

Town of Mount Desert  
Economic Development Committee Meeting\*  
September 13, 2021  
Minutes

*\* Continuation of June 14<sup>th</sup> special meeting*

**Attending:** Jamie Blaine, Matt Hart, Nancy Ho, Heather Jones, Durlin Lunt, Dan McKay, Kathy Miller, Stephanie Reece, Kerri Sands, Seth Singleton, Rick Wheeler, Averel Wilson

**Absent:** Megan Bailey, Martha Dudman, Don Graves, Tony Smith, Micki Sumpter

Attendance was by Zoom.

Dan called the meeting to order at 4 p.m. and asked Kerri to summarize her July questionnaire about creating a vision for the town and the subsequent responses from committee members. Kerri had charged each of us: **“As you think about the future of Mount Desert, what do you believe are the main principles that underlie appropriate and sustainable economic development?”** Respondents were asked to submit their top three ideas. Twelve people returned a total of 36 diverse and thoughtful responses, which Kerri then grouped into a few themes. She thanked the respondents for the “robust discussion of a shared future.”

Dan said he was struck by how consistent most of the answers were, with sustaining a year-round population the core issue the town faces, but one that required – and could often be at odds with – the need to preserve the town’s character and physical environment. “We don’t want to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.” We then discussed some of the barriers to achieving our vision, which Jamie had tried to summarize in his response. Kathy said she believed this group should become engaged in the next comprehensive planning process; and Nancy wondered whether our committee has the “teeth” to be effective, saying that she felt being involved in the planning could be a good way into the process.

This led to a broader discussion of the committee’s role: There are already two groups (Island Housing Trust and MD 365) working on housing, so what do we bring to the table? Averel noted the problems IHT faces finding good affordable houses to buy in the current market and worried that the group was “tweaking at the margins” and not making a big enough impact. Kathy concurred, noting that new construction and buying existing stock were both very expensive and not mutually exclusive.

Rick said that the core of the problem is the continuing demand for summer housing, particularly from families who have traditionally come here and have now expanded into the second, third and fourth generations, a trend that does not appear to be slowing. “If we are going to be a sustainable community, then we need land to build on.” But MD 365’s modest proposal for 5-6 units at Manchester and Neighborhood roads has already run into opposition. Seth pointed out that the need (1) to make sure new housing is compatible with the spirit and environment of the town and (2) the need for more housing were town-wide (really island-wide) matters, and he

worried that if we don't figure out a solution Northeast Harbor could spin off into a boutique village.

Durlin discussed rezoning some five-acre lot areas in Pretty Marsh; and Rick noted the pieces we already have in place: (1) high demand for housing . . . for summer people and "boomerangs"; (2) great schools; and (3) potential wealth we can tap. That's a good start for thinking about how to preserve a viable community here. Steph noted that lack of completion of the Main Street project was a sore spot with year-round residents and suggested that until that is completed, there may not be much enthusiasm for other new projects. Durlin concurred. That project should be completed in a little more than a year.

All these observations led to a discussion of our committee as a communication tool to set forth a vision for the town and then sell it to its various constituencies, a vision that seeks to bring people together, rather than focusing on projects that seem to divide us. It would be a role that sought to build consensus around all we want to build, protect, and preserve here . . . things that most people appear to want but have, for some reason, not yet joined together to accomplish.

But first, noted Dan, "we need something to communicate." Kerri and Jamie will work together to draft a vision statement for the town and present it at the regular October meeting.

Respectively submitted,  
Jamie Blaine, Secretary

Addendum: From Rick: One last thought for the group is for all of us to think about possible well-respected individuals/leaders in the year round, business and summer communities who as influencers can be helpful in conveying effectively the vision and articulating options, necessary steps, etc. Perhaps, we can share thoughts on who these individuals might be at our next meeting.