

DRAFT

Regional Planning and Governance

A synthesis based on the discussions of the Regional Planning and Governance group.

The Challenge:

Different parts of Maine have distinctly different needs, assets, priorities, economies and cultures. But we are making many decisions on a “one size fits all” basis in Augusta. At the same time Maine’s natural features—rivers, lakes, mountains, coastlines and cultural assets—are regional in nature, but they are being governed locally (with the exception of LURC), which leads to a fragmented mix of policies and potential threat to our overall Quality of Place. Strong growth of grassroots regional efforts to address open space planning, regional land use, preservation of cultural assets and large natural areas demonstrates a willingness among many to consider planning and governing on a more regional basis.

A Proposed Response:

1. Create meaningful regional asset plans that are based on the vision and goals of the regional community.

2. Devolve some state decisions to the regional level, based on priorities established in the regional asset-based plans. Examples might include capital investment spending, infrastructure grants and permitting for large projects.

3. Create criteria for establishing regions, which might include the following:

- A total number and size of regions that allows for efficient management and streamlining at the state level, meaning 6-12 regions to be established statewide.
- Regions that are built on existing divisions. Two ideas that have been discussed are using the Economic Development Districts, or using counties consolidated from 16 to 8. (see attached)
- Regions that are roughly equal in population and have a viable asset value.
- Regions that follow broad areas of economic activity and can include “subregions” nested within them.

4. Create a process for establishing the new regional authorities, which might look something like this:

Level 1: Municipalities in the region sign an MOU of participation and are awarded planning funds

Level 2: A regional vision, capital investment and future development plan are completed and adopted by referendum. The Quality of Place Council reviews and approves the regional plan as consistent with state goals. Regions are given an advisory role in state funding decisions.

Level 3: A regional board is established with the authority to implement the plan. It may administer state block grants, set up a TDR program, and have access to special funds—perhaps a portion of the salestax or special bond funds.