

Final report outlines potential improvements for Northport

By Chris Olson
Of The Enterprise staff

Making Northport a more pedestrian-friendly village with wider sidewalks, more trees, benches and dark-sky friendly street lighting is just one part of the final report from the Northport Future by Design project.

The final drawings and project report were presented to the public Tuesday night at the Northport Community Arts Center.

Improvements to the village waterfront area and better signage and "wayfinding" are also elements of the final report. The report, prepared by Gosling Czubak Engineering Sciences, Inc., of Traverse City, will be posted on the Leelanau Township Community Foundation's website, www.leelanaufoundation.org, within the next week.

Northport resident Jim Chapman, who attended the meeting Tuesday, said he and his wife have been involved with Future by Design committee process since its beginning in 2007. They have organized youth sailing classes that will be held at the south beach area of the village's waterfront starting later this month.

Chapman said he likes what he saw in improvements to the south beach area, including a new parking area and restrooms on the southern end of the beach area and reducing the size of the beach. "We keep a boat in the marina and we get a lot of beach sand blowing in from the south beach area. I think making the beach area smaller is a great idea," he said.

Chapman also supports the idea of improving road signs and posting wayfinding signs around the village. "I think that would be very neat. Having historical signs around the village would also be great," he said.

Klaus Heinert, a landscape architect with Gosling-Czubak, guided the firm's team in developing the final plan. He reviewed the plan at the public reveal Tuesday night. The final report will include preliminary cost estimates for turning the plan into reality.

"We're still working out some final details and will present those costs to the foundation before they put it online," he said.

In very rough numbers, Heinert said if the community decides it wants to use every part of the plan as presented, the cost would be \$4 million to \$6 million, built in phases spread out over 10 to 15 years. Heinert said federal grants and other funding sources would help offset costs.

Heinert said the final report is only a guideline. "You can take from it what you want," he said.

Chapman echoed Heinert's statement.

"Northport has always been a community that does it themselves. Our local people love to get involved and they are interested in seeing Northport continue to improve," he said.

The Future by Design committee was formed in 2007 by the Leelanau Township Community Foundation to guide the Northport-Omena community through the Small Town Design Initiative (STDI) process. The foundation was successful in attracting the design initiative program which is run through the Michigan State University College of Landscape Design. Through the summer and fall of 2007, students from the college were in Northport to meet with residents and business owners to learn how they would like to see the village grow.

From that process, the future committee came up with information and data that focused on improving three major areas of Northport: its streetscape, waterfront, and signage/wayfinding. According to Ann Marie Mitchell of the community foundation, the group secured a \$20,000 matching fund grant through the Michigan Coastal Management grant program to fund the next phase of design work. By matching the state's



A POSSIBLE future view of the Northport Village Marina area and boat launch was one of six graphics shown Tuesday night during a presentation that was part of the Future by Design process.

\$20,000, the foundation had \$40,000 available for the final report process.

The foundation sent out bids for the final design phase and received 10 responses. Gosling Czubak was awarded the bid, and the firm set up a temporary office in the former North Country Gardens building in downtown Northport.

Throughout 2008 and in 2009, Heinert and his team held a series of "storefront" meeting sessions where they presented different ideas based on the information gathered during the STDI process. From these sessions, Heinert and his team came up with the final design drawings, report and recommendations that were presented to the public Tuesday night.

Mitchell said what she liked best about the process was level of community involvement.

"The building of community consensus was a big part of this process. We took in a lot of information and compromises were made on all sides to come up with final plan that most of us can live with," she said.

While she liked just about all the ideas and recommendations put in the final report, Mitchell said the "streetscape" part - widening the sidewalks along Nagonaba Street, planting more trees and green areas along the street - is also a favorite.

The report includes improving the beach at Haserot Park and possibly adding a floating fishing pier and tall ship dock at the park. Other possible improvements in the report include developing a boardwalk along Mill Creek, from where it enters Northport Bay back to the Mill Street Pond.

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