



Town Hill Affordable Workforce Housing Public Meeting Summary of the Questions, Answers, and Comments

December 12, 2024 @ MDI High School
6:00 PM

Speakers: Cali Martinez (Town of Bar Harbor - BH) & John Kelly (Acadia National Park - ANP)

Attendees: Property abutters and other members of the community, and the following representatives: Christina Breen, Office of Senator King; Eric Stiles, President/CEO, Friends of Acadia; Kevin Schneider, Superintendent, Acadia National Park; James Smith, Town Manager, Bar Harbor; Marla O'Byrne, Executive Director, Island Housing Trust.; and Everal Eaton, Executive Director, Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce.

Question and Answer Session

Q: Will the parcel require a second means of access?

A: (BH) It's possible, but this will not be answered until we get further into the development process, which will factor in how many houses are within the proposed subdivision. The Police Chief and Fire Chief will also influence if two access ways are needed, as well as the Planning Board. Currently, the Land Use Ordinance does require two means of access for subdivisions of certain sizes. The standard for two means of access, at least in the recent few years, has been waived if the developer receives a positive recommendation from the Fire Chief that one access way is adequate. The town can't answer definitively what would happen once the project gets to the subdivision approval process, but it is possible the development could seek a modification of standard for the requirement of two means of access.

Q: Will there be an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), if so, will it consider the 200 acres that's a bit farther down the road to test for the cumulative impacts from both projects?

A: (ANP) The National Park Service abides by the National Environmental Policy Act. The exact process is not determined yet, and the EIS depends on the potential impacts and controversial environmental issues, among other factors. The EIS is the fullest type of environmental study that you can have. The Park Service will comply with other areas of that law, but we have not reached that decision point yet. We may end up completing an environmental assessment for our property (15 acres) and our development. But overall, regarding if we will complete an EIS, we are not sure at this point.

Q: How is affordable housing defined for this project? In what way would it be affordable and how would you ensure it is affordable?

A: (ANP) To provide some background, there was a lot of discussion when that federal law [16 U.S.C. § 341 Sec. 102(f)] was being developed, whether we should define “affordable workforce housing.” The consensus was to leave it undefined, to allow the local municipalities to decide what the term should mean. This created fluidity for us to determine how to best address the needs. It's not defined to our benefit.

A: (BH) For clarity on Bar Harbor’s perspective, the Town needs every type of housing, which includes market rate. Our housing need includes many other levels of affordability as well. We could choose any one of those needs or several of them. But what we need to do, as John stated, we need to collaborate with the other towns on MDI to really define the term. We need to determine what makes the most sense for the site and what best meets the needs of the MDI communities. So unfortunately, I can't answer what affordable means because we still need to have discussions with our other Island community members to better understand what this term means to different towns, and then from there, choose what housing types and affordability levels to pursue.

Q: How would you fund this project? Would the taxpayers be subsidizing this project?

A: (BH) The Town of Bar Harbor is aware many community members are struggling with their housing costs, and we want to be clear that the Town aims to protect its current residents and future potential residents to the absolute best of our ability. We are exploring every potential financial way to help afford this project. We applied for the Department of Economic and Community Development Housing Opportunity grant to help us pay for the upfront work that we need to complete in order to eventually develop housing on the site. We want to ensure our community is resilient throughout the future, and we can do that by creating more housing. We plan on developing strong partnerships to help fund the project through all of the development stages. The Town of Bar Harbor, through our new comprehensive plan, has deemed housing one of the biggest issues to overcome. And that's something that will take a lot of collaboration and time. But we are willing to take on that challenge.

Q: Is this housing meant for people from away to come and live here or to bring locals back?

A: (BH) The future development would likely end up housing people that work locally. It could be anyone that works on the island, Bar Harbor, Mount Desert, Southwest, or Tremont.

Q: What is the potential environmental impact of this project and what is your mitigation plan?

A: (ANP) Any time you develop a property, there are direct impacts. There is almost always an increase of impervious surface. There is going to be ground disturbance. There are going to be trees cut. There are ways to mitigate all of that. With the best of our ability, we will minimize or mitigate any of those impacts. Traffic is also a factor we are looking at, which will be part of the overall site analysis. And again, all this particular analysis is going to come through both the town's planning process as well as the national park. And the National Park Service will do the same for its 15 acres through a different process. We will look into variety of impacts, not just the natural or historic property resource impacts, but the community impacts, traffic and lighting. We know water is a very big issue and a concern for the area. There are different ways to deal with stormwater runoff and lighting concerns. You can use night sky lighting. If there's a negative traffic impact, the number of units could be adjusted to reduce the impact.

Q: Will this project be on Town sewer and water?

A: (ANP) Probably not as there is no sewer system close enough to hook into, but there will be a septic system that serves the development. There're ways to deal with septic concerns. This is a great example of where we can reduce impacts. The Park Service and the town may have common infrastructure. In that case, certainly we will share the road, but other resources that we will both benefit from may be shared, which could include wells and septic systems. If there is a way to develop housing and reduce environmental impacts, reduce costs, we would try to share as many of those infrastructure amenities as we can. But we have not had those discussions in any detail yet. These are still ideas and we still need to complete more site analyses to start having those discussions.

Q: Did anyone contact the state EPA (Maine DEP)?

A: (ANP) While the Park Service or the town did not directly engage with state agencies, the town's consultants have. And there's much more information than we could present tonight in a Protected Natural Resources report that goes into some of those details about sensitive habitats and potential endangered or threatened species. We are absolutely taking the Maine DEP's comments into account.

A: (BH) The report describes exactly what these agencies had to say about the site, in regard to potential impacts to certain species and other natural resources, especially threatened and endangered species. The report did mention that endangered and threatened bats may live

within the site. So, if we try to get any permits to put in a road, for example, we will definitely need to do further analysis on the impacts of these species and how we will meet requirements to protect them. So mitigating effects on endangered and threatened species is definitely going to be part of the process.

Q: Has there been any thought to having some sort of public recreational trails?

A: (ANP) Yes, we have thought about it. We have talked about what amenities to not only benefit this development, but perhaps the Town Hill community. A lot of the property is not developable for housing, but we could potentially use that land for recreational trails. As of now, these are just ideas. We have discussed a picnic area or even a playground to be a part of the project, including recreational trails. And also, just to note, to the south east of us is the Maine Coast Heritage Trust property. That land is significantly wet, but it is protected land. And there's a trail system further south from there. We are not sure about the potential for connecting to that, but that could be a possibility.

A: (BH) Once we complete the existing conditions analysis, we are going to enter in the conceptual housing development stage, which should be the fun part of the project. Which includes deciding where the houses are going and what amenities are most desired and feasible for the site. So, I would say, stay engaged and we will continue to advertise once we get to that point in the project. And we will likely conduct more engagement to really finalize what these amenities could look like.

Q: Has the Park Service ever considered centralizing their housing in one area in the park?

A: (ANP) We understand your point. Concentrating housing is a very real thought for the park. We have over 30 to 35 units that are spread over 15 locations, sort of disparate throughout the island. We are working slowly towards concentrating park housing, though not all housing in one area. That would probably be too much in one place at one time, but we do want to concentrate housing in clusters and develop new housing as best we can. We have other projects going on besides Town Hill. We would not want to put the 160 units that we may need in one place, anywhere on the island. We are very sensitive to Town Hill being a dark and quiet area. And we will do everything to work with community to keep that character the same.

Q: Will you clear cut as part of this project?

A: (ANP) We're not going to clear-cut the property and build rows and rows and housing. The next stage of the analysis will start to answer where and how can we sensitively develop housing on the site and work within the existing topography. We will avoid critical habitat and important stands of trees as much as we can.

Q: In order to maximize the housing on that piece of property, especially with all the wetlands, are you going to be looking at changing the zoning for Town Hill?

A: (ANP) When the property is divided, the 15 acres that is retained by the National Park Service is not subject to local planning board review or local ordinances.

A: (BH) The town's portion will abide by zoning. And we are not going to change anything for just one small area, but we are talking about, in general, how to help increase housing in Bar Harbor, and what changes we need to make to help facilitate more housing development. Some of those future Land Use Ordinance amendments may help us cluster housing to get more density in some areas. Any zoning change would likely not impact only one zone, we would look at any future change in a more comprehensive manner to determine the best ways to increase housing in Bar Harbor overall. We would treat the changes in the downtown area differently, where there's water and sewer, compared to the changes in the rural areas like Town Hill. But yes, we are thinking about potential Land Use Ordinance amendments. It's also part of the comprehensive plan that we reduce the number of zones and help simplify the development review process. We know having 40 zoning districts in such a small town creates a lot of complexity.

Q: Are these houses going to be rentals or ownerships?

A: We do not know yet.

Q: Is there an estimated length of the future road?

A: (ANP) We do not have those details yet, but it could potentially be around a quarter mile to a half a mile.

Q: How are we going to hear about the next steps?

A: (BH) We will continue the direct mailings to abutters whenever there's a significant point in the project and when we need feedback. But if anyone wrote their email on the sign-in sheet, I will email you the same message that the abutters receive.

Q: How can we access the report and the other work done so far?

A: (BH) You can either come to the Planning Office in person, which is downtown Bar Harbor at 93 Cottage Street. You could also access the documents on our website, on the [Planning webpage](#). Everything is currently published there.

Public Comments

- As far as noise and light at night, there are no lights. You can't even walk one step out of your house. It's so dark and the only noise in the neighborhood is the wind. And I'd like to keep it that way.
- The beauty of the island and the beauty of Maine is to keep it as natural as possible. People moved away from cities to come to a place like this, and we don't need to turn it into a city.
- There could be benefits to having two road entrances.
- I think it's worthwhile reminding folks of what a tremendous step up this project is from a transfer station.
- Obviously, I'm interested in the town ordinance because my wife and I have talked about building houses on the abutting property, and with the way the ordinances are now, they are very restrictive and limiting.
- We want affordable housing, and we need affordable housing. I was talking to Marla earlier and affordability isn't such a thing in our town. You've got to go to the state level and have somebody change the parameters around the qualifications for affordability.
- Tiny homes are a good idea.
- I don't think that the Town of Bar Harbor should be in the business of development. Our taxes are very high and they go up every year. We just can't afford to subsidize other people.
- We want year-round people.
- I'm concerned with the environment, and I know a lot about another subdivision that went in nearby and they do have bats that are endangered and there's vernal pools.