

Notes from May 7, 2020 Zoom Video Teleconference Meeting with  
The Young Families – Final Draft

Write-up includes follow-up interviews with Non-Zoom Participants

12 Zoom participants & 5 non-zoom participants

**Introduction: Began at 4:03pm**

We are recording. Last summer, we conducted several activities to gather community Inputs for the 20 Year Master Plan but once we got all the results, we realized we were lacking inputs from the community's young adults and young families. We also discovered that the 2009, 2015/2016 Master Plans provided a Vision for the Future of Pentwater, and associated goals but lacked an Implementation plan to drive the actions necessary to bring the identified 2008 Survey needs to fruition. The 2020 Pentwater Community Master Plan will also have an Implementation Plan with champions to work the 8 Major Themes/Issues that surfaced from the 2019 (and 2008) Community Assessments/Surveys.

**Major Themes/Needs:**

1. Affordable Housing choices for all stages of life
2. Address short-term rentals in single-family neighborhoods
3. High Speed Internet Service throughout the community
4. Unsustainable seasonal economy – retail season is too short
5. Lack of basic goods & services for residents
6. Infrastructure, transportation & parking needs
7. Nurture a community-wide continuous collaborative planning culture. “We plan together... all the time..”
8. Pursue expressed community support and interest in joint-use school facilities and continuing adult education/special interest classes/activities.

So with Amy Robertson and others help, we have reached out to you for your inputs to the following 6 Questions.

**The questions we will be exploring with you all are:**

1. What is unique about the Pentwater Community?
2. What do you want to preserve in the community?
3. What do you believe needs to change or feel is needed (businesses or services) for Pentwater to thrive?

4. What attracted you to come to, stay or return to Pentwater to raise your children?
5. From friends you know, what do you think is keeping young people from staying or returning to Pentwater to live, work, and raise their families?
6. If you are planning to leave Pentwater, why and what would keep you from leaving?

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**Comments from Participants:**

**#1 - What is unique about the Pentwater Community?**

Friendlier, coastal, historic, natural landscape, sense of community, beauty, community love, know your neighbors, know your business owners, know police officers, know your firefighters, beaches with so many access points like Summit, Bass Lake outlet, public state park (in other communities you need to know someone to get on the beach), fishing, hunting, Pentwater Pathways, the village is like Mayberry, kids are safe to ride bikes, opportunities to restore historical homes, other towns are not safe but Pentwater is safe place to raise kids, discovered Pentwater during camping, people wave to one another, amazing schools, small community gives more opportunity to take an idea and grow it – less people competing, encouraged to participate in community & share our gifts/talents, free opportunities like the arts, schools, literacy – access to all income levels.

Responses sent in/Unable to join call: 1 - Several things, I feel like we almost live in two different communities depending on the time of year. We have a lot of families that have called Pentwater home for generations and we have a lot of families who have had ties to Pentwater for generations but are only able to visit family owned homes intermittently. I think both contribute to the uniqueness of our village. Many of these people have watched me grow up, I have watched their families grow and continue to return for decades. I think it makes everyone feel like Pentwater is there second home, if not first. I think first time visitors can feel this friendliness as well. 2 – our unique location on both Pentwater Lake and Lake MI. 3- Quaintness, history, family stories, grew up in Hart, worked in Pentwater, small town friendliness, you can walk down the street and know people, lived in other towns that didn't have that unique friendliness, the water is a unique draw, easy access to the beach. 4 – kindness, sincerely appreciate each other's help as friends and mentors. 5 - I honestly believe that our uniqueness as a community has to do with location, services offered, and tradition. We are located near several great state parks, with a beautiful beach, hiking trails, camping, and picturesque views. Not only does that advertise towards the wealthier families who build their beautiful homes to vacation here, but we are also a hub for camping families and explorers. Our downtown has a beautiful quaint feel, as if it was a boutique section of a larger city (much like how East Grand Rapids feels compared to the whole of Grand Rapids), however, instead of being surrounded with big box stores we are surrounded by calming shorelines. The storefronts offer shopping, rest, fun, and a little self-care; perfect for our vacationing friends and families. In the past ten years, I have lived in several different states (while my husband finishes his PhD), and in each place I lived I met several people who have vacationed in Pentwater. For many of those vacationers, it was a family tradition. They would come back year after year, just as their grandparents did, to explore and revisit their old stomping grounds, to see what's new, and some, to

even settle down. Some of those traditions span, and continue to span, generations. How awesome is that?!

#2 - What do you want to preserve in the community?

Need to preserve and cherish our year- round residents. Balance attention- retail and services- for tourism with needs of year-round residents – fire, police, sidewalks, etc for the long-term success of Pentwater. Preserve safety and security. Invest in police (well-staffed), learn from other communities. Don't lose that. Strangers (tourists) bring safety & security concerns (NOTE: a later conversation highlighted concerns about the pitfalls of low-income housing – illegal drugs, crime/bullying, safety & security). Summer rules (stricter) for kids vs. off- season relaxed rules for kids. Preserve the value of smallest, even with affordable housing and diversity. Preserve thriving arts community, Artisan Center, Arts Council, and other intergenerational community activities.

Responses sent in/Unable to join call: 1 - I think there's a lot of nostalgia involved with many of the local businesses. Especially the ones that have not only been here for decades but have been in the same families for generations. That is not something you often see in other communities. It has become very difficult these days for family businesses to survive but Pentwater has done an excellent job at protecting them. 2 - Natural resources and small town charm. Small town charm to me is Mom and Pop owned businesses (no franchises), beautiful store fronts that show their own uniqueness, walkability and friendliness. We possess all of these things for the most part. Natural resources - cleanliness of the lakes, good fishing, pretty parks, clean beaches with good amenities and accessibility to all of these things. 3- preserve the connection to outdoors – hiking, fishing, kayaking, access to the river, established trees and green spaces, bikeable town, easy access via walking, adequate sidewalks, positive kayak launches, and Pentwater brick aesthetics – I love it! 4- Preserve the sense of community, security, natural resources, hidden places to go and easy access to beach. 5 - That tradition is one I would love to preserve in Pentwater. Also, keeping the events that have spanned those generations (the pie contest, the boat race, etc). I love Pentwater, and the way it feels like home for so many different kinds of people. The more we preserve that kind of inclusivity, where there's something for everyone no matter social status, the more we can bring that sense of home to a new generation of home owners, renters, etc.

#3 - What do you believe needs to change or feel is needed (businesses or services) for Pentwater to thrive?

Access to Year round restaurants, not just bars, like pizza parlor, family dining. Community center and places to go in the winter; mentioned our "old" rec center?; Concept of mixed use facility or community center (referenced in SE Michigan ie: Brighton & Livonia as examples though aware that our community isn't as large as Brighton or Livonia to support the same size facility & amenities) - consider some of these community center amenities: indoor soccer w/field turf, bball courts, pickleball, coffee shop, rock climbing wall, kids' jungle gym/climbing tunnels with entrance for kids near the coffee shop so parents can watch kids go in and out (one entrance/exit) for safety florist, web-designer on site, skate park at beach replacing metal slide/swings (relocate those by other swing set) or somewhere in town, teen hangout location, dog park. (As per one former resident from Utah) -build rec center onto library with lounge/reduced rate coffee shop for older patrons, reduced rate hot lunches for seniors, build in

intergenerational interaction opportunities, kids love to interact with seniors, work out facilities/equipment; Pentwater needs better sidewalks that are safe; Indoor Community pool with swimming lessons, lifeguard testing (would serve all ages) - year round access; Day Care SYSTEM – no day care for little babies, or after school programs, no certified licensed day care. Surrounding communities don't have a good safe place for kids in the winter. Find out how many families are traveling to Muskegon Rec Programs /Traveling sports clubs because it is too hard to get gym time at our local school... follow up with Katie Anderson – Parks & Rec Director. Regarding housing, need more long term or year-round rentals. Sustainable dual incomes. Co-operative (co-op) with offseason farm produce/cheese/etc; homemade items (soaps, etc) like the Muskegon Innovation Lab with drop in offices/incubator/shared workspace downtown to overcome high speed internet deficiencies, and mitigate costs while testing option of telecommuting or small business startup.

Responses sent in/ unable to join call: 1 - I think it's very import to make sure we have something to offer all age groups. Affordable housing, transportation, jobs, stores and entertainment geared toward all age groups. For young single people, families, low to median income citizens that work in our village, and retired non-working, long time community members. 2 - More year-round services and businesses that are willing to stay open year round, albeit abbreviated winter hours. I try to support the businesses that make the effort to be open Jan-March, etc. Having lost Dr. Nelson's office is just another blow. Also, affordable housing/high property taxes is a massive issue (I'm a realtor). Twenty-five + years ago, I worked in a gift shop in Pentwater that was open year round. It was quiet and we had abbreviated hours, but we and several other businesses were open. People knew if they came to Pentwater on a Saturday in February, they could find six or seven shops open and places to eat. Now they drive straight through and don't stop. 3 – Need year round grocery, but realize its hard for vendors. The Dollar General has been ok. PTW events year round is good to support community, family events, family focus. Technology needs to keep up- High speed internet to accommodate work at home, home based businesses. Husband does taxes so we have a reliable landline from Charter. Village Wifi is a nice addition. Village needs to keep websites up to date. 4 – Need community center, after-school day care, need year-round people and year-round income sources/jobs. 5 - One of the main changes for businesses and the model set for Pentwater has to do with its image. How are we defining what Pentwater is? Everyone knows Frankenmuth as Christmas town in Michigan, what do we know Pentwater as, other than a summer beach hub? What is it that we offer to keep you here year-round? We have so many art galleries, a home design store, bakeries...all pointing to the Arts. Last year we had Sol festival, art crawl...we could be such a successful art town. However, when downtown stores have offered pop-ups, they have mostly focused on brands that are already successful from Grand Rapids (or other locations in Michigan). Why not focus on the handfuls of artisans, musicians, and painters that exist within our own community?

#### 4. What attracted you to come to, stay or return to Pentwater to raise your children?

Family roots. Family traditions. Coming here is tough for people who have lived elsewhere and expect the amenities mentioned earlier. Everything has to align for most families: the right amount of land, house, schools. The schools with small class sizes has been a huge draw for most families. When one family's summer babysitter was so excited about growing up in Pentwater, they were sold. High School students help sell living in PTW and they also work well/help out the younger kids. Bullying at

Pentwater is really low, interclass collaboration is really high, high graduation rates, the arts & artisan center so close to the school and interaction with older generation is huge.

Responses sent in/Unable to Join call: 1 - I was born here. Grew up on Bass Lake and went to Ludington schools. I have moved away several times but ultimately settled on Pentwater to raise my first son, and there are certainly pros and cons. My brother moved to Grand Haven to raise his children because there is so much more available there, in the schools and community, but I don't feel in any way my son has been deprived of experiences. We are able to seek out activities that the school and community are unable to offer, but the sense of community and belonging you get in our tiny village/school is not something you can just teach children who haven't been part of it. 2 - Pentwater has been my home for almost 30 years, but I did not grow up here. My Mom's family is originally from Pentwater (my grandpa was the milk man) and my daughter is the 3rd generation to graduate from Pentwater. Now that my daughter is a senior, I am looking to leave Pentwater. I have struggled financially and personally because there is a lack of business in the area and I need to live in an area that offers more than 2 bars in the winter. My daughter is going to attend WSCC beginning in the fall, then she will be looking to leave the area. 3 – Changing career for husband in GR enabled the move to Pentwater for family friendly environment. 4 – By chance, housing opened up for her and her daughter (single mom) so she moved to gain walking distance to work, church, school. Great school for her daughter meeting special resources needs, small class sizes, and at first she was unsure of an environment where the high schoolers interact with the elementary students but has witness the loving helping environment fostered at Pentwater Public Schools across all grade levels. Her daughter knows older kids and they know her, as they exchange hellos around town. Where does that happen? Pentwater. 5- After living in so many large cities, it has been lovely to find the safety, rest, and community of helpers that Pentwater has to offer. Pentwater is a breath of fresh air for parents, with the added amenities of the great outdoors, artisan center, safe and loving school, and community of families who support one another. The vibe in the summer is electric and diverse, the events offered are perfect for the little ones. What's not to love? There's a little bit of everything for everyone.

Because responses started to overlap, we skipped the Question #5 & #6 but allowed participants to add any additional comments before we closed. Final comment included:

One primary reason given for not living in Pentwater is the availability of income/jobs. One family's response – we would love to find farmland in Pentwater- we aren't Pentwater residents, although my husband and I both do business in Pentwater (our organic farm and my beach yoga series has most its clientele in the village) and we do intend to send our son to Pentwater schools. The group recommended a Community Resource Facebook Group page for resource sharing for all ages, and within 5 minutes of the conclusion of the call, Heather Douglas had create PENTWATER COMMUNITY RESOURCES & INFO Group Page, and everyone on the call has been invited and asked to invite their local friends. Cindy & Amy shared information that I will follow up on regarding federal funding of childcare/afterschool care/latch key programs; also check with Amber Hellewell who had an in-home day care but needs a bigger home (Any viable day care provider needs supplemental funding or grant to offset facility costs to be able to offer affordable day care services). Final comment, we need better Village/Township/School connections, and need to unite retirees with families for intergenerational support including tutoring, talent sharing.

Responses sent in/Unable to Join Call: 1 – Q#5: Affordable housing, good jobs and the town basically closes down in the off-season. Although it's a bit of a catch 22, businesses can't stay open if there are no people, but people will not stay if the downtown is closed. Q #6: I have considered leaving. What has mainly allowed me to stay as long as I have is my steady, decent paying work. I have considered moving to start my own business in a more highly populated/less expensive community to start a business in. What keeps me on the fence is my love and knowledge of this village that has been my home for decades. 2 – Q#5/#6 - I have had many friends over the years that graduated from Pentwater or were summer kids that have said they would absolutely love to raise their families in Pentwater and send their kids to the school here. Lack of employment, affordable housing, high property taxes and lack of things to do in the winter are the major reasons they will not relocate. We have morphed into a retirement community and unfortunately, I do not see it changing any time soon. I love Pentwater, it is my home. I love to tell people where I'm from and so often they say, "we love that town! It's so pretty!" But then they often remark, what do you do in the winter??? And I say, go to Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Holland, etc., to shop, dine, find entertainment, and hang out with friends. 4 – Cousins used to help with day care but have had to move farther away for affordable housing. She has lost jobs because of lack of affordable/available daycare when her daughter was much younger. The Kids Adventure Club at school has been so beneficial as a supplement to day care in Shelby. While affordable housing is urgently needed like tiny homes or intergenerational housing for young families starting out or seniors looking to downsize, don't confuse it with low /no income housing. Low income/subsidized housing is not desirable as it brings drugs, crime, bullies, angry neighbors making life miserable for all. 5 - I am so drawn to settle in Pentwater for so many reasons; our fabulous school, the beauty of the lake, the friends I've made within the community (and how easy it is to get involved with various groups of people), but as a trained artist/musician, I'm not sure how to make a viable career here. At the moment, I am helping a friend of mine to create a community theatre organization, because we would love to give our talented friends in the community an artistic outlet. Our goal is to make musical theatre happen on the village green. It's a large goal that will need community help and support, but it's a way for our kids to get involved in the arts in a variety of ways, and for our older artisans and musicians to teach their craft. Right now, parents bring their children to outside cities for dance, music lessons, art lessons, etc. I'd love to have all of those options here.

All participants: Thank you so much for the opportunity to give my input.

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#### Summary of Comments

- 1) Raising a family in a safe and secure environment is key. Safe and secure translates to:
  - 1a) having trustworthy and affordable childcare, whether it is friends, family or an intown business
  - 1b) knowing neighbors, frequent visitors and residents "like Mayberry" "where everyone knows your name".

1c) Kids can ride their bikes around town without a concern (summer rules are tighter due to more strangers, than the other seasons but still better than a larger town). But like adults, kids need activities afterschool too. Many ideas were shared for the phasing- in of community center activities with an element of intergenerational programs for the benefit of both the young and old alike.

1d) There are many access points to the parks, beach, lake, fishing, hiking trails that all are well preserved, and the community welcomes the opportunities to contribute to maintaining these amenities through clubs etc.

2) Infrastructure like caring police and fire personnel, sewers, good quality well water, walkable sidewalks and neighborhoods are a given so little discussion

3) Bringing more jobs or employment opportunities is desirable but many families have at least one stay at home or work from home spouse but Covid-19 has demonstrated that employers in some industries can trust their employees to successfully telecommute and so more telecommuting than ever has demonstrated the need for highly reliable high speed internet. Some spouses have taken over their other spouses shuttered business to utilize the high-speed internet until the shop can reopen. So the market for rental commercial space may be about to blossom because the Village has more high bandwidth/connectivity available than the Township.

4) Being shuttered under the stay at home order has highlighted the need for the land use allowance of accessory dwelling units, affordable housing in Pentwater for grandparents, nanny's etc. The point was made however that affordable can be tiny /small footage homes, but low income/no income housing is not desirable due to the predominance of drugs, crime and uncivil behaviors. This compliments much of what we heard from our senior citizens that want to age- in- Pentwater, but can't afford to move out of their homes without having to leave Pentwater.

5) Bringing more jobs, and affordable housing will allow year-round services and businesses to thrive. Living in a town with well- maintained "Mom & Pop" businesses ( not big box stores or franchises) is a key characteristic that uniquely differentiates Pentwater.

Final Submitted by Chris Conroy

V 3 - May 19, 2020