

CLIMATE ACTION TOOLKIT #5

Foster Complete and Walkable Neighborhoods



PENOBSCOT
CLIMATE ACTION



MODERATE POTENTIAL
to achieve greenhouse gas
emissions reductions



HIGH POTENTIAL
to build community
resilience

Description of the Action

Complete neighborhoods are places where all residents, regardless of age, ability, or income have access to daily life necessities—including high-quality and affordable housing, schools and other civic functions, food, open space, healthcare, and other services—within 15 minutes by walking, biking, or public transit.¹ The Penobscot Climate Action region can take a proactive approach to fostering complete neighborhoods. Each community in the Bangor region may approach this differently, and yet in each case, it would involve a process for identifying specific neighborhood areas (for example, denser mixed-use areas or town centers), assessing those areas based on a set of complete neighborhood features, identifying gaps, and investigating specific interventions that would support those neighborhoods in becoming complete neighborhoods. The interventions will likely include some or all of the following approaches:

Zoning updates to support transit and walkability

– Identify changes to zoning that will support transit and walkability, such as allowing and incentivizing mixed-use development, enabling higher densities and infill development, adapting commercial first floor design standards to create vibrant streetscapes, reducing or eliminating parking minimums in specific areas, requiring or encouraging bike parking, and enabling neighborhood

community gardens and food forests. In some cases, these zoning changes may need to be accompanied by other types of supportive policy; for example, allowing winter on-street parking.

Zoning updates to support diverse and affordable housing

– Identify changes to zoning that will support diverse and affordable housing, such as enabling higher density and infill development, reducing minimum lot sizes, adopting density bonuses for affordable housing, and enabling diversity of housing types, including supportive housing. A starting point would be to update zoning and land use policies to align with State Legislation LD 2003, which includes a set of enabling policies to support housing production.

Complete streets policy

– Adopt a complete streets policy to ensure that all future street upgrade or new construction projects integrate complete streets design standards whenever practicable. “Complete streets” are a type of street design that prioritize safe and comfortable travel by people of all ages, abilities, and incomes by all modes of transportation. Features such as accessible sidewalks, separated bike lanes, and frequent and safe opportunities to cross the street are examples of complete street features. BACTS will develop complete street guidelines and draft policy language for different size municipalities to support this step; see Appendix A for more details.

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How This Action Supports the Goals of Penobscot Climate Action

- ★ **Equity and Environmental Justice.** Complete neighborhoods reduce transportation costs and increase access to daily life needs, including high quality and affordable housing, schools and other civic functions, food, open space, and other amenities and services. While this outcome benefits everyone, it can most greatly benefit older adults, people with disabilities, people with lower incomes, new Mainers, and other individuals who may not have a car.
- ★ **Environmental Health.** Complete neighborhoods make it easier to reach all daily needs by walking, biking, and public transit. Fewer trips by cars or trucks reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of air pollution.
- ★ **Community Resilience.** Complete neighborhoods make it easier to access resources and opportunities – whether that’s healthcare, groceries, school, or job. Greater access to resources builds community resilience both day-to-day and in an emergency.
- ★ **Regional Collaboration.** This toolkit encourages a network of complete neighborhoods that are connected by public transit routes and bike paths throughout the region. By working together to create this network, it expands the benefits of complete neighborhoods (including greater access to resources and opportunity) at a regional scale.

¹ Adapted from Portland’s Plan 2030. (<https://view.publitas.com/city-of-portland/portlands-plan-2030/page/1>)



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Capital projects to support complete neighborhoods

– Identify specific capital projects that would support walkable, complete neighborhoods, such as installing sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, or other complete streets projects; amenities such as bus stop shelters or bike parking; connections to multi-use trail networks; or neighborhood amenities such as small parks, community gardens, or food forests. Consider using demonstration projects to show the functionality and benefits of complete street projects while working towards more permanent infrastructure.

Partnerships and incentives to support complete neighborhoods

– In some cases, additional support may be needed to bring businesses or services into neighborhoods to cluster amenities in a walkable, transit-oriented area. Consider financing partnerships or incentives that can help offset costs of developing or bringing services to the neighborhood. Similar partnerships or joint financing strategies may also be needed to ensure affordable housing is developed in walkable, transit-oriented town centers.

KEY PARTNERS

- **City, town, and tribal governments in the region**
- **Regional organizations**, including BACTS and Eastern Maine Development Corporation
- **State organizations**, including MaineDOT
- **Public transportation providers**, such as the Community Connector and Penquis
- **Neighborhood constituents**, including businesses, organizations, and residents within the complete neighborhood areas
- **Community constituents** who depend on, or who could most benefit from, access to affordable public transit

Steps for Implementation

PHASE 1

Identifying Neighborhoods

Identify neighborhoods of focus – Select one or more neighborhoods to focus on for complete neighborhood efforts, and define the geographic boundaries. Small communities may choose one area (e.g., the town center or business corridor), whereas larger communities may choose a few neighborhoods to focus on. When a number of neighborhoods are a possibility, consider prioritizing neighborhoods with higher proportions of lower income residents, communities of color, or other priority populations. This process can also be iterative and repeated for more neighborhoods over time.

Co-define vision and goals – Host conversations with businesses, organizations, and residents within the neighborhood to discuss the concept of complete neighborhoods, and to collectively define opportunities, a vision, and goals for the process. This step could be conducted in tandem with identifying a neighborhood of focus to ensure community support.

PHASE 2

Complete Neighborhoods Assessment

Define assessment metrics – Identify a set of evaluation parameters to evaluate how well a neighborhood is meeting complete neighborhood goals; consider using a framework like the **TOD Standard** as a starting point, and adapting the set of evaluation parameters to best fit local needs. Consider working with a team of neighborhood constituents in the process of vetting and refining the evaluation metrics.

Assess strengths and gaps – Evaluate the neighborhood based on the complete neighborhood parameters,

Connections Across Existing Work and Other Climate Action Strategies

Bangor, Orono, Brewer, Hampden, and Old Town are currently participating in the **Village Partnership Initiative**. Under this program, each city/town has identified specific areas of their downtown for assessment, with a focus on features such as safety and traffic calming, active transportation networks, and reducing parking redundancy.

Phase two will involve implementing recommendations from the study, many of which will support complete neighborhood goals. Bangor has also been working to cluster residential zoning areas and transit routes, coordinate bus stops near new housing developments, and integrate mixed use development into commercial zoning areas. Both Bangor and Orono have been working to increase density and housing options in downtown areas.

Climate Action Toolkit #4, which focuses on working with local businesses and organizations to promote public transit and active transportation, will dovetail with the efforts to foster complete neighborhoods. It's also worth considering how community resilience hubs (Toolkit #9) could be a component of complete neighborhoods.

identifying both strengths and gaps. Consider working with a team of neighborhood constituents to conduct the evaluation together, and holding community conversations to discuss the findings with broader groups of neighborhood constituents.

PHASE 3

Ongoing Implementation of Interventions

Identify interventions – Identify and implement interventions to strengthen complete neighborhoods, which may include identifying changes to zoning (e.g., enabling mixed-use, higher density, parking reform, incentivizing or requiring proximity to transit for certain uses, etc.) as well as specific capital projects (e.g., complete street projects). It may also involve identifying business incentives or other approaches for bringing businesses or services into those areas to cluster amenities in a walkable, transit-oriented area. If neighborhoods aren't already on a bus route, work with Community Connector to explore options for bringing public transportation services to that area. Work with local community constituents to vet project ideas and to partner on projects as applicable.

Connect regionally – If conducting this process as a region, work together to map and discuss the network of identified neighborhoods as a region as a way to coordinate approaches and consider transportation connectivity between the neighborhoods.



Students on the way to school • Photo by Bicycle Coalition of Maine

PRECEDENTS

- **How Complete are our Neighborhoods?** - A GIS StoryMap of Portland, ME that talks through the concept of complete neighborhoods, and how the City is using GIS to assess complete neighborhoods.
- **Zoning for Great Neighborhoods** - A number of resources developed by the State of Vermont to support Vermont communities in developing walkable, complete neighborhoods.
- **Plan Forward** - Lincoln-Lancaster County (Nebraska) 2050 Comprehensive Plan, which breaks down many zoning and land use components to supporting complete neighborhoods.

RESOURCES TO GET STARTED

- **The TOD Standard** - The TOD Standard is a set of guidelines for transit-oriented development projects, developed by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy. While not all factors will apply, it could provide a useful set of metrics for assessing how well a neighborhood meets “complete neighborhood” goals.
- **LEED for Neighborhood Development (ND)** - The LEED for Neighborhood Development certification by the US Green Building Council (USGBC) outlines a set of metrics for developing more sustainable, well-connected neighborhoods.
- **Just Communities Protocol** - The Just Communities Protocol includes metrics, indicators, and a process for collaborating around neighborhood development to create just and sustainable neighborhoods.
- **Sustainable Development Code** - A resource that compiles example policies and land use codes from across the country. See “Chapter 4: Mobility and Transportation” for resources on complete streets, public transit, and bicycle and pedestrian mobility, and “Chapter 5: Community” for resources on housing affordability and housing diversity.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

- Depending on municipal capacity, the first few steps of this toolkit will likely be completed in-house; consultant costs to support the neighborhood assessment, policy review, and policy development may range from \$20k - \$150k, depending on scope.
- The upfront costs for the implementation of capital projects will be much more cost-intensive, but may dovetail with existing capital maintenance and/or be supported by State and Federal grant funding opportunities (below).

POTENTIAL SOURCES FOR FUNDING

- **MaineDOT Planning Partnership Initiative** - to conduct a planning process for identifying and investigating interventions for fostering complete neighborhoods; to plan projects towards complete neighborhoods
- **MaineDOT Village Partnership Initiative** - to plan / implement projects towards complete neighborhoods
- **Maine Housing Opportunity Program** - to support housing development, including municipal ordinance development, community housing planning services, and community housing implementation services
- **MaineDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program** - to implement projects towards complete neighborhoods
- **Community Development Block Grant Program** - to support a range of community projects, which may include infrastructure, housing, downtown revitalization to public facilities, and economic development
- **US DOT RAISE Grant Program** - to support surface transportation projects that advance safety, equity, economic development, and climate and sustainability goals
- **Funding earmarked for demonstration projects** (e.g., MaineDOT Pilot Project Initiatives, BACTS Safe Streets and Roads for All funding)