



IMAGE OF PLACE

Mention the name Northport, and for most who have frequented northwest Michigan and particularly the Leelanau, the place evokes special, time-tested images. Memories of finding that perfect second-hand book before heading off to the beach at Cathead Bay, or stopping for those last supplies before camping at the State Park, or finding a unique and “needed” garden supply or artifact to whisk back to home or cottage. The fireworks always seemed to be the most spectacular in the clear Northport night sky down on the waterfront, and the ice cream never tasted so good while exploring the former Willowbrook on a lazy July day.

However, beneath the warm summertime patina of smiles and fun, historic Northport has been a diverse, hardworking, prideful up north harbor town since its founding in the mid 1800’s. Its very name conjures evidence of purpose and destiny as a former anchor for northern county lumbering, fishing, agriculture and tourism. Yet the community’s very remoteness, its frontier character, presents a unique set of challenges to its economic viability in the 21st century.

As has happened previously, Northport finds itself at a place in time when the community must again begin to resurge itself, embrace the re-use of the hospital (now The Highlands assisted living community), survive the downturn of enrollment in its school district, jump start the sagging downtown core businesses, and revitalize a disconnected and aging waterfront. These places are all full of diverse, multigenerational, living, working and playing opportunities but are being challenged since their former “hay days” of past decades. The question is: How can the charm and allure of the place be reignited to prosper at full potential again?

Bolstered by a great outpouring of participation and interest during the summer of 2008 through the MSU Small Town Design Initiative (STDI), it seems the community has begun to ramp up for the challenge. *Future by Design Northport (FBD)* is a timely and critical step for the community to embark upon. It is clear that visioning and planning have been embraced as fundamental first steps. It is also clear the community will need to embark on a well-laid path of committed efforts, which when combined will help the community of Northport regain its unique, time-treasured image of “*a place not to be missed.*”

PROJECT AREA



Project: proposed area of focus

PROJECT GOALS

- 1 Foster the notion of developing a sense of place, a distinguished Village all its own that shares diversity in its history and culture, people, architecture, and public spaces.
- 2 Build upon existing infrastructure.
- 3 Improve walk-ability and universal access throughout the village center and waterfront.
- 4 Improve way-finding and signage.
- 5 Develop and improve existing pathways and make connections to village center and waterfront.
- 6 Improve the overall waterfront with a focus on connectivity between the three sub-areas (G. Marsten Dame Marina Park, South Beach Park, and Haserot Beach Park), and design for universal access, and improvement of environmental conditions.
- 7 Provide solid alternatives for implementation phasing and funding.

BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

The Village of Northport is a quaint shore-side town near the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula which was established in 1849 and contains a 100 slip marina, a boat launch facility, and two waterfront parks just off the downtown. Northport is rich in Great Lakes history and lore and offers outstanding sailing and boating. The community has an economically diverse population, many people with deep-rooted family history centered on the harbor, fishing and agriculture. Increasingly, people who love the area and ambiance are choosing Northport for their retirement community.

Over the last decade Northport, has begun to undergo significant positive change and transition. A major hospital that provided jobs and quality of life (thru available local health care) closed, but is now on the verge of rebirth as a elderly assisting living community. The small Northport public school system faced declining enrollment due the loss of young families and jobs to sustain them, however the community effort called the Northport Promise now in its third year is already advancing students on the college path and even enticing families to consider Northport Schools.

At the same time there has been renewed efforts to invigorate the community by the Northport-Omena Chamber of Commerce, Northport Area Heritage Association, the Visitor's Center, the Northport Community Arts Center (NCAC) and the Leelanau Children's Center as well as building renovations at the former North Country Garden's building and former Willowbrook.

The community has made a significant investment in the waters of the Great Lakes by installing the first-ever municipal sewer system in Northport, a nearly decade long process, designed to improve the environment and safeguard ground and surface waters. It is a catalyst for Northport's economic future. Sewer construction should be completed by the end of 2009.

More than 125,000 people drive through Northport each year to visit the Grand Traverse Lighthouse. With the community being literally a "lands-end" destination along the recently designated M-22 Scenic Heritage Route,

Northport can seize its vital place again in Leelanau County and North West Michigan.

In 2007, the Leelanau Township Community Foundation initiated a planned process known as Future by Design Northport to create a sustainable coastal community in accordance with the community visioning statement published in 2006: *"We the people who live and work here want to see Leelanau Township become a culturally, socially, economically and environmentally viable community with a diverse population in a healthy and safe rural environment in which conservation of the environment and economic development are compatible objectives."*



The goals of Future by Design Northport are to develop a specific plan that reflects community participation in all phases of the project; a plan that will realize the full potential of our historic waterfront village for multiple purposes and users, now in the future; a plan that is flexible and capable of being implemented in phases as resources become available.

The initial undertaking of the Future by Design process, which began in July of 2007, was the 2008 Small Town Design Initiative (STDI), a community-university partnership with Michigan State University's Landscape Architecture program. More than 600 people participated in this high-impact brainstorming and consensus building process. MSU's final report titled *Northport Image/Identity/Sense of Place*, resulted from four community work sessions, an MSU student and faculty site visit, student design team presentations, and more than 6,000 hours of undergraduate study. This remarkable participatory engagement shows just how much people really care about Northport, and the enthusiasm continues.

BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES (continued)

The goal of the STDI process was to convert ideas and images that the citizens of Northport communicated verbally into a series of sketches that graphically conveyed the desired visual character and image for the area.

A summary of the STDI report's key findings were:

Entrances to the community need to be upgraded, primarily by improving their landscaped settings and creating a better setting for welcome signs. Entrances from all directions need to be addressed, but especially entrances that are confusing as to how to find the downtown and waterfront.

Improvements in walk-ability need to be considered. Sidewalks need to be added or improved where appropriate.

An overall landscape beautification program should be developed and implemented.

Wherever possible, power lines should be relocated or placed underground.

Along street corridors, upgrading of some existing structures, and in some cases reverting to the original building's architecture, would add significantly to the visual character of the community.

Alleys and parking lots need to be improved and made more user friendly, as well as visually pleasing.

Connections via greenways/arcades/internal access within buildings between commercial areas and parking lots should be considered.

A collection of stores, restaurants, and supporting businesses should be encouraged to create a year around critical mass of interest for residents and businesses.

The Mill Pond area and water courses to the bay should be improved and turned into a major attraction.

New street lights, benches, banners and other street furniture should be considered.

The marina area and adjacent park and beach should be visually improved.

Trails and walkways should be added and well signed to connect various elements of the community and encourage boaters to spend time discovering Northport.

PROJECT APPROACH

The Leelanau Township Community Foundation (LTCF) rightly chose to explore ways to enhance the *“visual character and harmony”* through carefully designed improvements to the historic Village of Northport. The community has arrived at an opportune time to pursue an attractive and functional pedestrian-friendly streetscape for the downtown core linked to an improved waterfront with working marina. Additional pathways with people amenities, and interpretive and “way-finding” signage would also strengthen appeal to visitors and residents alike.

In addition, it has been recognized that aesthetic and functional improvements to public spaces also provide the palette to *entice new entrepreneurial and business sector activity*. Three major areas that will *spur economic activity* and thus *revitalize the community* are the Marina/Waterfront, the Mill Pond area, and the Core Downtown. Thus the LTCF desired Master Plan should help advance thinking and visualization on targeted areas that can spark “private” reinvestment as well. Finally, desire *and* involvement by local groups to improve areas of the community for specific use, activities and programming are the strongest basis to seek public grant and foundation funding. By combining these efforts the community will benefit from visual and functional “brick and mortar” upgrades, as well as position itself better for new public/private project initiatives.

The FBD work plan for this project was specifically proposed to build on past planning/design efforts done by the LTCF and community of Northport through the STDI process and to forward the following objectives:

Build public consensus and support for the Master Plan and for future projects

Provide work products/graphics geared for marketing proposed projects

Maximize available public/private funds, leverage local dollars, and take initial action

PROJECT APPROACH (continued)

The design team utilized five guiding principles for this project which have and will continue to assist the LTCF, and Future By Design Northport (FBD) committee to: **Validate** with the community, **Develop** critical validated aspects, **Visualize** right in the community with feedback, **Design** quality downtown/waterfront sub-space and overall conceptual plans, and **Implement** the first steps of a sound implementation strategy for action.

Based on the project objectives and the guiding principles above, the design team implemented the five-phase work plan beginning in November of 2008 and concluding in May of 2009.

PROJECT REPORT

The report resulting from the work has been compiled in some cases combining various phase work products into usable pieces. Additional supportive information and work products are referenced and appear in the appendix.

This report is designed to be a working tool and reference for advancement of the FBD goals and objectives, provide the basis for grant funding and in many instances create checklists and a design framework to be further refined into project plans and grant funding applications in the future. Detailed indexes are provided in each chapter that will allow a report reader to “zero-in” on the areas of interest more quickly. The following is a summary of the report contents.

VALIDATION AND DEVELOPMENT

During October and November of 2008 the design team conducted a series of Stakeholder “Storefront Studios”, each designed to build on the information being gathered, allow stakeholders to interact and share ideas, and to present and discuss concepts, work products and tools. For the purposes of this report, **Chapter 1- Validation and Development** findings were combined and include:

- Data Collection from Stakeholders
- Inventory Mapping (from digital survey and aerial photos)
- Downtown Building Assessment

- Elements of a Vital Downtown Core
- Evolution of Districts
- Opportunities and Constraints Mapping

VISUALIZATION AND DESIGN

Beginning in October and continuing through January and early February of 2009 the design team began to develop and utilize various visualization tools to test design ideas and gain feedback from stakeholders.

In late January through February final stakeholder “storefronts” and meetings with FBD committee and Village of Northport streets, marina and recreation committees occurred. These meeting helped the design team to begin to refine design, identify unresolved issues and questions, and finalize visualization products for the next phase. For the purposes of this report **Chapter 2— Visualization and Design** work products were combined and include:

- Storefront Studio Summary
- Façade Study Summary
- Streetscape Design Program, Plans, Visualizations
- Waterfront Design Program, Plans, Visualizations
- Signage Design Program, Maps, Visualizations

IMPLEMENTATION

Beginning late January the design team began to develop possible phasing and funding options as a guide and working tool to be used to help implement future projects. For the purposes of the report **Chapter 3—Implementation** products include:

- Key Recommendations
- Administrative Structure
- Streetscape Development
- Waterfront Development
- Phasing and Funding Scenario