

# Village of Empire Master Plan

2019

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# 2019 Village of Empire Master Plan

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Front Cover Caption: View of Empire Bluff

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Empire was incorporated as a Village in 1895. The original village and two additions were platted in 1892. At that time it was a bustling lumber town with a sawmill and loading wharf on Lake Michigan just south of South Bar Lake. At the turn of the century, Empire had a population of 609. After the lumber mill burned down in 1917, the population fell sharply, decreasing to less than 300 people by 1920. In the two decades following World War II, four other subdivisions were platted. These included South Bar Shores and Bacon's subdivisions located along LaCore Street, as well as Lakeview and Sunset subdivisions located at LaCore and M-22.

Most of the early settlers were associated with the local lumber industry. After the timberlands were nearly all gone and the sawmill closed, the village lost much of its population as many people moved to cities, or to new farms (homesteads) in the surrounding area.

The early village residents included people of a variety of nationalities, including Irish, Scots, French, Scandinavian, and Belgian. These people started businesses, orchards, and farms, which generally made a successful transition from a lumbering supported livelihood to other occupations.

In the 1950's, Empire became the site of an Air Force base that provided some employment opportunities and boosted the Village population by 300. The base was scaled down, and then phased out in 1988, but many of the retired personnel have remained in the area. The former Air Force base now serves as a national park maintenance facility, with nine seasonal and year-round housing units on the site. Additionally, one Federal Aviation Administration radar dome remains in operation on this former Air Force base.

The National Park Service (NPS) is a visible, influential part of the Village of Empire. The Sleeping Bear Dunes



Entrance sign to Empire

National Lakeshore was formally established in 1970. Since January of 1987, the NPS administrative offices and Visitor Center have operated in a leased building on the eastern edge of the Village.

Empire is a village of 375 year-round residents, according to the 2016 American Community Survey. The Village consists of several small seasonal specialty shops, artisans, restaurants, bars, banks, professional offices, and a variety of retail businesses to meet the everyday needs of the year-round residents.

The present economic base of Empire is the ever-growing tourism industry. The Village is nestled in the midst of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, which attracts nearly 1.7 million visitors yearly. Tourist visitation estimates have risen annually since 1984.

Agriculture, specifically apple and cherry orchards, have traditionally been and continue to be an important source of local employment. Many Empire residents commute daily to the Traverse City area. It is also important to note that Empire has a growing number of retirees. All these factors must be kept in mind while planning Empire's future.

Change will continue to occur. To ensure that those changes preserve and enhance Empire's most cherished qualities, the community must plan and prepare for change.



The purpose of the Empire Village Master Plan is to guide future development and change according to the community's priorities.

The Plan is intended to provide for:

- **Informed decisions:** The Master Plan provides a stable, long-term basis for informed decision-making. Analysis of existing conditions, combined with the goals and policies that are outlined in the Plan, help guide the Planning Commission and Village Council as they consider zoning, new development, capital improvements, and other matters relating to land use and development.
- **Optimizing Investments:** The Plan provides for coordination of public improvements and private development, and also helps the Village prioritize improvements to community facilities.
- **Predictability:** The Master Plan informs citizens, property owners, and neighboring communities of the Village's priorities and goals, as well as where and how the community is expected to grow—allowing them to plan for the use of property in a way that is consistent with the community's vision.
- **Zoning:** The Master Plan provides the legal foundation for zoning. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act requires the zoning ordinance be based on a plan designed to meet residents' needs for natural resources, housing, recreation, industry, business, service, and other uses.

## Planning Process

The Empire Village Master Plan was developed by the Empire Village Planning Commission in 2012, and updated in 2019. Public input was central to the 2012 Plan and the 2019 update with opportunities for participation through surveys, committee meetings, and forums. Public input for the 2019 update was obtained through a written survey and public forums held in August 2017 and March 2018. Plan goals, objectives, strategies, and future land use recommendations were developed based on public input obtained throughout the process, analysis of existing conditions, and previous or related plans and studies. The Plan was prepared in accordance with provisions of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (Public Act 33 of 2008) to enhance and protect the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens.

## Organization of the Plan

The Empire Village Master Plan provides overviews of existing conditions; discussion of public input; identification of issues and opportunities surrounding different elements of the community; goals, objectives, action statements and implementation strategies. Descriptions of best practices, relevant programs, and resources are highlighted throughout the Plan. The Plan is divided into sections and chapters as follows:

1. **Introduction** provides an overview of the plan and process.
2. **Existing Conditions and Context** discusses Empire's history, its place in Leelanau County and the

## What is a Master Plan?

State law allows townships, cities, villages, counties, and regions to create "master plans" that make recommendations about community issues like public services, housing, natural resources, and transportation needs. A master plan does not have the rule of law; instead, it acts as a guide for governments and other community partners to use when making decisions. To be effective, the Empire Village Master Plan must be put into practice through partnerships with communities, organizations, and local government units.

region, and issues that are relevant across the spectrum of the community, including demographics and economic issues.

3. **Natural Resources** provides an overview of the natural features found within the Village.
4. **Quality of Life and Sense of Place** discusses the community's place-based and quality of life assets.
5. **Land Use** summarizes the character, types, and location of the various land uses found in the Village, including residential, commercial, and community facilities and services. This section also includes the future land use map and district descriptions, which will provide the basis for the Zoning Plan. The future land use map and zoning plan formalize plan goals and objectives into future land use policy. These policies will be used in making decisions on zoning changes and new development. As the Village Council and Planning Commission experience turnover and changes in leadership over time, the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Plan will provide a stable, continuous basis for land use decision making through changes in the makeup of elected and appointed boards, thereby encouraging the implementation of the long-term goals and objectives of the Master Plan.
6. **Goals and Objectives** provide recommendations for actions and policies that will address the issues and opportunities identified in previous plan chapters.
7. **Plan Implementation** provides an overview of the Village's decision making structure, leadership, and other considerations that will ultimately drive the implementation of the plan. Public participation, civic engagement, leadership, and partnership opportunities will be discussed in this chapter.

# Related Plans and Studies

Plans and economic development strategies that are consistent across local boundaries are critical for success: in today's economy, traditional political boundaries are virtually ignored. Today's communication technologies enable businesses to operate in many communities; workers commute across multiple community boundaries; and businesses draw their customer bases from large market areas that do not follow political boundaries. On their own, communities can rarely provide all of the features necessary to support new economic needs, especially if it has an undiversified economic base such as tourism. Creating strategies for growth and economic development that are consistent across government boundaries can thus help communities attract and support new investment, facilitate business operation, and create a more competitive regional economy with advantages. This regional approach to planning and economic development also allows communities to seek funding, partnerships, and other resources for implementation of local goals from regional, state, or economic development partners. Some plans and studies in Leelanau County and the region that are important in planning and economic development activities for the Village of Empire include:

## Leelanau General Plan

The Leelanau County General Plan was developed with participation from stakeholders and units of government throughout Leelanau County, and was adopted in 2012 with an updated Plan expected in 2019. It provides guidance to the County and other stakeholders that are working to address issues around land use, housing, agriculture, economic development, recreation, and natural resources. It clarifies the roles of different players and recommends some strategies for moving forward in a way that respects local authority and private property rights, while leveraging relationships and opportunities for collaboration between communities and existing organizations. Rather than providing prescriptive recommendations for new development and growth, it is intended to be a high-level, broad-brush guide for addressing the issues, challenges, and opportunities faced by the many citizens, jurisdictions, businesses, nonprofits, and other stakeholders throughout Leelanau County.

## *Framework for Our Future*

This regional planning resource for local governments and community organizations was developed as part of Michigan's Regional Prosperity Initiative, which encourages local private, public, and non-profit partners to identify regionally-aligned growth and investment strategies. It includes information and tools that can help stakeholders address issues and supplement their local deliberation, planning, and decision-making processes. The *Framework* was developed by Networks Northwest with input and partnerships from a variety of community stakeholders and members of the public through an intensive, inclusive, region-wide community outreach process. The goals, strategies, and actions included in the *Framework* were built upon public input heard throughout the process, as well as on existing and adopted goals from local plans and planning initiatives.

## Grand Vision

The Grand Vision is a vision of regional growth built on input from over 15,000 residents in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Wexford counties. The process, completed in 2009, included random-sample, scientifically-valid surveys, public workshops, questionnaires, traffic modeling, and data analysis. It resulted in the selection of a "preferred scenario" - that is, a growth scenario that would promote the values that were identified by the public. The "preferred scenario," as identified by the questionnaire and tested by a random-sample survey,

included a vision of *future growth that would occur primarily in the region's cities and villages, with additional growth in the main cities of Traverse City and Cadillac. Large amounts of rural open space would be preserved. This development pattern would require investments in regional bus service, sidewalks, and bike trails in villages and cities, with some investments in new or widened roadways.*

Leelanau County results showed strong support for the preferred scenario, both in the questionnaire and in the follow-up random-sample survey. Some highlights from the study process for Leelanau County are as follows:

- Leelanau County residents rated their quality of life higher than residents of the region as a whole, and were more positive about the quality of life in the future when compared with the region.
- Leelanau County residents were more likely to feel that the most important qualities were “having friends and family nearby,” “a family friendly environment,” and “scenic beauty of the region and having access to nature.”
- The most popular growth strategies in Leelanau County were: “The development of more affordable housing should be encouraged ” (90%); and “more mixed use development should be encouraged” (87%). The least popular growth strategies were that most new housing should be separated from jobs & existing centers (62% disagree) and more regional freeways should be built (54% disagree).

#### Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation

The Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation is a non-partisan, self-funded non-government organization and advisory board whose purpose is to support the Leelanau business community by providing resources, programming, and collaborative opportunities that will strengthen the economic vitality of Leelanau businesses and communities. In 2016, the Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation (LPEF) conducted a survey with business owners in the County on several issues including their perceptions of the advantages of doing business in Leelanau County and the most critical barriers to their business success and growth.

#### Leelanau Housing Action Committee

The Housing Action Committee (HAC) was appointed by the Leelanau County Planning Commission in 2017, following support by the County Board of Commissioners. The County Board of Commissioners approved a set of actions/goals for the HAC, which held its first meeting in May 2017. The HAC is engaged in providing information and outreach to local units of government about becoming “housing ready” communities.

#### Leelanau County Target Market Analysis

A residential target market analysis was conducted by real estate consultants LandUseUSA in 2014 for Northwest Michigan. The study analyzes demand from various demographic groups for multi-family housing types from potential “movers” both inside and outside the study area.

#### Leelanau County Housing Inventory

Housing reports were prepared by Networks Northwest for Antrim, Benzie, Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Wexford counties, to provide the information foundation for a regional housing strategy, an element of the *Framework for Our Future*. The inventories provide an overview of housing affordability, type, and condition and information on related factors such as energy and transportation costs, vacancies and foreclosures, and homelessness.

# Chapter 2: Existing Conditions and Context

The natural beauty, historic character, small town lifestyle, and tremendous recreation opportunities available in Empire are, even taken singly, uncommon in many communities of a much larger size. For a village the size of Empire, the presence of these many assets represents a wealth of opportunity in terms of creating and maintaining a high quality of life for its residents and visitors.

Empire is not without challenges. The community's population is experiencing shifts in terms of aging and seasonality. A decline in the number of young people and families, combined with an influx of retirees, has created a skewed population that presents challenges for the local workforce. At the same time, high real estate values make it difficult to attract young people back to the community, as many are priced out of the housing market in Empire and Leelanau County as a whole. But despite these challenges—and in some cases, because of them—there are many opportunities to enhance Empire's quality of life and move towards new opportunities.

Increasingly, the health of a community and its potential for new investment is the product of many factors. First among them is a high quality of life: recreation opportunities, cultural activities, quality natural resources, and a

welcoming social environment. These elements work to attract new residents that bring with them skills, knowledge, buying power, and other assets that provide the necessary foundations for new economic investment.

As the Village works to maintain and improve the community's quality of life through planning and preparing for change, it must consider the Village's existing context. This chapter will discuss Empire's history, geographic context, community character, population characteristics, and economic assets.

## Empire in the Region

Empire's regional context forms the foundations of the community's population trends, employment opportunities, and lifestyle.

The northwestern region of Michigan's lower peninsula is a place of incredible natural beauty, tremendous natural resource assets, thriving agricultural economies, seasonal recreation and resorts, and year-round communities. The landscape of forests, lakes, rivers, orchards and farmland is dotted with villages and small cities that are considerable distances from larger metropolitan communities. These distances have helped these small communities shape their character and create individual identities that have



Empire Beach (Courtesy of The Empire Chamber of Commerce)

become well-recognized as retirement and resort communities as well as desirable places to reside.

This unique rural character and access to water, forest, and other natural resources has been the region's greatest economic driver. Many communities had their beginnings with the lumber industry or served as major hubs for water-based or rail-based transportation. Once the land was cleared, agriculture became an economic foundation for some parts of the region.

Natural resources and rural character have played yet another role since the 1970's. Many new residents, including significant amounts of retirees and seasonal residents, have moved to the area to take advantage of the region's small town and rural lifestyles, outdoor recreation opportunities, and natural beauty. Since 1970, the



Empire at Sunset (Courtesy of the Empire Chamber of Commerce)

region's population has nearly doubled—from 158,333 to 297,912 in 2010, with Leelanau County one of the fastest growing counties in the region and the state.

However, much of that growth has occurred outside of the region's cities and villages. The desire for rural lifestyles or homes on larger lots, combined with limited land supply and higher costs in city and village boundaries, has led to greater growth and development in rural areas, while the population of some communities remain stagnant or decline, due to factors including geographic area, aging populations, and loss of industry or employment.

## Population & Economic Indicators

Changes in the economy over the years, combined with changes in development patterns throughout the region, have had a dramatic impact on the population in both Empire and Leelanau County.

Beginning in 2008, the United States experienced a recession that had far-reaching and long-lasting effects on employment and housing demand—particularly in Michigan, which

experienced statewide population loss, some of the highest rates of foreclosure in the nation, persistently high unemployment rates, and home abandonment and blight throughout the state. While the most severe problems were concentrated in urban areas, no parts of Michigan were immune from the effects of the recession, and Northwest Michigan, including Leelanau County, experienced significant changes in its population, employment dynamics, and housing market. Between 2000-2010, Leelanau County's population grew by 3%, compared to 28% growth between 1990-2000. And between 2010-2015, the County's population grew only 1%, the lowest growth rate since before 1950.

Not only did growth rates slow, the characteristics of that growth changed. While many residents of Michigan – and Leelanau County – left the state for better employment opportunities, older adults continued to retire and move to Leelanau County, leading to a skewed population change: While the number of people aged 50 years and up increased, there was a substantial decline in individuals aged 35-44, children, and families in Leelanau County.

Many of these County-wide population trends have long been a reality for the Village of Empire, which has experienced significant fluctuations in its population since its population high of around 609 people during World War I. With the loss of the Village's sawmill and the lumber industry, the population

declined to a low of 251 people in 1951, a number that gradually increased until 1980, when Empire experienced a large loss of population between 1970 and 1980, with the scaling down of the Air Force Base, the community's largest employer. Another drop occurred between 2000 and 2010 (see Table 1). The 2010 population was estimated at 373, a slight decline of nearly 1% since 2000. The 2015 population estimate for the Village is 379.

### 1970—2010

The growth rate in Leelanau County nearly doubled.

**1.3%**

Growth rate in Leelanau County between 2010-2015

Overall, the Village's population size has been fairly stable, reflecting general population trends in Northwest Michigan villages, which typically experience slower growth than many of the region's rural townships. Yet, the characteristics of the Village's population have changed over the years, with related impacts on market demand and service needs.

### Household Size & Age

The age of a community's residents has significant impacts on housing demand, service needs, and employment base; while household size can reflect changes in community demographics and signal a need for additional housing options.

# Population Change, 1970-2016

(Table 1)

	1970	% change 1960- 1970	1980	% change 1970- 1980	1990	% change 1980- 1990	2000	% change 1990- 2000	2010	% change 2000- 2010	2016	% change 2010- 2016
Empire	409	-8.7%	345	-15.6%	355	2.9%	378	6%	373	-0.8%	375	0%
Leelanau County	10,872	16.6%	14,007	28.8%	16,527	18%	21,119	27.8%	21,708	2.8%	21,981	1.3%
NW Michigan	158,333	13.9%	208,286	31.5%	230,962	10.9%	281,468	21.9%	297,912	5.8%	303,254	1.8%

Source: US Census and 2016 American Community Survey

## Data Sources

A number of resources and data sources were used to inform the content of the Empire Village Master Plan, including:

- US Census
- American Community Survey
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Topical studies specific to County or local geographies

When reviewing data, it's important to note that different geographies, data collection methodologies, and update timelines mean that comparable information isn't always available at the Village level. And, changes in the Census mean that comparisons between current and historic Census is not available.

The decennial **US Census** is conducted every 10 years to measure population, age, and other basic demographic information for all geographies in the country. Historically, the Census "long form" also recorded more detailed information on individual household characteristics, including income, employment, poverty, housing value, commute time, etc. Since 2005, that information has instead been collected every 5 years by the **American Community Survey (ACS)**, a large, continuous demographic survey conducted by the Census Bureau that will eventually provide accurate and up-to-date profiles of America's communities every year. Questionnaires are mailed to a sample of addresses to obtain information about households and housing units. The survey produces estimates of population and housing characteristics data for small areas, including tracts and population subgroups. Questions asked are similar to those on the decennial census long form. Estimates for small geographic areas are based on data collected over a 5-year time period, and represent the average characteristics over that time period. For small geographies, the margin of error is high. Leelanau County data is used in place of Empire data for some detailed information.

Between 2010-2015, the Village lost population in nearly all age groups under the age of 44, while percentages of those age 45-65+ grew substantially. In 2000, Empire's population was younger than the County's; that trend has since reversed, with the Village's population now older than the County as a whole. In 2015, the proportion of the Village of Empire population over age 54 was 57.8%, compared to the County percentage of 28%. And, in 2000, the median age in the Village of Empire was 49.1 years, while the median age County-wide was 56.8 years. In 2015, Empire's median age (57.5 years) is above that of the County (52.4). Residents of both the Village and the County as a whole are significantly older than residents statewide: the median age for Michigan is 39.3 years. The median age and proportion of the population over age 54 is projected to continue to increase at a higher rate than the State.

As the population ages, the number of one and two-person households increase, a trend reflected in a declining average household size. Fewer school-aged children and family households represent growing numbers of "empty nesters" and contribute to the Village's shrinking household size. At 1.75 people per household (PPH), Empire's average household size is well below that of both the Average household size of the state (2.51 PPH) and County (both 2.38 PPH).

Some of these changes reflect natural age increases, as the Baby Boomers begin to reach retirement age; while some growth can be accounted for by new residents that moved to the area following retirement. These trends have tremendous impacts on the County's workforce, schools, and service and market demands.

## Seasonal Population

As a community centered around its outdoor recreation opportunities, Empire's economy and population are highly seasonal, with an influx of visitors and seasonal residents, and accompanying economic activity, occurring in the summer months.

Seasonal population fluctuations aren't measured by the Census or American Community Survey (ACS), but the ACS does count vacant housing units that are for "seasonal" use. In Leelanau County, 34% (5,103 housing units) of Leelanau County's total housing stock, and 36% (131 units) of Empire's, is classified as seasonal—compared to 6% of the State's total housing stock. The number of housing units classified as "seasonal" increased by 16% between 2010-2016, compared to only 5% total housing unit growth—likely reflecting a trend of conversion from year-round homes to seasonal housing.

Additional data is available from the *Northwest Michigan Seasonal Population Study* (2014), which shows changes in population by

month in each county in Northwest Michigan. Leelanau County's population is estimated to increase by 40% in the summer months to over 35,000 residents. This includes seasonal residents, overnight visitors, and other transient residents that are staying in second homes, campgrounds, RV parks, hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, cottages, and marinas (Northwest Michigan Seasonal Population Analysis, 2014, MSU Land Policy Institute). It is important to note that day-trip visitors, account for a significant amount of Empire's traffic and visitation. The National Park Service estimates that over 1.7 million people visit Sleeping Bear Dunes annually, with 72% of visits occurring between June and August. Many of those trips originate or end in the Village of Empire, accounting for an enormous population and traffic spike in the summer months.

## Housing

Like other Northwest Michigan communities, Empire is experiencing changes in housing demand and shortages of a range of housing choices that are impacting businesses, schools, and community vitality. Housing shortages are impacting households from across the income spectrum. (See Target Market Analysis, Leelanau County, Michigan, The Market Strategy [November 3, 2014] <https://www.networksnorthwest.org/userfiles/filemanager/3580/>)

A number of recent housing studies

document this shortage. The *2014 Leelanau County Housing Inventory* showed significant affordability gaps for households throughout Leelanau County, as well as issues related to housing quality or condition. Only about 9% of rentals and 3% of owner-occupied homes were considered “affordable” to households earning under \$50,000 per year. The 2016 American Community Survey reports the median home value of owner-occupied homes in the Village is \$195,100. Federal mortgage guidelines assume 30% of the household income will be spent on housing.

A 2014 “target market analysis” assessed the potential annual demand for new housing units in Leelanau County. It showed that there may be a market for 46 new owner-occupied housing units, and 88 rental units, in Leelanau County each year through 2019, for households earning between \$19,000 and \$92,000 per year. In Empire, there’s a potential demand for 6 new owner-occupied units and 10 new rental units each year for those households.

According to 2017 State Equalized Value (SEV) data, undeveloped residential lots, mostly located in the recently built subdivisions, range anywhere from \$10,000 to \$35,000 SEV, with higher values—above \$100,000—for existing houses located in these subdivisions. The median value for all taxable property within the Village is approximately \$68,150.



Typical New Neighborhood Housing

Housing affordability issues are compounded by transportation costs, as many residents commute outside the Village or County to work, shop, receive services or for school. National data indicates that households shouldn’t spend more than 45% of their income on the combined costs of housing and transportation. But a typical household in Leelanau County spends 58% of its total income on the combined costs of housing and transportation, while moderate income households spend 73% of their income on those two costs alone .

## Transportation & Commutes

Fifty percent (50%) of Leelanau County’s workforce (5,190 workers) work outside of the County, while 4,216 workers - 60% of the people employed in the County – commute into the County for work. The primary destinations for those commuting outside of Leelanau County are Grand Traverse, Benzie, Kalkaska, Antrim, and Wexford counties. The median commute time of the Village’s workforce is 19 minutes; 26% of workers in the Village commuting 30 minutes or

more to work (2016 American Community Survey). *Note: Data reflecting commuting destinations are not available at the village level.*

With large percentages of workers commuting to work, transportation costs—including vehicle ownership costs, fuel, insurance, and maintenance—make up a large proportion of an average household budget, the typical household in Leelanau County spends about 34% of its income on transportation costs alone.

## Income, Poverty, & ALICE Households

A 2017 United Way report identifies the cost of basic needs for each county in Michigan, and the number of households that are what United Way calls ALICE – an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE households have incomes above the federal poverty level, but still struggle to afford basic household necessities. In Leelanau County, about 8% of households are estimated to live in poverty, and another 20% of households are considered to be ALICE. With a median household income of \$56,189, and household “survival” budgets ranging from about \$19,000 per year to \$58,000 per year, many households in Leelanau County are clearly struggling to make ends meet.

(continued on pg. 20)

## Age Distribution, 2000-2016

(Table 2)

Age Group (years)	VILLAGE OF EMPIRE						LEELANAU COUNTY			MICHIGAN			
	Total, 2000	% of Population, 2000	Total, 2010	% of Population, 2010	Total, 2016	% of Population, 2016	% Change, 2010-2016	2000	2010	2016	2000	2010	2016
0-4	8	2%	18	5%	0	0	-	5%	4%	4%	7%	6%	6%
5-17	51	14%	32	9%	32	9%	0	19%	15%	13%	19%	18%	17%
18-24	24	6%	8	2%	29	8%	260%	6%	6%	7%	9	10%	10%
25-44	73	19%	63	17%	39	11%	-38%	24%	17%	17%	30%	25%	24%
45-64	133	35%	143	38%	150	41%	5%	28%	34%	32%	22%	28%	28%
65+	89	24%	111	30%	113	31%	1%	17%	23%	28%	12%	14%	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>		<b>375</b>			<b>36%</b>							

Source: 2016 American Community Survey estimates

## Housing Units & Seasonal Housing, 2010-2016

(Table 3)

	TOTAL HOUSING UNITS, 2010	TOTAL HOUSING UNITS, 2016	# SEASONAL HOUSING UNITS, 2010	# SEASONAL HOUSING UNITS, 2016	% SEASONAL HOUSING UNITS, 2016	% INCREASE IN TOTAL HOUSING UNITS, 2010-2016	% INCREASE IN SEASONAL HOUSING UNITS, 2010-2016
Village of Empire	347	360	113	131	36.3%	4.6%	15.9%
Empire Township	1,088	1,122	442	423	38.8%	3.1%	-4.3%
Leelanau County	14,935	15,214	4,681	5,103	33.5%	1.9%	9%
State of Michigan	4,532,233	4,544,920	263,071	286,249	6.3%	.3%	8.8%

Source: 2016 American Community Survey estimates

# Income Distribution

(Table 4)

HOUSEHOLD INCOME LEVELS	VILLAGE OF EMPIRE	EMPIRE TOWNSHIP	LEELANAU COUNTY	MICHIGAN
Less than \$10,000 annually	10.6	6.8	4.1	7.8
\$10,000-\$14,999	5.8	4.4	3.3	5.3
\$15,000-\$24,999	16.4	8.9	9	11.1
\$25,000-\$34,999	8.7	8.2	9.4	10.7
\$35,000-\$49,999	12.1	13.2	15.5	14.3
\$50,000-\$74,999	9.7	14.1	21.7	18.5
\$75,000-\$99,999	6.8	11.3	11.9	12
\$100,000-\$149,999	27.1	20.8	13.4	12.2
\$150,000-\$199,999	1.9	7.4	5.4	4.3
\$200,000 or more	1.0	4.8	6.3	3.8
Median Household Income	\$48,125	\$64,688	\$59,018	\$50,803

Source: 2016 American Community Survey

# Leelanau County Labor Force & Unemployment

(Table 5)

LABOR FORCE ANNUAL AVERAGES, 2017	LEELANAU COUNTY	MICHIGAN
Total Labor Force	10,655	4,883,815
5-Year % Change	4.8%	0%
10-Year % Change	-6.2%	-2.5%
Employed	10,133	4,657,272
5-Year % Change	8.4%	9.7%
10-Year % Change	-5.6%	0%
Unemployed	522	226,543
5-Year % Change	-36%	-46.8%
10-Year % Change	-16.30%	-35.7%
Unemployment Rate	4.9%	4.6%
5-Year % Change	-38.8%	-49.5%
10-Year % Change	-10.9%	-34.3%

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

## Economy

### Workforce & Unemployment

In 2017, the average unemployment rate over the course of the year in Leelanau County was 5% (Bureau of Labor Statistics). This low unemployment rate represents a significant change since the years of the recession, when many people left the County and the State to look for work elsewhere. In 2017, with low unemployment rates and increasing costs of living, business and other stakeholder input from throughout the County and the region emphasize that the County is now experiencing the opposite problem: it's become increasingly difficult for business to find and retain workers. Data from the Michigan Department of Labor and Growth shows that, between 2010-2016, the number of jobs in the County increased by over 11%, while the population increased by less than 1%. Contributing factors include the loss of young families and the aging of the population; high costs of living, including housing and transportation costs; limited daycare options; and a mismatch in the skills needed by employers and those possessed by the existing workforce. The workforce shortage is particularly pronounced in tourism-related industries, agriculture, and health care, which make up a significant share of the County's economic activity.

## Education

Educational attainment rates are an important consideration for business, particularly knowledge-based businesses, which often seek to locate in communities that are home to an educated workforce. Leelanau County is home to one of the most highly-educated populations in the State of Michigan: while 27% of residents statewide have a bachelor's degree or higher, 41% of Leelanau County residents over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher. The rate is even higher in Empire, where 55% of residents over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher. 97% have a high school diploma or higher (2016 American Community Survey).

These high educational attainment rates likely reflect, in part, the large numbers of college-educated professionals that have migrated to the region post-retirement.

## Tourism

Tourism is a foundation of the County's economy, and acts as its most visible economic driver. Tourism-related jobs (including those in Retail; Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation; and Accommodation and Food Services) account for 20% of the County's total jobs, employing over 2,400 employees. These jobs are typically lower-paying and seasonal in nature, with average annual earnings of \$23,784, compared to annual average earnings of \$44,808 for all jobs in the County.

One of the most important tourism-related drivers in the Village of Empire is the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Over 1.7 million people visit the park annually and nearly a quarter of a million people go to the Sleeping Bear Dunes Visitor Center within the Village limits on an annual basis. With promotion and awareness of the National Park on the rise, visitation has increased dramatically over the last ten years, from 1,008,315 visitors in 2008 to 1,678,126 in 2017—an increase of 66%. Increased visitation has had, and will continue to have, significant impacts on job opportunities and business revenues within the Village.

## Agriculture

While agriculture itself accounts for a relatively small proportion of Leelanau County's economy (7% of jobs), agriculture is a significant part of the County's "brand," creating a sense of place that drives tourism and contributes to the community's quality of life. It sustains businesses like fruit processors and retail outlets. What's more, entrepreneurial food and farming related activity has become an economic hallmark of Leelanau County, creating new interest regionally and state-wide in local foods, through farmers markets, wineries, food processing, and other food-related economic activity.

## ALICE Households: Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed

Many households are living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but an even greater number of households are what United Way calls ALICE – an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE households have incomes above the FPL, but still struggle to afford basic household necessities. A 2017 United Way report identifies the cost of basic needs for each county in Michigan, and the number of households earning below this amount – the ALICE Threshold.

**Annual Household Survival Budget—Table 6**

	Median Household Income	Unemployment Rate	% of households that are ALICE Households	% of Households in Poverty	Single Adult	2 Adults, 1 infant, 1 preschooler
<b>Antrim</b>	\$46,485	9.7%	28%	13%	\$16,632	\$59,508
<b>Benzie</b>	\$47,388	8.4%	27%	10%	\$19,188	\$55,244
<b>Charlevoix</b>	\$46,544	7.8%	27%	12%	\$18,924	\$55,908
<b>Emmet</b>	\$51,018	8.4%	26%	11%	\$19,260	\$53,760
<b>Grand Traverse</b>	\$55,013	4.4%	25%	10%	\$19,872	\$58,740
<b>Kalkaska</b>	\$40,534	10.4%	27%	16%	\$18,048	\$53,508
<b>Leelanau</b>	\$56,189	7.1%	20%	8%	\$18,852	\$57,708
<b>Manistee</b>	\$41,395	11.5%	25%	14%	\$17,556	\$52,452
<b>Missaukee</b>	\$41,098	11%	29%	15%	\$17,556	\$55,608
<b>Wexford</b>	\$41,354	9.5%	28%	16%	\$17,016	\$51,936
<b>Michigan</b>	\$51,804	7.2%	25%	15%	\$18,192	\$56,064

Source: United Way, 2017

# Leelanau County Housing Studies

A residential “target market analysis” was conducted by real estate consultants LandUse USA in 2014 for all counties in Northwest Michigan. The analysis analyzes demand from various demographic groups for multi-family housing types from potential “movers” both inside and outside the study area. The complete study and methodology is available online at [www.networksnorthwest.org](http://www.networksnorthwest.org). (Table 7)

POTENTIAL OWNERS/RENTERS	ANNUAL MARKET DEMAND - OWNERS	ANNUAL MARKET DEMAND - RENTERS	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	% THAT ARE SINGLE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS	MEDIAN RENT	MEDIAN HOME VALUE
Young singles	18	34	\$37,000	64%	\$550	\$89,000
Lower-income families/ households	0	15	\$29,000	17%	\$525	\$92,000
Lower-income Boomers	0	12	\$34,500	80%	\$525	\$92,000
Moderate-income Boomers	15	14	\$48,500	51%	\$700	\$147,000
Lower-income seniors	0	7	\$20,000	69%	\$500	\$95,000
Moderate-income seniors	6	2	\$38,500	48%	\$875	\$187,500
Higher-income seniors	7	4	\$92,000	30%	\$1,100	\$275,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>88</b>				

Source: 2015 Northwest Michigan Target Market Analysis, prepared by LandUseUSA. Underlying data provided by the Internal Revenue Service; US Decennial Census; American Community Survey; and Experian Decision Analytics

## Housing Affordability in Empire and Leelanau County

- A household earning the Village’s median homeowner income of about \$55,833 might be able to afford a home valued at about \$140,000; however, the median home value in the Village is over \$195,000.
- 44% of renters pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs.
- In order to afford the median monthly rent in Leelanau County, workers need to earn at least \$16.63 per hour, or \$34,600 per year.

## Housing Terms

Because there's no "one size fits all" definition for affordable housing, and because it can include market-rate and subsidized housing, it's important to define the different types and prices of affordable housing, as well as the various income levels and populations served.

### **Low-income, permanent, or long-term affordable housing is defined as:**

Rental housing or for-sale housing that is made affordable, through public or other subsidies, to low- and moderate-income households. Deed restrictions or other controls limit the resale price or rent for a specified number of years. Affordability may be guaranteed for periods ranging from 10 years to perpetuity. Housing is typically available to households earning 80% or less of the area median income (AMI).

### **Workforce housing is defined as:**

Rental housing or for-sale housing, located near employment centers, that is affordable to households with earned income. Workforce housing may be either subsidized or unsubsidized, and is often marketed to those with moderate- and entry-level incomes like teachers, police officers, medical technicians, office workers, construction workers, and retail and restaurant staff. Generally these occupations earn up to 100% of the area median income (AMI).

### **Supportive housing is defined as:**

Housing that is made affordable to residents with subsidy that is linked to support services such as mental health care, employment or job training assistance, addiction treatment, or other services that support independent living.

### **The Missing Middle is defined as**

The Missing Middle is a range of medium density, multi-unit, or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable living and smaller homes. It includes housing types like duplexes, four-plexes, accessory dwelling units, and clustered cottage housing developments.

Even within each of these categories, the types and prices of affordable housing vary considerably. Various income levels are used by funders and housing providers to determine the level of affordability and the type or level of subsidy. For current income levels by county in Michigan, visit [www.michigan.gov/mshda](http://www.michigan.gov/mshda).

Historic Empire Home

Empire Home



## Leelanau County Economic Overview

Leelanau County’s economy has historically been rooted in tourism and agriculture, and these remain among the County’s most important economic drivers today.

Employment in Leelanau County is concentrated in government (which includes employment at the Leelanau Sands Casino and other employment at the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians), tourism-related industries, and health care. Employment in tourism-related industries, including the Accommodation and Food Services sector, Retail, and Arts/Entertainment, represents about 20% of all employment in the County. However, because employment at the Leelanau Sands Casino and related businesses is counted as “Government” employment due to ownership by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, the actual number of individuals employed in tourism-related industry is likely to be notably higher than reported. Other important industries include Construction and Real Estate, each of which account for about 9% of all employment. Agriculture employs about 7% of the total workforce; but its connection to other industries should be noted, as agriculture drives a significant amount of tourism and entrepreneurial activity in the County.

Industry	Jobs	Earnings	Sales	Average Earnings
Casinos	1,730	\$91,415,833	\$333,819,627	\$52,842
<b>Accommodation and Food Services</b>	<b>1,123</b>	<b>\$28,294,295</b>	<b>\$75,329,767</b>	<b>\$25,195</b>
Construction	1,076	\$40,119,999	\$99,105,945	\$37,286
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	1,074	\$31,701,505	\$139,514,939	\$29,517
<b>Retail Trade</b>	<b>848</b>	<b>\$21,966,009</b>	<b>\$57,522,791</b>	<b>\$25,903</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	790	\$19,939,256	\$76,146,929	\$25,240
Health Care and Social Assistance	742	\$38,847,364	\$66,179,248	\$52,355
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	707	\$27,817,991	\$52,508,420	\$39,347
Finance and Insurance	679	\$36,974,364	\$78,469,061	\$54,454
Other Services (except Public Administration)	591	\$14,522,626	\$29,028,375	\$24,573
Manufacturing	587	\$22,727,598	\$128,905,901	\$38,718
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	481	\$13,369,164	\$29,534,089	\$27,795
<b>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>\$8,810,030</b>	<b>\$19,108,375</b>	<b>\$20,253</b>
Wholesale Trade	353	\$11,930,171	\$32,375,786	\$33,797
Educational Services	231	\$5,256,803	\$7,935,099	\$22,757
Information	106	\$4,217,240	\$18,194,813	\$39,785
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	98	\$8,526,259	\$21,878,756	\$87,003
Transportation and Warehousing	96	\$3,665,569	\$10,308,756	\$38,183
Management of Companies and Enterprises	14	\$354,350	\$683,345	\$25,311
Utilities	<10	\$266,162	\$990,598	\$38,023
	11,769	\$430,722,591	\$1,277,540,621	\$36,598

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

## Health Care

Jobs in health care are an important economic engine, making up 6% of jobs County-wide. As the population ages and demand for health care increases, this sector will become increasingly important. Currently, the Village contains several medical professional services, including Munson family care, physical therapy, pharmacy and lab services; as well as independent health care providers including dental services. Because these services act as a medical “hub” for the rural areas surrounding Empire, the Village is well-positioned to capitalize economically on the growth in health care services and demand.

## High-Tech Infrastructure

Wireless and broadband is becoming increasingly important in creating a competitive environment for new economic investment. Greater coverage of telecommunications and high-speed internet are critical in today’s business operations: high-tech, high-speed Internet infrastructure is a “must-have” in accommodating the interconnected, innovative nature of new economic growth. Residents have expressed the need for updated and faster broadband infrastructure available to the Village.

## Issues & Opportunities

### Population Changes

The Village’s population trends have had and will continue to have significant impacts on the economy, housing demand and value, and tax revenues, with subsequent impacts to service delivery and quality.

As the population ages and household size declines, demand for housing is likely to shift to smaller homes. What’s more, smaller household sizes mean that additional housing units will be needed even to maintain the current population. And, as more residents reach retirement age, the labor force will shrink, exacerbating the current workforce shortage. The ability to attract a new workforce will be impacted by costs of living, especially housing costs, that may prevent some potential new residents from relocating to the area.

To adjust to and prepare for these changes, the Village of Empire can consider options that help seniors “age in place,” that is, remain in their homes as their needs and abilities change. One way communities support aging in place is through in-home services like those that are offered by the Share Care. Other proactive approaches include allowing different types of housing to accommodate smaller households and individuals that no longer want to maintain a large home. These diverse housing types can also support younger

households or new residents that may be moving to the area to work and are looking for affordable residential options. Options like townhomes, condominiums, apartments, granny flats or accessory dwelling units, and small or even “tiny” homes can meet the needs of older households, young singles, empty nesters, and others, often at a more affordable price point.

### Workforce

The presence of talent—a skilled, knowledgeable workforce—is needed to support existing business, and also helps to create and attract high-paying, sustainable jobs. Yet, Leelanau County is experiencing challenges in sustaining a workforce even for existing businesses, particularly those with larger seasonal staffing. A survey conducted in 2016 by the Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation identified workforce shortages as a key area of concern. The workforce shortage is affecting the length of the season for some businesses, along with opening hours, menus, and expansion potential. Local and regional partners are focusing on workforce development through schools, job trainings, apprenticeships, and other educational approaches; but, as the region adjusts to the reality of an aging population that is increasingly reaching retirement, the ability to recruit new workers to the County and region is vitally important. Local efforts to improve the quality of life and affordability

of living costs will be key factors in attracting new residents, families, and workers that can support new and growing economic activity. Placemaking activities that enhance the sense of place and community—including community improvement projects, events and festivals (especially during the ‘shoulder season’) that bring the community together, and recreation improvements that provide recreation and entertainment options for all ages and income levels—can make Empire a more desirable place to live and do business. Housing is a particularly important component in attracting workers: in the LPEF survey of Leelanau County businesses, 74% of respondents cited the “availability of affordable housing for employees” as a

primary business challenge. Zoning changes that incrementally increase density or allow additional housing types, meanwhile, can create important residential options that meet the needs and preferences of individuals and families that may be looking to relocate in Empire.

### **Housing Affordability**

Housing affordability has serious impacts on quality of life, local businesses, school enrollment, and traffic patterns. When families or households experience housing cost overburden, they are at increased risk of foreclosure or homelessness. To avoid cost overburden, households may choose to live in substandard or overcrowded housing, or they may move to less expensive areas—often rural areas without significant services or

employment opportunities. These moves mean that businesses lose year round customers; school enrollment is destabilized, impacting school budgets; and traffic increases as residents commute into town for jobs, school, and shopping.

Affordable housing, small homes, rentals, or multi-family housing units consistent with single-family development—otherwise known as the “missing middle”—are all becoming more important in meeting the needs of the workforce, an aging population, small households, young professionals, and families. Without them, employers struggle to hire qualified new workers, including seasonal and professional staff; and schools lose out on new students. The ability to meet these needs is

## **High-Speed Internet in Leelanau County**

In 2016, the Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation (LPEF) conducted a survey of business owners in Leelanau County on issues including barriers impacting their business success and growth. Because the lack of available high-speed Internet service ranked high on the list, the LPEF established the Leelanau Internet Futures Team (LIFT), made up of local elected/appointed officials, public sector employees and local business owners tasked with examining the status of broadband services in Leelanau County with a goal of developing an action plan to provide high-speed Internet access throughout Leelanau County.

In partnership with Connect Michigan, LIFT surveyed Leelanau County residents, businesses and stakeholders to identify broadband needs and priorities, exploring focusing on Libraries, Agriculture, Economic Prosperity, Government, Healthcare, K-12 Education, Public Safety, Talent/Workforce Development, Tourism and Community Organizations. LIFT’s key findings and action items include:

- Among those households without a home Internet connection, 54.8% cite a lack of availability as the reason.
- 44.7% of people earning less than \$35,000/year are without Broadband services. Lack of availability is the major reason cited, however, 24.4% of those individuals said the service was too expensive.
- Convened a meeting with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) who either currently offers services in Leelanau County or might be

limited by land values, the high costs of development, regulatory obstacles, limited infrastructure, and a lack of developers with the experience or financing options needed to build these new housing types.

Housing was an important issue for the public during the Master Plan update, with a focus on housing that's affordable to the workforce and families year-round. To create more opportunities for housing, the Village of Empire can consider regulatory approaches that allow diverse housing options that cost less to build and provide year-round options—including rentals—for families and the workforce.

### **Tourism, Seasonal Population & Housing**

Empire's many natural assets, proximity to the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and recreational opportunities have enormous impacts on economic activity from tourism.

Tourism comes with some concerns as dependence on tourism-related industries naturally causes seasonality issues. While other local municipalities have concerns about the impact of seasonal housing on year-round residents, the Village of Empire is looking to take a proactive, evidence-based approach by focusing on issues and challenges specifically impacting the Village of Empire. As vacation rental options via the internet become more popular, there is a concern that new housing – particularly “affordable” or



Sleeping Bear Gallery

“workforce” housing – will be purchased, rented, or used for seasonal residents or visitors, which could impact businesses, schools, and the Village’s year-round character and sense of community. Although, anecdotally, many Village residents who participate in some type of seasonal rental activity, acknowledge that their return visitors become part of the fabric of the community—and often choose to purchase homes in the area. Housing data from the American Community Survey shows that seasonal housing units are increasing at a faster rate than total housing units, as year-round homes are being converted to seasonal homes. And as land and development costs increase, seasonal housing increasingly looks like the best investment for some builders or developers: with a strong market for seasonal homes, and the ability to turn a profit, there is more incentive to build seasonal homes than those that are affordable to the workforce or families.

At the same time, seasonal rentals and tourism have an important economic impact. Visitors who lodge in seasonal rentals spend

money at local businesses, and property owners are investing in the community and improving and rehabilitating property. Tourism provides jobs, supports local businesses, and influences the types of commercial, business, recreational, and other kinds of development that occurs here. What’s more, visitors who experience the community’s unique sense of place and its physical, natural, and cultural assets may choose to permanently relocate here.

There must be a balance between encouraging tourism’s economic benefits, while minimizing negative impacts to the population and housing market. Communities can research how other communities – locally and across the United States—are identifying methods to ensure proper balance in meeting the needs of year-round residents, seasonal residents and seasonal rentals. Careful study of the issues is an important step for the Village of Empire to begin the process.

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# Chapter 3: Natural Resources

The natural resources in and surrounding the Village of Empire are almost unmatched for a community of its size: towering dunes, over a mile of public water frontage, and a natural area inside the Village limits set it apart from other communities, and act as the foundation to Empire’s quality of life. Both residents and visitors take advantage of the wide range of recreation opportunities available in the forests, lakes, and streams within and surrounding the Village. Public input from the 2018 Master Plan update process showed a substantial consensus on preserving and enhancing Empire’s natural resources: survey respondents and public forum participants overwhelmingly agreed that the Village’s natural resources, primarily its beach and waterfront, are an important community asset that should be protected, maintained, and enhanced.

To ensure the continued and enhanced quality of these resources, it will be important to balance community development needs with environmental considerations. The benefits of such a balance are increasingly being quantified in economic, public safety, health, and social measures. Environmental quality and protection can enhance economic development efforts. Energy



View of Sleeping Bear Dunes from the Empire Bluff

efficiency reduces the costs of products and services, while the preservation of quality natural features increases the value of developed properties and acts as a draw for new residents and visitors. And, even more fundamentally, planning efforts must by their nature consider the environment upon which they are based. This chapter provides an overview of Empire’s natural features, to provide context for planning and future development.

## Natural Features

Empire sits in a small valley that outlets into South Bar Lake and

Lake Michigan. Two large sand dune systems bracket the valley on the north and south. The sandy soils in and around the developed portion of the Village were formed as the ancient lake shore terrace and on a glacial outwash plain. The hilly terrain to the south and southeast are glacial end moraines.

Once South Bar Lake was a part of the ancient Lake Michigan. However, as the sand dunes began shifting, the cove was cut off from Lake Michigan by the sand deposit. Only a small outlet connects the two lakes.

A portion of the dune areas are



Empire Beach—Lake Michigan

state classified as Critical Sand Dune Areas, and as such any development in this area must be in compliance with the provisions of the state statute and receive state approval in addition to local land use and zoning approvals.

### **Sand Dunes & High Risk Erosion Areas**

Steep slopes and bluffs, dunes, and sandy beaches are dynamic, ever-changing environments that must retain their dynamic features in order to function properly within the ecosystem. From the perspective of the built environment, the dynamic nature of dunes and coastal areas make them vulnerable to hazards like erosion that can cause damage to human life and property. As such, fragile sand dunes and high-risk erosion areas are regulated by state law controlling development in these areas. The State of Michigan regulates land within “critical sand dune areas” of the state. Empire is home to important and fragile dune systems that are regulated by the State.

According to the DNR, critical dune

areas protected by Part 353 represent the highest and most spectacular dunes extending along much of Lake Michigan's shoreline and the shores of Lake Superior, totaling about 80,000 acres in size. The State of Michigan has found that critical dune areas of the state are a unique, irreplaceable, and fragile resource that provide significant recreational, economic, scientific, geological, scenic, botanical, educational, agricultural, and ecological benefits to the people of Michigan. As such, alteration or use of critical dune areas shall occur only when the protection of the environment and the ecology is assured.

The DNR defines high risk erosion areas as the shorelands of the Great Lakes and connecting waters where erosion has been occurring at a long-term average rate of one foot or more per year. The erosion can be caused from one or several factors. High water levels, storms, wind, ground water seepage, surface water runoff, and frost are important factors causing erosion. The high risk erosion area regulations establish required setback distances to protect new

structures from erosion for a period of 30 to 60 years, depending on the size, number of living units and type of construction. Other setback requirements are applicable for home restorations and additions to existing structures. Any person or local government agency proposing to erect, install, move, or enlarge a permanent structure on a parcel must obtain a permit prior to the commencement of construction.

### **Wetlands**

According to the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), there are approximately over 4,500 acres of wetlands and wetland conditions within the Village limits, located mostly on the east-side, through Chippewa Run and South Bar Lake (see existing and future land use maps in Chapter 5). Wetlands are important features in the landscape that provide numerous beneficial services for people and for fish and wildlife. Some of these services, or functions, include protecting and improving water quality, providing fish and wildlife habitats, storing floodwaters and maintaining surface water flow during dry periods. Locations of these wetlands should be considered when planning for development or open space designations as a way to protect wetland resources.

### **Shoreline**

The Village of Empire is a shoreline community, with Lake Michigan as its western boundary. The Village has 1.36 miles of shoreline frontage along Lake Michigan, and 1.5 miles

of South Bar Lake frontage with public access available in both locations.

## Green Infrastructure

The Village of Empire is home to substantial, interconnected green infrastructure assets—including the National Park, Leelanau Conservancy properties, and Village-owned parks and nature preserves—that provide important economic and environmental benefits.

Green infrastructure provides a variety of community benefits. Because greenway spaces like trails and natural areas are often seen as more valued amenities by residents than even golf courses or swimming pools, green infrastructure can increase the value of nearby property, with corresponding increases in tax revenues.

Further, continuous systems of forests, wetlands, and other open areas reduce the risk of flooding by controlling storm water runoff and provide protection from storm damage and erosion in coastal areas. Green infrastructure systems also provide invaluable wildlife habitat and foster ecological

diversity.

Natural features provide significantly more benefits if they are maintained in larger units, such as a complex system of woodlands, wetlands, rivers, and streams. Larger, connected systems—often referred to as green infrastructure systems—are more successful at maintaining ecological diversity and integrity.

## Issues & Opportunities

Environmental quality was identified as an important community priority. Local roles in preserving and enhancing environmental quality include efforts to address storm water runoff and to institute measures that lead to greater coastal resiliency and protection of existing wetlands.

### Storm water Runoff and Impervious Surface Coverage

Sediment – including sand – is a major surface water pollutant that washes from roads, parking lots, and driveways. Sediment and sand

smother the habitat that aquatic organisms need to survive and reproduce. Sediment and sand enter our surface waters through stormwater carrying with it nutrients and many other forms of pollution such as salt, oil, and anti-freeze.

When rain and snowfall hit the ground, they naturally filtrate through the earth and recharge the groundwater. However, paved, or impervious, surfaces, prevent the filtration of rain or snow into the ground. This precipitation instead flows over the ground, picking up debris, chemicals, dirt, and other pollutants. Runoff then flows into a storm sewer system or directly into a lake, stream, river, or wetland, where it is discharged, untreated, into the water we use for swimming, fishing, and drinking.

Reducing impervious surfaces in a community provides significant benefits to water quality. Roads or parking lots make up the majority of a community's impervious surface coverage. In most communities, road design is significantly influenced by the county road commissions and local

## The Grand Vision: Guiding Principles for Natural Resources

- Protect and preserve the water resources, forests, natural areas, and scenic beauty of the region
- Protect our water quality
- Preserve the scenic beauty of the region
- Create ways to allow and encourage access to nature
- Be a good steward of our forest resources

## Coastal Resiliency & Empire's Dunes

Dunes occur in different shapes and sizes, formed by interaction with the flow of air, water, wind, sand, waves, vegetation and ice. They are subject to unique hazards related to the potential for the movement of sand and subsequent erosion, which can result in the loss of property or necessitate the relocation of homes as sand or soil is lost over time. Roadways along the shoreline may experience bank erosion which contributes to cracking and overall structural instability. The foundation of a structure, or underground utility pipes, in a dune area may become fully exposed and vulnerable to weather, extreme temperatures, water damage, or other sources of risk. At the other end of the spectrum, active dunes may result in deposition, with roads, parking lots, driveways, and structures becoming covered or buried in sand. These processes, and the likelihood of their occurrence, vary depending on how the dune was formed, and the different characteristics of each type of dune. Understanding the types of dunes, and the hazards associated with each, is central to appropriate planning and development.

Acres of vegetated, perched, parabolic dunes are located in Empire. These dunes were formed by strong winds and storms that created a repeated series of blowouts, or saddle-shaped or U-shaped depressions in a stabilized sand dune. The ridges of parabolic dunes are typically vegetated with grasses, shrubs, and trees, while the blowouts in between the ridges are usually very open with a few sparsely scattered clumps of grasses, herbaceous plants, and sometimes shrubs. Parabolic dunes are among the most common type of dune system in the Northwest Michigan, and Manistee, Benzie, and Leelanau Counties, feature some important parabolic dunes also known as "high perched parabolic dunes." Perched dunes are found "perched" atop bluffs that vary in height from 90 to 450 feet about lake level. Low perched parabolic dunes are located on either low-lying flat glacial lake plains or sand bars. Their higher elevations leave them more exposed to the wind, meaning they can be more active and hazardous than low perched parabolic dunes.

It's important to note that even parabolic dunes that appear stable can become unstable, as sand continues to move within them on a regular basis. The unpredictable nature of parabolic dunes means that development within these systems should occur with caution, sound site planning, and good building design that takes active sand movement into consideration. Improperly sited development is especially hazardous in high perched parabolic dunes due to active sand movement, coupled with erosion, particularly during storms and high water periods.

A number of resources have been developed with support from Michigan's Coastal Zone Management Program to help communities and property owners plan proactively for the dune systems in their communities. These resources and information, including online mapping tools, are available at:

### **Planning for Coastal Resiliency in Northwest Michigan: A Guidebook for Local Governments**

[www.networksnorthwest.org/coastalresiliency](http://www.networksnorthwest.org/coastalresiliency)

### **Coastal Dunes of Michigan's Northwest Lower Peninsula (Story Map)**

<http://mnfi.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=a2232d34a57644baac2687f5481033c2>

### **Northwest Lower Peninsula Coastal Resiliency Maps (ArcGIS Online Map Viewer)**

<http://arcg.is/2hjEJmz>

### **Leelanau Native Plant Initiative Program (LNPI)**

Leelanau County Planning Department

fire departments.

Allowing for flexibility in the number of parking spaces, or for shared parking between different uses, can also work to reduce the amount of impervious surface in the community.

## Coastal Resilience

Empire’s coastal resources are some of its most valued and cherished resources, beloved for their beauty and the recreation opportunities they provide. However, these areas—including the dunes, steep slopes, and shoreline in Empire—are vulnerable to natural disasters because of factors like extreme weather events and geological processes. Dunes are prone to natural movement and erosion more than other areas, and sand is easily impacted by development or construction that can disrupt the natural process of beach creation and replenishment, and may exacerbate erosion and

other hazards.

The potential hazards in these high-value areas make coastal resilience an important priority. The term coastal resilience refers to the ability of these environments to “bounce back” after hazardous events like coastal storms and flooding. Improving resilience—through anticipating, preparing for, responding to, and adapting to changing conditions, and recovering rapidly from hazardous events with minimal damage—is a key objective for communities that want to reduce the vulnerability and risks associated with coastal areas.

Empire’s dunes are protected as part of the National Park Service and by State critical dune legislation. Yet, it remains important to recognize that the most effective approaches to coastal resilience distribute responsibilities between federal, state, and local agencies and the

public.

The responsibilities and roles of local and county government are central to this collaborative framework. While state and federal agencies have some regulatory and permitting control, local governments must take the lead in planning and implementing resiliency policies that are outside the purview of state and federal agencies. Zoning is an important part of this framework, offering a number of techniques that can minimize the impacts of development and weather events on sensitive natural features. Key among those techniques is an approach known as shoreline protection setbacks, which require buffers of naturally growing grasses, shrubs, and trees in coastal areas. These setbacks have been shown to protect the health of streams, wetlands, rivers, or lakes. In order to be most effective, they must be large enough (50-100 feet)

## Best-Practice: Low Impact Development

Low-impact development or design (LID) is a series of techniques that manage rainfall to infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, and detain runoff closer to its source. With LID techniques in place, stormwater runoff becomes a resource rather than a waste product. Cisterns and rain barrels can use collected rain water for irrigation or as gray water for toilet flushing.

LID also promotes the idea that almost all elements of a site plan can be used for stormwater control. Parking lots can be made of pervious surfacing materials that allows stormwater to drain through the pavement and recharge groundwater sources; while rooftops can be used as planting areas, soaking up rainwater and reducing runoff.

These techniques often cost less to build than traditional closed designs, primarily by keeping stormwater on the ground rather than building infrastructure underground to handle it.

to capture surface runoff, and must be permanently conserved.

Other important zoning techniques include regulations that limit shoreline structures; require environmental impact statements, establish “bluff protection zones” or overlay districts in sensitive areas; and coordinate permits with related regulations.

## **Invasive Species**

Invasive species are plant or animal species that are not native to an area and cause negative effects on that area’s environment, health, or economy. A number of invasive species present a significant threat to the integrity of native plant and animal communities and the ecosystem in and around Empire. They present varying threat levels, but certain high profile invasive species are especially prolific and present the greatest disruptions to the ecosystem. These include Purple Loosestrife, Phragmites, Eurasian Water Milfoil, the Round Goby, and Quagga Mussels. These species are outcompeting many native species and are significantly disrupting the food chain and ecology of Lake Michigan and many inland lakes. On land, species like Baby’s Breath, Common Buckthorn, Garlic Mustard, the Emerald Ash Borer, and Spotted Knapweed are having tremendous impacts on the ecology of forested areas and open space.

The Village of Empire is host to a number of protected species; a full listing of those species found in

Leelanau County is provided in Appendix A. The listed species are protected under federal and/or state law due to their scarcity. Some of these species include the Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalis*), Pitcher’s Thistle (*Cirsium pitcheri*), and Michigan monkey-flower (*Mimulus michiganensis*).

Conservation and planning efforts can include actions that can help prevent or mitigate the spread of invasive species in order to preserve both vital ecosystem services and biological diversity. Addressing nutrient pollution through stormwater management is one action that communities can take, while community-led initiatives and partnerships can, and have been, successful in addressing invasive species issues. Networks of volunteers and environmental organizations like the Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network work to identify and remove invasives from public property. See common invasive plant species identified in the Village pictured on the next page.

## Common Invasive Plant Species



Autumn Olive



Baby's breath



Black Jet Bead



Black locust



Bush Honeysuckle



Dame's Rocket



Garden Yellowrocket



Garlic Mustard



Leafy spurge



Lyme grass



Phragmites



Spotted knapweed

# Chapter 4: Quality of Life & Sense of Place

The Village of Empire is endowed with an incredible quantity and quality of place-based assets. Beautiful views and vistas, the Village's rich historical heritage, and its small size are characteristics that are cherished by both residents and visitors. These assets create Empire's unique sense of place and may form the foundation for thoughtful, well-considered economic investment.

Enhancing sense of place, creating and promoting a positive identity, branding, and global visibility are key elements of placemaking, which uses local assets to create attractive and sustainable communities, improve the quality of life, and help communities succeed in the new economy. Placemaking involves working with the assets within the Village to focus on attainable, community supported opportunities for new economic investment. In addition to making Empire an even better place to live, work, and visit, enhancing Empire's sense of place and quality of life can create opportunities for economic development through tourism and attraction of knowledge workers and companies.

## Empire's Quality of Life Assets

The Village's location in the Northwest Lower Michigan region



South Bar Lake

has contributed to the creation of its distinct character with quality of life assets that are beloved by residents and visitors. Some of those assets that make up Empire's unique identity, as identified by public input, include:

### Small town atmosphere and lifestyle

The Village of Empire, despite its small size, acts as a year-round economic hub for residents in both Leelanau and Benzie counties. The Glen Lake Library, medical and health care services, banks, post office, restaurants, and other services are available for both year-round and seasonal residents that live within the Village itself, as well as in surrounding rural areas.

At the same time, the Village's small size makes for a close-knit community, and Empire residents appreciate the friendly atmosphere and other characteristics of small town life.

### Heritage and historic character

Empire has a rich historical heritage that is still evident in its housing stock and commercial buildings. A large percentage of Empire's housing stock was built before the mid 20th century and still retains its historic character. The Heritage Museum preserves the community's past, provides for community events and programming, and allows current residents to connect with the Village's history, helping to build a strong sense of place.

## Access to recreation

The Village has a wealth of high quality recreation opportunities and events. Empire Beach, outdoor activities, boating, Empire Bluff Trail, and other natural areas attract many visitors from beyond the region and the state. Nationally-significant recreation opportunities are in every direction within and outside Empire—the presence of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Leelanau Conservancy preserves, the Pere Marquette State Forest, Crystal River and a variety of attractions in nearby Traverse City attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to the area annually.

Village-owned or managed recreation assets are identified in the Village Recreation Plan, updated every five years to be compliant with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources requirements for recreation plans. The Village will continue to have an approved, updated and active Recreation Plan in place to remain eligible for state recreation grants.

### Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

Surrounding the Village, the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore was established in 1970 by an act of Congress that set aside the Lakeshore for preservation of the natural resources and for public use. The most prominent features, and those for which the park is named, are the perched dunes above Lake Michigan. The dune overlooks at the Sleeping Bear, Empire, and Pyramid Point bluffs are



Asparagus Festival on Front Street in Empire

about 400 feet above Lake Michigan. These unique features attract over 1.7 million visitors annually to the region, a number that has grown significantly since 2011, when Sleeping Bear Dunes was voted as the “Most Beautiful Place in America” on Good Morning, America.

For many visitors, their first stop in their visit to the National Lakeshore is the Village of Empire, which provides services like gas, food, and lodging. Its prominent location and importance to park visitors means that any management activities undertaken by either the National Park Service or the Village have direct impacts on the other, with shared social, economic and ecological impacts.

## Issues and Opportunities

### Community Image

Empire has tremendous place-based and quality of life assets that create

unique environment desirable to many as a place to live and visit. This includes a well maintained beach on Lake Michigan that attracts people from around the region; a downtown, small-town atmosphere, historic neighborhoods, surrounding natural resources and adjacent proximity to the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

### Location

The rural, scenic setting that surrounds Empire is inseparable from its image and lifestyle. According to the Land Policy Institute, rural areas located long distances from large metropolitan areas have important economic benefits that arise from these long distances, including the opportunity to market uniquely rural assets, such as recreation, local foods and festivals, scenic views and other rural placemaking possibilities. At the same time, it can create economic challenges, including difficulties in accessing educational or employment opportunities.



Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Headquarters in Empire

Empire—a small village with year-round services in a rural region, located only a half-hour drive from the largest city in the region, Traverse City—has a distinct “best of both worlds” advantage in terms of accessing benefits from both rural settings and larger communities. What’s more, distance learning and telecommuting make it easier for residents to access education and employment opportunities from the Village.

**Transportation Connections**

The presence and availability of state highways, sidewalks, and trail systems create tremendous visibility and access to the Village’s park, recreation, and other place-based assets. The Village is also served by the Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA), which provides fixed-route public transportation within Traverse City and Grand Traverse County. The re-instatement of the BATA “Village connector” line, can bring visitors and residents to and from Traverse City and Leelanau County villages. Additionally, enhancing Empire’s image as a “walkable community”

could enhance pedestrian or bicycle safety for waterfront or beach visitors that are traveling into the downtown and other parts of the community.

Creating enhanced walkability or biking opportunities, combined with the use of distinctive, attractive wayfinding signage to help pedestrians and motorists navigate through downtown, could also represent an opportunity to build awareness of Empire’s attractions and serve as a valuable business tool.

**Downtown/Village Activity**

Downtown events have great potential to stimulate economic activity—especially during the “shoulder seasons”. Festivals and events have historically been important in the Village. Capitalizing on these or similar traditions could act as draws to the downtown and help in generating revenue for local businesses. Signature annual events include:

- Snowmobile Drag Race (January)
- Asparagus Festival (May)
- Anchor Day (July)

- Hill Climb Revival (September)
- Hops & Harvest Festival (October)
- Artisan Market Place (November)

Many community activities are hosted and coordinated by non-profit groups in Empire such as the Empire Chamber of Commerce, the Empire Lions Club and the Empire Area Community Center (EACC). The Snowmobile Drag Race, The Asparagus Festival and the Hops and Harvest Festival are coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce. The Empire Lions host pancake breakfasts and chicken dinners as well as a very well attended auction in August. EACC coordinates Anchor Day and the Artisan Marketplace and, also, maintains an emergency fund to provide financial assistance to those that have fallen on hard times.

**Arts and Culture**

Arts and cultural opportunities are critical economic assets. The Empire Artisan Marketplace hosts skilled and talented workers. These creative workers are drawn to communities with a strong sense of place with a thriving arts-oriented culture. Leelanau County and the Northwest Michigan region are home to a large number of artists and others with creative talent that can be leveraged to enhance civic engagement, create a unique identity or brand, and support community image and beautification efforts.

## Gateway Communities

The Village of Empire is what is known as a “gateway community:” a community that lies just outside a major tourist attraction like a national park. Tourism is an economic boon for these communities in general, and the Empire area is no exception: in 2017, nearly 1.7 million park visitors spent an estimated \$177 million in local gateway regions while visiting Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. This spending supported a total of 2,520 jobs, \$64.8 million in labor income, \$121 million in value added, and \$212 million in economic output in local gateway economies surrounding Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

Tourism can impact communities in many ways. Communities that attract large numbers of visitors are often more desirable places to live and do business. This desirability often increases land values—a desirable effect for land owners, and a deterrent to workers or families that are looking to move to the community but are no longer able to afford to do so.

High volumes of tourist activity can have environmental and infrastructure implications, as well—from noise, to water quality, to traffic concerns, and more, all of which can ultimately affect the integrity of the natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources that drew people to these places to begin with.

Other communities around the



Secret Garden on Front Street

country have looked at strategies to ensure a balance is achieved between accommodating and capitalizing on tourism activity, but also keeping their small town’s character and way of life intact for those that live there year-round. Examples of the way Empire balances tourism with keeping the small town character includes the Chamber of Commerce activities that expand the traditional tourist season by increasing marketing for activities for spring, fall and winter and offering services and program through local non-profits such as the Lions Club and Empire Area Community Center.

To address tourism needs and impacts, it’s important for the Village, neighboring communities, the National Parks Service and related agencies to collaborate and communicate regularly about shared priorities.

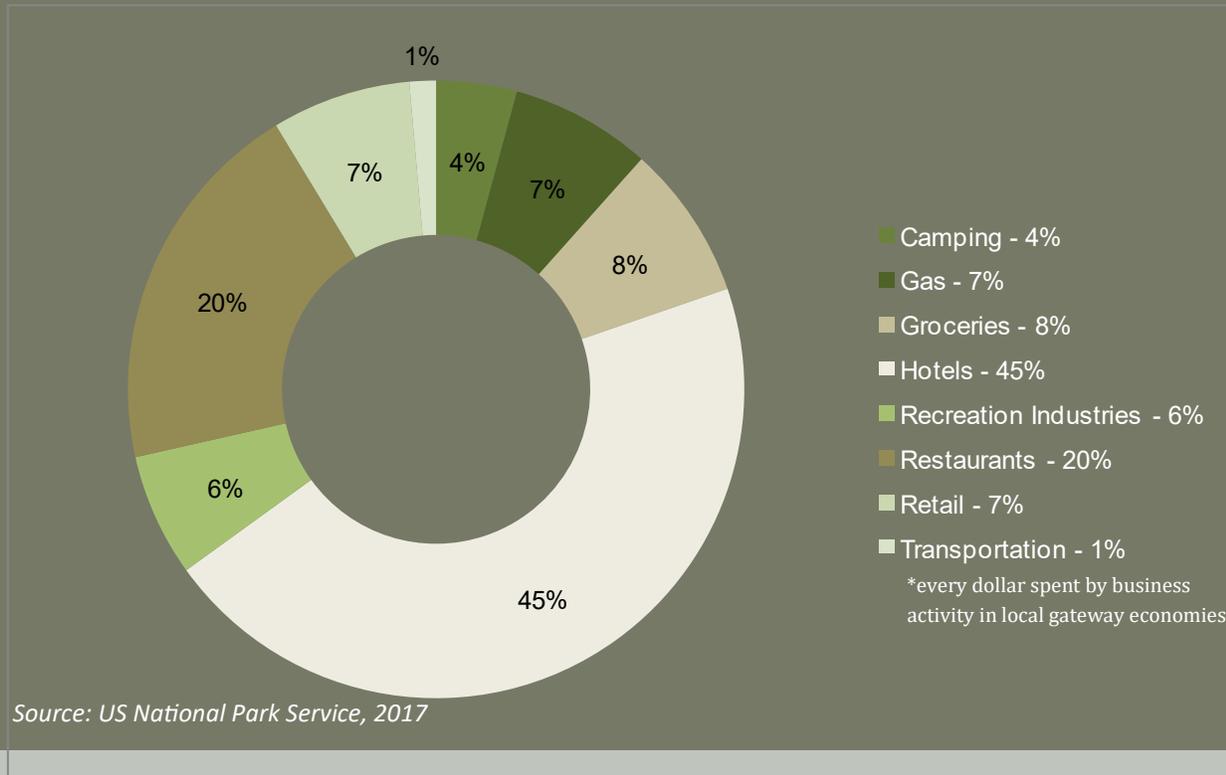
One approach to improved coordination between the Village, neighboring communities, the National Park Service, and related agencies is to convene discussions between communities and agencies through public forums to explore

common concerns and priorities. Forums can include a variety of opportunities for interaction and participation, emphasizing common elements of open communication, inclusion and collaboration.

The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore has stated a commitment to working cooperatively with surrounding areas/communities to ensure there’s a harmonious and productive relationship.

# Economic Impact of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

(Chart 1)



## Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Visitation

(Table 7)

	Total Visits	Coast Guard Station	Dune Climb	Stocking S. Drive	Esch Road	Platte River	Visitor Center
<b>2017</b>	1,678,126	33,287	130,735	153,448	34,580	88,895	236,555
<b>2016</b>	1,683,553	34,639	131,393	150,429	34,538	94,790	239,136
<b>2015</b>	1,535,633	28,185	122,888	134,900	30,646	89,327	218,952
<b>2014</b>	1,395,401	30,472	112,713	115,577	27,246	75,404	226,586
<b>2013</b>	1,340,007	29,896	93,696	117,008	30,448	84,512	207,180
<b>2012</b>	1,531,560	35,597	113,151	132,489	33,650	93,236	228,868
<b>2011</b>	1,348,304	30,999	96,738	113,400	28,726	83,482	196,945
<b>2010</b>	1,280,934	30,561	84,738	101,094	34,921	81,598	170,251

Source: US National Park Service, 2017

# Chapter 5:

## Current & Future Land Use

The Village contains approximately 600 acres of land area, not including South Bar Lake. Development patterns within the Village have been dictated in large part by its geography, bounded by water features, steep slopes, wetlands, and dunes. Forests cover steeply-sloped hillsides while wetland vegetation and lowland woods are found in lower elevations. With 3 cumulative miles of shoreline on Lake Michigan and South Bar Lake, lakefront homes are available along the shores of both Lake Michigan and South Bar Lake.

While many parts of the Village are currently developed, there nevertheless remains significant acreage that offers opportunities for new development that may be needed in the future to meet housing, economic, or service

needs. The future land use element of the Master Plan allocates land to take into account community socio-economic trends, real estate market factors, transportation, land use relationships, and community values. Consistent with the existing village character, this plan promotes the continuation of the mixed-use downtown area, provides for varied housing types, and highway commercial development. Recommendations are built through analysis of several types of maps and descriptions :

- The **existing land use map and descriptions** identify the current, “on the ground,” uses of properties within the Village. An understanding of existing land uses is needed to ensure that future development is compatible with the Village’s existing character,

environmental features, community needs, and vision and goals.

- **Zoning** identifies the permitted land uses for each geographic area in the Village. The zoning map shows what is allowed to occur legally on a parcel-by-parcel basis, *regardless* of the current existing use for that parcel.
- The **future land use map and descriptions** identify the preferred patterns of development and redevelopment and are based on the goals and objectives identified in the planning process. The future land use map is not intended to be parcel specific; future land use recommendations are intended to be used as a long-range (20+ years), general guide for

### Empire Zoning Ordinance & Relation to the Master Plan

The Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance are closely connected, and both have important impacts on land use and development. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006) requires zoning to be based on an adopted plan that is designed to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of all citizens. The master plan provides guidance for zoning decisions, including amendments to the text or the zoning map. As such, zoning is the method most commonly used to achieve master plan goals. However, it’s important to recognize that the Master Plan is only a guide, and cannot enforce where or how something is built. The Zoning Ordinance, on the other hand, is a **legally enforceable law** that regulates land and buildings, and establishes standards for development.

development patterns. Desired results are not expected to occur in the near future.

Through the Master Plan, zoning, and other policies, the Village of Empire intends to allow for reasonable growth to be accommodated with minimal land use conflicts or negative environmental impacts, while allowing for the continuation of existing commercial, residential, or recreational uses. To provide a context for these future land use decisions, this chapter includes descriptions of existing land use and neighborhood types found in the Village, issues and opportunities that have been identified for each use, and future land use descriptions and recommendations for the following districts:

- Residential
- Multiple-Family Residential
- Village Core—Mixed Use
- General Commercial
- Light Industrial
- Recreation/Conservation



West Front Street

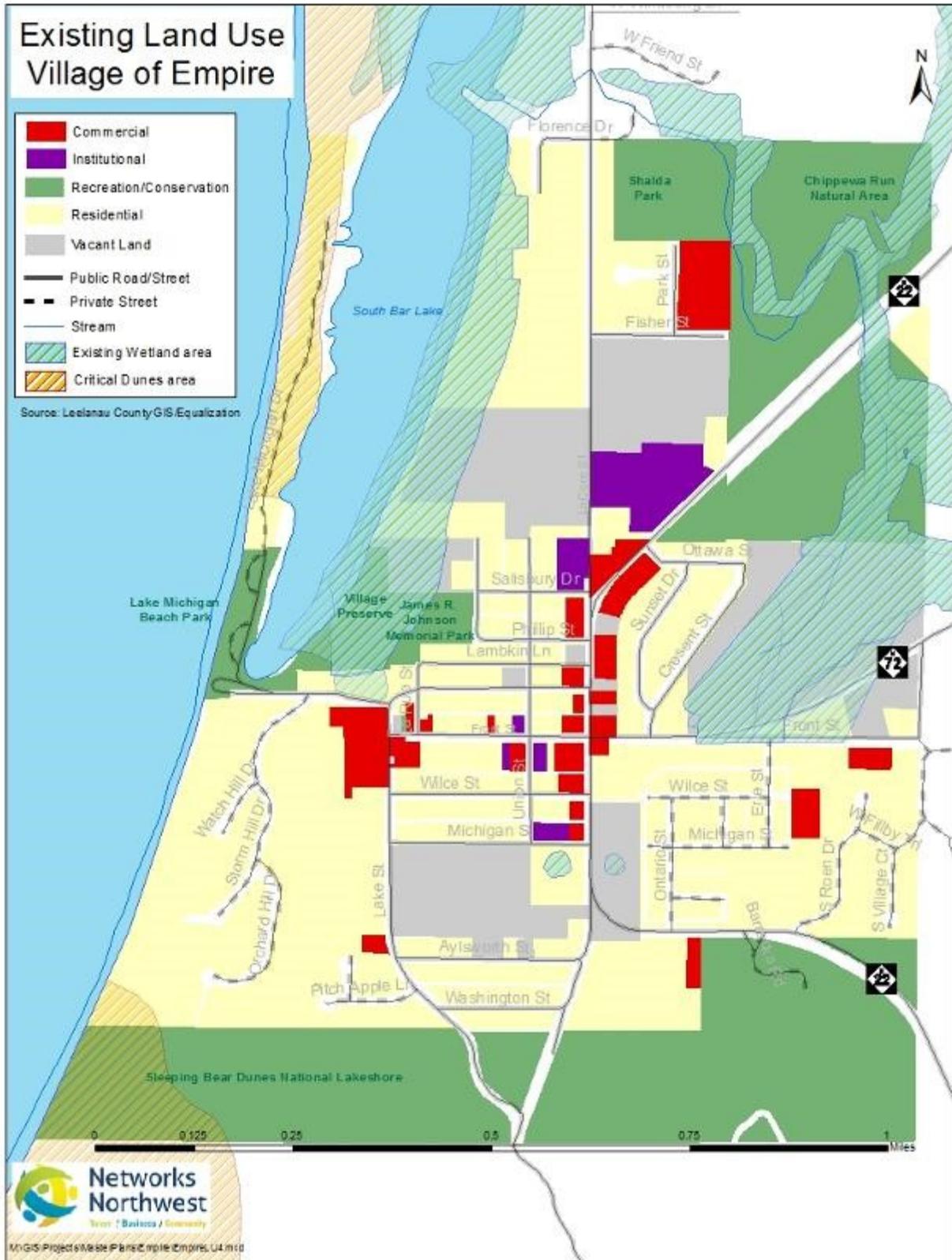
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**Map Notes:**

Existing Land Use Map (p. 43 figure 2) and Future Land Use Map (p. 45 and figure 4): These maps are not intended to be used to determine the specific locations and jurisdictional boundaries of wetlands subject to regulations under Part 303, Wetlands Protection Act of Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 P.A. 451, as amended or Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. Section 1344 *et seq.* Only an on-site wetland delineation as verified by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers shall be used for jurisdictional determinations.

# Existing Land Use Map (Figure 2)

*The existing land use map* identifies the current, “on the ground,” uses of properties within the Village. An understanding of existing land uses is needed to ensure that future development is compatible with the Village’s existing character, environmental features, community needs, and vision and goals.



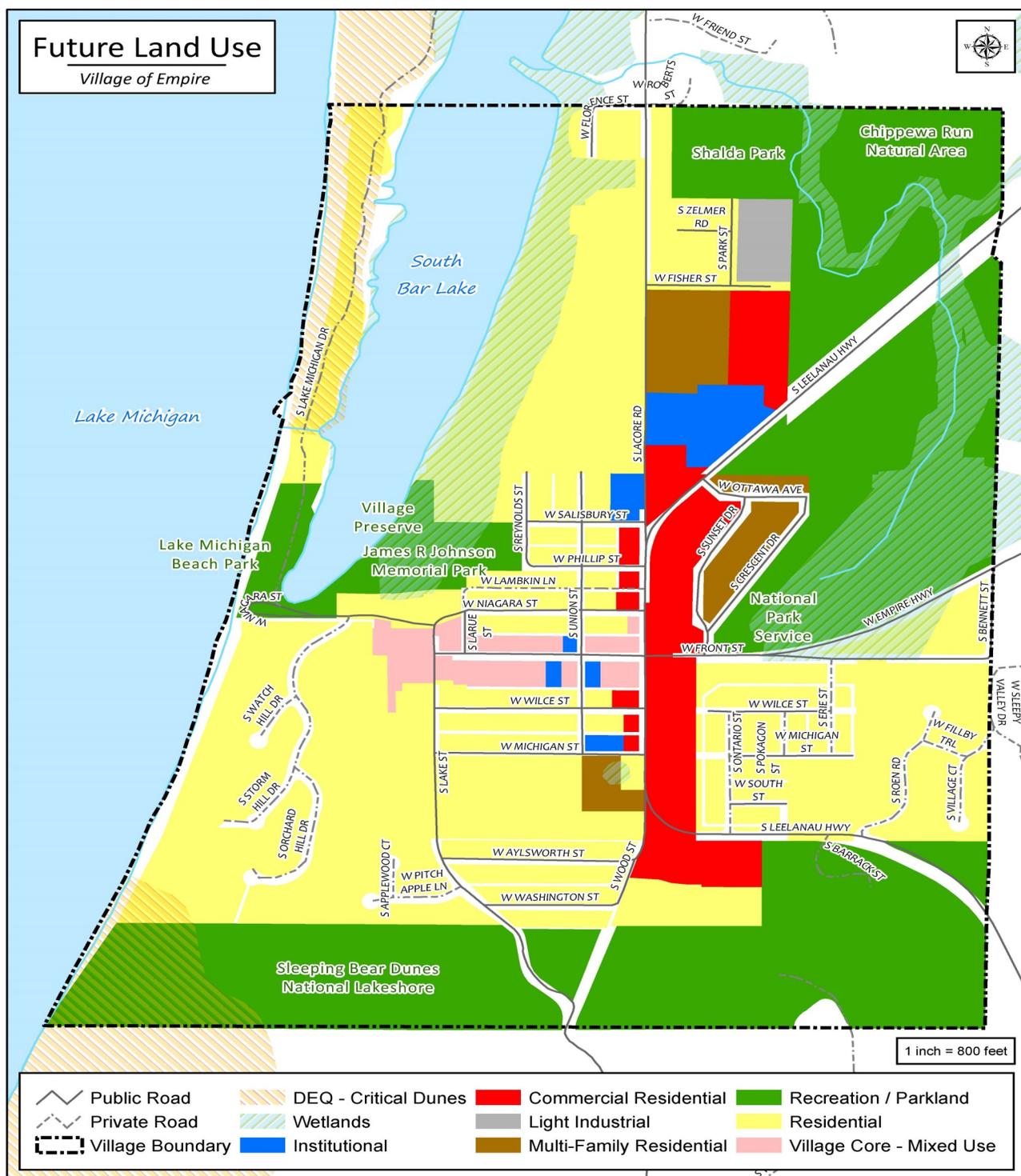
# Zoning Map (figure 3)

**Zoning** identifies the permitted land uses for each geographic area in the Village. The zoning map shows what is allowed to occur legally on a parcel-by-parcel basis, *regardless* of the current existing use for that parcel.



# Future Land Use Map (figure 4)

The **future land use map and descriptions** identify the preferred patterns of development and redevelopment, and are based on the goals and objectives identified in the planning process. The future land use map is not intended to be parcel specific; future land use recommendations are intended to be used as a long-range (20+ years), general guide for development patterns. Desired results are not expected to occur in the near future. (Map rendering by Leelanau County, Equalization Department).



This map is prepared by Leelanau County for reference purposes only. Leelanau County is not liable for any errors that may be found in this map.

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# Residential

With 254 acres containing an estimated 347 dwelling units, about 42% of the Village’s land area is categorized as residential land use. Empire’s neighborhoods are primarily composed of single family detached homes mostly built around the mid-20th century, with more recently-constructed, large-lot homes located in the southwest sector of the Village (Storm Hill, Heritage Hills), near the dunes area, with New Neighborhood and Empire Hills subdivisions located in the southeast sector of the Village. The Beaver Creek residential development is located adjacent to the Sleeping Bear Visitors Center.

The average residential density of the Village is 1.37 units per acre. Existing residential lots vary in size from 50x125 feet lots in the Village core, to large lots on the east side of South Bar Lake ranging up to nearly 20 acres in size.

The Village’s size allows for residential areas to exist in close proximity to Village amenities such as parks, playgrounds, shopping, churches, and other services. Most of the housing stock is located in the Village residential neighborhoods on walkable streets with lower traffic volumes.

## Zoning

There are five (5) zoning districts located within the Village that allow for residential use. These are General Residential (GR), Mixed

Residential (MR), Village Residential (VR), Planned Unit Development (PUD) and Commercial Residential (CR).

## Housing Stock

The 2016 American Community Survey estimates that there are 347 housing units. 44% were owner-occupied, 13% were renter-occupied, and 36% were considered vacant for seasonal use.

## Issues & Opportunities

### Village character

Village neighborhoods feature a mix of historic homes and summer cottages that foster a distinct small-town feel. Throughout the 2018 Master Plan process, public input clearly emphasized the desire to retain the Village’s small-town character.

### Housing Options

National trends toward shrinking household sizes mean that more housing units will be needed simply to maintain existing population levels—let alone to attract new residents, a workforce, or families, additional housing units. Given the Village population trends, there is likely to be a continued demand for housing. Demand may shift, however, from larger single family homes to smaller homes or multi-family homes as the population ages and household size continues



New residential construction in the Village Core

to shrink. Diverse senior housing types, including assisted living or skilled nursing facilities, might be needed for some parts of the population. Other approaches to senior housing allow seniors to “age in place” by ensuring that health care and social services are available and accessible to seniors locally and in their homes.

One way to accommodate this demand is through inclusion of “missing middle” housing types, such as duplexes, four-plexes, accessory dwelling units, or other medium-density housing types that are consistent with single family neighborhoods.

Other housing options that are important to the Village’s current and future population include “incremental” development types, that allow small-scale solutions in existing homes or neighborhoods. Converting single-family homes into two-family homes; allowing homeowners to rent out an extra bedroom; or accommodating boarding houses under certain

situations are all important approaches that can house diverse populations—in particular, the seasonal workforce that is critical to Empire’s tourist economy.

### Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is defined as housing that costs 30% or less of a household’s income. Families or individuals that pay more than 30% of their income for housing are considered cost overburdened. When households are cost overburdened, they are at a higher risk of foreclosure or homelessness; or are more likely to move into substandard or overcrowded housing, which can have serious impacts on quality of life, school performance, and well-being. Multiple housing studies, including the 2014 Leelanau County Housing Target Market Analysis and the *Framework for Our Future*, have found significant shortages of housing that’s affordable to many parts of the County’s population. Potential Village actions that could address those shortages include measures that would streamline the zoning process; provide regulatory support for diverse housing options; and make land available for diverse housing types.

### Seasonal Rentals

In a seasonal community with significant tourist activity like Empire, seasonal rentals are an important lodging option for visitors that come with both positive and negative community impacts. It’s important for the Village to continue its informed



Storm Hill Development—Original home of lumber company owner

monitoring of the impact of seasonal rentals on the Village and its resources. This may include a study of best practices as seasonal rental activity increases.

## Future Land Use

### Development Considerations

- Future development should consist of single – and two-family uses and accessory uses including accessory dwelling units, gardens, accessory structures, and home occupations.
- Multi-family dwellings and “missing middle” residential types, including conversions of single-family homes to multi-family homes, should be permitted when consistent with existing residential character.
- Diverse housing types and services for seniors should be allowed when impacts are mitigated. Adult foster care, assisted living, skilled nursing, and related health care services are all necessary to the aging population, and should be permitted when impacts are mitigated and design is

consistent/compatible with the Village’s character.

- Incremental housing options for the workforce, such as single-room rentals in single-family homes, or boarding houses, should be considered and allowed when uses are mitigated.
- Non-residential uses such as churches, parks, and daycare are also appropriate when traffic, noise, signage, and other impacts to adjacent use are limited.
- Sensitive environmental features should be protected, preserved, and enhanced.

### Residential

The Residential district covers a significant portion of the Village’s land area, and is located throughout the Village. Current land use within this district includes both historic and recently-built single-family homes developed in a grid pattern, along with more recently developed residential areas and subdivisions such as Storm Hill, Empire Hills, and Beaver Creek. Additionally, institutional

uses such as Churches are included in this category as well.

### ***Future Land Use Recommendations***

The intent of the Residential District is to maintain the current residential character of the Village while providing new housing opportunities. Any infill and redevelopment should incorporate the specific dimensional and building characteristics of these neighborhoods.

While current infrastructure limitations impact development densities and types, the designated Residential District should be retained for low- and medium-density residential development, along with residential “in-fill” development near the downtown area on smaller pre-existing platted lots. District regulations should be flexible enough to encourage development that is varied in density, land coverage and lot sizes, yet compatible with community character and image. Residential types including various senior housing options, the missing middle, and incremental development types should also be considered when compatible with community character.

Properties located adjacent to South Bar Lake and Lake Michigan face some unique waterfront and environmental considerations, such as issues concerning critical dunes areas, protected species, wetlands, water quality and shoreline protection.

### **Multiple-Family Residential**

The Multiple Family Residential District includes two primary areas: the northern half of the Village along LaCore/Fisher Streets, and between Michigan and Aylsworth Streets in the southern half of the Village. Both districts include vacant or developable property.

### ***Future Land Use Recommendations***

The multi-family residential development category is intended to accommodate a mix of housing types and densities, including single-family, two-family, and multiple-family dwellings, on lots varying in size. Higher density residential uses and missing middle housing types, such as apartments, townhouses, condominiums, and senior housing facilities, may be allowed.

Community uses such as parks, churches, schools, libraries, cemeteries, in-home occupations, health care and social services, and bed and breakfast facilities may also be allowed in this area if designed to be compatible with the residential setting.

# Commercial/Light Industrial

Commercial uses consume 21.6 acres of land, primarily along Front Street, Lake Street, and the M-22 corridor. A large majority of the Village's commercial uses are located on M-22; however, West Front Street is the focal point of the Village, boasting a traditional downtown with businesses and residential uses. Some light industrial uses are found outside the Village's commercial and residential areas.



West Front Street - retail core

## Zoning

There are three commercial zoning districts within the Village, including Village Core, General Commercial, and Light Industrial districts. Retail, service establishments, office space and other traditional commercial uses are permitted within these three districts. Special uses including, but not limited to, lodging, schools/clinics and open air businesses are permitted as special uses.

## West Front Street

The commercial uses located along West Front Street comprise the “downtown” of the Village, and include a blend of residential and commercial uses. This district fosters a strong sense of community and encourages pedestrian access to residential neighborhoods and parks. Features include compact development, a density and arrangement of land uses which encourages pedestrian

activity, and a mix of residential and limited commercial land uses in successful co-existence.

## M-22 Corridor

Basic services such as gas stations, financial institutions and medical facilities are located along the M-22 corridor. These uses serve both residents and visitors alike. Commercial development along M-22 is primarily pedestrian-oriented with accommodations in providing for safe auto-oriented access.

## Light Industrial

The Village is home to a small light industrial area located at the northeast corner of Fisher and Park Street that includes a long-term storage and a food production facility, as well as large dumpsters available for public recycling. To date, no additional property is zoned Light Industrial.

## Issues & Opportunities

### Transportation Connections

Traffic along M-22 creates concerns for pedestrian safety, particularly in the summer months, when traffic levels and congestion are high. The intersection of M-22 and M-72 was upgraded, in recent years, to a four way stop and provides safer, marked pedestrian crosswalks.

### Infrastructure

Any new commercial businesses are required to use a reserve field and a primary field in order to meet regulations of the Benzie-Leelanau Health Department for septic fields. This can limit options for commercial development. Commercial uses may, also, require further investigation to determine future utility infrastructure needs. This includes utilities such as



M-22 retail shops (south side of Empire)

electrical, water, natural gas, communications systems (including wi-fi), as well as roads and sidewalks. A lack of availability of these systems may limit options for commercial development or for design that meets Village priorities for walkability.

**Future Land Use**

**Development Considerations**

- Development should accommodate commercial uses designed to serve the shopping and service needs of pass through traffic as well as local residents and visitors.
- All uses permitted in the residential district, including single and two-family dwellings, multiple-family housing, senior housing, the missing middle, and incremental development types should be considered when uses are compatible with the Village’s character and uses are appropriately mitigated. Development should be consistent with

Empire’s historic character and existing building styles.

- Streetscapes and landscaping are encouraged.
- Parking should be located to the side or behind buildings, with on-street parking in front.
- Well-maintained sidewalks or other non-motorized transportation options should connect commercial uses to residential areas, parks, and other neighborhoods.
- Public uses or activities such as community events are encouraged.
- Sensitive environmental features should be protected, preserved, and enhanced.
- Light industrial use under Special Land Use Permit only.

**Commercial Residential District**

The Commercial Residential district includes properties along M-22. Land uses within this area include retail, office, and service uses, as well as institutional. Residential

uses should be incorporated or allowed. Buildings are one– to two-stories high, with parking located in front of or to the side of buildings.

**Future Land Use Recommendations**

The intent of the Commercial Residential District is to provide a variety of services and retail opportunities for residents and visitors within an environment that is safe for vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic. Consideration should be given to opportunities to incorporate residential development on the second floor of commercial buildings or in other areas within the district. Development in the district should be pedestrian-oriented and walkable with consistent streetscape/landscaping, and parking located to the side or rear of buildings. Design of buildings, signage, and other features should reflect the Village’s unique character.

**Village Core-Mixed Use District**

The Village Core-Mixed Use district includes properties along west Front Street. Land uses within this area include retail, office, service, and institutional uses. Buildings are one– to two-stories high, with minimal setbacks. Parking is located along the street.



Chippewa Run Natural Area

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***Future Land Use  
Recommendations***

The intent of the Village Core is to support and encourage the continuation of the mixed-use character of the district. A balanced blend of residential and commercial uses should be maintained along Front Street to preserve the small-town scale and character of the community. The Front Street area is appropriate for increased retail on the first floor, with residential above. As the balance of residential and commercial uses continues to evolve, issues such as parking, signs, and the overall character of the neighborhood should be continually monitored and addressed through zoning. Development in the district should be pedestrian-oriented with safe auto-oriented access.

**Light Industrial**

The Light Industrial district includes properties that are currently vacant or are home to agricultural processing/distribution activities.

***Future Land Use  
Recommendations***

The intent of the Light Industrial district is to accommodate existing light industrial uses, and to encourage and provide opportunities for additional light industry, including wholesale and warehousing uses as well as activities like research laboratories, high-tech industries, light assembly operations, office space, and commercial uses that support light industrial activities. Activities should not create smoke, gas, odor, dust, noise, or other environmental impacts beyond the property. Impacts of any light industrial activities should be mitigated and shielded from surrounding properties. Development in the district should be designed with measures to ensure appropriate vehicular access, attractive building facades, and significant landscaping to shield impacts of any light industrial activities from surrounding properties.

# Community Facilities, Services, and Public Land

A high quality of life and place depend in part on the availability of adequate and efficient community services. Well-maintained roads, parks, and public buildings support existing residents and pave the way for future investment and development.

## Wetlands

The Village of Empire possesses three important wetland areas. These resources provide wildlife habitat, protect groundwater/ drinking water, filter pollutants from surface runoff, possess recreational value and help in the prevention and mitigation of flooding. Wetlands are biologically rich and diverse places to observe plants and animals in their natural habitat.

## Water/Wastewater

Empire is served with a public water system. A 100,000-gallon underground cement reservoir storage tank is located south of the Village on U.S. government property. Four wells presently service the community; an 80 gallon per minute well at the public beach, a 90 gallon per minute and a 105 gallon per minute well at Shalda Park, and 250 gallon per minute well along M-22 north. At present, each residence and business has its own private septic drain field to dispose of sewage, with the exception of the New Neighborhood which is served by

several small community septic systems.

## Solid Waste

Solid waste is collected by private haulers and placed in Glen's Landfill in the Maple City area, a privately owned landfill. Community recycling dumpsters are located at the east end of Fisher Street to receive recyclable materials. This facility was funded by the Leelanau County recycling program.

## Village Public/Quasi-Public Facilities

Over 250 acres of land are devoted to public/quasi-public facilities and open space properties. These include the Post Office, Glen Lake Community Library, Township Hall, Fire Department facilities, Public Works maintenance garage, Village Office, the Empire Area Historic Museum, the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (including a Visitor Center located on private property leased to the Federal Government), Village parklands and open space, as well as the natural area owned by the Leelanau Conservancy. The museum was established by the Empire Historic Society and is on land leased by Empire Township on LaCore.

## Public Safety

The Leelanau County Sheriff's Department provides police protection for the Village. The Glen Lake Fire and Rescue Department

(GLFD), is a 24 hour a day, seven days a week service, staffed by a full-time chief and staff supplemented by a small contingent of part-time personnel. All Department members are certified Michigan firefighters and/ officers and licensed as either paramedics (EMT-P) or basic emergency medical technicians (EMT-B). The Department operates from two stations: the Public Safety Building, located at 6401 W. State Street in Glen Arbor, is staffed full-time with one paramedic and three firefighter/ EMT-Bs; The Fire Station in Empire, located at 11350 LaCore, is staffed full-time with two firefighter/EMTs. Shift staffing is augmented during the peak, summer months and personnel and equipment from either or both stations will respond to calls separately or together, depending on the nature and location of each incident. The Fire and Rescue Department provides Advanced Life Support (ALS) medical services, including transport, fire fighting services, vehicle extrication, high angle rescue at the Dunes, search and rescue, plus newly added marine rescue and fire fighting for Glen Lake and Lake Michigan in coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard.

The National Park also responds to public safety situations including traffic enforcement.

## Transportation

The historic center of Empire contains a grid-street pattern. While some anomalies exist, such as some narrower rights-of-ways and skewed road intersection angles, general traffic operates well in and around the Village as identified by the Village's recently adopted Transportation Plan.

State Highways M-22 and M-72 intersect at the corner of Front Street and LaCore Street. Highway M-22 provides the primary north and south access into the community and M-72 is the primary link to eastern Leelanau County and the Traverse City area to the east.

The official Act 51 street inventory shows 1.42 miles of major streets and with the recent addition of Lambkin Lane to the Village street network there are approximately 5.50 miles of local streets, along with 1.88 miles of State Highways within the Village. State Highway traffic counts have estimated average daily traffic (ADT) on the two State Highways. M-22 south of M-72 carries 1,400 ADT. M-22 north of town has an ADT of 2,200 trips. M-72 east of town has an ADT of 2,100.

The road right-of-way amounts to an estimated 21 acres of State Primary Highways, 35 acres in local streets, nine acres in major streets, and two acres in public alleys. In all, 67 acres or 13.7 percent of the Village area is space devoted to street right-of-way.



Village Office and Department of Public Works

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### Non-Motorized Transportation

A number of non-motorized transportation systems exist within and near the Village. In addition to a network of sidewalks within the Village, the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail, a multi-modal trail that extends through the National Park to Cleveland Township, includes a route through the Village. The Michigan Shore-to-Shore riding and hiking trail follows an abandoned railroad right-of-way to the east of the Village, with connections to and through the Village. The route uses the Niagara and Front Street right-of-way and the south side of M-72.

### Public Transportation

The Village is served by a dial-a-ride bus system that makes five round trips daily between Empire and Traverse City. Bus service is provided by the Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA), which serves Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties.

### Air Transportation

The William B. Bolton Airport is owned jointly by the Village of Empire and Empire Township. It is managed by the Empire Airport Authority, with representatives from both the Village and Township. The airport serves the general Empire area with hangars, runway lights, tie-downs, and an administrative building. The airport is located three miles east of the Village and two miles south on Benzonia Trail.

Commercial air service for the region is provided primarily by the Cherry Capital Airport, located in Traverse City.

### Public Buildings

About nine (9) acres in the Village (1.5%) are categorized as institutional or public uses. The Village office and Department of Public Works is located on LaCore Street. The Empire Township Hall is located on Front Street, which provides important community



Johnson Park Pavilion (owned by the Empire Lions Club)

meeting and event space. Also located on Front Street is the Glen Lake Community Library, which is set to undergo a major expansion in 2019-2020. Other institutional uses include the Fire Hall, along with a number of churches.

### Natural Areas and Parks

Despite its small size, the Village is home to a wealth of natural areas and parks, including:

- Chippewa Run Natural Area (Leelanau Conservancy)
- Johnson Park (Empire Lions Club)
- Lake Michigan Beach Park
- Shalda Park
- Village Nature Preserve
- Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (US National Park Service)

These parks and their amenities, along with goals and objectives for each park, are detailed in the Village of Empire Recreation Plan.

Sensitive environmental features such as the state-designated Critical Sand Dune Areas, the protected flora and fauna, the woodlands on the east side of South Bar Lake and in the northeast quarter of the Village, the dune west of Lake St., the Lake

Michigan shoreline beach and the steep, wooded hillsides to the south must be preserved to maintain the beauty of Empire’s natural setting.

## Issues and Opportunities

### Traffic and Pedestrian Safety

During the summer months, congestion occurs along the primary state highways and their major intersections. Traffic congestion and parking overflows or shortages result from the growing number of cars and recreational vehicles using the downtown and beach areas. As the National Park and Village experience increased visitation, pedestrian or non-motorized routes become more important.

### Waste Water Infrastructure

The Village currently does not have a municipal (community) sanitary sewer system, which may be a limiting factor to commercial and some residential growth and development in the Village. The Village commissioned a formal waste water feasibility study in April of 2016 and a Village feasibility study committee was formed. Upon completion of this exploratory study, the Village Council held three review

sessions of the study in the fall of 2018. On October 23, 2018, the Village Council formally accepted the Waste Water Study from the committee and “unanimously agreed to be open to any person or organization who comes before the Council with a viable, well-considered plan to solving specific economic (commercial) or residential waster water issue”. Public input and Master Plan Committee discussions throughout the development of the 2019 Master Plan identified questions and issues related to a waste water system, including costs, impact on development and community support.

## Future Land Use

### Development Considerations

- Development should be consistent with Empire’s historic character and existing building styles.
- Sidewalks or other non-motorized transportation options should connect commercial uses to residential areas, parks, and other neighborhoods.
- Public uses or activities such as community events are encouraged—especially during the “shoulder seasons”.
- Sensitive environmental features should be protected, preserved, and enhanced.

### Recreation/Parkland

The Recreation/Parkland district includes property in the northeast corner of the Village; along the southern Village boundary; and along the south end of South Bar Lake.

## **Future Land Use Recommendations**

The Recreation/Parkland category is designed to accommodate existing recreation property, areas for future recreation use, or other sensitive resource areas. This land use category will allow for low-intensity recreation development, as well as low-density residential uses consistent with recreational and conservation uses.

The Recreation/Parkland category incorporates Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore property. This public property is a highly-valued asset for the residents, businesses, and visitors, and it is the Village's intention to work cooperatively with the Park Service. Also included in this category is the Village-owned beach/park on Lake Michigan, as well as Johnson Park and Shalda Park, and the Chippewa Run preserve, owned and protected by the Leelanau Conservancy.

Development in or use of the Recreation/Parkland land use category should be consistent with the Village's Recreation Plan goals, including the goal to "provide and maintain community and recreation lands and facilities for safe access and enjoyment by residents and visitors."

Primary uses proposed in the Recreation/Parkland area include public and private forestry, wildlife habitat, parks and recreation, as well as similar open space uses. Secondary uses include low-density residential development.

# Chapter 6:

## Vision, Goals, & Objectives

One of the fundamental roles of a Master Plan is to provide a blueprint for the future, through the establishment of a vision, goals, and objectives. A vision is a long-term view of the community, while goals provide general direction and serve as a description of the desired future. They address issues and specific needs, but are broad in scope. Objectives are a tangible means of achieving goals.

The vision, goals and objectives in this chapter are intended to guide future development, policy initiatives, and other activities in a manner that reflects the community's values and priorities.



West Front Street retail shops

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These goals were developed using the Master Plan Committee's and public input, previously adopted plans and studies, and analysis of

current conditions, as discussed in previous plan chapters.

### Vision, Goals, Objectives, & Actions

In order to appropriately administer goals, objectives and strategies—and to ensure that progress is being made towards the community's vision—it's important to understand the roles of each and their relationship to each other.

- **A Vision** is a picture of where or what the community wants to be in the future.
- **Goals** provide general direction and serve as a description of the desired future. They address issues and specific needs, but are broad in scope.
- **Objectives** are a means of achieving goals, and are attainable.
- **Action Strategies** set forth the specifics necessary to accomplish objectives. One strategy might be used to accomplish multiple objectives; or an objective might require multiple strategies. Action strategies identify implementation tools (such as zoning changes) and the players involved in meeting goals and objectives.

# Future Empire: Vision

*The Village of Empire provides and preserves a quality of life for a diverse group of residents and businesses that reflects the Village's unique natural environment and small village atmosphere, while reflecting past history and our small village values, and to create a Village that is economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable.*

View from Empire Bluff Trail



# Goals & Objectives: Land Use & Development

## **Objective: Preserve and enhance unique community character and sense of place**

### **Actions:**

- Preserve the friendly, quiet and safe atmosphere found within the community
- Promote Empire as a walkable community.
- Explore modifications and amendment of the Village of Empire Commercial Residential (CR) Zoning District to separate, refine and enhance development standards within the Village commercial core, i.e., along Front Street and within the commercial corridor along M-22 Highway. A safe, pedestrian-oriented approach within the Village core and the safe pedestrian and vehicle-based transportation within the M-22 commercial corridor, and their connectivity, should guide this effort.
- Preserve the beauty of the natural environment and the vitality of the dune areas
- Protect water quality –both groundwater and surface water.
- Continue and expand community planting program.
- Promote the preservation and protection of historic sites, buildings and features in the Village.
- Encourage local community historic preservation and interpretations programs.
- Consider zoning changes to include design standards in line with the Village’s historic character and development patterns.
- Sensitive environmental resources including wetlands and water quality should be protected, preserved and enhanced.
- Consider options and MEDC Redevelopment Ready Communities best practices to make zoning more user-friendly and efficient.
- Continue to review and update the zoning ordinance as necessary.
- Continue to support testing and possible remediation of South Bar Lake and participate with the Leelanau County Clean Water Group.

# Goals & Objectives: Housing

**Objective: Provide for a range of housing types, sizes, and densities to ensure housing options for all incomes, ages, household sizes, and abilities conducive to the Village's small town character**

**Actions:**

- Preserve the scale and character of existing established neighborhoods.
- Explore possible partnerships with employers in the area for housing affordable to the local workforce.
- Encourage Empire Township to explore multifamily housing implementation options.
- Maintain and enhance the mix of housing to meet the varied economic needs of the community.
- Explore zoning changes to allow additional or diverse housing types throughout the Village.
- Explore zoning options for assisted living facilities.
- Explore federal, state and local financial incentives for encouraging quality long-term rental opportunities for all income levels.
- Explore and evaluate seasonal rentals in the Village.

# Goals & Objectives: Public Infrastructure

**Objective: Maintain, improve, and expand the Village facilities including infrastructure consistent with the community needs.**

**Actions:**

- Continue to review and update the Village adopted Capital Improvement Plan.
- Continue to examine the feasibility of implementing Village-wide infrastructure to address growth and encourage economic development including, but not limited to, waste water options, electrical, water, natural gas, communications systems (including wi-fi), roads, sidewalks, public washrooms and greenspaces.
- Promote continued cooperation between the Village and the Township on possible cost-savings initiatives.
- Explore the feasibility of burying utility lines village-wide.
- Explore the feasibility of implementing Village wide “green” technology (solar, wind, LED, etc).
- Explore and pursue opportunities to implement recommendations of the Village Transportation Plan.
- Consider the development of a Village Tree Maintenance Plan.
- Establish physical space to support community center activities and groups like the Empire Area Community Center.

## Goals & Objectives: Intergovernmental Cooperation

### **Objective:**

**Work with surrounding communities; other local, state and federal agencies; and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians to engage in sound cooperation where appropriate.**

### **Actions:**

- Explore forming a formal partnership with the National Park on issues such as workforce housing, transportation of visitors, enhancing accessibility, encouraging economic development, etc.
- Coordinate with other units of government as appropriate to address specific multi- jurisdictional issues as they arise, such as issues related to land use planning, recreation, public services, or transportation, including non-motorized pathways and connections.

# Goals & Objectives: Economic Development

**Objective: Promote Empire as an economically viable community which supports recreation, tourism, and small businesses.**

**Actions:**

- Encourage the addition of grocery/convenience stores, entertainment/restaurant options and/or other basic commercial services.
- Continue to promote the Village as a tourist/recreation destination essential to the existing and future economy.
- Explore the possibility of establishing formal partnerships with the National Park Service and surrounding communities to address seasonal influx by identifying potential availability of services, such as housing and transportation, for the seasonal workforce.
- Consider zoning changes to promote consistent design for M-22 development that is consistent with Village character, and to preserve and enhance existing character along Front Street.
- Encourage compatible commercial design standards.
- Coordinate and communicate with various State agencies for grant opportunities specific to the Village's needs, including the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program.
- Pursue participation in the MEDC Redevelopment Ready Communities program to gain access to its experience and knowledge base, best practices, and financial assistance through grants and other funding opportunities in support of Village projects, goals, and vital assets.

# Goals & Objectives: Community Character & Attractions

**Objective: Maintain our unique community character for enjoyment by residents and visitors alike.**

**Actions:**

- Continue to strive for high-quality maintenance of the beaches and parks as they are one of the most visited destinations in the Village.
- Market the Village as a “destination” by highlighting proximity and accessibility to the natural environment, including the National Park.
- Ensure the availability of ample green space measured against possible new development.
- Consider design guidelines, zoning regulations, and other policies that ensure growth or development is consistent with Village values and character.
- Continue to host and encourage events promoting the Village’s values and character.

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Sleeping Bear Marathon—start and end at Empire Lake Michigan Park Beach



# Goals & Objectives: Recreation Goal

**See Village of Empire Recreation Plan - Appendix E**

# Chapter 7: Implementation

## Zoning Plan

Zoning has traditionally been the primary means of implementation for most master plans. Further, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) requires the Master Plan to include a zoning plan, showing how land use categories on the future land use map relate to the zoning map. The Future Land Use Map and district descriptions act as the Village of Empire Village Zoning Plan. The proposed land uses illustrated on the future land use plan map are a guide and not intended to indicate the precise boundary between uses. These uses could vary depending on how a specific proposal relates to existing uses and to the plan.

Many goals and objectives in the Master Plan can be addressed through continued administration and implementation of, or changes to, the Village Zoning Ordinance. The Village should review and evaluate existing regulations to determine where and if changes are needed to encourage or accommodate the desired intent of the future land use map. As part of this review, the Village should also explore the possibility of implementing or reviewing regulatory techniques, including form-based zoning, the refinement of commercial zoning regulations within the Village core and along



Empire Lake Michigan Beach Park

the M-22 corridor and planned unit developments (PUD), that allow for safe pedestrian pathways and for the community to protect public safety and preserve its most valued characteristics while allowing for new development and redevelopment in areas that represent opportunities for infill and redevelopment.

## Rezoning and Conditional Rezoning

In many cases, current zoning allows for the use of properties in a way that is consistent with the intent of the Future Land Use Map. However, in some cases, rezoning may be needed to allow for the intended uses or development types of the Future Land Use Map.

Conditional zoning is a technique permitted in Michigan which allows a property owner to voluntarily attach conditions to a rezoning request. These conditions restrict the development of the property to that scenario proposed by the applicant, and must be offered by the applicant—not imposed by the local government. This technique may be useful in circumstances where possible impacts to adjacent uses are a concern.

## Capital Improvements, Grants, and Spending

While many Village planning goals will be implemented through zoning or other policies, some projects or



Empire Industrial Zone

objectives will require local expenditures. Because some expenses or improvements may be eligible for grant funding, the Village should pursue grant opportunities as appropriate. Other, non-grant funded spending needs will be addressed in the Village budget, which is adopted annually and addresses expenditures for facilities, maintenance, staffing, and other administrative functions.

To aid in the budgeting process, the Village should maintain and update its capital improvements plan (CIP), which provides a blueprint for capital expenditures such as roads, utility improvements, parks, and heavy equipment. A CIP offers important budgeting guidance for Village assets, helps the Village use tax revenues efficiently, aids in administration, and supports grant applications.

## Leadership and Public Input

The Village Council is elected every four years to represent the

community. Responsibilities include adopting plans and ordinances, setting tax rates, authorizing expenditures and borrowing, hiring administrative staff, providing oversight of public facilities, and other duties as necessary. The Council also appoints the Village Planning Commission, which is charged with development of plans and zoning ordinances, along with review of development proposals. Both elected and appointed leadership should attend regular training sessions on planning and zoning fundamentals, best practices, and emerging and innovative approaches to community development.

To ensure that the community is responsive to community and development needs while protecting the public health, safety, and welfare, the Village Council, Planning Commission, and staff should engage in regular, open communication with the community. Regular focus groups, public discussions, or other forum type opportunities should be

considered as a means to continuously obtain input and feedback. Pre-development meetings with property owners or developers should be available and encouraged to clarify ordinance requirements and approval procedures.

## Partnerships and Citizen Engagement

While many of the plan’s objectives may be addressed through Village policies, ordinances, or other regulations, many of the goals and objectives will require strong partnerships with community stakeholders.

The plan recommends pursuing partnerships with local service clubs, schools, nonprofits, regional agencies, and other levels of government. Partnerships broaden the scope of available grant dollars and other revenue, encourage citizen engagement in community activities, and enhance staff capacities and efficiencies. Possible partners may include:

- Leelanau County
- Neighboring units of government
- Glen Lake Public Schools
- Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District
- Chamber of Commerce
- Networks Northwest
- SEEDS
- Leelanau Conservancy

- Friends of Sleeping Bear
- National Park Service
- Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency
- Northwestern Michigan College
- Michigan State Housing Development Authority
- Michigan Department of Transportation
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- Watershed Center

Partnerships with some of these organizations may provide volunteer capital to implement some small-scale community projects. Volunteer activities will be critical to building citizen engagement and community pride.

To ensure that partnerships are efficient and effective, the Village may wish to consider partnership agreements that clearly identify responsibilities, accountability, and length of commitment.

## Plan Updates

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that all plans be reviewed, and updated if necessary, every 5 years. While comprehensive updates may not occur as often as every 5 years, regular review of the plan and its objectives will be important to ensure that the plan and related ordinances are effective, whether the goals and objectives are being addressed, whether the plan’s policies are still relevant and appropriate, and which

objectives remain to be addressed.

During the plan review, several objectives should be identified and prioritized as an implementation schedule, in order to help focus the Planning Commission’s activity throughout the year.

The Recreation Plan should be reviewed and updated every five years, to ensure that goals are relevant and objectives are being addressed.

## Provision of Municipal Services

The provision of municipal services, including water and sewer infrastructure, is one way that many communities address or achieve local plan objectives. While the Village of Empire provides municipal water, sanitary sewer services are not available. Because the lack of sewer services may limit options for new development and redevelopment, it’s important for the Village to consider the impacts, cost, and potential benefits of building a sewer system or

alternative sewer system options in the Village. Engineering studies and ongoing community discussions can help the Village explore these issues and determine whether, where, and how to expand infrastructure to accommodate new development or address Master Plan goals and objectives.

In addition, the Village will also consider providing assistance in street and other utility improvements within designated rights-of-way or in alternative rights-of-way, per the Village Transportation Plan. Typically, the Village will act as the vehicle to obtain grants and loans or will establish special assessment districts for financing such improvements.

## Preservation of Village Character

The beauty, visual appearance, and historic characteristics shall be, to the extent possible, preserved in any implementation efforts.

The Empire Sunset

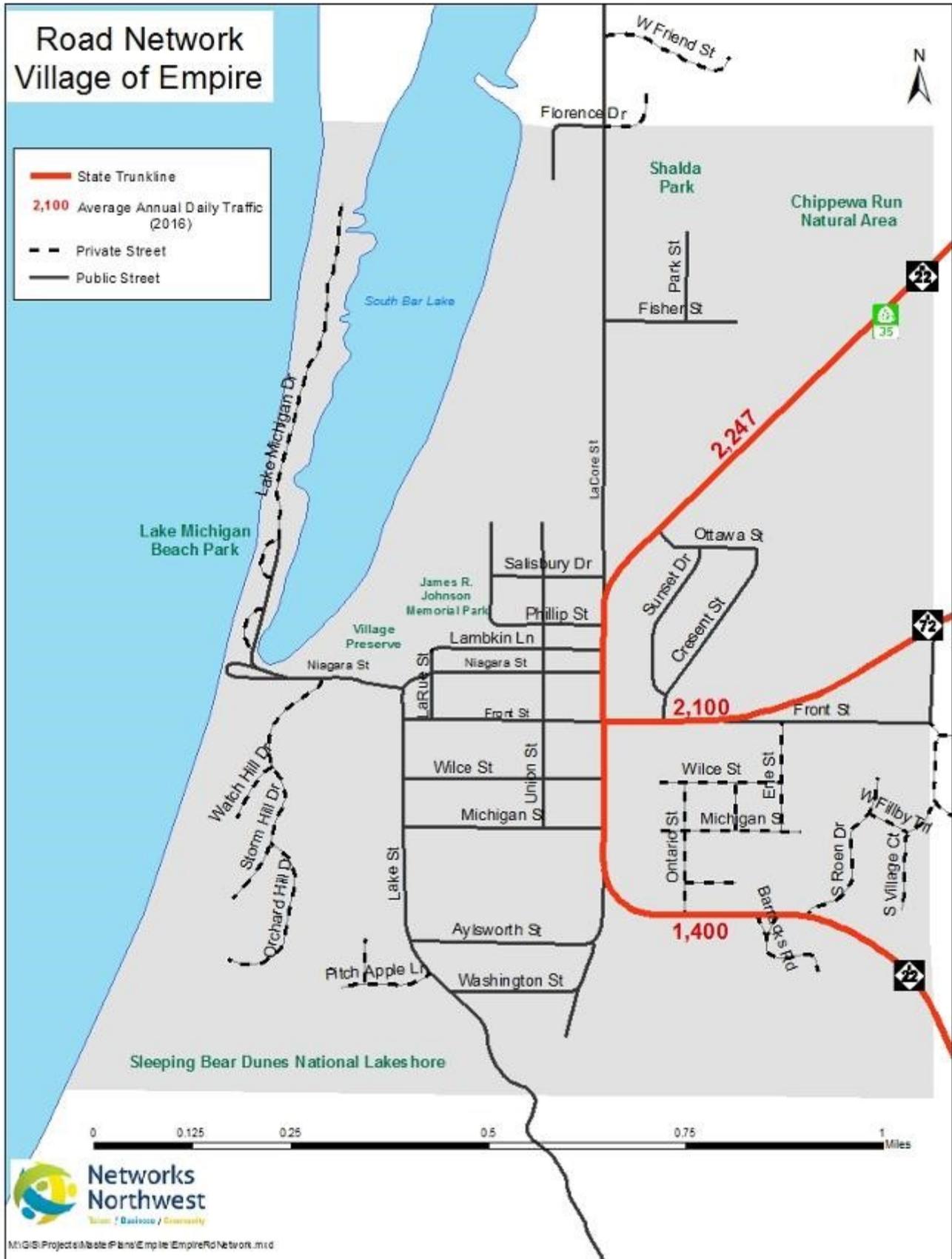


## Appendix A

### Leelanau County Endangered Species

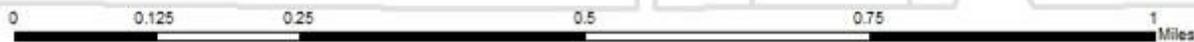
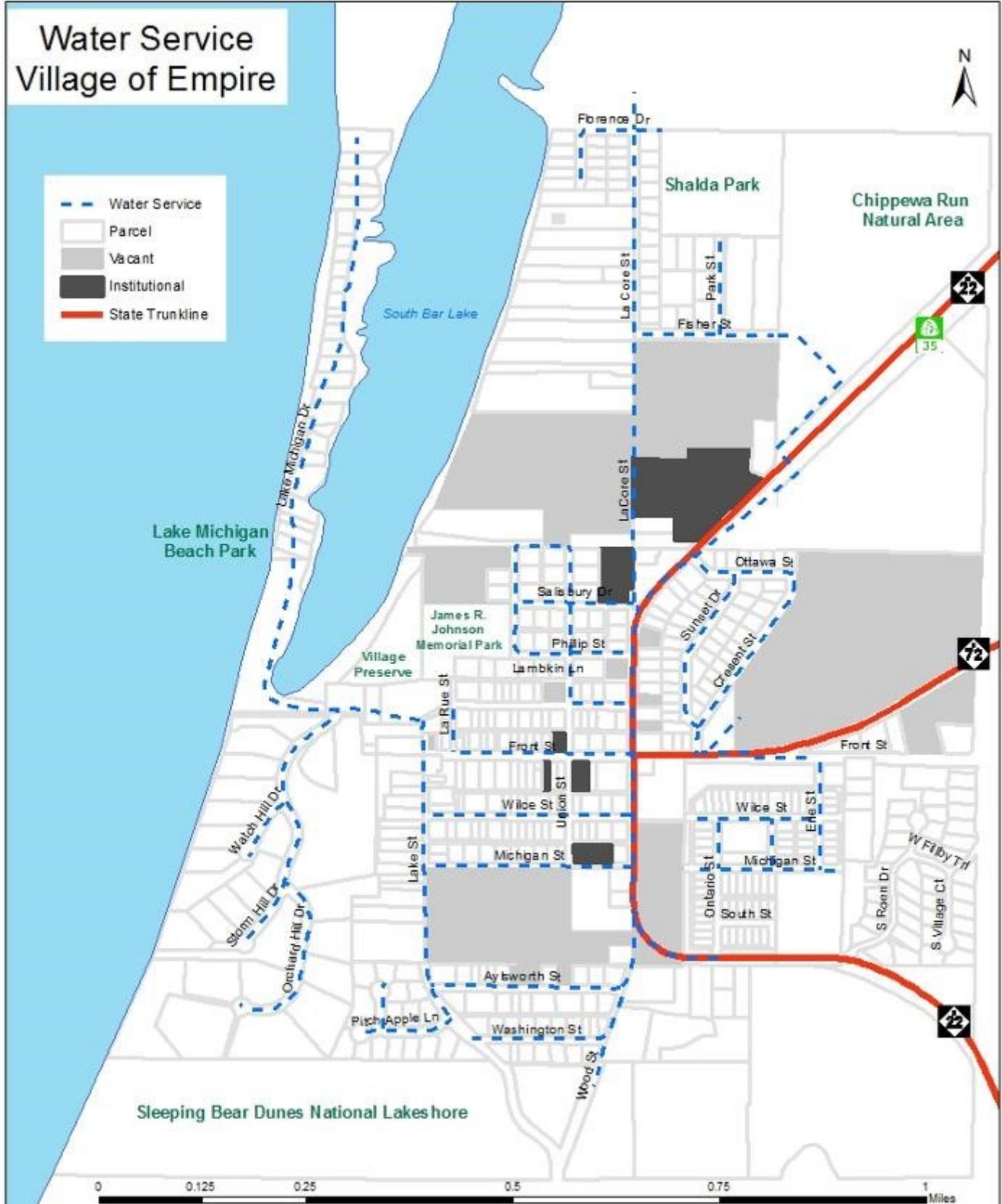
<a href="#"><u>Indiana bat</u></a> <i>(Myotis sodalis)</i>	Endangered	Summer habitat includes small to medium river and stream corridors with well developed riparian woods; woodlots within 1 to 3 miles of small to medium rivers and streams; and upland forests. Caves and mines as hibernacula.
<a href="#"><u>Northern long-eared bat</u></a> <i>(Myotis septentrionalis)</i>	Threatened	Hibernates in caves and mines - swarming in surrounding wooded areas in autumn. Roosts and forages in upland forests during spring and summer.
<a href="#"><u>Piping plover</u></a> <i>(Charadrius melodus)</i>	Endangered  <a href="#"><u>Critical Habitat</u></a>	Beaches along shorelines of the Great Lakes
<a href="#"><u>Rufa Red Knot</u></a>	Threatened	Only actions that occur along coastal areas during the Red Knot migratory window of MAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 30
<a href="#"><u>Michigan monkey-flower</u></a> <i>(Mimulus michiganensis)</i>	Endangered	Soils saturated with cold flowing spring water; found along seepages, streams and lakeshores
<a href="#"><u>Pitcher's thistle</u></a> <i>(Cirsium pitcheri)</i>	Threatened	Stabilized dunes and blowout areas

# Appendix B Infrastructure Maps



# Water Service Village of Empire

-  Water Service
-  Parcel
-  Vacant
-  Institutional
-  State Trunkline



This map is intended for reference only and represents a geographical interpretation, NOT a formal survey.

## Appendix C

### 2012 Master Plan Data

Table 1  
**Population Change (1940-2010)**  
 Village of Empire, Empire Township and Leelanau County

	1940	Percent Change 1940-50	1950	Percent Change 1950-60	1960	Percent Change 1960-70	1970	Percent Change 1970-80	1980	Percent Change 1980-90	1990	Percent Change 1990-00	2000	Percent Change 2000-10	2010
<b>Village of Empire</b>	266	-5.6	251	78.5	448	- 8.7	409	-15.6	345	2.9	355	6.5	378	-0.8	373
<b>Empire Township (excluding Village)</b>	325	-15.7	274	37.2	376	45.5	547	-16.6	456	10.3	503	40.6	707	14.4	809
<b>Leelanau County</b>	8,436	2.5	8,647	7.8	9,321	16.6	10,872	28.8	14,007	18.0	16,527	27.8	21,119	2.8	21,708

Note: Township populations, excluding the Village, are provided in parentheses; percent change is calculated for the entire Township, including Village portion.  
 Source: Northwest Michigan Council of Governments

Table 2  
**Age Distribution**  
 Village of Empire, Leelanau County, State – 2000 and 2010

Age Group	Village of Empire					Leelanau County		State	
	2000		2010		% Change 2000-2010	2000	2010	2000	2010
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent		Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
0-4 years	8	2.1	18	4.8	125.0	5.1	4.3	6.8	6.0
5-17 years	51	13.5	32	8.5	-37.3	19.3	15.2	19.3	17.7
18-24 years	24	6.3	8	2.1	-66.7	5.7	5.7	9.4	9.9
25-44 years	73	19.3	63	16.8	-13.7	24.2	16.9	29.8	24.7
45-64 years	133	35.2	143	38.1	7.5	28.3	34.4	22.4	27.9
65 +	89	23.5	111	29.6	24.7	17.4	23.4	12.3	13.8
<b>Total</b>	378		375		-0.8				
<b>Median Age</b>	49.1		56.8			42.6	50.3	35.5	38.9

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100 percent.  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Table 3  
**Seasonal Housing Characteristics**  
 Village of Empire, Empire Township, Leelanau County and State of Michigan - 2010

	Total Units	Seasonal Units	% Seasonal
<b>Village of Empire</b>	347	113	32.6
<b>Empire Township</b>	1,088	442	40.6
<b>Leelanau County</b>	14,935	4,681	31.3
<b>State of Michigan</b>	4,532,233	263,071	5.8

Source: US Census Bureau Census 2010

## Appendix C

### 2012 Master Plan Data (continued)

Table 4 Value of Specified Owner-Occupied Housing Units Village of Empire – 2005-2009	
Housing Values	Percent of Units
Less than \$50,000	0.0
\$50,000 - 99,000	1.7
\$100,000 - 149,000	11.3
\$150,000 - 199,000	19.1
\$200,000 - 299,000	42.6
\$300,000 or more	25.2
Median Value	\$238,000
Source: US Census Bureau Community Survey (2005-2009)	

Table 5 Income Statistics Village of Empire, Empire Township, Leelanau County and State of Michigan (in 2009 inflation-adjusted dollars)				
	Number of Households			State of Michigan
	Village of Empire	Empire Township	Leelanau County	
<b>Total Households</b>	172	563	9,354	
<b>Households Income Levels</b>				
Less than \$10,000	30	44	449	
\$10,000 to \$14,999	13	18	299	
\$15,000 to \$24,999	22	34	1,098	
\$25,000 to \$34,999	23	105	1,064	
\$35,000 to \$49,999	40	124	1,436	
\$50,000 to \$74,999	6	95	1,789	
\$75,000 to \$99,999	18	57	1,258	
\$100,000 to \$149,999	14	36	1,169	
\$150,000 to \$199,999	6	33	366	
\$200,000 or more	0	17	426	
<b>Median household income</b>	32,045	43,973	54,451	\$ 48,700
<b>Per capita income</b>	28,000	35,109	31,874	\$ 25,172
Source: US Census Bureau Community Survey (2005-2009)				

## Appendix C

### 2012 Master Plan Data (continued)

Table 6 Civilian Labor Force Comparisons and Unemployment Leelanau County and State of Michigan 2006-2010						
	Leelanau County			State of Michigan (in 1,000's)		
	2010	2008	2006	2010	2008	2006
Labor Force	10,769	11,234	11,628	4,790	4,936	5,068
Employed	9,684	10,544	11,048	4,193	4,519	4,719
Unemployed	1,085	690	580	597	416	350
Unemployment Rate %	10.1	6.1	5.0	12.5	8.4	6.9

Source: Office of Labor Market Information, Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget

Table 7 Employment by Industry 2009 Village and County				
Industry	Village of Empire		Leelanau County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining	0	0.0	430	4.4
Construction	20	15.3	1,065	10.9
Manufacturing	3	2.3	774	7.9
Wholesale trade	12	9.2	204	2.1
Retail trade	46	35.1	1,108	11.3
Transportation warehousing, and utilities	0	0.0	315	3.2
Information	3	2.3	163	1.7
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	6	4.6	537	5.5
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	2	1.5	837	8.5
Educational, health, and social services	20	15.3	2,463	25.2
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services	11	8.4	1,279	13.1
Other services (except public administration)	6	4.6	406	4.1
Public administration	2	1.5	211	2.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Community Survey (2005-2009)

## Appendix C

### 2012 Master Plan Data (continued)

Table 8

**Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore**  
Comparative Annual Public Use Data

Year	Total Visits	Coast Guard Station	Dune Climb	Stocking S. Drive	Esch Road	Platte River	Visitor Center
2011	1,348,304	30,999	96,738	113,400	28,726	83,482	196,945
2010	1,280,934	30,561	84,738	101,094	34,921	81,598	170,251
2009	1,165,836	27,297	81,320	94,853	28,321	73,686	158,982
2008	1,104,597	22,720	78,928	82,527	28,008	74,414	135,978
2007	1,134,312	21,986	83,315	78,837	31,798	79,363	133,421
2006	1,147,314	22,120	89,080	78,753	25,547	84,008	118,836
2005	1,218,410	22,466	92,593	89,278	25,547	86,708	117,032
2004	1,114,615	31,402	83,474	82,327	22,974	79,713	123,119
2003	1,153,962	26,307	83,645	84,297	25,022	80,037	137,780
2002	1,170,873	28,580	81,795	85,741	28,012	85,822	126,887
2001	1,127,107	32,549	73,796	82,265	25,007	81,035	125,577
2000	1,195,084	38,182	66,791	50,990	31,205	84,060	132,427
1999	1,364,834	30,274	93,149	90,316	35,683	114,088	134,808
1998	1,298,205	29,049	98,332	100,660	31,888	90,477	89,828
1997	1,157,616	25,745	92,287	89,846	23,764	77,566	71,028
1996	1,091,005	18,434	82,779	81,517	23,120	84,301	70,466
1995	1,151,957	24,958	83,345	97,282	23,477	79,213	73,278
1994	1,159,676	26,217	84,472	125,621	36,047	79,289	80,987

Source: U.S. National Park Service

# Appendix D

## Zoning Table—Schedule of Regulations

### Section 4.09 Schedule of Regulations

Zoning District	District Name	Min. Lot Area		Max.Ht of Structure	Yard Setbacks					Min. space btwn Bldgs	Min. & Max. SF per D.U or Main bldg	Maximum Lot Coverage %
		Area (sq. ft)	Width (ft)		Feet (a)	Front (ft)	Min. Side (ft)	Min. Rear (ft)	Min. Alley			
GR	General Residential	12,500	100	35	20 min	10	10	10	20	20	900	25% (b)
MR	Mixed Residential	2 ac (c)	150	35	40 min	20	20	20 (d)	20	40	1 BR- 540/ DU 2 BR 700/DU	40% (b)
VR	Village Residential	6,250	50	35	10 min 20 max	5	10	10	---	10	750	50%
CR	Commercial Residential	5,000	50	35	5 min 20 max	0 (e) (f)	10 (f)	10	---	10 (g)	750	70%
LI	Light Industrial	1 acre	100	35	20 min	15 (f)	20	10	---	10	NA	60%
R/C	Recreation/Conservation	3 acres	300	35	10 min	10	20	20	20	20	900	10%
PUD	Planned Unit Development	See Article 7		See Article 7								

- a) Maximum height for an accessory building shall be 25 feet or the height of the primary structure, whichever is less.
- b) Existing 50' wide (or less) platted lots shall be permitted a maximum of 50 percent building coverage.
- c) A minimum of 8,700 square feet of lot area is required per dwelling unit.
- d) Minimum setback from an internal drive serving multiple family dwellings, shall be 10 feet.
- e) Minimum 0' side yard setback applies when a commercial use is adjacent to a commercial use, the setback is increased to 5' for a commercial use adjacent to a residential use, or for a residential use adjacent to another residential use.
- f) Except when adjacent to a different zoning district, the greater of the two district side setback standards applies.
- g) The minimum building spacing does not apply for the portion of a building utilizing the zero setback provision, provided a firewall is provided between buildings located on the property line.

Key: D.U. --Dwelling Unit      sq. ft. --square feet      ft. --feet

Article 4: Districts  
 Village of Empire Zoning Ordinance      4-15      Amended: December 8, 2011  
 Effective: December 29, 2011



# EMPIRE TRANSPORTATION PLAN



**LSL PLANNING**

**MAY 26,  
2015**



# VILLAGE OF EMPIRE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Development of this Transportation Plan was made possible through grant funding provided by the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments.

Time and effort provided by:

*Empire Village Council:*

- Susan Carpenter, President
- Patricia Zoyhofski, Clerk
- Grace Ronkaitis, Treasurer
- Soni Aylsworth, Trustee
- Sam Barr, Trustee
- Dan Davis, Trustee
- Chris Frey, Trustee
- Gerry Shiffman, Trustee
- Lanny Sterling, Trustee

*Empire Village Planning Commission:*

- Randy Nelson, Chairman
- Phil Deering, Vice Chairman
- Teresa Howes, Treasurer
- Maggie Bacon
- Sam Barr
- Robin Johnson
- Peter Schous

*Empire Village Staff:*

- William Fuller, Zoning Administrator
- Val Dalton, Recording Secretary
- Darlene Friend, Administrative Coordinator

*Illustrations provided by Frank C. Clements, FASLA*

Technical assistance from LSL Planning and Progressive AE:

Northwest Michigan  
Council of Governments



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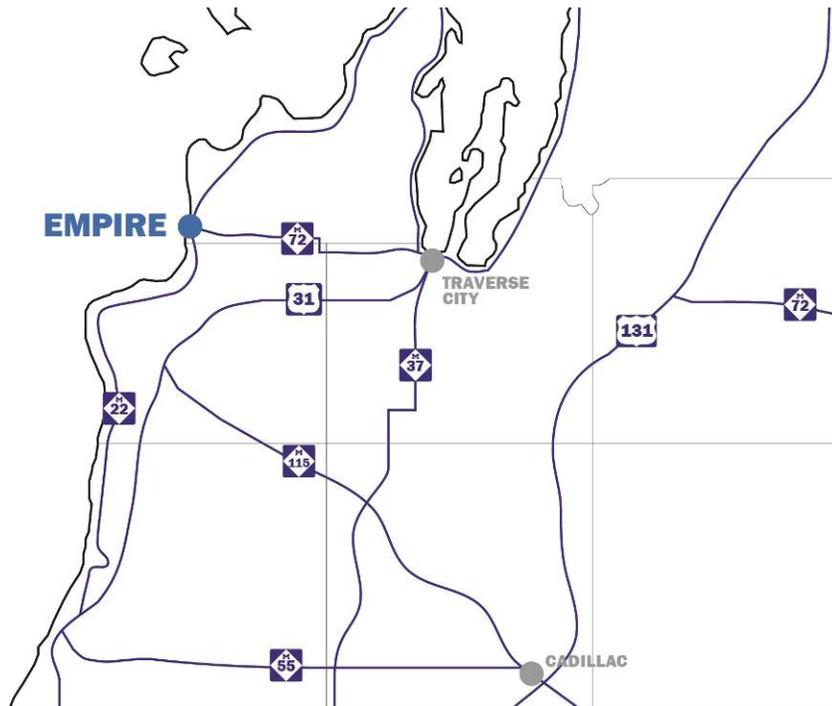
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## INTRODUCTION

Empire is nestled amidst some of Michigan's most notable attractions. Both year-round and seasonal residents are attracted by the area's beauty, small town living and proximity to nearby destinations. Those features bring with them some challenges to meet the transportation needs in a way that retains the Village's charm. Village leaders have prepared this Transportation Plan to help guide investment and decisions for improvements and changes to the Village's system of roads and off-road trails. This includes areas located within the road rights-of-way throughout the Village, but also areas where off-road trails may be needed for non-motorized mobility.



The main point of transportation activity in the Village of Empire occurs where the two state trunk lines, M-22 and M-72, intersect just east of downtown Empire. These trunk lines are mostly designed to carry vehicular and motorized traffic, and generally divide the Village into three distinct areas.

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) recently improved M-22 through the Village, installing wider road shoulders using a grant obtained by the village to incorporate sidewalks, street trees, and other traffic calming devices that were only partially implemented. More could be done to accommodate the non-motorized community. One of the key tenets of this Transportation Plan is to consider safety and flow of traffic not just for cars and trucks, but for all people – all users – of all ages and abilities – traveling by any means (bicycle, foot, stroller, etc). This concept is generally referred to as “complete streets,” or the consideration of travelers of all types when making transportation decisions.

Another factor in planning the transportation system is the future presence of the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail. This twenty-seven mile trail is currently proposed to terminate near the Village limits. A component of this plan addresses how to best accommodate traffic, especially non-motorized traffic that will likely enter the Village as a result of a new trailhead that is planned on Voice Road just north of the Village limits.

Wayfinding is another challenge to the area. Travelers along M-22 and M-72 are often unaware of the presence of downtown Empire or other key Village assets. With the future realization of the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail, wayfinding will become even more important. In all likelihood, Empire will act as a trailhead, at least for some time, and efficiently directing visitors to it will be important. Wayfinding is also

a consideration for those looking to visit Beach Park. Large volumes of tourists, and many area residents frequent the beach during the summer season. While the attention increases business for local merchants, it leaves the Village with the dilemma of traffic congestion, pedestrian access and parking related issues that come with such an attractive asset.

While this plan sets forth the ideas, vision and recommendations for the Village of Empire, many of the changes discussed cannot be completed without support from other road agencies. The Village works with the Leelanau County Road Commission on maintenance of local roads. The M-72 and M-22 trunklines are both under control of MDOT. Therefore, a large factor in the success of this plan will be cooperation with road agencies. MDOT and other agencies can be a resource for valuable information and knowledge. Understanding latest practices, research and data can help everyone come to an informed decision.

Other community partners, including Empire Township, the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore (SBNL), the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments (NWMCOG), the Traverse Area Recreational Trails (TART) and the State of Michigan (Shore-to-Shore Trail) will play a role in development of future trails. Many of these trails follow routes along state trunklines (M-72 and M-22 in Empire) and in the Village, many use local streets to make non-motorized connections. Therefore, streets play a larger role than just providing for vehicles.

Streets are more than just places for cars to travel, they represent important connections within a community, provide routes for travel and commerce, and project the first impression that will shape the community's image. Roads should still be preserved for their intended function, but they should also be designed to accommodate all expected users of the road. This means considering the needs of non-motorized users in addition to those of motorists. To support this concept, a Complete Streets Resolution on the following page has been adopted by the Village.





## COMPLETE STREETS RESOLUTION

### RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE VILLAGE OF EMPIRE, MICHIGAN Supporting a “Complete Streets” Policy for the Village of Empire Adopted October 22, 2013

- WHEREAS,** “Complete Streets” are defined as a design framework that enables safe and convenient access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and drivers of all ages and abilities; and
- WHEREAS,** “Complete Streets” are achieved through planning, design, construction and maintenance of a transportation system that improves travel conditions for bicyclists, pedestrians, transit, and freight in a manner that preserves local character; and
- WHEREAS,** development of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure offers long-term cost saving alternatives to costly road widening or reconstruction; and
- WHEREAS,** a transportation system that supports safe, active, and ample space for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles are more conducive to the public life and efficient movement of people than streets designed primarily to move automobiles; and
- WHEREAS,** increasing active transportation (e.g., walking, bicycling and use public transportation) offers the potential for improved public health, economic development, a cleaner environment, enhanced community connections, and more livable communities; and
- WHEREAS,** fluctuations in motorized and non-motorized traffic patterns, as a result of seasonal tourism, has created additional transportation needs and unique considerations that can, in part, be addressed by providing safe and efficient transportation routes for all users; and
- WHEREAS,** in response to the Complete Streets Initiative, the State of Michigan adopted an amendment to the Planning Enabling Act in 2010 stating that a community’s master plan shall include all components of a transportation system and their interconnectivity including streets and bridges, public transit, bicycle facilities, pedestrian ways, freight facilities and routes, port facilities, railroad facilities, and airports, to provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods in a manner that is appropriate to the context of the community and, as applicable, considers all legal users of the public right-of-way; and
- WHEREAS,** The Planning Commission has adopted a Transportation Plan for the Village, in part to comply with the elements required under Public Act 134 of 2010 Section 33(b)(i) and to prepare a document that will help the Village plan for projects that will improve the travel environment for all users.
- NOW, THEREFORE, THE VILLAGE OF EMPIRE RESOLVES,** The Empire Village Council hereby declares its support of “Complete Streets” policies, as generally suggested in the Empire Transportation Plan; and
- BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** It is the intent of the Village of Empire to work cooperatively with any agency that can assist with or whose approval is necessary to implement this policy, including but not limited to the State of Michigan Department of Transportation, the Leelanau County Road Commission, the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments and the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.



## VISION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### COMMUNITY INPUT

---

Empire Village Residents were involved throughout the development of this transportation plan, with all discussions taking place in public meetings and all information, surveys and draft transportation plans available on the Empire Village website. Prior to establishing a vision, goals and objectives for its transportation system, the Village of Empire reached out to the community to help identify concerns, questions and ideas to consider during a Public Input Meeting held on May 7, 2013.

The consultants held a kick off meeting with the Planning Commission on June 27, 2013 to discuss initial thoughts and concerns. A two-day public workshop was held August 1-2, 2013, where the consultants were available to review and discuss the preliminary recommendations, and provide their ideas and concerns. Day one was spent touring the Village with officials and interested residents, who indicated problematic locations, areas of concern, and places where attention is needed for other reasons. Day one concluded with a presentation to the public regarding the consultant's initial ideas and thoughts for solutions. Day two consisted of in-office work where the consultants met with the public throughout the day, toured the Village to confirm recommendations, and finally, presented a set of preliminary recommendations to the public and Planning Commission.

**Goals Worksheet.** A comment form (see addendum 1) was provided at the workshop held August 1, and August 2, 2013. Participants were invited to view preliminary ideas presented by the Village's consultants, and to provide their feedback regarding initial goal statements for the plan.

**Follow-Up Survey.** To gain additional input regarding the more specific list of projects that were likely to be recommended, the Village created a survey that was posted on its website and printed for additional comment. To ensure that all residents had ample opportunity to voice their opinions, the Planning Commission sent a letter on September 5, 2013 to all Village residents requesting they complete the survey, and directing them to the village website.

After the workshop and receipt of public input, the Village Planning Commission spent considerable time contemplating the consultant's recommendations and comments from the public to refine the following vision, goals and objectives and to establish the final set of recommendations provided in this Transportation Plan.

## VISION STATEMENT

---

"The Village of Empire will maintain a transportation system that supports economic vitality while protecting the environment, quality of life, and safety for all types of travel. The system will provide the necessary travel options while complementing the desired character of different areas in the village."

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

---

The following goals were used to drive the recommendations in this plan:

### **Goal 1: Develop a coherent plan to meet short, medium and long-term transportation and parking issues**

- 1.1 Encourage the Village to set aside monies for the purchase of property and rights-of-way for future transportation needs and anticipated parking issues
- 1.2 Establish short term parking to serve year-round residents

### **Goal 2: Maximize the efficiency of the transportation system**

- 2.1 Improve wayfinding to make it easier for visitors to travel to parking facilities and local points of interest and available parking
- 2.2 On major roads, encourage consolidated driveways on existing development and mandate consolidated driveways on new construction to reduce the number of curb cuts, improve traffic flow and reduce potential for crashes (i.e. access management)
- 2.3 Where alleys are available, encourage ingress and egress from alleys
- 2.4 Require new residential developments to connect to other adjoining streets; require stub streets for future connections

### **Goal 3: Promote a safe transportation system**

- 3.1 Investigate design improvements at intersections
- 3.2 Improve key pedestrian crossings with pavement markings, landscaping and other elements to slow down vehicular traffic and increase motorist awareness of crossing pedestrians and bicyclists
- 3.3 Promote traffic calming Village-wide
- 3.4 Promote pedestrian walkways throughout the Village
- 3.5 Encourage the establishment of fixed schedule Empire Village stop(s) on the BATA transit system with at least one public transit shelter

### **Goal 4: Design streets to fit the character of their environment and minimize impacts on land uses**

- 4.1 Improve the appearance of the streets, entryways to the village, and routes to activity centers

### **Goal 5: Address temporary surges in traffic due to tourism season and lessen impacts on the community**

- 5.1 Develop better pedestrian and bicycle connections from the Beach Park to other parts of the Village



## IMPROVING THE NON-MOTORIZED ENVIRONMENT

Historically, transportation decisions were made in the interest of motorized safety. While this has resulted in improved safety on Michigan roads, it has also resulted in degraded environments for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. For years, road right-of-ways have served their function of moving vehicular traffic; however they are a tremendous public asset that can be used for much more. Careful planning for non-motorized facilities includes an assessment of the existing environment, review of possible alternatives or opportunities that can improve that environment, and a set of recommendations that could be implemented and studied in further detail. In Empire, non-motorized facilities were considered an important component of the system for the following reasons:

- ▶ They improve pedestrian and cyclist safety, especially during the tourist season, by reducing potential crashes between motorized and non-motorized users.
- ▶ They provide alternative options to the vehicle for people who may want to park and walk into downtown, to the beach, to regional trails, etc. This in turn can help alleviate parking and congestion concerns when traffic volumes are especially heavy.
- ▶ They provide connections between homes, schools, parks, public transportation, offices, and retail destinations. Providing such connections can improve the quality of life for area residents.



Not all non-motorized users are comfortable using all types of facilities, so the Transportation System needs to provide travel options for a wide range of people of various ages traveling with various skill and confidence levels, at a variety of speeds. The system should also accommodate those with temporary and long-term physical and cognitive challenges, or those using mobility assistance devices

(scooters, segways, etc.) or pushing strollers and wheelchairs.

The behavior of the different types of bicyclists, studied by Roger Geller, Bicycle Coordinator of the Portland Office of Transportation, can aptly describe the typical mix of comfort levels:

### **Strong & fearless (<1%)**

- ▶ Always biking
- ▶ Any road regardless of condition

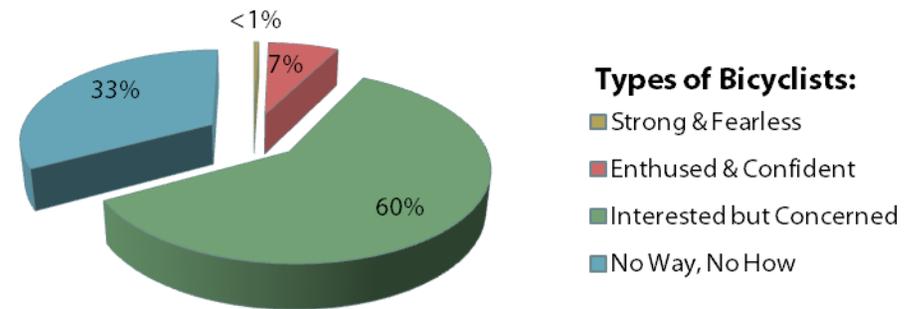
### **Enthusied & confident (7%)**

- ▶ Frequently bike
- ▶ Like designated facilities such as bike lanes

### **Interested but concerned (60%)**

- ▶ Occasional rider
- ▶ Prefer local roads and trails

### **No way, no how (33%)**



## BIKEWAYS

A bikeway is a route or path which in some manner is specifically designed and /or designated for bicycle travel. A "complete street" addresses the needs of all users, including people of all ages and ability, so a variety of facilities are needed. For example, less experienced bicycle riders may prefer an off-road route, whereas more advanced riders may prefer the speed allowed by riding on the road. Both riders, as well as those whose preferences fall in between, need to be accommodated by the system.

Riding bicycles on sidewalks can be a safety issue. The speed differential between a pedestrian and bicyclist is great enough to create a safety hazard if a crash were to occur. In some instances, however, there is not enough room to accommodate separate facilities. In such cases, use of the sidewalk as a bicycle facility may still be safer for some riders than riding in the motorized portion of the street.



**Shared Road:** A "standard" width travel lane that is shared by motor vehicles and bicycles. Indicated by a "sharrow" pavement marking, shared roads often help complete a signed Bike Route. They are helpful on local roads with on-street parking and wider pavement, where bicycles can generally ride comfortably in the vehicle travel lane.

**Separated Pathway:** Also known as "Class 1" bikeways or "multi-use pathways," a separated path accommodates both bicycle and pedestrian traffic. It is physically separated from motorized vehicular traffic by an open space or barrier that can be located either within a road right-of-way or within an independent easement. Two-way pathways should be at least 10 feet wide. Wider paths, up to 12 feet are recommended where high bicycle or pedestrian traffic is expected.

**Wide Paved Shoulder:** Wider pavement to the right of the edge stripe designed to serve bicyclists. Road shoulders are an economical way to accommodate bicyclists, especially in rural areas. Shoulders as narrow as one to two feet in width can accommodate more advanced riders, but preferably, shoulders should be a minimum of 4 feet wide when designed to accommodate bicycle travel. Wider, 6 foot shoulders are recommended along roadways where vehicle speeds exceed 40 mph, or where average annual daily traffic exceeds 2,000.

### **BIKEWAY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- BIKE 1.** Widen sidewalk on Lacore into a separated pathway
- BIKE 2.** To increase bike parking, racks can be installed downtown to replace on-street spaces
- BIKE 3.** Designate Lake, South Lacore, Wilco and/or Wood as shared roads to connect to Empire Bluffs Trail and to the south
- BIKE 4.** Install a separated pathway or sidewalk along both sides of M-72 between M-22 and Old Front Street/ Erie Street
- BIKE 5.** Designate downtown streets as shared roads
- BIKE 6.** Make a clear, safe connection between the Sleeping Bear Trail and downtown Empire

## **SIDEWALKS AND CROSSINGS**

---

Sidewalks consist of elements that define the character of public streets, sidewalks, and adjacent private property. The primary goal of designing pedestrian ways is to improve the safety and movement of pedestrians, illustrated by the following elements:

**Sidewalk Connection:** Several locations (shown on the Non-Motorized Map) were discovered where sidewalks are missing. Sidewalk gaps should be completed, especially along streets that already have sidewalks along the majority of its length. Typically, sidewalks are separated from the roadway by a narrow lawn, and are at least five feet wide. Sidewalks are usually constructed of concrete for durability reasons, but can also be constructed of other materials, like brick pavers, or other relatively flat surface. Care must be taken not to introduce materials that will pose challenges for those with disabilities.

**Wider Sidewalk:** Wider sidewalks, generally 8 feet wide or more, should be considered in places where increased pedestrian activity exists or where it is desired, such as on downtown main streets. Wider sidewalks provide more room for pedestrians, and can even be used to accommodate minor activities like retail display, outdoor seating, or bicycle parking.

**Road Crossings:** Crosswalks can be designed to help improve visibility of pedestrians and calm traffic. Crosswalks that employ a variety of techniques to improve the visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists, such as pedestrian countdown signals, painted or alternative crosswalk material, district or heritage identity elements, lighting, landscaping, curb bump-outs and bollards, advance warning signs, variation of materials in the cross walk and/or pavement markings in the roadway. Utilizing unique materials, visual clues and signage helps to create a distinct boundary of the pedestrian way.

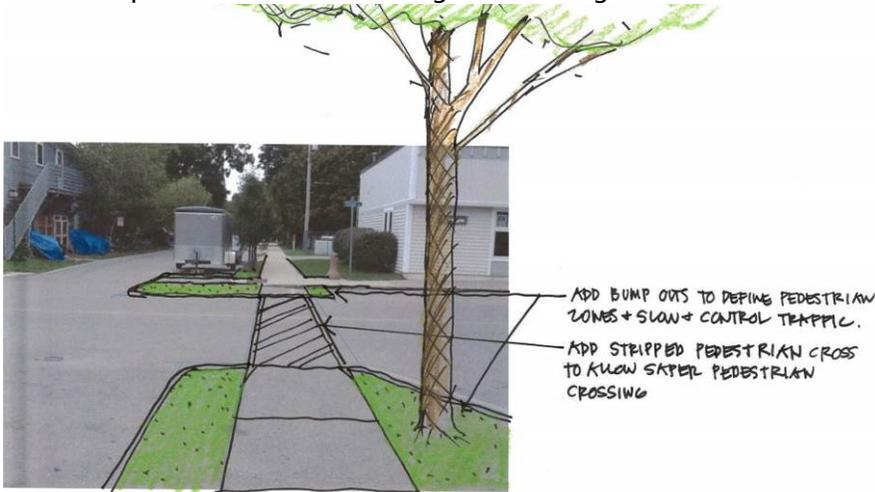
The presence of these elements will not only distinguish between the pedestrian ways and vehicular ways, but can act as traffic calming measures as well.

## **SIDEWALKS AND CROSSING RECOMMENDATIONS**

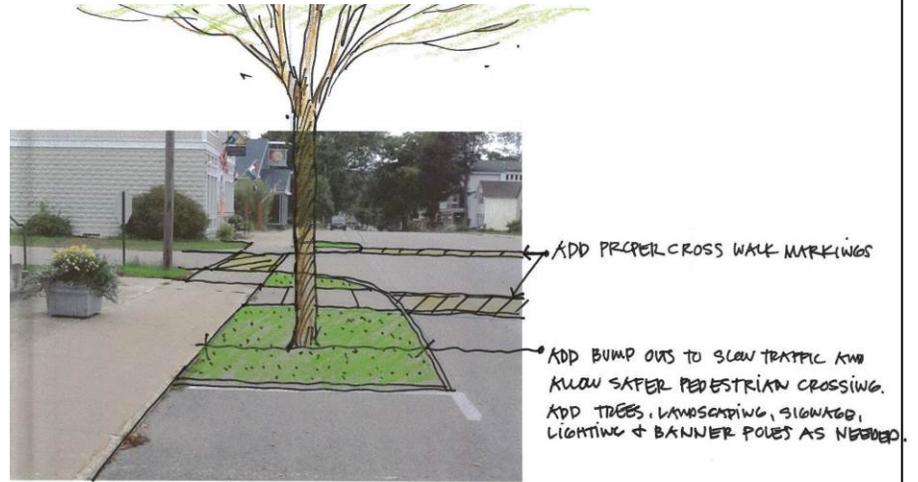
Specific recommendations for Empire include:

- S & C 1.** Paint wider pedestrian crossing markings at M-22 and M-72
- S & C 2.** Install signs in advance of pedestrian crossings on M-72 and M-22
- S & C 3.** Fill in sidewalk gaps (places where the sidewalk skips and then restarts)
- S & C 4.** Improve High Profile crosswalks at Front/M-72/M-22, Phillips/M22, Wilce/M22, Michigan/M-22, Salisbury/M-22, Erie/M-72 and possibly at Ontario/M-22 with additional pedestrian-oriented elements, including signs, pavement markings, and lighting
- S & C 5.** Install a wider sidewalk along Niagara to connect Beach Park with the access to Lion's Club and to downtown
- S & C 6.** Add pathway, aligned with Wilce extending from M-22 east into the New Neighborhood with high profile crosswalks
- S & C 7.** The Village should aim to improve pedestrian ways by installing decorative sidewalk treatments, ornamental lighting, banners, decorative walls, landscaping, street furnishings and other related elements.

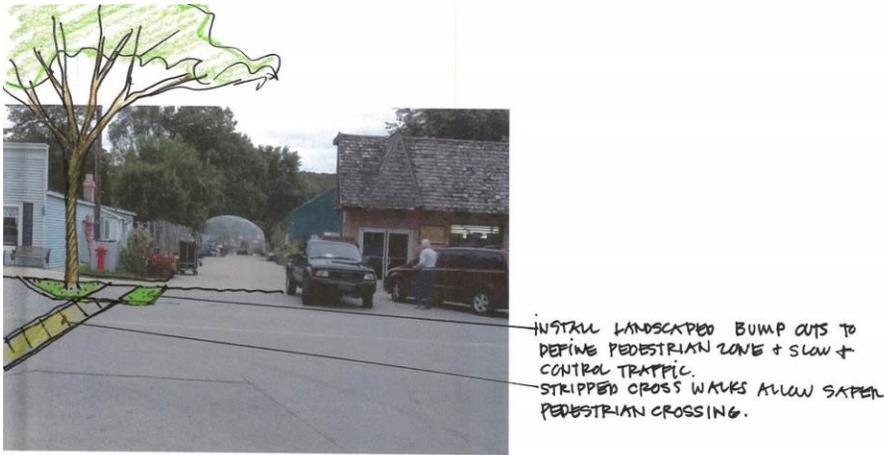
**S & C 7. Improve downtown crossings in the Village:**



LARUE ST. LOOKING NORTH AT FRONT ST.



SOUTH SIDE OF FRONT ST. AT UNION LOOKING WEST



LARUE ST. AT DEERINGS MARKET LOOKING SOUTH



**Downtown Detail**  
Showing locations of S & C Recommendation #7

**S & C 8.** Install a shared pathway or walkway along the south side of M-72 between M-22 and Erie Street



- INSTALL NEW CROSS WALK WITH PEDESTRIAN STRIPPING + SIGNAGE
- RECONFIGURE ALIGNMENT TO BE AT RIGHT ANGLE TO M-72
- ADD PEDESTRIAN WALKWAYS ON NORTH AND SOUTH SIDE OF M-72
- ADD PARKWAY STRIP AND PLANT STREET TREES

M-72 LOOKING EAST AT W. FRONT & ERIE ST.

**S & C 9.** Install curb bump outs at key downtown intersections:



- ADD BUMP OUT TO ENCLOSE AND DEFINE EVENTS AREA. ADD TREES AND LANDSCAPING.

SOUTH SIDE OF FRONT ST. LOOKING WEST



- ADD BUMP OUT TO DEFINE EVENTS AREA AND SLOW TRAFFIC. ADD TREES AND LANDSCAPING.

NORTH SIDE OF FRONT ST. LOOKING WEST



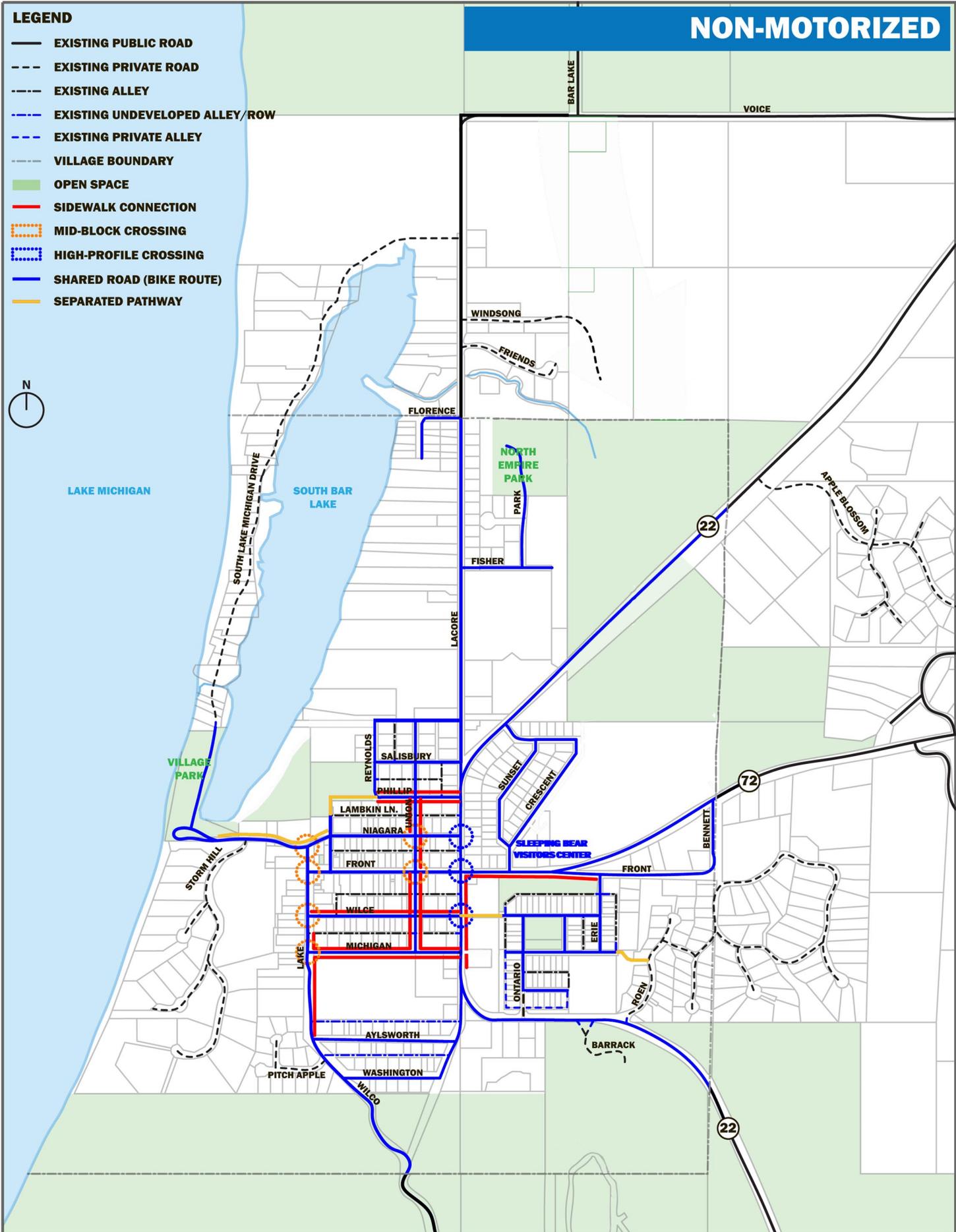
**Downtown Detail**

**Showing locations of S & C Recommendations #8 and 9**

# NON-MOTORIZED

## LEGEND

-  EXISTING PUBLIC ROAD
-  EXISTING PRIVATE ROAD
-  EXISTING ALLEY
-  EXISTING UNDEVELOPED ALLEY/ROW
-  EXISTING PRIVATE ALLEY
-  VILLAGE BOUNDARY
-  OPEN SPACE
-  SIDEWALK CONNECTION
-  MID-BLOCK CROSSING
-  HIGH-PROFILE CROSSING
-  SHARED ROAD (BIKE ROUTE)
-  SEPARATED PATHWAY



## WAYFINDING

Wayfinding is a navigation tool that assists visitors in locating their destination without confusion. Simply put, it is knowing where you are in the village, where your destination is located, and knowing how to get there from your present location. The Village could benefit from additional wayfinding to assist visitors looking for the Beach Park, parking areas, or other local destinations.

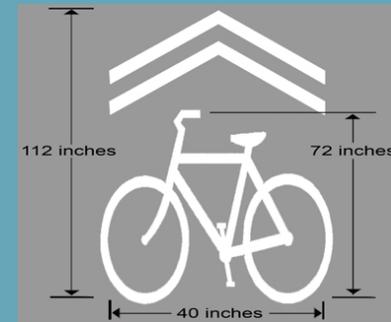
Current wayfinding issues in Empire include:

- ▶ Difficulty finding beach parking
- ▶ Southern Village entrance sign confuses drivers, who often confuse Roen Street for Downtown Empire
- ▶ Users of the future Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail will need guidance to navigate through town
- ▶ Wide streets attract mixed traffic, but there is no indication via signage
- ▶ Outside visitors are not aware of all of the Village's amenities



## MICHIGAN MANUAL OF UNIFORM TRAFFIC CONTROL DEVICES:

The State of Michigan publishes a manual that identifies the standard size, font, and messages that may be placed on certain signs. The following signs are in the Michigan Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MMUTCD):



### Sharrows

Are a new pavement marking in the MMUTCD Manual that are used to indicate streets where bicyclists and motorists are to use the same travel lanes



### Bike Route Signs

Are standardized signs in the MMUTCD

**WAYFINDING RECOMMENDATIONS**

- WAY 1.** Work with MDOT to move the Village’s southern welcome sign to a location that does not confuse traffic.
- WAY 2.** Install “sharrows” on low-volume, low-speed roads in the Village to indicate location of shared lanes rather than install bike lanes.
- WAY 3.** Install signs in advance of the Visitors Center, or move the sign so it is more visible to those entering the Village on M-72
- WAY 4.** Signs should be located based on local circumstances and good judgment. General recommendations are provided for general guidance below:

**BIKE ROUTE SIGNS**

Purpose	To confirm that a cyclist is on a designated bikeway. Bike Route signs can include destinations and their associated distances.
Location Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Mid-block or on the far-side of intersections</li> <li>▸ At the beginning of each bikeway</li> <li>▸ Immediately following key junctions on streets that do not have sharrows</li> </ul>
Specific Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Install signs along trail routes to direct traffic to key connections, shared road segments, local destinations, etc.</li> <li>2. Space signs approximately one half to one mile apart, based on the number of cross streets, and driveways.</li> </ol>

**ENTRYWAY SIGNS**

Purpose	To identify where key roadways enter the Village limit.
Location Standards	At the Village boundary, except where such placement causes confusion or an unsafe situation.
Specific Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Add “Downtown Empire X.X miles” and “Empire Beach X.X miles” on M-72 from east and on M-22 from north and south</li> <li>2. Relocate southern entryway sign to location west of Roen</li> </ol>

**DIRECTIONAL SIGNS**

Purpose	To indicate where a bikeway route turns, either onto another street or onto an off-road trail.
Location Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ On the near-side of intersections to let cyclists know in advance where to change direction or turn.</li> <li>▸ In advance of bikeway turns (near-side of the intersection) in the block immediately preceding the junction or turn and at least 25’ past the preceding intersection.</li> <li>▸ Where shared roads are used as part of the bike route, signs in advance of left-handed bikeway turns will give the bicyclist adequate notice so they can safely navigate vehicular traffic to make the turn.</li> </ul>
Specific Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Install Vehicular “Overflow Beach Parking” signs:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ On M-22 south of Front Street (to direct west onto Front then north onto LaRue)</li> <li>▸ On Niagara, west of Union (to direct north to Lion’s Club Park)</li> <li>▸ At entrances to Lion’s Club Park off Reynolds and LaRue</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Install Pedestrian “To Beach Park” signs:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ At Lion’s Club Park overflow parking lot</li> <li>▸ At north Village line along Heritage Trail</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. General wayfinding signs:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Public parking locations (future locations vary)</li> <li>▸ Empire Library</li> <li>▸ Township Hall</li> <li>▸ Parks (Beach, Lion’s Club Park and North Empire Park)</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

## TRAILS

---

A Trail is an off-road multi-use path that is also shared by cyclists and pedestrians. They are typically 10 feet wide, designed for regional travel as well as recreation, and are maintained for use all year round.

The Village of Empire is blessed with a location that is central to several area trails. The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is located to the north and south of the Village. The Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail is a paved, non-motorized, multi-use trail planned to span 27 miles from the northern boundary of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore to Manning Road south of Empire. The first segment of the trail, between Glen Arbor and the Sleeping Bear Dune Climb, is open and the second segment between the Sleeping Bear Dune Climb and the Voice Road/LaCore Street intersection is expected to be open in July, 2014. Michigan Shore to Shore Trail, which was created by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the U.S Forest Service, is a hiking and equestrian trail. The trail spans between Empire on Lake Michigan and Oscoda on Lake Huron. It is due to these planned trail projects, as well as a need to facilitate better non-motorized traffic that the following recommendations are given.

## TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

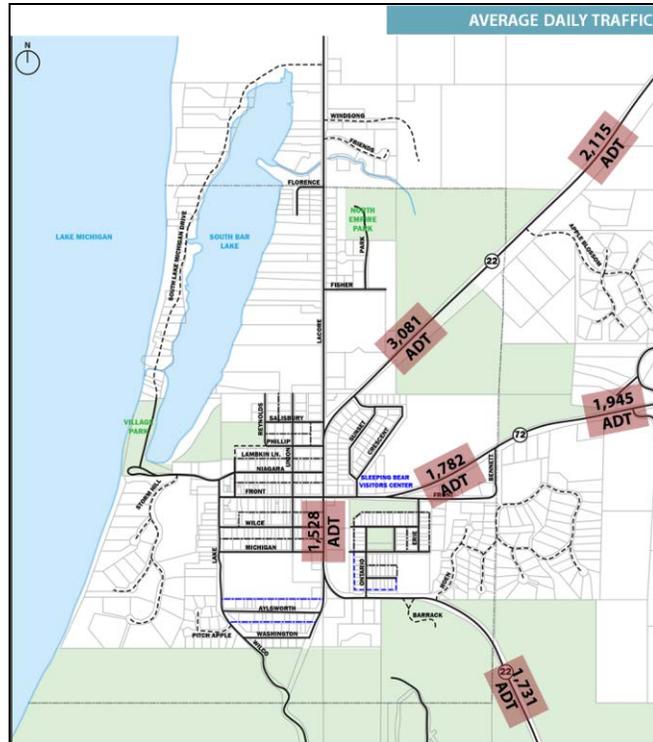
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- TRL 1.** Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail
  - ▶ Temporary Route – North Lacore Street
  - ▶ Long-Term Route –connect the north village and south village boundaries to the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Headquarters, hopefully in a way that also links existing village assets and the Conservancy lands.
  - ▶ Trail connection from conservancy to northern M-22 crossing, to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Visitors Center
- TRL 2.** Establish a route from the village to Empire Bluff Trail
- TRL 3.** Establish a trail along the east side of South Bar Lake to the rail bed, from the rail bed to Johnson Park
- TRL 4.** Michigan Shore to Shore Trail is maintained and managed by the Michigan Trail Riders Association and the village will coordinate any signage with the Michigan Trail Riders Association.
- TRL 5.** Bay to Bay Hiking and Water Trail
  - ▶ Coordinate with Planners of a 30 mile Paddle/Backpack trail running the sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore coastline from Platte Bay to Good Harbor Bay.



## IMPROVING VEHICULAR CIRCULATION

The historic center of Empire contains a grid-street pattern, which has been maintained quite well. While some anomalies exist, such as some narrower rights-of-ways and skewed road intersection angles, general traffic operates well in and around the Village. As the Village grew both in permanent and seasonal residents, so did the amount of traffic. Convenient access via state routes M-22 and M-72, along with the Village's location along Lake Michigan and adjacent the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore have made it a strong tourist and resident attractor.



**Average Daily Traffic Map**

M-22 and M-72 play a significant role in moving traffic within the region, and so their function should remain as such – a roadway generally designed to accommodate vehicular traffic. M-22 is also a designated State Heritage Route - the Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route. The more local streets within the Village are intended to provide a different function – to connect people to their homes and local businesses – with lower traffic volumes at lower speeds.

### ROAD CONNECTIONS

With any new roadway development, roads should be required to tie into the existing road network, and use of cul-de-sacs and other dead end streets should be discouraged except in areas where natural features, such as wetlands, or existing adjacent development patterns precludes through streets. Connected streets are beneficial because:

- ▶ They provide motorists with multiple routes, which help to reduce driving distances and diffuse traffic.
- ▶ They allow for the movement between neighborhoods and businesses without the need to access major roads. This can shorten trips and reduce traffic impacts to the major road network.
- ▶ They provide alternative travel options, where motorists can choose the most efficient and safest locations to access major roads.

### ROAD CONNECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

- ROAD 1.** Maintain pavement striping to define travel lanes and parking
- ROAD 2.** Extend Erie from New Neighborhood north to M-72 (see also INT 2 below)
- ROAD 3.** Find a way to extend Fisher Street to M22. to include an adjacent separated pathway
- ROAD 4.** Continue Union Street south as development of land occurs
- ROAD 5.** Coordinate business/truck deliveries downtown so they do not cause traffic congestion

## INTERSECTIONS

Intersection design can enhance mobility for all types of travelers. Intersection improvements should focus on reducing crashes, providing safe and comfortable crossings, and avoiding traffic back-ups. As a result of historic development and transportation decisions, the network of State Highways through Empire has created some unusual intersection alignments. While most residents have learned to safely navigate most of these, visitors are often confused. Intersections with higher volume roadways like M-72 and M-22 should be redesigned so streets or driveways intersect them at a 90-degree angle.

## INTERSECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

**INT 1.** Redesign Salisbury/Lacore/M-22 into a "T" intersection:



**INT 2.** Redesign Erie at M-72 to remove the skewed angle, preserve a landmark tree, and discourage cut-through traffic:



**INT 3.** Improve operations at M-72/M-22 by improving the intersection with crosswalks, landscaping, driveway closures and traffic control devices (i.e. stop sign or signal):



**LEGEND**

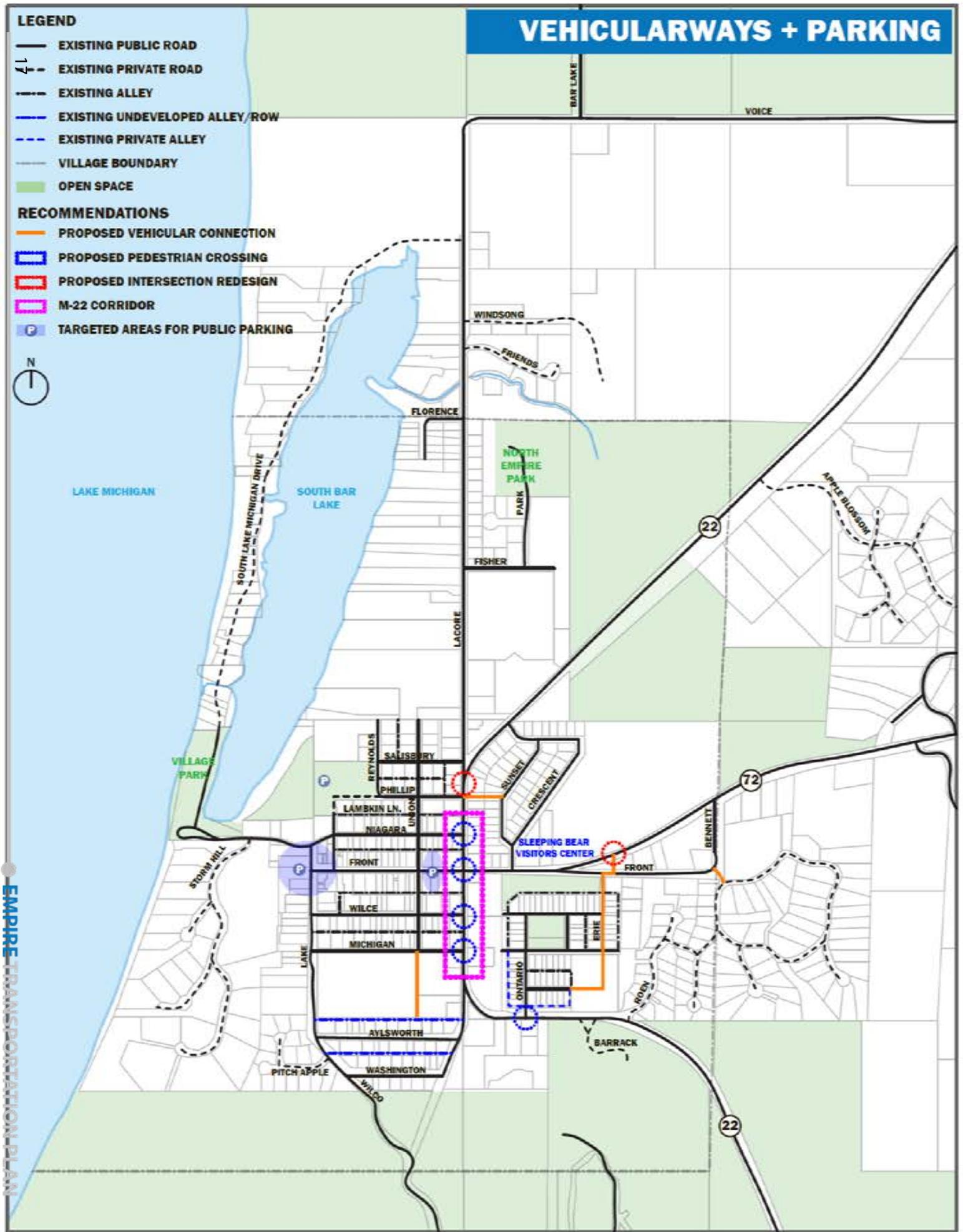
- EXISTING PUBLIC ROAD
- - - EXISTING PRIVATE ROAD
- - - EXISTING ALLEY
- - - EXISTING UNDEVELOPED ALLEY/ROW
- - - EXISTING PRIVATE ALLEY
- - - VILLAGE BOUNDARY
- OPEN SPACE

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- PROPOSED VEHICULAR CONNECTION
- PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN CROSSING
- PROPOSED INTERSECTION REDESIGN
- M-22 CORRIDOR
- P TARGETED AREAS FOR PUBLIC PARKING



**VEHICULARWAYS + PARKING**

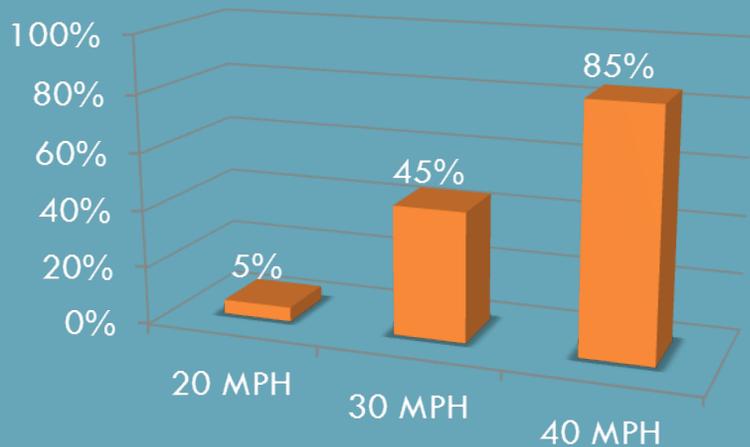


## TRAFFIC CALMING

One of the biggest fears of a pedestrian or bicyclist is being hit by an automobile. Studies show that the speed of the vehicle is one of the biggest factors in whether the result of such a collision is a few scrapes, a serious injury or a fatality. Even a small increase in speed can result in more fatal crashes.

Research shows that a pedestrian or bicyclist hit by a vehicle traveling 20 mph or less has a 95% chance of survival while only about 55% survive as collision with a vehicle traveling 30 mph (and only 15% if 40 mph or greater).

### % Pedestrian Fatalities in Crashes



Source: *Killing Speed and Saving Lives*, UK Dept. of Transportation, London, England 1994.

Different design elements can be used to help reduce speeds, such as along residential streets, in parking lots or near schools and parks. Traffic calming can include things like road narrowing, special pavement at pedestrian crossings, or other elements that attract attention, like landscaping or entryway features. Traffic calming at

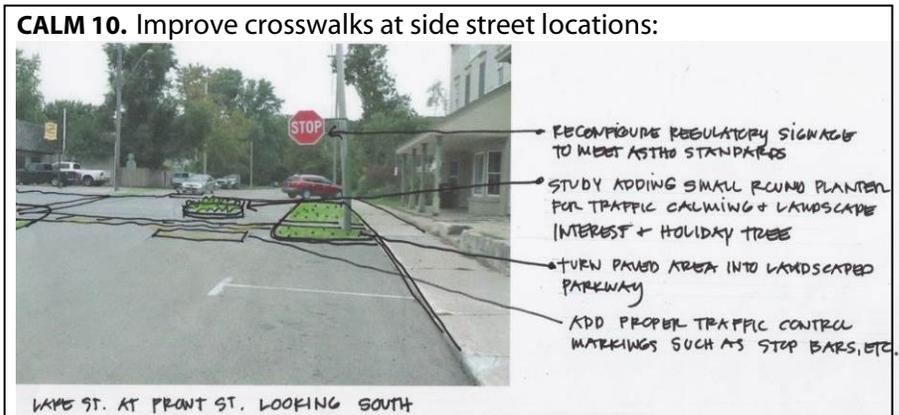
intersections can also include tighter turning radii so motorists are likely to turn at a slower speed, and curb bump outs to reduce the width that pedestrians must cross. This can actually benefit vehicular traffic too, since shorter crossing paths require less time for pedestrian time leaving more time for vehicular traffic.



## TRAFFIC CALMING RECOMMENDATIONS

Traffic calming design techniques should be considered especially for streets and intersections where there are relatively high volumes of pedestrians or bicyclists and where typical traffic speeds are notably higher than the target or posted speed limit. Specific recommendations for Empire include:

- CALM 1.** Install wide crosswalk markings and advance stop bars at key intersections
- CALM 2.** Install advance warning signs (not beacon signals) in advance of unsignalized crossings along M-22
- CALM 3.** Install a 4-way stop sign at the M-22/M-72/Front Street intersection
- CALM 4.** Install "Yield to Pedestrian" signs at key crossings downtown, like at Union Street and LaRue Street or at entrances to the Village's Core
- CALM 5.** Add traffic calming features along M-22 (landscaping, lighting, pathways/sidewalks, improved crosswalks, etc.) north and south of M-72
- CALM 6.** Investigate the use of curb bump-outs along Front at M-22 at key locations (See also **S & C 9** above)
- CALM 7.** Reduce speed limit to 35 mph, with associated "Reduced Speed Limit" signs at Village limits
- CALM 8.** Apply traffic calming, as discussed above, on residential streets to prevent cut-through traffic. Consider allowing private roads to be narrower than public roads



## ENTRYWAYS

Gateways are urban design elements located at entry points into the community. They can be used to announce the Village boundary and/or introduce the character and theme of a place or district. Gateways can be defined as a narrowing or perceived narrowing of the roadway, intended to cause drivers to slow down and recognize that they are entering an area of changed land use. Their design often combines hard and landscape materials in a way that will influence travel behavior and project the desired community image.

Gateways serve to welcome visitors, workers, and residents, and orients visitors to the community. They provide opportunities to celebrate local culture and history and frame perceptions of the community, and can reinforce a larger marketing effort aimed at creating a “brand” for the community, corridor or district. If properly designed, gateways can also be effective at calming traffic and improving safety.

Generally, travel speeds are linked to a driver’s perception. Where a driver perceives the possibility of cross-traffic, pedestrian activity or slower traffic, they will intuitively slow their travel speed. Elements within the drivers view will all shape how fast or slow they travel in order to feel safe. Just as expressways often are maintained with wide open areas alongside them, local roads should not be so “wide open” so as to encourage faster speeds.

### COMMON ENTRYWAY ELEMENTS:

- ▶ Gates
- ▶ Landscaping
- ▶ Public Art
- ▶ Pocket parks
- ▶ Curb bump-outs
- ▶ Medians
- ▶ Roundabouts
- ▶ Rumble strips
- ▶ Bike lanes
- ▶ Changes in road surface
- ▶ Road markings
- ▶ Signage
- ▶ Overhead banners
- ▶ Lighting
- ▶ On-street parking

## ENTRYWAY CONSIDERATIONS

Some general considerations for entryway designs include the following:

- ▶ Entryways should set the tone for the Village’s image, so they should reflect local culture, history or desires.
- ▶ Entryways must be consistent and appropriately scaled, and they should reflect characteristics of other elements used to define the district.
- ▶ The design approach and palette of materials must be consistent enough to relate to the other entryways and elements that define the districts.
- ▶ Improve landscaping along the road edge to present a sense of arrival. Landscaping can also be used to help buffer pedestrians from passing motorized traffic.
- ▶ Coordinated signage is essential to presenting a cohesive image, but some variety should be encouraged to delineate distinct districts or areas of the Village.

Some specific recommendations for Empire include:

- ENT 1.** Add distances to downtown and beach on entrance signs
- ENT 2.** Require new construction to bury power lines

**ENT 3.** Develop a downtown gateway at the east end of Front Street that includes landscaped areas, signage, physical features, or a combination of elements that will both improve the aesthetic, draw visitors, and calm traffic





## PUBLIC PARKING

With a traditional downtown, the Village of Empire has demand for public, on-street parking. In fact, many businesses on Front Street rely on it. However, with growing businesses and increasing tourist traffic, additional parking areas are needed to augment and enhance existing convenient on-site parking. Without convenient parking, some businesses may choose to relocate to larger sites outside the downtown. There are ways to increase the number of parking spaces through simple striping changes, and others will require more physical changes.

The Village of Empire and its Beach Park is a destination in the summer. Beach Park is highly used because of its wonderful amenities. However, the dilemma with Beach Park is providing access and parking without consuming the entire beach with pavement. The current parking lot provides significant parking, but more is needed to meet the increasing demand. The locations for additional parking are severely limited at Beach Park, so other alternatives are contemplated in this Plan. These include use of Johnson Field at Lion's Club Park.<sup>1</sup> They allow the use of the field for overflow parking with annual charge. There are currently no direct non-motorized routes that connect Beach Park to Lion's Club Park, or to other parking areas, so achieving such connections should greatly improve available parking for those who want to use the beach.

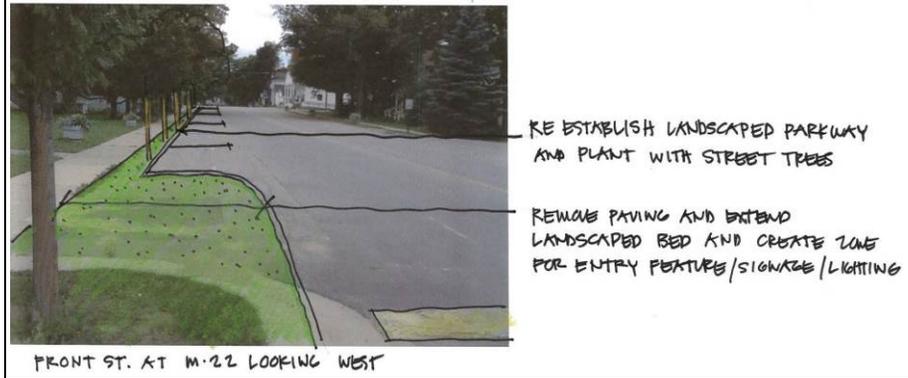
<sup>1</sup>Johnson Park is privately owned by the Lion's Club. Whereas there is currently a working relationship, this arrangement is subject to change without notice.



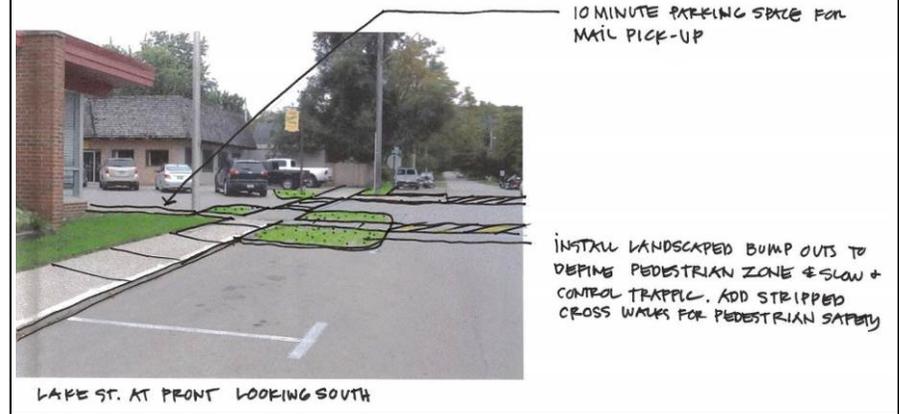
**PUBLIC PARKING RECOMMENDATIONS**

- PPARK 1.** Convert parallel parking on Lake Street to angled (adds approx. 9 spaces)
- PPARK 2.** Organize future parking lot use in the vicinity of Lake Street/Front Street
- PPARK 3.** Acquire additional long-term public parking lots (as shown on the Vehicular Ways Map)
- PPARK 4.** Where long-term parking locations are secured through lease or purchase, they should be paved and organized to maximize parking spaces.
- PPARK 5.** Conduct a long-term parking study that considers purchase or lease of land for municipal parking lots, accommodations for deliveries, short-term v. long-term parking, and handicap accessibility.

**PPARK 6.** If re-striped, parking spaces downtown should be shorter:



**PPARK 7.** Consider short term parking limits on certain downtown parking locations, such as near the Post Office:



**BEACH PARKING RECOMMENDATIONS**

- BPARK 1.** Pursue modest charge for beach parking if not restricted by deed or grant. If so, work to raise funds for park maintenance or improvements
- BPARK 2.** Maintain some dedicated resident parking
- BPARK 3.** Install direction signs to overflow beach parking



## MANAGEMENT POLICIES

Some transportation conditions cannot be addressed with physical changes. Municipal policies can have an impact on local operations.

### ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Access Management is a series of techniques and standards used to maximize existing street capacity and minimize the potential for crashes. Studies show reducing or limiting the number of access points, carefully placing, spacing and design of access points can help achieve safer environments and preserve efficient traffic flow.

Access Management can also improve the corridor for bicyclists and pedestrians by reducing and limiting the number of potential conflict points along the corridor. Proper placement and design of access points can help improve visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists and reduce the risk involved in crossing multiple driveways and intersections.

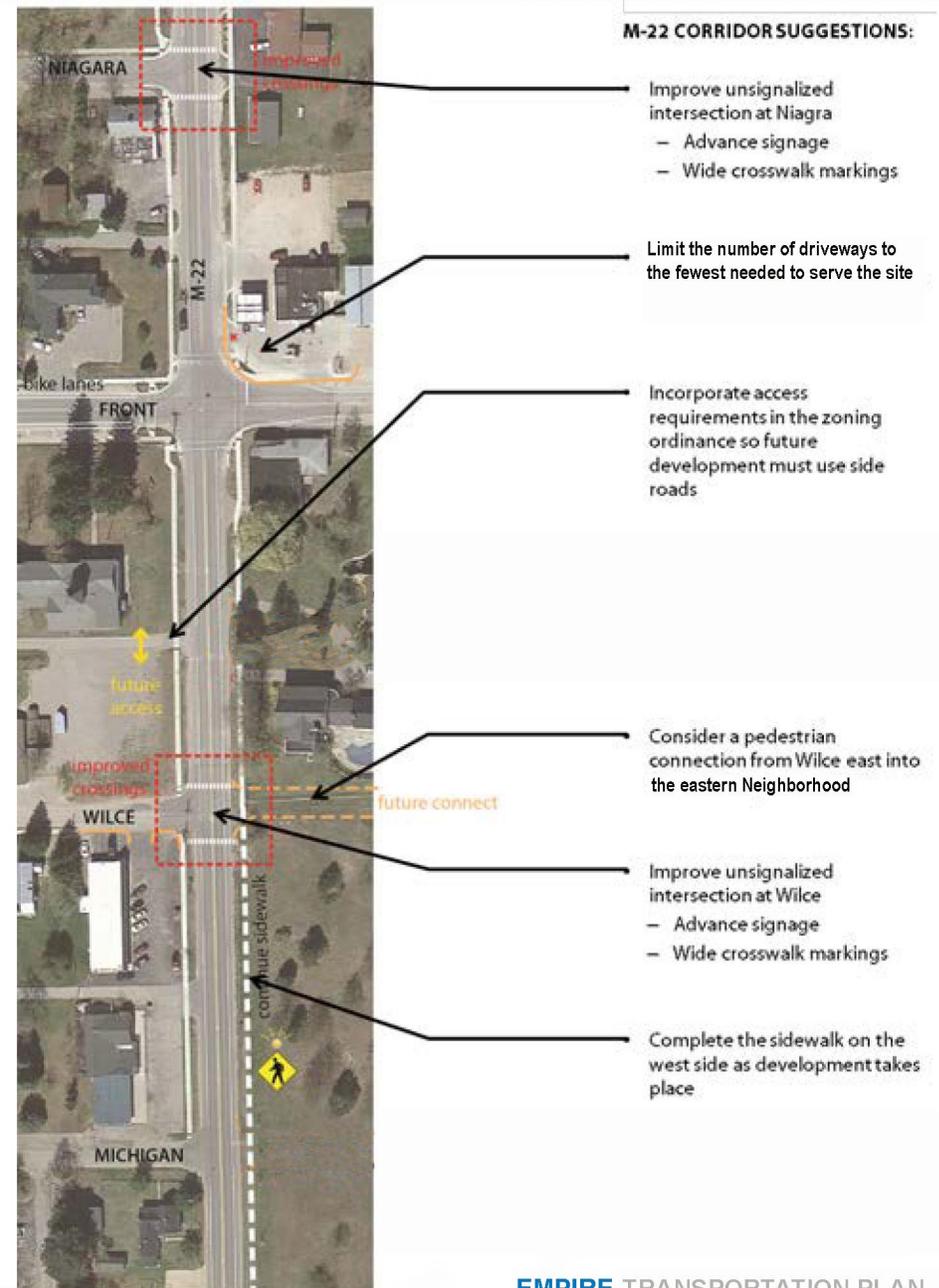
### ACCESS MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

**AMPOL 1.** Restrict parking in the right-of-way

**AMPOL 2.** Implement corridor improvements as shown to the right

**AMPOL 3.** Develop policies like the following to manage the location, spacing and design of new driveways

- › Maintain proper sight distance at road intersections.
- › Driveways need to be adequately spaced from intersections and other driveways (on both sides of the street) to assist in the reduction of turning movement conflicts.
- › Providing connections between parking lots limits the number of turning movements onto the main roadway and reduces the potential for crashes.



## **BICYCLE POLICY**

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Currently, the Village maintains a policy where bicyclists are prohibited from using public sidewalks. This causes bicyclists to ride in off-road trails, (which may not be available), or in the public street. While policies like this are helpful in areas with high pedestrian activity, bicycle-to-pedestrian crashes can still be very dangerous. In Empire, pedestrian volumes are not high enough to warrant such a restriction during most of the year. In light of this, the Village may choose to maintain a 'no bicycles' policy on sidewalks along Front Street where pedestrians are most prevalent, or scale back the policy to apply during the summer tourist season. In either case, it seems appropriate to relax the policy in some way.

## **BICYCLE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

### **BPOL 1.** Revise bicycle policy:

- ▶ Allow use of sidewalks for those under the age of 12, along with one guardian
- ▶ Allow use by inexperienced or disabled riders
- ▶ Allow use along higher speed and higher volume roadways
- ▶ Restrict sidewalks for 'pedestrian use only' along west Front Street

### **BPOL 2.** Require new developments to install sidewalks:

- ▶ Residential streets on at least one side
- ▶ Major Roads on both sides





## **M22/M72 INTERSECTION**

Existing Conditions – Intersection can become congested during the summer months resulting in unsafe conditions, especially for pedestrians.

Proposed Action – Control pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle movement by using traffic control devices, pavement markings and wayfinding. This will require working with MDOT.

## **CONNECT NEIGHBORHOODS THAT ARE LOCATED EAST OF M22 AND SOUTH OF M72 TO REST OF VILLAGE**

Existing Conditions – There is not a safe pedestrian walkway connecting East Front Street, New Neighborhood and Empire Hills with the rest of the Village. Pedestrians must walk on the shoulder of M-72 which has a speed limit of 55 mph.

Proposed Action – Look at possible locations for a safe multiuse path including the south side of M-72 and the New Neighborhood Open Spaces. Also look at the possibility of acquiring property adjacent to the New Neighborhood that can be used as a walkway.

## **TRAFFIC CALMING**

Existing Conditions – Excessive vehicle speeds on M-22, M-72 and some other Village Streets such as LaCore Street have a negative impact on safety.

Proposed Action – Use traffic calming to reduce speed, Possible solutions include “Your Speed” radar signs, speed humps, narrowing traffic lanes by using bump outs, plantings, crosswalk pavement markings, “share the road” markings and traffic control devices.

Explore changing the LaCore/Salisbury/M-22 intersection. Solutions for M-22/M-72 will require working with MDOT.

## **FRONT STREET**

Existing Conditions – Increased usage, especially in the downtown area, during the summer months resulting in congestion and limited parking.

Proposed Action – improve pedestrian crossings with pavement markings; designate Front Street as a Shared Road by using sharrow pavement markings. Explore the use of traffic calming.

## **BIKE ROUTES IN THE VILLAGE**

Existing Conditions – The Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail ends near the intersection of LaCore Street and Voice Road in Empire Township. The use of this trail has increased bicycle, vehicle and traffic interactions in the Village.

Proposed Action – Improve pedestrian, cyclist and vehicle safety by painting sharrow on public streets. Reduce vehicle speed by implementing traffic calming measures. Explore possible locations for a separated pathway.

ADDENDUM 1

COMMENT FORM						
This form is provided to receive feedback about what issues and priorities should be addressed in the Transportation Plan. Please take a moment to indicate your preference and opinion regarding the following preliminary goals and objectives. General comments can be written on the reverse side.						
Most Important Objective Under This Goal Is:	Goal or Objective Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/ No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Goal 1: Maximize the efficiency of the transportation system</b>						
	Improve wayfinding to make it easier for citizens and visitors to travel to local points of interest and available parking					
	Require new residential developments to connect to other adjoining streets, and require stub streets for future connections					
	Gradually consolidate driveways to improve traffic flow and reduce potential for crashes (i.e. access management)					
<b>Goal 2: Promote a safe transportation system</b>						
	Investigate geometric design improvements at intersections with skewed angles					
	Improve key pedestrian crossings with pavement markings, signals, landscaping and other elements to slow down vehicular traffic and increase motorist awareness of crossing pedestrians and bicyclists					
<b>Goal 3: Design streets to fit the character of their environment and minimize impacts on land uses</b>						
	Improve the appearance of the streets, entryways to the village, and routes to activity centers					
	When developing project design and construction timelines during peak tourism seasons, consider impacts to local businesses, industries and destinations					
<b>Goal 4: Address temporary surges in traffic due to tourism season and lessen impacts on the community</b>						
	Better direct visitors to Johnson Field overflow parking before they enter the one-way Beach Park driveway					
	Consider using temporary mechanisms, such as quick curb, to help delineate motorized and non-motorized ways					
	Develop better connections to Beach Park, especially a pedestrian connection to Johnson Field					



Village of Empire  
Five-Year Recreation Plan  
2018

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# 2018 Village of Empire Master Plan

## Acknowledgements

### Empire Village Council

Wayne Aylsworth  
Maggie Bacon  
Sam Barr, President  
Susan Carpenter  
Dan Davis  
Chris Frey  
Teresa Howes

### Empire Planning Commission

Todd Avis  
Phil Deering (Chair, 2018)  
Rollie Groening  
Randy Nelson (Chair, 2017)  
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Tom Rademacher  
Peter Shous

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Rollie Groening  
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Prepared with assistance from



**Networks  
Northwest**

Talent / Business / Community

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# Introduction

The Village of Empire offers a wealth of recreation opportunities for both residents and visitors. A mix of Village-owned facilities, along with other publicly-owned facilities and properties, includes public beaches, natural areas, trails, and sports fields.

As a recreation service provider, the Village recognizes the importance of maintaining its parks and recreation facilities, and of planning for future recreation services and facilities. A major factor in the provision of any service is the question of how projects will be funded. One possible source of funding for recreation projects is through grants available from Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).

Recreation was included as a key component of the 2012 Village of Empire Master Plan Update and the Village wishes to update this information and create a stand-alone Village of Empire Recreation Plan.

## Community Description

The Village of Empire is a community of 375 year-

round residents (2016 American Community Survey) occupying nearly one square mile of land abutting Lake Michigan. The Village is located within the boundaries of Empire Township on the southwestern edge of Leelanau County (see Figure 1-1). Empire's close proximity to the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore has established the community as a popular tourist destination. The year-round population, however, has remained mostly static over the last few decades.

Recreational use occupies the second highest amount of land in the Village with over 212 acres or 35.6% of the Village land area (Village of Empire Master Plan Update 2012). This recreational land includes publicly owned properties as well as quasi-public property which is held by a conservancy as a preserve or nature area.

## Population Characteristics

When planning for recreation facilities, the community's age and income levels are important

## Components of a Recreation Plan

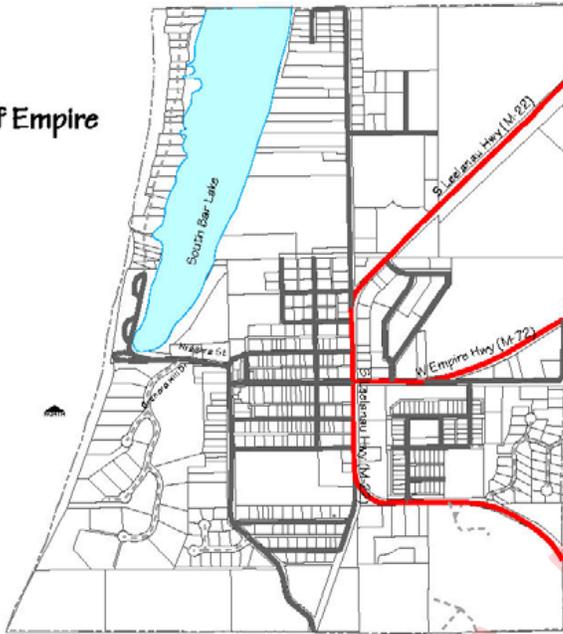
To become eligible for MDNR and other funding sources, a community must have an approved recreation plan. Components of a MDNR-approved recreation plan include:

1. **Community Description** describes the jurisdiction of the recreation plan and the extent of the plan focus.
2. **Administrative Structure** includes a description of how the park and recreation functions are carried out and who is involved with park and recreation programming. Also included are the current and projected annual budgets as well as funding sources.
3. **Recreation Inventory** provides an inventory of existing parks, natural areas and recreation facilities.
4. **Planning and Public Input Processes** discusses planning methods, as well as methods used to incorporate public input into the recreation planning process.
5. **Goals and Objectives** describes the goals and objectives developed during the preparation of this Recreation Plan.
6. **Action Program** identifies how the community will meet, or work towards meeting the Plan's goals and objectives over the next five years.

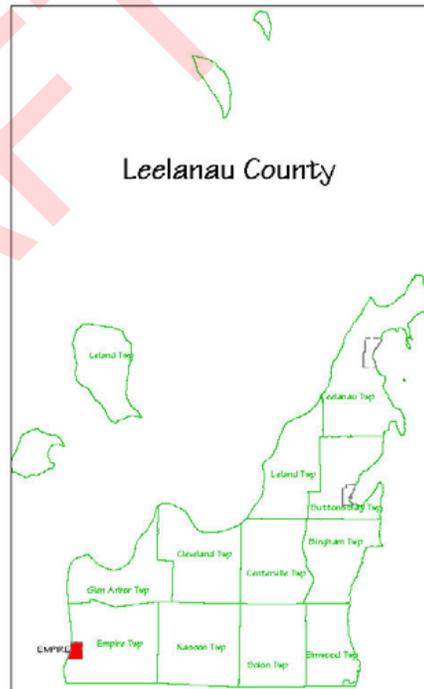
# Location Map, Village of Empire

Figure 1-1

Village of Empire



Leelanau County



State of Michigan



Source: Village of Empire Master Plan Update 2012

factors to consider. As detailed in the Village Master Plan (2018), the Village of Empire is home to a population that is aging at a rate faster than the region or the State of Michigan, with a median age of 57.1 years, compared to Michigan’s median age of 37 years. As the population ages, needs move from active recreation facilities like ball fields and playgrounds, toward more passive recreation types like walking and boating. Barrier-free access to recreation is particularly important for an aging population. At the same time, it’s important to consider activities and amenities for the populations that the Village hopes to attract and serve as residents and visitors, including younger people and families with children. Activities and amenities should also be within the financial means of the majority of residents.

It’s also important to consider the large influx of seasonal residents and visitors that use the Village’s recreation facilities. The 2014 Northwest Michigan Seasonal Population Study (Land Policy Institute) estimates that the population of Leelanau County increases by as much as 40% during the summer months, as measured by individuals sleeping in campgrounds, hotels/motels, and in seasonal housing units. The actual increase in population and visitation is likely much higher: the National Park Service estimates that over 1.5 million people visit the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore annually. Many of those visitors start and/or end their visits in the Village of Empire, with stops at the National Park Service

headquarters, located in the Village; at downtown retail and restaurants; and at Village-owned parks or beaches.

## **Administrative Structure**

At the present time, the Planning Commission is also serving as the Parks and Recreation Committee, with additional input from an informal ad hoc recreation committee. The ad hoc committee, in association with the Planning Commission, provides recommendations regarding park policies and projects to the Village Council.

The ad hoc committee, Planning Commission and Village staff serve as a community sounding board on recreation matters, and bring the concerns of the residents to the Village Council for consideration. Routine park maintenance is handled by the Village staff, contractors and volunteers, operating under the direct authority of the Village Council.

The ultimate decision making authority and responsibility for all park related projects resides with the Village Council.

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers are an integral part of the recreation projects in the Village of Empire. While there is not a designated volunteer group, volunteers are solicited on a project-by-project basis to provide some of the labor for the Village “in-kind” match on projects as appropriate,

## **Plan Review and Adoption**

The Recreation Plan was reviewed by Empire Village Planning Commission on \_\_\_ and the Empire Village Council on \_\_\_. Public comments were accepted as part of a Public Hearing held for the Recreation Plan on \_\_\_\_\_.

The Master Plan Update including the Recreation Plan was adopted by the Village of Empire Planning Commission on \_\_\_\_\_ and by the Village Council on \_\_\_\_\_. Copies of the minutes from the meetings when the plan was adopted are provided in Appendix D \_\_\_\_

**Table 1-1. Village Budget and Recreation Expenditures, 2010 - 2018**

BUDGET								
FY Beginning March 1	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Total Village	\$555,912	\$556,602	\$970,264	\$642,014	\$701,315	\$713,218	\$791,253	\$734,889
EXPENDITURES								
Recreation	\$70,140	\$56,358	\$66,628	\$112,932	\$150,282	\$88,724	\$140,146	\$89,838

*Source: Village of Empire*

including from local organizations such as the Empire Lion’s Club, Empire Area Community Center (EACC), the Heritage Museum and the Beautification Committee.

was budgeted as a recreation line item, demonstrating that the Village Council does routinely allot funding for recreational purposes.

**Relationships**

This recreation plan covers the Village of Empire, which is located within the geographic boundaries of Empire Township, and is part of the Glen Lake Community School district. Additionally, the visitor’s center and park headquarters for the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore are located within the Village. The Village of Empire intends to continue to partner with the National Park Service and surrounding jurisdictions on recreational projects as appropriate, especially as related to trail projects, including but not limited to the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail. This Recreation Plan includes provisions to continue and enhance the working relationship with Leelanau County, the Leelanau Conservancy, the National Park Service and Michigan Department of Natural Resources as related to the other recreation facilities located within the Village of Empire.

**Funding**

The Village of Empire's recreational activities and facilities are primarily funded through the Village’s general fund. Table 1-1 illustrates recreation spending for the past eight years, in comparison to the Village’s total budget. For the 2017-2018 budget, nearly \$90,000

# Recreation Inventory

An inventory of existing recreation facilities located in the Village of Empire is provided below, with properties identified on Figure 1-2.

Accessibility evaluations for Village parks and recreational facilities were conducted by Networks Northwest with input from the Master Plan Committee using the criteria provided in the MDNR Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plans (MDNR, 2016). These criteria are based on the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design. To assist with the assessment, the following references were used:

**ADA Rating 1:** None of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines

**ADA Rating 2:** Some of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines

**ADA Rating 3:** Most of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines

**ADA Rating 4:** The entire park meets accessibility guidelines

**ADA Rating 5:** The entire park was developed/renovated using the principals of universal design

## Lake Michigan Beach Park

**Size:** 6.7 acres

**Service Area:** Village, County, Region

**ADA Rating 3**

Lake Michigan Beach Park is a heavily-used park with frontage and access along both Lake Michigan and South Bar Lake. The park is a major attraction both for Village residents and seasonal visitors, offering recreational opportunities for swimmers, boaters, picnickers, and more.

Discussion in the recreation planning process identified concerns regarding runoff from pavement that at present flows into South Bar Lake at the boat launch and where runoff forms a pool adjacent to the anchor.



Other issues or potential concerns at the park include opportunities for expansion to accommodate the large demand for use of the park, and to provide additional amenities for visitors such as changing rooms, exterior showers, and mobi-mats to provide improved access to the beach.

All of the park boat launches, swim and fishing docks are inspected and maintained as part of the Department of Public Works budget and are eligible for inclusion into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) as needed.

### South Bar Lake Recreational Amenities:

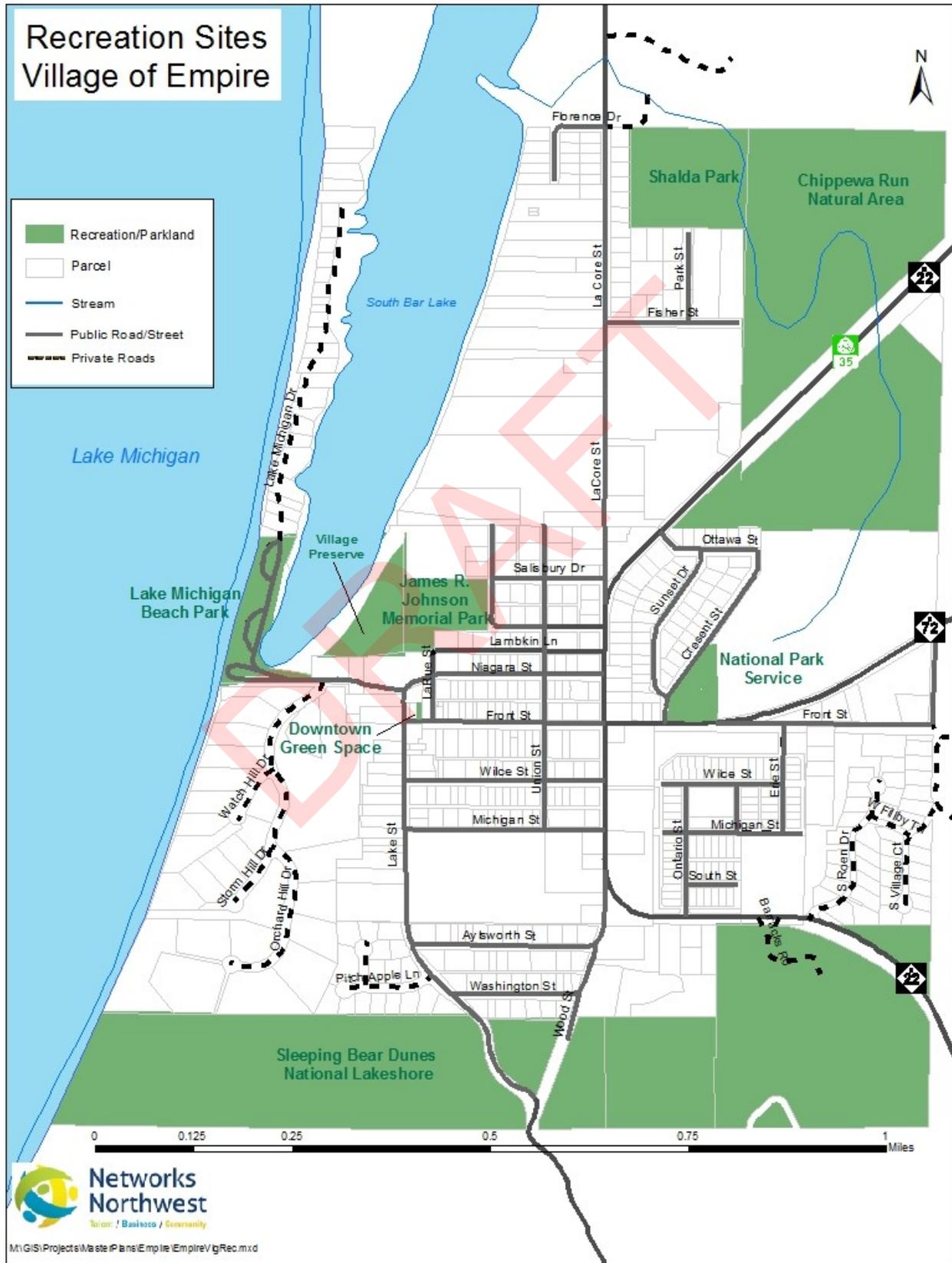
**Boat Launch**—a boat launch ramp with concrete pad located on the South end of the Lake. A wooden walkway is located to the north of the concrete pad that leads to an ADA accessible floating fish dock with a bench area.

**Swimming Dock**— seasonal and ADA accessible consisting of three (3) 60'x20' hinged floating platforms with no ramp and supported by six (6) poles/pipes for anchoring. Includes a swim ladder.

Additional amenities include a picnic shelter, ADA-compliant playground equipment, picnic grills, drinking fountain, bathhouse with restroom facility (accessible), fishing dock, picnic table and benches.

# Village of Empire Recreation Sites

Figure 1-2



# Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), all areas of public service and accommodation became subject to barrier-free requirements, including parks and recreation facilities and programs. The ultimate goal is to provide recreation opportunities that include everyone, regardless of physical or mental impairment.

When evaluating the accessibility of parks and facilities, barriers should be recognized from the perspective of the participant. These perspectives aid in preparing the design and planning future improvements to both current and existing facilities. Therefore, we can determine whether a site, building, and/or facility is in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines.

## **Perspectives to Consider:**

- Could a person with visual impairment have a reasonable means of identifying the facilities?
- If a person is physically disabled, is there a means to access all facilities, and if there are barriers, is an alternate route available?
- If a person has a reading disability, are there standard symbols indicating parking, restrooms, or trailway?
- If a person uses a walking aid such as crutches or braces, could the person move from the point of arrival to the various recreation facilities?

An evaluation of the Village of Empire's park and recreational system accessibility to persons with disabilities was conducted as a component of the 2018 Master Plan Update's recreation inventory. Each site was inventoried for its accessibility status, and results are noted under the discussion on that facility.

## **Transition Plan**

Much of the transition plan for the Village of Empire consists of the removal of small-scale accessibility barriers, which is readily achievable through using the general fund expenditures. This would include the systematic upgrade of play areas, the removal of uneven surfaces and sidewalk obstructions, the placement of accessible parking space signage, and the procurement of additional wheelchair-accessible picnic tables.

Capital improvement expenditures are targeted for more comprehensive accessibility remediation projects, which will be incorporated into the overall improvements of existing facilities. All new playground equipment, site furnishings, landscaping, and other facilities included in the capital improvements plan shall be designed and installed in compliance with the latest adopted U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barrier Compliance Board and U.S. Department of Justice standards.

South Bar Lake offers a wake free zone and is intended for small boats, kayaks, canoes, rowboats and paddle boards.

**Lake Michigan Recreational Amenities include:**

A seasonal boat launch ramp (recently upgraded in 2017) located at the north end of the public beach consisting of five (5) ramp units together measuring 150’ x 146’. Each individual ramp is composed of steel grates designed for both the annual set up in the Spring and removal in the Fall by the Village’s Department of Public Works.

Additional amenities include: Beacon Lighthouse for boaters/fishermen, basketball court (non-regulation size), historic structures with interpretive panels and ADA-compliant playground equipment

**Shalda Park**

**Size: 12.2 acres**

**Service Area: Village/Township**

**ADA Rating: 3**

Shalda Park is an “active” park that includes facilities for organized sports, including baseball and tennis, along with a walking trail. Recreation planning input identified needs for improved connections between Shalda Park and the nearby Chippewa Run Natural Area, and for an

ADA compliant footbridge that would provide access to the Natural Area while protecting the creek banks from erosion. Additional recommended improvements include floodlights for the baseball field and miscellaneous improvements to existing facilities. Input also suggested that the park may need additional promotion and/or improvements to encourage its use among residents and others, by offering facilities such as pickleball courts, a gazebo, and new/upgraded and accessible playground facilities.

**Recreational Amenities include:** Ball fields (2) with backstop, fenced outfield and dugouts; tennis courts (2, unlit); walking path; path to creek; children’s play area; storage building; restroom facilities (2, one ADA compliant), landscape buffer, drinking fountains

**Downtown Green Space**

**Size: .14 acres**

**Service Area: Village/Township**

**ADA Rating: 4**

The Village maintains a small open space park in the Village’s downtown. Some discussion has been held regarding installation of public restrooms at the park, which may be dependent on sewer/water infrastructure options.

**Public / Quasi-Public Owned Recreation Facilities**

NAME	OWNER	SIZE (ACRES)	FACILITIES
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore	National Park Service	107.7	Visitor’s facility with interpretive center and auditorium (leased), natural area, trails, picnic facilities
Chippewa Run Natural Area	Leelanau Conservancy (non-profit)	110	Natural area, 1.5 miles of trails
Johnson’s Park	Empire Lions Club	5.3	Picnic shelter with kitchen area, storage building with restrooms, playground equipment, pickleboard/shuffleboard courts, bocce ball court
Township Hall	Empire Township	0.28	Meeting facilities, indoor recreation facilities
Village Nature Preserve (formerly Nature Conservancy)	Village of Empire	13	Natural area with wetlands
Total		236.28	

**Recreational Amenities include:** Informational kiosk, picnic table

## Other Leelanau County Recreational Facilities

In addition to parks within the Village, residents and visitors also use recreational facilities outside the Village that are owned by other local governments, nonprofits, and state or federal agencies. Township, County, and State parks and campgrounds offer a wide range of recreational activities from picnicking and baseball to hiking and swimming. The local public schools within the county also all have recreational facilities, including sports fields and tracks. Designated public access sites on Lake Michigan and inland lakes and rivers feature boat launches, parking areas, and toilets. Such facilities are maintained by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources or Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. In addition, privately-owned recreational facilities open to the public provide amenities ranging from golf courses to canoe/kayak rental liveries, catering to both residents and visitors.

## Trails

There are numerous recreational facilities classified as trails that are in or run through Leelanau County,



including walking, hiking, biking, equestrian, and cross country skiing trails. Notable trail systems within and connecting to the Village of Empire include the Michigan Shore-to-Shore Trail, a cross-state equestrian trail; and the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail, which was developed collaboratively by the National Park Service, the Friends of Sleeping Bear, Traverse Area Recreational Trails, the M-22 Leelanau Scenic Heritage Route, the Michigan Department of Transportation, and other state and regional partners.

The Village of Empire completed a Transportation Plan in 2015 and included a series of recommendations for increasing the connections between the Village and nearby trails. Input in the recreation planning process reinforced the importance of improved/increased trail connections. These recommendations have been incorporated into this Recreation Plan. Refer to

## Community Recreation Events

	COMMUNITY EVENT
January	Empire Snowmobile Drag Race / Roy Taghon Memorial
February	Empire Winterfest
April	Lion's Club Pancake Breakfast
May	Asparagus Festival
June—September	Empire Farmers' Market—Saturday mornings
July	Anchor Day Celebration
September	Hill Climb—Car rally
October	Empire Heritage Days
	Hops Festival
	Sleeping Bear Marathon
November	Village Tree Lighting and Shopping in the Village
December	Christmas Potluck

# Planning and Public Input Process

## Recreation Planning Process

The Village of Empire recognizes the need to plan for future improvements at locally-owned recreation sites and consider in detail how these projects could be funded. In addition to investigating sources of grant and matching funding, the Village is actively pursuing funding from public donations of labor and materials to assist with recreation maintenance and improvements.

To ensure that recreation planning takes into consideration the full spectrum of community issues and input, the 2018 Recreation Plan was developed in conjunction with the 2018 Village of Empire Master Plan update process. The process included review and analysis of socio-economic data, natural resources, existing land use, and recreation inventory information required by MDNR as part of the recreation plan. The Master Plan Committee provided guidance and oversight in developing the draft plans and in engaging the public in the process. Networks Northwest provided assistance in coordinating meetings and developing the plan.

## Public Input Process

As part of the 2018 Village of Empire Master Plan Update, the Empire Village Planning Commission created a survey to obtain public input on priority community issues, including recreation. The questionnaire was distributed by mail in July 2017, and included an option for respondents to complete the survey online. One hundred eighty eight (188) responses were received. A sampling of the survey results related to recreation are shown on page 11. A public forum was also held in August of 2017 to discuss the survey results and invite community feedback. Approximately 50 participants attended the event. In addition, all meetings with the Village of Empire Planning Commission and Master Plan Committee were open to the public and posted in local public places.



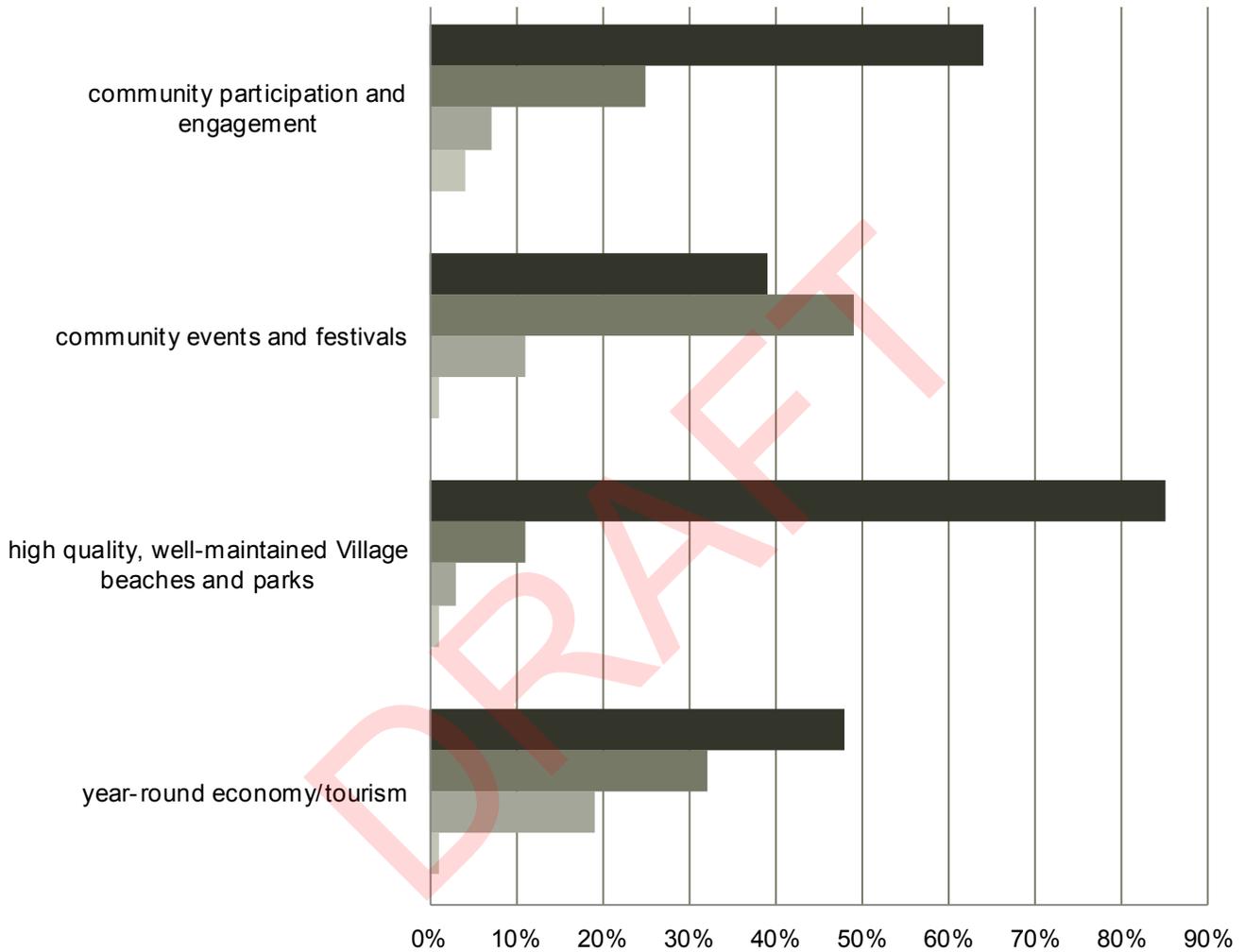
## Public Input Results

The July 2017 community survey results showed a near-unanimous agreement regarding the importance of Village beaches and parks. Public comment at the forum emphasized the importance of the beach as the Village's primary economic asset, and included suggestions on opportunities for improving Shalda Park. A number of concerns were raised regarding maintenance issues and lack of accessibility from the Village itself – without trail connections, visitors and residents can't easily walk or bike to the community's primary assets.

# Village of Empire Master Plan Survey Results

## July - August 2017

Figure 1-3



	year-round economy/tourism	high quality, well-maintained Village beaches and parks	community events and festivals	community participation and engagement
■ VERY IMPORTANT	48%	85%	39%	64%
■ SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	32%	11%	49%	25%
■ NOT IMPORTANT	19%	3%	11%	7%
■ NO OPINION	1%	1%	1%	4%

# Goals and Objectives

The Village of Empire, because of its environmental attributes, expanses of public (state and federal) land and low population density, currently enjoys a favorable reputation as an outdoor recreation area. To sustain and increase the current level of recreational activities for all age groups, the Village should pursue recreational improvements for all residents and visitors, and encourage the growth of **open-space recreation**.

## GOAL:

SUSTAIN AND INCREASE THE CURRENT LEVEL OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGE GROUPS AND ENCOURAGE THE GROWTH OF OPEN-SPACE RECREATION.

## OBJECTIVES

Encourage the preservation and continued vitality of Critical Dune Areas and federally-protected wetlands.

Develop a multi-purpose pathway system in the commercial area and throughout the Village to connect the downtown to area parks, recreation areas, National Park Service facilities and other existing trails.

- Widen sidewalk on LaCore into a separated pathway .
- Install a separated pathway or sidewalk along both sides of M-72 between M-22 and Old Front Street/Erie Street.

Work with partners to ensure the continued maintenance and accessibility of the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail, and to maintain and enhance trail connections to Village assets.

Pursue the development of bike lanes/designated bike routes where separate pathways are not feasible.

- Designate Lake, South LaCore, Wilco and/or Wood as shared roads to connect to the Empire Bluffs Trail south of the Village.
- Designate downtown streets as shared roads.

Proposed subdivisions, site condominiums, planned unit developments and commercial developments should be encouraged to provide or participate in the development of neighborhood parks.

- Consider zoning review procedures that require or encourage park development and trail connectivity in new developments.

Maintain open space and scenic vistas by encouraging Planned Unit Development, clustering and conservation easements.

Maintain existing and establish new trails for biking, cross-country skiing and walking in the Village.

- Establish a route from the village to Empire Bluff Trail into the Village
- Establish a trail along the east side of South Bar Lake to the rail bed, from the rail bed to Johnson Park.

Strive to connect to regional trails

- Coordinate any Shore to Shore Trail signage with the Michigan Trail Riders Association.
- Coordinate with planners of the Bay to Bay Trail (a 30 mile paddle/backpack trail) running parallel to the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore coastline from Platte Bay to Good Harbor Bay.

The Village of Empire has a system of **parks, ball fields and recreational facilities**. To meet the needs of the growing seasonal population and the increased tourist activity, it is important to improve and expand these recreational facilities. Recreational facilities should be developed to meet the needs of the whole community, all age groups and income levels.

<b>GOAL:</b>
MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY, GROWING SEASONAL POPULATION AND INCREASED TOURIST ACTIVITY
<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>
Encourage the consideration of recreational facilities as an integral part of community development plans.
Ensure all new playground equipment for Village parks is ADA compliant.
Enhance and/or expand public beach and water access facilities.
Provide ADA compliant bathroom facilities at all Village parks.

**Community-wide programs** that provide opportunities for year-round recreation, personal enrichment, art, musical and theatrical groups are contributors to the quality of life and attractiveness of the Village. It is important to ensure accessibility to adequate public recreation facilities and cultural activities for area residents and visitors. Coordinated programs and facilities that reflect the character and desires of the community can play a key role in attracting new commercial activities.

<b>GOAL:</b>
ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY TO ADEQUATE PUBLIC RECREATION FACILITIES AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES FOR AREA RESIDENTS AND VISITORS
<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>
Establish physical space to support community center activities and groups like the Empire Area Community Center.
Encourage community arts and crafts, musical and personal enrichment programs for all age groups and for seasonal-and year-round residents.
Encourage and promote cultural facilities and events that meet the needs of the entire community.

# Action Program

The action program describes improvements to existing facilities and the development of new facilities. Anticipated funding sources will be in the form of cash from the Village general fund, in-kind labor, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Leelanau Conservancy and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) grants. Sources of the grants include: Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), Coastal Management Program (CMP), Inland Fisheries Grant Program (IFGP), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Natural Heritage Small Grants, other appropriate grant programs.

<b>PROPOSED ACTION</b>
<b>Lake Michigan Beach Park</b>
Acquire frontage on the south east shoreline of South Bar Lake to allow for the construction of a boardwalk and nature walk with seating. Link into existing village-owned adjacent property and Johnson Park.
Install bio-detention or bio-retention swales to filter runoff from pavement that at present flows into South Bar Lake at boat launch & where runoff forms a pool adjacent to the anchor, as proposed in the Village Landscape Ordinance.
Create a natural amphitheater on the open space at the south end of South Bar Lake, utilize new pavilion as a stage for events, and provide water and power.
Replace new playground equipment as needed (ongoing purchases and installs).
Add outdoor “sand rinsing only” exterior shower for beach goers to enhance village beach amenities.
Add changing rooms to enhance village beach amenities, especially for day-trip beachgoers.
<b>Shalda Park</b>
Provide access to the Chippewa Run Natural Area by constructing an ADA compliant footbridge to provide a safe crossing and protect the creek banks and surrounding area from unnecessary erosion caused by undirected crossings.
Replace existing, non-functional floodlights and install low energy bulbs. Promote facility usage and encourage resident involvement i.e.—organize local softball leagues. Utilize the lighting for other evening /after dark events.
Install track with suitable walking surface.
Either replace or repair existing facilities.
Purchase portable ice rink system to enhance Village winter recreation.
Install fencing along baseball diamonds to protect park goers against balls going out of play.
Explore design and construction costs for a gazebo or pavilion. Build a structure that will appeal to and encourage involvement in the park.
Design and implement a more effective landscaped barrier between the commercial and residential properties and the park. Use native trees and shrubs to help create a bird-friendly habitat.
Install picnic tables and grills for more family-oriented use of the area.
Install new ADA-compliant swings and play structure for more family-oriented use of area.
Designate area and provide infrastructure to support a community garden.
Provide and promote shuffleboard and/or bocce courts to encourage more diversity of use for residents to organize teams/competitions and leagues.
Designate an area and provide infrastructure to support pickleball.
Maintain existing tennis courts.

## PROPOSED ACTION

### Village Trail System

Pursue linkages of existing trail systems. Create or designate necessary trails/routes to connect existing trails and provide signs to clearly identify connections.

Complete sidewalk connectivity throughout the village.

### Downtown Green Space Park

Develop a plan to install a public flush toilet restroom. The project is dependant upon a Village wastewater system.

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### Table 1-3. Recreation Capital Improvement Schedule

The following information includes information based off of the Village of Empire's six year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for FY 2016/17 through FY 2021/22.

PROJECT	CIP PRIORITY (YEAR PROGRAMMED)	FUNDING SOURCE	FUNDING AMOUNT
<b>Lake Michigan Beach Park</b>			
Acquire South Bar Frontage	2	MDNR and Conservancy	Negotiations with property owners
Wetland Enhancement & Boardwalk Area	3	MNRTF, NHSG, Property Owner and Village	\$18,000
Pavement Drainage	5	Community and Village	\$5,000
Picnic Pavilion/Amphitheater	5	MNRTF and Village	\$25,000
Playground Equipment	ongoing	Village (CIP General Fund)	\$6,000 (\$1,000 per year)
Exterior Shower	(2018)	Village (CIP General Fund)	\$3,600
<b>Shalda Park</b>			
Footbridge over creek to Natural Area	1	LWCF, MNRTF and Village	\$60,000
Baseball Floodlights	1	MNRTF and Village	\$5,000
Walking Track	1	MNRTF and Village	\$30,000
Restrooms	1	MNRTF and Village	\$45,000
Ice Rink	(2020)	MNRTF and Village (CIP General Fund)	\$10,000
Gazebo/Pavilion	1	MNRTF and Village	\$8,000
Landscaping	3	Consumers Energy and Village	\$15,000
Picnic Tables and Grills	1	MNRTF and Village	\$4,100
Playground Equipment	1	MNRTF, Game Time and Village	\$12,000
Sidewalk extension	1	MNRTF and Village	\$25,000
Community Garden	4	Village	\$5,000
Shuffleboard / Bocce Courts	3	Village	\$2,000
<b>Village Trail System</b>			
Trail Linkage System	2	MDOT, SBDNL and Village	to be determined
<b>Village Community Center</b>			
	5	Community	\$600,000
<b>Downtown Green Space Park</b>			
Public Restroom	(2021)	MNRTF and Village (CIP General Fund)	\$110,000
Portable Gazebo	3	MNRTF and Village	\$9,500
Source: Village of Empire Capital Improvement Plan FY 2016/17 - FY 2021/22			

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## Appendix A. Notes from August 28, 2017 Public Forum

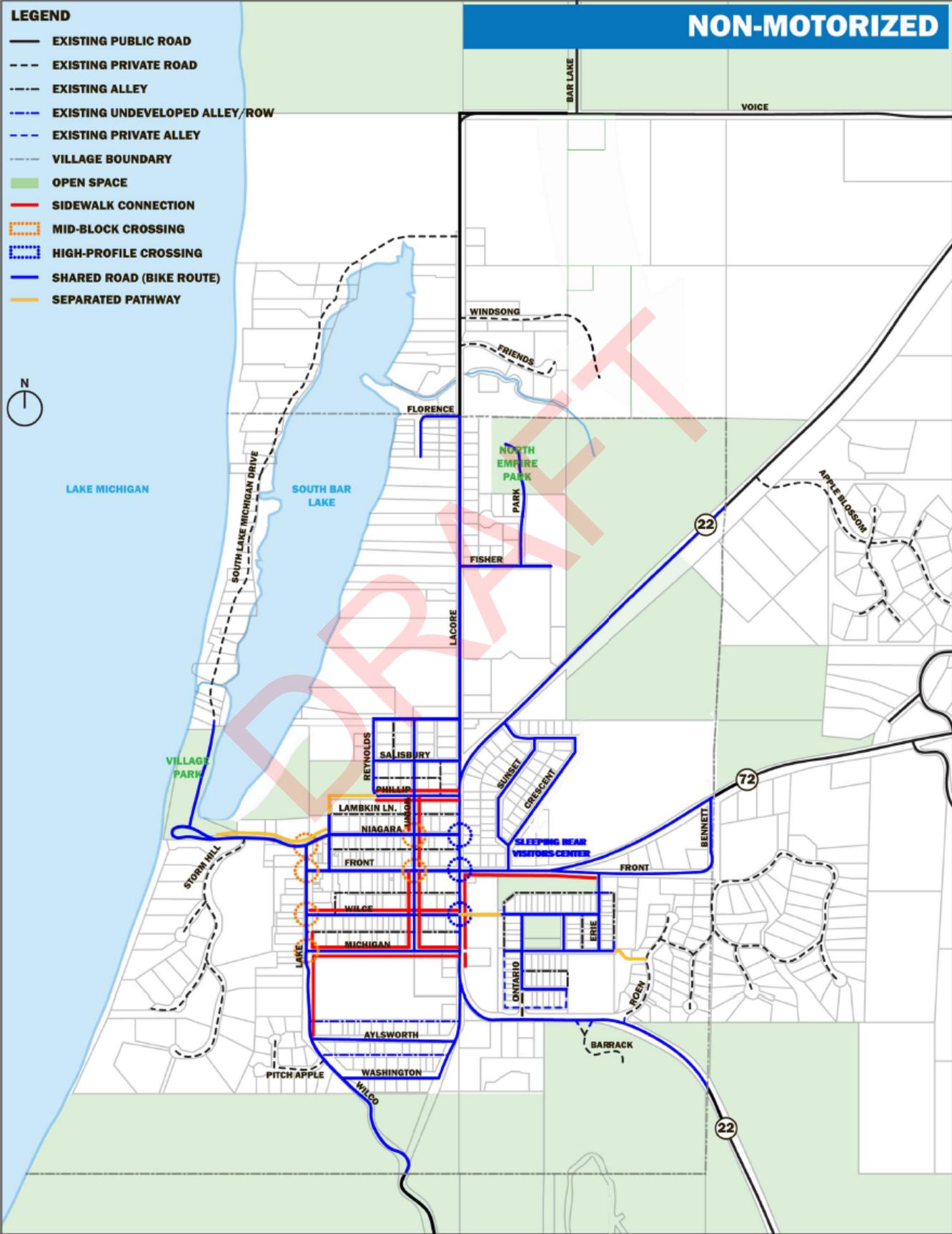
Source: Networks Northwest Empire Master Plan Survey and Public Input Results Summary and Report

- ADA parking @ beach – designated parking for residents
- Community garden @ Shalda
- Track, playground @ Shalda – everything in 2012 Rec Plan
- Smaller trees that won't break sidewalks
- Unique draw for Shalda – pool, ice rink, climbing wall, skate park – bring young people
- Beach grooming – pedestrian walkway on beach
- Connect SBHT to NPS headquarters
- Shalda Park bridge/greenway connections
- Community center for seniors & kids
- Space for live entertainment near beach – event structure, portable stage
- Community Center – Village Hall filled almost every day
- Preserve what we have – funding for maintenance
- Increase parking rates
- Concession stands, food trucks @ Shalda Park
- Winter activities
- Embrace bicycling
- Trail extension and bring people downtown safely
- Amenities for Shalda – i.e. BBQ
- Skate parks - kids using other Village locations unsafely
- Activities @ parks i.e. swim class
- Playground @ South Bar needs improvement



# Appendix C. Non-Motorized & Trail Maps

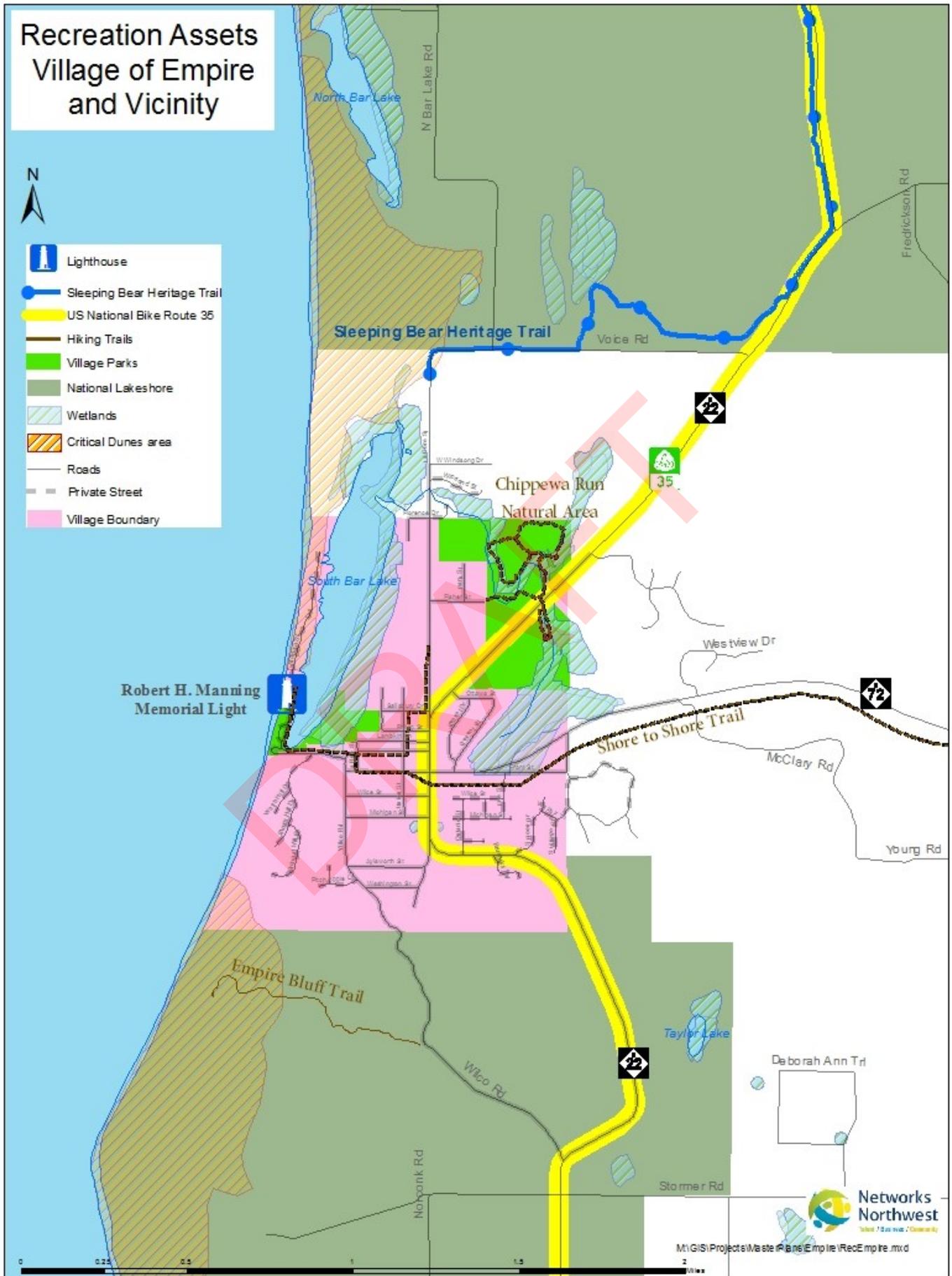
Source: Village of Empire Transportation Plan (2015)



# Recreation Assets Village of Empire and Vicinity



-  Lighthouse
-  Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail
-  US National Bike Route 35
-  Hiking Trails
-  Village Parks
-  National Lakeshore
-  Wetlands
-  Critical Dunes area
-  Roads
-  Private Street
-  Village Boundary



**Appendix D. Minutes - Plan for Adoption (pending)**

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