**Public Participation**

The planning process should begin by obtaining as much input as possible from the people of Georgetown about what the Town believes should be the focus of its plan and the direction it should take. The final reports would include a summary of the public participation process used by the planning committee in developing the Georgetown’s plan, and how information gathered during the public process was used to guide the plan’s vision statement, analyses, policies and strategies.

**Vision Statement**

The vision statement would summarize Georgetown’s desired future community character in terms of economic development, natural and cultural resource conservation, transportation systems, land use patterns and its role in the region. The rest of the plan should use the vision statement as a touchstone to ensure that all aspects of the plan are consistent with what the people of Georgetown expressed during the public participation process.

**Regional Coordination Program**

A regional coordination program with other communities is necessary to manage shared resources and facilities. Areas discussed in the Georgetown’s previous comprehensive plan were transportation, shared bodies of water, solid waste, culture and recreation, education, banking and shopping, public safety, utilities and communication. Health care would seem to be another area where regional coordination is important. Much of the above would be summarized from the appropriate topic areas.

**Future Land Use Plan**

We have placed our observations about this aspect of a plan after the topic areas because we think it is the topic that should be addressed only when work on some of the other topics, especially housing, the economy, water and natural resources, indicates the best approach to future land use in Georgetown.

**State Incentives**

We have placed the State’s incentives at the end of this supplement.

**Topic Areas**

To be found consistent with the *Growth Management Act*, Georgetown’s plan must contain the state goal, analyses, condition and trend data, policies, and strategies for the following required topic areas. We have organized the topic areas so that those at the beginning are related to the points emphasized in our recommendations to the Board of Selectmen.

* ***Marine Resources***

A significant number of Georgetown citizens are heavily reliant on the sustainability of our traditional marine economic resources including shellfish harvesters, fishermen, small boat builders, dock and marina services, and local eateries that serve local catches. Because of declining productivity in our shell fishing flats and the future threat of declining lobster yields due to the depleted stocks of baby and young lobsters, Georgetown needs to diversify its marine economy to offset the negative effect of predators like green crabs and warming water in the Gulf of Maine. Aquaculture, for example, is a potential resource that is growing rapidly in other island communities and coastal towns. Aquaculture provides a diversified product mix including quahogs, oysters, scallops, mussels, kelp and elver harvesting for land based maturation into eels for export. There is even the possibility of harvesting green crabs. Unfortunately, sea urchins, shrimp and ground fish are no longer an alternative resource due to overfishing and declining reproductivity.

Therefore, it is very important to the future of Georgetown's threatened marine resource economy that the town engages in a vigorous Comprehensive Planning process to offset the effects of negative trends we are already experiencing. Several individuals and/or organizations with scientific, practical and financial resources are prepared to assist in the planning and development of diversified marine resources that may enable Georgetown Island to work with fishermen, diggers, etc. to investigate improvements in current methods and/or explore practical alternatives.

* ***Population and Demographics***

The population of Georgetown appreciated from 914 to 1020 between 1990 and 2000, slightly below the rate anticipated in the 1993 plan. Since then, the population has only appreciated to 1036; this lack of population growth is projected to continue. The most dramatic demographic difference between 1990 and 2015 is that in 1990 approximately 13% of the population was over 65, and in 2015 approximately 30% of the population was over 65. As the island’s population ages, services to address the needs of the elderly will become increasingly important. The town will need to look at ways to “embrace” the retired/aged community and enhance public support to make Georgetown a better place for them to live in.

While Georgetown’s retirement age population has increased, the Georgetown Central School current population of 71 is currently approximately 60% of what the 1993 plan projected it to be in 2012. The school has been able to be sustained by the town’s relatively low mill rate, but there are concerns that the school will in time become no longer viable.  This is something the community does not appear to want so looking for ways for the island to attract and retain families with children is desirable. At this point in time the 1993 Population and Demographics section of the Comprehensive plan is no longer meaningful, but the data to upgrade it is available.

* ***Economy***

Are there ways for Georgetown to make the most of its resources so that there are increased job opportunities, and its overall economy improves, or does Georgetown see itself as being more of a bedroom community? If we want more businesses here, what kind of businesses? Much of what would be included in Economy interrelates with other sections, including the dependence of the local economy on marine resources, the importance of broadband access to small business and for people working from home, and the reasons why more of those who do work in existing local businesses do not live in Georgetown. Regionally, the growth of the health care economy, anchored in the new Mid-Coast Hospital, which opened in 2001, expanded in 2009, and with over 2000 employees, has become increasingly significant. This, along with other developments, most notably the loss of BNAS, and the growth of Brunswick Landing, means that the 1993 plan has become outdated.

* ***Housing***

The state goal is to encourage and promote decent housing opportunities affordable to those earning the median income in the region. At this point in time, Georgetown does not have housing that is affordable to those earning the median income in the region. Since 2000 the median cost of housing in Georgetown is estimated to have increased 78% while the median household income has increased only 38%. Construction of housing occupied seasonally has generally outpaced construction of housing occupied throughout the year. Short term rentals have becoming an increasingly important aspect of the rental market. By some measures, Georgetown real estate costs, including rentals, are the highest, or close to the highest of all nearby communities. Consequently, affordable housing has become a pressing issue for moderate as well as low income families*.*

Substandard housing does not appear to be a significant issue in Georgetown althoughGeorgetown may want to look to local volunteer and/or low-cost expertise to help prepare homes for the aged and to encourage winterization of houses to mitigate heating costs.

The 1993 plan tried to address affordable housing within the constraints of Georgetown’s ordinances, services, geography, etc. It laid out five policy actions, none of which has been implemented. These could be revisited in the updated plan, but some do not seem consistent with the character of Georgetown, especially as population projections for Georgetown indicate limited growth. A new plan would need to recommend ways for Georgetown to incorporate affordable housing that are fully supported by the community. It would also include constraints on building such as limited aquifers, salt water well intrusion, storm water runoff, overboard discharge, failed septic systems, and many areas of limited topsoil that are unsuited for septic.

* ***Water Resources***

The state goal is to protect the quality and manage the quantity of the State's water resources. In Georgetown, residents get their water almost exclusively from the ground, using wells located on their property. Some collect rainwater in cisterns. The quantity of groundwater is limited by the fact that “bedrock fractures”, the aquifer material in Georgetown, hold much less water than soil. The sole source of freshwater to the aquifers underlying Georgetown is precipitation, but only 10 to 15% of the precipitation that falls on the ground surface recharges them. Water quality is generally good in Georgetown, although some wells require pretreatment for iron or salt. Occasionally, wells are contaminated with coliform bacteria, and radon is found in some Georgetown wells in levels above the recommended Maine Advisory.

Currently, Georgetown's 1,036 +/- residents and the three times as many people who are in Georgetown in the summer have an adequate potable water supply because an annual average of 45 inches of precipitation recharges the island's aquifers at a rate greater than demand. Bedrock, lack of topsoil around the island, and low population density make future centralized municipal water delivery or wastewater treatment systems expensive, and unlikely. Residences, public buildings, and businesses have individual septic systems (septic tank and leach field). There are currently around 60 overboard discharge permits in Georgetown.  Siting septic systems can be challenging on Georgetown because of the limited amount of topsoil on the island.

Comprehensive planning for Georgetown should consider the health of Georgetown's water supply and septic systems. Adequate potable well water and adequate sites for septic tanks and leach fields have implications for the standard of living of Georgetown's year-round and seasonal residents, for local businesses, for Georgetown's tourism industry, and for future growth on the island.

* ***Natural Resources and Agriculture and Forestry***

Georgetown has many critical natural resources, including wetlands, wildlife and fisheries habitat, sand dunes, shorelands, scenic vistas, and unique natural areas.It also hasmuch conserved land to protect and enhance these resources. A section of the 1993 plan noted the that 320 of 364 responding to a questionnaire thought it important for the town to have open space conserved for the benefit of residents and future generations. Since then, over 1,200 acres has been placed in conserved lands and over 1,300 in open space, although almost half of the open space is not available to residents or visitors. Currently Georgetown has over 2000 acres of parks and preserves, 1942 acres of open space and 277 acres of woodlots. A high percentage of the conserved land is forested. Natural resources are also protected by local shoreland zone standards, which are consistent with state guidelines. Other land use ordinances are also consistent with applicable state law regarding critical natural resources. The 1993 plan focused on concerns related to construction, forestry and road construction, and their relation to soil erosion. It also charged the Conservation Committee with keeping updated information about wetlands, plants and animals of concern, which has been done.

Georgetown currently has only 15 acres of designated farmland. There are roadside stands that sell locally grown flowers and produce, and at least two gardens that are shared by members of the community. Between 2011 and 2014, an average of 46 acres per year of timber has been harvested, a modest increase over previous years.

Much of the 1993 plan’s Natural Resource section relates to being consistent with state and federal laws; the plan did not include a section on forestry and agriculture.

* ***Archaeological and Historic Resources***

The State’s goal of preserving the State’s historic and archaeological resources is particularly relevant in Georgetown, given Georgetown’s remarkable history and numerous identified sites of historic and archaeological importance.

Archaeological and historic resource data in Georgetown’s 1993 Comprehensive Plan is outdated. It can be updated easily and at no cost with assistance from the Maine Historical Preservation Commission. Recommendations from the 1993 Plan, which tasked Georgetown’s Planning Board and CEO with developing and implementing new permitting policies and ordinances, and the Select Board with designating a “town historic commission”-type group have not been implemented and should be reconsidered. The Georgetown Historical Society is interested in the work of updating this section.

Many descendants of Georgetown’s earliest settlers still live in Georgetown, and the Town’s pride in its past is strong. Georgetown’s historic coastal village character contributes to its appeal for tourists and residents alike and supports Georgetown’s economic base. This should be considered if maintaining Georgetown’s character is a goal of the Town Comprehensive Plan.

* ***Recreation***

The Georgetown Recreation Committee has traditionally organized the schedule of recreational activities for children and adults. In recent years the Georgetown Community Center, which operates as a non-profit, has been hosting and co-hosting an increasing number of recreational activities and programs. It has been and continues to be the goal to provide quality programming for residents with minimal to no cost to the individual.

The state’s focus of this section is on outdoor recreational activities. Since 1993, the addition of conserved lands under the stewardship of The Nature Conservancy and Kennebec Estuary Land Trust have added many miles of hiking trails to those at Reid State Park and The Josephine Newman Sanctuary. There are also two Town-owned properties with trails that are maintained for public use by the Town Conservation Commission. Two concerns that have been expressed are the relatively limited public access to water in Georgetown and the challenges to bicycling on the island.

A comprehensive plan would identify current and future recreation needs, ways to cultivate positive relationships with landowners and land conservation organizations. It would look at possibilities for organized recreational opportunities, including out of school time for youths. The 1993 Plan recommended an information newsletter about recreation activities in Georgetown. This does not seem to have happened, but the Conservation Committee has provided a map of the various conserved lands and trail maps are available at trail heads.

* ***Transportation***

The State goal of this section is to plan for, finance and develop an efficient system of public facilities and services to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.

Georgetown is an island connected to the mainland by two bridges. Approximately 33 miles of State supported Route 127 provides the single thoroughfare to and from the mainland, primary access to schools, shopping, services and access Town businesses, recreation and attractions. The Town maintains about 25 miles of its roads and annually contracts the Road Commissioner to perform maintenance. Town roads are generally serviceable; however, the process is informal. Route 127 currently maintains a “degraded priority status” with MaineDOT in part due to island geographic reality and in part due to not having a State approved long-range transportation plan. During the summer months, it is estimated that Town population increases to approximately 5,000 and traffic to State supported facility, Reid State Park, indicate growth in seasonal and tourist traffic. The maintenance and safety of Route 127 and all Town roads is vital to Georgetown’s safety, access and livelihood.

Provided the trends of slow population growth, limited economic development and a rising median age continue, updating the 1993 Comprehensive Plan will allow Georgetown to address transportation issues most important to the Town. For example, there are limited public or community transportation resources available to Georgetown and community-based options could certainly benefit the changing needs of our aging resident population. Known hazards such as pedestrian and cyclist safety on Route 127 and specific locations where studies have demonstrated hazards are most likely to occur (such as increased flooding due to sea level rise) can be addressed and become part of the prioritization of Town maintained roads.

Georgetown has not adopted a local long-range transportation plan that has been approved by MaineDOT. If the Comprehensive Plan were to be updated to be consistent with the Sensible Transportation Policy Act, the Town would need to establish an ongoing plan and schedule of maintenance, seek input from the Road Commissioner and public, and take into consideration its relation to regional plans.

* ***Public Facilities and Service***

Georgetown has limited public facilities**.** Municipal water supply, sewage, and energy services don’t apply. The 1993 plan addressed solid waste facilities, public safety (police, fire department), communications, health care, culture, education (GCS), recreation facilities, cemeteries, TOPMB and General Administration (town office). Most of it remains current. Alternative power generation and emergency power are concerns that should be addressed in the updated plan.

The school population continues to decrease but Georgetown Central School is a community resource used for many events beyond an elementary school. The Town Dock is a community resource that supports three basic functions/constituents: commercial fishermen, recreational boaters and resident/visitor take-out restaurant. The Georgetown Community Center is a private organization that provides support throughout the community.

Communications have changed dramatically since the 1993 plan and a number of Communications issues have been identified. Virtually every resident and visitor wants broadband and cell phone access. Fairpoint is moving to eliminate land line phone service. There is also a need for local on-line bulletin board and non-critical surveillance/alarm functionality for the community.

* ***Fiscal Capacity and Capital Investment Plan***

As noted in the 1993 Plan, Georgetown’s town related expenses are relatively stable; the school budget has continued to be the biggest variable; the combined school and county taxes represent 72% of tax expenditures. The mill rate in Georgetown remains low compared to most Maine communities because of the high number of seasonal residences, which continue to represent the preponderance of new housing.

Since 1993, Georgetown has added 2500 acres of conserved and open space land, reducing the tax base while providing other benefits to the Town. Conserved land in Georgetown is tax exempt, and open space land is taxed reduced rates. The Comprehensive Plan should analyze the impacts on the mill rate of reduced tax rates and tax exemptions for conserved and open space land, as well as other exemptions.

Georgetown has a tradition of being a relatively debt free town and this had not changed. Potential Capital investment related to road maintenance and/or improvement, town owned property, the purchase of land for public water access and other purposes would be evaluated in a new Plan.

* ***Existing Land Use***

Existing Land Use is not an element of the 1993 plan. This section of a Comprehensive Plan asks for analysis of questions such as: Is most of the recent development occurring: lot by lot; in subdivisions; or in planned developments? Is recent development consistent with the community’s vision? What regulatory and non-regulatory measures would help promote development in locations and of a character that are consistent with the community’s vision? It would include mapping of existing land use (everything from residential, to conserved, to forests etc.), a summary of lot size standards, and a map identifying the lots and principal structures built with the last 10 years.

**Future Land Use**

This appears to be have been the most controversial/divisive part of the 1993 Plan. Three of the 4 objectives of that Plan related directly to land Use; the fourth included land use. As noted above, the Exploratory Group believes that this issue should only be examined after looking at the areas of the plan that impact Future Land Use. There are inherent difficulties with directing growth in Georgetown and this may lead the Committee to ask the State for a “Growth Area Exemption” for which Georgetown appears to qualify. (Note, this would *not* exempt the plan from including Future Land Use in it.)

**STATE INCENTIVES**

A consistent plan would enable Georgetown

* Enact legitimate zoning, impact fee, and rate of growth ordinances; *This would protect town from lawsuits that claimed local ordinances are arbitrary.*
* Require state agencies to comply with local zoning standards. *This would protect town from state initiated projects that ran counter to its ordinances.*
* *Qualify for state Coastal Community Grants. The coastal community competitive grant programs provide funds to towns and regional organizations for projects in the areas of public access, water quality improvement, storm hazard resiliency, and marine-related economic development.*
* Qualify for preferred status with many state competitive grant programs; *(in its simplest form, it awards automatic “points” to a proposal from a town with a consistent plan.*
* Qualify for relaxed MaineDOT traffic permit standards for certain growth-area developments; *additionally, having a consistent plan appears to be necessary to even approach the DOT with a request.*
* Qualify for Site Location of Development Act exemptions for certain growth-area developments*; The Act requires review of developments that might have significant impact on the environment. This enables the town to have more input into the process.*
* Qualify for authority to issue Site Location of Development Act permits.
* Qualify for authority to issue Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA) permits. *The law is focused on "protected natural resources". A permit is required when an "activity" will be: located in, on or over any protected natural resource, or located adjacent to a coastal wetland, great pond, river, stream or brook or significant wildlife habitat contained within a freshwater wetland, or certain freshwater wetlands.*
* Guide state growth-related capital investment towards locally-chosen growth areas.*This relates to Construction or newly constructed rental housing and* *grants and loans for public or quasi-public service infrastructure, public or quasi-public facilities and community buildings.*