

Skowhegan Comprehensive Plan

2010 Update

Volume 1:

Summary and Recommendations

Accepted at Town Meeting June 7, 2010

Volume 1 Table of Contents:

Chapter:	page
Introduction: The Vision and Community Participation	1
1: Historic Skowhegan	4
2: Skowhegan Today and Tomorrow	8
3: Skowhegan's Economy	11
4: Housing in Skowhegan	16
5: Community Services	18
Capital Investment Plan	21
6: Community Recreation	22
7: Skowhegan's Transportation System	25
8: Land Use and Development	28
Land Use Plan Map	30
9: Farming and Forestry in Skowhegan	35
10: Water Resources	38
11: Critical Natural Resources	41
12: Regional Coordination	44

Introduction:

The Vision and Community Participation

The Town of Skowhegan has used a comprehensive plan to guide its activities for at least four decades. This document is an update to the version adopted in 1995.

Comprehensive plans have evolved from plans aimed at managing single aspects of a town, such as land use or transportation, to plans that integrate all aspects of a town's operation. The comprehensive plan now serves the same function with a town as a business plan does for a private business. This update of the plan is divided into two volumes: This volume summarizes each issue and provides recommendations for future actions; volume 2 contains the factual data and analysis relating to each topic.

Both the 1995 plan and this version were developed under Maine's Growth Management Law, which specifies a range of planning issues that must be addressed. The law requires a plan to analyze management of public services, control of development, protection of land and water assets, promotion of economic development and affordable housing, preservation of open space and historic resources and access to outdoor recreation opportunities. The law also requires identification of important local issues, followed by a set of goals, policies, and action steps aimed at resolving the issues.

The Plan as a Community Process:

This edition of the plan has been developed over the past two years under the direction of the Skowhegan Planning Board. The Planning Board is charged in its bylaws with maintenance of the plan. Early on, the Board determined that the planning process should have wider public participation. It initiated several efforts to involve the broader community.

Skowhegan is fortunate to have a tradition of strong community participation on a variety of municipal committees. These committees were asked to provide substantial contributions to the plan. The Heritage Council is responsible for much of the information and recommendations of the historic resources chapter. The Conservation Commission provided much of the text and recommendations for the chapters on water resources, natural resources, and farming and forestry. Most of the recommendations of the economic development chapter came from earlier work of the Skowhegan Economic Development Corp. and Main Street Skowhegan.

Town staff also provided valuable contributions based on their areas of expertise. The Town Manager and department heads contributed to the chapters on community services. The Road Commissioner supplied a large portion of the transportation chapter. The Recreation

Director did the same for the chapter on recreation. The Code Enforcement Officer and Town Planner provided information for the chapters on land use and development, and the Economic Development Director assisted with the chapters on housing and economic development.

Finally, the citizens at large had a chance to participate in the planning process. The town has, in the past, had a number of public opinion surveys, so it was not felt that another one would be very useful. The board chose instead to sponsor a series of public forums. The forums were held on consecutive weeks in the spring of 2009. A copy of the public notice is reproduced at right. While not very well-attended, these meetings did provide some essential direction for elements of the plan. For example, we heard several times that the town needed to be a leader in promoting energy conservation and “green” development. Following completion of the draft plan and review by the Maine State Planning Office, a final public hearing was held on April 20, 2010.

Your Chance to Have a Say in the Future of Skowhegan . . .

*The Skowhegan Planning Board is sponsoring a series of
Comprehensive Plan Public Forums*

*For the purpose of gathering popular opinions and suggestions for the
future direction of the town*

Each forum will feature an extended period of time for public participation.

Forum Schedule:

- April 28th, 5:30 PM: Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Forestry
- April 28th, 6 PM: Economic Development and the Downtown
- May 7th, 6:30 PM: Local Transportation Issues
- May 12th, 6 PM: Land Use and Development – General Direction
- May 14th, 6:30 PM: Local Housing Issues
- May 26th, 6 PM: Land Use – Specific Recommendations

All meetings will be held at the COMMUNITY CENTER
All residents and property owners of Skowhegan are Welcome.
For more information, phone the planning/codes office at 474-6904

Our Vision for the Future of Skowhegan:

A vision is a description of an ideal future. It can be thought of as “where we would like to be in 20 years.” A vision can be both *conceptual* – such as wishing for a better quality of life – and *substantial* – seeking a better arrangement of development and public services. A vision is the expression of community attitudes, crystallized to the point where we can hang them on the wall and compare them against each of our planning recommendations. This is the “mission statement” portion of our plan.

The most important element of a comprehensive plan is the land use plan. The way that land is used and developed in Skowhegan has an enormous impact on public investments in our transportation system and utilities, our tax rate, our access to recreation, economic opportunity, and many other aspects of daily life. The elements of our vision, outlined below, are fundamentally a set of *Development Principles* that describe the best possible future for growth and development, taking into account the whole range of factors, including economic, fiscal (public cost), environmental, and political.

The following *Development Principles* are distilled from local discussions during the planning process. They will serve as the measures against which our recommendations are compared:

THE TOWN VALUES ITS ROLE AS A SERVICE CENTER AND A SMALL TOWN, DERIVED IN PART FROM THE DISTINCTIVE URBAN AND RURAL LANDSCAPE OF OUR COMMUNITY.

THE TOWN WISHES TO PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE ECONOMIC VITALITY OF ITS DOWNTOWN AREA AS THE HUB OF SOMERSET COUNTY.

THE TOWN WISHES TO MAINTAIN A STRONG CONNECTION WITH RURAL VALUES, THROUGH THE PRESERVATION OF SUSTAINABLE FARMS, FOREST, AND OPEN SPACE.

THE TOWN WISHES TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC GROWTH, INCLUDING COMMERCIAL AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, WHICH WILL BE OF BENEFIT TO ITS CITIZENS.

THE TOWN WISHES TO PRESERVE ITS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS, INCLUDING THE QUALITY OF ITS RIVERS, LAKES, STREAMS, AND GROUNDWATER, ITS SCENIC RURAL SPACES, AND ITS DIVERSITY OF WILDLIFE.

THE TOWN RECOGNIZES THE RIGHTS AND INCLINATIONS OF RESIDENTS TO LIVE AND USE THEIR LAND IN WAYS THEY SEE FIT, AS LONG AS THEY RESPECT THE PROPERTY VALUES AND PEACE OF MIND OF NEIGHBORS AND THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE.

As with any set of goals, we recognize that every goal may not be 100 percent achievable. There are limitations. Principal among these is the role of government in our daily lives. Whatever development policies and rules the Town creates to carry out these principles should be clear and easy to understand, should not create a financial burden on future taxpayers, and should be limited in scope to the minimum necessary to achieve our goals.

Chapter 1: Historic Skowhegan

Overview and Summary:

- 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.
- Skowhegan has a long-standing commitment to preservation of its historic resources. 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 History House museum acts as a repository and exhibit of local artifacts. Several individual buildings are on the national Register of Historic Places.
- 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.
- 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.
- The town's Site Review Ordinance requires site assessments and design modifications to protect historic and archeological resources. The Subdivision Ordinance contains no such provision; however the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance requires archeological investigation prior to development in shoreland areas.
- Two previous large scale construction projects that have benefited from their respect for historic elements 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.

Policies & Strategies:

There are three components to this section: archaeological resources, architectural resources, and cultural resources. Each component plays a role in our past and in our future. For this section, the Heritage Council has put together the policy to which we would like to convey in the Comprehensive Plan immediately followed by the Strategy to which we feel will accomplish that goal. The components including policies and strategies are as follows:

Archaeological resources

Policies:

- Identify potential archaeological resources
- Protect current archaeological resources

Strategies:

1. Implement a study plan, in connection with qualified educational institutions, to map and survey the town for potential archaeological resources; and, upon identifying potential archaeological resource areas, support a second phase investigation to confirm or reject said resource area.
2. Delineate riverfront parcels identified as #1-8 in Samuel Weston's 1797 plan of Canaan Gore and Mile-and-a-Half Strip and require that future development within these parcels be limited until an archaeological investigation can be performed, and a determination of archaeological evidence and/or resources can be assessed and documented.

Implementation:

The Heritage Council will pursue funding and find cooperators to implement the townwide archeological survey. The Heritage Council will prepare a map and ordinance language for submission to the Planning Board to protect the resources within the Weston Plan area. These activities will be a priority in 2011.

Preservation of architectural resources

Policies:

- Protect Skowhegan's historic properties, structures and heritage sites.
- Protect and Enhance the Skowhegan Historic Downtown District

Strategies:

3. Continue the current plan of action for the preservation of the Dudley Corner structure and property, education about the significance of the structure and area, and the utilization of potential tourist draw from proper markings and marketing.
4. Identify and protect other significant structures.

5. The Town should directly support programs and grants that support the downtown area.
6. The Site Review Ordinance should be amended to keep intact the cohesive look and historical significance of the existing structures as well as limit any new construction to the same standards of design that will meld seamlessly into said cohesive look.
7. Require Heritage Council review and recommendation prior to approval of any new construction that may alter the appearance of the recognized Historical District.
8. Evaluate additional districts, as enumerated in the analysis, for potential architectural design criteria that would enhance the correct period of structures adjacent to our village area, and for recognition and support as being historically significant contributors to the recognized downtown district.

Implementation:

The Heritage Council will manage the current plan of action for the schoolhouse project. In 2011, the Heritage Council will evaluate and recommend to the Planning Board whether any additional blocks adjoining the downtown historic district should be considered for addition. The Planning Board will draft amendments to the Site Review Ordinance which will implement design standards in the historic district and require review by the Heritage Council within the district. These amendments will be concurrent with the timing of other amendments to the Site Review Ordinance (2011-12).

Preservation of our cultural history

Policies:

- Protect the Kennebec River vicinity.
- Expand the town's Support and Cooperation with the Skowhegan Fair
- Expand recognition of historically significant individuals, businesses, and/or entities.

Strategies:

9. Incorporate an historical perspective in preservation of open space and public access lands along the Kennebec River – the gorge, the eddy, and areas east of the falls across to the tributary Wesserunsett Stream.
10. Promote watercraft educational tours discussing the impact and use of the river on Native American inhabitants, the first settlers, the mills, the logging industry, and so on, in long-range development plans.
11. In conjunction with the Arnold Expedition Reenactment Trail Committee, provide proper markings along the waterway and support new recreational businesses and marketing to attract tourism, in a controlled setting, along that route.

12. Preserve public access in and around the Skowhegan Fair Grounds. Work in conjunction with the Skowhegan State Fair Association to educate the public on the importance of the fair as a cultural resource in Skowhegan.
13. Prepare a plan of action to formally recognize and celebrate historically significant individuals, businesses, and/or entities of Skowhegan by special events, calendar markings, signage, etc.

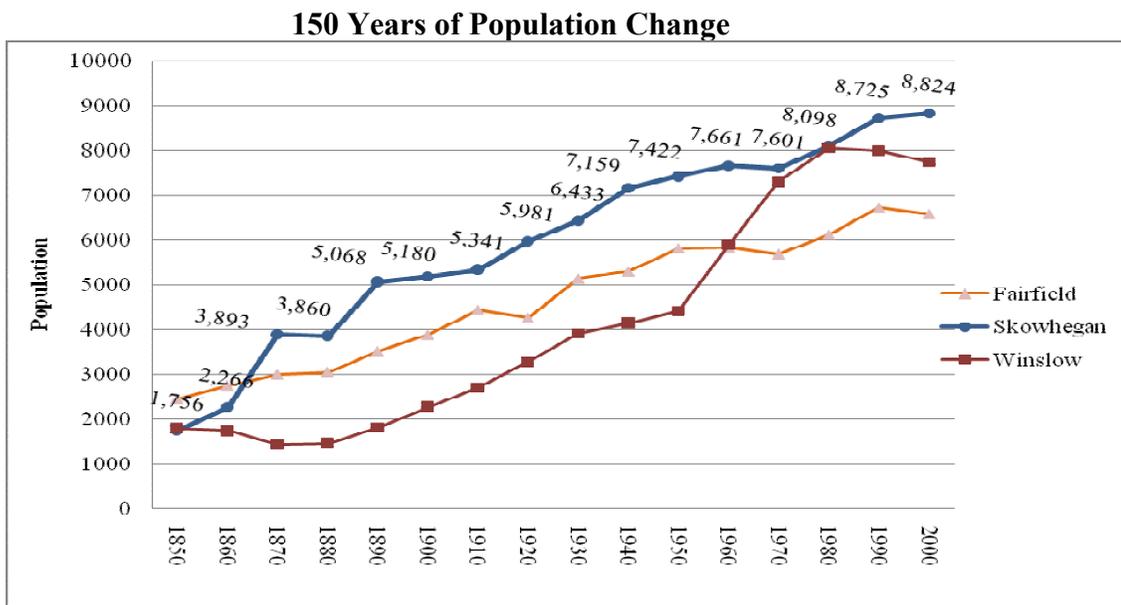
Implementation:

The Heritage Council will be responsible for prioritizing and coordinating planning and implementation activities for these strategies. During 2011 and 2012, the Heritage Council will schedule meetings with the Arnold Trail Committee, the Skowhegan Fair Association, Somerset Woods Trustees, and other groups as necessary to determine what role the Town can play in these activities. The Heritage Council will coordinate their activities with the Planning Board.

Chapter 2: Skowhegan Today and Tomorrow

The Past:

- Skowhegan has experienced slow and steady population growth throughout its history. It stands out as one of the few urban towns in this region to have actually added population during the 90's.



- In the 90's, Skowhegan's growth was due to a healthy birthrate. But since 2000, our increase has been due to in-migration – more people moving in to town than out. Since migration trends follow the economy, this is an indication that in the past few years Skowhegan has been doing relatively well, economically.
- Despite a population growth of less than 100 people in the 90's, the number of households has been growing rapidly (7.6 percent). A 19 percent increase in single-person households and 10 percent increase in single-parent families have combined with a slight decrease in traditional, two-parent families to lower the average size of a household to 2.31 persons.

The Present:

- The decline in average household size is not a well-known trend. But it has a huge effect on housing growth. The number of households in Skowhegan grew over 56 percent between 1970 and 2000, despite an overall population growth of only 16 percent. A (slight) majority of this demand for new housing is being met with housing units outside of the traditional urban area, increasing the cost of road maintenance, school busing, and other local services.
- With an average of 1.13 members of each household working, 55 percent of all working-age women are in the labor force, and 65 percent of all men. That comes to a total labor force (in 2000) of over 4,200. In addition, Skowhegan is a regional job center for the upper Kennebec valley. We host about 1,500 more jobs than we have resident workers.
- We all know about the baby boom. Baby boomers are now in their 50's and 60's. As the baby boom ages, the median age of Skowhegan has gone from 32 in 1980 to 39 in 2000. One out of six Skowhegan residents was over 65 in 2000.

The Future:

- 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. We do, however, know some of the factors that will affect future growth. Economic opportunities, births and deaths, housing price and availability – all will influence whether Skowhegan grows at a greater or lesser rate over the next two decades. To further complicate that the baby boom continues to impact the community. Even if population levels off, the character of that population changes.
- The conventional mechanism for forecasting the future is to continue past trends. A typical forecast would draw on the growth rate from the past 20 years, and assumes that it will continue into the next 20. Existing mathematical projections include those from Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG), which estimates Skowhegan's 2030 population around 9,350, and the State Planning Office (SPO), whose estimate for 2030 is 8,154. The difference? SPO expects a gradual increase in mortality due to the growing percentage of older residents, whereas KVCOG simply estimates current occupancy rates in new housing.
- While an estimate of future population is important and interesting, 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 are needed, how much infrastructure is necessary, and so on.
 - If we project along the lines of SPO's "decline" estimate, we won't need to add any new jobs to the economy, but we will still need 229 new housing units between now and 2025, occupying 4.5 miles of road frontage.
 - If we project along the lines of the KVCOG estimate of growth, we will need to see more than 500 new housing units between now and 2025. We would also see growth of about 225 jobs, and an increase of up to 200 new school children.

- These two scenarios merely bracket our actual future. But they demonstrate that we can manage it. 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 decline. Strategies we may use to shape the future include . . .
 - Policies that will encourage the creation of more jobs and small businesses;
 - Investment in roads or sewer extensions that will favor certain types of housing or commercial development;
 - Creation of organizations that will improve the quality of life, resulting in a more inviting and attractive community;
 - Management of new development in such a way as to limit new road-building, improve the efficiency of existing infrastructure, or preserve access to recreation lands; or
 - Anticipating and preparing for demographic trends, such as recreation, retirement, and housing opportunities for an aging population.

Whatever action we take will lead us toward a future path. If we favor a certain type of housing, we affect the size and character of our households. If we encourage a particular form of economic growth, specific jobs and incomes will result. If we create more elements of interest for a younger, more educated population, we create the conditions for rejuvenating the community and adding wealth. We are limited only by our resolve.

Chapter 3: Skowhegan's Economy

Overview and Summary:

- Skowhegan is the labor and service center of Somerset County, hosting about 1/3 of all jobs in the county. We host about 1,500 more jobs than we have resident workers. Despite that, more than half of Skowhegan's work force commutes to another town. For these reasons, Skowhegan participates actively in an assortment of regional economic development organizations and projects.

- An average of 1.13 members of each household in the workforce yields a total labor force (in 2000) of over 4,200. The unemployment rate in 2008 was about the same as it was 10 years prior (7.3 percent), though it has probably risen this past year.



- Skowhegan's median household income in 2000 was \$28,390. This was a *decrease* since 1990 when adjusted for inflation. (Some of this may be the result of more retired households.) The poverty rate also increased – from 13.6 percent in 1990 to 16.2 percent in 2000. The estimated median household income for 2007 was \$31,800; better than 2000 but still well below the 20 percent inflation rate over those seven years.
- Population growth anticipated for Skowhegan and Somerset County means job growth as well, unless they are all retirees. If we continue to average 1.13 jobs per household, Skowhegan needs a net gain of 225 jobs over the next 15 years.
- Skowhegan has a lower percentage of high school and college graduates than comparable towns. The best way to create better jobs and higher salaries is to raise the educational qualifications and skills of the workforce.
- Skowhegan's economic health is tied to the vitality of its downtown. The historical commercial center also includes the New Balance mill buildings and most of the government

and service buildings. A lot of money and effort have been invested in revitalizing downtown, including establishment as a Main Street Maine community.

- Other commercial concentrations include Madison Avenue, emanating from downtown in a 1.5 mile corridor, and the Waterville Road, reaching from the edge of downtown south to the SAPPI paper mill and Southgate Industrial Park. The town has four shopping centers, three of which are located on Madison Ave.
- While the traditional economy of Skowhegan has been manufacturing (footwear, wood products), these “primary industries” have been imperiled by a changing global economy. In response, Skowhegan is making the transition to small manufacturing, service, and tourist-based industries. Reinvigoration of the downtown and pursuit of projects such as the Run of River and two industrial parks are indicative of this new focus.
- Medical/health services are a major component of the local economy. Redington-Fairview General Hospital is reaching new levels of medical service and employment. Skowhegan is now the regional service center for routine as well as emergency health services.

Policies:

- Continue to expand its role as the service, employment, and trade center for the Somerset trade area.
- Continue to support investments in public infrastructure to generate economic development, including job training and business assistance.
- Improve the viability and attractiveness of the downtown area, through infrastructure development, business support, marketing, beautification, and other strategies.
- Build economic development strategies around our inherent assets, such as our heritage, our river and other natural attractions, and our crossroads location, for future economic growth.
- Make a special effort to focus on the “green” economy in business attraction and planning.
- Continue to participate with regional economic development organizations, to our mutual benefit.

Strategies:

1. Pursue initiatives for heritage- and eco-tourism, and other “green” businesses, including a Maine Maple Museum and Heritage Center and the Run of River Project.
2. Continue active downtown revitalization efforts, coordinating with the Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Skowhegan. Immediate objectives should be to fill upper story vacancies through improving handicapped access, attracting historic rehabilitation,

improving the mix of downtown businesses, and building on the range of events and attractions to the downtown.

3. Improve the municipal parking lot to make it more useful and attractive.
4. Work with Main Street Skowhegan to develop a downtown marketing plan, including a theme, promotional materials, and signage.
5. Utilize the Economic Development Director and Restructuring Committee to identify and define clusters of related businesses that could bid jointly on state or federal projects.
6. Ensure that the Site Review Ordinance continues to promote good quality commercial development in locations with good access to public services. Limit the size and impact of commercial development in rural areas in order to reduce municipal costs and environmental impacts.
7. Improve local access to post-secondary education and job skills, including entrepreneurial training and small business counseling. Work with local schools (RSU 54), UMaine ITV providers and KVCC to improve course offerings in these areas.
8. Complete the road and water system in Southgate Industrial Park.
9. Plan for expansion of commercial development areas consistent with the Sewer System Master Plan for sewer extensions.

Implementation:

The Town, through its economic development office, must continue to work closely with a wide number of local and regional economic development organizations to achieve our several objectives. Local organizations include the Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Skowhegan. A priority task should be continuation of the downtown revitalization through event planning, improvements to vacant retail/commercial space, and a marketing plan.

Regional organizations include Somerset Economic Development Corp., Kennebec Valley Council of Governments, the Old Canada Road Scenic Byway, Kennebec-Chaudiere Corridor, the Kennebec River Initiative, KV Tourism, Maine Center for Women, Work, & Community, and the school district. The Town Manager should continue the town's participation and communicate regularly with Fairfield and Madison to seek out opportunities to work one-on-one on projects of mutual benefit, and participate in emerging regional initiatives with potential for economic development.

In 2011, the Town Manager should delegate a working group to include school district and chamber of commerce representatives to improve course offerings and skills training through the high school or other venues.

The Town will work with the SEDC to incorporate and prioritize economic development infrastructure in its Capital Improvements Plan. The highest priority should be development of

the water system in Southgate within the next two years. Expansion of the sewer collector lines along Route 201 should be deferred until the new bridge and bypass is begun. The Town, through its economic development office, should vigorously pursue grants and other funding for infrastructure as well as community improvement projects.

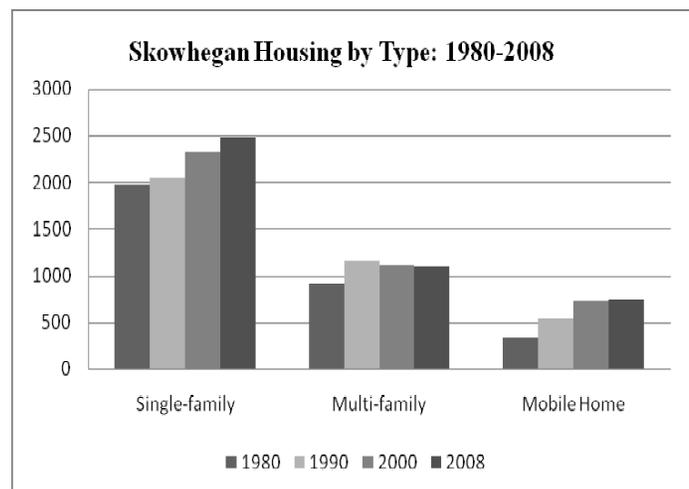
The Planning Board will review the Site Review Ordinance in 2011 and periodically thereafter to ensure that it does not discourage high-quality development from taking place. The ordinance should be amended in 2011 to limit the potential impacts of new commercial development in the rural areas.

Chapter 4: Housing in Skowhegan

Overview and Summary:

- A decline in household sizes is the primary driver of demand for new housing. Skowhegan's population grew by only 726 between 1980 and 2000, but the number of housing units grew by 864. Because of the decline in household sizes, Skowhegan could add 20 houses a year and still not add population. Skowhegan's growth projection estimates roughly 29 new housing units per year.
- As the nature of Skowhegan's households begins to change (older and smaller), their housing preferences should change as well. The trend since the 80's has been large, rural homes, but these will not suit the population of the future. Positive action may be required to avoid future population losses due to lack of appropriate housing.
- With interest in new construction focusing on rural areas over the past couple of decades, the backbone of Skowhegan's housing stock – the urban neighborhoods – is beginning to suffer from a lack of investment. Although the town has initiated several housing rehabilitation programs in the past, more work is needed. Of special concern is the retrofit of the older housing stock to save energy.

- The number of mobile homes in Skowhegan has more than doubled since 1980. The number of multi-family (apartment) units has increased far more slowly, and actually declined since 1990. This is not a good trend for an aging population.



- Planning for new development requires that we examine the affordability of housing. An “affordable” house is one in which the costs will not overly strain the household budget (generally about 30 percent of household income). Affordability becomes an issue in any community when households begin to get priced out of the market. This affects two groups the most: young people, on their way up the income ladder, and the elderly, who may have lived here all their lives but could no longer afford to.

- With Skowhegan’s median household income estimated at \$31,800 in 2007, an affordable home (according to Maine State Housing Authority) would be \$93,000. The average sales price for a house in 2006 was \$86,350. The state suggests that ten percent of all new housing should be affordable to households making only 80 percent of median – in Skowhegan’s case, a sales price of about \$73,000, or a rent under \$800/month.
- Though not much of an issue for ordinary homebuyers, affordability is emerging as one in the rental sector and among seniors. Approximately one out of four senior homeowners earn less than half of what it costs to maintain the average home. In 2006, there were 728 renters in Skowhegan that could not afford the average rent, including 232 seniors. MSHA statistics report an *unmet need* of 79 affordable senior rental units in 2007. The future? Baby boomers are now within 10 years of entering that “senior” demographic.
- Skowhegan will be required under state law to begin enforcing a building code in 2012. This mandate will mean additional code enforcement capacity and training, and higher construction costs to cover increased permitting.

Policies:

- Ensure the continued supply of decent housing in price ranges designed to match regional job creation efforts;
- Encourage the development of quality affordable housing, including rental housing, in Skowhegan’s growth area;
- Seek to achieve an average of at least three new housing units per year to be affordable to households making no more than 80 percent of the median household income;
- Encourage formation of a regional housing coalition to address affordable and workforce housing needs.
- Promote the development of additional senior housing to satisfy an anticipated boom in senior households.

Strategies:

1. On sewer lots (growth area), ensure that local regulatory standards do not interfere with a density of housing suitable for affordability.
2. Continue to allow the addition of at least one accessory apartment per dwelling unit on sewer lots.
3. Form a Senior Housing Task Force. (Priority) The SHTF will have as its objective to promote or develop a range of additional senior housing opportunities.
4. Apply for CDBG housing rehabilitation grants for targeted neighborhoods, and support

public or private sector grants for energy conservation improvements.

5. Implement the statewide Uniform Building and Energy Code, with a permitting system and fees to cover the required inspections and Code Enforcement costs.

Implementation:

A Senior Housing Task Force will be created as a priority strategy in 2010. The task force will detail the need for senior housing, and will investigate the feasibility of forming a housing authority or regional housing coalition to promote projects. The task force will also seek out and work with private developers on senior housing projects. The task force should seek to have a concrete course of action established by the end of 2011, with actual housing units in place by 2014.

The town's Community Development Office, together with the housing committee, will continue to identify and prioritize neighborhoods suitable for rehabilitation funds, and will emphasize structural rehab and weatherization/energy efficiency. The CD Office will identify and support grant programs for residential energy conservation improvements.

A building permit process will be put in place to implement the building code, according to the state mandated dates. Town ordinances do not currently restrict housing size or density within the sewered area; as they are amended over the next two years, they should be reviewed to ensure a continuation of this approach.

Chapter 5: Community Services

Overview and Summary:

- As the commercial and service center and county seat of Somerset County, Skowhegan bears the responsibility to provide public services and facilities not only to a growing population, but a large and varied workforce, commercial patrons, and tourists.
- In general, local services are adequate to meet anticipated growth. 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 (addressed in Chapter 6: community recreation), and traffic congestion in the downtown area (addressed in Chapter 7: transportation).
- A *Sewer System Master Plan (2007)*, prepared by Wright-Pierce Engineers, outlines existing and anticipated needs of the sewer system, with estimated costs and timetables. Six areas were proposed for geographic expansion (four in this planning period), which are consistent with the land use recommendations of this plan. A 1995 plan for managing combined sewer overflows (mixing of stormwater and sanitary sewer flows) has been implemented, with all remaining CSOs licensed under current regulations.
- Public water service to the town is provided by a private company, Aqua Maine. Aqua Maine owns not only its water sources but abutting lands, and is closely monitored under its state licenses. Current water demand is well within capacity.
- The Town's highway department has a comprehensive stormwater facility maintenance policy. Stormwater management often involves earth-moving, and the town has policies in place to minimize erosion in these activities.
- Public safety facilities are adequate to meet current demand. Additional planning is required, particularly in fire protection, to keep up with equipment and technology -- not necessarily associated with growth. Skowhegan's development ordinances specifically require up-to-date fire protection and public safety measures for commercial sites and subdivisions. Agreements with neighboring towns and Somerset County enable the town to draw on other resources for emergency needs. The Town also works closely with Somerset County Emergency Management Agency on such items as flood monitoring and disaster planning.
- Skowhegan is part of Regional School Unit (RSU) 54 for elementary and secondary education. Skowhegan's enrollment has declined gradually since 1980, and existing facilities

can easily accommodate anticipated growth. Some elementary facilities are functionally obsolescent, however, and discussions are underway to consolidate and replace them.

- The Town is making good progress reducing solid waste costs. The Solid Waste Ordinance mandates recycling, and town staff provides education and awareness for residents. Household trash volumes have decreased 3 percent over five years. Skowhegan cooperates with regional waste management efforts, including annual household hazardous waste collection. Some facilities on the recycling side are targeted for improvement/expansion.
- Skowhegan plays a lead role in coordinating and hosting regional public services. In addition to hosting household hazardous waste collections, the transfer station processes recycling from three other towns. The town participates in joint purchasing of capital equipment and contract services, and has equipment-sharing agreements with neighboring towns. Town officials actively look for new ways to reduce the cost of municipal services, such as the sharing of winter road plowing responsibilities.
- Continued public investment will be needed to support economic development. Communication infrastructure should be expanded with more access to broadband and wireless connectivity. Sewer service should be extended south along Route 201. A public water system is under development for Southgate Industrial Park.
- Skowhegan has a comprehensive capital improvements plan (CIP), 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.

Policies:

- Seek to meet current and expected public service and facility needs in a more efficient manner through regional cooperation, new technologies, cost-effective expenditures, and utilization of grants and alternative revenue sources.
- Provide expanded public facilities and services that are timed and located to support growth and development in Skowhegan's growth area, with a minimum of 75 percent of new growth-related capital expenditures targeted for the growth area.
- Stay within LD 1 spending limits.

Strategies:

1. Public Safety: Begin the process of identifying expansion and/or relocation options for the fire station.
2. Public Safety: Support countywide and regional planning for emergency management.
3. Highways: Maintain the current level of spending on maintenance and paving of town roads, with a defined prioritization plan.

4. Highways: Expand the town's pedestrian and bicycle trail network.
5. Solid Waste: Continue to promote waste reduction and recycling practices, including expansion of cooperation with neighboring communities.
6. Sanitary Treatment: Expand the extent of the sewer system, according to the 2007 Sewer System Master Plan.
7. Sanitary Treatment: Maintain and modernize the sanitary treatment plant according to federal standards.
8. Education: Expand communication with RSU 54 for the purpose of providing improved vocational and technology training programs targeted to job qualification.
9. Fiscal Operation: Incorporate capital investment portion of this Plan (following page) into the town's existing capital improvements planning and update the CIP annually as part of the regular budget process.
10. Fiscal Operation: Evaluate all capital improvement projects for possible grant eligibility or alternative funding sources such as impact fees.
11. General: Initiate conversations or studies with other Somerset County towns on any public service or facility strategy which has possibilities for cost savings or more efficient provision of services.

Implementation:

The Town Manager is responsible for financial planning and provision of public services, assisted by his department heads and the budget committee. The Town Manager determines priorities and timetables for anticipated public facilities improvements. The Town Manager will continue to participate in and identify new opportunities for multi-town cooperation.

The Town should establish and appoint members to a new Public Safety Committee by 2011. This committee should include, at a minimum, the Emergency Management Director, the Fire Chief, and Police Chief. The committee will be responsible for planning for fire station needs. The committee will also be tasked as a liaison with county public safety and emergency management planning.

The Planning Board is responsible for evaluating the impact that new development has on public services. The Planning Board should examine its development review system (Site Review and Subdivision Ordinances) to determine whether new development is imposing a financial burden on public services. Concurrent with its review of ordinances following this plan, the board should make changes to its ordinances as necessary to ensure that current taxpayers don't bear added costs of new development.

Capital Investment Plan:

The Town of Skowhegan has an existing Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). The plan is updated each year by the selectmen and town manager, with recommendations from the department heads. The CIP is structured according to department, with departments having their own priority list within their capital budget.

Existing bonded capital items include the following:

- CSO’s, two bonds (to be retired 2024, 2027)
- Two highway trucks (2010)
- Highway Obligation Loan (2018)

Active Reserve Accounts include the following:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Pollution Control Plant | • Fire Department |
| • Recreation Department | • Administration |
| • Municipal Building | • Assessor |
| • Police Department | • Community Development |
| • Public Works | • Cemeteries |
| • Roads and Sidewalks | • Public Works Building |
| • Solid Waste | |

The capital items listed below stem from recommendations made in this plan. While this listing does not mandate future inclusion in the CIP, it does suggest sources of funding other than local tax dollars, and a sense of priorities. “Timetable” can be interpreted as follows: *Short-term*: budget and plans in place, fund-raising underway; *Mid-term*: should be completed within this plan’s time horizon (10 years); *Long-term*: not expected within the planning horizon; *Staggered*: includes multiple individual projects on separate timetables.

2010 Capital Investment Plan

<i>Expenditure</i>	<i>Estimated Cost</i>	<i>Source of Funding</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
Second Bridge over Kennebec	In design	DOT	Long-term
Extension of sewer service	\$7.9M	Bonding, impact fees.	staggered
Water supply, Southgate Park	\$750,000	SEDC	Short-term
Implement sidewalk/bike trail plan	\$250,000	DOT, local match	staggered
Improvements for municipal parking lot	\$300,000	Bonding, private contributions	Mid-term
Energy rehab and efficiency improvements	Unknown	Energy efficiency grants or CDBG	Mid-term
Run of River – model development	\$ 80,000	Donations, town	Short-term
■ implementation	\$5,000,000	Donations, bonding	Mid-term
Ballfield complex	\$2,000,000	Grants, fund-raising	Short-term
Downtown bus/trolley	unknown	DOT, KVCAP	Long-term

Chapter 6: Community Recreation

Overview and Summary:

- Recreation facilities and services in Skowhegan are plentiful, and include both active (organized) and passive (individual) opportunities. The center of active recreation programs is the Skowhegan Community Center, also home to the full-time recreation department.
- Recreation programs range from childrens sports leagues to seasonal adult activities, and are open to all – non-residents (on a fee basis) as well as residents. Demand for recreation programs has triggered several planned expansions and improvements to recreation fields.
- Skowhegan has several community parks, trails, and open space areas. These are well maintained and offer opportunities ranging from cross-country skiing to biking. Several independent trail networks associated with these parks are proposed to be linked with the existing sidewalk system in the pedestrian and bicycle plan under development.
- Skowhegan residents enjoy access to the major water bodies in town. Boat launches and fishing spots are available on both the Kennebec River and Lake George. Lake George Park also provides an improved public beach. The proposed Run-of-River project would transform the Kennebec River’s recreation potential into a major draw and economic stimulus.
- Skowhegan is fortunate to host several non-municipal recreation facilities, including Lake George Regional Park, Eaton Mountain Ski Area, Somerset Woods, the Yankee Woodlot, and the Skowhegan State Fair.

Policies:

- Develop outdoor and indoor facilities for organized recreation to relieve the crowding and overuse that now occurs.
- Provide a variety of recreational programs suited to the full range of ages, abilities and interests of the Skowhegan population, with safe and convenient access to public facilities.
- Coordinate with town departments and other local and regional recreation providers to provide efficient development and management of facilities, avoid duplication of services and collaborate on special program offerings where appropriate.
- Make renovations/repairs to existing parks, playgrounds, and other facilities to maximize their use and meet the needs of both immediate neighborhoods and the wider community.

- Improve public awareness and utilize all possible opportunities for public participation in the acquisition, planning and management of facilities.
- Promote integrated greenbelts, walkways and recreational trails to link Town parks and recreation areas and open spaces.
- Develop a comprehensive funding strategy for recreation programs and facilities.
- Pursue additional water access and water-oriented recreation.

Strategies:

1. Aggressively pursue funding opportunities for completion of the planned ball field complex (high priority).
2. Continue to develop the Run of River Project in the Kennebec River Gorge area, by raising and allocating funds for the next phase in completing the project.
3. Work closely with Lake George Regional Park management and other regional recreation providers to enhance access to facilities.
4. Maintain the boat launch on the Kennebec River (Great Eddy) and improve facilities in collaboration with Somerset Woods Trustees or future owners.
5. Improve the availability and accessibility of outdoor ice skating facilities.
6. Involve public in evaluating demand for additional expansions to recreation offerings, such as a town pool, lighting for playing fields, or additional playgrounds/parks.
7. Establish priorities for renovations which will address the most deficient areas of the Town and provide the most benefit for the largest number of people
8. Integrate outdoor recreation needs into open space plan (Strategy 11-2). Target suitable land for future acquisition for parks and passive recreation. Include analysis of tax-acquired Town properties and/or sale of some property to fund purchase of other quality recreation space. The plan will incorporate a landowner outreach program to encourage greater public access to privately-owned open space.
9. Evaluate programs for the elderly population by seeking input from representatives to address deficiencies and/or lack of participation.
10. Identify underserved segments of the population regarding their recreation needs, and provide suitable activities which meet these needs. In particular, identify reasons for youth non-participation in programs (e.g. fees, distance, lack of self esteem etc.) and develop ways to overcome these obstacles. Reach out to individuals, neighborhood

groups, special interest groups, volunteer organizations, corporations, and larger institutions and involve them in the process where feasible.

11. Improve connections between recreation facilities and neighborhood population centers, utilizing public transit and pedestrian and bicycle routes. Bike/ped projects should be prioritized according to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Establish trails that interconnect with open space tracts, abutting towns, and to the larger natural systems in the area.
12. Keep facilities current with changes in mandates, guidelines, and research. Standardize common components used in individual parks and playgrounds (lighting standards, benches, fences, fountains, trash receptacles and other elements) to reduce repair, response time, and installation.
13. Continue to develop special events to focus attention and increase public use of recreational sites maintained by the Town. Encourage sponsorship of special events by local agencies, institutions or business.
14. Aggressively seek funding from state and federal sources, including matching grant programs such as Urban Trails, Land and Water, and trails development programs to acquire and develop recreational facilities. Monitor and take advantage of state bond issues for recreation development. Encourage local businesses, charitable foundations, and private institutions to fund specific recreation activities or improvements and give appropriate public recognition to all donations.
15. Secure additional public access to local water bodies through purchase or long-term easements, to expand fishing opportunities.

Implementation:

The recreation facilities and programs of the town are administered by the recreation department, with assistance of the Recreation Advisory Committee and Park Commission, and supported by public works, police, planning, and community development departments and the Board of Selectmen, where appropriate. The Department has established working relationships with the school district, Lake George Park, Somerset Woods Trustees and other recreation providers in the area. The Run of River Project is managed by a separate committee, chaired by the town's Road Commissioner. Most of the strategies listed above are ongoing programs of the Department.

Recommended capital investments should be incorporated and prioritized into the Town's CIP, although implementation should be primarily contingent on outside sources of funding. The Town should increase its efforts at seeking outside funding, with the goal of beginning the ballfield project in 2010 and the Run of River Project construction in 2012.

The Open Space Plan process will be initiated by the Conservation Commission according to the schedule established in the recommendations for natural resources.

Chapter 7: Skowhegan's Transportation System

Overview and Summary:

- Skowhegan is at the crossroads of two major federal highways (US Routes 2 and 201). As a result, the town is a transportation hub. But this role brings with it challenges of freight movement and congestion. The conflict between commerce and mobility has been a topic of discussion and study in Skowhegan for decades, with little apparent resolution.
- A planning process is underway to determine the need for and location of a new highway bridge linking the federal highways and circling around the downtown. The planning process is outside of the recommendations of the comprehensive plan, though we will have to adjust to its results. Although a solution is unlikely to be completed during the scope of this plan, the outcome of the planning process will affect other recommendations.
- Downtown traffic congestion and pedestrian safety must be addressed. Several efforts have been made to study traffic patterns, failing to yield consensus on a solution. This plan, therefore, does not endorse any of those proposals. The outcome of the bridge study will also affect the urgency of addressing downtown congestion.
- The Town is responsible for managing new traffic onto the system from new development. Subdivision and Site Review Ordinances lay out construction standards for subdivision roads and traffic impact standards for commercial driveways, but do not set limits or direct the traffic to preferred locations.
- The State, through its Department of Transportation (DOT) has maintenance responsibility for bridges, numbered highways, and certain other major roads outside of the designated Urban Area. The remainder of the road system is the responsibility of the Town to maintain. The Town has a system for determining maintenance and improvement priorities, including capital improvement appropriations. The town road system is in satisfactory condition on average. The roads budget is not keeping pace with maintenance needs, resulting in a forecast of declining overall quality.
- Parking lots are part of the transportation system. The Town regulates commercial parking lots so as to provide sufficient private parking, and manages several municipal parking lots. The majority of municipal lots are in the downtown area, where development densities preclude individual on-site parking. Parking in the downtown tends to be under-utilized; this could be due to the lack of downtown attractions and retail businesses, or to the unattractiveness of the lots themselves.

- The transportation system consists of more than highways and roads. The town has an extensive sidewalk and trail system, but no general public transportation options. A new plan will connect many of the sidewalks, walking trails, and bicycle trails. Public transportation is viewed as a need, both as an alternative mode of transportation and to alleviate downtown congestion, but a bus system is probably not viable at current development densities.

Policies:

- Work closely with DOT and regional transportation groups and initiatives to prioritize needs and integrate future DOT plans and programs with local planning.
- Integrate proposed transportation improvements with planning for development, to enhance system efficiency, public safety, natural and cultural resource protection, and quality of life.
- Provide diversity in transportation opportunities to meet the transportation needs of all users.
- Identify and prioritize transportation system improvements and maintenance procedures that maximize the cost-effectiveness of the expenditures.

Strategies:

1. Utilize road analysis software to assist in prioritizing for the town roads component of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
2. Participate in regional and state efforts to improve the transportation system, and link improvements to needs for economic development and overall growth.
3. Enact a Road Design Standards Ordinance for construction and acceptance of new town roads. In addition to engineering standards, the ordinance should contain specify practices for reducing erosion and runoff, and to maintain wildlife habitat by minimizing barriers to wildlife movement.
4. Review existing land use ordinances to ensure that developers identify and bear the cost of traffic impacts on the road system, reflect policies identified in regional transportation plans and studies, and are consistent with state law and DOT rules regarding access management and traffic movement.
5. Continue to work with the DOT on the study to address deficiencies in downtown traffic movement and river crossing options. Revise and implement land use strategies for the intersections and neighborhoods affected by the outcomes of the study.
6. Incorporate the recommendations of the sidewalk committee and Bike and Pedestrian Trail Plan into the CIP.

7. Work with the DOT and Northeast Border Corridor Commission to establish and study the impacts of an east-west highway in the Skowhegan vicinity.
8. Advocate to DOT to add a truck climbing lane on Casino Hill (Route 2) and other improvements on the state highway system.
9. Utilize best management practices for ditch and culvert maintenance work, through highway department training and procedures.
10. Cooperate with Somerset Woods Trustees (owners) to ensure continuation of the rest area on Route 2 east of town.
11. Improve the main municipal parking lot. Study traffic flow, add landscaping, improve drainage, and design to accommodate community events. Seek grants, bonding, and development fees for funding.
12. When feasible, institute a public bus or trolley, serving the downtown, Madison Ave., and the most heavily developed residential neighborhoods.

Implementation:

The Road Commissioner continues to be responsible for establishing priorities for paving, maintenance and improvement of the local road system. The Road Commissioner is also the principal point of contact between the town and DOT and regional transportation committees and study groups in the development of projects within Skowhegan and regionally.

The Town will periodically update its capital improvements plan with road, bridge, and other locally-funded transportation projects. This will include the pursuit of outside funding for bridge, trail, and other opportunities. The Town will investigate options for funding improvements to the municipal parking lot within the next two years.

The Planning Board will periodically review its land use ordinances to ensure that they coordinate with transportation policies. Prior to construction of major state improvements, the board should review its land use plans for affected areas and amend if necessary. In particular, the Town should prepare a companion plan to the recommendations of the bridge study to identify peripheral impacts, additional transportation investments, and land use strategies to reduce any negative impacts of the project.

Chapter 8: Land Use and Development

Overview and Summary:

- Skowhegan's historic land use patterns have resulted in an active commercial center and a large rural area. The commercial center is located at the junction of the river and two major highways, offering access to both transportation and power. Downtown Skowhegan has historically provided industrial, commercial, service and governmental functions, while the neighborhoods immediately surrounding it have grown up over decades of expansion.
- This historic growth pattern is being altered by a trend towards suburban sprawl. In 1990, 80 percent of our population lived in the urban area. But in the past ten years, 60 percent of the new homes and 2/3 of subdivisions have been built in the rural area. This results in a lack of investment in urban neighborhoods, deterring both maintenance and new development.
- The average rural subdivision lot is about 3.3 acres, even though the minimum lot size is half an acre. Subdivision lots account for only about one-third of all the homes built in the rural area. Vacant lots or single-splits account for the remainder.
- Despite the national recession, Skowhegan's commercial base continues to grow. In just the past couple of years the Planning Board has permitted expansions to retail and medical facilities as well as development in both industrial parks. Downtown revitalization efforts have generated investment in downtown commercial and industrial buildings. To date, very little commercial development has occurred beyond the sewer system, although the most desirable tracts of undeveloped land are located on Route 201 south of the urban area.
- Development in Skowhegan is controlled by several land use ordinances, including Site Plan Review, Subdivision, and Building Safety Ordinances. These three apply townwide, although some of the provisions in each apply differently to lots on the sewer system or inside the urban area. Shoreland Zoning and Floodplain Management Ordinances apply only to designated properties in Skowhegan.
- Because of demographic trends towards aging and smaller households, and economic trends such as higher gas prices, the urban area of Skowhegan may soon regain its popularity for housing. This trend would benefit the town by allowing more efficient use of public services, such as fire protection, school busing, sewer, and water. We should anticipate this trend and provide for it.

The Land Use Plan:

The land use plan is the portion of the town's business plan that anticipates where and when public services will be needed. As the town grows and develops, the growth will create a demand on services and resources. We need to anticipate that growth and, to the extent necessary, guide that growth, so that we can provide service needs in the most cost-effective manner.

In order to coordinate the land use plan with our overall vision, we need to establish a set of guidelines. These guidelines will be used to develop strategies for regulating or promoting growth. We propose the following four guidelines:

- 1) New growth should minimize the cost of town services in relation to revenues generated;
- 2) Development of land should not have an adverse effect on the value or enjoyment of neighboring properties;
- 3) New development should not degrade public natural resources, in particular water and air quality;
- 4) Within these boundaries, landowners should have the right to use their property as they see fit.

These guidelines are not far removed from the current path the Town has chosen, to regulate the development of land in proportion to its potential impacts. Rather than laying down rules for who can do what with their land, the town's rules provide protection for our priorities. In essence, we do not regulate *what* people can do with their land, but *how well* they do it.

Description of Growth Areas:

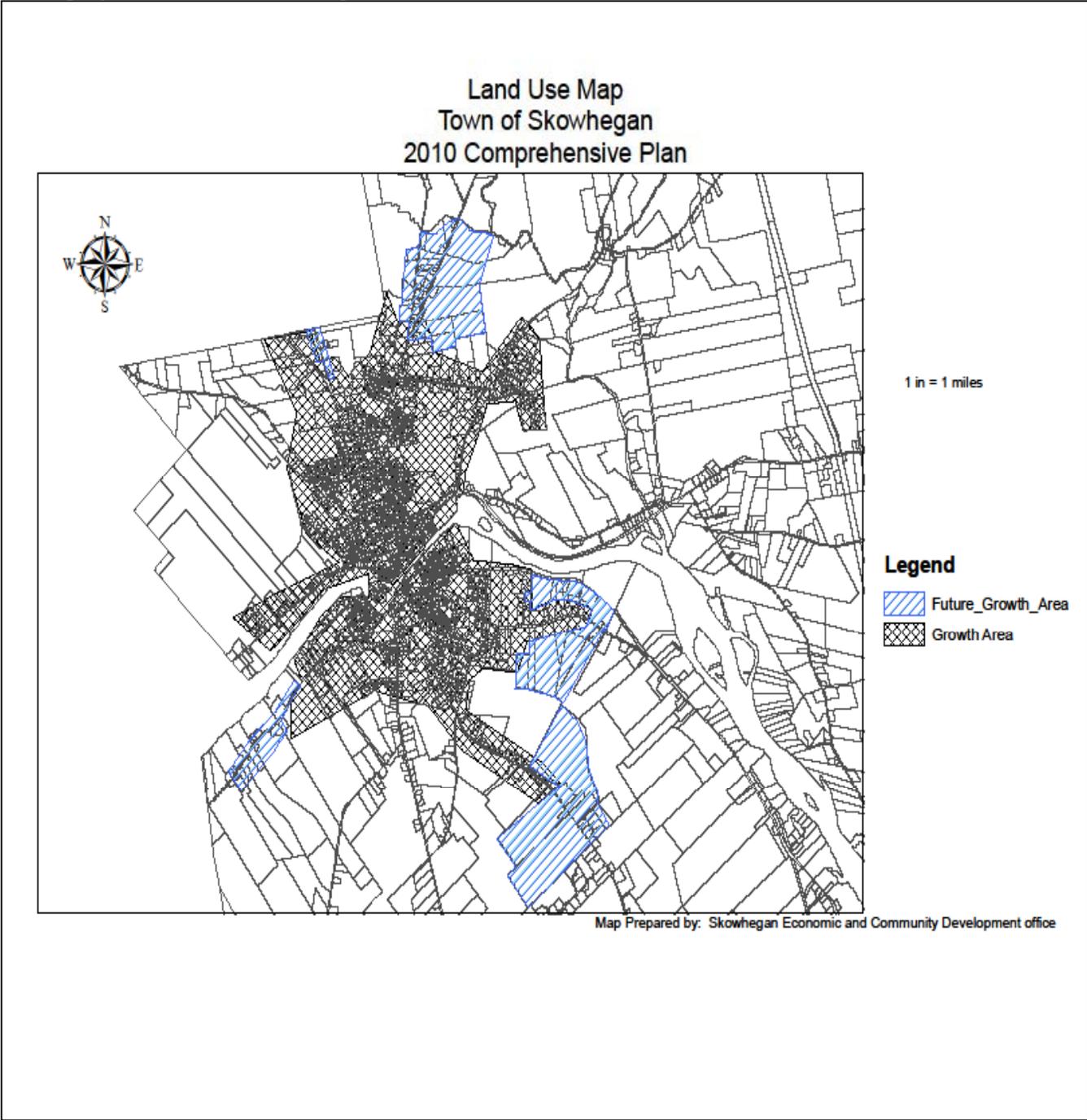
The town has identified a portion of our geographic area as the focus of future growth and development efforts. Within this area, the strategies identified as encouraging growth will be implemented and most growth-related capital investments will be directed (as they already are).

The *Growth Area* for Skowhegan is the area served by the existing public sewer system, shown as "Existing" in the Land Use Plan Map (following page). This includes all future development within reach of the sewer and already required by ordinance to hook in.

The growth area designated by this plan will be altered over the course of the planning period, to include any land to which public sewer is extended, either at public or private expense. The areas proposed for collector line extensions by the 2007 *Sewer System Master Plan* are shown on the Land Use Plan as "Future." In the event that SAPPI consented to allow private waste lines to connect with its treatment plant, these areas should also be included.

Within the general growth area, a sub-growth area is identified to encourage high density commercial or mixed use development. This designation is based on the existing design characteristics, which include multi-story buildings and a high percentage of lot coverage. This area is a blend of existing designations: the "downtown" and the historic district (see Vol 2 Map

Appendix). Within this area, certain requirements will be relaxed and other strategies will be employed to maintain existing densities.



Although the area designated as *Growth Area* is based on the availability of infrastructure, it consists primarily of areas where growth *has occurred*. At least 90 percent of the 2,557 acres encompassed in the sewer area has already been developed or otherwise locked up. We expect that future development of this area will consist primarily of 1) infill of the few vacant parcels, 2) redevelopment of commercial sites, or 3) redevelopment or replacement of existing housing at higher densities. Most of the strategies on pages 31-32 are meant to encourage these possibilities.

The eventual need to expand into undeveloped areas, particularly for commercial growth, is the justification for the *future growth area*. While a portion of these areas are already developed, the percentage is far lower than in the existing sewer area. The 750 or so acres available if all of these expansions were built greatly exceeds the 200 or less acres available in the existing sewer area. The proposed areas, as presented in the Master Plan include:

- 1) Route 201 South: 260 acres (30 percent developed)
- 2) Route 150 North: 280 acres (25 percent developed)
- 3) Route 201 North: 17 acres (10 percent developed)
- 4) Route 2 West: 68 acres (40 percent developed)
- 5) Route 104 South: 336 acres (10 percent developed)

The portion of Route 201 south (Waterville Road) beyond the existing sewer service area is the highest priority for expansion of the growth area. Development in this area will be accelerated if and when the new bridge is built. The sewer extension should be timed in conjunction with bridge construction, or at least within the 10 year planning horizon. Strategies to encourage development may be applied here. Impact fees should be considered as a mechanism to speed the installation of service infrastructure. Until then, standards should be applied which will make future sewer or water service cost-effective.

Remaining portions of town, consisting of about 91 percent of the total, are identified as *Rural Areas*. Within these areas, development which would have a negative impact on town services, environmental resources, or rural lifestyles will be discouraged. Examples of this type of development are mobile home parks, large conventional subdivisions, and businesses with more than 20 employees on site, unless they are resource-related. Ordinance standards and other strategies will be used to discourage these forms of development. In addition, an Open Space Plan will be developed and implemented to ensure protection for the highest priority rural areas.

It should be noted that existing policies in place for Skowhegan have served to direct virtually 100 percent of commercial and institutional development and a majority of residential development into the growth area. It is only within the past 10-20 years that the trend towards new residential construction has moved to the rural areas, and if the sewer extension plans were implemented, much of the recent “sprawl” would be incorporated into the growth area.

Strategies to Implement the Land Use Plan:

Recommended to Encourage Development in the Growth Area:

1. Develop or facilitate the development of significant new senior housing opportunities within the growth area, preferably within walking distance of the downtown subdistrict. This activity will be coordinated with Strategy 4-3 (Housing)
2. Identify additional residential neighborhood blocks for grant-funded housing rehabilitation or redevelopment, targeted at expanding workforce housing and promoting energy conservation. This activity will be coordinated with Strategy 4-4 (Housing)

3. Assist in revitalization of the downtown subdistrict, especially providing access to and marketing existing upper story building space. (high priority) This activity will be coordinated with Strategy 3-2 (Economic Development)
4. Waive permit fees or provide rebates for LEED-certified construction within the growth area. Identify other ways to encourage “green” development.
5. Within the CIP (chapter 5), prioritize and seek funding for infrastructure improvements that will increase development capacity in the growth area, e.g. sewer line and pump station expansion, sidewalks, public parking, and public open space. Consider the use of impact fees to finance sewer extensions.
6. Maintain the existing development densities, building coverage, parking requirements, and other standards that promote development in the growth area. Review requirements for the downtown subdistrict to permit/encourage greater densities.
7. Establish a public bus or trolley system in downtown and Madison Ave/North Ave. This activity will be coordinated with Strategy 7-11 (Transportation)
8. Provide a financial and regulatory incentive for mobile home parks to connect to the municipal sewer system.

Recommended to Discourage New Development in Rural Areas:

9. Amend the Site Review Ordinance to require a 50 foot sideline setback between new commercial development (except home occupations) and neighboring residences.
10. Amend the Site Review Ordinance to ensure that commercial development (over 20,000 square feet) not tied to resource development, four or more multi-family units, and mobile home parks are restricted or impose no negative impacts on rural neighborhoods, natural resources, or road systems.
11. Promote the use of conservation easements, land trusts and Tree Growth/Farm/Open Space tax programs to encourage rural landowners to voluntarily restrict development of their lands. Target areas identified by the open space plan and coordinate with Strategy 11-6 (Natural Resources)
12. Amend Site Review and Subdivision Ordinances where necessary to identify the Lake George Watershed, critical natural areas, and other areas identified in the Open Space Plan, and include appropriate measures to protect them, such as modification of proposed site designs, construction timing and/or extent of excavation. The regulatory process will incorporate maps and information provided by the Maine Beginning with Habitat program into their review process. This activity will be coordinated with Strategy 11-3 (Natural Resources)

13. Require subdivisions of more than 10 lots within areas designated by the open space plan to utilize open space design, with 50 percent of land committed to open space. Areas designated for open space should be significant farmland or contain essential wildlife habitat or corridors. It is anticipated that in open space subdivisions, the ordinance-required minimum lot size will be waived and that designated open space will be properly restricted against further development.
14. Enact a Road Standards Ordinance that will set a very high standard for town acceptance of new subdivision roads in the rural area. This activity will be coordinated with Strategy 7-3 (Transportation)
15. Provide regulatory and technical assistance to help establish and promote small scale local farms to alleviate the financial pressure to develop in rural areas. Review Site Review Ordinance to ensure that it does not inhibit local farm production and commerce. This activity will be coordinated with Strategy 9-6 (Farm/forest).
16. Public buildings and other growth-related capital investments shall not be located in the rural area, except in cases of operational necessity.
17. Following the decision concerning the route of the new bridge/bypass, the Planning Board will identify locations where it will provide access to land outside the growth area and establish targeted land use plans and standards for these locations. This activity will be coordinated with Strategy 7-4 (Transportation)

General Development Strategies:

18. Enforce state Uniform Building and Energy Code according to state-mandated deadline. Begin CEO training in 2011 for implementation by July 1, 2012.
19. Monitor and analyze trends in location of new development.
20. Establish a dialogue with neighboring towns over development strategies along regional arterials.

Implementation:

The Planning Board, over the coming 24 months, will evaluate the town's Subdivision and Site Review Ordinances, and will amend them to incorporate the recommendations of this and other chapters.

Beginning in 2011, the Planning Board will meet jointly with the SEDC, board members of Main Street Skowhegan, and other interested parties to identify new mechanisms to encourage and promote downtown development. The Planning Board will also attempt to meet annually with neighboring planning boards to discuss joint planning issues.

The Town, through the Conservation Commission working cooperatively with public and private organizations, will identify special natural resource areas and standards or initiatives suitable to protect them. Following adoption of an Open Space Plan, they will also take the lead in setting up a mechanism for connecting landowners with land conservation and protection strategies, including new farming opportunities.

The Town's planning and code enforcement offices will coordinate efforts to implement the new building code, monitor the type and location of new development, and promote energy efficiency in new (and rehab) development, beginning as soon as possible. The community development office will take the lead in promoting redevelopment of urban neighborhoods and high density development within the growth area.

The town's annual CIP process will include a mechanism for identification of investments that will increase development capacity within the growth area.

Evaluation Measures:

Commercial Development: Since virtually all new commercial development within the past has occurred either within the sewer service area or designated industrial parks/subdivisions, our objective is to continue this trend. Any significant new commercial development outside the growth area will require a report from the planning office specifying the circumstances and whether the town should change its policies in response.

Residential Development: Over the past ten years, approximately 40 % of the new housing units and 38 % of new subdivision lots have been established in Skowhegan's growth area. Based on historic growth trends, we can expect 504 housing units over the next 15 years. Our goal is to direct 75 percent of new growth to the growth area. That means 378 new housing units over 15 years, an average of 25 per year. However, in the past ten years, we have averaged only 27 units per year. Three-quarters of that figure would be 20. So our short-term goal should be to direct no fewer than 20 units per year in the growth area.

Beginning in 2011, the planning office will report annually to the Planning Board concerning progress towards these goals, together with recommendations for changes in policies and standards to address problem areas. Although the pace of subdivision development is too erratic to set an annual target for, the planning office will also track and report on the percentage of new subdivision lots created within the growth area.

In 2015 and again in 2020, the planning office will perform an overall analysis of the plan's implementation progress and success in achieving these goals, and report its findings to the Planning Board.

Chapter 9: Farming and Forestry

Overview and Issues:

- Skowhegan's forests have been a mainstay of the town's economic and cultural character since original settlement. Forests have provided income and jobs for generations of residents. Today, we have a mix of small woodlots and industrial holdings, managed tree farms and occasional cuttings. We also have large expanses of forest land held for conservation purposes. Roughly half of Skowhegan's land area is forested.
- Although a considerable number of timber harvesting operations are permitted each year, most are part of managed woodland. More forest is lost to development each year than clearing for agriculture. The amount of loss is relatively small, however. The number of acres in Tree Growth has remained virtually unchanged in 20 years (7,890 acres in 2007; 7,847 acres in 1987.)
- Project Canopy is a state initiative to promote street and park tree management. Skowhegan has completed a *Strategic Management Plan for Skowhegan's Community Forest (2007)*; the next stage of the process will be to implement a tree-planting plan.
- Increasing land values and a loss of commodity markets are contributing to a decline in traditional farms. In Skowhegan, much of the historically active farmland is in areas suitable for development, such as the northeast quadrant of town. Two traditional commodities – dairy and apples – are among the hardest hit.
- Despite a decline in commodities, the overall number of farms and contribution to the economy is growing. This results from a shift to a new pattern of farming. The new pattern relies on more intensive use of the land, value-added production, and local markets more so than prime soils and commodity markets. For example, the prospective development of a grist mill promises an alternative market for farm products. The new pattern relies more heavily on local policies and community support.
- Community support for agriculture is strong, as revealed in growing demand for local produce. The Skowhegan Farmers Market is successful, and the town has two CSA farms and a pick-your-own orchard. There are also a growing number of farmstands and greenhouses.
- Maple syrup production is considered farming, even though it comes from trees. Somerset County is the number one maple producing county in the country, and Skowhegan is a major participant. Five sugarhouses are located in Skowhegan. Most sell retail and are well patronized.

- 2,949 acres of open farmland is used as hayfield, cropland, and pasture in town according to tax records. In 2007, nearly 600 acres of cropland was enrolled for Farmland assessment.

Policies:

- Safeguard lands identified as active farmland or capable of supporting commercial forestry.
- Promote the use of best management practices for timber harvesting and agricultural production.
- Ensure the economic viability of farming and forestry.

Strategies:

1. Utilize appropriate expertise, such as the Maine Forest Service and the board and staff of Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District, when revising land use regulations which would affect agricultural or forest management practices.
2. The Conservation Commission will identify areas of prime farmland and suitable mechanisms for protection of the resource.
3. Limit the impact of commercial development in all rural areas, and incorporate regulatory standards in areas of prime farmland to limit commercial development to natural resource-dependent businesses and services, nature tourism/outdoor recreation businesses, farm stands, and home occupations.
4. In its revision of the Subdivision Ordinance, the Planning Board will protect priority areas and utilize strategies developed by the open space plan – the use of open space subdivision and other techniques
5. Encourage owners of productive farm and forest land to enroll in the current use taxation programs.
6. Encourage small scale agriculture and forestry operations, such as road-side stands, sugarhouses, improvements to the Skowhegan Farmers market and pick-your-own/cut-your-own operations, and incorporate value-added processing as an economic cluster in local and regional economic development plans.
7. Extend the Project Canopy planning process by developing and implementing a tree-planting plan.

Implementation:

The Conservation Commission will include farm protection planning in its open space plan, by identifying areas within rural Skowhegan that include Prime Farmland Soils or Soils of Statewide Importance, and which are by virtue of ownership patterns, capable of supporting agriculture. The commission will consult with the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources (DAFRR), the Maine Farmland Trust (MFT), Somerset Woods Trustees (SWT), and other advocates, to determine appropriate protective strategies to recommend for those areas. The proposed completion for the open space plan is 2012.

In revising Subdivision and Site Review Ordinances, the Planning Board will seek to limit the impact of development on prime farmland and active forest land. The Board will invite the Maine Forest Service and the board and staff of Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District to participate in the ordinance development process. In subsequent revisions to these ordinances, the Planning Board will incorporate state requirements to identify areas of prime farmland and protection strategies recommended in the town's open space plan.

In its ordinance review, the Planning Board will also ensure that no provisions unduly limit opportunities for rural landowners to market or process agricultural products or develop value-added processing.

The Conservation Commission will sponsor a farmer's appreciation dinner with local farmers. As part of the program, the commission will invite the town assessor and the Maine Farmland Trust to discuss current use programs as well as easements and other mechanisms available to permanently protect their farmland. The dinner should be held in the winter of 2010-11, with possible annual dinners to follow.

The Conservation Commission will organize a forum in cooperation with the town's Economic and Community Development Department in order to explore ways to support and expand the town's resource-based economies. Invitees may include the DAFRR, MFT, SCSWCD, Small Woodlot Owners Association of Maine (SWOAM), the American Tree Farm Association (ATFA), and local entrepreneurs. The Conservation Commission will also request that these associations bring informational materials on sustainable agriculture and forestry opportunities that town officials can share with local landowners. This forum should be scheduled for late 2010.

In planning for downtown improvements, the Town should include larger, more visible, and more permanent space for the Skowhegan Farmers Market.

The Community Forest Committee will complete the tree planting plan phase of its project by 2010.

Chapter 10: Water Resources

Overview and Summary:

- The Kennebec River is the most prominent water feature in town, and a defining element of Skowhegan's quality of life. After decades of pollution and water quality issues, the Kennebec is now classified as "Class B" – suitable for drinking water after treatment, for fishing, in-water recreation, hydroelectric generation, navigation, and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life.
- The Kennebec River is a regional asset. The Town is participating in the Kennebec River Initiative, to enhance the river and build public access, and has historically worked with other towns in Somerset County on river monitoring and improvement projects.
- Skowhegan has two significant great ponds. Lake George is located on the boundary with Canaan and is part of the Canaan Bog complex; its water quality is above average according to 2004 DEP data. Oak Pond is also located in eastern Skowhegan, but is significantly smaller; its water quality is average according to 2004 DEP data. Both ponds are on DEP's "lakes most at risk from development" list, though neither has had any significant development activity within their watersheds.
- A majority of the Lake George and Oak Pond watersheds consist of mature forest; neither is heavily developed. A 2001 Colby College water quality report recommends maintaining the mature forest in the watersheds to maintain good water quality. The Site Review Ordinance requires that commercial development within the watersheds meet Phosphorous control standards, but subdivision and residential development need not.
- Skowhegan's public water supply comes from local surface water, including a string of ponds known as Upper and Lower Ponds. A 2003 "Source Water Assessment" report ranks the watershed "low to moderate" for susceptibility to contamination and "moderate" concerning existing supplies and the Kennebec River which is a supplemental water source.
- There is a significant aquifer underlying the urban area that could be a supplemental public water source; however, it includes most of the commercial/industrial areas of Madison Avenue and North Avenue, and therefore is potentially compromised. The 2003 report asserts that a lack of controls over future nearby urban development could impact water quality of Upper and Lower Ponds and recommends establishing a watershed and

aquifer protection zone. While no zone has been established since then, the 2008 Site Plan Review Ordinance requires Low Impact Development techniques for stormwater systems as well as standards for chemical and hazardous materials management.

- The Skowhegan Highway Department has an aggressive policy towards stormwater control and management. Road crews are fully trained in Best Management Practices for road maintenance and construction techniques. Crews also participate in public awareness campaigns such as marking storm drains to remind people that what goes in at the drain comes out at the river.
- The Town participates in the National Flood Insurance Program, including ordinance updates and regular visits from FEMA staff to review the program and answer particular questions. Skowhegan initiated and, until recently, managed the county emergency response program, including establishment of a river monitoring system.

Policies:

- Protect current and potential drinking water sources.
- Protect surface water resources from pollution and improve water quality where needed.
- Provide public water supplies and sewer service in growth areas, to encourage more intensive development in those areas.
- Minimize the effects of direct discharges of wastewater treatment facilities by encouraging upgrade of existing public sewer systems and wastewater treatment facilities.
- Cooperate with neighboring communities and advocacy groups to protect both groundwater and surface water resources.

Strategies:

1. Update the Subdivision Ordinance to be consistent with the Maine Stormwater Management Law and rules concerning low impact development, DEP's allocations for allowable levels of phosphorus in lake/pond watersheds, and the Maine Pollution Discharge Elimination System program.
2. Monitor federal floodplain mandates and inform the Planning Board of any need to update the Town's floodplain management ordinance.
3. Monitor the requirements of the urban impaired stream watershed program, and continue to pursue funding to develop a Whitten Brook Urban Impaired Stream Watershed Plan. Currier Brook and other streams will be evaluated to see if they fall into the "urban impaired stream" classification.

4. Work with Aqua Maine and other public water systems to take appropriate action to protect public wellhead and aquifer recharge areas as necessary.
5. Provide water quality “best management practices” information to farmers and foresters.
6. Continue management practices and standards for erosion control and wildlife corridor protection in construction and maintenance of public roads, utilities, and properties and require their implementation by the local officials, employees and contractors.
7. Continue to participate in local and regional efforts to monitor and protect the quality of the Kennebec River and other significant water bodies, in particular involvement in the Kennebec River Initiative.
8. Obtain educational materials on milfoil and other invasive species and post at Lake George and Kennebec River boat launches and in the town office.

Implementation:

The Planning Board is responsible for drafting and proposing amendments to the Subdivision and Site Review Ordinances. The Board will propose amendments to further protect water quality in the Subdivision Ordinance for the 2011 annual town meeting. The Board will also consider whether to make additional changes in the Site Review Ordinance to further protect the significant aquifer north of Upper and Lower Ponds as it looks at overall revisions (2012).

In preparation for amending these ordinances, the Planning Board and Conservation Commission will have a joint meeting, inviting representatives from NEMO (Nonpoint Source Education for Municipal Officials) and Aqua Maine to attend and discuss issues related to their areas of responsibility.

The Conservation Commission will bear primary responsibility for regular monitoring of local and regional water quality issues and reaching out to cooperating individuals, groups, and organizations (e.g. Kennebec River Initiative, Lake George Regional Park) on a continuing basis. The commission will be responsible for identifying and applying for funding for an urban impaired watershed plan, a continuing activity until the plan is in place.

The commission will obtain Best Management Practices literature from applicable State agencies in 2010 and work with the town assessor to identify and mail the literature to all farm and forest landowners in Skowhegan within the coming year. The commission will develop a system to monitor fish populations and threats to water quality in tributary streams and report to the town, beginning in 2013.

Chapter 11: Critical Natural Resources

Overview and Summary:

- Skowhegan places a high value on its natural resource assets, and keeps current with state and federal mandates, such as shoreland zoning and floodplain management. We have one of the most active conservation commissions in the state, undertaking a range of projects designed to protect the land and water resources of the town.
- Somerset Woods Trustees (SWT) is a regionally-significant land conservation organization based in Skowhegan. SWT owns land and easements currently protecting 560 acres in town, including 12,000 feet of shoreline on Kennebec River and Wesserunsett Stream. Most of SWT's properties have wildlife protection and/or forest management as key components of their planning. Other land trusts and conservation groups also have a presence in Skowhegan.
- Beginning with Habitat data show one essential wildlife habitat (bald eagle nest site), two areas with rare, threatened or endangered wildlife, and three with rare plants or exemplary natural community locations. The Subdivision Ordinance and the Site Review Ordinance require prospective developers to verify locations of critical habitat and take appropriate measures to protect them prior to approval. This is an appropriate level of protection, since little more is known at this time about the protected species and their requirements. In addition, all but one of these identified areas are within regulated shoreland zones.
- The Canaan Bog is probably the most significant land-based natural area, occupying a good portion of eastern Skowhegan. Part of the bog is listed as an exemplary natural community by Beginning with Habitat program, incorporating both high value wetland habitat and deer wintering areas. The bog area is also the largest undeveloped habitat block in Skowhegan. While no effort has been made to provide special protection for the bog, it has historically been inaccessible to development.

Policies:

- Conserve critical natural resources in the community.
- Coordinate with neighboring towns and private, regional, and state conservation agencies and land trusts to protect shared critical natural resources.

- Utilize existing development regulations to continue to protect critical natural resources.

Strategies:

1. Continue to update the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance as conditions warrant.
2. (*High Priority*) Develop an Open Space Plan. Designate critical natural resource areas as priority areas in development of the plan. Priority areas will include:
 - a. Essential Wildlife Habitat (bald eagle nest site)
 - b. Rare, Threatened or Endangered Wildlife Habitat
 - c. Rare or Exemplary Plants and Natural Communities
 - d. Rare or Exemplary Natural Community Locations

The open space plan will identify whether these areas should be a) designated to further study, b) protected by ordinance or regulation, or c) priority for acquisition of title or development rights, based on their relative importance.

The open space plan will also serve to identify and suggest protective measures for areas of essential farmland (strategy 9-2) and outdoor recreation (strategy 6-8).

3. Identify critical natural resources and amend ordinances appropriately to protect those resources, including but not limited to, modification of the proposed site design, construction timing, or extent of excavation. The regulatory process will incorporate maps and information provided by the Maine Beginning with Habitat program.
4. Continue to utilize resource protection practices and standards for construction and maintenance of public roads and properties within the Public Works Department (PWD). The PWD shall continue following DOT's Best Management Practices for Erosion Control and shall require all its employees to attend Maine Local Roads Center training on erosion and sedimentation control.
5. Participate in ongoing interlocal planning/protection of Lake George and the Kennebec River.
6. Pursue public/private partnerships to protect critical natural resources such as through purchase of land or easements from willing sellers.
7. Distribute or make available information to those living in or near critical natural areas about applicable local, state or federal regulations.

Implementation:

The Conservation Commission is charged with preparation of an open space plan for presentation at the 2012 Town meeting. The open space plan will include a scenic view inventory and assessment, a priority list of high value natural areas, high value agricultural areas, and potential recreation sites, and strategies to pursue public/private partnerships to protect these areas

such as through purchase of land or easements from willing sellers. Areas identified in the open space plan will be integrated into the land use plan's rural areas wherever feasible.

The Planning Board will consult with the Conservation Commission in proposing amendments to Site Review (2012) and Subdivision Ordinances (2011) to further protect natural resource areas. The following standards are recommended and will be discussed:

- require applicants to solicit written review comments from the Skowhegan Conservation Commission, Maine Department Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) and Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) when any portion of a proposed development is within 500 feet of Essential Habitat Areas identified on Beginning with Habitat map.
- require applicants to adopt appropriate measures based on review comments to protect identified critical natural resources including but not limited to changes to proposed site design, construction timing and/or extent of excavation.
- require that any proposed subdivision within 500 feet of any Essential Habitat Area must be an open space subdivision with conserved land to include land contiguous to the identified habitat and left essentially undisturbed.
- require IFW written review comments when a portion of a proposed subdivision is within Canaan Bog or other deer wintering area as indicated on a State Beginning with Habitat map and require an open space subdivision if [50] percent or more of a conventional subdivision would encompass such a habitat area.

The Skowhegan highway department will continue to utilize best management practices for erosion control and will ensure that employees engaged in road maintenance work attend appropriate Maine Local Roads Center training. The highway department will also instigate practices to ensure that culvert replacement and other road maintenance activities do not alter or impede wildlife movements.

The Conservation Commission will coordinate an information and education campaign for residents as well as owners of property in or near critical natural resource areas. The commission will obtain informational literature, distribute it, hold public information sessions, participate in regional planning and conservation efforts, and pursue other activities as identified throughout the planning period.

Chapter 12: Regional Coordination

Skowhegan is the county seat and service center for Somerset County. Twenty six other towns look to Skowhegan for employment, service, and governmental leadership. The extent to which we exercise regional leadership and cooperation raises the quality of life for all Somerset County.

The Growth Management Law requires that our comprehensive plan enumerate existing and proposed elements of regional cooperation. While we participate in a broad spectrum of regional programs and efforts, they can generally be categorized into three areas.

Public Services:

Existing:

- Somerset County Courthouse
- Somerset County Sheriff/PSAP
- Somerset County Emergency Management
- Fire Department mutual aid agreements
- Solid Waste Management – recycling jointly with Madison, hosting regional household Hazardous Waste Collections
- RSU 54, hosting Skowhegan Area High School, Skowhegan Area Middle School, Skowhegan Regional Vocation Center,
- Skowhegan Recreation Department – community center and recreation programs open to all (fee for non-residents)
- Lake George Regional Park
- Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (joint purchasing, shared planner)
- Somerset Woods Trustees (access to properties for public recreation)

Proposed:

- Continue search for new opportunities for sharing public facilities and services (strategy 5-11)
- Expand regional cooperation in waste reduction and recycling (5-5)
- Expand communication with RSU 54 (5-8).
- Continue to support and participate in Lake George Regional Park (6-3)
- Participate in regional and corridor-level transportation planning (7-2, 6)

Growth and Development:

Existing:

- Somerset Economic Development Corporation
- Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce
- Kennebec Valley Council of Government – Economic Development Committee.

Proposed:

- Work with RSU 54 and Kennebec Valley Community College to expand job training, small business counseling and entrepreneurial skills (chapter 3-6)
- Continue active participation in regional economic development organizations.
- Investigate formation of a regional housing authority as option for Senior Housing Task Force. (4-3)
- Initiate contacts with neighboring planning boards on development issues along arterial highways. (8-20)

Natural Resources:

Existing:

- Kennebec River Initiative
- Lake George Regional Park
- Somerset Woods Trustees properties
- Old Canada Road Scenic Byway

Proposed:

- Continue participation in the KRI and other regional efforts to protect the quality of and access to the Kennebec River. (Chapter 10-6)
- Continue to engage in protection for the Lake George watershed. (11-5)