

Cook County Plan

The Future Cook County

COOK COUNTY'S SENSE OF PLACE

This land use plan exists to protect, preserve and enhance the qualities of Cook County that have attracted people to live, work and recreate here. This chapter presents those qualities that create Cook County's unique sense of place. It then describes through text and maps the desired future condition of Cook County which, if achieved, will ensure that those qualities are sustained.

The following describes the four groups of qualities that define Cook County's distinctiveness – Physical Setting: A Wild Land, Community: Independent and Cooperative, People and Nature: The Active Life, and Economics and Development: Small and Vibrant.

The Physical Setting: A Wild Land

Cook County's blend of diverse natural resources and features, including its climate, attracts people to visit and live in the county and is the foundation for most of its economic activity. The county's distinctiveness is founded upon its relatively low levels of development and population that are enhanced by a sense of undeveloped wildness and remoteness expressed, in part, by the presence of Lake Superior, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and other large tracts of publicly accessible land. This is furthered by its unique mix of seacoast and forest and lakes and mountains, its large expanses of relatively intact ecosystems, and its relatively unpolluted setting. Although the depth of individuals' understanding of and reaction to the physical setting may vary, there is a broadly shared acceptance of the inherent value of these features and the need to sustain them into the future.

Community: Independent and Cooperative

The relatively rugged, remote setting, absence of the full range of modern services and conveniences, limited economic opportunities, and deep winter function as a filter, selecting people intentionally desirous of living in Cook County. Those who pass through this filter tend to be independent minded people who nonetheless form a community that demonstrates an interplay of individuals across economic and social lines. The result is a small, open community evincing a pleasing small town flavor where people interact with each other in a variety of contexts, feel safe, care for each other, and accept newcomers while fostering an ongoing spirit of individuality.

People and Nature: The Active Life

Just as a rainbow results from the interplay of physical phenomena in the presence of an observer, the single defining characteristic of Cook County may be the direct, daily interaction between people and the natural world. This may occasionally be casual but seldom taken for granted. More often it is intentional and direct—hiking, skiing, boating, snowshoeing, camping, snowmobiling, golfing, canoeing, hunting, observing. It occurs along undeveloped lakeshores, in city yards, on well-groomed trails, down narrow deer paths, at quality resorts and recreational

facilities, or upon clear streams. The wealth of opportunity for interacting with nature, at formal built facilities or in natural unformed settings, offers time and place for recreational and contemplative pursuits. What exists is an interdependency in which people and the environment are sustained by the presence of the other.

Economics and Development: Small is Vibrant

Cook County's economy has always been based upon natural resources and comparatively small scale enterprises. A dynamic and diverse year-round tourism industry and to a lesser extent logging drive an economy once buttressed by fishing and timber. Its economic and cultural life is bolstered by a greater than average mix of the self-employed, artistically creative people, Native Americans, and a large number of seasonal residents. Few businesses can be considered large and nearly all are owned by local residents. Although the higher cost of living, lack of economic diversity, large number of lower waged jobs, and lack of affordable housing are significant issues, the county's desirable core qualities attract people willing to live on modest incomes and lessened economic opportunities. The large amount of publicly owned land generates economic values for tourism and logging, but also forces private development activities (e.g., residential, commercial) to occur within specific locations of the county.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION OF COOK COUNTY

The preceding Sense of Place statements present the overall vision for Cook County as perceived today and how the citizens want it to be in the future. This image of the future needs additional definition to clarify its application in making public land use decisions over time.

This next level of detail is provided by the following descriptions of the Desired Future Condition of specific geographic areas of Cook County. The narratives define the general look and feel of the specific areas and help provide substance to an understanding of how these areas should evolve over time into sustainable desired conditions. The areas described are:

Note: The narratives describing the Desired Future Conditions in the Year 2015 are written from the perspective of persons who have time traveled to that year and are reporting what they see about them. Thus, although speaking about a future Cook County, the verbs are in the present tense and, sometimes, in the past as they describe change during the period 1997-2015.

- ◆ General Conditions Throughout Cook County
Descriptions of conditions that will occur throughout Cook County.
- ◆ Highway 61 Corridor / Lake Superior Shoreline
Area roughly bounded by the lake and the inland ridge excluding the community centers and Grand Marais.
- ◆ City of Grand Marais and Surrounding Area
Although the plan has no jurisdiction in the city, it is necessary to describe what may be there, especially as it relates to changes in the surrounding area.
- ◆ West End Community Centers
Schroeder, Tofte and Lutsen are described as distinct areas.
- ◆ East End
Encompasses land east of County Road 14 including Hovland and Grand Portage.
- ◆ Gunflint Trail
The corridor along the Trail beginning above Swamper Lake.
- ◆ Inland Lakes and Forests
Regardless of geographic location, the inland areas of the county share traits separate from the community centers, Lake Superior corridor, and the Gunflint Trail. Distinct subareas are identified.

In the Year 2015 ■ DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

GENERAL CONDITIONS THROUGHOUT COOK COUNTY

Regardless of where one is in Cook County, certain images and conditions are experienced by residents and visitors. Most relate to a desire to sustain the unique physical and developed character of the county and to protect the natural resources key to the county's quality of life. These conditions include:

- each community area reflects a design distinctiveness as opposed to the sameness that pervades much of modern development in the United States.
- continued emphasis on public land ownership in the remote, rural areas with most private land ownership near roads, community centers and other easier-to-service and develop areas.
- public lands in developed areas, near community centers, and along Lake Superior have been maintained providing for open space, habitat, views, and recreation.
- a variety of motorized and, predominantly, non-motorized recreational trails are found within the county in consolidated corridors where appropriate and, in all cases, designed to meet the intended type and level of use.
- public (or shared) water and sanitary sewer service where environmental concerns, development density, and financial capacity exist.
- continuing pressure to meter the use of public lands in order to protect the natural resources from degradation and to sustain the experience sought by residents and visitors.
- growth in residential and general commercial development is concentrated in community centers helping to control public service costs and preserve the county's valuable wild and undeveloped character.
- electric power line and other utility extensions use existing road and utility corridors to the degree possible, are buried whenever feasible, and have rights-of-way maintained with environmentally sensitive methods; residents in remote areas are encouraged to use renewable methods of electrical generation not requiring utility corridor extensions.
- the county's economy is healthy and diverse incorporating use of locally produced and supplied goods and services, and featuring businesses that are small-scale, locally owned, and minimally polluting.
- Cook County has a reputation for consistent application of land use regulations.

In the Year 2015 ■ DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

HIGHWAY 61 CORRIDOR / LAKE SUPERIOR SHORELINE¹

The image of Cook County for both residents and visitors is defined in large part by the experience along this corridor as it supports most of the travel and exchange in and out of the county. It is arguably the most important portion of the county in aesthetic, economic and social terms. As viewed from the highway, it continues its appearance of being largely undeveloped with driveways and access roads to buildings that are out of sight. This appearance is broken by stretches that include sweeping lake vistas and other sites that have development adjacent to the highway. There are state parks and numerous informal and formal public areas, probably more than 20 years earlier, providing direct access to the lake or to views of it. The various community centers are built-up adjacent to the highway and have distinctive edges. The developed lands between these community centers will be primarily residences. Non-resort commercial uses, primarily catering to travelers, have increasingly been located in the community centers. The highway itself remains essentially a two-lane roadway. Driveways and roads connecting with Highway 61 are minimized through the use of service and frontage roads. Most of the roadway has paved shoulders enhancing safety without creating an overly broad swath through the woods. Traffic increases have been modest in keeping with changes in population and tourism.

The future of the Highway Corridor and Lake Superior Shoreline includes:

- the Lake Superior shoreline and water quality are increasingly protected from excessive vegetation removal, failing septic systems, erosion, intensive chemical use (e.g., lawn care), road salt, pollution from boat traffic, non-local airborne sources of contaminants, and similar impacts.
- sanitary sewage treatment have gradually shifted to shared systems in densely settled areas or to systems less susceptible to failure (e.g., self-contained composting systems).
- the scale, mass and orientation of structures as viewed from the highway or the lake have minimized their visual impact and sustain a small scale perspective of development.
- as viewed from the highway or the lake, most developed areas is unobtrusive, dominated by the natural setting and vegetation; this is especially true of structures on higher elevations.
- resorts/camps/parks and other recreational facilities are located along the corridor but other commercial uses will be located within community centers.
- the corridor east of Grand Marais experiences a less intense and lower level of development than the stretch west of the city.
- rare coastal wetlands have been preserved.

¹ This narrative covers the sections of the corridor between the community centers located along the highway and it directly supports the concept that the nodal aspect of the centers is to be strengthened.

In the Year 2015 ■ DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

CITY OF GRAND MARAIS and SURROUNDING AREA²

Grand Marais is Cook County's primary service and institutional center containing major public institutions (government and school), and most of the county's businesses and services in the setting of a village-like residential community. Emphasis has been placed on keeping the community's distinctive low-key, North Shore feel in style and intensity of development and in the form and character of the community. A strong orientation to and direct connections with Lake Superior is sustained. Grand Marais is compact, sustaining a tight, dynamic feel to the business district; commercial development will be limited to the corporate boundaries. The outlying area is primarily residential in nature with the occasional resort or tourist oriented business. Industrial activity has been limited to Hedstroms and the designated industrial park (Business Development Area).

The future of the Grand Marais area includes:

- strong, definite edges to the community minimize sprawl along TH 61 or up the Gunflint Trail.
- the small town feel of Grand Marais is retained through pedestrian friendly compactness, massing and pedestrian scale of buildings, relatively narrow streets, unique street scape and signage.
- a strong orientation to Lake Superior through direct physical and visual access from public places is enhanced.
- there is a mix of housing types with density higher than elsewhere in the county.
- residential development in the first "tier" outside of the City is rural not suburban in character; any expansion of the city limits will be orderly and planned.
- commercial uses are retained within a vibrant town center except those requiring large amounts of land for outside storage or display (example auto dealers and lumber yards).

² The County Land Use Plan does not have jurisdiction within the corporate limits of Grand Marais. This discussion is included to state the plan's goals for the land around Grand Marais which necessitates a review of the anticipated future of the community itself.

In the Year 2015 ■ DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

WEST END COMMUNITY CENTERS

The three historic community centers of Schroeder, Tofte and Lutsen continue to strengthen their function as developed centers in the West End, each playing a distinctive role. Tofte is the county's secondary commercial center with a strong commercial and public service hub and a mix of housing. Although Schroeder and Lutsen have many of the same uses and activities, in Tofte the larger scale of buildings and the greater intensity of uses reinforces this location as the "downtown" for the West End. The other two centers are more specialized. Lutsen is a resort community with large scale destination resorts and recreation facilities, concentrations of year-round and seasonal housing, and a small general business complex. Schroeder provides basic community commercial services, lower density housing, and smaller scale resorts. Even with greater levels of developed land, all three retain their natural setting and immediate access to open, public areas.

The future of the West End communities includes:

- each community center has been planned through local processes.
- the communities, especially Tofte and Lutsen, have definite, recognizable boundaries.
- the communities extend inland with greater depth and are less dependent upon TH 61 in the role of "main street".
- the intensity and scale of commercial development is low in Schroeder and Lutsen and higher in Tofte, but not as high as in Grand Marais.
- shared utility systems, especially for sewage collection and treatment, are used to support denser, residential and commercial development in Tofte and Lutsen.
- green spaces and public areas are retained as integral components of each community's overall design.
- all three communities contain a mix of quality housing affordable to a wide range of resident household incomes.
- LTV remains a major industrial presence.

In the Year 2015 ■ DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

EAST END

Most of the East End of Cook County is undeveloped forested areas or rural lands with low density residential uses. The village of Grand Portage is the largest community center containing Reservation offices, the school, post office, stores, and, nearby, the casino/lodge complex. Ryden's remains a multi-purpose commercial node while the Hovland community center may be enhanced through a few businesses primarily oriented to meeting the needs of

local residents.

The future of the East End includes:

- low density residential development with relatively greater density at Grand Portage village and the Hovland community center.
- most rural development is discrete and unobtrusive as viewed from roadways.
- much of the inland areas is managed for timber, wildlife, ecological values, and dispersed recreation.
- recreation is predominantly non-motorized forms including dog mushing, horseback riding, hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing none of which is aggressively promoted for intensive use.
- most economic enterprises are home businesses, home occupations, sustainable farmsteads, and an occasional rural industry such as a small scale sawmill.
- retail store and service development in the Hovland community center is small scale, rustic, primarily serving year round and seasonal residents.
- due to historic conversion of large tracts of industrial forest land into multiple individual private ownership, the value of public lands in this area has been recognized and the amount of public lands has been maintained and perhaps increased.

In the Year 2015 ■ DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

GUNFLINT TRAIL

The Gunflint Trail continues to be a portion of the county that is an extraordinary resource in North America. This corridor into thousands of acres of public recreation and wilderness area contains private ownership with a variety of resorts, outfitters, camps, residences, and related commercial services. As access points to the vast public areas, the commercial and private holdings benefit from a sphere of interaction with the public lands for their users and customers that extends miles beyond the limits of their private ownership.

The future of the Gunflint Trail includes:

- A roadway corridor largely flanked by forest cover with occasional roadside services and restrained, well-designed private and public informational signage.
- The number of resorts is probably unchanged from 20 years earlier although existing ones have expanded or been enhanced.
- Strong concern for the scale, materials and design of buildings. The historic image of the Trail has increased in importance as other areas of North America become more homogeneous.
- Commercial and social opportunities for trail residents and year-round visitors are provided at the various resorts; additional economic activity occurs in

numerous home occupations and businesses.

- A continuation of the change in visitor patterns that sees expanded winter and shoulder season use and increasing group sales to include retreats, lectures, education-oriented vacations as well as the traditional "experiential" trip-based customer.

In the Year 2015 ■ DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

INLAND LAKES and FORESTS

Large areas of Cook County remain as minimally developed forested areas mainly owned and managed by public agencies (US Forest Service, MN DNR, Cook County, Grand Portage Reservation). Ownership continues to determine the use of the largest blocks of land in the county. Public policy and management trends (regarding items such as fire suppression, timber management, motorized and non-motorized trails, habitat enhancement, and specific designations such as parks, scientific and natural areas) drive most of the uses over these areas. The large areas of undeveloped forest land have been differentiated from the rural areas of the county and have been preserved in an undeveloped state. Private development is primarily year-round and seasonal residences and has been encouraged to locate in areas of existing development, along existing roads, on developed lakes possessing the capacity to sustain such development, and in areas where services (e.g., school bus, utilities, emergency services) can be relatively efficiently delivered. Within this general description, there are several sub-areas that will exhibit their own characteristics over time:

- **Sawbill Trail:** The trail retains its unique character as the only undeveloped major access to interior lakes and forests and to the BWCAW. The outfitter at Sawbill Lake continues to provide services to those entering the wilderness on the west side of the county.

- **Caribou Trail:** The trail provides access to seasonal and year-round residences, resorts, and camps. This pattern is driven in part by the strength of Lutsen as a destination resort area and community center, the level of private ownership, and the availability of utility services. Water quality deterioration in Caribou Lake suggests density limits for this and similar lakes regarding septic systems, lawn care, and sedimentation from erosion. Alternate technologies and practices for sewage treatment, lawn design and care, and similar facets of development have been explored and implemented.

- **Devil Track Lake:** The east end of the lake continues to be a developed area having become more of a year-round residential neighborhood. The airport sees increased use. As with Caribou Lake, water quality issues in the lake and river have promoted the use of alternate site design, lawn care and, especially, sewage treatment.

- **Maple Hill:** A distinctive community characterized by single family homes in a rural, large lot setting with an eclectic mix of other uses such as a family sawmill, historic church, and a number of recreational facilities including a golf course, cross country ski system, and access to regional trails. While not suburban, this area is more densely developed than upper segments of the Gunflint Trail.

- **Kadunce Creek/Flute Reed River:** This has remained an area of low density development dotted with home businesses.

- **Arrowhead Trail/McFarland Lake:** This corridor has not been developed to the extent of the other inland trails. Over the past 20 years the previously low level of development was challenged as former industrial forest lands gradually underwent residential development (because the land was sold into multiple individual ownership), the amount of public land has been maintained and even increased. Limited public services, distance from community centers, public land use controls, and the preferences of the land owners have continued to hold the density of development to a low level.

- **Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness:** The BWCAW, state parks and other designated natural areas are used and valued by county residents and visitors and provide a base for the tourism economy.

- **Grand Portage:** Governed by the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and its adopted land use controls, the inland portions of the reservation is used for forestry, wildlife, and dispersed recreation.