

# Mancelona Area Master Plan

## Community Forum and Focus Group

## Results Summary and Report

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**PREPARED JUNE 18, 2018**

*As part of developing a new Master Plan for the Village of Mancelona and Mancelona Township, the Mancelona Area Planning Commission conducted two community forums and one focus group discussion to help create a shared vision of what Mancelona could become in the future, and to identify priority actions for the community. This report provides a summary of the comments made at these events.*

### **Overview: High-Priority Opportunities**

Through the three events, there was extensive discussion and ideas posed. Certain opportunities rose to the top, including the following:

- Regulatory barriers and lack of trails connected to the west side of US-131 create a missed opportunity to boost local businesses with trail users as well as making it easier for trail users to access trails. **Create easier connections between Village businesses and the trails and trailheads.**
- For visitors, finding trails and parks can be difficult. **Establish a wayfinding system to find trails, parks, and other locations.**
- Branding and marketing the community requires a coordinated effort to due to limited human and financial resources. There are other community issues that could use a larger coordinated effort. **Start holding a joint meeting of key boards and councils in Mancelona to share issues, project ideas, and collaborative marketing of the community.**
- Mancelona is lacking a parks and recreation director or committee to lead and coordinate recreation related efforts. However, there are many recreation resource people in the Mancelona area. **Create a parks and recreation committee consisting of local resource people.**
- The downtown is lacking investment and is tired and worn. In an effort to improve the downtown, **consideration should be made to develop a downtown façade program and possibly an inspection of buildings to ensure they're ready for redevelopment.**
- Public engagement and support is needed to improving the community. **Create a volunteer program to help with events, festivals, clean-up programs, and other community activities.**
- Mancelona's sewer system needs additional users to alleviate the high per user costs. There is also concern about the number of septic system failures in the Village and being able to serve those locations. **Secure grant funding to assist new users with accessing the system and fund hook-ups and to assist in overall system operations.** To help with the water system, **enforcement of a local ordinance is needed that requires homes with a water main across its frontage to hook-up to the water main.**

## Recreation Community Forum

*June 6, 2018 – Mancelona Township Hall*

The Recreation Community Forum was held on Wednesday, June 6 at 6:00 p.m. at the Mancelona Township Hall, 9610 S M-88 Highway. This was an opportunity for residents to voice their thoughts and ideas on improving parks, trails and other recreation facilities in the Mancelona area. For this event, a SWOT analysis was conducted that identifies a community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The results of that analysis are as follows:

### STRENGTHS

Strengths are the existing assets of the community. They are the physical and human elements that make the community attractive.

- Diversity of trails for different users
- Close proximity to trailheads
- Mancelona has only designated off-road vehicle (ORV) trail in Antrim County
- Significant amount of accessible public land
- Mancelona is a hub with three major highways (M-88, M-66, and US-131) and two County roads
- Mancelona is a bedroom community with good access to other communities
- Mancelona gets a lot of snow which provides recreation opportunities
  - Higher amount of snowfall than most other communities in the region
  - High amount of snow draws people north
- Resiliency of the residents in Mancelona
- Close proximity to a lot of lakes with fishing opportunities

### WEAKNESSES

Weaknesses are elements of the community that detract from resident enjoyment and visitor interest.

- Lack of wayfinding
- Village not welcoming to ORV users
  - No designated ORV trails around/into town
  - ORV rules are not clear
  - Tickets issued to ORV users accessing town via the road right-of-way
- Lack of leadership and support from County
  - Antrim County no longer has a Parks and Recreation Commission
  - County does not provide planning or financial assistance
- Proposed projects for Wetzel Lake have not been implemented
  - Lack of coordination and follow-through from agencies involved
- Mancelona does not have the number of lakes and rivers like elsewhere in Antrim County
- Lack of community involvement due to lack of knowledge
- Negative perceptions
- Limited marketing
- Limited options for hotels and dining (no bar or restaurant with alcohol)

## OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities are external conditions which may provide increased success to the community.

- Create more multi-use trails
- Shared access between ORVs and snowmobiles
- Connect to larger ORV trail network in surrounding area (Kalkaska)
- Develop loop trail at Wetzel Lake
  - Work with existing trail groups
  - Potential to connect loop with North Country Trail (Jordan Valley 45 Chapter)
- Develop camping opportunities at Wetzel Lake
- Connect with/start dialogue with state agencies and state representatives
- Provide more hotel and rental opportunities
  - Attract people looking for more affordable places to stay
  - Provide options that appeal to different trail user groups
- Develop vision to bring people in
- Use marketing to change perception
  - Build on planning efforts
  - Tell the story authentically, and build on what is here (not elsewhere)
  - Self-promote (no need to hire out)
- Use community events (concerts) as a means to reach a lot of people
- Mt Mancelona

## THREATS

Threats are also external conditions, but those which will potentially impede progress.

- User conflict
- Private property limits trail development and sustainability
- Struggle to engage and get support from state agencies (DNR, MDOT)
- State's political process can have negative impacts
- Too far north?
- Do not have lakes
- Do not have the tax base that other communities have in the area, yet have a large village

## Community Image Forum

*June 12, 2018 - Mancelona Village Hall*

The Community Image Forum was held on Tuesday, June 12 at 7:00 p.m. at the Mancelona Village Hall, 120 West State Street. In an earlier public survey, residents said they'd like to see the community cleaned up and have a better image. This forum was an opportunity for residents to voice their thoughts and ideas on improving the image of Mancelona. Highlights of the comments from the forum are as follows:

- When asked what word describes Mancelona, forum attendees offered: Home, resilient, hometown, heart, friendly, damaged, poor, community, lots of love, comfortable, strong, quiet, but beautiful, hope, trying, unique.
- Mancelona is home to many generations of families. People who are raised here often stay and live here or return back to Mancelona if they left earlier.
- There needs to be a property rental ordinance to address rental properties and landlord problems.
- As Mancelona is a community of families, daycare is needed for all the workers with children.
- Mancelona is a crossroads. It is halfway to everywhere.
- While Mancelona has several assets, its lacking a shared vision, capacity, and resources. The Master Plan will provide a shared vision, however the community will have to work together to increase capacity and seek out resources for key community efforts.
- A joint meeting of key organizations in Mancelona is needed to share issues, project ideas, and discuss marketing/branding the community. A letter will be sent out to organizations so they can receive a presentation on the master plan process, including School Board, Township Board, Downtown Development Authority, etc. This will be an opportunity for the boards to give feedback on goals and objectives and the overall master plan and provide thoughts on conducting a joint meeting.
- A downtown façade program is needed for Mancelona. Some wondered if there should be inspection of downtown buildings to ensure they're ready for redevelopment.
- Market the community with social media and Internet presence.
- Create a volunteer program in Mancelona to help with events, festivals, clean-up programs, and other community activities.

## Infrastructure Focus Group

*June 13, 2018 – Mancelona Village Hall*

The Infrastructure Focus Group was held on Wednesday, June 11 at 12:00 p.m. at the Mancelona Village Hall, 120 West State Street. Key organizations represented include the Village of Mancelona, Mancelona Township, Mancelona Area Planning Commission, Mancelona Public Schools, and Mancelona Area Water and Sewer Authority (MAWSA). The purpose of the focus group was to discuss ideas and opportunities to better promote the Mancelona water and sewer system and make it more accessible to customers.

- There is currently a 40-year bond on sewer system. The number of customers has dropped by 20 to 52 customers which has reduced revenue for the system. If 20 customers could be restored, costs to customer would be noticeably reduced.
- Benefit fees for accessing the system can be financed over 5 years with 0% interest. USDA Rural Development cannot finance hook-up fees. Benefit fees are on par with other communities.
- The sewer assessment was impacted when some customers were permitted pre-pay their full payment to avoid interest costs. This impacted the ability to pay off the bond with regular payments spread out over time. An audit of the assessment is being conducted.
- Rates are constantly monitored to ensure that customers are not overburdened by any extra costs.
- It was suggested that a grant program could be developed to assist new users access the system and fund hook-ups. Various sources for such program were mentioned including MEDC, Rotary, and Grand Traverse Band. Its approximately \$10,000-\$15,000 for a hook-up.
- There was concern that the system was incorrectly designed and initially improperly administered by Gourdie-Fraser Associates. There was question whether legal counsel was consulted with regarding this issue. It was believed that the statute of limitations has run out.
- A local ordinance requires that homes with a water main across its frontage to hook-up to the water main. However, the County Health Department is issuing well permits to homes with available water main despite the local ordinance. Need to approach County and resolve this situation.
- There is concern about the number of septic system failures in the Village and being able to serve those locations. The system cannot provide service beyond its current configuration.
- A grant from the State of Michigan's Stormwater, Asset Management, and Wastewater (SAW) program could be used to conduct study of system and access funding resources for the system.
- MAWSA has won multiple awards for best tasting water in the region by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Michigan Section of the American Water Works Association.