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September 9, 2025

To: Carley Feibusch, Monhegan Plantation Municipal Administrator
From: Dan DeBord, MCOG Community Planner
Subject: Monhegan Housing Existing Conditions Initial Findings

Dear Mrs. Feibusch,

As the smallest municipality by land area in the state, 12 miles out to sea, Monhegan Plantation faces several different challenges you are all well aware of in providing enough housing to meet the demand for year-round residents and seasonal workers. As a plantation, Monhegan's land use and zoning are regulated by the Maine Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC), which means that local control over zoning allowances is limited, and a unified vision must be identified to enable discussions with LUPC about any zoning changes. Between difficulties in obtaining construction materials, high cost of development if construction materials and builders are available, lack of local zoning and land use control to easily increase density allowances, and the limited availability of land, a great degree of creativity will be required to expand housing opportunities on the island.

This memo, along with the accompanying map, is an initial summary of the existing zoning framework, land availability, and regulatory constraints, drawing on past LUPC guidance, the questions being asked in the upcoming community housing needs and preferences survey, and recent MCOG zoning and land use analyses. We anticipate that we will refine these initial findings further throughout the coming months as additional insight is gained via community engagement workshops, review of survey results, and additional stakeholder conversations with Monhegan leadership, LUPC, and supporting organizations such as MISCA, Monhegan Associates, Lincoln County Regional Planning.

1. Zoning Framework and Land Use Patterns

Monhegan Island has a mix of Development districts and Protection districts. The Development districts, concentrated near the village, are the only areas that allow for multi-family or denser residential use.

- General Development (D-GN, 37.5 acres): Two-family and multi-family dwellings allowed by permit.
- Residential Development (D-RS, 16.6 acres): Two-family dwellings allowed by permit; multi-family dwellings require special exception approval.
- Maritime Development (D-MT, 1.8 acres): Established at Monhegan's request to preserve working waterfront and maritime uses; residential development is not allowed.
- Protection Subdistricts, covering the majority of the island, limit or prohibit residential uses:
- Aquifer Protection (P-AR, 72.7 acres): Only single-family homes allowed by permit.
- Unusual Area Protection (P-UA, 439 acres): Primarily conservation lands owned by Monhegan

Associates; only single-family homes allowed by permit.
- Recreation Protection (P-RR, ~312 acres): Also conservation land, prohibits residential development.
- Other protective overlays (shoreland, wetland, soils & geology) further limit development.

Only a small share of Monhegan's land area—primarily in the D-GN and D-RS zones—offers potential for workforce or multi-family housing development.

2. Land Availability and Physical Constraints

Lot Size and Nonconformance: Many existing island lots are undersized relative to LUPC dimensional standards. The Commission's affordable housing rules allow the minimum lot size to be reduced to 20,000 sq. ft. or less per unit, provided wastewater requirements are met.

Wastewater Disposal: Septic and wastewater disposal capacity is the most significant limiting factor for adding housing units. Many small lots cannot safely support individual systems. While rules generally expect wastewater disposal on the same lot as the dwelling, LUPC and DHHS allow combined or shared septic systems, which could enable higher density or clustered development.

Conservation Lands: More than half of the island is protected by Monhegan Associates under P-UA and P-RR subdistricts. Housing development on these lands is largely not permitted unless land is released from conservation, which would require legal, regulatory, and community processes.

Developed Properties with Potential: Properties such as the Monhegan House (in P-AR, currently a nonconforming commercial use) and the Monhegan Store have been discussed as candidates for adding residential units. However, "stacking" dimensional requirements (lot coverage, frontage, mixed-use standards) may complicate these scenarios.

3. Opportunities for Workforce and Housing Development

1. Maximize Use of D-GN and D-RS Zones
- Encourage small-scale multi-family and duplex development.
- Utilize special exceptions in D-RS for additional units.

2. Expand ADU Options
- Formalize ADU allowances through LUPC.
- Provide incentives or pre-approved design templates to reduce cost barriers.

3. Clustered Wastewater Systems
- Explore shared septic systems across undersized lots.
- Engage DHHS early to confirm acceptable technologies and approaches.

4. Mixed-Use Redevelopment
- Redevelop existing commercial lots (e.g., Monhegan House, Monhegan Store,) to incorporate housing, provided dimensional standards can be managed.

5. Partnerships and Funding
- Work with MISCA, Island Institute, and housing nonprofits to leverage funding and technical

support.
- Further investigate state, federal, and private affordable housing funds.

6. Long-Range Options
- Explore limited release of conservation land if near-village development proves insufficient.
- Consider petitioning LUPC for a tailored zoning or planning process to create additional flexibility.

4. Key Constraints and Risks

- Wastewater and water supply limitations remain the greatest barriers to expanding housing.
- Dimensional standards (setbacks, lot coverage, frontage) restrict infill potential on small lots.
- Funding complexity for mixed-use redevelopment may discourage private investment.
- Community character concerns could limit support for larger housing projects.

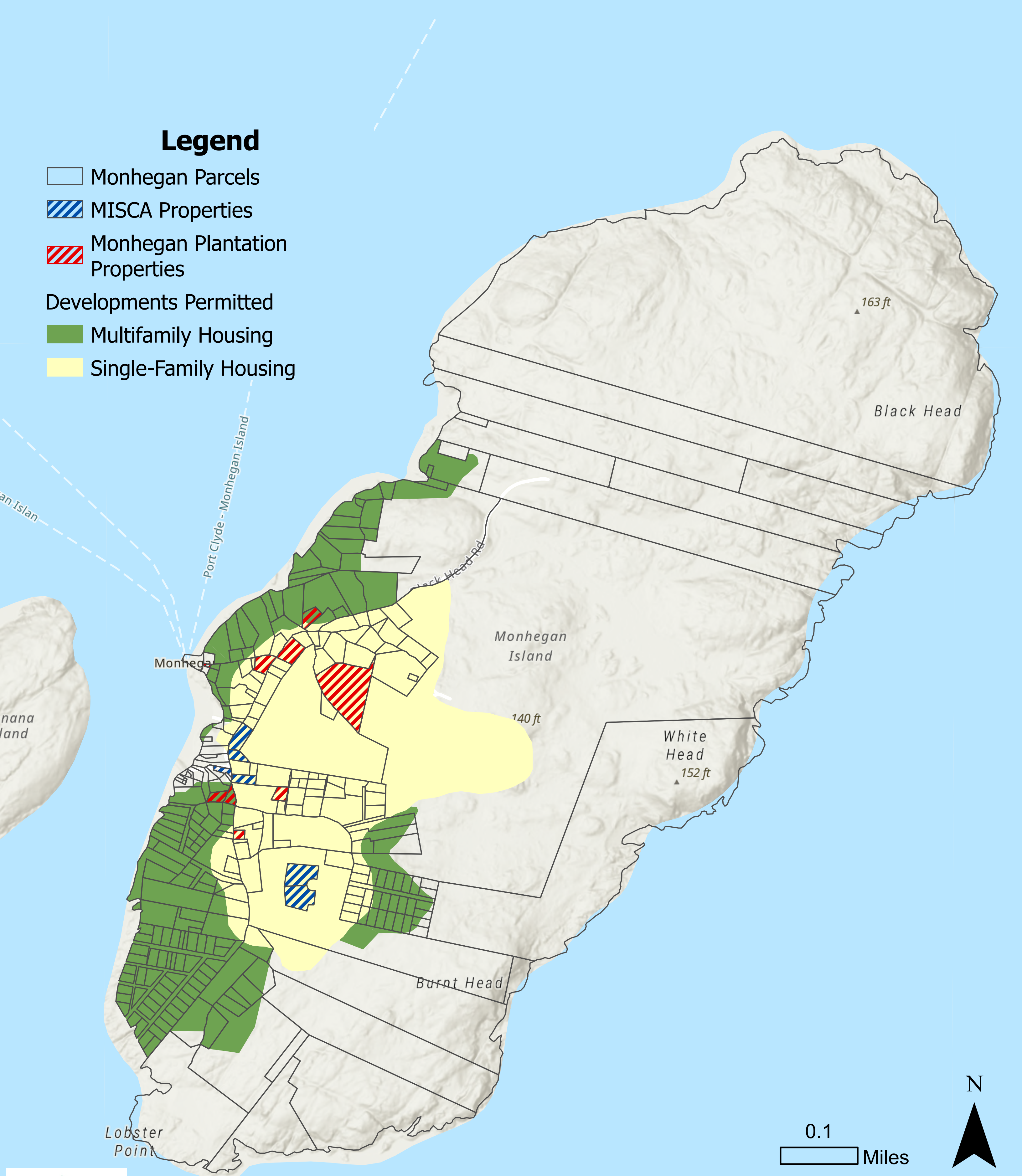
Conclusion

Monhegan's housing challenges are defined by its small land base, conservation commitments, and infrastructure limits. However, existing zoning (D-GN and D-RS), coupled with regulatory flexibility under LUPC's affordable housing rules, creates opportunities for carefully scaled workforce and year-round housing. Community support for ADUs, clustered systems, and small multi-unit projects, coupled with a lot-level analysis of wastewater feasibility for Plantation and MISCA owned lots in the D-GN and D-RS zones would provide a strong foundation for action.

The next steps should include:

1. Incorporation of results from community surveying, workshops, and stakeholder conversations into a refined final existing conditions report.
2. A lot-level analysis of wastewater feasibility in D-GN and D-RS zones.
3. Development of model legal and technical frameworks for shared septic systems.
4. Further investigation of existing pilot projects elsewhere in the state demonstrating ADUs or small multi-unit housing with shared systems on lot sizes similar to those on Monhegan.
5. Pursuit of funding partnerships to reduce the cost burden on residents and local institutions.

Monhegan Island Development Zones



Map prepared by Midcoast Council of Governments, Charlotte Nutt Dataworks

Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community