

CHAPTER FIVE

The Village Center

VISION

The Village Center is a vibrant locale with diverse activity. It is often thought of as a business center, but it is much more. Juxtaposed among and in proximity to the businesses are homes, governmental buildings, a church, and the Village Green. The design of the buildings and the landscape recall the craftsmanship, detailing, individuality, and human scale of nineteenth century architecture.

Parking is largely out of view and pedestrians are delighted by architectural and landscape beauty. There are spring flowers, brick walks and attractive buildings of scale, colors, and architectural detailing that remind people of the nineteenth century. Traffic is slow through the Village Center.

People are comfortable and secure while shopping or participating in community events such as Winter Fest and the Labor Day Round-Up. Parents enjoy watching their children play on the Village green and adjacent park. Residents of the Village and neighboring communities gather in the Village Center for concerts, ice cream socials, parades and other activities.

The Village Center is connected to all the residential areas by open spaces, pedestrian and bike paths and narrow, winding two-lane streets. Open spaces and paths follow natural features such as woods and the Franklin River. The Village Center is the location of the Village Administrative Offices, Police Station, Fire Station, Library and Community Church.

The Historic District lies within the Village Center and has many authentic period homes, public and commercial buildings with special lights, street pavement, signs and plantings that contribute to an attractive, unified appearance.

The Village Center is the heart of the Village of Franklin. It is the place where its residents go to vote and conduct governmental business, to educate themselves at the library, to attend services and events at church, to visit the dentist, to see a lawyer, and to play a game of baseball. In a nutshell, it is the main gathering place for the residents of the Village. For a select few residents, the Village Center has even more personal significance, for they live there. It would be hard to overestimate how important this district is to the image and life in the Village of Franklin.

This chapter of the Master Plan deals with the Village Center in an overall sense, and the next chapter deals more specifically with the commercial element.

VILLAGE CENTER HISTORY

The Village of Franklin was established on land that was originally purchased in 1824 by Dillucena Stoughton and Elijah Bullock, both from Niagara County, New York. The village grew with many settlers coming from the Detroit area. One of the first settlers, Dr. Ebenezer Raynale, gave Franklin its name in 1828. A business center was beginning to develop by 1830, adding many homes and businesses over the next few years, including blacksmith shops, buggy works, grist mills, taverns, hotels and a general store. Two mills were built, the first in 1837, to take advantage of the Franklin River's waterpower.

George Matthews became the first land developer in Franklin, buying part of Bullock's farm in 1833 and dividing it into lots. He also built what is now the Franklin Cider Mill on the north side of Village. By 1855 there were about 20 dwellings of

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various patterns and proportions in the village. Franklin grew relatively slowly for the rest of the nineteenth century because the rail line bypassed it. The early history is important because it established the basic pattern of development that exists in the Village Center today.

The Franklin area, including Southfield and Bloomfield Townships, experienced influxes of residential development after WWI and more significantly, after WWII. Several new subdivisions were built in the areas surrounding the historic district. New homes, commercial and civic buildings and the Franklin Community Church were constructed within the Village Center area during this period.

The history tells us that the Village Center is a collage of period styles conjured by constantly changing tastes and advances in building technology. For example, the style and technology from the early 19th century is most evident in the buildings and tight plat patterns in the heart of the Village Center along Franklin Road. This pattern dissipates the farther east or west of the Village Center one moves.

This is not only an interesting phenomenon to observe for historical purposes. These patterns of development from the nineteenth century lay the groundwork for planning and zoning today. Accordingly, the Zoning Ordinance's most intense classifications - the C-1, Local Business and R-3, Medium Density Residential - correspond roughly to the boundaries of the oldest plats in the Village Center.

APPEARANCE AND IDENTITY

The Village Center boundaries are considered for planning purposes to be coterminous with the boundaries of the National Historic District. Thus, Village Center extends from the Huda School on the south to the Franklin Cider Mill at Fourteen Mile Road north. Within the Village Center are several additional landmarks, including the Broughton House, Police Station, Village Green, Library, and Fire Station.

This small district contains structures that display a variety of styles of architecture, reminiscent of

the various periods of development. Century-old buildings are still in active use, providing links to the people and events of earlier times. Styles of architecture prevalent in the district include: Greek Revival (1830-1860), vernacular (1830-1890), Queen Anne (1880-1910), Colonial Revival (1880-1960), American Foursquare (1900-1930), and Craftsman (1905-1930). The mix of architectural styles is unified by a landscape of trees and shrubs.



It is significant that the buildings are laid out in a relatively dense development pattern in the Village Center. The closeness of the buildings has much to do with the character and walkability of the district, and the fact that the pattern that was established prior to the advent of the automobile. The boundaries of the National Historic District are generally the limits of dense development, taking in German Mill, Carol Street, and Bowden on the east side of Franklin.

In the residential areas, Franklin is faced with pressure for more intensive land use - larger homes on smaller lots. Many of the Village Center's attributes - front lawns, mature trees and shrubs, roads with a "soft" informal edge - are in danger of disappearing or being altered. With each passing year, irreplaceable historic buildings become more valuable, and their protection from inappropriate alteration becomes more challenging.

VILLAGE CENTER CHARACTER

A workshop was held in 1993 on the Village Center. The following statements from that workshop summarize the character of the Village Center, then and now:

- The Village Center is human-sized in scale.
- It has a small village feeling.
- It has an inherent rural quality
- There is a strong sense of historic continuum in the Village Center.
- It has vernacular rawness – what we see looks to have resolved out of basic human needs over a long period of time without the self-consciousness evident in most environments.

Effective preservation of the character of the Village Center requires the identification of elements that combine to make up the physical environment, together with an understanding of the evolutionary change affecting their existence.

In the Village Center, a number of what were originally historic residential structures have been adapted to commercial and office uses. “Newer” buildings have introduced the “Colonial Revival” style of architecture to the Village. Most recently, contemporary structures not related to the nineteenth or early twentieth century village character have been constructed adjacent to the Village Center in the form of residential condominiums and an office building.

The more recent contemporary styles, particularly the residential condominiums constructed east of the Village Center, fail to harmonize with the predominant nineteenth and early twentieth century character of the Village. While the mix of building styles contributes to the eclectic nature of the Village, continued disregard for the historic architecture of Franklin poses a serious threat to the character of the Historic District.

Changes in landscape features and decorative elements have followed changes in land use and architectural styles. Signs, lamp posts, walkways, fences, and landscape materials have been added to sites in the Village Center with seemingly little

regard for the overall character of the district. While some of these elements support the original Village character, many others detract from it.



The 1997 Master Plan analyzed and summarized Village Center character as being either essential, simulated, or changed. This classification has validity today and is presented below.

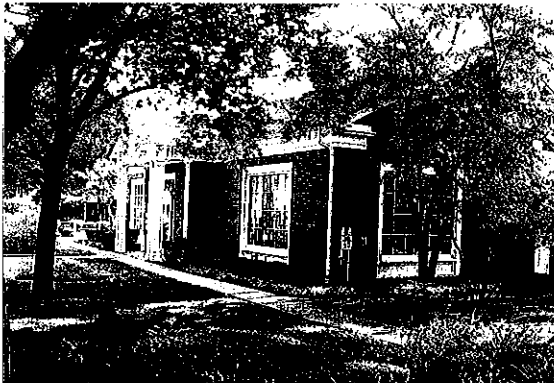
The *essential character* consists primarily of the historic architectural and landscape features that are still evident in the Village and are largely responsible for its distinction and appeal, both past and present. Features of this character include:

- An architectural heritage unique to Michigan and worthy of all efforts to ensure preservation and maintenance.
- Buildings set back from the road at varying distances in a pattern characteristic of early settlement.
- Commercial uses generally facing non-commercial uses across Franklin Road, contributing diversity to the environment and reducing the necessity for shoppers to frequently cross the roadway.
- Front lawns, mature shrubs, and trees that enhance the environment of the Village Center.
- The softness of definition between roadway, paths, and yards due to the general absence of street curbs and paved sidewalks. This pattern lends an

informality and comfortableness to the Village, but may lead to insecurity or confusion as boundaries between private and public, automobile and pedestrian are blurred.

- The substantial depth of the original lots that has allowed activities generated at rear doors of commercial and other uses to be kept at some distance from abutting residential properties.

The conversion of structures to new uses (typically commercial uses in old houses) can lead to the creation of a *simulated character* in the Village. Construction of new buildings designed in an historic architectural idiom also leads to the creation of new “old” character; new “Colonial Revival” architectural style structures are included in this category. Taken to the extreme, simulated character would produce a theme-park type environment of contemporary structures designed to present an image of historic character. Examples of this category of development include:



- Architectural guidelines for new construction designed to give the appearance of historic buildings, including materials, shapes, and colors.
- Site design controls requiring individual parcels to characterize early Village settlement while permitting landscapes that display buildings to the street.
- Single-site, off-street parking areas.

- Landscape buffers between residential and commercial uses.
- Coordinated lighting, signs, and graphics.

Contemporary late-twentieth century development reflects a *changed character* that is not incompatible with the Village Center as long as individual sites are widely-dispersed and located in out-of-the-way areas. The shape, scale, details, colors, materials, and landscape elements reflect little or nothing of the historic nature of the Village and are readily apparent as foreign even to a simulated turn-of-the-century environment. If the historic character of the Village is to be maintained, contemporary changed character development should be discouraged. Characteristics of this category of development include:

- Removal of existing historic architectural and landscape elements.
- Introduction of metal and glass as primary building materials.
- Vehicular, rather than pedestrian, focus to land uses.
- Widening of Franklin Road and introduction of curbs and other urban features.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

There have been several accomplishments in the Village Center since 1997, not the least of which is the reconstruction of Franklin Road, between Thirteen and Fourteen Mile Roads, a project that was accomplished with great sensitivity to the historic environment. Coincidental with the street paving was the installation of traffic calming devices and crosswalks with signs at critical crossing points. Tree planting along the road and in the Village Green has occurred, supported in part by grants secured by the Village Administrator. Monitoring the health of the trees continues, and additional tree planting is expected in the future. Other major achievements involved public safety buildings, including the construction of the Police Station, immediately south of the Village Hall, and the expansion of the Fire Station.

RELEVANT ISSUES

According to observations made at the 1996 town meeting, residents wanted the size and physical appearance of the Village Center to remain about the same, with the possible addition of a restaurant or coffeehouse, which has transpired since then. Eighty-one percent of Village residents agreed that the community should have an identifiable center. Seventy-nine percent believed that the design (size, color, style) of commercial signs should be controlled.

At the October 6, 2005, Master Plan Meeting, the Village Center was identified as one of the Ten Main Issues. Participants cited the need for more businesses, more foot traffic, more community activities, more enforcement of ordinances for absentee landlords, and the possibility of a special character zone for frontage parcels along Franklin Road.

Guided Growth

Development pressures and changing demands threaten to alter the appearance of houses and cultural facilities in the Village Center. While it is important to preserve the unique historic character of the Village, careful changes must be embraced to prevent stagnation and decline.

New or expanded civic and cultural facilities must complement the essential character of the Village, as is evident in the recent addition to the Franklin-Bingham Farms Fire Department station. Buildings can also be sited and or landscaped so as to minimize their visual impact on the overall character of the Village Center; a good example of this is the new police station tucked into a hillside behind the Broughton House.

Changes may be needed in the future for the Franklin Library and the Village government offices. By learning from previous development and staying mindful of the effects of new construction on a historic area, the needs of today's residents can be fulfilled while respecting the heritage of centuries that is inherent to the Village Center.

Destination: Franklin

Driving north on Franklin Road offers an opportunity to panoramically present the Village Center to visitors. Driving over the crest of the hill by the cemetery should feel like a century's worth of pressure is lifted off your shoulders as you descend into "the town that time forgot."

Despite the historic architecture and slow traffic speeds, drivers can all too easily continue through the Village without pause and without a chance to appreciate the unique character of Franklin. There is little to catch a driver's eye and compel him or her to park.

Attracting visitors to the Village Center as a destination could help to strengthen the economic base of Franklin, providing the means to fund historic preservation initiatives or Village-initiated infrastructure projects. Carefully-designed wayfinding signage and clear non-motorized connections through the Village Center from the cemetery to the cider mill could encourage visitors and residents alike to leave their cars behind and experience the Village as the early settlers did: by human power.

Village Center Residential

A crucial element in the nineteenth-century character of the Village Center is the inclusion of residences among commercial and civic uses. Although a few residences remain, several nineteenth-century residences along Franklin Road have been converted over the years to commercial use.



Among the remaining residences along Franklin Road a dichotomy exists. Some of the homes are stately in their appearance, with tasteful landscaping and towering trees. Other houses are heavily landscaped to buffer the private space within from the public world of the Village Center. These screens of trees and tall shrubs disrupt the character of the Village Center, creating voids in the fabric that is presented to passersby.



Within the Village Center but not fronting on Franklin Road there are several other nineteenth and early twentieth century homes, many of which have been tastefully restored and maintained. The juxtaposition of the homes, the fascinating architecture and landscaping, and the scale of development contribute to this being a very appealing, walkable neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen the Village Center as a destination by promoting its historic and cultural attributes.

- Consider initiating a series of educational events held on the Village Green and in public facilities that commemorate life in the 19th century village. Work with local school districts to organize field trips or adult education programs.
- Explore expansion of the library at its present location.
- Maintain a portion of the historical society museum, or a portion of its holdings, in a building in the Village Center to better interpret the rich history of Franklin Village.
- Continue to support activities, such as the walking tour of the Village Center and Historic District, which was developed by the Historical Society.

Protect and maintain the diverse architecture of residential structures in the Village Center.

- In conjunction with the Historic District Commission, develop illustrated design guidelines or a pattern book for homeowners who wish to renovate or expand their residential property within the Village Center. Encourage the preservation of 'vernacular rawness' without devolving into organized cuteness.
- Encourage landscaping that echoes historic treatments and creates a sense of unity throughout the Village Center.
- Install properly scaled, historic-style street lights to provide a safe pedestrian and residential environment.

Enforce the Historic District Design Guidelines, which are hereby incorporated into the Master Plan by reference. In concert with the Historic District Commission, develop a set of complementary urban design and landscape design guidelines to provide businesses and

residents with specific illustrated ideas from which to draw when undertaking renovations, redevelopment, or new development.

Encourage visitors and residents alike to use non-motorized forms of transportation in the Village Center.

- Create clear connections (sidewalks, bike paths, alleys) among activity centers throughout the Village Center and to the Franklin Cider Mill.
- Install appropriately-designed wayfinding signage to orient visitors to primary destinations in the Village.

Preserve the essential character of the Village Center.

- Maintain existing zoning and use of essential character sites unless (a) there is sufficient Village demand for change, and (b) the change conforms to adopted Village plans and is compatible with adjacent land uses.
- Protect existing setbacks along Franklin Road from encroachment by building additions or automobiles, including parking areas.
- Investigate placement of utility wires underground through the Village Center, where economically feasible, with minimum disturbance to vegetation.
- Review proposed building changes for compatibility with historic development in terms of scale, materials, and location.
- Appoint a sign review committee to develop and enforce sign regulations for the Village Center. Work with public safety personnel to clarify the degree of flexibility afforded by the Michigan Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices with respect to street and traffic control signs.
- Erect distinctively different signs for both street identification and traffic control. Uniform traffic control devices can be produced in signs with a more historic

character. Standard highway signs are out of character in the Village Center.

Strengthen and preserve the essential historic and rural character of the Village Center as the focus of the community. As described in the 1997 Master Plan, the essential character consists primarily of the historic architectural and landscape features that are still evident in the Village and are largely responsible for its past and present distinction and appeal. Features of this character can include:

- An architectural heritage unique to Michigan and worthy of all efforts to ensure its preservation and maintenance.
- Commercial activities generally facing non-commercial uses across Franklin Road, contributing diversity to the environment and reducing the frequency necessary for shoppers to cross the road.
- Buildings set back from the road at varying distances in a pattern characteristic of the early settlement.
- Front lawns, mature shrubs and trees that enhance the environment of the Village Center.
- The substantial depth of the original lots, which has allowed activities generated at rear doors of commercial and other uses to be held at some distance from abutting residential properties.
- The softness of definition between roadway, paths and yards due to the general absence of street curbs and paved sidewalks, all lends an informality and level of comfort to the Village.

Define desirable design treatments for front setbacks including small picket or wrought iron fences, and light standards and street signs that are compatible with the existing character.

Preserve the Village Center context when contemplating changes in land use or additions to structures. The scale, materials, and arrangement of structures and landscape

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should relate to those of the older buildings in the Village. Proposed changes should be reviewed and approved by the Historic District Commission.

Do not permit Village Center expansion onto the steeper slopes of the valley of the Franklin Branch of the Rouge River. The woodlots and vegetation masses in this area should be protected.

Consider special zoning techniques, such as overlay zoning, to implement design recommendations in the Village Center. The goal of such zoning is to preserve the historic character of the Village Center by establishing certain elements of the urban design and landscape guidelines, such as specifications for signs, lighting, landscaping, etc.



Construct a continuous pathway from Thirteen Mile to Fourteen Mile Road on the east side of Franklin Road.

Develop a plan to guide right-of-way improvements, including walkways, bench selection and placement, street tree locations, other landscaping, and lighting. Extend this plan to become a master landscape plan for public and private areas, covering general site landscaping, parking lot screening, etc.

Form a committee to formulate public and private lighting standards for the Village Center. Effective lighting can provide pedestrian safety, dramatically accentuate and beautify

buildings and landscapes, and bring life to a commercial district. For these reasons, historic design street lights should be seriously considered.

Construct restrooms for public use in the Village Center.