



Meeting Minutes
Thursday, June 6, 2013
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Caribou Inn and Convention Center

- I. 10:00 a.m. Welcome and Overview
- II. 10:15 a.m. Joella Theriault opened the public forum by providing an explanation of the Gro-Washington/Aroostook Sustainable Development Communities Project. This was followed by a powerpoint presentation of core findings of both the housing and transportation components. The following issues were discussed:

HOUSING:

- ≈ Accessibility: Not all persons desiring to live locally have access to housing. Raymond Cyr of Portage Lake Housing described his community's dilemma in providing senior housing for their residents. The Portage Lake Housing, Inc. began planning a 12-unit facility back in 2007. They conducted a feasibility study and a marketing analysis that proved that there was a need for senior housing in Portage yet they have not been able to secure funding to date. The project was scaled back to 6 units, the town purchased the land needed to construct a facility, and have had no success in securing the funding. Part of the problem is that USDA Rural Development, a funding resource, will not provide funding to construct a

new facility while existing facilities have vacancy. There are currently vacant units in Allagash, Danforth, and even Ashland, but residents of Portage are not willing to relocate to areas where they do not know anyone or have family nearby.

- ≈ Senior housing is very much needed. Living on a fixed income makes it very difficult to maintain existing homes, so seniors need to move and have no place to go.
- ≈ Affordability: Mr. Duprey commented that the property taxes in his community were extremely high. Last year, the Dupreys' paid annual taxes of \$300 and this year their taxes were up to \$600. This is most likely attributed to the school in their community. Caswell has a very low number of school aged children. If not for the Radar Road multi-family housing, there would not be enough school children to keep the school open.
- ≈ House prices are not affordable especially when taxes, insurance, and other related costs are added. ***So how does affordability, owning versus renting, and unwillingness to move to where housing is available play out? What will the plan be suggesting on this?***
- ≈ Past residents moving back to the area are inflating prices. Residents who moved away to other New England states are now returning home for retirement. They have sold their homes for a good price and find home sale prices low in Aroostook County in comparison. People "from away" may not understand real estate pricing in the region. ***On the contrary, I think they understand real estate pricing very well...***
- ≈ Architectural Barriers: There is a need to educate people that the state of Maine extends beyond Bangor ***What does this statement have to do with architectural barriers?***
- ≈ Assisted Living: There is a need for additional assisted living facilities because there is a large elderly population in many communities in Aroostook County

- ≈ The Fort Fairfield Community Hospital was recently closed down and is for sale. Perhaps that facility could be converted into an assisted living facility. There are no facilities in Fort Fairfield. ***Trust me, this won't happen. Mitigation and rehab costs are grossly prohibitive.***
- ≈ Availability: Not only is there a shortage of rental units, but good quality rental units. There was a great deal of discussion of the substandard subsidized housing units, especially those not covered under the public housing authorities. A high number of rental units have health and safety issues. In some cases, landlords collect the rent from low-income tenants but they do not take care of the rental units. Tenants should be educated that they can call a number (MSHA who provides the subsidy) and have someone inspect the home. It was also noted that perhaps these tenants have nowhere else to go and are afraid to speak up. At the same time, some landlords may not be able to make repairs because of the high costs of insurance, utility rates, building materials, etc. One landlord simply closed his apartment building – 10 units -- last year because he could not afford the upkeep on the building.
- ≈ Subsidized rents do not meet the costs of upkeep and day-to-day costs.
- ≈ Affordable housing really isn't affordable
- ≈ Transient population looking for quality rental is difficult to find because often it is not listed with realtors. TAMC has word-of-mouth network for new residents.
- ≈ Elderly Housing: As stated earlier, and on many occasions, there are simply not enough elderly housing units for the number of older populations here in Aroostook County.
- ≈ Energy Efficiency: Weatherization is working and lowers heating costs. It makes “the world of difference” to insulate and replace windows. One homeowner is thankful for ACAP because rather than using 420 gallons of fuel last winter, she used only 300, reducing her heating bill for the year by about \$500. This would not have happened without assistance from LIHEAP.

- ≈ The amount of heating oil used determines the weatherization list. Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) provides a priority list to ACAP based on the home that uses the most heating oil. This is determined through the LIHEAP program.
- ≈ Environmental Issues: Disposal costs (solid waste) are high and problematic. For instance, to dispose of a television set, a homeowner must pay \$45. This is too high, plus elderly and disabled people cannot handle the bulky, heavy TV sets. Electronics such as computer monitors and others are also difficult to dispose of.
- ≈ Homelessness: Aroostook Mental Health Center (AMHC) has a grant program, PATH, for homeless individuals to get to work
- ≈ Public Housing: There are long waiting lists for public housing; anywhere from 2 to 4 years. One issue with Section 8 vouchers is that there are long lists in some areas. People have a hard time finding a place to live and sometimes their voucher runs out. There is a short window for finding Section 8 housing. ***Will want to investigate this to determine what the cause of “having a hard time finding a place” means. Is it basic lack of available units? Is it that available units won’t pass HQS? How do local housing authority waiting lists (and wait times) compare to MSHA waiting lists and wait times?***
- ≈ People need to be educated so that they advocate for programs and changes.
- ≈ Rehabilitation of Existing Homes: There is a definite lack of housing rehabilitation funds. ACAP has a long waiting list of applicants in need of housing rehabilitation. Policy changes for the CDBG program now prohibit communities from apply for Housing Assistance funds if their community has a population of less than 3,000. This eliminates approximately 92% of Aroostook County communities from seeking grant funding.

TRANSPORTATION

- ≈ 40% of the 11,000± miles of roads in Aroostook County needs improvement
- ≈ There is a lack of public transportation
- ≈ More people are biking/walking today. Of the 400 surveys completed, a majority of respondents want improved biking and walking paths. ***What was the “geography” of these surveys; i.e., were there parts of the region that had significantly more responses?***
- ≈ One challenge that Aroostook County communities face is that MDOT continues to raise the match money for local road projects. Communities just can’t afford the matching funds.
- ≈ Aroostook Regional Transportation System (ARTS) provides transportation services in the area, which includes the volunteer driver services.
- ≈ Persons needing transportation must give a one-week notice if they need volunteer driver service and 24-hour notice for the bus service.
- ≈ Public transportation in rural areas is sometimes problematic because of the wait time. Once your doctor’s appointment is done, you have to wait for the bus; on the other hand if you go downtown only once a week, you have quite a few errands to run and not enough time to get it done to get back to the bus on time.
- ≈ Able bodied, unemployed people looking for a job can’t get to work because they can’t afford a vehicle. We are seeing this more frequently these days.
- ≈ How about a voucher program, like the Section 8 vouchers? There could be a program where you would have a voucher to pay for repairs on your car or for you to purchase a car to get to work. There may be a program already underway known as the New Freedom Program.

III. 11:30-12:30 p.m. Lunch

IV. 12:30 – 1:00 p.m. Open Discussion: Positive conversation centered on concerns and future of Housing and Transportation for long-term planning

- ≈ In the case of assisted living in Fort Fairfield, there would be sufficient space available between the nursing home and individual homes to construct a new facility if existing ones are too expensive to renovate.
- ≈ Could also convert existing vacant buildings into assisted living. Make good use of vacant buildings in town.
- ≈ There are safety issues in homes that need to be looked at. In the case of a hearing impaired individual, equipment needed is very expensive and insurance companies may not cover the costs. If a hearing impaired individual is in a rental unit, the landlord is responsible for this equipment because he needs to make sure the tenant is safe. This is another problem.
- ≈ Develop an expanded transportation system that better meets the needs, such as more stops for buses, individual drivers, and caretakers.
- ≈ There should be a rental housing database for Aroostook County, that lists apartments for rent, energy efficiency units, realtor offices, and landlord registry. The database should be updated regularly.
- ≈ Have a program for first vehicle purchases and fixed affordable payments
- ≈ There is an ASPIRE program through DHHS, but that serves only a small percentage of the population.
- ≈ Could start up a new program called Wheels-to-Work; have donation of used vehicles for the program.
- ≈ There is a need to look at the distribution of housing vouchers
- ≈ People need to advocate for the CDBG program
- ≈ Need to develop better lines of communication between agencies, city-to-city, city-to-state, etc.
- ≈ \$\$\$\$ - Need more funding
- ≈ Caribou is in need of more first floor, ADA compliant apartments
- ≈ Security deposit funding is also a problem, but can't really do away with security deposits because landlords need to be assured their apartment units will not be damaged. Maybe there should be a payback requirement.

V. Wrap-up/Other

Submitted by,

Joella R. Theriault

Jay Kamm