

CITY OF NISSWA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ONLINE COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS



To: Steering Committee Members

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NJPA

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RE: Comprehensive Plan Community Survey Results



Below are the key findings from the online comprehensive plan community survey. **178 responses** were collected during a four-week period (ending February 21st). The survey was developed after feedback was collected from participants who attended the Community Visioning Session on January 10th, 2017. A combination of broad, open-ended questions were asked, as well as questions regarding particular topics such as sense of place, park, trail and open space, transportation and infrastructure, economic development, housing, downtown, tourism, etc. These questions were asked to gather additional valuable insight and opinions of Nisswa residents.

The feedback collected will form the foundation of the goals and policies, help inform planning priorities, and will be addressed in the new comprehensive plan document. The responses are as follows:

Nisswa Character |

Nisswa is known as a quaint tourist community in north central Minnesota. Nisswa has a strong sense of community with its unique central business district and wealth of natural resources. Residents support a collaborative effort to maintain and preserve the community's unique sense of place and up-north feel. Community residents encourage the improvement of walkability efforts that enhance the pedestrian experience throughout the community and within the downtown realm.

Economic Development |

Nisswa has a very strong, thriving downtown environment during the summer months, which is an important component to economic development. Citizens support efforts to create places where people, especially young people, do not want to leave. These actions should ensure that precautions are taken to preserve the community character.

A diverse economy provides employment and investment opportunities. Survey respondents support continuing effort in supporting entrepreneurs and new businesses. Residents also support exploration of industry recruitment options (46%), and avoiding big-box related business.

Housing |

Strong neighborhoods will preserve the quality of life for all residents. Residents support coordinated efforts to develop diverse housing types that will meet the changing housing needs and preferences. 50% of survey respondents feel that there is not an adequate supply of quality housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, and stages of life. 51% of survey respondents “agree” that more affordable housing options are needed.

Park, Trails and Open Space |

Nisswa’s parks, trail networks, and open spaces are some of the city’s greatest assets. Though residents feel that the existing trail system is easily accessible, residents envision an interconnected, preserved, and functional park, trail, and open space network. Residents support increased public beach access, expanded trail networks connected to surrounding communities, as well as increased signage for new and existing trail users.

Part A – Location of Open Space Improvements

Nisswa is reasonably accessible and interconnected. Residents support expanding on street and off-street trail networks to improve connectivity throughout the community.

Nisswa residents acknowledged that natural resources are one of the single most cherished assets. Lakes and natural resources enhance the quality of life for its residents and visitors. Residents support cooperative efforts to increase public beach access

Natural Resources |

Area lakes, rivers, and streams can be described as the most cherished asset of the community. Residents strongly support preservation of open spaces, natural resources and the environment for future generation. By doing this, the city would balance the built and natural environment.

Part A – Best Management Practices (BMP's)

80% of residents indicated that they would implement BMP’s to help improve water quality and preserve the shoreland. It can be assumed that residents would support programming and community efforts towards the implementation of such best management practices, not only on a property owner level, but city-wide scale.

Tourism |

Nisswa’s economy depends heavily on revenues generated from sales. 93% of survey respondents agree that Nisswa is a welcoming and attractive place for visitors, and 85% of respondents agree that the Paul Bunyan Trail is an amenity in attracting tourists and visitors.

Part A – Downtown

Downtown plays a critical role in establishing Nisswa’s identity. It has served as the cultural, social, and economic heart of the city. The thriving downtown environment attracts people to the City not only as a destination, but often times a location for a second-homeowners. Residents support cooperative efforts to maintain the sense of place, and enhance pedestrian infrastructure in the downtown business district.

Part B – Trail network

Trails build strong, economically vital communities. Trails and green space are importance community amenities that spur economic development, and residents have noted open space as a cherished asset. Residents support the efforts of expanding not only trail networks, but support enhancements to the existing network as well as new connections. Respondents also noted the importance of wayfinding and signage for new and existing trail users.

Part C – Housing

The social and economic impacts of second homeowners on the communities near their second homes are significant. Respondents support efforts in preserving Nisswa’s unique sense of place, downtown environment, and natural resources, as well as support the preservation and continuance community events that engage all Nisswa residents during tourist season.

Part D – Natural Resource Preservation

Residents support a collaborative effort between citizens, the City and area Lake Associations to protect, preserve, and improve the quality of its natural resources (natural features, forest tracts, lakes, rivers, streams, and environmentally sensitive areas, etc.) for future generations.

Part E – Economic Development

Communities are realizing the economic potential of trails as highly desirable destinations that bring dollars to the places they serve. In addition to preserving critical open space and providing important transportation options, trail and greenways attract visitors from near and far. Survey participants (60%) have noted a “neutral” response on the City’s efforts in supporting entrepreneurs and new businesses.

Transportation/Infrastructure |

Nisswa has a strong transportation network and is served by both county and state highways. 56% of survey respondents noted that city services are effectively provided, and 47% report that there are adequate collector and frontage roads throughout the city. Respondents noted the importance of alternative transportation modes (walking, biking, etc.) and associated infrastructure (83%).

Downtown |

The Central Business District plays a critical role in Nisswa’s identity. Survey respondents want to see a coordinated and cooperative effort by the public, private, and institutional sectors for maintaining and improving the social, economic, and physical aspect of Nisswa’s downtown.

The following strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) was compiled, analyzed, and determined from respondent feedback:

Strengths:

- Sense of community
- Vibrant downtown and distinctive business district
- Walkable downtown environment
- Up North *feel* and strong sense of place

- Vacation destination
- Community activities and events
- Parks, trail, and open spaces
- Lakes and natural resources
- Resorts
- Tourism industry
- Locally owned and operated businesses
- Elementary school

Opportunities:

- Improve existing trail connections (on and off street)
- Explore opportunities to create new trail connections and expand trail networks
- Enhancement of existing park and trail network
- Encourage a mix of businesses downtown to ensure a thriving downtown environment
- Improve walkability in the downtown core
- Lake access
- Redevelopment opportunities at Sportland Corner
- Improve signage
- Community facilities
- Enhance the downtown business district
- Design standards
- Incentive programs
- Diversify local economy and increase living wage employment opportunities

Challenges:

- Retain younger population
- Retain residents
- Work closely with lake associations on water quality issues
- Increase pedestrian infrastructure and traffic calming devices
- Lack of diverse housing types for all buyers
- Road maintenance
- Infrastructure maintenance and expansion
- Preservation of natural resources
- Support for long term infrastructure investments
- Maintain the authentic community identity while encouraging business recruitment
- Absence of living wage employment opportunities

Threats:

- Opposition to change
- Lack of housing options
- Capacity concerns
- Sewer system expansion
- Infrastructure maintenance and expansion
- Lack of development and expansion opportunities
- Shortage of living wage employment opportunities
- Lack of incentive programs for business expansion and recruitment efforts