

Chapter One - Introduction

As used throughout this document, the “Bear Lake Community” refers to all areas within Pleasanton Township, Bear Lake Township and the Village of Bear Lake. These three jurisdictions constitute the geographical area administered by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission.

Regional Setting

The Bear Lake Community is located in the north-central portion of Manistee County (see Figure 1.1). Part of the northwest portion of Michigan, the Bear Lake Community has a rural character and great natural beauty, including family farms, rolling hills, wetlands, woodlands, lakes and streams and the historical Village of Bear Lake. The Bear Lake Community has a total area of 45,733 acres. Within the Bear Lake Community, Pleasanton Township has an area of 22,683 acres. Immediately to the south, Bear Lake Township includes an area of approximately 22,887 acres. The Village of Bear Lake has an area of approximately 203 acres. The Village of Bear Lake sits on the southeastern shore of Bear Lake in the northwest portion of Bear Lake Township. The most prominent feature of the community is Bear Lake - bordered by Pleasanton Township to the north and by the Village of Bear Lake and Bear Lake Township to the south.

The Bear Lake Community is bordered by: Blaine, Joyfield and Weldon Townships (Benzie County) to the north; Springdale and Maple Grove Townships to the east; Dickson, Brown and Manistee Townships to the south; and Onekama and Arcadia Townships to the west. The Bear Lake Community is in close proximity to Onekama (1 mile), Lake Michigan (8 miles), Manistee (15 miles) and Traverse City (45 miles).

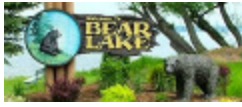
History of the Bear Lake Community

The following history of the Bear Lake Community was compiled from portions of the 2002 *Bear Lake Township Comprehensive Plan* and the 1999 *Pleasanton Township Land Use Plan*.

Figure 1.1
Bear Lake Community



Source: LIAA



The geologic character and surface topography of the Bear Lake area is attributed to the rock and mineral deposits left by massive inland seas and the advancement and recession of several glaciers. As the last glacier receded about 10,000 years ago, the melting ice left behind rolling hills and a vast watershed with several lakes and rivers. After the glaciers, the area was covered with a dense “mixed hardwood” forest.

Leaving evidence of stone tools, camp sites and burial mounds, early inhabitants of the area are believed to include a group known as the *Woodland Indians*. In 1836, the United States purchased the area containing Pleasanton Township from the Chippewa and Ottawa Tribes. However, most of the area remained uninhabited for many years, except for a small number of lumbermen who lived in the southern reaches of Bear Lake Township.

Providing almost free land to “bona fide settlers”, the Homestead Act of 1863 ushered in a number of settlers to the area. The first settlers are believed to be the families of Russell F. Smith, Simeon Anderson, Francis Buckner, John Edmonson, George Piece, Dwight Sibley and Charles Bailey. Most of these early settlers cleared their land and planted crops.

Bear Lake Township was legally established in 1865. By 1870, Bear Lake Township had a population of 417 people living in 91 homes, while Pleasanton Township had a population of 285 people living in 65 homes. The Bear Lake Post Office was opened in 1865. The first school was started in the late 1860’s and the first church was established in 1870 (where the Lighthouse Baptist Church now stands). Known as the Allegan, Muskegon, and Grand Traverse State Road, U.S. 31 was completed in 1870. It appears there were only two stores in the community, prior to 1870.

A description of the establishment of the Village of Bear Lake is found in the *Bear Lake Township Master Plan*.

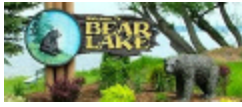
Photo 1.1
Downtown Bear Lake - 1925



Source: Manistee County Michigan GenWeb

As the first settler, Russell F. Smith had chosen his land with the idea of a future village. To this end, he offered 12 acres of land to anyone who would come in and start a village. His offer was accepted by a firm who would become known as Carpenter & Harrington, comprised of John S. Carpenter and Eliphlate Harrington.

These men built a small store, a boarding house, and a steam saw and grist mill on the site of the present village. Their enterprise was none too successful, for in the spring of 1873, they sold out to George W. and David H. Hopkins. Starting with just three to four buildings from Carpenter & Harrington, the Hopkins Brothers soon developed the Village of Bear Lake into the major service center for rural population. Hopkins immediately built an improved saw and grist mill. The following year, 1874, the firm platted 88 acres for the Village.



On June 1, 1876, the Bear Lake Tram Railway, utilizing horse-drawn freight cars, commenced operation, connecting the growing village with the docks at Pierport. In 1881, a new grist mill was built, reportedly the first roller mill in the State. In 1882, the Hopkins brothers built the Bear Lake and Eastern Railroad to replace the horse drawn cars with a team of locomotives. Steel rails and suitable equipment.

With the construction of the large sawmill in 1873, the Hopkins' immediately commenced buying logs from nearby farmers. Finally, with the construction of the Tram Railway in 1876, cordwood was shipped to Pierport for consumption in Chicago and Milwaukee. At a very minimum, this market for forest products would have doubled the income of homesteaders, while for the ambitious, income probably increased five-fold. Throughout this period, new businesses opened almost monthly on Lake Street in the Village.

After the turn of the century, most of the forest products in the area had been harvested. This led to the closure of the large mills and the railroad was dismantled.

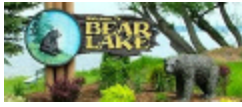
By the 1920's and 1930's the area experienced a decline in population as the quality of the soil changed due to the harvesting of the hardwoods and many farmers found it difficult to farm. However, many farmers turned to growing fruit crops while tourism and a summer cottage industry flourished.

Authority to Plan

The Bear Lake Community Comprehensive Plan has been prepared by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission ("the Commission"). The Commission was established under the authority of the Joint Municipal Planning Act, Public Act 226 of 2003 (MCL 125.131, et seq.). Section 5 of the Act states:

Subject to section 9, the legislative bodies of 2 or more municipalities may each adopt an ordinance approving an agreement establishing a joint planning commission (see Appendix A, for the complete Act).

As previously described and outlined in the formally adopted joint planning commission agreement, the Bear Lake Community includes the entire jurisdictional areas of Pleasanton Township, Bear Lake Township and the Village of Bear Lake. Among other provisions, the Joint Municipal Planning Act states the Joint Planning Commission must decide which planning act it will follow in adopting a comprehensive plan. The Bear Lake Community Planning Commission has elected to prepare this plan under the procedures of the Township Planning Act, Public Act 168 of 1959, as amended (please see Appendix B, for the complete Act).



Planning Approach

This plan was developed under the direction of and with the direct participation by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission. The Commission followed a well publicized planning process that began in September 2006. The comprehensive planning process was initiated to provide the framework for the development of the Bear Lake Community, the management of the community's resources and the protection of public health and welfare. This plan marks the *first* Comprehensive Plan of the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission.

This plan and the comprehensive planning process were supported by the *Partnerships for Change (Grant) Program*. The *Partnerships for Change Program*, including a thorough discussion of each of the phases of the planning process is addressed in more detail in the following chapters of this plan.

In developing this plan, the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission agreed that the plan would be based on the collective voice of the entire community. To that end, the Comprehensive Plan was developed upon the following assumptions:

- The most effective land use plans and regulations are community-wide and multi-jurisdictional in scope;
- Effective plans and regulations build upon the strengths of previous community efforts; and
- Future land use polices are best derived with the participation and input of citizens from throughout the community.

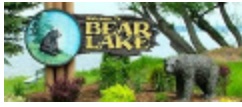
In addition, this comprehensive plan incorporates principles of *Smart Growth*, as presented by the *Smart Growth Network*, and adopted by the *Michigan Land Use Leadership Council*, including:

- Create a range of housing opportunities
- Create walkable neighborhoods
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective
- Mix land uses
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- Take advantage of compact development design

How to Use This Plan

The Bear Lake Community Comprehensive Plan is organized into ten major chapters. The following paragraphs briefly summarize each section.

Chapter One provides introductory information, including the regional setting for the Bear Lake Community, the legal authority for the Planning Commission to plan and the purpose of the plan.



Chapter Two provides the historical review of planning and land use regulation within the Bear Lake Community.

Chapter Three provides a summary of the social and economic characteristics of the Bear Lake Community. This chapter will contribute to the formulation of the plan's goals and objectives and will address population trends and projections, population density, age distribution, racial make-up, household characteristics, income, education, employment, housing and the economy.

Chapter Four provides a summary of the community facilities of the Bear Lake Community. This section will also contribute to the formulation of the plan's goals and objectives and will address transportation, recreation, schools, infrastructure, emergency services and community facilities.

Chapter Five provides a summary of the physical characteristics of the Bear Lake Community. This section will contribute to the formulation of the plan's goals and objectives and will address natural resources, topography, geology, farmland, environmental contamination and endangered species.

Chapter Six describes the current patterns of land use and land use trends over the last four decades.

Chapter Seven outlines the major planning issues of the Bear Lake Community.

Chapter Eight provides the goals and objectives of the plan.

Chapter Nine provides the plan recommendations and implementation strategies.

Chapter Ten outlines the future land use of the Bear Lake Community and the implementation priorities for the community.