

**SUSTAIN SOUTHERN MAINE
WESTBROOK, PRIDE’S CORNER PILOT
LESSONS LEARNED
April 16, 2013**

Realities and Assets in a Suburban Arterial Environment:

1. Low density arterials with encroaching strip developments in suburban settings **face development challenges:**
 - **Residential development is isolated:** Suburban developments are often disconnected from each other and restricted to one major access point. Even where developments are better connected, the high volume, high-speed roads they are connected to generally are not pedestrian or bicycle friendly. This makes it very hard for residents to travel to other parts of their community.
 - **Encroaching strip development:** Arterial roads, where left to their own devices, tend to develop in an automobile-centric pattern. Businesses locate far from the road with parking in front and tend to be focused on serving pass-through users rather than nearby residents. This type of development is usually visually unattractive, an inefficient use of space, and unfriendly to bikes, pedestrians, and even local automobile traffic. It does not tend to create a sense of community or unique identity or brand.
 - **The lack of a center:** Largely due to the first two points, there is no centralized focus in a typical suburban arterial community. Goods and services are scattered and designed for passers-by, without provision of day-to-day goods or services for nearby residents or potential residents.

2. But a suburban neighborhood served by an arterial road does **have assets that present opportunities for future development:**
 - **Developable land:** A suburban arterial community typically still has a lot of open land and underutilized land within it. There is a lot of opportunity for **commercial infill** development along the arterial road as well as new, **interconnected residential development** off the arterial road.
 - **Green space/rural character:** While the community lacks a defined center, its identity is strongly linked to its visual rural character. In addition to developable land, suburban communities such as Pride’s Corner have undeveloped land that can remain that way to keep the distinction between the urban area and the outer suburbs clear. This can provide a **distinct sense of place unique to this kind of center**.
 - **Classic layout:** The layout of many suburban arterial communities harkens back to classic New England town origins, with residential neighborhoods surrounding a primary intersection. This layout provides a **natural focal point** at the intersection, which has strong potential to become a center for the area.

- **Opportunity for transit:** The collection of residential development focused on a central area and the easy access provided by the arterial creates a great opportunity for transit. Pride’s corner exemplifies this by already being a part of the Greater Portland Metro bus service.

Place in Hierarchy of Centers: Growth Potential

3. Thinking about the growth potential of an existing district **requires understanding its place in the hierarchy of centers:** does it have the draw (from largest market area to smallest) of a regional, community, neighborhood, or convenience center? Pride’s Corner is currently operating as a convenience center, with a primary focus on pass-through traffic on the arterial. There is a desire to see this area serve more of the local residents’ needs and move towards becoming a village center.
4. The traditional layout of the Pride’s Corner area, with residential development surrounding a major intersection, has much potential to create and support a village center as is desired. There are already a good number of residential units within walking distance of this center along with plenty of developable land for more. **Combine this population with the pass-through traffic on the arterial and there is a significant customer base to support small to moderate sized businesses around the central intersection.**

Capacity for Growth

5. **Growing the residential base**, preferably within a 0.25- to 0.5-mile band of the business district, is essential to growth as a more complete neighborhood center. A built-in residential population – especially where competing centers are located within 3-to-5 miles – **is the surest path toward success as a center, providing the base to support** a more complete array of neighborhood-oriented goods and services.
6. Pride’s Corner is representative of suburban arterial development. This type of location has significant capability to absorb growth. A review of development potential suggests that Pride’s Corner has the capacity to absorb 5-10% of Westbrook’s projected residential housing growth over the next 25-35 years or some 90 – 180 units. In addition, 10% of job growth projections for Westbrook could generate 330 – 350 jobs in this area. Depending on the mix of retail, food service and office space, this could translate to between 165,000 s.f. and 175,000 s.f. of commercial space.
7. The capacity for growth of a location such as Pride’s Corner depends partly on the amount of buildable, vacant and underdeveloped land in the area. Low-density development along suburban arterials commonly have both vacant and underused land. This is true in the case of Pride’s Corner, which has significant amounts of land both fronting on the arterial road and off the major roads. The Pride’s Corner pilot suggests:

- Parcels with frontage on the arterial road that are either vacant or underused can be proactively developed with mixed retail and office space. This would easily accept the projected growth in these uses.
- Vacant land off of the primary roads can be used for residential development of a variety of types depending on what the market and local community is willing to accept. Environmental constraints may also restrict where and what type of housing can be constructed. In Pride’s Corner, it would be possible to create duplex or multifamily housing on the east side of Route 302 (Bridgton Road) behind new retail and office space built close to the road right of way. A new low volume street off Rte. 302 and connecting to Brook Street? would separate the residential and commercial uses and provide access to parking for both.

Where to Start

8. Respect the arterial nature of the main road

- Arterial roads passing through suburban areas carry a large amount of traffic, little of which is from the immediate area. There is little a suburban municipality can do to reduce overall traffic load. However there are strategies for making such a road as safe and people-friendly as possible without significantly restricting traffic flow.
 1. **Reduce curb cuts** by combining the access points for multiple properties/businesses into one shared access point.
 2. **Create a parallel local road** to serve new development on parcels not fronting on the arterial. This will consolidate the traffic from these interior parcels to one or two significant intersections with the arterial rather than many individual access points.
 3. **Reconfigure or close where possible old road intersections** that are dangerous and/or unnecessary. For example in Pride’s Corner the southern termination of Elmwood Road at Route 302 could be removed and the road could instead connect to Brook St. farther away from the Route 302 intersection. This would remove a confusing and dangerous traffic pattern from Route 302.

9. Create a village center and an unique place identity

- **Suburban environments are often lacking in commercial centers**, which causes residents to travel moderate to long distances for every need. By creating a commercial village center, travel patterns become more efficient and amenities are more convenient to residents, attracting growth. To encourage the formation of a village center, ordinances and design standards can be crafted to achieve certain goals:
 1. **Combine retail and office space.** This allows the area to be developed to its full potential, with retail and services available for local residents as well as the workers in the office space.
 2. **Create a less auto-oriented environment and make the village center visually distinct from adjacent areas.** Do this by locating new buildings close to the road,

leaving room for sidewalks and providing parking in back. Locate entrances and exits onto the arterial with adequate separation based on a preferred posted speed. Consider reducing or eliminating side setback requirements to provide a downtown feel, creating interconnected rear parking lots that share access and egress points. This combination will help to slow traffic traveling through and support the reduction of curb cuts as mentioned earlier.

3. **Create a consistent aesthetic theme.** Making sure the architectural design and scale of new buildings in the area is compatible with older buildings and each other creates a sense of visual identity. This helps to foster a sense of community among business owners and residents and also enhances the marketability of the center by enticing passers-by to stop and residents to visit often.

10. Improve walkability and bikability

- Creating connections between different areas to reduce the time required to get from one part of a community to another is a key component of improving the bicycle and pedestrian friendliness of an area. In an arterial setting, **these connections create a safe and attractive alternative to traveling on the high-speed arterial road.** Where road connections are impossible or undesirable, multi-use paths between different neighborhoods can reduce the isolation that is often a part of living in neighborhoods with only one access point.
- Constructing sidewalks and safe crosswalks on major roads is a necessity when creating a village center on an arterial. These increase the safety and attractiveness of the center, drawing in more users. Further, by connecting the various businesses they help to reduce curb cuts and traffic by **allowing customers to park once and visit multiple establishments.** This in turn attracts more customers as people consider it a major convenience to be able to complete multiple errands in a single location.

11. Provide transit opportunities

- Suburban communities located on or near arterial roads have great potential for transit routes to connect them to city and employment centers. Pride's Corner, for example, is already served by the Greater Portland Metro Bus system. **Keeping residential development focused around a central point increases the effectiveness of the transit stop,** over time creating opportunities for more frequent service. Providing safe and reliable transit can increase the attractiveness of a suburban village center by helping residents lower their travel expenses.

12. Protect environmental assets and the rural character

- As noted earlier, suburban communities often have large areas of undeveloped land available, providing rural character. **Not all land needs to be open for development;** many people will choose to live in the area for its rural character and access to recreational opportunities.
- Environmentally sensitive and recreational land can be identified and protected by environmental law, zoning or even town purchase, preserving a suburban center's unique identity and attractiveness. **Such land can also be developed as a distinct**

amenity through the addition of walking trails, which are often supported and maintained by a local community organization.

- **To additionally preserve rural character, major view sheds can be identified and protected.** In Pride’s Corner, a large area of hilly former farmland was identified as a serious contributor to the feel of the area. The municipality could decide to preserve it in some manner, such as reserving through conservation easement the most environmentally sensitive portions (steep slopes and gullies) and creating open space walking and biking trails that provide recreational opportunity for nearby residents.