Chapter 2. Community Description

2.1 Location

Figure 2.1: Location Map

The City of Charlevoix is the county seat of Charlevoix County, and is located on the northwestern coast of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. The City is bordered both to the north and south by Charlevoix Township, to the west by the waters of Lake Michigan, and to the east by Lake Charlevoix. Round Lake and the Pine River Channel, which flows between Lake Michigan and Lake Charlevoix through Round Lake, bisect the City.

The City of Charlevoix is not directly accessible from the interstate highway system; however, U.S. I-75 is approximately 40 miles east of the City, and provides access to the urbanized areas of southeast Michigan. U.S. 131 is easily accessible from Charlevoix and is a major link to Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and other urbanized areas of western Michigan. U.S. 31 and state highway M-66 and M-32 together provide access to Charlevoix; these state highways also offer easy access to northwest and north central Michigan.

2.2 City Character and Land Use

The majority of the City's lands are used for residential proposes, including a mix of single family, resort single family, and multiple family dwellings in the form of condominiums and apartment buildings. Residential neighborhoods are dominant and largely built out, with the exception of the Belvedere and Chicago Clubs. Although infilling will take place, there are limits on the number of additional homes that may be built in the future. In the coming years, the City's development trends will most likely be concentrated in redevelopment of exist-

ing properties. Demand for higher density condominiums and apartment buildings is currently very low but may increase in the future.

The Central Business District in downtown Charlevoix is considered the economic and social focal point of the area. This district includes several parks, highlighted by the recently revamped East Park, which is considered by many to be the most important park facility in the City due to the marina and numerous events held there. Commercial and office space, outside of the Central Business District, is primarily located adjacent to US 31, which bisects the City to the north and south. The Ance Industrial Park, on the north side of the City, is identified as a prime location for future manufacturing, technology and light industrial businesses. The existing and future land use maps, which help define Charlevoix's character and proposed future uses, are available in Appendix C.

The City of Charlevoix is typical of many Northern Michigan communities where there is a large resort population and significant numbers of transient tourists. Consequently, the real user population for the City's recreational lands and facilities is far greater than the City's permanent population (and that of the surrounding townships that use City lands and facilities). This fact also gives a dual purpose to the City's recreational lands and facilities. While providing for the demand for recreation spaces, they also bolster the City economically. This is particularly true of Lake Michigan and Lake Charlevoix public beaches, along with the municipal marina facilities.

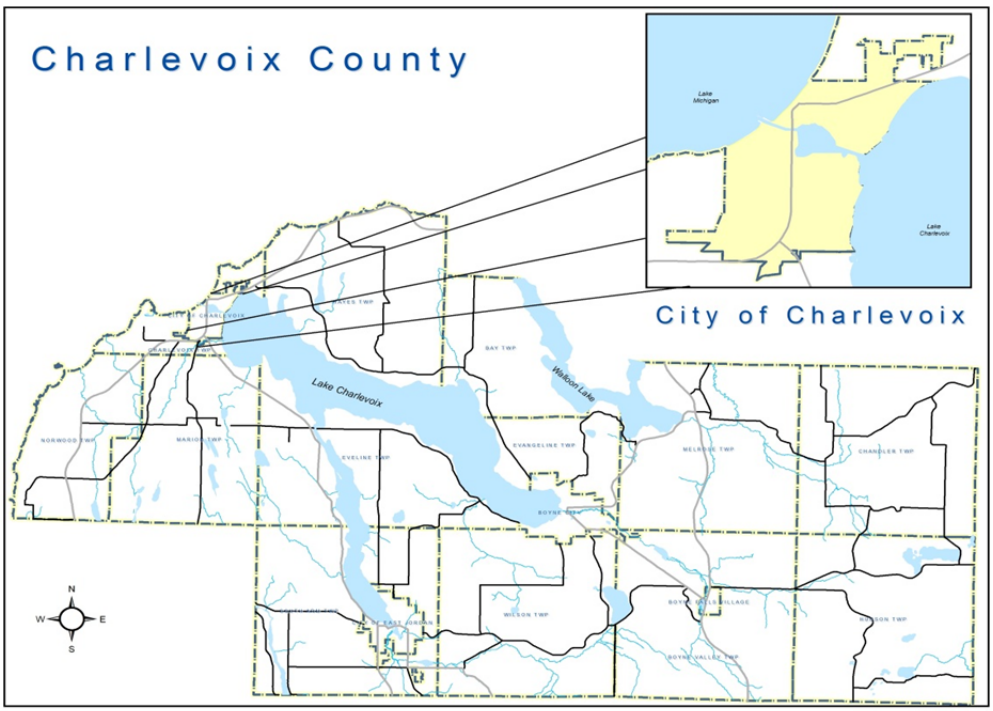

Figure 2.2: Vicinity Map showing the City's location in Charlevoix County.

2.3 Population

According to the Census Bureau's 2010 estimate, the City of Charlevoix had a population of 2,513, a 16.1% decrease since 2000, which could be attributed to the economic downturn and closing of several local companies. In contrast, nearby townships experienced growth rather than decline in the same time period. This trend is potentially due to the draw of rural living and lower annual property taxes. The decrease in the City's population indicates Charlevoix has the capacity to handle a population much greater than that which exists today.

According to estimates, the City's population experiences nearly a three-fold increase in the summer months. The ever-changing population can have a significant impact on the demand for recreational services and infrastructure.

Future population estimates and demographics are difficult to determine; making it more of a challenge to plan for parks and recreation facilities or programs.

2.4 Age Demographics

Charlevoix, like so many other communities, is growing older. With increasing life expectancies and decreasing family sizes, the community is faced with two questions: 1.) how to attract and/or retain younger people 2.) how to accommodate the needs of an aging population? Residential development and redevelopment projects over the past four years indicate that more and more baby boomers are retiring and relocating to Charlevoix from other metropolitan areas. This trend is expected to continue since Charlevoix has been, and will continue to be a destination for second homeowners typically here in the warmer months. The increasing population of older citizens and property owners requires the City to evaluate and plan for recreational activities for this demographic.

2.5 Transportation System

The City of Charlevoix includes transportation options not typically available for a City of its size. The City owns and operates a regional municipal airport, state of the art marina, and busses operated by the Charlevoix County Transit Authority. The City's proximity to numerous navigable waterways provides opportunity for vessels of varying sizes to access Charlevoix and the surrounding area.

Transportation within the City also includes exclusive services to and from Beaver Island. Charlevoix's municipal airport serves as a base for two, year round commercial flight services to the island. Downtown Charlevoix is also home to a commercial ferry service which provides multiple daily trips to Beaver Island. The ferry offers patrons the option to transport cars, bikes, and motorcycles to and from the island. The ferry is operational on a seasonal basis, depending on lake conditions, from April through December.

Charlevoix's street pattern is mainly configured as a grid and its most apparent traffic congestion issues are associated with the US 31 Memorial Bridge crossing of the Pine River Channel. While additional crossings have been explored, they are not practical considering the financial constraints and seasonal nature of traffic backups.

Except for sections of U.S. 31 and two one-way streets, all City streets are two lanes wide. Overall, traffic congestion, even during most summer months is not significant, except for a few concentrated problem areas. Traffic congestion on US 31 is primarily between Dixon and Carpenter Avenues. This results from heavy seasonal traffic volumes, bridge openings on US 31, and congestion related to the downtown traffic light and numerous intersecting side streets that empty onto Bridge Street. The narrowing of US 31 from four lanes to two causes further congestion problems in the summer months. Figure 2.5 shows the high traffic area in red where summertime backups are frequent.

The City's transportation network, like many other municipalities, does not provide for alternative forms of transportation including bike trails, or bike lanes. Establishing a plan for bike routes and implementing the plan will be critical in the future in reducing traffic flows, providing recreation and physical fitness, and safe passage to various points in the City. This plan is identified in Chapter 6.

The transportation network and overall community will also benefit by making efforts to make Charlevoix a "walkable" community," which is a key component of smart growth and quality recreational opportunities. This is also addressed in Chapter 5.

Figure 2.5: This diagram illustrates the primary area for traffic backups resulting from the bridge and the reduction from four lanes to two.

2.6 Environment

The City of Charlevoix Parks and Recreation Master Plan incorporates the environment as a valued resource that should be protected and enhanced by recreational opportunities and programs.

Climate

On any given day, Charlevoix is highly susceptible to quick, sudden changes in the weather. The City's proximity to Lake Michigan sets it and other coastal cities apart from inland communities. The lake keeps the area warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer, with less rainfall than locations further inland. Like many communities with an economy based on tourism and recreation, climate can be both a boon and bust. During the summer, weather can influence the number of tourists or seasonal property owners visiting Charlevoix, and in the winter the amount and duration of snow can impact the operation of local ski hills and resorts.

Water

Charlevoix has a unique connection with its surrounding water bodies. The lakes and the channel help make up much of Charlevoix's "character," and influence the City far beyond aesthetic value. Great care must be taken to ensure the quality, availability, and beauty of this valued resource is enhanced by our parks, recreational opportunities, and programs. This philosophy has already influenced the design of community investments such as the new Charlevoix City Marina, which is certified as a "Clean Marina," awarded by the Michigan Sea Grant with support from

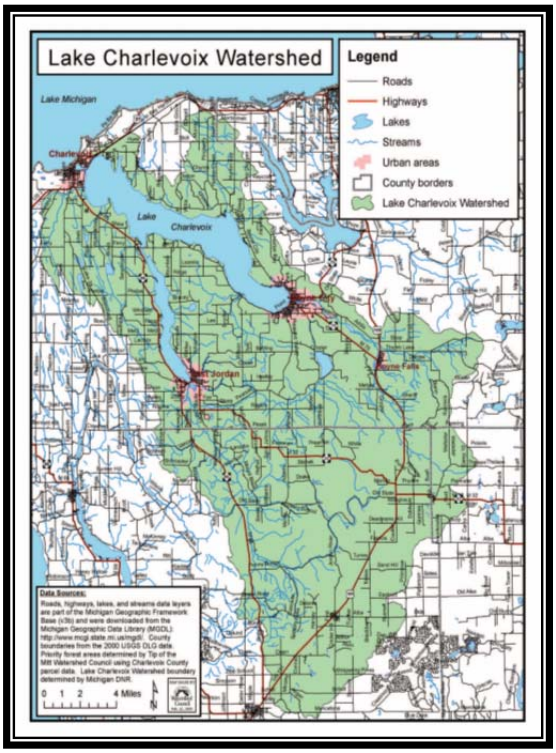

Figure 2.6 Charlevoix County Watershed Map

the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association. In addition, the redevelopment of East Park was designed to respect the qualities of Round Lake. Consequently, the impact on water quality by these two projects was carefully considered and greatly reduced.

Transfer of invasive species by watercraft using the boat launch facilities and marina can have negative impacts on the resource. Education and potential washing facilities at the boat launch could help curb this problem as boats are transported from lake to lake in northern Michigan.

Fishing is an important recreational activity providing an economic boost with the local fishing tournaments and launch fees from fishing boats. A parcel of land next to the US Coast Guard Station (Coast Guard Park.), which has yet to be developed with a dock, was purchased by the City with the intent of creating fishing opportunities for youth. Recreational fishing opportunities are enhanced with good water quality and habitat, which is another reason to protect water resources.

Soils and Shorelines

Generally, area soils are sandy loam and present slight limitations to development. The potential instability of disturbed slopes reinforces the importance of employing soil erosion and slope stabilization techniques into the design of any waterfront recreation features. The trend of beach grooming has also played a part in altering native wildlife habitats and planting exotic vegetation has helped spread invasive plant species, including purple loosestrife and phragmites. This is less of an issue in the City with the well-established beaches on Lake Michigan and Lake Charlevoix.

Sand Dunes

The size and scale of the sand dunes on Lake Michigan adjacent to Mt. McSauba span over a mile of shoreline. Given their unique qualities and community value, recreational activities must not destroy or adversely affect them. These areas are highly valued by both private property owners and the general public for recreation and scenic beauty. Although these dunes are partially located in Charlevoix Township, the City should nevertheless be concerned with their long term protection and preservation. Specifically, activities such as the new disc golf course and hiking at Mt. McSauba should not alter the balance of the sand dunes and associated native vegetation.

Dune area looking north toward Mt. McSauba

Trees / Woodlands

Most forests have disappeared from the City of Charlevoix during more than a century of development. The most heavily forested areas currently include Chicago Club's Old Island, the Michigan Beach Park on the north side of Park Street and the Belvedere Club's private recreation area. Mt. McSauba retains a number of areas of forest that signifi-

cantly contributes to the natural quality of this park facility.

Due to the importance of urban forestry, Charlevoix has established a Shade Tree Commission, as well as an Adopt-a-Tree program, to protect and to help replace them when they need to be taken down, or when they are lost to disease or storms. While trees are important community assets, it is also recognized that infrastructure maintenance and public safety requires trimming, pruning, and in some instances tree removal. The Shade Tree Commission has two volunteer Landscape Architects who provide professional advice on choice of species and maintenance following National Arborist Association Standards. In addition, the City has been a member of the Tree City USA program for the past 18 years. This national program provides local education, financial assistance, and many other benefits for our urban forestry program. The Shade Tree Commission should play an integral role in the proper pruning and removal of dead trees, specifically at Mt. McSauba and Michigan Beach Park.

Michigan Beach Park has about 7 acres of forested area on the north side of Park Ave.