

**TOWN OF BAR HARBOR**  
**Comprehensive Planning Committee**  
**January 11, 2023 — 6:00 PM — Hybrid meeting**  
**MINUTES**

Comprehensive Planning Committee members present in the Chambers were Kevin DesVeaux, Cherie Galyean, John Kelly, Cali Martinez, Kristin Murphy, Misha Mytar, Val Peacock, Allison Sasner, Kyle Shank, and David Woodside, and participating remotely via Zoom were Elissa Chesler, Greg Cox, Jacquie Colburn, and Jim Mahoney.

Excused absence was Mike McKernan.

Staff present were Planning Director Michele Gagnon, Assistant Planner Steve Fuller, Communication Coordinator Maya Caines, and Sustainability Coordinator Laura Berry (via zoom).

Participating remotely via zoom were consultants Steve Whitman, Liz Kelly, Eric Halvorsen, and Erik Woyciesjes.

**1. Call to Order**

Kyle Shank called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

**2. Excused Absences**

Excused absence was Mike McKernan.

**3. Zoom logistic, review/adoption of meeting agenda**

**On a motion by David Woodside, seconded by Allie Sasner, the meeting agenda was adopted on a roll-call vote (14-0).**

**4. December 14, 2022 minutes**

**On a motion by Kevin DesVeaux, seconded by Cali Martinez, the December 14, 2022, minutes were adopted, as amended, on a roll-call vote (14-0).**

**5. Public comment period**

There were no comments.

**6. Other efforts relating to the Comprehensive Plan**

Michele Gagnon updated the committee on a planned regional housing discussion being planned for the island. A tentative date has been set and once a firm date and location are set the committee will be notified.

Michele then introduced Eric Halvorsen and Erik Woyciesjes of RKG Associates. The firm was hired by the town to complete additional inventory and analysis of the housing supply and potential demand in Bar Harbor. This will be the first of two meetings with RKG on the Draft Housing Analysis they have provided to the committee for review. Ms. Gagnon reminded the committee that the focus of this work was on inventory and analysis, and not on solutions. Additional actions or potential solutions will be identified during the remainder of the comprehensive planning project.

Eric Halvorsen of RKG provided a short overview and introduction to the work completed. He thanked the town for the opportunity to complete this additional housing analysis, and thanked the staff for the help getting the two surveys out. The surveys resulted in very good quantitative data which informed this effort. It was also explained that the project scope was expanded to include a regional look at data and trends. Bar Harbor cannot address the housing issue alone, and RKG would like to see this work assist and inform others in the region.

Erik Woyciesjes then provided a twenty-minute presentation of the key elements of the draft Housing Analysis.

David Woodside asked if the employer survey responses were statistically significant. Erik Woyciesjes explained that they were because 75 employers responded and this included all of the largest employers. Kyle Shank noted that some survey responses noted unsafe living conditions. Michele Gagnon responded that this is significant information as it is important to maintain the existing housing stock and ensure safety considering how long it takes to create new housing units.

Val Peacock asked how seasonal and visa workers fit in. Erik Woyciesjes said that some survey responses were received from these groups. Mr. Woyciesjes added that this was asked in the employer survey and that there is a breakdown in the report. Ms. Peacock Peacock then asked if the unit prediction includes seasonal units. It was explained that it does not as it is a prediction based on existing owner- and renter-occupied housing units.

Ms. Peacock asked if the town knows where the larger multi-family units are. Ms. Gagnon explained that they do. Mr. Woyciesjes cautioned the group to remember that rental units are still a small percentage of the total housing units, and large multi-family structures are a small percentage of that small rental number.

The group then discussed how mortgage data represents sales in town, and the fact that some sales are cash purchases and harder to track. Interest rates and their potential impact on future demand and sales was also discussed. Kyle Shank added that all of this could result in a greater demand for rental units.

Kyle Shank asked the consultants from RKG what was the most unique or standard problem they encountered doing this work for the town. Mr. Woyciesjes explained that they are seeing unaffordable housing prices everywhere. The most interesting trend is the move inland and the impact that it will have on jobs and the local economy. Mr. Woyciesjes added that the regional impact on housing prices is also important to understand.

David Woodside commented on the potential need for 600 units and the fact that the town has not even identified where it could accommodate 100 units. A short discussion followed of how the Census collects data on residents and what constitutes full-time residency. This led to a discussion of how this data informs the projected number and type of units. Mr. Woyciesjes explained that the projection of housing units does not distinguish what type of units. Jim Mahoney added that by looking at the new units built by JAX, it appears that market rate projects may not be able to meet existing rental costs given construction costs. He also added that Bar Harbor is unique because it is on an island and most of the commuting traffic is in one direction.

Elissa asked for clarification on how seasonal workers are considered in this housing projection, if at all. Mr. Woyciesjes explained that they are not because the Census is focused on year-round residents.

Erik Woyciesjes then clarified that the projection of 600 units indicates a trend, and that the need for housing is high. This number will change and may not capture all groups seeking housing.

Ms. Chesler then asked what should be monitored as an indicator of success. Eric Halvorsen suggested the total number of units constructed and the number of units permitted need to both trend-up to show success. Mr. Halvorsen then added that the town needs to encourage construction of housing units that address the middle demographics. This will allow for the filtering that needs to happen so households can move up or down in the market. Kyle Shank added that even if the estimate is off it is a large number.

## **7. Public Engagement**

Liz Kelly provided an overview of the purpose for the Phase 1 Community Engagement Report. Ms. Kelly explained how this feedback that has been collected will be used to inform the Comprehensive Plan. The report includes key findings for each technique or event completed so far. This helps inform the identification of what issues and priorities

should be focused on in the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Kelly then asked if the committee had any questions or comments on the report.

There were no questions from committee members. Kyle Shank then suggested we come back to this at the next meeting to see if there is anything that needs to be discussed.

## **8. Feedback on Vision 2020**

Steve Whitman then shared a series of slides summarizing the feedback received from the committee members on the 2020 Vision, and some emerging trends. When committee members were asked, what still resonates from the 2020 vision that they want to keep and prioritize, most stated that the vision still resonates. There was some call for neighborhood/village specific elements. Topics mentioned most included the “Year-Round Community and Economy,” and “Increase in Housing Units and Types – and Affordability.” Also mentioned were “Walkable and Bikeable Downtown/Neighborhoods” and protecting dark skies, nature, views, and natural resources.

Steve Whitman then explained that when ask what topics are missing or lacking from the 2020 vision that are important to include in the 2035 vision, some general trends emerged. Many committee members called for balance between year-round community and tourism. Housing as an issue was identified as not as severe in 2007 – needs more emphasis now. It was also suggested that the vision mention Acadia National Park, potentially focus on major themes and thematic elements, and mention the climate emergency.

Michele Gagnon then added that we should look at sustainability broadly, and should include the balance of tourism and year-round activity, climate change, and other aspects such as cruise ships. John Kelly asked what is meant by “year-round,” as many employers, including Acadia National Park, College of the Atlantic, and others are open year-round. He added that he does not think people want a year-round version of August.

Ms. Gagnon added that the comprehensive planning process will not solve this but should guide the discussion as we look into this deeper.

Kyle Shank then addressed the concept of themes. The previous vision gave end goals, but did not identify the themes, strategic goals, and reasons for action. Mr. Shank suggested the committee focus on strategic goals that still provide some wiggle room for implementation. Ms. Gagnon agreed saying that the 2035 Vision should be written differently and more general. Val Peacock suggested that the vision find some common themes that will help unify residents. She liked the slide Steve Whitman shared that highlighted the need to balance year-round community with tourism. The vision should reflect this with AND statements not OR statements.

Ms. Chesler addressed the challenge of the term year-round with the following suggestion: diverse economy, workforce, and residents not solely associated with tourism. David Woodside reminded the committee to keep in mind that Bar Harbor is a town of 5,000 people and should be compared to other similar sized communities who are also limited in what they can offer. Cali Martinez suggested that some of the emphasis on year-round may be related to the high percentage of residents from elsewhere and their expectations for consistency in hours and operations. Kevin DesVeaux added that while many people claim no places are open in the winter he would disagree, and would say the town is well represented. At the conclusion of the discussion Steve Whitman suggested an in-person work session in March and a longer meeting that night. Kyle Shank suggested the details of the meeting be sorted out by email.

#### **9. Public comment period**

Resident Ruth Eveland, our perennial in-person attendee and all mighty knitter, suggested that given the value of the housing presentation it should be shared with both the Planning Board and the Town Council.


Cara Ryan commented that she had never heard the concern related to year-round, but maybe it is related to some perceived loss?

Erica Brooks told the committee it was interesting looking at this data and listening to the discussion. The town is coming off some difficult times and some of the data has shifted and it may appear more different than typical. She said that there are many cash sales so some of the mortgage data may not be enough. She felt, that overall, it was really good work.

**10. Adjourn.**

**On a motion John Kelly, seconded by Elissa Chesler, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM on a roll call vote (15-0).**

**Minutes approved the Comprehensive Planning Committee on February 8, 2023.**



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**Kyle Shank**

**Chair, Comprehensive Planning Committee**

Date 4/12/23