

## Community Guided Planning and Zoning in the Washington County Unorganized Territories First Round of Community Meetings

Alexander – October 15, 2015

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Please also see the Powerpoint presentation provided at each community meeting held in Alexander, Dennysville and Brookton in October, 2015.

These notes also accompany the audience-polling summary for the 3 community meetings.

Both are posted at <http://www.wccog.net/community-outreach.htm>

### Highlights from Notes (below)

- Guidelines/rules for subdivision development
- County vs. state decision-making on permitting and planning for local development projects - “The worst thing that can happen is for a project that everyone thinks is a good idea goes to Augusta and no one knows how to evaluate it.”
- What is the economic value of the recreational sector? What % of WC’s GNP comes from this sector?
- Competing interests –it was difficult for people to actually talk about this in specific ways.
  - Lobster fisherman worry about draggers
  - Conservation and development - Some want to keep woods for animal habitat; others want to develop/extract as much value as possible - what is the right balance?
  - The price of wood is dropping at the mill but it is not dropping for wood to burn
- How much does WC benefit from tax dollars? WC ends up getting more \$ than what WC sends to Augusta?
- Lack of common sense decision-making about projects (cranberries/wetlands) that can benefit the local economy.
- Protecting landowners rights.
  
- Q: Will this include guidelines and rules for Subdivisions?
- A (Judy): If we can add to the larger discussion on this topic we will. For example: Aroostook designated a new development district – not related to subdivision but they identified which UTs the new district applied based on specific criteria. We could review it and also apply it in Washington County

### Land use restrictions

- Assumes well defined guidelines

### Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP)

- Q: Will something like this be developed for the UT in Washington County?
- A: Judy and Hugh: This work is not substituting for the jurisdiction-wide CLUP

- For the areas we are focusing on – we will have a written document that analyses what is needed and wanted and based on that coming up with new prospective zones
- This will be a stand alone report
- Hugh: Any regulatory component will be added to the existing rules
  - As policies get implemented and put into rule these get incorporated into the existing rules; this gets done through the rule making process

Q: where do you participate if you want to influence the subdivision rules?

A (Hugh): - there is an on-going process looking at the subdivision rules in the entire LUPC jurisdiction

- Q: What would it take to bring this decision making to counties?
- A (Judy): It is a large administrative burden to bring all land use regulation to the county level – possible but we do not have the capacity
- Is there the energy and/or resources to do this?

A: Hugh A region could petition to take over permitting and planning function. But this may not be the best use of resources nor is there the capacity right now for this. These are political decisions.

### **Planning Process and Outcomes**

Community planning is designed to be lasting and to use local value systems to make decisions. They still need approved at the state level according to the existing statute.

- This is not a one-time opportunity to make changes – this can be a continuous process or ongoing planning process. We will be predetermining areas for development and conservation and management – that is the goal of this project.
- Comment: “The worst thing that can happen is for a project that everyone thinks is a good idea goes to Augusta and no one knows how to evaluate it.”
- Judy - This process will help provide more local control for where future development can take place; to reduce the two step process that currently requires a zone change and a permit; to a one step process that only requires a permit. County administration of the entire permit review process is possible under the statute but is not the end point of this 18-month process.

### **Importance of opportunities comments:**

- Could TIF money be used to improve malfunctioning septic?
- Question 9 re-blueberry growers should be turned around and posed: should we separate residential growth from blueberry fields
- Question 9 re Increase commercial and industrial – does increase mean more? Or if there was an increase in development do we want to plan for it. It should be about locating.
- Or is it about allowing where it goes and for what reasons?
- C: From an environmental perspective – the best location may need to be monitored
- C: We need development whether it is on the stud road or route 9
- Q: Mineral extraction - What does explore mean? A lot of exploring has been done earlier.

- A: Perhaps the verb is support or allow?
- Encourage – continued public access? vs Ensure

### **Land is an important commodity in WC**

Q: If you take recreation use – what is the economic value of this? What % of WC's GNP is this?

A (Judy): In Vermont in 1990s when they sought public support for non-game habitat support – birding, etc – studies were done describing/analyzing the economic value of these activities.

### **Competing Interests comments:**

- Lobster fishing worries about draggers
- Some want to protect the woods for habitat; others want to develop (what is the right balance)
- Conservation and development
- Most of the people who can pass a drug test have left
- The price of wood is dropping to go to the mill but it is not dropping for wood to burn
- Cutting wood every year in the same places – same road???
- Where are the deer now? Can't kill em and cut em and still have them

As a Company – having other people say what you can do with your land and stop us from what we are doing.

Try and maintain open lands, not to gate things, but there are other factors that keep us from maintaining that.

Protecting landowner rights.

Who is going to pay to do the right things? Culverts, roads,  
The population base in UT - cant' raise taxes on so few people  
Someone has to pay for all of this

C: If you have a lakefront lot for sale that means taxes.

C: But on Cathance Lake and Pleasant Lake – everyone has a septic system on the lake and this has an impact on fishing.

Trying to make changes that encourage economic development.

We are talking about bigger developments like residential developments

There may be some places better for that than other places.

### **Most Positive Impact?**

Impact on what? Define it

Difference if it is a place to have a picnic or place to go to work

Changes that are the most necessary is a well-defined plan that has been developed by WC

Predictability is the goal

Food security – a lot of farms sitting idle

Working with other agencies – older folks living there or left

Farmland Trust could help bring price down for younger family to begin farming

Seems common sense is lacking

Piece of land on Denny's road – clay soil, wooded, river

Cranberries were the big thing – good location

Dug hole – reviewed and a problem it being close to wetlands,

Identify those wetlands that could be converted for cranberry production

Removed trees and it became wetland, was not before

Lack of common sense.

Don't destroy the local economy to save a bird

Don't take 10 acres out of production because an eagle built a nest

These big land projects are jobs

Building a tax base from the grass roots

Baileyville expansion

Finding balance between issues

UT Taxes different

Everybody pays taxes to Augusta

The money from increased taxes does not necessarily impact the tax rate for people in the UT

Increase in tax base will be diffused.

WC should benefit from taxes raised in WC

This is what the TIF policy change was.

Get TIF rule changes

WC ends up getting more \$ than what WC sends to Augusta? Is this true?

Maine Revenue Service

Taxes are lower in the UT because there are less people, no schools, less services, no fire depts, and less control over what happens.

2 acres of land

Valued at \$6000

Big landowner is not paying \$3000 per acre – (no)

Tax appeal process is through the County Commissioners