Islanders Offer Input at Workshop

On a beautiful August 4th afternoon, 150 Peaks Island residents participated in a workshop sponsored by the Neighborhood Planning Committee. The Workshop featured 13 individual tables staffed by planning Task Team members who were presenting information specific to each Task Team topic. The goal of the Workshop was to get Islander input on a number of issues that ultimately will be included in the Neighborhood Plan. During the previous six months, in preparation for the Workshop, each Task Team collected data from various sources.

During the Workshop all community members were encouraged to move from table to table and include their opinions about each subject. Charles Enders felt that “the format provided a great deal of personal interaction and the opportunity to address issues in greater detail than would be the case with a more structured presentation.”

The workshop was an extension of the guiding principle of the neighborhood planning process: include the public in the development of the vision for their neighborhood. The first step towards that end was the six-page comprehensive Peaks Island Community Survey, which was mailed to everyone on the Island and was extremely successful, with more than a 55% return rate. The Community Survey was an opportunity for any community member to make his/her voice heard.

Though Peaks Island is considered a neighborhood of Portland, similar to Munjoy Hill or the West End, we are a special circumstance. Many of our neighbors are seasonal residents and have not been able to participate throughout the planning process. The Workshop, therefore, was the chief opportunity for our seasonal neighbors to participate in the planning process. Including their views and opinions was equally as important as the total number of participants. Mary Jane Burnett, transportation task team member, felt that the workshop achieved this goal; “there was...a good mix of year round and seasonal residents, along with long timers and newcomers.”

Goals, Hopes, and Visions For Peaks in 2020 Outlined

We believe that the goal for most Islanders is to maintain the character of Peaks—that is: [1] to preserve its beautiful natural environment, and [2] to strengthen its safe and friendly community where people know and help each other. Many of the Task Teams decided that we must launch an on-going educational campaign for both residents and visitors to develop an Island ethic of stewardship and a recommitment to community.

Task Team Updates

Team reports are still “works in progress.” Some of the current ideas are summarized below. Please be sure to read the Draft Neighborhood Plan which will become available just before Thanksgiving on the Peaks Island website, geocities.com/netpina, and in the Peaks Island Branch Library. The Planning Committee wants to give all Peaks Islanders ample opportunity to review the Plan and comment on it by the end of this year. Please read the Draft Plan, leave your remarks in the Library Comment Box or email: choppin@atl.net.

Architecture and Historic Resources

Nearly 700 structures on Peaks were built prior to 1920, with 623 of those built between 1880 and 1920. A variety of as-yet-unsurveyed architectural styles are found ranging from capes to cottages to contemporary. Most have undergone renovation and/or are well maintained. The community’s character is, to a large degree, directly related to its architecture and historic resources. Providing residents with the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of historic preservation will help to preserve our unique community character.

Demographics/Population

There were 843 year-round residents on Peaks Island according to the 2000 Census. That represents a 10% increase over 1990 census figures. As in much of Maine, the population is aging, and the 2000 median age on Peaks was 42.2 years. One area of special interest to Peaks Islanders is the summer population, a number that is difficult to determine precisely. Of the 871 housing units on Peaks, 457—just over 52%—are used seasonally.

The Economy

In general, survey respondents felt that zoning laws should be restricted to IR-1 and IR-2 zones and should sustain existing Island business while discouraging business expansion.

Housing

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Land Use  [Dick Springer] The survey revealed a strong consensus on the goals for Island land use policies: preserving open space, protecting ground water, discouraging sprawl, protecting views, preserving the architectural character of neighborhoods, controlling new development and protecting Island businesses all had general support. Encouraging affordable housing had strong support from the year round community. The zoning code is the primary tool regulating private land use but tax codes, environmental rules and water lines, the construction of roads, and conservation easements all may be used to promote desirable land use.

Marine Resources  [Curtis Rindlaub, Nate Gray, Jamie Carlson] The marine resources that include the immediate coastal waters and the shoreline that rings Peaks Island are both physical and aesthetic; they provide the physical and psychological boundaries between the Island, the sea and the rest of the world. These resources are used for recreation, commercial business, and transportation. The resources include docks, piers, moorings, haul/launch facilities, and beaches. General recommendations include the need to preserve the physical and aesthetic character of the shoreline, to bolster the rights of the public to enjoy and use the coast, to encourage the diverse uses of these resources (recreation, commercial fishing, commuting or other transportation, tours, etc.), to protect these resources from pollution and erosion, and to plan for future use pressures from mainland people. No issue is likely to change the character of Peaks Island more dramatically than the valuation and taxes on those properties that command either direct waterfront, deeded access, or water views. The neighborhood plan recommends a study of equitable alternatives to the State mandated real estate-based tax system.

Natural Resources  [Lynne Richard, Joyce Leslie, Charles Enders, Nate Gray, Johan Erickson, Val Hart] This report discusses wetlands, non-native invasive species of plants, municipal community forests, hazardous waste, regulatory compliance, and other miscellaneous environmental issues. Recommendations include developing a watershed protection action plan for the Island containing management strategies for invasive plants, avoidance of use of chemical controls, developing a regular household hazardous waste collection system, making an inventory of trees of interest for protection, limiting the deer herd, and providing education and information regularly to all residents and visitors about environmental issues.

Public Facilities  [Bill Hall, Nate Gray] Discusses the Community Building, the Library, the Peaks Island School, the Transfer Station and the Sewage Treatment Plant (leased by the City of Portland Water District). Both the survey and the August 4th Workshop encouraged the creation of additional public restrooms on the Island.

Recreation and Open Space  [Don Stein, Carol Baker, Nancy Hall] A unique characteristic of Peaks is that it is a neighborhood that is also a recreation destination. While Peaks has a number of public recreation areas or opportunities, there are few specific recreational facilities/locations for young people. The Team recommends this issue be addressed immediately. A substantial amount of open space has been preserved in recent years through the efforts of the Peaks Island Land Preserve. Islanders support the continued protection of open space and also want to maintain public access to the coast.

Transportation  [Nate Gray, Charles Enders, MJ Burnett, Barbara Strout] This team has collected data on the Island road system, vehicles on the Island, on-island parking, mainland parking, Casco Bay Lines and alternate transportation. The most important aspect of the Island's character is its roads, including well-kept gravel roads. Survey respondents indicated that there are about 400 cars, 135 non-commercial trucks, 17 commercial trucks and 43 golf carts in use. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents felt that traffic has become a threat to the quality of life on the Island, especially in the summer. There is also concern about the safety of some vehicles, parking congestion down-front, and alternatives to private car use. The need for a reliable taxi service is considered important or essential by sixty-five percent of survey respondents.

Neighborhood-Based Plan  [The Team] The next step is to incorporate the community's opinions, along with the previous research, into a Final Draft of the Neighborhood Plan. This document will be available to the community before Thanksgiving for public comment during December.

TIMELINE
- late November
- Draft Neighborhood Plan available at the Peaks Island Library and online at geocities.com/netpina
- December
- Comments by community members on the Draft are encouraged. Please leave your written remarks in the Library Comment Box or email choppln@aol.com
- January
- Open community meeting on revised Draft Plan
- Spring
- Final Neighborhood Plan submitted to Portland City Council and to Peaks Island community

Please read the Plan and share your thoughts!

Water Resources  [Art Astarita] Discusses the current state of the 25 waterways, the 16 ponds and wetland areas on the Island. Potential hazards include the contamination of groundwater and surface water, coastline erosion, and flood hazard zone impacts. Recommendations for both fresh water and marine water resources include review of monitoring sites, inventories, automobile and truck inspections, commercial inspections, setback guidelines, and storage and scheduling pick-up of hazardous material. Special focus includes Fire and Police Response plans, forest management and fire fighting in areas with low hydrant availability, and on-going education of the public about best household and garden practices for low environmental impact.

Vision 2020  [Cynthia Cole, Robin Walden] The Team has gathered short Vision Statements from a sampling of individuals on the Island in order to develop a picture of peoples' hopes for Peaks Island in the year 2020. Statements have been collected from older couples, mid-career persons with long roots on the Island, and teens. Additional comments have come from persons attending the August 4th Workshop, from the Survey and from a number of people informally. Some common ideas include: keep the rural quality and open spaces, have fewer cars, keep the 'low key' community character, have affordable housing for young families, take care of the needs of teens and senior citizens, keep the Island the way it is—don't have too many changes. A copy of all comments and interview statements is in the Library, upstairs in the Neighborhood Planning box.