



Brookings and the Work of FMM:

What We've Accomplished and Where We Go Next

Last year, Brookings Institution was commissioned by GrowSmart Maine to assess and produce an action plan supporting sustainable prosperity and quality of place for the State of Maine. The report, acknowledged by many as a valuable outsider's analysis of Maine's land use and economic issues, contains much useful information and insight, while reinforcing and validating the mission and goals of organizations, agencies, municipalities, and individuals across the state who have worked for decades for a sustainable Maine.

Friends of Midcoast Maine was founded when citizens articulated concerns about the sprawling Midcoast landscape, recognizing that no one primary organization had a watch on it. The very work of FMM lies in helping towns visualize their future in the context of growth, prosperity, and healthy landscapes.

Each year, Friends of Midcoast Maine takes stock of its work to date. This year, we are assessing accomplishments according to applicable sections outlined in the Brookings' *"Charting Maine's Future: An Action Plan for Promoting Sustainable Prosperity and Quality Places."*

The Brookings Report describes a Maine that is undergoing strong demographic change. For instance:

"Once mostly rural, Maine is suburbanizing. Just 23 percent of Maine's post-2000 population growth has occurred in regional hub towns. By contrast, 77 percent of recent growth has taken place in surrounding towns, newer emerging towns, and rural areas distant from traditional centers. As a result, the state is converting extraordinary quantities of rural fields and woodlots to residential places." (p.7)

- Four years ago, FMM established its Educational Program to assist volunteers who serve on local boards, committees and non-profits, as well as developers, builders, and community leaders, by providing technical advice with land use tools gathered from across the country. The purpose: To enhance existing downtown villages and protect farmland, working forests, and wild lands.
- FMM has worked with the Town of St. George on conservation subdivisions, growth mapping, and comprehensive planning, and with the Town of Lincolnville in planning ordinance reviews.

"Barriers to development in traditional regional hubs combined with weak local and regional growth management are eroding the state's unique character and contributing to sprawl." (p.10)

- The Friends of Midcoast Maine has been involved with Gateway One since it was first introduced by the Maine Department of Transportation two years ago to effect regional transportation and land use planning among 21 towns.
- This effort, two and a half years in progress, is at the point whereby a committee consisting of representatives from communities along the Midcoast stretch of Route 1 is hammering out strategies to keep Route 1 traffic flowing, while improving it as a vital and safe component to quality of place.

"...Support the revitalization of Maine's towns and cities while channeling growth." (p.12)

- In 2006, FMM supported efforts of Our Town Damariscotta to give voters a choice of whether they wanted to support big box stores. FMM's involvement, and the subsequent community emphasis on protecting small town character, reinforced the value we place on locally-owned business in our downtowns and villages.

"Maine's innovation oriented industry clusters are growing, but they remain a small part of the state economy" (p. 57)

- Friends of Midcoast Maine assists the Camden Area Futures Group in serving as a new regional economic development entity whose mission is to attract and retain jobs and retain Camden's year-round economy and quality of place.

"A grassroots initiative for sensible growth."

“Mainers are also feeling the effects of development patterns in the form of declining home affordability, driven by increased demand.” (p 63)

- In order to maintain a year-round economy in Maine, workforce housing must be encouraged in our communities. FMM has developed a Smart Growth Endorsement Program, which designates support and approval for qualifying in-town housing development projects.
- To date, four smart growth projects in Wiscasset, Edgecomb, Camden, and St. George have been endorsed, including concentrated mixed use projects, workforce housing and market rate housing.

“A lack of effective planning and growth management structures leaves Maine’s locally-focused land use system vulnerable to sprawl.” (p. 94)

- Regional planning and decision making is the bedrock of sustainable growth in the Midcoast. In September 2006, FMM hosted a workshop with noted planner Randall Arendt, an evening that drew more than 100 participants to Watts Hall in Thomaston. Other FMM workshops held over the past few years have featured landscape architect Terry DeWan, planner Elizabeth Della Valle, Maine State Planning Office Land Use Director Stacy Benjamin, and Institute for Local Self-Reliance Senior Researcher Stacy Mitchell.
- Other regional meetings have included speakers such as John Abrams, of Martha’s Vineyard, addressing affordable housing development approaches.
- These workshops, and our *Midcoast Maine Matters* evening series, are essential in disseminating the knowledge and tools that are needed at the local level, where decisions are made daily that affect how Maine shapes its future, and its human landscape.

Where we go next.....

Friends of Midcoast Maine is committed to continuing along this path we have set to provide smart growth land use education and technical assistance, project endorsements and advocacy.

- *Education and Technical Assistance*
New to 2007 -2008, we have hired Elizabeth Della Valle, AICP, to provide professional planning assistance to our midcoast communities. We fully expect her assistance to be invaluable in enhancing the ability of our citizens and municipal staffs to better plan for and prepare for the impact of growth on midcoast communities.
- *Project Endorsements*
We will continue to work with developers to make connections with the community and neighborhood prior to going to the local decision makers so that the project meets the needs of the community and responds to community issues. We will work to build community consensus.
- *Smart Growth Advocacy*
And we will continue to be a strong voice for sustained prosperity *while* maintaining our quality communities. We will continue our message of smart growth in policy and planning discussions statewide and throughout the region.

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“A grassroots initiative for sensible growth.”