



City of West Branch

Master Plan

Adopted December 1, 2014

WEST BRANCH CITY COUNCIL

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Jane Tennant	City Manager
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Shirley McClenahan	Member

CONSULTANTS

Don Hamilton, A.I.C.P.
Scott Bell, Assistant Planner & GIS Specialist



Clare - West Branch

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Planning Process



A Master Plan is a tool used by municipalities to analyze the current state of their communities and to plan for their future growth, development, and needs. This document attempts to address this process by detailing the City of West Branch's current conditions and looks to the future to take specific actions to address the needs of the community.

A Master Plan can generally be described by the following key characteristics:

- **Future Oriented:** The Plan concerns itself with long-range planning in guiding growth and land use needs. The plan is not only a picture of the community today, but a guide to how the community should evolve over the next five to ten years in response to growth.
- **General:** The plan establishes broad principles and policies to address future growth and land use needs.
- **Comprehensive:** The plan addresses all types of land uses and the practical geographic boundaries of each.
- **A Plan:** The land use plan is a tangible document which consists of both text and maps, with maps typically illustrating the policies set forth within the text.

The purposes of the Master Plan are intended to preserve and create a community that is best for its residents and its neighbors. In order to achieve this, the Plan is written as an analysis of what the community has and a guide regarding how to use it when making land use decisions.

Master Plans serve to:

- **Seek** citizen input on needs and services
- **Provide** an overall perspective of the land, how it is being used, and how it should be used in the future
- **Create** a general statement of the goals and objectives of the community
- **Preserve** the quality of life in the community
- **Promote** public health, safety, and welfare for the region's citizens
- **Guide** the use of limited resources and preservation in the most effective manner possible through clear and logical zoning decisions

Master Plans do not have the force of law. ***As guides, they are intended to be referenced and kept current.*** The Future Land Use plan is the key feature of the plan when making zoning decisions, capital improvement decisions, utility expansions, land divisions and all decisions with neighboring communities. It is important to remember however, that *as a guide, as opposed to an engineering tool*, the maps contained in this document are not intended to be used to scale property lines, be a definitive source for tax purpose, or determine the exact boundaries of flood plains or wetlands, for example.

The Plan only has value if it is used and it has more ongoing value if it is used in conjunction with all the other planning efforts that are going on in the City of West Branch and the surrounding communities. Coordinated planning helps each group leverage their individual funds, knowledge and momentum toward an outcome.

Some of these efforts are:

- West Branch Downtown Development Authority Plan
- Growth Analysis Planning group
- The Ogemaw Economic Development Corporation
- The West Branch Historic District Committee
- The I-75 Business Loop Market Study and Plan
- The Brownfield Authority

Community Description



HISTORY

According to Scientific Publication No. 1, Report of Earthworks of Ogemaw County, Michigan, (Cranbrook Institute of Science, Fred Dustin, 1930), researchers discovered that “mound dwellers” or “mound builders” lived in the Rifle River area 11,000 to 15,000 years ago. In 1931, anthropologists working in the Selkirk area uncovered three Indian mound formations. These and other mounds discovered in Ogemaw County confirm that ancient mound dwellers were inhabitants of the area long before Christopher Columbus discovered America.

The abundance of wild game and fertile soils for berries and planted crops drew Chippewa Native Americans to the West Branch area and the first Europeans in the area were traders, clergymen, and soldiers. For nearly 150 years, little contact between Native Americans and the new European settlers took place in this interior of northern Lower Michigan. Forts, outposts, and other settlements stayed near the shores of the Great Lakes.



After 150 years, Europeans by benefit of guns, germs, whiskey, and sheer numbers came to dominate mid-Michigan. The heavy influx of settlers began after the Erie Canal opened in 1825 making migration by the Great Lakes as easy, or easier than, the Ohio River route which had led to the settlement of the lower Midwest much sooner than Michigan. This new immigration from the northeast is evident by the numbers of New Englanders and New Yorkers who were early settlers of the area.

The magnificent white pines that graced the land in West Branch stood untouched until 1871. But having felled the forests further south, lumbermen began their trek north from the Bay City and Saginaw areas. Their progress was closely linked to the building of railroads. Railroads were a necessity since inland waterways were neither deep nor wide enough to provide dependable transportation. The railroad was built through West Branch between 1871 and 1872.



Ogemaw County Historic Timetable

- 1790 – part of Knox County
- 1803 – part of Wayne County, Indiana Territory
- 1810 – part of Michigan Territory
- 1818 – part of Michimackinac Territory
- 1819 – part of Oakland County
- 1852 – part of Mackinac County
- 1856 – part of Cheboygan County
- 1860 – part of Midland County
- 1867 – part of Iosco County
- 1875 – Ogemaw County established
- 1885 – Village of West Branch established

The end of the lumbering era was around 1910 when the catastrophic forest fires broke out during the dry summer. The fires were fed by dry-as-tinder brush and slashings left from the earlier lumbering activities. The fires were the end of the remaining old growth timber.

Originally called Springvale, the City of West Branch was eventually renamed to reflect its location – on the west branch of the Rifle River. West Branch had its beginnings in the early 1870s when the Jackson, Lansing and Saginaw Railroad built a line to the area for transporting lumber. In 1873 the City was given a US Post Office. By 1874 the area had added a

school, hotel, house, train depot, and a doctor and lawyer. The hotel, originally called the Weidmans and Wright Hotel was renamed the West Branch Hotel. Also in 1874 Edward Washington opened a general store. It was in his honor that Houghton Avenue was called Washington Avenue for a time. By 1884 the village included several stores, a bank, mill, and newspaper. West Branch was formally organized as a village in 1885 and was reorganized as a fourth-class city in 1905. By 1920, there were 1,105 people living in the City of West Branch.

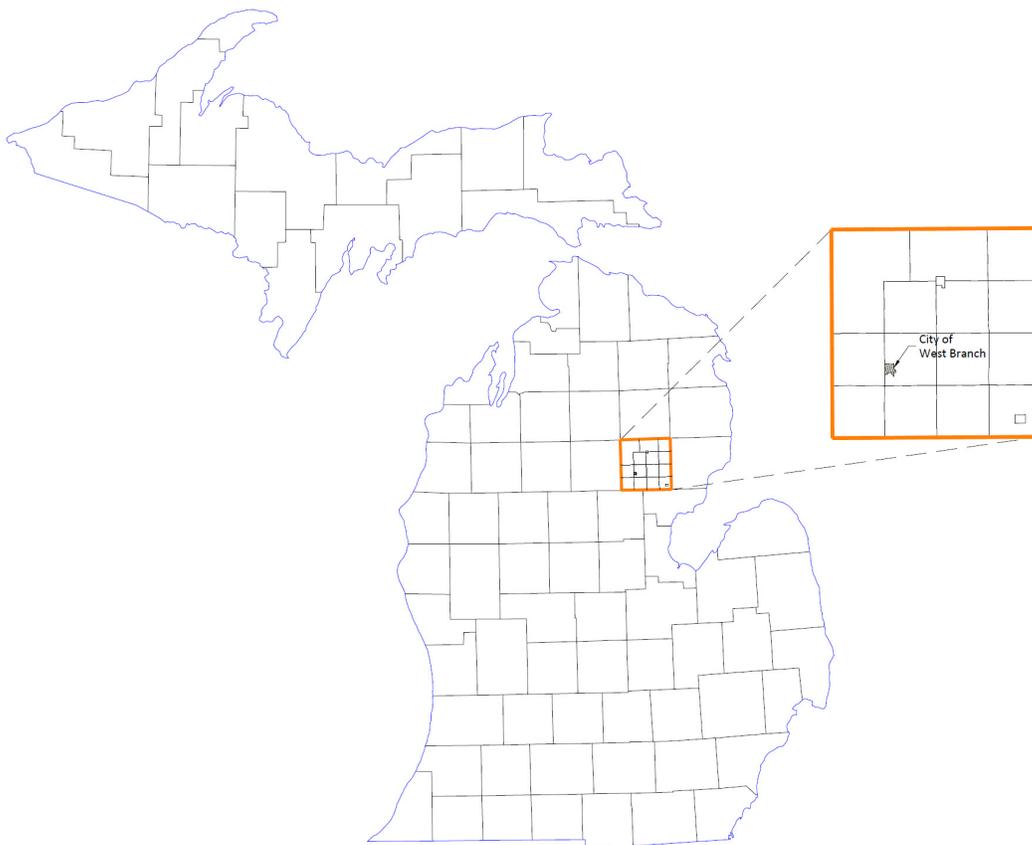


LOCATION

The City of West Branch is located at the junction of M-55 and M-30 in Ogemaw County and is the largest city in the county. It is the county seat and encompasses approximately 1.3 square miles. The northern edge of the City is bounded by Willow Street Court Street runs along the western city limits, and Fairview Street along the east. The southern boundaries are irregular.

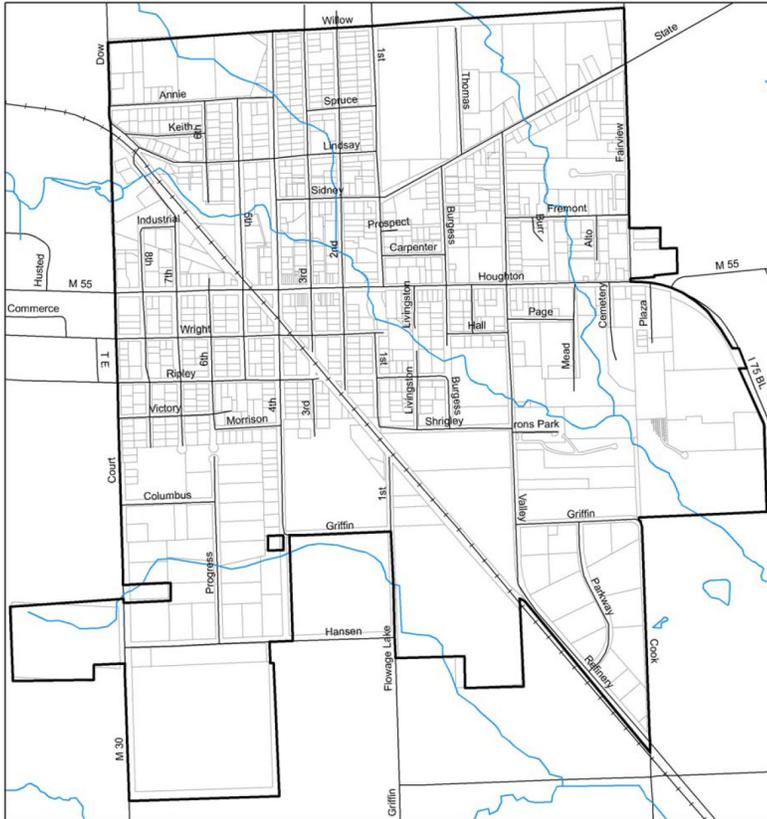
There are several smaller cities within 20 miles of West Branch. Distances to these and other Michigan cities are listed in the table at the left.

City	Distance from West Branch (miles)
Rose City	13.1
St Helen	13.8
Skidway Lake	14.7
Prescott	21.8
Sterling	22.5
Gladwin	26.6
Mio	27.2
Standish	27.9
Saginaw	62.3
Detroit	152.1



TRANSPORTATION ROUTES

Interstate 75 Business Loop (BL I-75) runs east-west through the center of West Branch on M-55 (Houghton Ave). The loop uses a portion of the former M-76 and the current M-55. M-30 (Court St.) runs along the western border of the City, north-south. Two I-75 interchanges provide access to the City of West Branch, Exits 212 and 215.

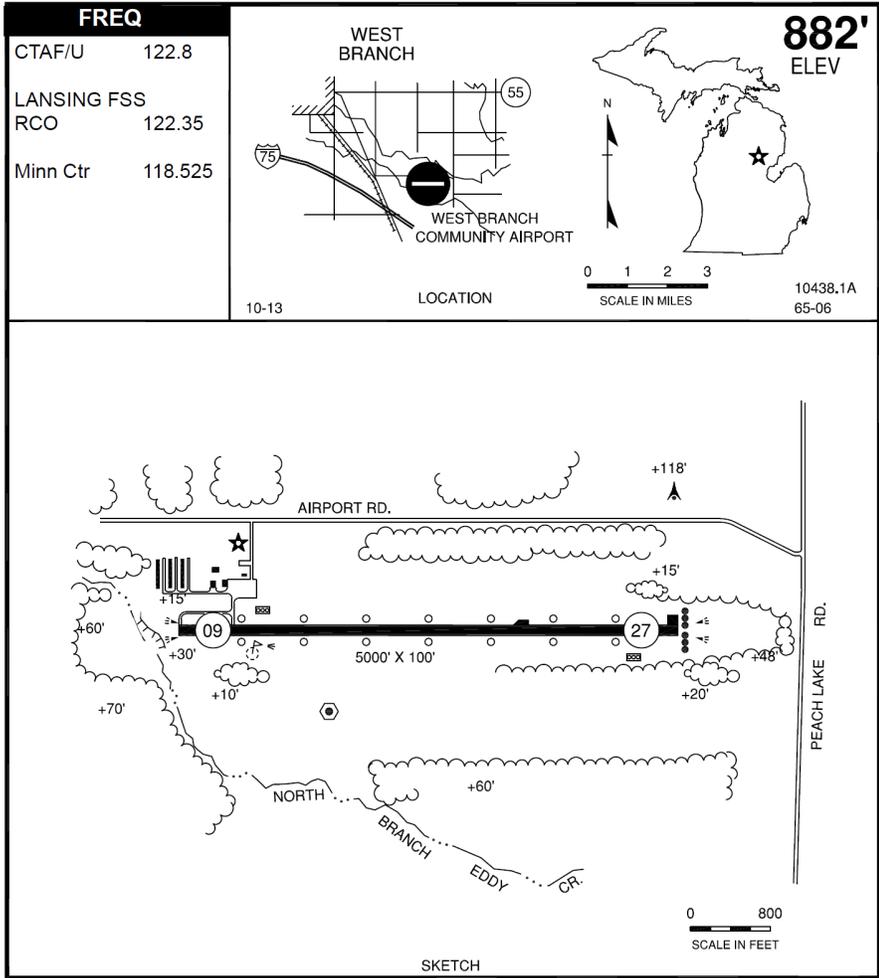


Most of the roads within the city limits are paved. There still remain, however, a few dirt roads, the east end of Willow Street for example. Both Houghton (M-55) and Court (M-30) carry substantial amounts of traffic.

The I-75 Business Loop Market Study and Plan Transportation Review and Report has identified average daily traffic volumes, crash statistics and road capacities and speed limits through West Branch and the corridor. While it is not necessary to repeat this work here, it is worth noting that traffic volumes entering West Branch on Houghton Street (M-55) are close to 8,000 vehicles per day as of 2007, making this a heavily traveled thoroughfare that merits traffic control and

management. Average daily traffic volumes in the center of town at Houghton and Fifth Street, have remained between 14,600 and 17,600 over the last seven years although they have been decreasing slightly, but steadily, during this time period. The MDOT 2010 Annual Average Daily Traffic Report estimates counts of 13,617 between the westerly city limits to Fifth Street, and 15,316 from Fifth Street to easterly city limits. Commercial traffic on M-55 through town appears to have remained more constant, at roughly the same percentage of total traffic volume, roughly 4.4% to 4.9%, at the east and west city limits and 3.7% in the center of town.

The Corridor Plan has isolated vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle traffic issues to study. Of these concerns, many access management, vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic related recommendations emerged and are detailed as part of that study. Those that impact the City of West Branch most are expressed in goals in this plan.

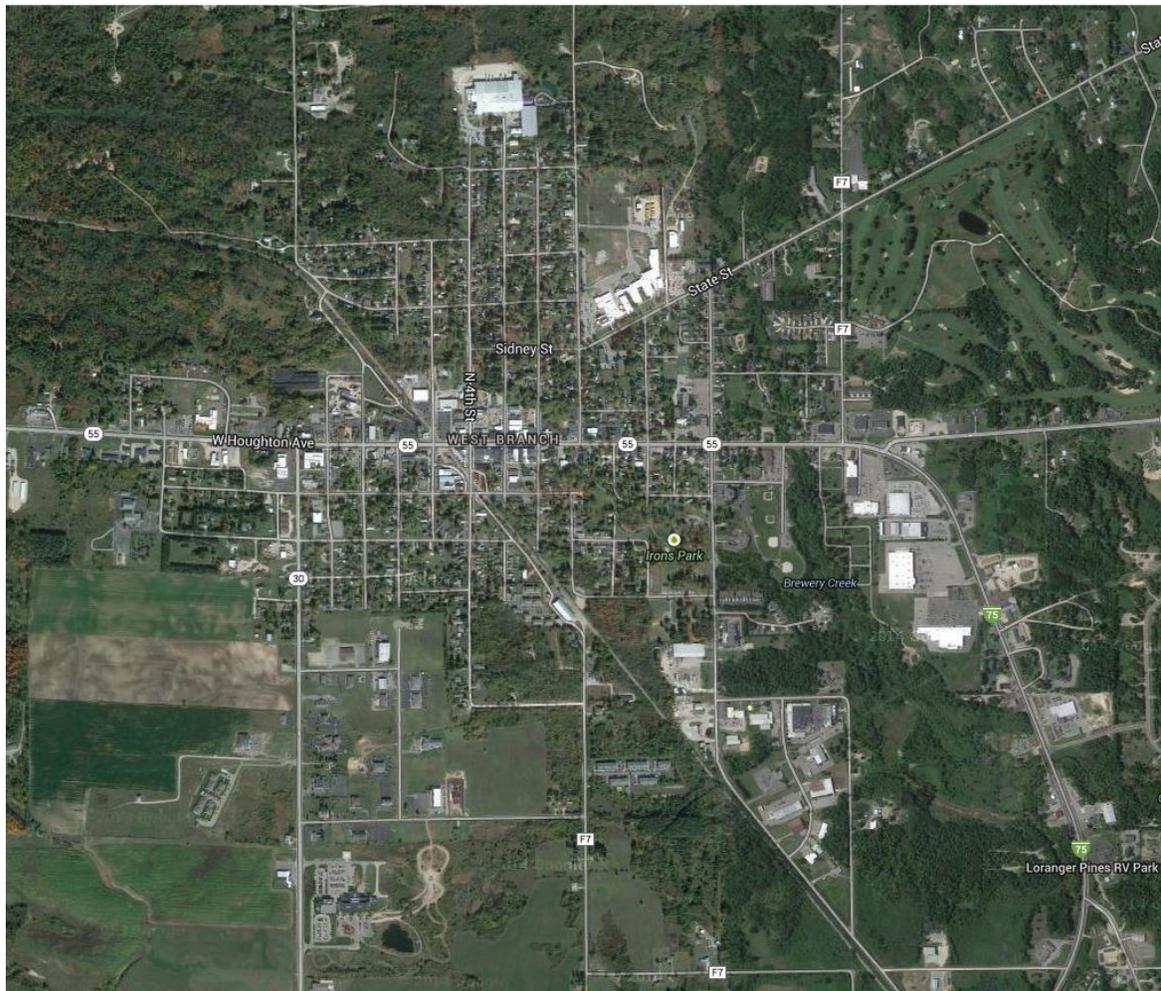


A community airport, three miles southeast of the city, serves private airplanes. The airport has a lighted 5,000 foot asphalt runway and offers fuel, hangers, and tie downs. The airport has an attendant during normal business hours and by appointment during non-business hours. Recently a new airport terminal building was constructed to offer visitors additional airport services. Bus service by Ogemaw Public Transit Organization serves the area with a demand/response for the City.

Additionally, the area is served by freight shipping, especially as there is a United Parcel Shipping

service office in downtown.

The City is also almost bisected by the old Jackson, Lansing and Saginaw Railroad line running from the southeast corner to the northwest corner of through the city. This rail line runs from Gaylord to the north to Bay City and from there connects with railway lines across the southern part of the state. Lake State Railway freight trains use this rail several times a week.

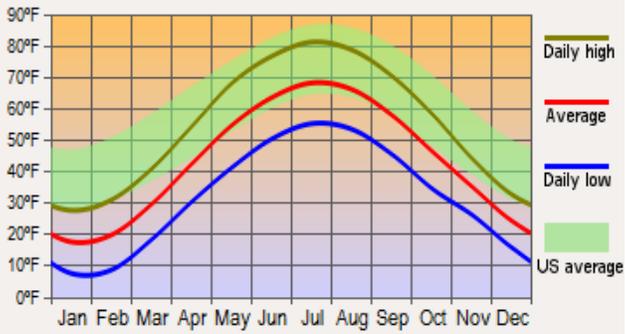


Circa 2013 Aerial Photo

UTILITIES

The City is served by a municipal water and sewer system. Recent concerns over water contamination led to the need to construct additional treatment facilities and modify some aspects of the distribution network. There are two water towers in the City, one, the famous smiley face and the other an older tower slated for removal when the water issues have been resolved. The City also has full cable and cellular service provided by private companies.

Average Temperatures

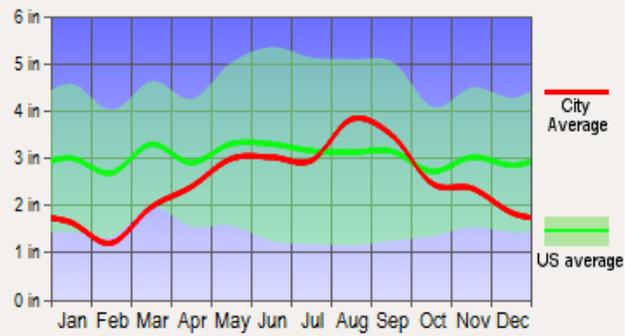


CLIMATE

The temperature in West Branch ranges from a daily maximum of 28°F in January to 81.5°F in July. The lowest daily minimum temperature of the year is usually recorded in January and is 8°F. The average annual temperature for the area is 55.6°F.

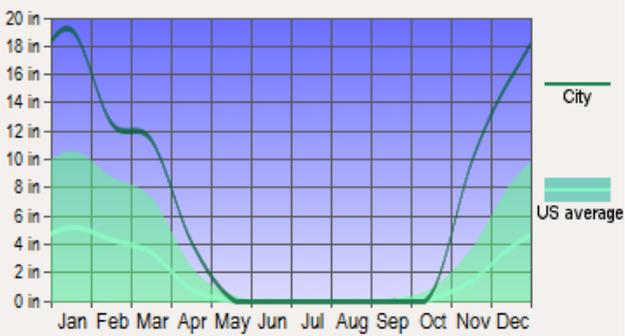
Total annual rainfall is just over 30 inches. August tends to have the highest amount of rainfall with an average of almost 4 inches. However, May, June, July and September have mean rainfall amounts of approximately 3 inches or more each month.

Precipitation



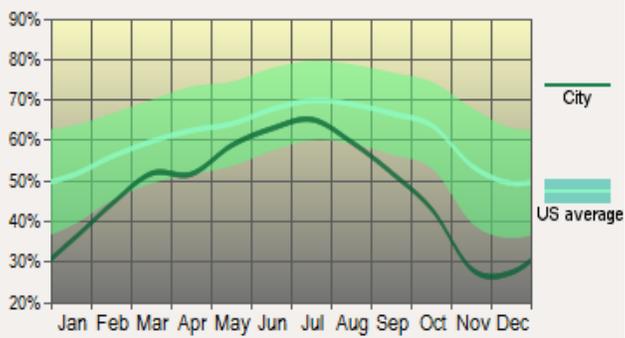
The variation in climate and four distinct seasons makes West Branch and the region desirable for water, biking and other summer sports as well as snowmobiling, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing in the winter. These activities draw tourists and visitors to the area, accounting for much of the seasonal fluctuations in population in the City and the increase in the number of workers associated with the Accommodations and Service industries.

Snowfall



Normally, January has the most amount of snowfall with an average of 13.2 inches. The next highest snowfall month is December with 11 inches. Both January and February have the highest amount of snow cover with average depths of 7 and 8 inches, respectively. Total annual snowfall is almost 50 inches.

Sunshine



TOPOGRAPHY

The average elevation of the City of West Branch is 955 ft. There is little elevation change in the City with several sections at 950 ft while there are portions at the northwest, northeast, and southwest corners that are 970-980 ft above sea level.



Ogemaw County, Michigan (MI129)			
Map Unit Symbol	Map Unit Name	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
11E	Rubicon sand, 18 to 35 percent slopes	0.2	0.0%
13A	Au Gres sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	127.9	6.3%
14	Roscommon mucky sand	36.5	1.8%
17B	Graycalm sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	10.8	0.5%
17C	Graycalm sand, 6 to 18 percent slopes	15.1	0.7%
20B	Montcalm loamy sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	0.9	0.0%
20C	Montcalm loamy sand, 6 to 18 percent slopes	0.0	0.0%
21	Histosols and Aquents, ponded	12.0	0.6%
22B	Nester fine sandy loam, 2 to 6 percent slopes	194.0	9.5%
22C	Nester fine sandy loam, 6 to 12 percent slopes	62.7	3.1%
22C2	Nester loam, 6 to 12 percent slopes, eroded	128.7	6.3%
22D	Nester fine sandy loam, 12 to 18 percent slopes	0.5	0.0%
22D2	Nester loam, 12 to 18 percent slopes, eroded	7.2	0.4%
22D3	Nester clay loam, 12 to 25 percent slopes, severely eroded	4.6	0.2%
23B	Kawkawlin loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes	177.6	8.7%
24	Sims loam	18.4	0.9%
28	Udorthents, loamy, nearly level	17.6	0.9%
38	Tonkey sandy loam	3.1	0.2%
44B	Croswell sand, loamy substratum, 0 to 3 percent slopes	163.9	8.1%
45	Wheatley mucky loamy sand	106.5	5.2%
47A	Gladwin sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	113.8	5.6%
48	Epoufette mucky sand	3.8	0.2%
50B	Menominee sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	6.4	0.3%
51B	Iosco sand, 0 to 4 percent slopes	145.8	7.2%

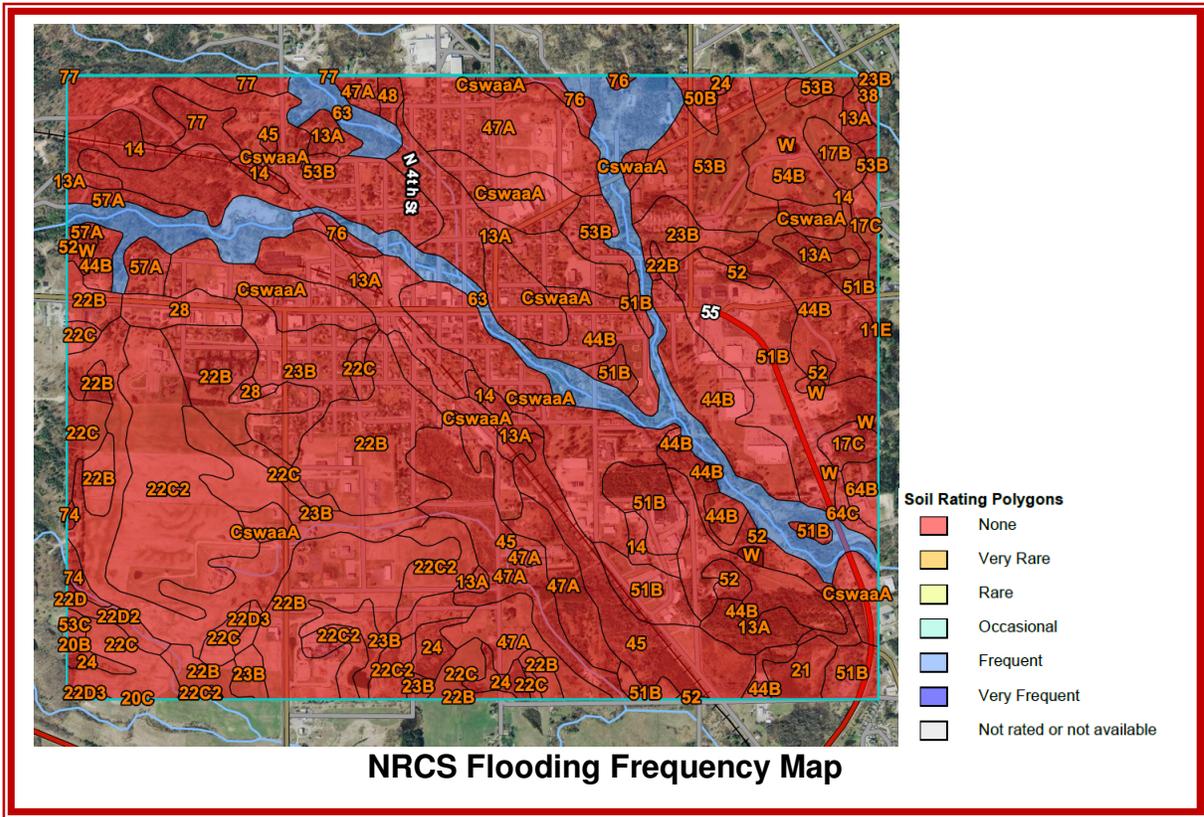
Ogemaw County, Michigan (MI129)			
Map Unit Symbol	Map Unit Name	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
52	Brevort mucky loamy sand	32.9	1.6%
53B	Manistee loamy sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	74.4	3.7%
53C	Manistee loamy sand, 6 to 12 percent slopes	2.0	0.1%
54B	Allendale loamy sand, 0 to 4 percent slopes	32.2	1.6%
57A	Belding sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes	16.6	0.8%
63	Evart sand	156.2	7.7%
64B	Melita sand, 0 to 6 percent slopes	7.8	0.4%
64C	Melita sand, 6 to 18 percent slopes	4.2	0.2%
74	Cathro muck	4.5	0.2%
76	Lupton muck, 0 to 1 percent slopes	12.5	0.6%
77	Tawas mucky peat	17.5	0.9%
CswaaA	Croswell sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	311.1	15.3%
W	Water	5.1	0.3%
Totals for Area of Interest		2,035.2	100.0%

Soil composition and drainage are important considerations for the construction of basements for houses. In West Branch, 85% of the soils are unfavorable for basements without major soil reclamation or special design required. The remaining soils are moderately favorable for basement use with special planning or design. These soils are located in the southwest corner of the City.

Ponding is defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as standing water in a closed depression. Unless a drainage system is installed, water is removed only by percolation, transpiration, or evaporation. “Frequent” ponding means that it occurs in the area more than once in two years. Areas considered to have frequent ponding are located in the southeast and northeast quadrants.

The river and creeks are banked by Evart sand and are considered to be areas of frequent flooding. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) “frequent” means that flooding is likely to occur often under normal weather conditions. This means the chance of flooding is more that 50% in any year, but less that 50% in all months of any year.

The rest of the areas in the city are not considered to be flood prone. The chance of flooding in these areas is near 0 percent in any year, with flooding occurring less than once in 500 years.



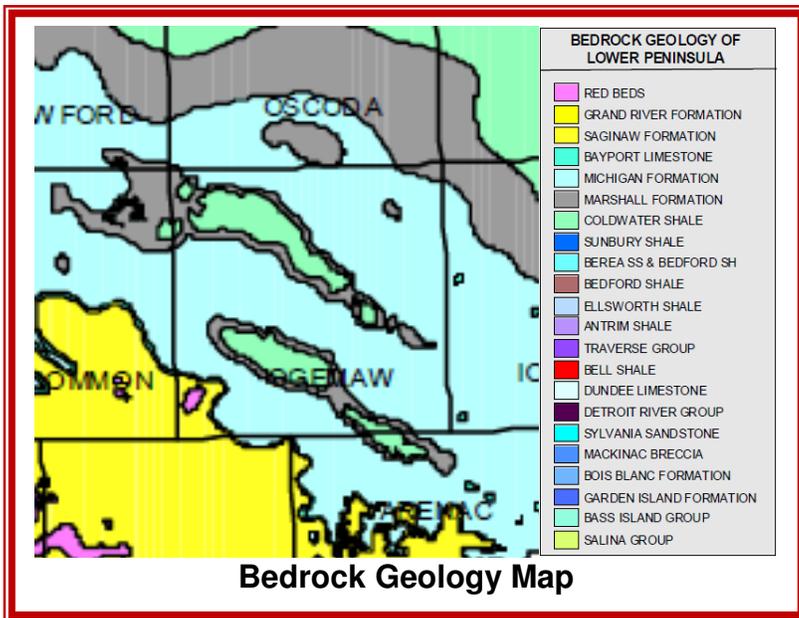
The Federal Emergency Management Administration has not mapped the City of West Branch so no federally produced flood maps are available. Soil analysis is being used in this Master Plan to discuss flood prone areas.

GEOLOGY

The geologic history and character of the city sets the tone for every other resource and land use issue. The geologic processes that gave rise to the land of the city, provided its elevations, shaped its contours, deposited its ancient deep underground deposits of oil and gas, formed its hills, carved its river valleys and laid down the parent materials for its soils. Rich gravel deposits along the face of the large West Branch-Port Huron Moraine bless the region with extractable resources but also leave it scars caused by that extraction. Geology is divided into bedrock and surface geology.

BEDROCK GEOLOGY

The bedrock geology of the city is that of the Michigan Basin: sedimentary rock of limestone, dolomite, shale, and sandstone laid down in ancient seas of Paleozoic Age up to 500 million years ago. Beneath these sedimentary rock deposits is ancient igneous rock, and above them is a thick layer of glacial drift varying in thickness and type, extending 1500 feet below ground surface. Several strata of the sedimentary rock deposits beneath the city are rich in hydrocarbons: oil, gas, and other petro-chemicals.



Some of the earliest oil development in the state occurred in the local, relatively shallow, Dundee formation during the 1930's. This field, and one in Oil City, Michigan, east of Mt. Pleasant, provided much of the initial fuel for early expansion of Michigan's auto industry. Many of the wells in the Dundee formation yield crude oil and "sour gas" hydrogen sulfide. This is not only foul smelling but highly toxic and can be dangerous when concentrated. In many places in the region, the gasses

associated with hydrocarbons mercaptans often lend a tell-tale "oil field" smell to the local still, summer air.

Many of the primary oil reserves of the Dundee formation have been depleted. For the past few decades, much of the activity in this field has been in secondary and tertiary recovery, including cleaning the old wells, injecting water to purge the remaining oil and related activities. Development of facilities to separate brine and water from gas and oil was a major activity during the past 20 years, but this has proved to be a marginal enterprise and is not expected to be a major aspect of hydrocarbon development and utilization in the future.

During the late 1950's, deeper deposits of more valuable natural gas were discovered in the Niagran reef formations. The subterranean faults and folds in the deep sedimentary rock formation serve to trap and concentrate both gas and oil. These have been extensively studied by the tools of seismology, and while some exploration continues, most of the patterns of potentially rich deposits and concentration are quite well known and are being actively extracted.

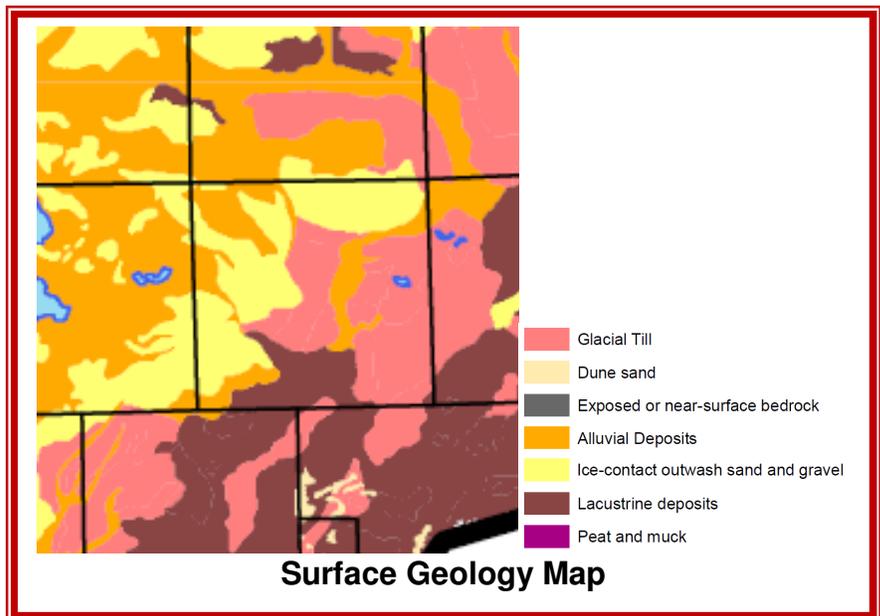
Pipelines, storage tanks, and well sites are apparent throughout much of the region. Both local and large capacity pipelines traverse the region in many areas. Oil and gas remain a major industry; however, from a planning point of view, is the often negative legacy left by this industry from its earlier days. A most notable instance is the abandoned refinery site located southeast of the city along Old M-76 which has been rehabilitated into the Manufactured Mulch operation. In addition, throughout the region, there has been the long-term impact of leaking wells, sludge pits, sour gas flares, abandoned sites, service roads, and a host of other hydrocarbon-related activities. The lands of the region have continued to be basically healthy in the face of these historic uses that attests to the resiliency of Mother Nature, but assuring responsible cleanup and better regulation in the future is a significant planning. One

of our most valuable resources for the future is the immense supply of fresh groundwater available in the region. Protection of this resource from subsurface contamination is a high priority.

A related issue is the severance of mineral rights from surface ownership of land parcels. Because of the value of the oil and gas that may lie beneath any given parcel of land, numerous land transactions have occurred in which the surface ownership was sold, but the mineral rights were owned by parties interested in developing the resources. This is a common practice in many places including West Branch.

SURFACE GEOLOGY

The surface geology of the city is glacial in origin. The depth of the “till plain” zone varies from about 850 to 1050 feet. This more fertile and gently-rolling landscape was overridden by glacial ice. The deposits are the “bed load” of the glacier, a mixture of all sizes of soil components from clay to boulders. This type of deposit is called a “till plain.” Because glacial meltwaters did not wash out the finer, more fertile



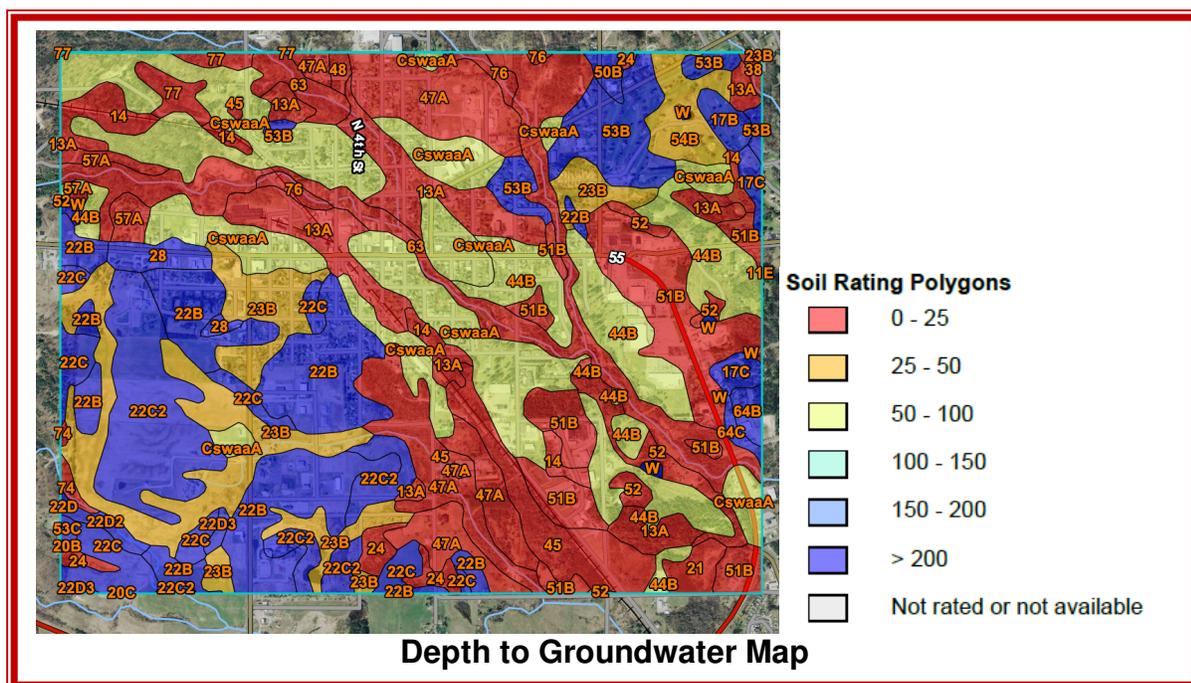
soils, these soils are inherently fertile and have high capacity to absorb and hold nutrients (cation-exchange capacity) for productive agriculture. Drainage can be a problem in lower areas, but with tiling, the till plain areas can be highly productive. These are also pleasant areas for low-density rural residential development.

SURFACE WATER

A fortunate consequence of the manner in which the glacial deposits were laid down is the abundant supply of fresh water in the city. The sandy soils above “Long Hill” receive a constant replenishment of water from melting snow and rainfall. These highly porous soils allow the water to infiltrate, recharging the underground aquifer with clean water filtered through hundreds of feet of pure sand and gravel. Layers of clay and silt bedded within the glacial deposition formed by the pattern of ice movement and melting cap this rich aquifer and create the conditions for springs and artesian wells wherever the clay cap is penetrated. Wetlands, headwater seeps and springs, ponds and artesian wells abound along the base of the moraine, extending southward even beyond West Branch in some places. Because the glacial drift contains limestone and other mineral-rich rock, the city’s groundwater tends to be “hard” and somewhat high in iron. Groundwater seeps, springs and wetlands

abound. It is probable that some of the streams that originate in nearby townships are actually recharged by infiltration over a more extensive area than the political boundaries of the city. Some of the headwater streams of the Rifle River system have actually been shown to have a greater base flow output than the surface input to their watershed area (MDEQ, Geological Survey Division). The only way this is possible is for the underground recharge area to extend beyond the boundaries of the surface watershed. Because of impermeable layers of clay sloping southward and southeastward from beyond the top of the Ogemaw Hills, it is highly probable that city gets groundwater from surrounding areas of Klacking, Foster, West Branch and Ogemaw Townships.

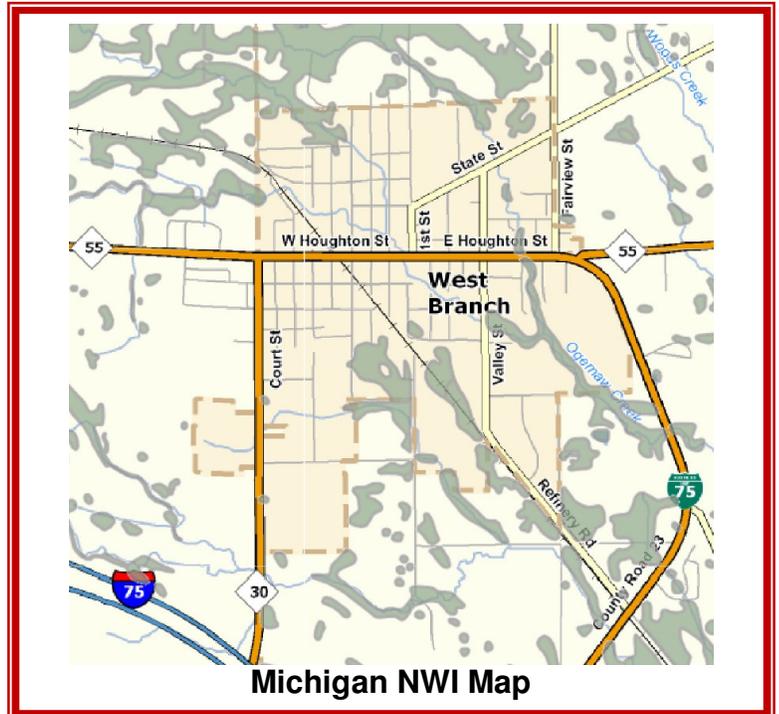
The City of West Branch is in the Au Gres – Rifle River Water Shed. The west branch of the Rifle River runs through the City from the northwest corner to the southeast corner. Ogemaw Creek joins the main river in the northwest quadrant of the City. Other small branches enter off the main river. Approximately 18% of the City’s land borders waterways.



The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) defines water table as a saturated zone in the soil which lasts for more than a month. The majority of the City’s land is between 50 and 100 cm above the water table; while 20% of the land, notably in the northeast and southwest quadrants of the city is more than 200 cm from the water table.

WETLANDS

The National Wetland Inventory classifies several areas in the City as wetlands. These areas are designated on the adjoining map. Most of these wetlands are categorized as Freshwater Forested Shrub and are predominately along the river banks toward the edges of the City, most notably in the southeast, northwest and northeast corners. (Note, not all of the river/creek banks in the City are considered to be wetlands.) Additionally, there are wetlands close to the southeastern section of the railroad tracks and a large area just north of Griffin Road bounded by First and Fourth Streets.



DEMOGRAPHICS

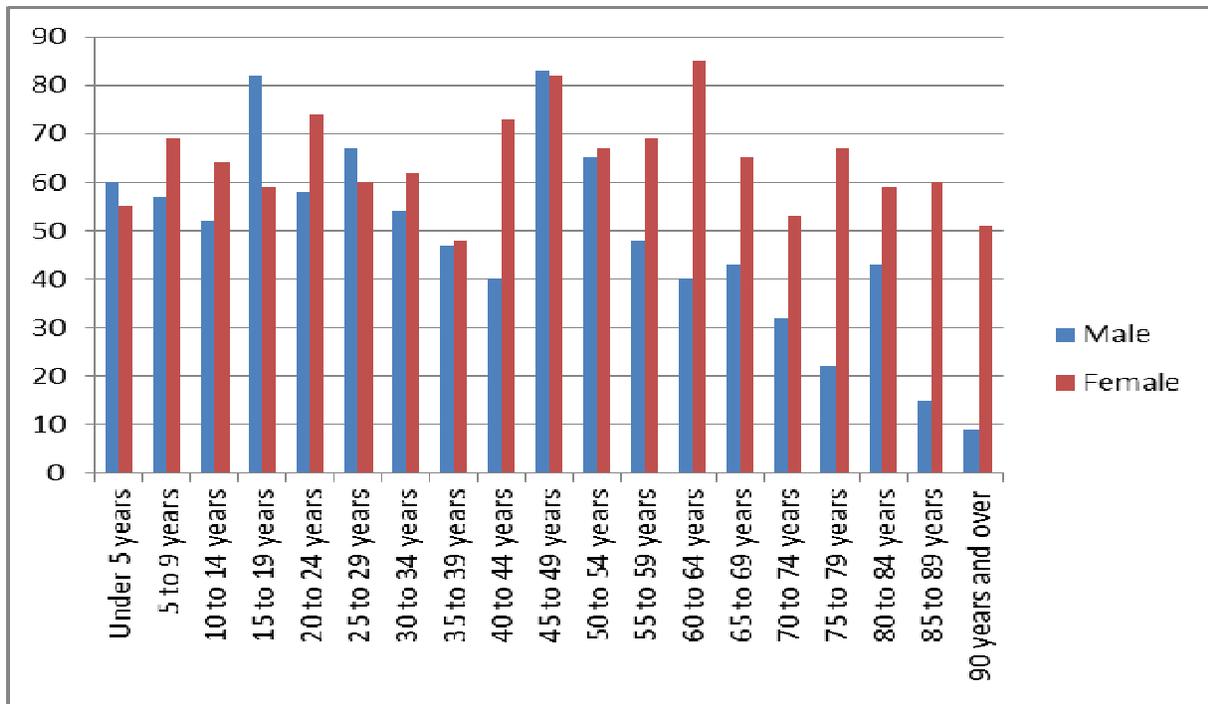
There was a dramatic increase in the education level from 1990 to 2012. Approximately 55% of residents over the age of 25 have some college education. This compares with 33% for 1990. The Michigan 2012 American Community Survey estimate the percentage of people who have obtained some college education is 57.9%.

POPULATION

The population of the City of West Branch has changed little for almost 6 decades. In 1940 the population was 1,962 and in 2000 the population was 1,926, a 1.8% decrease over the 60 years. The highest population was in the 1950s with 2,098 residents. The 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates have the total population of the City of West Branch down to 1,908, slightly lower than the 2000 census.

When compared to the population of Ogemaw County during the 1900s, West Branch seems to have matched a similar growth pattern up until the 1960s. From the 1970s through 2000, Ogemaw County's rate of growth was ahead of the City of West Branch. Predictions of substantial population growth from the 1970s, based on an anticipated influx from people from the Detroit area, have not been realized. Additionally, there was a 6.6% drop in population from the 1970s to the 1980s. This drop was attributed to the economic recession of the times. By the 1990s the population was back up to 1,914.

According to the 2012 ACS 5-year estimates, 44.9% percent of the City’s residents are male, and 55.1% are female. The age distribution of residents has remained almost the same from 1990 until the most current surveys. In general, the community seems quite balanced with 34% of the residents between the ages of 25 and 44, 25% under the age of 19, and 20% over the age of 65. In 1970 the median age for residents was 31.9 years, while the median age for Michigan was 26.3 years. By 2012 the median resident age was 43.1 years, closely matching the State median age of 38.8 years.



U.S Census Bureau 2010 Census Data

Almost all of the residents are of the white race (96.9%). The remaining 4.1% are Black, Asian, American Indian, or two or more races. One-third of the population comes from German origins. Other top ancestral nationalities are English, Irish, and French.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

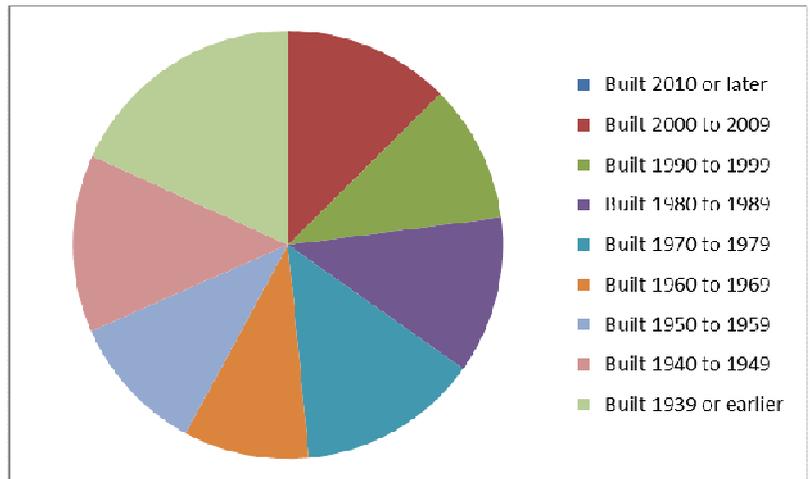
There were 1,006 households in the City of West Branch in the 2010 Census. This was an increase of 20.8% from 2000. Of these 1,006 households, 489 (48.6%) consider themselves family units, versus 517 who live in “non-families”. Family households are composed of married couples, both with and without children; single parents with children; and other related individuals. Nonfamilies are people who live alone or with people who are unrelated.

The number of households with children in 2010 was down approximately 5% from the 1990 Census numbers. There were 219 households with children, and 517 without. The average household size was 1.99 persons, as compared to 2.53 for the

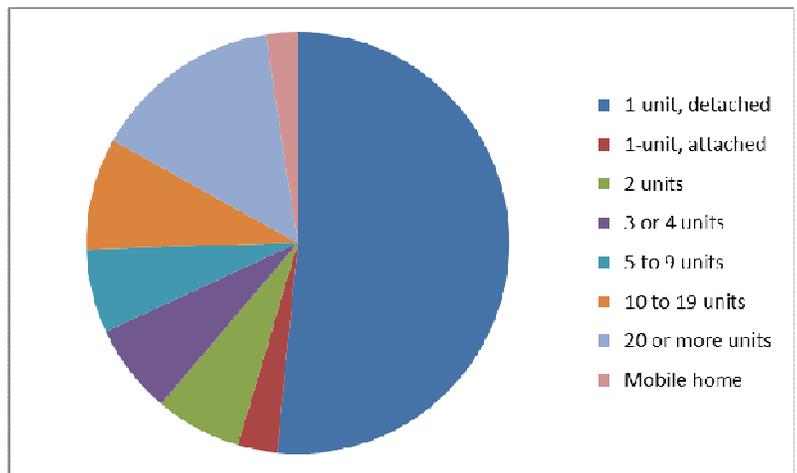
State of Michigan. This is down 36.4% from the 1970 average of 3.13, and a 15.0% decrease from the 1990 average of 2.34.

In 2012, there were 1,028 housing units. Of these, 852 were occupied, and 176 (17.1%) vacant. Owner-occupied housing accounted for 43.5% of the available housing units with a median value of \$88,300. Renters have a median monthly rent, including utilities and fuel costs (gross rent), of \$615 and account for approximately 56.5% of occupied housing. In the State overall the percentage of rental-occupied housing units is 28.9%. The City of West Branch has two senior citizen apartment buildings. Single units account for 54.0% of the occupied housing units while multi-family units comprise 46.0%.

The median year the City's housing units were built was 1956. That means that half of the City's units were built before 1956. And, in fact, 43.7% were built before 1940. There were 236 units built from 1990 to 2010. More evident are the newer condominiums on the east side of the city on Victorian Court and on Fairview close to Houghton. This change in the characteristics of newer housing units is representative of a constant, but aging, population and smaller family size. Additionally, more people are choosing life styles and living units that require less maintenance.

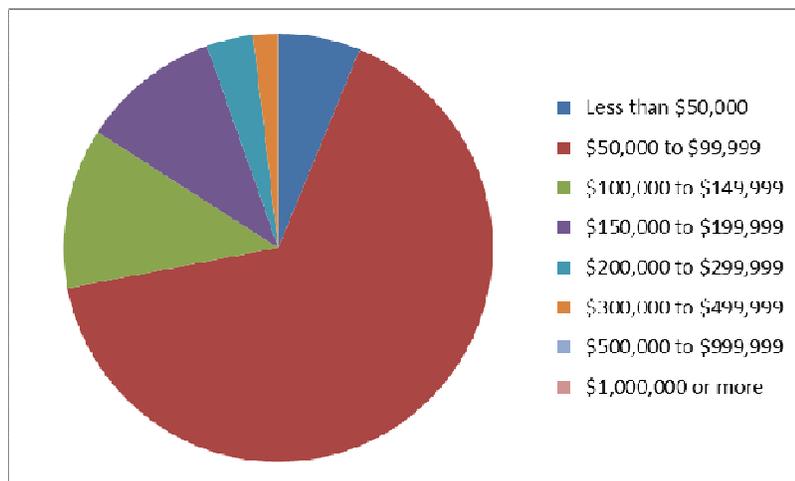


The median number of rooms for housing units in the city is 5.0. Only 22% of the housing has 3 rooms or less, while 38% of the housing has 4 or 5 rooms, and 40% has 6 or more rooms. Of the occupied housing, 100% has one occupant or less per room.



Three of the occupied housing units are estimated to be lacking complete kitchen facilities in 2012 and 11 are estimated not to have telephone service. This statistic is likely to indicate the growing trend toward people having only cellular phone service and wireless internet service instead of land lines, but this is not able to be substantiated with the 2012 census information. Homes are generally heated with utility gas (82.2%), while electricity, fuel oil, wood,

propane, and other fuels sources account for the remaining homes. The City of West Branch provides city water and sewer systems to all but a few residents who remain on wells for water supply.



The median house value in 2000 was \$67,200. It has been estimated that the median value in 2012 was \$88,300. The State median house value for 2012 was \$128,600.

EMPLOYMENT

Of the 1,554 residents 16 years and over in 2012, 771 (49.6%) were part of the labor force. People considered in the labor force are those who are employed or actively looking for work. Of these, 724 (93.9%) were employed and 47 (6.1%) were unemployed. In 1990 the comparable unemployment rate was 10.2% and in 1970 the rate was 8.6%. What is notable, however, is that in 1970 more than 90% of those eligible to work were part of the labor force – either employed or unemployed. By 1980 this had dropped to just over 53%, and in 2000 64% of those over 16 years old were considered part of the labor force. In Ogemaw County, 52.2% of the population over 16 years was part of the labor force in 2000. Of the county’s labor force, 8.5% were unemployed.

In 2000, 31% of those employed were part of the management/professional occupation group. This sector showed the largest increase from 1990. There are very few of the City’s residents employed in farming, fishing or forestry. Additionally, the number of those employed in the construction industry has decreased since the 1990s. Almost 80% of the work force was employed in management/professional, sales/office, or service occupations in 2000. This compares with 68% for those employed in these occupations in Ogemaw County.

There were 171 residents who did not have access to a vehicle in 2000. However, 599 had one or two vehicles and 82 residents had more than 3 vehicles. Over one-third of workers traveled between 5 and 9 minutes to get to work. The mean travel time for all workers was 13.1 minutes. Most workers (92%) used a car, truck or van to get to work.

The largest economic sector in West Branch is Educational, Health, and Social Services accounting for 27.6% of the jobs. It appears that West Branch serves the medical care needs for a wide area of northeast Michigan. Another economic section showing growth from the 1990s is the Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food services sector. In 1990 this sector accounted for 2% of the employment, while in 2012 more than 22.5% of the labor force worked in this industry. The Service Industry, of which these occupations are a part, is growing state-wide as well. Ogemaw County is a recreational area and tourism accounts for substantial income to the communities in the county, as is evidenced by the employment data.

Local government is another key employer in the City. In March 2006 there were 338 full-time and 100 part-time employees on the payroll. These jobs ranged from police officers to hospital employees.

PRINCIPAL EMPLOYERS OF OGEMAW COUNTY

SIC	Firm	Location	Employees	Product
622110	West Branch Regional Medical	West Branch	424	General Hospital
332996	Sandvik Hard Materials	West Branch	164	Fabricates pipes & fittings; nonferrous rolling & drawing; manufactures metal cutting machine tools; manufactures steel wire & related products
332321	Taylor Building Products Inc	West Branch	150	Manufactures metal doors, sash & trim
444110	Home Depot USA Inc	West Branch	150	Lumber other Bldg Mats
921110	County of Ogemaw	West Branch	135	County Government
452112	Kmart Corp	West Branch	125	Dept Stores Discount
721191	Forward Corp	West Branch	120	Hotel/Motel Operation Eating Place Drinking Place Gasoline Service Station Ret Groceries
332813	Gold Star Coatings Inc	West Branch	100	Plating service
623110	Rose City Geriatric Village	Rose City	100	Skilled Nursing Home
622210	Ausable Valley Community	West Branch	100	Residential Care

339932	American Plastic Toys Inc	Rose City	90	Manufactures toys; wholesales toys
623110	West Branch Geriatric Village	West Branch	86	Skilled Nursing Care Facility Intermediate Care Facility
621610	Dobson Healthcare Services	West Branch	80	Home Health Care Services
722110	Lumberjack Food & Spirits	West Branch	80	Eating Place Drinking Place
611110	West Branch-Rose City Area Sch	Rose City	75	School District
722211	G S Pizzeria	West Branch	70	Eating Place
611110	Whittmore-Prescott Area Schools	Prescott	65	Elementary School
611110	West Branch-Rose City Area Sch	West Branch	65	School District
713910	West Branch Country Club Inc	West Branch	60	Membership Sport/Recreation Club
721214	Cole Canoe Base Boy Scouts	Alger	60	Sport/Recreation Camp
446110	Specialized Pharmacy Services	West Branch	55	Ret Drugs/Sundries
492210	United Parcel Service Inc	West Branch	55	Courier Service
326199	Parkway Plastics Inc	West Branch	54	Manufactures injection molded plastic products
722110	Ponderosa	West Branch	52	Steak Restaurant
332999	Header Products Inc	Rose City	51	Manufactures metal cargo stabilizing bars; manufactures motor vehicle parts & accessories; manufactures screw machine products
721214	Young Men's Christian Assn	West Branch	50	Sport/Recreation Camp
445110	Spartan Stores Inc	Rose City	50	Ret Groceries Whol Meats/Products
611110	West Branch-Rose City Area Sch	Rose City	50	Elementary/Secondary School
713910	Willow Tree	West Branch	50	Membership

				Sport/Recreation Club
441110	Hodges Team Inc	West Branch	43	Ret New/Used Automobiles
713990	3 County Club	Prescott	40	Amusement/Recreation Services
722211	Tedle Enterprises Inc	West Branch	40	Fast-Food Rest Chain
923120	District Health Dept No 2	West Branch	40	Public Health Agency
611110	West Branch-Rose City Area Sch	West Branch	40	Elementary/Secondary School
446110	Walgreen Co	West Branch	40	Ret Drugs/Sundries
611110	Whittemore-Prescott Area	Prescott	39	Senior High School
621910	Ogemaw County Ems Authority	West Branch	35	Local Passenger Transportation
237310	Ogemaw County Road Commission	West Branch	35	Highway/Street Construction
621610	Leelin Home Health Care Inc	West Branch	35	Home Health Care Services
722211	King Venture Inc	West Branch	35	Fast-Food Rest Chain
445230	Brian's Fruit & Meat Market	West Branch	33	Ret Fruits/Vegetables Ret Florist
333515	Rose Tool & Die Inc	West Branch	33	Machine tools & accessories
813110	Seventh Day Adventist Church	West Branch	32	Religious Organization
441110	Arbour, Dean Ford Mercury of	West Branch	32	Retails Automobiles
493110	Pepsi-Cola Metropolitan BtIng	West Branch	30	General Warehouse/Storage
621112	Woodland Health Care Services	West Branch	30	Urgent Care Clinic
448140	RL Fashions of Michigan Inc	West Branch	30	Ret Family Clothing
922160	Frankenmuth, City of Inc	Rose City	30	Fire Protection
561613	1st Armored Inc	West Branch	30	Detective/Armored Car Services
445110	Chipps & Nichols	Prescott	30	Ret Groceries Ret

	IGA			Alcoholic Beverages
611110	Whittemore- Prescott Area	Whittemore	30	Junior High School

Source: Harris Publishing Company, 2008 InfoSource;

MAJOR EMPLOYERS

SIC	Firm	Location	Employees	Product
8062	West Branch Regional Medical Center	West Branch	420	Health care
8211	West Branch-Rose City Schools	West Branch & Rose City	404	Education
5311	Walmart	West Branch	360	Retail
5311	Tanger Outlet Center	West Branch	350	Retail
8062	Bortz Health Care	West Branch	207	Health care
9111	County of Ogemaw	West Branch	173	Executive Offices
7011	Forward Corporation	West Branch	160	Hotels and motels
8062	AuSable Valley Community Mental Health	West Branch	122	Health care

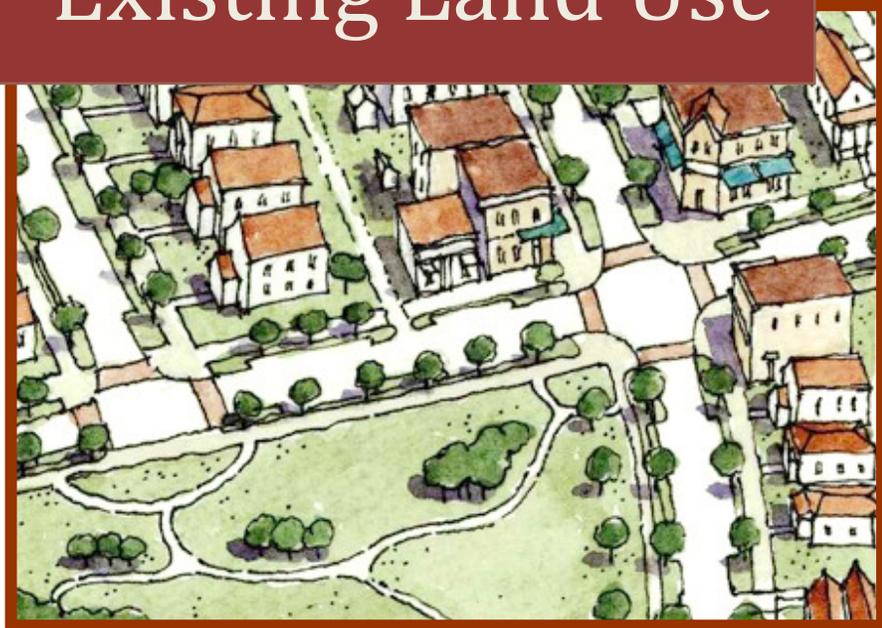
Source: Local County Economic Development Contact

INCOME

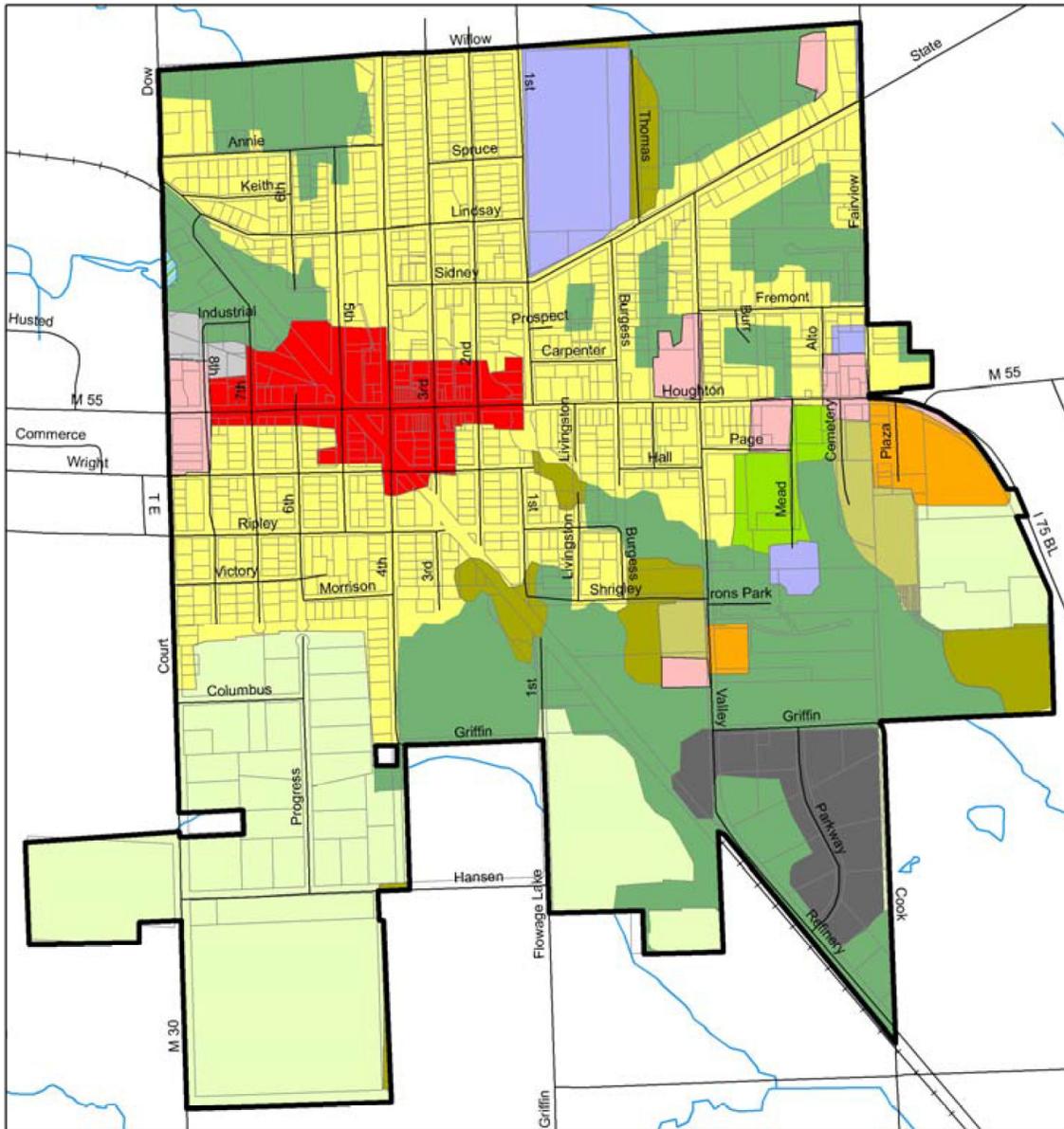
The median household income in 2012 was \$23,354. In Ogemaw County the median was \$35,320 and in Michigan it was \$48,471.

Almost 21% of the City's families were considered to be in poverty in 1990. By 2000, this number had fallen to less than 10%, just under the 11% number for Ogemaw County. The 2012 ACS 5-Year Estimates indicate that number for the City has risen to 18% in contrast to the Ogemaw County 14% and the State of Michigan at 12%.

Existing Land Use



The current land uses in West Branch have not changed significantly since they were last studied in 2009. Significant changes occurred prior to 2009 in the south half of the City where there has been extensive commercial and medical center development. Multiple family housing has been added throughout the City. Once vacant land is now almost all developed.



West Branch 1978 Land Use

Map prepared by:

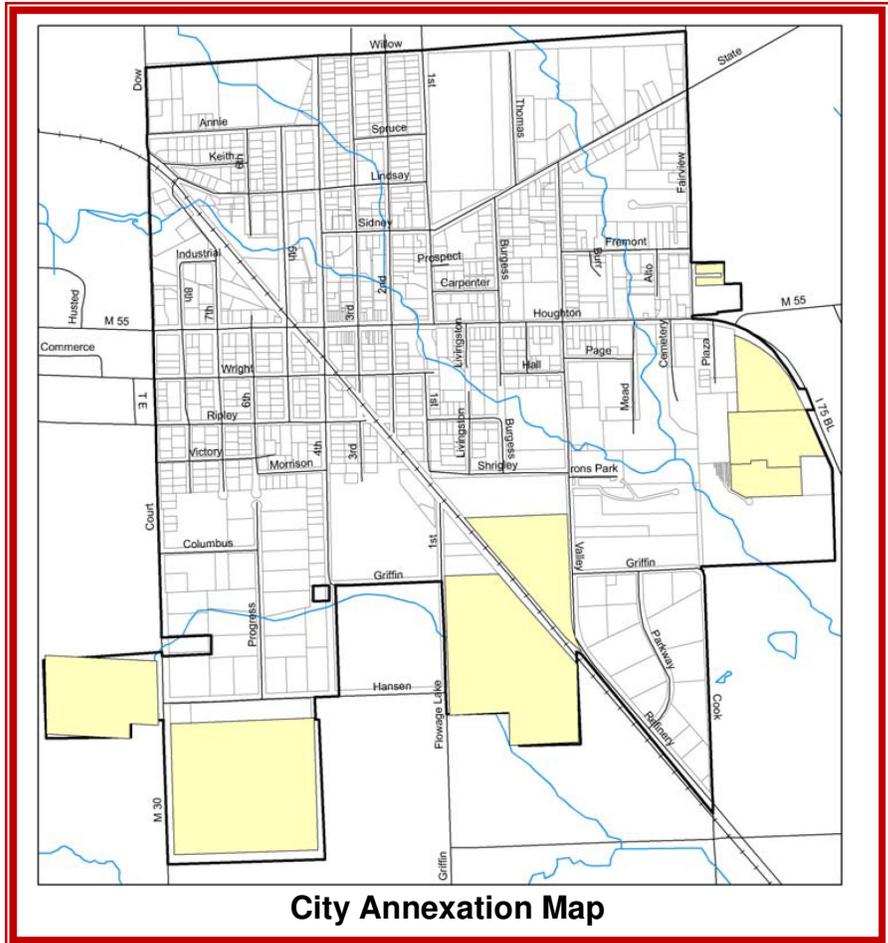
 crescent consulting
 Last updated: 4/17/08
 Data source:
 Crescent Consulting
 Michigan Geographic Data Library
 Michigan Resource Inventory System

Legend	
1978 Landuse/Land Cover	
	Single Family, Duplex
	Institutional
	Central Business District
	Shopping Center, Mall
	Neighborhood Business
	Industrial
	Industrial Park
	Cropland, Rotation, and Permanent Pasture
	Outdoor Recreation
	Herbaceous Rangeland
	Cemeteries
	Woodlands/rangelands



1 inch equals 1,000 feet

The City has grown geographically since 1978 through various annexation agreements, commonly known as “425 agreements.” Public Act 425, of 1984, permits cities to enter into annexation agreements to provide utility and other services to neighboring townships in return for sharing tax revenues on that land. Typically these agreements last for an extended period of time, 50 years, in the case of West Branch, at which time the City acquires full tax revenues on the property. In the interim, the City has full control over the use of the land. The following map shows the land that is being annexed through 425 agreements. While not technically annexed at this time, the land and population that are contained in these agreements are shown as part of the City of West Branch for purposes of the census and legal descriptions.



An aerial view of the City gives a visual indication of the current land use. Residential uses account for approximately 43% of the land, with rest being a mix of commercial, industrial, public, and undeveloped lands.

LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

Residential – Single Family

This classification is for areas with single family dwellings and accessory structures.

Residential – Multiple Family

This classification is used for multiple family dwellings and accessory structures.

Commercial

This category includes all parcels containing commercial facilities and religious institutions.

Industrial

Included in this category is land used for processing, extractive, manufacturing, fabrication, assembling materials, utilities or for the outside storage of equipment and materials.

Public/Quasi Public

This classification is used for public and government buildings, parks, and cemeteries. Schools – public and private – are also added to this classification.

Vacant/Undeveloped

All existing vacant or undeveloped parcels are included in this category including forested areas and wetlands.

LAND USE ANALYSIS

The Existing Land Use map on the following page is described here.

Land Use	Acres	Percent
Residential Single Family	30.74	35%
Residential Multi Family	5.38	6%
Commercial	19.59	22%
Industrial	8.43	10%
Public/Quasi Public	10.68	12%
Vacant/Undeveloped	12.31	14%
TOTAL	87.13	100%

Residential Single Family:

Residential land is located in the northern two thirds of the City. Low density residential land comprises about 31 acres or 35% of all land area in the City. This is the largest use of land in the City and it interspersed with some commercial, office and multifamily uses.

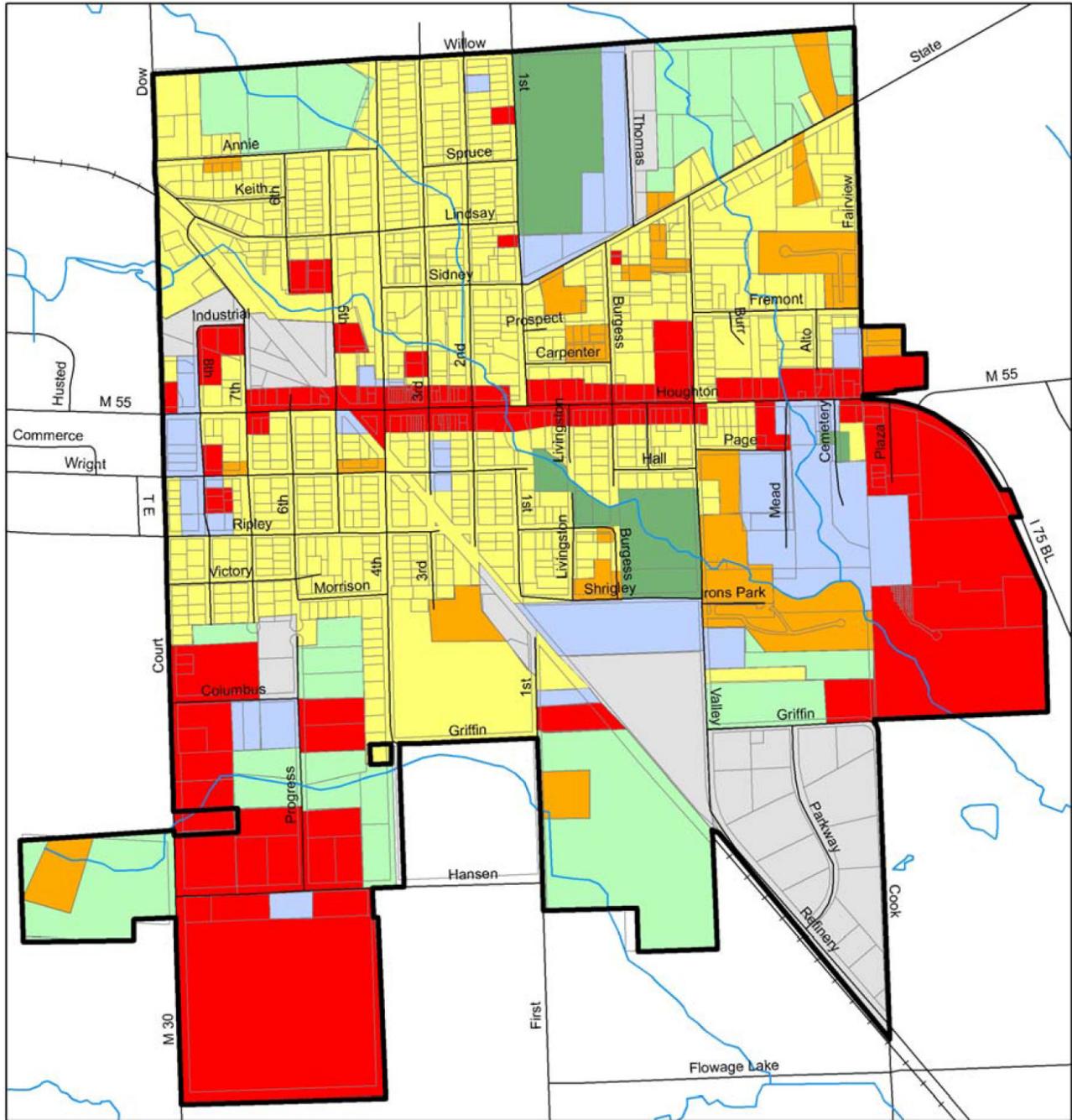
Residential Medium Density: Four and a half acres of land is medium density housing in West Branch. This is just over 6% of all land uses. Medium density housing is mainly on the eastern half of the City with a large development near Iron's Park. Two of the largest structures are managed by the City of West Branch as senior citizen housing. Survey results indicate that there is a demand for more multifamily housing at higher income levels.

Commercial: Commercial land uses are located in the downtown area along Houghton (M-55), on I-75 business loop on the east side of town and at the medical complex on the southwest corner of the City. Office commercial uses are also located throughout the community in homes. Commercial uses vary in type from independently owned shops in historic structures to typical franchise developments. Commercial uses are located on 19 acres and make up 22% of land area. Religious institutions are generally classified as commercial or quasi public, depending of the desires of the community. In West Branch they are included in this classification.

Industrial: There are 8 acres of industrial land which is almost 10% of the entire City. About half of the industrial land is undeveloped. Industrial uses are located in an industrial park at the southeast corner of the City that abuts the rail line, near the northwest corner of the City, also on the rail line and on Thomas Street across from the school complex on the northern edge of town. Some of these uses are original rail-related uses such as the grain elevator but the majority of uses are distribution-related due to West Branch's location on highways I-75, M-30 and M55.

Public/Quasi Public: Almost 11 acres of land are classified as public or quasi public. In West Branch this includes all the land for schools, parks and government offices. These uses are located throughout the City and use about 12% of land area. There is one public and one private elementary school and one middle school in the City.

Vacant/Undeveloped: Vacant land is the third largest land use in the City with over 12 acres and 14% of land area. This is a deceiving figure from the view of a driving survey since it appears that the City is almost fully developed, however there are large tracts of undeveloped land near the borders of the City on the north and south sides and as part of the industrial park. Some of this land is wooded or overgrown so it is not apparent that it is actually within the City's boundaries.



Map prepared by:

 crescent consulting
 ENP & ASSOCIATES
 Last updated: 4/17/08
 Data source:
 Crescent Consulting
 Michigan Geographic Data Library
 Michigan Resource Inventory System

West Branch Existing Land Use

Legend

City Limits	Commercial	Public/Quasi-Public	Railroads
Rivers	Industrial	Single-Family	
Roads	Multi-Family	Vacant/Undeveloped	
Parcels	Parks		

1 inch equals 1,000 feet



Community Input

To ensure that the City's Master Plan reflects the goals of the community, a survey was prepared to gather input from residents. In April 2008, the City of West Branch posted a community survey on their website and made printed copies available at City Hall, senior citizen centers and the library. Input was requested on several major issues including Housing, Land Use, Transportation, Recreation, Blight and Non-conformities, and General Community Development. The City's Planning Commission also hosted an open house where residents could come in and look at displays of the major land use issues in the City and answer short questionnaires about each. Public input was also welcomed at all Planning Commission and City Council meetings.

**A total of 113 surveys were completed:
75 via the website and
38 handwritten.**

GENERAL RESPONDENT PROFILE

- More than 50% of the respondents have lived in the City of West Branch for over 10 years.
- 70% of residents see themselves as "definitely" or "likely" living in West Branch in 10 years.
- Approximately 90% were over the age of 30.

THE CITY OVERALL

There are several reasons that residents have chosen to live in the City of West Branch.

The top reason given by 21% of the respondents was:

Being close to extended family

The next three most frequently chosen reasons were:

- Because of my job
- Housing choices fit my needs
- Pleasant neighborhoods

The most frequently mentioned positives and negatives about living in West Branch were:

Positives + Negatives -

- + Small town, friendly environment
- + Convenient location – close to schools, medical, shopping, work

- Lack of activities – recreation, entertainment
- Too great a police presence
- Lack of jobs
- High property taxes

The most important issue for respondents was the continued growth and development of job opportunities. This was voiced several times throughout the survey both as the need to attract and retain businesses and the importance of providing more job opportunities.

HOUSING

The majority of respondents was satisfied with the variety of housing currently available and felt that there were adequate housing alternatives for future residents. Should additional housing be needed, respondents thought that housing should either be built on undeveloped land in the City or outside of the City.

LAND USE

Many respondents commented that the City is lacking community activity centers - cultural, social, and recreational. Otherwise, they thought that the current density of development in the City was just about right.

TRANSPORTATION

Most respondents did not feel that truck traffic was a problem and understood that it was necessary for commerce. However, 27% did think that truck traffic caused a problem – contributing to noise, pollution and traffic congestion.

The intersection of Valley and Houghton was mentioned the most as having traffic issues. Several other streets that cross Houghton – including Fairview, South Seventh, and Court - and the downtown intersections were mentioned by many. Other congested points seemed to be near Glen's and Brian's Markets. The City is negotiating with M.D.O.T. to make extensive improvements to Houghton Avenue including back-in, angle parking.

In general, the respondents did not feel that parking was an issue for them. Of those that commented, near the downtown area and the area around the Courthouse were mentioned as areas for potential increased parking.

RECREATION

Although 77% of those who responded to the question felt that the City has enough parks and open spaces, many comments were made throughout the survey concerning the lack of community facilities.

The respondents expressed a need for the community to have areas that residents could interact socially – whether it was for recreation, exercise, cultural pursuits, etc. They viewed this as an opportunity to keep the community ties strong while providing activities for its residents. Residents seemed to be mixed on where they thought this type of development should happen; listing north side, center, close to town, and along the river as potential locations.

BLIGHT AND NONCONFORMITIES

The majority (84%) of respondents were not concerned about non-conforming uses or code enforcement near their homes. Just over half of respondents felt that the City should, however, do more to require property owners to keep their properties clean, safe, and well-maintained.

Residents were split on whether they were concerned about the number of vacant properties in the City.

The majority (80%) of respondents did not feel there was a problem with businesses locating in residential neighborhoods. However, several strong comments were made by those opposed to turning homes into businesses.

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT

Only 5% of respondents felt that the City was developing too fast, while 56% felt the City has a clear vision for guiding new development.

Additionally, respondents were mixed on whether the sanitary sewer upgrade should be paid through property taxes or user fees. And only about half were aware of the Sprinkling Meter program. Aged sewer and water distribution systems may be replaced when M.D.O.T. improvement are done on Houghton Avenue.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The City of West Branch has established a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) which provides the business district the tools to improve its economic growth. The DDA is authorized by PA 197 of 1975, which permits its creation of an authority to assist business districts with their financial growth by using tax increment financing (TIF). Tax increment financing provides communities with the ability to fund current projects by using future gains in taxes caused by increasing values of properties. No new taxes are levied but instead tax revenues are increased and invested back into the community.

The City of West Branch established the Downtown Development Authority on December 17, 1979 via Ordinance 154. In creating and establishing the DDA, the City found that the DDA was necessary for the best interests of the public to halt property value deterioration and increase property tax valuation where possible in the City's business district, to eliminate the causes of said deterioration, and to promote economic growth. The boundaries of the DDA were amended on November

17, 1986 (Ordinance 184). The minutes of the Council meeting indicate that this was done to correct an incomplete property description in Ordinance 154. The DDA district was expanded and extended again in November of 2010 by Ordinance 10-9. At this time the development plan was also updated.

The West Branch DDA's first Development Plan/TIF plan, known as "Project Pride" was adopted in 1986. Tax capture took place from 1986 to 2001. Bonds issued for projects in this TIF plan were retired on May 2002. On May 5 of 2003, the City Council approved an amendment/extension of the DDA TIF Plan (Ordinance 03-05). This plan extended and amended the 2003 TIF Plan/Development Plan. Projects that the DDA has provided funding for over the years include:

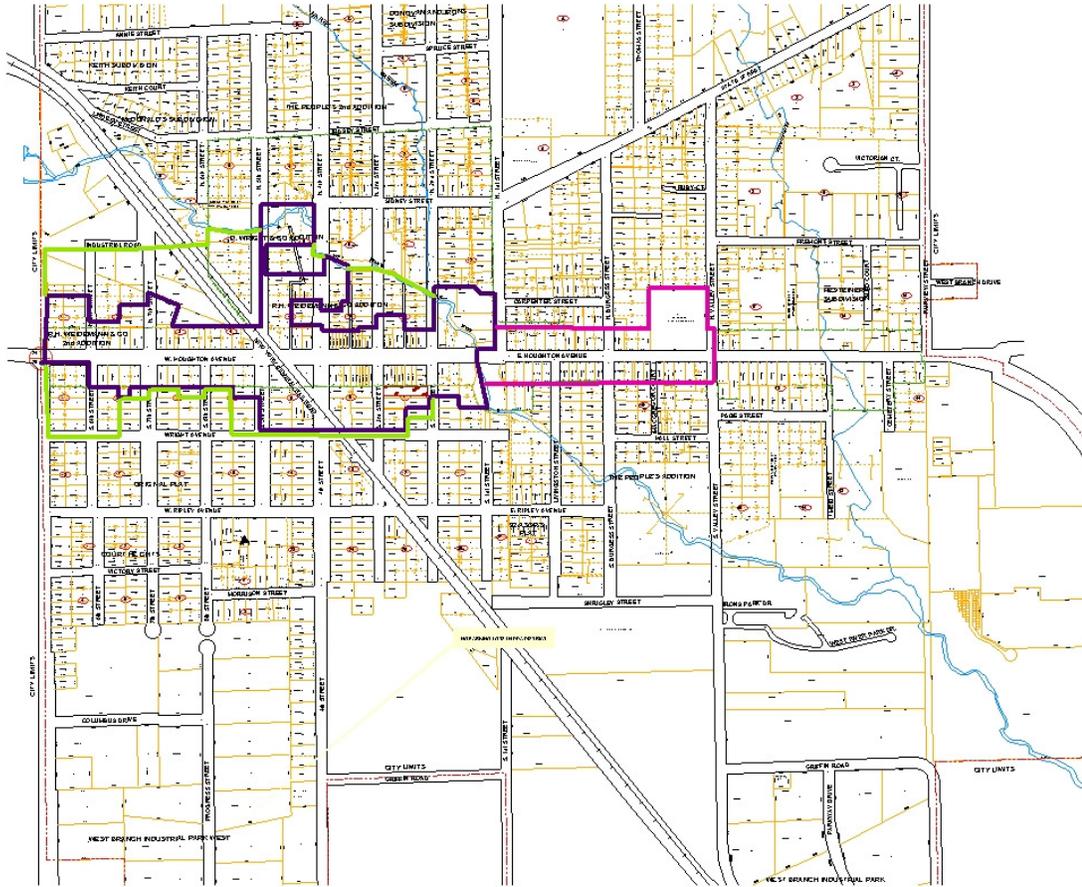
- Downtown streetscape improvements including sidewalks, planter boxes, landscaping, trash receptacles
- A revolving loan fund for façade improvements
- Railroad track crossing improvements
- Alley work
- Street improvements
- Funding for activities of the Retail Merchants Association, including Fabulous Fridays.

The Current DDA Development Plan includes the following objectives and actions:

- Make street improvements where necessary to improve the DDA district.
- Begin a Building Improvement Grant Program.
- Begin a revolving loan fund for gap financing for new businesses.
- Preserve and renovate historic buildings.
- Add restrooms in the downtown area.
- Improve parking in the downtown area.
- Improve and add wayfinding signage in the downtown area.
- Improve walkability in the downtown area by adding and improving sidewalks and multi-use paths.
- Continue to market vacant buildings in the DDA and encourage new businesses.
- Sponsor and promote special events such as sidewalk sales, downtown concerts, farmers market, Fabulous Fridays, art events, etc.
- Acquire or build a public events stage in the DDA district.
- Investigate options for improving the former Mill End Building.
- Investigate business incubator opportunities in the DDA area.
- Look at ways to incorporate public art into the DDA district.

Several of these projects have either been accomplished or are currently underway. A new public stage was acquired and inaugurated this summer. The former Mill End building has been purchased and renovated for use as a business. The DDA is actively sponsoring and promoting special events in the City. ACDBG Grant has

been obtained to assist in the construction of a new pocket park, which includes a new restroom building in downtown, as well as a connector trail to the newly expanded River Trail.



The Current DDA District Map

WELLHEAD PROTECTION PLAN

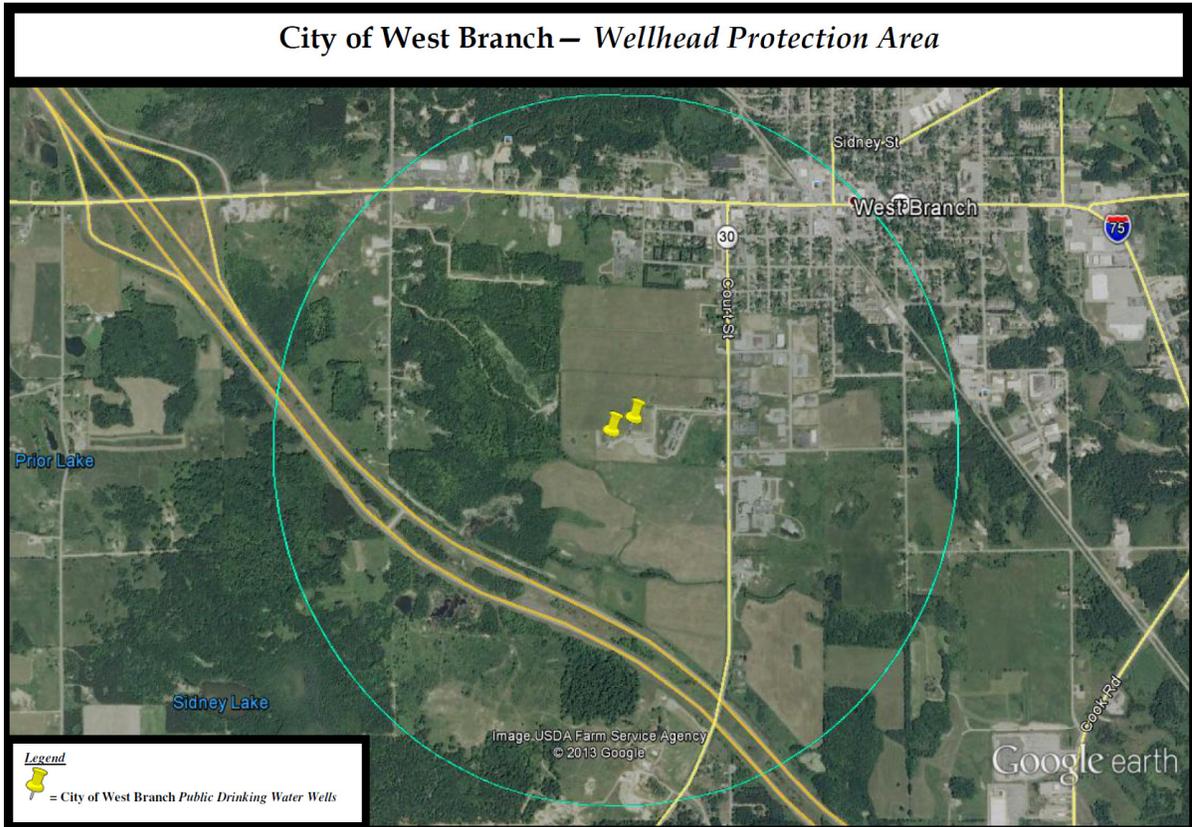
The City of West Branch has an approved Wellhead Protection Plan (WHPP) which will assist the community in developing long-term strategies to insure safe drinking water for their residents. The City of West Branch relies exclusively on groundwater. WHPPs develop long-term strategies aimed at protecting community drinking water supplies. The purpose of developing a WHPP is to identify the Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA) and develop long-term strategies aimed at safeguarding the area from contamination. A WHPA is defined as the surface and subsurface areas surrounding a water well or well field, which supplies a public water system, and through which contaminants are reasonably likely to move toward and reach the water well or well field within a 10-year time-of-travel. The State of Michigan requires communities to identify seven elements to be included in the WHPP. These elements along with a brief description are below.

- Roles and Responsibilities – Identify individuals responsible for the development, implementation, and long-term maintenance of the local WHPP.
- WHPA Delineation – Determine that area which contributes groundwater to the public water supply wells.
- Contaminant Source Inventory – Identify known and potential sites of contamination within the WHPA and include in a contaminant source inventory list and map.
- Management Strategies – Provide mechanisms which will reduce the risk of existing and potential sources of contamination from reaching the public water supply wells or well field.
- Contingency Planning – Develop an effective contingency plan in case of a water supply emergency.
- Siting of New Wells – Provide information on existing groundwater availability, the ability of the PWSS to meet present and future demands and the vulnerability of the existing wells to contamination.
- Public Education and Outreach – Generate community awareness in the WHPP by focusing on public education and the dissemination of WHPP information.

It is the intent of this Master Plan to encourage protection of the City's public water supply wells through the establishment of a Wellhead Protection Zoning Ordinance. Within the ordinance, zoning regulations will limit land uses and practices that may degrade groundwater quality within and outside the WHPA.

The most significant sources of water supply contamination are landfills, surface impoundment areas, subsurface percolation from septic tanks and cesspools, open dumps, uncapped or improperly capped abandoned wells, injection wells and underground storage tanks. These uses represent both *point* and *non-point* contamination sources. Point source is the term used to describe contaminants, which originate in the immediate area of the well or tap. All of the above, if located close to the water supply source, are examples of potential point source polluters. Contaminants from these uses may seep directly down through the soil to the water source.

Non-point source contamination is much more difficult to control because the cause of the problem may actually be located a considerable distance from the well. This type of contamination is caused by pollutants that filter into an underground aquifer and then migrate slowly through the groundwater aquifer to off-site wells and water sources. Prevention of this type of contamination must involve a collective effort on the part of property owners and local officials from a large geographic area. It is the intent of this Plan to recognize the importance of groundwater protection within the City of West Branch. All existing and future wells must be protected from both point and non-point source contamination to the greatest degree possible. It is also the intent of this Plan to recognize the importance of groundwater protection within the City of West Branch.



City of West Branch WHPP Mission Statement

- To insure a safe drinking source for residents and businesses by identifying past, present, and future threats to the public water supply.
- To work with other governmental and private agencies to promote a cooperative effort to protect and maintain our water sources.
- To educate residents, businesses, and children on how to preserve our drinking water.
- To develop a plan of procedures in the event that a harmful substance threatens the drinking water.

Goal	Ideas to accomplish goal
Prevent the pollution of surface and ground water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Plan and develop land uses that will not threaten the water supply -Educate the public on the effects pesticides have on the water supply - Evaluate current land issues and identify threats to the surface and ground water
Promote intergovernmental cooperation to insure protection of water sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Include other governmental agencies in the planning of the Wellhead Protection Program -Ask for assistance in the planning and development of land uses from other government agencies
Promote residential and commercial cooperation to protect surface water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Include people from both sectors in the planning, development, and implementations of the Wellhead Protection Plan -Educate the public on the effects pesticides, oils, paints, etc. have on the surface and ground water
Develop and implement planning provisions to protect ground water and surface water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Work with the Planning Commission to develop and implement planning documents aimed at groundwater protection
Educate the public on the need to protect ground water and surface water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinate education efforts with the school -Produce or purchase educational material to be distributed through special events -Send information to residents and businesses via the quarterly newsletter.
Plan and prepare for water supply emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Set up a plan and update it annually, which sets forth guidelines to follow in the event of an emergency
Protect the public health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ask all involved to watch and inform City Hall of any potential problems -Provide educational materials to residents and businesses -Have an emergency plan -Revisit abandoned well management in the WHPA to determine if further action is needed to inventory and properly abandon wells.

The WHPP contains a “Contamination Source Inventory” (CSI) that identified potential sources of groundwater contamination within the Well Head Protection Area from existing state databases. The following summarizes the inventory:

Sites of Environmental Contamination (201 Sites)

There was one Part 201 site of environmental contamination within the City of West Branch WHPA (Part 201 Site List).

- The Bicycle Factory, 201 N. 8th Street (Pollutants: PB, VCs, Xylenes, Paint Sludge, Paint Waste, Solvents)

Underground Storage Tank Sites

There are six active Underground Storage Tank (UST) sites within the WHPA (Storage Tank Information Center).

- Chemical Bank, 700 W. Houghton Avenue
- Forwards West Branch Mini Plaza, 600 W. Houghton Avenue (1 UST)
- Mobil, 411 West Houghton Avenue
- Schmitt Tire & Gas, 624 W. Houghton Avenue (1 UST)
- The Lazy Oil Company, 116 S. Third Street (1 UST)
- West Branch Regional Medical Center, 2463 S. M 30 (1 UST)

There are six closed USTs within the WHPA (Storage Tank Information Center).

- First Bank, 520 W. Houghton Avenue
- Lahti Fabrication, 651 Columbus Drive
- Ogemaw County Correctional Facility, 912 W. Houghton Avenue
- Ogemaw County Sheriff's Department, 806 W. Wright Street
- The Bicycle Factory, 201 N. 8th Street
- West Branch Diesel, 305 Court Street

Leaking Underground Storage Tank Sites

There are two open Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST) sites located within the City of West Branch WHPA (Storage Tank Information Center).

- Chemical Bank, 700 W. Houghton Avenue
- Schmitt Tire & Gas, 624 W. Houghton Avenue

There are four closed LUST sites located within the City of West Branch WHPA (Storage Tank Information Center).

- First Bank, 520 W. Houghton Avenue
- Forwards West Branch Mini Plaza, 600 W. Houghton Avenue
- Lahti Fabrication, 651 Columbus Drive
- Ogemaw County Sheriff's Department, 806 W. Wright Street

Oil and Gas Contamination Sites

City staff surveyed the Wellhead Protection Area to determine that there are no oil and gas wells located within the WHPA.

Hazardous Waste Generators

There are nineteen Hazardous Waste Generator sites located within the WHPA (Michigan Hazardous Waste Treatment, Storage and Disposal Facilities Directory and WHMD WDS Web Inquiry System).

- Agricultural Property, 2292 S. M-30
- Agricultural Property, 2512 S. First Street
- Agricultural Property, 2699 S. First Street
- Ameritech Corporation, 141 S. 5th Street
- City of West Branch Department of Public Works, 403 S. 1st Street
- County of Ogemaw, 806 W. Houghton Avenue
- Forward Corporation, 600 W. Houghton Avenue
- Lahti Fabrication., 651 Columbus Drive
- Michigan Department of Transportation, I-75 Northbound and Northbound over M-30
- Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency, 630 Progress Street
- Schmitt Tire & Gas, 624 W. Houghton Avenue
- Selly's Cleaners, 135 N. 4th Street
- Village Quik Lube, 3149 W. Houghton Avenue
- West Branch Collision Inc., 2515 S. M-30
- West Branch Medical Center, 2463 S. M-30
- West Branch Recycling Center, 153 N. 4th Street
- West Branch Tire and Automotive Services Inc., 962 W. Houghton Avenue
- Whiting Oil and Gas Corporation, Oil lines located throughout the WHPA
- Zettels Collision, 3091 W. Houghton Avenue

Groundwater Discharge Permits

According to the MDEQ, there are no groundwater discharge permit facilities located within the WHPA.

Landfill/Solid Waste Disposal Site List

There are no Solid Waste Disposal sites located within the WHPA (WHMD WDS Web Inquiry System).

Federal National Priority Sites

There are no federal national priority list sites located within the WHPA (National Priorities List).

Other Sites of Concern

There are several sites that were included in the previous WHPP Plan, but are not included on the MDEQ lists. They are:

- Dore Store, 411 W. Houghton Avenue
- Charles Wangler—Wangler Implement, 114 S. 4th Street
- Dean Arbor Ford Jeep Eagle, 3382 W. M-55
- Evergreen Clinic, 611 Court Street
- Maxi Muffler, 930 W. Houghton Avenue
- Railroad, City of West Branch, Throughout the WHPA
- Tri City Line X, 155 N. 4th Street
- West Branch Automotive, 623 W. Houghton Avenue
- West Branch Farmers Coop, 105 N. 7th Street
- West Branch Greenhouse, 166 N. 5th Street
- Wash It, 137 N. 4th Street
- West Branch Tank & Trailer, 129 N. 5th Street

Site Plan Review Criteria

The City has received an example site plan review that includes specific elements aimed at groundwater protection measures. It is interested in comparing this example with its current site plan review standards. The City believes that additional measures can be added to its current standards to ensure groundwater protection. The Planning Commission will review the standards. West Branch Township and Ogemaw Township are also interested in receiving the site plan review standards.

Environmental Permits Checklist

The City will also look into incorporating the Environmental Permits Checklist into its site plan review process. West Branch Township and Ogemaw Township are also interested in receiving the Environmental Permits Checklist.

Storm Water Management

Last year, the City installed two rain gardens in Iron's Park. Huron Pines worked with the Nature Conservancy and local students to install the rain gardens. In addition, the City has put in a storm water retention basin in South Valley near the Rifle River. This year, it is putting in another basin on South Burgess Street. Although these sites are located outside of the WHPA, the City would like to

continue looking for areas within the WHPA to improve storm water management efforts.

Abandoned Well Management

Although the City did a search of abandoned wells and plugged several of them, it will still educate the public about the danger of abandoned wells. The MRWA has provided information that can be included on the City's website and at City Offices.

Future Land Use



Discussion

The Planning Commission has reviewed and analyzed the various elements that may propel or retard development in the City of West Branch. The slowing of migration northward in Michigan since 2000, much effected by the recession of 2007-8, is a primary factor. The slowing of the economy nationwide and globally has had a notable effect on local economic activity. And although it appears the economy is improving, it is debatable whether we have seen the end of the consequences of the recession. Even though the City's population has a good balance of age cohorts, in the county and elsewhere in our northern region, the population is aging significantly. Despite West Branch having better than average employment opportunities, the region loses many of its younger generation to other areas of the state and nation where opportunities are much greater and wages and salaries are much higher. And the City has a disproportion of poor residents. All of these conditions have reduced housing and commercial property values and lessened the motivation for new development in and around the City.

Demographic changes in the county as a whole also have an effect in West Branch and are reflected in the plan. People are living longer, delaying marriage and child bearing, and birthrates have sunk to almost non-replacement levels. More housing choices for retirees and childless couples and individuals, more job opportunities for all ages, and a vibrant mixed-use, walkable downtown are called for. The City needs to offer entrepreneurial and job opportunities to keep and attract young talent. By continuing to provide the kinds of social and cultural activities that it is carrying on now, the city and its neighbors can attract and hold residents of all ages -- Boomers, Millennials and younger citizens -- as well as generating increased economic activity. The community survey completed by the Planning Commission in 2008 stated: **“The most important issue for respondents was the continued growth and development of job opportunities.”** This plan carries forward that ambition.

Vision

The City of West Branch Planning Commission sets forth this vision for the City of West Branch:

The City of West Branch will be a home town and a destination for visitors that is neat, trim, and friendly. It will be a town with a vibrant commercial downtown that provides diverse retail shops and services. The downtown will be pedestrian friendly with low speed traffic. Offerings for residents and guests will include special events, its parks, arts and culture, as well as a variety of culinary choices in its restaurants.

The city is located within a region rich in natural resources, forests, lakes, and rivers that will provide wide-ranging outdoor activities including hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, skiing, and many others.

The West Branch region will continue to be a hub for large box retail, outlet retail, medical, and distribution businesses. It will continue to have a diverse range of retail, services, and manufacturing establishments, all providing significant employment opportunities.

Goals & Objectives

The primary goal of this plan is to maintain and foster the growth and advancement of the City of West Branch as a place of order, enjoyment and opportunity for all its citizens. To do so the following objectives are put forward:

- Involve West Branch citizens in activities of the city that will advance the primary goal of this plan.
- Maintain the city's high quality residential neighborhoods and encourage new appropriate development.
- Maintain and improve the city infrastructure including the transportation functioning of the CBD.
- Promote and support existing businesses in the city and region to thrive and grow.
- Market the city and the region to attract additional commercial and industrial enterprises.
- Market the city and its environs to draw visitors and tourists to support local businesses and the local economy.

Objective:

- *Involve West Branch citizens in activities of the city that will advance the primary goal of this plan.*

Actions:

- Use the City website to provide meeting agenda and minutes of all council, committee, commission, and other bodies as well as to explicate issues and matters of importance before these boards.
- Include as many interested citizens as possible on committees on other boards. Encourage members of various boards to participate with other boards to increase communication among all the city government divisions. These boards may also include county and regional groups.

Objective:

- *Maintain the city's high quality residential neighborhoods and encourage new appropriate development.*

Actions:

- Ensure that the city zoning ordinance provides for sufficient areas for the construction of high quality dwellings, multi-family, townhouse, single family, and two-family, of varying densities and types.
- Enforce the blight ordinances to eliminate conditions that discourage the upkeep of existing housing and the construction of new high-quality developments.
- Continue and promote the housing rehabilitation program for improving existing housing stock.
- Work with realtors and builders to attract developers that can construct desired housing developments.

Objective:

- *Maintain and improve the city infrastructure including the transportation functioning of the CBD.*

Actions:

- Continue to make the downtown area “pedestrian friendly” and attractive by continuing to install streetscaping features including street lights, trees where appropriate, benches, wayfinding signage, parks, and well-maintained sidewalks and paths.
- Continue to negotiate with the Michigan Department of Transportation to re-surface Houghton Avenue and at the same time to replace aged sewer and water infrastructure in the right-of-way.
- Continue to investigate “back in” angle parking in the downtown area.
- Have installed traffic controls along the I75 Business Loop (Family Fare and Brian’s area). Include signage for the service drive in this area.

- Fill the gap between the City and the West Branch Township pedestrian and bicycle trails at Kmart.
- Ensure infrastructure is in place for desired development.

Objective:

- *Promote and support existing businesses in the city and region to thrive and grow.*

Actions:

- Continue to support tax incentives for industrial expansions.
- Establish guidelines for landscaping, including screening standards, and for architectural finishes with the Victorian theme.
- Continue programs to enhance façades and rear entrances of buildings, including potentially the MEDC/CDBG grant program.
- Make changes to zoning ordinance and signage regulations to allow for greater flexibility in downtown area – mixed-use CBD district.

Objective:

- *Market the city and the region to attract additional commercial and industrial enterprises.*

Actions:

- Inventory with local realtor’s available buildings and properties and their conditions for sale or lease (utilize city and other websites to portray).
- Determine the best mix of businesses needed in the downtown and identify lacks and market to them.
- Support and monitor programs for rehabilitation by the DDA and Ogemaw County (Façade Improvements Program, Brownfields, etc.).

- Support and monitor marketing of the downtown with regional partners.
- Ensure a strong marketing message is created and displayed on the City’s website and on other local websites.
- Create a marketing pamphlet.

Objective:

- *Market the city and its environs to draw visitors and tourists to support local businesses and the local economy.*

Actions:

- Continue special events that entertain residents and bring visitors to the city.
- Continue to work with neighboring townships to market the downtown and adjoining commercial areas with the Victorian theme.
- Develop and install wayfinding signage that will direct visitors to the West Branch Downtown and to other special sites in the city and elsewhere.
- Continue to cooperate with the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Corp., and neighboring DDA’s to promote the city and its attractions.

Future Land Use

FUTURE LAND USE CHANGES

The Planning Commission had reviewed the existing land uses and previous future land use map from the 2009 Master Plan and discussed the previous land uses changes. It was determined that there were no changes necessary from the 2009 master plan future land use map. However, a discussion of implementing a mixed use type of policy within the “Downtown Commercial” district may encourage desired development of some of the downtown vacant storefronts and under-utilized residences along the main street. Allowing mixed use developments may revitalize the downtown, and attract entrepreneurs and young professionals by providing more services and housing opportunities within the downtown. Below is a discussion of the 2009 changes:

Residential: The total of all land being designated for residential uses has changed less than 1% of the total land area and under one acre in size from the existing status to that proposed on the Future Land Use map. This is primarily due to designating most of the now vacant and/or undeveloped land as either single or multiple-family residential.

- Single family residential has been extended to the northwest up to the City boundary and north of State Street in the northeast corner of the City. These two additions of future single family land uses account for the greatest change in location of single family dwellings, but overall, the percentage and acres of land designated for single family remains almost constant.
- Multiple family uses area now shown south of the railroad tracks and east of First Street and encompassing the blocks between Carpenter, Burgess, State and First streets in the north center of the City. Many areas shown as having multiple family now on the existing land use map are shown as single family on the future land use map, meaning that there is no intention of expanding the multiple family uses in these areas.

The existing land use is roughly a half and half mix of single and multiple family dwellings.

The City of West Branch has a large number of multiple family units per capita for a community of its size with .35 units for every person, compared to roughly .1 units in communities such as the cities of Beaverton, Clare and Auburn. (Source: 2000 US Census of Population and Housing) West Branch also has a large population of senior citizens living in the multiple family units in the City. This population is generally considered the most stable type of renter, meaning they move less frequently than other age groups. The community survey indicates that there is additional demand for senior housing and higher-end multiple family units. These indicators, combined with a vacancy rate of 19%, a rate that is somewhat higher than the state overall for multiple family units, appears to show that there is a consistent market for these units, making it reasonable to plan for additional areas for multifamily.

Commercial: This is the category that shows the most change in area from the existing land uses to the future land uses. The existing land use map did not classify commercial land among the office, downtown and general categories as the future land use map does so the changes are somewhat more difficult to categorize.

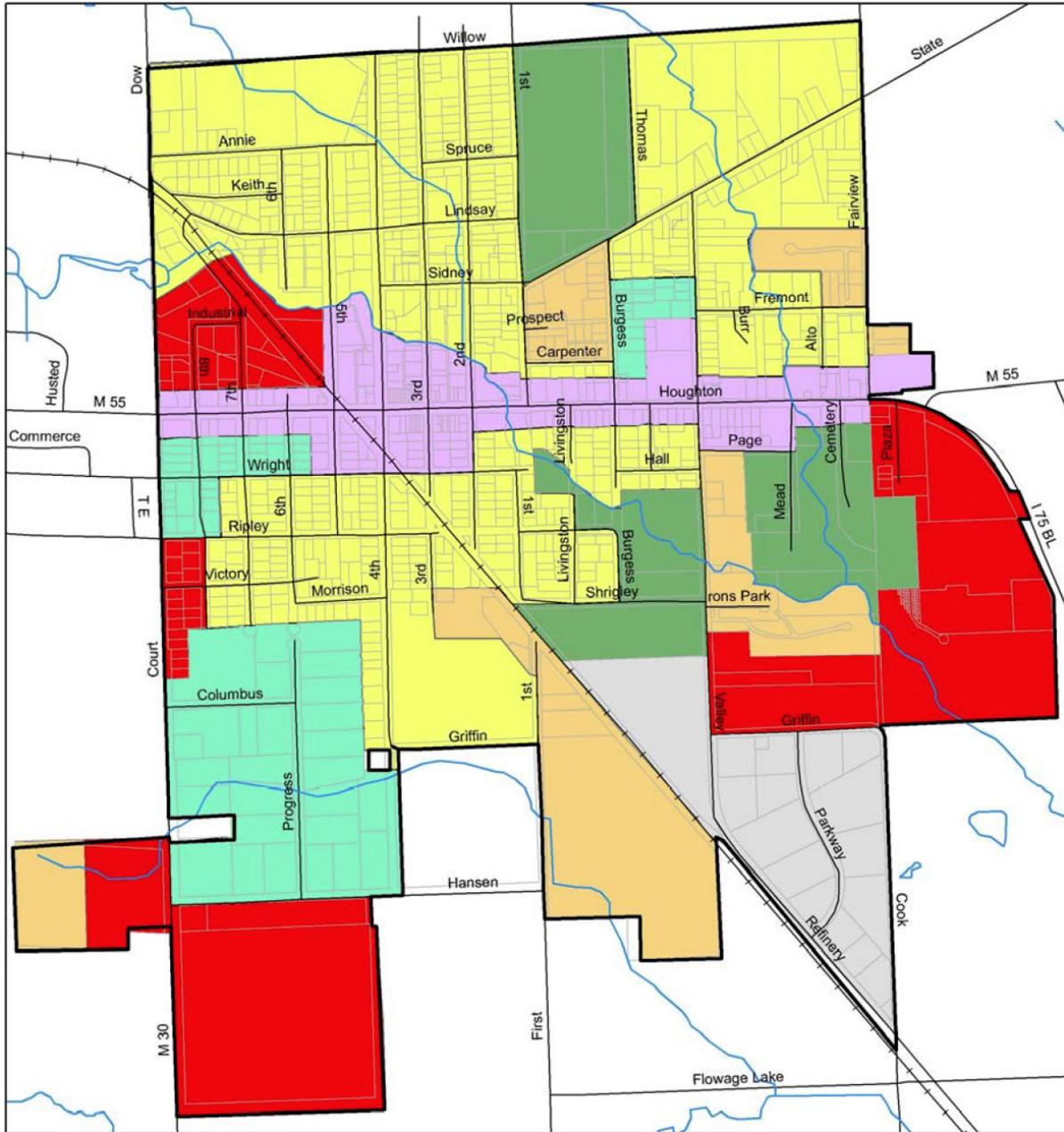
Overall there has been an increase of 32 acres in commercial land, most of this being reflected in the change from vacant status on the Existing Land Use Map to commercial status on the Future Land Use map. There has also been a change from an existing undeveloped industrial area to commercial status in the Future Land Use Map, located north of Houghton and west of 6th Streets. These changes, among many smaller designations, show in Increase of 14% of all land area in the City now classified as some form of commercial.

- The downtown commercial category has been extended to run the full length of the City along M-55, eventually intending on eliminating residential uses that now dot the main road. Seven acres or 8% of land is categorized this way.
- Office uses have also been expanded significantly as the once platted industrial park surrounding Progress and Columbus streets is now designated for office uses. Office uses are almost 9 acres in total and 10% of total land use in the City.
- Office uses have been officially designated along Court and Wright streets and along Burgess, just north and abutting the existing downtown commercial uses on Houghton. The purpose of this is to officially designate office locations in the City to prevent future encroachment of office uses into the residential areas.
- General Commercial uses are shown along the highways at the edges of the City. These include business route I-75 and portions of M-30/Court Street. General Commercial uses comprise 16 acres and about 18.5% of land uses.

Industrial: Proposed industrial land use decreases with this Master Plan by a small amount. An area along the rail road tracks in the central western portion of the City is currently being used, albeit very underused, as an industrial area. The consensus of the community is that this area is better suited and more likely to develop as commercial in the future.

An industrial area on Thomas in the northern portion of the City that is now being used as a beverage distribution warehouse is also shown as changing from industrial to parks and public uses. This area is directly across from school property and situated among residential and vacant land use that is planned for residential. Both of these changes total a decrease of 3.5 acres and a decrease of almost 3% in total industrial uses.

Parks/Public: The Future Land Use map shows these two uses as dark green. Statistically, there is a two acre decrease in the mapped land shown for Parks and Public land, comparing the Existing Land Use map to the Future Land Use map. The decrease is due to changing the land use designation for some public offices, such as the courthouse, to commercial land uses on the Future Land Use map. The purpose of this is to eliminate the ownership distinction on the Future Land Use map so that the map can be used as a basis for zoning decisions, which are use based. The uses in this category are parks, a cemetery, public schools and the river walk.



West Branch Future Land Use Map

Map Prepared by:

 crescent consulting
 ENP ASSOCIATES
 Last updated: 9/14/08
 Data source:
 Michigan Geographic Data Library
 and City of West Branch

Legend					
	Rivers		Downtown Commercial		Multi-Family Residential
	Roads		General Commercial		Office
	Parcels*		Industrial		Parks/Public
					Single-Family Residential



*Accuracy of parcel lines is not guaranteed and should be used for planning purposes only

1 inch = 1,000 feet