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### **COMMUNITY HISTORY AND BACKGROUND**

The Town of Rome is at the geographic center of the state, approximately 100 miles north of Madison, and 40 miles southwest of Stevens Point. It is also within 45 minutes of the state's nationally known recreational area, the Wisconsin Dells. With its location in Adams County, the Town offers country living and an abundance of natural resources combined with modern amenities, making it an exceptional place to live. According to a history written for the Town's sesquicentennial, "New" Rome was settled in the 1850s by approximately 130 people, half of whom were from Rome, New York, named after the Italian city. New Rome was very much like its New York counterpart in terms of the geological similarities – sand dunes, hardwood forests and pine barrens – as well as its placement in the center of the state. Settlers were drawn to the area by the potential of the rich agricultural fields and forest lands, and easy access to waterways. During that period, the Wisconsin River, a tributary to the Mississippi River, was a highway for the burgeoning logging industry. (Source: Scarborough, There's No Place Like Rome: Celebrating the Journey 1857-2007) According to the Adams County Historical Society, at the close of the century, immigrant farmers from eastern Europe were lured to the area by promoters promising inexpensive marshland that could easily be converted to fertile farmland through drainage. The Chicago & North Western Railroad did not arrive until 1910. A development and tourism boom in the county brought a degree of prosperity in the 1920s. Adams County, reliant on agriculture, suffered severely through the drought and depression of the 1930s.

Transportation improvements again brought new life to Adams County in the 1940s when the Wisconsin River Power Company began construction on the dams creating Castle Rock and Pentenwell Lakes. A bridge was built to span the Wisconsin in the 1950s, and the Interstate Highway System brought visitors and urban expatriates to Adams County. (Source: Adams County Historical Society) Today, the Town of Rome looks to the future by capitalizing on the area's natural resources, working to become an all-season recreational and tourism hub while also emphasizing environmental preservation.

Water resources play a big role in this vision. Together with the Wisconsin River, streams, ponds and lakes total about 5,200 acres in the Town, or 13% of total acres. According to the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in its development of the Town's 2016 comprehensive plan, the most significant features within the Town are Lake Petenwell, an impoundment of the Wisconsin River, and the Tri-Lakes, consisting of Lake Arrowhead, Lake Camelot and Lake Sherwood. In fact, at 26 miles long and three miles wide, Lake Petenwell is the second largest lake in Wisconsin after Lake Winnebago. Flowing westerly into Lake Petenwell is Fourteen-mile Creek, which was dammed in the 1960s to create Lake Sherwood, followed by Lake Camelot and Lake Arrowhead in the 1970s. Combined, the Tri-Lakes have a surface area of about 1,000 acres. About 4,000 homes are sited near the lakes.



Another natural resource that has a significant part in the Town's cultural and recreational environment, as well as residential and commercial development potential, is its woodlands. They are the prevailing land feature in Rome, covering almost 24,000 acres, or about 60% of the Town. Many of the woodlands are commercially owned.

Agriculture, once a central facet of the Town's history and growth, is now limited to about 650 acres. Farmland comprises less than two percent of total land in the Town. (Source: Town of Rome, Wisconsin Comprehensive Plan 2016)

There are about 4,000 households in Rome. Of the housing units in the Town, about 58% are considered seasonal. The rate of seasonal housing increased by more than 35% between 2000 and 2010. The Town has 25% of the seasonal housing stock in Adams County. The median household income in the Town is \$55,795 with a median home value of \$214,000 based on U.S. Census data from 2012 and 2016. This compares to Adams County's median household income of \$42,781, and median home value of \$135,900.



Scenic routes are abundant throughout the Town, highlighting some of the most picturesque natural, cultural, and historic features of the area. Rome residents enjoy modern services as the Town seeks to meet the needs of its evolving population.

Rome's beautiful settings are punctuated by additional life-style opportunities such as Lake Arrowhead, a 2,000-member homeowners association where members, families, guests and the community enjoy year-round facilities. Lake Arrowhead is a diverse community boasting two of the Midwest's best public, award-winning golf courses, and a 300-acre lake. Golf Digest has rated the Pines and Lakes courses four and one-half stars in its "Places to Play" rankings.



An addition to the Town in the last couple years, stimulated in part by a public-partnership, is Sand Valley Golf Resort. Under the vision of Mike Keiser "to bring 'golf as it was meant to be' to the United States," Sand Valley is situated on 1,700 acres of sand dunes. The first course, Rome, Wisconsin Sand Valley by Coore & Crenshaw, opened in 2017. A second 18-hole course by David Kidd, Mammoth Dunes, opened in July 2018. Sand Valley Golf Resort will ultimately host up to five courses and lodging. Again, Golf Digest rated Sand Valley the Best New Golf Course in 2107.



## **TOWN OF ROME AT A GLANCE**

Population: 2,720 Households: 4,000  
Percent of seasonal homes to total housing units: 58%  
Equalized Assessed Value: \$650 Million  
Land Area: 62 square miles  
Median Home Value: \$214,000  
Median Household Income: \$55,795 Rome, Wisconsin

## **SCHOOLS**

The Town is served by the Nekoosa School District which has six schools, including a traditional high school, middle school and elementary school. The District also has three other schools, the Wisconsin STEM Academy, Nekoosa Academy and the Niikuusra Community School, a self-described project-based learning environment providing an alternative approach to the traditional classroom for students in 5th-8th grade.

The Town is within the Mid-State Technical College district, with locations in Friendship, Wisconsin Rapids, Stevens Point and Marshfield. Wisconsin's higher education system is universally known for excellence. Chief among them include the University of Wisconsin – Madison, the state's flagship school. With an enrollment of more than 43,000 undergraduate and graduate students, UW-Madison offers more than 100 fields of study.

## **TOWN GOVERNMENT IN ROME**

The Town Board consists of five Supervisors elected every two years on an at-large basis.

The Town Chairman is the chief executive officer of the Town and presides over meetings of the Town Board. The current Chairman, Dr. Wayne Johnson, comes to the Town with 28 years

of CEO experience. In addition to the Chairman's service, the tenure of the other Supervisors is mixed, with one Supervisor serving on the Board more than 10 years, and others serving their first term.

The Town Chairman is responsible for making appointments to boards and commissions. The Town Board, as a whole, is responsible for establishing an annual Town tax rate (subject to elector approval), approving an annual budget and establishing the general policy direction of the Town. The Town employs a full-time professional Town Administrator along with well-qualified staff to professionally manage the Town's affairs and public services. Major areas of operation include police, fire/EMS, public works, library, planning and zoning, water, plus administrative services. The Town expects to create its first parks and recreation department in 2019.



The Town employs approximately 23 full-time employees, plus more than 60 part-time and paid-on-call personnel. The Town Administrator oversees combined budgets of more than \$8 million. This group of employees work collaboratively in the delivery of Town services, including a full-time professional Clerk-Treasurer. The Town's equalized value in 2018 is approximately \$650,000,000.

## **TOWN OF ROME MISSION STATEMENT**

Rome strives to be a diverse community offering a variety of residential living, year-round recreation and business opportunities with an emphasis on environmental preservation.

## **NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN ROME**

Also contributing to the Town's livability is the Lester Public Library of Rome. Two years ago, the Town more than doubled the size of the library. The new addition updated the existing library building with a larger children's and young adult library, a study room, computers, charging stations and a community room.

This fall a new Police and Ambulance facility is being constructed adjacent to the Town Administrative Complex. This will allow for a full-time ambulance crew in Rome through a partnership with the City of Nekoosa.

Healthcare can be accessed locally at the Aspirus Riverview Family Clinic. The clinic specializes in the treatment of acute and chronic illnesses. Aspirus Riverview Hospital is in neighboring Wisconsin Rapids. With a \$25 million expansion in the last two years, the hospital has a capacity of more than 200 beds for in-patient care, in addition to a range of outpatient services. Also, nearby in Friendship is Gundersen Moundview Hospital. The 25-bed hospital also includes 24-hour emergency care, diagnostic testing and clinical care.

## ALPINE VILLAGE BUSINESS PARK

The Town is proud of the businesses it is home to; regional businesses work alongside entrepreneurial operations to create a diverse and interactive base. Central to this has been the Alpine Village Business Park, established within the last 10 years. The Business Park is a planned area consisting of commercial, retail, light industrial and senior housing districts. According to the park's design manual, "the purpose of Alpine Village Business Park is to create a unique Business Park (BP) District in the Town of Rome that will become the regional center of commerce, while preserving and protecting the quality of life and the natural environment. Other goals include: Creating higher paying, full and part-time employment opportunities; developing a diverse array of services; promoting a high quality of life; creating opportunities for year-round residents; and increasing the Town's tax base. (Sources: Town of Rome Website; Town of Rome, Wisconsin Comprehensive Plan 2016; Alpine Village Business Park Development and Design Manual.)



With the help of an anticipated \$1.2 million state grant, a new POWT'S sanitary system is being planned for the Business Park. Discussions are also taking place with a "high end" hotel chain to build in the Business Park.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- For many years the Town has been a magnet for those seeking outdoor recreational activities, or for those wanting a second home "up north," as seen in the large percentage of seasonal homes in the area.

Yet, the area's population is an aging one. According to the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Rome is "aging at a faster rate than the county and the surrounding communities." For instance, the Town of Rome's median age was 38.7 in 2000. In 2010 the median age was 58.5. The increase in median age is the result of more than 61 percent of the population being over 55 years of age. Coupled with a smaller population of younger adults between the ages of 18 and 34, Town officials have turned an increasing amount of attention toward tourism as a means to attract people to locate, invest and recreate in the area.

- The Town made a significant investment in September 2015 by creating a Tourism-focused Tax Incremental District (“TID” No. 1). The TID comprises 3,614 acres of what is the Sand Valley Golf Resort. The Town provided tax incremental financing to accelerate the development by providing the installation of public infrastructure and cash grants and loan subsidies to the developers of the resort.



The initial projects within the District included assistance with the construction of Mammoth Dunes Golf Course and clubhouse as part of Phase 1 of the plan (Sand Valley, the first course, was constructed within the district but no TIF financial participation was involved in that course). Phase II contemplates a third golf course along with associated lodging. There may be additional development opportunities beyond Phase II that present themselves for TID participation.

- The Town anticipates making total project expenditures of approximately \$25.2 million to undertake the projects listed in the TID Project Plan. The development is projected to generate \$42 million in additional taxable value and is anticipated to add to existing recreational uses within the Town including Dyracuse Park, Lake Arrowhead, Lake Camelot, Lake Sherwood, and trapshooting facilities. The development has already created 500 additional jobs within the community.
- Complementing the efforts of Sand Valley and to promote the abundance of recreational and tourism options available within the Town, a Tourism Board was created, and a full-time employee hired. The new Town Administrator can expect to work with Town leaders and the Tourism Board to achieve several of its goals as outlined in its 2016 comprehensive plan, which is to provide quality infrastructure and public services to meet the future demand of residents and visitors, as well as the goal to enhance and develop year-round recreational opportunities in the Town.
- In comparison with other Town governments in Wisconsin, Rome is unique in the array of municipal services that it currently offers, many of which are typically provided by city or village governments.
- The Town is in a strong financial position and takes pride in its low tax rate and fiscal contentionsness. Like all Wisconsin municipalities, however, the Town’s finances are tested by various parameters guiding the generation of new sources of revenues, as well as State of Wisconsin tax levy limits. We expect to work closely with the elected and appointed officials on seeking out new sources of revenue as well as continuing to find ways to most efficiently deliver Town services.

- The Town recently contributed toward the addition to the Lester Library. It also successfully secured a \$500,000 grant for a splash pad. Other projects include providing a new public safety facility adjacent to the municipal complex. In the next several years, it will likely look at potential upgrades to its public works facility.



- The Town couples its outdoor activity-based lifestyle with a business-friendly openness to new development by advertising its eagerness to work with developers and business owners. The heart of the Town's business community is the business district along State Highway 13. Key to this area's success is the desired growth of the Alpine Village Business Park, which offers development opportunities on 250 acres along Highway 13, an area planned for commercial, retail, light industrial and senior housing.

- The Town also views this area as its gateway district. With its recent update to its comprehensive plan, and the Town's Community Development Authority is poised to make inroads in economic development. With all of these factors into play, the Town will work in cooperation with area Chambers of Commerce, REGI, the Town of Rome Business Alliance Association, as well as other regional resources, to complement their efforts, and to assure the Town's partnership in economic development activities and goals.