

## INTRODUCTION

*“If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else.” - Yogi Berra*

### 1. What is a Comprehensive Plan and Why Do We Need One?

A Comprehensive Plan is the community's vision for its future, and outlines the various “Policies” and “Strategies” designed to achieve the vision. Ultimately, the Plan guides future growth in a responsible and sustainable manner, while preserving Biddeford's rural community. The Comprehensive Plan in its simplest form is about land use – Where should growth be encouraged and where should it be discouraged? How will Biddeford achieve this? The Plan however includes many additional elements, outlined below, that are all interrelated and feed the overarching growth management program the Plan addresses.

The City of Biddeford's last Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1999. Generally speaking, the life of a Comprehensive Plan by statute is 10-12 years. After 12 years, a Plan that has been found consistent by the State (i.e., meets the requirements established in the Maine Growth Management Act – see below) loses its consistency status.

A Plan, however, is not just a document. It is a process that involves research regarding existing and past conditions, the analysis of these conditions and predictions for the future. It involves developing strategies to achieve the goals of the community and it involves a public engagement process to assess how well the Plan reflects the larger community vision.

The former Office of State Planning identified three basic reasons why it is important for a community to have a consistent Comprehensive Plan:

- A. In the simplest of terms, “good planning makes good communities”. It is about the long term sustainability of Biddeford and it is about the quality of life of its population. A good plan anticipates change and plans for it. As Benjamin Franklin once said, ““By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”
- B. The Comprehensive Plan is also the legal basis for City ordinances and City decision-making. Most importantly, a consistent Comprehensive Plan is the basis for the zoning ordinances that influence growth and development in the City.
- C. Lastly, the Comprehensive Plan assists the City in qualifying for various Federal and State grant and loan programs. In some cases, it not only assists the strength of such grant and loan programs but it can be a prerequisite. As grant and loan monies appear to be becoming more scarce and competitive, it is even more important for the City to have a consistent Comprehensive Plan.

## **2. Elements of this Comprehensive Plan**

The State of Maine largely defines the structure of Comprehensive Plans through what is referred to as Chapter 208: Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria. Chapter 208 establishes the criteria the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF) will use when reviewing Biddeford's Comprehensive Plan for its consistency with the goals and guidelines of the Growth Management Act (30-A M.R.S.A. §§ 4312 - 4350).

Chapter 208 outlines the minimum required "elements" of a Comprehensive Plan as follows (Note: Much of the following is either verbatim or paraphrased from Chapter 208):

### **A. Vision Statement**

The plan must include a vision statement that summarizes the community's desired future community character in terms of economic development, natural and cultural resource conservation, transportation systems, land use patterns and its role in the region.

### **B. Public Participation Summary**

The plan must include a summary of the public participation process used by the planning committee in developing the plan. The summary must indicate how information gathered during the public process was used to guide the plan's vision statement, analyses, policies and strategies.

### **C. Regional Coordination Program**

A regional coordination program must be pursued with other communities to manage shared resources and facilities, including but not limited to lakes, rivers, aquifers, and transportation facilities. The plan must identify any shared resources and facilities, describe any conflicts with neighboring communities' policies and strategies pertaining to shared resources and facilities and describe what approaches the community will take to coordinate management of shared resources and facilities. In addition, the plan must include a summary of regional coordination efforts from all applicable topic areas.

### **D. Future Land Use Plan**

The plan must include a Future Land Use Plan that brings together all previous components of the Plan and defines a community's Growth Areas and Rural Areas. The Future Land Use Plan is typically the focus of DACF's in-depth review for consistency with the Act.

## **E. Topic Area Components**

In order to be found consistent with the Growth Management Act, the plan must contain the state goal, analyses, condition and trend data, policies, and strategies for each of the required Topic Area outlined in Chapter 208. A community can also explore additional Topic Areas, as well as expand on the minimum state goal, analyses, condition and trend data, policies, and strategies, which is the case in this Plan.

### **1. State Goals**

The plan must indicate the state goal or goals relevant to each topic area as identified below. In some cases this Plan includes additional local goals.

### **2. Analyses**

The plan must identify the issues facing the community using the series of questions for each of the Topic Areas included in the Plan. These questions get to the heart of the issues a community must plan for to address the state goals.

### **3. Conditions and Trends**

To provide a basis for the analyses, the plan must include sufficient data necessary to identify current conditions and future trends for each of the Topic Areas. If something is not applicable to Biddeford, however, it can be omitted.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** As mentioned above, the “Conditions and Trends” section is the basis for the “Analysis” section of the Plan. As such, they appear in reverse order in this Plan.

### **4. Policies**

The minimum required policies for each (required) Topic Area must be incorporated into a plan for it to be found consistent with the Growth Management Act.

### **5. Implementation Strategies**

The strategies describe what actions the community will take to carry out its policies. The minimum required strategies for each Topic Area must be included unless sufficient alternative strategies are included. Alternative strategies will be considered by the Office to determine if they, in combination with the other strategies in the plan, address the goals of the Act. Strategies must identify the responsible party, anticipated timeline, and be developed pursuant to 30-A M.R.S.A. §4326(3).

## **F. Required and Optional Topic Areas**

The following are the required Topic Areas included in this Plan which satisfy the State's requirement under Chapter 208:

1. Population and Other Demographics
2. Economy
3. Housing
4. Historic, Archaeological Resources
5. Water Resources
6. Natural Resources
7. Agricultural and Forest Resources
8. Marine Resources
9. Recreation and Open Space
10. Transportation
11. Public Facilities and Services
12. Fiscal Capacity
13. Capital Investment Plan
14. Existing Land Use
15. Future Land Use Plan

The Following Topic Areas have been included to specifically call attention to their importance to the City of Biddeford:

1. Downtown and the Mill District
2. Climate Change and Sea Level Adaptation

They are singled out here, but their analyses, condition and trend data, policies, and strategies are intermixed through the other Topic Areas.

### **3. The Biddeford Comprehensive Plan Structure for Topic Areas:**

In order to satisfy the Topic Area Requirements outlined above, this Plan uses different terminology, although the Plan still reflects the minimum State requirements for consistency with the goals and guidelines of the Growth Management Act.

The structure of the Comprehensive Plan Topic Areas is set up in four (4) parts, one of which is a statement (State and Local Goals), and the other three (3) of which pose questions. The first question asks "What is happening?" The second question asks "What does it mean for Biddeford?" The last question follows from understanding what is going on and what it means and asks "What do we want to do about it?" This last question is critical as it sets the stage for two other questions. Assuming we want to do something about what is happening, we need to answer two (2) follow-up questions: "What do we need to do to get there?" and "Who should do it and when?" In more detail, the following represents the

Topic Area structure contained in this Plan to satisfy the consistency requirements established in the Growth Management Act:

A. Statement of State and Local Goals.

For example, the State Goal for Housing is to:

*To encourage and promote affordable, decent housing opportunities for all Maine citizens.*

B. What is happening? (Conditions and Trends)

“What is happening?” is the inventory component of the Comprehensive Plan. It is largely descriptive and is used to inform the development of the Plan, inform plan readers, and inform plan users. It is information based and lays the groundwork for exploring the second question posed. For example, the minimum Conditions and Trends that must be examined for Housing are:

- 1. The community’s Comprehensive Planning Housing Data Set prepared and provided to the community by the Maine State Housing Authority, and the Office, or their designees.*
- 2. Information on existing local and regional affordable/workforce housing coalitions or similar efforts.*
- 3. A summary of local regulations that affect the development of affordable/workforce housing.*

C. What does it mean for Biddeford? (Analyses)

“What does it mean for Biddeford?” is the analysis component of the Comprehensive Plan. It digs into the inventory developed previously and attempts to draw conclusions, good or bad, about where Biddeford is heading and why. For example, for Housing the Analyses must include at a minimum:

- 1. How many additional housing units (if any), including rental units, will be necessary to accommodate projected population and demographic changes during the planning period?*
- 2. Is housing, including rental housing, affordable to those earning the median income in the region? Is housing affordable to those earning 80% of the median income? If not, review local and regional efforts to address issue.*
- 3. Are seasonal homes being converted to year-round use or vice-versa? What impact does this have on the community?*
- 4. Will additional low and moderate income family, senior, or assisted living housing be necessary to meet projected needs for the community? Will these needs be met locally or regionally?*

5. *Are there other major housing issues in the community, such as substandard housing?*
6. *How do existing local regulations encourage or discourage the development of affordable/workforce housing?*

D. What do we want to do about it?" (Policies)

"What do we want to do about it?" is about next steps. It is about solutions to problems. It is about the continuance of positive motion and trends. It follows the last two sections by feeding from what is happening, why it is happening, and what it means to be happening, to what, if anything, can or should Biddeford be doing about. For example, the minimum Policies for Housing include:

1. *To encourage and promote adequate workforce housing to support the community's and region's economic development.*
2. *To ensure that land use controls encourage the development of quality affordable housing, including rental housing.*
3. *To encourage and support the efforts of the regional housing coalitions in addressing affordable and workforce housing needs.*

E. What do we need to do to get there? (Implementation Strategies)

Here the Plan gets into specifics. These are action steps that are assignable and have reasonable chance of implementation. For example the minimum Strategies in order to meet the State goals are:

1. *Maintain, enact or amend growth area land use regulations to increase density, decrease lot size, setbacks and road widths, or provide incentives such as density bonuses, to encourage the development of affordable/workforce housing.*
2. *Maintain, enact or amend ordinances to allow the addition of at least one accessory apartment per dwelling unit in growth areas, subject to site suitability.*
3. *Create or continue to support a community affordable/workforce housing committee and/or regional affordable housing coalition.*
4. *Designate a location(s) in growth areas where mobile home parks are allowed pursuant to 30-A M.R.S.A. §4358(3)(M) and where manufactured housing is allowed pursuant to 30-A M.R.S.A. §4358(2).*
5. *Support the efforts of local and regional housing coalitions in addressing affordable and workforce housing needs.*
6. *Seek to achieve a level of at least 10% of new residential development built or placed during the next decade be affordable.*

F. Who should do it, and when? (Implementation)

“Who should do it, and when?” is the time to roll up the sleeves and get to implementing what needs to be done. It defines key implementers, and often lead roles. It defines who has to be at the table to implement the strategies designed to get Biddeford where it wants to be, and to ultimately further the goals outlined at the outset. For example, if the Strategy is as follows...

*“Maintain, enact or amend ordinances to allow the addition of at least one accessory apartment per dwelling unit in growth areas, subject to site suitability.”*

...implementers could include:

*The City Planner and the Planning Board*

...and the recommended time-frame for implementation could be:

*Adoption of Ordinance(s) within one-year of Comprehensive Plan adoption.*