TOFTE TOWN CENTER DESIGN OPTIONS

OVERVIEW
TOWN PLAN
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TOFTE TOWN SQUARE
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NEXT STEPS
Three design options were explored in the study. They are:

- Current Development Patterns, which looks at the potential for development if Highway 61 were to stay in its current alignment,
- Tofte Town Square, which looks at the potential if the highway were moved away from the lake in the vicinity of the local businesses, and
- Tofte Hills, which looks at the potential for creating a town center west of the highway.

Areas of Concentrated Design Work

The design work concentrated on three key areas in town:

- Town Center West, the area around the town hall and the post office;
- Tofte Bay, the highway and the narrow strip of land that connects the two town centers; and
- Town Center East, the main area of local businesses.

Issues Addressed:

Each design option responds to the vision articulated in the Tofte Town Comprehensive Plan and during the Community Design Process in different ways; there are tradeoffs with each option. Each option:

- Provides for future growth while keeping and strengthening the village nature of the community,
- Addresses the circulation problems created by the current need to use the highway as the only connecting street in town by providing additional non-highway based circulation within the community,
- Recognizes that Tofte has two areas of commercial and civic activity,
- Recognizes the importance of the narrow strip of land along the lakefront,
- Protects the town’s scenic beauty and cultural assets by accommodating economic development and growth in two concentrated village cores in a way that is environmentally sensitive and supportive of the goal of future sustainability,
- Minimizes the safety concerns associated with Highway 61 by addressing the rebuilding and realignment of Highway 61, and
- Addresses the safety issues associated with the Sawbill Trail intersection.
The Town of Tofte Comprehensive Community Plan and the Tofte Town Center Design Project are two community driven projects that empower the community in decision-making processes and allow the community to respond to the changing conditions that impact the landscape and the town’s character. The Tofte Town Plan offers a design that enhances a sense of community, defines the community’s edges, and defines the town core. Highway 61 and the Gitchi Gami Trail act as the major linear systems in Tofte, supporting town center creation and promoting safer circulation. The plan’s major attributes are:

- Town Edge Area,
- Tofte Town Center West,
- Road Crosswalks,
- Gitchi Gami Trail,
- Tofte Bay,
- A New Sawbill Trail Intersection, and
- Tofte Town Center East.

These attributes create a larger area of reduced speed, especially near the school, and better pedestrian circulation supported by the new Gitchi Gami Trail. Key crosswalks are limited based on need and future town center expansion and enhancement. Safety is improved by pavement striping, signs, and reduced speed. The commercial zone marks the area of eventual development that could occur across the Town of Tofte under the community’s current zoning. The Town Center East and Town Center West are areas where future development could be concentrated to secure economic sustainability and enhance town character.
CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Future Development Under Current Conditions Overview

In this option the design explorations depict development in Tofte based on only available property identified in the design process. No mechanism currently exists to direct development throughout the town in areas zoned for commercial development. The eventual pattern may reflect the change from residential property to the type of strip development shown in the “Current Development Patterns: Town Center East” design. The work provides an option for comparison with the other design options as requested by the community.
**Town Center West**

The Future Development Under Current Conditions option leaves the existing residential properties as is. Because some residences are in areas that are zoned commercial, over time they may become businesses. The Tofte Homestead is opened up as a commercial center with its own parking. A new Highway 61 design based on the last Minnesota Department of Transportation design proposal has:

- A forty mph road with a 55-foot road width;
- A 50-foot clear zone on each side of the road with no trees;
- A four-lane road with a center turn lane, alternating right turn lanes at intersections, and two through lanes which make the road five lanes wide in some areas;
- Curbs and gutters that separate the highway from the sidewalks on both sides of the road; and
- The Gitchi Gami Trail serving as the sidewalk on the lakeside of the highway.
Tofte Bay
A new Highway 61 design based on the last MN DOT proposed design:

- Reduces the pavement to a 45-foot road width,
- Creates 2 lanes of traffic with a yellow striped center lane,
- Continues the current 40 mph speed zone,
- Shifts the road alignment 20 feet north of the current alignment, and
- Sites the new Gitchi Gami Trail on the lakeside of the road.
Town Center East

The Highway 61 design based on the latest MnDOT proposed design:

- Calls for a 40mph road with a 55-foot road width;
- Has a 50-foot clear zone on each side of the road with no trees;
- Is a 4-lane road with a center left turn lane, alternating right turn lanes, and 2 through lanes;
- Realigns the highway/Sawbill Trail intersection to make it a 90-degree intersection;
- Locates commercial development at the northwest corner of the Sawbill Trail and Highway 61,
- Encourages major strip development with Highway 61 frontage on the current salvage yard land;
- Creates a potential for resort development in the northern part of the salvage yard; and
- Sites the Gitchi Gami Trail along the lakeside of Highway 61.
CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Composite

The design drawing on page 51 shows the character of each focus area and how each focus area relates to the other two.

- The Town Center West has fragmented development; its parts do not add up to a greater whole. Nor does this option take advantage of the civic buildings to make a memorable public place.
- In the Tofte Bay segment the highway, the Gitchi Gamii Trail, and the Lake Walk do link the two town centers, but there is very little public space along the bay and the Gitchi Gamii Trail is located in a tight space right beside the busy, 40 mph 55 foot wide highway.
- The development in Town Center East does not resolve many of the problems and concerns such as separation and auto domination identified in the Tofte Town Plan and in the public meetings during this design project. This center remains car, not people dominated. The separate elements remain separate and the new development is separate also. The opportunity to build on the center’s existing amenities to make a public people-friendly place is lost.
TOFTE TOWN SQUARE

Tofte Town Square Design Option Overview

In this option the Gitchi Gami Trail and the Lake Walk along Tofte Bay connect the centers. This design builds on the existing food market, restaurant, museum, and gift shop to create the town’s main commercial center east of Tofte Bay. Along the bay more public space is created by shifting Highway 61 away from the lake and realigning the Sawbill Trail intersection. West of the bay a public and commercial space is created in a smaller cluster around the post office and the town hall.

The Town Square Option uses both the former highway right of way adjacent to the Coho Café and North Shore Market and the existing open space around the post office and the town hall to organize two public spaces that form the heart of Town Square East and Town Square West.

Opportunities

The Town Square Option addresses the following opportunities. It:

- Provides space to design two unified Town Centers that accommodate current needs and provide for future concentrated development;
- Creates a new Town Center East around the North Shore Market, Coho Café, and Commercial Fishing Museum that is more connected to the waterfront;
- Creates a new Town Center West by designing a public space around the post office and town hall and providing for new commercial development on the adjacent historic properties;
- Creates new highway frontage;
- Improves the pedestrian circulation with a roadside trail that connects the Town Center West businesses;
- Provides additional spaces for public parking in the town centers;
- Connects the existing trail systems in the region to the town center with a spur trail;
- Creates a Gitchi Gami Trail trailhead as a focal point in the town center;
- Improves local circulation for residents by making County Road 29 a local road parallel to Highway 61;
- Creates a new land for the public waterfront/open green space for gathering and community events that strengthens the connection between Town Center East and Town Center West;
- Traffic is slowed and pedestrian safety improved by the street design;
- The alignment of the Gitchi-Gami Trail along the existing Highway 61 is improved for user safety and for access to the new waterfront space;
- Provides better water access for pedestrians;
- Improves Tofte’s identity through new signs at the entrances to Tofte; and
- Provides for signature gateway sign to the Sawbill Trail that can become a template for all North Shore United States Forest Service trails to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

Challenges, Constraints, and Issues

A design for a town square had to respond to the following challenges, issues, and constraints. They are:

- Tofte’s topography limits where the road can be placed because there is a need to keep the road grade at 5% or less.
- The new Highway 61/Sawbill Trail intersection needs to be a 90 degree intersection to address safety issues.
- Bedrock issues limit the potential highway alignments.
- There are wetland conditions north of the existing highway at Tofte Bay.
- Property ownership issues of impact and acquisition exist with realignment.
- Safety issues for pedestrians on Highway 61 are created by a lack of any controlled intersections.
- Because the highway has conflicting uses; it functions both as the major regional commercial artery and a major national scenic byway, a new highway alignment raises issues of strip development unless revised town zoning concentrates new development.
- There is a need to adequate manage storm water runoff from impermeable surfaces.
- New Town Centers will require new infrastructure investments.
- Limited space and conflict of uses exist around the post office that limit designs for Town Center West.
- A redesign of some private business property will be needed to create a cohesive Town Center East.
- Ownership of a new road for the Town Center East area needs to be resolved.
- There is a need to provide for adequate parking in the town centers.
- Potential brownfield concerns in the salvage yard area need to be addressed.
TOFTE TOWN SQUARE DESIGN OPTION OVERVIEW
Town Center West

Town Center West makes the area around the post office and the town hall a civic precinct by creating a new town green and public plaza as the heart of this public space. The design also provides for existing and future adjacent businesses by accommodating their parking needs. This newly defined public place is composed of:

- A new green space by the post office,
- A public plaza connecting the post office, the green space, and Highway 61,
- A Gitchi Gami Trail trailhead,
- New highway frontage,
- Public parking,
- A new road that connects the Tofte Homestead, post office, town hall, and Tofte Park,
- Walkways that connect the various town center areas that improve pedestrian circulation throughout,
- A tree lined walkway to Tofte Park that has views of the lake,
- A new highway design with three 12’ lanes and 4’ shoulders,
- A new Highway 61 cross walk at the Holiday Gas Station,
- A sidewalk that connects Holiday Gas Station to the bank,
- Landscaping for the Tofte Homestead commercial area,
- New access to the telecommunications building,
- Existing post office parking and circulation stay as is,
- A new public plaza with parking at the town hall, and
- A pedestrian network that connects the existing paths to current retail, future retail, and the town hall, the community’s major civic institution.
Tofte Bay

Realigning the highway north away from the lake creates public space and opportunities along Tofte Bay. Features of the design of this important link include:

- Siting the Gitchi Gami State Trail to overlook Tofte Bay and to connect the two town centers,
- A boulevard, bollards, and a change in grade that separates the Gitchi Gami Trail from the highway,
- Superior Terraces, new public green space along the waterfront for public activities such as performances and watching fireworks, is created,
- A boardwalk that can be expanded with overlooks and stopping places,
- Low grass and wildflower plantings reduce erosion and maintain existing lake views,
- A 3 lane road that narrows to two 12-foot lanes with 6-foot shoulders, and
- Native North Shore meadow and forest plants that extend the natural environment to the lakefront.
Town Center East

The new Town Center East is created by the existing intersection of the Sawbill Trail and Highway 61. This major center of commercial activity in the town:

- Makes a safer 90-degree Sawbill Trail/highway intersection the gateway into the town center,
- Improves safety by reducing the number of access points to Highway 61 from 11 to 4 and making the road have three 12-foot lanes and 4-foot shoulders,
- Maintains right hand turn lanes at the western town center access and the Sawbill Trail,
- Locates new town signs at the “Town Square” intersections and the Sawbill intersection,
- Removes Highway 61 from its current location and relocates it north of the North Shore Market to provide a space for a village-scale town center with a “Town Square” that concentrates current and future businesses, provides settings for the museum and a new trailhead, and provides for more visitor parking,
- Extends the natural environment with dense forest and meadow plantings,
- Makes the Gitchi Gami Trail a major feature,
- Makes the Town Center East a destination for local and visitor trail users,
- Anchors the entrance road with the Gitchi Gami Trailhead,
- Provides a new access to the lakefront via a footpath,
- Integrates the public plaza, public green space, commercial/retail space and new circulation pattern into a new pedestrian-friendly system,
- Removes the fuel service from the North Shore Market and relocates it to a new area with highway visibility and greatly improved access, and
- Alters the intersection with County Road 29 to prevent unsafe access points to Highway 61.
SECTION

PERSPECTIVE VIEW OF TOFTE TOWN SQUARE
Composite

The Tofte Town Square design drawing on page 55 shows the character of each focus area and how each focus area relates to the other two.

- New plantings and pedestrian and automobile circulation accommodate a variety of uses, connect the separate buildings and spaces, and structure this site to be Town Center West, a memorable civic space for the community. Pedestrians, cyclists, and car drivers are accommodated.
- In the Tofte Bay segment the Gitchi Gami Trail is buffered from the busy, 30 mph 36 foot wide highway by a 4-foot boulevard.
- A public lakeshore ceremonial space and circulation system to Town Center East links the lake to the commercial/cultural area.
- In Tofte Town Square design the town center is connected to the lake. The highway is moved away from the lake to provide for a green village square that reinforces Tofte’s North Shore, North Woods identity and defines it as a special destination along the shore.
- Concentrated activity accommodates the existing commercial while providing for future village-scale growth and pedestrian, cyclist, and automobile systems provide access throughout.
TOFTE HILLS

Tofte Hills Design Option Overview
The Tofte Hills design keeps Highway 61 in its current right of way and looks at the lands available east and west of the Sawbill Trail intersection as areas for the new Town Center East. The “Tofte Hills” design aims to create a traditional hillside town by placing it into the surrounding landscape.

Opportunities
The Tofte Hills design addresses the following opportunities:
- Preserves most of the current properties,
- Provides space for the new Town Center East on the salvage yard property,
- Makes the new Town Center West a civic center by a site design that connects the post office and the community center to new businesses on adjacent properties,
- Provides new public parking in the town centers,
- Improve pedestrian circulation throughout the town with new trails,
- Increases public space along the waterfront that could provide additional opportunities for interpretation,
- Improves connections between the two town centers,
- Reinforces Tofte as a destination for visitors,
- Creates trail access for town residents,
- Changes the road alignment to allow space for a roadside trail,
- Improves safety at road and driveway intersections with Highway 61,
- Widens the road to accommodate turning lanes,
- Proposes a 30mph speed limit through the town centers,
- Provides new signs at the eastern and western edges of town, and
- Creates a new Sawbill Trail gateway sign that can become a template for all North Shore United States Forest Service Trails to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

Challenges, Constraints, and Issues
A design for the Tofte Hills design had to respond to the following challenges, issues, and constraints:
- There is limited space and conflict of uses in the Town Center West,
- No land would be available for public waterfront space,
- Commercial traffic would still be an issue on Highway 61,
- The availability of private land needed for the center is an issue,
- There will be a need to adequately manage storm water runoff,
- The new Town Centers will require an investment in infrastructure,
- The limited availability of suitable land to provide for parking in the town centers, and
- Unknown brownfield conditions may exist in the salvage yard areas.
TOFTE HILLS DESIGN OPTION OVERVIEW

AREAS OF TOWN CENTER DEVELOPMENT (ORANGE)

LAKE WALK AND OTHER TRAILS

HIGHWAY 61

EXTENDED COUNTY ROAD 29 ACCESS

TOFTE HILLS TOWN CENTER EAST

LAKE WALK AND OTHER TRAILS

NEW AUTOMOBILE CIRCULATION

TOFTE HILLS TOWN CENTER WEST

AREAS OF TOWN CENTER DEVELOPMENT (ORANGE)
Town Center West

Town Center West makes the area around the post office and the town hall a civic precinct by creating a new town green and public plaza as the heart of this public space. The design also provides for existing and future adjacent businesses by accommodating their parking needs. This newly defined public place is composed of:

- A new green space by the post office,
- A public plaza connecting the post office, the green space, and the Highway 61,
- The Gitchi Gami Trail trailhead,
- New highway frontage,
- Public parking,
- A new road that connects the Tofte Homestead, post office, town hall, and Tofte Park,
- Walkways that connect the various town center areas improving pedestrian circulation throughout,
- A tree-lined walkway to Tofte Park that has views of the lake,
- A new highway design with three 12’ lanes and 4’ shoulders,
- A new Highway 61 cross walk at the Holiday Gas Station,
- A sidewalk that connects Holiday Gas Station to the bank,
- Landscaping for the Tofte Homestead commercial area,
- New access to the telecommunications building,
- Existing post office parking and circulation are not changed,
- A new public plaza with parking at the town hall, and
- A pedestrian network that completes the existing paths to connect current and future retail with the community’s major civic institution.
**TOFTE HILLS**

**Tofte Bay**
- Maintains existing lake views by using low grass and wildflower plantings,
- Narrows the 3 lane road to two 12’ lanes with 6’ shoulders,
- Extends the natural environment to the lakefront by using native North Shore meadow and forest plantings,
- Provides new locations for interpretation and an overlook at the Lake Superior Terrace promontory, and
- Shifts the highway 10 to 15 feet away from the lake to provide a grade change between the road and the Gitchi Gami Trail.
Town Center East

This design:

- Extends County Road 29 to the east parallel Highway 61 to intersect with the Sawbill Trail,
- Creates a visual and an experiential separation from the highway with the terrace green, the focal point of the new town center,
- Develops a new traditional small town main street on County Road 29,
- Concentrates mixed-use development with business and retail on the main level and rental units above,
- Reorganizes the North Shore Market by locating a new food and fuel access on its north side by the Sawbill Trail access,
- Sites the Gitchi Gami Trail on the lakeside of the highway,
- Create new major crosswalks for Highway 61 that are called out by painted paving and signs,
- Reorganizes Coho Café/Water’s Edge parking into a safer configuration,
- Provides internal, not highway circulation that eliminates the need for Tofte residents to travel on Highway 61 when moving around Tofte,
- Provides traditional street front housing along the extended County Road 29,
- Accommodates the Tofte Vaag property, and
- Strengthens a small town main street environment by having new businesses front on Main Street and have patio areas and pocket gardens on the town terrace green.
Illustrative Locator
Composite

The Tofte Hills design drawing on page 75 shows the character of each focus area and how each focus area relates to the other two.

- Town Center West is the same as the one shown in the Tofte Town Center design. New plantings and pedestrian and automobile circulation accommodate a variety of uses, connect the separate buildings and spaces, and structure this site to be Town Center West, a memorable civic space for the community. Pedestrians, cyclists, and car drivers are accommodated.
Completing the Town Center Planning Process
The Town Board will continue working with the community to select the preferred Town Center design.

Implementing the Town Center Plan
Implementing the recommendations will require the Town to work with a number of agencies to make the Town Center a reality:

- The next immediate step is to work with Cook County in reviewing the current zoning regulations for the Tofte Town Center and immediately adjacent areas to determine if there needs to be modifications to the current zoning in order to achieve the desired Town Center as well as other visions from the Comprehensive Plan.
- The Town will need to review the Tofte Design Guidelines and the Guideline District boundaries.
- The Town will need to actively participate in MNDOT’s planning process for re-building Highway 61. They will also need to advocate for the recommended Town Center designs during this process.
- The Town will need to work with the Tofte Schroeder Sanitary District to determine the sewer requirements associated with the recommended Town Center Plan.
- The Town will need to work with a number of entities to secure funding for various aspects of the Town Center Plan. This includes seeking grants as well as advocating for monies with county, state, and Federal officials.