

Town of Casco

OPEN SPACE PLAN PROPOSAL

May 8, 2025



Submitted by:

GPCOG

GREATER PORTLAND
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

May 8, 2025

Anthony Ward
Town of Casco
635 Meadow Road
Casco, ME 04015

Mr. Ward:

The Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) is pleased to submit a proposal to the Town of Casco for a new open space plan. GPCOG staff are innovators, conveners, and mobilizers with a portfolio of work that spans all 25 communities within its membership. GPCOG's role as a Metropolitan Planning Organization and regional planning agency for Cumberland County affords it a depth of knowledge regarding transportation, housing, resilience, and economic prosperity.

For this project, GPCOG will assemble an experienced team with demonstrated success in mapping analysis, land use planning, and public engagement. The team is intent on ensuring the Town's updated open space plan reflects the collective voice of the people of Casco, and looks forward to working with its Open Space Commission. GPCOG's approach to planning embraces difficult tradeoffs and informed decision making. GPCOG understands that different viewpoints are valid, and that responsible local government charts a course among competing priorities.

GPCOG's experience in Casco acknowledges its wonderful character and tremendous potential. Past or existing projects include helping with Casco's 2024 comprehensive plan, developing a Vision Zero action plan (for 12 rural and island communities including Casco), analyzing Town-owned sites for housing potential, and supporting the current Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) priority-setting process.

GPCOG is committed to providing personal attention and quality of service to its clients while producing thoughtful and actionable work alongside local leadership and citizens. If you have any questions regarding this proposal, please feel free to contact me directly. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Paul Johnson, Director of Economic and Community Development

A photograph of a snowy forest path. The path is covered in white snow with dark tire tracks. The surrounding trees have green and yellow autumn foliage. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the path.

Table of Contents

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING	1
WHO WE ARE	2
OUR APPROACH	3
SCHEDULE OF WORK ...	4
COST ESTIMATE.....	4
PROPOSED PROJECT TEAM	5
COMPARABLE PROJECTS	6
OUR EXPERIENCE	7



PROJECT UNDERSTANDING

THE TOWN OF CASCO is seeking a clear, actionable plan to guide open space preservation, land stewardship, and community connections. GPCOG understands that Casco's proximity to Portland, its popularity as a seasonal Lakes Region town, and its reliance on natural resource-based industries all place growing pressure on the town's open spaces and recreation areas. These places are central to local jobs, quality of life, and climate resilience.

To develop a plan that meets these needs, our approach emphasizes close collaboration with the Open Space Commission and town staff, thorough review of existing plans and data, and inclusive, meaningful community engagement. The result will be a user-friendly plan grounded in local priorities, with clear steps for moving forward.

WHO WE ARE

The Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) is a regional planning agency that has served Greater Portland and the Lakes Region since 1969. Our work spans land use, housing, transportation, economic development, communications, and climate resiliency—all of which intersect with open space planning.

We bring deep regional knowledge and a strong track record of collaboration in Casco, including:

- Collaborative development of the town's Comprehensive Plan: supporting community engagement, drafting content, data analysis, mapping, and graphic design. (2023)
- Creation of a Vision Zero action plan for the 12 rural and island communities in the GPCOG region, including Casco. (2024)
- Analysis of Town-owned sites and Casco's land use ordinances to identify housing development potential. (2024)
- Support for the current Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) priority-setting process. (Ongoing)
- Facilitation of the Cumberland Oxford Lakes Area Broadband Initiative to expand fiber optic connections and provide high-speed internet to homes and businesses. (Ongoing)
- Application for a Federal Highway Administration "Safe Streets and Roads for All" grant to implement safety demonstration projects at several intersections in Casco. (Pending grant approval)

GPCOG knows Casco not just through plans and data, but by spending time in the community – attending Casco Days, engaging with residents, and taking part in meetings and local events. We bring both regional expertise and a grounded understanding of Casco's values to this work.



OUR APPROACH

START STRONG [DAY 1]

GPCOG will begin the process by meeting with the town's Open Space Commission to foster friendly and productive working relationships. This initial gathering will review the project's timeline and major initiatives to ensure a solid foundation for future work. Discussion of a guiding vision statement will help calibrate the new plan's tone and direction.

REVIEW EXISTING PLANS [MOS. 1-2]

While much has changed since the adoption of the last open space plan, it's important to acknowledge the effort put into it and leverage that effort to inform perspectives today. GPCOG will also glean key takeaways, goals, and policy suggestions from other documents like Casco's comprehensive plan. This will facilitate stronger understanding and better engagement with residents and stakeholders in Casco.

CONDUCT MAPPING & DATA ANALYSIS [MOS. 2-5]

Simultaneous with the review work, the GPCOG team will focus on inventory, mapping, and analysis. Creating up-to-date maps is an essential, time-consuming task. GPCOG will analyze data and identify opportunities while considering the policy and infrastructure recommendations from existing plans. As ideas and potential conclusions emerge, they'll be shared with the advisory committee.

COLLABORATE WITH THE COMMITTEE [MOS. 1-5]

As appointed representatives of the Casco community, the Open Space Commission will be GPCOG's sounding board and partner in crafting a new open space plan. Analysis of the existing plan will be used to examine the current moment. What does that plan suggest, and how successfully were those suggestions followed? Are they still relevant and supported? If so, are there new or better ways of achieving them? GPCOG will make sure that interpretation of data and mapping inventories align with the lived experiences of commission members,



What open space opportunities are most exciting to residents? Do they support town investment in them? These questions help clarify goals, priorities, and reasonable paths forward.

and will preview engagement materials and activities with them before public engagement begins.

ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY [MOS. 2-4]

Casco residents and stakeholders already know their community. The GPCOG project team will channel this expertise through two public meetings to identify challenges, opportunities, and other takeaways.

The first meeting will ask residences about open space improvements and conservation opportunities that excite them? Are they willing to see Town investment fund these priorities? What are their concerns? GPCOG will report that feedback to the advisory committee for reactions and insights. The second meeting will preview recommendations and debut the draft plan so that they can be adjusted as necessary for the final plan.

PREPARE THE PLAN [MOS. 3-6]

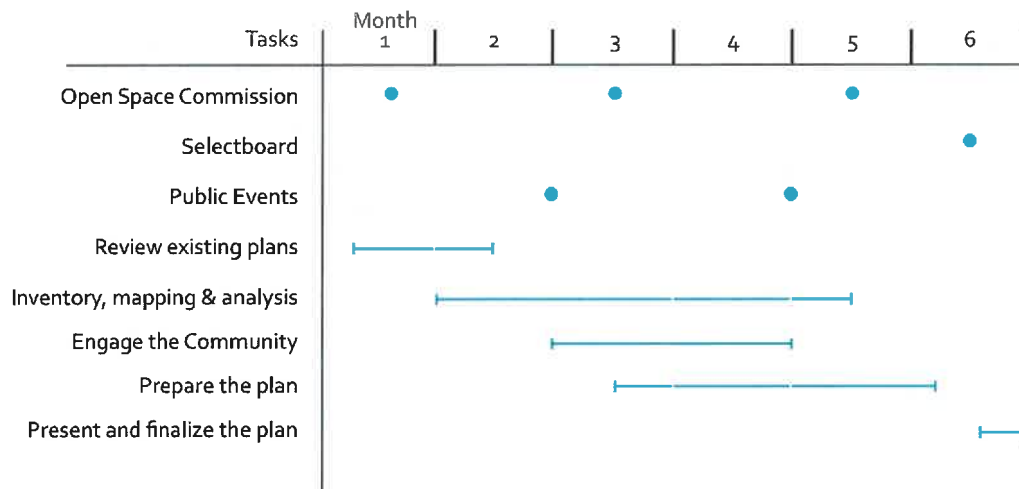
Once the project team understands residents' hopes for Casco, it will identify realistic strategies the Town can pursue in support of its residents' vision. The project team will develop graphically rich, easily understood, and action-oriented draft elements of the new plan for review by the advisory committee as they become available.

PRESENT & FINALIZE THE PLAN [MO. 6]

The project team will present the draft plan to the Selectboard, revising it based on their feedback.

SCHEDULE OF WORK

GPCOG proposes a six-month project schedule of overlapping phases under the oversight of the Open Space Commission. Early project work will be dedicated to studying the existing open space and other plans, and then reviewing, understanding, and collating appropriate data. The project team will assess the vision and goals supported by Casco residents through three open space commission meetings and two community meetings before presenting the final draft plan to the Selectboard. Each meeting is expected to be in person.



COST ESTIMATE

\$49,951

The vast majority of budget is allocated to staff cost, with potential staff listed under the Proposed Projected Team section. GPCOG anticipates a total estimated staff time of 590 hours at a cost of \$46,751. A remaining \$3,000 is set aside for direct expenses. The majority of these are intended to cover mileage and fund event costs such as displays, food, and beverage to facilitate successful, compelling public engagement. Together, all costs yield an expected project budget of \$49,751. Please note that printing of comprehensive plan materials is not included - this is anticipated to be paid for directly by the Town of Casco if physical copies are desired.

Personnel	Direct Expenses	Total Budget
Hours: 590	Supplies (meeting & office): \$200	\$49,951
Subtotal: \$46,751	Event Costs: \$1,500	
	Advertising: \$500	
	Mileage: \$1000	
	Subtotal: \$3,200	

PROPOSED PROJECT TEAM



Hazel Zhang, Data Analyst (Hourly Rate: \$59; estimated 175 hours)

Hazel collects, analyzes, and presents data to support decision-making across housing, transportation, economic development, and sustainability projects. She previously worked in roles focused on digital equity and affordable housing analysis. Hazel holds a Master of Urban Spatial Analytics from the University of Pennsylvania, a Bachelor of Architecture, and a dual degree in Finance from Beijing Jiaotong University in China.



Gretchen Anderson, Sustainability Program Coordinator (Hourly Rate: \$80; est. 125 hours)

Gretchen provides technical assistance on resource protection and resilience. She is experienced in project management, development, and regulatory compliance through her previous work as the Environmental Coordinator for the Town of Windham. Gretchen received her Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science from the University of Southern Maine in 2016.



Shukria Wiar, Senior Planner & Engagement Manager (Hourly Rate: \$100; est. 100 hours)

Shukria promotes sustainable growth while fostering connections with diverse communities. Shukria is passionate about creating inclusive spaces and empowering underrepresented populations. She has 20 years of expertise in municipal planning, project management, and community engagement. Shukria holds a Masters in Public Administration and BAs in Biology and Environmental Science from Clark University.



Rick Harbison AICP, Senior Planner & Data Manager (Hourly Rate: \$106; est. 100 hours)

Rick has led many local and regional planning projects from neighborhood master plans to long-range transportation plans. With expertise in GIS and graphic design Rick also oversees GPCOG's mapping and data services. As a certified drone pilot, Rick also incorporates beautiful photography and video into his work.



Lucy Sinclair, Data Analyst (Hourly Rate: \$59; est. 50 hours)

Lucy collects, analyzes, manages, and communicates about data for a variety of plans and projects to inform decisions about housing, transportation, economic development and sustainability. Lucy came to GPCOG as a Transportation and GIS Fellow through the Resilience Corps. Lucy holds a bachelor's degree from Vassar College in New York, where she double majored in Mathematics and French & Francophone Studies.



Maggie Johnson, Community Engagement Coordinator (Hourly Rate: \$71; est. 40 hours)

Maggie advances inclusion of historically underrepresented communities in planning and decision making. She manages and coordinates the Mobility For All programs, which engages a broad range of community members, organizations, and decision-makers in improving transportation access for people who experience barriers to services. She holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies and Economics from Oberlin College.

COMPARABLE PROJECTS

CONNECT 2045

Contracting Agency

Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS)

Contact

Pat Fox
PACTS Chair
patrick.fox@capelizabeth.org
207.799.1619

Services Provided

- Data collection & analysis
- GIS mapping
- Public engagement

This plan establishes a regional vision for transportation decisions and investments over 20 years. It identifies how the region can improve our network of roadways, transit services, and walking and biking facilities to meet present and future needs. Extensive public and stakeholder engagement shaped the approaches and recommendations.



HOUSING SITES DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

Contracting Agency

Town of Casco

Contact

Anthony Ward
Town Manager
award@cascomaine.org
207.627.4515 Ext. 201

Services Provided

- Land use ordinance analysis
- GIS mapping
- Development visualizations

GPCOG analyzed five sites for potential housing development via review of land use ordinances, calculation of net residential area, and mapping. GPCOG created visual representations of potential development based on its understanding of Town priorities and values.



CASCO COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Contracting Agency

Town of Casco

Contact

Anthony Ward
Town Manager
award@cascomaine.org
207.627.4515 Ext. 201

Services Provided

- Document design
- Public engagement
- GIS Mapping & analysis

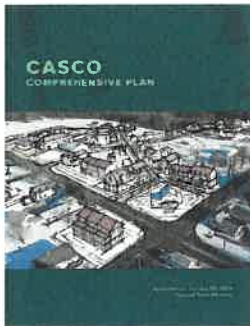
GPCOG staff collaborated with the Principle Group and the Town to facilitate community engagement, develop inventory chapters, and provide mapping and graphic design expertise for this ambitious 2024 plan (determined consistent with State requirements by the relevant reviewing agency).



OUR EXPERIENCE

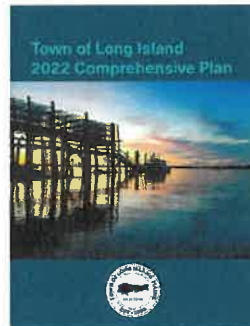
COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

GPCOG has led, partnered, or assisted with many comprehensive plans. While the core deliverable from each experience was a state-approved comprehensive plan supported by residents, for each process our involvement was tailored to meet the specific needs and budget of the individual community.



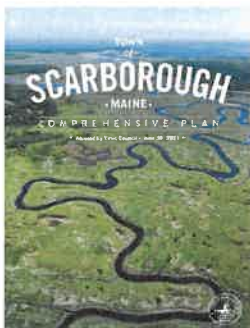
Casco Comprehensive Plan [2024]

GPCOG staff collaborated with the Principle Group and the Town to support community engagement, develop inventory chapters, and provide mapping and graphic design expertise for the plan.



Long Island Comprehensive Plan [2022]

GPCOG staff provided support to Town volunteers in facilitating community workshops and engagement activities, developing inventory chapters, and designing the final plan.



Scarborough Comprehensive Plan [2021]

GPCOG staff assisted Scarborough in developing inventory chapters and provided a final review of the plan.



Gray Comprehensive Plan [2020]

GPCOG staff assisted NorthStar Planning with developing inventory chapters and mapping and data analysis.

Our Experience (cont'd)

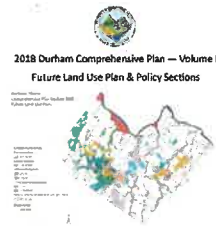
COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Town of Cape Elizabeth, Maine
2019 Comprehensive Plan



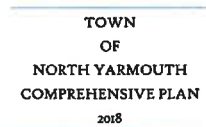
Cape Elizabeth Comprehensive Plan [2019]

GPCOG staff assisted Cape Elizabeth in developing the plan's inventory chapters and providing mapping and data analysis support.



Durham Comprehensive Plan [2018]

GPCOG staff led the development of Durham's comprehensive planning, guiding the entire planning process from initial visioning to final adoption and implementation.



North Yarmouth Comprehensive Plan [2018]

GPCOG staff assisted North Yarmouth in developing the plan's inventory chapters and providing mapping and data analysis support.

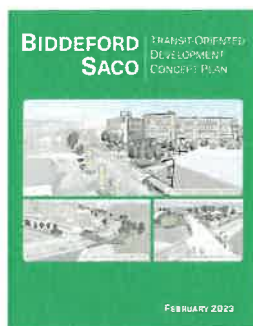


Portland Comprehensive Plan [2017]

GPCOG staff assisted Portland in developing inventory chapters and providing mapping and data analysis support.

Our Experience (cont'd)

COMMUNITY & REGIONAL PLANNING



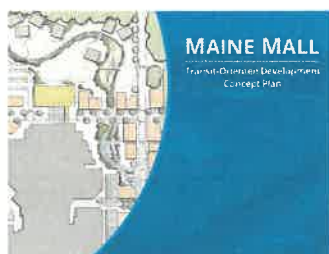
Biddeford Saco Transit-Oriented Development Concept Plan [2023]

This plan provides ideas and recommendations for how the Cities of Biddeford and Saco can create a more pedestrian-bicycle-friendly environment that supports the increased use of public transportation.



Connect 2045: A Long-Range Transportation Plan for the Greater Portland Region [2022]

Connect 2045 sets a bold, strategic direction for how the Greater Portland region can improve our network of roadways, transit services, and walking and biking facilities to meet our present and future needs.



Maine Mall Transit-Oriented Development Concept Plan [2020]

GPCOG worked with transit stakeholders, municipal staff, and the development community to create a vision for the Maine Mall area that identifies potential opportunities for increased density and mixed-use development that supports and encourages transit use. The plan was awarded the Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association (NNECAPA) Plan of the Year award in 2020 for “its overall quality, public participation, clarity of steps to implement and usefulness to others.”



South Portland West End Neighborhood Master Plan [2018]

Another winner of the NNECAPA Plan of the Year Award (2018), the South Portland West End Neighborhood Master Plan was another opportunity for GPCOG to create and implement a community-driven vision. The plan is notable for its approach in that it, “went beyond the traditional neighborhood plan and has been a driving force for real-time change, broad community empowerment, and enduring public and private partnerships.”