

Town of La Pointe Comprehensive Plan 2023 Executive Summary

- Preliminary draft prepared for Q&A sessions, July 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Comprehensive Plan writes down on paper what a community wants to achieve. It is a look at where the community is, and where it would like to be. It is a road map for the community to follow in order to achieve its goals. It provides the legal foundation for land-use and zoning decisions.

In December 2021, the La Pointe Town Board appointed a seven-member steering committee to update the existing Comprehensive Plan. In their work, committee members pledged that the updated Plan would be the *community's* Plan. It will reflect the priorities of those who live, work, and have roots here. Steering committee

members spent more than a year analyzing what they heard community members say, primarily in a 2022 Community Survey and in more than a half-dozen community forums.

This updated Plan is more than a list of good ideas. It identifies critical priorities, explains why the selected topics are priorities, then proposes ways to achieve those priorities.

In developing the 34 topics around which the Plan builds action steps, six areas stand out as the Island's most urgent priorities. After discussing what needs to be done, this Plan suggests an equally critical seventh priority: a way to actually get those things done.

CRITICAL PRIORITIES

1. Affordable, available and reliable access to and from the island. Ferry service is, literally, La Pointe's lifeline. It is fundamental to the existence of the Town, to the livelihoods of Island residents and enterprises, to the education of our children, and more. This Plan does more than support Harbor Commission efforts to buy the ferry line and run it in the public interest. It recommends restoring long-gone tiers of trips to provide better service for workers, students and their families, and residents who need to get to medical care and other fundamental services that are available only on the mainland. This Plan also recommends deliberate action by the Town to put succession plans in place for operating

the winds sleds and ice road, too.

2. Household success. This is a value against which nearly every idea in the Plan is measured: Does an idea or action help neighbors succeed, or does it set up barriers? This standard applies to a range of topics: transportation, year-round housing, the future of the school, food options, child care, health care, emergency service volunteers, and more.

3. Property taxes. In short, La Pointe property owners need to get more in return for the taxes they pay – especially from Ashland County and the Bayfield school district. If better results are not possible, the Town needs to take whatever action is necessary to

shift control of that tax money so the Island can eliminate waste and be more self-sufficient.

4. Affordable housing. The need is clear. The Town needs to step in and, with partners, spearhead the development of rental and ownership options for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Priority goes to those who work in La Pointe and commit to living here year-round.

5. Food. La Pointe is a food desert.

For much of the year, the Island is devoid of fresh produce and other fresh food. It's time to pull together growers, grocers and food networks, expand connections and capacity, and find innovative ways to make more abundant food options possible.

6. Health care. La Pointe is a health-care desert, too. The Community Clinic needs allies so it can remain sustainable, and provide or bring in options in mental health, aging in place, and other specialties.

THE ISLAND COLLABORATIVE

This Plan proposes that we can accomplish our critical priorities, make real progress in other areas, and build accountability into the Plan – if we accomplish it together. To achieve that, the Plan proposes an “Island Collaborative.” This is both a mindset and an ongoing, functioning community network.

The main purpose of the Collaborative is to create cooperative connections that mobilize the expertise and resources that exist among us – in the public sector, private sector, nonprofits, and individuals. By expanding our relationships, leadership, and trust, we can pursue ideas and solve problems in ways we are not doing now.

ADDITIONAL AREAS TO TAKE ACTION

The Plan addresses 27 other topics, in four broad categories. A summary:

Quality of life

Sustainable access to the island, affordable housing, and better access to food and health care are not the only resources that can improve household success here.

Child care. Additional support and structure for the de facto child care that the Madeline Island Public Library

already provides Island families.

“Community center.” A decision-making framework that makes clear the distinctions between a physical space; a coordinated set of activities that could improve quality of life for island residents; and what type of space is needed or can be repurposed to provide desired amenities.

Alcohol-free gathering spaces. Additional options to reduce isolation.

Community collaboration

Beyond the Island Collaborative ...

Engage seasonal residents.

Pursue technology and deliberate opportunities so residents who do not live here year-round can remain active in community decision-making.

Dialogue between the Town, Bad River and Red Cliff tribes.

The Town Board should initiate and nurture ongoing engagement and exchanges to pursue areas of mutual economic and cultural interest.

Formalizing relationships and responsibilities among key Island organizations.

Mutual commitments, expectations, and support that the Town and organizations can offer to preserve key elements in the quality of life on Madeline Island.

Grant proposal writer.

A dedicated individual to provide the time, research and expertise so the Town and Island organizations are more competitive in pursuing state, federal and philanthropic funding. Doing so helps the community pursue (and ultimately achieve) more initiatives without adding burdens on local property-tax payers.

Community websites.

Coordination to reduce work for individual organizations and make websites more useful.

Economic vitality

Timing is right to pursue the kind of balanced economy that can flourish in tandem with tourism.

Year-round availability of goods and services. Concerted efforts to meet the fundamental needs both of residents and visitors.

Leadership and business retention.

Dealing head-on with generational turnover that could leave key businesses empty, key services unavailable, key jobs undone, and substantial gaps in the community fabric.

Public space. Rethinking space, especially in the commercial core, in ways that can enhance community, connections, and commerce.

Business activities. Concentrate business and high-density activities in the “village” area’s commercial core, while allowing small-scale entrepreneurship and steering lower-density land uses elsewhere.

First impressions. Amenities that make the commercial core more attractive and user-friendly.

Thriving artists. A consistent strategy to raise the visibility of artists.

Bicycling infrastructure. An off-road trail and other steps to improve a mode that is the highest transportation priority for participants in the 2022 Community Survey.

Natural environment and heritage

The natural – not the man-made – is the attraction that lures residents and visitors alike. Access to the natural is, by far, the characteristic islanders value most.

The Island’s unique sense of place. In all decisions, protect the qualities that define Madeline Island’s core character.

Heritage and historical places. Collaboration to expand community understanding of Madeline Island’s unique historical and contemporary role among many cultures.

Wetlands protection. Tight restrictions that minimize intrusion of man-made uses upon delineated wetlands.

Access to nature. Valuing the natural should guide what types of development and activities the Town and others encourage or allow.

Climate change. Lakeshore erosion, changes in winter ice conditions, and population shifts are only some ways the Island is experiencing climate change.

Short-term rentals. An approach that supports the tradition of families

renting their own cabins, but sets up separate rules for properties that are not owner-occupied.

Junk. A junk ordinance that limits the collection of inoperative vehicles, equipment, appliances and other stuff.

Enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance. A process that promotes education, voluntary compliance, then deliberate and consistent enforcement.

Educating property owners about zoning. FAQs and other approaches that help residents understand what Town zoning does and does not do.

Density. Preserve the Island’s overall low-density (and no density) standards, while allowing innovative uses of higher-density development, especially for affordable housing.

Campers. Clarify and enforce what is and is not allowed.

Other parts of the Plan

The Plan also looks into how priorities overlap – or differ – among year-round and seasonal residents; collects demographics, data and other information about current conditions and trends; and includes maps and other information to provide context.