

**GREATER  
LOWELL  
COMMUNITY VISION**



**The Vision Report**



**January 14, 2013**



# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

## **2013**

### **GREATER LOWELL COMMUNITY VISION**

The preparation of the Greater Lowell Community Vision involved the contributions of many community leaders and residents. In particular, the efforts of the Steering Committee which initiated and provided the guidance for the formation of the Vision is acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

Liz Baker	Executive Director, Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce
Greg Pratt	Superintendent, Lowell Area Schools
Jim Turner	President, Lowell Area Schools Board of Education
Jerry Hale	Supervisor, Lowell Charter Township
Linda Regan	Clerk, Lowell Charter Township
Tim Wittenbach	Supervisor, Vergennes Township
Mari Stone	Clerk, Vergennes Township
Jim Hodges	Mayor, City of Lowell
Mark Howe	Manager, City of Lowell
Pinky McPherson	Member at Large
Ray Duimstra,	Member at Large

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The Steering Committee adopted  
The Greater Lowell Community Vision on

January 14, 2013

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# **THE GREATER LOWELL COMMUNITY VISION**

## **“COLLABORATION MAKES IT HAPPEN”**

In June of 2012 a Steering Committee with representatives from the City of Lowell, Lowell Charter Township, Vergennes Township, the Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce and Lowell Area Schools embarked on a collaborative effort to answer the question:

***“What do we want the Greater Lowell Community to be like in the future?”***

A six month effort presented that question to the citizens of the Greater Lowell Community in a variety of ways through a citizen survey, Community Café workshops, mobile workshops with area service groups and students from Lowell High School, and interviews with community stakeholders. Those efforts resulted in an answer to the question, which is presented in this Vision Report.

This report was crafted by ten members of Steering Committee which met on December 4, 2012 in a half-day retreat to distill the vast amount of data generated by the community responses to the above question into a coherent framework of goals, action steps, milestones and champions to form the Greater Lowell Community Vision.

This report focuses primarily upon the process used for the retreat and the Vision resulting from the retreat, including a number of “first steps” toward the Vision. These “first steps” will help insure early success as well as continued momentum as the Vision process transitions from the planning stage to the implementation stage.

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### ***Priority Recommendations***

**While the following Vision Report contains a multitude of Action Steps there are three such steps which if done initially will greatly enhance the likelihood that the remaining steps will be accomplished. The Vision Report therefore recommends that the following steps be acted upon first:**

- **The five entities representing the Steering Committee shall prepare and sign a Memorandum of Understanding committing them to implementing the Vision.**
  - **The five entities shall determine the need to create and fund a position to assist in implementing the Vision.**
  - **Action Groups shall be established representing each of the five themes of the Greater Lowell Vision and be comprised of members of the Steering Committee, community members, and other stakeholders.**
-

## **Retreat Process**

The retreat process began with a review of the following Vision Statement:

### **The Greater Lowell Community benefits from:**

- ❖ ***An historic and vibrant commercial district that utilizes its historic building stock for retail, office, and residential development;***
- ❖ ***Rivers for recreation and economic development;***
- ❖ ***Rural and agricultural areas for aesthetic beauty and food production;***
- ❖ ***Schools for talent development;***
- ❖ ***Local governments and non-profit entities for continued volunteerism, community cohesion, and collaboration.***

Information from the Community Input Report, which was a compilation of the numerous community engagement sessions, had been arranged prior to the retreat into the following five categories to facilitate and focus discussion by the Committee:

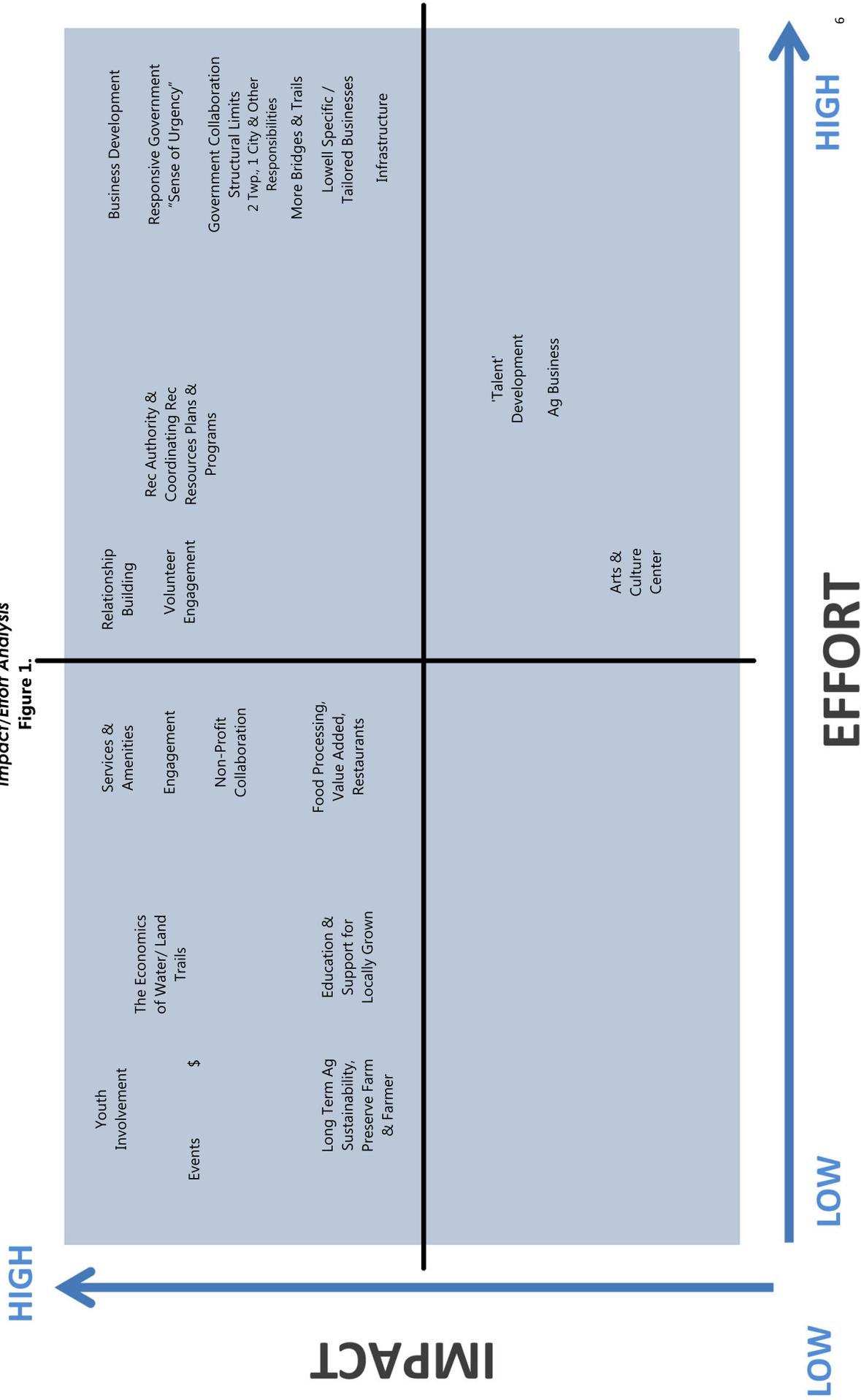
- 1. Business Recruitment and Retention**
- 2. Parks/Trails//Recreation**
- 3. Arts/Culture/Historic Preservation**
- 4. Local Food/Agriculture**
- 5. Collaboration/Talent Development**

The Steering Committee as a whole addressed the first category, Business Recruitment and Retention, by discussing the questions, ***“What is the key challenge? What is something new that you would like to see happen?”*** Answers were then recorded. Following this exercise, Committee members had the opportunity to split up and answer these same questions at separate tables for the remaining four categories. Recorded answers were further combined. During this exercise Committee members were able to consult the Community Input Report so as to consider the multitude of vision items and implementation steps recorded from the various community engagement sessions.

*Committee members consulted the Community Input report to consider the multitude of vision items and implementation steps recorded from the various community engagement sessions.*

The major ideas emerging were then prioritized by the entire Committee assigning each of them a designation on a grid based on low/high impact and low/high effort (Impact/Effort analysis). Figure 1 below shows the results of this discussion which served as a springboard for the Committee to create the framework for the Vision using the five categories previously identified.

**Impact/Effort Analysis**  
Figure 1.



## **Vision Framework**

Following the creation of the Impact/Effort analysis (Figure 1), the Committee (working as a large group) developed a Vision Framework for each of the five categories as derived from the Community Input Report. These frameworks include a statement of the goal or goals to be achieved; action steps along with “first steps” in some cases; milestones that measure whether a goal has been reached; and lastly, champions were identified that may be the best person or agency to undertake the action steps.

The follow is intended to be a framework for each category upon which a more detailed implementation strategy may be developed. This implementation strategy will be developed by champions in collaboration with local organizations and decision-makers. Additional champions will likely emerge over the course of the implementation of the Vision and additional action steps will be taken; the process will be dynamic and open to new participants, as more persons become aware of the process and momentum is fueled.

*The implementation strategy will be developed by champions in collaboration with local organizations and decision-makers.*

## **Monitoring Progress**

The Steering Committee should establish a means by which to monitor the progress of the Vision Framework. For example, the Committee may wish to re-convene on a quarterly basis for the first year. If the Steering Committee remains in place as a working body, some steps may be taken to establish itself formally by adopting by-laws or other rules of procedure. Eventually, the visioning process should be revisited, and perhaps updated via agreed upon community input methods.

## **First “First Steps”**

In addition to the Priority Recommendations noted above some initial steps which can be taken to communicate and implement the Vision could be:

- Recruit volunteers to form an implementation group for each of the five categories;
- The City and Townships should incorporate the recommendations of the Vision into their Master Plan updates;
- A link to the Greater Lowell Community Vision web site should be placed on the web site of the City of Lowell, Lowell Charter Township, Vergennes Township, the Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce and Lowell Area Schools as a reminder of the Vision effort and as a method to easily access Vision updates.

## **Final Notes**

The Vision for the Greater Lowell Community contained in this report is the result of the Steering Committee’s leadership and the participation of hundreds of Lowell area residents. The Vision is practical, somewhat predictable and substantially achievable. Yet what is envisioned herein would not have been brought forth without the process

which manifested the collective thoughts and voices of those who have staked their claim to the Lowell community. The continued collaboration and cooperation of community leaders and the willingness of ordinary citizens to get involved will determine the actual outcome in the coming years.

A certain amount of financial resources will be required to implement some of the vision items. However, many of the goals and action steps can be accomplished with existing resources, a recognition of what needs to happen and simply gathering the resolve to do it.

For when it comes to the future “There are those who let it happen, those who wonder what happened and those who make it happen.” The Greater Lowell Community Vision is for those who will indeed make it happen.

## ***Vision Framework by Category***

## Business Recruitment & Retention

### What is the goal to be achieved?

- 1) Provide jobs; 2) Ensure affordable services are available locally; 3) Create a broader tax base;
- 4) Ensure diversity of businesses;
- 5) Promote economic development

### Action Steps:

#### (What has to happen?)

- 1) Identify geographic strategy; coordinated land use planning.
- 2) Develop a Handbook and a one stop information center for business start-ups in both the City and Townships;
- 3) Utilize Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) tools.
- 4) Hire a person dedicated to recruiting new businesses and retaining and expanding businesses.
- 5) Leaders from Lowell and Vergennes Townships and the City of Lowell will collaborate to resolve tax rate and growth issues.
- 6) Identify gaps in existing market.

#### First Steps:

- Review MEDC tools
- Convene tax discussion meeting.
- As part of handbook preparation compile zoning requirements and project review procedures for City & Townships.
- Develop job description for new hire; identify funding source.

### Milestones:

#### (How do we know we are succeeding?/Measurables)

- 1) New businesses that take advantage of land and water trails
- 2) An increase in the total number of businesses.
- 3) A strategy for business development is prepared
- 4) Coordinated future land use maps
- 5) Existing commercial /industrial buildings are 100% full

### Champions:

Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce; City of Lowell , Lowell & Vergennes Townships, The Right Place; MEDC; The Source

**Committee Lead: Liz Baker, Tim Wittenbach, Jerry Hale**

# Parks/Trails/Recreation

## What is the goal to be achieved?

1) Administration and operation of area recreation activities and parks by a Recreation Authority; 2) Leverage natural resources & trails for economic good; 3) Develop more bridge trails and river portages

### Action Steps:

#### (What has to happen?)

- 1) Review and update Recreation Plans
- 2) Identify specific projects and prioritize them
- 3) Apply for funding/grants
- 4) Encourage ongoing collaboration with all Trail Groups; Invest; Support
- 5) Convene a meeting of area recreation leaders to discuss the possibility of forming a recreation authority

### First Steps:

- Joint review of Recreation Plans/prioritize projects
- Identify grant sources/grant writers
- Convene meeting to discuss formation of a recreation authority.

### Milestones:

#### (How do we know we are succeeding?/Measurables)

- 1) Major trail events are held
- 2) Businesses see increases from recreation participants
- 3) Amenities such as bike racks, kayak infrastructure are installed
- 4) Recreation activities become self-supporting
- 5) A campground/RV park is established

## Champions:

Kent County Parks; North Country Trail; YMCA; NPS (National Parks Service); Rails to Trails; Private Recreation Leagues and Associations; Local Government; Schools; Lowell Area Recreation Authority

**Committee Lead: LARA, Mari Stone**

## Arts/Culture/Historic Preservation

### What is the goal to be achieved?

1) Increase public participation at arts & cultural events; 2) Increase funding for the arts; 3) Establish a new arts and cultural center,

### Action Steps:

#### (What has to happen?)

- 1) Encourage plans and review them
- 2) "Improve facility" discussions need to occur
- 3) Plan new & expand current cultural events
- 4) Incorporate arts, culture, & history with other sectors such as business promotion, recreation, and education.
- 5) Keep involving schools and parents to build up volunteer base
- 6) Recognize the history & culture of the Greater Lowell Area.

#### First Steps

- Convene meeting of arts and historic groups; compare goals and activities; if practical, develop joint goals regarding facilities and programs. Consider a joint identity.
- Present joint and separate goals to business community, recreation groups, and schools.
- Issue requests for volunteers to schools and other groups to build interest and involvement.

### Milestones:

#### (How do we know we are succeeding?/Measurables)

- 1) Art Prize with chalk on trail
- 2) Art would be visible downtown and other public spaces
- 3) Area-wide arts/culture/historic preservation

### Champions:

LowellArts! Council; History Museum; Fallsburg Park; Historic Preservation Commission

**Committee Lead: Jim Hodges**

## Local Food/Agriculture

### What is the goal to be achieved?

1) Preserve farm & farmers; 2) Strengthen the economic value of agriculture in our community; 3) Increase the number of food processing industries; 4) Collaboration between local restaurants and local growers; 5) Educate citizens about the value of locally grown agricultural products.

### Action Steps:

#### (What has to happen?)

- 1) Geographic planning and zoning strategy to support economic development for agriculture.
- 2) Provide information to local landowners seeking to utilize their land for agricultural economic opportunities.
- 3) Educate residents on the value of agricultural products grown in the Lowell area.
- 4) Connect entrepreneurs with agricultural business opportunities.

#### First Steps:

- Review existing zoning, planning and utility plans for City & Townships to determine if they are agriculturally friendly and are designed to preserve farmland and provide value-added activities.
- Prepare a strategy to attract a food processing business to the community.
- Develop a brochure to promote agricultural activities and opportunities in the Greater Lowell community.

### Milestones:

#### (How do we know we are succeeding?/Measurables)

- 1) Successful farmer's market
- 2) Restaurants increasingly use locally grown food products
- 3) Establishment of an agricultural product processing facility

### Champions:

Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce; ; Local First; Future Farmers of America (FFA); MSU Extension; Fair Board; ; Michigan Farm Bureau

**Committee Lead: Mari Stone, Mark Howe**

# Collaboration/Talent Development

## What is the goal to be achieved?

1) Increase opportunities for young volunteers; 2) Stronger and more consistent collaboration among local governmental units; 3) Raise up community leaders; 4) Continue the culture of collaboration between governments, schools and non-profits groups.

### Action Steps:

#### (What has to happen?)

- 1) Seek out and identify volunteers; match volunteers talents with community needs
- 2) Formalize the process to continue what the Steering Committee started
- 3) A commitment from the five Steering Committee entities to create a position to assist in implementing the Vision
- 4) Identify who are the entities to further collaboration(i.e. Rails to Trails)
- 5) City & Townships meet to resolve matters pertaining to tax rate and growth issues.

#### First Steps

- Steering Committee entities sign memorandum of understanding committing to implementing the Vision.
- Identify entities for collaboration; organize by likely affiliation.
- Devise strategy whereby Governments, non-profit groups and schools cooperate to create data base and recruit volunteers.

### Milestones:

#### (How do we know we are succeeding?/Measurables)

- 1) More youth seated on local volunteer boards
- 2) Buy-in from all entities
- 3) Community-wide volunteer network & data base
- 4) Formal volunteer recognition process/event
- 5) Establishment of a process or program to train new leaders

## Champions:

Lowell Area Schools and private schools; Lowell Community Partners; Kaleidoscope; Pinky McPherson; Local Governments

**Committee Lead: Greg Pratt, Ray Duimstra, Pinky McPherson**

## ***Use of Appendices and Additional Reports***

This Vision Report is augmented by substantial supporting documents. These documents are valuable reference materials that can be drawn upon as the Vision moves forward.

Appendix A contains the key challenges and new ideas that were generated at the Steering Committee Retreat, which were then used to develop the Impact/Effort Analysis and the Vision Framework.

The Community Input Report is presented as a separate document which contains the summaries of all community engagement events held during the visioning process. The Community Input Report is valuable in that it contains a level of detail that will be useful in devising specific implementation strategies, and in focusing in on the desires of particular groups such as young people, community leaders, service groups, etc. It is an important reminder of those issues that emerged as most important to the community.

The Current Reality Report, also presented as a separate document, is an assembly of existing data, policy statements, specific cooperative efforts, and implementation gaps and issues. It is a valuable reference if and when detailed analysis regarding certain topics is desired.

## ***Appendix A***

## Business Recruitment & Retention

### Assessing Our Current and Future Environment

#### What is the Key Challenge?

- 1) Why do I go to Grand Rapids?
- 2) Attract non-local (Lowell) restaurant Options (Brann's, Applebee's, etc.)
- 3) How? Tax benefits offered/property tax abatement on land, etc.
- 4) Work with the Right Place to promote area.
- 5) Anchors:
  - a. More destination restaurants
  - b. DDA Liquor licenses
- 6) Competition is good: keeps us all growing and improving.

#### What is Something New that you Would Really Like to Happen?

- 1) Tax rated differently between City and Township needs to be addressed
- 2) City-Township Co-op
- 3) Access to Fundamentals; "Infrastructure", Transportation, Power, Low Taxes
- 4) Lower the City millage rate
- 5) Clear and precise zoning and where to go to get signature do's and don'ts
- 6) Tax differences between City and Townships
- 7) Workforce
- 8) An identified person/role who actively recruits businesses for our vision; keeps vision progress alive.
- 9) Funding assistance for current businesses to update or maintain site/facility.
- 10) Work with Right Place to bring more businesses to Lowell.
- 11) Recreation: Trails, River
- 12) Recruit businesses that promote living in small city; small grocery walk-able sites in City
- 13) Downtown "Hub" of healthy
  - a. Healthy food
  - b. Locally grown healthy food
  - c. Fitness store: hiking, exercise, etc.
- 14) Local Food Co-op
  - a. Offer free space on Main Street
  - b. Community incentive to add new products
  - c. Growers; offer ways to use the food
- 15) Farm products to processing
- 16) Farm products to restaurants
- 17) Internet: City and Townships
- 18) Develop a community-wide plan for internet provision
- 19) Support and training for local entrepreneurs
- 20) Work with colleges, universities.

## Parks/Trails/Recreation

### Assessing Our Current and Future Environment

#### What is the Key Challenge?

- 1) Fields
- 2) Business
- 3) Trails
- 4) Consistent use rates: rates from one community to another
- 5) Coordination of miscellaneous activities
- 6) Trail plan to connect unique community features (i.e. Fallasburg – Downtown)
- 7) Community Recreation Plan: How to better use existing parks
- 8) Pool partners with Y other than schools and municipalities
- 9) Grow recreational authority and wellness
- 10) All inclusive
- 11) Review other communities'
  - a. Best Practices of other communities
  - b. "Trade Hub" concept
  - c. Vision of Healthy Community
  - d. Market
  - e. Lowell as a fitness/trail hub
- 12) Wege land development
- 13) Identifying all our current spaces and maintenance/upkeep
- 14) Downtown Lowell Community Center Hub (YMCA?) that connects with river/trails
- 15) Community-wide plan for facilities champion
- 16) Create an event that utilizes all aspects we have here, water and trails (i.e. Iron Man Race)
- 17) Bridge from City to Lowell Township Park over Grand River
- 18) M-21 portage
- 19) Focus on river connections: bridges, portages
- 20) Connect rural areas and townships to trails and parks

#### What is Something New that you Would Really Like to Happen?

- 1) Encourage small businesses that fit healthy concept/tied to trails (hiking paraphernalia; fitness paraphernalia; etc.)

## Arts/Culture/Historic Preservation

### Assessing Our Current and Future Environment

#### What is the Key Challenge?

- 1) Center for Lowell Area Arts: need a place for classes, artists, galleries, functions
- 2) Arts and Cultural Center
  - a. Theater
  - b. Education
  - c. Music

#### What is Something New that you Would Really Like to Happen?

- 1) Historical, Arts, Tourism
  - a. Tourism
  - b. Historic buildings
  - c. Walking self-guided tours
  - d. Sculptures
- 2) Finance
- 3) Funding
- 4) Planning
- 5) Area Historical Society (not separate) with millage from Townships and City
- 6) Vision
- 7) Broad Passion—get people passionate about them

## Local Food/Agriculture

### Assessing Our Current and Future Environment

#### What is the Key Challenge?

- 1) Downtown "Hub": Quasi Fitness/Trails  
Focus tied to local food co-op, weekend food fair, etc.
- 2) Collaboration farmer to farmer to government to public
- 3) Master plan boundaries
  - a. West Main/M-21
  - b. Lincoln Lake
  - c. Vergennes
- 4) Green Sustainable

#### What is Something New that you Would Really Like to Happen?

- 1) MooVille in Lowell
- 2) Litehouse Foods
- 3) Tying the Healthy Community concept to local retail, healthy food, locally grown option restaurants
- 4) Promote collaboration between agriculture-food businesses
- 5) Education and support for locally grown produce
- 6) Infrastructure: high speed internet
- 7) Preserve "Open Space" tied to Community Hub/Park (Wege Land)
- 8) Alternative concept to YMCA community center at Wege Land
- 9) Long-term goals for development verses agriculture/open space preservation

## Collaboration/Talent Development

### Assessing Our Current and Future Environment

#### What is the Key Challenge?

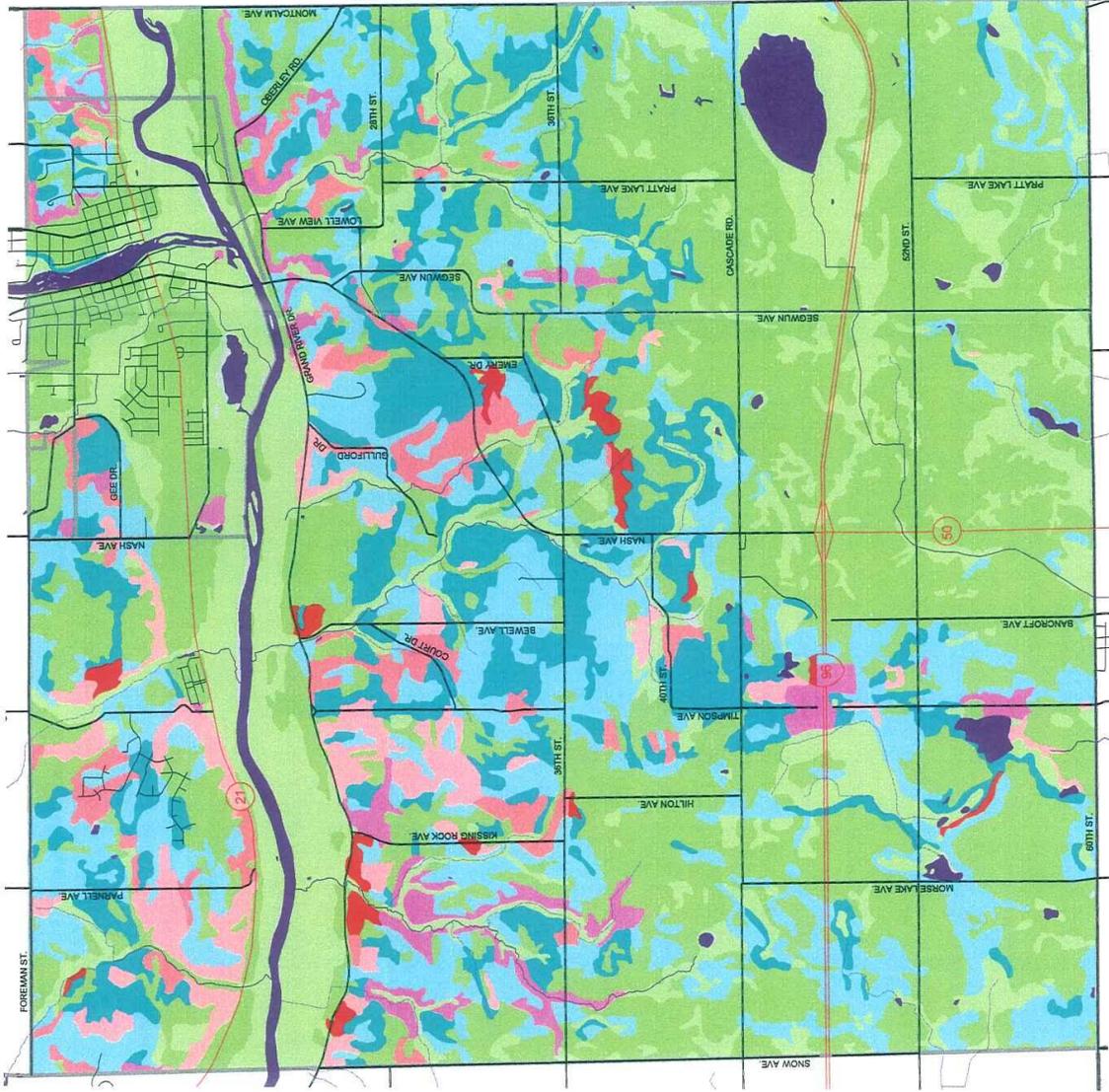
- 1) Transportation?
- 2) Define the Greater Lowell Area: How far north/south
- 3) Challenge is scope
- 4) Millage questions:
  - a. How to resolve wide differences
  - b. How to get differences understood by all parties
  - c. Where are some commonalities
- 5) Student/Youth Liaison on Committees
- 6) Attract Youth
- 7) 5x5 \$500 grant for Lowell Development
- 8) Santa Fe Mix
- 9) Lowell Leadership be revisited, reassessed, and restarted

#### What is Something New that you Would Really Like to Happen?

- 1) All communities have volunteer opportunities for new people
- 2) Encourage all locations in Lowell and all ages
- 3) Build a volunteer database:
  - a. Identify groups and individuals' talents
  - b. Match to needs in community
- 4) Continued non-profit collaboration
- 5) Vision — Funding
- 6) Non-profit consolidation and collaboration with government and schools
- 7) Where does LCP fit or not with this. It started this process
- 8) Succession Planning
- 9) LCP on Board
- 10) Visions evolve
- 11) Build on how this steering committee came to be and was successful



# MAP 1 TOPOGRAPHIC SLOPES LOWELL TOWNSHIP KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN



**CLASSIFICATION**

**HYDROLOGY**  
 Drainage and Intensity, Stream  
 River and Stream  
 Lake/Pond  
 Lake

**POLITICAL BOUNDARIES**  
 Political Boundary

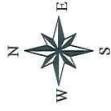
**ROADS**  
 Interstate  
 Highway  
 County Road

**PERCENT SLOPES**

NO DATA OR WATER

LEVEL

- 0 TO 6%
- 6 TO 12%
- 12 TO 18%
- 18 TO 40%
- 40 TO 45%
- 25 TO 45%
- VARIES



1:2500 0 1300 2600 3900 5200 FEET

DATA SOURCES:  
 MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES,  
 LAND AND MINERAL SERVICES DIVISION,  
 RESOURCE MAPPING AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY SECTION,  
 SOIL INFORMATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
 NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE, KENT COUNTY  
 SOIL SURVEY, 1986.





# MAP 3 NATIONAL WETLANDS

## INVENTORY LOWELL TOWNSHIP KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

### CLASSIFICATION

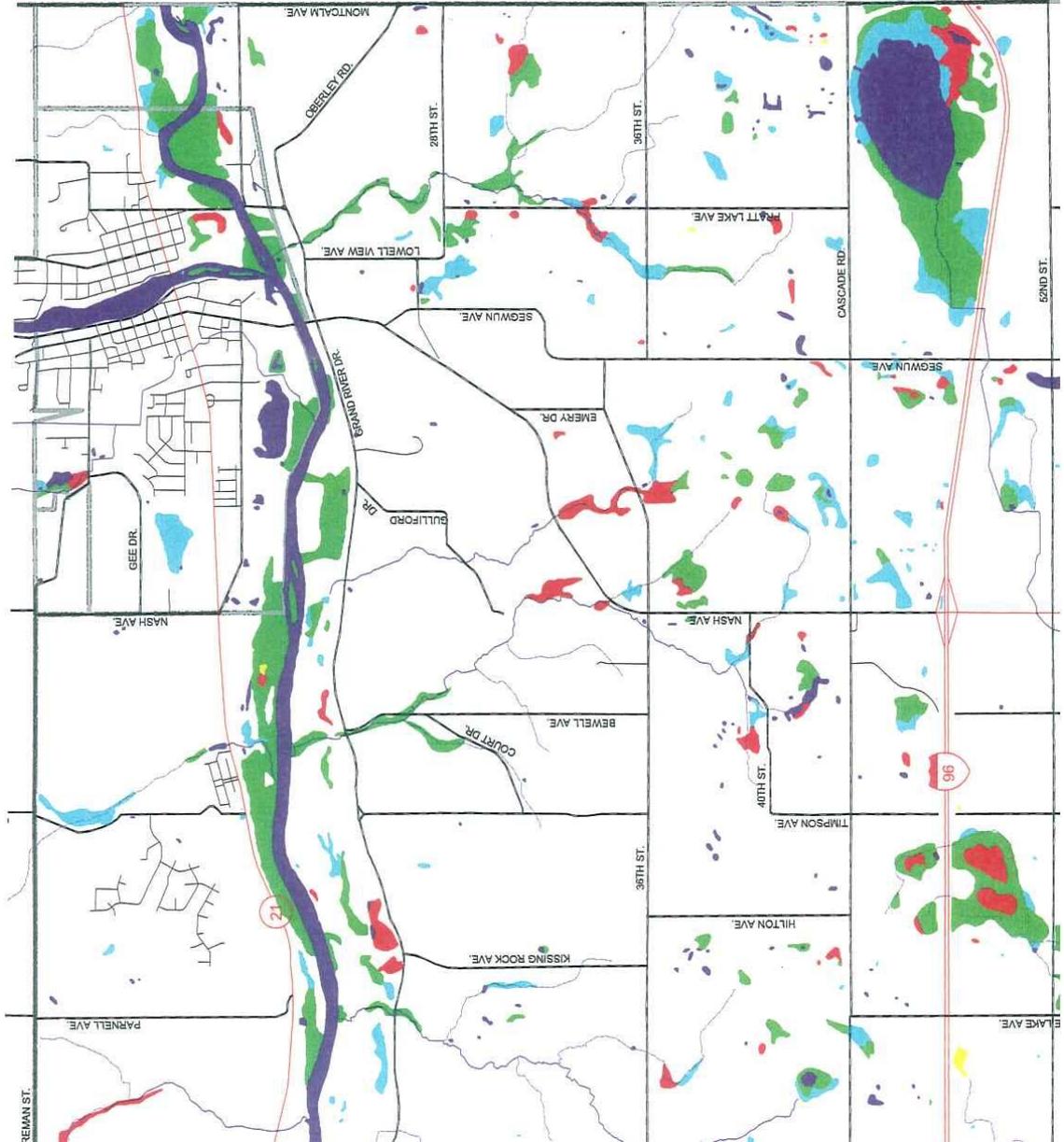
 HYDROLOGY	 DRAINAGE AND INTERMITTENT STREAMS	 RIVERS AND STREAMS	 POLITICAL BOUNDARIES
 ROADS	 HIGHWAYS	 STREETS	 COUNTY ROADS

### WETLAND TYPES

	AQUATIC BED
	EMERGENT
	FORESTED
	OPEN WATER/UNKOWN BOTTOM
	SCRUB-SHRUB



DATA SOURCE:  
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES,  
LAND AND MINERAL SERVICES DIVISION,  
RESOURCE MAPPING AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY SECTION,



# EXISTING WATERMAIN MAP

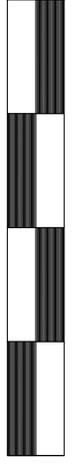
## LOWELL TOWNSHIP 2014

### KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

T 6 N, R 9 W

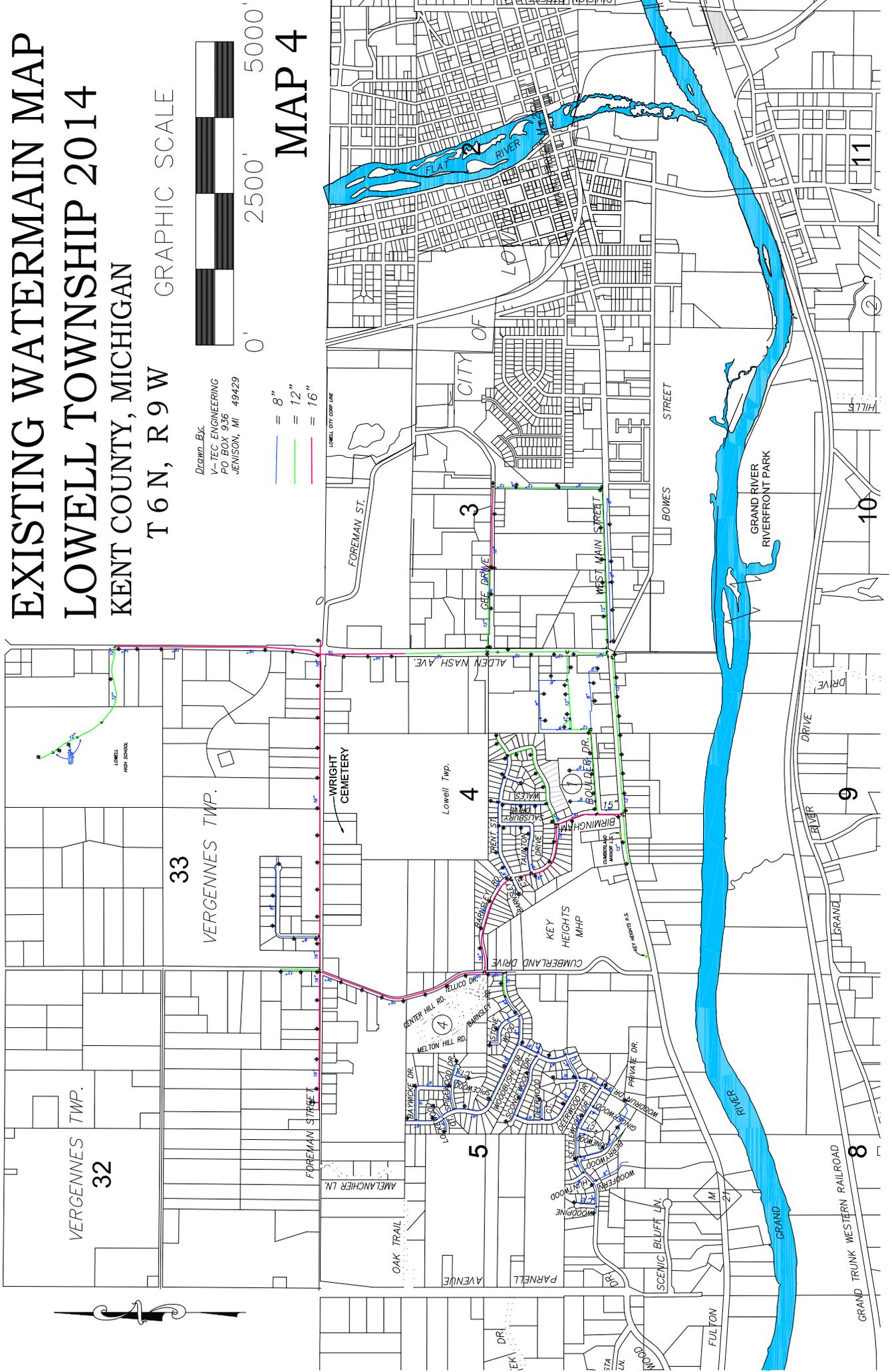
GRAPHIC SCALE

Drawn By:  
V-TEC ENGINEERING  
PO BOX 936  
JENISON, MI 49429



- = 8"
- = 12"
- = 16"

## MAP 4



# EXISTING SANITARY SEWER MAP LOWELL TOWNSHIP

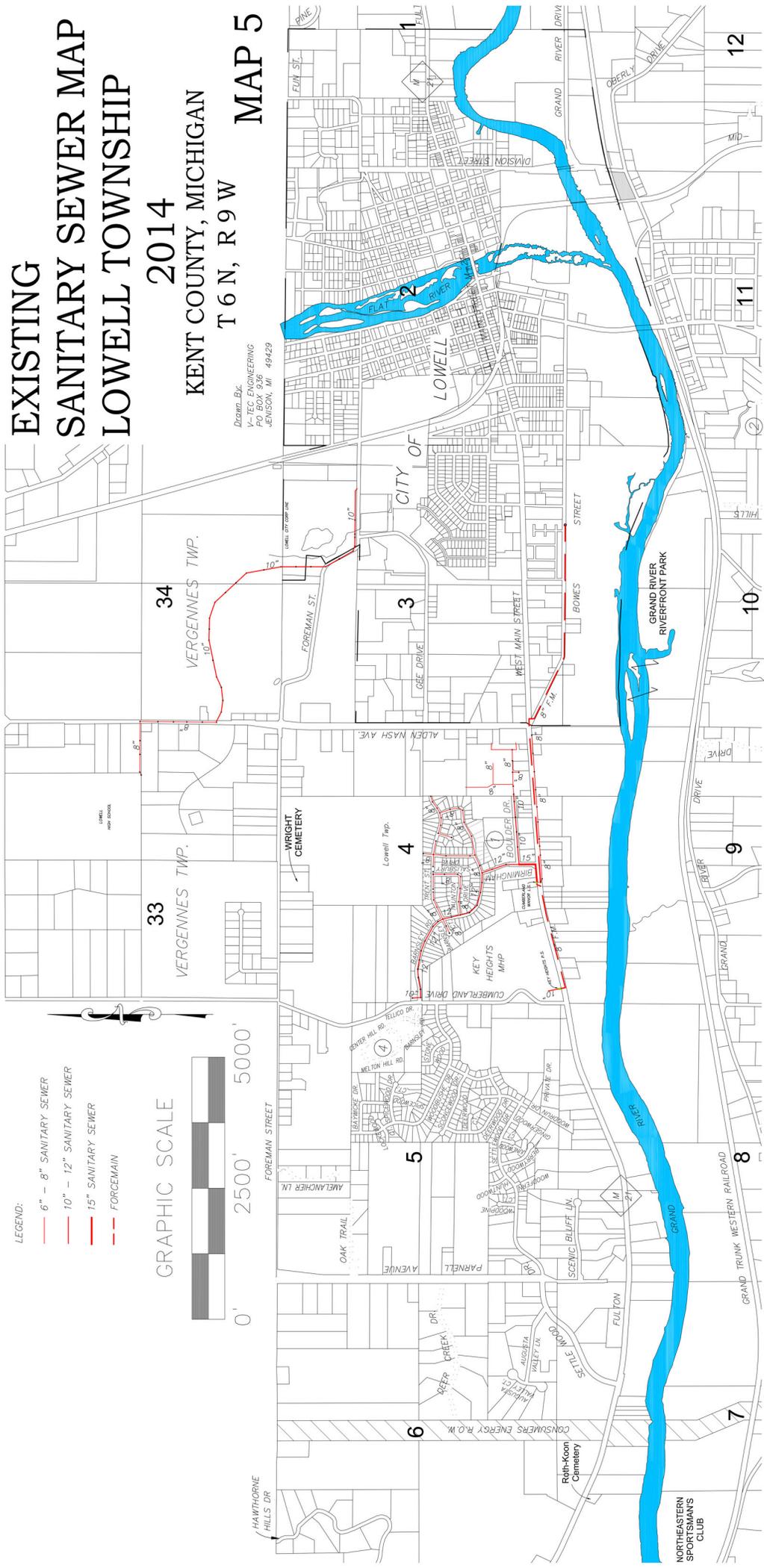
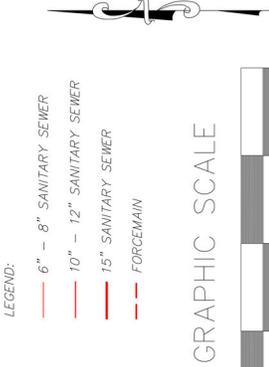
## 2014

### KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

#### T 6 N, R 9 W

## MAP 5

David L. Bix  
P.E.C. ENGINEERING  
P.O. BOX 200  
LEANSON, MI 49429



# ROAD CLASSIFICATION MAP

## LOWELL TOWNSHIP

KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN  
T 6 N, R 9 W

MAP 6

- COUNTY PRIMARY ROAD
- STATE HIGHWAY
- LOCAL ROAD
- NATURAL BEAUTY ROAD
- PRIVATE ROAD



Drawn By:  
V-TEC ENGINEERING  
4366 LIBERTY SQUARE  
GRANDVILLE, MI 49418

