

Town of Cumberland

Comprehensive Plan Update 2014

A comprehensive plan is a long-range plan that looks at current data relating to demographics, land use, housing, public facilities, infrastructure, transportation, and other areas. The State encourages plans to be updated at least every 10 years. The Cumberland Town Council adopted a new comprehensive plan in November 2009. During that process, residents expressed concerns about rising taxes and the difficulty of supporting quality schools and municipal government using primarily residential tax revenue. The Town Council directed town staff to explore ways to widen the tax base by reaching out to new and existing businesses. However there was still a reluctance to encourage residential growth for fear of the increased costs to provide town services to new residents, especially in the area of education. To challenge that assumption, the 2009 Comp Plan Committee engaged Charles Lawton, a highly regarded economist in the region, to conduct a “Fiscal Impact of Residential Growth” study. The results showed that contrary to popular belief, the Town would benefit from the tax revenue created by new housing, and more importantly, that the influx of new students into the school system would create an economic gain, not cost to the Town. The 2009 plan called for supporting business and residential growth in the designated “growth areas” of town (Rt. 1, Rt. 100 and the town center). It especially encouraged sustainable development that would provide affordable housing, small scale retail and restaurant uses, alternative transportation options and protection of open space and agricultural land.

The implementation of the 2009 plan was very successful. In less than four years, all but 9 of the 239 action items called for in the plan were accomplished. So why update the 2009 plan at this time? Simply put, to make sure the current plan remains significant and relevant. Planning is a dynamic process. The Town Council continues to be presented with new opportunities to enhance the community by making the best use of its resources. In response, the Council appointed a committee of 8 residents to look at the areas of the comprehensive plan relating to land use, housing and public facilities. Given that the 2009 Plan was based on census data that was nearly a decade old, the decision to amend the 2009 plan at this time allows this and future plans to utilize current decennial census data.

The Committee first met on May 16th and has met on a monthly or bi-monthly basis since then. All meetings were advertised and open to the public. Several members of the public attended many of the meetings, sat at the table with the Committee and provided insight into the issues being considered. The Committee presented its draft recommendations at a televised public presentation on November 14th. A summary of the proposed recommendations is included below. Please visit www.cumberlandmaine.com and click on the link for Comp Plan Update to find more detailed information relating to this Committee’s work.

The Planning Board will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, December 18th at 6:00 pm and the Town Council will hold public hearings on December 23rd and January 13th at 7:00 pm in the Council Chambers at Town Hall. We encourage the public to attend these meetings. All public hearings will also be broadcast on Channel 2 and available for viewing on the Town's website.

Highlights of Proposed Updates

HOUSING CHAPTER

- Work with potential developers to create rental housing for young people (ages 20-30) so that they have an affordable and flexible option for housing should they wish to live in Cumberland following high school or college.
- Consider establishing an Affordable Housing Overlay Zone in West Cumberland near the Industrial District. This would allow for greater density thereby reducing the cost per unit of new housing.

LAND USE CHAPTER

- Work to create local land use regulations that do not unnecessarily increase the cost of new, affordable housing.
- Consider revising the two rural residential zones. Delete the RR 1 zone which requires a 4 acre minimum lot size and also delete the RR 2 zoning district. Replace these two zones with one zone “Rural Residential” that requires a two acre minimum lot size.
- Consider allowing additional uses to the Route 1 commercial districts to allow for support services for employees of the businesses located there, as well as for the entire community to utilize.
- Consider adding Retail (limited to 3500 s.f.) and Restaurants (limited to 3500 s.f.). Ensure that all new development conforms to the Route 1 Design Guidelines and standards for hours of operation, number of seat, parking, lighting and signage.
- Consider ways to provide affordable public transportation

Please visit the Town Website www.cumberlandmaine.com for a complete listing of proposed updates, maps and additional information.