

Burt Township Master Plan Community Survey

Summary of Responses

Sharing the Survey:

The Burt Township Planning Commission chose to share the master plan survey via multiple means over a 4-month period to obtain as many responses as possible. A printed copy of the survey was mailed with every tax bill, a link was posted to the online survey on the Township’s website, and the survey was advertised in the local paper every two weeks. A tally of survey responses received was updated via the local paper bi-weekly and two presentations of the results were given at local Planning Commission meetings. As a result, 330 completed surveys were received, with a roughly 80% response rate.

Survey Categories:

The survey responses were organized into ten different topics aligning with chapters to be featured in the master plan. These categories included:

- Demographics
- People + Community
- Community Development + Land Use
- Housing
- Quality of Life
- Natural Resources
- Energy
- Infrastructure + Facilities
- Recreation
- Values + Goals

A summary of each category of responses is below:

Demographics

Although this category did not utilize the survey data received from the responses it featured the US Census data highlighting a dramatic change in age disparity within the community over the past 40 years. The population in 1980 featured nearly a 25% 4-way split for 0-20yr olds, 21-44 yr olds, 45-64 yr olds, and 65+ yr olds. In contrast the 2020 US Census data revealed a decrease in population paired with a significant increase in 65+ yr olds who now make up 54% of the population. Burt Township’s median household income of \$27,153 is less than half of what the state of Michigan’s median income is at \$59,584. These demographics indicate the community has an aging population many of whom are likely on limited and fixed incomes. This data was reinforced by the responses to the master plan survey questions and comments received.

People + Community

POPULATION

The survey responses received indicated a need to at least maintain the current population while many supported increasing the population. Many comments included with this response recognized a need to attract young workers and families to keep local businesses alive as well as the school.

EMPLOYMENT

54% of the survey respondents listed themselves as retired. Most of which listed little to no interest in increasing broadband access.

OWNERSHIP + RESIDENCY

52% of respondents had owned their property and/or lived in Burt Township for over 20 years. With 23% owning and/or living in the Township for 10-20 years. Of the surveys received, 36% of respondents lived in Burt Township year-round while 25% left in winter months and 39% spent less than 3 months a year in the Township. Of the respondents who did not live in the Township year-round, many referenced owning a second residence to reside in during the winter months, owning the Township property for generations and utilizing as a family cabin, and working in another region while utilizing their Burt property for vacationing and seasonal visits.

People + Community

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Survey respondents favored planned and limited growth concerning residential development as well as planned and structured growth for commercial development within the Township. Generally, residential development was strongly encouraged while commercial development was encouraged if done carefully. Many additional comments noted the small-town charm paired with mom-and-pop businesses as being very desirable. The need to refrain from hosting large chain establishments was frequently expressed. Affordable housing and options for senior care were also strongly encouraged. The development of marijuana facilities, mobile home parks, and additional short-term rentals were strongly discouraged.

Housing

RENTALS

Survey respondents weighed in on the popular discussion topic of short-term rentals within the community. 30% of respondents thought there were too many short-term rentals within the community with an additional 27% noting a need for long-term rentals. 21% of respondents noted a good balance of homeowner occupied versus rental properties, some of which mentioned the balance could easily be upset if the short-term rental options continued to grow. Many comments noted the need to attract young workers who could not afford to purchase a home or locate a long-term rental due to too many properties being utilized as short-term rentals. Others noted the income generated by the short-term rentals and their visitors helped support the Township's economy.

OWNERSHIP

Very few of the respondents noted renting and living in the Township. 40% of respondents lived and owned their home/property in Burt Township while 57% owned their home/property but lived elsewhere.

Quality of Life

Respondents generally rated the community as a good place to live with a slightly higher number noting the Township as being preferred as a place to retire versus raise a family. The sense of community was also rated as good with a few additional comments noting the sense of community had declined in recent years due to an influx of tourists. Access to affordable housing was fair to poorly rated as well as access to job opportunities.

Natural Resources

A strong desire to preserve and protect the Township's unique natural assets was expressed in the vast majority of survey responses. This was often paired with the need to limit ORV and Snowmobile traffic within the community and its high value natural areas. Respondents noted the bay area and shoreline as being the highest priority for protection. Additional comments recognized a need to remove food trucks and parking from the viewscape. The dunes, beach and general scenery were also listed as high priority areas to protect. The respondents were split as to whether the community should focus more energy on promoting its unique natural assets and local culture to draw more residents and visitors. Many comments associated with this question noted the community was discovered and there was no need to advertise.

Energy + Sustainability

Clean drinking water and reducing direct runoff into local water bodies were the key sustainable energy and infrastructure priorities for the respondents. There was also a strong desire to create a comprehensive lighting inventory and reduce light pollution within the community. Wind power was generally discouraged with solar power being slightly more favorable. Comments cited the lack of available sunlight, potential disturbance to the landscape + wildlife, and noise levels as a few concerns.

Infrastructure + Facilities

SEWER SYSTEM

The respondents were split on the decision to install a community sewer system. Some responses noted a need to have additional measures to ensure current septic systems were updated and not leaching. Others noted the need for a sewer system to ensure waste was properly treated. Some noted a sewer system would support larger businesses and community growth which was not a direction they saw as sustainable for the community.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Many comments paired with the existing water system noted too high of a monthly surcharge, especially for those on a fixed income. The desire for a medical clinic was frequently mentioned. Additional police protection was desired while fire protection was generally deemed appropriate. Road maintenance, snow plowing, streetlights, community events, building code enforcement, and township office services were all rated as appropriate. One note that did come up several times mentioned the need to restrict the gas station from plowing into the lake.

Recreation

Recreation and leisure time activities were both very highly rated within the community. Activities participants most often mentioned included hiking, going to the beach, biking, snowmobiling, fishing, hunting and cross-country skiing + snowshoeing.

ORV and Snowmobile use within the community proved to be a contentious issue reflecting the attitudes expressed in comments received. The majority of respondents noted a desire to have additional measures in place to enforce rules and restrict use on public lands and in natural areas.

Values + Goals

“What do you LOVE about Burt Township?”

Most respondents mentioned a combination of area character and natural resources, i.e. beauty and remoteness, peace and quiet, small town feel.

“What CHANGE would you like to see within Burt Township?”

Responses aligned to several keywords including:

- ORV/Snowmobile [regulation]
- Housing
- People [too many, attitude, action]
- Enforcement (police, law enforcement, sheriff)
- Resident(s) [qualities of, action of, action towards]
- Rentals [increase, decrease, types of]
- Families [attraction of, retention of]
- Growth [regulation of, of types (tourism, residents, actions)]
- Sewer system [need for]
- More: law/zoning/rule enforcement, restaurants, people [to do something], housing, more [consideration, respect, attention] of [something]
- Need: need [decision], need to have/find [something] (housing, change, jobs, enforcement, infrastructure, etc.)

Many people mentioned a need for increased law enforcement presence to help regulate ORVs and snowmobiles and tourism. There was a theme of increasing the number and diversity of businesses, as well as attracting workers and providing housing specifically for workers. A number of people mentioned the development of a sewer system or additional regulation of septic systems.

Most important issues facing the community.

Responses aligned to both themes:

- Community Development + Land Use: mostly negative comments on the direction of growth or the need for specific action towards an issue.
- Infrastructure + Facilities: mostly comments on the need for infrastructure (sewer being the most prominent), or the need for town services, business opportunities.
- Quality of Life: changes toward, mostly negative.
- Demographics: need for younger people/workers, services for current residents.
- People + Community: Attitudes towards [action, character, issues]

- Housing: short-term rentals [negative towards], affordable housing [need for]
- Natural Resources: protection of [type, quality of]

Responses aligned to keywords

- growth [of population, of community, of tourism]
- tourists/tourism [impact of]
- people [actions of, increase in, attraction of certain types]
- nature/natural resources [protection of]
- housing [short-term rentals, affordable housing, new development]
- keep [maintain, keep out (certain quality, action, control of)]
- population [growth of, attraction of certain types]
- school [maintenance of, removal of, increase students]
- community [attitudes towards, action of]
- residents [attitudes towards, actions of]
- sewer [need for]
- jobs [need for]
- snowmobile/ORV/ATV [regulation of]
- H-58 [maintenance of, expansion of]
- law enforcement [need for]

Need for medical/ambulance service/volunteers. Overpopulation/overuse/overdevelopment of community and natural areas. Responsible management of future growth and regulation. Affordable housing and viability of short-term rentals. Pollution and negative impact to nature, including creation of sewer system or increased regulation of septic systems. Changes to demographics and the need to attract younger families and workforce.

Ideal vision in 2050

Responses aligned to keywords

- nature/natural resources [protection of, maintenance of]
- town/community/area [development of, character of]
- maintain [current character, development, natural resources]
- beauty [protection of]
- families [attraction of]
- school [maintenance of, attraction of students]
- residents [types of, actions towards, actions of]
- energy [dependance on type, alternatives, quality]
- jobs [attraction of]
- law enforcement [need for, crime rate]

Infrastructure including sewer system and alternative or enhanced energy, service systems. Increasing number of businesses and diversity of economy. Maintaining town character and the preservation and maintenance of the current resources. Concern for overregulation, over-taxation, enforcement of laws and regulations. Planned, well-managed new development and town growth. Preservation of natural resources.

Natural attributes or viewscapes that should be preserved

Responses aligned to keywords

- Bay
- Beach(es)
- Forests
- view [view of, from certain place]
- Lake Superior
- School Forest
- Harbor
- Trails
- Dunes
- Lakeshore
- Agate Beach
- Coast Guard Point
- Woodland Park
- Sable Falls
- Sable Lake
- Sucker River

The bay was the most mentioned by far, along with beaches. A large number mention preservation of the views of the water from any point. Woods and water resources were also a concern.

Additional comments

- Preservation of certain attributes [character, natural resources, attitudes]
- Snowmobile/ORV/ATV regulation
- Infrastructure including streets, sewer, lighting, public bathrooms, marina docks
- Attitude towards (Township Board, past decisions, community development and services, taxes)
- Attitude towards (short term rentals/renters, capacity of services)
- Needs of residents versus non-residents
- Need for (additional housing, services, recreation, businesses, public bathrooms, law enforcement)
- Move food trucks away from area blocking views
- Deal with garbage dumpsters/trash/blight, port-a-potties