

EXISTING LAND USE

General Overview

Historically, development in Lyon Township has been influenced by several key parameters, including the predominance of agriculture, major transportation corridors, railroads, proximity to the City of South Lyon, proximity to the Detroit metropolitan area, soil limitations, natural features and resources, and development of the Kensington Metro Park. The most significant impact on development in the Township in recent years is the availability of public sewer and water utilities.

For most of its history, agriculture has been the predominant land use in Lyon Township. Early settlement of the township consisted mainly of farms, which were cleared from the heavily timbered land. Early concentrations of development took place in three locations during the 1830's: Kensington, New Hudson, and South Lyon.

The Town of Kensington was established in 1832 at the junction of the Huron River and a toll road, which later became Grand River Avenue. Kensington's prosperity rose quickly as a stagecoach stop for travelers, but started to decline in the late 1850's and by 1890 Kensington was a ghost town. In the 1940's, the Huron River was dammed, Kensington was flooded, and Kent Lake was expanded for the creation of the present Kensington Metropolitan Park.

New Hudson was settled in 1832 at the crossroads of Pontiac Trail, a state territorial road that was constructed in the 1830's and the primary north-south axis of the Township, and Grand River Avenue, which became the primary east-west axis. Like Kensington, New Hudson served as a stagecoach stop for travelers. When the Pere Marquette rail line from Detroit to Grand Rapids was constructed in 1871 New Hudson became a rail stop. Although New Hudson never incorporated as a city or village, it is now the home for the Township Hall and Fire Station No. 1.

In 1835 a settlement was established near a store and mill located in the southwest part of the township known for years as Thompson's Corners. In 1847, a post office was established in the settlement under the name of South Lyon. South Lyon, which was incorporated as a village in 1873, was an original stop on the Pere Marquette Railway, and it later became a rail stop for the Grand Trunk Western and Chesapeake & Ohio railroads.

Among the three original settlements, South Lyon experienced the most growth and development. The concentrated development in and around South Lyon serves the population of the Township as well as the City. However, the benefits of proximity to South Lyon have been offset by a series of annexations over the years, which have enlarged the City boundaries at the expense of the Township.

Development in the Township itself escalated during the past two decades, due in part to the construction of I-96, the availability of relatively low cost land, and the general westward push of development in the Detroit metropolitan area.

The construction of I-96, the major transportation corridor between Lansing and metropolitan Detroit, relieved Grand River Avenue as a major transportation corridor and made the Township easily accessible for residents who commute to the Detroit metro area. Two detrimental features have offset the improved accessibility. First, by removing traffic from Grand River Avenue, I-96 reduced the market for New Hudson businesses, contributing to its decline. Second, I-96 is a divisive force, separating the northern one-mile from the rest of the Township.

As the leading edge of development moved westward, assisted by I-96, Lyon Township became the new frontier for people seeking a spacious rural-like environment. The Township also became a destination for some industries in need of relatively low cost land with convenient freeway access. Proximity to the metropolitan area has also had some disadvantages, as Lyon Township became the target for unsightly landfills, contractor yards, and similar uses that are needed in an urbanized area but are typically located away from densely populated areas.

The construction of a wastewater treatment plant and extension of public water and sanitary sewer utilities unlocked the development potential of vast areas of the Township. Growth within the last decade has occurred at a faster rate, albeit not unchecked. Soil limitations and lack of public utilities continue to affect some areas of the Township, and while growth has not stopped, these limitations have caused new growth to occur at lower densities in areas where the soils are suitable for septic systems.

Wetlands have deterred development in certain parts of the Township, particularly along Grand River Avenue. Apparently the construction of I-96 altered drainage patterns, resulting in the formation of wetlands in the Township's prime industrial corridor. Consequently, although large expanses of land along Grand River Avenue are zoned for industrial use, only a portion of the land can actually be developed. The incorporation of Planned Developments in the Township Zoning Ordinance ensures development proposals will preserve and protect natural features and wetlands areas.

Gravel is another natural feature that has had a substantial impact on development in the Township. For many years, the gravel extraction operations south of Twelve Mile Road on the east side of the Township and west of Kent Lake Road retarded development on nearby properties. In 2003, Lyon Sand and Gravel completed the process of reclamation and

restoration of the lake edges, transforming the appearance of the former gravel pits under its jurisdiction.

As a result of the accelerated growth in the last decade, development plans covering vast areas of the Township have been approved. There are few agricultural parcels remaining, and open space is largely confined to parks and golf courses, with a few notable exceptions. The previous plan reported that the opportunity still existed to shape the Township to the form desired by residents. With this plan, that opportunity is substantially diminished.

Build-Out Analysis

The previous paragraphs described several physical parameters that have influenced development of the Township. Another extremely important parameter that has affected development is zoning. Zoning, in combination with physical and socio-economic factors, has produced a predominantly low-density single-family community consisting of 5,633 total housing units and 13,907 residents (SEMCOG 2009 Estimate).

A build-out analysis of an area provides a detailed look at the housing units, population and related services that could develop as a direct result of a community's existing plan or zoning regulations. By determining the potential residential population, the results of the analysis will not only provide insight into the impact a planned area will have on the existing uses but can also be used to calculate the demand the area will generate for municipal services and other supporting uses.

Methodology

Some data from the 2006 Build-Out Analysis is of value, but conditions have changed substantially with the addition of several Planned Developments, the recession, and new restrictions being placed on private roads in the Township. One impact of these changes is that costly land assembly of small parcels by developers is not as likely as in the past. When development revives, developers are more apt to search for 20, 40 and 80-acre parcels to develop. When the stock of these parcels is depleted, then the pursuit of 10-acre and smaller parcels may occur. Similarly, because of the Private Road Ordinance restrictions, it is likely that the Township will not see as many lot split proposals as in the past.

Based on the design of Planned Developments, it is now evident that every parcel cannot be developed to its maximum division potential. Topographic conditions, natural features preservation, unusual parcel shapes, and other features stand in the way of maximizing the development potential. Likewise, it is recognized that lot split potential on smaller parcels is substantially less than once expected.