

Blue Hill Peninsula Chamber of Commerce
Tuesday, February 6, 2007

Thank you for that kind welcome.

How many of you have teen age children or remember what it is like to be a teenager?
I have two teenagers. Whenever I am heading to a parent-teacher meeting and in fact when I told my 17 year old daughter that I was coming to speak with you, she gave me three unsolicited pieces of advice: "Please mom, no jokes, no singing and no stories." You will be pleased to know that I won't be singing, I won't try to tell a joke, but I am here to tell you a story.

It's the Story of the Camden Area Futures Group. Evidently, Mike Sealander heard about us on Public Radio several months ago.

How many of you have been to Camden? How many of you have been into Camden beyond Route One?

In late 2005, it was pretty clear to many people in Camden that MBNA would be leaving Camden and the surrounding towns for good.

- Many people in town felt we had been blessed by their presence,
 - by the renovation of old mills into productive work space,
 - by the influx of young people into our communities,
 - by the year round employment with good wages and benefits.
- The town had grown into more than a seasonal summer community.
- However, now they were leaving town and there was no commercial tenant for the mill space and no replacement for the hundreds of lost jobs.

The Town's Board of Selectmen appointed a 19 person Blue Ribbon Economic Development Task Force to spend **two months** to come up with some recommendations to address this loss and to develop a plan for the future.

For the Task Force to meet the ambitious schedule, activities were assigned to three subcommittees:

- Vision – to define a "**where we want to be**"
- Our Town – to establish a common understanding of our "**as we are**" situation
- Benchmarking – to identify proven techniques used by other communities showing "**how to**" **move from the "as is"** situation to "**where we want to be**" vision

As a result of this study, there were 8 recommendations with the top 3 being:

1. that the Select Board endorse the formation of an independent, non-profit Camden Futures organization drawn from all parts of the town's population. Such an organization would serve as a forum for advocating policies and activities that are in the long-term interest of the town to achieve desired economic development.
2. Support for the re-development of the Knox Mill/MBNA properties as **commercial properties**.

- The Task Force was very concerned about the new owners proposals to convert MBNA properties to residential condominiums;
 - A permanent loss of a significant percentage of the town's commercially zoned space.
3. Support for the protection and enhancement of Camden's harbor as a thriving working waterfront.

With that, the Camden Area Futures Group took flight and began with three projects:

- 1) the working waterfront (maintaining quality skilled jobs and preventing residential dev.
- 2) a consensus building process (Growing Together)
- 3) A quality jobs project: to attract new, young people to town with jobs in the arts and technology.

After a short while we realized that all of these were intertwined and we decided to use a consensus building process to address the working waterfront issue.

The issue was how to maintain the working waterfront, albeit a leisure working waterfront, with good paying skilled jobs and how to insure as little space as possible is converted to residential use. In Camden, as is in most all waterfront communities, the highest and best use is residential use and the pressure to convert working waterfronts to residential uses is tremendous.

How to protect the public's interest for a year round community while allowing private interests to provide good paying jobs and to grow and adapt to a changing market.

As a favor to me, USM professor Jack Kartez agreed to conduct 12 confidential, one on one interviews with stakeholders.

- He asked them pointed questions about their interest in the future of the harbor, their concerns about different land uses, their knowledge of the politics and other issues.
- The conversations between Jack and the Stakeholders suggested that there are four (4) key issues, as well as underlying interests.
- The **4 issues** are
 - Maintaining the working waterfront;
 - Avoiding private, condo-style, high-density housing development on the waterfront; and
 - Having flexibility as business land owners on the waterfront to conduct operations and develop facilities as needed; and
 - Envisioning and agreeing on enhancements to the waterfront.

In sum, the **strong interests** were:

1. Maintaining the character of the waterfront;
2. Having a viable local economy for working residents;

3. Having adequate flexibility to conduct business operations; and
4. Maintaining ease and extent of informal public access to the waterfront at many different points.

A fifth interest in creating a vision for future enhancement to the harbor—creating rather than only protecting—is less well-formed. A number of ideas for future development of Camden’s waterfront/harbor qualities, some proposed in the past, were raised by various participants in this assessment. These included:

- a. Enhancing the town boat ramp
- b. Creating new dinghy storage
- c. Redeveloping the “red sheds” at the head of the harbor
- d. Controlling additional residential development on the waterfront with a different mechanism than the first-floor-marine use zoning provision, (such as a percentage-of-structure-use provision that would allow mixed use but put limits on the residential component)
- e. Building the new pedestrian access (a bridge)

Three sources of conflict:

- Friction about land use changes,
- privatization of access and
- degrading of aesthetics

Jack pointed to “A conflicted public opinion about wanting Wayfarer to be able to stay in town, to grow and develop on one hand and not wanting anything on the waterfront to change, on the other hand.”

But Jack Kartez found there is much consensus among harbor land users and owners about a number of interests:

- the multi-faceted value of the harbor land use pattern that exists and its unique access to the public;
- the importance of the Wayfarer boatyard business to the town;
- the need for economic opportunities for working families;
- the desire for appropriate flexibility in the use of business properties to protect their viability without allowing undesirable change; and

- the strong desire to avoid gentrified housing development and loss of access on the waterfront; and
- the apparent interest among many to find ways to allow businesses the flexibility to succeed.

Jack recommended a consensus building process:

- first to address the interests of the community and
- later a focused process on Wayfarer.
- We have begun those meetings.

CAFG's hired a neutral facilitator, John Bird from Rockland.

Funded by CAFG/Wayfarer/Town of Camden: 1/3 public, 1/3 private and 1/3 citizens

Public input: 4 meetings so far with enormous input from residents.

- Over 100 people at each meeting.
- Various concerns heard were protecting the working waterfront,
- preserving view corridors,
- restricting residential uses
- some openness to rezoning another piece of land for boat repair.

Wayfarer marine: new owner who is a former resident, former MBNA person with good reputation, financial connections.

Where we are now: waiting for Wayfarer proposal

Owner Jack Kartez noted that "in 30 years doing business in Camden, I have never seen such an open, and cooperative process as I have in the past 5 months."

All of this work and process comes back to the key questions: "What do we want our town to become over the next 20-30 years? How do we make it happen?" "How do we grow and prosper and maintain our quality of life?"

Towns all over the state have good intentions to "preserve the rural character and to protect our small town way of life."

- Bar Harbor, for instance, had just those phrases in their comprehensive plan for the past 10 years but over 69.3% of the single family homes occurred in designated rural areas.
- 71% of the total developed acreage occurred in the rural areas over the past 15 years.
- *It appears that market forces over the past 15 years created significant demand that directed growth to the very areas that the 1993 comp plan attempted to protect.*
- It isn't enough just to state your intentions in your comp plan without having the implementation plan to make it happen.

Camden has a good comprehensive plan and good zoning to implement that plan. CAFG relies on the comprehensive plan.

- For instance, to maintain a working, vibrant downtown, buildings have restricted uses. Residential uses can not occur on the water level or the street level.
- They must be businesses or water related businesses.

- The old mills that were vacated by MBNA still must be mixed use with commercial uses on the ground floors and residential above.
- The hope was to keep it all commercial with good job producing space but now the upper levels have been changed to residential uses, and unfortunately to seasonal residential uses.

In October 2006, The Brookings Institution released its year long report on Maine. “Charting Maine’s Future: An Action Plan for Promoting Sustainable Prosperity and Quality Places” is now being discussed at every level of government and in almost every public meeting I have attended over the past few months. Here are a few of their findings as presented by Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution:

- Maine is within reach of new prosperity
- After decades of industrial restructuring and drift, the pace of transformation is quickening.
- Maine has jumped from the 46th fastest growing state in the 1990’s to the 26th fastest growing in this decade, the largest turnaround in the nation.
- Maine has the 5th highest rate of in-migration – that is the rate of new residents to existing population.
- Maine has gained 8,200 net new residents per year, the largest inflow in over 50 years.
- Every county in Maine, including Washington and Hancock counties have had a new gain in people from outside the state.
- Maine is attracting healthy and wealthy retirees from New England and the mid-Atlantic. And it is beginning to attract young, talented workers.
- In fact, Hancock County added close to 500 new jobs between 2001 and 2004.
- *It is this issue that CAFG is dealing with- how to attract and retain young, talented workers. We realize that young workers need other young workers around them to survive in Maine.*
- *They need a number of similar businesses (clusters) that a young worker can move between so they do not have to leave the state if they leave their job.*
- *They need like minded people so they can network, grow and learn.*
- *These people, young workers and retirees, are coming here because they are drawn to Maine, its beauty, and its safe, attractive and distinctive communities.*
- The Brookings report also found that our traditional industries are growing leaner and more productive and in some cases losing jobs.
- Our retirement services, health care, and tourism are growing due to the aging population and the quality of places.
- There are innovative clusters in organic farming, eco-tourism, information technology, biotech, all which build on our natural resource base and reflect national trends.
- Our per capita income was 91% of the national average in 2004, the highest in 60 years.

But how do we make these trends toward prosperity sustainable and how do we face the threats to prosperity?

- For instance, we still lack the critical mass in emerging industries such as biotech.
- Our work force is old, at least 45 years old. And the brain drain is still happening despite lots of young people moving in.
- Many of our young people are not prepared for jobs in the next economy.

- Our population is suburbanizing and dispersing.
- Our farmland is being converted to suburban uses. From 1980-2000 over 869,000 acres of rural land were converted to suburban uses.

Brookings points to driving forces that cause this to occur:

- Disparity in taxes in older and newer towns so it is cheaper to move to the outskirts.
- Rules and regulations that make redevelopment cost prohibitive and makes Greenfield development more appealing.
- Fragmentation of government with duplication of services.

Brookings proposes a package of solutions with cost cuttings and investments that I will not go into a lot of detail about. But, needless to say, the legislature and the Governor and Growsmart Maine and others are tackling this.

SO the question is, “what should the Blue Hill Peninsula do in light of these trends and what role should Chamber of Commerce play?”

Where you want to be in 20 years?

Do you have a clear plan for the future?

Are you talking to your neighboring towns to plan and act regionally to have a bigger influence over state policies and take advantage of economic trends? How do you get a piece of the economic pie? JOBS!

Do you want to and how do you position yourself to take advantage of the jobs coming up the Route One Corridor from Portland and Belfast and down the Route 1A corridor from Bangor?

Ellsworth is not just a commercial strip but high tech businesses are moving and expanding there, including a new expansion program of Jackson Labs to Ellsworth.

How do you attract young professional families? Good schools, affordable housing, recreation, internet access, and JOBS, etc.

How do you take advantage of the “brand” of Maine and bring new talent to your community? LL Bean has a brand that we all know. But it is their return policy that keeps people loyal customers. How do you build a favorable customer “return policy” to keep them coming back or a citizen “return policy” to bring them and then keep them in town?

Back to those teenagers I spoke of earlier, we want our children to be able to come back to Camden to live and work, not just to visit, vacation or retire.

Do you want to have a say in your future, a choice, or let it occur by chance?

Will the market forces really bring you the type of future you want to have?

In Camden's case, we decided that we could not let the future just happen to us.

We chose to have a role in it, to influence it, to make some things happen that preserve what we love about the Camden area and protect us from those things we don't want.

Only time will tell if we have made a difference. I hope you will chose to make a difference in the Blue Hill area as well.

Thank you.