

# 1.0 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Geographic Location

The City of Walker is located in western Michigan, on the western edge of Kent County and east of Ottawa County. The city is positioned on the northwestern side of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area. Walker was incorporated into a city in 1962 and has been growing steadily since that time. Walker features the Grand River on its southern border and a wealth of natural resources. The city is currently in the midst of changing from an area of rural farmland to a dense residential community. The City of Walker lies near the Fruit Ridge, a six-township agricultural area in western Michigan that produces approximately 40% of Michigan's apples that are distributed for national consumption.

Figure 1.1.0



Source: [www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com)

Figure 1.1.1



Source: [www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com)

## 1.2 Characteristics of Walker

The City of Walker is a diverse community located just south and east of the “fruit ridge” of west Michigan. The city has many natural resources within its boundaries including oil, plaster mines, muck farms, and gravel pits. In addition, the nearby fruit ridge adds to the uniqueness of the city.

The community consists of four census tracts as defined by the US Census Bureau, each containing unique aspects of the city. A tract map is available on page eight. The northeastern portion of the city, defined by Census Tract 115, is the oldest and most densely built area of Walker. This area of the city is bisected by Alpine Ave. and US Highway 131 going north/south, and Interstate 96 going east/west, along with two major city roads running the length of the city. This area also contains a commercial district running north and south along Alpine Ave. The district consists of mainly “big box” retail and stretches approximately two miles. Although Alpine Ave. has a bus line running along it, the heavy traffic, and lack of bicycle paths or sidewalks, means this area is not easily accessible for residents without an automobile.

The northwestern part of the city, defined by Census Tract 116, has many industrial parks and is zoned for future industrial growth. It also has several areas of low density residential scattered within the tract. In addition to Interstate 96 running east/west through the tract, the major north/south road, Wilson Ave., bisects this tract. The new city hall complex is also located within this census tract. This area has seen the largest gain in population with 4,127 people, or almost two and a half times their 1990 population. Census Tract 117.01 is considered the Central Business District of Walker. The city has a Downtown Development Authority is working towards a revitalization of this often overlooked area. Finally the southern portion of the city is defined by Census Tract 117.02. This area is considered rural and has the most undeveloped land. It is also the location of many resources including the majority of the cities oil rigs and gravel pits. It is also the home of Millennium Park, the newest and most expansive addition to the parks located in the city.

(Source: [www.ci.walker.mi.us](http://www.ci.walker.mi.us))

## **1.3 Census Data Analysis**

### ***1.3.1 Methods***

The practicum group collected and analyzed Decennial Census data for the City of Walker and the surrounding communities to gather a comparative perspective. The City of Walker wasn't incorporated into a city until 1962; data was collected for as far back as 1970 for Walker and several of the surrounding communities. While this older data was considered, the group focused the most attention on 1990 and 2000 data. The data was analyzed at the census tract and block group level to get the most accurate information about the trends of the city. The group used data collected from the US Census and the Grand Valley Metro Council. Additional data was collected to support these analyses and were taken from a variety of sources.

### ***1.3.2 Results***

The City of Walker has shown an increase in population since its incorporation in 1962. The city experienced its largest numerical growth to date during 1990-2000. During this period, the city's population grew to reach a total of 21,842. In this same period Walker's total housing units grew by 25 percent. The City of Walker has about 63.5 percent of owner occupied housing and 36.5 percent of renter occupied housing. The median housing value for the City of Walker in owner-occupied households was \$117,700 in 2000, a 39% increase (epodunk.com).

## **1.4 Community Indicators Matrix**

### ***1.4.1 Methods***

The community indicators matrix was modeled after two sources. The first was the *Planning Advisory Service Report Number 517* titled "*Community Indicators*" written in December of 2003. The second source was the community indicators matrix found in the *2000-2001 Annual Report of the Government Alberta, Canada*. the four goals and subsequent objectives were adopted from the City of Walker Master Plan 1998. The city listed their four goals

as: Community Image, Neighborhoods & Families, Land Use, and Resident Communications. the recommendations were based on how accurately Walker has been meeting its objectives and in turn reaching each of their four goals.

#### ***1.4.2 Results***

The community indicators matrix lists in detail each of the city's four goals, its subsequent objectives as outlined in the master plan. Results show that overall, the city has been successful at meeting many of the objectives outlined, but improvement in several areas is necessary. These improvements include better access to city resources, a more active role in addressing development pressures, and regular revisions to master plan. Despite these improvements there were many successes including: the addition of a geographic focal point called the Heart of Walker; additional programs implemented by the police and fire departments; additional points of access to community meeting information; and the Walker City Festival.

### **1.5 Future Population Distribution Scenarios**

#### ***1.5.1 Methods***

In this section of the project the group examined the population projections using four scenarios. Each scenario is based on utilizing different lot sizes and the effective amount of land consumed under each scenario. The lot sizes the group analyzed were one third acre, one half acre, one acre, and two acres. The land consumed was displayed using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) taking into consideration hydrology, planned sewer infrastructure, and current and future zoning. The recommendations were based on the Build-Out Analysis results and the overall goals of future growth as outlined in the Walker Master Plan.

#### ***1.5.2 Results***

Using projections based on calculations by the Grand Valley State University Office of Economic Expansion the group found that the population in Walker in the year 2020 will be about 32,081 people. Based on this number, the average number of people per household, and the number of building permits issued each year the group calculated the number of lots necessary to meet the demands of this new population. At one third acre growth the additional land consumption for residential growth would be 1,198 acres. This calculation doesn't include expansions to commercial or industrial areas that will likely coincide with the residential growth.

### **1.6 Overall Recommendations**

While the data and analyses found that Walker is making efforts to meet the goals outlined in the current Master Plan, improvements can be made. Data shows significant population growth and several demographic changes that must be addressed. After reviewing the build out analysis and population projections the group recommends growth at one third or one half acre lot sizes. In addition, several objectives outlined in the master plan are not currently being met, as revealed in the community indicators matrix. Recommendations for meeting these objectives include adding a bus route to The Rapid on Wilson Ave., improving sidewalks and adding a bicycle path to improve access

and encourage physical activity among residents. Second, the group recommends relaxing height restrictions and encouraging mixed use in order to increase density and preserve open space. These changes would complement the one-third lot size limit suggested by the build-out. Implementing these or other solutions to address the data trends shows the city is proactive and responsive to its citizens' needs.