

Process Steering Committee Meeting #1
WASHINGTON COUNTY UNORGANIZED TERRITORIES
COMMUNITY GUIDED PLANNING and ZONING PROCESS

May 27, 2015, 6-8pm

Machias, Maine

Attendance: Betsy Fitzgerald, Washington County Manager; Karen Holmes, Cathance Lake Association; John Dudley, Alexander resident and regional historian; Nate Pennell, WC Soil & Water Conservation District; Robert Murphy, American Forest Management; Charles Rudelitch, Sunrise County Economic Council; Jeremy Gabrielson, Maine Coast Heritage Trust (by phone); David Bell, Cherryfield Foods; Homer Woodward, Jasper Wyman & Sons; John Cashwell, Travis Howard, Wagner Forest Management; Alan May, Trescott resident, Maine Center for Disease Control; Mike Hinerman, Washington County Emergency Management Agency; Elgin Turner, H.C. Haynes, Inc.

Staff: Judy East, Washington County Council of Governments; Sarah Strickland, Consultant; Samantha Horn Olsen, Land Use Planning Commission; Frank O'Hara, Planning Decisions; Alison Truesdale, LandForms; Heron Weston, Washington County UT (Regrets: Dean Preston, Supervisor, Washington County UT)

Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Community Guided Planning and Zoning (Samantha Horn Olsen)
3. The geography of the Washington County UT (Dean) [wall maps]
4. Key issues in Washington County (brainstorm discussion)
5. Overview of anticipated planning process (Judy)
 - a. Response and suggestions (discussion)
6. Public participation ideas (Sarah)
 - a. Response and suggestions (discussion)
7. Comments from members of public
8. Date and location of next meeting
9. Adjourn

Community Guided Planning and Zoning

After introductory remarks from Judy, everyone introduced themselves. Samantha explained the history and purpose of prospective zoning, saying that this type of zoning emphasizes where the community would like to see development in the future rather than focusing on where it is now. Compared to the current permitting process in most of the unorganized territory, prospective zoning eliminates the need for rezoning before a development permit can be issued when the development is proposed for one of the pre-identified areas. The LUPC staff role in the process will be to provide information as needed, and to advise the group about how various ideas about how to proceed can fit within the Commission's statutory mandate from the legislature.

The product of the planning process that this meeting is initiating may be prospective zoning for some or all of the unorganized areas of Washington County. There are other useful products that the group could consider if it isn't possible to get all the way to new zoning maps. Some examples were provided. Judy

said that the County has dedicated \$80,000 in TIF funds from wind developments to this process. Samantha noted that it is important that this process is inclusive so that the product can be enthusiastically approved by Commission, knowing that it has public support and fits with the statute that the Commission must follow.

Questions:

- What has and has not worked in with this process in Aroostook County and the Western Mountains region? Samantha suggested that, based on these groups' experiences, it will be helpful to come up with goals early on to make the planning process efficient. The process can focus on how to improve the land use situation in Washington County without having to specifically identify problems to solve that have proven difficult to identify in the other regions. The other observation was that it's important to make sure you have the current key economic players in the room rather than speculating what might happen in the future in terms of economic development.
- Do the County Commissioners and LUPC weigh in early on? LUPC staff will be available to provide feedback throughout the process. The County Commissioners could weigh in if there is something they want to bring to the group's attention or discuss, but that is flexible.
- Would it be possible to create new types of prospective zones? Yes – Aroostook is doing this.

Geography of Washington County UT

Heron displayed a map of the county showing the organized areas, townships, and plantations, with population figures for each. It was noted that the county UT can be divided into four subregions, based on their primary commercial/natural resource assets: Route 9 to Grand Lake Stream is one area, the blueberry barrens are another unique area; Trescott and Edmonds are unique for their commercial fisheries. Danforth is the service area for the surrounding UT. It was agreed that the map should depict these subregions. Maps should also depict conservation easements.

Note from Judy: we will make use of the full power of GIS mapping to depict and analyze all relevant information including easements, property ownership, resources, infrastructure, facilities and multiple service area districts. .

Key issues in Washington County

Comments and additions to the list of issues presented:

- Would like to see more opportunities for small or expanding businesses in the Grand Lake Stream and East Grand Lake area that cater to tourism and recreation including home-based businesses. He also thinks it's important to protect the forest land base.
- Blend sustainable management of resources with development of economic opportunities.
- Address the needs for emergency/public safety equipment and facilities. Consider how to reach people as we develop and the year round population rises; the contracted fire departments in nearby organized towns are very small and all volunteer.
- Make sure the plan for development is thoughtful and logical.
- Maximize economic impact for year round residents of the county, with more intensive use where it is appropriate and realistic. Wind development and agriculture make sense.

- “Floating” zones that describe allowable development if certain conditions are met, like they are considering in Aroostook County, make sense.
- Develop a set of guidelines and zones for wind power and forestry.
- Increase the economic stability of Washington County (set as a goal)
- Address concerns about wind development and its impact on county resources.
- Future seasonal vs. year round development should be planned so it is not a drain on the County or create a need for State funding support
- Consider the communication process – how to engage the public to attend meetings & have input
- Consider Washington county health issues (there are failing septic systems that impact shellfish areas; arsenic in wells, there are serious housing issues)
- Listen to and engage other entities to deliver, eg. emergency messages to the disabled and seniors living alone (vulnerable populations); there are existing networks – use them.
- Protect landowner rights.
- Map the river corridors, conservation and working forest easements, TNC ownership – create a landowner map so that we understand whose land we’re looking at.
- Provide demographic and economic information about the county.
- Protect the working forest.
- Address habitat improvement (e.g., clam flats, ocean acidification); document the status of these resources
- Add electricity infrastructure/transmission corridors to natural gas infrastructure
- Include the old railroad bed – investigate whether broadband can be run down the corridor.
- It was noted that different issues apply in different subregions. It was suggested that the issues be separated by subregion and prioritized (low, medium and high).

Overview of Planning Process

Judy went over the draft back-out schedule.. The following refinements to the subareas of the county were defined/discussed:

- Northern UT; includes northern St Croix watershed, woodlands above Route 6, townships on north western WC border
- Northern Lakes; includes lakes, recreation, guiding, woodlands; may extend south to Route 9 on western border
- Blueberry Barrens/southwest working forest; upper watersheds of the Narraguagus, Pleasant and Machias rivers
- Coastal and southern Lakes; East Machias and Dennys River watersheds

There is a core Planning Committee but not many volunteers who indicated interest/ability to attend all of its monthly meetings. All stakeholders (currently 79 on the list) will receive notice of all working meetings and when draft work products are posted on the web site (<http://www.wccog.net/community-guided-planning-and-zoning.htm>). Stakeholders can choose to attend Planning Committee meetings as the subject or geographic area is of interest/concern to them.

Judy asked who else should be contacted to participate?

- Representatives from the Department of Transportation and other agencies interested in certain issues.
- The agriculture community; it was noted that they can be difficult to reach; suggest that we use the March 2016 Washington County Food Summit to reach them. Include DEBCO: the Downeast Blueberry Cooperative.
- Summer residents.
- Add representative from Eastern Maine Electric Coop.

Potential Meeting Venues:

- Airline Café (in Hancock County on Rte. 9): Ag and forestry
- Dennysville Snowmobile clubhouse
- Princeton Town Office
- Edmonds School

How do we get the public to participate?

Ideas:

- Sarah asked whether the large regional meetings are likely to draw people. Many agreed they would not and the people often only show if there is a draft product for them to react to (but then, how do they have input at the beginning?)
- In local Comprehensive Plan processes we ask each planning committee member to phone 5 people to attend or have a raffle for \$100 worth of heating fuel or something similar.
- Hold meetings when and where groups are gathering anyway (lake association meetings, pancake breakfasts, game dinners, club suppers).
- Conduct a survey early on in the process to get information from individuals at the beginning of the process.
- Make sure people without Internet access know about the process and can participate.
- Post information in transfer stations, town offices, grocery stores, and school weekly flyers.

Judy will refine the backout schedule to incorporate outreach meetings at places and times when people gather rather than in large regional meetings and we will review at the 2nd process meeting.

Questions:

How are the direct interests of stakeholders in the UT protected or distinguished from those from outside the UT? The survey will include questions about whether the respondent owns land or resides in the UT. Frank pointed out that there is a difference between input and decision-making. The process will seek broad-based input but decisions will be made by those contributing to the final plan document (the Process Steering Committee, the Planning Committee and the stakeholders), by the County Commissioners and with final approval by the LUPC.

What would success look like for this process and product?

- There would be input into the process from local people.
- The product sets the groundwork for economic development.
- The plan is thoughtful, logical.

- The plan demonstrates that the committee has thought ideas through to their conclusion – understanding the ramifications of development.
- Implementable, readable, understandable.

Does LUPC have records of denied development petitions? Yes, but they are few in number. There are conversations that take place in organized towns (with Code Officers) and in the UT (with field office staff) that never reach the permit stage because the proposals do not meet standards or be allowed in the zone – these are not tracked in permit databases. Samantha suggested that she can have the Downeast field office staff talk to the planning committee about her institutional knowledge of those proposals and permits that were approved, those that were denied, and those that never reached the permit review stage.

We need to recognize a few elephants in the room: LNG, the East-West highway, wind development, and alewives are the biggest issues, they may need to be addressed by this process if there is consensus to do so and if they are significant to the sub-region under discussion.

Next Meeting

June 15th, 4-6 pm at the Princeton Town Office - .15 Depot Street, Princeton

Encourage the representatives that are already on the stakeholders list from the Passamaquoddy tribe in Indian Township to attend the June 15 meeting.

Handouts: agenda; PowerPoint slides; prospective zoning description; Community Guided Planning and Zoning for Regions within Maine's Unorganized Territories (LUPC)

All posted on the web site: <http://www.wccog.net/cgp-and-z-process.htm>