

Comments on the Draft Comprehensive Plan and the Planning Board's Responses

March 18, 2009

1. Comment: The City should concentrate on: Development of a river walk starting from the train station and running up to the Coal Pocket; Development of a cruise ship-friendly dock; and Development of facilities that would attract high end mega yachts. (From the Public meeting 3/10/09)

Planning Board's response: Very good suggestion and many of these items are presently being pursued. Appendix H talks about costs of pier improvements for larger vessels. And this is included in the Capital Improvements Plan. Appendix G talks about the importance of trails and pathways and mentions the present effort taking place to develop a concept plan for a pathway along the river in the downtown.

2. Comment: Although there are several references throughout the document about philanthropic gifts, it would be nice to see a statement that notes the importance of philanthropy not only for the economic impact but how the contributions improve the quality of life in a community. The donors include businesses, corporations, foundations, individuals and organizations like the United Way. The entities supported include arts and cultural events, educational programs and opportunities, historic preservation, human resource services, new technology and the religious community to name a few. Encouraging philanthropy benefits the community! (e-mailed from a Bath resident)

Planning Board's response: A very correct statement. Appendix C discusses the important non-governmental organizations in Bath. And Chapter 4 includes an Issue Statement that highlights the importance of these organizations to our cultural enjoyment and to our economy. We hope that this will lead residents to support these organizations.

3. Comment: As a former resident of Bath (and with family still in the area), I would like to tell you how impressed I am with the city and its changes (this website, "the plan" in the Times Record). It seems as though you have all of the bases covered. I would like to add three thoughts to this

process because of the fact that I love this city so much and want to see you improve even more.

1-(I'm not sure if you have this or not) A teen center; A place (possibly established by the rec. department) that would allow high school students a place to go on the weekends. Pool, darts, ping pong, etc... could be offered.

2-A place (possibly connected to the center) where rock and jazz musicians can perform. I am a musician and the venues to rehearse and play were somewhat limited.

3-A BIG industry (dealing with computers) besides BIW for college students graduating can go and find a job.

I mention these things because if there had been these options when I was growing up, I would probably still be there.

I hope these thoughts help. (e-mailed from a Bath resident)

Planning Board's response: Responding to the last part of this comment first; Appendix B discusses the importance of diversifying the City's economy. Chapter 4 sets out Actions that should be taken to do this. Chapter 5 discusses the importance of the City's economic advantage provided by the Kennebec River and encourages proper use of the working waterfront areas for job creation.

Appendix H inventories all the activities that the Recreation Department offers to teens as well as residents of other age groups. It does mention that the Recreation Department should be aware of the changing needs of all citizens. The Planning Board, however, believes that meeting the needs of musicians to practice and perform is best met by the performing arts organizations in Bath or by the private sector; not by the City.

4. Comment: I wanted to pass along a couple of comments regarding the draft of the City of Bath Comprehensive Plan that was recently previewed for public comment, that was the purpose of my call to you last week. First, I would note it was with some disappointment to read in the Times Record and the Plan itself that Bath is preparing an economic development plan that includes "contingency planning for the future possibility of BIW shrinking or closing." That is certainly not the message we are sending to our employees nor is it part of BIW's plan.

While BIW has no objection to the concept of desiring economic diversity, planning for negative events or worse case scenarios, what is the basis for planning for closure? It certainly does not come from any communication that BIW has provided to the City of which I am aware. It would at least seem more balanced to also include a statement that Bath should plan for BIW's continued operations/future growth and support planning/economic development efforts with that goal in mind. I have reviewed the Comp Plan and cannot locate any statement which addresses that as a goal.

A couple of other points worth mentioning are the repeated characterizations of BIW as "Maine's largest private employer" which I do not believe to be accurate. Although the actual data on that point should be sought from the Maine Dept of Labor, MaineBiz has listed Hannaford, LL Bean and WalMart as having more active employees than BIW. The current employment level for BIW is erroneously listed in the Comp Plan at 5100 and it currently stands at 5654. (e-mailed from BIW)

Planning Board's response: Not planning for the possibility that a community's largest employer might downsize or even close seems to be irresponsible. There are many instances nationwide of textile mills closing in a weekend, of mines shutting down over night, and of paper mills closing with very little notice. Preparing for such economic catastrophes is a proper part of any city planning, just as is planning for a hurricane by a community on the Florida coast. It doesn't mean that that community wants the hurricane or is giving the public the wrong message by preparing for it. Perhaps the Issue Statement could, however, reinforce the unstated desire of the community that Bath Iron Works continue to be in Bath, continue to prosper, and continue to employ many workers from Bath and the region.

The second part of this comment is very good information and the Plan will be corrected with this data.