



# **Portland, ME Listening Event**

## **Meeting Narrative Report**

### **December 3, 2010**

#### **Overview**

At the recommendations of the Greater Portland Council of Government's Executive Director, this meeting was convened absent the Small Group exercise. Those involved in the planning and execution of the Portland meeting suggested a "round table" discussion amongst the participants would positively impact participation and responses.

#### **Topics**

The Greater Portland Council of Governments chose to pursue and discuss the following topic areas:

- a. Changing Demographic Trends (Diversity & Aging)
- b. Housing (Affordability, Diversity of Choice, Mortgage Issues)
- c. Business Development (Clusters, Playing to Your Strengths, Workforce Development, Access to Capital)
- d. Energy (Cost & Diversity)

For the purpose of this report the writer has identified each "topic area" and included the discussion points from the participants under each topic.

#### **Portland's Changing Demographic Trends (Diversity & Aging)**

- Portland is beginning to identify "Clusters of Color". These "clusters" are located in Portland's Public Housing as well as lower-income neighborhoods. Such concentrations inhibit acculturation and serve to further isolate the newly arrived immigrant.
- In Westbrook, Maine the Mayor suggests there are 60 languages in high school.
  - The ESL Program has doubled in one year.
  - There is a lack of interpretive services available for the newly arrived resident thus leading to further exclusion.
  - Those in attendance suggested there is little dialogue between "newer" ethnicities.
- The primary employers of the newly arrived immigrants are:
  - Barber Foods
  - Maine Medical Center
  - Service Sector/Local Hotels
- Such an influx of newly arrived immigrants has created a drain on local school resources. That said, such a drain has influenced and created tensions within Portland and its adjoining communities forced to manage this issue.

- The group suggests that the largest barriers to integration are:
  - Lack of Jobs
  - Lack of English Proficiency
  - Job Training
- **Potential Resource:** Center for African Heritage (Community Gardens & the canning and selling of products).
  - **Physical Address:** 68 High Street Portland, Maine 04102
- Those in attendance suggested the most recent and available Census data suggests while the overall number is small in terms of the total population of newly arrived immigrants, the “concentration” and lack of acculturation is leading to concentrations in the Portland, South Portland & Westbrook area.

### **Housing (Affordability, Diversity of Choice, Mortgage Issues)**

- 30% - 60% of households in the Greater Portland area live alone. A significant number of residents living alone are older/elderly.
  - It was suggested there exists a “mismatch” between the type of housing and “who” resides in it. Many elderly are living in larger multi-family units.
  - It was suggested that no local organization is focused on this issue at this time.
- In Portland, similar to other Berlin and Bangor there is a lack of workforce housing opportunities for younger families or younger working adults.
  - Homes are generally “too large” and “old” to support the needs of younger adults.
- In other areas such as Falmouth, current zoning prohibits necessary density to provide basic infrastructure up to and including municipal services.
  - **Note:** It was suggested by those in attendance that the zoning issue is “protective” and ensures little change to the existing status quo.
- Similar to other locals in the Northern Tier the lack of affordable housing options are an impediment to attracting new professionals.
- Lack of public transportation options was identified as an impediment.
- Currently, the way that HUD incentives are structured for senior and low-income housing projects, there are few financial incentives for projects smaller than 12-15 units. For many rural communities in Maine this size requirement coupled with the legal complexity of the HUD tax incentive program is a barrier to providing small scale senior housing. A more streamlined incentive program for smaller scale housing projects would help us to provide more housing options for Maine’s aging population.

### **Business Development (Clusters, Playing to Your Strengths, Workforce Development, Access to Capital)**

- Those in attendance suggested there exists a gap between what workforce development training opportunities exist and what is needed.
- Community colleges in Maine are able to meet the general needs of students while some programs are offered on a waiting list basis. This can negatively impact opportunities for young people as well as displaced workers.
- It was suggested that business credit IS available but the businesses no longer qualify for lending due to reduced sales, loss of equity, etc

- One participant asked a particularly poignant question. The questions (paraphrased) is as follows:
  - *“What is going to happen to local businesses that have maxed out their lines of credit and credit cards due to the recession? What’s the impact on the broader community when they are forced to close their doors”?*

### **Energy (Cost & Diversity)**

- High cost of energy continues to impede new business development.
- Some communities and residents impede development based upon environmental concerns which can and has historically impacted development.
- Energy inefficient households impact the young adult/family and the elderly at disproportionate amounts.

### **Opportunities for Future Collaboration**

- Federal Reserve Bank of Boston’s participation in GPCOG’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Forum on sustainability centered on a “community” theme in May 2011.
- Potential for Fed Economist to deliver a “State of the State” address for Maine and it’s CD organizations