



Frequently Asked Questions

What is GROWashington-Aroostook?

GROWashington-Aroostook is first and foremost a listening process to create and embrace a prosperous future. It is a regional planning effort that will assemble the facts, figures and maps we need to inform our conversations. The residents of both counties will be asked for their input, ideas and solutions for economic development and job creation, renewable energy, transportation, broadband, health, housing and infrastructure to create a plan for our future.

Why Washington and Aroostook counties together?

In July, 2011 the federal Economic Development Administration of the Department of Commerce agreed with a request from the State of Maine to realign the Economic Development District (EDD) that includes our two counties into a single Aroostook Washington Economic Development District. Many partners in the GROWashington-Aroostook consortium and workgroups were involved in the decision and supported its creation. An EDD is designated where there is some economic distress and in an area which is large enough to foster economic development on a scale that involves more than one single geographic area. The EDD is the vehicle through which federal financial support is provided for economic development and job creation of all kinds.

Who is facilitating this work and how is it funded?

The lead agency, Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC), received an \$800,000 Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grant from the HUD Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities. The primary staff leads in Washington County are based in the Washington County Council of Governments and the Sunrise County Economic Council. There are many other partners involved throughout the 2 counties as well as a 12 member consortium who have agreed to work together on a regional plan to GROWashington-Aroostook. Our region is one of 45 initial awards for Regional Planning grants; and additional 29 regions were awarded funds in November 2011.

What is the difference/relationship between GROWashington-Aroostook and Mobilize Maine?

Mobilize Maine is a partnership between Vital Economy Inc. and the seven Economic Development Districts in Maine, each of which are participating in development strategies based on their region's indigenous assets and opportunities. Mobilize Maine is a collaborative approach to economic development, which builds on regional strengths and assets that have market-leverage potential in a global economy. In Aroostook County to date, the planning process involves establishing five-year goals, mapping the region's indigenous assets, and conducting an in-depth analysis for two industry clusters: Renewable Energy and Information Technology/Operations Centers. Next steps include exploring additional industry action teams focused on air space, secondary wood products, and tourism development.

With the inclusion of Washington County in the Aroostook-Washington EDD (see answer to Why Washington and Aroostook counties together above) the Mobilize Maine approach will expand into Washington County. This expansion is taking place at the same time as the GROWashington-Aroostook regional planning effort. GROWashington-Aroostook has multiple elements that focus on economic development - thus it will be embedded together with Mobilize Maine - but GROWashington-Aroostook also includes workplan elements for housing, transportation, healthy communities and water infrastructure. These additional work plan elements will be useful to municipalities - to provide an efficient way to provide regional information for local Comprehensive Plans.

What if communities disagree? Will results be used at the local level?

All of us will work together to embrace a path for regional growth and prosperity, with the understanding that what works for one community or sub-region may not work for another. GROWashington-Aroostook recognizes and respects that the positions of individual communities may differ on specifics. This is part of our strength. We anticipate finding consensus on a broad regional vision but that not every recommendation will be agreed upon by every community.

Do local governments have to adopt the GROWashington-Aroostook recommendations?

No, in fact we have purposely left land use decision making out of the regional scope of work. The GROWashington-Aroostook recommendations will inform local communities and we anticipate they will be useful for local Comprehensive Planning purposes, in particular relieving the burden of developing data and policy in very small municipalities. However each community retains the authority to adopt what we hope will be a successful end product that reflects widespread investment and enthusiasm for our future.

How can I participate?

There are many different ways to participate in GROWashington-Aroostook:

- Consortium participation. The GROWashington-Aroostook Consortium is made up of elected representatives from the 2 counties, staff from agencies working on economic development, planning, housing, transportation and health, as well as state planning and transportation agencies. There is a signed Consortium Agreement among these groups.
- Partner participation. There are many partners in the GROWashington-Aroostook region. These include the University of Maine at Machias GIS Service Center, the Washington County Food and Fuel Alliance, Washington County: One Community, Aroostook Partners for Progress, Chambers of Commerce, Mano en Mano and many others.
- Workgroup participation. Workgroups will be formed around key topic areas. We seek interdisciplinary participation for this work and especially want to hear from those who are not typically represented in planning processes, but who feel the impact of the outcomes of our policy choices. Workgroup meetings are always open to the public. Interested residents can attend these meetings or share their thoughts with working group members.