

Executive Summary

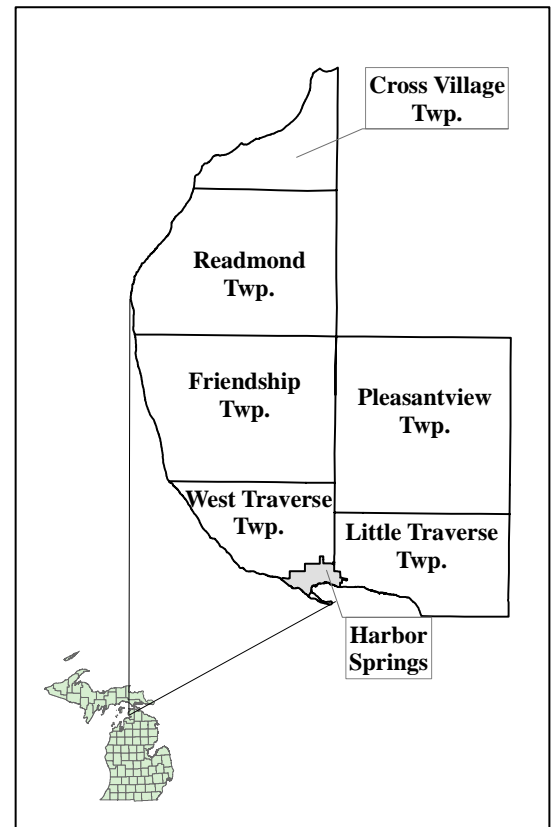
In 2000, a community-wide visioning effort undertaken in the greater Harbor Springs area (herein referred to as the HARBOR Area Community) documented what had been expressed time and again in numerous public surveys. The high quality of life must be maintained by:

- retaining the small town character,
- accommodating appropriate growth,
- preserving the extraordinary natural character and
- providing high quality community services/facilities.

In response to the visioning effort, HARBOR, Inc was founded and quickly established a Recreation and Open Space Initiative. The Recreation and Open Space Initiative was considered key because recreational, cultural, and open space assets were identified as primary contributors to quality of life and community economic well-being. Property owners, residents and visitors alike value their experiences in the HARBOR Area Community due to the recreational quality and natural environment. At the same time, many year round residents depend on the recreational assets of the area and natural environment to support their individual livelihood.

While these recreational and natural resource assets are essential and part of the larger community, individual jurisdictions, organizations and school district own and/or operate these facilities. With concern that future generations will be inadequately served due to the increasing cost of providing recreation, many community members have identified the need for funding to develop new and maintain existing facilities.

Recognizing that the greater community was served by a recreational system with assets owned or operated by multiple units of government and other organizations as well as the inherent need for funding, HARBOR, Inc. pursued a multi-jurisdictional Recreation, Trails and Open Space Plan. The jurisdictional boundaries of the plan are defined by seven separate units of government that generally comprise the same area as the Harbor Springs Public School District. HARBOR, Inc., along with 5 of the seven jurisdictions, submitted an application to *Partnerships for Change* for technical assistance to ensure that the plan meets the guidelines of Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) (one of many potential funding sources).



PURPOSE AND GOALS OF THE PLAN

A Recreation Working Committee comprised of local officials and interested community members, met for over a year, to identify gaps in the current system and opportunities for cooperation. This Working Committee, supplemented by input from several community-wide public meetings, agreed that the plan should focus on three key recreational areas - Trails, Open Space and an Umbrella System (for coordination and maintenance). A vision statement and goals were drafted to support the findings. The vision:

A coordinated system of recreation, trails and open space that serves the multiple local jurisdictions and organizations, enhances the economic and natural value of local resources and reinforces safe alternative modes of transportation.

The goals to support this vision:

1. Build and maintain an interconnected system of non-motorized trails for the purpose of recreation and transportation.
2. Promote safe and convenient access to high quality public waterfront, forests, view sites and open fields for all residents of the service area. Continue to evaluate, identify and pursue important key parcels and protect existing parcels.
3. Consider establishing an umbrella organization, system or instrument to assist with management/administration/maintenance for the benefit of the broader community and to guide future development/acquisition so that facilities are located within close proximity to the population served.

PLAN AND PROGRAM PROPOSALS

Trails

In a community with extraordinary scenic and natural beauty, trail based recreation enhances the user experiences of visitors and residents alike, providing an essential component of the local economy. Additionally, trails already have a proven positive record in the region (as seen in the Little Traverse Wheelway), thereby qualifying expansion of the system. In short, trails have the opportunity to provide greater connectiveness and access to the extraordinary natural and scenic environment without discrimination based on age or income.

From a planning and financial perspective, trails lend themselves to joint efforts because they cross jurisdictional boundaries and acquisition is best shared between many parties. From the perspective of community members, trails fill essential transportation and recreation needs for people of all ages, particularly our youth.

The Trail proposals described in this plan include:

1. An Easement Program
2. A Main Trail Routes Program

3. A Safe Routes to School Program

Open Space

As with trails, open space benefits the community as a recreational attraction for visitors and residents alike. Open space might include trails for active recreation or might simply be enjoyed for its aesthetic value. In addition to its recreational benefits, open space has tremendous environmental value, providing necessary areas for groundwater recharge and helping attenuate and filter storm water.

Again, from a planning perspective, it is clear that open space resources are served well from planning jointly. The cost of open space and waterfront property (or access) in the HARBOR Area Community makes acquisition nearly unachievable for individual jurisdictions. It is also equally clear that the benefits derived from access to the waterfront and open space are shared inter-jurisdictionally.

The broader area currently has a significant amount of open space however only a very small percentage of it is permanently protected. Interior open space is currently abundant, but incrementally becoming disjointed by development. Preservation activities should focus on potential corridors and large parcels to maintain the integrity of the existing open space. At the same time, waterfront open space is rapidly disappearing. Numerous public surveys have identified waterfront access as a high priority for residents of the study area. Open Space Acquisition/Preservation should focus on:

1. greenway connecting corridors,
2. large priority parcels,
3. view sites and
4. waterfront.

Umbrella System

One solution discussed among the Recreation Working Committee and often mentioned during public meetings was the idea of an umbrella organization to coordinate plan implementation. A workable umbrella system would need to be simple, yet flexible enough to provide support to a variety of local groups while allowing them to maintain their autonomy.

Properly structured and implemented, an umbrella system could address many of the weaknesses identified during public meetings as part of this planning process. It could:

1. provide the means for identifying community wide recreation needs and providing coordination of the activities designed to meet those needs
2. provide a common marketing and communications strategy for addressing Recreation, Trails and Opens Space in the HARBOR Area Community
3. provide a means to jointly address the funding and location of facilities that serve the broader community. A properly implemented umbrella system has the opportunity to more efficiently and effectively secures long term access to,

provide maintenance for and potentially upgrade facilities that are jointly used by the broader community.

ACTION PROGRAM

This plan focuses on those areas where a gap exists. The input received from our Recreation Working Committee and through public meetings focused on a desire to accomplish those things that are essential to quality of life, important to the economics of the area, threatened by changing finances or other dynamics and difficult to accomplish individually.

Implementation in this Plan focuses on Goal 1, Trails. Additional community discussion and planning analysis is necessary to arrive at workable implementation recommendations for Goals 2 and 3, Open Space and Umbrella System.

Organization

An organizational structure is recommended as part of the action program. The HARBOR Area Recreation, Trails and Open Space Authority is recommended to be structured under Public Act 321 of 2000, the Recreation Authorities Act. That public act allows for very comprehensive application of implementation techniques on the local level. Under that act, the local community is enabled to place appropriate local level restrictions.

An organization that is established under this act can receive many state and federal grants directly. At this time a tax levy is not recommended, however such an organization has the capability to pursue a local tax levy to fund local priorities relative to Recreation, Trails and Open Space. As more agreement is reached on Goals 2 and 3, Open Space and an Umbrella System, implementation recommendations will need to evaluate that potential because higher amounts of local level funding are necessary for those goals. In the meantime, the community can begin to accomplish the Goal 1 which has the capacity to leverage a larger percent of state and federal funding.

Therefore, in keeping with public priorities, it is recommended that an organization be incorporated to very specifically implement those Plan and Program Proposals that correspond with Goal 1 (trails), while remaining flexible enough to address Goals 2 and 3 (open space and umbrella system) in the future.

Advisory Committee System

The newly formed organization should develop an Advisory Committee System to review, prioritize, and make recommendation on the Plan Proposals and Programs. This should include, but is not limited to:

- Trail Advisory Committee
- Safe Routes to Schools Teacher/Parent Committee
- Open Space Working Committee

- Umbrella System Working Committee
- Joint Facility Advisory Committee (for the purpose of recommending improvement, maintenance, or new location of facilities that serve the broader community).

Funding

As expressed at several junctures during this planning process, citizens and public officials agree that cooperative funding initiatives are needed to support the Plan Proposals and Programs and to execute the Multi-jurisdictional Focus. The newly formed organization should immediately start to pursue funding from available sources.