

Village of Bellaire Master Plan

Focus Group Summary

Prepared by Networks Northwest

Reviewed by Village of Bellaire Master Plan Committee – November 14, 2018

As part of developing a new Master Plan for the Village of Bellaire, the Bellaire Master Plan Committee held four focus group discussions on key subjects: intergovernmental cooperation, natural areas and resources, economic development, and youth interests. Key stakeholders from the community were invited to these focus groups to provide their insight and ideas. This summary identifies the key issues and talking points from those discussions.

Intergovernmental Coordination

September 12, 2018

For this discussion, the following opportunities were identified to improve intergovernmental coordination with neighboring townships and the County:

1. Coordinate zoning/land use planning across boundaries on nearby properties with neighboring townships
2. Coordinate tourism promotion efforts and improvement of tourist-related infrastructure (i.e., trails)
3. Coordinate the County Facilities Plan with the Village Master Plan
4. Identify future growth options for the Village including redevelopment of existing parcels and consideration of annexation locations.
5. Increase communication between units of government (County, townships, Village) by focusing on issues of common interest. This may include having a regularly held summit of local officials to discuss common issues, receive training, and other activities.

Natural Areas/Resources

September 12, 2018

For natural areas and resources, focus group discussions identified the following strengths in the natural attributes of the Village and surrounding area along with the following needs to improve the natural areas:

1. Strengths
 - a. Abundance of water and water quality throughout the area, including the water trail which provides access and recreational opportunities
 - b. There are a significant number of outdoor/natural resource areas in and around the Village

- c. Volunteerism is high in the community that supports natural areas. Many of the organizations leading these efforts engage youth
- d. Paddle Antrim and other user groups are important in supporting natural resources areas

2. Needs

- a. Coordination of efforts to protect the natural areas and improve access is needed by organizations. Efforts may include identification and improvement of water access points. Individual agreements for maintenance of access points are currently in place but a larger partnership/agreement could be developed. Other efforts include creating a larger system of trails and providing other outdoor recreation features.
- b. Promotion of assets and trails needs to improve. Bellaire can be a trail town/hub (for water trails, hiking trails, biking trails, etc.)
- c. Develop a non-motorized trail connection from the Village to Glacial Hills
- d. Build awareness of assets by establishing a wayfinding/signage system
- e. Outreach to local residents about the opportunities to volunteer and access natural areas. Conduct promotion and awareness of local natural areas and assets at Village events, schools, and senior center
- f. Develop recreational facilities throughout the area with a balance of users (i.e., for both bikers and hikers)
- g. Better use of funding from public and non-profit sources. Local organizations need more consistent funding for their efforts
- h. Board development is important for local organizations. This is an opportunity for youth engagement, including having youth serve on boards
- i. Three Lakes Association education on water quality is a great resource
- j. "Pay to Play" access to recreation facilities may be considered as a funding source

Economic Development

October 10, 2018

In the economic development focus group, discussions focused on the following strengths and challenges or opportunities related to the Village:

1. Strengths

- a. Short's Brewing Company, distilleries, and cideries have been a springboard for a lot of activities and events, create awareness and name recognition, draws people and help make the Village a destination
- b. Four season recreation opportunities and recognition of Bellaire as a popular destination
- c. Shanty Creek now has greater connection with the Village and guests are visiting more
- d. Proximity to outdoor recreation activities including Grass River and Glacial Hills
- e. Bellaire is a hub with its proximity to Petoskey, Charlevoix, Gaylord, and Traverse City
- f. Bellaire is the nexus of the Chain of Lakes and provides good proximity to lakes and rivers
- g. Low crime
- h. Affordable housing when compared to other locations like Petoskey or Traverse City
- i. The scale of the Village is very walkable and bikeable

- j. Business owners work together to promote one another and create a sense of community
- k. Farmer's market that shares the same sense of community
- l. The community takes care of its senior citizens
- m. Schools are strong with after school programs for students
- n. Antrim County Airport is an important asset
- o. Movie theater that offers current movies at an affordable price
- p. Public library that offers activities
- q. Golf courses and skiing are located nearby
- r. Bellaire Historical Museum. 900 people passed through this past season from 40 states and 5 countries
- s. Conferences at Shanty Creek Resorts bring in additional visitors
- t. Short's and the Shanty Creek shuttle have brought tourists into downtown Bellaire
- u. Ball fields provide recreation opportunities
- v. Bellaire is a full service commercial community with plenty of retail businesses
- w. Lodging options and local amenities including a grocery store
- x. Large employers including Antrim County, Anchor Lamina America
- y. Opportunity for spin-off businesses that are connected to assets such as outdoor recreation destinations
- z. Marinas

2. Challenges/Opportunities

- a. Strengthen the relationship with the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance to attract new businesses and/or expand existing businesses
- b. Encourage development of housing in an affordable price range for employees
- c. Lack of rental housing
- d. Consider relocation of various businesses and possibly County government operations to optimize limited space in the downtown
- e. Improve public transit connections to other communities
- f. Opportunity to have food trucks in the Village
- g. Make the Village a work and play community that offers higher wages
- h. Address aging infrastructure to support new development in the Village
- i. Create activities for teens
- j. Attract Internet-based businesses to the Village
- k. Provide shared work spaces for startup businesses
- l. Enroll in the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program
- m. Balance growth with the current character of the Village
- n. Adding non-motorized pathway connecting to Glacial Hills
- o. Labor shortage
- p. Lack of infrastructure at the Bellaire Industrial Park; park is underutilized
- q. Helping new businesses deal with roadblocks; making the Village more business-friendly
- r. Lack of parking and access to public restrooms
- s. Improve the Village parks and make them a destination
- t. Encouraging investment from those who share the community's vision

Youth Interests

October 10, 2018

For discussions centered on youth interests, the following challenges and recommendations were identified:

1. Scheduling of activities between the first of the year and April
2. Athletics are taking up more time for students and academic requirements are more rigorous
3. Time management becomes more of an issue as activities are often over planned
4. Affordable day care and after school care is needed
5. Transportation for after school activities at a reasonable price
6. Opportunities for family activities including development of a skate park
7. A location for youth to hang out and to do “techie things” together
8. Public safety affording outdoor activities
9. Instructional time in a safe spot
10. Development of an Antrim County Center for Recreation offering internal programs in a variety of adventure sports and artistic endeavors; this could build on an adventure tourism theme for the Village
11. Repurposing of the Community Hall-discussion of its past, present and possible future.