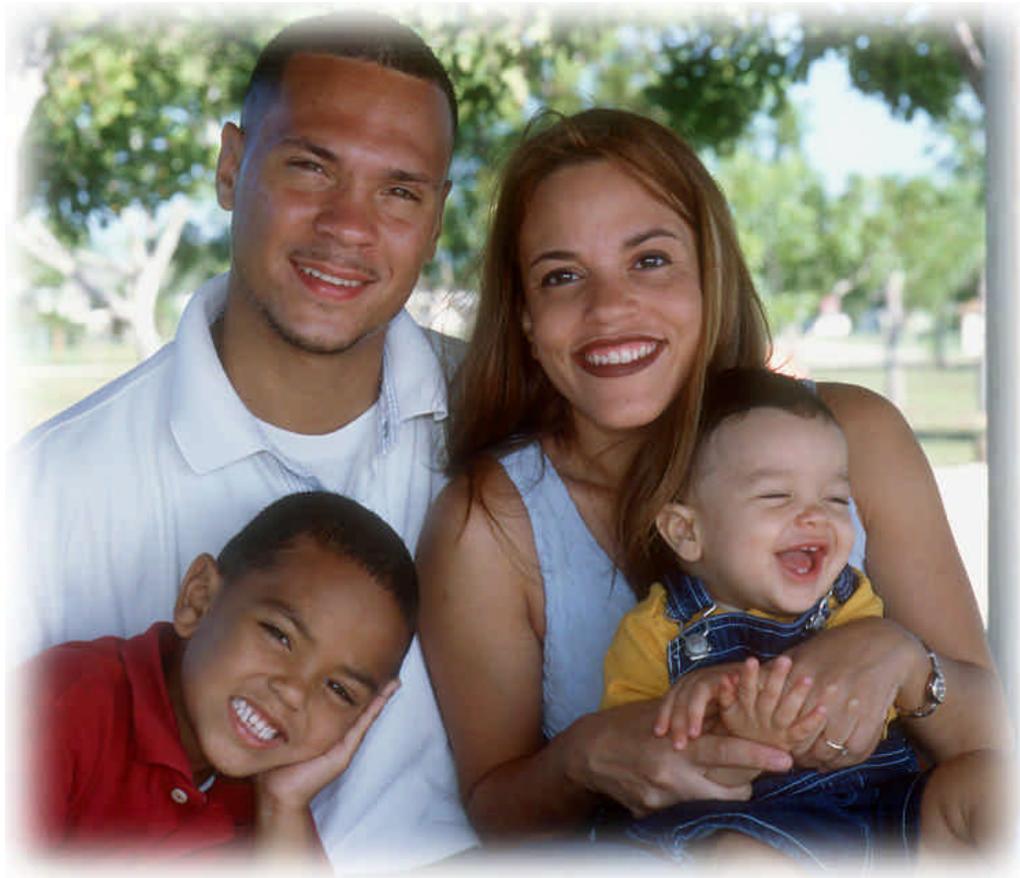


# CHARTING A COURSE FOR SOUTHERN MAINE

## *A Study Circle Guide on Homes, Housing, Growth, and Development*



*Produced by*

**The Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland**



**The Office  
of Public  
Affairs**

**&**



**Catholic  
Charities  
Maine**

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## Table of Contents

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Introduction: Housing, growth, and development in Maine	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The current situation</li><li>• What are the assumptions behind study circles on this issue?</li><li>• What are study circles, and how are they used?</li><li>• What's in this guide?</li></ul>	
Session 1 – Taking stock of what we think	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introductions</li><li>• Setting the ground rules</li><li>• Why should we be concerned about these issues?</li></ul>	
Session 2 – What values should guide us?	11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Terms to discuss and define</li><li>• A range of views</li></ul>	
Session 3 – What are our options for addressing these issues?	14
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A range of approaches</li></ul>	
Session 4 – From talk to action: What can we do to make a difference?	17
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking about ways to make a difference</li><li>• Setting priorities for the action forum</li><li>• Working on an action idea as a group</li></ul>	

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## *Introduction: Housing, growth, and development in Southern Maine*

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Southern Maine has experienced dramatic changes over the last few years. They are evident whenever you take a quick glance at the newspaper or a quick drive on Route 1. In terms of housing costs, York and Cumberland Counties are now both among the top ten most expensive counties in the country – and they are the only two in the top ten which are not in California.

Different people are concerned about these changes for different reasons. One fear is that the high cost of housing is having a terrible effect on low-income families and other vulnerable members of our communities. Another concern is that these costs are having a negative effect on the regional economy. Some people worry most about the effects of growth and sprawl on the environment and our quality of life. Others worry more about the effects of any attempts to make housing more obtainable, including the loss of local control, the specter of higher taxes, and the possibility that housing subsidies can make the situation worse rather than better.

Whatever you think about these issues, there is no time like the present to learn more about the situation, make your voice heard, and take action to make things better. This study circle program is intended to give you all of those opportunities.

In other communities where citizens have taken part in study circles, the people involved were able to find answers and take action on many different levels. Across the country, study circles are being held on a wide variety of issues, allowing neighborhoods and communities to build trust, make decisions, and take collaborative action.

### *What are study circles, and how are they used?*

A study circle is a group of 8-12 people from different backgrounds and viewpoints who meet several times to talk about an issue. In a study circle, everyone has an equal voice, and people try to understand each other's views. They do not have to agree with each other. The idea is to share concerns and look for ways to make things better. A facilitator helps the group focus on different views and makes sure the discussion goes well. This person is not an expert on the issue.

In over 160 communities over the last eight years, local organizers have been able to involve large numbers of people – hundreds and sometimes thousands – in study circles on the same issue at the same time. Study circle programs need the support of key groups and leaders in town. The circles help people from many backgrounds form new

#### *Study circles for this program will:*

- meet four times;
- use this booklet as a guide;
- talk about this issue in fair and honest ways;
- try to find common ground;
- come together as a whole community at the end; and
- find ways to take action.

networks in order to work together. They see common ground and want to take action for themselves, in small groups, as voters, or as part of a larger effort.

### *What are the assumptions behind these study circles?*

1. People come into the study circles ready to learn from each other.
2. Everyone is equally important.
3. People are looking for ways to build trust and respect.
4. This is about more than just talk. These discussions can lead to problem solving and action by individuals, groups, and the whole community.
5. When people join study circles they begin to own the issues. They stop thinking that “it’s someone else’s fault,” or “those people should solve the problems.”
6. People in study circles will have different ways of talking and seeing the world. It is important for people to learn to talk with and listen to each other, in spite of differences in cultural background, education level, or income.

### *What has happened in other communities as a result of programs like this one?*

Over 450 citizens have been involved in the “Decatur Roundtables” in **Decatur, Georgia**, a community next to Atlanta. The input gained in the circles was used to create the framework for a new city-wide strategic plan; many participants then got involved in teams to flesh out aspects of the plan, which can be viewed at [www.decaturga.gov](http://www.decaturga.gov). One of the challenges voiced in the program was the plight of older African-American residents in Decatur, who are finding it harder to stay in their homes as property values – and taxes – continue to rise. Accordingly, one outcome of the project was increased awareness of tax abatement opportunities for senior citizens. Other results include: the reorganization of City Hall to create a new Neighborhoods Liaison, the creation of the



Decatur Neighborhoods Alliance, and a civic affairs class called Decatur 101, being run by the city with help from roundtable participants. In March 2001, the Roundtables project was named one of six “best practices” in local government excellence by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

Following a study circle program on growth in **Clermont County, Ohio**, outside of Cincinnati, one township created an interim land-use plan and updated its zoning ordinances. Another township hired a consultant to begin its first look at land-use planning. Trustees from several townships are benefiting from relationships formed in the circles and are working together more effectively on everything from sharing services and information about vendors, to cooperating on road-paving projects.

In rural **Kuna, Idaho**, over two hundred people have been involved in “Keeping a Quality Kuna,” a study circle program that focuses on a range of issues facing the community. Some of the earliest outcomes ranged from the political (the passage of a school bond issue that citizens discussed in the circles and subsequently campaigned for) to the social (a “senior prom,” organized by high school students, which brought young

people and senior citizens together for a formal dance at the senior center). In 2000, local organizers began working with the Kuna city government on a series of events designed to incorporate citizen voices into the city's decision making process. They pioneered a new format that combines informational forums with study circles. Their subsequent citizen involvement efforts have used this approach, which has helped the community come to agreement on controversial questions in areas such as disaster preparedness, school funding, and city hiring. Kuna's process has helped the community make decisions about downtown development and helped get citizens and government working together on the new "Birds of Prey Area," an initiative to attract tourism and protect the stunning scenery of the nearby Snake River gorge.

**Guilderland, New York**, is a suburban community of about 33,000 residents located west of Albany. In 1999, the town faced dual challenges: the proposed expansion of a large mall, and the need to update the town's 1969 master plan. With the backing of the town's Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board, a small group of citizens organized community-wide study circles, involving 96 participants. All eight study circles included people from three different zones in the town. Organizers compiled notes taken in the circles into a report for the community, and planners incorporated many of the participants' suggestions into a proposed new comprehensive plan, adopted by the town in the fall of 2001. Guilderland Study Circles (GSC) has since been incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, and recently received the annual Award of Merit from the Guilderland Chamber of Commerce.

On the Southwest side of **Delray Beach, Florida**, a study circle program organized by a local chapter of MAD DADS has involved over 100 neighborhood residents – and started a wave of citizen action. Participants have organized a parent support group, started a youth basketball team, organized two prayer vigils to protest drug activity in the area, and launched a voter registration drive. Study circle participants are now working with city officials on a redevelopment plan for the city's main commercial thoroughfare. Finally, one circle developed a plan to rehabilitate a set of 10-12 houses in Delray Beach. Local residents with roofing, painting, and construction skills are now donating their time to the rehab effort, called "Maintaining the Village." The project has received materials from a local hardware store and a grant from the city.



### *The role of the facilitator*

In a study circle, the facilitator:

- Helps the discussion move forward.
- Helps the group set its own ground rules.
- Does not have to be an expert on the issue.
- Helps the group look at the issue from many points of view.
- Helps the group talk respectfully and productively.
- Does not join the conversation or offer an opinion.

### *What's in this guide?*

This guide is intended to help you organize your study circle. It is not a curriculum: the group does not have to cover every question or section, or use them in the order that they appear. Think of the guide as a tool, and use as you see fit.

In Session 1, you will:

- Get to know each other.
- Agree on how the study circle will be run.
- Share your concerns and experiences on these issues.

In Session 2, you will:

- Define some key terms.
- Talk about what values should guide your decisions on these issues.

In Session 3, you will:

- Compare different approaches for making progress on these issues.

In Session 4, you will:

- Brainstorm and prioritize your action ideas.
- Think about how you might implement an action idea.
- Wrap up the study circle.

## ***Session 1 – Taking stock of what we think***

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Most of our opinions about politics and policies are based on what happens to us in our daily lives – both our current situations and our past experiences. This session provides an opportunity to share our backgrounds, stories, and ideas relating to housing and growth. It should lay the foundation for the rest of the study circle, and set the tone for open, thoughtful discussion.

### ***Part 1 – Introductions***

(40 minutes)

1. Introduce and describe yourself to the group. Tell the group a little about where you grew up, and the home(s) you grew up in.
2. Where do you live now? How long have you lived there, and what do you like most about it?
3. How did you come to live where you live now?
4. How has your neighborhood or community changed in the time that you've lived there?
5. Describe the mix of people living in your neighborhood or community.
6. Why are you here? What do you hope to get out of this study circle?

### ***Part 2 – Setting the ground rules***

(10 minutes)

Here are some sample ground rules. We can add to them, if we like:

- Listen with respect.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
- Speak for yourself, and not as the representative of any group. Remember the others are speaking for themselves, too.
- If you are bothered by something that was said, say so, and say why.
- It's OK to disagree, but personal attacks are not allowed.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.
- Unless the group decides otherwise, what we say in the study circle is to be kept confidential.

### ***Part 3 – Why should we be concerned about these issues?***

(50 minutes)

Different people have different concerns about what is happening in Maine. The following views are intended to help get the discussion started. Each view is written in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. *Some viewpoints that are*

#### ***Tips for facilitators – Getting started***

- Welcome everyone, tell them about the program, and explain your role.
- Divide the session into four parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Introduce the recorder (or ask for a volunteer to record).
- Don't feel like you have to cover every question – or that you have to ask them in order.
- Label a large sheet of paper "Action Ideas." If group members come up with any action ideas, list them here. Tell the group they will have more time to discuss them later on in the sessions.

important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add other views, or to combine the ones you see here.

*Tips for facilitators  
Using the views*

- Ask for volunteers to read each view out loud, or ask members to read each view to themselves.
- After reading the views, ask the group some of the “Questions to think about.”

**View 1 – The high price of housing is a drag on the economy and our communities**

When people can't afford to live near where they work, it affects the quality of community life and the health of the local economy. Many people who work at or near the minimum wage – who are essential to our tourism and retail industries in particular – can't find homes anywhere near their jobs. In fact, it is

becoming increasingly difficult even for public employees and other middle-class people to find decent housing within a reasonable commuting distance. Many of our teachers, police officers, nurses, and firefighters can't afford to live in the communities they serve. Long commutes increase traffic and wear-and-tear on the roads, raise the cost of living, and leave us less time to spend with our families, friends, and neighbors. When workers get fed up with these long commutes, we lose valuable workers and essential public servants.



**View 2 – Local control is under attack**

We need to be able to decide what is best for our communities, but that basic right of local control is under threat. Developers are using the lack of affordable housing to try to thwart zoning decisions and get around local rules about lot sizes, minimum setbacks, and other restrictions on development. With the state's help, they may ram higher-density developments right down our throats. The small-town character of Maine communities is already endangered, and we risk losing this way of life forever if we can't maintain control. We chose where we live for a reason, and we don't want things to change in ways we don't agree with. *Forcing* us to accept changes in the way our communities look, and the way they function, is fundamentally undemocratic.

**View 3 – Unchecked growth = traffic, ugliness, and harm to the environment**

Growth and sprawl have all kinds of harmful effects that lower our quality of life. Traffic is becoming unbearable, and the costs of building and maintaining those roads are a drain on local and state budgets. These development patterns lead to strip malls, subdivisions, “big box” stores, and other eyesores that detract from Maine's natural beauty. Spreading suburbs and chain stores are taking the life and character out of our city downtowns and our small town centers. And of course, all of this building is steadily eating away at our forests, our open spaces, and our majestic coastline. This wealth of natural resources is

the foundation of our tourist industry and, more importantly, one of the principal reasons we love our state.

#### **View 4 – High housing costs create homelessness and poverty**

High rents and home prices are having a terrible effect on the most vulnerable people in our communities: the poor, the elderly, the disabled, and the mentally ill. The rate of homelessness is unacceptably high, including a large number of families. The working poor are spending a higher and higher percentage of their income on housing, leaving less and less for food, clothing, and other necessities of life. Rising property values mean rising taxes, forcing many elderly people to move out of their homes and into cheaper apartments. For generations, buying a home has been the first step toward the American Dream, but it is now increasingly out of reach for many Maine residents. A healthy, growing economy should be good for everyone, but it often makes life more difficult for our most vulnerable residents.

#### **View 5 – Affordable housing puts a burden on our schools and our tax base**

*Questions to think about when discussing the views*

- Which view is closest to your own? Why? What experiences and beliefs have helped form your views?
- Think about a view you don't agree with. What might lead someone else to agree with that view?
- What's missing? What other views would you add?

Building affordable housing may seem like a charitable thing to do, but it has great costs for our communities and our schoolchildren. The more people we have living in our towns and cities, the more expensive it becomes to maintain public infrastructure and educate all the students. When the people moving in are unable to pay their share toward those costs, the rest of us have to shoulder the added burden through higher taxes. And since the value of the houses – not the publicly subsidized rents – is what counts toward the state's school funding formula, bringing more low-income families into the community can actually reduce the amount of money the state gives to our schools. It is fundamentally wrong to force middle-income and upper-income people to subsidize lower-income people.

#### **View 6 – Young people don't have a future in the places where they grew up**

When families can stay together, live near each other, and help each other, our communities are stronger. But the rising cost of housing often forces grandparents to move once they retire, and prevents young people from living in the same communities where they grew up. Young people are our future leaders, workers, and taxpayers – without them our towns and cities



will decline. Our entire society is becoming segregated, not just by race or by income but by age. Our communities are more cohesive when people have the choice to stay in the same place for years, and even for generations.

### *Final questions*

(20 minutes)

1. Ask the recorder to report on the main themes of the discussion – do you agree with this summary? What would you add or change?
2. What were the main areas of agreement and disagreement?
3. What did you learn from this session? Any new ideas?
4. What do you hope will come from this study circle?

### *Tips for facilitators – Finishing the session*

- Thank everyone for coming.
- Remind everyone that it is very important for them to attend every session.
- Confirm the schedule and location for future sessions.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week, and ask participants to read the session beforehand.

## *Session 2 – What values should guide us?*

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In deciding what to do about an issue like housing, it may be helpful to talk about the core values we want to uphold. By sorting out these basic beliefs, we can understand each other better, find common ground, and come up with a shared set of ideas that will guide our opinions about public policy.



### *Part 1 – Terms to discuss and define*

(30 minutes)

The terms we use can be confusing if we don't have a shared sense of what they mean. Talk about how you would define the following terms:

- Affordable housing
- Obtainable housing
- The “American Dream”
- The free market
- Sprawl
- Diversity
- Local control

### *Part 2 – What Values Should Guide Us?*

(60 minutes)

The following views are intended to help get the discussion started. Each view is written in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. *Some viewpoints that are important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add other views, or to combine the ones you see here.*

#### **View 1 – Let the free market do its work**

As long as we don't interfere, the free market will generate enough shelter for all of us. After all, the free market is nothing more than the sum total of all our individual choices about where to live, what we can afford, and what we choose to spend. Everyone has at least some money to spend, whether from paying jobs, Social Security, welfare, or other sources, and so there is always at least some profit to be made by providing homes and apartments. If they aren't hindered by exclusive zoning requirements or shortsighted public policies, developers will provide houses and apartments to fit every income level. It is only when we restrict building or remove the potential for profit that the free market fails to work.

#### *Tips for facilitators – Using the views*

- Ask for volunteers to read each view out loud, or ask members to read each view to themselves.
- After reading the views, ask the group some of the “Questions to think about.”
- When an action idea comes up during the discussion, ask the recorder to list it on the “Action Ideas” sheet.

## View 2 – Honor people’s basic right to shelter

Shelter is one of the most basic human rights we hold. Having a decent roof over your head is essential to maintaining your livelihood and your dignity. Young people who are trying to make a life for themselves deserve the chance to buy their first home. If we want all of the children in our state to grow up into healthy, productive, educated citizens, we need to guarantee that their families have clean, safe, well-maintained houses or apartments. And



*Since these circles are being hosted by Catholic Churches, we should note Catholic Social Teaching as a potential guiding value:*

“People have a fundamental right to life and to those things necessary for human decency, such as food, shelter, health care, education and employment. People have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good. When people lack the basic necessities to live a life of dignity, their fundamental rights are being denied.”

the most vulnerable people in society, including the elderly, the disabled, and the mentally ill, have that same right to decent shelter. This right is supported by Catholic Social Teaching, by the core beliefs of many other religions, and by the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

## View 3 – Strive for a good diverse mix of residents

Diversity in all its forms – in age, income level, race and ethnicity – is good for our families, our neighborhoods, and our communities. When we have the chance to live near, work with, or go to school with people different from ourselves, we tend to become more tolerant, educated, and

better able to function in a multicultural world. This is an especially important opportunity for children to have. When communities have a wide variety of homes for people to live in, it leads to a more interesting mix of residents. It also helps ensure that different generations of the same family can live near to each other.

## View 4 – No taxation without representation

This country was founded with the belief that citizens should have some say over how their tax contributions are spent. Middle- and upper-income families have worked hard to be successful; they already pay more than their share in taxes, so they are already subsidizing lower-income people who may or may not deserve assistance. The more subsidies we give, the more we remove the incentive for people to work hard. It is particularly unfair to force communities to make room for new people in their schools and residential

### *Questions to think about when discussing the views*

- Which view is closest to your own? Is there a combination of views that best fits what you think?
- Think about a view you don’t agree with. What might lead someone else to agree with that view?
- What’s missing? What other views would you add?

areas. Buying a home in a particular community is not a right, it is a matter of setting goals and trying to achieve them.

### **View 5 – Our public employees should be able to live where they work**

The people who educate our children and keep our streets safe deserve the opportunity to live in the communities they serve. In fact, living where they work helps them do their jobs better: they know more about the community and its residents, their own children and homes are at stake, and they become even more committed to the welfare of us all. Public service is clearly a value that they hold dearly, and our policies about housing should affirm that belief and acknowledge the contribution they are making.

### **View 6 – Maintain local control**

We all deserve a say in the laws and policies that govern our communities. Self-governance leads to a stronger sense of citizenship because it gives us a feeling of responsibility to each other. We work harder to understand each other, find common ground within the community, and come up with rules that benefit us all. It also makes us more willing to work with and find compromises with other communities. As long as public policy is made through these kinds of discussions, the bargains and decisions we make will be fair and uncontroversial. But if policies are dictated to us, we will become less attached to our community and less likely to feel like citizens in a local democracy.

#### *Tips for facilitators – Finishing the session*

- Ask the reporter to give a brief summary of his or her notes on the session.
- Point out the “Action Ideas” sheet as food for thought for the next session.
- Thank everyone for coming.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week, and ask participants to read the session beforehand.

### **Final questions**

1. What would you add or change to the recorder’s summary of the session?
2. What were the main areas of agreement and disagreement?
3. What did you learn from this session? Any new ideas?
4. What would you like the group to accomplish in the final two sessions?



## ***Session 3 – What are our options for addressing these issues?***

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Across the country, communities are using hundreds of different techniques and approaches to deal with the kinds of concerns listed in Session 1. We may not be able to discuss a specific action plan in this session, but we can at least compare some of the main strategies. That will help us focus on plans and next steps in the last session.

The following approaches are intended to help get the discussion started. Each view is written in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. *Some approaches that are important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add other views, or to combine the ones you see here.*

### ***Approach 1 – Change our zoning priorities to allow for denser development***



Our zoning restrictions are preventing developers from building the kind of housing we need. Requiring that houses have large lots, and long distances from the curb to the front door, basically forces developers to build expensive single-family homes. Changing our zoning priorities will allow the free market to do its work, providing a more varied, less expensive supply of homes to meet the obvious demand. When families grow – either through new children being born or elderly grandparents moving back in – higher-density zoning would also give them more freedom to build additions to their homes. We can still control the look, type, and location of new building, guiding the growth so that we maximize the benefits of development while reducing the harms it can bring.

### ***Approach 2 – Provide more obtainable housing***

There are many ways to build housing that is more affordable to low- and middle-income families. We can't expect developers to meet this demand, since there is little or no profit to be made, particularly on the apartments with the lowest rents. We can provide tax incentives to developers, housing vouchers for low-income households, or have state or local government handle the construction directly. We should explore all these strategies, perhaps using different approaches in different situations; the bottom line is that we need to guarantee that there is a decent, inexpensive supply of housing.

#### ***Tips for facilitators – Using the approaches***

- Ask for volunteers to read each approach out loud, or ask members to read each approach to themselves.
- After reading the approaches, ask the group some of the “Questions to think about.”
- When an action idea comes up during the discussion, ask the recorder to list it on the “Action Ideas” sheet.

### ***Approach 3 – Lower taxes and force government to be more efficient***

Maine's unacceptably high tax rates are a big part of the problem, and lowering them is an obvious solution. We could provide tax abatements to seniors so that they can stay in

their homes. If taxes were lower in our cities, people would be less likely to move to outlying areas, reducing the rate of sprawl. And lowering taxes overall can give the whole economy a boost, creating jobs and wealth for people at every rung of the economic ladder. Reducing public budgets might also be good because it would force public officials to be more frugal and cut some of the fat out of government.

*Questions to think about when discussing the approaches*

- Which approach is closest to your own? Is there a mix of approaches that best fits what you think?
- Think about an approach you don't agree with. What might lead someone else to support that approach?
- What's missing? What other ideas would you add?

***Approach 4 – Provide for our public employees***

We need to show teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other public servants how much we value their presence in our

communities. On the early frontier, it was the responsibility of the settlers to construct a home for the local schoolteacher; today, school systems in several states are upholding this tradition by building housing specifically for teachers. The free market may reward hard work, but it doesn't recognize that some people make their living by helping others. We can use land trusts, tax abatements, and down payment assistance to give public employees a chance to live in the communities they serve.

***Approach 5 – Help people get to work more easily***

People can almost always find a decent, affordable place to live – the challenge is finding that home within a reasonable commuting time from where they work. Our housing crisis is actually more of a transportation crisis, and there are two main solutions: building better roads or providing more public transportation (or both). Maine has an acute shortage of East-West roads, forcing all the development to take place along the Route 1 corridor. It also has an acute shortage of all kinds of public transit, from buses to light rail. If people can get around with a minimum of time and hassle, the housing market will take care of the rest.

***Approach 6 – Use zoning and other tools to clamp down on growth***

Instead of focusing so much on the current housing crisis, we should worry about the housing crisis of the future. If we allow sprawl to continue unchecked, all of our problems will become harder to manage. By limiting the growth of industry and preventing development in outlying areas, we can preserve our natural resources, keep our population stable, and reduce our long-term need for housing. We should use tools like zoning, land trusts, conservation areas, growth boundaries, comprehensive planning, and impact fees to arrest or prevent new growth.

### *Approach 7 – Take care of the most vulnerable people in our communities*

We should concentrate on helping the people who are least able to adapt to these changing times: the elderly, the disabled, and the mentally ill. Our most vulnerable residents deserve decent homes, and there are many ways to help them, including tax abatements, tax vouchers, and new construction. Assisted living and halfway house facilities can be constructed by government; developers can also be subsidized or required to build them as part of larger projects.



### *Approach 8 – Help people afford their first home*

Once people become homeowners, their lives tend to improve. When a family buys their first home, they begin to build financial equity through their mortgage payments, become more attached to their neighborhood and community, and start to feel more confident about their future prospects. If we can help people get over that key threshold, we can transform their lives – and add to the stability of our communities – over the long term. Down payment assistance, mortgage assistance, and reduced rate home loans are all tools we should explore to make it easier for people to afford their first home.

#### **Final questions**

1. What would you add or change to the recorder's summary of the session?
2. What were the main areas of agreement and disagreement?
3. What did you learn from this session? Any new ideas?
4. What would you like the group to accomplish in the final two sessions?

#### *Tips for facilitators – Finishing the session*

- Ask the reporter to give a brief summary of his or her notes on the session.
- Point out the “Action Ideas” sheet as food for thought for the next session.
- Thank everyone for coming.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week, and ask participants to read the session beforehand.

## *Session 4 – From talk to action: What can we do to make a difference?*



By participating in this study circle, you have already made a contribution to your community. When people share their hopes and concerns, learn more about the issues, and begin to understand each other better, they become better, more informed voters, neighbors, and citizens.

But this project is also intended to help you make a difference in other ways. At the conclusion of the discussions, study circle participants from all over Southern Maine will meet to share their ideas at an action forum. The action forum is intended to summarize the ideas that came out of the circles for public officials and other decision makers, highlight the projects that particular circles are already working on, and allow participants, public officials, and others to begin working together on some of the more ambitious ideas.

The first part of the session is designed to help you get a handle on what kinds of action ideas you want to pursue. Part 2 is for deciding which ideas you want to bring to the action forum. Part 3 is for working on a specific idea you might want to implement yourselves. And Part 4 is intended to help wrap up the circle.

### *Part 1 – Thinking about ways to make a difference*

(30 minutes)

1. Break into groups of two or three people. In your group, spend a few minutes talking over possibilities on the “Action Ideas” list.
2. Think about action ideas that you believe would work for your community. You might talk about ideas from the lists, or you might invent new ideas.
3. Of all the ideas, which ones seem best? Why? Try to settle on two or three.
4. Come back together in the whole group. List the 2-3 best action ideas each group came up with.

#### *Tips for facilitators – Brainstorming and setting priorities*

- This session has four parts. Use the time suggested for each as a guide.
- Post the “Action Ideas” sheet.
- Suggest that the recorder write on a flipchart, so that everyone can see.
- Today, your circle will make a short list of action ideas to present at the action forum. Some ideas that individuals feel strongly about may not end up on that list. Tell people that they will have a chance to add their own ideas at the action forum.
- Adapt the instructions for selecting and setting priorities (Part 2 of this session) to suit your needs. Do what works best for your group. Use the numbers provided as a guide only.

## ***Part 2 – Setting priorities for the action forum***

(30 minutes)

From the lists we made in our brainstorm, we will now choose three or four action ideas that we think could make the most difference in our community. We will take these ideas to the action forum.

### *Instructions for setting priorities*

1. Start by looking at the action ideas you have listed. If some of the ideas are nearly alike, combine them.
2. The next step is to narrow down our lists. We will select a total of no more than eight of our favorite action ideas.

### *To narrow down the lists:*

- Each person will get three votes. Our facilitator will give each of us three colored stickers (or something similar) for this.
  - Each of us will vote for the ideas we like best. We can use all three votes on one idea, or we can spread them around.
  - Look at the ideas that have the most votes. There will probably be about eight.
3. Next, we will narrow down our lists again. Look at the eight ideas that you picked in Step 2. Which three or four of these seem most practical, useful, timely, and important? To help us talk about this, we will use the following questions:
    - What would it take to make these ideas become real? What help or support would we need?
    - What resources are already in place to help out? What are we already good at doing?
  4. If you now have only three or four ideas left, you are finished! You are ready to go to the action forum. (Skip step 5 and go on to step 6.)
  5. If you still have more than four ideas, vote again. (Use the same procedure as in Step 2.) After the vote, select the three or four ideas that get the most votes. These are the ideas you will take to the action forum. You are finished!
  6. Make sure that you write your final three or four ideas down on a sheet of paper.



## ***Part 3 – Working on an action idea as a group***

(40 minutes)

You don't have to wait for the action forum to start working on an action idea. If your circle has come up with an idea you want to tackle together, go ahead. You might want to pick out one or two of the more immediate, short-term ideas. Ask yourselves:

1. Is this idea already being tried in the community or region? How could we support those efforts?
2. What would it take to turn this idea into reality?
3. What community assets could we use to help move this idea forward?
4. What would our next steps be? What other groups might we link up with?

5. What kinds of support or help do we need in order to take these steps?
6. How should we split up the tasks and responsibilities involved in making the idea work? What role should each of us play?

### *Final questions*

(20 minutes)

1. What have you learned so far? What has made the biggest impact on how you think and act?
2. What are you committing to do to make a difference on these issues?
3. What do you most value about this study circle?