

MDI Tomorrow
Community Design and Land Use Committee Meeting Notes
March 29, 2002

Attending: Stewart Brecher, Robert Collins, Sam Coplon, Cheryl Curtis, Jane Disney, Helen Douglas, Don Kiley, Ted Koffman, Marla Major, David Manski, Sydney Roberts Rockefeller, Julia Schloss, Jerome Suminsby, Patty Tierney, Cuff Train, Kathy Woodside

Next meeting of the group will be on Monday, May 6, 8:00 - 9:30 at Acadia NP Headquarters, Rte. 233 (Eagle Lake Road).

Brief reports were given from each of the subcommittees formed at the last meeting: Bar Harbor village, Tremont/Southwest Harbor villages, Mount Desert village, and Natural Resources. People were asked to choose one or two of the most important topics or issues that were discussed at their individual meetings.

Village Reports

There were many common concerns among the village reports. Reports are presented by issue.

Inadequate/Outdated comprehensive plans and land use ordinances.

- Often comprehensive plans documented what existed at the time of writing. May include a few good suggestions, but the suggestions are no longer a sufficient guide when developing land use ordinances.
- Groups felt that their comprehensive plans have many loopholes. In Bar Harbor, the planning board and design review board members see more and more lawyers coming with clients to planning meetings to circumvent the intent of the comprehensive plan through loopholes.
- The feeling is that plans need reworking, and soon. As it is, residents and planning boards feel helpless to deal with the applications, and the lawyers advocating them.
- Many of the community characteristics we care about are defined by “value words” — these values need to be codified in a way that makes them enforceable.
- Need incentives and disincentives to guide preferred development, including: abatements, impact fees, tax breaks (for provision of affordable employee housing), etc. Need to see ordinances as worst case scenario, and build incentives on top of it. And must be comfortable with that bottom line.
- Need a paradigm shift to “Less is More.” Very often paradigm shifts happen as a post mortem, when a community realizes that something has gone very wrong. There should be many good models of what to do, and what not to do, from which we can learn. Would need to educate and communicate with diverse sectors of community, and be inclusive of differing opinions.

NOTE: It was suggested that we invite Evan Richert from the Maine State Planning Office to give a workshop on comprehensive planning, to encompass MDI and Ellsworth.

- Plans need to consider not only the type of development, but the pace at which it is permitted.
- Planning boards don't have time to do planning. Moratoriums and residential growth caps are possible tools that can be used to give towns time to work out planning issues.

Maintaining a balance in community character

- Working waterfronts are in danger of conversion as development pressures increase all over the island. Tremont/Southwest Harbor, for instance, are concerned about keeping a balance in their communities.
- Tremont/Southwest Harbor identified a problem limiting commercial growth to downtown area.
- Mount Desert's Ordinance Review Committee is working to shape ordinances that will protect desirable home-based businesses, which is seen as important aspect of maintaining a year-round community.

Coordinating island-wide issues

- There's a desire for some level of coordination between towns. Many issues are shared: watersheds, marine resources, etc. A list of shared issues was developed, and follows at the end of these minutes.
- Some feel this coordination is intuitive. It would be interesting/informative to compare the various town goals graphically, and by regulation.
- A goal is for towns to coordinate "cross-jurisdictional" land use issues. Approaches would be coordinated, but not necessarily with one governing entity. The aim would be to encourage participation, but not to diminish the individual characters of the island communities.

Rural and Natural Resources Group Report

This group identified their issues and opportunities as environmental protection, preservation, and improvement.

2001 was the first year MDI experienced an island-wide bloom of alexandrium, which closed down every clam flat on the island. This algal bloom results from heat and nutrient loading, and is an example of the island-wide impact of non-point source pollution.

More information is needed to help towns and communities plan, including:

- inventory of acreage of built impervious surfaces (roofs as well as pavement).
- comprehensive water quality inventory

- identification and inventory of wildlife corridors
- survey of people's habits, preferences, and experiences at MDI's beaches
- more data on nutrient loading

Data will be a major tool in shaping protection efforts. For example, Buzzard Bay worked with a grant from the EPA to develop models showing how much development it would take to “shut down” the Bay. With that information, 11 towns coordinated efforts to control development.

Issues Shared By MDI Communities

- Algal blooms
- Watersheds – quality and quantity of water
- Traffic management
- Loss of affordable housing / year-round residents
- Loss of year-round businesses
- Need for places to work
 - jobs
 - physical places to house businesses
- Loss of year-round businesses
- Property taxes/values
- Land consumption for residences
- Marine resources: clamming flats, lobstering, worming, etc.
- Threats to commercial waterfronts
- Sprawl
- Light pollution
- Noise pollution