



CHAPTER 5: VISIONING THE FUTURE

FEATURING:

- PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY
- ALTERNATIVES FOR FUTURE LAND USE
- ST. CLAIR COUNTY VISION 2045
- KEY PLANNING ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Since the development of the 2000 St. Clair County Master Plan, the public has been actively engaged in helping determine the overall direction for managing change in St. Clair County and its various local units of government. The following summary of public involvement pertains to this current update of the St. Clair County Master Plan and, as such, captures the time period from January 2013 to adoption of the plan in **TBD 2016**. The MPC recognizes and is grateful for the ongoing interest and valuable input from both the public and officials from local units of government to help shape and enhance the quality of life in St. Clair County.

Change is inevitable. The challenge is to anticipate change, plan for it, adapt to it, and thus benefit from it. For St. Clair County, the primary changes between 2015 and 2045 will be centered around demographic shifts (i.e. an aging population), infrastructure needs, and economic diversification. Therefore, there is one overriding recommendation within the St. Clair County Master Plan: Ensure that St. Clair County is a resilient community. Resilience is the capacity to adapt to change, whether gradual or sudden. Resilient communities can effectively adapt to changes in economic conditions, environmental conditions, and land use and transportation.

The success of any planning process is reliant upon public involvement. The MPC was committed to pursue a proactive public outreach effort throughout the development of this plan. Efforts were focused on soliciting community input to maximize awareness of the planning process. For the development of this master plan, the MPC turned to new methods of obtaining input and ideas from residents and other stakeholders. Namely, county planners took the process to where people already were and where residents could have easy access to the process: online and at community events.

Following is a summary of public involvement in the development of this plan.

JOINT BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

In the early stages of the master plan update process, a joint meeting between the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners and the Metropolitan Planning Commission was held on September 18, 2013. At this meeting, planning staff presented an overview of their current and projected work program, including the various projects and program areas in which they were involved. Planners also highlighted the input that had been received thus far from residents and from a survey of all the local planning commissions within the county.

After a summary of the public input, planners ran both boards through an exercise to prioritize program areas and planning activities. Additional discussions about the future of the capital improvement program and new regional planning initiatives were also held.

The 2013 joint BOC/MPC meeting also used the outcomes from two previous joint meetings in 2008 and 2009 as conversation starters.

IDEASCALE: ST. CLAIR COUNTY MASTER PLAN

For a one-year period beginning in May 2013, the MPC utilized an online public engagement tool called "IdeaScale" that allowed users to have an interactive discussion on planning issues. Users had the ability to submit ideas for the betterment of the county, vote on ideas submitted by other users, have detailed discussions to further elaborate on ideas or concerns, and provide other input they felt was important to the planning process.

5 Broad Objectives from 2008 Joint Meeting:

- Establish Efficient Government systems that are Flexible and Responsive
- Reduce Barriers to Business Start-up and Growth
- Stimulate Economic change through Regional Cooperation
- Foster Growth through Investments in Transportation
- Strengthen Traditional Downtowns through Urban Reinvestments

Focus Points from 2009 Joint Meeting:

- Market for lifestyles
- Increase involvement with SEMCOG
- Focus on education
- Airport Improvements
- Increase Business/Entrepreneur support
- Streamline the development process
- Intergovernmental Collaboration

Key Outcomes from 2013 Joint BOC/MPC Meeting

In an exercise focused on examining various program areas in which the planning department is involved, the BOC and MPC identified the following program areas as higher priorities that should be continued and expanded:

- Organizational Planning (i.e. departmental strategic plans, other special county plans)
- Economic Development
- Community Development
- Research and Data Development
- Local Community Assistance
- Non-Motorized Transportation
- Transportation Planning
- Waterfront Planning

The annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP) should be overhauled and brought into alignment with the county budget process. Both the BOC and MPC agreed that the importance of the CIP to the county organization needed to be highlighted and that the CIP process needed more buy-in from county departments.

In terms of participating in regional planning initiatives, both the BOC and MPC expressed strong support for continued active participation in the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), while at the same time staying in tune with new opportunities for collaboration with the new Region 6 (statewide prosperity region) consisting of the counties along the I-69 corridor and the Thumb.

Input sought for new St. Clair County Master Plan

Published: Tuesday, July 16, 2013



By Jeri Paoker
Staff Writer

Metropolitan Planning Commission is updating the St. Clair County Master Plan, but before that happens, planners will go through loads of feedback from county residents, business owners and other stakeholders in the county.



The IdeaScale website was a useful tool that provided access to stakeholders 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also allowed people to access the site and contribute to the process by simply logging on to their computer or smart phone. Traditional public meetings are sometimes difficult for people to attend for a number of reasons:

- There are fewer newspapers on porches.
- Work/family commitments (people are busy).
- Tough to draw in younger participants.
- Limited idea-generation/discussion in public meetings.
- Some people are reluctant to speak up in a public setting.
- It can be easier for special interests to hijack discussions at meetings.
- Once the meeting is over, engagement typically ends.
- There is potential to miss out on good ideas if the meeting has come and gone.

Why engage the public online?

- Allows planners to go to where the people are: tablets and smartphones.
- People are already interacting on the social web (i.e. Facebook, Twitter)
- More opportunity for discussion.
- Generation X and Millennials favor collaborative decision-making.
- Allows for increased transparency and access.
- Discussion threads afford planners and stakeholders opportunities for automatic follow-up. There is no meeting that will simply end.

Below are highlights of the input received on the IdeaScale website, which ultimately had 100 users, 35 submitted ideas, 310 votes on those ideas, and 50 discussion comments.

IDEASCALE SUMMARY: Public Input on Community and Economic Development

- Redevelop St. Clair County's brownfield sites.
- Repurposing the McMorran assets for collegiate use.
- Develop or sell the St. Clair County Airport.
- Develop a new combination train/bus station.
- Turn Desmond Landing into a mall like Partridge Creek in Macomb County.
- Develop a waterfront hotel in Fort Gratiot.
- Develop a large, development-ready industrial site.
- Create additional highway access into Port Huron.
- Recruit a major automaker to locate in St. Clair County.
- Build an economic development welcome team.
- Hold a master planning conference each year.

IDEASCALE SUMMARY: Public Input on Environment and Sustainability

- Support green energy for the individual homeowner.
- Harness the energy being created by Lake Huron dumping into the St. Clair River.
- Protect and restore our rivers, lakes, and streams.
- Support community recycling in St. Clair County.

IDEASCALE SUMMARY: Public Input on Housing and Neighborhoods

- Eliminate blight in our communities.
- Encourage and strengthen neighborhood watch programs.
- Promote minimum acreage and minimum road frontage in rural areas.
- Utilize green infrastructure in housing developments.

IDEASCALE SUMMARY: Public Input on Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

- Get McMorran Place to be self-sustaining.
- Need an indoor waterpark in downtown Port Huron.
- Pave the Wadhams to Avoca Trail and call it the ‘Yale to Wadhams Trail.’
- We need improved access to our rivers and lakes.

IDEASCALE SUMMARY: Public Input on Public Services and Infrastructure

- Capitalize on our waterways.
- More public transportation accessibility. Would like to see a new Amtrak station in downtown Port Huron.
- Bike path development - more paved bike paths with longer distances.
- Look into developing special corridor studies for key growth corridors, including Range Road, Fred Moore Highway, Marine City Highway, and potentially Gratiot.

IDEASCALE SUMMARY: Public Input on Quality of Life

- Adopt ordinances to control deforestation.
- Improve access to healthy food.

INPUT FROM LOCAL UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

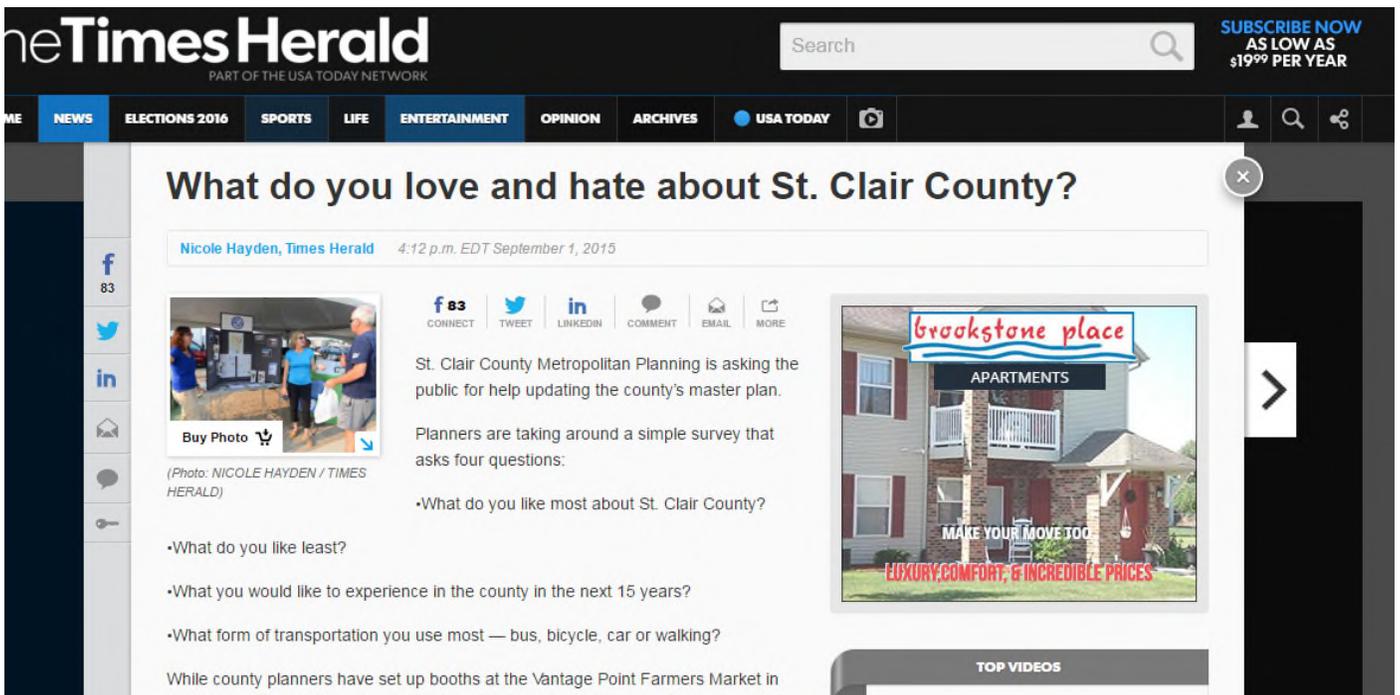
MPC staff analyzed every local master plan and studied each community’s goals and objectives so that we could ensure that the County Master Plan integrates those priority goals as appropriate. An overarching goal of the MPC is for the County Master Plan to bolster and complement local plans. Over the years, most communities have integrated elements of the County Master Plan into their own master plans – directing growth to existing infrastructure, preserving community character, protecting sensitive environmental areas, and planning for road improvements are just a sampling of such plan elements.

In 2013, the MPC surveyed all of the local planning commissions in the county to get their input on what they see as the biggest issues and opportunities for both their own community and the county as a whole.

Key local issues for communities: Key local issues identified in the planning commission surveys included employment/job training, road maintenance, public safety, blight, downtown development, and an aging population.

The biggest cross-jurisdictional planning issues for communities were incompatible land uses, the rising cost of public service delivery, blight, environmental issues, collaboration and funding.

Local units felt the biggest opportunities for St. Clair County were tourism, water and waterfront resources, the



proximity of the Canadian market, new private sector investment, recreational growth, and downtown development.

COUNTY MASTER PLAN ON-SITE OUTREACH

Just as the utilization of IdeaScale was an attempt to reach people where they already were, county planners set up a booth at local farmers markets in September 2015 to interact with residents and get additional input about what people like about their community and what they would like to see in the county over the next fifteen years. During these market visits, planners had a number of trend maps available for people to review and also surveyed those in attendance. On-site visits to farmers markets included:

- August 29, 2015: Vantage Point Farmers Market in Port Huron
- September 1, 2015: Vantage Point Farmers Market in Port Huron
- September 3, 2015: Marine City Farmers Market
- September 3, 2015: Algonac Farmers Market
- September 10, 2015: Algonac Farmers Market

Additionally, the brief survey forms were available at the following library branches for an extended period of time:

- September 15-22, 2015: St. Clair County Library - Capac Branch
- September 15-22, 2015: St. Clair County Library - Yale Branch

Combined, county planners interacted with hundreds of people during these on-site visits, which resulted in 250 surveys being completed. Those who completed the quick survey were asked three basic questions:

1. What two things they liked best about St. Clair County...
2. What two things they liked least about St. Clair County...
3. Something I would like to experience in St. Clair County in the next 15 years...

After compiling and analyzing the input, key themes emerged.

ON-SITE OUTREACH SUMMARY: *The two things I like best about St. Clair County are...*

- Our water resources and access to the waterfront.
- There are an abundance of parks and trails.
- Small towns and good people.
- Proximity to Detroit and to Canada.
- Natural beauty - lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- Great sense of community, civic pride, and fun community events.
- Beautiful area with a low cost of living.

ON-SITE OUTREACH SUMMARY: *The two things I like least about St. Clair County are...*

- Commercial development is spread out and there is a general lack of shopping, restaurants, and entertainment in downtowns.
- Blight and poverty spread throughout the community.
- Concern for public health due to proximity to “Chemical Valley” and the area’s high cancer rate.
- Lack of employment opportunities, particularly good paying jobs - both professional and manufacturing jobs.
- There are a lot of negative attitudes about our community and a general fear of change.
- Road conditions and the general timing of road construction projects.
- Not a lot of entertainment options for all ages and not much to do for young people.

ON-SITE OUTREACH SUMMARY: *Something I would like to experience in St. Clair County in the next 15 years...*

- Better roads
- More parks and additional trails
- Thriving downtowns with a diverse mix of shopping and restaurants
- A countywide public transportation system
- More waterfront parks, businesses, and events
- More activities and things to do for young people and teens
- More arts and cultural opportunities
- More and better jobs to keep our youth here

ALTERNATIVES FOR FUTURE LAND USE

ALTERNATIVE 1: USE GENERALIZED FUTURE LAND USE PLANS

This alternative makes the assumption that it will be possible for all of St. Clair County's 32 local units of government to actually pursue their individual master plans as they are currently written and approved.

The local master plans have many good features. Master plans for the townships and much of the county encourage farmland preservation. Most master plans provide ample land for industrial, commercial, and residential use. And the master plans state a desire to preserve open space and create recreational areas.

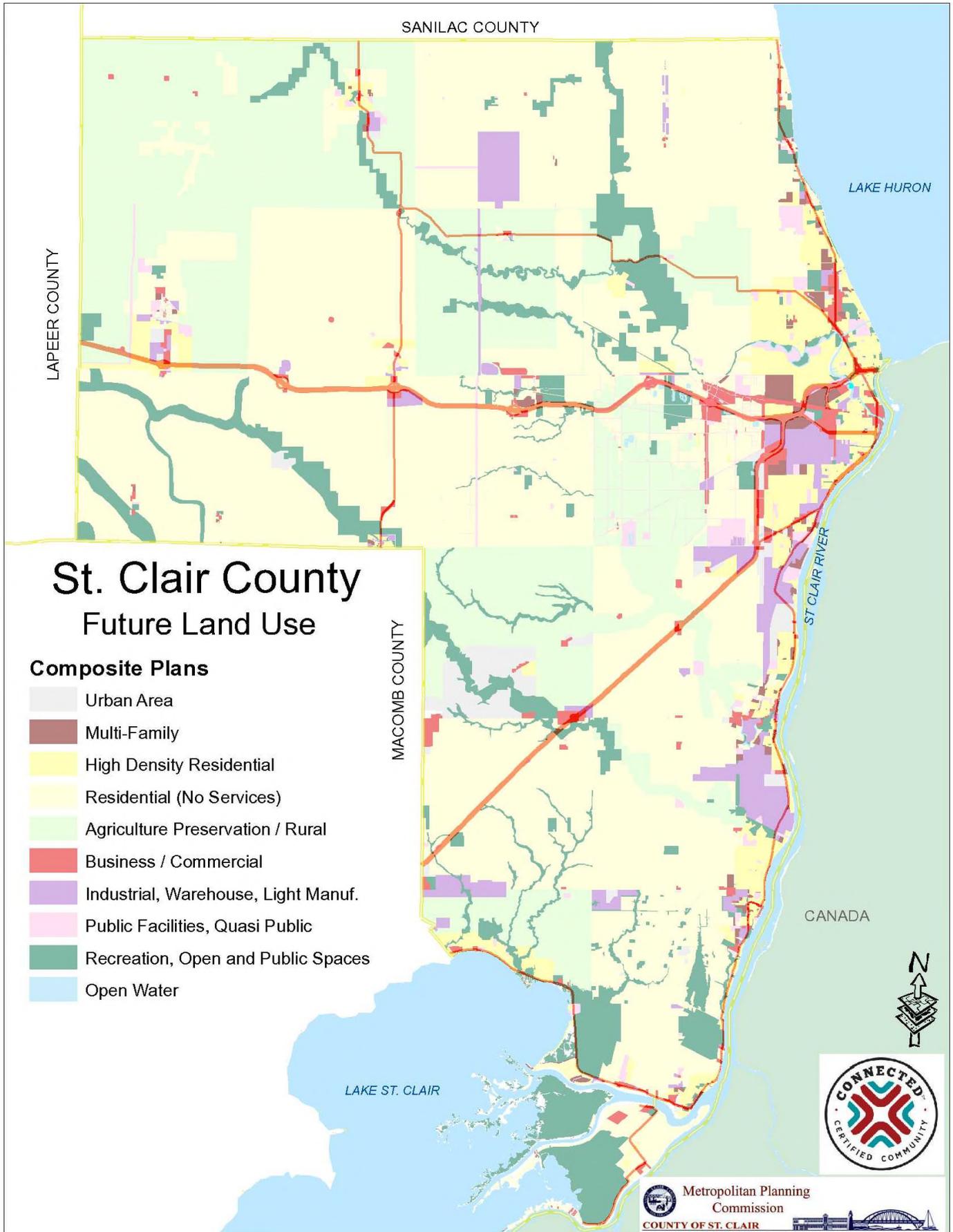
The local master plans also have some negative features. Master plans for the townships in the northwest part of the county allow residential homes to be built in fields along rural roads adjacent to farmland without an adequate buffer or provisions for these disparate uses. Local master plans also designate more land than is necessary for industrial, commercial, and residential use. And few contain mechanisms to protect water quality or rural character.

Individual local master plans also don't necessarily relate to land use planning in adjacent communities. For example, the area next to a stream may be protected as open space in one community, not protected in the next community, and protected in a third downstream community. This lack of coordination creates a checkerboard pattern that endangers the integrity of the entire corridor and negates the possibility of a trail or natural habitat that would benefit all communities along the corridor.

Generalized Master Plans

The map associated with this alternative represents the intention of all township and municipal generalized master plans as of 2015.

- Much of most townships are designated as agriculture/rural residential (off-white). Municipalities and townships along the eastern shore are designated as low-density residential (light yellow) and high-density residential (dark yellow).
- There are scattered pockets for industry and manufacturing (purple), business and commercial use (red), and office complexes (orange).
- Recreation and open space (green) is planned in unconnected strips from community to community, as is the case with sections of Pine River, Belle River, and Mill Creek.



ALTERNATIVE 2: USE GENERALIZED ZONING ORDINANCES

Local zoning ordinances, as currently written, contradict the intentions of local master plans.

Local zoning ordinances preserve only small amounts of land for agricultural purposes and contain few provisions for protecting natural resources and open space. In fact, local zoning ordinances allow for residential development that would house over 1 million people, which is 5.4 times more than the county's population in 2000.

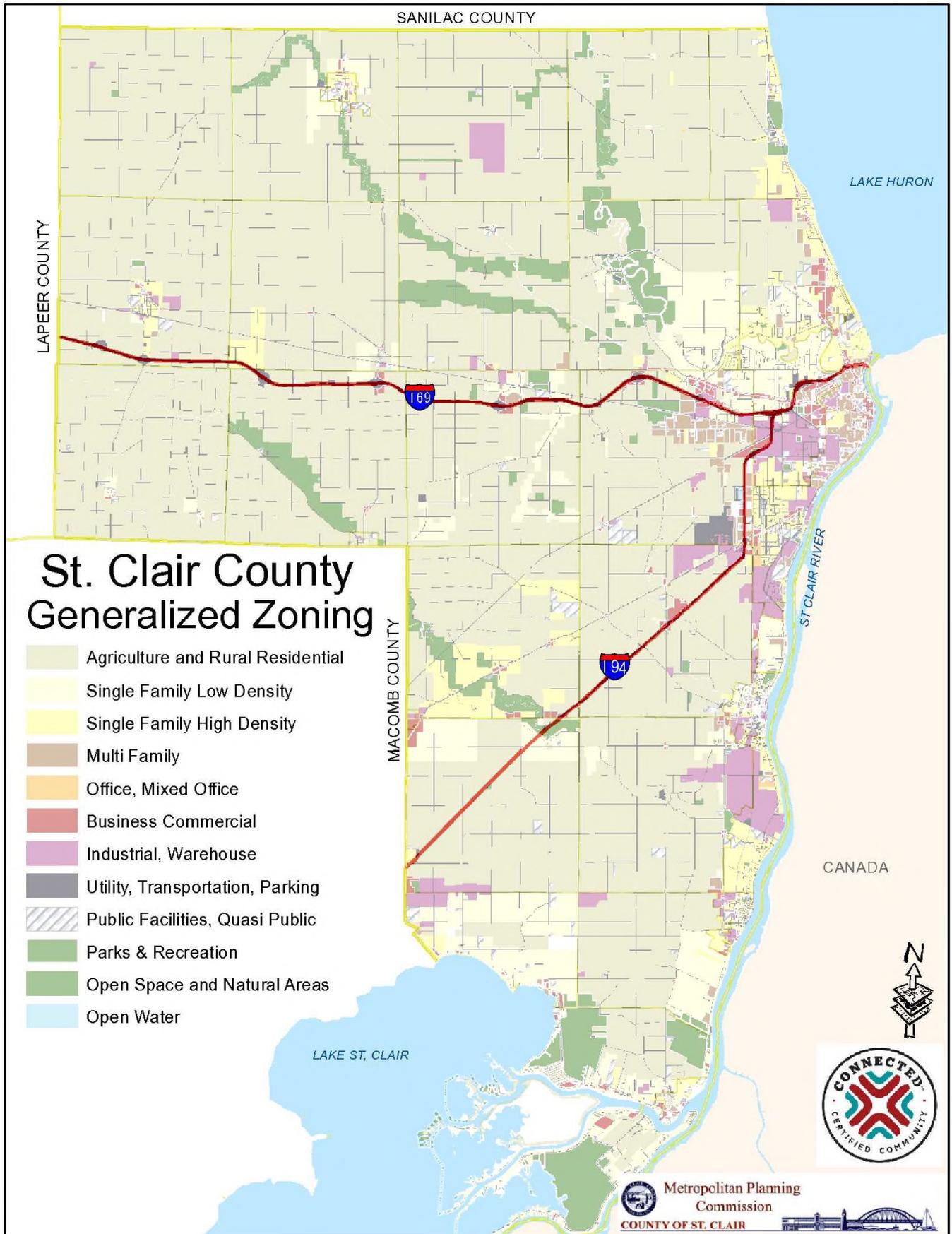
Local zoning ordinances allow for low-density residential development on lots of two to five acres. That population density will be too low to economically provide public water and sewer lines, but too high for adequate on-site septic systems and for groundwater supplies from wells.

Thus, local zoning ordinances would result in inordinate taxation as well as the potential for health and environmental problems caused by insufficient sewage disposal and insufficient water supplies.

Generalized Zoning Ordinances

The map associated with this alternative represents land use zoning allowed by township and municipal zoning ordinances as of 2015.

- The striking feature of this map is the differences between the intention of township master plans and the practices allowed by zoning ordinances within those same townships.
- Most township ordinances allow predominantly low-density rural residential (grayish-green). Some areas intended for low-density residential development on the master plans are actually zoned for higher-density residential (yellow).
- Zoning ordinances permit less land for industry and manufacturing (purple), business and commercial use (red), and office complexes (orange) than designated in the master plans.
- Zoning ordinances would allow for almost all the recreation and open space (green) to be consumed by residential development.



ALTERNATIVE 3: IMPLEMENT THE ST. CLAIR COUNTY VISION 2045

The Master Plan for St. Clair County continues to be a visionary document. There are disadvantages to having and using a countywide Master Plan. It requires an investment of time and energy. It involves public education and technical assistance. It necessitates proactive and coordinated cooperation among people and government officials throughout the county.

In spite of these immediate disadvantages, there are many long-term advantages that make the Master Plan a desirable tool to manage growth and change within St. Clair County. The Master Plan contains the means through which citizens and government can:

- Preserve and enhance the county's rural character.
- Protect water and air quality.
- Set aside sufficient land for commercial and industrial growth.
- Direct growth to areas best suited to provide public facilities and services.
- Mitigate the need for increased taxes to pay for urban services and utilities.
- Protect the environment for both animal habitat and human enjoyment.
- Create public transit systems to improve mobility.
- Foster a diverse, healthy, and sustainable economy.
- Make the county an attractive location for tourist and tourist dollars.
- Make the county a more desirable place to live and thus create more jobs.

How can all of these advantages be accomplished?

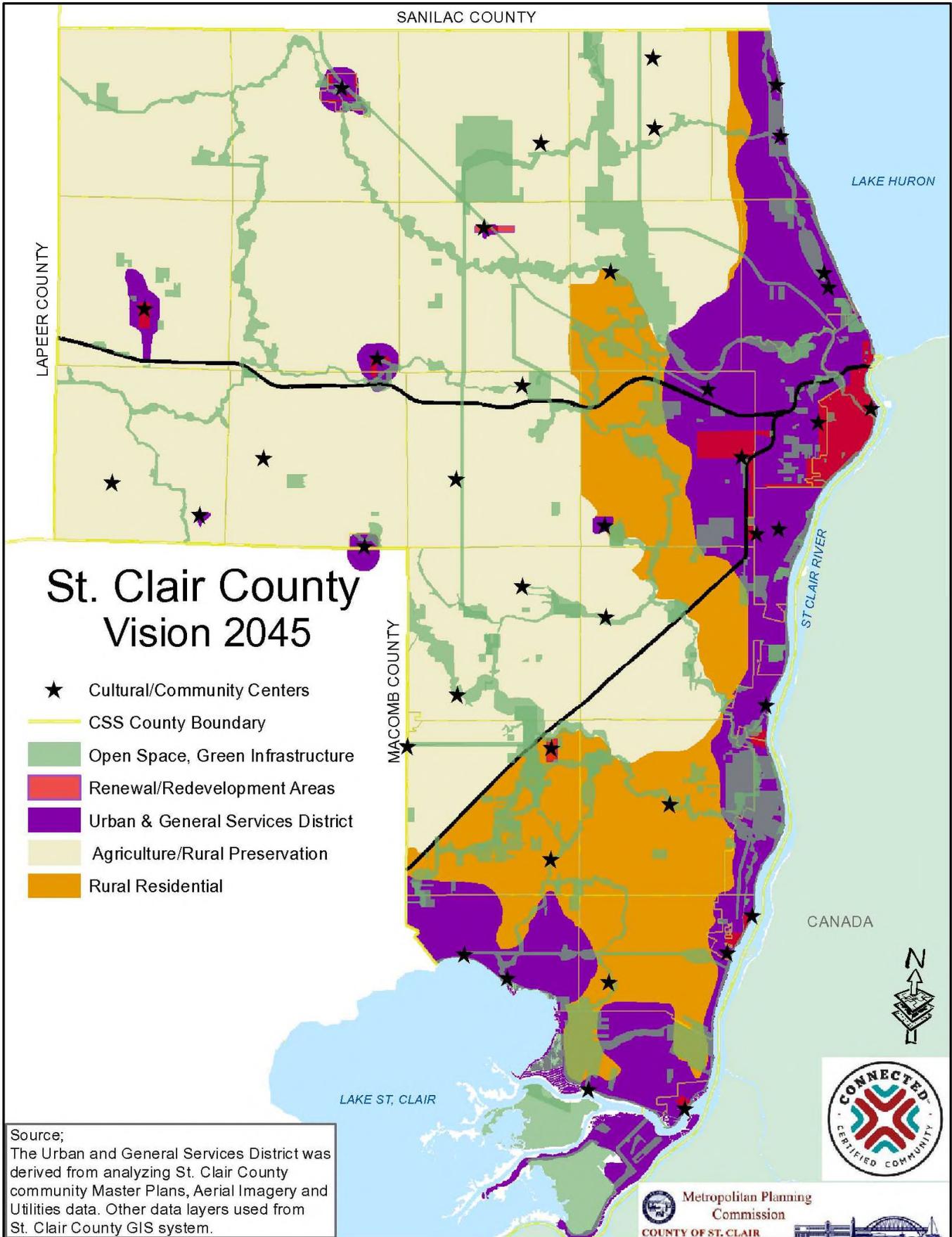
First, recognize that St. Clair County has many strengths, then take steps to preserve those strengths. We have space for homes, farms, industrial and commercial centers, education institutions, waterways and recreational areas, public facilities, small towns and big cities, urban scenes and country vistas, cultural and tourist attractions and historical resources and modern structures. We have sand and gravel, uplands and wetlands, woodlands and roadways.

Master Plan for St. Clair County

The map associated with this alternative contains many colors and land use designations. It depicts a composite of where we can best protect, preserve, or provide:

- Rural, agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional land
- Public facilities
- Utilities and transportation systems
- Recreational areas, open space, and environmental and natural resources

The Urban and General Services District (shown in purple) is the proposed area that should be considered for extension of public sewer, water, stormwater, police, fire, and other urban services through the year 2045. The western edge of the UGS District is constrained, in some areas, by physical limitations. The UGS District will help ensure fiscal responsibility and the wise use of land resources.



PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

OVERVIEW

To objectively evaluate the three alternatives described in this chapter and to come up with the recommendations in the next section, staff from the Metropolitan Planning Commission:

- Measured each alternative against quality of life factors.
- Rated each factor with a scale of positive, negative, or neutral.
- Totaled the ratings.
- Chose the alternative with the best rating.

The following matrix shows the rating of each quality of life factor within each for the three alternatives.

- The quality of life factors, which relate to citizen input obtained throughout the planning process, are represented in the left column.
- The three alternatives are represented in the three remaining columns.
- The total of positives, negatives, and neutrals appears at the bottom.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Based on the comparison of quality of life factors detailed on the following page, the preferred alternative for future land use in St. Clair County is that which results from the St. Clair County Master Plan and its Vision 2045 Policy.

The Vision 2045 Policy strives to:

- Protect critical natural resources;
- Preserve farmland and open space;
- Revitalize downtowns;
- Ensure governmental collaboration and the efficient provision of public services;
- Ensure the county is prepared to successfully compete in the knowledge economy;
- Ensure that the county's workforce is well-educated and highly-trained for 21st century jobs;
- Support entrepreneurs and enhance the business environment in the county;
- Ensure there are affordable housing opportunities throughout the county;
- Promote the sustainable use of resources;
- Capitalize on St. Clair County's cultural, historic and community character.

VISION 2045 POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The initiatives put forward in this Master Plan will not implement themselves. It will take continued commitment and support for many years. Cooperation and planning will be critical in order to achieve the goals desired by St. Clair County residents and maintain the high quality of life that we currently enjoy and crave in the future.

Change is inevitable. The challenge is to anticipate change, plan for it, and thus benefit from it. For St. Clair County, the challenges between now and 2045 will be managing changes in our economy, effectively planning for changing demographics, maintaining aging infrastructure, and ensuring our communities remain desirable and livable.

Therefore, there is one overriding recommendation within the St. Clair County Master Plan: Proactively plan for the future and be well-equipped to adapt to changes. To do this, we must have a plan and we must make decisions consistent with that plan. However, we also need to ensure that our planning mechanisms are not so rigid that county and local governments cannot effectively and efficiently respond and adapt to sudden changes or disruptions.

The following pages contain recommendations supported by the details and data found within the Master Plan. These recommendations are in regard to:

- Urban and General Services District
- Rural Residential District
- Agricultural/Rural Preservation District
- Existing Commercial and community Centers
- Redevelopment and Renewal Areas
- Open Space/Green Infrastructure

URBAN AND GENERAL SERVICES (UGS) DISTRICT

The Urban and General Services District (UGSD) is along the eastern and southern shore and in inland communities of Adair, Allenton, Avoca, Berville, Capac, Goodells, Memphis, Rattle Run, and Yale. These are areas of existing higher residential, commercial, and – in several cases – industrial use densities. Investing in public infrastructure will lead to even higher densities which are capable of supporting infrastructure and a full-range of public services.

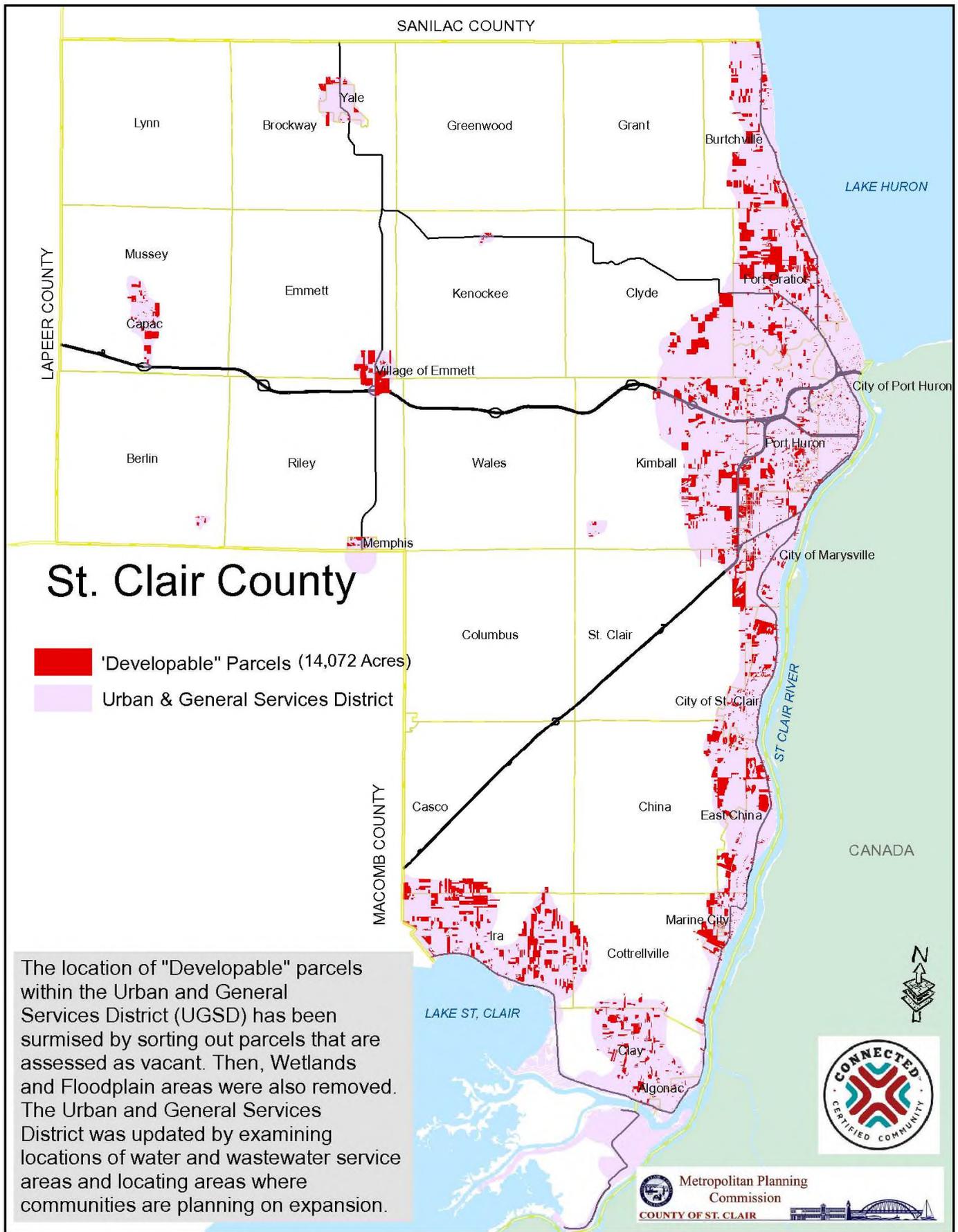
With planned developments and proper provision of public services, the UGS District has more than sufficient land area to accommodate all of the residential, commercial, and industrial growth expected within St. Clair County between now and 2045. As shown on the map on page 87, there are over 14,000 acres of developable land in the Urban and General Services District.

Additionally, this plan update incorporates a new recommendation for the UGSD. Like the district which was created with the 2000 Plan, the UGSD anticipates a 20-year planning period during which higher density development and public services will be focused and directed.

By directing growth toward this district, we can preserve the rural character and agricultural quality that exists in the northwest part of the county.

Recommendations:

- *Direct residential, commercial, and industrial growth to the Urban and General Services District.*





- *Provide and extend a full-range of public services, including water and sewer lines, in a managed, phased, and incremental manner as populations increase in the Urban and General Services District.*

RURAL RESIDENTIAL (RR) DISTRICT

The Rural Residential District is in the south-central part of St. Clair County. It serves as a transitional zone between the Urban and General Services District along the coast to the east and south and the Rural and Agricultural Conservation District to the west.

The Rural Residential District provides for rural, low-density home construction. While farm operations would be preserved in the short term, fewer resources would be devoted to farmland protection as in the central and western portions of the county.

This part of the county is already the site of the highest proliferation of new home construction and residential sprawl, primarily because of its proximity to counties to the south. Soils in this area can accommodate a relatively few or lower density of septic systems.

Recommendations:

- *Allow rural residential structures at a density of one unit per five acres.*
- *Discourage strip residential development.*
- *Do not extend public sewer and water lines into this district.*
- *Encourage farming – but not concentrated animal feeding operations – as long as it remains viable.*

AGRICULTURAL/RURAL PRESERVATION (ARP) DISTRICT

The Agricultural/Rural Preservation (ARP) District occupies the central and northwest part of St. Clair County. Residences in this district would primarily be farm families and their employees.

Density would be one residence per 40 acres, which is not the same as 40 acre lots. Rather, residences would be clustered in lot sizes of one-half to three acres, leaving larger tracts of land for viable agricultural and farming purposes.

New residents to these areas would be encouraged to move into existing villages, cities, or commercial and community centers (this is an opportunity not available to most people moving into this area of the county.)

Recommendations:

- *Preserve the Agricultural/Rural Preservation District for agricultural purposes.*
- *Direct new residential development toward existing cities and villages, in a manner recommended in the Urban and General Services District.*
- *Prohibit extension of sewer and water lines into the ARP District.*
- *Promote farmland preservation programs within the ARP District*
- *Establish programs to purchase development rights.*
- *Revitalize cities and villages, making them an attractive alternative to development on farmland.*

COMMERCIAL AND COMMUNITY CENTERS

Commercial and Community Centers are places of commercial activity and civic function. Some of these are incorporated cities or villages. Others are smaller settlement areas that have a higher residential density than surrounding areas.

Some are along the county's original trails, roadways, or railroad lines. But like those transportation routes, the communities have dwindled in size and railroad depots, post offices, churches, and one-room schools have disappeared.

Yet, because of the history and heritage within these centers, a certain level of public and private infrastructure remains, and the communities themselves are worth saving.

Recommendations:

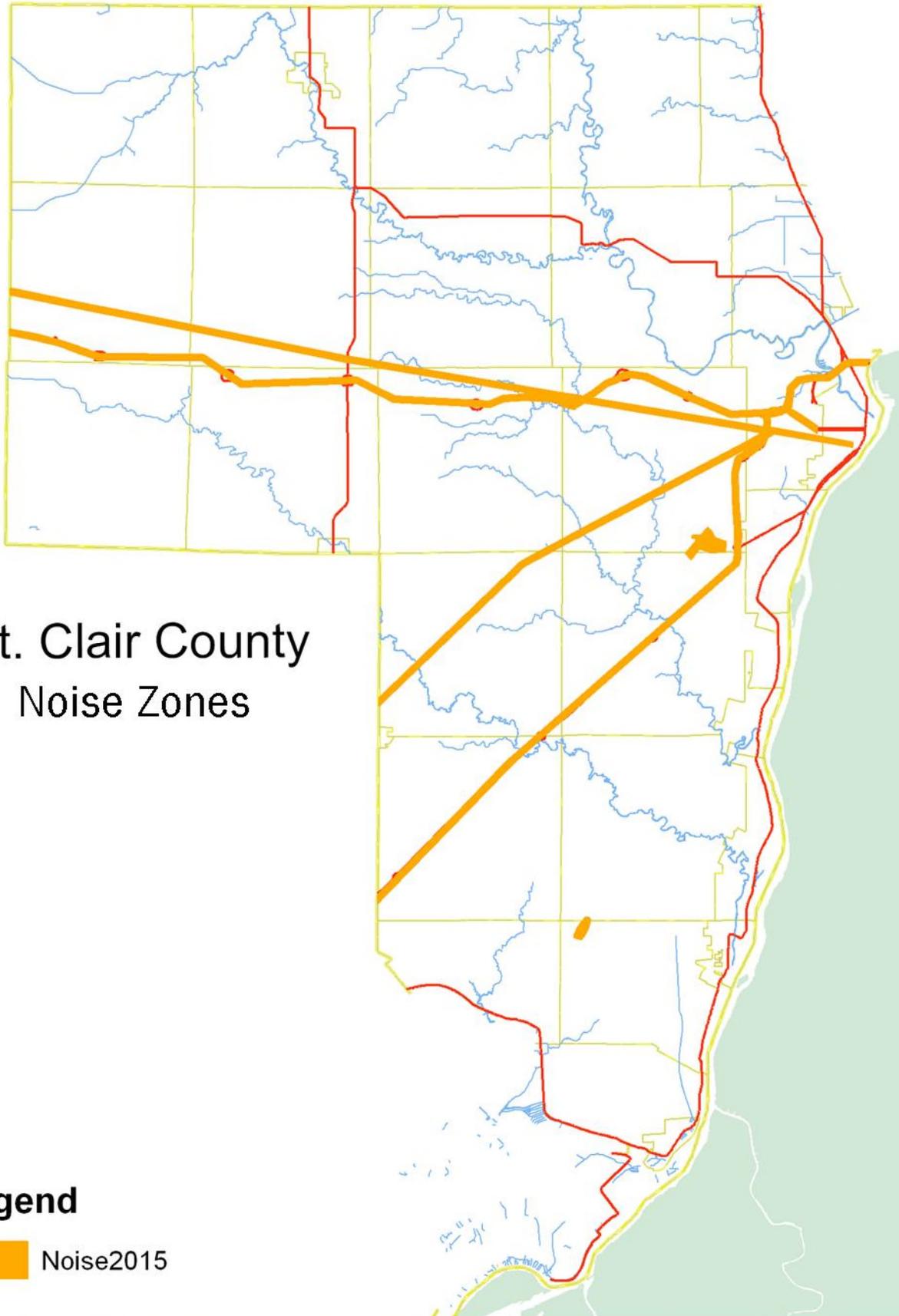
- *Invest in and reinvigorate existing Commercial and Community Centers rather than create new ones.*
- *Redevelop communities in which residential areas are clustered with small shops and stores that provide essential services, such as groceries and pharmaceuticals.*
- *In rural community centers, allow only development and commerce that contribute to the community's unique character, but recognize that there will be pockets of commercial activity in rural areas.*
- *Permit and encourage localized public sewer and water systems in existing Commercial and Community Centers.*



Blaine General Store - Grant Township



Shopping Center in Algonac



St. Clair County Noise Zones

Legend

 Noise2015

REDEVELOPMENT AND RENEWAL AREAS

Redevelopment and Renewal Areas are communities or parts of communities that, for any of several reasons, are in apparent decline. Development and Renewal Areas include neighborhoods with rundown houses, designated brownfields, and sites that may have contaminated soil due to previous industrial or commercial uses.

Recommendations:

- *Direct public funding and create legislation to improve and revitalize redevelopment and Renewal Areas.*
- *Encourage home improvement, Brownfield restoration, and site cleanup projects within Redevelopment and Renewal Areas.*
- *Aggressively utilize the St. Clair County Land Bank Authority as a tool to foster redevelopment and renewal in these areas.*

OPEN SPACE/GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The optimum location for open space corridors, environmental areas, trails and parks is along natural watercourses, of which there are many in St. Clair County, and their attractive natural land formations.

These corridors, areas, trails, and parks help define rural character, provide recreation opportunities, enhance water quality and wildlife habitat, and invite tourist. They are places where residents can play, work, relax and enjoy the quality of life,

Recommendations:

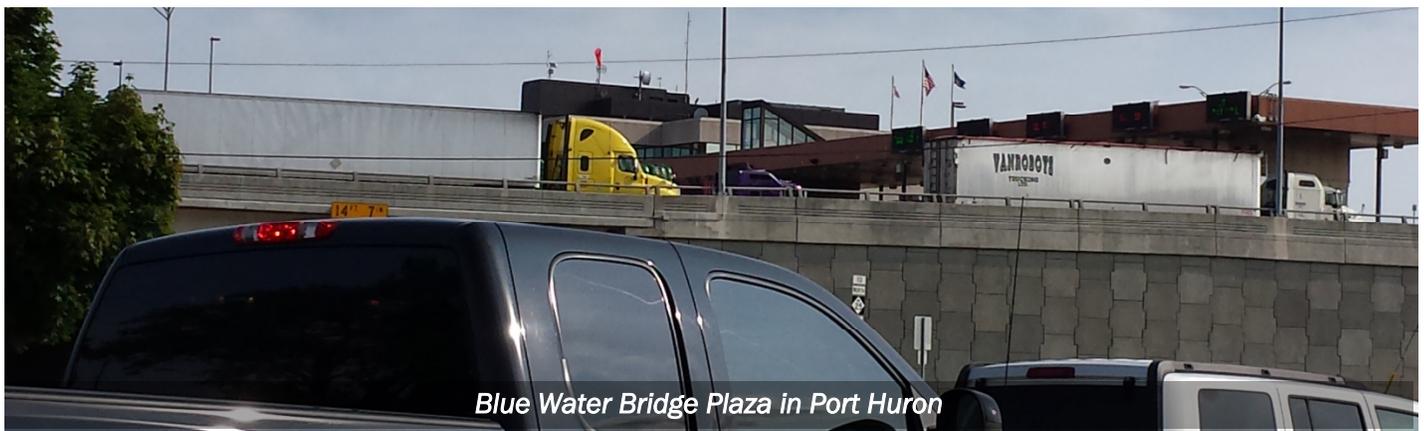
- *Acquire land that can be used for future public Open Space Corridors, Environmental Areas, Trails, and Parks.*
- *Create Open Space Corridors, Environmental Areas, Trails, and Parks according to the proposed Southeast Michigan Greenways Plan, the St. Clair County Recreation Plan, and local master plans.*
- *Develop these corridors and trails as alternative transit routes to connect various parts of the county.*

NOISE ZONES

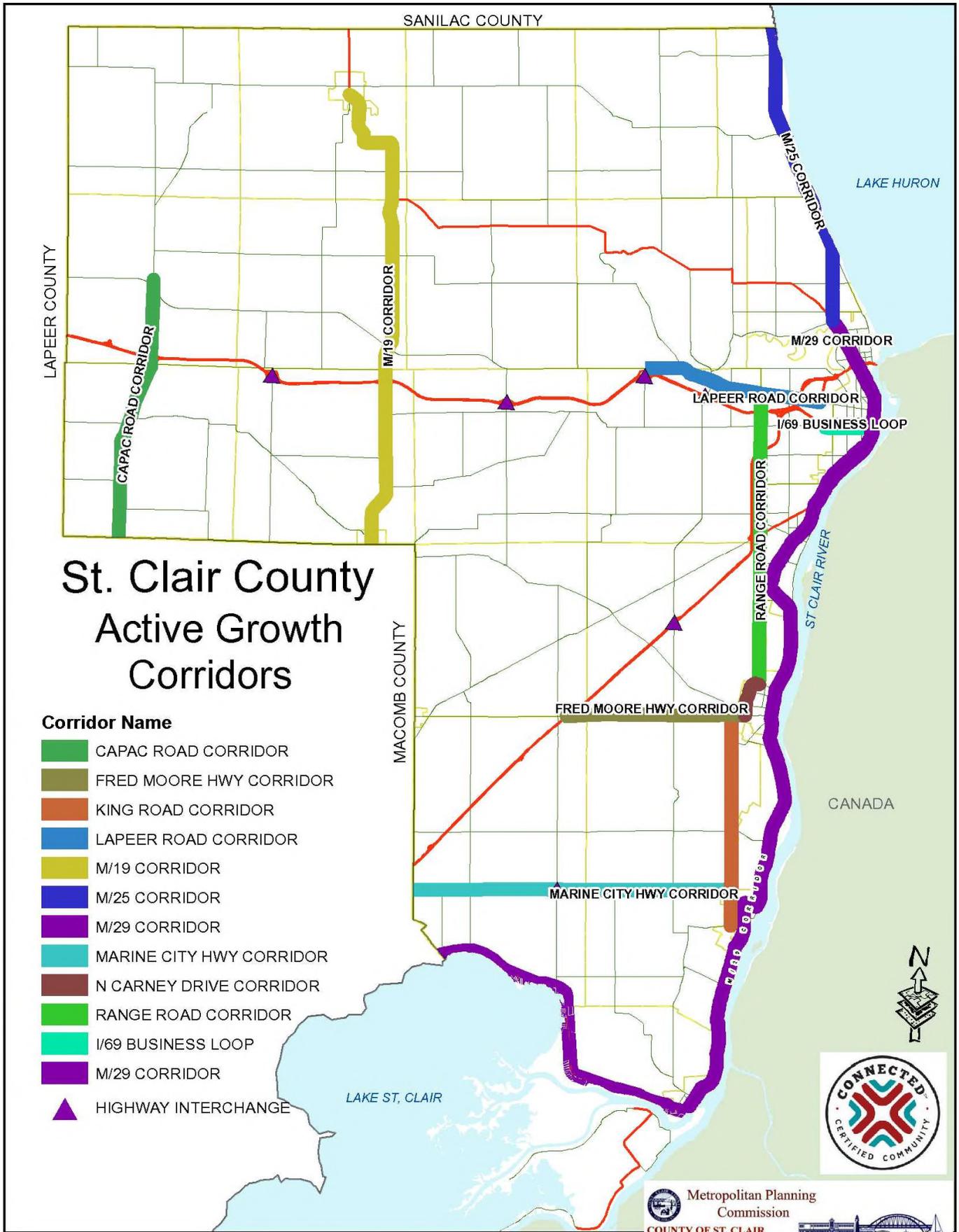
Noise zones are areas near interstate highways, railways, and airports that are subject to inordinate and uncomfortable noise levels.

Recommendations:

- *Direct residential development away from Noise Zones.*
- *Allow certain noisy commercial and industrial activities within Noise Zones.*
- *Create buffers between Noise Zones and residential areas*



Blue Water Bridge Plaza in Port Huron



KEY PLANNING ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

ACTIVE GROWTH CORRIDORS

According to the Project for Public Spaces' (PPS) report *Great Corridors, Great Communities*:

"A corridor planning approach that considers multiple forms of transportation, adjacent land uses, and the connecting street network can transform the transportation planning process into one that respects and enhances our natural and human environments. This broader strategy encourages joint planning initiatives among all interested parties, using a common set of principles."

That same PPS report identifies the attributes that the most successful corridors around the country exhibit, including:

- They promote communities' long-term goals.
- They offer a variety of land uses.
- They offer a diverse and connected network of transportation choices.
- They provide community destinations.
- They incorporate the vision of communities.

St. Clair County is home to a wide array of active growth corridors shown on the map on page 91 - corridors that are poised to see growth and development over the duration of the planning period covered by this plan. In order to effectively plan for and manage growth along these corridors, targeted corridor planning efforts should be initiated with multijurisdictional stakeholder groups. This will ensure that growth is managed proactively instead of reactively. Comprehensive corridor planning will analyze and address land use, transportation, people, mobility, environmental issues, and economic development implications. Stakeholders from each of those areas need to be involved in these targeted corridor studies.

There is not an immediate need to begin corridor studies on each of the identified active growth corridors. The timing of studies will need to be assessed by planners, elected officials, economic developers, and the general public. In short, stakeholders will know when a corridor is ripe for study.

From a prioritization perspective, the current need for corridor analysis is centered on three active growth corridors: the Range Road Corridor, the Fred Moore Highway Corridor, and the Marine City Highway Corridor. A multijurisdictional Range Road Corridor Study was adopted in 2001 and is in need of an update.

WALKABILITY

According to data collected by the US Department of Transportation, if destinations are close by, people will choose to walk to them. People want more walkable communities, which includes having useable sidewalks and amenities such as restaurants, shops, schools, churches, and parks all within walking distance. Current trends indicate that people are choosing to live where walking to core services and entertainment is a real option. This same trend holds true for businesses, as central business district and walkable suburban properties are increasingly desirable to office occupiers and investors. Over the past few decades, office vacancy rates in central business districts nationwide have dropped below the average vacancy rate for offices in suburban locations. Many studies have also found that a higher "urban walkability" score also helps downtown office properties to outperform suburban office properties.

According to Real Capital Analytics, using Walk Score Commercial Property Price Indices, highly walkable CBD and highly walkable suburban properties consistently outperformed car dependent suburban properties and somewhat walkable suburban properties over a 15-year span from 2000 to 2015.

There are several tools used to help communities become more walkable. These tools include walking audits, complete streets, revitalization projects, healthy corridors, and health in all policies.

Walking Audits

Walking audits are a tool used to measure the safety of the infrastructure for pedestrian usage. The physical area is assessed and recommendations are made. They are typically done near neighborhoods, schools, or places of employment.

Complete Streets

The complete streets concept entails having accessible streets for ALL users no matter their age or physical abilities, or by which mode they travel. Some of the facilities that make a street complete include sidewalks, safe crosswalks, ramps, signals, bus pull-outs, and pedestrian refuges. Each community will determine what is appropriate for their streets; urban areas will handle complete streets differently than rural areas. Over 700 regional and local agencies have adopted Complete Streets Policies and many best practices have been identified.

Revitalization Projects

Parks have often been used to serve as a “meeting place” to connect neighborhoods and revitalize different parts of the city. Not only do parks help improve distressed areas, but promote healthier lifestyles and help improve social equity. Other types of revitalization projects such as improving the commercial business district or adding other public amenities increase walkability within a community.

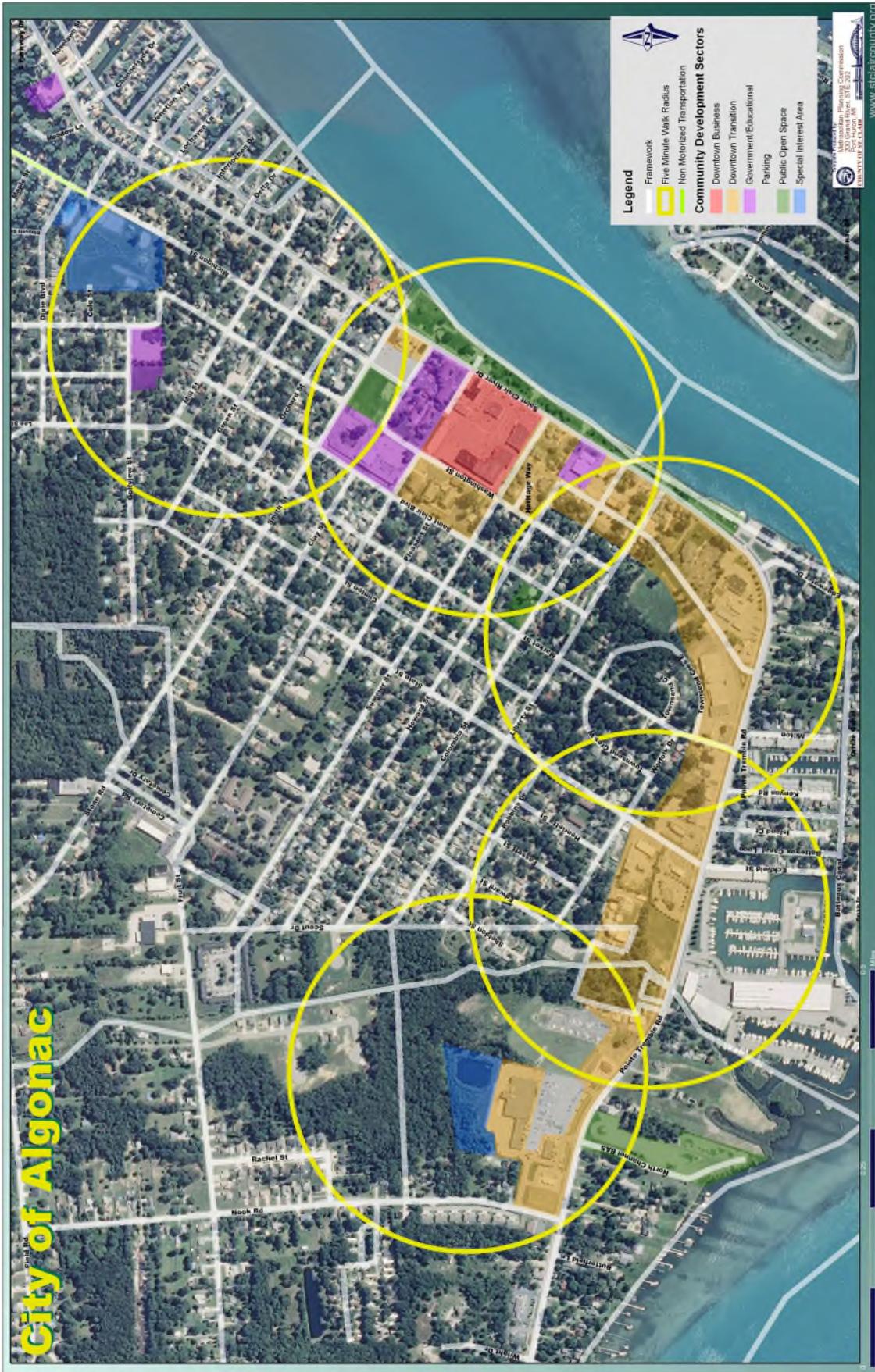
Healthy Corridors

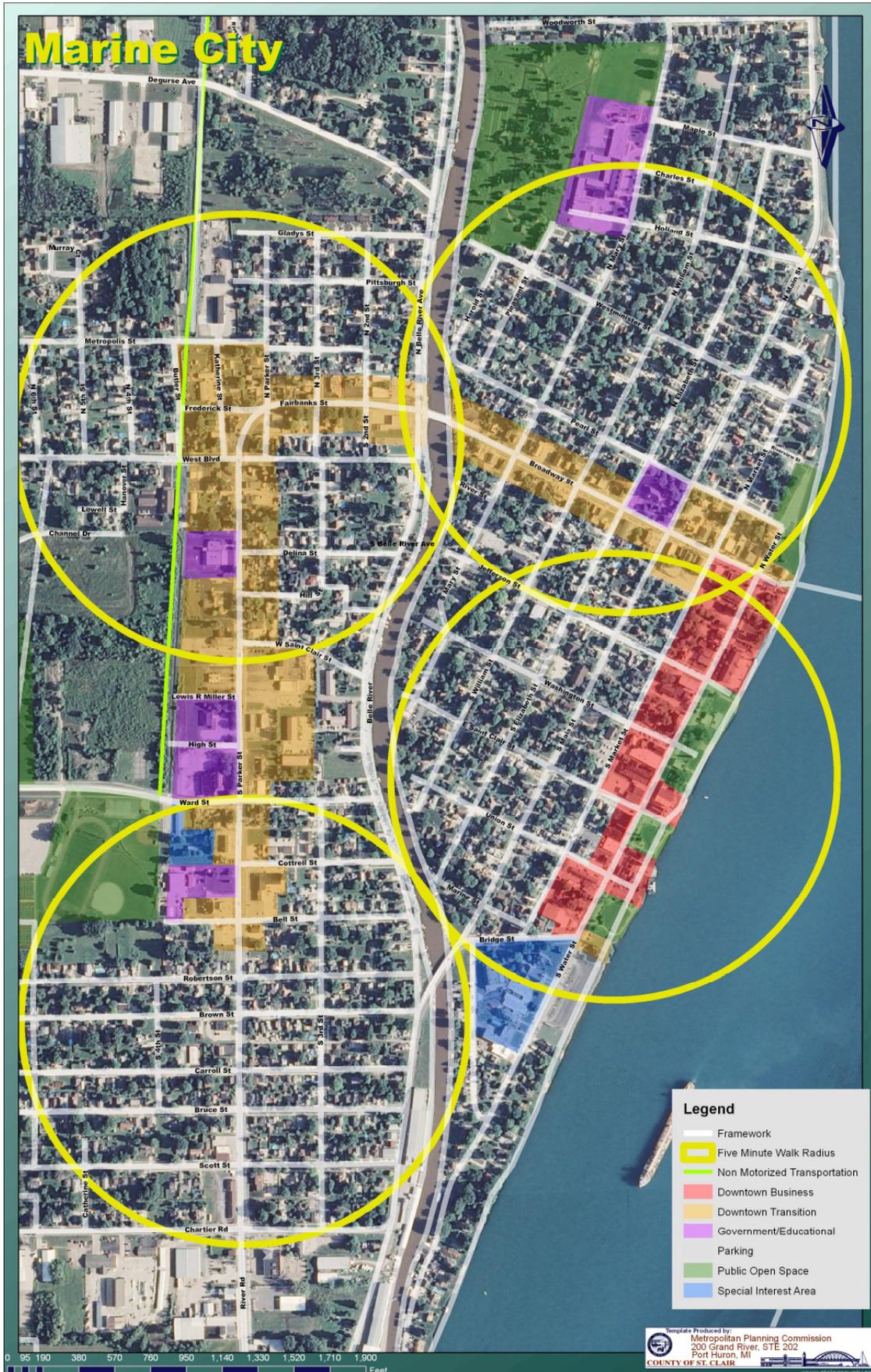
This includes making enhancements such as sidewalks and safe crossings along commercial corridors to connect neighborhoods. The main priority is enhancing connectivity to nearby communities including those that are inhabited by low income and/or minority populations, thus helping to address environmental justice issues.

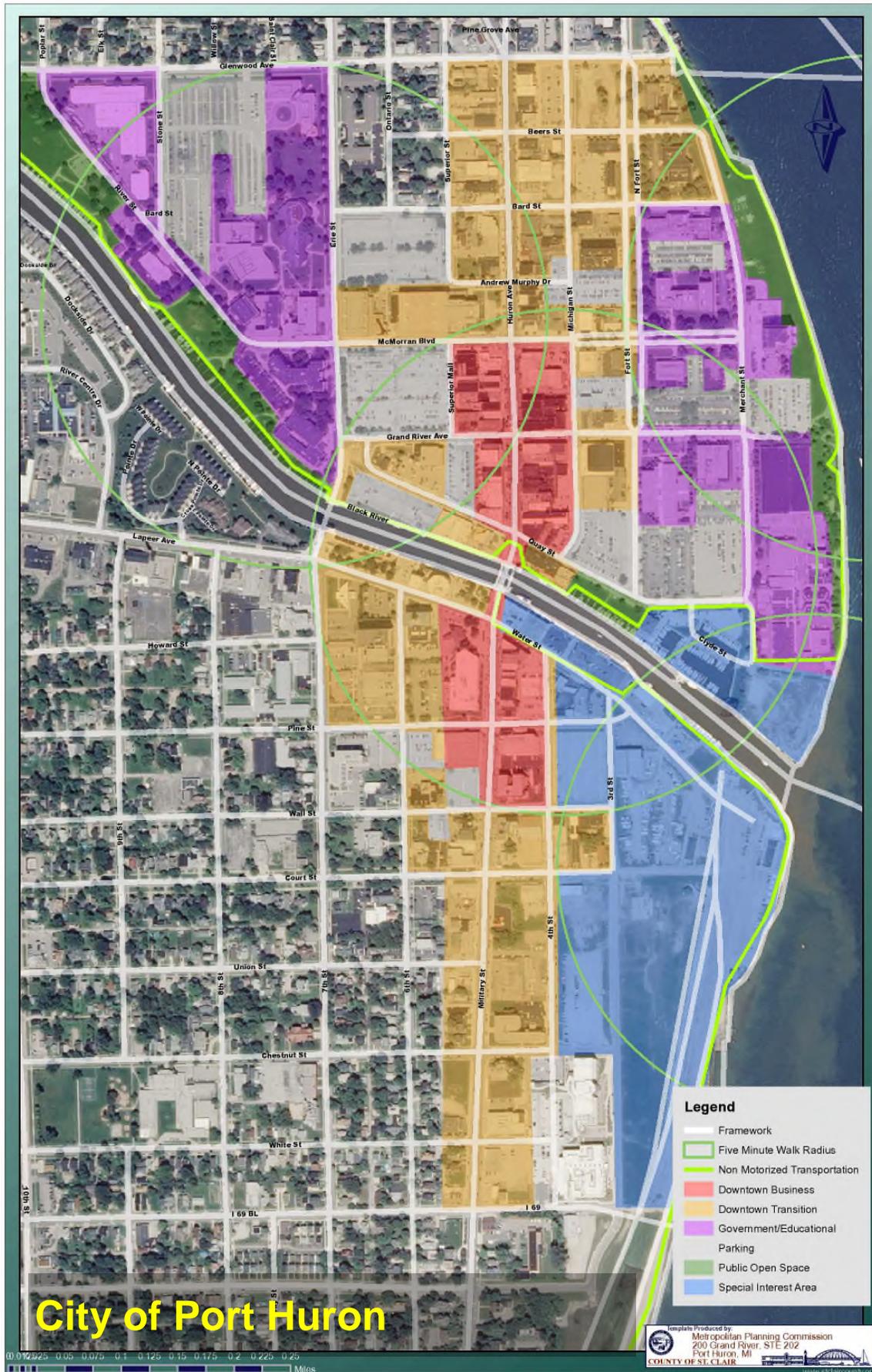
Health in ALL Policies

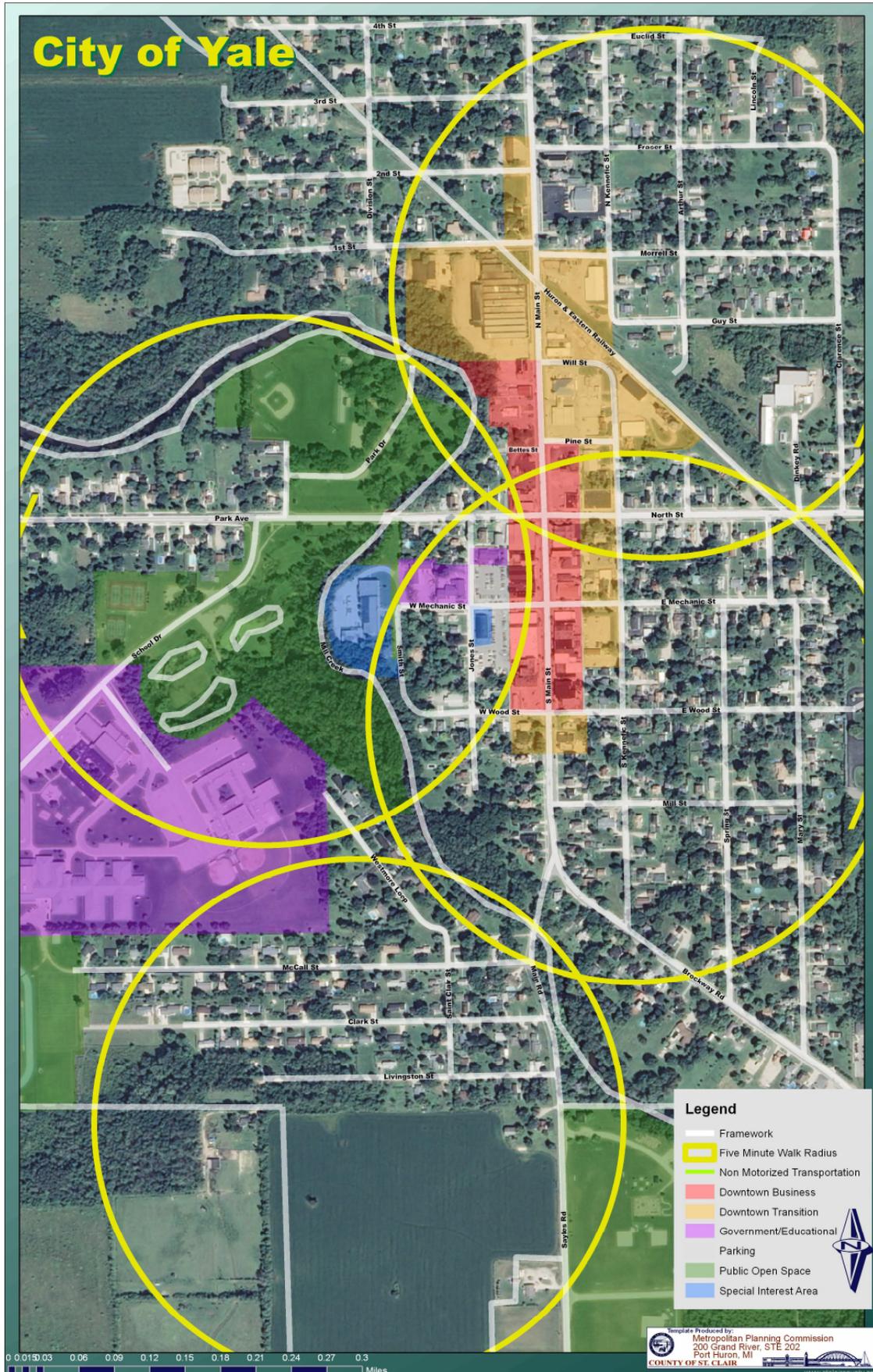
Generally speaking, those that live in walkable communities are healthier individuals. “Healthy public policy” is the idea of working across sectors and beyond the medical care system to ensure that health is taken into account when forming public policy. This includes avoiding harmful health impacts, as well as encouraging healthy activities and infrastructure.











Walk Scores

Walk Score measures the walkability of any address using a patented system. For each address, Walk Score analyzes hundreds of walking routes to nearby amenities. Points are awarded based on the distance to amenities in each category. Amenities within a 5 minute walk (.25 miles) are given maximum points. A decay function is used to give points to more distant amenities, with no points given after a 30 minute walk.

Scores range from 0 to 100, 0 is the least walkable and 100 is most walkable.

The city of Port Huron scored a 42 Walk Score.

Port Huron is a Car-Dependent city, most errands require a car. Although there is a beautiful Bridge to Bay trail that runs along the St. Clair River on the eastern boundary of the city, this score indicates there are gaps in the non-motorized network. This can mean that sidewalks are disconnected or core services are not in the densely populated areas and vehicle traffic inhibits pedestrian activity.

The city of Marysville scored a 46 Walk Score.

Marysville is a Car-Dependent city, most errands require a car. The beautiful Bridge to Bay trail also runs along the eastern boundary of the city, this score indicates there are gaps in the non-motorized network. There main commercial corridor, Gratiot Ave, does not allow for safe pedestrian activity.

The city of St. Clair does not yet have a Walk Score.

The City of St. Clair is also a small town along the St. Clair River, and it has a beautiful Boardwalk (part of the Bridge to Bay Trail). There are current efforts to improve the city's walkability such as the new plaza in front of the Mall. City stakeholders are also looking to provide a safer crosswalk to connect the Boardwalk at Palmer Park to the Mall plaza. There are a number of restaurants and bars, as well as shopping in the city center area.

The city of Marine City scored a 33 Walk Score.

Marine City is also located along the St. Clair River and Bridge to Bay Trail. There is a significant amount of development taking place in downtown Marine City, which will only improve the Walk Score over time. At the time there are several shops, restaurants, two theaters, and city parks located in the central business district.

The city of Algonac scored a 45 Walk Score.

Algonac is also located along the St. Clair River and Bridge to Bay Trail. Although, there is not a traditional downtown, there are restaurants, shopping, and service establishments located in the central business district along St. Clair River Drive.

The city of Yale does not yet have a Walk Score.

This small town in northwest St. Clair County offers living, working, shopping, and eating all in the downtown area. Its residential neighborhoods are situated in a grid pattern, which also bodes well for walkability.

The Metropolitan Planning Commission has developed a number of "5-Minute Walkability Maps," including Algonac, Marine City, Port Huron, and Yale. Additional walkability maps will be developed and maintained on a regular basis in an ongoing effort to increase walkability in St. Clair County.



AGING POPULATION

St. Clair County's population has been slowly declining since 2007. It is predicted to grow over the next several decades, but at a very slow rate. Beyond the information on the total population, noting the increase or decline of particular segments of the population is particularly interesting and useful, specifically the school age population, and the retirement age population. These can be good predictors of the need for increased capital expenditures, or expenditures on services to the elderly, or of the likelihood of increased sales to first-time home buyers. In addition, this distribution can provide clues to other changes that are happening in our community.

A further examination of the county's statistics shows that, similar to most of the nation, St. Clair County's population is aging. Over the past few decades, the county's age distribution has continued to increase in percentage of those aged 65 and older, while shrinking in those within the 25 to 44 years age range. Shifting population bases create new demands on county services.

Currently, nearly one third of the County's population is age 55 or above, and if this trend continues that proportion will continue to expand. The demographic for residents age 65 and above increased by 3,390 from 2005 to 2010; a surge of 16.5%. There has been an even larger increase in this "retired" age group because St. Clair County is a desirable and attractive place to live. The population age 45-69, those approaching retirement age, increased by 13,232 from 2000 to 2010, a 31% jump signaling that the aging of the County's population is a trend that is likely to continue into the next decade or so.

Also noteworthy is the 22% decrease in the 25-34 year age group from 2000 to 2010; the college graduate, young family group, that are not being retained due to the lack of good wages. These changing demographics need to be weighed carefully as the County experiences a reduction in the population of people of working age and an increasing population of retirees. The impact on workforce availability and a potential change in services desired by an aging population, have numerous and significant ramifications for economic development planning.

While these factors present challenges, it is during this transitional period that the changing service needs of an aging population should be identified. Plans to accommodate this projected growth need to be undertaken in advance in order to provide adequate services and infrastructure to our area's future residents. We need to help our communities plan and prepare to better meet the needs of our aging population.

Community Planning Implications

Keeping seniors connected in significant ways includes providing transportation to and from services, keeping them informed on services available, enhancing programming for health literacy, and creating an environment to promote physical wellness through trail development and green infrastructure that connects places within our communities.

Many seniors remain active well into their retirement years, and are interested in opportunities to volunteer or work part-time. By connecting seniors to open positions within the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, St. Clair County can promote both the well-being of retirees while at the same time benefiting the community through increased volunteerism.

Studies have shown that older adults overwhelmingly prefer to "age in place" in their existing homes and communities, but may need to modify their existing home or move to another residence that is more accessible, more affordable or more appropriate in size to accommodate their changing needs. For seniors on fixed incomes or with limited abilities, support for routine property maintenance is one important factor in their ability to remain in their homes. Likewise, modernizing and retrofitting homes for features like removal of front door steps or installation of shower grab bars also become necessary.

The County should play a critical role in promoting the development of home modification programs that assist older citizens to adapt their existing homes to meet their needs. Additionally, communities should assess their land use plans, zoning ordinances and building codes to promote the development of a range of housing options that meet the needs of an aging population. These should be as close as possible to transportation links and/or walkable distance from daily needs like medical services or shopping.

The county and its community partners should ensure that public safety personnel and first responders are trained to deal with the specialized needs of older adults and that these needs are specifically addressed in community disaster plans. Communities should also consider improvements to roadway design such as large print road signs, grooved lane dividers, dedicated left turn lanes and extended walk times at pedestrian crosswalks to accommodate older drivers and pedestrians. Local governments should assess their existing public transportation systems to see if they address the needs of an aging population.

Additionally, communities can ensure that their parks and recreational facilities include walking trails, benches and fitness facilities that would accommodate and attract older citizens.

MILLENNIALS

A 2014 study by the American Planning Association surveyed millennials and baby boomers on community preferences to find what exactly they want in cities. Despite their differences in age, they largely agreed on what they want in a community: They “want cities to focus less on recruiting new companies and more on investing in new transportation options, walkable communities, and making the area as attractive as possible.” Both generations also want municipalities to invest in education.



According to an October 2014 White House report, *15 Economic Facts about Millennials*, 42% of millennials identify with a race or ethnicity other than non-Hispanic white. Millennials, the cohort of Americans born between 1980 and the mid-2000s, are the largest generation in the U.S., representing one-third of the total U.S. population in 2013. As the White House report notes:

“The significance of Millennials extends beyond their numbers. This is the first generation to have had access to the Internet during their formative years. Millennials also stand out because they are the most diverse and educated generation to date.”

Millennials are also considered “digital natives,” meaning technology - particularly mobile technology - is an integral part of all facets of their lives. They are also the generation that grew up expecting “on-demand” services. As noted by George Arison in a November 17, 2015 post to *TechCrunch*:

“What makes millennials unique, however, is they came of age during a time of economic uncertainty. Many first entered the workforce during the worst job market in decades, which forced some to move back in with their parents and take historically low entry-level salaries. They are, by leaps and bounds, the most technologically savvy generation of consumers in this country’s history. They have been raised and educated in a seamless world of wireless connectivity, when walking around with a smartphone means that the entire history of human knowledge is accessible so long as a strong enough signal is available... this is a generation that requires both convenience and affordability.”

Millennials make up the current crop of young professionals that cities across the country are trying to attract and retain. In general, attraction and retention of millennials is centered on providing a high quality of life, urban amenities, and an abundance of choice - transportation choices, recreation choices, entertainment options, a variety of residential options, and an accessible social connection to other people in the community. It is in this regard that focused placemaking is critical for communities of all sizes.