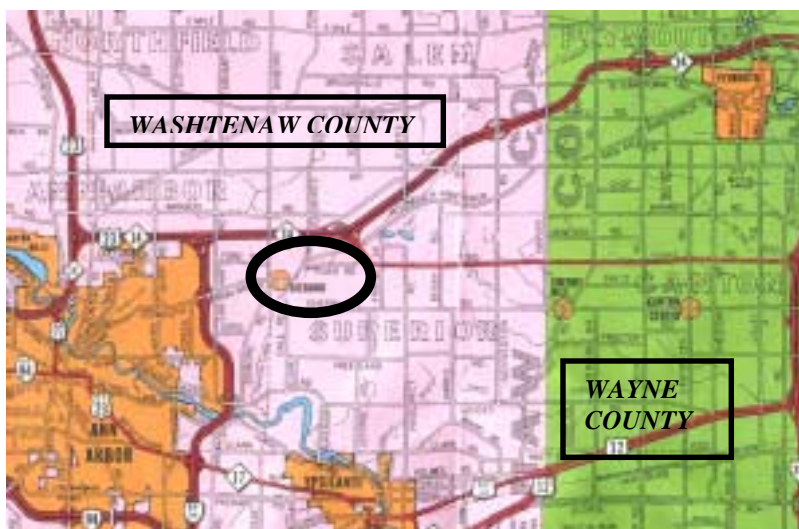


## Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Theme

Dixboro is a small, unincorporated village in western Superior Township, Washtenaw County, Michigan, just east of the city and township of Ann Arbor, Michigan, roughly bounded by Dixboro Road on the west; Fleming Creek on the south; M-14 Freeway on the north and Vorheis Road on the east. It was established in 1824 by John Dix, a retired sea captain, and is the site of several historic buildings. The center of the village fronts on Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road, a major arterial/collector that runs east-west from Detroit to Ann Arbor. Although there are several commercial establishments in Dixboro, it is chiefly residential.



*Figure 1. Dixboro in Context*

1990 United States Census figures place the population of Dixboro at approximately 810 persons. (See Figure 2.) It is likely that the population has increased over the past ten years, given the dramatic increases in the surrounding region. For instance, based on May 2000 population estimates (SEMCOG Population and Household Estimates, May 2000), the population of Superior Township has increased approximately 22% over the last decade, and the population of Washtenaw County as a whole has increased approximately 12%. Ann Arbor Township, Dixboro's neighbor to the west, is estimated to have grown, population-wise, approximately 18%. To Dixboro's east and northeast, the populations of Canton and Plymouth Townships in Wayne County have increased approximately 16% and 32%, respectively.

Not surprisingly, due to its rural nature and existing township zoning ordinances, much of the population increase in Washtenaw County has been housed in new single-family dwellings in low density, automobile dependent subdivisions. Recent development in Dixboro and its immediate environs has been of the large-lot variety (Glennborough, Matthei Farms). Additionally, major residential, commercial and office development west of Dixboro Road in Ann Arbor Township has had and will continue to have a significant impact on the village. The 1992 Superior Township Growth Management Plan predicts that the effects of the development in Ann Arbor Township will most likely take the form of increased rural housing in Dixboro and other parts of northwest Superior Township. Consequently, the village is in danger of losing its identity as an entity and evolving into somewhat of a "bedroom community" to Ann Arbor.

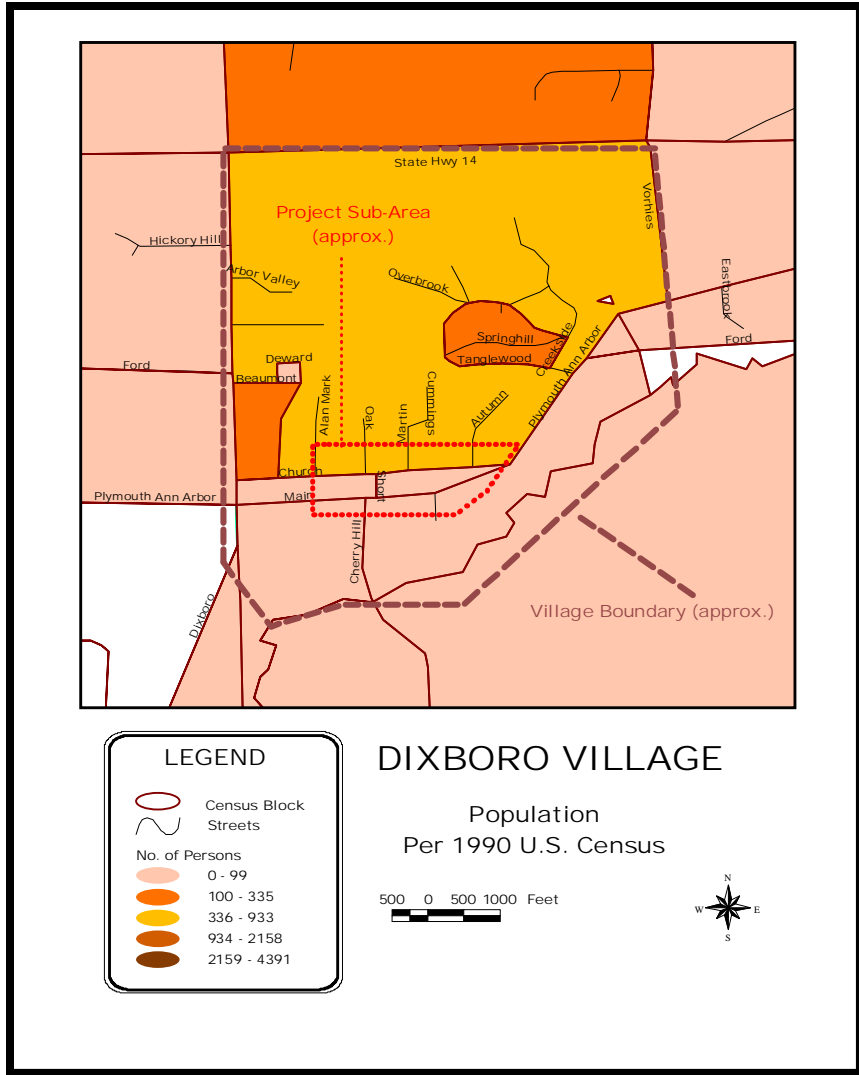


Figure 2. Population

## 1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this project was to assist community members in their efforts to preserve and enhance the quality of life that they have, along with their predecessors, thus far enjoyed as residents of Dixboro Village but which is threatened by intense development in neighboring areas. This is a classic example of a situation being experienced by countless historic, rural villages in the United States that exist in close proximity to urban areas.

Eighteenth or nineteenth century crossroads villages ... are being surrounded by new, large-lot subdivisions on former cropland, infiltrated by commercial strip development, and swamped by commuter traffic on now-inadequate roads. Many villages have, in fact, vanished beneath widened and 'improved' intersections ... The situation is complicated by the fact that villages often have no municipal identity; they are islands within larger towns, townships, or counties .... (Sutro, 1990)

In order to circumvent the obliteration that, for other, similar, villages in the United States has been inevitable, residents of Dixboro must take a proactive approach towards "reinventing" their village. Reinvention involves not only maintaining the status quo or re-creating what once was. It also entails taking the steps required for Dixboro to evolve into the type of village it might have become had it not been for the overshadowing that occurred with the expansion of Ann Arbor to its present state. Problems and issues facing Dixboro

Village today are a direct result of that expansion. Dixboro's redemption will be in creating an identity and sense of place that preclude further Ann Arbor development from totally annihilating it.

Several meetings were held with members of the Dixboro Village Community Group to define issues and articulate goals and objectives in order to formulate alternative strategies for both the long and short terms not only for use in the formulation of a plan, but also as a fundamental set of concepts for later presentation to the larger community as a first step in obtaining participation and support and building consensus. It is important to note that members of the Dixboro Village Community Group, which is a relatively small (less than ten people) grass roots movement, is not necessarily representative of the majority of Dixboro residents. The group's inception was triggered by their alarm over the steadily increasing traffic volumes on Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road as well as their apprehension over its possible widening. This project represents preliminary phase analysis and evaluation. It was initiated as a result of the Dixboro Village Community Group's invitation to faculty of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan to observe their experiences as they endeavor to take a proactive stance in planning matters affecting the character and destiny of their community.

### **1.3 Scope**

The scope of this project is limited to the sub-area (Figure 2) that is roughly encompassed by the current Village Center Zoning District. This district contains the Dixboro

General Store along with several commercial uses and a number of residences. Additionally, although they are not included in the Village Center Zoning District, the scope will include two key historic sites, the Dixboro Methodist Church and the Dixboro School. This sub-area is a key location relative to the re-creation and enhancement of the Village of Dixboro as a unique place within its surrounding region since to all intents and purposes it is the geographic center of the village.

Solutions best-suited to re-create and reinvent the Village of Dixboro were selected from a variety of strategies that have been utilized to retrofit similar villages across the United States, including elements borrowed from the neotraditionalist town planning movement. Included are several circulation and traffic-calming methods that can be implemented in the shorter term to create the basis or foundation for the longer term "reinvented village".

## Chapter 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 The Past

When endeavoring to create a sense of identity and place for a rural, historic village, it is useful to understand its past and devise an approach that allows for the legacy of the past to play a role in the future. Dixboro Village has a rich past as related by Carol Willits Freeman, a lifelong resident of Dixboro, in her book, “Of Dixboro: Lest We Forget”, first published in 1979 in the hope that “those who have read this book will think of Dixboro with some of the enthusiasm and love I feel for the little village”. Ms. Freeman describes a village that originally consisted of approximately twenty-five acres divided into 64 lots with a public square and reserve on Main Street (Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road). She speaks of the “little red schoolhouse” where she attended school, the “friendly village church” (currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places), the Ladies Aid Society, the Y.G.I.G. (You Go, I Go) and Idle Hour Social Clubs, and the Dixboro Baseball Team. Dixboro was a place where

“Doors were seldom locked, men and women were too busy to be bored, exercise took the form of plowing, haying, splitting wood, washing, starching and ironing lace curtains, raising chickens, hoeing the garden, or cleaning lamp wicks and chimneys. Entire families gathered around the dining room or kitchen table for three meals a day ... Bedtime came early, and the entire family was up early ... Automobiles were rare.” (page 73)

Over the years the village was home to blacksmith shops, apple cider mills, saw mills, crate and chair factories, creameries, a cemetery, a tavern, and of course, residences. According to Ms. Freeman:

The early settlers had to be an interdependent community in order to survive. Houses and barns were built with the cooperation of neighbors. Men helped each other to clear land for planting ... Farms remained in the same families – only generations changed. There was security in the knowledge that neighbors could be counted on in times of need .... We still like to think we are friendly in Dixboro. Going to school, church, or township meetings where four or five generations of families have gathered over the years has instilled respect and tolerance among the residents. Even though people don't visit each other as often as in the past, there's always a comfortable feeling that one's neighbors can be counted on when one needs them. (Freeman, 1979)

Superior Township acknowledges Dixboro as the only “permanent concentrated settlement” because it had the principal requirements for permanent settlements in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – “a regional road and a river or major stream to provide access and hydropower” (Superior Township Growth Management Plan, 1992).

## 2.2 The Present

Today, little of the historic village remains. Again from the 1992 Superior Township GMP:

The settlement grew slowly ... primarily as a residential settlement with some business services. With the advent of electricity, automobiles, and the paving of Plymouth Road, the village began to expand. By the time Dixboro Heights was constructed and occupied in the early 1950's, the population of Dixboro had more than doubled. The construction of new subdivisions during the 1980's and early 1990's (e.g., Tanglewood, Tanglewood Hills, Creekside) resulted in dramatic growth in Dixboro's population.

Presently, Dixboro is a village in name only. It is a loosely-knit, relatively low density residential area dependent upon the automobile for the accomplishment of the simplest tasks and acquisition of the most basic services. It is a collection of subdivisions with the remnants of a rural "historic" village at its center. Fortunately, these remnants – the historic general store, church, school and houses – are prime assets around which the village of Dixboro can be reinvented.

In recent years Dixboro has been experiencing intense development pressures due to its proximity to Ann Arbor and its location along the Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road Corridor, a major two-lane arterial/collector road that runs east-west between locations in Wayne County, Michigan and Ann Arbor.

Commuters traveling from Ann Arbor to Wayne County and vice versa are utilizing Plymouth Road as an alternative to M-14, an east-west freeway situated slightly north of Plymouth Road. This has resulted in particularly heavy traffic volumes over the past several years, particularly during peak commuting times. In an effort to exercise some control over the destiny of their village, the Dixboro Village Community Group formed to initiate discussion and action relative to the resolution of not only traffic issues, but longer range planning issues as well. One of their first acts was an attempt to persuade authorities to lower the speed limit on Plymouth Road, currently set at 45 miles per hour, on the portion of the road that runs through the center of the village. Traffic engineers from the Washtenaw County Road Commission determined that the 45 mph speed limit on Plymouth Road fell within legislated specifications and therefore was appropriate.

The Community Group is legitimately concerned that if current traffic volumes continue to increase, Plymouth Road will be widened to five lanes, an action that would ultimately destroy what remains of the historic and cultural character of the village. Less than one-half mile west of Dixboro, Plymouth Road is currently five lanes to accommodate access to the Domino Farms complex as well as relieve traffic congestion brought on by intense residential development activity in Ann Arbor Township. Similar fears of road widening exist relative to the future of Dixboro Road, which is the western boundary of the village and the boundary between Ann Arbor and Superior Townships, particularly since there has been a great deal of discussion about the Michigan Department of Transportation constructing an interchange at Dixboro Road and M-14. Vanishing "beneath widened and 'improved'

intersections” (Sutro, 1990) is a very palpable possibility for the Village of Dixboro in the not too distant future.

Although the Dixboro Community Village Group formed in response to the transportation issues described above, they are cognizant of the fact that the creation of a new master plan incorporating a combination of planning concepts, including key traffic calming methodologies, will best accomplish and support their overall vision for Dixboro and preclude future reactive transportation measures that would severely impair the continuance of Dixboro as a unique, historic rural village.

### **2.3 The Future**

The future of Dixboro is in the hands of its residents, hopefully with the support of the governing body, Superior Township. At the most rudimentary level there are two options: one is to do nothing, the consequences of which would spell certain death for the village in one of several ways. Either Dixboro will disappear under expanded transportation corridors, become yet another example of Washtenaw County style sprawl, or, longer term, assuming that development continues at its present rapid rate and in its current direction, be annexed to the City of Ann Arbor.

The second option is to create a vision for Dixboro Village that will become the essence of something far greater in the long term, i.e., a viable, modern village with a unique identity and character that maintains and cherishes its vestiges of the past. This farsightedness will result in the ultimate creation of a compact, primarily residential settlement with

supporting commercial and public activities that are accessible to pedestrians and a “place” where villagers and visitors alike encounter frequent casual social interaction as they run errands or attend social gatherings in the Village Center. The fruits of selecting the second option will move the process along to progressively higher levels, which in the interim will produce a community-sponsored and supported long term plan. The plan, although creative in its nature, will be eminently implementable in stages with the final product being the realization of the vision – a “reinvented” Dixboro.

## **Chapter 3. CURRENT STATUS**

An initial meeting was held with members of the Dixboro Village Community Group in December of 1999, with two subsequent meetings occurring in February and May of 2000. Problems and issues were identified and information was exchanged relative to steps that had already been taken by group members.

Previous actions by the group consisted of gathering data from SEMCOG relative to traffic volumes and crash statistics. Requests for a lowered speed limit on Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road and the conduction of a signal warrant study for the intersection of Plymouth-Ann Arbor and Cherry Hill Roads were submitted to the Washtenaw County Road Commission as well. Additionally, initial contact was established with Superior Township officials relative to retaining a professional planner specifically for the purpose of developing a new plan for Dixboro Village. The latter included the preparation of a draft request-for-proposal that would ultimately be distributed to selected planning firms in the area.

### **3.1 Lowered Speed Limit on Plymouth Road**

In 1997 a speed evaluation study was conducted by the Traffic and Safety Engineering Section of the Washtenaw County Road Commission on the portion of Plymouth Road that runs through Dixboro Village. It was determined that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed on the thoroughfare averaged 46 miles per hour. This, combined with an assessment that other environmental conditions in the area were in accordance with the posted 45 mile per hour speed limit, resulted in a denial of

the request for a lowered speed limit. The “85<sup>th</sup> percentile” speed is the speed at or below which 85 percent of vehicles travel. The 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed is used nationally by most agencies based on the fact that most drivers voluntarily adjust their speed to suit current conditions, i.e., road width, alignment, surface condition, roadside development, pedestrian activity, etc. (MDOT, 1999). Also contributing to the Road Commission’s decision to deny the request for a lower speed limit was the ambiguity of the development along Plymouth Road. It could be classified as neither a residential nor a business district.

### **3.2 Signal Warrant Study for Plymouth/Cherry Hill**

In 1998 the Washtenaw County Road Commission conducted a Traffic Signal Warrant Evaluation for the intersection of Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road and Cherry Hill. This was precipitated by resident complaints of a bottleneck at that intersection due to increased housing development in the area. During peak commuting hours, residents complained of having to wait as long as ten minutes to turn west onto Plymouth Road towards Ann Arbor from Cherry Hill. Consequentially, many commuters use neighborhood streets in order to avoid the intersection.

A copy of the “Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road, Cherry Hill Road Traffic Signal Warrant Evaluation” was obtained from the Washtenaw County Road Commission via the Freedom of Information Act. The evaluation was based on methodology set forth in Part 4C of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, 1978, as amended by the Federal Highway

Administration. Traffic control signal installation criteria includes, among other things, vehicular volume, pedestrian volume and accident experience. However, “the satisfaction of a traffic signal warrant or warrants shall not in itself require the installation of a traffic control signal ... A traffic control signal should not be installed unless an engineering study indicates that installing a traffic control signal will improve the overall safety and/or operation of the intersection.” (MUTCD, Part 4C.1) Therefore, although some of the criteria contained in Part 4C were met, the Road Commission determined that the installation of a traffic control signal at this time was not justified.

### **3.3 Updated Plan**

As a result of their unsuccessful attempts to find solutions to some of their issues utilizing traffic control measures, the Dixboro Village Community Group decided it would be in their best interest to update their master plan. Requests for assistance to Superior Township officials have met with some success to date. Funds have been set aside to hire a professional planner to initiate the larger community participation process. The first meeting is scheduled for June 22, 2000. Additionally, the services of the township planner have been made available to Dixboro residents for the purpose of formally updating the Dixboro General Development Plan Amendment (adopted in January 1986) to the General Development Plan of Superior Township. In 1992 the Superior Township Growth Management Plan superseded the Superior Township General Development Plan; however, the Dixboro Amendment of 1986 remains intact.



## **Chapter 4. PROBLEM DEFINITION**

It might be useful at this point to supply a definition of the term “village”. According Laurence O. Houston, Jr., in an article in “Small Town”:

A village is a predominantly residential area with supporting commercial and public activities lying near its center ... is compact relative to its surroundings and to traditional suburban tract development ... The density mix and arrangement of land uses encourages pedestrian movement among local origins and destinations.

Most current definitions emphasize a compact form, mixed-use, a well-defined edge and a pedestrian orientation (Sutro, 1990). Therefore, chief and foremost among Dixboro’s issues is its inability in its current situation to measure up as a bona fide village. Other problems and issues facing the community, as perceived by members of the Dixboro Village Community Group, relate to village viability and Dixboro’s role within the context of Superior Township and Washtenaw County as a whole. Inherent in these broader issues are those associated with village circulation, i.e., vehicular traffic volume and patterns, lack of pedestrian accessibility, and availability and location of parking. Another issue is the availability of sewer and water. The compact or cluster-type development required to realize the reinvention of a village cannot be serviced by the use of private wells and septic fields.

Finding solutions to the more basic problems will pave the way for solving the larger issues by providing an atmosphere that is attractive to and invites the type of development, both aesthetic and economic, required to recreate the Village of Dixboro. One of the most salient issues facing Dixboro, which if unresolved could potentially delay or make moot the entire re-creation process, is their ability to secure the necessary funding to accomplish their vision.

Equally significant is obtaining the buy-in of the larger community. As noted earlier, the Dixboro Village Community Group consists of a very small number of residents. Many of the issues discussed in this report, as well as possible solutions, are from the perspectives of these few people and do not necessarily represent a consensus of the population of Dixboro. Before

### **4.1 Role Within Superior Township and Washtenaw County**

Presently, based on the contents of the 1992 Superior Township Growth Management Plan, Dixboro Village enjoys special status as an “Area for Detailed Policies.” The GMP devotes several paragraphs to a discussion of the history of Dixboro, and points out that of all the settlements that occurred in Superior Township over the years, only Dixboro persisted as a “village” settlement. The township is cognizant of Dixboro’s attractiveness as a place to live as well as the inevitability of residential growth in the area due to the office and commercial development occurring just west of Dixboro in Ann Arbor Township.

Growth could overwhelm Dixboro's village character. The goal is to regulate growth in this area so as to preserve the essential features and character of the community. (1992 Superior Township Growth Management Plan)

As a result, a sub-area plan for Dixboro has been incorporated into the GMP. The basis of the sub-area plan is the 1986 Dixboro General Development Plan Amendment which will be reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure that the Dixboro community is preserved. Additionally, the GMP makes reference to Plymouth Road and the importance of maintaining its right-of-way at 66 feet, even though it is considered to be a primary roadway serving both regional and local traffic. Policy for the portion of Plymouth Road from Dixboro Road to Ford Road is to retain it as a two lane road that should not be widened unless absolutely necessary. Both Dixboro Road adjacent to the village and Plymouth Road through the village are considered to be "special corridors" because of the concentrated existence of "high-quality historic structures and sites." These corridors are to be protected from the adverse impacts of traffic and road improvements.

Although it appears that Dixboro has had and continues to have the support of Superior Township, some Superior Township policies preclude the reinvention of Dixboro as a viable entity. A case in point is reflected in the GMP where it is stated that the effects of increased development in Ann Arbor Township will be increased "rural" housing in Dixboro and its environs. It goes on to say that the development in Ann Arbor Township, because of its office and commercial nature, will forestall the need for office and/or commercial uses in

Dixboro. Large-lot size zoning and limitations on the number of residences in mixed-use buildings, particularly in the Village Center, and prohibitions against the extension of public water and sanitary sewer service into the Village Center District proscribe village existence.

Due to its unincorporated status and lack of definition, Dixboro's current role within the larger context of Washtenaw County is ambiguous. Other Washtenaw County villages, such as Dexter, Chelsea and Manchester, also began their existence as early nineteenth century rural villages servicing the larger farm community of Washtenaw County. However, because they were not located near any major urban areas, they thrived and flourished as entertainment and commercial centers for a much larger region than was available to Dixboro. No doubt Dixboro's proximity to Ann Arbor has been a blessing in many respects; however, it has had an extremely negative impact relative to Dixboro's identity as a self-sustaining village.

## **4.2 Circulation**

### **Traffic Volume and Patterns**

As mentioned earlier, traffic management and circulation problems precipitated the formation of the Dixboro Village Community Group. Both Plymouth and Dixboro Roads are experiencing high traffic volumes. The most recent traffic counts from the Washtenaw County Road Commission place Plymouth Road volumes at Dixboro Road at 13,500 vehicles per day and Dixboro Road volumes at the same intersection at 9,200 vehicles per day. The approximately one-half mile stretch of Plymouth Road that runs through the Village

Center contains only one traffic control device at Cherry Hill which is a yellow flasher on Plymouth Road with a side street stop on Cherry Hill (Figure 3). The speed limit is currently set at the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile of 45 mph. Road width from edge line to edge line is approximately 24 feet and the road surface is asphalt.



*Plymouth Road Looking East at Cherry Hill*

*Plymouth Road Looking West at Short St.*



*Figure 3. Plymouth Road*

Drainage is accomplished through roadside culverts that are located on either side, and in some cases both sides of the

road. There are no curbs, gutters, sidewalks or pedestrian/bike amenities of any kind, including crosswalks, even though the Village Center is the location of the Dixboro General Store, the Dixboro School and access to the Dixboro United Methodist Church, Dixboro's three registered historic sites. The Plymouth Road right-of way is 66 feet; however, building setbacks on either side of Plymouth vary, placing some buildings, particularly the Dixboro General Store, dangerously close to the road (Figure 4).



*Figure 4. Location of Dixboro General Store in Relation to Plymouth Road*

Plymouth Road has become more of a barrier than the “Main Street” it once was along which villagers traveled on foot to conduct their day-to-day business, attend church and school or visit the general store. It has had the effect of dividing the village in two rather than functioning as a seam that relates and joins the northern and southern neighborhoods and has all but destroyed the reality of a “village center” district.

Church Street, which runs roughly parallel to Plymouth Road on the north, is experiencing traffic volume and speed problems as well, although to a lesser extent than Plymouth. Motorists are utilizing Church as an alternative to Plymouth Road, particularly during peak commuting hours, due to congestion at the Plymouth Road/Cherry Hill intersection for vehicles attempting to turn left onto Plymouth Road from Cherry Hill during the morning rush hour and onto Cherry Hill from Plymouth Road during the evening commute. Although Church Street functions as a collector for Dixboro and Plymouth Roads from neighborhood access streets, it is chiefly residential with a speed limit of 25 mph and is not designed to accommodate higher speeds or volumes. Like Plymouth Road, Church Street has no curbs, gutters or sidewalks.

At the village center is Short Street which is approximately 300 feet long and runs between Plymouth Road and Church Street. It is used primarily as a shortcut for residents living north of Plymouth Road for vehicle access to Plymouth Road. It serves as a nexus for Dixboro’s historic sites and leads directly to the Methodist Church (Figure 5). It also has no curbs, gutters or sidewalks.

### **Lack of Non-motorized Access**

As evident from the above discussion, the Dixboro Village Center District affords nothing to the pedestrian or bicyclist. The community is extremely auto-dependent, not only because it lacks most basic services within its environs, but also because non-motorized activity could be dangerous. Conversely, because of the lack of services and other village-type amenities, there are few pedestrian destinations. Those



*Figure 5. Short Street*

that do exist, such as the Dixboro General Store and the Methodist Church, are not easily accessible due to the Plymouth Road barrier and the lack of sidewalks and crosswalks.

Pedestrians and bicyclists do not necessarily require a destination; however, there are no pedestrian or bike paths of any kind, even for the purposes of recreation and exercise. Although an absence of sidewalks throughout the village lends to its rural nature, pedestrians and bicyclists alike should be provided with safe and comfortable (freedom of fear from confrontations with motor vehicles) walkways for those who wish to take advantage of them.

#### **Availability and Location of Parking**

With the exception of private surface parking lots behind or adjacent to existing businesses, there is no public parking in Dixboro. With the exception of Plymouth Road on-street parking is not specifically prohibited; however, there are no designated on-street parking spaces or zones. Most on-street parking occurs on the road shoulder. This is particularly evident around the Dixboro General Store, where although there is a small parking lot behind the store, customers sometime find it necessary to park along the roadside on Cherry Hill or Short Street because the lot is full. A reinvented Dixboro will require sufficient and strategically located public parking to service the Village Center area and allow for “one-stop” parking, i.e., visitors park their cars when they arrive at the Village Center to shop, dine, or attend community gatherings and do not retrieve them until they leave the Village Center for the day.

### **4.3 Water and Sewer**

The existing plan for Dixboro and the Superior Township Zoning Ordinance do not support the provision of public water and sanitary sewer services to the Dixboro area, nor does Superior Township permit the use of private, community water supply and sanitary sewage disposal or treatment systems (Dixboro Plan, 1986). Therefore, densities requiring more sophisticated water and sewage systems are prohibited by law from being realized. This, of course, precludes lot sizes of less than one acre unless, on an individual lot basis, the Washtenaw County Department of Environment and Infrastructure approves the installation of a well and septic tank/drainfield. If local government officials and the public as a whole in Washtenaw County are speaking more than rhetoric when they campaign to curb sprawl, protect open space, and create sustainable communities, the time has come to seriously consider some of the available alternatives to well and septic systems so that areas that do not have access to public water and sewer may employ cluster development and new urbanist designs.

### **4.4 Funding**

In spite of the apparent support of Superior Township, obtaining funding to implement whatever strategies residents consider appropriate will be, at best, a difficult task. There are a number of funding avenues (which will be discussed later in this report) to be explored; however, with the exception of local fundraising, the community must be a legal entity in order to receive funds from federal or state coffers. Additionally, even if federal or state funding is obtained, it is typically the

case that a certain percentage of total project cost is contributed by the receiving entity or private interests. Since many of the issues being faced by Dixboro residents are circulation related, it is likely that large sums of money will be required to finance the solutions. For example, the installation of sidewalks would involve capital expenditures that would have to be approved, budgeted and supervised by Superior Township. Although this would not be out of the question, whether or not Superior Township has the wherewithal to accomplish such a task is up to question.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

In order to begin the process of “reinventing” Dixboro, it was necessary to address the following:

- Village viability
- Traffic management
- Pedestrian access
- Village Center layout and location of “Main Street”
- Connectivity between and among origins, destinations and public spaces

Complete coverage of the issues of funding sources and water/sewage treatment options are beyond the scope of this project. However, some basic information relative to both, as well as the issue of incorporation, will be provided in both the Open Issues section and the Appendices.

## Chapter 5. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The reinvention of Dixboro as viable, modern village will require an enormous amount of support and commitment on both the part of government officials and the community. It will involve a willingness to set aside the familiar and pursue some of the new and innovative ideas that are capturing the imaginations of people across the country who want to improve the quality and livability of their communities. A recent survey by American Lives of Oakland, California that American consumers prefer community design characteristics that include town centers, community gathering places and pedestrian orientation (New Urban News, January-February 2000).

Outlined below are several broad objectives for the community as conceived by members of the Dixboro Village Community Group that fall within the scope of this project. These objectives are intended to support the overall goal of creating a unique identity and sense of place for Dixboro within the context of Superior Township as well as relative to its position within the larger region of Washtenaw County, and more specifically, its relationship to Ann Arbor.

- Divert commuter traffic from Village Center by decreasing volume and speed
- Create an environment throughout the Village Center that encourages walking and discourages driving by increasing pedestrian orientation and access
- Exploit existing historic sites as focal points around which to create and establish public spaces
- Create a network of pathways for recreational purposes (biking, jogging, walking, etc.)
- Provide connectivity between and among neighborhoods, the Village Center and other open/public spaces
- Assess current parking situation and identify need for and location of public parking
- Redefine character of Village Center
- Encourage appropriate types of development within Village Center
- Investigate alternatives to individual well and septic tank/drainfield configurations for handling water supply and sewage treatment in the Village Center
- Solicit and encourage participation and support from the larger community
- Identify possible funding sources and investigate likelihood of securing funds from identified sources

## **Chapter 6. EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **6.1 Transportation Planning**

Contrary to the belief expressed by the Dixboro Village Community Group relative to the possibility of Plymouth Road being widened to five lanes through Dixboro Village, the Washtenaw County Road Commission has no plans to widen the road in the foreseeable future. In an interview on February 18 with Phil Carroll, Subdivisions Supervisor at the Road Commission, it was imparted that the Road Commission generally reacts to requests from local government units for road maintenance and upgrades or implements new construction or improvements on county roads that have been planned by SEMCOG with input and approval from the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Urban Area Transportation Study (AAYUATS).

According to Jennifer Evans, SEMCOG Transportation Engineer, SEMCOG is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) responsible for regional transportation planning in Southeast Michigan. There are also two transportation study agencies responsible for sub-regional planning – one of them being AAYUATS – with whom the regional planning process is coordinated. In May 2000 SEMCOG released the “Draft 2025 Regional Transportation Plan for Southeast Michigan.” Part of the plan is the “2025 Long Range Transportation Plan for Washtenaw County”, adopted by the AAYUATS Policy Committee on March 15, 2000 and submitted to SEMCOG for inclusion in the 2025 RTP. Although the Washtenaw County portion of the plan will not be available for distribution until the end of June, the 2025

RTP contains a listing of all planned projects for the period from 2001 through 2025, including those in Washtenaw County. The only planned project for the portion of Plymouth Road that runs through Dixboro is pavement rehabilitation that is scheduled to be performed sometime between 2006 and 2025. During that same period Dixboro Road is scheduled for widening to four lanes from Geddes (south of Dixboro) to Plymouth Road.

SEMCOG considers the RTP to be a “living” document that is subject to continual review and is updated periodically to “reflect changing conditions and new planning priorities” (<http://www.semco.org>, 2000).

### **6.2 Inventory**

#### **Historical Sites**

Dixboro’s three registered historic sites (Figure 6), listed below, are located within the Village Center (as described in the project scope).

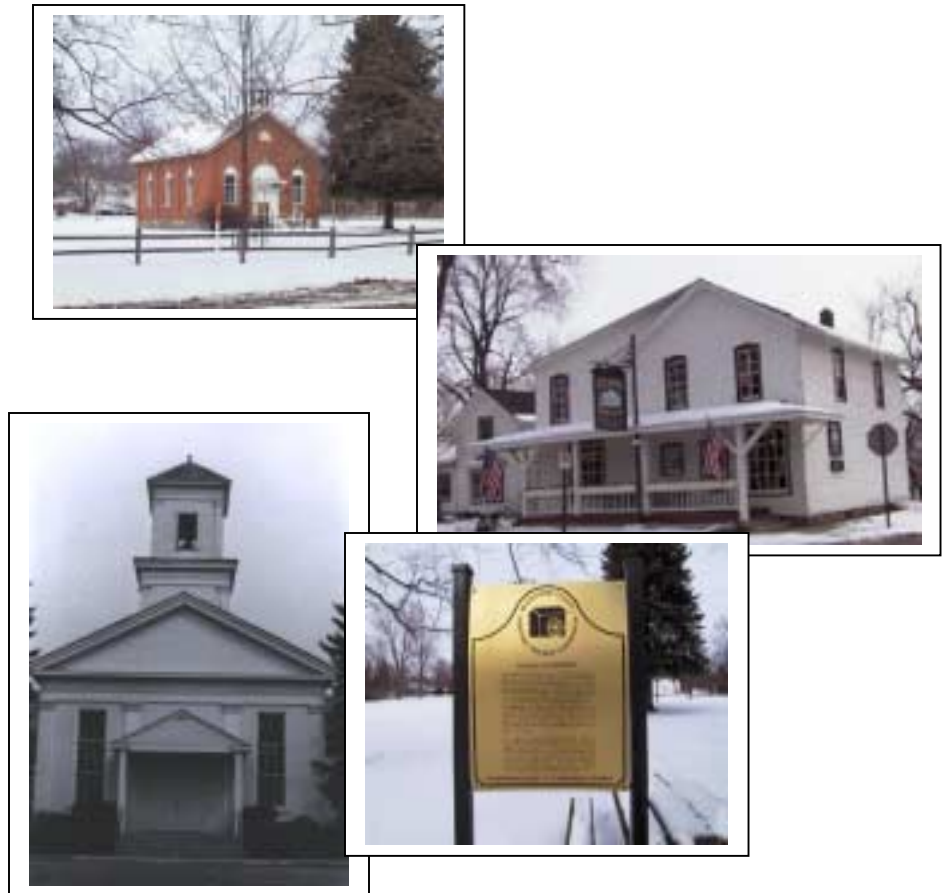
- ❖ The Superior and Ann Arbor Fractional District No. 2 Schoolhouse (Dixboro School) was designed and built by Paul Tessmer, a mason contractor from Ann Arbor, in 1888 to replace a frame schoolhouse built in 1826 when Dixboro was platted. It now functions as the Dixboro Cooperative Preschool. The site was registered as of June 15, 1984 with the State of Michigan.



- ❖ The Dixboro General Store is believed to have been built between 1860 and 1870. It was one of the chief “public” buildings in rural Dixboro Village and remained in use as a general store until the 1950s. In 1924 the second story, which was originally an apartment, was turned into a dance hall and an addition was added to the side of the store. Currently, antiques, among other items, are sold at the store. The site was registered as of October 2, 1980 with the State of Michigan.
  
- ❖ The Dixboro United Methodist Church, a well-preserved example of the Greek Revival temple-style, was designed by Abraham Cooper and constructed by E.W. Ford. It was completed in 1858 and is still utilized as a church. No exterior changes have been made to the building with the exceptions of the addition of educational wings in 1951, and the shortening of the cupola. The site was registered with the State of Michigan as of October 1, 1971 and listed on the National Register as of March 16, 1976.

There is also a Washtenaw County Historic District Commission historical marker acknowledging the history of the Village of Dixboro.

It is possible that several of the houses located in Dixboro’s Village Center could also qualify for historic designations. Whether that avenue is pursued or not, state historic district designation is possible for the area containing the three historic sites described above.



*Figure 6. History*

## **Commercial Land Use**

Although there are ten commercial and/or office uses in the Village Center, two of which are housed in historic sites, there is only one restaurant and no personal service or, with the exception of antique shops, no specialized retail type shops. Businesses such as hairstyling, tailoring or dry cleaning and gift, novelty, flower, etc. shops are, as a group, the mainstay of the village setting along with corner groceries, drugstores, coffee shops, taverns and restaurants of the proper size and scale to fit into the village vernacular. In other words, the types of enterprises that nearby residents might walk to and that if driven to, require only one stop – once the car is parked, all destinations are within walking distance (one-quarter mile radius) – contribute towards the requisite pedestrian orientation for villages. Other appropriate uses are art or dance studios, and offices for doctors, lawyers, dentists, accountants, etc.

There is an area designated as the “Neighborhood Shopping Center District” which currently contains a liquor store, a small grocery store with a deli, a gas station and a few other establishments located at the intersection of Plymouth and Ford Roads. However, it is unlikely that residents ever walk to it not only because there are no pedestrian paths or sidewalks, but simply because there is nothing about it that would induce pedestrian activity, even for those who live relatively close. It is really nothing more than a run-of-the-mill strip mall that currently serves as the “gateway” into Dixboro from the east. Interestingly enough, the land use policy for this district described in the Dixboro “Design Guidelines” is as follows:

“Each building or *cluster* (emphasis added) should comply with an overall design theme that reflects the rural village character of the nearby village center and unifies all site planning. Strip development is strongly discouraged. An attractive, comfortable, and convenient environment for users is desired that will not compromise the rural social community of Dixboro” (Design Guidelines, 1993).

## **Residential Uses**

The remainder of the existing uses is single-family dwellings – multiple family dwellings are prohibited. Although mixed-use is permitted, currently, none of the buildings in the Village Center District are mixed-use.

## **Entry Points**

The point of entry to the Village Center District from the east is at the intersection of Plymouth Road and Church Street. On the north side of Plymouth, between Plymouth and Church, is a vacant parcel. On the south side of Plymouth at the intersection is The Lord Fox (Figure 7), a restaurant that, although it has no historic designation, has quite a history in the Village of Dixboro. It was originally a residence, circa 1880, which, when sold, was remodeled into a restaurant called the Farm Cupboard. It subsequently burned to the ground, but was rebuilt in 1935 by moving a barn onto the house foundation and adding a dormer, glassed-in porch and rooms

on the back. In 1961 it was again sold and renamed The Lord Fox.

population in Dixboro from the 1920 count. (See aerial photograph on next page for locations of various enterprises.)



*Figure 7. The Lord Fox Restaurant (formerly the Farm Cupboard)*

Although on the west the Village Center District begins approximately 600 feet east of Dixboro Road, the intersection of Dixboro and Plymouth Roads is an appropriate point of entry because it is at this point that Plymouth Road narrows from five to three, and then immediately to two lanes as it passes through Dixboro Village and beyond. On the northeast corner of Plymouth and Dixboro Roads begins the Dixboro Heights Subdivision which was built in the 1950s for veterans. The occupation of this subdivision more than doubled the



## DIXBORO VILLAGE CENTER

### NON-RESIDENTIAL USES

- |                                  |                                    |                            |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Gibbons Antiques              | 5. Dixboro Methodist Church        | 10. Landau Office Building |
| 2. Applied Mechanics             | 6. Underwriters Corporation        | 11. Brain Office Building  |
| 3. Dixboro Cooperative Preschool | 7. Ann Arbor Consultation Services | 12. Dixboro General Store  |
| 4. Boy Scout Cabin               | 8. Ann Arbor Country Day Care      |                            |
|                                  | 9. Lord Fox Restaurant             |                            |

*NOTE: All other uses are either single-family residential or vacant property.*



*Figure 8. Village Center Land Uses*

## Chapter 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating a sense of place and identity for Dixboro Village where the village's history and legacy are preserved without compromising its viability can be partially achieved by implementing shorter-term strategies that create a foundation for the larger goal creating an environment that attracts and encourages appropriate types of development towards the reinvention of the village. In the interim, more pressing problems and issues can be solved on the way to realizing the ultimate goal. Some possible strategies are as follows:

- ❖ Employ traffic calming techniques, particularly on Plymouth Road through the Village Center, to produce conditions that compel drivers to decrease their speed. The perception that they are entering an area where pedestrians or slower vehicle traffic may be present will induce them to slow down. This will also help divert commuter traffic to higher speed roads and therefore decrease high traffic volumes during the peak commuting hours. Traffic calming and various traffic calming tools will be discussed in the next chapter.
- ❖ Establish a pedestrian orientation with a network of sidewalks, walkways and paths connecting locations within the Village Center to each other to surrounding neighborhoods and to any other public or open spaces as required. These could be positioned behind and between buildings as well as along roadways.
- ❖ Sidewalks and other walkways should contain appropriate street furniture and landscaping to produce a visually pleasing as well as functional streetscape. This could include but is not limited to rows of street trees to serve as a buffer from the road for pedestrians, benches, street lights, bike stands, etc. Consider the use of curbs to separate sidewalks and pedestrian activity from vehicle movement in roadways and catch basins as stormwater conduits to replace existing system.
- ❖ Develop recreational paths or trails for joggers, bikers, etc. that exhibit the same connectivity as described above. Utilizing landscaping to establish visual link from surrounding areas to the main street.
- ❖ Locate pedestrian crossings with appropriate signage as necessary within the Village Center to allow for safe movement of pedestrians across busy streets and through intersections. Consider enhancing crossings with pedestrian refuge islands, particularly along Plymouth Road. This will also have the effect of calming traffic.
- ❖ Create public spaces located along the network of sidewalks and walkways where residents can gather socially. This could include expanded sidewalks, small village parks, a village green, etc. Locate these public spaces to take advantage of existing focal points such as the Methodist Church or the Dixboro General Store.
- ❖ Provide public parking at a central location from which all destinations within the Village Center can be reached by walking.

- ❖ Emphasize points of entry from both the east and west on Plymouth Road with signs and landscaping to create gateways into the Village of Dixboro.
  - ❖ Emphasize historic significance by considering a historic district designation for the Village Center area.
  - ❖ Examine current zoning and either adjust zoning or create an overlay zone for Village Center District to ensure that land use is supportive of “village” concept. This means allowing for higher density development in order to build Dixboro Village. Permit conversion of single family dwellings to multi-family; two or more principal structures per lot on appropriate parcels; mixed-use structures of single or multiple family and retail or commercial; etc.
  - ❖ Elicit engineering advice and information relative to the installation of water supply and sewage treatment systems other than well and septic tank/drainfield. It will be necessary to convince both township and county departments that alternative systems are safe and feasible.
  - ❖ Develop interactive displays of proposed concepts to be displayed at specific locations, such as the General Store or The Lord Fox, where residents can review them, make suggestions, give comments, state opinions and ask questions. Educate residents by making public any other data that may be relevant to helping them understand concepts, plans, funding, etc.
  - ❖ Hold regularly scheduled meetings throughout the planning process to discuss comments collected at above displays as well as obtain community participation and consensus.
  - ❖ Investigate possibility of coordinating the implementation of circulation plans and traffic calming techniques with AAYUATS and SEMCOG planned projects in order to participate in their 2025 RTP and possibly take advantage of available funding.
  - ❖ Consider and investigate the possibility of incorporation for the Village of Dixboro in order to become a tax-collecting entity qualified to apply for state and federal funding. Information on the pros and cons of incorporation as well as some preliminary information relative to funding will be discussed in later chapters.
  - ❖ Publicize and distribute finalized plan locally to attract appropriate types of development within the Village Center and possibly obtain partial funding for public projects from private interests.
  - ❖ Continue existing design guideline policy and site plan approval in order to ensure that new development is vernacular with existing structures and overall historical character of Dixboro Village.
- See Appendix A for diagrammatic representations and sketches illustrating some of the above recommendations.

## Chapter 8. TRAFFIC CALMING

“Traffic calming is a holistic, integrated traffic planning approach that seeks to maximize mobility while reducing the undesirable effects of that mobility” (Hoyle, 1995)

Traffic calming is based on several fundamental principles. In general, they relate to the philosophy that streets are not strictly for cars, but should also play a role in the social interaction within a community. Residents of a community have the right to the best quality of life possible. That includes a quiet, safe, environmentally sound environment where everyone has equal access to transportation corridors, regardless of their means of mobility. All types of mobility should be maximized at the least possible cost. This is where traffic calming techniques come into the picture. These techniques involve, among other things, the altering of roadway design to reduce vehicle speed and changing the psychological feel of the street through design or redesign. The table on the next page lists various traffic calming tools that have been utilized with success in many parts of the world including the United States and Canada.

According to Hoyle, communities implementing individual techniques in varying degrees or some combination of several techniques can expect the following results:

- ❖ Noise and pollution reduced by 50%.
- ❖ Top speed of traffic down by 50%
- ❖ Less traffic volume and less cut-through traffic
- ❖ Greater safety for driver, pedestrians, cyclists and children

- ❖ A 43 to 60 percent less chance of being killed or seriously injured in an accident involving a car
- ❖ Up to 30 to 50 percent less traffic on roads in peak hours
- ❖ Increased viability of community life

The following pages contain examples of several traffic calming tools that may be appropriate for Dixboro, particularly along Plymouth Road. For more detailed information on these and other traffic calming methods, see Streets and Sidewalks, People and Cars by Dan Burden.

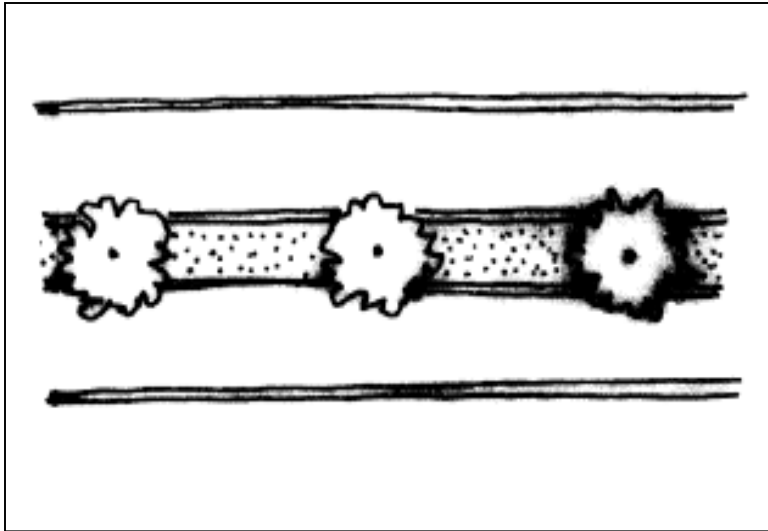
The source for all diagrams below, with the exception of the raised intersection sketch, is “Making Streets That Work, Seattle 1995.”

Tool	Page	Vehicle Volume	Vehicle Speed	Noise	Vehicle Conflicts	Traffic Diverted	Pedestrian Safety	Bicycle Safety	Emergency Vehicle Access	Estimated Costs	Timeline	Appropriate for Use on
Bulbout (Curb Extension)	24	—	▼	—	—	—	▲	—	—	high	long	both
Chicanes	25	▼	▼	▼	▼	▲	—	▼	▼	high	short	residential
Choker (Neckdown)	26	▼	▼	▼	—	▼	▲	—	—	low	short	residential
Diverter	27	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▲	▲	▼	low	long	residential
Driveway Link	28	▼	▼	▼	—	—	▲	—	▼	high	long	residential
Full Street Closure	29	▼	▼	▼	▼	▲	maintain access for these uses	—	—	high	long	residential
Gateway	30	▼	▼	▼	▼	—	▲	—	▼	low	short	both
Intermediate Median Barrier	31	▼	—	—	▼	▲	▲	▲	—	low	short	arterial
Landscaping Treatments	32	—	▼	▼	▼	—	▲	—	—	low	short	residential
Median	33	—	▼	▼	▼	▲	▲	—	▼	high	long	arterial
Modified T-Intersection	34	—	▼	—	▼	▼	—	—	—	low	short	arterial
Partial Street Closure	35	▼	—	▼	▼	▲	▲	▲	—	low	long	residential
Pedestrian Refuge Islands	36	—	▼	▼	▼	▲	▲	▲	—	high	long	arterial
Speed Humps and Tables	37	▼	▼	▲	—	—	▲	—	▼	low	long	residential
Raised Intersection	38	—	▼	▲	▼	—	▲	▲	▼	high	long	both
Reducing Number of Lanes	39	—	▼	▼	▼	—	▲	▲	—	low	short	both
Roadway Narrowing	40	—	▼	▼	—	—	▲	▲	—	low	short	both
Mini Circles	41	—	▼	▼	▼	—	▲	▲	—	low	short	residential
Roundabout / Mini-Roundabout	42	—	▼	▼	▼	—	▲	▲	—	high	long	arterial
Woofert	43	▼	▼	▼	▼	▲	▲	▲	▲	high	long	both

▲ use of tool will generally increase the condition, ▼ use of tool will generally decrease the condition, — use of tool will generally not affect the condition. Complete table notes on inside of the back cover.

**Table 1. Traffic Calming Toolbox**  
**Source: Streets and Sidewalks, People and Cars, April 2000**



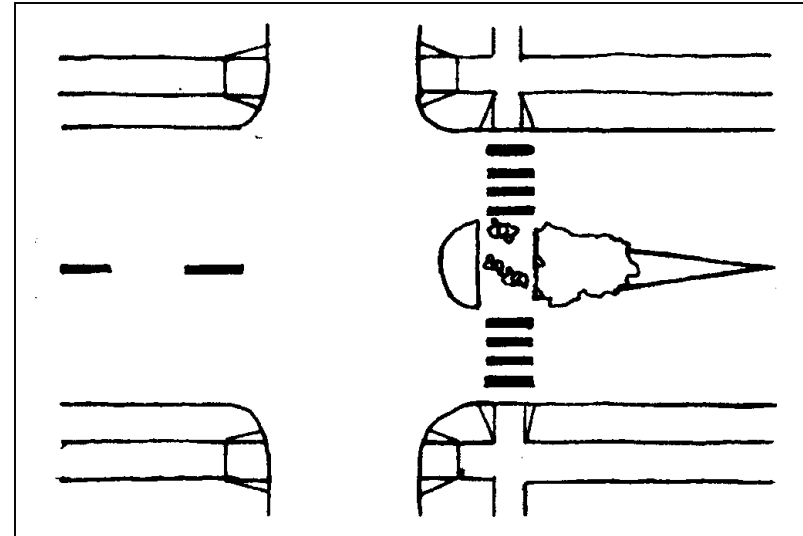


### ***MEDIAN***

- ❖ Manages vehicle traffic
- ❖ Improves access across streets
- ❖ Provides refuge for pedestrians/bicyclists crossing street
- ❖ Provides space for street trees/landscaping without excess runoff
- ❖ Most critical on high-volume, high-speed collectors and arterials
- ❖ Often increases property values
- ❖ Can double roadway safety by reducing conflicts

***APPROXIMATE COST: \$15,000-\$30,000 per 100 feet***

***PROPOSED LOCATION: PLYMOUTH RD.***

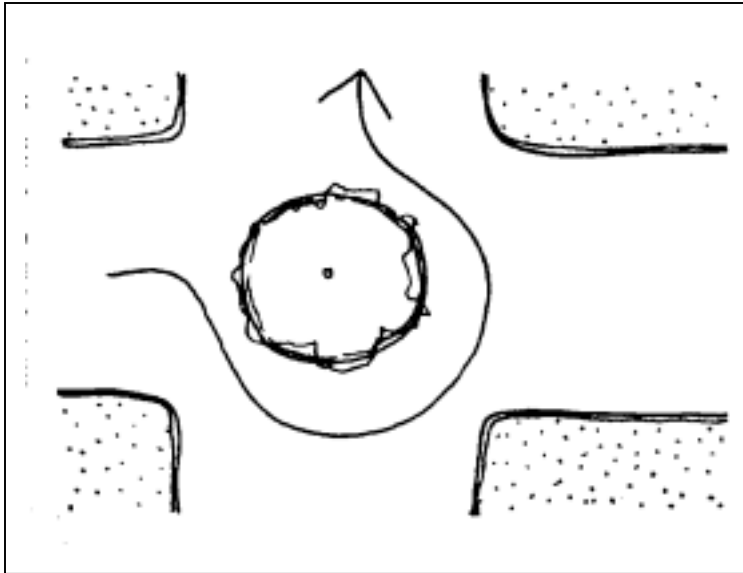


### ***PEDESTRIAN REFUGE ISLAND***

- ❖ Enhances pedestrian and bicyclist crossings
- ❖ Simplifies pedestrian decision-making
- ❖ Most critical on roadways with high speed and volumes

***APPROXIMATE COST: \$6,000-\$10,000 for basic island without landscaping***

***PROPOSED LOCATION: PLYMOUTH RD.***



### ***MINI-CIRCLE***

- ❖ Manages traffic at intersection
- ❖ Reduces crashes
- ❖ Reduces vehicle speeding
- ❖ Increases pedestrian and bicycle safety
- ❖ Landscaping that provides contrast increases effect for distances up to 200 feet

***APPROXIMATE COST: \$8,000-\$15,000***

***PROPOSED LOCATION: CHURCH &  
SHORT***

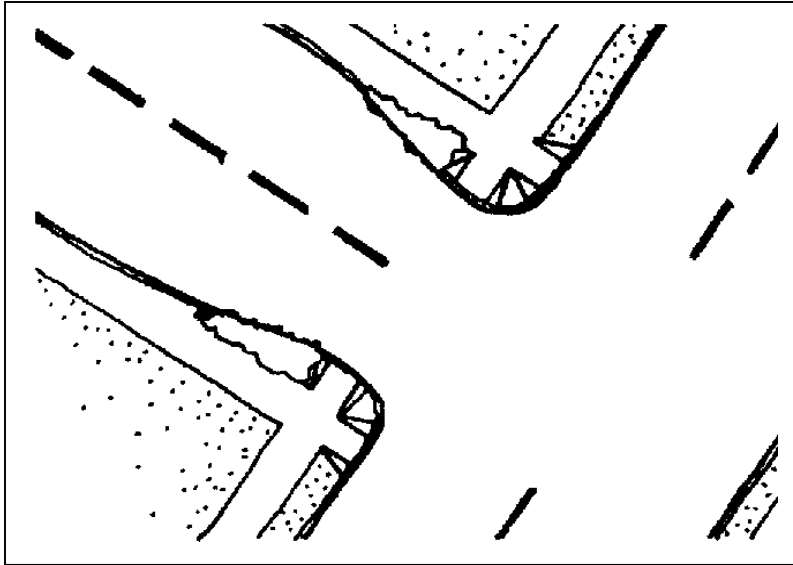


### ***RAISED INTERSECTION***

- ❖ Reduces conflict speed at most critical location
- ❖ Improves pedestrian and bicycle access and safety at most critical location
- ❖ Creates a prime corner
- ❖ May increase values of adjacent properties

***APPROXIMATE COST: \$25,000-\$70,000*** (alternative is textured intersection – contrasting paving material)

***PROPOSED LOCATION: CHERRY HILL &  
PLYMOUTH and/or CHURCH & PLYMOUTH***



### ***BULBOUT OR CURB EXTENSION***

- ❖ Improves safety for pedestrians and motorists
- ❖ Increases visibility and reduces speed of turning motor vehicles
- ❖ Improves midblock visibility of pedestrians
- ❖ Encourages pedestrians to cross at designated locations
- ❖ Provides opportunity for ramps for persons with disabilities
- ❖ Provides location for landscaping and amenities

***APPROXIMATE COST: \$5,000-\$20,000 each*** (can be built for little or no additional cost during a street reconstruction)

***PROPOSED LOCATION: PLYMOUTH & CHERRY HILL***

### ***GATEWAY***

- ❖ Transitions to a new area
- ❖ Creates a unique image for an area
- ❖ Sends message to motorists that they are traveling from a principal roadway to a commercial or neighborhood district and should slow their speed accordingly
- ❖ Strong visual effects are essential

***APPROXIMATE COST: Varies depending on design***

***PROPOSED LOCATION: CHURCH & PLYMOUTH and/or DIXBORO & PLYMOUTH***

### ***LANDSCAPING TREATMENTS***

- ❖ Enhances street environment
- ❖ Improves property values
- ❖ Projects image that street is part of a place rather than a through route
- ❖ Tempers motorist behavior
- ❖ Enhances all other types of traffic calming measures
- ❖ Increases community pride
- ❖ Reduces water runoff
- ❖ Requires additional funding for maintenance

***APPROXIMATE COST: Varies***

***PROPOSED LOCATION: MULTIPLE LOCATIONS***