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## INTRODUCTION

To mark the Village Centennial in 1969 the Sand Lake Chamber of Commerce published a commemorative book entitled “The Sand Lake Story”. This small paperback contains a wealth of information about the nature of the Village throughout its history. Two things are evident from the book; first, the Village proper remains much the same today as it was when first laid out; a small central business district, large central park, centrally located Village offices and post office surrounded by modest residential dwellings. Second, the services provided within the Village; a well-equipped and manned fire department, post office, telephone service, library, and police department are still being provided today as in the past.

Missing are the surrounding lumber mills, the railroad and the State highway that traversed the Village. Also missing are many of the jobs and businesses that supported that original population. Today the permanent Village population is primarily retired or employed outside of the Village. The businesses still serve Village residents as well as the surrounding community; however, a seasonal population has become critical to the continuing viability of the business community.

The Sand Lake Story begins thus:

THIS BOOK is respectfully dedicated to friends of other days who founded the Village of Sand Lake and by their efforts kept it going; to the gals and guys of today who are giving of their time and talent to sustain it; and to the sharp new generation which will soon take up the challenge of the next one hundred years.

In the preparation of this book one fact emerges, Sand Lake is typical of thousands of villages in this government “of the people, by the people, and for the people” and the future of the whole is dependent upon the success or failure of the smallest.

This Master Plan is one tool by which the vision expressed in this preamble may be carried out. This Master Plan is an update of the Master Plan completed in 1997. Unlike the plan prepared in 1997, the Sand Lake Planning Commission is personally preparing this update rather than contracting with a consultant. It is hoped that by so doing, the entire community will be involved in the process, and a greater sense of pride and understanding may result.

The 1997 Master Plan included a section on the intent and uses of the Master Plan in shaping the physical dimension of future land development. The Village of Sand Lake is like many other small historic villages in Michigan in that it is almost entirely developed, and there are few areas left for any major residential or commercial development. Due to the small population, further land development is encouraged to improve the tax base and provide additional customers to the local businesses. This attitude of welcoming development is counter to the anti-development mentality of large metropolitan areas.

It is the intent of this master planning process to determine who we are as a community, and who we want to be. It will also define where we live and help us understand where we want to live. Once we

determine who we want to be and where we want to live, we can make informed recommendations to further that vision. Through this process we will determine what needs to remain the same and what needs to change. From that we can form an implementation plan to identify and prioritize capital improvements and initiate administrative actions to lead us in a positive direction moving forward into the future.

The Planning Enabling Act; Act 33 of 2008, is the authority under which this endeavor is being carried out. Public notification and involvement of other agencies and the community in general is promoted, and in certain instances, required by the act. It is intended that this process and final document not only meet the requirements of the act, but also the spirit in which it was drafted.

## CHAPTER 1

### COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

This section of the Plan presents data relating to the Village population, physical characteristics and services. By comparing the available data, it is possible to identify trends in population, housing, land use, infrastructure and services. These trends give some insight for potential future conditions and serve as a basis for projections of future population, housing, and land use, so that future infrastructure and service needs in the community can be planned for.

This section will examine:

1. Population Trends
2. Housing Trends
3. Existing Land Use
  - a. Residential
  - b. Commercial
  - c. Agricultural and Vacant/Open Space Land Uses
  - d. Recreational
  - e. Institutional
  - f. Public
4. Infrastructure
  - a. Water System
  - b. Wastewater System
  - c. Stormwater System
  - d. Public Space
  - e. Roads
  - f. Sidewalks
5. Municipal Services
  - a. Fire Department
  - b. Police Department
  - c. Department of Public Works
  - d. Administration
6. Business Community

## 1) POPULATION TRENDS

Table 1 illustrates population data for the Village from 1960 through 2010, according to the United States Census.

Table 1

1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
394	380	388	456	492	500

The large growth between 1980 and 1990 is due in large part to the construction of an apartment building on Northland Drive, south of Oak St. Otherwise, the population has been growing very slowly over the past 40 years.

Paradise Cove became a RV condominium campground in the late '90s, somewhat stabilizing the seasonal population. It is estimated that the summertime population is about 100 during the week, 200 on an average weekend, with a maximum population of around 400 residents.

According to the 2010 census, the vast majority of residents, 94.6%, are white. Of the 188 households, 39.9% are married couples living together, 14.4% have a single female as head of the household and 38.3% are non-families. Also, 34% have children less than 18 years of age and 33% are individuals living alone. Also of note is the fact that 26.1% of households include at least one person age 65 or older.

With such a small base population, a closer examination of the census numbers should be considered. The Mildred Houting Retirement home contributes to the single individual household numbers and also influences the number of elderly residents. In addition, the seasonal population is not considered in the census data; however, during the summer season, the residents of Paradise Cove contribute substantially to the resident population within the Village, and the seasonal residents surrounding the Village contribute to the number of people using Village amenities and frequenting Village businesses.

According to American Fact Finder, of the total population there are 292 residents in the labor force. The total median household income is \$39,500, the median family income is \$47,000 and the median non-family income is \$14,250 per year. The data shows that 19.3% of residents have income below the poverty level. By comparison, the City of Rockford, which is 12 miles to the south, has a median household income of \$55,753, family median of \$74,944 and a non-family median of \$27,656 with 14.1% below the poverty level. In Kent County, the median household income is \$51,030, the median family income is \$62,949 and the non-family income is \$30,374 with 15.6% living below poverty.

## 2) HOUSING TRENDS

Based on 2010 U.S. Census data, there were 211 housing units in Sand Lake; 188 were occupied, 117 by owners and 71 by renters. The average household size of owner-occupied households was 3.10 and renter-occupied 1.93 persons.

Table 2 presents the housing mix of Sand Lake in 1990 and 2010.

Table 2

Housing Type	1990	1990	2010	2010
	Units	Percent	Units	Percent
Single Family	125	65%	117	55%
Multi-Family	57	30%	76	36%
Mobile Homes	10	5%	19	9%
Total	192	100%	212	100%

The 1990 Census data also indicated that Sand Lake had an older housing stock, as over 67% of the 192 units were built in 1970 or earlier; current data shows about 61% of the current units were built prior to 1980, 31% were built between 1980 and 2000 and only 8% of the stock has been constructed since 2000.

According to City-Data.com, the median value of owner-occupied dwellings in Sand Lake is \$92,900, and the median rent is \$410 per month. The Village Assessor has determined that the median value of residential homes is \$64,500. By comparison, according to City-Data.com, the median value in the City of Rockford is \$149,300 and the median rent is \$635 and for Kent county, \$141,000 and \$737 respectively. The 2014 Kent County Equalization report supports these values for Rockford and Kent County; however, the report does not include village information. This data is included only to compare housing costs within the Village with other areas. Using the data in this way, it can be concluded that property values in Sand Lake are comparatively low and that housing is quite affordable.

**3) EXISTING LAND USE**

Map 1 illustrates the generalized existing land use in the Village of Sand Lake through 2013. This map is based on a field survey conducted by members of the Village Planning Commission.

Sand Lake is a small community, approximately 1.5 square miles in size. Most of the land mass is undeveloped and much of the developed land mass is single-family residential. There is a small-scale business district located on the main street in the center of the community and an RV Campground in the northwest portion of the Village.

A significant portion of the undeveloped land is either wetland, lake, or dedicated to sewage treatment and disposal; these areas are thus undevelopable. Public open space, the library, churches, and elementary school also occupy a significant portion of the Village land mass.

The following is a description of the major land uses in the Village:

a. Residential Land Use

This category includes detached single-family and mobile homes and multi-family dwelling units. As stated earlier in this Chapter, the most common of these residential land uses found in Sand Lake is the detached single-family home. These dwellings are well-distributed throughout the developed portion of the Village.

The Village has only a few multi-family land uses. These uses include Old Mill Apartments, located along Northland Drive, south of Oak St., the Mildred Houting Retirement Community, located on the northwest corner of the 4th Street/Maple Street intersection, and an apartment building on Oak St., between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets.

b. Commercial Land Use

The majority of commercial development in Sand Lake is situated along Lake Street, between 5th Street and Northland Drive. This commercial area is considered downtown Sand Lake and primarily consists of small retail-type businesses which are intended to serve local and seasonal residents.

The other commercial corridor in the Village is located adjacent to Northland Drive. These commercial uses are scattered along both sides of Northland Drive. These businesses are oriented to more regional activity, especially since these facilities are located on a well-traveled county primary road.

Industrial Land Use

According to the land-use survey, only two industrial uses lie within Village limits. Located along Northland Drive, as shown on Map 1, both industrial uses are machine shops.

c. Agricultural and Vacant/Open Space Land Uses

This land-use category represents larger tracts of land that are primarily utilized for agricultural purposes or are vacant/open. There are two areas of active agricultural uses in Sand Lake, located in the southeast and southwest corners of the Village.

Vacant or open properties are scattered throughout the Village. Although some vacant properties consist of small lots in residential areas, a few are located between existing residential and agricultural uses. The potential for future development exists as the need for housing and non-residential use increases.

d. Recreational Land Use

Paradise Cove is an RV Condominium Campground located in the northwestern corner of the Village. It consists of two separate condominiums, with a total of 161 lots. Approximately 127 are occupied. The peak population is estimated to be 380 seasonal residents.

e. Institutional Use

Sand Lake Elementary School is located at the southerly terminus of 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and the Tri-County Schools Administration Building is located adjacent to and east of the school building. The Sand Lake/Nelson Township Library, a part of the Kent District Library System, is located on 8<sup>th</sup> Street, north of Lake Street. There are four churches located within the Village.

f. Public Land Use

Salisbury Park is located in the center of the Village and is well-used by residents and visitors alike. The Sand Lake Museum is located within the park, and park amenities include tennis courts, horseshoe pits, restrooms, a basketball court, children's play structures and equipment, picnic tables, and a gazebo. The park is the center of activity during the annual Independence Day Celebration and Winter Carnival. Several other private and public activities take place within the park throughout the year.

The Village and Nelson Township offices are located across 5<sup>th</sup> Street from the park, along with the police and fire departments and DPW garage. Across the easterly parking lot is the Sand Lake Post Office. In the very southwest corner of the Village is the Sand Lake Cemetery.

The White Pine Trail traverses the Village from south to north, parallel to and just west of Northland Drive. A parcel of land south of Lake Street, between the Trail and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, was purchased as part of the sewer system construction to house a lift station. It has been used as a public parking lot, and recently, the northern portion was developed to include a pavilion and to provide a resting place for users of the Trail.

South of the Sand Lake Elementary School is a large parcel of land dedicated to sewage treatment and disposal. This tract was purchased with federal funds to provide for this use and is not available for development. Part of that original purchase includes land lying between the school and the White Pine Trail, south of Cherry Street and north of the sewage treatment area. A storage facility for Village property is located on this parcel, and the open area is used for pulling events, event parking, and for running dogs and flying kites.

There is a small area in the northeast corner of the sewage disposal area that has developed into a motor park for mud boggs and demolition derbies. This area was not planned, but simply developed as part of the Independence Day activities, at the request of the Chamber of Commerce and with the cooperation of the Village Council.

#### **4) INFRASTRUCTURE**

##### **a) Water System**

The public water system was constructed in 1988 in response to aquifer contamination in the downtown area. The water tower was erected at that time to provide adequate water flows for fire protection; as a result, most village residents and businesses realize significant savings on their insurance premiums. There have been a few upgrades to the system, and with current maintenance efforts, the system is in compliance with current regulatory requirements.

The system currently serves 57% of the Village and the lower section of Paradise Cove. The current capacity of the system is 422 Residential Equivalent Units (REUs). The upper portion of Paradise Cove could require 150 REUs to replace their two well system. Given existing use, the system could support an additional 177 REUs as well as serve residents in Paradise Cove.

##### **b) Wastewater System**

Constructed in 1966, the system consists of 3 miles of sewerage, including three lift stations, a series of treatment lagoons, and a surface application system for treated effluent. The system underwent significant improvements in 2011 and is currently in compliance with regulatory statutes.

The system currently serves 95% of the Village, including Paradise Cove. The current design capacity of the system is 64,000 gallons per day (gpd) and expected peak demand is 40,000 gpd, which allows for an additional 24,000 gpd in additional development within the Village. This will allow for an additional 74 (REUs) to be added.

c) Stormwater System

The portion of the Village east of about 7<sup>th</sup> Street flows to the east through the Sand Lake Drain to Black Creek, and eventually the Flat River. Runoff from the area west of 7<sup>th</sup> Street flows to the Williams Drain into Duke Creek, and eventually the Rogue River. Both the Flat and Rogue Rivers enter the Grand River and are part of the Lower Grand River Watershed.

The stormwater system is not documented; however, there is some limited information contained in various other utility record drawings at the Village office. Knowledge of the system has been lost over the years due to attrition of Village personnel.

d) Public Space

As mentioned in Chapter 1, under Public Land Use, Salisbury Park is located in the center of the Village and is well-equipped and well-used. The White Pine Trail including the trail head park is also a well-used public space. Both of these facilities provide a place for recreational opportunities to the general public. The Sand Lake/Nelson Township Library provides educational and computer opportunities, as well as an indoor gathering space for the public in general and members of the KDL system in particular.

e) Roads

According to the Act 51 map, there are 2.65 miles of major streets and 2.44 miles of local streets within the Village's jurisdiction. In 2003 a bond was issued, and almost all the gravel roads and alleys in the Village were paved. No planning and very little engineering effort were expended as part of the project; as a result, there are many areas that have deteriorated and are in need of major maintenance or reconstruction. Maintenance consists primarily of patching major potholes. There is no up-to-date street inventory or master plan.

f) Sidewalks

The downtown business district has adequate concrete sidewalks. Four-foot-wide concrete sidewalks are provided in about one-half of the residential areas. There is no maintenance program, inventory, or master plan for sidewalks within the Village.

## **5) MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

a) Fire Department

The Sand Lake Fire Department is a volunteer organization that serves Sand Lake, the north half of Nelson Township, the south half of Pierson Township and Ensley Township. The Sand Lake station is located in the central Village and the Ensley station is located in Ensley Center, next to the Township offices. In addition to fighting fires, the fire department also responds to medical emergencies, auto accidents, chemical spills and other emergency situations. The department's 21 volunteers respond to approximately 400 calls for aid within their jurisdiction and assists other departments about 10 to 15 times per year. The number of calls has been slowly increasing over the past several years.

Due to the capabilities of the Sand Lake Fire Department and the ready availability of water, most of the Village enjoys an ISO fire rating of 6, which is excellent for a local volunteer department. This rating results in a substantial savings on homeowners' insurance rates, as well as peace of mind for Village residents.

b) Police Department

The Sand Lake Police Department is comprised of a Chief of Police and four part-time officers. The Department provides a full range of police services to the community on a limited budget. Services include patrol, investigations, crime reports, crime prevention and traffic enforcement. The Sand Lake Police Department responds to approximately 250 calls for service per year. The Department also provides high visibility during special Village events, especially the Independence Day Celebrations.

c) Department of Public Works

The DPW is responsible for maintenance of the Village's infrastructure and grounds. Maintaining the sewer system, water system, roads, and mowing the park, cemetery and other areas are a few of their responsibilities. When leaf burning became a major health threat in the '90s, a burning ban was enacted, and the Village DPW procured a leaf pick-up trailer and began collecting and composting leaves that homeowners rake to the edge of the road. They also pick up limbs and sticks that are piled at the side of the road. In the winter, after clearing snow from the roads, the DPW removes snow from the Village sidewalks. There are many other facilities the DPW takes care of on a regular basis.

d) Administration

The Village of Sand Lake operates as a General Law Village under statutes enacted by the State of Michigan. As such, they have an elected President and Council. Clerk and Treasurer are hired positions. The Zoning Administrator and Planning Commission are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Council. The Village uses the Nelson Township assessor and inspectors to operate within the Village.

## 6) BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Businesses within the Village of Sand Lake are no different than many rural communities in the United States in that they have suffered for the convenience of the traveling and shopping public. Construction of the interstate system drew traffic from the small villages that were scattered along the roads and highways that connected urban and industrial areas and placed it on efficient limited-access freeways. Prior to construction of the US-131 expressway, travelers between Grand Rapids and Big Rapids were forced to drive through Sand Lake, as well as Cedar Springs, Pierson, Howard City, etc., and as the need or desire arose, they would frequent the many businesses in those towns. Today, travelers must make an effort to leave the convenience of US-131 at exit 110 and travel one mile east to take advantage of the opportunities found in Sand Lake.

In addition to the improvements to the road system, the advent of the big-box retail store has taken its toll. The lure of inexpensive merchandise, wider selection and intense advertising, coupled with easy access via the freeway system, has drawn many customers away from the local businesses in Sand Lake. A few of the casualties include the lumber yard, hardware store, and grocery store. Although there are other factors in each particular case, declining customer base is the root cause these businesses suffered.

The remaining businesses are more local in nature, serving the needs of the immediate area. Most of those businesses have been in the Village for a number of years; a few are relatively new. The perception is that turnover in the downtown area has been rather intense; however, due to the fact that most residents have been in the Village for many years, it is the collective memory of those residents that contributes to that perception.

The Sand Lake Chamber of Commerce is very active in the community. The annual Independence Day Celebration is the most well-known activity organized and administered by the Chamber. However, the Chamber is also responsible for many of the amenities in Salisbury Park and many other activities, such as the annual Christmas and Easter celebrations, winter carnival, and movies in the park in the summer.

It is evident that many of the businesses in Sand Lake are struggling, but some are doing well. The customer base in Sand Lake will not likely support a national retail chain establishment or many of the amenities of urban areas; however, it has and likely will continue to support local entrepreneurs serving the needs of the local population.

## CHAPTER 2

### PUBLIC INPUT

The 1997 Master Plan stressed the importance of feeling the “public pulse” of the Village and a questionnaire was sent to Village Residents, and their responses were summarized in a short bullet-point list in that Master Plan. The current Planning Commission realized that this effort was informative but excluded the seasonal population, businesses, Village officials and staff. As a result, they decided to re-survey residents and include the business community and seasonal residents by sending them a questionnaire this time. Additional input from Village officials, staff, residents, businesses and Cove residents was sought as shown in Section 2: Additional Meetings.

There was also little evidence of interaction between these different communities and the Planning Commission during preparation of the 1997 Master Plan. It was decided that after the 2013 survey information was obtained, reviewed and summarized, that the Planning Commission would share this information with those communities, as well as the community at large, to solicit further comments and suggestions.

#### 1. COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE

It is clear from many of the comments that there are differing perspectives on the issues commented upon. It is important to understand that the comments received do reflect personal perceptions, and those perceptions are formed by personal experience; sometimes problems are perceived and sometimes they are real. The process of developing this Master Plan will sort out reality from perception; both types of problems must be addressed, but the solutions are very different in nature. The implementation portion of this Master Plan contains suggested solutions to both perceived and real problems.

The response to the 1997 survey, which was sent to resident-homeowners only, was 30%. In 2103, the resident-homeowner response was 26% (30 out of 117 resident homeowner units). However, there were 71 rental housing units that were inadvertently omitted, which brings the response rate to 16% of the 188 occupied housing units in the village; the same as the 1997 survey. Paradise Cove returned 18 responses (14% of 127 lot owners), and 7 of 54 businesses responded (13%). In total, there were 56 surveys returned out of a possible 369, which is a 15% rate. Although this seems a small sampling, it is within expected response rates.

The Planning Commission and Village Council had hoped for a higher response rate; however, the following survey results will be considered, along with other information received in the formulation of this document, as the basis for the action plan established. All of the surveys were tabulated, and the current survey results were summarized and compared to the 1997 Master Plan in the following pages. For more detailed information, reference the full survey results in the appendix.

**Please note that the percentages listed in the summary here are based upon the separate totals of 31 Village homeowner-residents, 18 Paradise Cove Residents, and 7 businesses.**

*1997: A majority of the respondents (64%) have lived in Sand Lake more than 10 years.*

In 2013 that number increased to 79% of homeowner respondents have lived in Sand Lake for more than 10 years. 50% of both Paradise Cove resident and business respondents have been residents for more than 10 years. This seems to indicate a relatively stable population, as well as one that is aging. Also of note is that a majority of permanent housing unit respondents own their home and 100% of Cove respondents own theirs.

*1997: Almost 60% of those responding indicated that the quality of life in Sand Lake is “staying about the same.” Whereas, only 11% said the quality of life was “getting worse.”*

In 2013 50% of homeowner respondents and 58% of Cove respondents indicated the quality of life was staying about the same, while one third of homeowner and Cove respondents indicated the quality of life was declining. Of the few businesses who responded to the survey, a majority indicated they felt the quality of life was getting worse.

*1997: The main reasons why people choose to live and stay in Sand Lake is the small town atmosphere and their “grass roots” connection.*

Survey respondents indicated the same in the 2013 survey with over 60% of homeowner respondents referencing small town atmosphere and family connections as reasons to live in Sand Lake. 18% of homeowner respondents and 33% of businesses indicated commuting distance as a reason to live in Sand Lake. The 2013 questionnaire added a category for ‘recreation’ to accommodate the inclusion of Cove residents; 76% of cove respondents indicated they live in Sand Lake for recreational opportunities, with 12% preferring the small town atmosphere.

*1997: In regards to issues that worry or concern residents, a majority of the respondents were worried about the conditions of both gravel and paved roads. When asked if they were worried about population growth, 73% said no. In fact, 71% indicated that Sand Lake’s population growth is happening at an acceptable rate.*

Concern about road conditions is still the top concern in Sand Lake, followed by water pollution and Zoning in that order. A strong majority of homeowner and Paradise Cove respondents indicated no concerns about population growth. 67% business respondents indicated they were worried about population growth; however, 75% of them felt the Village was growing too slowly, so the concern about population growth is the lack thereof. Most respondents indicated the Village was growing too slowly or at an acceptable rate; none indicated concern the Village was growing too fast.

*1997: The residents indicated that they prefer Village officials to encourage or accommodate all types of housing with the exception of single-wide mobile homes. Sixty percent stated that mobile homes should be discouraged.*

New residential development should be encouraged, according to 80% of 2013 respondents. As in 1997, respondents indicated all types of residential development should be encouraged or accommodated with the exception of mobile homes.

*1997: According to the questionnaire results, commercial shopping facilities in the Village are not adequate. Further, almost three-quarters of the respondents indicated that they make major shopping trips outside of Sand Lake, mostly for grocery and drug store needs.*

The 2013 survey indicated shopping and commercial opportunities in Sand Lake are still inadequate and are in decline. An overwhelming majority indicated the Village should encourage more commercial development. A lesser but still substantial majority would support a downtown redevelopment program.

*1997: The results showed strong (67%) support for more industrial area in the Village, primarily for development of light manufacturing and warehousing, versus heavy manufacturing.*

The 2013 survey indicated the same support among homeowner respondents for more industrial development in light manufacturing and warehousing.

*1997: The residents indicated that there is not a need for additional park land in the Village. Rather, the priority should be to improve the existing facilities.*

The 2013 survey indicated similar results to the 1997 survey, with the largest interest being in additional picnic areas.

*1997: A majority of the main wage earners of households in Sand Lake are in manufacturing (11%) or are retired (15%).*

The 2013 survey results indicated a similar retired percentage but a more varied spread of professions among wage earners.

*1997: When asked where the main wage earner of the family works, most work in Grand Rapids (37%) followed by Sand Lake (20%) and the remainder indicating employment elsewhere. **[NOTE percentages on Appendix survey said Grand Rapids 9% but that doesn't add up: 9+9+9+20+3+22 = 72, 37% for Grand Rapids adds up to 100]***

In 2013, 31% of homeowner respondents worked in Grand Rapids, 6% in Sand Lake, 6% Greenville, and 56% indicated employment elsewhere. 67% of Cove respondents indicated they work in Grand Rapids.

The questionnaire was drafted to allow ample room for comments and to offer opinions. Some of the comments were repeated several times. Some were specific in nature and some inflammatory; therefore, the comments were summarized for inclusion in this Master Plan. The individual questionnaire results and comments can be requested from the Village Clerk through the FOIA process. Following is that summary of the opinions expressed in the comments received:

There were many positive comments regarding good things that are a part of Village life:

- Sense of community
- The Sand Lake/Nelson Township Library is perceived to be a great asset to the Village
- Paved streets are appreciated

- High speed internet
- Activities such as the Independence Day Festivities, Winterfest, Halloween at the Fire Barn etc.
- The White Pine Trail is seen as an asset to the community
- Municipal services such as:
  - Leaf pickup
  - Snow plowing of roads
  - Snowplowing of sidewalks
  - Brush removal
  - Park maintenance
  - Adequate and dependable utilities
  - Keeping the Village grounds looking good
- Sand Lake Elementary School in the neighborhood
- The number of churches was noted as being appreciated

Of concern were the following:

- Poor condition of paved Roads
- High taxes
- Junk in yards
- Police presence, too much and too little
- Loss of businesses
- Appearance and condition of downtown area
- Water and Sewer rates
- Northeast corner of Northland and Main
- Lack of community activities
- Stagnant or declining population
- Traffic and sidewalks
- Mobile homes
- Declining real estate values

Within the comments were several suggestions:

- Improved Police/Business cooperation
- Need to advertise outside the immediate area
- Appeal to tourists
- Allow golf carts at least in alleys
- Nature preserve and trail around or through wetland area
- Restrooms adjacent to White Pine Trail
- Apply for grants and hold fundraisers to fund Village improvements
- Open a Farmer's Market
- Hold community block picnics
- Make Village more bicycle friendly

The topics receiving the most comments were:

- Taxes, water and sewer rates
- Lack of businesses and deterioration of downtown area
- Condition of Roads

Following is a summary of the information gleaned from meetings and interaction with the seasonal, business and political communities:

## **2. ADDITIONAL MEETINGS**

### **a. Business And Village Administration Meeting; March 24, 2014**

On March 24, 2014 a public meeting was held in the Village meeting room to solicit comments from the business community and Village personnel. Representatives from the business community were in attendance, as were members of the Village Council, Fire Department, Police Department and Department of Public Works. The forum provided an opportunity for various interests and perspectives to be voiced and for a frank and honest discussion of issues affecting the quality of life within the Village.

The Planning Commission took note of the issues and discussion from that meeting. At their April 1, 2014 regular meeting they reviewed and prioritized the subjects raised at the public forum. There were three general areas identified that are in need of improvement if the Village is to improve moving into the future; education, communication and cooperation. Following is their synopsis.

Many of the issues have to do with perceptions held by the local population. It is evident that residents need to be better informed regarding the various activities and policies in the Village. The Planning Commission determined that it is important to inform and educate residents and others about the following:

- Community events
- Water/Sewer bills
- Water Meters (lack thereof)
- Taxes / Decreasing revenue
- Funding of roads, special projects, fire department, tax revenue
- Which entities are responsible for what in the community
- Volunteer opportunities
- Grant possibilities and difficulties associated with them
- Services provided by the village (where do my tax dollars go?)

Enhanced advertising and information distribution could take many forms. Some ideas that were identified include:

- Development and maintenance of a Facebook page
- Regular articles or advertisement in the Cedar Springs Post or River Valley Shopper

- Including information in tax bills or in the Nelson Township newsletter
- Periodic Mailings
- Link websites with other local or county agencies and businesses
- Enhance the Village website
- Include Village information on the Chamber website and e-mails
- Look into radio or TV spots
- Look into Charter Cable as a resource
- Start a Village blog

Another area that needs improvement is communication within the community. It seems that some entities are working independently toward the same goals without the knowledge or support of each other. There also exists a perception that even when people do voice an opinion or ask a question, they are not listened to, or worse, ignored. On the other hand, there is a perception that residents and businesses are apathetic and not engaged in the community. It is very evident from the discussions at the public meeting that communication is a serious problem that needs to be addressed in a deliberate and aggressive way. Comments and suggestions follow:

- Communication needs to be improved between related groups so efforts are not duplicated, and funds and support can be leveraged.
- Communication needs to be improved with the general public; not only Village residents, but with the surrounding community. This will allow the businesses and the Village to understand and better serve their needs, as well as inform the general public of the goods and services available within the Village.
- Potential, or real project plans need to be communicated to the public.
- Communication can consist of a quarterly newsletter, public media such as Facebook, Twitter, a webpage, a Village blog, as well as articles in the Cedar Springs Post, or other papers.
- Aid in communicating could be solicited from a journalism program in a local high school or college that may be interested in creating articles for posting to a webpage and/or the Cedar Springs Post.
- Communication must also be maintained with the seasonal residents of Paradise Cove.

Cooperation between all the various businesses, the Village, and other entities is essential in improving the

Village and moving forward into the future. There is a synergy in cooperation that can be maximized to benefit the community as a whole. Following is a short list of the entities that should be cooperating with each other to the betterment of the entire community:

- Sand Lake Village Council
- Sand Lake Planning Commission
- Sand Lake Chamber of Commerce
- Sand Lake Police Department
- Sand Lake Fire Department

- Sand Lake/Nelson Township Library
- Village and Community Churches
- Tri-County Fraternal Order of Eagles 4467
- Local Scout Groups
- Local Sports Organizations
- Local Businesses
- Tri County Area Schools
- Sand Lake Parks and Recreation
- Sand Lake Department of Public Works
- Sand Lake Lions
- VFW Post 7912
- Paradise Cove

Some of the subjects of increased education, communication and cooperation efforts should include the fact that tax revenue is decreasing, road funds are decreasing, water and sewer rates are still low and/or normal in comparison to similar communities. Taxes are not enough to cover current village costs, let alone improvements. Apathy, evidenced by lack of attendance at public meetings, lack of involvement, and participating rather than complaining can also be improved by increased education and communication.

One participant at the public meeting voiced his perception that the police are “stalking” visitors to his business establishment. Although this perception was not shared by most others at the meeting, it is included here as a matter of record and a perception to be addressed. “Stalking” is neither something taken lightly by the Police Department, nor tolerated by the Village Council. The Police Department representative at the meeting expressed the department’s desire to partner with businesses with the intention of improving protection for all businesses and clearing up any misperceptions.

The same participant mentioned in the paragraph above, noted that attitudes in the Village have changed over time. He felt like no one waves or says “hello” any more. The friendly atmosphere has been replaced with indifference at best and animosity at worst. It is hoped that by implementing the recommendations that will be developed as part of this master planning process, that positive attitudes will eventually return us to a warm and friendly community where people appreciate each other and welcome all. After all, that is the charm of a small town which respondents commented on as being a positive aspect of living in the Village.

Besides education, communication and cooperation, there were several other comments noted by the Planning Commission during the meeting:

A “Welcome Pack” should be provided to new or prospective businesses with things they may need or want to know such as: our vision for Sand Lake, resources available, preferred architectural colors and design, community events, etc.

The public needs to be made aware of existing businesses and services that are available.

There is a desire for a well-stocked grocery store within the Village.

Local businesses need to be informed of the public's request for potential additions and/or alterations to adjust to their needs.

The Planning Commission should survey the public regularly, perhaps on an annual basis.

The Planning Commission should learn how to recruit desired businesses to the community to occupy vacant buildings as well as develop or redevelop areas within the Village. Recruiting industry to the area was also discussed.

There were a couple individual infrastructure items discussed, such as the big hole in the sidewalk in front of the hair salon, and what the residents have dubbed "5th Street Lake", which is a drain failure at the 5<sup>th</sup> St. and Oak St. intersection.

The Village needs a comprehensive stormwater system plan. We were informed by the Village President that such a plan is being contemplated but is possibly 2 years out.

The question of capturing the attention of traffic that travels through town was discussed. There is through traffic on Northland Drive, traffic on 131, both northbound and southbound, and traffic on the White Pine Trail. In this same vein, what we can do to improve the image of the Village at points of entry should be investigated.

Businesses should do more to connect with seasonal residents at Paradise Cove and attract them into the downtown area. Perhaps coupons and/or discounts could be offered.

The subject of allowing golf carts to operate within the Village should be considered.

Construction of a sidewalk connecting Paradise Cove to the library and to the rest of the sidewalk system should be considered.

The Planning Commission should investigate and determine, then promote the best methods of communicating with the public.

Architectural renderings of improvements to Main Street and the park have been prepared for the Village Council. Those exhibits of the "future of Sand Lake" should be circulated around the businesses to make them and the public aware that there is a vision. Part of that exhibition could point them toward our choice of communication to get more people informed and engaged.

Replacement of the existing notice board at the park with an electronic Events Board with scrolling community events should be considered.

Placing existing overhead electric services underground, especially in the downtown area should be considered.

An ordinance addressing the appearance of homes and businesses should be considered. The subject of encouraging compliance with, and enforcement of, current ordinances need to be investigated and acted upon.

Parking behind businesses and enhancement of parking in other areas should be considered.

Pressure should be brought to bear on our state representative for additional support for small communities and our needs.

## CHAPTER 3

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Village of Sand Lake desires to grow and get better in the future; that is the general goal of this entire process. Attracting more residents, especially more affluent residents, and new businesses is key to improving the quality of life within the Village. Land use regulation can be administered in a way that is helpful to prospective businesses. Infrastructure improvements can be made in such a way as to create a pleasant and useful environment for prospective residents. However, these need to be communicated to the public at large so that they are aware of them.

After considering the community characteristics and input from the public, the Planning Commission identified the following goals to aid the Village as we move into the future. Many of these goals are not directly related to land use; however, they do have an impact on future demand for property within the Village, as well as present and future land values. Infrastructure maintenance and improvement is also included in the Plan as the Planning Commission is responsible for creating an infrastructure capital improvement plan after adoption of the Master Plan. The capital improvement plan is to be updated annually thereafter.

Some of these goals have to do with communication and advertising, such as improving the image of the Village and publicizing events. These goals must be met in order for the Village to attract new and more affluent residents, as well as new businesses, to invest in the Village. The other more traditional goals must be met to improve the built environment so that when someone visits the Village, they want to stay and/or do business here.

#### Goal Setting:

1. Improve Image of Sand Lake
  - a. At entrances to town
  - b. Web Presence, TV, Radio
  - c. Word of Mouth
  - d. Concentrate on positive aspects
2. Spruce up businesses, make Main Street more attractive
  - a. Apply for grants
  - b. Get and/or publicize low interest loans
  - c. Change signage at park
  - d. Investigate other sign locations
3. Roads need repair
  - a. Street Inventory
  - b. Traffic study
  - c. Emergency 131, could get funding for that?
4. Publicize events
  - a. Village needs bigger role

5. Stormwater system
  - a. Document the system
  - b. Put in capital improvement plan
6. Sidewalks
  - a. Sidewalk inventory
  - b. Sidewalk improvement Plan
7. Replace wells at Paradise Cove
  - a. Work out now before it becomes critical
  - b. Internal system replacement is needed
  - c. Need better communication
8. Water and sewer rate communication/education
9. Improve communication between entities and agencies (as listed in Chapter 2 Section 2)
10. Increase lobbying efforts
11. Get more funding

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Meeting the goals enumerated in the previous chapter will require actual physical work be performed; therefore, the following list of action items are the work needed to satisfy the goals enumerated. Some can be implemented almost immediately, others will take time and money. The action items are listed in order of priority as determined by the Planning Commission, along with dates for completion. Many of the action items require input or actual accomplishment by others; the Planning Commission members will work to communicate and recommend to others the action that needs to be taken by them.

There are several areas within the Village that are currently adequate and are not in immediate need of improvement. These include the park, cemetery, and other open areas owned by the Village. Parking is not ideal, but is adequate for the present time. Although not directly related to land use or infrastructure, Village services such as Police, Fire, administration and the DPW are currently adequate; therefore, no immediate changes are recommended.

#### **1. Infrastructure**

##### **a. Roads:**

To adequately plan for future improvements and maintenance, a street inventory needs to be compiled. Rating the streets in terms of condition, adequacy and priority will allow for a rational infrastructure improvement plan. It is recommended that the Village Council commission a street inventory or provide funding so that the Planning Commission can undertake this task. The study should be completed by mid-summer 2015 so the Planning Commission can begin working on a capital improvement program as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act.

##### **b. Sidewalks:**

As with streets, an inventory is necessary to develop a rational improvement and maintenance plan. It would be most efficient if the sidewalk inventory can be developed concurrently with the street inventory. It is recommended that the Village Council add sidewalks to the street inventory they will conduct or fund with the same expected time of completion.

##### **c. Stormwater System:**

An adequate atlas for the current stormwater system does not exist. Properly documenting the system will allow for a rational plan to address the current known stormwater issues, and prevent future problems. It is recommended that the Village Council provide funding for staff to adequately clean and document the system and for an atlas to be prepared.

Given the necessity for a street and sidewalk inventory, which are a higher priority, this request could be scheduled for completion in 2016.

d. Water System:

The water system within Paradise Cove is in need of repair or replacement, and the wells will eventually cease to serve the needs of Cove residents. Planning should be undertaken now to determine the best engineering solution to the problem, identify what work needs to be done, and establish a budget. It is recommended that Village staff and representatives from the Cove begin a dialogue now, so that by the end of 2015 a capital improvement plan for the Cove water system can be completed.

## 2. NON-INFRASTRUCTURE

The responsibility for the following recommendations rests with the community at large. Participation by the Chamber of Commerce, Village business community, Village administration and staff, as well as the various entities identified in chapter two of this document, is required to accomplish the goals enumerated in chapter three. The Planning Commission members will work both corporately and individually to communicate our recommendations to the various agencies, groups and individuals that can best carry out those recommendations.

a. Improve Image of Sand Lake

i. Publicize Events

The Village of Sand Lake administration and staff need a larger role in this task. Although most events are organized and advertised by others, the Village has a unique sphere of influence that can be used to “spread the word”. The Village should also serve as a catalyst to improve communication between groups. It is recommended that the Village administration form an ad-hoc committee to work with the various groups to improve communication and collaboration.

ii. Improve Entrances to Village

Improved signage and landscaping at the entrances to the Village will help inspire a sense of place. Attractive amenities also project a feeling of pride by the residents and businesses. This should be a collaborative effort between the Village, Businesses, Chamber, and others that might want to participate. It is recommended that this task be undertaken by the above-mentioned ad-hoc committee.

iii. Media and Web Presence

The Village, Chamber, some churches and some businesses have a web presence. Those entities are encouraged to maintain and update those resources constantly, and to provide

links to each other to better spread information to differing audiences. It is recommended that the Village or Chamber take the lead on this task.

In addition, Charter Communication provides television and internet service to the Village. It is recommended that the Village and the Chamber contact Charter and investigate opportunities for advertising for non-profits and governmental agencies, then utilize any opportunity identified. Local radio and television stations also provide community advertising for non-profits.

iv. Word of Mouth

It is the recommendation of the Planning Commission that everyone that has any interest in the Village of Sand Lake at all should talk positively about all aspects of Village life, business, and governance. Each individual should concentrate on the positive aspects of the Village and support anyone working to make improvements. Positive rhetoric leads to positive attitudes, which in turn bring positive results.

b. Improve Attractiveness of the Downtown Area.

i. Apply for Grants and Low Interest Loans

The Village should work with businesses, and vice-versa, to apply for grants or other funding sources to help the businesses improve their buildings, especially the facades. In addition, in collaboration with the chamber and businesses, funding should be sought to improve the public infrastructure in the downtown area. It is the recommendation of the Planning Commission that the Village administration lead this effort

ii. Change Event Signage at the Park

The Chamber has, or has had this task on their agenda. A new sign will improve the appearance of the park and more effectively communicate upcoming events and activities. The Planning Commission will communicate our support for this endeavor to the chamber.