

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT

The Traverse City Downtown Development Authority (DDA), in collaboration with the City of Traverse City and the Traverse City Police Department, is working to develop a strategic plan to identify a desired vision for Traverse City's drinking culture as well as immediate, short-term, and long-term action step recommendations to achieve that vision.

For the past few months, the project team has been listening in order to understand community members' perspectives, insights, experiences, challenges, and expectations. The team received 1,130 responses to a community survey, conducted over 70 one-on-one interviews, and hosted several listening sessions. This report shares information about the engagement activities and summarizes, in high-level way, the vision elements, strengths, challenges, and ideas shared through the community engagement effort.

With the hopes, issues, and themes people have shared in mind, the team is now moving forward to develop strategic goals and action steps in collaboration with multiple public, nonprofit, and private sector stakeholders who are responsible and have authority for various activities related to land use planning and zoning, licensing and permits, transportation, public safety and law enforcement, group and tour management, marketing, outdoor events and festival management, menu development and customer experiences, and mental wellness and addiction treatment and recovery. A draft of this strategic plan will be available for public review and feedback in early September.

Who Participated

Survey

- March 2021
- 1,130 responses
- Majority local respondents: 40.4% (457) in the 49684 zip code, 32.9% (372) in 49686, 6.7% (76) in 49685, 4.4% (50) in 49696, 2.6% (29) in 49690
- Diverse age representation: 26%, 65 and older; 23%, 55-64; 15% 45-54; 22% 35-44; 13%, 25-34; 1% 21-24; the rest were under 21

Interviews

- April – July 2021
- 74 one-on-one interviews
- Liquor license holders; downtown business owners; neighborhood residents; art and cultural experience managers; event managers and tour hosts; event and tourism marketers and promoters; health and wellness professionals; law enforcement; local government

Listening Sessions

- June 2021
- 7 sessions
- Neighborhood residents; people who do not drink alcohol; marketing and media; adjacent business district (North Boardman); downtown restaurant, bar and tasting room employees; downtown customers

High-Level Themes

- **Care for Community:** Interviewees shared their passion for the community and a desire to celebrate what is good about it. Caring about neighbors, people who live here, people who choose to visit, and the success of small businesses were common thoughts and themes. People are proud of the community's craft beverage industry - wine, beer, and spirits - and of the small businesses that offer experiences and services that demonstrate care for customers, employees, neighboring businesses, and the broader community.
- **Impact versus Intention:** People are seeing a mix of healthy and unhealthy behaviors. Related to behaviors with a negative impact, such as related to noise, people shared their observations of the impact of behaviors and also their perceptions of intentions. Many people who shared concerns also shared they understood people were motivated by a desire to have fun, not harm others. When talking about tourists and visitors' behaviors, some mentioned their own tendency to be more relaxed with their behavior when they traveled. When older people talked about the behaviors they have observed with younger people, they talked about behaving differently in their 20s than they do now.
- **Expectation Management:** Many people associate alcohol with personal and event-based celebration. People talked about their desire to welcome people into the community, and the importance and enjoyment of the positive aspects of alcohol. They also shared a desire to create and manage expectations around behaviors and experiences, and to do this in a way that honored the small town nature of the community, a sense of neighborliness and the quiet enjoyment of living in a residential area, and of personal responsibility. Some people shared that people's desire for specific experiences while on vacation may not align with the expectations of those living here. Many shared they would like experiences and events to not be centered around alcohol consumption.
- **Sense of Empowerment:** Many interviewed shared they feel like they have control of their individual choices and behaviors, but they do not feel empowered to impact the overall culture. There was a strong desire to work on issues together, and an awareness that there was no single "solution" to creating a healthy culture.

Vision Elements

The words and phrases below are representative of the elements of a "healthy drinking culture" that participants shared in the survey, in interviews, and in listening sessions.

- Joyful.
- Celebratory.
- Safe.

- Responsible.
- Moderation.
- Regulated.
- Fun.
- Alcohol is enjoyed as part of a meal.
- Respectful of other people.
- Accountability for businesses and individuals.
- Focus on relationships and experiences and not on alcohol.
- Availability of transportation choices.
- No sense of social shame around choosing to drink, or choosing not to drink alcohol.
- Normalizing a wide range of beverages at social gatherings and celebrations.
- Community emphasizes physical and mental health and recreation experiences that do not feature alcohol.

Strengths Identified by Participants

- The strong craft beverage culture - wineries, beer, and spirits. Focusing on craft products and sense of place: the glamour of the building, the vineyard, the local sources of the product, the care the craftsperson put into making the product, the stories of the people creating and offering the service
- Social connections and people enjoying social time with friends.
- TIPS and TAM training and certification for staff.
- Empowering staff to decline service to people who have over consumed.
- Businesses voluntarily closing at or before midnight.
- Making alcohol part of the experience, not the experience.
- Serving food with alcohol.
- People drinking responsibly, understanding personal limits, and respecting people and places.
- Businesses hosting experiences and tours that are not coupled with alcohol.
- Police are present as a deterrent. Downtown business owners and staff having a strong relationship with police and public safety officers.
- Relationships between businesses. Sharing goals and being on the same page with intentions with staff and customers. Communicating when incidents are occurring, like cutting someone off who may head next door to a neighboring bar or restaurant.
- Businesses cooperating and sharing resources and ideas about how to co-create a healthy culture along with customers, employees, and community partners.

- Events and activities where alcohol is not featured (e.g. Tree Lighting ceremony, concerts at the Pavilions, guided walks at Botanic Gardens, etc.)

Challenges Identified by Participants

- When asked in survey, “How effectively does the Traverse City community promote a ‘healthy’ drinking culture?” 44.4% responded not effectively, 26.3% responded somewhat effectively.
- Litter and property damage (e.g. vomit and urine) at businesses adjacent or close to certain bars. Businesses not cleaning up after customers who make a mess on other properties.
- Rowdy behavior and fights in public spaces including sidewalks, alleys, and parks.
- Theft, including shoplifting for sport because people have been drinking.
- The behavior of people on brew and wine bus tours or paddle tours who start drinking early in the day and drink all day.
- Cherry Festival and the Beer Tent.
- Having alcohol at all types of event, from bike rides to book clubs.
- The Peddle Pub through the neighborhoods
- The behavior of people in bachelorette parties and other group gatherings.
- The behavior of people who are drinking at wine tours all day, then arriving at downtown restaurants.
- Drinking and driving, including automobiles and boating.
- Limited transportation options, particularly late in the evening and to areas outside of the downtown.
- Happy Hour and specials promotions that encourage people to over consume.
- Bars open past midnight. “Nothing good happens after midnight.”
- The public behaviors of patrons at Union Street, Dillinger’s, and Bootleggers.
- Social expectations and habits, including “Mommy needs wine” and parties among friends, or events, where there is subtle peer pressure and an expectation to drink or buy alcohol.
- A culture that promotes day drinking.
- Not enough non-alcoholic drinks options on menus that aren’t sodas.
- Reactions and assumptions made by servers when someone orders a non-alcoholic drink.
- The social stigma that comes with choosing not to drink alcohol.
- Customers showing up at establishments and expecting a different type of experience than what is offered regarding reservations, pace, and timing.

- Shame and blame, including on individuals whose behaviors have had negative impacts, and on businesses who are doing their best to help people manage consumption responsibly.
- Customers' hostility toward employees and businesses who choose to cut someone off.

Ideas and Expectations Shared by Participants

Participants in the survey, interviews, and listening sessions also shared specific hopes, ideas, and expectations of the City of Traverse City, the Traverse City Downtown Development Authority, and the Traverse City Police Department. These potential goals and action steps are reflected in three broad categories.

Policies and Licensing, including:

- Updating the zoning ordinance and permit process to create clearer criteria for the desired number, type, and location of liquor licenses, including at the neighborhood and block level.
- Updating processes and permit criteria for events and pedicab licensing.
- Assessing local ordinances such as those governing noise, or other substances such as marijuana or smoking downtown, to address alignment with drinking culture vision and goals.
- Making investments that ensure consistent and meaningful law enforcement for business and individuals.

Training and Education, including:

- Continuing TIPS and TAM training and certification for staff.
- Requiring tour operator training and certification.
- Coordinating training approaches.
- Considering private-sector incentive-based approaches for managing culture and experiences.
- Creating customer-focused education and outreach.
- Providing access to existing private and public sector resources that are greater than what one small business can offer, including the systematic promotion of available health and wellness services, and social activities and places to gather after-hours without alcohol.
- Continuing law enforcement training in de-escalation of conflict, including with those who are armed.

Experience Management, including:

- Promoting events and experiences in ways that do not center alcohol.
- Coordinating with hospitality and tourism promoters that feature Traverse City as a destination for recreation, fitness, families, friends, wellness, arts and culture, and food.
- Working with businesses where behaviors with negative impacts are occurring, including asking these businesses what they need in order to achieve shared community goals for a healthier drinking culture.
- Considering forming a Responsible Hospitality Council to articulate a vision, reinforce best practices, and support voluntary implementation of practices by liquor license holders and other businesses.
- Working with surrounding governmental units and with the private sector on approaches to fostering a healthy culture.

- Adding lights in dark alleys.
- Addressing social and economic conditions, like low income and housing.
- Having more proactive communication and dialogue with businesses, neighborhood associations, and the public, including benchmarking data and progress toward a vision.
- Continuing and increasing the presence of the downtown police officer to serve as a reminder to act responsibly, including at “hot spots,” after midnight, and during events.
- Increasing use of video cameras in areas where problems have been identified.