

Belfast Leadership and Action Summit

A Summary Report April 2007

**Submitted by
Alan Hinsey, KWRED**

Overview:

Over the past several years, business, government and community leaders and a wide range of interested citizens in Belfast have been considering how best to move the local economy forward. There has been quite a bit of lively discussion and debate and many groups have been engaged in the process. In November 2006 the City received the final draft of the Belfast “Vibrancy Report” (Crane Associates, Burlington, Vt.). This report laid out a series of recommendations for the City to consider to ensure that a thriving and sustainable economy for Belfast is achieved.

In addition to the “Vibrancy Report,” a number of other significant studies have been completed in the past few months and are now available to communities across Maine. Two reports that are beneficial for the City of Belfast to consider, along with the recommendations of the Vibrancy Report, are:

1. The Brookings Institute Report, “Charting Maine's Future: An Action Plan for Promoting Sustainable Prosperity and Quality Places,” and
2. The Maine Creative Economy Council Report

With these resources available, Community Leaders and City Officials decided to bring together a “working summit” made up of representatives from various groups, agencies and constituencies throughout Belfast. In a structured, facilitated and action/product oriented summit, the selected participants worked together to pull the best ideas and recommendations from these studies and to develop prioritized action plans that they all can agree on and support.

The Officials from the City of Belfast asked Eastern Maine Development Corp (EMDC) to assist with this process by designing a summit structure and serve as facilitators for the events. Chris Shrum, Director of the Community Development for EMDC and Alan Hinsey, Economic Development Specialist for the Knox/Waldo Regional Economic Development Council (KWRED – a program of EMDC) were engaged to design and facilitate the summit. The cost of the summit was fully underwritten through the generous sponsorship of Unitek.

The summit (called the Belfast Leadership & Action Summit) took place on 2 evenings in March 2007 -- Monday March 26 -- 6:30-9:00 PM – at the Univ of Maine Hutchinson Center -- and Thursday March 29 -- 6:30-9:00 PM – at the Belfast Boat House.

The purpose of the summit was to develop a short list (no more than 10) of consensus-based, prioritized goals that the participants can agree will lead Belfast toward a thriving & sustainable economic future. Groups who were invited to participate included:

- Belfast City Council
- Belfast City Manager
- Belfast Planning Board.
- Belfast Comprehensive Plan Committee
- Belfast Planning Office
- Belfast Economic Development Committee
- Belfast Harbor Committee (and Harbor Master)
- Belfast Chamber of Commerce Director
- Business Representatives (to be selected from the Chamber membership, the Downtown Business Assoc., and other individual business that are important to the economy of Belfast)
- Belfast Arts Groups
- Knox/Waldo Regional Economic Development Council
- The “Bridge to Bridge” group
- The Vibrancy Committee
- Univ Maine – Hutchinson Ctr
- Public/at large invitees (from various groups and segments of the population of Belfast – Rotary, Midcoast Leadership Academy, Education Community, etc)

All of the invited participants were given the following 3 documents to read in advance of the summit:

- **“Creating Vibrancy in Belfast”** – 2006 – Crane Associates (approx 50 pages)
- **“The Creative Economy in Maine”** – 2004 – Prepared for the New England Foundation for the Arts & the Maine Arts Commission (executive summary – 6 pages)
- **“Charting Maine’s Future”** – 2007 – Brookings Institute (brief summary document; an “action” fact sheet, and the 4 page Midcoast Regional Profile from the report)

In addition, a set questions were given to all participants as a “homework” assignment to be completed before the first evening event..

Evening One – March 26, 2007 (6:30 -9:00 PM):
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Approximately 110 participants showed up for the first evening session held at the Univ. Maine, Hutchinson Center. The evening session was broadcast live on cable access public television in Belfast.

Shrum and Hinsey conducted introductory exercises with the entire group, including a review of the process; a discussion of expectations; and a general discussion of the information/knowledge gained from the pre-summit reading assignments.

The remainder of the evening was organized around 2 workgroup sessions. The room was set up with 8 Topic Area work tables. Topic areas were as follows:

1. Downtown and the Belfast Economy
2. Waterfront and the Belfast Economy
3. Arts and Culture and the Belfast Creative Economy
4. Tourism and the Belfast Economy
5. Technology and the Belfast Economy
6. Education & Workforce Development and the Belfast Economy
7. Retaining Employers and Attracting New Businesses (jobs)
8. Marketing/Promoting Belfast

Each participant was asked to select 2 of the Topic Areas to work on for the evening. They then worked in groups to discuss the key economic issues for that topic area and propose initiatives, projects, and goals for that topic area to support a vibrant and sustainable economic future for Belfast. Finally, each work group was asked to prioritize the initiatives, projects, goals that they proposed for each of the topic areas.

As a result of the 2 structured work group processes conducted on the first evening of the summit, fifty-six (56) initiatives, projects, and goals were identified and prioritized by the 110 attendees. See Attachment #1 for a list of 56 initiatives, projects, goals proposed and prioritized by Topic Area.

Evening Two – March 29, 2007 (6:30 -9:00 PM):
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Approximately 80 participants returned for the second evening session held at the Belfast Boat House. The second evening was also broadcast live on cable access public television in Belfast. The results of the 8 Topic Work Groups (from the first evening) were posted on flip chart paper on the wall around the room.

After initial introductions and a review of the agenda for the evening, the remainder of the evening was divided into the following 5 segments:

1. **First Vote** -- Ranking of the fifty six (56) initiatives, projects, and goals that were identified by the Topic work groups on the first evening. Each of the 80 participants received 16 “sticky dots” to be used to “vote” for the initiatives, projects, goals that they felt were the most important for Belfast’s economic future. The participants were instructed to vote for their top 2 choices in each of the 8 topic area. See Attachment #1 – the number in the left-hand column reflects the results of this round of voting.

2. **Tabulating Votes** -- and consolidating/narrowing down the field of Top Priority projects. Based on a review of the votes cast, open discussions and consensus agreements regarding consolidation of various topic areas, the original 56 initiatives, projects, goals were narrowed down to the top 10 (see Attachment #2).
3. **Speeches** – Participants stood and spoke for several minutes in favor of each of the 10 top initiatives, projects, goals selected in the first round voting process. Advocates for the various projects provided their most compelling case in favor of the project and urged others to support it in the second round of voting
4. **Final Vote** – each participant was given only 2 “blue sticky dots” and instructed to cast their 2 votes for the initiatives, projects, goals that they believed were “the” most important to ensure a vibrant economic future for Belfast.
5. **Final Tabulation** – the tabulation of the final vote on the remaining 10 Top Priority projects was conducted. The results are shown in the left-hand column of Attachment #2.

Conclusions:

Overall, we believe that the summit achieved the objectives set out by the community leaders and city officials who initiated the process. The following are some general observations:

- Participation (in terms of number of participants; diversity of opinions; and level/quality of participation) was excellent.
- The participants were generally well informed on community issues impacting Belfast and were eager to share their insights.
- Discussions were spirited (even passionate at times) but always civil and very respectful of others – the participants are to be commended for this.
- The statements of positive/persuasive reasons in support of a particular project or initiative (instead of reasons why a project or initiative should not go forward) kept the focus of the sessions on potentially positive/constructive movement for the Belfast Community (there was no need for negatives – the real-time ability to “vote” on proposed topics gave the participants an opportunity for immediate and real feedback on each issue presented).
- The large group worked well together in the process of reaching consensus to narrow down the 56 items to the top 10.
- While “dot” voting process is by no means perfect, it provided a reasonably effective way for each participant to have fair and easy access into the multiple, weighed-voting process. While not perfect, the top priorities of the entire group clearly emerged as a result.
- By far – the “Working Waterfront” issue – and the “Community Performing Arts Center” emerged as the clear top priority projects for the participants of the summit.

- The voting for the next 3 priority topics were clustered closely together –
 - Comprehensive/Coordinated Marketing Plan for Belfast;
 - Walking Venues/Footbridge& Bike paths, Eastside/Westside Unification,; and
 - Encouraging Commercial Development – in housing (including affordable housing) and retail.
- While the total votes for these 3 topics are below the initial 2 highly prioritized topics — they did attract a significant broad range of attention by the participants and should be considered in the second tier of important project areas to be worked on by the community.
- The remaining 5 project, initiatives in the list of Top 10 fall below the more highly prioritized top 5. However, these 5 areas are also to be considered as important projects (remember – they were prioritized into the Top 10 out of an initial list of 56). These third tier projects are focused largely on the infrastructure needed for long term sustainability of the Belfast Economy

***The Top 10 projects/initiatives/goals
selected and prioritized by the summit participants:***

Tier One - MUST Address – significant level of focus & support – very high community value placed on these concepts/projects

1. Maintain friendly, real, working waterfront
2. Multi-use Community Performing Arts/Conference Center

Tier Two – Important Near Term Projects – broad range of community support – community sees these as important (now) for economic success of Belfast

3. Comprehensive/Coordinated Marketing Plan for Belfast
4. Unification of Eastside/Westside – for strong sustainable tourism strategy (walking venues, footbridge, bike paths, etc)
5. Encourage Commercial Development – housing, affordable housing, retail

Tier Three – Important for Long Term Sustainability of Belfast Economy

6. Develop a Business Incubator for Belfast
7. Promote Technology Infrastructure Enhancements for Belfast
8. Raise Educational Aspirations – at all levels – throughout Belfast
9. Develop/promote a Festival Plan for Belfast (centered around Arts & Culture)
10. Strengthen the Chamber of Commerce – including unified/coordinated marketing with various groups in Belfast

Recommendations/Next Steps:

The Belfast Leadership and Action Summit and the resulting prioritization of project areas was only one more step in the process for Belfast. Now, the community leaders and city officials of Belfast may have a better understanding of the collective wishes and wisdom of many of the knowledgeable and engaged members of their community. The priorities of this group of Belfast citizens regarding what they believe are the most important issues to be addressed to ensure a vibrant economic future for Belfast, clearly emerged. Now, community leaders and city officials must undertake the work (the “action”) needed to address these high priority issues for Belfast. Here are our brief recommendations regarding next steps:

- Widely publicize this report and the results of the prioritization process that took place at the Summit.
- Form an one time/short term “Leadership and Action Follow-up Team” (volunteers)
 - Team to be made up of a balanced number of private citizens and public officials (optimal size – 12 – 15) ;
 - Team membership should come directly from the Summit participant list;
 - The Team will select its own leadership structure and short term operating rules;
 - This should not be a formal committee appointed by the City Council – but rather it should be a broad, community-based group guided by the priorities that came out of the Summit.
- The “Leadership and Action Follow-up Team” should do the following:
 - Analyze the findings of the summit;
 - Confirm the top priority list;
 - As a group, clearly define the projects and develop concise project statements for each selected high priority project area in the Three Tiers;
 - This will be no more than one small paragraph
 - Assign the clearly defined project for action and implementation
 - The Team may assign the Top 10 priority projects to an existing group or unit of government; to a combination of groups and/or units of government; or to new groups/organizations that they may feel are needed to ensure that the project is fully accomplished.
 - The Team should be able to complete this task in 2 to 3 meetings – then disband.
 - We recommend that the 2 or 3 Team meetings be facilitated by an outside person – to ensure that the Team 1) stays focused on the summit outcomes; 2) stays on task; and 3) stays focused on the future positive actions needed to implement the goals of the summit.
- The Team should send the written Project Statements and assignments to the Belfast City Council – and be available to present those recommendations to the Council, if needed.

The above recommendations are merely one way to begin the process of converting the priority projects list into actionable plans and strategies. However the community leaders and city officials of Belfast choose to proceed, EMDC stands ready and able to assist with these plans and strategies.

Thank you for the opportunity to design and facilitate the Leadership and Action Summit for Belfast. We hope that we met your expectations and further we hope that the priorities that the engaged citizenry of Belfast brought forth out of will serve as a guide as you collectively work to ensure a vibrant economic future for Belfast.

Please feel free to call on us at any time.

Chris Shrum, Community Development Director , EMDC

Alan Hinsey, Economic Development Specialist, KWRED

Follow-up notes/assignments
Belfast Leadership and Action Summit
Top Ten Project list

From “follow-up workgroup” meetings
– 9/20/07 & 9/27/07

#1: Maintain friendly, real, working waterfront

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- Harbor Committee
- Harbor Master,
- City Planner
- City Manager

What? – The Lead Groups noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What a “working waterfront” is
- What is meant by “maintaining a friendly, real” working waterfront
- What groups, orgs, business, industry sectors must be included in the planning c –
- Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead groups noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
- Report will contain:
 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues

#2: Multi-use Community Performing Arts/Conference Center

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- the City Council has appointed a 7 member committee to work on this issue
- it is recommended that the City Council expand that 7 member group to 11 – and specifically add 4 members who have a background in Performing Arts center

development/management, as well as members with a background in Conference Center development/management.

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is Performing Arts Center and Conference Center?
- Are multi-use Performing Arts Centers and Conference Centers compatible in one facility?
- What are the essential characteristics/traits of successful Performing Arts Centers and Conference Centers?
- Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
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#3: Develop a Comprehensive/Coordinated Marketing Plan for Belfast

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- the Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce
- it is recommended that the Chamber of Commerce seek advice/input from:
 - local business/marketing experts
 - other groups in the area, such as:
 - Downtown Merchants groups
 - Arts group
 - University of Maine,
 - Econ development groups (KWRED/EMDC, etc)
 - Etc.

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is a comprehensive marketing plan?
- Who should be involved in the development of the plan?
- Who will be the target audience(s) for the marketing effort?

- Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
- Report will contain:
 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues

#4: Unification of Eastside/Westside – for a strong sustainable tourism/economic development strategy

NOTE – it was decided by the group that a separate “Eastside/Westside” Unification initiative should NOT be developed, but rather, that within each of the major goals/initiatives being planned for Belfast, the Lead planning group responsible for those projects MUST include statements and actions in their plans that will show how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issue has been considered and improved by the strategies and action steps proposed.

#5: Encourage Commercial Development, Affordable Housing and Retail Development

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- The City of Belfast is the Lead org
- it is recommended that the City seek advice/input from:
 - KWRED/EMDC
 - The Belfast Business Development Committee
 - The Chamber of Commerce
 - Elected Officials in the area
 - Belfast Affordable Housing Committee
 - Other knowledgeable Belfast residents and non-residents
 - Non-Profit orgs in the area
- It was also recommended that the City may want to approach Terry St. Peter to see if he would be available o help lead this planning effort

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is meant by “Commercial Development, Affordable Housing and Retail Development”
- Who should be involved in the development of the plan?
- Who will be the target audience(s) for effort?
- Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.
- Also – the lead org should consider EXPANDING the topic to include – general Economic Development expansion of Belfast–
 - Also include consideration of non-profit orgs impacts on the economy
 - Infrastructure needed – roads, schools, technology, etc
- In addition, the Lead Org should identify how all of the “Top Ten” goals/initiatives for Belfast (that came out of the Spring 2007 summit) will be factored into this overarching Economic Development strategy.

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
- Report will contain:
 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues

#6: Develop a Business Incubator for Belfast

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- The group recommened that Jane Haskell of the U Maine Coop Extension Service be approach to serve as Lead org for this effort
- It was also recommended that the Lead org seek advice/input from:
 - KWRED/EMDC
 - The entire Coop Extension program
 - The UMaine Hutchinson Ctr
 - City Officials from Belfast

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is meant by “Business Incubator?”
- Who should be involved in the development of the plan?
- Who will be the target audience(s) for effort?
- Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.

- Also – the lead org should give special consideration to the Belfast Center (the “Red & White Building”) as a model and possible location -- but also be sure to include the entire area of the Town of Belfast in the planning/research relative to a Business Incubator concept.

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
- Report will contain:
 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues

#7: Promote Technology Infrastructure Enhancements for Belfast

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- The Belfast Business Development Committee
- It was also recommended that the Lead org seek advice/input from:
 - KWRED/EMDC
 - Public Utility Commission
 - The “Connect Me” program
 - Area private sector technology firms
 - The Midcoast IT Planning group (Alan Hinsey – contact person)

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is meant by “Technology Infrastructure”
- Who should be involved in the development of the plan?
- Who will be the target audience(s) for effort?
- Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.
- Also – the lead org should give special consideration to:
 - Technology as a tool for economic development
 - Should the expansion of technology infrastructure be “private sector” driven only?
 - Is there a role for City ownership of technology infrastructure (like a municipal utility such as water/sewer/roads)?
 - Are Public/Private partnerships possible/desirable?

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
- Report will contain:
 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues

<p>#8: Raising Educational Aspirations – at all levels – throughout Belfast</p>
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Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- The Univ Maine – Hutchinson Center
- It was also recommended that the Lead org seek advice/input from:
 - Local Educators
 - SAD 34 – Aspirations Program
 - All post secondary institutions
 - Restorative Justice program
 - Voc Tech School
 - KWRED/EMDC

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is meant by “Educational Aspirations”
- Who should be involved in the development of the plan?
- Who will be the target audience(s) for effort?
- Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.
- Also – the lead org should give special consideration to:
 - De-stigmatizing Voc Tech education
 - How to include home school issues
 - Mentor Programs
 - The need to improve the quality of “basic ed” too – not just Post secondary

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
- Report will contain:
 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues

#9: Develop and Promote a Festival Plan for Belfast

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- The Belfast Chamber of Commerce
- It was also recommended that the Lead org seek advice/input from:
 - The Parks & Rec dept
 - Representative form all major festivals/events that occur in Belfast
 -

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is meant by “Festival Plan”
- Who should be involved in the development of the plan?
- Who will be the target audience(s) for effort?
- Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.
- Also – the lead org should give special consideration to:
 - The possible development of a “Community Festival/Events Council” – responsible for planning, scheduling, coordination of a Belfast Festival/Events Plan

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
- Report will contain:
 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues

#10: Strengthen the Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- The Belfast Chamber of Commerce
- It was also recommended that the Lead org seek advice/input from:
 - All other business/arts/econ development groups in the Belfast area
 -

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is meant by “Strengthening the Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce”

- Who should be involved in the development of the plan?
- Who will be the target audience(s) for effort?
 - Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
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 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues

#11: (This is NEW one – added by the Summit follow-up group) – Develop a plan to improve and develop Walking Venues, Footbridge use, Bike Paths, and other Pedestrian Amenities for Belfast.

Who? – Lead Group(s) responsible for leading action and implantation:

- The Belfast Bay Watershed – see if Skip Pendleton would agree to lead this effort
- It was also recommended that the Lead org seek advice/input from:
 - The 4 Eastside residents/business people who specifically made relevant comments on this topic in the original “Vibrancy Report.”
 - Belfast Trails org
 - Belfast Bike Club
 - Rte 52 Crossing group
 - Belfast Business Groups & Chamber of Commerce
 - City Council

What? – The Lead Group noted above will develop a written statement that defines:

- What is meant by “a plan to improve and develop Walking Venues, Footbridge use, Bike Paths, and other Pedestrian Amenities”
- Who should be involved in the development of the plan?
- Who will be the target audience(s) for effort?
 - Include a statement that shows how the “Eastside/Westside” unification issues will be included in this planning process.

When?

- Within 60 days (by Dec 31, 2007) – the lead group noted above will report back (in writing) to the City Council and the public
- Report will contain:
 - a clear and concise definition of the problems/issues/opportunities to be addressed, and
 - an outline of an action plan that lays out the steps to be taken (with projected timelines) to address the issues