UPDATE OF ORONO’S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS & ISSUES
April 24, 2013 Public Workshop

Complete drafts of sections at www.orono.org/planning
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OVERARCHING ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Overarching issues and opportunities are those that affect many aspects of Orono’s economy, neighborhoods, environment, services, and quality of life. These have been distilled from the detailed findings and issues that are summarized in the next sections. The issues and opportunities that likely will have the most far-reaching effects on the Town over the next decade include:

Population and Households:

(1) The steep decline in family-aged households and school-aged children, affecting the Town’s schools, ability to support downtown businesses, the composition of neighborhoods, and civic life.

(2) The rapid increase in the share of population 65+ and 75+ years old, creating both opportunities for business, volunteerism, and other aspects of town life and demands for public safety, health care, transportation and other local services.

Economy:

(3) Positioning Orono as a favored location for the “creative economy” (i.e., economic sectors that create or use intellectual property, sometimes also referred to as the innovation economy), including but not limited to start-up companies from the University of Maine.

(4) Strengthening Orono’s image as a University town in which new businesses want to locate and new faculty and staff want to live.

(5) Strengthening Downtown as a destination for both local residents and the University community.

Housing and Neighborhood:

(6) The opportunity – and perhaps the necessity – for new owner-occupied housing affordable to young families and others who want to be in-town close to village schools, services, and amenities.

(7) The opportunity to respond to growing demand among both younger households and senior households for traditional, walkable neighborhood design for new development that is close to schools and services, while preserving significant in-town open spaces and trails.

Water Quality:

(8) Long-term protection of water bodies – in particular, Pushaw Lake and Johnny Mack Brook – that are vulnerable to nonpoint source pollution.
(9) Reform of vernal pool regulation to simultaneously provide more assured protection of vernal pool habitat in a landscape setting and allow for growth close to in-town schools and serviceds.

**Municipal Finance:**

(10) Orono’s high tax rate, low per capita taxable assessed property value, and difficulty keeping up with aging infrastructure within the resources available.
SUMMARIES OF FINDINGS AND ISSUES

The Shape of Things: Geology, Topography, and Water Bodies

- Surficial geology – in particular the esker along the Stillwater and Penobsot rivers and the swampy materials that make up the Caribou Bog – are defining features of the Town. They provide the Town’s water supply, significant wildlife habitat, and recreational services.

- About one-fifth of the Town is covered with prime farmland soils, but most is in the immediate Penobscot and Stillwater river valleys and have been developed for urban uses. Large patches remain in places, such as south of Kelley Road.

- Most of Orono is covered with highly productive woodland soils.

- Orono is drained by five principal watersheds, one of which drains to Pushaw Lake. Pushaw Lake’s water quality is regularly monitored by the Greater Pushaw Lake Association, which is concerned about the lake’s phosphorus levels (elevated phosphorus causes damaging algae blooms). The lake’s naturally dark color likely is protecting it from algae blooms.

- The Penobscot River Settlement Agreement, which removes or bypasses three dams on the Penobscot’s main branch to restore the breeding grounds of anadromous species, including Atlantic salmon, also has included the refurbishing and expansion of the Orono Dam – a key part of Orono’s industry and tax base.

- Johnny Mack Brook is the Town’s only named urban stream. It continues to support wild trout. To date it has been naturally protected by its surrounding forest habitat.

Key Issues and Opportunities – Geology, Topography, Water Resources

Need to continue to protect the aquifer that supplies the Town’s public water
Need to protect Pushaw Lake and Johnny Mack Brook from nonpoint source pollution
Need to comply with increasingly strict storm water management rules under the Federal Pollution Control Act
The zoning and other changes by the Town in the Forest and Agriculture District recognized the importance and use of remaining prime farmland soils, as well as the continued productivity of small woodlots in town on productive woodland soils
Consider how best to use the tax base represented by the Orono Dam, which is part of Downtown’s Transit Oriented Development TIF District
**Rural Resources: Farms, Forest, Wetland, and Wildlife Habitat**

- Commercial farming and forestry are not significant parts of Orono’s economy.
- Nevertheless, the production of local food for local consumption is part of Orono’s lifestyle and economy, as evidenced by the Orono Farmers’ Market, community gardens, and the University of Maine’s specialization in agricultural sciences and education.
- 35 parcels containing 1,556 acres are enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax program; and the University of Maine maintains the 2,000-acre DeMerritt Forest in Old Town and Orono.
- Orono is recognized by the National Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree City USA.

- Orono’s wetlands fall into three major categories:
  - Caribou Bog, a unique natural community
  - Wetlands associated with tributary streams to Pushaw Lake, Kenduskeag Stream, and the Penobscot and Stillwater rivers
  - Floodplain wetlands along the Penobscot and Stillwater
- Orono has participated with the University of Maine in a vernal pools identification and mapping program, and to date 24 significant vernal pools have been verified; the status of many still is unknown.
- Unfragmented blocks of land are an essential component of wildlife habitat, and Orono has three large blocks of intact, interior forest land:
  - Caribou Bog – Orono Bog area (2,600 acres, shared with Bangor)
  - Pushaw Lake wetland and woodlands complex (2,300 acres, shared with Old Town)
  - Taylor Rd – OLT - DeMeritt Forest area (862 acres)

**Key Issues and Opportunities – Rural Resources**

*F & A revisions in 2009 sought to better protect blocks of woodland, wetland, and wildlife habitat*

*Promoting/supporting local food production*

*Balancing habitat protection and in-town growth east of I95/north of Kelley Rd*

*Reform of vernal pool regulation to streamline “growth area” development while protecting habitat blocks in rural areas*
Population and Households

- 2010 population: 10,362 (up 13.7% from 2000)
- 2025 projected population range: 10,800 – 11,200
- 2010 households: 2,831 (up 5.2% from 2000)
- 2025 projected households range: 3,050 – 3,200
- 2010 population living in households: 6,489
- 2010 population living in dorms: 3,696
- 2010 population living in nursing homes: 177

Long-term trends (1990-2010) by Age Group show decline in children and family-aged adults; strong growth in 55+
  - 14 and under: -25%
  - 15 to 24: 0%
  - 25 to 54: -18%
  - 55 to 74: +17%
  - 75+: +80%

Trends in Household Types (2000-2010) show decline in family households, especially family households with children; and growth in non-family households, including student households and elderly living alone
  - Family households - 5%
    - Family households with children -17%
  - Non-family households +14%
    - One-person person alone + 2%
    - Elderly living alone + 26%
    - Other non-family +34%

Key Issues & Opportunities – Population and Households

Loss of family households, family-aged population, and school-aged population
Growth in elderly population
Untapped opportunities that may come from the young adult population attending UMaine
High achieving population – in education, academic accomplishment, civic contributions to the community
Economy

- Bangor Metropolitan Area labor force growth, 2001-2011: +5%
- Sectors driving Bangor Metro growth:
  - Higher education
  - Wholesale distribution and transportation
  - Hospitals
  - Comparison goods retailing
  - Forestry support services
- Orono labor force growth, 2001-2011: +6%
- Jobs in Orono, 2010: ~7,000
  - Educational, health care & social assistance services: 63%
  - Professional, scientific, management & admin: 9%
  - Accommodation and food services: 9%
  - Retail trade: 4%
  - Other sectors: 15%
- UMaine enrollment, 2011: 11,168
  - Change since 2001: +2%
  - Change since 2007: -6%
- UMaine employment total, 2011-12: 2,522
  - Change in regular employees since 2006-07: -3%
  - Faculty employment (FTE’s): 708
  - Change in faculty FTEs since 2006-07: +6%
  - Change in faculty FTES in University’s colleges: -6%
- UMaine R&D, 2011: $74 million
- No. of start-up businesses, Target Technology Incubator: 8

Active economic development projects:
- Downtown redevelopment of Katahdin Building site for headquarters financial office
- Master planning for build-out of Maine Technology Park
- New Kelley Road Business Park
- GigU Main Street (ultra high speed fiber project)
- Orono Dam – second powerhouse

Key Issues & Opportunities – Economy

UMaine-related opportunities, including spin-off businesses from its R&D enterprise
Extension of sewer, high speed Internet fiber, natural gas lines
Perception of being unfriendly to businesses
Positioning Orono to accommodate the “creative industries,” including home occupations
Expanding Downtown’s customer base (UMaine visitors; office development)
Continue to build local economic development capacity through OVA and OEDC
Regional cooperation – Bangor Target Area Development Corp., Bangor Region Dev Assoc.
Housing

- 2010 housing units per Census: 3,089 (up 7% from 2000)
- 2012 housing units per Tax Assessor: 3,216 est.
- 2010 vacancy rate <2% owner units, 5% rental units

- Housing units by type, 2012:
  - Single family: 1,471
  - Multi-family: 1,629
  - Mobile homes in mh parks: 116

- Housing by age:
  - More than 50 years old: 41%
  - 20-50 years old: 39%
  - Under 20 years old: 20%

- Home heating:
  - Oil: 71%
  - Electricity: 16%
  - Natural gas (Bangor Gas): 5% (as of 2010)
  - Other: 8%

- Off-campus rental housing occupied by householder <25, including students
  - 2010: 723 units
  - Added in 2012: 188 units at The Grove

- Rental units by zoning district, 2011
  - Medium Density Residential (MDR): 697
  - Multi-family districts: 773

- Income needed for median priced home in Orono: $65,126
- Median household income in Orono: $51,250
- % homeowners paying >30% of income: 18%

- Estimated need for assisted rental housing
  - Non-elderly (25+ yrs old): 100-150 units
  - Elderly: 25-50 units

Key Issues & Opportunities – Housing

- Potential for a stressed local rental market with addition of large-scale rental complexes
- Gap in workforce housing, especially in town, close to services and transit
- Integrating student housing into neighborhoods
- Housing for an aging population
Transportation

- 24% of Orono workers walk to work and another 7% bicycle or take the bus.
- 55% drive to work alone and 10% carpool
- 4% work at home

- Orono Public Works Dept. is fully responsible for about 30 miles of road, plus another 9 miles in winter.
- The highest average daily traffic counts in Orono are on Stillwater Ave off Exit 193 (about 19,000 cars a day); on Main Street in downtown (more than 14,000 cars a day); at the Exit 191/Kelley Rd off ramp (about 12,000 cars a day); and on Park St. near College Ave. (about 11,000 cars a day)
- MaineDOT has identified 8 high crash locations in Orono, with the highest number of crashes from 2009-2011 at the Exit 193 off ramp to Sillwater (25) and the intersection of Park St. and Rangeley Rd (24).

- Outside of the immediate village, Orono’s local street system is poorly connected, causing issues for emergency and public works services, the interconnection of utilities, and turning traffic onto Route 2 and other arterials.
- Orono has about 13 miles of public sidewalks in varying condition, and a designated bicycle lane on Route 2.
- The Downtown Orono-UMaine Shuttle carried 49,000 passengers during the 2011-12 academic year. The regular BAT Connector also is seeing increase ridership.

- There are 5 parking lots with public parking located within 1,000 feet of the center of downtown, plus on-street parking on Mill St and parts of Bennoch Road and Main St. The 5 lots contain 331 spaces.
  - There are 179 spaces in the lots, plus 26 on Mill St., within 500 ft of the center of downtown (on Mill St). These are full or near-full on Fri and Sat evenings, with high demand also on Wed and Th evenings, Fri lunch time, and Sat mornings.
  - There are 152 spaces in the lots, plus 12 on Bennoch Rd near the Post Office, more than 500 ft but within 1,000 ft of the center of downtown. These are rarely more than 70% full. When closer spaces are full, these are relatively unused.

Key Issues and Opportunities – Transportation

Priority locations for road improvements, such as at Park St and Rangeley Rd
Evolution of a connected local street system
“Complete street” design for pedestrian and bicycle safety
Bridge access to Ayers Island
Downtown parking; and wayfinding to alert visitors to other spaces during peak periods
Balancing Town parking standards for new development against other needs, such as managing storm water
Municipal Services and Infrastructure

- Since 1969 Orono has operated as a Council-Manager form of government

- The Fire Department, which serves both the Town and the University of Maine
  - responds to 1,600+ calls per year, including medical emergencies
  - can respond to fire calls within so-called critical response time (5 minutes) for most in most of the Town east of Stillwater Ave; west of Stillwater, response times are in the 7-to-15-minute range or longer

- The Police Department
  - responds to approx. 200 crime-related incidents per year, more than 350 traffic accidents, and more than 100 alcohol-related incidents
  - provides a variety of kinds of assistance, such as property checks and medical assists.
  - The University of Maine has its own police department with jurisdiction on campus.

- The Orono-Veazie Water district maintains about 2,050 service connections, with a service area that covers most of Orono east of I-95.
  - The system has a safe yield of 2.0 mgd and an average demand of 1.3 mgd when the University is in session
  - The water supply meets bacterial, radioactive, and inorganic contaminants standards but is exploring strategies to address a disinfection byproduct (Total Trihalomethanes) that is elevated at times

- The Water Pollution Control Facility serves approx. 1,330 users in the built-up area east of I-95, including the University, which represents 54% of the billed flows.
  - The treatment facility – a secondary activated sludge wastewater treatment plant - was extensively upgraded in 2008. It has the capacity to treat 1.85 mgd and to accept a peak flow of 5.65 mgd. Current average flow is 1.2 mgd when the University is in session.
  - Combined sewer overflows have been dramatically reduced as a result of continuous investment in upgrading the sewer collection system.

- The Public Works Department:
  - Maintains 30 miles of road, plus another 9 miles in winter
  - Maintains all other public facilities in town
  - Oversees curbside pickup of trash under contract with a private provider
    - More than 3,900 tons of MSW are hauled from Orono to PERC annually, slightly less than the 4,270 tons Orono guarantees
    - The recycling rate in Orono is 21%, well below the state goal of 50%
    - Phase II of the Town’s construction demolition and debris landfill was opened in 2012, with 40,000 cy of capacity

- The Town has adopted the International Building Code, supplemented by its own Housing Code and Rental Registration Ordinance
The Zoning Ordinance was last extensively amended in 2009 as the result of an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan addressing land use in the Forest and Agriculture District.

- The Public Library, which occupies a 6,000 square foot structure built in 2009, has a collection of more than 19,000 adult books, 13,300 children’s books, 4,200 audio, video and music items, and nearly 100 periodical titles.
  - It receives more than 42,000 visits per year and loans out nearly 69,000 items.

- Orono Health Association operates out of the former Birch Street School and provides a variety of health services to children and senior citizens.

**Key Issues and Opportunities – Municipal Services**

- Extension of public water and sewer lines to other portions of the Town’s “growth” areas, and looping water supply lines
- Continued replacement of aged sewer and water lines, following respective capital improvement plans
- Need to clarify the sewer impact fee ordinance
- Desirability of a fifth public water supply well located in a separate field away from the existing four wells
- Single-stream recycling
- Need for a modern public works facility
- Aging infrastructure, with replacement and repair needs that outpace availability of funds
Parks and Recreational Facilities

- Orono manages its parks, recreational facilities, and programs with 3 full-time staff, between 4 and 22 part-time workers depending on the season, and an annual budget (2012-13) of about $334,000.

- The Town owns 7 parks, including 4 with water access, plus a community playground, the Municipal Pool, and an outdoor ice rink, and it is scheduled to assume ownership of the Union St. boat ramp as well. The parks are used for both active and passive recreation.

- The Town also owns 3 well-used facilities: Keith Anderson Community House, Senior Citizens Center, and Tredwell Building.

- The Town is served by athletic and multi-purpose fields and courts now owned by RSU 26.

- The Public Library and Downtown also are important recreational venues, and a “village green” with a small amphitheater is planned behind the library.

- There is an extensive trail and recreational open space network in Orono, developed over many years through the cooperative efforts of the Orono Land Trust, Town, University of Maine, and private property owners. The trails are within minutes of most residents.

- Town-owned trails are located behind the High School, in Sklar Park, in the Jerehiah Colburn Natural Area, and along the Stillwater River.

- OLT owns 198 acres in Orono, conservation easements covering another 641 acres, and seven additional trail easements. Its properties and trails are available for public, non-motorized use. OLT also maintains trails on Town land.

- The University of Maine also maintains an extensive trail and bike path system on campus.

- Several UMaine recreational facilities are available for public use, including the Student Recreation and Fitness Center.

- Major private recreational facilities include the Penobscot Valley Country Club and the Pushaw Lake Campground.

Key Issue & Opportunities – Recreation

Lack of neighborhood playgrounds
Drainage issues at the school athletic fields, and relationship of the Town to the RSU in maintaining these facilities
Better awareness of some of the parks and recreational facilities Orono has
Achieving longer, connected trails (such as along the Veazie RR bed) both to serve skiers, bicyclists and others and to build the trail network as a regional destination for tourism
Educating the younger generation about the value of Orono’s recreational amenities and building interest in them so that they will be cared for in years to come
Municipal Finance

- Orono’s taxable assessed value grew by 61% from FY 2003- FY 2009, and the tax rate fell by nearly $5 per $1,000. It then stagnated through FY 2013 and the rate has inched back up.
  - The tax rate is the highest in the region
  - The largest contributors to the tax base are apartment complexes, retirement and nursing facilities, energy companies, and properties in the Maine Technology Park.

- Nearly 46% of the Town’s tax base is represented by regional/state entities that are exempt from property taxes, primarily UMaine but also including The Housing Foundation.
  - Orono has one of the lowest levels of taxable property value per capita in the state (under $40,000)
  - The University and The Housing Foundation make voluntary payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs)

- Orono’s average property tax burden is estimated at 4.5% of median family income.

- Orono’s general fund budget was about $14 million in FY 2012
  - Nearly seven of every $10 of revenues came from property taxes
  - About 36% of expenses were for education, followed by 19% for public safety, 14% for general government, 13% for public works, and 8% for debt service

- The Town’s General Fund balance at the end of FY 2012 was about $7.7 million, of which about $3.0 million was undesignated. This is a healthy level (20% of the annual budget) but in the face of funding uncertainties is reasonably conservative.

- As of the end of FY 2012, Orono had long-term debt of $8.4 million supported by the General Fund and $9.3 million supported by sewer system user fees. Of the $8.4 million of GF debt, $3.9 million is tied to lease payments to OEDC at the NexxLinx call center.

- Orono has five Tax Increment Finance Districts that support specific development programs in the areas that they cover.

Key Issues and Opportunities – Municipal Finance

High tax rate, a reflection in part of low taxable assessed value per capita
Slow growing tax base
High share of tax exempt property, though PILOTs help to mitigate
Managing debt for high priority capital needs: on the order of $500,000 - $600,000 available annually versus needs that may be three to four times this level to keep up with depreciation
Insecurity of certain revenues: income from former EnvisioNet facility to support debt; potential impacts of state policies on intergovernmental revenue and on ability of UMaine to continue volunteer PILOT.
Historic and Scenic Resources

- Two historic districts in Orono are on the National Register of Historic Places:
  - Main Street Historic District, including 28 residential structures (some now converted to other uses) from Maplewood Ave. to Pine St. – on the Register since 1977; originally 29 structures but one was removed.
  - University of Maine Historic District, originally listed in 1978 to include 10 contributing buildings, expanded in 2010 and now includes 27 contributing building and four contributing sites

- Other National Register properties include the Page Farm Barn on campus, the Old Fire Engine House on North Maine Avenue, the U.S. Post Office, and the William Colburn House on Bennoch Road.

- Orono contains a number of historic and pre-historic archaeological sites – either verified or potential based on types of locations – primarily along the Penobscot River and Stillwater Branch and associated with the Caribou Bog. These have been mapped by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

- Orono’s Land Use Ordinance includes general standards addressing impacts of new development on historic and archaeological resources, but Orono does not provide for regulation through local historic districts. The National Register has no regulatory significance unless federal funds are being used for a project affecting the resource.

- The Comprehensive Plan Committee has identified and mapped 22 scenic resources – vistas, corridors, and specific scenic places, both rural and urban – including 14 east of I-95 and 8 west of I-95.

Key Issues and Opportunities – Historic and Scenic Resources

Pros and cons of encouraging preservation of historic and scenic resources primarily through their economic productivity and private market transactions versus the need for regulation.
Land Use

Note: This update of the Comprehensive Plan addresses primarily land use in the in-town section of Orono. Rural land use was addressed in the 2009 update of the Plan.

- Nearly half of Orono (49%) is forested, nearly a quarter (23%) is wetlands (some of which also is forested), primarily associated with the Caribou Bog, and about 18% is developed with buildings, roads, recreational areas, and supporting facilities such as parking lots. About 3% is grassland, primarily the fields near Route 2 south of Kelley Road, and nearly 8% is open water.

- The Town is divided into 2,155 parcels, including 1,600 in residential use, 144 in non-residential use (including the University of Maine campus), and 411 vacant parcels. The 411 entirely vacant parcels contain about 43% of all land in parcels. A number of these vacant parcels is covered by partly or entirely covered by wetland.

- Since the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, building permits have been issued for 502 dwelling units, including 106 single-family detached homes, 56 single-family attached homes or two-family buildings, and 340 apartment units, primarily Orchard Trails and The Grove.
  - 59% of the single-family detached homes have been built in so-called Rural or Transitional areas, while 41% have been built in the Town’s Growth area (east of I-95 and north of Kelley Rd)
  - All single-family attached and multi-family units have been built in the Growth area

- Since the 1998 plan, 150,000 – 175,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, the 135,000 Dirigo Pines Inn, and multiple University academic, research and recreational buildings have been built, virtually all in the Growth area.

- The Town is divided into 13 primary zoning districts for rural, residential, mixed use, commercial, industrial, and university purposes. It also has overlay districts to protect aquifer recharge areas and to provide for low-impact commercial uses in the Stillwater Ave. corridor; uses contract/conditional zoning; and has adopted the State’s model zoning ordinance for shoreland areas.
  - The Rural area of Town – including the Forestry & Agriculture District and Shoreland Resource Protection District – covers about 49% of the Town
  - Transitional areas (appropriate for moderate development but not yet with public sewer) – including the Low Density Residential and Gateway Medium Residential Development districts – cover about 16% of the Town
  - Shoreland areas other than Resource Protection cover about 6% of the Town
  - The Growth Area, not including shorelands, covers about 30% of the Town.

Key Issues and Opportunities – Land Use
Note: These issues focus mostly on the area east of I-95 and north of Kelley Road. As mentioned above, the area west of I-95 and south of Kelley Road was addressed in the 2009 amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. The exception has to do with the allowed locations of “newer mobile homes,” which was not previously addressed.

The impacts of large-lot zoning in in-town districts, particularly Medium Density Residential and Commercial-2, including the cost of new single-family homes and design of walkable neighborhoods

Residence-only zoning along Route 2, where high traffic volumes may inhibit compatible re-use and preservation of structures fronting on the road

Lack of guidelines in the Village Commercial and C-2 districts to help accomplish the village-scale design and architecture

35-foot height limit in non-residential districts, in view of enhanced fire department equipment

Need to streamline regulation of home occupations involving only office and other low-impact, low-traffic uses

The prohibition of “newer mobile homes” in the F&A district east of I-95, treating this area differently than the rest of the F&A district

The potential usefulness of re-introducing into the Land Use Ordinance provisions for “conditional uses” (the lack of this tool in the Ordinance has forced certain activities that do not involve construction activity into review under the Site Plan Review Ordinance, which is intended for projects involving construction)

The applicability of the Aquifer Protection Overlay District in Downtown Orono

The effective prohibition by overly stringent or ambiguous definitions of certain uses that may be acceptable in certain locations, such as “bed and breakfasts” (now limited to 3 guest rooms)

The existing threshold of 5-acres for clustered residential development, which prevents small-scale clustered development

The potential need to refine the boundaries of Village Commercial and Economic Development Zone districts; and, in the EDZ, to allow some level of mixed commercial-residential use

The need to clear up ambiguities and inconsistencies in the Land Use Ordinance, some of which arose when several individual ordinances were incorporated into a consolidated Land Use Ordinance