

# **BRANCH COUNT MASTER PLAN UNADOPTED UPDATE**

## **PREFACE**

This document is a Master (land Use) Plan for Branch County. The Plan contains an identification of land use trends, problems, advantages and opportunities which may impact future development; goals and objectives to guide development; practical tools and techniques to achieve the land use goals and objectives and an implementation section for further steps beyond Plan adoption.

A data base report (1993) was also developed as an initial step in plan development.

### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

#### **A. STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION OF THE BRANCH COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION.**

The Branch County Planning Commission developed the County's first Master Plan in 1974. In 1993 the Planning Commission in cooperation with the Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (smpc) began the process of developing a new master plan for the purpose of coordination and harmonious development of the county. Particularly the function of the County Planning Commission and purpose of the plan are specified in Section 4 of the County Planning Act (Act 282 of the 1945 Public Acts of the Michigan Legislature.)

Sec. 4: It shall be a function of the county planning commission to make plan for the development of the county, which plan may include planning in cooperation with the constituted authorities for incorporated areas in whole or to the extent to which, in the commissions judgment, they are related to the planning of the unincorporated territory of the county as a whole. The plan with accompanying map, plats, charts, and all pertinent and descriptive explanatory matter shall show the planning commission's recommendations for the development of the County. In the preparation of a county development plan, the planning commission shall make careful and comprehensive studies of existing conditions and probable growth of the territory within its jurisdiction. Such a plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the county which will be in accordance with present and future needs for best promoting the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants. Also, promoting efficiency and economy in the process of development. It shall be the duty of the county planning commission to: (1) make studies, investigations and surveys relative to the county; (2) formulate plans and make recommendations for the most effective economic, social and physical development of the county; (3) cooperate with all departments of the state and federal governments and other public agencies concerned with programs directed towards the economic, social and physical development of the county and seek the maximum coordination of the county programs of those agencies (4) consult with

representatives of adjacent counties in respect to their planning so that conflicts in over-all county plans may be avoided.

This plan includes a basic inventory of community resources, an identification of current trends, a listing of land use related problems and opportunities. Finally, based on an evaluation of this information a proposed future land use map was developed to reflect this evaluation and serve as a basis of future zoning recommendations to the municipalities of Branch County.

## **B. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

The purpose of this Master plan is to provide the officials and citizens of Branch County with an efficient and reasonable guide to the orderly growth and development of the community. The plan is designed to reduce zoning conflicts and promote countywide harmony.

## **C. OUTLINE TO THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The planning process involves four basic steps” (1) a survey and analysis of background information, a determination of problems and trends, and an assessment of future needs; (2) the formulation of goals, objectives and policies to serve as a guide to future development; and policies to serve as a guide to future development; (3) a written and graphic plan designed to achieve the goals; and (4) recommendations for implementation of the plan.

The Branch County Master Plan was developed in the following order:

1. Organize for Planning
2. Community History Summary
3. Review Existing Conditions and Past Trends
4. Assess Future Conditions
5. Determine Needs, Concerns, Advantages and Opportunities
6. Establish Goals and Objectives
7. Develop the Generalized Land Use Plan
8. Develop Recommendations for Implementation

The planning process, which is described in detail below, is intended to produce a decision-making guide, which reflects the views of the county residents.

### **1. Organize for Planning**

This step includes setting up a group to do the planning establishing the purpose for which we want to plan and deciding on steps to follow in the planning. The INTRODUCTION Section of this document explains how the county has organized for planning.

### **2. Community History Summary**

Before we can understand why things are the way they are today, or will be tomorrow, we need to look at the history of our community. The County History Section of this document serves this purpose.

### **3. Review Existing Conditions and Past Trends**

With an understanding of the history of the county, the next step in the planning process is to review the existing conditions and past trends in such areas as regional setting, natural conditions, populations and household characteristics, economy, land use characteristics, public and quasi-public facilities, open space and recreation resources and transportation facilities. Once we have reviewed existing conditions and past trends we can turn our attention to the future.

### **4. Assess Future Conditions**

Future conditions can be assessed with sufficient accuracy for general planning purpose through the use of projection techniques. Basic to all projection techniques is an understanding of the present conditions and past trends. Projections give us a “best guess” concerning future conditions. As more refined information is made available we can adjust our estimates of future conditions.

### **5. Determine Needs, Concerns, Advantages and Opportunities**

A listing of the community’s needs, concerns, advantages and opportunities is possible once the preceding steps are complete. This list will be a valuable aid in comparing the present conditions, and expected future conditions of the community with the goals and objectives of the community, which will be developed in the next step of the planning process. Such comparison permits the community to begin thinking of ways to achieve the goals and objectives, which they have established. The implementation techniques, which are included in this document, are a reflection of the results of this thinking process.

### **6. Establish Goals and Objectives**

Once the planning process is complete up to this point the community will have a good basis on which to either initially formulate goals and objectives for development or revise pre-existing ones. As stated in the introductory paragraphs to this Outline of the Planning Process Section, the purpose of “Planning” is to achieve community goals and objectives. Community goals and objectives should be reflected in the product of the planning process- the LAND USE PLAN.

### **7. Develop the Generalized Land Use Plan**

In this step of the planning process the most appropriate, adequate and acceptable range of development standards, based upon previous development goals for improving present and future development, are determined for use in developing the Land Use Plan.

As a product of planning research, national standards have been developed for land development to ensure adequate community health and safety. Such standards must be reviewed locally to determine whether each standard reflects the unique qualities of the community to which they, once modified, (if necessary) will be applied. Each of these standards must be acceptable to her community and be consistent with the previously established community goals and objectives.

The Land Use Plan will show cumulative results of the planning process, which include the determination of the best land use patterns as expressed by the desires of the community and as reflected in the goal and objective statements.

Each of these land use categories will be shown on the Land Use Plan: agricultural, residential, commercial, open space/recreation and transportation.

The Land Use Plan is intended to serve as a general guide for policy decisions pertaining to the community development. As stated in the INTRODUCTION to this document, the plan requires periodic review as community attitudes change and as development trends become more apparent than projections could indicate.

## **8. Develop Recommendations for Implementation**

Once the Land Use Plan is complete, the community should decide how to get from here (existing development conditions), to these (the general land use development pattern as shown on the Land Use Plan). For that reason, a list of recommendations on how to implement the provisions of the development plan, are usually developed as part of the planning process.

Typical recommendations often include the development of model ordinances and programs to achieve county goals and objectives as reflected in the Land Use Plan. The recommendations of Branch County Planning Commission are shown in the RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION Section of this document.

### Note

For the purpose of this document, the term “community” is defined to include all cities, townships and villages within Branch County.

## **II. COMMUNITY HISTORY SUMMARY**

Branch County was a primeval wilderness little more than 150 years ago, inhabited by the Potowatomie Indians.

While it is true that there were trading posts within the limits of what is now Branch County as early as 1825, the first actual white settler appears to have been Jabe Bronson, who made his home in 1828 in the locality now bearing his name-Bronson. It should be borne in mind that the entire population of Michigan in 1820 was less than 9,000, and not much more in 1828.

However, the old Indian trail between Detroit and Chicago (now the Chicago Road or US 12) saw great numbers of pioneers passing this way bound for Illinois and other parts of what was then the “far west”. The presence of the Indians deterred many who would otherwise have settled here.

It was in the year 1821 that Chief Topinabee and his people sold to the Whites what is now the County of Branch and a vast area besides, though they still continued to occupy it as before, supposedly on reservations, one of which was a tract six miles square called Mikkesawbee, in parts of the present Quincy and Coldwater Townships. But the Potawatomi roamed everywhere, to hunt and fish as they chose, in what seemed to them a paradise, for the wood abounded in deer, wild turkeys, pigeons, squirrels and other varieties of game, while the many lakes and streams swarmed with the finest fish; and walnuts, butternuts, hickory-nuts, hazelnuts and berries of numerous kinds were to be had in great abundance for the gathering. The deed conveying this godly land to the government was signed by Topinabee, followed by Wawenickamack, Mayonchee, Atchwemuckquee and numerous braves prominent in the councils and affairs of the Potowatomies.

There are quite a number of beautiful prairies, notably in Coldwater, Bronson and Girard; but the great bulk of this region was covered with splendid forest of beech, maple, walnut, hickory, whitewood, elm, oak and other trees. In told millions of lumber-feet of these trees were cut by the earlier settlers, piled in “log heaps” and burned in order to clear land. Many streams wandered through the forests, and there were some ninety lakes, large and small, in what is now Branch County.

In the year 1829 Branch County was laid and so named by the Territorial Legislature of Michigan. It was first attached to Lenawee County and later to St. Joseph for judicial purposes. The name was given in honor of John Branch of North Carolina, Secretary of the Navy in President Jackson’s cabinet at that time.

The year 1830 saw little hamlets spring up in Coldwater and Bronson, while a tavern was established as Quincy—all on the Chicago Road. On account of the lack of highways the settlements at the junction of the Coldwater and St. Joseph Rivers (Union City) and on the former stream at Hodunk were made several years alter, although Girard Prairie had a few white settlers soon after Coldwater’s inception. Both Coldwater and Girard had quite pretentious Indian Villages when the white man came.

From this time in, settlement proceeded rapidly, as shown by the fact that Michigan’s population increased from 31,639 in 1830 to 212,267 in 1840. But, Branch County’s early “boom” did not come until the Potowatomies were removed to Kansas in 1840.

Further impetus was also given by the building of the Michigan Southern and Northern Indiana Railroad across the county in 1850.

The county seat was first at Masonville, on the east bank of the river in the west part of the present city of Coldwater, but was soon transferred to the ambitious village of Branch, which held that honor for 1831 to 1842, when Coldwater won the coveted plum after an exciting and most memorable contest.

The county's separate existence dates from the year 1833, and its population increased steadily until 1900, when we numbered nearly 28,000 people. The official 1990 census was 41,502.

The County of Branch now has two incorporated cities: Coldwater and Bronson; also three incorporated villages: Quincy, Sherwood and Union City. Each has its own industries and sources of wealth and prosperity, by no means the least of which is the splendid agricultural county adjoining the villages of Batavia, Girard and Kinderhook are not incorporated; and to these may be added several smaller hamlets about the county.

Branch County citizens were deprived of their venerable old Courthouse in 1972 when a disastrous fire destroyed the building on the night of December 5. The fire gutted the second floor, and much water damage resulted to the lower floors. The extent of damage required that a new building be constructed since it was not economical to restore the historic old building which was built in 1887 at a cost of 50,000.00.

After the initial shock of relocating the many county offices in various parts of the City of Coldwater, the Coldwater State Home and Training School provided one of the buildings on their grounds as a temporary Courthouse. Although the space was cramped, the business of the county continued while the Board of Commissioners planned for a new Courthouse.

After almost three years in temporary quarters, a new Courthouse was finished and stands on the site of the old building. January 1976, was moving month, and the dedication took place in March of that year. A time capsule was placed in a "cornerstone" in the west wall, three feet north of the main entrance and five feet above the floor, and many mementos, past and present, were sealed therein.

The new Courthouse was built at a cost of 1.9 million dollars, being paid for by a bond issue voted by the people of the county.

The well-known clock tower on the old courthouse was sorely missed by the citizens of the County. Due to the efforts of a group of volunteer citizens, a new Clock Tower, situated on the southwest corner of the current courthouse grounds, was dedicated on July 30, 1988. The original bell and clock from the first clock tower were restored for use in the new tower. The project was completely funded by donations of time, talents, and money from the citizens of Branch County.

### **III. EXISTING CONDITIONS/PAST TRENDS**

#### **A. REGIONAL SETTING**

##### **1. The County's Place in the State**

Branch County is in the southern most tier of counties in the State of Michigan, just west of the midpoint of the State's southern boundary. The county's south line borders Indiana and the southeast corner of the county is within six miles of Ohio. Branch County is bordered on the east by Hillsdale County, on the west by St. Joseph County and on the north by Calhoun County. The largest city in Branch County is Coldwater, which is located in the center of the county. Halfway between Coldwater and the east county line is the Village of Quincy and halfway between Coldwater and the west county line is the City of Bronson. The villages of Sherwood and Union City are located in the northwest corner of the county about six miles apart.

The nearest large urban area is Battle Creek, which is 35 miles north of Coldwater. The county is 110 miles from Detroit, 160 miles from Chicago, 170 miles from Indianapolis and 60 miles from Lansing. Lake Michigan is 90 miles to the west. The county covers 332,613 acres or 519.7 square miles. Branch County is divided into 16 land survey townships, each of which is also a political township. The four southern tier townships each have areas of only 21.5 square miles, while the other 12 survey townships cover 36 square miles each. Five of the political townships cover less area than the entire survey townships where cities and villages have been created.

##### **2. Component Communities**

Branch County is divided into 21 minor civil divisions. Sixteen of these are townships, and two are cities. The three villages are subject to township authority and taxes, but provide additional services to their residents supported by village taxes.

###### **a. Cities**

The two cities are Coldwater, which covers roughly seven square miles, and Bronson, which covers a little over one square mile. Both cities have city manager forms of government.

###### **b. Townships**

From the northwest corner moving west to east, the northern most row of townships are Sherwood, Union, Girard and Butler. The second row from the north has Matteson, Batavia, Coldwater and Quincy Townships. The third row from the north has Bronson, Bethel, Ovid and Algansee townships. The southern most row of townships has Noble, Gilead, Kinderhook and California.

###### **c. Villages**

Quincy Village is in the center of Quincy Township. Sherwood Village is on the southern side of Sherwood Township. Union City Village is on the northern edge of

Union Township and extends slightly into Calhoun County. All three villages are roughly one square mile in area.

## **B. NATURAL CONDITIONS**

### **1. Climate**

Branch County is in North America's Continental Temperate climate zone. The winters and summers are somewhat moderated by Lake Michigan. The average annual daily maximum temperature is 58.0 degrees F with a January average of 30.2 degree F. and a July average of 80.8 degrees F. Precipitation averages 33.49 inches per year. Snowfall averages 47.8 inches per year.

### **2. Geology and Topography**

#### **a. Surface and Subsurface Geology**

The geologic history of an area is important to a better understanding of the present day natural environment, which, in turn, is necessary in planning for future land utilization and development. The "lay of the land" or topography, as well as soils, water resources and mineral resources of the county are intimately related to the future of the County. Surface characteristics reflect the most recent events in the earth's history. The geologic formations, penetrated by well drilling and excavations, reflect events and conditions that occurred millions of years ago.

For the purpose of this report, the deepest and oldest rocks are encountered at depths of about 6,000 to 7,000 feet below the present land surface. As a unit, they make up what is geologically known as the basement rock sequence. Their origin is related to the formation of the North American continent. The youngest units within this complex are estimated and characteristics of the rocks are such that mineral resources, other than iron and copper, are not to be expected. Based on present knowledge units below the basement surface, offer no economic potential.

The rock units above the basement's surface consist of two broad classifications. The first group consists of sequences of consolidated sandstones, lime stones, shales and related rock types and for the bedrock units. The upper surface of this unit is called bedrock surface. This group of rocks, vary in age between 220 and 540 million years of age. Above the bedrock are the unconsolidated sands, gravels, and clays deposited within the last million years by the glaciers which once covered the area.

The most recent advance of glaciers-the Wisconsin Glaciation –formed much of the present landscape of the county. Long hills, consisting of a mixture of silt, sand and rock fragments, trend north to northwesterly through the county. These are referred to by geologists as "terminal moraines." As waters rushed from the melting glaciers, they carried suspended loads of clay, silt, sand and gravel which settled out of the melted water as "outwash deposits" creating the generally flat plains and numerous depressions, many of which filled with water to become lakes. With the melting of glacial ice, the

material carried within it was deposited forming “till plains” of gently rolling topography throughout central and northwestern Branch County.

Exposures or outcrops of bedrock occur throughout the county. As stated earlier, the bedrock, in most cases, was covered by glacial material; however, outcrops of Coldwater shale can be found in Coldwater, Batavia and Algansee townships. It is these outcrops of shale and marl deposits which, during the first half of the century, were utilized in cement manufacture.

### **b. Topography**

Glaciation formed much of the present landscape of Branch County. Four basic types of land forms found throughout the county are known geologically as moraines, till plains, outwash and drumlins.

Moraines, till plains and drumlins have gently rolling topographic characteristics. Moraines are long, low hills which trend north to northwesterly through Branch County. Till plains are gently rolling topography scattered throughout central and northern Branch County. Between these slightly elevated land forms are the outwash plains appearing on the following topographic map as extensive areas of flat plains found throughout southern and western Branch County. Numerous depressions in the outwash plains contain most of the lakes of the county.

Throughout Branch County, surface elevations differ by 250 feet. Excessive relief occurs in limited areas of central and eastern Branch County, while other areas are, for the most part, gently rolling or flat.

### **3. Soils**

All of Branch County is within the gray-brown podzolic general soils region of Michigan. This soil region covers the southern one-third of the lower peninsula and corresponds to the re-settlement hardwood forests. There are six major soil associations in Branch County: Hatmaker-Locke-Barry, Fox-Oshtemo-Ormas, Fox-Houghton-Edwards, Matherton-Sebewa-Branch, Locke-Barry-Hillsdale, and Morley-Locke-Houghton. These six soil associations are classified by texture, natural drainage and slope into 28 specific soils.

### **4. Water Resources**

#### **a. Surface Water**

Open surface waters, composed of 116 lakes and rivers, cover 2.25 percent of the area of the county or 7,483.39 acres. The county is entirely within the St. Joseph River Basin, which empties into Lake Michigan. The St. Joseph River itself cuts through the northwest corner of the county. Major tributaries in the county are: The Coldwater River running from Coldwater Lake in the south to the north roughly through the center of the

county; and the Prairie River which drains the southwest corner of the county. The largest lakes in Branch County are: Coldwater Lake in Ovid and Kinderhook townships and the chain of lakes running northeast from Coldwater Lake to the Village of Quincy. Another chain of lakes has been formed on the Coldwater River along the western side of the City of Coldwater. The St. Joseph River has been dammed to form Union Lake between Union City and Sherwood. Matteson Lake is located three miles north of Bronson City and there are numerous lakes found in Kinderhook and Gilead townships. Smaller lakes and ponds are found clustered in Sherwood, Batavia and Noble townships. IN fact, every township except Bronson has at least one small lake or river impoundment.

#### **b. Groundwater**

Groundwater can be found almost everywhere in the county. Most of the water available to wells occurs in the sand and gravels of the glacial drift. The thickness of the drift ranges from a few feet to as much as 400 feet; a fact, which has a significant bearing on the water-producing capabilities of the glacial deposits. Generally, the thicker the drift the greater the possible number of sand and gravel beds and the more chances there of locating a water-bearing bed. As an example, the thick deposit of glacial drift in the buried valley that underlies the City of Coldwater yields large quantities of water. Other buried valleys, if filled, with materials similar to those as Coldwater, also may yield large supplies. In places where the drift cover is thin or where thick beds of clay are encountered, groundwater is difficult or impossible to obtain from the drift in usable quantities. In these areas many wells are drilled into the Coldwater shale, but yields are usually small and the water may be “salty.” Ordinarily, shale is a “tight” aquifer, which may be water saturated but too impermeable to yield the water locked within it. Successful wells finished in Coldwater probably tap more permeable lenses of sandstone, limestone, or fractured shale zones.

Geologic formations are a valuable source of water. The outwash deposits are the best aquifers in Branch County and often will yield large quantities of water. Moraines and till contain some water, but the yield to wells is usually small. Lakebeds are a poor source of groundwater; but if outwash lies below the lakebeds, good quantities may be obtained by wells penetrating into the buried outwash. The Coldwater shale, underlying the glacial drift, also is generally a poor source of water—yielding only 2-3 gpm to wells, in many instances, but it has been reported to yield as much as 10-30 gpm.

#### **5. Woodlands/Wetlands**

Woodlands, including wooded wetlands, cover 16.95 percent of Branch County or just 56,400 acres. There are no significant forest areas in the county, although there are stands of up to 150 acres. Most woodlands are from 5 to 20 acres and are scattered fairly evenly around the county. Only about 2 percent of the county’s 4,378 acres of wetlands are wooded. Wetlands make up only 1.3 percent of the area of the county. Long, wide stretches of wetlands are found along the St. Joseph River and Hog Creek. No area of the county is without scattered, 10 to 30 acres wetlands, but there are concentrations of these small wetland in Kinderhook and Ovid Townships.

## **b. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS**

### **1. Population Trends (see attached Quick facts from the US Census Bureau)**

Since 1950 Branch County has growth by 37 percent or about 282 persons per year (1990 Census). The county's growth rate was 15.6 percent during the 1950's but has slowed each decade since.

### **2. Housing Trends (see attached Census information)**

The largest housing unit in the county is single family units.

Of the county's housing units nearly one-third were built before 1940, nearly another third were built during the three decades between 1940 and 1970, and the remaining since then.

In 1998 a 39 unit assisted living senior facility is underway in the City of Coldwater. Previously the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MISHDA) had funded 16 subsidized housing projects for low income and elderly households. These projects created 668 total units of which 38 are three bedroom units, 294 are two bedroom units, 326 are one-bedroom units and 10 are efficiency apartments. Four of the projects are designated for the elderly and these account for 190 units.

Between 1993 and 1995 every part of the county received an influx of new dwellings. Of single-family houses 43 percent were built in four townships. Ovid Township received 92 or 13 percent of the new houses, Coldwater Township received 75 (11%), Quincy Township received 65 (10%) and Kinderhook Township 63 (9%). Of the mobile homes 36 percent were brought into two communities. The City of Coldwater received 143 (23%) of the new mobile homes and Sherwood Township received 79 (13%).

The City of Coldwater continues to have the largest number of new dwelling units (of all types). Recent housing developments include two condominium sites, one on the west side of Coldwater and one on the north side of Coldwater. In addition, a mobile home park has been built on the city's east side.

The following is a County-wide breakdown of building permits issued in 1997:

**Please see the attached county building permit information to review where and what type of permits were recently issued**

### **3. Income Trends**

Please see attached Quick Facts from the US Census Bureau

## **C. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

(see attached census information)

Employment groups include, agriculture, manufacturing, retail trade, wholesale trade, health, education, public administration and construction.

The Michigan Employment Security Agency (MESA) now called the Unemployment Insurance Agency (UIA) publishes annual reports of employment in Branch County.

The county's largest employers are the Community Health Center and the Michigan Department of Corrections.

### **2. Labor Force Characteristics**

See attached census information

## **D. LAND USE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUNTY**

### **1. Agriculture and Open Space Land Use**

Agricultural land uses take up about 70% of the area of Branch County. The largest amount is in crop- land and a smaller amount in pasture. Minimal acreage is given over to orchards and confined feeding. The remaining is herbaceous and shrub open land.

Agriculture uses dominate the county and are absent only in the urban areas of Coldwater, Quincy, Bronson and Union City; the wetlands along the St. Joseph and Prairie Rivers and around the larger lakes.

### **2. Residential Land Use**

Residential uses in Branch County takes up a little over 2 percent of the total area of the county. Most of this is single-family housing. There are nearly 300 acres of mobile home parks and more than 20 acres of multi-family dwellings. These figures do not include single housing units widely scattered along rural county roads. In addition some of the single family housing in the rural areas of the county could actually be counted in the Agricultural and Open Spaces categories, according to the Michigan Resource Information System. (MIRIS) The residential uses classified are in and extended out from the cities of Coldwater and Bronson, as well as the villages of Quincy and Union City. In Sherwood, the village has not been entirely built out. Strips of residential uses surround the lakes and are also found along some of the State highways and in small clusters around township hails and at some county primary road intersections.

### **3. Commercial Land Use**

Commercial land uses cover a small amount of acreage, approximately 319 acres, in the county. These uses are confined to the central business districts of Coldwater, Bronson, Quincy and Union City and the area along US-12 between downtown Coldwater and the US 12/I-69 interchange. A few isolated commercial uses are also found near the larger lakes.

#### **4. Industrial Land Use**

Industrial uses represent about .26 percent of the county's area. Of that, nearly ¾ of that are in Coldwater City. Quincy has approximately 15% of industrial use, Bronson has about 5% acres and Union city has 19 acres of industrial uses. There are also a few isolated industrial uses scattered about. But most are confined to areas near US 12 or the I-69 interchanges.

#### **5. Recreational Land Use**

A little over 650 acres of the county are in recreational land uses. About 200 acres are in the City of Coldwater. The county has five parks totaling 120 acres. These are: Memorial Park-30 acres in Coldwater Township; Riverbend Park-25 acres in Union Township; Gilead Lake Park-6 acres in Gilead Township; Quincy Marble Lake Park-60 in Quincy Township; and Angle Cove Campground-6 acres in Girard Township. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has 16 public access sites on various lakes as well as over 300 acres for a proposed State Park on the south shore of Coldwater Lake.

#### **6. Taxable Valuations**

Current Real Property Equalized Valuations In Branch County can be viewed on attachment **B** at the end of this plan.

### **E. INFRASTRUCTURES AND FACILITIES**

#### **1. Transportation**

##### **a. Road and Highway System**

There is one interstate highway, I-69, running through the county from north to south. I-69 runs from the Gulf of Mexico to Port Huron, Michigan. It provides Branch County with direct highway access to Lansing, Fort Wayne and Indianapolis. To the north I-69 interchanges with I-94, providing direct routing to Detroit and Chicago. To the south, I-69 interchanges with the Indiana Toll Road (I-80/90) with routing to Cleveland and Chicago. Running east and west through the county is US-12, which is primarily a two-lane all-season route between Ann Arbor and Chicago. The I-69 Business Loop is primarily a two-lane all-season route from US-12 in downtown Coldwater running south three miles to I-69.

The county is also served by three State highways, which are two-lane facilities. M-60 cuts through the northwest corner of the county between Jackson and Three Rivers. M-60 is an all-seasons route as is M-66, which ends at M-60 west of Union City. M-66 provides direct access to Battle Creek. The third State route, M-86, is all season and runs from Coldwater to Three Rivers.

The Branch County Road Commission has designated 85 roads or road segments as County Primaries of which 45 are classified, using Federal or State standards, as Major Collectors or Minor Arterials. The other 40 are classified as Minor Collectors.

The County Primaries are all paved roads. Of these; Marshall Road (Old27), Garfield Road, Old 78 (Wattles-Dunks-Athens Roads) and short segments of Squires and Batavia Roads are constructed as all-season routes.

All other county roads are classified as local roads. Some of these have been paved using township or special assessments district funding.

Local roads in Branch County Total 647 miles and primary roads total 364 miles. The State controls 74.91 miles of trunk-lines in county. Cities and villages have 36.91 miles of major streets and 49.69 miles of minor street.

#### **b. Public Transit System**

A transportation authority has been established to operate a demand-response passenger system in the county. The Branch Area Transit Authority (BATA) operates throughout Branch County, providing over 100,000 passenger trips per year. The system is funded by a combination of State grants, property taxes and fair-box receipts. As there has been no private sector intercity services for several years, BATA was able to obtain inter-local agreements with Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Hillsdale, St. Joseph and Jackson counties. These agreements allow the system to take Branch County residents to and from facilities in the neighboring counties.

#### **c. Airport**

The Branch County Memorial Airport is located in the southwest corner of Coldwater Township, just west of the Coldwater City limits. The airport has charter flight service and air-express service. Commercial air passenger service is available in Kalamazoo and Fort Wayne. Commercial air freight service is available in Battle Creek.

#### **d. Rail System**

There is only one rail line serving the county. The tracks run east to west through the county from Hillsdale to Sturgis. The rail line connects with CONRAIL in White Pigeon and connects with Norfolk and Western in Ohio.

The nearest rail passenger station is in Battle Creek-the AMTRAK Detroit to Chicago service.

## **2. Public Facilities and Services**

### **a. Recreation**

The Park System began with one park called Memorial Park located on Behnke Road, in 1964. The system has grown to 5 parks, with over 120 acres.

The City of Coldwater has 9 parks totaling 130 acres. Bronson has 4 public parks, Union City has 1 park, Quincy has 1 park, Sherwood Village has 1 park, Ovid Township has 1 park and the unincorporated Village of Ray in California Township has a size acre park, which is owned and maintained by the county.

The Park Trustees are currently the County Road Commissioners. The Park Director is the County Road Commission Manager.

Branch County has 107 lakes; two chains of lakes totaling 21 square miles. There are 6 golf courses (3 Coldwater, 1 Quincy, 1 Bronson and 1 Union City).

The State of Michigan has 16 public access sites totaling 39 acres and an additional 413 acres held for future development.

### **b. Schools**

Branch County has four community public school districts: Bronson, Coldwater, Quincy and Union City. The Union City School District extends into Calhoun County. The southeastern corner of Branch County is in the Reading School District, which is centered in Hillsdale County. Small sections of Branch County are served by Colon, Athens, Tekonsha, and Litchfield School Districts.

Kellogg Community College and Baker College have branches in Coldwater. There are other colleges in close proximity to Branch County.

The nearest public 4 year universities are Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo and Michigan State University in East Lansing. The nearest private colleges are Albion College in Albion and Hillsdale College in Hillsdale.

The Branch Area Career Center provides occupational skills training.

### **c. Police**

The Branch County Sheriff Department and the City of Coldwater Police Department each provide law enforcement officers. There is a Michigan State Police Post in

Coldwater. The City of Bronson, the Villages of Union City and Sherwood and Sherwood Township each have officers.

**d. Fire**

The Bronson Rural Fire Association is the largest district fire authority in the State in terms of number of participating communities. Virtually the entire western half of the county has joined this organization. Other fire departments are: Coldwater, Union City, Quincy, Sherwood and Lakeland.

**e. Emergency Service**

Emergency services are provided by a private medical service (EMS and a 911 Central Emergency Dispatch.

**f. Health Care**

The community Health Center (CHC) in Coldwater is the only acute care hospital in the county. CHC has licensed beds and an emergency trauma center. The county has two licensed nursing care facilities. The nearest largest medical center is in Battle Creek.

**g. Utilities**

Electrical power is supplied by the South Central Powers Cooperative in Coldwater and Union City and by Consumers Energy in the rest of the county. Consumers Energy also supplies natural gas to the Sherwood and Union City areas, while Michigan Gas Utilities serves the balance of the county. Telephone service is provided by several companies including: Verizon, CBPU and Charter Communication.

The cities of Bronson and Coldwater, and the villages of Quincy and Union City provide both municipal water and sanitary sewer to their residents. There is also a sanitary sewer district around Coldwater, Long and Lake George lakes. All other areas of the county are on private wells and septic tanks.

**h. Administrative Service/Libraries/Public Works**

Branch County has an eight member board of commissioners, each elected from one of eight districts, and a county administrator appointed by the board. Other elected officials are: clerk, register of deeds, treasurer, prosecutor, drain commissioner, sheriff and the district and probate court judges.

The county has eight departments. These are: Public Works, Equalization, Health, Maintenance, Microfilm, Mental Health, Sheriff and Social Services. Branch County provides the following services: Animal Control, Building Inspections, Conservation Officer and Probation Officers.

The county has 13 boards: 911 Central Dispatch, Airport Zoning Appeals, Building Inspection Appeals, Election Canvassers, Community Corrections, Election Commissioners, 4-H Fair, Jury, Library, Mental Health, Plat, Public Works and Veterans Affairs.

Branch County has established seven commissions: Aging, Housing, Parks & Recreation, Planning, Road and Solid Waste Management.

There are four authorities: Building, Branch Area Transit, Coldwater Lake Utilities and Concealed Weapons Licensing.

There is one district library, four branch libraries (union, Sherwood, Quincy and Alganssee) and one city library (Bronson),

There are 16 township governments, three village governments and two city governments in the county. Both cities and two of the villages have zoning ordinances and land use plans. Several of the townships have zoning ordinances.

## **PART TWO**

### **1. LAND USE TRENDS**

#### **A. AGRICULTURAL LAND USE**

While the number of farms in Branch County continues to follow decades long, nationwide, decline, the total farm acreage in the County has stabilized according to the Census of Agriculture. Agricultural land use still makes up 70 percent of the county land area.

The average farm size has risen in recent years. The number of farms less than 500 acres has fallen. The total acres in farms of under 500 acres has also fallen, while farms having more that 500 acres increased slightly.

The conversion of farm land to residential use is a trend in the County.

#### **B. RESIDENTIAL LAND USE**

The recent trend in developing has been where persons working in urban counties are choosing to live in nearby rural counties. This trend is also affecting the Branch County lake area, in general, Kinderhook and Ovid Townships.

#### **C. COMMERCIAL LAND USE**

The trend over recent decades has been for the central business districts of each city or village to experience difficulty in keeping retail structures occupied. The success or

failure of each downtown varies considerably. The theory has been that retail operations locate on State or U.S. Highways just beyond the city or village limit where development costs are lower and visibility high. The Willowbrook development within the City of Coldwater as the US-12/I-69 interchange indicates that simple land availability plus high visibility and easy access are the primary factors.

The Willowbrook development reflects a national trend whereby major retail chains are shifting competition to the smaller urban markets. A current trend is towards smaller, easy access shopping plazas. In Branch County US-12 on either side of Coldwater, but particularly to the east of I-69, should continue to attract retail activities. Additionally, interest is likely at the Jonesville, Fenn and Copeland road interchanges of I-69.

A current trend toward urban fringe development. Land along major roadways just outside village/city boundaries offers easy accessibility; low development costs while benefiting from high traffic volumes.

#### **D. INDUSTRIAL LAND USE**

Increased concern over the liabilities associated with both past environmental pollution and the potential for future liability has caused industrial developers to focus efforts on new industrial park facilities. Development by many types of industries has avoided areas not served by sanitary treatment plants. Given these restraints, the City of Coldwater purchased adjacent land and provided full public utility service. The success of the Certified Industrial Park program encouraged Union City and Quincy to follow this approach.

Brownfield redevelopment (the name given to contaminated urban site) may be more likely with the availability of Michigan Brownfield Development Initiative.

#### **E. RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE LAND USE**

With five county parks and 16 Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) public access sites located throughout the county, and parks systems in each city or village, there seems to be adequate recreational resources for county residents based upon MDNR Recreation Standards.

The Branch County Recreation Plan does not call for the establishment of any new park facilities.

The county and the cities have been concentrating on improving facilities at the existing parks.

The State of Michigan has had plans to develop a state park on the south end of Coldwater Lake. However, funding has never been found for the project. Given current State budget issues, development of this site is not likely in the near future.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources applies annually for grant funds to expand the public access site network on lakes and rivers in the County. There have been no recent purchases.

## **F. PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

The City of Coldwater and the Township of Coldwater have extended the city of Coldwater's sanitary services east from the City Of Coldwater along US-12 to just inside the township limits. In addition services have been extended north near the I-69/Jonesville Road interchange.

Both Union City and Quincy have also upgraded their public utilizes as well.

## **PROBLEMS, ADVANTAGES and OPPORTUNITIES**

A listing of community's needs, concerns, advantages and opportunities is contained in this Section. The list will be a valuable aid in comparing the present conditions, and expected future conditions of the community, with goals and objectives of the community which contained in the following Section. Such comparison permits the community to begin thinking of ways to achieve the goals and objectives which they have established. The implementation of techniques which are included in this document are a reflection of results of this thinking process.

### **A. AGRICULTURE**

#### **1. Problems**

- a. good agricultural land is being used for development-need to be concerned with preservation of good agriculture land.
- b. need coordinated planning to eliminate spot zoning and isolated development.

#### **2. Advantages**

- a. county has a good soil survey
- b. county has a variety of land and water resources
- b. agriculture provides a financially strong economic aspect to the county

#### **3. Opportunities**

- a. need to focus on preserving water supply-keep development consolidated around city, villages
- b. need to continue to look at cooperation between agriculture owners and lake owners with regard to water issues-water quality most important issue for the future

- c. poor agriculture land should be developed for recreation

## **B. BUSINESS**

### **1. Problems**

- a. Concern in county on growth-some members in community do not want growth
- b. Lack of high paying jobs

### **2. Advantages**

- a. school to work initiative
- b. excellent local education resources available
- c. county has excellent geographic location
- d. good road systems for location of manufacturing-access to highways and interstates
- e. utilities access-utilities willing to work with business
- f. county wide support for economic development

### **3. Opportunities**

- a. buy-in at local level with township involvement
- b. good communication at various levels-efforts to work cooperatively
- c. stronger workforce development board

## **C. EDUCATION**

### **1. Problems**

- a. Inadequate funding at the state level
- b. High percentage of families in the lower socio-economic status
- c. Population is below the state average in post-secondary experience.
- d. Transient student population especially in lower grades
- e. High percentage of homeless
- f. Limited affordable housing which stagnates pupil growth
- g. Size of schools limits offerings
- h. Limited pre-school educational opportunities
- i. Limited latch-key availability

### **2. Advantages**

- a. Collaboration among districts under leadership of Branch Intermediate School District.
- b. Accessibility to Branch Area Career Center (BACC)
- c. Diverse vocational offerings available at BACC

- d. Size of schools encourages participation
- e. Convenient access to quality post-secondary institutions
- f. County schools recognize and appreciate their role in the future of Branch County
- g. Recognition of quality schools in Branch County by contiguous school districts

### **3. Opportunities**

- a. Partnership with Calhoun Intermediate School District to facilitate continued development of curriculum to meet mandates of No Child Left Behind and EdYes
- b. Rekindle the partnership between business/industry and education
- c. Develop efficient opportunities through a search for shared services and resources
- d. Continued initiative of local schools to develop a shared vision for the future of Branch County with preservation the unique character of communities.

## **D. HEALTH**

### **1. Problems**

- a. poor provider participation in Managed Care
- b. increase in Medicaid and self-pay due to economy and high cost of health insurance
- c. high percentage of teenage births compared to Michigan average
- d. somewhat poor socio-economic conditions (i.e., educational attainment, low income levels, etc.)
- e. significant rates for reported and substantiated cases of rape
- f. higher than the Michigan average death rates from chronic disease (i.e., diabetes, cancer, stroke) and other injuries
- g. higher than Michigan average of water borne/food borne illness

### **2. Advantages**

- a. Willingness on part of agencies to collaborate and link initiatives
- b. County has received special designations status (HPSA, MUA)
- c. Low STD's and AIDS rates
- d. Improved access to some specialty services
- e. Well established linkages among health and human service providers
- f. Overall lower rates for index crimes (felonies)
- g. Low percentage of low birth weight babies
- h. County has one of the better children's immunization rates in the State

### **3. Opportunities**

- a. stronger human services coordinating body (Family Services Network)
- b. future dental care opportunities for underserved population

## **E. Tourism**

### **1. Problems**

- a. limited ready access to the lakes-only one public beach front in the county
- b. shortage of overnight/short-term (daily, weekly) motel/hotel rentals on lakes

### **2. Advantages**

- a. available full-service motel unit in Coldwater-facilities large meetings and small conventions
- b. good fishing in area lakes
- c. good local events-Car Show/Swap Meet, 4-Corbers Art Festival, entertainment under the stars, Applefest, Quincy Tip-up, Bronson Polish Festival, Union City Carp Rodeo, Strawberry Fest and Ice Fest
- d. recently developed tourism bureau-developing general brochure for county

### **3. Opportunities**

- a. Branch County Career Center has “hospitality” training program in their curriculum
- b. County has a progressive educational community
- c. Supportive city councils regarding tourist needs, evidenced by number of bed and breakfast establishments, new hotels and new restaurants
- d. Revitalized downtown area
- e. Branch County Tourism Bureau brings money for promotion
- f. Educate public on advantages of tourism and seasonal residents

## **F. TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT**

### **1. Problems**

- a. four townships remain un-zoned
- b. development brings about issues of water supply and quality
- c. lack of services in rural areas (i.e., water and sewer) may shift development of commercial, industrial and some housing to townships around cities or near interstate highways

(1) creates additional burden on these townships

(2) additional requirements placed on local units creates additional training and time commitments

## **2. Advantages**

- a. twelve townships do have zoning therefore they can control type and location of development
- b. many lakes in the county-abundant water supply which attracts vacationers to the area and attracts people to settle in the county
- c. additional requirements from Federal, State and others as it pertains to land use
- d. county-wide involvement and support for economic development

## **3. Opportunities**

- a. need good communications at various levels, i.e., townships and County Planning Commission
- b. with continued development, both in business and housing, there is a need for water supply and quality
- c. need to explore the availability of public utilities, i.e., water and sewer, for areas in need, i.e., residents along rivers or on lakes

## **G. Central City**

### **1. Problems**

- a. growth influences by development and employment opportunities (Coldwater's population has increased only 1.5% over the last decade, while Branch County increased 3.3%)
- b. expansion of commercial development in the East Chicago Street area resulted in traffic congestion and safety hazards. Leading to a change in the general character of the area
- c. median family income is less that county and considerably less that Coldwater Township

### **2. Advantages**

- a. steady nonresidential growth
- b. tax abatements to business/industry
- c. complete renewal of zoning ordinances
- d. continual updating of general codes and ordinances
- e. continues monitoring of rental housing units for safety
- f. large percentage of residents are under 65 years of age
- g. active Downtown Development Authority that enhances the downtown area
- h. enhanced/increased recycling program for residence

- i. combined Public Safety Department, with coordinating chief; all fire fighters are cross0trained as medical first responders
- j. extensive parks and recreation facilities
- k. adjacent to municipal airport
- l. home of the County Seat
- m. home of the community health center
- n. headquarters for District Library
- o. has public transportation system (BATA) located within the city, servicing the entire county
- p. street system has been classified under Act 51, allowing for continued funding for improvement

### **3. Opportunities**

- a. increased in residential housing development
- b. plenty available land/property for economic development
- c. increased educational opportunities with KCC's Grahl Center and Baker College (and associated college/university building utilization)

## **H. ROAD STATUS**

### **1. Problems**

- a. gravel roads are in need of upgrading
- b. local blacktop system in need of repair and expansion
- c. bridges in need of replacement on primary system

### **2. Advantages**

- a. primary system that has been repaired at least once in the last 20 years
- b. brush control program through roadside mowing program-purchase of boom mower has been a big asset
- c. Road Commission owned asphalt plant that has allowed more asphalt production with Road Commission personnel
- d. Equipment purchases keeping abreast of latest technology and lowering repair expenses, and manpower needed for repairing
- e. All-weather system of primary roads totaling 140 miles

### **3. Opportunities**

- a. With additional revenue possible, possible expansion of all-weather system
- b. Revenue would be added to local road system, both on gravel road improvement and expansion of black top system

## **I. COMMUNITY AT LARGE**

### **1. Problems**

- a. shortage of suitable affordable housing with conditions that qualify for government backed financing
- b. Branch County income is well below the State level
- c. Border state location
- d. Lack of technical skills to match specialized employer needs.
- e. Lack of an infrastructure outside of major cities, villages

### **2. Advantages**

- a. great quality of life
- b. available transportation to outside sources
- c. vocational education is available
- d. local junior colleges with university programs available
- e. available industrial sites
- f. available infrastructure in established industrial parks
- g. expanded community health center
- h. BATA-public transportation system
- i. Diversified industries
- j. Reasonably sized airport facility
- k. Good agricultural and livestock economy

### **3. Opportunities**

- a. continued support of Branch County Economic Growth Alliance
- b. coordination of job training with business/industry
- c. need to assure availability of homes and building sites
- d. promote agri-business
- e. need programs to further promote recreational facilities/activities

## **3. BRANCH COUNTY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The following goals and objectives have been established as a guide to development decisions. These statements also serve to direct the recommendations of the County Planning Commission as an advisory body to the township, city and village planning and zoning bodies.

### **A. RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**GOAL:** Provide a choice of housing types, location and environments to accommodate individual capabilities and preferences of current and future populations.

## OBJECTIVES:

- a. Provide for growth and development to occur in a controlled and orderly manner which will provide for residential living, yet, will not over develop lake areas.
- b. Discourage residential strip development along major transportation arteries.
- c. Discourage extensive single lot residential development in areas of high agricultural activity.
- d. Prohibit residential development in flood prone areas and regulate residential development in natural areas which would be severely damaged by uncontrolled development.
- e. Encourage the preservation, renovation, and maintenance of existing housing and protect existing and future areas from conflicting land uses which would decrease their desirability as residential areas.
- f. Higher density development may occur where serviced by sanitary sewer services provided the development of sanitary sewer and safe drinking water do not create a burden upon the County.
- g. Encourage residential development of a variety of neighborhoods to provide for different housing needs, location preferences, age groups and income groups.
- h. Encourage the majority of residential development to take place within areas of the County adjacent to developed residential areas or where necessary public services can be adequately provided in the developmental stages (rural subdivisions).
- i. Encouraged reasonable cost housing development in the County.
- j. Proliferation of driveway access to major roadways will be discouraged in favor of access to local or service roads in order to preserve the function of major roadways.
- k. Encourage residential development of undeveloped portions of the cities and villages that are not targeted for industrial development.

## **B. AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Goal: Preserve to the maximum extent possible the most productive agricultural lands of the County and to avoid conflicts between farm and non-farm uses.

## OBJECTIVES:

- a. Develop definite criteria for the designation of the most productive farmlands in the County and take steps to encourage long-term commitments to agricultural activities in the identified areas.

- b. Discourage land development activities in agricultural areas which would lead to land use conflicts or adversely affect farming operations and the economic viability of agricultural activity.
- c. Encourage intensive livestock operations and similar activities for locate away from residential areas. Also provide for the protection, of those operations that cooperate, from the encroachment of residential uses.

### **C. COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**GOAL:** Provide suitable areas for the orderly development of a variety of commercial and service activities to serve the needs of the projected population.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- a. Discourage lengthy strip commercial development along major transportation arteries.
- b. Encourage and support activities of Downtown Development Authorities to implement goals and objectives for commercial development.
- c. Encourage adequate off-street parking for central commercial areas.
- d. Discourage conflicting low volume uses within commercial areas.
- e. Encourage major commercial and service facilities to locate in downtown areas or in cluster developments (shopping centers) where essential public services can be economically provided and traffic can be accommodated without increasing traffic congestion.
- f. Encourage neighborhood convenience facilities and services at or near major lake area and in selected rural locations as necessary to serve the public.
- g. Proliferation of driveway access to major roadways will be discouraged in favor of access to local or service roads in order to preserve the function of major roadways.

### **D. INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**GOAL 1:** Provide for additional industrial growth and retention within the cities and villages.

**OBJRCTIVES:**

- a. Control industrial development so as to assure compatibility with residential or other land uses in the area.
- b. Industrial development should occur in a manner with provides for direct access to major roadways without relying on residential access streets.
- c. Maintain a public relations program for the purpose of attracting industry to the County.
- d. Make the current and future business regulations and future development process more user friendly.

- e. Industrial development should occur at locations and in a manner to minimize impacts upon adjacent land uses.
- f. Light industry may be provided for in areas where essential public services can be provided, operating efficiency maximized and congestion and public hazard minimized.

## **E, RECREATIONAL AND OPEN SPACE DEVELOPMENT**

**GOAL:** Provide adequate year-around recreation facilities to meet the needs of the County and preserve and enhance the County's natural features.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- a. Control lakeshore and stream bank development to assure that development does not directly or indirectly destroy these areas.
- b. Encourage conservation and protection of natural, scenic, lake and wooded areas for public enjoyment.
- c. Encourage the provision of adequate open space and recreational facilities in any major residential development proposal.
- d. Prohibit floodplain development except for recreational purposes.
- e. Develop a forum for communication between all local groups responsible for meeting recreational needs, such as schools, local clubs, ad hoc community groups, etc.
- f. Identify and protect appropriate open space and wetland areas of the County and incorporate these areas in the recreation plan.
- g. Encourage development of parks with facilities and equipment consistent with park size and anticipated usage.
- h. Increase the attractiveness and diversity of existing public recreation facilities to promote greater use of these facilities.
- i. Encourage the development and maintenance of passive recreation areas including, swimming, picnicking and hiking areas.

## **4. TRANSPORTATION**

**GOAL 1:** Provide for efficient, safe and convenient access to the transportation network.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- a. Encourage improvement of the road network to accommodate present and future vehicular traffic in an efficient manner.
- b. Review the classification of the existing roads to determine the primary function of each road (access to property, collection of traffic or major movement of traffic).
- c. Regulate land development to minimize congestion and assure that the road system serves as designed,
- d. Require proper road design in major residential developments.

- e. Identify the transportation needs of those residents without automobiles and support public transit to meet their needs.
- f. Encourage development of pedestrian and bicycle paths in appropriate parts of the county.

GOAL 2: Provide rail and street access so as to encourage and promote commercial, industrial and residential development.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Identify sources of funding for rail spurs and sidings for industrial parks.
- b. Provide for upkeep and maintenance of main rail line in County.

## 5. UTILITIES

GOAL: Provide for the timely development of necessary services-sewer, storm drains, water lines, in accordance with present and planned future needs of the County.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Carefully assess future needs
- b. Require all development to connect to utility services in a timely manner.
- c. Require all new apartments, mobile home parks and similar medium to high density developments to provide a central sewage disposal system until such time that sanitary sewers are available.
- d. Permit single-family residential development in areas not serviced by sanitary sewer provided lot sizes are consistent with public health requirements for septic systems and county residential and environmental policies.
- e. Maintain, improve and expand as necessary existing sewer and water systems to serve the needs of existing and planned commercial, industrial and residential uses.
- f. Develop a system of priorities to govern the extension of public utilities; i.e. for projects located within the city/village limits, outside the city/village limits and/or substantially beyond the existing built-up area.
- g. Reassess and update public utility improvement programs.
- h. Identify sources of funding for public utility projects.

## 6. COMMUNITY FACILITIES

GOAL: Provide for a range of community facilities and services to satisfy the present and future needs of the residents of the County.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. Encourage local police and fire facilities to locate with respect to functional service area requirements as the county develops.

- b. Encourage educational facilities to locate with respect to present and future development patterns.
- c. Encourage churches, public buildings and other places of public assembly to be located so as to be easily accessible to the majority of the public.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

### **A. COMMUNITY LAND USE PLANNING**

All land in Branch County is also in a township, village or city. Consequently, the goals and objectives of this plan as related to land use are also subject to community planning policy and zoning regulations. Branch County government should encourage township, village and city planning and zoning as a means of implementing the Master Plan.

### **B. MODEL ZONING**

In 1974 Branch County Government authorized the production of a model zoning ordinance to serve as a guide to township zoning. Through a contract between the Branch County Planning Commission and the Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (smpc) twelve townships have used the model to develop township zoning regulations. However, due to significant changes over the three decades, a new model ordinance should be developed to more properly guide the development and updates to township zoning ordinances.

### **C. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM**

A multi-year capital improvements program should be developed as a guide to future county government capital improvements. Such a program can aid in maximizing return on capital investments through proper planning and timing of such improvements.

### **D. RECREATIONAL PLANNING**

Branch County's Five Year recreation Plan should be maintained to assure appropriate planning and to maintain eligibility for state/federal grant funding.

### **E. HOUSING PLANNING**

Planning for and assessment of housing needs should continue to address the shelter needs of county residents and to maintain eligibility for state/federal grant funding.

### **F. SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT**

Planning should continue under the Solid Waste Management Act (Act 641) to properly plan for future solid waste recycling, reuse and disposal.

## **G. TRANSPORTATION NEEDS PRIORITIES**

Cooperative efforts among the county and municipalities should continue to develop and maintain a transportation (capital) improvements program to assure maximum efficiency and effectiveness of county transportation investments.

## **H. SPECIAL STUDIES**

As needed, the county government should support special studies to assure that relevant information is brought to bear on decision-making related to the county residents and resources. Collaborative efforts should be encouraged to maximize participation among potentially impacted parties.

DRAFT