



The Power of Home Rule and the Potential for Regional Solutions

WEAVING COMMON THREADS

POST-SUMMIT FORUM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What:

GrowSmart Maine hosted a forum one week after its Summit 2020, inviting participants to delve further into the **summit theme: the power of home rule and the potential for regional solutions**, focusing on three key issues that arose from Summit breakout sessions:

1. **Increase Access to Renewable Energy:**

Focus on removing barriers to renewable energy as outlined in the State Climate Action Plan. Recruit leading communities for a campaign to make it easier to align zoning and ordinances with this goal by demonstrating the tangible benefits of solar and other sustainable energy sources, in order to allay community concerns.

2. **Housing Choices:** Focus on broadening the diversity of housing types and rent-to-own and less conventional housing acquisition arrangements. Treat housing as a key economic development tool in both new development and adaptive reuse. Acknowledge that property ownership is an equity issue.

3. **Land Use Regulation and Enforcement:** Focus on improving certainty, coordination and communication. Local character can be preserved in ways that don't add to the cost and complexity of development.

Why Regional:

Whether ecological, fiscal, or of shared values, communities can recognize commonalities among one another. Working together can lighten burdens and boost outcomes.

Who:

Municipalities or coalitions beyond geographic proximity that share features or aligned interests, supported by regional planning organizations and nonprofits. Organizations that can help to facilitate the discussion include:

- Maine Alliance for Smart Growth, a program of GrowSmart Maine
- American Association of Retired Persons of Maine
- Councils of Government and Regional Planning Commissions across Maine

How:

- Existing funding from regional entities, additional funding from revenue sharing and tax policy innovations.
- Achieve buy-in through inclusivity, communicating shared values, and actionable strategies.

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POST-SUMMIT FORUM NOTES

Held Thursday, October 29th, 2020

In its post-Summit Forum, GrowSmart Maine looked at how to build regional approaches based on the strength of home rule. Whether ecological, fiscal, or based on shared values, communities can recognize commonalities among one another. Working together can lighten burdens and boost outcomes.

DEFINING REGIONALISM FOR THIS DISCUSSION:

Regionalism can be more than geographic proximity. There are common threads that encourage regional collaboration, such as aggregate organizations, similar assets or challenges, and/or businesses with shared or aligned interests.

FORUM BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 4 QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS FOR KEY POLICY AREAS

WHAT would define a region for this thread?

WHO LEADS?

- Who needs to be engaged in the process?
- Cape Cod Commission as a model to explore for Maine?
- COGs/RPCommissions/GSM – have regional experience value

WHO PAYS FOR IT?

- Existing funding sources that could be administered by regional entities?
- Implications of tax policy (TIFs, revenue sharing, service centers/rural hubs' mil rates vs surrounding areas, county tax levies)
- Important to ensure a sense of fairness among/ between collaborating municipalities
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HOW TO SUCCEED?

- Achieve local public buy-in for regional approaches
- Public engagement process: include storytelling and shared values.
- Need for skilled, trusted facilitators: what is the role of nongovernmental agencies in facilitating collaboration between towns?
- Ensure inclusiveness and diversity in who is participating
- Affirm why this common thread is important

FEEDBACK ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

There was discussion on the need for a corporate-style shared vision. The 2006 Brookings Report, "Charting Maine's Future," did provide shared vision – does it need to be re-vetted? GrowSmart Maine reinforced this action plan in 2012 with Charting Maine's Future: Making Headway.

A vision now needs to reflect needs and aspirations related to climate change. It was noted that corporations instill their corporate vision via a strong and focused internal and external communications plan.

BREAKOUT SESSION REPORT BACK AND DISCUSSION

Issue polling: Housing and Climate Action Plan (CAP) each had six votes, arts/culture and land use planning each had two votes. For choosing a breakout session, none chose arts/culture.

BROAD COMMENTS:

- Economies of scale vary with topics/problems.
- Likely we will need an incentive system for local elected officials to engage in regional efforts. People who are involved in local government do so because they are invested in that town. So regional-level efforts may be received with wariness, which needs to be overcome.
- Should look at effects of development and land use at a more regional/state level as is done in transportation via MaineDOT and MPOs. Consider funding at that level.
- Climate Change similarly is a regional issue and may be helpful in springboarding municipalities to adopt regional action. Municipalities don't have sufficient capacity to take on some key issues on their own.

THREE KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED FOR POTENTIAL ACTION

I: HOUSING

Participants: Ann Marie Kane (individual), Jeff Levine (GSM Board and Levine Planning Strategies, Karen Campbell (UMaine Center on Aging/AARP), Kate Raymond (KVCOG), Lucas Benedict (Acorn Engineering), Maggie Fleming (GSM board and Town of Falmouth), William Harper (KVCOG)

Key Points: Housing needs immediate attention; choice is simply not available. Housing should be looked at as a form of economic development as well as a basic equity issue.

OVERVIEW:

- Who is the audience for your housing project...a senior who does not always drive, for instance?
- Challenge of siloed approaches, "How do we coordinate this better?"
- Overall cost of housing/construction/ownership as a barrier.
- Developers are focused on vacancy rates and required space for parking
- Deregulation of local control: Reams of paperwork required to be put on a waiting list, no consistency in this process across municipalities.
- Property ownership is key to equity issue around housing.

AVENUES TOWARD SOLUTIONS:

HOME OWNERSHIP:

- Cost of ownership/building is barrier to home ownership
- Land banks are a tool.
- Consider existing housing stock available, is there support for renovating these so they are safer, clearer, more appropriate for the needs of people today?
- Rent to own options tied to philanthropy. Are there models in Maine? (Millinocket Housing Initiative)
- Section 8 has this option, but not activated in Maine. Opportunity?
- Ownership is core to equity as well; land use decisions begin with land/property ownership.
- Town-owned property; either sell it and devote funds to new housing or adaptive reuse. (Freeport and Cumberland did this.)
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as a tool: GSM will share our educational brief.

ADAPTIVE REUSE: (COVID ACCELERATING THESE TRENDS)

- Post-COVID-19 reuse of commercial space as housing; big box space as well
- Newly vacated office space could be turned into co-housing – excellent opportunity for downtown housing.
- Look at adaptive reuse of current housing stock. Will zoning allow it?

POLICY:

- AARP "Age-Friendly Community" designation has been earned by 70 towns all over Maine. This network could have value in communications and non-geographic regionalism. The designation includes criteria and guidance for items such as transportation and housing. Lori Parham serves on the steering committee of Maine Alliance for Smart Growth, a program of GrowSmart Maine, as one connection.
- Comment by Anthony Flint was "what's good for seniors is good for all."
- DECD should have a housing policy division coordinating with economic development with ability to push back on home rule.
- Perhaps housing and land use could merge around smart development zones, adding transportation. Smart development zones (locations that support denser development with reduced red tape) are a great idea, have been discussed before as part of Sustain Southern Maine, and work in other places
- Disincentivizing sprawl as we grow. Vermont does it well, albeit much smaller
- Portland has a proposal to allow overlay for tiny houses.
- Land banks lead to ownership.
- Offer some kind of tax incentives for adaptive reuse if it can be rehabbed/marketed as affordable housing.

2: STATE CLIMATE ACTION PLAN (CAP)

Participants: Ann Marie Kane (individual), Carol Morris (Morris Communications and GSM board), Jason Rauch (Regulatory – Energy and Environmental Policy for CMP), Pat Pinto (AARP Maine), Sarah Haggerty (Maine Audubon), Tom Rumpf (GSM Board)

Key Points: Making broad access to renewable energy easier is a critical and urgent need to mitigate climate change.

OVERVIEW

- Best way to reduce climate change is through smart growth, and Climate Council misses this.
- Discussion of the need for energy data, both for buildings and at the municipal level to create metrics for energy saving. There are some confidentiality issues but Jason indicated there are ways to manage that being evaluated in Boston. (This data need was brought up in a summit session as well.)
- Noted that transportation is #1 in emissions, buildings are #2, so clean power generation is a high-value priority.
- Emissions: transportation and buildings are low hanging fruit, then power generation.
- Discussion around the need to get renewable energy on the ground more quickly in more places, and that large solar array generation is hard because it needs to be approved town by town, which is slow and expensive
- Like wind power, solar is hitting NIMBYism
- Strength of home rule is where some communities lead, and convince others this is the way to go.
- We hear back from solar developers that rooftop and brownfield development is cost-prohibitive. Not sure if it's actually cost-prohibitive or just cheaper to build on greenspace... It's up to the developer to make those choices. There are projects like this in Portland.

AVENUES TOWARD SOLUTIONS:

- Carol volunteered to lead a group to discuss this further.
- What kind of research should be done to make this a more productive meeting?
- We have to make it easy. Right to Solar law exists in other states, which overrides local land use regulations.
- The possibility of creating a multi-town education campaign to help in moving these through the process was discussed.
- Moved to discussion of forming a YIMBY-like group focused on approval of solar generation – YOMRT (rooftop) or YIMLF (Yes in my landfill) YOMBrownfield. This group could be a combination of individuals and NGOs. Provide tools to towns. Maine Audubon has been focusing on this and has resources.

- Call it "Freedom for Solar" or something to disallow municipal barriers.
- CAP recommendations will have a section on energy and who might be the players; perhaps plug in the energy of this group to that effort and help implement directive and campaigns that come from this.
- Put solar on top of parking garages? Capture sun and provide protection to vehicles underneath from the sun and snow. No need to plow the roof.

3: LAND USE AND REGULATION

Participants: Andrew Glassberg, (individual), Becca Casey (GSM board and Senior Architect, SMRT), Donna Larsen (lk planning), James Fischer (Deer Isle Town Manager; MAP board, Chair of Hancock County Planning Commission), Ruta Dzenis (Municipal Planning Assistance Program at MEDACF), Tom Miragliuolo (Municipal Planning Assistance Program at MEDACF)

Key Points: Regional thinking for land use and development will help economic growth and prosperity; incentives are needed for municipal officials to adopt regional thinking on these topics

OVERVIEW

- Need collective mission/path/big picture to offset silos of town by town: provide reasons and incentives to communicate/share culture.
- Focus now is on regulation and enforcement capacity and mechanisms.
- Regional Planning Commissions are the right fit for this, lacking MaineDOT equivalent. Can't come from top down.
- Coordination and communication, streamline and make regulation more uniform so people understand what is required.
- Local character can be preserved in ways that don't add to the cost and complexity of development.
- Would like to have shared code enforcement.

AVENUES TOWARD SOLUTIONS:

- Need something comparable to MaineDOT for land use; coordination and streamlining
- Local elected officials often solely invested in their town. Is there a way to create more of an incentive system for regionality? Opportunity to parallel regional chambers/ economic identity (example Blue Hill Peninsula). How to find "one voice" – Blue Hill easier because of clear geographic boundaries.
- Regional land use planning and taxation issues need to be addressed.

KEY CONCEPTS/CONCLUSIONS

- **The Climate Action Plan** came up with doable ideas for getting renewable energy on the ground. Carol Morris volunteered to lead the follow-up process with several others offering to join in.
- **Land Use:** No one stepped forward to lead.
- **Housing: GrowSmart** Maine has developed a two-phased program, "Housing Choices for a Well-Rounded Community" which could form the basis for following up on these discussions. It begins with an educational workshop outlining local tools available to create a variety of housing choices, and then moves to developing a prioritized list of strategies for a municipality or a region.
- Nancy to bring these concepts to the Maine Alliance for Smart Growth steering committee to engage key partners and communities in moving forward.

SUMMIT BREAKOUT SESSIONS: SUMMARY NOTES

As background, below are notes from the earlier breakout sessions that followed Summit keynote presentations and discussions. Each venue hosted a mix of virtual and in-person participants in facilitated discussions with the goal of identifying actionable steps. These have been broken out into:

- **Key points** from Summit Breakout Sessions
- **Common threads** with potential for systemic regional approach
- **Successes** and ongoing efforts in regional collaborations

KEY POINTS FROM SUMMIT BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- Sharing administration is easier than sharing services
- Purchasing of materials/supplies easier to share than sharing services
- Environment ignores municipal lines; landscape approaches needed
- How to succeed: shared values, storytelling, unbiased trusted third party to facilitate
- Loss of State Planning Office still has an impact on local capacity and ability to coordinate among municipalities as well as perceived value of planning
- Tax policy/revenue sharing rules impact regional approaches
- State Climate Action Plan requires regional approaches
 - Community Energy Committees mentioned.
 - Are there regional/statewide connections between them?
- Economic Development and tourism marketing have regional potential

COMMON THREADS WITH POTENTIAL FOR SYSTEMIC REGIONAL APPROACH

- Housing came up several times as needing regional approaches, as it may be difficult to address locally
- Arts/culture as a regional economic driver opportunity
- Climate Action Plan, which puts much of the implementation on municipalities
- Land use Planning and Regulation: ordinances/MUBEC and code enforcement/zoning: are municipalities prepared to handle new sustainability aspects?
- Transportation (also listed in successes, addressed currently within existing regional and statewide infrastructure)

SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL APPROACHES; ARE THEY ALIGNED BY GEOGRAPHY AND/OR COMMON THREADS?

- **Community/Economic:** Our Katahdin as regional collaborative <https://www.ourkatahdin.com/>
 - **Community/Economic:** Aroostook and Washington County communities worked with the LUPC to do a regional planning and comprehensive plan <https://www.gro-wa.org/>
 - **Economic/Environmental:** a group of municipalities in Washington County has unified a single regional shellfish ordinance for the same water body
 - **Transportation:** KVCAP transportation system / Calais bus
 - **Transportation:** Regional transportation entities such as PACTS provide regional framework (NOTE: This framework is required by federal law for funding dissemination)
 - **Arts/Culture:** Libra Foundation and others in Monson area <https://monsonarts.org>
 - **Culture/Tourism:** Maine Woods Consortium <http://www.mainewoodconsortium.org/>
 - **Culture/Tourism:** Lewiston and Auburn are connected across a variety of spheres including planning for the bicentennial parade, annual Balloon Fest, etc
 - **Culture/Tourism:** Damariscotta also does this with adjacent communities for the Pumpkin Festival
 - **Culture/Tourism:** the Boothbay peninsula is doing a regional marketing and signage project
- **Culture/Tourism:** There are also regional multi-community trail systems (like Hallowell Augusta, Farmingdale, Gardiner Kennebec River Rail Trail)
 - **Climate:** Lincoln County coastal communities have assessed their risks (along with many other coastal communities) and are seeking state assistance in addressing them.
 - **Climate:** South Portland/Portland climate sustainability collaboration: www.oneclimatefuture.org
 - **Environmental:** The Brunswick-Topsham region joined together to evaluate the health of the amphibian ecosystem along the Androscoggin River
 - **Environmental:** Southern Maine, Cumberland region, Androscoggin region and Bangor have all united to share information and collaboration on delivering incredibly expensive services to meet clean water requirements that should have been done by the state—like public education campaigns—to meet permitting requirements.
 - **Municipal Services:** Many regions share refuse services, code enforcement and animal control, shellfish wardens etc.
 - **Municipal Services: Public Safety:** Many public safety mutual aid cooperation agreements exist between police and fire departments including such items as training personnel, fundraising, combating opioid addiction, reducing competition for finite donor resources, and joint use of technical expertise and specialized equipment.