

PORTLAND'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

PORTLAND, MAINE

**Compilation of Inventory, Goals, and Implementation
Initiatives from Plans Adopted as part of the City's
Comprehensive Plan**

**November 2002
Update - 2005**

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New Source Documents

Official Statement Dated March 21, 2002 – Duane Kline

Greater Portland Council of Governments (Port report)

Maine Natural Areas Program for critical resources

U.S. Census

Bay Keepers Newsletter & Report on Oil Spill

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PORTLAND'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE
INTRODUCTION

PORTLAND, A REMARKABLE CITY

The City of Portland is a truly remarkable city, comprised of the urban peninsula, the inner ring suburbs, the outer ring suburbs and the islands. The peninsula is densely developed, centered on the vibrant downtown with its historic Old Port, bustling waterfront, and burgeoning arts district, surrounded by the maritime industries of the working waterfront and the residential neighborhoods of East End, West End, Parkside and Bayside. Prominent features of the peninsula include three historic districts, and the major parks of the 1905 Olmsted *General Plan for Park System*, including Eastern Promenade, Western Promenade, and Deering Oaks.

Separated from the peninsula by Back Cove and I-295, the inner ring suburbs are characterized by low and medium density housing built in traditional neighborhood development patterns. Local businesses are clustered in neighborhood centers, such as Deering Center and Rosemont Corner, and community retail services are arrayed along Forest Avenue from I-295 to Woodford's Corner and Morrill's Corner. Much of this area was historically developed as the Town of Deering, which was annexed to Portland in 1899. Major features include Baxter Boulevard, Payson Park, and Baxter Woods, as well as Evergreen Cemetery, a turn of the century garden cemetery.

The outer ring post-war suburbs have both traditional neighborhoods, such as Riverton, with a street grid pattern, and the more suburban designs of North Deering and Longfellow Woods, with curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs. Outer Washington Ave., Auburn Street, Forest Ave., Brighton Ave., Westbrook and Congress Streets, have evolved over the past 50 years from the rural outskirts of Portland to growing population and employment centers in their own right. Regional shopping centers, such as Pine Tree and Northgate, are located within commercial crossroads of major arterials. The Portland Jetport, office parks and industrial parks are found along outer Congress Street and on Riverside Street and Riverside Industrial Parkway. Balancing this development are major open spaces and natural areas that comprise a municipal greenbelt along the Stroudwater River, from the historic Stroudwater Village neighborhood to the river valley westerly to the Westbrook line, connecting with the Fore River Sanctuary, and then jumping over to the Presumpscot River valley incorporating Riverside Golf Course and the river trail corridor along recently annexed and purchased land in North Deering.

The islands offer a unique variety of rural and village landscapes just a short ferry ride from downtown Portland. Peaks Island provides opportunities for seasonal and year round living within an easy ferry commute to town, and sustains a significant population with a variety of commercial services on-island. Cushing Island provides an exclusive enclave of historic homes in a private setting with a remarkable military architectural heritage. Little Diamond Island features a tightly knit community of historic cottages with the Casino at the landing providing a social focus, along with an assemblage of newer seasonal retreats nestled within the mature forest of the Sisters of Mercy subdivision. At low tide the sand bar connects Little Diamond with Great Diamond Island, and its historic cottage community on the westerly side. The easterly half of Great Diamond is centered on the redeveloped historic Fort McKinley complex surrounding Diamond Cove and the landing with its restaurant and shops. Away from the fort's parade grounds are roadways leading to historic gun emplacements, with newer seasonal homes along the wooded shoreline. Cliff Island remains a remote and rustic seasonal island, retaining a distinctly down-east character of sea faring and lobster fishing.

Together the islands, along with the 17 peninsula and off-peninsula neighborhoods and downtown, contribute to the remarkable diversity that is Portland, Maine.

PLANNING IN PORTLAND

History of Planning in Portland

The City of Portland has a long and impressive record of planning for its growth and development. One of the oldest comprehensive planning efforts in Portland occurred after the great fire of 1866. The degree of devastation across the City created the need to rethink both the distribution of uses and the architectural character on the peninsula, resulting in creation of Lincoln Park as “fire break” and codes requiring brick construction. In 1905 Portland adopted the General Plan for Park System prepared by the famous Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects and directed by Mayor James P. Baxter. City wide zoning dates back as far as 1928 and the Planning Board was formed in 1945. Planning in the 1960's revolved around the General Neighborhood Renewal Program. More contemporary comprehensive planning began with the Land Development Plan of 1974.

Planning Accomplishments

Over the past decade, the City of Portland has conducted numerous comprehensive planning activities that have produced a broad spectrum of comprehensive elements and specific plans that are more strategic in approach. The in-depth focus of the City's planning process has enabled Portland to develop the City's overall goals and policies, while at the same time creating the specific actions, investments, and other implementation measures, including land use ordinance provisions, necessary to address complex issues and to achieve community goals. This approach to planning has produced detailed documents that are inter-related and coordinated with the City's ongoing planning efforts. Specifically, Portland has pursued planning for the following geographic areas: a) waterfront; b) islands; c) downtown; d) Nason's Corner; e) Bayside; and f) Eastern Waterfront. The following functional uses or categories are components of the Comprehensive Plan: a) residential; b) commercial; c) industrial; d) open space; e) municipal facilities; f) historic resources; g) transportation; and h) arts and culture.

The City of Portland is fully committed to involve citizens and interested constituents in the planning process. Each plan includes extensive public input, which has resulted in active citizen support for City policies and endeavors. Portland Trails, Friends of the Parks, Friends of Evergreen Cemetery, and Friends of Deering Oaks are volunteer groups that were formed to implement the recommendations contained in the Shoreway Access Plan, Green Spaces/Blue Edges, and the historic landscape master plans for Evergreen Cemetery and Deering Oaks. Business and industry representatives have aided in establishing public and quasi-public organizations, such as the Portland's Downtown District, Downtown Portland Corporation, and the Portland Arts and Cultural Alliance, to carry forward the recommendations contained in Downtown Vision and the Portland Arts District. In addition, Portland has established administrative review boards, such as the Historic Preservation Committee and the Public Arts Committee, which were recommended during planning processes to protect and enhance the City's cultural resources and heritage.

Portland's Comprehensive Plan Assembled and Maine's Growth Management Act

Comprehensive planning is not static, but evolves, responds and guides the rapidly changing community in which we live. In response to the City's desire to better serve its citizenry, Portland has created a single document for the public, which summarizes the various plans that make up the City's Comprehensive Plan. With the grant under Maine's Growth Management Act, the City has created a unified package of its current inventory, goals and policies, and implementation measures from the City's many plans. The State grant also assisted Portland in updating the housing element of the Comprehensive Plan with Housing: Sustaining Portland's Future.

The Comprehensive Plan begins with the Community Vision prepared during the planning process for Housing: Sustaining Portland's Future. The Vision presents Portland's distinctive features to value, preserve and build upon. The second half of the Vision lists the future direction for Portland. The Community Vision is followed by a compilation of the goals and policies contained in the City's adopted plans. The goals and objectives from the City's diverse adopted plans are listed according to the most relevant the State Growth Management Goals. A bibliography of the numerous documents that comprise Portland's Comprehensive Plan is included in the Appendix. For a complete review of City policies, refer to the original source documents for the background, analysis, policies, and recommendations. Where the City goals and policies might relate to more than one State Goal, the strongest fit was chosen to avoid repetition.

The inventory and analysis chapters of this document are based on the underlying work for each adopted plan and the material has been updated to reflect current data and trends. The City also updated its inventory chapters by using a Geographic Information System (GIS) to develop a unified and versatile set of maps. Portland's GIS Workgroup has produced many of the computer-generated maps contained within this report, which offer a geographic presentation of land based data and interrelationships.

The City employs a wide range of measures to implement the Comprehensive Plan. The major initiatives are summarized in the first chapter of the implementation component of this document. The Future Land Use Plan is the second component of the strategy. The Future Land Use Plan supports the City's zoning classifications, highlights where redevelopment and rethinking of zoning will occur, and establishes growth and rural areas within Portland. The Regional Coordination Plan follows with highlights of goals and policies from the City's plans that have regional significance and require regional cooperation. These recommendations are found under the relevant State Goals as well.

**PORTLAND'S COMMUNITY VISION
FOR
THE FUTURE**

Distinctive Features to Value, Preserve and Build Upon

And

Future Directions for Portland

A COMMUNITY VISION FOR PORTLAND

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF PORTLAND TO VALUE, PRESERVE & BUILD UPON

Portland is an **intimate city, small in scale but big in urban amenities and a high quality of life**, which is situated around a scenic Maine coastal peninsula. Portland is a city of **neighborhoods around a vibrant downtown**, which make up the building blocks to the community as a whole.

I. A City That Provides For People

Portland is the largest city in Maine and is the **economic and service center** for the region.

Portland continues to attract people of workforce age due to **diverse job opportunities** (particularly in business and technology), quality employment, and a stable economy.

Portland has a **vital working waterfront** with diverse coastal commerce activities and water dependent uses.

Portland is the center for many **regional service institutions**, which offer high quality medical care, an extensive range of social services for those in need, and numerous higher education opportunities.

II. A City That Is A Good Place To Live

Portland retains a **small town feel** with a built environment that is scaled for people, is pedestrian friendly, and is accessible to the community. Residents value and seek to enhance the safety of the community, the proximity of commercial uses near residences, and the walkable nature of the city.

Portland enjoys a personable and congenial atmosphere that makes it a **welcoming place to work, live and visit**.

Portland offers the **amenities and services** of a big city. Throughout Portland there are diverse arts, cultural and educational offerings, assorted shopping opportunities, numerous scenic parks and active athletic facilities, and high quality municipal services and infrastructure.

Portland has an **active and vibrant downtown** both day and night due to its interwoven mix of residential, commercial, institutional and cultural land uses.

Portland is the **visual and performing arts center** of Maine.

Portland is a **city of neighborhoods** with a range of residential neighborhood types, such as high-density areas on the peninsula, early 20th century neighborhoods off the peninsula, suburban neighborhoods and the more rural areas of the Islands.

Portland is a great place for families with **good neighborhood schools** that serve families throughout their life cycle.

III. A City That Values Its Natural, Architectural And Cultural Heritage

Portland is a **coastal community** that is geographically varied and dynamic with:

Spectacular views of Casco Bay and the Islands, Back Cove, and Maine's Mountains from the City's promontories; and

Three meandering rivers with significant saltwater estuaries and streams that flow through neighborhoods;

Significant wildlife and fisheries resources; and

Access to our natural features through the City's trails, parks and scenic viewpoints.

Portland is a **culturally and ethnically diverse community** that values its shared history, is proud of its cultural diversity and is working together for a cohesive community.

Portland is a **historic maritime city**, which:

Retains a rich historic character for both commercial and residential neighborhoods;

Offers a broad spectrum of architecture and distinctive landmarks; and

Maintains unifying features, such as brick buildings and sidewalks, and established and traditional neighborhoods with narrow and interconnected streets.

A COMMUNITY VISION FOR PORTLAND

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PORTLAND

Portland is Maine's principal city, the **center of employment, housing, and services** for the region. In the future Portland will evolve as an extension, continuation and enhancement of the best qualities and characteristics of Portland today. Progress and prosperity will result from both incremental growth and bold initiatives tempered by careful consideration and foresight in planning. Portland's future will:

I. Build A Vibrant Small City

Build upon the distinctive fabric of Portland's built environment by **rehabilitating historic resources** and by **developing new buildings that respect the scale and character of traditional development patterns**. New development shall be pedestrian oriented and accessible.

Strive for innovation and bold initiatives that increase the livability and quality of life in Portland.

Support a **dynamic downtown** that embraces an intertwining of uses, including residential, business, retail, institutional, service, and arts and cultural uses.

Promote, **support and celebrate the arts and cultural community** that enriches the lives of our citizens.

Capitalize on Portland's economic assets and develop a strong economy based upon traditional industries, a strong retail and office center, and emergent opportunities in industry, business, and coastal commerce.

II. Serve The People

Provide compassionate services for the city's vulnerable citizens, while leading regional approaches to share the responsibility of caring for citizens in need.

Foster **expanded opportunities, innovative solutions** and **exemplary services** from Portland's institutions for higher education, health care, and community services.

Achieve and operate excellent neighborhood schools with state of the art facilities and which serve the educational needs of all students. Establish wide recognition that Portland schools meet or exceed the educational performance of any other public school system in the region.

Support and encourage the creation and preservation of an **adequate supply of quality housing** for all.

III. Provide High Quality Leadership

Create a **sustainable community** with vital neighborhoods, high quality infrastructure, a strong economy, and a healthy environment, while keeping municipal taxes affordable.

Encourage **excellence in City government and comprehensive planning** through increased civic involvement, responsive local government, accountable decision making, and creative and adaptive local and regional planning. Innovative thinking and leadership will preserve those attributes of Portland that we value.

Incorporate environmental, economic and neighborhood considerations in municipal decision-making.

Take the lead in developing **clear standards and rules and ensure adherence** thereto.

IV. Protect Our Community Attributes

Protect the natural environment and historic resources.

Preserve and enhance the park system with its trails, active recreation facilities and natural areas.

Strengthen alternative transportation options in order to create an accessible City that promotes ease of movement for all citizens, serving neighborhood needs, pedestrians, handicapped persons, bicyclists and vehicles.

Listen to, embrace, empower and support our diverse citizenry.