

# DRAC Kickoff Meeting

03/23/2026

## High-Level Meeting Themes

### 1) Alignment, Coordination & Breaking Down Silos (Highest Priority)

A dominant theme was the need to better align efforts across agencies, organizations, and sectors.

**Key ideas:**

- State agencies “rowing in the same direction”
- Reducing silos across economic development actors
- Coordinating funding, technical assistance, and policy
- Avoiding duplication of existing efforts while filling gaps

**Interpretation:**

DRAC’s core value is as a connector and aligner, not a standalone committee. Success depends on improving coordination across fragmented systems.

### 2) Limited Local Capacity vs. High Expectations

Communities, especially small and rural ones, face significant capacity constraints.

**Key ideas:**

- Limited staff and technical expertise in some small communities
- Managing urgent needs while building proactive plans is a challenge
- Aging infrastructure and tax base limitations
- Many towns with very small populations

**Interpretation:**

There is a structural mismatch between:

- What communities are expected to do
- What they are actually resourced to do

Any solution must be simple, scalable, and capacity-aware.

### 3) Need for Clear, Actionable Frameworks & Tools

Participants emphasized the need for clarity, structure, and usable guidance.

**Key ideas:**

- Members highlighted the need to define “development” clearly
- Establish goals, benchmarks, and priorities
- Create development-ready criteria
- Provide best practices and implementation guidance
- Clarify what DRAC is—and is not

**Interpretation:**

There is a strong desire for shared frameworks that translate complexity into actionable

steps for municipalities and partners.

#### **4) Incentives, Funding & Financial Feasibility**

Financial barriers were repeatedly identified as a core constraint.

**Key ideas:**

- Difficulty accessing and managing funding
- Misaligned or inconsistent incentives from local, state, and federal policies
- High construction costs and weak/uneven market conditions
- Rural housing projects often not financially viable
- Need for new or better-aligned financial tools

**Interpretation:**

Even when communities are ready, projects often don't pencil out. Financial tools and incentive alignment are critical to unlocking development.

#### **5) Regional Differences & Targeted Strategies**

A strong theme was that Maine is not one uniform market.

**Key ideas:**

- Significant economic disparities across regions
- Members noted that different tools needed for different places
- Some communities have capacity but no willingness; others the opposite

**Interpretation:**

A one-size-fits-all approach will not work. DRAC should adopt a targeted, tiered, or place-based strategy.

#### **6) Focus on Willing Communities & Pilot Projects**

There was broad support for starting where momentum already exists.

**Key ideas:**

- Identify communities that want to act
- Use pilot projects to test and refine approaches
- Build replicable models from early successes

**Interpretation:**

Early wins are essential. DRAC should prioritize implementation over theory by working with motivated communities.

#### **7) Developer Engagement & Market Reality**

Participants emphasized the need to include developers as core partners.

**Key ideas:**

- Direct communication with developers was mentioned as critical in this work
- Understanding real bottlenecks to getting projects built
- Financial and regulatory realities of development
- Bridging the gap between municipal goals and developer feasibility

**Interpretation:**

Development will not happen without developers. DRAC must integrate market

perspectives into planning and solutions.

## **8) Inclusion, Equity & Community Voice**

There was a clear call to broaden participation in development conversations.

### **Key ideas:**

- Include rural, small-town, and marginalized communities
- Engage Tribal governments, entrepreneurs, and financial institutions
- Ensure local voices shape solutions

### **Interpretation:**

Effective development must be inclusive and grounded in community needs, not just top-down policy.

## **9) Structural & System-Level Challenges**

Some participants raised deeper, long-term structural issues.

### **Key ideas:**

- Viability of small municipal governance structures
- Heavy reliance on property taxes
- Lack of regionalization
- Fundamental constraints in how development is funded and managed

### **Interpretation:**

Beyond near-term actions, there are systemic issues that may limit impact if not addressed over time.

## **10) Balancing Development with Conservation & Quality of Place**

Development must be integrated with environmental and community values.

### **Key ideas:**

- Coordinating housing, economic development, and conservation
- Protecting natural assets while enabling growth
- Waterfront, outdoor access, and place-based advantages
- Protecting existing farmland and improving local food access
- Smarter siting of infrastructure (e.g., schools, walkability)

### **Interpretation:**

The goal is not just more development, but better, context-sensitive development that

strengthens communities.

## Cross-Cutting Insights

Across all themes, a consistent pattern emerges:

- The challenges are not just technical—they are systemic and interconnected
- Communities need both capacity support and system-level alignment
- DRAC's role is less about creating new programs and more about:
  - Connecting
  - Clarifying
  - Piloting
  - Scaling what works

### Meeting Notes:

## Welcome & Framing

- There are organizations in Michigan doing similar work, such as land banks, as well as models like the Community Preservation Act in Massachusetts that help communities guide their own growth in ways that align with local priorities.
- There is a real risk of duplicating existing efforts if coordination and learning from these models are not prioritized. DRAC can play a key role in amplifying what is already working and filling gaps between existing initiatives.
- Many communities are optimistic but lack the capacity to take action. As a result, they tend to be reactive to development pressures, and the ability to plan proactively is rare.
- A key challenge is determining how to support communities that are stuck in a cycle of constant crisis management, dealing with one urgent issue after another, and lack the time and resources to think strategically about long-term development.

## Council Member Perspectives

### ***One sentence, what does success from DRAC in one year look like?***

- Success for DRAC in one year would mean serving multiple municipalities and ensuring those municipalities have a clear understanding of what the group is and what it can do.
- A key indicator of success would be the establishment of clear goals and priorities, along with defined benchmarks to measure progress.
- The group would develop a clear understanding of the issues and challenges facing development and identify actionable, implementable solutions.

- There would be a shared understanding of both opportunities and challenges, as well as clarity around priorities, statutory directives, and the types of development to focus on.
- DRAC would operate with a clear agenda and a set of actionable goals.
- It would make development more tangible and easier to communicate, providing real community examples that developers can understand and learn from, helping to illustrate what is possible.
- All state agencies would be aligned and working in the same direction.
- The group would be prepared to launch pilot projects and critically test its goals to ensure they are replicable.
- It would identify development-ready communities and the resources needed to support them.
- Rural communities would have increased awareness of available programs and incentives, and developers would be better informed about opportunities in those areas.
- The group would clearly identify statewide versus regional challenges and create defined pathways for collaboration across regions.
- There would be a strong understanding of what is happening in rural municipalities, including their limitations.
- DRAC would clearly define what it is not responsible for, to maintain focus and avoid scope creep.
- It would develop a framework for development incentives that is widely understood and consistently applied.
- The group would incorporate best practices from Michigan and successfully adapt them to Maine.
- DRAC would demonstrate longevity and resilience within the political climate, while maintaining access to experience and best practices.
- It would help small municipalities navigate redevelopment challenges despite limited capacity, providing guidance and support to help them succeed.
- The group would build a clear understanding of the complexity of the development process and how to effectively incentivize it.
- DRAC would reduce silos across Maine's economic development ecosystem, fostering better coordination and collaboration statewide.

## **Survey Results (Marina)**

- A high-level presentation of the pre-meeting survey was provided to members, assessing key development challenges and opportunities.

- The goals of the survey were to understand development perspectives, experiences, and priorities; identify key challenges, opportunities, and focus areas; and guide the committee’s strategic direction and actions.
- All members were given both a short and a long synthesis document summarizing the thematic results.
- The survey is intended to establish a shared baseline for all participants and to gather feedback on the draft synthesis document, which will serve as a foundation for future work.
- Key challenges identified include limited municipal capacity, aging infrastructure, reliance on property taxes, high construction costs driven by external factors, uneven market incentives, and regulatory complexity.
- Participants also highlighted struggles with the state system, including difficulty accessing and managing funding, delays in approvals, limited capacity, complex and evolving regulations, and insufficient development tools and support.
- The survey found that development is sometimes overlooked in state policies and programs. Growth-area investment requirements and state policies are applied inconsistently, with limited statewide planning coordination, and often treat urban, suburban, and rural areas too similarly.
- Municipal reliance on property taxes was identified as a significant factor shaping development feasibility.
- Additionally, overlapping regulations, infrastructure constraints, workforce shortages, and financing gaps were noted as major barriers to development. At the same time, housing affordability and the preservation of existing housing stock were identified as critical priorities.

## Survey Reflections

### *How do these results resonate? What is missing? Reactions and Additional Thoughts*

- The group should focus on practical, solvable problems to build momentum, particularly given that nearly half of Maine’s municipalities have 1,000 or fewer residents. Engaging developers is critical to understanding feasibility and identifying real bottlenecks. Input from marginalized communities, tribal groups, financial institutions, and entrepreneurs is also essential.
- Significant regional disparities require tailored approaches. Rather than a statewide strategy, a more effective approach may be to focus on 30–40 “development-ready” communities and invest in their core areas. At the same

time, smaller communities should not be excluded, as they can benefit from nearby development or pursue targeted projects with the right support.

- A tiered, “Main Street”-style model could help communities advance based on their readiness. Willingness and capacity often do not align, so strategies must be flexible and locally driven. Some small towns have succeeded by assembling advisory teams and leveraging fewer regulatory barriers, though replication is challenging due to resource constraints.
- Opportunities exist to align development with conservation, particularly around housing, outdoor access, and working waterfronts. However, this requires balancing competing land uses and planning proactively for environmental and economic changes.
- Barriers to development include regulatory complexity, infrastructure limitations, workforce shortages, and financing gaps. While tools like historic tax credits are helping, more clarity and input from rural communities are needed to unlock broader impact.
- Infrastructure and fiscal sustainability are ongoing challenges, as new development often does not generate enough tax revenue to offset costs in small communities. Strengthening local leadership, building support systems, and fostering community “champions” are key to advancing projects.
- Ultimately, stronger partnerships with developers and better coordination across sectors will be essential to reducing silos and enabling successful, scalable development across Maine.