

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Wascott has had a history of planning for its overall development needs. Most recently (2003-2005), the town was engaged in a planning process that included a comprehensive review of past and current development activities and projected changes forecasted over a future 20-year planning horizon.



In the early 1980's the Town of Wascott recognized a need for a plan identifying the development policies of the town. In April 1982, a Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Wascott was adopted. The plan identified that "One of the major difficulties that the Town of Wascott has had to face during the last ten years has been the rapid growth of second home developments and large influxes of seasonal residents." The plan also stated that "The town recognized that planning should take place now to prevent major problems from developing; rather than to react later to already occurring problems."

Today, the Town of Wascott continues to identify its community development needs and desires of year-round and seasonal residents. As part of the overall planning process, a vision statement for the town was developed that assisted in providing direction to those involved in developing this comprehensive plan. Wascott's vision statement reads: *The Homestead Act of 1862 provided the opportunity for settlers to own a home for their families in Northwestern Wisconsin. In 1910, our area separated from Gordon and became the Township of Wascott. Today, Wascott remains a rural community that must encourage a balance between the rights of its residents and the needs of its businesses. To maintain a positive town identity, we must preserve the natural integrity of the area while accommodating the influx of a diverse population, a demand for varied available housing, the increased recreational traffic, and the need for more businesses.*

PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

The *Town of Wascott Comprehensive Plan* is intended to assist local and county officials implement recommendations relating to its goals, objectives, and actions and assist in making future land use decisions. The plan will also assist with development and management issues by addressing short-range and long-range concerns regarding growth, development, and preservation of the community. The comprehensive plan will assist in:

- identifying areas appropriate for development or preservation;
- recommending types of land use for specific areas;
- identifying needed transportation and community facilities necessary to serve existing and future residents;
- directing housing and other investments to areas that can best serve the community; and
- providing detailed objectives and actions to implement the overall plan goals.

This comprehensive plan has been prepared under the Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning legislation contained in Wisconsin Statute 66.1001. The plan is organized into nine chapters or elements (issues and opportunities; housing; transportation; utilities and community facilities; natural, agricultural, and cultural resources; economic development; intergovernmental cooperation; land use, and implementation) each addressing one element specified under the law.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

In 2001, the Town of Wascott participated in a multi-jurisdictional grant application to the State of Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Grant Program seeking funds to assist in the development of the comprehensive plan. Upon being awarded funding, the town and other grant applicants from partner jurisdictions in Washburn County embarked on a planning process.

The overall process began with the development of a planning committee representing the varied interests throughout the town. The committee provided the overall direction, input, and recommendations found in the comprehensive plan. It is important to note that the development of the plan is intended to be representative of the entire community.

To begin the planning process, a community planning survey was mailed to all property owners in the summer of 2003. The survey included questions to gather basic demographic data, to ascertain residents' assessment of the current situation in the town, and to obtain opinions regarding the town's future. Information from the survey was used throughout the planning process and provided direction to the planning committee. Survey results are included in the appendix. The planning committee also developed a list of issues and opportunities confronting the community. These processes were helpful in establishing a baseline for developing the comprehensive plan.

Wisconsin's State Statute 66.1001 requires municipalities to adopt written procedures that are designed to foster a wide range of public participation throughout the planning process. The main goal of the public participation plan is to make all citizens of the community aware of the plan's progress and to offer the public opportunities to make suggestions or comments during the planning process. The Town of Wascott adopted a public participation plan for use in the overall development of the Town of Wascott Comprehensive Plan.



Throughout the planning process, the public was afforded several opportunities to participate directly in the development of the comprehensive plan. Meetings of the community planning committee were posted and public members attending all planning related meetings were afforded an opportunity to speak and participate jointly with the committee in plan review and development. The recommended draft comprehensive plan was circulated to all adjoining and overlapping jurisdictions and others required to receive the plan and made available to the public via hard copy and Internet. Two public information sessions were held. The first was held prior to the beginning of the planning process in which the overall planning legislation was reviewed; a second meeting was held to review the draft plan and solicit input. A public hearing on the comprehensive plan was held affording an opportunity for public comment.

TOWN HISTORY

The 1982 Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Wascott contained a section outlining a brief history of Douglas County and the Wascott and Gordon area. The following text is from the 1982 comprehensive plan.

The early history of Douglas County is a story of the Indian. The first known inhabitants of what is now Douglas County were the Mound Builders. They were a rather mysterious, advanced group of people that appeared on the shores of Lake Superior sometime after the last glacier receded some 10,000 years ago. They mined copper in the Minong Range and at Manitou Falls on the Black River. They pounded this metal into weapons, implements, and ornaments later to be found buried in curious mounds with their dead. Their civilization was eventually overrun by barbarous tribes, mainly of Muskogean and Iroquois linguistic stock, and disappeared as a distinct culture in late prehistoric American times. Only the mounds remain.

Next the Mascoutins, “People of the Fire”, lived here by trapping beaver, harvesting wild rice, spearing whitefish, and hunting deer. They remained until about 1400 when the Dacotah (Sioux), who were forced westward by the Iroquois, drove them out. From this time on, there were successions of various Indian tribes from the northeastern United States invading and inhabiting this region, until finally in 1490 the Chippewa’s (formerly called Ojibwas) built a settlement on Bayfield County’s Madeline Island. They eventually moved onto the mainland where they had a thriving community for over 120 years, until they were eventually overrun by white colonists.

The first white men to visit the area were the French. In 1618, Stephen Brulé, a voyageur for Champlain, coasted along the south shore of Lake Superior where he met the Ojibwa. Upon returning to Quebec, he carried back some copper specimens and a glowing account of the region. In 1632, Champlain’s map appeared, showing “Lac Superior de Tracy” as Lake Superior and the lower end shore as “Fond du Lac”.

Soon after, fur trading companies established settlements, while missionaries came bringing the first touches of civilization. Names and dates of some of those who pioneered in exploring the Douglas County area were Father Menard (1653), Radisson and Grosseilliers (1655), Father

Claude Allouez (1668), Nicolas Perrot (1671), Sier Randin (1673), Daniel Greysolon Du L'Hut (1679), and Pierr Charles Le Sueur (1693).

Wascott lies on one of the major water highways used by early travelers and voyageurs of inland America. This water trail, the Bois Brule – St. Croix River Portage Trail, was the most convenient link between Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. The Bois Brule and St. Croix River systems are only separated by a short portage over a sub-continental Divide near Solon Springs. The northward traveler used this water trail to take him to Lake Superior, while the downstream traveler could use it to go southwest to the Gulf of Mexico, unhindered by portages, by using the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers.

The waterway was also an important route in the Wisconsin fur trade, particularly when the French War with the Fox Indians closed the more southern routes. This territory was transferred to British rule by the Treaty of Paris in 1763 at the conclusion of the French and Indian War. It was explored by Capt. Jonathon Carver in 1767 and came under the flag of the United States government in 1783 under terms of the Treaty of Peace of that year.

Indian control of what is now Douglas County began to wane in the early 1800's, and in 1847 the Chippewa's signed a treaty giving up all rights to the region. With the Indian now on reservations, white settlers began to pour into the region to cut timber and prospect for minerals. In 1852, the government survey of townships in the county was completed. That same year the first settlers founded the City of Superior. A law enacted February 8, 1854, separated Douglas County from the larger County of La Pointe.

Superior was immediately selected as the county seat, though it was not incorporated until 1887. St. Louis was actually the first name proposed for the county; however, R. R. Nelson submitted an amendment to change the proposed name to Douglas County after Nelson's friend, Stephen A. Douglas, the Little Giant of Democracy.

It was in September 1860 when two canoes rounded a bend in the St. Croix River seeking a landing. This was the last year of peace for this nation for four long, bitter years of civil war. The leader of this group was one Antoine Guerdon of the LaPointe Trading Post on Lake Superior. The purpose of this voyage was to renew relations with the Chippewa Indians in the Northwestern part of Wisconsin, thus extending the fur trade for the Northwest Company, which had its post at Lac Du Flambeau.

As a result of this landing at the spot where the Eau Claire River empties into the larger St. Croix, Guerdon, or Gordon as he was later called, decided to establish a trading post here to accommodate the Indian tribes who trapped and hunted in this valley of Two Rivers. Another factor in the decision to settle at this point was the increasing demand for lumber in the westward expansion that was only delayed by the Civil War. Two years earlier a military road was cut through this area connecting St. Paul, Minnesota with the lakehead at Superior.

During the winter of 1860-61 Gordon purchased a tract of land from the Wisconsin Land and Improvement Company and the Henry Rice Land Company. He then sold his interests at LaPointe and built a Trading Post at this place that the Indians called Amick, The Beaver, in the

Chippewa tongue. During the following years, Gordon's store furnished the Indian trappers with supplies in exchange for their furs. All trade goods were hauled in either from St. Paul over the mail route by ox teams and horses or from LaPointe by boat, first through the Brule – St. Croix Portage and later out of the newly established port of Superior. Some years later Gordon was to acquire an interest in the first sailing vessel to haul cargo on Lake Superior. This was the famous ship Alegeonquon which was later destroyed by fire.

Antoine immediately constructed a log dwelling near the Eau Claire River which was used both as a home and trading store. This post became a supply point and a stopping place along the St. Paul to Bayfield mail route. It was here that the Chippewa's brought their fur and game to trade for food and other white man's goods. Gordon became their spokesman and counselor and managed to control the more savage of these wandering bands in times of provocation and stress. He also was called upon to provide food and shelter when the hunting was poor and the snows of winter deep.

In addition to the material good that was accomplished by Mr. Gordon, who was a deeply religious man with an above average education for the times in which he lived, he provided these children of the forest with some of the fruits of a civilized society by teaching them to read and write and worship God in the white man's way. A log building was constructed where the children, both Indian and White, received the rudiments of an education during the days of the week and religious instruction on Sunday. Mr. Gordon, who as a young man was choir master for the now famous Northwest Missionary, Bishop Barage of the Roman Catholic Church, conducted these services with the prayers and songs of the church. Many years later, his grandson, Philip Gordon, was to become a noted Indian priest, to fulfill a dream that Antoine Gordon himself cherished as a young man.

In the year 1874, a small church was built and later served by a group of Franciscan Fathers from Bayfield. The most notable of these priests was Father Oderic who is still remembered by many of the older residents of this area. He served these people for many years, coming to Gordon from Bayfield and Ashland. Father Cronstrom also served this north country. He has an especially noted place in the history of this Indian country by virtue of the fact that he translated most of the Bible into the Chippewa language. The translation was written on birchbark and now is in the possession of Northland College at Ashland. These missionaries accepted the hardships of their task as an inevitable part of their mission. They traveled by canoe and on foot during the summer months and snowshoes during the winters. Their struggle was a long and valiant one.

Mail service was established after the St. Paul Bayfield road was completed. An Englishman by the name of Dingley, who was related to Gordon delivered the mail under contract from the government. In the early years, the Bergin Hotel was built as a stopping place along the mail route for the mail carriers, lumberjacks, Indian traders, land lookers and settlers. A few years later, the Smith Hotel was built and served this community for many years as a boarding house and hotel. Both of these landmarks are now gone. Around the turn of the century, a formal town was created and the name of Gordon written into the record books. The village then became a unit of Douglas County at about the same time.

In the year 1882, the Northwestern Railroad extended a main line from St. Paul to Superior. Antoine Gordon deeded the right-of-way through the Village of Gordon. A depot was built at its present site and the first train stopped there in that year. This event accelerated logging operations and brought settlers into the Gordon and Wascott areas. The Town of Wascott came into being around the year 1910. Between 1906 and 1908 the Soo Line Railroad built its grade and tracks running through Gordon just west of the Eau Claire River. The line connected Chicago with the Lakehead parts.

Following the Civil War and the beginning of westward expansion, the vast pine lands of the north were explored and opened up. The demand for wood in the prairie country to the west brought into being the big lumber companies. Gordon became the chief supply point and log outlet for these timber operations. The first logger to cut timber in the St. Croix River Valley was a man by the name of Long. He logged with ox teams and floated his logs down the St. Croix River to Stillwater, Minnesota. That city became the terminal for timber cut around the Eau Claire River, St. Croix River, Eau Claire Lakes, Lake St. Croix, and the Moose River country west of Gordon. Mausser-Sauntry and Werhauser were the chief big operators cutting timber out of Gordon. These companies had many large camps in the vicinity of Gordon, Wascott, and Solon Springs. Gordon became the chief supply point for these camps in the winter and the river drives in the spring. Lumberjacks, horses, oxen, beans, flour, hay, whiskey, canthooks, axes, saws, salt pork, and sourdough all went out from here to the back forties and the big woods to make the logs.

Most of the timber barons and the now forgotten lumberjacks followed the timber from the east to make daylight in the Wisconsin woods. These men, with names such as Craig, Carlson, Harding, to name a few, with many others have since become legends in the story of the forests. Places such as “Deadman’s Creek”, “Frozenman’s Bridge”, “Sauntry’s Pocket”, and “Sixmile Dam” mark the now forgotten paths of these men who harvested the pine lands. The last log drive went down the St. Croix in 1912. After that, logging took on a new face and a new emphasis.

Those who have lived in the forest clearings were often at the mercy of great forest fires. The great fires of 1886, 1889, and 1910 left their mark on this part of Wisconsin. Fire-scarred trees; brush clearings and vast acres of second growth cover remained for years to mark the destruction of much of our timber resources. The Town of Gordon also suffered from fires. The year 1913 saw a part of the town destroyed by a fire. Forest fires often swept in on a high wind. In the early years, fire was considered a normal hazard of living; and fires in the timberlands often rolled unchecked, unless homesteads, lumber camps, mills, and villages were threatened. Water, manpower, horses, and simple hand tools were the only defense against this scourage. These and rain, subsiding winds, and the Lord’s help saved this Village of Gordon many times in the early years.

In the month of May of the year 1907, Antoine Gordon died at the age of ninety-eight. His passing marked the end of an era. He and his family are buried in the cemetery on the hill overlooking the river valley that he marked for his home over a half century before.

TODAY

The area's natural resources and cultural history continue to play an important role in shaping the community development pattern. Development of residential homes has continued to be influenced by the town's many lakes along with local and seasonal resident's desire to live close to public hunting and recreation lands.

Community members have attempted to develop a comprehensive planning document that examines the many issues and opportunities that confront to the town. In doing so, the locally developed comprehensive plan provides the town with information critical to assisting in making informed decisions on future proposals.