

## Chapter Seven - Planning and Development Issues

As described in Chapter Two, planning and development issues for the Bear Lake Community were identified through an analysis of the social-economic and land use trends. The following listings provide a brief summary of the key findings and trends identified by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission.

### People

- The Bear Lake Community has experienced modest growth over the past 15 years.
- Population growth in the Bear Lake Community is expected to continue at a modest rate.
- A comparison of the 1990 U.S. Census data to 2000 data indicates that the number of people 5-years or younger living in the Bear Lake Community has increased from 1990 to 2000 though the number of young families has decreased.
- Around 20% of the people living in the Bear Lake Community are 65-years or older and Census figures suggest that the percentage of residents in this category is increasing.
- The level of educational attainment has increased from 1990 to 2000.

### Housing

- A comparison of 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census data sets indicate that the number of housing units in the two Townships increased over the ten year period; while, at the same time, the number of housing units decreased in the Village.
- During the same period, the median home value (half the home values are higher and half are lower) in the Bear Lake Community increased over 50%.
- Also during the same period, the cost to rent housing in Bear Lake increased by over 10%.

### Economy

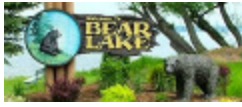
- The median household income in the Bear Lake Community increased around 62% to \$34,421 during the ten years between 1990 and 2000. However, the unemployment rate also increased.
- The number of people commuting to work outside the Bear Lake Community has increased from 1990 to 2000.

### Land Use

- The amount of land used for residential purposes increased by about 1,360 acres from 1978 to 2005. However, the amount of land used for commercial and industrial uses (taken together) increased by less than 80 acres during that same period.
- The percentage of land used for agriculture decreased by about 24% (2,648 acres) from 1978 to 2005. This was the largest change noted.
- Other significant changes in land use include a 1,103 acre decrease in non-forested lands and an increase of about 1,765 acres in forested land.

### Community Infrastructure

- Downtown Bear Lake has a number of empty and dilapidated buildings.
- The Bear Lake Community has no sewer system and a limited public water supply.
- The Bear Lake Community has a limited number of public recreation facilities.



With these characteristics and trends in mind, the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission solicited public opinion to help identify the planning and development issues of greatest concern for the Bear Lake Community. Public opinion was collected through a number of activities and exercises including, a thorough community-wide survey, three large public meetings, a joint meeting of elected and appointed officials and an interactive project website. Additionally, interested citizens were encouraged to attend regularly scheduled Planning Commission meetings.

### Community Survey

In an effort to better assess community attitudes toward important development and land use issues, the planning commission developed and mailed a community-wide survey to every address in the Bear Lake postal delivery system. Survey questions were organized under six topic headings, touching on issues identified at the first public meeting and at the monthly planning commission meetings. In total, 1,853 surveys were mailed. A total of 394 surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of about 21%. The surveys offer a broad-based and useful sampling of public opinion in the Bear Lake Community. A brief summary of the survey is discussed below. A copy and a full summary of the survey can be found in *Appendix K*.

#### Topic: General Land Use and Development

In response to the question, “How important was each of the following to your decision to live in the Bear Lake Community?”

- 83% of the respondents noted **air quality** as “somewhat” to “very important”, 77% of the respondents noted **rural/small town character** as “somewhat” to “very important”, 73% noted **wildlife habitat** as “somewhat” to “very important” and 74% noted **desirable neighborhoods** as “somewhat” to “very important”.

In response to the question, “What are the most important qualities of the Bear Lake Community’s rural character?” - 85% of the respondents noted **quiet** as “somewhat” to “very important”, 83% of the respondents noted **scenic views** as “somewhat” to “very important”, 81% of the respondents noted **large areas of forests** as “somewhat” to “very important”, 77% of the respondents noted **low amount of traffic** as “somewhat” to “very important”, 77% of the respondents noted **seeing lots of wildlife** as “somewhat” to “very important” and 72% of the respondents noted **access to small streams and small lakes** as “somewhat” to “very important”.

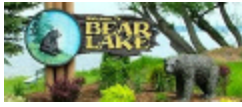
#### Topic: Downtown and Economic Development

In response to the question, “what types of business and economic development would you favor in or very near the Village?” - 78% of the respondents said they would be “somewhat” or “completely in favor” of a **farmers market**, 77% of the respondents said they would be “somewhat” or “completely in favor” of **more restaurants**, 75 % of the respondents said they would be “somewhat” or “completely in favor” of **additional medical services** and 69% of the respondents said they would be “somewhat” or

Figure 7.1  
Community Survey Poster



Source: LIAA



“completely in favor” of **more retail shops**. In response to the question, “Do you favor business and economic development in Pleasanton and Bear Lake Townships outside the Village of Bear Lake?” - approximately 71% of the respondents said **yes** and approximately 39% said **no**.

### **Topic: Housing and Neighborhoods**

In response to the question, “Where would you like to see most of the new housing developed?” - In most cases, the negative response was relatively high, with “no new housing” or “very few housing” receiving 38 to 43% of all responses for **In the Village of Bear Lake, In Bear Lake Township, In Pleasanton Township** and in **Groups or Clusters outside the Village**. Out of the six options, 38% of the respondents noted they would like to see “some new housing units” or “many new housing units” **next to the Village in the Townships** and 35% of the respondents noted they would like to “see some new housing units” or “many new housing units” **near existing country side roads**.

In response to the question, “What types of future residential housing would you favor in the Bear Lake Community?” - Over 50% of the respondents said they were “totally opposed” to the **conversion of homes to multi-family dwellings** and 63% were “totally opposed” to **mobile home parks**.

Out of the eight options, 51% of the respondents said they would be “somewhat in favor” or “completely in favor” of **single family dwellings on large lots**, 47% of the respondents said they would be “somewhat in favor” or “completely in favor” of **single family dwellings on very large lots** and Nearly 57% of the respondents said they would be “somewhat in favor” or “completely in favor” of **senior housing**.

### **Topic: Recreation and Tourism**

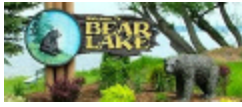
In response to the question, “Are you satisfied with the quality and quantity of recreation facilities in the Bear Lake Community?” - 56% of the respondents said **yes** while 44% said **no**. In response to the question, “How important are the following features to recreation & tourism for the community?” - 53% of the respondents revealed it was “somewhat important” to “very important” to **expand non-motorized trails** and 58% said it was “somewhat important” to “very important” to **provide additional public access to Bear Lake**.

### **Topic: Public Facilities**

In response to the question, “To support business and economic development, would you favor the expansion of the public water supply system in and around the Village if you did not have to pay any fees or taxes?” - approximately 80% of the respondents said **yes** and 18% said **no**. In response to the question, “To support business and economic development, would you favor the construction of a public sewer and wastewater treatment system in and around the Village if you did not have to pay any fees or taxes?” - approximately 82% of the respondents said **yes** and 18% said **no**. In response to the question, “Which of the following municipal facilities/services would you like to see constructed or improved?” - 88% of the respondents noted **maintenance of roads** as “somewhat important” to “very important”.

### **Topic: Natural Resources**

In response to the question, “Do you believe it is important to protect the water quality of the lakes, streams and groundwater of the Bear Lake Community?” - 98.4 of the respondents said **yes** and 1.6% said **no**. In response to the question, “Which things would you favor local government doing to protect



water quality?” - at least 74% of the respondents responded as “somewhat in favor” to “completely in favor” of all four choices, **Reduce Runoff from Streets & Parking; Maintain Shoreline Vegetation; Require Maintenance of Septics; and Protect from Invasive Species.** In response to the question, “How important do you think it is for the community to preserve the following natural features?” - 77% of the respondents said **open space (field & wetlands)** were “somewhat important” to “very important”, 83% of the respondents said **farms & orchards** were “somewhat important” to “very important” and 89% said **wildlife habitat** were “somewhat important” to “very important”.

### Public Meetings

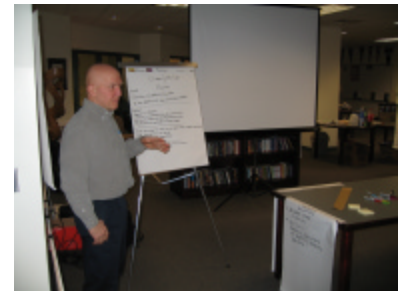
To solicit public opinion, the Planning Commission convened three large public meetings. Notice for each meeting was well publicized through articles in the newspaper and postings at municipal offices. In addition, flyers were distributed at grocery stores, and posters were placed in store fronts and public buildings. Notice for each public meeting was also personally advertised (word of mouth) by members of the Planning Commission.

Picture 7.1  
December 18, 2006



Source: LIAA

Picture 7.2  
December 18, 2006

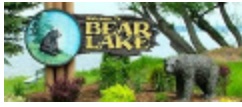


Source: LIAA

#### Meeting One: December 18, 2006

At the project kick-off meeting, LIAA staff members walked interested citizens through a description of the planning process. In addition, citizens were presented with a brief social and physical profile of the community. Citizens then engaged in several exercises to help identify a *Vision* for the Community. In the first exercise, participants were

asked to describe what they loved about the community and what they are most concerned about. Next, participants were asked to develop several “statements” describing their vision of what the Bear Lake Community could look like in 25 years. Finally, participants were organized in groups and asked to describe the *Strengths*, *Weaknesses*, *Opportunities*, and *Threats* (SWOT) of the community organized under six topic headings: Economy and Employment; Arts, Culture and Humanities; Government Services and Infrastructure/Agriculture, Natural Resources and Recreation; Youth and Education; and Urban Land Uses and Housing. The ideas expressed during each exercise were collected on flip-charts and discussed. In general, when asked what do you love about the Bear Lake Community? - participants noted natural resources, self-reliance and small town atmosphere. When asked, what are you most concerned about in the Bear Lake Community? - participants noted the lack of jobs and economic opportunities, water quality, Milfoil and inappropriate behavior on Bear Lake. When asked to list statements describing the vision of the Bear Lake Community in 2030, participants said, charming village, vibrant downtown, rural character maintained, greenery, and diverse agriculture. A complete list of the responses from these questions and results from the SWOT exercise can be found in *Appendix L*.



## Meeting Two: April 18, 2007

The second public meeting began with a presentation of a draft Bear Lake Community Vision Statement (stated below). This vision was derived from the comments and suggestions provided by participants of the first public meeting and discussions among the planning commission at their regularly scheduled meetings. The vision statement is intended to establish the foundation upon which the plan's goals and objectives are based.

*In 2030, the **Bear Lake Community** is a healthy mix of active farms, beautiful natural areas and rural residences surrounding a vibrant village with small town charm and modern amenities. The people of the **Bear Lake Community** are friendly, cooperative, and work together to support community events, preserve and rehabilitate downtown buildings, develop new businesses, and manage the area's agricultural and natural resources. From the pristine natural areas of the surrounding landscape to the lively streets of downtown, the **Bear Lake Community** offers residents and visitors of all ages, access to modern schools, a broad spectrum of services, healthy waterways, park and recreation facilities, a vibrant downtown, engaging community events, and employment opportunities.*

After a brief discussion on how the vision statement was established, participants provided the following comments and suggestions. Each idea, comment and suggestion was collected on flip-charts and discussed, including:

- Please mention Bear Lake specifically
- Please consider how important ground water is to the community
- Consider "acting" to protect the greater watershed
- Define "beautiful natural areas"

After further discussion concerning the comments suggestions about the draft vision statement, participants were asked to convene into small groups, under six topics of interest: General Land Use and Development; Downtown and Economic Development; Housing and Neighborhoods; Recreation and Tourism; Public Facilities; and Natural Resources and the Environment. Each group was

Picture 7.3  
April 18, 2007



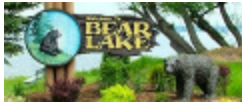
Source: LIAA

Picture 7.4  
April 18, 2007



Source: LIAA

presented with a preliminary set of goals and objectives pertaining to the topic they selected. The preliminary goals and objectives were derived from the answers provided at the first meeting (including the responses of the SWOT analysis) and discussions among the planning commission at their regularly scheduled meetings. Group members were asked to discuss and suggest comments and revisions to each goal and objective statement. Group members were then asked to prioritize each goal and objective as high, medium, or low. After about twenty minutes of discussion, participants were asked to convene under a different topic and the exercise was repeated. After the exercise, the ideas, comments, suggestions and revisions from each group was collected and discussed. In general, most of the



preliminary goals and objectives discussed received a high or medium priority. In addition, a few language revisions were suggested for some of the goals and objectives. A complete list of the responses (in CAP/~~STRIKE~~ form) from these exercises can be found in *Appendix M*.

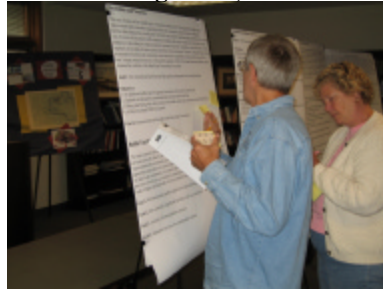
**Meeting Three: August 20, 2007**

The third public meeting began with a review of the planning process and a presentation of the results from the community-wide survey. After a brief discussion, members of the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission presented a revised set of goals and objectives. The revised goals and objectives were derived from

responses collected at the two previous public meetings

(including the preliminary goals and objectives discussed at the second public meeting), discussions among the planning commission at their regularly scheduled meetings and community survey results. LIAA staff members then presented the draft Future Land Use Map and Definitions. After another brief discussion, participants were asked to place comments (using yellow sticky notes) directly on large print-outs of each goal and objective and the future land use map and definitions. In addition participants were asked to submit comments directly on large print-outs of the draft *strategies* of the plan. Throughout the exercise, Planning Commission members convened around the large print-outs to help answer and/or clarify questions. At the end of the exercise, all the comments and suggestions submitted on yellow sticky notes were collected. Each comment was then discussed at the next scheduled meeting of the planning commission. A complete list of the responses from this meeting can be found in *Appendix N*.

**Picture 7.5**  
**August 20, 2007**



Source: LIAA

**Picture 7.6**  
**August 20, 2007**



Source: LIAA

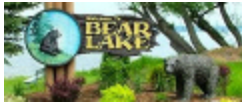
**Public Official Informational Meeting: May 14, 2007**

In an effort to inform public officials from the three jurisdictions about the progress and results from the first phases of the planning process, the planning commission hosted an informal “informational” meeting at the Bear Lake Manor. Planning commission members, township board members, village council members and other public officials from the three jurisdictions were invited. Interested citizens of the Bear Lake Community were also welcome to attend. With about 30 people in attendance, LIAA staff members provided a presentation outlining the progress and results of the two public meetings, results from the community-wide survey and the next steps toward adoption of the new comprehensive plan.

**Picture 7.7**  
**Bear Lake Manor**



Source: LIAA



### Project Website

For the purpose of providing an open and citizen driven planning process, a project website was established - (<http://www.partnershipsforchange.cc/bearlake>). Among other things, the website provided interactive mapping, direct access to information on meeting dates, important documents, draft chapters of the plan and meeting handouts. In addition, the website provided a “forum” in which citizens could voice their opinion or post comments on all of the questions posed at each of the public meetings and the draft comprehensive plan.

Figure 7.2  
Project Website

