



Village of Empire

2025 Master Plan Update

An Addendum to the
2019 Village of Empire Master Plan

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Prepared For:

Village Council

Planning Commission



Acknowledgments

Village Council

- Sue Palmer, President (2022-2024)
- Dan Davis, President (2024-2026)
- Maggie Bacon, Trustee
- Linda Chase, Trustee
- March Dye, Trustee
- Tom Rademacher, Trustee
- Ella Skrocki, Trustee (2024-2026)
- Margaret Walton, Trustee
- Chris Webb, Trustee (2022-2024)

Planning Commission

- Peter Schous, Chair (2022-2024)
- Bob Chase, Chair (2025-2026)
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Master Plan Update Working Group

- Maggie Bacon
- Bob Chase
- Margaret Ellibee
- Carey Ford
- Margaret Walton
- Chris Webb

Village Staff

- Derith Smith, Clerk
- Alacia Acton, Deputy Clerk
- John Friend, DPW Superintendent

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Grocer's Daughter Chocolate

St. Philip Neri Church

Glen Lake Community Library

Empire Township

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Purpose of this Master Plan Update

The lifespan of a standard master plan is 20-30 years, but as demographics change, it is recommended to update a master plan every five years. This allows the community to weigh in on several factors:

- Validity of the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles;
- Accomplishments of the previous five years in implementing the goals and outcomes previously set;
- Realign specific goals and outcomes to match any vision or direction changes; and
- Supporting continued updates and maintenance of short-term and medium-term goals and outcomes.

This 2025 Master Plan Update is intended to supplement the current 2019 Master Plan and its subsequent updates, including the:

- 2019 Village of Empire Master Plan
- 2020 Master Plan Amendment – Addendum A (Coastal Community Resiliency)
- 2022 Empire Transportation Plan
- 2018 Village of Empire Recreation Plan

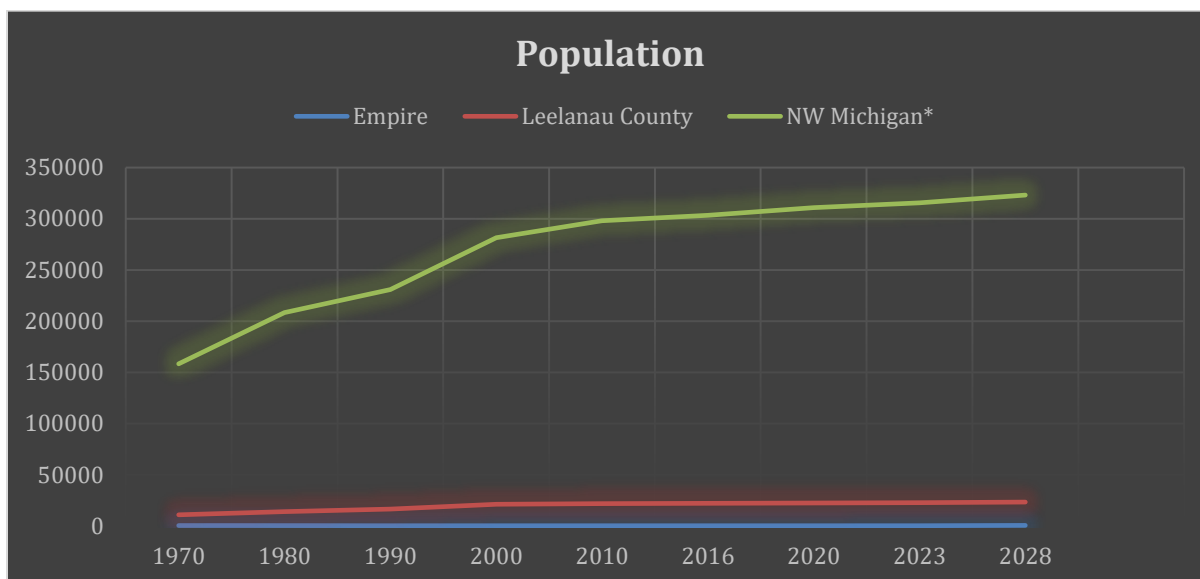
With these existing plans in consideration, the current master plan update expands and adjusts the 2019 Master Plan while also validating various parts within the plan. It can be inferred that all sections of the 2019 Master Plan are accepted in this 2025 Master Plan Update, except where noted within. Where conflicts arise, the item in question should refer to the new guiding principles to assess whether the problem or consideration meets the threshold of the criteria set within this plan.



Village of Empire Overview

Current Demographics

Empire, Leelanau County, NW Michigan



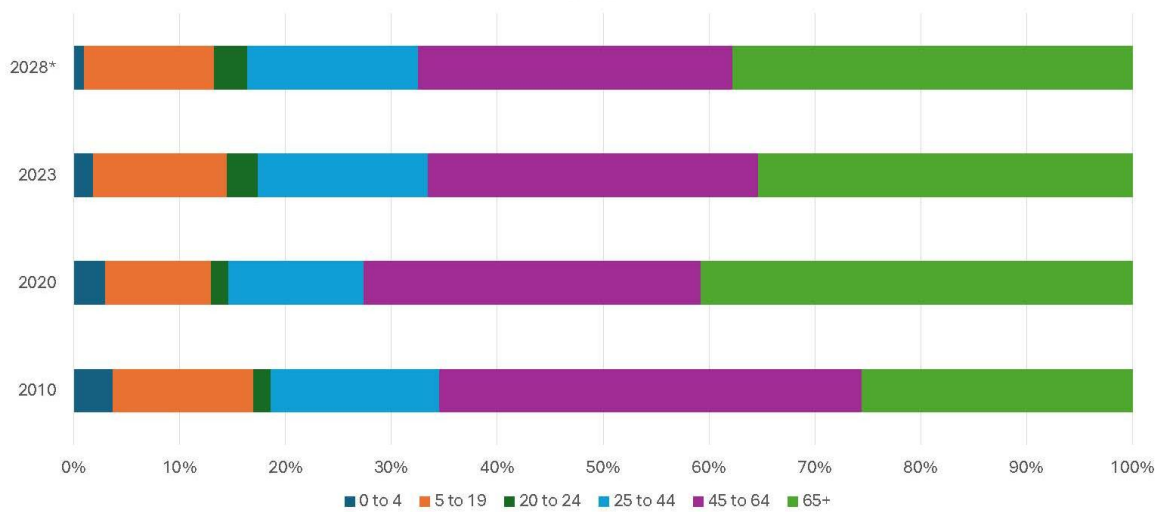
Population: Empire saw a decrease in population in the 1990's and it has remained relatively steady since then. Leelanau County had a small upward trend starting in the mid-1990's. That has leveled off and remained steady from 2010 to 2023. NW Michigan has seen a steady increase starting in 1980 and continuing to 2023.

Population and Age Distribution 2010 to 2028								
Empire Village			Experian Decision Analytics				Projected	
Age Group	2010	% of pop	2020	% of pop	2023	% of pop	2028	% of pop
0 to 4	14	4%	11	3%	7	2%	4	1%
5 to 19	50	13%	36	10%	48	13%	47	12%
20 to 24	6	2%	6	2%	11	3%	12	3%
25 to 44	60	16%	46	13%	61	16%	62	16%
45 to 64	150	40%	115	32%	118	31%	114	30%
65+	96	26%	147	41%	134	35%	145	38%
Totals	376		361		379		384	

Age Distribution: The total population has been static from 2016 to 2023. Of note is the sharp decline of the age group 45 to 64 between 2010 and 2020. This is coupled with a sharp increase of those aged 65+. This is close to the percentage changes between 2000 and 2010 and from 2010 to 2020, although population change for Empire Village decreased slightly during those time periods.

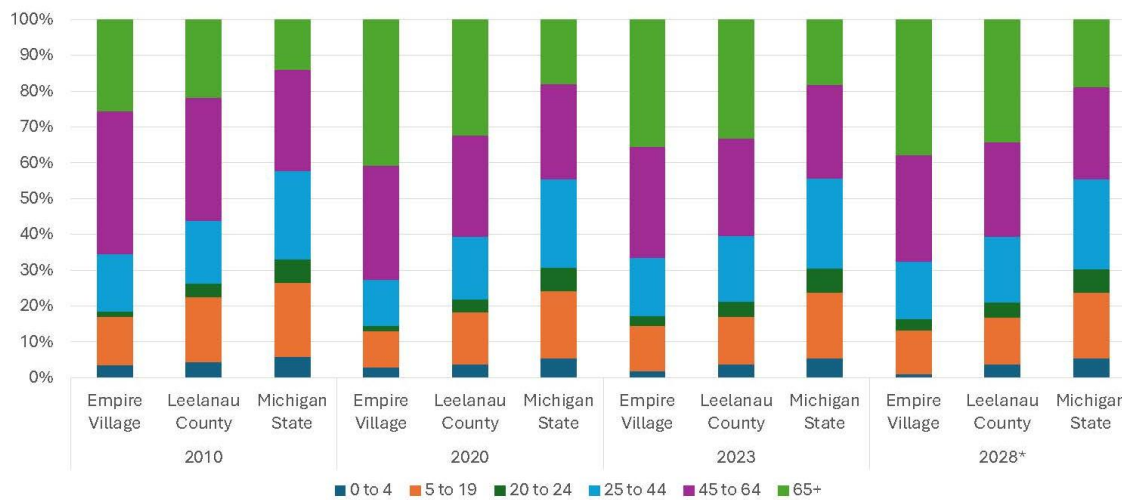


Village of Empire
Population by Age Over Time

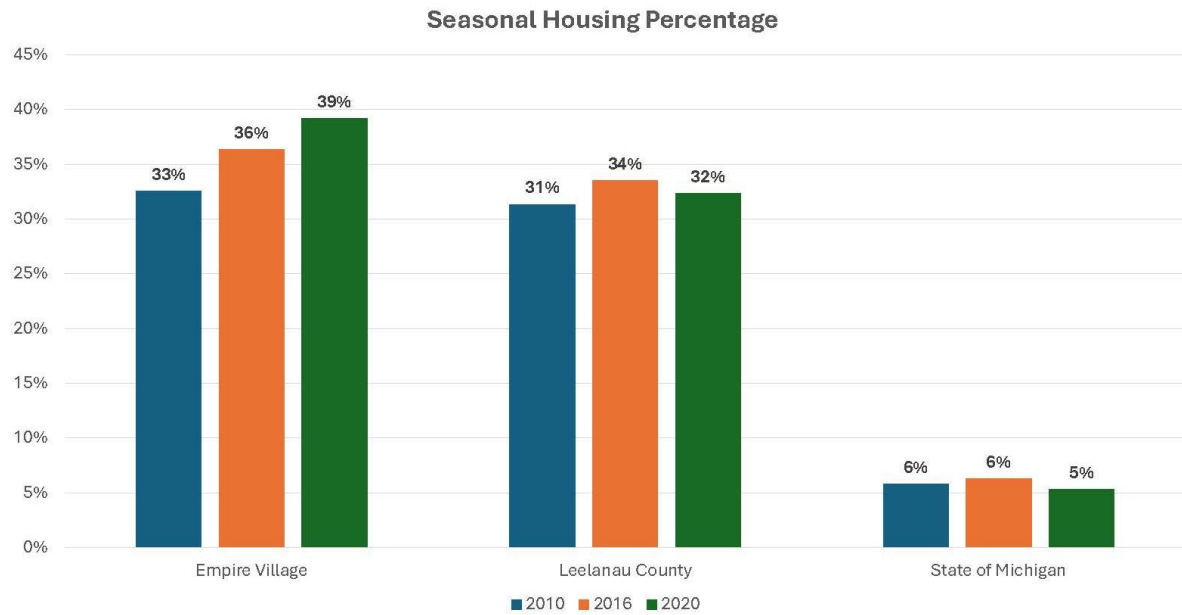


* Projected

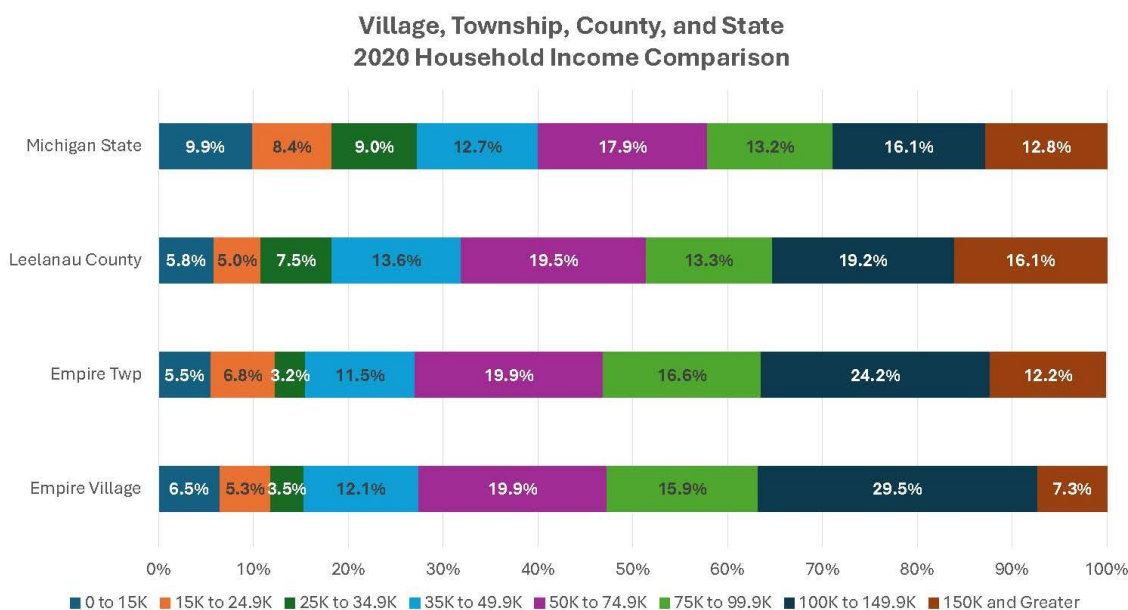
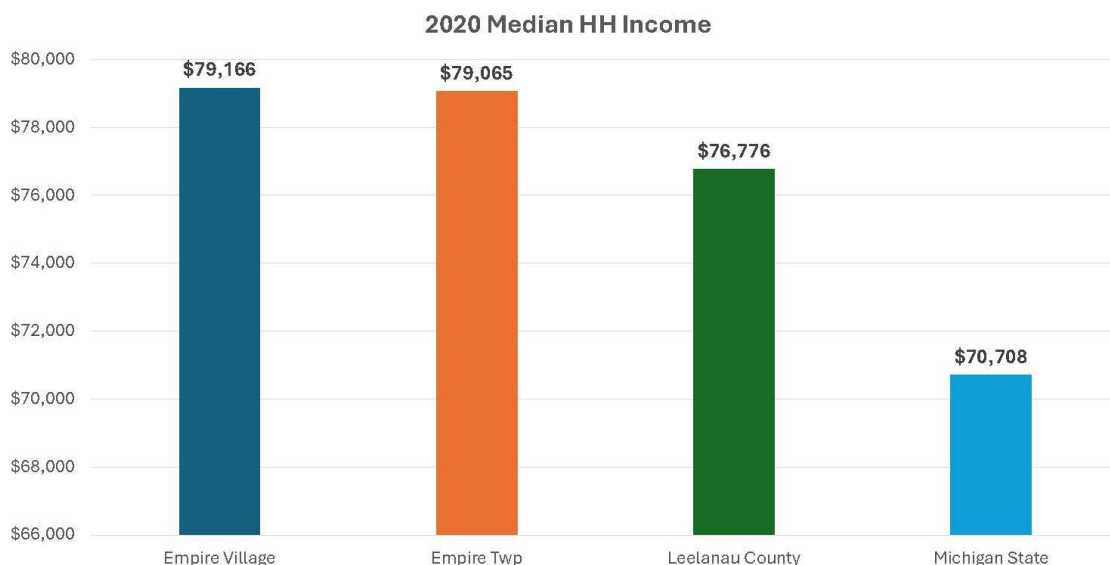
Village, County, and State
Population By Age Over Time



* Projected



Housing Units: The total number of housing units in Empire Village changed little from 2016 to 2020. Seasonal housing units increased 8%.



Income Distribution: There have been significant changes in income distribution from 2016 to 2020. Those in the less than \$35,000 income range decreased 63%. The \$50,000 to \$99,999 income range increased significantly, up 117%, and the \$150,000 plus range increased 152%. Median household income increased 65% from \$48,125 to \$79,166.

Considerations

As properties and businesses transition to new owners, their ideas of making the Village a thriving place for their business or development will inspire them to create moments of change in the community. Coming together and embracing new things and ways of thinking is difficult for many communities, especially in small, rural communities like the Village of Empire. It will be essential



to use the vision and the guiding principles to weigh the questions and the conversations around allowing new uses, new businesses, and new residents to thrive in the Village of Empire.

Growth and change come to many communities; how these communities manage and guide the change is wholly within their grasp and can make a difference in achieving your long-term vision as a community. Holding to your core values and utilizing your assets will help others see the value and authentic character of the Village.

Vision Statement and Guiding Principles

Two strategic components form the foundation of the overall policy direction for the 2025 Master Plan Update. The **core values** are the key attributes that have built the unique Village of Empire we see today. Citizens and stakeholders expressed these values as the drivers that support their community and should be preserved as the Village grows. These values are summarized in the engagement section of this plan.

The **guiding principles** were developed as the overarching elements describing and categorizing the core values. These provide the structural support and guidance for the vision described in the plan. The core values and the guiding principles filter through the analysis, recommendations, and implementation strategies featured in this plan. Overall, the core values and guiding principles represent the traditional structure of this 2025 Master Plan Update.

Vision Statement (adapted from the 2019 Master Plan)

The Village of Empire provides and preserves a quality of life for its residents and businesses that reflects the Village's unique natural environment and small village atmosphere while reflecting our history and small village values and creating a Village that is economically, environmentally, and culturally sustainable.

Guiding Principles





Chapter 2 - Community Engagement

Overview of the Engagement Process

The Village of Empire invited community feedback to inform the Master Plan update via one community questionnaire, two community open houses, and multiple working meetings between June and September 2024, the “high” season for Village residents and visitor traffic.

These activities are described in more detail below.

Public Meetings

The Master Plan update was overseen by a working group of Planning Commission and Village Council members. This team met biweekly, open to the public, to review and guide project deliverables, including the community questionnaire and draft plan content.

Economic Development Work Sessions

The Village Planning Commission and Village Council held three open-to-the-public work sessions to discuss economic development strategies in the Village of Empire.

Community Open Houses

The working group hosted two open houses on August 1 and 29 at St. Neri Phillip Church and the Empire Township Hall, respectively.

The first open house (August 1) focused on high-level aspects of the Master Plan, including feedback related to values and vision, experiences, existing land uses, and mobility and connectivity in the Village. Approximately 60 people attended. Local stakeholders, including Housing North, the Sleeping Bear Gateways Council, the National Park Service, local businesses, and community groups, were encouraged to attend. Attendees enjoyed delicious chocolate chip cookies generously donated by local chocolatier Grocer’s Daughter.

The second open house (August 29) offered a deeper analysis of these topics: a revised vision and guiding principles, specific development opportunities in the Village, missing land uses, and trail and street mobility improvements. Approximately 30 people attended.

Community Questionnaire

The Village facilitated a community questionnaire from July 15 to August 11. The questionnaire was available electronically (Survey Monkey), or printed copies were available at the Village offices and library. In total, 355 people participated in the questionnaire. 300 took it online, and 55 completed a paper survey.



Community Priorities

Throughout both open houses and numerous public meetings, there was repeated discussion about the opportunity to attract families with children to Empire to ensure the Village continues to be a vibrant and thriving place, and because the Village already provides such a safe, beautiful, and welcoming place to live. The lack of childcare and housing for all income levels was recognized as a barrier to young people/families living in Empire year-round. Participating community members expressed a desire for managed and thoughtful growth to ensure Empire's vibrancy without sacrificing its small-town charm and natural setting.

No matter age or demographics, participants prioritized natural resources, pedestrian safety/connectivity, economic development, and wastewater infrastructure as the most important topics for the Master Plan. High levels of support were shared for maintaining existing capital assets, like streets, parks, sidewalks, and materials management. Low levels of support were shared for adding new roads and parking infrastructure.

Numerous community members noted the welcoming, friendly, and connected nature of the Empire community as a huge asset to the Village. They expressed frustration at how important topics, like short-term rentals and wastewater infrastructure, are perceived to have stalled due to divisive and non-productive discussions among village leadership. Participants expressed hope for a more collaborative, transparent, and productive deliberation process on these and future topics in the village.

Integration of Community Input

Community engagement is an essential tool to gauge a community's population's attitudes, experiences, values, and goals. It offers an important vantage to the people who live, work, play, visit, and learn in a place. However, this perspective is only one tool in the Village of Empire's toolbox as it updates its Master Plan. The Village must also consider community data, previous and current studies, planning best practices, Village capacity, and local and regional context as it charts a path forward for Empire via the Master Plan.

The community input collected during this process has informed the recommendations of the updated Master Plan. Based on engagement to date, below are key recommendations for the Village to consider.

- **Preserve Small-Town Character by Focusing on Thoughtful Growth:** Update zoning and land-use policies to control the scale and type of development, ensuring it aligns with the village's character. Secure land for critical infrastructure, like a future wastewater system.
- **Develop a Plan for Local Amenities:** Support the viability of food retail in Empire by exploring and implementing appropriate incentives under the village's purview.
- **Consider all options for Short-Term Rentals.**
- **Enhance Infrastructure and Public Safety:** Install or improve sidewalks and crosswalks, particularly in high-traffic areas, and evaluate traffic patterns, especially near the post office.



- **Improve Communication and Transparency:** Provide educational opportunities for learning about Village Council priorities. Regularly reference and utilize the Master Plan and other guiding documents in decision-making, and increase transparency by making council discussions and survey results more easily accessible online.
- **Address Environmental and Aesthetic Concerns:** Develop and enforce policies to manage blighted structures and promote environmentally friendly practices, such as dark-sky lighting and native plantings.
- **Foster Community Engagement:** Encourage Empire partners to hold regular community meetings and events, and develop volunteer-driven initiatives that involve residents in beautification and community-building projects.

Please note: Appendix One of this document contains a Summary of Feedback from the Community Questionnaire.

Two additional reference materials, the complete Questionnaire and results, and the Open House survey and results, and many other reference materials are available for viewing online [here](#). The primary documents are listed under Master Plan Materials (Related to the Final Draft). All of these materials may also be viewed in print at the Village Office. Please call ahead (231-326-5466) so the staff can gather the appropriate materials for your arrival.

Chapter 3 - Recommendations

The following recommendations are guidance built from the community engagement, review of the current master plan, and within the new guiding principles outlined in this 2025 Master Plan Update. Though these recommendations are guidance, they lead the community towards realizing the ultimate vision of the community, derived from the community engagement in 2019 and 2025 plans.

Land Use

Residential Development

Housing was a strong element of the 2019 Master Plan. With the current statewide and regional efforts to promote housing availability and the general cost of maintaining, developing, and supporting housing in Michigan and Leelanau County, this topic must be addressed in this 2025 Master Plan Update. Though there is a small growth factor, based on demographic trends, there is a consensus that if housing is to be available for those who want to live in the Village of Empire full-time, then there needs to be housing options for those households. Opportunities for seniors to downsize, young families to settle affordably, and multi-generational housing options were all brought up through the engagement process.

A deeper dive into economic strategies is covered later in the economic development section. Still, within the land use section, some guiding elements can support housing for full-time residents and support the overall well-being of those who choose to live in the Village of Empire, either part-time or full-time, including:

- Housing should allow for multi-generational options, including “granny flats” or Accessory Dwelling Units compatible in design and scale with the primary home on the lot and within the allowance that septic systems permit.
- Allow developments that meet community needs, to access state, regional, and local economic incentives.
- Where appropriate infrastructure supports, allow for options of missing middle housing to increase efficiency in construction and provide more housing options.





- Review development standards (zoning and subdivision) to check for conflicts that cause higher home development costs to reduce the overall construction cost while maintaining quality.
- Develop options for Short-Term Rentals.

Master Plan Update: Housing Options in Empire

Which housing types are appropriate for various families in Empire? Place a dot in the various squares

	Accessory Dwelling Unit (Granny Flat)	Large Single Family Home	Single-Family Detached (Small Lot Home)	Single-Family Attached (Townhome)	Multi-Unit Home (duplex, triplex, quadplex)	Cottage Court
Young Adults	● ● ● ● ●		● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●
Young Families		● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●		● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●
Established Families		● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●		● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●
Empty Nesters	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●
Multi-Gen Families	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●		● ● ● ● ●	
Seniors	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ●



This is a board activity from a public open house event. It identifies the housing types selected during the first open house as potential housing types in Empire and then asks attendees to determine which household types would benefit from the housing type displayed.

Catalytic Area's

As part of the public engagement sessions, our consultants created examples of options for commercial or residential areas to either revitalize existing spaces or develop undeveloped properties. These are just examples that are intended to inspire. When an area in any municipality is identified as a strategic focal point for targeted development, it can generate a ripple effect, leading to broader positive changes and creating a more vibrant and prosperous environment.

Master Plan Update: Catalytic Area - Housing Development Study

Design Process: Explore an undeveloped site in the Village to depict the difference between standard lot development with individual wastewater systems and conservation development with community wastewater systems.

Conservation Subdivision



A Natural Area: Conservation of existing trees as public space

B Central Parking Areas: Place parking in rear to provide walkability along the street

C Housing Options: Mix of housing types and sizes to meet market needs

D Walkability: Sidewalks and trails through public spaces

E Wastewater System: Community wastewater system

Housing Types



Cottage Court



Townhome Rowing Pods



Small Lot Homes

Standard Lot Subdivision



A Natural Area: all private, limited protection of existing trees

B Parking: rear access or pull-through driveways and parking

C Housing Options: Limited housing variations and similar price points

D Walkability: Sidewalks on street

E Wastewater System: Individual wastewater system

Housing Types



Single-Family Residential



Catalytic Area 1: Housing study on a single lot. This analysis compares a standard lot subdivision, using similar housing types and lot sizes around the property, and a conservation subdivision, focusing on preserving public open space and allowing higher-density housing to achieve a variety of housing types and purchase prices.

(For illustrative purposes only to understand how the goals of this plan could be implemented at this location.)



Commercial and Mixed-Use Areas

Commercial and mixed-use developments are organized within the historic core along Front Street and the commercial corridor along M-22. These areas continue to be envisioned as walkable commercial corridors in the future but retain some infrastructure needs to support walkability, as explained further in the Mobility section of this plan update.

Key issues revolve around parking for attractions rather than businesses, walkability between uses and across highways, septic systems to support commercial growth, and noise conflicts between businesses and adjacent residences.

With any consolidated commercial area, whether a historic commercial district or a new development, conflicts are traditionally sorted out through nuisance rules; things like noise, traffic patterns, parking intrusion, and lighting are often on topic. As we look to resolve these conflicts, there's often a knee-jerk reaction to banning certain activities (e.g., evening music performances, parking on public streets, building large buffer walls, etc.), which inherently do a disservice to commercial establishments looking to grow business.

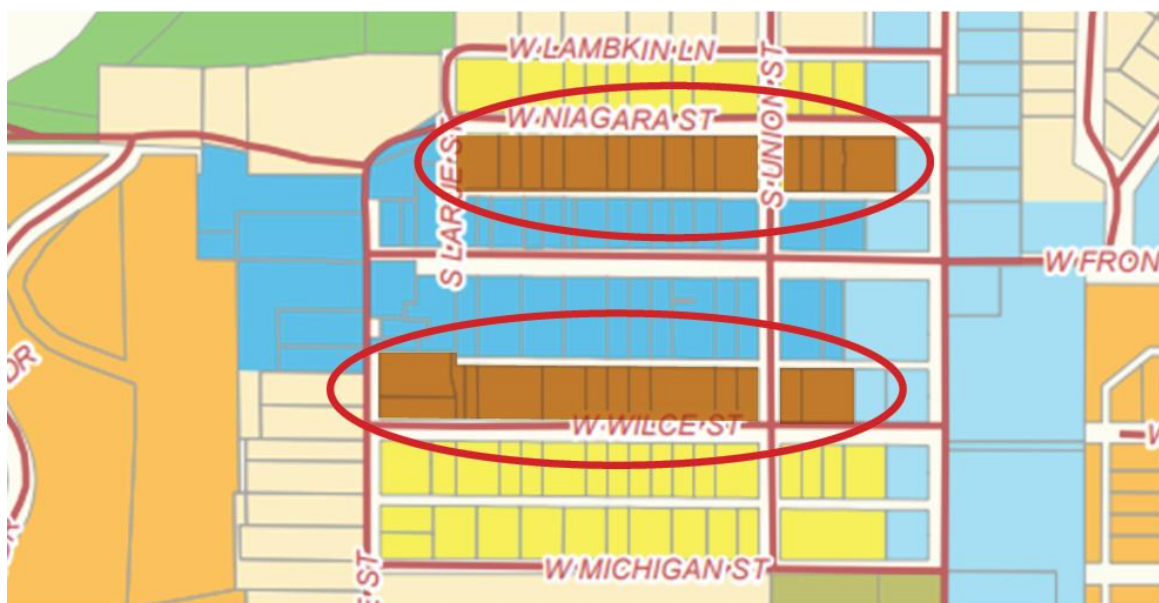
As the Village in Empire looks towards resolving conflicts, it will be better to search for means in the built environment that help alleviate these conflicts. Examples such as assembling transition areas for a natural activity transition between commercial and single-family could be permitted. This heavier residential or light neighborhood commercial activity type is often called missing middle development. This missing middle zone might include townhomes, small apartments, live-work, or corner stores that serve the local neighborhoods but are natural intensity transitions from commercial activity. This would not prohibit single-family uses; instead, it would establish the half-block on either side of Front Street as a transition area between the quieter single-family neighborhoods and the activity of restaurants and commercial endeavors on Front Street.

Though there is no immediate resolution to problems right now, this would have some resolution as homeownership changes hands and new housing types fill the neighborhood. This is the natural evolution of old towns in the United States before zoning, and by promoting a transition of density from the core commercial areas to the neighborhoods, the Village would be using the built environment to control many nuisance issues.

- Identify Front Street and M-22 as the commercial/mixed-use corridors in the Village of Empire, promoting walkable and context-sensitive streets, buildings, and infrastructure designs.
- By identifying the corridors as commercial/mixed-use, there is no prohibition on single-family dwellings as they exist today; however, new developments will not be able to be single-family dwellings unless they are mixed-use or live-work type buildings.
- Identify the half blocks on either side of Front Street and M-22 as residential transition areas that permit missing middle housing infill and light commercial options to help buffer the higher-intensity commercial on Front Street and M-22.



- Focus the parking policy on Front Street and M-22 to support commercial establishments and users of those commercial spaces rather than long-term visitor parking.
- Consider using incentives to support private or district wastewater systems to serve commercial establishments. To grow as a restaurant or to have food and beverage establishments settle into existing buildings, there will need to be some ability to have an expanded wastewater system (public or private). In an effort of caution, by not allowing these systems to exist or providing incentive support, many older and potentially historic buildings could get demolished to make way for larger private septic systems. Preventing this from happening will be a large part of maintaining the current character of the Village, especially along Front Street.



A zoning map with highlighted areas that could serve as a residential transition for missing middle development patterns, as explained in the commercial/mixed-use land use section.

Site Constraints



Design Process: Explore a way to preserve an historical asset and also provide public gather space, walkability, and a mix of uses to support activities close to the beach and along Front Street.

Catalytic Area 2: Commercial, Mixed-Use study on a historic property site. This analysis looked at the opportunity to expand Front Street's built form with a mixed-use development. It supported the preservation of the stables' livery at the corner of Lake and Niagara. This incorporated many items the team received during the engagement: walkability, gathering space, opportunities for small businesses, event space, townhomes, and apartment housing.
(For illustrative purposes only to understand how the goals of this plan could be implemented at this location)



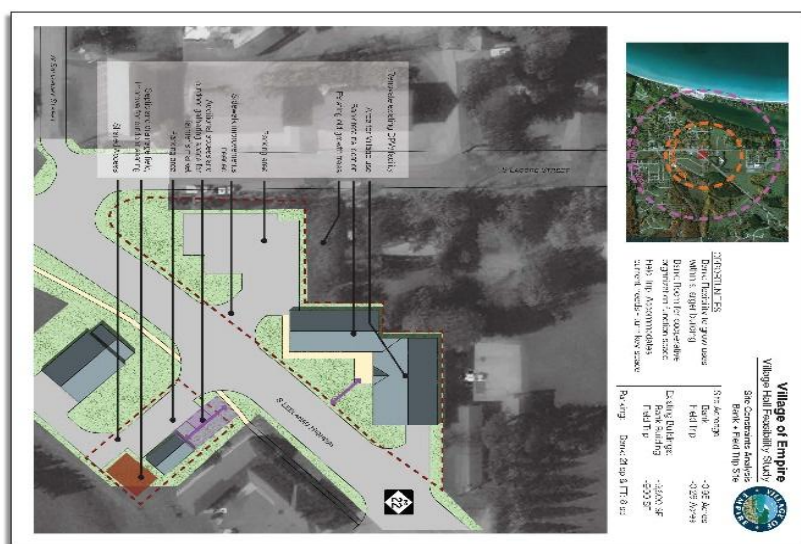
Public Facilities

Recent investments in the property along M-22 for new Village offices have begun to establish a civic area with public facilities and amenities in the village. With the new offices near the Village's entry on M-22, there is an opportunity to develop a gateway area from the north that could also be done on M-72 and the south entrance to the Village on M-22. These improvements are heavily focused on placemaking and streetscaping to enhance community pride and establish the core of the Village as visitors enter the area.

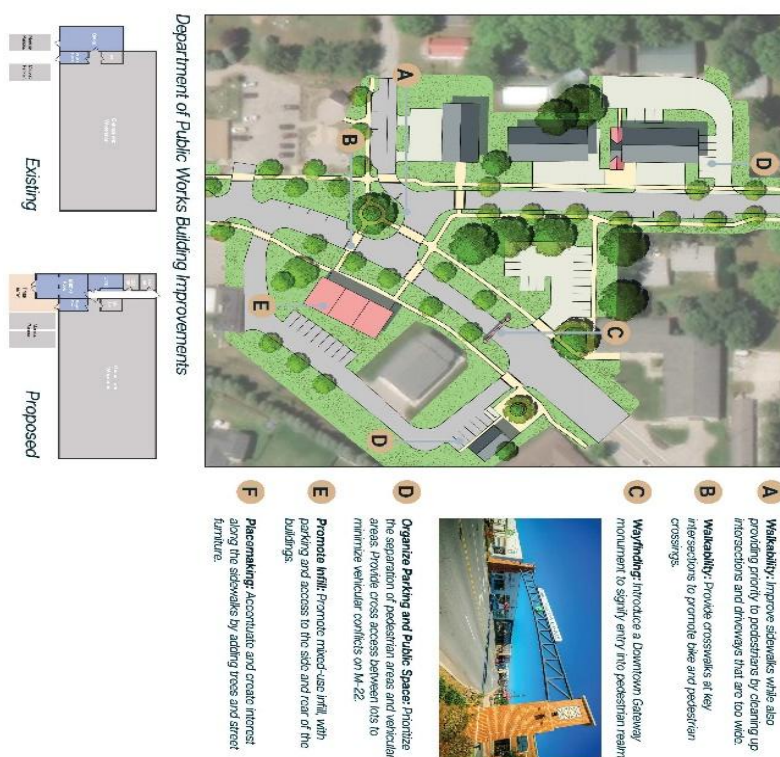
The following elements will support the development of a civic area in this location and illustrate the streetscaping and wayfinding systems that will highlight the Village along these thoroughfares and distinguish it from areas outside of the Village. Additional details are provided in the Mobility Section of this master plan update.

- Support connectivity between neighborhoods and public facilities, specifically with improvements to walking and biking. Provide crossings along M-22 that allow walkable access to the new Village Offices building.
- Provide varying sizes of gathering spaces within Village properties that permit them. This provides event spaces for varying sizes of groups and can be rented out during the year for small events.
- Establish gateway monuments along M-22 and M-72 that incorporate wayfinding, streetscaping, and placemaking initiatives as described in the Mobility Section of this plan.

Site Constraints



Design Process: Explore the options for connectivity between Public Works building, Village Office (Old Field Trip) and other public assets in the area. Promote walkability and additional parking.



2025 EMPIRE MASTER PLAN UPDATE



Green Spaces and Environmental Considerations

Carrying over from the 2019 Master Plan, the community values the green spaces, natural areas, and amenities within the Village and nearby. To maintain clean water for residents and visitors, it is essential to continue the programs and partnerships regionally to support these efforts.

Engagement with conservation groups to support local efforts to promote education of proper conservation habits for locals and visitors and support the community's guiding principles. Since large conservation areas and parks surround the Village of Empire and the Village also contains many conservation areas within its limits, it is not recommended that conservation districts acquire new lands within it. This will decrease the overall value of revenue potential within the Village and stymie the already revenue-limited budget.

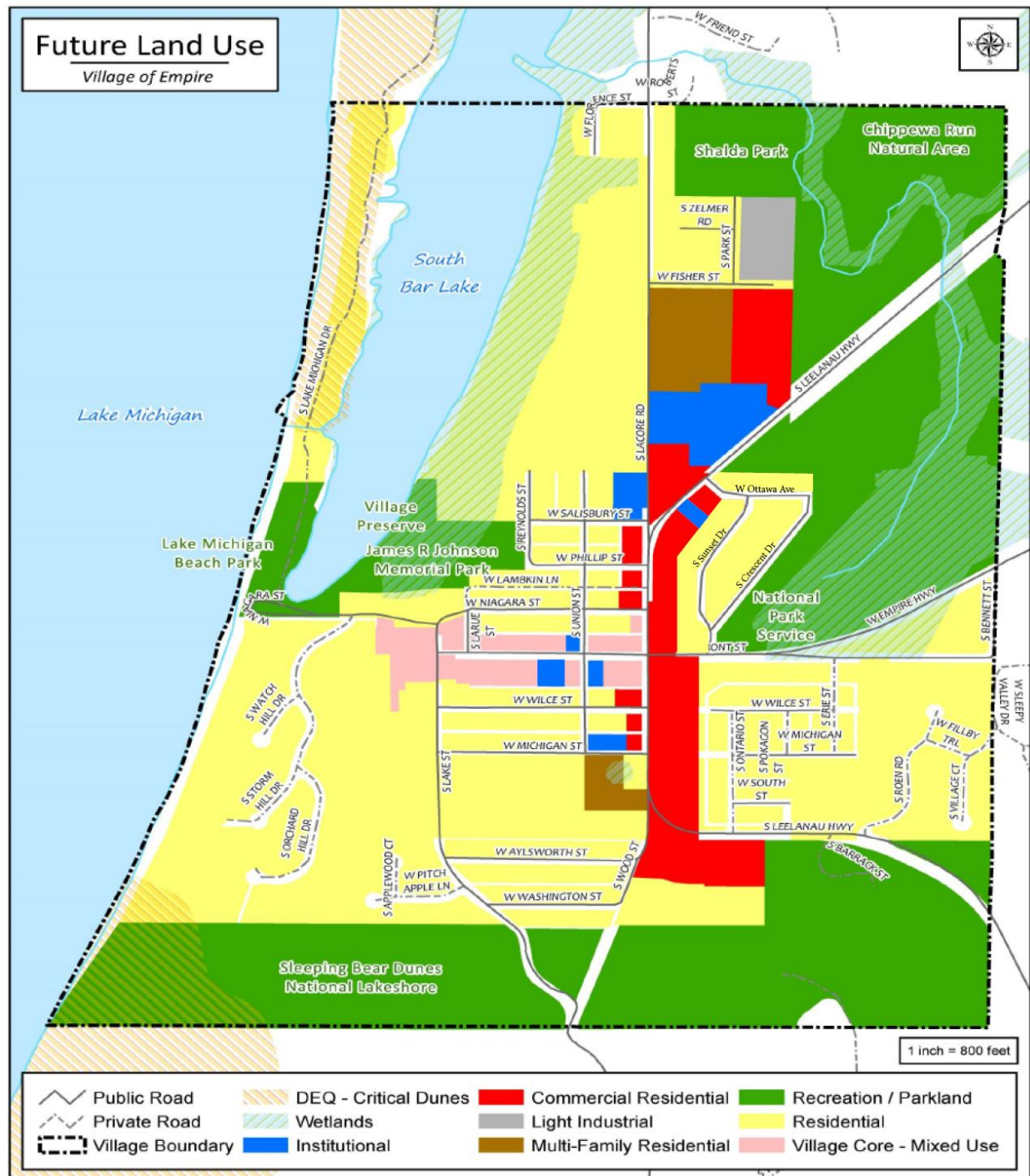
With this in mind, it will be necessary to:

- Support neighborhoods by preventing stormwater intrusion through creative infrastructure design, specifically rainwater capture systems, through Village-wide and regional stormwater planning strategies.
- Preserve existing conservation areas and maintain their edges to prevent pollution of the space or habitats.
- Support development projects that preserve existing trees in public or semi-public open spaces and parks.
- Require any PUD or master-planned development to design and program natural green spaces for private or semi-public use, such as trails, preserves, and other natural areas. *Those developments requesting and receiving incentives should be required to provide publicly accessible open spaces.*
- Consider zoning changes that allow density bonuses for preserving natural areas in a proposed development, including area or community wastewater systems and on-site, low-impact stormwater capture improvements.



Future Land Use Map Updates

- The future land use map has been updated to reflect the current development patterns of single-family neighborhoods.



Updated Future Land Use Map

Zoning Updates

With any master plan update, it is recommended that a zoning audit be performed to ensure that the zoning rules support the implementation of the vision of thoughtful and managed development in the master plan. With this in mind, it is recommended that any zoning audit review the following recommendations from this master plan:

- PUD standards are specifically related to minimum requirements for a mix of uses, housing type mix, infrastructure design (stormwater capture, community septic, open space trails, park allocation), roadway designs, walkability, bike trailheads, public open space, and other placemaking conditions.
- Mixed-use, Commercial, and Housing standards and density bonuses for community septic systems serving two or more properties.
- Parking requirements for existing buildings in the Front Street area.
- Density bonuses for developments that preserve natural areas, incorporate community wastewater systems, and on-site low-impact stormwater capture.
- Design standards for areas that incorporate placemaking and walkable areas, such as pocket parks, pocket plazas, areas for small outdoor gatherings, outdoor dining, and other public amenities.
- Consider Pedestrian-Priority streets that should bring buildings closer to the sidewalk, reduce parking in the front setback, and provide public amenities like outdoor seating. These improvements to new construction or building rehabs will support walkability in these areas.



Wayfinding monuments at key locations



Cottage courts for pocket neighborhoods



Trail oriented development



Accessory dwelling units and
“granny flats”



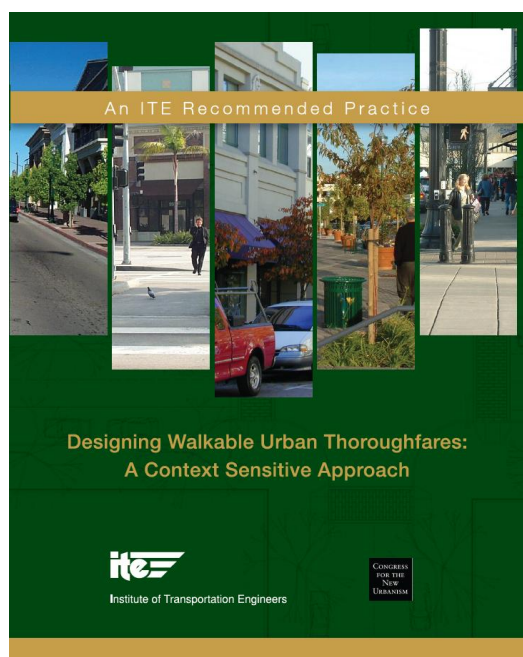
Smaller single-family lots

Mobility

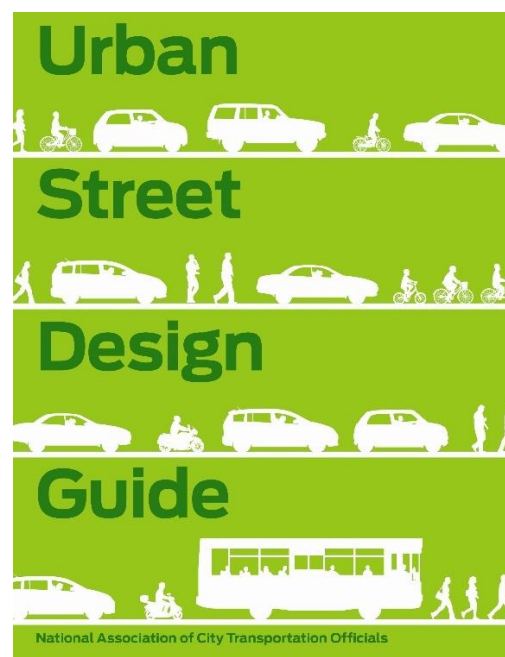
Many of the recommendations in the 2019 Master Plan and 2022 Transportation Plan still align with the community's desires during this 2025 Master Plan Update. The 2022 Transportation Plan includes many valuable additions, including focusing on Complete Streets to provide vehicular and active transportation options. The crucial goal is to ensure the roads' design matches and supports the development they serve. In the context of those desired improvements, the following stipulations are recommended:

Transportation Infrastructure

- As roadways are improved or utilities are replaced, enhance the roadways to support bike and pedestrian crossings or movements and to provide Complete Streets with context-sensitive design solutions, explicitly using the *National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide* for all streets and the *Institute for Transportation Engineers (ITE) Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach* for any MDOT facility in the Village of Empire.
- Utilize Complete Streets with context-sensitive design to distinguish between residential and commercial streets. Focus on narrowing travel lanes in neighborhoods and diverting on-street parking by non-residents. Improve roads, bike lanes, and pedestrian pathways to encourage more walking and biking when feasible.
- Sign lane and alley entrances for local use only and utilize best practices for lane and alley design to minimize cut-through traffic on residential lanes and alleys.



*Institute for Transportation Engineers (ITE)
Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A
Context Sensitive Approach*



*National Association of City Transportation
Officials (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide*

Walkability and Connectivity

- Set policy and design rules for M-22, M-72, and Front Street within the Village of Empire to be context-sensitive thoroughfares, focused on walkability and specifically addressing: reduced travel lane widths, gateway monuments or arches, shallower curb radii at intersections, reduce driveways and promote cross-connections between parcels (alleys), install additional sidewalks, street trees, street lighting, wayfinding signage, bike lanes, on-street parking, and stormwater drainage systems.
- Support context-sensitive design by updating zoning rules to assign maximum setbacks along thoroughfares intended to have pedestrian priority, such as M-22 and Front Street. This includes minimizing new private parking in front of buildings, instead allowing them only on the sides or rear of buildings.
- Continue to connect and enhance walkability within the village and connections to nearby attractions by filling in missing sidewalk connections and providing ADA ramps at key roadway crossings. Target improvements near new construction or building rehabilitation projects so that they become a supportive value addition to the project.
- Continue to support tree replacement and trimming along Village streets while trimming back and down bushes and shrubs that block visibility at street crossings.
- Provide bicycle racks (utilitarian or artistic) in appropriate locations where you want people to bike more, such as the beach, Village parks, Village offices, and any new commercial or mixed-use development.
- Public amenities and furnishings should be provided at key locations and attractions, such as kayak, paddleboard storage at the beach, and benches along Front Street.



Kayak and Paddleboard storage
at a local beach



Creative and artistic bike racks that match the
character of a neighborhood

Parking Management

- Consider a parking management plan that supports the community with parking strategies at key attractions, along commercial streets, and within neighborhoods.



- Continue to provide premium paid parking at the beach, but organize a policy and strategy that allows the fees from premium paid parking to be used to acquire and maintain overflow parking areas and manage on-street parking in the Village.
- Use signs to restrict Front Street on-street parking spaces to 2-hour time limits between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., limiting the use of these spaces to commercial users and minimizing the use of Front Street for overflow parking.
- Consider alternative Front Street designs for additional on-street parking and pedestrian sidewalk areas.
- Utilize a series of signage and parking bollards to identify appropriate on-street parking locations within neighborhoods close to Front Street and walking distance of the beach. During summer months, work closely with law enforcement to support the enforcement of these rules.



2-hour time limit sign for specific time frames.



Local Traffic Only sign for lanes and alleys



Economic Development

General

- Complete the Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) process.
- Research the options for establishing and funding an Economic Development Organization (EDO) responsible for the Village's economic development activities.
- Empower the EDO to carry forward the recommendations in the Master Plan.

Communications & Marketing

An EDO may establish and maintain a website and one to two social media channels highlighting the latest news and public events, and educating the community on master plan elements like the guiding principles. Your media presence should also include the following:

- Create a Small-Business-First Brand showing small businesses that Empire is a great place to start a new business or grow an existing one.
- Share stories of thriving local businesses to inspire and attract others, including video archives of existing and new business owners to help people understand who the business leaders in Empire are.
- Encourage new businesses to engage with the community through local events and initiatives.
- Highlight the Village's RRC status to attract developers.
- Target areas within Michigan that draw regular tourists to attract new full-time residents.

Business Retention and Attraction

With some staple businesses in Empire potentially changing hands, it is necessary to discuss the needs of Empire's business owners to retain employees, attract customers, provide experiences, and grow their business appropriately. These elements consider options for attracting new companies and retaining existing ones.

- Use communication channels like social media and the Village website to continue gathering data on local demand for commercial and retail businesses.
- Launch a "second location" campaign, targeting small businesses with existing locations in Northern Michigan in the categories identified through the Master Plan engagement (such as grocers, restaurants, and breweries).
- Prioritize incentives for resources like business incubators, co-working spaces, or affordable office locations. These could be on the ground floor of a live-work or mixed-use building or the development of flex commercial within a business park setting. In either case, focusing on proximity to food and beverage and entertainment locations to support other local businesses with this new development.



- Create a central place (preferably part of the Economic Development Organization) where entrepreneurs can get all the necessary information and services.
- Host regular networking events for business owners and entrepreneurs to connect.

Tourism and Recreation

Today's tourists focus on experiences, which the Village of Empire has many. As a tourist, spending time in Empire often emulates what it would be like to live in the Village full-time: days at the beach, working from a home office, biking to local stores, and hiking the dunes. As tourism improvements are made, it is important to first focus on the residents of Empire. Ultimately, how you build around your residents attracts tourists, who may eventually become full-time residents. Preserving and protecting natural areas is a priority for area residents. Therefore, developing tourism programming with a strong foundation in conservation will attract tourists who share these ideals and, hopefully, convert them into residents in the future.

- Develop eco-tourism programs highlighting the area's natural beauty while educating visitors about local ecosystems and conservation efforts.
- Offer guided tours led by local experts who can share knowledge about the environment, wildlife, and conservation practices. Workshops on sustainable practices can also engage tourists.
- Invest in sustainable infrastructure, such as eco-friendly accommodations, waste management systems, and renewable energy sources, to minimize tourism's ecological footprint. This focus allows for a broader economic incentive requirement for various funding programs.
- Collaborate with local businesses and organizations that prioritize sustainability. This can create a support network for conservation efforts and promote local products.
- Run awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of conservation and responsible tourism. This can include signage, brochures, and social media outreach.
- Provide clear guidelines for tourists on how to enjoy natural areas responsibly. This can include rules about wildlife interaction, waste disposal, and staying on designated paths.
- Create opportunities for tourists to engage in conservation efforts through volunteer programs, such as tree planting or beach clean-ups, allowing them to contribute positively to the community.
- Promote local culture and traditions tied to the natural environment. This will help visitors connect with the area while fostering respect for local practices and conservation efforts.
- Establish channels for tourists to provide feedback on their experiences and suggestions for improvement, ensuring their input is valued in ongoing conservation efforts.
- Implement capacity limits in sensitive areas to prevent over-tourism and preserve the integrity of natural resources.



Development Support (Redevelopment Ready Community)

- Establish an Economic Development Incentive Policy that identifies the Village's criteria for determining the incentive level (if any) it should award on any new project. The policy should reflect the principles of the Master Plan, including promoting thoughtful and authentic growth that creates connections and supports the conservation of natural areas.
- Utilize the Marketing and Communications strategies above to promote Empire as a Redevelopment-Ready Community, always highlighting the key principles of the Master Plan.
- Maximize the administrative fees to the Village included in each incentive program to support economic development and redevelopment programs.
- Create promotional materials for key redevelopment sites following the RRC process. The following graphics are illustrative samples to be used when a viable tract is confirmed for the RRC program.
- Develop a Request for Qualifications with MEDC staff to highlight key redevelopment-ready sites on the MEDC website.



These next two items are **examples** of promotional flyers that could be used should an economic development initiative becomes a priority for the Village.

They do not reflect any existing properties in the Village of Empire.

Proposed Redevelopment Site #1 Polly Lane/Parcel 041-000-000-01 Empire, MI



Envision Empire (EDO) and the MEDC are working with a private property owner to identify a developer for a 10-acre site designated for new housing development. This site is within walking distance to the Front Street Coordinator and our pristine Lake Michigan Beach Park. This Redevelopment-Ready site is perfect for missing middle residential development that meets the Village's economic and community development goals.

Project Goals

- Smaller homes and lots
- Preserve at least 20% open space
- Incorporate community septic
- Preserve existing trees
- Offer a variety of housing types, price points and sizes

Incentive Options

- Housing Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

Other Resources

- Site Assessment Funds (Brownfield)
- MSHDA – Missing Middle and MI Neighborhood Programs



Missing Middle Housing Development

Model Density

Single-Family Units
2 units @ 2000 sq. ft
4 units @ 1600 sq. ft
1 unit @ 1200 sq. ft

Duplexes

5 units @ 1200 sq. ft

Accessory Dwelling units

Contact Us!

Envision Empire (EDO)

Contact TBD

231-555-5555

Email us today! info@envisionempire.org



Proposed Redevelopment Site #2

Johnson's Way/Parcel 041-000-000-02

Empire, MI



Envision Empire (EDO) and the MEDC are working with a private property owner to identify a developer for a 5.3-acre site designated for a mixed-use development. This site is located within the Gateway Coordinator along M-22 near the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore headquarters, which sees 1.6 million visitors a year. Our pristine Lake Michigan Beach Park is a short walk to the west. This Redevelopment-Ready site is perfect for mixed retail and residential options that meet the Village's goals for economic and community development.

Project Goals

- Vibrant mixed-use development
- 2-story live/work options
- Town Square potential for public events
- Green space requirements
- Dining and Brewery

Incentive Options

- Brownfield Redevelopment
- Local Tax Abatement

Other Resources

- MEDC – Main Street, RAP, Community Block Grant

4500 sq. ft Commercial Space



Large Building Space

For dining /specialty

Mixed-Use

New builds retail/residential

5800 sq. ft

3000 sq.ft (2)

Townhouses

3000 sq. ft

Town Square – Open space

Community/Public Gathering

Contact Us!

Envision Empire (EDO)

Contact TBD

231-555-5555

Email us today! info@envisionempire.org



Partnerships and Funding

Collaborate with the following state and regional organizations on housing and economic development initiatives:

REGIONAL

- **Housing North** is the Region D Regional Housing Partnership Lead. This organization is active in driving policy changes that will affect housing in Empire and provides technical assistance and other resources.
- The **Leelanau County Land Bank (LCLB)** is a public authority created to efficiently acquire, hold, manage, and develop tax-foreclosed property and other vacant, blighted, obsolete, and abandoned properties. The LCLB has access to unique tools and funding sources to promote development.
- The **Leelanau County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA)** is a public body formed to revitalize blighted, contaminated, or functionally obsolete properties or develop housing properties, by implementing plans that use tax increment funds.

STATEWIDE

- **Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM)** Fellow Program—The Community Development Fellowship involves placing fellows in communities engaged or certified in [Redevelopment Ready Communities](#) (RRC) for fifteen months and working on a variety of projects to expand organizational capacity, increase local collaboration, and remove barriers to development.
- **Michigan Association of Planning (MAP)** MAP training is available year-round through their on-site workshop program. At an on-site workshop an instructor comes to your location, at a time and date convenient for your participants, and presents a comprehensive educational program, addressing the specific needs of your community. Topics include Accessory Dwelling Units, Housing Affordability and more.
- **Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)** is a public-private partnership agency and economic development corporation dedicated to job creation. The MEDC provides resources and incentive programs for existing businesses and new development. They manage the Michigan Business Development Program and the Michigan Community Revitalization Program, both of which could be accessible for economic development initiatives in Empire.
- **Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA)** is the state agency that awards resources for low, moderate and middle-income housing development projects in Michigan and provides resources directly to homebuyers. MSHDA's mission is to create and maintain affordable housing, support community economic development, and build stronger communities.



- **Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD)** - Provides resources to entrepreneurs in food, agriculture or forest products industries that are looking to expand, or are interested in starting or relocating to Michigan. Their regional representative can help develop strategies for targeting businesses growth and attraction efforts in this area.

FEDERAL

- **National Parks Service (NPS)** - Offers the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA), which supports locally-led conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the United States. NPS-RTCA assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors.



Chapter 4 - Implementation

Using the Master Plan to implement the vision of the community.

The following tables highlight the short-term, mid-term, and long-term strategies for focusing limited Village time and funding toward tangible community outcomes. As these tasks are completed, marking them off and adjusting this section will be the way to continue progressing over the lifespan of this master plan.

General Overarching strategies will span the entire life of the master plan and focus on general procedures, such as regulation updates and research.	Short Term Items should be accomplished within two years to ensure the appropriate mechanisms to activate this master plan are met.
Medium Term Strategies that span the next five years focus on building from short-term strategies and looking many years ahead for budgeting purposes.	Long Term These strategies lead the community toward the future we envision. Short-term and medium-term decisions should consider these strategies to ensure the success of these future endeavors.

General Strategies

General Strategies represent overarching guidance for continued success through all short-term, medium-term, and long-term programs. As Village staff and elected officials shift over time, these strategies can help update the efforts and continue the vision. This can also be used to adjust tactics or realign a program if the appropriate funding, staffing, or implementation process has shifted. This can be due to the Village receiving a grant or not. It can also be used to adjust alignments with partner agencies if their goals and strategies have been adjusted. As the Village of Empire Master Plan is implemented, alignment adjustments and coordinated shifting will occur over time.



General Strategies			
<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Time Requirement</i>	<i>Level of Cost</i>	<i>Partners</i>
Perform annual updates of Village maps, online and in this plan, to ensure the development of infrastructure and structures are aligned in this document.	Low	\$	Village Staff Leelanau County
Develop, align, and use a performance tracking system to highlight work performed, dollars spent, and quantifiable data to support funding programs and transparent operations of the Village.	Moderate	\$	Village Council Village Staff
Continue to perform demographic and master plan updates every five (5) years to understand changes in the Empire community. Update those findings in the Village of Empire Master Plan as addendums to the plan.	Moderate	\$	Planning Commission Village Staff
Establish and continue to evaluate incentive policies for Village participation in any incentives requested by developers or organizations.	Low	\$	Village Council
Work with the ABCD Committee to hold regular community meetings and events and develop volunteer-driven initiatives involving residents in beautification and community-building projects.	Moderate	\$\$	ABCD Committee Village Council Village Staff
Regularly reference and utilize the Master Plan and other guiding documents in decision-making, and increase transparency by making council discussions and survey results more easily accessible online.	Moderate	\$	Planning Commission Village Council Village Staff



Short-Term Actions (1-2 years)

Short-term strategies cover the next two (2) years but are not limited to just these strategies. Additional essential and emergency tasks develop daily, so often, these tasks take a side step to those endeavors. Keeping in mind that the gradual implementation of short-term strategies helps realize the long-term vision quicker, having a Village volunteer or staff advocate in charge of implementing the comprehensive plan and other special projects will support the continued implementation of these efforts.

Short-Term Strategies			
<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Time Requirement</i>	<i>Level of Cost</i>	<i>Partners</i>
Assemble a two-year Village Council Strategic Plan with newly elected Village Council Members.	Low	\$	Village Council Village Staff
Assemble a two-year Capital Improvement Plan based on the goals and guiding principles of this Master Plan and the two-year Village Council Strategic Plan.	Low	\$	Village Council Planning Commission Village Staff
Establish a grants and funding committee to support research and applications for funding projects that improve the Village.	Moderate	\$	Village Council
Explore the creation of an Economic Development Organization (EDO) to support economic development initiatives and track success with the grants and funding committee.	Moderate	\$\$	Village Council Village Staff
Adopt and publish an incentive policy to establish baseline requirements for Village participation in any development project	Low	\$	Village Council
Perform a zoning audit to validate that the development standards meet the goal and guiding principles of the master plan.	Moderate	\$	Planning Commission Village Staff
Update development standards where appropriate, according to the recommendations of the zoning audit.	High	\$\$	Planning Commission Village Staff



Short-Term Strategies			
<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Time Requirement</i>	<i>Level of Cost</i>	<i>Partners</i>
Work with developers to align their visions for developments to adhere to the goals and outcomes of this Master Plan.	Low	\$	Village Staff
Complete the Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) program	Moderate	\$	Village Council Planning Commission Village Staff
Coordinate a parking management plan and explore the feasibility of updates to the parking fee fund and the potential for using the fees to provide and upgrade parking throughout the Village.	Low	\$	Village Council Village Staff
Apply for the CEDAM Community Development Fellow Program - applications open October 14th	Low	0	Village Staff



Medium-Term Actions (2-5 years)

Medium-term strategies build off the efforts in the short term. These strategies allow for the implementation of more aggressive planning programs through the fulfillment of the construction of significant infrastructure plans, implementing ideas and concepts, and improving on those short-term strategies that still need to be completed. With a five-year update of the Village of Empire Master Plan, these medium-term strategies will be folded into short-term strategies and adjusted as needed.

Medium-Term Strategies			
<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Time Requirement</i>	<i>Level of Cost</i>	<i>Partners</i>
Continue to perform demographic and master plan updates every five (5) years to understand changes in the Empire community. Update those findings in the Village of Empire Master Plan as addendums to the plan.	Moderate	\$	Planning Commission Village Staff
For any major alignment changes in goals and outcomes, update Village development codes and manuals to reflect substantial changes to align with the updated Master Plan.	Low	\$	Planning Commission Village Staff
Activate the Economic Development Organization (EDO) to lead economic development initiatives in the Village.	Moderate	\$\$	Village Council Village Staff
Support local and regional non-profits' advancement and/or growth by incentivizing the creation of local facilities for meetings and storage to build strong relationships with other public functions.	Low	\$	Local non-profits Village Council
Establish a parking plan that supports on-street and public parking management, time restrictions, and funding support to expand parking options.	Medium	\$\$	Village Council Planning Commission Village Staff Parking Consultant



Long-Term Actions (5+ years)

Long-term strategies are the progressive continuation of the Village of Empire Master Plan. With each update, the long-term strategies should be used to fill in the strategies for short-term and medium-term time frames. As direction changes or the village's build-out is realized, new long-term strategies can be introduced to guide the Village Council and Staff, the community, partner agencies, or decision-makers. These long-term strategies fulfill the three guiding principles of Manage Growth, Make Connections, and Support Natural Areas.

Long-Term Strategies			
<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Time Requirement</i>	<i>Level of Cost</i>	<i>Partners</i>
Continue to perform demographic and master plan updates every five (5) years to understand changes in the Empire community. Update those findings in the Village of Empire Master Plan as addendums to the plan.	Moderate	\$	Planning Commission Village Staff
For major alignment changes in goals and outcomes, update Village development codes and manuals to reflect substantial changes to align with the updated Master Plan.	Low	\$	Planning Commission Village Staff
Continue coordination with MDOT, regularly confirm any potential street improvement projects on M-22 or M-72, and support the design process by providing Village policy for walkable streets.	Low	\$	Planning Commission Village Council Village Staff MDOT
Develop an evaluation method to analyze the ongoing fiscal impacts of the Economic Development Policy. Utilize the data gathered to reform the policy accordingly.	Moderate	\$\$	Village Staff Third-Party Consultants
Develop and implement a long-term housing strategy that aligns with the regional goals of the Statewide Housing Plan.	Moderate	\$\$	Village Staff Third-Party Consultants
Be an authentic, small community that supports its residents, businesses, and tourists in enjoying the Village of Empire	Moderate	\$	Everyone



Long-Term Strategies			
<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Time Requirement</i>	<i>Level of Cost</i>	<i>Partners</i>
Provide exceptional natural areas and attractions for residents, businesses, and tourists.	Moderate	\$	Everyone
Communicate, negotiate, and coordinate for the betterment of the residents and businesses in the Village of Empire and its regional partners and neighbors.	Moderate	\$	Everyone

Monitoring and Evaluation

An Excel workbook file has been provided to the Village of Empire to track progress and provide definable data points when progress is reported to constituents, grant funds, and regional partners. Village staff is intended to manage the file, and the digital working copy should always remain in their possession.



Chapter 5 - Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

This plan's recommendations relate to land use, mobility, economic development, and implementation strategies that support the community's goals and guiding principles. This includes:

- Land use: Being flexible yet consistent with development opportunities, focusing on fairly solving real-time issues. Enlist regional partners and third-party consultants to support healthy conversations and determine the best course of action on land use topics.
- Mobility: Focus on safety for pedestrians and cyclists within the community; vehicular movement is secondary within the commercial core and corridors of the Village. Parking management can help as tourism growth continues.
- Economic Development: Establish and prioritize base policies for incentive requests. Ensure that any investment in a project is reciprocated with community benefits. Growth is not worth it if no public amenity is tied to it; incentives must be about more than a future return.
- Implementation: Start with the basics and rely on your assets to help achieve the goals and tasks laid out in the strategies. These strategies are not finite; other things may come up to prioritize, but continue to make progress towards the long-term goals in all of your decisions moving forward.

Call to Action

With any plan, a champion or torch bearer must guide the way and prioritize implementation. Typically, this works better as a committee with the support of a staff member who can keep decisions made by the Planning Commission and Village Council in check with the plan's guiding principles. Dialogue around all decisions should reflect the guiding principles, and the decisions should support advancing or aligning with them.

Existing committees, such as the ABCD Committee or the Master Plan Update Working Group, may be best suited to take up the mantle of champion as the implementation arm of the Master Plan.



- **Divisiveness and Resistance to Change:** Many responses mention divisions within the community, especially regarding growth and development. Terms like "divided," "resistant to change," and "stuck in the past" suggest concerns about the village's ability to adapt to new circumstances.
- **Worries About Governance and Management:** There is concern about the effectiveness of the village leadership, with terms like "mismanaged," "dysfunctional," and "lack of vision" appearing in several responses. This reflects a lack of confidence in the current direction of local governance.
- **Challenges with Infrastructure and Services:** Many responses point to issues with infrastructure, such as the need for better sanitation, a grocery store, and improved public spaces. There's a sense that the village is struggling to meet the needs of both residents and tourists.

Mixed Sentiments:

- **Tourism Impact:** Tourism is seen as both a positive and a negative influence. While it brings economic benefits and vibrancy during the summer, it also creates challenges such as overcrowding and strain on local resources. This leads to a mix of appreciation and frustration.

Potential for Growth: Some responses express cautious optimism about the village's potential for growth, but this is often tempered by concerns about maintaining the village's character and avoiding overdevelopment.

Vision: What words/phrases come to mind when you think of the Village of Empire in the Future?





Positive Sentiments:

- **Optimism for Growth:** Many responses express excitement about the potential for new businesses, especially restaurants and a grocery store, and see these developments as opportunities for the village to thrive.
- **Hope for Thoughtful Development:** Some residents hope that the village will grow in a way that maintains its charm while enhancing its infrastructure and amenities. They desire controlled, sustainable growth.
- **Community Spirit:** Several responses reflect a strong sense of community and a desire to keep the village friendly, welcoming, and vibrant.

Concerned and Apprehensive Sentiments:

- **Worries About Overdevelopment:** Many responses express concern that the village may grow too quickly or in ways that could harm its character. There is a fear that Empire might lose its quaint, peaceful nature due to commercialization and the influence of wealthier newcomers. There is worry about the impact of short-term rentals and increasing tourism.
- **Resistance to Change:** Some residents are apprehensive about changes, especially those that might alter the Village's traditional, small-town feel.
- **Uncertainty:** Many responses convey uncertainty about the Village's future, reflecting concerns about infrastructure, housing affordability, and leadership direction.