

**MINUTES OF BUCKSPORT NEXT
MEETING ON ZOOM
JANUARY 10,2022**

Welcome (1) and Introductions (2)

Attendees: Bucksport Next Meeting Team: Rob Carmichael, Hans Krichels, Mary Powell and Colleen Gross. Representatives: James Boothby (RSU 25), Dean Martin (Friends of Fort Knox), Tracey Hair (HOME Coop), Lisa Ladd (Buck Memorial Library), Mary Jane Bush (Bucksport Comprehensive Plan), Matt Murphy (WERU), Dr. Stephen York (Brown Hall Community Center), Catherine Ring (New England Institute for Teacher Education), Landon Fake (Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust), Derek Cole (Bucksport PRIDE), Ron Russell (Northeast Historic Film and Main Street Bucksport), Special Guests: Sue Lessard, Bucksport Town Manager and Rich Rotella, Community and Economic Development Director

(3) Reminders of meeting purposes and community goals and visions:

Rob Carmichael welcomed Town Manager Sue Lessard who will be sharing a special update for the year's accomplishment and future needs. Rob restated the mission of the organization as the group of groups designed to promote collaboration. (For specifics see footnote below from Jef Fitzgerald provided by Hans Krichels, organization archivist¹.

(4) Organizational Needs and (5) Minutes:

Ms. Powell was able to set up the meeting with the assistance of the Maine Development Foundation, and she expressed her gratitude to their Program Director, Anne Ball. Mary will be taking minutes for this meeting and they will be posted on the Town of Bucksport website by Rich Rotella. Facilitator Rob Carmichael asked the membership for approval of the minutes from September 27th, 2021. They were approved with the correction of Landon Fake's name.

(5) Special Updates:

Town of Bucksport: Sue Lessard described the annual report that she has made to the Town Council. She added that the town government goals and objectives are set in February based on previous years' projects status and the needs of departments – the results of the planning meeting will be presented to the public to obtain feedback. Despite, the length of disruption caused by the pandemic, Ms. Lessard stated that the Town has been able to continue forward motion in reaching goals. Examples include – the developing of Bucksport service networks and groups that began collaborating

¹ **From Jef Fitzgerald** : “The *Umbrella Group* (maybe called Bucksport Next) is a group of groups and should not embody any of the particular goals or policies of the members groups. George’s original brain-storm was for a forum where group representatives could share their plans, successes and challenges for the benefit of all, voluntarily: enhancing coordination, avoiding duplication, sharing resources, building enthusiasm, etc...”2018.

during the pandemic and will continue to collaborate -such as HOME, the schools and various health providers. With this, Ms. Lessard offered to take questions from the meeting participants.

Question: Rob Carmichael asked what is the status of the Whole Oceans Project?

Ms. Lessard replied that her last contact with the primary owner was in late December. At that time they called and stated that they would be making some announcements on their path forward in the new year. From the town's standpoint, it is important to note that the company is current on their taxes and are in no violation of their agreements. She described them as a family-oriented business that purchased the land to own and not to divest for a profit. They allowed the community to use their land to stage the Parade of Lights again this year. The company bought the last available lot on the site this past year, which she noted is a significant investment.

Ms. Lessard reported that the Town has experienced no TIF tax loss from the delay of Whole Oceans developing their plant – it is still valued at the full value of property when they bought it. TIF constrains expense and it is at 16.20% and 80 cents. The town has achieved no loss of services over that last 5 years and anticipates that Whole Oceans will be moving forward.

Question: Mary Jane Bush asked about the Comprehensive Plan and for clarification about where Bucksport Next fits within the town planning process and the implementation of plan recommendations?

Ms. Lessard noted that there are lots of funds coming into the state and municipalities but that use of these funds requiring careful consideration given that that will be one-time allocations. Example of a project under consideration that feedback from Bucksport Next could be used would be public transportation. There are a variety of rural-focused models but of importance would be - What makes sense for the Bucksport area and what are the links to funding potential resources? She currently participates in the state rural transportation committee which presents models.

Ms. Lessard noted however, when money that comes to the community that is associated with the town the final decision is the responsibility of the Town Council unless it is a request for borrowing over \$300,000 in which case the voters must decide. However, discussions occurring at Bucksport Next could inform Council. She did add that every organization within Bucksport Next may not be interested in every topic in the Comprehensive Plan and perhaps subcommittees would need to be created? The Town general focuses on decisions that are compromise positions and projects or programs that serve the largest portion of the population. Mary Jane noted that she thought this response was very helpful.

Conclusion: Future Issues and Discussion of Role of Bucksport Next:

In conclusion, Ms. Lessard noted that projects that use the funds that are available as a result of the pandemic must be treated as one-time funds. The projects they are used for must be completed or have sustainable future funding options. There is no expectation that these current sources would be still available. She recalled a period of time when sewer and water was federally supported. When that ended it was tough situation for communities. Ms. Lessard is proud of the decision to use of federal recovery funds for existing front line and first responder employees. Likewise, these dollars can't be used to hire new employees, since they might not have support for them in future town budgets. Critical needs, however, include:

- HOUSING - Build housing that we need: Bucksport has started to address these needs by approving the 11 units in Timberland Building and completing the Park Street roadway. But we will need even more workforce or family and senior housing that is not restricted by income to support any economic growth.
- CHILD CARE - Businesses can't run if parents can't find childcare – the pandemic caused the loss of a large numbers of childcare providers in the state.
- TRANSPORTATION – The Town has made some progress with public transportation provided by Downeast Community Partners but it is not comprehensive and doesn't fill all the existing needs and/or gaps.

Ms. Lessard finished by stating that she was proud of this community and how it has faced the greatest challenges she has seen in 40 years.

(6) Points of Discussion:

Rob suggested that issues can bubble up from Bucksport Next and ideas that match items from the Comprehensive Plan can be communicated to Ms. Lessard. He noted that since the mission is to bring people together to share diverse perspectives, it may not always be possible to bring a consensus position from Bucksport Next. Ms. Lessard noted that Bucksport Next could be a forum for communication. She shared that it is difficult to communicate with the whole community. For example, the Town only mailed 3000 surveys about the allocation of recovery funds and only 200 were returned. People are now split between online/social media, the Enterprise and other traditional news sources (TV and radio) to obtain information.

- Hans reminded that group that Jef Fitzgerald was part of initiating Bucksport Next and also a representative of Comprehensive Plan Committee who believed it needed “shepherding.” Hans stated that this group can play a role in the process of 1) sharing information, 2) connecting resources and 3) presenting issues and or needs that are appropriate for the Town to address.
- Stephen York stated to Ms. Lessard that he concurred about the critical nature of access to childcare for people who are employed and housing for families.

- Rob stated that the process of Bucksport Next allows for the sharing needs through updates and connections. This can be a process and opinions and ideas can be shared with the Council.

(7) Member Group Updates:

Friends of Fort Knox: **Dean Martin** stated that the Fort Knox had a good year despite not being able to have Fright at the Fort for two years. Opening is May 1, 2022. There will be a Clean The Park Day in collaboration with the RSU 25 school volunteer coordinator. For the summer, they are still seeking volunteers. They will begin recruiting for a new position in March that will be 40 hours/weekly in season and 20 hours/weekly off season.

Colleen Gross notes that she has been with Bucksport Next for several years (since representing the Chamber of Commerce), but is not representing a specific organization this evening. Colleen is currently volunteering with the Verona Historical Society. She is working on a grant-funded project, that purchased a computer, scanner and projector to use to preserve historical documents electronically. She appreciates Bucksport Next as a forum for great individuals to gather and exchange ideas. Colleen also considers it important for Verona Island and Bucksport to collaborate on issues that impact both communities and their residents.

Buck Memorial Library: **Lisa Ladd** stated that the Library is finishing up a 5 month discussion series with Maine Humanities Council and obtained a mini grant to have Penobscot Language Historian and author, Carol Dana present about story telling on February 15th. The Library is partnering with schools to help stressed parents and is working to address the needs of patrons who cannot drive to library. They are also starting a program to match students with people who want to learn tech.

Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust: **Landon Fake** noted that the Trust has purchased land on the west side of the Dead River. This is a parcel that includes 100 acres in Bucksport on the Duck Cove Road. It included a house located on 5 acres, but this has already been sold. They are also taking in 25 acres on the Verona Island east shore (near the Joost House) to create a new community area that will include paths and trails. The Trust will need to raise money to build out the trails and make other long term improvements for this location. Landon was also pleased to announce that The Great Pong Mountain Conservation Trust won the Hancock County outstanding tree farm of the year award in 2021

WERU: **Matt Murphy** is celebrating a year of making his home in Bucksport. WERU is just down the road, and the station is always supportive of events in Bucksport. In the past, WERU has partnered with Wednesdays on Main for music and a film series. New partnerships may be music in the library, promotions for Bucksport and Bar Harbor Pride and future speakers on topics of community interest.

Wednesday on Main: Paula Kee sent an email that said that WOM would offer three events this summer June - August 2022. Booked so far are the Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers on June 8th at the Alamo.

Comprehensive Plan Implementation: Mary Jane Bush is still a member of comprehensive planning process, and they are continuing to conduct research and assess the areas in which we have made progress. (See previous discussion on Bucksport Next and Comprehensive Plan during discussion with Sue Lessard).

Northeast Historic Film: Ron Russell noted that many filmmakers have been productive during the pandemic doing documentary work and the NE Historic Film archives have been a resource for them. They have obtained a successful grant to enhance the facility.

HOME Co-Op: Tracey Hair described how the organization has been dealing with a Covid outbreak for 3 weeks. But they have been still developing a new diversion program to prevent homelessness – teams will be trained to work with families and individual at risk of losing their homes. They are also funding an outreach position because there are always more families needing services than places to support them. Family who have lost housing is a serious problem in the State of Maine and there are only a few facilities who can assist them. This is why the early intervention for people at risk is important. The state Homeless Count will be occurring next month. HOME continues to see the impact of the opioid crisis and has hired a Recovery Coach to provide peer recovery support through assistance from Healthy Acadia. Staff at HOME is trained to conduct covid testing and administer and/or distribute Narcan (drug to reverse opioid overdose) in the community. Ms. Lessard noted that they are working closely with Public Safety to assist with opioid overdose prevention.

Bucksport Pride: Derek Cole said that the group is currently meeting to start planning for the month of June and for additional programming to be offered throughout the entire year – with an added focus to involve LGBTQ allies and families. They are hoping that during the month of June there will be music acts, performers and coordination with businesses so the event would get visitors from both the waterfront and downtown.

- a. **Charles Brown Hall Community Center: Dr. Stephen York** is delighted that more groups are using Brown Hall for events, and they have just restored the floor in the large community center. *Know Your Neighbor, Scottish Dancing, the Community Garden Development group and the Grace Program* are current activities in the building. Brown Hall is also the location for a donate or loan service for durable medical equipment which is complementing the community services already offered the Bucksport Community Concerns (BCC). Brown Hall also remains a location on Wednesday for 12 Step Fellowships, AA and Alanon. Dr. York is would like to add programming for families with preschoolers and educational events for newcomers to Bucksport. Currently, in addition to the office of Main Street Bucksport, Derek Mattson, a telehealth nurse, works in the

building. The next Know Your Neighbor will be in March and feature the award-winning Bucksport High School Robotics team.

RSU 25: Superintendent James Boothby is very pleased with organization and accomplishment of their schools during the challenging Fall/Winter session that was just completed. Overall, the enrollment across RSU 25 is up to 93% in daily attendance, with only a slight dip to 91%. He noted that he would like to have more conversations about local government support for the school system in order to address critical needs and other gaps. The ASPIRE Golden Bucks program is moving forward providing new energy for students and teachers in the classroom through the introduction of content and volunteers from the community. (Recorders Note: *ASPIRE is a partnership among RSU 25, JMG and the MELMAC Education Foundation to continue advancing aspirations for students of all ages as they consider and their futures. It provides complementary educational activities to all ages to prepare them for careers and life*).

Community & Economic Development: Director Rich Rotella described how the town is undergoing the design of a new website. It will be more interactive and provide expanded information and services. New stone retaining walls have been completed downtown and this project will be expanded to Central Street and the baseball field walls. Five of eight lots in the Bucktown Heritage Industrial Park have been sold and a sixth sale is pending. The Holiday Parade of Lights proved to be extremely popular in both number of floats and people who came to view the event. Many businesses downtown did very well and it was similar to the crowd that came out for the Penobscot Maritime Heritage Association boat. A new housing/commercial plan has been prepared for the town by Forest Opportunity Roadmap (FOR) MAINE. It creates an additional housing site plan for 27 Main Street. This could expand the home creation project being developed on Park Street (off Rt 1) and the apartments on the former Timberland Building near Seaboard Credit Union. These projects are important components of the Comprehensive Plan and the other plans that were created for Bucksport. A crosswalk for these and other accomplishments have been completed and are available on the Community and Economic Development website (see report entitled Action Items from 2017-2020 Planning Documents). In addition, Sue and Rich announced that there are options being developed for a \$3 million federal grant to replace the 25-year old floats on the waterfront and the new engineering design would create year round options for the marina and docks.

New England Institute for Teacher Education: Catherine Ring stated that she is impressed with representation at the meeting tonight. She is a former educator and principal who now works to provide online courses and remote learning for teachers. Catherine has observed the serious challenges that teachers have faced during the pandemic. They have all now become more tech savvy as a result of having to offer distance learning to their students and now these skills can be used to address other professional needs.

Main Street Bucksport: Mary Sulya Powell announced that MSB has added 3 new board members: Katelyn Bray, Derek Cole, and Meg Keay. The Downtown Beatification initiative is now a Board-Led Committee of MSB. The British Tea held in December raised nearly \$1000 for this committee and they were grateful for the student volunteers from the Bucksport High School Honor Society and the many other people/groups that made donations. MSB is completing the Museum in the Streets, developing the livesWell food cooking and tasting project with funding from the Maine Community Foundation and will sponsor the Bridge Road Race, as well as the Art and Film Festivals.

(8) Conclusion and Next Steps

Hans noted that he has served as the keeper of the archives and coordinator and will continue in these roles. In the past, he had participated in Bucksport Next as a representative of the Comprehensive Plan and with Great Pond Heritage Trust. Hans believes Bucksport Next needs to at least create an internal “steering committee” structure to allow for decisions around meetings to occur. For example, the last two meetings required last-minute logistical decisions, and with a steering committee it could have been handled more quickly and democratically.

In conclusion, Hans asked the group if they had noticed the meadow out on Silver Lake Road. The area is fenced and has signage about becoming a future agro-tourism site. Presently, there are several dogs guarding some farm animals that he understands will be moved to Verona Island.

(9) Adjournment

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm.

NEXT MEETING – APRIL 11 AT 6PM AT BROWN HALL – 31 Elm Street

Recorded and Respectfully submitted by:



Mary E. Powell