

Executive Summary

This is a time for optimism. Madawaska, a town at the northernmost point of Maine, is home to 4,000 people with a rich history, abundant cultural and natural assets, and a spirit of entrepreneurship. Situated along the St. John River, it is the largest of twenty towns and townships in the St. John Valley region. Settled in 1785 by Acadians and French-Canadians, Madawaska continues to be a community predominately of French heritage. This distinct culture, the beautiful landscape, four-season outdoor recreation, along with its anchor industries, community spirit, and geographic location next to Canada, contribute to a strong sense of identity and place. They also form the foundation for enormous potential.

As with many small towns across rural North America, however, Madawaska faces significant headwinds, such as an undiversified economy, diminishing and aging population, and demands on scarce resources. These challenges, as well as external pressures of a rapidly changing world, can undermine the path toward a more vibrant future.

Ignoring our numerous challenges *and* abundant assets is not an option. Grand Plan Madawaska, a community and economic development strategy, responds to this universal interplay between strengths and challenges, and the quest for balance and resiliency. It is call to action for transformative change that points to a simple idea: to create a great place to live. Driving the strategy's planning process was to learn from the wisdom of the community, imagine what is possible, and plant a seed to redefine what rural means.

From March to July 2017, a planning leadership team composed of consultants, town staff, and a volunteer planning committee, conducted research and engaged in broad community engagement with over 450 people. We explored strengths and weaknesses, what is desired for the future, opportunities and priorities, and how to galvanize and mobilize toward vibrancy. We identified the importance of creating conditions for diversity, cooperation, a positive mindset, and new ideas to flourish. We learned that we must work together to maximize the potential for Madawaska, build wealth from within, and create a resilient community and local economy. Ultimately, we affirmed the uncomplicated truth that shaping our destiny starts with us.

Emerging from this planning process, seven key elements were identified as critically important to the future of Madawaska: Culture and Place, Local Economy, Youth and Population, Infrastructure, Quality of Life, Collaboration, and Mindset. These elements form the foundation for Grand Plan Madawaska's four strategic goals. These, along with their 12 strategies and 44 actions, will be the Town of Madawaska's primary focus over the next five to ten years.

FOUR STRATEGIC GOALS

- 1. Strong Culture and Place**
- 2. Vibrant and Attractive Community**
- 3. Diverse and Thriving Local Economy**
- 4. Efficient and Exceptional Government**

These goals, strategies, and actions speak to Madawaska’s vision to become a vibrant center of opportunity where the French culture, nature’s abundance, and an international bond make Madawaska a great place to live, work, and visit. They were inspired by hundreds of people who shared their concerns, ideas, and aspirations.

Practical directions and big ideas emerged. Community insight helped to create actions such as mapping of culture, nature, and business assets, revitalizing Main Street and the downtown district, stewarding the French language and making it more visible, investing in digital literacy, organizing a St. John Valley Regional Summit, designing a Welcome Home Campaign, and creating an entrepreneurial hub and Maker Space.

Grand Plan Madawaska is a strategy to shape the next decade. We recognize, however, that implementing a 10-year strategy can be a challenge due to changing administrations, budgetary fluctuations, and innumerable external influences. Since implementation is a continual process, it is recommended that annual review and evaluation takes place. By late 2022/early 2023, an in-depth assessment can be conducted and readjustments made where necessary.

The first of its kind for Madawaska, this strategy provides the opportunity for unprecedented private, public, and nonprofit sector collaboration. Though designed for the town of Madawaska, this strategy sets a course for increased connection with communities in the St. John Valley and our Canadian neighbors.

The hope is that Grand Plan Madawaska inspires, galvanizes, and guides everyone – residents, town staff, elected officials, businesses, nonprofits, and institutions – to move forward together to achieve success. Municipal government, however, cannot do this work alone. It will require patience and commitment, proactive and robust action, sustained investment, and celebration of successes along the way. Very importantly, implementing Grand Plan Madawaska will require a team effort with an effective action group for change and many partners in cooperative collaboration. We are all part of shaping a strong and vibrant future for Madawaska.