

Cover Page

Sustainable Tourism Management Task Force

Wednesday, February 11, 2026 Meeting

Issued on 02/05/2026

	Material Issued
ITEMS	
Cover page with date	✓
February 11, 2026, Meeting Agenda	✓
December 10, 2025, Minutes for approval	✓
Public Comments as of February 5, 2026	✓
Working Agreements	✓



TOWN OF BAR HARBOR
93 Cottage Street
Bar Harbor Maine 04609

Sustainable Tourism Management Task Force Meeting Agenda

**Bar Harbor Municipal Building
Town Council Chambers
Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 4:00 – 7:00 PM
Special 3 Hour Meeting**

Members of the public may attend in person or virtually via this [Zoom](#) link

Reoccurring Zoom Webinar: Webinar ID 854 4239 9205, Passcode 849107

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|-----|---|----------------|
| 1. | Call to Order | 4:00 – 4:05 PM |
| 2. | Adoption of Agenda | 4:00 – 4:05 PM |
| 3. | Excused Absences | 4:00 – 4:05 PM |
| 4. | Adoption of Minutes of December 10, 2025 | 4:00 – 4:05 PM |
| 5. | First Public Comment Period | 4:05 – 4:10 PM |
| 6. | Business Arising from December 10, 2025: | 4:10 – 4:15 PM |
| | a. Update to Town Council | |
| 7. | Strategy Development Process Updates: | 4:15 – 4:45 PM |
| | a. Check in on Timeline | |
| | b. Community Feedback / Parking Lot | |
| | c. Overview of Phase 5: Strategic Goals and Actionable Priorities | |
| | c. Community Engagement Upcoming: | |
| | i. Community Organizations Workshop, Mar 25, 2026 | |
| | ii. Open House, Mar 26, 2026 | |
| 8. | Situation & Carrying Capacity Analysis Presentation | 4:45 – 6:30 PM |
| | a. Equator AI Edmund Morris | |
| 9. | Second Public Comment Period | 6:30 – 6:50 PM |
| 10. | Task Force Member Comments | 6:50 – 7:00 PM |
| 11. | Closing Remarks & Confirmation of Next Meeting | 7:00 – 7:00 PM |
| 12. | Adjourn | 7:00 PM |



TOWN OF BAR HARBOR
93 Cottage Street
Bar Harbor Maine 04609

Sustainable Tourism Management Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Task Force members attending: Vicki Hall, Chair, Enoch Albert, Vice-Chair, and members, Christopher Cannon (virtual), Christine Kirk, Jeremy Dougherty, Katherine Zavestoski, John Kelly, David Woodside, Pat Bucello (virtual), Michael Boland

Excused: Jim Glavine, Alexa Kelly, Leila Long

Consultants attending: J E Austin: Michele McKenzie (virtual), Ben Nussbaumer (virtual)

Staff attending: Michele Gagnon, Cali Martinez

- 1. Call to order**
Chair Vicki Hall called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM
- 2. Adoption of agenda**
It was moved by David Woodside and seconded by Katherine Zavestoski that the agenda be approved as presented. Motion carried (10-0).
- 3. Excused absences**
Jim Glavine
- 4. Adoption of Minutes**
It was moved by John Kelly and seconded by Jeremy Dougherty that the minutes of November 12, 2025, be approved as presented. Motion carried (10-0).
- 5. First public comment period**
A member of the public made the point that Bar Harbor as a community is not sustainable given the seasonal nature of commercial activity, posing the question “how do you have a sustainable community in light of tourism, rather than how do you have sustainable tourism activity”? The commenter noted that tourism will come to Bar Harbor due to forces beyond our control. Can the Task Force look at ways to stimulate a year-round economy/invite year-round commercial activity?

6. Business Arising from the Minutes of November 12, 2025

- a. There was no business arising from the minutes. Michele McKenzie noted, however, that the minutes reference the final Situation and Carrying Capacity Analysis will be presented at the January 2026 Task Force meeting. The consulting team has since recommended that the January meeting of the Task Force be cancelled as they will still be working on the Report and the next meeting of the Task Force be held on February 11, 2026. This recommendation will be discussed later in the meeting.

7. Strategy Development Process Update:

a. Community Feedback/Parking Lot

Michele McKenzie presented three slides summarizing community feedback received to date through the public comment periods at Task Force meetings and through the group email address: STMTaskForce@barharbormaine.gov. The feedback was categorized as feedback considered to date, issues to be addressed later in the process, and resources/process considerations. There was a discussion regarding the meeting room set-up and potential ways to improve the sound quality and sightlines as well as the readability of the slides.

Before moving to the next items on the agenda, Michele provided an update on the process. The design stage of the work is being completed including the situational and carrying capacity analysis, the definition of sustainable tourism, the desired visitor and resident experience, and the shared vision and principles. A report on this stage will be submitted along with a ‘what we heard’ report.

b. Resident Survey:

Ben Nussbaumer reviewed the topline report of feedback received in the resident survey:

- The survey was open for just over one month, closing on Dec 4, 2025; 374 responses were received, 75% of which were submitted by year-round Bar Harbor residents; responses were received across a broad range of ages with 63% age 55+
- Ben provided an analysis of feedback received on the draft definition of sustainable tourism and the emergent themes/priorities that residents expect to see covered in the sustainable tourism management strategy.

The next two items on the agenda were flipped with Sustainable Tourism Definition becoming item c and Community Engagement Updates becoming item d.

c. Sustainable Tourism Definition:

A majority of survey respondents, 61%, found the draft definition of sustainable tourism to be clear and complete. Michele presented a summary of the feedback from the balance of respondents which focused on the wording and tone of the definition, as well as additional ideas for consideration. After a robust discussion, there was consensus among Task Force members in favor of a short definition, and that minor tweaks to the draft definition would address the essence of the feedback. Michele Gagnon noted that the Town produces engagement reports for all public engagements. In addition, the raw data is made available so that all comments received through the survey will be publicly available.

d. Community Engagement Updates:

- Michele provided an overview of the feedback received at the vision workshop held for community organizations on November 19, 2025. Seven

community organizations participated in the workshop. Also, in attendance as observers, were two members of the Task Force and three members of the public.

- Michele also provided feedback received at a briefing for the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce attended by members of the Chamber board of directors as part of the 'targeted presentations' component of the community engagement plan.

There was a discussion among Task Force members regarding the scope of feedback received and that the sustainable tourism management strategy is not intended to address every issue. This matter will need to be addressed in the next stage of strategy development. The point was also made that the Chamber does not represent all businesses in town. Michele noted that a planned business survey will go out to all businesses – not just chamber members. Also, the point was made that the consultants would benefit from speaking directly to key individuals.

8. Situation and Carrying Capacity Analysis

a. State of Maine May – Aug 2025 Tourism Numbers

Ben provided an overview of Maine summer 2025 visitation. The consulting team will incorporate this data in the situational analysis. Ben also provided a short analysis of opportunities that may emerge from alignment with the Maine Outdoor Recreation Roadmap initiative.

9. Second Public Comment Period

- A member of the public commented on the approach of extending the tourism season noting that it is a welcome change when the off season arrives and townspeople run into more familiar faces.
- Several members of the public asked about how the process will get feedback from residents who are not engaging in the process. The concern is that the process will be overly responsive to the squeaky wheel. The consultants replied that the process uses a number of tactics to understand the key issues, including a strong data driven approach.
- A member of the public asked if there is a tipping point where tourism adversely affects everything else in the community, and if so, what is that tipping point. The additional point was made that everything in the strategy should be measured against a vision of what result is trying to be achieved.
- A member of the public made a comment that the definition of sustainable tourism would benefit from being recrafted in third person rather than first person language. The additional point was made that the current tendency is to focus on managing vehicle numbers more so than dispersing people throughout the town (and the Park). Public transportation is part of the solution. It should be very expensive for visitors to bring their vehicles on to the Island. The process should look at other towns to see what planning solutions are being used to tackle similar problems. More revenue in the off-season desirable - this is a necessary discussion.

10. Task Force Member Comments

- Chris Cannon noted that more analysis of the resident survey results would be helpful to better understand how well the results represent the population.
- Several task force members commented on the proposed \$100 charge for international visitors to enter national parks.

- Noting that the consulting team is recommending no Task Force meeting in January, there was a robust discussion regarding the possibility of using the date noted for the January Task Force meeting for the purpose of discussing a theme noted in the Amenity Trap Report. The discussion did not result in a motion.

11. Confirmation of Next Meeting

- The date of the next meeting was discussed and confirmed as Wednesday, February 11, 2026, beginning at 4:00 pm.
- Michele Gagnon noted that an update on progress of the Sustainable Tourism Management Strategy initiative is on the agenda for the Town Council workshop scheduled for January 6, 2026. The workshop is open to the public.

12. Adjourn: at 6:00 pm it was moved by Katherine Zavestoski and seconded by Michael Boland that the meeting be adjourned. Motion carried (10-0).

Appendix: J. E. Austin Associates presentation deck.

Vicki Hall, Chair
Sustainable Tourism Management Task Force
Town of Bar Harbor

Date

From: [Denise Shomo](#)
To: [STMTaskForce](#)
Subject: Bar Harbor Resident Feedback to the Task Force
Date: Friday, December 19, 2025 11:02:01 AM

People who live in Bar Harbor choose to live here. That choice comes with residents understanding and accepting the pros and cons of living in a seasonal tourist town in a national park. We do not own Acadia National Park and it's selfish of us to want it all to ourselves and not share it.

However, it is our home, our town, our friends, our non-profits, schools, etc. We need access to services. Our only grocery store in town favors tourists and does not offer enough parking. We need a grocery store on the edge of town where residents can access without adding to town traffic. We need a post office that allows parking for residents to pick up their mail.

It's an undisputed fact that money talks. Money makes a difference in peoples attitudes. The underlying issue in my opinion and others I've spoken to is the unfair financial burden that tourism brings to the residence in the form of property taxes and town budget.

If we can solve this, residents will have a completely different and more welcoming attitude toward tourism. (Share the revenue with residents, well then bring it on!). Also, this would bridge the gap of animosity residents have toward businesses, lodging, restaurants, and yes even cruise ships to some extent. We may not like cruise ships but if they pay the bill we look the other way. Consider that Vegas charges 13% tourism tax and no one blinks. People do not stop going to Vegas because of a tourism tax. Bar Harbor is never going to solve this issue if it continues to make residents pay the burden of tourism.

Right now, tourism, the APPL, the chamber of commerce and all organized groups are the enemy making our lives worse. With the amount of potential tourism revenue, the residents should actually be getting a tax credit!! I don't expect that, and I understand this is also political and the system needs changing to fairly allocate funds to the town BUT how is it that no one understands this? What is it that I am missing? Why doesn't APPL go to Augusta and lobby for the fees they pay, to go to the town? Instead of fighting the residents, consider the effects if the APPL actually lobbied for the residents. That would put an end to the animosity, fighting, and wasted legal dollars that could be allocated for better use. Consider all the possibilities for a positive outcome.

Thank you,

Denise Shomo, Bar Harbor resident

From: [The Rev Peter J Miano](#)
To: [STMTaskForce](#)
Subject: comments on December meeting.
Date: Tuesday, February 3, 2026 10:40:56 AM
Attachments: [Attached Message Part](#)

Greetings from Bay View Drive,

First of all, I want to express my sincere appreciation to all the members of the task force, the involved town employees and the consultants facilitating the process. All of you are to be commended for your commitment and for the sacrifice of time that your participation entails. I especially appreciate the attentiveness you show to each other and to the public as you work through the details of the process. I attended the September meeting. I viewed the recording of the November meeting. I attended and raised a question during the public comment period at the December meeting. I found all meetings to have been interesting and informative.

I have to admit that I was a tad dubious about the process after the September meeting, because the power point display the consultants presented, was full of language copied and pasted from a simple google search. That made me wonder and made me a little uneasy. There was no reference at that time to the idea that sustainable tourism is data driven. I found the presentation at the November meeting, which I was not able to attend in person, to be very helpful. I attended the December meeting. The November and December meetings together reassured me a lot, but I have some concerns. For one thing, the consultants used the phrase *data driven* several times. But, I have this question: if sustainable tourism is data driven, why wouldn't that be stated in the working definition?

Beyond that, like others, I found myself a bit uneasy about how to evaluate some of the data that was presented in December. Specifically, I pointed out that 374 responses to the surveys represented about 15% of the year round residents of Bar Harbor. The answer I received, that this is common, was reassuring, but it did not actually answer the question. So, I have these questions:

Which 15% of the town's population responded to the survey? Are they the most civically minded, the most agitated, the most motivated?

Why do 85% of the year round residents not participate? Are they apathetic? Are they cynical? Are they shy?

How many surveys were sent out?

How were the recipients of the surveys chosen?

What is the response rate to those surveys?

Thanks for your effort and commitment.

Best regards,

Peter Miano
Bay View Drive



WORKING AGREEMENTS



In Meetings members *should*

- Stick to the agenda
- Allow one conversation at a time
- Be respectful of airtime and allow space for all Task Force members to speak



Between Meetings members *should*

- Loop the Chair of the Task Force in all communications with the Planning Director/Staff
- Communicate through the Chair of the Task Force and the Planning Director if you want to reach the consulting team



In Public members *should*

- Encourage people to participate in the process through the community engagement opportunities
- Refer official requests for comment to the Chair of the Taskforce or the Planning Director

