



Town of Bar Harbor
Planning Department

NOVEMBER 20, 2024

BAR HARBOR 2035

Executive Summary

A Summary of the
Bar Harbor 2035
Comprehensive
Plan



Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Comprehensive Plan Committee members who helped shape the Bar Harbor 2035 Comprehensive Plan, in addition to all the members of the consulting team.

Elissa Chesler
Jaquie Colburn
Greg Cox
Kevin Desveaux
Cheri Galyean
John Kelly
Jim Mahoney
Calistra Martinez

Michael McKernan
Kristen Murphy
Misha Mytar
Val Peacock
Allison Sasner
Kyle Shank
David Woodside

This document was created and edited by the Planning Department staff.

The Bar Harbor 2035 Comprehensive Plan has been found consistent with the Maine Growth Management Act as of October 25, 2024.



^Scan to access the Bar Harbor 2035 Comprehensive Plan and all the accompanying documents, or go to <https://www.barharbormaine.gov/501/Comprehensive-Plan>.

Introduction – Our Goal

PLANNING *WITH* INTENTION

“We want the Bar Harbor 2035 plan to be used and implemented, and to ensure success in that regard, we needed to do more to make this plan accessible.”

— Michele Gagnon, Bar Harbor Planning Director

What is this document?

The Executive Summary is meant to provide a concise overview of the Bar Harbor 2035 Comprehensive Plan’s key points.

It provides the highlights of the Comprehensive Plan and a general idea of what is included in the Plan.

While the best way to understand the details of the Comprehensive Plan is to read it in its entirety, this executive summary should provide a working understanding of the plan’s key points.

What is a comprehensive plan?

A comprehensive plan is a clear statement of the community’s long-range (10+ year) vision for the future and provides a way for a municipality (or town) to plan for and respond to change.

Comprehensive plans are intended to be “living documents” that are reviewed and updated as necessary to adjust to changes in the community. These plans cover a wide array of topics that, when combined, are central to the growth and development of a town that is able to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

HOW DOES THIS PLAN IMPACT THOSE LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY?

The Bar Harbor 2035 Comprehensive Plan will be used by a variety of individuals and organizations (please refer to the Navigation Guide for more information) to make important decisions about how to invest in the community and enhance the quality of life for people in Bar Harbor.

The 2035 Comprehensive Plan will impact zoning regulations, prioritize updates or changes to Town infrastructure, guide development decisions, and help the Town secure additional funding to meet identified goals.

HOW WAS THIS PLAN CREATED?

Bar Harbor's 2035 Comprehensive Plan is the result of extensive and thoughtful outreach that engaged the community to truly understand the needs and desires of those who live in, work in, and visit the town.

Additional details regarding the Comprehensive Plan preparation and engagement process can be found on pages 8-10 of the Comprehensive Plan.

BAR HARBOR'S VISION FOR 2035

Bar Harbor's vibrancy stems from the mix of people and the dramatic natural and cultural beauty of our place. Together, we build upon our diverse economic strengths and, through partnerships, we create solutions that meet year-round and seasonal needs. Our resilient and sustainable community includes sufficient equitable housing, robust infrastructure, and efficient transportation. We work through our differences to strengthen our collective sense of community. We take care of each other, and we take care of our place.

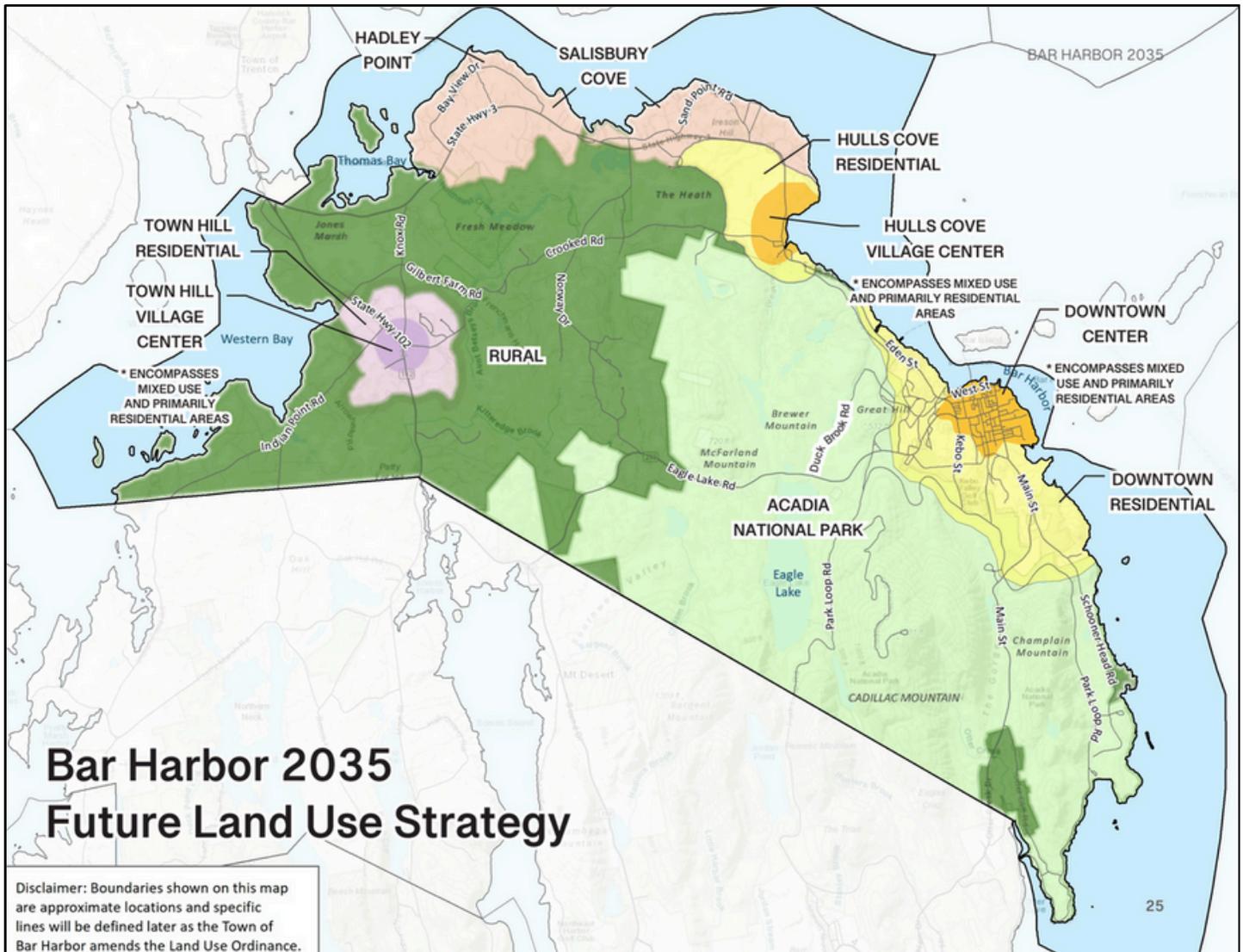
Please see pages 19-23 of the 2035 Comprehensive Plan for more information about Bar Harbor's Vision Statement.



FUTURE LAND USE STRATEGY

The Future Land Use Strategy focuses on minimizing sprawl and the fragmentation of the remaining undeveloped rural areas. It aims to balance the resource protection needs of the community with the housing, economic, climate action, and other needs identified by residents. The Future Land Use Strategy will take more than a decade to actualize. To accomplish this vision, Bar Harbor 2035 recommends using less land for new development, and encouraging gentle density outside of the downtown and village centers. In this comprehensive plan, gentle density refers to the focus of developing for what the land is able to reasonably accommodate.

The Strategy can be found in pages 24-36 of the Plan.



FUTURE LAND USE STRATEGY FOCUS AREAS



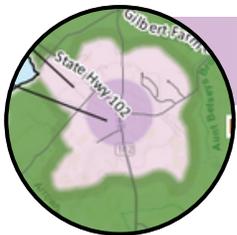
DOWNTOWN CENTER AND DOWNTOWN RESIDENTIAL

Bar Harbor's Downtown area will continue to function as the community's primary commercial and residential center. This area of Town presents the greatest opportunities for increasing density through new and infill development and redevelopment activity while keeping the character of the community in mind. This strategy will likely involve a variety of housing options and the protection of natural areas.



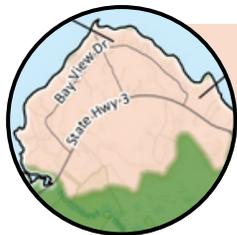
HULLS COVE VILLAGE CENTER AND VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL

Bar Harbor's Halls Cove area will continue to be a mix of residential and small-scale commercial uses at a density that is less than the downtown. Improving the walkability and bikeability of this area through improvements and connection to downtown is important.



TOWN HILL VILLAGE CENTER AND VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL

Bar Harbor's Town Hill area is envisioned to have a lower density than the downtown and Halls Cove because it is not connected to town water and sewer. Efforts will be made to improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to other areas in Town. Additionally, mixed use development and local connectivity across Town Hill will be encouraged.



HADLEY POINT AND SALISBURY COVE

Hadley Point and Salisbury Cove are envisioned to accommodate much-needed residential development in Bar Harbor. Similar to Town Hill, these areas will focus on gentle density and improvements to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.



RURAL

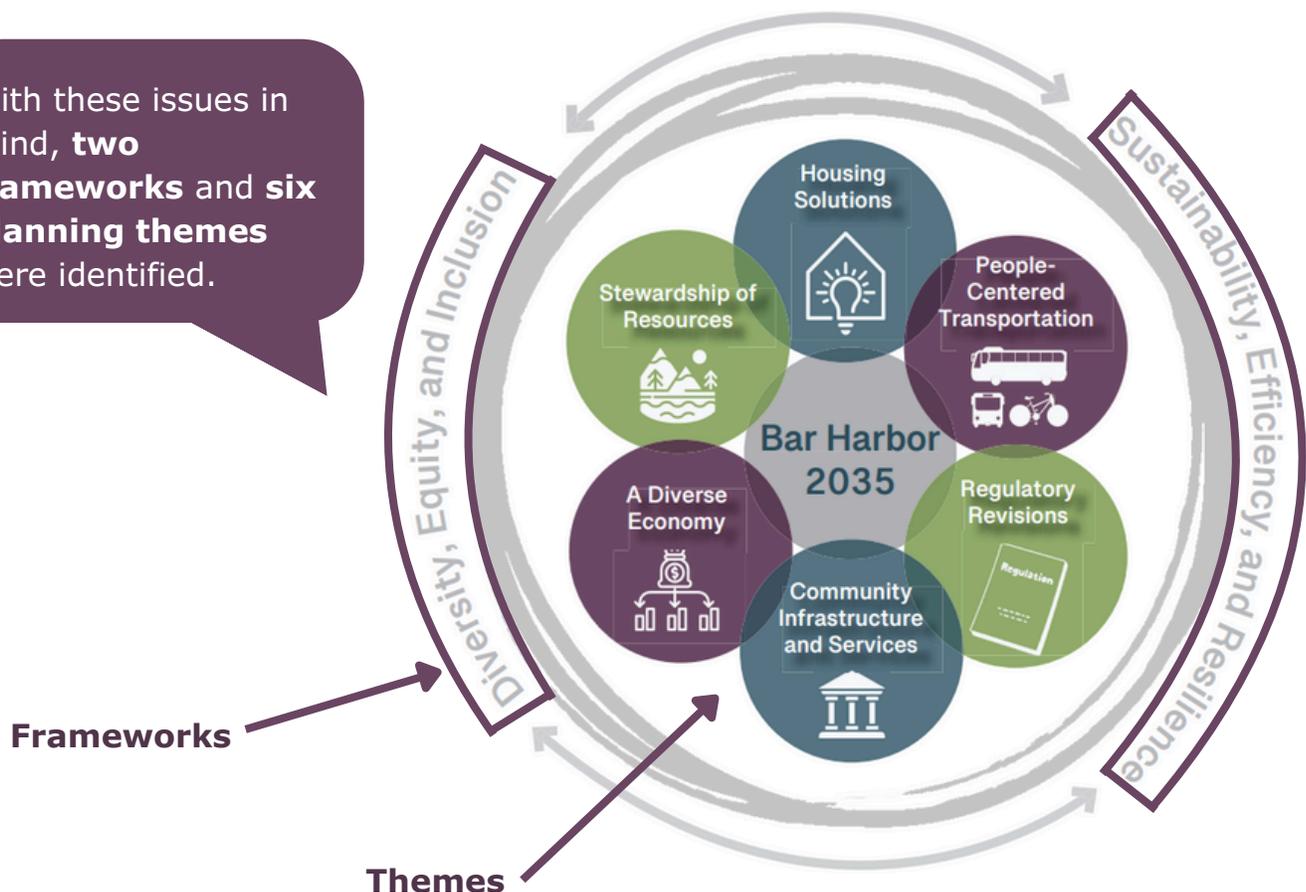
Rural areas currently account for 65% of Bar Harbor's land area outside of Acadia National Park. A large portion of the Northeast Creek watershed is within this rural area and preserving water quality for this watershed has been identified as an important priority. In this vision, the rural area remains rural.

HOW DOES THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ADDRESS BAR HARBOR'S MOST PRESSING ISSUES?

Based on public input, data collection, and research, the community identified the following primary issues:

- The impacts of both **housing and labor shortages** across Mount Desert Island;
- The **limited land available for future development**, which influences how Bar Harbor meets its future housing, economic, and infrastructure needs;
- The **cost implications of sprawling development**, which is prevalent in portions of town;
- **Infrastructure investments** that are needed to support future development activity;
- The impacts of **over-tourism and over-crowding** throughout the community; and
- The **lack of revenue**, as a small community, to meet the expectations and needs of residents and visitors alike.

With these issues in mind, **two frameworks** and **six planning themes** were identified.



PLANNING FRAMEWORKS

The comprehensive planning process identified two significant planning frameworks that inform every section of the Comprehensive Plan.

SUSTAINABILITY, EFFICIENCY, AND RESILIENCE

Through land use regulations, infrastructure investments, and partnerships, the community will strive to provide clean energy, reduce energy consumption, protect water quality, and minimize the reliance on fossil fuels in homes, businesses, institutions, and municipal operations. Bar Harbor will also continue to steward, protect, and rehabilitate natural habitats and find innovative solutions to other pressing climate issues.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Looking ahead, diversity, equity, and inclusion will guide and inform policy development, infrastructure design and investment, capital improvement planning, and local governmental processes and initiatives. This focus will help identify and address issues that some members of the community face disproportionately. Some of these issues include lack of transportation alternatives, secure and affordable housing options, food access, and social and recreational opportunities.



PLANNING THEMES

The themed approach to Bar Harbor 2035 has provided an opportunity to focus on the biggest issues that Bar Harbor must come to terms with and address over the coming decade and beyond. Each of the six themes is summarized below. For additional information on each theme, please navigate to the indicated section of the Comprehensive Plan.



Housing Solutions (*pp. 41-52*)

Housing is a significant challenge in Bar Harbor, affecting access to affordable and year-round options. Limited developable land and zoning laws restrict housing production, while competition from secondary homebuyers and short-term rentals complicates the situation for local businesses seeking employees. Community support for increasing workforce housing, particularly for young families and low-to-middle-income residents, is strong. The Town's strategy emphasizes maintaining existing units and developing diverse housing options, including missing middle housing. Collaboration with regional partners and local employers is essential in order to address housing needs effectively. Tracking progress with clear targets will help ensure that initiatives align with community needs.



Stewardship of Resources (*pp. 53-64*)

Bar Harbor's natural and cultural resources are central to its identity and economy, attracting both residents and tourists while enhancing quality of life. However, these resources face threats from development, climate change, and high visitation rates, endangering the community's unique charm. The area is rich in diverse ecosystems and historic sites, including significant archaeological locations and working landscapes which contribute to its appeal and ecological health. Climate change presents significant challenges. Future actions focus on collaborative conservation and achieving sustainability goals, including a commitment to renewable energy.



People-centered Transportation *(pp. 65-75)*

Bar Harbor's transportation system is crucial for connecting people to jobs, homes, and services, yet it faces challenges including congestion, safety issues, and limited infrastructure for various travel modes. The current network is fragmented and primarily car-centric, leading to conflicts between users and inadequate support for pedestrians and cyclists. Community feedback emphasizes the need for improved infrastructure, including more sidewalks and bike paths, and better public transit options. To address these issues, Bar Harbor is shifting toward a people-centered transportation approach that promotes diverse travel modes and incorporates the Complete Streets concept. This new strategy aims to enhance connectivity, safety, and sustainability while reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. Key initiatives include adopting a Complete Streets Policy, expanding public transit, and accommodating electric vehicles, all of which will contribute to a healthier, more accessible community.



Community Infrastructure and Services *(pp. 76-86)*

Bar Harbor attracts a significant number of visitors, requiring more infrastructure and service options to serve its peak population. For this reason, the Town must be creative with revenue opportunities to fund these larger infrastructure and service needs. The Town faces challenges due to aging infrastructure and the need for ongoing maintenance and improvements, requiring a careful balance of capital investments in the coming years. Community feedback highlights the need for improved transportation infrastructure and potential new revenue sources to mitigate tourism impacts. Bar Harbor aims to implement a Community Asset Management Program to effectively track and manage public facilities and infrastructure, ensuring timely investments and addressing future needs. Additionally, enhancing public communication and civic engagement is crucial for inclusive decision-making and support for new projects. The town seeks to align its facilities with sustainability goals, aiming for net-zero energy consumption and fostering a welcoming environment for all community members.



A Diverse Economy (pp. 87-97)

Bar Harbor's economy is heavily dependent on tourism due to its proximity to Acadia National Park. This dependence has led to conflicts between the needs of visitors and local residents. The community faces challenges such as rising housing costs, shrinking availability of year-round housing, and significant traffic congestion, all of which impact both residents and workers. Approximately 70% of jobs are filled by commuters from off-island, highlighting the difficulty that local employees face in affording housing on Mount Desert Island. Public outreach for Bar Harbor 2035 indicated a strong community desire for affordable housing and year-round economic activity, as many feel current tourism levels are unsustainable. Proposed solutions include collaborative tourism management, infrastructure improvements, and creating more housing options to support local workers. Addressing these economic and housing challenges is essential for fostering a vibrant community that balances the interests of both residents and tourists.



Regulatory Revisions (pp. 98-107)

Zoning ordinances guide land use, development patterns, and community aesthetics, aiming to balance housing, economic growth, and environmental protection. Bar Harbor has complex regulations, shaped by over 40 unique zoning districts. These regulations are increasingly seen as inadequate for addressing community needs and preserving the Town's character. As part of the Bar Harbor 2035 Comprehensive Plan, there is a push for regulatory revisions to simplify these rules, making them more user-friendly and aligned with the community's vision. Key goals include encouraging diverse housing options, supporting sustainable growth, and ensuring the protection of natural resources. Community feedback highlights the desire for streamlined zoning processes that support infill and multi-unit developments while preserving open spaces. Successful implementation will require strong collaboration among local community groups to craft effective regulations that align with Bar Harbor's Future Land Use Strategy.

HOW DOES THIS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN VARY FROM THE 2007 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

DIFFERENCES

2007 PLAN

- The 2007 Comprehensive Plan was very detailed in many areas and acted as specific area plans. This approach leaves little room for adjustments when developing ordinances.
- The 2007 Comprehensive Plan was village/neighborhood-focused.
- The 2007 Plan resulted in micro-zoning and fragmentation of lots in several zoning districts, as shown in the 40 current zoning districts.
- The 2007 Plan recommended large minimum lot sizes and minimum area per family, requirements which resulted in fragmentation of habitat by encouraging sprawl and lower density.
- The 2007 Plan had little to no discussion of transportation.

2025 PLAN*

- The 2035 Plan is specific enough to include the Town’s vision for future growth and to reflect the needs of the community but it is not overly prescriptive, leaving details to be decided during implementation.
- The 2035 Plan is organized in six primary themes, recognizing that many areas overlap and cannot be looked at in isolation.
- The 2035 Plan aims to move away from micro-zoning and focus on general character.
- The 2035 Plan aims to decrease sprawl by encouraging gentle density in key locations and by clustering development to protect natural resources.
- The 2035 Plan focuses on people-centered transportation policies and infrastructure improvements.

SIMILARITIES

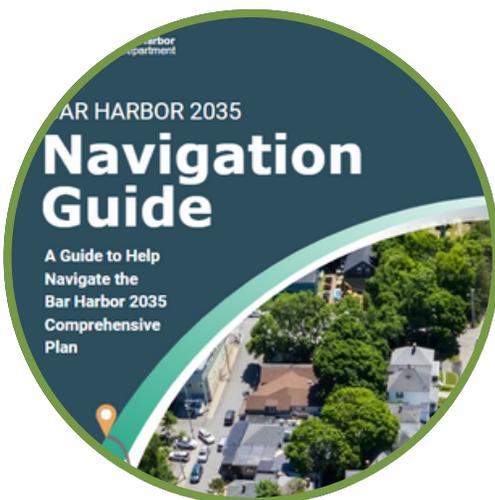
- The Future Land Use maps in both plans are very similar.
- Both comprehensive plans were found consistent with the Maine Growth Management Act.
- Both comprehensive plans recognize the need to expand water and sewer infrastructure.

*The 2025 Plan is also known as the Bar Harbor 2035 Comprehensive Plan

HOW WILL THIS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN BE IMPLEMENTED?

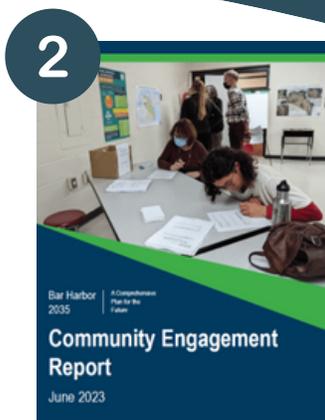


The Comprehensive Plan includes an Implementation Plan presented as a matrix. The matrix outlines actions and relates them to the six themes. Tracking progress will be done regularly, keeping the matrix up-to-date as projects are completed.



For an overview of how the Plan is organized, and a guide to find information in the Plan, please refer to our Navigation Guide. To learn how this Plan will be implemented, refer to page five of the Navigation Guide.

RELATED DOCUMENTS



State comments from the review of the Plan are available for review.

For additional information about the the Bar Harbor 2035 Comprehensive Plan, please visit our website or the Planning office.

Reports that informed the Comprehensive Plan include

1. Where Are We Now? - An Analysis of Existing Conditions;
2. Community Engagement Report;
3. Bar Harbor Housing Analysis;
4. Capital Investment Strategy.



Scan to access the documents listed on this page.



Town of Bar Harbor Planning Department



Planning Department

93 Cottage St. Bar Harbor, ME 04609

 207-288-3329

 www.barharmoraine.gov/202/Planning

 planner@barharmoraine.gov

 www.facebook.com/BarHarborPlanningAndCode/