

TOWN OF TOFTE

COMMUNITY PLAN

November 2015

Creating a Community Vision



2015 Town Board Members:

- Barb Gervais, Clerk
- Jeanne Larson, Supervisor
- Nancy Iverson, Treasurer
- Jim King, Supervisor
- Paul James, Chair

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Summary

The Town of Tofte Community Plan development process was conducted between April and September in 2015. The process included a Public visioning meeting and several planning committee work sessions. The process created a community vision, goals, and action steps. The process was facilitated by the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC), a regional planning organization whose jurisdiction includes Cook County, Minnesota. After a public review and comment period, the Town Board adopted the Comprehensive Plan by resolution on November 12, 2015. The Town will use the Plan to guide decisions and to support fund seeking efforts.

Demographics

Tofte Township key population data was gathered from the US Census Bureau and the American Community Survey (ACS). According to the 2010 Census, Tofte has an estimated population of 249. There is a slightly higher population of females (50.2%) than males (49.8%). Since the 2000 Census, Tofte’s population has risen by 10.17%.

Age/Race (US Census 2010)

Other key findings concluded that Tofte Township is predominantly Caucasian (94.4%) with the next largest racial group being people with two or more races (5.2%). The median age is 53.5 years old (median means the number that is in the middle of the oldest and the youngest persons in Tofte). The median age for males are 52.5, yet 54.3 is the median age for females. The following are the top three largest age groups in Tofte:

1. 55-59 years of age (13.7% of the population)
2. 65-69 years of age (11.2% of the population)
3. 60-64 years of age (10.8% of the population)

Household/Income (US Census 2010 and ACS 2013)

There are an estimated total of 135 households in Tofte. The average household size is 1.84 and average family size is 2.32. Tofte has 322 housing units, which include 135 “occupied” (year round) units. 187 housing units are classified as “vacant”, but the vast majority of these units (166) are utilized for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. The median household income is \$43,571 while the median family income is \$61,250.

Housing Occupancy (US Census 2010)

Total Housing Units: 332

- “Occupied” housing units: 135 (41.9%)
- “Vacant” housing units: 187 (58.1%)
 - For rent: 11 (3.4%)
 - Rented, not occupied: 1 (0.3%)
 - For sale only: 5 (1.6%)
 - Sold, not occupied: 0
 - For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use: 166 (51.6%)
 - All other vacant: 4 (1.2%)

Homeowner vacancy rate: 4.6%

Rental vacancy rate: 25%

Housing Tenure (US Census 2010)

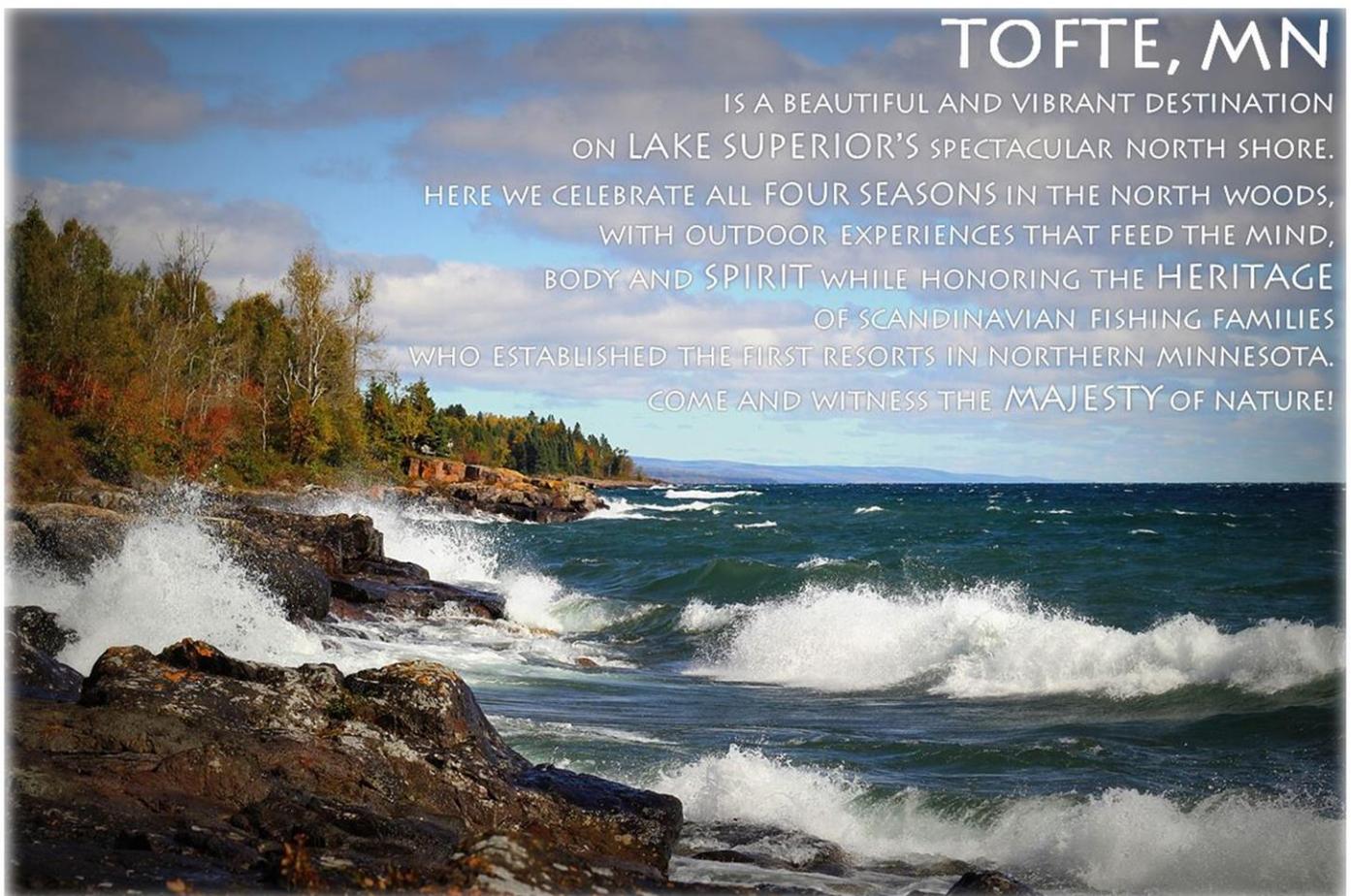
Occupied housing units: 135

- Owner-occupied housing units: 103 (76.3%)
 - Population in owner-occupied housing units: 187
 - Average household size of owner-occupied units: 1.82
- Renter-occupied housing units: 32 (23.7%)
 - Population in renter-occupied housing units : 62
 - Average household size of renter-occupied units: 1.94

Community Vision

A community visioning session was held on April 15, 2015 at the Birch Grove Community Center. Many members of the public attended and participated in an ARDC facilitated exercise. Participants stated what they thought were Tofte's physical assets, unseen assets, and what assets they'd like to see in the future. The exercise resulted in a list of issues that went on to be addressed in this plan. It also was used by the Town to create the following community vision:

Tofte, MN is a beautiful and vibrant destination on Lake Superior's spectacular North Shore. Here we celebrate all four seasons in the North Woods, with outdoor experiences that feed the mind, body and spirit while honoring the heritage of Scandinavian fishing families who established the first resorts in northern Minnesota. Come and witness the Majesty of Nature!



Recommendations

Transportation

The Town of Tofte has several assets involving transportation, including Highway 61, also known as the North Shore Scenic Drive. It is the Town's major traffic carrier, passing through the community on its Lake Superior shore. It is a paved thoroughfare connecting residents and visitors east to Grand Marais, the Cook County seat, and south to Duluth, the major regional center. It accesses many homes and businesses. Highway 61 has been designated as an All-American Road by the Federal Highway Authority, the highest honor a road can receive for its scenic and intrinsic qualities.

Other roads in the community include the Sawbill Trail, a gravel County Road that provides access to and from the Town's interior, home to some residences, trails, the Superior National Forest, campgrounds, lake accesses and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, a designated wilderness area. There are several National Forest roads branching off from the Sawbill Trail, connecting it to the west to Lake County roads and to the Gunflint Trail to the east. Another important roadway is the Tofte Town Road, a paved facility that provides access to Tofte Town Park, the Town Hall, and the Emergency Services Building.

Additional Transportation features include the Gitchi-Gami State Trail, a paved, non-motorized facility planned to span the entire North Shore from Two Harbors to Grand Marais. The trail is managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR). The trail is constructed through all of the Town of Tofte on a segment that runs from Schroeder to Lutsen (10.5 miles). However, there is a one mile section of unconstructed trail in Tofte's town center between the Tofte Ranger District building and a point just east of the Coho Café. This segment has been designated to receive federal construction funding in 2018. As of September 2015, a design plan led by a Landscape Architect was in the process of determining a viable trail route. The design plan will determine a detailed cost estimate for construction and it is possible that additional funding may be needed in order to implement the plan. The design plan process has involved significant input from the Town Board, local residents, business owners, and other involved entities. Until the trail is constructed through the community's center, bicyclists and other users can use the Tofte Town Road and a boardwalk to get through the area.

Tofte is served by Arrowhead Transit, a rural provider that (as of September 2015) can bring residents and visitors to Grand Marais on the first and third Thursdays of the month and to Duluth on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month. Arrowhead Transit is available to anyone that wishes a ride contact Arrowhead Transit for more information.

Tofte once had a small airport, but it has been closed for several years and is now designated for residential uses. Tofte also was home to a commercial dock on Lake Superior and was, many years ago, served by a ferry boat. The Tofte Planning Committee did discuss Lake Superior is a potential resource for transportation in the future. If ever viable, Tofte would support a ferry service that could move residents and visitors to and from Tofte without the use of a motor vehicle. This could be particularly useful to the tourism industry if the proposed passenger rail service is implemented between the Twin Cities and Duluth. In that scenario, a ferry could bring rail users the remaining miles to Tofte for lodging and recreation.

The Town of Tofte strives to have a safe, efficient transportation system that is in good condition and provides access to users of all abilities. Recommended actions include:

1. **Complete the Gitchi-Gami State Trail through Tofte.** The Town of Tofte supports the MnDNR's efforts to complete the trail's construction through the community. The Town wants the Trail to access Tofte Town Park and be fiscally feasible. To that end, the Town would support a scenario in which the Tofte Town Road and/or a lakeside boardwalk are used as part of the trail. In that scenario, the MnDNR should install clear signage and striping to guide trail users. The Town will continue to participate in the project's design process. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0 to 5 years)
2. **Improve Highway 61 through Tofte.** Currently Highway 61 has a rural profile through Tofte's town center area, with narrow shoulders, steep ditches, and sporadic lighting. The community would like to see the roadway have a small town community feel with urban storm water features, pedestrian considerations, intersection improvements (square to the highway with low grades), access management (including turn lane construction), and appropriately decorative lighting. The community understands, however, that the Minnesota Department of Transportation has not scheduled to reconstruct the highway in this area. The Town does want to express that if MnDOT does move forward in the future that the Town's desires regarding road improvements should be considered. PRIORITY: Long-Term (10-20 years)
3. **Improve the Sawbill Trail's intersection with Highway 61.** Currently, the Sawbill Trail intersects with Highway 61 at an angle and from an elevated grade. The intersection has only rural standard storm water management. This results in an intersection that has safety concerns due to diminished sightlines, has gravel spreading from it on to Highway 61 due to storm water erosion and the elevated grade. Concerns about vehicles sliding on to 61 from the Sawbill due to the elevated grade in winter have also been raised. The Town would like MnDOT and the Cook County Highway Department to examine the intersection and work to determine and implement a solution. PRIORITY: Mid-Term (5-10 years)
4. **Improve County Roads.** Most miles of County roadways in Tofte are very rural in profile with no shoulders and steep ditches, creating safety concerns. The Town of Tofte recommends that County work to improve roadway safety when viable. PRIORITY: Long-Term (10-20 years)

Public Utilities, Facilities/Services

Tofte does not have a community water or sewer system, but does offer other services as well as maintains multiple structures and facilities. Residents and visitors are required to develop and maintain their own water and sewer systems. The Town has a town hall, the Tofte Town Park, and the Town's Emergency Services Center. Arrowhead Electric provides power and each residence and business has high speed, broadband internet service, thanks to a recent Cook County fiber optic initiative. Hard wire telephone service in place, but it is noted that mobile phone service is poor in the community and is not available when well inland from Lake Superior. Cook County operates a recycling center in the community.

The Town of Tofte has a unique facility at Birch Grove. The former public elementary school is now home to a charter elementary school, a community center, a playground, an ice skating rink, and a pavilion. It is a strong community asset. Assisting with the promotion and management of the site is a non-profit foundation.

The Town of Tofte strives to have modern, safe, clean and efficient utilities, facilities, and services. Recommendations for action include:

5. **Ensure water is clean.** The Town of Tofte recognizes the importance of clean water for drinking and for recreating. In addition to Lake Superior, clean inland lakes are a beneficial to the quality of life for residents and quality of experience for visitors. The Town should consider the exploration of small area combined sewer treatment facilities when needed to maintain clean water. These systems could be spurred to implementation by new developments, but could also benefit surrounding existing structures. The systems should be professionally maintained and could require inspections by qualified government officials. The Town should also work to ensure other types of surface and ground water pollution is not occurring and should contact the proper resources, such as the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, if pollution is perceived. PRIORITY: Long-Term (10-20 years)
6. **Ensure safe and efficient drinking water.** The Town of Tofte should consider, when appropriate, a community water system for the central "urban" area of the Township. Bedrock and other factors mean well development in the lakeshore area is difficult and expensive. If significant new development is proposed or if multiple existing wells fail, the Town may want to explore the creation of a centralized water system. PRIORITY: Long-Term (10-20 years)
7. **Work to improve mobile phone service in Tofte.** The Town should continue to seek improved service from mobile phone providers for safety and convenience reasons. The Town understands the importance of such communication for local residents and visitors. Cooperating with providers on tower site selection or other initiatives should occur. Discussions indicate that mobile service will be improved by the end of 2016. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
8. **Provide wi-fi and electronic device charging at a bike rest stop on the Gitchi-Gami State Trail in Tofte.** As part of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail, a bicycle/trail user rest stop should be created. The stop should offer benches, a bike repair station, wi-fi access, and electric device chargers. This will address the lack of mobile phone service in the short-term. Wi-fi could also be made available for visitor use at the Town Hall and Community Center. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

9. **Provide charging stations for electric cars.** Modern electric cars recharge quickly. Providing charging stations would encourage visitors using electric cars to visit Tofte. The Town should work with a local business or otherwise identify an appropriate location to install the chargers. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years).
10. **Consider the improvement of the existing Search and Rescue structure.** The Town should examine the possibility of modernizing the facility for the search and rescue team, located on the Sawbill Trail. A larger, more modern facility may be need to best serve the community. PRIORITY: Mid-Term (5-10 Years)
11. **Be open to future emergency service collaborations.** For several reasons, including facility costs, numbers of volunteers, and average age of current staff/volunteers, Tofte should remain open to ideas of combining services with nearby departments if feasible and/or advantageous. PRIORITY: Mid-Term (5-10 years)
12. **Consider developing an emergency helipad.** In an emergency, helicopters may need to land in the community of Tofte. Currently there is not a designated landing area. In the past, medical helicopters have landed on Highway 61 in Tofte, forcing the temporary closure of the roadway, creating significant traffic issues. The Town of Tofte should examine possible sites for a designated helipad and determine a course of action to constructing it.
13. **Improve Tofte Town Park.** As part of a regional wayside improvement design process for the North Shore Scenic Drive, a landscape architect is currently developing improvement ideas for Tofte Town Park. The designs will center on a new picnic pavilion as well as parking and ADA access improvements. The design is intended to augment the site's excellent Lake Superior viewshed and make the park more attractive to users, including larger groups. The Town Board should continue to participate in the design process and work to implement the ideas. This will include the support of construction grant seeking. A sewered restroom facility could be considered for the site, particularly if combined with the Town Hall. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
14. **Develop a Birch Grove Community Center Master Plan.** The Town of Tofte supports the Birch Grove Community Center and seeks to make it even more valuable to the community. The site should be maintained fully. A future improvement to the site could include a small business development center. The site has a certified commercial kitchen. It could also offer access to technology, becoming an innovative business center, and a server storage location. A Master Plan should be considered for the entire site, including buildings and recreation facilities. The Master Plan will ensure the site is changed or improved purposefully and appropriately. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
15. **Improve the Town Hall and ensure proper facilities for Town officials.** Located near Tofte Town Park, the current Town Hall is a nice, fairly modern buildings with a meeting room, kitchenette, small office, and restroom. The restroom is served by a holding tank, not a sewer system. The tank needs to be pumped regularly at a significant expense to the Town. Additionally, there is no water to the building. The office is cramped and does not have enough storage for important documents and records. The Town should improve the Town Hall by seeking to have it sewered and supplied with water. The building should be expanded to provide proper office facilities. One option to address the office concern is to find a new site for it, perhaps at the Birch Grove location. This could be addressed in a Birch Grove Master Plan. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

Recreation and Open Space

Tofte is in a key location for recreation and outdoor enthusiasts. It is at the center of Minnesota's iconic North Shore of Lake Superior and is adjacent to popular Temperance River State Park. Inland is the Superior National Forest with lakes, trails and hunting lands. The popular Boundary Waters Canoe Area is accessible from the Sawbill Trail. Tofte is home to multiple resorts and outfitters. There is a MnDNR small boat access at Tofte Town Park on Lake Superior. The area has clean air, clean water, and a dark night sky perfect for star gazing. It is home to whitetail deer, moose, black bear, grouse, wolves, and many other species of wildlife. It has wild flowers, song birds, and beautiful autumn colors. In addition, there are many other assets not listed specifically in this plan.

Tofte's trails are a particular draw for visitors and residents. The Superior Hiking Trail, a long-distance nationally known facility passes through Tofte on the ridge above Lake Superior. The trail is managed by a non-profit organization that maintains the trail's tread, bridges, and campsites. It is a popular destination. Other hiking trails in the area are maintained by State Parks and the Superior National Forest, making hiking a primary draw for tourists.

Other trails include the Gitchi-Gami State Trail (discussed in Transportation Section) and the CJ Ramstead North Shore State Trail, a MnDNR operated snowmobile trail that also crosses through Tofte on the ridge above Lake Superior. Horses, cross-country skiing, and mountain biking are also allowed on the North Shore State Trail. There are no designated Off Highway Vehicle/All-Terrain Vehicle trails in Tofte, but they are allowed on certain National Forest roads.

Mountain Biking is a relatively new activity on the North Shore, but it is growing in popularity and opportunity. In Tofte, the Britton Peak Trail, just up from the North Shore on the Sawbill Trail (County Road 2), provides 5.5 miles of true single track trails in a challenging, but beautiful, boreal woods setting. The trail is on National Forest land, but is maintained by a local bike club. Mountain Bikers have expressed interest in connecting Britton Peak's trails with potential trails near Lutsen and further up and down the entire North Shore.

There are Forest Service campgrounds in the Town of Tofte, on the Sawbill Trail, at Temperance River and Sawbill Lake. There is also camping nearby at Temperance River State Park. The level of facilities at these sites vary from very rustic tent sites to sites appropriate for large recreational vehicles. There are also private campsites at some nearby resorts.

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area is a federally designated wilderness offering non-motorized water and portage routes away from roads and modern conveniences. It is a very popular, nationally known destination. Near Tofte are several BWCA entry points, including Sawbill Lake and Baker Lake. Permits are required to enter the wilderness and can be secured at the Tofte District Ranger Station, which provides information on all National Forest activities.

Other recreational facilities include a playground at Birch Grove and Tofte Town Park. Tofte Town Park is a fairly large open space with a small, aging picnic shelter, a walking path, barbeque grills, a restroom, and historical interpretation. A Minnesota DNR boat launch for Lake Superior is also present. The site is wooded and directly on Lake Superior's rocky coast. In 2015, the Town, with the cooperation of the North Shore Scenic Drive Council, began a redesign process for the Park. The

process is still ongoing as of September 2015, but it is expected that schematics for an ADA compliant new pavilion, a more efficient parking lot and other improvements will be proposed.

16. **Preserve Tofte's existing recreation and open space resources.** The Town of Tofte recognizes that trails, campgrounds, and other assets are critical to economic success and quality of life. These facilities require significant maintenance and oversight by a variety of agencies and volunteers, sometimes in the face of waning or static budgets. Tofte will work to ensure its assets remain world class facilities when needs are identified. PRIORITY: Ongoing
17. **Improve mountain biking opportunities in Tofte.** Currently there are 5.5 miles of single track trails in Tofte. The Town of Tofte supports additional trails if they are developed in appropriate locations and have a sustainable management plan. Tofte particularly supports additional trails that provide connections to other existing trails up and down the North Shore, including potential trails at Lutsen, and even a mountain bike trail that would traverse the entire North Shore from Duluth to Grand Portage. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
18. **Increase recreation opportunities at Birch Grove.** As part of a Master Plan process, Tofte would support the consideration of new recreation facilities at Birch Grove. Ideas include, but are not limited to, a disc golf course and bocce ball courts. Similar activity facilities could also be considered as part of the Tofte Town Park redesign process. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
19. **Advocate for a kayak launch at Tofte Town Park.** At times, people launching multiple kayaks and those launching motor boats can clog the Town Park's boat dock. Creating a separate, dedicated launch for kayaks would improve functionality and safety, and could inspire more residents and visitors to try kayaking on Lake Superior. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
20. **Seek out more attractions for youth in Tofte.** Tofte should support efforts that create more opportunities for youth. Working with Birch Grove, and possibly Sugar Loaf Cove and area resorts, a naturalist program could be a good fit for the area. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources

The Town of Tofte has an abundance of natural resources, including Lake Superior, forest lands, unique, rocky geological features, the Temperance River its waterfalls and gorges, and scenic overlooks at Carlton and Britton Peaks. This same environment creates challenges for agricultural endeavors, but gardens, greenhouses, and orchard trees do exist. Additionally, Tofte does have a significant food production history in the form of commercial fishing. Tofte was once the center of the fishing industry on the North Shore, primarily for the netting of herring and whitefish. There are still small commercial fishing operations in the Tofte area. There are cultural resources in Tofte, including the Commercial Fishing Museum, Town Park historical interpretation, and Town Park area installations.

Wildlife is of particular importance in Tofte. The community is known for its moose, whitetail deer, black bears, lynx, wolves, ruffed grouse, loons, ducks and other waterfowl, eagles, peregrine falcons and other raptors, and countless song birds and small mammals. Tofte's streams and lakes are home to walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, and brook trout. Lake Superior is home to lake trout, salmon, whitefish, and herring, offering a unique cold water fishery. Preserving habitat for these species ensures that they can be watched and enjoyed in Tofte for years to come. Wildlife watching and fishing are a significant part of the tourism economy in Tofte.

The Town of Tofte seeks to preserve its natural resources, increase its agricultural resources, and improve its historical and cultural resources:

21. **Increase arts opportunities at Birch Grove.** A Birch Grove Master Plan could also address desires for more arts programs. These could include, but are not limited to, a music venue with seating, a movie screen/stage, and art display areas. It should be noted that the site already has a hearth oven and a commercially certified kitchen that can be used for culinary arts programs. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
22. **Support Minnesota DNR and other agency efforts to study moose decline.** Studies show and anecdotal reports from residents and visitors support the fact that moose are declining in Minnesota. Moose are consistently associated with the Tofte area and are a part of tourism attractiveness. Tofte wishes to see the moose population stabilized and even improved in the area. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
23. **Increase interpretation.** Tofte supports creating more interpretation in the area. Forest Service and Minnesota DNR administered properties, as well as local entities, have the opportunity to highlight more natural, geological, and cultural resources at their parks and on their trails. Tofte supports signage and other ways of telling Tofte's story. Note that new technology can be used in interpretation, including downloadable audio and video tours. PRIORITY: Mid-Term (5-10 years)
24. **Tofte should consider increasing agricultural resources.** Agriculture and agricultural education could be a part of the Birch Grove master plan. A greenhouse, fruit trees that are specifically for the North Shore, gardens, and other facilities could be considered and could be promoted for community use. PRIORITY: Mid-Term (5-10 years)

Economic Development

After its beginnings in lumber and commercial fishing, Tofte is now primarily based on a tourism economy along with other service businesses. Some residents do commute outside of the township for government, mining, and other types of jobs.

Tourism is supported by the natural, cultural, and recreational resources already outlined by this document. Tourism businesses in Tofte include resorts and campgrounds, restaurants, and outfitters for canoeing and other activities, including bike rental. Service businesses include gas stations, convenience stores, banks, and a market. Tofte has a post office and a salvage yard is in Tofte as well. Tofte is also home to construction professionals with experience in building construction, landscaping and other commercial and residential development experience.

Tofte is also home to a unique tourism workforce. Each year, many, generally young, workers from countries outside of the United States, including places in Europe, Asia, and South America come to Tofte and the entire North Shore to work in the tourism industry at resorts and restaurants. These “student workers” present unique challenges and opportunities. Tofte wishes to embrace the student workers and enhance their impact on the community while they learn more about Tofte and its residents.

Tofte seeks to continue to grow its economy through tourism and other means.

25. **Offer Birch Grove as a site for North House Folk School events.** North House Folk School is a successful educational endeavor that recruits instructors and students for hands on classes for folk arts and skills. Tofte would like to explore how the Birch Grove facility could contribute to North House’s mission by provide additional or alternative space. This would draw additional visitors to Tofte. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
26. **Work to create a “Main Street” atmosphere in Tofte.** Tofte wishes to have a defined main street feel on Highway 61 as it moves through the Community. This will create a safer, more attractive facility that features existing and new service businesses and encourages visitors to stop. Pedestrian features, distinct lighting, unique signage and improved storefronts should be a part of the design. Tofte acknowledges that this is unlikely to happen unless MnDOT determines it will reconstruct the highway. See the Transportation Section for more discussion. PRIORITY: Long-Term (10-20 years)
27. **Create a student worker engagement program.** Tofte should explore developing a program to connect student workers and residents of the community. This would enhance the community’s diversity and cohesiveness and could help address logistical issues for student workers, including housing and transportation. Program activity ideas include matching individual student workers with Tofte families for mentoring and cultural exchanges, holding regular dinners featuring dishes popular in student workers’ home countries as well as popular Tofte meals, and using the internet, media, and other means to introduce students to the community and educate residents about their culture. More ideas would certainly be welcome. The program would likely need a coordinator and Birch Grove could play a role. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

28. Develop Tofte as a distinct destination. Tofte enjoys its position as beautiful community that offers a north woods and North Shore experience. It should consider finding a unique niche, however. Ideas could include festivals or programs featuring moose, winter camping, or mountain biking. PRIORITY: Mid-Term (5-10 years)

A Unique Opportunity?

Tofte could bill itself as a “Winter Camping Capital.” A winter camping festival could be held that features education, product displays and demonstrations, youth activities, a meal, and other associated events. Birch Grove could serve as a primary site for festival activities. Special designed winter “fat tire” mountain bikes are rapidly growing in popularity and trails designed for them could be incorporated into the theme. Tofte could work with the Forest Service to ensure that a designated campground or another site would be plowed and accessible and made available to winter campers that don’t have the experience or equipment allowing them to winter camp further away from their vehicle. A semi-permanent series of winter tent or yurts could be created, made available for rent, and connected by fat tire bike trails, cross country ski trails, snowmobile trails, or snowshoe trails.

29. Tofte should take advantage of Go Cook County. This planning process examined all of Cook County’s economics and opportunities and developed strategies for improvements. Tofte should review the document and take advantage of its recommendations. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

30. Address housing needs. Securing appropriate housing for its workforce is challenging for Tofte businesses. See the Housing Section for more discussion. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

31. Explore the idea of hiring a community coordinator. Having a community coordinator would be a unique way of addressing multiple opportunities in Tofte. The coordinator could provide staffing regarding economic and community development ideas, many of which are discussed in this document, including community festivals, the potential student worker program, enhanced usage of Birch Grove and associated programs, grant writing, communications with state and federal agencies, planning, improvement project management, and more. PRIORITY: Mid-Term (10-20 years)

32. Explore international economic outreach. Tofte should seek out ways, perhaps with the assistance of a student worker program, ways of marketing products and services on an international basis. This idea could be possible when considering how well connected the community is to broadband networks. Birch Grove could be a part of this recommendation. PRIORITY: Mid-Term (5-10 years)

Land Use

As a township and not an incorporated City, Tofte does not administer its own zoning. Cook County is responsible for zoning decisions, building permits, variance hearings and other planning and zoning tasks. Tofte does, however, have a Tofte Design Review Commission. This entity reviews commercial property owner zoning requests and makes comments regarding their fit with the Tofte central business area on Highway 61. A description of the Commission is as follows (source: Cook County Land Use Ordinance):

“In order to preserve the natural beauty of the area and its setting, to protect the welfare of the community, to maintain the property values created in the community, to protect and enhance land and property, for the promotion of health, safety and general welfare in the community, and to attain community objectives; exterior design of all new commercial development and all modification to existing commercial development shall be subject to design review as specified in the Cook County land use ordinance.

Within the Design Review District no person shall begin removal of vegetation, site preparation, building construction or demolition, dumping of material upon a site, (sign erection), exterior alteration or enlargement of existing structure, paving, fencing, or other improvements, with the exception of that required for single family homes and accessory structures, prior to review and approval by the Commission.”

Tofte seeks to retain its natural setting and small town feel.

34. **Continue the role of the Tofte Design Review Commission.** Significant business developments should be reviewed by Commission members to ensure a fit with the community. Design standards as listed in the Cook County land use ordinance should be reviewed periodically. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
35. **Participate in Cook County Planning and Zoning processes when appropriate.** Tofte officials should monitor and comment on County decisions that affect the Town. Tofte officials should seek to join County committees and should encourage citizens in Tofte to participate on the Planning Commission and other County committees. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
36. **Address properties with concerns.** Tofte should identify any properties with blight or other issues and work with the County and the property owners to address them. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

Property Discussion

One example of a property with concerns is the salvage yard that abuts both Highway 61 and the Sawbill Trail. The owners have improved the property significantly in recent years through cleanup and screening, but more improvements are desirable, such as installing screening on the Sawbill Trail frontage and adding vegetation to the screening on Highway 61. Tofte should support and assist with these improvements when possible.

Another property affecting the community is the “Tofte Homestead” site that is in the center of the community on Highway 61. It is a large parcel that is sitting unused with three buildings, not contributing to the community. It is strategically located between the highway and Tofte Town Park. A redesign of the property could result in the creation of a central entrance to Tofte Town Park and the buildings could be used for tourism and/or community purposes. Discussions with the land owner should be held.

Housing

Like much of Cook County, Tofte has concerns about housing. Due to many factors, including a lack of developable, privately owned property, generally lower paying service jobs, and the area's popularity for vacation/seasonal homes owned by residents of the Twin Cities and other locations, Tofte has a lack of affordable homes. Land prices are expensive and demand for housing is high. Housing for seniors and young people seeking affordable rents is especially scarce.

The Town of Tofte wants its residents to be able to "age in place" and not have to move to other communities as seniors' housing needs change. Tofte is working to build a small senior oriented housing development near Birch Grove. Tofte also recognizes that student workers and others working in the tourism industry are seeking affordable rental housing. Tofte understands that diverse housing options are critical to the economy of the community.

Tofte seeks to provide diverse housing options that, in particular, are affordable and appropriate for student workers, young families and seniors.

37. **Continue to seek the development of affordable housing near Birch Grove.** Tofte should work to complete the affordable housing project. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
38. **Seek out ways to increase the amount of developable land near Tofte's town center.** Tofte officials should seek out land exchange ideas to address with the Superior National Forest or other public property administrators in the area of Tofte near Highway 61. Such exchanges can be beneficial to both parties, as the other public land administrators can use the exchange to create a more contiguous land ownership pattern. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
39. **Identify private properties that are underutilized and work to develop them for housing.** Tofte should recognize properties that would be good for housing development and work with the land owner to find a way to affordably develop them. These developments could be a mix of commercial and residential uses. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)
40. **Promote second floor housing in commercial districts.** Tofte should work with Cook County to find ways to promote residential uses in commercial area, such as on the second floor of businesses. These apartments could offer affordable housing for younger people or seniors. Potential properties should be identified. Cook County can facilitate this idea by developing an appropriate mixed use zoning district for the town center area of Tofte. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

Intergovernmental Cooperation

The Town of Tofte is an open, welcoming community that continuously seeks ways to provide the best services at an affordable price. The Town regularly works with neighboring entities, the Forest Service, Cook County, the State of Minnesota, and other regional entities. Cooperative efforts regarding emergency services, marketing, and other programs are in place.

Tofte will remain open to new ideas for cooperation when it is beneficial to the Town, its residents, and its visitors.

41. **Review opportunities for cooperation.** Tofte will seek to cooperate with other governments when opportunities are presented. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

Implementation

A community plan needs to be regularly reviewed and revisited in order to be effective. An implementation checklist has been developed that will make that review efficient.

Tofte is committed to review the Community Plan regularly and to update it as needed.

42. **Regularly review the Community Plan Implementation Checklist and complete an update process when appropriate.** Tofte should conduct a formal plan review annually. Action steps should be designated as completed, in progress, still needed, or no longer needed. Tofte should update the plan when the majority of the action steps have been completed or been deemed as no longer needed. PRIORITY: Short-Term (0-5 years)

Cook County Zoning Districts

1. FAR-1 Forest/Agriculture Recreation District
2. FAR-2 Forest/Agriculture Residential District
3. FAR-3 Forest/Agriculture Residential District
4. LSR Lake Shore Residential District
5. R-1 Single Family Residential District
6. LR-1 Lutsen Town Center Single Family Residential District
7. LR-2 Lutsen Town Center Residential Incentive District
8. LTCG Lutsen Town Center General Commercial
9. LMGC Lutsen Mountaintop General Commercial District
10. TMU Tofte Mixed Use District
11. TP Tofte Park District
12. TGC Tofte General Commercial District
13. RC/R Resort Commercial/Residential District
14. GC General Commercial District
15. LI Light Industrial District
16. HI Heavy Industrial District
17. BDA Business Development Area
18. LBDA Light Business Development Area
19. WAOD Wildwood Acres Overlay District

For full descriptions of zoning districts, please refer to Cook County's Planning and Zoning Department.

Insert Map

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The Town of Tofte adopted this plan on November 12, 2015.

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Updates on the project can be viewed on ARDC's website:

<http://www.arrowheadplanning.org/TofteCompPlan>

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