

THE PURPOSE OF THE ROAD ROW MASTER PLAN

The master right-of-way plan of any community is a policy document that establishes the long-term future right-of-way widths for all roads under the jurisdiction of that community. Master right-of-way plans for some communities consist only of maps that indicate the ultimate right-of-way widths for the future, while other communities have plans that closely resemble master plans associated with land use planning. These plans incorporate demographic data and future land use plans to rationalize and develop a set of goals and objectives for roadway improvements and right-of-way widths.

The road right-of-way is an area of land of specified width under public ownership that encompasses the road and land on either side. Rights-of-way provide the necessary space in which to locate many above-ground functions such as roads, sidewalks, traffic signs and signals, landscaping and power lines. Many other services such as sanitary sewer and water lines, gas lines, and cable and telecommunication lines are located below-ground in the right-of-way. (Called out in large side bar text)

Insert two illustrations of typical ROW use here (urban/suburban and rural)

Roads within the cities and incorporated villages of Oakland County are typically under the jurisdiction of a combination of state, county and local agencies, while the townships do not have jurisdiction over any roads. Given this complex situation, it is important for communities to know what agencies have jurisdiction over which road rights-of-way within their boundaries. Communities having jurisdictional authority over roads should consider preparing a Road ROW Master Plan covering those roads (See the section at the end of this chapter for guidelines on developing such a plan). Oakland County's Master Right-of-Way Plan is a combination of maps and text. The Plan text was originally published about 1970. The maps were updated in the 1980's and again in the mid-1990's. During that time it changed from a single map of roads for the whole county to a series of twenty-seven (27) maps (found in Appendix __) indicating planned

right-of-way widths for each geographic township. The maps cover all of Oakland County and identify whether roads are under the jurisdiction of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC), the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) or local municipalities. Many of the maps have undergone updates, some as recently as 2005, as part of an on-going and continuous revision process.

Nearly all communities in Oakland County also have to contend with roads within their boundaries that are not under their jurisdiction. In this case the community's best option is to proactively pursue involvement in the respective jurisdictional authority's right-of-way planning process. This participation can be made more effective by working with neighboring communities to present a unified front on proposals/requests put forward to the jurisdictional authority regarding planning for roads under their control. Road ROW planning, for transportation or other infrastructure uses, frequently involves concerns/interests of multiple government bodies and utilities and thus should be approached as regional issues.

TECHNOLOGY AND ROAD ROW PLANNING

As illustrated above, right-of-way plays a critical role in supporting a multitude of services that improve the quality of life for residents and businesses. For successful technology development within Oakland County, planning for and preserving adequate right-of-way is essential in supporting existing technologies and future advances. Since there is inherent uncertainty regarding future advances in technology and the proliferation of specific technologies and because land acquisition can be difficult and expensive, it is in the best interest of local communities to adopt longer-term planning horizons (the County typically assumes 100 years) when calculating right-of-way requirements for utilities, new construction, roadway rehabilitation and improvement efforts. Since technology developments are occurring at a rapid pace, preservation of right-of-way is also critical in meeting future demands on rights-of-way to support technology infrastructure. Inadequate planning and preservation of right-of-way may result in a number of undesirable outcomes, including: overcrowding of right-of-way,

costly relocations of existing utilities and technology, and costly expansions to right-of-way requiring acquisition of homes and businesses. In addition, preservation of adequate right-of-way will allow the flexibility needed to institute Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) for necessary infrastructure improvements (for more details see the CSS chapters in this Toolkit).

RECOMMENDED WORK PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A ROAD ROW MASTER PLAN

Advancements in technology will likely continue at a rapid pace. This may place additional demands on rights-of-way to support technology infrastructure and as a result, the right-of-way could become crowded. In addition, utility road crossings affect quality and consistency of the road bed and surface. To ensure road rights-of-way are used wisely and equitably, agencies having jurisdictional authority should actively plan for their management. This could be accomplished by creating or updating a Road ROW Master Right-of-Way Plan in a form similar to a land use master plan. The plan should:

Establish well thought-out criteria for determining the width of a specific road ROW based on existing infrastructure, current unmet infrastructure needs, and proposed land uses.

Identify priority areas where additional ROW should be acquired based on potential demand.

Provide guidelines for the development of the ROW for the varied uses that typically operate within it (including three tiers of telecommunications infrastructure – underground, ground mounted, and overhead).

The following is the general description of each of the sections of a Road ROW Master Plan:

Section 1: Background Studies

As with a Community Master Plan, background studies should include all relevant information regarding the community that may bear on the need for ROW. This includes population demographics, existing land use patterns, future land use plans and zoning, summaries of transportation data and studies, and reports on utility function and demand.

Section 2: Existing ROW Conditions

This section contain a reasonable comprehensive summary of the existing road ROW in the community, the jurisdictional authority, it's width and what uses currently exist within each ROW. Although the MISS DIG system maintains records on the locations of infrastructure within road rights-of-way, a supporting GIS system could also be implemented to track and manage existing and proposed utility infrastructure. This GIS system could identify future desirable routes and locations for utility infrastructure as well.

Section 3: Goals and Objectives

A set of goals and objectives should be set out to guide the development of the criteria for determining the planned ROW width for roads. This will provide a rational basis for the criteria and require that competing interests relative to ROW width be considered and balanced in a comprehensive fashion. The concept of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) discussed in the second half of this toolkit should be considered and integrated into the ROW planning process at this step to some degree.

Section 4: ROW Width Determination Criteria

A set of criteria should be developed to provide specific guidance on how the proposed ROW width for a road should be determined. These criteria should address the difference between rural, suburban and urban roads and other key factors effecting specific right-of-ways. Ideally, this would be a set of specific criteria accompanied by guidelines to aid in addressing nonstandard circumstances. The purpose of taking the more comprehensive approach suggested in this outline is to produce a flexible approach to designating ROW width, not to produce a one size fits all solution.

Section 5: Build-Out Analysis

Given the long-term time frame recommended for ROW planning, it is appropriate to look at the long term development future of a community when addressing this issue. A build-out analysis for the community based on existing conditions, existing zoning and the future land use plan should be performed to show where the long-term demand for ROW infrastructure will be located. Combined with the ROW width determination criteria, the build-out analysis will provide a rational basis for making decisions regarding specific roads.

Section 6: Future ROW Plan

The final product of the ROW planning process is the Future ROW Plan, which will show the proposed ROW of all roads under the planning authority's jurisdiction. This section should include a summary of how the proposed ROW for each road was arrived at relative to the earlier sections of the plan. The final plan may turn up trends in the ROW width designations relating to local conditions, a summary and analysis of such trends should also be offered in this section. The Future ROW plan should also include actions items for changes in the zoning ordinance to address the proposed ROW (i.e. front yard setbacks, access management, etc.)