

# **Skowhegan Comprehensive Plan**

**2010 Update**

**Volume II:**

**Data and Key Issues**

*Accepted Town Meeting June 7, 2010*

# Table of Contents:

<b>Chapter:</b>	<b>page</b>
Introduction	
1: Historic Skowhegan	4
2: Skowhegan Today and Tomorrow	13
3: Skowhegan's Economy	22
4: Housing in Skowhegan	32
5: Community Services	39
6: Community Recreation	51
7: Skowhegan's Transportation System	56
8: Land Use and Development	67
9: Farming and Forestry in Skowhegan	74
10: Water Resources	79
11: Critical Natural Resources	87
Map Appendix	



# Chapter 1: Historic Skowhegan



## Planning Goal:

*To preserve Skowhegan's Historic and Archeological Resources.*

## Short History of the Town:

Like many Maine communities, Skowhegan's historic growth and development can be traced to its natural resources. The Kennebec River has played the formative role in each era of our past. That which attracted the first Native American travelers millennia ago has been, and will continue to be, the stimulus that attracts individuals, families, and businesses to our community for years to come. Understanding and preserving that resource is a crucial component of any Comprehensive Plan for our town. Skowhegan's past is the key to our future.

The history of Skowhegan begins before the recorded history of our European ancestors. Archeological evidence of Native American camps and villages continues to be discovered along the banks of the Kennebec River from Popham to Caratunk. This evidence seems to point to three migrations of Native American peoples. We have established that the Norridgewock band of the Abnaki Indian nation were the last native people to maintain fishing and hunting camps along the Kennebec River and its tributaries in what is now Skowhegan. These temporary or seasonal camp locations would later become the same areas where European settlers established the first known permanent residences.

Early settlement and growth patterns of Skowhegan show clear connections to the demands of Colonial America and Europe. The Kennebec River provided the resources for our early development. The abundance of fish and fur, ship building timber and rich soil, block ice and moving water provided the first industrious settlers a steady and profitable base upon which to build. The earliest settlers found the flat waters below the Wesserunsett River amenable to set up year round homesteads. In 1771 the first settlers, Peter Heywood and Joseph Weston, trekked up the river with their families and some cattle to establish the first permanent residences in the region. In the next decade many more settlers were granted land along the Kennebec River and soon villages were being established.

In time, a small community developed in this area and came to be known as the Canaan Plantation. The Town of Canaan incorporated in 1788, along with its neighboring town to the west, Norridgewock. These early settlements survived by hunting for and growing their own provisions as well as trading or selling animal furs, fish, and timber for goods they could not produce. Such commodities would eventually make their way to the larger centers of Boston, Newport, and eventually European ports. These trading post communities grow slowly because of harsh winters, unpredictable water navigation and the over-hunting or fishing of certain areas. However, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a new growth pattern had emerged along the river.

The Kennebec provided another valuable resource to the development of Skowhegan. The late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw development attracted to the power potential along the fast moving waters of the falls and the gorge. This natural waterway gave birth to the construction of mills and factories along the river and its tributaries. The mills utilized Skowhegan Falls, as well as Currier Brook and Whitten Brook, to turn their turbines, grinders, gears, and wheels. Hence the villages of Skowhegan (located in the juncture of Norridgewock and Canaan) and Bloomfield (located on the south side of the river) grew from necessity. Work forces were needed as the mills went into operation. French Canadian families migrated south into Skowhegan to work the mills. The villages of Bloomfield and Skowhegan blossomed into commercial centers to provide goods, services and housing to these new labor forces and micro-economies created by the mills.

Up through the early 1800's most of the commercial and industrial action took place on the island and the south side of the river (Bloomfield). Commercial activity on the north side of the river (Water Street) gradually increased from mid-century on. This growth period on the north side really blossomed in 1845 when the first bank moved onto Water Street. With the addition of the railroad in 1856 and the introduction of the telegraph in 1862, the Village of Skowhegan (incorporated as Milburn in 1814 and then, with its merger with Bloomfield, incorporated as Skowhegan in 1861) was soon the center of commerce for this area. By the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Skowhegan's mills produced textiles, tanning, paper, ice and other products that were shipped around the world.

In 1872, Skowhegan was recognized as the seat of the county. The construction of a court house and jail added another aspect to the town's expansion.

Skowhegan's economy continued to surge, as did its reliance on the Kennebec River. The lumber industry was in full gear, providing building materials for the new nation. Raw materials were floated down the Kennebec to the mills where they were processed and shipped out by rail. New industries were added: steel products, veneers, and footwear. More growth meant greater wealth. Eminent housing was built along the major thoroughfares of Madison Avenue, Water Street, Elm & Pleasant Streets, and Main Street. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, entire neighborhoods sprang up in the vicinity of Winter Street, Maple Street, and Dyer Street to the north; Mt. Pleasant Street, Millburn Street, and Alder Street to the south. Ethnic migrations of Italians and Irish brought with them the mason skills that built the newest commercial and public buildings in town. Skowhegan had grown into a robust, thriving community by the time the "War to End All Wars" started.

By the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the world's attention had turned toward the war. The boom years for Skowhegan were over. The nation now relied on steel, metals, and concrete for its infrastructure, transportation, and war machine. Growth for the town remained slow but steady throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Development was limited to walking distance of the established downtown commercial area. Additional neighborhoods to the north included Beech Street, Greenwood Avenue, and St. Mark Street, and to the south included Willow Street, Hathaway Street, and Pooler Avenue.

Though Skowhegan would generally follow the national economic tendencies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it never regained the substantial period of growth similar to its turn-of-the-century boom. From the 1940's to the 1980's many changes occurred in Skowhegan. Like most industrial towns, Skowhegan turned its back to the river. A new source of power had emerged – electricity –and the industries that ran on water were inefficient and costly. Sewage, waste, trash, and debris from industries, homes, businesses, and highways had been dumped into the waters, and they smelled. They could no longer support the wildlife and fish that attracted centuries of settlers. Overseas labor markets and newly automated factories put many mills out of service. And finally, in 1972, the federal Clean Water Act signaled an end to running logs down the Kennebec River. Skowhegan's identity as a river town was lost.

Building facades and interiors were altered to reflect the nation's postwar style. From the historic preservation standpoint, Skowhegan suffered many significant losses due to fires, disrepair, and "progress." Skowhegan's uncertainties became even more pronounced. The 20<sup>th</sup> century ended with the infusion of mass retailing nationwide. Big box stores, strip malls and mega-malls replaced the compact downtowns as the commercial centers across America. Tree-lined roads were replaced with multi-lane highways. Towns no longer looked at their natural resources for economic stimulus but turned instead to the highways and mega shopping plazas. Skowhegan followed this with commercial growth along Madison Avenue and East Front Street (renamed Waterville Road). Commercial giants like Walmart, McDonald's, and Burger King planted themselves amongst the beautiful homes of the century before. Commercial growth became voracious, with new plazas, box stores, and service stations replacing old, leaving empty plazas and vacant parking lots.

For Skowhegan, the removal of log runs from the river also meant the rise of logging trucks to move raw goods. Roads and intersections were widened. Historic characteristics of the town were dismantled or destroyed. Traffic was constant and noisy. The downtown was no longer the place to shop, eat, and meet up with friends and neighbors. These factors also started to push people further and further away from neighborhoods and downtowns. The downtown had lost its luster. A new growth pattern had emerged.

Skowhegan's growth moved further from the downtown. New residential housing and subdivisions sprang up in the traditionally agricultural or undeveloped areas around town. Road improvements meant that workers could spread even further out, toward neighboring rural Cornville, Athens, Norridgewock, and Canaan. People were looking for that quiet country setting that Skowhegan's business district and streets no longer provided. It is important to recognize however that this migration stretched the town's ability to maintain roads, services,

and emergency care. Taxes needed to provide betterments and the existing infrastructure could support a clean, vigorous small town setting, but not a sprawling one.

The millennium brings new hope and optimism to Skowhegan. In 2005, Skowhegan joined the national program of rebuilding historic communities with its recognition as a Main Street community. This recognition has helped revitalize the downtown with grant money and access to architectural assistance. The completion of a major infrastructural upgrade, the addition of an ambassador building, and installation of period lighting, trees, and sidewalks has brought a new glimmer to the historic commercial center. The Skowhegan Historic District is a cohesive grouping of 38 architecturally and historically significant buildings dating from circa 1880 to 1912. Restoration of the historic downtown facades and structures are rejuvenating the sense of a downtown center of commerce.

Ironically, one constant and truly individual feature of this town will determine how Skowhegan continues to grow and form into this new millennium. The Kennebec River is once again the key to Skowhegan's future. Current projects and ideas for the river – land preservation, walking trails and green spaces, parkways, and a kayak white water park – will once again invigorate this town. The Kennebec represents our heritage as a small New England mill town, a tourist destination, and even as a great place to live. How we treat this valuable resource will ultimately determine what direction the town chooses to go.

It is with this in mind that the Inhabitants of the Town of Skowhegan chose to protect our cultural and historical resources as a symbol and reminder of our community identity.

## **Inventory of Historical Resources:**

The cultural and historic resources of Skowhegan can be generally classified into four eras. Each era represents a period of time in the use of and/or the development of our town. It is important to understand that each period is general in nature and that overlaps, both developmental and chronological, may exist. The four major eras include the prehistoric (pre-contact) era, the colonial, revolutionary and frontier era, industrial growth era, and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century era.

### *The Prehistoric Era:*

This period of time represents the most complex era by definition, classification, and preservation. Though there is ample evidence of local Native American activity, the ability to pinpoint such activity to preserve and educate is an arduous and cost prohibitive task. Skowhegan is fortunate to have so many residents that share a passion for the understanding of how native inhabitants survived in this region. Numerous historic and prehistoric artifacts, as well as investigations on privately owned properties has allowed archaeologists the opportunity to inspect land formations, soil types, waterways, and other topographical indicators to develop a general theory of the prehistoric activities that may have occurred in our town.

Archaeological surveys have identified multiple sites in Skowhegan. For example, the bridge and highway by-pass proposal for Skowhegan has moved into the environmental impact

study phase, requiring the identification of potentially prehistoric or historic sites along a possible route. Initial investigations are research based and non-destructive. If any areas along the route are identified as needing further investigation then a second stage, including test pits, is initiated. In 2002, and then again in 2005, second stage investigations were performed along the proposed corridor. Test pits along the Cold Brook and the Wesserunsett River provided some evidence of prehistoric activity but were inconclusive in terms of what those activities may have been. However, several test pits along the Kennebec River showed early to mid-Ceramic and/or Susquehanna tradition prehistoric sites. These sites are considered eligible for National Registry.

These and other sites are generally not advertised, to reduce the possibility of looting or disturbance. The existing inventory for this era identifies by number only, and includes:

- Prehistoric Site 70.32 [Susquehanna tradition]
- Prehistoric Site 70.37 [Susquehanna tradition]
- Prehistoric Site 70.38 [Ceramic period]
- Prehistoric Site 70.30 [undetermined]
- Prehistoric Site 70.34 [undetermined]
- Prehistoric Site 70.35 [undetermined]

The process of surveying and preserving our past is a very arduous task. Financial resources will always be the first deterrent. Costs associated with exploration and evaluation can even deter development of prospective sites. While it is not believed that any individual or entity would purposely exclude this type of investigation, the financial resources required to complete the work could very well end the motivation to investigate in the first place.

The second consideration is defining the area of the research. Natural disturbances such as spring thaw, raging rivers, beaver dams, wind erosion, and biodegradation have detrimental effects on archaeological field work and recovery. Manmade disturbances such as field plowing, mill dams, road building, and general construction have a negative impact on archaeological resources. Determining the limit of work is a very scientific procedure. Field experience plays the biggest role in expertise. However the availability of field experienced experts is limited.

The third consideration is the goal of the research itself. Native American traditions generally demand that their cultural heritage be left undisturbed. Beliefs are that the material beings and spirits are of the earth and therefore should remain of the earth. Our European heritage requires classification, documentation, and public acknowledgement of our past. The challenge occurs because in order to protect (or leave alone) something, one must know where it is. In this case protecting a cultural site means being able to identify the location of the site and the scope of work of any ensuing project.

#### *The Colonial, Revolutionary and Frontier Era:*

This era represents the period of time between the first contact (early 1600's) and the first industrial era (early 1800's). Most of this period is dedicated to the early American explorers, hunters, and surveyors that traveled through our town. It is not until 1771 that settlers

made permanent homesteads within our boundaries. The preservation of this period is limited to the few remaining cellar holes and other structures left intact. However, significant areas along the Kennebec River at the gorge, eddy, and Wesserunsett Stream inlet remain very much undisturbed from their appearance during this colonial and revolutionary period.

The connection between America's settlement and the establishment of Skowhegan has been demonstrated. The Kennebec River played a major role in the success of the Massachusetts Colony by supplying ample hunting grounds for the earliest settlers. Raw materials, foods, and goods from the Kennebec continued to supply the settlements to the south during the pre-revolutionary period. The lands on both sides of the Kennebec were included in a grant from the Plymouth Council to the Pilgrims in 1629 with the Wesserunsett River recognized as the northern boundary of the grant. The Wesserunsett was again set as the northern boundary of the William Bradford purchase in 1649.

Native American trade routes and lifestyle were impacted greatly by traveling hunters and woodsmen. Tensions between the Native inhabitants and the traders grew increasingly hostile. Territorial battles ensued requiring former trading posts be converted into forts and armories. The completion of Fort Western [Augusta] in 1754 paved the way for permanent settlers along the Kennebec. Just before the outbreak of war, Skowhegan would see its first full-time inhabitants.

Two significant milestones of that era include the Arnold Expedition in 1775 and the Canaan Plantation. Recorded history tells us that the Arnold Expedition stopped in on our first settlers on the way up to Quebec. Author Stephen Clark noted "This stretch [of river] is about the same as it was when the expedition passed. Note the swiftness of the current that the bateaux [rowing boat] men were obliged to navigate" in his book *Following Their Footsteps: A Travel Guide & History of the 1775 Secret Expedition to Capture Quebec*. History can make judgment on the success or failure of the Arnold Expedition but the for the Kennebec and Skowhegan it was the first time these areas were properly surveyed and mapped for future growth. And that growth continued gradually for the next forty years in the settlement of the Canaan Plantation, Canaan, Bloomfield, and Milburn.

Significant elements of for this era include, but are not limited to;

- Dudley Corner Schoolhouse
- Arnold Expedition Trail
- Weston Mill
- Samuel Weston's 1797 plan of Canaan Gore and Mile-and-a-Half Strip lots
- Malbons Mills and dam

### *The Industrial Growth Era:*

This era represents the period of time between the creation of the first mills (early 1800's) and World War I (1914). As mentioned, this era also represents the greatest period of growth and prosperity for Skowhegan. That economic growth contributed the greatest amount of observable (tangible) historic resources to pass on from its generation. These resources are

obvious in our architecture, town layout, road and park names, and family names. They are evident in our daily lives through photographs, furniture, dishware, etc.

History is all about a chain of events interacting on each other. A chronological timeline will have numerous overlaps and gaps. In this case, the distinction between the end of the previous era and the beginning of this era is not so much a distinct world-changing event but a very localized yet significant (though unknown at the time) event.

The Somerset Central Agricultural Society opened its gates for the first time in January, 1819. This cultural event would draw in farmers and families from around Somerset County. The real impact of this draw was that it crossed the barriers of ethnicity, religious beliefs, and economic differences. All were invited; anyone could compete, plain and simple. And everyone needed something to take their minds off winter. Hence the beginning of Skowhegan's [Canaan's actually] importance to the region began.

Skowhegan continued to grow throughout this period. In 1885, electricity would be introduced to the town. In 1887, the public water works would be added. The growth also provided greater wealth and that wealth, in turn, demanded finer goods and restaurants, more culture and arts. In 1888, the Boston Symphony Orchestra Club would entertain the masses. And in 1893, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra would delight audiences here. Next came the advancements. In 1901, the first motorcycle rolled into town. A year later the first horseless carriage would get stuck in Skowhegan's mud. It seemed that this prosperity and growth would last forever. From it Skowhegan would get its village, its county status, and its identity. And we take from this era hundreds of examples of architectural and community history.

Significant elements of this era include not just structures but entire neighborhoods. While few contain or commemorate historically significant milestones, in context they describe the development of our community. They include, but are not limited to;

- Skowhegan Fair Grounds
- First Baptist Church of Skowhegan (re-located to 37 Main Street in 1822)
- Madison Avenue District
- Main Street District
- Water Street District
- Elm & Pleasant Streets District
- Fairview Avenue (Middle Road) District
- Island District
- Skowhegan Historic Downtown District
- original structure for the county jail
- first addition to the county jail
- original county courthouse
- original Strand Theatre
- Skowhegan Grange

### *The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Era:*

This era represents the period of time between World War I (1914) and the Korean War (1953). This period can be mostly defined by the impact of automobiles, the creation of larger mill complexes, and the impact of the wars on thriving mill towns.

The inventory for this era includes, but is not limited to;

- Maine Spinning Mill Company mill
- New Balance Factory building

### *The Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Era:*

This era represents the period of time after the Korean War (1953) to the present. This period can be mostly defined by the impact of the “new economy:” big box stores, chain retailing, and technology. But, it is important to recognize that history doesn’t stop at or after the Korean War. Names like Margaret Chase Smith, Scott Paper, and Redington-Fairview are engraved in our town history forever. It should be recognized that the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century represented a loss of traditional values, replaced by a sense of invention. Plastic, silicon, nylon, and concrete represented the future. The “leap of progress” meant leaving anything old to waste and starting new. No frontier was sacred; from Mt. Everest to the moon to the bottom of the ocean. History was being made while “historic” was actually being left to waste away.

In Skowhegan, however, efforts were made to stay connected with the past. Preservation efforts for this era include, but are not limited to;

- Margaret Chase Smith Library
- Establishment of the Skowhegan History House and Heritage Council

### **Analysis and Issues:**

Elements of Skowhegan’s traditional settlement pattern are still strongly in evidence. Skowhegan grew up as a river-oriented mill town. While the water power is now converted to electric current, many of the original mills are still in place, not to mention the urban village adjacent to the river. Although the current trend is to build out in the rural part of town, we still have a strong commercial core as well as healthy residential neighborhoods.

Perhaps Skowhegan’s strongest link to its heritage is not an artifact; it is the Kennebec River. The historical connection of the river to the establishment and development of Skowhegan is an important reminder of our past. In conjunction with recreational [fishing, kayaking, etc], commercial [guiding, rentals, fishing, etc.] and ancillary activities [overlooks, hiking, etc], the educational piece of the river is an important part of passing our heritage on.

Skowhegan’s Heritage Council oversees many of the protective efforts of the town, acting as guardian and watchdog of our historic inventory. The downtown blocks are contained within an historic district listed on the National Register, and this designation has been used several times to protect the district and fund its preservation. The next step may be to recognize major crossroads into the above-mentioned district as important historic contributors to the

aesthetics and culture of our town: the Water Street District, encompassing those properties along Water Street from the intersection of North Avenue to the intersection of Hessleton Road; the Madison Avenue District, encompassing those properties along Madison from the intersection of Commercial Street to the intersection of York Street; the Elm & Pleasant Streets District, encompassing all eligible properties on Elm Street and Pleasant Street including the History House and the Gould House; the Island District encompassing all eligible properties on Skowhegan Island including the Maine Spinning Mill Company mill and the Federated Church; the Main Street District, encompassing all eligible properties along Main Street from the intersection with Waterville Road and Willow Street including the Gov. Coburn Estate and the First Baptist Church; and the Fairview Avenue encompassing all eligible properties from the junction with Main Street to the Redington-Fairview General Hospital.

The town's Site Review Ordinance requires site assessments and design modifications to protect historic and archeological resources and the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance requires archeological investigation prior to development in shoreland areas. The Subdivision Ordinance contains no such provisions. Two previous large scale construction projects that have benefited have been the remodeling and addition to the Strand Theatre and the remodeling and addition to the Redington Home. Designing with foresight went a long way in improving our downtown while creating an architecturally pleasing and cohesive structure.

The Heritage Council seeks out historic resources that may have fallen into disrepair and develops plans to preserve them. The current priority is the Dudley Corner Schoolhouse, one of the first public buildings in town.

# Chapter 2: Skowhegan Today and Tomorrow

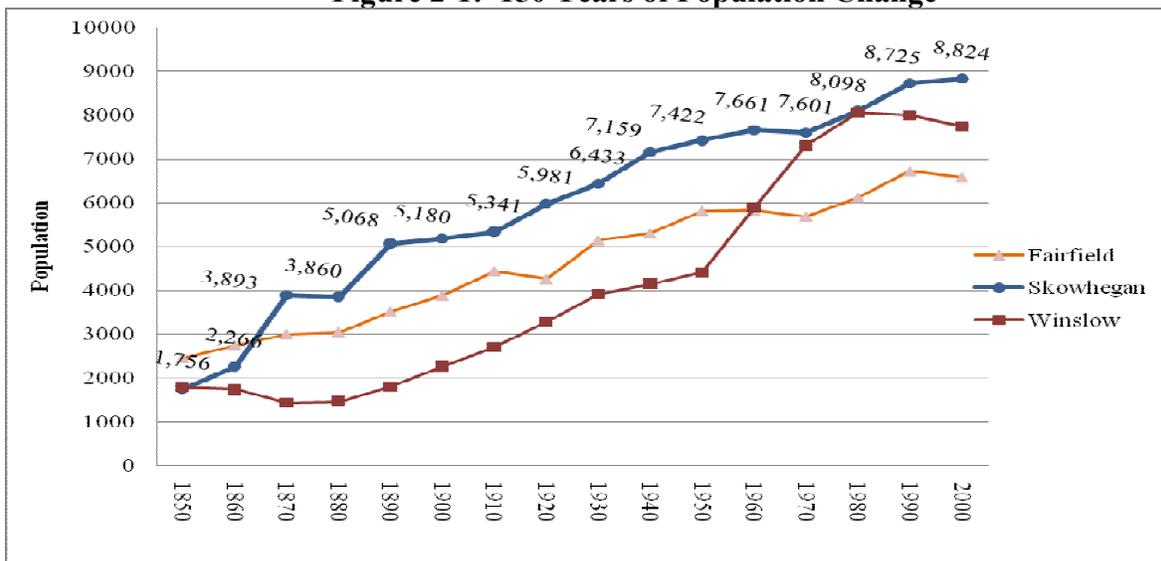
## A Demographic Profile:

Everybody judges a town by its population. Is it a big town? A little town? Is it growing? Declining? How many old people? How many children? How many minorities?

This chapter profiles Skowhegan's current population characteristics and trends. Equally as important, it looks at what is going on around us. As the seat of Somerset County, this town is not only the largest, but the center of economic and political activity. Trends in neighboring towns and towns of similar size can teach us and prepare us for Skowhegan's future.

Historic population trends illustrate change over decades. Figure 2-1, below, shows Skowhegan's population trends for the past 150 years, along with those of nearby towns. Skowhegan has experienced slow and steady gains for over a century, with the exception of a very slight plateau in the 60's. In contrast, Winslow's population experienced a rapid growth in the 50's and 60's, followed by a decline since 1980, and Fairfield, which, as late as 1860 exceeded Skowhegan in population, has had its ups and downs.

**Figure 2-1: 150 Years of Population Change**



The numbers in this table have been taken from the decennial census. As of the 2000 census, Skowhegan had a population of 8,824, a gain of 99 people from 1990. That census count is now eight years old, and we can update it with local figures. Between 2000 and 2009, the town assessor added 171 new housing units to the tax rolls. Kennebec Valley Council of Governments uses this figure, assumes a constant vacancy rate and diminishing household size (see below), to estimate a 2009 population of 8,831.

Skowhegan's population and growth rate is not unusual for an urbanized area in central Maine. In fact, any growth at all is good news. As the box at right shows, nearly every major town in this part of Maine lost population in the 90's. By comparison, Skowhegan is relatively healthy.

Town	2000 Population	90-00 Growth
<b>Skowhegan</b>	<b>8,824</b>	<b>99 (+1.1 %)</b>
Winslow	7,743	- 254 (-3.2 %)
Waterville	15,605	-1,568 (-9.1 %)
Fairfield	6,573	- 145 (-2.2 %)
Madison	4,523	- 202 (-4.3 %)
Pittsfield	4,214	24 (+0.6 %)
Farmington	7,410	- 26 (-0.4 %)

Small towns experienced the most growth in the 90's, as sprawl is a reality even in Somerset County. Towns such as Canaan (23 %), Cornville (20 %), and even Norridgewock (6 %) have been popular in the past because of cheap land prices, but a new focus on the cost of commuting may generate a turnaround in the future. Somerset County as a whole grew by 2.3 percent (1,121 people) from 1990 to 2000.

*Population Components: Migration and Natural Change:*

Population change can be broken down into two elements: "Natural Change," which is the difference between births and deaths, and "Migration," which is the difference between those moving into town and those moving out.

Natural change tends to be a fairly slow-changing number, based on trends in longevity and fertility. But that is not the case in Skowhegan. Between 1990 and 2000, Skowhegan recorded a net gain of 153 (153 more births than deaths). But between 2000 and 2005, the town experienced 609 births and 613 deaths, for a net *loss* of four. The increase in mortality suggests that Skowhegan is becoming home to an increasingly older population. A slight drop in births might be due to the aging of "Baby Boom" women out of their prime child-bearing years.

Migration tends to respond more to economics. People will choose to move into or out of a community based on factors such as availability of employment, cost of housing, and perceptions of community vitality. Migration is calculated as the difference between population change and natural change. In the 1990's, Skowhegan had an *out*-migration of 54 residents. But, between 2000 and 2005, the town had an estimated *in*-migration of 27. This can be viewed as an indicator that the Skowhegan is on the upswing, economically.

*Families and Households:*

The measuring stick for many demographic trends from the perspective of the Census Bureau is not persons, but "Households." Households consist of everyone living in a housing unit, whether they are single persons, families, or unrelated individuals. There are occasionally

persons who do not live in a “household,” and are classified as living in “group quarters,” but these are ignored statistically. (Skowhegan had a relatively large group quarters population in 2000, because of the 162 people in the county jail.)

Table 2-1, below, illustrates the type of households in Skowhegan, and how they are changing over time. The table demonstrates the conventional wisdom – traditional two-parent families with children are becoming less dominant. What made up over half of all households in 1990 is now just 47 percent. Every other household type is growing in double digits. Single-person households, in particular, are increasing rapidly, with elderly households a big part of that. Households with at least one person over 65 constitute almost one-third of the total households in Skowhegan.

**Table 2-1  
Household Characteristics, 1990 and 2000 Census Data**

<b>Household Type:</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>% change</b>
All Households	3,454	3,716	7.6 %
Single-person Households	923	1,099	19 %
Single-person “over 65”	435	451	3.7 %
Married-couple families	1,782	1,760	- 1.2 %
Single-parent male-headed families	101	118	17 %
Single-parent female-headed families	447	484	8.3 %

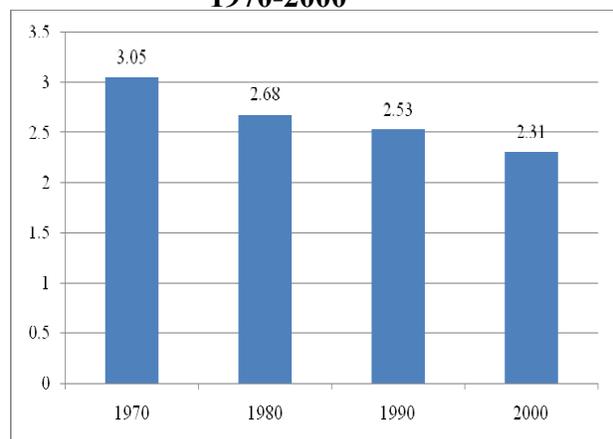
Note that the total number of households increased 7.6 percent during the same decade that the population increased by only one percent. The logical conclusion is that the average size of a household is getting smaller, which is indeed the case (see below). This is supported by the double digit increase in the number of single-person households.

Fewer people in more households means the average “persons per household” has declined. Throughout the country, the average number of persons per household has been trending this direction for decades. Factors include smaller families, broken families, more independent living among the elderly, and delayed marriage among the young.

In Skowhegan, these trends are shown in Figure 2-2, at right. The average household in 2000 is only about three-quarters that of 1970, 2.31 persons per household, versus 3.05.

The shrinkage of household size is not just an amusing statistic; it has an impact on development in Skowhegan: at 3.05 persons per household in 1970, we had 328 houses for every 1,000 people. At 2.31 in 2000, it now takes 433 houses for the same number. That means even if we had not gained a soul in population since 1970, we would have needed

**Figure 2-2: Change in Persons per Household:  
1970-2000**



860 more housing units. Or, to put it another way, the first 29 new houses in every year must go to balancing the decline in household size; only the 30<sup>th</sup> house leads to population growth.

The type of housing can influence household sizes and, therefore, population growth. Different housing types are in demand for one- and two-person households than three- and four-person households. The construction of a senior housing complex, the demolition of an apartment building, or the development of a large-lot subdivision -- all will influence the size of housing units, therefore the relative mix of household sizes, age groups, and number of children and elderly in town. This is an area in which Skowhegan could actually impact its future, by steps which encourage or discourage suburban housing, or apartments, or riverfront condo's.

*Population Features:*

Other physical features of the population are highlighted in the census. One of the most important of these is age. The age profile and trend of the population can tell us whether we should be planning for new schools or new senior citizen centers.

In nearly every community over the past few decades, the significant feature of the age issue has been the Baby Boom. These are persons born generally between 1945 and 1965. There were a lot of them; so many that their impact was felt first in schools, then, as they aged in starter homes, now in upscale and vacation homes, and soon in retirement centers.

Table 2-2, below, shows the impact of age group shifts on the town. In 1970, the Baby Boom was primarily under age 18. As the Baby Boom ages, young people decline, the segment in the middle swells, and that will soon carry over into the retirement-age group.

**Table 2-2  
Percentage of Population by Age Group, 1970-2000 Census**

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>
under 18	34.4	28.9	26.0	23.5
18-64	52.8	56.4	59.0	60.1
Over 65	12.7	14.7	15.0	16.4

More than 1/3 of the town was children in 1970; it is now down below ¼. One in eight was elderly in 1970; it is now more than one in six. In hard numbers: Skowhegan had 2,071 children in 2000, down from 2,616 in 1970. Aged 65 and over, we had 1,445 in 2000, up dramatically from 963 in 1970.

Another measure of community aging is its "Median Age." A median is a point at which exactly half the population is above and half below (not the same as "average.") Skowhegan's median age in 2000 was 39. This is a five year aging from 1990 (age: 34). Now, while most of us, as individuals, age ten years in a decade, it is not the same with a population. If the median age of a population rises, it means that more people are being added to the "old" side of the balance than the "young" side.

Skowhegan's median age is about average for the county. Somerset County, in 2000, had a median age of 38.9, and Maine 38.6. Similar towns are shown in the box at right. Madison and Winslow have higher median ages, and are "growing old" faster.

Town	1990 age	2000 age
<b>Skowhegan</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39</b>
Fairfield	32	37
Madison	36	42
Pittsfield	34	36
Winslow	35	41
Waterville	32	36

The census also tallies race and national origin. Racial proportions are not a big issue in Skowhegan. Like most of Maine, only 2.4 percent of the Skowhegan population is "non-white" including mixed-race. Most of those are Native American or Asian. In Somerset County, 98 percent of the population is white, and in Maine, the figure is 97 percent.

The ancestry of residents may be of some interest, though not necessarily from a planning standpoint. Skowhegan has a strong French connection. The census reports that 27.3 percent of the population is either "French" or "French-Canadian." The next largest ethnic group is English, at 20 percent, followed by Irish at 14.5 percent. However, the ancestries are very well integrated into the community; only 4.6 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home.

### **Tomorrow's Trends:**

Demographic facts and figures can be pretty boring. What we really want to know is what the future will be like. Demographic figures give us a feel for past trends, which surprisingly enough turn out to be predictors of future trends.

We cannot be certain of the future. We cannot draw a straight line from population figures of the past to arrive at tomorrow's population (though it serves as a good baseline). We do, however, know some of the factors that will affect future growth. Economic opportunities, the birthrate, housing price and availability – all will influence whether Skowhegan grows at a greater or lesser rate over the next two decades.

From a planning perspective, we do not need to know what our future population will be, though it is the first thing people will look at. What we really need to know and plan for are things like: how many additional jobs will be required to support the population, how many more houses, how much infrastructure is necessary, and so on.

The conventional mechanism for forecasting the future is to presume past trends. This is the mathematical approach to population projections. A typical forecast would draw on the growth rate from the past 20 years, and assumes that it will continue into the next 20. The Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG) growth forecast is based on such a formula. KVCOG's estimate extends to 2030, putting Skowhegan's population at 9,400.

The State Planning Office uses a more sophisticated formula that takes into account the survival rate of different age groups in town, migration rates, and other factors. SPO's forecast

for Skowhegan in 2030 is 8,154. Unlike KVCOG's projections, SPO projects a gradual loss in population, probably as the result of the growing percentage of older residents.

Without a crystal ball, perhaps the best course of action is to establish a set of "what if" scenarios. Each scenario estimates the land use, employment, and housing elements that will support the population profile – elements that are within our power to affect. It is only with a good knowledge of the impacts of planning decisions can we make good choices for our future.

These scenarios take the impacts out fifteen years, with a presumed current population of 8,850.

### *Scenario 1: Historic Growth Trends*

The first or "baseline" scenario for Skowhegan is the simplest – based on the population growth rate since 1990. Between 1990 and 2007, the town gained approximately 117 residents, an average of seven per year. So this scenario adds 125 to the 2007 population to come up with a projected 2025 population of 8,967.

Estimating the impacts of another 125 people, however, is not as easy as it seems. Social trends and changing lifestyles play a part. The trend with the greatest impact on growth is the declining household size. Unless we see some dramatic change in household behaviors, the number of persons per household will continue to shrink. The rate of shrinkage is not steady. It shrank by .37 in the 70's, .15 in the 80's, and .22 in the 90's. For the purpose of this forecast, we will assume that in 18 years, it will shrink another .25 – to 2.06 persons per household.

The decreasing household size applies not just to the newcomers but to the entire population. A 2025 population of 8,967 will require 4,353 housing units – 504 more than the 3,849 we have now. That's right: in order to accommodate a population increase of only 125 people, we will see an increase of over 500 housing units.

That is not as outrageous a forecast as it seems. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of occupied homes in Skowhegan increased from 3,454 to 3,716. That is an increase of 262 housing units, during a decade when the population rose only 99! 504 new houses in the coming 18 years is only a little above that rate.

What is actually built, however, will influence both household size and total population. We know from the statistical profile chapter that part of the reason for declining household size is the aging population. Yet, multi-family housing units – those most likely to be suitable for smaller or older households – are on the decrease in Skowhegan. If these trends continue, we will see greater demand for the one type of housing we are losing. At the other extreme, an upscale suburban subdivision is likely to attract young families with children. An average household size of 2.06 is not what you see in three and four bedroom homes. If these types of housing are favored, 504 units will generate not only greater population, but more school children as well.

Local policies that favor one housing type over another can have ripple effects. School children, while critical to our future vitality, historically have been viewed as a drain on local resources. In 2000, Skowhegan had an average of 0.43 school children per household; if our household size *did not* decrease, but we still had 500 more households, they could produce 215 more students, a 13 percent increase in enrollment. This would completely reverse recent declines. But if we continue current trends, the average number of students per household is declining, too. A decline to 0.33 students per household will result in exactly the number we had enrolled in 2007 (1,436).

Over five hundred new homes also require land area and street frontage. How much? That depends (in part) on whether the new homes are in our urban area or not, whether they are in subdivisions or not, and even if they are multi-family or mobile homes. If we go with current trends, six out of every seven homes have been built in our rural areas, which means that our minimum lot size is 20,000 square feet (assuming private septic systems), and 40,000 if a subdivision. Of course, very few new lots are designed to the absolute minimum. In fact, most new subdivision lots created over the past ten years are closer to *three* acres. That would require *at least* 1,500 acres of land to be developed over an 18-year period. Of course, that number would be somewhat less if the development were in the form of urban, multi-family homes or mobile home parks.

Two hundred feet on a road is considered standard for new lots. An average of 200 feet of frontage per home will result in demand for over 100,000 feet of road frontage. While most of it will be infill along current roads, if it were not, we would be talking about almost 10 miles of new road to maintain.

We can also calculate the number of new jobs needed to support these households. The demand for jobs may be viewed as a function of the number of households (1.13 workers per household in 2000) or of the population as a whole (47.8 percent of Skowhegan’s population was a worker in 2000.) In conventional situations, figuring on a number of jobs per household is the more accurate method, but in Skowhegan, if we are getting more retired households, we should lean towards the latter estimate. That gives us a figure of around 90 new jobs necessary to support population growth under this scenario.

*Historic Growth Scenario to 2025:*

New Residents:	125
New Housing Units:	504
New Jobs:	225
Developed Frontage	10 mi.

Since Skowhegan is a service center for Somerset County, we would have to create many more than 90 jobs over 18 years to provide the same proportion of opportunity for our residents. Only two out of five jobs in Skowhegan are currently held by residents. If this ratio holds, we will actually require about 225 new jobs (net gain of 12.5 per year) between 2007 and 2025.

*Scenario 2: Decline*

As noted above, the “official” forecast of the State Planning Office is for Skowhegan to lose population in the near future, coming in at about 8,400 in 2025. That would be a loss of

420 people in 25 years. This projected loss is not because the state has a poor opinion of Skowhegan; it is the combined effects of an aging population, lowered birthrate, migration to the suburbs, and general economic trends in Somerset County.

In Scenario 2, we will consider what would lead Skowhegan down the path that leads to this outcome.

A loss of 420 people over 25 years works out to about 0.2 percent per year, although if we use KVCOG’s 2008 population estimate of 8,852, it would be a little steeper 0.3 percent per year. However, when we apply the assumption of declining household size, it turns out that we will still need 4,078 housing units, an increase of 212 from 2008 levels. That is an average construction rate of almost 13 homes per year. (From this, it should be evident that new home construction doesn’t necessarily indicate population growth; a certain amount is necessary just to compensate for social changes.) That is roughly half the rate we have seen since 1990.

Obviously, a decline in housing construction could put us on the path to this scenario. Or more subtly, if we began building the small apartments or senior housing indicated by our potential demand, we could see the same scenario even with our current rate of construction.

A lack of job opportunities would be the other obvious trigger for this scenario. In the “Historic Trends” scenario, we estimated a growth of 225 jobs over 18 years to achieve population growth; if those jobs were not there, families (especially young ones) would move out of town and not be replaced. So, the “Decline” scenario is consistent with a zero job growth.

<i>Decline Scenario to 2025:</i>	
New Residents:	- 442
New Housing Units:	229
New Jobs:	0
Developed Frontage	4.5 mi.

Because this scenario still presumes an increase in housing, it still results in additional demand on land and public services. An increase of 229 housing units, unless they are predominantly multi-family buildings, would result in 45,800 feet of road frontage, about 4.5 miles of new road, and 700 acres of land consumed (if all rural).

The number of school children would undoubtedly decline at a more rapid rate than currently. If we use the Scenario 1 assumption that students will decrease to 0.33 per household, we would end up with 90 fewer students than we had in 2007 – a drop of about 6 percent.

### *Managing the Future:*

The scenarios in this section may be used to develop both indicators and measures of Skowhegan’s growth. It is not enough to take no action and hope for the best. In fact, failing to plan for more roads, employment, schools, and housing opportunities *becomes* the formula for Scenario 2. The comprehensive plan is the vehicle to recommend a range of strategies that will shape our future, such strategies as . . .

- Adoption of policies that will encourage the creation of more jobs and small businesses;

- Investment in infrastructure that will favor certain types of housing or commercial development;
- Creation of organizations that will improve the quality of life of the community, resulting in more attractive living conditions;
- Guiding new development such that we limit new road-building, improve the efficiency of existing infrastructure, or preserve access to recreation lands; or
- Create the local capacity to accommodate demographic trends, such as recreation, retirement, and housing opportunities for an aging population.

Whatever action we take will lean us toward a future path. Promoting or discouraging certain types of housing will affect the size and character of our households. Commercial development creates jobs and incomes. Retaining our younger population creates the conditions for rejuvenating the community and adding wealth. We are not limited to the two scenarios depicted in this chapter. We are limited only by our resolve to create the conditions necessary to achieve the future we choose.

As a community, we also need to plan for factors beyond simple growth in population. Perhaps most important is our status as a service center. That means our daytime population of workers and shoppers is larger than our census population. Our infrastructure, in particular our road system, needs to be expanded beyond what normal population growth would demand. While most of our services are operating well within capacity, continued growth of our “service center” status means investing in traffic controls, public safety capacity and other services.

Unless we experience a dramatic turnover in population, we will see increasing demand for elderly housing and services. Our population may not shift – it may even decline – but we will need to invest more in public transit, public safety, and recreation opportunities. On the other hand, we may be seeing more visitors to our community, as tourism in the Kennebec Valley picks up. This, too, bumps up our daytime population, and could require further traffic mitigation to coincide with tourist attraction efforts.

# Chapter 3: Skowhegan's Economy



## Planning Goal:

*Promote an economic climate that increases job opportunities and overall economic well-being.*

## An Economic Profile:

The health of a community is often measured by its economic energy. Income and employment statistics, in addition to describing the nature of the population, help us to predict demand for housing, recreation, social, and cultural services.

### *Individual and Household Income:*

The most conventional measure of the economic health of a community is the income of its individuals and families. The census reports two basic types of income measures: "per-capita income," (PCI) which is simply the aggregate income of the town divided by its population, and "Household Income," (HHI) which is the income (usually the median) of the households within the town. The latter is more helpful from a planning perspective, since households are the basic economic unit of the community.

Per capita income (PCI) is used for comparisons among geographic areas, such as towns. Skowhegan had a PCI in 2000 (technically, income received the year before the census, or 1999) of \$15,543. This is the lowest PCI among comparison towns (box at right). The rate of growth during the 1990's was a little

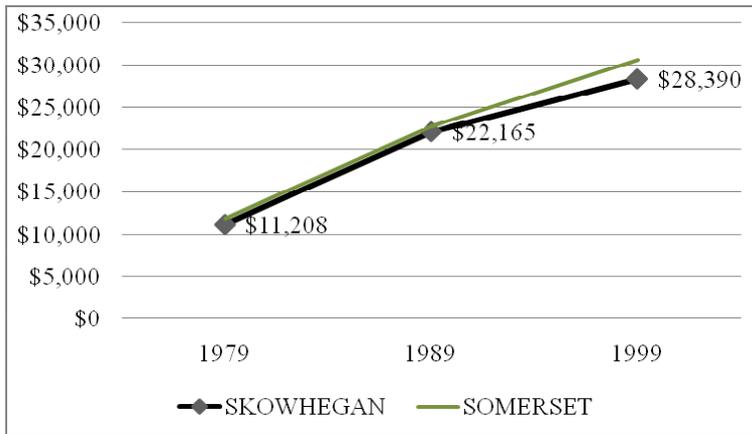
Town	1990 PCI	2000 PCI	% change
<b>Skowhegan</b>	<b>\$ 11,332</b>	<b>\$ 15,543</b>	<b>37 %</b>
Winslow	\$ 13,737	\$ 18,501	35 %
Waterville	\$ 12,002	\$ 16,430	37 %
Pittsfield	\$ 10,738	\$ 16,065	50 %
Fairfield	\$ 10,913	\$ 16,335	50 %
Madison	\$ 10,232	\$ 16,698	63 %

bit above inflation (about 32 percent), but lagged behind other large towns in Somerset County. Pittsfield, Madison, and Fairfield all began the 90's with lower per capita incomes than

Skowhegan, but ended higher. Somerset County, in 2000, was right on Skowhegan's figure, with its PCI of \$15,474, while Maine overall had a PCI of \$19,533.

Household income represents the actual budget that most families have to draw from. Since HHI is calculated based on all family members earning income, individual households can see a dramatic jump if a spouse or other family member starts working. Skowhegan's HHI in 2000 (1999 income) was \$28,390.

**Figure 3-1: Median Household Income, 1979-1999**



This is not a dramatic increase from the 1990 report (\$22,165) once inflation is added in; in fact, it is a loss in real dollars. This could suggest fewer family members working, or more households going on a fixed income (such as retirement). Skowhegan's income levels are falling behind the average and growth rate for Somerset County, which in 2000 recorded an HHI of \$30,731.

How Skowhegan's (and Somerset County) Household Income has changed over time is illustrated in Figure 3-1, above, with the actual 2000 breakdown of income levels in Table 3-1.

**Table 3-1: Household Income by Category, 2000**

Range:	Number	Percentage of Total
Less than \$10,000	546	14.7
\$10 – 25,000	1,052	28.3
\$25 – 50,000	1,281	34.4
\$50 – 100,000	715	19.2
\$100,000 and over	131	3.5

Source: US Census

The census identified 1,176 households with social security income – a whopping 31.6 percent of the total. It identified another 226 households (6.1 percent) receiving public assistance.

The Census also calculates what it calls the *Poverty Rate*, a figure varying from one locale to another and the number of persons in the household. While the Census Bureau does not report the actual “poverty line” (because it is different for each town and household size), it does report the number and percentage of residents below it.

In Skowhegan, 1,396 persons are below poverty level – 16 percent of the population. That figure includes 439 children (one out of every five children in town), 307 families (one in

eight), and 182 persons over 65. The most precarious household is the single-mother family; 179 of 484 single-mother families in Skowhegan are below poverty level – accounting for more than half of everyone below poverty. By comparison, in Somerset County, the poverty rate is 14.9 percent; among children it is 19.4 percent, and among elderly it is 12.5 percent.

#### *Labor Force and Employment:*

The labor force refers to the number of people either working or available to work within the working-age population. For the purpose of the census, the working-age population is everyone over age 16, including those of retirement age. Changes in the labor force indicate not just the number of jobs available but the supply of workers for potential job growth.

In Skowhegan, the 2000 labor force consisted of 4,211 people, 60 percent of everyone over 16. That included 2,052 women (55 percent of working-age women) and 2,159 men (65 percent of working-age men.) With 3,725 households in Skowhegan, an average of 1.13 members of each household are in the workforce. Put more practically, every seventh household in Skowhegan is a two-worker family. (With over 1,000 households consisting of a single person, that raises the proportion of conventional families with two workers even more.)

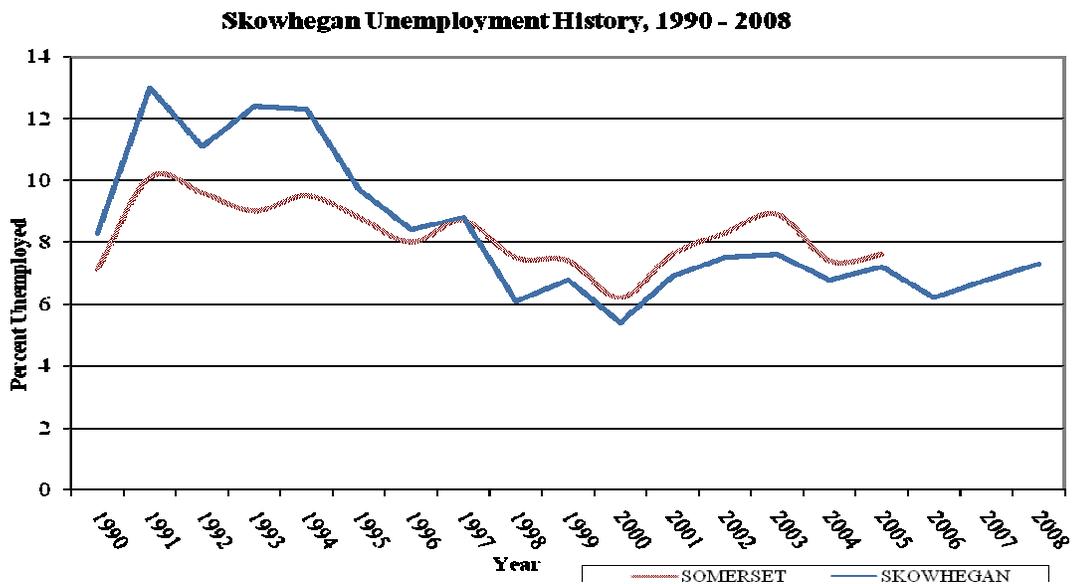
With 55 percent of all women over age 16 in the labor force, it is clear that Skowhegan has a significant number of two-earner households. In 1990, the town had about the same percentage, but in 1980, only 51 percent. Much of the job and economic growth in the 70's and 80's occurred because we had a supply of women able to participate in the workforce; it looks as if that supply has leveled off.

Being in the workforce is not the same as being employed. Two hundred eighty seven people were unemployed at the 2000 Census: an unemployment rate of 4.1 percent. The Maine Department of Labor, which takes monthly surveys, provides more accurate and timely numbers. Figure 3-2, next page, shows the unemployment trend in Skowhegan over the past decade (heavy line) with several other towns and the county's (wavy line) shown for comparison.

As can be seen from the chart, Skowhegan's unemployment history has been on a general downward trend since 1991, with a little jump upwards around 2001 and 2002. Skowhegan's 2007 unemployment rate was 6.8 percent, somewhat better than Somerset County, with a 2007 unemployment rate of 7.0 percent. At the time of this report, 2008 numbers, which are likely to show bumps for ALL towns, was not published.

Skowhegan is a significant player in the regional economy. Skowhegan is the hub of the Skowhegan Labor Market Area. The Skowhegan LMA had a labor force (in 2007) of 14,944; Skowhegan's contribution is 28 percent of that. The Skowhegan LMA had an unemployment rate of 7.3 percent in 2006, so Skowhegan also compares well with the regional economy.

**Figure 3-2**



As the hub of the labor market, Skowhegan draws its labor force from other communities, and imports more workers than it exports. In 2000, there were 5,375 workers employed in Skowhegan, more than 1,500 over the number of resident workers. That means we have a net influx of 1,500 commuters. However, our role as a job center has declined since 1990, when Skowhegan had 5,997 employed in town and 3,734 resident workers, an influx of over 2,200. The number of resident workers declined by only about 70, but the number of workers coming from out of town dropped by about 600.

<b>Skowhegan Residents Work in . . .</b>	
<b>Town of</b>	<b>Number (2000)</b>
Skowhegan	2,011
Waterville	190
Augusta	145
Fairfield	265
Madison	210

<b>Skowhegan Workers Come From . . .</b>	
<b>Town of</b>	<b>Number (2000)</b>
Skowhegan	2,011
Madison	513
Norridgewock	374
Canaan	213
Anson	185
Cornville	215
(Kennebec County)	714

The twin tables above show the major destinations and origins of Skowhegan’s workers. Persons who live in Skowhegan and work elsewhere go primarily to the larger employment centers to our south. Persons who come to work in Skowhegan come primarily from adjoining towns, although a surprisingly large number come from Kennebec County. The 2,011 persons who both live and work in Skowhegan constitute about 53 percent of the total work force.

*Job Types:*

Table 3-2 lists the occupation categories of Skowhegan workers in 1990 and 2000. However, as our economy changes, so do job descriptions, and many occupations in 2000 weren't even in existence a decade before. For this reason, the census is constantly changing the way it classifies the thousands of different occupations it must cope with, making the categories difficult to compare one decade to another. In 2000, the census lumped "professional" jobs in primarily with "executive and managerial," and broke up "administration and support" into several different classifications.

**Table 3-2: Occupational Profile of Skowhegan Workers, 1990 and 2000 Census**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>
Executive and Managerial	360	9.4	970	24.7
Professional	439	11.5	*	
Sales	367	9.6	886	22.6
Administration and Support	504	13.2	*	
Service	590	15.4	661	16.8
Farm and Forestry	89	2.3	38	1.0
Skilled Labor	1,054	27.5	883	22.5
Construction, Extraction	324	8.5	486	12.4

\* Category eliminated and combined with others in 2000 census

This table allows us to observe changes over time. To the extent that we can compare these categories, it is apparent that "skilled labor" has taken the greatest hit over the decade, made up for by gains in construction trades and sales. Since skilled labor, along with professional occupations, tend to be more highly paid than sales and service jobs, we would like to see gains in those occupations. A quarter of Skowhegan's labor force is now in executive and managerial jobs, but we still have nearly that many in sales, and one-sixth in service jobs.

The census also classifies workers by the industry of employment. This is not as good as describing a person's actual job, because a factory, for instance, may have secretaries, managers, sales staff and skilled machinists all together, but has the advantage of gauging which sectors of the economy are doing well, and the added advantage that the Maine DOL uses this classification for its annual updates.

**Table 3-3: Industrial Classification of Skowhegan Workers, 1990 and 2000 Census**

<b>Industry of Employment</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>
Construction	268	7.0	340	8.7
Manufacturing	1,123	29.3	994	25.3
Wholesale and Retail	818	21.3	644	16.4
Services, exc. health and education	548	14.3	620	15.8
Health and education services	694	18.1	955	24.3
Agriculture and Forestry	36	0.9	88	2.2
Public Administration	170	4.4	113	2.9

These numbers are more an indication of the health of various business sectors, than a reflection of the workers. The growth industry in Skowhegan is health and education services. There were slight upward bumps in construction, services, and agriculture, but a steep decline in manufacturing, retail, and public administration. This is sort of a mixed bag; manufacturing and health services tend to be higher-paying industries – one is growing the other declining. Retail and service industries tend to be lower-paying – one is growing the other declining.

The planning implications of these figures are where it helps us to develop or support local or regional economic growth. Manufacturing, for example, grabs the headlines when another plant shuts down. Yet, it is clear from the figures that manufacturing is only ¼ of the whole. The “growth industry” is health and education, and Skowhegan’s job growth reflects that trend. Economic development aimed at health, education, and other service-related jobs will best serve our current workforce.

*Education:*

Another clue to economic development efforts is the education level of the workforce. Jobs that require mastery of math, science and problem-solving skills are more likely to flow to areas with higher educational levels. College graduation is almost a basic requirement for many professional, health-related, and educational professions. Income levels can also be expected to be higher for jobs requiring more education.

Town	High School	College
<b>Skowhegan</b>	<b>78.1</b>	<b>12.6</b>
Waterville	82.7	21.0
Fairfield	86.4	12.9
Madison	82.1	9.7
Pittsfield	84.3	17.0
Farmington	84.5	26.5
*percent of persons over age 25		

Skowhegan has about 78 percent high school graduates and one in eight college graduates. This is somewhat lower than our neighbors. This is also lower than other job centers in the region (box at left). Skowhegan’s college graduation rate is a little above that of Somerset County as a whole (11.8 percent), but well below Maine (22.9 percent). Skowhegan

needs to boost its educational levels in order to attract higher-paying jobs, though it is often a chicken-and-egg circumstance (need the jobs first to attract the higher educational levels.)

**Local Business Profile**

A recent survey of commercial enterprises in Skowhegan tallied more than 450 individual business or service providers, including a breakdown as follows:

- 101 retail or wholesale sales,
- 161 providers of business, professional, or personal services,
- 40 restaurants, drive-ins, motel, hotels, and B & Bs.
- 89 doctors, clinics, or other health service providers,
- 37 automotive sales, service, or transportation businesses,
- 13 manufacturing operations,
- 4 private schools (not including daycare),
- 17 construction contractors or subcontractors.

These businesses range in size from the largest – the SAPPI mill on Route 201 – to one- and two-person home businesses. There are an estimated 60 businesses with only one or two employees, not including doctors and lawyers. Though SAPPI and New Balance, along with Redington-Fairview hospital, probably have the largest employee rosters, several retail stores have close to 100 employees, and some manufacturing operations only have one or two.

The survey did not really break down retail stores by size or type, but we can tell by observation that we have a diverse mix. We host Walmart, Hannaford and a few other franchise stores, but also many owner-run shops ranging from antiques to musical instruments. While there has been concern over the “big box” driving small stores out of business, a recent economic impact study conducted pursuant to the Walmart expansion concluded that the expansion would actually attract more customers to town and therefore to the other retailers. High occupancy of downtown storefronts and continuing investment in rehabbing retail space points to continued demand for small retail establishments.

In terms of other sectors, tourism is an emerging employment center. It is hard to track the impact of the tourist trade, except in particular industries, but we know that in 2000, over 900 people were employed in the eating and lodging sectors alone in Skowhegan. The Town is improving its downtown experience and recreation opportunities to better tap this potential, although a proposed bridge and bypass may counter those efforts. Natural resource-based industries have traditionally been a strong sector, but with the exception of SAPPI, have declined substantially.

It should be noted that the public sector in Skowhegan provides considerable employment as well. In 2000, there were 414 government workers, the great majority of which worked for the school district. A few federal employees, some state offices, the County, and Town government accounted for the remainder.

Commercial enterprises in Skowhegan benefit from access to two major arterial highways, and as such are somewhat geographically dispersed. Route 201 connects the SAPPI mill and Southgate Business Park, at the southern boundary of town, with the downtown and the town’s commercial growth area leading into Madison. Route 2 is not as well developed outside of the downtown, but that could change if the new bridge is built east of town.

The downtown area has the highest concentration of commercial buildings. Typical of older downtowns, most of the buildings have retail space on the main floor, and offices or apartments on upper floors, with little if any space for expansion or off-street parking. That means that opportunities for growth in the downtown are usually limited to retrofits and adaptive re-use. Several downtown buildings have recently been purchased and are undergoing renovation, with plans also in place to provide handicapped access to upper stories in a limited expanse of the Flatiron block. The former Solon manufacturing mill on the island is undergoing renovation with retail and office capacity and a first floor already operating.

The downtown area has gotten a boost from establishment of the Main Street Skowhegan Program. This has provided a nucleus and staff to pursue downtown revitalization

projects, such as the renaissance center. Most of downtown is also in a Tax Increment Financing District, 100 percent of the captured tax revenue going back into downtown improvements. Recent improvements have included sewer line, street and sidewalk upgrades. The town is now pursuing funding for façade improvements.

### **Infrastructure for Economic Development:**

Economic development infrastructure can be categorized as physical infrastructure, such as roads and sewers, and social infrastructure, such as economic development planning, business training and marketing. Both of these are essential in supporting economic growth.

Skowhegan's transportation infrastructure, though in good condition, is limited. Our signature highways – Routes 2 and 201 – though carrying heavy freight traffic, are two-lane, unlimited access roads. The nearest limited-access interchange is about 15 miles to the south (I-95 in Fairfield). The only rail access in Skowhegan is at the SAPPI mill. The Central Maine Airport in Norridgewock serves primarily general aviation.

Proposals are floating around for a new, limited-access, east-west highway corridor that could pass through Skowhegan. Though such an improvement would stimulate economic growth in Skowhegan, it is likely to be done only in stages and over a very long time period. Of more immediate impact is the plan for a new bridge and partial bypass of downtown. If implemented, this could have significant and conflicting impacts on economic development. For the downtown, it would greatly reduce congestion but also tourist and traveler activity. For the lands accessible to the new approach roads, it may increase land development potential, depending on how the Department of Transportation controls access points. At either endpoint of the bypass, development could swell and bring demand for extension of sewer service.

Skowhegan's utility infrastructure is of good quality and capacity. The infrastructure for power, water, and sewer was built for a larger industrial base than the town now has, so will provide capacity for some time to come. The only limitation is its geographic scope. Public sewer extends along Route 201 only to the top of the hill south of the downtown. Since there is quite a bit of development already beyond that point, with additional development pressures and the possibility of the new bridge access road connecting below this point, this would be the logical target for an extension. Such an extension, along with other logical growth areas, is contemplated in the town's *2007 Sewer System Master Plan* (for discussion, see page 1-31).

The Southgate Business Park includes plans to provide a standalone public water system, but it is not yet installed. The estimated expense for that system is \$750,000. Both Southgate and Northgate Parks are managed by the Skowhegan Economic Development Corp. The SEDC also has a small business loan program.

The town can bring a good deal of social infrastructure to bear in support of economic development. The town's Economic and Community Development Director coordinates and facilitates business location and development and administers three business loan funds. The Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce provides business support and promotion activities, as well as promoting Skowhegan as a business and tourist destination. The town has access to

strong educational and training programs, through RSU 54 Adult Education, with career counseling and training, as well as the Skowhegan Regional Vocational Center, which provides training and certificates in at least ten separate programs.

Skowhegan has a Commercial Site Review Ordinance that provides a process for local permitting of commercial development. Although the ordinance does not direct or dictate the location of development in any way, it does provide substantial development standards to protect road and public service capacities, natural resources, and residential neighborhoods.

Skowhegan can also tap into a number of regional organizations and plans. Perhaps chief among these is the Somerset Economic Development Corporation. The SomEDC does business support and attraction throughout the county, but is centered in Skowhegan. It operates under a strategic plan for development. Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG) does economic and community development planning, grant-writing, business loans and small business counseling. KVCOG maintains a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Skowhegan cooperates in both of these planning efforts and coordinates its own activities with them. The Old Canada Road Scenic Byway established a Corridor Management Plan in 2003. Although not technically in the corridor, Skowhegan participated in that effort, seeing that tourism development within the corridor would have a great impact on our own.

Local economic development planning efforts include the Skowhegan Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Skowhegan, and the SEDC.

The Skowhegan Center for Women, Work, and Community maintains a resource center providing information and training for women entering or returning to the job market.

## **Analysis and Issues:**

Skowhegan is the county seat and service center for Somerset County. It is also the transportation hub and “gateway” to the county. As such, it is the key structure of the regional economy. A majority of the large retail, service, medical, and transportation facilities are located here. It is at the center of regional development efforts. It is one of the few towns in the region with the capacity for substantial growth. Economic development in Skowhegan may not draw from outside of the labor market area, but will lift many of the other communities in the county.

Skowhegan still has a traditional manufacturing base, led by its two largest employers. While both of these employers are in good shape economically, that is no guarantee that they will continue to maintain their presence in Skowhegan. Both are in economic sectors notorious for movement. Skowhegan’s third largest private employer, the hospital, is expanding and in no danger of leaving.

The economic profile overall is one of a “mature” economy.” While we are developing a good diversity of small businesses, we are still vulnerable to a major hit in the manufacturing sector. There is great potential for growth in the communications and tourism industries, largely untapped. With Skowhegan’s aging population and service center standing, the growth

industries are likely to be health services, as well as legal and financial services. What must be done to support these?

The town has many and diverse development challenges. The downtown area is undergoing some revitalization and redevelopment, but will require continued new investment. Our TIF program and continued pursuit of grants address these needs. There are undeveloped or under-developed parcels within the service reach of public water and sewer, which are turning over slowly. The Town's ED Office works with regional partners in marketing and profiling these properties. The most attractive places for new development – Route 201 south and the Southgate Industrial Park – lack water and sewer service. A water system is planned for the industrial park, and the *Sewer System Master Plan* identifies expansion along the highway. Tourism has great potential, and the Town is working with the scenic byway and pursuing its own initiatives, such as the Run of River project.

These activities demonstrate that the Town has been attempting to diversify its economic base, as well as attract more high-paying jobs. Each challenge requires a unique response, new partners, and continued investment.

## Chapter 4: Housing in Skowhegan



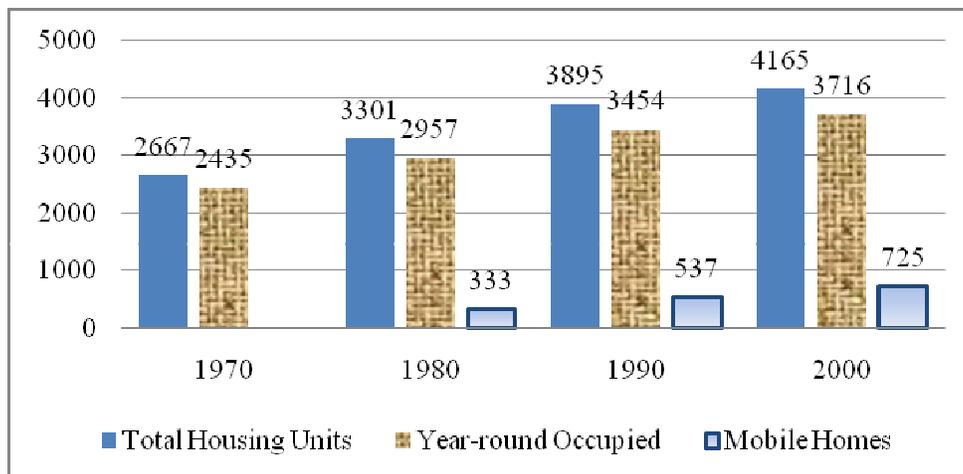
### Planning Goal:

*To encourage and promote affordable, decent housing opportunities for Maine citizens.*

People may come and go, but a town's housing is fixed. Housing is a part of the character and landscape of Skowhegan, and without it, there is no population. In fact, population estimates are often based on housing counts, because the availability of housing drives population growth or decline. This chapter reports on the housing stock in Skowhegan.

In Skowhegan, housing numbers have grown a lot faster than the population. The reason for this is the declining household size. The total number of housing units in 1970 was 2,667. In 2000, the count of housing units had risen to 4,165. (Figure 4-1) The town gained 1,498 housing units (56 percent) in thirty years, and only 1,223 residents (16 percent).

**Figure 4-1: Housing Growth in Skowhegan: 1970-2000**



Approximately three percent of the housing stock – 139 structures as of 2000 – are seasonal “camps,” unoccupied when the census is taken in April. These are primarily around Oak Pond and Lake George, with a few along the river. The rest are year-round homes. Most

of these are occupied, but in 2000, 2.3 percent of the year-round “owner-occupied” homes were vacant, along with 10.8 percent of rentals.

The figure above is based on the decennial census. Since 2000, we have only local tax records to go on. They show another 171 year-round housing units between 2000 and 2009, plus seven camps. This is a perfect illustration of the impact of declining household size. Despite the 171 new units, the town’s estimated population lost 29. The number also includes a loss, unfortunately, of 15 multi-family units.

## Housing Profile:

As housing stock changes over time, so does the nature of the community. Table 4-1, below, profiles the type of homes in Skowhegan, and how it has shifted over the years. In Skowhegan, the story is the rise in mobile homes and loss of apartments. From 1980 (the first year mobile homes were counted as a separate category) to 2008, the number of mobile homes has gone from 333 to 743, an increase of 120 percent (410 units). Mobile homes now account for more than one in six housing units in Skowhegan.

**Table 4-1**  
**Year-Round Housing by Structural Type, 1980-2007**

<b>Housing Type</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2009</b>
Single-Family (stick-built)	1,978	2,055	2,325	2,494
Multi-Family	916	1,160	1,117	1,102
Mobile Home	333	537	725	744

Source: US Census (1980, 1990, 2000), Town Assessor (2009)

Multi-family units went from 916 to 1,102, an increase of 20 percent (186 units), although that was all in the 80’s. Since 1990, the town has lost 58. Traditional single-family, “stick-built” homes have increased by 516 units over those 29 years, a growth rate of 26 percent.

The 2000 Census reports the age of homes in Skowhegan. 12.7 percent of homes were built between 1990 and 2000, and 33.5 percent were built before WWII. The best decade for home-building in Skowhegan was the 70’s, when almost 15 percent of the total housing stock was built. Relative to Somerset County, there has not been a great deal of housing growth over the past few years. The county as a whole gained 17.3 percent of its housing since 1990, and has only 27.8 percent pre-war. This is symptomatic of rural sprawl. Rural sprawl is evident even within Skowhegan itself. Between 1990 and 2000, the urban part of Skowhegan gained a total of 39 housing units; the rural part gained 231. In the same period, the urban area gained 62 mobile homes (remember, we lost 43 apartment units), while the rural area gained 126. (More than half of all homes built in the rural area were mobile homes.)

The census is also responsible for determining whether housing is “substandard.” There are many indicators of this. For example in 2000, 12 year-round homes in town lack complete plumbing facilities, and 124 lack a telephone. Five percent of the year-round homes use wood

as their primary heating source, though some may be a matter of choice rather than “substandard”. And 115 homes (2.8 percent of the total) consist of either one or two rooms.

Town	2000 Rental Percentage
Winslow	25.0 %
Waterville	50.9 %
<b>Skowhegan</b>	<b>34.1 %</b>
Fairfield	24.3 %
Pittsfield	26.5 %

As is common in urban towns, Skowhegan has a large share of rental occupancy -- about 34 percent (1,267 units) in 2000. As can be seen in the box at left, our more urban neighbor, Waterville, has a rental percentage of over 50 percent, while our smaller county neighbors, Fairfield and Pittsfield, both have percentages around 25 percent. Somerset County is far less

urbanized as a whole than Skowhegan. The county’s rental percentage is only 22.2.

The census does not tally how many rental units are apartments versus homes, but we can make a good guess. The total number of rentals is 1,267. The number of multi-family units is 1,117, a few of which are owner-occupied. So a good guess would be that about 80 percent of rentals are apartments, and 20 percent are mobile homes or single-family.

### **Housing Prices and Affordability:**

Skowhegan homeowners, like many in Maine, have been on a roller coaster ride of property values for the past twenty years. The U.S. Census asks homeowners their opinion of their homes’ value on the census surveys. Between 1980 and 1990, the value of a “specified” (stick-built, on less than ten acres) owner-occupied home rose from \$34,500 to \$60,400, almost doubling. Since the inflation rate only rose 60 percent over that decade, homeowners came out ahead. Between 1990 and 2000, however, home values rose only 21 percent, to \$73,200. Inflation over that period was 32 percent, so homeowners lost value.

Since 2000, property values have taken off once again. In 2004, based on actual sales, the median price of a single family home was \$120,250 (Maine State Housing Authority). That is a 64 percent gain over seven years. Although the recent recession has had a major effect on housing prices nationwide, it is too early to tell whether it has caused a reversal of this trend in Skowhegan, or just a slowing.

The box at right shows relative home values in the region. The values of property in the region seem to increase in proportion to proximity to the higher-priced south of Maine. Property values in Skowhegan were somewhat less than Fairfield and Waterville, but more than Pittsfield and Madison. They are somewhat above average for Somerset County (\$70,100), and well below the average for Maine (\$98,700).

Town	2000 Home Value
<b>Skowhegan</b>	<b>\$ 73,200</b>
Pittsfield	\$ 67,500
Madison	\$ 69,800
Winslow	\$ 84,900
Waterville	\$ 78,500
Fairfield	\$ 78,300

Prices quoted above were just the “median,” meaning middle of the pack. If we want to determine whether all our residents have access to housing, we need to look at the distribution along the price curve as well. Almost 2/3 of homes in 2000 were valued within \$25,000 of the median (\$50-100,000.) About 20 percent were valued under \$50,000 and only four percent were valued over \$150,000, with none over \$200,000. In 2009, according to MLS listings,

about 18 percent of homes were listed above \$200,000 in Skowhegan, although several of these included more than ten acres. These numbers are very similar to the remainder of Somerset County.

The price of a home reflects a balance between the willingness of a seller and the ability of a buyer. However, the *affordability* of housing is a public issue. If the families who currently live and work in town cannot afford the housing that is available, it means a turnover in ownerships and a loss of the existing population. The character of the community will change as a result. Affordability – the relationship between housing cost and income – is a goal of the Growth Management Law, but frankly, the bar is set pretty low, as it only requires that *ten percent* of new housing be affordable to families making 4/5 of the town’s median household income. In Skowhegan’s case -- \$25,400 a year in 2007, this guideline means that ten percent of new homes should be priced under \$70,000. About 12 percent of homes on the market in 2008 were priced below \$70,000. At the average rate of construction this decade, we would need to see two new homes per year priced under that number.

The affordable housing equation applies to both homeowners and renters. A house being “affordable” means that the household is paying less than a certain percentage of its income toward housing costs (mortgage, taxes, insurance in the case of owners; rent, in the case of renters). The accepted threshold is 30 percent. If a family is paying more than 30 percent of their income towards housing, the housing is classified as unaffordable

Town	2000: Paying more than 30% Of Income on Housing
<b>Skowhegan</b>	<b>25 %</b>
Winslow	20 %
Waterville	30 %
Fairfield	25 %

Table 4-2, below, provides a breakdown of the number and percentage of households in Skowhegan that pay more than 30 percent of their household income towards housing costs. (A certain percentage of rentals pay “non-cash rent” in census terms, therefore are not included.)

**Table 4-2  
Housing Costs as a Percentage of Income, 1990 and 2000 Census**

<b>Percentage of Monthly Income</b>	<b>1990 #</b>	<b>1990 %</b>	<b>2000 #</b>	<b>2000 %</b>
Owner – ownership costs				
Less than 30 percent	1,124	84 %	1,245	85 %
More than 30 percent	206	16 %	227	15 %
Renter – gross rent				
Less than 30 percent	603	51 %	673	53 %
More than 30 percent	509	43 %	468	37 %

Table 4-2 indicates that between 1990 and 2000, both owners and renters saw very small progress in the percentages of affordable households. This was a period when income growth outpaced housing costs, so it is not surprising. It does not, however, hide the fact that roughly one out of seven homeowners and one out of three renters are beyond the “affordability” threshold. A total of 695 households in 2000 were living in homes they technically couldn’t

afford. If we used the state target of 10 percent of new homes in the affordable range, we would be producing two per year.

In 2000, an affordable home for the *median* income household in Skowhegan was approximately \$78,600. Since Skowhegan's average home in 2000 was \$73,200, this is a preliminary indication that affordability is not a major issue in the homeowner market. Updated income data have been provided by a private market research firm. In 2007, the median income for Skowhegan was \$31,800 – able to afford a \$93,200 home – and the median home was \$113,000. In this instance, there is an affordability issue, although the data show a \$27,000 jump in home prices over one year, which might be a statistical anomaly. The average housing price within the Skowhegan region as a whole was only \$96,200, a much more realistic estimate.

Average numbers do not tell the whole story, however. They obscure the needs of certain income groups. Seniors or young people, for example, may suffer in the housing market if there is not at least a distribution of housing prices. According to MSHA data, 40 percent of seniors in Skowhegan have an income less than half of the median. Two-thirds of those are homeowners. MSHA says that renters aged 25-44 are the most likely to buy a new home, yet one out of five in Skowhegan make less than half the median income.

MSHA has a program especially tailored for first-time homeowners. In Skowhegan, an average of 14 families per year took advantage of the program in the early 00's, but in 2006-7, only three and seven families, respectively, used the program.

The prospects for renters are worsening. At the census, only 468 renters could not afford their housing. In 2007, with average rent for a two-bedroom unit at \$635, 728 renter families cannot afford that. That includes 232 senior renter households making less than half the median income. These numbers hint at a serious need for additional rental properties.

There are several governmental subsidy and assistance programs for renters making half or less of the median income. In Skowhegan, there are 307 subsidy units available, including 63 senior units. Of these, 132 are subsidized market-rate units. MSHA estimates that this still leaves 72 families and 79 senior households in need of assistance.

## **Housing and Neighborhoods in Skowhegan:**

Skowhegan's housing displays a certain character from block to block, which cannot be described by census figures. In the past, neighborhoods used to develop all at once, and so many of the homes on adjoining streets were of similar design and vintage, often attracting similar types of people, and exhibiting similar problems as they age.

The oldest neighborhoods in town are those immediately surrounding the downtown area, as development naturally radiated out from the commercial center. These neighborhoods display a variety of architecture, but are typified by the well-preserved Skowhegan History House. Many of the original homes, however, have been removed for expanded commercial development, and others have been renovated for commercial purposes. Contemporary with

this village-style development are the many older farmhouses that occupy the older roads east and south of the village.

As the mills were established, a lot of housing was established to support the mill workers. These tended to be multi-story homes on small lots, south of the river. These homes are now in the 100-year old category, and have a widely varying level of upkeep and quality. Many are now rental units, and some have been replaced altogether.

At roughly the same time, many of the downtown commercial blocks were established. Some of these contained upper story housing. Since then, some upper stories have become commercial space, but there is still a smattering of apartments in the immediate downtown.

In the 1940's and 50's, another spurt of growth occurred to the north of the downtown. Outer North Avenue and "Little Italy" were built during these times. These homes tended to be very economical and have developed a reputation over the years of being not very well-built (not just in Skowhegan). The Town of Skowhegan has even targeted CDBG housing grants to these neighborhoods, aimed at solving a number of construction and age-related problems.

Since the 60's, better roads and more cars meant less reason for housing development to be tied to the downtown. A lot of new homes have been built beyond the bounds of the built-up area. The urbanized area is still expanding, however. The most popular area in recent years has been Malbon's Mills Road. City sewer is available, and several parcels are still vacant.

### **Municipal Involvement in Housing:**

Over the years, Skowhegan has taken action to address the housing situation typical of an older housing stock. One of the principal actions has been to take advantage of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for housing improvements.

One recent grant was targeted to housing issues in the blocks surrounding North Avenue, but others have been applied townwide. Grants come to the town, but much of the finding is distributed in the form of loans, which, when repaid, are available to be loaned out again. In this manner, the town still maintains a revolving loan fund, available to qualifying households. Basic safety improvements are the highest priority, and there is a backlog of electrical and heating problems to be dealt with, but weatherization and other energy conservation improvements are moving up the list in importance.

CDBG funds, including the current RLF program, may only be utilized to benefit low and moderate income households.

The town has not established a housing authority to either establish or manage additional housing. The Kennebec Valley Community Action Program (KVCAP) is active in Skowhegan on renovation and improvement projects, but there is no regional housing authority, either. A housing authority would only be necessary for Skowhegan if the town determined that the need for a certain type of housing (e.g. senior citizen) was so dire that it required an infusion of government energy to kick-start it.

The town currently has neither building permit requirement nor building code. The Code Enforcement Officer (CEO) under the building safety ordinance is required to inspect completed buildings for fire safety. Neither the building safety ordinance nor the subdivision ordinance places any burden on the affordability of housing, nor does it encourage it.

Beginning in 2012, the town will be required to enforce the statewide Uniform Building and Energy Code. This will mean that the town will have to implement a building permit and inspection system. Since the CEO is currently working full-time, it is unlikely that he will be able to administer the new requirements within his current schedule. Whoever will be responsible for administering the Code will need to be trained and certified by early 2012.

### **Analysis and Issues:**

Skowhegan's housing stock consists of a wide variety of housing types, from a few seasonal camps on Oak Pond and Lake George, to older apartments and mixed-use buildings downtown. The majority of housing units are traditional single-family homes, although the number and percentage of mobile homes is growing rapidly. The number of apartment units is declining, either through loss of buildings or redevelopment.

Skowhegan's growth curve indicates that we are likely to experience an average of 29 new housing units per year. Recent growth has focused entirely on single-family households, which signals a coming shortage of multi-family units, at the same time as demographics indicate growth of smaller and elderly households. A major challenge to Skowhegan will be to retain seniors and young, single workers whose interests are not met by suburban homes.

Senior housing in particular is in short supply. The baby boom will soon be facing retirement. Many seniors already live isolated in family homesteads, with a few in nursing care homes, but there is a lack of transitional housing. If no developers step forward to provide active senior or transitional retirement communities, the town may be faced with an exodus of seniors and overall population decline. As the service center of Somerset County, the town should be taking the lead in providing senior housing.

The cost and affordability of housing is not an issue in Skowhegan. Current sale and rental prices are well within income brackets, both local and regional. State-established thresholds mean that in 2008, ten percent of housing must sell for under \$73,000 or rent for under \$630 per month. If the town targets the workforce and elderly housing markets, any emerging issues with affordability should be addressed.

Because of the many older neighborhoods in Skowhegan, maintenance is always an issue. The town has a history of active CDBG programming for housing rehabilitation, and is now focusing on energy upgrades. Skowhegan will be required by state law to enforce a building code beginning in 2012. The rate of construction will dictate whether the current Code Enforcement Office has the capacity to keep up with mandated inspections and permits.

## Chapter 5: Community Services



### Planning Goal:

*To plan for, finance, and develop an efficient system of public facilities and services to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.*

The growth of a community is based on the provision of public services, programs, and facilities. The healthy community can rely on a broad range of public services, efficiently provided. Public services range from public works and utilities to recreation programs to dog licenses. Primarily, these services are provided by the municipality and paid for by taxes, but there are many variations and options for service providers. In recent years, more services are being provided by regional groups, as a means to provide more “bang for the buck.”

Skowhegan can be proud of the many services that it provides to its citizens for the cost. As this chapter will show, the Town provides excellent educational, recreational, public safety, public works, and other services, does long-range financial planning, and cooperates with neighbors when possible to make the most efficient use of tax dollars.

### General Government

Skowhegan’s municipal administration is based on a Town Manager Form of government, where the Town Manager is the chief executive official, governed by five selectmen and a legislative town meeting.

Town staff under the direction of the Town Manager include Town Clerk and Treasurer (elected), Tax Collector, and various department heads. He (or she) is assisted by a town office staff who engages in the everyday administration of the town and its services. The offices of the town are located in the Skowhegan Municipal Building, an historic building in the downtown area, which also houses the Opera House. Though the town office has a meeting room for boards and committees, larger assemblies and the town meetings are held in the Opera House upstairs.

The range of public services offered by the Town is such that no small group of officials could manage them all. In addition to the Board of Selectmen, Budget Committee, Planning

Board, and Board of Appeals, Skowhegan citizens can participate on the Recreation Advisory Committee, Economic Development Corporation, Heritage Council, Conservation Commission, Sidewalk Committee, and several others.

## **Public Health and Safety Services:**

Skowhegan provides comprehensive public safety and health services, including local police, fire protection, and emergency services. The Town also engages in regional planning for emergency dispatch (Somerset County), hazard mitigation and disaster response.

### *Police Protection:*

The Skowhegan Police Department provides 24-hour coverage seven days a week. The department is professional and fully-trained, and includes both full-time and reserve officers, a Community Resource Officer, Parking Enforcement Officer, and support staff. Calls for service are on the increase, rising about ten percent per year. In 2008-9, the department responded to an average of 56 calls for service per day. The department has pursued grants for increasing its staff and recently won a grant for additional officers for a three year period. The Department also carries on several community service programs, including school programs. The annual budget for police service is roughly \$910,000, including grants and reimbursements. The Somerset Sheriff's Office also provides coverage in Skowhegan and the Maine State Police have a barracks in town.

The Police Department facility is located on the first floor of the municipal building. The facility and equipment are up to date. The town's Capital Improvements Plan includes a reserve fund for police department equipment.

### *Fire Protection:*

The Skowhegan Fire Department is made up of 8 fulltime and up to 30 call firefighters. This provides 24-hour protection, with two fulltime firefighters on duty at all times. The department puts countless hours into training, planning, fire prevention, and public fire safety education. No two emergency calls are alike, so they must be prepared to handle a variety of emergencies response situations. A number of firefighters within the department have taken the initiative to be crossed-trained in specialized emergency response fields. These training initiatives include Medical First Response, Hazardous Materials, Technical Rescue, Extrication, and Water Rescue.

The Department operates out of a four-bay station located on the island just outside of the downtown. This building houses three pumpers and a ladder truck, in addition to other vehicles and equipment. The facility is somewhat undersized for the modern vehicles and technology that is the standard today. Although the fire house is located in the middle of the largest concentration of homes and businesses, increasing congestion and difficulty in getting around will have to be a consideration in expansion or relocation of the building. Planning for the department's future building needs should be commencing within the next decade.

The Department's vehicle and equipment needs are met through the Town's Capital Improvements Program, though we have been the beneficiaries of federal grants recently to upgrade equipment and gear.

The availability of water in the areas served by the public water system is generally not an issue. All pumpers carry on-board tanks with initial attack capacity for rural areas. Although the rural areas are not thoroughly protected with water sources, the town has requirements to provide adequate fire protection for any new subdivision or commercial development.

The largest single hazard in town is probably the SAPPI mill. SAPPI has its own crews and equipment for emergency services, which could be called upon in a pinch for municipal emergencies. The town participates in mutual aid agreements with neighboring towns, and a HAZMAT agreement with SAPPI and Kennebec County.

#### *Emergency Management:*

All emergency dispatching is handled through the E-911 dispatch center at the Somerset County Sheriff. This arrangement seems to be working out well. E-911 street addressing has been completed.

Ambulance service is provided by the Redington-Fairview Hospital and though dispatched through the 911 system, the Town has no participation in the service. The Town does appoint a Public Health Officer, but his functions are limited to evaluating public health threats from buildings.

The Town is required to develop a hazard mitigation plan, consistent with federal, state, and county guidelines. The top hazard is the susceptibility of the downtown area to flooding. The Town Manager is the Emergency Management Director and is NIMS qualified. The town works closely with Somerset County Emergency Management on these and other issues.

### **Municipal Services:**

#### *Highway Department:*

The Highway Department is responsible for stormwater facilities, more than 90 miles of local roads, sidewalks, and other services. The Department also issues driveway permits inside the urban compact area.

The Department operates out of the highway garage, located on Cleveland Street just east of Madison Ave. This garage has adequate capacity, and is expected to be sufficient for the foreseeable future. The Highway Department consists of eleven full-time crew and twelve pieces of equipment. Equipment replacement for the Highway Department, as well as a prioritized list of street, sidewalk, and sewer repairs, generated by management software, is part of the Capital Improvements Planning process.

Additional information on the Highway Department's functions can be found in the chapter on transportation.

*Solid Waste:*

Skowhegan operates a comprehensive solid waste management facility, located off Route 150 north of the downtown. The facility incorporates a transfer station and areas for bulky waste and composting, as well as a recycling building.

The town has made long-term, substantial efforts to reduce the amount of waste, and has been moderately successful. Table 5-1, below, illustrates the trends over the past five years. MSW (undifferentiated waste) has been declining since 2005; it is now at the lowest level since 2001. Since the tipping fee for this is \$62.65 per ton, this is the most critical measure. Although the overall volume of recyclables is declining, we are diverting more materials to composting and separating out other wastes, such as CRTs, fluorescent lights, and mercury switches. The SPO estimated Skowhegan's recycling rate at 52.38 percent in 2004, and it has probably improved since then.

**Table 5-1: Waste Volumes, 2004 – 2008**

Waste Type:	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
MSW (tons)	6,161	6,379	6,263	6,108	5,986
Construction/Demolition					
Debris (tons)	990	855	1,202	1,503	1,206
Compostables (cubic yards)	680	720	800	900	1,000
Metal (tons)	245	264	255	267	211
Glass (tons)	30	33	34	35	34
All paper (tons)	305	297	205	223	208
Cardboard (tons)	379	800	853	782	653
Plastic 1 & 2 (tons)	10	14	12	12	9

Source: Town of Skowhegan

The town's Solid Waste Management Ordinance mandates recycling. Transfer station staff carry out an active education program, both at the facility and at local schools and other venues. The town recently conducted a regional recycling study using a grant from the Efficient Delivery of Local and Regional Services Fund, and the resulting partnership with Madison is showing reduced costs for both communities.

The success of these efforts has created some demand for additional space and equipment at the facility. Capital needs are incorporated into the town's CIP.

The town also hosts the regional Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day, held annually in October. Several neighboring towns participate. In addition to hazardous waste, the collection includes prescription drugs and e-waste.

The Town has an ordinance to regulate the spreading of sludge from non-local sources. To date, there have been no permits issued. There are several hundred acres spread with sludge from the municipal sewer plant.

#### *Recreation Program:*

The Town of Skowhegan provides land and facilities for public recreation. The opportunities provided are discussed in Chapter 6, *Community Recreation*. This section focuses on the operation of the town's recreation department.

Skowhegan has full-time recreation staff, with offices located at the Skowhegan Community Center on Poulin Drive off of West Front Street. Throughout the year the Skowhegan Recreation Department offers hundreds of programs for all ages, both indoor and outdoor. Some of the events hosted in recent years include the first State Qualifying Babe Ruth Tournament at Memorial Field, an entertaining Tim Sample contest and a Children's Miracle Network fundraiser.

While recreation programs and facilities are in good shape for the present, the Town should be considering how future demographic changes would affect demand for recreation. Population growth over the next couple of decades will probably increase demand for adult recreation. Because the youth population is holding steady or declining, there may be no increased demand for youth programs, but there will be a lot of demand for passive recreation and senior programs as baby boomers begin to retire. The Town is in the process of identifying unmet needs for senior recreation programs.

#### **Utilities:**

A large portion of the urbanized area of Skowhegan is served by public water and sewer systems. The systems overlap extensively, and where available, serve as an incentive and locus for new development. A map of the sewer service area is included with this report.

#### *Public Water System:*

Public water service in Skowhegan is provided by Aqua Maine, a public utility that manages fifteen water systems in Maine. The Skowhegan system covers nine square miles, serving approximately 2,400 residential customers and 50 commercial accounts in the town.

Water is supplied to the system from two small ponds located just east of the downtown area. A pump system allows the company to pump water directly from the river to refill the ponds, but that is rarely used. The ponds are spring-fed. Although there is concern that the aquifer supplying these ponds lies beneath heavily developed Madison Avenue, there are no known issues concerning pollution or groundwater contamination. Surrounding the ponds, the water company owns or controls 114 acres, to protect the quality of the source.

The distribution system is in very good condition. Overall, the system is well below its capacity to supply needs, primarily because it was designed to serve industrial uses which no

longer exist. The system's capacity is 1.4 million gallons per day, and current usage is about 600,000. According to the plant superintendent, there are no areas within the current service area to which he would have to deny service to new development. Planning has been completed for a public water supply to serve the isolated Southgate Industrial Park on Route 201 near the SAPPI plant. Installation of the system is pending funding.

There are also a considerable number of state-licensed public water supplies in Skowhegan. These serve the public in locations like mobile home parks, campgrounds, or restaurants that are not located on the Aqua Maine system. According to data supplied by the Maine Drinking Water Program, none of these public water supplies is at particularly high risk of contamination.

#### *Public Sewer:*

A public sewer system owned and operated by the Town of Skowhegan serves the urbanized area of the town, roughly 2,000 residential and 350 commercial/industrial customers. Wastewater drains to the Water Pollution Control Facility, located on the Kennebec River. The facility is designed to treat an average daily flow of 1.65 million gallons per day, and a peak flow through the primary treatment area of 7.5 million gallons per day (mgd).

Current flows of 1.26 mgd put the plant at about 75 percent capacity. Local septage wastes are also accepted at the plant, as per ordinance. Neither the plant nor any of the collection lines or pump stations are at capacity. The only issues with the system at the moment are the age of some of the collection lines and plant equipment.

A *Sewer System Master Plan* was prepared and presented to the town in January, 2007, by Wright-Pierce Engineering. The master plan identified and prioritized capital needs through 2025. The master plan assumed that 70 percent of municipal growth in that period would occur on the sewer system. Using those assumptions, the plan estimated that about 173,000 gpd would be added to the system, well within the design capacity.

Based on its analysis of developable land, the plan identified seven geographic areas suitable for extension of collection lines, essentially moving land from unsewered to sewer status. If the system were extended to serve all seven areas, additional flows would amount to 173,000 gpd., putting the plant at capacity. The plan does, however, go on to eliminate two of the seven expansion zones from consideration within the planning period. The five remaining areas of varying sizes and locations are depicted in the Land Use Plan (Volume I) as the basis for our future growth areas.

#### **RSU 54 Education Services:**

Skowhegan is served by a K-12 public school system that includes five other towns in Maine Regional School Unit (RSU) 54. It is not in the scope of this plan to do educational facilities planning. The school district has done an adequate job of identifying needs for buildings and programs. The only reason for analyzing the educational system is to identify the relationships between school facilities and the town's growth.

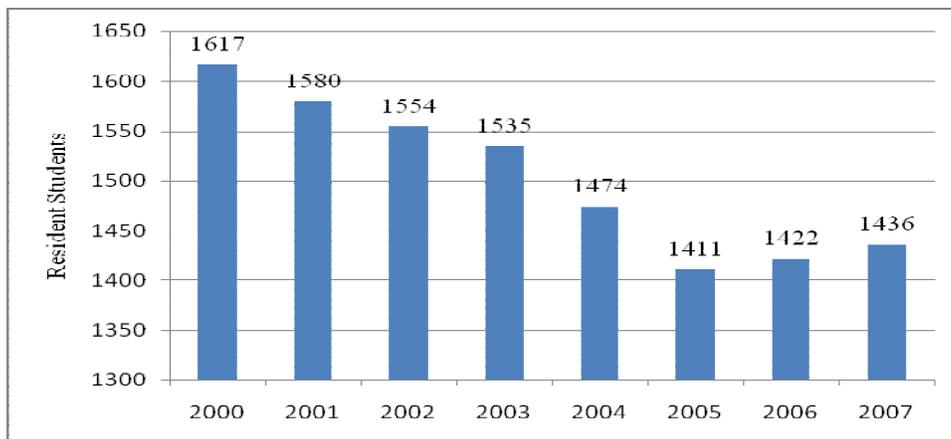
The district consists of several elementary schools, including two in Skowhegan, plus the Skowhegan Area Middle School, Skowhegan Area High School, and Skowhegan Regional Vocational Center. It is possible that within the planning period, Skowhegan's elementary schools will be consolidated into one new facility. Overall, the quality of the facilities and instruction is high. Skowhegan schools have been cited for excellence through various state measures of educational quality. Locally, respondents to the public opinion survey were well-satisfied with the quality of the schools.

The quality of schools is a function of the quality of staff and facilities, and stability of finance and administration. Per-pupil costs in RSU 54 amount to \$9,787 (2007-8). This is relatively high in comparison to neighboring districts. Bingham (SAD 13) is higher, but a much more rural district. Per-pupil costs are also rising at a faster rate than most other districts in the region. RSU 54's costs in 1997-8 were lower than MSAD 13, 53 (Pittsfield), 59 (Madison), and AOS 92 (Waterville). For the state, 07-08 per-pupil costs averaged \$9,370, an increase of about 82 percent since 1997-8.

<b>Regional Perspective: Per Pupil Costs</b>		
District	07-08 cost	ten-year change
<b>RSU 54</b>	<b>9,787</b>	<b>99 %</b>
MSAD 13	11,993	127 %
MSAD 48	7,338	76 %
MSAD 49	8,209	76 %
MSAD 53	8,500	68 %
MSAD 59	8,790	57 %
AOS 92	8,734	53 %

As demonstrated in Figure 5-1, below, student enrollment declined rather dramatically in the early part of this decade (2008 figures not on table total 1,406). This is partly due to the lack of population growth since 2000. Maintaining the same (or improved) facilities over time with a declining enrollment is difficult, and may be a contributing factor in rising per-pupil costs. However, declining enrollment means that the school system has the capacity for additional growth projected by this plan. The most optimistic growth scenario depicted in this plan (page 18) would still just match the enrollment recorded for 2000 by 2025.

**Figure 5-1: Skowhegan Enrollment Trends 2000-2007**



The school system functions well within the community. School facilities are used regularly for community meetings and adult education and training classes. School grounds are used for recreation. The West Front campus is located adjacent to the Skowhegan Community

Center. Future expansion of the recreation fields between the two will include pedestrian and bicycle connections, which will result in an integrated education/recreation complex.

## **Cultural Facilities and Services:**

The Skowhegan Opera House at the town hall is a cultural gem. Long used as the locale for town meetings and local talent shows and recitals, the first theatrical production was held in 1909. It has, in recent years, become part of a circuit for big name performing artists. The opera house underwent major renovations in 1977 and is in good condition; however, current standards require a sprinkler system to be installed, and that project is underway.

The town has two movie theaters, the Strand, which has been preserved and expanded as an example of the art deco style of interior design, and the Drive-in, which is one of the last drive-in theaters left in the country.

For more active forms of culture, the town is the site of the Skowhegan State Fair. The weeklong event has been held annually since 1819. The fairgrounds are also used year-round for agricultural and other events. The fair is a major draw and support for the economy of Skowhegan.

The town is served by two libraries. The Skowhegan Free Public Library was constructed in 1889 on a site overlooking the Kennebec River, and has remained almost unchanged in (exterior) appearance ever since. It has gone through several renovations, including major improvements for energy efficiency in 2008. The library is staffed by several full-time employees, and volunteers have logged more than 6,000 hours per year. The library is still managed by the Bloomfield Academy Trustees, but receives a contribution of close to \$90,000 a year from the town.

The Northwood University Margaret Chase Smith Library commemorates one of Skowhegan's most famous citizens. Located in Senator Smith's former home, the library houses her personal records and hosts many public affairs events and collections. While it is not a lending library, it does contribute to the cultural education of the town and the region.

The Skowhegan History House is the heritage museum for the town (see Chapter 1). It is located in a blacksmith's home dating from 1829 adjacent to the Kennebec River. It houses collections of artifacts and is open to the public regular hours.

## **Fiscal Operation**

Community facilities and services, with some exceptions, are dependent on municipal revenues. The quality of services relates to our capacity to support them with dollars. This support comes in the form of taxes and other revenues. As costs increase through inflation or the provision of higher service levels, revenues must go up accordingly. Our "fiscal capacity" is our ability to do this without serious financial impact.

Category	2006		2005		2004	
	Expenditure	% of total	Expenditure	% of total	Expenditure	% of total
General Gov't.	\$1,236,972	6.4%	\$1,392,273	7.2%	\$1,384,622	7.3%
protection	\$1,739,276	9.0%	\$1,353,554	7.0%	\$1,502,473	7.9%
Highways & Streets	\$905,883	4.7%	\$723,441	3.8%	\$605,067	3.2%
Health/Sanitation	\$761,388	3.9%	\$634,053	3.3%	\$636,199	3.4%
Pollution control	\$441,988	2.3%	\$339,595	1.8%	\$328,381	1.7%
general asst.	\$177,191	0.9%	\$85,943	0.4%	\$70,233	0.4%
Education	\$10,989,284	56.8%	\$11,282,516	58.7%	\$11,281,089	59.5%
County	\$1,400,797	7.2%	\$1,427,169	7.4%	\$1,470,304	7.8%
Recreation	\$314,132	1.6%	\$261,599	1.4%	\$269,228	1.4%
Debt Service/Int.	\$120,464	0.6%	\$444,895	2.3%	\$302,549	1.6%
Total	\$19,356,703	100.0%	\$19,205,575		\$18,952,380	
Adjusted: 2006 \$	\$19,356,703	-2%	\$19,685,714	-2%	\$20,070,570	1%
Local Valuation	\$1,023,640,400	2%	\$1,007,204,200	1%	\$998,295,500	6%
Mill Rate	16.45		16.6		17.1	
Commitment	\$16,838,885	0.7	\$16,719,590	-2%	\$17,070,853	6%
Full Value Mill Rate	15.22		15.59		16.69	

Category	2003		2002	
	Expenditure	% of total	Expenditure	% of total
General Gov't.	\$1,316,027	7.2%	\$1,238,325	7.0%
protection	\$1,436,758	7.9%	\$1,373,671	7.7%
Highways & Streets	\$596,221	3.3%	\$594,814	3.4%
Health/Sanitation	\$635,534	3.5%	\$548,993	3.1%
Pollution control	\$293,618	1.6%	\$274,069	1.5%
generaal asst.	\$65,754	0.4%	\$45,552	0.3%
Education	\$11,164,753	61.4%	\$11,081,450	62.5%
County	\$1,414,549	7.8%	\$1,282,183	7.2%
Recreation	\$258,978	1.4%	\$169,180	1.0%
Debt Service	\$104,771	0.6%	\$386,018	2.2%
Total	\$18,194,782		\$17,735,285	100.0%
Adjusted: \$	\$19,923,286	1%	\$19,785,484	
Local Valuation	\$944,847,700	-1%	\$949,803,900	
Mill Rate	17.1		17	
Commitment	\$16,156,896	0%	\$16,146,666	
Full Value Mill Rate	16.61		16.46	

According to our audit report for FY 06, it costs about \$19 million to run the Town of Skowhegan for a year. (Complete history in full-page table) Of that amount, \$11.3 million went to education and \$1.5 million for county tax. Of the remaining municipal expenditures, the largest are in the categories of general government (\$1.4 million) and protection (\$1.5 million).

By contrast, in FY 02, the Town spent \$17.7 million, about \$11 million of which was for schools. After adjusting for inflation, however, the overall budget is about 2 percent less over four years, and the proportion for schools went from 62.5 percent to 56.8 percent.

Over the four-year period, the largest increases appeared to be in the categories of “protection” and “highways and streets.” All of the increase for protection came in 2006; the increases for highways and streets are probably driven by the increasing cost of oil/asphalt during that period. The other significant increase was in “general assistance.” The 2006 tax rate was reduced, however, primarily because of a large reduction in interest on the debt.

The real test of fiscal capacity, though, is not how much more we spent, but in whether we were able to do that without a burden on taxpayers. Taxes (property plus excise) accounted for about 93 percent of our total budget in 2002, but only 91 percent in 2006. That indicates that taxpayers have been shouldering less of the burden of running the town. Non-local revenues were primarily intergovernmental transfers, however, and these may be reduced in future years as a result of the recession.

A measure of taxes is the mill rate. The local mill rate is the tax applied to the assessor valuation of property. As the table on the previous page shows, the local mill rate dropped from 17.0 in 2002, to 16.45 in 2006, most of the decline coming in 2005 and 2006.

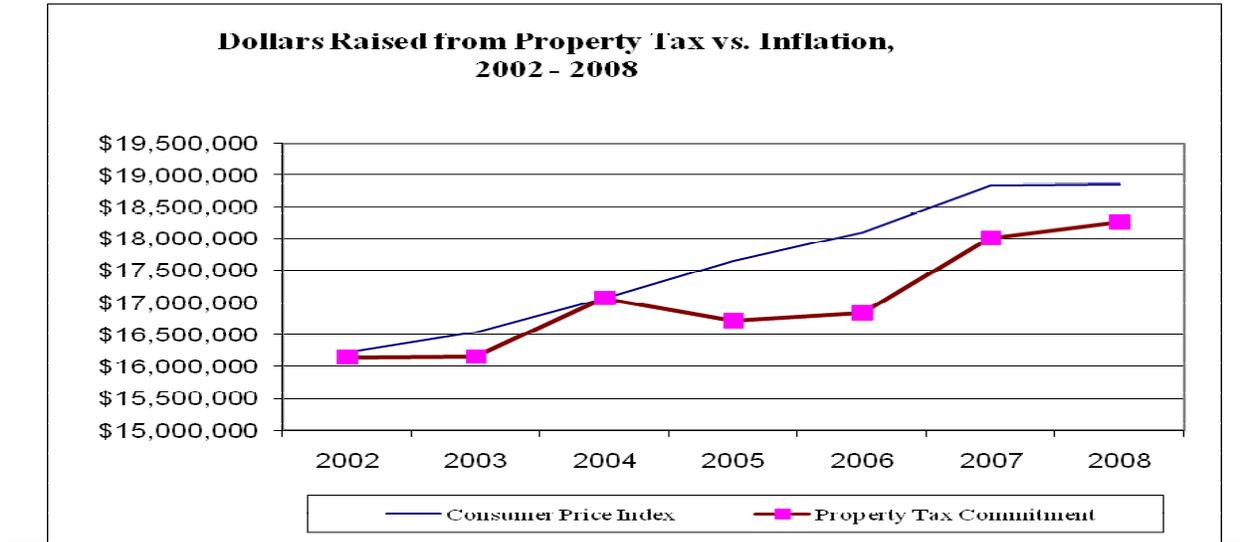
The “Full Value Mill Rate” is the municipal commitment applied to the state’s estimate of valuation (rather than our own), so that it may be compared over time and with other towns. Our full value mill rate has dropped dramatically compared to 2002.

The box at right shows Skowhegan’s mill rate in relation to our neighboring towns. It turns out that tax rates correlate very closely with the size of towns. Skowhegan’s smaller neighbors are not shown in the box, because they have significantly lower rates. With the exception of Bingham, Skowhegan has the highest tax rates in Somerset County. This is not due to management; this is the result of providing a higher level of services to workers and visitors as the job and service center of the region.

<b>Tax Rates:</b>	
	2007 FULL VALUE
Town	Mill Rate
<b>Skowhegan</b>	<b>15.30</b>
Pittsfield	14.11
Madison	15.12
Winslow	14.88
Waterville	18.14
Fairfield	14.52

Total revenue from property tax has declined in comparison to the overall inflation rate. Figure 5-2, below, shows the line for tax commitment versus the consumer price index (as applied to the 2002 commitment). Since 2004, the rate of growth in the commitment has been well below the rate of inflation. While this means that, on average, property taxes are going down as a percentage of household expenditures, it also means that the town budget is not even keeping up with inflation.

Figure 5-2:



While this shows good fiscal management within the town, it also shows that Skowhegan is not gaining tax revenue from increases in property values. Our valuation increases come from two sources: new construction and real estate prices. If our tax rate remained constant, we would be seeing a steady addition to revenues from these sources amounting to an average of \$364,000 a year, or about 11 percent increase in commitment revenue over five years. Our actual increase was about 6.5 percent.

While it is difficult to project future valuation increase, we can be optimistic in the short term. An expansion to Walmart, conversion of the old county jail, and renovation of the mill on the island will boost valuation over the next year or two. A major expansion of the campus of Redington-Fairview General Hospital is, unfortunately, tax-exempt. The Town has two TIF districts, with a captured value of about \$96 million: the SAPPI mill, expiring in 2021, and the downtown district, expiring in 2017. Revenue from both these districts is earmarked for economic development, and amounted to about \$412,000, as of the 2006 audit report.

Like any service center, Skowhegan has many tax-exempt properties. The Town has about \$5 million in churches, \$6.1 million in the hospital, and \$8.1 million in other exempt properties. This amounts to only 1.6 percent of total valuation and does not place an undue burden on town services.

Skowhegan implements a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP), which is an essential tool in keeping tax rates stable and reasonable. The CIP fills two roles: it allows us to program large expenditures. And, it allows us to look at our long-term needs and space them out, rather than reacting when it is too late to save money. The CIP also allows us to link certain anticipated expenses with grants or alternate funding. While there is no incentive or priority for capital investments to be directed to a particular area, the great majority go to urban area facilities.

In the 2010 budget, six capital debts were listed, two of which will be retired in this fiscal year. Total debt runs about \$6 million, well below the Town's debt limit. In 2009, the

town put about \$723,000 into 11 capital reserve accounts. Over the past few years, the Town has spent almost equivalent amounts in debt retirement and capital reserve funding (about \$670,000 in 2010). The Town also has a good track record with grants.

The town is currently on good financial footing, and this year had no trouble staying within the LD1 limitation. That situation could change with anticipated state cuts to education, revenue sharing, homestead exemption, and other areas, and with an increase in county taxes due to debt service on the new jail. Although Skowhegan has not been faced with this decision yet, when times get tight many towns defer their saving for capital improvements. This is a stopgap measure that ends up costing more in the long run.

## **Analysis and Issues:**

Skowhegan provides the full range and quality of public services and facilities expected of a small service center community. Public safety and utility services are sized to support a large commercial base as well as the resident population. The town participates actively in planning processes (e.g. *2007 Sewer Master Plan*, ongoing DOT Second Bridge Study) to anticipate infrastructure needs for growth and development.

No public facilities are at or over capacity for current needs. Within the 10-year planning period, priority items are an expansion to recreation fields (discussed in the recreation chapter), water system for the industrial park (economic development chapter) and traffic congestion in the downtown area (transportation chapter). Skowhegan's sewer master plan includes systematic expansion of the service area, including extensions into growing commercial areas and the vicinity of the school complex. These extensions will provide an excellent base for Skowhegan's future growth. The town has recently made major investments in an effort to address CSO and plant capacity issues.

While highway maintenance is an issue in the face of increasing materials and fuel costs, the town has a good planning structure to identify and prioritize roads and bridges that need improvement and its equipment and infrastructure needs are integrated with the town's capital improvements plan. Public safety, emergency response, and disaster planning services are generally considered to be excellent. In addition to local police, Somerset County Sheriff and state police both have bases in town, and the PSAP and emergency management offices are also located in town. Changes to the dynamics of town and equipment needs will require an examination of the fire station, but that should be ten years or more into the future.

Skowhegan has a history of initiating regional discussions on sharing and improving community services. Regional cooperation will become even more of an issue as everyone gets squeezed. The Town continues to take an active role in organizing and participating in opportunities to provide more cost-effective services regionally.

Skowhegan has a comprehensive capital improvements plan, seeking a mix of reserves and bonding for its projects, with a good awareness of grant opportunities. Additional items suggested in this plan to support growth should be integrated into the CIP.

## Chapter 6:

# Community Recreation



### Planning Goal:

*To promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities, including access to surface waters.*

Recreation is a valuable element of community life, particularly in a town such as Skowhegan, with so many opportunities. Skowhegan has a large developed infrastructure, expanses of undeveloped open space, multiple opportunities for water-based recreation, and some very good cooperating recreation providers.

Recreation can generally be classified into two categories: organized, or “active,” recreation – usually supported by developed facilities and programs, and unorganized, or “passive,” recreation, often with supporting facilities, but more a solitary or family activity. Both are addressed here.

### Organized Recreation:

Skowhegan has a town recreation department that not only supplies a wide assortment of organized recreation opportunities, but coordinates its activities with other towns and local recreation groups and businesses. The center of recreational activity is the Skowhegan Community Center, located off of Route 2 just west of the downtown. The community center houses a large gym, a game room, an exercise room, and two large function rooms with kitchen facilities.

The recreation department manages and maintains 20 outside facilities including the outdoor skate park, 2 outdoor basketball courts, 3 tennis courts, 7 ball fields, 3 playgrounds, 3 trails, 2 canoe portages, the ice rink at the fairgrounds as well as adjacent lawn areas around these facilities. These facilities are in a variety of conditions: The playgrounds are nearly new; the ballfields are overused and need drainage improvements; the ice rink is open to the weather and would require major improvements to be open to “sanctioned” games.

The recreation department also maintain 14 commons, parks and other areas around town including Island Avenue Commons, VFW Main Street Park, North Avenue triangle, Water Street triangle, Norridgewock Avenue triangle, Skowhegan Indian area, Arnold Expedition Park - Madison Avenue triangle, Route 2 - West Front Street triangle, Gorge River View area, the History House grounds, Dudley Corner Schoolhouse, Highway Department grounds and the Skowhegan Free Public Library grounds.

The recreation department is very active in pursuing and obtaining grants and donations for recreation activities. Current grants include:

- Recreational Trails grant from ME Dept. of Conservation for rehabilitation of Heselton Street trail;
- \$27,500 from New Balance Foundation for equipment and staff for outdoor and after school programs;
- ME Dept. of Education grants for summer nutritional feeding program;
- Land and Water Conservation Fund grant for reconstruction of Memorial Field playground.

A major expansion of outdoor recreation facilities has received state and local permits but is not yet funded. The expansion, to be located on the community center grounds, will include a regulation football field, a practice football field, three soccer fields, and a softball diamond, in addition to the three little league fields, basketball courts, skate park, and playground already located on site. The expansion will also adjoin and connect the community center with the high school grounds, permitting additional utilization and parking. The anticipated cost is in the neighborhood of \$2 million and the plan is to be operational by 2012.

The recreation department organizes literally hundreds of programs, both at the community center and at satellite facilities. These range from family ice skating to youth outdoor exploration, and include the usual basketball and soccer leagues. The programs often take advantage of other local facilities, such as the Family Bowling Center, Decal Gymnastics, a local horse farm, and Lake George Regional Park. A special effort is made to incorporate family and adult programs. The department has documented over 15,000 youths and 10,000 adults using the facilities every year, with about 10,500 youths registered for organized programs. Non-residents are permitted into the facilities and programs on a fee-for-use basis.

The department also assists with a number of annual events for the community. These range from Holiday Stroll and Midnight Madness to hunter safety classes and cooking demonstrations.

Outside of local government, several other entities offer organized recreation opportunities. There is a gymnastics studio and karate dojo in town as well as a bowling alley. The Skowhegan Fairgrounds provides space for timely events. Eaton Mountain Ski Area is a downhill skiing facility offering a 590 foot vertical drop, with snowmaking and lights, just five minutes from downtown. Additional facilities are located in the region, including dance studios, a swimming pool, and indoor ice rink.

## **Unorganized “Passive” Recreation**

Unorganized recreation generally refers to outdoor facilities that are open for public use but generally do not have structured hours or competitive programs. This class of recreation ranges from community beaches and parks, to solitary pursuits like hunting, fishing, and hiking.

### *Water Access and Activities:*

Skowhegan has access to water-based activities, but the limiting factor tends to be in the available access points. The Kennebec River and Lake George are the two waterbodies accessible for recreation.

The Kennebec River Access is located east of town. It is on land owned by Somerset Woods Trustees that also includes the Route 2 Highway Rest Area. The access consists of a boat ramp and parking. The State of Maine operates the facility on land owned by Somerset Woods Trustees. Local discussions have been held to improve the facility with a dock, as it is the only true river access for several miles in either direction. Rudimentary portage points are located above and below the dams, for adventurous canoeists and kayakers.

The Kennebec River also offers very good fishing from its banks, particularly just below the dams.

Townpeople have been working for a number of years on an ambitious project to establish a whitewater recreation park in the Kennebec Gorge below the dams. This project requires a great deal of access negotiation, coordination, and engineering, and has been proceeding slowly as funding is available. This project is envisioned as a destination-quality recreation facility, as well as an economic development tool, to be located immediately adjacent to downtown. The town recently received a Riverfront Development Bond grant to obtain easements and add signage, parking and viewing areas, and a federal grant through MDOT to construct a paved, handicapped-accessible trail through Debe Park on the south side of the river. The next step in the process is to develop a model of the project, to test engineering and hydraulic structures, which should lead to fund-raising to begin construction itself by 2012.

Lake George Regional Park is a day-use lakeside park established in 1992, owned by the State of Maine, leased through an inter-local agreement by the towns of Skowhegan and Canaan, and managed for public use by Lake George Corporation, composed of residents from the two towns.

The park does not receive funding from the state, yet serves to fill a major geographic gap in the state-managed park system since there are no state parks in this area of Maine. With the leadership of a full-time Park Director, the park’s year-round activities include educational programs, trails, amenities, and events. Each year a combination of roughly 20,000 community members and visitors use the lake, public boat launch and the surrounding 320 acres of land for swimming, fishing, picnicking, boating, hiking, skiing, playing fields, and group use facilities. Every summer over 200 area children grades 1-6 participate in a four-week nature-based day camp at the park called Camp Podooc. The park is a growing destination and vital community

hub to the Skowhegan and Canaan communities.

#### *Land-based Activities:*

Land-based passive recreation consists of such activities as hunting, hiking, bird-watching, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and cycling. It takes place throughout town, but depends in large part upon public access to tracts of undeveloped land. This access can be in the form of publicly-owned or managed tracts of land, but is more often in easements or landowner agreements permitting public use of private lands. Continued access to these opportunities is contingent upon the continuing good will of landowners.

Snowmobiling is considered a passive form of recreation. Skowhegan is crisscrossed by snowmobile trails and linked to an interstate network through the Interconnected Trail System (ITS) trail #87 running along the northwestern corner of town. The proximity of the trail to US 201 and downtown Skowhegan makes us a hub of snowmobile activity. There are four snowmobile clubs active in Skowhegan, maintaining the trail using contributions from public and private sources. The town receives and turns over \$25,000 annually from the state for trail maintenance.

There are several hiking/walking trails and trail networks in Skowhegan, consisting of almost 100 miles of trail area. Many of these trail systems are isolated from the rest of town. The Skowhegan recreation and public works departments are working on a plan to connect these trail networks to the sidewalk system already existing downtown, as well as improvements to the sidewalks themselves. When implemented, downtown residents will be able to have pedestrian access to many natural areas on the fringes of the built-up area. Several of the trail networks are also used for cross-country skiing in winter, and Lake George park has a groomed trail network dedicated to cross-country skiers.

The same plan is also establishing a series of bicycle routes and facilities throughout town, so that residents from neighborhoods can travel to schools, parks, and the community center without reliance on a car.

#### **Analysis and Key Issues:**

The key issue to be addressed with regard to outdoor recreation is whether we are prepared for future demand. We need to look at expected demographic and economic changes, as well as our overall vision for future direction, to determine what the nature of future recreation demand will be.

Skowhegan's population profile is aging, reflected in a decline in the numbers of young people (11 percent fewer in 2000 than 1980) and rise in the number of elderly (21 percent increase). We have a good assortment of programs for young people and families. We actually have more demand than we have facilities. But, there is likely to be lower demand in the future. That is, unless something else happens to attract many more young families and "turn over" the demographic.

An aging population means more demand for different forms of recreation. In the past, the kind of recreation demand generated by this dynamic has been met by a senior center or program, but the current generation of retiring seniors is much more likely to be of the “active retirement” type. These tend to show a preference for outdoor activities, such as boating, cycling, and hiking. Skowhegan may have a supply of these opportunities now, but it may not be adequate, and demand is likely to rise.

Skowhegan has excellent prospects, both on the organized side, with its existing facilities and active recreation department, and on the unorganized side, with its lakes and open space, and relationships with Lake George Corporation and Somerset Woods Trustees. In these areas, it is merely a matter of anticipating demand and coordinating activities.

There are a few perceived needs that should be addressed:

- The expansion to the ballfields is all ready to go pending funding. This activity has been planned for several years as a way of alleviating overcrowding.
- Skowhegan has a large potential demand for walking and bicycle trails, both for recreation and transportation. While bicycles can currently use paved roads, these are not as safe as separated trails, especially Route 201. The town should complete and implement its plan for development of bicycle and pedestrian trail systems, starting with linking destination points, such as the schools, parks, and existing recreation trails.
- Many of Skowhegan’s recreational opportunities are provided through private or regional entities. The town can support these organizations and cooperate to provide more opportunity at the same or reduced cost. At the same time, the range of opportunities has stressed the town’s ability to support them financially, and we need to continue our excellent record of obtaining grants and donations.
- The town also needs to ask itself if traditional access to recreation opportunities over private lands is shrinking or in jeopardy. The trend across the country is for landowners to restrict access, either to assert private property rights or to avoid potential liability or destruction of property. In many places, this results in a loss of opportunities that people have taken for granted for decades. There is no evidence that landowners in Skowhegan have been posting their properties to any greater or lesser extent. We can help to ensure continued access by confronting issues such as damage and liability before they happen, and continuing good relations with landowners.

# Chapter 7:

## Skowhegan's Transportation System

### Planning Goal:

*Plan for, finance, and develop an efficient system of public facilities and services to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.*

### Overview:

Skowhegan is a crossroads. With the historic arterial highway, US 201 connecting most of the country with Quebec to the north, and US 2 linking northern New England and Montreal to the west with Bangor and the Maritimes to the east, Skowhegan is virtually the hub of Maine. As both a crossroads and a service center, Skowhegan sees high traffic volumes generated by local trips, tourists, commuters, and freight haulers from local to international. The majority of vehicles on these corridors carry people passing through Skowhegan to or from the interstate, or coming in to Skowhegan for work, school, or shopping.

Most of our traffic utilizes the major east-west and north-south thoroughfares leading through town, leading to several questions: What is the impact of continuing development along existing arteries? Will natural growth lead to congestion and reduced traffic capacity? What are future alternatives to the current road system?

The transportation system is critical to Skowhegan's growth, yet transportation and growth complement and conflict with each other. To the extent that commerce requires access to customers, or to move freight, transportation capacity is essential. Any form of development, even single family homes, will generate new traffic, eventually overwhelming the capacity of existing roads. At a million dollars a mile, new highways are in short supply. The issue is this: Can we continue to engage in current or projected development without creating unsustainable conditions within the transportation system?

### The Highway System:

Skowhegan's road system consists of 101.5 miles of roads and highways, encompassing 21 miles of state highway, 13.5 miles of state aid roads, 67 miles of town ways, and a few individual private roads (subdivision or camp roads). Maintaining the road system is the

responsibility of both state and town governments. The Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) has varying responsibilities for state roads, depending on whether they are within the Urban Compact Area, the pre-designated boundary between urban and rural development densities (see map). The MDOT is responsible for all maintenance on the non-compact portions of US 201 and US 2, and all but snow plowing on non-compact portions of major collectors -- other numbered highways, Norridgewock Ave., and some urban streets. The Town is responsible for maintenance on the remainder.

A few privately-owned and managed roads exist in Skowhegan. These are primarily providing access to properties around Oak Pond, or serving small subdivisions, and there is little likelihood of them ever becoming public roads.

Road condition ratings are generally based on the design and drivability of the roadway. US 201 is considered to be in very good condition throughout its length. US 2 is in very good condition to the west, and in good condition to the east, except for a significant portion on which old pavement is sloughing off. This section of road is scheduled for a ¾" overlay in the next couple of years, but this may prove to be a short-term cure, as the symptoms are indicative of a need to reconstruct the base.

State Routes 104 and 150 are considered rural collectors and held to a lower standard than arterials. Route 150 (North Ave.) is considered to be in good condition. Route 104 (Middle Road) is in fair condition, with width and alignment issues.

The 67 miles of local roads include almost the entire in-town grid, and several rural and subdivision roads. The town uses a road surface management system (RSMS) to gauge the condition and maintenance needs of these roads. According to RSMS, between 60 and 70 percent of the road system is in good condition from year to year. The town's paving plan targets between five and seven miles of road per year for re-paving.

The Town does not track private roads, because it has no jurisdiction or authority for maintenance on them. The very few that exist serve small subdivisions. A subdivision road that is built to ordinance standards for a minor street is traditionally accepted as a town road.

The town expends about \$700,000 a year on summer road maintenance. We receive about \$124,000 a year in URIP (Urban-Rural Initiative Program) funds from the state, earmarked for capital improvements. The town expends about \$550,000 a year on winter maintenance. This includes plowing of 88 miles of roads (town ways plus state roads inside the urban compact).

#### *Functionality of the Road System – Traffic and Safety*

The purpose of a road system is to carry traffic. Technically, traffic is the product of people moving from one destination to another. Residential destinations in Skowhegan are somewhat dispersed, and well-served by the grid-style road system in the urban area. Most of the commercial and institutional destinations are located on major traffic routes. Major traffic nodes include the SAPPI and New Balance Mills on Route 201, Northgate Industrial Park,

Fairgrounds Marketplace and other stores along Madison Avenue, the high school/junior high complex and community center on Route 2, the hospital on Fairview Ave., and the downtown area. Employers, such as the mills, and schools tend to concentrate their traffic demand at certain times of the day (peak hours), while retail and service operations tend to spread out.

Traffic is generally measured in vehicle volumes. The Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) is estimated (based on sampling) for Skowhegan’s primary roads. These figures, particularly when viewed over time, are a good indicator of highway system use.

Table 7-1, below, provides a picture of traffic levels at critical points in Skowhegan. The table shows that several points on the system have experienced a decline in traffic, while others have experienced substantial increases. Traffic downtown, as indicated by Island Ave. and Madison Ave., has remained almost static.

**Table 7-1: Traffic Levels and Growth along the Skowhegan Road System**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Base Year: 1996</b>	<b>Most Recent: (2006 or other)</b>	<b>Annual Change: (growth rate)</b>
Island Ave @ Water St.	21,020	21,080	.03 %
US 2 east of East Ridge Road	4,880	5,890	1.9 %
Fairview Ave.	2,740	4,960	6.1 %
North Ave. (150) north of High St.	8,770	7,480	-1.6 %
E. Front Street (201) @ Main St.	15,930	12,700	-2.3 %
Madison Ave (201) @ Water St.	11,850	12,680 (07)	0.6 %
High Street @ North Ave.	2,510	3,370	3.0 %

Source: MDOT Annual Traffic Volume Counts

The overall average growth rate for traffic in Somerset County is 1.5 percent per year. The general tendency is for traffic to shift from urban areas into rural ones, or from more congested roadways to less congested ones. Traffic growth on Fairview Ave. and Route 2 east may be examples of the former trend. Development is definitely accelerating in this part of town, both from the hospital and suburban subdivision; Route 2 growth may be reflective of population growth in Canaan and Palmyra, in addition to east-west commercial traffic growth.

Skowhegan’s transportation system is heavily influenced by I-95, even though the interstate does not run through the town. Interstate highways are traditionally magnets for major retail, warehousing, and employment centers. Skowhegan’s north-south highways carry traffic through Skowhegan to commercial locations along I-95 to work and shop. Routes 2 and 201 are major freight corridors that feed into the interstate. In addition, tourist and commercial traffic from northern New Hampshire and western Maine converges on downtown Skowhegan as it funnels along Route 2 to I-95 eastward.

Congestion within the downtown area and access to I-95 have led to proposals for a new bridge and connecting links to Route 2 and 201 in Skowhegan. The Skowhegan Transportation Study has not yet determined the need for or placement of these improvements, so it is too early to speculate on the impact on the system (other than eased mobility overall). This plan does not

address the advisability or location of the new bridge. The MDOT is performing the planning process guided by a Public Advisory Committee, and the project may not even occur within the planning horizon.

Although congestion in Skowhegan is primarily limited to the downtown, ride-sharing is a practice that may reduce congestion and overall vehicle use. In 2000, about one out of eight Skowhegan workers carpooled, but there is little formal opportunity to encourage this. The Veteran's Parking Lot, adjacent to the Town Office, is designated as a Park-and-Ride, but is only slightly used. The MaineDOT sponsors a program to match potential ride-sharers, called GOMAINE, but we have no information on its penetration in Skowhegan.

Congestion may also be addressed with land use management techniques. Since congestion is partly due to adjacent land uses, control of those uses and the access points can alleviate congestion and improve safety.

Skowhegan has several ordinances that regulate the impact of land use activities on the transportation system. The Streets and Sidewalks Ordinance regulates driveway entrances and is in the process of being amended to include road construction standards. It currently sets limits on the number, location and width of driveway entrances onto city streets (or state roads within the urban compact.) This ordinance does not, however, limit driveway location based on sight distance, or contain standards as strict as the MDOT Driveway Permit Rules.

The Site Review Ordinance regulates most forms of commercial development. This ordinance contains standards for driveway location and design, parking lot design, and traffic impacts. Standards require consideration of parking layout for pedestrian safety, bike and pedestrian access to sites, and handicapped access. The standards also encourage internal circulation and inter-connections with other development, in order to minimize impact on the public roads. The Subdivision Ordinance contains traditional road construction standards.

Neither the Subdivision nor Site Review Ordinances use road design standards to affect the location or overall pattern of development, such as requiring development roads outside of the growth area to remain private. The Site Review Ordinance does permit commercial developers in the downtown area to choose an alternative to on-site parking, so that development density can be maintained.

Traffic safety is a major consideration in a road system. While some level of traffic accidents is virtually inevitable, historically unsafe road locations should be addressed. These are identified by the MDOT as High Crash Locations (HCL). HCLs have a higher-than-average number and/or severity of crashes. A closer analysis must be done to determine whether the crashes are caused by poor road design, congestion, driveway proliferation, or some other cause. Skowhegan only had two locations of concern as of 2008: one road segment – the Middle Road south of Varney Road, and one intersection – the junction of Madison Ave with the Fairgrounds Market place. The problem with the former is probably alignment and road condition; the latter, congestion and turning movements.

*Bridges:*

Bridges are a critical, though often overlooked, link in the road system. It is usually only when a new bridge is proposed, as is the case in Skowhegan that the issue is at the forefront. This report does not address the issue of the second bridge, except as it may affect the overall transportation system and future development. It is expected that the ongoing MDOT-sponsored Skowhegan Transportation Study will do a more thorough job of analysis and recommendation than this plan.

The following table lists the bridges in Skowhegan. Bridges that exceed 20 feet in length are the responsibility of the State, regardless of ownership of the road. Bridges under 20 feet and culverts are generally the responsibility of the Town.

**Table 7-2: Skowhegan Bridge Inventory (2008)**

Road	Bridge Name	Length (ft)	Deficiencies	Maintenance Responsibility	Federal Sufficiency Rating
US 2/201	Margaret Chase Smith	182	none	State	64
Lambert	Lambert	12	none	Town	92
Stewart Hill	Cold Brook	21	Channel, culvert, approach	town	63
Hathaway	Hathaway	16	none	town	99
Mill St.	Mill St.	27	Substructure, deck, channel, approach	town	48
US 2	Lambert Brook	13	none	state	58
Oak Pond	School House	10	approach	town	92
Hilton Hill	Old Smith Pond	44	Substructure, channel	town	26
Notch	Malbons Mills	81	approach	town	97
US 2	Sucy	21	none	State	81
US 2	Wesserunsett	234	none	state	76
US 201	Woolen Mill	22	none	state	33
US 201	Cold Brook	21	none	state	63
Malbons Mills	West Ridge	85	none	state	84
Maine 104	Currier Brook	10	Channel, culvert	state	58
Hilton Hill	Red Bridge		Superstructure, deck	town	58
Maine 150	Smith Pond	116	channel	state	81
Maine 150	Perkins	49	none	State	61

Source: Maine DOT bridge inventory

None of the bridges on the inventory are posted for weight limits, though the roadways leading on to them may be posted in the spring. The Cold Brook (Stewart Hill Road), Malbon's Mills (Notch Road), and Red (Hilton Hill Road) Bridges are listed as low use, redundant bridges, which means they are low priority for maintenance.

Over a number of years, the Town has allocated \$35,000 a year into a fund for bridge repairs. During the current year, the fund will pay out approximately \$115,000 for rehabilitation of the Mill Street Bridge. The Red Bridge, Notch Bridge, and a culvert on Stewart Hill Road are also priorities. The MDOT has budgeted for removal of the Old Smith Pond Bridge and relocation of the crossing within the next two years.

### *Parking:*

The Town maintains seven municipal parking lots. Most of these lots are located in the downtown area. The primary and largest lot is the Municipal Lot, accessible from Commercial Street and High Street. This provides parking for the Flatiron Block, movie theater, courthouse, and other downtown facilities. The Riverview Lot, located behind the Water Street block, provides added store and restaurant parking, plus parking for river access. The Island Lot is located on Skowhegan Island, and is used primarily for the church and fire hall. Lots located adjacent to the town office and community center are primarily dedicated to those uses.

The Veteran's Lot, located east of the town office, contains 29 spaces. It serves the town office and some commercial uses, but is also designated as a park-and-ride. Park and ride usage is light, either because it is relatively new, or because it is poorly signed.

The parking lots are restriped annually, but receive little added maintenance. All lots were repaved with bond money about a decade ago. The Municipal Lot is seldom full, except for concerts and events in the downtown. However, if business traffic and occupancy picks up in the downtown, as a result of downtown revitalization efforts, capacity could become an issue at some point. The lot contains no landscaping and is not very inviting to potential users.

### **Sidewalks and Bicycle Routes:**

Skowhegan has a sidewalk system covering more than 20 miles. The older, grid-layout portion of town has sidewalks throughout, and some of the newer subdivision roads have them as well. Most of the sidewalks are separated from the roadways by an esplanade, but some are adjacent. Most are asphalt paved.

The town also has a series of independent walking trails. These trails are mostly in the form of nature or exercise loops through public and private properties. These trails are as follows:

- The Conservation Trail, located behind the extension service building on Norridgewock Ave.,
- Coburn Trail, located in Coburn Park,
- Heselton Trail, located east of Margaret Chase Smith School,
- Philbrook and Portage Trails, located just south of the river, near the great eddy,

- The High School Trail, located behind the high school, and
- The Marti Stevens Trail, located north of Route 2 near the high school.

No discussion of pedestrian routes would be complete without mention of the pedestrian bridges across the Kennebec River. The Swinging Bridge connects the island with West Front Street. This is an historic bridge, recently rebuilt. The Walking Bridge connects the downtown area with neighborhoods south of the river. This is a rebuilt railroad bridge. It is scheduled for re-decking in the near future. In 2009, federal funding was obtained for a new trail from the south end of the bridge through Debe Park. This is one element of a larger plan, under development now, to connect the existing trails and popular facilities (community center, hospital, New Balance, schools) over existing and new sidewalks and bike trails.

The Town currently allocates \$30,000 a year to sidewalk maintenance and reconstruction. This is adequate to maintain sidewalks in their current condition, but no expansions can be made. New sidewalks are required on a case-by-case basis in both the Subdivision and Site Plan Ordinances, and the Town has a history of pursuing grant money to expand or improve sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities.

Bicycle usage is growing in Maine, both as a form of transportation and recreation. While most bicycle travel occurs on roads, the safer and more comfortable alternative is to have separated bike routes. Even when bikes are confined to roadways, there are design measures and infrastructure that can create a safer route.

Skowhegan has no exclusive or priority bike trails, but the bicycle and pedestrian plan now nearing completion identifies low-volume roads and complementary routes that should be incorporated into the townwide bicycle network. New developments, including the proposed ballfields adjacent to the community center, are being required to accommodate cyclists with either pathways or facilities.

At some point, it is expected that a regional bike trail will roughly follow the Kennebec River. Though that project may not be within the horizon of this plan, it is something to keep in the back of our minds.

## **Rail, Air, and Public Transportation:**

Though a huge majority of transportation now occurs by private vehicles on the highway system, other forms of transportation constitute alternatives for the future.

The only functional rail line into Skowhegan is an industrial spur into the Sappi Paper mill. The spur is in good condition and is used on a regular basis, but is exclusive to the mill. Some old rail bed is still in existence elsewhere in town, but there is little chance of it ever being re-established.

There are no public airports within Skowhegan but general aviation services are available at Central Maine Airport in Norridgewock. The Central Maine Airport has capacity

for increased growth, and is a potential asset to future development and tourism in Skowhegan. The nearest airport for passenger service is Bangor International, about one hour to the east.

The Skowhegan area is served by local transit provider Kennebec Valley Community Action Program (KVCAP). No fixed route service is available, but a special van and volunteer driver service is available for elderly, handicapped, and other special needs clients. At some point, a public bus or trolley route serving Madison Avenue and the downtown area would probably be warranted, but at present the costs would be prohibitive.

## **Analysis and Key Issues:**

### *Second Bridge*

The current incarnation of planning to erect a second bridge has been underway since 2008, and is expected to conclude with recommendations concerning a location to cross the Kennebec River, possibly including highway links to both Routes 2 and 201. The primary purpose of the study is to reduce congestion and commercial traffic within the downtown area. Both north-south and east-west flows would be affected.

This plan will take no position on the technical aspects of the study, except to reinforce the notion that downtown congestion, especially from large trucks, is an issue (see below). If a new crossing were sited within the downtown area, it should be designed in a context-sensitive way, with accommodation for pedestrians and bicycles, and suitable design elements. If the crossing were sited outside of the current downtown, we need to consider the implications of opening up new areas for development. One solution might be to create Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts at new intersections, with TIF revenue going to enhance downtown commercial opportunities.

Even though the transportation study will be concluded shortly, it is not expected that any bridge would be completed within the next ten years. That puts it at the outer limits of this plan. Nevertheless, the town should be prepared to respond to the recommendations of the study, with a local task force to identify infrastructure and land use impacts.

### *Downtown Traffic and Parking*

Traffic congestion in the downtown area – specifically the triangle rotary known as the Flatiron Block – has been the subject of study and discussion for decades. Many recommendations have been put forward, ranging from incorporating High Street into the one-way system, to removing some corner buildings. Recent downtown infrastructure improvements have fixed a few problems and, together with the lack of growth in traffic volumes, postponed a worsening of the situation.

The Skowhegan Transportation Study has projected that, without an alternative river crossing, traffic downtown will eventually reach the breakdown point. This would be bad for business, increase travel delays, and endanger pedestrian safety. The problem should not be

considered “solved” even with construction of a new bridge. It is important to create and maintain an attractive downtown, which means maintaining a balance between good traffic flow, easy access, and safety.

While parking is readily available in the downtown area in either municipal lots or on-street spaces, there remain some improvements that could be made. The primary municipal lot is unattractive. An unattractive parking lot is a blighting influence on an area, as well as discouraging people from using it. It could be greatly improved with landscaping, including islands with trees around the perimeter, and circulation islands in the interior, to discourage its use as a drive-through. If sufficient room exists, consideration could be given to dedicating a portion of it to green space – a location for the farmers market, small events, or an information kiosk near the chamber building.

If significant new development were located in the downtown, such as a major employer, parking would be at a premium. Most lots are too small to support on-site parking, with either the existing building or a new one. This is already an issue on the island, where the former Solon Manufacturing Plant is being converted to retail use.

In other towns, developers may simply buy the adjoining lot and raze the building for parking. This “empties out” the downtown just to provide more parking spaces. Skowhegan addresses this in its Site Review Ordinance by permitting developers to contribute to municipal parking capacity in lieu of providing their own. This arrangement could be formalized, with establishment of a municipal parking district (MPD). An MPD could assess fees and raise funds for improvement and eventual expansion of the municipal lots.

### *Financial Stability*

The transportation system is very costly to maintain. The system is in a constant state of deterioration, and deferring maintenance accelerates the pace and costs of repair. Even without improvements, the roads in Skowhegan require over a million dollars a year in upkeep.

The roads and bridges for which the state is responsible are generally in good condition; however, state and federal funding for transportation is in decline in proportion to needs. Improvement projects are being postponed and maintenance deferred. Locally, the Town has a good system for identifying maintenance needs (RSMS), and is looking to upgrade it. The paving program is funded annually through the town’s CIP. We need to preserve funding adequate to keep the system at the same quality level as it currently operates.

Similarly, walking and biking trails often get short shrift in funding for maintenance and, especially, expansion. While the town’s sidewalks are generally in good condition and we have an enviable system of walking trails, we also have an ambitious plan to connect and enhance the pedestrian system, as well as establish a safe bicycle circulation network around town. The town should begin setting aside funds for implementation, to be used as matching funds for an aggressive grant-seeking effort.

### *Development and Traffic Growth*

Traffic continues to increase overall, driven in part by new residential and commercial development. Since new development is happening mostly on the outskirts of town, it is not surprising that the traffic growth and high crash locations are there, while traffic in the core remains unchanged. A new bridge, if located outside of the core area, would accelerate both commercial and rural sprawl unless managed.

Major traffic generators include Madison Avenue and the Fairgrounds Market Place, the Sappi and New Balance mills, the schools, and the hospital. Continued development of rural areas and commercial growth along the Waterville Road, will accelerate traffic growth on rural highways as well as Route 201.

Growth in traffic, and particularly commercial traffic, accelerates the deterioration of the highway system. Little can be done about this in the short term. In the long term, new development can be directed into existing well-served areas, and away from narrow or poorly-constructed rural roads.

Development also increases the number of driveways and intersections, contributing to traffic conflicts and safety concerns. The town has standards for location of those driveways, though this only provides for a case-by-case approach. The town should consider encouraging more interconnection between developments.

The grid pattern of streets in older sections of town produces quiet streets even in dense neighborhoods, because it gives people options. Subdivisions on dead-end roads funnel traffic onto main roads, creating more congestion. The Town should seek out opportunities to imitate the old grid system with interconnections between existing and proposed roads. This principle can be applied to commercial developments as well, requiring connections between parking lots, so cars need not travel on public roads for trips of just a few hundred feet. Though the town's ordinances contain these provisions, few developments implement them.

### *Regional and Statewide Trends*

More than any other public service, the transportation system is heavily connected to trends and events outside the town's boundaries. Commercial growth in Madison and new houses in Cornville put traffic on Skowhegan's road system, as does the interstate a dozen miles away. Sensitivity to these influences – and what others are doing about them – will help in preparing Skowhegan for the future.

Skowhegan's transportation problems will not disappear with the construction of another bridge. It might allow commercial traffic to skirt the downtown, but is almost certain to encourage sprawl, and the spreading out of traffic. Skowhegan will be even more of a crossroads, but that crossroads will become larger.

The idea of an east-west highway has been kicking around for almost half a century, but may be gaining momentum. The second bridge is envisioned as a potential component of that, with Route 2 the preferred alignment. As plans for the east-west highway progress, Skowhegan should be at the table. We stand to gain at least as much as any other town *en route*, and have good reason to be interested in the idea.

The Old Canada Road Scenic Byway consists of the upper stretches of Route 201. Even though the byway designation ends at the Madison-Solon town line, the impacts of the byway are likely to be felt in Skowhegan. As the byway becomes more well-known and a potential tourist attraction, tourist traffic will pick up in Skowhegan. This may increase traffic congestion, but will also provide another cog in our economic development engine.

### *Scenic and Environmental Impacts*

We tend to overlook the fact that roads and other forms of transportation can have an effect on our natural environment as well as our built one, ranging from interfering with wildlife movements to providing improved access to riverfront for bikers and walkers. The more people that use the system, the greater these impacts are. In this respect, a development design or location that minimizes demand for the transportation system can also reduce environmental impacts and pollution.

The existing road system has not resulted in any significant negative effects on wildlife or water quality. The Town is sensitive to potential erosion or runoff problems and follows best management practices provided by the MDOT for all ditching, culvert, and earth-moving activities. There is one drainage system that has been a constant source of erosion, but it drains Route 201 south of the urban compact, and is the MDOT responsibility.

Roads have in fact created many opportunities for access to historic and environmental resources and scenic vistas. Route 2 parallels the Kennebec River through much of Skowhegan, and provides a very pleasant travelling experience. Of particular note is the rest area and boat access at the great eddy, though the MDOT has recently explored the idea of closing it. This is an area where the Town may have to collaborate with the private owner to protect a scenic resource that the MDOT cannot. Route 201 also provides glimpses of the river. Bigelow Hill Road provides outstanding mountain vistas to the north.

## Chapter 8:

# Land Use and Development



### Planning Goal:

*Encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of Skowhegan, while protecting rural character, making efficient use of public facilities, and preventing development sprawl.*

One of the most important elements of a plan for the future of Skowhegan is its plan for growth. We've made many assumptions in this plan that support growth: continued home construction, accelerated economic development, expansion of public services and recreational opportunities, and so on. But if growth comes as we are predicting, what will its physical impact be? In this chapter, we are primarily concerned with the pattern of new development.

One of our primary concerns in planning for the pattern of new development is the cost of public services. Public services are more costly to provide to development spread out at random than it is to more traditional patterns, such as a village. This is true of roads, of school buses, of utilities, of fire protection, and other services. To the extent that we can retain Skowhegan's historic growth patterns and guide new development in the same manner, we can provide more cost-effective public services.

### Historic Development Pattern:

As described in the Chapter 1, Skowhegan initially formed around the river. The river provided transportation to the first settlers – they established their farms on the flatland closest – and power to the first mills. The early merchants set up shop near the mills, and the village was formed. Skowhegan's existing town center is the dominant land use feature of the town.

Skowhegan's town center area encompasses the dams and historic mill buildings, the "flatiron block" of storefronts, blocks of single-family homes and apartments built over the past 200 years, the heart of Somerset County's medical, legal, financial, and governmental services, as well as Skowhegan's town office, police, fire, and public works services. Over the years, the

downtown has expanded to encompass Madison Avenue, the hospital district, the Northgate Industrial Park, and the school complex on West Front Street.

The town center is at the crossroads of two major highways, so the natural tendency is for development to expand out along these roads. Route 2 to the west gradually tapers to widely distributed homes and open lands; Route 2 to the east has a cluster of commercial development in the Dudley Corner/River Road areas, but otherwise is primarily rural. Since the town center is just a half mile from the Madison town line to the north, Route 201 in that direction has been heavily developed, and has been the focal point of commercial growth for several years.

The town center is served by both public water and sewer systems, and is densely developed enough to support such systems. Further expansion is anticipated. The town created a *Sewer System Master Plan* in 2007, which identifies five feasible (out of seven possible) areas for extension of collector lines. Development within the areas identified would constitute a logical expansion of urban Skowhegan. (Map attached)

Route 201 to the south contains a mix of commercial development and private homes. It is anchored by the SAPPI paper mill at the Fairfield town line and the new Southgate Industrial Park just to the north of it. This is currently the most attractive and active site for new commercial development.

There are no significant concentrations of development in the remainder of town. The rural roads have seen quite a few individual homes and small subdivisions. There are large tracts of undeveloped land, and particularly along the boundary with Canaan to the east. Lake George and Oak Pond have some seasonal camps and a few year-round homes on their shores.

#### *Residential Development:*

Although Skowhegan shows the traditional pattern of dense housing in the town center and farmsteads in the countryside, contemporary development trends are changing that pattern. Signs of rural sprawl are beginning to emerge.

According to the 1990 Census, nearly 80 percent of Skowhegan's population lived in the census-defined urban area. Between 1990 and 2000, the urban part of Skowhegan gained a total of 39 housing units; the rural part gained 231. In the same period, the urban area gained 62 mobile homes but lost 43 apartment units, while the rural area gained 126. (More than half of all homes built in the rural area were mobile homes.) This resulted in a decline in urban area population of almost 300 residents during the 90's.

The census-defined urban area is not identical to the public sewer service area, but statistics for the two are parallel. Permit records kept by the Code Enforcement Officer indicate that between 1998 and 2008 – an 11 year period – 298 new housing units were placed in town. 180 of these – about 60 percent – were on septic systems, 118 hooked to the town sewer. This shows a slightly better record of urban growth recently, but still a minority.

Census figures and local permits both seem to indicate a loss of multi-family housing. This is discussed further in the housing chapter, but is used here to illustrate a pattern. Multi-family units tend to require a public sewer system. The loss of multi-family units relative to single-family is further evidence of a population shift to rural areas.

Development is most visible when it comes all at once in the form of a subdivision, but subdivisions in Skowhegan account for little more than one-third of rural housing lots. In ten years of rural development from 1998 to 2008, 6.5 new subdivision lots were created each year, though 16.4 new houses were built each year. Clearly, the great majority of new homes built are on individual lots not associated with subdivisions.

Skowhegan is fortunate to have seen at least some of the subdivisions over the past ten years occurring within the sewered area. About one-third of all new subdivision lots created in the past ten years are on sewer. It is notable that the average size of lots created on sewer is 0.87 acres, while those created on septic average 3.3 acres (See table 8-1). This allows for much more efficient utilization of land and provision of services.

**Table 8-1: Approved Subdivisions, 1998 – 2008**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subdivision Name</u>	<u>Sewered Lots</u>	<u>Unsewered Lots</u>	<u>Median Acreage</u>
6/8/98	Cady Subdivision		3	2
8/17/99	Scanlin Subdivision Phase 2	8		1
11/16/99	Hill Crest Subdivison		4	9
8/15/00	Timber View Estates II	10		0.5
5/1/01	White Pines Subdivison	3		.65
8/21/01	Parlin St. Manufactured Hsg. Sub.	4		.5
9/17/02	Rowe Road Subdivision		3	3
10/7/03	Prentiss Cluster Subdivision	5		.5
10/7/03	Sam Circle Subdivision	3		7
12/4/03	Glen View Acres Subdivision		14	4
5/4/04	Bigelow Hill Estates		6	2
8/17/04	Southgate Industrial Park*		7	5
9/6/05	Yankee Heights Subdivision		10	2
11/30/06	Stony Brook Subdivision		3	2
12/11/06	Veilleux Subdivision	3		.5
8/30/07	Peaceful Pines Subdivision		5	3
4/15/08	South Side Estates Subdivision		13	3
11/4/08	Robin L. Scanlin Subdivision	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	1.5
	TOTAL:	37	71	

\* Commercial subdivision

Source: Skowhegan Planning Office

There is no locus in the rural area that appears to be more popular than others. There are certainly quite a few corners of town that are desirable due to road access, scenic qualities, or landforms, but actual development trends seem to follow the needs of current landowners.

### *Commercial and Institutional Development:*

Skowhegan's new commercial development, unlike its housing, is much more likely to occur in the existing built-up areas. The town has only had site review requirements since 2004, with very spotty records before that time, but since then, virtually all of the commercial growth has occurred within the reach of the sewer system. The only exception has been a building constructed on the town's Southgate Industrial Park.

The downtown area contains the highest concentration of commercial or mixed-use buildings. Water Street and the Flatiron Block, in particular, represent iconic commercial architecture from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Several of these buildings have been actively occupied for decades, and others are currently undergoing renovation. Assisted by Main Street Skowhegan and the town's Community Development Program, the town center is undergoing revitalization. There are constraints to this trend: most of the buildings have virtually no parking or expansion capabilities, and many cannot provide handicapped access to their upper stories. The greatest opportunity for redevelopment is the former Solon Manufacturing mill building on Island Ave. The three-story brick mill is in the process of conversion to retail and other uses.

Madison Avenue is the primary commercial highway. Lower Madison Avenue is a blend of historic homes (many converted to commercial use) and older commercial buildings. The upper portion of the road is characterized by more modern commercial architecture, much of which is built on the sites of older commercial buildings. The entire length of Madison Avenue, from town center to Madison, is less than a mile.

Madison Avenue has the capacity for increased occupancy. Two older retail complexes are under-utilized, and new construction pads are available at a third.

Waterville Road – Route 201 south of town – contains more opportunities for commercial growth. This is a high-traffic road, the direct link to the Interstate, with quite a bit of developable land. Currently, the frontage is characterized by a variety of development, from classy riverfront homes, to small, roadside businesses. Perhaps the factor constraining greater development of the road is the lack of public water and sewer.

The SAPPI paper mill and the town's Southgate Industrial Park are at the very southern end of Route 201. The park was sited there because of proximity to the mill's three-phase power, and a water system is planned for the near future.

Prospective plans for the second bridge show it linking up to Route 201 just south of the built-up area. Five miles of frontage south of the proposed juncture has no geographic nor ownership constraints. While there is not currently a demand for large commercial tracts, this area is certainly appropriate, if public sewer (at a minimum) were available.

Another focus of growth is the Redington-Fairview General Hospital on Route 104/Fairview Ave. The hospital is expanding its campus, with a new medical office building and added parking. It owns additional tracts, suitable for further growth of health-related services.

## **Land Use Guidance, Zoning, and Regulation:**

Skowhegan has a network of local ordinances intended to regulate local development. Taken together, they place little restriction on new home construction, and increasingly-tighter restrictions on larger and more complex development.

Two ordinances are mandated: the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, which restricts development within 250' of rivers and ponds, and within 75' of primary streams; and the Floodplain Management Ordinance, which restricts development on the 100-year floodplain. These are the only ordinances which constitute "zoning," affecting only certain property owners. All other ordinances apply equally throughout the jurisdiction.

In addition to the mandated Floodplain Management and Shoreland Zoning Ordinances, the town has Site Review, Subdivision, and Building Safety Ordinances.

The Building Safety Ordinance was last updated in 2004. It sets standards for lot size (20,000 square feet) for lots with septic systems, and setbacks (5 feet) outside of developed blocks with common walls. Although these are very basic standards which are almost always exceeded, there has been no occasion or reason to consider increasing them. The ordinance also requires new development to be inspected (for fire safety) prior to occupancy. This ordinance creates a *de facto* zoning requirement based on connection to sewer, but the 20,000 square feet is required by state law, does not say anything new.

The current Subdivision Ordinance was enacted in 1989 and amended as recently as 2005. The Ordinance was state of the art when adopted, and has been amended to keep current with state law and practices in street and access design. Other than some needed tweaks to procedures and standards, the Ordinance adequately regulates the technical aspects of subdivision development.

Among other things, the Ordinance requires subdivision lots to have 100 feet of road frontage and 10,000 square feet of land area if on sewer, 200 feet and 40,000 square feet of area if on septic systems. This means that subdivision lots must meet a higher standard than individually-created lots, although since the average subdivision lot is over three acres, it does not seem to be a concern.

The Site Review Ordinance was overhauled in 2008 to become more user-friendly and current with development practices. The Ordinance sets a permitting process for new commercial development; Planning Board approval is required for buildings over 10,000 square feet and some other forms of development. The Ordinance contains standards to limit a development's burden on traffic, water flows, town services, the neighbors, and other elements. The new ordinance has been tested several times in the past year and has performed well.

Neither the Subdivision nor Site Review Ordinances regulate development by zoning. Both contain different standards for some urban development, i.e. within the sewer area or the urban compact area (roadway segments designated by MDOT).

Though the town's existing ordinances require only minor updates, a much larger regulatory issue is on the horizon. The town will be required to enforce the statewide building code by 2012. This is more of a housing-related issue than land use, but the new regulation will have to operate in conjunction with the existing ordinances, and be enforced by the Code Enforcement Officer.

The town has good capacity to administer a regulatory system. The town has a fully equipped planning office, with a full-time, certified CEO and a professional planner on retainer from Kennebec Valley Council of Governments. The planning office works closely with the town's community development office to assist applicants prior to formal submittals.

### **Analysis and Issues for Continued Development:**

Skowhegan is the clear population, commercial, and service center for Somerset County, and as such will continue to be the focus of development for the region. As the region's economy shifts, however, from an industrial base to a service base, different styles and patterns of development emerge. The town has the infrastructure to support it; we just need to ensure that we have policies and standards that guide development into that infrastructure.

The traditional industrial base tended to be oriented towards power needs (water power along the river, then three-phase transmitted power); it was highly capitalized and relied heavily on labor proximity. A dense development pattern was the logical end. The new service base is much more diversified and small-scale; it is oriented towards clients/customers, and reliant on visibility and access. The tendency is for a dispersed, road-oriented development pattern. This creates the conflict with Skowhegan's vision for the future.

Skowhegan wants to build on its traditional downtown, its natural attractiveness, and its rural landscape as objectives for the future. This runs contrary to the emerging growth pattern. The town also wants to minimize the burden of government on its citizens, including both regulation and taxation. This takes away two of the strongest tools for realizing its vision. The town has not yet reached the point where the vision is lost, but will have to look at some creative ways to attain these competing objectives.

Skowhegan's residential growth patterns have changed dramatically over the past decade. The 1995 Plan claimed that "the Town has largely avoided 'sprawl' because of the pattern of development over the past twenty years." (page 8) But in 2000, the census tallied only 57 percent of the population in the urban area. And since 1998, approximately 60 percent of new housing, and 66 percent of subdivisions, have occurred outside the town's sewer area. Meanwhile, the town has lost dozens of housing units in the form of multi-family buildings in the urban area.

Land use regulation is used as a tool for managing development impacts. The Site Review Ordinance adequately regulates the design of commercial development, but does not limit or direct it. The Subdivision Ordinance does the same for subdivision development. The Building Safety Ordinance specifies lot sizes and setbacks, but except for sewer service areas,

these standards apply uniformly townwide. Outside of state/federal mandates, there is no regulation of development by location. *At least three proposals for townwide zoning have been rejected by local voters in the past twenty years.*

Although there is considerable economic advantage for a person to build in areas of town accessible to public water and sewer, the initial costs sometimes get in the way. Building lots with sewer and water are more expensive, and there are substantial connection fees for new hookups.

Based on the town's development and regulatory history, any attempt to guide the location of new development should be within the context of existing regulations, or in the form of incentives or direct action. Skowhegan's situation is not that dramatic; a shift of just nine housing units per year from unsewered to sewerred lots would change the ratio from 40:60 to 75:25. And commercial development is still virtually entirely within the sewerred area.

Skowhegan has the demographic trends to support our vision. As the service center for the county, we have a huge potential market for workforce housing in the urban area. And as an aging population – both in town and the county – we are rapidly approaching a need for housing more suited for seniors or people simply wanting to “downsize.” Both of these trends can be addressed with multi-family, townhouse, or other relatively high density housing appropriate for sewerred areas.

The town has shown admirable foresight in developing a master plan for sewer expansions. These expansion areas are the obvious candidates for future growth areas. Four out of the five identified expansion areas include state highways and are designed to accommodate commercial growth, but several of them also include enough capacity and range to serve new residential neighborhoods. However, none of the expansion areas are funded or proposed to be built in the near future. The town may need to consider a mechanism for financing and implementing the expansions.

## Chapter 9: Farming & Forestry in Skowhegan



### Planning Goal:

*To safeguard agriculture and forestry resources from development which threatens those resources.*

Most people refer to Maine as rural. But what exactly do we mean by “rural?” Portland is not rural; neither is downtown Skowhegan. Yet, the bulk of Maine outside of Portland is rural, just as the balance of Skowhegan is rural, right?

According to Webster’s Dictionary, “rural” means “of the country, or country life.” Of course, Webster also defines “countryside” as “a rural area or its inhabitants.” The thesaurus tells us that synonyms for the adjective “country” are “arcadian, bucolic, pastoral, provincial, rural, [and] rustic.” All emotionally-charged words, but again, what does it mean?

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation conducted a rigorous study in 2001, with in-depth interviews of hundreds of rural, suburban, and urban residents across the United States, to define perceptions of rural America. They found that, “Agriculture plays the predominant role in respondents’ perceptions of rural America...the overwhelming majority of people in our study – both rural and non-rural – believe agriculture is the dominant industry of rural America.” Perceptions of rural America are dominated by agricultural images, but not just any agriculture – small family farms: “The three most common images of rural America...were farms and crops (32 percent), pastures (21 percent), and animals (12 percent).” Skowhegan has all three.

Driving along two-lane roads particularly north of downtown and in eastern Skowhegan, seeing the farms and forests, definitely conjures up the thought “rural.” Despite creeping sprawl, viable agriculture and forest land covers the majority of Skowhegan.

### Agriculture in Skowhegan:

Skowhegan has at least 2,949 acres used for farming including hayfields, cropland and pasture. 1,920 acres of farmland are enrolled in the Farm and Open Space Tax Program. In 1995, there were 1,100 acres of farmland in the program. Since then 820 acres have been added. This program allows property owners a reduction in their assessed property value. The land

may be used for crops, pasture, or horticulture and can include woodland and wasteland. Additionally, the parcel must contribute at least \$2,000 gross income from farming activities, each year. Most of the farms in this program are small. Of the 30 parcels in the program, there are only three over 100 acres in size.

The Farm and Open Space Program is not so much about tax breaks for farmers as about recognition of another role that farmland plays. Contrary to common perception, building tax base is not the best way to keep taxes down. With a few exceptions (such as the SAPPI mill in Skowhegan), tax dollars from new development do not pay their share of local costs. Hundreds of case studies through the US have shown that towns provide about \$1.06 in services for every commercial tax dollar they receive, and \$1.27 in services for every residential tax dollar. But towns provide only \$0.16 of services for every tax dollar from farms and woodland. All “tax base” is subsidized by the taxes from open land; the more land that gets developed, the less there is to subsidize. Perhaps this is why taxes are always higher in the cities.

Farming itself remains a viable industry, despite dramatic changes to the industry. The old model – large, full-time farms producing crops, animals, or other products for sale in bulk to the food industry – has become harder to sustain in the face of even larger, well-funded competition from better growing areas of the world. This model is represented by large barns and grain silos. The new model in Maine produces small crops of high value produce for sale to local customers. It does not need large barns or prime farmland. It is represented more by the local farmers market, roadside stands, and premium value-added products.

The shifting trend is amply illustrated in agricultural statistics for Somerset County. (Ag statistics are only collected as low as the county level.) The number of farms in Somerset County in 2007 is the highest since at least 1974, with 564 farms. The total acreage in farms has dropped: it was 124,000 acres in 1974 and 111,000 acres in 2007. As a result, the average farm size dropped as well: from 259 acres in 1974 to 197 in 2007. That is the statistical result of a few large farms shutting down and a lot of farms as small as five acres starting up. About 40 percent of farms are now in the 50-180 acre size class, with another 1/3 at 10-50 acres. Not coincidentally, while the value of traditional commodity crops like apples, dairy, and forage have flat lined, non-traditional crops such as strawberries, organic meats, and table vegetables have skyrocketed. And it is no secret that Somerset County has recently become one of the top maple syrup-producing areas of the world.

The trend is also affecting employment and income at farms. Smaller farms do not employ as much outside labor, and in fact, few farms are even full-time jobs for their owners. In 1974, 296 people listed farming as their primary occupation; in 2007, the number dropped to 238. Significantly, the number of female “principal operators” went from 24 in 1978 to 45 in 1997, to 92 in 2007. And of greatest importance, the average-per-farm income has gone from \$47,000 in 1992, to \$57,000 in 1997, to \$95,000 in 2007. Like the ideal model of a successful business, *farm income has increased while productivity has improved and quantity of inputs (land) has been reduced.*

This new model of farming requires a different form of community support and planning for its success. Reliance on infrastructure, such as shipping facilities and prime farmland, is less important. Viewing farming as a vital form of local small business becomes more important.

In Skowhegan, community support for farming is evidenced by a thriving farmers' market, two CSAs, a pick-your-own orchard in Skowhegan and, of course, the continuing Skowhegan State Fair. Plans to establish a commercial kitchen and grist mill fed by locally-produced grains are an additional example.

The map of active farmland in Skowhegan (attached) illustrates how much farming takes place in town. The more significant farms in town are inventoried below:

- Grassland Farms: Organic Dairy located off Malbon's Mills Road. Intends to branch into organic grain production.
- Stonewall Farm and Gardens: Table vegetables and farmstand on East Ridge Road.
- Cayford Orchard: Apple orchard and pick-your-own on Hilton Hill Road.
- Dostie Farm: Maple syrup and retail store on the Back Road.
- Oak Ridge Farms: Icelandic sheep and value-added products on Route 2.
- Pine Acres Farm: Table vegetables, farmstand, blueberry pick-your own on East River Road.
- Smith Brothers: Maple products and retail store on Rowe Road.
- Smith's Maple Products: Retail store for maple products on Bennet Ave.
- Strawberry Hill Farms: Maple products and retail store on Rowe Road.
- Chez Londorf: Seasonal Maple Products on Burrill Hill Road

A map of agriculturally significant soils is included in this section of the Plan. As the map demonstrates, prime farmland soil lies north and east of downtown and west of East Ridge Road, near the Kennebec River, and between Canaan Road and Oak Pond Road. Unfortunately, some of this area is also where people have traditionally made their homes, and development occurs on top of good farm soils in some parts of town. Nonetheless, many areas with these important soils are not developed, and a new state mandate requires that significant farmland be identified during a subdivision review process.

One or more of the following voluntary programs managed by the USDA provides conservation assistance to nine local farmers: the Conservation Stewardship Program in which agricultural and forestry producers if under contract must treat two resource concerns; the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which offers assistance to implement conservation practices that may include waste storage or treatment that will require a comprehensive nutrient management plan; and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program that provides landowner assistance improving/restoring wildlife habitat.

### **Forest Management:**

Forestland is also a major contributor to Skowhegan's sense of "rural." The Tree Growth Tax Program has 99 parcels, 8,437 acres, enrolled in Skowhegan, up almost 1,000 acres from the 7,454 acres enrolled in 1996. Enrolled land makes up approximately 13 of

Skowhegan's 62 square miles, with many more wooded parcels not enrolled. The Tree Growth program is similar to the Farm and Open Space program, in that a landowner with at least 10 acres of managed forestland can obtain a reduced property tax assessment.

Many wooded parcels are not enrolled in the program for various reasons. Some are conservation lands (not managed commercially). Some forestland has been protected by Somerset Woods Trustees, a land trust that owns/protects 560 acres in Skowhegan including Coburn Woods, a 300 acre parcel with a sustainable forest and wildlife management plan. Other forested conservation lands include Lake George Regional Park, Aqua Maine property, the Yankee Woodlot, and several small parks owned by the Town. Many woodlots are either too small to enroll in Tree Growth, or their owners do not want to be bound by a management plan. Eyeball estimates of total forest cover in Skowhegan run about 65 percent (25,000 acres).

Clearing trees for development is more of an issue than clear-cutting for forestry. Although the total acres under management have increased since 1996, overall forest cover has declined. The only significant corporate forest land in Skowhegan is owned by Plum Creek.

A significant portion of Skowhegan's economy is derived from the forest resource, tapped in to the larger region. The SAPPI paper mill is the town's largest employer and taxpayer. Other forest-dependent businesses include smaller sawmill operations, equipment sellers and mechanics, and trucking companies.

Skowhegan has a long history of involvement in urban forestry as well. These are the small parks and roadsides in town that provide shade, exercise, and aesthetic appeal to residents. Using Project Canopy grant funds, the town completed a strategic management plan for its community forest resources in 2007. The town is now moving on to implement the plan.

## **Analysis and Issues:**

Skowhegan contains approximately 39,680 taxable acres. In 1996, 22% of that land was registered under either the Farm and Open Space or Tree Growth Current Use Tax Program. Today, approximately 10,524 acres are in these programs, 27% of Skowhegan's taxable land. This is a comfortable increase, and a sizable proportion of Skowhegan's land area.

Increasing property values and demand for development have contributed to a loss of farmland. But there are positive indicators for farming in Somerset County. The number of farms has increased and average sales per farm in the county almost doubled between 2002 and 2007. This data indicates that many farms are becoming more lucrative. Among the reasons cited for this profitability, are 1) conversions to organic farming which fetches a premium price, 2) more local retail outlets, where farmers receive a premium over commodity prices and 3) easy access to local restaurants and stores where farmers enjoy a steady market at near-retail prices. Interestingly, local policies can influence all three of the reasons given.

The new model of local farming not only affords a farmer more revenue, but it also protects town resources. Best Management Practices, such as maintaining riparian buffers and diversifying cover crops, in conjunction with organic farming, minimizes pollution and

sediment runoff in the community. The Town can encourage sustainable farming with informational brochures to local farmers and assistance with financial and regulatory issues. The Planning Board can support local farms by lessening the development review burden for farmers who wish to add a farm stand or value-added operation. The Skowhegan school system could purchase from local farms, providing a sustainable stream of income for farmers. Finally, municipal officials can support local farmers' markets, restaurants, and businesses aimed at adding value to local farm produce.

Currently, one of the hidden aspects of agriculture and forestry in Skowhegan is that it is being increasingly forced "out of view" – relegated to back lots with a tiny sliver of land providing access to the public road. Individual homes line rural roads, many on small lots. The visual image of half a dozen homes stretched back-to-back along the road clashes with the pastoral image of rural agriculture.

In addition to the image of rural life being disrupted, tracts of potential farmland are still being lost to development. There are two categories of agriculturally significant soils recognized by the USDA that have been mapped in Somerset County: Prime Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance. Prime Farmland Soils, according to the USDA, have the soil properties needed to produce sustained high yields of grain crops. Farmlands of Statewide Importance have similar characteristics to Prime Farmlands, but not in great enough quantities to be labeled Prime Farmland. As the description of Prime Farmland above implies, less effort is required to produce high yields. The grist mill proposed for the old jail in Skowhegan indicates the value of protecting these significant farmland soils for production of grains. In addition, a state law enacted in 2009 requires areas of agriculturally significant soils to be identified in subdivision review applications.

There are currently no local organized efforts to protect farmland in Skowhegan, outside of the traditional role played by the Soil and Water Conservation District.

Significant tracts of forestland have been protected by Somerset Woods Trustees, Lake George, and Aqua Maine. There are organizations such as Maine Farmland Trust and the Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine, which operate statewide respectively protecting farmland and forestland.

## Chapter 10: Water Resources



### Planning Goal:

*To protect the quality and manage the quantity of our water resources, including lakes, aquifers, great ponds, estuaries, and rivers.*

### The Kennebec River and Its Tributaries

Skowhegan is located entirely within the Kennebec River basin. The total drainage area of the Kennebec River is 5,870 square miles; the River's drainage area to Skowhegan is 3,894 square miles.

The Kennebec River is perhaps one of the Town's most significant natural resources. It is important for the generation of hydroelectric power and it has fisheries, wildlife, aesthetic, historic and recreational value to the community. Next Era Energy generates hydroelectric power at the Weston Project located within the urban area on the Kennebec. The project consists of two concrete gravity dams totaling 921 feet in length and a powerhouse that is integrated with the south dam.

Recreationally, the river is used for canoeing, boating, fishing and swimming. Public access to the Kennebec below the Weston Project dam is provided by the Department of Conservation's public boat ramp on Somerset Woods Trustees' land downstream of the Great Eddy. The river also serves as a scenic amenity to the community, and provides important fisheries and wildlife habitat for a number of species. Historically, the river was important for transportation, as life support to Native Americans and as a part of the Arnold Trail.

There are a number of subwatersheds that are drained by tributaries to the Kennebec River-these include:

1. Wesserunsett Stream Watershed, which includes Cold Brook and West Branch, and drains most of the northern portion of the town.
2. Carrabassett Stream Watershed, which includes the West Branch of the Black

Stream, Lake George, Lambert Brook, Round Pond, Oak Pond, Stafford Brook, Oak Stream and the Canaan Bog, and consists of a band of land along the eastern side of the town.

3. Snow Brook- Craigin Brook-Martin Stream Watershed, that occupies the southeastern portion of the town.

4. Currier Brook Watershed, which includes a portion of the urban area and outlying area just south of the Kennebec River.

5. Ledge Brook Watershed, a small area located along the town's boundary with Norridgewock.

The Kennebec River and its tributary streams have been classified by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection as Class B. Class B waters are generally defined as suitable for drinking water supply after treatment, for fishing, recreation in and on the water, industrial process and cooling water supply, hydroelectric generation, navigation, and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life.

The Kennebec River is used as a supplemental source of drinking water for Skowhegan by Aqua Maine Water Company. The watershed above the river intake includes a majority of the downtown area of Skowhegan.

A number of small streams in Skowhegan have been categorized as "impaired," meaning they are suffering some form of pollution from urban development. Of these, Whitten Brook is the highest priority for action. A Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Report has been prepared to illustrate problems with the stream, and a stream Management Plan should be the next step in restoring it. Cold Brook and Currier Brook are also classified as impaired.

Water quality in the river is affected by activities that occur within the watershed. Runoff can carry pollutants, eroded soils and other substances into the river thereby degrading water quality. The urban area includes a number of gas stations, petroleum storage facilities, manufacturing facilities, motor vehicle maintenance garages, and other commercial and industrial activities. Increased turbidity has been noted in water drawn from the river during periods of high run-off. Based on the observed increases in turbidity, the river intake is not used during these periods. The shorefront land adjacent to the river intake is undeveloped and under the control of Coburn Park and the Town of Skowhegan.

Drainage from the streets and urban area sometimes enters the river as combined sewer outflows (CSO). Combined Sewer Systems are old systems that were designed to collect both rainwater runoff and domestic and industrial sewage. Most of the time this was conveyed to a sewage treatment plant where it is treated and then discharged to a water body. During periods of heavy precipitation the waste water volume in a combined sewer system was historically designed to overflow directly to nearby streams and the Kennebec River. These outfalls are permitted by the State Department of Environmental Protection, and are monitored to maintain the standards required by the Clean Water Act.

Skowhegan's system was significantly upgraded in 2007 to reduce CSO events from an average of 300 events annually to fewer than 100 events in 2008 and with control system changes are expected to drop to 10 events in 2009 according to data from Skowhegan's Water Pollution Control Plant.

## **Lakes and Ponds:**

There is one lake and four ponds located in Skowhegan. Three of these, Lake George, Oak Pond, and Round Pond are designated by the State as Great Ponds because they are 10 acres or more in size. The largest is Lake George, a small portion of which is located within Skowhegan, with the remainder in Canaan. Lake George drains into Oak Pond. Round Pond also drains into Oak Pond but at 14 acres, does not command a very large watershed. Great Ponds and their shorelands are subject to special regulation through Shoreland Zoning and Maine's Natural Resources Protection Act. Upper and Lower Ponds together are approximately four acres in size, located northeast of downtown Skowhegan, and are used in conjunction with wells as the primary source of the AquaMaine Water Supply.

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) gathers data on many lakes in Maine. The following is information available to date:

### Lake George:

Direct drainage area: 5.63 square miles  
Surface area: 318 acres  
Flushing rate: 0.77 flushes per year  
Maximum depth: 68 feet  
Mean depth: 24 feet  
Fisheries management: warm water and cold water

Based on 2004 DEP data, Lake George appears to have stable water quality conditions. The lake shows dissolved oxygen depletion in the bottom waters at levels which are considered as having a moderate reduction in cold water fish habitat, but pose no immediate risk for the development of a significant phosphorus internal recycling problem. Too much phosphorus can lead to algal blooms. An abundance of algae will turn a lake green, block out sunlight to deeper levels, and deplete oxygen supplies, which in turn endanger fish and plants.

Lake George serves as a natural resource of regional significance. The Lake George Regional Park was created in 1993 out of a private summer camp, to meet regional recreation needs identified in the State's Recreation Plan. The Park, most of which is located within Canaan, consists of 125 acres, and includes two swimming areas, hiking trails, boat access, and picnicking areas. With the exception of the park and a few cottages, there is very little development on the shores or within the watershed of Lake George.

### Oak Pond:

Direct Drainage area: 1.17 square miles

Surface area: 86.5 acres  
Flushing Rate: 4.55 flushes per year  
Maximum depth: 53 feet  
Mean depth: 25 feet  
Fisheries management; warm water and cold water

Water quality for Oak Pond is average and the lake has stable water quality conditions with moderate algal production according to 2004 DEP data. Dissolved oxygen depletion occurs in the bottom waters to levels which are considered as having a moderate reduction in cold water fish habitat, but pose no immediate risk for the development of a significant phosphorus internal recycling problem.

There are a number of camps and residences on the shores of Oak Pond and within its watershed. Public access is not available to Oak Pond or Round Pond, limiting fisheries management activities.

While Lake George and Oak Pond water quality seems fine now, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) includes both on its list of Lakes Most at Risk of Development. A majority of Lake George and Oak Pond watershed consists of mature forest according to 2001 Colby College Water Quality Report. The report recommends protecting mature forest in watershed to maintain good water quality. Phosphorous management according to DEP-recommended practices is required by both the subdivision and site review ordinances.

#### Round Pond:

Direct Drainage area: 2.88 square miles  
Surface area: 14 acres  
Flushing Rate: 19.84 flushes per year

Round Pond's rapid flushing rate contributes in part to its good water quality, and it is not listed as a Lake at Risk from Development.

#### Upper and Lower Ponds:

Upper and Lower Ponds are the primary sources of drinking water for Skowhegan providing 80% of the total. The local watershed relative to the intake of the ponds is mostly forested with limited residential development along roadways that border the watershed. However, the watershed is tucked into the broader Skowhegan urban area. The Water Company owns 114 acres, the majority of the land surrounding Upper and Lower Ponds.

The ponds are off limits to recreational activities or shorefront development. Recreational vehicles use the area around the ponds, however, resulting in soil erosion in certain locations. Data are not available to determine the trophic state of Upper or Lower Ponds. Raw water pH and turbidity are monitored regularly and the ponds show good water quality.

The overall ranking for susceptibility of these ponds to contamination is low to moderate according to a 2003 Source Water Assessment Report. This conclusion is based on the limited development, significant land control in the watershed by the water company, and on the more densely-settled, urban setting that immediately surrounds the watershed. However DEP includes these ponds on its list of Lakes Most at Risk of Development. The ponds are believed to be fed by groundwater seepage from the aquifer, which exists both inside and outside the surface watershed of the ponds. Therefore, the quantity and quality of this water are potentially sensitive to land uses overlying the aquifer.

## **Wetlands:**

Wetlands, regardless of size, act to prevent flooding by absorbing and dispersing excess rainfall; they serve as recharge areas for groundwater; they provide habitat for flora and fauna; and they act as water purifiers. There are a number of wetland areas within Skowhegan as the Water Resources Map indicates. Canaan Bog, located in the southeastern corner of Skowhegan, is by far the largest wetland in town approaching 3000 acres in size. At least a dozen other wetlands are over ten acres and therefore protected by shoreland zoning standards.

Additional wetland information is included in Chapter 11, Critical Natural Resources.

## **Groundwater:**

Groundwater is literally water found in the ground, as distinct from surface water or water in the air. Aquifers are geological formations in the ground containing usable quantities of water. There are two types of ground water aquifers: sand and gravel aquifers and bedrock aquifers. Over half the homes in Maine rely on private bedrock groundwater wells.

The Maine Geological Survey (MGS) has mapped sand and gravel aquifers but not bedrock aquifers in Somerset County. The sand and gravel areas mapped represent principal ground water recharge sites (recharge is the process of precipitation filtering through the soil to replenish ground water).

MGS has mapped one significant sand and gravel aquifer and two lesser aquifers in Skowhegan. Significant sand and gravel aquifers are areas that have moderate to good potential ground water yield – generally between 10 to 50 gallons per minute. The other category of aquifers includes those with yields of between 3 and 10 gallons per minute. The significant aquifer is located in the area around the intersection of Route 150 and the Steward Hill Road, just north of the urban area. The less significant aquifer is much larger; it surrounds the significant aquifer, extends eastward to Malbon's Mill Road, westward to the Russell Road, and includes much of the urban area north of the Kennebec River. The other sand and gravel aquifer is located along either side of the Kennebec River just northeast of the SAPPI mill.

The primary sources of ground water contamination in Maine are malfunctioning septic systems, leaking underground fuel storage tanks, salt leachate from sand/salt stockpiles and leachate from landfills. Certain land uses such as automobile graveyards and junkyards,

agricultural use of pesticides and herbicides, and certain industrial activities also have the potential for contaminating ground water.

The Town's primary municipal water supply, Upper and Lower Ponds, is located near the significant aquifer. A solid waste facility was located north of this aquifer. The 2003 Source Water Assessment points out that the aquifer could be a supplemental water source to Upper and Lower Ponds. The report also asserts that a lack of zoning to control future nearby urban development could negatively impact the water quality of Upper and Lower Ponds. The report recommends establishing an Upper and Lower Pond watershed protection zone and a significant aquifer protection zone to protect actual and potential sources of Skowhegan's drinking water.

The Skowhegan Site Review Ordinance contains up-to-date performance standards regarding use, storage, and management of hazardous or toxic materials and other potential pollutants.

### **Shorelands/Floodplains:**

Shorelands are land areas adjoining water bodies that can serve to maintain water quality and provide important wildlife habitat. Shorelands with steep slopes and highly erodible soils are particularly fragile and can be easily eroded causing sedimentation of adjacent water bodies. Natural, vegetated areas on shorelands can serve to hold the soil in place. As wildlife habitat, undisturbed shorelands usually have a greater diversity of species and often serve as important travel corridors. So-called "buffer areas" consisting of undisturbed vegetated areas also serve to filter out nitrogen, phosphorus and other contaminants from runoff from nearby land-use activities.

Skowhegan's Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, updated in 2009 to meet State requirements, helps protect water resources. The Town's Site Review Ordinance, updated in 2008, also addresses non-point pollution with stormwater provisions requiring "that biological and chemical properties of receiving waters must not be degraded by stormwater runoff."

Floodplains are associated to varying degrees with most of the town's water bodies. Flooding generally occurs in the spring during periods of heavy rainfall, melting snow, and ice dams. Flooding has historically had its greatest impact on the town along the banks of the Kennebec River. Major floods have occurred in 1936, 1973, 1984 and 1987. The April 1987 flood is the flood-of-record for the area.

The impact is such that about 15 years ago, Skowhegan became one of the first Maine communities to install and monitor its own river gauges. The U.S. Geological Survey maintains other flow gauges on the Kennebec at Bingham (35 miles upstream) and Sidney (26 miles downstream).

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has mapped 100-year floodplains in Skowhegan. A 100-year flood is a flood that has one chance in 100 of being equaled or exceeded in any one year period. Mapped floodplains are located along the banks of the following water bodies in Skowhegan: the Kennebec River, Cold Brook, West Branch

Wesserunsett Stream, Wesserunsett Stream, Currier Brook, West Branch Currier Brook, Whitten Brook, West Branch Black Stream, Carrabasset Stream, areas of the Canaan Bog, Lake George, Lambert Brook, Round Pond, Oak Pond and Oak Stream.

FEMA Maps are used for the administration of the National Flood Insurance Program. To participate in the program the Town is required to administer a Floodplain Management Ordinance that is designed to discourage additional development within the floodplain. Skowhegan has an aggressive program of floodplain management. In addition to having a certified ordinance, the town participates in the Community Rating System, and has an emergency Management Plan, with the Town Manager designated as Emergency Management Director. The Town cooperates closely with Somerset County Emergency Management on flood monitoring and early warning, with the county agency now responsible to monitoring the river gauges.

### **Analysis and Issues:**

The Kennebec River is the predominant water feature in Skowhegan. Over the life of the town, the river has evolved from transporting settlers to transporting logs, to providing water power, to carrying industrial waste. It is now virtually free of pollution, and is again emerging as an asset to the community, this time in the form of a recreational draw.

Point sources of pollution from Skowhegan's considerable industrial base have been eliminated, with discharges either treated on-site (SAPPI) or directed to Skowhegan's sewage treatment facility. Sewer overflows have been addressed through a multi-million dollar holding tank system. The river is used as a supplemental public drinking water source, using the same treatment as the primary source.

The town works closely with Aqua Maine Water Company, the provider of public water. Although the company's primary source – two spring-fed ponds – is just outside the downtown commercial district, the company owns a protective buffer, and the town has regulations in place to limit potential contaminants to the groundwater. There should be no capacity or quality problems with the public water system.

There is at least one stream in the urban area classified as an "urban impaired watershed," primarily due to the number of commercial uses and impervious surface in the watershed. The Town is addressing these issues through watershed planning, and has standards in its site review ordinance to promote low impact development practices. As well, the Town's public works staff are regularly trained and have good awareness of best management practices for road maintenance and construction.

Lake George is the most significant great pond. Most of the watershed is either inaccessible or controlled by Lake George Regional Park. There are no commercial uses, and very few camps in the watershed. Oak Pond is smaller and only slightly more developed. Both are located in the Canaan Bog complex, which limits development potential, but the site review ordinance requires phosphorous management techniques and the subdivision ordinance is proposed to be amended to do so.

Skowhegan has historically been subject to flooding, so has an aggressive floodplain management program in place. The Town's Floodplain Management Ordinance is up to date, we have a river monitoring system in place, and a close relationship with the Somerset Emergency Management Agency.

# Chapter 11:

## Critical Natural Resources

### Planning Goal:

*To protect critical natural resources including wetlands, wildlife and fisheries habitat, shorelands, scenic vista, and unique natural areas.*

### Description of Critical Natural Resources:

Critical natural resources include wildlife and fisheries habitat, wetlands, shorelands, scenic vistas, and unique natural areas. Critical natural resources are thus a wide variety of environmental attributes providing the backbone of an ecological system. By implication, a loss of critical natural resources leads to air and water pollution, decreased wildlife diversity, and overall environmental degradation. As our human footprint on the land increases, we disturb these resources. For example, water quality is significantly affected by human development patterns. The more impervious surface on the land, such as roads, homes, and driveways, the more pollution enters our streams and lakes from overland runoff.

The quality of a critical natural resource is related to its size. The more fragmented a forest becomes, the less able it is to support many of its natural inhabitants. Development fragments habitat. Roads, utility corridors, buildings, parking lots, and any other human construct that breaks apart a natural habitat “fragments” that habitat. Fragmented habitats have increased proportions of edge area.

Many predators, such as raccoons, foxes, and crows concentrate hunting along forest edges. Exotic and pest plant species invade edge habitats more easily than interior woods. Climate is also affected, with edge-dominated patches having higher temperatures, more wind, and variable humidity. Eventually, biodiversity of an ecosystem is compromised, and it simply becomes a matter of time before the “natural” environment is as homogeneous as the ubiquitous suburban cul-de-sacs. Many native species populations decline over time when there are small and fragmented habitats.

## Wildlife and their Habitats:

Certain wildlife habitats have been identified by the state as in need of special protection. *Essential wildlife habitat* are areas providing physical or biological features essential to the conservation of an endangered or threatened species in Maine, such as nest sites or important feeding areas that may require special management considerations.

Designation of Essential Habitat establishes a standardized review process within existing state and municipal regulation. Activities of private landowners are not controlled by Essential Habitat designation unless they require a state or municipal permit, or are funded or carried out by a state agency or municipality, in which case they must be evaluated by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW). Data for Skowhegan indicates only one Essential Habitat. Now that bald eagles are about to be removed from the state endangered species list, a bald eagle nesting site in Skowhegan will no longer be designated an essential wildlife habitat. The site is owned by Somerset Woods Trustees and will continue to be protected.

*Significant Wildlife Habitats* are areas mapped or identified by the IFW and protected under Maine's Natural Resources Protection Act. They would include state or federal endangered or threatened species habitat, deer wintering areas, seabird nesting islands, critical spawning and nursery areas for Atlantic salmon, significant vernal pools, high- and moderate-value waterfowl and wading bird habitat, and shorebird nesting, feeding, and staging areas. Permits are required for certain activities that occur in significant wildlife habitats.

The Maine IFW has identified a number of significant wildlife habitats, including deer wintering areas and waterfowl and wading bird habitat, which are regulated by Maine's Natural Resources Protection Act. The Act requires a permit for most land use activities that involve working in, or disturbing soil within or adjacent to a protected natural area (e.g. identified significant habitat). Mapped significant wildlife habitats are displayed on the Map of Significant Natural Resources.

Deer wintering areas or "deer yards" are critical to the survival of white-tailed deer. In Maine, studies indicate that mortality of deer can exceed 35% during severe winters. Frequent severe winters in marginal winter habitat, may reduce a deer population to a small fraction of its summer potential. Deer wintering areas usually consist of softwoods. They provide deer with shelter from wind as well as improved mobility in the snow, thereby decreasing their energy demands. New development and other modifications to deer wintering areas reduce the overall ability of an area to support deer during periods of severe weather.

**Table 11-1: Deer Wintering Areas**

<u>Location</u>	<u>DIFW#</u>	<u>Rating</u>
NW of Town	060043	Indeterminate
Canaan bog	060044	Indeterminate
S of High School	060045	Indeterminate

N of Canaan Bog	060046	Indeterminate
SE of Oak Pond	060047	Indeterminate

Source: Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Beginning with Habitat is a State-initiated habitat-based landscape approach to assessing wildlife and plant conservation needs and opportunities. The goal of the program is to maintain sufficient habitat to support all native plant and animal species currently breeding in Maine by providing each town with a collection of maps and information depicting and describing habitats of statewide and national significance found in the town. The maps and data are compiled through a cooperative effort of agencies and organizations. The Skowhegan Code Enforcement Officer has a copy of all Beginning with Habitat maps and data, both paper and electronic versions. These maps were used to compile data for the maps in this plan.

The Beginning with Habitat approach addresses both general natural resources and individual species locations. From Beginning with Habitat resources and local information, Critical Natural Resources worthy of special protection may be identified. At a base level, all endangered and threatened species are Critical Natural Resources.

A state endangered species is any species of fish or wildlife that has been determined by IFW to be in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A state threatened species is any species of fish or wildlife that has been determined by IFW as likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future. Although an endangered species is by definition more impaired than a threatened species, there are no state regulatory policy differences between the two categories. Other than bald eagles which have been federally delisted as endangered and will likely be removed from Maine's list, the only species appearing on the state endangered or threatened list is the Eastern Box Turtle, documented in the southern end of town.

IFW keeps a third, unofficial list of Special Concern species. They have no special legislative protection. They are believed to be vulnerable and could easily become threatened or endangered. A fresh water mussel called a Creeper is included on the list and is noted on our map in Wesserunsett Stream. A wood turtle, on the list of Special Concern species, was observed by a Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) biologist in 1998 on a Somerset Woods Trustees parcel located easterly of Malbon's Mills Road to Wesserunsett Stream. This area is part of what's been delineated a "Hardwood Seepage Forest," a type of rare natural community delineated on the map.

After delisting from the State endangered species list, IFW will list the Bald Eagle as a Special Concern species, which triggers review for projects that come under Maine's Site Location of Development law. Bald Eagles continue to be protected by the Federal Bald Eagle/Golden Eagle Protection Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Although the Maine Endangered Species Act applies only to animals, the MNAP maintains an "official" list of endangered and threatened plants in Maine. This is a list of native plant species whose populations within the state are highly vulnerable to loss. Endangered plants are those estimated to be in danger of being lost from the state in the foreseeable future.

Threatened plants are those that with further decline could become endangered. Because plants are not protected by state law, they are reliant upon local policies for their survival.

Skowhegan contains one endangered plant, Indian Grass. Indian Grass has been documented from only eight towns in Maine, on very few river and lake shores. This grass grows to a height of 3 to 8 feet. It is rare endangered here because it's located at the northern limit of its range. Other plants in Skowhegan that are on MNAP's list of Special Concern species include: Broad Beech Fern, Clinton's Bulrush, Garber's Sedge, Long-leaved Bluet, Pale Green Orchis, and Vasey's Pondweed. Photos and a description of the above-mentioned plants can be found at [www.maine.gov/doc/nrimc/mnap/features/plantlist.htm](http://www.maine.gov/doc/nrimc/mnap/features/plantlist.htm)

The MNAP has classified and distinguished 98 different natural community types that occur rarely within the State's landscape. Three of these are located in Skowhegan. A Hardwood Seepage Forest previously mentioned is located east of Malbon Mills Road extending to Wesserunsett stream. Much of this area is owned by Somerset Woods Trustees. A portion of Canaan Bog is a very unusual Kettlehole Bog-pond Ecosystem. A unique Rivershore Outcrop is located just east of the downtown along the Kennebec River. These and other critical natural resource locations are depicted on the Significant Natural Resources Map.

## **Wetlands:**

Wetlands are those patches of the world that are caught between land and water; too wet to walk on and too dry to swim. For centuries, they have been regarded as waste lands. With a better understanding of ecosystems, however, we have come to realize how valuable they are. Wetlands are habitat at a critical stage of development for many species of wildlife, including essential elements of the food chain; they capture water, allowing it to seep into aquifers, they buffer the effects of floods, and they filter pollutants from surface waters, among other benefits.

Skowhegan has a large number of wetlands, some of which are too small to provide much value, but others that are quite significant. The Shoreland Zoning Law and Skowhegan's ordinance require protection for areas of moderate to high value waterfowl and wading bird habitat. These areas also receive protection in the Natural Resources Protection Act. There are twelve of these habitat areas in Skowhegan. They are depicted on the Map of Significant Natural Resources.

Also of importance are seasonal wetlands known as vernal pools. Vernal pools emerge in the spring, just long enough to provide essential habitat for amphibians and other species. Because these areas are small and seasonal, they are difficult to depict on a map. Nevertheless, they are subject to protection under the Natural Resource Protection Act, and need to be identified and acknowledged in local development plans. Three significant vernal pools have been identified in Skowhegan to date: on the outskirts of Canaan Bog, on Route 201 east of Southgate Industrial Park, and on the Coburn Woods parcel owned by Somerset Woods Trustees. More are likely to be identified as we get better information.

## **Scenic Resources:**

Scenic resources are those natural or man-made features considered aesthetically appealing to the majority of people, and which make a community a pleasing place to live. Skowhegan's varying topography and land cover provide a multitude of opportunities for scenic views. The Kennebec River and numerous undeveloped road corridors permit the passive enjoyment of scenic views, characterized by large expanses of forest, open fields, farms, streams and other waterbodies.

Areas noted as having particular scenic value in Skowhegan include:

- Route 2/Kennebec River/Wesserunsett Stream below Great Eddy; outstanding gateway east of downtown, site of the Route 2 rest area and public boat launch; owned by Somerset Woods Trustees (SWT).
- Coburn Woods hillside, west of downtown, highly visible from major roads, shopping centers, and the fairgrounds. Owned by SWT.
- South side of Kennebec River by island; owned by SWT.
- Bigelow Hill Road and Back Rd.; hilltop scenic vistas.
- East side of Kennebec River, East River Rd., Eaton Mtn. Rd.; owned by SWT.
- Hastings Brook Farm and adjacent lands, Malbons Mills Rd., Wesserunsett Stream. Hastings Farm protected under easement with Maine Farmland Trust, but other lands could be developed.

## **Analysis and Issues:**

Several Skowhegan ordinances help protect critical natural resources. Shoreland Zoning standards protect riparian resources, including many areas identified as critical natural areas, by maintaining buffers and requiring development setbacks. The Shoreland Zoning standards were recently upgraded with amendments that meet new State Guidelines.

Recent amendments to Skowhegan's Site Review Ordinance require that no wetland identified by IFW as moderate or high value for wildlife habitat can be filled, requires developers to identify and protect other critical natural resource areas, and requires any development within a deer wintering area to incorporate recommendations from a qualified wildlife biologist as measures to protect the resource. Skowhegan's subdivision provisions are outdated in this respect and need to be more protective concerning critical natural resources.

The best protection of critical natural resources is permanent protection through land purchase or conservation easement by a land trust or similar organization. Skowhegan has a good start with Somerset Woods Trustees (SWT), a land trust based in Skowhegan. Their local

ownership includes sixteen parcels totaling almost 560 acres, and 12,000 feet of shoreline on the Kennebec River and Wesserunsett Stream. Most of these SWT properties have forest and/or wildlife resources as key components of their management plans. One example of such a property is Coburn Woods, a 300-acre parcel whose management plan was developed in collaboration with Maine Audubon as part of its Community Forestry Focus Species Program.

As the Map of Significant Natural Resources reveals, there are many more critical natural resource areas that warrant the Town's attention. Creating an *open space plan* with these areas as priorities for protection would be a major step towards that goal. An open space plan identifies areas with critical natural resources as well as other open space priorities. An open space plan identifies areas most in need of protection and puts municipalities in a better position to partner with outside organizations for whatever protective measures are most appropriate.

Skowhegan shares some critical natural resources with neighboring towns. Resource areas such as Lake George (shorelands and watershed), the Kennebec River (shorelands), Canaan Bog, wildlife habitat areas, scenic vistas, etc. are shared. Members of the Skowhegan Conservation Commission participate in interlocal efforts to protect Lake George. Interlocal cooperation needs to be extended to other natural resources shared in common.

The Town should also consider how improved protection of natural resources will complement planning for outdoor recreation. Currently, several recreation trails utilize existing open space and conserved land. Better coordination may improve the experience of these trails, but we will have to be careful not to degrade the resource. The proposed Run of River Whitewater Park on the Kennebec will require access and utilization of riparian areas. While use of the park will improve public awareness of natural assets and scenic areas along the Kennebec, it must be planned with sensitivity to critical riparian areas.

# Map Appendix