

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND LESSONS LEARNED

A Northern Maine Perspective



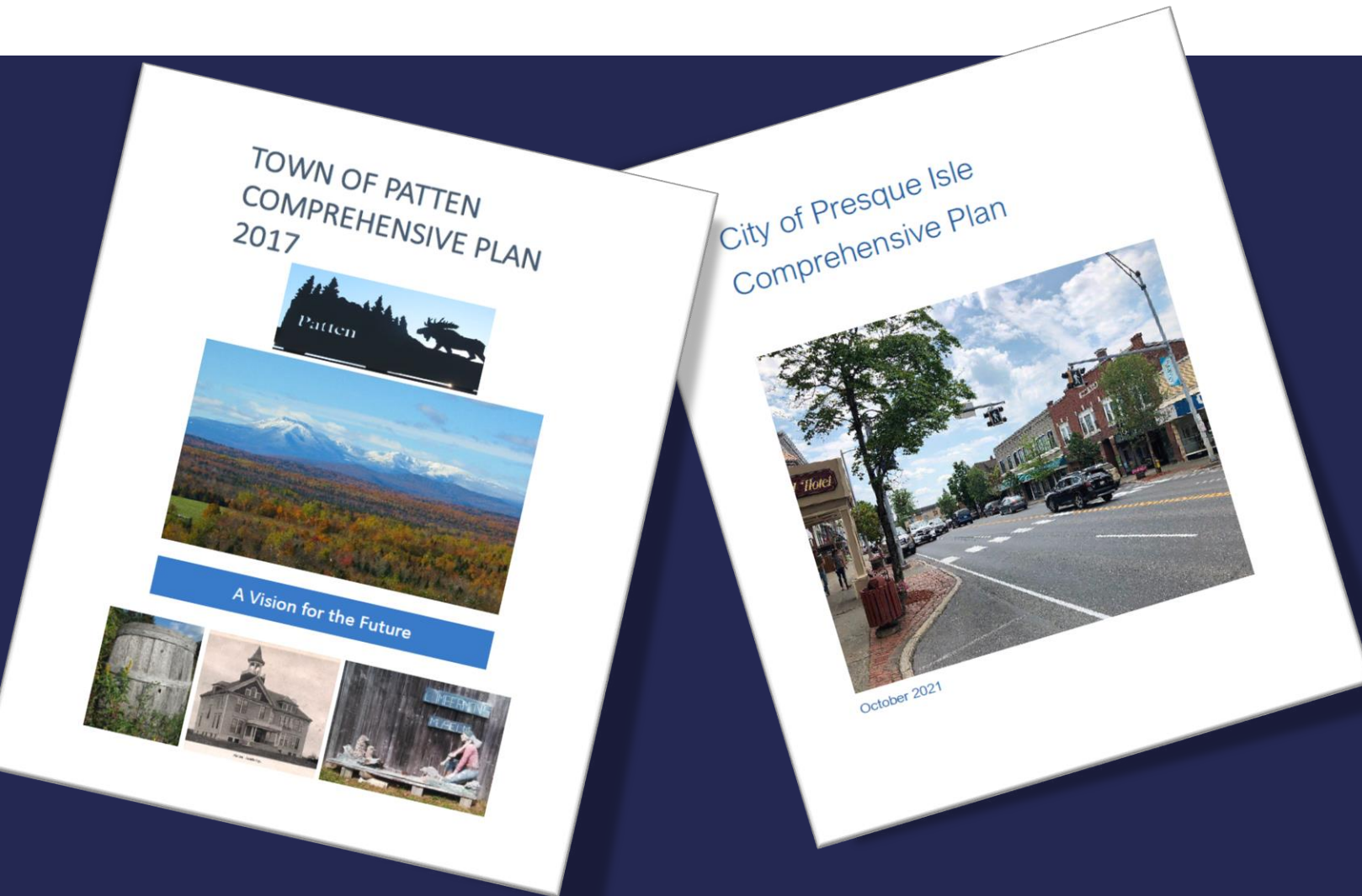
OUR SERVICE AREA

Overview

- Our region contains 2 cities, 3 “larger communities” but consists mainly of small rural communities
- There are no municipalities in NMDC’s service area with a population greater than 10,000
- There is (was) one planner. Caribou may be looking for an assistant City Manager/Planner
- Generally speaking, planning capacity is lacking in the region
- Most do not have land use regulations other than shoreland zoning
- For decades, all the communities suffered from out-migration. Since COVID, this is changing



WHAT DOES COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING LOOK LIKE?



“Growth” management and comprehensive planning centered around:

- Stemming population loss
- Planning for the needs of an aging population
- Natural Resource Management
- Community Development
- Land use and land use regulation is/was an after thought

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE ON THE GROUND



Blighted Properties

Public Facilities and
Services



Natural Resources

Transportation



WHY DO YOU LIVE HERE-IS THIS VISIONING?



VISIONING-REMEMBER WHY YOU LIVE HERE

- Perhaps the most overlooked part of the comprehensive planning process
- Municipalities want to jump in and write/review. Reactive rather than proactive
- True Visioning is the cornerstone of a successful comprehensive plan
- There are things some things municipalities have been or are doing to increase participation:
 - Baking cookies/providing food
 - Home heating fuel/firewood/gas card raffles
 - Free transportation to meeting
 - Booths at festivals/events
 - Going out and speaking with groups – seniors, recreation, businesses, etc

VISIONING- HOW?

- Workshops and meetings
- Digital engagement and public surveys. Need to be careful as digital platforms are not public meetings
- Consultants- many times are residents who have a background in designing workshops or analyzing data. Also helps bring new people into the planning process.
- Spend some time developing materials and resources- people like looking at maps, pictures, concepts.
- Fairs, festivals, events.
- Drop boxes at Town office, library, grocery store, others



POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- They are usually receptive as it helps with their strategic planning and workplan development.
- Need to be careful that the input is too homogenous.
- We have successfully used:
 - Aroostook Regional Transportation Systems
 - Aroostook County Action Program
 - Aroostook Area Agency on Aging
 - Soil and Water Conservation Districts
 - Community economic development commissions- usually in the larger communities
- I'm sure there are others

VISIONING- THE GOOD AND THE BAD

▪ The Good

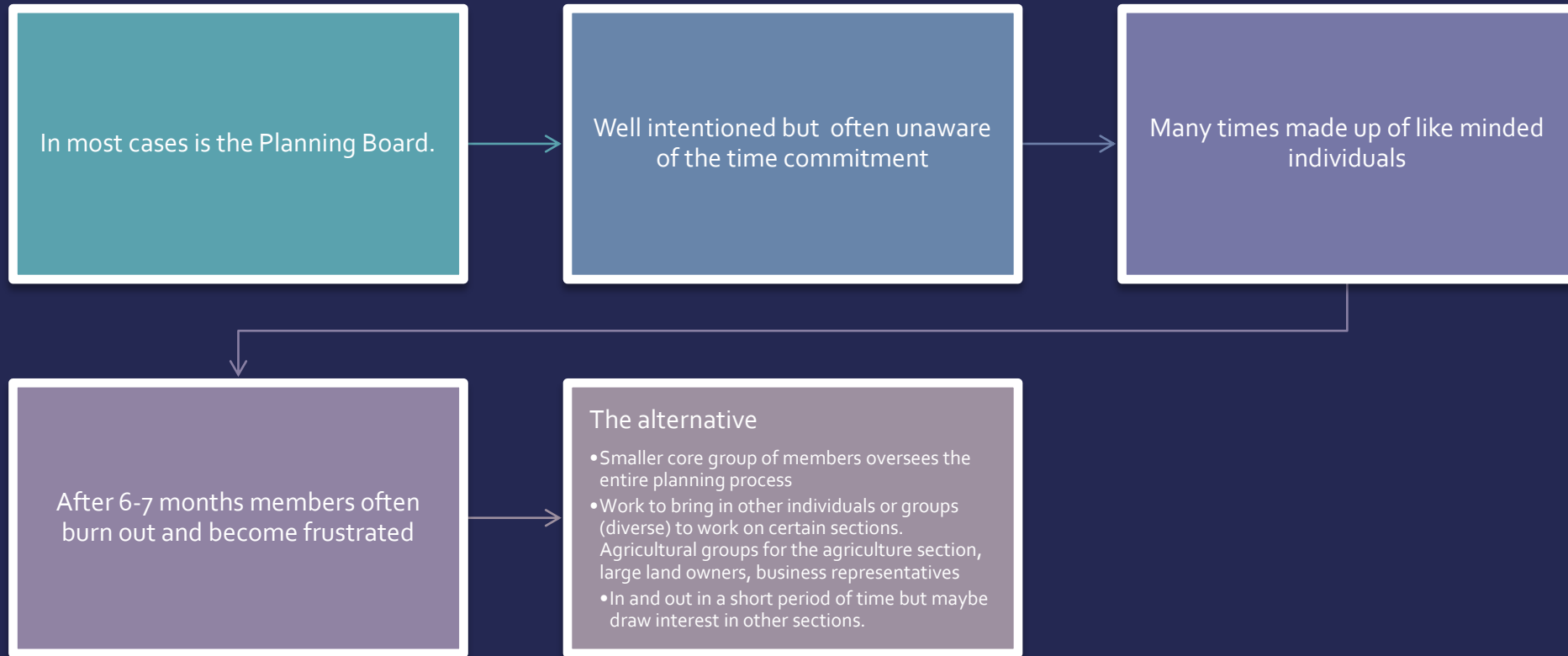
- **Example:** A community envisions itself as a thriving, sustainable hub where residents enjoy a high quality of life, excellent education, and economic opportunities for all.
- **Explanation:** This vision is inspiring, inclusive, and focuses on long-term outcomes. It provides a clear direction for the community's development.
- Aspirational, inclusive, and actionable

▪ The Not So Good

- **Example:** A community envisions itself as having lower crime rates.
- **Explanation:** This vision is too narrow and lacks inspiration. It doesn't paint a picture of a desired future or address underlying issues.
- A better vision would focus on creating a safe and inclusive community where residents feel connected and supported.
- Limited in scope, lacks inspiration, and fails to address root causes

THE “NUTS AND BOLTS” OR A BETTER TERM “THE STUMBLING BLOCKS”

- Planning Committee
 - Data Analysis
- Future Land Use Plans
 - The Checklist



THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Paralysis by analysis- what the heck do we do with all of this information?



Bring it to a manageable level

While a trend isn't a plan it is often understandable by the planning committee

Instead of worrying about what the 55 year old age group is doing, look at the trend of an aging or a younger population.

Have the conversation of what trends may mean to school enrollments, recreational programs etc

DATA ANALYSIS

THE LAND USE PLAN

- Often the biggest stumbling block of the planning process and usually the most contentious
- Thought of as a back door zoning ordinance
- Growth and rural designations are difficult for the community
 - Prime farmland soils are also the best for development
 - Water and sewer is mitigating a water quality issue and not designed to accommodate growth
 - New residents want large lots away from neighbors- roads, fire, ambulance

LAND USE PLAN

- The Inventory and Analysis leads to the Land Use Plan.
- Helps to manage development and public infrastructure. An uncoordinated pattern of community growth will produce adverse effects on commerce, housing, streets, and public facilities.
- One of the most common examples of uncoordinated development is allowing elderly housing to be located where it is inaccessible from the rest of the community!.
- It does not take long for a community to realize that the entire process of providing services should have been discussed before approving those developments.
- Incompatible land uses: some land may be developed before the community realizes that the land is subject to periodic flooding.

THE LAND USE PLAN



WE HAVE COMMUNITIES WITH PUBLIC SEWER (WATER QUALITY MITIGATION) THAT WERE NOT DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE ADDITIONAL GROWTH



WHAT IS THE CORRECT SIZE- THERE IS NO RIGHT ANSWER.



WE HAVE SEEN $\frac{3}{4}$ OF A TOWN DESIGNATED AND OTHERS JUST A TINY PORTION.



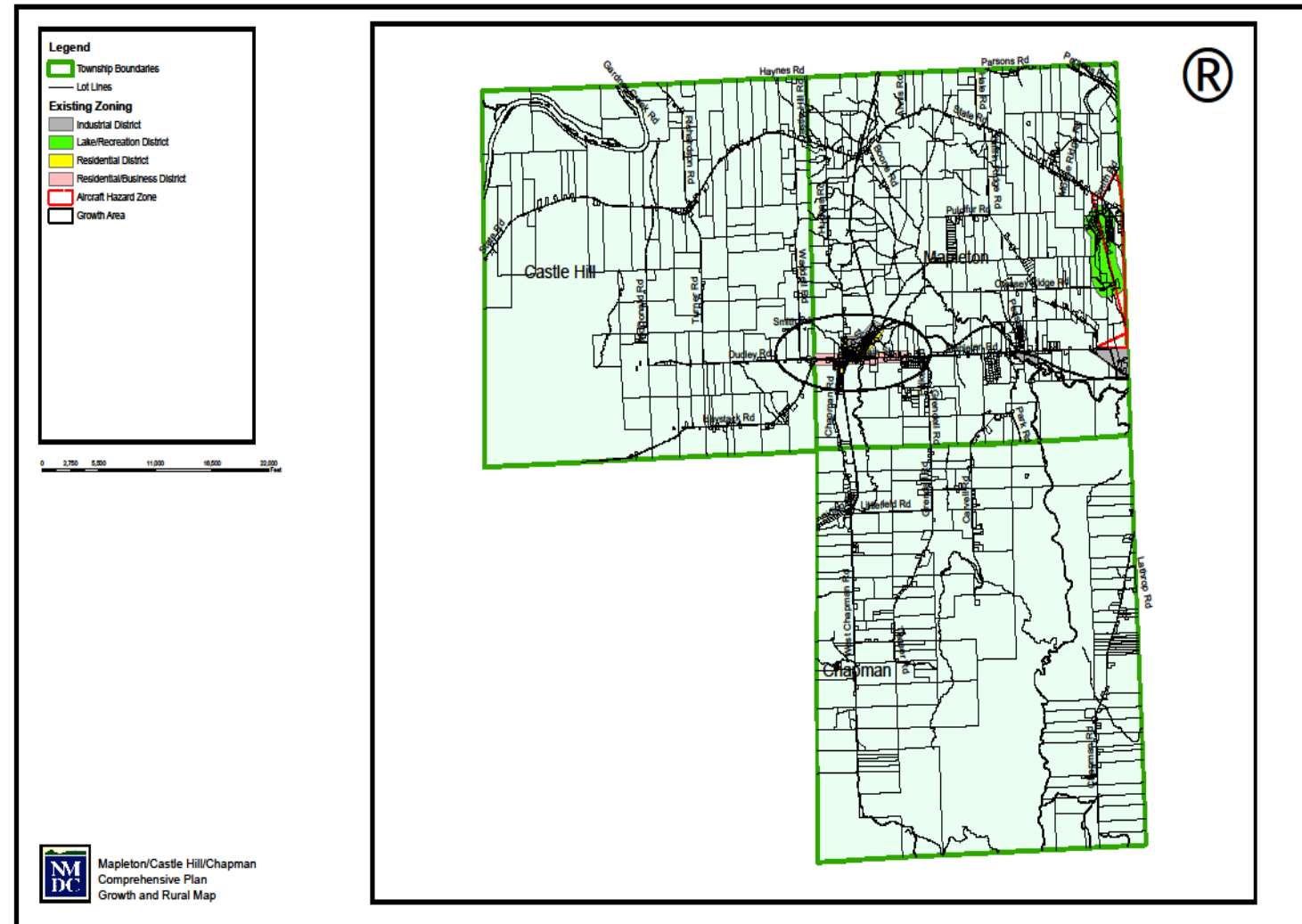
IN MANY INSTANCES GROWTH/ RURAL EXEMPTION

THE LAND USE PLAN

- Strong public participation is needed (for the entire plan but particularly for the land use plan).
- The designation of Growth and Rural often led to the conversations of the “haves vs. have nots.”
- Rural designations are thought of as Resource Protection. That should not be the case. Think about what is located there and how do you support the designation
 - Example Agricultural land uses but then not allowing smaller scale agricultural support such as retail, agritourism etc.
- Even non-regulatory strategies can cause problems..”how come my road is chip sealed when the village area is paved?
- This is where the Committee often gets cold feet especially when 500 people show up to oppose the Plan.

THE LAND USE PLAN

- What is the correct size for a Growth Area? Is there is a right answer?
- As planners we need to reduce the fear that this is a “zoning ordinance.”
- It really is the implementation of the vision...even if the vision is done on the fly.



THE CHECKLIST

- Somewhat of a Catch 22
- Towns seem to like the checklist. Provides guidance and helps them address issues not necessarily thought of
- Ensures that components are addressed for consistency
- Sometimes stifles creativity (writing to the test) or “we are DONE”
- As always, the Plan is the municipality's. There are always opportunities to be had.

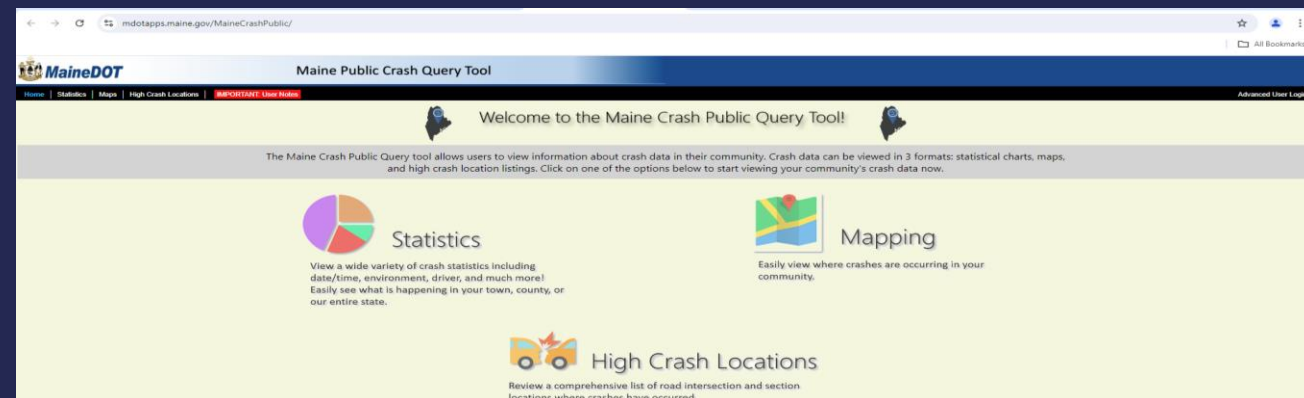
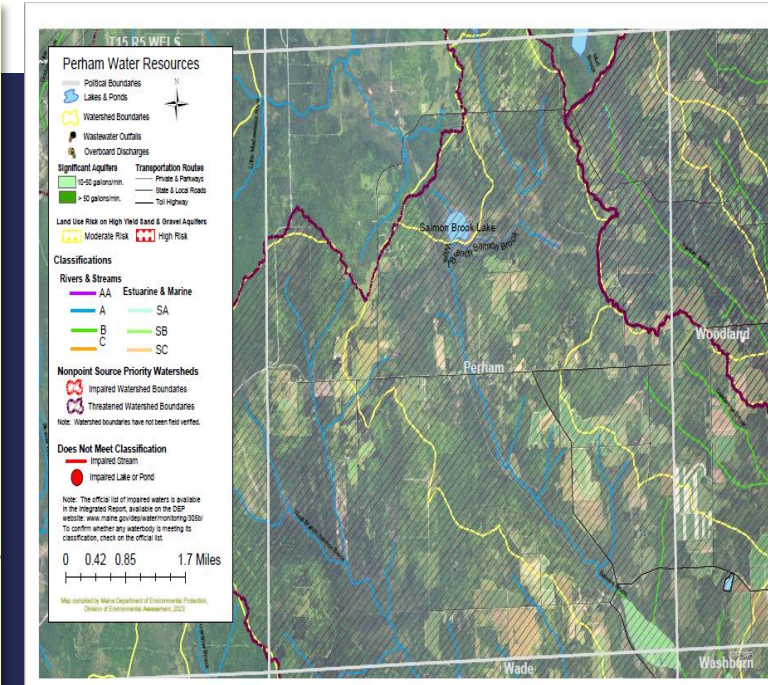
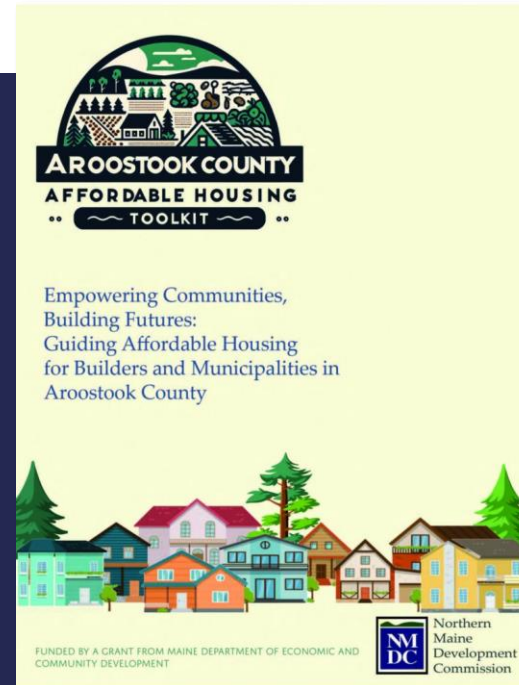


FINAL THOUGHTS

- Multiple authors- costly in time, money, and political capital
- Regional Plans- good if towns participate
- Multi-town plans- we have two. Work well when one govt. is central to all.
- Costs- a big stumbling block. Fix a road or plan?
- Living in the past-Loring closure in 1994
- Unrealistic time frames and expectations. We want a Plan on August 5
- Times are changing

FINAL THOUGHTS- TIMES HAVE CHANGED

- We are extremely fortunate to have a wealth of information, data and guidance at our fingertips
 - Affordable housing toolkits
 - Crash data and traffic counts
 - Natural Resources
 - Demographics
- Always double check
- From a data standpoint...these are the good old days



A GREAT PHILOSOPHER AND WORD SMITH ONCE SAID....

“You got to be
careful if you
don’t know where
you’re going,
because you
might not get
there.”

• Yogi Berra

