



Livingston County Department of Planning

MEMORANDUM

TO: Livingston County Planning Commission and the Howell Township Board of Trustees

FROM: Scott Barb

DATE: November 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Z-34-25 Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance: Article 2, Section 2.02 Definitions.

Scott Barb
AICP, PEM
Director

Robert A. Stanford
AICP
Principal Planner

Martha Haglund
AICP
Principal Planner

The Howell Township Planning Commission is proposing to amend the definitions in the Township Ordinance with the addition of 'Data Processing'. Staff have reviewed the proposed amendments for accuracy and compatibility with the existing ordinance language and offer the following summary for your review. Staff comments are written in *italic and underlined* with additions and changes to the Ordinance written in red.

Article 2, Section 2.02 Definitions

The following definition will be added to the subsection:

Data Processing. A facility or facilities used to house, and in which are operated, maintained and replaced from time to time, computer systems and associated components, including but not limited to telecommunications and storage systems, cooling systems, power supplies and systems for managing property performance (including generators and mechanical and electrical yards), and equipment used for the transformation, transmission, distribution and management of electricity (including private substations), internet related equipment, data communications connections, private communications towers, environmental controls and security devices, structures and site features, as well as certain accessory uses, buildings or structures located on the same lot such as utility buildings, offices, warehousing, cafeteria, guardhouses, diesel storage tanks, water storage tanks, security fencing, and other similar structures, improvements and appurtenances.

Department Information

Administration Building
304 E. Grand River Avenue
Suite 206
Howell, MI 48843-2323

Staff comments: Data processing is methods or operations performed on data that transforms and analyzes it into a format for further use. The above definition should read 'Data Processing Facility'. As written, the definition is incorrect.

TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION: DISAPPROVAL. The proposed definition was denied at the September 23, 2025, public hearing on the proposed amendment.

RECOMMENDATION: The definition is incorrect as noted in staff comments. The Planning Commission should consider the error as stated in staff comments and offer their recommendation to the Howell Township Board.

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(517) 546-7555
Fax (517) 552-2347

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Web Site
milivcounty.gov

	LIVINGSTON COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT CONDITIONAL REZONING REQUEST	CASE NUMBER:
		Z-35-25

COUNTY CASE NUMBER:	Z-35-25	TOWNSHIP:	Howell Township
REPORT DATE:	November 10, 2025	SECTION NUMBER:	Sections 7 & 18
STAFF ANALYSIS BY:	Scott Barb	TOTAL ACREAGE:	1007.3 acres

APPLICANT / OWNER:	Stantec Consulting, Jack Ammerman
LOCATION:	19 parcels bounded by Owosso Road, Marr Road, Fleming Road, and Warner Road.
LAND USE:	Currently vacant farmland with some low density residential.

CURRENT ZONING:	REQUESTED ZONING:
AR – Agricultural Residential, SFR – Single Family Residential, and NSC – Neighborhood Service Cm	RT – Research and Technology
PERMITTED/SPECIAL USES (Not all inclusive):	PERMITTED/SPECIAL USES (Not all inclusive):
<u>Permitted:</u> AR: General agriculture, single-family dwellings, churches, stables. SFR: Single-family dwellings, day care facilities. NSC: Retail and service establishments, vehicle repair, contractor offices.	<u>Permitted:</u> RT: Airport related uses, scientific research, business research, testing labs, educational facilities, professional and medical offices and facilities, institutional offices, computer applications and data processing.
<u>Special:</u> AR: Airports, campgrounds, cemeteries. SFR: Adult day care, child group day care. NSC: Automotive gas stations, neighborhood shopping centers, commercial kennels.	<u>Special:</u> RT: Tool and die, machine shops, light assembly, mini-warehouse facilities, general storage, restaurants.
<u>Minimum Lot Areas:</u> AR: 1 acre; SFR: 1 acre, 10,000 sq. ft. with water and sewer; NSC: 1 acre or 10,000 sq. ft. with water and sewer; RT: 2 acres, 20,000 sq. ft with water and sewer.	

TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND PUBLIC COMMENTS:	ESSENTIAL FACILITIES AND ACCESS:
The proposed conditional rezoning was DENIED at the September 23, 2025, public hearing. Minutes of the meeting demonstrate a few proponents of the project with an overwhelming majority of attendees voicing their opposition to the proposed data center conditional rezoning.	Water: Potential connection to MHOG
	Sewer: Potential connection to Sanitary
	Access: Property access has not been determined as there is no site plan submitted with the rezoning application to the County.

EXISTING LAND USE, ZONING AND MASTER PLAN DESIGNATION:

		Land Use:	Zoning:	Master Plan:
Subject Sites:		Primarily vacant parcels with some single-family residences	AR – Ag. Residential, SFR – Single Family Residential, NSC – Neighborhood Service Commercial	Agricultural Preservation and Low Density Residential
	To the North:	Agricultural vacant	AR – Agricultural Residential	Agricultural Preservation
	To the East:	Agriculture, single family residences, few commercial buildings	AR – Agricultural Residential, SFR – Single family res., NSC – Neigh. Service Commercial	Agricultural Preservation and Low-Density Residential
	To the South:	Single family residences and agricultural	AR – Agricultural Residential, SFR – Single family Residential	Agricultural Preservation
	To the West:	Single family residences, agriculture	NSC – Neighborhood Service Commercial, AR – Agricultural Residential	Medium Density Residential and Local Commercial

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS:

Soils / Topography:	Primary soil types on the parcels consist of Miami and Conover loams. These are prime farmland soils based on the USDA Soil Survey of Livingston County, MI.
Wetlands:	Small pockets of wetland soils exist on the sites and are located adjacent to county drains on the property per the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality wetland mapping service.
Vegetation:	The overall project site has been used as cropland. Sparse vegetation exists in some areas.
County Priority Natural Areas:	A few small Priority 2 and 3 natural sites are on site: one along Marr Road and the other along Owosso Road.

TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN DESIGNATION:

The Howell Township Future Land Use Map (2022) designates the subject parcels under the conditional rezoning request as **Agricultural Preservation and Low-Density Residential**. The Township Master Plan states the following regarding the land use classifications:

‘Agricultural Preservation: These areas are intended to remain rural. These areas are intended to maintain the existing agricultural lands in the Township. Housing in these areas should be on large lots to keep density low. The area planned for Agricultural Preservation includes the majority of the Township. In addition to preserving large swaths of farmland that helps to support the agricultural industry in the community, these areas also help to maintain the existing character that many Township residents identify as what they feel is most important about the community.’

'Residential – Low Density: The characteristics of these areas are intended to be consistent with typical suburban residential uses. The land use would include suburban style residential housing and customary accessory uses in the neighborhoods or individual lots. Neighborhood developments would have low volume neighborhood scale roads that are lined with sidewalks, pedestrian scale lighting and street trees. Neighborhoods should include amenities such as neighborhood scale parks or playgrounds. Individual lots may be located along rural connector roads in closer proximity to the city.'

The significant portion of the proposed conditional rezoning will involve parcels that are master planned as Agricultural Preservation and are labeled as prime farmland by the USDA Soil Conservation Service. The remainder of parcels that comprise the conditional rezoning request are classified as Low-Density Residential and can be found along Fleming Road and Warner Road. Preservation of open space and community character is a primary goal of importance that is detailed in the Township's Master Plan (page 13) with 88 percent of township residents indicating that preservation of farmland was important.

While the applicant has indicated that setbacks for the proposed use of the property as a data center will be significant, these setbacks alone do not replace the loss of open space and prime farmland that will result if the proposed conditional rezoning is approved. The Township Master Plan does not lend support to the request to rezone the parcels to Research and Technology. Designated future land use classifications are distinct within the Township and are designed to keep the Township of a rural nature as stipulated throughout the plan. The request to conditionally rezone to RT – Research and Technology is not consistent with the Howell Township Future Land Use Plan.

COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:

The 2026 Livingston County Master Plan is currently being drafted. While the document will not direct parcel specific land use decisions, it will define policies that Townships should consider when amending their own future land use maps and plans. An overwhelming theme as the 2026 plan is being drafted was the concern over rural character and how to maintain that character for generations to come. We encourage local governments to make wise land use decisions that will mitigate potential land use conflicts while promoting good governance and land management.

COUNTY PLANNING STAFF COMMENTS:

The applicant is proposing to conditionally rezone 1,007 acres of land in Sections 7 and 18 for the purpose of constructing a data processing facility in the Research and Technology District. The intent of this district is to provide an area in the Township for the planning and development of land uses that directly relate to research, technology, office, and other professional uses including data processing. Section 125.3405 of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act allows any landowner to voluntarily offer in writing conditions for the use and/or development of land subject to required approvals by that municipality.

Article 23 of the Howell Township Zoning Ordinance establishes the criteria and factors that are to be considered for a conditional rezoning. Currently, the applicant has applied to the Township for a text amendment to define 'data processing' and has applied for conditional rezoning with the following conditions:

- The applicant offers a minimum of thirty (30) ft. wide landscaped buffers around parking areas, with planted and maintained trees, shrubs, berms, fencing, and walls.
- The applicant has offered significant setbacks (100 ft. front and rear yards, 50 ft. side yards).

- The applicant has offered tailored sound mitigation strategies.
- The applicant offers that the facility will implement water efficiency and sustainability by recycling water through cooling systems before discharge, landscaping with native vegetation to reduce irrigation needs, capturing rainwater on site, and incorporating water saving features and fixtures within the facility.

It should be noted that no specific information has been submitted as to how some of these conditions will be met and we are not confident that the public hearing requirements of the Open Meetings Act were applied due to the last-minute change of location.

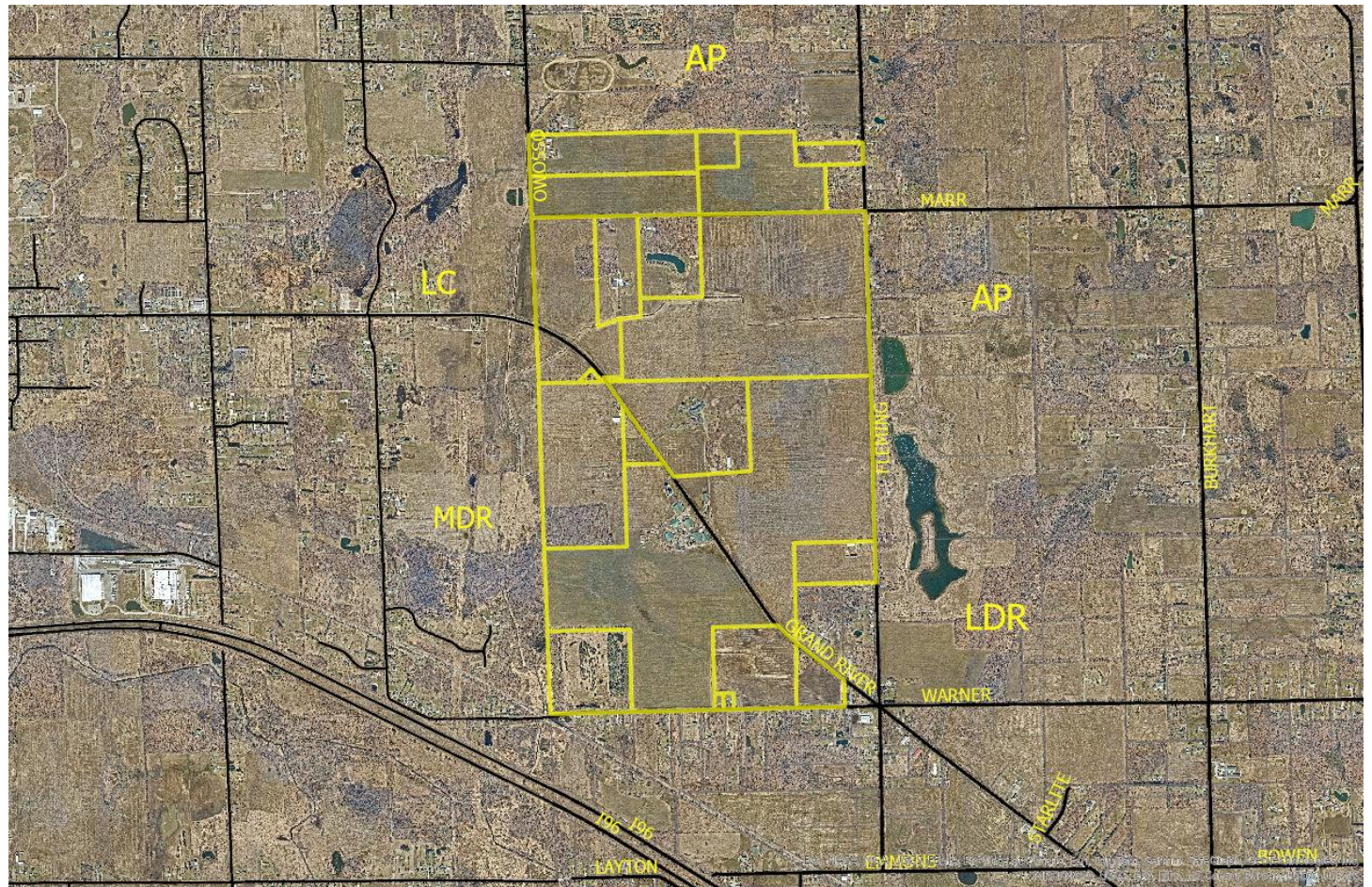
Article 23.02 of the Howell Township Zoning Ordinance details the information to be considered by the Planning Commission and Township Board for approval of a rezoning of land whether conditional or not:

1. **Whether the rezoning is consistent with the policies and uses proposed for that area in the Township's Master Land Use Plan.** The proposed conditional rezoning is not consistent with the Howell Township Master Plan. The Township FLU map identifies Agricultural Preservation and Low-Density Residential for the proposed parcels under consideration.
2. **Whether all the uses allowed under the proposed rezoning would be compatible with other zones and uses in the surrounding area.** The submitted information indicated that with significant setbacks and increased landscaping, potential land use conflicts may be mitigated. A proposed data center on the site could be potentially harmonious with adjacent land uses. Additional information would be needed to determine development potential.
3. **Whether any public services and facilities would be significantly adversely impacted by a development or use allowed under the requested rezoning.** While the developer has offered to pay for any necessary infrastructure improvements, there is no data to suggest whether public services would be affected or not. Capacity studies, cost analysis, and feasibility studies may be required to place the burden of proof on the applicant prior to any action on the rezoning.
4. **Whether the uses allowed under the proposed rezoning would be equally or better suited to the area than uses allowed under the current zoning of the land.** Data processing facilities need large amounts of land to be developed, and the selected sites offer an opportunity for such a proposal. The current zoning of land as agricultural preservation offers the Township the rural landscape and character that has been a hallmark for the community for decades. The Township will ultimately need to determine if this agricultural hallmark is worth the exchange of any potential benefits that would result with a data processing center. We believe there are benefits and constraints with either current zoning designation.

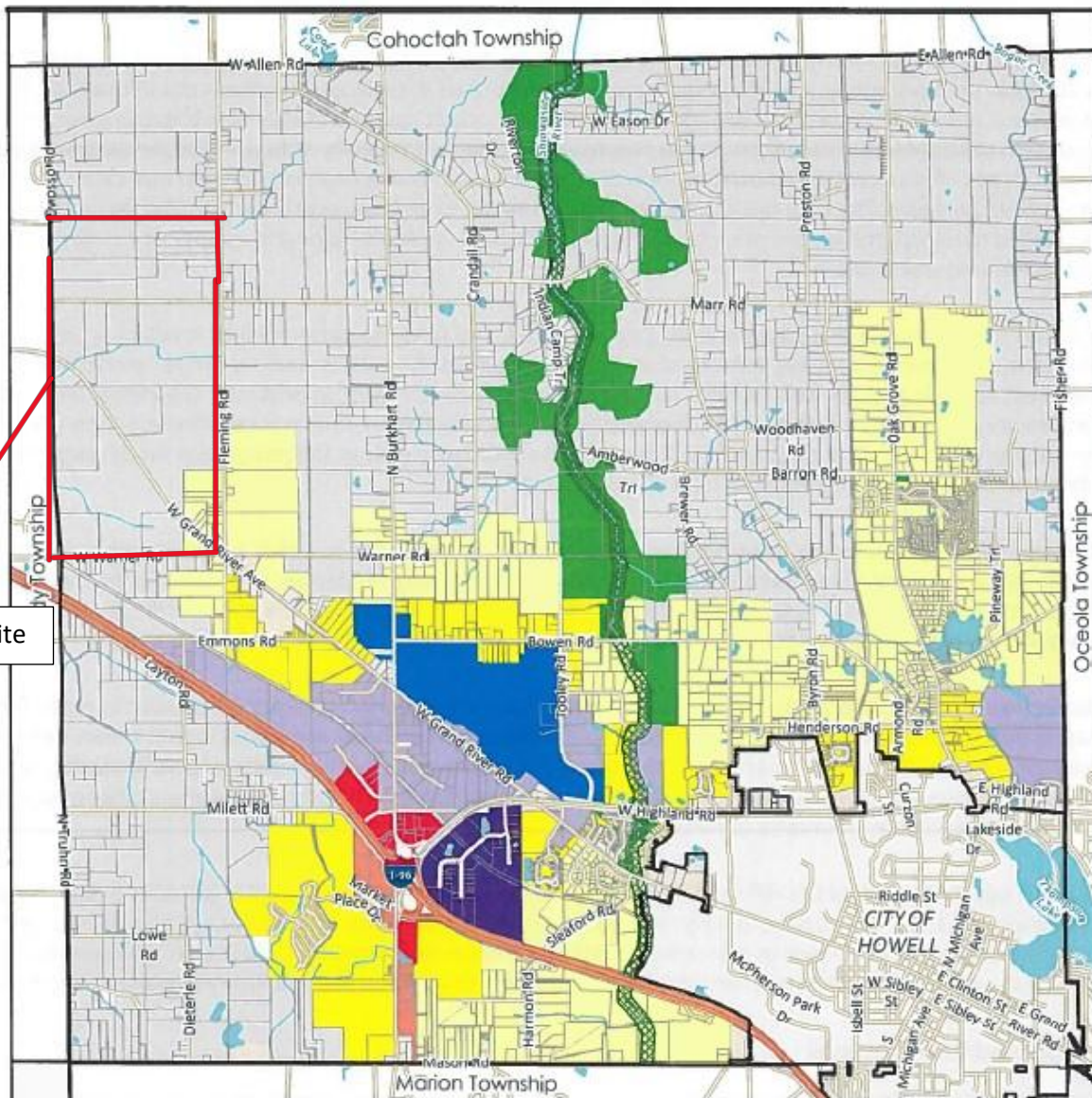
The proposed conditional rezoning offers opportunities and constraints based on our review of the application as submitted. It is our understanding that potential benefits of such a development would be significant tax revenue, expanded utilities for owners of land and future development, additional jobs, and potential grant support for schools and other community organizations. We also understand that the Township Master Plan has been designed to keep the community rural and to maintain the existing rural character that has been a hallmark of the community for many decades. Eighty-eight (88) percent of township residents determined that preservation of existing farmland and open space was important in the community, and we see that continued trend across the county. As submitted, the proposed conditional rezoning is not consistent with the Howell Township Master Plan and does not provide specific information to determine if the rezoning to Research and Technology is a sound benefit to the community.

COUNTY PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The proposed rezoning from AR (Agricultural Residential), SFR (Single Family Residential), and NSC (Neighborhood Service Commercial) to RT (Research & Technology) is not consistent with the overall goals, objectives, and future land use intentions of the Howell Township Master Plan. The Planning Commission should review the facts presented in this review and offer their recommendation to the Howell Township Board.

EXISTING LAND USE MAP WITH SURROUNDING ZONING

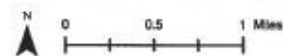
FUTURE LAND USE MAP



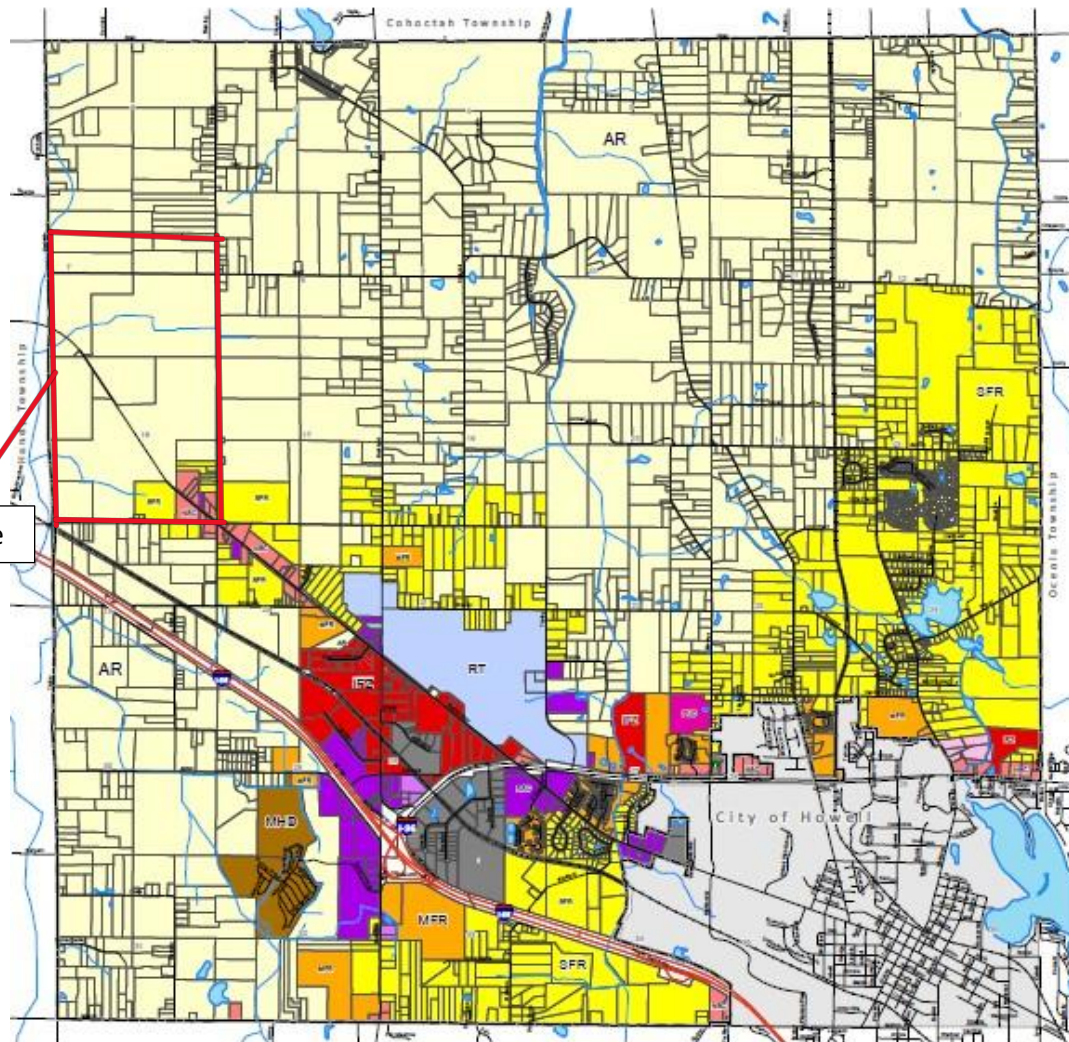
Project Site

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Agricultural Preservation | Residential - Medium Density |
| Airport | Industrial Flex |
| Commercial - Local | Industrial |
| Commercial - General | Recreation and Preservation |
| Commercial - Highway | Shiawassee River 200 foot Overlay |
| Residential - Low Density | |

Future Land Use

Howell Township
Livingston County, MichiganData: Livingston County, State of Michigan
Prepared by: Carlisle/Wortman Associates, Inc.
Date: December 7, 2022

TOWNSHIP ZONING MAP



Project Site

Zoning Designation

Conditional Rezoning	NSC - Neighborhood Service Commercial
PUD - Planned Unit Development	HSC - Highway Service Commercial
AR - Agricultural Residential	RSC - Regional Service Commercial
SFR - Single Family Residential	IFZ - Industrial Flex Zone
MFR - Multiple Family Residential	I - Industrial
MHD - Manufactured Housing District	RT - Research & Technology
OS - Office Service	

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this is the official Zoning Map referred to in the Zoning Ordinance of Howell Township, Livingston County, Michigan.

Township Supervisor Paul R. Smith Date 11/14/2025
Township Clerk Jane R. Smith Date 11/13/2025

ZONING DISTRICTS MAP

Howell Township
Livingston County

1/30/2021

Carlisle/Wortman Associates, Inc.
Ann Arbor, Michigan

