

# Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —



**POPULATION:** 2,200

**CHALLENGE:** Growth

**FOCUS:** Planning

**KEY TOOL:**  
Action Plan

**“One great offshoot of Community Heart & Soul was it reversed the flow of information in Damariscotta. Government began to reach out to residents in a way that hadn’t happened before, and residents responded in a way that hadn’t happened before.”**

**—Jane Lafleur, former executive director, Friends of Midcoast Maine.**

## DAMARISCOTTA, MAINE

Damariscotta is a picturesque coastal village with a rich history that can be dated back 2,500 years thanks to ancient oyster shell middens, or remnant piles, left along the banks of the Damariscotta River by the Wawenock Abenaki. Historically, Damariscotta’s economy was rooted in shipbuilding. Today, the town is a regional shopping and service center. In the summer months, the population grows with second homeowners and tourists.

Major development proposals in the early 2000s created controversy in this scenic coastal town. In 2005, in response to a proposed Wal-Mart, voters approved a 35,000-square-foot limit on retail buildings. The development was thwarted, but the divisiveness surrounding the issue underscored the need for a more proactive way to approach planning.

Managing growth and balancing the burgeoning tourist economy with the needs of the local community were front of mind when Heart & Soul launched in late 2008.

Damariscotta launched Community Heart & Soul® at the town’s annual Great Pumpkin Fest and Regatta. The project was led by the Damariscotta Planning Advisory Committee, a 28-member board created by the town to advise the board of selectmen.

### **Involve Everyone:**

Nearly 1,000 residents were engaged through neighbor-to-neighbor chats, community conversations at potluck dinners, a growth survey, a community planning summit, and a youth survey.

Government officials engaged more regularly with residents through enews and other forms of communication. For example, when sidewalks were being rebuilt, officials held meetings, went door to door, and sent out emails to hear from residents.

The town’s 2014 comprehensive plan, which reflected the results of extensive community engagement, was approved by 95 percent of voters.



# DAMARISCOTTA, MAINE

## Focus on What Matters:

The Heart & Soul statements generated by the residents of Damariscotta focused on the things that make Damariscotta great, now and in the future:

- We can work locally and can grow locally owned businesses.
- We have a strong sense of community where people trust one another and feel safe.
- We are an involved community that participates in schools, organizations, churches and community events and festivals.
- We appreciate the close proximity of culture and nature. Right out our back doors we might see a seal or a moose, but we also have fine restaurants, art galleries, theater, bookstores and library, all within walking distance.
- We have easy access to goods and services, to local government and to information.

The residents not only focused on the things that led to their 2014 Comp plan but creating key improvements to the unique character of Damariscotta – including their dynamic waterfront. Improvements have been made to the waterside park including benches, picnic tables, landscaping, and interpretive signs. Public restrooms and a walkway connecting Main Street to the waterfront—were both priorities raised during Heart & Soul.

## Play the Long Game:

Heart & Soul was instrumental in the approval of the Comp plan in 2014. But the decisions the community made then live on in real activities and actions today.

Over a decade after Heart & Soul began, it lives on in Damariscotta. It continues to guide actions within the city, and a Facebook page engaging residents is still up, running, and active.

In 2019, over 100 Damariscotta community members celebrated the successes in the community since Heart & Soul, including public improvements, land use code changes, planning projects, grants, donations, growth in community organizations such as at the YMCA and the Land Trust, commitment to new conservation, preservation and the retention of community character, to name just a few.

Town Manager Matt Lutkus remarks, “Our 10 year CH&S celebration allowed our community to recognize all the achievements that have been guided by our Heart & Soul, including our Comp Plan, a Natural Habitat Initiative, Historic Preservation work and the new focus of our Public Access and Safety committee. After a decade of CH&S, we celebrated all the success that has been achieved within our community and have recommitted to embracing our Heart & Soul for the future.”

As Board of Selectmen Chair Robin Mayer, put it, “Civic engagement in Damariscotta’s planning and economic growth that began over 10 years ago with the implementation of the Heart & Soul project is still very much alive and well in Damariscotta. Our community continues to stress what matters most to retain Damariscotta’s New England charm while moving into the 21st century. We would not be as grounded without community involvement.”

Heart & Soul gave Damariscotta more than the typical document that simply sits on the shelf, the lasting impact lives on within the efforts and residents within the community, every day.

Visit [communityheartandsoul.org](http://communityheartandsoul.org) to learn how Community Heart & Soul® can help your town to shape the future based on what matters most.