GrowSmart MAINE

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION: FIRST STEPS

Practical Steps to Transform Commercial Strips
Into Mixed-Use Centers

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Can commercial strips in the small town environment such as we find in Maine be retrofit to meet the needs of both property owners and the public?

To answer the question, three design exercises were carried out in cooperation with local planners and the owners of (1) an older strip shopping center in an in-town location, (2) an older strip shopping center in a suburban location, and (3) a group of properties in an emerging strip along a rural arterial and, in each case, local planners and design and development consultants.

The purpose was to test whether there is a "sweet spot" for developing, redeveloping or expanding these properties into activity centers that satisfy both owners' perceptions of market requirements and best land use–transportation practices.

The benchmarks for best land use–transportation practices are embodied in the "four Ds": density, distance (accessibility), diversity (mix of uses) and design. At certain levels of density, distance, diversity and design, choices in transportation improve and pressure on arterials is reduced; and retail experts suggest that the same strategies that help achieve these levels also can help to brand the centers as livelier, more competitive locations.

Each exercise found a "sweet spot" that appears to be achievable. The combinations of strategies are tailored to the specific conditions of the properties, but there are common elements:

- For the older properties, it appears possible to approximately double the floor area of development within the same land area, adding density and mix of uses without disrupting legal arrangements with existing anchor tenants. Using floor area ratios as a measure of density, a good target is to increase the FAR from a typical range of 150-250 square feet of floor area per 1,000 square feet of land area to about 400 square feet of floor area.

- With a mix of uses that have different peak periods of demand, overall parking ratios can be dropped from the standard 4 to 5 spaces per thousand square feet of net leasable areas to 2.5 to 3.5 spaces.

- For an emerging center along a rural arterial, there is a significant advantage for two or more property owners to cooperatively plan development in a mixed use, hamlet format.

- Several design elements seem to be central to simultaneously meeting property owner objectives and best land use-transportation practices:

    - Creating a new "main street" within the center to open up new frontage for development and new opportunities for a circulation grid;

- Establishing or improving connections to surrounding properties - these improve customers' access to the center and may open up access to amenities, such as trails, that can add to the center's activities and brand;

- A residential component – whether apartments, live-work units, residence or business hotels, or in the case of a planned hamlet a full mix of residential types – will be complementary to neighborhood and community centers in all types of locations (urban, suburban or rural);

- Bounding a center improves the image of the center as a distinct and identifiable place and can be achieved by adding buildings close to front property lines, the use of green spaces and landscaping, or a combination of these;

- Implementation of a redevelopment or development plan in most cases will be incremental and needs early, stand-alone phases to generate financing of subsequent phases.

This project was limited to examining individual or small groups of properties that are part of larger commercial strips. Redeveloping or developing them according to best land use-transportation practices would be a first step toward transforming commercial strips into mixed-use centers. The lessons learned from these exercises apply to the larger strips as well and are available to property owners who see opportunities in them and to communities who may want to upgrade their land use regulations to be consistent with them.

Fortunately, a number of community-based efforts in Maine are underway to facilitate the transformation. This report reviews the status of several. To the practical first steps suggested in this report for individual properties they add broader plans for zoning and public investments needed for the transformation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Strips of commercial development along highways are such a familiar site on the American landscape that "it is hard to imagine our communities without them."[1] It has been the dominant form of commercial development in Maine for more than 50 years, both responding to the outward migration of households from cities and, in turn, reinforcing it.

Investments in this pattern of commercial development – in private dollars to build and continually add to it and of public dollars in the highways and other infrastructure needed to support the development – are so substantial and fixed that it is indeed hard to imagine our communities without it.

There is another vision, though, and a growing body of evidence that the alternative can be safer, less costly, more environmentally sound, and at least as convenient as the commercial strip. And segments of the market are actively looking for this alternative.

The alternative revolves around the idea of activity centers. These are mixed use commercial districts with housing integrated or close by, built at a walkable scale. Traditional downtowns, villages and hamlets are natural activity centers and are themselves enjoying a revival – one sign of changing demographics, changing market realities (including energy costs), and changing market tastes.

In the U.S. there are also examples of the new vision at work out on the commercial strips. These include notable retrofits of older suburban centers that have been forced by competition to re-brand themselves or encouraged to do so by changing markets. There also have been entirely new planned, mixed-use suburban developments based on village, traditional neighborhood, or transit-oriented models.

In Maine, too, there have been glimmers of interest in the alternative vision of activity centers in suburban locations as diverse as Standish Village, North Windham, Morrill's Corner in Portland, and Dunstan Corner and Oak Hill in Scarborough. Moreover, two comprehensive studies sponsored by the Maine Department of Transportation and the Maine Turnpike Authority using sophisticated transportation and economic models point to the long-term benefits of the alternative vision.[2]

The challenges of implementing the alternative vision, however, are daunting. Investments in commercial strips and long-standing market acceptance of a pattern that accommodates the automobile and an auto-dependent lifestyle make it hard for the alternative to gain traction. And financing redevelopment is a challenge in a state with low rates of growth; where development happens mostly on a small scale and incrementally; where proof of the benefits of

[1] ICF International and Freedman Tung & Sasaki. 2010. *Restructuring the commercial strip: A practical guide for planning the revitalization of deteriorating strip corridors*. Washington, DC: United States Environmental Protection Agency, p. 1

[2] *Gateway 1 Corridor Action Plan*, July 2009; *Gorham East-West Corridor Feasibility Study*, March 2011

change comes hard; and where community attitudes favor voluntary rather than mandatory approaches.

So, where to start implementing the vision? Part of the implementation will be to continue to invest in downtowns so that they can be strengthened centers in their own right, responding to the markets that want to be downtown. But what about the suburban strips, the businesses and other activities that choose to be there and the consumers who choose to use them? **The purpose of this project – "Implementing the Vision: First Steps" – is to look at how moving the strips toward the vision can get a foothold to the benefit of both developer and community.**

"First Steps" does not promise wholesale solutions or quick, dramatic change. But it wants to stir the imagination; and it especially wants to find the sweet spot between design for best transportation-land use practices, on the one hand, and market acceptance by commercial property owners and tenants on the other. The project will be a success if it motivates individual strip shopping centers owners to envision how they can be part of the transformation of their centers and immediate surroundings into multi-purpose activity centers that serve the community, consumers, and their own interests.

THE "FOUR Ds" AS A USEFUL GUIDE

The Maine DOT and Turnpike studies mentioned above focused on what are known as the "Four Ds" to test the alternative vision against the continuation of past strip patterns of development in highway corridors.

The first study, *Gateway 1*, covered a 100-mile stretch of Route 1 in Mid-Coast Maine from Brunswick to Stockton Springs. If the past pattern of development persists in the corridor for another 25 years, models projected that:

- A third of this length of Route 1 will operate at or near failure during the summer
- Thousands of vehicles will divert to residential roads as drivers try to get around the Route 1 congestion
- A quarter of Routes 1 and 90 will be "stripped out"
- About 20% of highly scenic viewsheds as seen from Routes 1 and 90 would be gone[3]

The alternative, a "community-centered" corridor, would (compared with continuing the past pattern):

- Reduce the miles of congested Route 1 by 61%
- Reduce the miles of local roads with excessive volumes of traffic by 34%
- Reduce the miles of Routes 1 and 90 that are "stripped out" by 56%

[3] *Gateway 1 Corridor Action Plan*, July 2009, p. 4

- Reduce the acres of development in highly scenic viewsheds by 26%[4]

The setting for the second study was different, but the results were similar. This study, the *Gorham East-West Feasibility Study*, addressed the commuting corridor serving the western suburbs of metropolitan Portland. Commercial strips in this region are a part of an outward spreading, low-density pattern of development. Its effects on traffic will require at least $85 - $110 million to fix even if the pattern of future development changes to something more benign – and more if it doesn't.[5] These findings are consistent with national studies that have examined correlations between the form of development and transportation systems.[6]

In a center-oriented pattern, there is a hierarchy of core growth areas – regional, community, and neighborhood – that vary in size and intensity and serve different functions. But they have certain common attributes that often are summarized as the "four Ds":

- Density (as measured by homes per acre, jobs per acre, or floor area ratios)
- Distance (between land uses, and the time and cost to travel between them)
- Diversity (mix of uses)
- Design (interconnections, streetscapes, managed driveway access, accommodating multiple forms of transportation)

The four Ds help reduce impacts by giving more choices for transportation, including walking and transit; by enabling the "internal capture" of trips – meaning once you arrive at a place you can park once and do multiple things; and by improving the safety and, for many, the enjoyment of the place, whether a neighborhood or commercial district.

Downtowns and village centers naturally accommodate the four Ds and are most successful when they exploit the advantages that come from them. Linear strips work in a polar opposite way, reducing density, increasing distance between activities, reducing the mix of activity in any one place, and designing exclusively for auto travel.

Reinventing the commercial strip as a center-oriented system requires re-deploying the four Ds in the suburban environment.

MARKET ACCEPTANCE

There are signs that consumers would respond favorably to this shift—and already are. Demographics are part of the reason: The baby boom is beginning to age into a life stage that will require greater proximity to services; and "Generation Y" – now in its teens-to-late twenties

[4] Ibid., p. 8

[5] *Gorham East-West Feasibility Study*, March 2011, pp 7-10 and 7-11

[6] For comprehensive overviews of the interactions between Transportation and Land Use, see, *e.g.*, Moore and Thorsnes, *The Transportation/Land Use Connection*, Planning Advisory Service Report Number 546/547, 2007; and Ewing and Cervero, *Travel and the Built Environment – Synthesis*, 2002.

– places a premium on networks, affordable in-town living, and "urbanized" suburban locations with amenities.[7]

Nationally, a number of former strip centers have been reinvented as mixed use centers, and more are on the way. Mashpee Commons on Cape Cod is the best known regional example of center-oriented redevelopment of an earlier suburban shopping center, but others also have seen opportunities to turn around older or failing strip centers by introducing mixed use, higher density, and traditional urban design.[8]

Figure A. Redevelopment of Mashpee Commons

Figure B. Wayzata Bay Center Redevelopment Plan

ELEMENTS OF THE "SWEET SPOT"

In looking for the "sweet spot" between the best practices of a center-oriented pattern of development and the needs of commercial owners and tenants, "First Steps" looks at three related dimensions:

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[7] See, for example, Urban Land Institute's report, *Generation Y: America's New Housing Wave*, 2011; and the National Association of Realtors' report, *The 2011 Consumer Preference Survey,* 2011

For shopping center developer perspectives on consumer trends, see, for example, Shearin, "Retail Architecture's Changing World," *Shopping Center Business*, on the web at http://www.shoppingcenterbusiness.com/articles/JUL10/story1.shtml; and Lisa Fuller, "On the Drawing Board," *Shopping Center Business*, on the web at http://shoppingcenterbusiness.com/acrticles/JUL06/story1.shtml.

[8] For example, The Crossings at Mountain View, California, redevelopment of a 1960s mall into a mixed use center: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/case/crossing.htm; Belmar at Lakewood, Colorado, also redevelopment of a declining 1960s shopping center: http://www.tndtownpaper.com/Volume7/belmar_colorado.htm; and Wayzata Bay Center, Wayzata, MN, redevelopment of a 14-acre shopping center to a mixed-use, urbanized center, including retail, senior housing, conventional housing, office, and hotel: http://www.wayzatabaydevco.com/.

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- **Site Design**: the "Design" element of the four Ds -- something about which much has been written and, in places, implemented;

- **Land Use-Transportation Components**: threshold targets – in the Maine context – related especially to the Density, Distance and Diversity elements of the Four Ds; and

- **Market Realities**: the needs of commercial property owners for parking, visibility, frontage, branding, and recovery of investments.

In the following sections, we will first take a look at a typology of highway commercial strips, because not all strips are the same or susceptible to the same treatment. Then we will:

- Briefly review site design;
- Review land use-transportation components and suggest measurable thresholds that can serve as targets for First Steps;
- Identify other market considerations that affect redevelopment of commercial strips; and
- Present the results of three case studies that have involved property owners, designers, and planners in search of the "sweet spot."

II. TYPOLOGY

Highway strip corridors vary in their characteristics, depending on the location, age, and the economic conditions of the area. For purposes of this paper, highway commercial strip development is organized into four types: bypassed strip, mature/graying strip, growing strip, and emerging strip. Characteristics of these four types are summarized in **Table 1**. This typology is adapted from the review of commercial strips by Horose and Sheesley.[9]

The different commercial strip types generally feature a common element, the strip shopping center. Re-envisioning this typical element is the primary focus of this paper. Two of the types may be especially motivated to re-envision their futures now:

- The mature/graying shopping center

  These older centers frequently are losing market share and tenants to newer strip centers, or are having trouble filling vacancies able to pay leases needed to cover costs, and could benefit from a new approach. By focusing on the graying shopping center, we capture the potential to create a new center-oriented pattern of development with infrastructure and some activity already in place. Here we test how the four Ds (density, distance, diversity and design) can begin to be implemented to the benefit of the shopping center's owners and tenants as well as the community.

- The emerging strip

  By looking at the emerging strip district, we recognize the more rural scenario of individual lot development along arterial roads beginning to coalesce into a defined commercial strip. Here we illustrate the opportunity to establish a vision *before* build-out occurs, to embrace the 4 Ds to create a marketable "sense of place."

As will be seen, these two types became the basis of the case studies for this project.

[9] Horose, Caitlyn and Sheesely, Kristel, 2011. *Restructuring the Commercial Strip.* Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine

Table 1. Typology of Commercial Highway Strips

	Relative Location	Characteristics	Common Problems	Example
Bypassed Strip	Oldest sections of the highway corridor closest to larger cities. Along arterials that connect downtowns to early suburban towns	Largely built-out but may be underused Some historic structures and features may remain	Disinvestment (vacant buildings, underutilized lots, decaying facilities) A few to many marginal businesses Roads congested with pass by traffic	 **Morrill's Corner**
Mature/ Graying Strip	Edge of city or suburb	30-50 yrs old Parts may still be growing (e.g. with fast food outlets, branch banks) but older parts are "tired"/"gray" Major anchors may have moved out to a new or expanding strip	Often visually aged May have been renovated, especially where residential remains strong & traffic volumes high Anchors may have been replaced by lower rent tenants; some chronic vacancies	 **Augusta Plaza**
Growing Strip	Varies, but typically found in communities/ suburbs near cities Connects suburb to suburb	Partially to fully built-out with anchor Typical strip pattern – linear, low density, auto-oriented Relatively successful businesses	Traffic congestion Conflict b/n through traffic & local access and b/n cars & pedestrians Various costs and problems associated with sprawl development	 **No. Windham**
Emerging Strip	Rural or semi-rural areas/communities	Only moderately developed; may not yet have an anchor; ample developable land May be pressure from development leapfrogging to more affordable land Strip-friendly zoning	Uncoordinated lot-by-lot development Loss of open space High potential for strip pattern to emerge	 **Mosher's Corner, Gorham**

III. SITE DESIGN

Much has been written about redesigning highway corridors. The desire to improve the experience one has when running errands, shopping, stopping for gas, getting something to eat, or otherwise engaging in the "strip mall" experience has long been on the minds of planners, designers, and many communities. As a result, there are many good examples on how to improve the "look and feel" of the commercial strip. New England-based examples include:

- Design Guidelines, Salem, New Hampshire
- Contextual Design on Cape Cod: Design Guidelines for Large Scale Development
- Route 132 Corridor Report, Town of Barnstable, MA, Cape Cod Commission
- Design Handbook, Town of Kittery, Maine
- Gateway 1, Performance Standards for Large Scale Developments
- Envisioning Better Communities, Randall Arendt

Given the rich resources that already exist, this paper need not delve into site design in detail – though site design is central to the case studies presented later. Table 2 provides an overview of key items in a "current practice, best practice, better practice" format.

TABLE 2. Overview of Commercial Strip Site Design Practices			
	Current/Common Practice	**Better Practices**	**Best Practice**
Building Siting and Site Orientation	Sites/buildings organized by and fronting commercial driveways and parking lots with large setbacks from public streets.	Sites and buildings organized by and fronting internal circulation patterns mimicking public streets.	Sites and buildings organized by and directly fronting public streets
	Buildings set back far from street.	Maximum setbacks (to replace or supplement minimum setbacks).	Liner buildings directly fronting public streets to create a functional streetscape; building additions to create new building entrances along public street; create a 'build to' line for new development.
	Buildings oriented to parking lots.		Site buildings oriented to public streets; remove underperforming storefronts to create new streets; require new public streets (rather than private driveways) to orient new development/ redevelopment.
	Little relationship of buildings to one another; no architectural standards	Architectural standards detailing recommended building forms and scale.	Architectural standards detailing required building forms and scale.
	Single-story, single-use buildings.	Minimum buildings heights; incentives for multi-story bldgs.	Require multi-story building/usable second stories
Site Access and Circulation Planning	Site access oriented principally to automobile access.		Multi-modal access including transit, bicycle, pedestrian; bus shelters; sidewalks on public streets; sidewalks/walkways to building entrances; quality streetscape; bikeways on public streets; secure bicycle parking

TABLE 2. Overview of Commercial Strip Site Design Practices			
	Current/Common Practice	**Better Practices**	**Best Practice**
	Frequent, uncoordinated driveways along arterial street frontage.	Consolidated driveways; shared driveways; driveways off of side street.	For new development, require public streets as part of new development/redevelopment to organize new development. For existing development, consolidate driveways.
	Poor connectivity and circulation within the site.		Retrofit site to create pedestrian walkways within parking lots to buildings; remove under performing storefronts to create new circulation ways; create new 'streets' within parking lots to connect within site.
	Poor connectivity to surrounding areas/sites.		Create/reconfigure inter-parcel connections for auto, bicycle and pedestrian access to adjoining sites; inter-parcel connections as part of site plan review; reverse frontage roads; maximum block lengths; create new 'streets' within parking lots to connect to adjoining sites.
Parking Areas	Parking dominates the parcel and view from street.	Create vegetated buffers between street and parking; use landscaped berms between street and parking.	Locate parking to the rear and sides of buildings; introduce landscaped islands within parking lots; break up parking into smaller groupings/pods; reduce the amount of parking to reflect shared parking demand; use maximum parking requirements (rather than minimums only); introduce parallel or diagonal on-street parking along on-site streets.

IV. LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION COMPONENTS

Because transportation is simply a means of connecting land uses to each other, the way one is planned and built has rapid feedback effects on the other. A spread out commercial strip requires high capacity highways to serve it, and high capacity highways further extend the strip. A compact arrangement of land uses offers choices in transportation that, in turn, encourage additional intensity of development.

"First Steps" strives to integrate land use and transportation design to shift the land use pattern from strip development toward a center-based pattern.

THE MAKING OF AN ACTIVITY CENTER

What distinguishes an "activity center" in the way we are using the term? Downtowns, villages, and traditional neighborhoods with corner stores all function as activity centers. In many ways, so does the inside of a covered mall, although the large parking lots in which it is embedded are hostile to human interactions outside of its walls.

The things that distinguish an activity center from a commercial strip are its intensity of activity, the interactions of people, the mix of activities, the connections between activities, and the bounding of the center. Some metrics that measure the strength of an activity center come out of the four Ds, which, taken together, are correlated with several measures of impacts on environment and transportation facilities.[10]

- **Density** (as measured by homes per acre, jobs per acre, or floor area ratios)

> In a small city environment the Maine Department of Transportation's handbook, *Sensible Transportation* (2008), suggests a minimum of 3 to 5 dwelling units per acre, 20+ jobs per acre, and/or a floor area ratio of 0.7 over a neighborhood-sized area of 50 to 150 acres. These densities can support bus service, for example. In a suburban environment, these levels may not be entirely achievable but still are useful guidelines.

- **Distance** (between land uses, and the time and cost to travel between them).

> Because activity centers have a number of uses within walking distance of each other, a useful guide for distance within an activity center is a radius of 0.25 to 0.5 mile.

[10] See, *e.g.,* Ewing, Penal, and Chen, *Measuring Sprawl and Its Impact,* Smart Growth America, http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/MeasuringSprawl.PDF

- **Diversity** (mix of uses).

> Strong activity centers tend to have at least one or two primary uses for which the center has competitive advantage or a unique role in the region, plus one or more secondary uses. For example, a suburban activity center may have primary retail and hospitality roles and secondary office and entertainment roles.

- **Design** (interconnections, streetscapes, driveway access, distinct edges, etc.).

> "Design is the glue that makes a comprehensive transportation-land use system work. Design covers a lot of ground: the geometry and interconnection of streets, the management of access between roads and adjacent properties, the 'streetscapes' of neighborhoods, and the 'context' or character of the place served by the transportation system. Without good design, we find that distance, density, and diversity of land uses are less able to provide for choice, safety and efficiency of transportation." (*Sensible Transportation Handbook*, MaineDOT, 2008.)

A hallmark of activity centers is that they are relatively self-contained and bounded in the landscape – that is, a resident, visitor or customer can undertake several activities within the place, and there is in fact a "sense of place" in which the different transactions and interactions are occurring. The design facilitates the interactions. Many commercial strips draw a lot of customers and are financial successes but do not measure up as activity centers.

LAND USE

While some strips include uses other than retail and personal services, such as entertainment, lodging or apartments, the dominant use is commercial. This type of land use is consistent with the commercial strip's drive-to, complete-a-task, and drive-away experience. Lingering in a "strip" is generally not part of the experience. Contrast this with a "downtown experience," which often encourages lingering and multiple activities because of the mix of land uses. **Table 3** compares some of the land use metrics of a typical, small town downtown in Maine and the village area of which it is a part with a typical commercial strip shopping area.

TABLE 3. Comparison of Land Use Metrics, Typical Small Downtown v. Typical Neighborhood or Community Strip Shopping Area

METRIC	Small Town Downtown	Small Town Downtown + Village	Commercial Strip
Land area	15 to 40 ac	25 to 150 ac	5-20 ac, arrayed along several hundred to several thousand feet of road frontage
Distance from center to edge	250 to 750 ft	0.25 to 0.5 mi	.25 to 1+ mi along frontage, with 500-1500 ft depth
Uses drawn to this type of center	Specialty retail (incl. specialty foods and urban grocers), variety of restaurants and entertainment, arts and cultural outlets, government buildings, parks, financial, legal & business services, professional offices, personal services, hotels and inns, mix of residential uses		Full-line grocery stores, department and big box stores, furniture, housewares, hardware and drug stores, branch banks, personal services, fast food & family restaurants, auto and related sales, multi-screen theaters, business and tourist lodgings, office/ business parks
Mix of use (Diversity)			
Commercial	65% - 90%	30% - 70%	90% - 100%
Residential	5% - 25%	20% - 60%	0% - 10%
Civic and Parkland	5% - 10%	10% - 15%	0%
Intensity (Density)			
Jobs/Ac	40 - 60	5 - 15	15 – 20 (in center itself)
Comm'l. Floor Area Ratio (FAR)*	0.6 – 1.0	---	0.1 – 0.2
Dwelling units/residential ac	Combined with commercial	2 - 8	---

* FAR = total commercial floor area divided by buildable land area

Sources: Wilbur Smith Associates, *PACTS Arterial Land Use Policy*, in Destination Tomorrow, 2004; Surveys conducted by HNTB Corp. and E. Richert for *Gateway 1*, 2005 and *Gorham East-West Feasibility Study*, 2009

Target Land Use Thresholds for "Centers"

A re-envisioned commercial strip is part of a suburban environment and will continue to be suburban in scale even with a shift to a "center" pattern of development. **The challenge is to set development targets that will reduce impacts on public infrastructure and open lands, increase transportation choice, allow for re-branding of the strip as a livelier activity center, and meet the perceived needs of center owners and tenants for access, parking, and visibility.**

Because of its continued reliance on auto travel and thus parking fields nearby, a re-envisioned suburban strip retrofit into an activity center likely will not be able to achieve the intensity of use of a small town downtown, at least initially. **It is reasonable to target a level between the existing strip and downtown: on the order of a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.4, or 400 sq. ft. of commercial floor area for every 1,000 sq. ft. of buildable land area.** This is still a suburban ratio but twice the ratio achieved by the typical strip shopping center in Maine.

TABLE 4:Target Thresholds for a Re-Envisioned Strip

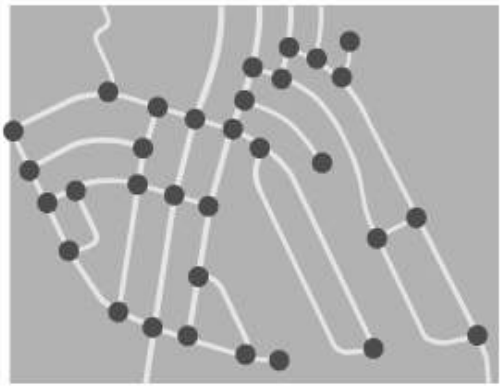
METRIC	Core	Core and Surrounding Area
Land area	15 to 25 acres	25 to 150 acres
Distance from center to edge	250 to 500 ft	0.25 to 0.5 mi
Mix of use		
Commercial	75% - 90%	60% - 85%
Residential	5% - 10%	5% - 25%
Civic and Parkland	5% - 10%	5% - 15%
Intensity		
Jobs/Ac	20 - 40	5 - 20
Comm'l Floor Area Ratio (FAR) (total commercial floor area/buildable land area)	0.4	0.4
Dwelling units/residential acre	4 - 8	2 - 4

TRANSPORTATION

Network of streets: There are metrics that also signal workable systems for moving about within and between activity centers. The skeleton of the system is the network of streets and sidewalks the serves the center and connects it to other centers. A well functioning center in a suburban or small town context likely has:

- A street pattern that resembles a grid, modified as needed to fit with topography and avoid sensitive environmental features, with lengths of streets between intersections (i.e., blocks) typically **no greater than 600 feet**.
- A **maximum of 10 curb cuts per mile**, with frontage roads and shared points of access to supplement driveways into individual parcels
- **At least one street connection** to each adjacent property.
- Within the center and surrounding area, a street system with **at least 1.2 "links"** (segments of roads or other vehicular pathways that run between intersections of roads or other vehicular pathways) **for every "node"** (an intersection, head of a cul de sac, or dead end) will help assure easy movement between uses, including by pedestrians, without having to turn back onto arterials or collectors. **Figure C** illustrates a modified street grid with 1.3 "links" for every "node" (43 links, 32 nodes). **Figure D** illustrates various street designs and the benefits of a network of streets.

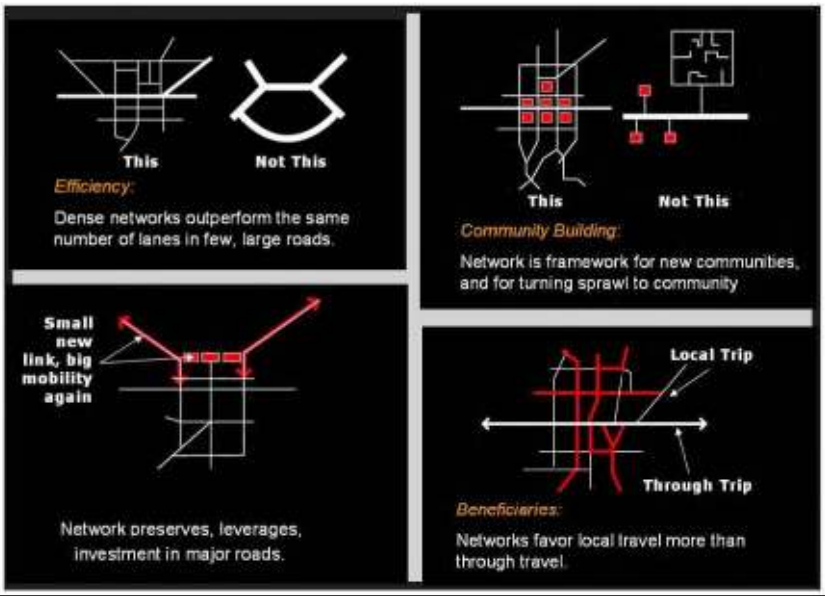
Figure C. Links and Nodes



Off-Street Parking: Off-street parking drives much of the design of strip centers, following formulas that strip center developers and tenants regard as necessary to their success (and that most towns require in their zoning ordinances). There is little trust in alternative approaches.

How much off-street parking is really needed, and is there a "sweet spot" between the

Figure D. Benefits of a Street Network
Source: Smart Transportation Guidebook NJ-PA, 2008



market's perceived parking needs and best transportation-land use practices?

- The typical supply of parking spaces in suburban shopping centers nationally, including Maine, is around 5 per 1000 square feet of gross leasable space in the center. Studies by the Urban Land Institute and International Council of Shopping Centers and the Institute of Transportation Engineers[11] show that this exceeds peak seasonal demand by 20% or more. In other words, 20% or more of a typical shopping center's parking lot could be converted to income-producing space and still meet peak demand.

- Actual parking demand among retailers varies by type of use: supermarkets generate average peak hour Saturday demand for 4.75 spaces per 1000 sq. ft. (4.36 during average peak hour on weekdays); discount stores about 4.5 spaces (during the peak hour on a Saturday in December; drops to 2.75 on Saturdays in other months); home improvement superstores fewer than 3.5 spaces; hardware stores fewer than 3 spaces per 1000 sq. ft., and pharmacies and furniture stores fewer than 2 per 1000 sq. ft.

- **Because of the mix of uses in a typical neighborhood or community shopping center, the average peak hour demand often falls below 4 spaces per 1000 sf.** ULI's and ICSC's surveys "suggest that for neighborhood and community centers, the recommended ratio may be as low as 3.7 spaces per 1,000 square feet of GLA" if the mix includes uses other than retailers –for example, restaurants, cinema, or other complementary, non-retail use.

Land use mix also can reduce peak hour demand if it is broadened to include other uses that have different peak hours. A business hotel's peak demand is overnight, starting after 9 pm, for example, and spaces can be shared. Suburban office use has a peak hour demand of less than 3 spaces per 1,000 sf *and* does not infringe on the peak hour Saturday demand of many retailers. A fitness center's average peak demand is about 5.2 spaces per 1,000 sf, but the peak period is 6 pm – 7 pm, after normal business hours of other shopping center uses.

Finally, a reduction in parking may be acceptable to the market if the excess space is converted to complementary uses that, by the variety and proximity of uses, don't require as many single-occupant vehicle trips to the center. Trips can be more easily shared; and alternative means of travel become more feasible if multiple needs can be satisfied within a small radius.

In sum, a re-envisioned strip that converts excess parking to productive use and employs a mixed-use strategy should be able to reduce supply down to between 2.5 and 3.5 spaces per thousand and still meet peak demands for parking. This also is consistent with the earlier suggested land use target of a 0.4 Floor Area Ratio.

[11] Institute of Transportation Engineers, *Parking Generation*, 3rd Edition (2004; second printing); ULI-the Urban Land Institute and The International Council of Shopping Centers, *Parking Requirements for Shopping Centers,* Second Edition (1999; third printing 2003)

OTHER MARKET CONSIDERATIONS

Best Opportunities

From interviews of strip shopping center owners, developers, tenants, and architects/planners, the best initial opportunities for re-envisioning a neighborhood or community strip center as activity centers likely:

- Are mature/graying centers and emerging strips; or established, still growing strips with additional adjacent, undeveloped land for which the owner is open to more innovative design that appeals to different types of uses and tenants – and that can buffer against weaknesses in traditional retail tenants.

And/or:

- Are in areas with demographics that favor a hybrid urban-suburban form, either due to tastes or to logistics. These include markets with strong young adult segments (such as college towns) or business and government visitors (such as state capitals and areas with corporate headquarters); markets with an aging population that may favor alternatives to the superstore and big box formats, with choices in transportation; or markets that cater to entertainment (e.g., tourist towns) and lifestyle.

- Face an environmental issue that requires remediation, such as a center that is in the watershed of a stream that is failing to meet water quality standards, or a new center that needs a storm water management plan that favors compactness and preservation of vegetative buffers.

In each of these situations, a center-oriented approach to development or redevelopment may be accepted as in the interest of the owner-developer.

Frontage and Visibility

Tenants rely on visibility from main roads, and anchor tenants demand it. This typically leads to long frontages free of visual obstruction. This requirement combined with a demand for ample parking in front of the businesses defines the deep setback, auto-oriented, low-density character of strip shopping centers. The market challenge is to find design techniques that preserve visibility while allowing more intense use of the land and creating the hard edges that are important to defining space.

Branding

Emerging and graying centers may welcome the branding opportunities that a more lively, compact, walkable, hybrid design offers. Such a design can distinguish the center from established competitors, and retail experts indicate this is a market trend nationally.[12] The branding might include entertainment and recreational amenities (what one observer calls “a synergistic trinity of

[12] See, e.g., “Malls’ New Pitch: Come for the Experience,” in *The New York Times*, July 17, 2012

retail, catering, and leisure facilities"[13]); a lifestyle approach that incorporates housing with the convenience of retail, restaurants, and services (even civic uses); or a set of fairly typical uses but with landscaped focal points that also serve as gathering places.

Phasing

In markets with modest absorption rates, implementing a re-envisioned center plan typically will require phasing, with early phases helping to finance later phases. In addition, a phased approach allows the developer to move incrementally toward threshold targets – such as higher floor area ratios, fewer parking spaces per thousand square feet, and redesigned frontages – and to test tenant and consumer acceptance of the plan. An incremental approach, in which each increment can stand on its own, allows the development to pause or to stop if the developer believes that the next phases would meet with resistance.

[13] Coleman, Peter, *Shopping Environments: Evolution, Planning, and Design,* 2006, p. 445

V. MOVING MAINE'S STRIP CENTERS TOWARD ACTIVITY CENTERS

While some shopping centers elsewhere in the U.S. have been transformed into town centers, and many new mixed-use centers have been built from scratch in the mode of new urbanism, little has happened in Maine along these lines. With the possible exception of the Portland area, the markets in Maine are too small and absorption rates too slow to easily attract the capital needed for whole, large-scale makeovers or large new mixed-use developments.

Nevertheless, **there are a few examples in Maine of local efforts to break out of the mold of the linear strip.** These are instructive to the question of how to move incrementally toward activity centers needed to anchor center-oriented plans for highway corridors.

FALMOUTH: ROUTE ONE

The ±1-mile commercial strip along Route 1 in Falmouth, from a point north of its intersection with Route 88 to Bucknam Road, was developed during the second half of the 20th century. Over the last 20 years, investments in infrastructure and landscaping have improved its appearance though the way it functions as an auto-oriented strip is still largely the same. Yet, more recently it has begun to evolve in some interesting ways, and the Town is continuing its efforts to "re-envision" this strip.

- **Village Center Plan** - Most recently (2013), the Town has developed an Infrastructure Plan to transform its Route 1 corridor into a pedestrian-friendly village-like center. The plan for the public right-of-way calls for green center medians, wide sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and landscaping upgrades. This plan was developed in advance of an MDOT scheduled repaving of Route One. A major component of the $11.7 MM plan is the underground placement of all power and communications infrastructure. The plan is to be financed with Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funding through 2030. This TIF funding has been in place since 2000. The expenditures for the Infrastructure Plan were approved by Falmouth voters in June 2013.

  The plan also has a zoning component governing development of private properties. These "Village Center" zoning amendments were approved by the Town Council in May 2013 and will bring new buildings closer to the road, put parking in the rear, encourage mixed uses, and allow increased building heights. The vision is for a vibrant "center" that encourages investment, and helps to distinguish Falmouth along the Route 1 corridor.

- **The Shops at Falmouth Village** – This 1999 retail center was built on the site of a former auto dealership at the intersection of Route 1 and Depot Road. Its metrics reflect a typical suburban retail shopping center: about 74,000 sf of space on nearly 8 acres of land (FAR of 0.21); and 369 parking spaces (nearly 5 spaces per 1000 square feet of leasable area). It is anchored by a Staples office supply stores and includes a mix of retail stores, restaurants, and a branch banking office. It is a specialty retail facility within a larger corridor that otherwise functions as a large community retail and office center.

Its layout represents an incremental step away from a typical strip center. Instead of a single, linear building set behind multiple rows of parking, it is a grouping of four buildings. Two of the buildings are located close to Route 1 with only a double-loaded parking lot in front; one building helps to define the corner of Route 1 and Depot Road, and the two buildings together occupy about 45% of the frontage of the parcel. This is just enough to provide a modest sense of enclosure, still provides a generous view corridor to the anchor store at the rear of the property, and allows a majority of the parking to be embedded toward the center of the property but still directly in front of the anchor. The architecture features the appearance of sloped roofs and upper story space, although it is a single-story complex. **See Figure E.**

The Route 1 right-of-way includes a landscaped esplanade and sidewalk in front of the development. While the sidewalks alone do not make this district walkable, they help supply a visual edge between the center and the road and perhaps prepares for a time when this corridor has a livelier, more intense mix of uses between which customers and visitors will want to walk.

Figure E. Shops at Falmouth Village

- **Tidewater Village** – This mixed-use development was approved in 2007-2008 and consists of 38 or 40 high-end, single-family house lots located directly behind the Route 1 commercial strip, with frontage on the Presumpscot River estuary; three-and-one-half story office/residential buildings; and dedicated open space. The development is connected by road to an adjacent apartment complex and to the Route 1 commercial strip. Much of it has been built and occupied. This project demonstrates the marketability of a planned, mixed-used development that is convenient both to a town's commercial offerings and to natural amenities. It also illustrates how a long-time commercial strip can evolve beyond single-purpose use and exclusively highway-oriented design, and how a wider corridor perspective can provide opportunities to provide compatible land uses that support each other.

- **Falmouth Shopping Center -** This 1960s, conventionally-designed, 240,000 sq. ft. strip community shopping center, anchored by a supermarket, has always included a two-story wing with office uses on top of ground floor retail. It has been renovated, including an upgrade of the façade, and since 2005 the Town has worked with the owner to master plan the site with some modest in-fill development. Another 20 acres behind the property in the same ownership are vacant, and in 2009 the Town initiated a community-

based visioning effort and encouraged a mixed-use master plan for the entire 60 acre property. A large vacancy in the center was created (and remains) when the supermarket relocated and expanded within the center. It is unclear what the near-term plans for this complex will be.

- **At grade Turnpike Spur – Route 1 Intersection** – The Turnpike Spur connects to Route One with a ramp system. Because the Spur carries relatively few vehicles, the Town has been interested in exploring if a new at-grade intersection could serve the same purpose. This would alleviate the need for MDOT to maintain a bridge over Route 1 as well as the associated ramps; this might make 10+ acres of State-owned land potentially available for commercial development. This effort is currently in the feasibility stage.

- **Stormwater Management** - Realizing that paving and development can be at odds with environmental protection, the Town commissioned a Stormwater Management Plan in 2012-13. This plan, for the first time, mapped all stormwater infrastructure as an integrated system and identified opportunities for collaborative public-private stormwater retrofits. This effort will allow the Town to maximize development opportunities, while minimizing environmental impact.

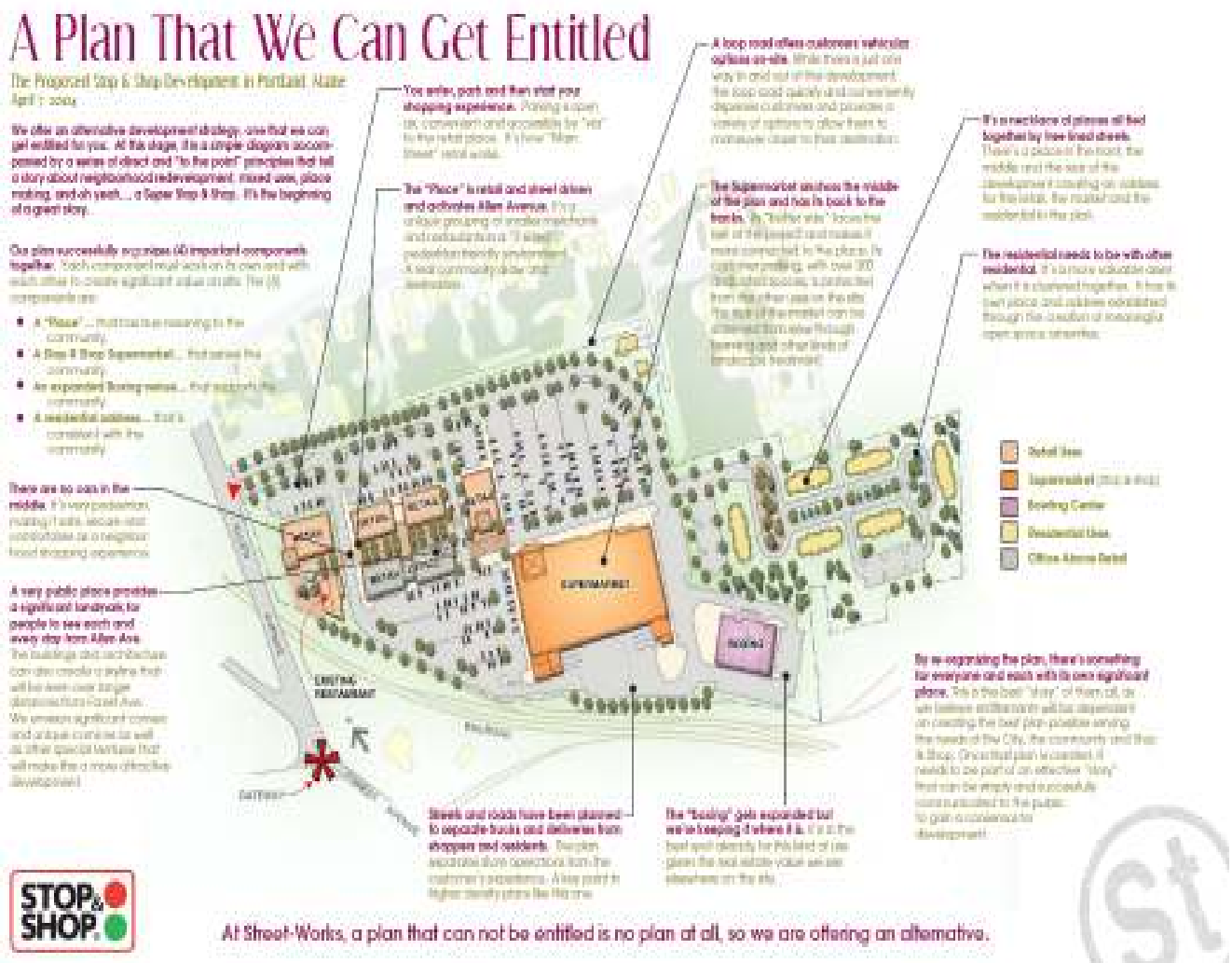
PORTLAND: MORRILL'S CROSSING

Morrill's Crossing, which was to be located at Morrill's Corner near the intersection of Allen Avenue and Forest Avenue in Portland, was approved in 2006 but never built. Controversial from the start, the proposal was advanced by a supermarket chain as a mixed-used development. As approved, it included a 66,000 sq. ft. supermarket, 63,000 sq. ft. of additional retail and office space, 43 dwelling units (including both second-story and freestanding apartments and townhouse condominium units), and recreational facilities on a 20-acre site. The FAR of the project as a whole, including the residential development and the built recreational facility, was 0.27 – meaning it would have been a third or more intensive than a typical strip center. Excluding a 1.5-acre multi-purpose recreational field and a 1.5-acre storm water detention pond, the effective FAR would have been about 0.32, twice that of a typical strip center. The layout provided 666 parking spaces, of which 493 were for the 129,000 square feet of retail/office and related mixed uses, a ratio of 3.8 spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. of space.

Although the approved design included a mix of uses, more intensity than a suburban strip center, and more land devoted to buildings and less to parking, the project was criticized as "a suburban solution for an un-suburban location," with a layout that failed to make a "place." The design and development firm Street-Works of White Plains, NY, offered an alternative that re-organized the same mix of uses into what it argued would create a walkable "place," following some form-based principles. The plan did not specify square feet of building space, though it appears roughly the same, or the number of parking spaces, though there appear to be approximately 450 for the supermarket and other retail/office uses. If this is accurate, the parking ratio is about 3.5 spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. of space.

Figure F shows Street-Works' alternative. The original, in terms of mix of use and metrics, is clearly an incremental improvement over the conventional strip shopping center design, and the fact that it was offered by an anchor retailer demonstrates that there is leeway in the typical formula for a suburban shopping center. Street-Works' critique attempted to move it another increment by organizing the same elements in a more cogent way.

Figure F. Morrill's Crossing Alternative Plan



SCARBOROUGH: OAK HILL PLAZA

Oak Hill Plaza dates to 1972 and was developed as a neighborhood shopping center. It is located at the intersection of Route 1 and Route 114 in Scarborough, in an area that the Town considers its center. The public school campus, town hall, and library are nearby. The plaza includes about 113,000 square feet of building space on about 18.6 acres. It does not include the adjacent Hannaford's supermarket, which appears visually to be part of the plaza and cements Oak Hill as a strong neighborhood shopping area, but is separately owned and was separately developed.

Oak Hill Plaza has a FAR of about 0.14 and about 6.3 parking spaces per 1000 sq. ft. of building area. It is not an entirely linear development but rather is laid out within a triangle defined by Routes 1 and 114 and an internal road that serves as frontage for the supermarket. Occupants include branch banks, drug store, hardware store, some specialty retail, fast food, post office, and a variety of services and small offices.

Several years ago, encouraged by the success of the redevelopment of Mashpee Commons in Massachusetts and by the prospect of new zoning by Scarborough in the Route 1 corridor, the developer, Alpha Management, engaged Terrence J. DeWan and Associates to prepare a conceptual master plan that would (a) expand the development in a format that borrowed from new urbanism and (b) use proceeds generated by the expansion to retrofit the existing Oak Hill Plaza to a similar format. It was determined that the permitting problems associated with wetlands on the adjacent land on which the plaza would be expanded were too severe, and the project never materialized. However, the conceptual plans provide insights into what a long-time suburban shopping center owner and manager considered feasible from a market point of view.

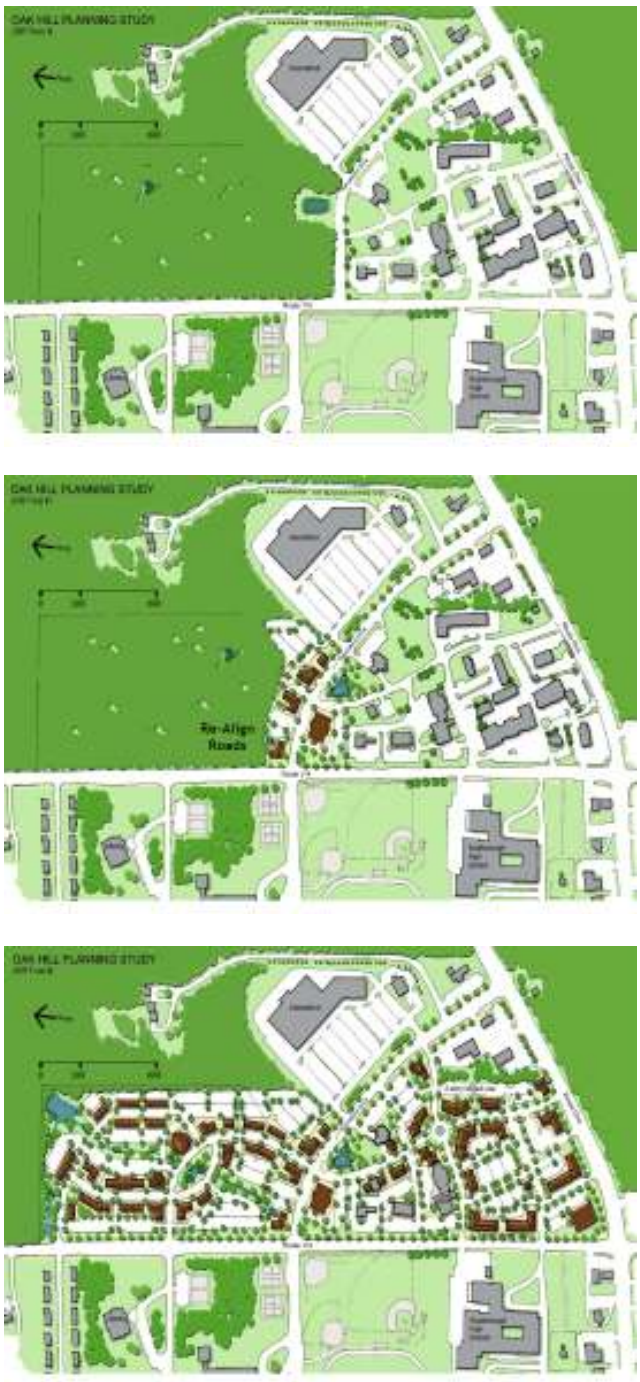
The conceptual master plan envisioned a re-orienting and expansion of the internal street system to create frontage opportunities for commercial uses that would be located close to the roads with shared parking to the rear of the buildings; would have expanded the mix of uses, including a hotel; would have made explicit connections to the schools and libraries on the opposite side of Route 114; would have included landscaped focal points bounded by prominent buildings; and would have used internal green space for storm water mitigation. The plan was to be implemented in several phases so that investments would not outrun absorption rates.

The conceptual plans do not indicate the square feet of space or the amount of parking, and so it is not possible to estimate FAR or parking ratios. What can be learned from the conceptual plan is the use of phased expansion to finance retrofit of the existing center, and the ways in which existing circulation can be retrofit into a rational system of interconnections, both internally and with surrounding land uses.

Figure G shows the layout of Oak Hill Plaza as it existed at the time; how the first, incremental phase of expansion included a realignment of Hannaford Drive to create a clear intersection at Route 114 directly opposite access to the school campus; and the full build-out and retrofit.

Although the concept plan did not proceed to permitting, the shopping center owner continues with infill development and believes the plaza could add upwards of 50% more space, consistent with Scarborough's zoning scheme (which encourages town-and-village center types of development) and recent planning for expanded pedestrian facilities.

Figure G. Oak Hill Plaza: Existing (2006), First Phase, and Build-Out as a Mixed Use Center



STANDISH: STANDISH CORNER VILLAGE

Standish was selected for GrowSmart Maine's Model Town Project in 2008 to implement "smart growth" strategies from Standish's recently adopted Comprehensive Plan. Key goals for the project were to revitalize the area around Standish Corner, attract new businesses, and conserve Standish's rural character. The Model Town project provided an opportunity to re-envision the convergence of Routes 25 and 35 at Standish Corner, to rethink the current typical commercial strip form of development, to consider the potential for a compact, center oriented form of development. A new Standish Corner plan was crafted to encourage development that would create a vibrant and pedestrian friendly village center. The plan returns mixed use to Standish Corner, with the hope of stimulating economic activity in the area and establishing an active town center.

The Model Town project resulted in adoption of the first Form-Based Code in Maine, on June 7, 2011. The Standish Corner District creates a series of walkable and interconnected mixed-use neighborhoods to support the historic village core at the intersection of Routes 25 and 35. The Code envisions an active public realm, directs investments in infrastructure and requires locating buildings to create a pedestrian friendly environment.

WINDHAM: NORTH WINDHAM 21ST CENTURY DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

The Town of Windham has been examining its Route 302 corridor over the past two years, developing a plan to transform the corridor from its current character as a "to" and "thru" highway strip dominated by vehicles and nondescript development into a "21st Century Downtown". The Town officially adopted the plan in January 2013. From the town's website, "The North Windham 21st Century Downtown Master Plan is both a practical and bold vision for the future of North Windham. This optimistic Master Plan prescribes a future where transportation options, land uses, streets and architecture create a new type of suburban 'downtown'. Rather than approaching North Windham as just another 'corridor study' that only promotes vehicular movement, this Master Plan addresses a wide range of issues reflecting the desire of the community to reveal and strengthen the opportunities found in North Windham." Goals of the plan include:

- Creating "street networks in an incremental manner that respond to the existing built context and allow for the growth of new neighborhoods surrounding the commercial core" **(Figure H)**
- Establishing "a renewed 'sense of place' in Windham's commercial center through Complete Streets, infill development, increased residential densities, vibrant public realms, mobility options and access to open space."

Implementation of the plan will take a consistent long-term effort by the town and business community. To achieve the vision, the plan recommends a combination of the following strategies:

- Enactment of polices and ordinances. Examples include a complete streets policy, impact fees, and zoning standards that will promote pedestrian scale development.
- Off-site and on-site improvements accomplished through the development review process. This includes limiting curb cuts and the installation of pedestrian amenities.
- Use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF), bonds and grants for large infrastructure initiatives such as medians and connector roads

Figure H. Conceptual Future Street Network Overlaid on Aerial Image of Route 302

YARMOUTH: ROUTE 1 CORRIDOR

In September 2012, the Town of Yarmouth held a "Planapalooza" for its Route 1 corridor to develop a new vision for the future of the commercial corridor. Over the course of a week, public events developed goals to guide the "new vision" for Route 1. These goals include enhancing economic vitality, creating a more walkable and livable corridor, integrating Route 1 into the community with new street connections, and designing a vibrant public realm. This new vision was then translated into a form-based development code. In May 2013 the Town Council of Yarmouth voted unanimously to adopt the form based code for its Route 1 Commercial Corridor.

The new code, titled "Route 1 Character-Based Development Code", unlocks underutilized commercial property and value along the corridor and regulates how new and infill development can occur. Unlike the regulations and quasi-regulatory design guidelines the code replaces, the community's desired development pattern can now be achieved, creating a Route 1 "place" more like the character of Yarmouth's much-loved historic Main Street.

The code is a direct product of a multi-day design charrette called "Planapalooza" held in September 2012. This event yielded an illustrative master plan for the corridor, showing how by applying sustainable principles of design the highway corridor can evolve into a pedestrian oriented boulevard **(Figure I),** integrating into the adjacent local street network, and forming new blocks through infill buildings. The Character-Based Development Code activates the plan by setting development standards that allow the plan to be built. The document is user friendly, with an emphasis on graphics, and includes different street cross-sections for reconciling the 120 – 140' wide state-owned Route 1 right-of-way, targeting a design speed reduction from 45 mph to 25 mph and creation of a "complete street" which considers all users, including pedestrians and bicyclists.

Finally, as is the intent of form based codes, the majority of building and lot development may be permitted by/through staff review only, since the vision and intent of the community has been firmly established through the Comprehensive Plan, the Planapalooza charrette process, the drawing of the illustrative plan and the review and public hearing process for adoption of the code.

Figure I. Rendering of Yarmouth Route 1 "Boulevard"

ROCKLAND: CAMDEN STREET NEIGHBORHOOD VISION PROJECT

The Rockland Economic Development Advisory Committee (REDAC), with the assistance of Friends of Midcoast Maine (FMM), is working to develop a new vision for the Rockland commercial neighborhood from Maverick Street north to the City/Town line with Rockport. After several presentations about efforts around the country to redevelop commercial strip areas and develop more pedestrian friendly and economically successful community places, Rockland is undertaking a yearlong planning effort to engage the public and bring in technical assistance to develop a "values based" community vision for the area.

The goal of the planning effort is to make the commercial corridor area of Rockland and Rockport a successful place for people, businesses and transportation. To date, FMM and REDAC have held seven workshops. Each workshop focused on a different technical topic and included robust public engagement, whether it was defining community values, measuring street, sidewalks and parking spaces, or evaluating various built forms and public realms. The workshops focused on developing and gaining consensus on the community values, assessing the opportunities for improving walkability with Dan Burden of the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute and analyzing the economic impact of Rockland's strip versus its compact downtown development patterns with Joe Minicozzi, of Urban 3 LLC. These preliminary community workshops helped to shape and form the understanding of the importance of place, streets as places, community engagement, and the economics of strip development that results in lower tax revenues, rents and fewer jobs per acre that more compact development.

Currently the project is developing design alternatives for four sites and the abutting public right-of way that will serve as prototypes of the public and private design alternatives. Again, public workshops provided discussion and guidance on various public space alternatives, road designs and private building scenarios. This design work should be completed by June-July 2013 and implementation steps such as zoning, land use code amendments and other tools and incentives to carry out the community held vision will be considered by the City of Rockland and the Town of Rockport.

The project is expected to be completed in the fall of 2013 after vetting the design options to the public at various public venues. The expectation is that it will evolve into implementation steps to carry out the vision that is most in-keeping with the agreed upon values of the City of Rockland and its citizens.

WISCASSET

The Town of Wiscasset, in partnership with Maine DOT and Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission, is developing a Master Plan for the commercially developed section of US Route 1 (aka Bath Road) in Wiscasset. **Figure J** shows the study area. Through an intensive study of traffic and land use along Bath Road, the Bath Road Master Plan will provide guiding principles, strategies,

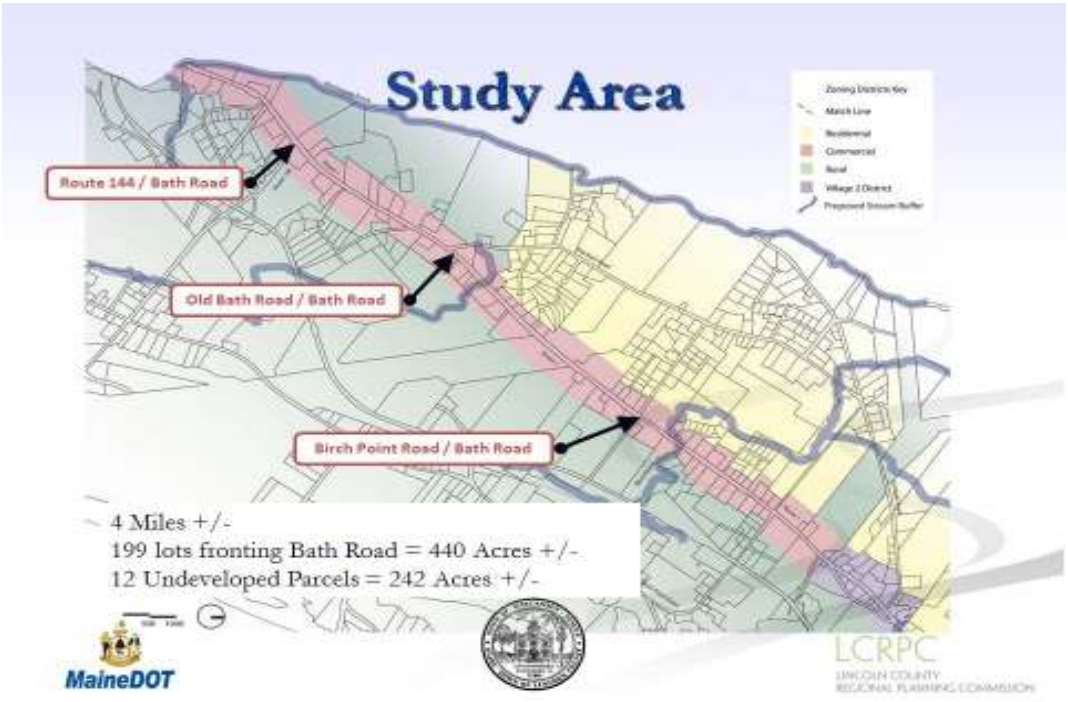
and opportunities to facilitate development within the commercial corridor in a manner that promotes traffic movement as well as economic growth.

The goals and outcomes of the Master Plan include:

1. Identify traffic improvements within the highway and on adjacent, developed and developable properties to meet the needs of existing and future development, while maintaining or improving the highway's mobility, safety and capacity; and
2. Address the potential of specific properties with concept plans and street networks demonstrating the potential for development adjacent to the corridor that improves local pedestrian and vehicular circulation; and
3. Develop a responsible plan for coordinated highway infrastructure improvements and transportation enhancements as well as practical financing strategies needed to implement the plan; and
4. Provide design standards for corridor preservation; and
5. Identify transportation-related land use strategies incorporating best management practices consistent with Wiscasset's Comprehensive Plan; and
6. Balance the needs of residents with those traveling through Wiscasset

The Master Plan, anticipated to be completed by fall of 2013, will document existing and proposed conditions with summaries, analysis graphics, and illustrative drawings. The Master Plan will include an implementation plan identifying priority, costs, phasing, and responsible parties.

Figure J. Wiscasset Study Area



VI. LESSONS LEARNED: THREE CASE STUDIES

Between September 2011 and June 2012, GrowSmart Maine conducted three exercises with property owners, designers and developers to test the feasibility of shifting older and emerging "strip development" formats into more compact, "center"-like formats. As discussed earlier, research suggests that center-like formats can reduce traffic pressures on arterial roads, create choices in transportation, promote economic development, respond to consumer demand, and, if widely adopted, may slow the conversion of "green fields" and rural lands to development.

The question in these exercises was whether the best practices associated with a more compact form of development can also be practical and profitable for the owners of the properties being examined. Is there such a "sweet spot"? In the small city-small town environments that represent the settings for commercial development in most of Maine, the "sweet spot" will not be a dense, urban format served by public transportation with short turnaround times, because population levels are too small. Nor will it be a format with hundreds of thousands of square feet of mixed use development in which many people can live and work within, say, a half-mile radius, because markets are too small and absorption rates too slow.

But is there nevertheless a "sweet spot" that works in the context of a small town or small city? The small town downtown, of course, is a model of compact, mixed use development, and there are many such examples in Maine. However, commercial activities drawn to the highway strip (see Table 3) frequently are those that have rejected or would not fit within the historical village format. Commercial strip businesses are generally distinct from downtown businesses, often with an orientation to mass market or commodity goods and services. And this distinction is expected to continue. What we are looking at with this paper, and these exercises, is whether *a different form of development* can serve these uses. So the question is whether there is a center-like format that intensifies or "in-fills" a strip property in a way that moves it toward better, if not best, practices, and is also practical and something in which strip property owners would invest.

To select the three case studies GrowSmart conducted a statewide solicitation through the Maine Association of Planners listserve and word-of-mouth inquiries for sites which met the typology criteria (see Section II) and involved a willing property owner. As it happened, the three case studies include a rural, a suburban, and an in-town example:

- Route 196 in Topsham near the intersection of River Road – an example of an emerging commercial strip in a rural highway setting;
- Renys Plaza on Route 3 in Belfast – an example of an older strip center in a suburban highway setting;
- Augusta Plaza on Western Avenue in Augusta – an example of an aging strip center in an in-town setting.

In each case, the property owner(s) graciously allowed us to "borrow" their sites to re-envision how they might develop in the future (in the Topsham case) or be redeveloped (in the cases of Renys Plaza and Augusta Plaza). Municipal planners and owners provided the background and field

information needed to assure that the exercise would account for the constraining circumstances – wetlands, easements, long-term agreements with tenants, and other conditions – that face most development and redevelopment projects. Other developers also served as sounding boards for market and financing realities.

The exercises were hypothetical: they do not represent proposals by the property owners and do not impose expectations on them. We "borrowed" the sites in order to test the possibilities, understand the limits, and learn lessons that might be taken to heart by owners, developers and communities throughout Maine. We hope, of course, that the results of the exercises will be useful to both the property owners and the communities.

ROUTE 196 AND RIVER ROAD, TOPSHAM: RURAL EXAMPLE OF AN EMERGING STRIP

Background

Rt. 196 is an arterial that connects Topsham to the Lewiston-Auburn Metropolitan Area. The intersection of Route 196 and River Road is along a semi-rural section of the highway mid-way between the Route 196 interchange with I-95 and the Town of Lisbon, in the vicinity of the former Pejepscot Village. At one time a paper manufacturing mill was located nearby along the Androscoggin River, and the small village, located just southwest of the study area, included workers' homes, a general store, and a school. There also was a church on Rt. 196 near this intersection.

Parts of the Route 196 corridor west of I-95 and Topsham Fair Mall have been incrementally filling in with low-density development along the Rt. 196 frontage. The strip either side of the intersection of Route 196 and River Road includes several businesses, among them a modular homes dealer, an office building, a dog grooming service, a day care center, and a pharmaceuticals packaging facility.

The Topsham Route 196 "mini-charrette" was conducted in June 2012, in cooperation with three of the principal property owners in the study area.

This case study consisted of a tax record and windshield review of the area around the Route 196 – River Road intersection and along the nearby Meadow Crossing Road; an overview of land use along the Route 196 corridor from I-95 to the Lisbon town line; review of zoning, soils, wetland and power line easement information; and background discussions with the Town Planner on the future of Route 196 and the Town's intention to prepare a corridor plan. The Town Planning Department provided several useful maps as part of the background. The one-day "mini-charrette" to brainstorm how this emerging strip might evolve as a mixed-use center included a site walk. Participants included:

- David Giroux, property owner and developer
- Bob Williams, property owner and developer
- John Charrette, PortCity Architects

- Terry DeWan, Terrence J. DeWan and Associates
- Theo Holtwijk, Director of Long-Range Planning, Falmouth, ME
- Mary Mayo, GrowSmart Maine
- Melissa Poulin, landscape architect intern
- Mitchell Rasor, MRLD Landscape Architecture + Urbanism
- Laura Reading, landscape architect intern
- Rich Roedner, Town Planner, Topsham
- The "Re-Envision" team of Lynne Seeley and Evan Richert

The properties that constitute the study area have significant frontage on Route 196, and the largest parcel, with 151 acres, has frontage on both Route 196 and Meadow Crossing Road.

Figure K provides an aerial view of the existing site and immediately surrounding area. **Table 5** provides additional facts about the study area.

Figure K. Emerging Strip at Rt. 196 & River Rd., Topsham

Objectives and Design Charge, Route 196 & River Road

To guide the participants in the re-envisioning exercise, a set of objectives and a "design charge" were provided in advance of the mini-charrette. In combination, these criteria articulate the vision and parameters for a more compact form of development in the Topsham location.

Objectives

The objectives of the re-envisioned Route 196 and River Road site were to:

- Re-direct this emerging commercial strip toward a hamlet concept. (Note: as used here, a "hamlet" is a rural or semi-rural settlement that is smaller than a village but has some of the same residential, commercial and open space elements of a village, has an internal road system that serves the uses in the settlement, and is distinct enough to have an identity of its own.)
- Prepare a concept that would be feasible to implement from a property owner's or investor's point of view.
- Develop the concept in a manner consistent with local comprehensive planning and the State's growth management principles.

Table 5. Fact Sheet – Rt. 196 and River Rd., Topsham	
Location	Rt. 196 (Lewiston Rd), Topsham, at intersection with River Rd. About 2.1 mi. west of I-295 interchange (2.4 mi from Topsham Fair Mall entrance) and approximately mid-way between Topsham Fair Mall and Lisbon Falls. Pejepscot Village – a small collection of homes and former school building – is located southwest off River Road; leads to a large recycling facility (Grimmel Industries) along the Androscoggin River, formerly a paper mill site.
Size of Study Area	Six parcels containing total of 186 acres. Four smaller parcels, each with a structure on it, range from 1.5 to 3.9 acres. A 24-ac parcel with frontage on Rt. 196 lies immediately behind. A 151-ac parcel, with access from Rt. 196 and frontage on Meadow Cross Rd., wraps around the 24-ac parcel.
Owners	Town Planner Rich Roedner discussed the exercise with the three primary property owners: Rob Sherman, owner of Hallmark Homes; Dave Giroux, owner of the land leased to Waltz Pharmacy and the adjacent 24-ac parcel; and Bob Williams, owner of the 151-ac parcel.
Existing Uses	The smaller parcels along Rt. 196 have buildings that serve several businesses: an office building for Independence Association (Woodford's Family Services); two lots owned by Hallmark Homes with its office and displays of model homes; and a building leased by Waltz Pharmacy (for packaging activities, not a retail store) that was recently vacated. The 24-ac lot has a gravel drive/parking/storage area but is otherwise vacant; the 151-ac lot is vacant.
Utilities	Sewerage and water supply are on-site; public lines end 1+ mile to the east.
Soils	Soils are generally shallow to bedrock and/or seasonal groundwater, but profiles allow subsurface wastewater disposal.
Land Uses in the Area	Besides the office building, Hallmark Homes, and Waltz's facility, the immediate area includes: a dog grooming business and a day care center; two utility corridors that cross within the study area, at least one of which is marked as a recreation trail; and homes. Grimmel Industries (recycling) is along the Androscoggin River to the southwest, near the location of the former Pejepscot Village paper mill, and large gravel pits are farther west along Rt. 196 and the river.
Access & Traffic	Study area includes frontage along Rt. 196 and Meadow Cross Rd. AADT in 2010 was 12,940 at Rt. 196 and Old Lisbon Rd. adjacent to the site.

The design charge to the participants was to:

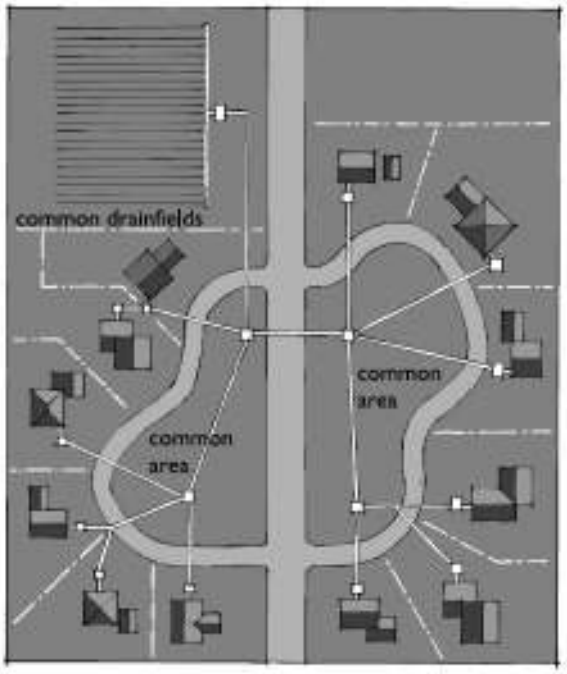
- Build an identity as a hamlet that can succeed both commercially and residentially. The study area might be the entirety of a hamlet or part of a larger hamlet that is connected to the Pejepscot Village area.

- Incorporate a mix of uses, including a core of commercial and higher density residential uses, other residential development of lesser density but in a neighborhood format, and significant open space for recreation, production, and green space

- Design the development with multiple, safe, internal street and pedestrian connections; minimize dead end streets.

- Because there is no prospect for public sewer or water lines, design the hamlet with subsurface wastewater disposal and on-site wells. Where subsurface wastewater disposal is used, state law limits residential density to two dwelling units per acre (gross). Consider the option of engineered, community subsurface wastewater disposal for some or all of the development, with contracted administration by the Topsham Sewer District or use of a community sanitary district, as enabled by state law to facilitate compact growth patterns in areas without public sewers. (Title 38, Chapter 11-A) This allows smaller lots that are connected to the community system, as long as overall density is not greater than 2 units per acre. **See Figure L.**

Figure L. Community Septic System



Results

The composite results of the mini-charrette were compiled by the Re-Envision team and edited and translated by Terry DeWan and Ben Gleason of Terrence J. DeWan and Associates into the graphic shown in **Figure M**. In sum, the illustrative plan:

- Incorporates a core area within a quarter-mile arc of Route 196 with opportunities for a mix of small commercial and light industrial uses and clustered residences (not exceeding state standards for development using subsurface wastewater disposal).

- Sets up a new "100% location" for the commercial uses off Route 196, with a new street parallel to Route 196 and managed highway access and high visibility from Route 196.

- Offers a connecting residential neighborhood that extends beyond the core, accessible from either Route 196 or off Meadow Cross Road; and avoids dead-end streets to the extent possible.

- Provides space for engineered community subsurface wastewater disposal systems on suitable soils for the clustered development.

- Is laid out to allow logical phasing of development, both the commercial and the residential, so that it can be built as market conditions warrant.

- Uses open space in multiple ways: conservation of wetlands and woodlands, greens within residential areas, an interconnected trail system accessible to all homes, and for community wastewater disposal systems.

The exercise provided an opportunity to test the "center" concept for an emerging rural area. The key lessons learned are presented in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Lessons Learned – Rt. 196 and River Rd., Topsham

Involving the Players

- **Property owners, local planners, and professional designers are likely to have different beginning points for an exercise such as "re-envisioning the strip."** An open exchange among them can open the door to strategies that meet the objectives of both property owner and community.

Types and Mix of Land Uses

- **The best commercial opportunities for an emerging strip along a rural arterial likely will be of two types:**

  - **Convenience retail and personal services**, which draw upon the spending power of both passing traffic and suburbanites who have located in the immediate area or who will be part of the planned development envisioned in this pilot. "Convenience retail and services" refers to commercial offerings that meet everyday needs – food (basic groceries, take-out foods, café, snacks), general store, hair dressing, day care, pet services, branch banking, hardwares, etc. – and for which customers do not want to travel far.

  - **Small scale light industry and offices of trades people, other sole proprietors, or nonprofits.** They can benefit from the visibility and accessibility of an arterial location but cannot afford land prices/rents in more central locations, or who need room to spread out.

- **The organization (or re-organization) of a re-envisioned, emerging strip in this situation can usefully follow a hamlet model, embracing a mix of commercial, residential, resource-**

based, and open space activities, in roughly the following proportions:

- **Commercial and light industrial:** 40% - 70% of a core 20 to 30 acres; 10% to 20% of the total land area
- **Residential:** 20% - 40% of a core of 20 to 30 acres; 40% to 50% of the total land area,
- **Resource-based activity** (farming, woodlots, outdoor recreation): variable, from a modest presence (e.g., recreational paths) to a large presence (e.g., a farm field)
- **Open space:** cumulatively, including resource-based activity and unbuildable area, 30% to 40% of the land area; used in part to enable clustering of residential development

- **The hamlet can be targeted to one side of the arterial or can be envisioned as a combination of neighborhoods settled either side of the arterial.** Given its location along a rural corridor, the arterial can be a boundary, with the "hamlet" located on one side of the road; or, especially if at or near an intersection or where there is a legacy neighborhood, it can be a settlement of separate but related neighborhoods either side of the arterial that are conjoined by the commercial activity along the arterial. This increases the business potential of the commercial activity and provides desirable services to two or more neighborhoods.

Size and Form

- **The size of the planned area likely needs to be at least 50 – 75 acres, and preferably 100+ acres.** This size allows for unbuildable area, creates options for circulation, and provides for the mix and amount of uses that will create critical mass for a viable hamlet. The Topsham Rt. 196 pilot area contained 186 acres.
- **This size of an area likely will require working with multiple property owners who are interested in seeing the land developed.** Either the land needs to be assembled under single ownership or the property owners need to cooperate for planned development.

  There are **strong arguments for cooperation** that appeal to the self interests of the owners

  - **The profitability of the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts**: cooperation expands frontages and greatly increases the chances for good circulation through the area; design is not automatically limited by wetlands or similar constraints that may be concentrated in one part of the planning area; and the area is large enough to promote identity, branding, and an appeal to future investors and buyers.
  - **Property owners may also want to promote a larger public good** than might be able to be achieved on an individual parcel.

  There also will be **obstacles to coordinated development** even if the property owners are willing participants.

  - These include **personal financial decisions, different timing requirements, willingness to cooperate on infrastructure, and agreeing on compensation** where the development

potential of one parcel is shifted to another parcel to make the overall development work. Municipalities can help by preparing templates for cross-easements between property owners (for utilities and access, for example) and by adopting planned development provisions that reward cooperation.

- **Adopt a form that is flexible.** The land uses that ultimately choose to locate in the development are not entirely predictable. The form of the development – its layout, the relationships of lots to circulation, the relationships of non-residential and residential lots to each other – and related zoning or internal regulations should be able to accommodate whichever sets of uses want to be there.

- **A well traveled arterial road with high speeds, wide lanes and shoulders, and with existing development along it will limit the notion of creating a "center" typical of a traditional "hamlet" along the main road. Adapt to that by creating a new "100% location" -** a new 4-corners at the intersection of a new road parallel to the arterial and a cross road that provides the primary access from the arterial into the interior of the property. This arrangement also (a) provides valuable new frontage for commercial activity and (b) manages access along the arterial.

- **Preserve and add view lines from the highway to the new 100% location**.

- **Use open space** for protection of regulated resources, working lands, green infrastructure that doubles for storm water management and absorption fields, amenities such as greens and recreational trails, and containment that provides identity for the hamlet and privacy for residences.

Phasing

- **Allow for development in phases.** Make sure there are stand-alone development components that can generate early cash flow, spread out costs, and allow time for market conditions to ripen.

Infrastructure and Circulation

- **Most emerging strips along arterial roads will not have public sewerage. Therefore, soils must be adequate for subsurface wastewater disposal.** This is a basic screening criterion.

- **Make engineered community subsurface wastewater disposal systems part of the design from the beginning**. This gives essential flexibility to design and allows larger expanses of contiguous open space in strategic locations rather than fragmenting the landscape into oversized individual lots. These systems work best if maintenance is **contracted with a local sewer district or a new community sewer district** is established for this purpose, as allowed by state statute (38 MRSA Ch 11A)

- **The interconnection of roads in the planned area should have a link-to-node ratio of at least 1.3 or 1.4.** This allows for easy circulation and multiple pathways through the planned

area without having to turn onto the main roads. (See Figure C earlier in this paper.)

- **Connect the planned area to adjacent areas at a few strategic points.** The connections should include one or more vehicular rights of way if possible; at a minimum they should include pedestrian and recreational paths, using utility or other corridors that can be accessed by adjacent subdivisions. These provide additional ways to reach the convenience center in the hamlet as well as opportunities for recreation.
- **Allow for future transit options.** A "hamlet" will not have the residential density or numbers to justify public transportation on its own. However, a location along an arterial that connects job centers (such as, in this case, Lewiston-Auburn with Brunswick-Bath) means that it is **positioned to be a stop for an intercity bus or a vanpool program.** Properly designed, it will have sufficient size to be a node in an intercity system.

The best commercial opportunities for an emerging strip along a rural arterial likely will be of two types:

- Convenience retail and personal services that can draw upon the spending power of both passing traffic and suburbanites who have located in the immediate area
- Small scale light industry and offices of tradespeople, other sole proprietors, or nonprofits who can benefit from an arterial location but cannot afford more central locations, or who need room to spread out.

The size of the planned area likely needs to be at least 50 – 75 acres, and preferably 100+ acres.

- This may require working with multiple property owners who are interested in seeing the land developed.
- There are strong arguments for cooperation that appeal to the self interests of the owners: the profitability of the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. Property owners often also want to promote a larger public good than might be able to be achieved on an individual parcel.

The organization of the center can follow a hamlet model, with a mix of commercial, residential, resource-based, and open space activities, in roughly the following proportions:

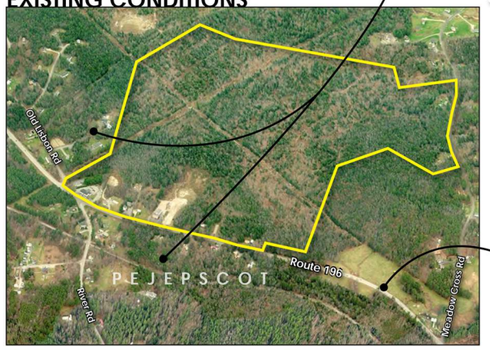
	% of core 20-30 acres	% of total land
Commercial and Light Industrial	40-70%	10-20%
Residential	20-40%	40-50%
Resource Based Activity	Variable from a modest presence (e.g. recreational paths) to a large presence (e.g. farm field)	
Open Space (cumulatively)	30-40% (used in part to enable clustering of residential development)	

A well traveled arterial road with high speeds, wide lanes and shoulders, and existing development along it will limit the creation of a traditional "hamlet" along the main road.

- Adapt by creating a new "100% location" – a 4-corners at the intersection of a new road parallel to the arterial and a cross road that provides the primary access from the arterial into the interior of the property.
- This arrangement also (a) provides valuable new frontage for commercial activity and (b) manages access along the arterial.

Connect the planned area to adjacent areas at a few strategic points.

EXISTING CONDITIONS



An arterial can be either regarded as a barrier or boundary line.

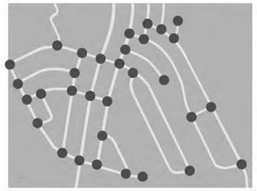
- The "hamlet" can be located primarily on one side of the road;
- Or it can be seen as a settlement of separate but related neighborhoods either side of the arterial that are conjoined by the commercial activity along the arterial.

Adopt a form that is flexible.

- The land uses that ultimately choose to locate in the development are not entirely predictable. The form of the development – its layout, the relationships of lots to circulation, the relationships of non-residential and residential lots to each other – and related regulations should be able to accommodate different sets of uses.

The interconnection of roads within the planned area should have a link-to-node ratio of 1.3 or 1.4. This plan achieves a ratio of 1.38.

A link-to-node ratio is a measure of interconnection in a neighborhood – of how easy it is to move from one part of the neighborhood to another without having to go onto the highway. It's the **number of links** – sections of road between intersections – **divided by the number of nodes** – intersections and cul-de-sac heads. For example, in the illustration, the link-to-node ratio is 1.3 (42 links and 32 nodes).



Emerging strips along arterial roads without public sewerage should make engineered community subsurface wastewater disposal systems part of the design from the beginning.

Allow for development in phases.

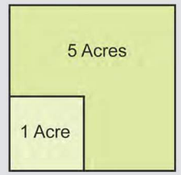
Use open space for protection of regulated resources, working lands, for green infrastructure, amenities, and containment that provides identity for the hamlet and privacy for residences.

Preserve and add view lines from the highway to the new 100% location.

0' 200' 400' 600'

KEY

- Existing Building
- Proposed Commercial/Convenience
- Proposed Light Industrial/Distribution
- Proposed Residential
- Wetlands
- 10' Contours
- Trails



GrowSmart MAINE

FIGURE M. TOPSHAM: ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN FOR ROUTE 196/RIVER ROAD

TOPSHAM: ROUTE 196/RIVER ROAD

Emerging Rural Commercial Strip

A New Vision for Maine's Highway Commercial Strips

A GrowSmart Maine Project

Design assistance and graphics by:

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November 30, 2012

RENYS PLAZA, BELFAST: SUBURBAN EXAMPLE, AGING SHOPPING CENTER IN A GROWING STRIP

Background

The Renys Plaza "mini-charrette" was conducted in September 2011, in cooperation with R.H. Reny, Inc., the owner of Renys Plaza on Route 3 in Belfast.

This case study consisted of a tax record and windshield review of the plaza, the commercial strip of which it is a part, and the larger surrounding area; review of zoning, soils and wetland information; background interview of Mary Kate Reny, director of marketing and operations for Renys Department Stores; and information from the city planner on the recent history of this section of Belfast. It culminated with a one-day, on-site "mini-charrette" to brainstorm a re-envisioned center. Participants included:

- Mary Kate Reny, Renys Department Stores
- Richard Berman, Developers Collaborative
- John Charette, PortCity Architects
- Theo Holtwijk, Director of Long-Range Planning, Falmouth, ME
- Wayne Marshall, City Planner, Belfast, ME
- Mary Mayo, GrowSmart Maine
- Mitchell Rasor, MRLD Landscape Architecture + Urbanism
- The "Re-Envision" team of Lynne Seeley, Evan Richert, and Bruce Hyman

Renys Plaza was built in the 1960s and is anchored by Renys Department Store, which added space in 2007. It is a mature center, and the commercial strip has continued to spread along Route 3 to the west. Significant office and institutional space is in the vicinity, including AthenaHealth, a cloud-based health care billing and electronic services company; a Bank of America call center; and the Hutchinson Center, which is an outreach center of the University of Maine.

Figure N. Renys Plaza and Surrounding Suburban Commercial Strip Development

The shopping center, including a branch bank on a separately owned outparcel that shares parking in the center, contains about 74,500 square feet of floor area on about 8.8 acres. There are 4.91 parking spaces per thousand square feet of gross floor area.

Figure N shows the site and immediately surrounding area. **Table 7** provides additional facts.

Table 7. Fact Sheet – Renys Plaza, Belfast	
Location	Intersection of Rt. 3 (Belmont Ave.) and Route 1, Belfast, just west of Rt. 1
Size of Parcel	17.75 acres. However, the shopping center is located only on the front 8.8 acres, with ~330 ft of frontage on Rt. 3. The back half of the property, which includes a drainage way and some wetland, is vacant
Age of Center	Originally built in 1964. Renys expanded in 2007
Size of Center	66,099 sf, plus a 2,868 sf Damariscotta Savings Bank and 300 sf Wass' Hot Dog Stand, for total of 69,267 sf. In addition, Bangor Savings Bank has a 5,260 sf branch on its own lot that uses shopping center parking
Floor Area Ratio	0.19
Parking Spaces	366, including Bangor Savings Bank 4.91 per 1000 sf of gross floor area
Business Mix	Retail, restaurant, hair salon, banks; vacant former drug store; Renys anchors with ~ 38,000 sf store. (89% retail/restaurant, 11% service)
Access	Access was changed as a result of MaineDOT reconstruction of the Rt. 3/ Rt. 1 intersection. Single direct access into center off Rt. 3 for west-bound, right-turning traffic only. New access road just to the west of the plaza provides shared access into the plaza for all traffic.
Transit	Fixed route bus service not available
Other development within 0.25-mi on Rt 3, west of Rt 1	Goodwill retail store, Chevrolet dealership, fast food, gas/convenience store (also Concord Trailways bus stop), bank, lumber store. Total of about 73,000 sf of commercial space. Part of a larger commercial area, majority of which is east of Rt. 1; the highway isolates the Reny's portion of the strip from the larger area to the east.
Other development just beyond 0.25-mi, off Rt. 3	Former MBNA complex, now divided between AthenaHealth (an office processing center with ~182,000 sf and ~350 employees) and Bank of America call center (~334,000 sf). Driveway to Univ. of Maine Hutchinson Center is 0.6 mi west on Rt. 3.
Residential	One single-family home within 0.25 mi. Farther to the west (more than typical walking distance), off Crocker Road, is the 46-unit Springbrook Condominium, originally built by MBNA as apartments for workers. Crocker Road is a rural residential road.

Objectives and Design Charge, Renys

Again, to guide the participants in the re-envisioning exercise, a set of objectives and a "design charge" were provided in advance of the mini-charrette. In combination, these "criteria" articulate the vision and parameters for a more compact form of development in the Renys Plaza location.

Objectives

The objectives of the re-envisioned Renys Plaza center were to:

- Improve center profitability for the owner; and
- Improve the function of the shopping center and immediately surrounding area as an activity center consistent with best land use-transportation practices

The design charge for the participants was to:

- Approximately double the productive floor space in the center, to about 153,000 square feet, in order to achieve a floor area ratio of at least 0.4;
- Identify trade-offs with parking, including whether the parking could be reduced to at least 3.0 – 3.5 per 1000 sq. ft. of leasable area and still be adequate for a marketable mix of uses;
- Maintain a strong visual corridor from Route 3 to the anchor store, Renys;
- Strive for a synergistic mix of land uses, both on site and with consideration for the land uses that are within roughly a 0.25-mile radius of the center; and uses that would, at least intuitively, fulfill a market need;
- Provide good vehicular and pedestrian connections within the shopping center, with immediately neighboring properties on the same side of Rt. 3, and with land uses on the opposite side of Rt. 3; no new curb cuts on Rt. 3;
- Provide a layout that could distinguish and brand the center as an appealing destination; and that could enhance the sense of place for the area of which the shopping center is a part.

Outcomes and Results

The composite results of the mini-charrette were compiled by the Re-Envision team and edited and translated by John Charette of PortCity Architects into the graphic shown in **Figure O.** In sum, the illustrative plan:

- Adds about 71,000 square feet of total floor area to the site (bringing the total of about 146,000 square feet), including two multi-story buildings, one a business hotel and one an office building (either, in a different position on the site, could be, *e.g.,* elderly or other apartment housing);
- Achieves a floor area ratio of 0.38 (up from 0.19);

- Provides for 389 parking spaces, an increase from 366, for a ratio of 2.7 per 1000 square feet of gross floor area, which translates into about 3 spaces per 1000 square feet of leasable floor area;

- Shifts the mix of uses as follows:

Existing Mix		Proposed Mix	
Retail/restaurant	89%	Retail/restaurant	51%
Services	11%	Services	6%
		Hospitality	28%
		Office	15%

- Removes the old, "tired" retail wing of the center and replaces it with new, expanded retail/restaurant (or mixed use) space that takes advantage of new frontage along an extended side street, a strengthened internal circulation grid that connects to the side street, and a pedestrian corridor through this new retail section.

The exercise provided an opportunity to test the "center" concept for a suburban commercial strip. The key lessons learned are presented in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Lessons Learned – Renys Plaza, Belfast

Balancing Land Use Intensity and Parking

- **In this suburban setting, it is possible to design to a floor area ratio of nearly 0.4, increasing productive space and still reasonably accommodating parking.**

  This is still relatively low commercial density but may be sufficient to create a new look, feel and vibrancy of a center, with potential for parking-and-walking to fulfill multiple needs. Strategies to get to this FAR include:

  - Replacing sub-optimal uses with uses that are able to share existing parking because of differing peak periods of activity (e.g., business hotel and retail)

  - Adding stories, either by (1) attracting a multi-story use, such as a hotel, office building or apartment building, or (2) adding second-story space that appeals to certain sectors, such as small professional offices or, depending on the configuration of the center and surrounding amenities, apartments;

  - Incorporating parallel parking along aisles that have been converted into an internal or access road with frontage for a tenant.

- **Neighborhood and community shopping centers frequently are over designed (by 20% or more) for parking and have slow or dead spots that can be used more productively.**

  These areas may be obvious by watching parking patterns during busy periods.

- A good technical measure of whether a parking lot is overdesigned is to identify slow or dead areas during a Saturday afternoon in the second week of December – what the Urban Land Institute has identified as the 20th highest hour of the year in terms of demand for shopping center parking (source: ULI, *Parking Requirements for Shopping Centers*, 2nd Edition, 2003).

- To get a true picture of areas of excess parking, count parking spaces in locations that may be unacceptable for customers but should be acceptable for employees.

Mix of Uses

- **Uses that have strong synergies with other uses in the center or in the immediate area should be targeted for re-development or infill.**

  If a portion of the center is relatively unproductive – vacant spaces or spaces occupied by tenants paying low rates – assign residual value to it and compare this with the cost of demolishing it and reconstructing a synergistic new, non-retail use. See the Table titled "On-Site Support and Synergy in Mixed-Use Project" in **Table 9.**

- **A neighborhood or community retail center benefits from residential uses nearby.**

  A center at this level of the retail hierarchy relies on a proximate residential base. In an auto-oriented strip such as Renys Plaza, the primary trade area may reach 20-30 minutes away by car. Even so, such a center gains resilience, identity, and assured sales if part of the residential base is within one-half mile. If that does not exist, and if there are suitable locations on site (such as, in the case of Renys Plaza, woodlands that offer an amenity), it is worthwhile considering adding residences to the mix.

Designing for Identity and Visibility

- **Define the front corners and the frontages of the development.**

  Use structures or landscaping to give the center identity, define the point of entry, and funnel a long view to the anchor store from the point of entry. The new uses placed in these corners and along the frontage will themselves have superior visibility.

- **At the end of internal roads, "terminate the view" with an important structure.**

  Provide a view to the entry of an anchor store or structure that serves as part of the brand of the center.

Circulation and Connections

- **Superimpose a crossroads configuration to and within the parking lot that:**

  - Aligns with adjacent roads and access points to adjacent properties (especially examine the road layout within a 0.25- to 0.5-mile radius for possibilities of

connecting to land uses that can support the shopping center – for example, office workers who might patronize a restaurant in the center);

- Converts two or more parking aisles into internal roads that provide "frontage" and "corners" for additional productive building space – which may be smaller structures that can be built and marketed incrementally, or a larger structure for a use that fulfills a market need, such as a hotel or entertainment facility.

- **Evaluate surrounding undeveloped lands for the possibility of trails or other pedestrian connections and for their amenity value.**

  - This may improve connections to potential customers within walking or bicycling distance; and as a recreational amenity for hospitality, entertainment, or residential uses, appropriate for the center.

  - Include areas that are set aside to preserve wetlands or to manage storm water runoff, as these may be natural areas for trails.

Phasing

- **Provide for phasing of redevelopment or expansion, with earlier phases financing later phases.**

- **Also think of the re-development as modules, with the flexibility to move around pieces or adapt to market conditions** – e.g., in the hypothetical case at Renys Plaza, the new office building might be apartments if shifted away from Route 1 and placed in a quieter part of the site facing undeveloped woodlands.

Table 9. Synergies between major land uses

	Degree of Support/Synergy			
Land Use	**Residential**	**Hotel[a]**	**Retail/ Entertainment[b]**	**Culture/Civic/ Recreation**
Office	◆◆	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆
Residential	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆◆
Hotel	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆
Retail/Entertainment	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆
Cultural/Civic/Rec	◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆

Bullets: ◆=very weak, ◆◆=weak, ◆◆◆=moderate, ◆◆◆◆=strong, ◆◆◆◆◆=very strong

[a] Synergy is strongest between high end hotels and condominiums, less for mid-priced hotels and other residences.

[b] Restaurants and food services are the main source of benefit for offices.

Source: *Mixed Use Development Handbook,* 2nd edition, Urban Land Institute, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 85.

Evaluate surrounding undeveloped or partially developed lands for the possibility of trails or other pedestrian connections:

- Pedestrian connections may serve as a way to interconnect with potential consumers within walking distance and as a recreational amenity for entertainment or hospitality uses that may be appropriate for the center. Include areas set aside to preserve wetlands or for management of storm water as this may be prime areas for a trail network.

Superimpose for consistency a crossroads configuration to and within the parking lot:

- Align the crossroads explicitly with adjacent roads and access points to adjacent properties. Examine the road layout within a 0.25 to 0.5 mile radius for possibilities of connecting to land uses that can support the shopping center and that improves accessibility from them - for example, office workers who might patronize a restaurant in the center.
- Convert two or more parking aisles into internal roads that provide "frontage" and "corners" for additional productive building space - which may be smaller structures that can be built and market incrementally or a larger structure for a use that fulfills a market need, such as a hotel.

At the end of internal roads, "terminate the view" with an important structure:

- Provide a long view to the entry of an anchor store, a new building on an outparcel, or a structure that serves as part of the brand of the center to help focus consumery.

Identify underused portion of parking lot and designate for redevelopment:

- Identify underused parking by observation over different peak periods;
- Guide: Underused parking should at the least represent a general area of the lot that has significant excess parking stalls during the 20th highest hour of the year in terms of parking demand, as defined by the Urban Land Institute in Parking Requirements for Shopping Centers. This typically occurs during the afternoon of a day in the second week of December;
- To get a true picture of areas of excess parking, consider parking spaces for employees to be moveable to locations that may be unacceptable for customers (e.g., behind center buildings with access via an employee entrance or back door), such that employees are not using desirable areas of the parking lot - whether for customer parking or redevelopment.

Consider uses that have strong synergies with other uses in the center or immediate area (e.g., within one-quarter mile):

- If a portion of the center is relatively unproductive, has chronic vacancy or attracts tenants only at rates that are heavily subsidized by others; assign residual value to it and compare this value with the cost/value of demolition and replacement with a new use for which there appears to be demand and higher value.

Table 1. On-Site Support and Synergy in Mixed-Use Projects

Land Use	Degree of Support/Synergy: Residential	Hotel[a]	Retail/ Entertainment[b]	Culture/Civic/ Recreation
Office	●●	●●●●●	●●●●	●●●
Residential	●●●	●●●	●●●●	●●●●●
Hotel	●●●●●	●●●	●●●●	●●●●
Retail/Entertainment	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●
Cultural/Civic/Recreation	●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●

Bullets: ●=very weak, ●●=weak, ●●●=moderate, ●●●●= strong, ●●●●●= very strong.
[a] Synergy is strongest between high end hotels and condominiums, less for mid-priced hotels and residences.
[b] Restaurants and food services are the main source of benefit for offices.
Source: *Mixed Use Development Handbook*, 2nd edition, Urban Land Institute, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 85.

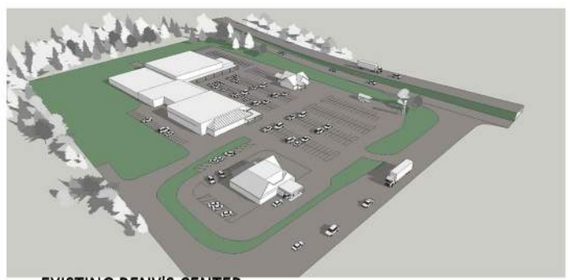
Define the front corners and the frontages of the development

- Use structures or landscaping elements to define the point of entry, give visibility to the new uses placed in these corners/along the frontage, and provide a long view to the anchor store from the point of entry.

Design as close to a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.4 as possible.

- A FAR of 0.4 is still low density and suburban in scale, but may be sufficient to create a new look, feel, and vibrancy of a center, with good potential for parking and walking to fulfill multiple needs.
- Consider the addition of one or more uses (or replacement of obsolete uses) with a use that is able to share existing parking because of differing peak periods of activity (e.g., business hotel with retail; offices with sit-down restaurants with evening service);
- Consider adding stories, either by attracting a multi-story use, such as a hotel or office building, or by the addition of second-story space that appeals to certain sectors, such as small professional offices and, depending on the configuration of the center and the immediately surrounding area, apartments;
- Consider incorporation of parallel parking along internal roads that do not directly serve angled or 90-degree parking (for example, if a former parking aisle has been converted into an internal road for frontage for additional development).

Design the redevelopment strategy in a way that can be phased, such that earlier phases can help finance later phases.



EXISTING RENY'S CENTER,
ROUTE 3, BELFAST, MAINE

Existing conditions Parcel data		
8.8 acres	383,328	sq.ft
existing parking	366	spaces
Existing FAR	0.19	
Existing parking ratio	5	spaces per 1,000
Existing use mix		
Retail	88.0%	
Service	11.0%	
Hospitality	0.0%	
Office	0.0%	
Restaurant	1.0%	
Proposed conditions Parcel Data		
Proposed FAR	0.38	
Proposed Parking	389	spaces
Parking Ratio	3.00	spaces per 1,000
Proposed use mix		
Retail	43%	
Service	6%	
Hospitality	28%	
Office	15%	
Restaurant	8%	

GrowSmart MAINE

BELFAST: RENYS PLAZA

Graying Suburban Strip Center

A New Vision for Maine's Highway Commercial Strips

A GrowSmart Maine Project

Design assistance and graphics by:

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FIGURE O. RENYS PLAZA: ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN

AUGUSTA PLAZA: IN-TOWN EXAMPLE

Background

The Augusta Plaza "mini-charrette" was conducted in July 2012, in cooperation with Commercial Properties, the owner of the plaza on Western Avenue.

Prior to the exercise, the study team conducted tax record and field reviews of the plaza and its environs; discussed the property, its history and tenant mix with the center's owner; received background information from the City Planning Bureau; reviewed the state government's State House campus master plan, which includes prospects for an adjacent site; and reviewed zoning, ownership patterns, and traffic and circulation patterns on Western Ave., Capitol Street, and local side streets. The City Planning Bureau provided a helpful portfolio of background maps. Participants in the mini-charrette included:

- Dan Catlin, VP of Commercial Properties and CEO of Commercial Properties Management
- Jim Brady, RED Group – Real Estate Development
- John Charette, PortCity Architects
- Malcolm Collins, Architect
- Terry DeWan, Terrence J. DeWan & Associates
- Theo Holtwijk, Director of Long-Range Planning, Falmouth, ME
- Mary Mayo, GrowSmart Maine
- Matt Nazar, Deputy Director of Development Services, City of Augusta
- Mitchell Rasor, MRLD Landscape Architecture & Urbanism
- The "Re-Envision" team of Lynne Seeley and Evan Richert

Augusta Plaza was built in 1962 and was the first suburban-style center on Western Avenue, just west of the west side rotary in Augusta and the State House complex. It is anchored by K-Mart, which has a long-term lease in the center.

In the years after Augusta Plaza was built, two other shopping centers were built farther west on Western Avemue: the Turnpike Mall, anchored by Sears, 1.5 miles west at the I-95 interchange; and the Capitol Shopping Center just 0.3 mile west, anchored by Shaw's Supermarket. In the hierarchy of shopping centers, Augusta Plaza and Capitol Shopping Center, though non-adjacent and in entirely separate ownerships, together effectively function as a community shopping center. Shaw's Plaza provides the supermarket anchor and Augusta Plaza the general merchandise anchor. The Turnpike Mall, which is of the same vintage as Augusta Plaza, is itself a community shopping center, with Hannaford Brothers supermarket on an adjacent property.

In addition, Augusta Crossing, a relatively new center of big box stores, is located about one mile west, off Western Avenue near I-95. The large inventory of retail space in the Western Avenue corridor creates an extremely competitive environment for an older center such as Augusta Plaza. At the time of the mini-charrette, there were significant vacancies, in large part due to a recent move by Goodwill Industries retail store to a parcel near Augusta Crossing.

One of the striking features of Augusta Plaza is its proximity to the State House complex on Capitol Street but its lack of connection to this large customer base. The plaza has neither visual nor good physical connection to the State House. It is a mere quarter-mile from the State Office Building, but the most direct route to it is one-half mile and, perceptually, it may as well be much farther away. The closest component of the State House complex abuts the plaza on the south, and, ironically, it is an incompatible use: the Department of Transportation Motor Garage. It has the appearance of a semi-industrial site and is a serious barrier for access to the plaza from Capitol Street. Notably, the State House Campus Master Plan calls for relocating the motor garage and redeveloping the site for other State Government purposes. There are no foreseeable prospects for such redevelopment, but the master plan recognizes that eventually the economics of the Capitol Street location will dictate a higher use.

The plaza is separated from both the motor garage site and another governmental neighbor, the Federal Office Building, by steep embankments. Across Western Avenue within the plaza's immediate trade area is Augusta's sizeable, historic west side residential neighborhood, which helps to support the convenience-oriented stores and services in the plaza.

Figure P is an aerial view of the site and surrounding area. **Table 10** provides additional facts about the shopping center and surrounding area.

Figure P. Augusta Plaza and Surroundings

Objectives and Design Charge to Augusta Mini-Charrette Participants

A set of objectives and a "design charge" were provided in advance of the mini-charrette. In combination, these "criteria" articulate the vision and parameters for a more compact form of development in the Augusta Plaza location.

Objectives

The objectives of the re-envisioned center were to:

- Re-brand the center as distinct from newer, competing centers, enhancing its profitability
- Improve function of the shopping center and immediately surrounding area as an activity center, consistent with best land use – transportation practices
- Consider how Augusta Plaza and the adjacent Maine DOT Motor Garage site might one day be integrated

Table 10. Fact Sheet – Augusta Plaza	
Location	Western Ave., 0.25-mile west of the west side Rotary
Size of Parcel	10.87 acres, excluding a 0.66-ac outparcel occupied by Wendy's
Age of Center	Built in 1962. The current owner, Augusta Plaza Associates, acquired in 1997
Size of Center	The main building is 115,380 sf; with all buildings added, total is 128,880 sf, excluding Wendy's
Floor Area Ratio	0.27
Parking Spaces	Approx. 422 (excluding Wendy's), for a ratio of 3.27 spaces per 1000 sf gross
Business Mix	Anchored by K-Mart; Goodwill recently vacated 11,500 sf, and another 11,380 sf also are vacant. Other tenants include retailers (Fastenal, Radio Shack, Smoke Shop), restaurants (Friendly's, Little Caesar's), an office, a radio station, services (laundry, UPS store, beauty salon). K-Mart has a long-term lease
Access	Five curb cuts off Western Ave., one off a dead end side street, Amherst
Transit	Limited fixed route bus service: 1- to 2-hour service, 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., with 6 stops/day at Augusta Plaza
Other development within 0.25-mi	Adjacent to the east: multi-story Federal Office Building and Post Office Adjacent to the south: Maine DOT Motor Garage • Embankments to the east and south isolate the plaza from the adjacent properties Shaw's shopping center is 0.25 mi west State House is <0.25 mi as the crow flies, but closer to 0.5 mi by currently available street connections
Other nearby development	Capitol Shopping Center, anchored by Shaw's Supermarket, 0.3 mile west Augusta Armory is 0.5 mi west; airport is 0.6 mi west Augusta Plaza is at the eastern end of a long, Western Ave. commercial strip
Residential	Large, older neighborhood with single-family and small multi-family homes across Western Ave., north of the strip; good street grid serves the area

The "design charge" for the participants was to:

- Consider how Augusta Plaza could be transformed into a more urban center, consistent with its in-town location and proximity to State House, while meeting practical parking needs.
- Improve connections to key activity centers on Capitol Street, especially the State House complex; and find strategies to overcome the steep topography that separates the site from Capitol Street and the Federal Office Building
- Suggest uses that could be added to the land use mix to take advantage of proximity to the State House and could promote the internal capture of trips within the center and adjacent area
- Increase floor area ratio to at least the 0.4 to 0.5 range
- Explore how the Maine DOT Motor Garage site could be integrated to the mutual benefit of that site and Augusta Plaza if and when the State decides to relocate the garage to a more appropriate location
- Explore a form and aesthetic that would refresh the brand of the center as an appealing destination and business location

Results

The composite results of the mini-charrette were compiled by the Re-Envision team and edited and translated by John Charette of PortCity Architects into the graphic shown in **Figures Q and R.** In sum, the illustrative plan:

- Adds about 112,000 sf of floor space to the center (bringing the total to about 241,000 sf), partly by adding a multi-story residential structure that could be apartments, a business hotel, or extended stay hotel serving capitol visitors or a combination; and partly by replacing an aged wing of the center with two-story Main Street style buildings.
- Shifts the mix of uses as follows:

Existing Mix		**Proposed Mix**	
Retail/restaurant	83%	Retail/restaurant	46%
Service	5%	Service	6%
Hospitality or Resid	0%	Hospitality or Resid	30%
Office	12%	Office	18%

- Anticipates future redevelopment of the adjacent Maine DOT Motor Garage site as recommended by the State House Campus Master Plan, with a parking garage to be shared by the Augusta Plaza and state government site.

- The garage is connected to the residential/hotel structure. Off-street parking is provided at a ratio of 2.62 spaces per 1000 sf of gross floor area, or approximately 3 spaces per 1000 sf of net leasable area (assuming 85% floor area efficiency).
- In addition, the side street would be reconfigured to accommodate modest on-street parking.

- Creates a new, internal Main Street running between the signalized intersection at Western Avenue and the new multi-floor structure. This is the key element for urbanizing and re-branding the center.
- Incrementally strengthens the front edge of the site along Western Avenue.
- Maintains the structure and parking that serves the center's longtime anchor tenant, which has a long-term lease and associated rights.
- Suggests short-term steps to build the opportunity for redevelopment, most importantly establishing direct vehicular and pedestrian connections between Capitol Street (and its State House employee and visitor market) and the plaza.

The exercise provided an opportunity to test the "center" concept for an in-town (urban) commercial strip. The key lessons learned are presented in **Table 11.**

Table 11. Lessons Learned – Augusta Plaza

Realities and Assets in an Urban Environment

- **An older shopping center along an urban arterial faces constraints to redevelopment as a more vital "smart growth" node:**

  The constraints of past decisions – for example, deals with an anchor tenant (long-term lease at low rate, dedication of parking and other space, etc.) or past sales of outparcels that limit cash flow, flexibility, and incentives for change; and suburban model of development that placed the buildings at the rear of the site and parking along the access road, limiting visibility and discouraging pedestrian use.

  The constraints of the site – for example, a site smaller and tighter than competing sites in suburban locations; parking ratios below what may be considered industry standards and thus little dead parking area that can be readily converted to development; infrastructure (utilities, curb cuts, traffic signals) that may be expensive to rearrange; design of the site decades earlier with little thought given to interconnection with surrounding uses.

  The constraints of the surrounding area – the surrounding built environment may appear fixed with little opportunity to assemble land or change circulation patterns; and some surrounding uses may be incompatible with the new brand of a re-envisioned site.

- **But an older shopping center along an urban arterial also has an array of assets that**

present opportunities for profitable redevelopment:

- proximity to a built-in population and flows of people – both a surrounding, usually densely settled neighborhood and commuter traffic headed to in-town jobs;
- traffic signals that slow/stop traffic, increasing exposure time for potential customers and guaranteeing turns into and out of the center;
- proximity to synergistic uses and activities with which to forge connections;
- in some cases, adjacency to properties that have become obsolete or are underused in their locations and are ripe for combining with the center;
- existing local roads that, although they may need improvement, can be used to give more porosity to the site and create better inter-neighborhood connections;
- the relative ease of re-branding the development in a highly visible location;
- on an already urbanized site, fewer natural resource constraints to face in the permitting process;
- political support attached to redevelopment of an older urban site.

Place in the Hierarchy of Centers

- **Re-envisioning an urban strip center requires understanding its place in the hierarchy of centers**, i.e., whether it has the draw (from largest market area to smallest) of a regional, community, neighborhood, or convenience center. Augusta Plaza, anchored by a discount department store, appears to operate in conjunction with a neighboring strip center (anchored by a supermarket) as a community center. This implies a primary market area that reaches 3 – 6 miles and a market area population of 20,000+.
- **But in an urban environment there may be unique opportunities that go beyond the typical suburban hierarchy of shopping centers.** The urban environment is richer and more varied than the suburban, and opportunities previously overlooked may be key to re-envisioning the future of the center.

  For Augusta Plaza that opportunity comes from proximity to the State House – fewer than 1,000 feet away as the crow flies, but, due to lack of interconnection, nearly one-half mile away along existing streets and sidewalks. A public parking garage that is part of the capitol complex is similarly close but disconnected.

Forging Connections

- **If the center is isolated from nearby uses that can be tapped as part of a re-envisioned center, forge safe, attractive, convenient connections with them as a first order of business**.

For Augusta Plaza, there are two potential points of interconnection from Capitol Street that, if forged, could quickly change the impression of the center from one that is distant from a major source of customers (the State House and various offices) to one that is a short walk for these customers. This refreshed connection can also change the market's perception of the viable mix of uses that could be located at the center.

Urbanizing the In-town Strip

- A graying, in-town strip faces formidable competition from the next tiers of newer suburban strip shopping centers. **A fresh, distinctive re-branding as an in-town urban center may be an effective way to attract new customers and new types of tenants**.
- **An urbanized redevelopment plan should reasonably aim for*:***
    - 35% - 40% of site frontage devoted to building walls located within 0 to 50 feet of the front property line – enough to create an identity and sense of containment but preserving view lines to the anchor and other businesses deep into the site;
    - a floor area ratio (total floor area as a percent of total land area in parcel) of at least 0.4; if a parking deck is used, 0.5);
    - off-street parking at a rate of 2.5 spaces per 1000 sf of leasable floor area, which should be sufficient if the mix of uses includes activities with different peak demand periods, and if newly forged connections with destinations within a quarter-mile increase pedestrian traffic;
    - a mix of uses that includes -- in addition to retail and take-out restaurants -- office, live-work, and lodging uses that take advantage of proximity to in-town activities and newly forged connections to them (in an in-town setting, if residences already are present in significant numbers within one-quarter to one-half mile – as is the case with Augusta Plaza – building more residential uses is optional, but specialized residential uses such as live-work units or a residence inn to serve a particular market – in this case, companies and individuals with business at the State House – is a strategy worth examining);
    - incorporation of a quasi-main street *within* the site, lined up with the primary access into the site and fronted by new development;
- **Take greater advantage of the traffic signal at the main point of access into the site.**

  The signal is a must for centers along heavily traveled arterials – many tenants insist on it because it guarantees safe left-hand turns into and out of the property; and it can be part of the announcement of the center itself. Align the interior "main street" with the signal, with an important building at the opposite end of the interior "main street."

Land Assembly

- **If the center is on a modest parcel, some degree of land assembly likely will be required to fully realize the potential of a re-envisioned site**

  Whether to obtain rights-of-way for improved connections to customers in the surrounding area or to gain land for complementary uses or for auxiliary services such as a parking facility.

  In the case of Augusta Plaza, relatively minor acquisitions will be needed to connect to State House and office-based customers along Capitol Street. A major acquisition of an underused adjacent site (Maine DOT motor garage) is highly desirable, in part to provide a parking deck with direct access to the plaza site and in part to intensify complementary uses that also want to be close to the State House. (Such intensified use on this site is envisioned in the State's campus master plan.) A parking deck would free up valuable land that could be used for development and reduce the sea-of-asphalt appearance that characterizes the plaza today.

- **A municipal partnership almost certainly will be needed to facilitate the full potential of a re-envisioned center.** The municipal role includes:

  - advocacy with adjacent land owners (in this case, State government)
  - customizing zoning regulations if necessary
  - recognizing the urban nature of the re-envisioned site and allowing parking on adjacent side streets, if needed, to support the redevelopment
  - assistance with financing public infrastructure, such as a parking facility and public improvements to integrate the site into the neighborhood (connecting local roads and providing for street trees and lighting, for example), using tax increment financing or other common mechanisms

Microphasing

- **As in most redevelopment projects in environments where absorption rates may be slow, a realistic phasing plan is essential, with early phases providing the capital for later phases. If the Augusta Plaza case is representative, the first phase actually is a microphase**: i.e., not necessarily involving significant new development of space but rather improving the skeletal conditions of the center by:

  - establishing long neglected connections to a large, adjacent potential customer base (new, direct pathways from the State House and the offices on Capitol Street),
  - improving circulation on the site for freight deliveries – consistent with a long-term redesign of the site, and
  - redeveloping one or two of the outparcels (under the plaza's ownership) fronting on Western Avenue, consistent with the longer term new design as an urban alternative to

the outlying suburban strips.

Complementing Versus Competing with Downtown

- **From a public policy point of view, a re-envisioned urbanized center that could compete with downtown may be troubling.** There may be some competition. However, Augusta Plaza and Downtown Augusta perform different functions:

  Downtown is now primarily a civic, financial, and office center; Augusta Plaza is part of a community retail center that also is adjacent to another critical component of the city, the headquarters of State Government. The uses attracted to a re-envisioned center likely will be those that can best take advantage of the retail role and the adjacency to State Government. There will be some overlap between a re-envisioned Augusta Plaza and Downtown, but Augusta Plaza's objectives are to (1) successfully compete with outlying suburban strips, not with Downtown, and (2) provide functions that need or want to be adjacent to a unique customer base.

An older shopping center along an urban arterial faces constraints to redevelopment as a more vital "smart growth" node:

- The constraints of past decisions that limit flexibility
- The constraints of the site, which is smaller and tighter than competing suburban locations;
- The constraints of the surrounding area with limited opportunity to assemble land or change circulation patterns.

Mixed-Use

- Lodging / retail / office opportunity. Multi-story format could accommodate 100-room business or long-stay lodging within 5 minutes' walk of Capitol on upper floors

Forging New Connections

- Forge safe, attractive, and convenient connections with nearby uses is the first order of business. There are two potential points of interconnection that could quickly change the impression of the center, one to the Capitol / State House via Capitol St. and one to the Capitol St. corridor via Amherst St.

Land Assembly

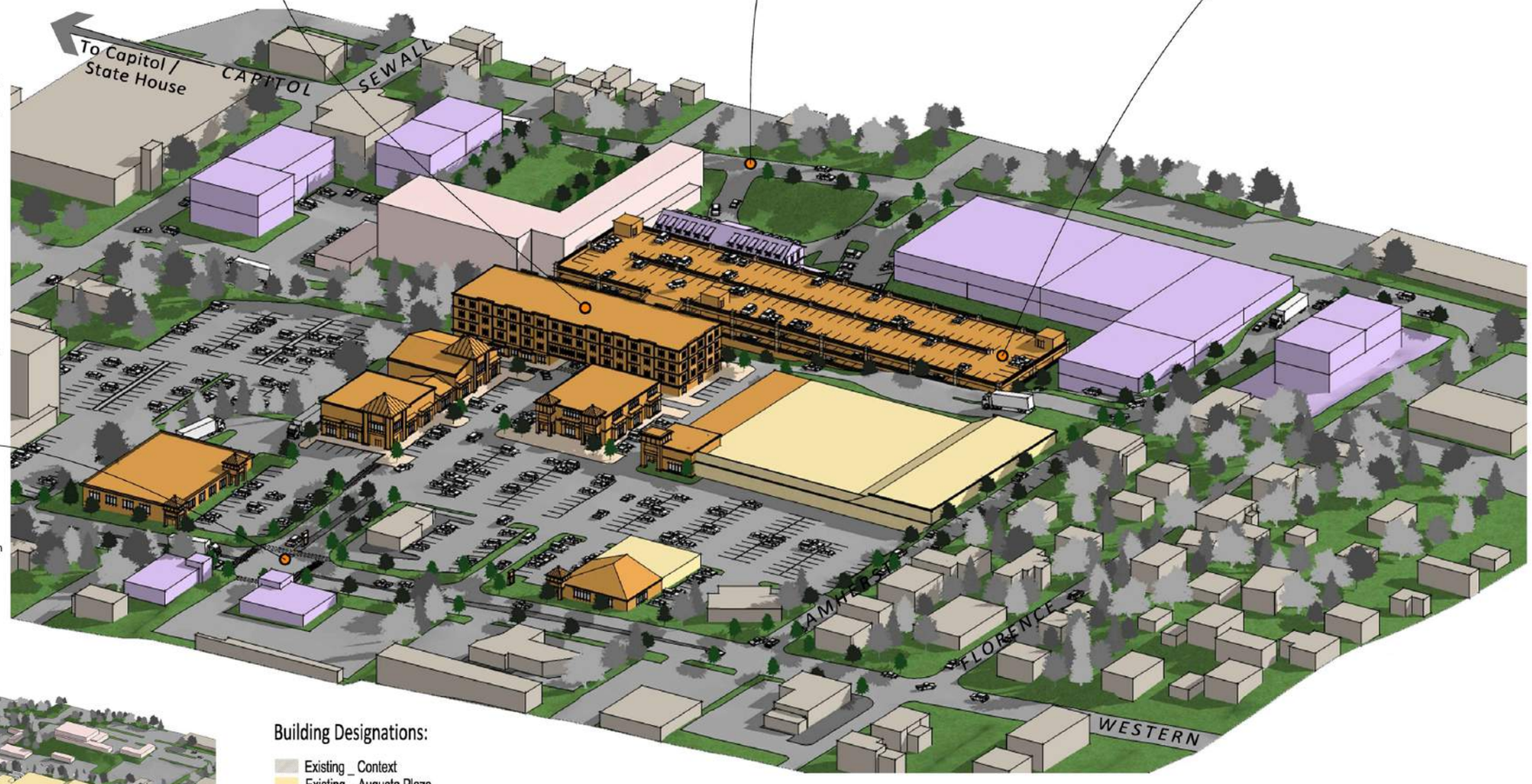
- If the center is on a modest parcel, some degree of land assembly likely will be required to fully realize the potential of a re-envisioned site - whether to obtain rights-of-way for improved connections to customers in the surrounding area or to gain land for complementary uses or for auxiliary services such as a parking facility. Here, there is a great opportunity to acquire rights for connections from Capitol Street and to build and share a parking garage.
- Redevelopment phased based on availability of adjacent parcel.

An older shopping center along an urban arterial has an array of assets that present opportunities for profitable redevelopment:

- proximity to a built-in population and flows of people - including surrounding, often densely settled neighborhood and commuter traffic headed to in-town jobs;
- traffic signals that slow/stop traffic, increasing exposure time for potential customers;
- proximity to synergistic uses and activities with which to forge connections;
- in some cases, adjacency to properties that have become obsolete or underused in their locations and are ripe for combining with the center;
- existing local roads that, although they may need improvement, can be used to give more porosity to the site and create better inter-neighborhood connections;
- the relative ease of re-branding the development in a highly visible location;
- on an already urbanized site, fewer natural resource constraints to face in the permitting process
- political support attached to redevelopment of an urban site

Main point of access to new internal "Main Street":

- Take greater advantage of the traffic signal at the main point of access to the site. The signal is a must for centers along heavily traveled arterials - many tenants insist on it because it guarantees safe left-hand turns into and out of the property; and it can be part of the announcement of the center itself. Align the interior "main street" with the signal, with an important building at the opposite end of the interior "Main Street." This "Main Street" provides frontage for significant new development.



EXISTING AUGUSTA PLAZA,
WESTERN AVE. AUGUSTA, MAINE

Building Designations:

- Existing _ Context
- Existing _ Augusta Plaza
- Existing _ Maine DOT
- Proposed _ Augusta Plaza
- Proposed _ Potential Neighboring Development

An urbanized redevelopment plan should reasonably aim for:

- 35 - 45 % of site frontage devoted to building walls located within 0 to 50 feet of the front property line - enough to create an identity and sense of containment but preserving view lines to the site's anchor and other businesses deep into the site;
- a floor area ratio (total floor area as a percent of total land area in parcel) of at least 0.4, if a parking deck is used, 0.5;
- off-street parking at a rate of 2.5 spaces per 1000 SF of leasable floor area, which should be sufficient if the mix of uses includes activities with different peak demand periods, and if newly forged connections with destinations are within a quarter-mile increase pedestrian traffic;
- a mix of uses that includes - in addition to retail and take-out restaurants - office, live-work, and lodging uses that take advantage of proximity to in-town activities and newly forged connections to them;
- incorporation of a quasi-main street within the site, lined up with the primary access into the site and fronted by new development

Design as close to a Floor Area Ratio [FAR] of 0.4 as possible (0.5 or more if using parking garage):

Existing Conditions Parcel data				
	10.87 acres		473,497	sq.ft
	Existing parking		422	spaces
	Existing FAR		0.27	
	Existing parking ratio		3.27	spaces per 1,000
Existing Use Mix				
	Retail		79.1%	
	Service		0.0%	
	Hospitality		0.0%	
	Office		11.6%	
	Restaurant		3.4%	
Proposed Conditions Parcel Data				
	Proposed FAR		0.51	
	Proposed Parking		304	spaces
	Parking Ratio *[Includes 2 FLs of Parking Garage]		2.62	spaces per 1,000
Proposed Use Mix				
	Retail		36%	
	Service		6%	
	Hospitality		30%	
	Office		18%	
	Restaurant		10%	

GrowSmart MAINE

AUGUSTA: AUGUSTA PLAZA

Graying Urban Strip Center

A New Vision for Maine's Highway Commercial Strips

A GrowSmart Maine Project

Design assistance and graphics by:

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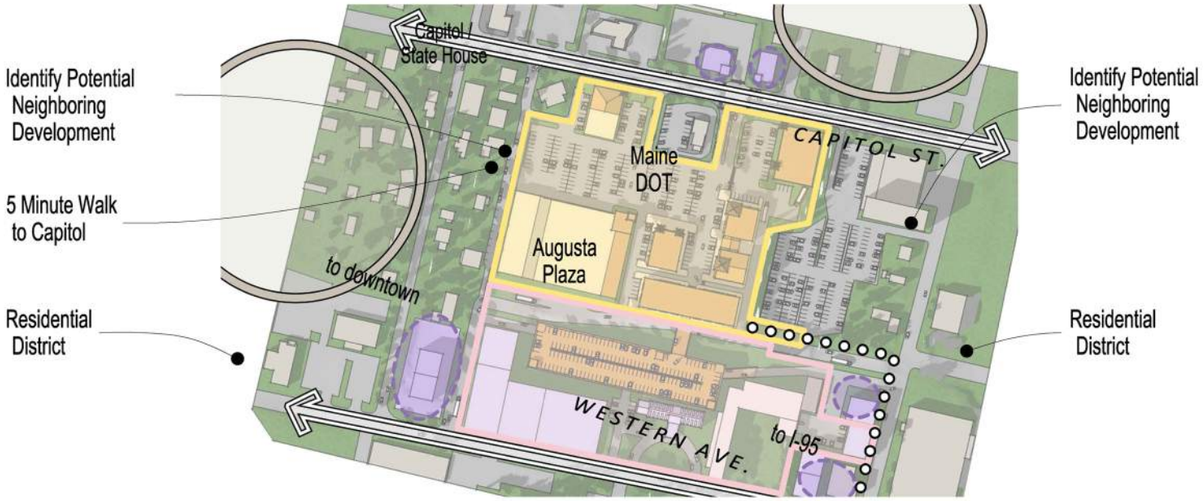
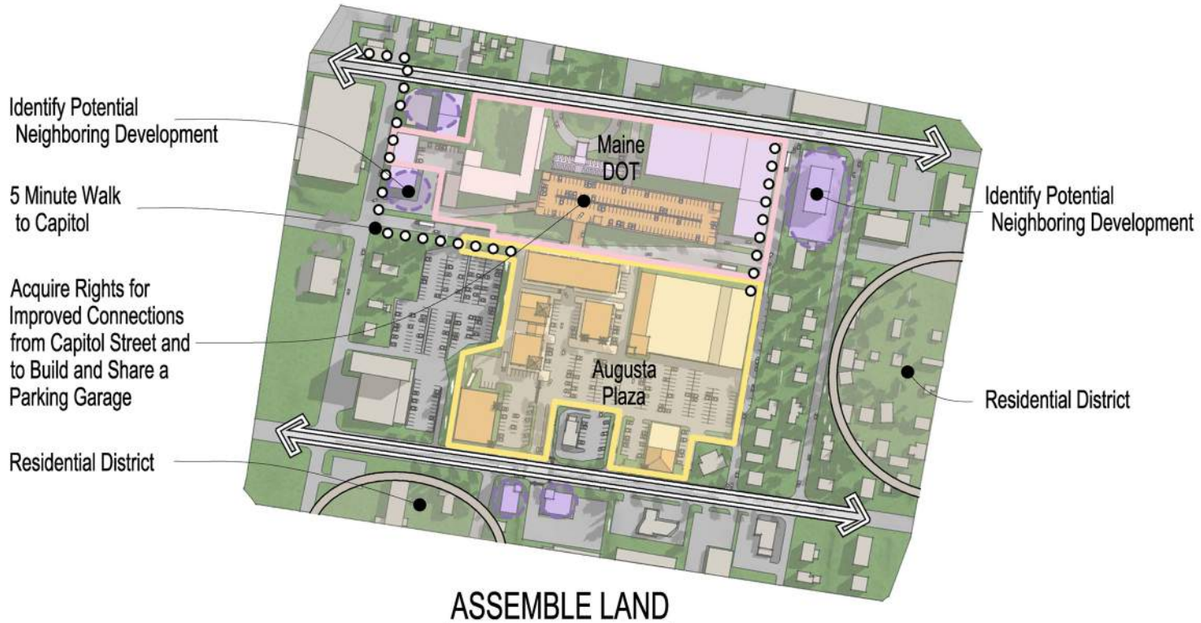
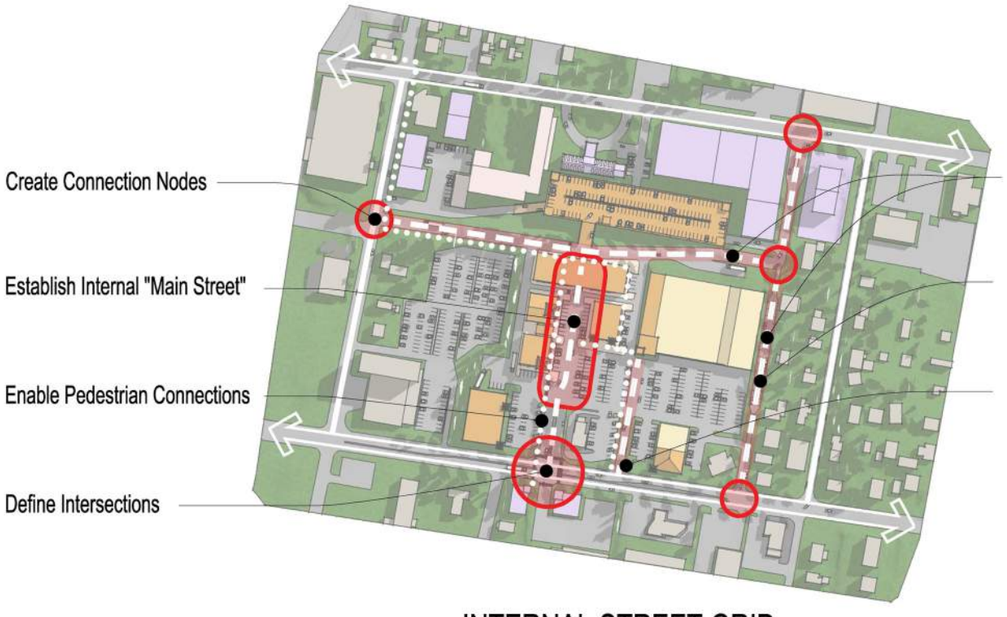
FIGURE Q. AUGUSTA PLAZA: ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN



EXISTING PARCEL & STREET GRID



ASSEMBLE LAND



INTERNAL STREET GRID

DEVELOP NEW "MAIN STREET"

GrowSmart MAINE

AUGUSTA: AUGUSTA PLAZA

Graying Urban Strip Center

A New Vision for Maine's Highway Commercial Strips

A GrowSmart Maine Project

Design assistance and graphics by:

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FIGURE R. AUGUSTA PLAZA: ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN

VII. COMMERCIAL STRIP CONVENING

GrowSmart Maine hosted a "Commercial Strip Convening" in April 2013, bringing together representatives from 10 communities, Sustain Southern Maine participants, and several others who are working on commercial strip projects in Maine. A shared interest in "re-envisioning" Maine's commercial strips was the catalyst for the convening.

As discussed in Section V. Moving Maine's Strip Centers Toward Activity Centers, many local efforts are underway to re-think and re-design commercial corridors. With the GrowSmart project nearing completion, it seemed like an opportunity to "convene" communities to:

- Connect our common work
- Present GrowSmart Maine's (GSM) commercial strip work
- Give everyone a chance to share information about their commercial strip work (i.e. process, concepts) for the benefit of all
- Brainstorm "lessons learned" about process and concepts
- Provide "next steps" guidance for GSM work on commercial strips

The day's conversation proved enlightening and encouraging. A lot of thoughtful, creative effort is underway to transform commercial strips from "anywhere USA" stop-and-go experiences, to landscaped, pedestrian friendly, multi-activity designed "places".

As the day's discussion revealed, this transformation will take time and is not without its challenges. Financial costs, political will, economic considerations, community consensus, parking considerations, business needs/interests, long-term process and implementation – these are some of the challenges the group discussed.

To address some of these challenges, the group shared a number of "lessons learned", including: engage property owners from the beginning and often; involve local officials early and often; use visualization techniques to show new ideas; build support with as many constituencies as possible – develop a shared vision; consider incremental steps; "good" is OK, instead of perfect; explain financial impact early on; create public places first; public safety engagement important.

And be bold and be patient.