



Somerset County Community Conversation Notes
Lakewood Golf Course
June 8, 2016

1. What is your vision for Somerset County?

- Community with healthy demographics and sustainable population
- 100% literacy
- Enhanced recreational activities
- Access for children
- Everyone has opportunity for gainful employment
- Improved health
- More diversified economic base
- Equitable services across County for all populations who need them
- Appreciation and development of cultural assets for people who live and travel through the County
- Creative 21st century jobs
- Need high speed internet throughout County
- Every child grows up with no adverse childhood experiences (no ACES)
- Culture that supports aspirations that can be achieved and the opportunity to achieve them
- Commitment by the community to fund these visions
- Education available to all
- Every child can “catch frogs” and play in the outdoors
- Support agriculture movement
- Opportunities to utilize wood fiber resources and revitalize that sector
- Positive attitude towards environment
- Foster culture of entrepreneurialism
- Communities where neighbors are taking care of neighbors; strong social culture
- Community with openness to ethnic diversity

2. What are the greatest strengths of communities in Somerset County

- Natural resource balance (wood fiber, river, etc)
- Good examples of successful partnerships and collaborations
- Ability to convene and commit to the success of the region

- Environment and benefits of outdoors
- Access to farmland
- Wonderful hiking trails and organizations that support them
- Ability to attract young people
- Maine brand (nurture and protect)
- Farm to table movement
- Performance spaces underused and could attract people to the area
- Industrious people who work hard and work with their hands
- Authentic artists and crafts people
- Geographic location
- Cultural resource centers
- Big employers such as New Balance, SAD 54, hospital
- Large employers and service providers have a culture of collaboration and cooperation
- Kennebec River
- Youth
- Renewable energy (solar, natural gas, hydro)
- Great business models that give back
- SAPPI Mill
- Volunteers with ability and willingness to collaborate with each other

3. What are the greatest challenges of communities in Somerset County

- Improve transportation system
- Poverty and low income families
- Increasing abuse and neglect of children
- Opioid addiction
- Discomfort with growth; roadblock to change
- Underutilized downtowns; flight from downtown; vacant buildings
- Lack of high speed internet
- Expanding welfare problem
- Access to affordable health care for families
- Future of old historic homes
- Lack of hope and aspirations
- Aging population; ability to age in place
- Universal access to broad band
- Making resources known; better marketing
- Need to improve educational opportunities
- Generational poverty and attitude that don't deserve certain things
- Keep money local; fiscal issues
- Working with state and local governments on regulations
- Access to affordable housing
- Foreclosed properties just sitting there

- Volunteer workforce aging
- Civic engagement
- Shrinking workforce; businesses that want to expand but can't find employees

4. How can we build on those strengths and address those challenges?

- Build aspirations for everyone; bring strengths together to offer children opportunities to build aspirations
- Matchmaking app for keeping foreign physicians in County
- Incentives to live here, work here
- Renew local TIF and reinvest in town
- Fund mentoring programs
- Continue to identify and share assets of the County
- Land trusts focus on affordable housing
- Health clinic/addiction clinic accessible to anyone in need
- Include northern parts of County
- Increase ACES knowledge
- Better public transportation
- Supporting needs of young families
- Ethnic diversity
- Bridging gap of income inequality and economic diversity; start changing dialogue in the community to invest in everyone's success
- Proficiency based education and engagement; mentoring opportunities
- Create vision of high speed internet to all
- Actively pursue industries that support each other and the region's natural resources
- Create a culture of personal accountability
- Encourage understanding of what it is like to work and what it takes to achieve that; process starts at an early age
- Expand leadership capacity in nonprofit organizations
- Build collaboration to impact community
- Develop youth connection to community
- Strong community bases; sponsoring youth groups
- Co-branding for the region; how to develop brand that stands out; values and natural resources
- Investment in conversion of existing architecture - commercial real estate to part-residential; system of support; match current business to community needs
- Building advocacy program for County (in conjunction with marketing the region)
- Use arts, recreation, and cultural programs to develop a sense of pride/worth in community; get people invested
- Develop sense of community pride, hope, and worth
- Eliminate "them" and "us"

- Foster creative ways into creative economic concept (micro loans, creative start ups, home based businesses, etc)
- Create universal vision so that all can participate; impact state decisions
- Create a blue-zone; longevity
- Develop youth entrepreneurs
- Human capital
- Encourage displaced refugees to join community
- Get people to think more positively; incorporate arts and education
- Communication, both external and internal
- Develop destination tourism products
- Support existing businesses and invest in new ones
- Linking industries/workplaces to school systems
- Increase pre-school opportunities
- Expand opportunities for education after grade 12
- Greater connection between schools and workplace
- Eliminate anti-education attitude (“college isn’t for everyone”)
- Use all educational resources (community colleges, universities, etc)
- Lifelong learning approach essential to all; not a one size fits all
- Raise aspirations of children
- Increase partnerships and internships to build employment opportunities
- Community needs to look at their resources and build on
- Education an excellent investment
- Consider both long and short term strategies; example of short term strategy is a closer relation between institutions and business / government
- Re-building employment opportunities
- Training on soft skills
- Research and development of wood fiber products; public investment good; encourage private investment as well
- Marketing and self-promotion as individuals; don’t be bashful about what is good about living in Somerset County
- Improve infrastructure (broad band, decent roads, connectivity)