

A New Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Long Island

by Melanie Nash

Last year, the Town of Long Island began the process of creating a new comprehensive plan. These plans are required by the state of Maine, and they serve as a framework for the future of the town that creates them. As part of this process, I was hired last spring as an Island Institute Fellow to come live on Long Island and assist the town with a number of projects, primarily the comprehensive plan. I have always wanted to work with coastal communities in Maine, and this position provided me the unique opportunity to live on the island that I am working with and really become a member of the community during my two-year stay here.

A major factor in the beginning of my work with the island and the comprehensive plan was and still is the COVID-19 pandemic. Even the hiring process was impacted by the pandemic, and I was not able to do an in-person interview on the island before accepting the position. The island and I took a chance on one another, and I have been continuously grateful for that chance. The comprehensive planning process has all been during this time of uncertainty, and it has been incredible to see and participate in a process that has engaged so much of the community even now.

In Fall 2021, the comprehensive plan committee was focused on community engagement, finalizing and analyzing results of a community survey and hosting public forums to get feedback. These forums were varied, with topics including housing, wellness, the working waterfront, and more. We also had two vision workshops, which were designed to allow members of the community to share their vision for the future of the island with the committee. The first meeting that I helped run this fall was one of the vision workshops, and we had about 50 community members show up to participate. Not only did people come to hear what we had to say and to get informed about the plan, but they worked with others to draft their own hopes, dreams, and priorities for the town. The aspirations that were created during these meetings became the vision statement and guiding principles of the plan. The community spirit that was demonstrated through the enthusiastic participation in these events was so fun for me to see as a new resident of the town, and showed me how deeply people care about their island.



Long Islanders gather for a planning session

Throughout the past four months of my work, I have continued to see people step up for the good of Long Island. Even during a season of uncertainty, people are continuing to get involved in the town and in the planning for its future. During the committee's monthly meetings on Zoom, we consistently have guests from the community who want to hear where we are in the process, ask us questions, and share their ideas. Community members have signed up to manage photos for the plan, to edit some of the writing, and to serve as topic experts who can help chapter authors find relevant and correct information. The goal of all of this work is to ensure that the voice of the community is heard in the planning for Long Island's future. I look forward to my next year and a half on the island when we can finish the planning process, and get to work putting the community's plans into action.



A clear and calm day at the Long Island wharf