

# Open House Results

## Village of Empire 2025 Master Plan Update

### Introduction

The Village hosted two open houses on August 1 and 29, at St. Neri Phillip Church and Township Hall, respectively.

The first open house (August 1) focused on high level aspects of the Master Plan, including feedback related to values and vision, experiences, existing land uses, and mobility and connectivity in the Village. Approximately 60 people attended. Local stakeholders, including Housing North, the Sleeping Bear Gateways Council, National Park Service, local businesses and community groups were encouraged to attend. Attendees enjoyed delicious chocolate chip cookies generously donated by local chocolatier Grocer's Daughter.

The second open house (August 29) offered a deeper analysis of these same topics and others, including a revised vision and guiding principles, specific development opportunities in the Village, missing land uses, and trail and street mobility improvements. Approximately 30 people attended.

This report summarizes the open house feedback into major themes and includes comments provided at both open houses verbatim. The report concludes with recommendations for the Village to consider, based on the open house results.

### August 1, 2024 Open House

The first open house focused on high level aspects of the Master Plan, including feedback related to values and vision, experiences, existing land uses, and mobility and connectivity in the Village. Approximately 60 people attended.

#### Values & Vision

Most participants felt that the current vision statement of the Village accurately represents their vision for Empire. It reads:

*The Village of Empire provides and preserves a quality of life for a diverse group of residents and businesses that reflects the Village's unique natural environment and small village atmosphere, while reflecting past history and our small village values, and to create a Village that is economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable.*

## Appendix B

Participants were then asked how they see Empire today versus how they'd like Empire to be in the future. The statements below attempt to summarize the various feedback received.

**Empire Today Summary:** A beautiful place without a clear vision for the future.

**Empire Tomorrow Summary:** A beautiful place with managed and thoughtful growth so that all may enjoy Empire's high quality of life, natural resources, and vibrant small community feel.

Poster sticky note comments:

### How do you see Empire today?

- Unaffordable for working families
- Too many boomers stuck in the past
- Unsure of where it is going
- a fragile treasure!
- We need a grocery store affordable! By no means should Empire become another Glen Arbor
- Welcoming, genuine, lovely but a bit stagnant
- At risk of becoming a seasonal "hotel" along with a retirement center for retirees. We need ore young families and provide attainable housing for them
- At a crossroads...do we move forward and thrive? Or do we allow small minded people to scare people into thinking their taxes will go up because this is happening.
- Bi Polar - group likes quiet, quaint, natural, ok with limited convenience.- group more focused on convenience. Service w/o consideration of expense
- Stuck in the past
- Lovely small town w/ many hands helping others
- Effort to slow short term rentals and get long term permanent residence
- The village hasn't progressed due to council bickering. We could have so much more - retail -restaurants, grocery. But nothing gets done. Looking at the household medium, we all could afford to pay more taxes to make this happen. Council needs to get along.
- Small
- So much potential
- Friendly, small, local, seasonal (somewhat)
- A beautiful village with caring people but struggling on how to move into the future. Fear of becoming a Glen Arbor or fear of higher taxes has frozen the VC and residents (the old guard) from taking actions that would benefit younger families and businesses that want to live and thrive here.
- Stuck - NOT MOVING - due to such difference of opinions - need to bring people of different viewpoints together

### How do you want to see Empire in the future?

- Waste water system so we can have some growth. Not huge growth - can't happen anyway - protected by parks.
- Township is constrained in maintaining itself by lack of waste system.
- Affordable
- Keep Empire environmentally strong water quality, beaches, noise, no jet skis! Impressed with to \_\_\_\_\_ with present council.
- Grocery store + other quality of life amenities like additional food and beverage options
- Would love to see more communal spaces - community center, grocery store, child care facility. I envision a future that is resilient.
- More full time residents that work & if some are families w/ kids even better.
- Waste water system
- Waste water system!! Nothing else happens until we get this!!
- Install municipal wastewater system, regulate STRs, hire different clerk
- Preserve current natural spaces and allot a percentage of new development to natural greenspace
- Full grocery, better connection (off-street) to the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail
- "Multi-generational" diverse community that provides housing & services for all income levels
- More collaboration and partnerships between local government agencies (village, township, chamber, etc.) to support and encourage local businesses
- Municipal sewer
- Grocery store , sewer system, affordable housing
- Grocery store, public garden, improved "main" street
- Keep small-town philosophy accept + embrace Empire being Empire (thoughtful, well considered growth)
- Dark sky friendly
- With a sewer grocery store and more attainable housing
- Preserve natural spaces and quietness (13 yr old seasonal resident)
- Please consider sewers, septic system, banning dry septic systems that leech into South Bar
- Encouraging of Life! A place where Empire's young life-long residents can put down roots & thrive - where small families & small businesses can survive & thrive. Where events & community connection is encouraged & supported. Too often have we seen difficulties placed on businesses and life-bringing events that discourage the expansion of joy. However this village can't survive w/o it. (families, young people, biz, events)
- Grocery store
- Everything! Quiet
- More full-time residents with children

## Appendix B

- More affordable housing and living for young families, grocery store, more vibrant, walkable shop community
- Would like to support more sustainable business development while maintain small village feel
- Dark sky - the village is too bright at night!
- Let's attract young people & families - emphasize great schools, great place to live - safe!
- Keep small town/village character, preserve natural spaces, grocery store (small), dark skies
- Quiet
- Develop specifics to reach vision
- Viable retail i.e. grocery store and the courage to do what it takes to get us there
- Grocery store
- A brewery
- Waste water, an inviting vibrant Front Street w/ no empty buildings
- Limited STRs
- More innovative, welcome to new businesses + jobs, open to the seasonal aspect that allows for tourism
- Keep the community civil - and accepting of others views, stop pushing agendas not needed...wastewater in whole village, too small for full grocery, no one shops it but tourist
- Respect our heritage but let's move Empire into the future with innovative thinking and incentives to bring in new business and younger population (leverage our natural assets)
- We need a viable commercial community which includes a sewer/septic system that can sustain a grocery store and more commercial venues.
- Wastewater system

## Existing Land Use

### Master Plan Update: Existing Land Use

What Land Uses Are Missing? (Place a dot under what types of uses you'd like to see more of)

**Existing Land Use Village of Empire**

**Future Land Use Village of Empire**

**Key Elements**

- Majority residential land use, with scattered commercial in between.
- Central core of commercial on MI-22
- Surrounded by parks and preserve areas.

**Other Considerations**

- Focus on mixed-use along Front
- Central core of commercial on MI-22
- Preserving neighborhood patterns

**Residential Building Types**

- Single-Family Homes, Detached Dwellings
- Small Lot Home, Detached or Cluster Housing

**Commercial Uses**

- Neighborhood Retail
- Office, Co-Lab Office, etc.

**Industrial Uses**

- Agriculture (Photo courtesy: Barclay Gibson 2007)
- Flex Building

**Other Uses to Consider?**

**Urban Residential Building Types**

- Townhomes, Attached Dwellings
- Multi-Family Buildings

Community Questionnaire

Place Strategies Building Community Together

PLACECRAFT

VILLAGE OF EMPIRE

Participants were asked to place a sticky dot next to the land uses they feel are missing in the Village of Empire currently. By order of highest to lowest votes, these are:

- Neighborhood retail (39 votes)
- Small lot home, detached or cluster housing (23 votes)
- Townhomes, attached dwellings (15 votes)
- Flex Buildings (12 votes)
- Office (12 votes)
- Single-family homes, detached dwellings (9 votes)
- Multi-family dwellings (5 votes)
- Agriculture (3 votes)

Other comments included wastewater treatment, community center, co-op housing, accessory dwelling units, mixed-use, industrial park, skate park, and school or childcare uses.

Poster sticky note comments:

- Central waste water treatment for Village Core/Front Street, at the very minimum
- Could the village consider purchasing the \_\_\_\_\_ (Elise note-can't read this word) property (barn on lake street) with parking lot? It could be developed into a multi-

## Appendix B

use building/commercial/office or? Also, what about purchasing the former high school for similar purpose?

- Commerce Park/Industrial Park
- Sunset Ottawa crescent are year-round and part year owner residents - not multiown
- A skate park! For Empire's youth can connect & build community. A super-fun, safe, and supportive place for kids (young and old) to thrive!!
- Consider traffic patterns - protect residential areas.
- Additional school or childcare options.\*
- Reduce minimum lot sizes. Add flexibility to minimum parking requirements
- Regular /convenient bus service to/from surrounding towns, including Traverse City & TVC airport
- Community center
- Love the library as a community space! Make small co-op housing with shared yard space! Neighborhood retail - specifically a grocer option!
- ADUs Accessory Dwelling Units
- Multi-family housing would be more affordable, right?
- Don't let commercial sprawl down M-22; keep village center in the VILLAGE; promote mix businesses/residential down Front Street
- Allow mixed-use buildings on Front St - live work - residential over retail - legalize housing in all commercial zones

### Mobility & Connectivity

Participants were asked to consider the existing streets and parking plan and non-motorized trail plans for the Village of Empire and note improvements to these plans. Feedback for both plans is summarized below.

**Existing Streets and Parking Plan Comment Summary :** Slow vehicle traffic, improve crosswalk signals/signage/stripping, maintain sidewalks in winter, ensure street parking does not impact visibility for drivers and pedestrians.

**Existing Non-Motorized Trail Plan Comment Summary :** Add bike path along LaCore, improve trail parking signage, improve nighttime lighting to protect dark skies, extend bike trail into Village core and to the beach, maintain existing sidewalks.

Poster sticky note comments:

#### Existing Streets and Parking Plan

- Can we connect Shalda Park w/ Chippewa run trail over the creek? Build a bridge so the watershed isn't affected?
- Focus on keeping village walkable; vehicle parking away from Village center - maybe more on M-22 stretch
- Round about especially @ town Hall or yield sign @ crosswalk

## Appendix B

- Improve the \_\_\_\_ of signage (welcome to Empire/directions to beach, park, etc.) + new street signs that are distinct for Village
- Improve Front St and do we need parking on both sides of street? Could there be a median with trees/\_\_\_\_?
- Village sidewalk need maintained in the winter. Snow removal for winter walkers. Add bike lanes on each side of LaCore connecting to trail from Empire.
- Village needs a municipal paid (?) parking lot in vicinity of local businesses.
- Reduce speed in residential areas.
- Residential streets too narrow for parking on both sides and volume of traffic. Cars parking too close to corners impairing visibility of oncoming crossing traffic.
- Multiple designated, safe pedestrian crossings along M-22 corridor. Place traffic-slowing elements along M-22 corridor. And plant keystone trees (oaks, maples) on both sides of M-22 corridor for beauty in the years to come \*
- Slow traffic in residential areas.

### Existing Non-Motorized Trail Plan

- Oh the joy of walking Empire's (sometimes) sleepy streets under the stars (DARK SKIES ARE SO SPECIAL!). Keeping Empire walkable should be of utmost importance and ensuring that a sweet street meander or bike ride is possible by encouraging SLOW TRAFFIC through residential areas <3
- Bike path along LaCore
- Connect sidewalk from Michigan Street an M-22 South to S. LaCore/Wood St; Improve existing sidewalks \*
- Improve street lighting by getting rid of the overhang lights and replace with post lights that preserve the night sky!
- Designated bikeway along LaCore between Front Street and the Heritage Trail. Walking path/widened apron for pedestrians/bikers heading up to Empire Bluffs Trail.
- Constantly helping tourists find bike trail. How about parking lot near Village DPW with signage.
- Need a road at Fisher to go straight thru to M22 (Fisher connect to M22). Too many commercial trucks to Cherry Republic on LACORE!! w/bikers
- Use the \_\_\_\_ parking lot for \_\_\_\_ parking (paid?)
- More trail /bike accessibility to the beach front
- Find other solutions to street lighting - the LED replacements are so bright and shine directly in our windows
- Extend bike trail into Village core/beach
- Sidewalks on more village roads.
- Bike trail extended into Village.
- Let's start w/ fixing/maintaining our existing sidewalks. Adding more will require more maintenance (especially in winter months)
- Extend sidewalk south on LaCore all the way to Washington

## Appendix B

- Keep trees trimmed so all sidewalks are easily walkable

### Experience Areas

Participants were asked to consider proposed “experience areas” within the Village of Empire, which are meant to describe the different experiences a person could have in different parts of the Village.

Generally, these proposed areas did not jive with participants’ experiences in the Village. Most comments either disputed the areas or questioned their purpose and recommended that if the Village pursued this framework further, the Village should consider names rooted in the Village’s history.

Poster sticky note comments:

- For the most part, these names/designations are unknown to residents, so I wonder at their effectiveness/purpose
- Why??
- What is the purpose of these names?
- I like the idea of incorporating history in the names of the areas - or topography or agriculture/plants.
- Gateways to what? I agree. The names Eastside Gateway, Southside Gateway sets us apart. We are members of Empire.
- Are there historical roots for the current names? Could they be changed to reflect the history of the village?
- Eastside gateway shouldn't be called that. We aren't a "gateway" to anything - These are our homes. TC is east. We are Empire.
- Gateway Corridor should Extend South on M22 and East on M72. Don't like Eastside/Southside Gateway names.
- Southside Gateway is misnomer. Should be Orchards. The Northern most point should be Northside Gateway!



## August 29, 2024 Open House

The second open house offered a deeper analysis of the same topics explored in the first open house and questionnaire, including a revised vision and guiding principles, specific development opportunities in the Village, missing land uses, and trail and street mobility improvements. Approximately 30 people attended.

## Economic Development Goals

### Master Plan Update: Economic Development Goals

*What topic related to economic prosperity is most important for the Village of Empire?*  
Place a colored dot next to the development topic that you believe is most important for consideration

Expand / increase the quality of existing retail ● ● ●

Increase dining options (sit-down restaurants) ● ●

Attract additional entertainment uses

Increase housing options in the Village (price or type) ● ● ●

Increase trail and walkability connections

Increase programmed community events

Improve or enhance recreation options

Increase tourism activity

Provide wastewater system (public or private) ● ●

Support and promote home-based or co-working business ●

*How would you merchandise commercial uses in the Village?*  
Place the colored dot with corresponding uses in the locations you believe is appropriate for that commercial use.

Participants were asked to identify the development topic most important for the Village of Empire. The highest voted topics were:

- Expand/increase the quality of existing retail
- Increase housing options in the Village (price or type)
- Provide wastewater system (public or private)
- Increase dining options (sit-down restaurants)
- Support and promote home-based or coworking businesses

Poster sticky note comments:

- Short term rentals - too many
- Keep historic homes as residential on front street. Do not need wastewater system for that.

## Appendix B

- Development of front street properties assumes a community wastewater system!
- Where is commercial waste water system field going to be located to support new businesses?
- Art galleries & boutiques
- Child care (day) and elder care (day)
- Home goods for repair maintenance - Hardware
- Frozen foods outlet
- Remote worker spaces
- Vet's office

## Catalytic Area Developments

Participants were shown three development scenarios in three key locations in the Village: the former hardware store, housing development options (no specific site in mind), and the new village office area.



The proposed developments generated discussion at each poster station but there was not a lot of written comment provided. Generally, participants considered the “conservation subdivision” housing development, with preserved natural areas, smaller homes, central parking, and wastewater system, as a better fit than the “traditional subdivision”.

Poster sticky note comments:

- Where is item E located (note: E = conservation subdivision)? How much area does it take?
- Great concept for vacant land.
- Like the look of new homes vs. old village look
- Seems like a lot of homes on a small area (conservation subdivision)
- Public Works + Village Office Area
- Not in favor of C (note: C = wayfinding example) - looks a bit much for size of our Village.

Mobility & Connectivity

### Master Plan Update: Mobility + Connectivity

#### New Streets and Parking Plan Recommendations

**Key Elements**

- Stitching the roadway grid together in key locations
- Primary crossings along M-22
- Centralized public parking areas around Front St.

#### New Non-Motorized Trail Plan Recommendations

**Key Elements**

- Sidewalks primarily within the central core
- Sidewalk connections to key attractions
- Minimal connections off of the highway system outside of the central core of the Village

What other improvements should be considered?

- Focus on keeping the Village walkable
- Improve the Village entry signage and wayfinding
- Improve Front Street with landscaping
- Snow removal from sidewalks in winter
- Provide public paid parking (shared parking lot) in vicinity of local businesses
- Control traffic from cutting through residential neighborhoods
- Provide safe pedestrian crossing along M-22 in the commercial corridor
- Connect Fisher to M-22

What other improvements should be considered?

- Provide a bike path along LaCore
- Connect sidewalk from Michigan Street at M-22 to LaCore at Wood St
- Improve lighting with full-cutoff fixtures to support dark skies
- Trailhead parking for bike trail routes
- Increase and improve bike/trail connectivity to the beach
- Provide more sidewalks on Village streets and repair existing sidewalks
- Enforce landscaping maintenance to keep sidewalks clear

Based on the feedback from the first open house, participants at the second open house reviewed a series of improvement options to the streets and parking plan and non-motorized trail plan.

Participants did not leave any feedback on the proposed recommendations but did offer general comments and questions, namely about the need for maintenance of any improvements, and need for additional crosswalks and bike paths.

Poster sticky note comments:

- Encourage home maintenance - front st (and more eyesores)
- 1. Absolutely; 2. yes; 3 yes 4. yes but where 5. yes! 6. yes 7. not important
- Signage delineating public vs private beach
- More bike paths - especially along LaCore to the beach
- If you enforce landscaping to keep sidewalks clear, will that mean keeping the road ROW free as well?
- Village has enough sidewalks no need for more
- Don't add to Heritage Trail concrete and tree marsh removal
- Do not need to increase or improve a bike path to the beach!
- Too many crosswalks!! Too Glen Arbor
- Need more pedestrian crosswalks along M22



## Appendix B

- I'm sure visitors and resident alike who appreciate a comfortable, accessible public restroom
- All good ideas but who pays for Fisher connection?

## Housing Options

### Master Plan Update: Housing Options in Empire

Which housing types are appropriate for various families in Empire? Place a dot in the various squares



Participants were asked to consider a variety of housing types and match them with the audience they feel is well suited for each type. Results are shown above.

## Recommendations

Based on the open house responses, below are a series of recommendations for the Village of Empire to consider in the Master Plan update. These are draft recommendations, and could be modified based on other key inputs such as community data, previous and current studies, planning best practices, Village capacity, local and regional context, and other forms of public input (questionnaire, meeting comments, etc.).

- **Preserve Small-Town Character by Focusing on Thoughtful Growth.** Update zoning and land-use policies to control the scale and type of development, ensuring it aligns with the village's character. Secure land for critical infrastructure, like a future wastewater system.
- **Develop a Plan for Local Amenities:** Support the establishment of a small, independent grocery store in the village by exploring Village-controlled incentives, partnerships with other agencies, or community-supported models.
- **Enhance Infrastructure and Public Safety:** Install or improve sidewalks and crosswalks, particularly in high-traffic areas, and reevaluate traffic patterns, especially near the post office.
- **Address Environmental and Aesthetic Concerns: Develop** and enforce policies to manage blighted structures and promote environmentally friendly practices, such as dark-sky lighting and native plantings.
- **Foster Community Engagement:** Continue holding regular community meetings and events, and develop volunteer-driven initiatives that involve residents in beautification and community-building projects.