
HERMANTOWN
A SENSE OF PLACE

HERMANTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

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Hermantown is a unique and varied City. The natural landscape is as variable as the development throughout the community. Located above the Lake Superior escarpment, Hermantown has broad flat upland areas and a portion of the City slopes downward in a southeasterly direction toward the St. Louis River estuary. Rainfall and snowmelt are drained through a system of wetlands and trout streams to the east, southeast and southwest. Miller Creek, Keene Creek and the Midway River are the primary drainage ways in the community. There are large undeveloped forested bogs and wetlands that provide separation between highly developed areas along Trunk Highway 53 and the less densely developed residential neighborhoods.

The City is laid out on a grid of county highways that provide access to local development and serve the travel and access needs of surrounding communities as well. The grid pattern is primarily along section lines that divide the City's 32 square miles into one square mile sections. Development has utilized the county road grid to provide access to individual residential lots and the section interiors remain largely undeveloped. These acres of undeveloped woodlands provide habitat for a variety of wildlife and Hermantown residents are used to deer, fox, bear, beaver, racoons, and other indigenous wildlife in their backyards and neighborhoods.

Development in Hermantown has long been influenced by the economic development characteristics of Duluth. Hermantown's initial growth was due in part to a demand for more spacious residential development on the fringe of Duluth. The southeast quadrant developed at suburban density beginning in the late 1940s, and on through the 1950s and 1960s. Many of Hermantown's early plats were laid out in the 1940s but not developed for many years after. The former Duluth Air Force Base was a major impetus for development of housing, and commercial development along State Trunk Highway 53 was primarily in response to development of the Air Force Base and the population center it provided.

Expansion of the Duluth International Airport continues to dominate the landscape in the northeast corner of the City. The minimum security Federal Prison now occupies a portion of the space that housed the U.S. Air Force base that was closed in the late 1970's.

Commercial development along the Trunk Highway 53 corridor has mushroomed in the past 15 years and many of the highway's older initial commercial developments have been redeveloped to provide space for the "big box" retailers such as Menards and Wal Mart. Most of the automobile dealers that were once located below the bluff in Duluth have relocated to the Highway 53 Corridor. Duluth's decision to allow the Miller Hill Mall development provided the impetus for service and retail businesses to seek land in the corridor and locate "over the hill". The Hermantown portion of the highway remains the home to many businesses that first located in the corridor because they required large land areas to display and service products such as recreational vehicles, mobile homes and large equipment. These base businesses needed an easy-to-find location with inexpensive land and often were owned by people that resided in the community. Today, Hermantown's commercial district extends from the Maple Grove Road north and west to the City limits along the state trunk highway. Easy access and ample parking are key attributes for development in this commercial district. Land values have soared, and more retailers are seeking a location within a few minutes or miles of the Miller Mall.

The Highway 53 corridor is a busy place throughout the year as northlanders, Canadians, Wisconsin residents and residents of Michigan's Upper Peninsula travel to this "multi-state retail center" because of the variety of goods and services that are available in both Duluth and Hermantown. At the same time, the highway provides a link to the recreation centers of Minnesota and Canada and the summer months see a significant increase in traffic as vacationers travel through, to, and from the area.

Hermantown has a second major highway corridor as Federal Trunk Highway 2 crosses the southern end of the City and eventually links with TH 53 to the west of Hermantown. This highway corridor has less traffic than Highway 53, yet is an important link for truck traffic that brings goods and services to northland residents. The lack of public utilities in this corridor serves to limit the amount of commercial and light industrial development in this portion of the City.

Away from the bustling Highway 53 corridor are the quiet residential neighborhoods that formed the core of Hermantown and in recent years have attracted more development and new residents from Duluth and other areas. The City is characterized by large lot residential developments that were first dependant on wells and septic systems, but later required public water to replace shallow wells because of contamination from failing septic systems that functioned poorly in the tight glacial till soils and high groundwater levels that are prevalent throughout the community.

During the early years of residential development in Hermantown, most single-family homes were located along the county roads closest to Duluth because most wage earners were employed either in Duluth or at businesses that served the Air Force Base. The City's mobile home parks provided housing for the transient families of the U.S. Air Force and later were sought by older residents that wanted to enjoy the mild summer weather, but yet avoid the perils of the often harsh winters in the Lake Superior basin.

Hermantown residents wanted quality education for their children and the Hermantown School district was formed to provide for their educational needs. City fathers had considerable foresight and set aside large land areas for the school system that today remains a major drawing card for new families seeking quality educational facilities for their children. The elementary school, middle school and high school had room to grow and their expansive campuses, with more than 200 hundred acres of land in the heart of the City, provide a unique setting for the educational system. The City was willing to help provide needed athletic facilities in the form of baseball and football fields that met the needs of the community, yet limited the financial burden on the school district to use their tax levy for such purposes. In the 1980s the City used its resources to construct a modern Ice Area that has since been paid for and turned over to the School District to provide for athletics and general school use.

Hermantown in the Year 2000 is the fastest growing community in Northeast Minnesota. Expansion of the commercial areas and new residential subdivisions have attracted new residents from the metropolitan area as well as other areas of Minnesota. In the past 20 years (1980 to 2000) Hermantown has become the focus area for new residential and commercial development. No longer just a bedroom community for Duluth-based business and industry, Hermantown residents can now boast that their residents both live and work in the City.

This, however, is not without adverse impacts, as communities around Hermantown have also seen new residential development that has moved out of the central cities of Duluth, Superior and Cloquet and located in the first and second tiers of townships west and north of Hermantown. This sprawl development in conjunction with development of the commercial/retail center of the region brings a significant amount of traffic moving through the City on a daily basis. Coupled with growth in the community, the City's public safety and administrative staff have had to deal with the issues of this growth while a majority of the financial resources are siphoned off to St. Louis County and the school district. Where the City must provide the basic services and infrastructure to residents, most of the needed financial resources go St. Louis County which in turn provides little or no services or support. On a statewide basis Hermantown is penalized financially for growing and must look to developers to provide infrastructure for new development.

The only exception is the provision of the local one half percent sales tax that is pledged to funding public safety and the trunk sewer project for which the City fathers worked hard to secure from the Minnesota State legislature.

Hermantown in the Year 2000 is at a cross road in development of the community. New residents are continuing to be attracted by the positive commercial and residential development attributes of the community. Yet these same community attributes or characteristics are being threatened by continued growth. Higher taxes by the County and School district are a problem for older long term residents that want to maintain their

households, and new residents seem to want to close the door on more new development to protect their interests and property investments.

The challenge for the new community comprehensive plan is to preserve the qualities of the community that are valued by long term residents and attracted new residents and businesses to the City.