Chapter 2
EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

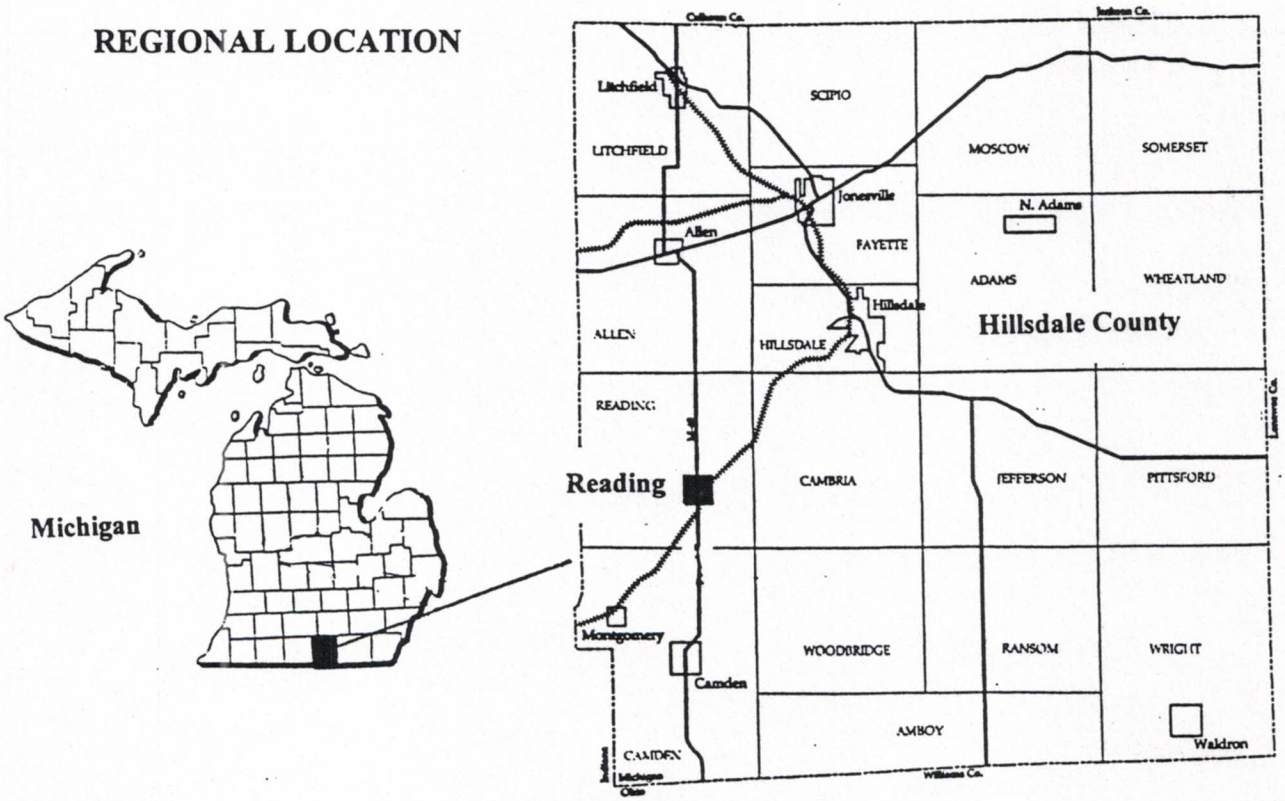
Regional Setting

The City of Reading is situated in south central Michigan. This region is primary rural with agriculture being the principal land use activity. Numerous lakes in the area are developed with seasonal homes, resulting in higher summertime population. Reading is located on State Route 49, which connects with US-12 eight miles to the north of Reading and Interstate 80/90 (Ohio Turnpike) approximately 16 miles south of Reading in Ohio (The City is 10 miles north of the Michigan/Ohio stateline). The distance to the Indiana stateline is 10 miles.

Reading is very well located with respect to major cities in the tri-state area (i.e. Michigan, Ohio and Indiana). Within one to one and one-half hour's drive time are Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, Jackson, Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti in Michigan; Toledo, Ohio; and Ft. Wayne and South Bend, Indiana. Major metropolitan areas of Detroit, Chicago and Columbus are slightly farther but very convenient by interstate highways to Reading. It is estimated that the resident population within six hours drive time from Reading is more than 26,000,000 people. Moreover, numerous automobile industry assembly and component production facilities are an easy drive from Reading.

Given the "just in time" operating philosophy for the parts and components supply system for manufacturing in the United States, Reading's location and easy access to the interstate highway network represent a significant opportunity to attract new manufacturing investment. This is especially true as regards auto parts manufacturers serving Tier 1 component suppliers and automaker assembly operations in the Mid-West.

REGIONAL LOCATION



HISTORY OF THE READING AREA...

The Beginnings

Prior to 1835, the Reading area was wilderness, inhabited Native Americans and traders. In that year, Judge John Mickle, his wife, child and hired man relocated from Maumee, Ohio to a tract of land three miles north of the present City of Reading. He began clearing woodland and construction of a small cabin. Dozens of settlers from the Maumee area soon followed on word of favorable conditions surrounding Judge Mickle's walnut log cabin built during 1835. Eleazer Gleason moved to Reading Township in late 1835, onto land south and east of the present City. The homestead is still owned by Gleason descendants.

In 1837, a petition filed with the legislature requested setting off a Township from the south part of Allen Township and another from the northern part. The petition sought to name the south Township Troy or Utica. These names having been taken elsewhere in Michigan, the south Township was then called Reading (the north became Litchfield). It has been suggested the name Reading was in honor of Wright Redding, one of the early settlers in the Township. Reading Township was officially organized in the spring of 1837 by Act of the Legislature. The first Township meeting held at the home of John Mickle. In 1839, the legislature reorganized the Township, setting off Camden Township and leaving Reading Township as six miles square and officially designated by the United States Survey as Town 7 South, Range 4 West (T.7.S, R.4.W.). The voting population in the Township was less than 30 persons.

As of 1840, there was but one principal road in the Township, cut by first settlers, the John Mickle family and only slightly improved by common use. The road ran from Jonesville (the County Seat) via Sand Creek through Reading Township to the Ohio State line. Reading Township and Hillsdale joined forces to build a road from Hillsdale via Reading to the Indiana State line. This road and the original north/south road intersected what is today the corner of Main and Michigan Streets within Reading.

The Village of Reading (Basswood Corners)

Due to ever more settlers moving into Reading and long rides to market (sometimes weeklong), a de facto village begin to take shape beginning in the mid-1840 period. The Berry brothers began keepirig a small stock of goods in a building at the present main corners of the City. The Berry brothers were the pioneer merchants of Reading. A blacksmith set up business in about 1846 on Michigan Street at the site of the old Weaver Tannery. That same year, Morris Inglesby began a factory making grain cradles on the site of the Reading House. Thus, the "Village" of 1850 consisted of a small mercantile store, grain cradle factory and a blacksmith shop. The original settlement was named "Basswood Corners" based on the existence of 7 large Basswood trees standing at the corner of the present Main and Michigan Streets. Thomas Berry owned this land and left the Basswood trees standing as a landmark while clearing away all other timber. In the late 1840's, this corner was the junction of the Jonesville and Hillsdale Roads and thus named Basswood Corners.

In 1847, Dr. William Hullinger purchased an acre of land from Thomas Berry on which the Basswood trees stood. The doctor cut down the trees and used them to build a log home. A year

or two later, Dr. Hullinger built the first frame home in what is now the City. In 1853, the Doctor purchased the grain cradle factory, moved it to the rear of the property and began construction of Reading's first hotel. This structure burned down prior to completion. In 1854 the hotel was rebuilt and was in continuous use until 1893 when replaced by a brick hotel structure. Thomas Berry also constructed a hotel in the early 1850's that later became known as the Howder House. This hotel was in continuous use until the Reading House was built and then it was abandoned.

First Commercial Establishments

While the Berrys did sell mercantile, their business was secondary and intermittent. In 1853, Nelson Turner built the first mercantile establishment in the Village, a substantial frame structure on the present site of the Crane block, opposite the hotel. This building was used until 1889, when it was destroyed by fire. In 1854, the Orr brothers built a second "general store" across the street from the Turner mercantile store. This building also burned in 1889 and was replaced by the present Mallory block on the southeast corner of Main and Michigan Streets.

The Railroad Arrives

Soon after the close of the Civil War, a project to build a railroad was proposed running from Jackson, Michigan to Cincinnati, Ohio by way of Fort Wayne, Indiana. This railroad was to run through Reading. Reading Township issued bonds to aid in construction of the railroad and Reading area citizens purchased railroad stock. The railroad was built during 1868-69 and began regular service to Reading on November 6, 1869.

The railroads marked the beginning of a business boom for Reading. The original plat for Reading(lands south of Michigan and east of Main Streets) occurred circa 1862 on lands owned by Thomas Fuller, etal. New businesses were started and many new homes were constructed in the Village during the 1870's. The Wringer Company, Colby Company, Warner's White Wine and Tar company, a tannery (became the largest buffalo hide tannery in the world) were but a few of the new businesses.

The Village of Reading Is Incorporated

The formal Village of Reading was created by Act of the legislature in 1873. The first Village election was held at the Howder House on April 14, 1873.

The Fire of 1899

Notwithstanding the introduction of railroad transportation to Reading, possibly the most significant event of the 19th Century was the great fire of August 25, 1899. The fire began in the hayloft of a livery barn located behind the business blocks on the west side of Main Street. The fire spread rapidly to adjacent business blocks and nearby homes to the west of the livery barn. A total of 22 buildings were completely destroyed by this fire, including 10 business blocks (storefronts), four homes and eight barns. While this fire was very devastating, it wasn't long before rebuilding began in earnest within the fire swept-district. New, more substantial buildings

were built, many of which exist today along the west side of Main Street, south of Michigan Street.

Municipal Facilities

One significant result of the great fire was the recognition of the need for improved fire protection. Until 1900, fire protection for the Village was in the form of a hand pump engine and fire wells located in various parts of the community. On September 26, 1899 (one month after the great fire), a special election was held to consider approval of a new municipal water plant. The plant was approved by a favorable vote of 5 to 1 and the water plant began operation during July of 1900. In 1901, voters approved a bond issue for an electric powerhouse.

A City is Born

The decades between 1900 and 1930 saw continuous changes in the Village of Reading. Many new buildings were built, electric streetlights were installed, streets were paved to accommodate automobiles, bus service started, along with growing cultural opportunities and improved public school facilities. On May 14, 1934, the Village residents adopted a city charter and thus began the City of Reading. The first Mayor was Adelbert Hakes who served from 1934-1941.

Post Depression Era Events

The Reading Public School District consolidated in 1947. The Acme Chair Company was sold to Bryan Manufacturing and later became Wagner Industries. In 1951, the Reynolds Elementary School was built on Strong Avenue. By the year 1976, some 58 businesses operated in the City of Reading.

NATURAL FEATURES

Natural features provide an essential element which both enhance and protect the quality of life in Reading. Planners are faced with decisions that require balancing protection of the natural environment with the man-made environment. A major planning theme today is termed "sustainable community". This term means that as a community is planned and subsequently developed, policies within the Master Plan require man-made changes within the community give high respect to existing natural features.

This section of the Plan is intended to present natural features found within the City and immediate environs. The Planning Commission may consider adopting policies related to decision making which respects existing environment. Sustainable policies suggest that by altering a site plan slightly, for example by preserving existing trees, planners can help both the developer and residents without making impossible decisions for or against the environment.

This chapter presents information regarding topography (slope of the land surface), surface soils, drainage, flood plain and wetlands and woodlands as they exist in the City.

Topography

Topographic variations within the City of Reading range from 1162 feet in the extreme Northwest and Southwest comers of the City to more than 1210 feet above sea level at a point on N. Ann Street. Most areas within the City are characterized as level to gently rolling.

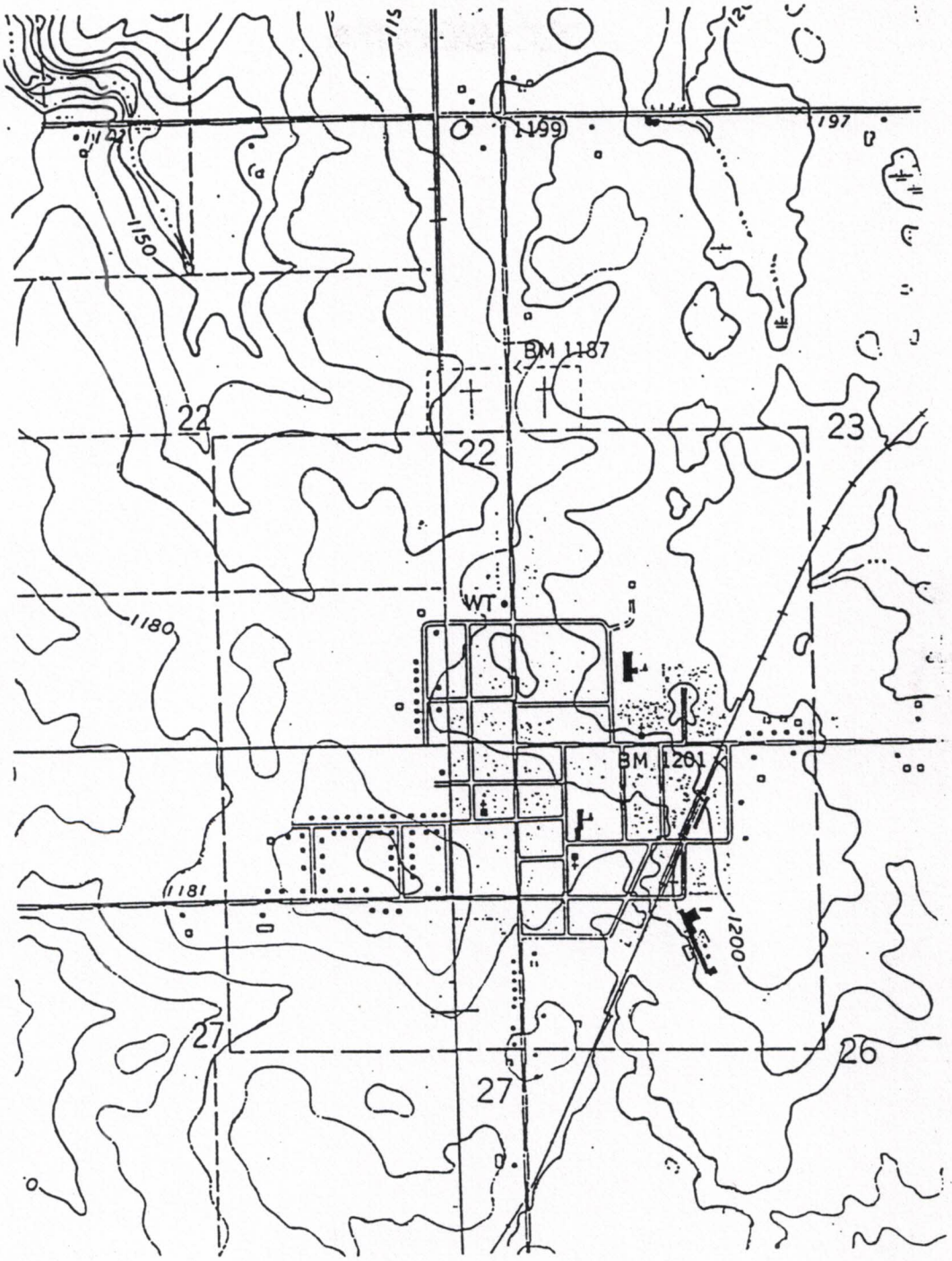
Resource value

Slopes and rolling hillsides are a limited, non-renewable resource. Distinctive features of the City's landscape (opportunity for significant views) are few in the City. Those present should be preserved.

Impact on Development

Elevation changes, such as at the North end of N. Ann St., can be restrictive to land development or street extensions absent severe site modifications by way of re-grading. Changes in elevation should be respected in the site plan for development, with minimal earth change. Differences in elevation between land uses can help create a buffer. Preservation of existing views should be considered a priority. Restrictions on building height, size and placement can aid in view preservation.

TOPOGRAPHY



City of Reading MASTER PLAN

Figure NF-1

Legend:

Intermittent Stream flow

Contour line

Wetland

Bench Mark BM

Source: U.S.G.S.

Geoff Moffat, JD,PCP
Urban Planner
Battle Creek, Michigan

Soils

Within the City limits, surface soils are primarily clay loam. These soils are not well drained. As such, absent well-developed storm water management, rainwater will collect on the surface in streets and yards following a storm event. Typically, storm water will leave only overland. Thus, low, poorly drained areas will experience accumulation of storm water for significant periods. Existing storm sewers in the City are for the most part former sanitary sewer lines, now replaced. These lines are not capable of handling storm water during severe rain events. As such, the combination of poorly drained soils and undersized drains has resulted in periodic flooding. As new development occurs, the City must give special attention to storm water management practices.

Surface Drainage

The City of Reading is situated atop high ground in relation to the area immediately surrounding the City. Surface drainage for Reading is unique in that surface water leaves the City in four directions. The Meade Drain begins near the East City limits at the Hillsdale Railroad north of Michigan Street and flows southeasterly into the St. Joseph River. To the north, just into Reading Township are two drainage areas. Flowing north and then west under M-49, one system is in the Long Lake Watershed. The second located at the northwest corner of the City, flows westward to Berry Lake. A fourth watershed area begins on the southwest comer of the City along Elm Street and flows west.

Within the developed portions of the City, closed storm drains poorly serve most areas. As stated earlier, this is due in large part to undersized sanitary sewer lines used as storm drains.

Resource value

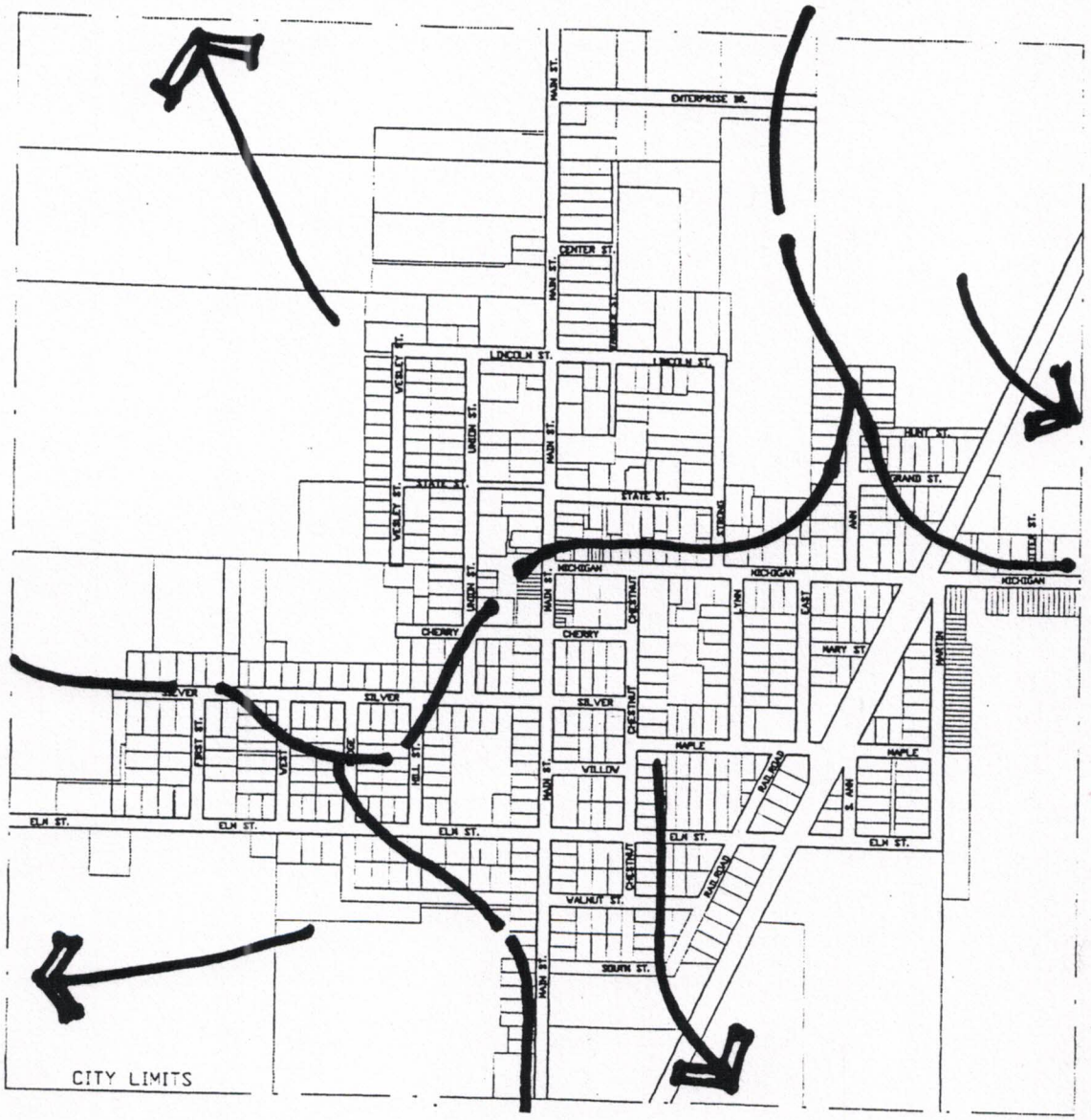
Watersheds serving the perimeters of the City are open county drains. Much of the vacant land areas in Reading appear to be in these watersheds.

Impacts on Development

All new development and redevelopment areas must be adequately serviced by storm drainage systems. Opportunities exist to use open drainage ways in the form of gentle swails as well as storm water retention basins, either wet or dry. This system can provide adequate service, foster groundwater recharge and provide aesthetic enhancements.

Floodplain

The Federal Floodplain Information Maps do not depict 100 or 500 year flood hazard zones within the City. However, as stated earlier, Reading does have localized drainage issues to be concerned with, especially in existing residential areas. Any new development, including single residential lot infill, will of necessity, have to address drainage and flooding concerns by careful attention to finished lot grades and proper storm water management facilities.



City of Reading MASTER PLAN

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Figure NF-2

Legend:

Drainage Divide

Source: Hillsdale Co. Drain Commission
U.S.G.S.

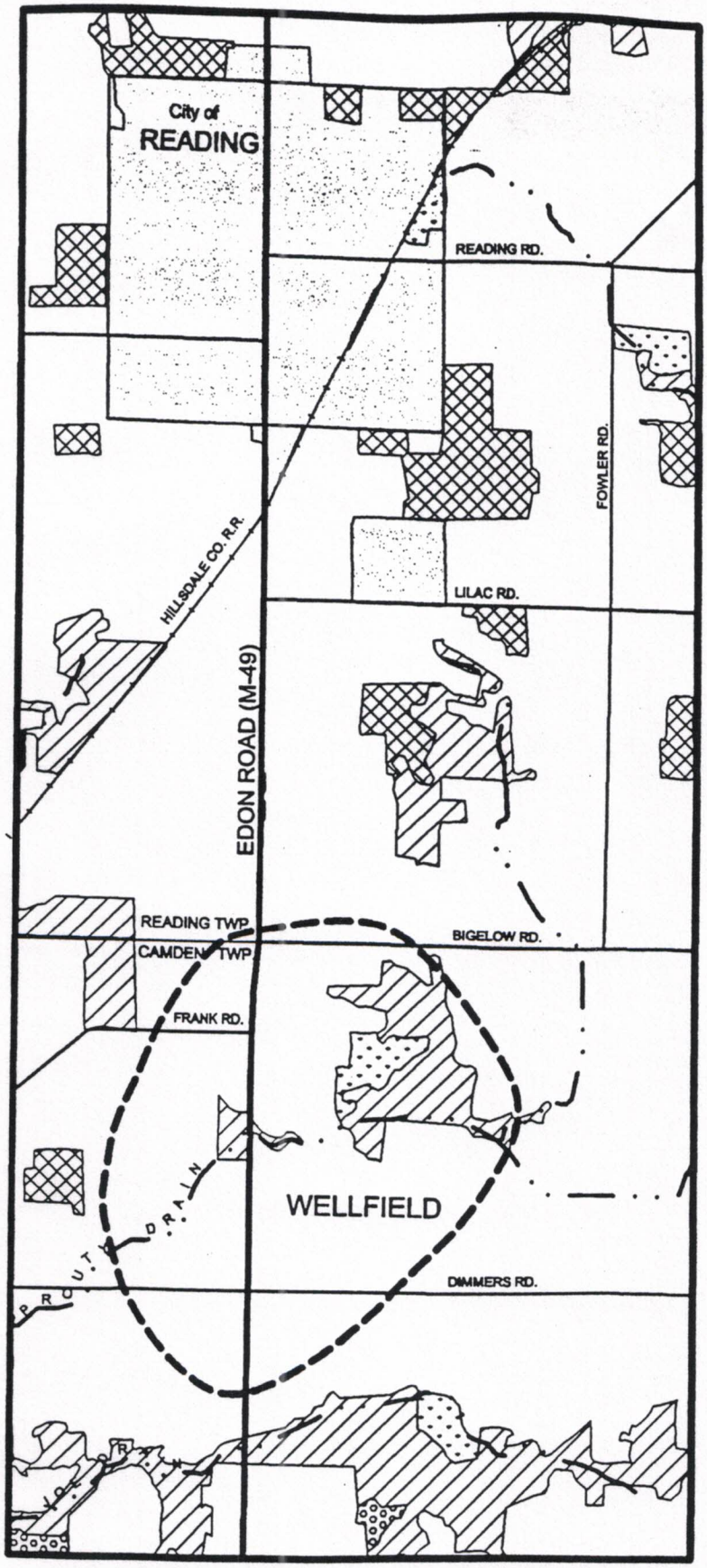
Impacts on Development

Whenever new development is to occur in or adjacent to an existing woodlot, every effort should be made to protect it. For example, careful inventory and mapping of wooded areas as a part of the site development plan together with prudent land clearing practices can preserve much of the scenic and resource value of the woodlot.

All new developments should include street trees, parking lot trees and tree buffers whenever incompatible uses may be in close proximity. Deciduous trees should be used primarily along streets and in parking lots, whereas evergreen trees are more effective when landscape buffers.

Threatened and Endangered Species

From review of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Department of Interior data bases, there do not appears to be any threatened or endangered species of animals, flora or fauna within the City of Reading.



OTHER NATURAL FEATURES

Legend

- Wellhead Protection Area Boundary
- Urban Areas
- Agricultural Areas

Natural Vegetation

- Lowland Hardwoods
- Upland Hardwoods
- Open Field/Herbaceous
- Open Field/Shrub

Source: MDEQ MIRIS

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POPULATION ANALYSIS

Population Data and Changes

Population change within the City of Reading can be characterized as slow, steady growth. As shown on Table PA-1, from 1970 to 1999, the population grew from 1,125 to an estimated 1999 population of 1,177.

Table PA-1
TOTAL POPULATION AND CHANGE
1970-1999

	1970	1980	1990	1999(1)
Total Population	1125	1116	1127	1177
Percent Change	-	-. 08%	+. 09%	+4%

(1) Estimated source: U.S. Census

A slight decrease in population occurred between 1970-1980. However, since 1980 the trend has been a slow population increase.

Population change in Reading is influenced by development in the Reading area and within Hillsdale County. Table PA-2 depicts comparative estimated population change for Reading, Reading zip code area and HiIlsdale County.

Table PA-2
COMPARATIVE POPULATION CHANGE
1990-1999

Place	1990	1999 est.	Change	% Change
Reading City	1127	1177	+50	4.0%
Reading Zip	2260	2319	+59	2.6%
Hillsdale Co.	43431	46561	+3,130	7.2%

Hillsdale County has experienced significant population growth of 7.2% since 1990. Readings estimated increase of 4% during the same period compares favorably.

Population Forecasts

Projecting future population within any community is not an exact science. Many factors directly influence population change. Some of the major factors include regional growth, employment opportunities, land use policies, housing availability and community amenities such as recreation and cultural opportunities.

Population forecasting employs different methods and is based on certain assumptions. If

SUMMARY OF POPULATION FORECASTS FOR THE CITY OF READING

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Ratio	1,205	1,246	1,287	1,328	1,368
Growth (L)	1,205	1,211	1,216	1,221	1,227
Growth (H)	1,205	1,227	1,253	1,278	1,303
Arithmetic (L)	1,138	1,144	1,149	1,155	1,160
Arithmetic (H)	1,177	1,202	1,227	1,252	1,277
Chat	1,221	1,283	1,345	1,407	1,469
Average	**1,191**	**1,219**	**1,246**	**1,273**	**1,301**

The average forecast of population suggests an increase of 124 persons over the next 20 years within the City. As stated earlier, land use policy, economic development, and the City's initiatives regarding new residential development will have very significant impacts on population change.

HOUSING ANALYSIS

Introduction

At strategic planning forums held in the Spring of 1999, condition of existing housing and lack of new housing were determined to be major issues of concern to the citizens of Reading. Since residential structures are the basic physical element of every established neighborhood, housing must be the primary focus of any neighborhood preservation effort.

Housing Inventory

Based on a visual enumeration of all housing units in the City, during August of 1999, there were 436 dwelling units of all types in the City.

Table HA-1
DWELLING UNITS BY TYPE
City of Reading

	1970	1980	1990	1999
Single Family	334	-	321	326
Single Family Attached	8	8	1	9
Mobile Home	18	22	34	30
Duplex (2 units)	18	18	22	22
Multiple Family (3+)	29	-	48	49
Total	**407(1)**	**447(1)**	**436(1)**	**436(2)**

(1) U.S. Census, Assume statistical error in 1980
(2) Field count, August 1999, Geoff Moffat, Urban Planning Consultant

As can be seen, the 1980 U.S. Census data seems to be incongruous with 1970, 1990 and 1999 enumerated data. It should be presumed the 1980 data statistical aberrations, since other years seem to track very well.

Since 1970, a net increase of 29 new housing units has occurred within the City. Rental units and mobile homes have accounted for most of the increase.

Housing Occupancy Rates

The number of vacant housing units within the housing stock of a community gives an indication of housing need. Reading vacancy rate for all housing stock has ranged in the 7-8% range throughout much of the 1970-1990 period. This suggests there has been historically a lack of demand in the existing housing stock and probably depressed home values. Population trends have not supported a strong housing demand. Moreover, condition of the housing stock may have also been a factor in the comparably high vacancy rate.

Normal or acceptable vacancy rates for existing housing stock are typically around 5% where housing demand is average to strong. Owners and renters moving activities create much of the 5% and in addition, selling and "buying up" or " buying down" in the local market contributes to the overall vacancy rate. According to the Hillsdale County CHAT Report, "The City's vacancy rate of 8.26% in 1990 will decline throughout the forecast period (through 2010) to about 6.25%.

It appears recent population increases (expected to continue) have reduced the vacancy rate and this trend will likely continue. The result will be increases in existing home prices, improvements to owner-occupied units and rental rate increases within the Reading market. Increased demand and rental rate increases can spur construction of new housing units.

Housing Conditions

During August 1999, Geoff Moffat, the City's Urban Planning Consultant, conducted a field survey of exterior housing conditions throughout the City. Categories that used for this survey were as follows:

Sound (1). Housing included as sound were all structures, regardless of age, in good repair and maintenance. Exterior walls, windows, doors, roof, overhangs, porches, porch supports and exterior foundation were viewed.

Minor Repair (2). Included in this category were structures that showed in need of painting, bad cracks in walls, weathered roofing, deteriorated gutters and down spouts, masonry in need of tuck pouting windows broken or in poor condition and similar minor defects.

Major Repair (3). In this category were structures in serious despair, evidence of weakened foundations, porch or roof sag or collapse, missing windows, and other unsafe conditions.

Of the 436 dwelling units within the City, 357 were sound, 69 were in need of minor repair and 10 were in need of major repair or demolition.

Table HC-1
Housing Conditions 1999
City of Reading

Type of Units	Total Units	Sound	Minor Repair	Major Repair
Single Family	335	275	54	6
Mobile Home	30	16	13	1
Duplex	22	20	2	0
Multiple Family	49	46	0	3
Total	**436**	**357**	**69**	**10**

EXISTING LAND USE

The City of Reading corporate limits contain one square mile of land or a total of 640 acres. Most of the existing development is mature. Some neighborhoods contain significant historic structures. There are limited areas of new land development evident within the City, including new buildings in the Reading Industrial Park and commercial uses along Main Street near Walnut Street and just north of Downtown. Few new homes were observed during the land use survey.

A Citywide land use survey was completed during early September 1999, the results of which are presented on the following pages.

Land Use Categories:

Residential-Low Density.

Land use in this category includes all structures occupied as one-family dwellings and the land on which they are situated. This use category represents the largest land use in the City with repsect to the amount of acres occupied. Low-density residential use occupies 142 acres of land within the City or 22.18 percent of the total land area.

Residential-Two family.

This category includes structures having two dwelling units within them and the land on which they are located. A total of 2.6 acres of land are used in this category or 0.04 percent of the total land area of the City.

Residential- Multiple Family.

This category of land use includes structures in which three or more dwelling units are located. Lands occupied by multiple family residential use occupy a total of 4.2 acres of land or 0.06 percent of the total land area of the City.

Commercial Use.

This land use category includes all commercial retail and commercial services uses found within the City. All Downtown business area and scattered outlying commercial uses have been included. Commercial land uses occupy 12.0 acres of land within the City or 1.9 percent of total land area.

Industrial Use.

This category of land use includes manufacturing, warehousing and distribution activities. The Reading Industrial Park is included only to the extent of sites that are occupied at the time of this survey. This land use activity occupies a total of 43 acres within the City or 6.7 percent of the

total land area.

Public Use.

Land uses included in this category are all municipal property and school property, whether or not in active use, churches, public street and railroad rights of way. Schools occupy and control about 60 acres within the City, municipal lands about 5 acres, churches 2 acres, the railroad about 12 acres and there are 51 acres of land included within public street rights of way. Total land in this category is 130 acres or about 20.3 percent of the total land area within the City of Reading.

Vacant Lands.

This land use category includes active and fallow farmland and vacant lands. Not included are the many large lots or center of block areas within the City which are not in active use but which are part of sites owned in connection with an existing active land use. These small areas could be placed in active use just as the vacant lands. Some 306 acres of land are in use as farmland or are currently vacant.

Table LU-1
EXISTING LAND USE 1999
City of Reading

Land Use Category	**Acres in Use**	**Percent of total**
Low density Residential	142.0	22.18
Two Family Residential	2.6	0.04
Multiple Family Residential	4.2	0.06
Commercial	12.0	1.90
Industrial	43.0	6.90
Public	130.0	20.31
Farmland/Vacant	306.2	47.84
Total	**640.0**	**100.00**

Summary-Existing Land Use.

Of the 640 acres of land within the City of Reading, about 306.2 acres are vacant or currently devoted to agricultural use and 338.8 acres are developed. This City of Reading has ample physical space in which to grow within the boundaries of the present municipal limits.

To assure sound growth and development of the vacant areas within the City and immediate environs of Reading Township, careful assessment of future land use relationships, appropriate locations for public street access, street extensions other infrastructure needs necessary to support growth areas is now required.