

Q5: The Chamber is embarking on a new project to grow and attract creative industries and creative talent in the Traverse City area (e.g. – film, art, technology, advertising, graphic design, writing & publishing, visual arts, architecture, culinary, etc.) What can you do as a city commissioner to support efforts like this to grow creative industries and year around job opportunities in our area?

CITY COMMISSION CANDIDATE

Tim Werner: Investing in fiber to the premises can add value and opportunities to a wide variety of creative industries. To support creative talent, Traverse City needs to provide housing opportunities in a range affordable to young professionals.

Gary Howe: As a City Commissioner, the first task -- and an ongoing one -- is to stay plugged in to the needs of the those on the front lines of innovative industries. What are they looking for that the community isn't currently providing? Not everything can be addressed through government, but government plays an important role.

Second, it's critical that we realize the importance of place in attracting a diverse, creative workforce. We must cultivate and maintain a community that is accessible to a more diverse population, and one that meets the needs of the next generation. We need to develop a shared vision about housing that is inclusive of everyone, and is integrated throughout the community. We need to invest in a strong downtown and other cultural and business districts (i.e. Warehouse District, Corridors) to help the economy remain truly vibrant and lively year-round. We need to support the arts and cultural attractions through investments in City programs like the Arts Commission, and find ways to support and partner with organizations like The Crooked Tree Arts Center, Wharton Center for Performing Arts, the State Theatre, and the Dennon Museum as they bring world-class programming to Traverse City.

Third, we need to design a diverse transportation system that gives residents and visitors choices. We've made progress in creating a walkable downtown. We need to continue to improve in this area, and take up the next task of completing sidewalk networks in the neighborhoods, and connecting them to the corridors with efficient transit and comfortable street design for all users. Someone may still need to drive to work most days, but when they are home, we need to ensure that they can walk to a park or the grocery store, or that they can comfortably ride a bike to meet friends at a restaurant. Cities that create these types of opportunities are the cities that are attracting and retaining creative talent.

Overall, we need to work to create a place where people are encouraged to take calculated risks in building businesses and creating jobs. As a City, we can help to reduce barriers to success by facilitating the basics, like fiber to the premises. At the same time, we must continue to invest in creating a sense of place with great parks and protected natural areas. We need to support local products and food, invest in clean energy production, and create public places where people naturally connect. Traverse City has always outperformed its size and location as it grew from a lumber town to what it is today. It's critical that we continue to evolve, embracing new ideas and new opportunities. Only in this way can we remain true to our city's unique character and history, and realize the potential of Traverse City's tomorrow.

Michele Howard: As a City we need to support the Arts. During the budgeting process, I was instrumental in getting more funding for our Arts Commission. I am also a strong support of the Opera House. Infrastructure and technology (like the fiber network referenced in the last question) is also a critical component to supporting the creative economy. But we must also identify the opportunities to provide new or different services to our evolving local economy. While this is daunting task, listening to the Chamber as a partner is part of that. As a City Commissioner, I can't know everything and must depend on others to help the City and work in partnership for a better place for business and residence alike.

Brian McGillivray: The fiber network is one. The city also needs to stop whining about its traffic and housing problems as if these issues don't exist anywhere else and instead talk about efforts to address them. The city and community at large has a lot to offer. I would like to see city economic development staff and associated agencies change their focus from assisting more downtown development (which currently happens more quickly without their assistance and tax breaks than with it) to non-tourism based business recruitment.

Jeff Leonhardt: As I stated previously, the city can best support the creation of businesses by doing the things the city is responsible to do: Maintaining the livability of the city. That includes the infrastructure, neighborhoods, environment, parks, municipal services, etc. That is really a big job and enough. If we have that, I believe that will encourage the creative growth mentioned. These businesses mentioned want to come here because of the attractiveness of the place. That is why it is important not to spoil it. I guess I would put the question back on them: What are they going to do for the city? The people before us have provided and maintained this beautiful place. I welcome these new businesses to come and help us grow sensibly and protect it.