

People, Place, and Prosperity

Executive Summary

1st Report of the Governor's Council on Maine's Quality of Place



“As the search for quality places grows in importance, Maine possesses a globally known ‘brand’ built on an image of livable communities, stunning scenery, and great recreational opportunities. Likewise, as ‘innovation’ drives more of the economy, Maine’s reputation for Yankee ingenuity and resourcefulness matters more.”

—The Brookings Institution, Charting Maine’s Future, 2006

We all love Maine. It is why we live here. It is the reason we want to protect our unbroken forests, wild rivers, picturesque downtowns, village greens, and historic houses, grange halls and libraries.

It turns out there is another reason to safeguard all these things. It is Maine’s economy. The things we enjoy are things that people around the country and the world value. As the rest of the country becomes more crowded and homogenous and polluted, what sets Maine apart — what makes Maine distinctive — our Quality of Place — becomes an ever more important economic asset.

In 2006, The Brookings Institution, a national research organization that has studied the economies of many states, issued a report asserting that Maine’s Quality of Place is an economic asset of increasing value for Maine. Not just an asset, but Maine’s *chief* asset. Our own research confirms this finding.

The reason is that in the new economy, the greatest competition worldwide is for *people*. People looking for a place to retire, or to visit awhile. People with energy and skills who can start and sustain businesses in the new innovative sectors that Maine has targeted for future growth — biomedicine, composite materials manufacturing, computer programming, advanced technologies for boat-building, the new “local” agriculture, and the like.

People with skills in these areas can live anywhere. Our research shows they are most interested in living somewhere with a high Quality of Place. This is our most powerful advantage in the global marketplace for people.

In March 2007, Governor John Baldacci appointed the Council on Maine's Quality of Place. This brochure summarizes the Council's recommendations. A full report and accompanying background papers can be accessed on-line at www.maine.gov/spo/qualityofplace.

Yet Maine is careless with this powerful economic asset today. We let our open spaces get fenced off. We let our downtowns and historic buildings deteriorate. We let our scenic landscapes get cluttered. We let our best and most unique asset lose its special quality.

“Mainers both native and ‘from away’ are spreading out across the land, building homes and strip malls along an ever-widening frontier...the spread of anonymous suburban development threatens to gradually (or not so gradually) degrade Maine’s quality of place at a time when quality of place means more and more.”

—The Brookings Institution, Charting Maine’s Future, 2006



Preserving and enhancing our Quality of Place is a new kind of economic development challenge. We need new economic development tools to respond.

Governor John Baldacci has begun to assemble this new toolkit, leading Maine to invest in community colleges, research and development, natural resource-based industries, the creative economy, and nature-based tourism.

The Governor’s Council on Maine’s Quality of Place proposes to add several major elements, including a bold new “asset-based” development strategy. The goal is to engage people in all corners of Maine, to act together and enhance the economic advantage that is Maine’s foundation for future growth — our Quality of Place.

We make 15 recommendations in three major areas: regional landscape conservation, community and downtown revitalization, and using an asset-based development strategy in Maine.

Asset: Lakes and Lands



The pristine seclusion of the Downeast lakes has drawn sportsmen for generations and is the backbone of the region’s economy. The Downeast Lakes Land Trust, consisting of 342,000 acres, 60 lakes, and 1,500 miles of riverfront, was created to protect this unique asset. Operated and supported by local residents, the trust manages a sustainable forestry operation, builds recreational infrastructure (such as hiking trails and campsites), and works to secure the region’s natural character into perpetuity.

Our first set of recommendations addresses regional landscape conservation. Maine's Land for Maine's Future program has had great success and popular support in preserving important landscapes. We propose to continue and expand this program, but at the same time recognize that Maine taxpayers cannot buy everything that is needed. We need to engage private landowners, who are already the caretakers for much of the beauty of Maine, and reward them for conservation and public access.

We wish to acknowledge and reward the creative regional landscape protection efforts underway and encourage more of them. We need to update Maine's basic land use laws and state practices to align them with Quality of Place principles. We must work smarter to protect these assets.

The second set of recommendations addresses the revitalization of our communities, our village centers, our creative economy, and our built environment. We recommend working with developers and communities to preserve and enliven our downtowns. We propose a statewide program to connect all of Maine's major centers with trails; as President Dwight Eisenhower once envisioned an interstate highway system, we envision a statewide, off-road biking and walking network for all Maine residents and visitors to enjoy.

A New Regional Development Strategy

Regional Landscape Conservation

1. Recognize and Support Private Landowners' Crucial Role in Protecting Maine's Quality of Place
2. Recognize, Incentivize, and Reward Regional Landscape Conservation
3. Recognize and Act Upon the Historic Changes Faced by LURC
4. Align the State's Basic Land Use Statutes with Quality of Place

Community & Downtown Revitalization

5. Adopt a Strong State Community Preservation and Development Policy
6. Provide Communities with Development Assistance
7. Enhance Historic Preservation Tools
8. Enact the Maine Community Preservation Act
9. Create the Maine Intrastate Trail System

Asset-Based Development Strategy

10. A Local-Regional Approach to Development: Use a locally-driven, broadly participatory structure to identify key assets and to design and implement strategies to preserve and promote these assets
11. State Incentives and Support: Establish a state grant program to assist with the preparation of regional asset-based development strategies
12. State Coordination: Establish a permanent state-level Maine Quality of Place Council
13. Implementation Funding: Provide reliable funding to implement regional and statewide asset-based development strategies
14. State Support: Organize state programs and agencies to incentivize and support bottom-up, asset-based development efforts
15. Workforce Development: Align Maine's workforce development system and programs with Quality of Place opportunities

Asset: Heritage and Culture

Maine's western mountain communities share a distinctive history and culture tightly bound to the natural landscape. Business, nonprofit, and government leaders formed the Maine Mountain Heritage Network to build a brand around the region's history, culture, and natural resources. It is currently evaluating options for having the region designated as a National Heritage Area.



We urge strong and fiscally responsible tax incentives for historic preservation. As in the case of landscape preservation, we recommend realigning state policies and programs to support development in built-up places.

The last set of recommendations proposes a bold new “bottom-up” approach to Maine economic development, called “asset-based development.” It involves inviting people from all walks of life in all parts of Maine to gather and identify key Quality of Place assets; to assemble local resources and energy that, with state support and private assistance, will speed the conservation of landscapes and the revitalization of communities and built-up areas.

As part of this new approach, we propose that state government organize *itself* to align its agencies to make flexible funds available to help people within their regions build Maine’s Quality of Place advantage.

This is a dramatically *new* way of thinking for Maine people. In the old way, Maine’s surroundings were nice but not relevant to economic development. Today, Maine’s surroundings remain nice, but they are now the very *key* to our economic future.

We cannot afford to wait and leave the future to chance. We need to act today to strengthen the Maine we love and, at the same time, assure an economic future for our children.

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www.maine.gov/spo.
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Asset: Winter Wonderland



Mainers have been traversing the Northern Maine landscape on skis since the state’s earliest days. The Maine Winter Sports Center, building on that tradition, erected two world-class cross-country ski and biathlon facilities in Aroostook County. International and national competitions in Fort Kent and Presque Isle have infused millions into the local economies and exposed the area to competitors, fans, and television audiences around the world.