This project was completed for Van Buren County by Western Michigan University’s Planning Studio class within the Department of Geography. A group of graduate and undergraduate students led by their instructor worked to develop this product during the Spring 2019 semester.

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The 2020 Plan has been prepared under the direction of and with direct participation by the Van Buren County Planning Commission.
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Barbara Rose
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District #7 – Paul Schincariol
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Welcome to the 2020 Van Buren County Master Plan – a vision for the stewardship of the future of Van Buren County. To maintain the County as a community with a high quality of life, abundant natural beauty, successful agricultural landscapes, vibrant small towns and endless recreation opportunities, we must all work together with a common vision.

Plan 2020 builds upon the 2017 Van Buren County Master Plan, and satisfies the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, as amended, requirements for a Master Plan. It was developed through an open public process led by community stakeholders committed to making a difference in the County. It is based on the belief that residents of Van Buren County can work together today to decide how change will happen and to create the community of tomorrow.
PURPOSE AND INTENT

The Van Buren County Planning Commission was reestablished in accordance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, as amended. The members of the Planning Commission are appointed by the County Board of Commissioners and are charged with the responsibilities set forth in the Act to prepare and adopt a county plan. The mandated role of the Van Buren County Planning Commission is to assist local planning commissions and the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners in making lawful and sustainable planning decisions.

The statute states that, once having adopted the County Master Plan, the Planning Commission powers are limited with regard to local decision-making. The Commission is given certain powers in reviewing specific work or projects under consideration by local boards, departments, or agencies, but has no approval or disapproval powers over such actions by local governments. Assistance is also provided through the evaluation of local plans and ordinances regarding their relationship to county-wide patterns. These reviews seek to ensure that Van Buren County will have development that meets the needs of the present without compromising resources necessary for future generations.

Land use planning is essential for long-range sustainable growth. Its utilization promotes the health, safety and welfare of a community. Conversely, the lack of planning results in haphazard growth. It leads to problems such as loss of productive farmland, urban core degradation, and increased infrastructure costs. Communities have the responsibility to create an environment with pleasant living conditions now and in the future. This includes a sustainable pattern of agriculture, commerce and industry, recreation, housing, public facilities and natural resources. Planning, based on an evaluation of existing conditions, provides the process that effectuates this desired land use pattern.

This plan attempts to provide the content necessary to help local governments apply community development objectives and strategies compatible with surrounding areas. It has been developed based on Guiding Principles adopted by the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) and advocates the tenets of “Smart Growth”, which were adopted by the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council in their final report entitled Michigan’s Land, Michigan’s Future, dated August 15, 2003. It is meant to serve as a guide that facilitates land use decisions in Van Buren County and will be used by the County Planning Commission as a tool in its advisory role.

This document also provides data that will be helpful to local units in developing their own comprehensive plan. Additional information and data about land use and planning is available on the Van Buren County web site at vbco.org.
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians

The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians is of particular importance to the history and makeup of Van Buren County. At one time the territory of the Potawatomi Indians extended from Lake Erie to the site of present-day Chicago. The Potawatomi lived in villages united by clan and family ties, subsisted by hunting, fishing, gathering, and agriculture, and traveled extensively throughout the Great Lakes by foot and canoe. The Potawatomi were linguistically, culturally, and politically allied with the Odawa and Ojibwa to the north.

Potawatomi territory was gradually relinquished through a series of treaties with the United States. This culminated in the 1833 Treaty of Chicago, which led to the removal of the majority of the Potawatomi to Iowa and Kansas. However, the villages along the St. Joseph and Paw Paw River Valleys, resisted the push to sign the Treaty. These villages, who had largely converted to Catholicism, united behind the leadership of Leopold Pokagon and were able to negotiate the right to remain in Michigan.

The Pokagon Band, as these allied villages came to be known, were not able to secure a reserved land base under the Treaty, but Leopold Pokagon was given money and by 1837 had purchased...
1,000 acres of land in Cass County's Silver Creek Township, a traditional hunting area. At the new settlement, families were allowed to establish individual homesteads. A portion of land was given to the Catholic Church, upon which the Sacred Heart of Mary Church now stands. The land was never owned by the Band as a whole, however, and the property was gradually divided and broken apart.

The families along the Paw Paw River followed a similar strategy after the Treaty of Chicago, purchasing individual homesteads in the area, and a Catholic church and cemetery was established for the Potawatomi at Rush Lake, north of Hartford in Van Buren County. The Paw Paw River villages and Pokagon’s village had always remained in close contact, and after Leopold Pokagon’s death, many of the Silver Creek families relocated to Van Buren County.

Simon Pokagon, Leopold’s son, rose to prominence during the late 1800s. Born in 1830 near Sumnerville, Simon was educated at Notre Dame and Oberlin. After earning an education, Pokagon returned to the tribe, living at the Rush Lake community. He authored numerous booklets and articles, and he spent his life trying to improve Indian relations with Caucasians and make their integration as easy as possible. He made a famous speech at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, offering a counter position to the Exposition’s theme celebrating the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s voyages. Simon Pokagon died at his home near Hartford, Michigan, on January 28, 1899. He is buried in the Rush Lake Cemetery.

Although the Pokagon Band was recognized as a tribal entity with the right to remain in Michigan under the 1833 Treaty of Chicago, the Band endured a long battle to have the United States acknowledge their sovereign status. The Band pursued several lawsuits to obtain their treaty rights and land claims through the 1800s and 1900s, and was refused tribal status under the Indian Reorganization Act (1934). Their long struggle to gain federal recognition finally succeeded in September of 1994, and the Pokagon Restoration Act was signed into law by President Clinton.

In 2007, the Pokagon Band opened the Four Winds New Buffalo casino on the Pokagon Reservation located in New Buffalo Township, Michigan. The casino is operated in accordance with the Indian Gambling Regulatory Act and a compact made with the State of Michigan. The casino boasts a rotunda built in the style of the Potawatomi people’s traditional lodges. Due to its success, the casino was expanded as early as 2011. The tribe opened a second casino in 2011,
Four Winds Hartford, and a third casino in 2013, Four Winds Dowagiac. The Band is limited to three casinos by its 2008 compact with the State. The tribe has invested the revenues from gaming in the construction of needed housing and a community center.

The tribal membership was approximately 4990 members as of 2014. They occupy reservation lands in a total of ten counties in the area. Tribal government functions are located in Dowagiac, Michigan.

An 11-member Tribal Council governs the Pokagon Band toward the following desired outcomes:

**Our nation will:**

*Increase Pokagon Band land base and strive to protect Mother Earth.*

*Revitalize language and culture.*

*Honor and share Elder’s wisdom.*

*Encourage and develop the ideas, energy, talents, and leadership abilities of Pokagon Band youth.*

*Promote the health and well-being of Pokagon Band citizens.*

*Enhance economic opportunities for Pokagon Band citizens.*

*Develop comprehensive education opportunities for Pokagon Band citizens.*

Various boards, commissions and committees are tasked with carrying out the functions of the tribal government required by the Pokagon Band Constitution, including communications, education, health services, housing, natural resources, and social services.

The new Justice Center houses the Tribal Court and the headquarters for the Tribal Police Department. The interior and exterior designs are culturally appropriate for traditional peacemaking and native justice proceedings.
Farm to Table: Agriculture in Van Buren County

From its sprawling vineyards and apple orchards, to its many farmer’s markets, Van Buren County is a premier destination for those who seek an authentic farm to table experience.

Situated within a unusually temperate growing environment, and located in close proximity to major metropolitan areas, Van Buren County is respected as one of the top fruit growing counties within the Midwest. Van Buren’s citizens welcome visitors with an open door and encourage them to enjoy the amazing culinary options and agricultural facilities within the county.
ABOUT THE VAN BUREN COUNTY MASTER PLAN
INTRODUCTION TO A NEW APPROACH

Communities within Van Buren County have historically applied a traditional planning balance between the preservation of natural resources and rural character and support for economic growth and development. However, while the County’s local units of government individually define their visions for land use and community aesthetics, there is no mechanism in place to bring together the goals, objectives and priority issues of local planning commissions and local master plans in the broader regional discussion. It will take a collaboration of local planning commissions to advance land use decision-making that is more inclusive, more cooperative and more informed. The new master plan for Van Buren County is the ideal vehicle to make this happen.

Many conventional elements and the comprehensiveness of a local community master plan are not in place here. Rather, this plan is based on a collective and collaborative view amongst ALL of the planning commissions in the County. It identifies values common to the communities within Van Buren County, and establishes strategies intended to enhance those values and place them at the forefront of land use decisions. Specifically, in place of the typical list of land use goals and objectives, the values and strategies set forth in this plan are centered around key areas of focus common to the communities within the County. There is also a newly purposed advisory role for the Van Buren County Planning Commission and its staff in this planning process; a process that is centered around the County’s role as a convener; an educator; and a resource. This approach will serve to create partnerships, maximize resources, and apply community-wide strategies with improved results.
Van Buren County has many places to visit and discover by people who enjoy wildlife and natural beauty. The location and the climate created special types of outdoor activities such as, fishing, boating, hunting, and hiking. Also, there are some activities such as wildlife viewing and volunteer working that don’t take a specific place.

- Booting: south haven marina on lake Michigan
- Camping: Van Buren State Park at South Haven.
- Horseback Riding Trails: Van Buren Trail State Park
- Hunting: Cornish State Game Area, Fuller Woods State Game Area, Keeler State Game Area, Kinney Waterfowl Production Area. Those areas have different types of species such as American Bittern, Mallard, Ring-necked Pheasant, Eastern Wild Turkey, White-tailed Deer, American Woodcock.
- Snowmobiling: Snowmobile Trail - LP595, and Snowmobile Trail - LP58

Reference:
https://www.michigan.gov
In 2019, an inventory of all adopted local master plans within Van Buren County was completed. Of the County’s 29 local units of government (18 townships; 4 cities; 7 villages), 26 communities have adopted master plans and zoning ordinances. Geneva Township, Bloomingdale Township and the Village of Bloomingdale are the only communities in the County that do not engage in planning and zoning.

A review of these local master plans was conducted for the purposes of identifying the most important land use issues and key areas of focus for Van Buren County communities. Within these key areas of focus, the common values cited for each area of focus and the strategies developed to enhance those values were then identified. Supported by an analysis of current trends, a showcase of these key areas of focus and common values and strategies represents the core of the Van Buren County Master Plan.
This Plan actively acknowledges the land use policies in the master plans developed by the local units of government in Van Buren County. The following table illustrates that the communities within the County are working individually to address similar land use related issues. Recognizing these similar issues as ‘key areas of focus’ for the County will allow for a coordination of strategies.

| Goal / Area              | Township of Porter | Township of Paw Paw | Township of South Haven | Township of Hamilton | Township of Columbia | Township of Antwerp | Township of Keeler | Township of Decatur | Township of Lawrence | Township of Almena | Township of Pine Grove | Township of Covert | Township of Waverly | City of South Haven | Hartford City | Village of Decatur | Village of Mattawan | Village of Lawton | Village of Paw Paw |
|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Residential              | X                  | X                   | X                      | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                  | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                    | X                 | X                | X                | X              | X              | X                 |
| Agriculture              | X                  | X                   | X                      | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                  | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                    | X                 | X                | X                | X              | X              | X                 |
| Open spaces              | X                  | X                   | X                      | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                  | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                    | X                 | X                | X                | X              | X              | X                 |
| Economic development     | X                  | X                   | X                      | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                  | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                    | X                 | X                | X                | X              | X              | X                 |
| Infrastructure           |                    |                     |                        |                      |                     |                    |                    |                      |                     |                    | X                    | X                 | X                | X                | X              | X              | X                 |
| Community character      |                    |                     |                        |                      |                     |                    |                    |                      |                     |                    | X                    | X                 | X                | X                | X              | X              | X                 |
| Public services          | X                  | X                   | X                      | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                  | X                   | X                   | X                  | X                    | X                 | X                | X                | X              | X              | X                 |
| Transportation           | X                  | X                   | X                      |                      |                     |                    |                    |                      |                     |                    | X                    | X                 | X                | X                | X              | X              | X                 |
HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

Each identified Area of Focus is discussed in three parts: Current Trends and Analysis; Community Values; and, Strategies to Enhance Community Values.

**Current Trends and Analysis**

References collected data and information about the key area of focus within the County.

**Community Values**

Reflects the common values or principles applied to the key area of focus. It describes desired outcomes of actions but does not necessarily identify how to achieve them.

**Strategies to Enhance Community Values**

Actions recommended to strengthen or build upon the applied community values. Strategies generally address:

- **Direction**
  Where is the community trying to go?

- **Scope**
  What kinds of activities are involved?

- **Resources**
  What is needed or available to make it happen?
DEFINING THE ROLE OF COUNTY PLANNING

Although the Plan’s value statements and strategies are formulated and discussed based on the key areas of focus, an overarching value related to communication and collaboration provides the framework for the action element of the Van Buren County Master Plan and defines the role of the Van Buren County Planning Commission.

Strategies developed to enhance communication and collaboration among local units of government require the County to provide leadership in the role as:

**Convener**- of discussions among local units of government, county and state agencies, local non-profits, and user groups to help bring the groups together to serve the greater good.

**Educator**- to local governmental boards, commissions and committees on a myriad of topics requiring expertise.

**Resource Provider**- to local governmental boards, commissions and committees to assist them in staying informed on land use issues in the County and to cost-effectively provide guidance/information sharing on specific topic areas, including model ordinances, best practices and topic experts.

The strategies set forth in the Action Plan are a deliberate step toward solidifying that relationship between the County Planning Commission and the local units, and will underscore a collaborative system of land use planning in Van Buren County.
Today, Michigan wines rank among the finest wines made anywhere in the Country. Van Buren County has many of these famous wineries, in which are featured on the Southwest Michigan Wine Trail.

The Lake Michigan Shore Wine AVA holds 90% of Michigan’s vineyards. This area is the Historic cradle of Michigan’s viticulture with commercial vineyards dating back to 1867. The region is part of the great Fruit Belt that produces most of America’s grapes for juice and jelly production, catching the attention of a large companies such as Welch’s Grape Juice Company.

St. Julian Winery in Paw Paw is credited with being the state’s largest and oldest continuously operating winery, followed by Warner Vine Yards wineries nationally-known as the award winning wineries benefiting from the area’s location east of Lake Michigan. Van Buren County is a must-visit tasting destination when looking for Southwest Michigan wineries and breweries.

What better way to share quality wine with friends, family, and your community while helping to preserve the rural countryside of Van Buren County.
VAN BUREN COUNTY PROFILE
REGIONAL SETTING

Van Buren County is located in southwestern Michigan along the scenic Lake Michigan shoreline. Its convenient proximity to local economic centers such as Kalamazoo, St. Joseph/Benton Harbor and South Bend, along with its status as a halfway point between Chicago and Detroit, make it a popular destination for recreation, business and tourism.

Van Buren County is known for its agricultural roots, favorable growing climate, and boundless natural assets. The miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, many inland lakes, endless blue and green trail systems, an agri-tourism emphasis, active small-town centers and rural communities, offer both residents and visitors alike a wide range of amenities, opportunities and quality living environments.

Local units of government include the county seat of the Village of Paw Paw, as well as 18 townships, four cities and six other villages. Most municipalities maintain their own master plan and zoning ordinance, but several jurisdictions within the County have adopted joint plans with neighboring communities. The various jurisdictions within the County, along with many local agencies and organizations, have a history of collaboration and cooperation.
LAND USE

The most recent completed Current Land Use map for Van Buren County dates back to 1978 and does not provide an accurate representation of land use in Van Buren County today. Until an accurate, updated Land Use map is complete a tax classification map is used here to identify current county land uses. The land use classification map identifies the current tax classification for each parcel of land in Van Buren County. This map was originally created from aggregated tax classes, and does not distinguish between developed and undeveloped land.

The total area of the County is approximately 1,090 square miles, of which about 607 square miles is land and 482 square miles is water.

The predominant land use is, by far, residential and agricultural, constituting 92% of the total land area. This is followed by a substantial amount of publicly owned land, such as state land and county parks, at 3%.

Agricultural land occurs throughout the County, but fruit crops tend to be concentrated in the western portions nearer Lake Michigan.

Residential uses are found in higher densities along the eastern fringe of the county near the more urbanized Kalamazoo County, and the western fringe of the county in close proximity to the Lake Michigan shoreline. Residential land use is also predominantly found in and around the County’s many small towns and near the many popular inland lakes. More intense land uses such as commercial, industrial, institutional and transportation are primarily found within the County’s four cities, and to a lesser extent in villages and along major corridors throughout the County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification Type</th>
<th>Area (in acres)</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>178,337</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>176,050</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax Exempt</td>
<td>11,797</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>7,571</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>5,561</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>3,203</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNR Property</td>
<td>1,669</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Forest</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Acreage</td>
<td>384,955</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost 46% of land in the County is used for agriculture. Many local units have adopted zoning techniques to preserve essential farmland.
POPULATION

Van Buren County’s total population was 76,258 in 2010, a decrease of only 5 people from the 2000 population of 76,263. It is estimated that the population decreased to 75,190 by 2017. Though the county’s total population has remained relatively stable, the communities of Antwerp Township, Almena Township and Paw Paw Township located near the Kalamazoo County border have experienced significant growth. The County has an overall population density of 125.5 people per square mile.

As a community with many tourist destinations and vacation homes, Van Buren County experiences population increases during the summer months when a temporary influx of seasonal residents arrive.

At 40 years, the median age of Van Buren County residents is higher than the state and national median ages of 38.1 and 37.2 respectively. Locally, the lowest median age of 31.3 was in the City of Hartford, where 34.29% of the population is under 19 years of age. The highest median age of 47.6, was in the City of South Haven, where 29.6% of the population is over the age of 60. In 2010, 25.5% of the County’s population was under 18 years and 13.8% was 65 years or older. In 2017, it is estimated that 16.5% of the households were 65 or older.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipal Units</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almena Twp.</td>
<td>4226</td>
<td>4992</td>
<td>18.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antwerp Twp.</td>
<td>6298</td>
<td>12182</td>
<td>93.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington Twp.</td>
<td>2075</td>
<td>2073</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>-4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangor Twp.</td>
<td>2121</td>
<td>2147</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloomingdale</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>-14.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloomingdale Twp.</td>
<td>2121</td>
<td>2147</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breedsville</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>-15.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia Twp.</td>
<td>2479</td>
<td>2588</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covert Twp.</td>
<td>3141</td>
<td>2888</td>
<td>-8.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decatur</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>1819</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decatur Twp.</td>
<td>2078</td>
<td>3726</td>
<td>79.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva Twp.</td>
<td>3975</td>
<td>3573</td>
<td>79.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gobles</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton Twp.</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>1489</td>
<td>-17.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>2476</td>
<td>2688</td>
<td>8.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford Twp.</td>
<td>3159</td>
<td>3274</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeler Twp.</td>
<td>2601</td>
<td>2169</td>
<td>-16.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>-5.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawrence Twp.</td>
<td>2282</td>
<td>3259</td>
<td>42.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawton</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattawan</td>
<td>2536</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>-21.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paw Paw</td>
<td>3473</td>
<td>3534</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paw Paw Twp.</td>
<td>3738</td>
<td>7041</td>
<td>88.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pine Grove Twp.</td>
<td>2773</td>
<td>2949</td>
<td>6.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Porter Twp.</td>
<td>2406</td>
<td>2466</td>
<td>2.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Haven</td>
<td>5013</td>
<td>4400</td>
<td>-12.23</td>
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<td>South Haven Twp.</td>
<td>4046</td>
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<td>-1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waverly Twp.</td>
<td>2467</td>
<td>2554</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COASTAL COMMUNITY

Find your perfect escape on Van Buren County’s 13 miles of Lake Michigan coastline! The county’s Lake Michigan Shoreline and hundreds of inland lakes serve as a great recreation and vacation destination for the whole family! Visit the beach, play sand volleyball, sail, or jet ski on the beautiful lakeside escape.

Kayaking, boating and swimming are just a few of the activities offered on the Lake Michigan coastline!
AREAS OF FOCUS
Van Buren County is situated within an abnormally warm growing climate given its northern latitude. Due to the moderating effects of Lake Michigan, most of the County is in US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Hardiness Zone 6b. This temperate hardiness zone is more common in states like Kentucky, Missouri, and Oklahoma, and extremely uncommon farther north. This unique micro-climate is ideal for growing fruits, vegetables and orchard products.

According to the USDA there are 1,113 farms that comprise 175,121 acres of land in the County. There is a diverse variety of crops grown within the County, from fruits and berries to traditional mainstays like feed corn and soybeans. Van Buren County is not only the number one producer of blueberries within the State of Michigan but of the entire United States, with 8,497 acres of land devoted to the crop. The County is also the number one producer of blackberries and bell peppers within the state, and is a leading producer of strawberries, grapes and apples.
Just as there are a diverse array of crops grown within the County, there is an equally diverse contingent of farm operators managing Van Buren’s agriculture. There are currently 535 female farm operators in the County, as well as more Hispanic American and African American farm operators than any other county in Michigan. Van Buren County is also home to a growing Old Order Amish community that was founded in 1998, and has grown exponentially since then. Today, the Amish community is especially centered in Bloomingdale Township with some expansion into neighboring municipalities.

Van Buren’s residents and community leaders recognize the historic value and economic importance of their county’s agricultural and rural character. In an effort to assist the farmland and open space preservation efforts of the local units of government, the County adopted the Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Ordinance, establishing a formal countywide preservation program that allows the purchase of development rights for farmlands. In addition to the PDR program, Van Buren County also supports the farmland preservation efforts of local units of government through tax relief and zoning techniques.
The population and housing in Van Buren County is generally concentrated in the local cities and villages. Paw Paw, Hartford, Decatur, Bangor, and South Haven all reflect the greatest densities of population and housing units per square mile of land area within the County.

In 2010, the majority of the County’s housing consisted of owner-occupied, single-family detached housing, accounting for 68.7% of the housing stock. The remainder of the housing stock consisted of: 3.1% duplexes; 6.5% townhouse/attached single family; 18.6% multi-family, and 3.1% mobile or manufactured housing. Most rental and multi-family housing in the County is concentrated in and immediately adjacent to the County’s town centers where necessary infrastructure is available.

Housing vacancy rates in Van Buren County are low, especially in recognition that the majority of ‘vacant’ housing units are for seasonal, recreational or occasional use. In 2010, only 8% of the housing units in the County were actually vacant; a rate that is estimated to have declined further in 2017 and reflective of the housing shortage trends occurring in southwest Michigan.
The affordability of housing in Van Buren County is also of relevance in identifying housing needs. Overall, the estimated median household income in the County in 2017 was $49,119, while the estimated median value of a home in the County was $123,100. In order to determine the extent to which housing is affordable, the unit price statistic is calculated by multiplying the household median income by 2.5. Based on the overall County median household income, an affordable home costs $122,798 or less. Because the median home value indicates the ‘middle’ value of homes in the County, it can be assumed that over half of the homes are valued at greater than $123,100, slightly higher than the cost of an ‘affordable home’ to at least half of the population.

The adequacy of housing is also measured by the physical condition of the home. The age of housing can often influence the general quality of a neighborhood and may signal areas where increased code enforcement is needed.

As of 2017, nearly 60% of the housing in Van Buren County was built prior to 1980.

The continued development and renovation of affordable housing remains important in Van Buren County and should be directed to developed areas supported by infrastructure, walkable environments and proximity to services. The County continues to encourage low impact development strategies in rural areas adjacent to town centers in order to preserve farmland and natural features essential to the agricultural and recreational economy.

Nearly 70% of housing in Van Buren County is single-family detached, with an overall vacancy rate of less than 8%.
Value Statement
Van Buren County values recreation as a key source of local tourism and an economic driver for the community. It is recognized that our vast natural resources provide the platform for recreation opportunities in the county.

Strategies to Enhance Community Values
- Create a reference list of evaluation guidelines for conditions of existing recreation facilities to ensure adequate maintenance.
- Facilitate municipalities within Van Buren County to work together on recreation issues and regional recreational assets, as recreation has been established as a regional priority.
- Study and identify if areas within the County are deficient in recreational facilities based upon Department of Natural Resources Guidelines; provide assistance in addressing facility gaps through the County Parks & Recreation Plan.
- Serve as a resource to local units of government in the preparation of local parks & recreation plans needed to secure recreational grants for facility improvements.

Recreation in Van Buren County is largely tied to the area’s abundant and pristine natural assets. Extensive Lake Michigan coastline, numerous inland lakes, recognized blue and green trail systems, and expansive agricultural areas attract and serve both community residents and visitors.

Waterways, wineries, trails, and parkland within the County allow for a diverse selection of recreational opportunities, offering something for everyone! An abundance of water resources provide many areas for water sports, such as skiing, tubing, boating, and fishing. In addition to waterways, the area is host to nearly a dozen golf courses and a ski resort, as well as two raceways, offering County residents and tourists numerous ways to participate in recreational activities.

Van Buren County has become a hotspot for wineries and breweries in Michigan. Due to a uniquely warm climate providing for agricultural opportunities within the community, an abundance of wineries and breweries have become a staple in the area, making wine tasting, spending time on wine trails, and exploring wine country accessible in Van Buren County’s own backyard!
With recreation and local tourism as an economic driver in the County, local municipalities within Van Buren County have listed recreation and preservation of the natural environment as a top priority. Providing adequate recreation is often a regional task. Communities within the County have teamed up to acquire, maintain, improve, and attract users to local recreation destinations. The joint master plans between Hartford Township and the City of Hartford, and between Hamilton Township, Decatur Township and the Village of Decatur, have listed maintaining and enhancing high quality recreation facilities as a priority.

The Kal-Haven Trail extends 33 miles across Van Buren and Kalamazoo Counties, connecting South Haven and Kalamazoo.
### Southwestern Michigan Trails

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linear Path</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mountain Biking Trails</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battle Creek Linear Trail</td>
<td>Over 22 miles of trails wind through wooded areas, open fields, parks, and some commercial areas. Historical and cultural elements along the trail.</td>
<td>All Sabo Land Preserve</td>
<td>7 miles of mountain bike trails go through this land preserve, Located near Kalamazoo Valley Community College. <a href="http://www.kalva.edu/landpreserves">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holmen Zealand Bike Path Network</td>
<td>Several miles of a bike path network including multi-use paths separate from the main roads and co-road connections. Includes the Laketown Connector Path which runs along Laketown Dr. and connects to the Trail Winds Trail Network.</td>
<td>Dr. T.K. Lawless Park</td>
<td>9 miles of light mountain biking trail for all difficulties. M-40 to Lewis Lake Rd, S on Lewis Lake Rd N to Monkey Run Rd. Turn East onto Monkey Run Rd. The path is on the left. <a href="http://www.kalamazoo.org/parks">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalamazoo River Valley Trail (KVT)</td>
<td>The KVT connects the Kalamazoo River Trail, the Battle Creek Linear Park, and the Portage Area Western Trail. The KVT passes through downtown Kalamazoo, Portage, and Battle Creek.</td>
<td>Fort Custer Recreation Area</td>
<td>25 miles of mountain biking trails. Accessible from Eagle Lake &amp; Whitmore Lake parking areas, designated for mountain biking and through the campground. <a href="http://www.fortcuster.com">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KalHaven Trail South Haven</td>
<td>A 54-mile crushed limestone trail connecting South Haven and Kalamazoo. The trail meanders through wooded areas, past farmlands, over rivers, and streams. The trail is suitable for all non-motorized activities, including mountain biking.</td>
<td>KalBog Forest, MSU</td>
<td>This area has several low-track roads great for beginner riders. <a href="http://www.msu.edu/property/details.aspx?id=68561">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Henry Runnymeade Trail</td>
<td>The trail passes through farmlands, woodlands, small rivers, and along rivers and streams. The most scenic part of the trail is its close proximity to the Thornapple River. Sections of the trail are closed Nov-Dec.</td>
<td>Modoc Recreation Park (MI)</td>
<td>360: 2.2 miles of trail with a hard-packed natural surface along the St. Joseph River. <a href="http://www.thornappletrail.org">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portage Biosentinal Linear Park</td>
<td>A network of biking trails with parking at Doyon Road (just west of Portage Library), Stabler Park, The Charter School (Portage), or the Portage District Library.</td>
<td>Lake Creek Park (IL)</td>
<td>LC: 425 miles of beginning to intermediate level mountain bike trails, <a href="http://www.giantbikemagic.com">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Buren Trail South Haven</td>
<td>A 45-mile multi-use trail that runs between Portage and South Haven. Bikers, runners, and walkers will find a pleasant place to enjoy.</td>
<td>Markin Glen Park</td>
<td>Only the downhill course is open to biking. The downhill course measures the small amount of elevation change available. <a href="http://www.mswaterways.org">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yankee Springs Recreation Area</td>
<td>13 miles of mountain biking trails, includes a four-mile loop of the Deep Lake Trail, and leads through some of the most rugged hills in the area.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mswaterways.org">Link</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Van Buren County, ideally situated within three urban areas: Kalamazoo (east), Benton Harbor (west), and Grand Rapids (north), is home to numerous and vibrant small town centers. These communities serve as anchors within the County and bring economic and civic value to the region. They offer quaint downtowns, civic arenas, public spaces, and housing choices in walkable environments, accenting the County’s rural landscape. These town centers successfully attract business and serve residents and visitors in the County and are valued.

Many local master plans support building upon an existing town center or focusing on an existing downtown or main street. The County recognizes that sustaining self-contained communities that offer a broad range of social and economic amenities, and that are buffered by the open lands and agricultural uses, will provide the region with active charming places with strong identities.

Support for growth in existing developed areas has led to the success of the Van Buren County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, which has participated in the clean-up and redevelopment of numerous urban sites in the County and resulted in private investment and jobs.

Focusing development in existing cities and villages has recently become a state priority as well. The state-wide economic development strategy focuses on ‘placemaking’, which
understands that ‘a community without place amenities will have a difficult time attracting and retaining talented workers and entrepreneurs, or being attractive to business.’ In consideration of the focus of local master plans and the recognized value of creating a network of unique town centers in the County, ‘growth and investment areas’ throughout the County have been identified by the Van Buren County Planning Commission.

Growth & Investment Areas are based on the existing development pattern, zoning, infrastructure, and community assets, like schools and post offices. Essentially, growth is directed to areas of existing development or established contiguous areas where infrastructure and services are available. Land uses in these areas are anticipated to be of a mixed-use village form and provide excellent opportunities for new businesses and housing modeled after the region’s pattern of traditional towns and villages.

The following Growth & Investment Areas map identifies priority locations for development and redevelopment as encouraged by local units of government and the County.
Growth and Investment Map

- Zones for Growth and Investment
- High Density Community Centers
Van Buren County is known for its rural charm and casual pace of living, but it is also known as an important transportation crossroad, strategically situated between two major cities and a number of smaller urban centers. Highlights of the transportation system in Van Buren County include the following:

**Corridors**

The County is traversed by Interstate 94, which connects travelers to Detroit and Chicago and a number of important regional attractions, including Indiana Dunes National Park. This double lane thoroughfare makes five stops within the County and spans 24 miles between Hartford Township and Mattawan Township. It is for this reason that the I-94 corridor, especially at its exits, is one of the most important growth corridors within the County. Service and hospitality developments cluster at exits providing amenities and convenience to residents and visitors alike.

Interstate 196 connects the County and neighboring areas to popular attractions in northern Michigan, including Traverse City and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. There are three exits that hug the lakeshore within the County and service popular recreational destinations and the City of South Haven. Besides these major thoroughfares, there are also a number of smaller state and county highways that crisscross the area and provide key connections between local
communities. Smaller centers of growth tend to cluster around these roads, both in the form of traditional downtown developments and in modern shopping plazas. These corridors are very important for the economic sustainability of the County, but most municipalities agree that they need to be carefully planned to ensure the continued protection of the area’s rural culture and heritage.

**Complete Streets**
Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets are designed to make it easy to cross the street; to safely walk or bicycle to work; and for public transit to run on time. Signed into law in August 2010, many local communities have adopted policies and resolutions prioritizing the creation of transportation facilities that accommodate all users.

**Public Transportation**
For those without access to a personal automobile, or who prefer public transportation, there are also bus and rail connections between the county and neighboring communities. A bus station in South Haven and the Amtrak Train Station in Bangor provide popular connections to Grand Rapids and Chicago. Area Amtrak stops include: Bangor, Kalamazoo, Dowagiac, Niles, South Bend, Elkhart and multiple stops in the Chicago area. The Van Buren Star provides bus routes within the communities of South Haven, Bangor and Paw Paw. Van Buren Public Transit also provides specialized transportation service for the elderly and those with disabilities.
Air Travel
In addition to public transit, the County is also served by several area airports. These include: Gerald R. Ford International (Grand Rapids), Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International, Capital City (Lansing), Southwest Michigan Regional (Benton Harbor), South Bend Regional, and Midway and O’Hare International (Chicago). Many smaller airstrips for private craft are located within the County.

Non-Motorized Transportation
Two major non-motorized pathways traverse Van Buren County: the Kal-Haven Trail and the Van Buren Trail. The Kal-Haven Trail was originally a 33.5-mile-long linear multi-use trail that linked Kalamazoo to South Haven. The trail started in South Haven on North Bailey Avenue and ended in Kalamazoo at a trailhead located on 10th Street. In 2008, the trail was extended east from the trailhead to downtown Kalamazoo as part of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail. The trail occupies an original 1870 railroad bed that has since been converted to a trail with a limestone/slag surface. It is usable for all non-motorized bicycles, hiking, and snowmobiling. Most of the trail runs through Van Buren County and, from the trailhead west to South Haven, is operated by the County. The Van Buren Trail runs through open farmland, blueberry fields, dense brush and wooded areas. This creates a nice, but challenging ride that is more suitable to mountain bikes. The width of the trail varies from 10 to 18 feet. The South Haven Trailhead is located on Lovejoy Street next to the water tower. The City of Hartford trailhead is located on Prospect Street. Thousands of local residents and tourists use the trails each year. Many youth, non-profit, and recreational organizations request to use the trails each year, often for multi-day rides. Through the partnership efforts of the various groups who operate and have special interests in the trails, operations should run smoothly for years to come.

Water & Wastewater
Most local municipalities provide public sanitary sewer and water utilities for their residents, while rural townships rely on private on-site systems.

Energy
Van Buren County is serviced by a number of local utility companies. The Indiana Michigan Power Company services roughly a third of the County’s total land area, with Consumers Energy being the predominant carrier in the rest of the County. Small areas of the County are also serviced through the Midwest Energy Cooperative.

Broadband
High speed internet is available for most of the County through fiber broadband, cable broadband, DSL, and wireless broadband. There is no portion of the County where internet service is not provided. Given the County’s predominantly rural setting, broadband service is essential in support of e-commerce, tourism, and entrepreneurship.
Area of Focus 6

Natural Assets

Value Statement
We value the natural features, open spaces, and landscape of Van Buren County that provide the basis for the health of the local economy and quality of life for its residents.

Strategies to Enhance Community Values

- Develop a comprehensive list of area organizations that work in the area of natural resource protection with descriptions of the work they do and the expertise they offer local units.

- Provide educational resources and model ordinances to local units in the areas of natural resource protection and open space preservation.

- Convene local units and provide a County connection on county-wide natural resource protection issues and measures to bring strength to the issues with state agencies.

- Facilitate coordination and cooperation between local units, other governmental agencies, and community organizations that contribute to the management of environmentally sensitive areas and natural assets.

- Continue to promote and educate on the use of land use regulatory measures and development standards that promote the protection of key natural features and encourage development techniques that retain large, un-fragmented parcels.

- Promote through local master plan and zoning ordinance reviews waterfront and watershed management techniques that regulate land use and require development practices designed to protect surface water and groundwater quality.

- Prohibit the use of phosphorus-based fertilizers and other potential contaminants in the maintenance of public infrastructure and property.

The County’s landscape is highlighted by Lake Michigan and its 14 miles of shoreline along the west side of the County, as well as over 300 inland lakes and ponds ranging in size from less than 0.1 acre to 300 acres.

Both the Black River and the Paw Paw River flow through the County, with the Black River emptying into Lake Michigan at South Haven and the Paw Paw River joining the St. Joseph River just above its mouth on Lake Michigan at Benton Harbor.

County residents view the rivers as a priceless community asset and a beautiful, wild and thriving floodplain forest eco-system, serving as a habitat for migratory birds and rare species of butterflies, snakes and turtles. The rivers and adjacent wetlands are also home to over 39 species of fish.
Van Buren County is largely rural with nearly 46% of its land area being public lands, undeveloped or in agricultural use, and another 45% in low density residential development and open space. The local natural beauty, outdoor recreation, and favorable agricultural conditions figure prominently in the minds of residents and serve as the dominating force behind the vision for the County.

Based on local master plans and a variety of local opinion surveys, water quality and storm water management continue to rank as top priorities in the County. Findings include:

- All residents depend on groundwater for domestic water supply.
- Lakes and wetlands are key locations for threatened and endangered species.
- Water quality and the area’s natural resources are important to the area’s economic development.
- The area’s natural assets attract tourists to the region.
- The area’s natural assets provide an increased quality of life that helps attract workers/residents needed by area employers.
- The County’s green and blue infrastructure (network of multi-functional open spaces, including parks, woodlands, waterways, wetlands and open countryside) have a considerably positive impact on population and employment levels.

As the community has recognized the value of its natural assets, there have been county-wide efforts instituted to protect those resources, including the Van Buren County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Ordinance, establishing a formal countywide program to protect and preserve farmland and open space within the County, and numerous local watershed and waterfront management efforts.
Kayaking on the Paw Paw River within Van Buren County.
Zoning was established in an era in which the key purpose for land use regulation was to separate residential land use from commercial and industrial activities. Over the years, the factors affecting land use have changed. Advances in transportation and communication; the migration of people and industry from urban centers to suburban and rural locations; changes in lifestyles and living arrangements; and, the changing demands for natural resources present a challenge to traditional zoning techniques. Communities now recognize the need and ability to apply development standards that instead complement and protect the region’s unique beauty, diverse natural resources, and exceptional recreational opportunities.

Land use planning and zoning are essential for long-range sustainable growth. The utilization of these tools and techniques promote the health, safety and welfare of a community. Within Van Buren County, zoning is used to apply land use regulations that protect the look and feel of the community. Zoning remains the single most important tool for managing development and aiding the County in achieving goals and visions.

With the gift of vast natural resources in Van Buren County, there comes a responsibility to protect the environment, and to keep pleasant living conditions intact now and in the future. This includes involvement in creating sustainable patterns of agriculture, commerce and industry, recreation, residences, and public facilities. Planning, based on an evaluation of existing conditions, provides the process that effectuates this desired land use pattern.
The County recognizes that land suitable for farming is an irreplaceable natural resource with soil and topographic characteristics that have been enhanced by generations of agricultural use, and when such land is converted to residential or other uses, a critical County resource is permanently lost to the current and future citizens of Van Buren County and the State of Michigan. Because the availability of farmland and open space, including wetlands, woods, agricultural fields and wildlife habitat areas, stimulates both the human spirit and the local economy, these resources are protected through use of zoning and land use management.

Local municipalities in Van Buren County have implemented techniques to preserve the agricultural and rural character of the region while also responding to development trends. Zoning responsive to economic development objectives in small towns creates special needs and special criteria such as promoting a vibrant downtown or commercial district, while still keeping rural and residential areas intact. Implementation of zoning techniques such as mixed-use districts and form-based codes, allows the County to meet these needs. Recognizing the need to be flexible in order to achieve the goals of their master plans, communities are increasingly modifying their development standards.

To be successful, this effort also requires flexible development standards by other public agencies that regulate development, including the road commission, fire departments, and the health department, among others.

**Value Statement**

Van Buren County values its mix of active farms, beautiful natural areas, rural landscape, and conveniently situated cities and villages with small town charm and modern amenities. The County values the protection of its key resources and reinvestment in existing areas of development.

**Strategies to Enhance Community Values**

- Sponsor and facilitate education and training on development review.
- Create a reference list of what is needed to ensure development success for use by local jurisdictions during development reviews.
- Convene county-wide discussions of road and fire standards by local planning commissions to identify areas well-suited to a common approach.
- Develop and make available to local communities a model form-based code for small downtowns and traditional neighborhoods.
- Develop a web page that provides up to date information about community projects within Van Buren County to facilitate coordination between communities and market the County.
- Continue and expand upon a system of coordinated review by external agencies of local zoning ordinance updates.
- Encourage and facilitate joint site plan reviews among local jurisdictions along major county corridors and in areas along jurisdictional boundaries.
In Michigan, land development regulation is generally a local responsibility. This means that individuals can have a great influence on the policies and regulations that affect their community. Land use planning and zoning is entrenched in Van Buren County as 26 of the 29 local units of government maintain a planning commission and have prepared a master plan and zoning ordinance.

With 26 local units of government engaged in land use planning and almost 200 planning commissioners in Van Buren County, there is opportunity for collaboration and planning together. In addition, each of the surrounding counties and adjacent communities have a planning commission. Many planning commissions in the County have opened lines of communication with their neighboring planning commissions to coordinate on land use issues of common concern. To date, there have been some formal collaborative efforts, most notably the joint master plans developed by Village of Decatur/Decatur Township/Hamilton Township and the City of Hartford/Hartford Township.
Beyond county borders, coordination with adjacent counties becomes equally as important to address the many issues that go beyond county boundaries, including infrastructure, transportation, and protection of natural resources, as well as regional assets, such as trailways. In the report, “Breaking Down Barriers to Cooperative Land Use Planning” by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), barriers to multijurisdictional planning and land use decision making can be gradually lowered or removed with the help of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-jurisdictional diplomacy that 1) respects the unique histories and needs of townships, villages and cities; 2) recognizes both common interests and fundamental differences between cooperating municipalities; and, 3) builds trust and works toward shared city-township goals.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional planning support that offers a sophisticated understanding of municipal governments, state statutes and local powers, and helps communities problem-solve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical assistance that supports local planning and decision making such as geographic data development and analysis (e.g., using geographic information systems), as well as community-wide information sharing and public participation processes (e.g., citizen task teams, survey research, and community-active Web sites).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and educational workshops supported by a growing library of successful model projects providing a clear record of success and lessons learned from an assortment of multijurisdictional projects.</td>
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</table>

**Value Statement**

Van Buren County values the creation of opportunities for local units, the grass-roots decision-makers, to collaborate with each other and numerous other potential partners, on land use issues of interest and common impact.

**Strategies to Enhance Community Values**

- Create regular forums where local planning commissions meet to talk about identified common interests.
- Sponsor community round tables with subject matter experts to provide education and assistance on topics of concern with little cost to local units.
- Develop a communication platform between the County and local planning commissions to allow the County to identify and facilitate potential partnerships in local decision-making.
- Provide educational opportunities to local units on the merit, availability and requirements for joint planning efforts. Serve as facilitator in joint planning projects.
- Actively communicate to local units about regional and intra-county planning opportunities and programs.
Van Buren County shares borders with Allegan, Kalamazoo, Cass, and Berrien Counties which all have local planning and zoning. Other than a healthy portion of Kalamazoo County and the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area in Berrien County, these areas are primarily rural where residents often travel to the two urban areas for work, air transportation, shopping, college, medical care, and recreation. Although limited formal discussion of regional issues has begun through the Regional Prosperity Initiative, there is currently little collaboration among the counties on land use issues.

Roundtable discussion for agriculture week in Paw Paw.
Assets of Van Buren County.
Highlighting the best from the county and its communities.

1. Lake Michigan Shoreline
2. Transportation Connections
3. Recreational Areas
4. Wine Country
5. Small Town Charm
6. Inland Lakes and Rivers
Lake Michigan Shoreline

Van Buren’s 20 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline provide boundless recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Transportation Connections

With rail, bus and road connections, Van Buren County is a regional crossroads with boundless opportunity.

Small Town Charm

From quaint downtown shops to local festivals, each of Van Buren's 11 villages and cities has something unique to offer.

Recruitment Galore

From hiking, to biking, to cross country skiing Van Buren County’s dozens of miles of trails offer something for everybody.

Inland Lakes and Rivers

The scenic Paw Paw River and hundreds of inland lakes provide year round recreation and sport and help drive the local economy.

Wine and Dine

With multiple wineries and orchards, Van Buren County has become known as a popular place to wine and dine.
Gaps and Opportunities Map

- **High Density Walkable Growth**
- **Greenways**
- **Blueways**
- **Potential Bus and Train Amenities**
- **Potential Trailways Amenities**

- **Highway Commercial Potential**
- **Potential Greenway Expansions**
- **Community Gateway Corridors**
- **Wine Trail Stops**
It is the mission of the Van Buren County Planning Commission to:

- Encourage and facilitate local planning efforts, especially with respect to coordinated planning – **ENCOURAGE & CONVENE PARTICIPANTS**

- Emphasize the importance of ongoing education and training for local appointed and elected officials in order to uphold responsible, effective decision-making – **DELIVER EDUCATION**

- Help communities understand the need to plan in order to proactively mitigate land use conflicts, resolve issues, and make development decisions that are predictable, equitable, and cost effective – **PROVIDE RESOURCES**

**OVERARCHING RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Promote consistency, complementation, and coordination in land use between and among county, city, village, and township entities through master plan review and coordinated County planning.

- Provide educational opportunities, ideas, and resources to local governmental boards, commission, committees, and the citizens they serve.

- Help local units to understand and respond to issues related to urban sprawl.
• Be present and available to local units to respond to local needs.

• Continue education of its own members to better serve the local units.

The Values and Strategies to Enhance Values established within each Area of Focus have been translated into actions to form the Action Plan for the Master Plan. The Action Plan has been developed as a matrix according to the three Mission centerpieces: Encourage and Convene Participants; Deliver Education; and Provide Resources.

The following four categories are listed within each Mission centerpiece:

1. **Action** – a measurable activity that supports completion of a Strategy.
2. **Partners** – community members, municipalities, businesses or other groups needed to collaborate to execute the Action.
3. **Required Resources** – financial or personnel-based assets needed to execute the Action.
4. **Outcome** – result gained (or goal met) from execution of the Action.

### A. ENCOURAGE & CONVENE PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>Required Resources</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bring together a team of local officials and non-profit organizations engaged in land conservation efforts to assist individual local units with farmland and natural resource preservation strategies.</td>
<td>Local and County planning commissioners, staff/consultants, conservation personnel</td>
<td>Staff time; professional technical assistance and internet-based outreach resources</td>
<td>Effective protection of farmland, open space and natural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist in communication between local units planning for town centers and gateway corridors to facilitate coordination of transportation, land use, and design policies.</td>
<td>Local planning commissioners, staff/consultants, elected officials</td>
<td>Staff time, professional technical assistance, communication platform</td>
<td>Multi-modal connectivity between town centers; recognition of gateway corridor design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convene a quarterly meeting of planning commissioners and planning/zoning staff from each local unit within the County to engage on planning trends and</td>
<td>Local and County planning commissioners, staff/consultants</td>
<td>Staff time; internet-based outreach program</td>
<td>Flourishing joint ventures and partnerships between municipalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>Required Resources</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
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<td>community priorities and to build collaborative strategies on issues of common interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organize an annual meeting for local units in the County to collaborate on land-use planning and transportation issues.</td>
<td>Local and County elected officials and planning commissioners</td>
<td>Staff time; internet-based outreach program</td>
<td>Acquire insight on land-use planning and transportation issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate strategic alignment of the County Planning Commission, Economic Development Corporation and Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.</td>
<td>Representatives and staff from all boards</td>
<td>Facilitator; internet-based outreach resources</td>
<td>Coordinated delivery of economic development and redevelopment services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. DELIVER EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partners</strong></td>
<td><strong>Required Resources</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor annual training workshops for local planning commissioners on key local issues.</td>
<td>Local planning commissioners</td>
<td>Professional technical assistance</td>
<td>Affordable educational opportunity on relevant local issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor annual basic training workshops for local planning commissioners and zba members.</td>
<td>Local planning commissioners, local zba members</td>
<td>Professional technical assistance</td>
<td>Affordable training opportunity; consistency in local training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide technical GIS training to planning and zoning administrators within the county.</td>
<td>Local zoning administrators</td>
<td>GIS professional consultant</td>
<td>Availability of yearly GIS/zoning workshop for municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct educational forums for County residents and businesses on current planning and zoning topics.</td>
<td>Local residents; community business owners</td>
<td>Professional technical assistance</td>
<td>Informed public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. PROVIDE RESOURCES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partners</strong></td>
<td><strong>Required Resources</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a source of GIS data, information, and assistance for local units within the County.</td>
<td>Staff from local units within the County</td>
<td>County staff time &amp; technical resources</td>
<td>Local units within the County up to speed on use of GIS techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and public a bi-annual newsletter with planning information for local units . . specifically zoning, transportation, and environmental/agricultural protection.</td>
<td>Staff from local units within the County</td>
<td>County staff time &amp; technical resources</td>
<td>Van Buren County online and newsletter presence as a planning resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an online, comprehensive planning resource directory on funding resources, experts, facilitators, case studies, and best practices related to specific topics.</td>
<td>Local and County planning commissioners, staff/consultants</td>
<td>Professional technical assistance, web site development</td>
<td>Accessible resource specific to the County and local issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Develop and provide model ordinances on land use and development issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Staff/consultants</th>
<th>Professional technical assistance</th>
<th>Assistance in ordinance development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop a County-wide codification system for zoning ordinances to help in comparing ordinance language within the County.</strong></td>
<td>Staff/consultants</td>
<td>Professional technical assistance</td>
<td>County-Wide Zoning Codification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>