THE SETTING
THE SETTING

The Region

Tofte is located in the west end of Cook County along the North Shore of Lake Superior about 90 miles northeast of Duluth, MN. Native Americans arrived on the North Shore shortly after the retreat of the last glaciers 12,000 years ago. French explorers and voyageurs arrived about 350 years ago. Tofte’s European white settlement began in 1893 when three Norwegian fishermen settled in the area. Brothers Andrew and John Tofte and their brother-in-law Hans Engelson sold lake trout and bluefin to markets in Duluth, the Twin Cities, and Chicago. The Tofte pier was an important landing point for travelers and commerce before the communities along the North Shore were connected by road. The North Shore Commercial Fishing Museum, a replica of the original twin fish houses, tells the story of commercial fishermen on Lake Superior.

The Scandinavian influence in Tofte is reflected in its buildings that have steep roofs to shed snow. The buildings also reflect a usage of material native to the area. In addition, these Scandinavian influenced buildings reflect clean, simple utilitarian lines. At the turn of the century, logging was a mainstay of the area’s local economy. There are numerous remnants of old logging railroads inland from the Shore. In fact, early railroad beds now serve as roads.

Tofte, with its prominent “Welcome to Superior National Forest” sign is a gateway to the National Forest and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The Town is also a gateway in terms of providing outfitting services, resorts, and cabin accommodations for visitors.

Tofte has a wealth of natural resources. Lake Superior, vast forested tracts, inland lakes and streams have very limited development on them and are homes to healthy populations of various plant and animal communities.

Tofte is in the coniferous biome. Over the years the landscape has been formed by natural forces such as wildfire, insects, and other natural change agents. With European settlement, the natural environment has been altered through logging, road and trail construction, trapping, and other human activities such as fire suppression. However, natural forces today still continue to have a significant role in shaping the environment.

A continental divide separates Tofte into two major watersheds. One flows north into the Hudson Bay via the Rainy Lake Watershed, and the other into Lake Superior. There are numerous smaller watersheds. The Temperance River watershed is one of the relatively large watersheds in the County draining about 18,600 acres.

Lake Superior is the world’s largest body of freshwater, containing over 10% of the total surface freshwater on earth. Most of its shoreline is forested and rocky.

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Township

Tofte Township extends from the shore of Lake Superior over 24 miles inland into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) covering over 164 square miles. The majority of the residents live along the North Shore within three miles of the Lake. This is primarily function of public land ownership as well as the location of infrastructure and early settlement patterns.

The population of Tofte, according to the 2000 census is 226. The 1990 Census indicated that Tofte’s population was 231, a very slight loss in population. In general, Cook County has experienced an increase in population, although it appears that Tofte is basically stable at around 230 people.

Land use, jobs, and the ability for a community to grow are all strongly tied to housing. A community’s future, its health, wealth, and vitality are also interwoven with a community’s housing availability. The community has and does recognize the need for affordable housing for all its residents. The average value of new housing has risen from $38,000 in 1990 to $80,000 in 1994 and continues to rise today.

The major access going inland is the Sawbill Trail winding northward for 23 miles and terminating at Sawbill Lake, and entry point to the BWCAW. The only inland commercial business is an outfitter at Sawbill Lake. East/west access is the “600 Road” and Cook County 3 and FR 165. These inland roads serve for timber hauling and in the Fall are very important for Fall Color Tours. Driving any of these roads in the inland area provides many opportunities for wildlife viewing.

There are many hiking, skiing, and snowmobile trails in Tofte Township. Snowmobile Trail access is provided adjacent to the Temperance River State Park. The Superior Hiking Trail runs along the ridge and provides many scenic viewing opportunities. The Sugar Bush Ski Trail provides cross-country skiing opportunities. There are many old logging roads providing hunting, hiking, and bicycling opportunities. There is a lake-walk trail following the shoreline that will eventually connect to Tofte Town Park In addition, the Township has thousands of acres of land to simply walk in the woods.

Currently all of the sewage treatment on residential and commercial properties is done by individual systems. Tofte is a member of the Tofte Schroeder Sanitary District (TSSD). This group has explored options for sewage treatment systems and is continuing to do so.


Current Zoning

Currently, about 98% of the land use in the Township is in Forest - Agricultural -Recreational land use. The remainder of the land uses are residential (R1), commercial (GC), and resort / commercial (RC/R) and Lakeshore Residential (LSR) predominately along the shore of Lake Superior. In terms of land use, the significant variable for providing opportunities for housing as well as other development is the amount of available private land for development.

The area looked at as a possible town center has approximately 130 acres of General Commercial area; Resort Commercial / Residential comprising about 265 acres and Residential comprising 1,260 acres.

The Town of Tofte also has a Design Review District that provides direction for all new commercial development and modification of existing development. These design review district guidelines will need to be reviewed in light of any decision made regarding the Tofte Town Center.

In addition to the zoning classification of the commercial area, the dimensional standards, permitted uses, and performance standards are very important in achieving a compact Town Center. These standards will need to be reviewed to see if they will provide the standards necessary to achieve the desired Town Center.
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Community

Tofte’s “Community Core” was defined as the corridor along Highway 61 from the United States Forest Service pull out on the west end to the storage garage on the east end. It is these areas that experience transitions from natural and undeveloped to the developed area of the town. The geographic extent that relates closely to this core extends west to Temperance River State Park, north along the Sawbill Trail, Carlton Peak and Lake Superior. Within this zone, two areas of town center concentration were identified during the public meeting process. The areas focused around:

- The Post Office Town Hall and Holiday Gas Station on the West side and,
- The North shore Market, Coho Café, and Water’s Edge on the East Side.

A third key area was identified by the community as the area between the centers along Tofte Bay. This stretch is a thin band of land that consists of:

- Highway 61,
- Beach,
- Lake Walk and,
- Wetland Area North of the Highway.

Tofte Bay is an area of major concern to the community because of its lack of land base along side Highway 61, circulation safety, and the existing vistas of Lake Superior.

Carlton Peak, rising above the settlement of Tofte is the highest peak on the North Shore. It rises 927 feet above Lake Superior and 1,529 feet above sea level. At the turn of the century, the peak was owned by Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing as a possible source for abrasives. Subsequently, a quarry on the south side of the peak supplied the material for the Taconite Harbor breakwater.

The U.S. Forest Service Ranger Station in Tofte has a number of the log buildings that were constructed by the Minnesota Civilian Conservation Corps and are still used as residences. Inland, logging camps, and the Sawbill CCC Camp were also built with roughhewn logs and timber planks. Only remnants of the foundations of the CCC Camp remain today.

Tofte maintains picnic facilities and a public boat launch in the Tofte Town Park and celebrates its heritage with a fireworks display every Fourth of July. The Park, with its pedestrian bridge and wishing well are fine examples of cobblestone masonry. As with most of the public services in Tofte volunteers do the maintenance of the park, which reflects the active civic life of the community.

Temperance River State Park, on the west side of Tofte was established in 1957. It offers camping, hiking, skiing, and swimming.

Birch Grove School is a focal point for the community. As well as being a school, it serves as a community center where residents can use the facilities for meetings and other gatherings. It also has a computer lab available for residents’ use. In addition, once a week, it provides space for a health clinic. There is also a youth hostel located in the School.

Community: A Closer Look

Tofte has a unique collection of amenities. Some of these resources are concentrated in two areas that the community has identified as the areas that feel like town centers. Although many amenities exist across the town, many are poorly connected. Better connections between the town centers and the various amenities in town were identified as major programmatic elements to be addressed in the design work.

Due to the lack of available land for a town center, finding a land-base to explore town center designs became a crucial component of the project. The areas identified in meetings were:

- The Tofte Homestead Parcel,
- Post Office Parcel,
- Private land on the west side of the Sawbill Trail and,
- The Salvage Yard Parcel.

With the goal of concentrating development around the two existing town centers and limiting the spread of commercial development through out the Highway 61 Corridor, these areas provided the best opportunities to explore town center designs.
Temperance River has two campgrounds, one on each side of the river. Both campgrounds are closer to Lake Superior than most other state park campgrounds near the lake. Besides the “bar-less” mouth of the river, Temperance River has three waterfalls which can be reached by footpath. The park features unique stream eroded river course showcasing North Shore’s geology. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperance_River_State_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperance_River_State_Park)

Ray Berglund Wayside Rest
Berglund Wayside Rest is located near the Onion River at the East side of Tofte Township. It marks the entrance into Tofte and could be the location of a new town sign.

Superior Hiking Trail Trailhead
The Trailhead on the Sawbill Trail inland from Highway 61 is for the Carlton Peak Hiking Trail, a popular local trail. This is a typical trail sign; it provides mileage for key trail routes.

Tofte Park and Boat Launch
Tofte Park offers a unique public park along the North Shore. The park provides water access and staging dock, pavilion, interpretative information, and the lake walk path.

Eastbound View Along Highway 61
This view from Highway 61 at Town Center West shows the natural character of the community, its wide ditches, and its commercial development.

Lake Superior Shoreline
This view depicts the shoreline character in the Tofte area.

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Carlton Peak
Carlton Peak is one of the most dramatic mountain peaks along the North Shore of Lake Superior. This Forest Service viewing pulloff shows the pronounced cliff edge that shapes the north side of the ridge. This formation and a lower sloping south face create a sawtooth form, the Sawtooth Mountains’ namesake.

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Carlton Peak

Lake Superior Shoreline
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Coho Café and Water’s Edge
The Coho Café and Water’s Edge Trading Company along with the Northshore Market and Bottle Shop and Commercial Fishing Museum form the existing Tofte Town Center East, the major commercial center in town.

Northshore Market and Bottle Shop
These stores are the major markets for western Cook County and eastern Lake County. They are important parts of Tofte’s existing town center east.

Commercial Fishing Museum
The only museum dedicated to fishing on the North Shore, the Commercial Fishing Museum has historic commercial fishing boats, indoor displays, and a giftshop. Built to resemble a historic fishing structure, the building and the displays express the cultural heritage of the area.

Unique Rock Detail
These rock details were constructed by a local resident from various types of beach rock. They are a design unique to Tofte.

Post Office
The anchor of Town Center West, the post office, is an active civic place in the Town Center West.
Coho Café and Water's Edge

Commercial Fishing Museum

Northshore Market and Bottle Shop

Post Office

PHOTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS