

A Guide to Reading Gouldsboro's New Comprehensive Plan

Bill Zoellick, September 2026

Gouldsboro developed its new 2025 Comprehensive Plan to guide the Town's growth and investments over the next decade. After five years of meetings and State review, the Plan is now in final form and ready for submission to voters. A meeting at the Town Office on Tuesday, September 15, at 6 PM will address residents' questions about the Plan. The Town will ask voters to approve the Plan's final submission to the State at a special town meeting at the Town Office on Thursday, September 24, at 5 PM. You can download the 2025 Comprehensive Plan from the [Town Website](#).

Reading the Plan from beginning to end is difficult. This *Guide* shows you how to develop a good understanding of what the Plan is recommending, and why, in about an hour.

Why a New Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan outlines a municipality's vision for its future and recommends policies and actions to achieve it. Gouldsboro adopted its most recent Comprehensive Plan in 2005. At the time, the sardine cannery in Prospect Harbor was still operating, and an average-income local household could afford to buy an average-priced house. Given the substantial changes over the past 20 years, the Town needed a more up-to-date picture of where it stood and what it could do to preserve what is valuable and essential to the Town and its residents while addressing new challenges.

About five years ago, a subcommittee of Gouldsboro's Planning Board began work on a new 2025 Comprehensive Plan to reflect current realities and challenges. Gouldsboro submitted the plan to the Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) in December 2025. After reviewing the draft, MOCA recommended a few changes to the Plan's structure, which are incorporated into the version now available on the [website](#).

Working With the Electronic Document

Before delving into the substance and structure of the Plan, here are two suggestions for working with this complex, seventeen-chapter document.

1. Do not try to read it online or on paper. [Download](#) it and work with it as an electronic file on your local device. This PDF (Adobe Acrobat) document includes electronic links that make navigation easy. For example, clicking any entry in the Table of Contents or any reference to a Map, Table, or Figure will take you there. (Unlike a web page, these links are not necessarily underlined or colored.)
2. Most PDF readers support opening a sidebar that displays a list of the main chapter headings and other document elements. This makes navigation much simpler. Different readers call this structured view of the document by different names (e.g., Bookmarks, Outline, Table of Contents), but learning how to open it will save you a lot of time and frustration.

Getting a Quick Understanding of Key Objectives and Issues

The Plan's recommendations aim to help Gouldsboro become the kind of community it seeks to be in ten years. So, the place to start is that vision: What are we aiming for? The ***Vision Statement***, which begins on p. 21, consists of only five paragraphs. However, the 242 pages that follow are, in a very real sense, all about identifying the geographical, natural, and social assets that support this vision, the challenges that put it at risk, and the steps Gouldsboro can take to realize it.

The next part of the Plan to review is the ***Executive Summary***, which provides a one-paragraph summary for each of the Plan's "issue-focused" chapters, covering topics such as "Housing", "Economy", "Water Resources", and so on. These paragraphs offer a snapshot of the current situation and a brief overview of the Plan's recommendations.

Next, jump to ***Chapter D: Housing***, which describes a problem that makes it difficult to support and sustain the "vibrant, sustainable, and connected community" identified in the first sentence of the Vision Statement. Teachers, nurses, first responders, tradespeople, and other working-age people and families that the Town needs to settle or stay here cannot afford to buy a house or find a place to rent.

After that, review ***Chapter J: Water Resources***, which explains that Gouldsboro's access to drinking water is adequate for the Town's housing and businesses as currently arranged, with each relying on a private well. However, the Town's geology and hydrology limit any development that requires substantial water flow rates and volume. For example, many locations in Town cannot support the flows and volume required for large apartment complexes or densely clustered housing.

Next, review ***Chapter N: Existing and Future Land Use***, which synthesizes information from Chapters D and J, along with other chapters, to examine what Gouldsboro might do to realize key elements of its Vision Statement, including housing that working people can afford, access to employment opportunities, and protection of its natural resources.

Finally, review any other chapters that align with your interests.

A Focus on Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The fourteen "issue-focused" chapters follow a similar structure. Each begins by summarizing key findings and issues, offering a brief overview of findings from the 2005 Plan, and summarizing public survey findings that informed the 2025 Plan. Each chapter then presents tables, maps, and other data and descriptions that outline the current state of the issue or resource.

Note that each chapter closes with a table that identifies the goals that should guide the Town's actions on the issue, along with recommended objectives, strategies the Town should pursue to achieve those objectives, the parties responsible for implementing the strategies, and recommended timelines. ***Reviewing the end-of-chapter table for each of the key chapters*** listed above, along with others aligned with your interests, will give you a clear sense of what the Plan suggests Gouldsboro should focus on over the coming years.