

Chapter 1.0 Introduction and Brief History

1.1 Introduction

The preparation of this Master Plan represents many months of study, analysis and review by the Republic Township Planning Commission with technical assistance from the Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission. Existing conditions and circumstances that affect the Township are discussed in chapters 2 through 8. Chapters 9 and 10 use the background information as a basis for developing goals and strategies as well as plans for future land use.

A Master Plan is a land use and infrastructure plan that sets forth local goals, objectives and policies for community growth and development over the next 20-30 years. The Master Plan serves as the basis for the local zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and other local land use regulations as well as ensuring that capital improvements are consistent with the community goals and policies expressed in the Master Plan. With this in mind, the Master Plan represents a statement about what the community is, what the residents of the Township value, and what they hope the community will become.

Republic Township is faced with some serious issues regarding its future, therefore, establishing an informed basis for decision making is a priority. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, mandates the Planning Commission as the agency to create the Master Plan and describes the process in detail. The Master Plan will also discuss the current zoning districts and regulations in the Township and explain how the zoning districts are related to the districts covered in the Future Land Use plan. Once this plan is adopted, it will serve as the guide to development of some areas, to conserve other areas and to lead the Township for the capital improvements plan.

There has been considerable interest in planning for the Township's future. In 2006, a meeting held at the Republic-Michigamme High School and chaired by the principal produced a plan and highlighted a number of concerns. Several of the concerns have been addressed and some issues still remain. A Township Recreation plan was developed in the 1990s and updated in 2007. A number of changes in the area have prompted this larger scale plan, which is designed to examine the Township's present status regarding recreation, as well as the potential for recreational development. The results from a citizen input survey are also included in this Master Plan, as they represent an important source of citizen input.

This plan is the end result of a growing interest in doing something about the future of our community now. It also represents a great interest in having some influence on the Township's future so that it will remain a beautiful place to live as well as supplying the

needs of its citizens. This plan reflects the community's deep concern for the natural beauty of the surroundings and a strong commitment to retain and strengthen the community's quality of life.

In summary, this plan is intended for use as a guide by local officials when considering matters related to development and land use. Planning is a process that requires ongoing review and analysis. To that end, this plan will remain a "work-in-progress" and will require timely and thoughtful revision to be of the greatest value.

1.2 Historical Background

Republic and the mine which shares its name have been linked since the moments of their joint beginning. A map of the region dated 1871 shows just one structure, likely to be the first house built in Republic by the mine geologist in 1870. A map dated 1872 illustrates a community named Iron City and a mine. The bluff which overlooked the Michigamme River was earlier found to contain "lenses" of high grade iron ore. The digging in the face of the bluff was the beginning of mining in Republic. When the lenses gradually played out, the mining continued in the digging of shafts which eventually extended half a mile into the earth. The name "Republic" appeared in 1873 when the Post Office serving the local population adopted the mine name for its mailing address, in all likelihood by the postmaster. In 1903, the Republic Iron Company was sold to the Cambria Iron Company. The mine was sold again in 1913 to the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company, with whom the town's destiny has been locked for years.

In 1890, the population of the village was 2,590 people, at a time when transportation was largely by railroad and horses. At one time Republic was served by these railroads. All of the needs of the residents had to be supplied in the town. By 1920, the population had slipped to 2,074, and by 1926 Cleveland Cliffs was faced with the cost of hauling ore a half mile up to the surface and the depletion of high quality ore and closed the mine. With the coinciding national depression, the community experienced hard times.

An interesting note from the mine manager in the 1920's casts some light on the mindset of the community when he noted in a letter that, "it is difficult to obtain labor because they prefer to go to Iron Mountain to the Ford Plant." As we look at the history of the town we see that there has been a constant drain of manpower to neighboring communities from 1920 into the present. The appeal of the Ford plant was higher wages, a cleaner workplace and regular hours. In those years, it is likely that "working away" was the answer to a lack of jobs in Republic. This trend continues into 2009.

Local government functioned almost as though it was a part of the mine, given that the mine manager also typically served as the Township Supervisor. At the time,

government at the local level was likely to serve the interests of the mine. Thus, the closing of the mine in 1926 not only left a deep economic hole, but also left government in the hands of people who had little experience governing. By 1950 the word was out that CCI was going to open a low grade ore mine using a pellet making process to improve the quality of the ore. Even with the announcement, nothing could stem the slow slipping away of the population; in 1950 there were 1,490 people in the village.

The expansion of open pit mining provided employment for an average of 800 workers. That same expansion brought about two other changes that made a significant impact on the community. The first was the relocation of the main north/south transportation corridor, M-95, so that it bypassed Republic. The second and most significant was the initiation of a program to relocate houses from Republic to a new location about 3 miles south of the village of Republic. The program began with the relocation of the first house in 1955. Homes on mine property were relocated from Swedetown Hill, Park City and portions of Republic.

This process resulted in serious divisions in the community between those who sought to preserve the town, particularly the businesses, and those who supported for one reason or another, the move south. Many community members were left with a sense of hopelessness and resignation due to the move. The end result was the moving of about one fourth of the families and their homes from the village of Republic and the establishment of a new location called South Republic. The Township Supervisor, Henry Adams, found a program which would have provided a grant for moving a small number of homes, perhaps four or five a year. This grant could be renewed each year to move an additional four or five homes. Conflict and resentment over the move appears to have been so great that the program was not put into operation.

In 1981, economic conditions were deteriorating and the demand for steel was down. Cleveland Cliffs chose to close the Republic Mine and many businesses in the community gradually closed or the owners moved. Those who remained have been distressed by conditions they had little control over. One of the little noted effects of the economic problems has been the loss of trained and successful managers. Very little capital was left in the community and the business closures left few venturesome individuals in the community. The best and the brightest of the high school graduates moved on to live their lives elsewhere. The combination has left the community with an ongoing series of problems both economically and socially.