

Pillar 6 – Objective 1

Examine and adapt a sustainable tourism model approach.

PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

Program A: Facilitate the development of a sustainable tourism plan and approach, at a local and regional scale, that builds on the existing work in the current Master Plan.

Scope

- Partnering with TC Tourism, Grand Traverse County, Networks Northwest, and regional stakeholders
- Exploring funding tools such as a regional hotel/lodging tax to offset increased service and infrastructure demands
- Evaluating legislative needs and best practices from peer communities
- Supporting education and communication around sustainable tourism concepts (e.g., Pure Michigan Trail Town)
- Engaging a specialized consultant to guide planning and benchmarking

Sequenced Timeline

Near-Term (2026-2027)

- Convene regional partners to define scope and leadership structure
- Begin education and public dialogue on sustainable tourism model
- Coordinate on hotel tax discussions

Mid-Term (2027–2029)

- Develop and adopt sustainable tourism framework
- Engage consultant (if supported)
- Align funding tools and legislative efforts
- Integrate plan into regional capital and service planning

Long-Term (2031+)

- Implement funding mechanisms (if approved)
- Monitor infrastructure, environmental, and service impacts

- Adjust tourism strategy based on measurable outcomes

Funding Requirements + Potential Sources

Primarily Staff time During Exploration Phase.

Potential Additional Needs

- Consultant services
- Dedicated staff coordination
- Legislative advocacy resources

Potential Sources

- General Fund (if contribution approved)
- Regional cost-sharing
- Hotel/lodging tax (if implemented)
- Grant exploration

Staffing / Operational Constraints

- Staff capacity for regional coordination
- Legislative and policy development workload
- Public education and engagement demands

Primary Staff

- City Management
- Planning
- Finance
- Communications & Strategic Initiatives
- Engineering

Commission Direction Needed

- Affirm City's role in facilitating sustainable tourism planning
- Identify sustainable tourism
- Provide guidance on pursuing consultant support
- Clarify position on hotel/lodging tax exploration
- Establish expectations for regional coordination and reporting

POLICY FRAMEWORK

Policy A: Work with Traverse City Tourism and other tourism entities to explore future tourism models and approaches that could reduce the negative local impacts and enhance positive local impacts of the visitation economy

Scope

- Evaluating how visitation impacts roads, utilities, public safety, housing, and neighborhood quality of life
- Aligning tourism growth with infrastructure planning and service capacity
- Exploring legislative tools and funding mechanisms to offset visitor-related costs
- Integrating findings from the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Study and related mobility planning efforts
- Identifying strategies to reduce congestion, infrastructure strain, and seasonal imbalances

Sequenced Timeline

Near-Term (2026–2027)

- Coordinate with TC Tourism on future tourism model discussions
- Align TDM Study findings with tourism impact management
- Evaluate legislative and funding options

Mid-Term (2028–2029)

- Develop agreed-upon tourism impact mitigation strategies
- Align infrastructure planning and tourism initiatives

Long-Term (2030+)

- Monitor infrastructure and service impacts
- Adjust tourism strategies based on measurable outcomes

Funding Requirements + Potential Sources

Primarily Staff Time during Exploration Phase.

Potential Additional Needs

- Consultant analysis (if expanded)
- Legislative advocacy efforts

Potential Sources

- General Fund (if contribution approved)
- Regional cost-sharing
- Lodging/hotel tax (if adopted)

Staffing / Operational Constraints

- Staff capacity for regional coordination
- Data analysis and impact tracking workload
- Legislative development demands

Primary Staff

- City Management
- Parking
- Planning
- Engineering
- Finance
- Communications & Strategic Initiatives

Commission Direction Needed

- Affirm collaborative approach with TC Tourism
- Provide guidance on legislative and funding exploration
- Establish expectations for tracking infrastructure and service impacts
- Clarify resident protection priorities within tourism policy discussions

Policy B: Advocate for more existing lodging revenue funding to be directed to impact management

Scope

- Working with Traverse City Tourism and regional partners
- Engaging in legislative dialogue to clarify allowable uses of lodging revenue
- Communicating resident impacts related to tourism-driven service demands
- Coordinating outreach with local and state representatives

Sequenced Timeline

Near-Term (2026)

- Engage TC Tourism and regional partners in funding discussions
- Meet with local and state representatives

- Establish shared advocacy position

Mid-Term (2027–2029)

- Monitor legislative opportunities
- Continue coordinated advocacy efforts

Funding Requirements + Potential Sources

Primarily staff time.

Potential Additional Needs

- Legislative advocacy coordination

No new funding required for exploration.

Staffing / Operational Constraints

- Leadership and staff time for advocacy and coordination
- Legislative engagement capacity

Primary Staff

- City Management
- City Commission
- Finance
- Communications & Strategic Initiatives

Commission Direction Needed

- Affirm advocacy position regarding lodging revenue allocation
- Support engagement with local and state representatives
- Align messaging with TC Tourism and regional partners

Policy C: Explore new mechanisms to capture new funding from the visitation economy that can help manage environmental impact and sustainability.

Scope

- Reviewing festival and large-event fee structures (Parks & Recreation Commission initiative)

- Assessing park usage fees for high-impact tourism events and impacts on parking and parking revenues
- Exploring taxation or financing tools tied to visitation
- Aligning visitor-generated revenue with environmental sustainability and maintenance needs

Sequenced Timeline

Near-Term (2026–2027)

- Complete Parks & Recreation fee structure review
- Analyze fiscal and legal feasibility of additional mechanisms

Mid-Term (2027–2029)

- Develop and evaluate new funding proposals
- Initiate legislative or policy process if required

Funding Requirements + Potential Sources

Primarily staff time during exploration phase.

Potential Revenue Tools (if adopted)

- Adjusted event and park fees
- Visitor-based taxation or financing mechanisms

Staffing / Operational Constraints

- Financial and legal analysis capacity
- Legislative coordination workload
- Policy development bandwidth

Primary Staff

- City Management
- Parks & Recreation
- Finance
- City Commission
- City Attorney

Commission Direction Needed

- Provide guidance on pursuing visitor-based funding tools
- Support Parks & Recreation fee structure review
- Authorize fiscal and legal analysis of new mechanisms
- Establish parameters for balancing tourism revenue with resident access

Pillar 6 – Objective 2

Continue to enhance the strategy to diversify the economy.

PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

Program A: This programmatic area is delivered by Traverse Connect and other partner groups.

Traverse Connect Scope

- An equitable and sustainable future for city residents
- Foster a regional collaborative approach
- Build a thriving year-round economy
- Alignment of City OKRs with Traverse Connect Scope of Services

Regional Economic & Community Development Leadership

(Alignment: Pillars 3, 4, 6)

- Convene municipal, county, and private-sector partners
- Host infrastructure and economic development roundtables
- Provide commissioner and elected official education and grant training
- Facilitate regional planning and zoning administrator collaboration
- Coordinate infrastructure pre-planning forums

Talent-Focused Economic Development

(Alignment: Pillars 2, 4, 6)

- Employer-assisted housing pilots (Make MI Home grants, employer partnerships)
- Internship and apprenticeship consortium (Michigan's Creative Coast platform)
- International student placement and experiential learning pipeline
- Legislative advocacy for childcare expansion and Tri-Share

- Workforce attraction and retention strategies

Targeted Industry Attraction & Cluster Development

(Alignment: Pillars 5, 6)

Blue Economy & Maritime Tech

- Freshwater R&D
- Marine charging corridor
- E-boat development
- PFAS remediation technology
- Inclusion in Michigan Maritime Strategy

Uncrewed Systems (Drone Industry Cluster)

- Rural health innovation testing
- Defense/dual-use applications
- Coast Guard pilot programs
- State-level industry leadership

Agriculture Tech & Renewable Energy

- Viticulture initiatives
- Carbon capture policy engagement
- Aquaculture startup support

Business Retention & Expansion

(Alignment: Pillars 1, 2, 3, 6)

- 1,000+ annual business retention visits
- 700+ annual business expansion referrals
- Developer roundtables and project coordination
- Strategic corridor readiness initiatives
- Master Plan best-practice briefings

Housing, Zoning & Community Development Support

(Alignment: Pillars 1, 4, 6)

- Zoning Atlas collaboration
- Pattern-book housing and ADU policy support
- Participation in height/density policy discussions
- Corridor and site-readiness strategy development

Experiential & Educational Industry Tourism

(Alignment: Pillars 5, 6)

- Drone and marine technology conferences
- Michigan ReShore Event
- Outdoor recreation and wine industry support
- Startup Week participation

POLICY FRAMEWORK

Policy A: Maintain and deepen the partnership with groups like Traverse Connect and Michigan Works, to support ways to diversify the economy and elevate local jobs and wages (for example the 'blue economy')

Scope

Strengthen and formalize partnerships with Traverse Connect, Michigan Works, Grand Traverse County, and other regional entities to:

- Support targeted industry growth (e.g., blue economy, technology, mobility, sustainability sectors)
- Elevate local wages and workforce opportunities
- Align workforce development with housing, childcare, and infrastructure strategies
- Identify tangible, measurable outcomes tied to City investment
- Coordinate regional economic diversification strategy

Sequenced Timeline

Near-Term (2026)

- Meet with Traverse Connect, Michigan Works, and County leadership
- Identify priority sectors and measurable outcomes
- Define City contribution (financial and policy support)

Mid-Term (2027–2029)

- Align capital planning and zoning with targeted industry needs
- Track workforce and wage growth metrics
- Adjust partnership investments based on performance

Funding Requirements + Potential Sources

Allocation of City funds to Traverse Connect (as determined by Commission)

- Staff time for coordination

Potential Sources

- General Fund (if contribution approved)
- Regional cost-sharing

Staffing / Operational Constraints

- Leadership and staff time for coordination
- Capacity to track measurable economic outcomes
- Balancing economic strategy with other strategic priorities

Primary Staff

- City Management
- City Commission

Commission Direction Needed

- Affirm City's role in regional economic diversification
- Provide guidance on financial support to Traverse Connect or similar entities
- Establish expectations for tangible outcomes and reporting
- Clarify priority sectors (e.g., blue economy, sustainability, technology)