

# Summer Residents Association

Fall 2014

A Publication of the Summer  
Residents of the Town Mount Desert

## NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings!

We are all back into our routines after an amazing summer in Maine, and for me winter is descending fast on a beautiful fall here. Hopefully you all have enjoyed the same.

I am reporting this fall to all SRA members on the many happenings of last summer and also update you on other positive progress made working with the Board of Supervisors, the town, the merchants, the Economic Steering Committee and the Economic Development Consultant.

I would like to clarify the two phases of signage:

**Phase I** was a town funded project that was presented at public meetings and approved by the Board of Supervisors at the town meeting may of 2013. These "wayfaring" signs are directional signs for automobile traffic and placed throughout the town of Northeast Harbor.

**Phase II** are the informational, pedestrian-based signs and kiosks that direct people to local businesses and provide general information. Examples being the sign at the marina and the informational sign on Main Street. The SRA worked in partnership with the town and local merchants to create these informational signs.

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THE TOWN OF  
MOUNT DESERT

The Economic Development Consultant, Jackie Hewett's term expires in September 2015. Jackie has done an amazing job of introducing and coordinating activities. The newly formed events committee has worked hard to create and carry out many special events. The events we witnessed last summer will be, we hope, ongoing events for years to come. Examples being the Thursday night movies, the Lynx visit and the Antique Car Show. Please see a condensed version of Jackie Hewett's report included in this newsletter.

The Economic Steering Committee has introduced the idea to the Board of Selectmen to consider someone who can continue the good works the consultant has begun. The need to keep up the momentum that the Economic Development Consultant has worked so hard to create is important. The town is considering a number of different options at this time to achieve this goal. This subject is covered in Jackie Hewett's report.

The Economic Steering Committee consists of Durlin Lunt, Martha Dudman, Matt Hart, Nancy Ho, Rick Wheeler, Rick Savage and myself. The group meets once a month and has proven to be a valuable entity to keep communications going and for the

### SRA Board of Directors

Kathe Gates McCoy, President  
Donald Graves, Vice President  
Charlie Merriman, Treasurer  
Phillip Moriarty, Secretary  
Jan Russell, Nominating  
Matthew Baird  
John Boyton  
Larry Golfarb  
Lynn Janney  
Howard Lapsley  
Lili Pew  
Bill Roberts  
Kent Schmidt  
Rick Wheeler  
Averel Wilson

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### SRA Mission Statement

The mission of the Summer Residents Association of the Town of Mount Desert is to provide an effective means of communication between the summer residents and the Town leadership on issues that concern the current and future well-being of the Town. The Steering committee (Board of Directors) seeks to represent and to keep them informed of, and involved in, the Town planning process on current and future issues.

The Summer Residents Association seeks to be the timely and constructive voice of the summer residents with Town government working closely with Town leaders to preserve and protect the unique character, culture, environment and quality of life in the Town of Mount Desert.

SRA to become more informed of the workings of the town. The discussions involve solving problems, creating new initiatives and keeping the channels of communication open all for the betterment of the villages of Mt. Desert. Working together to achieve the Urban Land Institutes recommendations has been and will continue to be a priority for the Economic Steering Committee.

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## Notes from the President continued

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Ham Clark is revolving off the Economic Steering Committee. We all wish to thank him for his wisdom, dedication, his many constructive ideas and contributions to the ESC's cause.

As many of you remember, the August SRA meeting introduced the idea of broadband becoming a reality for the island. A presentation was given by Tilson Technology. This presentation was the first introduction to inform us as to how, when and where all this technology might reach us. The town of Mt. Desert, in collaboration with other communities, has followed up to get more detailed information. Please see Durlin Lunt's comments on broadband in OTHER ISLAND NEWS.

I wish to thank the board and all members of the SRA for all their valuable guidance and loyalty in our involvement in the town of Mt. Desert, the place we all love so much.

The goal on everyone's part, summer residence association, and the town of Mt. Desert representatives, the Economic Steering Committee and merchants is to make our community a better place. We all want to see island thrive.

Happy holidays to you all,

Kathe McCoy

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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## CONSULTANT JACKIE HEWETT'S REPORT

### TO THE TOWN OF MT. DESERT

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This report summarizes the year's activities and accomplishments and outlines some opportunities and constraints for the future.

The year began in August 2013 with interviews and discussions with business owners, summer and year round residents, and town officials. The goal of these interviews was to identify concerns about the economic status of the village of Northeast Harbor and to determine thoughts about revitalization efforts. The results of these interviews were varied but one common concern was the scarcity of commercial operations along Main Street during the winter months, especially a place for coffee or a beer and a burger. It was felt that the sense of community that used to be so apparent in the village had been lost. On the business front, many of the business owners had had a poor season and were very concerned that if traffic did not pick up they would be forced to close. This became a reality with the closure of the Holmes Store and The Full Belli Deli and the contraction of Local Color at the end of the season.

Many ideas about how to revitalize the village were proposed. These included more and better business signage (especially signage to link the harbor and Main Street), increased marketing of the village, more events, filling empty lots along Main Street, improving the visual quality of Main Street, adding restaurants to Main Street, (especially year round offerings), and keeping shops open later in the evening and on Sundays. There were also comments concerning the need to increase commercial offerings at the harbor.

These observations opinions coupled with data recommendations from the recent Urban Land Institute report were used as a basis for developing a plan of action. Since survival of village merchants was the most immediate concern, initial focus was to bring more visitors to town and help existing businesses improve their marketing. A second focus, although certainly linked to first, was to initiate new events that would engage residents, improve village's sense of community and create opportunities for attracting additional tourism based spending. The attraction of new businesses to the village was the final focus and through these efforts a number of new businesses opened in summer and several others are in planning stages.

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## Accomplishments

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The following economic development initiatives were accomplished this year

- A \$40,000 economic development sign package was planned and implemented. This "phase II" project was funded privately through local business and SRA contributions. Its goal was to improve information about village businesses and include two business directory signs, a visual information column in the harbor, better signage at the village information center and signs that create a visual link between the harbor and Main Street.

- A Thursday night outdoor market program was created. Funded by both town and private contributions.

this program was designed to market Northeast Harbor to tourists and to provide a fun and engaging evening for town residents. Several area restaurants participated in these nights by providing food for purchase and the Maine Seacoast Mission provided free popcorn and water.

- Two daily trips to Northeast Harbor by Oli's Trolley were established. With help from town officials, the Chamber of Commerce and Oli's Trolley, parking was created for the trolley near Main Street and the Chamber provided a village directory map and merchant coupons for trolley patrons. These trips provided visitors with a great introduction to Northeast Harbor and an opportunity for village merchants to display their wares to a new audience.

- A visit by the tall ship Lynx was secured. From July 17th -21st the tall ship Lynx was in Northeast Harbor giving tours of the vessel in the morning followed by afternoon sails. This event was well attended by both residents and visitors alike.

- A comprehensive event listing for the Town of Mount Desert was created. This list was printed in rack card format and distributed throughout the island. It was also provided to a variety of websites and was comprehensively covered on the Mount Desert Chamber of Commerce website. In addition, press releases for major events were written and sent to all local news outlets.

- The Town of Mount Desert Antique Car Show in Northeast Harbor was organized and held. On August 16th, private sponsors and the town hosted an antique car show on the Village Green. The show included music, food and over 40 cars. This event was very well attended.

- The Town of Mount Desert Event Committee was created and funding for its operation was secured. This ten-member committee worked throughout the winter and spring of 2013-2014 to both plan and secure funding for events

and to create the comprehensive event list outlined above.

- A town funded economic development budget for use in marketing and development efforts was established.

- An amendment to the town's sign ordinance was secured. This amendment allows for the use of temporary event signs and allowed the placement of the economic development signs.

- A free seminar on Internet marketing was organized for the Mount Desert Chamber of Commerce. Karen Zimmerman of Z Studio in Bar Harbor provided this seminar.

- A program to install historic maritime displays in harbor buildings was initiated.

Additional economic development successes:

- The Chamber of Commerce launched an updated and fully integrated website this past spring. This new site vastly improves the marketing of member's businesses.

- A new building at 123 Main Street is under construction. It will house a food related business on the first floor and a business incubator space on the second floor. An additional project at 145 Main Street is in the planning process. It is envisioned that this project will provide retail space on the first floor and housing on the upper floors.

- Six new businesses opened in Northeast Harbor this summer. They included Maine Gifts from the Sea, Artemis Gallery, Stuff, Mrs. Browns, The Gallery and Showroom at One Rockend Road, and Schneible Fine Arts. In addition, the Holmes Store was purchased and reopened under new management.

Economic development happens slowly and changes often take several business cycles to become apparent. Some businesses, especially the higher end retailers, reported a very good summer. Others felt the summer was

about average and a few felt it was slow. This is based on the sign in logs they keep from May through August. There are no other quantitative indicators available at this time but as tax receipts are tabulated more information can and will be obtained. It is still too early to access the effect the actions outlined above had on the health and vitality of the commercial core of Northeast Harbor. The Chamber of Commerce visitor center reported a 19% increase in visitors this past summer.

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## Action Plan For 2014 -2015

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The goal of the coming year is to enlarge and improve upon the successful programs established this past year and to identify and pursue potential new initiatives that expand our success.

These initiatives may include:

- Increased coordination efforts with state and regional tourism and economic development departments. Joint marketing and other promotional efforts will be a priority

- Analysis of broadband opportunities for the Town of Mount Desert

- Continued efforts to fill vacant lots along Main Street in Northeast Harbor, attract new businesses to Town and ensure full occupancy of existing commercial spaces

- Examination of potential zoning revisions and business opportunities that can bring additional economic activity to the harbor area

- Creation of a sustained mentoring program for town business owners

- Identification of additional events for all the villages of Mount Desert

- Increased town marketing including the production of a town wide brochure, additional radio advertising, potential TV spots, and an increased social media presence

- Institutionalization of the Event Committee and the creation of reproducible event plans and funding sources. A rotating list of volunteers comprised of both year round and summer residents will be created for additional event support.

- Creation of a downtown development plan for Northeast Harbor that focuses on the infrastructure, circulation and façade needs of Main Street.

## Recommendations

To ensure continued progress toward Northeast Harbor village revitalization and town wide economic prosperity, the town should start to evaluate methods to secure this outcome once this year's consulting efforts conclude. Some options to consider include: 1) full time position, 2) part time position and or 3) retain a consultant as the town currently has

- Continued consulting assistance. This option continues the status quo of utilizing an outside consultant to help drive the town's economic development program. The costs and results of this approach are known and it does not require any long-term obligation. However, it may also signal a lack of commitment to continued revitalization efforts.

- Subcontracting. Some economic development initiatives might be subcontracted to the Chamber of Commerce or the Neighborhood House or be accomplished using more volunteers. However, while the Chamber of Commerce might be able to play a role in this effort, at present it lacks the capacity to do this work due to low membership, a lack of organizational capacity and inadequate funds to hire an executive director.

The Neighborhood House could manage certain aspects of an economic development program, especially the event component, but it has limited staff and existing programs that take priority. In addition, since its mission is

not economic development, this may be a poor fit.

The use of a fully volunteer board is another option. However, entrusting this type of effort to a volunteer board would most likely result in spotty and inconsistent results. Volunteer committees, even with dedicated members, generally cannot sustain an effort like this. Many members have jobs of their own and cannot invest the time that is required. They are most effective in setting goals and policies but less so in follow through.

- Hire a permanent municipal economic development director. A permanent economic development department with an adequate operational budget and access to other town departments would signal a long-term commitment to the town's future economic success.

A professional staff member would be responsible for promoting the business and economic development interests of the community. He/she would provide guidance to individuals and companies wishing to establish, relocate, or expand their business within the community and he/she would provide assistance in the development of short and long term economic and community development plans. He/she would serve as the point person for the coordination and execution of town-sponsored events and would work with the Economic Development Steering Committee to formulate and implement marketing and business attraction strategies. A part time position is an alternative option but would decrease the amount of effort dedicated to the task and slow the process.

The accomplishments of 2013-2014 required many hours of time and effort from a variety of individuals. Town office staff, the police and public works departments, and the harbormaster all provided manpower. Their assistance was essential since volunteer help was limited and somewhat inconsistent and many tasks required professional

skills or equipment. Since none of these departments had budgeted for this assistance, some experienced unexpected cost overruns associated with providing this help. These unbudgeted costs need to be considered in next year's budget.

## Conclusion

The work of the past year should be the beginning of a longer-term effort to revitalize the village of Northeast Harbor. Structural changes to the community such as the transition of housing from year round to summer use and a change in the nature of summer residents vacationing and spending patterns has dramatically altered the village's economic landscape. Long term efforts such as increasing affordable housing opportunities in and adjacent to the village will help balance these shifts in the future; but, in the near term additional actions to support existing businesses and attract new year round enterprises are needed. The actions of the past year should serve as building blocks toward the goal of sustained growth and prosperity for village merchants and a returned sense of community for village residents.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the Town of Mount Desert this past year. The commitment I have seen from town staff, business owners, residents and town officials has been impressive. I sincerely appreciate all the support the Board of Selectmen has provided and look forward to working together over the coming months.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jacqueline K. Hewett

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## OTHER ISLAND NEWS

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Durlin Lunt reports that the Tilson Study/ Proposal for Broadband covering the Mt. Desert area was shared at both the league of elected officials meeting on October 15 and the league's managers meeting on October 28 as a means to begin the conversation.

Broadband access is a standing agenda for the league this year and will be discussed at each meeting. If the town of Mt. Desert wishes to pursue a study this year it will need to be budgeted as the process gets underway after the first of the year. Any league town that wants to join in with the study needs to decide by early January. All of this will take time. A preliminary study will most likely be the first step.

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Matt Hart, a member of the Board of Selectmen and Community Relations Director at the Neighborhood House, reported the visitor center welcomed over 13,400 guests this last season. There were 48 states and 16 countries represented. This number is up over the previous two years. The visitor center welcomed approximately 10,700 visitors in 2012 and another 9,800 in 2013.

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Many comments from merchants have come to our attention stating that all in all the summer season was a good one. Although it seemed to be a slow start, things picked up big time in August and September. There are always varying opinions, but most seemed to be happy with the summer season sales.

For example: the owners of White Ginger said it was the best summer they have ever in twelve years.

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The Island Housing Trust's (IHT) president, Chris Spruce reports: "Thanks to generous donations made to the IHT, including SRA members, a local family now owns a year round residence in NEH. In return for the bridge grant provided by the homeowners assistance program, IHT's affordability covenants were placed on the property to ensure it remains affordable for the next working family in a future re-sale. A total of 79 adults and children have found year-round housing due to the IHT's efforts." This is the first in NEH. The house is located on Tracy Road. IHT is currently trying to raise funds to underwrite additional bridge grants for the island's working families. Please visit thier website at:

[www.Islandhusingtrust.org](http://www.Islandhusingtrust.org)

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Cell towers have been placed in Pretty Marsh and Somesville. The tower in NEH will go up before the next summer season. Due to the fast pace of technology, the towers are built so they can be easily modified if the technology changes to a smaller version. Some people were concerned about the aesthetics of the tall towers, so it is nice to know that the large towers can be replaced in the future.

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It has been determined by the planning board that Hall Quarry is a lawfully existing quarry and eligible to submit a licensing application. Due to expected appeals any final decisions regarding quarry operations are not expected in the near future.

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John Boyton's project on Main Street is coming along. The gas station has given John permission to place a camera on the building so that we can all watch the building being constructed in real time. Check it out and have fun watching!

The web address is:

<http://rtpartners.org/webcam>