



City of Cheboygan

DANIEL SABOLSKY,
CHEBOYGAN CITY
MANAGER, TALKS
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND THE
IMPORTANCE OF
COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Photos and Story by Phil Eich,
Storyville Social, as part of the
Michigan Main Street Story
Series

Cheboygan's potential is unlimited.

I went to school for public administration, and the management of small local governments was one of my specializations. My true love is economic development, planning, and community development. For instance, when I buy a house, I don't look at what the house is now—I look at what it could be. I've got that vision. I like the challenge and creativity of restoring something or making it better. I like to ask, 'That's what it is now, but how can I make it better for the people who live in that community?' Whether it's bringing in new jobs or taking an old, abandoned building and making it functional again. I like that economic and

community development requires you to use both sides of your brain.

I've always been like that. I'm the person who asks a lot of questions and always wants things to be better. Some of that goes back to the Boy Scouts and my dad's rule when we went camping: You always leave a place better than you found it. I can't coast. I don't give up—it's just not in me. I think I was given a talent, and I need to use it because this community deserves better. I can't sit on my hands.

When I interviewed for the Cheboygan City Manager position, I was familiar with the area and its challenges. So, I said, 'Look, if you want to hire somebody who's going to maintain this place, just skip

over me. If you want somebody who's going to change it and make it better, then I'm the person to hire.' And I got the job.

After I got the job, and before officially moving here, my wife and I visited. We had a good feeling about the people we met and the community. People would come up and say, 'Hey, what can I do to help you?' And they were genuinely asking me what they could do for my family and me. Not everybody's like that.

When you do economic development and community development, the first thing you want to do is build a good core. Cheboygan was already going in the right direction: we have a great Main Street board, and I wanted to make sure we had the right person. We encouraged Polly Schneider to come here as Main Street Cheboygan Executive Director because the Main Street organization is the key to turning this town around.

Anywhere I go, whether on vacation or on a fishing trip, I always check out the downtown to see what it looks like, check out their parks, get ideas, and take pictures with my phone. These spaces are so important because if

the first thing someone sees as they're pulling into town is ugly or unappealing, it's hard to overcome that first impression.

Polly wasn't even on the job for two months when the DDA purchased a building on the riverfront. We've got a phenomenal team here, and Polly could see the vision we have.

I always say, 'the city manager's job is a lonely world' because you've got the staff, the mayor, the council, the general public, and the business owners, and they're not all on the same page on every issue. You can't always make everyone happy, but my team and I try to be proactive, and we look ahead.

What I'd like to see, and what we need here in Cheboygan, is a diversity of housing. Most of the housing we have now is either in poor condition or high-end, so we need to fill that void in the middle. We need apartments; we need townhomes; we need cluster homes where everything's on one floor.

We were built as a super-city, but we're tiny. We have infrastructure going everywhere and 49 miles of roads to maintain. Cheboygan was

designed to be a city of 20,000 people.

I don't know if I want it to grow that large, but I think if we got near that 10,000 people range, it would be comfortable, and the economics would work. Growth is good, but it needs to be controlled growth.

Here in Cheboygan, we don't want to be another upscale northern Michigan town. We want to continually improve, but we will always want to stay Cheboygan.

—Daniel Sabolsky, Cheboygan City Manager

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