

CROTON TOWNSHIP VISIONING SESSION

On July 30, 2011, seventeen residents from Croton Township gathered to share their perspectives about the future of their township. After exploring the Six Pillars of Prosperity and Placemaking concepts as well as personal visions for the future, the group agreed that the elements contained in the following statement conceptually captured a vision of the future that is compelling, honors the community's collective values and is the desirable direction for Croton Township could pursue.

The group also agreed that community input into this statement was most critical before the Croton Township Board approved any vision statement. We offer the statement below as a starting point for community dialogue about the future of Croton Township.

PROPOSED CROTON TOWNSHIP VISION

A rural community offering residents an enhanced quality of life and the ability to pursue individual happiness while protecting our natural resources.

“Quality of life enhancements” will focus on infrastructural improvements:

- Access to basic community services
 - For example, medical care, a community gathering center, police and emergency services personnel (EMS), reliable cell phone service, computer access, and library
- Continued progress of modern convenience installation without losing the small town feel
- Enhanced safety through traffic and parking controls
- Expanded parking facilities
- Trail development in collaboration with Big Prairie Township
- Modernization of parks and boat launches

“Pursuit of individual happiness” will focus on community life:

- Common sense ordinances balancing one's pursuit of happiness with the good of the whole community as well as balancing property rights with public access
- Development of recreational opportunities
 - A range of activities to build community and attract day tourism
 - Day tourism should become a significant township revenue source.
- Support for job creation through technology infrastructure development and education
- Community education and understanding of our natural resources and how to better protect them

Recorded Notes from the Visioning Session

The event began with attendees sharing what they are most proud of in the township AND what they would consider as a measure of success for the township. Individual input is listed below.

What we are most proud of:

- Physical attributes of the township (8 responses)
 - Ponds as an asset and activity possibilities
 - Wild life, woods and water
 - Beauty of the rivers and trees—It's a great ride!
 - Natural resource combination and synergy among the natural elements
 - How we're situated on the water
 - Campground
- Quality of Life
 - Small town atmosphere—that we don't have a McDonalds or Wal-Mart (4 responses)
 - Campground offers the charm of another time
 - Slow pace
 - It's a nice place to live
 - We have common sense township government
- The people who live here – willing to pitch in and support causes (2 responses)
- Programs and services
 - Available recreation
 - Children's summer recreation program

Measures of Township Success

- Bigger is not better
- Quality of Life Measures
 - Take current success up a notch with modern conveniences
 - When we've found a way to provide conveniences without losing our slow pace.
 - Provide residents' quality of life, i.e. roads, bike paths, i.e. easier quality of life
 - Quiet atmosphere maintained
 - People (retirees & new residents) want to stay
 - Is this a place I want to live?
 - Small businesses providing basic comforts
 - Internet access-improved access to the world
- Revenue Measures
 - Improved revenue by marketing our assets
 - Revenue gains to invest in the township
- People measures
 - When people jump in to share talents and help out.
 - Lots of people use our campgrounds and parks
 - Increasing tourism- we are a "go to" spot with repeat visitors
- Communication measures
 - Complete communication with residents to know what's going on
 - Cooperation and communication among all entities

Assessment of the "Six Pillars of Prosperity"

The assembled group broke up into small groups and conducted a group assessment of the township's current state regarding the six pillars.

Most Important to our Future	6 Pillars Identified with comments	Group Assessment '+' means it is an asset, '0' means neutral, '-' means a negative influence
*	Attractive Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need to improve parks and landscaping 	5 + + + + + 1- <i>due to sub-station</i>
*	21st Century technology	2 + <i>making progress</i> 2 - need cell phone service 1-neutral
	Thriving Agriculture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider Managing timber resource as a job creator and good for natural resource maintenance 	3-0 1+ <i>We have good crops and tree harvesting</i> 1-
*	Natural Resources for Recreation and Job Creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These need protection by zoning ordinance 	5+ 1-0 on job creation from natural resources
	Competitive Schools/Life-long learning --++0 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need a community-supported school 	2 + <i>Library and day care are good assets</i> 1-0 2 -
	Inclusive, entrepreneurial culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a false perception that the twp gov't does not support businesses Consider an incubator for business development 	1 + <i>due to entrepreneurialism & resourcefulness of residents</i> 1-0 3 -

Conclusion regarding the Six Pillars:

These three pillars are important to our future development as a township of prosperity

- Improve Attractive Community
- Enhance 21st Century technology without destroying natural resources
- Protect and leverage Natural Resources for recreation

Placemaking

Attendees discussed ideas in small groups to answer the question "What assets could be beefed up and better marketed to make the Township a day trip "destination"? Each group could offer their top 3 ideas to the whole group. The full list is below with the most promising ideas in bold as identified by the whole group assembled.

- **Music shows**(weekly shows) – feature talent from this area
- **Farmers Market, Craft or Flea Market at Conklin Park (weekly)**
- **Color tour – driving or on the river**
 - **Requires energizing the business**
- **Weather cam and fishing report over Croton Pond (shown on Channel 8 or Positively Michigan fishing show) to promote the area**
- **Trail development for Snowmobiles and Bikes**
- **Seasonal activities: River: canoe and kayak races & Winter: Cross-country skiing**
- Advertising to let people know that we're here
 - Website
 - Camp Harvest Bible Camp – connection with Chicagoans – cooperate with this group for advertising.
- Festivals
- Croton Business Alliance as an asset, but they are fragmented ...how do we give them the tools to better market themselves and bring in others
- Become more friendly with sister twp to join forces that would promote the recreational activities we share. (Big Prairie Twp)
- Seasonal River activities: canoe and kayak races
 - Good clientele-athletic, competitive
 - People appreciate and sensitive to natural beauty
 - Needs a better place to launch and park cars
- Walking history tour of Croton Dam of 1907 and the people who built it
- Hydro boat racing on the pond
- Sportsmen's Club activities, i.e. rifle range, grill for barbecue night, be a part of the community rather than a drinking club.

Personal Visions Shared

The group worked individually to identify their own personal visions for the future of the township, against the backdrop of previous conversations in the day and a list of infrastructural concerns such including quality of life, health, safety, community welfare, commercial interests, participation in the democratic process, natural environment and green space, prosperity, diversity, cultural heritage.

Each person shared their vision with a small group. Each group was asked to select the top three elements of the shared vision statements that would be most critical to the future of Croton Township. The top three elements from each group are listed below.

- Maintain our rural nature with the small town atmosphere and our natural resources
- Be a destination for activities and healthy living
- Meet more basic needs, i.e. urgent care and schools
- Improve quality of life including:
 - Senior center/gathering place
 - Medical center of some type
 - Openness to new ideas; we need to be intentional about our future and proactive to protect our vision
- A balanced approach to personal property rights
- Communication and Collaboration with Big Prairie Township
 - Shared stewardship of the river
 - Shared ordinances for consistent protections
- Getting business owners and residents more involved
- Increase and maintain outdoor activities of all types
- Scenic beauty for commercial establishments combined with safety for patrons
 - Alternative parking options
- Keep river “green”, but not through draconian measures. Use a common sense approach.

After this sharing, the group shared their observations, noticed the shared concerns throughout the three conversations and identified the critical elements that are integrated into the vision statement offered on page 1.

Once community input is gained and the Township Board finalizes the vision considering all input received, then the Township Board should engage in a long term strategic planning process that would outline the priorities for development, long term funding needs, and a multi-year plan for implementation.

A critical competency to achieve the vision will be persistent two way communication with the residents “as owners”, with Big Prairie Township, and effective advertising beyond the community to attract the day tourists from West Michigan.

Final report prepared by event facilitator,
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