

Proposed Land Use Plan

Growth and Rural Areas

The process of designating growth and rural areas, and of creating a proposed land use plan, is a step toward creating or updating a zoning or land use ordinance. There are no hard-and-fast rules about what percentage of the community's development should be directed into growth areas over the next 10 years. A reasonable objective would be for 70-80 percent of new development to occur within the designated growth areas. This would be consistent with the downtown-and-countryside pattern of development in Maine right into the 1960's and 1970's, until a sprawling pattern took firm hold in many Maine communities, including many in northern Maine.

Enough land needs to be included in the growth areas to provide future lot and homebuyers with a choice and to allow the housing market to function. How much land should be in the growth area should be the planning committee's and the resident's decision. It should represent a relatively small percentage of the city's total acreage and be configured in such a way that sprawl is discouraged. For example, a growth area that is stripped along the length of Routes 161, 1 and 89 would be unacceptable because it does not adequately protect the corridors.

With these guidelines for designating rural and growth areas in mind, consideration has to be given to the characteristics of each area. Is the growth area an area to which the city should direct much of its development over the next 10 years? Does the growth area have the ability to absorb new development? Is the growth area generally free of severe environmental constraints? Conversely, are the characteristics of the growth area such that development should be directed away from it?

There are different kinds of growth areas (residential, commercial, and industrial), and different kinds of rural areas (agricultural and forest). Among growth areas, it may designate (for example) one or more types of residential growth areas, one or more types of commercial or industrial growth areas, traditional downtown areas, other mixed use areas, and/or seasonal resort areas.

There also may be different shades of rural areas. In addition to resource protection areas (as in shoreland zoning), for example, there may be areas with special environmental features (for example, the watershed of a lake that serves as a public water supply, or outstanding ridgelines), or with multiple environmental constraints (as shown on the development constraints map in the Plan), or with especially important farm or forest land. These may not merit the stringency of resource protection, but nevertheless warrant a level of conservation that can be achieved only if little development is allowed. There also may be rural areas that are not so constrained by environmental concerns, but, due to distance from public services, are best earmarked for low density residential activity, provided rural character can be maintained.

This Land Use Plan has been carried over from the 1992 Comprehensive Plan found consistent by the Maine State Planning Office. Caribou has proposed no new changes to this plan.

Growth Areas:

Growth areas should be designed with the following criteria:

1. Have, or can efficiently obtain, public facilities and services.
2. Have natural characteristics suitable for development.
3. Are large enough to accommodate the expected growth over the next 10 years.
4. Are large enough to accommodate a variety of housing types.
5. Must be limited to a size and configuration that encourages compact rather than sprawling development.

Rural Areas:

As mentioned previously, the majority of Caribou's land area is rural, outside of the downtown (growth) area. The principal use of this large land area should be for agriculture, forestry, rural type residence, and associated uses. Land use ordinances developed for rural areas by municipal officials should limit the number of, size of, and type of commercial businesses allowed in these rural areas. Other specific purposes of this area should include conservation of natural resources, reduction of soil erosion, and the encouragement of appropriate recreational land use. Rural areas should be designed to:

1. Include important agricultural and forestlands.
2. Include large areas of contiguous, undeveloped land used by wildlife, for resource protection, and for outdoor recreation.
3. Include important natural resources and scenic open spaces.
4. May have very low densities of development interspersed among fields and woodlands.
5. Should not include areas in which a significant portion of the community's development is planned to occur.

Under Maine's Growth Management Act all but the R-3 (Rural Residential Zone) could be considered "growth" areas in that (for the most part) they are grouped around the downtown area and encompass the built-up areas of the City. The one exception to this is the Grimes Industrial Park, located a few miles east of downtown on the Aroostook River. It should be considered a growth area yet it is not centrally located.

Rural Areas

The R-3 zone, the City's "rural" area is described in the zoning ordinance as a zone "intended for the kinds of uses which have traditionally predominated in rural New England; forestry, farming, farm residence, and a scattering of varied uses not inconsistent with a generally open, non-intensive pattern of land use". Over the years, through "special exceptions" this goal has been obscured and some inappropriate uses have been approved. Under this plan, limits to these special exceptions are spelled out which will help prevent further erosion of the rural concepts.

Extensive growth in the R-3 (Rural) zone in Caribou, however, is not a threat. Actually, with the population shrinking, the trends show most development occurs elsewhere. This has been born out by the amount of growth that has occurred in the “growth area” since the 1992 plan has been adopted.

Growth Areas

Caribou’s growth areas comprise the following zones: R-1, R-2, R2A, R-4 (all residential zones); C-1, C-2, RC-2, C-3, C-4 (all commercial); I-1 and I-2 (industrial zones); and the H-1 zone (hospital). Generally, with the exception of two industrial areas and the R-4 zone, these mixed land use zones are compactly located around downtown and are served by public water and sewer services. The R-4 zones north of downtown and the proposed areas east and west of downtown, serve as transitional residential growth areas and little significant growth is expected in the next 5 to 10 years. However, this area has served as a zone where higher end housing has been constructed that utilizes larger lot sizes. It is also an area that has little viable agriculture or forestry resources.

Land Use Plan

The land use plan for Caribou is one of the most important components of the Plan. Examining past and present land use can be used to determine the location and the amount of land available for particular purposes. Since the Plan and its goals, policies and strategies are a long-range guide for the growth and development of Caribou, it can not be so specific or rigid and has to be flexible and able to adapt to unforeseen changes and demands. The Planning Committee inventoried agricultural and forest lands, soil types and characteristics, natural resources, transportation networks, housing needs, demographics, local and regional economy, and public facilities and services. These inventories were then analyzed and put into a land use plan. Implementation of the land use plan is accomplished through the following land use strategies.

The Planning Committee felt that there should be no changes in the minimum lot sizes. Lots along state and state aid routes are required to meet the Maine Department of Transportation Access management rules. The following are the provisions for the zoning ordinance development strategies for the implementation program.

1. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to:
 - A. Draft or update requirements and performance standards to include:
 1. Allowing apartments on the second story of commercial buildings.
 2. Reviewing land uses in the R-3 District.
 3. Developing guidelines for the disposal of industrial wastes.
 4. Telecommunications and windmill siting standards.
 5. Changes in Planning Board and Board of Appeals wording.
 6. Parking issues in the downtown.
 7. Curb cut issues.
 8. Traffic patterns in the downtown.

- C. Review and update, if necessary, the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance.
- D. Review and update, if necessary, the Floodplain Management Ordinance.
- E. Review and update if necessary areas within the growth area that may have been “spot zoned” in the past.