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# Bear Lake Community Comprehensive Plan

Village of Bear Lake  
Bear Lake Township  
Pleasanton Township

Prepared by the  
Bear Lake Community Planning Commission

With Assistance of the  
Land Information Access Association  
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With financial Assistance from the  
Village of Bear Lake  
Bear Lake Township  
Pleasanton Township  
Vision Bear Lake  
Manistee County Community Foundation  
Partnerships for Change Program

**P**ARTNERSHIPS  
*for* **C**HANGE



**Land Information  
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October 2007

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### **Plan Adopted**

Village of Bear Lake:  
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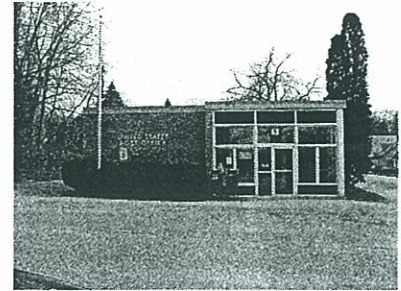
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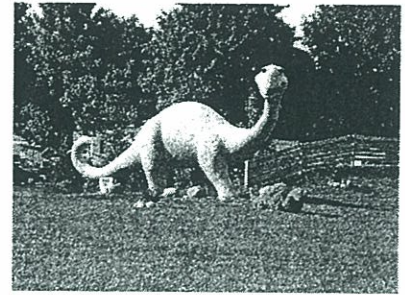
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## Chapter One - Introduction

As used throughout this document, the “Bear Lake Community” refers to all areas within Pleasanton Township, Bear Lake Township and the Village of Bear Lake. These three jurisdictions constitute the geographical area administered by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission.

### Regional Setting

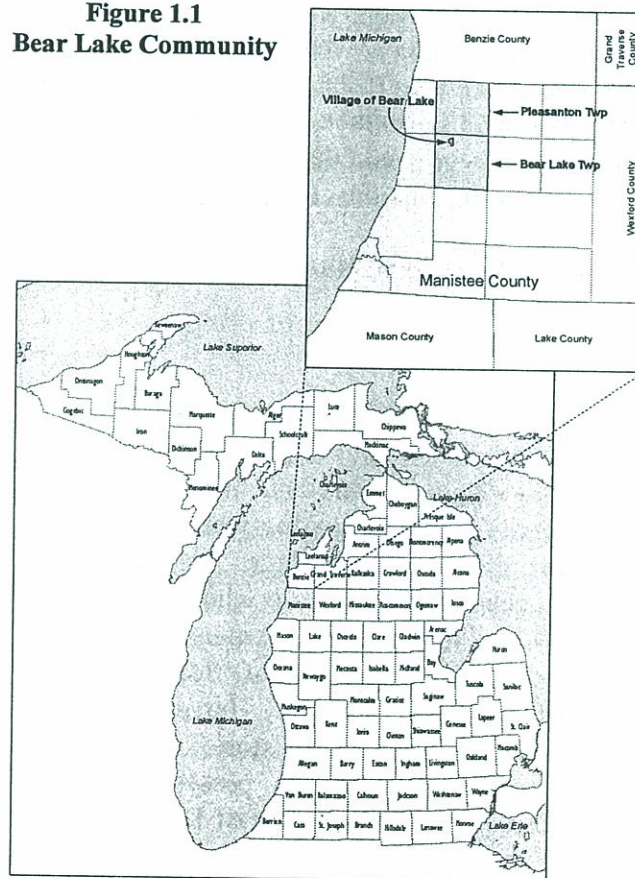
The Bear Lake Community is located in the north-central portion of Manistee County (see Figure 1.1). Part of the northwest portion of Michigan, the Bear Lake Community has a rural character and great natural beauty, including family farms, rolling hills, wetlands, woodlands, lakes and streams and the historical Village of Bear Lake. The Bear Lake Community has a total area of 45,733 acres. Within the Bear Lake Community, Pleasanton Township has an area of 22,683 acres. Immediately to the south, Bear Lake Township includes an area of approximately 22,887 acres. The Village of Bear Lake has an area of approximately 203 acres. The Village of Bear Lake sits on the southeastern shore of Bear Lake in the northwest portion of Bear Lake Township. The most prominent feature of the community is Bear Lake - bordered by Pleasanton Township to the north and by the Village of Bear Lake and Bear Lake Township to the south.

The Bear Lake Community is bordered by: Blaine, Joyfield and Weldon Townships (Benzie County) to the north; Springdale and Maple Grove Townships to the east; Dickson, Brown and Manistee Townships to the south; and Onekama and Arcadia Townships to the west. The Bear Lake Community is in close proximity to Onekama (1 mile), Lake Michigan (8 miles), Manistee (15 miles) and Traverse City (45 miles).

### History of the Bear Lake Community

The following history of the Bear Lake Community was compiled from portions of the 2002 *Bear Lake Township Comprehensive Plan* and the 1999 *Pleasanton Township Land Use Plan*.

**Figure 1.1**  
**Bear Lake Community**



Source: LIAA





The geologic character and surface topography of the Bear Lake area is attributed to the rock and mineral deposits left by massive inland seas and the advancement and recession of several glaciers. As the last glacier receded about 10,000 years ago, the melting ice left behind rolling hills and a vast watershed with several lakes and rivers. After the glaciers, the area was covered with a dense “mixed hardwood” forest.

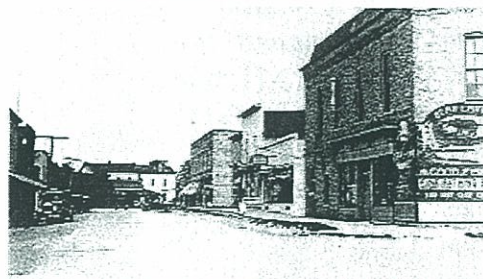
Leaving evidence of stone tools, camp sites and burial mounds, early inhabitants of the area are believed to include a group known as the *Woodland Indians*. In 1836, the United States purchased the area containing Pleasanton Township from the Chippewa and Ottawa Tribes. However, most of the area remained uninhabited for many years, except for a small number of lumbermen who lived in the southern reaches of Bear Lake Township.

Providing almost free land to “bona fide settlers”, the Homestead Act of 1863 ushered in a number of settlers to the area. The first settlers are believed to be the families of Russell F. Smith, Simeon Anderson, Francis Buckner, John Edmonson, George Piece, Dwight Sibley and Charles Bailey. Most of these early settlers cleared their land and planted crops.

Bear Lake Township was legally established in 1865. By 1870, Bear Lake Township had a population of 417 people living in 91 homes, while Pleasanton Township had a population of 285 people living in 65 homes. The Bear Lake Post Office was opened in 1865. The first school was started in the late 1860’s and the first church was established in 1870 (where the Lighthouse Baptist Church now stands). Known as the Allegan, Muskegon, and Grand Traverse State Road, U.S. 31 was completed in 1870. It appears there were only two stores in the community, prior to 1870.

A description of the establishment of the Village of Bear Lake is found in the *Bear Lake Township Master Plan*.

**Photo 1.1**  
**Downtown Bear Lake - 1925**



Source: Manistee County Michigan GenWeb

As the first settler, Russell F. Smith had chosen his land with the idea of a future village. To this end, he offered 12 acres of land to anyone who would come in and start a village. His offer was accepted by a firm who would become known as Carpenter & Harrington, comprised of John S. Carpenter and Eliphate Harrington.

These men built a small store, a boarding house, and a steam saw and grist mill on the site of the present village. Their enterprise was none too successful, for in the spring of 1873, they sold out to George W. and David H. Hopkins. Starting with just three to four buildings from Carpenter & Harrington, the Hopkins Brothers soon developed the Village of Bear Lake into the major service center for rural population. Hopkins immediately built an improved saw and grist mill. The following year, 1874, the firm platted 88 acres for the Village.





On June 1, 1876, the Bear Lake Tram Railway, utilizing horse-drawn freight cars, commenced operation, connecting the growing village with the docks at Pierport. In 1881, a new grist mill was built, reportedly the first roller mill in the State. In 1882, the Hopkins brothers built the Bear Lake and Eastern Railroad to replace the horse drawn cars with a team of locomotives. Steel rails and suitable equipment.

With the construction of the large sawmill in 1873, the Hopkins' immediately commenced buying logs from nearby farmers. Finally, with the construction of the Tram Railway in 1876, cordwood was shipped to Pierport for consumption in Chicago and Milwaukee. At a very minimum, this market for forest products would have doubled the income of homesteaders, while for the ambitious, income probably increased five-fold. Throughout this period, new businesses opened almost monthly on Lake Street in the Village.

After the turn of the century, most of the forest products in the area had been harvested. This led to the closure of the large mills and the railroad was dismantled.

By the 1920's and 1930's the area experienced a decline in population as the quality of the soil changed due to the harvesting of the hardwoods and many farmers found it difficult to farm. However, many farmers turned to growing fruit crops while tourism and a summer cottage industry flourished.

### **Authority to Plan**

The Bear Lake Community Comprehensive Plan has been prepared by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission ("the Commission"). The Commission was established under the authority of the Joint Municipal Planning Act, Public Act 226 of 2003 (MCL 125.131, et seq.). Section 5 of the Act states:

*Subject to section 9, the legislative bodies of 2 or more municipalities may each adopt an ordinance approving an agreement establishing a joint planning commission (see Appendix A, for the complete Act).*

As previously described and outlined in the formally adopted joint planning commission agreement, the Bear Lake Community includes the entire jurisdictional areas of Pleasanton Township, Bear Lake Township and the Village of Bear Lake. Among other provisions, the Joint Municipal Planning Act states the Joint Planning Commission must decide which planning act it will follow in adopting a comprehensive plan. The Bear Lake Community Planning Commission has elected to prepare this plan under the procedures of the Township Planning Act, Public Act 168 of 1959, as amended (please see *Appendix B*, for the complete Act).





## Planning Approach

This plan was developed under the direction of and with the direct participation by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission. The Commission followed a well publicized planning process that began in September 2006. The comprehensive planning process was initiated to provide the framework for the development of the Bear Lake Community, the management of the community's resources and the protection of public health and welfare. This plan marks the *first* Comprehensive Plan of the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission.

This plan and the comprehensive planning process were supported by the *Partnerships for Change (Grant) Program*. The *Partnerships for Change Program*, including a thorough discussion of each of the phases of the planning process is addressed in more detail in the following chapters of this plan.

In developing this plan, the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission agreed that the plan would be based on the collective voice of the entire community. To that end, the Comprehensive Plan was developed upon the following assumptions:

- The most effective land use plans and regulations are community-wide and multi-jurisdictional in scope;
- Effective plans and regulations build upon the strengths of previous community efforts; and
- Future land use polices are best derived with the participation and input of citizens from throughout the community.

In addition, this comprehensive plan incorporates principles of *Smart Growth*, as presented by the *Smart Growth Network*, and adopted by the *Michigan Land Use Leadership Council*, including:

- Create a range of housing opportunities
- Create walkable neighborhoods
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective
- Mix land uses
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- Take advantage of compact development design

## How to Use This Plan

The Bear Lake Community Comprehensive Plan is organized into ten major chapters. The following paragraphs briefly summarize each section.

*Chapter One* provides introductory information, including the regional setting for the Bear Lake Community, the legal authority for the Planning Commission to plan and the purpose of the plan.



*Chapter Two* provides the historical review of planning and land use regulation within the Bear Lake Community.

*Chapter Three* provides a summary of the social and economic characteristics of the Bear Lake Community. This chapter will contribute to the formulation of the plan's goals and objectives and will address population trends and projections, population density, age distribution, racial make-up, household characteristics, income, education, employment, housing and the economy.

*Chapter Four* provides a summary of the community facilities of the Bear Lake Community. This section will also contribute to the formulation of the plan's goals and objectives and will address transportation, recreation, schools, infrastructure, emergency services and community facilities.

*Chapter Five* provides a summary of the physical characteristics of the Bear Lake Community. This section will contribute to the formulation of the plans goals and objectives and will address natural resources, topography, geology, farmland, environmental contamination and endangered species.

*Chapter Six* describes the current patterns of land use and land use trends over the last four decades.

*Chapter Seven* outlines the major planning issues of the Bear Lake Community.

*Chapter Eight* provides the goals and objectives of the plan.

*Chapter Nine* provides the plan recommendations and implementation strategies.

*Chapter Ten* outlines the future land use of the Bear Lake Community and the implementation priorities for the community.





## Chapter Two - Planning in the Bear Lake Community

### Local Planning and Zoning

Prior to the establishment of the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission and the adoption of this plan, planning and zoning for Pleasanton Township and Bear Lake Township were administered separately. The Village of Bear Lake did not oversee planning and zoning activities. The most recent *Pleasanton Township Land Use Plan* was prepared by the Pleasanton Township Planning Commission in 1999. According to the Pleasanton Township Land Use Plan, *“the Commission determined that with a population under 5,000, little or no growth in population over the last ten years and with a locality that was primarily rural in character, the simplest plan (Land Use) was probably adequate for our present purposes.”* The most current *Bear Lake Township Comprehensive Plan* was prepared by the Bear Lake Township Planning Commission in 2002.

**Figure 2.1**  
**Bear Lake Township Comprehensive Plan**



Source: Bear Lake Township

Pleasanton Township regulates land use under a zoning ordinance adopted in 2003. Bear Lake Township regulates land use under a zoning ordinance adopted in 1995. *Map 1* illustrates the current zoning districts for Pleasanton and Bear Lake Townships. With the adoption of this plan, the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission is prepared to develop a new comprehensive joint zoning ordinance. However, until such time as a new joint zoning ordinance is prepared and adopted, the Townships will continue to enforce their separate zoning ordinances under their separate administrations.

**Figure 2.2**  
**Pleasanton Township Zoning Ordinance**



Source: Pleasanton Township

### Previous Master Plans

According to the 1999 *Pleasanton Township Land Use Plan*, *“the overall goal of the Pleasanton Township Planning and Zoning Commission and Township Board is to promote orderly growth and an attractive quality of life for its residents, while protecting our lakes, streams, wetlands, unique environmental areas and groundwater from contamination. Townships have a right to expect that property values will be protected by reasonable and compatible zoning.”* According to the 2002 *Bear Lake Comprehensive Plan*, *“the purpose of township planning is to provide a guideline for future growth and development. It must take into account the inherent right of the individual and balance it with their rights as neighbors.”* Due to the informal composition of the Pleasanton Township Land Use plan and the lack of a future land use plan for the Bear Lake Township Comprehensive Plan the geographic description of land uses for the future in the Bear Lake Community were depicted and generally accepted under the Future Land Use Map of the *Manistee County Comprehensive Plan* (see *Map 2*).





Six future land use categories were identified in the *Manistee County Comprehensive Plan*. According to the County Plan, the six categories were based on the Standard Industrial Classification Manual and several other land use studies and reports from a number of state-wide land use and environmental organizations. The six categories include:

### Commercial

Uses found and commonly allowed include:

- Retail Trade
- Finance, Insurance and Real Estate,
- Services
- Transportation, Communications, Electric, Gas Service, Public Administration

Might also include:

- Housing Units

Under special conditions might include:

- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Wholesale Trade

Recommendations for this topic

There should not be strip commercial zoning along highway/main roads

### Residential

Uses found and commonly allowed:

- Housing units
- Open Space
- Parks, limited to a small maximum size

Might also include:

- Home Occupations
- Under special conditions might include:
  - Retail Trade - limited to a small maximum size
  - Finance, Insurance and Real Estate - limited to a small maximum size
  - Services - limited to a small maximum size
  - Public Administration - limited to a small maximum size

Recommendations for this topic:

- Provide safe transportation by avoiding residential strip development and its inherent conflicts from frequent driveways, pedestrian and automobile use in the same area negative visual impact.
- To promote quality housing for all citizens of Manistee County.

### Resource Development

Uses found and commonly allowed:

- Agriculture, Forestry (including operator's home)
- Open Space
- Mining
- Home Occupations

**Figure 2.3**  
**Manistee County Comprehensive Plan**



Source: Manistee County





Might also include:

- Agriculture, Forestry related businesses
- Housing Units

Under special conditions might include:

- Retail Trade - limited to a small maximum size
- Services - limited to a small maximum size
- Public Administration - limited to a small maximum size

### **Resource Limited**

Uses found and commonly allowed:

- Agriculture, Forestry (including operator's home); with limits
- Open Space
- Home Occupations
- Housing Units

Might also include:

- Parks; limited to a small maximum size
- Mining

Under special conditions might include:

- Parks

Recommendations for this topic:

- To recognize lands in the county which are areas of the county which have severe limitations to unlimited development due to natural features such as, but not limited to wetlands, and soil types which are not suited for on-site sewage systems. Further to place that recognition into municipal planning, zoning.

### **Rural Residential**

Uses found and commonly allowed:

- Housing units
- Home occupations
- Agriculture, Forestry
- Mining
- Open Space
- Parks

Might also include

- Public administration - limited to a small maximum size
- Retail trade - limited to a small maximum size
- Services - limited to a small maximum size

Under special conditions might include:

- Retail Trade - limited to a small maximum size
- Services - limited to a small maximum size
- Transportation, Communications, Electric and Sanitary Services Wholesale Trade - limited to a small maximum size
- Construction - limited to a small maximum size



### Special and Unique

Uses found and commonly allowed - Might also include - Under special conditions (each the same)

- Generally what is allowed is specially tailored to the specific unique reasons the area is designated, most often to protect and preserve those attributes leading to the area being recognized.

### Planning in Adjoining Jurisdictions

Several of the Townships adjacent to the Bear Lake Community have adopted comprehensive plans. Additionally, Manistee County has adopted a Comprehensive Plan. Land use planning and regulation in adjacent townships and Manistee County will have an impact on the future development of the Bear Lake Community. Similarly, future land use planning and regulation in the Bear Lake Community will have an impact on the surrounding jurisdictions. Therefore, the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission (in accord with state law) has worked to communicate and cooperate with adjacent jurisdictions during the preparation and adoption procedures of this Comprehensive Plan.

### Area Planning and Development Support Organizations

The Northwest Michigan Council of Governments (NWMCOG) provides assistance and support to local governments in 10 northwestern counties throughout the region, including Manistee County. The NWMCOG is a valuable resource for the Bear Lake Community. Information and data sets published by the NWMCOG were consulted and utilized in the preparation of this plan.

### Recent Planning Activities in the Community

In 2004, Manistee County initiated a process to prepare a new Comprehensive Plan. As part of this process, the Manistee County Community Foundation and the NWMCOG facilitated *EnVision Manistee County* - a community-wide dialog addressing current and future quality of life issues such as infrastructure, economic development and recreation. In the following year, a companion grass roots project *Vision Bear Lake* was initiated to help the Bear Lake Community consider where conservation and economic development would fit within the county-wide plan. Under this initiative, a Vision Bear Lake Task-Force facilitated a “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) strategic planning workshop with citizens interested in redeveloping downtown Bear Lake.

**Picture 2.1**  
**EnVision Manistee County Meeting**



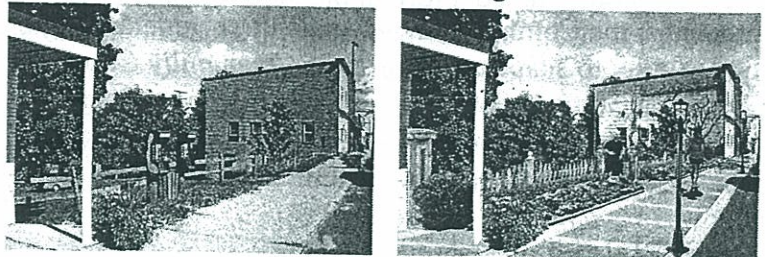
Source: EnVision Manistee Final Report





In 2006 Manistee County initiated *Designs of Envision Manistee County*, a year-long community driven initiative led by the Michigan State University Small Town Design Initiative (STDI). Under the direction of the Michigan State Landscape Architecture Program, the STDI placed students in communities across Manistee County to develop environmental design ideas for downtowns around local issues and opportunities. The Village of Bear Lake participated in this initiative. The full STDI slide presentation can be found in *Appendix C*.

**Pictures 2.2 & 2.3**  
**Bear Lake STDI Images**



Source: Final STDI Report

### **The Bear Lake Community Planning Commission and the Comprehensive Planning Process**

In April 2006, public officials from the Bear Lake Community submitted a proposal (see *Appendix D*) to the *Partnerships for Change Program* seeking assistance to establish a Joint Planning Commission and guide a public planning process that encouraged citizen participation and open dialogue to create a community-wide comprehensive plan unique to the Bear Lake Community. The proposal marked the culmination of several discussions between officials from the three jurisdictions on issues of mutual concern. These issues included population growth, the preservation of the community's natural resources, the expansion of public utilities and the need for further collaboration.

***Partnerships for Change*** is a multi-jurisdictional planning assistance program administered by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), a non-profit community service organization. Program sponsors include the Michigan Municipal League (MML), Michigan Townships Association (MTA), Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) and the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP). The overall mission of the program is to foster new and expanded cooperation between cities, townships and villages in developing and carrying out local land use policies that contribute to the preservation of cultural and natural resources. Wherever possible, these policies encourage urban redevelopment and discourage inefficient, low-density development.

With an agreement firmly in place (see *Appendix E*), LIAA staff members and local officials began working together on the specific parameters and language of an agreement to establish the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission. After several meetings, a formal agreement and ordinance was established and presented to the three jurisdictions for their approval. The formal Agreement and Ordinance (*Appendix F*) were adopted by the Village and the two Townships in November 2006.

**Picture 2.4**  
**Bear Lake Community Planning Commission**



Source: LIAA





With the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission firmly in place, LIAA staff members and the Commission initiated a formal planning process in December 2006. In addition to its regular monthly meetings, the Commission convened three general public participation meetings, giving citizens the opportunity to shape the *Bear Lake Community Comprehensive Plan*. Each meeting was well publicized through advertisements and press releases in the local newspaper and municipal newsletters. In addition, notices were placed in public buildings and flyers were provided to local merchants (see *Appendix G*). The three public participation community meetings are briefly described below.

**Public Meeting: December 18, 2006**

At the project kick-off meeting, LIAA staff members “walked” participants through a description of the planning process. In addition, participants were presented with a brief social and physical profile of the community. Participants then engaged in several activities to help identify the *Vision* of the Community.

First, participants were asked to describe what they loved about the community and what they were most concerned about. Next, participants were asked to develop several “statements” describing their vision for the Bear Lake Community in 25 years. Finally, participants were asked to describe the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats (SWOT) of the Community. These ideas were collected on flip charts and used to help frame the issues of the community and establish a *Vision Statement*. The vision statement is the foundation upon which the goals and objectives are established.

**Pictures 2.5 & 2.6  
December 18, 2006 Public Meeting**



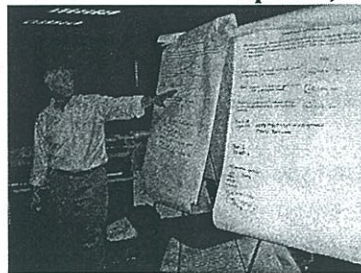
Source: LIAA

**Public Meeting: April 18, 2007**

At the next public meeting, LIAA staff members presented participants the results of a comprehensive land use and land cover update for the entire Bear Lake Community. In addition, participants were presented with the draft Vision Statement and a set of *preliminary* goals and objectives. Participants were then asked to discuss and submit comments and

additions to the goals and objectives at specific topic tables. The comments and suggestions provided during this exercise were discussed by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission and helped to shape the *final* goals and objectives as well as the strategies outlined later in this plan.

**Pictures 2.7 & 2.8  
April 8, 2007 Public Meeting**



Source: LIAA

**Public Official Informational Meeting: May 14, 2007**

This meeting provided an informal opportunity for public officials (e.g. planning commission, township board, village council) and other interested citizens to learn more about the progress of the community planning process and share ideas about the future of the Bear Lake Community.

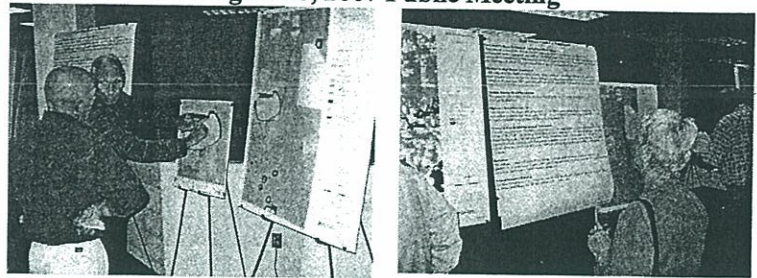




### Public Meeting: August 20, 2007

At the third public meeting, LIAA staff members presented participants with the results of the community-wide survey. In addition, the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission presented participants with a set of *revised* goals, objectives and strategies. Finally, participants were presented with a *working-draft* future land use map. Participants were then asked to discuss and submit comments and additions to the revised goals, objectives, strategies and draft future land use map on boards around the room. Like previous meetings, the comments and suggestions provided during this exercise were discussed by the Bear Lake Community Planning Commission and helped to shape the *final* goals, objectives, strategies and future land use map outlined later in this plan.

Pictures 2.9 & 2.10  
August 20, 2007 Public Meeting



Source: LIAA

### Community Survey

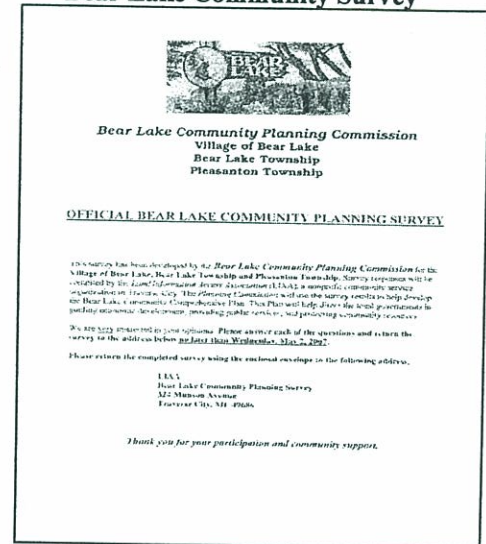
In April 2007, a comprehensive community-wide survey was printed and mailed to every address in the Bear Lake Community postal delivery system. In total, 1,853 surveys were mailed. A total of 394 surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of about 21%. The surveys offer a broad-based and useful sampling of public opinion in the Bear Lake Community. This information was compiled with other citizen input received throughout the planning process, helping to form the basis for this plan's goals and objectives.

A more thorough discussion of the results of these three public meetings and the survey will be discussed in Chapter Seven of this plan.

### Project Website

For the purpose of providing an open, citizen driven planning process, a project website was also established - (<http://www.partnershipsforchange.cc/bearlake>). The website provided direct access to information on meeting dates, important documents, draft chapters of the plan, meeting handouts, interactive maps and a public forum.

Figure 2.4  
Bear Lake Community Survey



Source: LIAA