

Bayfield's success achieved with strong vision and policies

Bayfield has been on an historic success curve. Bayfield seeks not to simply extend the curve but to create a cycle that renews its uniqueness over time.

Like many rural American tourist destinations, Bayfield is caught in a positive feedback loop. **That is, the more desirable Bayfield becomes, the more pressure there is on community resources, including its residents.** As small town charm becomes an endangered feature of American life, places like Bayfield become powerful magnets to visitors and second homeowners. As its popularity has grown, property taxes have risen. Residents, unable to afford the growing costs and/or find employment, have departed; the resulting diminishment in the market for basic services has caused a simplification of the economy primarily tied to visitor services; **and, worst of all, a fear looms that "community" itself may be disappearing.** Another highly successful resort community Whistler, British Columbia, is embarking on a sustainable community plan. Experiencing the burdens of its own success like Bayfield, Whistler asks: *"Are we in danger of that moment ...when the quality of place is eclipsed by the quantity of space? ...when the environment that was uniquely fresh becomes typically stale? ...where individuals make decisions for short-term gain rather than long-term benefit? ...when the icon no longer lives up to the visitor or resident expectations?"*



Questions of this nature have driven Bayfield's planning and combined with the passion of this community to rescue itself, plans, goals, objectives and actions have unfolded.

A comprehensive plan is a community's vision for its future. It serves as a policy statement made by a local government to guide anticipated growth and meet community goals and goes beyond a traditional land use plan by looking broadly at the many elements that shape a community. Where a *land use plan* maps out the desired physical development of an area, a *comprehensive plan* takes social and economic goals in to account. This "big picture" approach guides government in realizing its citizens' desire. Bayfield's Comprehensive Plan was developed over fourteen months beginning in October 2000 and was adopted in December 2001.

"Smart Growth" legislation

Wisconsin, under progressive new legislation called Smart Growth, provides guidelines for comprehensive planning for local communities. This legislation does not take away local control; rather, it empowers small communities such as Bayfield by identifying elements that shape it and providing citizens with ample opportunity to design their future. The legislation requires that cities, towns, and counties in Wisconsin have comprehensive plans by 2010.

Primary concerns relative to the overall character, social, economic and environmental health of Bayfield include:

- Maintenance of a viable community with enough people to support basic public services
- Living-wage jobs in town or within a reasonable commuting distance
- Preservation of natural beauty of area
- Balanced economy
- Affordable housing
- Maintenance of scale and village atmosphere

Community goals are tied to core values

VALUES: Diversity, Equity, Identity, Stability, Opportunity, Community, Sustainability, History, Balance, Stewardship, Compassion, Personal Enrichment, Happiness, Safety

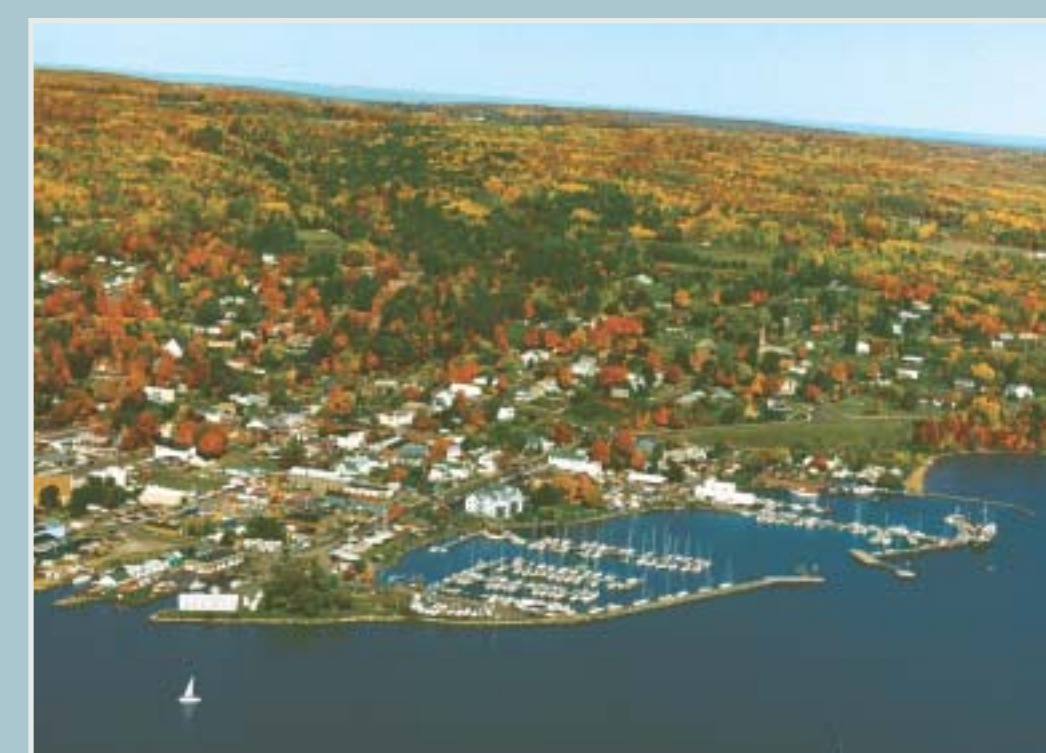
Two hundred and forty actions were developed to implement these goals and objectives. (found in the complete Comprehensive Plan document). The **OVERALL GOALS** for Bayfield are:

- A compact, human-scale city with a population of 1,000 nestled in a beautiful natural setting
- A city known for its creativity in making Bayfield affordable to long-time residents in the face of rising taxes, an influx of seasonal residents and other impacts of its growing popularity
- An economically strong and well-integrated city, fostering local businesses and business initiatives, regional cooperation and clean industry
- A resilient, diverse, and self-sufficient local economy that meets the needs of residents and builds on the unique characteristics of the community
- A wide range of housing opportunities and well-maintained housing stock

- A leader in historic and cultural preservation
- A place with a widely-held ethic of stewardship that strongly encourages individuals, institutions and corporations to take full responsibility for the economic, environmental and social consequences of their actions, balancing private and individual rights with nature and the public good
- An environmentally-aware community with distinctive open spaces and natural features, protected habitats, parks and areas for outdoor recreation
- Well-known for its participatory approach to planning and community decision-making
- Rich in the arts and recreational opportunities, celebrating the talents and culture of the people of the Chequamegon Bay region
- Expansion of choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility for the needs of the disadvantaged and elderly
- Safety and security resulting from the interconnectedness of people and effectiveness of public services
- A community that values and supports quality education for all ages
- A community that honors diversity and is free of prejudice



December 1, 2000 parcel data courtesy of the Bayfield County Land Information Office. 1:24,000 Hydrography and Municipal Boundaries provided by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Roadway data from U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line files. Map source: Northwest Regional Planning Commission. Photos: Don Albrecht, Bayfield Heritage Association, Jessica Dexter, Gilbert Larsen, Madeline Island Ferry Line (Gary Knowles), Ros Nelson, Pinehurst Inn, Jane Silberstein. Graphic design: Roslyn Nelson, Watermark.



A Vision of Bayfield in the Year 2020

In 1997, Bayfield was dubbed "the best little town in the Midwest." The publicity drew attention and the popularity of Bayfield as a tourist destination soared. Now, in the year 2020, folks look back and congratulate themselves on attending to the problems and opportunities that accompanied this popularity and on expanding planning efforts to create a vision of its future and public support for fulfilling it.

Visitors continue to flock to Bayfield to experience its abundant natural beauty, recreational opportunities, small town friendliness, quiet charm and human scale development. Bayfield remains remarkable for work in historic, cultural and natural resource preservation and has recovered some qualities that appeared to be disappearing as tourism skyrocketed in the 1990s. Bayfield is known as environmentally aware, with distinctive open spaces and natural features, clean air and water, protected habitats, parks and outdoor recreation. Bayfield is now a place where residents can earn a living and have basic consumer needs met and is acclaimed for initiatives in affordable housing and low impact economic development – features which draw visitors interested in reclaiming their own communities and retaining or improving their quality of life.



Top: The Methodist Church behind the Knight House was a victim of arson in early 40s. Below: The Theodore Ernest house was built in 1885.



An Erickson Orchard Apple Festival booth

Population grew to 1000 over the past twenty years and it is now more diverse than ever with a mix of age, ethnic and economic groups, giving the community greater stability. Bayfield has emerged as a place for families, where jobs, housing, schools, public services and social and recreational opportunities continue to improve. **A key feature of Bayfield's progressive view of healthy community has been housing programs.** The Sustainable Homes Project allows residents

and young families to afford homes. While property values continue to be higher than those nearby, there are now programs to assist people with average incomes to purchase homes. Special needs have also been factored into housing, especially those of the elderly. Assisted living allows resident elders to remain here as they age and also draws retirees and their families to the area. Most homes (75%) in Bayfield are owner-occupied and new development is directed toward both permanent and seasonal residents.

With Bayfield's burgeoning popularity in the late 1990s came traffic issues, especially pedestrian safety and parking during the summer. Today, congestion is managed by providing adequate parking (some remote with shuttle service), wider sidewalks, highly visible crosswalks, and improved signage throughout downtown.

One of the most challenging hurdles to clear years ago was the matter of job creation and a year-round economy. Bayfield did not want to create more jobs at the expense of its natural assets. It recognized that financial capital could not grow without strict respect for social and natural capital as well. Part of the solution was an effort to attract information, technology-based businesses by meeting their diverse needs, as well as creating a context for businesses to cooperate in an approach to essential services and resources, thereby providing relief from high property taxes. Training programs sponsored by the City help educate a local workforce and are incentive for residents to remain in the area. Value-added agricultural and forest products have emerged as a prominent part of the economy. Home-based businesses are encouraged, with adequate zoning protecting residential neighborhoods. Bayfield has also become a center for ecotourism, marine science,



and the media arts and technology fairs. A major environmental magazine is now headquartered here, including its entire editorial and circulation department, and a local, independent newspaper has enhanced community awareness and involvement.

To preserve and enhance local features and model green building standards developed in the late 1900s, Bayfield's progressive Community Planning and Development Department works closely with the Chamber of Commerce in recruiting business consistent with community values.

Downtown Bayfield remains a visitor magnet with its quaint and historic character, cohesive design, human scale and architectural integrity. The downtown provides a wide range of goods and services for residents and visitors alike. Quality, imaginative retail establishments are a hallmark and the absence of franchises and fast food is notable. Locally owned shops, restaurants and inns prevail. City Hall is centrally located in a restored, refurbished older structure – testament to the City's allegiance to the preservation of usable structures. Bayfield's downtown also provides broad access to the waterfront on a lakefront trail which links with the historic Brownstone Trail. The marina, also in the downtown area, offers 155 slips for pleasure boats with long term parking off-site, thus freeing up more of the waterfront for pedestrian and non-vehicular use.



Downtown Bayfield looks much the same today as it does in photos like these, taken some fifty years apart.

The Bayfield public school system offers an excellent education

for elementary, middle and high school and reaches out to others – housing adult education, seminars, conferences and other learning opportunities. Secondary students now attend a regional consolidated school that brings together ethnically and economically diverse populations. The public school system also works with the City's internet/ information technology center so children can become technologically educated at an early age, preparing them for college and careers and enabling them to remain in Bayfield if they choose. Further, a youth activity center provides programs that inspire appreciation of arts, culture and history as well as a variety of recreational opportunities.

Furthering the integrity of Bayfield are carefully thought-out design and development standards, conservation regulations, energy conservation programs, a zoning ordinance and ongoing planning that maintains consistency between the vision and policies and laws that support implementation of that vision. Over the years, Bayfield has proactively developed and enhanced its relationship and connections with neighboring jurisdictions and **a shared vision now moves them forward as partners in the same watershed.**

