



HOBBA Meeting Notes

The meeting focused primarily on the future of the **Searsport information booth/visitor center**, along with tourism promotion, cross-marketing among local businesses, and upcoming community events.

Main discussion: information booth / visitor resource center

The group questioned whether the existing information booth is effective in its current location. Members noted that it receives limited visible traffic, has relatively little information inside, and is not clearly identifiable as a tourist information center. Rough estimates suggest it would cost **\$5,000–\$7,000 to move the existing building within town**, not including more substantial site work.

There was general interest in locating some type of visitor center **closer to downtown and pedestrian traffic**, rather than investing heavily in the current site. Members identified bathrooms, internet/Wi-Fi, parking, and a visible downtown location as important amenities.

The conversation evolved toward a more ambitious idea: instead of simply maintaining a rack of brochures, Searsport could have an **actively staffed visitor/resource center** that helps visitors plan activities and trips. The center might sell or book tickets for boat cruises, museums, tours, and other experiences; offer packaged itineraries; sell local merchandise; and potentially earn commissions or service fees that could help support staffing.

Melissa from Captain Nickels Inn strongly supported the idea, explaining that visitors frequently ask what there is to do in Searsport and the surrounding region. Guests use Searsport as a base for trips to places such as Acadia and Camden, but often do not realize how many activities are available locally and regionally. A centralized resource could help visitors plan their stays and encourage them to return.

The group also discussed potentially using **available downtown commercial space** rather than waiting indefinitely for the existing information building to be moved. This seemed more achievable in the short term, although rent, staffing, and operating costs would need to be worked out.



Tourism and marketing priorities

There was strong agreement that Searsport businesses and organizations need to do more **cross-promotion**. Members suggested linking to one another's websites, menus, attractions, events, and suggested itineraries.

Two concrete winter priorities emerged:

- Develop a **2027 calendar of events before the tourist season begins**.
- Build a coordinated **cross-promotion effort during the winter**, ideally by January–March rather than waiting until summer.

Members also discussed working with the **Maine Office of Tourism** and exploring grant opportunities. However, it was noted that tourism grants tend to support marketing activities rather than ongoing expenses such as rent or staffing.

A recurring theme was that Searsport can market itself as an alternative to more crowded destinations such as Bar Harbor: a quieter, more personal **small-town Maine experience** while still providing access to attractions throughout the region.

Likely next steps

The strongest implied action items were to explore available downtown space for a visitor/resource center; develop the concept over the winter, including possible ticket sales, packages, local merchandise, staffing, and partnerships; contact the Office of Tourism about grants and ideas; assemble next year's events calendar early; and improve links and cross-promotion among area businesses and organizations.

The group appeared inclined to **stop making the relocation of the existing booth the immediate priority** and instead investigate a downtown resource-center model that might be easier to implement.



Community updates and upcoming events

A number of organizations shared announcements. These included the Coleman House opening on Labor Day weekend with the *Six Airports in History* exhibit and an October student/Eagle Scout-related historical clothing project; a September 19 estate auction; a community picnic at Mosman Park; a September 12 event in Stockton Springs; Labor Day arts/workshops and the subsequent Touchstones/Fiber College activities; and **Sardine Fest on October 3**.

The local concert series is also doing well, averaging **more than 100 attendees**, with roughly 145 at the Katahdin Valley Boys concert. Upcoming performers/events include Paul Sullivan, Annie and the Rainmakers, a November Choral Festival of Gratitude benefiting the Interfaith Fuel Fund, and the Penobscot Bay Ringers in December.

Finally, the **Bridge to Bridge project** is moving forward somewhat slowly. A request for ideas is expected to go out soon, and there is some urgency because the grant supporting the effort lasts only one year.

Bottom line: The meeting shifted from a narrow question—*where should we move the information booth?*—toward a broader idea: creating a **visible downtown visitor and community resource center that actively connects tourists with Searsport businesses, events, attractions, and regional experiences**. The winter would be used to develop that concept, strengthen cross-promotion, and prepare a coordinated events calendar for next season.