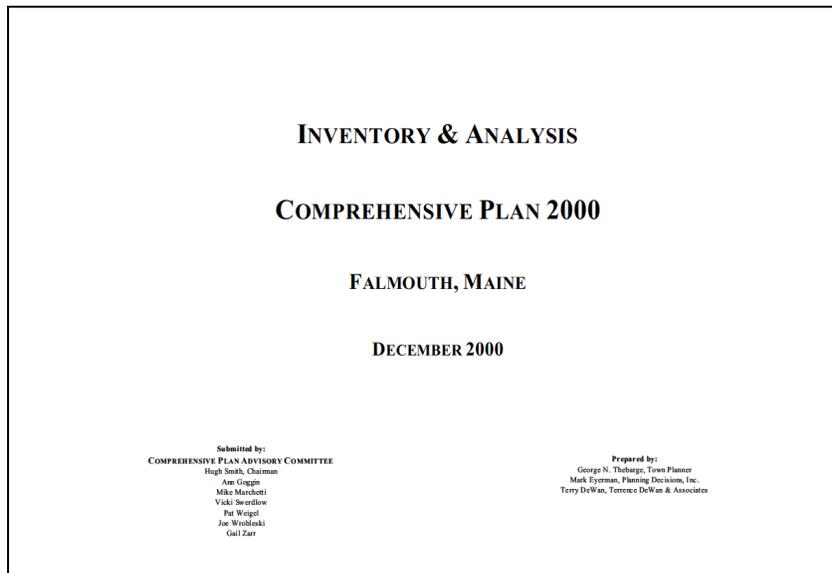




## Getting Ready to Update Comprehensive Plan 2000

Draft: January 11, 2010

This memo is intended to assist the Council in providing direction to LPAC+ for the preparation of an update to the Comprehensive Plan 2000. The Town Council anticipates discussing this topic on January 25, 2010.



Questions that the Council may wish to discuss are:

- What it sees as the purpose of a Comprehensive Plan? <sup>1</sup>
- What kind of Comprehensive Plan Update should the Town prepare?
- What should be included? What should be worked on first?
- How can preparing a Comp Plan Update be a worthwhile, informative, and enjoyable experience, while also resulting in a useful document for the Town?
- Should the Comp Plan Update be designed from the outset to pass muster with the Maine State Planning Office?

Determining the form and process to produce a Comprehensive Plan Update depends largely on three key factors:

1. Familiarity with, and evaluation of, 2000 Comprehensive Plan;
2. Amount of change in Falmouth since 2000; and
3. Maine State Planning Office's Comprehensive Plan Review for "Consistency."

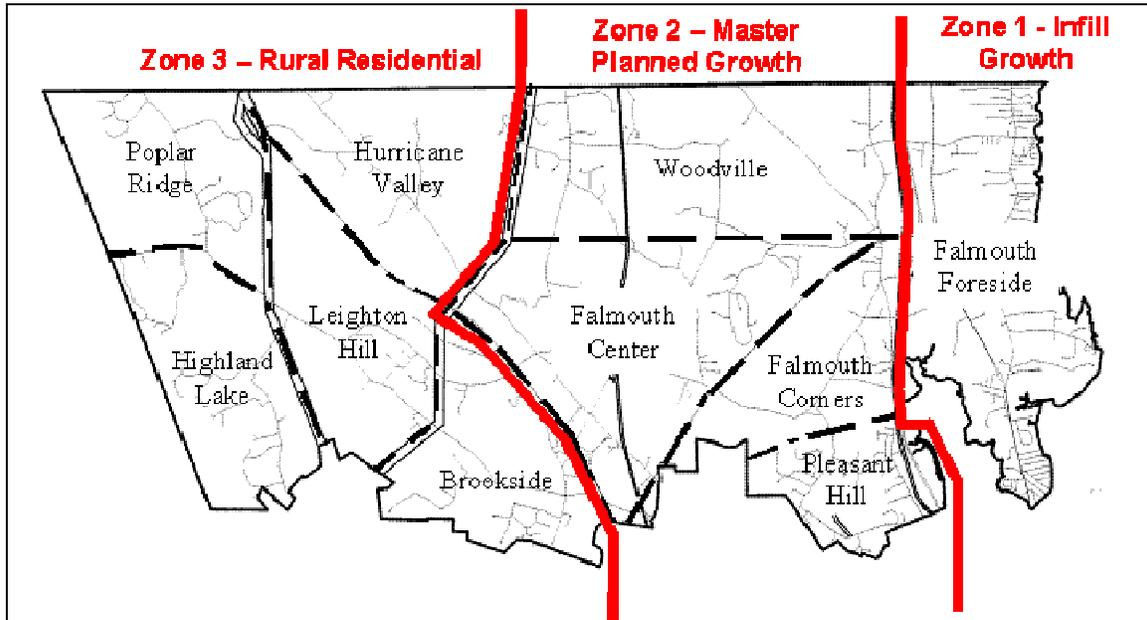
Each of these factors is discussed below.

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<sup>1</sup> Some people see the Comprehensive Plan as a strategy to tackle the Town's issues (a "plan to plan"), while others see it as a document that identifies, as well as solves, all issues before the Town. It is important for the Council to be on same page on this.

## 1. Familiarity with, and evaluation of, 2000 Comprehensive Plan

The Town's Comprehensive Plan 2000<sup>2</sup> is an 11 by 17 inch document modeled after the "official" State Planning Office-format. There is a second, support document (also titled Comprehensive Plan 2000) with 8.5 by 11 inch format that was developed concurrently to help explain development trends, four growth scenarios, and present the concept of Residential Master Planning.



Important questions are:

- Did the Comprehensive Plan 2000 meet the Council's expectations?
- Are the 2000 goals and policies still relevant?<sup>3</sup>
- Does the Council have consensus on the policy direction described in the 2000 plan?
- Are the 2000 issues and implications statements still relevant?
- Were the 2000 actions implemented?<sup>4</sup>
- What actions are currently in process?
- Should any actions be carried forward?

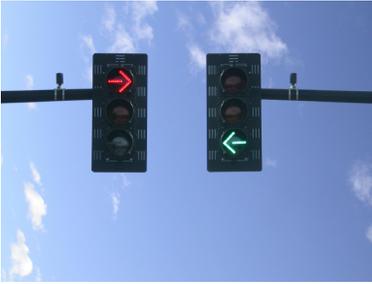
Staff comment: The Comprehensive Plan 2000 appears to be a solid document which can be updated and fine-tuned, rather than rewritten from scratch.

<sup>2</sup> The two Comprehensive Plan 2000 reports are posted on the Town's website at [http://www.town.falmouth.me.us/Pages/FalmouthME\\_Planning/reports](http://www.town.falmouth.me.us/Pages/FalmouthME_Planning/reports).

<sup>3</sup> The goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan 2000 have been extracted into a summary document. See APPENDIX 1A for the summary and APPENDIX 1B for the complete version.

<sup>4</sup> A draft Implementation Status report has been produced to provide a sense what actions have been taken since 2000. See APPENDIX 2.

## 2. Amount of change in Falmouth since 2000



Since 2000 a number of new plans have been produced, both by Falmouth as well as regional planning authorities GPCOG and PACTS. Each of these plans has its own set of recommendations, which need to be reviewed.<sup>5</sup>

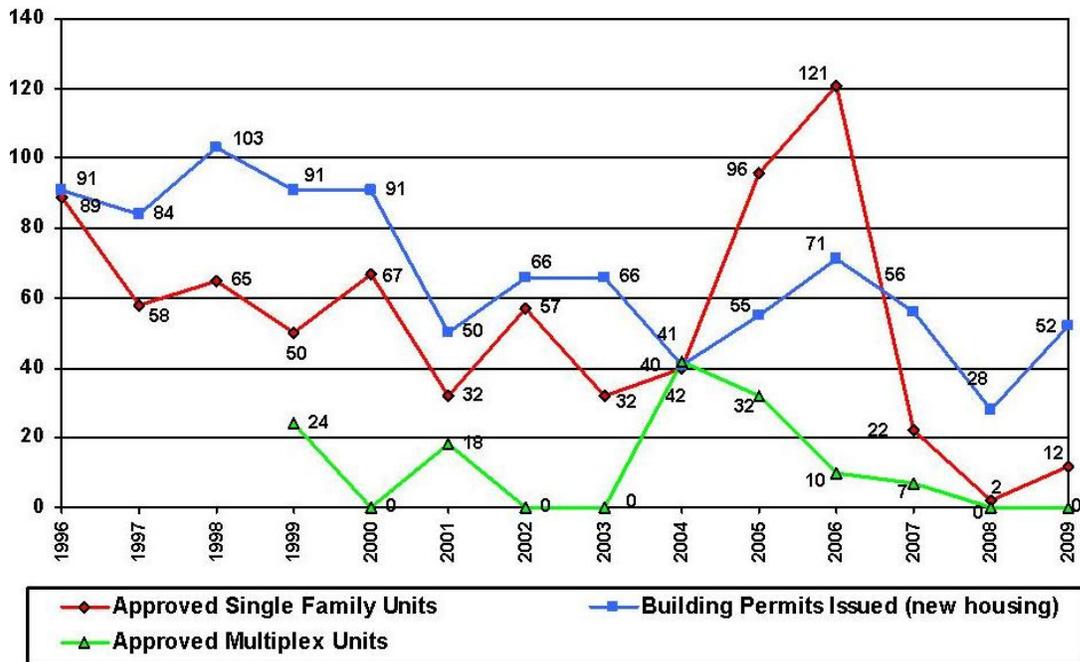
In addition, the Council identified some topics that it felt needed priority attention in the Comprehensive Plan Update.<sup>6</sup>

- Are there “new” issues or new themes that have emerged?
- What “next steps” could be proposed for existing issues?
- Is there a new consensus on the Town’s priorities?
- Is there “new thinking” that should be considered?
- Are there any topics that should be tackled first?

There also have been changes in Falmouth’s population and development, including:

- Residential development;
- Commercial development;
- Facility development (roads, utilities, community facilities); and
- Open space protection.

**RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT TRENDS: 1996 - 2009**



<sup>5</sup> See APPENDIX 3 for new Falmouth and regional plans since 2000.

<sup>6</sup> See APPENDIX 4 for an excerpt from the 2009-10 Council Work Plan.

All 2000 inventories require updating. These inventory updates have not yet been developed.

Staff comment: Arguably the greatest amount of progress has been made on open space protection. Residential development patterns have kept pace, but have not necessarily resulted in more compact development. The greatest commercial successes have been an outgrowth of master planning efforts (West Falmouth Crossing, Tidewater) and may hold promise for the future. The Town has booked successes with its facility needs, but significant needs remain.

### 3. Maine State Planning Office's "Consistency" Review



It is important to realize that the Maine State Planning Office (SPO) has a great deal of influence in how a community goes about creating its Comprehensive Plan Update if that community chooses to have SPO review its Comp Plan Update for consistency with the State's Growth Management Act. While it is not mandatory to do so, it is recommended.<sup>7</sup> Comprehensive Plan 2000 was found consistent by SPO on March 14, 2003. This will officially last through March 14, 2015.

The Comprehensive Plan approach from SPO contains:

1. Vision statement (on the community's desired future community character).
2. Analyses, condition and trend data.
3. Policies and strategies.
4. Regional coordination program.
5. Future Land Use Plan.
6. Implementation section.
7. Provision for future periodic evaluation of the plan and its implementation.

Question: Does the Council wish to pursue an SPO-consistent Update?

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<sup>7</sup> An SPO flyer makes the case for preparing a plan that is "consistent" with Maine's Growth Management Act - see APPENDIX 5. SPO has a required Self-Assessment Checklist which raises many questions to be answered - see APPENDIX 6. The 2005 *Comprehensive Planning: A Manual for Maine for Maine Communities* by SPO also contains useful information. For its Table of Contents - See APPENDIX 7. For Chapter 3 ("Contents of a Comprehensive Plan") - See APPENDIX 8. SPO also has an extensive (and annotated) Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule (applicable as of September 2008), which is used to review Comp Plan Update submissions. The web link for that is <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/compplans/annotated/index.htm>. Please note that there is a current process to revise the Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule. See the following link: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/compplans/208revisions/index.htm>. Falmouth should keep an eye on any changes that may result from this process if it chooses to prepare an SPO-certified Update.

Staff comment: While the Update is a general development guide, the Town's land use ordinances are legally binding. The Town must ensure that its Update and ordinances are not in conflict with each other and will be able to withstand any potential legal challenges. The Town Attorney has helped to assure this in the past with much success.

## STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

### 1. Visioning

*Imagine for a moment  
what your community  
could be at its very best.*

The first step in almost any Comp Plan process typically is development of a Vision for the community.

SPO's *Community Visioning Handbook*<sup>8</sup> states that "before there can be a meaningful comprehensive plan, residents must agree on a mental picture of what they want the community to look like, feel like, and be like."

Residents, according to SPO, must imagine what people should experience; imagine the sidewalks and bike trails and roads for cars and trucks; picture the parks and nature preserves; and identify the best places for new houses and what those houses might look like. This mental picture is a "vision." Separate visions are often described for each of the neighborhoods in the community. These could form the basis of a future neighborhood-based land use plan.

SPO states that the vision should be the driving force behind the community's comprehensive plan. The community creates the vision, and the comprehensive planning committee takes the vision and translates it into the community's blueprint or comprehensive plan. The vision describes what people want, the comprehensive plan describes how to get there.

Different ways a community can use a vision, according to SPO, are:

- As an introduction to the comprehensive plan. The vision should describe where the community wants to go. The rest of the plan should provide more of the concrete data necessary to move the community towards its vision.
- As a yardstick for determining which goals and policies will best get the community moving in the direction it wants to go. Remember to make sure the rest of the comprehensive plan addresses each piece of the vision. For example, if the vision describes "parks and recreation areas within walking distance of every home," then the rest of the comprehensive plan should address this vision.
- As a guide for reviewing other town plans and documents. Does the zoning ordinance or grant application or budget or capital improvement program move the community closer to or further away from its vision? If not, change the zoning ordinance, grant application, budget, capital improvement program, or even the vision itself.

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<sup>8</sup> See: *Community Visioning Handbook: How to Imagine – and Create – a Better Future*, SPO, 2003. See: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/docs/compplanning/visioning.pdf>

- As an annual check-in. For example, at the beginning of every year, use the vision to ask whether the community is spending too much time reacting to problems and not enough time initiating positive steps towards achieving the vision.
- As a stimulus for new initiatives. For example, if part of the vision does not fall into the purview of any existing committee or group, then the community should create a new task force to explore the issue.
- As the vehicle for an annual community-wide meeting. A vision could be revisited to reassess the entire community's goals – and progress – every year. This will insure that the vision and comprehensive plan stay fresh and relevant.

## 2. Update approaches <sup>9</sup>



There are two basic update approaches that can be considered.

### Option A:

The traditional Comprehensive Plan approach from SPO can work quite well. It has the following components:

1. Vision statement.
2. Analyses, condition and trend data.
3. Policies and strategies.
4. Regional coordination program.
5. Future Land Use Plan.
6. Implementation section.
7. Future periodic evaluation.

Staff can prepare the required analyses, condition and trend data, while LPAC+ can focus on the Vision, updating the Policies for all topic areas, and preparing a new Implementation Plan addressing all topics. It is likely that much of the Comprehensive Plan 2000 can readily be incorporated in an Update. Examples of this approach are the Town of Cumberland, which recently completed its plan, and the Town of Yarmouth, which is currently working on its plan. Westbrook and South Portland are just starting their Update processes. <sup>10</sup>

### Option B:

<sup>9</sup> Preparing an Update provides options as how to improve the previous report or to take benefit of the work that has already happened. Many recommendations are made in the SPO report titled *Updating Your Comprehensive Plan: 50 Recommendations for Making Plan Updates More Effective*, SPO, 2003. See: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/docs/compplanning/updatesmanual.pdf>. Four options are suggested by SPO for ways to approach an Update - see APPENDIX 9.

<sup>10</sup> See: [http://www.cumberlandmaine.com/CP/Comp\\_Plan\\_adopted\\_final.pdf](http://www.cumberlandmaine.com/CP/Comp_Plan_adopted_final.pdf)  
[http://www.yarmouth.me.us/index.asp?Type=B\\_BASIC&SEC=%7BF56ACA85-C22B-4353-88AA-7E934C20CBCC%7D](http://www.yarmouth.me.us/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7BF56ACA85-C22B-4353-88AA-7E934C20CBCC%7D)  
[http://www.westbrookmaine.com/index.asp?Type=B\\_BASIC&SEC=%7B2AFB11A0-724E-45F9-82B0-C5258793FCF5%7D](http://www.westbrookmaine.com/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7B2AFB11A0-724E-45F9-82B0-C5258793FCF5%7D)  
[http://www.keepmecurrent.com/current/news/article\\_524a3d02-d884-11de-8169-001cc4c002e0.html](http://www.keepmecurrent.com/current/news/article_524a3d02-d884-11de-8169-001cc4c002e0.html)

An alternative approach is to first start work on one, or more, stand-alone topics, and incorporate specific recommendations from those into an Update, where appropriate.

LPAC+ (and/or other appropriate groups) can work on the details of those topics, one at a time, while staff – in a parallel manner – can begin work on updating the inventories and preparing minor policy suggestions/recommendations on other subjects. After completing the stand-alone topics and when preparatory work has been completed by staff, LPAC+ could focus its work on pulling together the formal elements of the Update (as outlined in Option A). This approach is somewhat analogous to how the City of Portland has approached Comprehensive Planning. In addition to Portland’s Comprehensive Plan, there are seven on-going long-range planning efforts focused on the waterfront, housing, neighborhood planning and transportation.<sup>11</sup>

While there are advantages to producing separate, smaller work products, staff is concerned that an in-depth effort on stand-alone topics may take a lot of time and may not bring a Comp Plan Update addressing all topics to completion soon. It is anticipated that the stand-alone topics would be addressed in either option A or B. The difference would be that they would be subject to more detail in option B than in option A.

Therefore, a key question is what level of detail the Council expects for these stand-alone topics.

Note: Both option A and B could start with a Visioning exercise.



## 2. Stand-alone Topics

If the Council is interested in Option B, potential stand-alone topics should first be placed in priority order.

Topics which the Council has previously mentioned are:

- Compact development (growth areas)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Portland has conducted numerous long-range planning activities that have produced a variety of components of the Comprehensive Plan, which include functional elements, such as *Housing: Sustaining Portland's Future*, and strategic or geographic area plans, such as the *A New Vision for Bayside* or the *Eastern Waterfront Master Plan*. The City compiled these separate long range planning efforts into one document and updated information with recent data. Portland’s Comprehensive Plan was found to be in compliance with the Growth Management Act by the State Planning Office in 2003. (Source: <http://www.portlandmaine.gov/planning/complan.asp>)

<sup>12</sup> Some make mention of the “neighborhood” or “village” concept, focusing on walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods that can provide for many of our daily needs. This could be part of the Compact Development topic.

A new report which could be useful for the Compact Development topic has been issued by SPO titled *Creating Traditional Walkable Neighborhoods: A Handbook for Maine Communities*, July 2009. See: [http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/docs/traditional\\_neighborhood\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/docs/traditional_neighborhood_handbook.pdf).

See also APPENDIX 10 for a 2007 *Interim Compact Development Report* by CDC/CPAC, which recommends moving forward with compact development in Falmouth and lays out a series of questions to be addressed.

- Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) (non-growth areas)
- Specific vision areas such as Rt. 100
- Transportation planning
- Economic development

Other possible topics are:

- Workforce Housing
- Sewer Master Planning (Should the Town’s sewer system be used as a tool in growth management?)

Note should also be made of two other overarching topics that may take on special importance over next 10 years and beyond:

- Sustainability (also known as: Climate Action or Energy Efficiency)<sup>13</sup>
- Regional Collaboration (especially in a time of fiscal constraint).

There are also other questions to consider:

- Does the Town have an adequate supply of land that can be developed for commercial development?
- Should unfragmented wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors be a consideration in determining which parcels of land are protected or not?
- Should “compact development” in Falmouth Foreside and on The Flats be tackled as a stand-alone topic by removing existing non-conformities and building in accordance with existing development patterns?
- Should the idea of a Town Center continue to be implemented?

Question: Which topic(s) is (are) likely to have the greatest impact?

The stand-alone topics would be addressed in either option A or B. The difference would be that they would be subject to more detail in option B than in option A.

### 3. Clear Structure



Whichever approach is chosen, having a clear, transparent, thematic organization of the Update will help people relate to it and will help its implementation.

Thinking of the Falmouth as consisting of four interweaving sets of “infrastructure” (❖) is one way to help to organize the Update.

Possible topics are listed under each heading. In blue are the chapter headings from the 2000 Comp Plan.

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<sup>13</sup> In 2008 GPCOG adopted seven sustainability principles. See: <http://www.pactspan.org/documents/Principles.pdf>

- ❖ **Residential Infrastructure**
  - a. Compact Development
  - b. TDR
  - c. Workforce Housing
  - d. Other?

Growth, Housing

- ❖ **Commercial Infrastructure**
  - a. Falmouth Shopping Center Master Plan
  - b. Route 1 Plan (South)
  - c. Route 100 Vision
  - d. Economic Development Strategy
  - e. Other?

Growth, Economy

- ❖ **Open Space Infrastructure**
  - a. Archeological Inventory
  - b. Other?

Water Resources  
Natural Resources  
Marine Resources

Forest Resources  
Historic and Archeological Resources  
Outdoor Recreation Resources

- ❖ **Facility Infrastructure**  
(Transportation/Utilities/Community Facilities)

- a. Community Facilities Plan Plummer-Motz and Lunt Schools
  - Falmouth Memorial Library
  - Town Offices
- b. Transportation System Improvement Program
- c. Sewer Master Planning
- d. Other?

Public Services  
Water Resources

#### 4. Other Observations



##### Concise Report

Producing a concise final document will permit the greatest use, readership, and reference. Appendices can contain all necessary support material.

##### Public Engagement

Involving the public in an effective manner will be key to make sure the Update is a plan by and for “the people.”

##### Implementation Strategy

A Comp Plan Update stands or falls by the strength of its Implementation Strategy and the Town’s consistent oversight of and dedication to such a process over the next decade.

##### Frequent Communication

Frequent communication and project updates of preliminary findings between LPAC+ and the Council are strongly recommended, so course adjustments can be made and all parties are on the same page.

Staff will be happy to assist the Council with this important assignment in any manner it desires and is enthused about its potential.