

2022

FEDERAL ISSUES PAPER

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March 2, 2021

Senator Susan Collins
413 Dirksen State Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Angus King
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Congresswoman Chellie Pingree
2162 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Jared Golden
1223 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Collins, Senator King, Congresswoman Pingree, and Congressman Golden,

On behalf of the Maine Municipal Association's Executive Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to discuss issues of municipal importance, as well as commend each of you for protecting residents during this relentless and ongoing pandemic. Your willingness and ability to work together during divisive times is a tribute to your commitment to the people of Maine.

Additionally, we greatly appreciate the time you have spent discussing issues with municipal officials, not only at the March event, but throughout the year. Our interactions with you and your staff are always constructive. As we discuss federal relations with our peers across the nation, we are reminded of the uniqueness and responsiveness of Maine's Congressional Delegation. We are grateful that you recognize us as valued partners.

This public health crisis has taught us that when we work together, we are stronger. Your support for state, county and municipal public safety and health programs, as well as for ensuring that Maine's medical care system receives the equipment, staff, and assistance necessary is vital to our collective physical, mental, and economic wellbeing.

It is with pride that the Association also recognizes the contributions of municipal government officials, who day in and day out, step up to the plate to deliver the services residents, visitors and businesses need to succeed. Over the last year, municipal government employees continued to illustrate that our work is important to Maine residents, who often rely on us as a trusted safety net. With local ingenuity our communities know we will resolve issues and address concerns. Our collective efforts ensure that Maine remains a special place that people are proud to call home.

Due to federal investments in infrastructure, affordable housing programs and economic development, Maine remains economically viable. The State's coffers will benefit from an \$820 million surplus, enabling investment in programs addressing beach erosion, sea-level rise, and our aging infrastructure. Although the long-term impacts associated with inflation, real estate market valuations, supply chain and labor force constraints are of concern, our short-term fiscal health is strong.

The robustness of the State's finances would not have been possible without your support for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Due to this investment, Governor Janet Mills and the Maine State Legislature will invest

\$920 million in much needed programs, including initiatives to weatherize homes, upgrade municipal culverts and treat drinking water.

By mid-December 2021, over \$120 million in ARPA funds were distributed to towns and cities. Through public hearings and forums municipal leaders are now exploring how this federal revenue will be invested in their communities.

At the top of the list is expanding broadband access throughout the state, increasing Maine's stock of affordable, workforce and senior housing, and making improvements necessary to address the adverse impacts of climate change. Considering both the enormity of these tasks and their regional impacts, municipal officials are also looking for ways to collaborate with county and state partners to implement programs that have far reaching and positive impacts. In addition, communities across the state have recognized the contributions of first responders and frontline employees by providing premium pay for guaranteeing that vital public services were delivered without a moment's disruption.

Municipal officials also appreciate your continued financial support of our "tried and true" federal programs.

Due to your advocacy, in 2021 Maine's Department of Transportation received \$300 million in both discretionary grants and federal formula funding. In addition to furthering significant investment in our transportation network, federal aid will reconstruct approximately 4.5 miles of Foxcroft Road in Houlton and make \$1.6 million of improvements to Broadway Street in Bangor.

Continued investment in the Community Development Block Grant funded \$16 million in housing, public facility, and public service improvements across the state. Your \$35 million investment in the LI-HEAP program will provide the funds necessary to aid over 44,000 households in heating their homes.

These are but a few examples of how your work benefits our communities.

However, 2021 presented municipal governments with significant challenges, primarily with respect to our workforce. Despite all efforts to attract qualified employees, there are too few law enforcement officers, EMS providers and other individuals to fill our vacancies. We ask that you continue to promote investment in the tools necessary to support our recruitment efforts, such as training, student loan forgiveness and no-interest mortgage programs.

While grateful for all that you have done, there is more work ahead. For this reason, we respectfully request your ongoing assistance in our efforts to build and retain our workforce, protect Maine's waterfront, and increase access to broadband.

Thank you for helping us keep Maine special, your support of local leaders, and the excellent work you do for the State's residents. I look forward to discussing our successes and challenges when we meet in March.

Warmly,

James Bennett
Biddeford City Manager
President, MMA Executive Committee

THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) OF 2021

“Piglet noticed that even though he had a very small heart, it could hold a rather large amount of gratitude.”
~~ A.A. Milne.

Municipalities have their federal delegation to thank for filling the year ahead with promise and potential. Senator Collins, Senator King, Congresswoman Pingree and Congressman Golden, thank you for all that you have and continue to do on behalf of the great state of Maine. Municipalities would not be in such a secure position without your commitment to the needs of local government. A special thanks also goes out to the staff of our federal delegation, who have been an immeasurable help to municipal officials with questions and concerns throughout the past year. Everyone has assisted to make 2021 the most positive experience possible.

Municipal leaders are grateful for the ARPA and the immense effort of Maine’s federal delegation to deliver \$240 million in local fiscal recovery funds to support towns and cities throughout the state. Already these funds are making a positive difference in the fight against COVID-19 and the negative impacts brought on by the pandemic.

Right now every community is busy putting these ARPA funds towards their most urgent needs by bringing needed hazard pay to frontline and essential workers, organizing vaccination and testing clinics, modifying public spaces and work sites for safe reopening, improving technology to remotely continue the important heritage of town meetings, and bringing assistance to the hardest hit households and businesses. The timely arrival of ARPA funds has allowed local governments to return, as much as possible, to a sense of normalcy. For this, all are deeply grateful.

The Final Rule addressed the initial limitations. The changes made between the Interim and the Final Rule are further proof that Maine’s Congressional Delegation advocates for its residents. The broadened guidelines in the final rule addressed every municipal concern with the interim rule.

Premium pay eligibility was expanded to capture all the invaluable municipal employees that worked through the pandemic. Additional water and sewer infrastructure projects like culvert repairs, dam rehabilitation, and residential wells were incorporated to match the types of infrastructure needs existing in Maine. Broadband investment opportunities were widened to appropriately advance deployment in underserved and unserved areas.

The final guidelines also clarified important areas of confusion, allowing municipal officials to feel more confident about their spending decisions. This is a significant benefit to municipalities because it allows them to explore creative options more comfortably for expending ARPA funds. Prior to this clarity, many municipal leaders felt paralyzed to make a spending decision that might unknowingly result in a claw-back from the Treasury. Thankfully, the gray area has been defined.

The biggest victory in the final rule is the new standard allowance for revenue loss. Without this change, Maine’s municipalities were largely excluded from accessing the most flexible category in ARPA. While having little to no real revenue loss bodes well for Maine’s perseverance and relative well-being throughout the pandemic, it previously felt as if the category was based on an inequitable set of standards for municipalities countrywide. With the changes included in the final rule, every municipality is provided an even-handed opportunity to address the general government service needs most personal to each community. The addition of the standard allowance is going to facilitate true transformational change in many municipalities.

State, county, local and private-sector partners are stepping up.

Municipalities are forging strong partnerships in every corner of the state. Encouragement from Washington D.C. for ARPA recipients to collaborate with these funds has been embraced in Maine.

Towns are banding together to share costs and split services. Counties are lending fiscal support through application processes, direct pass throughs to municipalities, and projects that promote local priorities. The state has launched numerous programs accessible to municipalities that will leverage even more financial support to accomplish developments with price tags above the local allotments.

These new partnerships are more than just opportunities to maximize return on ARPA funds. They will also serve as the foundation for lasting commitments between different levels of government and across the public and private sectors. Maine might look back at the American Rescue Plan Act as a turning point in collaborative planning.

Reporting is the last remaining unknown. To date, Maine's non-entitlement communities are still awaiting the final word on reporting and compliance. With the April reporting deadline looming, municipal officials are

hopeful the requirements will be manageable for communities with limited staff capacity and minimal experience managing federal funds.

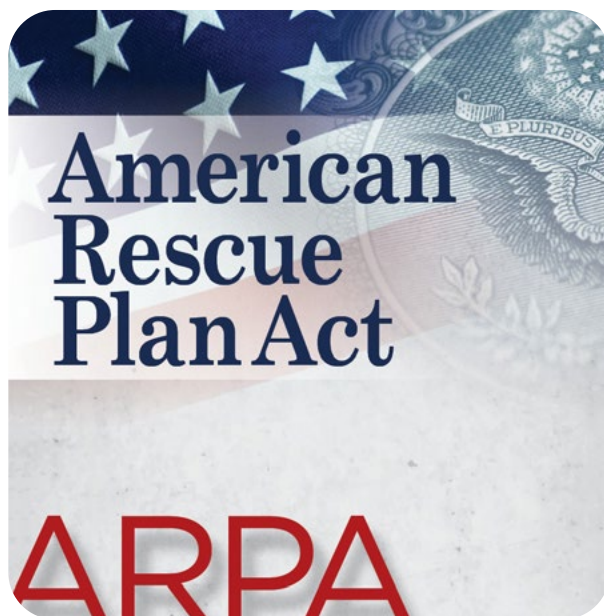
There are many municipalities that either never or infrequently manage federal grant dollars. This makes ARPA both a novel and anxiety-producing experience. The foremost thought for every municipal leader is appropriately spending these funds with robust justifications. Their immediate next thought is on reporting.

The level of ease and simplicity of the reporting requirements will determine two outcomes. First, the impact of municipal programs will be dependent on reporting flexibility. Straightforward reporting requirements will encourage municipal officials to reach for aspirational projects rather than low-hanging fruit.

Premium pay is an example of how clear guidelines expedited widespread utilization of this expenditure category. Municipal officials understood the purpose of premium pay, the method for disbursement, and what is required for reporting. As a result, a large portion of communities are leveraging their ARPA funds to provide premium pay to their deserving staff.

The second outcome from a simple reporting process will be to encourage Maine's municipalities to apply for and access future federal grants. It is a familiar sentiment that federal grants are overly complicated for small communities to access. The American Rescue Plan Act is an opportunity for the federal government to demonstrate the benefit and convenience of its grant programs. The result could be that more municipalities pursue federal funds in the future.

On behalf of all of Maine's municipalities, from Portland to Glenwood Plantation, thank you.



PROTECTING MAINE'S WATERFRONTS

*“What do they long for, as I long for one salt smell of the sea once more?”
~~ Edna St. Vincent Millay.*

The importance of Maine's vast shoreline and waterways to the tourism industry is well established, and like other shore rich states, Maine has long understood the importance of its waterfronts to generate economic wealth beyond scenic beauty.

In 1978, Maine adopted a long-term plan known as Maine's Three Port Strategy to invest, revitalize and protect the deep-water ports that provide key marine industry and transportation links. Even though strategic planning started 40 years ago, the challenges that these communities face cannot be addressed with state resources alone. It is vital that federal support and alternate ways of developing and protecting these assets is not viewed only through tourism or scenic lenses.

The focus on high-end housing and tourism that naturally flock to these areas is concerning, and the result is a shift from investment in marine construction, scientific research, fishing, and ship building to lower paid service jobs when working waterfronts are lost. However, when retained, working waterfronts add value that expands state and federal coffers through larger collection of payroll and sales tax revenue from these high-wage industries.

Tourists are visibly adding to the municipal struggle to balance the needs of those who recreate on Maine's shorefronts, while supporting both traditional and burgeoning high tech marine industries that help keep younger generations here and provide livable wages necessary to grow more resilient communities.

Part of the struggle to maintain working waterfronts is the invisibility of their biggest

challenges, and the property value that harbors contribute to the community when used for alternative high value real estate development. William Needelman, waterfront coordinator for the City of Portland, feels these unique and limited geographies are vital because they offer the few places “where boats can safely talk to the land.” Needelman adds, “Their challenges are largely invisible and hidden from the scenic view.”

For the past eight years, Needelman in collaboration with neighbors and stakeholders, have been waging the harbor's battle against time. Sedimentation in the harbor has not been addressed in almost 100 years, slowly making it harder for commercial boats to access the city's historic working waterfront. These challenges are exacerbated by the adverse impacts of climate change.

While high-end housing development and increases in private moorings will fill shallower spaces, these changes push employees in key water dependent industries further away from their workplace. The result is more robust investment in sea-level rise mitigation efforts focused on protecting valuable real estate rather than on “blue economies.” In Portland, this also impacts new migrant communities who make up nearly 40% of the marine workforce.

In response, Portland has engaged a coalition of unusual stakeholders including the City of South Portland, private landowners, the Friends of Casco Bay, fishing interests, the Portland Harbor Commission, and the Maine Department of Transportation to address the topic of dredging the harbor. The project, akin to repairing a leaky roof, will restore more than a quarter of commercial berths lost to sedimentation, repair environmental damage caused by historic industrial processes along the feeding tributaries that find their way to Casco Bay, and prepare the harbor for a long future of marine activity.

While sea level rise may seem like a benefit to this issue, it worsens the situation. Increased

storm activity stirs up or “re-suspends” sediments and forces the movement of vessels to avoid them.

Receiving the nation’s first submerged lands U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Brownfields Assessment Grant, the coalition carried out assessment work that the individual pier and dock owners were unable to do on their own. The EPA funds were leveraged by State revenues and allowed for testing the chemical and geophysical components of sediments, mapping existing bathymetry, establishing planned water depths to bring back lost berthing, estimating dredged sediment volumes, and planning for sediment disposal. Without that federal support, the prohibitively expensive task would not have been manageable. Ironically, private owners would be unlikely to secure funding from traditional lending institutions for the study, as sedimentation and diminishing berthing supply is seen as a risk factor for future value.

The study showed evidence of the harbor’s toxicity from historic industrial use, but also the incredible improvements in mitigation that Portland and the surrounding communities have accomplished through stormwater planning. “You can see where the Clean Water Act came into effect in the sediments.” Needelman says, “The removal of the legacy contaminants and disposal of that material in a confined aquatic disposal (CAD) cell location will improve the health of the harbor and prevent doing harm during its disposal.”

Due to prohibitive costs, land disposal is not feasible for small business owners that compromise most of the waterfront. Where on-site disposal has been used, contaminated sediments burden the receiving community -

often and usually a less affluent or more rural community. Storage in a CAD cell not only protects municipalities adjacent to the harbor but also other areas of Maine where land storage would be required.

However remaining idle is not an option, the clock is ticking.

While the city and the collaborative group has all the permits in hand necessary to move ahead with the project, in part because of the assistance of their state and federal partners, they were not successful in attempts to secure the additional grant necessary under the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) and Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) programs to build the CAD cell. The uniqueness of the project that led to the USEPA grant also makes it a challenge to fit neatly into a federal program.



Without the funds to move forward, the city is sitting on permits with approaching expiration dates and

must make some hard decisions while seeking alternate funding. “We need to know what the magic formula is to get our \$30 million project over the line. We are hoping the federal delegation will help us advocate for this project,” says Needelman.

Lubec was one of the communities able to secure a federal grant to improve their special place where fishing boats talk to the land. According to the project description, funds will be used to construct a boat launch, breakwater, and wharf to accommodate 35 boats and to create a protected mooring field and sheltered boat launch. The wharf improves the transportation infrastructure to the pier and provides two hoists to assist in getting

products off boats and to market safely and quickly.

Following the tragic death of five fishermen in 2009, the Town of Lubec sought the grant to “mitigate the inclement weather or winds coming from the north that have caused fishermen to die, boats to sink, loss of property, and many cases of hypothermia.”

The work of Maine’s Congressional Delegation and support for BUILD was instrumental in the grant being awarded to Lubec.

Such investments would be impossible for the local taxpayers to shoulder and without deeper support for water dependent infrastructure from a variety of stakeholders who reap the benefits of those industries, they will quickly be replaced by high-end housing out of the reach of most Mainers.

Maine’s fishing communities are grateful for the assistance in making our harbors safer and helping municipalities leverage federal resources to supplement their heavy local contributions.

The interconnection between harbors and water quality also benefits from the federal partnership to support infrastructure to address legacy contaminants and processes. These are lifts that cannot be met by states alone. As the Portland project has revealed, mitigating upstream challenges has measurable effects in sediments and ecosystems that further protect economic resources.

Maine’s cities and towns are grateful for the \$68 million investment in wastewater and drinking water programs that will help Maine’s most impacted communities and vulnerable citizens. These EPA funds will help towns replace lead pipes that pose a risk for contaminated water in schools and homes. Additionally, the funds will supplement state and local efforts to address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) that contaminated

residential wells in rural communities without public drinking water systems.

Fairfield, a community struggling under the burden of widespread PFAS contamination, has been seeking to expand public water along the Route 201 corridor which would include residents impacted by contamination of forever chemicals. However, the ways in which the community can pay for that \$40 million expansion includes loans, which may add burden to impacted taxpayers.

“One section at a time we can try to ensure that clean drinking water is available to everyone who needs it,” Michelle Flewelling, the Fairfield town manager said.

Federal support for wastewater and drinking water programs will move these efforts along rapidly and better protect the residents who did not create the problem and are least able to shoulder the cost of the solution. Fairfield is not the only community facing a private well contamination crisis that will require the costly expansion of public water infrastructure.

Industrial processes that led to these legacy issues are far more likely to impact older, rural, and impoverished areas of the state and reliance on local resources and utility rates would further exacerbate the disparities. Municipal officials thank the delegation for their support of the federal infrastructure package that will help them address these public health threats.

Officials hope the delegation will keep all the marine resources, legacy contaminants mitigation projects, and deep-water port communities in mind as they hear of new opportunities to leverage funds otherwise inaccessible to our rural state. These projects make vital improvements to protect citizens, maintain existing economies and create the conditions for future growth and innovation to happen close to home. Ultimately, federal investment in Maine’s communities will flow resources back to federal coffers.

MAINE MAINSTAYS: Curating the tourist destinations communities desire.

“I would really rather feel bad in Maine than good anywhere else.” ~E.B. White.

Keeping Maine a thriving tourist mecca requires protecting the core attributes that contribute to its brand without hampering local aspirations. For this to occur, local governments should be encouraged to take the reins of tourism industry planning and spending.

Tourism is back and initial reports of Maine’s tourism industry indicate 2021 totals may even surpass pre-pandemic visitation and spending. This is great news for a state where nearly one fifth of the workforce is employed in tourism related businesses.

To achieve this rebound the state marketed itself as a safe tourism destination amid the pandemic and enticed residents to “rediscover Maine.” Businesses pivoted operations to prioritize customer and employee safety and Maine’s federal delegation was instrumental in securing \$11 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to go towards the tourism and recreation economy. Additional federal support of national parks will reap benefits in Maine, where Acadia National Park generates about \$500 million in economic output annually and indirectly supports over 5,000 jobs in the region.

Local governments were also instrumental to the tourism rebound, and more broadly, to the overall success of the tourism and recreation industry.

The role of local government in tourism is easily overlooked, yet their influence contributes to the experience of every visitor. It is helpful to visualize the typical traveler coming to Maine

in order to understand the role municipalities play in the tourism industry.

In October 2021, the Maine Office of Tourism (MOT) presented a summary of summer tourism. According to MOT, the vast majority of visitors drive to Maine to relax and unwind, and one in three visitors have travelled here at least ten times. While in Maine, three in five visitors travel to other regions within the state beyond their primary destination, and the most cited top activity is food, beverage, or culinary experiences. These attributes indicate that travelers are familiar with the communities they are visiting, coming back to favorite places year after year. They drive through Main Streets and visit downtown centers. Tourists are here to experience the Maine lifestyle, something local governments are keenly aware of and striving to promote.

The attraction of Belfast in July compared to Bethel in January is clear, and both communities have worked hard to generate their tourist appeal. State and federal level action will lift all communities in Maine, however only local government can add the distinctive flair that uniquely exists in that municipality. Coastal communities might focus on preserving working waterfronts to foster an aesthetic that draws sightseers and epicures. The boat tours, lighthouses, and lobster shacks that draw visitors in droves to places like Belfast would have no such benefit in a mountain community like Bethel.

Efforts to mitigate impacts of climate change on tourism at the state and federal levels are necessary, but again, local governments should be encouraged to participate. Climate change is already influencing decision-making and outcomes in every municipality, although not in identical manners.

Shortening winter seasons highlight the dichotomy climate change is having on the tourism industry around Maine. Fewer days of snow has pushed ski towns and snowmobile

hubs to reinvent themselves with a spring, summer, and fall tourist draw. Meanwhile a longer summer brings more people to areas offering boating, fishing, shopping, or dining. It is not just the length of seasons that municipalities are adapting to, but numerous climate change impacts such as increased flooding risk, spread of invasive species like milfoil and browntail moths, or depletion of marine resources.

In the same manner that each of Maine's municipalities is distinctive, so too are the ways climate change will threaten the vitality of their tourist appeal. Local governments are closest to these threats, and programs, funding, and policies should facilitate their participation in the process of safeguarding the aspects of the tourism industry they desire to be preserved or expanded.

The local government model of curating a tourist appeal is not new, however now is the time to expand local action.

Cruise ships and national parks illustrate the need for local involvement in Maine's tourism industry. The mass of visitors that cruise ships bring each year is accepted as a welcome addition to Maine's economy and reputation, likely converting first-time tourists to repeat visitors. However, some municipalities have had to contend with excess crowds and stress on municipal services and infrastructure, sometimes to the displeasure of non-cruise line tourists. At least one Maine community is strongly considering limiting the number of cruise ship arrivals in 2023.

Acadia, as noted earlier, brings enormous benefits to its surrounding communities, and while the park is a jewel within Maine it is not the only gem to be sought. Ecotourism and outdoor recreation are domi-

nant aspects to Maine's tourism industry and can be readily promoted in communities. One reason to diversify Maine's natural and scenic destinations is to avoid overuse of fragile and delicate ecosystems. Rather than loving our national parks to death, we should spread the love to other federal, state, and local spaces. Drawing visitors to other natural destinations will also thin the crowds at popular sites, making the experience more enjoyable for all visitors. Local parks complement the tourist and recreation industry, providing extra draw to tip the scale. Maine's state and local parks are eager for the added interest too.

For a second consecutive year state parks attracted a record number of visitors in 2021 and while data is not available at a municipal level, all signs indicate that community parks and local public spaces experienced a similar uptick in usage. Conversations surrounding planning for ARPA funds reveal most municipal officials contend there was a dramatic increase in park usage in 2021, in part from residents looking for safe recreation opportunities and in part from visiting tourists seeking the same.

In order to maximize the industry's rebound, the next year is ripe for investment into Maine's local tourist destinations. Communities are reimagining themselves as a four-season destination by preserving land in trusts and open-

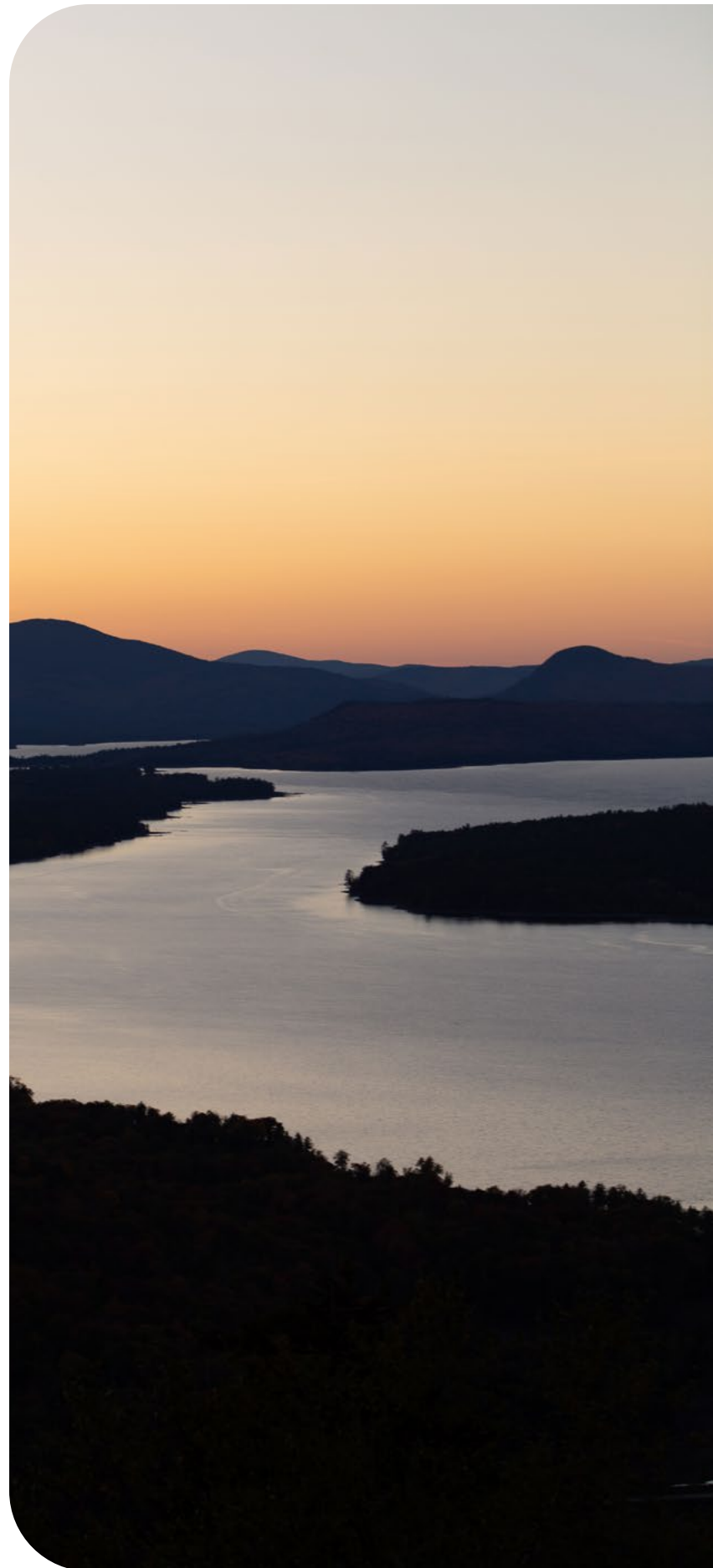


ing new public spaces. Mountain biking is one such activity that has gained a foothold in the state and with additional support could establish Maine as one of the sport's top destinations. Local spending on parks and recreation will similarly attract new residents, who also enjoy recreating the Maine way.

The ARPA funds awarded to state and local governments will benefit the tourism industry as a whole, but not equally across the state. Most municipalities have these ARPA funds earmarked for urgent priorities for the public health response and to address negative economic impacts. This means struggling parks and recreation departments might be forced to limp along with skeleton funding, while new initiatives or attractions remain unfunded.

Pockets of improved and expanded tourism will be created with these ARPA funds, often as local matching dollars to a larger funding source. Skowhegan's Run of River project demonstrates the success communities can have developing the local flavor of tourism that residents want to see in their towns. Skowhegan is thankful for the enabling financial support secured by its federal delegation, but the project would not have gotten off the ground without local support. Skowhegan is contributing over \$800,000 of its ARPA funds as a local match for the project.

As part of the \$11 million in funding secured for MOT, a portion will be used to support local leadership in rural counties to shape the future of tourism and outdoor recreation in their communities. The state recognizes that local leaders are closest to the attributes that set their communities apart and know best which qualities to capitalize on that both draws the type of tourists it desires and fulfills the needs of residents.



DIVIDING COMMUNITIES: Long Lasting Ramifications of the Pandemic

“For many years we have enjoyed the luxury of crossing the border with ease, right or wrong, this has become an expected way of life for everyone on both sides of the border.” ~~ Michael Ellis

While Maine's tourism industry is rebounding, for the 15 organized communities sharing the international border with the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick and Quebec, the recovery is slow. These communities, once reliant on the free travel between the two countries for tourism, work, and economic development, struggle as pandemic related restrictions continue to impede travel.

According to Michael Ellis, Calais City Manager, the economic and social impact to the community has been monumental. The closure of the border dividing the city from St. Stephen, New Brunswick caused some businesses in the community to experience significant revenue losses, in some cases hitting the 80% mark. According to Ellis, the impacts spared no one, as several businesses in the city's downtown closed, including restaurants, hair salons, a clothing store, and unsurprisingly the community's currency exchange facility. However, Ellis notes that the tide is changing, as some of those businesses have reopened under new ownership or management.

In addition to the economic impacts, the border closing has had a more concerning effect on the residents in both countries. “The social impact to our community has been even greater,” Ellis stated. The inability to connect with family and loved ones during challenging times cannot be overstated.

In a plea for compassion, Ellis noted “if you've never been a member of a border community, it may be difficult to understand the tremendous mental health impacts the pandemic has

had on residents who have missed weddings, funerals, graduations, birthdays, important milestone celebrations, or even the fundamental right to visit a loved one in need.”

The city manager's one request of the Congressional Delegation is that “they continue to consider the mental health of those being cut-off from their friends and family, as well as the overall health and well-being of those on both sides of the border.”

To that end, municipal leaders appreciate the delegation's work and advocacy for a return to normalcy, not only for economic development reasons, but for the sake of families divided by a border, impacted first by the closure and still today by the limitations placed on travel.

Accessibility and Affordability Drive the Need for Continued Broadband Investment

“High speed internet is as fundamental as electricity, heat, and water. It is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity. We need to have affordable, high-speed internet throughout our state, and with willpower we will get there.” ~~ Governor Janet T. Mills.

The market failure to provide affordable broadband to all Mainers cannot be corrected town by town and Maine deserves better than a patchwork of municipalities with adequate service. With unifying federal policy Maine can close the divide between communities with affordable reliable broadband and those without.

The federal delegation's dogged work in Washington D.C. over the last year is bringing improved or new broadband access to tens of thousands of Mainers. The American Rescue Plan Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provide historic amounts

of funding for broadband deployment and infrastructure. This legislation marks a turning point for Maine's connectivity future.

ARPA sent a monumental \$129 million in broadband funding to Maine, and it is possible the IIJA will bring a similar amount. Many have noted however, this is just a down-payment on broadband in Maine since the state's projected unmet need is much larger.

Maine is forced to expend much of these funds to play catch-up. By such standards as wired-broadband coverage and average download speeds, Maine ranks in the bottom quartile of all states. Independent researcher BroadbandNow ranks Maine 43 in state broadband access, while U.S. News and World Report puts Maine even lower. Widespread coverage gaps, hefty last-mile connection costs, and outdated infrastructure all need to be addressed before Maine can achieve national parity.

Maine's comparative lack of affordable internet also complicates the matter as it creates dueling priorities, expanding coverage to unserved and underserved areas while increasing access and equity.

The City of Lewiston demonstrates the too frequent quandary of accessible, yet unaffordable, broadband in Maine. Lincoln Jeffers, Lewiston's Economic and Community Development Director, explained that access is not

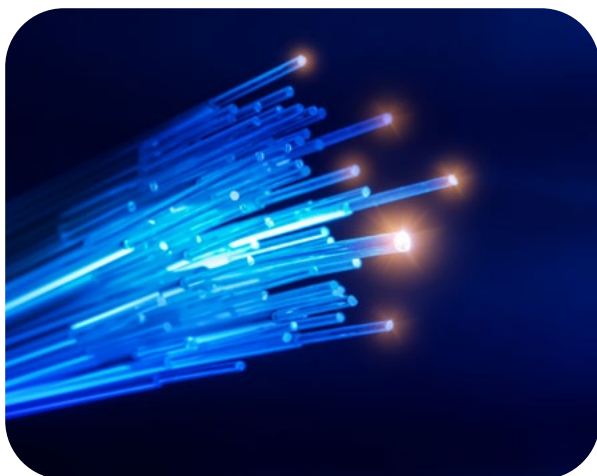
the only issue, "There are already five providers in the downtown, the network is there." Jeffers continued, "The bigger issue for us is the affordability... The tenants can't afford it." While Lewiston is a Community Development Block Grant recipient, restrictions prevent these federal funds from being used to subsidize broadband rates. Jeffers is worried that without subsidies or tax credit considerations, communities like Lewiston will be "forced to build its own network," which he feels is redundant where infrastructure already exists.

In Lewiston, the average entry-level broadband plan starts at \$42 per month. Although the FCC sets a bottom standard for download speeds of 25 mbps, it is commonly accepted that residents dependent on broadband for work, education and healthcare require much faster speeds. In practicality, broadband plans fast enough to meet daily needs are closer to \$100 per month.

Achieving reliably fast and affordable internet is not just essential for current Mainers, but also vital to attracting new residents that rely on broadband for commerce, employment, education, medical services, and communication. To meet the needs of residents today and to attract new Mainer's tomorrow, municipalities are deep in conversation with state agencies, internet service providers, and contractors.

The conversations are not quick or easy and success has been piecemeal. Some communities scraped together bonds, grants, and property-tax revenue to fund various broadband initiatives. At least two municipalities are applying the entirety of their ARPA allocations to broadband deployment.

Communities have undertaken studies, contracted providers, created affordability programs, and built physical networks. Progress could be improved with access to grant programs with local match opportunities, low-interest bonds, and technical planning supports. The federal government's continued support is vital to affordable broadband deployment.



IN CONCLUSION:

Local leaders are thankful for all the Congressional Delegation has done for the people of Maine. The support for ARPA, as well as continued investment in housing, home heating and weatherization programs, economic development programs, and broadband and transportation infrastructure are vital to the state's wellbeing.

However, Maine continues to struggle with the following critical issues that fall short of the federal radar.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

According to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the amount of waste each person generates increased from 1,140 pounds in 2014 to 1,256 pounds in 2019. Although the numbers are not yet available, the exponential increase in on-line shopping during the pandemic will only worsen the problem. Although Maine has a recycling rate goal of 50%, the average is 37%. Most troubling is it costs \$77 per ton to dispose of solid waste and \$130 per ton to recycle. Municipalities are running out of options, and the property taxpayers who fund the lion's share of these expenses cannot absorb additional burdens. Support for the implementation of a national product stewardship program incentivizing the use of less packaging will help mitigate the volume and costs of waste disposal.

PTSD

Municipal officials also urge support for programs enabling first responders to access treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The pressure providing public safety services places on employees, the trauma associated with responding to situations when people are at their most vulnerable, and the stigma associated with asking for help, (are just a few) of the reasons impacting the ability to recruit public safety officials.

PFAS

Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have been discovered throughout the state's water table, in organic foods, cow's milk and even local venison harvests. Broadly speaking, municipal officials support phasing-out products and activities that exacerbate the PFAS predicament, increasing wastewater, groundwater, and drinking water testing, and remediating sites once identified as contaminated. The problem however is that municipalities cannot do this alone. According to the Department of Environmental Protection, the state must commit \$20 million annually to tackle the problem of forever chemicals. This only addresses the issues of testing, remediation, and landowner compensation. More resources will be needed to reinvent how municipal facilities handle, process, and dispose of PFAS containing products and byproducts.

OPIOID CRISIS

Communities struggle daily with the impacts of the opioid crisis. According to the Office of the Attorney General, 504 Maine residents died from drug overdoses in 2020. That record, according to the University of Maine's Rural Drug and Alcohol Research Program, was shattered in 2021 at 636, a 23% increase. Access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment programs is needed in all areas of the state, as is the implementation of standards for the safe disposal of used needles that unfortunately litter public areas, putting at risk the municipal employees left to collect the waste.



OUR MISSION

The mission of the Maine Municipal Association is to support excellence in Maine's municipalities by providing important services and advocating for their common interests.

OUR CORE BELIEFS

Local Governance

We believe that local government is the foundation of a strong democracy and is fundamental to the provision of essential services that promote the safety, health and well-being of residents and communities.

Leadership

We believe in the accessibility and accountability of municipal officials, with a commitment to honesty, civility, integrity, and the highest ethical standards. Municipal Officials are entrusted to develop cohesiveness and build strong future-driven communities.

Collaboration

We value and support opportunities for collaboration and partnerships among municipalities, public organizations, and private entities.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

We respect the uniqueness of each municipality and the diversity within the community. We are dedicated to ensuring that all individuals are treated equally, respectfully, and fairly.

Fiscal Integrity

We believe in financial accountability, transparency, and responsible management of resources are essential for MMA and its member municipalities.

Excellence in Service

We believe in listening to and supporting member municipalities to ensure that their priorities, needs, and educational requirements are met through services and programs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT
begins with **YOU**