

Midcoast Council of Governments Strategic Plan

Introduction. The Midcoast Council of Governments (MCOG) Strategic Plan reflects the goals and strategies for the region as articulated through a four-step planning process. In the first two steps, forums were conducted at four locations in the region (the subregions), and through planning sessions with the region's professional planners. In this next, the third step, we will ask the General Assembly for further input in setting priorities for goals and strategies.

The Board of Directors will be responsible for the fourth step in the strategic planning process. Using input from the General Assembly, the Board will approve a schedule of priorities that will include:

- Priority
- Time frame within a 5-year framework
- Responsible parties
- Funding
- Benchmark

The annual work plan and budget will be guided by this strategic plan and available resources. The staff and partner allegiances will be organized accordingly.

Present Mission and Vision Statement.

The mission of MCOG is to **strengthen the capability of member municipalities and counties** to act individually and collectively to make Midcoast Maine a better place to live, work, and play.

This involves:

- Developing and implementing a **regional economic development strategy**;
- Identifying, developing, and implementing **regional strategies for other pressing issues and opportunities**;
- **Mobilizing resources in the region**, including member municipalities and counties, business and economic development organizations, environmental and conservation nonprofits, schools and research laboratories, and others, to implement regional strategies;
- **Providing technical assistance to municipalities and counties** to effectively design and implement planning and development policies;
- **Advocating at the state level for policies and funding** that support regional and local planning and development strategies;
- Exercising other such powers as member **municipalities and counties may delegate**.

The call for this strategic plan emanated out of this mission statement and guidance from the MCOG Board of Directors

Organizational Statement. Based on MCOG Bylaws and State Statute, MCOG exists as a creature of its' municipalities. As such, this strategic plan has been developed and will be implemented through MCOG's structure:

MCOG General Assembly: Membership, representing each community in the MCOG region will provide general policy guidance, provide a platform for regional discussion, and approve MCOG's annual operating budget. The General Assembly meets twice per year.

MCOG Board of Directors: The General Assembly nominate membership. The Board of Directors provides oversight for the organization, assures that the budget is expended properly, and will be responsible for final approval and implementation of the Strategic Plan, via the annual work program.

MCOG Subcommittees:

Midcoast Economic Development Committee (MCEDC): responsible for implementation of economic development strategies as well as the development of the Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) necessary for Economic Development Administration funding. This CEDS process is a useful vehicle for all other economic development planning.

MCOG Loan Committee: Manages MCOG's loan portfolio while making loans and investment to businesses that further the goals of the strategic plan.

MCOG Nominating Committee: Appointed by the President of MCOG, this group will be responsible for nominations to the MCOG committees

MCOG Ad Hoc Committees: The Board of Directors may establish additional committees as needed.

MCOG Staff: Staff provide for the daily implementation of the Strategic Plan while meeting the needs of member communities. MCOG is funded through a variety of mechanisms, all of which require some level of reporting. Presently, MCOG is staffed with 5 full time (one a contractor) and 3 part time contractors. The Executive Director reports directly to the Board of Directors. Staffing levels are based on demand and funding levels.

Based on discussion thus far, implementation can be delivered through the following planning subgroups:

- Community and Regional Planning
- Economic Development
- Sustainability and Resiliency
- Housing
- Transportation Planning

Staff will be assigned and have responsibility for one or more of these, as overseen by the Executive Director. Partnerships will be identified and cultivated to expand capacity and meet the goals of this plan. Strategic plan benchmarks will be monitored and presented to the Board of Directors for their evaluation every 6 months. Budgets, staffing levels (including permanent and contracted positions), schedules, and priorities will be adjusted as needed.

Strategic Plan Primary Goals and Strategies. Findings from the SWOT analysis (forum 1) and the strategic ideas collected in forum 2 were organized into the following seven goals, with supporting strategic actions.

1. **Midcoast Sense of Place.** Preserve and strengthen, through land use strategies and investment, the sense of place and character associated with MCOG town centers, villages, neighborhoods, working waterfronts and the natural landscape by relaunching a robust community and regional planning program that delivers, through technical assistance, what member communities need in terms of information, tools and assistance to preserve community character as they define it.
 - a. To help address the pressure of growth and development, establish a regional land use strategy that maps growth and non-growth areas on a local level, aligning them sub regionally to understand conflicts and similarities, and then work to coordinate interlocal growth area patterns while reducing rural, non-growth area sprawl.
 - b. Identify critical working waterfronts, assess their risks and vulnerability to change and access and work with host communities and partners to address identified issues.
 - c. Collaborate with regional partners to inventory, identify character-defining properties at risk, and coordinate strategies to protect and conserve high priority natural assets.
 - d. Brand quality and character of place as a strategy for the Midcoast Region and ensure that there is connectivity between community centers and the natural assets of the region.
 - e. Maintain MCOG's place as a land use and comprehensive plan technical services provider to serve all communities by staying abreast of changes in statutes, planning models, and communicating those trends.

2. **Hub of Excellence.** Expand the MCOG region's economic diversity by relaunching an economic development program focusing on embracing its place as a *Hub of Excellence* within the state of Maine's economic development strategy.
 - a. Implement the use of the Midcoast Economic Development Committee (MCEDC) investigate and conduct the following actions:
 - i. Identify and develop the keys associated with hubs: talent and a convergence of research, higher learning, skilled workforce and business, and a livable, healthy space (https://www.maine.gov/decd/sites/maine.gov/decd/files/inline-files/DECD_120919_sm.pdf).
 - ii. Work with member communities to identify key local and regional businesses of all sizes to attract, grow or expand and ensure a link with MCOG's partners in workforce development.
 - iii. Focus on the following business clusters, identifying their vulnerability, workforce needs, investment strategies, and link them to local development strategies:
 1. Creative Economy
 2. Marine Economy including fishing, aquaculture, and value-added production; coordinate with SeaMaine
 3. Farming, hydroponics, and value-added production
 4. Manufacturing, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Boatbuilding and composites

- b. Machining and precision manufacturing
 - c. Technical components, including medical
 - d. Woodworking
 - e. Specialty food products and ingredients
 - 5. Maine Bio and bio related research and manufacturing
 - 6. Hospitality and ecotourism
 - 7. Aviation
 - 8. Green Economy
 - b. Coordinate the work of MCEDC with the MCOG Loan Committee to grow and diversify MCOG's lending and grant capacity, including links to private and public lenders and assist businesses that emanate from the work above or are identified through outreach. Establish a strategy for improving our:
 - i. Presence in the region;
 - ii. Access to funds; and
 - iii. Lending process.
 - c. Establish a regional broadband strategy and assist member communities as needed.
 - d. Coordinate businesses and workforce development with Goal 5 Regional Housing.
 - e. Work with Brunswick Landing Tech Place to establish a second center in the north eastern part of the region to further the work of incubator business development.
 - f. Identify best practices for local permitting processes to help communities reduce the cost and barriers to development.
3. **Bring more Federal and State \$ to the Midcoast Region.** Position the MCOG region and take advantage of the present opportunities for infrastructure and other supportive funding on a state or federal level.
- a. Pursue funds that will assist the region and its community's in meeting their strategic goals. Infrastructure areas of focus could include:
 - i. Town center roads
 - ii. Town rural roads
 - iii. State road systems
 - iv. Municipal water systems
 - v. Municipal sewer systems
 - vi. Waterfront facilities and access
 - vii. Municipal facilities
 - b. Use the Midcoast Economic Development Committee to develop fair and transparent criteria for including infrastructure projects in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).
 - c. Coordinate the application to federal representatives for earmark funding.
 - d. Coordinate the delivery of the MDOT Village Partnership in conjunction with MDOT to meet the multiple transportation needs of our village centers.
 - e. Revitalize the Route 1 Corridor Development strategy (aka Gateway 1) to coordinate transportation planning throughout the MCOG region, stressing:
 - i. Connectivity
 - ii. Alternative transportation modes, including transit, pedestrian, and trails system investment
 - iii. Safe and efficient road systems at acceptable levels of service, and
 - iv. A reduction in energy and emissions in the corridor.
 - v. In conjunction with Goal 6, coordinate an EV charger planning and investment program and apply for funding at the state and federal level.

- f. Provide annual training and technical assistance on demand for Tax Increment Financing proposals.
 - g. Assist our member communities by facilitating, with our county partners, the development of a plan for regional emergency management assistance by:
 - i. Establishing the subregional collaborations and experts necessary to coordinate emergency management response in the MCOG region;
 - ii. Working in subregions to define the baseline issues;
 - iii. Facilitate discussion in the subregions to establish a sustainable emergency response system across urban and rural borders.
4. **Housing.** Implement a regional program that addresses the short term and long-term housing shortage in the MCOG region.
- a. Establish a regional working group to study and advocate for housing in the MCOG region.
 - i. Conduct an analysis of housing need across the housing, income and age continuum and provide a regional definition for affordable, workforce, and attainable housing.
 - ii. Collaborate with area business (clusters) to identify employment needs by job type, income, and locational preference, providing an additional understanding of supply needs by housing type.
 - b. Address the shortage of workforce housing at local and sub-regional levels by focusing on the development of public and private partnerships to create housing to meet the needs of existing and future businesses.
 - c. Identify and work with communities to address the conflicts between growth and non-growth areas and the land use barriers that exist the development workforce and affordable housing in the MCOG region.
 - d. Identify funding sources and develop creative mechanisms (i.e., TIFs or Maine Housing Community Solutions Program) to assist communities and development partners in addressing the needs identified above.
 - e. Develop regional and local strategies for the management of accessory and short-term rental units.
 - f. Working with appropriate partners, help coordinate regional housing strategies for:
 - i. Seniors;
 - ii. Homelessness; and
 - iii. Supportive Housing
 - g. After needs assessments, further assess the potential for intergenerational housing development.
5. **Sustainability and Resiliency.** Establish an effective sustainability and resiliency program that helps member communities address issues of climate change, reduce its' root cause - carbon emissions, while embracing the green economy.
- a. Develop a regional Sustainability and Resilience Plan that:
 - i. Collects and analyzes data to establish a baseline of climate related challenges on a local and regional level including but not limited to:
 - 1. Sea level rise
 - 2. Storm event impacts
 - 3. Wildlife impact
 - 4. Emissions
 - 5. Energy usage
 - 6. Demographic impacts of climate migration

- ii. Develops local and regional plans, with our partners, to mitigate or reduce the impacts of climate change while embracing the green economy¹ as an implementation tool.
 - iii. Identifies financial resources to support the plan.
 - b. Implement the Sustainability and Resilience Plan by:
 - i. Establishing MCOG, in conjunction with Lincoln County Planning Commission, as the regional delivery partners recognized by the funding agencies of the State of Maine to deliver sustainability action plans.
 - ii. Forging collaborative partnerships among member communities, business and economic development organizations, and environmental and conservation nonprofits that result in meeting the goals/benchmarks of the plan.
 - iii. Ensuring that commercial, industrial, institutional, and housing developments address issues of sustainability and net-zero impact, as implemented through model building and development codes and investment strategies.
 - c. Establish a baseline and measure the demographic impacts of climate migration into the region.
- 6. **Communication.** Strengthen the recognition of MCOG, and the region, through communication, collaboration, and the use of technology.
 - a. Create opportunities, through funding and internal communication for collaboration among member communities.
 - b. Identify and connect critical partnerships needed to achieve MCOG goals and build capacity in the region.
 - c. Upgrade MCOG's communication system, including its email blast system, the website, and the use of social media where appropriate.
 - d. Position MCOG and its' website as a go-to resource for member communities in addressing comprehensive planning, land use strategy implementation, and associated capital planning.
 - e. Regularly inform the MCOG community of funding availability and provide technical assistance where needed.
 - f. Create a position dedicated to communications management.
 - g. Collaborate with Lincoln County Planning Commission on regional planning efforts whenever appropriate.
 - h. MCOG, working with its membership, will advocate for the region where state policies will have a direct impact.
- 7. **Diversity, Equality and Integration (DEI).** Develop a DEI core plan that addresses how MCOG will address issues of employment, education, and service among the many demographic groups of the Midcoast Region, within the framework of the green economy.
 - a. Identify and map key non-profits for collaboration and clearly define MCOG's role in that assistance.
 - b. Develop an understanding of the key issues of for DEI by:
 - i. Conducting a deep demographic analysis of the region to better understand MCOG's people.
 - ii. Provide a baseline for measuring income disparity across all demographic groups and establish trends.

¹ Green economy: UNEP (2011a): [A] green economy [is] **one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.** Further defined, green economy can be "economic activity related to reducing the use of fossil fuels, decreasing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, increasing the efficiency of energy usage, recycling materials, and developing and adopting renewable sources of energy" (Maine's Green Economy: An Overview of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Sectors, Maine Department of Labor, February, 2010).

- iii. Identify and describe demographically the key social service issues facing our member communities.
- iv. Provide a consistent platform for the discussion of DEI issues across all demographic groups and partnerships.
- v. Develop an action plan to address DEI issues within the parameters of green economy planning.
- c. Work with MCOG communities and partners to establish the region as a community for all ages while addressing issues of agism and need disparities among our seniors.
- d. Establish an employment strategy with regional partners that better prepares and diversifies the MCOG workforce for a changing economy while also integrating new Americans into the community.
- e. With demographic information, address issues of increasing income disparity including, but not limited to the following:
 - i. Cost of housing
 - ii. Cost of transportation
 - iii. Cost of day care and services to rural citizens
 - iv. Cost of energy efficient homes for poor homeowners
- f. Insure, through partner collaboration, that the social service needs of our member communities' most needy citizens are identified and connections made.

Strengths

Attraction of Strong downtown Anchors, working waterfronts, neighborhoods, character, sense of place, village form, history	22(1)
Coastal Communities	4
Islands/peninsulas, waterfronts access to water	3
Craftmanship, economic diversity, entrepreneurs (fishing, farms trades, creative economy), ability to adapt, good paying jobs	19 (1)
TechPlace/Brunswick Landing	1
Natural Landscape, natural resources scenic vistas	14
Non-Profits	8
Public Education System, school diversity, school of technology	5
Creative economy, culture, and the arts	5
Local Food, Farm to table	5
Access to Public Lands	4
Route 1 Corridor spine, 3 ring binder	4
Tourism assets	3
Engaged passionate citizens, volunteers	4
Available land/favorable zoning	2
Embrace diversity	2 (1)
Wealthy benefactors	2
Special events	1
Health care, Potential for Green energy, Young at home workers, networks	

Weaknesses

Lack of workforce housing, all price points	17 (1)
Disparity of incomes, housing, poor households, cost of living on coast	6
Seasonal /homes/seasonal rentals, “dark” homes, Reliance on tourism	4
Sprawl/land use policies (impacting cores, climate change, trans), infrastructure investment and cost, capacity, lack of funding	14 (1)
Lack of transportation network coordination, public transit, parking	10 (2)
Aging Population/available workforce/child and adult day care support	9
Mental Health, addiction, senior services	9
Regional Collaboration, comp planning, regs, clash of home rule, consensus	8
Lack of professional capacity and turnover	7
Lack of Workforce, good jobs, youth attractions, retaining youth	7
Acceptance and training for Diversity, folks from away, increase diversity	6
NIMBYism, resistance to change, new to the community	5
Town Meeting form, given poor participation	5
Broadband (rural concern noted)	3
ost of living in coast, construction	3
Permanent public access to water	3
Electrical Grid Infrastructure	2
Working water fronts and folks from away clash	
Communication/engagement	2
Real estate Market/land rich cash poor, age of housing	
Geography, distance from service centers, university cores	3
Ticks, brown tail	2
Too many non-profits competing for scarce resources, volunteers	2
Cost of negative discourse	
Mr. Eddy is bias and unpleasant in SWOT workshop (Thomaston we think)	

Opportunities

Skill set development all ages/4 year, initiatives technical schools, hub of excellence concept	12
Funding sources, infrastructure opportunities	9 (4)
Creativity in Housing Solutions (in the core, growth areas) Transportation connectivity across all modes (including rail); high tech design	9 (4) 5 (2)
Planning/implementation along Rt. 1 spine connecting to villages, cores	4 (3)
Housing Trust, partners	4
Green Economy Promotion	9 (5)
Lifestyle, work at home, active recreation, attracting and retaining skilled young workers	7
Exporting local industries (arts, crafts, farming, farm to table)	6
Embracing diversity: immigrant/new Americans/new older/incarcerated	6
Promoting Region, brand, tourism strategy, ecotourism regional story	6
Outdoor recreation, diverse, options, sustainable, preservation	5 (1)
Duplicating Tech Place in the region	1 (2)
Regional planning, training, and communication	3 (1)
Coordinating Broadband	2
Expand manufacturing base	
Natural resources support protection and conservation	1
Transition from old guard	1
Land within growth areas	

Threats

Sea Level Rise/climate Change (capacity to address, flooding, farming)	12(5)
Ill prepared for growth given resources, infrastructure, regional conflicts	
Local ordinances, competing priorities, state support	10
Pace of Change exceeding ability of Communities to address	4 (2)
Seasonality, volume of visitors, short term rentals	7 (2)
Natural Gas/oil supply, cost of energy	5
Cost of construction	4
Retaining and Attracting Youth, quality experience	4 (1)
Housing Supply (new buyers, interest rates, profits)	4
Naysayers focused on taxes, increased polarization, bias	4
Climate Migration of people and real estate impact	3
Aging in Place, services, connectivity	3
Iconic Industries (lobsters, blueberries)	3
Increase in Homelessness	3
Density where it cannot be supported	3
Historic Preservation	2
Reliance on Nonprofits, scarce resources	2
PFAS	1
EV infrastructure Network	1
Impact of Amazon on Merchants	1 (1)
Aging out of service industry workers	1
Change in culture from residents “from away”	
Broadband	
Addictive drug crisis	