

TOWN OF DUNE ACRES, INDIANA

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee

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This Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Dune Acres, Indiana on December 21, 1010. It supersedes all previous Comprehensive Plans.

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I. Introduction

A. Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan guides planning and development policy for the Town of Dune Acres, Indiana. It describes the elements that make Dune Acres a unique and desirable community in which to live. The plan also describes goals for existing and future developments in the Town, as well as some recommended steps to achieve those goals. Finally, it outlines programs and infrastructure needed to allow the community to grow and improve the quality of life for all its residents. In short, it outlines what we, as a community, value and our commitment to actively protect those values for future generations.

B. Significant Historic and Cultural Attributes

Dune Acres has always maintained a strong commitment to preserving its unique natural environment. The Town lakeshore is accessible to all residents as a community beach, and there are large community open spaces throughout the Town. The depth of concern for the Town's development was demonstrated in 1953 and 1954, when property owners raised \$51,500 to purchase 197 acres of wooded and wetland area on both sides of Mineral Springs Road which was threatened by undesirable development and donated it to the Town. This land continues to be part of its valued park holdings.

Over time, property owners again contributed to develop a playground for children, and facilities for tennis, soccer, and basketball. Generous gifts of land, money, and equipment by residents have helped to improve the parks, Town Hall, Clubhouse and other parts of the Town. Land now occupied by roads and Town parks is owned by the Town of Dune Acres, having been either purchased by the Town from private landholders or donated to the Town with the stipulation that it be used solely as a Town park.

C. Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

In 1966, Congress authorized creation of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. This legislation designated certain areas in Lake, Porter, and La Porte Counties, including 698 acres within non-residential area of the Dune Acres Town limits.



II. Demographics

Dune Acres is located within the three-county urbanized region commonly referred to as Northwest Indiana. It is an area that has experienced significant growth and change in the past thirty years. Porter County, the county in which Dune Acres is situated, has experienced the greatest population growth of the three. That growth occurred primarily in the larger municipalities of Chesterton, Portage and Valparaiso. Small lakefront communities such as Dune Acres have experienced more limited growth since 1980, due in part to the scarcity of available land and housing.

Offsetting the growth in Porter County has been job losses in the steel mills and other related manufacturing industries since 1979. Wholesale, retail, trade and service jobs have made up for a portion of this job loss. Increasingly, more residents of Northwest Indiana commute to jobs in Chicago and its immediate suburbs. Various organizations are making coordinated efforts to attract tourists to the area that, it is hoped, will foster the growth of employment opportunities for local residents in the food service, lodging and recreation sectors.

Over the past decades, cyclic changes in population patterns have changed the character of Dune Acres. Prior to World War II, Dune Acres was largely a summer residential community. A number of families spent the entire school vacation period in Dune Acres every year. Some of these families later became full-time residents. Following the war there was an increase in permanent residents, including many families with children. The facilities and natural environment of the dunes area in general, and of Dune Acres in particular, provide a fine place to raise a family or a happy summer atmosphere for children, a fact which should not be overlooked in planning.

In 2010, 47% of the residents lived in the Town full time, while 53% were part-time residents. The challenge faced by the Town is to maintain its high standards of environmental and open space resources and supportive municipal services with a possibly shrinking full-time resident base. To address this challenge, efforts to involve part-time residents in the activities and governance of the Town are vital to the future of the community.

Housing

The growth in housing stock has leveled off somewhat, with a net gain of 15 homes over the past 19 years. In 2010, there were 163 homes in Dune Acres. Future growth is limited by the relatively low number of available building sites within the Town --approximately 30 in 2010. This shortage of building sites could exert upward pressure on property values and entice owners of multiple or oversized lots to sell available land for development of additional residences.



All residential property is zoned for single-family dwellings and is substantially owner occupied. Given the unique natural setting of the community, the high quality of its housing stock, and its proximity to Chicago, it seems likely that Dune Acres will continue to attract buyers seeking a second home. The challenge for the Town is to integrate second-home residents into the social fabric of the community and find ways for them to make meaningful contributions to its future.



III. Goals and Recommendations

The overall goal for Dune Acres is to remain a vibrant Town that:

- ▲ continues to attract a diversity of people,
- ▲ recognizes its unique natural setting as one of its most valuable assets, and
- ▲ embraces its role as steward of its Town parks, beaches and duneland environment.

The natural setting of the Town of Dune Acres is exceptional. Its residential area is bordered by Lake Michigan, with beaches forming the north boundary. On the southern edge, and interspersed within the residential districts, are nationally significant duneland and wetland habitats that contain federally-listed plant species throughout.

The community's primary goal is to preserve its nationally significant natural environment and to uphold its high standards of community open space. While planning for the Town's future, the rich environmental quality which attracted its original developers and residents, and which continues to attract its residents today, must still be vigorously preserved and enhanced. New residential housing should be welcomed, but our responsibility is to assure that each new home fits sensitively within this natural context. Municipal services and facilities must be well maintained to serve these goals.

A. Preserve, Protect and Enhance the Unique Natural Assets of the Community

1. Preserve Our Natural Environment

Consideration of appropriate means of protecting the environment should continue to be an important part of Town planning activities. The Environmental Commissioner and/or Commission should provide informed direction and leadership in this effort. This would involve not only the identification and preservation of existing flora and fauna species, but also a plan for management of invasive plants. Protection of this fragile environment must continue to be controlled through strict enforcement of existing ordinances governing builders and maintenance workers.

The Town should continue a deer management program that helps to preserve all plant species and prevent erosion of the soil while still maintaining a healthy deer population.





2. Protect Our Sand Dunes

A unique part of the Dune Acres ecosystem is its fine dune sand, which is the predominant soil type in most residential areas of the community. This sand has very fine particles which do not adhere well and which need vegetation and certain slope characteristics to maintain stability. Any disturbance of the vegetative cover or change in slope or contour can result in rapid erosion. New residential construction must continue to be sensitive to these concerns. Protection of native habitats will not only preserve significant plant and animal species, it will also contribute to maintaining stability of our highly sensitive dune environment.



3. Promote Clean Air, Soil and Water

Monitor the activities of all relevant governmental agencies, non-governmental interest groups and companies that regulate, produce or remediate pollutants and actively involve Town residents in decisions that may adversely affect our community's natural environment.

4. Promote Responsible Stewardship of Private Property

Encourage all owners to be good neighbors and maintain their property in an environmentally and aesthetically sensitive manner.



B. Uphold High Standards of Community Open Space.

The Town of Dune Acres has an exceptionally high ratio of parkland to residents when compared to nationally accepted park standards. Most Town parklands remain in their natural duneland, wooded, or wetland state. Town beaches are a critically important element in the park system. There is one park that offers residents recreational facilities, which include four tennis courts, three basketball backboards, one football/soccer field, a playground and an outdoor ice-skating rink. The following objectives are intended to insure that the high standards of community open space are preserved.

1. Protect the Shoreline and Beaches.

The 2.20 miles of sandy beach shoreline in Dune Acres are continually affected by the dynamics of changing lake water levels, wave energy, and the resulting shoreline erosion. Most of the shoreline has some type of constructed erosion protection. Since these protective measures have been built by individual lakefront property owners, construction design, materials, and quality vary widely. When such efforts are randomly instituted, as happened in Dune Acres, natural actions can erode the beaches in some manner, and a discontinuous beach may result.



Further, because of the dynamic nature of natural beach formation and erosion along such a long shoreline as Lake Michigan, shoreline treatment and activities from the Michigan City breakwater to the Port of Indiana all have an impact on Dune Acres' shoreline. To assure effective erosion control, the Town should develop and adopt a foredune protection plan.

2. Continue to Maintain Town Beaches.

The Town of Dune Acres owns most of the lakefront beaches with the exception of some lots, which have riparian rights.

The Town maintains various beach access stairways and foot paths along with limited permit-only parking for use by residents. These are important connections in the Town's open space system, and the Town remains committed to their continued use by all residents. These beach access sites, and the stairs and parking areas that facilitate access to the beach, should be well maintained at all times.

C. Maintain and Improve the Practice and Commitment of Volunteerism by Dune Acres Residents.

Dune Acres is unique in the degree of volunteerism throughout all aspects of Town life and government. This volunteerism generates a strong sense of "community," improves the quality of life, and does so at minimum cost. Continuing the tradition of a Town government consisting of unpaid Council members and Commissioners is vital to maintaining the character and spirit of Dune Acres.

1. Establish a process to visit with all new residents to discuss Town history, volunteerism, government, social life, etc., and to encourage their participation in Town activities. Provide information on local shopping, schools, libraries, restaurants, and recreational opportunities.
2. With the decrease in full-time residents (see Demographics), the Town Council should consider all possible avenues to involve part-time residents in the workings of the Town, including appointing part-time residents to key Town positions such as Commissioners and commission members, as well as taking leadership roles in the social life of the community.

D. Retain the Existing Single-family Residential Character of the Community.

The entire residential area of the Town of Dune Acres is zoned R-1, residence district.



1. Continue development of additional single-family houses, consistent with existing lot size requirements. Following its original Town concept, Dune Acres should encourage development of lots consistent with its existing zoning and subdivision ordinances. The resulting additional density should not adversely affect the Town because of the large amount of common open space throughout. However, new residences or significant building additions and alterations should comply with all building codes, be thoughtfully sited, and sensitively and professionally designed, to preserve as much of the natural topography, dunes, and woodland as possible.
2. To compliment the single-family residence concept, ordinances have been enacted to prohibit short-term rentals. These ordinances should be strictly enforced.

E. Security

Security is provided by the Town Security Officers, under the supervision of the Dune Acres Police Commissioner.* They are headquartered at the Town Security Office on Mineral Springs Road at the entrance to the residential section of Town. This office is serviced twenty-four hours a day. Security Officers make regular rounds of the Town and provide additional presence at East Beach during the summer months.

The Town should continually review and analyze the existing security systems and, when feasible, deploy the latest security and alert technology consistent with the overall needs of the Town and its Security personnel.

F. Infrastructure

The Town has an existing infrastructure that serves its needs well. This includes: a system of roads that links all housing in Town; an historic Clubhouse with meeting and catering facilities; a security office at the entrance to the residential section of Town equipped with security devices; a Town Hall that contains meeting facilities for the Town Council and other municipal functions, as well as the Office of the Clerk/Treasurer; and a maintenance building that houses a fire suppression system for the Clubhouse as well as various town vehicles, tools and workshop facilities.

The Town should carefully maintain all of these assets, as discussed below, upgrading or replacing where appropriate. The list does not indicate a priority among the items.

**Additional law enforcement services are provided by the Porter County Sheriff's Department and the Indiana State Police.*



▲ Place all Utility Lines Underground

Electricity and telephone service are currently supplied to many sections of the Town via overhead wires strung from poles along the roadside and through the Town. This overhead delivery system is not only unsightly; it is also unsafe. During storms and other inclement weather, the wires are subject to damage from falling tree limbs that cause outages and endanger residents left without power or telephone service in an emergency. In addition, short circuits and other equipment malfunctions have the potential to spark a very dangerous fire that could cause major damage within the Town.

The Town should investigate the possibility of working with the utility companies to place all wires underground.

▲ Explore Replacement of the Existing Town Hall

Develop a plan to design and construct a new, multi-purpose facility that would serve not only as a meeting place for Town business, but also could include: Clerk Treasurer's Office; public restrooms accessible to users of the Town park and tennis courts; a warming room for ice skaters use; repository and display area for Town historical materials; a library or book exchange; storage of Town records etc.

▲ Develop and execute a maintenance schedule for all Town properties.

In addition, a complete inventory and valuation of Town properties should be compiled and kept current

G. Additional Planning Considerations

This list does not indicate a priority among the items.

- ▲ Facilitate the development of social services for the elderly residents consistent with current zoning ordinances.
- ▲ Look for additional potential revenue streams to bolster the financing of Town services and maintenance of infrastructure. Utilization of the Dune Acres Civic Improvement Foundation should be encouraged. Residents should regularly be made aware of the potential of the DACIF to enrich community life.
- ▲ Investigate alternate sources of power, such as wind, wave and solar for use both in Town structures and, possibly, the entire Town. Concurrently, energy conservation by the Town and individual residents should also be strongly encouraged.



- ▲ Continue the upkeep and maintenance of the historic Dune Acres Clubhouse. Additions and improvements should be consistent with the architecture and charm of the building and grounds.
- ▲ Develop a disaster plan that addresses rapid communications, evacuation and other emergency actions.
- ▲ Encourage the use of electronic media such as email, the Internet and instant messaging to communicate with residents.
- ▲ Take actions to control and reduce light and noise pollution.
- ▲ Improve the central repository and record keeping system for Town documents.
- ▲ Establish a permitting process for utility companies and outside contractors.



IV. Appendix

A. History

Dune Acres, Indiana was incorporated as a Town in 1923 by Dune Acres Incorporated, a real estate corporation based in Gary, Indiana. At about the same time, the Dunes Highway (now US 12) was being completed between Gary and Michigan City. The first subdivision plat was recorded in Porter County in 1926 with two hundred thirty-four lots. Since then, ten additional subdivisions have been recorded. Prior to World War II, the area was largely a weekend and summer residential community, but it grew considerably immediately after the war into a community of permanent residents. In 1990, the community had 149 single-family homes, and by 2009 the community had 162 single-family homes. With the exception of a portion at the southwest corner of the community, there is currently no commercial or other industrial development within the Town. (See Map 1)

The property on which the Town of Dune Acres was developed was originally owned by the privately held Dune Acres, Incorporated. Initial prospective residents purchasing land in Dune Acres purchased a lease for the land with Dune Acres, Incorporated. Subsequent residents purchasing houses in Dune Acres purchased only the improvements at current market value from a private owner. They then made application for the assignment of a land lease for the underlying land with Dune Acres, Incorporated. Each homeowner had the right to purchase fee simple title to the land itself for a nominal sum when all the leases expired in 2022. This lease-hold practice was eliminated in 1998 when Dune Acres, Incorporated ceased to exist and all leaseholders received a deed to their property in 1999.

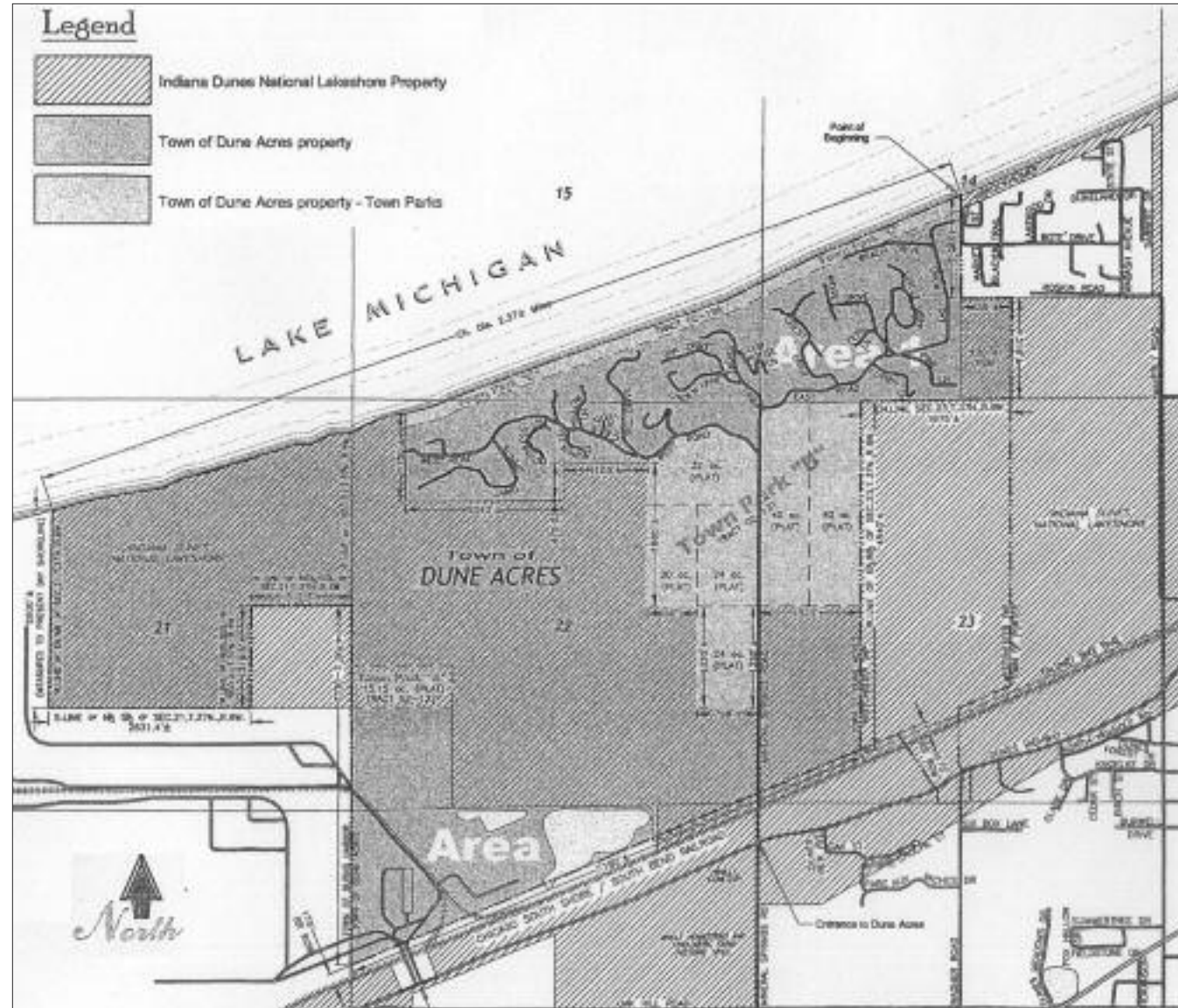
Early plans for development included the Clubhouse with an adjacent guesthouse, a golf course, and a harbor at East Beach. The harbor was built but was destroyed by storms in 1927. The nine-hole golf course returned to nature during the Depression. The roads, the Clubhouse park, and most of the beach was deeded by the real estate corporation to the Town as park.

A revocable license was granted to the public over Town park land for use of the parking lot and walkway to Cowles Bog by the Town of Dune Acres. The Town can revoke this license at any time. Town parks A, B and C lie within the boundary authorized by Congress with Public Law 89-761 of November 5, 1966. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is prohibited from acquiring park land within the town of Dune Acres.



B. Map

The following map shows the boundaries of the Town of Dune Acres Indiana, Dune Acres park B, and the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.



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