



## *Communities*

“COMMUNITY” HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A BUZZWORD for everything the twenty-first century is not: intimacy, familiarity, a sense of reciprocal responsibility, shared history and place. “You recognize your holding ground,” writes Maine poet Philip Booth, “and know what deviation / swung your compass back.” Community is thus about return — a going-back to a world that is more familiar and more appropriately scaled for human beings.

Island communities may sometimes be isolated, provincial, inbred, even bigoted against outsiders — but they also have inherent strengths that few other places in the contemporary world possess. “In the winter, I started an egg delivery route, dropping by my customers’ houses once a week,” recalls Chellie Pingree as she recounts her slow entrance into North Haven’s tight-knit year-round community. “I came in through their kitchen doors and was occasionally asked to sit at their well-scrubbed or cluttered tables and drink coffee. Talking about the small things that fill our lives, I gradually began to know my neighbors and find out who was in this community...”

Communities don’t have to be isolated rural places. Long Island in Casco Bay was a neighborhood of Portland, Maine’s largest city, when its residents decided they had more in common with each other than the folks at City Hall — and declared their independence. Quite literally, they took control of their own future. As one resident put it, “We’re finally taking ownership of our problems.”

Small communities are always subject to large forces beyond their control. The year-round islands off the Maine coast face constant battles with the Maine State Ferry Service that is their lifeline to the mainland. Real estate prices and the rising taxes they bring with them are pushing many island communities in the direction of extinction.

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