City of Biddeford
Downtown Development Commission

September 25, 2024 at 5:30 PM
City Hall Second Floor Conference Room & Zoom

Join Zoom Meeting Online
Or call in by phone: +1 312 626 6799
Meeting ID:
Passcode:

1. Roll Call and Determination of Quorum
2. Approval of Minutes
    2.a Approval of August 28, 2024 Minutes
3. Old Business
    3.a Public Art Pacards
    3.b Farmer's Market
    3.c Upper Main Street
4. New Business
    4.a Comprehensive Plan - New Projects?
5. Other Business
6. Updates and Discussion
7. Adjourn

Downtown Development Commission

Meeting Minutes Wednesday August 28th, 2024

A meeting of the Downtown Development Commission was held in the Conferences office at City Hall. Call to order at 5:30 pm on Wednesday August 28th, 2024.

Roll Call; Present: Bob Cyr, Karin Gregory, Neva Gross, Jeffrey Purser, and Patrick Mourmouras, City Staff: Brad Favreau. Absent: Steve Beaudette

Motion by Karin, and seconded by Neva to accept the previous meeting minutes. Approved unanimously.

Updates:

Climate Change: There will be a follow up public meeting of the Climate Council at the Biddeford Middle School on September 19th at 6 pm. Brad will share RSVP link.

Water Street Park: The green space has been approved by the council to plant trees and shrubbery from Pierson's Nursery. There will also be a memorial plaque on the site commemorating the Aranovich Family who once owned the Columbia Hotel on the land donated to the city after it burned down.

HPC Design Guidelines: The city has selected the firm of Johnson Mirmiran and Thompson Inc. to create design guidelines for the Historical Preservation Committee starting in September. There will be future meetings for input from the community.

Sustainability Commission: The city approved creating a Sustainability Commission from the ad hock committee recommendation that was created back in April

City Welcome Signs: The new Welcoming Signs into the city have been installed, a project that DDC started earlier with an updated design.

Old Business:

Public Art Placards: Pat and Karin shared information of their recent tour on identifying the public art in the downtown area. The nonprofit creative arts group Engine created a wayfaring map of many of the sites of paintings on the buildings. Discussed and brainstormed potential ideas for next steps in the process, with type of plaque, description, wording, QR code, identifying the owners of building, consent for locating on sites. A future meeting with folks from Engine and HOB proposed to assist Pat and Karin on next steps.

New Business:

Farmers Market: Neva shared that the City Council was approached from a company interested in running a farmers market in Biddeford. Information was shared to new members that the DDC had worked at creating a Farmers driven market to the downtown a while back ago. Much research went into the development, but the lack of support from the farmers and vendors at the time for a variety of

reasons the project never got commitment to launch and the project dropped off the list. Karin shared there was some interest from a women in Dayton and would reach out for details. Brad had been in contact with another resource to help facilitate a farmers market. Neva will provide more details on the company at the next meeting. Karin and Brad will get more information from their contacts. Perhaps the initiative can be resurrected in the future.

Upper Downtown Open House: Jeff shared an idea to help promote the businesses in the upper downtown area on Main Street from Jefferson to Elm Streets with a open block event. Brad was going to introduce Jeff to Delilah from the Heart of Biddeford to set up a meeting to discuss. Karin made the motion to have Jeff explore the open house idea with HOB and Pat seconded the motion. All Approved.

Motion to adjourn made by Karin, and seconded by Neva to adjourn. All in favor.

Next meeting will be September 25th, 2024

6 Economy

1. What's Happening?

The relationship between available raw materials and the labor force has always been an important factor in Biddeford's economy. Timber, waterpower and a safe harbor were the basis of the early shipbuilding and sawmilling industries. This drew farm labor from the surrounding area into the City. As America began to industrialize in the 1800s, Biddeford became a leading manufacturing center of textiles supported by the available waterpower and a coincident surge of immigrants, first from Ireland and later from Quebec, Canada and elsewhere.

Textile manufacturing continued to be part of Biddeford's economic base well into the next century but at a reduced scale. As the industry declined in the 1950s, Biddeford's unemployment rose and people left the City in search of other employment. Downtown Biddeford flourished with activity during its manufacturing heyday. With the decline in activity in the mills, a drop in population and the development of suburban shopping centers and commercial strip development, the downtown area experienced a decline from its high point in the 1950s and 1960s.

Since then, the City's economic well-being has varied, rising and falling with the times, between and within the following the sectors:

- Mixed-uses within the Downtown and the Mill District;
- Industry outside of the Mill District;
- Retail;
- Offices;
- Institutions;
- The Creative Economy; and
- Lodging.

2. What the Community is Saying

"Support and encourage locally owned and operated businesses within Downtown Biddeford."

"Explore starting a "buy local" program, possibly with neighboring communities, to promote the purchase of locally-produced farm products in and around Biddeford."

"Continue to support and fund efforts that enhance the Downtown and Mill Districts"

"Work to attract a large indoor space for downtown functions such as conferences, weddings, etc."

"Ensure locally produced foods and goods are available in the Downtown through the creation and support of a farmers/makers market."

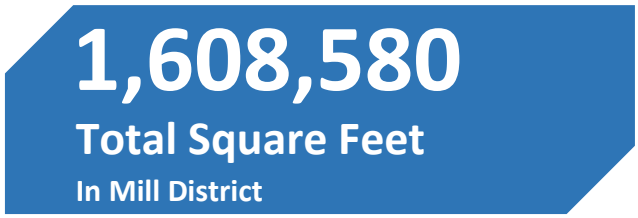
"Develop a local network of partners to provide resources and guidance to emerging entrepreneurs/makers."

3. Biddeford's Economy Today

11,700
Total Jobs
Sept., 2022

$991
Avg. Weekly Wage
First Quarter, 2022

3.1%
Unemployment Rate
Sept., 2022



KEY ECONOMIC DATA

Table 6-1 presents general housing characteristics for Biddeford between the years 2010 and 2020. For this period, the population of Biddeford has increased by 5.9%. While the overall population has grown, the number of housing units has grown at a slightly slower rate of 5%. For this same period, the number of households increased by 9.5%). As a result of relatively stable population increase and the number of households, with more units added as a percentage than either, the average household size has fallen slightly.

Table 6-1. Population and Civilian Labor Force, Biddeford, 2015 and 2020

	2015	2020	% Change 2015-2020
Population	21,277	21,502	**6.0%**
Population Age 16 and Over	17,745	18,755	**5.7%**
Civilian Labor Force	12,221	12,740	**4.2%**
Civilian Labor Force Percent	68.9%	67.9%	**(1.5%)**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates

Table 6-2. Employment and Wages, Biddeford, 2015 and 2020

	2015	2020	% Change 2015-2020
Number of Employers	726	723	**(0.41%)**
Number of Jobs (all industries)	10,677	11,097	**3.9%**
Avg Weekly Wage	$738	$900	**22.0%**

Source: Maine Dept of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information 2015 Q1 and 2020 Q1

Table 6-3. % Leading Employment Sectors by Jobs, 2015 and 2020

Sector	2015	% of Total Jobs	2020	% of Total Jobs	% Chg. '15 – '20
Health Care & Social Assistance	2,269	21.3%	2,473	22.3%	9.0%
Retail Trade	1,906	17.9%	1,855	16.7%	(2.7%)
Manufacturing	1,416	13.3%	1,592	14.3%	12.5%
Educational Services	1,314	12.3%	1,386	12.5%	5.5%

Source: Maine Dept of Labor Center for Workforce Research and Information

Table 6-4. Top Employers 2019

Employer name	Sector	Number of Employees
Southern Maine Health Care	Health Care	1,423
University of New England	Educational Services	606
Market Basket	Retail Trade	400
AVX Tantalum	Manufacturing	247

Fiber Materials, Inc.	Manufacturing	226
Wal Mart	Retail Trade	170
Hannaford	Retail Trade	160
Home Depot	Retail Trade	150
Target	Retail Trade	150
Southridge Rehabilitation	Health Care	100

Source: Biddeford Planning and Development Department

Figure 6-1. Inflow and Outflow of Labor for Biddeford

Figure 5-6 describes inflow and outflow of workers for Biddeford in 2019. Only 2,265 workers that live in Biddeford stayed in Biddeford for work. Almost 4 times as many (8,581) that live in Biddeford commute elsewhere for employment. As a service center community, Biddeford experiences a significant inflow in comparison, with 9,158 workers living outside of Biddeford coming to Biddeford for employment.

4. Challenges and Opportunities

Downtown and Mill District

The Downtown and Mill District have both experienced significant redevelopment over the past 10-15 years, but are both poised for significant further economic growth through such opportunities presented with the 3 Lincoln Street property (former MERC site) and vacant or underutilized mill and downtown space. The continued residential and mixed use development in these areas present perhaps the best opportunities for sustainable and resilient economic growth moving forward.

More and more companies around the world are embracing the work-from-home and work-remotely mentality to attract and retain new employees and provide some flexibility to employees. Biddeford, with its burgeoning development in the downtiown and Mill District can attract workers from outside Maine who have this flexibility.

The Mill District has over 1 million square feet of space used for a wide array of uses including housing, retail, office space, light manufacturing, dining and more!

York County Consolidated Courthouse

The planned consolidated York County Courthouse on Route 1/Elm Street at the former Pate parcel, Route 1 between Five Points and the Arundel Townline is positioned well for significant redevelopment. Land uses to complement the Courthouse are a focal point of Biddeford's priority for this area. The land use ordinances should be updated to reflect this area as a redevelopment corridor and the potential for quality, higher density commercial, service, and mixed use development.

Arts and Culture Tourism

Tourism to this point has not been a major economic force in Biddeford. There are many seasonal homes on the Coast but they are just that – family seasonal homes. However, it is a goal to make the City more destination-oriented. There are a number of critical attributes that can serve that transition:

- The continued development of the Biddeford Mills Museum, with tours to take advantage of the tremendous history and experience of the canals;
- The expansion of the theater and its experience;
- The continued growth and housing of the cultural heritage experience here in Biddeford and York County;
- The growth of the arts and foodie industries within the downtown and mill district;
- The development of transit and trail systems to connect the downtown urban experience with the natural resources of the community; including:
    - **The Riverwalk,**
    - **The Eastern Trail,**
    - **Biddeford Pool and the preservation areas,**
    - **Rachel Carson**
- The growth and expansion of UNE as a division 1-2 University;
- The Recreation Section of this plan (Section 8) discusses many of the special events that occur in Biddeford, through the recreation department and the Ice Hockey Arena;
- See also the Historic, Archaeological, and Cultural Resources Section of this Plan (Section XX) for a detailed discussion of those resources contributing to economic growth and sustainability in Biddeford.

Industrial and Commercial Space

While industries in the Biddeford area are trending towards 5-6 clusters, the place to do that work is running out. The arts, creative economy and small manufacturing can continue to re-use the mill space. Industries that are growing or are in need of more modern commercial or industrial space, however, will not find much available in Biddeford. As mentioned above, the four parks are essentially full. The Robert G. Dodge Business Park is nearing capacity and the Airport Industrial Park (Phase 1 and 2), the Biddeford Industrial Park, and the Alfred Road Industrial Park are all fully built out. Most of the land available for future commercial and industrial development is marginal or is not currently serviced by public sewer and/or water (i.e., Alfred Road west of the Shops at Biddeford Crossing). The greatest potential for new industrial and commercial development is the redevelopment of existing built parcels along Route 1 and Route 111 south and west of 5-Points, where public utilities currently exist, as well as the development of the "Maggie Mae" parcels and the potential for new mixed use development off Andrews Road along the Turnpike towards South Street.

Public Facilities

Public Facilities in Biddeford are discussed in detail and Section 7 of this Plan. In general, as mentioned above, the B-2 Zone west of Biddeford Crossing is not currently serviced by sewer and water. Three-phase power runs throughout Biddeford as does broadband and fiber networks. The main lines for fiber include Elm Street from Precourt Street south, Hill Street, West Street, Route 111 and Alfred Street, and Elm Street from 5-Points north to the Saco City line. The community shares access to the "3 Ring Binder". One real advantage that the community could make use of is the fact that the Mill District and hence a portion of the downtown, exist as a public utility in and of itself and exist off the grid.

Economy:

What Comes Next?

Biddeford remains the service center community for its labor market region and for this part of southern Maine. As such, it both imports and exports workers and is required to maintain an infrastructure in support of business development. In this role, the community houses six significant economic clusters from which to build (health and education, retail, manufacturing, arts, entertainment and food, and professional management (followed closely by construction). Each has a key role to play, whether at Biddeford Crossing, the four business parks, including the hospital, or with the downtown and Mill District.

This, of course, requires a financial commitment to maintain infrastructure support. The community does this through the creative use of TIFs, which will require monitoring and adjustments and the establishment of a capital improvement program. Outside of the community, both for-profit and non-profit development will continue and will, from time to time, need the assistance of the community to coordinate the acquisition of funds for future development.

Biddeford operates within the context of a larger regional center that includes the City of Saco. Together, Biddeford and Saco combine to make the third largest regional center in the state. They are in turn heavily influenced by the Portland and Portsmouth markets, who at this time are growing at phenomenal rates. As a result, Biddeford has become a very attractive, affordable solution to locating within those markets. At the time of this Comprehensive Plan update, Biddeford and Saco, together, can play a very crucial role in their regional success and the redevelopment of their respective downtowns and Mill Districts.

Goal 1

Promote an economic climate that increases job opportunities and overall economic well-being within the State and Biddeford, recognizing Biddeford's role in the region as a Service Center community.

How We Get There:

- **Continue to promote and support Downtown Biddeford, including the Mill District, as the historic, cultural, commercial, and the mixed-use core of the City.**

- **Explore lowering or removing parking requirements for development and redevelopment projects in the downtown and Mill District while augmenting public transit connections and active transport (walking, biking) accommodations.**

- **Continue to promote and support the Route 111 Corridor from Five Points to Arundel as a regional commercial and service focus area of the City.**

- **Establish a "Tech Place" business incubator program that utilizes Biddeford's existing institutional structure, manufacturing and development clusters, and City network to support Biddeford as a "maker" community to develop in.**

- **Encourage and support the redevelopment of the existing uses along Route 1 (Elm Street) from Five Points to the Arundel Town Line, especially in context of the new York Judicial Courts on Route 1/Elm Street.**

- **Focus economic development initiatives that support Biddeford's capacity to continue to build upon and thrive as a regional service center community.**

- **Support the Biddeford Municipal Airport as a valuable infrastructure asset in the City.**

- **Support efforts to strengthen neighborhoods in and around the Downtown area (West Brook to May Street, and Downtown to Five-Points) and their relationship to the Downtown and Mill District. Examples being the Bacon Street area, May Street, and the Five-Points area.**

- **Support Biddeford's Working Waterfront economy.**

- **Support the rural resource-based economy, including, but not limited to, forestry and agriculture.**

- **Enhance opportunities in the creative economy through the support of arts and culture throughout the community.**

- **Continue to engage in regional economic development and planning initiatives where regional approaches are most appropriate, such as through the work of the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) and/or neighboring towns and cities.**