

Communities Move Forward With Plans While Awaiting 'Can Small Towns Be Cool' Packet

By Karen Gould

Eleven months have passed since more than 100 area people attended a community and economic development presentation in St. Ignace called "Can Small Towns Be Cool?" Now, participants await a packet that will contain contact information to link them to resource people in other communities, advisors who can help with grant writing, and online training sessions.

This "tool kit" will be available as early as this spring, or by next summer, said Dave Ivan, the Clinton County Extension director who presented the workshop in January.

The program highlighted some of the traits shared by towns that are vibrant, growing, and positioned to attract future businesses and residents. Suggestions include creating a unique identity by preserving

buildings that give character to the town, engaging citizens in the growth planning process, and creating a "gathering place" for people to meet socially.

In the meantime, in St. Ignace, projects already are underway that reflect traits of successful small towns highlighted at the presentation. The Downtown Development Authority is working with Michigan State University Extension to offer hospitality training to businesses in the spring. It is working with Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) of Mackinac County on a rental rehabilitation grant to assist property owners in fixing up apartments in the downtown area, or converting buildings to apartments.

In Clark Township, a series of lunch meetings has been revived with a new focus on the ideas pre-

sented at the Cool Cities seminar, with the first meeting planned for October 30. Open to all community residents, the gatherings offer an opportunity to share ideas and offer suggestions on making the area vibrant and attractive to tourists and potential residents.

A key piece missing from St. Ignace to make it a "cool small town," said Michelle Walk, Mackinac County Extension director, during the January presentations, is a community social center, where people can meet and talk about the community. Coffee shops and wireless hot spots, she said, can bring people together.

"We don't have that one gathering place year-around," she said.

In successful communities, plans to improve the community often are moved forward by citizens.

Improving the experience for both visitors and residents includes providing better customer service, available downtown housing, attractive storefronts, and being mindful of the community as a whole, Ms. Walk said.

In a tourist-based town, the community is the product.

"From a visitor perspective, if somebody comes to town and has a bad experience at a restaurant, at a hotel, or at a retail shop, they're

not just not going to come back to that business, they're probably not going to come back to St. Ignace."

The "Can Small Towns Be Cool?" presentations were given in nine states to more than 225 communities over the last two years and were followed by a series of 10 smaller focus groups of people who attended the presentations. Mr. Ivan is just completing the focus group sessions,

and the information gathered at them will determine what will be included in the tool kits.

"I'm hearing similar themes on what communities are seeking," said Mr. Ivan.

Communities want to tap community opinions and are seeking ways to add vitality and encourage entrepreneurship, he said, and they want to network with other communities to discover what has been successful elsewhere.

Commercial Zones To Be Expanded at Cedarville, Hessel

By Jonathan Eppley

An expansion to nearly double the commercial zones in Cedarville and Hessel were among updates to the township master plan reviewed by the Clark Township Planning Commission Tuesday, October 21. The plan could be approved at the next meeting.

During a 4.5-hour meeting, the commission reviewed changes made to chapter six of the revised master plan dealing with land use and policy statements, and reviewed changes to eight of the 23 zoning articles, including parking and loading facilities, landscaping, signs, special land uses and permits, zoning board of appeals, non-conformities, and amendments. Ten zoning articles still need to be drafted or reviewed.

The changes that were reviewed came out of questions asked during a public hearing September 30.

Brad Kaye, a consultant planner from Traverse City-based consulting firm Gourdie-Fraser, hired by Clark Township, said the commission did not meet so long because it is behind schedule, but rather to just get it done.

The commission had hoped to complete its meeting in three hours.

"I think what happened is that we've gotten into the depth and the detail that's come out of it. It's just taken a little bit longer than expected to go through [the revisions] and work through them. The

comments that we heard, particularly on the zoning ordinances, took a lot of discussion that we had thought would go a little bit quicker than it did. But the comments that came out needed response," he said.

While there are substantial additions being made to the master plan, much of it will remain the same, he said.

Major changes to take effect under the updated master plan are the zoning expansion of the Hessel and Cedarville commercial areas. Both will nearly double in size.

The commercial zone in Hessel will be extended along M-134 westward to where Nye Road intersects, to the east where Island View Road intersects and south to Lake Street.

The Cedarville commercial zone will be extended west along M-134 to 4 Mile Block and east to Short Street.

The two zones are to be extended to accommodate existing and future commercial properties.

The commission briefly discussed zoning the entire M-134 corridor between Hessel and Cedarville as commercial, but decided to make that decision at some time in the future.

"Over time, there is the talk in the master plan about tying the two areas together in a more formal sense, but that would be something that would be looked at through further revision of the master plan," Mr. Kaye said. "At this point, there is no revision on it."

Other changes reviewed at last week's meeting included reducing the frontage from 200 feet to 100 feet for island properties at least one acre in size. Similarly, the change will be made to mainland

rural waterfront lots to reduce minimum frontage from 150 feet to 100 feet for properties on the community sewer system, and increase to 200 feet for those on private septic systems.

"I see the value there," said commission member Mike Miller about easing frontage restrictions. "A lot of people have approached me and said they think the restrictions are too restrictive."

Allowable frontage for non-waterfront urban residential properties along M-134, between the road and the structure, will also be reduced from 200 feet to 100 feet.

The township master plan is intended to act as a long-range policy document and set the direction of the township's vision in the foreseeable future. The state requires that it be reviewed at least every five years, Mr. Kaye said, and it has been more than five years since the township last reviewed its master plan.

Zoning ordinances are "current regulatory documents that say, 'Today, this is what you can do on any future parcel within the township,'" Mr. Kaye said.

The commission could approve the master plan as early as its next meeting Tuesday, October 28.

Some of the zoning ordinances, however, require more public input and all require approval from the Mackinac County Planning Commission after the township commission approves them.

"We're hoping to have at least portions of that done by December, pending on exactly how far we can get in the next meeting or two. It may be into January before the entire zoning ordinances can be completed," Mr. Kaye said.

Island School Tables Decision About Employee Annuities

Mackinac Island Public School's Board of Education tabled a decision Thursday, October 23, about whether to join a newly formed consortium that will manage school employees' tax sheltered annuities. The accounts, called 403(b) plans, will have to be managed by either a school employee or an outside agency to comply with new Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rules. All school districts in the state are affected by the new rule.

Annette Eustice of the school's auditing firm explained that this can be an administrative challenge for school districts because the IRS now wants school districts to have a plan, an administrator, and a monitoring system in place to be sure employees with the plan are not loaning or borrowing money they should not be, or putting more money in the plan than the IRS allows.

If the school decides to join the consortium offered by the Kent

Intermediate School District, it would pay a one-time fee of \$500.

An education session about the IRS changes to teachers' annuities is scheduled to be held in December in Sault Ste. Marie and St. Ignace.

Decision to join the consortium was tabled for next month's meeting, which is set for 6 p.m. Thursday, November 13.

Northland Players To Perform in Play

Local performers with the Northland Players will present their fall production, "Moon Over Buffalo," at the Cheboygan Opera House Saturday, November 1, at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, November 2, at 2 p.m., and Friday, November 7, and Saturday, November 8, at 7:30 p.m.

Ticket prices range from \$8 to \$12.

For reservations, call the Opera House box office at (231) 627-5841 or (800) 357-9408.

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 Little Bear Arena
 Cost \$25.00
 Any Questions Call Amy Marshall After 5:00 p.m. at 643-0248

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 Eric Tannebaum - Former University of Michigan Wrestler,
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Saturday, November 29th 1 p.m.
 Little Bear East Arena
 Entry Fee \$5
 Deadline for Sign-up: Nov. 28th
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 Open to All Ages, Adults Welcome
 This is a Single Elimination Tournament
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 Children Ages 4-8 FREE
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 For more information call Little Bear East (906) 643-8676

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- Boat Show Volunteer for Over 20 Years
- Past Board Member and President of the Les Cheneaux Historical Association
- Lions Club Member
- Friends of the Library Member
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I am available for questions, concerns, ideas, or just to talk to.
 Please feel free to call me at (906) 484-2519.
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