

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

LOCATION

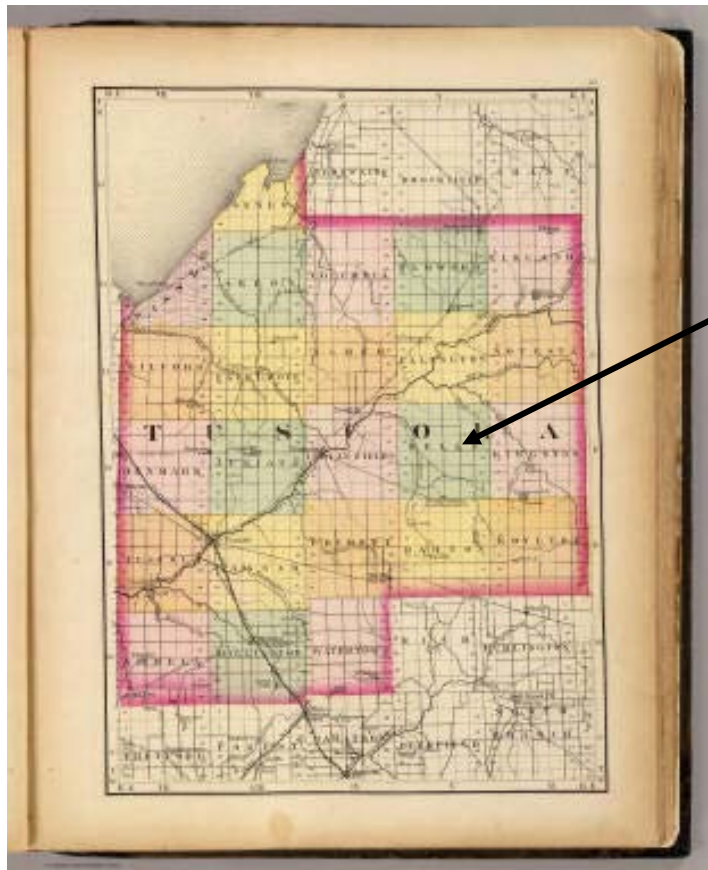
Coordinates at Center: 43.4978°N 83.2894°W
Continent: North America
Country: United States
State: Michigan
Peninsula: Lower
County: Tuscola

Wells Township is located in the Thumb Area of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. It is one of 23 townships located in Tuscola County. The Township is situated between the City of Caro to the northwest and the Village of Kingston to the southeast.



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In developing a plan for the future, it is beneficial to study historically significant information.



Wells Township
Map of Tuscola County, Michigan, 1873
David Rumsey Historical Map Collection,
www.davidrumsey.com

Wells Township was organized on October 14, 1858 with the election of its first Township officers. The Township was named after Joseph Wells, its first permanent white settler. He had moved to Tuscola County in 1856 and settled in Section 32 of Wells Township near the junction of Sucker Creek and Wells Road.

Many of the early settlers were farmers during the growing season and worked in the logging industry during the winter months. The logging industry was a principle source of income for the early settlers through 1870. Large quantities of cork pine were cut and delivered down the Sucker Creek to the lumber mills of Saginaw. That lumber was much in demand by the big cities in the East. (Picture from markrputnam@ipoetry.us)



In the fall of 1871, a major forest fire swept across the northern and central parts of the Township devastating the lumber industry and leaving portions of the Township nearly bare. Small fires gradually ran together drawing in dry air instead of moist air from over the lakes. Wind carried debris, starting new fires. The pine needles and stems on the ground contained resin and, combined with leaves and other organic matter, burned very hot. These fires burned hottest on the ground unlike the fires today that burn hottest in the air. The combination of land clearing by this major fire and the Homestead Act of 1862 helped to increase settlement in the Township. By 1883, most of the government land in the southern portion of the Township was settled. In the fall of 1881, a second major fire swept across the northwest section of the Township.

Most of the early farmers were engaged in milk production and this remained a main source of agricultural income through World War II. Other farmers also engaged in cash crop farming and mixed farming. Other residents supplemented their income with work outside the Township. After World War II, the importance of agriculture in the Township began to decline. New residents who were not involved in agriculture began to move in and current residents began to seek jobs outside the Township. The trend in recent years is for the continued increase of residents who are not involved in agriculture directly but who desire the rural setting, which Wells Township has to offer. The trend in land use has been toward the growth of larger farms rather than small family farms with corn, beans, and wheat being major crops.

The last active railroad, the D C & S, in the Township ended operations in 1953. On the train's last run through the Township coming into the little settlement of Daytona, Charles Ferguson, the regular engineer, suffered a heart attack and died with his hand on the throttle. Operation of the road legally ended on December 31, 1953 by consent of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Its path through the Township is still visible today, even though the tracks have long been gone. The right-of-way was sold to the Detroit Edison Company.

In 1871, Wells Township built its first school in section 14. At one time the Township had seven schools (Berry, Bethel, Block, Frankfort, Sand Hill, Seelbach, and White Star), but eventually these Township schools merged into the present school districts of Caro, Cass City, and Kingston.

The first church service in the Township was held by the Methodists in 1860. The United Brethren Congregation built a church in 1883 in Section 33 of Wells Township. The Lutheran Congregation also had a church on Plain Road, North of Riley and the Methodist Congregation built the Bethel Church at the corner of Rossman and Lee Hill Roads. North Wells Cemetery, a cemetery north of Frankford Road on South Hurds Corner Road was Lutheran in origin.

AUTHORITY

Planning for the future is an important responsibility of local government. The preparation of a Master Plan is the means by which the preferences regarding the future development of the community are expressed. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act specifically gives the Township Planning Commission and the Township Board the authority to prepare and adopt a plan. The specific uses for and benefits of preparing a Master Plan include the following:

- Helps direct growth into a desired development pattern, rather than leaving the future shape of the community to chance and circumstance.
- Assists in planning for future public facility needs, helping to ensure that expenditures on new capital facilities, utilities, and services are cost-effective.
- Provides the policy direction needed to make wise zoning decisions, and provides the legal support for zoning decisions.
- Provides a clearly stated expression of public goals and policies, to guide private sector decisions.
- Considers the public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare in order to best meet present and future needs of the community.
- Helps protect natural features, which are major community assets, and indicates the use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability.
- Identifies and helps maintain aesthetic values of the community.

APPROACH

The planning process involved four inter-related phases:

Phase 1: Compile Information

Phase 2: Outline a Preferred Future

Phase 3: Develop the Land Use Plan and Supporting Narrative

Phase 4: Develop Specific Implementation Strategies to Carry Out the Plan.

ORGANIZATION

The major elements of the Master Plan beyond the location description, history, and this introduction include the following:

Description and Analysis of Existing Conditions and Trends in the Township

A comprehensive “snapshot” of the Township at the present time is provided, thus outlining the unique features of the community. The existing characteristics of the community are described, including physical characteristics, a socioeconomic profile of population, a study of current land use patterns and economic development, transportation patterns, and available facilities, utilities, and services offered in the Township. Where appropriate, predictions and projections are made to guide planning.

Citizen Input, Visioning Activity

The opinions of community residents are sought, compiled, and studied. A visioning activity is completed by the Wells Township Planning Commission.

Issue Identification

Based on knowledge of past and current trends in the community and citizen input, major growth and development issues that need to be addressed in future planning for the Township are identified.

Formulation of Community Goals and Objectives

The general land use goals and more specific objectives of the community are identified, describing the state of the Township within the next twenty years.

Future Land Use Map and Zoning Plan

Based on knowledge of the past and goals for the future, a Future Land Use map is prepared which depicts the extent and direction of future growth in the community. The zoning plan explains which zoning districts of the Township implement the recommendations of the future land use designations.

Implementation Summary

The final phase of the planning process includes the development of specific implementation strategies to carry out the Master Plan.

This plan and the goals and objectives contained within it should be the guide for all significant land use decisions made by the Township for the next twenty years, with a required review at least every five years, as mandated by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. The regular reviews assure that the Master Plan remains relevant and useful, and enable the community to focus on particular challenges.