



# Grobbel Environmental & Planning Associates

PO Box 58 Lake Leelanau Michigan 49653

October 18, 2018

Wexford Joint Planning Commission  
c/o Cherry Grove Township  
4830 E. M-55 Highway  
Cadillac, MI 49601

**RE: Public input Session Results - Master Plan Update**

Dear Wexford Joint Planning Commission,

Please find the attached results from four (4) public input sessions held on behalf of the WJPC throughout Wexford County from August 24, 2018 to September 12, 2018. As you will see, some common themes emerged from these facilitated public input sessions including:

- the importance of forest lands and water quality to the economic future of the area;
- open space, large parcel sizes, and peace and quiet are highly valued;
- the Amish community is highly valued in terms of contributions to region, and their greater involvement with local government is sought;
- existing zoning is too complex, too restrictive, and needs to be simplified, increase flexibility, and tailor it to differences between Townships;
- the master plan is too complex and too lengthy;
- property taxes are too high, need more intergovernmental cooperation and sharing of resources;
- currently there is a lack of accountability and civility in the public spaces;
- the need to address blight conditions on properties within the WJPC's jurisdiction; etc.

This input is valued and very useful in guiding the WJPC toward next steps in the process of updating the existing Master Plan. However, the number of participants in the input sessions was relatively small, i.e., thirty-six (36) public participants, with a half dozen or so folks attending and speaking at every or nearly every session. Consequently, it recommended that the WJPC consider undertaking additional public outreach efforts, such as a carefully crafted on-line public opinion survey to further inform updating the Master Plan.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [cgrobbel@grobbelenvironmental.com](mailto:cgrobbel@grobbelenvironmental.com) or 231-499-7165. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Grobbel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Christopher P. Grobbel, Ph.D.  
Sr. Planner

## Wexford Joint Planning Commission Public Input Session #1 - NE Wexford County

### Colfax Township Hall, (member Townships Liberty and Greenwood Townships) Master Plan Update 2018

August 24, 2018

*Questions/responses:*

*(#) = number of votes that each of the #15 participants had #3 votes to cast as desired for items they considered "most important."*

#### 1. **What are the best things to be found in NE Wexford County (e.g., Greenwood and Liberty Townships)?**

- National forest with trails, wilderness, and water resources (i.e., creeks, streams, lakes, etc.) - brings visitor and their dollars. (1)
- Open space - we have room without encroachment, private; privacy and individual freedom. (2)
- Can possess animals without limits
- Generally few regulations, e.g., no zoning in Colfax Township (8).
- Less traffic, though getting busier.
- Peace and quiet - very important.
- lack of housing density, i.e., spread out with large lots grants us privacy - needs to be kept in zoning, i.e., zoning should not be too restrictive (1)
- Wildlife (+/-) brings opportunities for hunting, fishing, education, and shapes lifestyles, e.g., Manistee River corridor but Pine River zoning is too restrictive.

#### 2. **What are the challenges that face NE Wexford County (e.g., Greenwood and Liberty Townships)?**

- Zoning, rules, ordinances, regulations - too many, too restrictive.
- Selma Township property taxes are too high. (2)
- Passing along large properties to heirs, logging revenues cant keep up with property taxes.
- Zoning - e.g., front yard restrictions, setbacks are too restrictive. (2)
- Maintain private open space - keep larger lots.
- Development along waterways needs to be controlled.
- Much of land is federally-owned, other areas are state-owned so tax exempt.
- Government is too big, and in many communities government lacks accountability (1)
- Traffic - too fast, not fast enough
- All terrain vehicles (ATVs) on public roads are causing too much road damage (2).
- Bicyclists are causing conflict on public roads, i.e., "are in the way."

3. **What opportunities exist to improve & maintain NE Wexford County (e.g., Greenwood and Liberty Townships)?**

- Open, do not close federal and state forest roads to ATVs, (e.g., US Forest Service is closing roads to motorized vehicles, snowmobiles, etc.). (1)
- No zoning in Colfax Township is good.
- If zoning is to be kept, it needs to be simplified and streamlined. (9)
- Master Plan needs to be based on meaningful public input through lots of outreach and public input. (1)
- Amish community in NE Wexford County bring diversity, unique community character, and dollars to the areas (i.e., furniture, foods/farms, tourism).
- Amish could be encouraged to coordinate with and utilize local services.
- Agricultural retail and agricultural enterprises.
- Home occupations and cottage industry - should look at zoning and revise if too restrictive. (2)
- Short term rentals (with or without absentee owners) - should be examined in zoning and revised if too restrictive (1)
- Ag businesses, e.g., cheese-making, need more freedom, fewer regulations/restrictions. (1)
- Need to conserve natural resources and protect water quality for future and future users. (4)
- Tourism - e.g., agricultural, river fishing, camping, canoeing (we have plenty of blue waters and skis, and trees).

4. **What could/should NE Wexford County (e.g., Greenwood and Liberty Townships) look like in 2038?**

- Keep it the same, but balance it with increased economic opportunities . (3)
- Must be more opportunity for growth.
- Tip of the hat to the Amish, especially in Colfax Township.
- Right to farm must fit well with local zoning/regulations.
- Do not add more regulations, and get rid of the regulations that are not working (3).
- Must be more diversity and civility - how do we all get along? (1)
- History repeats, must not enact regulations that limit or prohibit/prevent innovation.
- Local taxes are out of control, local government is inefficient
- Less property taxes are needed.
- Fewer unfunded state and federal mandates are also needed.

## **Wexford Joint Planning Commission Public Input Session #2 - NW Wexford County**

**Wexford Road Commission Office, (member Townships Antioch, Springville, Wexford and Hanover Townships)**

### **Master Plan Update 2018**

September 5, 2018

#### *Questions/responses:*

*(#) = number of votes that each of the #8 participants had #6 votes to cast as desired for "most important."*

#### **1. What is the single biggest change you have seen in the nation/US culture in the past 15 years (positive or negative)?**

- Lack of civility in public, and increased social polarization.
- Movement to electronic-based economy and social media.
- Growth of too much regulation - especially state and federal regulation.
- Infrastructure has collapsed. (1)
- Population growth, and the aging of the population. (1)
- Importance of the Internet and wide-spread use of smart phones. (2)
- Changing availability of communication technologies; access issues exist, especially to high speed internet, in the parts of Wexford County. (1)
- Lack of personal service, or good service at all from companies, corporations and organizations.
- Lack of accountability.
- Internet is good, but laughed Amazon which is changing economy, workplace/wages, and challenging locally-owned retail.
- On-line shopping has changed the parcel delivery industry, UPS, US Postal Service, etc.
- WexExpress is good, bus lines are good, its been improved with new a dispatch system, smaller buses and a move to an on demand system. (1)

#### **2. How have these national trends/changes effected Wexford County (positively or negatively)?**

- More Amish have come to Wexford County, especially the northern tier Townships (Greenwood, Liberty, Colfax and Cedar Creek).
- Too much regulation.
- Voluntary Fire Departments are struggling due to regulations and economics, e.g., 2 years of training required of fire fighters has cased problems keeping fire fighters. (3)
- Wexford County Road Commission is struggling due to revenues and many road improvements are needed. (1)
- Local government is collecting and spending too many tax dollars. (5)
- Should consolidate to four (4) shared township halls county-wide. (1)
- WJPC should share resources, e.g., buildings, etc. especially given state and federal regulatory mandates.
- Road Commission budget is suffering too many MDEQ regulations, has increased their costs.

- Technology changes have resulted in increased economic and physical mobility, but decreased road safety, e.g., texting while driving.
- Social media has changed the community, positively and negatively.
- Medical marijuana now legal, recreational marijuana legalization will be on the ballot soon. (1)

**3. What is the single greatest change you have seen in Wexford County Township in the past 15 years?**

- Wexford County zoning ordinance and master plan are terrible and old, i.e., from 2004.
- Zoning is too complex.
  - Need to simplify both, e.g., several similar districts. (5)
  - Need different levels and types of zoning in different Townships.
  - Too many zoning districts/classifications. (3)
  - Zoning and Master Plan Future Land Use Maps need to have different cross hatch patterns, not colors. Problematic for copying, printing and the color blind. (1)
  - Minimum lot sizes, parcel sizes need to be revised in the zoning ordinance. (4)
  - Need to revise Agricultural District density, minimum lot size, parcel size.
  - Zoning ordinance needs more flexibility, diversity to reflect differences between Townships.
  - Ag businesses, ag retail, small farms, specialty farms need to be supported not inhibited in planning and zoning.
- Keep Wexford Wexford! (1)
- Local not outside expertise and local landowners need to inform and direct Master Plan update and zoning revisions/updates. (1)
- Many, many zoning districts reduce flexibility of outcomes. (4)

**4. What should the WJPC do to address these changes/trends?**

- Address medical marijuana, microbreweries, wineries, distilleries, etc. are on the rise - who knows what's next?
- Address population that has shifted toward seasonal residents and retirees.
- Address development pressure from Traverse City. (2).
- Deregulate. (3)
- Create more flexibility in regulations. (5)
- Need far more permitted uses, fewer special land uses in zoning. (9)
- Remember zoning purposes are limited, e.g., protect property values and prevent nuisances.
- Allow new land uses and redevelopment opportunities at Boon Crossings. (1)
- Address blight and dilapidated properties. (10)

## **Wexford Joint Planning Commission Public Input Session #3 - SE Wexford County**

### **Cherry Grove Township Hall, (member Townships Selma and Cherry Grove Townships)**

September 8, 2018

#### *Questions/responses:*

*(#) = number of votes that each of the #6 participants had #6 votes to cast as desired for "most important."*

#### **1. What are the strengths that exist within Wexford County?**

- National forests with trails (i.e., snowmobile, cross country skiing, hiking, etc.), and camping (3)
- Three (3) distinct seasons create economic opportunities - e.g., festivals spread out through the year such as Back to Bricks, Buckley Old Engine, Mesick Mushroom, Jeep Blessing, Hoxeyville, County Fair, etc.
- Hunting and fishing year-round.
- Year-round resorts, e.g., Caberfae and Coyote Crossing, need more such year-round resorts.
- Possess all-sports lakes, e.g., Lake Mitchell (also with sewer and USFS campground).
- Rural character with large parcels, less traffic. (2)
- Agriculture - fresh air.
- Peace and quiet. (1)
- Amish are here, especially in the northern part of the county - good neighbors, generate revenues, provide services, built furniture, produce food, construction services, crafts, but little involvement is local government and traffic compatibility issues exist. (2)
- Possess manufacturing, esp. in Cadillac and Mesick (e.g., boats, military goods, molds, etc for the auto industry). Provide good jobs, good pay, and need to retain.
- Railroad service remains in the County - important for industry and color tours.
- Opportunities to expand rails to trails.
- Have day camps, e.g., church camps.

#### **2. What weaknesses exist in Wexford County?**

- National forest does not contribute to the local tax base and is a large percentage of the land base in the County, becoming increasingly less accessible by USFS closing areas. (4)
- Inability for local governmental cooperation due to special interests, competition for resources, jealousy, no communication, e.g., fire fighting services, DDAs.
- Leading in diseases such as Lou Gehrig's disease.
- Contamination legacy from former industries., e.g., Northern Aire, Plating, Mitchell Corp., Wexford County Landfill, etc.
- Not much historic preservation being done, e.g., the octagonal barn.
- Poor lake water quality due to past logging practices/history, erosion along the Manistee River.
- Increased development and agriculture causing runoff of polluted waters.
- Only a few public sanitary sewer systems in the County.
- Lack of public participation in local government.
- Lack of public faith in local government.

- Good local governance is needed.
- Reliable and affordable internet is not widely available.

**3. What opportunities exist for the the WJPC in Wexford County?**

- Education and outreach to the public. (2)
- Increased household income. (2)
- More affordable housing, less permitting fees. (1)
- Local groceries, Walmart etc needs some competition, e.g., Boon Grocery.
- Better utilities and infrastructure should be developed over time.
- Amazons of the world should be granted tax incentives for locating facilities.
- Revise Ag District/Rural; Residential District in the zoning ordinance.
- Home-based businesses must be allowed and should be expanded and directed toward existing infrastructure. (3)
- Expand college/university offerings - e.g., competition is needed for or alternatively strengthen Baker College offerings in the area.
- Define within each 11 participating WJPC Townships an vision for the future and update it each 3 years.
- Work more closely and better with and between local governments.

**4. What threats exist before the WJPC and/or Wexford County in the next 20 years?**

- Increasing taxes. (5)
- Loss of personal freedom.
- Loss of local governmental control. (1)
- Loss of youth segment of the population, especially 30-somethings. (1)
- Loss of physicians, medical services in the County.
- Lack of intergovernmental coordination.
- Further loss of manufacturing and its jobs in the County, dues to automation and changing technologies such as artificial intelligence. (Changing technology is also an opportunity ... for some).
- Education is key!
- Changes are inevitable, need to maintain regulatory flexibility.
- Threats to water quality. (2)
- Increased crime, especially drug-related crime. (3).



## **Wexford Joint Planning Commission Public Input Session #4 - SW Wexford County**

### **Harrietta Village Office, (member Townships Slagle, boon and South Branch Townships)**

September 12, 2018

#### *Questions/responses:*

*(#) = number of votes that each of the #7 participants had #6 votes to cast as desired for "most important."*

#### **1. If I were King/Queen of Wexford County, I would be sure to do...**

- Put in place a point of sale septic ordinance.
- Pave "my road." (2)
- Address safety issues at the Boon Rd & M-115 highway intersection. (1)
- Improve access to high speed internet in the County.
- Enact noise and light pollution regulations - keep the peace and quiet. (5)
- Address blighted properties through-out the County. (4)
- Cooperate with public transportation projects, e.g., high speed rail, to downstate destinations. (2)
- Work with state offices to decrease concentrations of sex offenders in the Village of Harrietta. (4)
- Traffic enforcement is needed - work with the County sheriff. (1)
- Support local newspaper(s). (1)
- Address ubiquity of drugs and alcohol in the community. (4)
- Mandate public participation in all levels of local government.
- Fill the rails to trails gap, i.e., Cadillac to Midland, Yuma (gap) to Benzie. (2)
- Discourage bicycle tours on rural roads, due to public safety direct them to rails to trails.
- Support national forest trails and Caberfae. (1)
- Correct Forest Service's heavy-handedness, make them pay property taxes.
- Make natural gas available to rural areas of the County.

#### **2. If I were King/Queen of Wexford County, I would be sure not to...**

- Allow bicycles to interfere with motorized traffic.
- Impose water meters private water well supply systems.
- Fail to train local governmental officials.
- Discourage affordable housing through zoning fees and regulations.
- Set minimum home floor sizes in zoning, but do allow tiny homes and tiny home communities in zoning. (1)
- Allow Lake Mitchell and Lake Cadillac properties to become unaffordable, but would prevent congestion, direct taxes to cleanup for water quality and explore a waterfront overlay district in zoning.
- Require homogeneity in zoning districts, but allow flexibility in zoning.
- Fail to address short-term rentals. (2)
- Fail to enact appropriate regulations for wind electric generator systems.
- Take away or limit hunting and fishing rights. (1)

**3. What is the most important thing for the WJPC to do now and over the next 20 years?**

- Address blighted properties. (6)
- Better define 9-1-1 emergency service issues, and service-sharing with Gaylord or fail to invest in 9-1-1- upgrades. (2)
- Do a 5 year master Plan update, not a 20 year plan. (4)
- Address solar electric generation systems in zoning. (2)