

Town of Mount Desert Revitalization Committee

Report of Findings and Recommended Actions

April, 2011

Committee Members:

**Kathy Branch, Co-Chair
Lanie Lincoln, Co-Chair
Katie Bell
Buddy Brown
Ham Clark
Kathe Gates McCoy
Stephanie Kelly-Reece
Ed Lipkin**

Facilitator:

Ron Beard (University of Maine Cooperative Extension)

Town of Mount Desert Manager:

Durlin Lunt

Executive Summary

Recommendations to the Town of Mount Desert Board of Selectmen from the Revitalization Committee

Primary recommendations:

1. Seek recommendations from the Marine Management Committee regarding expansion of the Northeast Harbor Marina beyond the current shore-side improvements, focusing on dredging for additional moorings and partnering with private developers for likely new businesses associated with a marina.
2. Engage a Technical Assistance Panel from the Urban Land Institute (ULI), in the summer of 2011, to assist the Town of Mount Desert and all its villages to work on the strategies presented in this report and others to revitalize the economy of the community (see Appendix II for more background)

Secondary recommendations:

- a. Ask Town Manager to list and review implementation of strategies from the 2007-08 Town Comprehensive Plan, determine appropriateness in 2011, and re-work priorities, assign responsibilities to various committees and staff for implementation and establish reporting deadlines
- b. Add municipal capacity to assist the Town Manager to coordinate, monitor, and report on progress of future planning and economic / community development efforts endorsed by the Town or Selectboard
- c. Ask the Town Manager, with assistance from members of REStore, to continue work on draft policies to permit community functions such as farmer's market's, art shows and concerts on town-owned land, such as the Green at the marina.
- d. Endorse action by the Revitalization Committee to generate further recommendations from a task force made up of representatives of appropriate municipal and private sector groups for signage and "street-scape" improvements as a way of making all the villages of Mount Desert more welcoming and visitor friendly (groups may include Marine Management Committee, REStore, Chamber of Commerce, Village Improvement Societies, Revitalization Committee)

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Overview of the work of the committee

Based on current feedback from their members at the July 2010 Meeting, the Summer Residents Association (SRA) developed a framework for an Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from both the SRA and from the Town of Mount Desert (TMD) “whose purpose would be to make suggestions for the long term betterment of the Town, its citizens, and taxpayers.”

A proposal was submitted to the TMD Board of Selectmen by the SRA President at the end of July, 2010, and this proposal was subsequently approved at the August, 2010 Meeting of the Selectmen. The SRA appointed four Committee representatives from its Board of Directors, and the TMD Selectmen identified four community volunteers to serve on the “Revitalization Committee”.

The first Revitalization Committee Meeting, consisting of the eight members above, a Facilitator (Ron Beard), and the Town Manager (Durlin Lunt) was held on September 13th, 2010. The Revitalization Committee sponsored a community forum on October 6, 2010, and attracted over 125 citizens to express their hopes for the town, and some strategies for moving forward. (A summary of ideas from this forum is included as an Appendix I of this report.) The committee met monthly from October to March, using the internet, telephone and computer technology to allow summer residents on the committee to participate.

Goals of the Committee

After a thorough review of the current economic and social concerns and the good efforts of others within the Town of Mount Desert (TMD), the Revitalization Committee will make recommendations to the Town of Mount Desert Board of Selectmen for the long term betterment of the Town, its year-round citizens, and the summer resident community. The over-riding goal for the Committee was to “do no harm” to all that is good in this special place.

Committee Work Process

In its first two meetings, the committee decided to:

- Build off of recommendations from all prior and current planning efforts, such as the Comprehensive Plan and the work of REStore Northeast Harbor and the Chamber of Commerce
- Obtain additional input from all the TMD stakeholders: the year-round residents, the summer residents, and the TMD business community.
- Segment general feedback and observations into four broad categories for additional analysis by the committee:
 1. Coordinating with existing town plans and committees.
 2. Stimulating and building the local economy
 3. Marketing the Town’s assets and making it more attractive
 4. Reaching beyond the Town to collaborate with others.
- Develop / analyze / refine potential opportunity areas within these four categories.
- Consolidate into a set of general recommendations (the Report) for communication to the Board of Selectmen prior to the Town Meeting in May, 2011, including two *primary* recommendations, to be acted upon now, and *four secondary* recommendations, where additional Town involvement and outside consulting expertise is required, including costs and timelines, prior to formal approval and implementation.

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Committee Recommendations to the Town of Mount Desert Board of Selectmen

Primary Recommendations:

1. Seek recommendations from the Marine Management Committee regarding expansion of the Northeast Harbor Marina beyond the current shore-side improvements, focusing on dredging for additional moorings and partnering with private developers for likely new businesses associated with a marina.
2. Engage a Technical Assistance Panel from the Urban Land Institute (ULI), in the summer of 2011, to assist the Town of Mount Desert and all its villages to work on the strategies presented in this report and others to revitalize the economy of the community (see Appendix II for more background)

Secondary recommendations:

- a. Ask Town Manager to list and review progress on implementation of strategies from the 2007-08 Town Comprehensive Plan, determine appropriateness in 2011, and re-work priorities, assign responsibilities to various committees and staff for implementation and establish reporting deadlines
- b. Add municipal capacity to assist the Town Manager to coordinate, monitor, and report on progress of future planning and economic / community development efforts endorsed by the Town or Selectboard
- c. Ask the Town Manager, with assistance from members of REStore, to continue work on draft policies to permit community functions such as farmer's market's, art shows and concerts on town-owned land, such as the Green at the marina.
- d. Endorse action by the Revitalization Committee to generate further recommendations from a task force made up of representatives of appropriate municipal and private sector groups for signage and "street-scape" improvements as a way of making all the villages of Mount Desert more welcoming and visitor friendly

Groups on the task force may include Marine Management Committee, REStore, Chamber of Commerce, Village Improvement Societies, Revitalization Committee, with possible assistance from Tom Martin and the Hancock County Planning Commission)

The task force should seek input from residents of all villages for uniform visual style throughout the town. Preliminary suggestions for signs include "Welcome to village). local directional signs for public facilities, recreational resources, etc)

The Task Force should develop list of priorities and budget, explore shared financing from public and private sources

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The task force could also develop strategies to improve the visual appearance of the town and all of its villages. As part of its work, the task force could

- Encourage the Chamber of Commerce to develop and offer a beautification workshop
- Seek involvement of College of the Atlantic landscape students and faculty to suggest simple, cost effective landscaping and “streetscaping” projects
- Discuss with town manager ways to improve street cleaning and various other projects
- Seek involvement of Garden Club and Master Gardeners for various projects, including hanging flowers in business district of Northeast Harbor and other villages
- Work with the Historical Society and Chamber of Commerce to develop special recognition of 250 Years of Incorporation, perhaps through flags and banners
- Work with the Chamber to create additional marketing materials for the town, including so-called “branding” of the community to attract visitors and year-round businesses
- Work with the Chamber and interested citizens to pilot a self-guided walking tour of the Main Street of Northeast Harbor, using ten small numbered sign boards placed at historical sites, coupled with a map and brochure
- Work with the Chamber to funnel citizen suggestions for various improvements to village appearance to the business community

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Appendix I

Summary of ideas presented by citizens at the October 6 2010 Community Forum

1. Co-ordinating with existing town plans and committees

- Link efforts with the existing comprehensive plan for TMD and engage the people currently on the Town Planning Board. "Don't re-invent the wheel."
- Engage the Chamber of Commerce.
- Fully understand the Town's current demographics first before making recommendations
- Identify what it is that we want to attract from tourists (and what we do not want)
- Add a Planning Director to TMD with general oversight and coordination responsibilities
- Maintain an ongoing oversight for Revitalization through future linkages with the Board of Selectmen, etc.
- Link effort closely with Re-Store NEH group
- Link effort with the new marina development plans and the Harbor Committee
- Link closely with the various Village Improvement Societies
- Help get more current planning information on the Town's web-site
- Link Main St, NEH plans with plans for the new marina. Consider establishing the Marina as an anchor for tourism via expanded commercial utilization.
- Maintain/improve dialogue and overall relationship between the summer community (via the SRA) and the year-round residents

2. Stimulating and building the local economy

- Create a re-development district(s) to help overcome zoning/other development obstacles
- Work with various established employers on the Island (Jackson Labs, MDI Biological Labs, College of the Atlantic) to encourage entrepreneurs to start up separate spin-off type businesses. May entail raising private capital to incubate
- The Town needs more restaurants, a drug store, dry cleaners, a soda fountain/ice cream shop, a book store; consider opening satellite shops from existing successful MDI establishments
- Understand the economic realities of running a business in this very cyclical calendar environment, and help train/assist potential new entrepreneurs get started.
- Help create a Co-op for "incubator" businesses to make and sell products year-round
- Explore all possible funding sources to help assist in incubation of new businesses
- Include Seal Harbor and Otter Creek in economic plans.
- Need for more affordable housing for employees and for artisans (and address restrictive zoning barriers). Need to enable a high density residential community in NEH
- Offer tax breaks for new (and existing) businesses
- Look at best taxing practices in other communities
- Encourage light industries (e.g. SW development) to come to MDI via better interface with the State of Maine Government in Augusta
- Enable incentives for shoppers to "buy local"
- Talk to the fisherman (and other local businesses) to find out what they want. (Lobster wholesaler? etc.)
- Consider "tax based sharing" with other Towns, such as Bar Harbor and Ellsworth.
- Invest in services to help older members of the community and to ensure they stay here year round
- Consider further use of the Island's rural spaces to help farmers and to attract younger people

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- Link local businesses as common "parts suppliers" into products that are sold locally
- Look beyond the land side of the Marina project to consider expansion and better utilization of the water side of the marina
- Explore mixed use zoning for village centers
- Leverage marina development into more jobs via parallel commercial business development
- Explore options for an adult retirement-type community
- Solicit restaurant and boutique shop owners in winter resorts (such as Florida) to see if they would be interested in opening a seasonal venue in the Town.
- Investigate the use of part of the Kimball Terrace Motel as affordable housing in the off-season

3. *Marketing the towns assets and making it more attractive*

- Market our assets: we are near to Acadia National Park (ANP); easy harbor and ocean access; friendly, safe environment; biking/walking/hiking opportunities abound; winter outdoor activities; the NEH Library and The Neighborhood House
- Our villages already have many wonderful traditional stores, so use them as success stories in future marketing efforts
- Promote more author and artist events
- Add welcoming signs to Towns; have better helpful signage in general; improve/expand sidewalks; add more benches to main street; add attractive landscaping; add flower pots and hanging flower pots to public/common areas; improve lighting with common and consistent plans; put utilities underground
- Be conscious of not getting over-crowded in the summer (leading to parking issues and no place for people to eat, etc.)
- Balance development with what people like about the way it is right now
- Add a band box in the NEH town park by the marina
- Increase the availability of the "green space" near the marina for arts and crafts shows, a farmer's market, festivals, etc.
- Help get more informative and helpful information re the Town's assets on the Town's web-site
- Expand activities / events into the shoulder seasons of spring and fall
- Consider TMD's access to part of the cruise ship business? -- if desired, market it better
- Link Main St, NEH plans with plans for the new marina.
- Don't lose the quaint local flavor of the Town

4. *Reaching beyond the town to collaborate with others*

- Maintain/improve dialogue and overall relationship between the summer community and the year-round residents
- Work with our excellent schools and hospital
- Increase bus service for locals, not just tourists (Cranberry Isles and Tremont have expressed similar concerns)
- Develop better communication between ANP and the Towns on MDI
- Develop an "whole-Island" view on common issues
- Enhance the relationship between TMD and the Hancock County government
- Encourage affordable work-force housing in each village of TMD and all island towns
- Look for "best practices" from other communities, including those locally, across Maine, and nationally

Appendix II

Background on Urban Land Institute and Technical Assistance Panels

Since 1947, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Over 500 Technical Assistance Panels (TAP) have been conducted in 12 countries (see link

<http://www.uli.org/CommunityBuilding/AdvisoryService/TechnicalAssistancePanels.aspx>)

TAPs are one and half-day, intensive working sessions where our expert panelists address a set of questions proposed by the sponsoring organization - a local government, non-profit organization, or developer — about a specific development issue or policy barrier within a defined geographic area.

ULI assembles an interdisciplinary volunteer panel who explore the project, interview stakeholders, and make recommendations. Panelists approach the assignment from all perspectives, including market potential, land use and design, financing and development strategies, and governance and implementation. This objective and diverse team of real estate and planning professionals would not be available "for hire" anywhere. The strength of the ULI Technical Assistance Panel lies in the cross-section of experts examining the issue from all angles and producing an implementation strategy that is based on sound information, community realities, and best practices.

Where appropriate and beneficial to the client, ULI will partner with other organizations to extend the breadth and expertise of the panel. In Maine, this could include the Hancock County Planning Commission, which provides member towns with technical assistance on land use and transportation planning and community development (see <http://www.hcpcme.org/>), and the Maine Downtown Center, a program of the Maine Development Foundation, which has successfully helped Maine communities with downtown revitalization efforts (see http://www.mdf.org/mdc_overview.php).

While most of the administrative costs are underwritten by the ULI, clients are charged a fee of \$5,500. Panel members are ULI experts who volunteer their time because of a commitment to the principles of redevelopment, planned growth, economic expansion, and local and regional capacity-building.

The town would need to submit an application by May 1 to secure the assistance of a ULI technical assistance panel for the summer, 2011. Tom Martin, of the Hancock County Planning Commission and Ron Beard, of University of Maine Cooperative Extension, could work with the Town Manager to prepare the application, and if successful, work out logistics for the site visit.



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REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS ULI Boston – Technical Assistance Panel

Objective

ULI Boston's Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) program is designed to provide objective, expert advice to municipal and community-based organizations on the feasibility, design, or implementation of development initiatives. It is specifically intended for organizations/municipalities that have limited staff or financial resources or that operate in economically disadvantaged areas. Previous projects have ranged in scope from generating ideas for redeveloping individual sites to creating strategies for revitalizing entire downtown districts.

Program Description

ULI Boston's TAP program brings expertise in real estate development, design, and finance to bear on local land use planning and development projects. Once a project has been designated as a TAP, ULI Boston will assemble an interdisciplinary team of senior local professionals for a day-long brainstorming session. The one-day TAP program developed out of ULI's fee-based national Advisory Services Program, which concentrates a team of national experts in a comprehensive look at all angles of the development process to formulate realistic options to move a project forward. The TAP program is a way for organizations with more limited resources to focus local ULI Members' expertise on a specific problem at a nominal cost.

The sponsoring organization/municipality will be responsible for gathering and presenting the background needed to understand the project. The sponsor also will provide staff support for the meeting and for any follow-up report or presentation. ULI members will volunteer up to a day of their time developing an understanding of the problem, compiling recommendations, and debriefing the sponsors.

ULI Core Competencies

Members of ULI Boston can provide expertise and advice in the following areas:

- Land use design and planning
- Market feasibility analysis
- Financial analysis and structuring
- Structuring private/public partnerships
- Adaptive reuse of buildings
- Development process, permitting and community relations
- Transportation planning and TOD



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PANEL PREPARATION

- **Briefing Materials.** The sponsor is responsible for assembling all relevant background information relating to the issues being addressed. This material should be ready for delivery to the panel chair, each panel member and ULI Boston staff at least two weeks before the scheduled Panel. ULI will determine what is needed for the Panel's review and will assist the sponsor in reviewing materials and identifying additional materials and information needed for the Panel.
- **List of Resource Individuals.** The sponsor must prepare a list of resource individuals available on the day of the TAP. The list should be restricted to approximately 5 people and should include key members of the private and public sectors who might provide valuable insight and information to the panel.
- **Interview Schedules.** The sponsor is responsible for gathering these key stakeholders together for the morning session and, if necessary, during a one-hour follow-up afternoon session.
- **Project/Area Tour.** If the issues deal with a specific project or project area, the sponsor is responsible for arranging a tour of the project or project area. The sponsor must arrange for transportation and an accompanying staff person to answer panel questions.
- **Other Resource Materials.** Additional resource material that is not appropriate or too bulky for inclusion in the panel briefing books should be made available at the panel meeting place. Such information might include zoning and general plan materials, market data, economic studies and projections, maps and other similar materials as needed. The ULI manager and the sponsor will determine prior to the panel session what materials might be helpful to the panel deliberations.

LOGISTICS

- **Panel Meeting Room(s).** The sponsor is responsible for providing a conference room for the panel meeting, group interviews and the panel presentation. The presentation room should be set up in a manner consistent with the type of final presentation desired and the amount of audience participation desired.
- **Transportation.** As previously indicated, it is helpful but not critical that transportation for group activities, such as the site or area tour, are provided in one vehicle. In order to reduce the time required for local transportation, it is recommended that as many interviews as possible be conducted at the main location where the panel is meeting.



Technical Assistance Panel

APPLICATION FORM

Please provide the following information and submit to ULI Boston

Applicant Organization _____ Date _____
Contact Person _____
Title _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ Fax _____ E-Mail _____

Please attach the following:

1. Statement of the problem/issue.

Provide a brief description of the major problems or issues that you wish the Panel to address. Include a brief history and current status of the project/study area/issue.

2. Sponsor information

Please describe (1) the type of and major business activity of the sponsoring organization; (2) what role the sponsor plays in the particular issue(s) suggested for the Panel; and (3) include a brief history of important projects/activities that recently have taken place or are planned or under consideration.

3. Questions to be addressed by the Panel

List the major questions/issues to be evaluated by the Panel. Be as specific as possible. Please organize questions/issues by major topic, such as (1) market issues; (2) planning and design issues; (3) feasibility and financing issues; (4) management and implementation issues; and so on.

4. Sponsor responsibilities - planning and logistics

Please identify the individuals who will be responsible for working with ULI Boston to prepare background and briefing documents; organizing and scheduling interviews; conducting a project/area tour; providing physical facilities for panel work sessions and presentation; and providing general logistical support. Also identify to extent known the key people whom you believe can contribute to the panel's understanding of issues. Please provide name, organization and title, telephone and fax numbers for all individuals listed.

5. Fee arrangement

While no fees are charged for the TAP program at this time, the sponsor is expected to cover all the expenses associated with the panel, including preparation of briefing materials, copying, logistics, lunch, transportation to and from the meeting site, and any other expenses.

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6. General Panel Schedule

The attached schedule represents the general format and timing of the Panel process. The schedule is subject to change depending on the issues involved in the assignment.

GENERAL SCHEDULE – Local Technical Assistance Panel

- 8:00 a.m. Panel meeting - introductions, initial discussion of key issues and additional information needs, review of schedule and panel member assignments.
- 8:30 a.m. Site visit and/or start of interview process with key resource people, on an as-needed basis. Site visit should last no longer than one-and-one-half hours to allow time for interviews.
- 12:00 a.m. Working lunch - report first overview of findings based on morning sessions; identify information gaps/conflicts that need to be resolved.
- 1:00 p.m. Follow-up interviews if necessary.
- 2:00 p.m. Develop consensus on major conclusions; identify key themes that address major issues; identify areas where the sponsor should do follow-up work to further assess panel's conclusions.
- 3:00 p.m. Organize draft outline of key summary and conclusions; draft detailed outline covering key points and issues; and convert to flip chart/report handout for presentation. Organize presentation and panelist involvement.
- 4 to 5:00 p.m. Presentation and discussion of panel conclusions and recommendations.