



Why create a Comprehensive Plan?

Communities complete Comprehensive Plans for a variety of reasons. At their most basic level, communities complete Comprehensive Plans to prepare for the future. A comprehensive review of community issues and policies promotes discussion among neighbors and can help communities avoid problems that sometimes occurs when community decisions are made in a piecemeal fashion.

A comprehensive plan is a guide to the future for the town. It is not an ordinance or a set of rules, it is instead a guide for the town government to move in the direction the people want. It provides a map indicating what direction the town wants to go in over the next 10 years, and it also provides a “snapshot in time” of the town.

Good planning makes good communities.

A good Comprehensive Plan should enable a community to:

- Sustain rural living and a vibrant village center.
- Preserve a healthy landscape and a walkable community.
- Balance economic prosperity with quality of life
- Protect working waterfronts and/or community farms.
- Develop a discussion among neighbors.
- Develop a basis for sound decisions in town management.

In summary, a Comprehensive Plan is there to encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of the community, while protecting the towns rural character, making efficient use of public services and preventing any development sprawl.

Financial Incentives

State Law and various agencies have established incentives for communities to develop Comprehensive Plans. Over \$80 million is awarded through 25 state grant and loan programs that either require or encourage applicants to have a consistent comprehensive plan. These include:

- DECD Funds / Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
 - Housing Assistance - \$500,000
 - Home Repair Network - \$1million
 - Public Infrastructure - \$1million
 - Downtown Revitalization - \$300,000
 - Public Service Grant - \$50,000
- Land for Maine’s Future - Multiple grants of \$25,000
- Land and Water Conservation Fund - \$500,000
- MDEP 319(h) Non-Point Source Protection Grants - \$50,000 - \$150,000
- DEP State Revolving Loan Fund - \$200,000
- MDOT Village Partnership Initiative – Varies by Project but at least \$50,000+
- MDOT Stream Crossing grant - \$200,000

More than \$4 million is available to towns with a consistent Comprehensive Plan!!!

How has a Comprehensive Plan benefited a Town?

A good example is the community of Belgrade, which has used its Comprehensive plan as a real driving force for instituting changes and actively planning. The Plan was and still is the consulted guide for coordinating the towns committees and staff to implement identified strategies.

Belgrade has a dedicated implementation committee that monitor progress (or the lack thereof) in the implementation of the Plan's recommendations, report their status, and make recommendations for the Plan's implementation to the Select Board for their consideration and action.

Specifically, the plan has directed focus on managing the suburbanization of Belgrade as it continues to grow in population and to develop. This has enabled the town to complete a review of Town ordinances for which it is responsible for administering for consistency with the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan. They have been incorporated into two ordinances by the Planning Board – the Commercial Development Review Ordinance and the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance. This includes incorporating improved management of stormwater and phosphorous runoff from developments and better protecting the water quality of the Belgrade Lakes. Additionally, work has been done on the Subdivision Ordinance to be consistent with the Plan, as well as other needed updates.

This active planning allows the town to handle change and development actively and not reactively, to safeguard the towns natural resources and quality of life for residents.

Quotation from George Seel – Belgrade Planning Board:

“... the Plan has provided focus as well as impetus and some level of accountability for various Town Boards, Committees and officials... the PB formulated an action plan to implement those recommendations calling for ordinance changes/updates, principally our Commercial Development Review Ordinance (our version of a site review ordinance), Shoreland Zoning and our Subdivision ordinance (now underway with KVCOG's technical help)...

And the truth be told, the Comp Plan since it guides Town policy and was overwhelmingly approved by the voters, gives efforts like ordinance updates political cover. Our select boards and their individual members over this timeframe have to varying degrees supported or opposed the recommendations of the plan and their implementation, and especially work on our land use ordinances. It is however difficult to argue with efforts to implement these recommendations, including ordinance development, if you believe in local democracy.”

How important it is to have broad-based participation?

Any good comprehensive plan requires a bold planning process that engages the public in a meaningful way. Without a strong public participation component, you run the risk of developing a plan that lacks broad community support, or a timid one that elicits little debate, but which is so cautious as to be ineffective.

Communities should always work for a significant level of public participation and outreach. Many communities, however, can struggle with sustaining public interest. Despite efforts to be inclusionary, comp plan committees often encounter poorly attended meetings and attrition of committee members. Often it is not until the vote on the plan at Town Meeting that a large segment of the citizenry voiced its views in support – or in opposition.

No simple formula exists for increasing the level of citizen participation in plan updates. If anything, promoting involvement gets harder as time goes by as the pace of everyday life quickens and many municipal governments struggle to fill volunteer boards. Through creativity, persistence, and strategic focus, however, the community should look to design a more effective public participation process.

Strong public participation is a must to create “buy-in” to the Plan.

People will rarely embrace change unless they think that a problem exists in the first place. Committees may be stymied in their efforts to address important local and state goals unless a strong case is made for why these goals are pertinent to the community – and important to pursue. Such early “buy in” by the general public is necessary before the community can focus squarely on any problems with a sense of common purpose.

A sense of public ownership for goals and planning concepts need to be fostered and refute the notion that the plan is state imposed. Lack of real support for the plan it can lead to poor implementation, blunting its effectiveness.

Ideally there should be a long-term process of building awareness of how planning in general and addressing particular plan goals can benefit the community. Creating public ownership of the plan and its approaches is essential if it is to be effective and worthwhile. A community should avoid the plan simply becoming a response to state requirements rather than to the community’s own needs.