

Maine Quality of Place Council

Minutes of Meeting, July 1, 2009
Conference Room, State Planning Office,
184 State Street, Augusta

Present: Council Members: Richard Barringer (chair), Commissioner John Richardson, Edward Barrett, Martha Freeman, Eleanor Kinney, Donna McNeil, Robert Thompson, Robin Zinchuk, and Dan Stewart representing Commissioner Cole. **Council Staff:** Jody Harris, Sue Inches. **Others:** Maggie Drummond of GrowSmart Maine, Lock Kiermaier, Andrew Fiske of DEP, Kirk Mohny of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

Quality of Place Legislation: Martha Freeman reported that the Governor's bill, LD 1389; *An Act to Create State and Regional Quality of Place Investment Strategies for High-value Jobs, Products and Services in Maine*, has been "carried over" and referred to the Legislature's BRED committee for consideration next session. Unfortunately, despite the bill being sent to the Revisor's Office in December last year, it was not printed until April and was one of the last bills the committee took up. They were unable to complete their work on the bill before the deadline passed and the Senate President pulled all bills that had not been reported out by committees before the deadline. The BRED committee was presented with high-quality testimony and held two work sessions, but was still working on finding consensus on a couple of provisions when the deadline passed. As a result, the bill went directly to the Senate without a committee report. Sue Inches, Eleanor Kinney, Bob Thompson and others did a fantastic job working the halls to craft a Senate amendment that had the support of almost all committee members. Quite simply, time ran out and the Legislature was dealing with bills on tax reform and a supplemental budget. The Governor remains very supportive of the bill and we now have time to address any concerns that the committee or other legislators may have.

Richardson: The proposed amendment to make this part of Land and Water Resources Council diminishes the Quality of Place brand. Would like to see work done on inventorying existing grant preference points (e.g. HUD), so that the Council could present a plan for a uniform set of preference points. Believes there are too many commissioners on the Council; would like the proposed membership expanded to include EDDs, cultural agencies, and the public. Also, would offer to eliminate or merge some existing boards or councils to reduce the size of government.

Barrett: Agrees on the proposed council, need people who can set the agenda and advocate for it. Commissioners are often too busy.

Kinney: Agrees, need to keep Quality of Place brand as the focus.

Mobilize Maine: Bob Thompson provided an overview of the Mobilize Maine effort in the several EDD regions. Regions are in the process of setting goals and establishing benchmarks and developing a template on how to integrate CEDS planning with Quality of Place. The

regions are also doing private and philanthropic fundraising and engaging new people with different interests from past planning efforts.

The EDDs are about to submit a major grant application to EDA to fund this effort for two years. Mobilize Maine is being discussed at the highest levels of EDA. There is real interest in what's going on in Maine in this regard. The grant request, which is due at the end of the month, will total \$1.4 million, including cash and in-kind match. EDDs have a half million committed for match. A \$90,000 state, in-kind match is needed.

The EDDs earlier submitted a letter of interest to the Environmental Funders' Network and have been invited to submit a full application.

Barringer: When will asset-based plans be developed sufficiently to drive grant preferences? (18 months – 2 years). What would an “approved” plan look like? Who approves it? (Approved means approved locally. QOP Council needs to evaluate the validity of the process, inclusive of QOP values and interests). We need to evaluate and document what's going on across the regions, learning from it, acknowledging weaknesses/failures, correcting those, and reporting faithfully to the Governor, Legislature, and funders. (Evaluation is part of the EDA grant application, including a staff person housed at SPO to do this).

Barrett: The Council should look at Enterprise St John in Canada, which has good measures for evaluating success. They turned an economic development initiative into one that works to make St John an attractive place to live, recognizing that people drive innovation and development.

Environmental Funders' Network (EFN): Eleanor Kinney updated the Council on the EFN's grant process. The EFN received nearly 100 letters of inquiry, all of a high caliber with regional, collaborative, statewide efforts. Seventeen were invited to come back with full proposals. The EFN will make its decisions on what gets funded in early August. With 97 organizations actively involved in some aspect of QOP, EFN hopes to get them hooked up with Mobilize Maine. They will make good, motivated stakeholders. ENF expects to fund \$600,000 in proposals this year and \$2 million over three years.

Communities for Maine's Future (CMF): Maggie Drummond of GrowSmart Maine provided an overview of the Community for Maine's Future bond, which the Legislature approved to put to the voters in June 2010. CMF is designed as a sister program to the Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF). It is a competitive grant process that uses the statutory language of the Municipal Investment Trust Fund with language added reflecting the Quality of Place nature of the Riverfront Improvement grants. Voters will vote on \$5 million for CMF that includes \$1.5 million for the Endangered Buildings Revolving Fund (discussed below).

Maggie also updated the Council on several other bills of interest:

- Uniform Building Code: several bills were presented to weaken the code, but none of these went forward. A bill on contractor licensing was received favorably by the BRED Committee and carried over to the second part of the session.
- Historic Tax Credit – a problem with the per project cap as defined by Maine Revenue Services came up and will need to be resolved in the second half of the

session. The current interpretation of the cap by Maine Revenue Services would severely limit its effectiveness larger projects.

- TIFs – under certain conditions, communities can now use TIFs to finance the development and operating costs transit systems and recreational corridors

Site Law: Andy Fiske from DEP and Sue Inches of SPO spoke to the bill that would have linked the Site Law with the Growth Management Act. There was strong resistance to the bill especially in rural places. There is legitimate concern with how state and local planning interact when no local land use ordinances exist. For towns that have no land use planning tools, should large development be sited anywhere, with no restrictions? How do we deal with this kind of development in rural areas? How do we connect state and local decision-making? The discussion around the bill raises a fundamental question: How is Maine going to grow and develop? The locational aspect of the Site Law bill (LD 1268) was removed and further thought is needed on how to move forward with this issue.

Bike and Pedestrian Trails: Dan Stewart of MaineDOT provided an update on the department's trails' report, a recommendation of the Governor's Council on Maine's Quality of Place. The report, which is near final, includes recommendations on policies and funding, as well as "how-to" resources for communities to develop bike and pedestrian trail systems. Noting that the majority of bike and pedestrian trails are locally-driven, this report will help communities build and connect local trail systems.

Endangered Building Fund: Kirk Mohny of Maine Historic Preservation Commission thanked the Council for their work getting this into the Governor's Bond Package. The fund, if approved by voters, would provide a tool where an historic preservation organization can purchase an option on a property and then locate a buyer who is willing to redevelop the property in a way that protects its historic character. The fund is "revolving," so that once a property is sold for redevelopment, the money used to purchase the option is returned to the fund. Sue mentioned that an example of this practice is now underway (using private funds). Maine Preservation has purchased an option on a building that was an inn for black travelers to Maine 150 years ago. Maine Preservation has located an interested buyer who will restore this historic property.

Next Steps: The Council discussed priorities for the summer and fall including:

1. LD 1389, develop a strategy for advancing the bill before the BRED committee and Legislature next session;
2. Evaluate Mobilize Maine, attend meetings, monitor efforts, and track results. Sue Inches of SPO has been doing this. A special projects position has been proposed as part of a Mobilize Maine EDA grant. If the grant comes through, this person would attend and evaluate progress of Mobilize Maine in each region.
3. Identify preference points offered through existing state grants for quality of place projects, conditions, constraints, in order to report back to BRED with more concrete information. The Council suggested that SPO work with 4-5 programs that might lend themselves well to these kinds of preference points, namely: Land for Maine's Future, Communities for Maine's Future, New Century Communities, Bike and Pedestrian Trails and CDBG grants.

4. Develop a communications plan for Q of P for the fall that might include Op Ed pieces, talking points for the Governor, and presentations by council members at conferences and events, etc.

Next Meeting: Mid-September, date TBD.

Meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.