SUSTAIN SOUTHERN MAINE
INDIA STREET PILOT
LESSONS LEARNED

Realities and Assets in a Downtown-Adjacent Neighborhood

1. An older, downtown-adjacent neighborhood faces **constraints to redevelopment**:

*   **The constraints of past land uses –** Industrial uses, many now defunct, were common in such neighborhoods, and they have brownfield and clean-up costs associated with them; and older properties that stood in the shadows of the industrial uses may have experienced deterioration or obsolescence.

*   **A lack of clear identity –** Downtown-adjacent neighborhoods such as the India Street neighborhood may be seen as neither a strong residential nor a strong commercial neighborhood, or as a strong mix of the two, in part because it is still evolving into a third or fourth generation role that has not been clearly defined, or at least not clearly understood by the market place.

*   **Recent redevelopment that may not comport with the desires of neighborhood residents and businesses –** The vacuum created by economic loss of previous industry and uncertainty about the next evolution of land use leaves open the possibility of new uses flowing in without context or an understanding of the uses, layouts and designs that would serve as building blocks for a revitalized neighborhood. The uses and designs may be initially welcome signs of positive change but ultimately may not be seen as advancing a neighborhood's vision of itself. In the case of the India Street neighborhood, large, block-size franchise hotels have been important economic investments and votes of confidence in the neighborhood, and contribute important new mixed uses that add vitality to the neighborhood. However, certain design characteristics of these most recent developments do not necessarily advance an unfolding vision as a fine-grained, residential/mixed-use, downtown-adjacent neighborhood, with a highly permeable block structure.

*   **Neighborhood edges that have been seriously altered and sealed off** – The edges of a downtown-adjacent neighborhood without a strong identity or economic position may, in the relatively recent past, have been sealed off for projects undertaken in what was thought to be in the public interest but without consideration of the consequences for the neighborhood. In the case of the India Street neighborhood, Franklin Street to the southwest and the Munjoy South multifamily development to the northeast were designed without consideration for vital connections to downtown or to the rest of the Munjoy Hill neighborhood.   This loss of permeability need not be a permanent condition, as plans are underway to reconfigure Franklin Street, and as further redevelopment might occur in the future around Munjoy South.

2. But an older, downtown adjacent neighborhood such as India Street has **assets that significantly outweigh the constraints**:

- An historic architectural fabric that is valued in today's market place;
- An historic street grid that is very walkable and contributes both to quality of life and to market value for the land uses that are served by it;
- A relatively complete infrastructure that is ripe to support revitalization;
- A core mix of residential and commercial uses, including long-standing uses that are well recognized and loved, that serve as springboards to additional development;
- Proximity to downtown that, if new connections can be forged, is a magnet to a range of residential and commercial uses;
- Multi-modal transportation services, existing and potential, that create choices for those who want to live or work in or visit the neighborhood;
- Significant parcels, including those formerly in industrial use, that are vacant or underused and inviting to redevelopment;
- Political support for redevelopment of an older urban neighborhood.

3. If a downtown-adjacent neighborhood has developed **a voice of its own**, the chances of setting the course for redevelopment in a way that meets multiple needs are improved. In the case of the India Street neighborhood, this voice comes through the India Street Neighborhood Association.

Place in the Hierarchy of Centers

4. 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? The place of a downtown-adjacent neighborhood is not fixed: it may be an extension of Downtown itself and part of its regional role; or it may have the identity and land uses of a principally residential district supported by a strong neighborhood commercial mix; or, if there is a strong tourist amenity – such as Portland Harbor – involved, it may also serve a seasonal commercial role. The India Street neighborhood is something of a hybrid but appears primarily suited to fit into the hierarchy of centers as a neighborhood district that is distinct from Downtown, but with a complement of uses that also serve larger primary and seasonal markets.

Capacity for Growth

5. At the April 30, 2013 workshop, the India Street neighborhood was charged with accommodating a reasonable share of the City's projected growth over the next 25 years, based on its size, proximity to downtown, and the critical mass needed to support the shopping, employment, and leisure needs of an urban neighborhood. The workshop identified a potential capacity for on the order of:

- 550 new housing units – in part driven by a strong desire on the part of the neighborhood to evolve into a distinct mixed-use neighborhood with a strong residential identity typical of many downtown adjacent neighborhoods elsewhere in the U.S.

- 180,000 square feet of additional commercial space, which may translate into about 350 jobs and likely will be a combination of additional retail and service businesses drawn to a growing residential district (with a trade area that extends to much of the rest of the East End), and of cultural, professional office, restaurant and entertainment, and visitor enterprises that draw from different market areas.

These targets appear achievable under one or more design formats.

6. This capacity for growth must take into account – and likely will be limited by – two overarching design considerations:

- **Building form and height**. If the vision for a downtown adjacent neighborhood is as a residential/mixed-use district of human scale, building height likely will fall within the range of 2-6+ stories, varying by location within the district. In the case of the India Street neighborhood, there is strong consensus to maintain a 2- to 4-story height along most of the India Street spine, which is in context with the concentration of older, small scale buildings that remain there. But there are divergent opinions of the appropriate height allowances for the larger parcels closer to the harbor and adjacent to Franklin Street. The lower reaches of India Street, and possibly along Middle Street, are somewhat sensitive to future building heights along the street face. Form codes can address such concerns with stepbacks and massing limitations at particular mapped locations as appropriate   It is very likely that high lot coverage, building close to the street and extensively utilizing each lot will be common practice to achieve necessary floor area ratios and growth objectives….

- ….Which demands resolution of the second design consideration, **parking**. The walkability of the neighborhood, proximity to jobs on the Portland peninsula, and the availability of bus service reduce auto dependency somewhat, but the auto will remain a significant presence. On-street parking, reduced off-street parking requirements, modest off-street lots, structured parking, and car-sharing services such as U-Car Share and Zipcar all will be needed to satisfy demand. In the case of the India Street neighborhood, the recently constructed structured parking with excess space (as of 2013) was created with the intent to relieve some of the constraint that might otherwise exist in order to facilitate development of surrounding parcels.

7. **The growth likely will occur at three scales:** a small, incremental scale on existing lots, including additions, rehabs, and re-uses of existing buildings; a medium scale that involves the assembly of a few properties for the purpose of redevelopment; and large scale that involves planned development on large parcels that may have been cleared of a former large-scale use, was ancillary to a former large-scale use, or have been assembled for redevelopment.

8. **Small- to medium-scale residential or residential/mixed-use growth** likely will take the lead. This will be especially the case in downtown-adjacent neighborhoods, such as India Street, where the vision is for a strong residential neighborhood supported by a lively neighborhood commercial district; where location and pedestrian-friendliness likely appeal to two growing residential markets (the young, so-called Generation Y now in its household formation years and the retiring Baby Boom Generation, a percentage of which seeks out downtown adjacent neighborhoods for their rich amenities); and where residential growth is prerequisite to neighborhood commercial growth. A variety of housing types to also accommodate family households should be maintained and encouraged to create a full spectrum of lifecycle housing choices.

Location of Growth

9. Because of its mixed-use character, **a downtown-adjacent neighborhood needs a "main street" of its own,** much like a village needs a main street. In the India Street neighborhood, India Street itself has historically served this role and will logically continue to do so. Much of the commercial growth will be along this spine. Somewhere along the main street likely will be a "100%" location – a crossroads through which much of the traffic (pedestrian as well as auto) is funneled, with high visibility. The uses on the corners of this intersection need high "imageability," as they will contribute strongly to what is remembered about the neighborhood. In the case of India Street, the intersection of India and Middle Street may naturally be the 100% location.

10. **Where the edges of a downtown-adjacent neighborhood were previously compromised, it may be possible to reconstitute them as prime redevelopment opportunities.** In the case of the India Street neighborhood, the conversion of Franklin Street from a highway arterial that seals the neighborhood off from Downtown to an urban avenue that is permeable enough to reconnect the neighborhood to Downtown is such an opportunity. As an urban avenue, the street has valuable frontage, along which new development will redefine the neighborhood's edge and contribute to its identity as a desirable residential/mixed-use district.

Housing Choice

11. **Housing choice likely will be a significant challenge for many downtown adjacent neighborhoods.** Some, as in mill towns, may have structures that lend themselves to redevelopment that can take advantage of various tax credits in order to provide for a mix of affordable as well as higher end units. But those that rely on removal of existing buildings and

new construction may trend strongly toward upper end units. The India Street neighborhood falls largely into this category. In these instances, public policy that includes, for example, use of Affordable Housing Tax Increment Finance Districts, may be necessary to assure a variety of housing choices.

12. In addition, **affordability may be achieved through development of small, compact units** targeting one- and two-person households who expect and are willing to use the amenities of the neighborhood as an extension of their dwelling units and require fewer than typical number of parking spaces.

The Importance of Form

13. **A downtown adjacent neighborhood's identity is dictated in large part by its scale and pedestrian-friendly design**. The critical elements include[1]:

- Relatively high residential density within a relatively small district, putting many people within walking distance of many activities and, for trips outside of the district, bus stops;
- A fine-grained mix of uses – both horizontal and vertical – that invite a flow of people at different times of the day, seven days a week;
- A street pattern with blocks that typically are not more than 400 feet long and 1,600 feet around the perimeter of a block. Longer blocks and larger buildings should be interrupted and made permeable by mid-block pedestrian ways or alleys or streets;
- Continuous sidewalks with widths scaled to the pedestrian activity of the street – probably a minimum of 8 feet; 12 feet to allow two couples walking in opposite directions to comfortably pass each other;
- Street-oriented buildings, with commercial and mixed use buildings placed close to the front property line (may leave space for outdoor seating or sign board); and with "permeable" facades – front entrances and fenestration that relate to the street;
- Human-scale buildings – neither so tall as to block a pedestrian's cone of vision (at four stories, "the intersection of building and sky still registers in the pedestrian's peripheral vision" [Ewing, p. 77]); nor so horizontally large or dominated by a single use that the casual interaction between pedestrians and a mix of uses along the street is discouraged.
- Access to public spaces, such as plazas, small parks, and greens – typically as extensions of sidewalks, which are equally part of the public realm.

12. In a downtown adjacent neighborhood, where market demands may justify large buildings, **building height likely will be a point of contention** as different interests try to balance the space economy of height and the draw of height to high value amenity locations (such as

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[1] These are drawn from the India Street Neighborhood workshop discussion, the City's design manual, and reference materials such as Ewing and Bartholomew, *Pedestrian- and Transit-Oriented Design* (2013).

overlooking a harbor) vs. considerations of human scale. Where buildings taller than four stories are envisioned, careful consideration of formal elements such as stepbacks and massing envelopes are critical to retaining a human scale sidewalk experience.

Connection and Mobility

13. As self-sufficient as a fully functioning downtown-adjacent neighborhood might be, **connections to the downtown to which it is adjacent are fundamentally necessary for services and opportunities** – from jobs to entertainment to governmental services– that can be provided only from a downtown with a regional scale. A downtown-adjacent neighborhood that is isolated from its downtown is an oxymoron. In the case of the India Street neighborhood, the redesign of Franklin Street is driven in large part by the desire to re-connect the neighborhood and Downtown.

14. Other than an urban downtown, **a downtown-adjacent neighborhood has perhaps the best potential to be able to support a range of transportation choices**. Important and interesting destinations, from places that supply necessities to places that supply entertainment, are within walking and bicycling distances. Density can support public transportation with short time intervals. They may have infrastructure from earlier periods for intercity travel – as the India Street neighborhood has the infrastructure for rail and ferry services.

Where to Start

15. The framework for the further development or redevelopment of a downtown adjacent district can usefully begin with:

- **Vision** – a neighborhood-driven expression of what the neighborhood aspires to be
- **Connection** – establishing, re-establishing or improving connections to the adjacent downtown and surrounding neighborhoods
- **Standards** – adopting form-based standards to guide the next generation of development
- **Streamlined permitting** – a system of streamlined permitting for development that meets measurable form-based standards, perhaps including permit-by-rule for small-scale development.

In the case of the India Street neighborhood, the Sustain Southern Maine workshop was intended to help articulate a vision that will be basis for a neighborhood plan.