

Preface

Bristol is at a crossroads as it faces the continued, and intensifying, challenges of the 2020s. The Town is experiencing rapid growth and development as more and more people discover a place that has historically been overshadowed by the draw of surrounding more “touristy” communities. As a result, the population continues to trend toward older, retired, and more affluent individuals and young families cannot afford to purchase homes in the Town. Bristol’s tradition of access to natural resources is increasingly threatened as more land becomes private. Jobs based on marine resources are threatened by climate change. Community organizations are disbanding due to a lack of volunteers. Local people are finding it much harder to make a living and are forced to seek homes and jobs elsewhere. These changes fly in the face of what most people want - to keep Bristol “the way it is.” At no time, therefore, has it been more essential for the Town to work together to create a plan for the future.

Bristol has not had a fully approved Comprehensive Plan for 35 years. In 1987, both the Town and the State approved a Plan. Twenty one years ago, in 2002, the Town approved an update to the prior Plan, but the State did not. The 2002 Plan was deemed ‘inconsistent’ with the Maine Growth Management Act in several important areas. The Comprehensive Planning Committee hopes that this Plan (2023) will be both approved by the residents and found consistent by the State of Maine in order to support the Town’s efforts to effectively guide growth and development in the face of increasing and rapid changes.

Very little medium and long term planning has taken place in Bristol since 2002. The residents have not been offered a comprehensive opportunity to fully understand what currently exists and express what they want for the future. Understanding the present, and envisioning the future, is a task we need to undertake together. To accomplish this collaboration, we must write the plan (Comprehensive Plan Committee), approve the plan (voters and State Planning Office), and execute the plan (Select Board and the town’s committees and staff).

The plan represents a first, tentative, step. Approving and executing are the next.

Bristol's 2023 Comprehensive Plan offers a vision for Bristol that is based on what the Committee has heard from residents, who are 'the heart and soul' of the community, and the data collected and analyzed. The Committee used this information to think strategically about what Bristol needs in the next ten years and present the conclusions in the document that follows.

We found that Bristol wants to stay, as much as possible, "the way it is now", keeping its rural character and caring for nature and the sea. However, change is inevitable and we need to actively understand the best ways to keep what we have, and plan for our future. We know that we need affordable housing and that older people want to continue to live in a community that they love. We know that we value our natural and historical resources and want to maintain public access to these resources for future generations. We know we will be affected by a changing climate and want to find ways to make the town resilient in the event of storms and hurricanes. We know we need to plan carefully in order to move forward with these priorities in mind.

We must help to monitor both the Town's Plan and the ways in which it is implemented. We recommend that the Town create a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to work with the Town and help guide the Town's decisions over the next 10 years (when the Comprehensive Plan is due to be updated).

We urge you to remember that a comprehensive plan for a town is not mandated by the state, but almost every town in Maine makes one. A plan offers advice and suggests strategies but does not implement them. The voters decide if the plan should be adopted and the Select Board and the Town staff execute the decisions. A plan can, if adopted, empower the community to control what happens by making a blueprint for growth. A plan confirms what the community loves about their Town and wants to preserve. All the parts of the plan are interconnected and each one will contribute to its success. Consulting each other, planning and implementing our actions is a way to understand, and meet these challenges. We must all be partners in the effort to preserve the best parts of Bristol and to shepherd our Town through the challenges of the future.

How to Use This Plan

The organization of the Plan, how to use it, and what to read

Bristol's 2023 Comprehensive Plan is organized to make it easy for the Town's residents to find the information they need to understand, think about, and decide the future direction of Bristol. There are two sections. The first section (pages 1-42):

- Describes how the Plan was developed and will guide the Town's future;
- Explains the Town's Vision;
- Lays out the Plan's most important strategies;
- Describes the public participation process and planning process;
- Presents a Future Land Use Plan.

Most importantly, the first section explains the process of the Plan's adoption and implementation.

The second section is an inventory of information currently known about the Town as presented in eleven chapters of data, goals and strategies and a summary of our regional cooperation. These chapters provide a detailed overview of each topic and are important for long range planning decisions. Each chapter concludes with proposed goals and strategies that suggest how the Plan can be implemented. A matrix of the goals and strategies from the Inventory chapters is in Appendix C.

This section also contains Appendices that provide background data, analysis, and maps that support the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Plan. It also provides summaries of the Public Participation and some of the documents used in preparing the Plan.

Depending on your time and interests, considering using it in the following ways:

Purpose	Suggested Reading	Estimated Time	Pages
I want key takeaways and have limited time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preface • Summary 	4 MIN	
I want to understand the recommended goals, policies, and strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Goals, Policies, Strategies Matrix 	10 MIN	
I want to understand the comprehensive plan process and strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 1 • Goals, Policies, Strategies Matrix 	20 MIN	
I am interested in the data collected and how it has been used to make the plan.	<p>Read Appendices as desired:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A - Inventory Chapters • B - Fiscal Capacity and Capital Investment Plan • C - Goals, Policies, Strategies Implementation matrix • D - State Planning Criteria Reference Checklist • E - Survey results 	Variable	



Photo by Gross

Plan Summary

Overview

A Comprehensive Plan collects, analyzes and presents detailed information to support goals and strategies that are recommendations to the Town to take action. This combination of data and strategic proposals can be overwhelming and we offer a brief summary here to help explain key information.

A Comprehensive Plan

A Comprehensive Plan is a planning document intended to be a guide for communities when making policy and land use decisions over a 10 to 15 year period. The whole planning process is an opportunity for the community to come together, look at where they are, and plan for where they would like to be. It prepares the ground for future growth that would still maintain the rural atmosphere that its citizens and many visitors have come to appreciate and cherish. The Comprehensive Plan is an important planning document because it guides policy decisions, land use decisions, and municipal investments.

Why does the State need to approve the Plan and agree that it is consistent with the State Growth Management Act? A plan that is approved by the State makes that municipality eligible for the grants and loans, and allows the municipality to legally impose land use, impact fee, rate of growth and shoreland zoning ordinances that can stand up in a court of law. The top priorities for the Town are represented by groups of individual goals stated within each of the inventory chapters - some of which are requirements of the State Growth Management Act of 2008.

The Benefits of a Comprehensive Plan

A Comprehensive Plan **benefits** a community like Bristol because it allows the Town:

- To control what happens in its community;
- To establish a blueprint for growth for the next ten years;

- To preserve the things the community loves about the Town; and
- To apply for a portion of \$80 million in available State grant and loan funds.

Bristol's 2023 Comprehensive Plan **looks forward** and **asks for action**. It is based on an extensive analysis of data, strategic thinking, and listening to the residents, 'the heart and soul of the community'. They are passionate about Bristol's small town atmosphere, its people, and its natural beauty. They like the low property taxes. They are concerned about development, lack of conservation, a lack of affordable housing, and climate change. They want to "keep Bristol the way it is", but understand that change is unavoidable.

The plan has two sections, the first with the vision, priorities, a land use plan and an action plan, the second with all the detailed data and reports on Plan outreach.

The first section of the Plan looks forward. It begins with the **Vision Statement** and **Priorities**, which, together, present what we see as the Town's ambitions and hopes for the next decade.

Vision Statement

The Committee, guided by research and residents' feedback, envisioned Bristol in ten years and summarized it in the following Vision Statement:

We believe that Bristol should **maintain its rural character** as an unpretentious and welcoming coastal town. **Its natural beauty**, especially the coast and the sea, its undisturbed rural areas and conserved lands, **is vital to its future**. Careful planning for the **use of our land** is important in preserving the town's character.

Every generation is important, from its children to its older residents, (that form the majority of the population). They all need to have access to **affordable housing** in order to be able to live here at all ages. Education for our children is vital and **work of all kinds** should be encouraged and supported.

While residents appreciate and value Bristol's consistently **low tax rate**, they believe that supporting all these aforementioned priorities is most important.

Bristol believes that **climate change is of grave concern**, and that future Town practices and policies should be developed to help mitigate its effects.

In order to achieve the community's vision for Bristol, **we must act together** to put these recommendations into action.

Priorities

The **Priorities** were developed from the Vision Statement: they form the core of the Plan and guided the goals and suggested strategies. Adopting them is the first step to defining the actions that are needed to implement the Plan.

In order to preserve Bristol, we must:

- Protect the Town's rural character;
- Protect and maintain our natural and marine resources;
- Provide access to affordable housing;
- Understand the impacts of climate change on the Town;
- Use the Comprehensive Plan as a roadmap for the future.

The priorities are the basis for the goals and strategies that accompany each of the eleven chapters in the second section of the plan. They consist of a simple set of instructions to make the priorities work for everyone. They assign responsibilities and a timeline.

Future Land Use Plan

Bristol's land is one of its most valuable resources. The Future Land Use Plan is the most important proposal in the plan and is drawn from the Vision Statement and Priorities.

A Future Land Use Plan is essential to maintaining Bristol's rural character and its small town feel. In order to develop this Plan, four proposals were examined including growth in and around the villages, along the major roads, allowing development all over the town but keeping a quiet rural feel and emphasizing conservation and natural resources. A second proposal which combined growth in the villages with the conservation of natural resources received approval.

Based on the research, including data collection and public feedback, the Comprehensive Plan Committee recommends a Future Land Use Plan that accomplishes the vision of Bristol as a rural, intergenerational community that values its natural resources and preserves its small town village structure. The extensive corridor of “Critical Rural Areas” ensures the protection of the natural resources that are critical to the vision and the future of the Town.

The **Future Land Use Plan** is a summary of what we want Bristol to look like in the next 10 years. It proposes a road map for how we will get there, and is a call for the Town to make an **Action Plan**. An Action Plan is imperative. Without it, the Town’s vision will not become a reality. This Comprehensive Plan proposes goals, policies, and specific implementation strategies that will embody the characteristics of the Future Land Use Plan and address issues identified in the Inventory Chapters.

Conclusion

Bristol’s Comprehensive Plan is ambitious and assertive; it suggests ways for the Town to change and develop over the next ten years that match the Committee’s research and the opinions of the residents. The dialogue that began with the surveys and the Future Land Use Workshop should be the first of many conversations about the Town. This is the most important thing that we learned - that the Town wants to make the changes necessary to protect the things we love about Bristol, and that many people want to be involved in the process. Only through the future determination and efforts of many will Bristol continue to embody the values of its residents.