

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

The **Leelanau General Plan** was developed with the support and guidance of citizens and representatives of all local governments in Leelanau County to offer an overview with inner consistency on the issues of future County land use. It is founded on the principle that all land use and infrastructure decisions that do not involve issues of greater than local concern should be made at the local level. These decisions should be carefully coordinated with adjacent jurisdictions and appropriate County agencies. The plan looks to a continuing partnership between the County and local units of government in the achievement of the shared vision described in this plan. The partnership can be built on mutual respect in areas of overlapping responsibilities and mutual support in areas where responsibilities are separate but compatible in pursuit of common goals and benefits. It is envisioned that future local comprehensive plans will be compatible with the **General Plan**, but more specific with regard to land use and local implementing policies.

Each local governmental unit in the County entered into a mutual agreement at the beginning of the process (1991) in the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU), to participate with the County in the development of a general plan which would look in a coordinated manner at the issues and alternatives for guiding growth in the County.

This planning process represented an unprecedented commitment in the state of Michigan on the part of both County and local units of government. Each local government agreed to:

- participate, fully and freely, in the process by appointing one elected official, one planning commissioner, and one citizen-at-large to participate;
- communicate all suggestions via the participation process;
- participate fully in the various forums, seminars, workshops, and other meetings scheduled as a part of the process;
- accept, review, discuss, and respond to all reports, working papers, documents, etc. produced relative to the plan;
- provide without cost needed data, reports, and other information.

In turn, the County agreed to:

- coordinate and pay the costs of preparation of the County-wide growth management plan;
- conduct basic planning research and mapping.

It is hoped the **General Plan** is not merely a "County plan" even though it has been adopted by the County Planning Commission. Instead, it is intended to be a plan that affects the lives of all County residents and visitors on a daily basis. It is not intended to be as detailed as local comprehensive plans usually are, but rather to address the broader issues, and especially the multi-jurisdiction issues from a County-wide perspective.

The ultimate success of the **General Plan** largely depends on the commitment that is made to implementation. Commitment needs to come from every local government, the County, the various state and federal authorities as well as a broad spectrum of County citizens. It would be easy to ignore addressing the issue of implementation in the **General Plan**, but that would only delay discussion on this most important issue until much later, and forego several opportunities for meaningful public input. As a result, Part Three of this plan proposes an implementation strategy.

PROCESS USED TO DEVELOP THE PLAN

Broad citizen involvement was encouraged by the Citizens Advisory Committee whose opinion is reflected in the following quote from an early working paper:

"Involving people in the planning process means acknowledging that everyone has something of value to contribute. This system seeks to avoid setting up citizens, developers, environmentalists, or local governments as "the enemy". Recognition of this fundamental can change the dynamics of growth management from "us against them" to "we're all in this together".

The process followed to create this plan attempted to create a shared common vision of the future.

RELATIONSHIP TO LOCAL PLANNING AND OTHER COUNTY OPERATIONS

This **General Plan** is intended to guide the actions of the County Planning Commission and many of the priorities of the County Planning and Community Development Department. It should also play a major role in guiding public facility and infrastructure decisions by the County Board of Commissioners and other County departments and commissions (such as the Road Commission) after capital improvement programs compatible with the **General Plan** are prepared. Part Three focuses on these issues and the institutional changes that need to occur for this goal to be accomplished.

It is believed that common pursuit of the policy guidelines in this plan has led, and will continue to lead, to improved efforts to integrate and coordinate planning throughout the County. It is hoped a mutually supportive working relationship between the County and local units of government can build from the positive experience achieved by the many local government officials and citizens who significantly participated in the development of this plan.

GENERAL PLAN UPDATES

The **General Plan** is founded on mutually supportive relationships in pursuit of mutual goals. To ensure that these relationships and goals remain mutual, it is important to periodically reexamine the plan and update it. The Plan advocates the preparation of annual reports to document actions taken to implement the plan as well as the preparation of annual work programs and budgets. The **General Plan** is reviewed every five years to ensure it continues to reflect a common vision for the future of Leelanau County. In 2017, in preparation for a new update, a Planning Questionnaire was developed by the County Planning Commission and released for Leelanau County residents to complete. Some of the results from that 2018 Leelanau County Questionnaire (2018 Questionnaire) are included in this update. Of particular significance, 96% of responders from the 2018 Questionnaire felt that housing availability and the cost were important, followed by wage and the ability to earn a living. When asked what the most important qualities of Leelanau County were, over 96% felt the scenic views were important, followed by access to Lake Michigan and inland lakes.

PERSPECTIVE

The **Leelanau General Plan** assumes future growth will occur at about the same rate in the next 20 years as in the recent past. At the present time, the most significant economic development activity in the County is neither agriculture nor tourism (the mainstays of the economy for decades); rather, it is the construction of new single family homes.

Much of this development has been on large lots scattered along existing roads throughout the County. If the low density residential sprawl pattern of most of the growth in the last three decades continues, however, it will destroy the present character and traditional economic vitality of the County. Each new dwelling on prime orchard or forest land not only permanently converts that land out of renewable resource use, but also creates a new public service burden and contributes to rising taxes on the farmer -making it more difficult for the farmer to stay in business.

PRINCIPAL STRATEGIES

The **General Plan** proposes a compact land development pattern that protects renewable resource lands (such as orchard land and forests) as well as sensitive natural resources (like wetlands and dunes). It proposes policies to encourage location of future land development in and near existing villages, as well as near Traverse City. It proposes infrastructure management policies to achieve and reinforce this land use pattern. It encourages open space protection, while simultaneously permitting large landowners an opportunity to capture the development value of their land. Open space zoning and rural clustering techniques are also proposed to encourage new development in rural areas to be sited so as to minimize visual impacts on the landscape and to minimize public service costs.

The plan proposes measures to protect the small-town, rural character of County villages and the scenic qualities of the major road corridors. Using naturally occurring vegetation for landscaping, minimizing signs, burying utilities, placing parking at the side or behind commercial buildings are all measures proposed to retain the existing character in the County.

More specifically, the plan proposes an environmental protection strategy that also:

- Identifies and avoids development near sensitive environments.
- Protects water quality of surface water and ground water.
- Minimizes land fragmentation of large parcels.
- Links open spaces.
- Restricts keyhole development.
- Protects renewable resources.

The plan proposes widespread acceptance by citizens of a stewardship ethic that views land not as an asset to be exploited, but rather as a resource held in trust for future generations for use by the present generation.

Citizens and local government officials basically have two choices: maintain the status quo and accept a diminished quality of life or change destructive development patterns. This **General Plan** advocates the latter.

The **General Plan** is neither a slow growth nor an anti-growth plan. It calls for balanced growth that is carefully guided to protect and enhance the quality of life in the County. It accepts the principle that environmental protection and economic development are not incompatible objectives.

It recognizes that a healthy economy depends on a healthy environment. To these ends the following strategy is proposed:

- Curtail sprawl and encourage compact development.
- Protect and enhance the existing economic base.
- Create new year-round jobs.
- Guide new development where public services are adequate or efficiently added.
- Phase future growth.
- Seek to achieve a better balance between the location of job/housing/transportation.
- Protect agricultural operations
- Protect sand and gravel resources.
- Address equity concerns of large landowners in the implementation of development regulations.
- Improve educational opportunities.
- Improve health and human services.

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Additional tools to be used to better manage growth include:

- Concurrency requirements so new development occurs after necessary public facilities are in place (not before).
- Village and rural service districts to define what services will be available where and when.
- Capital improvement programs to better guide development of new public facilities.
- Development of a County-wide map to identify the location of all new future public facilities.
- Development of impact assessment procedures and checklists.
- Development of model local ordinances.
- Further enhancements in the County Planning and Community Development Office's data center function and Geographic Information System.

The plan recognizes special needs for affordable housing and jobs among a growing segment of the year-round residents. It also recognizes the growing economic disparity between persons of different age and income classifications.

The **General Plan** recognizes important roles for the County in the provision of:

- Data
- Maps
- Coordination and communication
- Technical assistance
- Model plans and ordinances
- Capital improvement programming
- Conflict resolution

- Training
- Limited financial support and encouragement of local planning
- Assistance in passage of new legislation to improve the range of available tools to manage growth.

A list of the principal issues in which guidance from this plan is likely to be sought are presented below.

- As the basis for more detailed township and village plans and development ordinances.
- As a framework for private investment in the County.
- As an aid to village, township, and County public facility and infrastructure decisions.
- As a guide to the County Planning Commission in fulfilling its responsibility to review proposed public facility expenditures, and township plans and zoning amendments.
- As a guide in improving protection of air and water quality.
- As a guide to improved long term resource management decisions, especially with regard to renewable resources, critical plant and animal habitats, and sensitive environments.
- As the basis for joint village/township/County grant utilization activities.
- As an organization plan for County program expenditures.
- As a means of facilitating intergovernmental cooperation (e.g., with not only the County and local units of government, but also with area schools, the National park Service, the Soil Conservation Service, the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, MDOT, Benzie and Grand Traverse Counties, etc.).
- To define issues of greater than local concern and establish appropriate mechanisms to deal with those issues.

CITIZEN BENEFITS OF THE PLAN

If implemented as presented, this plan will benefit the average citizen in the following ways:

- Infrastructure and public services will be incrementally provided in compact areas as needed, rather than spread widely across much of the County.
- Owners of agricultural and forest land will have improved opportunities for success due to reduced pressures from non-farm residences and will have new opportunities to capture the development value of their land without dividing and selling it for residential development.
- There will be many different types of housing opportunities to meet the needs of young and older families, “empty nesters”, retirees, and persons with special needs.
- There will continue to be large expanses of orchards, woods and other open spaces across the County for many years to come.
- The unique beauty of the County will continue to be largely maintained.
- Sensitive natural features like wetlands, floodplains, dunes, and unique plant and animal habitat will receive greater protection over time, increasingly through acquisition of key properties by land conservancies.

- New jobs will be encouraged in areas where public services are available and adequate to meet needs.
- Local and County governmental agencies will more closely coordinate planning and the provision of other public services to eliminate unnecessary overlap, gaps and inefficiency.
- Public services will be adequate to meet the needs of a diverse population.
- Developers will find, over time, greater uniformity in local land use regulations across the County.
- Development of coordinated planning objectives and ordinances between and among all the local jurisdictions will greatly benefit all because conflicts and variations will be reduced. Such a concept should in no way affect the autonomy of local governments with respect to implementing their ordinances. Compatibility throughout the County, however, will enhance the character, future growth, development, and economic well being of constituencies of the County. Such consistency will add legal strength by minimizing challenges and interpretations.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

The **General Plan** is organized into three major parts. Part One examines issues from a County view. It presents a comprehensive description of the character of Leelanau County and the key policy guidelines proposed to protect and enhance the quality of life in the County. Part Two takes a traditional "functional" view of issues and proposed policy initiatives to address them. Specific policies and action statements generated from extensive citizen input in seven functional areas (such as land use, transportation, natural resources, etc.) are presented to supplement and support the general growth management strategy presented in Part One. Part Three presents the structure for and major efforts to be initiated to implement the **General Plan**. It includes a proposed institutional structure for planning decisions and identifies the actions that should be taken to implement the **General Plan**.

PRINCIPAL GOAL

The major purpose of the **General Plan** is to record a consensus based growth strategy developed over several years. It is intended for joint use by Leelanau County and local governments within the County in making coordinated and mutually supportive future land use, infrastructure and public service decisions.

It includes policy guidelines and a brief description of key planning tools to achieve the following goal:

“It is the principal goal of the **General Plan** to establish a strategy for guiding growth that protects, and where possible, enhances the unique character of and quality of life in the County. To that end, the **General Plan** focuses on balancing environmental protection, resource management and economic development so as to provide a foundation for a sustainable economy that permits long term prosperity for all present and future Leelanau County residents. The balance so achieved should not sacrifice environmental quality when reasonable and prudent development alternatives exist. This plan recognizes that a healthy economy depends on a healthy environment. Achievement of this goal means protecting the integrity of the land base for use by present generations without unnecessarily compromising the options of future generations.”

FIVE POLICY GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING GROWTH IN LEELANAU COUNTY

Policy Guideline: Intergovernmental Cooperation

A partnership founded on mutual respect and mutual support in achievement of the common goals of this **General Plan** should guide the development and implementation of new relationships between the County and local units of government in the County and between the County and adjoining counties in the region.

Policy Guideline: Preservation of County Character

The existing natural and people-made features in the County that make up its rural character are interdependent with the activities that comprise its economic base. It is important therefore, that future land use change in the County enhance, not undermine the character of the area around it, and in so doing contribute to protection of the unique rural character of the entire Leelanau County.

Policy Guideline: Working with Nature

Extensive and diverse sensitive natural features found throughout provide the foundation for the present and the future quality of life in the County. They should be protected where pristine, restored where damaged, and have access and use managed for long term sustainability.

Policy Guideline: Balanced Growth

New residential, commercial, and industrial development in the County is encouraged provided it is: 1) in locations with public services adequate to meet its needs, 2) environmentally friendly, 3) consistent with the character of development in the area, 4) consistent with local plans and regulations, and 5) compatible with the guidelines of this **General Plan**. In the implementation of this policy guideline, both the County and local governments would seek to ensure over time, that all the health, safety, and general welfare needs of its citizens that can be reasonably met are accommodated with a variety of land uses in the pattern proposed and in a manner which does not unnecessarily compromise options for future generations.

Policy Guideline: Managed Growth

Local comprehensive plans and local development regulations (including for example, zoning and subdivision regulations) should be updated and thereafter maintained, to include goals, objectives, policies and strategies for managing future growth compatible with the **General Plan**. Local plans should include more specific land use and density proposals at the parcel-specific level. Local regulations should focus on design and other issues of local significance. Public facilities should all be constructed according to local capital improvement programs that are coordinated at all governmental levels in the County.