



Strategic Plan for Community Transformation

2016 and Beyond

Prepared By Main Street Skowhegan | Abridged version

Executive Summary

Skowhegan is at a pivotal point in time. With recent changes in manufacturing and the wood industry, the need for business diversification has never been more critical. The town and members of the community recognize this need for change and have begun to look to Skowhegan's strengths as potential game changers. Several social issues have become more prominent as of late, illuminating the need to address these as a community. In order to resolve issues, strengthen our economy, and realize our full potential, we all need to begin rowing the boat in the same direction.



*“It will take all people getting on the same page with the same vision to make [it] happen.” –
electronic survey participant*

Capitalizing on our unique location and natural resources, emphasizing our strengths, and empowering our community are all important elements outlined in the following pages. Skowhegan must continue to think innovatively and creatively to solve social problems, enhance economic vitality, and become the type of place residents are proud to call home and visitors fall in love with. This plan will help guide the community toward this shared vision.

*“Embrace Skowhegan’s assets. Elevate the unique. Include everyone in the future.”
– electronic survey participant*

Main Street Skowhegan undertook the process of developing this plan in the fall of 2015. Over the course of the following months, the strategic planning committee gathered and analyzed data and engaged local residents, listening to their dreams for Skowhegan. After eight months and conversations with more than 500 members of the community, this plan was created.

Skowhegan is poised for change. We should learn from the past but make the future our own. A core group of people has stepped forward to lead, prepared to tackle projects both big and small. Collaboration is essential, and hard work is inevitable. With the future of Skowhegan at stake, we encourage **everyone** to get involved.

*“Community development is strongest when it involves a broad base of community action. Citizens should be viewed as players, not recipients, in development.”
– electronic survey participant*

Over the next several years our town will be a place that people watch in awe, as we join together as a community to achieve our ultimate goal of becoming a thriving economic, cultural, and recreational destination where residents enjoy a high quality of life.

Reading the Plan

Goal

The ultimate outcome we are striving to achieve; may take an extended period of time to accomplish.

Objectives

Specific outcomes that support the attainment of a desired goal.

Strategies

A plan of action to achieve a specific objective.

Action Steps

Detailed initiatives, projects, or steps to fulfill a strategy.

Strategies for Transformation

The Ultimate Goal: Skowhegan is a thriving economic, cultural, and recreational destination where residents enjoy a high quality of life.

In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives have been identified based on data analysis and feedback from the community. Each objective has one or more corresponding strategies that provide a road map for success.

Objective #1: Diversify and Grow the Economy

Economic Transformation (ET) Strategies:

- ET#1** Attract a broad range of new businesses.
- ET#2** Support existing businesses to encourage growth.
- ET#3** Expand Skowhegan's agricultural food hub.
- ET#4** Cultivate programs to engage, support, and retain youth workforce.
- ET#5** Invest in infrastructure.
- ET#6** Enhance recreation and promote natural resources.
- ET#7** Nurture the creative economy and enrich arts and cultural assets.

Objective #2: Make Skowhegan a Tourist Destination

Tourism Transformation (TT) Strategies:

- TT#1** Invest in tourism product development and promotion.

Objective #3: Restore Community Pride, Strengthen Reputation, and Promote a Positive Public Image

Communication Transformation (CT) Strategies:

- CT#1** Communicate events, opportunities to get involved, and progress of action steps.
- CT#2** Employ marketing strategy and an external communications plan.

Community's Vision for Skowhegan

A vibrant cultural center with a variety of shops and restaurants, bustling with activity into the evenings. Businesses facing the Kennebec, with a river promenade, vendors, and pedestrians. Water Street as a pedestrian mall. Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area in full swing. Enhanced trails, parks, and other recreation activities. No longer just a pass-through town, but instead a true Maine tourist destination.

“I hope to see Skowhegan as a destination for visitors from Maine and beyond, with a reputation for great locally sourced food, art, entertainment, a beautiful riverfront with access for the local community and visitors to enjoy, a vibrant economy with employment potential for professionals, laborers, and entrepreneurs; a place where youth choose to remain as they grow to adulthood, and seniors move to after retirement. In other words, a place for our local community to be proud of and for visitors to wish they lived here too.” – electronic survey participant

Summary

The above objectives and strategies were identified as top priorities by members of the community. We recognize that there is a lot to be done within the community that isn't directly addressed in this plan. However, it's our hope that as we work to advance the economy, enhance our sense of place, and promote a positive image of our town, that we'll help to improve the quality of life for all. All citizens of Skowhegan should have the opportunity to thrive.

A rising tide lifts all boats, and through the implementation of this plan, we'll transform the community into a vibrant, new Skowhegan.

Plan for Action and Collaboration

Shaping the future of our town is both exciting and challenging. It will require hard work and determination. The more invested groups and individuals we have working toward the ultimate goal, the more quickly we will achieve it.

We encourage anyone who is interested in lending a hand, leading a project, or learning more to contact Main Street Skowhegan at info@mainstreetskowhegan.org or 207-612-2571.



Please join us for the first strategic planning implementation meeting on Tuesday, July 19 at 7:30 a.m. at the Renaissance Center at 60 Water Street. The meeting will be held in the second floor conference room.

Appendix: Action Steps and Metrics

See the following pages for action steps, which are grouped according to a timeline: short-term steps (to be completed within one year, before June 2017), mid-range steps (two to three years, by June 2019), and long-term steps (five or more years).

Short-Term Action Steps (one year, before June 2017)

- Actively outreach to developers

- Assess current opportunities for youth workforce development and community involvement programs and determine baseline data
- Assess infrastructure needs, create a plan for meeting these needs, and apply for matching dollars to fund these activities—metrics to be determined by key collaborators
- Complete Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area business plan and raise additional funding for the project via capital campaign
- Consider establishing an ambassadors group to promote Skowhegan’s brand
- Continue collaborating and partnering with organizations and/or professional service providers to assist with implementation of the plan
- Continue meeting with Maine Motorcoach Network; work with the network to bring bus tours back to town
- Continue town beautification projects to attract businesses and shoppers (e.g., apply for fourth round of CDBG façade grant)
- Create a comprehensive community calendar to capture and promote all area events
- Create agritourism activities for visitors, including one farm-to-table tour
- Create and execute an annual external communications plan that is inclusive of a marketing strategy and media plan (incorporate Skowhegan's brand to encourage cohesive messaging)
- Create and execute internal communications plan for the community (incorporate Skowhegan’s brand to encourage cohesive messaging)
- Create comprehensive business incentive package and startup guide
- Design “open for business” campaign; highlight stories of local entrepreneurs/business owners
- Design and launch VisitSkowhegan.com, a marketing tool and informational resource for visitors, developers, and potential business owners; incorporate community calendar
- Drive more than 5,000 unique visitors to VisitSkowhegan.com
- Encourage public art displays, sidewalk shows
- Explore opportunities and create a comprehensive plan for bringing more events and programming to Skowhegan via the opera house, fairgrounds, Coburn Park, and other performance venues
- Explore opportunities for extending the Old Canada Road from Solon to Skowhegan
- Explore options for improving pedestrian walkability and safety; including timeline for repainting sidewalks and needs assessment (additional signage/indicators, etc.)
- Gather additional email addresses from community members to use as communication vehicle
- Identify successful businesses in Maine; outreach to owners and use new business incentive package to entice them to expand to Skowhegan



- Increase business-to-business communication through a formalized mentorship program and regularly scheduled gatherings
- Package existing assets and events to create tourism products (e.g., recreation and cultural offerings, local and regional tours)
- Partner with local organizations and others to tell Skowhegan's story from a historical perspective; include educational information about our heritage in order to build understanding of multiple cultures
- Partner with Somerset Cultural Planning Committee to create a cultural plan for Somerset County
- Plan a minimum of four educational seminars annually for small business owners
- Plan and execute events that will draw visitors to Skowhegan (e.g., River Fest)
- Tell Skowhegan's unique story through promotion of our assets: heritage/history, agriculture food hub, cultural offerings, recreation opportunities and facilities, economic opportunities, welcoming community
- Utilize Maine Office of Tourism and Kennebec Valley Tourism Council as vehicles for promotion
- Utilize Skowhegan brand to promote quality of place and quality of life
- Work with agricultural community to increase consumption of local foods among students as well as residents receiving financial assistance
- Work with Maine Office of Tourism's new Destination Development Specialist and other collaborators to create an asset inventory, form a steering committee, and plan for future tourism development



Mid-Range Action Steps (two to three years, by June 2019)

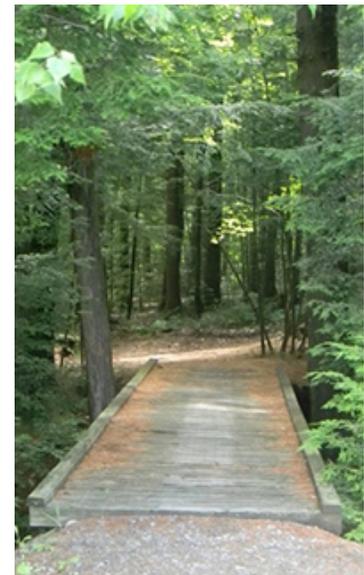
- Communicate with more than 2,000 email subscribers
- Consider adding volunteering as a high school graduation requirement
- Construct whitewater features in Kennebec River gorge (per Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area plan/design)
- Create program to get youth involved in town politics (e.g., junior select board members)
- Create youth programming, including job shadowing, civic engagement, technical training, volunteering, and apprenticeships through partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and the municipality
- Create youth workforce development and community engagement opportunities through recreational trail development
- Draft a plan for capitalizing on the popularity of agritourism, the farm-to-table movement, and craft brew industry. Consider tours, new restaurants, and inclusion of local brewers and farmers.
- Explore and support alternative and more efficient energy opportunities (solar, geothermal, etc.) and improvements
- Explore opportunities and draft plan for business incubator

- Explore opportunities for enhancements to parking, lighting, sidewalks, crosswalks, drainage, and sewer
- Explore partnership opportunities with KVCC and other local colleges
- Explore ways to add affordable housing, specifically in downtown
- Extend broadband access to Skowhegan residents and businesses and increase broadband speed to 10 Mbps (download)/10 Mbps (upload)
- Forge partnership with the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture to further integrate the school and its artists into everyday life in Skowhegan
- Formalize Skowhegan’s Langlais Art Trail through partnership with other Maine organizations that possess sculptures; create promotional materials and an online presence
- Increase fruit and vegetable consumption among adults and high school students—determine metric with help from key collaborators
- Increase unique visitors to VisitSkowhegan.com by 2 percent year-over-year
- Investigate necessary upgrades and repairs to existing art and culture infrastructure, including the Skowhegan Opera House, Grange Hall, and Coburn House
- Investigate opportunities for adding solar charging stations in municipal parking lot
- Line up 12 months of entertainment programming at local venues
- Offer a minimum of two tours for visitors
- Plan and execute a “shop local” marketing campaign
- Plan local business events, including Small Business Saturday promotions, a small business week celebration, and a restaurant week, to attract customers and increase sales revenue
- Work with local tourist service providers to develop additional metrics



Long-Term Action Steps (five or more years)

- Add 10 new businesses, including two restaurants and one employer with 20+ employees
- Add 50 or more full-time employees
- Add diverse offerings in town, including food vendors, restaurants, coffee shops
- Communicate with more than 4,000 email subscribers (nearly half the population)
- Complete Riverfront Renaissance plan and develop riverfront for enhanced walkability and river viewing (e.g., path from Coburn Park to boat landing)
- Develop additional recreation opportunities—including enhanced trails for hiking and biking, scheduled raft rides down the gorge,



and more—in the area surrounding gorge (per Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area plan/design)

- Expand, improve, and maintain current trail system for hiking, biking, and more
- Explore opportunities for adding/upgrading agricultural infrastructure, expanding available marketable products, and supporting farmers, makers, and producers
- Explore opportunities for additional recreation attractions, including Eaton Mountain, ATV trail connections, mountain biking trails, etc.
- Explore opportunities to improve transportation (e.g., more biking and walking trails, better utilize/promote Somerset/Kennebec Explorer)
- Grow accommodation offerings (e.g., Airbnb, campgrounds, B&Bs, hotels)
- Grow square footage dedicated to agriculture in Skowhegan—determine metric with help from key collaborators
- Implement Somerset County Cultural Plan (mid to long-term)
- Increase tax dollars generated by locally owned businesses by 10 percent
- Increase the proportion of all high school students involved in the local community by 50 percent
- Pilot portable services to underserved (library, mental health services)
- Upgrade existing buildings to make usable for businesses (purchase, demolish, reconstruct, remodel, repair)
- Welcome a minimum of five bus tours and/or tour groups per year

