

## **Aroostook County Community Conversation Friday, May 12, 2017**

### **What is your vision for Aroostook County?**

- More networking with agencies
- More support for struggling families
- To be known for “over quality of life”
- Families economically self-sufficient
- Tourist destination
- Model for collaboration
- Increased access to quality health care and social services
- Creativity to solve issues/barriers together
- Transportation (local and major)
- Free of substance abuse
- A great place to retire
- Large and growing population
- Increase educational attainment
- All young people are equipped with all the tools and resources to succeed in the future
- To be more connected to the rest of Maine, United States, and the world
- Accessible/good transportation including airport, railroads, and roads
- Vital/family farms – diversified family farms feed us
- Families are economically self-sufficient
- Better promotion of the wonderful resources we have
- Rural America is giving back with our natural resources (Aroostook County feeds the state)
- Tourist destination
- Prepared workforce for the opportunities in The County
- Everyone has opportunity to be healthy
- Small, rural communities are stable
- A model for collaboration (as a cost-effective way to provide services and education); Chapman, Mapleton, and Castle Hill have merged some of their services
- Increased access to quality health care and social services
- Be a great place to base a business
- Affordable broadband, high-speed internet access for all throughout The County
- Adequate, affordable, secure housing for all
- Quality transportation in The County, including for low-income individuals and families
- Strong networks among agencies
- People reenter successfully into the community from jail with all the resources they need and have opportunities for redemption
- A consistently welcoming for all, civil, diverse community
- Free of racism, welcoming communities

### **What are the greatest strengths of communities in Aroostook County?**

- Family friendly
- Sense of pride in work
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Natural resources, recreation, family
- Pride – we just need to share it better!
- People
- We can collaborate; we've had to collaborate for a long time to stretch resources so we have experience
- We are innovative and invent ways to get things done
- Pride of community
- Habit of neighborly concern
- Welcoming environment (not the stigma that you are "from away")
- Great, safe place to grow up
- Maine School of Science and Mathematics in Limestone; they just received national recognition as 10<sup>th</sup> best in U.S.
- Great work ethic
- Abundant natural resources – forests, farms
- You can see the stars here
- Access to green space
- Tremendous environment
- We have room to grow
- Strong continuity for education K-18
- Housing is affordable
- Four-season tourist area with a lot of potential
- Individuals don't "get lost." They can make a big difference.
- There is a "mystique" about The County, which could be part of marketing
- Our Canadian neighbors – proximity to Canada (even the Pope's office called about visiting)
- Aroostook delegation works together
- Wealth of resources and knowledge from aging population
- People are willing to take a risk
- Strong, competitive, capable, committed workforce (stand out among others across the country for its pride in a day's work)
- Large fields – plenty of land

### **What are the greatest challenges of communities in Aroostook County?**

- Road conditions
- Lack of marketing/promotion
- Health care costs – no clinics
- Broadband
- Marketing our area as a whole
- Breaking away from status quo
- Adaptability to the changing world around us
- Using strength in numbers to create change on local, state, and national government levels

- Transportation
- Geography
- Highways
- Educating people about job opportunities and educational institutions. Aroostook Partnership is focusing on the good jobs available in The County so people don't have to move away.
- Attracting students to the excellent education institutions we have here
- Skeptical about others who come here
- Tell students why they need to stay here
- Increasing aging population
- Decreasing population
- Not good at marketing ourselves
- Cost of education and its impact on municipalities
- Lack of public transportation
- Lack of cultural scene
- Lack of broadband
- Lack of access to good rural health care, clinics, health insurance, transportation to health care throughout The County
- Opioid addictions
- Lack of access to child care
- Location – end of the road, armpit of Canada
- Bangor is not northern Maine
- Poverty
- Lack of treatment for substance abuse
- Lack of psychiatric care, especially residential care
- Lack of visibility at state and national level
- There's added time and expense to be involved at the state and national policy levels
- Helping seniors stay in their homes (need home repairs, in-home care, caregiver support and respite, transportation, social opportunities)
- Lack of assisted-living facilities
- Can't afford to raise a family on The County wages
- Tax system is higher for middle class and there's high property tax in The County
- We need to increase population-build collaborative partnerships; we need a more collaborative model
- How do we engage adults?

### **How can we build on those strengths and address those challenges?**

- Market ourselves as the other Maine in the right way, workforce, clean air, land
- Tap into people who choose to live here and have them tell their story
- Create "good" news by media spots
- Keep networking with other agencies
- Be up, up, up in your approach
- Marketing ourselves outside of Aroostook County

- Collaboration among all communities and across the state
- Workforce – internships – build upon space to offer internet, printing at one location for those who don't have access
- Eliminate negativity and look outside of the box
- Create a welcoming/accepting environment for young and older people to collaborate and move our county forward with the changing landscape
- Banning status quo thoughts/phrases at meetings and committee

#### Small Group Reports:

- We need to increase population-build on our collaborative partnerships
- How do we engage adults?
- Engage young families and their partners (i.e., doctors)
- Market ourselves as the Other Maine in a positive way – clean air, why people come and stay here. Opportunities are here.
- Marketing – four seasons, great place, safe, to raise kids
- Can attract innovation and promote entrepreneurship; one way is to provide seed money and offer low rent in a package to encourage people to start businesses in Aroostook County. Include nascent business
- Build on agency wisdom in The County – business mentorships
- Tap into older population – wisdom and talent
- Invite young people to serve on boards – help bring them along, create guidelines, ban the phrase, “we’ve done that before”
- Provide paid and other internships – can we work on this?
- Promote adult education
- Increase population – a solution could be in inviting migrant populations, making it attractive for them to stay and grow families
- Bring youth together before they leave. How can they start a business and live here? Funding? Give them the tools to realize their vision and to be entrepreneurs. Provide them with resources to start their businesses, tools, technical assistance, mentors.
- Solve issues at home – nonprofits leading the way
- Marketing – give people more reasons to come here and let them know what’s happening. An example is the Phish concert
- Nonprofits can raise funds together – collaborate and write a grant with a number of organizations making visions a reality
- Work on our image – increase awareness – Legislature increase tourism budget – air photos to use for marketing
- Planting seeds early that this is a great place
- Cultural shift – positive talk vs. negative
- Attraction and retention of workforce. Opportunities website (3,000 jobs a year turn over in The County so there are job opportunities, but only 80 were posted)
- Use alumni better – colleges can help us – they could host job fairs for local businesses, too
- Create business and teachers gatherings to promote awareness of needs and career opportunities; you don't have to go to Portland for good jobs

- Approach transportation as a two-pronged issue – within The County and in and out of The County. Funding is a huge challenge for this. Can we attract money that could be used to pay volunteers for the cost of gasoline?
- Take all transportation resources and put them under one umbrella – focus on current assets and bring them together (AAA, RSVP, ART, volunteer drivers) – look at what others are doing across the state
- Develop a marketing and branding plan that is comprehensive – tourism, business, education
- Customer service-update – make it easier for people to access information; update and maintain user-friendly websites that are also mobile-friendly
- Career centers – local mentors, use aging population
- Education – should we consider consolidation of our resources at the high school level so students are in a larger school with more resources and instructional opportunities? Can we tap into the Maine School of Science and Mathematics more?
- Increase vocational and technical education opportunities