

East Bay Township 2021 Master Plan Update Community Focus Group Results Report

June 24, 2021

Introduction & Overview

East Bay Township hosted a series of focus groups in 2021 to inform the current update to the Township Master Plan. The Township hired Statecraft to facilitate the focus groups. Five focus groups were held around the topics of families with children, business, transportation, natural resources, and senior citizens. The purpose of the focus groups was to understand the most pressing issues facing East Bay Township from the perspective of East Bay Township residents, business owners, visitors, and stakeholders.

The focus groups were held remotely via Zoom and attended as follows:

- Senior Citizens, February 9, 2021: 11 attendees
- Families with Children, May 25, 2021: 13 attendees
- Business, May 27, 2021: 5 attendees
- Transportation, June 2, 2021: 10 attendees
- Natural Resources, June 3, 2021: 21 attendees

Several high-level themes emerged across all focus groups, including:

- The TART Trail system is widely appreciated and used. Additional non-motorized infrastructure is desired.
- Traffic speed and flow throughout the Township is a concern for many resident and business stakeholders.
- East Bay Township’s mix of urban amenities and rural character make it a desirable place to live.
- Land use regulations should protect and enhance our dense woodlands, open spaces, and inland lakes.
- The Hammond and 3 Mile intersection’s future land use and design generated a lot of interest, specifically including safe pedestrian crossings, community amenities, and active businesses are desired in the area.

This report summarizes the feedback shared in all focus groups. For topic-specific feedback, see the following pages:

Families with Children	Pages 2—3
Business	Pages 3—4
Transportation	Pages 4—5
Natural Resources	Pages 6—7
Senior Citizens	Pages 7—8

Families with Children Focus Group Feedback, May 25, 2021

Focus group registrants were asked to provide their feedback to two questions via email prior to the focus group: what is working well and what is not working, related to raising a family with children in East Bay Township?

The following responses were summarized and presented at the focus group:

What have you seen and experienced in East Bay Township that is working well related to raising a family with children?

- Family-friendly amenities, including library, grocery stores, and local businesses
- Pedestrian infrastructure, including trails and sidewalks
- Green spaces, parks, and preserves
- Water resources
- Neighborhood character

What have you seen and experienced in East Bay Township that is not working well related to raising a family with children?

- Lack of safe pedestrian and bike connections and crossings
- Road and intersection speed and flow
- US-31 corridor aesthetics
- Lack of affordable childcare

What do you want the Township to do related to raising a family with children in East Bay Township?

Next, focus group attendees were asked to consider what the Township and partners could do to support raising a family in East Bay Township. The most popular ideas are listed below.

- Create new pedestrian connections including nonmotorized trails, sidewalks, and biking lanes.
- Improve existing pedestrian crossings and intersections.
- Work with transportation partners to reduce speeds on major roads and near schools.
- Encourage parks development near neighborhoods.

Discussion Notes

Focus group attendees were asked to share which responses above resonated with their personal experience, other ideas they would add to the list, and any questions. Oft-repeated feedback is summarized below.

- Future pedestrian infrastructure improvements should be considered as new developments are proposed and should prioritize neighborhood connections and intersection safety.
- Housing is needed for all income levels.
- The process for reviewing new development requests should be thoughtful and transparent.
- Groundwater contamination is a concern.

- East Bay Township’s character provides the right mix of urban convenience and rural space. New development should be thoughtfully targeted to maximize urban connections and minimize sprawl.
- Increase community gathering amenities in parks.

Business Focus Group Feedback, May 27, 2021

Focus group registrants were asked to provide their feedback to two questions via email prior to the focus group: what is working well and what is not working, related to owning and/or operating a business in East Bay Township?

The following responses were summarized and presented at the focus group:

What have you seen and experienced in East Bay Township that is working well related to owning and/or operating a business?

- Township support and assistance during Covid-19 pandemic
- Township character, including family-owned businesses and food trucks

What have you seen and experienced in East Bay Township that is not working well related to owning and/or operating a business?

- Need more assistance in dealing with environmental challenges
- Need clearer ordinance and guidelines

What do you want the Township to do related to owning and/or operating a business in East Bay Township?

Next, focus group attendees were asked to consider what the Township and partners could do related to support owning and/or operating a business in East Bay Township. The most popular ideas are listed below.

- Communicate with businesses about available financial and technical assistance.
- Support family-owned business development.
- Increase landscape buffering standards between different land uses.
- Work with partners to reduce speeds on major roads.
- Improve US-31 corridor aesthetics.

Discussion Notes

Focus group attendees were asked to share which responses above resonated with their personal experience, other ideas they would add to the list, and any questions. Oft-repeated feedback is summarized below.

- Develop a brand for the Township.

- Be proactive in identifying what types of businesses are needed and how to attract them.
- Implement buffering measures between commercial uses will improve community and corridor aesthetics.
- Encourage the development of community center amenities at Hammond and 3 Mile intersection, including a coffee shop, farmer’s market, and community gathering space at the Township offices.
- Locate new development to protect dense woodlands, open spaces, and inland lakes.

Transportation Focus Group Feedback, June 2, 2021

Focus group registrants were asked to provide their feedback to two questions via email prior to the focus group: what is working well and what is not working, related to transportation in East Bay Township?

The following responses were summarized and presented at the focus group:

What have you seen and experienced in East Bay Township that is working well related to transportation?

- TART Trail
- BATA
- Road shoulder improvements

What have you seen and experienced in East Bay Township that is not working well related to transportation?

- Need more pedestrian and bike infrastructure
- Limited enforcement of high vehicle speeds
- Dangerous intersections
- Pedestrian crossings on US-31
- Vehicle congestion near schools and inland lake parks
- Traffic flow on US-31 between 3 Mile and 4 Mile roads

What could the Township do related to transportation in East Bay Township?

Next, focus group attendees were asked to consider what the Township and partners could do related to supporting transportation improvements in East Bay Township. The most popular ideas are listed below.

- Seek funding for non-motorized trail planning and connections
- Improve the safety of pedestrian crossings and intersections
- Work with transportation partners to reduce speeds on major roads
- Support additional BATA routes within Township

Discussion Notes

Focus group attendees were asked to share which responses above resonated with their personal experience, other ideas they would add to the list, and any questions. Oft-repeated feedback is summarized below.

- US-31 and Hammond ingress and egress should be thoughtfully designed to support traffic flow and safety along the corridors.
- Need additional crosswalks on US-31 for pedestrians crossing between hotels and Lake Michigan.
- Vehicle traffic on the US-31 corridor will slow as dense development continues along the corridor.
- Reducing speeds on major roads and improving pedestrian crossings work together.
- The Township should continue to partner with environmental and natural resource partners to ensure that natural resources are safeguarded and with transportation partners to minimize traffic speeds and maximize intersection efficiency.

Natural Resources Focus Group Feedback, June 3, 2021

Focus group registrants were asked to provide their feedback to two questions via email prior to the focus group: what is working well and what is not working, related to natural resources in East Bay Township?

The following responses were summarized and presented at the focus group:

What have you seen and experienced in East Bay Township that is working well related to natural resources?

- The Township's existing open, natural, and green spaces
- Parks & recreation opportunities (hike, bike, swim, ski, boat)
- TART & VASA trails provide connections to nature and outdoors
- Tree protection ordinance in development
- Holiday Woodland Preserve acquisition
- Mitchell Creek Meadow Preserve in development
- Forest Lakes Overlay district regulations
- Community engagement

What have you seen and experienced in East Bay Township that is not working well related to natural resources?

- Enforcement of existing ordinances
- Weekend ordinance violations
- Wetland and ground water protection
- Tree cutting

- Reactive planning & zoning

What do you want the Township to do related to natural resources in East Bay Township?

Next, focus group attendees were asked to consider what the Township and partners could do related to natural resources in East Bay Township. The most popular ideas are listed below.

- Increase zoning enforcement
- Adopt a local wetland ordinance
- Increase buffer and landscape requirements
- Limit intensity of uses in environmentally sensitive areas
- Adopt a tree ordinance

Discussion Notes

Focus group attendees were asked to share which responses above resonated with their personal experience, other ideas they would add to the list, and any questions. Oft-repeated feedback is summarized below.

- The Master Plan and Zoning Ordinances are well-intentioned. Enforce existing zoning rules and close loopholes.
- Township residents are very engaged in natural resource issues.
- Many property owners are well-meaning but don't understand what is allowed and not allowed on their property. Communicate with property owners, residents, realtors, and contractors around Township land use regulations.
- Wetland and tributary protections are vital to ensure the Township remains rich in high-quality water resources.

Senior Citizens Focus Group Feedback, February 9, 2021

Introductions

Attendees were asked to introduce themselves, provide how long they have lived in East Bay Township, and identify the most pressing issue our community is facing. In summary:

- Attendees ranged from relative newcomers to the Township, to those who had grown up here. A few grew up here and have since moved back in the past decade.
- Key issues identified included short-term rentals, affordable housing, recreational activities for seniors, environmental and aesthetic concerns in Forest Lakes Area, zoning enforcement, growth management, coordination with county planning, traffic, and roundabouts.

Discussion

Attendees were then polled to identify when topic(s) to discuss in more detail, and in which order. These included environmental protection, recreation, transportation & economic development, and housing, as summarized below.

- **Environmental Protection**
 - Numerous sites on Munson Ave in need of beautification.
 - Dark sky protection is important.
 - Concern about lack of separation and green buffers between land uses.
 - Education of real estate professionals regarding protection requirements
 - Desire to keep rural character.
 - Consider preservation of agricultural lands, including Preservation of Development Rights program.

- **Recreation**
 - Desire for further development and accessible access to biking, hiking, cross-country ski trails and pathways.
 - Desire for safe biking lanes on rural roads of Township.
 - Desire for more canoe and kayak points of access for East Bay and inland lakes.
 - The Township is a mecca for retirees and retirees today are active and healthy. Design recreation opportunities with elderly population in mind.

- **Transportation & Economic Development**
 - Need more promotion of the Bayline bus service. Desire for frequency and hours of operation expanded within the Township.
 - Traffic issues are increasing in summer and throughout year.
 - Hammond and Three Mile has potential for better transportation and land use development, such as a roundabout and village center, respectively

- **Housing**
 - Acknowledgement service workers in Township have difficulty finding housing and varied and more affordable options are needed
 - Concerns over traffic and number of new homes planned for Hammond.
 - Desire for high quality homes while still preserving the landscape and existing trees.
 - Tiny homes should be addressed in new master plan.