

APPENDIX C

Analysis of the winners of the WWWW “Favorite Places” session, chosen by participants in the town visioning session, March 6, 2004

In the “Favorite Places” exercise, about 79 participants first identified all their personal favorites on a small map that the Comprehensive Plan Committee provided to each person. Then, they marked on a much larger map (there was one at each table) with small blue stickers the three places, either natural or manmade, that they most value. Next, each table of citizens identified those favorite places that received the greatest number of blue dots; they sought the “top three” winners but sometimes a tie made it necessary to include more than three sites. As table facilitators reported the outcome of this process to the entire group of eight tables, planning consultant Esther Lacognata recorded this information as best she could (the talk was fast!) on an even larger map. Throughout the exercise, there was a great deal of conversation and discussion. People seem to be enjoying hearing from others as well as enjoying the opportunity to highlight their point of view.

A planning expert recently said that the key to revitalizing a community is convincing local people that there is something there worth saving in their neighborhood or town. Participants in the WWWW “Favorite Places” exercise don’t need convincing: they quickly created long lists of the natural and manmade features that they value in Wiscasset and many said they could have made longer lists given more time.

Where are the places we love most? All over town. What are they? They range from large areas such as the entire viewshed of the village from the Sheepscot River (and the opposite) to particular personal favorites such as the grove of trees at the southern intersection of the Old Bath Road and U.S. Route 1; the road where someone learned to drive; the hunting grounds in the northwestern corner of the town; the town library; the town clock; White’s Island; Huber’s Market.

As conversations unfolded and participants shared their personal lists, others often commented, “Yes, I hadn’t thought of that; I love that place, too.” Now as they travel around the town, these people will recognize panoply of places that their fellow citizens enjoy and value.

The “grand-prize winners” in the “Favorite Places” exercise emerged clearly.

1. Every table affirmed the critical importance of **Wiscasset’s historic village center** by choosing it as one of their top three priorities. The historic buildings there won more attention than any other aspect of the town. Some

people had specific favorites (for example, the Lincoln County Courthouse, Castle Tucker, the Nickels-Sortwell House, the brick commercial buildings, the Customs House) while others named whole streets (Federal, High, and Main streets garnered the most attention) and many simply said “the entire historic district” or “the historic village as a whole.” This last approach seems the most useful, for each historic building is intrinsically connected to its context and it is the experience of the whole that makes Wiscasset’s Village so rewarding.

2. The second grand-prize winner was **the Sheepscot River, including not only the waterfront and harbor but also the entire river shoreline.** People highly value the Sheepscot both for its environmental and its scenic qualities. Seven of eight tables included river resources among their top choices. Four tables specifically mentioned the town waterfront and three chose the river and its shoreline. People often mentioned White’s Island in connection with the harbor or the river and it seems right to include it here. Again, consolidating all the river-related features that people valued seems to be the best way to reflect participants’ priorities.

3. The third grand-prize winner was **the rural area west of the village,** including some conservation lands and stretches of undeveloped roadway. Six out of eight tables included some feature of the “greenbelt” among their top three sites. Different tables focussed on different aspects of this area (one table chose Willow Lane; two chose the Morris Farm; one chose the Sortwell Forest; one chose the Dickinson Road area; one chose the “greenbelt”; one chose the “conservation lands” west of the village including these features and more). Because all these places abut, it seems most useful to consider them as a whole – as the “greenbelt” several people called it. It should be noted that next to or in close proximity to this greenbelt are the Wiscasset Primary School; the Wiscasset High School; the Wiscasset Community Center; the school district office; and another parcel of undeveloped town-owned land; and that the Community Playground is directly across Route 27 from the school district office.

4. Finally, participants said they greatly value **Chewonki Neck and the Eaton Farm,** undeveloped river peninsulas in the southern end of town. Three out of the eight tables chose Chewonki as one of their top three sites and two tables chose the Eaton Farm. Because of their proximity and because the Eaton Farm has recently become or will soon be part of the Chewonki Foundation, it again seems reasonable to regard these peninsulas as one general conservation area.

These were the “favorite places” in Wiscasset that received the most consensual praise. But this is not to say that the other sites people mentioned, even sites in which just one individual showed a particular interest, are unimportant. Indeed, one person with passion can awaken us to a place or feature that contributes something significant to Wiscasset’s unique identity. We must all watch and listen for such places; they are often lost as towns grow and much that is

distinctive about a town can disappear with them. Reading the full lists from each table at the event is interesting and inspiring.

As Wiscasset continues to change and develop, we must hold our “favorite places” in the forefront of our minds so that we may grow without sacrificing the key features that make Wiscasset beautiful, livable, interesting, and unique. We could encourage, attract, and welcome growth with confidence if we knew that the town’s “favorite places” are safe. It is not surprising that these very same features are often cited as the ones that have attracted new residents and businesses. Clearly they deserve appreciation and protection.