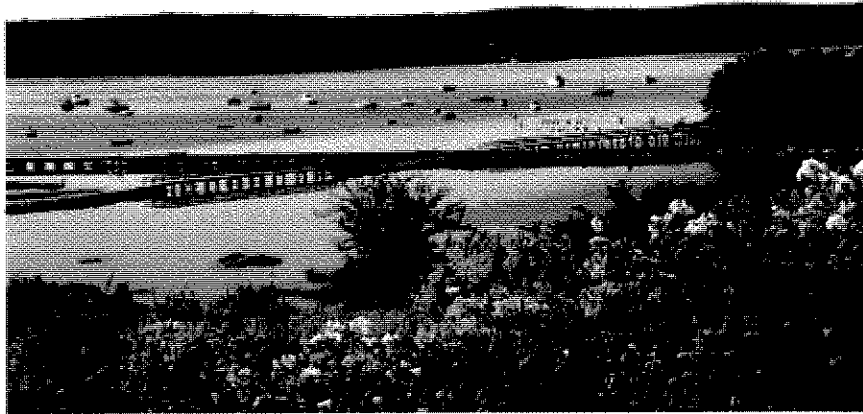


RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ON WISCASSET'S WATERFRONT



The Waterfront Master Plan Advisory Committee

Judith C. Foss, Chair

OCTOBER, 2002



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Summary

The Waterfront Master Plan Advisory Committee began work in January, 2002 to form a plan for economic development on the riverfront, which Wiscasset residents have identified as a priority. The Committee held public meetings to discuss what is currently on the waterfront and what approach should be used to promote development in the future. The goal was to create a blueprint with action steps and specific goals for the Town to pursue.

The Committee listed the following as important conceptual elements in its waterfront economic development plan:

- Protecting the working waterfront
- Public access
- Issues of size and scale of development
- Automobile parking
- Mixed land use as a concept
- A transportation mini-hub for rail and ferry service
- Public vs. private investment
- Wiscasset's zoning ordinance and site plan review

The committee listed the following as preferred types of development:

- Marina
- Cruise ship attraction
- Waterfront trail and public access
- Retail shops
- Railroad station and ferry terminal (transportation mini-hub)
- Main Street Pier request for proposals
- Mason Station

The Committee has recommended six steps for the Selectmen to take at this time. These are:

1. That the Selectmen vote to adopt this report as the official waterfront master plan for the Town of Wiscasset.
2. That the Selectmen identify the rail and ferry projects as priorities for the Town Manager.
3. That Town staff undertake a simple but systematic marketing effort to the small cruise lines.
4. That Town staff draft a request for proposals for the use of Main Street Pier.
5. That the Town establish a waterfront access task force with the Town Manager as chair.
6. That the Town revise the zoning ordinance.

The Need for Action

Town officials now have an opportunity and there is a need to take action to promote waterfront development. The problems are not financial. There is no shortage of plans and proposals. Many reports and ideas about waterfront revitalization are available. What is needed now is momentum, which can come from Town Hall in the form of a clear endorsement of a set of policy directions, the revision of inadequate and stifling land use ordinances, a fresh initiative with the Maine Department of Transportation to advance the rail and ferry projects, appropriate use of the Main Street Pier, and a selective marketing campaign to attract private partners who will invest in Wiscasset's future.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	2
Background and Purpose	4
Existing Conditions	7
Strategies for Economic Development	16
Preferred Types of Development	23
The Need for Action	25
Findings and Recommendations	25
Future Land Use Diagram	29ff
Committee Members	30

Summary

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt this report as the official waterfront master plan for the Town of Wiscasset.
2. Identify the rail and ferry projects as priorities for the Town Manager.
3. Undertake a simple but systematic marketing effort to the small cruise lines.
4. Draft a request for proposals for the use of Main Street Pier.
5. Establish a waterfront access task force with the Town Manager as chair.
6. Revise the zoning ordinance.

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Background and Purpose

America has fallen in love with its waterfronts, setting off a development trend that began, arguably, with the successful rebirth of the Inner Harbor in Baltimore in the 1960's and which is continuing today in many forms and scales all along the East Coast. This trend is not news to Maine's coastal communities, where tourism and commercial fishing have long been economic mainstays.

State agencies promote waterfront development. Town councils debate the merits of working waterfronts versus the "festival marketplace" concept. Commercial fishermen worry about being priced out of the waterfront real estate market. Meanwhile, Mainers gird themselves for another tourism season upon which many depend for their livelihoods.

For Wiscasset, the prospect of waterfront development is both a temptation and a concern. It may be a key to holding the tax rate down and providing jobs, but it also may change the character of this peaceful village on the Sheepscot River, 10 miles from the sea. Preserving the charm of the village is an important goal for residents.

In January 2002, the Wiscasset selectmen appointed a committee of 17, headed by the Town's economic development consultant Judy Foss of Stafford Business Advisors to take a fresh perspective on waterfront planning and development. This would be the first such systematic review since 1991, when a thoughtful report titled "Riverfront Study, Wiscasset, Maine," was published.

Since then, much has changed in Maine and New England in terms of wealth, disposable income, leisure time, and travel patterns. Maine's coastal communities have always appealed to the visitor in search of uncomplicated pleasures, hoping to reconnect to an America without shopping malls, national restaurant chains and interstate highways. This will continue to be a powerful trend in tourism. The slogan, "Maine: The way life should be," has not lost its appeal to the American imagination.

The closing of the Maine Yankee Atomic Power Plant in 1998 brought an abrupt end to a golden era of low property taxes and generous municipal budgets in Wiscasset. Suddenly, the property tax base was greatly reduced, shifting the burden to small business and residential taxpayers. The impact of this shift was alarming. Quickly, the Town needed to re-think its approach to economic development, land use, the business/residential mixture of the tax base, and municipal spending. Now Wiscasset, like other Maine communities, would have to struggle with revenue shortfalls and public policy pressures. The debate has been intense and the solutions, elusive.

During the eight years of the King Administration, Maine's transportation policy has been transformed. With great difficulty and patience, the state has finally restored passenger rail service between Boston and Portland, after an absence of 40 years. Eventually this service, operated under a contract with Amtrak, will extend onward to Brunswick. State officials are committed to the concept of "car-less" vacations in Maine through the development of a passenger rail network, a marine highway system similar to Alaska's, and a marketing campaign to get out the word that one can visit the state without the family automobile.

Significantly for Wiscasset, the Maine Department of Transportation owns the rail line connecting Brunswick and Rockland. State officials plan to run passenger trains on this route, linking with the Amtrak service in Brunswick in the west and with buses or ferries where the tracks pass through coastal towns to the east. The idea of linking Wiscasset and Boothbay Harbor by bus or ferry is currently being pursued. The state has diligently advanced these plans, which may in time begin to address the problem of congestion on Route One.

Focused though it is on transportation alternatives like rail and ferry services, the State has nevertheless continued to pay attention to traditional highway planning issues. The Maine Department of Transportation has put forward several alternatives for a Route One bypass around Wiscasset, setting off an intense local debate that has tested the very fabric of the community. From a planning standpoint, the village waterfront is central to the bypass debate because this is

where Route One serves the commercial district and then connects to the Davey Bridge over the Sheepscot River. If a bypass were built, traffic volumes, roadway geometry and circulation patterns in the village would be radically altered.

Wiscasset needs to set an economic development framework for its waterfront regardless of how the bypass issue might be eventually settled. Many aspects of a waterfront strategy are unrelated to Route One and its eventual improvement or relocation.

These are some, but certainly not all, of the complexities that one engages in undertaking a plan for the economic development of Wiscasset's waterfront in 2002. Each of these issues is connected to the others, yet each must be solved separately.

In 2001, Stafford Business Advisors surveyed community opinions regarding economic development and the role it should play in future Town policymaking. The future of the Maine Yankee site is a huge issue for Wiscasset. Mason station, with its deepwater frontage and rail access, is an underutilized asset. The Wiscasset Airport gives the area an economic development advantage over many Maine communities. These are some of the issues that Stafford wanted to explore with the community. Through this survey, it became clear that citizens wanted the Town to place a high priority on waterfront development.

The waterfront district in this report extends from Joppa Cove on the north to White's Island on the south (called the "village waterfront" in earlier reports). Looking westward, it terminates at Water Street. The study area then skips over Pottle Cove, and resumes to include Mason Station.

The Waterfront Master Plan Advisory Committee, as the Selectmen's committee is called, met throughout much of 2002 in search of a strategic concept for waterfront development that it could submit in the form of recommendations, to the Selectmen. Citizens were asked for their ideas. Experts were interviewed.

This report contains the results of this work.

EXISTING CONDITONS: THE WISCASSET WATERFRONT IN 2002

The Village Waterfront District

From the Yacht Club on the south to Joppa Cove on the north, the Village Waterfront district consists of about eight acres of land. It is one half mile long, divided into two roughly equal parts by Route One. The distance between the river's edge and Water Street varies, averaging perhaps 150 feet in depth, giving the District an elongated, narrow shape. Railroad tracks owned by the State of Maine run the length of the district, near the shore.

At the south end of the District, the presence of the Yacht Club, Waterfront Park and Town Landing have created somewhat more space on partly filled land. Just south of the Davey Bridge, the Town has built a large platform on pilings, known for historical reasons as the Creamery Pier, referred to in this report more descriptively as Main Street Pier.

North of the bridge there are few developments or features other than the railroad tracks running north and east across the river and sewage treatment plant built some 30 years ago on Cow Island east of Joppa Cove.

The River

The Sheepscot River is an important waterway connecting Wiscasset with the open sea. Wide and deep where it joins Sheepscot Bay, the river runs straight north, narrowing gradually but maintaining deep, navigable water throughout. In the south, the river is 175 feet deep; approaching Wiscasset, the depth is in the 60-foot range, more than ample for ocean commerce. Near the Village, the river shoals up, with 13 feet of depth near Main Street Pier.

The U.S. Coast Guard maintains aids to navigation throughout the river. There is a difficult bend at Clough Point, further complicated from a navigational standpoint by a 25-foot sounding which deeper draft vessels would need to avoid. The river is tidal, with strong but

manageable currents on the daily ebb and flood tides. Small boats particularly will feel the effects of these currents and may plan their trips accordingly. In summary the river is a major asset, adding to the beauty and the economic potential of the town.

Town Landing

Town Landing, also called Wiscasset Waterfront Park, is a well-developed and hard-working marine center on the river's edge at the south end of Water Street. Both lobster harvesters and recreational boaters use this site heavily. Arriving at the site one sees 50 paved parking spaces, six stalls for storing boat trailers, two public rest rooms, two boat launching ramps and three substantial piers with floats.

The northernmost of these piers is called Pedestrian Pier, with picnic tables and a lowrise "bandstand." The attached floats provide public access and overnight berthing for visiting boats on a fee basis. The middle pier, called Main Pier or Memorial Pier, has public floats on one face and floats dedicated for use by lobstermen on the other. This is where lobster boats lay to unload crates of lobsters into the buyer's truck, usually in the early afternoon after a morning of hauling traps. Note that the pier is strong enough for use by heavy trucks. The third and final pier, called Old Town Landing, is a finger pier with a boat launch ramp on each side. A gangway leads to a small square float used for public access and to support the boat-launching activity.

The Yacht Club

The Wiscasset Yacht Club operates from facilities that it owns and maintains adjacent to Town landing. Its holdings consist of an attractive one-story clubhouse on pilings, on-site parking, and a float for members' use. There are 165 members and 90 boats. This is a membership club that operates in the spring, summer and fall.

Boat Mooring Area

Permits for approximately 100 moorings are issued annually by the Harbormaster for resident and non-resident recreational and commercial boats. Two moorings are owned and operated by the

Town. No business is engaged in the mooring rental trade. Powerboats outnumber sailboats by a ratio of four to one.

The Railroad

Railroad tracks owned by the Maine Department of Transportation follow the shore through the village waterfront. These tracks, known as the Rockland Branch, begin in the Town of Brunswick and loop eastward through Bath, Woolwich, Wiscasset, Newcastle, Waldoboro, Thomaston, and end in Rockland, a distance of about 55 miles. Work is now in progress, funded by a State bond issue, to upgrade the tracks to accommodate rail service for passenger trains operating at moderate speeds. Within the next three years it is possible that service will begin, connected at Brunswick to the Amtrak/Boston service. State officials believe this service will be used by Bath Iron Works commuters and by tourists.

Commercial Fishing

Lobster harvesting and worm digging are the sole commercial fisheries based in Wiscasset, which is too far upriver to attract fin-fishing boats. Lobster fishing is active in the spring, summer and fall. A dozen lobster boats are homeported in Wiscasset and another dozen or so also use Town Landing to land their catch. For a fee, these boats can use the Town's jib crane for loading and unloading. A seafood dealer brings his truck to the Town Landing each afternoon to buy lobsters from the boats. The south portion of Main Pier is dedicated exclusively to the lobster harvesters.

The digging of bait worms at low tide is an important source of income for many area residents. For those who are physically able to perform it, this work can be financially worthwhile. And as many as 150 people may be engaged in this activity on a busy day. Buyers who sell and ship the worms nationally and internationally are located in the Wiscasset area. The diggers launch their boats from the two ramps at Town Landing, where worm storage cars are located.

The issue of adequate facilities for commercial fishing must be considered in any long-range plan for the waterfront. These facilities

would include sufficient parking for trailers and gear storage for transfer to boats.

Recreational Boating

Communities reflecting on waterfront economic development should not overlook the importance of recreational boating. To dismiss this activity as insignificant, seasonal or marginal is a mistake, because it does in fact connect to the local economy and to important community values. Even though Wiscasset is 10 miles from open water and notwithstanding that the major marinas are clustered in the Ebenecook/Boothbay/Christmas Cove region, recreational boaters remain a strong presence on Wiscasset's waterfront.

Because of Wiscasset's upriver location and tidal current, powerboats far outnumber sailboats. Most sailboats will only transit the river on a favorable tide, which greatly increases their speed over the bottom. A cruising sailboat making the 10-mile river trip on a fair tide will take about an hour and forty-five minutes but if travelling against the tidal current the same trip would take perhaps three hours. This limits somewhat Wiscasset's appeal as a harbor for cruising sailboats like those that visit Boothbay Harbor and Christmas Cove.

The Harbormaster reports that there are 100 recreational boat moorings in the river, a number that has been stable in recent years. The Wiscasset Yacht Club which owns property at the south end of Town Landing is an attractive boating center. In addition, kayaking is a growing business.

Boat Launching Ramps

The Town maintains two boat launching ramps at Town Landing, which are heavily used. Located on Route One, this is an ideal spot for families to launch their outboard motorboats from trailers for a day of river cruising or fishing. Commercial fishing guides and Commercial worm diggers also start and end their trips here. The Town provides six oversize parking stalls for boat trailers. Supplemental trailer parking is available nearby but more is needed to meet the demand.

Main Street Pier

The Main Street Pier, also called Creamery Pier, is immediately south of the point where Route One crosses the Sheepscot River in Wiscasset. Approximately 150 by 100 feet, it is a wooden platform owned by the Town, and resting on pilings over the river. Aside from simple benches built into its railings, it is featureless. Because of its ideal location on the river next to the business district it has strong potential for commercial or public access uses, or both.

The Rockland Branch railroad tracks pass along its west side. Adjacent to the north is a paved parking lot owned by the Maine Department of Transportation and available for public use. The Main Street Pier is separated from Town Landing by 600 feet of private shoreline containing a rough footpath along the remains of the narrow gauge railroad spur.

Route One

The average daily traffic count through Wiscasset on Route One in the peak summer season is 25,000 vehicles, causing legendary traffic congestion in and approaching the Village and providing one of the principal sources of inconvenience to through traffic and to local residents alike. Following Route One east from Bath, it is the preferred route for visitors touring the Maine coast by car. The beautiful towns on Penobscot Bay and Mount Desert lure this summertime traffic, as does Acadia National Park. Another major traffic generator on Route One is the Bath Iron Works shipyard, with its labor force of 7,000.

The community is now engaged in an intense debate over the concept of a Route One bypass that would probably be located north of the village. The Maine Department of Transportation has proposed several alternative routes but before a bypass can be built three major hurdles will have to be surmounted. First, the concerns of Wiscasset residents (and residents from neighboring towns) would have to be solved. Each proposed route brings forth its objections and objectors, and it is apparent that some citizens are not comfortable at this point with the changes that a bypass would bring

to the region. Second, as with any such construction, obtaining the necessary environmental permits will be a daunting task, one that will require broad-based support for the project and skill on the part of the planners. Whether the permits can in fact be issued is uncertain, as the ill-fated Sears Island port project recently illustrated. The final difficulty will lie in finding the money to build what will inevitably be a very expensive undertaking.

The Treatment Plant

In the early 1970's Wiscasset built a sewage treatment plant on Cow Island, a quarter mile north of the Davey Bridge. It is owned and operated by the local authority and is supported through sewer user fees. Located about 500 feet from the town proper, the plant is accessed by a paved road and causeway at the north end of Railroad Avenue. The Rockland Branch tracks are also located here, passing just west of the plant then crossing the Sheepscot River. The plant is clean and well maintained.

Land Use Regulations

Wiscasset has adopted a zoning ordinance that sets out nine zones:

1. Shoreland Resource Protection
2. Shoreland Residential
3. Shoreland business
4. Stream Protection
5. Residential
6. Business
7. Village Waterfront
8. Commercial
9. Rural

A zoning text describes the land uses allowed in each zone and a map shows where is zone is located. Some zones are described in more detail than others.

Wiscasset's land use ordinances also provide for a planning board, with the important function of site plan review, and for a building inspector who is authorized to issue building permits when applicable

conditions are fulfilled. After construction is satisfactorily finished, the Town's code enforcement officer issues a certificate of occupancy.

Rulings of these officials can be appealed to the Town's Board of Appeals, which has limited discretion, and in some cases to the courts.

Wiscasset also has adopted a historic district ordinance that places the entire village, including the Village Waterfront District, on the National Register of Historic Places.

The current waterfront land use pattern is mixed. Restaurant, office and retail uses are grouped near Main Street (Route One.) Next to this are residences fronting on the river. At the far ends of the district are Town Landing to the south and the treatment plant to the north. The Main Street Pier is a prominent land use from a public access standpoint. The presence of the railroad track is also a significant land use factor because it runs throughout the district following the water's edge.

Mason Station is a 40-acre site used on a standby basis for generating and distributing electricity. It has deep-water access on the river that as recently as 1997 allowed oil barges to supply the facility. There is a rail spur that connects with the Rockland Branch. FPL Energy owns the property.

The Development Review Process

In general, the development review process begins with the property owner or developer applying to the building inspector for a building permit. For larger projects, the building inspector will send the applicant to the Planning Board for a site plan review or a permit (the process varies from zone to zone) before a building permit is granted. The powers of the Planning Board are spelled out in the ordinance and in various State laws. In essence, the Planning Board controls the development process.

Public Opinion Survey

In the fall of 2001 Stafford Business Advisors undertook a widely-distributed survey to gather the views of residents about priorities and strategies for economic development. One hundred and fifty seven surveys were completed. Among the many topics posed was the question of whether or not citizens would be in favor of increased development on the waterfront. Seventy-six percent said yes, they would be in favor .

Parking

On-street parking in or near the Village Waterfront is located on Main Street, Water Street, Middle Street, Railroad Avenue and by the Main Street Pier. Most of this parking is regulated by signage. There are no parking meters. The parking on Main Street and on Water Street is stripped and signed with a two-hour limit. Railroad Avenue is unpaved and unsigned.

The Maine Department of Transportation owns a paved parking lot alongside the Creamery Pier on Route One, a prime location generally available for free public use. Its capacity appears to be about 15 spaces depending on how it is used and the presence or absence of snow.

A municipal lot with 12 unpaved spaces is located on South Water Street near Le Garage Restaurant. The Town Landing has 50 paved and stripped public spaces. A municipal lot on Middle Street has 12 spaces.

WATERFRONT PARKING

LOCATION	NUMBER OF SPACES
Municipal lot on South Water Street	12
South Water Street itself	27
North Water Street	24
Railroad Avenue	No spaces are laid out
MDOT lot at Main Street Pier	15
Town Landing	50

Pedestrian Circulation and Public Access

The best public access to the waterfront is found at Town Landing, which offers parking for cars and boat trailers, floats, two boat launching ramps and rest rooms for visitors. The nearby Main Street Pier provides an open deck for viewing the river but there are no facilities here. Town Landing and the Main Street Pier are separated by private house lots. Walking from one to the other involves travelling over rough terrain and, in all likelihood, trespassing on private property. The presence of railroad tracks gives the area an industrial feeling that discourages easy pedestrian movement.

South Water Street is attractive to pedestrians, with good sidewalks, interesting shops, restaurants and galleries. North Water Street also offers some shopping and food service, but quickly transitions into private homes as one proceeds north.

Railroad Avenue is an unpaved and somewhat formless public way along the water's edge north of Davey Bridge. Although it might not be as appealing to walkers as the Main Street Pier/Town Landing area, it has the potential to be a part of an attractive waterfront access plan if the Town were to move in that direction in the future.

Mason Station

The Mason Station property, which is zoned for industrial use, is the only point between Portland and Searsport that combines access to deep water via rail. The site includes: a power plant and associated switchgear; a deep water (35 foot M.L.W. depth) pier used for fuel oil barge unloading; oil storage tanks; a rail spur; and a former coal storage yard.

The owner of Mason Station, FPL Energy, intends to continue to operate the existing power plant for peak power generation for the near future, but is open to commercial proposals for other uses of the site as long as those uses do not interfere with continued power generation. Potential compatible activities include port/terminal operations, rail-to-barge transload traffic, bulk materials processing

and distribution businesses, and marine businesses such as boatyards, chandlers and stevedoring services

Strategies for Economic Development on the Waterfront

Given its small size, and its location close to both businesses and homes, the community must make some careful choices about future development on the waterfront. The long, narrow shape of the district and the presence of an active railroad track are further limiting factors. The performance of the Maine and New England economies over the next ten years will shape future economic development decisions.

Nevertheless, Town officials can influence the direction and pace of waterfront development. This can be done by having a plan, putting in place workable regulations, and by stating publicly their desire for and support of new commercial development. This creates a climate of predictability that can attract businesses to invest in the area. While other communities are debating proposals when and if they come forward, Wiscasset can have settled in advance many of the questions that investors and business owners ask in relation to their plans for the future.

To make this possible, the community needs to establish public policies regarding economic development proposals. This will provide a basis for deciding which proposals to seek out and support.

- Protecting the working waterfront

The Advisory Committee gives its strongest support to preserving the working waterfront. Both from an economic and sociological standpoint commercial fishing, including worm digging, is important to Wiscasset, giving employment to residents and contributing to the Town's character. Whatever developments may be proposed in the future, they should be viewed in terms of their impact on the working waterfront so that it is preserved and strengthened. Some Maine

communities have made provisions in their zoning ordinances to protect maritime and water-dependent uses, an approach that Wiscasset should consider.

Commercial and recreational boating should be physically separated for safety and efficiency, with lobster boats and worm harvesting in one location and pleasure boats in another. Facilities for commercial fishermen need to allow for small and mid-sized trucks to come alongside the moored boats for gear and catch transfer, and for vessel servicing.

While some Maine communities feel that recreational boating and commercial fishing should not be located in the same area, it is possible for Wiscasset to have both on the riverfront compatibly, provided this is done according to a plan. The success of the Town Landing reflects this.

Transient boaters need places to moor or anchor their boats overnight. Rarely are they looking for dockage. The dependable availability of rental moorings will attract some of these boaters notwithstanding the long river trip involved. A trip to Wiscasset is attractive for cruising boats when weather out in the bay is poor, provided that they know in advance that moorings are available and can be rented.

Town policy should encourage recreational boating but it should continue to be located into its own dedicated area. The nearby presence of commercial lobstering activities adds interest and value to the recreational moorings and docks.

- Public access

Public access to the waterfront must be a priority in Town policies and planning. Physical barriers to access should be eliminated where possible and avoided in the future so that the public has obvious, safe and inviting access to the water's edge and the activities that take place there. The presence of railroad tracks inhibits access, as does the lack of clarity as to which property is private and which is public. Fencing should not be built along the railroad right of way.

Additional automobile parking would help waterfront access. The current inventory of spaces is not adequate, notwithstanding the efforts of the Town to create off-street lots on Water and Middle Streets and to stripe and sign the on-street spaces.

Through land use regulation and careful town planning, views of the river should be preserved. This requires attention to issues such as tree planting, tree trimming, building height limits, and subdivision approvals.

New projects along the river should include public access as part of the responsibility of the developer. Generally this can be done without compromising the safety or commercial viability of a project. Land use regulations, contract zoning, and negotiations over public support are ways to accomplish this.

No public walkway along the water's edge currently exists. Fortunately, it is still possible to design such a walkway because no insurmountable barriers would prevent its construction, although in the future this opportunity could be lost. A public amenity of this kind would have great and enduring value to Town residents, the general public, and abutting property owners. Undoubtedly, it would encourage new commercial development nearby, probably small scale and year-round, that would be in the Town's interest. Initial construction of a waterfront walkway does not need to be elaborate or expensive.

An important step in promoting access is the acquisition or control of property by the Town. A program of land acquisition must be based on a plan or planning concept which defines the purpose and extent of the undertaking. This does not need to be a detailed construction plan initially. Various tools or approaches can be considered. For example, land swaps may work. The purchase of easements is another approach. A program of opportunity acquisition, although somewhat passive, could be considered. Eminent domain proceedings are the ultimate and definitive way of placing property in Town ownership, although going this route can be expensive as well as troublesome. Outside funding sources are never easy to secure but are by no means out of the question. The nonprofit organization

Portland Trails, which has a long, patient and successful history in Portland, has information that could help Wiscasset evaluate the idea of improved waterfront access.

- Issues of size and scale of development

In the village waterfront, new development should be small in scale, in keeping with existing conditions. This involves issues such as building heights, considerations of bulk and mass, building materials, setbacks and side yards, location of parking, landscaping and signing. Larger-scale development including heavy commercial and light industrial uses would be appropriate at Mason station.

- Automobile parking

Summertime is when Wiscasset is short of parking. Only during this season of peak demand does parking become a significant issue. Although the Town has stripped much of its parking inventory and hourly-limit signs are in place, little enforcement effort is made to prevent overtime parking. Most summer visitors park legally in any event.

The Town's program of building small off-street lots has been successful and should be continued on a small-scale basis, using carefully selected sites that are compatible with the surrounding area.

The construction of parking decks or garages, although they offer high-density parking in relatively small spaces, are unlikely for Wiscasset. The cost of building structured parking is exceedingly high, far greater than parking revenues, if any, could support. Further, given the architectural character of the Town, one might question the compatibility of such a structure.

A more promising approach lies in parking resource management to make the maximum use of existing facilities. The most direct way to increase capacity is to increase turnover. For Wiscasset, this would mean a review of parking signage. In summer, the Middle School parking lot appears to be underused. With signage and education this can contribute to the supply of parking, possibly as day parking for employees. On weekends, the courthouse lot is underused. An

arrangement between the County Commissioners and the Village merchants should be explored, with Town officials present to facilitate the discussions. Parking on Railroad Avenue can be more productive through better signing and organization. This may require help from the Maine Department of Transportation, which owns the railroad right of way. Another possible approach is to analyze the economics of a trolley park and ride operation to determine if Wiscasset has the critical mass to support this type of service during the summer on a financially self-supporting basis.

New developments along the riverfront should provide for their own parking. The zoning ordinance requires this, but the language is vague and should be improved. Clearer, more specific directions in the ordinance would be helpful to prospective developers and the planning board.

The Town should not create large, paved parking areas at or near the water's edge. This is not the correct use of this unique real estate, which will be more productively developed for commercial projects, public access, and facilities that specifically promote a working waterfront.

- Mixed land use as a concept

The term "mixed use" refers to a pattern of development that mixes offices, retail, service businesses (like banks) lodging, food service, and institutional building together as market demand allows. Whether or not mixed use should be allowed is connected to preservation of the working waterfront and the issue of gentrification—the return of people into a revitalized waterfront district.

Wiscasset must maintain a zone dedicated to seafood harvesters, as discussed above. Although a working waterfront may not be the highest and best use of property from an economic standpoint (other types of development being more profitable) it should be preserved nevertheless. This is the highest priority.

Still, there is room for some mixed-use development on a carefully planned basis. Mixed use is appropriate between the Main Street

Pier and Town Landing if the owners of this private property desire to use it for such in the future.

The ideal mixed-use plan would contain businesses that meet the year round needs of residents and that relate in some way to the working waterfront to the extent possible. Food stores, laundries, hardware stores would be examples of types of businesses that could serve both markets, although whether they are needed is beyond the scope of this plan.

- A transportation mini-hub for rail and ferry service

This master plan endorses the idea of placing a ferry terminal and rail station on the waterfront north of the bridge. The Maine Department of Transportation has proposed these services, with passenger trains running between Brunswick and Rockland and a passenger ferry connecting Wiscasset and Boothbay Harbor. These two modes, train and ferry, will feed passengers to one another. They will need the same elements: parking, seating, rest rooms, ticket counter, heating system, and utility space. A strong case can be made for combining both facilities into a single development. Given the locations of the river, the tracks and the village center, a location north of the bridge is ideal for a transportation mini-hub.

- Public vs. private investment

Some form of public financial participation will be necessary to launch the waterfront development process. The private sector alone is unlikely to make investments on a scale that would transform the waterfront into the vibrant district that it can become. This does not mean that the Town needs to take on large new financial burdens, however.

The best or most immediate prospect lies in a plan by the State to bring passenger rail service to Wiscasset. Almost certainly, the state will provide most or all of the funding for station facilities.

The State's plan to undertake ferry service will require the construction of a pier, probably dredging, parking and shelter for

passengers. It may be advantageous for the rail and ferry to share some facilities

The Town should leverage a state investment in a ferry pier into a larger project that would begin to create a commercial fishing center north of the bridge. Given the seasonal operation of a ferry service and the limited use it would require of the pier, the possibility of shared use is appealing.

The scope and strength of these two projects, rail and ferry, can hardly be overstated, as they would provide substantial investments in the village waterfront. They would offer new services for the public and attract new users to the Town. With this will come increased business and opportunities for new private investment.

The third major element of public infrastructure is the creation of new access along the water's edge linking Town Landing, the Main Street Pier, the ferry terminal and the rail station. The Town would be responsible for this, including the design, acquiring the necessary rights of way, the construction and maintenance. If the Town was committed to this, practical, affordable ways can be found to accomplish it.

- Wiscasset's zoning ordinance and site plan review

Current zoning laws present a major obstacle to development of the village waterfront. They are highly restrictive, requiring very large lot sizes, low-density development, and unrealistic setbacks. Unless these are changed, property owners will be unable to realize the full use and value of their holdings and the Town will be denied the benefits of new investment.

The zoning text itself is uneven, treating some topics in great depth and others too briefly. The section covering definitions is inadequate. There is no listing of prohibited uses. From a developer's standpoint, the ordinance is difficult to understand and difficult to work with.

A radical re-writing of the ordinance is not necessary. It is, however, in need of technical revisions, better organization, clarity, and adjustments without which waterfront development is unlikely to be

accomplished in any meaningful way. Contract zoning language and a Tax Increment Financing policy to spur development should be considered. Input from current businesses is critical to this analysis.

Preferred types of development

Marina

A privately owned and operated marina will be a significant addition to Wiscasset's waterfront, attracting transient boaters and supporting homeport needs of residents. The Main Street Pier is a potential location.

Cruise ship attraction

Attracting cruise ships to Wiscasset would require nothing more than a modest marketing effort to those lines that operate small ships in the New England/Canada range, not a difficult group to identify. These lines are interested in ports of call like Wiscasset, where the large cruise ships are unable to visit. This creates the marketing niche of these lines. Facilities at Town Landing appear to be adequate for these vessels. Preparation for this activity would include establishing a schedule of docking charges, addressing the need for security, and arranging for linkage to bus/rail tours.

Waterfront trail and public access

Many citizens feel strongly that public access should have a priority in the master plan. Most waterfront communities along the East Coast have created these types of open space for the public, which in addition to their value as amenities, also induce commercial activity. A vehicle access way outboard of the railroad tracks should be considered.

Retail shops

Retail shops in the village waterfront should serve the year-round needs of residents and should support, if possible, the working waterfront and its commercial potential.

Railroad station and ferry terminal (transportation mini-hub)

These two facilities, proposed by the Maine Department of Transportation, have the best potential to lead development and investment in the village waterfront. They have the advantages of serving the community at large, attracting new business and spending to the area, and having the financial support of the State of Maine.

Main Street Pier request for proposals

The Town should issue a request for proposals for use of the Main Street Pier, an underused asset in a prime location. Realistically, activities could be in place on the pier by the spring of 2003. In its request, the Town should describe carefully its intentions, calling for a market value rental rate, a reasonable term consistent with the extent of private investment required, and a use that will add value to the business and civic life of the village.

Mason Station

If FPL Energy makes the decision to release some of its property for other commercial uses that are compatible with its power generation activities, the Town should seek the highest and best use for that site. Active pursuit of investors who are interested in developing a rail-to-barge transloading operation or other commercial activities that could utilize the deep-water access is encouraged.

The need for action

Town officials now have an opportunity and there is a need to take action to promote waterfront development. The problems are not financial. There is no shortage of plans and proposals. Many reports and ideas about waterfront revitalization are available. What is needed now is momentum, which can come from Town Hall in the form of a clear endorsement of a set of policy directions, the revision of inadequate and stifling land use ordinances, a fresh initiative with the Maine Department of Transportation to advance the rail and ferry projects, appropriate use of the Main Street Pier, and a selective marketing campaign to attract private partners who will invest in Wiscasset's future.

Findings and Recommendations

NUMBER ONE

Currently there is no clear statement of how waterfront development should proceed in the future, what types of development the Town wants, or where any new features or structures should be built. A community consensus emerged fairly clearly and easily in the course of preparing this Master Plan. Yet it would be difficult today to point to an official document or declaration that sets out in conceptual terms the Town's intentions. This puts the Wiscasset in a position of simply reacting to development proposals under pressure when and if any should arrive and, perhaps more troublesome, doing so without the benefits of a calm community dialogue and a thoughtful underlying strategy.

We recommend that the Selectmen vote to adopt this report as the official waterfront master plan for the Town of Wiscasset, to serve as a guideline for developers, Town officials, planners, Town boards and commissions and for the various agencies of State and County government.

NUMBER TWO

The best opportunity for waterfront development lies in the plans of the Maine Department of Transportation for a passenger rail service and a ferry service in Wiscasset. No other capital investment in the near to mid-term will come close to these two projects in terms of cost, economic impact, favorable publicity for the Town, and sheer uniqueness among coastal communities. These projects are not based entirely on their financial strength. Their capacity to change transportation modes away from dependence on the automobile make rail and ferry services appealing to federal and state transportation planners who have access to public funds and a mandate to invest them in alternative transportation systems. But because these projects are public-sector based, they are complex, slow to develop, and in need of constant, expert attention at the local level.

We recommend that the Selectmen identify the rail and ferry projects as priorities for the Town Manager to pursue with the Maine Department of Transportation, other coastal communities and with the Town's legislative delegation. Use correspondence, meetings, strategies for regional development, timetables for completion and funding analysis as tools to advance these projects.

NUMBER THREE

The prospect of attracting small cruise ships to Wiscasset's town landing is realistic. These vessels produce important new retail and restaurant business for their ports of call, bringing a sense of excitement and optimism to the community that no other element of the tourism sector can match. Small cruise lines now operate along the Maine coast and they are looking for attractive harbors that are too small to accommodate the megaships that they must somehow compete with. Itinerary planners, who are easy to approach, have just three criteria for any new port of call: Are the facilities adequate for the safety of the passengers and ship? How would this stop fit in with our overall steaming schedule? Will the passengers have an enjoyable experience? Wiscasset has a strong story to present.

We recommend that Town staff undertake a simple but systematic marketing effort to the small cruise lines now operating on the Maine coast with the goal of securing three ship calls in 2004.

NUMBER FOUR

Main Street Pier (Creamery Pier), with its potential for both public access and commercial use, is the single most underused economic asset available to the Town. No other site offers the combination of public ownership, visibility from Route One, waterfront access, and nearness to shopping and restaurants. In securing this site, the Town made a farsighted investment, but the full value of that investment has yet to be redeemed. Often, the most successful waterfront developments combine public space with small-scale commercial activity in a relationship of mutual support. Since the Town has the good fortune to own this prime site, it can control the business arrangements of a public/private partnership on the pier. Potential uses should reflect substantial commercial development including marine related elements. Lease terms offered by the Town should be consistent with the level of private investment required.

We recommend that Town staff draft a request for proposals for the use of Main Street Pier. This offering must be commercially realistic while protecting the interests of the Town, particularly as to public access. Responses should be brought to the Selectmen not later than February 2003.

NUMBER FIVE

Although little development has occurred along the river's edge in the village, there are few places where the public can access the waterfront on public land safely and conveniently. The exception to this is Town Landing, which is fully developed and well used. Most of the riverfront land is owned either by the Town or the State of Maine. Earlier, the Town set aside funds to acquire property rights south of Main Street Pier (Creamery Pier) but no deal was ever concluded and the funds remain, apparently, in the general fund. Access for vehicles in the south section of the waterfront is poor, also.

We recommend that the Town establish a waterfront access task force with the Town Manager as chair to develop a concept plan, preliminary budget, timetable and funding sources.

NUMBER SIX

Wiscasset's zoning ordinance is poorly written in many respects, both as to the waterfront zone and overall. As a document, it is difficult to read and work with, a result of its rambling organizational format, inconsistencies, gaps, and silences. Some specific issues in the Village Waterfront zone are:

- Open space and resource protection are over-emphasized and include pages of detailed regulations on tree pruning, tillage of soil, mulching ("one bale per 500 square feet"), skid trail approaches, campsites, and the like. Village development, on the other hand, is shortchanged. The text for the Village Waterfront Zone covering the siting and building of houses, parks, stores, offices, marinas, treatment plants, pumping stations and power stations consists of only 126 words in total.
- There are no side yard, setback or meaningful parking requirements.
- Each individual business must occupy a one-acre site and no construction is allowed within 100 feet of the river, requirements that would make any waterfront development impossible.
- Rail stations and ferry stations, so important to Wiscasset's future, are not permitted in the waterfront zone.

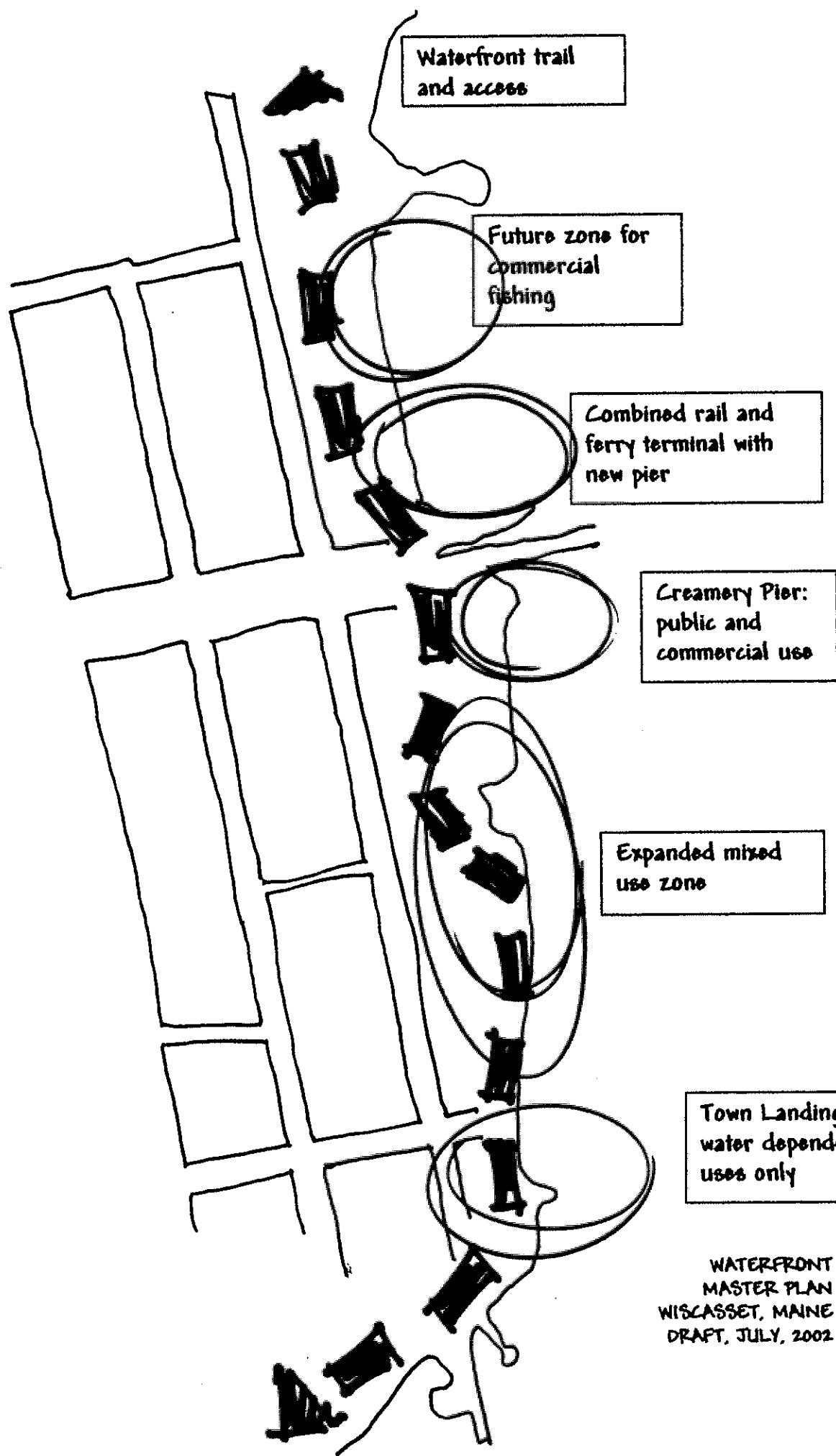
The ordinance in chief is deficient in its definitions, its description of permitted uses and, importantly, prohibited uses. It is a difficult and discouraging document for those property owners, investors, developers, and Town officials who must attempt to use it

Attempts have been made and are ongoing to repair the ordinance piecemeal, by fixing a section here, amending a section there. This is being done through the good will of civic volunteers, with guidance

from the code enforcement officer and others. Helpful as this is, much more needs to be done.

We recommend that the Town revise the zoning ordinance promptly with assistance from a professional planner. While there is no need to change the zoning map or the basic zoning framework now on the books, these documents in their current form are not serving the Town well. Revisions should be made for clarity, internal consistency, completeness, balance, and readability.

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Waterfront trail
and access

Future zone for
commercial
fishing

Combined rail and
ferry terminal with
new pier

Creamery Pier:
public and
commercial use

Expanded mixed
use zone

Town Landing:
water dependent
uses only

WATERFRONT
MASTER PLAN
WISCASSET, MAINE
DRAFT, JULY, 2002

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