

# **SOUTH HOUGHTON LAKE AREA 2017 JOINT MASTER PLAN**

**DENTON TOWNSHIP AND ROSCOMMON TOWNSHIP  
JOINT PLANNING COMMISSION**



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## Summary

The commercial district of the Houghton Lake Area is located on the south side of Houghton Lake and is mostly located in the townships of Denton and Roscommon. Historically, the commercial district was made up of three unincorporated villages: The Heights and the Village located in Roscommon Township and Prudenville in Denton Township. These areas once served as the primary nodes of commerce and entertainment in the townships. Each still boast their own post offices and other unique “mom and pop” businesses. Like many historical regions in small towns, these three historical nodes have changed and commerce has declined. However, the assets of historical structures, lake access parks and individually unique circumstances provide an opportunity for revitalization.

These nodes are connected by a four lane state highway (M-55) which provides efficient traffic flow for businesses and residents of the townships. The transportation infrastructure has allowed the commercial district in Houghton Lake and Prudenville area to “fill in” the space between the three historical areas. The Houghton Lake area now extends for nine miles on M-55 running along the south shore of Houghton Lake.

The area has seen the development of many small business, but perhaps most notably, the addition of several big box stores. The businesses include Walmart, Home Depot, Tractor Supply, Dunham’s and several more. The Houghton Lake & Prudenville area also has an impressive amount of medical access from emergency first response services, Urgent Care, and three hospitals in neighboring counties.

Houghton Lake is a popular tourist destination. Being a great place to visit, many people decided to move here to retire. The economy changed from mostly tourist services to one built more on retirement and permanent residential needs.

This Joint Master Plan between Denton and Roscommon Townships is to serve as a guide to improve the character, amenities and quality of life in the townships. Character can be improved by planning and concentrating on beautification and blight elimination. Focusing on developing and restoring the three historical nodes is also an important part of maintaining the character of our community. Through this beautification process, the townships can help encourage the development of amenities in commercial districts with easy and safe pedestrian travel. Encouraging the revitalization of the three nodes will help improve our quality of life through providing easy pedestrian access to unique business districts in three areas. Each of these three nodes also have established public parks with lake access. With creative planning and community support, the utilization of this plan will assist local leaders in making Houghton Lake a more beautiful place in the future.



## ***Background of Area Planning Efforts***

In 1994, Roscommon Township, Denton Township and Lake Township collaborated in producing the Houghton Lake Area-Wide Master Plan for Land Use ("1994 Plan"). In 2001, Denton Township and Roscommon Township, with the assistance of Lapham Associates, reviewed the 1994 Plan and prepared the South Houghton Lake Area Master Plan Update and Strategic Plan of Action ("2001 Plan Update"), which found that the 1994 Plan was still well-founded and identified work that still remained to be done.

In 2009, Roscommon Township and Denton Township, with the assistance of Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC, each adopted ordinances and entered into an agreement under the Joint Municipal Planning Act, MCL 125.131, et seq, forming a joint planning commission between the two townships.

In 2010, the Roscommon County Planning Commission, with the assistance of Lapham Associates, produced the Roscommon County Master Plan for Land Use, which provided a wealth of background data regarding the entire County and identified a number of actions designed to improve the County's economic development.

In early 2015, the Denton Township and Roscommon Township Joint Planning Commissions, with the assistance of Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC, began review of the current conditions in the two Townships to determine whether additional modifications should be made to the prior plans. The results of that review are contained in this 2016 Joint Master Plan.

## ***Introduction***

Denton Township and Roscommon Township are the two most populous townships in Roscommon County, Michigan. They form the southern boundary of Houghton Lake, which is Michigan's largest inland lake. The Townships comprise a 130-square-mile, four-season recreational paradise, dotted with inland lakes and streams, with most of their developed land bordering more than 10 miles of Houghton Lake waterfront. The Houghton Lake & Prudenville area makes for a truly amazing "Up North Experience."

The Townships are centrally located in the state, within a 1-to-3-hour drive from anywhere in Lower Michigan. Denton and Roscommon Townships are considered part of Northern Michigan, an area of the state located north of Clare. This area has no large metropolitan areas, but has vast forests, lakes, streams and other natural areas with relatively low population densities. The Townships are at the center of several moderate size cities including Cadillac, West Branch, Grayling and Gaylord, where some manufacturing and other businesses are more prevalent. On the west, Cadillac is located on US-131, and on the east is West Branch on I-75. US-127 runs north from Clare through Roscommon Township, where it joins I-75 just north of the County line and continues north through Grayling and Gaylord to the Mackinaw Bridge and beyond.

Houghton Lake's historical identity has principally been as a resort area catering to a mostly blue collar population. Attractions including the lake and water sports, open public areas for hunting, fishing, ORV's and snowmobiles, golf courses and festivals have been draws for generations of visitors. It is a quiet area that runs at a slow pace.

One of the most pressing recent problems for the area, the Eurasian water milfoil epidemic in Houghton Lake is being managed by the Houghton Lake Improvement Board, which has been vigorously addressing this issue with special assessment district financing. Importantly, the health and beauty of the community's principal asset Houghton Lake must be ensured in order for the community to remain robust and for the desired vision of this area to be achieved. Further actions to develop the community will build on this valuable asset.

## ***Zoning***

Denton and Roscommon Townships each have zoning to regulate growth and development, to protect natural resources and property values, and to provide needed services and business opportunities.

Roscommon Township recently adopted a comprehensive revision to its zoning ordinance. Denton Township also believes it needs to revise or rewrite its zoning ordinance to adjust to the current problems and issues and to resolve deficiencies in the current ordinance. Both townships identified vacant, blighted and derelict structures and old nonconforming signs as problems that need to be addressed. Each township recently adopted separate recreational plans.

## ***Population***

<b>POPULATION TABLE</b>			
	1990	2000	2010
Denton Township	4,290	5,817	5,557
Roscommon Township	3,323	4,219	4,411
Total	7,613	10,036	9,968

## ***Overview of Existing Development***

The main areas of commercial activity are in Roscommon Township around the M-55 / US-127 intersection and in Roscommon Township and Denton Township along M-55. The Houghton Lake area is developing rapidly as a regional commercial center. Some of the stores include Wal-Mart and numerous fast food outlets.

Dense residential areas in both Townships lie close to Houghton Lake. Within these areas, resorts and other tourist related uses often exist. Elsewhere there are residential subdivisions, scattered rural residences and a few farms. Because of relatively poor soils



and a shorter growing season, agriculture plays only a small role in the region. Residents are primarily rural or live within urbanized clusters such as around Houghton Lake and Prudenville.

## ***Major Employers***

The lack of high paying jobs in the area has proved difficult to solve, and was even further exacerbated during the recent recession that hit the entire nation, and Michigan in particular. The preponderance of employment in the Townships remains in the retail, government, and services sectors, traditionally the lowest paying. The following major employers are located in Roscommon Township and Denton Township:

<b>MAJOR EMPLOYERS</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>Business Type</b>
Wal-Mart Stores	Houghton Lake	150	Department/Grocery Store
Home Depot USA	Houghton Lake	108	Home Improvement
Houghton Lake Schools	Houghton Lake	80	Elem/Sec Schools
Denton Township	Prudenville	70	Government Office
St Vincent DePaul	Prudenville	60	Social Services
Spicers Boat City	Houghton Lake	50	Outdoor Superstore
Arnies Arts 'N' Crafts	Houghton Lake	22	Craft Store
Mid-Michigan Health	Houghton Lake	55	Medical Office
King Nursing Centre	Houghton Lake	50	Skilled Nursing Care
Roscommon Township	Houghton Lake	47	Government Office
Dept of Human Services	Prudenville	43	Government Office
Halliday Sand & Gravel	Houghton Lake	40	Excavating/Sand Mining
Quest Golf Club	Houghton Lake	40	Golf Club, Real Estate
Munson Family Care	Prudenville	35	Medical Office
Signature Truck Systems	Houghton Lake	35	Delivery Trucks
Helms Transportation	Houghton Lake	35	Trucking
Limberlost	Houghton Lake	30	Restaurant/Bar
Buccillis	Houghton Lake	30	Restaurant
State Electronics	Houghton Lake	30	Retail Electronics
Commission on Aging	Houghton Lake	28	Social Services
State & County Associates	Houghton Lake	25	General Contractor
Oberon Properties	Houghton Lake	25	Auto Sales
Camping World	Houghton Lake	23	RV Sales
Don Nester Chevrolet	Houghton Lake	22	Auto Sales

Michigan State Police	Houghton Lake	21	Government Office
The Brook	Houghton Lake	17	Assisted Living
White Deer Country Club	Prudenville	7	Golf Course
Dunhams	Houghton Lake	20	Retail Sporting Goods
Peebles	Houghton Lake	7	Department Store
Tractor Supply	Houghton Lake	12	Hardware Sales
Porath Contractors	Houghton Lake	25	General Contractors
Coldwell Banker Schmidt	Houghton lake	17	Real Estate Sales
O'Reilly's Auto Parts	Houghton Lake	10	Retail Auto Parts
Family Fare	Houghton Lake	36	Grocery Store
Camp CoBeAc	Prudenville	16	Christian Camp & Retreat Center
Houghton Lake Ambulance	Houghton Lake	32	Emergency Treatment

Major employers located elsewhere in Roscommon County include Kirtland Community College (300 employees), Lear Corp (200 employees), ROOC Inc (150 employees), MDNR (107 employees), Roscommon County (99 employees), Gerrish Township (73 employees), Spartan Stores (65 employees), Roscommon Area Public Schools (55 employees), CA Hanes Realty (50 employees). Along with these major employers there are also numerous small employers in the Houghton Lake & Prudenville area.

## ***Major Roads***

Major transportation routes to and through the Townships include US-127 on the West and Interstate I-75 to the East. These two major highways meet just north of the northern Roscommon County line. The Townships are connected to several major state highways that traverse the state and the county and provide access to and from many surrounding communities. The Townships lie within a one-hour drive of several small communities including Grayling, Gaylord, Cadillac, West Branch and Gladwin. Interstate I-75 and US-127 as well as M-18 and M-55 connect the Townships to Cadillac, Gaylord, Grayling, Saginaw, Midland, Bay City and Flint, putting them within the range of the modern commuter. Access to Interstate I-75 and US-127 also provides residents across Michigan, the United States and Canada with access to the Townships' recreational and vacation opportunities.

## ***Public Transportation***

The Roscommon County Transportation Authority provides intra-county bus services for the county residents. The County received grants from the State and Federal Governments to build its own facility. The County purchased the land for the transportation building, which was dedicated in November 1988. Continuing the process of growth and improvement, in 2004, it became an Authority with its own governing board.



## **Airports**

There are four small community airports in Roscommon County: Houghton Lake State Airport located in Roscommon Township; Blodgett Memorial Airport located northeast of Houghton Lake, Roscommon Conservation Airport located southeast of the Village of Roscommon; and St. Helen Airport in St. Helen. The Midland-Bay City-Saginaw International Airport (MBS) is about an hour away and is the closest commercial airport capable of handling large jets; the largest airlines serving MBS are Delta and United. Alpena Regional Airport also offers daily flights to Detroit and through a Delta Airlines air link.

## **Local Parks**

Both Townships have recently made great strides in the development of parks and beaches along the shore of Houghton Lake. The newest addition is Denton Township's Trestle Park, a universally accessible park located in the heart of Prudenville on the Houghton Lake waterfront near the corner of M-55 and M-18.

Denton Township's Sullivan Beach is located 4 blocks west of the corner of M-55 and M-18 in Prudenville. The site is over an acre in size with a sandy beach for swimming. Public restrooms are on site, along with a small playground. A boat launch site on the east side of the park is suitable for launching small boats.

Johnson's Beach is a narrow strip of land 210' long on Dogwood Drive, with no facilities and limited parking. Rotary Park in Denton Township has a pavilion, public restrooms, and soccer and baseball fields, in addition to a playground and picnic area.

Roscommon operates three parks. Lakeview Park is located on Houghton Lake waterfront along M-55, 2.5 miles east of US-127. The completed phase one of this barrier-free park includes a wheel chair-accessible fishing pier, tiered seating with a natural fish mural, a covered picnic area, benches and some playground equipment. A kayak launch is also located along the natural shoreline. Phase two of this popular urban waterfront park will utilize an adjacent old cottage parcel purchased by the township and adding 140' of frontage on Houghton Lake. The project will develop additional accessible amenities and includes; family style UA rest/changing rooms; native landscaping/screening; pergola/shape structure and a rooftop interpretive plaza space and swimming beach. This phase is a MDRTF granted project that should be completed in the fall of 2016.

Skinner Park in Roscommon Township includes a par 3 disc golf course, a walking trail with fitness equipment, two pavilions, grills, play areas and soft ball fields. In August, a free movie on the park event has drawn hundreds to this location.

Heights Park is located on 248' frontage of Houghton Lake in Roscommon Township and provides a picnic shelter, grills, play area, and a swimming beach.

## ***Hiking Trails***

The State of Michigan also maintains designated trails for hiking, biking and cross-country skiing within Roscommon County. South Higgins Lake State Park contains three of these trail systems. The Blue trail is 5.5 miles in length, the Green Trail is 2.0 miles long, and the Red Trail is 3.5 miles long. All three of these trails are used for hiking and cross-country skiing. The Tisdale Triangle east of Roscommon is a 10.1-mile trail system used for biking, hiking and cross-country skiing. Lost Twin Lakes is a 3.0-mile trail system located southeast of Houghton Lake used for biking and hiking. The Red Pine Nature Area north of St Helen has 1.5 miles of interpretive foot trail.

## ***ORV Trails***

Roscommon County has passed an ORV Ordinance that permits off road vehicles to travel on the far-right side of the maintained portion of a road or street within the county given certain restrictions as to the time of operation, speed limits, and noise. Furthermore this ordinance provides the authority to impose civil fines for violations, restitution for damages, and restrict various routes if deemed necessary. Roscommon County has several Department of Natural Resources designated ORV trails and currently has 4 trail head locations with parking provided to permit access to this trail system. These ORV trails include:

- Owens Road Trail Head
- Leota Trail – 52.1 miles of trails west of US-127
- Denton Creek Trail – 37.3 miles of trails between US 127 and highway M-18
- Denton Creek Route – 28.6 miles of trails, Highway M-18 to Maple Valley Road
- St. Helen Trail – 43.7 miles of trails between Waco Road and St. Helen
- St. Helen Route – 8.7 miles of trails between Waco Road and St. Helen
- M-30 to St. Helen #3 Michigan Cross Country Cycle Trail – 14.5 miles of trails between Gladwin County and St Helen Trail
- St. Helen to Geels Trail – 13.7 miles of trails between St. Helen and Geels
- Geels Trails – 46.2 miles of trails east of I-75
- Geels to Roscommon Route – 9.0 miles of trails from Geels to Village of Roscommon
- Beaver Creek Trail Michigan Cross Country Cycle Trail – 30.9 miles of trails between Geels and West Higgins Lake Trail
- West Higgins Lake Trail – 35.3 miles of trails west of Higgins Lake

## ***Government Offices***

Roscommon Township maintains its own township hall and offices, which are new facilities with an adjacent area for sports activities. Houghton Lake Building Agency and the Houghton Lake Sewer Authority offices are in Roscommon Township. Denton

Township has established its township hall in Prudenville, which also houses the local office of the Secretary of State. Roscommon County offices in Prudenville include the Animal Control Building, Roscommon County Road Commission, County Health Department and Roscommon County Transit Authority.

## ***Police and Emergency Services***

The County Sheriff is aided in law enforcement by the Michigan State Police and the Denton Township Police. Denton Township has its own Fire Department that services Denton Township. Roscommon Township Fire Department services Roscommon Township. The Denton Township Ambulance Service provides coverage with two full-time Advanced Life Support Ambulances to Denton Township. Houghton Lake Ambulance Authority provides Roscommon Township (and Lake Township) with ambulance services.

## ***Utilities***

Utility services in the townships are provided by Consumers Energy (electric service), DTE Energy (natural gas service), AT&T, Verizon & Frontier (phone service). Cable television and high-speed internet services are provided by Charter/Spectrum Communications.

Public sanitary sewer service is available in the Houghton Lake area through the Houghton Lake Sewer Authority. The Authority was created in 1973 by the townships of Denton, Lake and Roscommon for the purpose of operating, maintaining, administering and managing a sanitary sewage facility for the benefit of the townships and for any other township or municipality which hereafter joins in and becomes a part of such sewer system and the related agreement, all for the betterment of the health, safety, economy and general welfare of the participating municipalities. Beginning January 1, 2007, the Authority took control and ownership of the sewer facilities as allowed for under Act 233 of 1955. The Authority includes sewer systems of Denton, Lake, Roscommon and Markey Townships.

The Houghton Lake Sewer Authority oversees three separate treatment facilities located in Roscommon Township, Denton Township and Markey Township. The Roscommon Township wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) has a capacity of 1.1 million gallons per day and currently is treating between 700,000 to 800,000 gallons per day. The Denton Township WWTP has a capacity of 700,000 gallons per day and is currently treating around 550,000 gallons per day. From these figures it appears that the sanitary sewer capacity in these areas is sufficient and has room for expansion of future development.

Potable water availability has not been a problem and does not appear that it will become one unless intensive growth occurs in the Townships.



## **Schools**

Primary and secondary public education is supplied by the Houghton Lake Community Schools. Houghton Lake Community School District serves about 1,700 pupils in a nearly 500 square mile area that comprises of the southern portion of Roscommon County and the eastern portion of Missaukee County. The Houghton Lake Community School District includes Collins Elementary School and Houghton Lake Middle School, which have been updated, and Houghton Lake High School. In addition, there is also the Houghton Lake Adult & Community Education School, and the Houghton Lake Cosmetology School located in Roscommon Township. Houghton Lake Community Schools closed Merritt Elementary School and Prudenville Elementary in 2005 due to declining enrollment and funding. Houghton Lake Community Schools consistently score well on state exams and its schools are considered “very good” to “excellent.”

Established over 55 years ago, Our Lady of the Lake Regional Catholic School in Prudenville provides elementary education including a Young 5's/Montessori kindergarten program and continuing through eighth grade. In addition to Our Lady of the Lake is the United Methodist Church Preschool. Skeels Christian School, a private school, just 15.5 miles from Prudenville in Gladwin is also an option for students in the area.

The Townships are also within the COOR Intermediate School District, which includes the counties of Crawford, Oscoda, Ogemaw and Roscommon, an area covering 2400 square miles and six local public school districts. The ISD acts as a link between the Michigan Department of Education and local school districts. The ISD provides Special Education, Career and Technical Education, Information Technology and General Education programs and services on request that single local districts find difficult or impossible to provide.

New to the area in 2012 is the Charleton Heston Academy, located in Richfield Township, Roscommon County. The school has grown considerably in attendance from approximately 140 to 503 students, and boasts an excellent teaching staff.

Higher education is available to the Townships' students through Kirtland Community College in Roscommon County. Created in 1966 by a vote of the electorate from six local K-12 school districts in all or part of nine counties. Kirtland is the largest Michigan community college district, totaling 2,500 square miles. Approximately 65,000 people reside within the Kirtland district. Kirtland Community College has enlarged its capacity by constructing new buildings to house new health care training and police academy training on an expandable scale. In addition more recent expansion of academic programs in automotive technology, computer sciences and industrial technologies have allowed the college to continue to provide advanced education and career opportunities for the surrounding community.

Advanced educational opportunities are also available to the Townships' students at Michigan's fine public colleges and universities, including Delta College in Bay City, Saginaw Valley State University in Saginaw and Mid-Michigan Community College in

Harrison, as well as other state colleges and universities in East Lansing, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Mt. Pleasant, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Big Rapids and elsewhere in the state.

EMT training is also available amongst the townships.

## ***Libraries***

The Houghton Lake Public Library is located in Denton Township and is open Monday through Saturday. Established originally as a school district public library in 1964, the Library Board of Trustees chose to become a district library in 1995 and passed a successful millage in 1996 to provide a stable funding source for the library. Named in March 2005 as one of the best small libraries in America by Library Journal and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Houghton Lake Public Library offers services, programs, a collection of almost 42,000 items in various formats (books, audio books, music CDs, DVDs, videos, magazines, newspapers, large print materials, and more), and free Internet access (including wireless). The Houghton Lake District Library is the anchor of the county for fiber optic Internet, and has in turn tripled internet speeds. Most library services are free except for minimal charges for printing or photocopying and overdue fines on videos or DVDs. Other free services include interlibrary loan, reserves on materials, and online access (both in-house and remote) to reference databases. Awarded the first State Librarian's Excellence Award in Michigan in 2001, the library was cited for exemplary public service. Though small and rural, the Houghton Lake Public Library strives to provide the same kinds of services and programming that larger libraries provide. The library remains patron-centered with the Board of Trustees, staff, and volunteers working together to provide a quality library with excellent services.

The Library at Kirtland Community College is also open to the general public and offers a number of services. A large number of reference materials are available and reference librarians are available to assist in research. Librarians are available to help find demographic, marketing, and other information necessary for preparing a successful business plan. The Library also has lists of wholesalers and suppliers, and online resources to help the businessperson. The Kirtland Library offers an online catalog, WebCat. Kirtland Library subscribes to a variety of online indexes to help find articles in magazines, journals, newspapers, and professional literature. The online indexes are available from within the Library and some of the indexes can be accessed from homes.

## ***Hospitals***

Area hospitals include the West Branch Regional Medical Center (WBRMC) in West Branch offers full medical and surgical services including cardiopulmonary services, nutrition services, laboratory services, diagnostic services, rehabilitation services, pain clinic, general surgical services, plastic/reconstructive services, orthopedic services and gynecological / urology services. WBRMC has a 24-hour emergency room staffed with board certified medical doctors. WBRMC also collaborated with St. Mary's Hospital of

Saginaw to construct the Seton Cancer Institute that offers oncology services, radiation, chemotherapy, and hematological services. WBRMC also maintains Lakeside Medical Arts Center in Prudenville which offers both primary and specialty care.

Munson Hospital in Grayling also serves the community. Services include Inpatient care, extended care, 24-hour physician-staffed Emergency Department, general and specialty surgery services and outpatient services including: Radiology, Laboratory, Cardiopulmonary, Cardiac Rehabilitation, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Diabetic Education, Nutrition Services, Occupational Health, Holistic Health, and Sleep Lab. Munson Hospital recently merged with Mercy Family Care in Prudenville, and is now known as Munson Family Care.

Mid-Michigan Medical Center of Gladwin also provides the area with medical services. Mid-Michigan Medical Center-Gladwin is a 25-bed primary care hospital providing general medical and surgical care for inpatients and 24-hour emergency room coverage. They also provide a wide range of services including: Cardiopulmonary, Imaging services, Laboratory, Pharmacy, Rehabilitation services, and Sleep Lab. Mid-Michigan Health Park is a medical outpatient facility with a full range of outpatient services including primary and specialty care by physicians from the Medical Centers in Clare and Midland, as well as an Urgent Care facility in Houghton Lake.

## ***Amenities and Attractions***

Houghton Lake, with 20,044 acres and 30 miles of shoreline, is the largest inland lake in Michigan and home of the nationally-famous Tip-Up-Town USA winter festival. There are beautiful streams with excellent fishing and scenic canoeing. There are several thousand acres of public land furnishing hunting for deer, grouse, woodcock, squirrels and ducks. The area includes beautiful scenery, hiking trails, golfing, camping facilities, fishing, hunting, boating, swimming, water skiing, snow skiing, ice skating, sledding, ORV's and snowmobiling. Local attractions and activities in the Townships and nearby include:

- Bluewater Trail and Lost Twin Lakes Trail (canoe and kayak)
- Boating resources, numerous public access sites
- Fishing & Hunting
- Roscommon County Quilt Trail
- Hiking
- 6 public golf courses
- Birding; Kirtland Warbler Habitat and Festival is to the north
- Nordic skiing and cross-country ski trails
- Groomed snowmobile trails
- ORV trail network
- Michigan Shore-to-Shore Trail from Empire to Oscoda and points north and south, a 500 mile interconnected system of trails.
- Sailing
- Tip-Up-Town USA winter festival, Houghton Lake (last two weekends in January).
- Oldsmobile Club



- Pumpkin Run Car Show
- ATV Jamboree
- Guided color tour, Houghton Lake
- Arts & Crafts Fair, Houghton Lake
- Bluegill Festival, Lake St. Helen
- Michigan Fireman's Association Memorial, Roscommon
- Houghton Lake Senior Center
- Au Sable Forest
- Backus Creek State Game Area
- Houghton Lake Wildlife Research Area
- Genealogy Club
- Roscommon County Fair
- Rusty Nuts Car Show
- Area 4 Special Olympics-Summer Games

## ***Unincorporated Villages***

Both Townships are very interested in revitalizing and place-making the mixed-use village areas of Prudenville (Trestle Park) in Denton Township and Houghton Lake Heights in Roscommon Township. The Joint Planning Commission envisions these two areas as “bookends” to the more heavily commercial area along M-55 that lies between. These two village areas are described below.

### ***Houghton Lake Heights***

“The Heights” dates back to a 1880s lumbering settlement. A post office called “The Heights” opened in 1923 and was renamed “Houghton Lake Heights” in 1956. The area hosted sportsmen in the former Heights Inn, and for a time the “Houghton Queen” docked at The Heights and carried up to 68 passengers on cruises around Houghton Lake. There was also a large waterslide built on stilts (often referred to as Sanford's dock) operating in the 1920s.

The 1920s through the 1950s saw the peak of activity in The Heights. The area offered many services in the early to mid-1900s, with a variety of stores, hotels and attractions that did a thriving business, including Bill Park's Grocery, Dr. Snyder's Drug Store, the Little Gift Shop, RaWalla Dance Hall, Akin's Hotel, Parker's Barbershop and post office, The Heights Inn, Ray Walling's garage and gas station, Girley's Gift Shop, Tam-a-rack Lodge and Anderson's Patent Medicine Store.

Today, Houghton Lake Heights hosts a post office, a public access lakeshore park and two pubs. Most of the buildings constructed in the 1920s and 1930s have been demolished, but the Heights Inn still stands, although it is no longer an operating hotel. Residences now predominate in the area.

The Joint Planning Commission envisions this area as once again a mixed-use development, with vacant buildings repurposed as shops, boutiques and restaurants. Achieving this goal will require a community investment in streetscaping, pathways, trails and off-street parking for visitors. Financial assistance will also likely be required for building façades and other improvements to encourage new businesses to locate here. Such funding may require an investment of Township general funds or a district millage such as is authorized by the Downtown Development Act.

### ***Prudenville (Trestle Park District)***

Centered on M-55 and M-18, this area is a 5-corner key node gateway into the Houghton Lake area from I-75. New Trestle Park, newer brick strip malls and a newer Walgreens are nearby. The area is currently comprised of vacant/obsolete buildings with inadequate sidewalks, but is adjacent to universally accessible park with State of Michigan historical designation and Houghton Lake access.

Elements of the plan for this area include expanding greenbelt and adding adequate sidewalks and updated streetscape. Demolish obsolete, non-historic buildings, repurpose closed buildings, and provide Wi-Fi hotspots to the area. The area is a key corridor and key node. This area is mentioned in the Roscommon County Place-based Targeting Strategy MSHDA housing funded grant. There is no "fixed route transit," but the Roscommon County Transit Authority services this corridor and has transit stops/pickups. The area can be accessed by car, bike, boat and pedestrian traffic. This is a business district and residential area with many amenities that need updating.

This area also meets Creative Place-making. Denton Township has begun the process with the building of Trestle Park, which includes a Michigan historical marker relating to the lumber era. The park was built through a DNR Trust Fund grant and has its own non-profit "Friends of Trestle Park" that arranges concerts, art series and other events, some of which are fundraisers.

Other non-profits involved in this corridor are Houghton Lake Lake Association, Houghton Lake Rotary, Roscommon County Community Foundation, Houghton Lake Lions Club, Kiwanis Club, Houghton Lake Area Historical Society and Houghton Lake Public Library. Many volunteer hours have been devoted to "shaping the physical and social character of this neighborhood." Trestle Park is the catalyst to bring more awareness to the current businesses in the area and to entice other businesses to open.

This area would eventually have mixed uses, retail, restaurants, event center, park, etc. It is near quality public spaces, including Denton Township Hall, Secretary of State, Denton Stone Hall (used for meetings and arts events), Trestle Park and Houghton Lake access. Roscommon County is Broadband certified; Wi Fi hotspots are important for our residents and visitors and would be available. It is serviced by car, foot, bike, boat, and in winter, snowmobile traffic. There are multiple housing options available in the surrounding area. There are non-historic buildings in this key corridor; however, the park is built on an historic site. Art and culture is being incorporated by the offering of free outdoor concerts,

art in the park, and being part of the Roscommon County Quilt Trail. Green spaces and sidewalks will be created.

This project would create additional interest traveling west on the M-55 corridor by attracting other businesses. Added interest to this corridor would increase income to our existing businesses along with potential new businesses that would create jobs.

Implementation would rely on several sources. The above non-profits have contributed to the park and Denton Township is the largest supporter. Evidence of support has come from the DNR Trust Fund, Houghton Lake Lake Association, Houghton Lake Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Roscommon County Community Foundation, and Houghton Lake Lions Club. In-kind support is through many volunteer hours, Friends of Trestle Park, Houghton Lake Area Historical Society, Houghton Lake Public Library, Houghton Lake, Lake Association, Wal-Mart and other businesses, and the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly.

### ***Village of Houghton Lake***

The Village of Houghton Lake is located in Roscommon Township, between the Heights and Prudenville. Its general location are the blocks surrounding the intersections of Federal and Tower Hill with M-55. The area was established by Oliver King in the early 1900s, who ran a general store. It served as the location of the Roscommon Township Hall before a new hall was built on Knapp Road. It has also been home to hotels, cabins, farms, automobile dealerships and a post office. Today it has a party store, saloon, church, bank, cosmetology school, post office and a new public lake access park, Lakeview Park. Some of the original historic structures remain and are still being used as functioning public buildings to this day.

## ***Property Taxes***

Both Townships levy a number of property tax millages for various purposes. Denton Township levies 1.1234 mills for general operating, 1 mill for fire, 1 mill for police, 0.5 mill for roads and 1.5 mills for ambulance, totaling 5.1234 mills. Roscommon Township levies 1.2773 mills for general operating, 1.9348 mills for fire and 0.5 mill for roads, totaling 3.7121. These millages have remained constant for a number of years, and are at the higher end of millages levied by general law townships in Michigan. Assessed values in the Townships have also remained relatively flat over the past decade, so that tax revenues to the Townships have not kept pace with the general level of inflation.

<b>PROPERTY VALUES TABLE</b>			
	<b>1995</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Denton Township</b>			



Real Property	122,419,650	224,393,700	255,278,000
Personal Property	6,243,850	7,163,300	8,598,500
Roscommon Township			
Real Property	48,793,100	121,441,600	140,039,600
Personal Property	5,115,425	6,415,900	6,427,400

Although the Townships' tax revenues have not increased for some time, it is questionable whether the voters would authorize a special tax millage for funding the improvements needed to accomplish the goals in this plan. Judging from the responses to past millage proposals for various purposes, actions initiated by the Townships under this plan will need to be supported by the Townships' general funds, public and private grants, special assessments of benefitting property owners, or other funding sources. There may also be feasible funding opportunities under the Downtown Development Act and Corridor Improvement Act to finance some portion of the needed infrastructure and site improvements. In addition, the State Housing Law provides low cost options and potential cost recovery for the removal of dilapidated structures.

Non-Homestead Properties	2011	2012	2013	2014	Non-Homestead Properties	2011	2012	2013	2014
State Edu Tax	6.0000	6.0000	6.0000	6.0000	State Edu Tax	6.0000	6.0000	6.0000	6.0000
HL Public School	18.6750	18.6750	18.6750	18.9300	HL Public School	18.6750	18.6750	18.6750	18.9300
COOR	1.0030	.8859	.8859	.8859	COOR	1.0030	.8859	.8859	.8859
Kirtland	2.2193	2.2193	2.2193	2.2930	Kirtland	2.2193	2.2193	2.2193	2.2930
HL Public Library	.6000	.6000	.6000	.6000	HL Public Library	.6000	.6000	.6000	.6000
County	6.2389	6.3673	6.3673	6.8679	County	6.2389	6.3673	6.3673	6.8679
Roscommon Township	3.7121	3.7121	3.7121	3.7121	Denton Township	5.1234	5.1234	5.1234	5.1234
HL Ambulance	1.69	1.69	1.69	1.69	Transit Authority	.5000	.5000	.5000	.5000
Transit Authority	.5000	.5000	.5000	.5000					
Total Millage	40.6383	40.6496	40.6496	41.4152	Total Millage	40.3596	40.3709	40.3709	41.1365

In August of 2014, voters in Michigan approved Proposal 1 which phases out personal property taxes that small businesses and manufacturers pay on equipment and furnishings. The state of Michigan was required to reimburse local school districts and independent school districts (ISD) for the amount of estimated revenue lost due to the "small taxpayer" exemption and provide a mechanism for the reimbursement for voted bond issues. For bond issues approved before 2013, each local school district and ISD must add to its 2014 taxable value its 2014 small taxpayer exemption loss. Therefore, in 2014 there was an increase of .2650 mills (.2550 for Houghton Lake School Debt and

.0100 for Kirtland Community College Debt). Also, voters in Roscommon County approved an increase in the Roscommon County Sheriff's Law Enforcement Millage from 1 mill to 1.5 mills (\$1.50 per \$1,000 taxable value). The 1.8% millage rate increase over the last five years creates a stable environment of anticipating tax burden in general.

### ***Special Assessments***

In an effort to eradicate the infestation of an invasive aquatic weed known as Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM), the Houghton Lake Improvement Board (HLIB) was formed in the year 2000 under the authorization of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act 451 of 1994. The Improvement Board formed a special assessment district composed of all parcels of land in the townships surrounding Houghton Lake which would benefit from the improvements. It is funded by a special assessment.

## ***Considerations for Action***

### ***Local Challenges***

Denton Township and Roscommon Township face a fairly daunting array of problems and challenges. Among other issues, the Townships face the following:

- Low and diminishing population
- Relatively low incomes
- Lack of qualified and trained workers
- Flight of our youth (ages 18-35)
- An older population
- Illegal drugs and other social problems
- High unemployment
- Dilapidated, blighted and abandoned buildings
- Lack of a diversity of restaurants and shopping
- Lower percentage of college and advanced degreed residents

### ***Local Assets and Resources***

Fortunately, Denton Township and Roscommon Township are also uniquely blessed with assets and resources that many other areas would dearly covet. Some of the area's strongest assets include:

- Houghton Lake
- Forests
- Smaller lakes and streams
- Gravel and sand deposits
- Wildlife
- Four seasons of natural beauty

- Golf courses
- Hunting, fishing and outdoor sports
- Open land accessible to the public
- Festivals
- Clean air and clean water
- Convenient transportation access
- New fiber-optic system
- Excellent schools
- Low crime rate
- Peace and quiet
- Winter and abundant snow for winter sports
- Houghton Lake Area Tourist Bureau
- Houghton Lake Chamber of Commerce
- Recently updated Senior Center & Conference Center
- Hotels

These resources are the basis for the Townships' existing wealth, and they will be the base for the Townships' future economic growth and development. Major businesses have developed in the Townships to cater to tourists and travelers. The Townships must continue to build on those important and unique assets and resources.

### ***Pure Michigan***

Since the Townships are centrally located in Michigan, they should not ignore the opportunities available to them as part of this state. Potential sources of future growth in Michigan are automotive and other industrial high technology research, biotechnology and informational technology, alternative energy, health-care services, health-related manufacturing, and tourism. The Townships should identify which niches it could fill among these, or to identify others, then to develop the strategies to pursue them. Although the county has barriers, it also has assets that many other places do not have and it does not have the negative baggage many other places have. Michigan has the eighth largest economy of the 50 states, but is the fourth largest exporting state. Therefore, consideration should be given to products that could be produced in Denton and Roscommon Townships for export.

### ***Roscommon County Goals***

Denton and Roscommon Townships are also a large and integral part of Roscommon County, which has identified particular goals for its own growth and which may mesh well with the future growth of the Townships. The County Planning Commission has proposed the following actions in its 2010 Plan:

- Determine potential target industries; designate districts for these targeted industries



- Develop and nurture a pool of educated workers; job training for targeted industries and establish an incubator
- Perform “Economic Gardening” to attract and keep entrepreneurs in targeted industries; identify Stage I, II and III businesses to aid
- Ensure that Zoning and other regulations are clear, fair and quick for economic development – expedited permitting and approvals
- Provide assistance through the County EDC and elsewhere for developers and entrepreneurs
- Build and maintain sufficient infrastructure where required – roads, water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer, Internet and cellular coverage
- Attract venture capital to the county
- Improve the electrical grid and broadband availability in the county
- Aggressively market for entrepreneurs and tourism
- Coordinate marketing with consistent incentives
- Maintain good intergovernmental communication and cooperation
- Promote and encourage public recreational facilities – parks, trails and recreational activities

### ***Roscommon County Action Plans***

In addition to engendering a research and manufacturing sector for the County economy, the County Planning Commission has prioritized the fostering of its other existing assets, seniors and tourism, by cultivating high quality service providers for them:

- Develop a high-class health care sector
- Encourage farm markets and specialty farm products
- Encourage more bed and breakfast establishments, up-scale restaurants, and hotels
- Develop arts and crafts cultural events and districts as well as mixed-use village downtowns
- Aggressively market the county and its products, attractions and services

- Pursue grant opportunities for recreational, economic, planning, infrastructure and other needed capital improvements and programs

### ***Rental Dwelling Codes and Property Maintenance Codes***

A number of the housing units in the Townships are rentals, and a large percentage of these are not maintained up to reasonable standards of habitability. One of the regulatory techniques available to the Townships is the adoption of a rental dwelling code, providing for minimum standards, licensing and inspections of rental dwellings. Another tool available is a property maintenance code, which would apply to the maintenance of all properties, whether owner-occupied or rental, residential or commercial. Examples of both types of codes can be found in other townships and municipalities across the state of Michigan.

### ***Dilapidated Dwelling Ordinances (DDO)***

A very effective approach to the removal or repair of blighted buildings is a DDO under the Michigan Housing Law. A DDO allows the Township to order a removal or repair without court action, after a hearing before a Township-appointed hearing officer, which makes the DDO procedure preferable to other types of blight elimination ordinances.

If the owner does not perform the removal or repair within the appointed time, the Township may step in and perform the removal or repair itself. The Township's costs of removal and repair and related costs (including legal costs) become a lien against the property, which the Township may enforce just like a tax lien. If the owner does not pay the Township's costs, its property will eventually be sold at tax sale. The proceeds from the tax sale will be used to pay the back taxes and the Township's removal and repair costs. If the tax sale price is not high enough, the Township may lose part of its costs. If the sale price exceeds the taxes and costs, the excess amounts are retained by the County Treasurer who conducts the tax sale.

### ***Sign Ordinances***

Signs are currently regulated in both Townships under their zoning ordinances. Although the zoning ordinances are effective in the regulation of new signs, there continue to exist a number of older nonconforming signs that the Townships are unable to regulate or eliminate under their zoning ordinances. To address these older signs, the Townships may adopt free-standing sign ordinances under the Township Ordinance Act, which would not be subject to the same existing nonconforming use limitations that are inherent in zoning ordinances.

## ***Downtown Development Authorities (DDA)***

One of the most useful tools for financing the cost of redevelopment of blighted or deteriorated commercial or mixed-use areas in the DDA. The DDA allows a combination of tax increment financing, an up-to two-mill tax levy within the district, special assessments, and donations and grants to finance both infrastructure and site improvements within the district. Municipalities have used the DDA for streetscape improvements and other infrastructure, as well as for grants to rehabilitate private structures and their facades. It would be possible for Denton Township and Roscommon Township to each establish a DDA District. Each Township may only create one DDA District, however.

## ***Corridor Improvement Authorities (CIA)***

Similar to the DDA, the CIA allows a municipality to fund improvements by tax increment financing. However, the focus of a CIA is on a road corridor, rather than a downtown area. To qualify for the CIA, a corridor (such as M-55) must comply with the following criteria:

- The corridor must have at least 51% of existing first floor space classified as commercial.
- The corridor must have been in existence for the past 30 years.
- The corridor must be adjacent or is within 500 feet of a road classified as an arterial or collector according to the Federal Highway Administration.
- The corridor must contain at least 10 contiguous parcels or at least five contiguous acres.
- The corridor must be zoned to allow for mixed-use and high density residential.
- The corridor must presently be served by municipal water or sewer.
- The municipality must also agree to expedite the local permitting and inspection process in the development area and to modify its master plan to provide for walkable non-motorized connections, including sidewalks and streetscapes throughout the area.

Unlike the DDA, the CIA does not authorize the levy of a tax millage within the district. However, the other advantages of a CIA are similar to a DDA. Each Township may have more than one CIA District.

## ***Townships' Action Plans***

The following action plans identify and seek to implement the Townships' goals and objectives. This plan is intended to address some crucial issues within the Townships and propose actions to be undertaken as soon as possible to address them.

- Rewrite the Denton Township Zoning Ordinance (Denton)
- Adopt a Residential Rental Code and Property Maintenance Code (Joint)



- Adopt a Dilapidated Dwellings Ordinance and an abatement program (Joint)
- Adopt a free-standing Sign Ordinance to address existing signs (Joint)
- Prepare a Mixed-Use Plan for the Prudenville – Prudenville area (Denton)
- Establish a DDA centered on the Prudenville – Prudenville area (Denton)
- Prepare a Mixed-Use Village Plan for Houghton Lake Heights (Roscommon)
- Establish a DDA centered on Houghton Lake Heights (Roscommon)
- Develop a Corridor Improvement Plan for M-55 from US-27 to I-75 (Joint)
- Establish one or more CIA Districts along M-55 between US-27 and I-75 (Joint)
- Development of a trail head (Denton)
- Observe County Resolutions and Plans such as the Hazardous Mitigation Plan, Wildfire Protection Plan, Storm Water Management Plan, and any other resolutions or plans that would comply with township plans and objectives (Joint)

Respectfully Submitted,

## ***Denton Township and Roscommon Township Planning Commissions***

### ***Members***

Kim Akin  
 Alan Terrian  
 Bryan Jeske  
 Robert Brotebeck  
 Carie Milburn  
 Carol Asher  
 Fred Chidester  
 Jim Debo  
 Jim Braid  
 Joyce Golden  
 Morry McLain  
 Paul Tiepel

### ***Planning Staff***

Rachael Barnes (Priebe)  
 Tim Muckenthaler  
 Aleisha Hepfer

### ***Attorney***

William Fahey

\_\_\_\_\_, 2017