

A Vision for Harpswell

On May 4th 2002, Harpswell residents gathered and created a vision of the town's future. This vision will be used to aid policy decisions, to direct town resources, and as a common picture of the town's future. The following vision statement reflects what residents said during the visioning meeting.

Introduction

In Harpswell the ocean is all around. Rocks, trees, fields, islands, farms, and stone walls combine to create an ever-changing landscape. The smell of salt water and mud flats hang in the air. The peaceful evenings are lit up by stars. Harpswell has a diverse natural beauty.

There is diversity in the people as well. There are newcomers and old-timers, fishing families and retirees. They meet in the town's small historic villages, or on their boats in the harbors. They meet at the post offices, or in the libraries, or on walking trails, or at school events. Harpswell is a cozy, caring community, where people see each other often. Every citizen is equal, and every citizen is listened to in town meetings.

This is the special character of Harpswell that must endure forever.

Special Places

The character of Harpswell is reflected in its special places.

Harpswell consists of long narrow peninsulas. The views along the roadways driving through Town, Routes 123 and 24, capture its diversity and beauty. There are inlets and farms, forests and historic churches, harbors and villages, stone walls and winding paths. The tips of the Harpswell peninsulas are special places to visit and look out on the ocean, including Potts Point, Land's End, and West Cundy's Point. Special coves and beaches include Sandy Cove, Mackerel Cove, and Stover's Cove.

Harpswell's Future Development

The Town of Harpswell wishes to keep its rural and peaceful atmosphere, and preserve its natural environment; but at the same time remain affordable and home to a diversity of people, young and old, fishing families and business leaders, newcomers and old-timers.

To accomplish both goals, the Town's future development needs to be carefully managed. The Town's water supply must be protected, and to achieve this alternative source s – such as desalinization – might be considered. Access to the waterfront should be preserved, especially for fishermen and women. Pump-out facilities could be established in each harbor, in order to protect water quality. Open space can be purchased and protected, at the same time that land for affordable housing is identified and made available. In particular housing for the elderly should be developed within existing

village areas. Libraries and post offices should also remain in village centers. Historic preservation activities should maintain the buildings and surrounding character of old houses and village centers. Bike and walking paths can connect the villages and school and recreation areas. Road improvements, street lights, and signs can be limited to preserve the rural, peaceful, unhurried feel of the community. Local stores and businesses should be encouraged, particularly inside village areas, and chain operations discouraged. The re-establishment of regular ferry service to Portland, either at Bailey Island or South Harpswell, could reduce automobile traffic.

Harpswell's Villages

Within this general framework, here are the visions for the individual villages, neighborhoods, and areas within Harpswell.

Cundy's Harbor should remain a village that accommodates multiple activities – from fishing access to tourist/restaurant to village center (library, church, retail – and a re-located post office). Because the village sits atop a fragile water supply, and is limited in land availability, future development ought to be on a very small and careful scale. New housing should be sized to fit with the existing buildings, be located on land near the village (not spread out along Cundy's Harbor Road), and be planned in a way that does not harm the water supply or further burden traffic. The village itself should be made more walkable to discourage driving – new sidewalks put in, utility poles buried below ground, and bike paths created to connect to other parts of Town. Retail should be locally-owned and small in scale. Holbrook Wharf ought to be maintained with a small restaurant and working fishing operations, and restrooms and a pump out facility might be added. Land could be purchased to create beach access to Sandy Cove for local residents.

Great Island should continue to develop as a community center. It could include a town recreation area – with ball fields, tennis courts, skate-boarding, a place for seniors – either near the Town Hall or at a more intensively-used school complex. The area is a good location for a post office (moved from South Harpswell). Route 24 should be preserved as an open, winding, beautiful entrance to Town – curb cuts for new developments restricted, street lights discouraged, and bike trails set alongside. This is an area where marine-related and home-based businesses can develop – but not strip malls. Water activities should remain quiet, with controls place on jet ski usage. Open space can be identified and purchased, and walking trails can be developed to connect the areas.

Orr's and Bailey Islands should also retain their village/fishing/rural character. Restaurants, shops, post office, and church ought to remain in the village center. The Orr's Island Library should be preserved and become a community center. Town landings with parking should be added to both islands. A ferry connection to Portland might be re-established here (or in South Harpswell). Public transportation and bike paths could connect to the villages, thus reducing car traffic. Public access to the waterfront for fishermen and women, and to Cedar Beach (including access for the handicapped), should be created and maintained. Mackerel Cove ought to be preserved in its current

state. Development and seasonal conversions should be limited in order to protect water supplies.

North Harpswell should retain its current historic character. Skolfield Farm's buildings and orchards and fields ought to be fully protected by a land trust. A village center could be created near the church and Bailey Store. There small-scale stores and home-based businesses might be encouraged, so long as they do not require too much parking, and are done in ways sensitive to the historic architecture of the area. Public access to the water can be created at Lookout Point and on the state property off Allen Point Road. The Vegetable Corner is a special place, but traffic at the intersection of Mountain Road and Route 123 needs careful management. At the north end of Route 123 a cluster affordable housing development with green space could be built. Route 123, like Route 24, should retain its rural character, with protected open space, bike paths, no street lights, junk removed from yards, and no strip commercial development.

South Harpswell should also retain its historic village character. The old Fuel Depot is a key resource for the future. It can be redeveloped with recreation and open space in mind for local residents. The Dolphin Marina is currently and should remain a focal point for a restaurant, fishing boats, and pleasure boats. More water access should be created for fishermen and women. Parking should be added to the existing wharf. The school library could be open more hours, and serve as a community center. The West Harpswell School should remain open for early grades. The post office might move to Mountain Road. Craft stores, gas and food stores, should be encouraged. The historic character of Potts Point and the Auburn Colony should be preserved. Development should be carefully controlled to protect clam flats and preserve the water supply. More recreation in the form of a bathing beach, recreation area, biking and walking trails, should be created.

The Challenge for Harpswell

After many years of relative stability, Harpswell has been discovered as a beautiful place to live by the outside world. New people and new houses are part of Harpswell's future. This is unavoidable. This vision describes one way that the future change can be directed to occur in ways that enhance the community as a whole. The challenge for the Town and its Comprehensive Planning Committee is to put in place the tools to accomplish this vision.

*Vision Statement drafted by
Planning Decisions, Inc.*

*with assistance from the
Harpswell Comprehensive Planning Update Committee*