

Incorporating Community Values in Land Use Plans

Using CommunityViz as part of a Heart & Soul Community Planning process

Location: Damariscotta, Maine

Partners: Town of Damariscotta; Friends of Midcoast Maine; Orton Family Foundation; Spatial Alternatives; Placeways LLC; B. Dennis Town Design



Context: Damariscotta is a historic village near the head of Maine's Damariscotta River. The local population is just over 2000, but the town is a service center for some 9000 mid-coast Maine residents and the destination for thousands of tourists every year. In 2005, a proposal for a new Wal-Mart caught the community by surprise. After aggressive political campaigns and at times divisive public debate, the town passed a retail size cap that blocked the proposal. Another result of the crisis was a newly invigorated interest in proactive long-range planning. In 2007, the Town of Damariscotta created the Damariscotta Planning Advisory Committee (DPAC) to bring the town back

together and to solicit better public feedback on land use issues. Later, Damariscotta was selected by the Orton Family Foundation to participate in a Heart & Soul Community Planning project. The Town worked with the Foundation over the next two years, using a variety of citizen engagement processes to identify community values and to develop a concrete vision for the future. In 2009, the community hosted a design charrette to explore options for guiding new growth in a manner consistent with the vision and values. One of the project partners, Spatial Alternatives, with support from Placeways, used CommunityViz to analyze various design and development scenarios in relation to the values identified by the community. The CommunityViz "value mapping" portion of the larger Damariscotta planning project is the focus of the project description that follows.

Project Description: Through the Heart & Soul Community Planning process, DPAC listened to the community to develop a draft vision statement and to derive a set of values that define Damariscotta:



We value **working locally** and growing locally owned businesses



We value **living locally**, being able to afford to live and shop in town



We value **community involvement** where people participate in schools, organizations, churches and community events and festivals



We value having **culture and nature in close proximity**, where we might see a seal or a moose but also have restaurants, art galleries, local theater and a library, all within walking distance



We value an **accessible community** where we have easy access to goods and services, to local government and Information



We value a strong **sense of community** where people trust one another and feel safe.

*"CommunityViz gave us a quantifiable way of measuring the values expressed by the community. It visually and graphically highlighted significant differences between the way the community **has been going** and the way we **want to go** as expressed in the charrette and in other venues."*

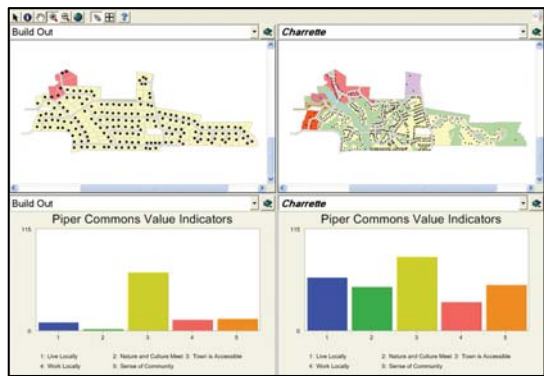
— Jane Lafleur, Executive Director, Friends of Midcoast Maine, and Heart & Soul Coordinator for Damariscotta.

Using a structured value mapping process, the CommunityViz team, with input from residents, defined the elements that make up these values and developed an understanding of their “drivers” (what positively or negatively affects them). From this information, the team developed quantifiable composite indicators to use for comparing scenarios in CommunityViz. For example, to assess how well a future plan will support the value “culture and nature in close proximity,” one can measure square feet/person of performance spaces, percentage of land in public open space, and percentage of housing within 1/4 mile of public open space.



Two scales of plans were used to test and illustrate how alternative scenarios perform with respect to supporting identified values. First, the CommunityViz team used the value mapping approach for an area called Piper Commons, a major parcel of land close to downtown that is likely to be developed in the near future. Two scenarios were tested: a Build Out Scenario using current trends and policies, and a second Charrette Scenario developed through the charrette process. Similarly, the approach was used on a study area that included lands along a main business route and the downtown. In each case, the team could measure key value drivers and illustrate the performance of each scenario with respect to the identified community values.

Technology and Tools: The team used CommunityViz Version 4, including Scenario 360™’s Build-Out Wizard and Scenario 3D™. A variety of citizen engagement tools were used throughout the larger “Heart & Soul” project. These included community-wide celebrations, potluck themed dinners and storytelling events, one-on-one “neighbor to neighbor” story interviews, town-wide and youth focused surveys, issue-specific community forums, and a multi-day design charrette. Keypad polling was used at several events and at the final charrette presentation to gauge how the charrette plans resonated with the attendees.



Outcomes: The CommunityViz value mapping models provided a comparative view of the overall value impacts for the two scenarios. They could not be considered exact, but they did give a sense of whether an option supported community values or not, and they

served as a good starting point for deeper discussion. Not surprisingly, in both the Piper Commons model and the larger study area model, the Charrette Scenarios performed better with respect to supporting the community’s identified values than the Build Out Scenarios. In some cases, the differences were extreme. For example, in the proposed Piper Commons area, development along the lines of the charrette plan will significantly improve Access to Nature and Culture compared to development under existing zoning.

The project resulted in an extensive list of implementation recommendations, key among them the adoption of “Smart” or Form- Based Codes for Damariscotta’s future development. In 2010, the Town initiated a project to develop Form-Based Codes to shape new development in a way that is consistent with the values and vision defined by those living and working in Damariscotta. DPAC and the town are working on additional implementation plans that will further achieve of the values expressed through the “Heart and Soul” community planning process.

KEY LINKS

- CommunityViz
<http://placeways.com/communityviz>
- Orton Family Foundation
<http://www.orton.org>
- Town of Damariscotta
<http://sites.google.com/site/damariscottame>
- Friends of Midcoast Maine
<http://www.friendsmidcoast.org>
- Spatial Alternatives
<http://www.spatialalternatives.com>
- Placeways
<http://www.placeways.com>
- B. Dennis Town Design
<http://www.bdennis.com>