

1.0 Introduction

Little Traverse Township lies on the north side of Little Traverse Bay, between the cities of Petoskey and Harbor Springs. Even though Little Traverse Township is small in land area (18 square miles, or half the size of a standard 36 square mile geographic township), its location makes it the heart of Emmet County. The Township includes historic resorts covering most of its Little Traverse Bay waterfront, the community of Conway which is situated along US-31, the former railroad, and Crooked Lake. Many of the golf/ski resorts in the County are located either in, partially in, or immediately adjacent to Little Traverse Township. No matter where you are going in Emmet County, you almost always have to travel through Little Traverse Township, making it a place that is growing and one that will continue to grow into the future.

Location and Regional Setting

Little Traverse Township is located geographically within Emmet County, in the northwest part of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan (see **Map 1**). The City of Harbor Springs and West Traverse Township abut Little Traverse to the west, Pleasantview Township lies to the north, Littlefield Township and Crooked Lake lie to the east, while Bear Creek Township and Little Traverse Bay make up the Township's southern boundary. Springvale Township is adjacent on the far southeast corner. The county seat is in Petoskey about ten miles by road from the Township Hall. Mackinaw City and the Mackinac Bridge are about 30 miles to the north, Traverse City is 85 miles to the southwest, and Gaylord is about 50 miles to the southeast.

The Harbor-Petoskey Road (M-119) runs through Little Traverse Township from the south to the west, connecting the resort communities of Petoskey and Harbor Springs. County Primary Road C-81 (Pleasantview Road) links much of the County from north to south, bisecting the Township while connecting M-119 to ski/golf resorts such as Boyne Highlands and Nubs Nob, as well as Wilderness State Park and Mackinaw City. West Conway Road connects M-119 to US-31 in Conway from east to west, making it an important local connector. Because of the Township's central location and easy access, many public facilities are located within its bounds including: Harbor Springs Airport, Emmet County Transfer Station, Emmet County Road Commission, and the Harbor Springs Area Sewage Disposal Authority.

Emmet County is one of the fastest growing counties by percentage in the State of Michigan. This is primarily due to its high quality of life factors including recreational opportunities, an abundance of natural resources, and small town community charm. Little Traverse Township with its central location will continue to experience commercial and industrial growth pressures along its corridors and additional residential development in its hillsides.

Government

Little Traverse Township was organized in 1855, just after the reorganization of townships by the State legislature. A mistake was made in this reorganization when the State defined Little Traverse and Bear Creek Townships to have overlapping boundaries, the southern half of T35N-R5W. The County Board of Supervisors created a new Township, L'Arbor Croche whose boundaries were the same as Little Traverse Township, minus the overlap piece. This seemed to solve the problem, except that the name, L'Arbor Croche, was dropped and the original name of Little Traverse was kept. This explains why Little Traverse is not a full square Township.

Insert Location Map 1- to be provided]

Originally, Little Traverse Township was one of only four townships in the County, encompassing what we know today as Friendship, Pleasantview, West Traverse and Little Traverse Townships. After the Homestead Act in 1875 opened lands up for settlement, six new townships were created in the County; two were Friendship and Pleasantview, created out of what was formerly Little Traverse.

After that split, Little Traverse Township was still much larger in land area than now, encompassing all of what is now Harbor Springs and much of West Traverse Township. The northerly Township line, in 1875, went all the way to Lake Michigan. In 1897, that part of Little Traverse Township that was in T35N-R6W, and part of southern Friendship Township, was detached to organize as West Traverse Township. In 1932, the City of Harbor Springs was created from the incorporated Village, changing the boundaries of Little Traverse Township to what we know of today.

Community History

Little Traverse Bay

In 1741, the Ottawa tribe settled at L'Arbre Croche, which included the areas along the Little Traverse Bay shoreline from Cross Village to Seven Mile Point. During this time period, it was the largest Ottawa Indian settlement in Michigan. Some say it continued along the shore for more than 15 miles. The center of the Ottawa town was in the area of Good Hart and Middle Village.

A treaty in 1821 surrendered most of the native winter hunting grounds in southeast Michigan. This led to the end of the Ottawa hunting migration, therefore keeping them in the area year round. Places like Little Traverse Bay for the first time started to become permanently settled. In 1827, a Catholic mission was built in the "New L'Arbre Croche" or "Little Traverse" as it was called, at the site of what is known today as the City of Harbor Springs. By 1839, the population of Little Traverse Bay had grown to 1,943 individuals.

In 1855, the Treaty of Detroit allowed each Native American family to choose an 80 acre piece of land and a single Native American who was over 20 years of age the chance to choose 40 acres. In 1872, the lands were reopened to those Indians who were not eligible in 1855. Three years later in 1875, the Homestead Act opened the rest of these areas for public sale. It was the Homestead Act that brought the EuroAmerican to Little Traverse. In 1875, there were only 150 white settlers in the Little Traverse Bay area, by 1880 there were 6,640.

The railroad line coming from the south originally ended in Petoskey, but the growing community of Little Traverse took it upon themselves to encourage the railroad company to extend the line to their community. This extension was completed in 1880, helping both the logging industry and the resort/ tourist industry to flourish.

Most of the steep forested hillsides of Emmet County had not been logged during the logging era of the 19th century. This was due to difficult access issues. With the advent of the railroad, along with shipping, the interior could be logged. Railroad lines were built into the interior of the County to Harbor Springs, and one of eight sawmills in town processed the lumber. Lumber and wood products could then be transported by rail or boat from Harbor Springs to the rest of the world.

The resort industry started booming as soon as land was available and access was possible. The first of these resorts in Little Traverse was the development of Harbor Point in 1875. Although Harbor Point is now in West Traverse Township, it was originally developed within the boundaries of Little Traverse Township. It is located on the point in Little Traverse Bay that forms the Harbor of Harbor Springs.

The next resort to develop, in 1878, was the resort of We-que-ton-sing. "Weque", as locals call it, was developed after two Reverends visited the area looking for a place where "worn-out and sweltering humanity could repair to recover health and enjoy rational recreations." The Reverends picked the shores of Little Traverse Bay. The Citizens of Harbor Springs gave the group 80 acres to develop as a summer resort. The property is less than a mile from Harbor Springs, half of which is on the waterfront, and the other half is on a high 100-foot plateau, overlooking the Bay.

Before the turn of the century other resorts developed along the shores of the Bay. From east of Wequestoning, there was and still is Roaring Brook, Ramona Park, and Menonqua Beach. Most all of these resorts had large inns during the early 20th century. None of the original buildings are in existence today. The most famous was the Ramona Park Inn, later called the Harbor Inn. Ramona Park Inn had a large hotel, casino, and dance hall. It was one of the most lavish nightclubs of the area during the first half of the 20th century. Harbor Inn was listed on the list of Michigan Historic Sites; the Inn was torn down in 1994.

Conway

The shores of Crooked Lake were also developing along with Little Traverse Bay. The Inland Waterway, linking Crooked Lake to Lake Huron, was used by the Native Americans as a transportation route; small Indian settlements developed along the route.

Settlement of the area now known as Conway began between 1872 and 1879. The Post Office was built in 1882. A private railroad line was built from Petoskey to Conway, open in 1879, and then in 1882 a station of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad was opened. (This line went all the way to Mackinaw City and therefore the private line was no longer in service.) Conway was originally called Crooked Lake, then Dodge's Landing after early settler William E. Dodge, and then named Conway in 1882 after Dodge's grandson Conway Dodge who died at age 11.

In 1892 Dodge platted the Village of Conway which included land for a school and church. At this time, along with the entire area, Conway was booming. The original church is in existence today, as the Conway Community Center and the original church was just recently moved to another location.

When resorters started to settle the Little Traverse Bay region, they wanted to take a boat trip along to view for themselves the scenic Inland Waterway. A common way to take the trip was the circular route from Little Traverse Bay to Mackinaw City, Cheboygan and through the system of lakes and rivers which make the Inland Waterway. The terminus of the route was Conway, which is the closest point of navigable water to Little Traverse Bay. In 1900 the inland waterway boat trip was the most traveled boat route in North America and Northern Michigan's first tourist attraction. The excursion boats, which at one point there were 32, had to stop in Conway (or Oden) loading or unloading passengers. Hence, Conway flourished around the turn of the century.

Conway never became an incorporated Village, but there a nice small community continues to reside in the Plat of the Village of Conway. Although it is not incorporated, the post office, railroad station, US highway and the famous tourist attraction has kept its name on the map over the past one hundred years.

Current Planning Context

Little Traverse Township has been administering their own zoning ordinance since 1975. The Township Zoning Act (Public Act 184 of 1943) provides for the statutory basis for the Zoning Ordinance, which is to be based on an adopted Master Plan. Little Traverse Township has based their Zoning Ordinance on the Emmet County Master Plan adopted in 1973 and updated in 1997. The Emmet County Planning Commission also acts as the Zoning Coordinating Committee for any changes to the Zoning Ordinance. The purpose of a Township-level Master Plan is to allow Little Traverse Township to focus more directly on issues of local concern, and to develop greater local involvement in the planning process.

Plan Organization and Purpose

This Master Land Use plan begins by providing the background information necessary for Little Traverse Township to assess its current conditions and move toward the future. Chapters in the plan include a social and economic profile, housing characteristics, a natural resources analysis, an inventory of existing community facilities, and a market assessment. All existing land uses within the Township are categorized and mapped in order to identify current land use patterns and potential problem areas. Community goals have been identified by the Zoning Board, based in part on a community visioning forum. With knowledge of existing conditions and community goals, the Zoning Board developed a future land use map. This map is intended to guide future community land use decisions, and can serve as the starting point for future land use regulations and standards.

By creating this Master Plan, the community has established the guiding principles and road map for Little Traverse Township over the next twenty years. By creating a Master Land Use Plan, the people of Little Traverse Township clearly demonstrate an understanding of the need to balance community growth with reasonable resource protection. By planning wisely for future residential, commercial, and industrial development, Little Traverse Township will be able to preserve the many natural resources that have drawn people to the area for the last century, preserve the essence and character of the Township, and provide adequate services for residents and visitors alike.