

Brooksville Comprehensive Plan Committee  
Notes from Community Meeting of October 14, 2021 at the Community Center

Present from CPC Committee were: Jonathan Hall, Co-Chair; John Gray, Co-Chair; Nancy Sanford; Bud Fisher; John Kimball; Abbie McMillen; Jarod Farn-Guillette, Planner with the Hancock County Planning Commission; and Debbie Grimmig, Secretary.

Members of the public in attendance: Michael McMillen, Carol Gray, Don Condon, A.J. Glazer, Marc Tucker, Josie Chase, Eric Chase, Lola Bogyo, Alison Chase, Verena Stoll, Kurt Stoll, Lew Payne, Rick Klain, Carole Pascal, Tom Pascal, Kathleen McClure, Elizabeth Hill, David Avery -- reporter for the Weekly Packet. (There may have been other attendants who did not sign the attendance sheet.)

John Gray, Co-Chair of the Committee, welcomed everyone to the meeting. He thanked the Comprehensive Plan Committee for drafting a wonderful Plan and thanked Jarod Farn-Guillette from Hancock County Planning Commission for his technical assistance. He went over the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Fact Sheet and highlighted the following in reference to the draft Plan:

- This is a document that includes a set of recommendations which started with a community survey and were developed over a series of meetings through consensus of the Committee;
- The draft Plan does not create ordinances or zoning;
- It does not raise property taxes. On the contrary, the Comp Plan places the Town in a better position to obtain grants and other funding that may defer tax increases;
- The current Comp Plan was developed in 2006, is 15 years old and the State recommends that Comp Plans be updated every 10 years;
- The target date for submission to the State for review is 12/1/2021. Changes to the plan based upon input from the community meetings may be made up until the draft is submitted. Once submitted, no changes may be made other than those recommended by the State. The State review process takes several weeks; and
- The final Plan will be approved by voters in March, the day prior to the regular town meeting.

Jonathan Hall, Co-Chair of the Committee welcomed the community members and thanked the Committee members and Jarod Farn-Guillette for their work on the plan and the Select Board for their support. He also recognized Freida Peasley who has been extremely helpful in posting minutes as well as every chapter of the draft on the Town website. This meeting is an opportunity for the public to provide input into the plan and for the Committee to address your questions. He opened up the floor for general questions.

The question was asked regarding specific ideas the Committee had to address the problem of affordable housing. John Gray responded that the Town just created a Housing Committee and are recruiting for members to serve on the new committee. The goals and strategies of the Housing Chapter were reviewed. Jarod Farn-Guillette noted that the American Association of Planners identifies housing as one of the four top challenges facing communities. The State requires a goal of 10% of the new residential development to be affordable, which may include building new residences or converting current housing.

The other three top challenges identified by the American Association of Planners include equitable access to the internet, climate change and infrastructure.

Does the Comp Plan address child care and early childhood education? Affordable housing will attract families with small children and there is a serious lack of childcare services, including people to provide services and facilities, in Brooksville. What might resources be that will allow families with small children to work? The school has a Pre-K program and the Healthy Peninsula group is addressing this issue. Jonathan Hall noted the plan did not address this issue in any of the sections, but it was an excellent suggestion which the Committee will address.

After there were no more general questions, Jonathan Hall reviewed the goals and strategies for each chapter.

Chapter A – Population. As more people and businesses move into Brooksville, there will be greater need for faster and reliable internet. Abbie McMillen provided an update on upgraded internet in Brooksville. Consolidated Communications has made some improvements in some sections of town. Six different proposals have been received and they are being evaluated. It is difficult to provide specifics because information in the proposals is proprietary. Information that is public is on the website.

Another concern raised included services for seniors to remain in their homes. There is a need for more favorable property tax policy so that people are not taxed out of their homes. Some aging-in-place strategies, such as tele-medicine, and transportation services, are included in other sections of the Plan.

Chapter B – Economy. Internet is a great need in order to grow the economy. Climate change has an impact on the economy, for example the collapse of lobster industry. The Brooksville Climate Change and Rising Sea Committee is looking at infrastructure vulnerabilities. Brooksville is part of a multi-town coastal coalition considering the impacts of climate change. Agriculture is also affected by climate change as evidenced by the brown tail moth and tick infestations. Not all climate change is negative. As droughts and forest fires continue in the west, New England becomes a more favorable climate for agriculture. At one time, Maine was a leading producer of cattle and grain. Over the years the infrastructure for agriculture has diminished. For example, there are no slaughterhouses in the area. More support of agricultural infrastructure is needed. Identifying these issues in the Comp Plan is critical in order to attract funding.

One resident expressed concerns about the impact a business has on his neighborhood. The business is responsible for used propane tanks, dilapidated buildings, old vehicles, parking congestion next door to his residence. There are serious safety concerns, especially given the fire at this location this summer. When this resident moved to Brooksville 50 years ago, it was a beautiful area. Now he feels this area is the “slum Of Brooksville”. This is contrary to the idea of a picturesque rural community. Jonathan Hall said that the Comprehensive Plan Committee had a number of discussions about the tension between a community that wants to maintain a certain character and the individual’s right to the use of their own property. There will be more issues as more people move to Brooksville and more businesses locate here. The plan recommends discussion of these issues, but recognizes we cannot mandate a change.

There was a suggestion to include a recommendation for safety of all.

Chapter C – Housing. This was addressed earlier.

Chapter D – Transportation. There was a question about increasing the width of the shoulders of the roads which will provide greater safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The width of the right-of-way is 49.5 feet. The Comp Plan makes recommendations for safer pedestrian and biking areas. Concerns were

raised that the roads on Cape Rosier are narrow and in sections the lives of pedestrians and cyclists are endangered by the lack of room to get off the road. This same problem also exists on the stretch of road between Condon Point and downtown South Brooksville. Jarod Farn-Guillette said that the Maine DOT budget for planning for pedestrians and bike lanes has increased. Also, the CDC (Centers of Disease Control) also advocates for safer roadways. Abbie McMillen said that solar-powered speed signs are available for about \$3,000. Other transportation related item included the plan for Brooksville to install an electrical vehicle charging station.

Chapter E – Public Facilities. What is the average age of the volunteer firefighters? The Committee does not have that information, but does recognize the serious challenges of maintaining and training a volunteer fire department.

Another serious concern was raised about the current system of property taxation. This is a system based solely on market value and not of the wealth of the property owner. It is a regressive tax which has a harder impact of those with less income. The value of shoreline property has gone up, resulting in higher taxes. People have lived in these properties for generations and they are taxed at the same rate as the properties that have recently been sold. It is placing a serious burden on some of the property owners. Does the Comp Plan address these issues? John Gray explained that by State law the properties have to be assessed between 70% and 110% of fair market value. There may be adjustments after that for open space or agricultural land. The law requires every property owner to be treated in the same way. Suggestions to address the burden of property taxes for shore properties include implementing an abatement system for properties that have been in the family for generations. The State Legislature might provide for mitigation of property taxes in anticipation of the effects that climate change will have on shore properties. The State School Funding Formula helps to offset the money needed to be raised by property taxes. Relief may be better addressed at the State level through income taxes than at the local level.

The Comp Plan does address providing more access to the shore for those residents who do not have shore property.

Chapter F – Health and Recreation. A typo was noted on page 10 – It should read “Americans with Disabilities Act”.

Covid has increased the availability of tele-medicine. State regulations were relaxed to allow for Zoom appointments. The advantages have been great in terms of time and money spent going to out-of-state specialist appointments. Unfortunately, the State regulations again require in-person appointments.

Chapter H – Marine Resources. This section includes a dredging project and repairs to Betsy’s Cove to allow for all tides access to the water.

An error was noted in Table G-2 – South Wharf Road is owned by the town and is not an easement. John Gray explained the history of this area. The Town is responsible for the town landing and South Wharf Road.

Chapter H – Water Resources. Maine Coast Heritage Trust turned the park over to Brooksville and Sedgwick. The towns will maintain the park. There was a question about the harvesting of alewives from this area. John Gray believes the State regulates the number of alewives that may be taken and the numbers depend upon the depletion or recovery of the fish stock.

Chapter I – Natural Resources. No Comments.

Chapter J – Agriculture. No Comments.

Chapter K -- Historical and Archeological Resources. No Comments.

Chapter L – Broadband. Questions about the status of proposals were addressed earlier. Abbie McMillen received a round of applause in recognition for her outstanding work on the Broadband Committee and how extremely important improved internet access is for residents and businesses in Brooksville.

Chapter M – Climate Change. The plans for installing the electric vehicle charging station should be added to as a strategy in this chapter. Firefighters should receive special training in responding to fires in electrical vehicles because of the unique risks that they pose.

Chapter N – Current Land Use. A resident had a question regarding the impact of two expensive homes being built on each side of his property will have on his own property taxes. John Gray said that these new homes should not affect his property taxes. The additional valuation from these two new homes will increase the total value of the town and thus has the potential of reducing the mill rate, which may keep property taxes the same or delay future increases.

Chapter O – Future Land Use. There was a question about the use of the Callahan Mine site as a solar farm. Since the land is privately owned, perhaps the reference to placing a solar farm on the site should be eliminated from the Comp Plan. Placement of a solar farm will be unsightly as viewed from different areas of the shore and water.

A member of the audience thanked the Comprehensive Plan Committee for their hard work in drafting this Plan.

Jonathan Hall reminded everyone that a second community meeting is scheduled for Thursday November 4, 2021 at 7:00pm at the Brooksville Elementary School.