

Town of Wells, Maine Comprehensive Plan Update

Submitted To:

Comprehensive Plan ~~Improvement Task~~
~~Force~~Update Committee
Wells, Maine

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~~February 24, 2005~~
June 1, 2022

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Part 1 -- Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Wells is a publicly adopted document that states what the citizens of Wells want to achieve for their community over the next decade, and how they intend to achieve it. What the citizens want to achieve is captured in the Vision and then further identified are known as “policies”, and how they intend to achieve it are know- the steps they will take together to make this vision a reality are known as “implementation programsstrategies”.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PURPOSE AND USE

The Comprehensive Plan’s purpose is to document ~~the Town’s commitment~~ the direction and actions needed in Wells to achieve ~~a the town’s~~ vision for the future (See Part 2 Chapter 1 for the Vision). The Comprehensive Plan reflects a long-range (e.g., ten year) view of future issues and opportunities. Issues are identified, projected and options selected to set a course of action. These decisions are the basis for the policies and implementation programsstrategies identified in this Plan.

The adopted Plan is used by citizens, elected officials, Town Committees, business investors, and others. They use it to help make daily decisions about the issues and opportunities that shape the Town’s physical, social and economic development. It is used to establish the legal foundation for several implementation programs and activities including, but not limited to the Town’s land use regulations. While the Comprehensive Plan is not a zoning ordinance, land use regulations must be consistent with the Plan.

In addition, the Comprehensive Plan’s purpose is to implement Maine State Planning LawGrowth Management Act (M.R.S.A. Title 30-A, Chapter 187) and related state and regional development policies.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ORGANIZATION

The Comprehensive Plan is organized into four parts: Introduction, Policies and Implementation Strategies, Implementation Program, and Appendix.

Part 1: Introduction

This part-section describes the Plan’s purpose, use, planning process, and plan adoption.

Part 2: Policies and Implementation Strategies

This part-section addresses es key ~~decision~~ issues facing the ~~Town~~ town and new opportunities, and (e.g., population growth, land use, transportation, community appearance, economic development, housing, etc.) identifies implementation actions that will be pursued.

Part 3: Implementation Program

~~This program describes the different types and purposes of actions available to achieve the policies. This section organizes the many implementation actions identified, assigns primary responsibility, and determines the level of priority.~~

Part 4: Appendix

This part-section includes background research and analysis on various community development issues that provide the basis for the adopted-identified policies and strategies.

The Comprehensive Plan is a living document. As Town-town issues and opportunities change and decisions need to be made, the Plan must be reviewed and updated to reflect current policies and implementation programs. Therefore, comments and suggestions about the Comprehensive Plan are always welcome. The Town of Wells has established a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to take the lead on these efforts upon adoption of this Plan. Checking with Board of Selectmen

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ADOPTION

The Comprehensive Plan is adopted by the Citizens of Wells at a Town Meeting. Unlike other communities in the region, this is accomplished when the Comprehensive Plan is presented at the polls. In 2009 the Wells Town Meeting process became a secret ballot voting referendum rather than a traditional Town Meeting format. However, this process is still referred to as “town meeting”.

The first Comprehensive Plan was written in 1963. In the 1980’s a major effort was made to prepare a new Comprehensive Plan. It consisted of three volumes and was adopted November 5, 1991. A revision was adopted on November 3, 1993. The present Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2002 and amended in 2003 with changes to allow for the new Transportation Center zone.

The plan adopted in 2002 was found by the Maine State Planning Office to be inconsistent with state Growth Management law. In response to these inconsistencies, the Town of Wells formed a Comprehensive Plan Improvement Task Force in 2003. This plan represents workThe 2005 Comprehensive Plan was completed by this Task Force, in 2003 through 2005. It builds upon, incorporates, consolidates, reformats and updates prior Comprehensive Plan policies and implementation programs. In 2016 efforts to update the 2005 Plan were not approved by the Comprehensive Plan Committee, and as a result were not presented for consideration by the citizens of Wells at the Town Meeting. A citizen initiated local ordinance titled Chapter 12 was adopted in 2019 to guide all future comprehensive plan update efforts in Wells, and to ensure that the 2005 Plan serves as the starting point. The 2022 Comprehensive Plan Update will be presented to the citizens of Wells for adoption at the November 2022 Town Meeting.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

The Comprehensive Planning process is an open process that encourages citizen participation, and is informed by state, regional, and local data and resources. This process is guided by a Comprehensive Plan Update Committee in accordance with the locally adopted ordinance Chapter 12.

State Planning Requirements

The Maine Legislature adopted the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act in 1988 and the Growth Management Act. The act requires that each municipality in the ~~State~~state, except those under the jurisdiction of the Land Use ~~Regulation-Planning~~ Commission (~~LURCLUPC~~), develop a local growth management program that guides the future growth of that community. The local growth management program must be consistent with State and regional goals and with the State's coastal policies.

Under the act, the local growth management program consists of two parts:

1. The preparation and adoption of a comprehensive plan by the Town. This plan must comply with State requirements and must be reviewed by State and regional agencies prior to its final adoption.
2. The preparation and adoption of an implementation program that is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and carries out the goals and policies set forth in the Plan. State and regional agencies must also review this program.

The State law requires that Wells update its Comprehensive Plan. This update of the Town's Comprehensive Plan has been prepared to fulfill that requirement.

Town of Wells Town Planning Program

Based on the Maine State Planning requirements, the Town of Wells Planning Program includes the following phases/planning activities that may occur simultaneously depending on the issues/opportunities facing the Town:

Phase I - Issue /Opportunity Research and Analysis

Phase II - Alternative Plan Evaluation and Selection

Phase III - Comprehensive Plan or Amendments Adoption

Phase IV - Implementation Development Plans, Projects and Programs

Phase V - Annual and Five-Year Capital Budgeting

Phase VI - Monitoring and Evaluation

The results of this planning process are a series of interrelated Town plans including:

Comprehensive Plan – The comprehensive, long-range (e.g., ten-year), general plan that contains general policies to guide the physical, social and economic development of the Town. The Comprehensive Plan is reviewed and updated as needed.

Development Plans and Programs – Short-range, specific plans and programs for an area of Town (e.g., Town Center or Harbor), or functional activity (e.g., Transportation and Circulation

or ~~Drainage Open Space Protection~~) prepared and adopted to implement adopted Comprehensive Plan policies. The Development Plans and Programs contain detailed design concepts and/or standards to guide the physical, social, economic development of the Town. In some cases, the Development Plans and Programs will need to be adopted by ordinance to provide the legal basis for implementing the Comprehensive Plan (e.g., the Development Plan for Transportation and Circulation for requiring street dedications, easements, etc.). In other cases the Board of Selectmen or Planning Board may adopt Development Plans where they are providing a guide for development. Development Plans or Programs are prepared as needed and approved by the Planning Board after a public hearing and updated as needed.

Site Plans – Immediate, specific plans for a site or parcel of land that an Applicant proposes to develop. Site Plans require detailed information about the land use, location, development, traffic and circulation, parking, appearance, landscaping, drainage, etc. as described in the Town Land Use Ordinance. These plans are reviewed for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, any applicable Development Plans or Programs, and Town Ordinances. The Staff Review Committee or Planning Board may approve site Plans after a public hearing. Site Plans are prepared and may be amended as needed.

Subdivision Plans – Immediate, specific plan for the legal division and development of a specific parcel of land. Subdivision Plans require detailed information about the street layout, lot size, grading, drainage, impact on water quality, and other information as described in the Town Subdivision Ordinance. These plans are reviewed for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, any applicable Development Plans or Programs, Town Ordinances and applicable State and Federal regulations. The Planning Board may approve subdivision Plans after a public hearing. Subdivision Plans are prepared and amended as needed.

Construction Plans – Immediate, specific working drawings with detailed specifications for the implementation of an adopted Development Plan, Site Plan or Subdivision Plan. These plans could be for the construction or development of a street, building, park, etc. The Office of Planning reviews construction Plans and Development for consistency with approved Development, Site or Subdivision Plans and applicable building and other codes.

Comprehensive Plan Update Process

~~As stated above, this update of the Comprehensive Plan is the result of the Town of Wells' reaction to State Planning Office inconsistencies identified in the 2002 Comprehensive Plan Update. The Comprehensive Plan Improvement Task Force worked on this version of the plan in 2003 and 2004. The Task Force is comprised of citizens, selectmen and Town staff. The Task Force completed its work under the guidance of the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission, the Town's planning contractor. This update process was led by the Wells Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) created by the Board of selectmen as identified in Chapter 12. The CPUC was composed of an engaged group of citizen volunteers who provided their time, energy, and knowledge by guiding and informing the creation of this updated Comprehensive Plan. Assisted by Town Staff and the selected consulting team, this process was governed by Chapter 12, a local ordinance that now regulates the update process for the Wells Comprehensive Plan.~~

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Part 2 – Policies and Implementation Strategies

Chapter 1 The Vision for Wells

~~The Comprehensive Plan's Vision for Wells describes the overall features of what the citizens of Wells want their Town to be. This Vision for the Town of Wells was informed by the existing conditions analysis completed in 2021, and located in the Appendix of this Plan. It was then created with feedback and direction from the residents of Wells and the members of the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee. like. The-This Vision defines-addresses the overall character of the Town-town in terms of its natural, social and built environment while recognizing the changing economy and the realities of climate change that local leaders and residents are facing. The intent of the Vision is to help visualize the town of Wells in the year 2032, and have a clear image to work towards through the many implementation actions identified in this Plan.~~

THE VISION FOR WELLS IN 2032

~~As a historic coastal New England community, the town of Wells contains valued natural resources including conserved forest lands, protected surface waters, an active harbor, a productive estuary supporting wildlife and fisheries, and several prized beaches. Over the past decade, Wells has continued to protect and steward this important network of natural resources while guiding new development activity in ways that both preserve and enhance the community's distinct character.~~

~~As the community continues to transition to new types of economic activity and away from the land-based industries it relied on in the past, Wells remains a highly desirable place to live and work because of its welcoming people, network of protected open spaces, history, and coastal location. Together, the citizens of Wells are working to embrace new residents and economic opportunities, while making the community more resilient to the changing climate and coastal hazards. This has been accomplished through both new land use regulations and infrastructure investments. These changes are now guiding and informing new business and housing opportunities that add value and reinforce the character of the community. Quality municipal services with an emphasis on health, safety and sustainability, and an interconnected transportation system also contribute to the quality of life for residents, and continue to attract seasonal visitors.~~

~~More specifically Wells has achieved this Vision by accomplishing the following:~~

~~Housing:~~

Transportation:

Economic Development:

Coastal Impacts and Natural Hazards:

Open Space and Conservation:

~~Wells is a terrific community with great people and a great environment. The vision for Wells is to preserve and promote Wells' small town historic traditional rural New England seacoast community character, appearance and values for a better quality of life.~~

~~If quality is conformance to a standard, then continually improving quality means continually setting and achieving higher standards for excellence in planning, design, development, service and operations. Citizens drive standards: their aspirations, expectations, their goals and policies.~~

~~Setting standards will enable Wells to:~~

- ~~● Retain and improving the quality of life.~~
- ~~● Promote economic opportunity.~~
- ~~● Promote health and safety.~~
- ~~● Promote educational opportunity.~~
- ~~● Promote environmental protection.~~

~~Vision Benefits~~

~~There are several benefits from this vision for Wells including:~~

~~1. Retaining Small Town Character and A Better Quality of Life.~~

~~The first benefit is retaining and promoting a better environment for business and living. Wells' economic base is tourism. Its attraction for tourist and residents alike is its historic and traditional New England seacoast and rural environment, character and appearance. This character and appearance is derived from Wells' architecture and rural environment. The architecture reflects the New England Colonial and Victorian styled wood homes, buildings, barns or barn like buildings painted in colonial colors that give Wells its unique character herein referred to as Traditional New England Style or the Wells Maine Style. This architectural Style also influences the design of signs, graphics, street lighting, paving and the other "built" features in the Town.~~

~~Similarly, the Traditional New England Style reflects the Town's unique setting on the seacoast/marine estuary and in the upland rural forested area. Tourists and residents alike are attracted to this town character and appearance. Thus, the vision is to preserve and enhance the traditional New England style small town character and appearance for everyone's benefit.~~

~~2. Improved Central Area~~

~~A second benefit is improving the central area of Wells in the vicinity of the Route 1/Route 109 intersection. This area forms the historic commercial heart of the Town and it will be enhanced with pedestrian and other transportation improvements that will protect its character and advance its livability.~~

~~3. Protecting Rural Areas and Neighborhoods~~

~~A third benefit is preserving and enhancing the rural areas (i.e. with agricultural, forestry and residential uses) and residential neighborhoods (i.e., with low, medium and higher density residential uses) of Wells. Neighborhoods will also be linked to other neighborhoods and to the central area by pedestrian and bicycle ways to promote off road movement, open spaces, and scenic local and collector streets.~~

~~4. Beach Areas with Neighborhoods and Village Centers~~

~~A fourth benefit is protecting and enhancing the seacoast and adjacent marine estuary areas and residential areas with neighborhoods and neighborhood village centers. The areas will feature less vehicular traffic, public access and open spaces to protect natural ecologically critical areas. The village centers could include limited convenience services and public facilities such as a fire station or park. The neighborhoods will also be linked to other neighborhoods and the central area by pedestrian and bicycle ways to promote off road movement, open spaces, and scenic local and collector streets.~~

~~5. Open Space and Natural Ecologically Critical Areas~~

~~A fifth benefit is preserving and protecting land for recreation, tree growth and natural wildlife habitat, and, where appropriate, linking it by streams, pedestrian and bicycle paths and other ways.~~

~~6. Transportation Center (Maine Turnpike Exit 19 Area)~~

~~A sixth benefit is continuing to develop a mixed-use business area aimed at serving the customers of the new Wells Transportation Center with Amtrak “Downeaster” train service and Maine Turnpike (Interstate 95) Exit 19 access. As described more fully in Chapters 6, 7, & 8 of this plan, land use and development policies and regulations will be prepared in order to promote the development/redevelopment of this area to serve travelers (tourists, residents, and others) at this transportation gateway to the Wells community. The Town will work with the Turnpike Authority and developers to effectively utilize the Transportation Center access road and the traffic signal at Route 109. Traditional New England style architecture will be promoted.~~