

Governor's Council on Maine's Quality of Place

Minutes of the First Meeting, April 19, 2007

The Cabinet Room, State Capitol Building, Augusta

Next Council Meeting: Wednesday, May 23, 9:00-4:30, at a location in Augusta.

The meeting will include:

1. a series of professional panels, including Council members, to discuss their perspectives on Maine's quality of place and its possibilities as a central "driver" of Maine community and economic development; and
2. a facilitated conversation among Council members of how we, individually and collectively, define Maine's "quality of place."

Present: Council members Richard Barringer, Edward Barrett, Martha Freeman, Bruce Hazard, Eleanor Kinney, Charles Lawton, John Marsh, Mary Kate Reny, Hank Schmelzer, David Whitney, Donna McNeal for John Rohman, Rich Knox for Jay Espy. Staff members John DeVecchio, Kate Reilly, Henry Renski, Jack Kartez, Linda LaPlante. Guests Lori Allen, Maine Downtown Center; Alan Caron, GrowSmart Maine; Maggie Drummond, GrowSmart Maine; Mark Muro, The Brookings Institution. Governor's Office liaison Karin Tilberg.

1. Introductions & Greetings: The meeting opened at 9:00 a.m. After introductions of the Council members and staff present, Dick Barringer read a letter of greetings and gratitude to the Council and staff from Gov. John Baldacci (who was tending to storm-related emergency matters). In part, the letter reads: "Last year's Brookings report told us we need to build upon the assets that make us truly distinctive; to seek efficiencies in government at all levels; and to invest in innovation, education, and job growth. We are finding the savings Brookings asked for, and we are investing in education and innovation. Now, your job is to help us identify the assets that make Maine a truly distinctive place, so that we may sustain them and build upon them.... Today, I am asking you to help us better understand the elements of our quality of place; to clarify their relationship to our economic well-being; and to recommend ways and means to secure their benefits for sustainable prosperity" (see Attachment 1).

2. Brookings Report Update: Alan Caron of GrowSmart Maine spoke of the question originally posed to the Brookings Institution, "How can we grow sustainable prosperity in Maine and not wreck the place?"; and offered several reasons for the report's popularity, including the quality of the data, a plan of action people are anxious for, and its optimistic, non-partisan tone. Caron has learned from GrowSmart's public meetings since the report that Maine people are deeply ambivalent about growth, and that place

matters greatly to Maine people. GrowSmart is now engaged in a 4-year effort of outreach and advocacy to build upon the Brookings report and recommendations.

Mark Muro of the Brookings Institution, principal author of the report, spoke to the process of the report and its findings and recommendations. Most of his presentation was devoted to the theory and practice that connects “place” to economic prosperity, from the writings of Adam Smith and Alfred Marshall to the contemporary works of Michael Porter, Richard Florida, and others (see PowerPoint presentation, Attachment 2).

John DelVecchio of the State Planning Office followed with a status report on Brookings report recommendations directly related to the Council’s charge (Steps 4 through 8 in the Brookings Report Summary & Status, Attachment 3). Kate Reilly of the same office reviewed the outline of a white paper on “Place and Prosperity” she and colleague Henry Renski are preparing for the Council (see Attachment 4).

A rich conversation accompanied these presentations, around “quality of place” and its connections to Maine economic prosperity, culture and values, land use and landscape protection, downtown revitalization, and historic preservation. The Council’s discussion revealed “quality of place” to be a very complex issue operating today within a very dynamic political environment.

3. Next Steps. Jack Kartez facilitated a lengthy discussion among Council members and guests about our next steps. The outcomes below were recorded by Kate Reilly.

Information needs: Council members agreed to begin by establishing common understanding of important Quality of Place issues; would like to convene panels of experts familiar with economics, planning, historic preservation, downtown revitalization, and the creative economy; and to hear from Maine business owners, landowners, developers, and working households.

Highest Priority Questions from the Brookings Status Reports: First, a dedicated fund for Quality of Place investments: Should one be created? How would it be funded? How and by whom would funds be allocated? Which investments would qualify? Second, institutional structures: Are Maine’s existing institutional structures (state, regional, and local governments, educational institutions, service providers, economic development agencies, etc.) generating the desired results? Are they appropriate for today’s economy, or are they vestiges of the past? Should state government *facilitate* regional economic initiatives or *create/direct* them?

Council Position on Near-term Policy Debates: The Council agreed that individual members, and their respective organizations, may advocate on policy issues during this legislative session; some even encouraged others to do so. Members also agreed that it is too early to develop positions as a body that is still gathering information and developing a work plan.

Communications: The State Planning Office has established a website for the Council's work and documents, www.maine.gov/spo/qualityofplace/index.php where these meeting minutes will be posted. In addition, the SPO will maintain an email address list of "interested persons" who wish to receive directly all Council agendas, minutes, materials, etc; anyone who wishes to be included on this list may contact Linda LaPlante at linda.c.laplante@maine.gov. Finally, the State Planning Office will create an on-line format for Council members to communicate readily with one another.

4. Next Meeting: As agreed at the close of the meeting, we will organize the next meeting of the Council on Wednesday, May 23, 9:00-4:30 at a location to be determined in Augusta. Barring another emergency, the Governor will join us at 10:00 a.m. The meeting will feature:

- a series of professional panels, including Council members, to discuss their perspectives on Maine's quality of place and its possibilities as a central "driver" of Maine community and economic development; and
- a facilitated conversation among Council members of how we, individually and collectively, define Maine's "quality of place."

If possible, the SPO staff white paper on what is known about the relationship between "quality of place" and economic prosperity will be made available to inform our discussion, or an interim progress report will be given.

Homework: Contemplate/answer the questions, What is Quality of Place? What does it mean to me? What would it take for Maine to realize my definition of Quality of Place?

Meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.