

City of Bangor
Comprehensive Plan
Phase 2: Draft Vision Statement and
Plan Goals
Version 1
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plan BANGOR
2022 Comprehensive Plan

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Introduction

Phase 2 of the comprehensive planning process involved a robust engagement strategy to gain feedback from stakeholders on the City's strengths, challenges, and their vision for the future of Bangor. The Engagement Summary provides details of each of the engagement strategies and summarizes the comments received through each activity.

The project team reviewed and analyzed feedback from community engagement, input from City staff, boards, committees, and the City Council, and research done in Phase 1 of this project, to develop a vision statement and plan goals that are representative of City stakeholders and their values as expressed through the planning process.

Key Themes Identified

Below is a list of key themes recurring throughout the visioning process. This list does not represent all viewpoint expressed through community engagement but highlights the ideas that were communicated most frequently.

- Addressing housing availability and affordability
- Increasing the diversity of housing options
- Addressing homelessness
- Supporting and expanding social services for mental health and substance use
- Maintaining City infrastructure
- Supporting walkability/bike-ability
- Supporting a vibrant downtown
- Addressing property maintenance/vacant buildings
- Addressing public safety concerns
- Protecting natural areas
- Enhancing Bangor as a destination for arts, entertainment, and culture
- Addressing climate change
- Supporting a welcoming and caring community
- Preserving and protecting what makes Bangor unique

Draft Vision Statement

Bangor is a small and vibrant city that balances the economic and cultural amenities of a large city with the friendliness of a small town. Bangor will continue to strengthen social connectedness through its neighborhoods, downtown, institutions, and other assets. Bangor will enhance its position as a destination for arts and entertainment, a hub for transportation and industry, a center for education and healthcare, and a gateway to northern and eastern Maine.

Bangor will be innovative in addressing the needs of residents and in its approach to guiding growth and development, while preserving what makes Bangor unique. The city will continue a collaborative approach that engages residents and all stakeholders in decision making to ensure that Bangor is an equitable place for all.

Draft Goals

- 1. Create and preserve housing that is affordable** and is in proximity to transportation, services, and amenities.

All Bangor residents should have access to safe, quality, affordable housing in livable, vibrant communities. As discussed in the Inventory and Analysis, almost half (47.5 percent) of Bangor residents are considered housing cost burdened (more than 30 percent of their gross income is spent on rent or mortgage). Average housing sale prices in Bangor are less than the state and the nation, however, housing in Bangor remains unaffordable for many residents. More housing will have to be produced to meet the growing and changing needs of the residents. Strategically locating housing choices near daily conveniences and transportation options will help to build the foundation for vibrant, livable communities. Housing production should address diversification in housing types, in addition to affordability. Bangor's current housing stock is dominated by detached single-family units. Housing diversification will need to address affordability, unit type and unit size. In addition to the creation of new housing, more attention will need to be given to the preservation of the current affordable housing stock. Between 2010 and 2019, Bangor's housing supply decreased on both the rental and homeownership sides, while the number of vacant units increased during that same reporting period. Leveraging programs such as the Community Development Block Grant program can help to incentivize the rehabilitation of deteriorating and aging housing stock so that the units are not lost to years of vacancy. Rehabilitation of the City's older units, especially in the urban core, could help to enhance the supply of affordable housing opportunities within existing neighborhoods where access to services and amenities currently exists.

- 2. Protect critical environmental areas** that are essential to supporting ecosystems and wildlife habitats, prime agricultural areas, as well as areas that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Bangor's abundance of natural areas and open spaces in proximity to the urban core is one asset that makes the City unique. The community recognizes the importance of protecting land and waterways for habitats, biodiversity, recreation, and agriculture and values the benefits of these environmental areas. Development pressure on undeveloped lands, human activities, and impacts of climate change all pose threats to some of the City's most sensitive environmental areas and protected or threatened species. While many of Bangor's most critical environmental areas are protected from future development through designation under the Resource Protection District or Parks and Open Space District, not all of these areas have this protection. In addition to protecting environmental areas for biodiversity and protection of critical habitat areas, the preservation of land for agricultural use should be considered to support the City's climate action goals, to benefit the local economy, and to address food security concerns by increasing accessibility to healthy foods.

- 3. Provide support to community organizations** and agencies providing social services in Bangor and the region and participate in coordinated initiatives to serve vulnerable populations.

In recent years, Bangor has experienced a significant increase in the population of people experiencing homelessness. The City has also experienced an increase in demand for services associated with vulnerable populations, including mental health and substance use. Although this set of issues is not unique to Bangor, the City functions as a service center for a much larger region and has been challenged to address regional problems with limited City resources. While significant action is needed beyond the local level to help address the many root causes of homelessness and mental health and substance use challenges, the City can continue to play an important role in supporting the work of community organizations.

- 4. Promote Bangor as a destination for arts, entertainment, and culture**, and encourage the growth of the arts and entertainment industry and businesses that support it.

In accordance with the City's 2021 Economic Development Strategic Plan, Bangor will strengthen its entertainment industry to attract more businesses, especially to downtown. The City will benefit from the success of larger venues, like the Cross Insurance Center and Maine Savings Amphitheater, by supporting the development of smaller venues and businesses that support the entertainment industry, including restaurants, bars, and retail stores. The growth of local businesses can encourage visitors to spend more time and money in the City and also contribute to the quality of life for Bangor residents. The Economic Development Strategic Plan notes that attracting people to live, work, and play in Bangor, especially young people, is critical to the City's economic growth and stability.

- 5. Provide a variety of housing options** to meet the changing needs of Bangor residents and the future needs of new residents of all ages, lifestyles, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Meeting the housing needs of Bangor residents now and in the future will require innovative approaches to providing housing choices. As described in the Inventory and Analysis, the City's housing stock has not only declined in recent years but has not diversified itself enough to keep up with the changing demographics of the City. Single-family dwelling units still account for 43 percent of the City's housing stock. Housing options such as smaller dwelling units, multi-family units, senior housing and housing for people with special needs should be encouraged. Redevelopment or infill projects within the urban growth boundary will be encouraged. All development will be done in a way to minimize impacts to the environment.

- 6. Create a physically and socially connected community** through improvements to infrastructure, services, and accessibility to improve health, safety, and well-being.

As the impacts of COVID-19 have demonstrated throughout the world, having a physically and socially connected community is important to quality of life and well-being.

Bangor residents are largely reliant on personal automobiles for transportation; however, not all residents have access to or the ability to drive a personal vehicle. Providing a network of safe and accessible non-driving transportation options is critical for many Bangor residents and visitors and important to the quality of life for all residents. This includes well-connected pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, safer street crossings, and transit options. City stakeholders identified the importance of walkable neighborhoods in creating livable and resilient communities. The City will prioritize strengthening existing neighborhoods by improving connectivity as a more sustainable approach to growth.

The sense of community that is shaped by the social connections of residents, business owners, and other City stakeholders is what many community members value the most about Bangor. In addition to the physical pattern of development that supports social connectivity, social programs and services, schools, libraries, businesses, and other amenities, all offer opportunities for social connectedness. The City will continue to support facilities and services and encourage the development of new resources and amenities that will contribute to the community. The City will look to continue to increase accessibility and equity of services and public spaces to increase access and opportunities for residents of all ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.

- 7. Encourage innovation and sustainable economic growth** by attracting and retaining a diverse mix of businesses, supporting business growth, and helping to cultivate new industries that will benefit from the City's existing infrastructure and amenities.

In addition to being a service center and transportation center, Bangor has several academic institutions that are developing a talented workforce and engaging in important research in growing industries. The City will continue to strengthen its existing assets (schools, cultural diversity, transportation, entertainment, local businesses, etc.) to attract and retain a diverse workforce to support growing industries.

- 8. Focus on resiliency** and develop equitable strategies to adapt and help protect the community from the effects of climate change.

The City is engaging in a coordinated planning effort to develop a regional climate action plan. This plan will encourage resiliency through supporting non-vehicular transportation options, identifying and supporting those who are most vulnerable to climate change, incorporating climate design in infrastructure planning, building economic opportunity through climate planning, among other strategies identified in the climate action planning process.

- 9. Support a vibrant downtown** with a diversity of services, amenities, housing, and transportation options to support those who live, work, and play downtown.

Bangor has made significant investments in revitalizing the downtown. Restaurants, shops, and residential redevelopments have attracted people to live, work, and play downtown. The City will continue to support initiatives to strengthen the economy and downtown community, allowing for a diversity of development options and coordination of City services.

10. Enhance the efficiency and transparency of municipal services by anticipating and planning for future funding needs, implementing innovative tools for communication and service delivery, and strategically investing in infrastructure in a way that is compatible with the City’s values of equity and sustainability.

As it becomes more expensive to deliver services and maintain infrastructure, the City will plan strategically for funding City operations. Consideration will be given to building or accepting new infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, sewers extensions, etc.) related to development of undeveloped land. Consideration should be given to the cost of maintenance as it relates to the benefit of a new development, as well as the benefit to the City in furthering equity and sustainability goals. In addition to analysis of development costs, the City will build upon investments in technology that will reasonably reduce maintenance and service delivery costs over time. Technology and innovation investments should also support the City’s equity and sustainability goals, including improving transparency of operations and accessibility of services.

11. Protect and promote the City’s history and culture while supporting redevelopment and adaptive reuse of historically significant and unique structures in a way that respects the historic and architectural integrity of the City’s downtown and neighborhoods.

Bangor has an abundance of historic and cultural assets that, collectively, create a sense of identity for the City and tell a story that should be shared. The City’s assets play a valuable role in the local economy and help to build strong, healthy, and resilient neighborhoods. A marketing strategy for the City, as recommended by the 2021 Economic Development Strategic Plan and the City’s Arts and Cultural Policy, should be developed to highlight Bangor’s history. As the City goes through redevelopment, it should be done with awareness and sensitivity of the City’s historic and cultural fabric. Wherever possible, redevelopment and adaptive reuse should occur in a way that reinforces the City’s historic and cultural identity. Additional incentives can support preservation of historic structures and encourage the reuse of historic buildings. In order to continue to protect these valuable assets, opportunities to expand historic districts and designate additional City landmarks should also be supported.

Deep Dive Focus Areas

The following is a list of topic areas that, based on visioning feedback and the resulting vision statement and plan goals, require additional research and discussion with key stakeholders in Phase 3 of this project.

- Housing availability and affordability
- Climate action planning – regional coordination
- Community services and the unhoused population
- Economic growth and innovation
- Residential and commercial growth areas