

## The Local Economy

### Introduction and Overview:

The health of a community is often measured by its economic activity. Income and employment, in addition to describing the nature of the population, can be indicators of current and future demand for housing, recreation, social, and cultural services. This chapter reports on the economy from two perspectives: statistical information and local business issues.

### Brighton's Median Household Income:

The most conventional measure of a town's economic health is the income of its individuals and families. The Census reports two basic types of income measures: "per-capita income" which is simply the aggregate income of the entire town divided by its population, and median household income, which is the average income of the households within the town. For planning purposes, the median household income is more helpful than the per capita income.

Per capita income (PCI) data is used to determine the average per-person income for an area and to evaluate the standard of living and quality of life of the population. Since PCI divides the town population number, including all individuals and not just adults, by the total income of the population, it will inevitably be lower for areas where more people are not working or are working but earning lower wages money.

**TABLE 1: BRIGHTON PLANTATION'S PER CAPITA VS. MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOMES**

	Brighton
<b>Per Capita Household Income</b>	\$18,256
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$50,750

*Source: 2022 American Community Survey & Censusreporter.org*

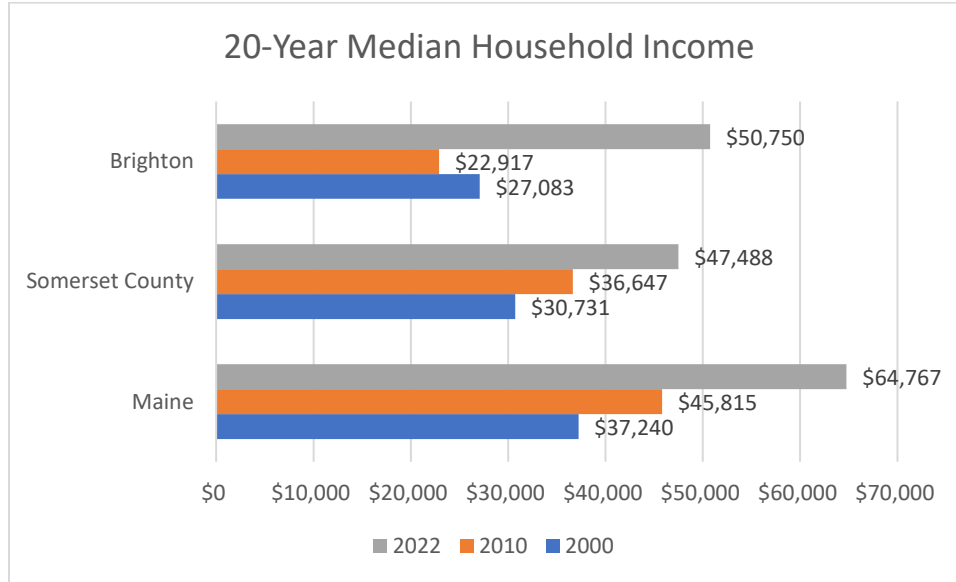
Median household income represents the total gross income received by all members of a household within a 12-month period. The median divides the income distribution into two equal parts: one half of the cases falling below the median income, and one half above the median income. Two factors distinguish it from per capita income:

- 1) decreasing household size over time,
- 2) changes in the number of members of the household with income.

Figure 1 shows changes to median household income over a 20-year period for Brighton, Somerset County and the State of Maine. In that 20-year period:

- Brighton's median household income increased by 87 percent.
- Somerset County's median household income increased by 55 percent.
- Maine's median household income increased by 74 percent.

**FIGURE 1: INCREASE IN MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME\***



Source: 2000 Census, 2010 and 2020 ACS  
\* Income has been adjusted for inflation

Brighton’s median household income is higher than that of Somerset County, likely because there are so many fewer households in Brighton, resulting in a much smaller sample size of population. When looking at median income data for smaller populations, like that of Brighton Plantation, the numbers can sometimes be skewed or seem higher than they really are due to the small size of the community. In places with fewer people, a few individuals with significantly higher incomes can dramatically raise the median income. Since the median represents the middle point of a data set, even one or two high earners can make the median appear much higher than the income levels of most residents.

For example, if Brighton Plantation has only a handful of households and one or two of them have particularly high incomes, the median income will be pulled up by those few. This doesn’t necessarily reflect the typical income for the majority of the population. Larger populations tend to have a wider range of incomes, so the median figure tends to be more representative of the general population. In a small community, however, the effect of a small number of high earners can create a misleading impression of the area’s overall economic standing.

These income levels are also a way to assess housing affordability. A housing unit is considered affordable if a household whose income is at or below 80 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) can live there without spending more than 30 percent of their income (including insurance, utilities, heat, and other housing-related costs). This is true for both renters and owners.

For example, in Somerset County, 80 percent of the AMI by family size is as follows:

Family of 1: \$46,150  
 Family of 2: \$52,750  
 Family of 3: \$59,350  
 Family of 4: \$65,900

Family of 5: \$71,200  
 Family of 6: \$76,450  
 Family of 7: \$81,750  
 Family of 8: \$87,000

This data is from 2024 and can be found on the Maine Housing website ([https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/homeimprovement/80-ami-income-limits.pdf?sfvrsn=6df08615\\_5](https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/homeimprovement/80-ami-income-limits.pdf?sfvrsn=6df08615_5)). In Brighton, 80 percent of the median household income is \$40,600. Roughly 44 percent of Brighton’s 26 households earn less than this income level.

The American Community Survey identified 16 households with social security income, about 62 percent of all households. It also identified 14 households with retirement income; however, there is probably a significant overlap between these categories. The 2022 ACS identified only 3 families with public assistance income.

**Local Labor Force and Employment:**

Labor force is defined as the sum of employed and unemployed persons, thus being in the labor force is not the same as being employed.

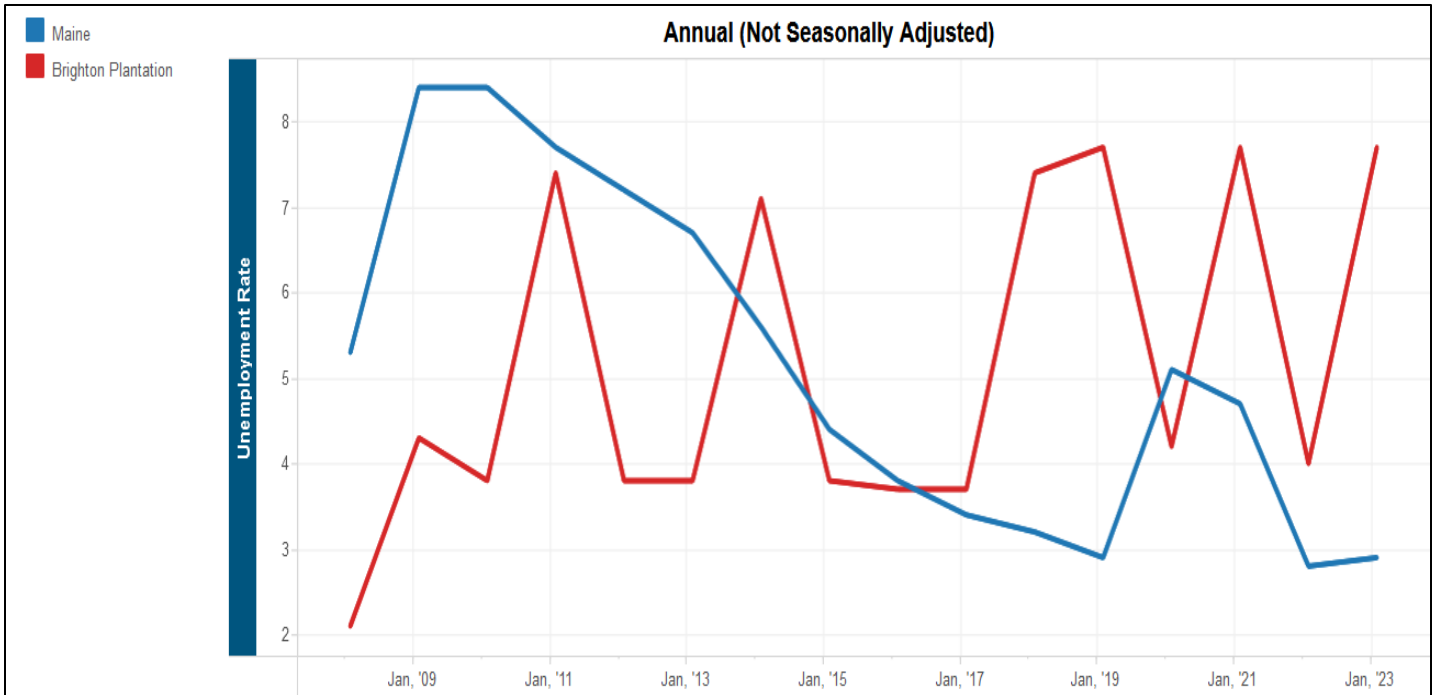
Unemployment rates are reported by the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL). The MDOL conducts surveys and is generally more accurate than the Census or ACS. Figure 2 is a graph of unemployment in the State of Maine and Brighton Plantation.

**FIGURE 2- UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS IN MAINE AND BRIGHTON PLANTATION**

Year	Month	Geography	Area Name	Civilian Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
2023	-	State	Maine	687,322	667,619	19,703	2.9%
		City/Town	Brighton Plantation	26	24	2	7.7%
2022	-	State	Maine	681,172	661,833	19,339	2.8%
		City/Town	Brighton Plantation	25	24	1	4.0%
2021	-	State	Maine	688,542	656,138	32,404	4.7%
		City/Town	Brighton Plantation	26	24	2	7.7%
2020	-	State	Maine	671,979	637,985	33,994	5.1%
		City/Town	Brighton Plantation	24	23	1	4.2%
2019	-	State	Maine	698,261	678,011	20,250	2.9%
		City/Town	Brighton Plantation	26	24	2	7.7%
2018	-	State	Maine	700,856	678,584	22,272	3.2%
		City/Town	Brighton Plantation	27	25	2	7.4%
2017	-	State	Maine	703,871	680,164	23,707	3.4%
		City/Town	Brighton Plantation	27	26	1	3.7%
2016	-	State	Maine	693,917	667,723	26,194	3.8%
		City/Town	Brighton Plantation	27	26	1	3.7%
2015	-	State	Maine	687,859	657,550	30,309	4.4%

Source: MDOL

**FIGURE 3- UNEMPLOYMENT GRAPH FOR MAINE AND BRIGHTON PLANTATION**



Source: MDOL

Figures 2 and 3 show Brighton’s civilian labor force, as well as employment and unemployment rate compared with the state. Brighton has cyclical trends of highs and lows, which happen more frequently than the highs and lows seen at the state level, likely because the state is on a much larger scale. The trend caused by the pandemic is easily visible on the state level, but not evident for Brighton Plantation in and around 2020. This cyclical nature is also influenced by the seasonal work that many residents participate in, particularly in trades and forestry. These industries often experience fluctuations based on the time of year, contributing to the more frequent changes in employment and unemployment rates seen in Brighton compared to the state as a whole.

**Labor Market Area:**

Brighton Plantation is a contributor to the Skowhegan Labor Market Area (LMA), detailed in Table 2 below.

**TABLE 3: LABOR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE SKOWHEGAN LMA & BRIGHTON**

Year	Geography	Civilian Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
2023	Skowhegan LMA	13,524	12,977	547	4.0%
	Brighton	26	24	2	7.7%
2020	Skowhegan LMA	13,359	12,531	828	6.2%
	Brighton	24	23	1	4.2%
2015	Skowhegan LMA	14,478	13,550	928	6.4%
	Brighton	26	25	1	3.8%
2010	Skowhegan LMA	14,960	13,256	1,704	11.4%
	Brighton	26	25	1	3.8%

Source: Maine Department of Labor

**Commuting to Work:**

Brighton has no residents who are employed in town. There are, however, nine people who live outside of town and commute to Brighton Plantation for work.<sup>1</sup> 23 Brighton residents commute elsewhere for work (Figures 5 and 6).



Source: 2021 ACS  
Figure 4- Inflow/Outflow of Commuters

<sup>1</sup> The Comprehensive Plan Committee felt this number could be misrepresented as there is not much industry in Brighton Plantation. Instead, this could account for those who work at a business located in Brighton but conducts work in other towns across the state.

**FIGURE 5- WHERE WORKERS LIVE WHO ARE EMPLOYED IN BRIGHTON**

<u>All County Subdivisions</u>	9	100.0%
<u>Harmony town (Somerset, ME)</u>	2	22.2%
<u>Bingham town (Somerset, ME)</u>	1	11.1%
<u>Franklin town (Hancock, ME)</u>	1	11.1%
<u>Harpswell town (Cumberland, ME)</u>	1	11.1%
<u>Penobscot Indian Island Reservation (Penobscot, ME)</u>	1	11.1%
<u>Skowhegan town (Somerset, ME)</u>	1	11.1%
<u>Solon town (Somerset, ME)</u>	1	11.1%
<u>Sullivan town (Hancock, ME)</u>	1	11.1%
<b>All Other Locations</b>	0	0.0%

Source: 2021 ACS

Figure 5 shows where people live who commute to Brighton and Figure 6 shows where Brighton residents travel for employment. All data is for year-round workers; no information on seasonal workers was available.

**FIGURE 6- WORK DESTINATION FOR BRIGHTON RESIDENTS**

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Share</b>
<u>All County Subdivisions</u>	23	100.0%
<u>Athens town (Somerset, ME)</u>	3	13.0%
<u>Harmony town (Somerset, ME)</u>	3	13.0%
<u>Skowhegan town (Somerset, ME)</u>	3	13.0%
<u>Bangor city (Penobscot, ME)</u>	2	8.7%
<u>Augusta city (Kennebec, ME)</u>	1	4.3%
<u>Brewer city (Penobscot, ME)</u>	1	4.3%
<u>Brunswick town (Cumberland, ME)</u>	1	4.3%
<u>Clinton town (Kennebec, ME)</u>	1	4.3%
<u>Dover-Foxcroft town (Piscataquis, ME)</u>	1	4.3%
<u>Greenville town (Piscataquis, ME)</u>	1	4.3%
<b>All Other Locations</b>	6	26.1%

Source: 2021 ACS

## Job Types:

Table 4 broadly lists the occupational categories of Brighton’s workers for 2015 and 2022.

**TABLE 4: OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE FOR BRIGHTON**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>Total Employed</b>	26	20
<b>Management, business, science, and art</b>	3	5
<b>Service</b>	8	4
<b>Sales and Office</b>	5	2
<b>Natural resource, construction, and maintenance</b>	4	9
<b>Production, transportation, and material moving</b>	6	0

*Source: 2015 & 2022 ACS*

In 2015 nearly 23 percent of the labor force was employed in the category ‘production, transportation, and material moving’. In 2022, no Brighton residents were employed in this occupational category. The ‘service’ category also decreased between 2015 to 2022, while the ‘natural resources, construction, and maintenance’ category more than doubled in this time.

Brighton’s workforce can also be broken down by industry of employment, as in Table 5. This is not as specific as describing a person’s actual job because, for example, manufacturing may include secretaries, managers, sales staff and skilled workers all together. However, breaking industries down in this way provides information to gauge which sectors of the economy are doing well. An additional advantage is that this is the classification that the Maine DOL uses for its annual updates.

**TABLE 5: INDUSTRIAL CLASSIFICATION FOR BRIGHTON**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>Total Employed</b>	26	20
<b>Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining</b>	5	5
<b>Construction</b>	0	9
<b>Manufacturing</b>	0	0
<b>Wholesale trade</b>	0	0
<b>Retail trade</b>	5	0
<b>Transportation and warehousing, and utilities</b>	4	0
<b>Information</b>	0	0
<b>Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing</b>	0	0
<b>Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services</b>	2	0
<b>Educational services, health care and social assistance</b>	10	6
<b>Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services</b>	0	0
<b>Other services, except public administration</b>	0	0
<b>Public administration</b>	0	0

*Source: 2015 & 2022 ACS*

In Table 5, the ‘agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining category retained the same amount of Brighton workers, while all other categories, besides construction, decreased. From Table 5, it appears that the categories ‘agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining’ and ‘educational services, health care and social assistance’ are the strongholds of the local economy.

**Brighton’s Local Business Climate:**

Brighton has a small local economy, with most businesses being inconspicuous home occupations or small enterprises. The town encourages home-based businesses, such as farm stands, as they align with the rural character and have minimal impact on traffic or natural resources. While there is no opposition to larger commercial or industrial development, such projects would need to be in keeping with the town's rural atmosphere and ensure there are no adverse effects on traffic or the environment.

Currently, Brighton has no defined priorities for economic development besides that it must be in a location that can support that type of development without causing adverse effects to natural resources. Considerations include appropriate soil, topography, road access, proximity to wetlands, and existing land use patterns.

Brighton does not have public utilities such as municipal water, sewer, three-phase power, or broadband, and there are no plans to introduce these services in the future. Any proposed development in the Plantation is expected to operate within the existing constraints, without the support of these amenities. The type of economic development



that would require such utilities is neither anticipated nor welcomed in Brighton.

Brighton does not have any economic development incentives such as Tax Increment Financing District, as the town does not wish to encourage an excessive amount of development or large scale development. For appropriate economic development, the Land Use Zoning Ordinance details specific districts and requirements for approval, including performance standards to allow the town's Planning Board oversight.

### **Forestry and Agriculture:**

Brighton's primary economic driver is the vast expanse of working forest in and around the town. Timber company giant, Weyerhaeuser owns approximately 17,000 acres of commercial forest in Brighton, which is about 80% percent of the town's land area. The remaining land not owned by Weyerhaeuser is largely forested, as well.

Brighton has small-scale agriculture, primarily consisting of personal hobby farms and farm stands. The plantation's hilly terrain and short growing season limit large-scale farming. Forestry, while a significant part of the local economy, operates outside of the town, with large commercial foresters transporting products through town to large mills, such as SAPPI in Skowhegan. These forestry operations do not typically employ local residents, as the work is carried out by external crews

The Agriculture and Forestry chapter of this plan details the parcels enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax Law Program and harvest production information. The logging industry and forestry management operations are likely the reason the occupational category of natural resource, construction, and maintenance increased, and the job category of agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining stayed the same between 2015 and 2022.

### **Unique Assets:**

Brighton Plantation boasts several unique assets, including a wealth of recreational opportunities that attract outdoor enthusiasts year-round. The town is home to well-maintained ATV trails and snowmobile routes, offering exciting terrain for those who enjoy winter pursuits. In addition, Brighton's proximity to nearby ski areas allows for easy access to skiing and snowboarding, making it an appealing destination for winter sports enthusiasts. The area is also rich in historic resources, with sites that reflect the town's past and its rural heritage. While there is a clear opportunity to expand tourism, such as developing more outdoor recreation, promoting its historic sites, or creating additional lodging options, these opportunities have yet to be fully realized, leaving room for future growth in tourism.

### **Regulation of Economic Development:**

Brighton's Land Use Zoning Ordinance includes the following five land use districts:

1. General Development District
2. Residential Development District

3. Shoreland Development District
4. General Management District
5. Protection Districts

Permit requirements are dependent upon the land use activity and the district. Different permit types include:

No permit required

Permit issued by the Code Enforcement Officer

Conditional Use Permit granted after review and approval by the Planning Board

General Development District: This district comprises the area where present and future residential, commercial, industrial and other significant development are considered to be the most desirable in terms of road access, economic viability, concentration of present development, and retention of natural character in the remainder of the community.

Residential Development District: The purpose of this District is to set aside certain areas for single family residential uses to provide for residential activities apart from areas of commercial and industrial development. The intention is to encourage the concentration of residential type development in areas which are appropriate for the use and to prevent development in such areas which is incompatible with residential uses.

Shoreland Development District: The purpose of this district is to regulate residential and recreational development and other uses so that the development or use will not degrade the waters, recreational potential, fishery habitat, or scenic character in shoreland areas suitable for development.

Protection Districts: The purposes of these districts are to regulate land uses to protect the public health, safety and welfare and to protect sensitive and significant resources in the beds and waters of all water bodies (including lakes and ponds), flowing streams, wetlands, floodplains and in shoreland areas along such water bodies in order to maintain water quality and scenic and recreational values; to protect plant, fish, and wildlife habitat; to minimize the economic and human costs of floods; and to maintain the groundwater table and groundwater recharge and discharge areas.

General Management District: The purpose of this district is to permit forestry and agricultural management activities to occur with minimal interference from unrelated development. In addition, it provides protection of the food supply for wildlife that inhabit the forested areas of the plantation.

Under Brighton's existing Land Use Zoning Ordinance, commercial and industrial development are generally permitted in two districts: the General Development District and the Shoreland Development District. For the Shoreland Development District, the only commercial and industrial uses that are permitted are those which require a shoreland location to function.

In both districts, any commercial and industrial uses must comply with the performance

standards outlined in Article 4 and require a Conditional Use Permit, granted after the Planning Board reviews and approves the application.

Brighton's Land Use Zoning Ordinance was adopted by the town in 1995 and needs an update, which is scheduled to happen concurrently with the update of this Comprehensive Plan. Updating the Ordinance would provide more up-to-date standards and requirements to further protect the town's natural resources, direct growth, and preserve rural areas.

### **Summary of Analysis:**

Historically, Brighton's economic growth has happened in incremental changes.

Brighton's abundant outdoor activities and recreational opportunities draw many visitors every year and every season, a virtue the town would like to continue to promote.

Brighton's labor force has changed little over the past decade. The unemployment rate is low, but that's related to the low population numbers. Brighton is within commuting distance of the Skowhegan Labor Market Area, which is where most of the town's working population commutes.

Minimal economic development has taken place in Brighton in the past decade and that trend is anticipated to continue in the coming decade. The town's Land Use Zoning Ordinance delineates a district in which appropriate economic growth will be directed. The Land Use Zoning Ordinance will be updated to include new standards to protect natural resources and to make the document more user-friendly.

Policies:	Strategies:	Implementing Party/Timeframe:
<p><b>LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:</b></p> <p>Brighton Plantation’s local economy is an important contributor to the health and vitality of the Plantation and is linked to many other areas of Plantation policy. Like many other communities, Brighton Plantation is facing trends that are unfavorable, such as rural location and lack of investment capital. But Brighton Plantation has several assets as well – it’s waterbodies, recreational opportunities and good quality of life. The town should continue to promote these assets, cooperate with private businesses and regional economic players, and maintain a focus on suitable economic development to succeed in building a more robust economy.</p> <p><b>State Goal: To promote an economic climate which increases job opportunities and overall economic well-being.</b></p>		
Policies:	Strategies:	Implementing Party/Timeframe:
<p>1. To support the type of economic development activity the community desires, reflecting the community’s role in the region.</p>	<p>1.1: If appropriate, assign responsibility and provide financial support for economic development activities to the proper entity (e.g., a local economic development committee, a local representative to a regional economic development organization, the community’s economic development director, a regional economic development initiative, or other).</p> <p>1.2: Explore ways to help existing businesses stay in Brighton Plantation.</p>	
<p>2. To make a financial commitment, if necessary, to support desired economic development, including needed public improvements.</p>	<p>2.1: Enact or amend local ordinances to reflect the desired scale, design, intensity, and location of future economic development.</p> <p>2.2: If public investments are foreseen to support economic development, identify the mechanisms to be considered to</p>	

<b>Policies:</b>	<b>Strategies:</b>	<b>Implementing Party/Timeframe:</b>
	<p>finance them (local tax dollars, creating a tax increment financing district, a Community Development Block Grant or other grants, bonding, impact fees, etc.)</p> <p>2.3: Explore grant opportunities for appropriate economic development.</p>	
<p>3. To coordinate with regional development corporations and surrounding towns as necessary to support desired economic development.</p>	<p>3.1: Participate in any regional economic development planning efforts.</p> <p>3.2: Explore options to coordinate with the regional school system for training opportunities for young workers.</p>	