

Lutsen Town Center Plan

**A Guide for
Public & Private
Actions &
Investments:**

May 2004 Final Draft

Lutsen Town Center Plan

A Guide for Public & Private Actions & Investments:

Final Draft Version May 2004

Prepared for

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~ This report was funded with a grant from the Minnesota Coastal Program. ~

Lutsen Town Center Plan

Introduction to May 2004 Version

Lutsen is a physical place and, as one participant in a recent public meeting put it, “a state of mind”. Preparing a plan that identifies and implements shared community desires for the physical space called Lutsen must bear in mind the intangibles, which more than anything else define the place perceived as Lutsen.

Lutsen is a home for many and for a much larger number of people a destination – a destination that focuses on the ski hill and golf course, the lake, wild land, and area resorts. But, even with its lengthy history of settlement the community lacks a readily identifiable community center, not as a destination in the sense of the ski hill or local resorts, but as the physical place containing locally oriented community services, commercial enterprises, and public places. What exists today is a series of unconnected sites, not much more (in location and setting) than pull-offs along Highway 61 – there is no cohesive center.

The County’s comprehensive plan recognized the importance of community centers and sought to strengthen them. A subsequent sketch plan articulated a set of core concepts for more firmly defining Lutsen’s town center. That effort has been followed by the current, on-going one.

This document is rightly labeled a “working draft”. It is a work-in-progress. It continues the process of creating ever more detailed plans for Lutsen’s Town Center. Each step tests old assumptions to either affirm or reject them. Each step introduces new concepts and modifications of old ones in response to the changing physical and social environment. Each planning step brings the community closer to that commonly agreed upon set of concepts that will become the foundation for subsequent public and private actions. This is where the community’s thinking lies today, December 2003.

Lutsen Town Center Plan

The Planning Context

This work-in-progress version of a plan for Lutsen's Town Center was developed within this context:

❖ **Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County¹**

The County's 1997 comprehensive plan emphasized sustaining and enhancing the three West End community centers. Key policy statements include – each community is planned through local processes ~ Tofte and Lutsen have definite, recognizable boundaries ~ the communities extend inland with greater depth and are less dependent upon TH 61 as “main street” ~ shared utility systems are used to support denser residential and commercial development ~ contain a mix of quality housing affordable to a wide range of household incomes.

❖ **Lutsen Township Planning**

Lutsen Township is undertaking planning processes that will eventually address the entire township. The first effort focuses on the town center, an area which creates the town's identity, and is experiencing continued pressure for various types of development and retains opportunities to establish a desired land use pattern. The Town then intends to work on key inland lake projects such as the Caribou Lake area and apply lessons learned there to other inland lakes and the no-service portions of the township.

❖ **Lutsen Concept Plan² (“The Sketch Plan”)**

In 1999 Lutsen Township took the first step towards creating a plan for the town center area. This document defined core concepts as the basis for subsequent discussions and initiatives. The plan was based on the following principles: observe the values of the area ~ provide a common framework for public and private decisions ~ foster economic public servicing of developed areas ~ encourage compact development pattern that reduces pressure on valued natural areas ~ reinforce sense of place specific to Lutsen. Further, the plan recognized “the key premise is that public infrastructure should guide development rather than follow it.”

❖ **Lutsen Town Center Plan**

This current document flows from the concept plan and began with a request from the County asking the Township to provide more refined guidance concerning future development in the Town Center area. Labeled a work-in-progress this document explores approaches to implementing concepts presented in earlier processes. While certain principles and details have gelled, other key elements of a unified plan remain to be defined and agreed upon. The Town Planning Committee is continuing the planning process.

❖ **Lutsen Inland Lakes & Rural Area Planning**

Once a final town center plan is adopted and shifts into implementation, the Town Planning Committee will pursue planning processes for inland areas.

¹ *Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota*; prepared by Klaers, Powers & Associates, Robert J. Bruce, Pro-West & Associates, and Donald Bargaen; adopted May 21, 1997.

² *Lutsen Sketch Plan: Concepts to Guide Infrastructure & Development in the Lutsen Area*, prepared by Klaers, Powers & Associates, Carduus Consulting, Pro-West & Associates, September 1999.

Lutsen Town Center Plan

"Facts on the ground"

Like any other process, this planning effort is in good part shaped by the reality of what already exists. These "facts on the ground" create and limit opportunities and are constantly changing. More often than not, however, as more "facts" are fixed on the ground, options for effecting desired land use and transportation patterns are complicated, irrevocably lost, or become more expensive. The following are key facts now grounded in Lutsen.

❖ **Steam Engine Road**

The official platting of Steam Engine Road and associated lots and the subsequent construction of the road fairly well is a mixed blessing. While addressing the desire and need for more development in the Town Center area it did not creatively push forward the town center concept presented in the 1999 Lutsen Community Concept Plan.

❖ **Recent commercial development**

Several pieces of property recently changed hands in the Lutsen Town Center and the new owners promptly took action. One developed a plumbing supply/contractor building (with room for retail, offices, and apartments) and another built an office building housing a credit union and real estate firm. Yet a third property owner has proposed a multi-purpose storage facility. These developments happen to be located in the right place and reinforce the town center concept. But, they indicate that nothing stands still and that without an agreed upon plan for the town center the next round of development may pre-empt plan options.

❖ **Ongoing residential development**

Residential development continues to emerge in the Lutsen area. Recent projects include the Mink Farm, Lutsen Log Lodges, and The Heritage. The second home market drives most projects while year-round housing remains difficult to satisfy. These projects are being undertaken as stand-alone efforts with no coordinated interaction or connections.

❖ **Norbakken Road easement**

Like many roads serving local development Norbakken Road is a private road dependent upon easements across private property. The owner of one section of land crossed by the road is negotiating transferring the easement to another alignment. This is a classic example of the type of private decisions that are (and must be) made that could close down or complicate future regarding desired road networks. It highlights the weakness of relying on private roads to serve multiple developments.

❖ **Public direction and coordination**

Despite the preparation of a county plan and a Lutsen concept plan there is marked lack of public coordination of development in the area. The growth and shape of the town center has resulted from incremental, strategically unplanned, and only tactically coordinated private actions. There is no overarching guidance by public entities nor is direction being provided through public investment in infrastructure. With the constant pressure for more residential and commercial development in the area now may be the last window of opportunity for meaningful public direction to implement the Lutsen concept plan.

Lutsen Town Center Plan

Conceptual Framework

The 1999 plan described broad concepts for a future Lutsen town center area. The following text refines those concepts into a more detailed yet unfinished framework to guide additional planning and future development. The Lutsen Town Center idea is based on the desire to maintain the image of Lutsen as a destination while creating an identifiable community center.

❖ **Lutsen Community Connector Road**

The concept of a community connector road was first introduced in the 1999 sketch plan. This road provides an alternative to Highway 61 for certain trips, creates a common access to privately owned lands to foster coordinated development, “deepens” the Lutsen area supporting the potential for a greater sense of place, and reinforces the Lutsen commercial center. It connects the Lutsen Mountaintop with Lutsen Town Center. There is presently little consensus on the immediate need for or feasibility of this road. At this point the plan retains the concept for future consideration but makes no recommendation regarding any aspect of its implementation.

❖ **Lutsen Mountaintop “Main Street” (MTGC)**

The resort-commercial area at the top of Lutsen is to slowly adopt a more village-like, “main street” atmosphere corresponding with that of Lutsen Town Center at the base of the hill. The intent is to introduce sidewalks, street features, and such to foster a feeling of a “village at the top of the hill”.

❖ **Lutsen Town Center “Main Street” (LGC)**

Lutsen Town Center, incorporating the Arrowhead Electric to Lockport to Clearview area, could become a mixed-use commercial-residential area. It could gain a small village feel through street design – sidewalks, parallel parking, building design – zero lot line placement of buildings, one to two story construction, and use of alleys and shared parking. Commercial uses would focus on various retail and service outlets catering to local residents and tourists. Housing units could be integrated with commercial development most likely as second floor apartments; there would be no stand alone residential structures.

❖ **Residential Development: Town Center (LR-1)**

Growing outward from the Town Center is an area of “village-like” residential development. The intent is to offer a mix of housing design and cost options within a setting that approximates a small village. Interconnecting streets and pedestrian ways would be preferred over separate cul-de-sac layouts. The actual density of this development will be determined by the capacity of the land to support grouped water and sewer utilities.

❖ **Residential Development: Incentive Area (LR-2)**

To the west and north of Lutsen Town Center could be a tier of residential development intended to provide year-round housing and enhance the village-like atmosphere of the Town Center. Development density could be increased if the developments used common utility systems. Creation of new access points along Highway 61 will be discouraged.

❖ **Resort-Commercial Residential Area**

The area east of the Ski Hill Road, west of the Mink Farm Road, above TH 61, and below the ridgeline would remain a designated resort-commercial residential area. This area could be developed with single family homes, vacation rental homes, resorts, bed and breakfasts, and the like.

❖ **Residential Development: Other**

The remaining residential area, generally east of the Town Center, would follow existing zoning guidelines. As noted below, special attention to development setbacks and screening would be applied along the Highway 61 corridor.

❖ **Business Development Area (LBDA)**

Recognizing the need for a place for existing home businesses to expand to allow for more employees, and for the creation of living-wage jobs, an area for small business development should be created near the Town Core. This area would allow only low-traffic, self-contained businesses such as public utility offices, warehousing and indoor storage and very restricted light-industrial uses.

❖ **Highway 61 Corridor**

The Highway 61 corridor could undergo significant changes including: closure of accesses (one of the two Railroad Drive accesses, Paradise Park Road, Norbakken Road); turning lanes into and from town center area; “village” treatments in Town Center area to help define it and to slow traffic; and town “entrance” signs to denote Town Center area.

The essence of Lutsen focuses on the wild landscape and rugged shore. Retaining this identity will require techniques including screening and development setbacks so as to retain the undeveloped look along the entire stretch of Highway 61 in Lutsen. To further enhance this identity landscape treatments such as planting lupine and maples can be undertaken. Besides augmenting the naturalness of the corridor these actions will further enhance the village atmosphere of the Town Center.

❖ **Recreational Trails**

As it proceeds from the west to Lutsen the Gitchi-Gami State Trail is presently indicated to run on the lakeside of Highway 61. At some point this plan recommends that the trail shift over to the north side of the highway and run through the Town Center. Options for crossing points include being incorporated into an underpass on the new bridge on the Poplar River or within the slow speed zone at Town Center. A parking lot and service node could be established at the Town Center. Working with the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association, the Lutsen Highway Planning Committee will determine the best placement for the Trail.

A spur trail leading from the North Shore State Snowmobile Trail to the Town Center presently exists. As future platting of land and development occurs in the Town Center it is important that this access be maintained.

Lutsen Town Center Plan

Essential Town Center Elements

The following narrative describes essential elements of the proposed Lutsen Town Center.

❖ **Town Center Road Network & Flow**

A network of revamped existing and new roads create the transportation frame for the Town Center.

- Steam Engine Road could become the backbone of the Town Center. Its intersection with TH 61 would be the primary entrance to the area.
- Norbakken Road would connect to Steam Engine road at some point above Clearview House. Below that point the easement will revert to the underlying private property owner.
- Paradise Park Road would no longer intersect with TH 61. Instead it could loop around the County Plumbing site intersecting Steam Engine Road at two points – across from the frontage road and further up the hill across from the newly aligned access to Norbakken Road.
- Alleys and shared parking lots could run behind development along Steam Engine Road above the newly aligned Norbakken Road. For example, a parking lot could be created behind the Credit Union / real estate building. A drive-through lane for the Credit Union could access off Steam Engine Road. Another shared parking lot could be constructed within the area.

❖ **Main Street Design**

In Lutsen Town Center and Lutsen Mountaintop street design will help create the sense of being in a small village.

- Village street design concepts could be applied to Steam Engine Road (from power line to TH 61), the revamped Paradise Road, and the first block of the realigned Norbakken Road.
- Key design elements include curb and gutter, sidewalks, streetlights, and appropriate streetscape components (e.g., furniture, planters, etc.).
- For most of these streets there would be on-street parallel parking. As noted earlier, shared parking lots would be located behind the buildings.
- Zero front and side yard lot line development could be allowed and fostered. This will create the desired density, building massing, and impression for a small town.

❖ **Highway 61 Access & Design**

The key concept is to limit access to TH 61 and focus it at a few, well developed intersections.

- The following accesses would be closed: the easternmost Railroad Drive access; Paradise Park Road; and Norbakken Road (western Clearview entrance).
- Steam Engine Road would become the central access to Lutsen Town Center. The existing eastern entrance to Clearview would become the main eastern access and the current Arrowhead Electric access road would become the main western access point.
- The three main access intersections would have right and left turn lanes to facilitate safe traffic flow.

- The section of TH 61 through Lutsen Town Center would have village design elements. These are intended to reinforce the sense of a village setting and to slow traffic.
- Street features and landscaping would clearly define the three main access intersections as *the* entrances to the Town Center. The area between the these intersections would be landscaped so as to: provide room for the Gitchi-Gami Trail, and a retaining wall that helps establish an village setting and visually unifies the access points.
- The unofficial existing frontage road along the inland side of TH 61 could be retained, extended, and formally designated as a frontage road, or alternative highway designs allowing for safe access points could be developed.
- At Steam Engine Road the frontage road would move slightly inland to provide adequate stacking room for cars turning on and off the highway.

❖ **Lutsen Town Center “Main Street”**

The Town Center could be a mixed-use commercial and residential district that will have a small village sense of place.

- Commercial uses would be most forms of retail and service not involving extensive outdoor display or storage (e.g., auto sales). Drive-through dining establishments also would be excluded.
- Residences could be integrated within commercial development (e.g., second story apartments). There will be no stand-alone residential structures.
- Structures would be one to two stories. As in village downtowns, buildings may be constructed up to the sidewalk and to the side lot line (so-called zero lot line construction). Lots would be smaller, appropriate to a town.
- Sidewalks and pedestrian ways would facilitate walking throughout the area.
- Along both sides of Steam Engine Road just below the power line corridor commercial development would line the street with the alley/service road and shared parking to the rear. On the west side, the area behind this line of development would be the Town Center density residential development.

❖ **Waste Water**

The density of the Town Center and adjacent residential area would necessitate the use of grouped drinking water and wastewater collection and treatment systems. Assuming that suitable soils and conditions can be found the Town Center commercial/residential area would require roughly a five-acre treatment site; the adjacent village-like residential area would require at least another five acres.

❖ **Town Center Entrance Signs**

To the west and east of the Town Center along TH 61 would be distinctive Lutsen “entrance” signs. These signs would demark the Town Center, inform motorists of local businesses, and along with highway design strive to slow traffic to appropriate speeds to facilitate safe travel through the area.

Lutsen Town Center Plan

Supporting Actions

Implementing the eventual final version of the Lutsen Town Center Plan would require closely coordinated organizational and institutional actions. The following narrative highlights the most critical of these.

❖ **Project Guidance & Coordination**

Implementing a Town Center plan will take considerable coordination. A dedicated committee is essential to sustain project momentum and insure essential coordination and cooperation from private and public interests. The Township should officially establish the committee; besides community residents membership would include, at least as ex-officio members, representatives from various County and State agencies.

❖ **Utility Development & Financing**

For the density proposed by this plan, some form of common drinking water and wastewater collection and treatment systems will be necessary. It is recommended that the Town undertake an engineering study to assess the capacity and potential locations for these systems as soon as possible.

The increased densities proposed by this plan will be conditioned on the landowners providing these common systems as part of their developments.

The town main street using Steam Engine Road will require improvements and village-like design features including curb and gutter, storm water drainage, sidewalks, and lighting that will necessitate construction at one time to serve the entire Town Center commercial area. A creative mechanism for funding must be sought to appropriately spread costs over all the development and to avoid permanent public fiscal responsibility.

❖ **Subdivision / Parcel Creation**

Land subdivision procedures are to be changed to require that all land subdivided within the area generally bounded by Lutsen Town Center, Ski Hill Road (CR 5), TH 61, and the ridgeline (T 59 N R 3 W Sec 27 & westerly 40s of Sec 26) is to be by an official plat.

❖ **Zoning Ordinance**

Changes in zoning *on the land* will only result from requests by affected landowners. Changes in the descriptions of the zoning districts should be undertaken in preparation for such requests. Thus, the following changes in the county's zoning ordinance are suggested:

General Commercial – Lutsen Town Center (LGC) and Lutsen Mountain Top (MTGC)

Create variations of the General Commercial District called Lutsen Town Center General Commercial and Lutsen Mountain Top General Commercial.

- Purpose remains same but geographic scope is limited to Lutsen.

- Dependent upon implementation of a grouped wastewater collection and treatment system: reduce minimum lot size to .25 acre; for commercial or mixed-use commercial/residential developments reduce front and side yard setbacks to 0 feet; off-street parking requirements would be modified downward to account for presence of on-street parking and shared parking lots.
- Define permitted and conditional uses to reflect the concepts outlined in this plan's "Town Center Main Street" narrative under Essential Town Center Elements.

LR-1: Lutsen Town Center

Create variation of the R-1 Single Family Residential District called LR-1: Lutsen Town Center Single Family Residential District.

- Purpose would reference intent to implement Lutsen Town Center plan.
- All development would have to be connected to a common wastewater collection and treatment system.
- Permitted uses would be same as R-1 except that temporary use of a recreational vehicle as a dwelling would not be allowed.
- Conditional uses would be the same as R-1 except: long-term use of recreational vehicles as dwellings would not be allowed; home businesses would not be allowed.
- Minimum lot area would be .25 acre for single and duplex units; would increase to .5 acre for larger units. Minimum lot width would be 75 feet; would increase to 125 feet for 2+ units.
- Minimum road setbacks would be reduced to 25 feet from right-of-way. Side yard setbacks would be 10 feet. Rear yard setbacks would be decreased to 25 feet.

LR-2: Lutsen Incentive Area

Create variation of the R-1 Single Family Residential District called LR-2: Lutsen Town Center Residential Incentive District.

- Purpose reflects intent to implement Lutsen Town Center plan.
- All basic requirements of the current R-1 district apply except as otherwise noted.
- Only within this area may developers utilize the proposed "Lutsen Community Incentive" components of the Open Space Subdivision regulations.
- If units are served by a common wastewater collection and treatment system, density of units may be increased up to 150% (that is, instead of potentially 20 units per 40 acres at 2 acres per unit, 30 units could be built) and the minimum lot size can be to as low as .75 acre.

Lutsen Town Center Plan

Moving Forward

Even though it will require another phase of the Town Center planning process to “etch the details into stone”, there are actions needing attention at this time. They include the following.

❖ **Final Lutsen Town Center Plan**

- Obtain Town approval of the final plan followed by adoption by the County Board.

❖ **Waste Water**

- Apply for a grant to assess and identify sites where treatment can feasibly be undertaken, especially for development occurring in the Town Center.

❖ **Zoning**

- Draft revisions to the zoning ordinance to define the Lutsen Development Districts.
- Upon adoption of revised zoning ordinance, landowners may apply for zoning changes if they so desire.

❖ **TH 61 Reconstruction and Gitchi-Gami State Trail**

- Form a committee to begin the process by which MnDOT establishes Lutsen Town Center improvements as a firm project and encourage the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association to begin process of defining the trail alignment through Lutsen.

❖ **Design Standards**

- Form committee to review possibility of establishing design standards.