

2006



Creating Vibrancy in Belfast Maine



Crane Associates, LLC

Belfast Vibrancy Committee

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Introduction

The objective of the Belfast Vibrancy Project is just what the name implies, to create a vibrant Belfast. This report is the first step in this direction; however, it cannot be the last. All of the actions identified herein must be implemented by someone or some entity. This report is a plan of action that identifies the City's most unique and marketable assets and a strategy on how to capitalize on them. Without following through on the suggested actions, this plan is destined for a dusty shelf.

This project was funded by a grant from the Maine Community Development Block Grant program. The City hired Crane Associates, LLC of Burlington, Vermont to organize the steering committee, conduct the research and complete all aspects of this project. The project scope and budget limited the amount of research that could be accomplished but it was adequate to gain a thorough understanding of Belfast's potential and make unambiguous suggestions on where to go from here.

The reader should be clear as to what this report is and is not. This is a plan to increase vibrancy in Belfast. Vibrancy, however, is not economic development and this report is not an economic development plan. Vibrancy is defined as "pulsating with life, vigor, or activity"¹; to the Vibrancy Project Committee members it means more foot traffic, more parking spaces filled, increases in sales volume, and businesses able to stay open all year long. Vibrancy, therefore, is both a result of and a facilitator for, economic development. A Belfast pulsating with life and activity tells prospective employers that this is a great place to relocate your business. As more businesses move in, it generates more foot traffic, sales volumes increase and the viability of local businesses improves. Therefore, vibrancy is one component of economic development. It is one tool in the economic development toolbox that is used to leverage the ability of the City to improve its local economy. Other tools such as business loan programs, financial incentives, business recruitment strategies, retention programs, and the like are not explored here. This report sharpens one tool - Vibrancy.

A Belfast pulsating with life and activity tells prospective employers that this is a great place to relocate your business.

In order to successfully take advantage of this research and report, Belfast needs to place the implementation of vibrancy -- and economic development in general -- in the context of a community wide system. Each and every one of Belfast's 6,872 citizens is a vital resource. They are active agents in a web of organizations and entities that make Belfast what it is. Advancing the vibrancy of Belfast will require understanding how all the agents and entities in Belfast are connected. We can not rely on only one person or a small committee to implement the recommendations herein.

¹ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. 1988. Merriam-Webster, Springfield MA.

There is no silver bullet in advancing vibrancy or economic development in Belfast. Far too many communities seek solutions to a symptom and do not try to remedy the underlying problems. As a result (and at the risk of self-indictment), high priced consultants are paid through grant funds to write a “plan of action,” yet there is no staff to implement it; or a business loan program is established for start-up retailers but what they really need is accounting and management skills; or incubator space lies empty because the grant funds were available to build it but a needs assessment was never completed. Yes, this report is an action plan, but in order for the Vibrancy Project to be successful, the report must be regarded as just the beginning. Although approximately 30-40 people were interviewed for this project, 4 focus groups were held, several articles in the local media discussed the project, and most, if not all, of the prominent stakeholders were represented, still, too few people and organizations were aware of this project.

This report can act as a catalyst to start a community wide dialogue and maintain a long term vision for this project. The goals were set high: increase foot traffic, increase sales volumes, increase the hours of operations for local businesses and so forth. This is more than one small grant and a 6 month study can accomplish. It requires follow-through and a long-term sustained effort. It requires integrating this project into the whole system of Belfast; not just the business community but the arts community, the educational community, municipal government, the social service community, regional and state-wide entities, and the non-profit community.

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Belfast Vibrancy Committee	
Dawn Blake	Michael Hurley, Mayor
David Carlson	Bob MacGregor
George Darling	Mary Mortier
Chuck Gerry, Chair	

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I. Overview of Belfast



Belfast, Maine is a city with a harbor. The harbor has influenced the city's local economy more than any other natural resource. The harbor's first wharf was built in 1799 and by the time the City was incorporated 54 years later it was the third largest ship builder in Maine.

The City had about as many people in the mid-1800's as it did in the 1970's. Over 600 ships came out of the Carter Shipyard alone. Only 10 were built after 1900.

The preference for shipping by rail and the invention of the automobile contributed to a steep decline in the demand for ships. Nonetheless, the harbor still proved to be a valuable resource as the Sardine Packing industry started in 1911. Ninety-five years later the skeletal remnants of this industry are now being revived into waterfront condominiums, boutique shopping and fine restaurants. Again, the harbor is the reason why the property is valuable and this project viable.

By 1940, another economically important industry located on the waterfront - chickens. By 1950, Belfast was processing more chickens than any other place in the country. Chickens were a way of life in Belfast. The Broiler Festival, Maine's largest chicken barbeque and where the city's finest maiden was crowned the Broiler Queen, occurred every summer. Again, the harbor made this industry successful, unfortunately because it was where the chicken waste was dumped. No one remembers with quaint affection the harbor turning red with blood, the

Today, the harbor is still the magnet that attracts the economy.

odor of dead chickens or the showers of white feathers, but they remember nonetheless.

Not only do Belfast residents remember, but many of those workers are alive and well and some are still of working age. By the time Maplewood Poultry closed in 1980 and Penobscot Poultry closed in 1987 over 2000 workers were left unemployed. While the State of Maine's population rose by 9% during that decade, and Waldo County's population rose by 16%, Belfast's population remained essentially flat.

Belfast in Transition

The only constants through all of Belfast's economic transitions are the waterfront and the spirited work ethic and ingenuity of its citizens. Today, the harbor is still the magnet that attracts the economy. Even though the chickens are gone, the waterfront and the workers are still

here. The financial institution, MBNA, saw the possibilities of Belfast and built a state of the art operations center in 1996 and employed 2000 people. MBNA has contributed to a change in the physical and cultural landscape of Belfast. Their contributions to numerous social service agencies and public spaces have improved the city's quality of life.

The report recognizes, as should those who try to implement the recommendations herein, that Belfast is still in an economic transition. The greatest asset that MBNA, now Bank of America, has given Belfast is not a waterfront park or hospital expansion (albeit they are remarkable expressions of generosity) but it is the opportunity for Belfast to step into the new economy. A national employer in the financial services sector will create opportunities for "new-tech" spin offs, subcontractor support services, and will help residents see that the economic opportunities of the 21st century will not be in manufacturing but in knowledge-based businesses, creativity, and technology services.

Belfast is transitioning into a new economy. What this report does is help the City identify current trends and suggest ways it can use its assets (people, natural resources, and physical infrastructure) to take advantage of these trends. The next section identifies national trends in the economy and how they might be relevant to Belfast.

II. American Economy in Transition

It is important to keep the changes that are occurring in Belfast in perspective. As we strategize on how to create a vibrant Belfast we must remember the external economic forces at work – those forces that we cannot control but can use to our advantage. Just as Belfast is adapting to a new economy so is the United States. Terms like “globalization” and a “new world economy” are becoming common. The North American Free Trade Agreement and the European Union are manifestations of the new economy. Manufacturing in the United States has either lost millions of jobs or the sector has remained flat (depending on which report you read and believe). In either case, most economists agree that the importance of manufacturing in today’s economy is decreasing and being replaced by high technology services and other “knowledge-based” jobs.

These growing sectors of our economy are more complex, flexible, dispersed and dynamic than we have ever experienced. This new economy is changing our society, from the way we communicate with each other and prioritize our national interests, to how we educate our children and arrange our working environment.

“The U.S. economy has undergone a profound structural transformation in the last decade and a half. The information technology revolution has expanded well beyond the cutting-edge high tech sector. It has shaken the very foundations of the old industrial and occupation order, redefined the rules of entrepreneurship and competition, and created an increasingly global marketplace for a myriad of new goods and services. In short, a New Economy has emerged. ...”
New Economy Task Force Report: Making the New Economy Grow, An Action Agenda. Progressive Policy Institute

Technology and knowledge-based employment are not only the fastest growing economic sectors but they are also redefining our economic geography. Location is just as important today as it was during the industrial revolution but the demands are dramatically shifting. Woolen mills chose a riverside location for its power source, the steel industry located near its raw materials and major transportation infrastructure. Major employers in the technology sector also strategically choose locations based on their critical needs.

The spirit and vigor of American entrepreneurialism has not changed; innovation is alive and well. However, today’s innovators are not tied to a place. Just as the mills moved toward water, and the steel industry moved toward the iron ore, knowledge-based industries will move closer toward knowledge and a physical space that inspires innovation. A community’s quality of life is becoming more important as an economic development tool than ever before. Noxious fumes, smokestacks, loud noises, and excessive traffic that were once a sign of progress and jobs now repel knowledge-based employers. Clean air and water, recreational opportunities, safe streets, affordable housing and

quality schools are essential in attracting employers. Entertainment, art, and cultural opportunities, are playing a critical factor as well. The new American economy is forming clusters and networks of like businesses and skills. Fostering an environment of innovation is essential for municipalities if they seek to attract the strongest sectors of our economy.

“Under the new regime of geography, wherever intelligence clusters—small towns, big city or any geographic location—that is where wealth will accumulate. For cities and other communities, the more technology reduces the tyranny of place and past affiliation, the greater the need to make place a more attractive one. Surveys of high-technology firms find “quality of life” is more important to skilled workers than traditional factors such as taxes, regulation or land costs.” The Renewed City in the Digital Age. 2000. Joel Kotkin and Ross Devol. The Milken Institute

The Partners for Livable Communities has done extensive research on trends that are occurring in cities throughout the country as they attempt to meet the challenges of the new economy.¹ Whether or not these trends are relevant to Belfast, we should keep them in mind as we try to understand the broader context within which Belfast operates.

Trend #1. Developing Twenty-Four-Hour Downtowns.

“A successful downtown,” as described in a 1998 Urban Land Institute report, “requires a twenty-four-hour environment, a place where people live, work, and play throughout the day and night.” Twenty-four-hour downtown strategies recognize that developing office space is not enough. Instead, cities must consider other types of economic activity, and cities must consider, especially, what happens in the downtown once offices and other businesses close for the day. Without housing, a twenty-four-hour downtown is not possible. For the first time since the first half of the 20th century the development of housing in and near central city downtowns is succeeding. A 1998 Brookings Institution survey found that all of the cities surveyed are projecting increases in downtown living and in many cases very substantial increases. These include cities with downtowns that have been in deep decline as well as cities that are not thought of as having downtowns.

Trend #2. Fostering Cyberdistricts.

Ironically, cities that did not undergo major redevelopment that modernized their cores with glass-cased skyscrapers have found that late 19th and early 20th century buildings and districts are an asset in the economy of the 21st century. They are discovering that live-work space possible in “funky” old commercial and industrial areas is especially attractive to companies and workers focused on the content side of the new economy. Joel Kotkin has referred to these areas as “cyberdistricts” that have transformed formerly destitute warehousing and manufacturing space into highly desirable post-industrial hubs. In many cases, these districts have become ‘knowledge value’ neighborhoods with strong residential, retail and cultural components.

¹ The Creative City: Power for the New Economy. Resource paper. (no date) Partners for Livable Communities. www.livable.com.

Trend #3. Accenting Amenities.

Portland, Maine, Burlington, Vermont, and Providence, Rhode Island have capitalized on natural and man-made amenities to give impetus and structure to their downtown redevelopment programs. In each of these cities the “magic of water” has been capitalized on in the context of a broad downtown development program, proving that “bodies of water are a tremendous resource for development in cities, in some cases continuing, at least in part, in their original economic function and in others being transformed into centers of animation or mixes of the two.”

Trend #4. Creating Destinations.

A National League of Cities (NLC) report states that, “for many cities in the United States, tourism and the related industries of entertainment, culture and leisure have become a make-or-break sector that determines the health and future prospects of the local economy... tourism/entertainment has become crucial to the economic development of virtually all central cities in the United States, as well as to a large number of suburban jurisdictions and smaller cities and towns outside of metropolitan areas...” What is good for visitors is often good for recruiting and retaining knowledge-based industries and economic development in general.

A city's economic vitality and its ability to attract visitors are closely related. It makes sense, therefore, that in NLC's survey the list of facilities designed to attract visitors is similar to the list of facilities that respondents consider important for promoting local economic vitality. The four facilities rated as top contributors for both attracting visitors and contributing to the economic vitality of the city are: convention center, entertainment/restaurant district, sports facility and festival/retail mall. Historic districts were rated fifth for attracting visitors.

Trend #5. Upgrading Old Economy Enterprises.

Most of the media attention paid to advanced technology in the economy and to its potential for urban economic development has focused on attracting high tech companies or supporting startup high tech enterprises. As important or more important for many cities, is the contribution that technology can make to the adaptation or revitalization of old economy industries. This can occur in several ways:

- 1. Technology can be incorporated into an existing industry to increase its productivity and strengthen its competitiveness.*
- 2. Certain assets of a dying industry can be reconfigured to create the core of a new industry.*
- 3. The disappearance of a major generator of economic activity such as a defense installation or a larger corporate employer may leave resources in the community that can be capitalized on to secure new economy investments.*

Trend #6. Capitalizing on Clusters.

If innovation is a social process and face-to-face tacit knowledge is important, then innovation is also place based. The networks at the heart of the new innovation model function most effectively when their components are clustered geographically in a region. The competitive advantages generated by an industry cluster, states a report commissioned by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, “derives not only from the concentration of related industries, suppliers and services in the same place, but also from access to highly specialized economic inputs that are not usually provided solely by the business sector. These resources often referred to as “economic infrastructure” or “foundations” include workforce skill training, transportation and communication infrastructure, and efficient regulatory procedures. Industrial concentration encourages the development of economic foundations that are tailored to the needs of a region’s clusters, providing crucial sources of competitive advantage.” Clusters are likely to arise “naturally” and, if so, their value can be enhanced by organized effort or they can be initiated in situations where the basic elements are present but undeveloped.

Trend #7. Nurturing Networks.

In some areas of the country, high tech development is stimulated and supported through organized programs to develop collaborations between research and education institutions and local companies. It is not necessarily or automatically the case that a major research university will translate into an economic development asset for a city. Some are passive in the local economy, important as employers and purchasers of goods and services, but not making a direct contribution to dynamic sectors of the economy.

Targeted effort, however, can open the door to the ivory tower. Opportunities can be created to make the results of research available through startup or existing companies. Strong academic programs in areas such as biomedical research, advanced materials and information technology can create a hub of investigation and innovation that stimulates expansion in existing companies and can help attract new companies.

Trend #8. Attracting High Tech Investment.

As discussed above, the location of high tech companies tends to be less influenced by traditional location factors such as proximity to raw materials and markets and the costs of transportation than is the case for old economy companies, especially manufacturing. High tech companies are interested in different location factors. For example, they tend to locate with other companies like theirs and the related supporting networks (see cluster strategies above). They also tend to be responsive to the more subjective lifestyle desires of their owners, managers, and key workers. Many high tech companies can be where the people want to be and, all other things being equal, they will want to be in a place with a desirable quality of life.

Trend #9. Capturing New Economy Spin-offs.

In the new economy, information and telecommunications technology have conquered time and distance, at least for some purposes. As

a result, business functions that previously could not be carried out without co-location, can be divided and some can be located almost anywhere. These include back office operations and call centers. Not normally viewed as high tech in themselves, back office operations include the traditional processing functions required by major corporations, especially those in the financial services industries. Call centers serve both traditional functions such as telephone information and newer functions such as telecommunications service calls and Internet commerce fulfillment. Most jobs in back office operations, though they are made possible by the technology of the new economy, are not, in themselves, highly technical. They create opportunities for workers who may not have advanced degrees but have a solid basic education and good work habits. Thus, they provide an excellent opportunity for cities to tie the benefits of new economic growth to a wider range of residents.

Trend # 10. Investing in Human Capital.

Studies of business location decisions have consistently shown that quality of labor force is one of the, if not the, top factors in businesses' decisions of where to locate or expand. Now, the labor factor has transformed into a "human capital" question and is becoming much more central to economic development, both local and national.

Scientists and engineers who may require high quality research institutions for their work are very mobile and will not locate or remain in an area that does not offer first-class primary and secondary schools for their children.

At all levels of education and training -- from K-12 through advanced research institutions -- places that offer high quality institutions and programs have a significant advantage over those that do not. "The emphasis on education, training, and labor market as a location issue," writes Natalie Cohen in a recent Brookings Institution background paper, "is a major change from a number of years ago. In the past, decision makers put more emphasis on land, buildings and transportation networks. Corporation real estate executives' litany has changed from 'location, location, location' to 'education, education, education.'" As we evolve into a more knowledge-based economy, virtually every company will require technical literacy at all skill levels.

These trends have been observed by economic development specialists around the country. Municipalities successful in transforming their local economy have engaged in similar, locally-appropriate activities. Not all of these trends are relevant to creating a vibrant Belfast; but it is important to recognize the trajectory that the national and global economy is heading so that Belfast can plan to flow with the current instead of against it.

III. Belfast Travel and Tourism Economy

Any municipality that has an active tourism sector is bustling with foot traffic and shoppers with expendable income. Tourism promotes vibrancy. This report must, therefore, look at how Belfast can improve on its tourism trade. In order to examine the opportunities open to Belfast for improved business and visitor recruitment, we must first examine the Belfast tourism market in comparison to Maine and the United States. The external opportunities that are available to Belfast will come from an understanding of the outside forces that regulate the tourism market in Maine. An understanding of Maine's reputation to outsiders and how it excels or is deficient in certain areas is important foundational information on which to build a Belfast marketing strategy.

State and National Trends in Travel and Tourism

The Maine Office of Tourism conducts regular analyses of the Maine tourism industry. Much of this section is taken from agency reports, most notably "Travel and Tourism in Maine: The 2004 Visitor Study Management Report."

The size of the US travel market for overnight trips has grown slightly (+4%) over the last 5 years. Most of this growth was in marketable trips. These are trips where the destination is subject to influences in marketing as opposed to trips where the destination is predetermined (visiting friends and relatives, or business trips). Business travel in the United States was up slightly in 2004 (by 1%) for the first time in five years. However, over a 5 year period business travel has decreased by 18%. The three most popular types of trips in the United States in 2004 were touring, special events and outdoor related trips, in that order. Beach, casino, and business/pleasure trips followed, and all have participation rates over 10%. Although straight business travel has declined over the past five years, business/pleasure trips were the fastest growing type of trip, growing by 19% from 2003 to 2004.

The size of Maine's combined day and overnight trip market was estimated at 43.6 million trips in 2004. There were 34 million day trips taken and 60% of those were marketable trips, followed by 33% visiting friends and relatives, and 7% business. The most popular marketable trip was shopping, followed by outdoor travel, touring, and beach trips. Of the nearly 9 million overnight trips, 46% were marketable trips, followed by visiting friends and relatives at 41%, and business at 13%.

Within the day trip market, 57% of those trips were from non-residents and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the non-residents were from the greater Boston area. Non-residents performed an even greater role in Maine's overnight travel industry. Eighty-two percent of overnights trips were completed by non-residents and 61% of them were in the regional market.

Between 1999 and 2004, the total Maine travel market has experienced no growth. During this time period, overnight trips decreased by 5%, visits to friends and relatives decreased by 11%, and marketable trips decreased by 4%. The reason Maine's travel market remained flat instead of decreasing was because of overnight business travel. Contrary to the United States, which saw a decrease in business travel by 18% from 1999-2004, Maine business travel increased by 12%. In the year 2004 alone, overnight business travel increased by 22%.

Compared to the United States, Maine excels at overnight touring and outdoor related trips. Maine's market in touring and outdoor related trips is nearly twice as large as the national average. In all other trip types, Maine was relatively equal or less than the national average. Ironically and unfortunately, these two categories have decreased in growth from 2002 to 2004. Beach trips, special events, and business/pleasure trips have all increased during this period. On a national ranking, Maine outdoor trips held an exceptional 19th place in 1999. By 2004, the ranking dropped to 28th. The other major categories of travel types, touring, beach, and specials events, also did not advance in the national rankings from 1999 to 2004.

Residents typically make up 20%-25% of Maine's overnight travel market. Non-resident overnight travelers primarily come from the regional market (79%) with the rest from outside the region. A marked dichotomy is apparent between those from within the region and those outside regarding the type of trip they prefer. Fifty-six percent of the touring trips were taken by people outside of the regional market, while 29% were taken by those from within the region. The dichotomy is even more pronounced, but in the opposite direction, when comparing outdoor trips. Three times as many outdoor trips were taken by those within the regional market than those from outside. Five times as many beach trips were taken by those from within the regional market than by those from outside.

The number of Maine day trips from 1999-2004 has remained relatively flat showing only a 1% increase. In 2004, most day trips are taken for shopping at 27%, or for the outdoors at 25%.

Out of state travelers contributed 2.4 billion dollars in overnight travel and another 2.1 billion dollars to the Maine economy in 2004. After including day travelers, a total of 6.2 billion dollars was spent on travel and tourism in Maine. Of the 6.2 billion, 1.7 billion was spent by Maine residents and therefore not imported. The benefits by category, in rank order, are:

1. Retail – 31% of the \$6.2 billion total, or \$1.9 billion
2. Restaurant Food – 28%, or \$1.7 billion
3. Transportation – 15%, or \$1.0 billion
4. Accommodation – 13%, or \$0.8 billion
5. Recreation – 13%, or \$0.8 billion

Total travel expenditures for both day and overnight trips between 1999 and 2004 have increased by 23%. So, while the total number of trips to Maine has remained flat, travelers are spending more money.

Travel and tourism in Maine supports 176,633 jobs, with a payroll of \$3.8 billion dollars, and generates \$549 million in tax revenues. Non-resident travel was responsible for 66% of this total economic impact.

More than half of all overnight trips occur in July, August, and September. Massachusetts was the most important source of non-resident overnight trips to Maine. Massachusetts accounted for 38% of non-residents' overnight marketable trips and the Boston metropolitan area itself for 36%. Massachusetts was the only state that contributed more than 10%. The states that contributed between 4% and 10% include: New Hampshire (8%), New York (7%), Connecticut (6%), Pennsylvania (5%), California (4%) and Rhode Island (4%).

The average overnight traveler to Maine was similar in demographics to the average U.S. traveler except for being slightly older, 44.7 years of age on average versus the U.S. norm of 43.9. However, the reason Maine's average age is higher than the US is not because of an extraordinary number of senior citizens it is because Maine has fewer child visitors than the U.S. average. Maine's largest age category of traveler is the 35-44 year olds. Maine also exceeds the U.S. average in single people, and two-person households coming into the state. Sixty-eight percent of the trips to Maine are taken by households with no children under the age of 18. Most visitors are employed full time in managerial, professional, and other white collar jobs. Thirty-five percent of the visitors are earning over \$75,000. Twenty-five percent are earning between \$50,000 and \$74,999, and another 24% are earning between \$25,000 and \$49,999. Over 50% of the visitors have a college education.

Visitors on an overnight stay to Maine planned and booked further ahead than the U.S. average. The most common planning horizon for the United States is less than a month, yet for Maine it is 6 months. Almost eight-in-ten of the trips were booked ahead in whole or part. The internet was used more often than any other single source of information including the advice of friends and relatives. Of those booked in advance, 40% were booked over the internet compared with 6% through a travel agent. Auto clubs, visitor bureaus, and books were more commonly used for Maine than the U.S. norm.

The average travel party size on Maine trips was 3.4 persons, and comprised of:

1. spouses (74%);
2. children (26%);
3. friends (22%);
4. parents (9%);
5. all other relatives (17%).
6. Only 5% of people traveled on their own.

Trips to Maine tend to last longer than the U.S. average. The average length of a trip to Maine, including all travel time, in 2004 lasted 6.3 nights, well beyond the 5.1 nights for the U.S. The average length of stay *in* Maine during that trip was 4.7 of the 6.3 nights. One third of all Maine visits lasted 1-2 nights, and forty percent lasted over seven nights.

Seventy-three percent of Maine visitors arrived in their own car. Comparatively few arrived by plane (5% versus the U.S. average of 25%). About 5% come by ferry or boat.

Thirty-eight percent of travelers on marketable overnight trips used non-commercial accommodations. Of this group, 23% stayed in their owned house or timeshare, 14% stayed with friends or relatives, and another 1% stayed on a privately held boat. The national average for staying in a timeshare or second home is 2%; Maine is clearly an anomaly in this regard.

The most common commercial choice for accommodations in Maine is a motel. This is 70% more popular than the national average. Hotels, rented houses, and campgrounds were the next most common choices. Seven percent of Maine visitors stay in Bed and Breakfasts or Country Inns.

The most popular experiences on Maine trips were:

1. visiting small towns/villages (64%);
2. visiting the beach/ocean (59%);
3. shopping for gifts and souvenirs (44%);
4. eating a lobster (43%);
5. eating unique local foods (34%);
6. visiting wilderness areas (39%);
7. touring scenic byways (36%);
8. experiencing the natural environment (31%);
9. visiting historic areas (25%).

The Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) estimates that 81 percent of all travelers last year were cultural/historic visitors. Cultural and historic travel in the United States was up by 13% over the last decade. Approximately 56% of all travelers are attracted by the area's culture. Forty percent of all travelers say that their travel is enhanced when they can see and do something authentic (as opposed to constructed). TIA estimates the growing tourism sectors are those that provide enrichment/education, eco-tourism and soft adventure.

In 2004, the most frequently visited regions within Maine were, in rank order:

1. the Southern Maine Coast and Greater Portland/Casco Bay (40-45%);
2. Mid-Coast (25%);
3. Downeast Acadia (24%);
4. Maine Lakes & Mountains (16%);
5. Maine Highlands and Kennebec & Moose River Valleys (10%-11%); and,
6. Aroostook (5%).

The leading main regional destinations were the Southern Maine Coast (29%) and Downeast Acadia (18%) and Greater Portland/Casco Bay (17%). So while the Mid-Coast region ranks second at 25% in frequency of visits, it drops to a 4th place ranking at 11% for the main

destination. Southern Maine and Downeast Acadia are the top two primary destination regions.

The location of the Mid-Coast region, in between the two top destinations, helps explain its high frequency of visitation. If it lay north of Acadia it might not fair as well.

Further illuminating the travel patterns of a Maine visitor is a review of the primary destinations by location. The primary location specific destinations in rank order are:

Primary Destinations by Location			
Portland	32%	Fryeburg	5%
Kittery	28%	Brunswick	4%
Freeport	26%	Bethel/Sunday River	4%
Kennebunkport	26%	Machias	4%
Ogunquit	23%	Kingfield/Sugarloaf	4%
Bar Harbor/Acadia Park	21%	Moosehead Lake	4%
Old Orchard Beach	19%	Lewiston	4%
Boothbay Harbor	12%	Augusta	3%
Camden	11%	Baxter SP/Katahdin	3%
Rockland/Rockport	11%	Calais	3%
Bangor	9%	The Forks	3%
Sebago Lake	8%	Jackman	3%

Table 1: Primary destinations in Maine.

The top five primary destinations are in southern Maine followed by Bar Harbor/Acadia at 6th place and then back to southern Maine for the 8th and 9th ranking positions. So while Downeast Acadia may be the second most popular region to visit, most of that visitation is concentrated in Bar Harbor/Acadia National Park. Bar Harbor is 90 minutes or 58 miles away from Belfast.

Another important observation is that Maine's primary destinations are on the coast. Bangor is the first inland location and ranks 12th with 9% popularity rating. Therefore, when visitors document that their most popular activity is visiting small towns and villages it means they mostly prefer small towns and villages on the coast. Likewise, when data show that touring and outdoor related trips beat the national average by 100%, those trips are occurring along the coast.

When visitors to Maine were asked about their preferred characteristics of a trip, an "adult atmosphere" ranked the highest at 86%. Visitors also come to expect a family atmosphere and a worry-free environment (ranked 77% and 79%, respectively). These characteristics are demanded more from Maine than the average US destination by over 20%. What visitors also expect from Maine is a "unique" experience. Sixty-one percent of the Maine visitor market demands a unique experience; the U.S. average on this question is 42%. All of these expectations tend to provide opportunities for Belfast.

Sixty-one percent of the Maine visitor market demands a unique experience; the U.S. average on this question is 42%.

Mid-Coast Region



Figure 1: Maine tourism marketing regions.

Maine tourism marketing is divided into 8 regions. Belfast is in the Mid-Coast region which extends from Bath to the Penobscot River in Waldo, Knox, and Lincoln Counties. There are 66 municipalities in the region with a combined total of approximately 109,500 permanent residents. While all the municipalities enjoy some level of tourism the major destinations are generally considered to be the following 11 municipalities: Searsport; Belfast; Lincolnville; Camden; Rockport; Rockland; Thomaston; Damariscotta; Boothbay Harbor; Bath; and Brunswick.

The Mid-Coast Tourism Association describes the region on its marketing web site as: "Maine's Mid-Coast is the kind of genuine Maine experience you've always imagined. Discover a wealth of picturesque harbors, rugged peninsulas and majestic lighthouses of breathtaking scenic beauty. Explore our dramatic and alluring coastline by land and sea. Visit our towns, villages and island communities (with daily ferry service), where the hospitality is as genuine as the natural beauty all around you." This is how Belfast is described, "The local flavor of our area can be seen as you walk the docks and watch lobstermen hauling their traps or drive along the country-side to see farmers planting their crops or tilling the soil. Mom-and-pop businesses are on every corner where you can find home-baked goods and a little local gossip. Our area is well known for its exceptional crafts and antiques."

The Mid-Coast region receives over 5.7 million day trips per year and 1.3 million overnight trips of which at least one night is spent in the region itself. Travel data show that a majority of those trips are to Boothbay Harbor, Camden and Rockport. Belfast isn't considered the primary destination for even one percent of Maine's visitors. Merchants along the Route One by-pass corridor stated that most of their customers come from the north. So while 7 million visitor trips are coming to the region, most are not traveling farther north than Camden. On the other hand, Downeast/Acadia sees about 7.8 million trips per year. Bar Harbor/Acadia National Park ranks as 6th in the most visited Maine destinations. This means that that area accommodated approximately 9 million visitors in 2004.

Belfast is right in between these two destinations. It is not a primary destination but rather one that people visit while passing through. Belfast is fortunate that it is on the “tourism trade route”; other municipalities don’t have this benefit. The proximity to large numbers of visitors is an asset, getting them to stop is the challenge. On the other hand, it has been stated often and clearly, “we don’t want to be like Camden” (and presumably Bar Harbor). The question then becomes, how many of these 7-9 million visitors does Belfast want? How many can it accommodate without being overrun? What is the carrying capacity of Belfast tourism? The number of visitors that Belfast currently receives is unknown. Approximately 16,000 visitors per year enter the visitors center at the bottom of Main Street in Belfast. What percentage of total visitors that amounts to is uncertain? The Bay Festival used to have approximately 50,000 attendees in one weekend.

There are 342 overnight guest rooms in Belfast. Assuming a citywide average of double occupancy for each room, only 684 overnight travelers can stay in Belfast on a given date if all of the rooms are occupied. At an average occupancy rate of 54%¹ the city can experience approximately 134,816 overnight visitors per year. This is a far cry from the millions who are going to Bar Harbor.

Overnight travelers, although fewer in numbers, generate more revenue than day travelers. The most common reason for overnight visitors is for pleasure, 43% visit friends or family, and 1% of the visitation is for business. The three most important types of overnight trips are Touring Vacations (elder hostels, cruise ships, historic tours, sightseeing) followed by Outdoor trips (camping fishing, hunting, boating), followed by Special Events (fairs, festivals, races, spectator sports). Compared to the State of Maine, the Mid-Coast region

1 Smith Travel Research, 2006



Figure 2: Primary market area for Belfast tourism.

Lodging and Visitation in Belfast	
Belfast Harbor Inn	61
Seascape Motel & Cottages	15
Admiral's Ocean Inn	20
Gull Motel	14
Colonial Gables Oceanfront Villa	66
Comfort Inn Ocean's Edge	83
Penobscot Bay Inn	19
White House At No 1 Church St	6
Yankee Clipper Motel	24
Jeweled Turret	7
Alden House	7
Harbor View House of 1807	6
Londonderry Inn	5
Mad Captain's House 66	3
Frost House	4
Wealthy Poor House	2
Total Rooms	342
Double Occupancy	684
Theoretical Maximum Annual Visitors	249,660
Assumed Occupancy Rate	54%
Est. annual number of overnight visitors	134,816
Source: Crane Associates	

Figure 3: Lodging and visitation in Belfast.

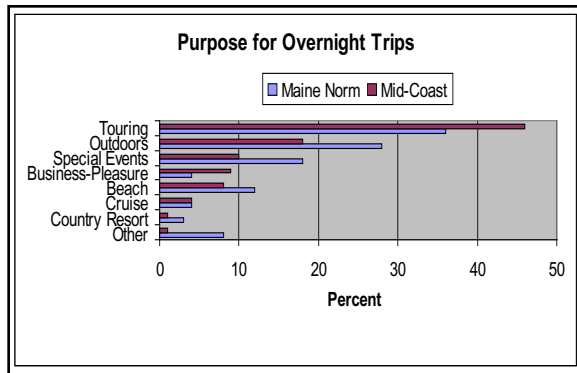


Figure 4: Purpose of overnight trips to Maine and Mid-Coast Maine.

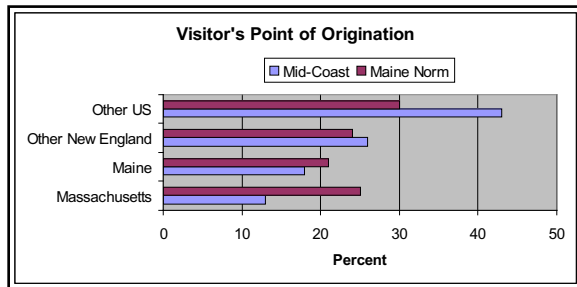


Figure 5: Visitor's point of origination on trips to Maine and Mid-Coast Maine.

excels at touring and business/pleasure trips. Overnight visitors tend not to use the Mid-Coast region for beach purposes, however, the day visitors use the Mid-Coast beaches twice as often as the rest of Maine.

Visitors to the Mid-Coast region are likely to come from farther away than an average Maine visitor. Visitors to Maine are generally composed of 30% from outside New England, 25% from Massachusetts, 24% from other New England states, and 21% from Maine. The Mid-Coast region gets far more visitors from outside of New England than the state average (43%) and from other New England states (26%). Visitors from other points in Maine and Massachusetts tend to go to other regions than the Mid-Coast.

Mid-Coast in Transition

The Eastern Maine Development Corporation has studied the Mid-Coast region for major trends in the economy and demographics. Their work demonstrates that the population in the Mid-Coast is rapidly aging. While the total population has grown by nearly 10% in the past 15 years, the population of 20-34 year olds has decreased by 24%. Belfast population has remained fairly flat, increasing by only (26) people between the two census surveys. During that time, Belfast lost (120) 20-34 year olds and lost another (113) 35-44 year olds.

In total, Belfast lost about 3.5% of its young working population. On a comparative basis, Belfast is doing better than the region as a whole in retaining its younger worker population. However, Belfast has a comparatively older population; the median age in Belfast is 43.5 years while the Mid-Coast region's median age is 42 years.

“The last time someone thought about geographic boundaries was over 150 years ago. It's time we re-think what makes geographic sense in terms of economic development and tourism marketing....”

The EMDC's report speaks to the need to reposition the region to accept a new economy. Consistent with the national trends identified above, EMDC sees the region as transitioning from an extraction based economy to one of “tourism and value-added knowledge-based processes.”¹

¹ Coordinated Economic and Community Development for Knox and Waldo Counties. A presentation by EMDC. 2006.

ing jobs and to import tourism revenue, EMDC states that the region must:

1. retain and attract human capital;
2. preserve and “brand” the uniqueness of place;
3. focus on the needs of a knowledge based economy.

The region’s municipalities must develop a coordinated strategy; they must work in cooperation not competition with one another and create a readily identifiable region. This statement rings back to comments in the Bridge to Bridge focus group discussion where participants stated the need to create a new tourism marketing region. While they were mostly focused on tourism, we need to remember that what is good for tourism and visitor attraction is also good for attracting jobs in the New Economy. As one participant stated, “The last time someone thought about geographic boundaries was over 150 years ago. It’s time we rethink what makes geographic sense in terms of economic development and tourism marketing. I know your job is to figure out how to best promote Belfast and I guess my response to that is ‘you don’t.’ If you just market Belfast you lose.” You need to create a new region and market it as a whole.”

Although the focus of this report won’t change because of this comment, it still rings true in the larger scheme of regional economic development. On the other hand, Belfast is the county seat, a regional shopping area, and the largest municipality in all of Lincoln, Knox and Waldo counties. If a marketing campaign were to concentrate on a single municipality, Belfast should be it. Focusing a marketing and branding campaign on Belfast will likely have spillover benefits to the whole region.

Belfast Institutions

There are several organizations that take responsibility to market and promote Belfast. Below is a brief description of each.

THE BELFAST AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chamber of Commerce has approximately 275 members from Belfast and neighboring towns. The organization is largely run by a volunteer board of directors; however, they recently hired a part-time assistant director and were recently granted \$50,000 from the City to help fund an Executive Director position. The organization hosts regular business networking socials, public events, and operates an information booth near the Belfast waterfront during the summer tourist season. Additional member benefits include free listing in a 90-page area guidebook, other print and web-based advertising opportunities, and a variety of business to business relationship building opportunities.

Their annual budget is typically between \$80,000 and \$90,000 and shows no net capital reserves. According to the Maine Department of Labor there are a total of 1,527 firms in the Belfast Labor Market Area

and 678 in Belfast City. Therefore their current membership is at approximately 20% of its potential. The capacity and capabilities of the organization is limited by the volunteer hours of its active members. There are approximately 20 active members that complete most of the work of the organization.

BRIDGE TO BRIDGE

Bridge to Bridge is a recently formed business group association. Their focus is promoting and marketing the businesses along Route 1 between Belfast and Orland. This marketing idea grows out of the opportunities the new Penobscot River Bridge presents. The new bridge will feature a 442 foot observation tower and will be in its own right a tourist attraction. The Association has approximately 30 members who pay a fee for service membership. Their revenue is mainly from advertising on their website and brochure. The organization's first brochure was distributed in June 2006 in which 61 businesses between Orland and Belfast advertised.

An interview with the organization founding members revealed that the Bridge to Bridge Association grew out of their need to be better represented in the local business community. The founding members are businesses on Belfast's eastside. They recognized that their marketing challenges are different, their customer base is different, and their business community has a unique aspect to it. They felt that only a new organization would adequately represent their needs. The organization is currently run by approximately 6 volunteer business owners in Belfast's eastside.

WALDO COUNTY MARKETING ASSOCIATION

The Waldo County Marketing Association implements one activity. They raise funds, coordinate, and host a group of travel writers each year to the region. The travel writers come to Waldo County and tour the entire area. They write articles about their experiences and publish them in travel journals nationwide. The program is a success by all accounts. The program has a long track record and the articles about Waldo County have given the area excellent publicity.

UPTOWN BUSINESS GROUP

The uptown businesses include those businesses at and near the intersection of Route 1 and Route 3. There are two shopping plazas, car dealers, banks, franchise restaurants, a large grocery, and department stores. These businesses organized to promote their mutual interests. The organization isn't an official entity in the sense that it has by-laws, is registered with the Maine Secretary of State's Office, or has a tax-status. Instead, it is an affiliation of commercial neighbors that speak with a common voice regarding their area of town.

DOWNTOWN MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION

This is a group of approximately 50 downtown businesses. It has a president, working committees and a small budget. The group creates and implements ideas to promote and improve the downtown. They make streetscape improvements, organize holiday decorations, and create sales promotions. They were, and are, active in many successful ventures including the Belfast Bears, the First Friday Gallery Walk, and decorating the trash receptacles with flowers.

IV. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in Belfast

The previous section of this report presented a limited review of the recent performance and evolving structure of the national, state and local economy in terms of tourism and new opportunities. The review used the latest available quantitative data pertaining to the region and city. A quantitative assessment explains the economic data but it does not explain why. Because of the inherent limitations of a quantitative analysis this report also includes a qualitative investigation called a SWOT analysis.

A SWOT analysis is a procedure to determine the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of a particular entity. It uses one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions to determine the uniqueness of a community. It is a highly effective tool for gathering primary data or information not already compiled and not readily discernable from a review and analysis of the numbers. As an interviewee once put it “native intelligence is a valuable aspect of the community.” It is not only valuable for local businesses but also in writing a commercial development plan for Belfast. The underlying purpose of the interviews and focus groups is to understand how Belfast is unique and thereby gain insight into its competitive advantages. The SWOT’s overall objective is to understand the economic development potential of Belfast through the eyes of local business owners and community members.

A community’s Strengths are defined as assets that are owned and controlled by the community; a public park, for example, is a strength. A Weakness is a liability that is within the control of the community; trash or crime in a public park, for example. An Opportunity is an asset that is outside the control of a community; for example, sunny weather, or proximity to the ocean. Finally, a Threat is a liability that is outside the control of the community; for example, three months of warm weather or one company being bought out by another.

A cross section of business owners in Belfast were selected by project committee members to be interviewed for this SWOT analysis. They represented a range of business sectors, employer sizes, geographic locations in the City, and customer bases. A total of 20 interviews with individuals or groups were held between May and August, 2006. The interviews took between 60 and 90 minutes each and involved a total of over 40 people.

Strengths and Opportunities



THE NEW PENOBSCOT RIVER BRIDGE

The new bridge being built over the Penobscot River in Bucksport is causing much excitement. The opportunities to use this new infrastructure as an attraction are so great that it spurred a new regional marketing entity, Bridges to Bridges. This organization has the potential to tie the southern half of the Downeast marketing region with the northern end of the Mid-Coast region including Belfast. The bridge will be completed in 2006. Whether it will attract visitors who wouldn't otherwise come is too soon to tell. At the least, it will redirect existing Downeast visitors to the southern border of the Mid-Coast region.

UNDERUTILIZED STATE PARKS

State Parks and The Maine State Park system has (84) parks, reserved lands and trails. There are six within 20 miles of Belfast including Moose Point, Swan Lake, Fort Point, Fort Point Lighthouse, Warren Island, and Fort Knox State Historic Site. While Camden has the most visited state park in all of Maine, the parks in Waldo County are relatively accessible and crowd free.

LITTLE TRAFFIC CONGESTION

How valuable this asset would be to a tourist should need no explanation. However, it is rarely used in marketing the region.

NATURAL BEAUTY

One group said that a local birder recently discovered that Maine has 292 native bird species but during migration the Belfast bay and area has 692 species. We are unique in that sense. We are a birders paradise. The National Birders Association had their national conference in Bangor – it should have been in Belfast. Murray Carpenter, local naturalist, and Seth Benz, with the Audubon Center, should be contacted and their talents tapped into to promote nature based tourism. We should be promoting eco-tourism. The Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition and the Coastal Mountains Land Trust are two organizations that help promote and protect the environment and are assets to the community.



WORKING WATERFRONT

Some interviewees commented on how a working waterfront is a real attraction. People like to see authenticity. This is consistent with Statewide research that shows 61% of Maine visitors are demanding a "unique experience." Most visitors to Maine don't live along an ocean waterfront and therefore rarely experience a real port. The Belfast Harbor has a good mix of working vessels, such as tug boats and lobster boats, that provide visitors with a sense of historic Maine. The harbor also has shipbuilders and boat repair businesses on the water's edge which add to the authenticity.

"WE'RE NOT LIKE CAMDEN"

The comment "we don't want to be like Camden" occurred so often that it needs to be recognized here. It is included in the Strengths section

because Belfast isn't like Camden in terms of traffic volume and total visitors. The number of tourist establishments such as restaurants, lodgings and gift shops are significantly less than Belfast. Also, on a comparative basis Camden's architecture may be considered more recent and have more buildings that may be considered non-traditional. What Belfast wants to avoid is excessive crowds, traffic and tourism related development. Camden suffers from too much traffic in part because Route 1 goes through the center of the town. Therefore, they receive more traffic than visitors. One of Belfast's strengths is the Route 1 by-pass. This creates a situation where those who go to Belfast want to be there. Belfast is also fortunate that excessive tourism development didn't create a real estate market where old historic buildings were worth more torn down and exchanged for larger and more modern hotels and shopping centers. "People like Belfast because of what it doesn't have (i.e., chain stores, traffic, a faceless city)." People who come here have the ability to relax.

THE CONCENTRATION OF ARTISTS AND CRAFTSMAN

The number of artist and crafts people that are hidden all around here is unusual. Artists, musicians, actors, and craftsmen are a real asset and should be supported. There is a lot to do around here but it is disorganized. The Chamber should be the central clearing house for all activities. The arts bring in a lot of people. The Elder Hostel art programs were the only programs that consistently sold out in Belfast. Visitors want art studio tours, artist speakers, art shows, behind the scenes in art and theater. We should also have an Eco-arts program. We could have an artist-in-residence program where artists are inundated with nature and create art.

WATERFALL ARTS

Waterfall Arts had their grand opening in September. There are 5 levels of art space: private studios on the top floors; public board meeting room for 18 people; Fallout Shelter that holds 100 people for music and meetings; Art library; arts to business symposium; business incubator and networking opportunities. The Center chose Belfast because it is the urban hub of the region.

MBNA/Bank of America

MBNA, a national credit card company, moved into Belfast in 1996. They became the City's largest employer and contributed significantly to the community's quality of life. Donations of land, and infrastructure complimented the 2000 jobs the company provided. Most importantly, the company introduced Belfast to a major new employment sector of the 21st century economy. This creates opportunities for related spin off businesses, support services, and educational programs through the University of Maine's Hutchinson Center.

Bank of America recently bought MBNA and currently employs 2000 people, 650 of whom are Belfast residents. The company recently placed a 132,000 square foot state-of-the-art business building on the market. This creates great potential to diversify the economy and attract another complimentary employer.

BELFAST HISTORY AND ITS HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The Belfast Historical Society and Museum is a great asset to our city. Historic architecture is like a museum in the streets. The museum is open in the summer and lectures occur each month.

LOCAL BANKS

Some mentioned that having a local bank gives better sense of security. Local banks indicate that they are willing to invest in the region; and working with local banks is sometimes easier.

NATIONAL THEATER WORKSHOP FOR THE HANDICAPPED

This organization, located in the former Crosby High School on Main Street, offers a nationally recognized program for handicapped individuals in performance and other theater arts. It creates another venue to promote Belfast to a national audience. It also has space for indoor performances which the City is seriously lacking. This venue has not been used to a great extent for public performances outside of the NTWH mission. There may be opportunities here.

EASTERN MAINE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Eastern Maine Development Corporation has placed new attention to Belfast. By adding a new staff person dedicated to promoting the greater Belfast area, the city now has regional recognition and external support.

Weaknesses and Threats

A WEAK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

A weak chamber of commerce is not presented as a criticism of the organization or people within it, but simply a statement of current conditions. If certain members within the organization comment that it is weak then this report must recognize it and move toward solutions. At the same time that interviewees commented on its weaknesses they nearly all stated that it is heading in the right direction. Most agree that the Chamber is improving.

The Chamber has approximately 250 of the 700 potential businesses. This leads some to believe that it is not representative of the region. Some feel that the name is not accurate. The Chamber should be a regional Chamber and simply calling it the Belfast Area Chamber isn't enough. Most see the new funding for the new Executive Director as a positive step, but they also stated that before they hire anyone a strategic plan should be developed to direct this new person. A plan should include how to market the region, how to include other areas of the city, how to expand membership, and define the job of the Chamber. Some commented that there was too much negative history between the Chamber and other areas of the City, that they should dissolve it and start over with a new organization that focuses on marketing a new geographic region that makes sense.

PLANNING AND MARKETING REGIONS ARE NOT LOGICALLY DELINEATED

Belfast is located on the northern tip of the Mid-Coast marketing region which includes three counties and 66 municipalities. Marketing regions are entities the State uses to measure tourism activities, conduct state-wide planning initiatives and allocate funds. The regions follow county borders which are political subdivisions and have no real relevance to tourism marketing. Most of the visitors that come to Belfast are heading in a southward direction. Northbound travelers tend to stop less, according to merchants interviewed who survey their customers. These comments say that Belfast is more part of the Downeast Acadia Region than the Mid-Coast. Simply joining it to this region may not make sense either since it would be on the southern edge of a region that extends all the way to Canada. Delineating a marketing region based on common qualities and assets is more appropriate. The Penobscot and Blue Hill Bays tie the area together more than the county boundaries do.

DIFFUSE MARKETING EFFORTS

For a region with 7-9 million visitors there are too many marketing organizations. The organizations that promote Belfast include: the Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce; Bridges to Bridges; Uptown Merchants Association; Downtown Merchants Association; the Waldo County Marketing Association; and the Maine Mid-Coast Tourism Association. Each of these organizations competes for advertising dollars and/or membership fees to promote the same thing. As a result, they are either forced to focus on one small aspect or method of promotion (e.g. recruiting travel writers) or the organization doesn't receive enough revenue to do an effective job, or both.

NO VENUE FOR 500 PEOPLE

The City needs a place to hold performances and concerts. The Belfast Opera House has an historic theater with amazing architectural features but it needs millions of dollars of repair.

V. Product Strategy

Introduction



Creating vibrancy in Belfast means attracting people. While individual components such as free parking, a variety of delicious restaurants and attractive architecture are helpful, people still need a reason to choose Belfast over other similar options. Just as a merchant needs to give shoppers a reason to purchase from her store verses a competitor's, so must Belfast create a reason for residents, visitors, and employers to choose this place over another to live, work and play. In this sense, the City of Belfast is

a "product" that must be refined and marketed. Existing businesses need a reason to stay, new employers need a reason to locate in Belfast, travelers need a reason to stop, and residents need to be proud that Belfast is their home.

Existing businesses need a reason to stay, new employers need a reason to locate in Belfast, travelers need a reason to stop, and residents need to be proud that Belfast is their home.

Refining the product of Belfast is much more complex than a restaurant or shoe store refining and directing its product toward a specific audience. A municipality is challenged with balancing multiple interests. Residents, visitors, existing businesses and prospective employers all have distinct, and at times, competing interests. The City's best option in this situation is to focus on improving and build-

ing upon its greatest assets and to tap into appropriate market trends. Earlier sections of this report describe the City's greatest assets and national or regional trends. This section is dedicated to defining the "Belfast niche" and to begin to create a brand identity with which businesses, visitors, and residents can associate. It then presents ideas on how to market and promote this identity.

The Belfast Brand

One of the first places to start to understand Belfast's identity is to read how travel writers describe the City. After a review of travel publications including Yankee Magazine (Summer 06), Fodor's Guide 2006, Moon Handbooks (Maine 2006), Insider's Guide to Maine(2006), and An Explorer's Guide, Maine, (Thirteenth Edition), one starts to read a consistent message. When describing Belfast, travel writers like to use words like "quaint," "charming," "quirky," "artsy," "eclectic" and, the most common, "culturally cool." These independent objective observations are indicators of a very real and distinctive culture in Belfast. This culture is a result of the City's history.

The City's economic past is rooted in the hard work of the marine sectors such as ship building and seafood harvesting and processing. Major economic forces (such as the invention of the automobile) caused a shift in the local economy toward shoe manufacturing and chicken processing, both of which died by the 1970's. During this time, Belfast, and Waldo County in general, became the destination for the "back-to-landers." Young adults from urban areas found Waldo County as a place to live a more independent, self-sustaining life. Hence, for the past 40 years Belfast became the mixing bowl for blue collar workers and hippies. This results in a Main Street with one store selling compost toilets and solar panels directly across from a barber shop selling \$10 hair cuts. No wonder travel writers using terms like eclectic and quirky to describe the City.

This mix of cultures isn't actually new, however. When shipbuilding was at its peak, so was artist Percy Sanborn. A native of Belfast, Percy Sanborn lived from 1849 until 1929 and was a prolific painter. His work can still be seen at the Belfast Museum. The melding of two cultures still occurs today. French and Webb shipbuilders and Wayfarer Marine are continuing the 21st Century version of the Maine coast marine industry while the expansion of the Kingdom Falls Art Center into the former Belfast Elementary School and the success of the Arts in the Park festival and the proliferation of art galleries in town is all evidence that the mix of industry and art is alive and well in Belfast. Belfast is where art and industry thrive.

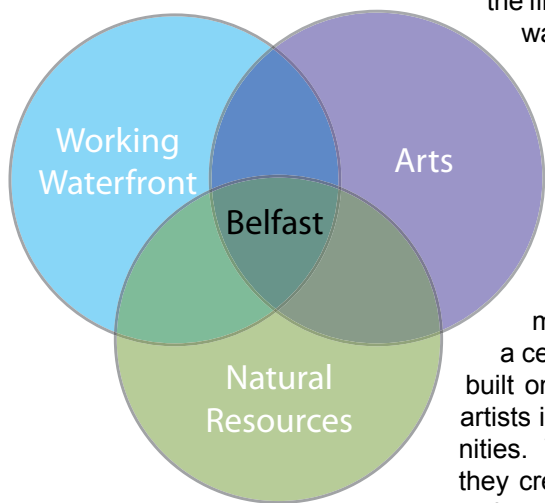
Belfast is not a destination in Maine, nor is it the "authentic" Maine. Belfast is not "the way life was," nor is it the way "life should be." Belfast doesn't tell people how to live. Belfast is Belfast. Belfast is simply the way life is.

Belfast citizens are proud to be part of a community with a diverse history – and diverse future. After interviewing many local residents, here are some of the descriptions people used for Belfast: "a place where you can be yourself"; "friendly," a place that "goes its own way"; "stubborn"; and "a different way of life". Residents of Belfast see their

own city as a place where independent thinking is strong and where a diverse history is embraced and perpetuated.

Any Belfast brand used for marketing and promoting the city should be derived from its history. The City's brand grows out of the common ground between art and industry, between hard work and a free spirit, and from a life based on the realities of the local economy. Belfast always adapted and changed with the economic realities of the time. It boomed in the late 1800's with shipbuilding; it dove in the 1930's; it boomed from the 1940's-1960's with manufacturing and food processing; it dove again in the late 1970's; and now it is booming again with the financial sector and other elements of the new economy. In some

ways, to understand the Belfast brand one must understand what Belfast is not. Belfast is not a destination in Maine, nor is it the "authentic" Maine. Belfast is not "the way life was" nor is it the way "life should be." Belfast doesn't tell people how to live. Belfast is Belfast. Belfast is simply the way life is.



The Belfast niche is not one but a combination of several. First and foremost the greatest asset in Belfast is its working waterfront. The waterfront is why the Irish and Scotch settlers moved up from Londonderry, New Hampshire and has become a central focus of its local economy ever since. Any niche must be built on this asset. Second, as previously mentioned the cluster of artists is a niche that is attractive for economic development opportunities. While artist themselves do not typically employ large numbers they create a quality of life that attracts clean industry and the most active sectors of the new economy. Third, Belfast's high quality natural resources are a marketable niche. While the waterfront is one of those resources, it doesn't mean the working waterfront, rather it refers more toward the aesthetic waterfront and recreational opportunities. Other marketable natural resources are the rich diversity of bird species, clean air and water, and the nearby forests in neighboring municipalities.

These three major assets of Belfast form its unique niche. These are the assets that will sell Belfast more effectively than any other. Marketing campaigns, promotional strategies, and events, should be focused around this niche – the intersection of arts, the waterfront, and natural resources.

Promoting Belfast

Promoting and marketing a place is more complicated than selling a specific product. The challenge comes from the fact that marketing and promotion arise out of the traditional business practices refined in places like Madison Avenue. Promoting a place is not the same as promoting a commodity because a place is a complex package of goods, services, and experiences that mean different things to different people. Furthermore, place promotion is a matter of public policy and public expenditures that must advance the welfare of the whole community. The objectives in promoting Belfast are multifaceted. At times, they even appear conflicting. The Vibrancy Committee would

measure success by increased foot traffic in town, by increased sales, by businesses being open at night, and parking spaces being full. However, they, and the rest of the community, are adamant that they don't want to be "like Camden," that the lack of traffic jams is a selling point, and to some residents an increase in employers is preferable to an increase in visitors. Clearly, a balance needs to be maintained.

Any promotion of a geographic place, especially a municipality, must be sincere. The approach should be original and should arise out of the unique assets of the community. Many communities, for lack of resources or creativity, rely on imitations of past work. We have all seen the multitude of campaigns like: 'B_____ means Business'; or 'L_____ is Looking Up'; or '_____ the Heart of ___ County' or '_____ the Gateway to the _____'; you fill in the blanks. The slogans have been over played. Belfast would waste resources and energy by falling into the trap of modifying a past effort. The simple "I ♥ NY" campaign is credited with significantly helping the city's financial troubles. The hundreds of subsequent imitations are remembered for nothing. The "What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas" campaign plays on the reputation of that city. While these multi-million dollar promotional efforts reaching a national market are beyond the scope of this project, there are lessons to be learned nonetheless. First, keep it simple. Lengthy and wordy messages overrun the attention span of any audience. Second, place promotion is based on its reputation and plays into the assumptions people have about it. Third, they are honest and sincere statements that can be easily made by people who know the place well. We can easily see Woody Allen saying "I love New York" or Frank Sinatra saying "What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas." Any catch phrase for Belfast must sincerely reflect its culture and build upon the expectations of the visitor. Can we imagine the average Belfast citizen saying "Belfast is the way life is?" or can we see the phrase "Belfast is Belfast" firing the curiosity and feeding into the expectations of the visitors who read about Belfast in the travel guides?

The objective in promoting and marketing Belfast is to increase visitors and to attract employers. Fortunately, in the new economy these are compatible objectives. As trend #4 says, what is good for promoting tourism is good for attracting businesses in the new economy. Promoting business in the new economy is much more subtle than it was during the industrial and manufacturing eras when tax breaks, available real estate, and access to transportation networks were the greatest selling point. Today, it is all about the image of place, the quality of life, and the opportunities for personal enjoyment. Ironically, in the new economy, when employers are looking for an ideal location, to some degree, they are more interested in what happens after work than during work. Fortunately, Belfast has plenty of resources (and even more untapped potential) in this department.

Public events in Belfast have traditionally been regarded as fund raisers for a specific purpose or simply as community entertainment. This report suggests that the City now regard public events as economic development recruitment tools. Public events serve the public welfare in numerous ways and can make efficient use of scarce resources.

Public events are the manifestation of civic pride; they draw residents out and make them feel proud to be a member of the community. At the same time, public events attract outsiders who return home and spread the news about Belfast. Some of those people are travel writers and reporters who write about the event. Over the long term a reputation builds. All the while local merchants are benefiting from a temporary increase in foot traffic.

Public events are good for business, good for employer recruitment and good for the residents. In this light, the City would be justified in using public resources to help stage these events and it is recommended that they do so. This is not to suggest that the City doesn't currently help in promoting public events and economic development in general, they do. The City assists with some events where possible and they underwrite certain organizations such as the Bay Festival, the Belfast Museum, the Downtown Merchants, and the Chamber of Commerce. However, if the City had a more formal arrangement with a clear set of tasks with respect to public events it may enhance the capabilities of the private sector volunteers. Department level in-kind services would help reduce the cost of the event and ease volunteer coordination. For example, the Burlington Electric Department helps hang banners on telephone poles. In Stowe Vermont, the public works department provides field preparation and clean up for outdoor festivals. Other municipalities provide services through their police, fire, recreation and public works departments. Belfast should investigate how its City departments might be able to provide services for event promotions.

A schedule of public events should be established and planned to be maintained over the long run. Just as the Belfast brand is culturally-grounded, so must be each event. The City should strive to have 12 events per year. Naturally, it would take a few years to establish this schedule. Start with the obvious and easiest, such as Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, and Arts in the Park. Then concentrate on reviving the Bay Festival by replacing the tacky elements of cotton candy and penny arcades with culturally-grounded elements that celebrate the history and culture of the City such as shipbuilding and the working waterfront (more on this in the recommendations section). Next, festivals in the shoulder seasons should be considered such as an Oktoberfest, Harvest Festival, and Spring Revival. Finally, events during the colder winter months should be planned. The 2-year old "Old Fashion Christmas" and 10-year old "New Years By The Bay" are excellent holiday events that should be sustained. If after 5 years the City went from what they have today to 9 events in a year they should consider this a success. Each event will attract additional, privately-sponsored side events, more foot traffic, and generate ample materials for news media and travel writers, tourism promotional materials and business recruitment packages.

VI. Recommendations

The recommended actions to move Belfast toward a more vibrant community are multi-faceted. Vibrancy is made up of many components, such as marketing, events, business retention, institutional improvements and so on. These components are interdependent and work together toward a common goal of vibrancy. The recommendations presented here are divided into the following components of vibrancy:

1. Events
2. Marketing and Promotions
3. Business Promotion & Retention
4. Infrastructural Improvements
5. Institutional Changes
6. Aligning with National Trends

There is also a hierarchical element to these components which should be recognized. Certain actions are prerequisites for others. Some recommendations can be implemented more efficiently if others were completed first, or some actions can have a longer lasting impact than others. Naturally, those actions with long-term impacts tend to be more expensive and take longer to complete. For example, the benefits of MBNA's purchase and donation of Belfast Commons and Steamboat Landing to the City will outlast the benefits of any one event that this venue will hold. For illustrative purposes, a vibrancy action pyramid is shown here in Figure 6.

The components that are most fundamental are at the base; they act as support for the components above it. The actions further down the pyramid will likely be more complicated to implement, more expensive, and take more time than those at the top. However, these are the components that will serve as a foundation for others. They facilitate many of the actions above it and therefore are the most important. Concentrating only on the actions higher on the pyramid will not lead toward long-term sustained progress toward vibrancy. However, they still serve a vital role. The easier and less expensive actions at the top will tend to boost moral and build confidence which is needed when tackling the more difficult ones. So implementation of these actions isn't necessarily progressive from top to bottom or from bottom to top but from both directions; a priority should be based on what is most appropriate for the city at this time.



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Figure 6: Vibrancy Action Pyramid.

Another observation the author feels compelled to make regarding these recommendations is what is already successful. Too many reports are written about what needs to change at the expense of not revealing what works. Belfast has an amazing supply of creativity and community spirit. The city should be proud of its current efforts such as the Arts in the Parks celebration, First Friday Gallery Walks, hosting the Farmers Market. The City has a new Arts Center, the Belfast

Maskers, and the Museum in the Streets. The waterfront with its community boating programs, the footbridge and other new developments are all great assets that the City has supported on its own. Relative to other municipalities, Belfast is active with many energetic boards and committees. The city is full of ideas and creative residents; they know what will work and what doesn't. Most outsiders don't have this valuable insight. Consultants are most helpful in identifying trends to tap into, suggesting general categories of actions, or specific markets that would be successful in Belfast. No outside consultant can replace the creativity of Belfast residents, but he does help in guiding the city toward more efficient choices. These recommendations are intended to offer a new perspective on the city. They make observations on the underlying causes, not symptoms, of current day challenges to achieve vibrancy such as institutional issues, capital infrastructure and long-term trends. The recommendations then use existing assets and creativity to efficiently achieve the city's goals.

Connecting East and West

Before the recommendations are presented, one issue specific to Belfast should be discussed in general terms. There is a division between the east side businesses and the downtown that can and should be addressed in all of the recommendation components.

For too long the Passagassawakeag River separated these two areas into different business cultures and socio-economics. Today, this history is still felt. However, from the authors point of view there is more history than substance here. The two areas are complimentary matches for visitor attraction and business development. The east-side has a majority of the lodging businesses (and the most affordable ones) and more auto-oriented shopping. The downtown has the walkable streets with shopping and the waterfront that tourists look

The two areas are complimentary matches for visitor attraction and business development.

for. If the downtown businesses want visitors to stay longer the visitors will need a place to stay. Only 7% of Maine's visitors stay in bed and breakfasts, while motels are the most popular choice.

There are no motels downtown. If the eastside businesses want more visitors they will need a place that attracts them. The eastside is not a place that attracts visitors and gives them reason to stay. Some of the businesses there give visitors a reason to stop: banners, "sale" signs, wood carvings and other forms of visual advertising. These are roadside attractions intended to temporarily stop those passing through. They get people to stop but not to stay. Downtown gives them a reason to stay. The two areas are symbiotically dependent. From an outside perspective the two areas need each other. Unfortunately, however, the author has observed and heard opinions that reveal more of a competitive nature rather than a cooperative one. Concerted efforts to change this relationship will help everyone. This should happen under all categories of recommendations especially institutional, infrastructural, business retention, and events.

Aligning with National Trends

The most fundamental actions that the city can do to improve its vibrancy is to tap into some of the emerging national trends in the new economy of the 21st Century. These trends are described above. Some of the most relevant trends for Belfast are recommended here:

DEVELOPING A TWENTY-FOUR HOUR DOWNTOWN

Twenty-four hour downtowns do not mean that the businesses are open all night long. It means that the downtown is a place to work, play and live. Existing buildings should be fully occupied. Upper floors should be developed for residential living. City staff should work with building owners to determine why their properties are not yet occupied. If funding is preventing the development of these buildings the staff should identify how the new TIF district benefits them. Staff could also help landowners apply for grants through the Maine Downtown Revitalization Program. The objective of this action step is to work with private building owners to help ensure that all downtown property is fully occupied.

DEVELOPMENT OF A CYBERDISTRICT

A vibrant downtown Belfast will have wireless internet access from Church Street to the Waterfront. This is an expensive proposition and one that will take a sustained effort. The City Council should appoint a technology committee of individuals highly experienced in broadband internet technology to research the constraints and options for the City. This is not a political committee but a technical one. The committee should study the specific constraints facing the city in creating a wireless network downtown; identify different options available to the city; and provide a set of recommendations within one year of being appointed.

A successfully implemented cyberdistrict will certainly be a public/private venture. One action the committee should take during their first year is to hold a public meeting, specifically inviting property owners, and have a variety of experts from the public and private sectors to provide information on the benefits of cyberdistricts, how to plan for and market cyberdistricts, and who can provide resources and assistance.

Large and small cities throughout the United States are using cyberdistricts to invite new jobs and increase the vibrancy of their community. Lynn, Massachusetts, Blacksburg, Virginia, St Louis, Missouri, Burlington, Vermont and Seattle, Washington are using cyberdistricts as an economic development tool. The State of New Jersey is providing 30 million dollars to municipalities for planning cyberdistricts.

ENHANCING THE WATERFRONT

Belfast already knows the value of the waterfront. From Wakeag Landing to Steamboat Landing, and the number of smaller ventures in between, property owners understand that the water improves prop-



erty values and attracts investors. This isn't news. The city also has a large undeveloped parcel in the middle of this stretch. A private touring company is currently leasing the property and operating boat tours from there. This is good since it buys the City time to understand what won't be developed by the private sector and to plan on filling in with complementary development. The private sector will likely develop dining, shopping, and residential development. The City should plan on using this property to enhance its niche. The Belfast niche is the intersection of the working waterfront/ the arts/ and natural resources

(birds and marine life). Something that enhances this niche would be most valuable. A shipbuilding school, a maritime museum, a marine research institution, or incubator space for emerging marine businesses may serve the city's interest very well. Care should be taken to not develop this property for uses that do not need access to the water.

Other improvements to the waterfront should include upgrades to the pedestrian infrastructure on Water Street. Improved pedestrian access to the footbridge and other businesses there would help these businesses survive. The author made two unsuccessful trips in search of a business on Water Street simply because of the way the area looked. Sidewalks and signage would increase foot traffic in this area. If they haven't done so already, the city should be making capital improvement plans for pedestrian infrastructure along the waterfront.

Institutional Improvements

Institutional issues in Belfast ... are probably the largest impediment to increasing vibrancy, business health, and economic development in general throughout the city.

Institutional improvements are the most critical to Belfast. Although "Aligning with National Trends" appears on the bottom of the recommendations pyramid, in the case of Belfast, Maine they are not the most important. National trends are first only because they are typically more expensive, more complicated to implement, and have a longer term time horizon. Institutional issues in Belfast, on the other hand, are probably the largest impediment to increasing vibrancy, business health, and economic development in general throughout the city. If the City or other entities were interested in investing in Belfast to improve its economic development potential, improving institutional capacity would be the most effective and efficient choice of investment. The two institutions that need internal capacity and personnel improvements are the City itself and the Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce.

THE BELFAST AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

As described above the Chamber is a volunteer-based organization. Only until recently did they hire a paid part-time assistant. There are 275 members and they have an annual budget of approximately

\$85,000. Many of the people interviewed have stated, and the author agrees, that the numerous business organizations that have formed in the City is a reflection of a weak Chamber. Chamber members reading this shouldn't interpret this as a saying the chamber members are weak or have poor organizational skills. The statement reflects the capacity of the organization, not any individual. The individuals running the Chamber are devoted to the organization but they are overtaxed. There are too few active members and too many responsibilities. A Chamber of Commerce is expected to provide a wide range of services that come to be standard expectations based on what other similar organizations throughout the country provide their members. A Chamber of Commerce in the county seat with a labor market area of 1,500 businesses would typically have a paid staff and a diverse array of business retention, promotion, expansion, and recruitment programs.

The Belfast Chamber may be stuck in a downward spiral. Other organizations such as the Uptown Businesses and Bridge to Bridge are forming because they are not having their needs met through the Chamber but the Chamber needs them and their membership dues to meet their expectations. When other organizations splinter off and become successful they compete for membership dues and advertising dollars thereby reducing the chances that the Chamber can grow to serve the needs of future members.

This competition doesn't help the new organizations either. The Bridge to Bridge group has experienced a rapid increase in interest. Sixty-one businesses advertised in their first publication. However, Bridge to Bridge has relatively the same administrative structure as the Chamber: a small group of volunteers do all the work. It won't be a few years before these individuals see that it is more important to focus on running their own business than starting a regional non-profit business organization. If they have enough revenue they may be able to hire staff. That would mean competing for the same regional pool of advertising dollars, and then their chances of success become limited just like the Chamber's. These organizations will either burn out or focus on one specific product like the Waldo County Marketing Association currently does.

All of the business organizations mentioned in this report must come together under one roof.

All of the business organizations mentioned in this report must come together under one roof. In order for this to happen, the new umbrella organization would have to create a strategic plan to meet the needs of each of the splinter organizations. The strategic plan would include the following:

1. an organizational element that defines the working components of the organization. Here you will see each of the current business organizations, Bridge to Bridge, Uptown Businesses, Downtown Merchants and so on as an organizational component, or special project, that recognizes their specific needs and includes a strategy that sets out to meet them;

2. a staffing element that describes the duties and responsibilities of paid staff, their level of pay, job descriptions;
3. a membership element that describes a process and clear action steps that must be followed to increase membership;
4. a financial element that describes the array of revenue sources that are needed;
5. a comparative component where other Chambers of Commerce are described, and where their finances, membership issues, organizational components, and staffing details are used as benchmarks to creating this new organization.

Some of those interviewed believe that the current structure is not regional enough and that a name change is necessary to invite more members. The author is not convinced that a mere name change will increase membership; although, the Penobscot Bay Regional Chamber just received new members due in some part to their new name. However, they also have a very charismatic leader who has many years of management experience in similar organizations. Many say this also has a lot to do with the increase in membership. The Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce may in fact need to change its name but that would be explored and determined through the development of the strategic plan mentioned above. What is more important is substance. Real organizational, staffing, and financial changes are most critical to the future of the Chamber.

The Chamber just received \$50,000 from the city to hire an Executive Director. This is a positive step in the right direction. What also must be remembered is that this is the third time the Chamber has attempted to hire an Executive Director. Past mistakes should not be repeated. Writing a strategic plan first and including all of the business groups in the process would be a new direction for the Chamber and may avoid past mistakes. The City and the Chamber should also sign a Memorandum of Understanding that attaches certain conditions on the \$50,000 including the City's involvement in the hiring process, the drafting of the job description, and performance evaluations.

To write the strategic plan an organizational consultant should be hired. Great care should be used in hiring one, however. Many consultants sell themselves as organizational consultants or strategic planning consultants. The industry is not regulated nor is there recognized professional certifications (worth any salt) and therefore the field is large. Help should be sought in hiring an organizational consultant from state agencies, private corporations and non-profit entities who have worked with them in the past. The President of the Penobscot Bay Regional Chamber of Commerce should also be approached as a resource.

CITY OF BELFAST

The institutional capacity of the city should also be explored. How can the city itself better utilize its resources to advance vibrancy within its borders? The City currently does help in many ways. The \$50,000 to the Chamber is no small gesture. They also facilitated Wakeag Land-

ing with contract zoning, they operate the Belfast Boathouse, pay for Summer Nights, and assist in many projects. These suggestions are not to imply that the city doesn't help with promoting itself. It clearly does. However, the city is a powerful force; it is one of the largest employers in town; it has access to critical infrastructure; and it can help smooth the way for public events and promotions. More planning dialogue on how the city might help should occur. The following suggestions should be explored by the relevant city departments:

1. Police department can provide security services during public events;
2. Public works department can help with public events set up and clean up;
3. Public works department can help with the streetscape beautifications that the downtown merchants currently perform;
4. The planning and assessor departments can be more responsive to the public's request for information. Many people interviewed complained about the insular nature of these departments. The first stop for many potential investors in the city is these two departments; unfortunately, this may not be known to them. Anecdotal evidence from those interviewed suggests that they find the public more of a distraction than an asset. The people interviewed stated that progress in these departments was slow, creativity was stifled, and interactions were cold.
5. The police department has walking patrols on downtown streets nearly everyday in the form of parking enforcements. These employees can be the City's ambassadors. Trained in the basics of tourism and hospitality and armed with a brochure and a smile they can be helping lost travelers. Instead of just passing out parking tickets they are now passing out street maps as well. These city ambassadors are outgoing, observing the public, and helping visitors find their way. Imagine the impression on the visitor when a City Ambassador approaches and says "Can I help you? Yes, the public rest rooms are down on the left" or "Sorry sir, you can't park here but there is free parking two blocks down." It may be the first program of its kind in Maine.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PERSONNEL

The City of Belfast currently has no one whose sole job responsibility is to promote economic development for the city. While the Mayor and City Manager do an excellent job in this area, their responsibilities are spread over many other duties. A city of 6,500 typically has a Community Development Director whose job it would be to implement this plan and perform many other similar responsibilities. Discussions should begin on either funding a new position or redefining the job responsibilities of existing employees.

Infrastructural Recommendations

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FOOTBRIDGE

The new footbridge is an infrastructural improvement that should be used to physically connect the eastside businesses to the downtown. The footbridge itself should be marketed as an attraction. The City should rent concession stands on the bridge for crafts and art products. Events could occur in and around the bridge. The more the bridge becomes a focal point the closer people are getting to the eastside.

While many people have mentioned that it is inconceivable to expect visitors to walk from downtown to their motels on Route 1, the author agrees, but only in terms of past conditions. Now that the footbridge is built, it will be an attraction in and of itself. When Wakeag Landing is finished there will be many more people at the other end of the bridge. Once people are on the bridge they are only 1/3 of a mile from the center of the bridge to Perry's Nuthouse. If they are on the bridge for entertainment reasons and not for travel the trips seem much easier. It is approximately 1/3 of a mile from Steamboat Landing to the Chamber of Commerce's Information booth. Because that is such a pleasant walk most people don't mind doing it. The objective here would be to make the walk from Wakeag Landing to the eastside a more pleasant experience.

Another way to help connect the two sides might be for the city to consider giving or renting eastside businesses space to tastefully advertise their products or provide free samples.

EASTSIDE STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS

One of the major challenges eastside businesses have is getting travelers to stop. The reason is because motorists see this stretch of road as a highway. Merchants struggle to advertise their businesses. The design of the road, the density of buildings along the road and the long line of sight make motorists feel safe at higher speeds. Certain road-side features are known to help slow traffic. They aren't inexpensive but they work. These features are: street trees, sidewalks, on-street parking, and strategic signage. The author understands the complexity of adding these features on a state highway, on the hand they are not impossible, and suggests that planning start now. A Master Plan for the eastside commercial areas should be undertaken. The plan should include a continuous sidewalk from the footbridge to Yankee Trader. Visitors on the eastside should be able to ride a bike safely from their motel to downtown without going on Route 1.

Other features on this stretch of road should include better signage that welcome visitors from the north to Belfast. An indication to the motorist that they are entering a new community should be made loud and clear. A single 4'x4' sign that says "Welcome to Belfast" usually doesn't do it. Banners that celebrate Belfast repeated down the street remind motorists that they have entered a town where people want them to visit.

INDOOR PERFORMING ARTS VENUE

The City of Belfast would greatly benefit from a public venue that held 500 -1,000 people. This is yet another expensive and long-term project but the city would see a sustained increase in visitors were such a venue available. The city should establish a working committee of area landowners and community developers to explore the possibilities.

MODIFICATIONS TO BELFAST COMMONS

Belfast Commons is a spectacular venue for outdoor events. However, the hedgerow that bisects the Commons from the Steamboat Landing area eliminates the possibility for large concerts. The slope of the site creates an ideal amphitheater with a stage toward the waters edge. With slight modifications to the landscaping, this could be a great venue for outdoor operas, symphonies, plays and other concerts.



MARKET THE RAMP PARK

The Belfast Ramp Park is a great asset that is poorly placed and underutilized. Ramp Parks make statements about a community. They say that the community is a cool place; they attract youth, diversity, and people with creative ideas. In addition, skateboarding, in-line skating, and BMX biking are spectator sports. People stop and watch participants perform acrobatic stunts. Ramp parks are as much a part of modern day communities as wireless internet.



From the author's point of view, the Belfast Ramp Park seems to be considered more of a donation that was placed off the beaten track. When interviewing people about the city's greatest assets, no one mentioned the ramp park. However, in comparative terms with other similar municipalities this is one of the finest publicly-owned ramp parks in New England. This is an asset that should be touted. If we were deciding where to place this today, we would recommend placing the park in a highly visible location on the waterfront. A location on Water Street or Front Street would be ideal. This is a high quality asset that is not capitalized on. Belfast has the opportunity to hold regional competitions and gain corporate sponsorships.

There have been some comments on the occurrences of unsafe or illegal activities that happen at the park. The Park would be a much safer and user friendly park if it were highly visible. As it stands now,

“Planners do not seem to realize how high a ratio of adults is needed to rear children at incidental play...spaces and equipment do not rear children...only people rear children and assimilate them into civilized society.” Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities.

teens go there after school and spend two or three hours there with few, if any, adult eyes nearby. As many of us know, teens have a pecking order and those at the bottom have a harder time integrating. The fewer the adult eyes the more established the pecking order becomes and the more it becomes a private hang out for a

small group of teenagers. In a highly visible location, adolescent competition is less successful. The eyes of local business owners, shoppers, and tourists lend a low-key, informal enforcement mechanism on ethical and respectful behavior.

Business Retention and Promotion



Retaining and promoting existing Belfast businesses are essential to building on the Belfast niche and brand. Colburn Shoes and Consumers Fuel are examples of how long term businesses become part of the identity of a city. Public places, restaurants, and other businesses and events also become part of the city's identity. The following is a list of recommendations to help support the long-term retention of existing businesses.

MARKET AND PROMOTE THE ARTS NICHE

This niche is a great opportunity for Belfast. A city on coastal Maine that strongly promotes the arts may not be unique but it is rare. The city should work with the Arts Center at Kingdom Falls. Facilitate the expansion of the Center by rezoning as appropriate or by applying for development funding to rehabilitate the building. The artists community and Belfast City should consider a joint promotional campaign in state and regional markets.

Art programs should engage visitors more. Current programs meet the needs of residents but few are available to visitors. Arts programs that allow people (children and/or their parents) who are just visiting Belfast for a day can have a lasting impression. It is also a refreshing change from the typical tourist activities. This helps sell the Belfast niche. Visitors should know that they can go to Belfast and not only see art but participate in it. If they can schedule a day's activities they may be more likely to stay longer.

BUSINESS VISITATION PROGRAMS

Many businesses often say “we never hear from the City unless we’re doing something wrong or after I sold my business.” A retention pro-

gram should include regular visits by the City to understand the constraints and challenges facing business owners. Some of the problems may be under the jurisdiction of the city, such as parking or security. Others issues may be outside the city's purview such as accounting or legal matters. However, if common problems exist between businesses the city may be in the only position to identify that and coordinate solutions for all concerned. Determining who in the city would do this goes back to the institutional issues mentioned above.

Marketing and Events

As stated earlier, the Belfast community is full of creative individuals who could design locally appropriate events if given the right guidance and organizational support. The recent grand opening of the footbridge is evidence to this fact. Therefore, the author recommends the following categories of events but further recommends that the Vibrancy Project create an events committee to fine tune these ideas. The events suggestions presented here are thematic, the details and activities for each event should be determined by the events committee.

The most successful events in Belfast will be those that celebrate the unique assets of Belfast. For example, the Broiler Festival celebrated Belfast's unique economy. After the poultry businesses left, the festival was renamed to the Bay Festival and it became a carnival typical of any in the country. The festival lost its unique niche and eventually was closed in 2006. Festivals and events must celebrate the city's greatest assets and promote its brand: the intersection of arts, the working waterfront and natural resources.

The City of Belfast should work over the long run toward creating, sponsoring and promoting 12 festivals per year. Within the next 5 years they should strive to have 9 long-term annual events on the calendar which include the ones already occurring such as Arts in the Parks. The following ideas for events are presented for further consideration by the Vibrancy Committee:

A CULTURAL ORIGINS FESTIVAL

1) Belfast should honor Belfast. One of the first places to start celebrating the City's unique heritage is to go back to its roots. Belfast was named by its original settlers after Belfast, Ireland. No other place in Maine can claim that distinction. Hence, there is no better place in Maine to celebrate the Celtic traditions endemic to Ireland and the rest of the British Isles than in Belfast. The presence of the sea also adds to the similarity and atmosphere since Belfast, Ireland also sits at the head of the tide in a harbor off the North Channel. In addition, the city has innkeepers from Ireland, bagpipe players and possibly other connections that should be explored by the events committee. Belfast, Maine should also investigate becoming a Sister City with Belfast Ireland. It may provide unique marketing and promotion ideas, in addition to promoting international goodwill. There are many benefits of participating in the Sister City program. Further information on this can be found at Sister Cities International (<http://www.sister-cities.org/>).

THE WORKING WATERFRONT

2) A festival or event should be established to promote the City's working waterfront. This event doesn't celebrate just the water and its recreational aspects, it celebrates the people who earn a living from the ocean. This is an opportunity for the public to learn from and maybe experience a wide variety of marine related occupations. Similar to an open studio program for artists, the marine related occupations invite people in to promote their trade. Shipbuilders, marine repairmen, lobster harvesters, mussel growers, marine researchers, ship captains, the City Harbor Master, the Coast Guard, and others show the public the details of their jobs. There can be competitions, races, hands-on experiences, seafood, music, and games. Maybe this is the new "Bay Festival."

WATERBASED FESTIVAL

3) Another water based festival that is recreation oriented is also viable. Boat races, boat shows, fishing derbies, kayak tours, guided fishing trips and natural history interpretation of the bay would be successful. These activities can all happen at the same festival, or the committee can choose to market just one. Fishing derbies, in particular, typically generate large amounts of economic activity and commercial sponsorships.

SPORTING EVENTS

4) A sporting event should be considered. Triathlons, marathons, and bicycle criterions, for example, are widely popular and excellent spectator sports. These events draw in people from around New England and the United States. They also generate substantial corporate sponsorships and are financially lucrative. For example, registration fees for the Burlington City Marathon in Vermont are \$70 per person, or \$130 per team, and there are 4,500 bib numbers distributed. The marathon receives major corporate sponsorships, and a recent study showed that the 10 year old event had an economic impact of over 3 million dollars annually. The event is self sustaining and has its own paid staff. A Belfast triathlon may be a great way to connect the eastside with downtown and to take advantage of the bay. Competitors can swim or paddle across the bay and a portion of the course can be on the eastside of town. A dramatic final stretch could involve crossing the footbridge, entering downtown via Water Street, and crossing the finish line at the waterfront.

A CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS

5) Finally, an arts event should be planned for the long term. This is suggested in addition to the current Arts-in-the-Park weekend. Arts-in-the-Park is primarily a venue for visual artists and craftspeople to sell their products. It is an excellent event that draws in a lot of people and we recommend that it be continued and supported by the City. An additional arts event that celebrates a different medium is suggested. The performing arts, such as music or theater should be explored. A music or performing arts festival at Belfast Commons would be a spectacular venue. A team that involved the Belfast Maskers, Waterfall Arts, the National Theater Workshop for the Handicapped, and others the author may have missed, should be assembled to brainstorm on the most locally appropriate performing arts festival fitting for Belfast. These discussions should also include the possibility of a small film festival.

NATURAL RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Travel Industry Association of America states that outdoor recreation is the second most popular activity (after shopping) among travelers. Belfast has two outstanding resources they must capitalize on, the bay and their birds.

BIRDING

Bird watching is the second fastest growing outdoor recreation activity in the United States. Sixty-one percent of Maine's overnight visitors expect a "unique" experience and there are many unique birding opportunities in Maine. For example, Maine is the only state in the nation with Atlantic Puffins and they are located in Penobscot Bay.

Birding presents a great opportunity for Belfast. Bird watchers are high end customers. Research by the consulting firm, Fermata Inc, shows that the average birder is 52 years of age, earns \$62,000 per year, and spends nearly \$500 per trip. Most birders come from suburban locations and go on approximately 10 trips per year. These visitors are likely to stay in lodging places that are locally owned and promote the local heritage. Birders are most likely to enjoy arts, cultural and historic activities when not birding. This is a fast growing segment of the visitor and tourism market that is ideal for Belfast to tap into.

"Do what you can
with what you have
where you are...."
Teddy Roosevelt

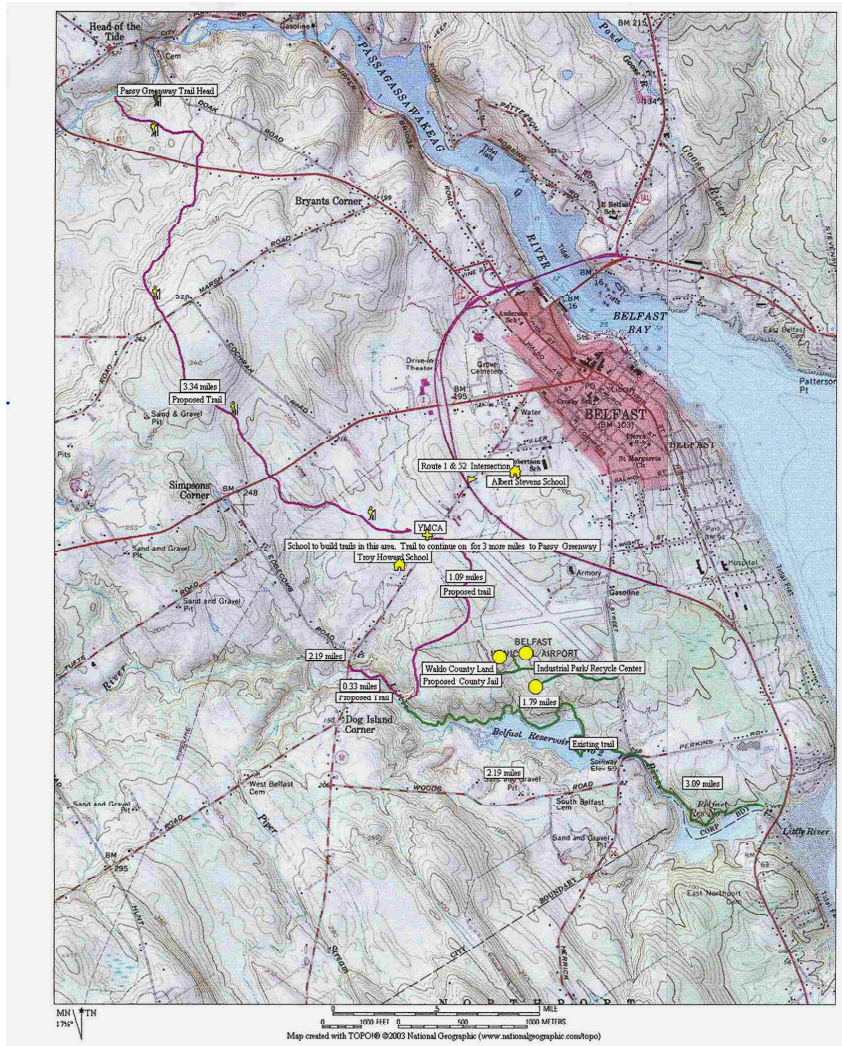


Figure 7: Proposed Passy Greenway Trail.

In order for Belfast to do this, the City Council and Mayor should appoint a partnership committee between current entities and individuals for the sole purpose of promoting bird watching in Belfast. There are many valuable human resources in Belfast that can support this effort. Current institutions such as the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition, the Coastal Mountain Land Trust, the Audubon Center, Mainebirding.net, the Vibrancy Project committee members, private sector tour operators, and certain members of the community with experience in ornithology and nature based tourism, should meet to determine specific tours, activities, birding opportunities and target audiences to market.

During these discussions the group should consider creating the “Belfast Birding Trail.” There already exists a plan to create the Passy Greenway Trail that would extend from the Head of the Tide area, past the High School and YMCA area, and connect to the existing trail along Belfast Reservoir. We recommend that the City support this trail since it fits well with the Belfast brand. However, if the trail was dedicated as a “birding trail” it would further strengthen the Belfast niche and not detract from the other uses. The trail would simply include interpretive signs about bird habitats and species likely found along the trail. It may include birding platforms and benches for birders to rest and observe. The trail would be marketed and promoted as a self guided tour similar to the Museum in the Streets concept.

Belfast already held a birding day and there was interest in seeing it occur again. The Eastern Meadowlark, Barrows Golden-eye and Bobolink are species of great interest to many birders. During winter migration periods, Belfast has more bird species than the state as a whole. Belfast still has many open fields and green spaces that provide excellent habitat. If birding became a popular and lucrative activity there may be justifications (and therefore funding) for conserving these parcels.

NATURAL HISTORY TOURS

Natural history tours in Belfast Bay can be convenient, safe, short or long, and can be a unique and interesting promotion of the Belfast culture. A sea kayaking company recently left the City's waterfront. A new company is emerging in Belfast and it should be encouraged to locate on the waterfront. The Harbor Committee should actively seek to keep touring companies on the waterfront. Non-motorized boat tours and motorized natural history interpretation tours would help boost the image of Belfast and promote its brand. The specifics on how to accomplish this shouldn't be stated here out of context. Rather the Harbor Committee should invite local businesses in natural history tours and non-motorized boating to a meeting and proactively solicit ideas on how the City can promote and support these businesses.

One of the more difficult aspects of operating a guided service on the Maine coast is finding certified guides. In Maine, all guides providing tours for profit must be certified. The Harbor Committee can build a relationship with the Maine Associations of Sea Kayaking Guides and Instructors and the Maine Professional Guides Associations to encourage that more certification classes and instructions occur locally and connections are made between new guides and local businesses.

VI. Conclusions: Where do we go from here?

This report has devoted over 25 pages to identifying and defining the Belfast brand and to documenting a long list of recommendations on how the city can encourage more vibrancy. The first half of the report is supporting documentation. This report can appear overwhelming and, as a consequence, is at risk of being put aside. This would happen if a small group of people tried to implement these recommendations. The best way to take advantage of this report, so that it will eventually spur more vibrancy, is to use it as a foundation for a community wide dialogue.

The Belfast Vibrancy Project involves everyone. The research and recommendations of this report involves every city department, all business groups, a majority of the local non-profit organizations, the school system, and certain individuals and associations. There is room for everyone to take ownership of at least a small piece of this report. Indeed, implementing these recommendations will not be successful unless all of these groups buy in to the report's concepts and fine tune the recommendations to meet their specific needs.

The report should be used as a departure point for a community development summit involving hundreds of business owners, citizens, non-profits, city departments, and state and federal government representatives. The report should be presented as a conceptual paper. The purpose of the summit is to:

1. raise awareness of the project and the report's findings;
2. build a larger and more cooperative audience;
3. insert locally appropriate details to make the concepts a reality for Belfast; and,
4. create ownership of the recommendations among a wide array of groups so that the recommendations are implemented by numerous organizations.

Vibrancy means people. Only a community-wide, coordinated effort involving all sectors of the population will make this project successful.