While we recommend standards in the Zoning Ordinance to promote agritourism (see below), the Master Plan should acknowledge the recent creation of the Farmland and Natural Areas Preservation Committee and include supporting language for its upcoming tasks. We anticipate that many of the policies of the Farmland and Natural Areas Preservation Committee will eventually be adopted into the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance, so we recommend establishing that link as soon as possible in the Master Plan.
- d. Zoning Plan.** The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that a zoning plan be included in a master plan that explains how the land use categories of the future land use map relate to the districts on the zoning map. The Master Plan currently has a Zoning Plan; however, with the anticipated repeal of the Enterprise Service (ES) District and Highway Commercial (HC) District, the Township should eliminate the references to these districts in the Zoning Plan. At the same time, the Future Land Use Map should be reviewed for consistency with the Zoning Plan.
- e. Public Participation.** The public participation feedback for the current Master Plan was obtained in 2010 (2 Planning Fairs and a community survey). The public input recently received for the Northfield Community Park Master Plan yielded excellent feedback and was a reflection of the community's excitement about planning the future of the community. If an update to the Master Plan is initiated in 2017, it would provide an excellent opportunity to invite the public to provide input on the community's future land use policies. This can include an online survey, public workshops and charrettes, and stakeholder interviews.

We understand that the Township currently has an agreement with Cobalt Community Research to conduct a survey. A comprehensive community survey can be an excellent way of obtaining the public's opinions about development, preservation, public services, and several other topics. These opinions, in turn, will be used to shape public policy. The Planning Commission has asked us to evaluate the draft survey (the latest version we have is titled "Draft 6") and provide comments. The following are our initial comments and suggestions regarding the survey:

- In Question 1, there is a question asking the respondent to rate the "cleanliness of downtown Whitmore Lake." We recommend asking about "appearance" and/or "attractiveness" of downtown Whitmore Lake.
- In Question 2, we recommend adding a question about "Availability of different types of housing (e.g., detached single-family homes, attached single-family homes, apartments, manufactured homes, etc.)"
- In Question 5, there is a general question asking the respondent to rate the "availability of bike paths and walking trails." We recommend that a question be added asking about the sidewalk network.
- In Question 12, the last 2 questions ask about opinions regarding additional housing development. The response choices for these questions are confusing because the respondent

won't know what it means to "allocate existing funds to accomplish" or "request a small millage to accomplish" more housing developments.

- In Question 13, it seems as though increasing the residential density in the Agricultural area is already under consideration by the Township. This statement may elicit defensive responses. We recommend changing the question to: "If the Township were to consider additional residential development in the Agricultural areas of Northfield Township, please review the following statements and rate your level of agreement with each." Also, the last question asks about supporting additional residential housing if sensitive areas are preserved, but it does not include a density.
- In Question 14, we recommend including a statement instructing the respondent to "select all that apply."
- In Question 22, we recommend changing "Child(ren) over age 13-17" to "Child(ren) between ages 13-17." Also, we recommend changing "Child(ren) over age 17" to "Other adults." In this case, "other adults" can include children ages 18-19 as well as senior citizens.

3. Whitmore Lake Downtown Strategic Action Plan and Design Framework. We recently prepared a proposal to Northfield Township for a Downtown Strategic Action Plan and Design Framework (enclosed). The intent of the Strategic Action Plan and Design Framework is to continue the DPG's work on the Northfield Community Park Master Plan by looking at downtown Whitmore Lake as a whole and creating a vision of future development. The proposed Strategic Action Plan will be based on heavy public engagement, consideration of real-life design scenarios of downtown Whitmore Lake, development of a design and connectivity framework, creation of downtown design guidelines, and adoption of a Strategic Action Plan and implementation schedule. When completed, we would propose incorporating the policies into the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance where appropriate.

4. Zoning Ordinance Updates

- a. Amendments to encourage more development activity downtown.** The Whitmore Lake District (WLD) was adopted in 2013 to encourage development in downtown Whitmore Lake that was mixed use, human scale, and had good urban form. So far, the WLD does not appear to have had a major impact. One of the impediments that we've noticed in the Zoning Ordinance is that the WLD includes an inordinate number of Conditional Uses, which will discourage many types of business from starting because of the high barriers to entry. We recommend that the Township review the land uses of the WLD and try to include more uses as Permitted Uses. This will also encourage re-use of buildings – the re-use of a building is much easier if there are more Permitted Use options. Additionally, if the Township starts the Whitmore Lake Downtown Strategic Action Plan and Design Framework (described above), the design guidelines can be codified with accompanying graphics based on real-life scenarios in downtown Whitmore Lake.
- b. Amendments to encourage more agricultural tourism uses.** The Zoning Ordinance allows for agricultural tourism uses as Conditional Uses in the AR district. The Michigan Right to Farm Act may require some of the uses listed to be permitted as part of a commercial agriculture operation, so we recommend reviewing these regulations to ensure they are consistent with the Right to Farm Act. The Township may want to obtain comment from the Farmland & Natural Areas Preservation Committee regarding any research it has done on agricultural tourism and how the Zoning Ordinance could be amended to encourage more agricultural tourism uses.
- c. Land Use table to simplify uses and fix discrepancies between similar uses.** Several months ago, McKenna prepared a Non-Residential District Use Matrix (enclosed, dated June 29, 2016). We recommend adopting a similar table into the Zoning Ordinance that also includes the residential zoning districts. However, this table reveals areas where there are redundant uses that are difficult to interpret.

This has made the Zoning Ordinance more difficult to administer and understand over time. Therefore, we recommend resolving these conflicts as part of the adoption process of the land use table.

- d. Medical Marihuana.** On September 22, 2016, Governor Snyder signed three new bills that expand the regulatory framework affecting medical marihuana in Michigan. Of these, PA 281, the Medical Marihuana Facilities Licensing Act, MCL 333.27101 et seq., is the one which is of particular interest to municipalities, both because it provides a range of land uses that the state will be licensing, which a municipality may choose to allow within its jurisdiction, and because there are license fees, and potential tax-sharing revenue, available to municipalities related to those facilities. PA 281 became effective on December 20, 2016, and it provides that licensing of marijuana facilities, by the State, will begin 360 days after its effective date, i.e. in December of 2017. Thus, municipalities also have about that long to consider what actions they would like to take in response to it, though proprietors will certainly want to be securing sites in anticipation. PA 281 authorizes the following 5 types of facilities: (1) Class A-C Growers (500-1,500 plants); (2) Processors; (3) Secure Transporters; (4) Provisioning Centers (commonly called dispensaries); and (5) Safety Compliance Facilities (testing labs). A municipality may adopt an ordinance to authorize one or more of the five types of marijuana facilities within its boundaries and to limit the number of each type of marijuana facility, but shall not impose regulations regarding the purity or pricing of marijuana or interfering or conflicting with statutory regulations for licensing marijuana facilities. If a municipality wants to prohibit all 5 types of facilities, it is unclear whether the municipality must adopt an ordinance to that effect or simply do nothing. We recommend that the Planning Commission discuss these types of facilities and consult with the Township Attorney regarding what actions, if any, the Township should take to achieve its desired regulations.

- 5. Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update.** The Parks & Recreation Master Plan was adopted in 2015, so it will not expire until 2020. However, in order to remain eligible for many state and federal grants, the Plan must stay up-to-date as grant opportunities arise. With the upcoming completion of the Northfield Community Park Master Plan, we recommend incorporating it into the Parks & Recreation Master Plan to take advantage of any grant opportunities for Northfield Community Park.
- 6. Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Assistance.** The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires any community with a water or sewer facility to annually approve a CIP. The CIP process allows for the Township and its departments to predictably budget for capital expenses in the coming years, such as water and sewer improvements, park improvements, road and nonmotorized infrastructure, and other large capital expenses.

A proactive work program can help build a quality community, and we look forward to working with the Township as it actively seeks to preserve its rural character and sense of place.

Respectfully submitted,

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