

L. REGIONAL COORDINATION

The town of Cooper is situated approximately 100 miles east of Bangor and is bordered on the north by the towns of Alexander and Crawford, on the east by the towns of Meddybemps and Charlotte, and on the west and south by the unorganized territories of Berry Township, Cathance Township (formerly Townships 19 and 14 respectively) and Township 19. Commercial retail activity in Machias, Calais, and Bangor attracts Cooper residents as consumers and for work.

Comprehensive planning recognizes the importance of regional cooperation. The land uses in one community can impact another community, particularly when that land use is located near the boundaries of the town. Charlotte and Alexander have a locally adopted Comprehensive Plan that is consistent with state law; neither Crawford nor Meddybemps have prepared a Comprehensive Plan. None of the adjoining towns have adopted town wide zoning. The unorganized territories have land use functions administered by the Maine Land Use Regulatory Commission (LURC).

Cooper has included analyses of regional issues in the areas of transportation, economic development, public facilities and natural resources management. Cooper will attempt to develop compatible transportation, economic development and resource protection standards with nearby communities.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

Roads

As communities with limited employment and services, Cooper residents must travel to other communities for the majority of their shopping and employment. The town is a small “bedroom” community with a significant portion of Route 191 that serves as both “Main St.” and a regional collector road. Cooper is dominated by the condition of Route 191 and the considerable amount of heavy truck traffic using it on a daily basis. It is considered “unbuilt” in transportation engineering terms and is in terrible condition throughout the town. There are dozens of long stretches of multiple longitudinal fissures in the road surface that are 4-8 inches wide and, in some cases, 6-8 inches deep. This issue affects businesses, the overall safety and convenience of residents, as well as property values.

Transportation linkages in Cooper consist primarily of State Route 191 which runs in a north-south direction in the southwestern corner of town before bending and running in an east-west direction to the eastern boundary with Meddybemps. Although the population of Washington County has decreased modestly during the 1990s, MDOT states that the total number of vehicle miles traveled in our County has increased by over 13 percent. Most roads are not congested now, but there is a need to protect them from future degradation and the significant taxpayer expense of adding remedial capacity. The town should ensure that access management standards are used to keep the Level of Service (LOS) on Route 191 from deteriorating.

It is important that Cooper continue to participate in regional transportation planning efforts. Municipalities can cooperate with neighboring communities and regional committees (eg. Corridor Planning initiatives) to formulate corridor management plans that seek to encourage residential, commercial and industrial development with entrances and driveways co-located and with the needed road improvements paid for by the developer. Corridor management plans outline the appropriate locations for such access management techniques as frontage roads, shared driveways, intersections, turn lanes and signals.

Public Transportation

There are no public transit facilities in town. The Washington Hancock Community Agency (WHCA) provides scheduled van and door-to-door on demand transportation from our town to Machias, Ellsworth and Bangor for clients referred to them by the State of Maine Department of Human Services. These services are provided to income-eligible persons and are typically children in state custody, welfare clients, Medicaid patients with medical appointments, the elderly and disabled, or people needing transportation to Meals for Me. Most of the longer trips are for medical services: shorter trips are to local doctors, pharmacies and groceries. Users of this service are mostly families living below poverty level, people with mobility limitations, people with one or no available vehicles, and the elderly.

West Coastal Connection Bus Service offers daily service from Calais to Bangor, round trip. West also operates services three times weekly, connecting coastal communities to Ellsworth and coordinating its schedule with other service providers. Pick-up points are at various locations throughout the county.

Airports

There are no airports or public airfields within town. Private planes can land on Cathance Lake and provide private air service. Primary regional airports include:

1. Bangor International Airport, provides national and international commercial passenger and freight services, as well as civil defense operations. 11,441-foot main runway. Car rental services are available.
2. Deblois Flight Strip, off State Route 193, has a 4,000-foot runway but no beacon or fueling services. Last rated by the state in poor condition.
3. Eastport Municipal Airport has a 4000-foot runway and provides limited charter and instructional services. Beacon and fueling services. Last rated by the state in good condition.
4. Hancock County - Bar Harbor Airport in Trenton is the nearest airport with regularly scheduled passenger commercial service. In addition to daily commuter service to Boston, Massachusetts, charter service is offered. Car rental services are available. 5,200-foot main runway.
5. Lubec Municipal Airport has a 2032-foot gravel/turf runway, with beacon, but no fueling services. Last rated by the state in good condition.
6. Machias Valley Airport has a 2909-foot runway and is used by private plane owners and in an emergency, by air ambulance services. Beacon, but no fueling services. Last rated by the state in good condition.
7. Princeton Municipal Airport has two runways, the larger of which is 3999 feet, and is used primarily by private businesses and recreational fliers. Beacon, but no fueling services. Last rated by the state in poor condition.

Railroad Facilities and Rail Services

The former Maine Central Railroad line runs through unorganized territory and towns to the south and east of Cooper, however it is exempt. Abandoned rail lines stretch across Washington County and are generally in poor condition, as passenger service stopped nearly fifty years ago and freight service stopped in the mid-1980s. Recent efforts by the state have been made to create recreational trails along abandoned rail lines and rights-of-way through our County. The Downeast Sunrise Trail is an 80-mile multi-use trail that is nearing completion for use on the exempt Calais Branch of the rail line corridor from Ellsworth to Ayers Junction. The Management Plan for the Calais Branch specifies that if rail becomes a feasible use of the corridor then the Downeast Sunrise trail will no longer be the primary use of the corridor. The East Coast Greenway is a bicycle and walking trail planned to extend from Key West, Florida to Calais, Maine, which may use some rail line rights-of-way. There are efforts to expand freight rail service in Washington County, particularly in the Calais and Eastport areas with connections to the PanAm lines that cross into Canada and back into Maine to reach the western part of the state across the Route 6 corridor in northern Washington County. Passenger rail service in the State has been given a boost recently with the reinstatement of passenger service between Boston and Portland.

Ports

There are no port facilities in our town. The deep water Port of Eastport is the closest port. It has two piers, three berths, with a low tide depth of 40 feet, and over 75,000 square feet of covered storage. The outer berth can accommodate a ship up to 900 feet in length. There is also a municipal breakwater for use by smaller vessels.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Cooper is tied into the regional economy of Washington and Hancock counties. Because of its reliance on service center communities like Calais, Machias and, to some extent, Bangor for the majority of goods and services it residents use, fluctuations in the region's economy directly affect the well-being of Cooper residents.

Recent closures of the Louisiana Pacific plant and the closure/re-opening of the Domtar mill, both in Woodland, affected residents in Cooper. Responses to these shifts vary and include retraining, returning to school, taking early retirement and doing other related work. Some younger workers are leaving the area but many of all ages remain. Many are simply travelling further for employment and working several jobs.

REGIONAL NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES

The town of Cooper shares the shoreline of Cathance Lake with the neighboring unorganized territory of Cathance Township. There are several small watersheds in Cooper depicted on Map 4, almost all of which drain toward the Dennys River. The exceptions are small portions of the upper watersheds of Seavey Brook and three small lakes in Berry Township which are part of the headwaters of the East Machias River. Vining Lake is another small headwater lake that drains into the East Machias watershed. As well, Fifteenth Stream traverses the northeast corner of Cooper and drains into Meddybemps Lake which is hydrologically connected to both the Dennys and the St Croix Rivers.

Howe Brook Mill Stream, flowing out of Mill Pond and the streams know as Big Inlet and Little Inlet all drain into Cathance Lake which ultimately reaches the Dennys River in Cathance Township. Dead Stream and Splinter Brook drain directly into the upper reaches of the Dennys River which forms the border between Cooper and the neighboring town of Charlotte.

Cathance Lake is managed by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife as a coldwater fishery. It is actively supported by the Cathance Lake Association with members from Cooper and Cathance Township. The Maine DEP and the Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program (VLMP) have collaborated in the collection of lake data to evaluate present water quality, track algae blooms, and determine water quality trends.

There are no mapped aquifers with potential yields greater than 10 gallons per minute in the town of Cooper. However, certain local wells do yield between 10-50 gallons per minute. A mapped aquifer with potential yields of 10-50 gallons per minute is located in neighboring Meddybemps under the large blueberry heath located on either side of Route 191. Except for blueberry fields scattered along the major roads through town, the majority of these watersheds are forested.

The Natural Areas Program is administered by the State Department of Conservation whose job it is to document Rare and Unique Botanical Features. These include the habitat of rare, threatened, or endangered plant species and unique or exemplary natural communities.

There is one “Rare and Exemplary Community” (see Natural Resources chapter) documented in Cooper along its border with the town of Charlotte (formed by the Dennys River). It is known as a Stream Shore Ecosystem, a group of communities bordering and directly influenced by the open-water portion of a stream (first order through third or fourth order) and includes vegetated aquatic communities as well as the emergent and bordering communities.

Cooper also contains one Focus Area of Statewide Significance. It is part of what is called the Meddybemps Heath, a 2,500 acre heath that is the second largest domed bog ecosystem in the Eastern Coastal and Eastern Interior regions. Meddybemps Heath lies at the southwest side of Meddybemps Lake where Sixteenth and Fifteenth Streams converge at the lakeshore. It is contained within the three towns of Alexander, Cooper and Meddybemps. It is a large peatland embedded with remnant geologic features including an elongate esker that separates much of the lake from the interior of the bog.

Finally, the upper reaches of the Dennys River form part of the eastern boundary of the town of Cooper. The Atlantic Salmon Commission has protected the land adjoining the River where there are extensive wetlands within Cooper (see Maps 2, 4 and 7).

REGIONAL PUBLIC FACILITIES ISSUES

Within the town, there is one beach operated for town taxpayers, residents and their guests providing fresh-water access to Cathance Lake. It is depicted on Map 2, Cooper Public Facilities and Transportation. There are several additional traditional access points that traverse private land in the town of Cooper. There are three public boat launches providing access to Cathance Lake in Cathance Township, one fully ramped boat launch on Route 191 and two carry-in access points at the south end of the Lake.

Cooper has no Town Office. The Town Clerk and Tax Collector operate from their homes. The roads commissioner also operates from his home. Meetings of Boards and Committees are conducted in the Cathance Grange during all but the worst winter weather when the Grange parking lot is not plowed. Selectmen's meetings are held at the home of the Tax Collector. Between the years of 2008-2010 Cooper cooperated with the adjoining town of Alexander to construct a municipal records storage addition to the Alexander Municipal Building. The storage area is climate controlled and fire proof. Records from Cooper were moved into the facility in the Spring of 2010.

Cooper residents dispose of their solid waste at the Marion Transfer Station. The refuse is then carried to New Brunswick or the PERC1 facility in Orrington. Demolition debris is also taken to the Marion site. Towns using the Marion facility are exploring options for a construction and demolition disposal site with neighboring towns. According to the State Planning Office the Marion Users Transfer Station (Charlotte, Cooper, Cutler, Dennysville, East Machias, Machiasport, Meddybemps, Northfield, Pembroke, Perry, Robbinston, Wesley, Whiting, Edmonds, Marion, No. 14 Twp, Trescott, T19 ED BPP, T18 ED BPP) had a 15.16% recycling rate in 2006.

Public safety and services for Cooper is provided by the Washington County Sheriffs' Office and the Maine State Police. The Washington County Sheriffs Department provides the dispatching services for emergency services with non-emergency routing through Orono. Cooper receives first responder volunteer ambulance service by the Alexander Fire Department. Downeast EMS provides full ambulance transportation to area hospitals.

The town of Cooper is a member of School Union 107 (to be named pursuant to an Alternative Organizational Structure in 2010) which also includes the towns of Meddybemps, Princeton, Baileyville, Grand Lake Stream, and Crawford. Each town has elected school committees that oversee school affairs.

Grades K-8 have the option to attend the Alexander Elementary School, Woodland Elementary, Rose Gaffney in Machias, or to the Elm St Elementary in East Machias. Transportation however is only provided to those attending Alexander or Woodland. High school students may attend any of the regional high schools (Calais, Shead, Washington Academy, Woodland, Machias Memorial) but bussing is provided only to Woodland. School bus services are combined with Meddybemps to reduce costs for both towns.

Recreational resources in Washington County have an impact on the local and regional economy. Tourist-related businesses that rely on the recreational opportunities are significant sources of income to many towns in the area. In Cooper, some businesses benefit in part from an influx of tourists and second home owners to the region, especially during the summer.

Regional recreation facilities accessible to Cooper's residents and to visitors include wildlife refuges, parks, golf courses, picnic areas, public access to surface waters, and hiking and snowmobile trails.

Public Survey

Opinions on regionalization were generally positive particularly for regional ambulance services.

1 Penobscot Energy Recovery Center

Support for coordination among towns to seek ways to improve Route 191 was significant. Participation in a regional airport authority was polarized with many expressing no opinion perhaps because they did not understand what it means for the town. Re-consideration of the de-organization of town government did not have a majority of support though some still think it deserves consideration. Future annexation of land from unorganized territory received very mixed opinions with many expressing no opinion at all. Again, this may result from a lack of understanding of what such annexation would look like or mean for the town.

SUMMARY

Cooper has a long history of cooperation with adjoining towns and multiple towns in the region. This activity is strongest in the sharing of public facilities and municipal services as the cost savings are often most clearly realized in these areas. Cooper is very active on regional committees and authorities dealing with solid waste, emergency response, watershed management and economic development. These activities will continue with a strong emphasis on regional transportation policy, facilities sharing and infrastructure development (high speed broadband Internet in particular).