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I am a Garfield Township resident and am writing this in attempts at being a "better" citizen by trying to inform (at least from my perspective) this master plan process beyond the limited scope of the survey that was mailed. I am part of a family of four which includes two small children ages 4 and 20 months, my children are fourth generation of family in my house.

It occurred to me to think of Garfield Township as the "Flint of Grand Traverse County." It's the place to travel through to get to someplace else nicer, buy something, eat at a restaurant, but if given the option probably the last township in the county anyone would care to have a family and raise children in. There's a lot of concrete and asphalt, commerce, and traffic but no real parks and zero sidewalks. It seems as though the powers that be are doing everything they can to drive out families or at least to make Garfield Township less inviting to them. My family would consider moving to someplace more family friendly, but it's nearly impossible to find decent affordable home in the area.

I contend that Garfield Township could consider itself close to "maxed out" with development and it should perhaps consider making life for the few people that live here better, via quality-of-life improvements like sidewalks and parks. The direction of the township seems to be the pursuit of maximum commercial development at all costs, and that Garfield Township has gone "all-in" on commercial / industrial development like Flint did on the auto industry and its attendant commercial development.

In comparison Blair Township is much smaller than Garfield in terms of revenue but has the nicest township park in the county. They have a large, centralized park that contains tennis courts, basketball courts, exercise equipment, a circular track for walking or running, a few baskets for disc-golf and most importantly, a wonderful child play area.

This large play area for children has nice equipment with different spaces dedicated to different age groups-a large climbing and play area for older kids and smaller equipment for toddlers. Connected to this playground area is the best splash pad / water park area in the county. This whole play area is very thoughtfully enclosed in a nice fence with only two ways in or out. The fence is the perfect height so one can see through/over it while sitting on a bench to look for escaped children, yet low enough so they can't escape unless a gate is left open. There are numerous benches for tired parents to sit on, and the fact that those parents only must watch two exits allows them that time to relax. Additionally, connected to the play area is also a covered porch space with tables that can be used for changing diapers, picnics, parties, and anything else.

My family of four often travel to Blair Township to use that park. The unique and thoughtful characteristics of that park provide tired parents with an opportunity to relax while their children have a wonderful time and interact with each other. This park in Blair Township provides its families with a much nicer quality of life and in my opinion, Garfield Township should be embarrassed that a much smaller and less affluent township outclasses it in quality of life it provides its families. My wife and I were surprised by another unexpected benefit to ourselves, while our children played there, we were able to meet and interact with other parents. We have made friends from this process and as is often the case, parents are as starved for adult interaction as the children are of peer stimulation.

Another suggestion is the building of sidewalks or bike paths. I realize this is a county-wide problem but outside the city itself, there is nowhere to ride safely within the township. I live four miles from work and would gladly ride my bicycle to work to alleviate traffic, save money and get exercise. I tried last year but after a few close calls with speeding traffic, I gave up after an inattentive driver did bump me with their car and knocked me off my bike. It's impossible to take one's family on a bike ride anywhere along the main arteries like Cass Road, M37, South Airport Road, Garfield, etc. Perhaps more people would bike to work or utilize bike paths if available, and this might even in some small way, help with traffic congestion on the roads.

I realize Garfield Township does have unique opportunities it provides, the park on East Silver Lake Road and Hickory Hills are examples. However, neither of these really offers much to families with young children, and the important ability for young children to interact with each other is virtually non-existent in these places.

How many different types of chicken sandwiches do we need in Garfield Township? How many different widget stores does Garfield Township need in addition to a mall on life support and a dead Kmart building? At some point one would hope that the families living in Garfield Township would realize some benefit for their children other than being able to buy them a convenient happy meal, taking a quick trip to the mall to play in a tiny play area, or even buying a cheap ticket to the same old baseball game at a largely empty stadium. Are there some creative ideas for providing families with recreational activities perhaps in the winter months? Why not be ambitious and take Blair Township's Park model and make it bigger and better because Garfield is bigger, wealthier, and supports its local families?

The troubling demographic problems in the area are well known and now starting to become painful to those very same commercial and industrial businesses Garfield Township has been working overtime to cram into the township. The likely workforce needed for most of those businesses is of a younger demographic, but the township has shown little interest in creating an atmosphere that allows younger families to thrive and want to live in it. Those wealthy retirees that keep moving here are not going to work in your new Chick-Fil-A, your Elmers Excavating, or your various other businesses starved for good employees. Perhaps Garfield Township can change its priorities and values away from commercial interests and development to making the quality of life better for the young children and their families, and when I say young families, I mean

blue-collar families as that's what most of those businesses essentially are, and the types of employees they will need.

Surrounding townships like Blair and Long Lake can provide their communities a more family-friendly quality of life off the back of Garfield Township. They don't have to worry about taking up space for big-box stores or car dealerships, Garfield has done that for them. They can save their spaces for parks or single-family homes. They have options.

But, I suppose, being the "Flint of Grand Traverse County" is something.

If you've taken the time to read through this, it is appreciated thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Baker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a stylized "Baker".