



**CITY OF BUCHANAN PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026 – 6:00 PM**  
**CHAMBER OF BUCHANAN CITY HALL - 302 N REDBUD TRAIL, BUCHANAN MI**

**AGENDA**

*The City of Buchanan Planning Commission, in compliance with Michigan's Open Meetings Act, hereby gives notice of a Planning Commission meeting to be held in the Chamber of City Hall.*

*\* Comments may also be submitted in writing at least 4 hours in advance to the Zoning & Community Development Director Kristen Gundersen at [kgundersen@cityofbuchanan.com](mailto:kgundersen@cityofbuchanan.com)*

*\* Buchanan City will provide necessary and reasonable auxiliary aide and services to those individuals with disabilities who wish to attend the public meeting upon receiving at least one (1) week's prior notice. Any such individual requiring such aids or services should contact the city in writing or by telephoning: Buchanan City Clerk; 302 North Redbud Trail, Buchanan, MI 49107, 269-695-3844.*

**I. PUBLIC HEARING**

A. Call to Order

B. Roll Call

C. Opening of Hearing and Statement of Purpose of the Hearing

*The purpose of the public hearing is to hear public comments on proposed amendments to Sections 71-5 Zoning district established; Section 71-14.A – Figure 71-A Buchanan Zoning Map; creation of Section 71-16.H Establishment of zoning districts and regulations; Section 71-18 Uses – Table 71-J Use Matrix – Accommodations- Article V Definitions and any other sections of the Unified Development Code that may be necessary to fully implement and a Short-term rental overlay district consistent with Ordinance 2025.09.443, as adopted in the City of Buchanan Code of Ordinances.*

D. Announcement of the Rules of the Hearing

E. Presentation by the Applicant

F. Presentation by the Opposition

G. Applicant's Rebuttal

H. Closing of Hearing

**II. Regular Meeting - Call to Order**

**III. Pledge of Allegiance**

**IV. Roll Call**

**V. Resignation Announcement and Appointment of Chairperson**

A. 1) *Accept the resignation of Chairperson Ralph McDonald.*

2) *Appoint new Chairperson and other positions if needed.*

**VI. Approve Agenda**

**VII. Public Comments - Agenda Items**

**VIII. Approve Minutes**

A. *Consider the Regular Meeting Minutes from February 10th, 2026.*

**IX. Old Business**

[A.](#) **Sign Discussion #3**

[B.](#) **Master Plan Update Discussion #3**- *Title Survey Background*

[C.](#) **Vacant and Underutilized Building Ordinance**- *Discussion*

**X. New Business**

[A.](#) **Unified Development Ordinance**- *Consideration of Text Amendment- Creation of Short-term Rental Overlay District*

[B.](#) **Unified Development Code**- Buffering, Tree preservation, landscaping and fencing.

**XI. Public Comment - Non-Agenda Items Only**

**XII. Zoning & Community Development Director Comments**

**XIII. Commissioner Comments**

**XIV. Adjournment**

# Memorandum



Date: March 3, 2026

To: Buchanan Planning Commission

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Public Hearing - Amendment - Unified Development Code – Short-term rental regulations - Lodging**

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## Background

In 2025, the Code of Ordinances was amended to add short-term rental regulations. While reviewing the Unified Development Code (UDC), staff found no specific reference to Short-term rentals (stays of less than one month). Some communities have language regulating short-term rental in both documents.

Within the UDC, the term “lodging” is defined and references “tourist homes” which are allowed in the General Neighborhood (GN) or Suburban Commercial (SC) districts as Special Use Permits if approved by the Planning Commission when there are 6 rooms or less and they are permitted in the Neighborhood Center (NC) and Downtown (D) districts by right. The GN district covers a sizable portion of the city which does not fall within the adopted Short-term rental map which depicts properties in portions of the Neighborhood Center (NC), Industrial (I), Downtown (D) and General Neighborhood (GN) districts.

To improve the intent of the 2025 short-term rental ordinance, staff are recommending changes to the UDC. Creation of an overlay district allows the “Short-term rental permitted area map” be included along with an intent statement, basis for regulations and an applicable/exception section. Table 71-J changes the use matrix associated with lodging by dropping the room reference and adding hotel/motel, bed and breakfast and short-term rental. Lastly the definition of lodging is changed, and five new terms are added.

Attached is the legal notice. The agenda item found under New Business includes the staff memorandum, application and draft language changes.

## Action

Conduct public hearing.



**POSTED: February 19, 2026**

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING  
CITY OF BUCHANAN, MICHIGAN  
PLANNING COMMISSION**

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the City of Buchanan Planning Commission will hold a Public Hearing on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, beginning at 6:00 p.m. at Buchanan City Hall, 302 N. Redbud Trail, Buchanan, Michigan 49107. The purpose of the public hearing is to hear public comments on proposed amendments to Sections 71-5 Zoning district established; Section 71-14.A – Figure 71-A Buchanan Zoning Map; creation of Section 71-16.H Establishment of zoning districts and regulations; Section 71-18 Uses – Table 71-J Use Matrix – Accommodations- Article V Definitions and any other sections of the Unified Development Code that may be necessary to fully implement and a Short-term rental overlay district consistent with Ordinance 2025.09.443, as adopted in the City of Buchanan Code of Ordinances.

At the hearing, all interested parties will be allowed to be heard. All materials concerning this request are available for public inspection at City Hall, 302 N. Redbud Trail, Buchanan, MI 49107, during normal business hours.

Written comments may also be submitted in advance of the meeting to Kristen Gundersen, either by delivery to Buchanan City Hall or via email to [kgundersen@cityofbuchanan.com](mailto:kgundersen@cityofbuchanan.com)

Kristen Gundersen  
Planning and Community Development Director

Kalla Langston  
City Clerk

# Memorandum



Date: March 4, 2026  
To: Planning Commission Members  
From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director  
Subject: Resignation Announcement and Appointment of Chairperson

## Background

Ralph McDonald informed city staff on Friday, February 27<sup>th</sup> that he was resigning from the Planning Commission effective immediately. Mr. McDonald's term expired in June 2025 and was serving as Chairperson.

The adopted Bylaws state the Commission elects a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary annually after July 1<sup>st</sup>. In the absence of the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson shall serve as Acting Chairperson for the meeting.

Since the Chairperson has resigned from the Commission, it would be appropriate for the Commission to elect a new Chairperson until the term ends on June 30<sup>th</sup>. If the new Chairperson holds an elected position, it would be appropriate to fill the vacant created.

A simple motion to elect someone as Chairperson with a roll call vote is needed.



**CITY OF BUCHANAN PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2026 – 6:00 PM**  
**CHAMBER OF BUCHANAN CITY HALL - 302 N REDBUD TRAIL, BUCHANAN MI**

## MINUTES

- I. *The City of Buchanan Planning Commission, in compliance with Michigan’s Open Meetings Act, hereby gives notice of a Planning Commission meeting to be held in the Chamber of City Hall.*
- II. *\* Comments may also be submitted in writing at least 4 hours in advance to the Zoning & Community Development Director Kristen Gundersen at kgundersen@cityofbuchanan.com*
- \* Buchanan City will provide necessary and reasonable auxiliary aide and services to those individuals with disabilities who wish to attend the public meeting upon receiving at least one (1) week’s prior notice. Any such individual requiring such aids or services should contact the city in writing or by telephoning: Buchanan City Clerk; 302 North Redbud Trail, Buchanan, MI 49107, 269-695-3844.*
- III. Regular Meeting - Call to Order**
- Meeting called to order at 6:02pm.
- IV. Pledge of Allegiance**
- McDonald led in the pledge of allegiance.
- V. Roll Call**
- Present: McDonald, Vigansky, Houser, Brown, Pleasant, Lysy, Garry
- Absent: None
- City Staff Present: City Manager Tony McGhee, City Clerk Kalla Langston-Weiss, Director of Planning & Community Development Kristen Gundersen
- VI. Approve Agenda**
- Houser moved, seconded by Brown, to approve the agenda as presented. Voice vote carried unanimously.
- VII. Public Comments - Agenda Items**
- None.
- VIII. Approve Minutes**
- A. *Consider approving the Regular Meeting Minutes from January 13, 2026.*
- McDonald noted that item 8 should read ‘minutes’ instead of ‘agenda.’
- Vigansky moved, seconded by Pleasant, to approve the minutes from January 13, 2026 as amended. Voice vote carried unanimously.
- IX. Old Business**
- A. Master Plan Discussion**
- Gundersen asked the Planning Commission to think of potential names for the Master Plan. Brown suggested something adjacent to the Herd, which the school uses for athletics. Lysy suggested a play on Life if Better Here, such as Even Better Buchanan.
- Hamilton has provided the previous survey and is suggesting breaking it up into smaller categories, while keeping the survey time under 15 minutes. There was discussion of the naming of districts in the map, survey formatting, and how to best distribute it.

Vigansky recommended removing questions about parking since he does not feel we will get useful responses. Gundersen recommended keeping them to better inform potential future development by providing accurate information about visitor parking preferences. The plan will look forward to the next 20 years.

Vigansky asked about education for residents regarding tree lawn and sidewalk maintenance. Gundersen answered that the City has a budget for sidewalk repairs, targeting problem sidewalks, especially those on school routes. A contractor has been retained and contact has been made with property owners.

**B. Sign Discussion**

Gundersen presented her draft sign ordinance. She has added verbiage, changed some language, and expanded the exemption category. There was discussion of different sizes for signs of different types, including sandwich boards and temporary signs. LEDs, lit signs, and message board requirements were also discussed.

Gundersen presented some options for hearings, approvals, and modifications. There was discussion of Design Review and what did and did not need their approval. Replacement of existing signs can be approved administratively, and new signs go to Design Review. Gundersen outlined the parameters for modifications the Planning Commission can approve.

There was discussion about what the Planning Commission would like to see regarding murals, with Gundersen speaking to her previous experience in St Joseph and recommending the Planning Commission approve murals. Gundersen will continue to update the Planning Commission with her edits.

**X. New Business**

None.

**XI. Public Comment - Non-Agenda Items Only**

None.

**XII. Zoning & Community Development Director Comments**

None.

**XIII. Commissioner Comments**

Vigansky – looking forward to greater code enforcement in town. Thanked McGhee and Gundersen for their hard work.

Pleasant – thanked everyone for the motivation, it is helpful.

Brown – welcomed Gundersen, thanked McGhee.

Lysy – it was another good meeting and they are making progress.

Garry – enjoyed working on the sign ordinance and is ready to tackle the rest. She is also looking forward to the engagement survey.

Houser – excited about the updates to the new zoning code.

McDonald – thanked everyone for their time and commitment to the Planning Commission and the City.

**XIV. Adjournment**

Brown moved, seconded by Houser, to adjourn at 7:37pm. Voice vote carried unanimously.

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Kalla Langston-Weiss, City Clerk

# Memorandum



Date: March 4, 2026

To: Planning Commission Members

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Discussion #3 - Unified Development Code – Signs**

## Background

The Planning Commission began hearing concerns regarding Section 71-30 Sign standards during the January 13<sup>th</sup> meeting at which time directed staff to move forward to address issues. During the February 10<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Commission reviewed changes to several sections of the Unified Development Ordinance pertaining to Signs. Concern was expressed regarding processing of mural requests and staff was directed to draft language for review.

## Update

Attached is the second draft of changes to Section 71-30. Ordinances from the cities of Holland, Benton Harbor, New Buffalo, St. Joseph along with the village of Bridgeman have been reviewed along with the previous Sign Ordinance from Buchanan.

Please disregard formatting. Once a final draft document is completed, proper formatting will take place along with review by the city attorney before a final recommendation is taken by the planning commission. In cases where there is a list of items, information will be provided in alphabetical order when appropriate.

New language added and discussed during the February 10<sup>th</sup> meeting is shown in yellow highlight and underline with deleted language being stricken. Additional changes for review during the March 10<sup>th</sup> meeting are shown in teal highlight and underline. Following is a summary in order of draft changes made:

- Purpose statement – language added
- Compliance - language added
- Exclusions - language added
- No vested rights – language added
- Substitution - language added
- Permits required – expanded the language
- Signs exempt from permits – modified and expanded the language
- Prohibited signs – language added
- Permitted signs and restrictions retitled District sign regulations –
- #1 permitted sign types... and #2 all signs must... deleted language and incorporated into new Table 71-T which is moved to #1;
- #3 no sign placed in or over... deleted and replaced with Revocable License Agreement;

## Memorandum

- #4 language moved to Sign area measurement #8 and previously “measurement”
- #5 illumination was modified
- #7 new regarding Electronic message center
- #8 sign area measurement (partial old code) added language from 4
- #9 sign height measurement (partial old code)
- #10 added billboard requirements
- Table 71-T
  - Removed reference to signage that is exempt from permits (a-frame/sandwich and window)– regulations moved to Exempt signs
  - Redesigned table and incorporated N, NE, GN, NC – One or Two-Family Residential Use and N, NE, GN, NC - Three-Family or more Residential Use or Non-Residential Use – this allows for schools, parks, religious institutions or non-profits located in residential districts to have signage. It also allows entrance signs for subdivisions or multiple-family complexes.
  - Combined wall type signage and includes – awning, canopy, hanging, projecting and wall.
    - Removed reference to marquee.
    - Provided regulations for N, NE, GN and NC districts – three-family or more residential uses or non-residential use
      - Max size 1 x building frontage
      - Max 1 per
    - Consolidate square footage allowance and how measured to one standard – 2 sf per building frontage/width facing street or parking lot (2 sf similar to portions of previous sign code)
    - Maximum 3 types of signs.
    - Hanging/Projecting signage added maximum projection of 4’ no dimension provided
    - Min. clearance for signs over alley or drive aisle – increased from 8’ to 15’
    - Allow signage on side or rear of building when access door exists
      - Max size 20 sf
      - Max 1 sign building frontage building
  - Free-standing sign - monument and pole signs –
    - Only one type allowed per parcel
    - No change to clearance requirements
    - Suggest maximum overall height (no requirement now):
      - 6’ for monument sign in N, NE, GN, NC – multiple family and nonresidential uses
      - 8’ in D, SC and I
      - 15’ pole in D and SC not allowed in I
    - Max. square footage (monument 32 sf per street frontage and pole 200 sf)–
      - 32 square feet in N, NE, GN and NC
      - 50 square feet in D, SC and I
    - Minimum setback from lot line – 3’

## Memorandum

- Added billboard to Table, definition and language. Must provide regulations to allow them somewhere in the community. Suggest I District with regulations.

### Article IV Administration and process

Please note a larger portion of the current language from this Article is included in the draft document to help provide context. Where language has been removed, the section names have been provided.

- Section 71-33.B Planning Commission – added reference to sign modifications
- Section 71-34.G/Table 71-U – Timing of notice added “Sign modification”
- Section 71-34.K Review of applications by decision-making bodies – added Sign Modifications
- Section 71.36.A/Table 71-V Specific standards – modified Sign permit making PC being appellate body rather than ZBA
- Section 71-36.I Sign permit – modified and expanded language included for PC to review and approve sign modifications. Established process, requests that can be made and factors for granting modification.
- Section 71-36.I Sign permit – expanded 71-36.i.2.b Authority to Approve Requested Mural Installations. Established process and factors for approval.

### Article V Definitions

- Modified: awning or canopy; free-standing; mural; off-premises sign and reader board
- Added: banner; donor; electronic message center; expressive sign; Historical marker; on-site informational; roof; sandwich board
- Added: billboard; business frontage; monument sign; pole sign; sign; snipe; temporary sign; transported sign; vehicle sign; wall sign, window sign

### Next Steps

Review the additional draft changes and direct staff to make changes. Discuss, review and if the changes depicted in teal along with language found in updated Table 71-T is appropriate. Direct staff to make necessary changes.

During the April meeting staff would like to provide the following:

- A final draft version of the document with all redline removed (only highlighted language and language not changed will remain), organize sections as needed and use correct formatting.
- Continue to refine the following language and place appropriately:
  - D. Removal
  - E. Non-conforming
  - G#6 electrical permit
  - H. Maintenance and liability – review and likely move “removal” to this section

**DRAFT 2- 0310206 PC MEETING DISCUSSION**  
**Discussion 2 – new language added 03102026 – shown in teal**  
**Discussion 1 new language added 02102026 – shown in yellow**

Sec. 71-30 Sign standards

**A. Purpose**

This section establishes the standards for the number, size, placement, and physical characteristics of on-premise signs visible from a public sidewalk or adjacent property. Signage regulated is located on private property and does not include directional, emergency, or traffic related signs owned or required by city, county, state or federal governmental agencies. The regulations are designed to protect the interest of public health, safety and welfare while accommodating the need for signs to inform, direct, identify, advertise, advocate, promote, endorse and otherwise communicate information.

While these regulations allow for a variety of sign types and sizes, they do not necessarily ensure every property owner or business owner's desired level of visibility. It is not the intent or purpose to regulate the message or content displayed on any sign.

~~(A) These regulations do not restrict the content of signs.~~

**B. Compliance and applicability of other regulations**

It shall be unlawful for any person to erect, relocate, enlarge, alter, modify or maintain a sign or allow a sign to remain on property in the city except for compliance with this Section. All regulations in this section shall be in addition to any other applicable laws, rules and regulations concerning signs. If any provision in this section is inconsistent with the provisions of any other law presently existing or enacted in the future, the more restrictive will apply.

**C. Exclusions.**

Government signs are not regulated by this section.

**D. No vested rights.**

Nothing in this section shall be interpreted or construed to give rise to any permanent vested rights in the continuation of any particular sign, and it is hereby declared to be subsequent amendment, change or modification as may be necessary for the preservation of public health, safety and welfare.

**E. Substitution/no discrimination against non-commercial signs or speech.**

The owner of any sign which is otherwise allowed by this section may substitute non-commercial content in lieu of any other commercial or non-commercial content. This substitution of content may be made without any additional approval or permitting. The purpose of this provision is to prevent any inadvertent favoring of commercial speech or non-commercial speech, or favoring of any particular non-commercial message over any other non-commercial message. This provision prevails over any more specific provisions to the contrary in this section.

The clause shall not be construed to allow content which is profane, obscene, threatening, discriminatory or otherwise not protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or art. 5 of the Michigan Constitution.

**A. ~~(b)~~ Permits required.**

1. A permit is required to erect, alter, place, or replace any sign or sign structures as regulated and required by this section or by the City's Code of Ordinance. A permit is also required for substantial maintenance or repair to an existing nonconforming sign.
2. To obtain a sign permit, a completed application as provided by the city shall be filed with the City in accordance with Section 71-26I Sign Permit.
3. Properties located within the D Downtown District are required to obtain Downtown Design

Review in accordance with Section 71-36H Downtown Applications.

B. ~~(b)~~ Signs exempt from permits.

All signs with the exception of the following require a sign permit: The following signs may be installed or erected without a permit:

1. ~~A frame ground sign; changed name to sandwich board~~
2. ~~Small signs. Any sign that does not exceed four square feet in area; referenced as nameplate~~
3. ~~Window signs; moved and expanded~~
4. ~~Official sign. Notices required by law, signs erected by a governmental agency or public utility; reworked~~
5. ~~Temporary signs. Not more than one temporary sign is permitted per facade and may not exceed 32 square feet in area. Temporary signs must be removed within 48 hours after the event. Temporary signs may not be displayed longer than the event or 30 days.~~
6. Donor signs up to two square feet in size.
7. Historic markers placed under the authority of the local, state, or federal government and not exceeding two square feet in size.
8. Home occupation sign, not to exceed 3 square feet and nonilluminated (from section 71-23.A.5)
9. Nameplate or plaques up to 2 square feet in size, bearing the name of the building occupant, one per occupant.
10. Official legal notice.
11. On-site informational signs.
12. Vehicle signs, where the on which the sign is displayed does not regularly go unoperated for a period exceeding seven consecutive days. - defined
13. Sandwich Board signs under the following: (likely will be moved to a different area)
  - a. One board per business;
  - b. Maximum height of 4 feet (no requirement now);
  - c. Maximum square footage of 9 8 square feet (reduced to 8 sf);
  - d. Maximum width 24" or 30" **NEED TO DECIDE** ;
  - e. Displayed outside during business hours and stored inside when the business is closed;
  - f. Shall not have moving parts or attachments, including but not limited to, balloons, pinwheels, streamers, pennants, flags, or similar adornments;
  - g. Shall not be illuminated or have sound amplification;
  - h. Shall be constructed of wood, metal, or other similarly durable material and shall have adequate support to prevent tipping or movement of the sign and shall not present a tripping hazard to pedestrians.
  - i. Must be placed to allow unobstructed ADA compliant route to business and surround areas;
  - j. Located on private property or the necessary license received for use public property in the D Downtown district.
14. Signs located on or within a building, in compliance with MCL125.3205d, that commemorate any of the following:
  - a. Any of the following how die in the line of duty: police officers, firefighters, medical first responders, members of the United States Armed Forces or correction officers;
  - b. Veterans of the United States Armed Forces.
15. Temporary signs which allow for the freedom of expression or promotion of temporary events

while minimizing clutter, visual distractions, obstructions, and nuisances when meeting the following: (likely will be moved to a different area)

- a. General regulations:
  - i. Shall not be illuminated;
  - ii. Shall not have supports or borders wider than two inches on any side; and
  - iii. Shall be removed no more than seven days after an event concludes if the sign is associated with a particular commercial event.
- b. Signs placed on a lot where the primary use is a single-family or two-family residential use
  - i. The maximum overall sign height is four feet.
  - ii. The maximum sign area is six square feet.
  - iv. The maximum total area of all temporary signs displayed concurrently on one lot is 24 square feet.
- c. Signs placed on parcels where the use is not a single-family or two-family residential use
  - i. The maximum overall height is eight feet.
  - ii. the maximum total area of all temporary signs displayed concurrently on one parcel is 32 square feet.

16. Window signs when applied to the interior or exterior of the window or door glass does not exceed 25% of the glass area. Windows that are immediately adjacent, on the same wall face of the same building, maybe averaged together. (25% per existing code)

- D. Removal. The zoning administrator or their designee is authorized to remove any sign deemed to be unsafe or a hazard to the public. The cost of the removal will be billed to the property owner.
- E. Non-conforming signs.
  1. If a sign display is not current, is in a state of disrepair, or is left blank for a continuous period of 60 days, it is considered abandoned, within 30 days after abandonment the owner of the property must remove or replace the sign or the message. The sole exception to this provision is signs installed as an integral component of a building.
  2. Illumination may not be added to a nonconforming sign.
  3. A nonconforming sign may not be replaced except to bring it into complete conformance with this section.
  4. If a sign is removed or damaged to the extent that the cost of restoration exceeds 50 percent of the original value of the sign it must be removed or brought into complete conformance with this section.
- F. Prohibited signs. Signs with the following features are prohibited:
  1. ~~Off-premise signs, including Snipe or bandit signs and vehicular signs; definition created~~
  2. ~~Signs located within the clear sight triangle according to Figure 71-B Clear site lines; - there is language in article about clear sight triangle~~
  3. ~~Signs extended above the parapet or eave of a roof; Roof signs~~
  4. Signs utilizing animation or which contain the optical illusion of sign movement;

- 5. ~~Signs incorporating noisy mechanical devices or emitting smoke or steam;~~ Signs emitting smoke, vapors, particulate matter, odor or open flames
- 6. Inflatable signs or devices with the exception of balloons used in temporary, non-commercial situations;
- 7. Portable signs, except a-frame ground signs sandwich boards and
- 8. ~~Any unsafe sign (language pertaining to unsafe signs is included in Article. Abandoned signs. - definition created~~
- 9. Pornographic or obscene signs.
- 10. Signs imitating or resembling official traffic or government signs or signals that confuse, mislead, or create a safety hazard.
- 11. Signs prohibited under federal, state, or local laws, rules or regulations.
- 12. Neon, LED, or other light types permanently outlining windows or doors.
- 13. Transported signs unless the vehicle with the transported sign is operating lawfully in a public or private road. - defined

**TO BE DISCUSS – should the following be prohibited? If yes, definitions to be added are below:**



**Definitions:**

**Pennant sign:** a geometric piece of fabric or other material, commonly attached by string, with rows of loose materials, streamers, shapes, or strands, or supported on small poles intended to flap in the wind and used to draw attention. A pennant sign is not a feather flag.

**Feather flag:** A temporary sign applied to cloth, paper, flexible plastic, or fabric of any kind with only such material for backing, are generally a single sign attached to a support post and typically having a dimensional ratio of four high to one wide and move in the wind to attract attention. This can also be referred to as a feather banner or feather sign.

**Portable changeable message board or sign:** A sign containing a changeable message and designed to be transported or moved and not permanently attached to the ground, a building, or other structure.

**G. ~~Permitted signs and restrictions.~~ District sign regulations**

Table 71-T sets forth the sign types, maximum size, height and number of signs allowed, minimum setbacks, prohibited or permitted signs. All permitted signs require a sign permit prior to installation unless exempt under section \_\_\_ or allowed as temporary under section \_\_\_ of this chapter.

**Table 71-T Permanent Sign Standards**

Table 71-T District Sign Regulations					
	N, NE, GN, NC - One or Two-Family Residential Use	N, NE, GN, NC - Three-Family or more Residential Use or Non-Residential Use	D	SC	I
<b>Wall Signs: Awning, Canopy, Wall</b>	Permit Required				
Maximum square footage for business frontage		One times (1 x) the building frontage	Two times (2x) the building frontage not to exceed a combined total of 150 square feet		
Number allowed		1 per building frontage	3 per building frontage		
Maximum square footage for side or rear wall having a secondary entrance (not on building frontage)		20 square feet			
Number allowed on a side or rear wall having a secondary entrance (not on building frontage)		1 per wall			
Maximum height		20 feet or below the bottom of any second floor window, whichever is less. Shall not extend above the roof deck or parapet and shall not be located on a penthouse or elevator overrun.			
Minimum vertical clearance		8 feet when located over public or private sidewalk; 15 feet over public rights-of-way or drive aisles. If projection less than 4" no minimum vertical clearance			
Maximum projection		12" from face of building			
Illumination - see section ___ for additional information					
<b>Wall Signs: Projecting or Hanging</b>	Permit Required				
Maximum square footage			6 square feet		
Number allowed			1 per building frontage		
Maximum projection from wall of building			4 feet		
Maximum height			Below the bottom of the second floor window		
Minimum vertical clearance			8 feet		
Illumination - see section ___ for additional information					

	N, NE, GN, NC - One or Two-Family Residential Use	N, NE, GN, NC - Three-Family or more Residential Use or Non-Residential Use	D	SC	I
<b>Ground Signs</b>			Permit Required		
Number allowed, total	1 per development entrance	1 per parcel	1 per parcel		
Maximum size	32 square feet	32 square feet	50 square feet		
Maximum Height - Monument	6 feet	6 feet	8 feet		
Maximum Height - Pole		6 feet	15 feet		
Minimum setback	3 feet from any lot line	3 feet from any lot line	3 feet from any lot line		
Minimum vertical clearance for pole sign			8 feet		
Illumination - see section ___ for additional information					
Changeable message board - see section ___ for additional information					
<b>Billboards, see Section ___ for additional information</b>					Permit Required
Number allowed					1 per parcel
Maximum size					260 sf
Maximum height					30 feet
Minimum setback					50 feet
Distance between signs					300 feet
Minimum clearance from ground					8 feet
Illumination - see section ___ for additional information					

1. ~~Permitted sign types are limited by district and the following restrictions according to Table 71-T. INFORMATION INCORPORATED INTO NEW TABLE 71-T~~
  - a. ~~The number of signs per type;~~
  - b. ~~The area of signs; and~~
  - c. ~~The height of sign copy.~~
2. ~~All signs must be a minimum of eight feet clear over sidewalks and vehicular areas. INFORMATION INCORPORATED INTO NEW TABLE 71-T~~
3. ~~No sign may be placed in or over a public right-of-way with the exception of the following:~~
  - a. ~~A-Frame Sandwich board signs are permitted on a public sidewalk during hours the associated business is open, but must maintain a five foot clear path for pedestrian travel;~~
  - b. ~~Awning and/or canopy signs;~~
  - c. ~~Hanging signs;~~
  - d. ~~Marquee signs; and~~
  - e. ~~Projecting signs.~~
3. Revocable License Agreement for Signs Projecting Over Right-of-Way.  
Projecting signs, awnings, and canopies which extend over the City right-of-way or city owned property shall have a minimum clearance of 8 feet from the ground to the bottom of the sign structure. An executed Revocable License Agreement from City Council or designated staff is required prior to obtaining a sign permit. The following are two exemption from this requirement:
  - a. Flags projecting over the right-of-way shall be attached to the wall of the building at least 6 feet above the adjacent grade, shall not project more than 3 feet from the face of the wall, and shall maintain a clear space of 8 feet from the bottom of the flag to the ground.
  - b. Sandwich Board placed on right-of-way within the D Downtown District are required to obtain .
4. ~~All signs may be double-sided by right, if the configuration of the sign permits. Only the larger side contributes to the calculation of sign area. Moved to #8 measurement/Sign area measurement~~
5. **illumination**  
~~All signs may be illuminated by an external light source or internally illuminated if neon with the exception of signs located in NE and GN. – *existing language modified question NE and GN because of religious institutions located in these districts.*~~
  - a. Any permanent wall or free-standing sign may be internally or externally illuminated.

- b. If externally illuminated, the source of the light ~~must be enclosed~~ shall be located, shielded and directed to prevent the source of light from shining directly onto traffic any public right-of-way or a residential property.
  - c. Uniform lighting shall be used throughout a sign to create a uniform appearance rather than creating some areas that appear brighter than others.
  - d. Signs shall not be illuminated between the hours of 11:00 pm and 6:00 am, except that a business open after 11:00 pm or before 6:00 am may have illumination during business hours. **old code C-1 neighborhood district only – “shall be lit only during actual hours of business operation”**
  - e. The use of bar bulbs or flames is prohibited, except that bare bulbs are permitted on electronic changeable boards. ~~to illuminated~~ illumination may be by means of ~~exposed neon or LED strip lighting.~~ See prohibited signage for LED strip lighting
6. All signs must comply with the building and electrical codes of the City of Buchanan. Underground wiring is required for all illuminated signs.

**7. Changeable message centers/boards/reader boards NEED TO DISCUSS WHERE ALLOWED FOR TABLE 71-T**

- a. In addition to other regulations contained in this section, the following provisions shall apply to changeable message boards, where allowed:
  - i. One changeable message board is permitted per business; however, no more than one changeable message board is permitted per lot.
  - ii. Changeable message boards shall only advertise on-site products or services or non-commercial public information such as time/temperature, safety alters, and community/civic events.
  - iii. Changeable message boards are permitted only on free-standing signs and shall not be attached to the exterior wall of a building.
  - iv. Changeable message boards shall be integrated into a free-standing sign in order to create a cohesive, single-looking sign and shall not occupy more than 50% 6 square feet of the total sign face on each side. ~~(6 sf allowance comes from Table 71-T)~~ may want to consider % of sign face **TO BE DISCUSSED**
  - v. With the exception of wall mounted signage located in the D Downtown district, illumination shall not exceed 0.0 foot-candles at any lot lines that are adjacent to or across a right-of-way from a residential use. In all other cases, the illumination shall not exceed 0.5 foot-candles at the lot line.
  - vi. Changeable message boards shall not be illuminated between the hours of 11:00 pm and 6:00 am, except that a business open after 11:00 pm or before 6:00 am may have the changeable message board illuminated during business hours.
- b. Electronic message centers (EMC) must comply with the following additional regulations:
  - i. An EMC shall not be used or displayed in a way that presents multiple screens within a single sign face, whether simulated or actual.
  - ii. Transition from one message to another shall be instantaneous, without movement or other transition effects between messages.
  - iii. Messages must remain on display for no less than seven seconds. Scrolling and flashing display messages is prohibited.
  - iv. Illumination shall not exceed 0.0 foot-candles at any lot lines that are

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adjacent to or across a right-of-way from a residential use. In all other cases, the illumination shall not exceed 0.5 foot-candles at the lot line.

- v. Any new EMC must be equipped with both a programable dimming sequence as well as an additional overriding mechanical photocell that adjusts the brightness of the display to the ambient light at all times of day. Such programming and mechanical equipment shall be set so that the electronic sign, from dusk to dawn or in overcast conditions, will be no more than 40% of the daytime brightness level. Manufacturers' information must be submitted with the sign permit application.
- vi. A copy of the manufacturer's operating manual for the EMC, including any recommended standards for brightness, display operations and any computer interfaced programs, must be available for immediate access at the business location where it is operating and must be provided to the zoning administrator upon request.

c. Electronic vehicle fuel station signs displaying fuel prices must comply with the following:

- i. A maximum of three fuel products may be displayed per sign face, limited to fuel product pricing only.
- ii. The maximum electronic message area is 12 square feet or five square feet per fuel product displayed.

#### 8. Sign area measurement (old code)

- a. The area of a sign shall be measured as the area within a single, continuous perimeter composed of either the smallest square, or rectangle, or circle which encloses the extreme limits of writing, representation, emblem, logo, or any other figure of similar character, together with any frame or other material or color forming an integral part of the display or used to differentiate the sign from the background against which it is placed, excluding only the structure necessary to support the sign. Reader boards shall be included in the sign measurement. (old code)
- b. The area of a freestanding or projecting sign that has two or more faces shall be measured by including the area of all sign faces, except if two such faces are placed back-to-back shall be counted as one face. If the two back-to-back faces are of unequal size, the larger of the two sign faces shall be counted as the one face. (old code)
- c. In the case when a double sided sign has one side larger, the allowed square footage is based on the larger of the two sides.

#### 9. Sign height measurement (partial old code)

- a. The height of a sign shall be measured as the vertical distance from the highest point to grade of the top of the curb or the center of the street immediately adjacent to the sign or parking lot surface whichever is greater.
- b. Unless otherwise provided in this section, the height of a sign is measured from the existing average finished grade level of the premises where the sign is located to the highest point of the sign structure. Freestanding signs located in raised planter boxes shall have the height measured from the existing average finished grade outside the planter box. The ground beneath a sign shall not be raised to artificially raise the height of a sign.

#### 10. Billboards.

The following standards shall apply to all billboard unless specifically exempted in this section:

- a. A sign face shall not exceed 260 square feet per side and the total area of a

double-faced sign shall not exceed 520 square feet. A double-faced sign shall consist of the two sign faces being parallel to each other and facing opposite directions.

- b. Billboards greater than 100 square feet in size shall be located a minimum of 50 feet from the nearest property line and 100 feet from any residential use or district, public park, religious institution or any public or private school.
- c. Billboards must have a minimum ground clearance of eight feet and may not exceed 30 feet in height.
- d. Billboards must have a minimum separation of 300 feet from any other billboard or any public waterway.
- e. Billboards shall be located perpendicular to the nearest street.
- f. Billboards must be free-standing and shall not be attached to, erected on, cantilevered over or constructed above any other structure.
- g. Billboards shall not incorporate flashing or rotating lights, beacon lights, running lights, animated copy, electronic message centers or digital displays.

Exemption: Billboards lawfully existing on the date this chapter becomes effective shall be allowed to continue in their current location and size even if in conflict with the provisions of this chapter. However, all other regulations shall continue to apply to such billboards.

Moved/created new Table 71-T to Section 71-30.G.1

TABLE 71-T SIGN STANDARDS										
Sign	Signs-(max)	Area (max)	Copy-Height (max)	N	NE	GN	NC	D	SC	I
<b>A-Frame</b>	1 per tenant	9 sq. ft.	n/a				■	■	■	■
<b>Awning</b>	1 sloping plane & 1 valence per awning	75% awning area	16 in. on sloping plane, & 8 in. on valence				■	■	■	■
<b>Banner</b>	1 per event	76 sq. ft.	n/a				■	■	■	■
<b>Canopy</b>	1 per canopy	2 sq. ft. per linear ft.	30 in.				■	■	■	■
<b>Hanging</b>	1 per tenant	6 sq. ft.	n/a				■	■	■	
<b>Marquee</b>	1 per entry	4 sq. ft. per linear ft.	30 in.					■	■	
<b>Monument</b>	1 per facade	36 sq. ft.	n/a		■	■	■		■	■

TABLE 71-T SIGN STANDARDS										
Sign	Signs-(max)	Area (max)	Copy-Height (max)	N	NE	GN	NC	D	SC	I
<b>Mural</b>	1 per facade	no max.	n/a				■	■	■	■
<b>Off-premise</b>	Not permitted	n/a	n/a							
<b>Pole</b>	1 per property	200 sq. ft.	30 in.						■	■
<b>Projecting</b>	1 per tenant	6 sq. ft.	8 in.				■	■	■	■

<b>Reader board</b>	1 per tenant	6 sq. ft.	12 in.						■	■
<b>Wall</b>	1 per tenant	3 sq. ft. per linear ft.	18 in.						■	■
<b>Window</b>	1 per window	25% of glazed area	12 in.						■	■

■ Permitted

H. Maintenance and liability.

1. Painted or paper-faced signs must be maintained free of peeling paint or paper, sun fading, staining, rust or other conditions which impair the legibility of the sign.
2. Any permitted signs, including all supports, braces, guys and anchors, must be maintained in a manner not to cause a hazard to the public.
3. The city requires proof of current, in-force liability insurance in the aggregate amount of at least \$500,000.00, as a condition of granting a sign permit or as a condition of allowing the continued use of an existing sign, in the following instances:
  - a. Signs that extend over the city right-of-way.
  - b. Freestanding signs whose height exceeds the horizontal distance of the base of the sign to the nearest city right-of-way

Draft 03/10/2026 DC

## ARTICLE IV. ADMINISTRATION AND PROCESS

This article outlines the bodies with review, approval, and appellate authority in administering this chapter.

### Sec. 71-33 Review and decision making bodies.

#### A. City Commission.

1. Powers and duties. In addition to any authority granted the City Commission by charter, ordinance or state law, the commission has the following powers and duties under this chapter:
  - a. Amendments to text and zoning map. To review, hear, consider and approve or disapprove:
    - i. Text amendments. Petitions to amend the text of this chapter.
    - ii. Zoning map amendments. Petitions to amend the zoning map.
  - b. Initiate amendments. To initiate petitions to the text of this chapter and the zoning map.
  - c. Other. To take any other action not delegated to the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals or heads of city departments, as the City Commission may deem desirable and necessary to implement the provisions of this chapter.

#### B. Planning Commission. The Planning Commission establishment, organization, powers and duties are enumerated in Chapter 70 of the City of Buchanan Code of Ordinances and include review, hear, consider and approve or disapprove Sign Modifications or Mural requests.

#### C. Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator.

1. Powers and duties. In addition to the jurisdiction, authority and duties that may be conferred upon the Zoning Administrator by other provisions of this chapter and general or special law, the zoning administrator has the following jurisdiction, powers and duties under this chapter:
  - a. Administrative adjustments. To review, hear, consider and approve or disapprove administrative adjustments.
  - b. Temporary use permit. To review, hear, consider and approve, approve with conditions or disapprove temporary use permits.
  - c. Minor deviations. To review, hear, consider and approve, approve with conditions or disapprove minor deviations for site plans.
  - d. Interpretations. To render interpretations of all provisions of this chapter, including interpretations of the text; interpretations of the zoning map boundaries; and determinations of whether an unspecified use falls within a use classification or use group allowed in a zone district.
  - e. Enforcement. To enforce the provisions of this chapter.
  - f. Administer chapter. To establish application requirements and schedules, to review and make recommendations to the City Commission, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals on all applications considered by those boards, and take any other actions necessary to administer the provisions of this chapter.
  - g. Provide expertise and technical assistance. To provide expertise and technical assistance to the city commission, planning commission and zoning board of appeals.

D. Zoning Board of Appeals.

1. Powers and duties. The Zoning Board of Appeals has the following powers and duties under this chapter:
  - a. Variances. To review, hear, consider and approve, approve with conditions or disapprove variances.
  - b. Appeals of administrative decisions. To hear, review, consider, and affirm, modify or reverse any decision or interpretation of the zoning administrator.
2. Appeals. An appeal of a decision by the Zoning Board of Appeals must be filed with the Circuit Court within 30 days after the decision in writing, or within 21 days after the board approves the minutes of the meeting.

E. Design Review Committee.

1. Powers and duties. The design review Committee is the decision-making body for applications subject to downtown design standards unless the proposed work qualifies for administrative approval under [Sec. 71-36 H. Downtown applications](#).
2. The Design Review Committee meets on an as-needed basis when discretionary review is required.

**Sec. 71-34 General provisions.**

The general provisions of this article apply to all applications for development approval and procedures under this chapter, unless otherwise stated.

- A. Authority to file applications. Applications may be submitted by the following entities:
  1. Community development department. The authority of the community development department to file an application is limited to applications that may be required for activities or development on city-owned land.
  2. Staff, city commission, or planning commission. The authority of the city commission or planning commission to file an application is limited to applications for text amendments or applications for zone map amendments.
  3. Applicant is not owner. If the applicant is not the owner of the land, or is a contract purchaser of the land, a letter signed by the owner consenting to the submission of the application is required.
  4. Applicant is owner. If the applicant is the owner of the land, a letter signed by the owner, including other owners, if applicable, or an association representing the owners consenting to or joining in the application is required.
- B. Simultaneous processing of applications. Whenever two or more forms of review and approval are required, the applications for those approvals may be processed simultaneously.
- C. Fees.
  1. Determination of fees. The city commission will determine the fees to accompany all applications submitted under this chapter.
  2. Fees to be paid. No application can be processed until the established fee has been paid.
- D. Determination of Sufficiency.
  1. Determination of sufficiency. Within seven days following receipt of the application, the Zoning Administrator will determine if the application is complete.

2. Determined insufficient. If the Zoning Administrator determines the application is not sufficient, a notice will be provided to the applicant specifying the deficiencies. If the applicant fails to correct the deficiencies within 60 days, the application will be considered withdrawn.
- E. Scheduling of public hearing. When an application for development approval is subject to a public hearing, the zoning administrator will ensure that the public hearing is scheduled by the decision- making body reviewing the application.
- F. Public Notification. All applications for development approval requiring public hearings must comply with the Michigan Statutes, [Table 71-U](#), and the other provisions of this section.
1. Content. All notices for public hearings must:
    - a. Identify application. Identify the application and the name, address, and telephone number of the applicant or the applicant's agent.
    - b. Date, time, and place of public hearing. Indicate the date, time and place of the public hearing.
    - c. Location. Describe the land involved by street address or by legal description and nearest cross street, and area (size).
    - d. Describe nature and scope of application. Describe the nature, scope, and purpose of the application.
    - e. Notify public where they may be heard. Include a statement that the public may appear at the public hearing, be heard, and submit evidence and written comments with respect to the application.
    - f. Written comments. Include a statement describing where written comments will be received prior to the public hearing.
  2. Published notice. When the provisions of this chapter require that notice be published, the city is responsible for preparing the content of the notice and publishing the notice in a newspaper of general circulation that has been selected by the city, and paid for by the applicant.
  3. Written notice.
    - a. General. When this chapter requires that written notice be provided, the applicant is responsible for preparing and mailing the written notice. Notice will be mailed to:
      - i. All property owners and occupants of the land subject to the application.
      - ii. All property owners, and occupants of structures within 300 feet of the boundary of the land subject to the application.
      - iii. All neighborhood organizations, public utility companies, railroads, and other persons who have requested to receive notice by mail.
      - iv. For appeals of administrative decisions or requests seeking an interpretation of this chapter not involving a specific parcel of property, notice under [Sec. 71-34 F 2](#) is sufficient.
      - v. Failure to give proper notice does not invalidate a proceeding unless mandated by state law.
    - b. Notice by mail. Notice will be deemed given when deposited during normal business hours for delivery with the United States postal service or other private or public delivery service as first class or similar mail.

- G. **Timing of notice.** Unless otherwise provided in the Michigan statutes and laws or this chapter, notice will be provided as shown in [Table 71-U](#).

TABLE 71-U NOTICE TIMING		
Application	Notice Required	
	Written	Published
Text amendment		Planning commission: Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing City commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
Zoning map amendment	Planning commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing City commission: reasonable time prior to public hearing	Planning commission: Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing City commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
Special use permit	Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing	
Variance		
Appeal		
<b>Sign modification or mural</b>	<b>No notice is required</b>	

H. Registration to receive notice by mail.

1. General. Any neighborhood organization, public utility company, railroad or any other person may register with the city clerk to receive written notice of all applications for development approval.
2. Requirements for eligibility. To be eligible for registration, the requesting party must provide the city clerk information in the form required to ensure notification can be made.

I. Deferral of review of application.

1. Submission of request. An applicant may request that consideration of an application at public hearing be deferred by submitting a written request for deferral to the zoning administrator.
2. Zoning administrator review. The zoning administrator will consider deferral requests of less than 30 days, and grant the requests for good cause.
3. Decision-making or advisory body review. The decision-making or advisory body reviewing the application will consider deferral requests of more than 30 days, or beyond the next regularly scheduled meeting of such body, and will grant the requests for good cause.

J. Withdrawal of application.

1. Submission of application. Any request for withdrawal of an application will be submitted in writing to the zoning administrator.

2. Prior to notice of public hearing. The zoning administrator will approve a request for withdrawal of an application if it has been submitted prior to the time of a public hearing or decision on the application.

K. Review of applications by decision-making bodies.

1. Text amendments and zoning map amendments.
  - a. Review and recommendation by planning commission. After submission of an application for a text amendment or zoning map amendment, the planning commission will conduct a public hearing on the application. After the close of the public hearing, the planning commission will make a recommendation to the city commission recommending either to approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove the application.
  - b. Review and action by city commission.
    - i. After receipt of the recommendation from the planning commission, the city commission will conduct a public hearing on the application. After the close of the public hearing, the city commission will approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove the application based on the relevant review standards.
    - ii. If a valid protest petition is filed against a proposed amendment to the zoning map according to MCLA § 125.584(5), as amended, the approval request will not be approved except by a favorable vote of two-thirds of the city commission membership.
  - c. Notice of adoption. Notice of the adoption of an amendment to the text of this chapter or the zoning map will be published in a newspaper of general circulation within 15 days after the date of adoption according to MCLA § 125.584(7), as amended.
2. Special use permit. After submission of an application for a special use permit, the planning commission will conduct a public hearing on the application. After the close of the public hearing, the planning commission will either approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove the application based on the relevant review standards.
3. Variance. After submission of an application for a variance, the zoning board of appeals will conduct a public hearing on the application. After the close of the public hearing, the zoning board of appeals will either approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove the application based on the relevant review standards.
4. Sign Modifications and Murals. After submission of an application for a sign modification or mural, the planning commission during a public meeting will either approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove the application based on the relevant review standards.

- L. Notification of decision. Notification of a decision on an application will be provided by the zoning administrator to the applicant within 14 days after the decision. A copy of the decision will also be made available to the public at the offices of the zoning administrator, during normal business hours.

**Sec. 71-35 Public hearing procedures.**

All public hearings must comply with the following procedures.

- A. Conduct of public hearing.
  1. Burden of proof or persuasion. The burden of demonstrating that an application complies with applicable review and approval standards of this chapter is on the applicant.

2. Rights of all persons. Any person may appear at a public hearing and submit evidence, either individually or as a representative of a person or an organization.
3. Exclusion of testimony. The body conducting the public hearing may exclude testimony or evidence that it finds to be irrelevant, immaterial, or unduly repetitious.
4. Offers of testimony. In the event any testimony or evidence is excluded, the person offering such testimony or evidence will have an opportunity at that meeting to offer the testimony or evidence for the record.
5. Continuance of public hearing.
  - a. General. The body conducting the public hearing may continue the public hearing to a fixed date, time and place. An applicant has the right to request and be granted one continuance; however, all subsequent continuances are granted at the discretion of the body conducting the public hearing only upon good cause shown.
  - b. Notice. A public hearing for which proper notice was given may be continued to a later date without again complying with the notice requirements, provided that the continuance is set for a date within 30 days, or to the next regularly scheduled meeting, and the date and time of the continued hearing is announced at the time of the continuance.
6. Time. Action must be taken as promptly as possible in consideration of the interests of the applicant, the citizens of the city and the city.

**Sec. 71-36 Specific standards for development approval.**

A. General. [Table 71-V](#) summarizes the development review procedures for all types of applications.

TABLE 71-V DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES						
Procedure	Authority					Notices
	Staff	PC	ZBA	CC	DRC	
Text amendments	R	[R]		[DM]		N
Zoning map amendment	R	[R]		[DM]		W, N
Special use permit	R	[DM]				W, N
Variance	R		[DM]			W
Appeals of administrative decision			[DM]			W
Administrative adjustments	DM		[A]			
Site plan review	DM					
Sign permit	DM or R	DM	[A]	A		
Temporary use permit	DM		[A]			
Certificate of zoning compliance	DM					
Downtown application	R				DM	
Interpretations	DM		[A]			

TABLE 71-V DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES						
Procedure	Authority					Notices
	Staff	PC	ZBA	CC	DRC	
<b>Key</b>						
Planning Commission	PC					
Zoning Board of Appeals	ZBA					
City Commission	CC					
Design Review Committee	DRC					

Review & Recommendations	R
Decision Making Body	DM
Appellate Body	A
Public Hearing Required	[ ]
Published Notice	N
Written Notice	W

**\*\*\*Section B Amendment to text or zoning map and C Special use permit not included \*\*\***

D. Variances

1. Purpose

- a. General. There are two types of variances allowed under the terms of this chapter: dimensional variances and use variances.
- b. Dimensional variances. Dimensional variances are deviations from the height, setback, yard, lot coverage, parking, landscaping and signage standards of this chapter, when special conditions make the literal enforcement of the provisions of this Ordinance result in peculiar difficulties to the owners of the land, and the deviation would not be contrary to the public interest.
- c. Use variances. Use variances are variations from the schedule of permitted uses in a zone district when unnecessary hardship uniquely associated with the property, this chapter unreasonably restricts the property owner’s access to permitted uses.

2. Authority. The zoning board of appeals is authorized to review and approve, approve with conditions or disapprove an application for a variance.

3. Standards.

- a. Dimensional variance. The zoning board of appeals will approve a dimensional variance on finding there is evidence that all of the following standards are met:
  - i. There are special circumstances that are peculiar to the property for which the variance is sought, that is not applicable to other land in the same zone district.
  - ii. The special circumstances are not the result of the actions of the applicant or titleholder of the land.
  - iii. The literal interpretation of the terms and provisions of this chapter would deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other land in the same zone district.
  - iv. The variance will not adversely affect adjacent land in a material way.
  - v. The variance is generally consistent with the purposes and intent of this chapter.
- b. Use variance. The zoning board of appeals will approve a use variance on a finding there is evidence that all of the following standards are met:
  - i. The literal interpretation of the terms and provisions of this chapter would deprive the applicant from using the property for a permitted use which is a right commonly enjoyed by other land in the same zone district.
  - ii. There is unnecessary hardship based on special circumstances that are peculiar to the property for which the variance is sought that is not applicable to other land or structures in the same zone district.
  - iii. The special circumstances are not the result of the actions of the applicant.
  - iv. The variance will not adversely affect adjacent land in a material way.
  - v. The variance will be generally consistent with the purposes and intent of this chapter.

c. Conditions of approval. The zoning board of appeals may impose conditions on the proposed use as necessary to ensure compliance with the standards in this section.

d. Recording. The zoning board of appeals may require the applicant to record the variance with the County Register of Deeds. The variance is binding upon the

landowners, their successors and assigns.

- e. Expiration. Unless specified in the variance, an application for a construction permit must be applied for and approved within one year of the date of the approval of the variance, otherwise the variance becomes invalid. Permitted time frames do not change with successive owners.
- f. Extension. Upon written request, one extension of six months may be granted by the zoning board of appeals for good cause.

E. Appeals of administrative decisions.

- 3. Authorization. Any person affected by any decision made by the zoning administrator may appeal the decision to the zoning board of appeals.
- 4. Procedure.
  - a. Initiation of appeal. An appeal must be initiated by filing within 30 days of the date of the decision.
  - b. Contents of appeal. The written appeal of the administrative decision must include a statement of the error, the date of that decision, and all materials related to the decision. A nonrefundable filing fee as set by resolution of the city commission must also be submitted.
  - c. Scheduling of notice and hearing. The zoning administrator will schedule a hearing at the next regularly scheduled zoning board of appeals meeting.
  - d. Action by zoning board of appeals. At the hearing on the appeal, the appellant must state the grounds for the appeal and identify any materials or evidence from the record to support the appeal. The zoning administrator will be given an opportunity to respond. After the conclusion of the hearing, the zoning board of appeals will affirm, partly affirm, modify, or reverse the decision.
- 5. Standards. A decision will not be reversed or modified unless there is substantial evidence in the record that the decision fails to comply with either the procedural or substantive requirements of this chapter, state law, or the federal or state constitutions.
- 6. Conditions. The zoning board of appeals may impose conditions upon an affirmative decision to ensure the requirements and purposes of this chapter are followed.

F. Administrative adjustments.

- 7. General. This section sets out the procedures and standards for administrative adjustments, which are modifications of 10% or less of any numeric dimensional standard of this chapter.
- 8. Procedure.
  - a. Action by the zoning administrator. Within 30 days after the application is determined sufficient, the zoning administrator will review the application and approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove the administrative adjustment.
- 9. Standards. The zoning administrator may approve an administrative adjustment upon a finding that all of the following standards are met:
  - a. General. The requested adjustment eliminates an unnecessary inconvenience to the applicant, is consistent with the character of development in the surrounding area and will not result in incompatible land uses;
  - b. Mitigates adverse impacts. Any adverse impacts resulting from the administrative adjustment will be mitigated to the maximum extent feasible; and
  - c. Technical nature. The administrative adjustment is of a technical nature and is required to compensate for some unusual aspect of the site or the proposed development that is not shared by landowners in general.
- 10. Conditions of approval. The zoning administrator may impose restrictions and

conditions on an approval as are determined are required to ensure compliance with the general goals, objectives, and policies of this chapter.

**\*\*\*Section G Site Plan and H Downtown applications not included \*\*\***

I. Sign permit.

1. **Administrative review of sign applications.** Procedure.

- a. Action. After the application is determined sufficient, the zoning administrator will review the application and determine if the application complies with the standards in [Sec. 71-30](#).
- b. Approval. If the zoning administrator finds that the application complies, the zoning administrator will approve the sign permit.
- c. **Appeals from any interpretations, determinations, or denials made by the zoning administrator shall be made to the planning commission and submitted on such forms provided by the city for that purpose and subject to such fees set by the city commission prior to the posted submittal deadline prior to the next regularly scheduled planning commission meeting.**

~~Fails to comply.~~

- ~~1. If the Zoning Administrator determines the application fails to comply, the applicant will be provided comments explaining why the application fails to comply, and an opportunity to submit a revised application. A revised application will be reviewed and approved, approved with conditions or disapproved, based on the standards in [Sec. 71-30](#).~~
- ~~2. If the application is not resubmitted within 30 days, the application will be considered withdrawn.~~

- d. **Applications denied by the zoning administrator for the reason that the proposed sign requires a sign modification of the sign regulations by the planning commission as provided under section \_\_\_ - of this section, the applicant shall submit a complete application for such request to the planning commission on such forms provided by the city for that purpose and subject to the fees set by the city commission prior to the posted submittal deadline prior to the next regularly scheduled planning commission meeting.**
- e. **Appeals from a decision of the planning commission shall be made to the city commission on such forms provided by the city for that purpose and subject to such fees set by the city commission and within 30 days after the decision in writing, or within 21 days after the planning commission approves the meeting minutes.**

2. **Planning commission review and approval of certain sign modifications and murals**

**Subject to the standards and limitations set forth in this section, the planning commission shall have the authority to review certain sign applications and grant approvals. Any**

approval granted shall be valid for not more than 180 days.

- a. **Authority to Grant Requested Modifications of Sign Regulations.** The planning commission has no authority to grant a modification for signs prohibited under section \_\_\_\_\_ of this section. However, the planning commission has authority, in connection with an application, to grant approval of a request for modification of the sign regulations for permitted signs, subject to the following regulations.
  1. **Review.** The planning commission shall, within 60 days of receiving a complete application, either grant approval of the application by written findings stating the reasons therefor, deny the application, or grant the application with modifications or conditions. Failure of the planning commission to act within 60 days, or such further time to which the applicant may agree, shall be deemed to be a decision of denial.
  2. **Authorized Modification.** The planning commission may grant an applicant's request to modify the provisions of this section as follows:
    - (a) To increase by no more than 20 percent the maximum allowable height of any free-standing sign.
    - (b) To increase by no more than 20 percent the maximum area of signage otherwise allowed.
    - (c) To increase by no more than one sign the maximum number of signs or sign types otherwise allowed.
    - (d) To allow no more than one sign type to be located on a lot where signs of such types are not otherwise allowed.
    - (e) To adjust the required spacing between any signs, structures or lot lines.
  3. **Factors for Approval of Modifications.** The factors to be considered by the planning commission for permitted modifications shall include, but are not limited to the following:
    - (a) **Minimum Request.** The modification requested is the minimum change necessary to alleviate the hardship while addressing the unique and specific needs of the applicant.
    - (b) **General Standards.** Carrying out the strict letter of the provisions of this Ordinance would create a particular hardship or a practical difficulty not caused by an act or omission of the applicant.
    - (c) **Unusual Physical Limitations.** The subject property or the structure on which the sign is proposed to be located is burdened with an unusual physical limitation, such as irregular shape, unusual geographic location, exceptional feature, or other extraordinary physical condition, that is peculiar to the subject property and is more than merely an inconvenience or cost consideration to the applicant.
    - (d) **Location Factors.** The subject property location supports the permitted modification, reviewing such factors as size and use of parcel, setbacks, adjacent property uses, and speed of adjacent roadway(s).
    - (e) **Adverse Impacts.** The modification, if granted, would have no significant adverse impact on any abutting or adjacent property, the essential character of any part of or all of the neighborhood, or the use, enjoyment or value of other nearby properties.
    - (f) **Public Health and Safety.** The modification, if granted, would have no significant adverse impact on and would not endanger the public health or safety of the public.

b. **Authority to Approve Requested Mural Installations.** The planning commission has authority, in connection with an application to grant approval of a request for installation of a mural as defined in Article V subject to the following regulations.

1. **Review.** The planning commission shall, within 60 days of receiving a complete application, either grant approval of the application by written findings stating the reasons therefor, deny the application, or grant the application with modifications or conditions. Failure of the planning commission to act within 60 days, or such further time to which the applicant may agree, shall be deemed to be a decision of denial.

2. Factors for Approval of Murals. The factors to be considered by the planning commission for installation of a mural shall include, but are not limited to the following:
  - (a) Art Work. The mural design does not include elements that would be considered inappropriate and/or indecent by community standards and the art work provided is sufficient and accurate for review.
  - (b) Location Appropriate. The proposed mural placement on the building does not negatively impact vehicular or pedestrian traffic once installed and does not disrupt the properties landscaping and maintenance activities.
  - (c) Placement in Neighborhood/Surrounding Area. How many murals are in the neighborhood/surrounding area and what impact could the new mural have on existing ones.
  - (d) Scale and Placement on Building. Is the scale of the mural on the exterior wall and view from public right-of-way properly designed and placed. Does the mural design minimize alterations to the existing façade of the building including windows or doors.
  - (e) Enhancement and Activation. How will the proposed mural enhance and activate the pedestrian and streetscape experience.
  - (f) Installation Process. The applicant has sufficiently documented how the exterior wall will be prepared prior to installation of the mural, how the mural will be installed and what if any city permits will be required (right-of-way permit), documentation regarding public utilities being disturbed either on the building or overhead.
  - (g) Maintenance and Removal. Written document has been provided regarding the future maintenance and/or removal of the mural.

#### ARTICLE V. DEFINITIONS

This Section provides definitions for terms in this chapter that are technical in nature or that may not reflect a common usage of the term.

\*\*\* definitions A – Z with exception of sign related language not included \*\*\*

**Signs:** An **object**, devise, structure, fixture, or placard using graphics, symbols, and/or written copy designed specifically for the purpose of advertising or identifying an establishment, product, service or activity. Multiple types of signs exist and are defined below:

**Awning or canopy:** a fixed or movable shading structure, cantilevered or otherwise entirely supported from a building, used to protect outdoor spaces from sun, rain, and other natural conditions. Awnings are typically used to cover outdoor seating for restaurants and cafes.

**Banner:** a temporary lightweight sign that is made of flexible, nondurable materials such as fabric, cloth or plastic and is typically affixed to a building or accessory structure. A banner sign does not include a feather or pennant sign.

**Billboard:** An off-premise sign which contains a message unrelated to or not advertising a business transacted or goods sold or produced on the premises on which the sign is located.

**Business frontage:** The maximum linear width between exterior wall(s) of a building, or in the case of a multi-tenant building, the maximum linear width between the exterior and/or demising walls of an individual tenant located at street level and having an individual exterior entrance. Building frontage must abut a public street or a parking lot abutting a public street; it is measured in a single straight line parallel, or essentially parallel, with the abutting public street or parking lot. The building frontage is used to determine the maximum square footage of wall signs. A corner lot is considered to have a building frontage abutting each public street or parking lot; maximum signage is calculated individually per building frontage.

**Donor or memorial sign:** a sign that contains names, acknowledgements, or factual information to acknowledge or honor a benefactor, volunteer, or individual associated with the structure or site upon which it is located.

**Electronic message center:** an electronic changeable message board, including an electronic screen or monito, which is not an animated sign.

**Expressive sign:** a temporary sign that promotes or expresses an individual's personal non-commercial ideology, belief, value, or message. Examples of expressive signs include, but are limited to, signs expressing political beliefs, supporting clubs or sports teams, and expressing religious views.

**Flag:** Any fabric, banner or bunting containing distinctive color, letters or symbols.

**Freestanding sign:** A temporary or permanent sign erected by the City of Buchanan, Berrien County, or the state or federal government, including temporary signs as necessary in conjunction with the improvement of public infrastructure. A sign that is not affixed to a separate structure or building but is affixed to the ground, including but limited to pole signs or monument/ground signs.

**Historical marker sign:** a plaque bearing historical information related to the nearby structure, land or area upon which it is located (i.e., date of construction, early owners and builder, etc.)

**Inflatable sign:** a sign composed of an inflatable, nonporous bag, and exceeding 20 cubic feet.

**Marquee:** a permanent structure constructed of rigid materials that projects from the exterior wall of a building.

**Marquee sign:** a sign affixed flat against the surface of a marquee.

**Monument sign:** A base-mounted, freestanding sign placed on the ground and not attached to any building or other structure. A monument sign includes a solid supporting base of at least twelve inches in height and a width equal to or greater than the width of the sign face.

**Mural:** a design or representation painted or drawn on a wall. A design, graphics, or representation painted or drawn on a wall or other structure which does not contain commercial copy, advertising symbols, lettering, trademarks or other references to a particular entity, product or service located on the premises where the mural is located, or any other premise.

*Official legal notice: Notices required by law, signs erected by a governmental agency or public utility*

**Off-premises sign:** a freestanding sign owned by a person, corporation or other entity that engages in the business of selling or donating the display space on that sign, commonly referred to as a billboard. A sign which contains a message unrelated to or not advertising a business transacted or goods sold or produced on the premises on which the sign is located. Sometimes referred to as a billboard and can be free-standing or attached to a building.

**On-site informational sign:** a sign that identifies entrances and exits, safety precautions, open and closed information, warnings and other such incidental information for the property upon which the sign is located, including drive-thru menu boards, which is of a minimum size and height to provide the necessary information while not extending above the parapet, eave or wall of the building.

**Permanent sign:** a sign that has a permanent location on the ground or which is painted on or attached to a structure having a permanent location and which meets the structural requirements for signs as established in the building code.

**Pole sign:** a freestanding sign that is affixed, attached, or erected on a pole that is not an integral part of or attached to a building or structure.

**Projecting sign:** a double-faced sign attached to and not parallel with a building or wall.

**Reader board:** a portion of a sign, with written representation, emblem, graphic, logo, symbol or other display that on which copy can be changed periodically, either manually or electronically without altering the face surface of the sign, whether or not displayed is periodically rearranged. This definition excludes sandwich boards.

**Roof sign:** a sign which is erected, constructed and maintained above any portion of the roof or parapet.

**Sandwich board sign:** a free-standing, portable, temporary sign consisting of two faces connected and hinged at the top and whose message is targeted to pedestrians; it is also known

as an A-frame sign or inverted T-shaped sign.

**Sign:** An object, device, display or structure, or part thereof situated outdoors which is used to advertise or identify an object, person, institution, organization, business, product, service, event or location by any means including words, letters, figures, designs, symbols, fixtures, colors, motion illumination or projected images.

**“Signs” do not include the following:**

- a. Flags which do not advertise a business, product or service, not larger than 30 square feet and affixed to permanent flagpoles or flagpole mounted to buildings, subject to the maximum building height of the zoning district it is in. However, if such flags are greater than 30 square feet, they are considered signs and are subject to regulations in this Article.
- b. Seasonal decorations which do not advertise a business, product or service.
- c. Interior signs that are not visible from adjacent property or public rights-of-way.
- d. Merchandise, pictures or models of products or services incorporated in a window display.
- e. Governmental, educational, military, religious, fraternal, and civic symbols or crests.
- f. Tablets or plates containing only the building name and/or date the building was installed when cut into the masonry surface or permanently affixed to the building.
- g. Time and temperature devices not related to a product and not larger than six square feet.
- h. Works of art, including murals, which do not advertise a business, product or service.
- i. Address numbers in compliance with the International Property Maintenance Code, Premises identification.

**Snipe sign:** Any sign tacked, nailed, posted, pasted, glued, or otherwise attached to trees, poles, stakes, fences, public benches, streetlights, or other objects, or placed on any public property in the public right-of-way or on any private property with or without the permission of the property owner for commercial uses.

**Temporary sign:** Any sign which is erected or displayed on a non-permanent basis for a limited period of time. Examples of temporary signages include, but are not limited to, a banner sign, construction sign, garage sale sign, political sign, expressive sign, real estate sign, and sandwich board sign.

**Transported sign:** A sign attached to or pulled by a vehicle that may be displayed or affixed to a moveable object such as but not limited to a car, truck, trailer, or similar transportation device. A transported sign is not a vehicle sign.

**Vehicle sign:** A sign, painted or otherwise, attached to an operable vehicle or pulled trailer that is regularly used and moved. A vehicle sign is not a transported sign.

**Wall sign:** any sign mounted or attached to and supported by the wall of any part of a building or structure and in which the horizontal sign surface is parallel to the building wall or structure.

**Window sign:** any sign painted on, affixed to or placed against any window intended to be viewed from the outside.

# Memorandum



Date: March 4, 2026

To: Planning Commission Members

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Master Plan Update Discussion 3 – Title, Survey Update and Background Demographic Information**

## Background

During the January 2026 meeting, Marcy Hamilton representative from the Southwestern Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) attended the meeting and reviewed the timeframe for the creation of the update of the 2021 Master Plan.

## Project title

During the February meeting, discussion regarding a possible name of the plan took place. The title “*Even Better Buchanan*” was well received with comments regarding the inclusion of deer herd to be in keeping with the school system. By naming the plan, the community and stakeholders can better understand the community’s aspirations and work toward achieving the established goals and objectives. Following are other options that include deer or herd references:

Running with the Herd: Buchanan’s Community Master Plan  
 The Next Leap: Buchanan’s Buck Vision Plan  
 Stronger Together: The Buchanan Herd Plan  
 One Herd, One Future, Building Buchanan Together  
 Lead the Herd: A Vision for Buchanan

## Survey Update

During the February 10<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Commission reviewed draft questions and staff received additional member feedback after the meeting. Per the request of the Police Department, there have been some questions pertaining to them included.

While discussing with the consultant, it was concluded the location map was not necessary based on the size of the community and was replaced with questions pertaining to the number of people that live in the dwelling unit. If this information is desired, we can have a board asking for information at a public meeting.

Staff have been testing the survey and believe it will be ready to go soon.

## Memorandum

It is recommended the survey remains active for 3 weeks. A notice can appear in the April 1<sup>st</sup> water bill letting people know there is a survey available. With timing along with spring break the week of March 30<sup>th</sup>, staff will have the survey go live on March 30<sup>th</sup> and end on or about April 17<sup>th</sup>. Flyers will be distributed at different locations to get more people participating and a portion of the website will provide information.

### Review of Background/Supplemental Information

Marcy Hamilton will be attending to review the attached background and supplemental information used to draft the new plan.

### Future Activities

In review of the calendar from the January 2026 meeting, a public visioning session is proposed to take place in June or July. Staff is concerned about attendance at a July event and recommend efforts should be made to schedule the event for Tuesday, June 9<sup>th</sup> and cancel the regularly scheduled meeting.

### Next Steps

The Commission should decide on a project title for the master plan document that will be used in all promotions and activities moving forward. The Commission should review the information included in the packet for discussion at the meeting.

# *DRAFT*



Adopted by Planning Commission

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Adopted by City Commission

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**CITY COMMISSION**

Mark Weedon	Mayor
Patrick Swem	Mayor Pro Tem
Raquell George	Commissioner
Larry Money	Commissioner
Dan Vigansky	Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION**

Tony Houser	Vice Chairperson
Dan Vigansky	City Commission Representative
• Jen Gerry	Secretary
• Peter Lysy	Member
• Jacob Brown	Member
• Matt Pleasant	Member

**CITY OFFICIALS**

Tony McGhee	City Manager
Kalla Langston	City Clerk
Deborah Perez	City Treasurer
Kristin Gundersen	Community Development Director

This Master Plan was prepared with assistance from  
the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission



City of Buchanan Master Plan 2027

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The City of Buchanan is located* in the southeast corner of Berrien County, the most southwestern county in Michigan. From the center of town it is approximately a 1½ hour drive to Chicago and a 2½ hour drive to Detroit. The City has a resident population of about 4,300 and covers a total area of 2.47 square miles (2.4 square miles of land and .07 square miles of water).

The City of Buchanan recognizes the importance of comprehensive planning for growth and long-term sustainability and has actively facilitated the process necessary for the development of a master plan. This plan will serve as the primary tool for guiding the future development of the City; for deciding where development will occur in the community (and in what form), and for framing decisions regarding the City’s capital improvement projects. When the City is faced with choices regarding issues such as growth, housing, transportation, neighborhood improvement, and service delivery, the master plan will serve as a guide by describing the long-term goals for the City’s future as well as defining the policies needed to determine day-to-day decisions.

The City of Buchanan’s Comprehensive Master Plan strives to build a broad, unified vision of the City’s future from the many ideas of a multi-faceted population. The plan integrates the aspirations of the City’s residents, businesses, neighborhoods, and officials into a sound strategy for managing change. Throughout the wide variety of ideas publicly expressed, a number of consistent themes emerged - ultimately guiding the creation of a vision for the Community:

## COMMUNITY VISION

As a community we want the City of Buchanan to be a safe and beautiful City committed to the protection of the natural environment, we hope to build a City that is economically healthy and a good place to do business, and we foresee a City with diverse housing and employment opportunities and excellent public services. Buchanan will be a City where every resident can say, “*Life is better here*”.

To achieve this vision, members of the steering committee studied the results of the community surveys, public visioning sessions, current demographic data and other pertinent information, and then carefully constructed the following goals:

**Community Goals**

**GOAL 1 – HOMETOWN CHARACTER:**

Celebrate and further enhance the hometown character of the community.

**GOAL 2 – HISTORY & ART**

Promote and fully develop the historic character and artistic qualities of the community.

**GOAL 3 – RECREATION & TOURISM**

Become a vibrant community meeting the social, leisure, cultural and recreational interests of residents and visitors.

**GOAL 4 – THRIVING BUSINESS CLIMATE**

Develop a proactive approach to achieve a thriving business climate and create a sustainable economic environment.

**GOAL 5 – INFRASTRUCTURE**

Provide sufficient infrastructure for the recruitment of new business while supporting the needs of current residents and the expansion and retention of current businesses.

**GOAL 6 - EDUCATION**

Provide the highest level of education and educational facilities possible.

**GOAL 7 – HOUSING**

Establish a wide spectrum of appropriate housing opportunities meeting the needs of residents in any social or income group at every stage of life.

**GOAL 8 – RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE**

Provide leadership, responsive governance, and high quality public services in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

**GOAL 9 – TRANSPORTATION/MOBILITY**

Develop and maintain a coordinated circulation system that efficiently and safely provides for existing and future circulation of all traffic (motorized, non-motorized, and pedestrian) in the Buchanan area.

**GOAL 10 – LAND USE**

Plan land uses so future development and redevelopment will occur in a coordinated, connected, and harmonious manner and will be in the long-term best interest of the entire community.

**GOAL 11 – NATURAL RESOURCES**

Protect and enhance the natural resources within the City including wildlife habitats, fens, scenic vistas and unique geological features through educated and responsible use.

**GOAL 12 – REGIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Represent the best interests of the City by providing active leadership regarding regional issues.

Information incorporated throughout this plan reveals the rationale considered for each goal and subsequent objective developed in the Implementation Plan. It is the overall goal of this plan to remain relevant and responsive to residents, as well as City government, and thus be considered a vital resource for planning decisions now and in the future.

## MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT

*A comprehensive master plan* is a public policy document designed to guide the future of a municipality. Master plans are developed and adopted through a defined process including public participation, research, analysis, and recommendations for current and future planning. The public participation process ensures that the desires of residents will be responded to and achieved whenever possible. A relevant articulate master plan can be used as a guide for making a variety of decisions such as those relating to land use, zoning, and infrastructure improvements. The outcome of these decisions should fulfill the basic purpose of the master plan which is to:

- Determine, develop, and preserve the community character
- Promote the public’s health, safety, and increased quality of life
- Promote the responsible use of natural resources
- Promote intelligent land use that avoids sprawl and overcrowding
- Promote maximum mobility on public roads, streets, and sidewalks
- Facilitate systems to provide public transportation, water and sewer, recreation, and other public services

### Planning Authority

*The City of Buchanan has prepared* this Master Plan under the authority of the Municipal Planning Act, Public Act 285 of 1931, as amended (2006).

### Roles and Responsibilities

*The City is organized under the Home Rule Act* of Michigan, which authorizes cities to formulate their own charter provision, and operates under the Commission-Manager form of government as prescribed by the City of Buchanan’s Charter. (See Organizational Chart following this section) Under this model the City Manager is responsible for managing the day-to-day operation of the City and the City Commission’s main function is legislative; setting important policies that chart the future course of Buchanan. The City Commission is comprised of five (5) members who serve four (4) year terms. The Mayor and Mayor Pro-Tem are selected at the first meeting in November following the City election.

*The City’s Planning Commission is responsible* for the development and implementation of the City’s Master Plan. Because a master plan is, by design, an evolving and flexible document the plan should be reviewed annually to determine if any changes are needed. These reviews are necessary to be responsive to changes in growth trends and current community attitudes on growth and development. As part of

the review process, the Plan Commission will look for completed projects and identify any areas where the plan’s vision may or may not be working. Following the review, an annual report is prepared and delivered to the City Commission. Every five years, the City and Plan Commissions will review and update the plan if the circumstances warrant. If the plan does not require any updates, this determination will be recorded in the Minutes of the City and Plan Commission meetings. If changes are recommended, the pre-determined guiding principles, vision, and overall goals will be examined and weighed against the proposed changes to be certain they uphold the intent, and vision of the plan. Any extension, addition, revision, or other amendment to a basic plan shall be adopted under the same procedure as a plan or a successive part of a plan under the procedures stated in Michigan Public Act 285 (2006).<sup>1</sup>

***The Buchanan Area Chamber of Commerce***

provides leadership in promoting the spirit of the community through increased communication and cooperation among businesses, organizations, and individuals in order to enhance the growth, prosperity, and quality of life in the Buchanan area.<sup>2</sup>



***The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission*** partnered with the City of Buchanan’s government leaders and residents to collect and assess information about the needs and desires of the community. The data was then analyzed and, with public participation, became the foundation for the development of the master plan. This master plan is a compilation of background information, recommendations, goals, and objectives for each of the subject areas it covers. The Action Plan is the strategy to implement the **goals** which are conceptual, broad, and long range and the **objectives** which are the steps leading to the achievement of the goals.

Throughout the planning and development process the following tenets of Smart Growth helped provide the foundation for the master plan by seeking to:

- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions
- Foster a distinctive, attractive community with a strong sense of place
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
- Mix land uses

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/>  
<sup>2</sup> Chamber website <http://www.buchanan.mi.us/>

- Encourage a range of housing opportunities
- Create walkable communities
- Take advantage of compact building design
- Provide a variety of transportation options
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environment areas
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities

These objectives were considered and then customized to specifically meet the needs of Buchanan's residents. It is hoped that as changes are made through reviews and updates, these objectives will once again be considered as they provide established guidance to help communities reach their fullest potential.

# PURPOSE

A master plan serves as a decision-making tool for the City to help guide future development. It addresses the appropriate locations of, and relationships between, various types of land uses. It designates specific areas which have been determined to be most suitable for various uses, based upon such considerations as existing land uses, public infrastructure, transportation access, environmental conditions, topography, and soil types.

However, it is also more than this, serving as a multi-year inventory of the community, providing an analysis of community conditions, and being used as a tool to measure community change over time.

Although the plan takes the form of this written document, it is of secondary importance to the synthesis of collective thought by community members from which it was created. The plan is intended to be a realistic compendium of the City’s goals and desires at a given point in time, not an idealized end-state at some unspecified point in the future. As such, the plan is designed to be flexible, and to be able to respond to changing circumstances. As its definition implies, the word “plan” is both a verb and noun, and results in an ongoing process as much as this end-product.

This master plan provides the conceptual framework on which specific implementation instruments, such as the zoning ordinance, are based on. In this role, it provides the legal “backbone” of the zoning ordinance, and helps guide the decisions made by administrative bodies, such as the Plan Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals, which relate to the master plan, and protect their decisions from being seen as arbitrary or as excessive exercises of their authority.

Where applicable, the plan also informs and gives direction to routine administrative functions such as a capital improvement plan, the issuance of building permits, zoning and site plan reviews, and sub-area planning efforts, such as for parks and the downtown.

In short, the master plan, as an “umbrella statement” of community goals, provides the parameters directing day-to-day decisions and policymaking.



# COMMUNITY PROFILE

## LOCATION

The City of Buchanan is located in southwest Michigan in Berrien County, in the southwest corner of the State of Michigan. It is surrounded on all other sides by Buchanan Township. The City is part of Michigan portion of the South Bend, Indiana Urbanized Area.

## HISTORY

The Potawatomi Indians were the first residents in the area, with many settlements established along the St. Joseph River. By 1833 the Potawatomi Indians had signed away the land in exchange for land west of the Mississippi River. Near the time of the treaty, the town's industry was born when Charles Cowels, the first settler, built his shingle mill. Russell McCoy soon followed and constructed the first sawmill along McCoy Creek. Because of McCoy Creek and the power furnished by the water, sawmills and gristmills became the mainstay industry of the area.

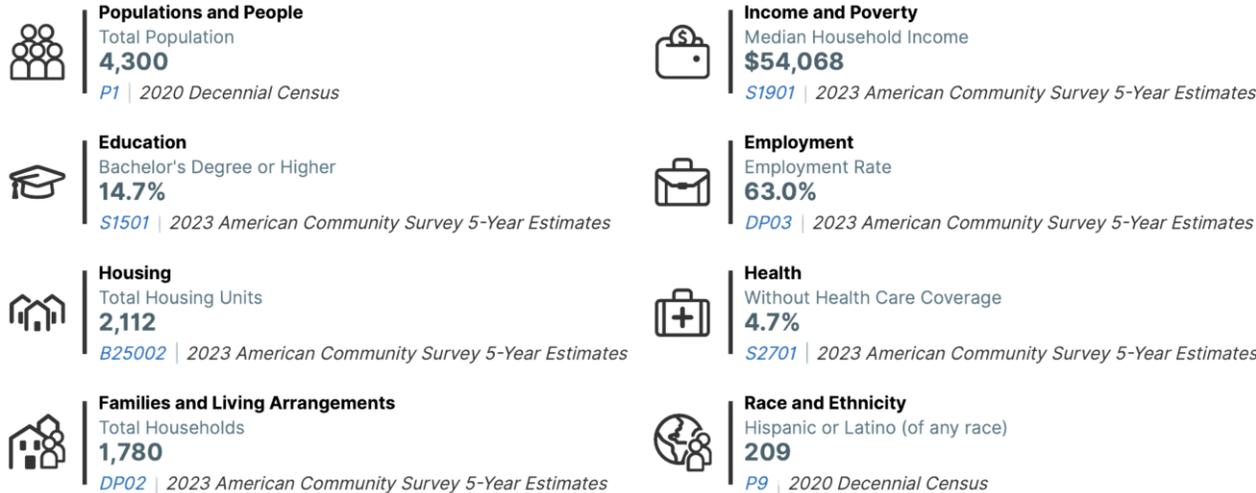


The growing community joined in the cause for Michigan's statehood between 1835 and 1837. A famous senator, James Buchanan of Pennsylvania who became the 15th President of the United States, sided with Michigan to obtain this goal. Miller John Hamilton, who platted the area, honored Senator Buchanan for his championship by naming the community after him and recorded it as such in 1842. At the time of the city's incorporation in 1858, Buchanan was a thriving area of some 860 people.

The area was rich in timber, in the natural abundance of game, fruits, maple sugar, wild honey, and plentiful fishing in McCoy Creek and the St. Joseph River. Buchanan continues to enjoy many natural assets and has become known as "Redbud City" due to the profusion of these beautiful trees throughout the area.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Understanding population, demographic, and economic conditions provides essential context for land use, housing, infrastructure, and service planning. The following tables and charts summarize long-term population trends, age distribution, household and income characteristics, and employment structure for the City of Buchanan and surrounding geography. Together, these indicators help explain current needs and inform future planning priorities.



This summary provides a snapshot of key demographic and economic conditions in the City of Buchanan based on Census and American Community Survey estimates. The city has about 4,300 residents, 1,780 households, and 2,112 housing units, indicating a small but established housing base with some vacancy or turnover. Median household income is approximately \$54,068, and about 63 percent of working-age residents are employed, reflecting a primarily working community with moderate income levels. Only about 4.7 percent of residents lack health insurance coverage, which supports overall household stability.

Educational attainment levels show that roughly 14.7 percent of residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, suggesting room for growth in higher-skill workforce development. The presence of Hispanic or Latino residents, about 209 people, contributes to the city’s demographic diversity and should be considered in outreach and service planning. Together, these indicators point to a stable small-city profile with continued need for housing reinvestment, workforce development, and affordability-focused planning.

**Population**

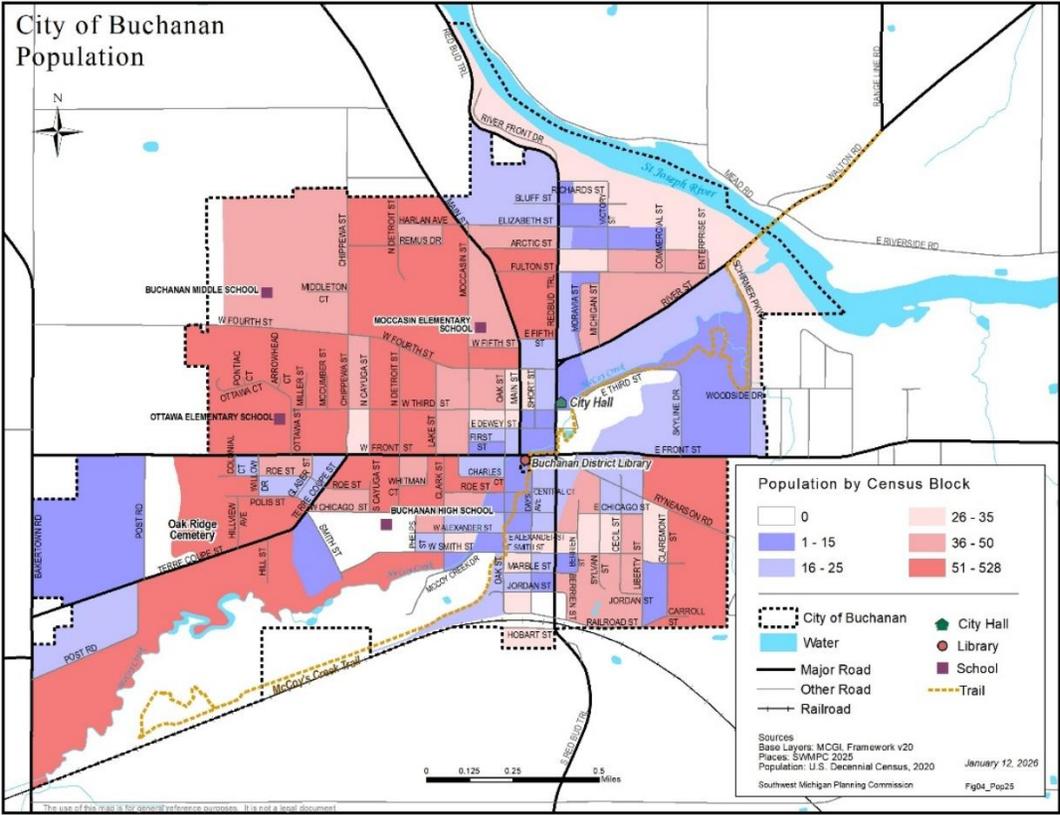
As shown in Table 1, the City of Buchanan has experienced a gradual population decline over the past several decades, decreasing from 4,992 residents in 1990 to 4,300 residents in 2020. This represents a decline of approximately 3.5 percent between 2010 and 2020. Berrien County also experienced a modest population decrease during this period, while the State of Michigan overall recorded slight population growth.

**Table 1: Population Trends**

	1990	2000	2010	2020	% Change 2010 to 2020
City of Buchanan	4,992	4,644	4,456	4,300	-3.50%
Berrien County	171,276	162,453	156,813	154,316	-1.59%
State of Michigan	9,262,078	9,938,444	9,883,640	10,077,331	1.96%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020

This pattern suggests that population change in the city reflects broader regional dynamics, including aging populations, slower household formation, and limited in-migration compared to statewide trends. Even modest population decline can affect housing demand, school enrollment, infrastructure utilization, and fiscal capacity, making it important to align future development strategies with realistic growth expectations.



**Age**

The age distribution of a community can be an important factor in identifying social and economic trends as well as public service needs. Table 3 summarizes 2023 estimates, summarizing the breakdown by age cohort. The median age in the City of Buchanan is 32.9 years.

**Table 3: City of Buchanan – Population: Total, Gender, Age Distribution**

Age	Total Number	Total Percent
<b>Total population</b>	4,259*	100%
<b>Male</b>	1,943	45.6%
<b>Female</b>	2,316	54.4%
<b>Age Groups</b>		
<b>Under 5 years</b>	395	9.3%
<b>5 to 9 years</b>	214	5.0%
<b>10 to 14 years</b>	283	6.6%
<b>15 to 19 years</b>	174	4.1%
<b>20 to 24 years</b>	492	11.6%
<b>25 to 34 years</b>	642	15.1%
<b>35 to 44 years</b>	436	10.2%
<b>45 to 54 years</b>	579	13.6%
<b>55 to 59 years</b>	111	2.6%
<b>60 to 64 years</b>	238	5.6%
<b>65 to 74 years</b>	361	8.5%
<b>75 to 84 years</b>	168	3.9%
<b>85 years and over</b>	166	3.9%
<b>Summary Age Groups</b>		
<b>Under 18</b>	1,018	23.9%
<b>18 years and over</b>	3,241	76.1%
<b>21 years and over</b>	3,173	74.5%
<b>65 years and over</b>	695	16.3%
<b>Median age</b>	32.9	

*\* This figure differs from the 2020 Census count because it is based on the 2019–2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimate, rather than the single-year 2020 Census snapshot.*

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates*

The city’s demographic profile indicates a mature population structure with a broad distribution across age groups. As shown in Table 3, the median age is 32.9 years, with approximately 24 percent of residents under age 18 and about 16 percent age 65 and older. The presence of both younger households and older residents suggests a need for a diverse housing stock that supports families, working adults, and aging residents.

The largest age cohorts fall within the 20–44 and 45–64 age ranges, representing core working-

age populations. This distribution supports the local labor force but also signals future demand for workforce housing, accessible housing options, and aging-in-place accommodations over time. Planning efforts should account for lifecycle housing needs and neighborhood design that supports residents at all stages of life.

**ECONOMIC & HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS**

Economic indicators for the City of Buchanan show a mixed picture of household stability and financial vulnerability. As summarized in Table 4, the city’s median household income is \$54,068, which is lower than the county median. The poverty rate is comparatively lower than the county rate, but the share of ALICE households, Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households, meaning working households whose incomes are above the federal poverty line but still insufficient to cover basic living costs, is significantly higher.

**Table 4: Summary of Economic Characteristics**

	City of Buchanan	Berrien County
Median Household Income	\$54,068	\$68,984
Poverty Rate	6.7%	12.9%
Employment Rate	63.0%	58.3%
ALICE Households	41.7%	28.5%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates; United For ALICE, County Reports: Michigan, 2023

With over 40 percent of households classified as ALICE, a substantial portion of residents may face affordability pressures related to housing, transportation, utilities, and healthcare. This has direct implications for housing and rental affordability, and workforce development initiatives. It also reinforces the importance of maintaining a range of housing price points and supporting programs that reduce cost burdens for moderate-income households. The employment rate shown in Table 4 indicates that most working-age residents participate in the labor force, supporting local and regional economic activity.

**Table 5: Employment by Industry**

Industry	Share (%)
Manufacturing	32.6%
Retail trade	19.2%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	11.0%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	10.9%
Other services, except public administration	7.5%
Wholesale trade	3.4%
Information	3.2%
Public administration	3.1%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	2.9%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	2.4%

U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

The city’s employment base is strongly influenced by industrial and service sectors. As shown in Table 5 manufacturing represents the largest employment category, accounting for roughly one-third of jobs. Retail trade, hospitality and food services, and education and healthcare services also represent significant employment sectors.

This industry mix suggests that local employment opportunities include a combination of production, service, and care-based occupations. A manufacturing-heavy employment structure can provide stable jobs but may also increase exposure to sector-specific economic cycles. Diversification of the employment base over time can help improve resilience and income stability.

**Table 6: Household Characteristics**

Household Characteristics	City of Buchanan	Berrien County	State of Michigan
Percent of households with individuals under 18 years	23.3%	25.7%	27.1%
Percent of households with individuals 65 years and older	28.5%	36.0%	32.9%
Average family size	3.09	2.94	3.05
Total number of households	1,752	63,999	4,076,369
Average household size	2.40	2.35	2.42

*U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates*

Table 6 provides an overview of household characteristics in the City of Buchanan compared with Berrien County and the State of Michigan based on 2023 American Community Survey data. Overall, Buchanan’s household patterns closely resemble those seen across the county and state. The city has a slightly smaller share of households with children and a somewhat lower proportion of households with residents age 65 and older compared with Berrien County, though these figures remain generally in line with statewide trends. Household and family sizes in Buchanan are also comparable to those observed regionally, suggesting that living arrangements in the city reflect broader demographic patterns across Southwest Michigan.

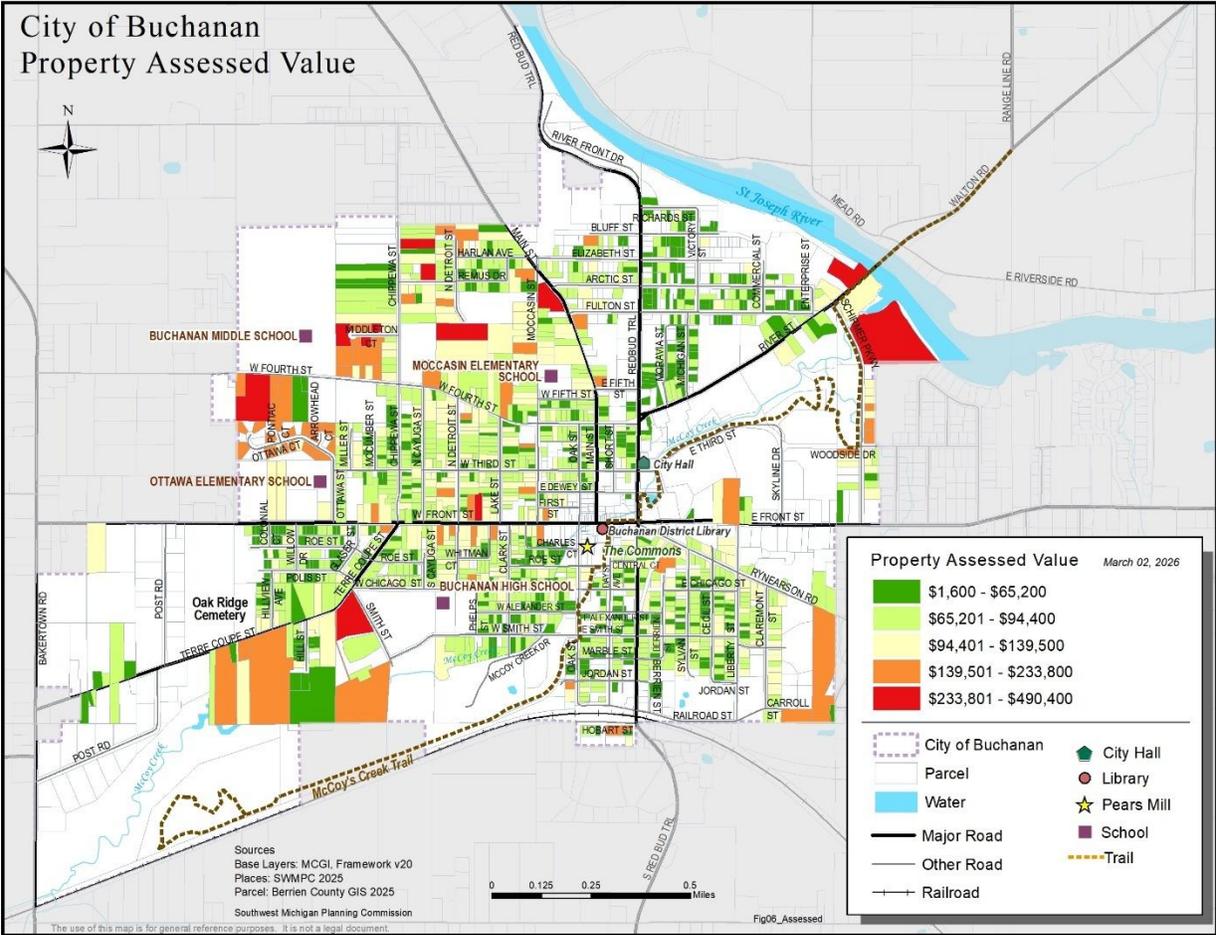
**HOUSING**

Table 7 shows the change in renter-occupied housing units over time in the City of Buchanan. According to the U.S. Census, a housing unit is vacant if no one is living in it at the time of the interview, unless its occupants are only temporarily absent. In addition, housing units where all the occupants have a usual residence elsewhere are grouped with vacant units.

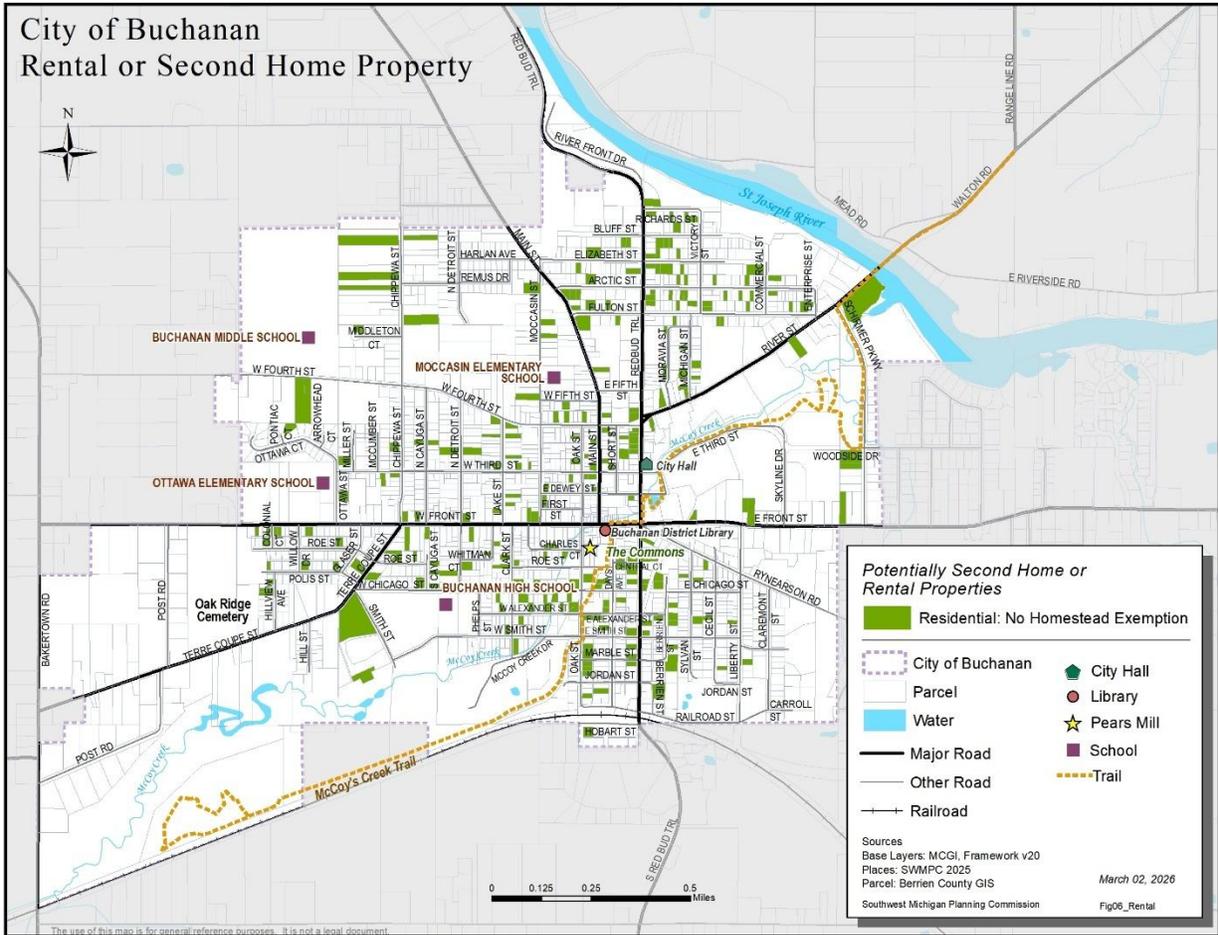
**Table 7: Housing Unit Summary**

	2000	2010	2023	Percent Change 2010 to 2023
Owner Occupied Housing Units	1,195	1,113	997	-10.42%
Renter Occupied Housing Units	720	788	783	-0.63%
Vacant Housing Units	183	238	332	39.50%
Total Housing Units	2,098	2,139	2,112	-1.26%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2010, 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates



Will add narrative



Will add narrative

**Table 8: Percentage of Income Spent on Rental Housing 2023**

Percent of Income Spent on Rental Housing	City of Buchanan		State of Michigan	
	Number of Households	Percent of Total	Number of Households	Percent of Total
Less than 15%	96	12.3%	141,107	14.0%
15% to 19.9%	243	31.0%	127,069	12.6%
20% to 24.9%	14	1.8%	125,101	12.4%
25% to 29.9%	74	9.5%	115,451	11.4%
30% to 34.9%	112	14.3%	91,155	9.0%
35% or more	244	31.2%	409,574	40.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

Table 8 shows the share of household income spent on rental housing in the City of Buchanan based on 2023 ACS data. Housing affordability is commonly evaluated using a benchmark of 30 percent of household income spent on housing. In Buchanan, approximately 45.5 percent of renter households spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent, including 14.3 percent

spending between 30 and 34.9 percent and 31.2 percent spending 35 percent or more. This indicates that a significant share of renters in the city may be experiencing housing cost burdens.

## REGIONAL HOUSING

Housing markets extend beyond municipal boundaries, and focusing only on a single community can overlook the forces shaping housing supply, demand, and affordability. Residents and workers move across jurisdictions, and housing availability in one area directly affects nearby communities. A regional perspective helps explain shared challenges such as limited rental supply, rising prices, and changing household needs, while allowing local housing strategies to be better aligned with surrounding markets and regional development patterns.

The City of Buchanan is located within District 7 of the *Berrien County Housing Needs Assessment (2025)* prepared for Cornerstone Alliance. The assessment divides the county into eight housing submarkets, allowing local conditions to be understood within a broader regional framework. The following summary highlights key housing characteristics and trends relevant to Buchanan's regional context.

The surrounding area is characterized by a stable, ownership-oriented housing market. More than four-fifths of occupied housing units are owner-occupied, a higher share than seen countywide, while renter-occupied units make up a comparatively smaller portion of the housing stock. Vacancy rates are lower than the county average, indicating a relatively tight market. While some vacant units are seasonal or recreational in nature, these units play a less dominant role here than in other parts of Berrien County.

Household growth has been modest and largely flat over the past decade and is projected to decline slightly through 2030. Rather than rapid growth or contraction, housing demand in the area is expected to be shaped primarily by household transitions, including downsizing, aging in place, and reinvestment in existing homes, rather than by significant population increases.

The age profile of households is notably older than both the county and the state. More than half of households are headed by residents age 55 or older, and the number of households age 75 and older is projected to increase substantially in the coming years. This trend is likely to increase demand for smaller, accessible, and lower-maintenance housing options, as well as housing that supports aging in place and senior-oriented living arrangements.

Both the rental and for-sale markets are highly constrained. Rental vacancy rates are extremely low across multifamily and non-conventional housing types, and affordable rental units are fully occupied. Similarly, the for-sale market has limited inventory, with available homes representing well under a healthy level of supply. These conditions limit housing choice and mobility for residents, including younger households, seniors seeking to downsize, and the local workforce.

Taken together, the regional context points to a housing market that is stable but constrained, with future needs driven less by growth and more by aging demographics, limited housing availability, and the need to maintain and adapt the existing housing stock.

**Table ## Regional Housing Characteristics**

Indicator (2025)	Regional Submarket
Owner-Occupied Share	~81.5%
Renter-Occupied Share	~18.5%
Vacancy Rate	~10.4%
Households Age 55+	~54.8%
Rental Vacancy	~1% or less
For-Sale Supply	~2.4 months

**Table ##: Available For-Sale Housing in Region (As of August 25, 2025)**

<b>Total Units</b>	36
<b>Median List Price</b>	\$402,000
<b>Average Square Feet</b>	2,361
<b>Average Year Built</b>	1961
<b>Average Days on Market</b>	59

**COMMUTE TO WORK**

Table 10 shows that, similar to most communities in Michigan, the most prevalent commute mode in the City of Buchanan is driving alone at 80.8%, which is slightly higher than the state average. The average commute time to work is 19.3 minutes, which is slightly lower than the state average. Around 24% of commuters have a travel time of 30 minutes or more.

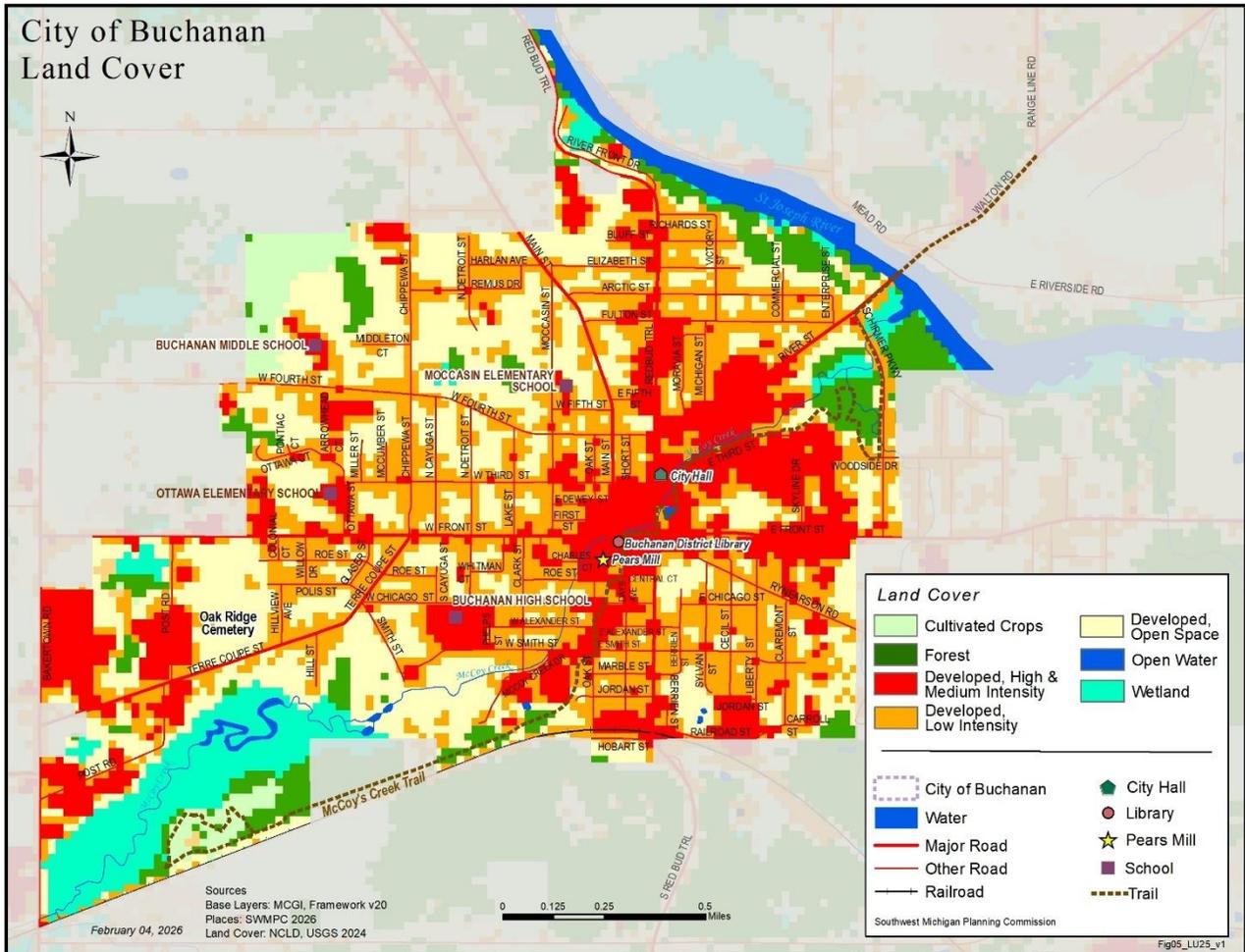
**Table 10: Mode of Transportation to Work 2023**

Mode of Transportation to Work	City of Buchanan	State of Michigan
Drove Alone	80.8%	75.6%
Carpooled	11.7%	8.0%
Public Transportation	0.0%	1.0%
Worked at Home	3.7%	12.0%
Bicycled	0.0%	0.3%
Walked	2.9%	2.0%
Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means	0.9%	1.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

### EXISTING LAND USE

The USGS produces land use/land cover data, which is described below. Please note that land use has changed over the years, and the data does have a margin of error. However, the information below is helpful to get a general idea of land use, if not necessarily updated and specific enough to be exact. The City of Buchanan includes about 1,661 acres.



### Land Use/Cover Classifications

**High/Medium Intensity Developed.** This land use classification includes urban land uses more intensive than single-family homes, such as multi-family housing, commercial, institutional, and industrial land uses. This medium to high intensity land use includes 313 acres (19%). It includes areas with a mixture of buildings and vegetation.

**Low Intensity Developed.** The most abundant land use for the City of Buchanan is low intensity development, mostly including single-family homes, with 561 acres, which is 34% of the City. It includes areas with a mixture of buildings and vegetation.

**Developed Open Space.** Developed open space in the City of Buchanan includes maintained lawns larger than those found at a typical single-family home. This land use includes 475 acres (29%). It includes areas with a mixture of some buildings, but mostly vegetation in the form of

lawn grasses, with impervious surfaces accounting for less than 20% of total cover. These areas most commonly include large-lot single-family housing, parks, and vegetation planted in developed settings for recreation, erosion control, or aesthetic purposes.

**Forest.** The City includes 103 acres of forested land (6%), but due to the smaller size of areas covered, they would better be described as wooded land. Wooded lands are especially concentrated along the wetlands along McCoy Creek’s mouth to the St. Joseph River, City owned property in the southwestern corner of the City, and a few other areas.

**Wetland.** The City has 119 acres of wetlands (7%). Wetlands include areas with vegetative cover and the soil or substrate are periodically saturated with or covered with water. Wetlands in Buchanan are most highly concentrated in the floodplains of McCoy Creek (e.g., Southwestern Michigan Land Conservancy property) and along the St. Joseph River (e.g., City boat launch). A more precise map and exploration of wetlands is in the Wetlands section of this plan.

**Open Water.** Surface water in the City includes the St. Joseph River and McCoy Creek. It consists of 40 acres (2%) of the City.

**Cultivated.** Part of the Buchanan Middle School property is cultivated. Some of the areas on the map may be misidentified as cultivated during the data analysis, but consisting of only 48 acres (3%), the impact on the land use data presented here is minimal.

**Table 11. Land Use/Land Cover**

Land Use/Land Cover	Acres	Percent
High/Medium Intensity Developed	313	19%
Low Intensity Developed	561	34%
Developed Open Space	475	29%
Forest	103	6%
Wetland	119	7%
Open Water	40	2%
Cultivated	48.8	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,661</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: National Land Cover Database, USGS 2024

# COMMUNITY FEATURES

## TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

The City of Buchanan street transportation system offers options for motorists, public transit riders, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Residents can access a countywide public transportation system whose options are being redeveloped for transit riders as this Plan is being written. Beyond the City’s street network, residents can further connect to intercity bus service, private transportation providers, rail, and flight options.

Buchanan has excellent regional transportation access for motorists via I-94 and its nearby access to U.S. Route 31. The distances below are to city centers. Travel times are approximate.

South Bend, IN	17 miles/30 min.	Chicago, IL	90 miles/100 min.
Kalamazoo, MI	65 miles/80 min.	Indianapolis, IN	163 miles/3 hours
Grand Rapids, MI	100 miles/100 min.	Detroit, MI	208 miles/3 hours

## Roads

There are several sources of funding for the street network within the City of Buchanan, depending on the classification and geographic location of the roadway. Many roadways qualify for multiple sources of funding. The table below outlines the various State of Michigan funding and federal funding sources available. Descriptions of these funding programs are given below. The table divides roadways into ones that are federal aid eligible and ones that are not, known as local roads. Local millage street funding and other funding sources are not featured here.

**Table 12. Road Funding Overview**

	Local Roads	Federal Aid Eligible Roads
State of Michigan Act 51 Funding	X	
Federal Surface Transportation Block Grant Funding		X
Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Funding		X
Federal Transportation Alternatives Program Funding		X
Federal Safe Routes to School Funding	X	X

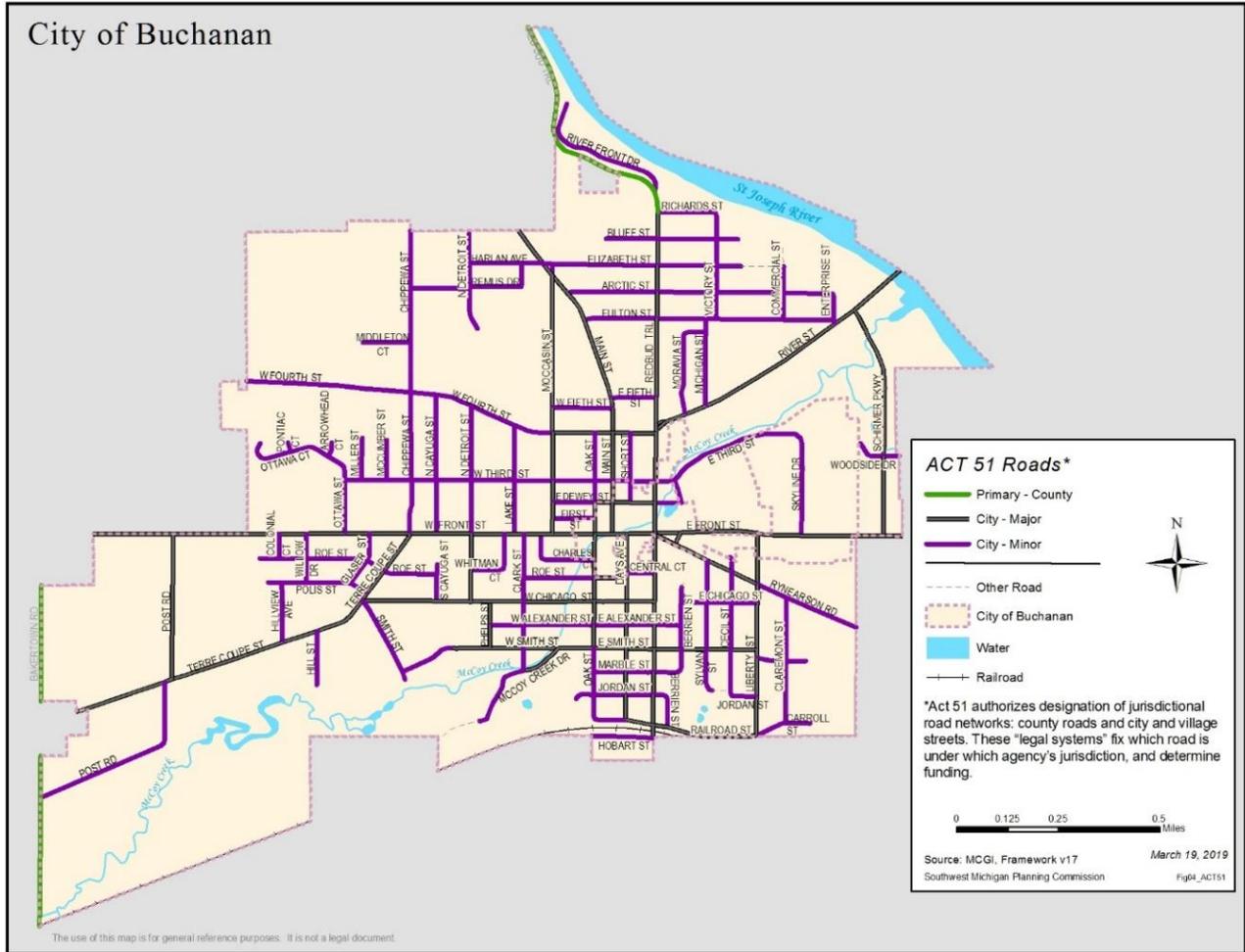
**State of Michigan Act 51** of 1951 distinguishes streets as either “major” or “local” for funding purposes. The law establishes the obligation for the City to maintain their streets, including preservation, reconstruction, resurfacing, restoration and rehabilitation, as well as for snow removal, cleaning, patching, signing, and marking.

**Major Streets:** The City’s major streets include Redbud Trail south of Richards St, Front St, Main St, Moccasin St, River St, Terre Coupe St, Post Rd, Chicago St west of Redbud Trail, Liberty St, Rynearson Rd west of Liberty St, Days Ave, Railroad St east of Days Ave, Phelps St, McCoy Creek Dr east of Clark St, Roe St between Oak St and Days Ave, Oak St between Smith St and Dewey St, Dewey St between Oak St and Redbud Trail, Schirmer Pkwy, and Smith St west of Liberty St to about 550 feet west of Phelps St.

**Local Streets:** Act 51 designates any non-major public City street as a local street.

**Act 51 Certification.** The State of Michigan maintains a map for each road-maintaining jurisdiction showing each jurisdiction’s Act 51 designated major and local streets. Per Act 51 of 1951 the City has 11.72 miles of major streets (highlighted purple on the map) and 16.54 miles of local streets, with a total of 28.26 street miles. (Other street maps in this section show the street names more clearly.)

**Act 51 Street System**



**Federal Aid Eligible – The National Functional Classification**

In addition to the State of Michigan’s Act 51 system for funding City streets, the federal government uses a system called the National Functional Classification, which distinguishes streets into the following categories:

**Interstate:** Interstates accommodate large volumes of traffic at high speeds with access points and limited interchanges at major interesting roadways. The City of Buchanan is about ten miles away from I-80/I-90 via U.S. Route 31, and is about 19 miles away from I-94 via U.S. Route 12.

**Arterials:** Arterials are higher capacity roadways that move traffic from collector roads to interstates. Access along arterials is usually limited in order to increase traffic flow and level of service. Often, there are opportunities to enhance the safety and performance of arterials through reductions in conflict points and enhancements to traffic signal networks. Arterials have been broken into two subcategories: principal arterials and minor arterials.

**(a) Principal Arterials:** Principal Arterials typically carry higher traffic volumes and are spaced further apart than minor arterials. The City of Buchanan does not contain any principal arterials, but less than two miles away are two exits to U.S. Route 31, which is a principal arterial.

**(b) Minor Arterials:** Minor Arterials should provide more access points along a given route than primary arterials, and will generally accommodate lower traffic volumes. There are two streets within the City of Buchanan that are classified as minor arterials: (1) Front St east of Redbud Trail continuing on outside the City as Niles-Buchanan Rd to U.S. Route 31 and Niles, and (2) Redbud Trail south of Front St continuing on outside the City to U.S. Route 12.

**Collectors:** Collector roads are typically two-lane roadways that provide access to adjacent arterials while linking land uses such as residential neighborhoods, parks and schools, to one another. Speed limits on collector roads are lower, usually between 25-35 mph.

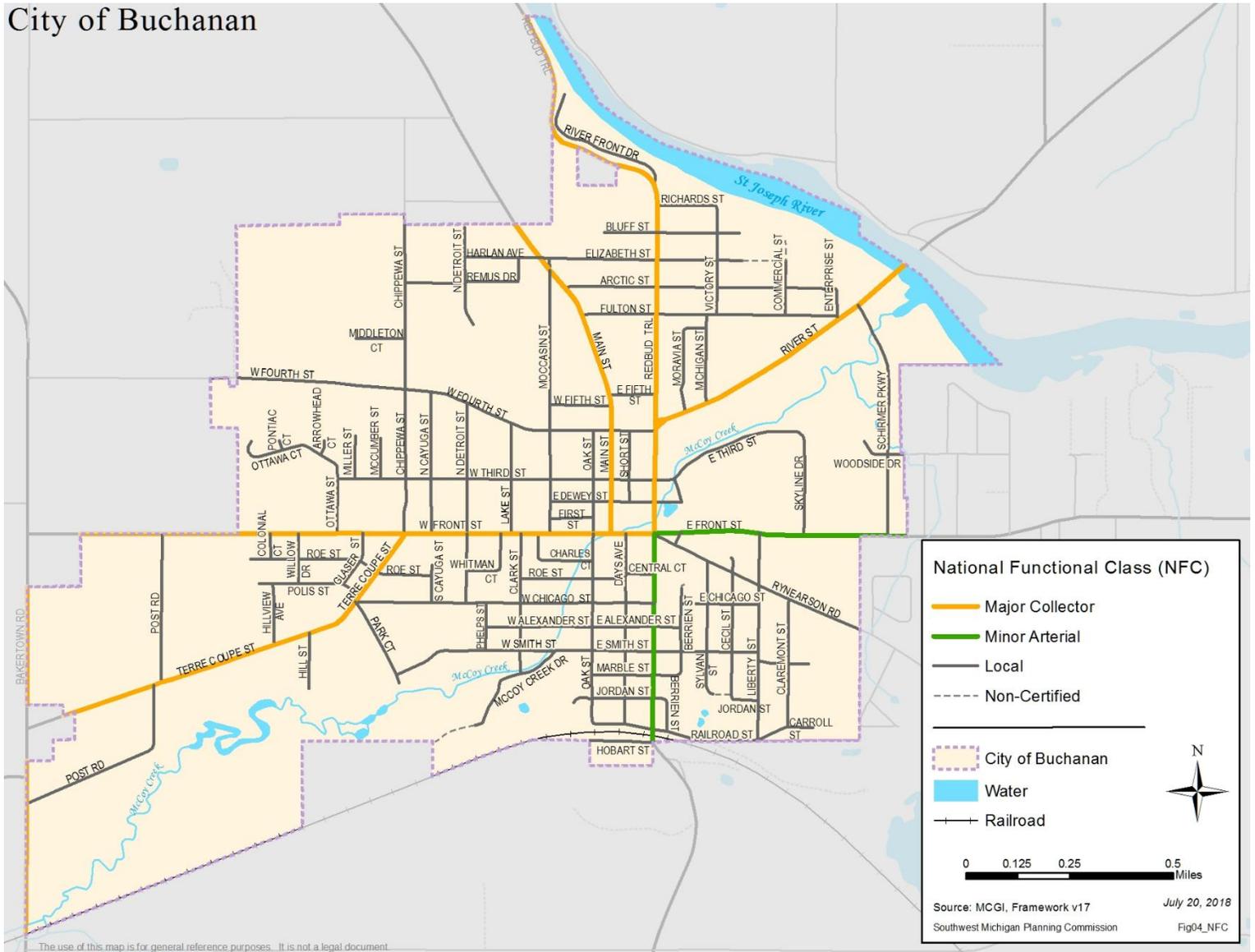
**(a) Major Collectors:** The following street in the City of Buchanan are major collectors: Redbud Trail north of Front St, River St, Front St west of Redbud Trail, Main St north of Front St, and Terre Coupe St.

**(b) Minor Collectors:** The City of Buchanan does not have any minor collectors.

**Local Roads:** Local roads provide direct access to adjacent land uses and are mostly located in residential areas. The posted speed limit is typically 25 mph. These are the roads that are not federal aid eligible.

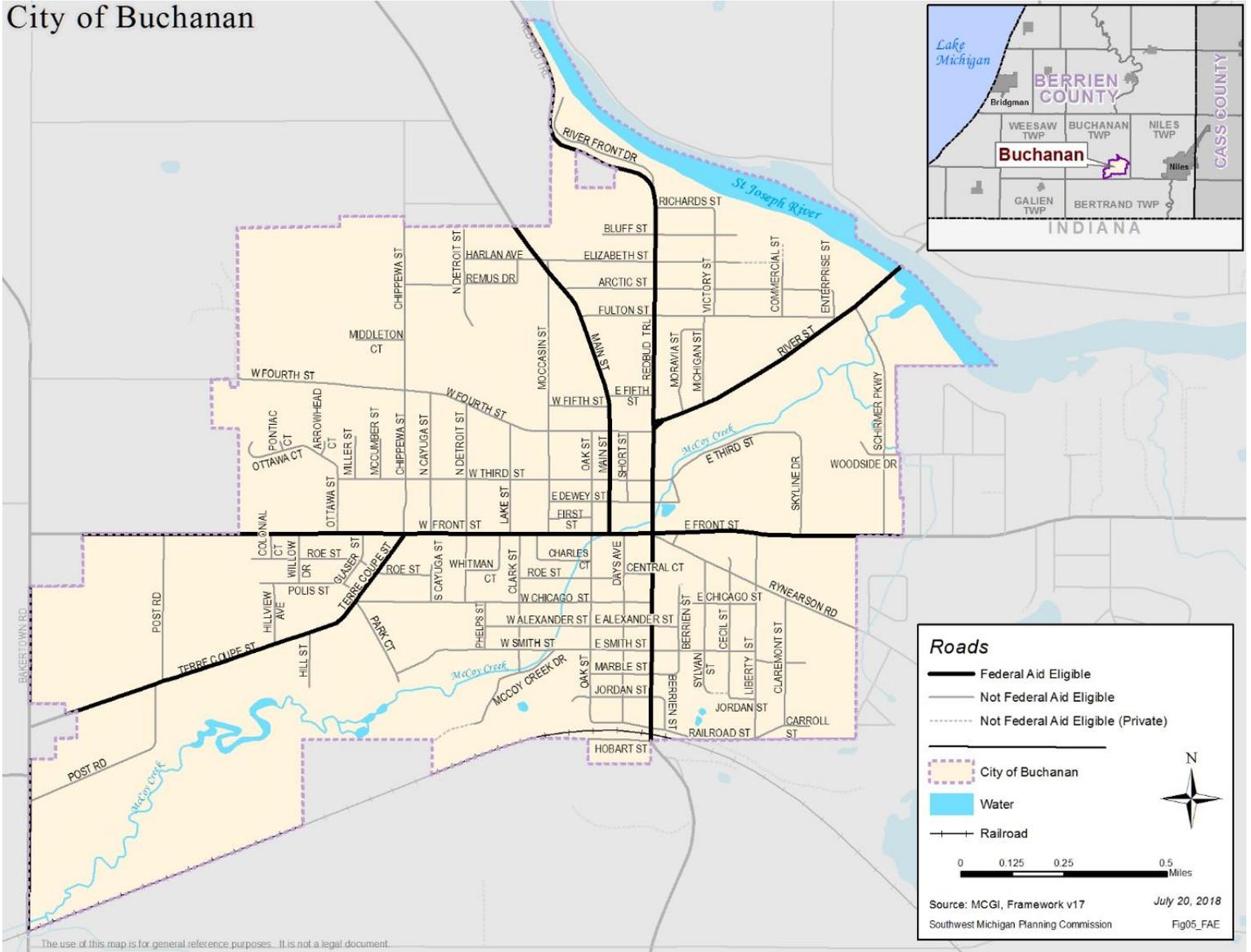
### National Functional Classification

## City of Buchanan



### Federal Aid Eligible Roads

## City of Buchanan



**Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Funding**

As a member of the Niles-Buchanan-Cass Area Transportation Study (NATS) the City of Buchanan can submit projects utilizing federal Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) money for federal-aid eligible road projects. This funding can be used for road improvement projects such as resurfacing and reconstruction and may also be used on pedestrian, bicycle, transit infrastructure and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements.

**Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Funding**

The federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program provides a flexible funding source for transportation projects and programs that help improve air quality and reduce congestion. State and local governments can use CMAQ funds to support efforts to meet National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) under the Clean Air Act in both nonattainment and maintenance areas for carbon monoxide, ozone, and particulate matter.

- *Nonattainment areas* are those where air pollution levels exceed NAAQS.
- *Maintenance areas* are those that were out of compliance with NAAQS for these pollutants but now meet the standards.

**Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Funding**

The federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a competitive grant program that funds projects like bike paths, streetscapes, and historic preservation of transportation facilities that enhance Michigan’s intermodal transportation system and provide safe alternative transportation options. These investments support place-based economic development by offering transportation choices, promoting walkability, and improving the quality of life.

**Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Funding**

Federal law provides funding for infrastructure projects, law enforcement, education, and encouragement activities aimed at enabling and encouraging children to walk and bike to school. This program is called Safe Routes to School (SRTS). This program encourages a healthy and active lifestyle at an early age, and improves safety, as well as reducing traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of elementary and middle schools. Schools serving children in grades K-8 are eligible for SRTS funding, which is available on a competitive grant basis.

**Select Highway Information**

**U.S. Route 12.** The primary east-west highway in the area is U.S. Route 12. It does not pass through the City, but it is only one mile away to the south.



**U.S. Route 31.** Three interchanges for the limited-access north-south U.S. Route 31 are within two to three miles of the City, affording excellent access to north-south destinations.



**Traffic Volumes**

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Traffic Engineering staff routinely performs traffic counts mid-April through November on roads throughout Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties. This service is free of charge to member jurisdictions within the three counties. The data is collected by pneumatic tubes which are stretched across sections of roadways. Traffic data is also obtained from other entities and included in the traffic count database as a public

service. Find up-to-date traffic counts here [www.swmpc.org/traffic\\_counts.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/traffic_counts.asp). In addition to being a vital tool for transportation planning and travel forecasting, traffic count information can be used by:

- Transportation engineers and planners throughout the region to identify existing traffic problems and solutions
- Site selection for local economic development
- The Michigan State Legislature and U.S. Congress to make decisions regarding the need for and allocation of state and federal funds

In Buchanan, the streets listed in the table below have had traffic counts taken over the last 13 years. East Front Street has the most traffic of the streets measured at an average daily total of 12,723. Red Bud Trail and Bakertown Road have counts from 4,000 to 6,000 average daily totals.

**Table 13. Traffic Counts**

Street	Limits	Average Daily Total	Date of Count
Bakertown Road	Between Galien Buchanan Road and Front Street	4,044	9/20/2010
Redbud Trail	South of Buchanan City Limits	6,089	6/25/2009
East Front Street	Between Red Bud and Main	12,723	6/1/2014
Main Street	North of Front Street	1,498	6/4/2007
Red Bud Trail	North of Fourth Street	5,471	6/1/2014
River Street	East of Red Bud	3,005	7/28/2014

*Source: Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Traffic Counts*

**Public Transit**

There are several independently operated public transit providers in Berrien County that provide service to residents. Most often, these services are focused on serving the needs of the elderly, disabled, and people with low incomes. Age differences among older adults must be considered in transportation planning. People between the ages of sixty and seventy can have a different set of needs compared with people age eighty and above. For older adults who are unable or choose not to drive, support for community transportation options will become increasingly important. A new mix of services including traditional public transit, door-to-door transportation and door-through-door transportation will need to be considered to meet the needs. For example, there may be older adults with limited mobility who no longer can drive and have no family or friends and need more assistance than what traditional public transportation can provide.

**Dial-A-Ride**

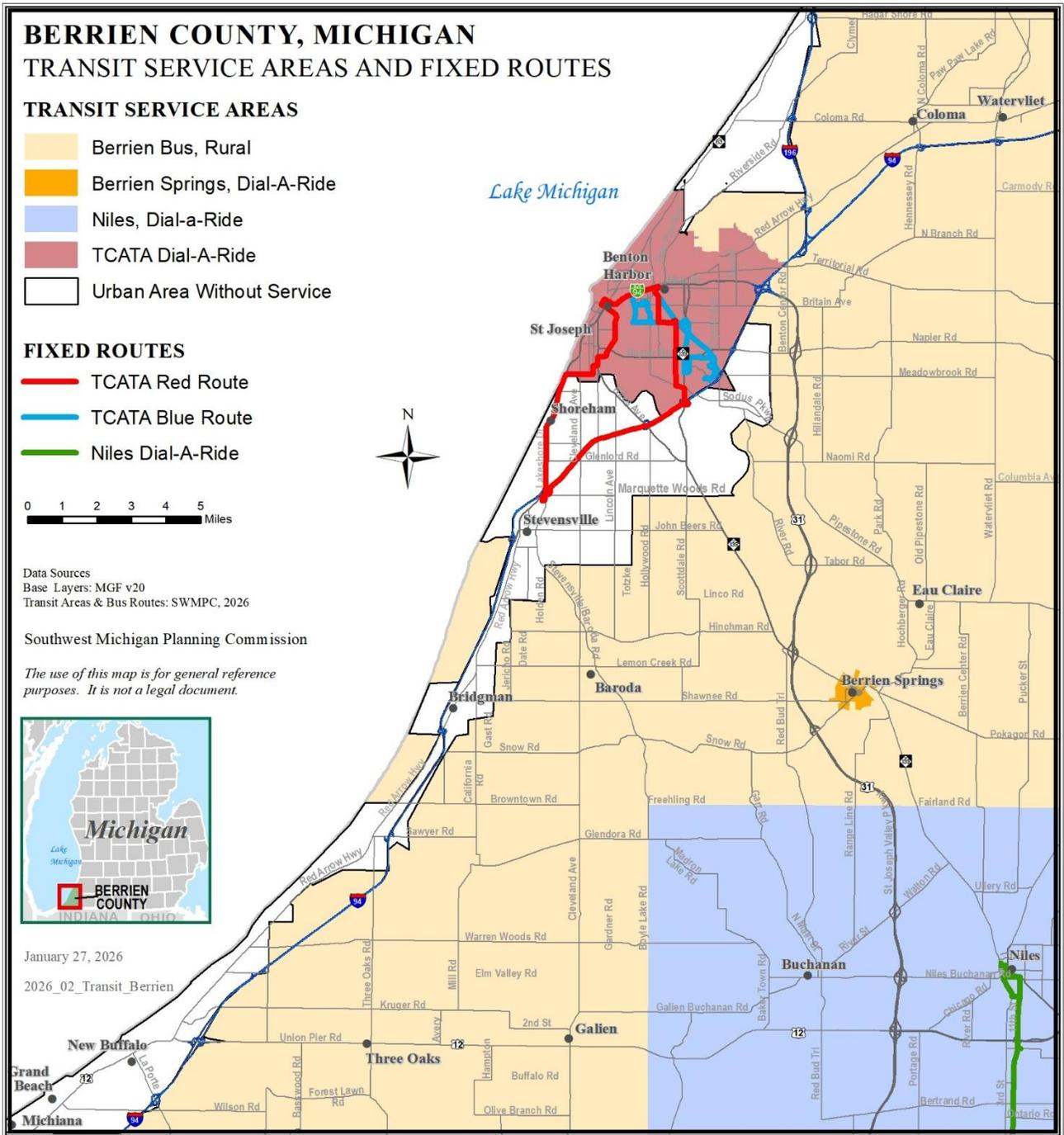
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**Berrien Bus**

The Berrien Bus provides transportation to non-urban areas not serviced by a Dial-A-Ride and has both a semi-fixed bussing route as well as a demand-response service. Berrien Bus is Berrien County’s designated rural transportation provider and receives federal financial assistance. Berrien Bus receives no local financial support from a local millage. Transit routes service Buchanan, Benton Harbor/St. Joseph, and Niles. Since Fares are half price for seniors and disabled community members.



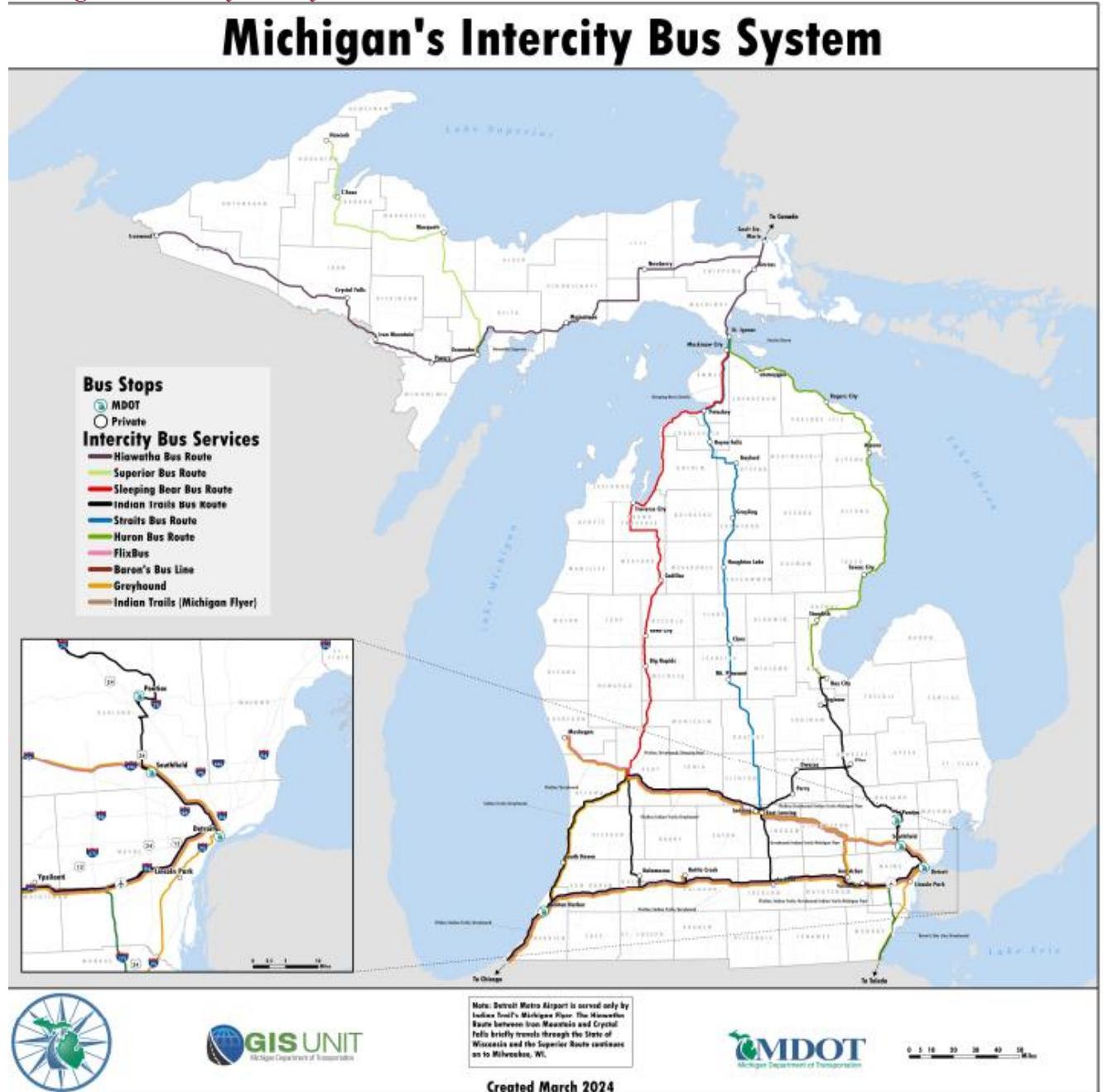
### Public Transit Service in Berrien County



### Intercity Bus Service

Intercity bus service provides scheduled service to cities over much longer distances than local transit agencies. Greyhound, Indian Trails, and Superior provide direct service from the Benton Harbor Transportation Center to various destinations that include Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, Holland, Grand Rapids, Elkhart and Chicago. The Benton Harbor Transportation Center is located approximately eighteen miles from the City of Buchanan on M-139.

### Michigan's Intercity Bus System



**Non-Motorized**

Sidewalks, bike lanes, trails and play an important role in transportation, as they provide a safe path for people to walk and bike. Sidewalks and trails can aid road safety by minimizing interaction between pedestrians and motorized traffic. The City of Buchanan has an existing network of sidewalks along many of its streets. Many communities are working to develop asset management plans to assess the condition of sidewalks and create a schedule for repair/ replacement. On April 12, 2021 the City Commission unanimously passed a resolution to adopt a Complete Streets Policy that encourages all infrastructure projects to consider all users of any age and ability especially as it relates to bicyclists, pedestrians and public transit users.

**Walk Score**

Walkability is a measure of how friendly a community is to walk in. It has health, environmental, and economic benefits. The website [walkscore.com](http://walkscore.com) generates a “Walk Score” of 78 for a person in downtown Buchanan. The Walk Score is based on how far someone would need to walk to get to various amenities: dining, groceries, shopping, errands (such as pharmacy and post office), parks, schools, and culture and entertainment venues. Walk Scores up to 49 are considered “Car-Dependent: Most errands require a car” and walk scores between 70 and 89 are considered “Very Walkable: most errands can be accomplished on foot.” “Downtown Walk Scores” are shown in table 16 to compare how walkable downtown Buchanan is with other area downtowns.

**Table 14. Downtown Walk Scores**

Community	Score	Description
Galien	13	Car-Dependent: Most errands require a car
Edwardsburg	33	Car-Dependent: Most errands require a car
Coloma	58	Somewhat Walkable: Some errands can be accomplished on foot
Berrien Springs	71	Very Walkable: Most errands can be accomplished on foot
<b>Buchanan</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>Very Walkable: Most errands can be accomplished on foot</b>
Dowagiac	79	Very Walkable: Most errands can be accomplished on foot
Niles	82	Very Walkable: Most errands can be accomplished on foot

**Bicycle Lanes/Bike Parking**

The City does not currently have a network of bicycle lanes. Currently bicyclists share the road with motorists. As the City looks forward, bicycle lanes could offer the public a safer non-motorized transportation alternative.

Bike racks provide additional parking capacity for customers to visit local businesses. Bicycle parking not only invites cyclists in, but shows the town and business values sustainability, which is an increasingly important factor in the decisions of consumers. Bike racks should be located in the downtown and at destinations such as farmers market, parks, schools, retail areas and apartments.



**Multi-Use Trails**

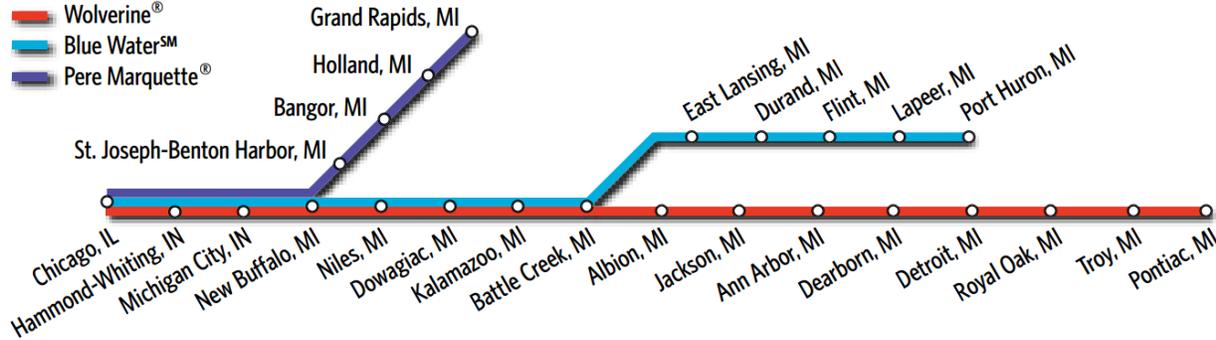
The McCoy Creek Trail has a rich historical background, which begins in the 1820’s. At this time, 13 mills were located along the McCoy Creek generating energy for the City of Buchanan. The McCoy Creek Trail is a multi-use path for walking and biking. The trail is currently four miles one way, including loops, which branch off the main path. It extends from the E.B Clark woods on Schirmer to the Buchanan Farmers Market and includes several decks that overlook McCoy Creek. The path has some handicap access points and portions of which have more stable ground usable by wheelchair. Three access points and parking spaces are available: off of Schirmer Parkway, Days Avenue, and from the Memorial Fields Athletic Complex. The City has plans to extend McCoy Creek Trail to Red Bud Park and also to connect to the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail in Niles along Walton Road.

Add Berrien County Trails Master Plan information here

**Passenger Rail**

While the private vehicle is the predominant mode of travel to destinations across county and state boundaries, passenger rail options are available to residents in the City of Buchanan. Amtrak provides passenger rail service via three Michigan service lines. All three lines have a western terminus in Chicago where passengers can change trains to get to any passenger rail station in the United States. The closest passenger rail station to Buchanan is the Niles Station (6 miles away; about 15 minutes by car). It is served by the *Wolverine* and *Blue Water* services.

**WOLVERINE SERVICE, BLUE WATER and PERE MARQUETTE**



**Wolverine.** Amtrak’s *Wolverine* service connects stations between Chicago and Detroit, and on to Pontiac. See the chart above for a full listing of all of the cities served by the *Wolverine*.

**Blue Water.** Amtrak’s *Blue Water* service has the same stops between Chicago and Battle Creek as the *Wolverine* service (see above). Beyond Battle Creek, the *Blue Water* also services East Lansing, Durand, Flint, Lapeer, and Port Huron.

**Pere Marquette.** Amtrak’s *Pere Marquette* service provides daily service between Chicago and Grand Rapids, with stops in St. Joseph, Bangor, and Holland. Trains do not service the Niles Station. The service is limited to one trip daily leaving Grand Rapids in the morning and returning home from Chicago in the evening.

**Amtrak Thruway Bus Connection.** Amtrak Thruway Bus Connections are available at several train stations in Michigan and Chicago to offer additional destinations to passengers. See the Amtrak Michigan Services Schedule for additional information.

**Commuter Rail**

The closest interurban commuter rail service for Buchanan is the South Shore Line, an electrically powered line operated by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District between Millennium Station in downtown Chicago and the South Bend Airport. The closest stations to Buchanan are the South Bend Airport (13 miles away; about 20 to 25 minutes away by car) and the next station to the west, Hudson Lake (14 miles away; about 25 to 30 minutes away by car). Residents can use this option as part of their travel plans to points west as far as downtown Chicago.



*Life is hard. The train is easy.*

**Aviation**

**Southwest Michigan Regional Airport (KBEH).**

The Southwest Michigan Regional Airport (SWMRA) is the largest airport in Berrien County, and the only all-weather airport in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. The airport houses over 60 privately owned aircraft and is home to several corporate aircraft, including Whirlpool International Corporation fleet. Over 400 companies from all over the United States and Canada use the airport annually.



The airport has air cargo activity with UPS flights and other local charter operators delivering material for just-in-time manufacturing. In addition, the airport is important in the times of medical emergencies; either transferring critically ill patients or as organ donor transport. The U.S. Coast Guard utilizes the airport for refueling during operations on Lake Michigan. The Southwest Michigan Regional Airport offers free parking located at the airport terminal. There are rental car services available.

The SWMRA is governed by the Southwest Michigan Regional Airport Authority, established in 1997, which is responsible for airport operations. The airport authority is comprised of six municipalities: Cities of Benton Harbor and St. Joseph, St. Joseph Charter Township (including the Village of Shoreham), Lincoln Charter Township, Royalton Township, and Benton Charter Township – all of which contribute a millage. The latest economic impact estimate conducted (2014) by Michigan Department of Transportation showed the airport's contribution to the local economy to be \$30 million.

**Other Nearby Airports.** There are a few other general aviation airports in the region, none of which are all-weather facilities. Andrews University Airpark, which is owned by Andrews University, is located in Berrien Springs. Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport is owned by and located in the City of Niles which has about 30 aircraft based there.

**Scheduled Air Passenger Service**

Within 120 miles of the City of Buchanan there are six airports that offer scheduled airline passenger services. South Bend Regional Airport is 13 miles from the City and provides daily non-stop domestic flights to Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Phoenix, New York Minneapolis and several cities in Florida.

Major public commercial air travel occurs through Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD), Chicago Midway International Airport (MDW), Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GRR) in Grand Rapids, Fort Wayne International Airport (FWA), and Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport (AZO).



**Table 15. Airport Distance to Buchanan**

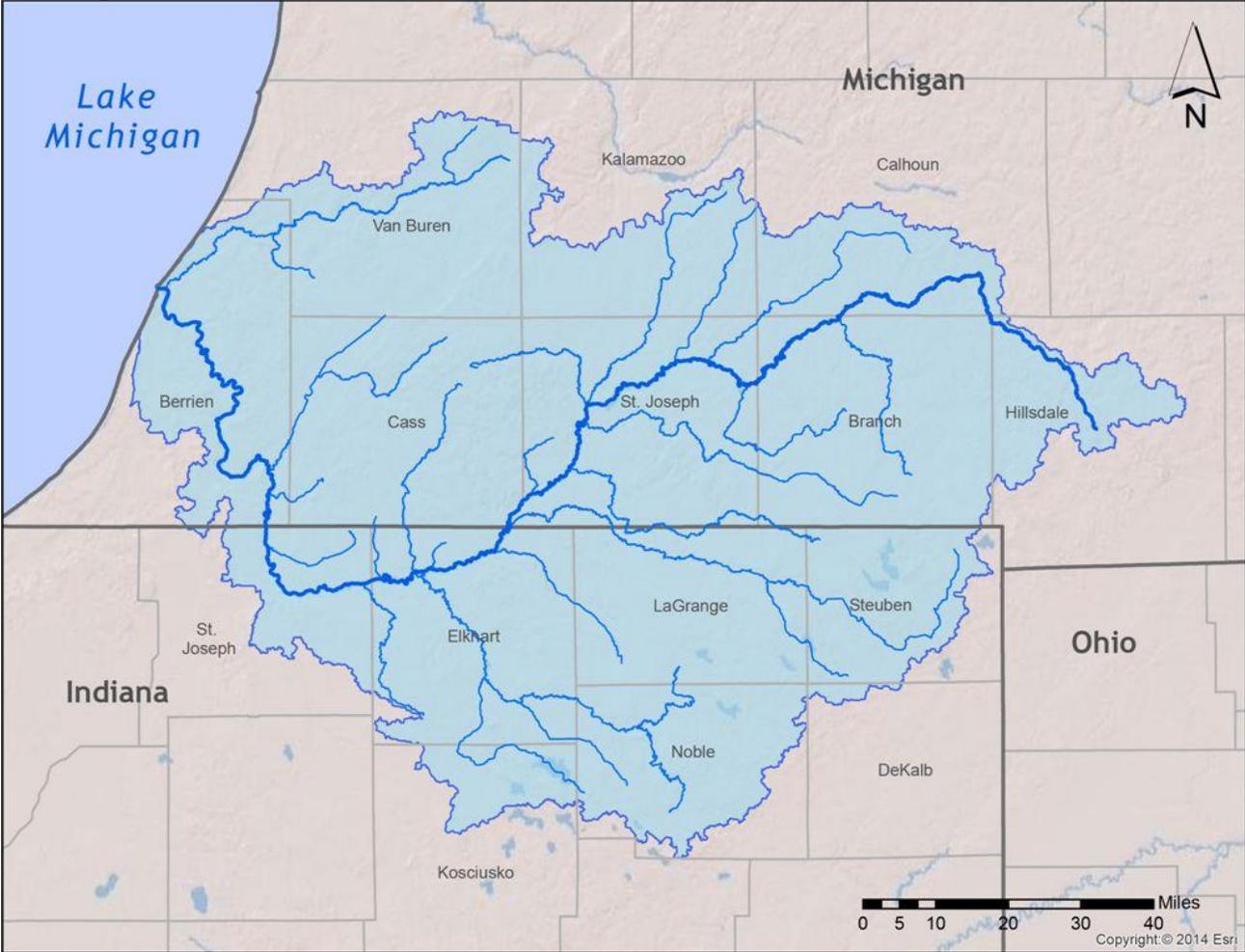
Airport	Miles from Buchanan
South Bend Regional Airport	13
Kalamazoo International Airport	70
Midway International Airport	95
Gerald Ford International Airport	110
Fort Wayne International Airport	110
O'Hare International Airport	115

**NATURAL FEATURES**

**Water**

Water is a defining feature of Buchanan. The St. Joseph River flows along the City’s northeast boundary. More information about the St. Joseph River watershed, the third largest river basin in Michigan, is available in the St. Joseph River Watershed Management Plan of 2005 – available online: [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/ess-nps-wmp-st-joe\\_209205\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/ess-nps-wmp-st-joe_209205_7.pdf).

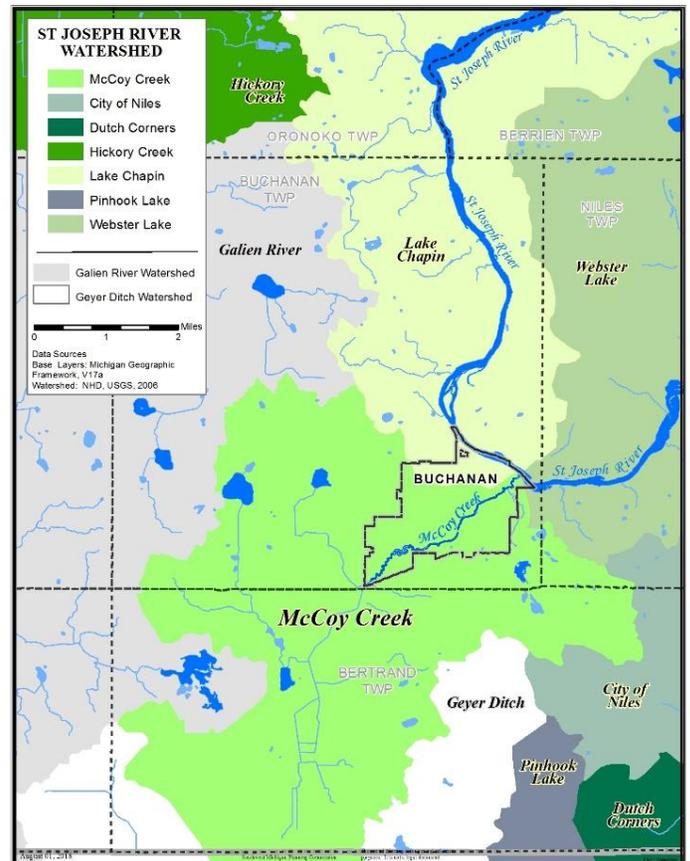
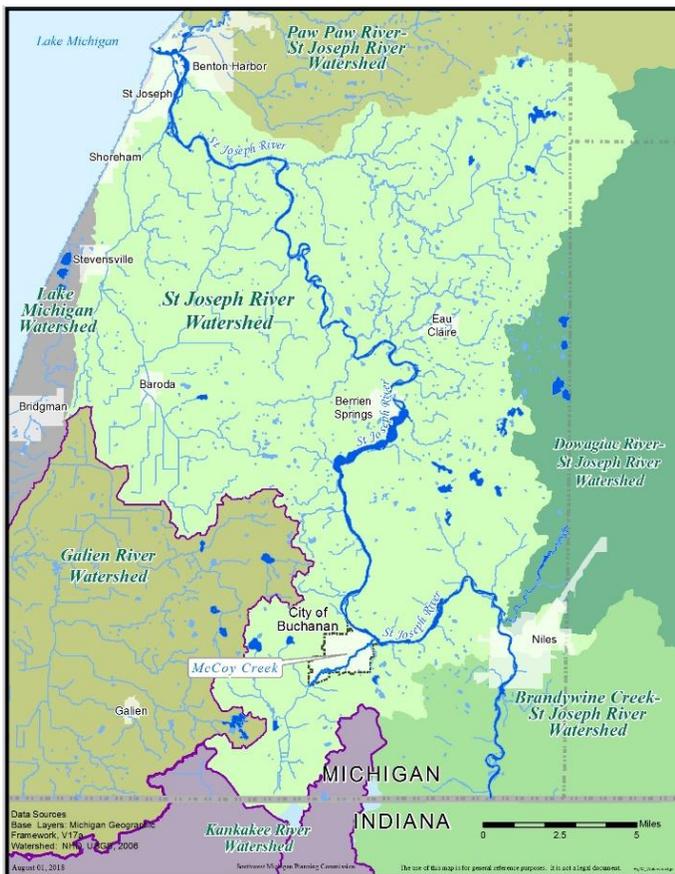
**St. Joseph River Watershed**



McCoy Creek flows from the southwest corner of the City, meandering to the northeast for almost 8 miles before it empties into the St. Joseph River. McCoy Creek originates in northern Indiana and Bertrand Township, Michigan. The McCoy Creek watershed covers 22 square miles and is designated as a Type 1 Trout stream by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The City of Buchanan removed an adjustable weir on the creek and also restored a large portion of the creek channel. In fact the City was awarded the “Outstanding Civil Engineering Achievement Award” for the McCoy Creek Restoration Project by the American Society of Civil Engineers Southwest Michigan Branch. In 2013, the McCoy Creek Restoration Project improved the hydrology of the Mill Race while enhancing fish habitat. A white oak lunger structure and large woody debris were installed at multiple locations to provide fish resting areas. Along with this project, the Mill Race at Pears Mill is now operational while preserving the trout stream. Because McCoy Creek is a designated trout stream, Buchanan received grants from the MDNR Fisheries Division and a local fly-fishing group helped fund the project. Buchanan had several stakeholders in this collaborative project, including the Buchanan Preservation Society and community volunteers.



### McCoy Creek Watershed



### Wetlands/Floodplains

Wetlands and floodplains are extremely valuable resources. Buchanan has wetlands scattered throughout the area. See the wetlands map, further into this section. The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA) defines a wetland as “land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp, or marsh...” "Wetland" is the collective term for marshes, swamps, bogs, and similar areas often found between open water and upland areas. All wetlands located within five-hundred (500) feet of a lake, stream, or river are regulated by the State of Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, as well as those in excess of five (5) acres in size which are not contiguous or located within five-hundred (500) feet of a lake, stream, or river.

A river, stream, lake, or drain may on occasion overflow onto the surrounding banks and inundate adjacent land areas with floodwater. The land that is temporarily inundated by water is defined as a floodplain. In Michigan, the term floodplain has come to mean the land area that will be inundated by the overflow of water resulting from a 100-year flood (a flood which has a 1% chance of occurring any given year).

In the past, people viewed wetlands and floodplains as wastelands. Wetlands were drained and converted to farmland or filled for development. Attitudes today towards wetlands and floodplains have changed with the discovery that they are valuable natural resources providing many important benefits to people, wildlife and water quality.

With increasing development in the floodplain, open spaces, and wetlands, our land has lost the ability to soak up rain. Buildings and pavement that have made the land increasingly impervious are now replacing areas that were once effective sponges storing precipitation. As a result, floods are becoming larger and more frequent. Wetland and floodplain protection is extremely important for the health, safety and welfare of residents. Especially because so many wetlands have been lost since pre-settlement times, in fact 30% loss within the City of Buchanan. Loss of wetlands has severe negative effects on the water quality and the ability to mitigate flooding. With only 70% of wetlands remaining in the City of Buchanan, it is imperative to protect these remaining resources from development and encroachment.

**Wetlands and floodplains...**

- Hold excess water allowing it to be slowly released into lakes and rivers, and seep into groundwater aquifers – which lessen the impact of flooding after large events
- Filter pollutants before entering lakes, rivers, and groundwater aquifers
- Give time for sediment to settle out, thereby keeping it out of water bodies
- Support important wildlife habitat and are frequently used by humans for recreation

How land is developed impacts the quality and quantity of our water. Land uses from any part of the watershed, such as polluted runoff from homes and farms, eventually affect the health of the whole watershed.

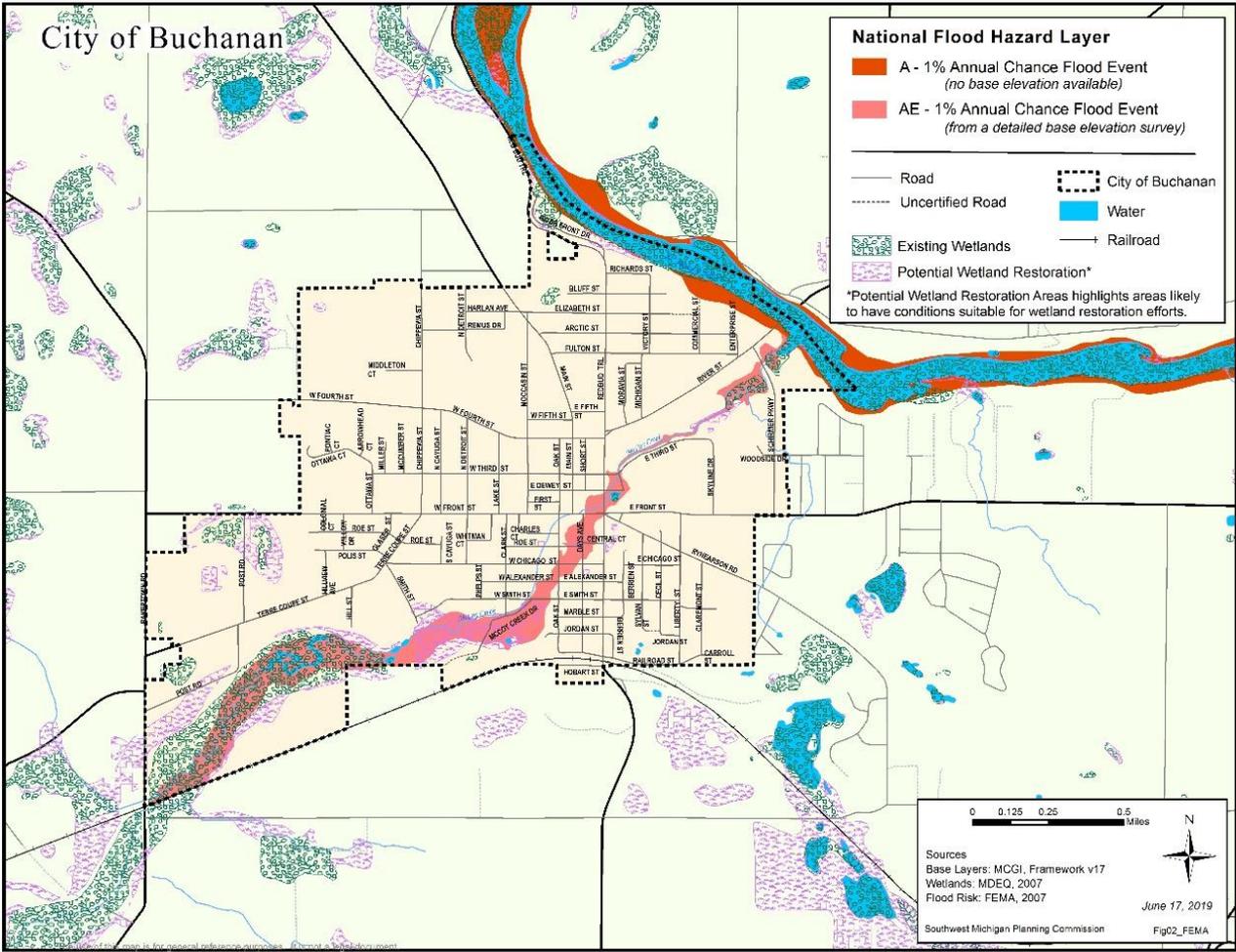
**Lost Wetlands...**Of the estimated 11 million acres of wetlands that were in Michigan 150 years ago, only 3 million remain.

**Table 18. Wetland Acreage**

Acres in Buchanan City	
Lost Wetland/Potential Restoration	67
Existing Wetlands	153
<i>Source: Michigan Department of EGLE</i>	

The map shows lost and existing wetlands. Lost wetlands are labeled “Potential Wetland Restoration Areas,” which are red on the map. Wetlands are and were significant for filtering sediment and nutrients (which cause algae and nuisance weed growth), and for mitigating flooding. Loss of wetlands and wetland function are extremely detrimental – causing increased water pollution and more flooding. Floodplains are located along McCoy Creek and the St. Joseph River. Much of the property in the floodplain within the city is undeveloped and much is owned publicly or by quasi-public conservation interests.

**Wetlands/Floodplains**



## Natural Resource Stewardship

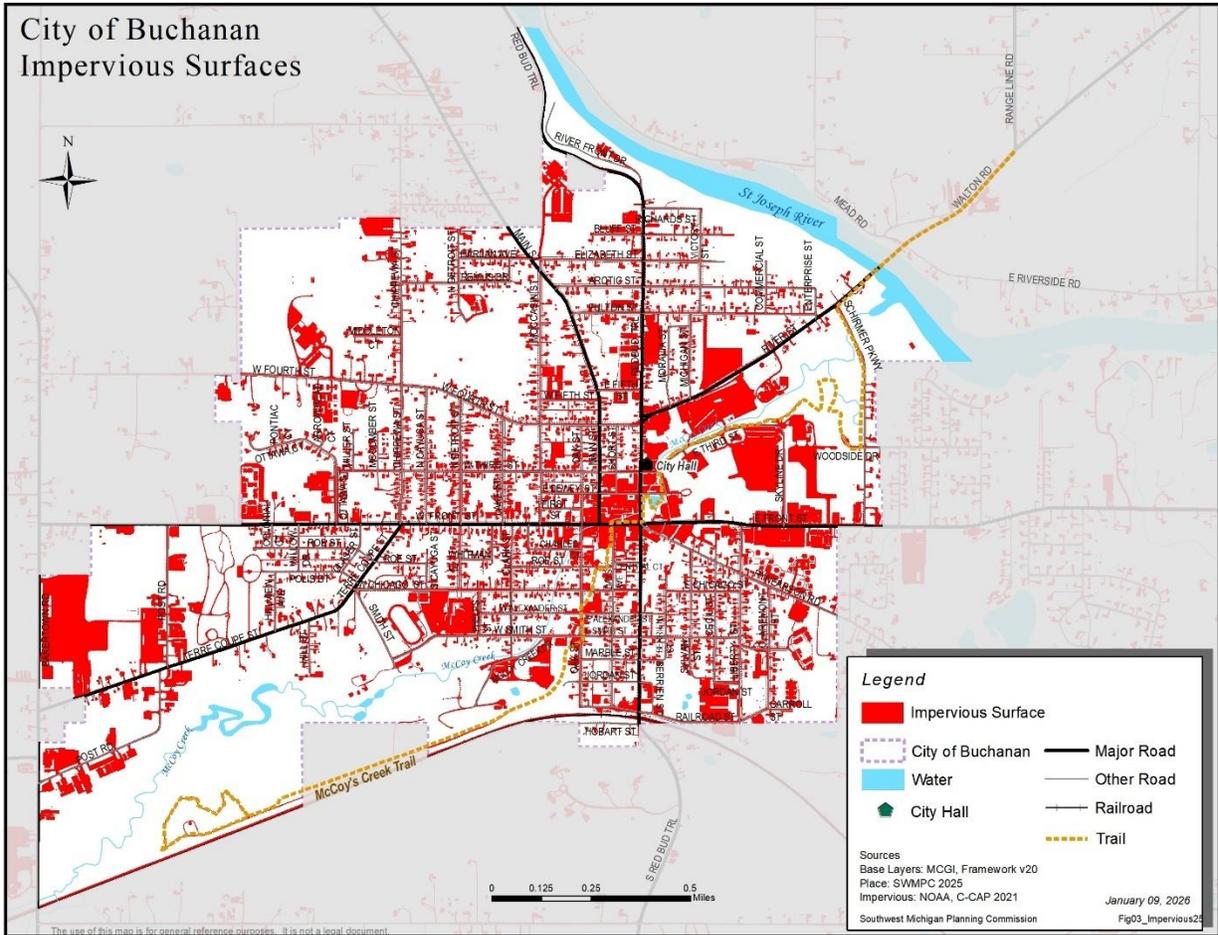
### Stormwater Management

As development and imperviousness increase (due to construction of roads, rooftops and parking lots), the area available for infiltration decreases. Consequently, more rainfall becomes stormwater runoff, which carries pollutants to nearby waterways such as chemicals, oil, grease, salt, etc. Pollution of our water may not be immediate, but as the pollutants keep washing into our water, they may become unusable for fishing, swimming, canoeing, etc. Even drinking water can be affected.

**Traditional attitudes** about managing stormwater were to move the water off the site as quickly as possible with curbs, gutters, and storm sewers. **Today**, effective stormwater management practices include decreasing the total amount of stormwater runoff, slowing down the flow and allowing water to soak naturally into the ground by using low impact development practices such as native plants, rain gardens, and riparian buffers.

With development there is an increase in the amount of impervious surfaces which leads to a drastic rise in the amount of runoff and a decrease in the amount of water being returned back into the ground to provide drinking water supplies. Stormwater management should be concerned with controlling both the quality and quantity of water moving off a developed site.

**Impervious surfaces** include rooftops, sidewalks, roads, and parking lots. These surfaces prevent precipitation and melt water from infiltrating soils. Soils compacted by new construction can also be highly impervious.



Low Impact Development techniques should be utilized to first protect natural features, natural drainage ways and existing topography. The amount of impervious surfaces in new construction and redevelopment projects should be minimized whenever possible to protect water quality. Second, LID techniques should be used to slow and reduce runoff by maximizing opportunities for filtration and infiltration of water throughout the site. This will decrease the need for large detention or retention areas. See [www.swmpc.org/lid.asp](http://www.swmpc.org/lid.asp) for information on implementing LID in new and redevelopments. Also any land disturbance within 500 feet of a waterbody/wetlands or greater than one acre needs a soil erosion/sedimentation control permit from the Berrien County Drain Commissioner’s office.

The goals of these practices are to improve water quality by filtering and reducing polluted run-off that degrades habitat and flow in nearby streams, rivers, and lakes.



**RAIN GARDENS or BIORETENTION BASINS**

An excellent example of adding beauty with a purpose. Native plants are planted in small depressions to temporarily hold, soak in, and filter runoff that flows from parking lots and rooftops.



**VEGETATED SWALES**

These are shallow channels which are densely planted with a variety of native grasses, shrubs, and/or trees designed to slow, filter, and infiltrate runoff.



**BMPs in Action  
WIGHTMAN RAIN GARDEN  
2303 Pipestone Road,  
Benton Harbor, MI**

This large rain garden is planted with native shrubs, perennials, and flowers, which not only improve Ox Creek, but also this business's curb appeal. Employees were involved in designing and planting the garden. This rain garden was partially funded with state grant dollars by a company committed to a cleaner and healthier Ox Creek.



**RIPARIAN BUFFERS**

Areas of land that exists between low, aquatic areas such as rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands, and higher, dry upland areas planted with native plants, shrubs and/or trees. These plants slow and filter runoff before it reaches the waterbody.



**RAIN BARRELS or CISTERNS**

These structures are designed to intercept and store runoff from rooftops allowing for its reuse. They provide a supplemental water supply often used for irrigation.



**PERMEABLE PAVING**

Alternatives to traditional pavement include pervious asphalt, pervious concrete, interlocking pavers, and plastic grid pavers, which allow rain and snowmelt to seep through the surface down to underlying layers of soil and gravel.



**GREEN/VEGETATED ROOFS and WALLS**

Roofs and exterior walls can be designed to support living vegetation. The vegetations slows and filters runoff and also provides heating and cooling energy benefits, increases lifespan, reduces heat island effect, and enhances aesthetics.

**Green Infrastructure/Native Vegetation**

There are features in any community that many residents would readily recognize as important to the character of the area and to their personal quality of life. Some of these features may be cultural, such as a downtown business district, historic buildings, lighthouses, or other similar man-made features. Other features used to connect a community to its residents will be natural resources such as lakes, woods, wildlife, scenic views, and other similar features. How these elements are included in the fabric of a community can have a profound influence on their value. Clearly there are some resources, which, if lost, would significantly detract from the environment and the community as a whole.

Natural features such as native vegetation, woodlands, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors add to the natural features that lure people to the Buchanan. Removing these natural features will not only alter the landscape of a community but it can also lead to water quality issues such as increased runoff, erosion and flooding. Development should be discouraged where significant natural features exist.

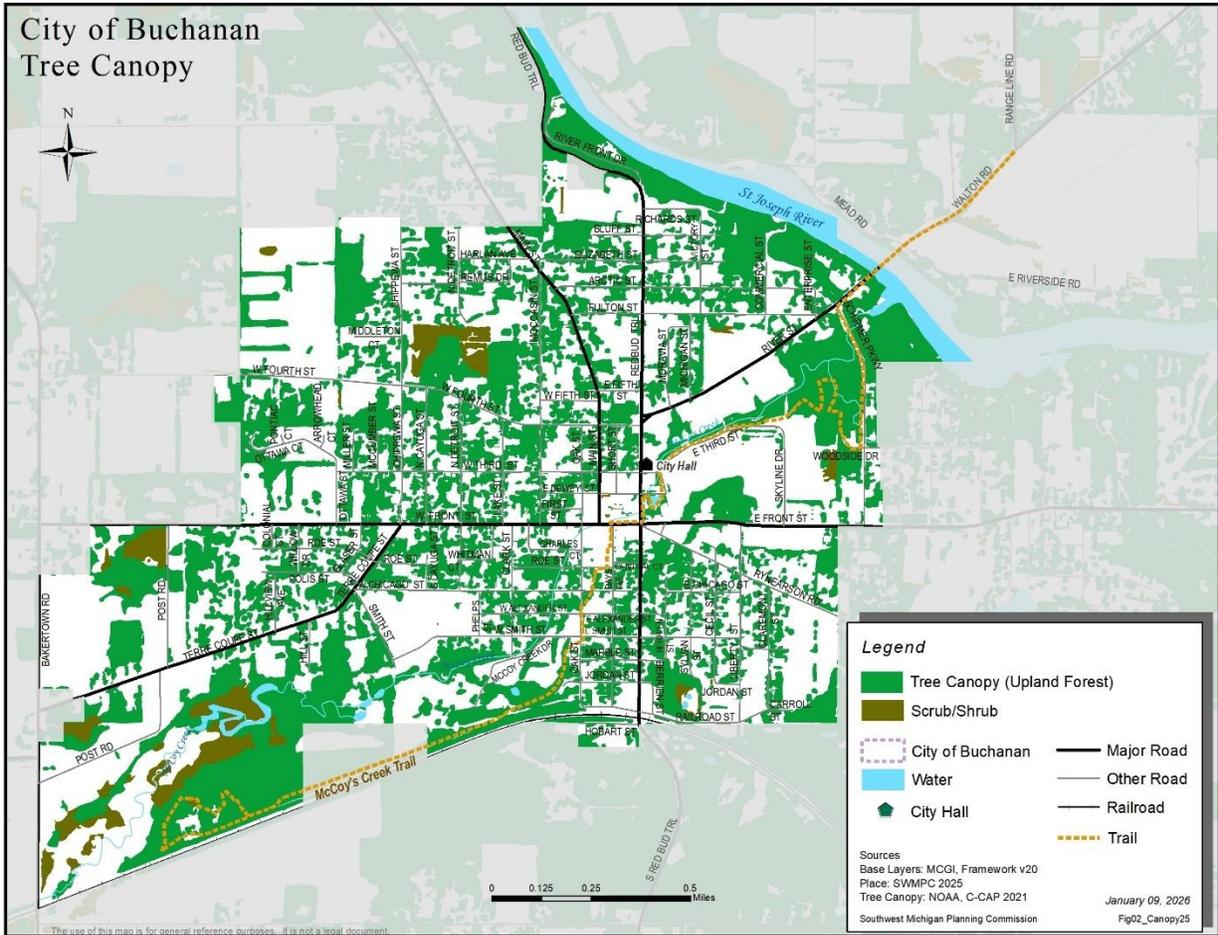
Native vegetation refers to the plant life that exists as a natural part of the landscape. It is increasingly recommended that native plants be used because of their performance, site enhancement, and life cycle cost benefits. Native plants typically cost more initially (depending on local availability); however, they are more cost-effective in the long run because they require less water and fertilizer, and are more resistant to local pests and diseases. Native plants are also known to be very effective in managing storm water because many species have deep root systems which stabilize soil and facilitate the infiltration of storm water runoff. Native plants provide habitat for birds, butterflies and other wildlife, help to buffer noise pollution, filter air pollution and provide us with stunning landscapes. Native plants can be incorporated into individual home, commercial and industrial sites to add water quality recharge benefits as well as aesthetic benefits to the landscape.

**Natural resource areas perform important functions such as:**

- Filtering out water pollutants
- Recharging groundwater supplies
- Removing air pollutants
- Providing recreational opportunities
- Providing wildlife habitat
- Enhancing the overall quality of life of a community

Green infrastructure is a connected network of natural areas and other open spaces planned and managed to conserve natural ecosystems and the services that they provide. These lands provide multiple benefits to people and wildlife such as maintaining clean air and water, providing areas for recreation and providing wildlife habitat. Green infrastructure elements can be in urban, suburban and rural areas and may or may not be open to the public. Green infrastructure is essential to the health, safety and welfare of the area residents.

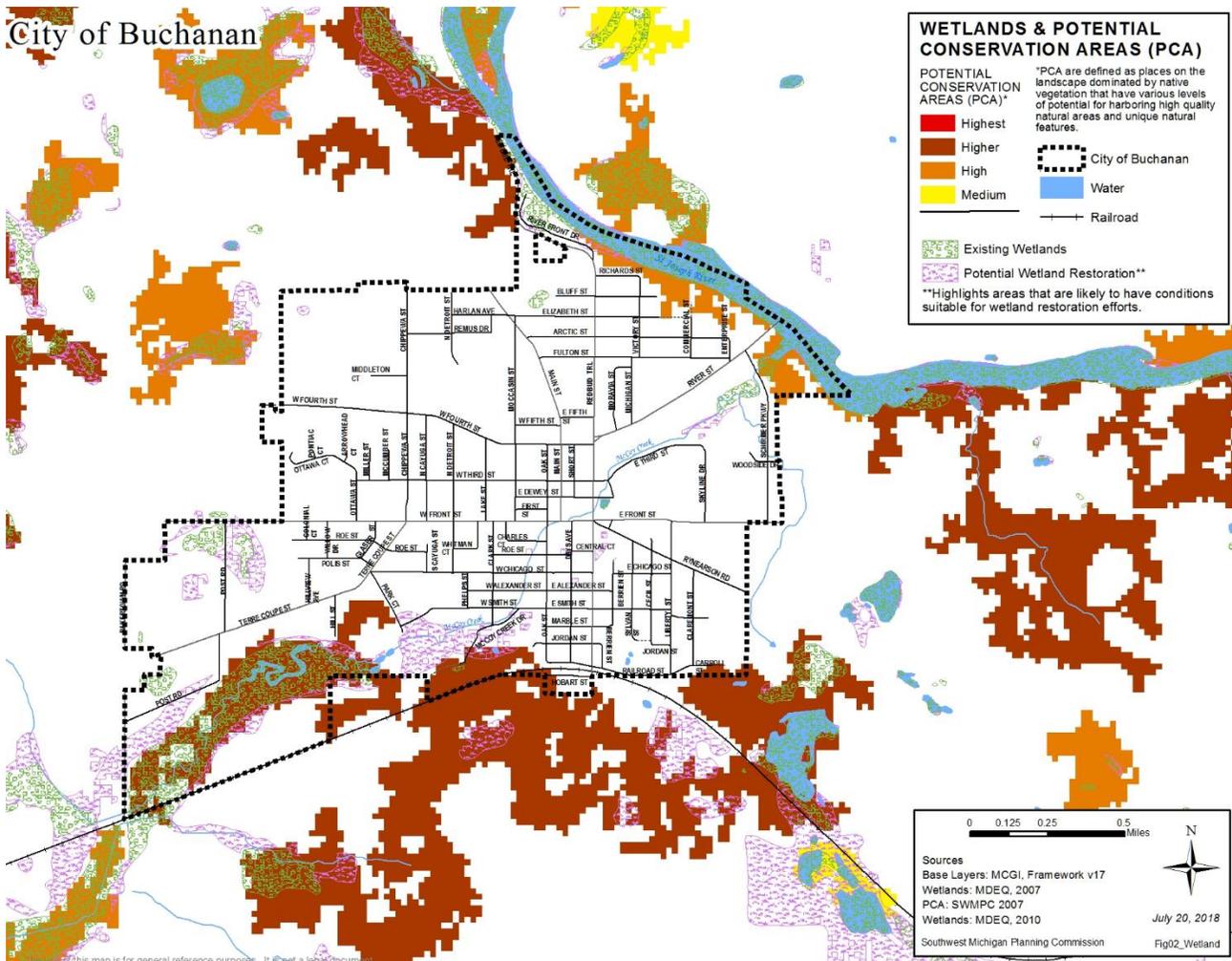
Natural resource conservation is a fundamental component of a community’s long-term environmental and economic health. Communities that incorporate both the built and natural environment into their future land use map or vision will ensure that the areas that provide important natural functions such as filtering drinking water supplies, recreational opportunities for residents and habitats for wildlife, will be protected. In effect, the features that the community has grown to enjoy will be there for generations to come. A community with a clean environment, clean water, green spaces and trails will be the community that has a stable, sustainable future and offers a high quality of life for its residents and visitors. Communities that provide this high quality of life will be able to retain talented workers and attract new residents and businesses.



The Potential Conservation Areas map represents the last remaining remnants of the area’s ecosystems and natural plant communities. These maps rank areas where the landscape is dominated by native vegetation that has various levels of potential for harboring high quality natural areas and unique natural features. In addition, these areas provide critical ecological services such as maintaining water quality and quantity, soil development and stabilization, habitat for pollinators of cropland, wildlife travel corridors, stopover sites for migratory birds, sources of genetic diversity and floodwater retention. Consequently, it is to a community’s advantage that these sites be carefully integrated into the planning for future development. Striking a balance between development and natural resource conservation and preservation is critical if Buchanan is to maintain its unique natural heritage.

**Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs)**  
 Defined as places on the landscape dominated by native vegetation that have various levels of potential for harboring high quality natural areas and unique natural features. Scoring criteria to prioritize areas included: total size, size of core area, length of stream corridor, landscape connectivity, restorability of surrounding land, vegetation quality and biological rarity score.

## Potential Conservation Areas – City of Buchanan



## UTILITIES

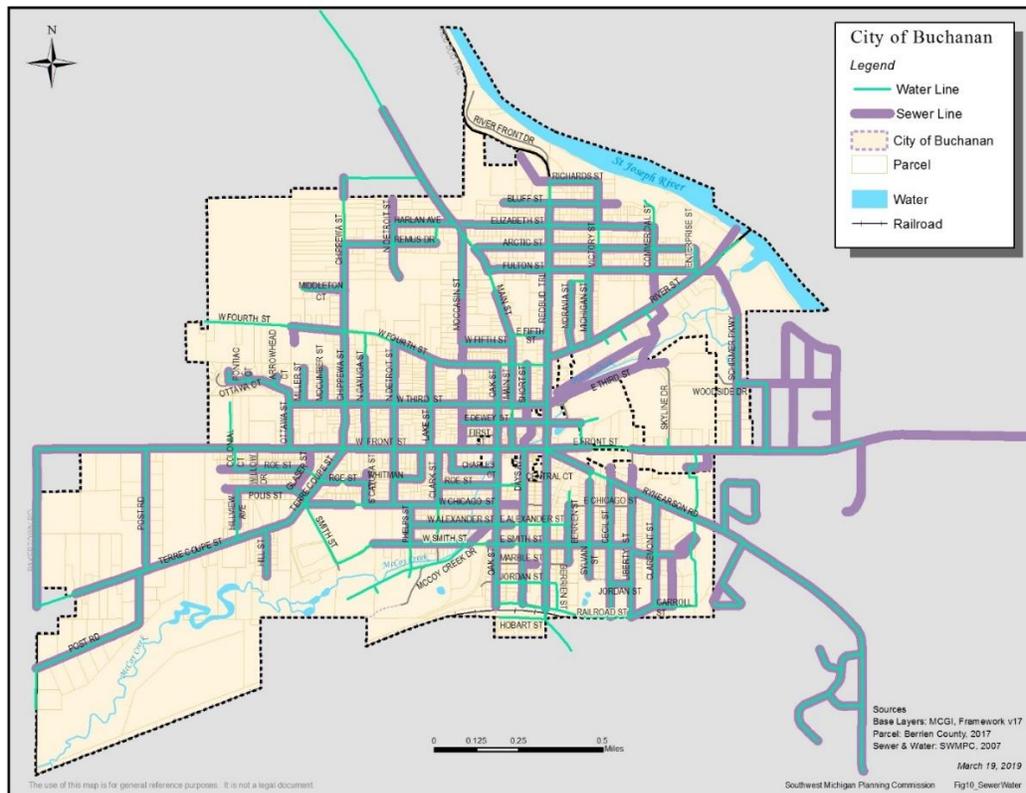
### Water and Sewer

The city of Buchanan’s Water, Wastewater and Public Work’s Departments provide water and sewer service for residents and business owners within the city of Buchanan as well as some areas within Buchanan Township. The City is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the water and sewer infrastructure throughout these areas.

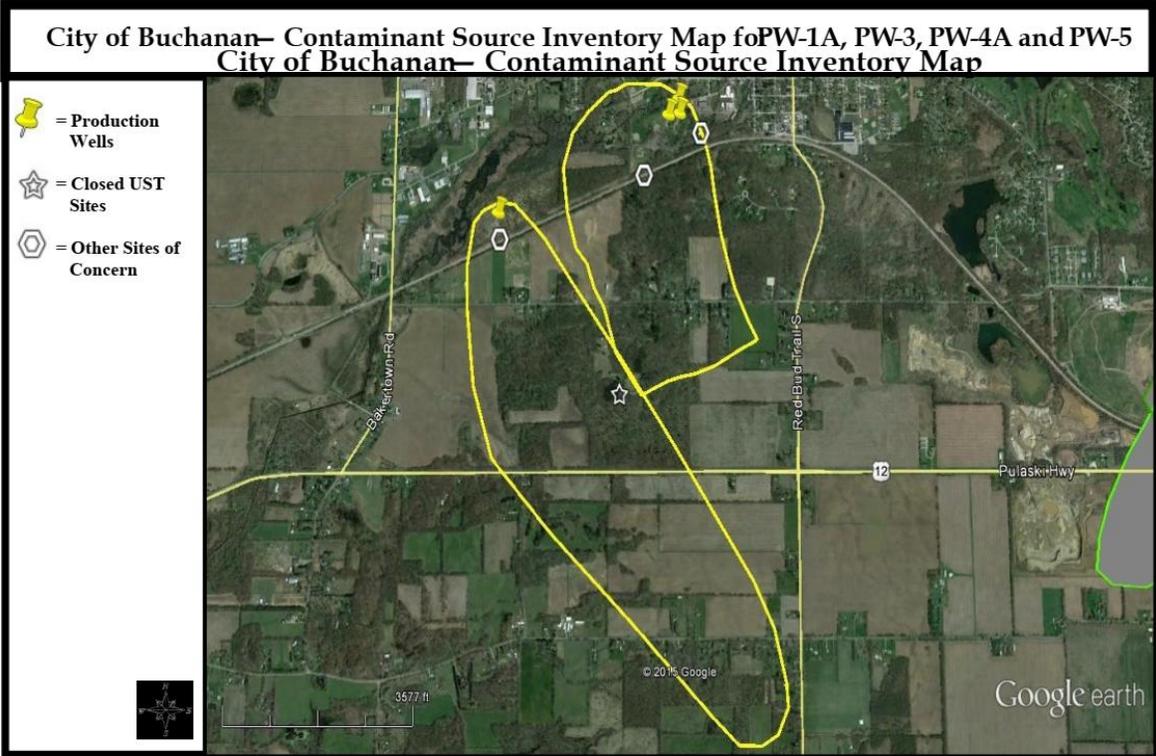
The City of Buchanan built one of the first wastewater treatment plants on the St. Joseph River in 1938 and has updated the plant several times since. Along with the treatment plant, the city owns 5 lift stations and 26 miles of sewer lines. The current plant is designed for a population of 15,000 with a maximum design flow of 3.75 million gallons per day. Average daily treatment is provided for a population of 4,400 people at a flow of 1 million gallons per day. The treatments system maintains discharge quality treatment standards for suspended solids, carbonaceous organic materials, phosphorous, ammonia and fecal coliform. The solids are disposed of at the Southwest Berrien county Landfill. Treated water is discharged to the St. Joseph River.

The city of Buchanan sources water from three wells. Combined the three wells deliver approximately 500,000 gallons of water per day. Water in the City of Buchanan is distributed through 30 miles of water mains to two elevated water towers which combined contain 750,000 gallons. Other components of the water system include a water treatment facility, 252 water hydrants and over 650 valves.

### Water and Sewer Infrastructure



The City has an ongoing Wellhead Protection Program approved by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). A Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA) is defined as the surface and subsurface areas surrounding a water well or well field, which supplies a public water system, and through which contaminants are reasonably likely to move toward and reach the water well or well field within a 10-year time-of-travel (EGLE 1). The purpose of developing a WHPP is to identify the WHPA and take the necessary steps to safeguard the area from contaminants. The program provides inspections for possible contamination sites, increases public awareness of water contamination, explores possible new well sites, and plugs abandoned wells. For more information, see the City’s Wellhead Protection Plan. This plan encourages coordination of the master plan and zoning ordinance to protect these important areas. One option is to create a wellhead protection overlay zoning district that does not allow for certain high risk contamination uses to be built in these sensitive areas.



**Energy**

Homes and businesses in Buchanan are provided electric and natural gas service by Indiana Michigan Power (part of American Electric Power) and SEMCO Energy Gas Company. The service is generally considered adequate for current and projected residential and business needs. More and more individual property owners, whether residential, commercial, or institutional, are investing in and using decentralized electrical power systems off the commercial grid. They are using wind, solar, or other renewable sources, with newer, more robust battery systems. These decentralized renewable power systems help alleviate the burden on electrical power transmission infrastructure, decrease dependence on nuclear systems which generate hazardous waste, create new decentralized electrical system jobs, increase resiliency, and many other benefits. As electrical companies and government regulators change to this new, evolving

paradigm, it is important for the zoning ordinances and local regulations to keep up and allow property owners to invest in and use these new systems.

**Telecommunications/Internet**

Buchanan has a variety of telecommunications and internet service providers, including landline phone, mobile wireless, and broadband services. High-speed broadband internet service of at least 25 Mbps is key for strong internet capability and the Buchanan area has broadband service available at this level of service. More information about broadband internet service is available through Connect Michigan, a non-profit in partnership with the Michigan Public Service Commission, working to ensure that everyone can experience the benefits of broadband (877-846-7710; info@connectmi.org).

## PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS

### WILL UPDATE THIS SECTION ONCE RECREATION PLAN IS IN PROGRESS

The Buchanan Area Recreation Board (BARB) oversees the development, maintenance and planning of recreation areas such as parks and special facilities which serve the city and Buchanan Township which in turn contributes to the wellbeing and social and economic health of the Buchanan community. The City has 8 neighborhood parks throughout the city totaling over 23 acres (McCoy Pond Park, Kathryn Park, Old City Hall Park, Victory Park, Ravish Park, Spafford Woods, Smith Park and Tot Lot). The City also has large natural areas E.B. Clark Park (12 acres), Redbud Riverfront Area (16.4) acres and McCoy Recreation Area (27 acres). More information can be found in the City's Recreation Plan.

Other area recreation assets include **Mud Lake Bog Preserve** owned by Buchanan Township (108 acres). **Bakertown Fen Nature Preserve** owned by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (83 acres) nature preserve is located within the city limits. **Fernwood Botanical Garden** is a non-profit, 105 acre property with cultivated gardens and vast natural areas, as well as a cultural and education center located just outside of the City.

**McCoy Creek Trail** is currently four miles one way, including loops, which branch off the main path. It extends from the E.B Clark woods on Schirmer to the Buchanan Farmers Market and includes several decks that overlook McCoy Creek. The path has some handicap access points and portions of which have more stable ground usable by wheelchair. Three access points and parking spaces are available: off of Schirmer Parkway, Days Avenue, and from the Memorial Fields Athletic Complex. Additionally, a mobile app exists to help inform and educate trail users about the trail and its environment. The City has plans to extend McCoy Creek Trail to Red Bud Park and also to connect to the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail in Niles along Walton Road.

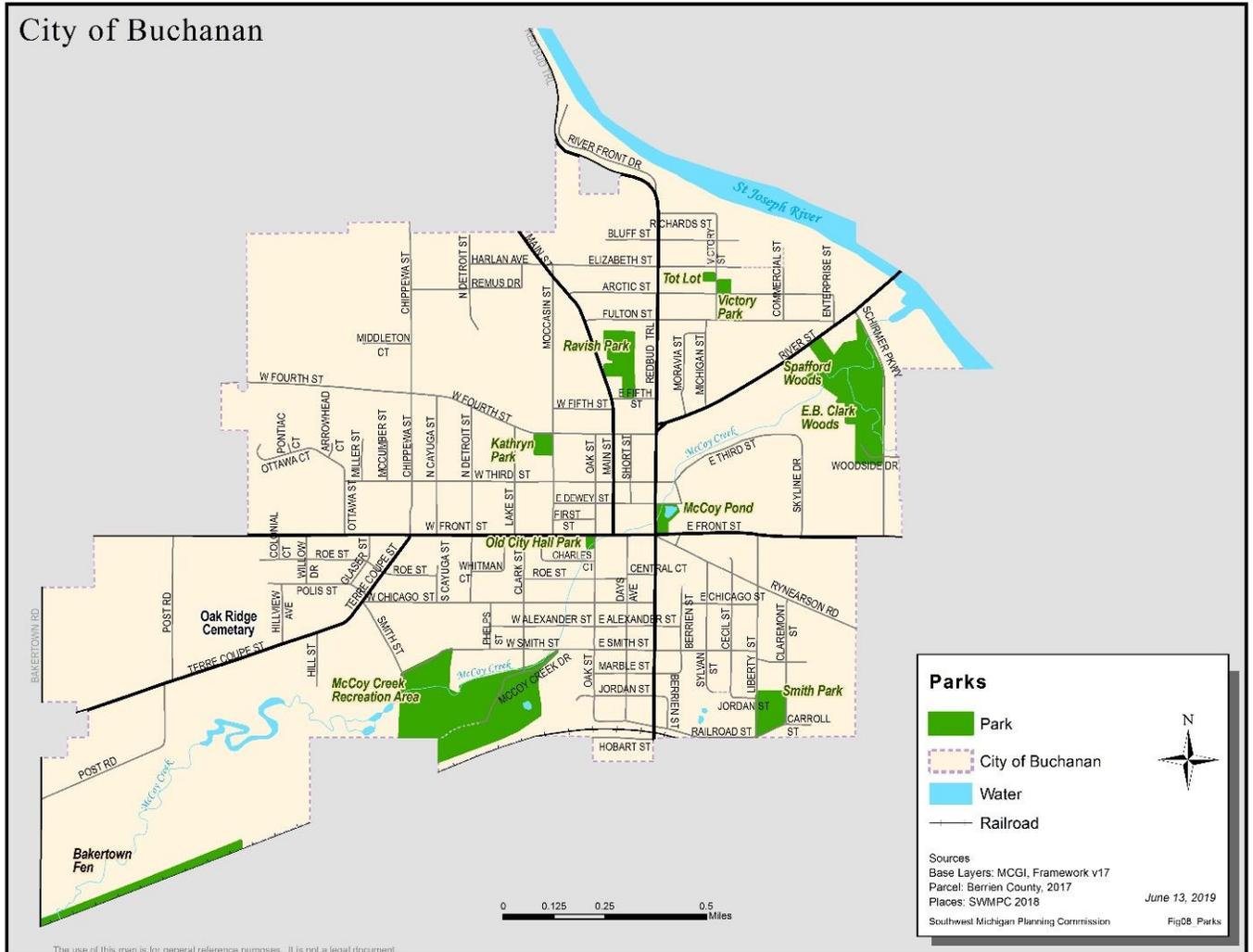
**St. Joseph River Water Trail** is a canoe/kayak trail that is over 66 miles from Niles, Michigan to Lake Michigan. The City of Buchanan has three access sites along the St. Joseph River Water Trail. All of these access sites could use improvements. The first and closest access site to downtown Buchanan is commonly referred to as Redbud Riverfront Park. The park has a boat ramp and an expansive dirt parking area. The city recently ran power to the park and local officials have been considering developing a campground (with restrooms) in the park. The second access site is located just above the Buchanan Dam, along Mead Road. The access site has a meandering pathway down to the river and a small dock. Many paddlers bypass the dock and exit the river along a narrow strip of beach just downstream. An accessible launch should be placed directly off the dock and the small beach area should be blocked off with new landscaping or signs. The third access site is located just below the Buchanan Dam, along East River Road. The access site also has a meandering pathway down to the river but no formal dock features. An accessible launch should be placed directly off the shoreline. In addition, a paddler's plaza and kayak storage could be placed at the site. Visit [www.michiganwatertrails.org](http://www.michiganwatertrails.org) for more information on the water trail.

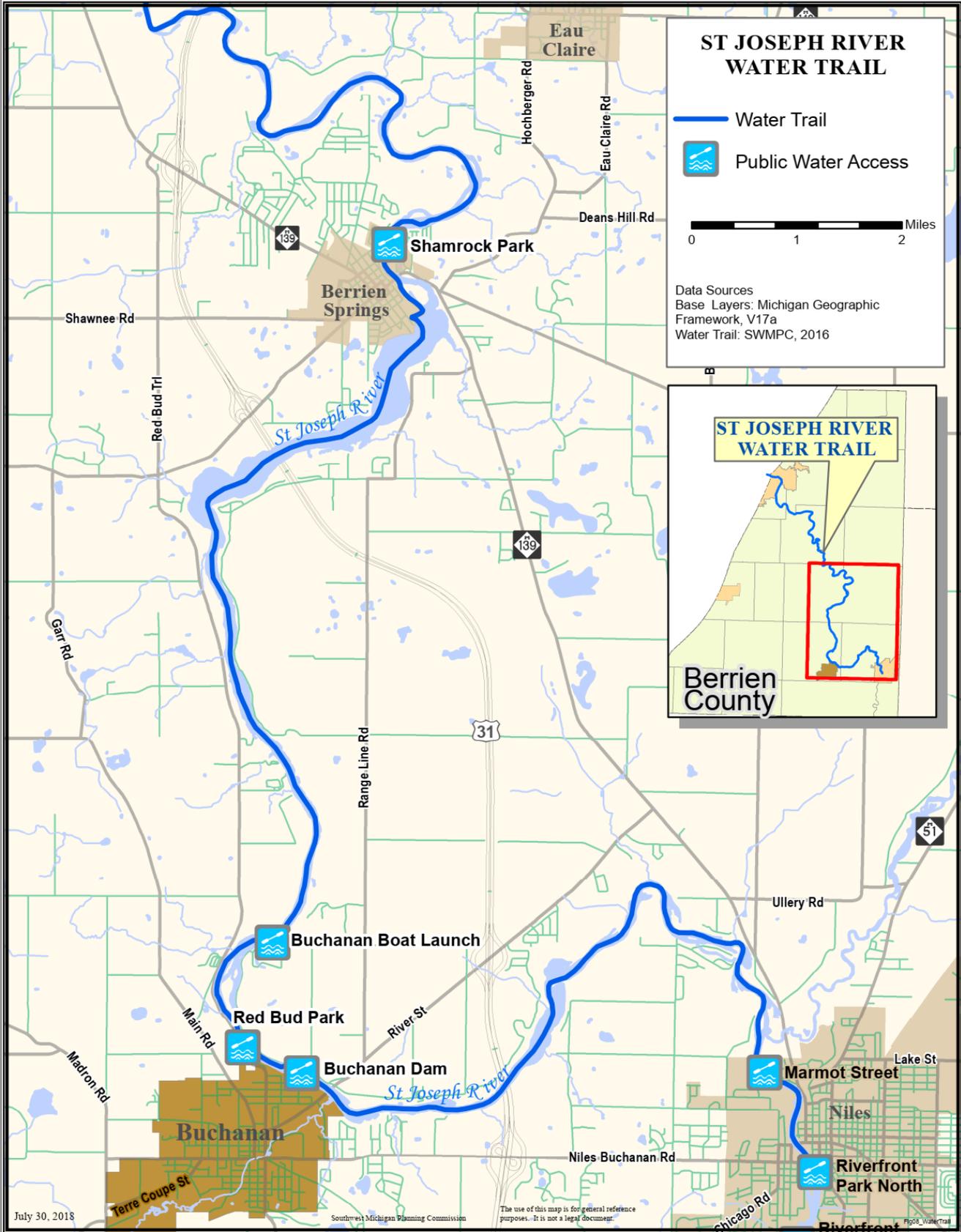
**A Trail Town** is an active, attractive and interesting place with accessible and comfortable spaces, hosting a variety of activities that promote social interaction and a strong sense of place. A Trail Town should meet the needs of trail users and residents of the community. A Trail Town has physical amenities that support trail users such as bike and kayak racks, wayfinding signs,

wide sidewalks, drinking fountains and benches. A Trail Town has business amenities to support day trip trail users such as bike shop, kayak outfitter, casual restaurants, ice cream shop, etc.) as well as overnight trail users with lodging options. Buchanan took part in a Trail Town effort and the results are in the Lake Michigan Coastal Communities: Trail Towns Master Plan.

<https://www.swmpc.org/downloads/buchanan.pdf>  
<https://www.swmpc.org/trailtowns.asp>

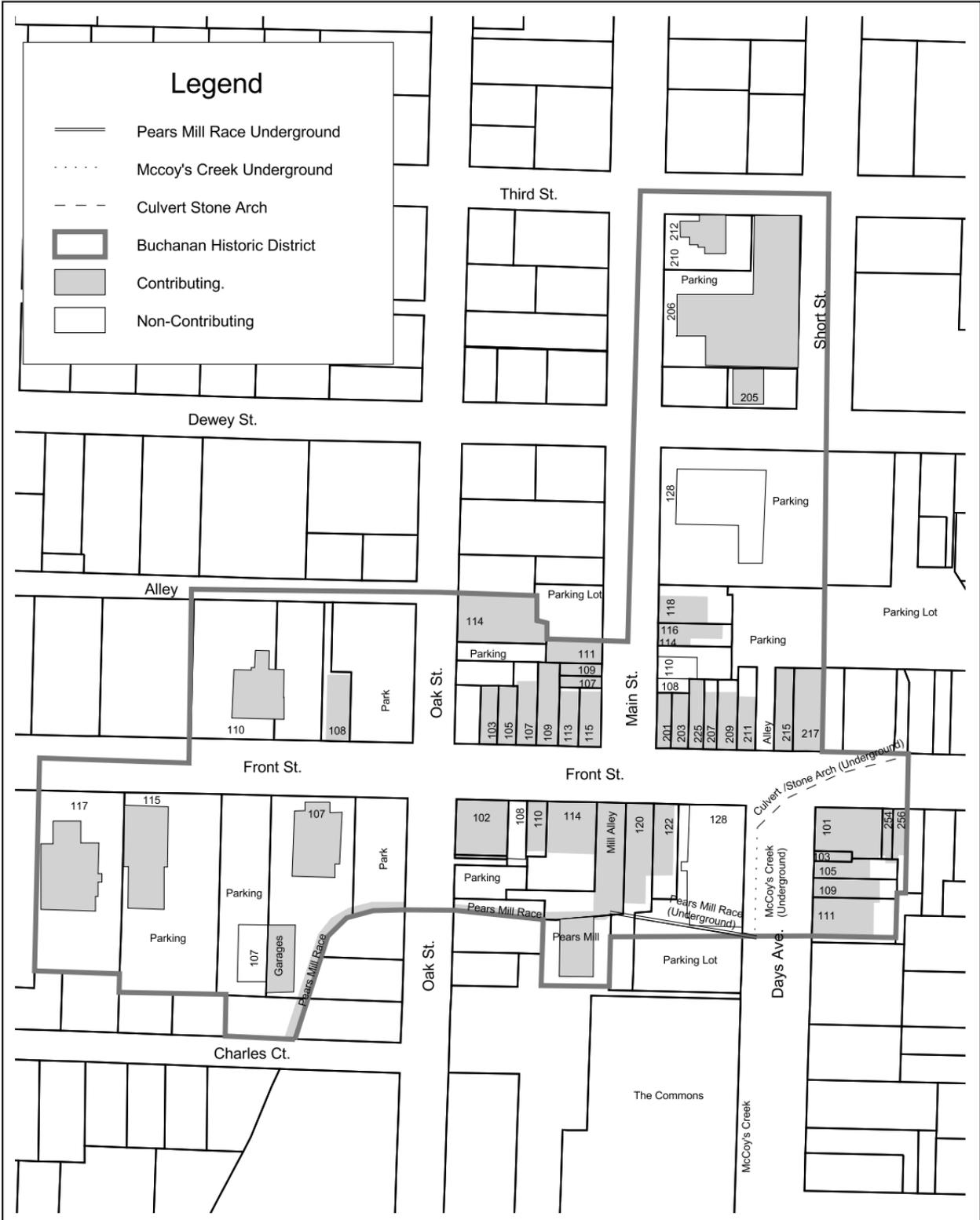
### Parks and Nature Preserves Within the City of Buchanan





**HISTORY, ARTS AND CULTURE**

Buchanan has a rich history. There are designated historical districts with many interesting buildings. The **Buchanan Downtown Historic District** is a primarily commercial historic district located between 117 W. and 256 E. Front Street and between 108 and 210-212 Main Street, along with adjacent sections of Oak Street and Days Avenue. The district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009. The district contains 40 buildings, along with a millrace, culvert, and alley. The buildings range from one to three stories tall, and date from 1855 to 1966. All the buildings in the district are constructed of brick with three exceptions: the Pears Mill, the 1855 Conant-Parkinson Building at 111 Main, and another commercial building on Front Street. Following is a map and short descriptions of some the historic buildings and areas in the downtown.

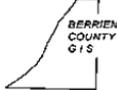


Scale: 1":150'

### Buchanan Downtown Historic District

City of Buchanan, Berrien County, Michigan

DATE: 02/27/2009



Note: Parcel line locations are generalized.

**Pears Mill** was constructed in 1857 as a water-powered flour mill along McCoy Creek. The mill is the only one remaining of the original 19 water-powered mills. The mill was restored and continues to be maintained by the all-volunteer Buchanan Preservation Society and is listed on the Register of Michigan State Historic Sites. A gift shop, tours, and periodic demonstrations of historic trades are part of the experiences available to visitors. The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) developed plans to enhance the Pears Mill area and plaza by providing landscaping, seating areas, lighting, pathways, open space, and other amenities creating a pedestrian-oriented place for people to gather in the downtown.<sup>3</sup>



**The Tin Shop Theatre** was believed to have been built around 1910 by a Buchanan merchant and has been home to a variety of businesses including a furniture factory, a lumber dealer business, drill products manufacturing, and even served as a hospital during the 1918 flu epidemic. In 1982 the Buchanan Fine Arts Council began restoring the building into a fine arts center and in 1984 staged the first of over 80 productions performed during the last 23 years.

**The Union Block Building** was completed in 1863 during the height of Civil War prosperity. The Union Block building anchors the core of the downtown's nearly one hundred seventy year old commercial and mercantile center. Built by wealthy local merchants and political figures John Ross and Lorenzo Alexander, the Italian Renaissance Revival structure historically served the community with retail space on its first floor, professional offices on the second floor, and public meeting space on the third. The Union Block was listed on the National Register of historic buildings in 2007 and is currently undergoing renovation to once again house retail business.

**Ross-Sanders House** located at 107 W. Front Street, is a Greek Revival house built by John Ross in 1856. Ross was a prominent businessman and downtown property owner in Buchanan. This was Buchanan's first brick home. The unique home was acquired by the city in 1951 and served as the police station and City Hall until 1984.

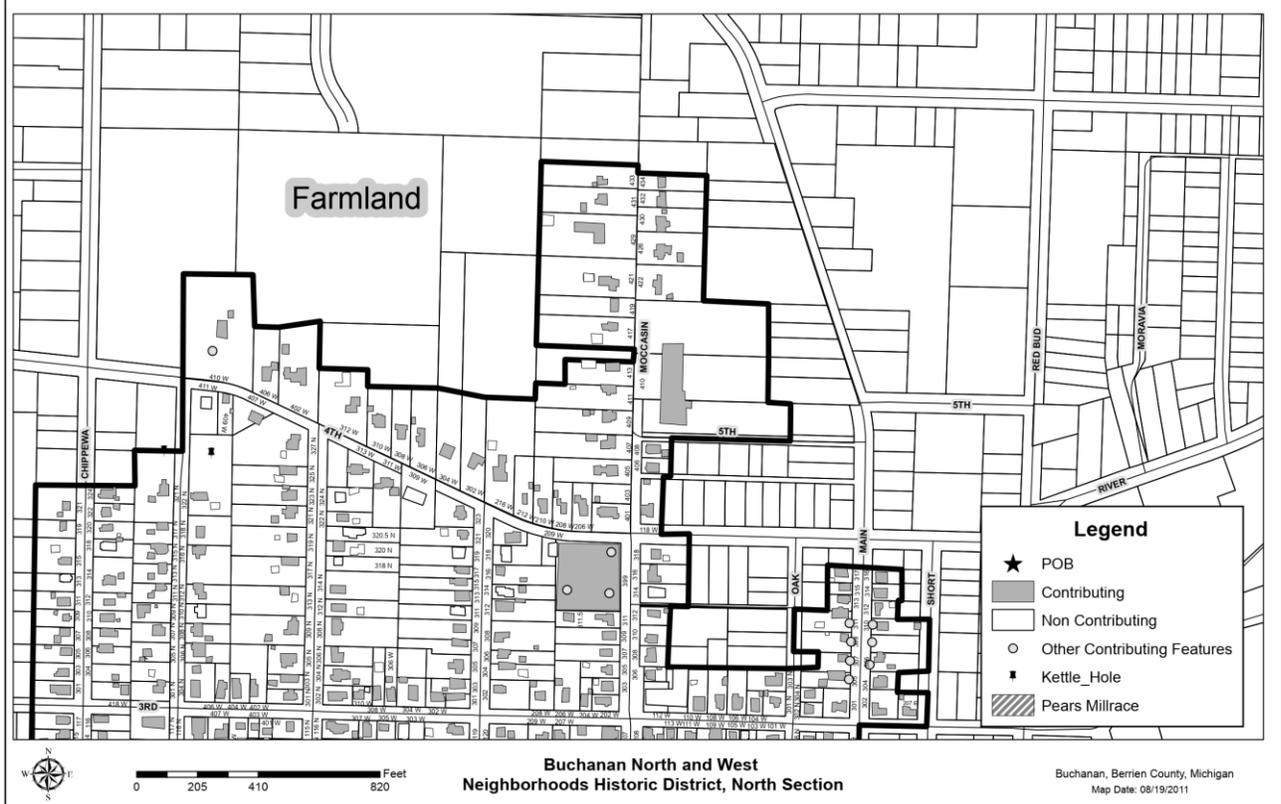


**The Common** is an outdoor amphitheater used for plays and lunch-time and summer evening concerts featuring jazz, country, rock & roll, and bluegrass music. The Farmer's Market is also held at The Common. The City has plans to maintain this area and to provide amenities that will create a pleasant, passive, park experience. Improvement projects that may be completed include landscaping, sidewalks, paths, fences, flags, seating areas, and general maintenance. There are often evening and lunch-hour concerts featuring jazz, country, rock & roll, or bluegrass music.

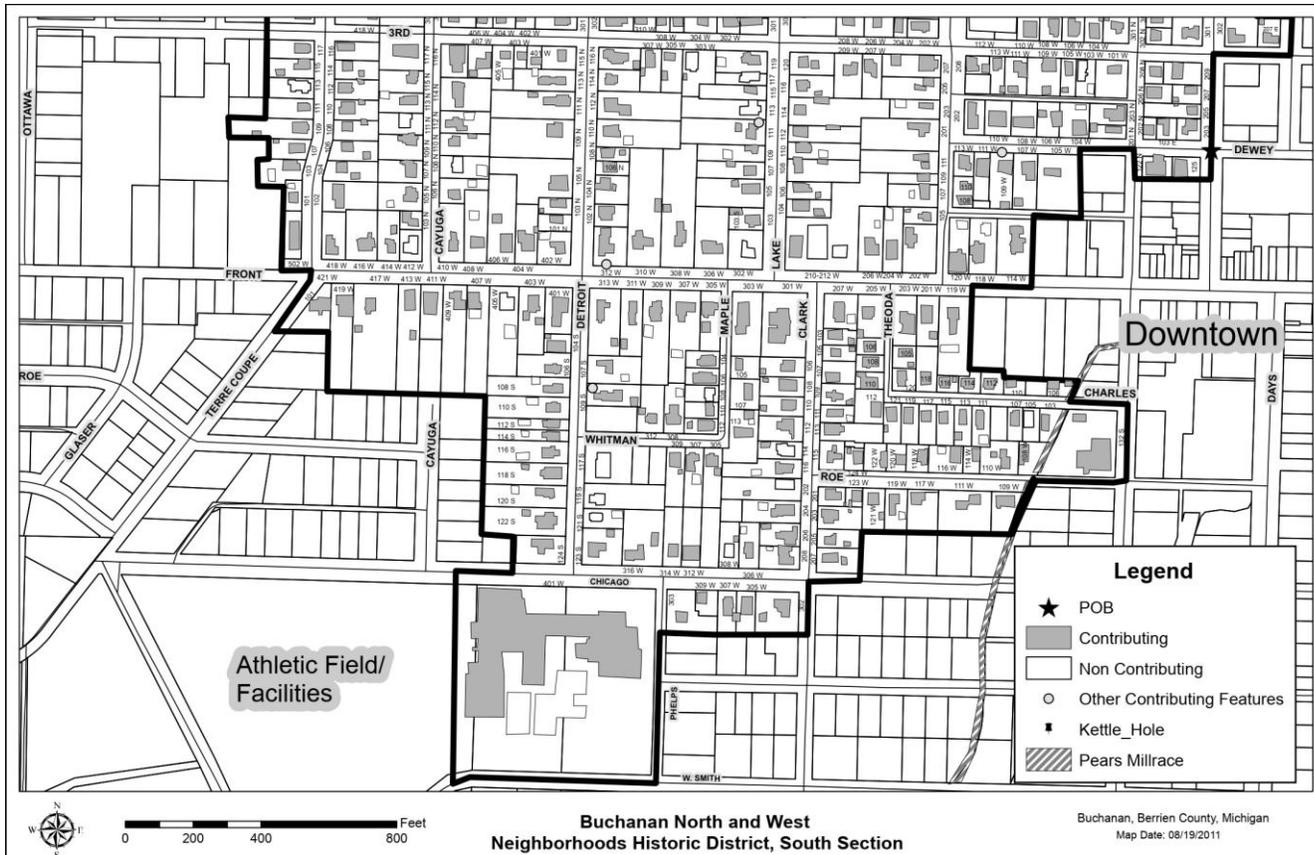
<sup>3</sup> City of Buchanan Downtown Development Authority Plan, 2007

*The Buchanan Art Center* is a non-profit organization housing a Main Gallery, a smaller Show Place Gallery and a gift shop. The mission statement of the Art Center is “To provide a place in our community dedicated to the nurturing of the arts by providing a quality education program for all ages.” To fulfill this mission, the Art Center offers classes and workshops to people of all ages.<sup>4</sup>

**Buchanan North and West Neighborhoods Historic District** occupies a mostly flat area north and west of downtown Buchanan. It contains 698 mostly residential and accessory buildings and other features, which date from the 1840s to 2003, and range in height from one to two stories, with two-story buildings predominating. The buildings range in style and form from Greek Revival and Italianate to International Style, Ranch, and Split Level, with bungalows and gable-fronts (with and without wings) making up almost half of the total homes in the district. A small number of churches, schools, commercial buildings and other features are also present. Following are maps of the North and West Neighborhoods Historic District.



<sup>4</sup> <http://www.buchananartcenter.org/index.htm>



# COMMUNITY SERVICES

## CITY SERVICES

### City Governance

The City is organized under the Home Rule Act of Michigan, which authorizes cities to formulate their own charter provision, and operates under the Commission-Manager form of government as prescribed by the City of Buchanan’s Charter. Under this model the City Manager is responsible for managing the day-to-day operation of the City and the City Commission’s main function is legislative; setting important policies that chart the future course of Buchanan. The City Commission is comprised of five (5) members who serve four (4) year terms. The Mayor and Mayor Pro-Tem are selected at the first meeting in November following the City election.

### Public Works

The major responsibility of Public Works Department is maintenance of 28 miles of streets. This includes street sweeping, routine asphalt repair, leaf collection, and snow plowing. The department is also charged with cleaning sewer lines, mowing City parks, and keeping the streets clear of snow in the winter. The Department uses a wide variety of equipment including a front end loader, street sweeper, heavy-duty trucks, and specialty equipment.

### Police, Fire, Ambulance

The Police Department consists of a Chief of Police, Assistant Chief of Police, two Sergeants, six full-time Patrol Officers, two part-time Patrol Officers, two Code Enforcement Officers and one Civilian Secretary. The department is supplemented by up to 25 Reserves Police Officers and four Police Chaplains. In addition to the regular duties, the police department participates in a number of special community events and activities.

The Buchanan City Fire Department consists of 22 paid on-call members and receives 90 to 120 calls per year. This department does not run medical calls. Their auto fleet consists of two pumper trucks, one 75 foot aerial truck, and one van for personnel transportation. The Buchanan City Fire Department has an ISO rating of 5 out of 10 (1 being best), a very good rating for a volunteer based department. ISO ratings affect insurance rates for property owners. Ratings are determined by weighing criteria such as water supply (e.g., water tower capacity, frequency of fire hydrants) and fire department preparedness (e.g., number and qualifications of firefighters, fire equipment). In comparison, the Cities of Baroda, Berrien Springs, Eau Claire, Galien, and Three Oaks each have an ISO rating of 7.

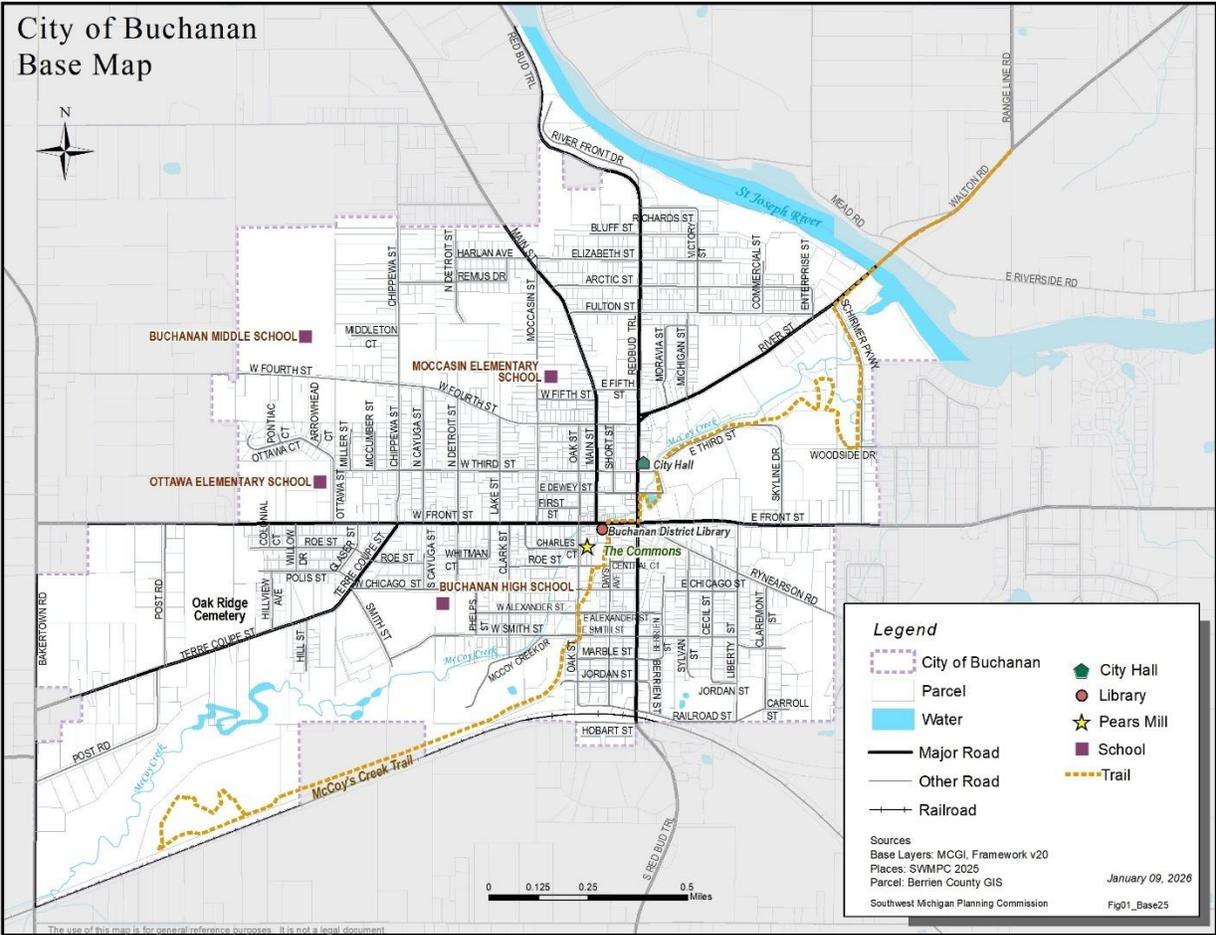
SMCAS is a municipally owned non-profit ambulance service which serves the greater Niles and Buchanan areas. Each ambulance employs a basic level medical technician and a paramedic level emergency medical technician. SMCAS makes sure that their employees are trained in the most recent and updated use of advanced diagnostic equipment and many of the staff are at specialist level while all of the full-time employees hold certification in Critical Care Emergency Medical Transportation Program from the University of Maryland. More information about SMCAS can be found at their website: <http://www.smcas.org/>.

**Cemetery**

Oak Ridge Cemetery consists of 45 acres, 35 of which have been developed and 10 more of which will soon be available for future use. Maintenance is provided by two full time city employees and part time employees who help with lawn upkeep, leaf removal, snow removal, and ice control. Burial services as well as foundation installment and funeral assistance are provided by city employees.

**Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling**

Buchanan City provides residential solid waste disposal and recycling services through a city-wide contract with Reliable Disposal. Nearby, the South Berrien County Landfill (SBCL) provides trash and recycling services. PADNOS, located on Walton Road, accepts drop off recycling including cardboard, metal, electronics, paper, and books.



**OTHER ORGANIZATIONS/INITIATIVES**

One of the characteristics that make the City of Buchanan unique is the spirit of community that shows itself in the number of volunteer organizations and initiatives in the City. Below is a list

of a few of those. For a more complete list please visit the city’s website at <https://www.cityofbuchanan.com/community/page/community-links>

**Buchanan Downtown Development Authority**

Will add narrative

**Buchanan Library**

The Buchanan Public Library, located on East Front Street, has occupied its current residence since 2001. In 2013 the Buchanan District Library embarked in their Open Doors, Open Books, Open Minds campaign set out in three phases. The report for this project can be found at this link: <https://www.buchananlibrary.org/bdl-groundbreaking-program.pdf> In 2015 the Buchanan District Library received a \$10,000 grant from the Indiana Michigan Power foundation which is to aid in the construction of a new community room on its second floor. This area is proposed to support local businesses, new programming, and organizations.

**One Buchanan**

One Buchanan was founded in 2016 with particular concern for those who have experienced discrimination or exclusion. One Buchanan is committed to strengthening the city as a place of belonging, a hallmark of the American dream of diversity and inclusion. Their mission is to advance Buchanan as a city that welcomes and cares for all people irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation. The City has shown its commitment to diversity by passing a city ordinance in 2019 that addresses non-discrimination policies and equal protection for all persons. The ordinance specifically states that the city will not discriminate based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, height, weight, marital status or disability.

**Buchanan Promise**

Buchanan Promise is a multimillion-dollar fund that is to provide scholarships to graduating high school students pursuing a post-secondary degree from an accredited institution. This scholarship is available to those students who reside within the school district, the amount they are awarded depends on the length of time that they have been residents within the district – those who have lived in district k-12 will receive 100% of the available scholarship grant. The Goal of this grant is to make a long term investment in education, provide more access to higher education, and support economic development within the community. The endowment was established by Walt Jr. Wally.

**REGIONAL BUSINESS SUPPORT**

Southwest Michigan offers a variety of business and entrepreneurial support. A few of these groups are noted below, including a brief statement of purpose. These regional groups give Buchanan access to resources to develop and grow their local economy.

**Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber**

Service Area: Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties  
Purpose: To strengthen regional assets, advocate for regional priorities, and cultivate an economic ecosystem that prepares our region for future opportunity. Our “Ecosystem Approach” focuses on the following four pillars of Service: Leadership Development., Business Development, Economic Development and Community Development  
Website: <https://smrchamber.com/>  
Telephone: 269-932-4042



**Berrien County Community Development Department**

Service Area: Berrien County  
Purpose: Influencing, encouraging and supporting private business growth, expansion and job creation to continually stabilize our tax base without duplicating efforts.  
Website: <http://berriencounty.org/304/Community-Development>  
Telephone: 269-983-7111x8257



**Cornerstone Alliance**

Service Area: Berrien County  
Purpose: Customer-focused economic development solutions through partnerships that grow employment opportunities, increase the tax base and add to the economic vibrancy of our area.  
Website: <http://cstonealliance.org/>  
Telephone: 269-925-6100



**Kinexus (Michigan Works!)**

Service Area: Southwest Michigan  
Purpose: Customer-focused economic development solutions through partnerships that grow employment opportunities, increase the tax base and add to the economic vibrancy of our area.  
Website: <http://kinexus.org/>  
Telephone: 269-927-1064



**Lake Michigan College**

Service Area: Southwest Michigan  
Purpose: Workforce training and development for healthcare, skilled trades and hospitality.  
Website: <https://www.lakemichigancollege.edu/home/programs-majors/workforce-training-development>  
Telephone: 269-927-1000



**Buchanan Chamber of Commerce**

Service Area: Buchanan Area.  
Purpose: Improve communication, provide leadership, promote growth, and enhance the quality of life for those residing in the Buchanan Area  
Website: <https://www.buchanan.mi.us>  
Telephone: 269-695-3291



**Michigan Economic Development Corporation**

Service Area: Michigan  
Purpose: Growing and attracting business, keeping talented residents here, and revitalizing our urban centers  
Website: <http://www.michiganbusiness.org>  
Telephone: 888-522-0103



**Michigan's Great Southwest Sustainable Business Forum**

Service Area: Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties  
Purpose: Educates, engages and empowers our community to more equally value environmental stewardship, social responsibility and economic growth.  
Website: <https://mgssbf.org/>  
Telephone: 616-422-7963



**Southwest Michigan Planning Commission**

Service Area: Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties  
Purpose: Planning great communities together – through transportation, environment, economic development and community planning, with mapping/GIS expertise.  
Website: <http://www.swmpc.org/>  
Telephone: 269-925-1137



**Southwest Michigan First (Kalamazoo)**

Service Area: Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties  
Purpose: Company growth, government and education alignment, acceleration of its vibrant core communities, talent development and communication of its regional advantages.  
Website: <https://www.southwestmichiganfirst.com/>  
Telephone: 269-553-9588



# Memorandum



Date: March 4, 2026  
To: Buchanan Planning Commission  
From: Tony McGhee  
**Subject: Consideration of Vacant and Underutilized Building Ordinance**

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Vacant and underutilized buildings can have a significant impact on the health and vitality of a community. When buildings remain unused for extended periods of time they often become magnets for vandalism, nuisance activity, and property maintenance issues. They can also create safety risks, reduce surrounding property values, and detract from the economic and social vibrancy of neighborhoods and the downtown. At the same time, buildings that sit idle represent lost opportunities for housing, small business activity, and investment that could otherwise contribute to the community.

The proposed Vacant and Underutilized Building Ordinance is intended to provide the City with a proactive framework to address these challenges. The ordinance establishes a process for identifying and registering vacant or underutilized buildings, ensuring that they are properly maintained and secured, and encouraging their return to productive use. It also discourages the long-term warehousing of commercial space for storage purposes when such uses are inconsistent with the City's development goals.

A central goal of the ordinance is to strike a fair and balanced approach. The intent is not to penalize property owners who are actively working to rehabilitate, market, or redevelop their buildings. Rather, the ordinance is designed to encourage progress toward activation while providing clear expectations and accountability. The proposed framework includes the use of activation plans with milestones so that owners who are legitimately pursuing renovation, leasing, or sale of their property have a clear path forward.

The ordinance also recognizes that there are circumstances beyond an owner's control that can delay redevelopment. For that reason, the proposal includes a hardship exception process that allows the City to provide temporary relief when property owners can demonstrate legitimate financial, legal, environmental, or personal barriers to activating a property. This provision ensures flexibility and fairness while still maintaining reasonable oversight.

**Memorandum**

Overall, the proposed ordinance seeks to balance community interests with property owner realities. By encouraging the productive reuse of long vacant or underutilized buildings while allowing flexibility for legitimate hardship situations, the ordinance aims to reduce blight, strengthen neighborhoods, and support continued investment and vitality throughout the City of Buchanan.

**Attachment A: Draft Vacant and Underutilized Building Ordinance**

# Attachment A



DRAFT PROPOSED ORDINANCE 03/04/26

CITY OF BUCHANAN  
VACANT AND UNDERUTILIZED BUILDING ORDINANCE  
ORDINANCE NO. [\_\_\_\_]

AN ORDINANCE TO REGULATE, REHABILITATE, AND PROMOTE THE ACTIVE USE OF VACANT AND UNDERUTILIZED BUILDINGS; TO DISCOURAGE NONCONFORMING STORAGE USES OUTSIDE STORAGE ZONES; TO ESTABLISH DEFINITIONS, REGISTRATION, LOCAL RESPONSIBLE AGENT, INSPECTION, MAINTENANCE, ACTIVATION, FEES, ENFORCEMENT, HARDSHIP RELIEF, AND APPEALS; AND TO PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE.

SECTION 1. PURPOSE AND INTENT

This ordinance is intended to:

1. Ensure that abandoned, vacant or underutilized buildings are maintained, secured, and transitioned to productive use.
2. Reduce blight, vandalism, fire risk, and depressed property values.
3. Align with City planning goals for downtown vitality, neighborhood stability, and economic development.
4. Provide a fair process for temporary hardship relief with accountability and milestones.
5. Utilize an administrative fee schedule adopted by the City Commission for transparent and adjustable fees.

SECTION 2. DEFINITIONS

**“Building”** means the first floor of a building. The upper stories shall not be considered as part of a structure subject to regulation under this ordinance.

**“Abandoned or Vacant Residential or Nonresidential Building”** means a structure in which all lawful activity has ceased, or reasonably appears to have ceased for ninety (90) days or more and meets any one or more of the following criteria:

- (1) Provides a location for loitering, vagrancy, unauthorized entry or criminal activity;
- (2) Is not secured so as to prevent unauthorized entry;
- (3) Is damaged or rendered structurally unsound by decay, fire, flood, weather, or vandalism to an extent which prohibits safe human occupancy;
- (4) Demonstrates a lack of property maintenance and upkeep as evidenced by one or more violations of the 2015 International Property Maintenance Code, as adopted by the City;

**DRAFT PROPOSED ORDINANCE 03/04/26**

- (5) Has one or more utilities for water, sewer, electric or gas disconnected or not in use.
- (6) Is not maintained in compliance with one or more City ordinances.
- (7) Is not currently used or occupied consistent with the building’s zoning requirements, permitted use, or most recent licensing; or
- (8) Is a potential hazard or danger to persons or members of the public.

**“Abandoned or Vacant Residential Building”** means a residential structure and any accessory building or accessory dwelling unit.

**“Active Use / Activation”** means continuous permitted or approved occupancy or operation consistent with the building’s intended design, certificate of occupancy, City permit and compliance with the Unified Development Code.

**City Official.** City Manager, Building Official, Code Enforcement Officer, or City staff designated by the City Manager.

**“Lawful activity”** means that activity for which the structure was built or intended to be used. No building shall be used primarily for storage of personal or business items, unless such use has been previously approved by the City and is consistent with the Unified Development Code.

**Local Responsible Agent.** A person or entity with authority to act for the owner, which person or entity must have a residence or office located within sixty miles of the municipal boundaries of the City of Buchanan, and which person or entity must be continuously available in person or as a personal representative for inspections, emergencies, and communications.

**“Owner”** means any person or legal entity with legal or equitable title or control of real property, a lessee, or a person or legal entity acting as a Local Responsible Agent of the owner with respect to a building , which agent shall have the authority to accept service of notices or legal papers relating to the building on the owner's behalf concerning housing, zoning, blight, dangerous buildings, and/or other matters concerning the property on behalf of the owner of a property and authorized to legally consent to City access to the property for any inspection necessary to ensure compliance with the terms of this Chapter. Status as a Local Responsible Agent must be established by the Owner submitting to the City an original written document signed under notary by the actual titled owner that specifically authorizes the Local Responsible Agent to carry out the duties described in this definition. “Owner” includes any lender under a note secured by a mortgage or any person, firm, or

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corporation holding a mortgage on a residential or commercial structure that has initiated, is in the process of, or has completed foreclosure proceedings, filed a complaint for foreclosure by judicial action or is publishing a notice of foreclosure by advertisement.

**“Personal Storage Use”** means the storage of property, vehicles, or materials not tied to an active, certificate of occupancy, City business license, and permitted under the Unified Development Code.

**“Underutilized Building”** means a building in which more than 50% of the ground floor square footage is used for private or business storage, warehousing, or other non-public/inactive use inconsistent with the Unified Development Code or certificate of occupancy, including storefronts used for business or private storage.

**SECTION 3. REGISTRATION**

**A. Duty to Register**

1. Owners must register any building defined in this Ordinance within ninety (90) days of the date of the existence of any of the conditions defined as “Abandoned or Vacant Residential or Nonresidential Building” or notice issued by the City.
2. Registration shall be renewed annually until the building is activated, demolished, or receives a City issued certificate of compliance with the subject ordinance.
3. Registration must be completed through the City’s designated portal or form and shall include: Owner and Local Agent Responsible identities and contacts; property/parcel identification numbers; prior and intended use; Activation Plan (timeline, milestones); maintenance/security measures; and continuously available emergency contact identity and contact information.
4. Abandoned or Vacant Residential or Nonresidential Buildings subject to probate court proceedings shall be registered with the City within thirty days of the date of filing or entry of closing or the probate estate or case.

**B. Certificate of Vacant/Underutilized Registration & Inspection**

1. Upon registration and payment of applicable fees, the City will issue a Certificate of Vacant/Underutilized Registration and schedule an inspection.
2. Properties must pass inspection or receive a Correction Order with deadlines; upon compliance, the City issues a Vacant Property Ordinance Certificate of Compliance valid for one year for non-residential properties, subject to maintenance. For residential properties, a Vacant Property Ordinance Certificate of Compliance valid for six months, subject to maintenance.

**C. Fees**

**DRAFT PROPOSED ORDINANCE 03/04/26**

1. Registration, renewal, inspection, and re-inspection fees shall be set by the City Commission Fee Schedule and may include escalating renewal tiers to discourage prolonged vacancy/underutilization.
2. Failure-to-register, late renewal, and ownership-search cost recovery fees may be applied in accordance with the Fee Schedule set by the City Commission.

**D. Limited Exemptions**

1. Up to ninety days for real estate actively listed for sale/lease, for which the Owner must present written proof of the sale or lease listing.
2. During an active, permitted construction period with valid City issued permits and demonstrated progress.
3. Seasonal residential occupancy, if compliant with property maintenance and not used primarily for storage.
4. For multi-tenant commercial buildings, if at least 60% of the square footage is leased, the building will be considered in compliance with the subject ordinance.
5. Up to ninety days for other potential limited exemptions approved by the City Manager.

**E. Transfer of Ownership**

The seller of an Abandoned or Vacant Residential or Nonresidential Building must notify the City Manager within thirty (30) days of the date of sale or transfer and provide the name and address of the purchaser or transferee. The purchaser or transferee must register the property in accordance with this Ordinance within forty-five days of the sale closing or transfer. No refunds or credits of fees will be given when there is a transfer of ownership.

**SECTION 4. MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY STANDARDS**

Owners shall:

1. Comply with all City building, fire, and International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC); the Unified Development Code and maintain weather-tightness and structural integrity of an entire structure.
2. Secure all openings; maintain operable locks; prevent unauthorized entry.
3. Maintain exterior grounds including sidewalks and parking lots, remove all trash, weeds, snow/ice, graffiti and address any vermin, mold, or hazards.
4. Maintain fire protection/suppression systems where applicable; and maintain heat or winterization to protect plumbing.
5. Prohibit storage or warehousing as a primary use unless permitted by the Unified Development Code and licensed by the City.

**SECTION 5. UTILIZATION & ACTIVATION PLAN**

**DRAFT PROPOSED ORDINANCE 03/04/26**

In order for a structure to not be considered vacant or underutilized, the property owner must submit an activation plan that includes clear milestones and anticipated completion dates. The plan must be reviewed and approved by the City Manager or their designee in accordance with the requirements set forth in this section. The terms of an approved activation plan may be extended if reasonable progress has been demonstrated and the extension is approved by the City Manager or their designee.

**A. Residential**

1. Within ninety (90) of receipt of written notice of violation issued by the City, an Owner must submit to the City and implement an activation plan for Building occupancy, renovation, or sale that meets the requirements of this Ordinance.
2. After twelve months of submission of the activation plan with the City, if no substantial progress occurs in meeting the terms of the activation plan, the City may issue rehabilitation/nuisance orders or apply escalated renewal fees under the Fee Schedule set by the City Commission and/or civil action.

**B. Commercial/Non-Residential**

1. Within ninety (90) of receipt of written notice of violation issued by the City, an Owner must submit to the City and implement an activation/marketing plan for building lease-up, tenanting, adaptive reuse.
2. After twelve months of submission of the activation plan with the City, if no substantial progress occurs in meeting the terms of the activation plan, the City may issue rehabilitation/nuisance orders or apply escalated renewal fees under the Fee Schedule set by the Commission and/or civil action.

**C. Anti-Warehousing / Non-Business Related Storage**

1. Storage of materials shall only be permitted when it is directly associated with a permitted business activity that is actively operating on the subject property.
2. Limited-Use Storage Permits may include conditions including hours of access, fire safety measures, and inventory limits to mitigate impacts.

**D. Temporary Activation Permit**

Upon issuance of a certificate of occupancy, and if needed, a temporary use permit, the City may issue Temporary Activation Permits (e.g., pop-ups, artist/maker uses, seasonal markets) for up to 180 consecutive days to incentivize interim utilization, subject to public safety, other City ordinances, and if permitted under the City’s Unified Development Code.

**SECTION 6. INSPECTIONS, NOTICES, AND ENFORCEMENT**

1. Inspections. Initial and periodic inspections may be conducted by the City to verify compliance and progress.
2. Notices. Written notice will specify violations and a correction period of thirty days, or a shorter period for imminent hazards or to protect public safety.

**DRAFT PROPOSED ORDINANCE 03/04/26**

- 3. Penalties. Civil fines, administrative penalties, inspection and reinspection fees, and cost recovery shall be as set in the Fee Schedule established by the City Commission. Repeated noncompliance may trigger escalating monthly penalties.
- 4. Violations. Violations of this Chapter shall constitute a civil infraction. Each day that a violation continues constitutes a separate offense. The remedies, penalties and enforcement powers established in this Chapter shall be cumulative, and the City may exercise any or all of them in any order.
- 5. Remedies. The City may abate hazards, place liens, pursue civil actions, and condemn/demolish unsafe structures consistent with law.
- 6. Failure to Register. The City may assess added costs to determine ownership, including title search and recover costs pursuant to the Fee Schedule established by the City Commission

**SECTION 7. HARDSHIP EXCEPTION**

**A. Eligibility**

The City may grant hardship exception for a specified, limited period of time, for any one or more of the following:

- 1. Financial Hardship. Documented inability to finance rehabilitation/lease-up despite good-faith efforts (e.g., denied financing, pro forma, broker engagement).
- 2. Legal Impediments. Probate/estate, bankruptcy, foreclosure, receivership, title defects, active litigation, or recorded restrictions preventing action.
- 3. Physical/Environmental Constraints. Contamination requiring remediation; disaster damage; extraordinary structural failures; public infrastructure constraints outside of Owner control.
- 4. Redevelopment in Progress. Executed design contracts, permits applied or issued, construction financing in process or secured, or executed letters of intent to purchase real property or leases.
- 5. Health/Disability. Temporary Owner incapacitation with a property care plan or agent engaged.
- 6. Inability to Reside in Residence. Owner not living in residence due to needing care provided through a facility such as a nursing homes, memory care center, assisted living facility, or rehabilitation facility.
- 7. Market Hardship. Demonstrated lack of reasonable market interest despite listing or marketing at fair market value for a period of six or more months and Owner submission of with a revised marketing strategy.

**B. Application**

Written request to the City Manager or his designee with supporting documents, including financials, legal filings, contracts, environmental reports, real estate listings/price history or

**DRAFT PROPOSED ORDINANCE 03/04/26**

such additional documents requested by the City Manager. Site inspection or interview may be required.

**C. Duration & Conditions**

1. Initial hardship up to twelve months, renewable upon proof of progress.
2. The Owner must submit to the City written minimum maintenance and security plans, quarterly status reports, and date-specific milestones, including milestone dates for permit submittal; financing applications, and list of completion of updates.
3. Failure to maintain or meet milestones shall void the hardship relief.
4. All other applicable building and property maintenance ordinance requirements outside of this Ordinance shall remain applicable.

**SECTION 8. APPEALS**

An owner may appeal a registration determination, citation, or penalty to the City Commission within thirty days of the date of City notice. The appeal must be in writing and state the relief requested. A hearing shall be scheduled within sixty days of the submission of appeal. The City Commission’s decision is final, subject to judicial review.

**SECTION 9. SEVERABILITY**

This Ordinance and the various parts, sentences, paragraphs, sections, and clauses it contains are hereby declared to be severable. Should any part, sentence, paragraph, section, or clause be declared unconstitutional or invalid by any court for any reason, such judgement shall not affect the validity of this Ordinance as a whole or any part thereof, other than the part so declared to be unconstitutional or invalid.

Should the application of any provision of this Ordinance to a particular property, building, or structure be adjudged invalid by any court, such judgement shall not affect the application of said provision to any other property, building, or structure in the City, unless otherwise stated in the judgement.

**SECTION 10. EFFECTIVE DATE**

Effective **[insert date]**. All Abandoned or Vacant Residential or Nonresidential Buildings subject to this Ordinance must be registered as required by this Ordinance within thirty days of the effective date of this Ordinance.

# Memorandum



Date: March 3, 2026

To: Buchanan Planning Commission

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Amendment - Unified Development Code – Short-term rental regulations - Lodging**

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## Background

In 2025, the Code of Ordinances was amended to add short-term rental regulations. While reviewing the Unified Development Code (UDC), staff found no specific reference to Short-term rentals (stays of less than one month). Some communities have language regulating short-term rental in both documents.

Within the UDC, the term “lodging” is defined and references “tourist homes” which are allowed in the General Neighborhood (GN) or Suburban Commercial (SC) districts as Special Use Permits if approved by the Planning Commission when there are 6 rooms or less and they are permitted in the Neighborhood Center (NC) and Downtown (D) districts by right. The GN district covers a sizable portion of the city which does not fall within the adopted Short-term rental map which depicts properties in portions of the Neighborhood Center (NC), Industrial (I), Downtown (D) and General Neighborhood (GN) districts.

To improve the intent of the 2025 short-term rental ordinance, staff are recommending changes to the UDC. Creation of an overlay district allows the “Short-term rental permitted area map” be included along with an intent statement, basis for regulations and an applicable/exception section. Table 71-J changes the use matrix associated with lodging by dropping the room reference and adding hotel/motel, bed and breakfast and short-term rental. Lastly the definition of lodging is changed, and five new terms are added.

Attached is the completed application along with the draft language changes.

## Standards for Review

Section 71-36.B.2 Standards provides five factors that must be considered when reviewing proposed amendments to the Unified Development Code. Please review and discuss each factor before a motion and recommendation is made to the City Commission.

- a. Consistent with master plan and vision plan. Whether and the extent to which the proposed amendment is consistent with the master plan and the vision plan.
- b. Changed conditions. Whether and the extent to which there are changed conditions that require an amendment.
- c. Community need. Whether and the extent to which the proposed amendment addresses a demonstrated community need.

## Memorandum

- d. Compatible with surrounding uses. Whether and the extent to which the proposed amendment is compatible with existing and proposed uses surrounding the subject land, and is the appropriate zone district for the land, or the proposed amendment to the text of this chapter will maintain or impose compatibility among uses and will ensure efficient development within the City.
- e. Development patterns. Whether and the extent to which the proposed amendment would result in a logical and orderly development pattern.

### **Action**

Please deliberate the request, review the factors stated above from Section 71-36.B.2 before making a recommendation to the City Commission.



# Text Amendment (Changing Language in Zoning Ordinance) Application

Please print legibly. All portions must be completed. Do not leave any section blank, use N/A. Incomplete forms will be returned. If additional space is needed, please use additional sheets of paper.

## Property Information

Applicable Section of Zoning Ordinance that amendment is requested: Section 71-15.A, Section 71.16.H, Section 71-18 - Table 71-J and Article V Definitions

Briefly Explain Request: Incorporate language in the Unified Development Code regarding short-term rental based on language in the Code of Ordinances.

Are there other requests associated with application?: If yes, explain: No.

## Applicant Information

In case of trust, provide the name, address and telephone numbers of all trustees and beneficiaries of the trust. An LLC or corporation must provide a copy of Articles of Incorporation. In case the applicant is not the property owner, written permission from the property owner is required.

Name of Applicant: Kristen Gundersen, Planning/Community Dev Dir

Relationship to Property Owner: staff

Mailing Address: 302 N Redbud Trail

City: Buchanan State: MI Zip Code: 49107

Telephone Number: 269.695.3844 ext 19 Emergency Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: kgundersen@cityofbuchanan.com

Attorney: Butzel

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Engineer or Architect: N/A

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Proposed Language Change (please use additional paper if needed)**

Existing section and language from Zoning Ordinance: \_\_\_\_\_

See attached excerpt from Unified Development Code which has existing and proposed language changes. New language is underlined and deleted language is stricken.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Proposed new language for the Zoning Ordinance: See attached document

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Explain how the proposed new language supports the goals and objectives of the adopted Master Plan: The 2021 Master Plan, Housing references short-term rental in the commercial districts. After discussions in 2025, an ordinance was adopted regulating short-term in the city. The changes were placed in the Code of Ordinances. Language is needed in the Unified Development Code (UDC) Land Use references the use of overlay districts. After reviewing the UDC staff language regarding short-term rental is necessary and would be best addressed by creating an overlay district and additional definitions associated with Lodging.

**Text Amendment Standards**

If needed use additional sheets of paper to respond to Standards.

Section 71-35.B.2 Standards. The advisability of amending the text of this chapter or making an amendment to the zoning map is a matter committed to the legislative discretion of the City Commission. In determining whether to adopt or disapprove d the proposed amendment, the City Commission must consider the following factors:

- a. Consistent with master plan and vision plan. Whether and the extent to which the proposed amendment is consistent with the master plan and the vision plan. The 2021 Master Plan under #10 Land Use references considering adopting overlay zoning for other uses. After reviewing the Code of Ordinance regulations, it was concluded creating an overlay district and adding definitions was appropriate. In addition under #7 Housing states develop housing policies and allow short-term rental in commercial districts.
- b. Changed conditions. Whether and the extent to which there are changed conditions that require an amendment.

In 2025, the Code of Ordinances was amended creating regulations for short-term rental. The Unified Development Code (Zoning Ordinance) did not provide any reference to short-term rental.

- c. Community need. Whether and the extent to which the proposed amendment addresses a demonstrated community need.

The proposed amendment establishes an overlay district for short-term rental uses and includes the "permitted map area" adopted in the Code of Ordinances.

- d. Compatible with surrounding uses. Whether and the extent to which the proposed amendment is compatible with existing and proposed uses surrounding the subject land, and is the appropriate zone district for the land, or the proposed amendment to the text of this chapter will maintain or improve compatibility among uses and will ensure efficient development within the City.

The short-term rental overlay district is in keeping with the adopted regulations found in the Code of Ordinances that were adopted in 2025.

- e. Development Patterns. Whether and the extent to which the proposed amendment would result in a logical and orderly development pattern.

Discussions regarding short-term rental regulations and appropriate locations were discussed as several public meetings before the Code of Ordinances was amended.

### TEXT AMENDMENT (REZONING) APPLICATION CERTIFICATION

The Applicant certifies and acknowledges and agrees that:

- A. The statements contained in this application are true and correct to the best of the Applicant's knowledge and belief. The owner of the subject property, if different from the applicant, states that they consent to the filing of the application and that all information contained is true and correct to the best of their knowledge;
- B. The Applicant understands that an incomplete or nonconforming application will not be considered. In addition, the Applicant understands that the City may require additional information prior to the consideration of this application;
- C. The Applicant shall make the property that is subject of this application available for inspection by the City at reasonable times;
- D. If any information provided in this application changes or becomes incomplete or inapplicable for any reason following submission of this application, the Applicant shall submit a supplemental application or other acceptable written statement containing the new or corrected information as soon as practicable but not less than ten (10) days following the change, and that failure to do so shall be grounds for denial of the application;
- E. The Applicant understands that if the application is approved with conditions, those conditions will need to be met as part of any permit issued; and
- F. The Applicant understands that if the division is approved, a land division does not occur until receipt of a registerable conveyance is supplied to the City of St. Buchanan.

On the 9th, day of February, 2026, I/We have read the above certification, understand it, and agree to abide by its conditions.

Kristen Gundersen Planning & Dev Div Kristen Gundersen  
 Signature of Applicant or Authorized Agent      Name of Applicant or Authorized Agent

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN

To before me this 9th day of February, 2026

Karla Langston

Notary Public

KALLA LANGSTON  
 NOTARY PUBLIC - STATE OF MICHIGAN  
 COUNTY OF BERRIEN  
 My Commission Expires June 09, 2032  
 Acting in the County of Berrien

New language is underlined and language to be deleted is stricken

Sec. 71-5 Zoning districts established

A. Zoning under this chapter is limited to the following district designations.

8. Short-term rental Overlay District allows short-term rental uses to be located in specific geographic areas.

Sec. 71-14 Zoning districts

A. Official zoning map – Figure 71-A (Zoning Map shall have the following language added under “Zoning Districts”)

Overlay District

Short-Term Rental Overlay District – see Sec. 71-16.H.11

Sec. 71-16 General requirements

Section 71-16.H Establishment of zoning districts and regulations

1. through 10 - intentionally left blank (in future Tables 71-C through 71-H will be retitled)

11. Short-Term Rental Overlay District (STROD)

a. Intent. The Short-Term Rental Overlay District is established and applies to the area shown on the map in Section 71-16.H.11.c. The intent of the Short-Term Rental Overlay District is:

i. Protect and promote the health, safety and welfare of the City’s residents, property owners, visitors, and neighborhoods by allowing short-term rentals (STR) within the City under certain conditions as found in Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinances and in certain zoning districts.

ii. Recognizes that short-term rentals may potentially promote tourism, increase property values, and provide valuable business opportunities for property owners.

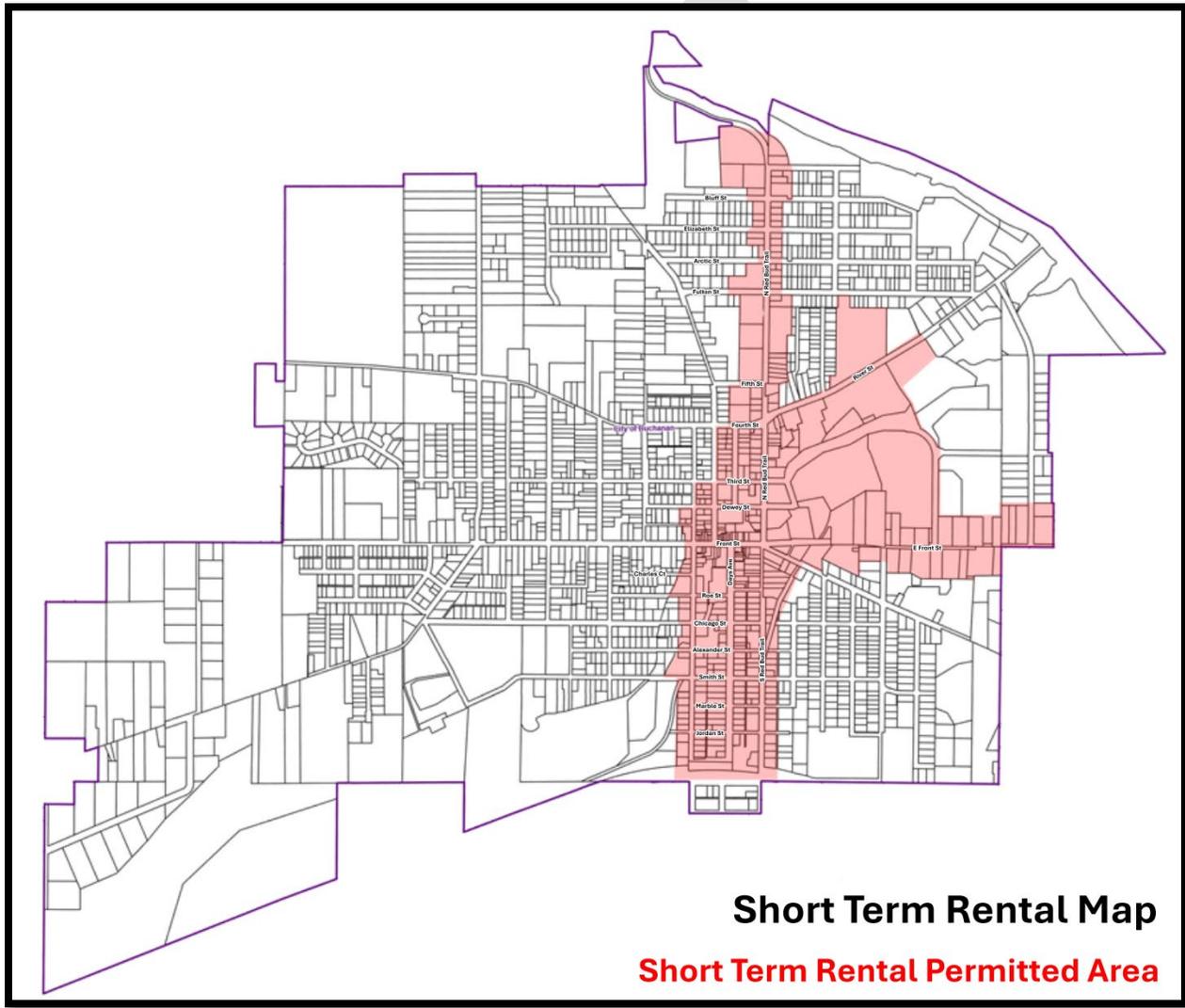
iii. Ensure that the operation of short-term rentals is done in a safe and beneficial manner for the well-being of all in the community. The character of residential zoning districts must also be protected and preserved.

iv. While short-term rentals can provide community benefits, their proliferation in residential neighborhoods can cause difficulties where character of the use takes on a more transitory and commercial character.

v. By creating the overlay district it will decrease potential conflicts with adjacent properties, limit impact on long-term housing availability and maintain the residential character of neighborhoods.

b. Basis for Regulations. Whereas in 2025, the City Commission adopted Ordinance 2025.09.443 establishing regulations that must be met for short-term rental in Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinance which may be amended from time to time.

c. Short-term rental Areas. The Short-Term Rental Overlay Map as established in Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinances.



d. Applicability, Exception

i. Properties located outside of the overlay district are prohibited from requesting use variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals for the establishment of a short-term rental unit.

Section 71-18 Use

Table 71-J Use Matrix

TABLE 71-J USE MATRIX							
	N	NE	GN	NC	D	SC	I
<b><u>Lodging/Accommodations</u></b>							
<u>6 rooms or less</u>			S	■	■	S	
<u>12 rooms or less Hotel/Motel</u>				■	■	■	
<u>More than 12 rooms</u>					■	■	
<u>Bed and Breakfast</u>			S	■	■	S	
<u>Short-Term Rental</u>			OD	OD	OD	OD	OD

Key :

- Permitted use ■
- Temporary use T
- Accessory use A
- Special use permit S
- Prohibited use blank space
- OD Overlay District

Article V. DEFINITIONS

Lodging: a land use that provides sleeping accommodations to temporary guests, whether in a whole building, a dwelling, or a portion of a dwelling, with or without meals or services. Occupancy is transient. Lodging includes hotels, inns, bed and breakfasts, tourist homes, and similar establishments. Lodging is not a residential use or a short-term rental use.

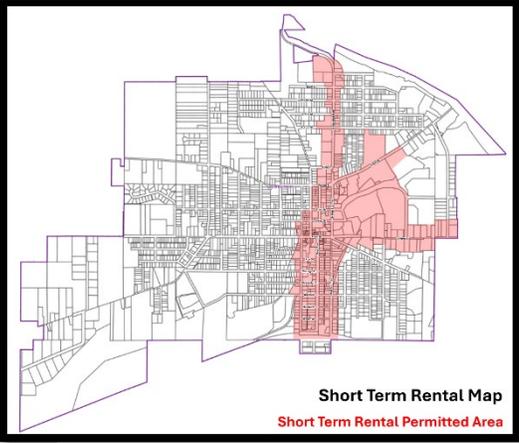
Bed and breakfast: a single-family detached residential structure operated by an owner or employee who lives on site, offering as an accessory use, overnight sleeping accommodations to transient tenants for compensation, and may provide meals.

Hotel or motel: A facility offering transient lodging accommodations to the public. Hotels may include restaurants, meeting spaces, ballrooms and banquet halls. A hotel shall not be

considered or construed to be a multiple family dwelling, Bed and Breakfast or Short-Term Rental.

Overlay District: A zoning district which has definite boundaries and is superimposed over all existing zoning districts within those boundaries. The overlay district may establish additional regulations, reduce existing regulations, or extend or limit the permitted uses within the underlying zoning district. Where there is a conflict between standards in the Overlay district and the underlying Zoning district, the standards in the Overlay district shall be applied. The intent is to address particular issues that span a geographic area and may include more than one underlying zoning district or portions of underlying zoning districts.

Short-Term Rental Overlay District: Allows short-term rental with stays of less than one month as a permitted used in accordance regulations found in Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinance.



Short-Term Rental: A commercial use which is subordinate to the residential principal use of a dwelling unit, where the tenant is allowed to lease the dwelling unit for periods of less than one month. Short-term rental is a commercial use. If a tenant leases a dwelling unit for a period of at least one calendar month, this is not a short-term rental but instead is a residential use. A property authorized for short-term rental use may also be used for such residential uses. Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinances provides requirements for operation.

# Memorandum



Date: March 4, 2026

To: Planning Commission Members

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Discussion - Unified Development Code – Buffering, Tree Preservation and Fencing**

## Background

The Unified Development Code became effective on December 12, 2025, and staff has been using it to answer questions and review requests and is recommending Section 71-26 Buffering, Section 71-28 Tree preservation and landscape standards along with Section 71-29 Fencing standards be reviewed for clarification, expansion of regulations to include refuse screening and lighting standards.

### Section 71-26 Buffering.

The language provides states “newly developing property” to provide buffering. Many buffering/landscape codes also allow the use of fencing.

Section 71-27.H Loading standards include information about refuse collection must be located and screened so it is not visible from adjacent streets, or residential uses (Section 71-27.H.1.b). This language is typically found with buffering or landscaping regulations.

### Section 71-28 Tree preservation and landscape standards

Within Table 71-S there is at least one tree - Sweetgum which is typically not desired because it drops balls. There may be other species that may not be desired. In addition, there are some references that are unclear – “special status list” for protected trees. It is believed the language should be reviewed to look for opportunities for further clarification and improve the flow of the section. Staff would also recommend the Buchanan Tree Friends be involved once drafting is further along.

### Section 71-29 Fencing standards

May fence regulations provide for posts to extend 6” above the actual fence material and most require the “good side” face out. There is also concern regarding safety and athletic fencing needs for some users as a 6’ fence may not be appropriate. Added language can be drafted to allow city staff under certain conditions to increase the allowable height of a fence, or the variance process can be modified for granting fence variances with different

## Memorandum

standards. Staff have heard concern about the use of chicken wire fencing on neighboring properties that should be further discussed. Maximum heights of fencing have been provided, however, there is no reference to streetside when the parcel is a corner lot or the need to maintain the corner lot clear sight line.

Many communities regulate lighting in parking lots with maximum height of poles and cast of glare. The UDC does not have any provisions associated with lighting requirements. Staff are recommending language be added.

### Next Steps

Discuss the concerns brought up by staff and decide if they should be addressed. If it is concluded changes are necessary, direct staff to prepare draft language for further review and discussion at a future meeting. Similar to the signage discussions, staff would review other community's ordinances and redline the existing language with proposed changes to be reviewed by the Planning Commission at future meetings.

## Excerpt – Unified Development Code – Sections 71-26 Buffering, 71-28 Tree preservation and landscape standards and 71-29 Fencing standards

### Sec. 71-26 Buffering

Buffering is required between industrial and commercial development and adjacent uses.

- A. Transition with landscape buffers. A landscape buffer is required along shared lot lines where different zoning districts abut, as specified in [Table 71-L Buffer Requirements](#).
- B. Buffers must meet the configuration standards in [Table 71-M Buffer Types](#).
- C. Landscape buffers must:
  - 1. Be located on the newly developing property;
  - 2. Include continuous evergreen hedges with one row per five feet of buffer width;
  - 3. Include ground cover to cover all exposed soil; and
  - 4. Allow two understory trees to substitute for one canopy tree, up to 30 percent of the required tree count.
  - 5. Natural drainage ways or existing vegetation may be substituted for required buffers when:
    - a. The feature is at least 20 feet wide.

TABLE 71-L BUFFER REQUIREMENTS							
Proposed Zoning	Existing Adjacent Zoning						
	N	NE	GN	NC	D	SC	I
N							
NE				A	B	C	C
GN				A	B	B	C
NC	C	B	A				B
D	C	B	A				B
SC	C	C	C	B	B		
I	C	C	C	C	C	B	

TABLE 71-M BUFFER TYPES			
Type	Width of Buffer	Hedge	Canopy Trees
A	6' minimum	6' high at maturity, planted 30 inches on center, minimum.	1 per each 50 linear ft.
B	10' minimum		1 per each 40 linear ft.
C	25' minimum		2 per each 50 linear ft.

## Sec. 71-28 Tree preservation and landscape standards

### A. Purpose.

1. Preserve and increase Buchanan's urban tree canopy for public health, safety, welfare, storm-water management, heat-island mitigation, habitat, community character, and economic development.
2. Implement the Buchanan Tree Maintenance Program, including its risk-based priorities, seven-year pruning cycle, planting targets, and species-diversity goals.
3. Satisfy Tree City USA eligibility and the MEDC "Development-Ready Communities" Best Practice 2.6 for Green Infrastructure.
4. Provide plain, prescriptive standards that is simple to administer, with direction from the Tree Board (formerly Buchanan Tree Friends) as needed.

### B. Applicability.

1. All new construction, site-plan, or subdivision applications in every zoning district.
2. Any removal of a Protected Tree ( $\geq 8$  in. diameter at breast height (DBH)) or Landmark Tree ( $\geq 24$  in. DBH or on the City's "special-status" list).
3. Public trees in rights-of-way, parks, civic spaces, and City facilities.
4. Routine single- or two-family yard activity that does not remove a Protected or Landmark Tree is exempt from subsections E - G.

### C. Administration.

1. The community development director (or designee) is the approving authority.
2. Tree-Work / Tree-Removal Permits are one-page forms; compliant applications are approved administratively within 5 working days.
3. The community development director may consult a certified arborist, the Tree Board, or the City's on-call engineer; reasonable review costs may be charged to the applicant.
4. A Tree Fund is hereby created; in-lieu fees, fines, and donations are used solely for public-tree planting, maintenance, or inventory updates.
5. Tree Board designation. The volunteer organization known as Buchanan Tree Friends is hereby designated as the Buchanan Tree Board for the purposes of this Code, Tree City USA, and grant eligibility.

### D. Public tree care.

1. Street- and park-tree pruning must follow a 6- to 7-year cycle; young trees ( $< 6$  in. DBH) must receive structural training every 3 years.
2. High-risk trees identified in the Buchanan Tree Maintenance Program are treated first, then moderate-risk, then routine maintenance.
3. Any contractor working on a public tree must hold ISA Certified Arborist credentials and obtain a permit.

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E. Tree preservation in development.

1. Tree survey. Site plans must show location, species, and DBH of all existing trees  $\geq$  6 in. DBH.
2. Preservation priority. Designs must avoid Landmark Trees. The Administrator may waive preservation if no prudent and feasible alternative exists.
3. Protection during construction. Preserved trees must be fenced at the dripline or  $\geq$  10 ft. radius, whichever is greater; no grading, trenching, storage, or vehicle traffic is permitted inside the fence.
4. Credits for preservation. Each healthy tree  $\geq$  8 in. DBH retained counts toward new-tree requirements, per [Table 71-Q](#).

TABLE 71-Q TREE PRESERVATION CREDITS	
Existing Tree Diameter at Breast Height (DBH)	Count As
8 to 17 in.	2 new trees
18 to 23 in.	3 new trees
$\geq$ 24 in. (Landmark trees)	4 new trees

F. Tree removal and replacement.

1. Removal of any Protected or Landmark Tree requires a permit.
2. Replacement is calculated on total diameter removed:
  - a. Protected Trees – replace 50% of removed DBH (inch-for-inch).
  - b. Landmark Trees – replace 100% of removed DBH.
1. Replacement stock: deciduous 2.5-in. caliper minimum; evergreen 8 ft. tall minimum.
2. If the site cannot physically accept all required inches, pay an in-lieu fee of \$200 per 2.5-in. caliper (or equivalent) to the Tree Fund.

G. Landscape planting standards.

1. Front-yard planting by zoning district:
  - a. NE:  $\geq$  2 understory trees or 1 understory tree + 10 shrubs.
  - b. GN & NP-M:  $\geq$  1 understory tree or 10 shrubs.
  - c. Existing healthy trees may satisfy these counts.
2. Suburban Commercial (SC) & Industrial (I) Districts
  - a. Minimum landscaped area: 15% of gross lot area.
  - b. Minimum 2 shrubs per 250 sq. ft. and 2 trees per 500 sq. ft. of required landscape area; cover beds 100% with living groundcover or mulch.
  - c. At least 25% of landscaping must lie along lot lines if abutting a different zoning district.

- d. Outdoor storage and waste areas within 15 ft. of a lot line must be screened by a continuous 6-ft. opaque fence, wall, or evergreen hedge.
- 3. Street trees, parking lots, and internal landscaping.
  - a. Street frontage. 1 canopy tree per 40 linear ft. of new public or private street.
  - b. Parking lots. 1 landscape island with a canopy tree per 12 spaces; islands minimum 9 × 18 ft. and curbed with openings for infiltration.
  - c. Internal plantings may count toward the lot-wide tree totals.
- 4. Clearances between trees and objects are required per [Table 71-R](#).

TABLE 71-R TREE CLEARANCES	
Horizontal	
2 ft.	from walks and curbs (in wells or planters)
3 ft.	from swales
5 ft.	from underground utilities
6 ft.	from one-story eaves
8 ft.	from two-story eaves
Vertical	
8 ft.	above walks
13 ft.	above drives and streets

- 5. Prohibited material.
  - a. Plants with hazardous thorns within 2 ft. of front or side-street lot lines.
  - b. Artificial plants or artificial turf except on athletic fields.
  - c. Species listed as “invasive or noxious” by the State of Michigan or subsection [L](#).

H. Exemptions.

- 1. Dead or imminently hazardous trees (documented by photo or arborist letter).
- 2. Species classified as invasive by the State of Michigan.
- 3. Emergency work by public utilities.
- 4. Active commercial orchards or Christmas-tree farms.
- 5. Routine pruning that follows ANSI A300 and removes ≤ 25% of live crown in one season.

I. Species selection and diversity.

- 1. Follow the Recommended Species List in subsection [M](#), excerpted from the Tree Maintenance Program, as amended by resolution.
- 2. Diversity goal: no more than 20% of any one genus or 10% of any one species within a development phase.
- 3. To reduce over-representation, no additional maples may be planted until the citywide maple share falls below 30%.

hghgh

J. Maintenance and warranty.

1. Applicants must guarantee survival of new plant material for two growing seasons; dead plantings must be replaced at the applicant's cost.
2. For large projects requiring financial guarantees, the City shall inspect replacements before releasing any bond or letter of credit.

K. Enforcement and penalties.

1. Violation is a municipal civil infraction; fines per municipal Schedule of Fees plus required tree replacement.
2. Illegal removal of a Landmark Tree requires 200% inch-for-inch replacement or equivalent in-lieu fee.
3. The Administrator may issue stop-work orders for continued non-compliance.

L. Prohibited species list.

1. The following species shall not be planted within the City and, if present, should be removed when practical:
  - a. Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)
  - b. Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)
  - c. Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*)
  - d. Glossy Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*)
  - e. Callery/Bradford Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*)
  - f. Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*)
  - g. Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)
  - h. Any species listed as "Prohibited" or "Restricted" under Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, Part 413.

M. Recommended species list.

1. The recommended species list is in [Table 71-S](#). The City Commission may, by resolution, add to or revise this list to address pests, climate trends, or inventory data without amending the text of this section.

TABLE 71-S RECOMMENDED SPECIES LIST

COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	CULTIVAR	NATIVE	SHAPE	MATURE SPREAD (FT.)	MATURE HEIGHT (FT.)
<b>American Elm</b>	Ulmus americana	Valley Forge; Princeton	Yes	Vase	50 to 70	70 to 90
<b>American Hornbeam</b>	Carpinus caroliniana		Yes	Upright	20 to 30	20 to 30
<b>American Linden</b>	Tilia americana		Yes	Rounded	30 to 50	50 to 80
<b>American Yellowwood</b>	Cladrastis kentukea		No	Rounded/ Vase	20 to 50	40 to 50
<b>Bald Cypress</b>	Taxodium distichum		No	Pyramidal	25 to 35	60 to 80
<b>Blackgum</b>	Nyssa sylvatica		No	Pyramidal / Oval	25 to 35	65 to 75
<b>Bur Oak</b>	Quercus macrocarpa		Yes	Upright Oval / Spreading	40 to 60	60 to 70
<b>Cockspur Thornless Hawthorn</b>	Crataegus crusgalli var inermis		Yes	Rounded	10 to 25	10 to 15
<b>Crabapple</b>	Malus spp.	Sugar Tyme; Prairie Fire; Various	No	Rounded	20 to 25	20 to 25

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**TABLE 71-S RECOMMENDED SPECIES LIST**

COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	CULTIVAR	NATIVE	SHAPE	MATURE SPREAD (FT.)	MATURE HEIGHT (FT.)
<b>Cucumbertree magnolia</b>	<i>Magnolia acuminata</i>	Various	No	Pyramidal	20 to 35	40 to 70
<b>Dawn Redwood</b>	<i>Metasequoia glyptostroboides</i>		No	Upright Pyramidal	20 to 30	60 to 80
<b>Eastern Hackberry</b>	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>		Yes	Rounded	40 to 50	60 to 70
<b>European Hornbeam</b>	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	Fastigiata; Various	No	Oval	20 to 30	10 to 30
<b>Ginkgo</b>	<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>	male trees only	No	Round / Pyramidal	30 to 60	50 to 75
<b>Golden Raintree</b>	<i>Koelreuteria paniculata</i>		No	Rounded	30 to 40	30 to 40
<b>Green hawthorn</b>	<i>Crataegus viridis</i>	Winter King	No	Upright Vase to Spreading	15 to 20	10 to 15
<b>Hybrid Elm</b>	<i>Ulmus X</i>	Patriot; Triumph; Accolade	No	Vase	30 to 45	40 to 60
<b>Japanese Tree Lilac</b>	<i>Syringia reticulata</i>	Ivory Silk	No	Oval to Rounded	15 to 20	20 to 30
<b>Katsura tree</b>	<i>Cercidiphyllum japonicum</i>		No	Upright to Pyramidal	30 to 40	30 to 40
<b>Kentucky Coffeetree</b>	<i>Gymnocladus dioica</i>		No	Upright to Rounded	40 to 70	50 to 70
<b>Kousa dogwood</b>	<i>Cornus kousa</i>		No	Rounded / Vase	15 to 30	15 to 30
<b>Little-leaf Linden</b>	<i>Tilia cordata</i>	Greenspire	No	Pyramidal to Rounded	30 to 40	40 to 60
<b>London Planetree</b>	<i>Platanus x acerifolia</i>	Bloodgood; Various	No	Pyramidal / Rounded	50 to 70	75 to 90
<b>Northern Red Oak</b>	<i>Quercus rubra</i>		Yes	Rounded	60 to 80	50 to 60
<b>Pin Oak</b>	<i>Quercus palustris</i>		Yes	Upright Pyramidal / Oval	40 to 50	60 to 80

**TABLE 71-S RECOMMENDED SPECIES LIST**

COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	CULTIVAR	NATIVE	SHAPE	MATURE SPREAD (FT.)	MATURE HEIGHT (FT.)
<b>Red Horsechestnut</b>	Aesculus x carnea	Briotti; Ft. McNair	Hybrid	Upright / Oval	30 to 40	60 to 80
<b>Redbud</b>	Cercis canadensis	Various	Yes	Rounded	15 to 25	15 to 30
<b>River Birch</b>	Betula nigra		Yes	Upright / Oval	30 to 40	40 to 60
<b>Serviceberry or Juneberry</b>	Amelanchier x grandiflora	Autumn Brilliance; Princess Diana	Hybrid	Rounded	10 to 15	10 to 25
<b>Silver Linden</b>	Tilia tomentosa		No	Broad Columnar	30 to 50	50 to 70
<b>Swamp White Oak</b>	Quercus bicolor		Yes	Upright Oval / Rounded	50 to 60	50 to 70
<b>Sweetgum</b>	Liquidambar styraciflua		Yes	Pyramidal / Oval	35 to 50	60 to 75
<b>Sycamore</b>	Platanus occidentalis		Yes	Pyramidal / Rounded	50 to 70	75 to 90
<b>Thornless Honeylocust</b>	Gleditsia triacanthos var inermis	Various	Yes	Rounded	30 to 70	30 to 70
<b>Tuliptree</b>	Liriodendron tulipifera		Yes	Pyramidal / Oval	35 to 50	70 to 90
<b>Zelkova</b>	Zelkova serrata	Green Vase; Village Green	No	Vase	40 to 50	60 to 80

**Sec. 71-29 Fencing standards**

- A. Construction of a fence requires a zoning compliance permit issued by the zoning administrator prior to construction.
- B. When erected on a lot line, all of the fence and any of its supporting structures must be contained within the lot.
- C. Chain link, barbed wire, razor wire, and electrically charged fences are not permitted.
- D. Fences may not exceed four feet in height in the front yard and may not exceed six feet in height in all other yards.