

August 31, 2015

# Benzie County Master Plan Survey Results Summary and Report

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As part of the 2015 Benzie County Master Plan update, the Benzie County Planning Commission and the Master Plan Committee developed and released an online survey in July 2015 in order to:

- Help the County determine where and how to focus future activities
- Help the County determine Master Plan goals related to community priorities
- Provide basic education to the public on the Master Plan update and related organizational issues, including the statutory role of the Planning Commission

The questionnaire was distributed via email by Committee members, Benzie County staff, Networks Northwest staff, County and local Planning Commission members, and others; hard copies of the survey were made available at the Benzie County Government Building and other locations throughout the County from July- August 18, 2015. Three hundred sixty-one (361) responses were received.

The following report summarizes survey responses by question “theme,” with some background information on each question, in order to aid in analysis. Complete survey results and comments are included as an appendix to this document.

## **Introductory Note: Using the Survey Results**

When reviewing survey results, it’s important to note that the questionnaire is not a statistically valid survey. Results must be balanced with additional data sources and dialogues, including committee discussion, focus groups, other forms of public input, and research and analysis. Further, survey responses are only one factor to consider when engaging in discussion and making decisions about Master Plan content and goals, and as such should be evaluated in the perspective of the planning process as a whole: as a single dataset created at the beginning of the process, survey results will help to point the way towards additional research, input opportunities, and discussion throughout the process.

Also, please note that while survey results are not statistically valid, they do represent an important and detailed source of information relative to the priorities and concerns of Benzie County residents from each community in the County, including both full-time and seasonal residents, and representing ages 18 and up. Dozens of comments provided in each question reflect strong interest and a variety of opinions on specific issues, including wind towers, County planning roles, agricultural practices and preservation, and housing choices. Yet, despite the geographic diversity and wide-ranging perspectives represented by survey responses, the net results of the survey show a strong and broad consensus on priority issues and strategies designed to address them. The results also reflect a strong interest in County Planning Commission activities and in intergovernmental coordination and cooperation. These common priorities provide an important starting point for County-wide discussions on future goals, as well as County, local, and collaborative planning initiatives or activities.

## Demographics

All Benzie County townships and villages were represented in the survey. Benzonia (54 respondents), Blaine Township (47), the City of Frankfort (39), and Joyfield Township (35) represented nearly half of all survey respondents. Participation from incorporated villages amounted to only 34 respondents.

18% of respondents were seasonal residents. 43% of Blaine Township respondents identified themselves as “seasonal” residents, reflecting the highest percentage of seasonal residents.

In terms of age, over half (55%) of survey respondents were aged 56 or older. About a third (32%) were between the ages of 35-54, 10% were 25-34 years of age, and 3% were 18-24 years old. No respondents were under the age of 18.

About two-thirds of survey participants are currently employed. Employed participants are nearly evenly divided between those who work in Benzie County (34%) and those who work outside of Benzie County (32%). 33% were retired and 4% answered that they are not currently employed.

## Prioritizing Community Issues

The intent of Question #1 is to identify “important” or priority areas for further exploration and research as part of the Master Plan update. Respondents were asked to rank each option 1-5 (1 being most important, 5 being least important). The response options were selected based on analysis of the 2000 County Master Plan and local Master Plan goals and objectives. Each issue was identified as a County-wide priority, based on its presence as a **goal or objective** in both the County Master Plan and local master plans. Topics like alternative energy and mineral extraction were not included in the response options because they were not identified as specific goals in the County or local master plans.

### #1: Please prioritize the following community-identified issues in order of their importance to you

335 respondents ranked answer responses as follows:

1. Preservation, protection, and enhancement of natural resources (4.79)
2. Preservation of scenic character (4.46)
3. Agriculture/agricultural economy (3.59)
4. Economic development (3.43)
5. Housing choices (2.84)
6. Transportation choices (1.90)

## Strategy Questions

Questions #2-7 were designed to identify interest in potential strategies or opportunities to address priority issues as outlined in Question #1. Because there are many ways in which the County Planning Commission is statutorily enabled to participate in the priority issues identified in Question #1— i.e., by providing education, crafting model ordinances, facilitating grant applications, and coordinating public

dialogue - responses to these questions may be considered by the Planning Commission as they develop goals and objectives for each issue and as they work to identify how best to structure and prioritize future activities to meet community priorities.

## **#2: How important are the following strategies in addressing issues related to the preservation of scenic character?**

321 participants responded to Question #2. Responses reflect a strong consensus on the importance of initiatives designed to preserve scenic character, which was identified as a top priority in Question #1. Nearly all respondents indicated that it was “somewhat” or “very” important to *preserve open space* (93%) or *provide for scenic view protections* (92%), while well over two-thirds of respondents expressed support for strategies that would *limit development on hilltops or ridgelines* (84%), *provide signage guidelines* (81%), or *reduce light pollution to preserve dark skies for stargazing* (80%).

44 respondents (14% of respondents) included written comments. Windmills (8), dark skies (5), signage (5), and tree or forest preservation (3) were the mostly frequently cited interests or concerns.

## **#3: How important are the following strategies in addressing issues related to natural resource protection**

320 participants responded to Question #4. Reflecting the top priority ranking the issue was assigned in Question #1, there was support for natural resource protection strategies nearly across the board, with large majorities of respondents indicating that all strategies were important. Water quality appeared to be the highest priority relative to natural resource protection, with 97% of respondents indicating that *water quality planning and protections* were “somewhat” or “very” important. Respondents also indicated that it was “somewhat” or “very” important to *preserve and enhance shoreline areas* (94%), *limit development in sensitive natural areas* (93%), *improve stormwater management infrastructure and techniques* (93%), and *preserve open space through land purchases or easements* (88%).

28 respondents (9% of respondents) provided written comments. Water quality issues were the most frequently cited, followed by the economic impact of natural resources on the County.

## **#4: How important are the following strategies in addressing issues related to agriculture in Benzie County?**

The 317 responses provided to Question #3 expressed a strong consensus around a variety of agricultural strategies. 93% of respondents indicated they feel it’s “somewhat” or “very” important to *build and support local or regional food economies* and to *preserve and protect farmland*. 91% felt it was important to *enhance the business environment for agriculture* and 88% agreed that *reducing conflicts between agriculture and residential uses* was important.

29 respondents (9% of respondents) provided written comments that reflect a variety of opinions on the agricultural economy. Farming practices (chemicals, pollution, etc) were cited several times, as were farm/residential conflicts and local food . Wind energy was also identified as a concern tied to agriculture.

#### **#5: How important are the following strategies in addressing issues related to transportation?**

318 people responded to Question #5. Reflecting the lower priority assigned to transportation in Question #1, support for transportation strategies was more divided in some cases than in other topic areas; however, support for *maintaining and improving existing roads* was near-universal, with 99% of respondents indicating that this strategy was “somewhat” or “very” important. Also identified as “somewhat” or “very” important were strategies to *improve or expand connections between trail systems and local amenities* (81%) and *improving or expanding non-motorized trails* (80%). A slight majority (51%) of respondents indicated that *improving or expanding motorized trails* was “not important,” reflecting the only strategy in the survey that did not receive a majority of positive responses.

41 comments (13% of respondents) reflected a strong interest in non-motorized trails (12 comments in support, 4 indicating that there are enough trails). Road maintenance, walkability/accessibility, and the importance of motorized trails were also cited by multiple respondents.

#### **#6: How important are the following strategies in addressing issues related to housing?**

Notable majorities of the 317 responses to Question #6 indicated that most housing strategies listed were “somewhat” or “very” important, though consensus was not as strong as in responses relative to other issue areas. Support was strongest for *addressing blighted or substandard housing stock* (86%), *preserving, maintaining, and improving existing housing stock* (85%), and *providing for more affordable housing opportunities* (80%). Majorities of respondents also expressed support for strategies relative to specific types of housing options – rentals, smaller homes, and multi-family housing – but support was somewhat more divided than in other survey questions. 62% indicated that it is important to *provide for multi-family housing types (apartments, townhouses, etc)*; 66% supported *providing for additional rentals*; 69% supported *providing for smaller homes*; and 72% supported *providing for additional single family housing in cities and villages*. Only 54% felt that it was important to provide for additional single family homes in rural areas or subdivisions.

49 respondents provided written comments (15%). Comments reflected a variety of positions, including opposition to government involvement in housing; difficulties in finding affordable housing, particularly for young people or families; locating development in existing villages or cities; and creating additional housing opportunities.

## **#7: How important are the following strategies in addressing issues related to economic development?**

The 318 responses to Question #7 reflect strong interest in economic development initiatives, with all strategies receiving 81% positive responses or higher. 93% indicated that it's "somewhat" or "very" important to *provide for additional hi-tech/communications/Internet infrastructure*, while 92% would support efforts to *attract or retain a skilled workforce*. 88% of respondents answered that it's important to *improve community or public spaces to enhance quality of life*. Significant majorities also expressed support for strategies that would *provide for additional sewer and water infrastructure to support business development* (84%), *expand access to natural gas and electric* (83%), *market or promote Benzie County to workforce and businesses* (82%), and *engage in regional economic collaboration and planning* (81%).

41 respondents (13% of responses) provided written comments. Many comments reflected a strong interest in infrastructure (both sewer/water and hi-tech communications), while others addressed workforce issues, natural resources, and the importance of community character in economic development.

## **2000 Master Plan Goals**

The response options in Question #8 reflect goals in the *existing (2000) Benzie County Master Plan, written exactly as they are in the 2000 Master Plan*. The intent of this question was to gauge whether the public continues to support the same general principles in 2015, or whether priorities have changed.

## **#8: The 2000 Benzie County Master Plan included the following primary goals for future growth and development. Please state whether you agree or disagree with each of the following goals.**

The 318 responses to Question #8 generally affirmed 2000 Master Plan goals, with most respondents agreeing by large margins with most statements. Significant majorities of respondents agreed with the following goals:

- The vision in the Benzie County Master Plan must be achieved without violating protected property rights (85%)
- A strong effort should be made to achieve or continue intergovernmental cooperation within Benzie County (86%)
- The pristine natural environment of the County should be protected from degradation (90%)
- Natural resources should be protected from inappropriate use or conversion (91%)
- Scenic character should be preserved or enhanced wherever feasible in the County (92%)

Slightly smaller majorities agreed with the statement “An economy built on renewable natural resources is sustainable and should continue to be the principal economic base for the future,” while 69% agreed that “Future development should primarily take place in a compact development pattern.”

31 comments (10% of responses to Question #8) expanded on issues including natural resources, property rights, and future development patterns.

## County Planning Commission Activities and Intergovernmental Cooperation

Questions #9 and #10 were designed to aid in prioritizing future County activities around each of the issues identified in the survey. When reviewing results for Questions #9 and #10, it’s important to note that an underlying assumption of the planning process as a whole is that the Planning Commission is statutorily enabled and required to engage in certain activities. Survey results will not dictate, nor are they intended to dictate, what the roles of the County Planning Commission might be. Rather, they are merely intended to help the County prioritize how they wish to use their limited resources to engage in future activities.

With that goal in mind, Question #9 is intended to: 1) to clarify to the public how the County Planning Commission might participate in issues identified in the survey, and 2) identify ways in which the public would like the County Planning Commission to participate. The question is based on the implicit understanding and knowledge that the County Planning Commission is **statutorily enabled** to engage in these roles already.

Question #10, meanwhile, highlights intergovernmental cooperation – a major focus of the 2000 Master Plan – as a means to implement various community initiatives. Additionally, the potential to facilitate intergovernmental cooperation or collaborative initiatives is one potentially important role for the County Planning Commission. Question #10 is intended to determine how the public prioritizes various intergovernmental cooperation opportunities in light of new organizational roles (i.e., the County no longer administers zoning) ; and, should the County Planning Commission wish to facilitate or assist with any intergovernmental initiatives, responses to Question #10 can help provide direction.

### **#9. Which of the following planning-related activities do you feel the County Planning Commission should prioritize in achieving the goals that the community has identified?**

Strong majorities of the 318 responses to Question #9 supported the potential County Planning Commission activities. The strongest level of agreement was relative to planning and development of infrastructure, with 84% of respondents in agreement. 79% of respondents supported County Planning Commission involvement both in *convening local governments to discuss and collaborate on priority issues* and *participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits (i.e. to conduct county-wide studies or plans, purchase land for*

*open space preservation, etc).* 77% agreed that the County Planning Commission should *encourage consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries*; 72% supported *regional economic collaboration and planning*; and 70% agreed that the County Planning Commission should *prioritize coordinating and hosting educational workshops on priority issues for local governments*.

30 comments (9% of responses) addressed collaboration, workshops and education, and local/county goals.

**#10: Some issues have broad community impacts that extend beyond the boundaries of individual local units of government (townships, cities, and villages), and may be addressed by partnerships, coordinated planning, or other types of collaboration between governments. How important do you think the following examples of intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration are in meeting community goals?**

Support for intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration was high, with significant majorities of the 318 responses to Question #19 answering that collaborative initiatives were “somewhat” or “very” important. 89% indicated that it’s important to *share village, city, township, county, and regional staff or resources*; 87% supported *participation in collaborative initiatives around county-wide initiatives*; and 85% agreed that it’s important to *participate in joint planning and zoning initiatives*.

Of the 22 comments provided (7% of responses), most expanded on the support for collaboration expressed above.

# Benzie County Master Plan: Priority Issues & Opportunities

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From March 2015 through January 2016, Networks Northwest staff worked with the Benzie County Master Plan Committee to obtain input from the public and specific stakeholders on a variety of community issues. Activities included:

2014-2016	County Planning Commissioners and staff, local governments, transit, business, agriculture, hospital, and other community representatives met at multiple committee meetings to develop the survey, plan focus group meetings, and review survey results.
April 2015	All local plans were reviewed in the <i>2000 County Master Plan &amp; Local Plan Synopsis</i> to identify priority community issues and local strategies.
Summer 2015	Committee members developed and distributed a community-wide survey in summer 2015. Over 300 responses were received.
September 2015	The <i>Local Government Focus Group &amp; Discussion: County Planning Commission Roles, Responsibilities, and Coordination</i> focused on the history of Benzie County planning and zoning, statutory County roles, and county and local planning coordination.
November 2015	The <i>Economic Development Focus Group &amp; Discussion</i> attracted over 40 business, local government, and other community representatives to discuss business challenges and needs and share thoughts on how the County or local governments can support business growth.
December 2015	The <i>Housing Focus Group &amp; Discussion</i> provided information on housing needs and trends, solutions, and County and local government roles in housing strategies.
January 2016	The <i>Transportation Focus Group &amp; Discussion</i> shared information on County transportation services, challenges, needs, and opportunities for solutions and partnerships.

Input and analysis from these activities is summarized below for the Planning Commission's/Committee's consideration regarding specific information, issues and opportunities to address in-depth in the Master Plan and strategies to explore around priority issues. Additionally, the information provided below is proposed to be used as follows in the development of Master Plan content and goals:

- For issues that attracted strong interest or support in surveys or discussion, but that were not substantially addressed in local master plans, the Master Plan will address potential local roles around the issue (i.e. zoning approaches), as well as potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action
  - Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops on priority issues for local governments
- Where priority issues are being addressed by local plans, ordinances, or other initiatives, existing local approaches will be identified and reviewed as best practices or case studies.
- Where issues require or allow direct county engagement or leadership, specific county actions will be identified as potential goals.



## Housing

Like the Northwest Michigan region as a whole, Benzie County is experiencing changes in housing demand and shortages of a range of housing choices —particularly rentals—that are impacting businesses, schools, and community vitality. Small homes (under 1,000 square feet), rentals, or multi-family housing units consistent with single-family development—otherwise known as the “missing middle”—are all becoming more important in meeting the needs of the workforce, an aging population, small households, young professionals, and families. Without them, employers struggle to hire qualified new workers, including professional staff; and schools lose out on new students. Meanwhile, few developers region-wide have the experience or financing options needed to build these new housing types. Yet, housing needs as such were not addressed in the 2000 Master Plan, and there was little in-depth discussion of these issues in local plans.

- Affordable and workforce housing was identified as an important need in the November 2015 business focus group, and was also emphasized in the 2015 survey, with 80% of survey respondents noting that it is important to provide for more affordable housing opportunities. Comments and concerns expressed in focus groups, committee discussions, and survey results include:
  - Young people, professionals, and families struggle to find housing they can afford.
  - Many employers report shortages of housing for their seasonal workforce.
  - Seasonal residential development makes up the bulk of new housing construction; concerns exist that new “affordable” or “workforce” housing will be purchased, rented, or used for seasonal residents or visitors.
- Blighted and substandard housing stock are priority issues for survey respondents, as is the preservation and maintenance of existing housing stock.
- The 2015 survey showed support for strategies relative to various types of “missing middle” housing options, including rentals, smaller homes, and multi-family housing.
- Survey results showed general support for single-family housing development – depending on its location. More survey respondents (72%) expressed support for *providing for additional single family housing in cities and villages*, compared to those who felt that it was important to provide for additional single family homes in rural areas or subdivisions (54%).
- Focus group comments indicated that limited infrastructure is a primary barrier in developing higher-density housing in key areas.

## Proposed Master Plan Content/Analysis

Issues and questions raised in surveys, focus groups, and committee discussions show a strong community interest in and need for housing, but the issue of housing is not substantially addressed in local master plans, and the County lacks a cohesive approach to the issue. As such, the Master Plan is proposed to:

- Identify housing needs and demands
- Recognize local zoning roles relative to housing type, density, etc
- Discuss potential county roles/tools (Land Bank Authority, brownfield incentives, etc)
- Reference ongoing/existing plans, studies, strategies, and initiatives
- Identify potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action
  - Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops for local governments

## Transportation

Transportation issues in the 2000 Master Plan were focused on road maintenance, road conditions, by-passes, and scenic highways. Local plans and survey responses supported the focus on road maintenance and road conditions, but other transportation issues, including transit, Complete Streets, and trails were also raised in local discussions and survey results.

- Complete Streets were identified by the County Planning Commission as a priority to address in the Master Plan update; and some local plans addressed Complete Streets.
- Local master plans, 2015 survey results, and a January 2016 focus group discussion show a consensus around road maintenance as a top transportation priority. Nearly all survey respondents supported the concept of *maintaining and improving existing roads*. Additionally, much of the January discussion focused on road maintenance issues, including:
  - The impact of poor road condition on vehicular and pedestrian safety
  - Road funding and legislative inaction around transportation improvements
  - The need for state/legislative funding solutions
- Non-motorized trails are an important county priority, addressed both in local plans and in survey results that showed support for improving or expand connections both between trail systems and local amenities (81%) and non-motorized trails in general (80%).
- Transit was not addressed in many local plans, but survey results showed support (73%) for enhanced transit options, and discussion identified a number of transit-related concerns and opportunities, including:
  - Improved connections to transit for employers/employees
  - Needs for more timely transit to work/better service hours
  - Assistance for seniors and other populations
  - Needs and opportunities for cross-county/regional transit service

## Proposed Master Plan Content/Analysis

The nature of transportation infrastructure warrants County leadership in identifying and participating in solutions. In response to issues and questions raised in surveys, focus groups, and committee discussions, proposed content will:

- Introduce Complete Streets and identify local roles in creating them
- Review and summarize the County's transportation improvement plans and identify county road funding issues
- Identify barriers to use of transit and opportunities to enhance it
- Identify priority pedestrian improvements and trail connections/improvements/expansions
- Identify additional transportation opportunities/goals
- Identify potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action
  - Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops on transportation issues for local governments

## Economic Development

Economic development priorities in 2000 focused on growing existing businesses and ensuring adequate infrastructure for new business. Survey respondents, focus group participants, and local plans, however, emphasized new approaches to economic development that focus more on creating and supporting an entrepreneurial environment, attracting talent, and placemaking that capitalizes on the County's natural resources and unique community.

- Focus group and survey participants indicate that high-speed Internet is an important economic development priority for County residents and businesses.
- Benzie County and Northwest Michigan are currently experiencing a skilled labor shortage; and much of the discussion around economic development has focused on the need to develop, attract, and retain a skilled workforce. Business focus group comments around workforce issues include:
  - Challenges are particularly severe in finding and retaining seasonal workers.
  - Survey responses and focus group comments indicate that quality of life and place are important factors in attracting and retaining skilled workers, and that improvements to community or public spaces that enhance quality of life are important economic development strategies.
  - Housing shortages impact the ability of businesses to recruit and maintain a workforce.
- Infrastructure development is an important priority. Majorities of survey respondents expressed support for strategies that would provide for additional sewer and water infrastructure to support business development and expand access to natural gas and electric. Focus group comments also reflected a strong interest in infrastructure (both sewer/water and hi-tech communications), and concerns that a lack of sewer/water/natural gas infrastructure are barriers to business development.
- Surveys and focus groups indicated that the "quality of place" is an important factor in attracting and retaining business and workers.
- The business focus group emphasized the importance of governmental or regulatory roles in economic development. Concerns included:
  - Many local regulations are daunting, time-consuming, and limit new types of investment/development.
  - Taxes are burdens on business owners.
  - Inconsistent regulations force businesses or developers to "start from scratch" in every community.
  - A lack of economic development staff or capacity to act as liaison between potential investors/businesses and communities means that some new businesses lack the support needed to relocate or expand in Benzie County.
  - Rules should focus on what we "do want" vs what we "don't want."
- Local plans and focus group participants indicate that activities should focus on cottage industries and entrepreneurial activity– in contrast to economic development priorities in 2000, which focused on growing existing businesses and ensuring adequate infrastructure for new business.

## *Proposed Master Plan Content/Analysis*

County leadership around economic development is important in ensuring a cohesive approach to business growth and economic development. To determine the most appropriate County and local roles around economic development, proposed Master Plan content will:

- Discuss county and local roles and opportunities around economic development and workforce development
- Identify opportunities for high-tech infrastructure/sewer/water/electric improvements
- Identify additional placemaking opportunities/goals
- Identify potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action

- Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits
- Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
- Coordinating and hosting educational workshops on economic development for local governments

## Food and Farming

Agriculture was a high priority in the 2000 County master Plan, with a focus in the 2000 Master Plan was on development pressure, ag/residential conflicts, and farmland preservation. However, but local plans now also emphasize the agricultural business environment, including a growing interest and demand for local food that is creating new business opportunities as farmers and food producers innovate and diversify, creating new job opportunities and expanding markets.

- Agriculture and the agricultural economy were ranked as the third-highest priority community issue in the 2015 survey. Survey responses expressed a strong consensus around a variety of agricultural strategies, with an emphasis on building and supporting local or regional food economies (93%) and enhancing the business environment for agriculture (91%). This strategy was also included in over half of local master plans.
- *Preserving and protecting farmland was an important priority both in the 2000 Master Plan and in the 2015 community survey.* Additionally, two-thirds (62%) of local plans addressed farmland preservation.
- Conflicts between ag land and residential development were a focus of the 2000 Master Plan; and 88% of survey respondents supported indicated that it is important to address those conflicts. However, only four local plans identified goals relating to agricultural/residential conflict.

## Proposed Master Plan Approach

Benzie County is home to a number of strong local initiatives and comprehensive planning approaches to food and farming. Proposed Master Plan content will build on planning and implementation initiatives around the agricultural economy, and its connection to economic development, by providing information that will:

- Identify farming exports and agricultural assets (i.e. farmland)
- Discuss farmland preservation options and approaches
- Identify local initiatives around agricultural economy
- Identify additional food and farming opportunities/goals
- Identify potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action
  - Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops for local governments

## Intergovernmental Cooperation and Planning Roles

The 2000 Master Plan emphasized the importance of intergovernmental cooperation. Given changes to the County Planning Commission since 2000, intergovernmental cooperation and planning roles have grown in relevance. Focus groups and survey responses show strong support for coordinated intergovernmental initiatives and for various County Planning Commission roles around intergovernmental cooperation.

- Multiple communities have partnered together to develop coordinated master plans, and, in some cases, joint master plans: Colfax Township, Weldon Township, and the Village of Thompsonville have developed a joint master plan, as have Homestead and Inland Townships; Benzonina and Platte Townships have created the West Benzie Joint Planning Commission; and Joyfield, Gilmore, Blaine, and Crystal Lake Townships, together with the Village of Honor and communities in Manistee County, have worked together through the Lakes to Land initiative to develop a coordinated approach to planning, recreation, and zoning in their communities.
- Strong majorities of survey respondents supported potential County Planning Commission activities relative to:
  - Planning and development of infrastructure ( 84% support)
  - Convening local governments to discuss and collaborate on priority issues (79%)
  - Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits (i.e. to conduct county-wide studies or plans, purchase land for open space preservation, etc) (79%).
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries (77%)
  - Regional economic collaboration and planning (72%);
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops on priority issues for local governments (70%).
- Participants of the local government focus group/discussion emphasized the importance of trust, transparency, and working relationships between County and local governments, as well as interest in how the County can support local initiatives as a resource.
- Survey responses also supported collaborative initiatives including sharing village, city, township, county, and regional staff or resources (89%); participation in collaborative initiatives around county-wide issues (87%); and participation in joint planning and zoning initiatives (85%).
- Comments at the economic development focus group identified difficulties in working with multiple communities/ordinances, as well as support for approaches to permitting and zoning that are consistent or coordinated across local boundaries.

## *Proposed Master Plan Approach*

A key focus of the Master Plan update process related to County planning roles and engagement in local planning issues. In response to issues and questions raised in surveys, focus groups, and committee discussions, proposed content will:

- Discuss county Planning Commission roles, statutory authority, and potential activities
- Identify various local models of intergovernmental cooperation as best practices/case studies
- Identify additional intergovernmental cooperation/coordination goals
- Identify potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action
  - Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops on priority issues for local governments

## Natural Resources

The preservation of natural resources was a high priority of the 2000 Master Plan, and remains a priority County-wide. Surveys and local plans emphasize the importance of Benzie County's natural resources to its economy and quality of life.

- The preservation, protection, and enhancement of natural resources was ranked as the highest priority community issue in the 2015 survey; and was addressed in 100% of local plans, with detailed goals and objectives around sensitive environments in 85% of plans.
- Water quality appeared to be the highest priority relative to natural resource protection in the 2015 survey. It was also included as a goal in 92% of local plans, and in many cases was addressed with extensive goals and objectives, including watershed management, stormwater considerations, and pollutants/erosion impacts, as well as issues that were not addressed in the 2000 Master Plan, such as shoreline considerations and greenbelts.
- Other important natural resources strategies identified by the survey include preserving and enhancing shoreline areas (94%), limiting development in sensitive natural areas (93%), improving stormwater management infrastructure and techniques (93%), and preserving open space through land purchases or easements (88%).
- Wind energy/wind towers are a natural resource issue that has been a charged topic of discussion within Benzie County. At the beginning of the update process, the Committee took the position that wind towers would not be a point of discussion in Master Plan input activities due to the fact that the County plays no role in approving or siting wind towers; and that any authority over wind towers lies with the State or with local zoning ordinances.
- Similarly, the Committee agreed that because authority over mining issues and mineral extraction – which were addressed in the 2000 County Master Plan – and other energy-related issues lies largely outside of the County, issues like mineral extraction would not be a point of discussion. Additionally, no local plans addressed these issues, likely due in part to limited extraction or mining activity in Benzie County in recent years and to limited local or County roles in these issues.
- Forestry was also highlighted as an issue in 2000; but fewer than half of local plans included forestry-specific goals and objectives, particularly in relation to the issues highlighted in 2000, such as fragmentation and forest diversity.

## *Proposed Master Plan Approach*

Benzie County is home to a number of strong local initiatives and comprehensive planning approaches to natural resources. Proposed Master Plan content will build on planning and implementation initiatives around natural resources and:

- Discuss role of natural resources in economy and quality of life
- Identify primary natural resource assets and issues
- Identify local initiatives around natural resource preservation
- Identify opportunities to support or enhance local initiatives
- Identify additional natural resource opportunities/goals
- Identify potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action
  - Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops on natural resource issues for local governments
- IF wind towers are included as a topic, content will ONLY address historical, factual information and current local approaches; while emphasizing that the County has no authority or jurisdiction over wind towers. The plan will NOT include recommendations relative to wind towers.

## Placemaking

Placemaking refers to community improvement strategies and initiatives that result in vibrant, safe, and friendly places that are cherished by both residents and visitors. It builds on a community's unique assets – including its history, natural resources, or public spaces and buildings. It prioritizes the “livability” and vibrancy of a place, which depend on factors like walkability, social events, entertainment options, gathering spaces, and the unique character or sense of place created by historic buildings, natural resources, or scenic vistas.

- Placemaking and a placemaking inventory were identified by the County Planning Commission as priorities to include in the Master Plan update.
- Survey comments, committee discussion, and the November 2015 economic development discussion identified Benzie County's unique character as one of its most important assets, and also ranked placemaking as an important economic development strategy.
- In Benzie County, residents and stakeholders have expressed near-universal support for the preservation of scenic character in local plans, surveys, and the 2000 County plan; and components of scenic character, including open space preservation, design and signage guidelines, and hilltop and ridgeline development guidance were addressed in local plans and supported by survey respondents. Placemaking efforts are thus likely to focus in part on the preservation of scenic and rural character, via strategies identified by local plans and survey results.
- Survey results showed strong support for dark skies and dark sky provisions, which can be considered a component of the County's scenic or rural character; but only 6 local plans addressed them.
- A key component of placemaking involves a focus on appropriately-located development and designed development; and local 77% of plans specify that new residential development should be located in proximity to existing public services and facilities.

## *Proposed Master Plan Content/Analysis*

The County Planning Commission identified placemaking as an important priority, which has been borne out by surveys, focus groups, and committee discussions; but “placemaking” is a nebulous term that is often poorly or only partially understood in the context of local needs or potential action. As such, the Master Plan is proposed to:

- Define “placemaking” and Benzie County's placemaking assets (natural resources, scenic views, arts/cultural facilities, recreation facilities, etc)
- Create a generalized placemaking inventory
- Identify local zoning roles relative to placemaking (design guidelines, dark sky provisions, etc)
- Identify local placemaking initiatives as best practices/case studies
- Identify additional placemaking opportunities/goals
- Identify potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action
  - Participating in collaborative placemaking efforts with local governments and nonprofits
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops for local governments

## Infrastructure

Business and industry need access to affordable, reliable, efficient infrastructure to produce and distribute goods and



services. Adequate access to roads, energy sources, sewer, municipal water, and other services that support the operations, expansion, and improvement of business must also be paired with technology-based infrastructure: telecommunications and high-speed internet are critical in today's business operations.

- Lack of sewer/water/natural gas/electric infrastructure were identified as barriers to business and housing development by focus group participants; and survey respondents expressed support for additional sewer and water infrastructure to support business development
- Lack of affordable high speed internet/broadband was an important issue for both survey respondents and focus group participants.

### *Proposed Master Plan Approach*

County leadership is critical in infrastructure development or enhancement. As such, in response to issues and questions raised in surveys, focus groups, and committee discussions, proposed content will:

- Discuss role of infrastructure in economic development and quality of life
- Identify gaps in infrastructure
- Discuss potential County roles around infrastructure development or enhancement
- Identify specific County goals and actions for infrastructure
- Identify potential county opportunities to engage in activities including:
  - Convening local governments for collaborative action
  - Participating in collaborative efforts with local governments and nonprofits
  - Encouraging consistent planning and zoning across local boundaries
  - Coordinating and hosting educational workshops on infrastructure issues for local governments

## The Benzie County Soil Associations Map

There are seven soil associations in Benzie County. Each soil association featured on the map is a landscape with a distinctive proportional pattern of soils. These associations normally consist of one or more major soils and at least one minor soil. Soils associations are somewhat general, thus individual soils should be verified and examined in the field to determine actual site conditions.

The following information on soil associations in Benzie County is by major soil group. Descriptions are based on the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Official Soil Series Descriptions (OSDs). Additional soil data is available on the USDA NRCS website:

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/survey/class/data/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_053587](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/survey/class/data/?cid=nrcs142p2_053587)

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### Deer Park-Upidsamments-Eastport

*Deep Park Series* – Very deep, excessively drained soils formed in sandy deposits on beach ridges, level plains, and stabilized sand dunes along the Great Lakes. Slopes range from nearly level to very steep.

*Upidsamments* is a taxonomic class of the *Deer Park Series*.

*Eastport Series*: Well to moderately well drained sandy soils. Slope is nearly level to gently sloping.

### Iosco-Brevort-Gladwin

*Iosco Series*: Very deep, somewhat poorly drained soils formed in sandy lacustrine deposits or outwash and the underlying loamy lacustrine deposits or till. Slope ranges from nearly level to gently sloping.

*Brevort Series*: Very deep, poorly drained or very poorly drained soils formed in sandy materials underlain by loamy glacial or lacustrine deposits. Slope is nearly level.

*Gladwin Series*: Very deep, somewhat poorly drained soils formed in sandy glaciofluvial deposits. Slope ranges from nearly level to gently sloping.

### Kalkaska-Leelanau-Emmet

*Kalkaska Series*: Very deep, somewhat excessively drained soils formed in sandy deposits. Slope ranges from nearly flat to steep topography (70%).

*Leelanau Series*: Very deep, well drained soils that formed in sandy and loamy deposits on moraines. Slope ranges from nearly flat to 50 percent.

*Emmet Series*: Very deep, well drained or moderately well drained soils formed in sandy loam till. Slope ranges from nearly flat to 50 percent.

### Roscommon-Tawas-Au Gres

*Roscommon Series:* Very deep, poorly drained and very poorly drained soils formed in sandy deposits. Slope is nearly level (0-2%).

*Tawas Series:* Very deep, very poorly drained organic soils overlying sandy deposits. Slopes are typically nearly level, but may be gently sloping.

*Au Gres Series:* Very deep, somewhat poorly drained soils. Slope ranges from nearly level to gently sloping.

#### **Rubicon-East Lake-Eastport association &**

*Rubicon Series:* Very deep, excessively drained soils formed in sandy deposits. Slope is nearly level to steep (70%).

*East Lake Series:* Very deep, somewhat excessively drained soils that formed in sandy and gravelly outwash. Slope ranges from 0 to 50 percent.

*Eastport Series:* Well to moderately well drained sandy soils. Slope is nearly level to gently sloping.

#### **Rubicon-Grayling- Croswell association**

*Rubicon Series:* Very deep, excessively drained soils formed in sandy deposits. Slopes are nearly level to steep.

*Grayling Series:* Very deep, excessively drained soils formed in sandy glaciofluvial deposits. Slope ranges from 0 to 45 percent.

*Croswell Series:* Very deep, moderately well drained soils formed in sandy glaciofluvial deposits. Slope ranges from 0 to 12 percent.

#### **Tawas-Roscommon-Cathro**

*Tawas Series:* Very deep, very poorly drained organic soils overlying sandy deposits. Slopes are typically nearly level, but may be gently sloping.

*Roscommon Series:* Very deep, poorly drained and very poorly drained soils formed in sandy deposits. Slopes range from 0 to 2 percent.

*Cathro Series:* Very deep, very poorly drained organic soils formed in organic material overlying loamy glacial deposits. Slopes range from 0 to 2 percent.