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# Comprehensive Plan for the Shoreland Zone, Town of Harpswell

Harpswell (Me.) Planning Board

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TOWN OF HARPSWELL MAINE  
INCORPORATED JAN 25, 1'58

PREFACE

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE SHORELINE ZONE  
TOWN OF HARPSWELL

PREPARED BY  
HARPSWELL PLANNING BOARD  
HARPSWELL MAINE  
(approved 6/17/74)

Introduction. The Town has had a certain reluctance to adopt comprehensive municipal codes in the past. This plan, including proposals for both a sub-division ordinance and also a shoreline zoning ordinance, represents a major shift in the Town's position. The consensus of the members of the Planning Board and Selectmen is that adoption of this moderate approach to planning will be more acceptable to the citizens of the Town than a more complex one. The Town understands, however, that the comprehensive plan will be refined and broadened to provide for zoning of the entire Town and the adoption of comprehensive municipal codes.

Objectives. The objectives of the land use plan for the Town of Harpswell are to protect and enhance the Town's desirable features, to provide for either the improvement or elimination of undesirable or unsightly features, and to provide for the balanced, orderly growth of the Town in the future and to preserve,

protect, and maintain the traditional quality of living within the Town which for over two centuries has been that of a low density residential, coastal fishing community.

History. Harpswell is one of the oldest communities in the State of Maine. It was first settled in 1720 and incorporated as a town in 1758. During the 19th Century, it was renowned for its construction of large sailing vessels. Its population has remained relatively stable during most of its history, except that the ten year period ending in 1970 reflected an increase in population of approximately 25% to a total of 2,572. Most of this increase can be attributed to individuals who are converting summer residences into year round homes.

Economic Base. The principal industries of the Town are fishing and summer recreational activity. The fishing industry takes many forms. Lobster fishing provides a livelihood for

many families. The dragger fleet catches shrimp, whiting, and ground fish. The sardine fleet provides sardines for processing plants. The Town also has several wholesale dealers in fish and shellfish. Both the building and also the repair of fishing vessels are important adjuncts of the fishing industry, as well as the sale of fuel and marine supplies necessary for their maintenance.

The Town's recreational industries are reflected by its several motels, restaurants and marinas. Each year, the Town holds its famous Tuna Tournament which attracts participants and onlookers from all over the country.

The swell of people into the Town during the summer months to participate in recreational activity also creates a need for the many service industries which are located in the Town, such as building contractors, masons, gift stores, real estate brokers and insurance agencies.

Residents of the Town who are not employed in one of the

activities described above, are, for the most part, employed at the nearby Bath Iron Works, Brunswick Naval Air Station, Bowdoin College, or with local contractors.

Community Facilities. The Town has a number of community facilities shared by both the townspeople and the summer residents. These include town landings, a town-owned wharf and float for public use, a park located on Orr's Island, three bridges, and an additional bridge under construction which will link both sides of the town and have effect of uniting East and West Harpswell, creating a more homogeneous community.

The Town at present has no public beaches and one of its goals should be to expand the Town's recreational facilities to include beach areas and other shore areas for common use.

Community Services. The following community services are available in the Town. Police protection is provided both

by the Cumberland County Sheriff's Department, by the Maine State Police, and also by local constables. Fire protection is afforded by four volunteer companies located at West Harpswell, Cundy's Harbor, Orr's Island and Bailey's Island. Waste disposal is handled by a town dump and by a private service which hauls away waste materials. Most of the homes in the Town have private septic systems, but there are also several small waste treatment plants. The Town dump must be closed within one year and one objective of the Town will be to locate a suitable dumping area which will conform with all state requirements. Health service is provided by means of several volunteer ambulance services operating from both East and West Harpswell, a town nurse, and a town health officer. Highway maintenance is the direct responsibility of the Department of Transportation for the two main thoroughfares in the Town and the Town has a road commissioner to oversee the maintenance and repair of other roads which are the responsibility of the Town. The

Town possesses several municipal buildings: A Town House located at Harpswell Center, two modern school buildings, one located in East Harpswell and one located in West Harpswell.

The Town school system consists of the two elementary schools described above. Education beyond that level is provided to the Town's children by means of its participation in SAD 75 which includes Topsham, Maine. The Town has several churches and cemeteries and four private libraries.

Physiography. An examination of the maps which are a part of this document, reveals that Harpswell has an extraordinarily long coastline which totals 148 miles in length, excluding the small islands. Much of the Town's terrain is heavily wooded with stands of spruce, pine, cedar, birch, and oak. The soil conditions around the Town are generally shallow. The highest part of the Town is 200 feet above sea level. Because of the terrain and soil conditions in the Town, the best use



for its land is for low density residential and those uses which tend to preserve and support its commercial fishing industry. Large scale farming is not productive.

Developers have recognized the desirability of Harpswell as a residential community and presently a large development is pending before the Planning Board. Action on it is being held up, however, because of a moratorium on all sub-divisions enacted at the last Town Meeting. The moratorium will cease automatically when the Town formally adopts a sub-division ordinance.

Along with residential uses, the town can adequately accommodate recreational uses, as evidenced by the many recreational uses already located there, and the various activities connected with its fishing fleet. The few commercial areas are without exception used to provide services either for the Town's fishing industry or recreational industry.

An examination of the land in the Town reveals that the Town has very little land owned by it and dedicated to public use. One of the goals of the Town should be to increase its inventory of desirable land so as to continue to provide its residents and summer tourists with docking facilities, beaches, parks, hiking trails, scenic areas as well as the preservation of the marine and wild life presently within its boundaries.

Goals and Objectives. One of the most important goals for the Town is to preserve the charm and the pleasant living conditions afforded to its citizens. A new community building should be considered for use by the officials of the Town government and the citizens of the Town. The Town should develop recreational programs for all its citizens. In conjunction with the Conservation Committee of the Town, plans should be developed to preserve the natural resources and wild life of the Town.

Long range planning for the proper development of the Town.

would include the development of water system and waste disposal systems, methods of providing police protection, tree planting and landscaping in order to preserve the scenic vistas of the Town, and preserving the historical and natural beauty of this more than 200 year old Maine community. Since its inception, the Town has enacted two ordinances: a trailer ordinance, and an ordinance relating to the control of Dutch elm disease. One of the important goals for the Town, acting in conjunction with the Planning Board and other interested citizens, will be the adoption of comprehensive codes intended to preserve and improve the quality of life throughout the Town. The Town will have proposed sub-division and shoreline zoning ordinances submitted to it at a special Town Meeting in late June. After the adoption of these ordinances, the Town will have an opportunity to consider ordinances relating to health, plumbing, waste disposal, road construction, and a comprehensive zoning ordinance for the entire Town.