

# Berlin Master Plan

## Visioning Exercise Conducted on 1/23/08

### Part 1 - Summary of Key Findings

#### Question 1 - Describe Berlin's Success

So what does the success of Berlin look like to you? How has the community changed? In particular: Please write down a few things that you really like about Berlin today, in 2008. What are the things that help define Berlin for you, and that you hope will be retained in building Berlin's future.

#### **The key findings from this question included:**

- A strong interest in celebrating the unique natural setting by retaining the natural resources in Berlin and increasing opportunities for a range of recreational opportunities in and around Berlin.
- Retaining the historic character of the structures and diverse cultural heritage of the Berlin.
- Creating a stronger connection to the Androscoggin River so that everyone can enjoy this resource in their own way.
- Maintaining the small town atmosphere and quality of life currently found in Berlin.

#### Question 2 – Identifying existing concerns

And what are the things that concern you today? What are the issues that you think Berlin needs to work on and correct as it works towards a successful future? Please write down a few of these.

#### **The key findings from this question included:**

- Concerns related to the local economy including the declining tax base, lack of economic diversity, and the need for good paying jobs.
- A need for greater pride in the homes and businesses in the City and a need to clean up these properties to help change the perception of Berlin.
- A desire to address the many infrastructure related issues in Berlin including roads and other transportation limitations, telecommunications, dilapidated and unsafe structures, and opportunities to create clean renewable energy from various sources.
- Working to improve the relationships with surrounding communities so that regional issues can be addressed and a positive regional identity can be created.

#### Question 3 - Sharing Ideas from Away

As you have traveled, whether for work, or vacation, or perhaps in the service, you have likely been in communities or regions that you thought were successful. What was it that you liked about those communities? What are the things that were going on there that you think should be considered for use in Berlin?

#### **The key findings from this question included:**

- Making improvements in the downtown area that increase the level of activity, connect with the river, accommodate pedestrians, and increase telecommunications connections to the outside world.
- Capitalize on all of the opportunities for outdoor recreation that draw residents and visitors to Berlin.
- Working toward greater sustainability within the City by addressing issues related to energy, infrastructure, food, natural resources, and the economy in new ways.
- Using new approaches that will build on all of the wonderful characteristics Berlin already possesses to make the City better, not different.

# **Berlin Master Plan**

## **Visioning Exercise Conducted on 1/23/08**

### **Part 2 - Summary of Responses by Group**

The consultant team started the visioning session by asking the participants to envision Berlin in the Year 2030.

*It has been a long, hard task, with lots of community involvement, many meetings, and lots of public and private effort, but now, in the Year 2030, Berlin is widely viewed as a success story. The closing of the pulp mill in 2006 changed Berlin's future. But 24 years later, Berlin is viewed as a success, a model for communities moving forward from a traditional, narrowly-based, manufacturing economy, to something new and more diverse.*

#### **Question 1 - Describe this Success**

So what does the success of Berlin look like to you? How has the community changed? In particular:

Please write down a few things that you really like about Berlin today, in 2008. What are the things that help define Berlin for you, and that you hope will be retained in building Berlin's future.

#### **The key findings from this question included:**

- A strong interest in celebrating the unique natural setting by retaining the natural resources in Berlin and increasing opportunities for a range of recreational opportunities in and around Berlin.
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#### **Group A Responses:**

- Diversity of businesses
- Natural Resources (7)
- Open space (2)
- Four Seasons (2)
- Walkability (2)
- River (4)
- Riverfire
- Northern Forest Heritage Park (2)
- Historical Society
- Moffet House
- Closeness of community/Hometown Feeling

- Exchange of ideas
- Availability of services
- College (2)
- Boom Piers
- Airport
- Broadband Availability
- Time in history – change – we’re at a turning point
- Multi-cultural Heritage (2)/ Ethnic
- Arena – expand into a community center (for youth)
- Boom Piers
- People – energetic (4)
- Sense of Community - “Home”
- Location – with major cities ½ day drive away
- Historic Buildings i.e. City Hall
- ATV Park
- Festivals/programs for the community
- Neighborhoods – keep intact/ downtown/ Main St.
- Character of the community
- Small town atmosphere
- St. Kieran’s Art Center
- Churches – Russian/ St. Anne’s /Congregational

Group B Responses:

- Historic downtown and Main Street – retain the character of the structures
- Open riverfront (especially on Main Street and former mill site)
  - Riverwalks with buildings set back from the river
  - Parks along the riverfront with trails for walking, jogging
  - Legal access points to the river
  - Attractive building facades along the river
- Develop system of land banking – city should buy properties that would help achieve a purpose in the future
- Keep and expand recreational opportunities such as snow machine trails, canoe trail, connect to regional hiking trails
- Create a dog park
- Expand on parks and recreation offerings by developing a community center, working with AMC on outdoor programs, summer camps and programs, expand youth and adult programs
- Protect the natural and cultural history
  - Nansen Ski Club and jump
  - Logging history and Northern Forest Heritage Park
  - Multicultural heritage and population through Northern Forest Heritage Park and Berlin Historic Society
  - Railroad – preserve for tourist train and for transportation
  - Keep Mt. Forist and Mt. Jasper undeveloped

### Group C Responses:

- A “small town” quality of life – a safe place to live and raise children
- Continue the growth of an overall positive outlook in the community
- Cultural diversity
- Beautiful buildings are retained and restored
- Notre Dame arena, the ski jump, heritage park, and other noteworthy amenities
- Public accessible land for recreation
- Celebration of Berlin’s unique natural setting
  - multiple mountain ranges
  - mountain city
  - a cleaner and cleaner river through the city center
- Continue growth of the river as a whitewater recreational resource
- Outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities
- Continuing to serve as a regional hub
- Many connections between the community and the landscape (economic, identity, tourism, recreation)
- Amenity migration continues
  - A strong natural environment amenity base drives growth
- The celebration of built amenities
- Berlin front porches should be cherished, renovated
  - Berlin, a “front porch city”
- Tree lined streets
- Dense residential areas surrounded by woods
  - neighborhoods
- Celebration of Berlin’s history (Nansen ski club – first in history?)
- Berlin can be the envy of the state again!

### Group D Responses:

- Small town atmosphere
- Small community friendliness
- Unique landscape
- Downtown buildings: preserve historical buildings, remove as necessary (with improved aesthetics)
- Lack of industry/Diversification
- Views
- Hockey heritage
- Close knit community
- Work ethic/good workers
- Milan Airport is the largest airport north of Laconia, 5000 ft runway with jet fuel large enough to land a 707
- Diverse culture
- Friendly residents/culture
- Rivers – visible and utilized
- Oldest ski club
- Hockey Town USA
- Skiing closer to city 15 min from offices

- Kayak close to city
- St. Kieran and beginning of thriving art community
- Northern Forest Heritage Park
- Mt Washington
- Clean beautiful air
- Investment opportunities and funds that can draw businesses

## Question 2 – Identifying existing concerns

And what are the things that concern you today? What are the issues that you think Berlin needs to work on and correct as it works towards a successful future? Please write down a few of these.

### **The key findings from this question included:**

- Concerns related to the local economy including the declining tax base, lack of economic diversity, and the need for good paying jobs.
- A need for greater pride in the homes and businesses in the City and a need to clean up these properties to help change the perception of Berlin.
- A desire to address the many infrastructure related issues in Berlin including roads and other transportation limitations, telecommunications, dilapidated and unsafe structures, and opportunities to create clean renewable energy from various sources.
- Working to improve the relationships with surrounding communities so that regional issues can be addressed and a positive regional identity can be created.

### Group A Responses:

- The Economy (4)
- Lack of diversified economic opportunities
- Lack of Development and Employment
- Lack of buildable space (WMNF)
- Confines of state and federal laws
- Loss of anchor tenant downtown – JC Penney
- Infrastructure (4) – built for larger population
- Clean up streets/downtown
- Pride in your home/business
- Don't forget what is good today as we move ahead
- Leakage of tourists Route 2/16 (2)
- Demographics – 55+ / the economy and this generation
- Entrepreneurs – help support them!
- A need for low/no cost start up \$ for new businesses
- Support local business/ shop local
- Not enough utilization of the airport
- Housing (2)
- Downtown – empty store fronts/run-down storefronts (first impressions)
- Perception of Berlin
- Interstate access

- Decline of tax base and revenues
- Don't just continue to take anything that is thrown our way – jobs/industry
- People may not be ready for change
- Berlin/Gorham road and use of – lack of pedestrian lanes, wide roads
- Conditions of the roads to Berlin (3)
- Wards and changes to the political structure
- Public transportation limitations
- Taxes for residential owners
- Attitude of citizens
- Have not capitalized on natural resources – we need to
- Need to sell ourselves (businesses and services) to each other
- Mill site impact on community – fit in community

#### Group B Responses:

- Too many cheap rents
- Lack of affordable and adequate housing or all stages of life
- Develop a variety of housing types (senior housing, condos)
- Fix Hutchins Street and complete the East Side Arterial
- Complete Phase II of the Route 110 reconstruction
- Lack of small and mid-size industry – need more with good pay to help keep young people in the area
- Have Community College help with job training
- Expand college educational opportunities
- Enforce housing codes and encourage better building maintenance
- Repair streets – don't ignore primary streets and work on only streets under construction for Berlin Water Works projects
- Improve communication on planning for infrastructure projects, especially between the City and Berlin Water Works
- Improve services for younger and older residents by building a community center, pool
- Improve mental health services
- Need a community health center for medical care with a walk in clinic priced according to need
- Instability of doctors in the area and high turn over of doctors
- Androscoggin Valley Hospital is downsizing and needs to better balance financial issues with patient needs
- Provide alternate renewable energy that stays local and is not sold outside of the region; would make energy more affordable in the region
- Use methane at Mt. Carberry Landfill for energy production
- Need to sustain ourselves as a community
- Keep small stores on Main Street
- Improve relationships with Gorham and work with them on regional issues such as school and dispatch
- Create and Androscoggin Valley identity and market it
- Low community self esteem (need to change)
- Create a positive future and more optimism
- Get more people involved and change the perception about getting things done through marketing and education about the process
- Celebrate successes and record them

- Public participation and follow through – need to create more
- Need to get people behind issues

#### Group C Responses:

- Transportation of good and services is limited
- Dilapidated structures
  - More concern over abandoned structures
- Lack of parking in downtown and upper main street is a concern
- Out-migration of young citizens
- Need to increase the tax base
  - High residential tax burden
- Need to diversify economic base
  - Small industry
  - Small businesses
- Availability of housing for 55 and older (55 and older communities)
- Building surplus in downtown (should be used to address parking needs)
- JOBS
- Availability of high speed internet
- Aging infrastructure
  - Need school repairs and upgrades
- Should industry be in the middle of town?
- What will happen with the remaining stack? The presence was one thing when it supported the whole city, another when it is for 20-30 jobs.
- Lack of activities and guidance for kids
- Need for more indoor recreation
  - Constructive opportunities for recreation for young people
  - Affordability is key (ice rink not always affordable to all)
  - YMCA needed
  - Volunteer efforts could play a significant role
- Need more effective communication between communities in the valley
- Lack of valley identity
- Need more community gathering places, both indoor and outdoor
- Less reactive decisions based on immediate need (prison development cited as an example), more proactive planning
- Transportation issues
  - Need truck routes
  - The system of one-way streets is too complex, doesn't benefit downtown and businesses
  - Signage improvements are needed

#### Group D Responses:

- More collaboration
- Opportunity for tourism
- Preserve some industry
  - can be marketed better
- Opportunities for energy (biomass)
- Hydro dams
- Rail

- Gateway to city unattached (look of town at entry)
- Energy costs
- Dilapidated building
- Lack of accommodations
- Reputation (Welfare city with odor)
- Lack of 30-something population
- Lack of brand for Berlin/Coos
- Need to engage people outside the Andro Valley. We talk to ourselves and not the rest of New England
- Location of energy producers → consider aesthetics
- Signage – state and city road signs need more and uniform
- Lack of hotel
- Lack of well-run recreation center/recreation facilities
- Lack of awareness of opportunities for business, wages, tax credits, etc.
- Need Entertainment – movie theater, youth center, YMCA, indoor tennis
- Taxes too high
- Wasted methane at waste facilities. Potential for even more bad odor.
- Small population
- Need good paying jobs
- Make better use of rail industry near mill
- Tourism along river
- Locate business appropriately. Industry near rail, tourism near river, ATV business near Jericho Lake
- Need Creative thinking about what business could be here
- Need more business retention and recruitment
- Littleton downtown- small business base
- Need Canoe rentals and river walk
- Need more entrepreneurial business
- “Things to do for a day”
- Need Entrepreneurial spirit

### Question 3 - Sharing Ideas from Away

As you have traveled, whether for work, or vacation, or perhaps in the service, you have likely been in communities or regions that you thought were successful. What was it that you liked about those communities? What are the things that were going on there that you think should be considered for use in Berlin?

**The key findings from this question included:**

- Making improvements in the downtown area that increase the level of activity, connect with the river, accommodate pedestrians, and increase telecommunications connections to the outside world.
- Capitalize on all of the opportunities for outdoor recreation that draw residents and visitors to Berlin.
- Working toward greater sustainability within the City by addressing issues related to energy, infrastructure, food, natural resources, and the economy in new ways.
- Using new approaches that will build on all of the wonderful characteristics Berlin already possesses to make the City better, not different.

### Group A Responses:

- Casino – small/managed growth
- Rail – Boston/Portland/Montreal
- Better access (Roads, Railroad, Public Transportation, Airport)
- Keep Berlin, make it better, not different!
- Berlin pride campaign – bumper stickers, etc.
- Unique stores downtown with local businesses/products/industries
- Utilizing River, stores/businesses related to river use
- Sustainability – energy costs, local foods, open space to support local agriculture
- High Speed Internet
- Renewable Energy/Local Usage/Eco-Industrial Parks
- Regionalization – “Valleywide”
- Pedestrian ways
- Keep scenic views, keep Mt. Forist undeveloped
- Keene, NH – good layout/ model community
- Need a hotel in Berlin
- Better (more aggressive) representation in Concord
- Taxes – don’t want big increases
- Keep our old buildings
- Enhance/further develop NFHP – keep our history
- Better communication and use of resources between Berlin and Gorham
- Mill Site – private four year college with for profit work on sciences/engineering/energy issues (Policy and technology)

### Group B Responses:

- Harrisburg, PA – Riverwalk
- San Antonio, TX – Riverwalk
- Lewiston/Auburn, ME – has done a good job in disguising a building to make it fit the streetscape (e.g. a parking garage looks like a regular building)
- North Conway – has a lot of businesses, businesses on Main Street
- Rangley, ME – snow machine access into town (but don’t want to become West Yellowstone where snow machines take over the town)
- Philadelphia, PA – citywide internet access – free Wifi
- Manchester, NH – sports center for hockey, basketball

### Group C Responses:

- Franklin, NH - a possible model for Berlin, had dealt with many of the same issues
- Claremont is another possible comparator
- Berlin – a city with free wireless internet
- Whitewater park in town to stimulate tourism and enhance amenity base
- Capitalize on bicycle tourism
- Create more of a walking/biking community
  - Establish bike lanes
- Need a more active downtown, with gathering places and events, to stimulate activity, interest, and identity (there was a lot of support for this idea)

- Need to celebrate the river, focus the downtown on it
  - Perhaps a “river walk” type of development

Group D Responses:

- Portsmouth – theater in the park
- Street signage for Yarmouth
- Verizon Center – Major functions
- OK City - Ugly city with nice stadium and hotels – “brick town”
- Butter factory – Portsmouth
- Halifax - Trails
- St. Johns, NB - Trails
- Activity downtown makes you want to stay
- Seattle – Revamp development buildings, eco-friendly city, apartments – go green
- Charge absentee landlords for vacant buildings
- Dover – reuse old buildings, concerts, riverfest and concerts
- Lewiston-Auburn – Androscoggin Rivers and Brewery and Power using energy wisely
- Build around industry so it becomes a draw
- Burlington – Lakefront – Rollerblading, etc.
- Walking downtown
- Good roads or air transport to get here
- Great linked trail system – links all of Coos via trails
- YMCA
- Highway/ATV – Multiple mode of recreation
- Dogsledding
- Just as pretty or prettier
- Wilderness camping and other activities
- Mixed economy (including industry)
- Region branded – people from around USA know what Coos/Berlin means
- Great college – including 4-year and masters degrees
- Medical facility connected to education
- Beautiful forest maintenance
- Future development that doesn’t contradict current landscape
- Safe as it is today