

Governors Council on Maine's Quality of Place

Minutes of the Third Meeting, June 19, 2007¹

Public Utilities Commission Hearing Room, Augusta

Next Meeting of the Council: July 13 in Belfast. 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Location to be announced.

Present: Council members: Edward Barrett, Richard Barringer, Jay Espy, John Marsh, Martha Freeman, Bruce Hazard, Eleanor Kinney, Charles (Chuck) Lawton, Kevin Mattson, Mary Kate Reny, Evan Richert, John M. Rohman, Henry (Hank) Schmelzer, Barbara Trafton, Ken Young. Staff members: Sue Inches, John Del Vecchio, Jody Harris, Kate Reilly, Jack Kartez. Guests: Tim Glidden, Ruta Dzenis, Jon Weber, Bret Richardson, Holly Dolby, Crystal Callaghan, Maggie Drummond, Will Brennan

Introductions & Greetings: The meeting opened at 9:05 AM with the introduction of Council members, staff, and guests. Minutes from the May 23 meeting were accepted with no changes. No changes to today's agenda were suggested.

Richard Barringer briefly informed the Council of two recent meetings of interest: a Friends of Midcoast Maine meeting at which Evan Richert gave a presentation on changing demographics in the midcoast and implications for planning and development, and a Community Preservation Advisory Committee meeting held June 18th where Richard gave an update on the Q of P Council which the Committee warmly received and asked that Richard report back in September.

Legislative Update: Sue Inches, deputy director of the State Planning Office (SPO), was invited to give a review of bills related to Brookings recommendations.

- LD 1872, "An Act to Preserve Maine's Quality Places," proposes an increase in the lodging tax and a surcharge on registry deeds as funding sources for "Quality of Place" investments. The bill has been voted "Ought Not to Pass" out of Committee.
- LD. 1848, "An Act to Promote Sustainable Prosperity," would create a government efficiency commission and reinvest savings in research and development. This bill has been killed and a Legislative Prosperity Committee has been assigned to deliberate the issues in the bill.

¹ Note: The minutes have been prepared by staff of the State Planning Office from notes taken throughout the day; they are intended to summarize a rich set of presentations and conversations, and do not necessarily represent accurately the thoughts and opinions of those cited here.

- LD 677, “Resolve Directing the Developments of a Building Code, and Building Rehabilitation Code,” has been signed into law. The bill will develop next steps for implementing the model building codes.
- LD 262, “An Act to Amend the Credit for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties,” received unanimous Taxation Committee support but, due to a fiscal note, was held over until next year.
- LD 1810 “An Act to Enact the Informed Growth Act,” proposes an economic impact study for retail stores over 75,000 square feet. The bill has passed the House and Senate and the Governor is expected to sign it.
- LD 1803 “An Act to Clarify Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Ordinances,” has been passed and signed into law. This bill implements recommendations to improve local comprehensive planning.

Presentations

Place and Prosperity: economic effects of Q of P.

Kate Reilly, State Economist, and Henry Renski, Ph.D., Maine North Star Alliance.

Kate and Henry reviewed the highlights of their research, conducted at the request of the Council, into the intellectual underpinnings of the claim in the Brookings Institution’s 2006 report that Maine’s quality places are scarce and valuable assets in toady’s economy. Their findings are based on a review of the economics and planning literature on the causes and effects of quality of place. (See paper attached, “Place and Prosperity”).

They note that new technologies have decreased the constraints of physical distance and that Maine is attracting businesses and individuals who previously could not have located here. “High tech” businesses in particular are attracted to locations with ample and attractive “quality of place” amenities. These places tend to experience higher economic and population growth. Kate and Henry noted that traditional economic development strategies focus on decreasing business costs (supply, production, other...) but that success today also involves knowledge and innovation. Currently, they pointed out, quality of place serves as a complement to traditional economic development strategies, not a substitute, but its importance is likely to increase as the economy turns more toward the “high tech” industries that value it most.

Kate and Henry concluded that successful economic development policies and initiatives align a region’s unique assets with promising and realistic market opportunities.

MaineDOT Presentation: Connecting transportation and community planning and investments.

Greg Nadeau, Deputy Commissioner, and Kathy Fuller, Director of Environmental Services

Greg reviewed for the Council the Department's "Connecting Maine" (its Long Range Plan) started two years ago as a blueprint for transportation planning and investment in Maine. He pointed out that freight traffic will double in the next 20 years and that "intermodalism" is a key to the future. He described how the Department involves local and regional entities in its planning and investment strategies. He pointed out that while the primary funding sources for transportation are either level or in decline, the service base is continually growing. While mandated by the State Transportation Policy Act to provide non-highway investment, no dedicated funding source exists to comply, leaving MaineDOT to rely on limited capital funding from feds.

Kathy reviewed the Department's efforts to link land use and transportation planning. There continues to be a disconnect between local land use decisions and state transportation decisions—outpacing the ability to respond to congestion and other problems; but Maine DOT is working to change this pattern. Disconnected land use and transportation decisions simply move the problems from one location to another, Kathy noted. The Gateway 1 planning project initiated by MaineDOT in 2004, in partnership with SPO and FHWA, involves working with 21 midcoast communities to identify scenarios for future transportation and land use investments. Beginning this fall, the project will be developing proposed land use and transportation policies and strategies connected with each identified scenario, and next will identify incentives for local choices supporting the plan.

Creative Economy Report

Jody Harris, State Planning Office:

Jody reviewed the highlights of Maine's Creative Economy initiative. Jody's white paper concludes that, with over 63 thousand people employed in the arts and technology sectors (only slightly smaller than the number employed in manufacturing), Maine's creative economy is substantial and is growing fastest in rural areas; and that the Quality of Place Council should build creative economy strategies into its work. Jody's primary conclusions and recommendations include:

Conclusions:

- Maine's creative economy work needs to embrace both the technology sector and arts and culture sector. These sectors must expand to provide the amenities creative workers desire

- Maine needs to exploit the opportunities created by artisan-based businesses and foster connections, collaboration, and integration
- Maine needs a coordinating mechanism to build and sustain creative communities

Recommendations:

1. Foster cluster-like connections for artisan-based manufacturing companies
 - o Bring in the technology sector
 - o Support networking opportunities
 - o Consider university CENTRO model
2. Support the development of creative communities
 - o Invest in and expand Maine Downtown Center
 - o Provide special events grants to communities
 - o Develop model ordinance language for mixed-use zoning

Facilitated Discussion (Jack Kartez and Sue Inches, facilitators)

After hearing from the presenters and discussing their topics, Jack asked the Council members each to identify the things they feel constitute Maine’s Quality of Place. This generated a long list of characteristics, many of which are interrelated (see Synthesis of Flip Charts attached.)

Sue then presented to the Council a list of 4 possible areas of focus to guide staff research, developed from a review of the Council’s two previous meetings. The Council agreed to move ahead with these four areas of focus:

1. Regional Planning and Governance

Develop incentives; evaluate/propose models and strategies for regionalizing land use, development, land protection and other decisions. Propose strategies for moving forward on this issue.

2. Downtown Revitalization/Historic Preservation/Creative Economy

Develop recommendations on downtown revitalization, historic preservation and the creative economy effort that will remove constraints and encourage investment in downtowns

3. Asset Based Development Strategy

Develop a supplemental economic development strategy for attracting and developing business and tourism based on Maine’s unique assets. Strategies should incorporate downtown revitalization, historic preservation, creative economy and nature-based tourism and be regionally based, supported from below and integrated across state agencies with development responsibilities.

4. Outreach and Education

This item on hold until first three items are developed

5. Large Landscapes

This item on hold until presentations and discussion at July 13th meeting.

(Please see “Areas of Focus” attachment. If you haven’t volunteered to work with at least one of the areas, please consider doing so. Email Linda LaPlante with your preference, so you can be included in email correspondence prior to the next Council meeting.)

Continuing Issues

Finally, a number of issues were raised during the day that were important, but not resolved. These are recorded here in a “parking lot” as issues to be revisited in the future Council deliberations:

- a) The critical importance and role played by private property owners in allowing public access to natural resources. There is a fundamental change happening in Maine where public access over private lands has been a given in the past, but is now being closed off to the public, necessitating more public acquisition of property for public access.
- b) Two diverging views of quality of place have emerged: one which says that we should identify who our markets are and invest in Quality of Place in ways that serve those markets; the other which says that we should strengthen our Quality of Place to reflect our own values and then the right people will be attracted to this.
- c) The differences between residents’ and non-residents’ perspectives on quality of place, e.g. Maine residents avoiding Bar Harbor during the high tourist season, visiting off-season instead;
- d) The question of whether quality of place carries the seeds of its own destruction (e.g. Florida’s St. Armand’s Circle then and now)...how do we address “the preservation piece” of quality of place?
- e) The need for an overarching, organizing principle to frame our Quality of Place work. An asset-based strategy that builds on Maine’s unique assets might provide this framework.

Next Meeting: Friday, July 14, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Hutchinson Center in Belfast.

Two panels of guests will address issues surrounding landscape protection in Maine, and the future of the Unorganized Territory. Council members will address the several “focus areas” identified above, to formulate a work plan and statement of resource needs.