

Maine's Quality of Place Findings – Draft 10.02.07

1. Maine's Quality of Place (Q of P) is an economic good or asset of real and increasing value.
2. Today's high-growth industries (including R&D, healthcare, professional services, nature & heritage-based tourism, retirement, etc.) especially value Q of P and are attracted by it.
3. Successful Q of P protection/development initiatives are generally found to be regional, strategic, and multi-dimensional in nature and organization.
4. "Asset-based" strategies complement more traditional approaches to economic development, and build upon a region's unique strengths and marketable assets to create opportunity and strengthen the assets.
5. Maine's Q of P, our unique and marketable assets, includes our
 - natural environment, including clean air and waters, open space, and access to them
 - historic heritage and downtowns
 - cultural heritage and traditions
 - forestry, maritime, and agricultural heritage
 - working lands and waterfronts
 - traditions of integrity, hard work, and quality products
 - physical infrastructure, businesses, and civic organizations that support these and provide access to them.
6. This is a crucial moment where our competitive advantage in quality of place is strong, but we face its loss if we don't take action to protect and strengthen it. Maine's Q of P is threatened today by
 - increasing residential and commercial "sprawl," including into the Unorganized Territory
 - lack of new investment in our historic downtowns
 - changing ownership and management goals of large, forested lands
 - increasing numbers of large development proposals with regional impacts
 - the continuing decline in employment within our traditional industries
 - the decay and loss of unique historical resources

- diminishing public and commercial access to public waters, private lands, and open space
- fragmented jurisdictions over key natural resources
- increasing competition among municipalities for development and property taxes.

7. Numerous nations, states, counties, cities and towns, and non-profit organizations today pursue asset-based development strategies, though not always by this name. What is in common among these efforts is that:

- ideas, priorities, and leadership originate at the local and regional levels
- higher levels inform, provide technical assistance, fund, facilitate, and support local and regional efforts
- a comprehensive and coordinated approach to community and economic development, characterized by effective long-range planning and implementation
- joint private, public, and non-profit support, commitment, and involvement
- performance measures and evaluation are generally weak (not unusual among economic development programs, in general).

8. Maine is not now well-organized to respond to Q of P threats and to realize an asset-based development strategy. Current economic development efforts are

- too crisis-driven
- too focused on responding to local “needs,” spreading resources too thin to be effective in this regard
- too top-down, not sufficiently bottom-up
- too dominated by the separation of programs and available resources into organizational silos and boxes (land conservation, housing, downtown redevelopment, historic preservation, multiple marketing efforts, etc)
- too fragmented and narrowly focused at the local level.

9. To protect and build upon Maine’s Q of P, Maine needs to foster and pursue an asset-based development strategy that is

- driven by ideas, priorities, opportunities, and leadership from the local and regional communities

- based on effective local/regional planning and implementation
- supported by state-level technical assistance, facilitation, and funding effectively organized and coordinated to advance the local/regional effort
- supportive of joint private, non-profit, and public sector efforts, commitment, and involvement
- monitored on a continuing basis by appropriate performance and evaluation measures.