

TOWN OF BAR HARBOR

Comprehensive Planning Committee Meeting

March 9, 2022, 6:00 – 8:00 PM

MINUTES

The meeting was held via Zoom.

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

1. **Call to order**
Chairperson Shank called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.
2. **Excused absences.** Jacquie Colburn as excused.
3. **Zoom logistic, review of meeting agenda and adoption.**
On a motion by Elissa Chesler, seconded Kevin DesVeaux, the agenda was adopted (14-0)
4. **Adoption of February 9, 2022 minutes**
On a motion by Greg Cox and a second from Elissa Chesler, the minutes were adopted (14-0).
5. **Public comment period**
No comments were made.
6. **Public Engagement**
Liz Kelly provided an update on the flyer, website, and other outreach related tasks. Additional photos are still being sought, and materials are being migrated from the town website to the new project website to avoid confusion. The flyer now reflects the feedback received by Committee members and is ready for distribution as a print and digital outreach strategy. Kyle Shank and Michele Gagnon agreed to coordinate flyer distribution with the Committee members. Liz Kelly will coordinate with staff and Val Peacock on the idea of crowdsourcing additional images.

Steve Whitman explained that the first Polco question will be circulated in April. After a short discussion it was decided that the first batch of Polco questions should include a combination of open-ended questions that relate to what people love about Bar Harbor, topics of concern, questions the plan should address, and could include a request for ideas on what the initiative should be named.

Steve Whitman and Michele Gagnon are working on a short project announcement video that will be ready for circulation by early April.

7. Existing Conditions

Steve Whitman provided an update on the status and timeline of the existing conditions work being completed by the consulting team. The draft report will be delivered to the Committee in May, and the goal is to have a revised report for the public in June. The online form is still available for Committee members to use if topic specific information or ideas come to mind. On March 7 and 8, both Steve Whitman and Eric Halvorsen visited Bar Harbor and conducted interviews to inform the work of the consulting team.

8. Economy Discussion

Eric Halvorsen provided a short introduction to the topic of the local economy and economic development. This included an overview of the goals and analysis suggested by the State of Maine. Mr. Halvorsen also explained that he will begin to address these and other items while completing the analysis that is underway for Bar Harbor. The goal is to identify and communicate that the local economy functions as a distinct ecosystem and is dependent on many other topics being explored during this comprehensive planning process.

The following feedback and ideas were offered by Committee members during this discussion of Bar Harbor's economy:

- Affordable housing for mid-scale working people is the most pressing economic issue.
- Desire for more year-round businesses, especially by College of the Atlantic students, including coffee shops and restaurants - but how do we define year-round?
- More year-round housing is needed to support expanded business activity year-round.
- Fishing/aquaculture industry gets marginalized because of cruise ships and other access related issues.
- Lack of childcare and childcare slots on the island impacts many people and large employers.
- While there always seems to be interest in more year-round businesses Bar Harbor has many things other many communities do not.
- It is important to recognize what we have already and describe what is missing that we want to encourage.
- Lack of housing impacts the ability of businesses to attract and retain employees, and lots of income is lost when employees commute off island.
- 100 open positions exist at Jackson Lab, with wages above the state median income, and housing is the biggest detriment to filling them.

- Need the infrastructure in place to support this housing growth. Including water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure which is largely constrained.
- COVID has also impacted the labor pool, and the ability for businesses to stay open in winter, etc.
- Encourage a diverse economy to be more resilient to the threats to tourism.
- If we're going to use policies to guide economic development, how much will they make a difference knowing market forces will still drive business activity to some degree?
- What do we mean by housing need? Is there a number of units needed?
- It is important to clarify that many tourism-based businesses support year-round activity and employ some staff year-round.
- Community is torn - some want tourism to grow, some do not, and overcrowding in summer is already an issue.
- Acadian National Park is already working to limit access to summer visitors.
- Many businesses run a loss to remain open in winter.
- In the summer months many of year-round residents do not frequent local businesses (retail and service) that are overrun with tourists.
- The Town Council is currently looking at existing infrastructure needs. Are we trying to meet the demand experienced last summer?
- Examining tourism on the island should be looked at through a holistic lens - it is really an issue beyond the town including the island, region, state, and country.
- There are many local entrepreneurs and self-employed residents, and a large creative and craft-based population.
- A resilient local economy is desirable. The past disruptions experienced by the tourism industry are an indication that a more diverse economy is needed.
- Opportunity to nurture and capture College of the Atlantic graduates and others to set up businesses.
- Not much interest in increasing the amount of land area zoned for commercial uses.
- Market forces will likely prevent any scaling back of the tourism sector.
- The condition and capacity of the sewer system needs to be addressed, already strained and requires improvements.
- Sidewalk capacity is already a huge issue, and there are not enough places to walk during tourist months. Cellphone capacity and roadway capacity are also an issue during summer months.
- A sidewalk assessment has been completed and Public Works has great data on this. A road condition assessment is in the budget for this coming year.
- Outside of the Downtown there is less infrastructure and other needs like open space and natural resource protection are priorities.

9. Transportation Discussion

Liz Kelly provided a short introduction to the topic of transportation. This included an overview of the most common aspects of transportation planning as they relate to the goals and analysis suggested by the State of Maine. Ms. Kelly touched on the inventory, assessment, and issue identification work underway and some of the earlier plans and studies informing this effort.

The following feedback and ideas were offered by Committee members during this discussion of Bar Harbor's economy:

- Data from the Public Works Department should be used to identify the highest priority needs.
- In the downtown, road capacity is already a huge issue, along with poor sight distance, narrow roads, parking space issues (lots of parking on roads that are really too narrow to accommodate parking), and dangerous crossing areas.
- Assess bridge conditions in Bar Harbor and be prepared to identify the funding sources needed to replace them.
- Analyze the circulation pattern in downtown and develop alternatives to expand pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure.
- Dangerous to bike in downtown due to congestion and parked cars. In addition, there is no separated space to ride.
- Route 3 is scary to bike on because of the small shoulders, and many College of the Atlantic students rely on biking to get around.
- The Route 3 and West Street intersection needs attention. There is no good way for pedestrians and bicycles to cross.
- More year-round transit options desired by College of the Atlantic students.
- Where does parking meter money go? Could it be used to address some of the issues identified?
- Unsure how economically feasible it would be to expand year-round bus service.
- Biggest issue with public transit is that it is not reliable for people to use. Also, inconvenient due to its service schedule for many people to use consistently or for travel outside the region.
- Fortunate to have public transit at all. Very rare for a community of this size, and only here because of Acadia National Park. Expansion of public transit may require new public/private partnerships.
- The Land Use Ordinance does not currently allow for parking garages which was one of the intended uses of the parking funds.
- Insufficient parking within the Downtown. A circulating shuttle could help address this need.
- Outside of downtown, there is limited infrastructure in general - no bus, no sidewalks or bike lanes.
- Crooked Road and Norway Drive are big collector roads and have no shoulders and could funnel bike traffic to downtown if infrastructure was there.
- The route from Town Hill to the Downtown needs infrastructure improvements that would make bicycling safely a possibility.
- Heading south towards Jackson Lab this is also poor road condition, and no safe biking space because there is no shoulder.
- Winter parking policies are also frustrating. No parking on road in winter is frustrating for people who are landlords and it's hard to get people to rent because this is not allowed and parking alternatives are limited.
- The head of the island now has so much congestion at certain times of day that it can take much more time to get off/on the island.

- Connection between school and ball field must be addressed as this should be a super safe pedestrian route. School Street also needs more sidewalks.
- The Island Explorer is the largest public transit system in the State of Maine.
- For the Island Explorer finding drivers is also an issue due to lack of housing and Bar Harbor not being an affordable place to live.
- The budget for Downeast Transportation is \$2.8 million/year. Seventy -two percent (72%) of this is paid by the National park Service, largely through park entrance fees and the remainder is covered by Friends of Acadia, LL Bean, Towns, and others.
- There is a need to increase the knowledge and support for what it takes to operate a public transit system. The public needs to know how its funded and where the money comes from.
- Many people come with bikes or rent bikes so there is lots of opportunity here to increase cycling. Increasing bicycle infrastructure may not decrease congestion but will provide more options. E-bikes will also become an alternative for more people.
- Very few signs on the roads alerting vehicles of cyclists. Could use more share the road signs on key corridors.
- Policy actions needed related to winter parking and one-way roads and circulation in the Downtown.
- Consider creating pedestrian only zones in downtown if this is feasible.
- It is not possible to get into Downtown for a quick bite to eat during peak season anymore.
- As it gets more congested, more cars cut through neighborhood streets.
- There have been plans made for Cottage Street and Main Street. These streetscape redesigns have never had the momentum to fund these improvements and are starting to get old now. It would be nice to do something with them as it routinely comes up in council discussions.

10. Next Steps

The April meeting will focus on parks, open space, and recreation and community facilities.

11. Public comment period

No comments were made.

12. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:53 PM on a motion by John Kelly, seconded by John McKernan (14-0).

Minutes approved by the Comprehensive Planning Committee on April 13, 2022:


 Kyle Shank
 Chair, Comprehensive Planning Committee

5/4/22
 Date