

Village and Waterfront Plan  
for the  
Town of Orland



Prepared by the Orland Waterfront Committee

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Hancock County Planning Commission

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## Contents

Background and History .....	3
Priorities .....	4
Village Area .....	4
Waterfront Access .....	4
Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety .....	5
Parking .....	5
Current Conditions and Opportunities .....	6
Waterfront Access .....	6
Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety .....	7
Parking .....	8
Village Economy .....	8
Goals, Objectives, and Strategies.....	9
Conclusion.....	12
Appendix A. Photos.....	13
Appendix B. Maps .....	28

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## Background and History

The Town of Orland was originally settled in the 1760s and incorporated in 1800. The earliest settlers made their homes in what is now considered the Village area. We know they operated mills and built ships, and it is likely that the river played an important role in the daily lives of residents, influencing the physical growth and development of the community. By the early 1900s, Orland village bustled around the river; the vibrant community boasted churches, shops, and schools, all within an easy walk.

The river flowing through present-day Orland Village, known as the Orland River south of village dam, and the Narramissic River north of it, is a tributary of the Penobscot River. The Orland River joins the East Channel of the Penobscot just north of where it meets itself after encircling Verona Island and empties into Penobscot Bay. The Orland/Narramissic River has always been an important fishery, used extensively by the native people of Maine for centuries before European settlement. Home to Atlantic salmon, alewife, shad, eels, and other fish species, the river has played an important part in subsistence, commercial, and recreational fishing for centuries. The commercial harvest of alewives and elvers continues to this day.

The current dam in Orland village, and earlier ones, were constructed across or near “Lower Falls”, which powered mills in the 1700’s, and which impeded navigation upstream. The Orland River has been dammed at Lower Falls since the early 1800s. The first dam was constructed of granite, and was required by law not to interfere with fish passage. The current dam was built in the 1930s by Maine Seaboard Paper Company, the predecessor to the paper mill in Bucksport most recently operated by Verso Paper. Originally, the dam was constructed to provide a water supply for the mill, a use that was never realized, as an alternative source upstream, Alamoosook Lake, proved preferable. Since the 1800s, the dammed stream has created a ponded area of the river which has become a characteristic of Orland Village.

In 2010, The Verso Paper ceded ownership of the dam to the Town of Orland. After an extensive survey of the condition of the dam, and consideration of the financial, environmental, recreational, and public safety considerations of maintaining the dam, replacing it, or removing it, the residents of Orland voted in June 2016 to keep and maintain the dam.

## Priorities

### Village Area

Although Orland Village still retains the character of a quintessential New England village, it no longer functions as a hub of social and commercial activity in the community. Several large, historic commercial buildings still stand, but are largely vacant and/or underused. The village is dominated by Route 166, known locally as “Castine Road”, which is the major route used for funneling traffic from U.S. Route 1 to Castine, a popular tourist destination. This road has been upgraded in recent years, and its’ function and good condition make it easy for vehicular traffic to speed through the village, heedless of posted speed limits. Although several “destinations” still exist in the village area within an easy walking distance of each other (i.e. the post office, church, park, dam site), lack of sidewalks, paved shoulders, and shoulder width inhibit bicycle and pedestrian activity in the village, and a lack of commercial activity makes for limited interest in the village from visitors, whether on foot, two wheels, or four. Promotion of a vibrant, attractive village that appeals to residents and visitors is a priority of the Orland Waterfront Committee.

### Waterfront Access

The village’s waterfront alongside the impoundment of the Narramissic River is an important part of the community’s character. Even when daily livelihoods of residents no longer depended upon the water, the river still provided an important fishery and recreational asset. Alewives and elvers are still commercially harvested during their spring runs. Recreational and sport fisherman ply their lines along the length of the river, from Alamoosook Lake to below the dam.

The river and impoundment are also popular for recreation. Historically, neighborhood children would skate in the winter and swim in the summer. Boating along the glasslike surface of the impoundment is a relaxing activity enjoyed by many, and the annual River Day held every year in Orland draws locals and visitors to the village. Residents enjoy regular glimpses of aquatic animals and wildlife drawn to the waters’ edge, and birdwatching is a popular draw in the area.

Through in-person testimonials and survey responses, Orland residents have reiterated their enjoyment of the river for these and other purposes, and have expressed a desire for more public access to the waterfront. Currently, boaters have informal access from several waterfront property owners, as well as some of town-owned property where boats can be launched, and swimmers can wade in. These sites

are limited in their accessibility and utility, however, and identification of possible waterfront access sites, and planning for their possible development and improvement, is a priority of the Orland Waterfront Committee.

### Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety

Providing a safe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists in the village area is of key importance. In addition to providing the health benefits of outdoor exercise, it reduces the need for vehicular navigation, thereby reducing traffic load and parking demand in the village. Bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly downtowns also stimulate economic development. Pedestrians and bicyclists are likely to patronize village businesses, since they pass by at an easier pace than if they were travelling by car, and aren't hindered by the need to find a place to park. Both U.S. Bicycle Route 1 and the East Coast Greenway pass through Orland Village, bringing bicycle enthusiasts to the region who may choose to stop and enjoy waterfront amenities and/or village businesses. Promoting safe pedestrian and bicycle passage in the village is a priority of the Orland Waterfront Committee.

### Parking

An associated concern is the limited availability of public parking in the village area. Currently, public parking is extremely limited. In order to encourage economic development in the village area, as well as enhanced recreational use by boaters, walkers, and bicyclists of the village and waterfront area, the identification of areas for development as public parking is a priority of the Orland Waterfront Committee.

## Current Conditions and Opportunities

### Waterfront Access

As part of the study of the Orland Village Dam that was done by Stantec, public opinion surveys were collected from residents of Orland and other towns in the region to determine how the river was being utilized and why. The majority of people who responded to the recreational, aesthetic, and cultural use survey (87%) stated that they enjoy using the ponded Narramissic River for boating. In addition, several respondents used a fill-in-the-blank feature to say they enjoyed kayaking in this area. Another popular response was wildlife/bird watching (62%). Respondents also indicated that they enjoy fishing (35%) and swimming (30%) there. The vast majority (97% of respondents) indicated that they enjoy the river during summer, 76% during fall, 65% during spring, and 27% during winter. A majority of respondents seemed in favor of maintaining the impoundment, for a variety of reasons. Many stated that the ponded river area gives Orland a “postcard” village, and feel that the water body provides Orland Village with its character.

There are no state-maintained public boat access sites on the Narramissic or Orland Rivers. The Orland River can be accessed using the public boat launch on Verona Island, but it is a lengthy route which can be difficult to navigate with tidal changes, and the Orland Village dam prevents further navigation, requiring a portage. No designated portage route exists at the dam site.

The small park along Narramissic Drive in the village, adjacent to the parking area, is a primary access point to the water (Photos A and B). From here a canoe or kayak can be hand-launched, and swimmers can wade into the impoundment area. No formal water access facilities, such as a reinforced ramp or dock, are maintained here, but the town does mow and maintain plantings in the park area.

The town owns another waterfront location that has been used for launching trailered boats (Photo C). This area, adjacent to the former boatbuilding site on Fish Point Road, is still available for this use, but the launch site has an abrupt grade change from land to water, which many trailers cannot accommodate. There is no parking at this location, although it is within reasonable walking distance from the parking area on Narramissic Drive.

The town also has a right-of-way to the dam off Fish Point Road (Photos D and E). Although public use of this site is not promoted, if undeveloped land adjacent to the right-of-way could be acquired, there is potential for a public park and/or waterfront access, and possibly parking (Photos F and G).

Public access to the dam on foot is possible via the discontinued town road on the east side of the river. The road runs from the Castine Road to just beyond the dam, between the river and Dark Mountain Road. Although this was a town road at one time, it is gated off to general vehicular access (Photos H and I). The road is used by commercial fishermen who harvest alewives and elvers around the dam in the spring. Although access during high flows and tides is inadvisable, there are several locations just above and below the dam where the water can be easily accessed (Photos J, K and L). The water accessed below the dam is brackish, and navigable to Penobscot Bay. Beyond the dam the road is in a state of disrepair, and ends at a bend in the river (Photo M). The bend creates a flat, open area of calmer water which could be a good waterfront access site (Photos N and O). The condition of the road in this last section is particularly bad, as the steep slope towards Dark Mountain Road has created significant runoff and erosion problems. There is a small parking area at the turnoff for the road from Route 166 (Photo P). This area is owned by MaineDOT and is rarely used. Whether or not public parking is allowed, or whether town ownership is a possibility, is unknown.

Additional waterfront parcels may be available for acquisition and/or development by the town. A review of any appropriate parcels that could be acquired through tax liens or purchase may be worthwhile. A possible partnership with another organization for acquisition, such as Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust, may also be an option. As an example, a waterfront parcel off Lower Falls Road is for sale (Photo Q). The price of the parcel is not known, nor are the costs associated with developing it. However, if the town is interested in acquiring property to create a designated public waterfront park or access point, this parcel could be explored as an option.

### [Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety](#)

Safe pedestrian access in Orland is a concern. There are several destinations in the village that could be accessed and enjoyed by an easy walk; including the Post Office, the church and park on Narramissic Drive, the Bicentennial Park on Gray Meadow Road, and the town office, Community Center, and athletic fields on Schoolhouse Road. If future public waterfront access areas are developed, they also will draw pedestrians and bicyclists. Besides the destinations, Orland has opportunities to promote designated “walks” in the village that promote health and wellness, and highlight the beautiful residential architecture and history of the village, if they can be developed on routes that are safe for traversing on foot.

The only sidewalk in the village area is on the Castine Road bridge over the river. Road shoulders in many areas are narrow or non-existent. While most of the town roads in the village have a low traffic

load and can be negotiated easily by pedestrians, even without designated pedestrian ways, Castine Road (Route 166) has a heavy traffic load, and is the spine of the road network in the village area. Additionally, through-traffic on the way to Castine often travels at a high rate of speed through the village area. There are automated speed-feedback signs in the village, maintained by MaineDOT, for traffic approaching the bridge from either direction, but additional traffic-calming devices may be warranted to slow vehicular speeds and enable safe road crossings, especially across Castine Road.

### Parking

Few public parking spaces exist in Orland Village. Currently, public parking is limited to a handful of unlined spaces on Narramissic drive, across the road from the church and maintained by the Town. A few on-street parking spaces are also available, as are several private spaces maintained by private businesses for patron use. Some potential exists for the development of parking behind the commercial buildings on Castine Road, which could promote business growth in the buildings. As mentioned previously, there may also be potential for public parking at the entrance to the discontinued dam access road on the Maine DOT parcel. An adjacent vacant parcel, formerly home to a blacksmith shop and known as the “Ginn” property, may also have potential, although it is not advertised as for sale.

### Village Economy

Businesses in Orland village have struggled in recent years. Currently, a few of the historic commercial storefronts are vacant. Another houses an antique shop, but is for sale. A handful of bed and breakfast establishments existed until recently, but currently no lodging establishments are open in the village area.

A full economic and downtown development plan is beyond the scope of this project, but several of the goals of the Committee are consistent with and complementary to the promotion of business development and vibrancy in the village area. Increasing parking options will make it easier for businesses to lure patrons. Establishing safe walking and biking environments will also make it easier for those exploring the village casually to stop in at a shop or for a bite to eat. Currently, no eateries exist in the village area, but by implementing the strategies laid out in this plan, we are setting the stage for a rebirth of commercial interest and investment.

## Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Organizing an action plan into goals, objectives, and strategies, and assigning a responsible entity for each, is an effective way to build upon data and observations and identify the path forward. Each goal that is identified by the committee is partnered with one or more measurable objectives that work toward that goal, so that plan elements can be evaluated periodically. Each objective is coupled with one or more strategies that can be employed to achieve the objective.

### 1. *Goal: Identify and promote public waterfront access in the village area*

- a. Objective: Maximize the potential of existing town-owned waterfront sites
  - i. Strategy: explore costs, permitting and signage for upgrading existing public boat access (*selectboard, parks staff*)
- b. Objective: Explore opportunities for acquiring additional waterfront sites
  - i. Strategy: form a volunteer waterfront access committee to explore the various options for enhanced waterfront access, and work with town officials
  - ii. Strategy: identify available resources for property acquisition and/or property improvements (*selectboard, waterfront access committee*)
  - iii. Strategy: Obtain cost estimates for property acquisition and /or property improvements (*waterfront access committee*)
  - iv. Strategy: Consider cost and benefits, long- and short-term, of available acquisition and/or upgrade options (*selectboard, town staff, waterfront access committee*)

### 2. *Goal: Make walking and biking safer in the village area*

- a. Objective: Identify additional traffic-calming options for village area
  - i. Strategy: Meet with MaineDOT to discuss options and funding for potential solutions (*selectboard*)
- b. Objective: Identify roads or road stretches for increased shoulder width and/or bike lanes
  - i. Strategy: Meet with MaineDOT to discuss options and funding (*selectboard*)

- ii. Strategy: Meet with municipal officials to discuss options (*selectboard, road commissioner*)

### 3. Goal: A vibrant, attractive village that appeals to residents and visitors

- a. Objective: Determine why businesses have not been able to thrive in the village
  - i. Strategy: Form a volunteer “village enhancement” committee to champion village improvement projects and work with town officials, organizations, and volunteers
  - ii. Strategy: Collect any available data from closed businesses about factor leading to closure (*village enhancement committee*)
  - iii. Strategy: Review existing ordinances and policies for regulations that impede business development (*village enhancement committee, town staff*)
- b. Objective: Promotion of village as destination
  - i. Strategy: Meet with Chamber of Commerce to explore ideas and options (*village enhancement committee*)
  - ii. Strategy: Develop wayfinding system to guide visitors to destinations/highlights (*village enhancement committee*)

### 4. Goal: Encourage walking and biking as a healthy way to enjoy and explore the village

- a. Objective: Identify walks that take advantage of the safest routes, and highlight scenic and historic features
  - i. Strategy: Partner with volunteers from local organizations, like the historical society, to develop and promote routes. (*village enhancement committee*)

### 5. Goal: Ample village-area parking options

- a. Objective: Increase village-area parking options for passenger vehicles to promote pedestrian enjoyment of village area
  - i. Strategy: Identify available resources for property acquisition and/or property expansions (*village enhancement committee, town staff*)

- ii. Strategy: Obtain cost estimates for property acquisition and /or property expansions (*village enhancement committee*)
  - iii. Strategy: Consider cost and benefits, long- and short-term, of available acquisition and/or upgrade options (*village enhancement committee, town staff, selectboard*)
- b. Objective: Increase village-area parking options for vehicles with trailers to promote use of waterfront areas for boat access
- i. Strategy: Identify available resources for property acquisition and/or property expansions (*village enhancement committee, town staff*)
  - ii. Strategy: Obtain cost estimates for property acquisition and /or property expansions (*village enhancement committee*)
  - iii. Strategy: Consider cost and benefits, long- and short-term, of available acquisition and/or upgrade options (*village enhancement committee, town staff, selectboard*)

## Conclusion

Orland Village, nestled along the banks of the Naramissic, is picturesque, but hidden inside the picture is a community that faces challenges with its local economy, its responsibility to maintain the structural integrity of the recently-acquired dam, and its ability to keep the village thriving, and welcoming to bicyclists and pedestrians. Tackling all of these problems can be overwhelming, but by working towards smaller goals within these interconnected issues, a variety of benefits and positive change can be realized. The goals and strategies laid out here will address some of those larger issues, while making the waterfront more accessible and the village more enjoyable.

Although waterfront access is currently limited, there are several good options for enhancing and acquiring sites at various levels of investment and commitment. Orland is also fortunate to have a village infrastructure to build upon, needing only improvements and enhancements to fully realize the potential for a vibrant and dynamic community. The Orland Waterfront Committee is encouraged by the many options and opportunities that have surfaced during this process, and is excited to move forward towards implementation of plan elements with the encouragement and participation of the broader Orland community.

## Appendix A. Photos

**Photo A. Waterfront park on Narramissic Drive**



Photo B. Waterfront park on Narramissic Drive



Photo C. Boat launch on Fish Point Rd.



Photo D. Right-of-way to dam off Fish Point Rd.



Photo E. Dam site off Fish Point Rd.



**Photo F. Undeveloped land adjacent to dam right-of-way on Fish Point Rd.**



**Photo G. Undeveloped land adjacent to dam right-of-way on Fish Point Rd.**



Photo H. Discontinued road to dam off Castine Road (gated off to vehicles)



Photo I. Discontinued road to dam off Castine Road (gated off to vehicles)



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Photo J. From the dam, looking downstream



Photo K. Possible waterfront access site just below dam



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Photo L. Looking downstream from dam



**Photo M. Below dam, access road becomes a footpath (not maintained)**



**Photo N. Riverbend below dam (possible water access)**



**Photo O. Riverbend below dam (possible water access)**



Photo P. Parking area off Castine Rd. leading to dam access road (owned by MaineDOT)



Photo Q. Waterfront parcel for sale on Lower Falls Rd.



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Appendix B. Maps

Map 1. Village Area

