

April 25, 2024 Steering Committee Activity Center Discussion

As part of the Activity Center Steering Committee's meeting, a general discussion took place regarding the Township's Activity Centers. Discussion was led off when the Steering Committee members were asked what makes the three areas unique, historical or special to the residents and Township. Over the course of nearly an hour of discussion, many comments were provided with the following representing a summary of key points.

Preservation of the rural character and natural environment were identified as main contributors for a desire to have planning and development that compliments the existing feel and avoid becoming similar to some surrounding Townships. A tree ordinance, zoning that promotes, and restrictions on lighting and signage to promote dark skies were mentioned as possible methods to retain the rural character. Some felt that development policies should be consistent across the Township with clear standards for signage, dark skies, trees, screening and more.

Traffic and safety all along Long Lake Road was a top concern, with excessive speeds and general congestion being mentioned. Safe pedestrian and bicycle access were also discussed to increase walkability and connections. When the Township is examining planning and development, members identified considerations such as existing businesses and residential neighborhoods. It was also brought up that there is a lack of water and sewer availability. Improved communication between the Township and residents regarding development plans and allowed uses in the Activity Centers was asked for.

The North Activity Center was primarily viewed as the most established and likeliest area for a community hub and increased connections between businesses, public assets, and neighborhoods. Many expressed opposition to more development of the Hamlet Center, with a desire to preserve its character and existing businesses. The West Activity Center was noted as having a residential feel with businesses fitting in well. Other comments included consideration of the M-72 Commercial area, community beautification, supporting increased agritourism opportunities for local farms.

April 25, 2024 Activity Center SWOT Analysis

The Activity Center Steering Committee's initial meeting provided an opportunity to provide general comments regarding the three identified Long Lake Township Activity Centers. Additionally a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) exercise was done by members for each of the Activity Centers, West Activity Center, Hamlet Center, and North Village Center. Below is a synopsis of those general comments and of the SWOT Analysis. Full comments can be found in Appendix XX.

In general, the Steering Committee expressed concerns about the development of the three activity centers, prioritized the protection of the natural environment and the rural character of the Township and within the Activity Centers. One of the most mentioned themes was environmental protection, including water quality and groundwater supply. Some of the measures to ensure protection mentioned by attendees included tree ordinances and septic inspections.

It was mentioned by several responses that the Township should focus on one activity center, with the North Activity center identified as the preference. Many expressed the interest in development that maintains the Township's rural and natural aesthetics. Ideas to do so included building standards in the Activity Centers, dark sky preservation, and supporting agritourism. Connecting existing neighborhoods to businesses and parks, and the Activity Centers themselves was mentioned as an opportunity to increase walkability.

West Activity Center

Strengths

The rural charm and appeal of the West Activity Center was attributed to the natural beauty of the area, proximity to lakes and adjacent communities, and existing and unique businesses that provide a residential feeling to existing families (including farming and agritourism).

Weaknesses

Weaknesses mentioned in the West Activity Center included new development clashing with the existing rural aesthetic, traffic issues (speed, boat parking congestion, busy intersections), visual appeal (blight, clear cut areas), and planning concerns.

Opportunities

Themes of the opportunities in the West Activity Center consisted of smart development, zoning standards, and planning that compliments the existing rural aesthetic of the area. Environmental protection (tree cutting, water quality, etc.) traffic calming, and supporting agritourism and existing farms were also mentioned.

Threats

Threats identified included environmental damage and concerns from clear cutting and increased development, traffic problems (especially during the boating season), loss of the rural character and open space, and overcrowding.

Hamlet Center

Strengths

The Hamlet Center strengths included existing local businesses, public beach access and Township's Taylor Park.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses in the Hamlet Center also included traffic concerns and pedestrian access (crosswalks, handicap access, etc.) and safety, and potential effects to the water quality. Some mentioned that more development would create more issues and other areas should be focused on for development.

Opportunities

Members indicated opportunities in the Hamlet Center could be connecting parks to each other and to surrounding neighborhoods, expand park and offerings, and addition of trees. Leaving the area as is, was also mentioned as an opportunity.

Threats

Threat within the Hamlet Center included a loss of character, impact to existing businesses, traffic safety, and the natural environment.

North Activity Center

Strengths

Strengths of the North Activity Center were the established businesses contributing to the local feel and rural character through things like their signage and look. Many families are located in or near the area which holds Long Lake Elementary School and accessibility to local trails.

Weaknesses

The main weakness in the North Activity Center was traffic safety, including speed and congestion. Others included future considerations such as a farm market competing with existing farms, connectivity and blight of abandoned buildings.

Opportunities

The opportunities for the North Activity Center included improved traffic safety (traffic calming, roundabout, etc.) and pedestrian access (connectivity, sidewalks, bike path, etc.), preservation of rural character, place-making, and redevelopment of abandoned buildings.

Threats

Threats identified within the North Activity Center include overdevelopment and growth leading to rural character loss and natural environment damage, traffic speeds and congestion, and overcrowding leading to resident displacement.