

**CITY OF BELFAST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
JANUARY 2021**

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SECTION 1.1 LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

To the readers of this Comprehensive Plan update:

In 2019, the Belfast City Council appointed a Comprehensive Plan Committee with the task of providing a basic update of the previously approved Comprehensive Plan which was adopted in 2012. The Comprehensive Plan Committee was comprised of residents from various Wards of the City. The following plan is the result of this Committee's efforts over the course of 2019 and 2020.

The Committee, with planning assistance from The Musson Group, went through, in detail, each section of 2012 Comprehensive Plan to update data, statistics and subsequent analysis as well as ensuring consistency with the State of Maine's Growth Management Act. The Committee also discussed each section's goals and strategies and made changes where items were determined to have been completed since 2012 or no longer relevant to the current plan.

An outline of the public participation executed as a part of planning process and dating back to 2012 can be found in Section 2.2 (Public Participation Process) of this Plan. In addition to monthly Committee meetings, which were open to the public and advertised, the planning process involved outreach to various City Committees and Department Heads, discussions with members of the public and City Council updates. A formal Public Hearing on the plan update will be scheduled after the Plan is submitted to the State for review. The Committee's meeting agendas and materials are posted on the City's webpage.

As part of the recommended process, the Comprehensive Plan Committee has also been tasked with continuing to meet in order to take a deeper dive into goals, policies, and land use issues that might need to be changed or addressed in the future. This continued planning phase will include additional public outreach and a community wide survey. The result of this effort will be completed in 2022 with a possible plan update.

SECTION 2.1 VISION STATEMENT

Belfast is a historic, geographically large, coastal service center community that depends upon its people. Our overall vision is to maintain and enhance the vitality of Belfast.

We seek diverse opportunities for all residents and business owners to support themselves through work, education, and community. We seek the revitalization of older buildings and facilities and new development that benefits individuals and the community as a whole, without burdening City taxpayers. We seek to remain the hub of Waldo County, the ‘Shire Town’, attracting economic development as an employment, retail, civic and cultural center. We seek to continue and expand regional cooperation in matters in which the City shares common interests with other municipalities.

We seek to protect our City’s historic and natural assets, which have defined Belfast through the generations, and upon which many derive justified pride. A clean environment is essential for our basic health and livelihood, and should be safeguarded.

Each chapter of this comprehensive plan provides data, analysis, policies, and recommendations (known as implementation strategies). The City will consider these recommendations in its decision-making including proposals to amend ordinances and to provide municipal services. This plan lays out a framework by which the City, over the next ten years, can address the various issues raised. This plan is an “enabling” document; one that attempts to identify local problems at this moment and point out paths to possible solutions. Some well thought out ordinance amendments may and probably should ultimately result, but they will each be based on a public participation process subject to a vote at a future City Council meeting. Public participation is crucial to ensure that Belfast citizens understand the costs and benefits of the options considered and support the decisions made. Because this document is a plan, it will require periodic revision to incorporate new data, to respond to new trends, and to react to new realities.

The implementation of the seven key themes described in the Proposed Land Use Chapter of this plan, summarized in the following paragraphs, will help us to achieve our vision.

Waterfront & Downtown Area. The City’s downtown and working waterfront area differ from any other area in Belfast. It is important that the City recognize their importance and unique qualities and adopt land use policies and direct capital expenditures to ensure the health of this area. This is a growth area. (shown in purple on the adopted overall land use map)

Existing Residential. Much of this area is located within the by-pass and is shaped by long established residential neighborhoods. It also includes lands along the coast near the Northport line and along the River near Robbins Road and Patterson Hill. While

additional residential development can occur in these areas, the amount of growth which likely can be accommodated is less than in the area identified as Encouraging New Residential. This is a growth area, but mostly because of existing development patterns. (shown in light yellow on the adopted overall land use map)

Encourage New Residential Area. This area presents real opportunities in which to encourage new or additional denser housing development. These areas often are located close to services, schools, shopping and major employers, and there is adequate land to encourage new housing without facilitating sprawl. This is a growth area. (shown in light orange on adopted overall land use map)

Mixed Use/Growth. Most of these areas now support a mix of development, including businesses that cater to both the tourism and local market, as well as housing. Public sewer and water usually is available, and often there is sufficient vacant or underdeveloped land to support future development. The areas are near major roads, usually Route 1. Allowing a mix of development can present challenges, but this approach reflects how owners have chosen to use their properties. (shown in light blue on the adopted land use map)

Jobs Area. This area now supports most of the larger employers in Belfast, including Waldo County General Hospital, and there is additional land to support future job creation development. The area is adjacent to the City's main road arteries, and often there is less likelihood of conflict between new intensive development and existing residential development. This is a growth area. (shown in burnt orange on the map)

Main Retail. This area near Route 3 supports most of the intense and larger scale retail development, including businesses which are nationally recognized, which now occurs in Belfast. It also is the area in which the City has chosen to seek development of a larger retail store that offers general merchandise. This is a growth area. (shown in pink on the map)

Rural Area. This area comprises greater than 50% of the land area in Belfast. While there are a significant number of single family homes in the area, most are located on larger lots and there is a significant amount of undeveloped land that is either forested or active or former farm fields. Many of the lots are greater than 50 acres in size. The City recognizes that development will occur in this area, but it is an area in which the City should not extend public sewer or allow significant levels or types of nonresidential development. This is a rural area. (shown in light green on the map)

SECTION 2.2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS BELFAST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The preparation of the City of Belfast's Comprehensive Plan was a major undertaking for the City. Most work was charged to the Comprehensive Planning Committee, a 7 member volunteer Committee appointed by the City Council in 2003, a standing Committee which is identified in the City Charter. Most staff support to the Committee was provided by the Code and Planning Department, with additional work provided by the Midcoast Regional Planning Commission. In 2019, the City Council appointed an updated Committee to, with the help of The Musson Group, update the Plan that was adopted in 2012 with current trends and data. The goal of this update was to update the Comprehensive Plan inventory chapters with recent data and statistics to bring the Comprehensive Plan up to date.

The 2003 Comprehensive Planning Committee conducted considerable research and background work in preparing all components of this Plan. It focused much of its attention in preparing recommendations in the Future Land Use Plan (Section 4 of this Plan) and the Policies and Strategies identified in the respective chapters of Section 3 (Required Topic Areas). The Committee thoroughly discussed and debated the recommendations which ultimately did and did not make it into this Plan. Some recommendations involved preparing multiple drafts of the proposed language until consensus was reached or a vote was taken. The 2019/2020 Committee reviewed and amended each chapter, including Policies and Strategies, to reflect what has been completed since the 2012 was drafted.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee initiated work on this Plan nearly 20 years ago. In 2003, the City launched its efforts by conducting a series of well attended neighborhood meetings; 13 meetings over 4 months which attracted about 300 participants. The City provided notice to all property owners in various sections of the City and asked the residents to come out and speak with the Committee about issues with which they were concerned. The City has a report available which describes information provided at the neighborhood meetings. The City, with the support and encouragement of the Comprehensive Planning Committee, soon thereafter pursued the preparation and adoption of several Ordinance amendments to City Zoning and Shoreland Zoning Ordinances to address several specific concerns that were raised.

In 2004 – 2005, the Committee formulated its initial recommendations for the Future Land Use Plan and conducted two public informational meetings in the spring of 2005 to solicit public comment. These meetings were well attended and the Committee used comments offered at the meetings to decide how to pursue potential revisions to the proposed Land Use Plan. The Committee also worked with Planning Board and Council to advocate and pursue amendments to the Zoning and Shoreland Ordinances for the Working Waterfront Area, with a focus on implementing contract rezoning provisions to allow the redevelopment of the former Stinson Seafoods plant which closed in 2001. The Council adopted the Committee's recommendations

in 2004, and shortly thereafter participated in the review of an initial redevelopment proposal for the former Stinson Seafoods property.

In 2006 - 2007 the Committee refined its work on the Future Land Use Plan and began preparing draft language for the 12 Required Topics identified in the Growth Management Act. The key issue confronting Belfast at the time was to arrive at community consensus regarding the regulation of larger retail developments. The Committee investigated potential locations and options to regulate larger retail development, and perhaps emblematic of the community's view of such development, offered both majority (4 Committee member votes) and minority (3 votes) reports on its recommendations for larger development. The Council, in 2007 and in 2008, adopted Ordinance amendments to implement what is locally known as the 'great compromise', through which the City would allow the development of one larger general retail merchandise store in a limited section of the Route 3 Commercial zoning district. These Ordinance amendment meetings often involved the Comprehensive Planning Committee, the Planning Board and the Council, and the public hearings attracted much public participation. The Ordinances which were adopted are identified as recommendations in the Future Land Use Plan.

By 2008, many of the original members of the Comprehensive Planning Committee were no longer serving on the Committee. The reconstituted Committee re-examined and completed work on a revised Future Land Use Plan. In September – October 2008 the Committee conducted 2 public informational meetings on the recommended Future Land Use Plan, and in November conducted two follow-up public meetings on the Plan. In March 2009, the Committee delivered its final report to the City Council on said Plan.

In April 2009 the Committee met with the Council at two workshop meetings to discuss its recommendations in the Final Land Use Plan. Post these joint workshop meetings the City Council met at 6 workshop meetings and 2 regular Council meetings to review and refine the Future Land Use Plan. The Council, in September and October 2009 conducted public hearings on the Land Use Plan and at its meetings of October 13 and 27, 2009, chose to adopt the Land Use Plan, including amendments they had directed to the Plan.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee, in 2010 and 2011, turned its attention to preparing specific recommendations, draft language, to address the concerns raised in the 12 required topics. The Committee reviewed and approved final versions of the resource maps, the analytical information presented in the respective Sections, and the policies and strategies recommended for Council action. Most of this work occurred at the Committee level with limited members of the public appearing at Committee meetings. The Committee, however, did reach out to other City Committees and community organizations which had specific knowledge and experience regarding issues identified in the 12 topics. These outreach efforts included:

- Section 3.1 Historic & Archaeological Resources - Belfast Historical Society
- Section 3.2 Water Resources - Belfast Water District
- Section 3.4 Agricultural & Forestry Resources - Maine Farmland Trust

- Section 3.5 Marine Resources - Belfast Harbor Committee and Harbormaster
- Section 3.7 Economy - Belfast Economic Development Committee (no longer exists)
- Section 3.8 Housing - WaldoCAP
- Section 3.9 Recreation - Belfast Parks and Recreation Committee

In addition, Department staff and Midcoast Regional Planning Commission staff interacted with appropriate other City staff to assist in preparing Chapter 10, Transportation, Chapter 11, Public Facilities and Services, and Chapter 12, Fiscal Capacity & Capital Investment Plan.

While the Committee completed most of its work on good quality drafts of the language for the 12 required topics in 2011, Code and Planning Department staff were unable to complete final drafts of these Sections until late 2012. A final draft Plan, a Plan which includes all elements required by the Growth Management Act and the accompanying Review Criteria, was delivered to the Belfast City Council at its regular meeting of November 20, 2012.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee and the work accomplished in preparing this Plan has often led the way in how the City has considered and pursued land use and similar policy questions. All Committee meetings were open for public participation. The neighborhood meetings and public meetings which the Committee conducted attracted over 800 participants.

The City of Belfast thanks each and every member of the Comprehensive Planning Committee which volunteered their time and their ideas and passion to the completion of this Plan.

REGIONAL COORDINATION

Introduction

Comprehensive planning recognizes the importance of regional cooperation and coordination. The land uses in one community can impact another community, particularly when that land use is located near municipal boundaries. Belfast is bordered by the Towns of Belmont and Morrill to the west, the Towns of Waldo and Swanville to the north, the Town of Northport to the South, the Town of Searsport to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean. Many residents in these surrounding smaller communities are dependent upon Belfast because it is the principal service center for commercial goods and services, medical services and employment opportunities, and is the county seat.

Land Use Planning and Ordinances

The next table shows the status of comprehensive plans in the surrounding communities.

Town	Comprehensive Plan	State Consistency
Belmont	Yes (1993)	Yes (1997)
Morrill	Yes (2017)	Yes (2017)
Northport	Yes (2003)	Yes (2003)
Searsport	Yes (2018)	Yes (2019)
Swanville	Yes (1991)	No (1991)
Waldo	Yes (1994)	Yes (1993)

The next table lists the zones in the communities that border Belfast. There are no conflicting land use zone/districts, and most uses in the surrounding communities that are located within ½ mile of their respective boundary with Belfast are similar to the type and intensity of land use that occurs in Belfast. This is true regardless if the joint border occurs on a major road, such as Route 3 (Belmont) or Route 1 (Searsport and Northport), or a lesser road, such as the Back Belmont Road (Belmont), Routes 7 and 137 (Waldo), Oak Hill Road (Swanville) or Route 52 (Northport).

Town	Districts/Zones bordering Belfast	Minimum Lot Size [sewered] in acres or sf (square feet)	Minimum Road Frontage [sewered] in ft (feet)
Belmont	a. Rural Residential b. SZ (Stream Protection)	2 acres	200 ft
Morrill	SZ (Stream Protection)	40,000 sf residential/recreation; 60,000 sf other	NA
Northport	SZ (Stream Protection, Resource Protection, Marine Residential-Recreational 1)	60,000 sf	NA
Searsport	a. Rural Agriculture b. Mixed Residential c. Residential 2 d. SZ (Limited Commercial)	a. 3 acres b. 20,000 sf [7,500 sf] c. 60,000 sf d. 30,000 sf residential; 60,000 sf other	a. 200 ft b. 100 ft c. US 1 state standards, other roads 100 ft d. NA
Swanville	SZ (Stream Protection)	40,000 sf residential/recreation; 60,000 sf other	NA
Waldo	SZ (Stream Protection)	2 acres (town wide, supersedes smaller minimums in SZ)	200 feet (town wide)

Note: Morrill, Northport, Swanville and Waldo do not have zoning districts beyond shoreland zoning (SZ). See the Land Use and Natural Resources Chapters for more information.

Economy

Belfast is the principal service center community for the labor market area and for Waldo County. Most of the region’s jobs are located in Belfast. Belfast residents share with other towns within a wide commuting distance the effects of regional economic activities as noted in the Economy chapter of this plan. Recommendations have been suggested to retain and expand Belfast’s own economic activities while retaining as much as possible of the marine, rural and agricultural activities that have been its historic economic base and which still provide much of the region’s scenic character. See the Economy Chapter for more information.

Education

Education services in Belfast and the surrounding communities are delivered through a regional approach. Regional School Unit #71 (RSU #71) serves the communities of Belfast, Belmont, Morrill, Searsport, and Swanville. Six of the nine RSU #71 schools are

located within Belfast. See the Public Facilities and Services Chapter and the Population Chapter for more information.

Recreation

Belfast's recreational facilities and opportunities are generally satisfactory for a community its size. Neighboring towns also enjoy using facilities and programs available in Belfast, particularly for organized youth groups and the City's parks. See the Recreation Chapter for more information.

Public Facilities and Services

Belfast provides most of its own public services, unlike many of the surrounding towns that receive police protection from the Waldo County Sheriff and the State Police. The Belfast Fire Department has a mutual aid agreement with surrounding communities.

Medical service is primarily provided by Waldo County General Hospital in Belfast. Emergency medical transportation is coordinated by EMS/Ambulance in Belfast. Several of the neighboring towns have agreements for EMS provided by Belfast. See the Public Facilities and Services Chapter for more information.

Transportation

US Route 1 and State Routes 3, 7, 52, 137 and 141 traverse Belfast, linking the City points east, west and south. Daily bus service is offered through Waldo CAP and Concord Trailways, to Bangor, Boston, and points in between. General aviation is provided by Belfast Municipal Airport. Most residents depend upon private vehicles to get to work and to shop since public transportation is insufficient. See the Transportation Chapter for more information.

Natural Resources

The Passagassawakeag River flows from Waldo into Belfast, as do several small streams, Webster Brook and Marsh Brook. The Goose River flows from Swanville into Belfast and Upper Mason Pond. Searsport, Belfast and Northport share frontage on Penobscot Bay. The Little River flows between Belfast and Northport and the city line divides Belfast Reservoir (1) with Northport. To the extent that any future development might impact these shared water resources, it would be beneficial to include the surrounding towns in such planning. Water quality is affected by all of the communities that border water bodies and the greater watershed. The Coastal Mountains Land Trust, Maine Farmland Trust and other groups have assisted landowners to preserve portions of land fronting water. See the Water Resources, Critical Natural Resources, Agricultural and Forestry Resources, and Marine Resources Chapters for more information.

Housing

The supply of affordable workforce housing is crucial to the local and regional economy. Belfast has a larger supply of housing, both owner-occupied and rental, than neighboring communities, including subsidized housing for eligible low-to-moderate income persons, the elderly, and the disabled. However, since Belfast is a service center community, property taxes are higher than in the surrounding municipalities. Residential development has and often continues to occur inland at farther distances from Belfast, where housing costs, land, and property taxes are generally lower. See the Housing Chapter for more information.

Regional Recommendations/Implementation Strategies

Refer to the Recommendations/Implementation Strategies in each of the above referenced chapters for recommendations that include regional cooperation and coordination.

From the Economy Chapter:

- Support Chamber of Commerce outreach efforts to expand market for local businesses. Consider continuing ongoing funding for the Chamber based upon measurable results, like the creation and retention of businesses and jobs in Belfast.
- Explore opportunities to participate in meaningful regional economic development efforts.
- Work with neighboring communities to explore joint opportunities for economic development.

From the Housing Chapter:

- Consider creating a community affordable housing committee and/or regional affordable housing coalition.
- Work with interested local organizations and individuals to oversee the development of a housing strategy that sets forth regulatory and non-regulatory techniques designed to provide for a range of affordable housing opportunities within the City of Belfast.
- Identify potential non-profit and for-profit developers and create partnerships to explore and develop housing opportunities, including both the rehabilitation of existing buildings and new construction.

- Continue to work with regional, state-wide and national organizations which have constructed affordable housing projects in Belfast, including housing projects which have often targeted persons with specific needs, to increase the availability of affordable housing in Belfast. These organizations include but are not limited to PenquisCAP, Volunteers of America and Coastal Enterprises.
- To meet housing needs of the elderly, the City will encourage participation in programs, grants and projects, within the City or the region to insure sufficient, affordable housing options for its elderly citizens, including the permitting of Community Living/Congregate Housing facilities.

From the Transportation Chapter:

- Continue to update a prioritized five-year improvement, maintenance, and repair plan for local/regional transportation system facilities that reflects community, regional, and state objectives.
- Update a multi-year road improvement program to include maintenance, upgrading and rebuilding priorities by year, as well as costs for these projects, for all roads.
- Initiate or actively participate in regional and state transportation and land use planning efforts.
- Work with the MaineDOT as appropriate to address deficiencies in the system or conflicts between local, regional, and state priorities for the local transportation system.

From the Recreation Chapter:

- Work with public and private partners to extend and maintain a network of trails for motorized and non-motorized uses. Connect with regional trail systems where possible.
- Give particular attention to the need for City-owned cross-country skiing and nature study areas, and City-owned walking/jogging paths and the need for public access to Upper and Lower Mason Ponds and Belfast Harbor.

From the Marine Resources Chapter:

- Implement any local or regional harbor or bay management plans, or work with neighboring communities to create a harbor management plan for shared resources.

From the Water Resources Chapter:

- Participate in local and regional efforts to monitor, protect and, where warranted, improve water quality.

From the Critical Natural Resources Chapter:

- Initiate and/or participate in inter-local and/or regional planning, management, and/or regulatory efforts around shared critical natural resources.

From the Agricultural and Forestry Resources Chapter:

- Include agriculture and commercial forestry operations in local or regional economic development plans.

From the Public Facilities and Services Chapter:

- Explore options for regional delivery of local services, such as but not limited to EMS Services.
- Continue to support the Belfast Water District to work with Swanville and Searsport for the mutual protection of the aquifer, and to monitor any potential impacts from the Swanville dump/transfer station on the quality of the ground water. Continue to review water quality of the ground water. Continue to review water quality tests with District officials (City Council and Code Enforcement Officer).

From the Future Land Use Plan

- Meet with neighboring communities to coordinate land use designations and regulatory and non-regulatory strategies.
- Provide the code enforcement officer with the tools, training, and support necessary to enforce land use regulations, and ensure that the CEO is certified with 30-A M.R.S.A. §4451.