

**DRAFT – FOR PUBLIC REVIEW**

**Master Plan  
Of  
Claybanks Township, Oceana County, Michigan  
Amended \_\_\_\_\_, 2025**



**Prepared by**

**Claybanks Township Planning Commission**

**Approved by**

**Claybanks Township Board**

**August 13, 2007  
REVISED -----, 2025**

**Table of Contents -**

Authorization -----4

Introduction ----- 4

Claybanks Township Profile

    Pre Settlement ----- 5

    Settlement ----- 6

    Early Years ----- 6

    The new Settlers ----- 7

    The Current Population ----- 7

    Current Land Use ----- 7

    Streams and Floodplains ----- 8

    Inland Lakes ----- 8

    Critical Dune Areas ----- 9

    Claybanks Township Soils -----10

    Claybanks Township Roads-----11

    Oil and Gas Wells ----- 12

    Water Wells -----12

    Camp Claybanks ----- 12

Zoning in Claybanks Township-----13

DRAFT

## **Authorization**

This, the Claybanks Township Master Plan has been created under the provisions of Michigan Public Act 168 of 1959, as amended and approved by the Claybanks Township Board August 13, 2007. Amended and approved by the Claybanks Township Board \_\_\_\_\_, 2025.

## **Introduction**

### **The Role of the Master Plan**

Every community has a responsibility to look beyond day-to-day zoning issues and look at the long-range consequences of their decisions. Similarly, the community must have a document that provides guidance for land use and development by considering a wide range of possible futures. Claybanks Township's long-range view is presented through this Master Plan.

Claybanks Township has seen patterns of development over the past few years that highlight a growing concern over land use. Township leaders and residents have become concerned about losing the township's rural character and this concern is valid, because with development changes come. However, residents, both new and old, face a seeming paradox: people who move to rural areas "to get away from" growth in other places, then demand that the community "not become" the same kind of place from which they escaped.

Many rural communities in Michigan are facing this challenge, and there is no simple solution for all of the contrasting concerns about land development. But advocates for both development and preservation have common goals; each want "better planning." Decision makers, then, must balance the interests of landowners wishing to develop their properties, while maintaining the features that attracted people to the area in the first place.

Those "quality of life" features -- farms, rural views, natural features and Lake Michigan-- are what make Claybanks Township special. A successful Master Plan must consider these elements, along with impending development pressure and take steps that will ensure that development "fits" in the area. Accordingly, use of the right planning tools is needed to ensure that the township continues to be a special place.

### **How Does the Master Plan Affect You?**

How the Master Plan affects you depends on your particular situation:

If you are a property owner you may have several interests, including not only your property but properties that are in a similar land use category.

As a homeowner, you will be interested in the properties in your immediate neighborhood. You may wish to know what uses are proposed for vacant land in your area.

As an owner of vacant property, you will want to know what land uses are proposed for your property.

As a township resident, you will be interested in the overall concepts of the Plan, as expressed in its goal statements. These statements will give you an indication as to the township's view of the present and the future.

### **How to Use This Plan**

While the plan is comprehensive in scope and can be used for a number of purposes, most property owners will get the greatest benefit from the plan by the following simple process:

**Step #1** What land use is proposed for your property, or the area surrounding your property? This information is on the Future Land Use map. This map is divided into separate land use classifications. Find the classification of land use in which your property is located.

**Step #2** Determine how the Planning Commission and the Township Board view development in your area.

The description of the Future Land Use classifications will indicate the planned development within your area; it may be fairly specific or somewhat general. This part of the Plan is intended to provide some reasonable direction to the Planning Commission, as well as provide property owners information about development within the township.

**Step #3** Determine the meaning of the land use designation for your property. Find the Future Land Use classification your property is located within and read the long-term land use vision for that area. Depending on the nature of your interest, this may be as far as you need to go. If you have a specific proposal that does not match the expectations of the Plan, you may want to look at it in more detail.

**Step #4** Determine how your property is affected. The Future Land Use classification will indicate the planned use of your property. This does not mean that you cannot continue the use that you currently have. Land use within Claybanks Township is regulated by the zoning of your property. See the zoning ordinance or call the Township offices for more information.

Whether you are a landowner, developer or a homeowner, the Master Plan may have a profound impact on the future of your property. As part of the Claybanks Township community, it is important that you become familiar with the Plan and what it may mean to you and your Township.

## **How the Plan was Developed**

This plan was created by the Claybanks Township Planning Commission and approved by the Claybanks Township Board. The planning commission consisted of seven residents representing the diversity of the township, appointed and charged with the development of a “Master Plan” for the township. Material for the township history was collected from several sources including Oceana County Road Commission, Oceana County Health Department, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Oceana County Historical and Genealogy Society and Michigan Department of Natural Resources. In order that all property owners in the township have an opportunity to have input into the plan an opinion survey was conducted and sent to all the property owners. The response to the survey was 51 percent, which the commission considered to be adequate to get a sense of the property owners’ concerns and suggestions for the township’s future growth. The plan was reviewed by LSL Planning Inc. and many of their suggestions were incorporated prior to final acceptance.

## **Claybanks Township Profile**

### **Pre-settlement**

An Act was passed on February 13, 1855, that defined Oceana County as it currently exists. Prior to 1855 the Name “Oceana” was used to define a large part of western Michigan, but did not include what is now Oceana County. At that time the area now called Oceana County was part of Mackinac County.

It is believed that French missionaries explored the east coast of Lake Michigan as early as 1615. Pere

Marquette was active along the coastline from the late 1660's until his death near the mouth of what is now the Pere Marquette River in May 1675. The area to be Oceana County was surveyed in 1837 and 1838. However, no real interest in making permanent settlements in the county was made until the late 1840's when lumbermen started to harvest the virgin pine forests of the area.

## Settlement

In 1849 six families and several single men were the first settlers in what is now Oceana County. They all settled along the shore of Lake Michigan, between Flower Creek and Whisky Creek, in what is now Claybanks Township. At that time the transportation was either on Lake Michigan, along the Lake Michigan beach or on a trail established by the Native Americans from the head of White Lake to what is now Section 21 in Claybanks Township. These early settlers and the many who followed in the 1850's were truly pioneers, contending with Native Americans, no roads, many wolves and other than a few small areas cleared by the Natives, a land of trees and tree stumps.

The 1855 Act establishing Oceana County created three townships, Claybanks, Stony Creek and Pentwater. Pentwater Township contained the top row of townships, Stony Creek Township (renamed Benona in 1857) contained the middle two rows of townships plus the top row of sections of the current Claybanks Township. Claybanks originally consisted of all of the current townships of Claybanks, Grant, Otto and Greenwood except for sections one through six of what is now Claybanks Township. These townships were divided as the county was populated over the next fifteen years or so.

Claybanks Township evolved as follows:

- In December 1857 the County Board of Supervisors took Greenwood Township from Claybanks.
- In December 1858 the County Board of Supervisors added sections 1 through 5 to Claybanks with Benona retaining only section 6. *(Benona may have also retained section 5 at this time)*
- In February 1860 the County Board of Supervisors took Otto Township from Claybanks.
- In March 1866 the County Board of Supervisors took Grant Township from Claybanks, and at this point the current boundaries of Claybanks Township were established.

*(The above information is extracted from "Oceana County Pioneers and Businessmen of To-day, 1890)"*

## Early Years

The population grew rapidly and by 1880 the population of Claybanks Township was 643, including 246 children under the age of 16. The main source of income was general farming, generally on 80 acres or more. The county seat was located at Whisky Creek (Village of Roseville) until it was removed to Hart in 1864. Three post offices were established: Claybanks at Whisky Creek, Flower Creek in section 27 and Holstein in the NE corner of section 22. In 1859 the first road was laid out, but it would have been many years before roads were anything but wagon trails. Religious services were held in homes by traveling ministers from the mid 1850's with edifices being constructed in the 1880's. The Peace Lutheran church was built in 1880 (removed about 1960). Trinity Lutheran Church in 1884, St. John's Catholic Church and Claybanks Methodist Church both in 1885, a Methodist Episcopal Church in the SE corner of section 1 (removed in the 1950's). The first school was located at Whisky Creek, but over the years five schools were located in the township: Pine Grove – section 16, Bradyville – section 2, Girdle Road – section 13, Green – section 25 and Flower Creek – section 27. Some township residents attended school at the Cranston school in Grant Township and the Gee and Sumner schools in White River Township. All of these "country" schools were consolidated into either the Montague or Shelby School Districts by the 1960's.

The social lives of the residents were centered on the schools, churches and neighbors that joined forces for threshing grain, filling silo, etc. This rural farming way of life continued until the automobile, farm

mechanization and out-of-area employment, especially during World War II, started the decline of self-sufficient family farming.

## **The New Settlers**

By the year 2000 only a handful of self-sufficient agricultural enterprises operated in the township. Beyond that, the balance of the tillable land is now used for hobby farming, rented to the few large agricultural enterprises, divided into residential parcels or has been left dormant and has or is becoming overgrown. Socially, the township has been changed as it has become more of a bedroom community with the influx of people of diverse backgrounds and visions for the future of the township.

The development of the Lake Michigan shoreline began in the early 1900's with the establishment of several plats: Stony Heights on Stony Lake in 1924, and Roseville Beach in Section 8 in 1926. Then another wave of plat development occurred between 1954 and 1973 with 13 plats /subdivisions totaling approximately 360 lots. In 1960 the Asa J. Bays Subdivision with eight lots, located along Webster Road, became the only inland subdivision.

As of 2006 a new wave of development is in the works, The Claybanks Sunset Site Condominiums was established in 2004 and the remaining undeveloped parcels along Lake Michigan are expected to be subdivided in the next few years. The challenge for the township is to control this development so as not to exceed the capacity of the area relative to roads, septic system absorption capabilities and public services.

## **The Current Population**

The 2020 U.S. census provides a comprehensive study of Claybanks Township. As of 2020, there were 855 people residing in the township, with a median age of 45 years. 202 people, or 24 percent of the population, were less than 20 years old and 203 people, or 24 percent, were 65 years of age or over. Of the 603 people 25 years or over, 97 percent had a high school education or higher, and of those, 16 percent had achieved a bachelor's degree or higher.

## **Current Land Use**

Claybanks Township has a total area of about 24 square miles or about 15,360 acres. The township is considered a rural community with low density residential development except for areas along Lake Michigan and the small portion of Stony Lake that is within the township. Other than some home occupations there are no large industrial or commercial businesses except for a private campground. There is a seasonal influx of migrant workers that harvest much of the fruit and asparagus raised in the township.

There were 996 parcels in 2025. 649 parcels, or 65 percent, were improved, while 347 parcels, or 35 percent were vacant.

An analysis of the 2025 assessment roll shows the township's true cash value to be \$289,900,032 dollars. The residential property class has a true value of \$223,589,970 dollars, which represents 77 percent of the total, true cash value.

It is estimated, based on a review of the latest aerial mapping of the township property, that about 6,400 acres or 42 percent of the township is actually used for agricultural purposes. This includes homesteads of landowners even if they rent their property but generally does not include unused property and not-for-profit

property uses. It is difficult to determine the change in the amount of property used for agricultural purposes since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the population was predominantly families making their living from their small farms of 80 acres or so. Prior to World War II a large part of the township was fenced and much of the marginal land, including much of the Flower Creek drainage, was used as livestock pastureland. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century most of the marginal land and the Flower Creek drainage have been reclaimed by nature and is overgrown by native trees and bushes as well as invaders, principally Autumn Olive. Autumn Olive is a bush that grows to a maximum height of about 20 feet and in a very few years can completely cover an area and crowd out all other growth. This invasive species has already claimed some unused farmland in the township as well as areas in other parts of the county.

## **Streams and Floodplains**

Flower Creek passes through the southern part of the township and empties into Lake Michigan just south of section 33 in White River Township. The main “trout stream” part of the creek is confined to sections 26, 27, 33, 34 and 35, but what some call “Little Flower Creek” starts in section 13 and flows southward through section 14, 23 and feeds into “Big Flower Creek” in section 26. A large part of the township is drained by this stream system. The mainstream is a trout stream while the northern branch has much more silt and mostly a clay bottom and does not support a year-round trout population.

During the spring runoff and after rainstorms there can be significant flooding in sections 26, 27, 33 and 34 making part of this area unsuited for residential development. Stream crossings and construction within floodplains are regulated by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ).

Whisky Creek is a very small spring fed stream that starts in section 17 and enters Lake Michigan in section 8.

These streams require protection from contamination from septic system leaching as well as surface runoff from agricultural activity.

## **Inland Lakes**

Three small lakes are in the township, all of which have been reduced in size over the last century.

Park Lake is located in sections 10 and 11 and has not seen any development yet. Except for a small area on the East end, the lake is now basically a marsh.

Jake’s Lake, located in section 10, has seen some development but is nearly dry in the summer.

Long Lake, in early years known as “Ole’s Lake”, is located in section 8 and is mostly marsh at this time.

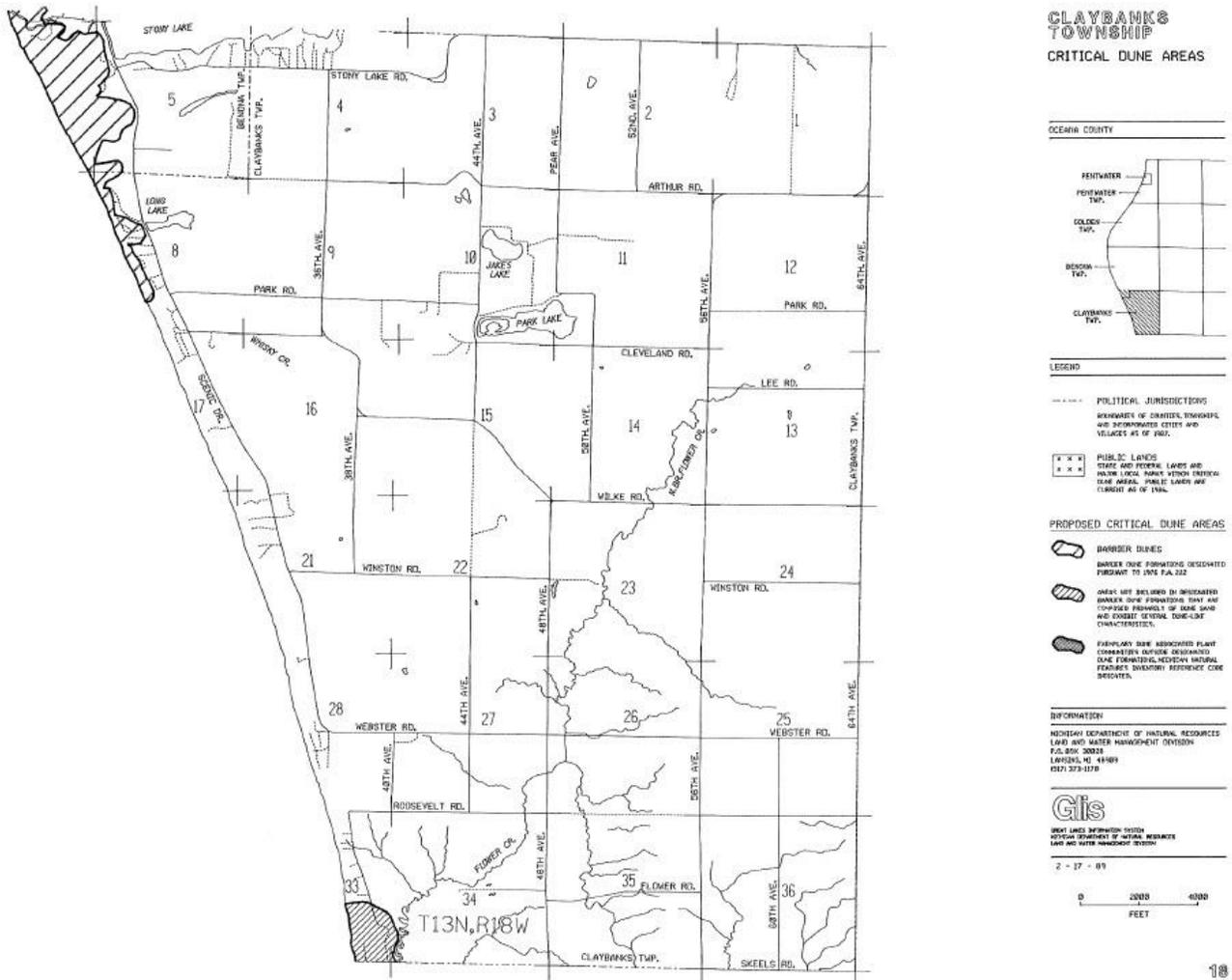
These small lakes provide wildlife habitats and should be protected from excessive development.

# Critical Dune Areas

Two areas along the Lake Michigan shoreline have been defined on a State of Michigan Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy map as shown below.

The area shown in section 8 is defined as a barrier dune and the area in section 33 is defined as an area that exhibits dune like characteristics. The map does not show Michago Beach and neighboring areas that were severely damaged during the 1986 storm when Lake Michigan was at its near record high water level. In this area homes were built on dunes that had been built up subsequent to the previous high-water cycle that had occurred in 1886.

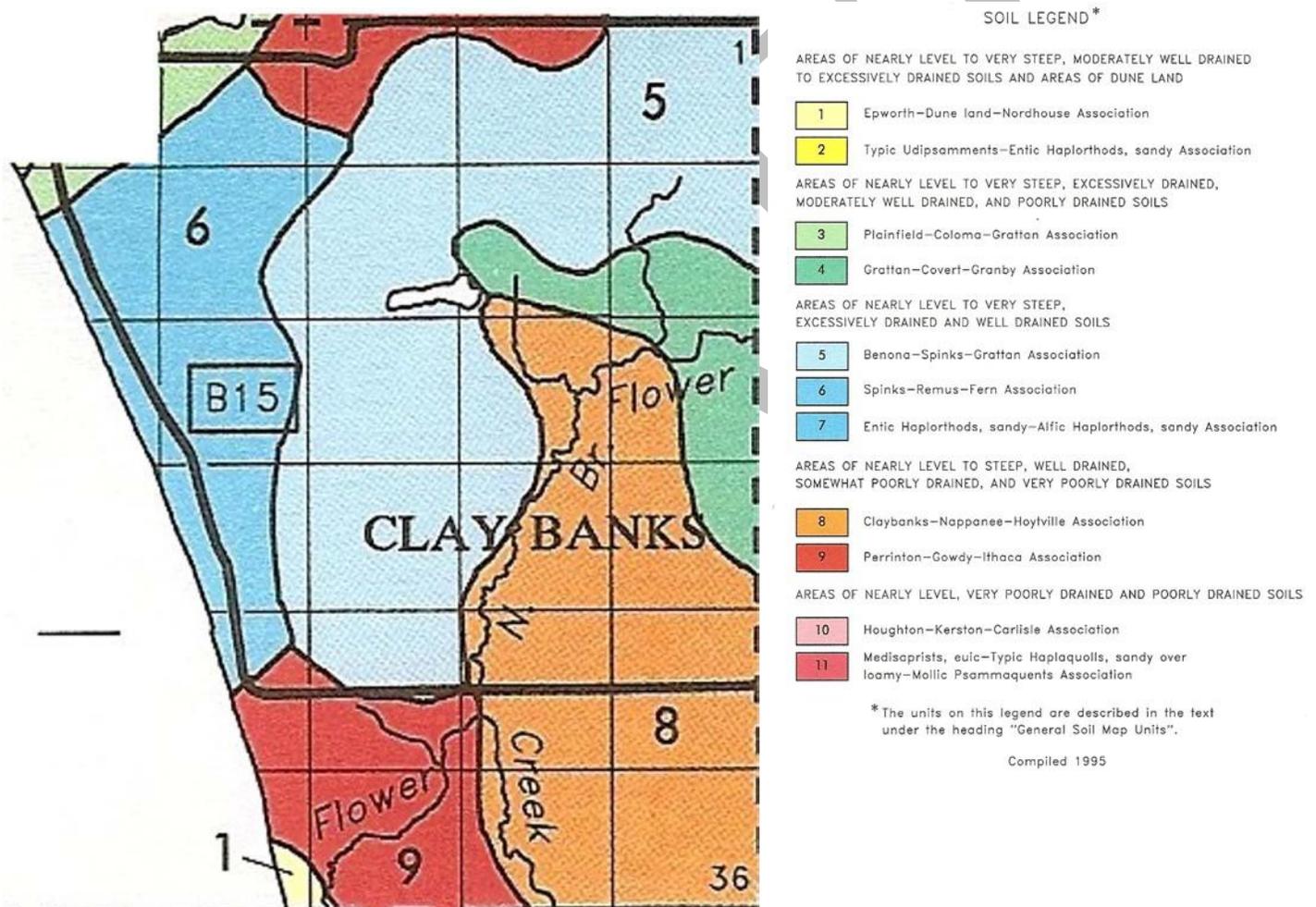
The entire Lake Michigan shoreline in the township is covered by the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA), PA 451 of 1994. The two parts that provide regulations are part 323, Shoreline Protection and Management, which regulates high risk erosion areas and part 353, Sand Dune Protection and Management, which regulates critical dunes.



**Figure I- Critical Dune Areas**

## Claybanks Township Soils

The latest soil mapping for Oceana County was completed and issued in 1996 by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The soil in the township ranges from very light unproductive sandy soil, fertile sandy loam, to heavy clay loams. Since very early settlement times orchards have been planted in the northern and western parts (north of Webster Road) of the township where the lighter well drained soils are found. The lower, flatter, generally heavier and often less well drained soils are found in the southeastern part of the township and have been used as general cropland. The topography of the township varies due to its formation by glacial activity with rolling hills and some areas that were swamps. Most of the swampy areas were drained and cleared during the early settlement times and used as cropland. It is common to find several quite different soil types in a 40-acre field as well as significant drainage problems notably in the areas where the clay soils that the township was named after are near the surface.



Source: Soil Survey of Oceana County, Michigan, U. S. Department of Agriculture and others, 1996

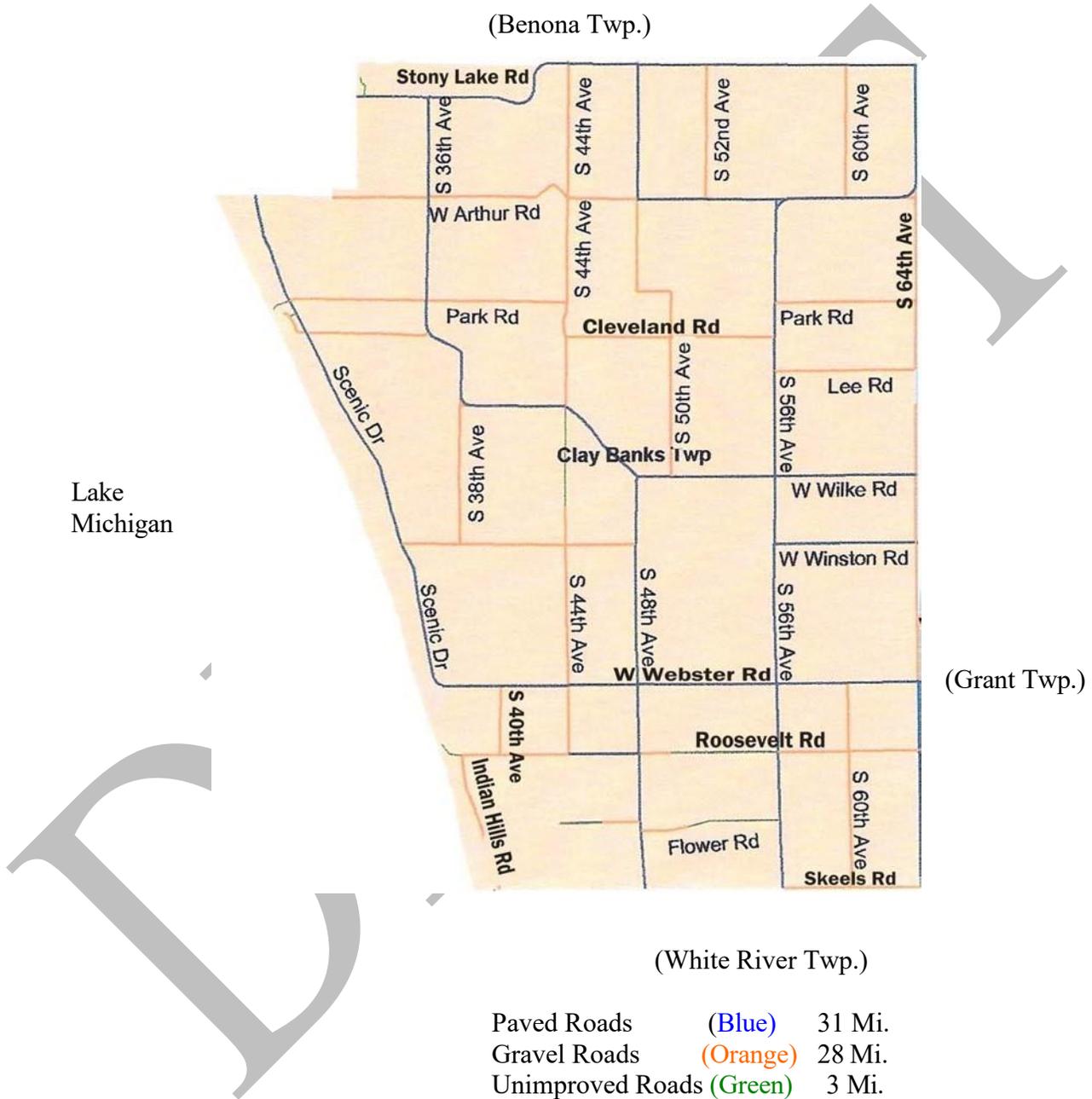
### **Figure II – Claybanks Township Soils**

The soils in the township vary from well drained soils with good percolation ability to heavy clay soils with very poor percolation ability. In addition, there are areas that are wetlands and other areas that are periodically flooded. Development in areas that could cause environmental issues should not be allowed.

The Prime farmlands based on soil type are shown as types 8 and 9 in the above map, but there are areas of unique soils and conditions that are conducive to agriculture in the other soil types as well.

## Claybanks Township Roads

The township roads are shown on the township map below. There are four roads in the township that are partially unimproved and shown in green on the map. There are three lake access roads, two to Lake Michigan and one through the Oceana County Park to the launch ramp on Stony Lake. 50<sup>th</sup> Ave between Wilke Rd and Cleveland Rd has been registered as a “Scenic Road” by the State of Michigan.



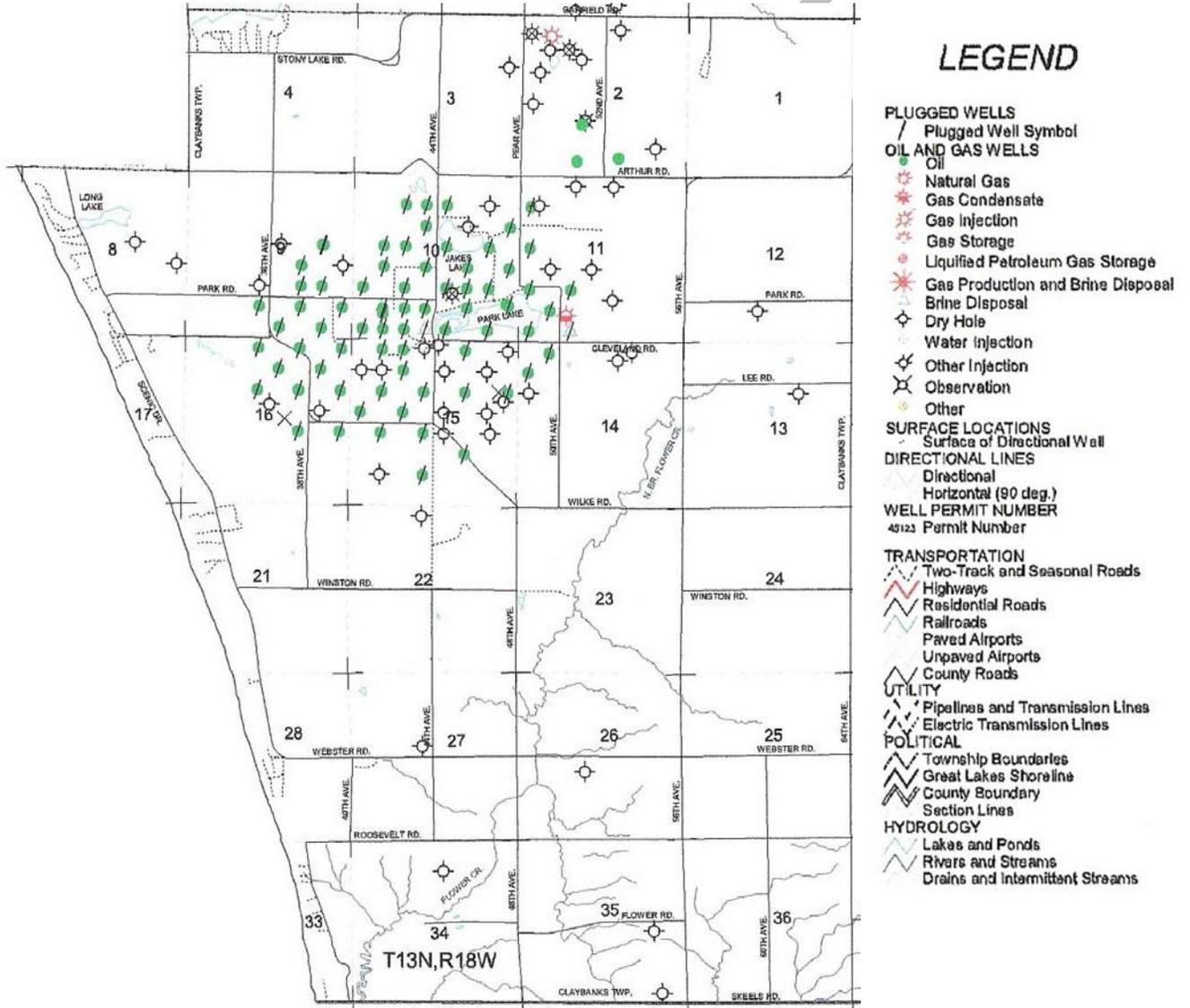
Source: Oceana County Road Commission

**Figure III – Claybanks Township Roads**

Most of the paved roads in the township are in poor or very poor condition with much patching and edge deterioration with little chance of improvement in the foreseeable future. Some of the early paved roads were not constructed to modern standards. The carrying capacities of the townships gravel roads and the condition of the paved roads must be a consideration when determining allowable development densities.

# Oil & Gas Wells

Oil exploration began in the township in the late 1940's with the establishment of the Claybanks field that produced to a limited degree into the 1990's. This was a shallow well field, generally less than 2000 feet. In the 1970's exploration as deep as the Niagran level began with several wells producing oil and sour gas. Three of these wells were combined and a re-injection facility was built on Arthur Road to extract the oil and re-inject the sour gas. The other wells sat dormant for over 20 years before they were connected to a pipeline for out-of-town processing. The map below shows the past activity, although there are some early dry holes missing from this record.



Source: Michigan Department of Natural Resources

**Figure IV– Claybanks Township Oil & Gas Exploration**

# Water Wells

The availability of useable water varies throughout the township and varies from very shallow (20 feet or so)

to a small area where it is difficult to find sufficient quantity as deep as 300 feet. Two areas where water is more difficult to find in sufficient quantity are near section 26 and at the west end of Roosevelt Road. Many of the early wells in the township were artesian wells. Some of these wells flowed as little as one or two gallons per minute to wells that flowed many times that amount.

The water quality also varies with well depth and location. Although the water is generally good, iron, calcium carbonate and even tannin may be encountered, and excessive hardness can occur. In a small area in the center of the township the water can be brackish. It is possible that this brackish water might have been caused by contamination from improperly sealed oil test wells. Due to farming activity, it is not uncommon to find excessive nitrates at shallower levels. High nitrate levels, more than 10 milligrams per liter, are normally caused by contamination of the ground water by human or animal waste or fertilizers. This can normally be avoided by going deeper.

## **Camp Claybanks**

In 1953, just south of the Claybanks Township Park the U.S. Army established Camp Claybanks. This was an anti-aircraft firing range that covered 434 acres and created a danger zone over Lake Michigan that extended from the White Lake channel to Little Point Sable and 10 miles out into the lake. It had a permanent detachment of approximately 100 military and civilian personnel, but during the summer months as many as 1500 Army Reserve and National Guard troops from Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Iowa would be stationed at the camp. The firing range overlooking Lake Michigan had positions for 16 guns up to 90-millimeter size. In 1958, the Army announced the closing of the camp. The noise from the guns could be heard throughout the township and had become a sore spot for the residents living close to the camp. Today all that remains of the camp are cement foundations and the land has been subdivided and some homes have been built.

## **Zoning in Claybanks Township**

The first Claybanks Township zoning ordinance was adopted October 19, 1970. On November 17, 1975, the township board established a township planning commission which resulted in the approval of a much more comprehensive ordinance adopted July 24, 1978. In 1985, as development became a greater concern and the 1978 ordinance had many problems that made enforcement difficult, an update was necessary. This ordinance was adopted July 11, 1988. Also, in 1988 Conoco Corporation's attempt to build a gas scrubber plant in the township brought zoning to the forefront in the minds of the public. After several contentious public and township board meetings the township board approved the permit, although Conoco dropped their plan and never started the plant. At this same time a group petitioned for a public referendum to invalidate the 1988 ordinance and in the fall 1988 election the ordinance was repealed. The zoning in the township then reverted to the 1978 ordinance which remained in force until the current ordinance was adopted May 13, 1996.

During the preparation of the 1988 ordinance the Claybanks Township Board adopted a one page "Master Plan" (see below) which was meant to reflect the board's view of the future growth of the township.

## ***“Claybanks Township Master Plan”***

*“In order that the land in Claybanks Township be used in a manner that would best meet the needs of the public, this Master Plan has been adopted by the Claybanks Township Board.*

*The township has been agriculturally oriented since its organization in 1855. This land use is considered essential to the future of the state and the county and should be continued. Non-agricultural development of cropland should be discouraged.*

*The township has been used as a “bedroom” area for local industry and commerce. This single-family residential use is non-intrusive and beneficial to the tax base. This type of development should be encouraged on non-cropland.*

*The township lakeshore frontage on both Lake Michigan and Stony Lake is well developed and serves a public need and is beneficial to the tax base. The platted development occurred from 1925 to the 1970’s. These plats have been developed as relatively high density single family resort property with either direct or indirect access to one of the lakes. Non-platted resort residential lots were also developed during this time. This land use is considered appropriate and may be continued indefinitely. However, future development should be less dense to provide a balance of property types and to meet the needs of current property owners in the less densely populated and yet undeveloped resort areas along Lake Michigan.*

*This board believes that commercial, industrial and multi-family development in the township would adversely affect the rural atmosphere of the township and would not generally be in the best interest of the public. These land use needs are being met by the several nearby urban areas.”*