

14. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & KEY ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

This section summarizes the issues and trends discussed in detail in the proceeding chapters. This summary is followed by a discussion on the top issues facing Bucksport. These are the issues that will be the primary focus of the goals, objectives and implementation strategies. It presents issues that require regional collaboration.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND TRENDS for 2016 by Chapter

1. Population

Bucksport gains relatively few additional residents for the summer season. The town could lose as much as a quarter of its total population by 2030. Its average age is rising but it is still lower than Hancock County's. Bucksport's median income is lower than most neighboring towns, but is higher than Hancock County's or Maine's.

2. Economy

At the time of Verso mill closing, it was a major regional employer. About 24 percent (144 people) of the mill's 600 employees were from Bucksport, the rest were from elsewhere. About 35 percent of the Bucksport labor force worked in town. There was also substantial commuting into town. About 60 percent of the jobs in Bucksport were held by out of town residents.

There is less seasonal fluctuation in employment in Bucksport than there is county-wide. The number of jobs held by Bucksport residents increased from 2,282 in 2000 and to 2,472 in 2010. Retail trade and the education/social services sector experienced the greatest rates of increase.

- ★ Bucksport has done major work to revitalize its downtown and implement its downtown revitalization plan.
- ★ The Town is adding 8 new lots with utilities in the Heritage Industrial Park.
- ★ Many other town improvements should help boost local economic development.

3. Housing

The number of occupied dwelling units increased by 4.2 percent between 2000 and 2010, but the total number of dwellings (vacant and occupied) increased by about 12 percent. There was a 37 percent increase in the number of duplexes and multi-family

units. Bucksport had 222 subsidized rental units in 2011, which was nearly 16 percent of all such units in the county.

Home sales and rental prices are below the county median. Given the gradual increase in the median age of residents, more senior citizen housing may be needed. Real estate agents report that there are a limited number of energy-efficient homes and rental units available in the middle-price range. The town needs to assess the extent of substandard and energy-inefficient housing.

4. Transportation

As observed before the mill closure, traffic increased at a much slower rate in recent years than in previous decades. There were cases of minor decreases in traffic flow. The area of Route 1/3 between the Verona Island bridge and the Orland town line has seasonal congestion problems. The town has continued to invest in road improvements but still has some outstanding segments in poor condition. It has also expanded its recreational trail system, There are also some parking problems in the downtown and at the marina. The rail line and port facilities could be important assets for new businesses locating in town.

As the population ages, the town needs to prepare for an increasing number of residents unable to drive vehicles. This will make it important to improve the sidewalk system based on the priorities listed in a sidewalk master plan. Further expansion of public transit may also be needed.

5. Public Facilities and Services

The town has made extensive use of capital improvement planning to keep its services and facilities in prime condition. Continued improvements, such as replacing aging water mains, will be needed. Overall, services and facilities are adequate. However, the drop in property tax revenue due to the mill closing means that it will be challenging to maintain the current level of service. Bucksport shares many of its various /public services and facilities with neighboring towns, including recreation, wastewater treatment and emergency services. Educational services are also provided regionally in Bucksport through RSU 25.

6. Recreation and Cultural Resources

The Bucksport Parks and Recreation Department offers a large variety of indoor and outdoor programs for all age groups. The community is also served by several other organizations. The town has developed various walking trails including the waterfront walkway and two parcels adjacent to Silver Lake. Initiatives from other organizations add to a rich tapestry of opportunity to learn and enjoy arts, sports, and recreation in

Bucksport. These include RSU 25, the Public Library, Northeast Historic Film and the Bucksport Cultural Arts Society (BACAS).

While recreational facilities and programs are generally considered adequate, there are some deficiencies. For example, there are no town-owned freshwater swimming facilities apart from the municipal pool. More outdoor or indoor options for swimmers may be considered. The town's reduced fiscal capacity since the mill closure will affect funding. As the population ages, the town may want to offer more recreational services for the elderly.

7. Marine Resources

While Bucksport has made many improvements to its waterfront, it faces several challenges. These include limited parking, a shortage of dock and float space, and poor pedestrian connections between the waterfront walkway and the Main Street area. The mooring plan is out of date. The harbor needs dredging.

Fishing plays a minor role in the town's economy. This was the case even before the waters were closed for lobster and crab harvesting due to mercury contamination. Rather, the town's marine infrastructure primarily supports industrial and recreational activities. A water taxi service to Fort Knox would enhance efforts to boost tourism.

8. Water Resources

Bucksport has nine fresh water lakes, the Narramissic River, and numerous streams and wetlands. State-mandated shoreland zoning has provided some protection for these resources since the 1970's. Overall, municipal ordinances provide adequate protection to the town's water resources. The lake watershed phosphorus control standards are based on 1992 guidelines and need to be updated.

It is important to monitor conditions in all lakes, with a particular focus on Silver Lake, which is the source for the domestic water system serving the village area as well as the industrial fresh water needs of the mill site. With the cessation of paper making, the remaining major industrial fresh water need is the replacement cooling water for the power plant. However, the mill site owners still control far-reaching water rights to Silver Lake and the extended watershed from Alamoosook Lake via a steel pipe aqueduct and could draw upon that entire resource once again should the need arise.

9. Natural Resources

The natural resources in Bucksport have been utilized for industry and personal use over the generations. The cessation of paper making in 2014 may signal a time when less pressure is placed on consumption of natural resources and more attention is put on their enjoyment in place.

The town ordinances generally offer adequate protection for Bucksport's natural resources. The development review process is now more focused on species habitats. Due to state mapping of key natural features, there are far more data on natural resources than was previously the case. The town continues to enjoy a variety of fish and wildlife.

10. Agricultural and Forest Resources

Farming is not a major land use in Bucksport, about 6 percent of the land area is devoted to cultivation and pasture. There are some small commercial operations and some hobby farms. Interest in purchasing locally grown food is illustrated by the success of the Bucksport Farmer's Market. There is local interest in establishing a "Food Hub" in Bucksport to help develop production and markets.

Forestry is much more significant in terms of acreage with about 80 percent of the town in woodland, including forested wetlands. About 23 percent of the forest land in Bucksport is dedicated to commercial management. Smaller woodlots account for a large portion of the undeveloped acreage in the rural parts of town. About 18 percent of the town's land area is held in the tree growth tax classification. The Mill used to be a large purchaser of local pulp wood. Verso Paper, LLC still trucks some tree-length logs to its mill in Jay from the log yard it owns off River Road in Bucksport. The volume, however, is only a small fraction of what the mill once bought from local woodlot managers.

11. Historic and Archaeological Resources

Bucksport has nine properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. State records indicate three prehistoric sites along the Penobscot River in town. Six archaeological sites have been identified by Maine Historic Preservation. Another 33 additional significant historic properties have been identified locally. The town has enacted land use standards to protect key historic sites. Efforts to preserve historic properties in Bucksport are ongoing.

12. Existing Land Use

While the 2003 comprehensive plan called for most new residential development to take place in the growth areas designated in the future land use plan, only six of the 73 residential subdivision lots/units approved between 2002 and 2015 were in the growth area. Many commercial operations in town have gone out of business. Eighty-three commercial uses were granted permits in existing buildings on Main Street and only twenty of those remained in business as of late 2015.

There were 202 building permits granted for new residential construction between 2002 and 2015. Yet the year-round population increased by sixteen persons between 2000 and 2010. New home construction occurred at a faster rate than the population. The

town continues to invest in its downtown. It still, however, faces major challenges in attracting and retaining new businesses to the downtown.

13. Fiscal Capacity

The closure of the Verso Paper Mill in 2014 ended an eight-decade span over which the town received more than half of its revenues from the mill site owners. There were times during that span when the mill's tax bill amounted to 70 percent of the town's total. In recent years, through improvements and diversification of the tax base and depreciation in the mill valuation, reduced the mill's share to about 45 percent. With the town's reduced overall valuation for tax year 2015-16, the remaining power island equipment, buildings and land on the site accounted for about 17 percent of the town's property revenues.

PRIORITY ISSUES

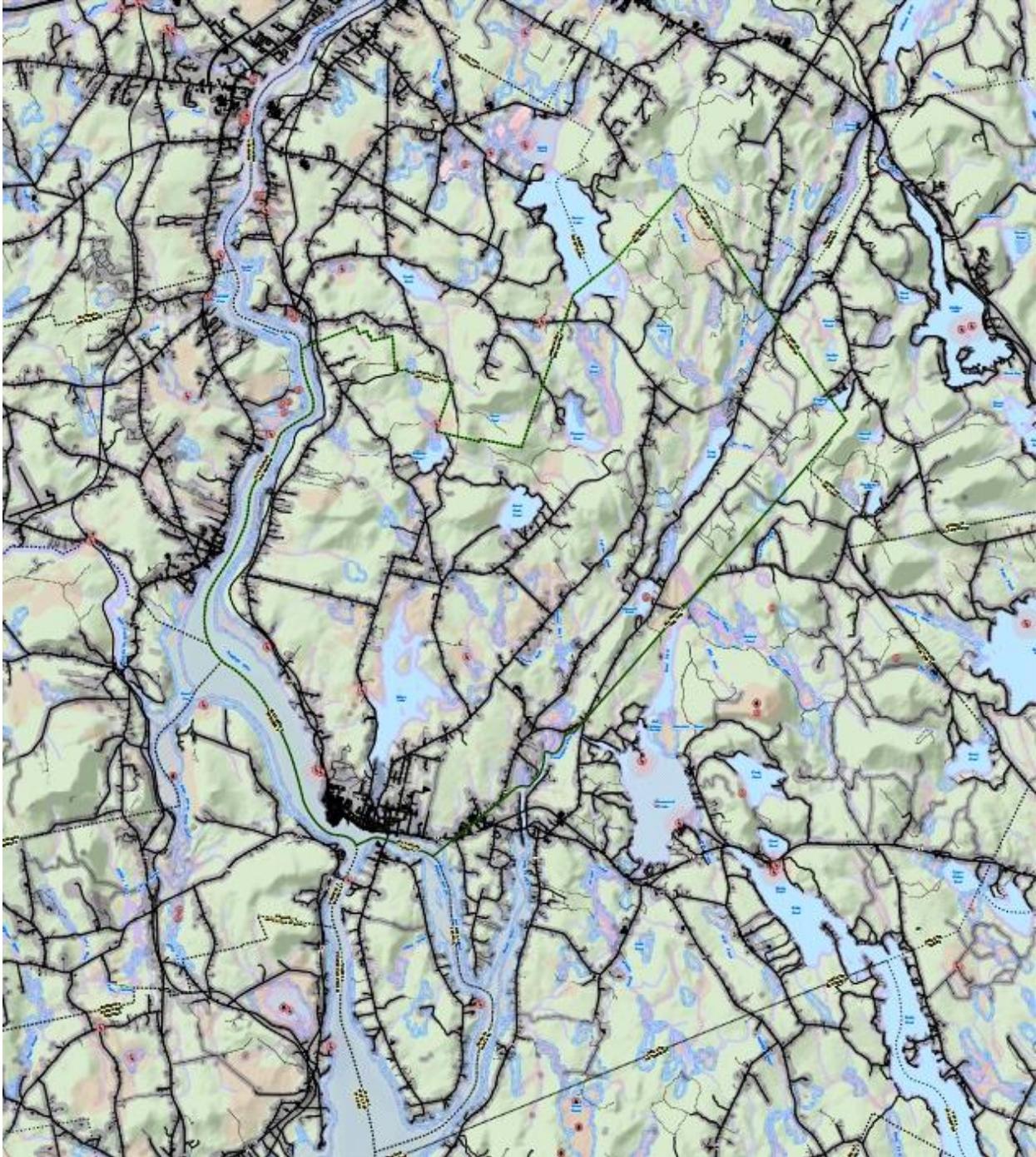
Bucksport faces an interrelated set of challenges. While adjusting to the loss of the town's major employer and tax payer is the immediate challenge, there are other issues that need to be addressed concurrently. These include assuring the town infrastructure and services are able to accommodate new employers. For example, the port needs to be maintained and improved to accommodate the freight needs of future employers. Similarly, the rail line needs to be kept serviceable. High-speed Internet service is also important.

Another top issue is the projected overall decrease in population and the increase in the number of elderly. A drop in school enrollment may make it more challenging for the RSU to maintain the diversity of offerings and reduce its ability to collaborate on vocational training initiatives with employers. Given the high skill level needed for most new jobs, other labor force training programs may be needed.

To accommodate the needs of the elderly, the town will need to take additional measures to assure it is pedestrian friendly such as improved sidewalks and road crossing points. Public transit and ride services may have to be expanded. Health care and social services planning agencies will continue to be important partners in planning the future of Bucksport. There may be opportunities for the town to attract private sector developers to build retirement housing for middle income individuals.

Another top issue is water resources. Silver Lake needs to be monitored to assure its water quality is maintained. Given the uncertain future of the aqueduct and dams, the mill site may no longer have access to the estimated 10 million gallons per day that were used by Verso.

Given the changes in the global economy, the town's future is likely not to include a reliance on one major employer. To attract small-scale entrepreneurs, the town must maintain its quality of life. This means capitalizing on its natural and cultural resources. The town's land use ordinances must strike a balance between having a "user friendly" land use permitting process while also assuring quality development and protection of Bucksport's rural character.



Bucksport and vicinity

A full-size version of this regional planning map by Beginning with Habitat is available at:

www.bucksportmaine.gov

KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

This list focuses on the primary regional issues that Bucksport faces. As a service center, the town is affected by many trends in the region. The size of the region affecting each trend varies. This analysis distinguishes between regional and sub-regional issues. Regional refers to issues that are county-wide or part of the greater Eastern Maine area. Sub-regional issues involve the towns immediately adjoining Bucksport.

1. Economy

Bucksport is already an active participant in regional economic development endeavors in the Greater Bangor area and Hancock County as well as all of Eastern Maine. This regional collaboration is an essential part of the post-paper mill era. The town also participates in statewide economic development groups.

2. Public Services and Facilities

These issues are primarily sub-regional. The town shares RSU 25 with adjoining towns. If school enrollment declines, further consolidation of the school facilities may be necessary. There are also mutual aid arrangements on fire protection and rescue services with adjoining towns. The fire department is also participating in a three-county mutual aid plan. The potential for expanded regional dispatching is discussed periodically. Social services and health care planning also require coordination with other towns in the greater Bucksport area. The Bucksport transfer station also accepts waste from Orland

3. Transportation

Transportation planning occurs at both the regional and sub-regional levels. The town is involved in regional transportation planning activities. Examples include the Penobscot River Corridor between Bangor and Bucksport and the Downeast Coastal Corridor between Bucksport and Calais. Public transportation is another important regional endeavor. The Penobscot Narrows Passenger Transportation Plan is an example of sub-regional transportation planning. The plan addressed bicycle and pedestrian opportunities in Bucksport, Verona Island, and Prospect. The needs of the Route 46 corridor also need to be addressed on a sub-regional basis.

6 Recreation and Cultural Services

While residents from adjoining towns already use many of Bucksport's recreational services and facilities, there is the potential for more coordination. For example, a regional committee exploring options for YMCA services. Other regional groups include the Bucksport Area Cultural Arts Society and the Bucksport Area Senior Citizens Center. The Bucksport Bay Chamber of Commerce also sponsors special events. Other sub-regional groups include, but are not limited to, the Rod and Gun and Snowmobile Clubs, and the Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust. Any long-

range recreational planning should address the needs of the greater Bucksport area. This is important if the current level of programs and facilities is to be maintained.

7. Marine Resources

Marine resource planning occurs at various levels. The broadest scale is the Penobscot River watershed and Penobscot Bay. Bucksport is affected by upstream pollution sources including mercury.

The potential removal of the Orland village dam could enhance fish migration. Harbor planning requires coordination with Verona Island and Prospect. The proposed water taxi service between Bucksport and Fort Knox is another example of a sub-regional issue.

8. Water Resources

Bucksport shares lake watersheds with adjoining towns. Since activity anywhere in a watershed has the potential to affect lake water quality, it is important to coordinate protection measures on a watershed basis. The Verso Mill used up to 10 million gallons per day of water that originated in Orland. This water will now resume its natural drainage course and flow through the Narramissic and Orland Rivers. Orland is presently undertaking a study of future Route 46 corridor options for these rivers. It is important that Bucksport participate in this study.

9. Natural and Forest Resources

The Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust has worked both in Bucksport and adjoining towns in identifying and protecting key natural resources. This is an important part of managing those natural features that cross municipal boundaries. The closure of the mill reduced demand for pulp timber. Bucksport may want to work with other towns, forest land owners and state forestry officials in preparing study of options for forest resources.

10. Land Use

Towns are sometimes affected by land development trends in adjoining towns. One example is the Route 1/3 corridor in Bucksport and Orland. If Orland were to enact town-wide zoning, the two towns may want to coordinate their zoning standards along this section of road.