

# BELFAST STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT ANALYSIS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Belfast Comprehensive Plan Committee, with the assistance of The Musson Group, began the first round of stakeholder engagement in March 2021. Stakeholder outreach consisted of an initial series of round-table focus group discussions conducted over zoom. The first focus group was centered on community health and wellness and the second around economic development and housing. The community health and wellness discussion had nine stakeholders in attendance representing six local organizations. The economic development and housing discussion had six stakeholders in attendance representing four local organizations.

While the focus groups pulled in a handful of local stakeholders, the Committee felt it was valuable to reach out to specific stakeholders in the business community and other local groups. In June 2021 the Committee conducted a series of 14 one-on-one stakeholder interviews.

The stakeholder engagement summarized in this report will be used to inform the drafting of the City of Belfast's Comprehensive Plan. These key stakeholders have valuable input on challenges and opportunities facing business and specific population groups. The stakeholder input will contribute to the recommendations and goals of the final Comprehensive Plan and policy guides. By integrating stakeholder input and forming relationships with key groups now, the City will be able to better implement the plan and action items in the future.

## PARTICIPATION

Round-table focus group discussions included stakeholders from the following organizations:

- Midcoast Realtors
- Our Town Belfast
- Midcoast Council (Real Estate President) & Board of Realtors for Midcoast
- The Office (coworking space)
- Nordic Aquafarms
- Waldo Community Actions Partner (Transportation Services, Early Children)
- Waldo County Recovery Committee
- Waldo County Homeless Coalition
- Restorative Justice
- Waldo County YMCA
- Game Loft
- Waldo County General Hospital
- Belfast Soup Kitchen
- Volunteers of America Northern New England (men's re-entry center Belfast)

Additional interviews conducted by Committee members included stakeholders from the following organizations:

- Belfast Water District
- Regional School Unit #71
- Cornerspring Montessori School
- Front Street Shipyard
- Hammond Lumber
- Harbor Festival
- Maine Behavioral Healthcare
- Nordic Aquafarms
- Belfast Rotary Club
- Scouts
- Rail Trail & Harbor Walk Committee
- Waterfall Arts

## KEY FINDINGS

According to stakeholders interviewed, Belfast is best described as **“A regional hub offering services and employment opportunities to residents and neighboring community members.”** and **“An historic, coastal community that serves the day-to-day needs of residents.”**

When stakeholders were asked if there were specific things they love about working, living, or doing business in Belfast, many mentioned they love that the **community is strong, diverse and supportive.**

Stakeholders, both in the interviews and focus groups, discussed the following as opportunities and challenges facing Belfast in the coming years:

- Affordable housing
- Climate change
- Remaining business positive

Hurdles facing stakeholders and their organizations included:

- Funding
- Attracting younger membership and employees
- Staffing
- Housing

## STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SUMMARIES

### Community Health & Wellness

The stakeholders participating in the round-table discussion on Community Health & Wellness brought a consensus that there are a lot of organizations doing important and good work but that there is a community need for collaboration. The organizations doing work that centers around housing, homelessness, food security, childcare, workforce development, transportation, recovery support and other social services need support to align the work and connect various services with guests of various organizations.

September 2021

There is an opportunity to work together to provide collaborative added value to the community by bringing organizations with goals that align to the community in a cohesive and organized way.

The discussion centered on the following challenges facing the Belfast community:

- Housing
- Food services
- Family and child services
- Transportation
- Access to medical & dental care
- Need for affordable commercial spaces
- Community stigma
- Collaboration among community organizations including for grant applications
- Lack of case management & social work in Waldo County

Belfast is a welcoming community that values their diverse population. It will be important for the Comprehensive Plan to use inclusive language that reflects this value.

### **Economic Development & Housing**

The stakeholders that participated in the second round-table discussion focused on similar challenges as the Community Health & Wellness discussion but from an economic perspective. With stakeholders from the real estate industry in attendance, there was discussion around what is prohibiting people from buying homes in Belfast. This included, to name a few, challenges stemming from the need to align zoning with the needs of homebuyers, access to financing, and access to construction workers for small-scale residential projects. Infrastructure, including public transportation is also a factor limiting growth in the City.

The discussion centered on the following challenges facing the Belfast community:

- Housing
- Workforce (trades in particular)
- Office Space
- Public Transportation
- Childcare

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW RESULTS

Below is a full comprehensive summary of the responses Committee members received during stakeholder interviews.

<b>Q1</b>	<b>Which of the following best matches how you would describe the City of Belfast?</b>	
<b>SUMMARY</b>		
A regional hub offering services and employment opportunities to residents and neighboring community members.		12 of 14
An historic, coastal community that serves the day-to-day needs of its residents.		11 of 14
A regional destination for recreational opportunities.		8 of 14
A unique and welcoming community where human needs are valued.		8 of 14
A rural community.		8 of 14

<b>Q2</b>	<b>Are there specific examples of things you love about working, living, or doing business in Belfast?</b>	
<b>SUMMARY</b>		
Strong, diverse and supportive community.		9
Loves the beauty and quaintness' of City and region.		3
Strong business community.		3
Belfast is unique and quaint.		2
Housing affordability in Belfast is a challenge.		
Doing business in Belfast is a challenge.		
Strong support of the school district from community.		
Enjoys the waterfront.		
Enjoys the waterfront and outdoor events.		
Daily needs of residents are met.		
Recreational opportunities for all.		

<b>Q3</b>	<b>Do you think there are any opportunities that Belfast should be looking toward over the next 5-10 years? What about any challenges that we may be faced with?</b>	
<b>SUMMARY</b>		
Business Opportunity/remain business positive		3
Affordable housing		3
Impacts of climate change.		2
Poverty in the County		
Better partnerships w/ business and education		
Provide Day Care 24/7		
Filling older commercial spaces (currently vacant)		
Balance daily needs of community with encouraging tourism		
Grow the waterfront as an asset		
Need for local accommodations for visitors.		
Coastal heritage (enhance and maintain)		
Diversity of activities		
Enhance and maintain trails/walkways.		
Aging infrastructure		
Broadband availability		
workforce shortage		
Public transportation		
Encourage new restaurants and food diversity.		
Taxes and cost of education.		

<b>Q4</b>	<b>Can you share any of your organization's goals for the next 5-10 years?</b>	
<b>SUMMARY</b>		
Maintain and enhance water infrastructure		
Strategic plan for RSU #71		
RSU #71 new school/renovations		
Growing both programs and building.		
Grow employees		
Increase entertainment options		
Expansion of substance use treatment and behavioral health services for children		
Operations beginning in 2023		
Attract new membership and continue community legacy of service		
Grow program and involve more young people		
Support various campaigns and organizations that provide recreational opportunities. Management Plan development for the trails, walking paths, and bridges.		
grow staff and benefits		

<b>Q5</b>	<b>Are there hurdles you envision encountering while working towards these goals?</b>	
<b>SUMMARY</b>		
Funding		5
Attracting younger membership		4
Staffing		3
Housing		3
Professional development and training of staff		
Regulations, taxes etc		
Broadband		
Local opposition		

<b>Q6</b>	<b>Are there things that the City could be doing better or differently that would help your organization succeed in achieving your goals or overcoming challenges?</b>	
<b>SUMMARY</b>		
City should support housing		3
City is extremely supportive.		3
Childcare facilities		2
Broadband		2
City should remember to always put the taxpayers first.		
Invest in public transportation.		
Consider psychiatric urgent care facility		
Strong relationship with the City		
City could seek more involvement/collaboration		
Increasing funding and jurisdiction of City owned parks and rec spaces		
Invest in community organizations		
Help facilitate collaboration between community organizations		