



Village Office

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Public Comment in Support of GTRLC Re-Accreditation

To the Land Trust Accreditation Commission,

I write as Village President of Elberta with profound gratitude and enthusiastic support for the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy's application for a seven-year renewal of accreditation. Since 2008, GTRLC has not only protected our cherished landscapes but has also invested its resources, expertise, and heart in our community's well-being. We are deeply thankful for their unwavering partnership and visionary leadership.

Highlighted Projects in the Village of Elberta

Elberta Dunes South Natural Area (EDNA)

Our partnership with Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy began in 2008 with this beautiful corridor of forested dunes stretching from M-22 to the Lake Michigan shoreline.

The story of Elberta Dunes South Natural Area begins in 1991, when Jim Thorpe—a man with deep ties to northern Michigan and a background in the Civilian Conservation Corps—purchased the land from Marie Sivertson Kreger, daughter of the original owners, Ole and Susie Sivertson. Facing illness and financial hardship, Marie asked Jim to promise that the land would never be sold for development. He agreed, and years later reached out to GTRLC to explore permanent protection options.

In 2008, thanks to grant writing, matching funds, and conservation support provided by the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC), the Village of Elberta received a \$1,158,800 grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund to acquire the property. The land was formally dedicated in 2011 as the 58-acre Elberta Dunes South Natural Area.

This remarkable preserve features towering 845-foot dunes, 1,425 feet of Lake Michigan shoreline, and critical habitat for rare species including Pitcher's Thistle, Lake Huron Locust, and nesting Piping Plovers. Nearly three-quarters of the site is designated as a Critical Dune Area by the State of Michigan.

Today, with marked hiking trails and a scenic viewing platform, EDNA serves as an in-town sanctuary where education, recreation, and habitat protection thrive. It stands not only as a breathtaking natural space, but as a living tribute to promises kept and a community's enduring commitment to conservation.

We are immensely thankful for the daily joy and sense of pride this natural area brings to residents and visitors alike.

Elberta Beach Improvements Project

For years, Elberta Beach faced significant environmental and safety challenges. Unauthorized vehicle access caused extensive damage to the fragile dune ecosystem, threatening native plant species and compromising public safety. At the same time, the absence of basic amenities—such as restrooms, sufficient parking, and accessible pathways—limited safe and enjoyable use of the area for residents and visitors alike.

In response, the Village of Elberta partnered once again with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) in 2016 to develop a comprehensive improvement plan. The project scope included:

- **Expanded Parking Area:** Designed to accommodate increased visitor traffic, especially during peak summer months.
- **New Pavilion:** A shaded, multi-use structure for community gatherings, picnics, and recreational events.
- **ADA-Compliant Accessibility:** Upgraded pathways and facilities to ensure inclusive access for individuals of all abilities.
- **Flush Toilets:** A major improvement over previous conditions, providing clean and convenient restroom facilities.

Thanks to GTRLC's expertise in grant writing, the project secured \$300,000 in funding from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) in 2020. However, pandemic-related delays and rising construction costs nearly doubled the original budget. In a remarkable show of dedication, GTRLC stepped in to cover the \$350,000 shortfall, ensuring the project could move forward without compromise.

By August 2025, the transformation was complete. The dunes were stabilized, native vegetation was replanted, and new access controls were installed to protect the landscape for future generations. This milestone reflects not only environmental stewardship but also the power of partnership. We extend our deepest gratitude to GTRLC for their unwavering support and commitment to our community.

Elberta Waterfront Community Conservation Project

On December 15, 2024, GTRLC negotiated a \$19.5 million purchase of a 35-acre former industrial shoreline between Betsie Lake and Lake Michigan—an achievement we celebrate and appreciate.

Thanks to their guidance, the Betsie Valley Trail will soon extend through this property, linking municipal beaches to 22 miles of regional paths.

We're grateful for the 9 acres set aside for village-led redevelopment (housing, retail) and for preserving 16 acres of forested dune habitat that shelter 18 state-threatened plant species.

GTRLC's dedication made possible expanded invasive-species removal and stormwater infiltration improvements—efforts that safeguard our shoreline and improve water quality.

Most critically, GTRLC's swift action to raise the necessary funds for acquisition prevented a large-scale, high-impact development that would have permanently altered Elberta's shoreline. The proposed project—widely viewed as “monstrous” in scale—threatened public access, ecological integrity, and the scenic character of our community. Without GTRLC's intervention, this irreplaceable landscape could have been lost to private interests and irreversible damage. Their leadership preserved not only land, but the values and vision that define Elberta.

The Village of Elberta is profoundly grateful to GTRLC for their visionary acquisitions, meticulous stewardship, and generous support. Their work—from restoring shoreline ecosystems to creating accessible green spaces—embodies excellence, transparency, and long-term resilience. Granting GTRLC a seven-year accreditation renewal will empower them to build on these successes and continue enriching northwest Michigan's environmental health and community spirit for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration and for recognizing the invaluable contributions of the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.



Jennifer S. Wilkins
President, Village of Elberta