

Rivertown Comprehensive Plan (abridged)

Note: The following is an abridged comprehensive plan intended as a reference for the exercises in the text and is based on the comprehensive plan prepared by LSL Planning, Inc. for Chelsea, Michigan.¹ This abridged version follows the format of a typical full comprehensive plan, but focuses on land use sections; sections describing social and economic aspects of the comprehensive plan have not been included.

CITY OF RIVERTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Adopted by Rivertown City Council, September 1, 2010

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Section 1: Introduction

Description and Purpose of Comprehensive Plan

Rivertown's comprehensive plan is a guide for growth over the next twenty years. The plan was developed through evaluation of data, trends, the vision local citizens have for their community, and alternatives for development. The plan's underlying purpose is to guide the community's physical, social and economic growth. It addresses the intensity and arrangement of land uses for the benefit of the community overall, identifies areas that should generally remain the same, and provides a guide for areas that are planned to change through new development or redevelopment. In addition, the plan provides a framework for municipal facilities to support the desired land use pattern—streets, pathways, parks, utilities, and other city infrastructure. A link between land use and those facilities helps ensure wise allocation of public investments in capital improvements.

The plan provides policies and actions for community leaders to consider. This plan is a “living” document, and as such the planning commission should review the plan on an annual basis. This review should focus on the existing goals, evaluating which have been met and those that have not, and culminate in an implementation strategy. Some recommendations may require changes or amendments to the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, and/or the capital improvements program. Others changes can occur through a combination of municipal and private investments—new roads, pathways, park improvements, homes, stores, and industry.

¹ This version of the Rivertown Comprehensive Plan has been significantly shortened and abridged for use in exercises in this book. The comprehensive plan on which it is based was prepared by LSL Planning, Inc. for Chelsea, Michigan. The full document can be found online at: <http://www.city-chelsea.org/> (Accessed 12 November 2009). An example of a Comprehensive Plan for a large city is the “Forward Dallas” plan, found at: <http://www.forwarddallas.org/> (Accessed 7 December 2009).

Section 2: Demographics and Trends

Population Characteristics

A small Midwestern town, Rivertown has a population of 5,200 plus 900 students who attend Reliance College. Including farm families living on the city's periphery, the total population of the Rivertown area comes to about 7,500. The city currently has 530 single-family houses, 28 multi-family structures, and 39 commercial properties.

Many of the city's residents commute to other cities for work. The greatest number travel 15 miles east to Erie Falls, which has a population of 20,000. Residents also travel 15 miles to Erie Falls to shop at Falls Mall, the largest shopping center in the region.

Population Trend According to the 2010 census, Rivertown had a population of 5,112, a 17 percent increase from 2000.

Population Projection According to the Regional Council of Government's 2030 Regional Development Forecast, the City of Rivertown's population is projected to increase by 38 percent between 2010 and 2030. The forecast uses a multi-tiered system of regional, district, and small area forecasts to predict housing, population, and employment for the region. The process takes into consideration land coverage and plans including current and future land use, sewer service areas, soils suitability, recreation and public lands, and flood-prone areas. Many of the surrounding townships are expected to grow at an even greater rate.

Number and Size of Households The number of households in the Rivertown area has continued to grow with a corresponding growth in population. The number of households has increased from 1,750 in 2000 to 1,990 in 2010. A decrease in the average household size mirrors national and statewide trends. The trend can be attributed to a number of factors including an increase in single-headed households and couples without children, the growing number of families choosing to have fewer children than past generations, the aging "baby boom" generation creating more empty nester homes, and a growing number of senior-oriented housing developments.

Population Age Two demographic groups are strongly represented. The large number of elderly living in the city are primarily older farm families who have moved into the city limits. The second group is the college student population. Students live primarily near the campus of Reliance College.

Housing Characteristics

The majority of housing units were constructed before 1960. Other housing units, especially in the River Heights area, were constructed during growth spurts in the 1980s and 1990s. The median housing value for Rivertown is \$159,800 (Census 2000). In 2000, the majority of housing units in Rivertown were single-family detached homes. In comparison to 1990, the percentage of detached homes has decreased in the wake of more duplex and multiple-family home construction. This trend reflects the changing household sizes and composition.

The majority of homes in Rivertown are owner-occupied. Vacancy rates remain low, while a slight decrease in owner-occupied housing and an increase in renter-occupied units occurred between 2000 and 2010.

Local Economics

The median household income in Rivertown was \$49,132 in 2010; River County's median household income was \$51,990 and the state's median household income was \$44,667. The surrounding townships share a relatively high household income. Only 4 percent of families in Rivertown reported incomes below the poverty level in 2000, as established through the Federal Office of Management and Budget. This is lower than River County's average of 10 percent and the state's average of 7.4 percent.

Occupation and Industry Management and professional jobs account for 27 percent of Rivertown's employment. Sales and office represent 20 percent of jobs, followed by service occupations (13 percent), construction and maintenance (8 percent), and production and transportation (6 percent). Education, largely at the college, accounts for eight percent; six percent of the working population are currently unemployed. Much of Rivertown's history is based on farming, and 12 percent of its current residents have retained this occupation.

Key Findings and Issues

Population and household growth in the city and surrounding area is expected to continue, but at slower pace than in the last decade. With additional population come additional demands on community facilities, traffic congestion, and other impacts that can alter the character of the area. Careful planning and coordination with adjacent townships is needed to ensure that this growth occurs at a balanced rate and in a manner that respects the inherent qualities of the city.

As household compositions evolve, as the population ages, and as household sizes decrease, housing needs will change in the city. The typical single-family home and lot may not meet all these needs, and consideration should be given to providing a variety of housing options. The mature housing stock will continue to be an asset for the city because of the neighborhood character it provides, but will be a challenge in terms of continuing maintenance. In order to protect the character and value of these areas, renovations, expansions, and other reinvestment will need to be supported.

As newer neighborhoods have developed on the outer edges of the city, neighborhood connectivity has diminished. Where the opportunity for new development exists, stronger links between existing and new neighborhoods should be encouraged.

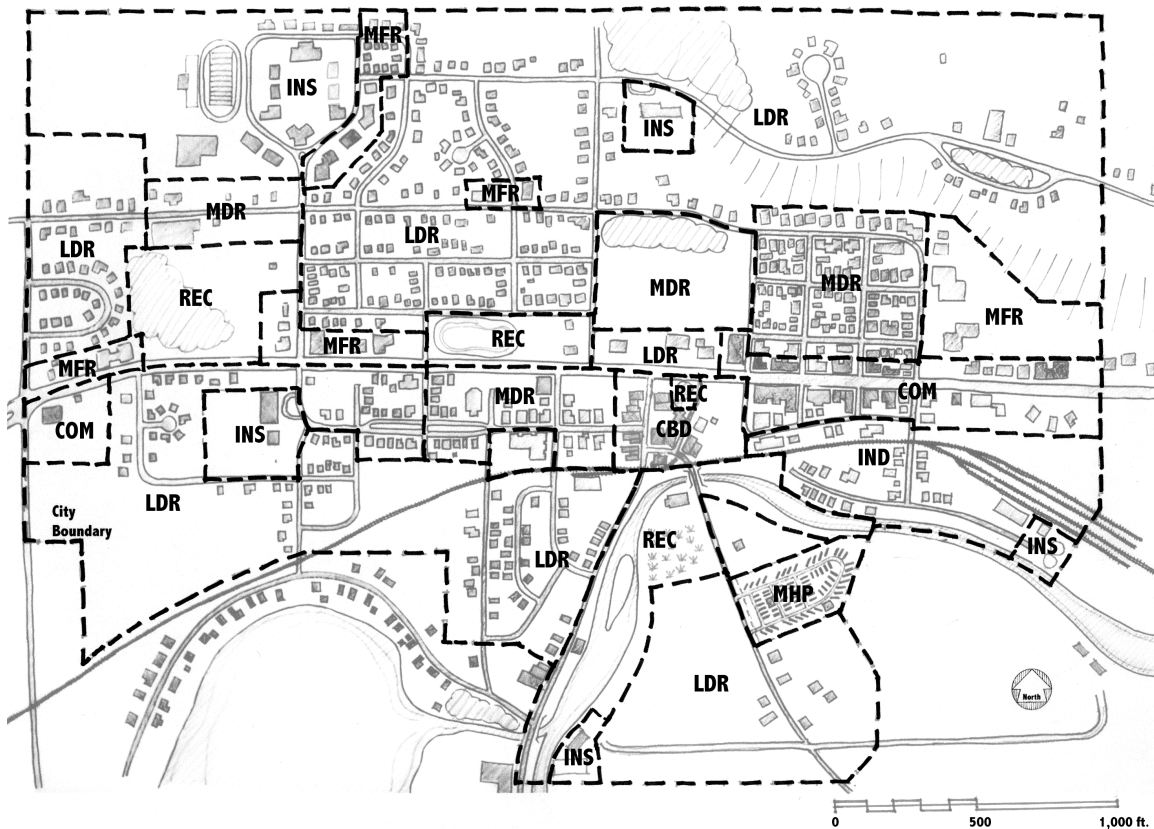
There is still potential for additional commercial and office development and redevelopment as the population grows and market demands increase. Consideration should be given to establishing design principles for future projects, and efforts taken to ensure that appropriate commercial establishments locate within the existing commercial districts. Future efforts should promote these districts, which currently have significant deterioration.

The Rivertown area has attractive natural features. The Eagle River is clean and provides good fishing. Nearby Bitterroot Lake is a motor-free 20-acre lake suitable for fishing and water sports. Walden Pond, located in the center of the city, is a spring-fed pond; however, contamination from an adjacent salvage yard is suspected.

The city currently provides minimal public transportation. Two on-call vans serve the entire city. They are available for anyone at a nominal cost throughout the day and evening, six days a week.

Section 3: Land Use

This chapter outlines existing conditions, goals, and future recommendations for land use, beginning with a community planning framework that establishes an overall perspective of what Rivertown wants to achieve. Goal statements provide a more specific approach to realize the stated vision. Finally, each part provides detailed recommendations and management strategies to achieve these goals. This chapter should be used in concert with Chapters 4 and 5 of the comprehensive plan to ensure the land use pattern in the Rivertown region is sustainable and vibrant into the future.



AB.1 Existing land use map

Existing Land Use

Existing Land Uses The following summarizes the existing land uses within the city; the categories correspond to the Existing Land Use Map [Figure AB.1].

Low Density Residential (LDR) Low density residential, primarily single-family homes, makes up the largest land use area. Densities vary from one neighborhood to another, but the neighborhoods generally contain small to moderate sized lots typical of traditional Midwest cities. Most existing neighborhoods are integrated into Rivertown's urban fabric through grid pattern streets and a connected sidewalk system. Older housing stock reflects traditional neighborhood design elements, with prominent front porches, varying architectural styles and details, recessed or detached garages, and shallow setbacks. These features have contributed to an intimate and admired neighborhood experience.

Multiple Family Residential (MFR) A variety of multiple family dwellings include attached townhouses, two-story apartment complexes, a large new senior housing complex, and a limited number of second-story apartments above commercial buildings within the central business district. The existing mixture of multiple family unit types offers a variety of housing options for residents.

Central Business District (CBD) The nineteenth century downtown district near the Eagle River and railroad line is characteristic of small, historic downtowns with a mixture of uses—retail, restaurants, personal service establishments, office, and limited second-story residential—situated in a compact area. Many of the structures in the central business district are historically significant.

Twentieth Century Commercial District (COM) A second commercial district is located along Biltmore Avenue on the east side of the city. Built primarily in the twentieth century, it includes a mix of retail and office. None of the buildings is architecturally significant, except for the vacant Bijou Theater.

Commercial and Office In addition to the commercial districts described above, Rivertown includes limited strip commercial businesses along Biltmore Avenue at the eastern and western edges of the city.

Industrial Industrial land is located along the railroad tracks on the east side of the city, north of the river. Eagle Stove Works is the main historic industry located in this area. Several properties and lots remain vacant, offering new opportunities for industrial growth in this area of the city.

Institutional The largest institution in the city is Reliance College, a private undergraduate college. Other public buildings include the city hall, combined fire and police building, library, and post office. The nearest medical facilities are located in Erie Falls, fifteen miles to the east.

Parks and Recreation City Park is located on the west side of the city. The city also owns land along the north side of the Eagle River and surrounding Walden Pond.

Open Space The old Biltmore Farm is a large open space located in the center of the city, directly behind the Biltmore Mansion. Open space available for development is found in the River Heights district on the northeast side of the city and land adjacent to the college campus in the far northwest corner of the city.

Surrounding Land Uses Rivertown is generally surrounded by agricultural and large lot single-family residential land uses that represent a rural atmosphere. Land uses near Rivertown that influence land use patterns and traffic flows within the city include:

- Bitterroot Lake as a residential/recreation area.
- A number of small to medium sized industrial uses east of the city on Biltmore Avenue (State Road 51).
- A new middle school/high school complex just west of the city boundary on Biltmore Avenue (State Road 51).

Future Land Use Goals

As Rivertown and its environs face continued pressure for new growth, the community wishes to accommodate high quality development served by roads, infrastructure and municipal services that maintain the community's character as a small town. The comprehensive plan enumerates the following goals related to the overall vision for the community:

- To promote a balance of residential, commercial, industrial and institutional uses, located and arranged in a logical pattern which complements neighboring land uses.
- To encourage quality industrial, office, and commercial development to provide employment opportunities for residents and to diversify the tax base.
- To maintain a small-town environment bounded by a distinct rural setting, with coordinated decisions on land use, pathways, roads and utility provisions, through cooperative planning with the surrounding townships, the River County Road Commission, and other organizations.
- To ensure that new development and redevelopment conserve the most important features of the natural environment and stormwater quality.
- To accommodate new development or redevelopment as far as possible through the existing capacity of roads, municipal sanitary sewer and water systems, schools, parks, open space and recreation facilities, and city facilities/services or the concurrent construction of new infrastructure.
- To preserve and enhance community character through the creation of design guidelines and regulations for architecture, signs, lighting, pedestrian amenities, and traffic/access management. Infill residential, either new homes or substantial expansions/renovations, should respect the character of the existing historic neighborhoods in terms of setbacks and building design.
- To direct industrial development and expansion to areas currently zoned as industrial along the railroad tracks.
- To maintain a distinct downtown as a city center that meets the shopping, civic, entertainment and recreational needs of current and future residents and visitors.

Because Rivertown's downtown is the focal point of the community, its historic qualities are a major factor in making the downtown a unique place. The plan's goals for the Central Business District are:

- To promote retention of existing businesses and encourage their expansion when consistent with other goals in the plan.
- To encourage new retail and commercial land uses in appropriate areas.
- To ensure that new infill development is compatible with the downtown's historic architecture, scale, proportion and character.
- To develop an updated marketing and promotional strategy for the downtown district.
- To promote future expansion of the central business district eastward along Biltmore Avenue.
- To improve the downtown by adding parking, pedestrian amenities, event areas and other elements that keep the downtown vibrant.
- To address the economic viability of the downtown through a diversified mixture of complementary commercial, office, residential and civic uses.
- To ensure that renovations of historic buildings in the downtown retain their historical and architectural integrity.