

Brewer Comprehensive Plan

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Brewer's Vision

The City of Brewer can capitalize on the economic opportunity made possible by its urban location and access to an excellent highway network, and at the same time maintain safe and quiet residential neighborhoods, high quality schools, river and neighborhood parks and paths, a friendly atmosphere, distinct rural and developed areas, and an affordable tax rate.

Based on this vision, the following goals will provide overall direction for the city's comprehensive plan, including the policies and implementation strategies relating to land use, public services, natural and cultural resources, economic development and taxes.

1. **Valued assets.** The City's primary goal is to retain, enhance and build upon the assets that residents and business people value most about Brewer. These include our:
 - a. high quality school system;
 - b. high quality municipal services;
 - c. safe, friendly, attractive, and quiet residential neighborhoods that are separate from our commercial areas;
 - d. attractive areas for business growth
 - e. attractive parks and variety of recreational opportunities;
 - f. convenient access to other locations in the region and Maine;
 - g. willingness to work with our municipal neighbors;
 - h. The Brewer Performing Arts Center; and
 - i. Penobscot River waterfront and corridor.

We also want to respect and promote our historic heritage, natural resources, and diverse housing opportunities.

2. **City government.** We want a nimble city government characterized by foresight, civility, leadership, and team work; guided by a long range vision and capital improvement plan; and capable of healthy self-evaluation and quick adjustments as conditions and needs change.
3. **Cost of government.** We are willing to pay for a high quality school system, better roads, a more attractive community, recreational facilities, pedestrian pathways, and other city services, but only in the framework of a relatively stable tax rate that grows only slowly and predictably, and depends upon an expanding, sustainable, and diverse tax base.
4. **Economy.** We want Brewer to be a place where an individual or corporation can start a business with relative ease, and expect it to thrive; and where workers have the skills to hold well-paying jobs and participate in the global economy. We recognize the importance of our local economy in providing jobs, services, and products to people in the city, region, and beyond. We want continued strong cooperation in helping businesses to locate, expand, and stay here, and expect in return support and respect for this community and its people, neighborhoods, regulations, infrastructure, and natural

environment. We want to encourage businesses to continue to invest in the community. We want Brewer to continue to have a diverse economy and be a major player in the region's economy.

5. **Community.** We want:
 - a. strong community identity, pride, and spirit characterized by cooperation and positive action;
 - b. active involvement in city affairs from many residents and businesses and from all neighborhoods;
 - c. a strong sense of a close knit community of caring; and
 - d. support for the children, elderly, and others in our community most in need.
6. **Centers of activity.** We recognize the importance of centers of activity in Brewer where people can shop, obtain services, and take advantage of recreational, social, cultural, governmental, and/or educational opportunities. We will strive to ensure these areas are well planned so they function effectively, and, to the extent possible, are connected to neighborhoods by pedestrian and bicycle paths and public transportation.
7. **Visual appearance.** We want private and public investment in the beautification of our city, especially at city entrances, in commercial-shopping areas, neighborhoods, and rural areas, and along the riverfront.
8. **Traffic and safety.** We envision streets that are safe for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists; and, in residential areas and centers of activity, traffic that is controlled, slow, quiet, and appropriate.
9. **Recreation.** We want ready access to parks, pathways, and other recreation areas from every neighborhood in the city and along the river front. We envision pathways linking all parts of our city and providing opportunities for people to exercise and enjoy the out-of-doors, especially along the riverfront and without interference from vehicular traffic.

History

Beginnings. Brewer, Maine, is the hometown of some very famous and important people. It is also the beginning of settler-life along the Penobscot River. From humble beginnings there arose an important and vibrant community that in the 1800's was one of the most important areas in the Northeast United States. Today, the spirit of our forefathers lives on in a City that is successful and energetic.

Well over two hundred years ago a young man, named John Brewer, left his home in Massachusetts and took a small sailing vessel along the coast of Maine to the Penobscot River and the present site of Brewer. He built a dam and sawmill at the mouth of the Segeunkedunk stream and built a small cabin for himself and his family. Other settlers came with him to form the beginnings of a township that would eventually incorporate the area of Brewer, Orrington and Holden. There were a couple of other settlers that had come the year before, but it was Brewer who built the first major colony.

John Brewer and the settlers had just begun to make their town when the Revolutionary War began. The British occupied the area north of the Penobscot River and built a fort at Castine in which to secure this land from the revolutionary colonists. Of course this was very disturbing to the settlers. John Brewer had become a captain in the militia and was the spokesman for the settlers with the British. When the colonists, who were now Americans, sent a large number of ships to take the fort at Castine, it was John Brewer who was able to give the fleet commander information that would have been beneficial to the American cause. Unfortunately the fleet commander did not follow the information and a British fleet intercepted and defeated the Americans. Some of the American ships that were destroyed are still in the waters off of Brewer and part of one has been recently uncovered.

With the defeat of the American fleet and their failure to take the fort, it was John Brewer who aided the wounded and saw to their safety. By then it was becoming increasingly dangerous for Brewer and he took his family back to Massachusetts for the duration of the war. Many other settlers did likewise, but some stayed in their homes and the settlement was maintained.

After the Revolutionary war, John Brewer and many other settlers returned to their homes. A group of them petitioned to have the area incorporated and the area became known as Orrington. It wouldn't be until 1812 that Brewer separated from Orrington and had its own government.

Business and Industry. During the 1800s, Brewer began to grow as a town. The skills of the inhabitants and the natural resources of the area allowed for the development of many important businesses. That combination of individual ability and available resources continues to this day. Until modern times, the river was the major "road" and since the Penobscot River is one of the largest and most powerful rivers in New England, it supported many businesses. Originally the streams emptying into the river allowed for dams which powered the mills; sawmills for creating lumber and grist mills for grinding corn and grains. Later the river itself would have dams, which created power plants, paper mills, and textile mills. Originally, however it was the small streams that were the power source. Also the river paved the way for log drives started in the great north woods and the use of these logs for lumber, shipbuilding and shingle making.

One of the major industries of the Brewer area in the 1800s was shipbuilding. These were the days of the great wooden ships and Brewer was the center for building some of the great wooden sailing ships in America. Great rafts of logs were driven down the river to Brewer, sawed into lumber or made into masts and other spars, then used in building ships in the great boatyards of Brewer. Even when most wooden ships were replaced by steel, Brewer produced some wonderful wooden steamboats. It was the time of lumber barons, famous captains, and the wealth of the area.

Another major industry was ice-harvesting. Very large ice houses were built along the Brewer shore to house the tremendous amounts of ice that could be obtained. During the winter, the river froze over and large blocks of ice were sawed from the river to be moved to the ice houses by ramps. Each company had a section to harvest. In the ice-house the blocks of ice were stored in sawdust to prevent melting until the next spring. Once the river was open, ships could load a cargo of ice blocks and transport them to large cities for ice-boxes. Penobscot River ice harvesting was a major source of refrigeration until the development of the electric refrigerator.

Brewer took advantage of its soil to develop a major industry. Much of the area is clay and clay makes bricks. There was a time when many brick companies produced a product that was shipped all over. It made good ballast for the sailing ships, so that captains could derive an extra source of income from their voyages. Brewer brick making continued well into the twentieth century.

With the decline of the wooden ships and the development of modern refrigeration, the fortunes of the area began to decline. The area which once rivaled Boston was fading. There were still small businesses and industries, but the boom times were over. But Brewer always was able to maintain itself in the world. Eastern Manufacturing produced paper from rags and later from wood pulp and that anchored the City for many years. Recently a new company, Cianbro, has taken over the former site of Eastern Manufacturing and produced metal modules for shipment anywhere in the world.

Famous People. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is a true American hero. He was born in 1828 in a small house that still exists along North Main Street. He grew up in a strong family that had both military and religious foundations. During the battle of Gettysburg, Chamberlain's bravery and daring secured the extreme flank of the union army and prevented the confederates from surrounding them. His action probably saved the battle and turned the tide of war. For his gallantry in many of the major battles of the war, he was brevetted to Major General and was chosen to receive the confederate surrender of arms at Appomattox. He was four times governor of the state of Maine and president of Bowdoin College. For years after his death he was all but forgotten. Then Michael Shaara wrote "the Killer Angels" which was the basis of the movie "Gettysburg" and Chamberlain was re-discovered. Today he is recognized as a man of extreme courage and morality. Brewer can be extremely proud of this hero.

Charles Eugene Tefft was born into a well-recognized Brewer family. He was a teen living in the family house on Center Street when he sculptured the bust of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. He then created a sculpture which came in second in national competition and he received a scholarship to an artisan school in New York. Tefft spent a career creating sculptures that are in major cities around the United States and was recognized as one of America's finest sculptors.

Adapted from Brewer website write-up prepared by David Hanna.

Education – Brewer School over the Years. By 1882, in a time before school buses, there were 11 schoolhouses in local neighborhoods, plus a free high school at the ferry village (its classes were held at the town hall, then later at the Brimmer Street School).

The advent of buses made it possible for schools to serve broader areas. By the 1960s, Brewer had six schools that served grammar school children; Capri Street School, Pendleton Street School, State Street School (1948), and Washington Street School (1952). There was also the Junior High School on Somerset Street (originally built as the high school in 1926), and the Brewer High School, built in 1958.

With all the schools aging, in 2011 a new school, built to replace all the K-8 schools, opened on the site of the former Pendleton Street School (which had closed due to a mold problem several years before). The new Brewer Community School was designed to echo the history of Brewer, with its various wings designed to reflect five themes: shipbuilding, the river, ice harvesting, brick-making, and papermaking. Hallways use colors and motifs to convey those themes, and historical photos adorn the walls throughout. In 2011, Brewer voters approved a referendum to accept \$5.4 million in interest-free federal funding to renovate the high school.