

# **TOWN OF BAR HARBOR**

## **Comprehensive Planning Committee Meeting**

### **February 9, 2022, 6:00 – 8:00 PM**

### **MINUTES**

The meeting was held via Zoom.

Comprehensive Planning Committee members present were Elissa Chesler, Jacquie Colburn, Greg Cox, Kevin DesVeaux, Cherie Galyean, John Kelly, Jim Mahoney, Calistra Martinez, Michael McKernan, Kristin Murphy, Misha Mytar, Val Peacock, Kyle Shank, and David Woodside. Allison Sasner was absent.

Staff present were Planning Director Michele Gagnon, Assistant Planner Steve Fuller, Code Enforcement Officer Angie Chamberlain, and Deputy Code Enforcement Officer Mike Gurtler.

Consultants present were Steve Whitman, Maggie Mills, Liz Kelly and Eric Halvorsen.

1. **Call to order**  
Chairperson Shank called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.
2. **Excused absences.** Allison Sasner was excused.
3. **Zoom logistic, review of meeting agenda and adoption.**  
On a motion by John Kelly, seconded by Vice-chairperson Mytar, the agenda was adopted (14-0)
4. **Adoption of January 12, 2022 minutes**  
On a motion by Elissa Chesler and a second from Calistra Martinez, the minutes were adopted (14-0).
5. **Public comment period**  
No comments were made.
6. **Public engagement**  
Liz Kelly provided an update on the revisions to the Outreach Plan, and asked for feedback on the draft website, newsletter, and flyer.

There was a discussion about how would emails submitted to the [cpc@barharbormaine.gov](mailto:cpc@barharbormaine.gov) group email address would be handled. Michele Gagnon said that staff and the consultant will coordinate and organize a timely response.

Several Comprehensive Planning Committee members mentioned that emails sent to [cpc@barharbormaine.gov](mailto:cpc@barharbormaine.gov) are going into the spam filters (junk folder). Steve Fuller offered to look at solutions to this issue.

Cherie Galyean suggested that a short summary be added to the website explaining what resulted from the 2007 Comprehensive Plan. Michele Gagnon cautioned that could be a big job and should just address general actions taken.

It was suggested that edits to the flyer include showing the name of the town (Bar Harbor) on one line, and fixing the link from the Bitly (a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) — web address — shortening service) address at the bottom.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee was informed that a short project video is being pursued, and a videographer is still in need. Several possible contacts were provided.

#### **7. Existing conditions**

Steve Whitman provided an update on the existing conditions analysis work, adding that he is working with the town's department heads on the Facilities and Utilities inventory and analysis section. He reminded the Comprehensive Planning Committee that the online form is available for any additional information they would like to provide directly to the consulting team on any of the topics being explored.

In early March, Steve Whitman and Eric Halvorsen will be in Bar Harbor to hold in person meetings and conduct fieldwork. John Kelly offered to arrange a tour of Acadia National Park during their visit. Kyle Shank suggested looking into the new re-assessment that is underway.

#### **8. Land Use Discussion**

Maggie Mills provided an overview of land use as one of the topics being explored in the Comprehensive Plan, and the items related to this topic that the State of Maine requires. She then started the discussion on land use by reviewing the questions that had been provided to the committee members ahead of the meeting.

Kyle Shank asked about the terms used in the presentation, and where to find those definitions. Michele clarified that is on the town's Comprehensive Plan webpage <https://www.barharbormaine.gov/501/Comprehensive-Plan>.

John Kelly asked what the difference is between land use and land cover. Steve Whitman explained that land use refers to the purpose that the land serves — its primary use, while the land cover refers to the surface cover on the ground that is accommodating development of various types or natural resources.

Elissa Chesler stated that the zoning does not address the use types specifically. Kyle Shank added that the zoning in Bar Harbor is reactive and really should be proactive. He suggested that there are many pre-existing non-conforming uses in each zone. Misha Mytar said that

we should identify and address the limited amount of agricultural uses and agricultural land cover, and coastal areas, as these are under pressure from development.

Val Peacock noted a disconnect that exists in people's mind related to the zoning and the uses in each zone. She gave as an example the mixed-use area in the Downtown Commercial zone. Another example that she provided was the presence of commercial uses in residential areas. The Malvern Belmont property was also mentioned as a location that may be able to accommodate additional housing density including affordable units.

Kevin DesVeaux mentioned that the town has started to see some employee housing projects. Michele Gagnon agreed that employee living quarters and shared accommodations project are both starting to happen. Misha Mytar suggested that the existing cluster housing provisions in the Land Use Ordinance provides incentives, but is not being utilized because it is cumbersome and is may be ill understood. Michele Gagnon agreed that these provisions need work and that more incentives need to be provided to entice development.

Mike McKernan asked if the Comprehensive Planning Committee should be looking at land to accommodate future development at the parcel level. Steve Whitman explained that the Comprehensive Plan will be looking more at general areas of the community, but specific areas may be identified through this process as presenting notable opportunities for development.

Kyle Shank remarked that downtown issues should be addressed and that parking solutions are needed as parking impacts other areas of the town as well.

Jim Mahoney suggested trying to identify the mixed-use nature of parcels and of areas of the community, as much as possible, rather than the general use types. He also would like to know what uses exist that are deemed industrial in nature, and where others could be accommodated. Then he added that the downtown encompasses areas with their own character and mix of uses and that we may want to preserve some of the year-round residential areas. Finally, he said that we should address the safety of certain intersections in the downtown, adding that the Police Department will be studying this.

Calistra Martinez suggested that the zoning be simplified, that the zones be condensed, and that setbacks requirements be reduced so development can happen closer to the road improving walkability and calming traffic.

Val Peacock noted that some local roads, such as Kebo Street and Ledgelawn Avenue, have seen an increase in through traffic, and that this should be addressed. She added that crosswalks, pedestrian safety, and bicycle facilities should also be addressed in the downtown.

Elissa Chesler pointed out that there are few places to secure a bicycle, and that there is a lack of bicycle lanes and paths downtown. She advised that electric bikes will make bicycling, as a mode of transportation, more popular over time, and we need to consider having the supporting infrastructure.

Mike McKernan suggested that there are opportunities to work with some the intuitions that have large land holdings, such as the Mount Desert Island Bio Lab, the University of Maine, the College of the Atlantic, and The Jackson Laboratory. He added that this would require creating incentives for them to utilize some of their land for development including for housing solutions.

Calistra Martinez said that the wide sidewalk constructed along Route 3 by the College of the Atlantic has provided lots of benefits for walking and biking in that area.

Jim Mahoney indicated that the Comprehensive Plan should recognize that some of the downtown residential streets have on-street parking and two-way traffic and that the conversion to one-way traffic should be considered because the streets are not wide enough.

Kyle Shank commented that way-finding signage is needed in the downtown to better direct people.

Misha Mytar noted that many of the comments relating to land use have focused on transportation and the strong connection that exist between the two. She also thinks that the Comprehensive Planning Committee should identify areas where infrastructure could be extended to support future development. Then, added that maybe the backside of Hamilton Hill could accommodate more density.

Michele Gagnon explained that the town is facing limitation to increase development on the sewer system as it needs to abate infiltration and inflow before it can add to the system. She then explained, that the current zoning is “negative” as in, if the use is not specifically stated as allowed, then it is prohibited. Instead, of listing general category of uses and working under the assumption that the use is allowed unless specifically prohibited. The zoning should not be confusing. There is much work to do on the Land Use Ordinance, and this relates directly to housing which is the town’s biggest issue.

## **9. Housing Discussion**

Eric Halvorsen provided an overview the items related to housing that the State of Maine requires. He shared an overview of how he will approach research and analysis for this topic. Then, he referred to the list of questions that were shared with the Comprehensive Planning Committee ahead of the meeting.

Val Peacock explained that the community cannot support the people who want to live in Bar Harbor and that these people are being pushed out of town. She added, that overall there is a lack of housing units, and that many houses are used for vacation rentals.

David Woodside commented that given the list of potential demands and desires, it does not seem possible to meet the demand for housing. Then he asked, how can housing be addressed along with the other priorities? He concluded by saying that maybe the community will need to look for solutions elsewhere in the area.

Eric Halvorsen suggested that the town may need to focus on the parts of the solution the private sector will not touch.

It was noted that the new Town Manager is not able to find housing in Bar Harbor.

Kyle Shank, stated that his concern is 15 years out, when families can no longer remain in town. Pressure will mount to cut important services like schools. This may contribute to a large demographic shift. Elissa Chesler added that the many displaced residents then need to commute into town and this compounds the congestion issue. There also has been a loss of service workers and tradespeople. Some families are unable to shift in structure or separate, as desired, because of the housing challenge. We may need to allow for taller, denser housing options, at different price points.

Kristin Murphy added that the median income is not enough to afford a house, and that housing units are being converted to weekly rentals. As a result, the school enrollment is dropping.

Jim Mahoney suggested that a balance needs to be sought and that it will not be possible to satisfy all the demands. He also cautioned the desire for density in some areas of the community where it could disrupt the character and not address affordability in the process. Deed restrictions may be needed in an effort to truly provide affordable housing.

Calistra Martinez provided an overview of the challenges experienced by the College of the Atlantic students in finding housing, and said this has been a longstanding issue for students and staff, alike. She added, that the College of the Atlantic may be pushed to provide more housing to address this need.

Cherie Galyeon pointed out that there is a need for quality housing stock — units that are safe and efficient, and that the Island Housing Trust should be approached to help with creative solutions.

John Kelly suggested that housing be looked at as an island-wide issue, and Michele Gagnon agreed.

Kyle Shank added that the cost and supply of housing are both a problem, and that we will need to remove zoning barriers to help employers build employee housing.

Kevin DesVeaux shared his viewpoint, as a business owner, who owns both housing for employees and vacation rentals. He mentioned that he would like to build affordable year-round rentals but he is not sure how this is possible.

Val Peacock mentioned that the Conners Emmerson schools are in poor condition and that the we are conducting a \$3 million-dollar study to evaluate the needs and possible solutions. She noted that it is important that these two planning processes be coordinated.

Michele Gagnon invited the Comprehensive Planning Committee to attend the February 23<sup>rd</sup> Planning Board workshop related to affordable housing (data, local programs/projects, and funding).

**10. Next steps**

The March meeting will focus on Transportation and Economy. The May meeting will be on Monday May 16 instead of May 11.

**11. Public comment period**

No comments were made.

**12. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 PM on a motion by John Kelly, seconded by Misha Mytar (14-0).

**Minutes approved by the Comprehensive Planning Committee on March 9, 2022:**

  
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Kyle Shank  
Chair, Comprehensive Planning Committee

5/4/22  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date