



Village of Pentwater Strategic Action Plan December 2025

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Village of Pentwater Profile

Pentwater is a picturesque community located in Oceana County on the western shore of Michigan, nestled between Lake Michigan and a 500-acre inland lake also named Pentwater Lake. Some of the Village's key characteristics are:

- **Lakeside Community:** The village's geography is defined by its proximity to both Pentwater Lake and Lake Michigan, connected by a channel. The area is renowned for its clear waters and "sugar-fine" sandy beaches, especially at the popular Charles Mears State Park.
- **Charming Downtown:** Pentwater features a downtown area with a mix of shops, art galleries, restaurants, and marinas reminiscent of a charming New England town.
- **Community Hub:** The Village Green park is a central gathering place, hosting numerous year-round events, including summer band concerts, art fairs, farmers' markets, and holiday festivals.
- **Tourism & Recreation:** Originally a lumbering town, Pentwater has transitioned into a popular tourist destination, with its population swelling during the summer months. Visitors and residents enjoy a variety of outdoor activities, including boating, fishing, swimming, hiking, and winter sports such as cross-country skiing and ice skating.
- **Lifestyle:** The village has a small year-round population of around 900 residents and is known for its relaxed, family-friendly atmosphere. It attracts a mix of permanent families, telecommuting professionals, and retirees who enjoy the serene, community-oriented environment.

For more information, you can visit the official [Village of Pentwater website](#) or explore the community's offerings on the Pure Michigan website. <https://www.michigan.org/>



Village Council Members

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Pro-Tempore

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Strategic Action Plan Steering Committee Members

Dean Gustafson

Kyle Jansen

Amy LaBarge

Mary Marshall

Joe Roberson

Toby Van Ess





I am so pleased that the Village of Pentwater is initiating its first formal strategic action plan. We are a quaint and beautiful Village of about 900 homes who pay taxes to support a population that can swell to more than 10,000 in the summer months, and our infrastructure has to support that incredible growth. We have aging infrastructure as you can see by our sidewalks, streets and street signs and other infrastructure you cannot see such as sewer lines, water lines, and more. We have plenty of needs and we cannot afford to do everything at once.

When I ran for office I developed my vision for the Village, and one of the processes I felt the Village could improve was its long term planning. The old adage, "Plan the work and then work the plan" is how we can get things done, and in a manner that is transparent to the community. Our strategic action plan will help us focus on things that are important to the Village as discovered in our SWOT analysis conducted last summer. Thank you to our community for such impressive participation in the process. Your feedback absolutely guided our planning as you can see in reviewing this document.

What you can expect from us now is to thoughtfully follow through on the plan and report our progress to the Village Council and the community on a regular basis. This plan will not get dusty while sitting on a shelf; it will be worn, weathered and coffee stained as we use it to guide our budget and our actions. Our Village deserves this level of attention on how we care for our physical assets and our people.

It is an honor to serve this community. As always, I remain "Positively Pentwater."

Mary Marshall, Pentwater Village Council President

Dear Members of the Pentwater Community,

I want to start this correspondence by stating that it truly was a pleasure working with the Village Council and the Steering Committee on the development of the Village of Pentwater's strategic action plan. This 3 to 5-year plan is a culmination of collaboration and feedback from the residents and community members who took the time to express their views through personal interviews, attending a community forum, or completing the web-based survey.

Over the past six months, we embarked on a strategic planning process to establish village priorities and develop specific, measurable goals. This resulting strategic action plan serves as a helpful guide for the village's operations and future development.

Key highlights and outcomes of this planning effort include the development of:

- **Mission and Vision Statements**
- **Guiding Principles**
- **Five S.M.A.R.T. Goals**

The next step is for the Village Council and Staff to merge goals into existing operational plans. Working groups will be formed around each strategic priority to validate recommendations and transition them into actionable projects. This strategic action plan will serve as a useful tool for the Village of Pentwater in achieving its intended vision and fostering continued progress.

Thank you again for your commitment

Sincerely,

Chet Janik, Consultant

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MISSION STATEMENT

“A village mission statement is a concise declaration of its purpose and values. It guides decision-making and actions, reflecting the village's commitment to its residents and community. Examples include enhancing quality of life, providing reliable services, fostering community engagement, and preserving the village's unique character.”

To ensure that our lakefront village embraces its heritage, protects the environment, and welcomes everyone into a strong, connected community.



VISION STATEMENT

“A vision statement is a concise declaration of an organization's aspirations, outlining its desired future state and providing direction for its strategic planning. It describes what the organization hopes to achieve in the long term.”

Our village will be a strong, welcoming community where every voice is valued. We are committed to preserving our heritage while embracing thoughtful progress through transparent, responsive, and enhanced government services.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

“Guiding principles are fundamental beliefs, values, or rules that provide direction and structure for decision-making, behavior, and actions within an organization or community. They act as a framework, ensuring consistency and integrity by aligning actions with broader goals and ethical standards.

Village of Pentwater’s Guiding Principles

SERVE

Services-We will maintain and improve the village’s services and infrastructure in a fiscally responsible manner.

Excellence –We will enhance the quality of government for our residents

Respect -We will communicate openly, honestly, respectfully, and with integrity.

Value-We will continue to recognize the value of our neighborhoods, businesses, and school system while maintaining the village’s character.

Environment -We will promote good stewardship of our natural lakefront environment by protecting and conserving resources.

SWOT SURVEY RESULTS

37 personal interviews and two community forums attended by 34 people

143-People took the time to complete the online survey.

214 Total Responses

173 Residents of the Village of Pentwater

41 Non-residents of the Village

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. It is a strategic planning tool used to assess the factors that can impact an organization. A SWOT analysis helps identify areas where an entity excels, areas needing improvement, potential advantages, and potential challenges.

STRENGTHS -*What does the Village do well? What advantages do we have over similar villages?*

79% NATURAL AND COASTAL BEAUTY –parks, marina, beaches, close to several major cities

72% “A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND BELONGING” -friendly, caring people, small town atmosphere, and service clubs. A lifetime of memories

53% VOLUNTEER AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES- Service clubs, social networks, the arts. concerts, special events

35% VILLAGE BUSINESSES ARE FRIENDLY, CLEAN, WALKABLE, AND IMPROVING IN QUALITY

35% MUNICIPAL SERVICES—Water, sewer, and recycling services

WEAKNESSES- *What factors in our control detract from our ability to be more effective? What areas need improvement? What does the Village lack?*

49% LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND YOUNG FAMILIES, DECLING SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, TOO MANY SHORT-TERM RENTALS

36% COMPETING VISIONS BETWEEN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, RESIDENTS, AND TOURISM

35% LACK OF A DEFINED PLAN FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND CHANNEL MAINTENANCE (especially sidewalks and parking)

20 % A HISTORICAL LACK OF CONFIDENCE/COMMUNICATION WITH VILLAGE GOVERNMENT –distribution of information, hidden agendas, personality conflicts, prior managers, outdated zoning regulations

18% LACK OF MEDICAL, DENTAL SERVICES, QUALITY RESTAURANTS, AND GROCERY STORES

OPPORTUNITIES- *What opportunities exist in our area that the Village can benefit from? Are there unserved needs that the Village can address?*

39% EXPANSION AND SUPPORT OF YEAR-ROUND BUSINESSES, HOTELS, RESTURANTS, AND EXPLORE MEDICAL/DENTAL SERVICES OPTIONS AND TAX INCENTIVES

33% DEVELOP OR UPDATE ZONING, SHORT-TERM RENTAL MASTER PLANS, AND FOLLOW-THROUGH STRATEGIES TO ATTRACT FAMILIES AND INCREASE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

29% ENHANCE VILLAGE’S MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION PLANS

24% RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, bike trails, parks, community green spaces

19% EXPAND SERVICES AND HOUSING OPTIONS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

THREATS: *What obstacles does the Village face? What factors exist that are beyond our control? Are there any anticipated unfavorable trends?*

65% LACK OF YOUNG FAMILIES\ AFFORDABLE HOUSING, TOO MANY SHORT-TERM RENTALS, DECLINING SCHOOL DISTRICT ENROLLMENT

48% LACK OF A PLAN FOR CHANNEL DREDGING AND INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES

44% LACK OF VITAL SERVICES IN VILLAGE (medical, dental, grocery, hardware, and hotel)

29% LACK OF SERVICES FOR THE AGING POPULATION

28% LACK OF ENFORCEMENT-zoning, building codes, STR, and golf carts



VILLAGE OF PENTWATER GOALS

GOAL # 1: By February of each year, complete a prioritized list of capital, master, and recreational plans for the upcoming budget cycle, supported by identified grant funding opportunities and a multi-year funding strategy.

Specific: Produce a prioritized list of village projects, research grant opportunities, and develop a multi-year funding strategy. This task will be assigned to the village manager to ensure the 2026 budget and future annual budgets are based on a well-researched, financially feasible plan.

Measurable: By the completion of a final, prioritized list of projects, the number of grant opportunities identified, and the development of a multi-year funding strategy. Measured by comparing the prioritized list against recommendations from the Capital Improvement Plan, Master Plan, and Recreation Plan.

Achievable. Completion of the process by February of each year, allowing for the necessary review, prioritization, and research activities to be completed before the budget is due. The process leverages existing planning documents (CIP, Master Plan, and Recreation Plan) to inform decision-making.

Relevant: The goal directly supports the broader financial and strategic objectives of developing the upcoming annual village budget. By prioritizing projects based on community needs, the goal ensures that resources are allocated to the most relevant initiatives.

Time-bound: This deadline is strategically placed to ensure the prioritized plan is ready for review and inclusion in the upcoming 2026-27 village budget, which typically starts its fiscal year in April

GOAL # 2: Enhance senior citizen services by partnering with county officials and local agencies to establish a dedicated senior living task force. This task force will serve as a communication wing to work with the Oceana County Community on Aging (OCCA) and other local organizations to create a multi-channel communication plan to distribute information to seniors by July 2026

- **Specific:** By the end of January 2026, a Senior Services Task Force will be formed with at least eight members, including representatives from the Ocean County Council on Aging and at least two senior citizen advocates. By December 2026, develop a communication plan to ensure all senior citizens are aware of the OCCA services available and can choose any Pentwater-specific additions that may be needed. Work with Village staff to identify accessibility challenges to inform Village priorities for infrastructure improvements.
- **Measurable:** The number of task force meetings attended. Success will also be measured by distributing brochures to at least 20 key community locations, such as local stores, libraries, and county and village offices.
- **Achievable:** By leveraging existing relationships with county partners and community leaders to recruit task force members. A committed task force and a timeline that includes content creation, design, and production. Costs can be managed through budget allocation or grant applications. An information campaign can be executed through partnerships with the task force's member agencies.
- **Relevant:** The task force directly works to develop a communication plan that will reach all seniors in the community related to OCCA offerings and Pentwater-specific resources. Creating informational materials directly addresses the need to inform seniors and their families about available support services. Effective communication is essential to ensure seniors are informed and able to access the required services
- **Time-bound:** The deadline for forming the task force and identifying services is January 2026. The deadline for completing and beginning distribution of the resource materials is December 2026. The communication campaign will be completed and assessed by October 2027.

GOAL # 3 Enhance effective governance and staff/council working relationships

***First Objective:** To develop, approve, and distribute an updated staff handbook that is aligned with current local, state, and federal ordinances and village policies*

- **Specific:** The updated handbook will address potential legal compliance issues, clarify internal policies, and improve readability
- **Measurable:** Once the handbook is approved by the legal advisor and council, and has been acknowledged by 100% of staff and council members through a signed receipt.
- **Achievable:** The village manager will coordinate the effort to meet the targeted deadline
- **Relevant:** An updated handbook will reduce legal risks and ensure all staff members and council members are aware of current policies and regulations.
- **Time-bound:** The new handbook will be drafted within 6 months and approved and distributed 12 months.

***Second Objective:** To establish and implement clear communication protocols between the manager, council, and staff to increase transparency and efficiency.*

- **Specific:** The manager will develop, with input from the council and staff, a written set of communication guidelines covering preferred methods, response times, and appropriate channels for different topics.
- **Measurable:** The effectiveness of the new protocols will be measured in manager-staff communication satisfaction scores in the next manager's annual evaluation.
- **Achievable:** The manager and village president will lead the initiative to develop realistic and agreed-upon guidelines.
- **Relevant:** Clear communication channels will reduce misunderstandings, improve response times, and build trust.
- **Time-bound:** The new communication protocols will be developed within XXX months and implemented immediately thereafter.

Third Objective: *Train all staff and council members on the updated staff handbook and the new communication protocols to ensure a common and consistent understanding.*

- **Specific:** The training program will cover the key updates in the staff handbook and provide detailed instruction on the new communication protocols.
- **Measurable:** The success of the training will be measured by a 90% or higher score on a post-training survey for staff and council members.
- **Achievable:** The manager will organize the training sessions, and attendance will be mandatory for all staff and, hopefully, council members.
- **Relevant:** Consistent training ensures that everyone operates from the same understanding of rules and processes, reinforcing a culture of compliance and cooperation.
- **Time-bound:** All training sessions will be completed within four months of the handbook and communication protocols being finalized.

Fourth Objective: *To establish clear and consistent protocols for all council committees to improve clarity, efficiency, and alignment with the council's overall goals.*

- **Specific:** The protocols will define the committee's scope, meeting frequency, reporting requirements, and the process for proposing and voting on actions.
- **Measurable:** All committees will adopt the new protocols within six months.
- **Achievable:** A joint council-manager committee will be appointed to draft the new protocols and present them for full council approval.
- **Relevant:** Standardized protocols will ensure that council work is focused, consistent, and directly supports the strategic priorities of the council
- **Time-bound:** The committee protocols will be finalized and adopted within 6 months and fully integrated into committee operations by 12 months

GOAL # 4: Modernize and clarify the Village's ordinances by reviewing the complete municipal code, eliminating ambiguous or outdated language, and integrating clear, well-defined regulations within a specified timeframe.

Specific: The project will guarantee alignment between ordinance sections and publish a comprehensive, searchable digital document for residents.

Measurable: The planning commission or a designated committee will review each chapter of the existing policy. A new, digitally searchable version of the municipal code will be published on the Village's website.

Achievable: A cross-departmental team, comprising members of the Village Council and the Planning Commission, will be formed to lead the project. Community input will be gathered through public hearings and surveys. The village will allocate the necessary budget and staff time for the project.

Relevant: Clarifying the language of ordinances will provide residents, businesses, and staff with a clear understanding of regulations, reducing confusion and disputes. Updating ordinances to reflect emerging practices and removing ambiguous language can help reduce legal challenges related to the interpretation and application of these laws.

Time-bound: The project will officially begin within 30 days of the Village Council's approval. Within 12 months, complete the review of the entire municipal code and produce a report identifying ambiguous language, inconsistencies, and areas needing new regulations. Within 24 months, draft and review the new ordinances and amendments, holding public hearings and consulting with the planning commission. Within 36 months, achieve final Village Council adoption of the updated code and publish the fully searchable, modernized municipal code on the Village's website.

GOAL #5: Enhance community communication and engagement through increased resident participation in village initiatives and improved website user satisfaction.

Specific Two-way communication: Implement at least two new communication avenues, such as an annual community forum, a "staff Q&A" feature on the website, and/or "town hall" events.

- Volunteerism: Create a centralized online portal detailing volunteer opportunities, application procedures, and impact reports.
- Website: Redesign the village website to feature improved navigation, a robust search function, and clear categorization of documents.
- Agendas: Standardize the formatting and publication of Council meeting agendas, including key topics or keywords, to enable easy searching and indexing.
- Ordinances: Establish a straightforward workflow and process to ensure online ordinances are updated promptly following any changes.

Measurable: Track and report a minimum 10% increase in overall resident engagement, and the number of residents volunteering for village efforts. Track the time from an ordinance change being enacted to its online publication, ensuring all updates meet the 30-day requirement.

Achievable: Utilize municipal communication software or social media platforms. Adopt best practices in website design, including clear navigation and adherence to accessibility standards. Use agenda management software to automate the indexing and search ability of meeting topics.

Relevant A more engaged community is more likely to support village initiatives and provide valuable feedback. Easy access to information builds trust between the village administration and residents.

Time-bound: All components of the goal will be completed within 12 months.

PILLARS

“A village's pillars are the crucial core principles that provide essential stability, strength, and support for the entire community. They function as the figurative foundation, much like architectural columns, ensuring the village's ongoing success, well-being, and resilience.”

Pentwater’s Four Pillars

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Practices that ensure decisions are made and implemented transparently and accountably to achieve the best possible outcomes for the village

Village ordinances revisions

Establish effective policies and procedures

Establish council-manager relationship norms

INFRASTRUCTURE

Essential structures and services that provide the necessary physical support for the village to function properly

Channel Dredging

Capital Improvements Plan: Water and Sewer Systems

Develop a sidewalk replacement program

Utilize the Parks and Recs. Plan to enhance municipal park areas.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Local businesses, job opportunities, and partnerships strengthen the village's economy.

Promote year-round activities

Identify opportunities for more lodging and housing

Zoning code revision

Council review of Short-term Rental Ordinance

Sell/Develop old City Hall

COMMUNICATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Building meaningful relationships, working in unison, and understanding the local culture

Improve communication processes with the community and partners

School District, DDA, Chamber, and Township

Partner with county officials to enhance senior services options

