



TOWN OF BAR HARBOR

93 Cottage Street
Bar Harbor Maine 04609

Sustainable Tourism Management Task Force Meeting Minutes Wednesday, February 11, 2026

Task Force members attending: Vicki Hall, Chair, Enoch Albert (virtual), Vice-Chair, and members, Christine Kirk, Jeremy Dougherty, Katherine Zvestoski, Jim Glavine, David Woodside, Leila Long (virtual), Pat Bucello (virtual), Alexa Kelly. Arrived after Agenda Item 6: John Kelly.

Excused: Michael Boland

Unexcused: Christopher Cannon

Consultants attending: J E Austin: Michele McKenzie (virtual), Ben Nussbaumer (virtual)
Equator AI: Edmund Morris (virtual)

Staff attending: Michele Gagnon, Cali Martinez, Police Chief David Kerns

- 1. Call to order**
Chair Vicki Hall called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.
- 2. Adoption of agenda**
It was moved by Jim Glavine and seconded by Katherine Zvestoski that the agenda be approved as amended. Motion carried (10-0).
- 3. Excused absences**
Michael Boland
- 4. Adoption of Minutes**
It was moved by David Woodside and seconded by Jeremy Dougherty that the minutes of December 10, 2025, be approved as presented. Motion carried (10-0).
- 5. First public comment period**
There were no public comments during the first public comment period.
- 6. Business Arising from the Minutes of December 10, 2025**

- a. **Update to Town Council**
Ben Nussbaumer noted that the consulting team had attended a Town Council workshop on February 3, 2026 to provide an update on the strategy development process. Council members expressed that they were pleased with the progress to date and encouraged broad outreach to the community including additional 1:1 meetings.
7. **Strategy Development Process Updates: Michele McKenzie**
- a. **Check In on Timeline:** The process is now entering Phase 5, ‘Strategic Goals and Actionable Policies’.
 - b. **Community Feedback/Parking Lot:** Many of the issues that remain in the ‘parking lot’ will be addressed in Phase 5. There was a question from Jim Glavine regarding whether or not safety of visitors was adequately detailed in the parking lot. This detail will be added.
 - c. **Overview of Phase 5:** The objective of this phase is to develop a practical strategy framework building on all the consultation and research to date. The first step is to define the specific ‘problems’ that the strategy will address and then go into a round of consultations to discuss potential solutions.
 - d. **Community Engagement:** The focus on community engagement continues throughout the project and is particularly active in Phase 5. Michele noted the upcoming Community Organizations Workshop, public Open Houses, the Business Survey as well as access to the visitor survey courtesy of the Chamber of Commerce. John Kelly mentioned that the Island Explorer has an annual ridership survey from Aug 2025 that has a lot of good information which should be considered.
 - e. **Main Themes from Consultations:** Michele presented a slide showing the main themes from the consultations to date. Vicky Hall asked a question regarding how these themes differ from what is seen in other destinations. Michele responded that themes are very much focused on tourism management considerations. David Woodside asked about the experience of the consulting team dealing with destinations with issues similar to Bar Harbor. Michele and Ben noted that the team is experienced dealing with all types of scenarios and that each strategy is informed by the priorities of the community.
8. **Situation and Carrying Capacity Analysis: Edmund Morris**
Edmund presented the data component of the project methodology. There was a long Q&A with Task Force members. It was confirmed that a copy of Edmund’s presentation deck and report will be available for review.

Q. Footfall impact before and after cruise ship ordinance?

A. Data is noisy. Bar Harbor is growing despite the cap. Cause and effect is hard to determine. Edmund will look at this question in more detail.

Q. Footfall data – is it at a point in time or over the course of a day? ‘The data doesn’t seem to correlate with our experience.’

A. Placer AI is the source of the data. The labels used by Placer AI can be misleading. This will be labeled more clearly in the final report. In terms of volume, the reports can be customized for time of day. The time frames used are detailed in the report.

Q. Real estate is being bought up at high prices. Do you have examples from other gateway communities that help local residents with issues such as property tax?

A. Local options taxes – or equivalent – is the most common tool. In addition, essential services are sometimes incented e.g., day care centers. For example, Chamonix, France, has capped accommodation and requires developers to invest in local housing and/or services when building tourism facilities. Many of these concepts are new and not fully

evaluated. There are examples of tourism communities with very few remaining tourism residents.

Q. Sedona has a tourism challenge similar Bar Harbor. They have addressed a lot of similar things in their sustainable tourism plan. Other examples Oceanside CA, Banff AB, Park City UT. Have you seen differences in destinations that have a long tradition of tourism vs. destinations that are newer? European examples are not as relevant – we are interested in US models.

A. There is a big difference between US destinations. Newer destinations may have an easier time setting sustainable tourism plans. The challenge is to be careful with direct comparables as the drivers may be different. Bar Harbor will have to select parts from different sustainability plans.

Q. There is a lot of information. We need more time to dig into the data and come back with questions. On the specific topic of essential services, we have a lot of services for a town of 5,200 people. We also have an urban center nearby in Ellsworth. On the topic of seasonality, this is our way of sustaining tourism – the fact that it doesn't go 365 days a year. Residents are relieved when the low season arrives.

A. Yes there will be more time for review and questions at upcoming meetings

9. Second Public Comment Period

There were no public comments.

10. Task Force Member Comments

Task Force members agreed that there is a need for more time for discussion after they have had the opportunity to fully review the report and perhaps longer meetings, including with Edmund.

11. Closing Comments and Confirmation of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be March 11, 2026, at 4:00 pm.

12. Ajourn: At 6:49 pm it was moved by Jim Glavine and seconded by John Kelly that the meeting be adjourned. Motion carried.

Appendix: J. E. Austin Associates presentation deck; Equator AI presentation deck.

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

3/11/2026

Date