



CHEBOYGAN COUNTY MASTER PLAN

CHEBOYGAN COUNTY BUILDING ■ 870 S. MAIN STREET, PO BOX 70 ■

CHEBOYGAN, MI 49721

PHONE: (231)627-8485 ■ FAX: (231)627-3646

www.cheboygancounty.net/masterplan/

YOUTH SPECIAL TOPIC

Meeting Date: April 19, 2012

Staff Report

We met with 9 students from the Cheboygan High School. Also in attendance were 4 Planning Commissioners (Stu Bartlett, Steve Churchill, Chuck Freese, Sharon Lyon) and one staff person, Steve Schnell. The students were chosen for the meeting by Dr. Michele Ackerman, principal at the High School. Dr. Ackerman was provided the questions ahead of time but the students were not aware of the questions. Steve Schnell provided a summary of the Master Plan, its purpose, and the importance of youth input for the planning process. The students were mostly from the area around the City of Cheboygan but one was from Mackinaw City.

They were asked what they would like to improve upon in their community in the next 20 years, what would they want future generations of kids their age to experience in their community. Many answers focused on places for kids to socialize safely with other kids their own age. Their suggestions focused mostly on activities that are family-friendly and locations that are near downtown, the river, and the parks.

One student acknowledged that there are some potentially great parks, such as the local skate park, but they are not well-maintained. They liked the downtown but wished there were more activities, more places that attracted other people with more places to “hang out”. They mentioned that places for more special events would be a great benefit to the downtown. At one point, a student mentioned that she would like to have a drive-in movie theater in the downtown for showing movies at nights in the summer.

Problem locations for these students were the city’s beachfront Gordon Turner park and after dark at the County Fair. The students felt that both of these venues attracted the wrong crowd for their age group. At these locations there were often slightly older students who liked to smoke and drink. They also mentioned that the local recreation center had been “taken over” by the adults and hockey practice. They understood that those activities bring in the money but they felt that there was no place for them and their desired activities.

They also suggested that there is a need to get kids more volunteering opportunities and more job opportunities. They want to get involved in the community but don’t know how. Also, they all said there isn’t a problem finding summer jobs but there is a need for more challenging job experience. They would really like to have internships. One student went so far as to say that if the high school had a job counselor to help link students with interesting work experiences, many students would take advantage of this.

They were asked what makes a good place for kids their age. The students pointed to qualities such as having a variety of affordable activities in or near the downtown, parks and schools. The

events that they enjoy the most are those water-based events and outdoor activities such as the Rusty Stud snowmobile race. They were also very glad to know that the Boosters Ball was being opened to kids.

A couple of students often mentioned the City of Charlevoix as a good example of providing family and kid-friendly activities. They mentioned all the events they have in the downtown with bands, activities and shops. They mentioned Mt. McSauba in Charlevoix as a great place for kids all year round. It is a small city-owned hill for skiing, sledding, disc golf and many other activities.

They were asked to use one word to describe their community. The words they suggested were *welcoming*, *supportive*, *know-everything* (everyone knows what you're doing, both good and bad), and *boring*.

All students in the meeting were chosen from the best and brightest and all wanted to go to college and didn't plan on coming back. They said they would like to come back but do not imagine they would have any job opportunities in Cheboygan in their field of choice. Two stated they would like to be in the arts (music and art) but that those programs were being cut at the schools. Another student wanted to be an engineer but didn't imagine those jobs to be here. Another student wanting to be a welder but would probably go to Ferris and not come back.

Their favorite classes were welding, the Drift Inn work experience, and band. They would very much enjoy taking more business classes that let them take risks and experiment with their small business ideas.

Summary

There clearly were not enough opportunities in this community to challenge the students who participated in this meeting. They wanted more recreational programs and more small business work experiences. The outdoor experiences are plentiful in this area but the organized programs that get kids jumpstarted in sports and activities that use these recreational areas are lacking.

Reflecting on this meeting with those planning commissioners who attended, it was stated that the youth of the community are the biggest asset that we have. It was suggested that if more recreational programs were offered to youth this would also benefit the older population and the whole community. Placemaking efforts would support the creation of places that were described by these students.

Reality is that it is tough to find volunteers to organize the programs for youth but that it is essential to the community to keep them active, involved, and challenged so that they find a way to return.

It was also suggested that the Planning Commission reach out to other communities that involve their youth to learn more. Wolverine and their leaders were suggested as good examples to learn from.