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**For Immediate Release: 6/29/2020**

**Fresh Air on Main Street Project Moves Ahead in Freeport**  
***Proposal to Close Main Street on Weekends Approved by Maine DOT***

Freeport, Maine – The Department of Transportation has approved the Town of Freeport's proposal to close a portion of Main Street to vehicular traffic on Saturdays and Sundays starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. The closure will begin at 8 a.m. on Saturdays and end at 8 p.m. on Sundays for two weekends. It would continue through Labor Day weekend only if an evaluation process indicates that the project is helping businesses.

According to Freeport Town Council Chair John Egan, "the Town Council wanted to try something different, although this idea is not completely unique. Downtown Freeport is an attractive place to walk around town, and we're trying to highlight that. We hope this will remind locals and visitors about our accessible downtown and return some energy to our community. Moving some downtown activity outdoors will also help accommodate those who would prefer to spend less time indoors for health and safety reasons during this unprecedented time."

Peter Joseph, Freeport Town Manager, started receiving phone calls and emails from businesses owners and residents asking for a street closure or other major town-wide response almost as soon as stores began closing due to COVID-19 concerns.

According to Joseph, "We looked immediately at what we could do as a municipality to help support businesses during a really difficult time. Our Town Planner, Caroline Pelletier, moved quickly to draft an emergency ordinance to allow businesses to move activities outdoors upon reopening, which was approved by the Town Council in mid-May. We realized during that process that although some businesses had a desire to move some of their retail operations outdoors, the compact layout of our Town center did not provide the space for them to do that safely without further constricting sidewalks, which are already less than six feet wide in some places. Putting sales racks and displays on the sidewalks in these locations isn't possible because it would cause accessibility issues for users of wheelchairs and strollers, and would prohibit pedestrian users from maintaining safe social distances from other pedestrians. We hope that allowing the use of the vehicle travel lanes will help to provide more space for those outdoor business activities, as well as for guests to maintain safe social distancing while in our downtown."

The planning process was different in Freeport than in other Maine communities. The process started back in April and has been steered by group made up of representatives from Visit Freeport, Freeport Economic Development Corporation, Greater Freeport Chamber of Commerce, the Town of Freeport, Freeport Police Department and L.L.Bean.

Before settling on a final proposal, two different surveys were deployed to more than 500 business leaders and residents seeking input. Even though these surveys demonstrated significant support for the plan with more than 70% of respondents in favor, the closure was modified significantly based on feedback. It was made shorter due to business requests and a detour eliminated to accommodate residents' concerns.

The Town of Freeport also held a public comment session on Wednesday, April 24 where verbal and written comments were submitted both in support of the plan and against. Planning group members also interviewed more than 50

individuals and continue working one-on-one with some businesses to overcome specific hurdles around access to deliveries during the closure.

Joseph explained, "We've undertaken a robust public input process, and have modified the initial proposal several times to address concerns from residents and businesses. While we've been able to address most of the concerns associated with this proposal, the Town remains committed to using input from residents and businesses to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposal, and we will discontinue the Main Street closure immediately during the two week trial period if the economic or public health concerns raised during our public input process are realized."

Contrary to media reports there are no plan for games or concerts inside the closure. The plan is only intended to open up space to shop and dine and provide additional space for social distancing.

"We want to assure our visitors that we're working together as a community to provide a safe, welcoming experience every time you enter our historic village", said Kelly Edwards, Executive Director of Visit Freeport. Edwards continued, "we've always been known as a favorite destination for fresh air shopping and dining, and this closure helps create even more outdoor space for social distancing."

Main Street stores including Polo Ralph Lauren Factory Store, Fjallraven, vineyard vines, Sperry, Loft Outlet and The Cosmetics Company Store are working on plans to bring retail outside on the weekends. The L.L.Bean Pop Up Shop will be set-up within the closure on Main Street on select weekends with popular products, offering an alternative way to shop Freeport's most famous retailer. There will be shaded seating areas for those waiting for a table at one of nearby restaurants or to enter retail stores that are limiting shoppers according to their square footage.

Other Freeport businesses located outside of the closure may have a temporary presence on Main Street through an easy application process being managed by Visit Freeport including temporary retail or dining as well as signage to help direct guests to their business.

All activities within the closure are required to adhere to the State of Maine COVID-19 Prevention Checklists for the related industry. Guest will also notice educational signage about social distancing and mask wearing throughout downtown. Complimentary disposable masks will be available at the new Visit Freeport Information Center located at 115 Main Street, next door to L.L.Bean.

Visitors to Freeport this summer will also be excited to see that several retailers have opened new stores or expanded their footprint downtown. Toad & Co just relocated their Warehouse Outlet from Portland to 9 Bow Street, right next door to their full retail store at 11 Bow Street. The Levi's Outlet is now open at 46 Main Street. Later this summer, EMS (Eastern Mountain Sports) will be opening a store at 4 Mill Street.

The best way to start planning your fresh air trip to Freeport is online at [visitfreeport.com](https://visitfreeport.com). Details on what to expect on July 4 & 5 will be posted there as well as on the Visit Freeport social media channels closer to the weekend.

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Suggested outline:

Maine DOT has approved the Town of Freeport's proposal to close a portion of Main Street from 8 a.m. Saturday to 8 p.m. Sunday for a two-week trial period beginning with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. If successful, the closure could continue through Labor Day weekend. Map courtesy: Caroline Pelletier, Freeport Town Planner