



Bangor, ME Listening Event

Narrative Report of Small Group Sessions

December 2, 2010

Framing Statement

The out-migration of young people coupled with the in-migration of retirees has led to the “greying” of many of our towns, cities and northern tier states. An educated and dynamic labor pool of young people is often a major contributor in attracting new business & industry into a town and/or city and can lead to a more positive business development environment.

Discussion Questions

1. Has such a phenomena impacted your local community and if so specifically how?
2. What strategies have your local municipalities taken to reverse such a trend and maintain & attract young people?
3. Are there strategies which aren’t being deployed which you feel would positively impact these phenomena and if so what are they?

When asked about issues and potential strategies that could impact this trend those involved highlighted:

- The age of the housing stock make the purchase of housing by 1st time homebuyers difficult due to the costs associated with “updating” and weatherization.
 - Older housing stock is very energy inefficient thus increasing the “housing costs” for younger workers.
- Many younger adults seek rental housing but high energy costs (heating) create financial hurdles for many young families, thus causing them to consider other locales with “newer” rental stock.
- When comparing more “rural areas” to the Greater Bangor region, one must realize many of the residents still make their livings via the “3 F’s” (Fishing, Farming & Forestry). Today those opportunities provide limited opportunities and can lead to a lower standard of living.

Strategies for attracting a younger work force

- Ensure high quality educational offerings are provided at local community colleges and universities.
- Ensure college programs and courses offered meet and exceed if possible the labor force needs of tomorrow’s industry.
- Increase the number and type of apprenticeship programs.
- Match employment opportunities with education and other vocational training opportunities.
- Provide flexible work schedules.
- Focus on seasonable employment.

- Provide incentive programs for younger workers (on-site and/or affordable childcare options, opportunities to pursue additional educational opportunities, etc.)
- Younger workers need to part of the solution, incorporate their insight and needs (1st person)
- *Industry specific strategies* focused on attracting younger workers
- Venture capital

Framing Statement

The problem(s) with Foreclosures and Vacant properties can be viewed through a “community lens” where the problem is a symptom of broader issues affecting neighborhoods such as higher concentrations of unemployment, elevated crime rates, and poor code enforcement. Often this problem is viewed as a singular housing problem or singular Real Estate Owned (REO) problem.

Discussion Questions

1. Have your community’s policy makers & housing organizations chosen to take a holistic and comprehensive approach to the problem or not?
2. If so what are some specific examples?

Those involved highlighted the following organization working on this issue. The foreclosure and REO property issue in Maine has little to do with Predatory Lending. Majority of foreclosures are due to high unemployment and a lack of living wage paying jobs.

When asked about strategies in dealing with the local foreclosure issues those involved highlighted the following:

- CAP Agencies, Bangor Homeless Shelter, local Board of Realtors, City and Town Programs, Habitat for Humanity, Coastal Enterprise Inc., Maine State Housing.
- Community Banks and CAP agencies are working with people to help them stay in their homes if possible.
- A focus on energy efficiency programs will help people make their homes more efficient and thus more affordable.

Issues that continue to impact problem(s)

- A higher number of abandoned homes in more rural areas and lots of abandoned manufactured housing units.
- Cities generally have larger number of affordable rentals than rural areas. Affordable rental options in rural areas are very limited.

Additional strategy options

- Centralized database is needed that identifies vacant/foreclosed properties.
- Work towards establishing cooperative housing that utilizes current housing stock, vacant land and buildings.
- Educate citizenry at a younger age and continue through adulthood focused on financial planning, budgeting, etc.
- Those involved reiterated the sentiments that this issue all comes down the lack of opportunity as it relates to “good paying jobs” in the region.

Framing Statement

As the tensions increase between the need for good paying jobs and quality of life, what are the ways your community can balance the two? For many communities rich in natural amenities, there is a desire to maintain the natural landscape to attract visitors to the community yet development can lead to good paying jobs for the residents of the area. How do you suggest such issues can be reconciled?

Discussion Questions

1. What job growth opportunities exist elsewhere that our community can work to recruit while not sacrificing the natural environment?
2. Are there ways to leverage the natural environment without giving up what your community values?
3. Is your community sustainable with a service based economy?

When asked about the balance between developments (living wage paying jobs) versus environmental concerns, those involved highlighted the following:

- There exists a need to view the cup as “half full” as opposed to “half empty”.
- A service sector economy is NOT enough to meet the needs of Maine’s labor force.
- Need to focus on new competitive advantage production opportunities that provide opportunities for new entrepreneurs to enter the market and more self employment opportunities.

Opportunities

- Asset Based Community Development (A,B,C,D)
- Comprehensive ROI opportunities with natural resource management.
- Adaptive reuse of downtowns and mills
- Adaptive reuse of workforce
 - Increases productivity
 - Increase median wages

Challenges

- Attraction
- Retention of workers
- Increase in median wages
- Demographic trends
- How to increase productivity of workforce

Barriers

- Broadband internet access
- Higher energy costs
- Transportation issues
- Burden on employers
- Skills mismatch of current labor force & underemployment
- Low expectations of citizenry
- NIMBYs (**N**ot **I**n **M**y **B**ack **Y**ard)

Framing Statement

When the housing bubble burst, so did our economy at many levels. The recession tightened and at times choked the access to credit in both the housing and small business lending arenas. Small businesses report “new credit lines” have become the most difficult credit to acquire. This is particularly problematic as such lines of credit are often used to meet short term cash flow needs. Others report unilateral changes of credit terms/conditions by lenders have become routine and generally bring negative consequences to small business. Overall, business suggests credit (Lines of Credit, Loans & Credit Cards) is much more difficult to acquire than 5-10 years ago.

Discussion Questions

1. Based upon your experience (professional and personal) what impact has this had on small business formation?
2. What impact has the tightening of credit had on Maine’s current small business community?
3. What novel or new models (if any) of capital acquisition are you aware currently being utilized by existing small businesses or start-ups?

When asked about the access to capital for business financing needs those involved highlighted the following:

- Access to capital was suggested to be less of an issue. From the lenders perspective in the room, the community banks are doing a good job at meeting the capital needs of “start-ups” and current business enterprises.
- The Business Energizer Loan Fund DOES provide business capital
 - A Zero default rate exists
- USDA Grant Program is available to access if suitable.

Opportunities/Strategies

- A more responsive and formal referral process needs to be in place for the purpose of networking.
- Need a mentoring system for displaced workers who are in the process of being re-trained.
- Potential for the coming together of home business organized in a cooperative model that would allow smaller industries to take advantage of “scale” and lower costs reducing risks while seeking traditional financing opportunities.
- Participants cited the need to focus on more high tech industries.

Framing Statement

As the cost of a college education continues to increase at faster rates than inflation, enrollments at community colleges have risen steadily. Either as a portal to a four-year degree or as the principle workforce development ‘training organization’ within your community, the role and importance of community colleges continues to grow.

Discussion Questions

1. What role do you see local colleges playing in positively impacting ‘structural unemployment’ and workforce development?
2. Also, due to increased enrollment in community colleges (specifically in our area) resulting in large waiting lists, what role do you see adult education playing in positively impacting ‘structural unemployment’ and workforce development?
3. Similarly, do you see any opportunity or changes occurring within our Career and Technical Schools?

When asked about the role of colleges and universities as a workforce development training organizations, those involved highlighted the following:

- Those involved cited the major issues as:
 - Readiness
 - Access
 - Affordability
- A need for a change in culture on how formal education is viewed.
- Business community can take an active role in encouraging “currently employed” to pursue advanced training opportunities. This could include:
 - Tuition reimbursement benefits
 - Flexible schedules
- Increased outreach campaign for educational attainment and focus on “ACCESS” and “how” to navigate enrollment process and “who” can assist prospective students. Many people don’t know process OR how to begin.
- All educational institutions need to be aware of and adapt to the changing world. The attendees suggested community college is doing a better job than universities.
- Need for college to accommodate “non-traditional” students. Locations of institutions are an issue and the absence of broadband inhibits online learning opportunities.
- Need to start during middle school and high school focused on financial literacy and expanding on successful programs such as Junior Achievement & “Pathways”.

Framing Statement

Maine faces the increasingly difficult problem of increased home heating costs during it’s long winter months and the impact those costs have on a homeowners ability to maintain their household.

Discussion Questions

1. How are creditors’ helping homeowners stay in their homes by making the home itself more energy efficient and thus more affordable to maintain. Are they helping, or is this a program that needs to be implemented?
2. How does this translate to heating costs for small and large businesses?
3. What programs have you seen that help them maintain their costs?

When asked about the high cost of energy, the role of lenders and nonprofit organizations in providing support, those involved highlighted the following:

- There exist federal and state monies for improving energy efficiency but lack scale to reach all Mainers. Examples include
 - First Time Homebuyer coupons for “free” energy audits.
 - Energy tax credits for energy efficiency improvements (ends December 2010)
 - CDBG funds have also been used to assist in efforts.
- Some in attendance suggested the need for the following for current homeowner:
 - Smaller unsecured loans at reduced rates to fund energy improvements. This would help solve the problem of no equity in homes due to reduced values thus inhibiting a homeowner in securing the typical home equity line of credit.
- *Efficiency Maine* does provide assistance, but more public awareness is needed.

- Small business audits now cost money.
- Governor of Maine is now looking at the direct import of oil from NB at a .12 cents per gallon savings.
- **Question:** Can displaced workers be trained and utilized to assist in energy improvements as a means of reducing Maine's unemployment rate?