

Machias Comprehensive Planning Committee Minutes
Monday, May 5, 2025
At Machias Tele-Business Center

Ann-Marie Evans called the meeting to order at 6 p.m.

Committee members in attendance were: Ann-Marie Evans, Joshua Spencer, Carole Porcher, Frank Rodriguez, Chris Meroff. Also attending were: Sarah Dedmon, town manager; Patricia Tilton and Tora Johnson, planners from Sunrise County Economic Council; and Sharon Mack, recording secretary. Members absent and excused were Aaron Ackley, Julie Barker and James Jackson.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion by Spencer, second by Rodriguez, the April 21 minutes were accepted as presented.

Business:

Patricia Tilton and Tora Johnson presented a slide show of demographics regarding population and housing. The question was how many additional units of housing would be needed to respond to predicted slow but steady population growth. Tora Johnson said Machias' stock of vacant, owner or renter occupied residences is in decline. The median rent in 2023 was \$703/monthly, up from \$618 in 2018. The estimate of 7 seasonal residents is likely much higher and a community survey could help get an accurate number for a housing inventory.

It was stated that the condition of existing buildings was of great concern. One third of all homes in Machias were built before 1940 and Machias has a larger proportion of vacant homes than the rest of the county.

Discussion centered on the need for starter homes, not additional low income housing, and places for seniors to age gracefully. This could build the tax base. It was said that Machias needs to get aggressive in creating new job opportunities but new places to live is a partner to that effort. It is urgent to create a system where living spaces and jobs go hand in hand. Census projections are that an additional 1900 housing spaces will be needed by 2030 in Washington County and 30-35% of those should be in Machias. Other statistics showed that the median cost of a home in Machias is \$300,000 and the median income

is \$38,000. Of homeowners in 2022, 28% of seniors were having difficulty affording their homes and 60% of those with an annual income of \$30,000-\$35,000 were struggling to afford housing. Rental costs have outstripped inflation and 64 % of senior renters are struggling.

Discussions included:

- Giving incentives to investors to build diverse housing options in Machias.
- Creating a system that allows for low income residents to move up from subsidized housing to home ownership.
- Becoming proactive in making it easier with available housing for businesses to locate here.
- Focusing on making broadband connectivity available.
- Focusing on easing density prohibitions by using small lots and closer buildings surrounded by green spaces to keep Machias's history and culture intact. No "copy and paste" architecture.
- Seek opportunities for construction on town owned properties.
- Create a goal and then back it up with the comp plan and land use rules and zoning to protect Machias New England village style and be responsible and attractive.
- Build for what Machias is aiming to accomplish - the need to focus on single family homes.
- Updating local building codes to address the issue of aging structures. Define substandard buildings and trash codes.
- Make all definitions in the comp plan clear such as the meanings of subsidized, subdivisions, workforce housing, affordable.
- Utilize existing tools and programs, such as Sunrise County Economic Council's loan and finance program, and pooling groups of investors to move forward.
- Investigate base floor elevation requirements and education for those areas affected by flooding.

Patricia Tilton asked committee members to look at the existing list of Machias' businesses and update as necessary. She asked them to work on the survey, providing input and answers.

Next Meeting Date: May 19, 2025

Adjourn:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m. on a motion by Dedmon, second by Spencer.