

CAMDEN DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN
Community Meeting #1
January 26, 2012

Nearly eighty attendees were asked to break into groups to discuss their most pressing concerns, as well as their highest hopes for the future of Camden. These are the results, reported to the meeting from the break-out groups, and arranged here in alphabetical order. This listing is not an indication of the priority of important these issues were assigned by the participants, but readers should know that many of the hopes, as well as many of the concerns, were shared by most of the attendees.

TOP HOPES:

#1: **QUALITY OF LIFE:** Maintain Camden’s unique quality of life, which draws businesses and residents to the area, while making this a better place to live and work.

Activity: Create high-visibility activities downtown year-round

Bring more activities to Town: Think of closing an area to vehicular traffic one day a week to create an area for the Farmers Market to be right Downtown.

Create a Historical Museum.

Create an Arts Commission to bring more art and art events to Town; they are popular now and the Town should do more events like sidewalk art shows.

Embrace recreational themes: Take advantage of the Snow Bowl, State Park, Pathways, and create outdoor activities year-round.

Utilize the “campus concept” for multi-layered activities and events. Think of shutting off side streets to host certain events downtown.

Create more outdoor events year round like the Winter Festival and Christmas by the Sea.

We need a sense of pedestrian energy – visible activity – on the streets and sidewalks to attract visitors to stop and to attract locals downtown.

Work to “keep the lights on” after conferences have ended with follow-up activities and events making visitors extend their stay.

College Campus: Establish a Community College.

Green Energy:

Use a bio-fueled trolley to shuttle people around town including to and from outlying parking areas.

Create opportunities to develop hydro-power at the Megunticook River Dams to attract green industries and businesses.

Locals:

Establish businesses locals want and need downtown – a moderately priced clothing store and other useful stores – to bring locals back downtown to the shops year-round. Bring a retail mix back to Town.

Involve locals and engage them in these decisions: work especially to reach those with dissenting opinions so they can be heard.

Work to maintain a sense of community and find shared goals; motivate others to join in efforts.

Find those with common interests and form coalitions to work toward common goals.

Make the downtown very livable and walk able for downtown residents; encourage people to live downtown; reduce traffic and walk everywhere. Provide the services people need within walking distance. Rents need to be reasonable for residents as well as for businesses.

Need a place to hold forums to discuss issues – divisive and otherwise – to work problems out before they escalate.

Locals need to collaborate on making decisions, but when a decision has been made the Town needs to embrace the wishes of the majority and not continue the fight.

Movie Theatre:

Parking: Parking garage with new and modern office spaces on ground floor.

Better signage to parking areas. Two hour parking limits in some areas isn't business friendly (schooner rides take longer than allowed parking).

Pedestrians:

Create pedestrian traffic with new pathways, a River Walk, a Harbor Walk - interconnected and leading to various parts of Town, as well as linking to outlying areas like the Snow Bowl, the State Park and the Tannery as well.

Get people out walking on the streets – including locals.

There is a lot of pavement at the intersection of Mechanic and Main – do we need it all or is this an opportunity to create a welcoming, pedestrian oriented central space – a hub.

Public Landing: Make the landing a gathering place for people instead of parking.

Streets and sidewalks:

Bring activity and life to the streets, sidewalks and parks: More outdoor seating opportunities (benches); outdoor café tables; art at intersections as part of streetscape and in the park.

Technology-based information systems (GPS, Google Maps, Phone Apps):

This could be used to provide information to supplement signage to show where parking is located in Town among other things.

The Town could develop a Downtown Merchants App

The Town should bring Broad Band – free Wi-Fi – to Town for locals and visitors alike.

Encourage more technology-based conferences and events to come to Town.

Encourage technology-based businesses to come to Town by providing state-of-the-art office space.

Tourism Bureau: Instead of the Chamber, have an office just for tourism providing information and directions – not just to Chamber members but to everyone.

TOP CONCERNS

#1: JOBS! JOBS! JOBS! The downtown needs to be vital year round, the town needs to be vital year round, and we need good, well-paying, year-round jobs – lots of them.

Economic Development/Business atmosphere:

Many businesses have closed in the last six months of 2011: how many and why? This information needs to be gathered and assessed.

Create a business incubator.

Marry the friendly atmosphere of Camden with responsible business development.

Work hard to find a way to help Camden's businesses compete with other tourist destinations.

Camden's Ordinances restrict business development.

The current Select Board is more business friendly – make changes.

Concerns are sometimes created instead of evolving naturally – resist changes made just to change.

The Downtown Plan should focus on what happens here in winter to bring about year-round development; businesses do OK in the summer – we need to work first on becoming a year-round Town.

Camden needs to define a brand – a unique identity – in order to remain competitive.

Take advantage of all the other studies that have already been done instead of doing that work all over again.

Character of the Town:

Don't throw the baby out with the bath water in trying to "improve" the Town: Avoid mistakes made by other towns trying to improve traffic or pedestrian safety and losing what is unique – don't use traditional solutions but find solutions that fit this Town; Maintain the look of the Downtown as it is now; Changes should evolve not be created "evolution not revolution";

We can't do "nothing" and resist change; we must find what we can do to create business year-round and keep the character of the Town and then do it.

Market the Historic character of the Downtown specifically; the B&B's in particular are in historic buildings – this is a valuable asset that should be stressed.

We are a small Town with a limited Downtown area; recognize our physical limitations and don't overdevelop.

Dark Houses and Dark Neighborhoods:

Many close in neighborhoods are summer only residences now and many are rented most of the season; this takes business away from B&B's and owners don't contribute to the Town as participating residents, don't own businesses or support them year round. They are not functioning households and the trend is harmful to the Town.

Jobs:

Create incentives to encourage small start-up businesses to set up here.

Work to fill need for year-round good jobs downtown.

Provide good office spaces with parking.

Good jobs won't come without amenities – which comes first? Provide the amenities and employers will come; or, create jobs and the amenities will follow. What can the Town do?

Jobs continue to be lost downtown: Work to attract businesses with good jobs; work to attract year-round small businesses.

Work to retain our young people and to attract young families.

Create shared office-space concept for small businesses.

Lighting: This is not a friendly Town at night; we need better lighting as well as places to shop or walk.

Very poor pedestrian lighting: it is hard for pedestrians to see where they are walking and harder still for drivers to see pedestrians.

Night time activities: Movies, movies, movies – everyone want the theatre back.

There is nothing to do at night for visitors and locals alike. Young people won't come to stay if there is nothing for them to do. Visitors to B&B's are always asking what they can do.

Parking: Existing parking should be better used. Educate employees and employers about the need to free up parking on downtown streets.

Provide parking on outer Union Street with bike rentals to get around Town.

We need a parking garage – preferably on Town property at Mechanic Street.

Pedestrians: Improve Mechanic Street and Bayview Street intersections for pedestrians.

Create an actual physical walkway to move pedestrians off Main Street and around various parts of Town.

The Town needs to be more pedestrian friendly day and night.

There needs to be recognition of public v. private property when developing pedestrian walk ways.

The pedestrian pathways should evolve instead of being created suddenly; they can be planned but perhaps not implemented all at once.

Rents: Camden is losing businesses to Rockland and Belfast due to highest rents around.

What can be done to help bring them into line? Young people from Town want to stay and start their businesses here but just cannot afford the rents.

Schools: Keep the elementary and middle schools in Town.

Signs: A major concern is improving signage both to improve traffic flow and help people find their way around Town. In addition to several comments along these lines people added:

No billboards! All signage should be in good taste.

Monitor the size of signs.

Work on directional signage first.

There is an over-emphasis on the need for parking and signs to parking.

Use visual clues instead of signs – or in addition to signs – to help direct people. There are things that can be done with streetscapes to get people to turn corners instead of more signs – Rockland has done well with this with planters, benches, etc.

Tourism: Don't accept that Camden can *only* be a tourist town.

Town Property:

Chamber-of-Commerce: The office should be relocated to one of the Gateways, or at the entrance to Town, to make the services more accessible and free up valuable space on the

Public Landing.

The Public Landing is underutilized: take advantage of this spectacular space. This would be a good night-time destination for people walking if there were lighting and some café tables – a gathering place.

Town Office: Find the highest and best use for the building, relocate the Town Office and return the building to retail like it always was.

Utilize the entire Opera House including redoing the third floor; the concept under discussion is exciting.

Traffic:

Congestion caused by double-parked delivery trucks on Route 1.

Don't muck up the intersection at French and Brawn.

Fix the intersections at the Gateways to make them more welcoming, safer and easier to travel through: The Stop sign at Stop-and-Go is not very welcoming.

Make traffic flow better by working on pedestrian crossings so everything flows better.

Be creative in finding an interactive solution to the traffic/pedestrian situation at the bottlenecks.

Young People: There are no activities for young people here.

Make the Town child-friendly with activities geared toward children and families.

Zoning: Establish consistent zoning for downtown permitting retail on the first floor.

Save ground floor space for retail and not for residential.