
Community Goals

The following community goals will be the basis of the *City Plan*. These goals express the expectations and needs of the people of Traverse City. Many characteristics should be preserved including the small-town atmosphere, the natural environment and a healthy environment for businesses and residential neighborhoods. Some modifications, however, may be in order. These include: developing compact commercial *centers*, building a more walkable community, and strengthening residential/commercial neighborhoods. To facilitate understanding of the intent of each goal, a description has been added.

- **Maintain a small-town atmosphere.**

This includes a smaller *scale*, community-minded people, familiarity, friendliness and concern; a hometown feeling with a complementary mix of old and new.

- **Protect and enhance the rich, natural environment.**

Protect woodlands, wetlands, water areas and other significant features. Require sensitivity to the natural environment when developing or redeveloping land.

- **Promote a healthy mix of uses while providing for the preservation of property values and the opportunity for economic expansion.**

The healthy mix of uses provides a unique opportunity to shorten trips, create functional neighborhoods, and exciting places. Special attention should be given to the quality of pedestrian spaces and the architectural design of new buildings as they relate to neighboring structures. This helps create a consistent and positive design character.

- **Preserve the community's historic resources.**

Traverse City's historic resources add a real element of satisfaction for our visitors and residents. These resources help make Traverse City a desirable place to live, work and play.

- **Plan parks and open space areas and recreational opportunities within neighborhoods.**

Assure that parks and recreational facilities are close to residents and encourage a variety of recreational opportunities and specialized areas (e.g., baseball, tennis, skiing, natural area).

- **Keep the public bayfront primarily as an open-space resource.**

Enhance the public shoreline by removing concrete rubble and existing structures, including the power plant, improve the zoo, open up views and access to the Bay, develop sidewalks and bikeway links between parks. Consider constructing a cultural *focal point* for the City.

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- **Boardman Lake and Boardman River south of Eighth Street will serve primarily as a recreational and residential resource.**

Provide quiet natural open spaces, develop biking and hiking trails, promote passive activities, emphasizing community use on the waterfront. Promote the establishment of residential neighborhoods adjacent to this linear park system.

- **Boardman River north of Eighth Street will serve primarily as a commercial, recreational and residential resource.**

Promote the integration of shops, cafes and residential *dwellings* with the river. Encourage pedestrian *scale*. Move parking away from the riverfront.

- **Preserve existing neighborhoods, which may have residential, business and industrial uses. Encourage active neighborhood and business associations and assist in developing neighborhood plans.**

Facilitate the formation of neighborhood associations by working with areas on development plans to address more specific issues including traffic circulation and land use.

- **Maintain and encourage a diversity of housing.**

Plan housing opportunities for all people. Encourage housing on compact lots. Encourage a diverse mix of housing types carefully located and designed to be in *scale* and compatible with natural and developed surroundings.

- **Promote the development of *community centers* and *neighborhood centers*.**

Compact commercial *centers* bring jobs, shopping and cultural opportunities closer to where people live. Positive attributes of centers warrant providing incentives to encourage existing linear commercial districts to be reorganized.

- **Keep downtown a regional destination.**

Encourage a diversity of residential, retail, entertainment, service and recreation uses. New buildings should be thoughtfully located and designed in *scale* with downtown buildings. Preserve the pedestrian-friendly size, and provide convenient accessibility for all modes of travel.

- **Promote a sustainable economy.**

Encourage a diversified tax base to shield the City from large fluctuations in the economy. Balance the interests of residents, tourists, business and industry. Encourage development that permits long-term prosperity for the community by balancing environmental protection, resource management and economic development.

- **Support industrial growth in appropriate areas throughout the City.**

Recruit and support those industries that reflect the environmental ethic of the community.

- **Provide for planned growth and changes.**

Planned growth is influenced by the community's goals and the marketplace. Recognize the implications of change as well as the alternatives for choice.

- **Create a balanced and diversified transportation network.**

Incorporate the needs of the motorist, pedestrians and cyclists along all streets. Protect rail rights-of-way for transit use and promote compact mixed-use development to make walking and public transit practical. Encourage regional cooperation in developing a transportation network.

- **Rigorously enforce the zoning and sign ordinances.**

Ensure that all violations are afforded prompt attention.

- **Continue cooperative governmental action to deal effectively with local and regional issues.**

Coordinate with other governmental agencies to effectively deal with transportation, housing, schools and infrastructure demands on the City. Employ citizen participation to ensure accountability.

Preface

The adoption of a new *City Plan* has not been an easy process, nor was it expected to be.

The rewrite of the 1977 *City Plan* was initiated in August 1988. In the fall of 1993, work began on a second revision of the proposed land-use map and the written goals, objectives and policies. This was done in response to claims that the map drawn up earlier that year was idealistic and the text, while laudable, was negative in some areas and needed to be thoroughly reviewed for consistency. Written and spoken suggestions from months of public hearings were tirelessly reviewed by city staff from an implementation standpoint and again by a subcommittee of the planning commission for clarity of direction. As a result of public input, changes were made to the land-use map and accompanying text, while the heart of the plan (the goals), remains intact.

In the text portion, long-held beliefs, such as maintaining a small-town character, protecting and enhancing natural and historic resources, preserving neighborhoods and maintaining a vital downtown, were melded with newer concepts such as creating well defined and planned commercial centers, as opposed to allowing freewheeling sprawl to continue. It was felt that commercial centers in varying degrees of intensity had many advantageous side effects, especially in a developed community that is suffering from overtaxed roads. They encourage walking, biking and, in many cases, one-stop shopping. With the integration of residential dwellings, centers also provide opportunities to live and work in the same area, as well as opportunities for shared parking. Coincidentally, the above advantages also have a positive impact on motor vehicle traffic, especially when coupled with coordinated, shared driveway access. This concept receives added emphasis in the Plan. While these by-product improvements to the traffic system appear minimal, it has been the Planning Commission's belief that a key component to maintaining our small-town character is "calming" traffic and not allowing our constrained piece of land

to be overrun by ever wider strips of asphalt.

In response to suggestions from many commercial property owners that the Plan embrace current businesses and provide direction for where and how they should develop, the land-use map drawn up earlier in the year was carefully reviewed. Months of discussion resulted in a significantly different land-use map. The text promotes the integration of commercial centers with surrounding areas by unifying elements of signage, driveways, parking, bus stops, landscaping and architecture. In addition, it promotes internal growth in existing commercial centers, smaller more efficient parking lots and density bonuses for the inclusion of residential units.

As a result of reviewing and adjusting the land-use map, it became apparent to the Planning Commission that some areas needed additional TLC. Areas that experienced sudden commercial growth, accelerated traffic increases or presented unique environmental concerns became evident. The Plan envisions that certain uses that generate heavy traffic and extended business hours (such as drive-through establishments and convenience stores) would be required to meet certain performance standards.

The refinement process will continue with planned annual reviews in November of each year. The goal is to keep the *City Plan* as a living document that will serve us well for many years to come.

Linda Smyka

Revised May 8, 2002

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Italicized Words

Italicized words are defined in the glossary at the end of this document.

City Planning Commission

(at adoption date)

Linda Smyka, Chair
Jack Boynton, Mayor
Ann Dane
Robert Dean
Paul Fitzsimons, Past Chair
Richard Lewis, City Staff Representative
Daniel O'Neil, Vice Chair
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The City Planning staff is credited with furnishing the original plan concepts and the base material from which the final plan was developed. Their prudent guidance was instrumental in assisting the City Planning Commission with the preparation of this document.

Cover Artwork: Charles Murphy

Resource Citizens

The following citizens served on various committees in the preparation of the *City Plan*. Their contribution is the essence of this community-based document.

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
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| Mary Gillett | Jo Rundio | |
| Geraldine Green * | Gil Rupp | |
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| Larry Hardy | Tim Schreiner | |

* Former City Planning Commissioner

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Traverse City Planning Commission under the authority of Public Act 285 of 1931, as amended, is required to make and adopt and may from time to time amend in whole or by parts a master plan for the physical development of the City of Traverse City; **AND**

WHEREAS, the *City Plan* (Master Plan) provides Traverse City the fundamental ability to shape the urban environment in accordance with the principles and objectives therein and to avoid costly and undesirable decisions affecting the well-being of the community; **AND**

WHEREAS, the Traverse City Planning Commission concluded after reviewing existing conditions, issues and trends of the municipality and the neighboring jurisdictions that the 1977 *City Plan* was in need of revision and updating; **AND**

WHEREAS, citizens of the Traverse City community played an integral part in establishing the goals, objectives and policies of the updated *City Plan* which recommends specific techniques and priorities for change and improvement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED : That the *City Plan* dated November, 1977, is hereby revoked and annulled and that the accompanying *City Plan* containing goals, objectives, policies, plans, recommendations and graphics (listed on page ii) bearing the date September 28, 1994, is hereby adopted by the Traverse City Planning Commission on this the 28th day of September, 1994.

Linda Smyka, Chair
Traverse City Planning Commission

Dated: September 28, 1994

Purpose

The *City Plan* serves as a general guide for the use of land. It is intended to encourage positive growth in a manner that will promote economic well-being and enhance community character. The Plan provides a commonly accepted yardstick against which future decisions will be measured. When consistently applied, the *City Plan* has value as a decision-making guide, and provides the legal basis for protecting the community. The Plan is not law, but it does provide a foundation for future zoning and sign ordinances, as well as other local laws which regulate the use of land. In some instances, the goals, policies and text will remain as guidelines and will not be translated to law.



Photograph courtesy of Robert Parker

The plan encourages growth that promotes economic well-being and enhances community character.

Introduction

Just a few decades ago, a person could easily tell when entering Traverse City. The City limits were clearly identified at the point where the buildings met the fields and forests. Today, the green-and-white “Traverse City City Limits” signs confirm that our boundaries have been blurred by development.

A population once confined to a small geographic area now consumes five times that area. In 1960, more than half of the population of Grand Traverse County lived in the City; in 1994 less than a quarter live in Traverse City. Although the community setting has changed from a small, compact community nestled on Grand Traverse Bay to a community stretching out over several jurisdictions, Traverse City still remains the focus for the region, providing many of the urban services including numerous parks and beaches for the developing area.

The most challenging issue facing the City today rests in our ability to balance the positive aspects of preservation and development. Although Traverse City’s population has slowly declined, traffic congestion along with demands placed on utilities and parklands have increased significantly. Growth of the City’s tax base has not kept pace with the increased demands placed on our aging infrastructure. Our ability to maintain a unique yet comfortable community environment will depend heavily on cooperative efforts. It is envisioned that this chapter will attempt to reconcile the growing disparity between revenues and expenditures, and the associated challenges. Together with the townships and Grand Traverse County, Traverse City must effectively deal with the “cost of growth” by implementing an equitable means of paying for urban services on a region-wide basis.



The vision and dedication of community leaders transformed this blighted area (photograph taken in 1972) into Traverse City’s panoramic Open Space.



The Open Space in 1994.

The reader of this Plan will quickly realize that the Plan deals with issues and areas that transcend governmental boundaries even though the City has little or no direct control over these areas. The *City Plan* was purposely conceived and broadened in recognition of the highly interrelated nature of this very complex natural, cultural and economic community. It is hoped this area-wide view will allow a better understanding of the magnitude of regional issues, and will encourage the City and its neighbors to unify their decision-making in the best interest of the entire community.

Whose Plan Is It?

It is the responsibility of the Planning Commission to prepare and adopt physical plans for the City. According to Municipal Planning Act 285 of 1931, as amended:

The [Planning] Commission shall make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the municipality including areas outside of its boundaries which, in the Commission's judgment, bear relation to planning of the municipality.

This Plan, developed by the City Planning Commission, is adopted by that body. To ensure balanced representation on the Planning Commission, and to be in accordance with the Municipal Planning Act, the Planning Commission "shall consist of nine members who shall represent insofar as possible different professions or occupations." On the other hand, responsibility for implementing the Plan (in the areas of zoning, capital expenditures and the like) lies almost entirely with the City Commission, which is elected by the citizens of Traverse City. It is therefore essential to have public input and support for the Plan, as well as for future Plan amendments.

Several planning documents are referenced to in the following chapters. These documents include the Grand Traverse Bay Region Development Guidebook, Traverse City Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and Grand Traverse Commons *Adaptive Reuse* Feasibility Plan and GTC District Plan. These documents spell out more specifically the concepts proposed with the *City Plan*. In addition, more detailed neighborhood plans drafted with residential, business and industry input will be developed as part of the *City Plan*. Any amendments to the above documents do not require a *City Plan* amendment unless the City Planning Commission deems the amendment is inconsistent with the *City Plan*. Should this be the case, the Planning Commission shall amend the *City Plan* to ensure consistency, or delete the language referring to the document in question.

Implementation

A *City Plan* serves as a futuristic decision-making guide which is intended to positively shape the growth and change that will inevitably occur in and adjacent to the City of Traverse City. It portrays commonly accepted goals for community development and establishes ideal forms against which future public and private development decisions can be measured. In an ideal sense, the Plan is far more than its outward written and graphic appearance might suggest. It should depict a way life, a meaningful urban existence, an attitude of community spirit that is more often felt than seen. The Plan cannot achieve its intended objectives by itself. People are the essence of the community and people must make conscious and deliberate efforts to see that the idea or ideal is kept alive. The planning process is ever-active. The community's goals are always in the process of being sought after.

Planning is a process. Oftentimes, plans are erroneously construed to be the end product of planning, providing all the answers for the future. As disappointing as this may seem, planning is a process first and a product second. Incidental by-product of the process are background reports, master plans, feasibility studies, economic studies, capital improvement programs and zoning ordinances, among others. These products are only as good as the effectiveness of the process itself and the process never ends, being a continuing cycle of plan formulation, implementation, re-evaluation, reformulation, and on and on. Somewhere, in the middle of this theoretically endless process, something usually breaks down and, unfortunately, the only things remaining are the tangible by-product that soon become outdated and unusable.

To remain viable, the Plan must be flexible and dynamic, not static. It must respond to changes over which the City has little or no control. The City should be wary of plan obsolescence and should instill in its citizenry the idea of flexibility, yearly review and change.

On the other hand, the Plan is general, but not too general; specific, but not too specific. It purports to establish concepts, patterns, and relationships first, and to answer specific questions second. It may be difficult to find a specific answer to every rezoning question. If the general principles of the Plan are applied, however, an answer should be forthcoming. Too rigidly interpreted, the Plan will serve no futuristic purpose. Too loosely interpreted, the Plan will lose value and meaning. The secret to proper use lies in understanding its purpose and its limitations.

The Plan is not law as enacted by the governing body, the City Commission. It is permissive, not mandatory. Because it is not law, it does not replace, circumvent or supersede any other normally required decision-making procedures, such as public hearings, rezonings, Planning or City Commission approvals. These fundamental procedures will continue to be employed by the City exactly as they are now. If disregarded or inconsistently applied, however, it loses value as a decision-making guide and leaves the City open to legal challenge.

Perhaps the one thing that needs to be remembered most in the course of utilizing the *City Plan* is that no decision can be made independently of all others. Since the Plan theoretically establishes a balance between land-use intensities, street capacities and natural and cultural systems, a change may be far more complex than might be apparent at face value.

Annual Review and Public Involvement

The City Planning Commission will initiate an annual review of the *City Plan* in November of each year. This procedure will include at least one public forum or meeting to be preceded by ample publicity. If, in the course of discussion, the Planning Commission determines that certain changes should be considered, official public hearings will be published and held accordingly. Based on public discussion, a final decision will then be made. As larger issues arise in the annual review process, the Planning Commission may appoint citizen and business study groups to work with the planning staff. A mechanism for monitoring progress in implementation of the *City Plan* should be initiated after the adoption of the Plan. The annual review should identify whether the goals are being satisfactorily met.

The key to the *City Plan*'s viability lies in its ability to reflect current, as well as changing, circumstances. In reality, the Plan may change sufficiently over a period of time where a comprehensive overhaul of the Plan is appropriate.

One final note on public involvement is offered. Even though the *City Plan* calls for specific public-improvement solutions to given problems, it is intended that public review and comment be solicited as a normal and customary part of the project-initiation process. While the *City Plan* may provide the rationale for project implementation, there will still be opportunities for public review prior to construction. Responsive and accountable government requires that this participatory practice be vigorously followed.



The proposed City Plan was displayed in a downtown storefront, which helped facilitate public discussion about its goals and objectives.

Amendments

The *City Plan* is intended to be a living document, and can be looked upon as a product of a process. When there are significant events, advances in technology, or changes in public policies impacting the content of the Plan, it can be amended.

A *City Plan* amendment may be initiated directly by the Planning Commission, upon recommendation to the Planning Commission by the City Commission or by petition from an individual and/or group of property owners. In all cases, a public hearing is required before any amendment may be adopted.



Photography courtesy of John Russell, Record Eagle

Neighborhood parks within walking distance of children's homes make Traverse City a special place.

Traverse City - A Special Place

Considered a medium-sized city, Traverse City retains many small-town qualities. It is small enough to encourage neighborliness, yet big enough to allow for personal privacy. While it is consistently felt that Traverse City is unique, the elements contributing to its distinctiveness defy description. Is it size, *scale*, the business and residential investment in the community, or its cultural, social and natural amenities that make this city so attractive to residents and tourists alike? Although difficult to capture on paper, it is important to identify those aspects of the community we value the most. How do we protect our current interests, as well as the interests of future generations? How and where should we encourage change so that future generations might have a historical context within which to evaluate growth? Every asset Traverse City has also brings with it its own special set of considerations, and there are positive ways to deal with these issues.

The Grand Traverse area's burgeoning population (not within but beyond the City's boundaries) is one of the most challenging features of recent growth. Increasing vehicular traffic saturates our *major streets*, burdening City services without compensation. The small-town setting and full-service downtown is seriously challenged by the proliferation of outlying shopping malls and suburban growth. The 1880 municipal boundaries no longer make sense, either governmentally or economically. However, any effort to change these boundaries is extremely difficult because of legal and political reasons. These and other challenging aspects need to be addressed in a positive manner.

Traverse City's natural and historic physical features are very important, but equally important is the population's need for services. To satisfy the residents' needs and still preserve the characteristics that give us cultural and historical strength, it is essential that we employ sound and responsible planning practices.

History

Around 1850, the unique combination of timber and water resources nurtured the first seeds of economic development and the permanent settlement in Traverse City. It began as a lumbering town and grew rapidly for the next several decades with timber as its economic base and the Grand Traverse Bay as its highway. The lumber era in Traverse City continued until 1910. It ended abruptly with the depletion of timber resources, but not before it generated a large turn-of-the-century population influx and development boom. The decline of the lumber industry had a significant negative impact on the City's economy and population. With a population of 9,407 in 1900 and 12,115 in 1910, it declined to 10,925 by 1920, recovering to 12,539 by 1930.

Some time before the turn of the century, an economic transition from lumber to agriculture took place. Increased knowledge of soils, and the moderating climatic effects of the east and west bays, produced a thriving seasonal fruit industry. Traverse City soon became an important fruit producing and processing center. During this same period, tourism also became an important economic factor in the Grand Traverse region. Its clean lakes, sandy beaches, and vast woodlands all enhanced its appeal. Because both the agricultural and tourism trades peaked significantly each summer, Traverse City's population and job opportunities also soared during the warm season--a trend that continues to this day. Year-round employment opportunities, however, were few.

By 1960, with its population topping 18,000, Traverse City turned a new page in its history as a year-round community. Four-season recreation, education, medical-care services, governmental, and new industrial and retail developments grew rapidly, and soon brought about within the region an increased economic stability. Along with this stability came an increase in population, primarily outside the City's boundaries. The Traverse City area evolved into a thriving service center for large portions of northern Michigan. Increased economic diversification, meanwhile, has had a stabilizing effect on the economy.



Photography courtesy of the Grand Traverse Pioneer and Historical Society
The old Morgan building was located just south of what is now known as the "Open Space" on the west arm of Grand Traverse Bay.

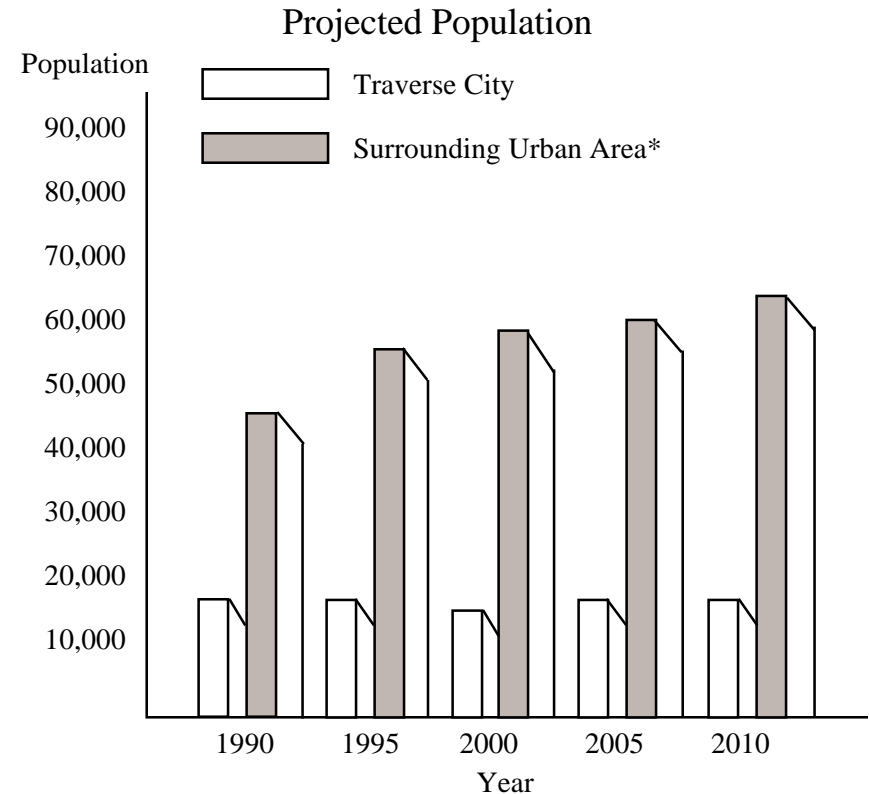
Assumptions About the Future

No one knows precisely what the future holds for Traverse City. It is necessary, however, to make realistic assumptions that can serve as a basis for making practical decisions about the future. Such assumptions are normally projections of past trends which function reliably in the short term, but may result in error if projected too far into the future. Traditional planning assumptions are challenged every day in areas of urban development patterns. There is a rising emphasis on human values, economic stability and the preservation of the cultural and natural qualities that are basic to the City's rewarding lifestyle.

We must not, however, confuse assumptions with realistic goals. Erroneous assumptions based on what we would like to have happen rather than what truly can happen will only provide a distorted view of the future. This results in a plan that quickly becomes outdated and confusing. While the Plan must strive for an ideal, it must also be tempered with reality. The following assumptions are based on recent trends. If any of them should become suspect due to unforeseen circumstances, the Plan will be reevaluated in a timely manner and amended accordingly.

1. Population and Growth

Population and growth will be determined by birth, death and migration. Since birth and death rates are not expected to change substantially, migration will be the primary factor affecting the region's population. Because of its desirability, continued growth of Traverse City's permanent and transient populations is likely. It is anticipated that the concentration of population will continue to disperse across the region as the number of people per household within the City drops, and more people choose to live in township settings. It should be noted that Traverse City is part of an economic ecosystem that is 10 times larger than the City proper.



| | Traverse City | Surrounding Urban Area* | Total Urban Area |
|------|---------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1990 | 15,155 | 45,387 | 60,542 |
| 1995 | 15,513 | 54,338 | 69,851 |
| 2000 | 14,532 | 59,192 | 73,724 |
| 2005 | 15,141 | 63,507 | 78,648 |
| 2010 | 15,750 | 67,822 | 83,572 |

Source: 1990 & 2000 US Census and Traverse City Transportation & Land Use Study

* Includes parts of Elmwood & Peninsula Townships and all of Acme, Blair, East Bay, Garfield, Green Lake, Long Lake and Whitewater.

2. Economy, Employment and Income

Traverse City is the hub of a transforming economic region. It is expected that high employment rates will prevail in the region over the next several years. Industrial development, too, will grow in response to the physical advantages Traverse City offers. A number of additional factors also will play a role: transportation and energy costs, the size and quality of natural resources, and the City's proximity to a sizable market for goods and services. The tourist industry will continue to grow in the region as a result of rich scenic and recreational resources. Traverse City will remain more service- than product-oriented, but will experience increasing industrial diversity.

3. Energy and Materials

The cost and availability of energy and other natural resources will have a definite impact on future transportation and development patterns. More compact and cost-effective developments (e.g., higher density housing, mixed use neighborhoods) will be in demand to offset rising costs. Both new and old developments will incorporate innovative ideas to save energy.

4. Environment and Housing

People will be increasingly concerned about environmental protection. The result will be the need for improved governmental tools to guide and regulate growth and increased financial support for environmentally responsible programs. The challenge will be to find ways to balance environmental protection, economic issues and rising costs. Growth management will tend to increase housing costs which will be offset by allowing higher densities in suitable locations.

5. Transportation

Major increases in energy and transportation costs and in traffic congestion will result in altered transportation habits, such as trip reductions, public transit, biking, walking and more energy-efficient automobiles. Traffic will increase primarily as a result of new development being placed in isolation from the existing town fabric. Rail, air and water transportation may become more important as alternatives to conventional travel are being sought.

6. Regional Center (Downtown)

Because of its distinct geographic location, it is anticipated that downtown will remain a regional commerce center and serve as the base for area services. Growth associated with region-serving activities (retail, industry, health and human services, government, education) will strengthen the local economy and increase demands for urban services.

7. Regional Cooperation

Watersheds, air quality, transportation and a number of other natural systems and social issues transcend political boundaries. In addition, some services can be more efficiently delivered on a regional basis. For these reasons the city will work cooperatively with adjacent units of government as a means to provide effective planning and cost-effective services.