



Waldo County Community Conversation—Notes
Belfast Boathouse, Belfast
Friday, April 29, 2016

What is your vision for Waldo County?

- A model of community-based, just, sustainable food systems
- Literacy and good transportation for all
- More age diversity (need more young people)
- A community free of traumatic early childhood experiences
- A county that creates good-paying, environmentally-friendly jobs
- More opportunities and services for people in poverty and with low income
- Schools in Waldo County funded at the level voted on by the people
- Need a community college presence in Waldo County
- Build on the thriving arts community and the land conservation community
- Build on success of linking the arts with farm and land sustainability
- Support the “handmade”
- Sustainable energy = sustainable economy (protect air, water, land)
- Recreational opportunities available to all ages
- Tackle climate change as a county
- Build social trust, more racial and income diversity
- Become a model for sustainability education
- Maintain our unique identity
- Take a real look at housing
- Address addiction issues
- Build a resilient community, including disaster planning
- Access to preventative services in addition to health care
- Great at dealing with tough issues through civil discourse
- Maintaining and sustaining our resilience
- Defining what Waldo County is to people who don’t live here
- Need to tie the county together
- High speed internet and broadband affordable for all
- Need to think differently about how Belfast supports outlying towns
- Waldo County as an appealing place for youth – youth feel like they are a part of Waldo County

- Expand our definition of community to include all beings/creatures; connect to the land and natural world, and grow food in cooperation with the natural world
- Waldo County as a model of “you don’t need to have a vehicle to live here” (share ride resources)
- Best early childhood education/care through adult education system in Maine
- Strong ecosystem for support/development of community-based, cooperatively and employee-owned businesses and social enterprises that can meet many of the needs identified at the gathering – good jobs, affordable housing, healthy local food, etc. Strong support for individual, social and cooperative entrepreneurship.

What are the greatest strengths of Waldo County?

- A huge percentage of people are actively engaged
- People enjoy their jobs
- Natural beauty and resources
- Generous people in this community
- Strong local economy
- Great base of volunteers
- Lots of young farmers
- Potential models for apprenticeship programs
- Value creativity & innovation
- Self-reliant
- We care for our neighbors
- Strong independent businesses and entrepreneurship
- Strong arts culture
- Vibrant year-round community
- Commitment to a healthy environment
- We can disagree and still respect each other
- We are a small community, we are all different, yet we tend to get along
- Good location, easily accessible
- Access to good educational institutions and healthcare
- Good options for young people
- Good leadership
- Variety of recreational opportunities
- Wonderful libraries, great YMCA programs for youth
- Smart people
- Good access to locally grown foods
- Diversity of business and social enterprises
- Civic participation and vibrancy

What are the greatest challenges for communities in Waldo County?

- Need to resist living in the “echo chamber” of our own circles, which is divisive
- How can we continue dialogue that enriches community?
- Elderly people aging in place can be isolated
- Increasing population of special education students in Waldo County
- Huge population in Waldo County who are not here today – how to engage them so we can go beyond “preaching to the converted”
- Access/transportation (need shuttles)
- Poverty (need to move out of...)
- Property tax burden
- There are only so many funders and so much need
- Higher average of teen pregnancy in Waldo County
- Need to hustle to make a living in Waldo County (many people have multiple jobs to make ends meet)
- Difficult rental market
- Disparity in wealth (coast vs. inland)
- Deep multi-generational poverty
- Lack of state funding for public schools
- Different situation inland from Belfast (“from away” talk, “culture wars”)
- Homelessness, substance abuse, mental health issues
- Not enough early childhood education opportunities
- Overcoming our lack of racial diversity
- Trash, littering is a problem (lack of a sense of ownership)
- Demographics, lack of age diversity. Over half of millennials in U.S. are multi-ethnic and research shows they want to live in communities that reflect that. We need to proactively welcome/attract young multi-ethnic populations, whether native or foreign born.

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

- Lack of transportation for many is a challenge - it needs to be more mainstream. We are a community with many activists, and we can use the strength of our volunteer base to focus on solving this issue. Solution suggestions included: people can call 211 transportation service; post information; start a rural Uber; web-based rides that are youth- oriented; bring institutions into the conversation; create multiple vibrant community hubs; change our environment to be more friendly for bicycles and walking; support an active community/teen center.
- Better transportation and multiple hubs can help with job creation.
- Decentralize Waldo; multiple hubs to help address lack of accessibility; identify groups who are already working on this and help to support that work.
- A challenge is the divide between those who have and do not have. We can call on our strong volunteer base and use creative culture to find ways to connect

people and come together as community. How do we make connections for those who are disconnected? Consider exploring how we can involve local schools and students in finding solutions.

- Poverty and disconnect between jobs and skills needed. We can use the strengths of educational institutions to help identify what kind of education would be best for the individual. Find a way to match people and skill sets with jobs. A survey?
- How can we access and repair empty houses in our community for people who are in need of housing?
- Strong volunteer base, but the challenge is burnout. Can businesses help to bring in new volunteers to prevent volunteer burnout?
- Challenge: unemployment. How do we give people access to education?
- Challenge: need for child care. Support and strengthen the organizations that are addressing this issue and/or providing services.
- Strength: our public early education services. Use these to address challenges related to generational poverty by creating better access to them. Empower people to help create positive change for themselves.
- A challenge for the whole community is drugs. Early childhood education and drug treatment will help to turn the tide, but funding is needed.
- We must have public, universally available early childhood education and childcare system. Not just private, expensive all-day year-round offerings, or half-day half-year offerings.
- Entrepreneurship education. We need to teach kids how to think entrepreneurially as an ethic that will help them thrive and support themselves as adults, as well as teach them how to start businesses and social enterprises.
- Engage low-income adults in helping them to help themselves by supporting them with financing, education, training, and mentoring. Help them create enterprises that meet their basic needs and ideally to create jobs for themselves.
- To the extent that it is possible, support for enterprise development should be focused on things that are restorative of our people, communities, and environment.
- Address the existing structural, intergenerational poverty in our community by 1) creating safe, healthy, educational environments for the youngest children; 2) teaching school-age kids how to create livelihoods for themselves; and 3) helping parents and other adults in the county create community-based businesses and social enterprises (e.g., childcare, transportation, etc.) that can meet their needs and create jobs for themselves. The goal is to break intergenerational poverty in one generation, so we estimate that this is about a 20-year project.