

## Character Plan

The Character Plan is intended to summarize some of the key physical components that contribute to the special and unique character of the Grand Traverse Commons. The Character Plan is also intended to identify specific objectives and strategies that work to enhance or preserve the character and identify future action policies.

### Signs

#### On-Premise Signs

On-premise signs (commercial signs) throughout the Grand Traverse Commons appear to be haphazardly placed, aesthetically dissimilar, and dimensionally inconsistent. Inconsistent signs can impact traffic safety and detract from the aesthetic character of the campus. According to standards established by the American Planning Association, the best regulations attempt to create a level playing field, where rules are applied uniformly and fairly to all businesses and do not unduly hinder business or favor certain businesses over similar ones in the immediate area<sup>1</sup>.

The Joint Planning Commission will work with municipal planning staff members, business owners and other stakeholders to develop sign standards that address the items listed below. Standards may vary in different areas of the campus based on the form and character of the buildings and surrounding landscape. However, the cumulative impact of all signs will be considered.

- **Type:** The type of sign permitted (i.e., freestanding, pole, monument, wall, banner, etc...)
- **Size:** The cumulative square footage of all signs on the property
- **Number:** The total number and location of signs on the property
- **Characteristics:** Material, lighting, graphics and attachment method

<sup>1</sup> Planning and Urban Design Standards, American Planning Association, 2006

Commercial Signs - Commercial signs throughout the Grand Traverse Commons are inconsistent and detract from the overall character of the campus.



### Directional Sigs

Many of the signs that contribute to the overall inconsistent character of signs throughout the Grand Traverse Commons are directional signs. In some instances, directional signs made with different materials and proportions are located in the same area. Most directional signs are permanent structures. However, some signs appear to be temporary and hand-made, directing people to specific businesses or special events. In addition, many of directional signs direct visitors only toward specific sections of the Commons and do not incorporate other areas of the campus.

Wayfinding systems help to assist both motorists and pedestrians navigate to major destination points within a defined environment. Wayfinding systems can include signs, maps, banners, and information kiosks. The Joint Planning Commission will work with local stakeholders to establish initial design and aesthetic preferences and then work with a wayfinding consultant to establish a formal wayfinding system.

In addition, the Joint Planning Commission will work with the Downtown Development Authority, the City of Traverse City, and the Charter Township of Garfield to link with current and future way-finding systems outside the Grand Traverse Commons, right.

Directional Signs - Directional signs are inconsistent and are geared toward single purpose visits.



Directional Signs - New City of Traverse City Wayfinding Sign



### Interpretive Signs

Interpretive signs can serve many functions. Interpretive signs can inform visitors about the natural environment (e.g., watersheds and eco-systems), community programs (e.g., beach-erosion, water quality) or community history. Often, the short stories and/or information described through interpretive

signs can help build a sense of place, increase public awareness, and help demonstrate a commitment to a specific mission or program. Currently, there are a couple of interpretive signs within the Grand Traverse Commons. They provide information about trails and the Champion Black Willow Tree (see below). In an effort to increase awareness about the historic and environmental attributes of the campus and help enhance the overall character of the site, the Joint Planning Commission will work with the Grand Traverse Historical Society and local environmental advocacy organizations to develop a series of interpretive signs. At a minimum, the signs will describe the history of the former state hospital and highlight many of the natural features of the campus.



**Lighting**

The primary purpose of exterior lighting is to provide for the safe illumination and navigation of sidewalks, streets, and parking lots. Exterior lighting can also be used to illuminate signs, landscape features and buildings. The choice of light fixtures and illumination patterns and intensity can influence the character of an area. There are a number of different light fixtures and illumination patterns within the Grand Traverse Commons. The Joint Planning Commission will work to minimize over lighting throughout the Commons without compromising safety. In addition, the Joint Planning Commission will work to develop standards for light fixtures and illumination patterns. Unique standards may apply to different areas of the campus based on the form and character of the buildings and surrounding landscape. However, the cumulative impact of all lighting will be considered.

Interpretive Signs - The Joint Planning Commission will work with the Grand Traverse Historical Society to develop a series of interpretive signs that describe the history of the former state hospital. The picture below is an example of an interpretive sign in Traverse City.



Lighting - The Joint Planning Commission will work to develop standards for lighting in the Grand Traverse Commons.



## Site Furniture

Site furniture includes small-scale physical amenities such as benches, waste receptacles, drinking fountains, and other items. The location and placement of site furniture should be based on the typical functions of specific areas and need. In addition to its functional capacity, the design and materials of site furniture can influence the character of an area. The Joint Planning Commission will work to develop standards for site furniture. Different standards may apply to different areas of the campus based on the form and character of the buildings and surrounding landscape.

## Public Art

Art can add an interesting visual element to a campus landscape. Art can also help to define the character of an area by featuring local artists, incorporating art made from materials located on the site and/or characterizing a specific quality of the area. The Grand Traverse Commons does not feature many examples of public art. The Joint Planning Commission will work with local artists, organizations, and local property owners to incorporate art in public locations and settings throughout the Commons. Public art should enhance and not distract from the character and beauty of the historic buildings and surrounding natural landscape.

## Parking

The size, placement and appearance of parking areas can greatly influence the character of an area. According to Architect Mark Hinshaw, *parking lots are more than just for the circulation and storage of vehicles; people pass through such places on foot, and their needs of safety, convenience and visual appeal must be met.*<sup>2</sup> Currently, the Grand Traverse Commons is served by small and large surface parking areas, a parking deck, and on-street parking. The design of the parking deck was influenced by the surrounding historic buildings and incorporates optimal use of vegetative screening. Parking Lot K is a large, expansive surface parking lot, typical of most suburban settings. The Joint Planning Commission will work to develop parking areas that are distinctive, sympathetic to the surrounding area, pedestrian friendly, and can accommodate multiple uses such as public gatherings. The Joint Planning Commission will also explore opportunities for shared parking and work with developers to utilize porous pavement

<sup>2</sup> Mark Hinshaw, FAICP, LMN Architects. Planning and Urban Design Standards, American Planning Association, 2006

Site Furniture - Site furniture can include items such as benches, waste receptacles and drinking fountains. The photo below shows a trash receptacle near a trail head. This same receptacle would not be appropriate near Building 50.



Public Art - The Joint Planning Commission will work with local artist to encourage the placement of public art throughout the Commons. (Below) - Art near Building 50.



and other techniques that limit storm-water runoff. The Joint Planning Commission will also work to develop new and convenient parking areas for bicycles.

### Comfortable Places that Support Social Interaction and Activities

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of the Grand Traverse Commons is that it is an interesting place of constant activity and social interaction. There are several areas within the campus that support social interaction and activities. People utilize the natural areas for passive recreation. The large historic lawn in front of Building 50 is used for recreation and large community events. Though privately owned, the front lawn serves a greater public purpose. In addition to the grounds, several of the local businesses have established areas that promote social interaction - where people can sit, eat and talk with each other. The existing sidewalks and pathway system also supports an interactive and social environment.

According to authors and AICP Planners, Al Zelinka and Susan Jackson Harden, *Placemaking* can be defined as *the process of adding value and meaning to the public realm through community-based revitalization projects rooted in local values, history, culture and natural environment.*<sup>3</sup> The Joint Planning Commission will continue to support the development of placemaking components that contribute to the sense of place of the Commons, support social interaction and allow for passive and active activities. Many of these physical components have been outlined in this section of the plan. Additional components are described in the Objective and Strategies section of this plan. The Joint Planning Commission will also work with local property owners to support development that works to create great spaces for people.

<sup>3</sup> Al Zelinka and Susan Kackson Harden. *Placemaking on a Budget*. APA 2005. Planning Advisory Service

Parking - The Joint Planning Commission will encourage the use of porous pavement techniques (see Elmwood example below) and new areas for bike parking.



Comfortable Places - The Grand Traverse Commons includes several comfortable places that support interaction and activities. Shown below is a bocce-ball tournament on the historic front lawn and tables in front of Left Foot Charley Winery.

