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A Vision for Berwick: A Case Study of the Citizen Initiated Visioning Process for Downtown Redevelopment in Southern Maine

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A Vision for Berwick:

A Case Study of the Citizen Initiated Visioning Process for Downtown Redevelopment in Southern Maine

By

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Capstone

M.C.P.D., Community Planning and Development

University of Southern Maine

Submitted to the Department of Community Planning and Development, Muskie School of Public Service, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Community Planning and Development.

Abstract

This Capstone follows the downtown redevelopment visioning process in Berwick from the initial presentation to Town Officials up until formal adoption as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan. Berwick has a monumental task ahead of it as the Town looks to redevelop an 11 acre abandoned factory site that is located directly where a downtown should be. Residents of Berwick had to work with Town Staff to navigate a considerable amount of lingering controversy and to rebuild trust between the public and local government. Members of the Downtown Vision Committee worked tirelessly to reach out to the community through education and motivated organization. Citizen-led committees will be critical in the implementation of the newly adopted Downtown Vision Plan.

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Introduction

Berwick is a community that has a difficult time defining its own identity. In the Southern-most part of Maine bordering New Hampshire, Berwick isn't quite Maine and it isn't quite New Hampshire. Berwick is currently a bedroom community with most residents commuting to work and travelling to shop.

Berwick's identity is further confused with the 2008 closing of Prime Tanning. Since the 19th Century Berwick was known for the leather the community produced, and over 300 residents once worked in the industry. All that remains of the proud leather producing history in Berwick is an ugly abandoned factory that covers the portion of the Town that should be a Village Center. Some residents decided to take Berwick's future into their own hands, and develop a vision for what the Town could be. This report is a case study of the process that residents and Town staff undertook in order to help Berwick create an identity, and draft a vision for the town's future. Members of the Berwick Downtown Vision Committee would spend over year learning, educating the public, and working towards healing wounds that had divided the community.

Description of Berwick

Physical: Size, geography

Berwick is a border town in Southern Maine separated from Somersworth, NH by the Salmon Falls River. The Town is 37.86 square miles and abuts the Rochester, NH; Somersworth, NH; Lebanon, ME; North Berwick, ME; and South Berwick, ME. There are a number of important water bodies throughout Berwick such as the Salmon Falls River, Little River, and Hatfield Pond. Berwick is relatively hilly, and is physically defined by the large rolling fields and farmland that surround the inner and more developed core.

Demography

The population of Berwick was 7,242 at the 2010 Census. As with most communities in Maine; Berwick lacks ethnic diversity. Berwick is 96.2% white which is actually a little higher than the Maine number of 95.3% white. The median age is slightly lower at 39, than the State of Maine at about 43. But the median age in Berwick is still higher than the national median age of 37.

Government

Berwick utilizes Town Meeting for all legislative action. This means that in order for any money to be appropriated for any use that the request has to be approved by a public referendum.

The public referendum applies to all ordinance changes as well. The Board of Selectmen acts as an executive body to oversee the operations of the Town. The Board of Selectmen accomplish this task by hiring a Town Manager to handle day to day operations as well as management of Town Staff. The Board of Selectmen also contributes by advising on budgets, and policy as well as appointment of citizens to Public Boards.

History of Berwick

Prime Tanning and Berwick

The Leather Industry and the Town of Berwick have been associates since the middle 1800's. As far back as 1850 the W.T. Ricker Boot & Shoe Leather Company was operating in a field just

North of Berwick's Downtown (Fall, Goodrich, Hall, Walter, Webster, & Wentworth, 1963). By 1868 a leather tannery was operating on the 11-acre parcel that currently holds the abandoned Prime Tanning buildings.

In 1935 a Russian immigrant named Morris Kaplan expanded his Woburn, MA tannery operations into Berwick, ME by purchasing a 125,000 square foot facility at its current location (Haberman, 2008). For the next 68 years Prime Tanning would remain the largest employer in Berwick, and at one time employed over 300 people.

In October of 2001 Prime Tanning made the decision to close operations in Berwick, and at least 250 employees were laid off as a result. Due to the September 11th Terrorist attacks in New York City, and the conflict that followed, Prime was able to reopen the Berwick Plant with scaled back operations just two months later (Belluck, 2001). The Berwick plant would stay in operation with 150 workers making leather for combat boots to be used for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq until 2008.

In August 2008 Prime Tanning made the decision to close the Berwick plant and transfer all remaining production to Hartland, ME (Haberman, 2008). 150 jobs were lost in Berwick at the time, and have never come close to being replaced in the community.

For over five years the residents of Berwick have dealt with the reminder of this enormous economic loss to their community every day as they drive through what should be a downtown. Instead of a traditional New England Main Street lined with small retail shops and restaurants; Berwick has an enormous abandoned factory deteriorating directly across the street from the Town Hall.

Key Challenges to Planning Presented by Berwick

Gaining Public Trust

Planning in Berwick, ME is a particular challenge due to a hurricane of controversy that ravaged the town after Prime Tanning closed its doors.

In November 2010 a developer came to the Berwick Town Manager with a plan to retrofit the former Berwick High School which, like Prime Tanning, had been abandoned for some time. The developer for the Sullivan School Project conducted public charettes at which Berwick residents were told that the building would be marketed for elderly housing. It came to light later that the apartments would in fact be intended for 50-60% low income housing. Many residents of Berwick believe that the developer intentionally misled them in order for the Town to agree to lease the property to his company (Rachin, 2012). To make matters worse; the developer received Planning Board approval for 1 and 2 bedroom units, but built 3 bedroom units in the building (Beland, Fosters Daily Democrat, 2012). This would eventually lead to several long-standing Town employees, including the Town Manager, resigning from their positions.

While the Sullivan School Project was still being discussed another wave of controversy hit Berwick. The Vice-Chairman of the Berwick Selectmen was accused of an ethics violation after his wife purchased a house in Berwick that was foreclosed upon by the Town. The Selectmen in question's wife was able to acquire the property for a \$20,000 bid, and many residents accused them of using privileged information to secure the low bid (Beland, Bangor Daily News, 2011).

Three Berwick Selectmen were recalled at a public referendum in large part because of this issue.

These two issues created an environment where paranoia and conspiracy were and still are openly accepted. During the Vision process the DVC and the Planning Department had to remember to conduct all activities with transparency. There were almost constant accusations against DVC members, and Town Staff in regards to motivations, and potential impacts of any Downtown development plan.

Process of Developing a Vision

The idea for redeveloping downtown Berwick is not a new one. The Berwick Comprehensive Plan from 1991 outlined the study area for the Downtown Vision Committee (DVC) through an overlay referred to as the Village Center (Town of Berwick, 1991). The objectives for the Village Center, in the comprehensive plan, are very similar to the results that the Vision Report developed 23 years later. In 1991 the comprehensive plan included goals for the Village Center such as allowing for mixed use buildings with commercial on the first floor and residential on the upper floors (Town of Berwick, 1991). Even as early as 1984 Berwick had a downtown revitalization plan incorporated as a section of the Comprehensive Plan. The Town of Berwick has shown that the community would like a real New England downtown, but has never found a way to implement a plan to achieve this goal.

Town Warrant Appropriation

When Prime Tanning closed permanently in 2008 the citizens of Berwick were ready to begin the process of downtown revitalization again. The Town approved by public referendum the purchase of several key parcels of land in the Village Center between 2008 and 2010.

Frank Underwood is a retired civil engineer and resident of Berwick who founded Underwood Engineering. Underwood Engineering works mostly with municipalities in New Hampshire and Maine. While Mr. Underwood was still active with Underwood Engineers he was able to observe a very successful downtown revitalization effort that took place in Newmarket, New Hampshire. Newmarket was similar to Berwick with a large Mill situated in the downtown, and a semi-desolate Main Street. In 2001 the Town of Newmarket contracted with Underwood Engineers to develop a plan for the successful redevelopment of their Main Street. In 2009 the Newmarket plan was awarded the annual planning award from Strafford Regional Planning Commission (Strafford Region Plans, 2013). Taking his experiences from Newmarket Frank Underwood began approaching the Board of Selectmen about creating a downtown vision for Berwick.

Mr. Underwood brought in GLA-Beta Group whom he had worked with in Newmarket to make presentations to both the Berwick Planning Board and Board of Selectmen about the benefits of a downtown vision study. Mr. Underwood was able to convince the Board of Selectmen to place a warrant article on the 2012 Annual Town Meeting ballot that would allot \$35,000 for the Town to hire a planning & design firm to undertake a downtown vision plan. The warrant

article was approved at Town Meeting, and GLA-Beta was selected as consultant for the project (Underwood, Memorandum RE: Consultant Selection, 2013)

Formation of DVC

GLA began to hold public discussions with citizens of Berwick in September 2012. Seven citizens were appointed to serve as the Downtown Vision Committee by the Board of Selectmen on March 19, 2013. This Vision Committee would serve as the official steering committee for the Visioning process and also as a liaison between the public at large and Town staff. The Board of Selectmen did a very good job of selecting an age diverse group for the Vision Committee. Two of the Vision Committee members were recent college graduates in their early twenties; two members were working professionals in their early thirties; two members were sixty something recent retirees; and one was an elderly land developer.

The younger members of the Vision Committee created an excellent video that explained how the loss of Prime Tanning affected the Community, and captured Berwick resident's thoughts about what they would like to see at the site. The video was titled "11 Acres," and served as an excellent informational piece to kick-off the Visioning process and spark community interest.

What Would You Do With 11 Acres?



Figure 1 – Citizen Sketch Template

Survey and outreach

Working with GLA-Beta the Vision Committee developed a community survey and mailed it to every residence in the Town of Berwick. Roughly 500 responses were received from the Vision Survey and submitted both online and by mail/drop box. These responses were used as the basis for developing the Vision Plan for Downtown Berwick. The Vision Committee sent volunteers to the Berwick Transfer Station on the weekends, and various civic activities throughout the week in order to survey citizens directly.

An informational presentation was set up in the Berwick Town Hall that included an 11" x 17" aerial photo with the Prime Tanning parcel "whited out." Citizens were encouraged to draw in their own designs to answer the question "What would you do with 11 acres?" ([Figure 1](#))

Design Charettes & GLA

GLA held two separate charettes on Saturdays (5/4/13 and 6/22/13) at the Berwick Town Hall. During these charettes citizens participated in activities which highlighted where they thought improvements should take place in Town. Citizens were taken on guided tours around Berwick that were hosted by members of the Vision Committee. Landscape architects from GLA interacted with Berwick residents to create refined sketch plans from citizen submitted sketches.

101 Courses

The Vision Committee hosted several "101 courses" where various experts were brought in to educate the public on planning techniques, funding, and past experiences. These courses were usually held as a part of a regularly scheduled Board of Selectmen meeting or Planning Board meeting in order to maximize turnout.

Subcommittees and Citizen Involvement

As the Visioning Process moved forward several specific areas of interest came to light. Members of the Vision Committee began to break out into sub-committees that could work towards addressing their areas of interest. Although unaffiliated with the Town of Berwick, a Berwick Arts Society was formed and began to hold art exhibitions around Town. A Riverfront

committee was created in order to bring attention to recreational opportunities in and along the Salmon Falls River. Trails, Sustainability, Economic Development, and Preservation & Heritage committees were also formed to address specific areas identified through the Visioning Process.

Development of Report

Early in the process the Vision Committee members decided that they would prefer to write their own report for submission to the Town. The report that GLA submitted would be used as a technical backup document to the actual Vision Report.

The Berwick Town Planner and several members of the Vision Committee took on the responsibility of writing a Vision Report and Implementation Plan, and the GLA Report would be adopted as an appendix to that document.

Lessons Learned/Challenges that Surfaced

Managing Citizen Expectations with Consultants and Budget Awareness

The Berwick Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager initially tasked the Town Planner with delivering the Vision Report in time for Berwick's 300th Anniversary Celebration on the weekend of June 8, 2013. May 4th was the date of the first scheduled charette, and it became clear very early in the process that this would take longer than anticipated. The turnout for the first charette was quite good, but the second scheduled charette was mostly made up of members of the Vision Committee. The consultants encouraged the Vision Committee to schedule a 3rd charette and the DVC initially agreed. Town Staff had to stop any plans for a 3rd charette due to

time, and budget limitations. Staff had to educate Vision Committee members about the actual costs of having consultants on site conducting workshops.

Several of the Committee members were unhappy with the report that GLA had submitted and requested numerous rewrites. Most of the complaints were centered on how the report seemed somewhat generic and not custom-tailored to Berwick. Committee members needed to be educated about the difference between spending \$25,000 dollars on a plan and spending a million dollars. Austin, Texas spent over a million dollars paying private planning consultants to assist with their comprehensive plan update (Stoll, 2014).

These interactions with private consultants served as a valuable lesson to inexperienced Town staff that it is extremely important to understand the details of a contract with a private company, and to ensure that involved parties know those details as well. Consultants are private companies and are ultimately working towards earning a profit. Some larger towns and cities pay millions of dollars for custom built plans in their communities. At the same time \$25,000 is not a lot of money, and can lead to more generic reports. Citizens would benefit from understanding that the community will get what it pays for from consultants. A thorough RFP (request for proposals) process should be followed where applicants provide the Town with samples of plans at varying cost levels to ensure a better public understanding.

Discussions with Long Email Chains

The DVC had a very lengthy email list through which they would send out relevant information. Sometimes impromptu discussions would develop out of those when people would “reply-all.” One of the more prominent issues took place when a Co-Chair of the DVC sent out an email

gauging public opinion over what the Town should do with the Prime Tanning parcel. The options for the Town at the time were to: 1.) Take it for back taxes; 2.) Buy it at a discounted rate; or 3.) Contact the owner for some sort of public-private partnership for redevelopment. This topic sparked a huge backlash with over one-hundred replies, and to compound the issue the owner of the Prime Tanning Parcel was included on the discussion. Several citizens of Berwick relentlessly attacked the Prime owner, and made a lot of unsubstantiated claims about him personally. The Town was contacted by the owner of Prime, and a meeting was set up. Luckily for the Town the owner of Prime wanted to begin a discussion of a public-private partnership in order to redevelop the parcel in line with the Vision (Meriturn, 2014).

The lesson learned here is that while sending out emails with many recipients is a great way to get your message to many people; discussion of those emails through a reply-all option should never take place. You are risking the possibility of upsetting residents as well as potential development partners when your intention is to maintain positive relations with people in your community. Additionally, if a quorum of any official Town Board is a part of a “reply-all” on an email there is a risk of Ex-Parte Communication.

Next Steps

The residents of Berwick voted on March 13, 2014 on whether to add the Berwick Downtown Vision Report and Implementation Plan (Appendix A) as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan. The vote to approve the DVC Report and Implementation Plan passed Town Meeting by an overwhelming margin of 370-92.

In order to ensure that this plan actually goes into effect an Implementation Plan was written as a guide for active sub-committees and Boards. The Plan is broken into core principles that were brought to the Vision Committee's attention as areas of need during the survey. Those core principles are Economic Development & Affordability; Environmental Sustainability & Conservation; Land Use & Aesthetics; Recreation & Open Space; Community & Arts.

To ensure that the Vision is implemented the Downtown Vision Committee will evolve into a yet to be named comprehensive planning committee. All original DVC members will be invited to stay and all of the Chairs of the newly formed subcommittees will be required to join. In addition to subcommittee chairs and original members of the DVC, two Planning Board members and at least one Selectman will be asked to join. With this broad representation assembled into one steering committee it will be much simpler to address the needs and concerns of all the different citizen groups operating in Berwick. One of the top priorities for the comprehensive planning steering committee to address will be changes to the Land Use Ordinance.

Land Use & Aesthetics

The Berwick Land Use Ordinance is outdated and is in desperate need of significant changes. The Vision Plan calls for a number of alterations to the Ordinance that will encourage economic growth and aid the redevelopment of the Prime Tanning parcel in downtown.

The most difficult Land Use Ordinance change to implement will be the DVC report's recommendation to "Develop and adopt a Form Based Code as part of the Urban Overlay District (Appendix A)." The town is fortunate to have two experienced urban planners on hand

to advise citizens and to draft ordinance amendments. Form Based Codes require a significant understanding of architecture when drafting the design standards and the town has no one on staff with this ability. Additionally, Berwick is a very frugal community that is always dealing with the issue of rising tax rates with a limited commercial base. It may be difficult to convince the Town Meeting legislative body to approve any further funding for outside consultants to assist Town Staff with preparation of these design standards.

Another significant Land Use change will need to take place in the Subdivision Regulations. A policy in the Action Plan states “Make downtown pedestrian friendly and accessible by creating safe and continuous routes of travel to, from, and through downtown for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles (Appendix A).” The comprehensive planning committee will have to work with the Berwick Planning Board to create regulations that require more stringent transportation improvements such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and wider roads to accommodate bike lanes. The adoption of impact fees to pay for further public improvements has been discussed and could greatly benefit this effort. North Berwick, ME has impact fees that charge \$1000 per bedroom on a building permit, and the revenue generated from those fees is used to purchase open space throughout the Town.

Environmental Sustainability and Conservation

The Berwick Sustainability Committee has formed a partnership with the Salmon Falls Collaborative to assist with limiting negative impacts upon the Salmon Falls River that divides Berwick from New Hampshire. Through this partnership these two organizations will attempt

to bet the Town of Berwick and City of Somersworth, NH to adopt regulations that will protect both communities' drinking water intakes.

Sustainability is also working with Town Staff and State Officials to draft Low Impact Development Standards for the Berwick Land Use Ordinance.

Economic Development and Affordability

The newly formed economic development committee is going to become a 501(c)(3) non-profit so that they will be able to apply for and administer grant funding to spur economic development. This committee has already begun the economic development process by utilizing current members to apply for Brownfields funds from the EPA. The Environmental Protection Agency could potentially award the economic development committee up to \$250,000 that could be used to clean up any potential contamination below the Prime Tanning Site. This funding could serve as a significant means of encouraging development on the Prime Tanning Site.

Recreation and Open Space

The Berwick Trails Committee is tasked with developing a comprehensive trail system throughout Berwick that can be used as an alternative to traditional transportation. This Committee has already begun to work with a local Boy Scout troop to build a trail on Town-owned land that will connect the Berwick Downtown with the Berwick Public Library. Students from Noble High School are raising funds for and building informational signs that will be placed along the trail.

The Riverfront Committee has convinced the Board of Selectmen to demolish the old water treatment facility in Berwick in order to provide the public with kayak and canoe access to the Salmon Falls River. In the future the Riverfront group will partner with Berwick Recreation to construct a garage on that site that will rent canoes and kayaks to the public.

Community and Arts

This summer the Berwick Art Association will create a mural on the Prime Tanning wall that faces Town Hall. This mural will be created by residents of Berwick who will paint the mural block by block. The Art Association hopes that this mural will serve as point of pride for the community, and provide hope for a better future.

The Town will begin to hold more events and activities in the Downtown. In 2013 during Berwick's 300th anniversary festival residents shut down Sullivan Street and held a car show. The car show was such a success that it will now become an annual event during the Town's anniversary celebration.

Conclusion

The Downtown Vision process has been a resounding success for Berwick. A community that was lacking any real identity and sense of community pride has begun to come together around some very real interests. Citizens were able to look beyond Prime Tanning and find many other aspects of their community that could be improved. One of the most important successes of the visioning process is the way that controversy and wide-spread mistrust that has run rampant throughout Town since Prime Tanning closed is beginning to recede. The Downtown

Vision identified the many areas that make Berwick special, and also identified issues that should be addressed in order to make Berwick a better place to live. As long as the Prime Tanning building is still standing it will continue to be an 800lb gorilla in the corner, but the gorilla is becoming more difficult to see.

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Berwick Downtown Vision Report and Implementation Plan

VISION STATEMENT

**Berwick is a rural, riverside town that appreciates the importance of a
connected, actively engaged community and proudly cultivates its
unique strengths and small town character**

by:

- **Promoting small business and creative outlets where local talent, entrepreneurship, and agriculture flourish;**

- Fostering a healthy relationship with land and river through conservation, environmentally-minded development, substantial and functional green space, and responsible recreation;
- Creating a safe, friendly downtown where youth, families, and community come together.

FEBRUARY 18, 2014

Prepared By: Downtown Vision Committee

Berwick, Maine

Technical Assistance: BETA Group- GLA Division

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February 18, 2014

Board of Selectmen

Bryan O'Connor, Chairman

Robert E Crichton. Vice-chairman

Eleanor M Murphy

Bart E Haley

Edward Ganiere

Town Offices

11 Sullivan Street PO Box 696

Berwick, Maine 03091

Re: VISION REPORT

Downtown Vision Committee

Dear Board of Selectmen,

The Berwick Downtown Vision Committee (DVC) is pleased to submit our report entitled "Berwick Downtown Vision Report and Implementation Plan" (hereafter "Vision Report") dated March 19, 2014.

It does not seem like eighteen months have passed since the kick-off meeting on September 19, 2012. The Downtown Vision Committee (DVC) along with many citizens have pursued a vision for downtown Berwick through many endeavors, including a town-wide survey and mailings, public meetings, walking tours of downtown, “charette” workshops, regular reports to the Board of Selectmen, and educational presentations referred to as the “101” series.

Beta Group - GLA Division professional staff assisted the DVC, providing technical assistance, facilitating discussions to get early thoughts and ideas out into the open, and creating scale illustrations of proposed downtown scenarios.¹

The comprehensive plan already contains goals very similar to those arising from the 2013 Community Survey (hereafter “Survey”) conducted by the DVC. This means the town’s desires and priorities have remained consistent over at least the last few decades. It also begs the question: if we are at this point in 2014 so far from reaching goals contained in the comprehensive plan since 1991, what confidence should we have in the current visioning process to finally produce these changes?

The DVC believes at least three aspects of the situation today make the difference:

- Prime Tanning Out of Business. Once a critical source of jobs and income for Berwick, the 11 acres occupied by Prime Tanning has prevented the town from diversifying the town center with other businesses or community space since its closure in 2007. Although Prime Tanning remains under independent ownership and environmental contamination presents barriers, the site is now potentially available for redevelopment.
- Implementation Plan. This vision report not only lists goals, it provides guidance on achieving those goals and sets up a framework for approaching change within the spirit

¹ (Excerpts and figures taken from the Beta Group - GLA Division Reference Document and Appendix A will be denoted as Ref.1).

of the community vision. This plan:

- Establishes an organizational structure for the relationship among committee and government entities charged with carrying out the vision.
 - Identifies the groups responsible for carrying out each goal.
- Community Engagement. This visioning process has been driven by the efforts of volunteers and a great deal of public feedback and participation. The vision cannot be achieved without active community support, and the community has unprecedented optimism and willingness to participate in and show support for town initiatives.

Whenever DVC members interacted with the public, people readily engaged in discussion and expressed an interest in getting involved. These discussions instilled a conviction in us, the DVC members, that Berwick citizens have placed a level of trust and confidence in this small group to put forth a “vision” that best represents our town.

The following report presents this vision (hereafter “the Vision”). It conveys the need to build a strong economic center without sacrificing the small town feel, provide outdoor recreation while protecting natural resources and the rural landscape, and strengthen and sustain community ties, town pride, and quality of life far into the future.

To follow through with the next steps, the DVC will adopt a new name (Envision Berwick) and a new role: to coordinate subcommittee activities, consult with town officials, and communicate with the public to express and safeguard the integrity of Berwick’s community vision.

This report, with reference to the Beta Group-GLA Division Reference Document and Appendix A, serves as the deliverable the DVC was charged by the town to submit. We trust the content of this report along with the documented public support will allow for Town Meeting approval of this Berwick Downtown Vision Report and Implementation Plan.

If each of the seven of us were to have written this report individually, no two would be the same in style and presentation, but this final report expresses our common view that Berwick holds great potential and is on track toward a positive future. The members of both the informal vision committee (email network) and the formal DVC have had fun, enjoyed the time well spent, and believe the town is best positioned to move forward.

With that statement we wish to thank the Board of Selectmen for allowing us to serve, and we look forward to the next phase.

Very Truly Yours

BERWICK DOWNTOWN VISION COMMITTEE

Jessica Sheldon, Co-Chair

Frank Underwood, Co-chair

James Bellissimo

Serena Galleshaw

Judy Haley

Kevin Gray

Paul Boisvert

Patricia Boisvert (Honorary)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This Vision Plan presents Berwick with a choice. Berwick has the opportunity to make one of the greatest turnarounds in U.S. history. The town can continue to carve its place as a bedroom community with rising tax rates or choose to invest in its people and future to become a model small town others look to emulate.

Problem

Main streets are a town's economic and cultural hub and remind us of what we were and who we are today. Berwick does not have a Main Street. Berwick has 11 acres of ugly abandoned buildings in the heart of the downtown. These buildings are not only an enormous waste of potential, but a chilling reminder of how much we've lost as a community.

Background

The closure of Prime prompted the town to revisit the 1991 Comprehensive Plan and explore new options for the Village Center. Berwick began its visioning process in September 2012 with the involvement of citizens and the assistance of consultants. In March 2013, the town appointed a seven-member steering committee, the Downtown Vision Committee (DVC). The DVC met frequently, conducted a town-wide survey, organized "101" educational presentations, and sought public input at workshops and the 300th Anniversary Celebration.

The Vision

A clear vision emerged. Residents prize and wish to preserve Berwick's rural, small town character. Downtown, they want to find small, local businesses, plenty of green space, access to the river, and a variety of ways to come together and grow as a community.

Public Participation

The DVC realized strong public support and participation are necessary to bring the Vision into reality. Fall 2013, citizens joined new subcommittees dedicated to carrying out specific goals arising from the Vision, such as a boat launch, public trail, and farmers' market.

Implementation

It will take commitment and a clear plan to build on these early successes. This report provides an Implementation Plan consisting of specific policies and action items. Implementation is framed around core vision principles and should be embraced by community leaders.

An important part of the Implementation Plan is keeping future efforts consistent with the vision. It also recommends an organizational structure (see Org Chart, p.8) for the relationships between committees and town boards to facilitate a clear and consistent process for approaching change within the spirit of the Vision.

Final Comments

The Vision Plan is not a magic bullet that will miraculously solve all of Berwick's problems, but it is a valuable tool that will provide direction for problem solvers. Perseverance, and patience, and communication will be the most important drivers moving forward. Challenges lie ahead, but Berwick has never been in a better position to turn challenge into "prime" opportunity.

BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

Comprehensive Planning Effort

State Statute for the Comprehensive Plan

In 1988 the Maine Legislature passed and enacted “The Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act” 30 MRSA §4960 which required municipalities to utilize a public outreach process to develop and adopt a “Comprehensive Growth Management Plan.”

The Town of Berwick formed the Berwick Comprehensive Planning Committee, comprised of a group of seventy-five (75) citizens. With the assistance of the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC) over the course of a year, this committee prepared the Comprehensive Plan in 1991 referred to as PART II - THE PLAN.

THE PLAN was adopted at the Annual Town Meeting in 1991 and has been revisited several times. These document revisions and updates occurred in 2000 and again in 2004. THE PLAN as amended is available on the town website.

Prior Updates to the Comprehensive Plan

The original 1991 Berwick Comprehensive Plan described “Village Plan 2010” promoting a downtown revitalization area, with a village center mixed use district. The plan included, among other components, adding sidewalks and pedestrian scale lights to several streets.

By 2004 planning efforts sought to define Berwick’s village center and within it a more tightly defined village area abutting the Salmon Falls River and loosely centered on the main Prime Tanning site. The village center includes both C-I and SCI Districts as identified in the Land Use Ordinance. (See Figures 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3 and are from Ref. 1).

Local Legislative Authority for the 2012-2014 Berwick Vision Process

The Downtown Vision Study began as the latest effort to update the Comprehensive Plan. The major departure of Prime Tanning in 2007 prompted the need to revisit THE PLAN with a focus on the “downtown,” or what is identified as the village center.

At the 2012 Annual Town Meeting the legislative body voted and approved funding to conduct a study to establish a downtown vision. The process would follow the growth management procedures including public outreach and final adoption of a supplement to the 2004 PLAN focused mainly on the SC/I and R/CI Land Use Districts. These areas experience the major impact of the Prime Tanning Facility closure.

With the boarded up facility creeping into blighted conditions and subject to vandalism the Downtown Vision Study commenced.

The Downtown Vision Study Mission Statement

The initial kick-off meeting for the visioning process was held on September 19th, 2012. During monthly meetings, the Planning and Design firm of GLA, a division of BETA, led discussions among citizen attendees about priorities for downtown Berwick and ways to obtain additional input from other members of the community. At the March 3, 2012 Meeting the following mission statement was approved.

“To Develop and Present To The Citizens of Berwick A Downtown Vision Report.”

Appointment of the Downtown Vision Committee (DVC)

In order to fulfill the requirements of the warrant article there needed to be a formal component to the process that would be the responsible entity to complete THE PLAN update to the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and ultimately to the Town Meeting Body. At the March 19, 2013 Board of Selectmen meeting, the Board appointed seven (7) citizens as the Downtown Vision Committee (DVC) steering committee, tasked with pushing progress forward.

The DVC group adopted the Mission Statement and met more frequently on the order of every two (2) weeks and also held the first Monday of the month meeting with the much larger informal group. At times the DVC met every week.

LOGO: The DVC felt the importance of the undertaking and anticipated level of public outreach required the need to establish an identity. A local artist, Erin Duquette, created the following logo. It is the position of the DVC that this logo be used as the ‘trademark’ for the Future of the Town of Berwick.



Public Participation and Outreach

Kick-off and Early Meetings

Before the formal formation of the DVC, meetings open to the public were held the first Monday of every month. With the assistance of GLA-BETA Group, a seven (7) month commitment of time reaching out to the public on an informal basis began. The kick-off meeting to the process was noticed to the public and held on September 19, 2012.

DOWNTOWN VISION COMMITTEE

EARLY THOUGHTS & IDEAS



KICK-OFF MEETING
WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 19, 2012
TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM
AT 6:30 PM

Attendees at the Kick-off Meeting: 23

Over the course of the seven (7) months, meeting agendas were established, meeting notes were maintained, and an email mailing list was established for attendees and anyone else who wished to be included. The meetings were noticed on the town website and scrolled as a Public Service Announcement (PSA) on the Berwick Community TV (BCTV).

Community Survey

As a first order of business the seven-member DVC steering committee developed a 10-question Berwick community survey in order to directly solicit public input from as many Berwick residents as possible. The DVC mailed out the Survey in April 2013 to every residence and also made it accessible online via Survey Monkey. Over 500 people responded. The level of response represented approximately 8% of the voting population!

Survey responses and comments served as the primary basis for discussions and decisions regarding a community vision for the future of downtown Berwick.

The complete survey along with the responses and comments can be located in the Beta Group Reference Document Appendix A and consists of 92 pages.

Citizen Sketches

Throughout the visioning process, the public was asked, **“If you were given a clean slate at the 11.69 acre Prime Tanning site what would you like to see?”** The DVC received over 25 sketches and dozens of letters regarding the site, all putting forth different concepts for the heart of the village center.

In public response to the survey question: **“What one action or change would be most significant toward creating a sustainable and vibrant village center?”** the majority of respondents pointed to improvements on the Prime Tanning properties with the primary focus on business development.

Citizen sketches of the Prime Tanning parcels were analyzed for the various uses people had envisioned. GLA consultants categorized and tabulated these into pie charts, then consolidated them into professional graphics of three generalized scenarios depicting 10% green space, 40% green space, and 75% green space. (See Figure 2-4 Ref.1).



The DVC presented and sought feedback on these scenarios on multiple occasions, including the well-attended 300th Anniversary celebration on June 8 & 9, 2013.

The DVC was in attendance on voting day June 11, 2013 with the polls open from 6 AM to 8 PM. The panel board scenarios were displayed and discussed with the citizens as they exited the polls. The polls recorded 517 voters for the day.

101 Series and Guest Presentations

The DVC strongly believed an “educational effort” was needed due to the historic level of discussion within the community regarding the “Prime Tanning Site”. The DVC prepared a program of events that included the invitation of guest speakers to meetings and special “101” informational sessions throughout the spring and summer of 2013.

Guests offered valuable insight into “Brownfield” site redevelopment, transportation, the Salmon Falls River watershed, funding programs, and form-based code zoning, and planning tools and strategies. We learned about other towns’ experiences and gained awareness of organizations offering resources and assistance.

Charrette Workshops

Charrette #1:

The DVC and GLA consultants arranged two intensive public planning sessions, known as “charettes.” The first charrette on Saturday May 4, 2013 began with group walking tours of the downtown and immediately surrounding areas. Discussions covered a range of topics and yielded a fourth sketch of how downtown might look in the future. This half-day session was attended by twenty-six (26) residents.



Charrette #2:

The second charrette on Saturday, June 22, 2013 focused on ways to improve traffic flow. Further discussions of the panel scenarios took place, and we neared a point of consensus.

A mini third charrette was held on Monday evening on June 24, 2013 to provide an opportunity for others who may not have been able to attend the Saturday session.

The full details of the two (2) charettes are included in the Beta Group Reference Document in Appendix A.

Summary of Meeting and Events

Informal Group:

September through May

Nine (9) Meetings

DVC Steering Committee:

April 2012 through February 2014

Thirty-nine (39) Meetings

Scheduled Events (The “101”Series) *

Brownfields 101

May 2, 2013

Transportation 101

May 21, 2013

Funding 101

June 18, 2013

River 101

June 4, 2013

Form-Based Code Zoning

June 20, 2013

*These events were conducted by representatives from Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission, Consultants, the Town Manager and the Town Planner. These presentations were televised to the public and the tape recordings are archived through BCTV, available for replay.

Special Invited Speakers:

Paul Goodwin (Somersworth Vision 2020)	April 1, 2013
Dwayne Morin, North Berwick Town Manager	May 6, 2013
Perry Ellsworth, South Berwick Town Manager	May 6, 2013
David Witham, Somersworth City Councilor, Smart Growth	June 8, 2013
Dale Sprague, Somersworth City Councilor, Main Street Project	June 8, 2013
Delilah Poupore, Heart of Biddeford, "Approach"	June 9, 2013

Other Events:

Charrette #1 with Site Walk (9AM to 4PM)	May 4, 2013
Presentation to South Berwick Rotary	
Berwick 300th Anniversary Celebration	June 8&9, 2013
Town Meeting Balloting Day	June 11, 2013
Greater Somersworth Chamber- After Hours	June 19, 2013
Charrette #2	June

Summary of public points of contact:

Email list-	147
Mailings:	
Town wide Survey Questionnaire -	3203
Survey Results -	505
Survey Response Comments-	244
Voters on Balloting Day-	-----
Facebook Likes/Comments-	429

Formation of Subcommittees²

Through the work of the DVC it became apparent the town needed to keep momentum going and make some “low hanging fruit” type public efforts. These efforts would center on the core drivers identified during the visioning process. The DVC created a second mailing with a summary of survey results and invitation to participate in subcommittees. There was considerable new public interest in serving on subcommittees.

While waiting for the draft report from the Beta Group the following subcommittees with mission statements have been established:

Economic Development: To seek and support responsible and relevant business opportunities which will improve the lives, cultural identity and employment opportunities for the citizens of Berwick consistent with the Berwick’s tradition of a small, rural, riverside Town.

Preservation and Heritage: To discover, catalogue, promote and advocate the preservation of elements of our Town's heritage through public awareness efforts and ongoing educational outreach activities. Our goal is to maintain Berwick's rural way of life and retain its historic values, while developing the downtown in a sustainable way.

Riverfront: We are a group of citizen volunteers interested in creating recreational opportunities on the Berwick riverfront for the purpose of canoeing, kayaking and citizen gathering. We will plan, coordinate and facilitate activities relating to the access and enjoyment of the riverfront in Berwick. Our goal is to work cooperatively with the Trail Committee and Recreation Department.

Trails: To enhance outdoor recreation and enjoyment of Berwick's natural landscape by

² Subcommittees are acting in sync with the Vision Report and will continue to interact with the Public through the DVC, per the Org Chart.

developing, maintaining, and advertising a network of trails linking the village center and other parts of town.

Sustainability: To serve as a resource, a catalyst, and an advocate for environmental sustainability and green development in Berwick by collaborating with other organizations and neighboring communities, collecting and sharing information, recommending projects and policies, encouraging community participation, and acting as a bridge between ideas and their implementation.

Early Achievements

Not quite a year since the Survey, the exterior of downtown Berwick appears much the same, but beneath the surface Berwick is already becoming a much different place.

What's New?

- Berwick Art Association newly formed with over 100 members and regularly conducting events, such as the Berwick Art Fair.
- First Berwick Winter Farmers' Market in the Town Hall, featuring over 20 vendors and drawing hundreds of customers.
- Second annual Holiday Tree lit in front of the Town Hall, with a permanent stand that will allow it to become an annual tradition.
- 300th Anniversary Celebration, June 2013.

What's Coming Soon?

- Town mural on the wall of Prime Tanning.
- Public trail through the Penny Pond area.
- Boat access ramp on the Salmon Falls River.
- Car show and town festival, June 2014.
- Images of America book about Berwick, to be published by Arcadia Publishing.

The visioning process has also allowed members of the DVC to recognize how many programs and organizations are already active in Berwick. For instance, the Great Works Regional Land Trust is constantly working to conserve land in Berwick, the Berwick Public Library has a full calendar of events, and the Berwick Recreational Department hosts several sports and other events throughout the year. Part of the vision is to improve town-wide awareness of current programs and encourage coordination among all groups to enhance opportunities for residents.

This only scratches the surface, as new people become involved and new ideas take shape. With town support, citizens and vision committee members are identifying and addressing the needs of the town one step at a time. Each group is making the most of what we have now while seeking additional resources and funding for future projects.

THE VISION

Vision Statement

From Berwick's own expression of its needs and desires for business, the value of land/river, and the goal of sense of community, the DVC composed the following statement to summarize the key elements of the Berwick Vision and the town we desire to be.

Berwick Downtown Vision Statement

Berwick is a rural, riverside town that appreciates the importance of a connected, actively engaged community and proudly cultivates its unique strengths and small town character by:

- **Promoting small business and creative outlets where local talent, entrepreneurship, and agriculture flourish;**
- **Fostering a healthy relationship with land and river through conservation, environmentally-minded development, substantial and functional green space, and responsible recreation;**
- **Creating a safe, friendly downtown where youth, families, and community come together.**

Vital to this vision statement are two concepts tying together the three main components of strong economy, healthy environment, and community-centered downtown. These are: community engagement and uniqueness. Fulfilling the vision depends on an informed, actively involved community, and the Vision will be a source of pride when it stays true to Berwick's distinctive identity.

Vision Plan Elements

The Vision seeks to establish downtown a center for community interaction, business activity, and outdoor recreation. Attending to the following elements will provide for the framework for such a village center.

Main Street

Berwick is lacking a “Main Street.” With appropriate ordinance guidelines, building facade and streetscape improvements and re-development and new development projects can result in the establishment of a “Main Street” in the village center.

Walkable/Bikeable Downtown

Walking downtown is not only healthy, it is good for business (*see WalkBoston.com*). Getting people out of their cars and keeping them there focuses revenue into the downtown. Patrons need to be able to park and walk to several businesses, banks, and grocery stores, as well as civic and institutional destinations, such as the post office, library, and town hall. Berwick, in large part, has limited sidewalk connectivity and difficult pedestrian crossings. Improvements in these areas will enhance the walkability of downtown.

Roads

The road surface itself plays a large role in walkability. Street widths correspond to vehicle speed; the wider the road, the faster vehicles move, and one-way traffic patterns tend to promote speed. Well marked and safely located crosswalks are critical. Traffic calming measures such as bump outs and speed tables can reduce crossing distances and moderate traffic speed. One-way traffic corridors should be evaluated and measures taken to reduce speed and improve safety for walkers.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks are vital to the walkability of a downtown. They need to be wide and inter-connected. For safety, groups of people or families pushing baby strollers should not be forced off the sidewalk because it is too narrow. Good sidewalks should be at least 72” wide. Good sidewalks should also be raised above the road surface, since vertical separation creates a feeling of comfort

for the pedestrian.

Trees and Sidewalk Enhancements

Regularly placed street trees provide shade and definition as well. The tree canopy frames the street, creating human scaled spaces and calming the traffic. Quality furniture such as benches, tables, bike racks, and trash cans enhance sidewalks and promote use.

Bike Lanes

Upcoming Somersworth Main Street improvements will create bike lanes to the border of Berwick. To encourage bike traffic to continue into Berwick and expand non-motorized travel options, bike lanes should be a priority addition to the roadways in downtown Berwick.

Trails

Berwick's land resources can support trails in place of sidewalks. Trails in many cases create a more pleasant pedestrian experience than walking curbside. For example, the library is currently not connected to the downtown by sidewalks, but there is an opportunity to make this connection with a trail through town-owned land. Likewise, a riverfront trail will encourage greater public use of the property along the river.

Bridges

A pedestrian bridge to Somersworth would undoubtedly be a very popular way to move between the two communities. These multi use routes would accommodate a variety of non-motorized traffic, such as joggers, walkers, and bicyclists.

Other Streetscape Amenities

Such amenities should include bicycle racks, trash receptacles, pet waste stations, bench options, outdoor seating/gathering areas, street trees, rain garden plantings, and public information areas such as interpretive kiosks. These make the outdoor experience more enjoyable and interesting, encouraging people to walk and gather downtown.

Signage

Berwick lacks organized signage to highlight destinations in the village center. The town should consider developing a set of guidelines for unified public system that provides information and fits the character of the community. Projecting blades or hanging signs should be encouraged. Billboards and signs with bright or flashing illumination should be prohibited.

Lighting

Reconstruction of the Somersworth-Berwick Bridge will introduce ornamental lighting that should be expanded into downtown Berwick.

The Vision establishes free standing ornamental lighting with appropriately scaled fixtures and poles. Lighting should be dark sky friendly, shielded, directed downward, and efficient. Light ‘trespass’ into second floor spaces and neighborhoods should be eliminated. LED technologies allow for extended lifecycles and reduced maintenance costs. Light posts can be outfitted with brackets for hanging banners and baskets, adding detail and interest to the streetscape.

Underground Infrastructure

Many communities desire to place their utilities underground because of the significant aesthetic benefit to appearance of downtown. In most cases budget constraints prohibit the required level of investment, but new developments and re-development projects can lead the way, especially if requirements for these projects include installation of underground utilities with new construction. The town should consider guidelines for underground utility and communication service requirements.

Alternative Traffic Solutions

Current traffic concerns include daily backups at the bridge intersection, large truck traffic, and cars moving quickly through downtown. Charrette discussions explored concepts to improve traffic flow including removing the traffic signals at the bridge.

These ideas were discussed with Maine Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Kittery Area Comprehensive Traffic Solutions (KACTS) with the intent to continue to explore the most appropriate strategy for Berwick. The rerouting of traffic during the 2014 bridge rebuild will provide a convenient test of one possible solution; with this insight, the town should re-evaluate

and plan future layout of roads and intersections.

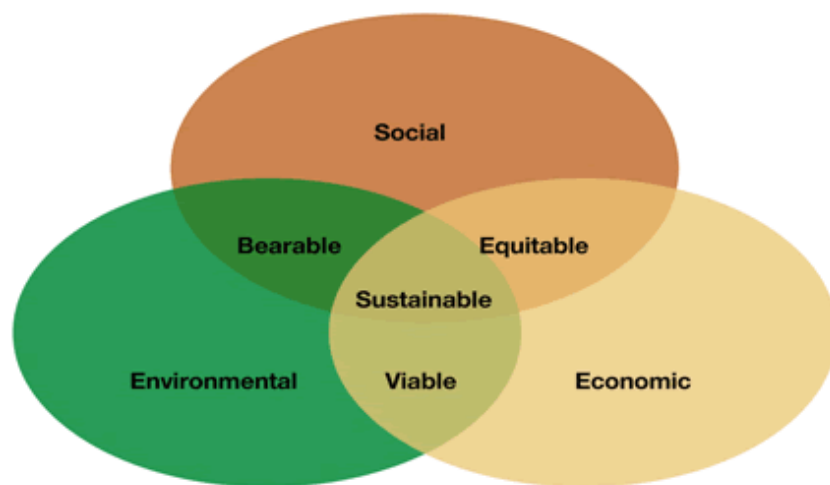
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Overview

The Vision provides a picture of what the citizens would like Berwick to become, but it does not provide the steps for making the vision a reality. The framework for realizing the Vision arises from the policies for implementation as well as identification of key stakeholders who have the ability to put the Vision into action.

This plan seeks to ensure the Vision is both achievable and sustainable. Organization and delegation of policies and action items are steps toward making the Vision achievable. To create lasting and positive improvement over time, the Vision must also be sustainable.

It is helpful to think of sustainability as a three-legged stool where the stool can only stand if all three legs are present. The three legs of the sustainability stool are environmental, economic, and social. When social and environmental are accounted for the situation is bearable. When economic and social are present the situation is equitable. When environmental and economic are included the situation is viable. But only when all three aspects are included is anything sustainable.



Balance of the Three Pillars

The implementation policies outlined in this section are based on core principles identified through the visioning process. These principles incorporate the economic, environmental, and social needs of the Town.

Keys to Successful Implementation

Developing a community vision became a continual learning process, and from the lessons learned, the DVC identified some elements critical to successfully implementing the vision in the years ahead.

Trust

In order to best position the Town for moving forward trust needs to be restored. The decision making process at the Board level needs to be assured.

An example: The Town may face a decision that will require a separate non-profit cooperative be established to control the redevelopment of the Prime properties. This allows liability associated with the redevelopment to fall with the “cooperative” rather than the Town.

Communication

Significant involvement and public support is necessary to make progress, but it can be difficult to sustain. To participate in an event, people must first know about it. To provide input, people should first have access to the information they need to make knowledgeable decisions.

Struggling to get the word out about DVC activities, it quickly became apparent Berwick lacks a central channel for communicating with the general public. Most of the surveys were filled out by hand, rather than online, just one indication that many residents prefer printed rather than online communication.

These observations led the DVC to believe it is imperative for Berwick to have a newsletter in addition to other modes of information sharing, such a town-wide calendar, website, bulletin board, and enhanced use of BCTV. Public outreach must be a top priority.

Collaboration

Berwick residents seem overwhelmed by the financial and other obstacles before us. However, 101's, special meetings, conferences, and online searches have helped the DVC appreciate the vast wealth of knowledge, experience, grants, and other resources accessible through outside entities. Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission, Maine Development Foundation, Heart of Biddeford, and Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative are just a few organizations that offer information or assistance.

Somersworth councilmen gave a presentation on their city's visioning process and current projects, such as the 2014 Main Street improvements. The DVC recognizes development of Somersworth's and Berwick's adjacent downtowns will benefit from a coordinated approach.

In the community survey, respondents expressed a desire for Berwick to build on its unique character, not copy any other town. To capitalize on our unique strengths, we need to understand ourselves in a regional context, work closely with our neighbors, and take full advantage of outside expertise and resources.

Patience

Survey respondents expressed frustration over the seemingly immovable eyesore of Prime Tanning. Rather than be discouraged, the DVC began noticing other places where action could be more immediate. For instance, we turned our attention to the river, where we could explore boat access and a riverfront nature preserve and trail system.

Building a central place for community can begin in less tangible ways, simply by giving people reason to gather downtown. The 300th Anniversary Celebration, Berwick Art Association events, Berwick Winter Farmers' Market, and the Holiday Tree are a few examples.

Each small success connects us, inspires us, and ultimately brings us closer to our goal. We must be willing to take action on opportunities as they arise and celebrate every achievement, small or large, as one step closer to the future we have envisioned.

There also need to be checks and balances at the outset. Taking small, targeted, successful steps in the beginning will continually build town-wide confidence of the citizens.

Structure

An important part of the implementation plan is keeping future efforts consistent with the vision. The vision report recommends an organizational structure (see Org Chart, p.8) for the relationships between committees and town boards to facilitate a clear and consistent process for approaching change.

Core Principles

This plan is broken into subsections that center around core principles derived throughout the visioning process as well as results of the Survey. These core principles are meant to serve as an organizing point to delegate implementation responsibility and provide direction for the Town going forward.

The core principles are:

- Economic Development and Affordability
- Environmental Sustainability and Conservation
- Land Use and Aesthetics
- Recreation and Open Space
- Community and the Arts

Stakeholders Identified

[Abbreviations for stakeholders in parenthesis]

Plans are only as useful to a community as the value that the community places on them. Berwick has had a comprehensive plan in place since 1991 with an update added in 2004. Time and time again goals are created to address the same issues. If 2014 is going to be different, members of the community must accept responsibility for carrying out this plan. The Downtown Vision Process harnessed an energy through which this plan will be implemented. The following are groups and individuals with the ability and know how to achieve these goals.

Berwick Stakeholders:

- 1) **Berwick Board of Selectmen:** Responsible for carrying out the directives of the Town Meeting and making a variety of policy decisions. **(BOS)**
- 2) **Berwick Planning Board:** Responsible for enforcement of the Berwick Subdivision Ordinance and interpretation of the Land Use Ordinance in relation to Conditional Use Applications. May suggest changes to the existing ordinance and forward those on to the Board of Selectmen for inclusion on the Town Meeting Warrant. **(PB)**
- 3) **Recreation Commission:** Assists with defining policies, identifying future offerings, providing feedback on past activities, and assisting with the operating budget and the Capital Improvement Plans. **(RC)**
- 4) **Town Manager:** Carries out policy decisions made by the Board of Selectmen and manages Town Government. **(TA)**
- 5) **Recreation Director:** Provides area residents with special events, recreational offerings, and summer programs. The Director is also responsible for the care and maintenance of the Town's Recreational Facilities. **(RD)**

- 6) **Berwick Code Enforcement Officer:** Responsible for issuing all development permits and inspections relating to those permits in town. The CEO is responsible for ordinance interpretation and assistance to the Planning Board and Board of Appeals. **(CEO)**
- 7) **Envision Berwick (formerly Downtown Vision Committee):** Coordinate subcommittee activities, consult with town officials, and communicate with the public to express and safeguard the integrity of Berwick's community vision. **(EB)**
- 8) **Berwick Tomorrow Cooperative, LLC:** This proposed Non-Profit Entity would guide economic development in light of the vision and serve to maximize grant opportunities, promote the Town's unique assets, work with current and prospective business owners, and limit liability exposure. **(BTC)**
- 9) **Economic Development Subcommittee:** see mission statement, p. 21 **(EDC)**
- 10) **Preservation & Heritage Subcommittee:** see mission statement, p. 21 **(P&H)**
- 11) **Riverfront Subcommittee:** see mission statement, p. 21 **(FBR)**
- 12) **Trails Subcommittee:** see mission statement, p. 21 **(BT)**
- 13) **Sustainability Subcommittee:** see mission statement, p. 21 **(SUS)**
- 14) **Berwick Art Association:** "We create events, facilitate dialogue, and work with schools and local nonprofits to build a network in which artists and their communities prosper" (<http://berwickartassociation.weebly.com/about-us.html>). **(BAA)**

Regional Stakeholders:

- 15) **Great Works Regional Land Trust:** "Conserve the value of our natural, historic, agricultural, forestry, scenic and recreational resources. Great Works pursues this mission by holding property and conservation easements where these values are present and by promoting the need and value of conservation through education and other related activities" (<http://www.gwrlt.org/index.php/about-us>). **(GWRLT)**

- 16) Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission:** SMRPC has been conducting economic development, environmental, land use and transportation planning and providing technical assistance to the municipalities in the region for over 40 years. **(SMRPC)**
- 17) Somersworth Planning & Development Director:** With only a river separating Somersworth and Berwick, it will be vital to maintain relations with development staff on both sides. **(SDD)**
- 18) Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative:** “An action-oriented partnership between local, state and federal partners working to protect and sustain high quality drinking water in the Salmon Falls River watershed” (http://www.prep.unh.edu/sfwc/about_sfwc.htm). The Collaborative is an inter-state effort to protect drinking water supplies for more than 47,000 residents in Maine and New Hampshire. **(SFWC)**

Economic Development & Affordability

Responsibility: Economic Development Committee; Board of Selectmen; Town Manager

Policies:

- 1) Enhance downtown Berwick as an economic center for business consistent with the small town character.
- 2) Maximize Berwick's options and opportunities by working with outside entities and seeking a variety of resources to support Town initiatives.
- 3) Apply sustainable practices to all action items.

Survey Support:

Individual responses from the Survey indicate Berwick residents have a legitimate concern regarding the rising tax rate³. Residents of Berwick are worried their taxes will continue to rise and they will no longer be able to afford to live in the town.

Economic Development Local Best Practice:

Heart of Biddeford Main Street Challenge

An entrepreneurial start up competition that focuses on the designated downtown district. Three business concepts are eligible: a business interested in opening a new or expanded location; new businesses; or a significant expansion of a current downtown business that includes an additional business concept. Up to three Grand Prize winners can be chosen, and

Only a few businesses currently line the streets of downtown Berwick, and most of the Village Center is locked up within the boundaries of the former Prime Tanning. 62.3% of survey respondents felt strongly that downtown Berwick should improve as a business center. The economic venues favored were (over 90% somewhat or strongly supported these categories):

³ Q5 Envisioning Downtown Berwick, 49.1% of responses felt strongly, and 38.5% somewhat that affordability should improve in Berwick.

- Restaurants
- Vendor markets (like farmers' markets)
- Small Retail

Summary:

From these top choices and many survey comments, Berwick residents clearly expressed their desire for a quaint Village Center with a small town feel. Quality eateries, indoor and outdoor markets for locally sourced products, and small shops fit this scene. Some light industrial, such as a micro-brewery, found support among a mix of the above, but Berwick residents oppose large retail or heavy industry in the town center.

The policies and action items identified for this goal are intended to attract desirable business to Berwick which will provide quality employment, enhance quality of life, and improve the base tax rate for the Town.

Environmental Sustainability

Responsibility: Board of Selectmen, Sustainability Committee, Great Works Regional Land Trust, Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative, Preservation and Heritage

Policies:

- 1) Utilize up-to-date green technology and solutions to support economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
- 2) Protect water quality of the rivers, streams, lakes, and aquifers in Berwick for aquatic life, public drinking water, and recreational opportunities.

Survey Support:

To “what do you see as Berwick’s greatest strength or most valuable resource?” top survey answers overwhelmingly highlighted Berwick’s natural assets: open landscape, rural character, natural beauty, agriculture, and the Salmon Falls River.

Survey respondents indicated 52.4% felt strongly and 39.1% somewhat strongly that Berwick should improve environmental sustainability. Berwick must conserve, protect, and support our natural resource systems by developing and adopting better practices for long-term stewardship of Berwick’s environment.

Summary:

Berwick cares about respecting and protecting its natural resources now and into the future. It is also proud of its agricultural heritage. These are key pieces of our identity.

The policies and action items identified for this goal are intended to establish a proactive and comprehensive approach to sustainable development that is protective of natural resources.

Land Use

Responsibility: Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Town Manager, Southern Maine Planning and Development; Code Enforcement Officer; Somersworth Development Director

Policies:

- 1) Enhance the downtown to have an attractive appearance representative of town character.
- 2) Improve traffic circulation through downtown.
- 3) Make downtown pedestrian friendly and accessible by creating safe and continuous routes to, from, and through downtown for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles.
- 4) Pursue an approximate 60/40 blend of small business and functional outdoor space on the Prime Tanning parcels.
- 5) Safeguard Berwick's rural character.
- 6) Apply sustainable practices to all action items.

Survey Support:

No answer in the Survey had such an overwhelming response as the appearance of downtown. 80.9% of respondents to the survey indicated that they felt strongly that the appearance of downtown should be improved. Only 1.8%, or 8 people, who took the Survey, felt that there was no need for improvement in the appearance of downtown.

Prime Tanning was once an integral part of the economic and social fabric of Berwick. Now an empty and ugly building has sat unused in the most prime parcel of real estate in Berwick. The focus of many survey comments was replacing the Prime Tanning parcels with business, green space, and community activities.

As mentioned earlier, Survey respondents highlighted Berwick's open land and rural character as one of the Town's greatest assets. Land use changes should seek to preserve the natural landscape and represent this value by providing outdoor green space and means of pedestrian travel downtown.

Summary:

To promote a Main Street community where community residents and visitors enjoy walking and doing business, Berwick must closely examine its land use options downtown.

The policies and action items identified for this goal are intended to improve the appearance and use of the Prime Tanning and other downtown parcels to reflect town character and values and to generally preserve the rural and open landscape of the Town.

Recreation

Responsibility: Board of Selectmen, Berwick Trails, Recreation Commission, Town Manager, Friends of the Berwick River Front; Recreation Director; Great Works Regional Land Trust; Preservation and Heritage.

Policies:

- 1) Look to the Village Center as a trail hub.
- 2) Create active public commons space downtown.
- 3) Provide for and encourage outdoor recreation in the Village Center and on/along the Salmon Falls River.
- 4) Apply sustainable practices to all action items.

Survey Support:

Berwick has experienced a large boost in local interest in recreational activities over the last year. The local sports programs have long been a point of community pride. The Survey revealed a need for continuing to add to the recreational opportunities in town.

Community Survey

Recreational Responses:

54% felt strongly that recreational opportunities should be improved in Berwick, and 37.9% felt somewhat.

48.3% felt strongly that there should be some sort of public access to the Salmon Falls River, with 37.5% indicating some interest.

74.2% of survey respondents

The most popular citizen sketches of downtown Berwick were the Charrette #1 sketch and the

sketch entitled “40% Green.” Both depict small business lining the perimeter of an interior green space.



40% Green space Downtown Design Concept credit to Gates, Leighton, and Associates Berwick Downtown Vision Plan January 2014 pg. 18

This preference reinforces survey results. Out of 16 development categories, public commons received the highest percentage of “strongly” supported responses (70.9%) and ranked third in combined percentages of “somewhat” and “strongly” supported types of development (after restaurants, vendor markets, and small retail).

Berwick residents are also in favor of renewing a connection with the Salmon Falls River that runs through downtown. About 75% supported “the Town purchasing riverfront land for public access to the water.”

Summary:

Berwick residents want to protect the rural character of Berwick, design a downtown that reflects that value, and provide shared spaces for celebrating it together.

The policies and action items identified for this goal are intended to provide substantial

Trail Building Local Best Practice:

Portland Trails is a non-profit urban land trust that operates in Portland, ME. Their goals include: creating and maintaining a 50-mile network of trails in the Greater Portland area; engaging the participation of neighborhoods, schools, and the business

green space downtown, create pedestrian connections and access to downtown, and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities on land and river.

Community and the Arts

Responsibility: Berwick Arts Association, Preservation & Heritage, Events & Activities Committee, Board of Selectmen

Policies:

- 1) Encourage an informed and actively involved community through consistent and up-to-date public outreach.
- 2) Make downtown Berwick a primary center for community activity and interaction.
- 3) Apply sustainable practices to all action items.

Survey Support:

When divided into distinct categories, the number one answer to “Berwick’s greatest strength or most valuable resource” was its people. Yet, 95.7% of survey respondents somewhat or strongly believe Berwick needs to improve its “sense of community;” this category was second only to appearance of downtown for need of improvement.

In many survey comments, respondents asked for a Berwick community center or raised concerns about lack of safe and healthy recreation for youth and too few choices for families and seniors.

Community & Arts Best Local Practice:

Belfast, Maine has a thriving arts community flourishing throughout the Downtown. Every Friday night there are guided art walks where visitors and residents alike can enjoy the many lively galleries. Aspiring artists are given assistance with studio space costs allowing individuals who may not have the opportunity due to financial reasons to showcase and

Residents want to meet neighbors at a café or coffee shop, art center, or yoga studio. They are enthusiastic about more open space, but they do not envision empty parks; they have ideas for how to fill that space with community activity: music festivals, outdoor amphitheaters, craft fairs, farmers' markets, ice skating rinks, skate parks, and walking and biking trails.

Summary:

To truly fulfill Berwick's vision, downtown must not only provide a physical balance of business and green space, it must serve as a hub for community gathering.

The policies and action items identified for this goal are intended to provide activities and events that bring people together and create a sense of pride to those living in Berwick.

IMPLEMENTATION POLICIES AND ACTION ITEMS

Economic Development & Affordability		
Policy	Action	Responsibility
Enhance downtown Berwick as an economic center for business consistent with the small town character.	Identify what makes Berwick unique to this region and market the Town to potential business and industry based upon those characteristics.	BOS, TA, BTC, EDC
	Conduct a business needs survey.	EDC, BTC
	Engage in targeted marketing and outreach to businesses consistent with vision concepts.	EDC, BTC
	Seek State of Maine Business Friendly Designation.	EDC, BTC, BOS, TA
	Join the Somersworth Chamber of Commerce.	BOS, EDC, TA
	Employ tax incentives and other mechanisms to encourage desirable development downtown; for example, establish a Tax Increment Finance District or Pine Tree Zone.	BOS, TA, EDC
	Facilitate relocation opportunities for existing businesses to promote the vision.	EDC, BTC
	Support local farming, art, and business communities through farmers' markets and other such venues.	EB, RC, EDC, P&H
Maximize Berwick's options and opportunities by working with outside entities and seeking a variety of resources to support Town initiatives.	Establish collaborative relationships and maintain open and frequent communication with Somersworth and other neighboring communities.	EDC, TA
	Apply for Brownfield funds.	BTC, EDC, TA, BOS
	Establish a Nonprofit Entity, such as Berwick Tomorrow Cooperative, LLC, to guide economic development within Vision concepts.	EB, EDC
	Actively reach out to federal, state, and regional organizations for grants, guidance, and assistance.	BTC, TA, BOS

Apply sustainable practices to all action items	Ask core questions regarding energy, materials, low impact development, and other considerations for sustainability.	BOS, PB, SUS, TA
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Environmental Sustainability		
Policy	Action	Responsibility
Utilize up-to-date green technology and solutions to support economic, social, and environmental sustainability.	Establish formal protocol for new development and re-development that requires thorough consideration of environmentally sound procedures, building materials, and energy sources; encourage application of options most conducive to long-term sustainability.	SUS, BOS, PB
	Research and employ renewable energy and energy efficiency techniques on Town property.	SUS, TA
Protect water quality of the rivers, streams, lakes, and aquifers in Berwick for aquatic life, public drinking water, and recreation.	Work with members of the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative and others to write and implement a water quality protection plan; this plan should describe a public awareness campaign, long-term monitoring program, establishment of riverbank buffer zones, and low impact development regulations.	SUS, SFWC
	Adopt Low Impact Development (LID) ordinances.	TA, PB, SUS
	Support the Town's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit through Best Management Practices (BMP's) and Capital Improvement Projects that increase municipal compliance and limit illicit discharges.	BOS, TA
	Support GWRLT in land conservation efforts within the Salmon Falls Watershed.	SUS, GWRLT, SFWC


Land Use		
Policy	Action	Responsibility
Enhance the downtown to have an attractive appearance representative of Town character.	Develop and adopt a Form Based Code as part of the urban overlay district.	PB, TA, BOS
	Examine current land use ordinances and adjust where needed to be consistent with vision concepts.	TA, PB
	Inventory and preserve significant structures (e.g. Prime stack) and places (eg. cemeteries) that have historic value or reflect Town character.	P&H, BOS, PB
	Promote underground utilities where possible under new development and re-development.	PB, BOS, TA
	Create public focal points of community pride in the Village Center (e.g. mural, memorials, and welcome sign).	BOS, BAA, P&H
Improve traffic circulation through downtown.	Commission and conduct a traffic study, collaborate with MDOT and KACTS to improve vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and implement study recommendations.	TA, BOS, SMRPC
	Enhance and promote public transit options.	BOS, TA
Make downtown pedestrian friendly and accessible by creating safe and continuous routes of travel to, from, and through downtown for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles.	Enhance or add sidewalks, crosswalks, and trails to ensure pedestrian access to all major points within the Village Center.	PB, BOS, TA, BT
	Take advantage of wide roads to add bike lanes throughout downtown Berwick; link to bikes lanes entering from Somersworth (will be part of Somersworth's Main Street enhancements).	PB, TA, SDD
	Design, permit, and construct a pedestrian bridge into Somersworth.	BOS, TA, SDD

Pursue an approximate 60/40 blend of small business and functional outdoor space on the Prime Tanning parcels.	Clarify redevelopment options by gaining a more in-depth understanding (beyond the ASTM Phase I Assessments) of potential environmental contamination and associated liabilities potentially present on Prime Tanning properties and other locations "off-site" from the tannery.	BOS, TA, SMRPC
	Obtain controlling interest in the Prime Tanning parcels by pursuing ownership, a partnership, or a joint development agreement with the property owners.	BOS, TA
	Convert a large portion of the former Prime Tanning parcel into active park space.	BOS, TA
	Form a detailed plan for redevelopment of the Prime Tanning parcels.	TA, PB, BOS, SMRPC
Safeguard Berwick's rural character.	Support land conservation efforts of GWRLT and others.	TA, BOS, SUS, P&H
	Explore options to preserve farmland and become a farm-friendly town.	BOS, P&H, SUS, TA, PB
	Seek to revive Berwick's farming industry by connecting owners of inactive farmland with aspiring farmers.	P&H, SUS
Apply sustainable practices to all action items	Ask core questions regarding energy, materials, low impact development, and other considerations for sustainability.	SUS
Recreation		
Policy	Action	Responsibility
Look to the Village Center as a trail hub.	Establish and maintain connecting trails from downtown Berwick to outer parks, trails, and public buildings. For instance, create a public trail to the Berwick Public Library through the Penny Pond parcel.	BT, TA, BOS
Create active public commons space downtown.	Secure access, design permit and begin construction of the Lower Salmon Falls River "preserve" (linear park) and trail system below the dam.	BOS, TA, EB

	Pursue approximately 40% green space downtown.	PB, TA, BOS
	In public park and open space, include amenities and features conducive to a variety of community activities (e.g. outdoor amphitheater, gazebo, playgrounds).	RD, BOS, TA, RC
Provide for and encourage outdoor recreation on/along the Salmon Falls River.	Secure permanent public access to the Salmon Falls River.	FBR, TA, BOS, RD, RC
	Provide a boat launch for non-motorized boats.	FBR, BOS, TA, RD, RC
	Establish and maintain communication with our neighboring towns regarding water-related activity.	FBR, SFWC, SDD
Apply sustainable practices to all action items	Ask core questions regarding energy, materials, low impact development, and other considerations for sustainability.	SUS, PB
Community and the Arts		
Policy	Action	Responsibility
Encourage an informed and actively involved community through consistent and up-to-date public outreach.	Communicate recent news and upcoming events in a diversity of ways to reach a majority of residents; among others, these may include a town newsletter, event board, social media, comprehensive online calendar, and communication with schools.	EB, BOS
	Support BCTV as a central source of public information.	EB, BOS
	Streamline communication among Town boards and committees, per org chart.	TA, BOS
Make downtown Berwick a primary center for community activity and interaction.	Encourage, plan, and support community events, especially within the Village Center (e.g. art fairs, car shows, farmers' markets, kayak/canoe races, music festivals)	EB, RC, RD
	Identify a location and pursue funding for a community resource facility near the Village Center (e.g. re-use of the Estabrook building).	BOS, TA, RC, RD, EB

	Establish a permanent location for a Berwick Historical Museum to store and display historical artifacts and documents.	P&H, BOS, EB
Apply sustainable practices to all action items	Ask core questions regarding energy, materials, low impact development, and other considerations for sustainability.	SUS

Appendix B - Berwick Community Survey



Envisioning
Downtown Berwick

YOUR OPINION COUNTS

PRSRT STD
ECRWSS
U.S.POSTAGE
PAID
EDDM RETAIL

LOCAL POSTAL CUSTOMER
Berwick, Maine 03901

DOWNTOWN VISION COMMITTEE
QUESTIONNAIRE/SURVEY



Berwick Community Survey Prepared by the Berwick Downtown Vision Committee



It has been said that quality of place and economic success are closely linked. This questionnaire is being sent to all Berwick residents and will be used to develop a community vision for Berwick Village. Please take part in this initiative to collectively and actively shape a vibrant future for downtown Berwick.

If you prefer, you may fill out the survey online instead: www.surveymonkey.com/s/envisionberwick.

1. Are you a resident of Berwick? Yes / No
2. Do you own property in Berwick? Yes / No
3. Do you own a business in Berwick? Yes / No
4. How much do you feel Berwick needs improvement in the following characteristics?


Please indicate your age (optional):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> < 20 yrs old | <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 yrs old |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 21-30 yrs old | <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 yrs old |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 yrs old | <input type="checkbox"/> > 60 yrs old |

Characteristic	Not at all	Somewhat	Strongly	Comments
Sense of community				

Appearance of downtown				
Historic preservation				
Cultural character				
Downtown as a business center				
Recreational opportunities				
Environmental sustainability				
Public access to Salmon Falls River				
Affordability				

(Staple or Tape)



Envisioning
Downtown Berwick

STAMP

YOUR OPINION COUNTS

**Please Return
Survey by
April 15th, 2013**

TOWN OF BERWICK
Department of Planning
11 Sullivan Street
P.O. Box 696
Berwick, Maine 03901

Please Place Stamp
OR
DROP OFF AT:
Town Hall, Library
Kennebunk Savings
or Mayo's Restaurant

(Staple or Tape)

5. At what level would you support these types of development in the village center?

<i>Development</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Strongly</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Large Retail (eg. chain/department stores)				
Small Retail (eg. grocery market, hardware)				
Specialty Retail (eg. kayaks/canoes, bikes, books, cards, pottery, antiques)				
Restaurants (eg. café, deli, bistro, bakery, diner)				
Light Industrial Manufacturing (eg. clothing, furniture, electronics, appliances, micro-brewery only, specialty products)				
Technology Park (eg. computer software, medical applications, research & development)				
Offices (eg. insurance, accounting, law, dentist/doctor, real estate, architecture)				
Residential Space (eg. upper-floor dwelling units)				
Public Commons (eg. park, community garden, gazebo, playground, access to walking/biking trails)				
Marina on Salmon Falls River (eg. boat docks, riverside walkways/benches)				
Vendor Markets (eg. seasonal or year-round farmers' markets, art/craft fairs)				
Cultural Center (eg. dance, art, film, music, photography, performing arts)				
Wellness Center (eg. gym, sports complex, youth facility, yoga studio, nutrition programs)				
Entertainment Venues (eg. movie theater, arcade)				
Educational Campus (eg. university extensions, vocational annex)				
Other:				

6. Would you support the town purchasing riverfront land for public access to the water? Yes / No

7. What do you see as Berwick's greatest strength and/or most valuable resource?
8. What one action or change would be most significant toward creating a sustainable and vibrant village center that attracts locals and visitors alike?
9. What kind of community do you foresee 'passing on' to future generations?
10. Please complete this welcome sign with the Town motto that would make you most proud:

Welcome to Berwick

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Please stay involved!

Attend the Berwick Downtown Vision Committee meetings the 1st Monday of every month in the Town Hall.



"Envisioning Downtown Berwick"

Send us your questions and ideas:

Town Planner John Stoll: planning@berwickmaine.org, 207-698-1101 x115;

Downtown Vision Committee Members: Frank Underwood (lindafrank4@comcast.net); Jessica Sheldon (champneyjs@hotmail.com)

As a member of the Berwick community, you are helping to create our future. Thank you!