

---

# Town of Phelps

*Vilas County, Wisconsin*



## *Strategic Planning Session* **Summary Report**

*February 2012*



## **Introduction**

On February 6, 2012, the Town of Phelps hosted a *strategic planning session* at the Phelps School. The purpose of the session was to gain information from residents, landowners, elected officials, and other stakeholders regarding the community in order to develop an implementation strategy for the long-term economic health of Phelps.



The fifty-seven people who attended the visioning session were asked to participate in a CAP Survey, Values Exercise, and Nominal Group Exercise. Each of these was aimed at generating discussion regarding the community's most valued attributes and most significant challenges. Those who could not attend were able to participate remotely by picking-up copies of the exercises at the Town Hall or Phelps Community Library, or by downloading the forms from the Town's website. Completed forms were either dropped off at the Town Hall or delivered by mail. In total, 73 people participated directly or remotely in the planning session.

The results of the session, presented throughout the remainder of this report, demonstrate a significant level of community consensus toward local action aimed at enhancing economic conditions and quality of life in the Town of Phelps.

## **Visioning Session**

### **CAP Survey**

A *Community Attitudinal Preference* (or CAP) Survey is a general opinion survey aimed at generating responses with regard to the favorable and unfavorable aspects of community development. It is an ideal tool for issues identification, particularly at the beginning of a meeting, since it focuses not on the host community (Phelps) but on cohort communities...those that are similar in size, land use distribution, demographic composition, and geographic location. The cohorts selected for the CAP Survey included:

- Town of Arbor Vitae, Vilas County
- Town of Land O'Lakes, Vilas County
- Town of Manitowish Waters, Vilas County
- Town of Minocqua, Vilas County

- Three Lakes, Oneida County

The purpose of a CAP Survey was to begin to identify the attributes of a community that make it a desirable place to live or visit in preparation for the Values Exercise.

### CAP Results

The level of familiarity with the cohort communities varied. Most respondents were very knowledgeable about the Towns of Land O' Lakes, Minocqua, and Three Lakes. Fewer were familiar with the Towns of Arbor Vitae and Manitowish Waters. Some cohort attributes that were viewed most favorably included:

- Small, attractive downtown with lots of diversity in terms of places to shop and eat
- People are passionate and active within the community
- Charm and an old town feel
- Clean and inviting
- Arts and culture, theatre, library
- Has a diverse economy with lots of jobs
- Located on a major highway with opportunities for economic development, has an airport
- Available healthcare and medical facilities
- Lots of festivals and local community events, always something happening
- Mixture of local resident and tourist services
- Retains the old Northwoods feel while incorporating modern things like clothing stores, coffee shops, and wineries
- Has most of what you expect in a town...post office, bank, multiple gas stations, local services
- Bike paths and walking trails

Less favorable attributes included:

- Too much traffic and congestion in the downtown, hard to find parking on weekends
- Too much commercialized shopping, chain stores, and chain restaurants
- Not located on water

### Values Exercise

A *Values Exercise* is intended to identify the places, structures, people, landscapes, and institutions that are most highly regarded in a community. The objective of this exercise was to determine how residents, business owners, landowners, officials, and other stakeholders viewed various aspects of the greater Phelps community. It centered around four general questions:

- *Why is Phelps special to you?*
- *What is the one thing someone must see or do upon visiting Phelps for the first time?*
- *What do you miss most about 'old' Phelps?*

- What is the one thing you would change about Phelps?

The facilitation of the values exercise involved a meeting management process known as *graphic recording*. Particularly effective in large group settings, this technique encourages freethinking and the rapid generation of ideas. Participant comments are recorded in real time on a wall graphic (see below) that helps to establish the group’s memory of both the flow and content of the discussion. This method of meeting facilitation evokes enthusiasm, encourages interaction and cooperative participation, and leads to informed consent since participants are able to visualize their ideas and build upon each other’s comments.



**Nominal Group Exercise**

The *Nominal Group* technique is an issues prioritization method that allows for rapid decision-making while taking into account the opinion of all participants. During the nominal group exercise, participants were each provided with three yellow adhesive dots and asked to place them onto the wall graphic adjacent to those topics they deemed to be of the greatest importance.



The top five issues that arose during the session were:

- Grocery store
- Downtown
- High-speed internet and cable access
- Phelps School
- Support for change

The complete results of the nominal group exercise, including input from people who participated remotely, are presented on the following pages. The numerals that appear in parentheses following some of the responses indicate the number of people who identified that issue as a priority.

### Why is Phelps special to you?

- [Phelps] School – pride, being a graduate, small class sizes (15)
- Bank, Post Office, library (6)
- It's my home, family history, memories, lived here long time (6)
- Location on the lake, North Twin (6)
- Friendly community, nice people (5)
- Lakes and rivers (5)
- Peaceful, quiet (4)
- Churches (3)
- High-speed Internet (3)
- Beautification activities – road work, landscape and plantings, lighting (2)
- Beautiful farms (2)
- Blackjack Springs Wilderness (2)
- Clinic (2)
- Dock area is very nice (2)
- Fire protection, paramedics (2)
- Fireworks – 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade (2)
- Gas station – convenience store (2)
- Good place to raise children (2)
- Headwaters of Wisconsin River (2)
- Historical museum (2)
- Small town, rural atmosphere, space – not crowded (2)
- Snowmobile trails (2)
- Fire tower (1)
- Hackley Phelps Bonnel Co. (1)
- Hunting and fishing (1)
- Restaurants (1)
- Taxidermist (1)
- Active local groups – service groups
- Afterglow X-C ski trails
- Annual X-C ski trip
- Bamboo fly rod guy
- Campgrounds
- Desire to maintain clean water and air
- Dido
- Drive [in to town] on Hwy 17 and CTH A
- Golf course
- Gone from company town to standing on its own
- Good people with good values
- Hair care
- Hazen and Sand Lake Clubs
- Holiday Lodge
- It isn't, should be renamed Backwards, WI
- Junction of three watersheds
- Laundromat
- Many friends in Phelps
- Motivation to renovate community
- New lights and flowers
- Nice community park
- Northwoods Living Care Center – assisted living
- Old Military/Indian Trail
- Our cabin on Spectacle Lake
- Our summer town
- Our year-round, lakefront home
- Out of the way, no traffic
- Phelps is our town
- Phelps Senior Center – must be preserved
- Picnic events in the park
- Potential for being a very attractive community
- Pretty cemetery
- Proximity to Eagle River
- Safe community
- Scenic beauty
- Second home to children and grandchildren
- So much potential
- Town-owned lakefront property
- Wildlife
- World record Tiger Musky



What is the one thing someone must see or do upon visiting Phelps for the first time?

- Beauty of North Twin, other lakes and streams (9)
- Eagles, loons, osprey – wildlife (4)
- Museum and Town history (4)
- X-C skiing and snowshoeing – Afterglow X-C ski trails (4)
- School – prettiest playground in northwoods (3)
- Town park, athletic fields (3)
- Bicycling, bike the roads (2)
- Hike Blackjack Springs Wilderness Area (2)
- Holiday Lodge (2)
- Library (2)
- Lowell Buell Baseball Diamond - see an old timers' baseball game (2)
- Maple syrup boiling (2)
- Pick mushrooms and berries (2)
- Restaurants (2)
- Snowmobiling (2)
- View from the fire tower (2)
- Walk in woods – fall colors (2)
- Go fishing with family – ice fishing (1)
- 4th of July celebration and parade - fireworks
- Antique fishing lure store on Hwy 45 and J
- Boating and sailing – space for boating, clean water
- Cold winter nights - stars
- Colorama
- Downhill ski at Ski Brule
- Echo at Whispering Lake
- Fishing OK, could be better
- Frosty glitter on winter morning
- Fundraisers
- Graffiti on fire tower – at night
- Golf course
- Hike trail from Spectacle Lake Campground to Kentuck Lake
- Kirks of the North
- Mesun and Samuelson sleighing
- Mural on Big Store
- North Twin island
- Nothing here useful except boating
- Phenomenal birding
- Picnics
- Sand Lake Pub
- Sunset on lakes
- Swimming, clean water
- Swimming at thoroughfare – boating through
- Trilliums in spring - arbutus
- View of lake from school
- Wisconsin River headwaters

What do you miss most about 'old' Phelps?

- Grocery stores – Big Store, General Store, movies on 2nd floor for kids (9)
- Cozy Corner - cappuccino machine, downtown coffee shop with Wi-Fi (8)
- Hardware store (7)
- Hospital and pharmacy, clinic, medical care (6)
- Hackley House Antiques (3)
- Ice cream store (3)
- It was 'alive', vibrant, liveliness (3)
- People working – jobs, industry (3)
- 2nd largest sawmill in Wisconsin
- Activity of downtown
- Airport
- Auto dealership
- Auto repair – in town
- Bait stores
- Banks will not loan to build business
- Beach across from hospital
- Bowling alley
- Cleanliness
- Cleaned-up shooting range and turkey shoots
- Community now just looks sad
- Dairy farms
- Football team
- Forest Service timber receipts
- Gift shop
- Ice rink
- Little Emporium by Sand Lake Golf Course
- Lost resorts
- Old Finn Hall
- Old Phelps-New Phelps, no difference
- Pallet corporation
- Pre-fab Building Co.

- Real estate office
- Restaurant
- Sailing capital of Northwoods
- Sand Lake Club
- Smoky Lake Reserve
- Theatre
- Total community involvement
- Train, railroad – depot
- UPS drop-off
- Video store
- Visit dump to see bears
- Wisconsin Trailer
- Young people

What is the one thing you would change about Phelps?

- Grocery store (26)
- Downtown – dumpy looking, clean-up (25)
- High-speed internet and cable access (12)
- Quality shops – local shopping, tourist dollars (8)
- Restaurants in town, breakfast and lunch spot (7)
- Sport shop, hardware store (7)
- Town support for changes (7)
- Clinic and pharmacy (6)
- Get rid of Big Store, Big Store is an eyesore (6)
- Small business (6)
- Internet cafe and bakery, coffee shop, ice cream shop – facing the lake (6)
- Jobs (4)
- Bike trails, routes through town (3)
- More camping (3)
- Publicly-accessible fire tower (3)
- Community Center – in middle of park (2)
- Focus on silent sports - skiing, paddling, sailing, biking, hiking (2)
- Keep the nursing home (2)
- More activities – ski invitational, bike festival, snowmobile run, wood/woodworking festival, etc. (2)
- No ATV routes through town (2)
- Opportunity for downtown, lakefront development (2)
- Support for farmers and local produce (2)
- Beautify park across from hospital (1)
- Clean-up mess at old pallet plant (1)
- More swimmable areas (1)
- Some type of industry (1)
- Affordable housing
- Arts cooperative
- Barber shop
- Basic services
- Be different, don't copy other northwoods communities
- Brew pub
- Boat and small engine repairs
- Boat, canoe, and kayak rentals
- Bring in young people
- Christensen barn
- Debris at Day Care
- Do something with wetland at corner of CR E and Coveyville
- Dump is too expensive
- Evaluate school – make grade school
- Have lost services returned
- Improve the sidewalks with large flower containers and benches
- Inviting public shoreline
- Make people feel welcome
- Model the finer qualities of Sayner and Land O' Lakes
- Museum building too dangerous to enter
- Need multi-year plan to achieve vision
- New buildings
- New, larger town hall
- New Town Chairman and Town Board
- Nothing, it is what it is
- Reason for someone to drive to Phelps
- Rental housing
- Require school to work within budget
- Re-vision what Phelps can be
- Tear down the Big Store and Sylvan Products
- Tourist information spot
- Update the buildings
- Variety stores, but not chain stores



---

## **Additional Comments**

Participants were asked to provide any additional comments they had regarding the planning session or the community in general in the 'Notes' section of the meeting agenda. The comments submitted include:

- I feel the most critical thing needed to revitalize Phelps is an overall positive attitude by the community government and organizations. Three Lakes is a good example of that attitude. Three Lakes is the Best Single Town in America [sponsored by Kraft Singles]. National TV coverage, several thousand people at the party. The Three Lakes Chamber bringing the Budweiser Clydesdales in last summer. Phelps gained a large amount of notoriety in 2011 due to the ATV issue. Discover Wisconsin could include that in a program. Silent Sports vs. Silent Shops in Phelps? Has there been a decision on restoring or replacing the Big Store? The concept of a multi-use facility including a Town Common space could invigorate the entire area.
- Priority to clean-up downtown street
- My primary concern for out town is that the 'small town bickering; would instead become a positive change. That we would all be able to work together, dream together, talk together and progress together...that what has begun tonight would continue and grow.
- WW Vets have disbanded. Would like to see new people step up and continue the effort.
- Most of the 'Specials' can and are done in nearly every other town in northern Wisconsin. We really need to connect with the retirees in the areas. Make it the Florida of the north. Provide condos, other housing, grocery/co-op type stores. Provide interesting activities for them [retirees]. Perhaps we should think outside the box. The school was mentioned – again – do we need the school here? Northland Pine offers more than we can. Let the school go and use the building for seniors – exercise areas, etc. businesses aren't interested in our area for a variety of reasons. So let's go with what is – Retirees!
- I would like to see a place in Phelps set aside for quiet sports – no motors – no snowmobiles, ATVs, etc. Have bike and hiking trails, etc. Lots of people come here for the woods, water & peace & quiet. There is no such place that I know of in the state. Imagine the whole township set aside this way. I guarantee lots of people would want to leave, but many more would come & property values would go up. No, I'm not a fool – I don't see this happening, but perhaps could in a small way. Pete Moline Afterglow Resort is a good example of this idea working.
- Would like to see a special company that would be a draw.
- Special: school exercise facilities. Change: clean-up downtown.
- Not special: downtown clutter.
- The town needs a purpose to get people off the big road and into town.

## **Comprehensive Plan**

The Town of Phelps Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2010. The document, prepared by North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC), is a 20-year land use plan intended to guide development in the community. It is structured around the nine planning elements identified in the Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (66.1001 Wis. Stats): issues and opportunities; housing; transportation; utilities and community facilities; agricultural, natural, and cultural resources; economic development; intergovernmental cooperation; land use, and implementation.

---

Each element of the plan includes a series of implementation goals, objectives, and policies. Those related to the chapter that focuses on economic conditions in the community (*Chapter 9: Economic Development*), an emphasis of the Strategic Planning Session, appear below.

### **Goals**

1. *Promote the expansion and retention of the current economic base and the creation of a range of employment opportunities.*
2. *Support residential development.*
3. *Develop and beautify the downtown and lakefront to become a centerpiece of the town, including an area for community functions.*

### **Objectives**

1. *Encourage new residential, commercial, and industrial development to locate in designated areas on the Future Land Use map.*
2. *Encourage businesses to locate in Town of Phelps.*

### **Policies**

1. *Encourage home-based businesses that do not significantly increase noise, traffic, odors, lighting, or would otherwise negatively impact the surrounding areas.*
2. *Direct commercial and industrial development to designated areas on the Future Land Use Map.*
3. *Continue to support the Chamber of Commerce and the county economic development efforts.*
4. *Focus economic development marketing on tourism orientated business, service, retail, and light industrial businesses.*
5. *Promote community activities and events that benefit local and downtown business and merchants.*
6. *Preserve and utilize old buildings and historic sites to anchor the downtown and areas small town theme.*
7. *Retain and acquire public common areas or park sites to accommodate special events and community activities in the downtown area.*
8. *Pursue opportunities for financial and other incentives to attract and locate business.*

9. *Develop a plan for the downtown waterfront in conjunction with local businesses, residents, and various community groups, to include landscaping and design.*

To view the Town of Phelps Comprehensive Plan in its entirety, visit the NCWRPC website at: [www.ncwrpc.org](http://www.ncwrpc.org).

## Planning Assessment

The results of the February 6<sup>th</sup> discussion and information gathered during the development of the Town of Phelps Comprehensive Plan, when considered in their entirety, offer a vision for the community. The planning assessment provides a strategy to achieve that vision. As the bulleted lists on the previous pages demonstrate, responses to the values and nominal group exercises spanned the full range of land use issues and quality of life concerns. From improvements to Phelps' downtown to job creation to an innate appreciation for the natural environment, they offered a glimpse at the passion held for this community by year-round and seasonal residents alike.

The purpose of the planning assessment is to evaluate the data compiled during the visioning session and present it in a way that allows the community to consider from a variety of potential implementation tools...

- Actions that should be addressed in the short-term (1-2 years)
- Those that may be deferred to the mid-term (3-5 years)
- Others to be re-evaluated and addressed at a later date

Of the 215 issues presented during the exercises, most can be placed into one of six categories: *revitalization & redevelopment*, *local goods & services*, *economic growth*, *facility & infrastructure enhancements*, *environmental preservation & outdoor recreation*, and *community pride*. However, the interdependent nature of many of these means that any one of them could be placed into two or more of the categories below.

### Revitalization & Redevelopment

Revitalization and redevelopment get to the core of community character. Successful communities, those that are vibrant places to live and work, often possess a unique character...one that separates them from their municipal neighbors. One of the cohort attributes most frequently cited by CAP Survey participants was the attractiveness of a particular community's downtown. It was viewed as "clean and inviting" with "charm and an old town feel." To varying degrees, residents believe that this aspect of the downtown has been lost in Phelps.

However, the community has a number of assets from which to build upon. Very few downtowns in Wisconsin's northwoods are located on the shores of a lake, much less

---

one as attractive as North Twin. In addition, the existing architectural stock in the community, particularly the buildings that housed the hardware store and house the museum, provide a template from which local design standards can be drafted. Although the structures themselves may be limited in terms of use and longevity, their facades can be preserved so as to retain an important visual link to 'old' Phelps. The recent addition of new streetlighting and flower planters, much appreciated by a number of meeting participants, offers an example of the steps a community can take to create character.

Examples include:

- Downtown Phelps
- The Big Store and adjoining parcels
- Recent road improvements, landscape and plantings, street lighting
- The dock area, farmers' market site, and beach across from hospital
- The drive into town on STH 17 and CTH A
- Current architectural stock
- Unsightly properties in the town core
- Site of the railroad and train depot

### **Local Goods & Services**

Long time residents remember a Phelps that was a dynamic community with a small but thriving local economy; the Town offered many of the goods and services typically found in a larger community. Much of that economic diversity is now gone. However, similar small communities around the country have taken steps to revitalize their local economies by focusing on locally produced, valued-added goods and services, technology-related enterprises, and destination eco-tourism, among others.

The desire for a local grocery store received more 'votes' during the nominal group exercise than any other issue. Phelps may or may not possess the demographic distribution necessary to support a conventional supermarket. If that market exists, there are steps the Town can take to identify and advertise that market. If it does not, there are alternative models, including cooperatives and satellite stores, which may be pursued to provide quality, affordable groceries in the community.

Examples include:

- Grocery store
- Bank, post office, and library
- Churches and the cemetery
- Restaurants, taverns, and the convenience store
- Healthcare and medical facilities
- Ice cream shop, coffee shop, bakery, internet café
- Clubs and resorts
- Hardware store, repair shops
- Theatres, galleries, and community gathering places
- Gift shops and antique stores
- Variety stores, sport shop, and bait store
- Beauty salons, barbers

---

## Economic Growth

Historically, Phelps was a *company town* dominated by a single local employer. Logging and related activities were the dominant industry sector. As one participant mentioned during the values exercise, the Town was once home to the second largest saw mill in Wisconsin. Much of the economic development in the community was dependent upon the timber harvest. As logging declined in the northwoods, so did the community. Phelps is still in the midst of a transition from this economic model.

Fortunately, Phelps is not alone in facing the challenges associated with a historic company town. Communities across the country have had to rethink themselves when the dominant local industry shuttered its factories, mines, or mills. Those that have successfully navigated the transition have done so by diversifying their economies. The timber resources that fueled Phelps' growth still exist in the surrounding Nicolet National Forest providing opportunities for small-scale, value-added economic development. Improvements in communications technology, particularly with respect to internet access, offer the means by which small businesses located in relatively remote, rural communities can compete in the regional and global marketplace. Opportunities for agricultural growth exist within the township, particularly in the niche heirloom and organic sectors. In addition, the natural beauty of the community will always provide opportunities for expansion of the tourism market.

Examples include:

- Jobs and employment opportunities
- Industry
- Small business
- Agriculture
- Timber, wood products, woodworking
- Tourism

## Facility & Infrastructure Enhancements

Schools, fire stations, community centers, parks, and municipal garages are all necessary elements of a functional community. Infrastructure such as roads, sewer and water systems, gas and electric utilities, and communications networks serve existing residents and businesses and provide for desired growth.

Phelps School is, perhaps, the most valued institution in the community. The long-term viability of the school will play a considerable role in determining the future of the community. With it, the potential exists for Phelps to attract young families eager to embrace a slower-paced lifestyle in a safe and beautiful rural setting. This demographic group brings with it demands for a specific category of goods and services and offers a distinct model for economic development. Without the school, opportunities for community development could transition to senior living and/or a greater emphasis on the tourism industry. Each of these options creates opportunities for alternative economic growth models.

---

Internet access, particularly broadband availability, is an absolute necessity for a business wishing to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. Access to modern, high-speed cellular networks is equally important. A community that lacks adequate communications access will find itself at a competitive disadvantage in the economic development arena. High-speed internet access and improved cellular coverage, particularly outside of the town core, will be necessary in order to attract the types of small business development desired in Phelps.

Examples include:

- Phelps School
- High-speed (broadband) internet and cable television access
- Fire protection and public safety
- Town Hall and community center
- Town park, playground, and athletic fields
- Multi-modal transportation systems

### **Environmental Preservation & Outdoor Recreation**

This is a category of abundance. Opportunities for outdoor recreation abound in Phelps. In order to achieve the community's long-term goals, development within the town must occur in harmony with the natural environment. This may require the adoption of local land use ordinances that, in concert with the Town's comprehensive plan, ensure that future commercial and residential growth occurs in areas compatible with such development.

A number of meeting participants suggested that an emphasis be placed on *silent sports*. Marketing the community's suitability for activities such as bicycling, hiking, sailing and paddling in the summer and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing during winter months may help distinguish Phelps from other towns in the northwoods. When carefully planned, the facilities that support these uses can compliment those provided for snowmobiling, power boating, and other conventional outdoor activities.

Examples include:

- Lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands
- Wildlife
- Headwaters of the Wisconsin River, junction of three watersheds
- Blackjack Springs Wilderness Area, Afterglow XC ski trails, Echo at Whispering Lake, Old Military/Indian Trail, Smoky Lake Reserve
- Clean air and water
- Snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, boating, and golfing
- Skiing, swimming, sailing, paddling, bicycling, snowshoeing, camping, sleighing, and walking in the woods
- Berry and mushroom picking
- Views of nature, sunsets, stars



---

## Community Pride

Pride of place is a critical element of all successful communities. The level of engagement in local events is an indication of quality of life values. A community that gathers to celebrate its accomplishments and those of its citizens is often viewed as a desirable place to live or start a business. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade and fireworks, Colorama, the Scarecrow Festival, and the Maple Tour are some of the events that demonstrate local pride.

Examples include:

- Friendly people, great place to raise children
- Rural character, peaceful and quiet
- Natural landscape
- Phelps Museum
- Local events, festivals, parades, and celebrations

The results of the Values and Nominal Group exercises *paint a picture* of a future Phelps...one that reflects the desires of those who participated in the planning process and, by extension, the community as a whole. The remainder of this report presents some of the actions and methods through which the Town may secure that future.

## Thriving Communities

The visioning session identified many local strengths and assets to build upon in Phelps, while also presenting some of the significant challenges the community faces in achieving its goals. A clear understanding of *what we have* and *what we lack* is necessary in order to identify and prioritize the components of an economic development strategy in any community.

The bulleted list below describes some of the characteristics most associated with strong, healthy communities. The more of these attributes present in a given location, the more desirable that community will be as a place to live, work, and play.

- *Public Spaces* – Community gathering places where residents and visitors gather to participate in local events, farmers' markets, and other civic celebrations.
- *Compact and Diverse Cores* – Downtowns constructed on a human scale featuring a mixture of residential, commercial, and institutional uses that provide necessary goods and services and allow for living, shopping, and working in a central location.
- *Affordable Housing* – Particularly for important demographic groups such as young families, recent graduates, seniors, and seasonal workers.
- *Quality Schools* – Well-staffed, with reasonably sized classes. Centrally located in safe neighborhoods that allow children to walk and bike to school.

- *Employment Opportunities* – Local or regional jobs that offer living wages to provide for the economic security of residents.
- *Access to Healthcare* – The availability of healthcare options for all members of the community regardless of age, ethnicity, and income.
- *Green Space* – Places for residents and visitors to play and relax outdoors.
- *Multi-modal Transportation Systems* – Transportation options that give residents the choice to walk, bike, or drive to their destinations.

To a great degree, the success of any one of these elements is contingent upon the others. A healthy school requires families with young children. Families need living wages, affordable housing, quality schools, and healthcare. A vibrant downtown depends upon a strong, local economy. Healthy economies exist in areas with abundant local and regional employment opportunities. Green spaces and public spaces are among the factors businesses consider when expanding or relocating operations.

Its ability to enhance and expand upon existing attributes will play a significant role in determining how effectively Phelps can attract and retain the people and businesses necessary to sustain it in the long-term.

### Tourism

The Town of Phelps enjoys a relatively small but thriving tourism sector. Fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, cabin rentals, and seasonal residents all add dollars to the local economy. The obvious question to ask is, “What percentage of the local economy can and should be dependent upon tourism?” There are mixed opinions within the community. Some see tourism as a primary economic generator needed to maintain Phelps while others may view it as a threat to the character of town. The reality probably lies somewhere in between.

The economic benefits resulting from tourism can take a number of forms, including:

- *Jobs* – Direct employment such as hunting and fishing guides or bed & breakfast owners or jobs in supporting industries like food services, lodging, and retail.
- *Increased Spending* – Increased spending in the community generated from visitors or tourism businesses can enhance the viability of local businesses.
- *Economic Diversification* – The diversification associated with the tourism sector of a local economy can provide an insurance policy against hard times. By offering an additional means of income, tourism can support a community when other local industries are under financial pressure.

- *Infrastructure* – Infrastructure including roads, parks, and other public spaces can be developed and improved both for visitors and local residents through increased tourism activity in a region.
- *Social Benefits* – Community identity and pride can be generated through tourism. A positive sense of community identity can be reinforced and tourism can encourage local communities to maintain their traditions and identity.
- *Environmental Benefits* – Providing financial or in-kind support for the conservation of the local environment and natural resources will enhance the reputation of any tourism business. Ecotourism can place a greater focus on the conservation of natural resources through the recognition of their importance to visitor experiences and their economic value to the local community.

However, tourism may create challenges as well.

- The service-sector jobs common in tourism-related industries tend to be low paying and may not provide healthcare and retirement benefits.
- Property values tend to be higher in communities with significant tourism sectors, making it difficult to find affordable housing.
- Conflicts between year-round residents and vacationers may create friction in the community.

As it does today, tourism will no doubt play a considerable role in the future economy of Phelps. However, the community is justifiably hesitant to 'put all of its eggs into the tourism basket.' The eight elements of a thriving community presented earlier in this section provide a starting point for discussion around the steps necessary to expand and diversify the local economy. Ideally, tourism will become just one of a number of industry sectors sustaining Phelps in the long-term.

## Action Plan

The action plan presents and defines some of the steps that may be taken to revitalize the downtown and diversify the Phelps' economy. Those that would be best addressed within the next 24 months are classified as short-term actions. The mid-term category includes actions targeted for completion within the next 3 to 5 years. Finally, long-term actions are those that may be re-evaluated in the future and implemented based upon need and budget.

The recommended actions presented on the following pages correspond to the six categories listed in the Planning Assessment. Each identifies the *champions* responsible for ensuring its effective implementation as well as a list of potential sources of funding that may supplement the general fund.

## Short-term Actions (1-2 years)

### **Market Trade Analysis**

A market trade analysis (MTA) is a crucial first step in preparing a community economic development strategy. The MTA is comprised of two components: a *market demand analysis* and a *location quotient analysis*. Both utilize cohort analyses (i.e., comparisons of the local economy with those of communities of similar size, demographic profiles, geographic locations, etc) to identify the existing market potential of a local economy.

### **Market Demand Analysis (MDA)**

The MDA is the tool most often used by a community in assessing its economic base. It is designed to identify opportunities for new or expanded types of economic development. The foundation of an MDA is a *socioeconomic base analysis* (SBA). The SBA provides a general survey of local employment opportunities (a key determinant of future economic health) and describes the relative skills of the existing workforce. It is comprised of market profiles describing and comparing each community in the study. The profiles include detailed information related to age, gender, households, employment, and consumer spending, among others.

### **Location Quotient Analysis (LQA)**

The LQA is a tool used to identify the export capacity of a local economy and the degree of self-sufficiency of a particular industry sector (i.e. manufacturing, retail trade, health care, etc.). In conjunction with the MDA, the LQA is effective in identifying specific opportunities for economic development.

**Categories** – *Economic Growth, Local Goods & Services, Revitalization & Redevelopment*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Community Development Corporation, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund*

### **Comprehensive Plan**

Amend the comprehensive plan (and future land use map) to create increased opportunities for greater land use diversity and flexibility in the town core. Particular emphasis should be placed upon mixed-use development. In addition, the plan should clearly identify the boundaries of the town core. The potential boundary may include lands adjoining: STH 17 from just south of West Hill Road to just east of Town Hall Road; Hill Road, Old School Road, Town Hall Road, and West Hill Road,

**Categories** – *Revitalization & Redevelopment, Economic Growth*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Plan Commission, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund*

**Downtown Master Plan**

Develop a master plan for downtown Phelps comprised of elements including: architectural and design guidelines, civic gathering places, pedestrian and bicycle amenities, streetscaping, technology and communications, landscaping, and wayfinding, among others. The plan should focus on enhancing local livability, character, accessibility, and vitality. Consider the development of a Downtown Business Owners Association.

A downtown master plan is a critical element in attracting development and qualifying for state and federal grant funding.

**Categories** – *Revitalization & Redevelopment, Economic Growth, Facility & Infrastructure Enhancements, Community Pride*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Plan Commission, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund, USDA, USEPA*

**Marketing Strategy**

Develop a Town of Phelps marketing strategy aimed at attracting new residents, businesses, and visitors to the community. Be prepared to build upon interest generated by the *Discover Wisconsin* program. Utilize social media to advertise community events and celebrate local successes. Utilize the results of the Strategic Planning Session and Market Trade Analysis to create brochures and other marketing materials for local, regional, and statewide distribution. The goals of the marketing strategy should be to:

- Retain and expand existing local businesses
- Recruit new business and industry
- Attract tourists, young families, and retirees

Celebrate successes. Post local business 'birth announcements' and 'birthdays' on the Town website and Facebook page.

**Categories** – *Economic Growth, Facility & Infrastructure Enhancements*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Community Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund*

**Grocery Store**

Investigate all available options for providing healthy, affordable groceries in the community, including: conventional supermarkets, small satellite stores, locally owned cooperatives, community-supported agriculture (CSA), community gardens, and expanded farmers markets, among others. Identify potential locations for grocery stores

when updating the comprehensive plan.

**Categories** – *Local Goods & Services, Economic Growth*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Community Development Corporation, local agricultural producers*

**Funding** – *General fund, local investors*

**Economic Development Plan**

Utilize the results of the Market Trade Analysis to implement an economic development plan (EDP). The EDP should include an economic gardening component focusing on growing local businesses as well as a strategy to secure outside businesses investment within targeted industry sectors. Consider establishing a business incubator to nurture and support new start-ups.

Focus on planning for a digital economy. Provide assistance and incentives to businesses to expand broadband and wireless access throughout the community. Identify and monitor new enterprises to assess potentially emerging trends in the local economy.

**Categories** – *Economic Growth, Revitalization & Redevelopment, Local Goods & Services, Facility & Infrastructure Enhancements*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Community Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Vilas County Economic Development Corporation, North Central Wisconsin RPC*

**Funding** – *General fund, USDA*

**Community Events**

Continue to support local festivals, and encourage new events, that celebrate the community, its businesses, and its people. Feature a business of the month or person of the month and post event announcements, summaries, and digital images to Facebook and the Town website. Establish a goal of having one or more local events each month.

Pursue *Joint Effort Marketing* grant in partnership with an adjoining municipality.

**Categories** – *Community Pride*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Plan Commission, Community Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Wisconsin Department of Tourism, volunteers*

**Funding** – *General fund, Wisconsin Department of Tourism*



**Mid-term Actions (3-5 years)**

**Community Redevelopment Plan**

Develop a community redevelopment plan to identify underutilized, vacant, abandoned, and deteriorating structures for renovation or removal. Complete an inventory of all such structures in the community, particularly those located within the town core. Revise and utilize existing ordinances, or develop new ordinances, to more effectively address blighted properties within and adjacent to the town core. Consider the use of *Requests for Proposals* to solicit redevelopment bids.

**Categories** – *Revitalization & Redevelopment, Community Pride*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Plan Commission, Community Development Corporation, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund*

**Land Division Ordinance**

Develop a Town of Phelps land division/subdivision ordinance to guide residential development in the community. The ordinance should include conservation design principles to ensure that future residential development occurs in harmony with the natural landscape.

**Categories** – *Revitalization & Redevelopment, Environmental Preservation & Outdoor Recreation*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Plan Commission, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund*

**Affordable Housing Plan**

Develop a plan to increase the supply of affordable housing in the community. Conduct an inventory of the existing housing stock to identify current stock of owner-occupied and rentals units. Work with Vilas County to incorporate inclusionary zoning requirements or bonuses within the zoning ordinance.

**Categories** – *Revitalization & Redevelopment, Environmental Preservation & Outdoor Recreation*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Plan Commission, Vilas County, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund, WHEDA, HUD*

**Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan**

Develop a Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan to improve multi-modal transportation opportunities, provide connectivity between various local destination nodes, and create links to county and state trail systems. Wisconsin’s Complete Streets law requires that a portion of all future state and federal transportation funding associated with road reconstruction projects incorporate pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

**Categories** – Facility & Infrastructure Enhancements, Revitalization & Redevelopment, Environmental Preservation & Outdoor Recreation

**Champions** – Town Board, Plan Commission, WisDOT, WE Bike, consultant

**Funding** – General fund, WisDOT

**Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan**

A Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) is a document that describes current park, recreation, and open space assets in a community and presents a strategy for meeting future needs. The purpose of the plan is to guide future park and recreation area land acquisition, development, and maintenance activities by identifying the general location, character, and extent of existing and needed parks, playgrounds, and special recreation areas in the community.

Statutes prohibit local government from applying for state and federal park and recreation funding without a locally adopted CORP.

**Categories** – Environmental Preservation & Outdoor Recreation, Community Pride, Economic Growth, Revitalization & Redevelopment

**Champions** – Town Board, Plan Commission, consultant

**Funding** – General fund, WDNR, NRCS

**Capital Improvements Plan**

A Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) allows communities to responsibly plan for future improvements, particularly those related to road maintenance, vehicle replacement, parks and recreation facilities, and town facilities, among others. A CIP is also beneficial in planning for community improvements to support existing local businesses and desired economic development activities.

**Categories** – Facility & Infrastructure Enhancements, Growth, Revitalization & Redevelopment

**Champions** – Town Board, Community Development Corporation, consultant

**Funding** – General fund

**Long-term Actions (6-10 years)**

**Tax Increment Financing**

In 2004, the state legislature approved the Town Tax Incremental Finance Law. This program had previously been available only to villages and cities in Wisconsin. TIF is a financing tool that towns can use to promote tax base expansion. It can aid in financing infrastructure improvements and other preparatory actions for specific agricultural, forest, manufacturing, and tourism activities as classified in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). A Town TIF may be used to fund:

- Agricultural projects – crop production, animal production, support activities for agriculture and forestry, support activities for animal production, and refrigerated farm product warehousing and storage.
- Manufacturing projects – animal slaughtering and processing, wood product manufacturing, paper manufacturing, and ethyl alcohol manufacturing.
- Forestry projects – forestry and logging, and support activities for forestry.
- Tourism projects – recreational and vacation camps (except campgrounds), RV parks and campgrounds, racetracks, dairy product stores, public golf courses

**Categories** – Revitalization & Redevelopment, Economic Growth

**Champions** – Town Board, Economic Development Corporation, consultant

**Funding** – General fund

**Stormwater Management and Erosion Control Ordinance**

Develop an ordinance to regulate stormwater and construction site erosion to more effectively reduce nonpoint source water pollution and protect surface water resources. Implement programs to preserve and restore vital natural systems whenever new residential or commercial development occurs. Incorporate *low impact development* requirements.

**Categories** – Environmental Preservation & Outdoor Recreation

**Champions** – Town Board, Plan Commission, consultant

**Funding** – General fund, WDNR, NRCS

**Historic Preservation Plan**

Historical and cultural resources are valuable community assets warranting preservation. Towns have the authority to preserve their heritage through the development of historic preservation plans and ordinances (Wisconsin Statutes §60.64). The first step in

developing such a plan is to conduct an inventory of historically or culturally significant places and structures in the community.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Main Street programs identify a number of benefits to historic preservation planning:

- Creation of local historic districts stabilizes and often increases residential and commercial property values
- Increases in property values in historic districts are typically greater than increases in the community at large
- Historic building rehabilitation creates more jobs and results in more local business than does new construction
- Tourists drawn by a community's historic character typically stay longer and spend more during their visit than other tourists
- Historic rehabilitation encourages community investment and produces a high return for municipal dollars spent

**Categories** – *Revitalization & Redevelopment, Community Pride*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Plan Commission, local volunteers, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund, SHPO*

**Comprehensive Plan**

Review and update the comprehensive plan, as required under 66.1001 Wis. Stats.

**Categories** – *Revitalization & Redevelopment, Local Goods & Services, Economic Growth, Facility & Infrastructure Enhancements, Environmental Preservation & Outdoor Recreation, Community Pride*

**Champions** – *Town Board, Plan Commission, consultant*

**Funding** – *General fund*