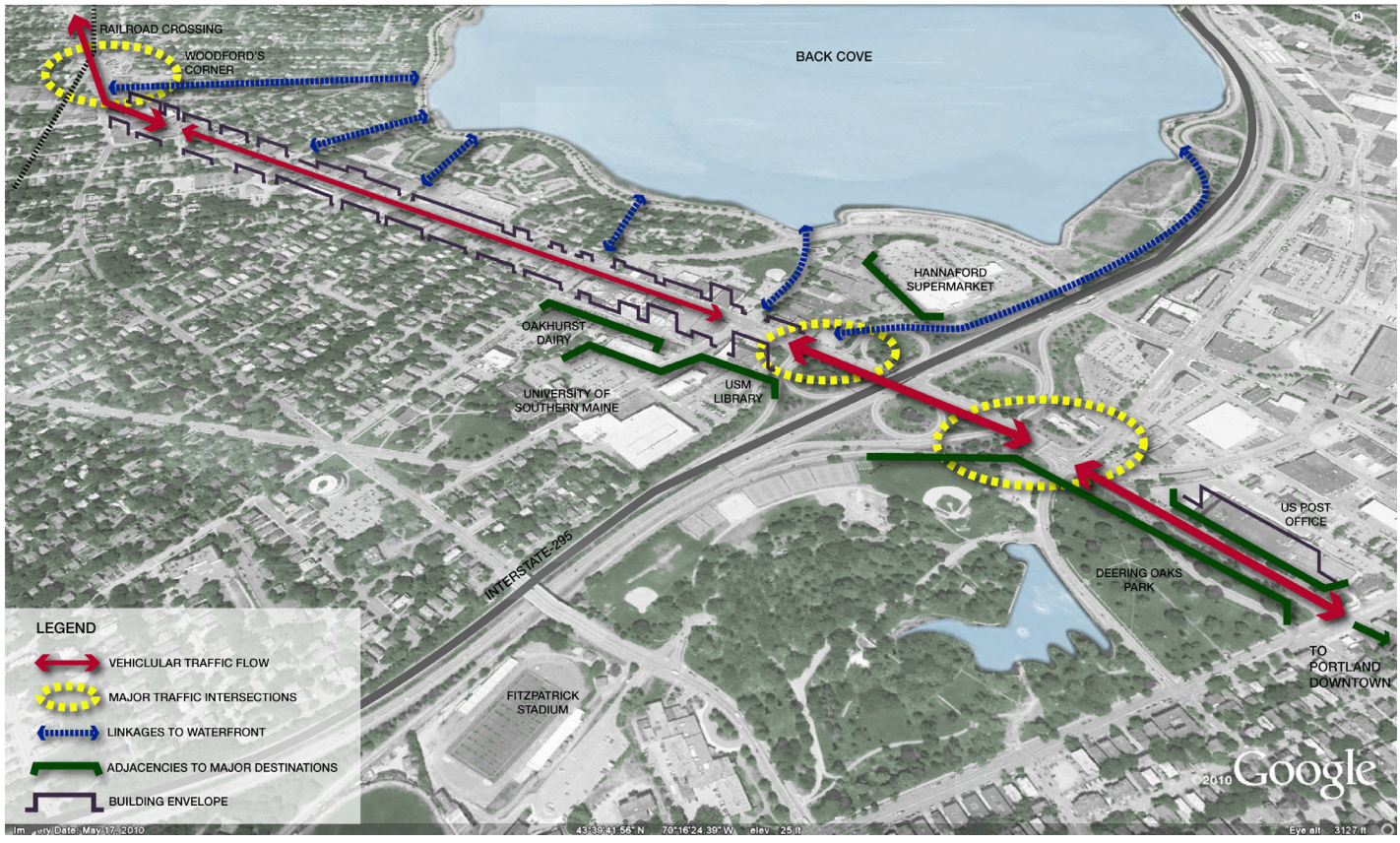
INTRODUCTION

IBI Group Proposal to the City of Portland and the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) to Complete the Forest Avenue Study

This document is an excerpt from the proposal presented by IBI Group, the firm selected by the City of Portland to complete the Forest Avenue Transportation and Land Use Plan, also known as "Transforming Forest Avenue." The first section, Project Understanding, describes the transportation, development, and economic characteristics of Forest Avenue and identifies some of the issues currently facing the corridor. The second section, Project Approach, explains the key ideas and concepts that IBI Group will apply to the plan to address these issues.

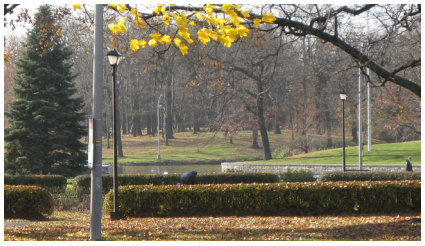
PROJECT UNDERSTANDING

Forest Avenue is a vital link connecting downtown Portland to its most dense outlying neighborhoods, retail and employment centers, the University of Southern Maine, and also to the outskirts of the City of Westbrook. At present, the study area between Park Avenue and Woodford's Corner is most visibly used as a vehicular throughway by private autos. Two bus routes also use this section of Forest Avenue, although most passengers are not from the immediate vicinity of the study area. However, these statements do not begin to tell the full story of Forest Avenue. As described in the Request for Proposals (RFP), the study area encompasses sections of the corridor that differ radically in character. The IBI Group team offers a project approach that will recognize these differences and will guide the city and the community in selecting a transportation and land use strategy that will be sensitive to the contextual details within and outside the study area.



Overall Site Conditions

University of Southern Maine Library



Deering Oaks Park

US Post Office

The southern section of the study corridor can be distinguished by the large city blocks, open road expanses, and structures taller than in the rest of the study area. Despite being visibly engineered for auto traffic, this section also has higher pedestrian and bicycle traffic because of its proximity and connectivity to major destinations like the University of Southern Maine campus. The two major anchor destinations at this end of the corridor are the large brick and granite façade of the City's main Post Office and Deering Oaks Park, the City's largest park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. The remainder of the southern end of the corridor between the intersections with Park Avenue and Baxter Boulevard/ Bedford Street is dominated by the overpasses, ramps, and median strips for the interchanges with Interstate Highway 295. The major challenges within this section of the corridor will be to leverage the opportunities presented by the proximity of major destinations and to address the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.

The section of Forest Avenue between the intersections with Baxter Boulevard/Bedford Street and Lincoln Street is characterized by smaller blocks, denser development, and shorter and older structures situated right on the sidewalks. Many of the commercial properties are converted residential buildings. In a few cases, aging commercial developments include strip malls and car repair shops. There are many curb cuts into fast-food chain parking lots. Several storefronts and an office building in this section have been recently rehabilitated. The scale and uses of this streetscape are far more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly than the southern section of Forest Avenue. However, the growing dominance of autos and auto-based land uses, in addition to the lack of infrastructure, safety measures and amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists, has led to a steady decline in pedestrian foot traffic along this stretch. The lack of pedestrian traffic, along with an underutilized transit service and a perceived lack of parking is likely having a negative impact on area businesses. Appropriate infrastructure that builds on the existing pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly characteristics and some land use adjustments could address the challenges in this section of the corridor.

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING

The main feature of the northern end of the corridor is a five-corner intersection: Woodfords Corner. This intersection is distinguished by the presence of a railroad crossing and queuing that occurs when the crossing is closed for the passage of freight trains. In general, traffic volumes along Forest Avenue are high, especially during peak hours. Traffic congestion is exacerbated by poorly timed traffic signals. Traffic signal interconnections with the railroad crossing, necessary to prevent queuing over the tracks, sometimes cause cars to sit through several signal cycles. The traffic situation at this intersection is expected to worsen when the frequency of the Amtrak's Downeaster service is increased. Indentifying problem areas and preparing the tools to manage the worsening traffic situation at this intersection while integrating bicycle and pedestrian amenities is a major challenge for this section of the corridor.

On the other hand, Woodfords Corner has some diverse land uses and unique architecture including two attractive older brick buildings with housing and offices above street level storefronts. The Oddfellows Building is four stories tall and has a distinctive clock tower; the other is a three-story triangular corner building. This section has also witnessed new developments such the new Walgreens pharmacy and the addition of some new businesses. These new developments present opportunities for Woodford's Corner as well as for the entire corridor.

Corridor-wide, another major asset to build upon are the well kept abutting neighborhoods of tightly spaced, single and multi-family homes. Other than the downtown peninsula, these neighborhoods within one-half mile of Forest Avenue have some of the highest residential density in Portland. The proposed land use and transportation approach should leverage the opportunities presented by the residential density and commercial uses to create a vibrant, safe, and complete streetscape. Channeling such opportunities in the right direction such that the community can come together to create a sustainable and livable place will be the major focus of the IBI Group team's work plan.

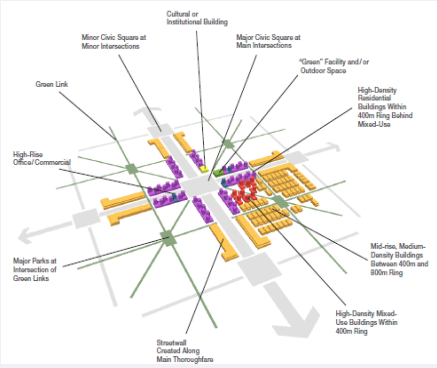
PACTS and the City of Portland are looking to positively influence the transportation and land use characteristics of this vital corridor over the next two decades. For the IBI Group team, this project presents an opportunity to develop this corridor to its full potential of a complete street and community that is experienced pleasantly by a person walking on the street, riding a bicycle, driving a car, or sitting in a bus. Our goal is to create a corridor that serves as a destination as well as a transportation link.

Commercial Development along Forest Avenue

Woodford's Corner

PROJECT APPROACH

Our approach is based on answering three key sequential questions:



"Where are we now?" focuses on completing research and data collection, and on compilation and analysis of information to develop a thorough understanding of the current circumstances and issues including an analysis of financial feasibility;

"Where do we want to go?" focuses on establishing overall objectives and identifying priorities that meet needs of the region today and erecting a design concept for development; and

"How do we get there?" focuses on identifying specific actions and strategies and for implementing the identified goals and objectives.

The process of answering these questions is guided by a number of key principles, including those contained by Transit-Supportive Development (TSD), Complete Streets, and Context Sensitive Design (CSD) approaches; consideration of less traditional land use regulatory approaches such as Form- Based Codes; a thorough and meaningful public involvement process; and financial prudence.

"The future of public space is in our streets."

JANETTE SADIK-KHAN, COMMISSIONER, NYC DOT

Transit-Supportive Development (TSD)

Pedestrian-friendly development and urban design are the foundations upon which a transit system can grow and develop. By encouraging mixed use, moderate-density development with safe and comfortable access for pedestrians, communities can create a setting where transit becomes a reliable and convenient alternative to auto use. TSD is critical in communities that have not yet attained a significant transit mode share—where transit service may be available, but auto-oriented land uses discourage people from taking advantage of it.

Complete Streets

Streets are the most heavily used public spaces and are the predominant structure that informs the character of a city over time. They are the public framework upon which land uses are organized and around which people's daily lives revolve. All streets cannot possibly be all things to all users, but all users must be considered and accommodated in a safe and respectful fashion on all streets. This means more than simply providing a separate facility for each user; it is an exercise that acknowledges the limitations and interactions of each user group and their interaction with the others. Complete Streets balance the priorities of each group within a hierarchy of street types and respects their diverse interests and needs.

PROJECT APPROACH

Complete Streets design should take into account not only travel space for each mode but also intersection treatments, block size and connectivity, pedestrian comfort and safety, parking, emergency and service vehicle access and stormwater management.

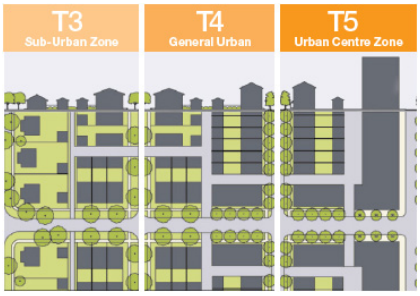
Form-based Codes

Traditional Euclidean zoning regulates development through restrictions on land use by geographical area—residential, commercial, and so on—and density, usually through minimum lot size or maximum Floor-Area Ratio. An unintended consequence of this approach is that it can result in lower density and longer travel distances to reach commercial destinations, both of which may encourage automobile dependency. Euclidean zoning provides only crude tools to define the way that buildings interact with the street, meaning that the resulting development may be not be conducive to pedestrians and may lack a sense of place.

Form-based codes offer creative and flexible approach to regulating physical form rather than land use. Form-based codes provide an emphasis on the interaction with built form and the public realm. They produce an enhanced public experience by addressing the entire palette of materials that form the public realm. Form-based codes allow planners greater control over the built environment while providing clarity for development partners to fulfill the community vision. The built environment includes horizontal and vertical elements such as building heights, fenestration (window density and façade articulation) setbacks, street frontage, and landscaping. Form-based codes can be implemented on a city-wide basis, as an alternative to traditional zoning in specific areas, or as an incentivized overlay zone. In the case of an incentivized overlay zone, developers have the choice to either comply with the traditional zoning regulation or with the new form-based code.

Context-Sensitive Solutions (CSS)

Transportation and land use solutions will be most effective if they are tailored to address the real needs of the specific area and community at hand. This can be best achieved if stakeholders are engaged to share their knowledge and work together to develop a solution that addresses their needs. Local knowledge and long-term experience with responsive, efficient, and effective public processes will allow this team to delve deeply into specific issues from the beginning of the study. An effective process based on communication, collaboration and consensus-based decision making will lead to a durable solution that preserves and enhances the built and natural environment and addresses the needs that stakeholders have identified.



IBI Group has previously used the Duany Plater-Zybek's Form-Based Code Urrban Transect to develop a land use and density models for a Station Area Pilot Planning Project in Waterloo, ON.

"All streets cannot possibly be all things to all users, but all users must be considered and accommodated in a safe and respectful fashion on all streets. This means more than simply providing a separate facility for each user, it is an exercise that acknowledges the limitations and interactions of each user group with the others and balances the priorities of each group."

IBI GROUP URBAN DESIGNER MARC COOLEY

Public Participation Events

Public Participation

Our strategy for public participation begins in the first stage of the project before any detailed plans are developed or presented. Building on existing relationships with key stakeholders in Portland and along this specific corridor establishes the trust required to maintain momentum and ensure that all voices are heard and included. Approaching the community and stakeholders with an open agenda fosters the feeling of community involvement helps them to become personally invested in successful solutions. They are excited by the opportunities the project presents. Inclusion of the broadest range of people in this process through individual meetings, steering committee meetings, public meetings, and wide distribution of documents and related materials will result in a rich list of broadly supported recommendations and conclusions for improving this key portion of Forest Avenue.

Arguably more important than the list of recommendations and conclusions is the overall public acknowledgement that the study process that led to them was inclusive, fair, efficient, representative, and worthwhile. Though these attributes are what lead to broad support in the end, often there can be some tension between these goals (e.g. between inclusive and efficient) during the process. A healthy level of discussion about particular issues is to be expected in a process with results that will affect so many people. Working through this discussion with an accepted decision-making framework leads to superior outcomes.

Financial Prudence

King Street City Centre District
Kitchener, ON

In the current environment of conservative fiscal policy, financial implications of every opportunity must be properly identified and evaluated. Planning and design must also consider the financial realities of today's economy by identifying cost-effective solutions and acknowledging financial considerations of policies and design decisions. For planning and design to truly be considered successful, the project must be financially justifiable. Working for public sector and private sector clients has allowed us to develop an inherent understanding of financial implications and how to create projects that "work".