



MCKENNA

January 10, 2018

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

**Subject:** Proposed 2018 Community Development Work Plan for Northfield Township

Dear members of the Board of Trustees and Planning Commission:

Throughout 2017, Northfield Township and McKenna have worked together on several different projects in order to advance planning goals of the Township. In 2017, we have served the Township Board of Trustees, Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and DDA on the following:

- Completing the North Village Master Plan, including the public participation, design, and market analysis. This project was formerly known as the Northfield Community Park Master Plan.
- Completing the Whitmore Lake Downtown Strategic Action Plan and Design Framework, including public participation, design, and all analyses, to guide future development of the downtown area.
- Monthly advisory assistance to the Planning Commission including reviews for site plans, rezonings, and conditional land uses, and other assistance as needed.
- Zoning Administrator assistance, including permit reviews, phone calls with applicants, attendance at ZBA meetings, and preparing ZBA reviews, and other assistance as needed.

As 2018 begins, we would like to recommend the following projects to the Township based on feedback received from both the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and Planning Commission, along with our analysis of the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

1. **McKenna Attendance at DDA Meetings and Other Ongoing Assistance.** We proposed to work with the DDA to foster more activities and development in the downtown area by implementing the goals and objectives of the Whitmore Lake Downtown Strategic Action Plan and Design Framework. We are in the process of working with the Township to release an RFP for downtown design elements.
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 five 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. However, some areas of the Master Plan would benefit from additional policies or further review, including:
  - a. **Incorporation of Completed Plans into Master Plan.** We recommend officially incorporating the North Village Master Plan and Whitmore Lake Downtown Strategic Action Plan and Design Framework into the Northfield Township Master Plan.

- b. **Details of Non-motorized Transportation Plan.** With the recent adoption of Complete Streets legislation in Michigan, it is important for the Township to plan for appropriate interconnectivity of its current and future non-motorized and motorized transportation systems. Although the Master Plan supports a non-motorized (e.g., pedestrian and bicycle) transportation system 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 be updated with an inventory of the non-motorized facilities located in the Township, including sidewalks, and should include specific policies for how the non-motorized network will be developed in the near future. There are major considerations for a non-motorized system, which include the locations of high priority corridors and opportunities to link to existing systems in adjacent communities. McKenna has assisted in the development of their non-motorized systems in Hamburg Township and Lyon Township, and we are familiar with the local non-motorized transportation systems and plans. Specifically, the Township is located near two major regional trails in the Lakeland Trail and Washtenaw County Border-to-Border Trail, both of which are planned to connect to a statewide system of trails. The Township should explore ways to connect to these trail systems in the future.
- c. **Agricultural Production and Preservation.** The Master Plan includes goals for preserving the farmland of the community, which include promoting agricultural tourism. While we recommend standards in the Zoning Ordinance to encourage 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 several of the policies of the Farmland and Natural Areas Preservation Committee will eventually be incorporated into the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance, so we recommend establishing that link as soon as possible in the Master Plan.
- d. **Future Land Use Map and Plan Review.** We recommend reviewing the Future Land Use Map in response to some changing conditions in the Township. Current economic trends around the country are showing a decrease in demand for retail space, as indicated by the closure of many “brick and mortar” stores. Also, Southeast Michigan has a strong industrial economy including a variety of traditional and high-tech manufacturing. Northfield Township has seen new industrial development in the past few years, especially along E. North Territorial Road. The Future Land Use Map may be updated to allow for more industrial uses instead of commercial uses, and may include some mixed areas to act as a buffer between the two and to allow both use types.
- e. **Zoning Plan.** The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that a zoning plan be included in a master plan to explain how 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, we recommend an update to the Zoning Plan and the Future Land Use Map based on recent updates to the Zoning Ordinance, including the repeal of the Enterprise Service (ES) District and Highway Commercial (HC) District. At the same time, the Future Land Use Map should also be reviewed to ensure its consistency with the Zoning Plan, and incorporate the Whitmore Lake Overlay District.
- f. **Public Participation.** The public participation input for the current Master Plan was obtained in 2010 (two Planning Fairs and one community survey). The public feedback recently received for the North Village 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 begun



in 2018 or 2019, it would provide an excellent opportunity to invite the public to provide feedback on the community's future land use policies. This can include online surveys, public workshops and charrettes, and stakeholder interviews.

### 3. 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.
4. **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 completion of the North Village Plan, we recommend incorporating it into the Parks & Recreation Master Plan so that the Township is able to take advantage of any grant opportunities for this park.
  5. **Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Assistance.** The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that any community with water or sewer facilities shall annually approve a CIP. The CIP process allows for the Township and its departments to predictably budget for capital expenses in coming years, such as water and sewer improvements, park improvements, roads and non-motorized 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,

**MCKENNA**



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