



SUSTAIN SOUTHERN MAINE

Partnering to strengthen our economy, environment and community

Centers of Opportunity: Typologies



**A report for Sustain Southern Maine
Greater Portland Council of Governments**

December 2013

Sustain Southern Maine Centers of Opportunity: Typologies

Acknowledgements

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, grant number MERIP0020-10, awarded to the Greater Portland Council of Governments. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.

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Which Type of Center is Right for Your Community?

This tool is designed to assist municipalities with decision-making when working to create more livable and economically productive centers. To be successful, it's important to understand how different types (typologies) of centers function together regionally.

A Successful Center is Based on Market Realities

Regardless of county or even town lines, a region is made up of an economic hierarchy of centers. There is a natural inter-reliance town-to-town, town to suburb, and suburb or town to city. Understanding this inter-reliance helps us think about the relationships between centers of various market size and the realities of how market decisions are made. This is important for municipalities to understand before they focus on the range of market possibilities within the region for their community.

If municipalities work together, they can help the region to become economically stronger by attracting right-sized businesses that will provide jobs, goods and services for their residents. Not every town can have a regional center, but all will have neighborhood centers, many will have community or downtown centers, and a few will have attributes making them capable of hosting a seasonal center. Some will become an employment center for surrounding communities. (Definitions for all these types of center are below.)

Key to good, long-term and feasible economic growth is to understand each municipality's economic roles in the region. Those roles are largely dependent on location and characteristics sought after by residents and businesses alike. Of course, a municipality's roles may transform over time, but the extent of the transformation is tied to a timetable that is largely unpredictable. Some will evolve over a relatively short period of time, while others will take many years. To attempt to rush the process, or create too many centers too close together (a common mistake) is doomed to failure, with the resulting empty storefronts, underutilized industrial parks and stalled residential developments that are all too common in Southern Maine.

Every type of center can be defined by:

- The geographic area from which it draws its customers, sales, and/or workers – this geographic area is known as the center's *trade area* (or, in the case of workers, its *labor market area*); and
- The characteristics of the center itself – these characteristics determine the *form* of the center (whether tight-knit, as in a hamlet, village, or downtown, or more spread out, as in a highway strip), how efficiently it functions (in proximity of homes, consumption of energy and use of land, etc.), and whether customers and workers will have choices for getting to the center (auto, bus, walking, bicycling).

A Primer: Trade Area Economics

There is a natural hierarchy of centers that can be supported within an existing economy. In order to ensure success, it is important to understand how your emerging center will fit into the surrounding regional economy.

The economics of this hierarchy are routinely used by many regional and franchise retailers to decide where to locate stores and forecast sales. These economics often are not used by small independent retailers, and this contributes to failure, especially when the retailer is of a type (say, a women's clothing store) that tries to locate in a type of center (say, a small neighborhood center) that simply does not command the trade area needed for that kind of store.

A center's primary trade area can be defined as the contiguous geographical area that supplies the center with 60% - 70% of its sales. Its secondary trade area adds 10% - 15%. The rest comes from beyond the trade area (long-distance commuters or visitors passing through, etc.). The geographic and population sizes of these trade areas are measureable, as noted below. *We have also included visuals of these centers at the end of this document: an aerial view, a plan view and a street view.*

1. Convenience Centers: These centers are by far the most numerous. Most communities have at least one, larger towns have several, and larger cities have many. These centers are based on a convenience store/gas station or small general

store, with limited additional retail or personal services and often a take-out food place. Convenience Centers come in many styles and sizes: they may be located along a well-traveled suburban road corridor, at a rural four-corners, or at an intersection or along a main street in an urban neighborhood. In all cases, they will be located in a very convenient location just minutes away from their customers, who use them for routine pick-up or "on-the-spot" items, such as gas, single grocery items, or pizza. A Convenience Center needs a minimum primary trade area population of about 3,000 - 5,000 to support it. This means Convenience Centers can be quite close together in urban areas, and much farther apart in rural areas. This population can vary *somewhat* based on the amount of surrounding competition, the area's income, household size and other demographic characteristics, as well as volume of pass-by traffic.

Examples of Convenience Centers include Walnut Hill in North Yarmouth, Meetinghouse Hill in South Portland, Tory Hill in Buxton, Berwick Corner, West Cumberland around the intersection of Rte. 26 and Blackstrap Rd., the intersection of Rte. 77 and Broad Cove in Cape Elizabeth, the Town Market area of Falmouth Foreside, and Circle Plaza in Kittery.

2. Neighborhood Centers: Neighborhood Centers are anchored by a full-line grocery store and have a greater mix of retail and other everyday goods and services than a Convenience Center, including hardware store, banking, Laundromat, drug store, salons, fast food and/or coffee-shop or other small restaurant, and similar small retail and service

businesses, and usually some small professional or other offices. Neighborhood centers generate trips from a larger area than Convenience Centers, and users often do multiple tasks (grocery shopping, banking, dry cleaning) in one trip rather than making different trips to different locations. But most of the businesses provide routine goods and services that people want fairly close by.

The geographic size of the trade area depends on whether the center is in an urban or rural area. In an urban area, it might be a neighborhood within, say, a quarter-mile radius, or a section of the city. In a rural area, the population would occupy a larger geography at much lower density. In all cases, Neighborhood Centers rely heavily on a nearby residential base. A Neighborhood Center needs a minimum primary trade area population of perhaps 12,000 to 25,000, again varying somewhat based on surrounding competition and trade area demographics.

The physical form of existing Neighborhood Centers may be fairly compact, as in a hamlet, village, small downtown or city neighborhood; or may be a suburban strip along a highway. In a hamlet, village, downtown or city neighborhood, homes are integrated into the center or are in close proximity. In these more traditional settings, there also are other uses, such as town halls, post offices, places of worship, and schools.

Examples of Neighborhood Centers include Yarmouth Rte. 1, Deering Center and North Deering in Portland, Oak Hill in Scarborough, Springvale in Sanford, Gorham Downtown, Wells Center, and Mill Creek-Knightville in South Portland

3. Downtowns: Downtowns warrant a category and an explanation of their own. Downtowns once served, and in some cases still serve, as Neighborhood and Community Centers, but by the 1990s, the mix of retail and service activity – especially the supermarket and department store anchors -- that define the hierarchy of retail centers had abandoned downtowns for suburban locations. Many downtowns went through - and are still going through - a period of adjustment. And many have carved out new and invigorated roles. Most still support retail activity, especially if they have strong seasonal populations nearby, but their stronger roles are as centers for business and legal services, other office functions including the offices of professionals and the so-called “creative” class of innovators, government, restaurants and entertainment, and culture. Important signifiers of a Downtown are its historic, often central, location in the community and the presence of civic uses and gathering places as well as commercial and residential uses. Notably, Downtowns continue to grow as residential locations for young adults, seniors, singles, and others drawn to the walkability and varied amenities of Downtown.

The next set of centers are included as examples of the larger types of centers that exist in Maine. Centers of this size are much less common. Because of the limited number available, Sustain Southern Maine did not choose any of these three typologies as pilot projects, nor did we provide illustrations of these centers.

4. Community Centers: Community Centers have stores and services that consist of a combination of everyday goods and services *as well as* goods and services for which customers are willing to travel or comparison shop: Community Centers are common but less numerous than Convenience and Neighborhood Centers. They are co-anchored by a grocery store/supermarket *and* a general merchandise store of some type, usually a discount department store. This includes a “big box” stores in most suburban Community Centers. They have a mix of everyday goods and services and “comparison” goods stores, such as clothing, furniture, and appliance stores. They also include eating places, many types of personal services (medical, banking, personal care, etc.), and office uses.

General merchandise and other comparison goods stores have the ability to draw from larger trade areas than Neighborhood Centers and also require larger populations to support them. The minimum primary trade area population typically needed to support a Community Center is around 30,000 to 40,000 – though there are some examples of small Community Centers with smaller trade areas. In Maine, the trade area of a Community Center usually includes all or parts of *two or more municipalities*.

Many downtowns at one time served as Community Centers, but the loss of supermarkets and department stores to suburban locations has changed the role of downtowns (see below). The existing physical form of the majority of Community Centers today is highway strip development.

Examples of Community Centers: Falmouth Rte. 1, the South Sanford Center for Shopping area, Westbrook Crossing/Pine Tree Shopping Center (Westbrook/Portland), North Windham, Rte. 111/Alfred St in Biddeford. Downtown Portland and Downtown Saco still have elements of Community Centers. Outside of Sustain Southern Maine’s area, Downtown Bath is a good example of a downtown that continues to function as a small Community Center.

5. Regional Centers: These large centers are based primarily on goods and services for which customers are willing to travel and comparison shop: Centers anchored by department stores and with a host of other comparison goods stores adding up to 400,000 or more square feet of floor area require large trade areas - only a few exist in Maine. Several of Maine’s larger downtowns – Portland, Bangor, Lewiston, and Presque Isle, for example – once functioned as Regional Centers, but today Regional Centers are primarily take the form of malls and associated big box or “power” centers comprising large specialty stores near highway interchanges, which also host office and business parks.

Examples are the Maine Mall, the Auburn Mall, and the Bangor Mall. Certain specialty centers – such as factory outlet centers in Downtown Freeport and Rte. 1 Kittery – also rely are wide trade areas. These typically are not easily replicable and function outside of the traditional hierarchy of centers.

6. Seasonal Centers: This specialty category describes an area that does not fit into any of the above typologies based on heavy seasonal, tourist related or business traveler uses, and

in some cases based on heavy concentration of hotels, inns and motels and related eateries. These centers may include some uses that year-round residents utilize but the majority of the use is seasonal or aimed at business travelers.

Examples are parts of Wells, parts of York, parts of Old Orchard Beach.

7. Employment Centers: This category denotes an area that is anchored by a large employer or series of employers or business-type parks. There may not be any mix of uses directly around these centers but they represent a location where there is an opportunity to provide such a mix – whether complementary commercial or commuter services or even housing. If a mix of activity is highly unlikely – such as in the case of some industrial parks or distribution and warehouse centers – we have not included that area in our survey of all existing centers.

Examples of employment centers are Maine Medical Center (both in Portland and on Rte. 1 in Scarborough), Rte. 1 at Falmouth/Cumberland town line area, Pratt-Whitney in North Berwick.

Success Strategies for Your Town's Center

The Sustain Southern Maine team mapped more than 160 centers in the Southern Maine study area. The large majority are existing or emerging Neighborhood Centers (both the smaller and the larger versions). The nine pilot studies in a sampling of these centers demonstrated their significant

capacity for growth.

The next question is what size, form, and mix of uses create the best chance for these centers to grow as efficient, appealing, “livable” hubs of activity – with the ability to absorb significant shares of future housing and job growth? Municipalities can use this guide to think about how to shape the growth of these centers. In the process, there will be many considerations. For example, it may be that more residential density is needed before businesses are attracted. It's possible that traffic and parking form a barrier and a new circulation patterns should be explored. Or maybe a cluster of housing exists and would benefit from some neighborhood business activity, like a market or convenience store that would reduce the need to drive.

Based on the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) Land Use Policy, to offer choices in housing, choices in transportation, room for job growth, and quicker return on public investments in infrastructure, centers should have a mix of uses, an optimum density of development within a defined area, and complementary open space. The targets below are intended to be a framework. They are a tool and not a mandate.

How to Get Started

Tips/Process and the 4 D's:

- Choose a location where your town wants to grow.
- Determine what land is available (undeveloped and unrestricted, landowner interest) and whether it is developable.
- Begin by considering the 4Ds (Density and Diversity, Design and Distance)¹
 - **Density:** Look at population, housing and job projections.
 - Determine the % of jobs and % and type of housing (mix, density and intensity) you think can be captured in that center.²
 - **Design:** Determine what you want the place to look like including the maximum height (number of floors) of buildings and where surface parking is to be located.
 - Consider the need for other amenities like landscaping, lighting, access to open space.
 - **Distance:** Consider traffic circulation, carefully plan the location(s) of access points, limit the

use of dead ends, look for ways to interconnect existing streets. Create frontage or backage roads. Include sidewalks/crosswalks and trails in your planning. Think about whether provision for transit should be planned for.

- **Diversity of Land Use (Land Use Mix):** Strive for a mix that can share traffic, customers, and parking; and that will allow customers and residents to meet a reasonable number of needs within walking distance of homes and job locations.

¹ Sensible Transportation, A Handbook for Local and Inter-Community Transportation Planning in Maine - MaineDOT

² Density is limited by availability of water and sanitary infrastructure. Public or Engineered (Community) sanitary systems permit for density based on treatment plant capacity or quality of soils.

In Table 1, note the synergies between activities as rated by Urban Land Institute

Table 1. Synergies between major land uses				
Land Use	Degree of Support/Synergy			
	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: <i>Mixed Use Development Handbook</i> , 2 nd edition, Urban Land Institute, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 85.				

Use definitions:

Residential – Structures designed for people to live in, examples include detached single family homes, duplexes, townhouses, condos, and apartments (excludes dormitories, nursing homes, and barracks).

Hotel – Facilities offering transient lodging accommodations to the general public and providing additional services, such as restaurants, meeting rooms, entertainment, and recreational facilities.

Retail/Entertainment – Establishments offering sales, services, and/or amusement activities to end users, examples include restaurants, general stores, boutique stores, department stores, supermarkets, malls, delivery service, movie theaters, performing arts venues, bowling alleys, and sports venues.

Culture/Civic/Recreation – Facilities offering enrichment, community, and/or physical activities , examples include museums, art galleries, libraries, community centers, municipal services (town hall, policing, fire protection, public works), parks, playgrounds, tennis and basketball courts, ball fields, golf courses, swimming pools, and marinas.

Densities and Data for Different Centers

The following tables are taken from the PACTS Land Use Policy.

Convenience Center:

	Radius of Area	Min. Area in Acres	Preferred Range of Area in Acres	Min. Population	Min. Housing Units	Housing Units per Acre	% Preferred Housing Mix	Min. # Jobs	Jobs per Acre	% Preferred Commercial Mix	% Public Uses
Primary	500'	18				4-8	50-80%		20-40	10-40%	10-15%
Secondary	1000'	36				2-4	50-80%		10-25	5-15%	10-15%
Total	1000'	54	25-125	200	100			100			

Floor area ratios (building square footage to total land area) for commercial buildings in small Neighborhood Centers should be no less than 0.3.

Neighborhood Center:

	Radius of Area	Area in Acres	Preferred Range of Acres	Min. Population	Min. Housing Units	Housing Units per Acre	% Preferred Housing Mix	Min. # Jobs	Jobs per Acre	% Preferred Commercial Mix	% Public Uses
Primary	750'	40				4-12	30-70%			20-60%	10-15%
Secondary	1500'	80				2-6	50-80%			15-30%	10-15%
Total	1500'	120	50-200	300	150			200	200		

Floor area ratios (building square footage to total land area) for commercial uses in this type of center should be no less than 0.5.

Downtown Center (Urban and Rural/Suburban)

URBAN DOWNTOWNS											
	Radius of Area	Area in Acres	Preferred Range of Acres	Min. Population	Min. Housing Units	Units per Acre	% Preferred Housing Mix	Min. # Jobs	Jobs per acre	% Preferred Commercial Mix	% Public Uses
Primary	2000'	288				4-14+	20-60%			30-70%	5 -15%
Secondary	4000'	578				2-8+	20-60%			20-60%	5 -15%
Total	4000'	866	400-1200	5000	2500			5000	30-40+		

RURAL OR SUBURBAN DOWNTOWNS											
	Radius of Area	Area in Acres	Preferred Range of Acres	Min. Population	Min. Housing Units	Units per Acre ³	% Preferred Housing Mix	Min. # Jobs	Jobs per acre	% Preferred Commercial Mix	% Public Uses
Primary	1000'	72				4-12	20-60%			30-70%	10 -15%
Secondary	2000'	144				2-8	50-80%			15-30%	10 -15%
Total	2000'	216	100-400	1000	500			500	20-30+		

Floor area ratios (building square footage to total land area) in downtowns should be no less than 0.7 and in some locations could be much greater.

³ Density allowed when Community or Public Sanitary Systems are available.

Illustrations of Centers

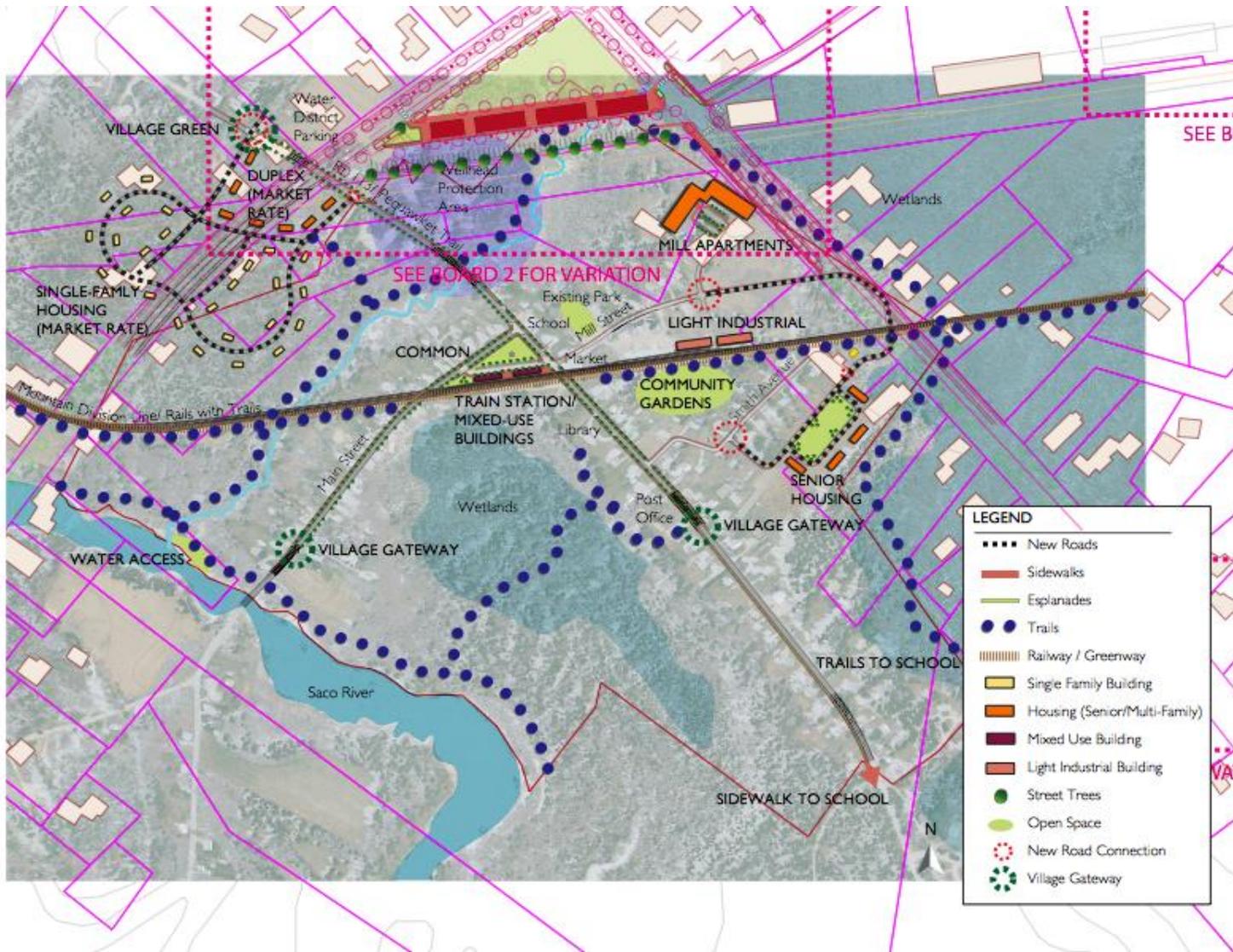
As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. The following pages offer local examples and illustrations for the five most common kinds of Maine centers:

- A Rural Convenience Center: Steep Falls village in Standish
- A Suburban Convenience Center: Dunstan Corner on Route 1 in Scarborough
- An Urban Convenience Center: India Street Neighborhood in Portland
- A Downtown: Gray Village
- A Neighborhood Center: Mill Creek Plaza in South Portland

Steep Falls Village in Standish: A Rural Convenience Center



Here is an aerial of the existing village area. Note it is very rural, typical of an older village that was once vibrant due to an active local mill economy. The closing of the mill reduced economic activity, but classically attractive architecture, rural amenities such as river and woodland trails and a core of residents remain.

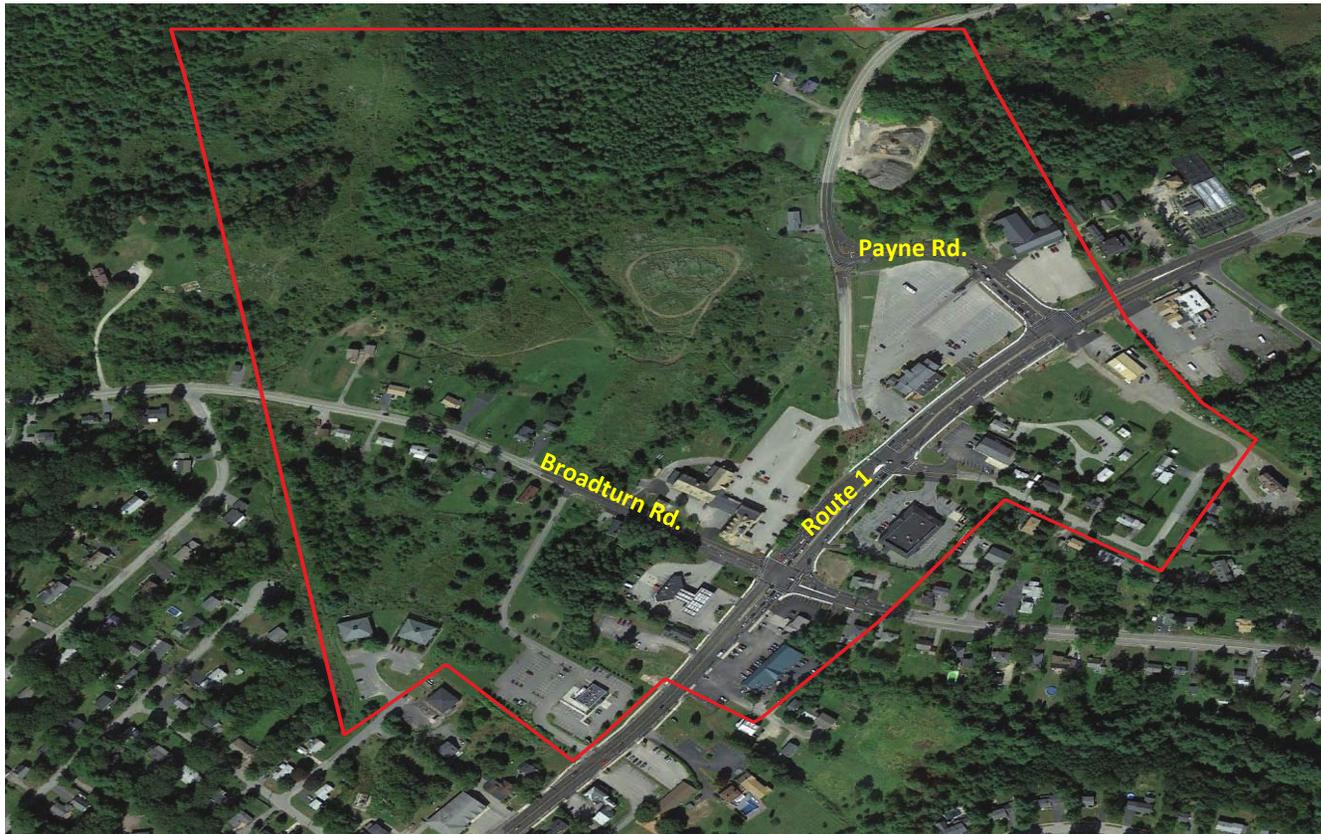


Here is an overhead view of how Steep Falls village could grow, with clustered senior housing, apartments, community gardens and smaller single-family housing. This growth would be enhanced by the creation of a rail stop on the Mountain Division Rail Line.

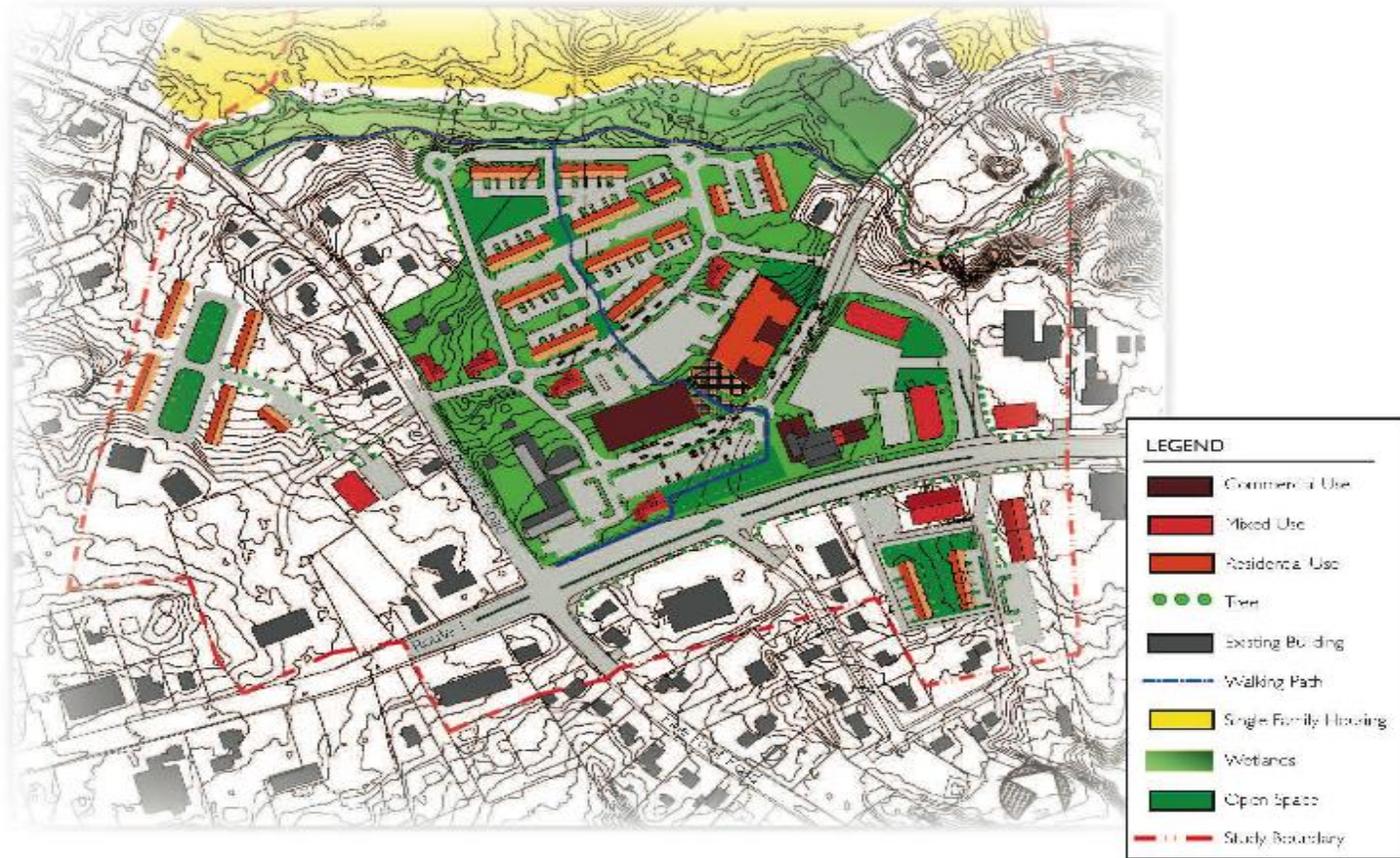


Finally, here is an artist's rendering of how new cottage-style clustered housing might look, easily fitting into the rural environment. In the distance, you can catch a glimpse of the existing town buildings, walking distance from the new housing.

Dunstan Corner on Route 1 in Scarborough: A Suburban Convenience Center



Here is an aerial of Dunstan Corner. In a suburban setting at Route 1, MaineDOT has just recently rebuilt the intersection of Payne Road and Route 1 (right-hand side of study area), providing the opportunity to build a new road between Payne and Broadturn Road, creating a new mixed-use center with both residential and commercial development opportunities.

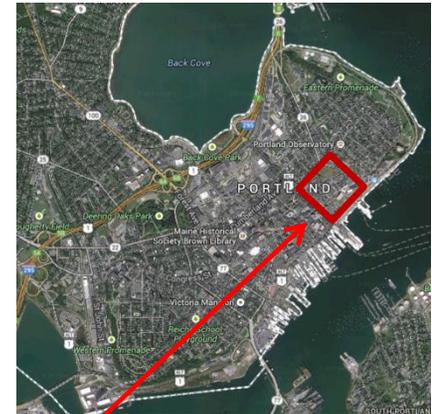


Here is a plan view of a new mixed-use development, with a new bicycle/pedestrian friendly “Main Street” bordered by retail stores and town homes. New single-family homes back up to rural land but remain walking distance to stores and restaurants. Retail can take advantage of Route 1 traffic and the surrounding existing residential housing for additional economic support.

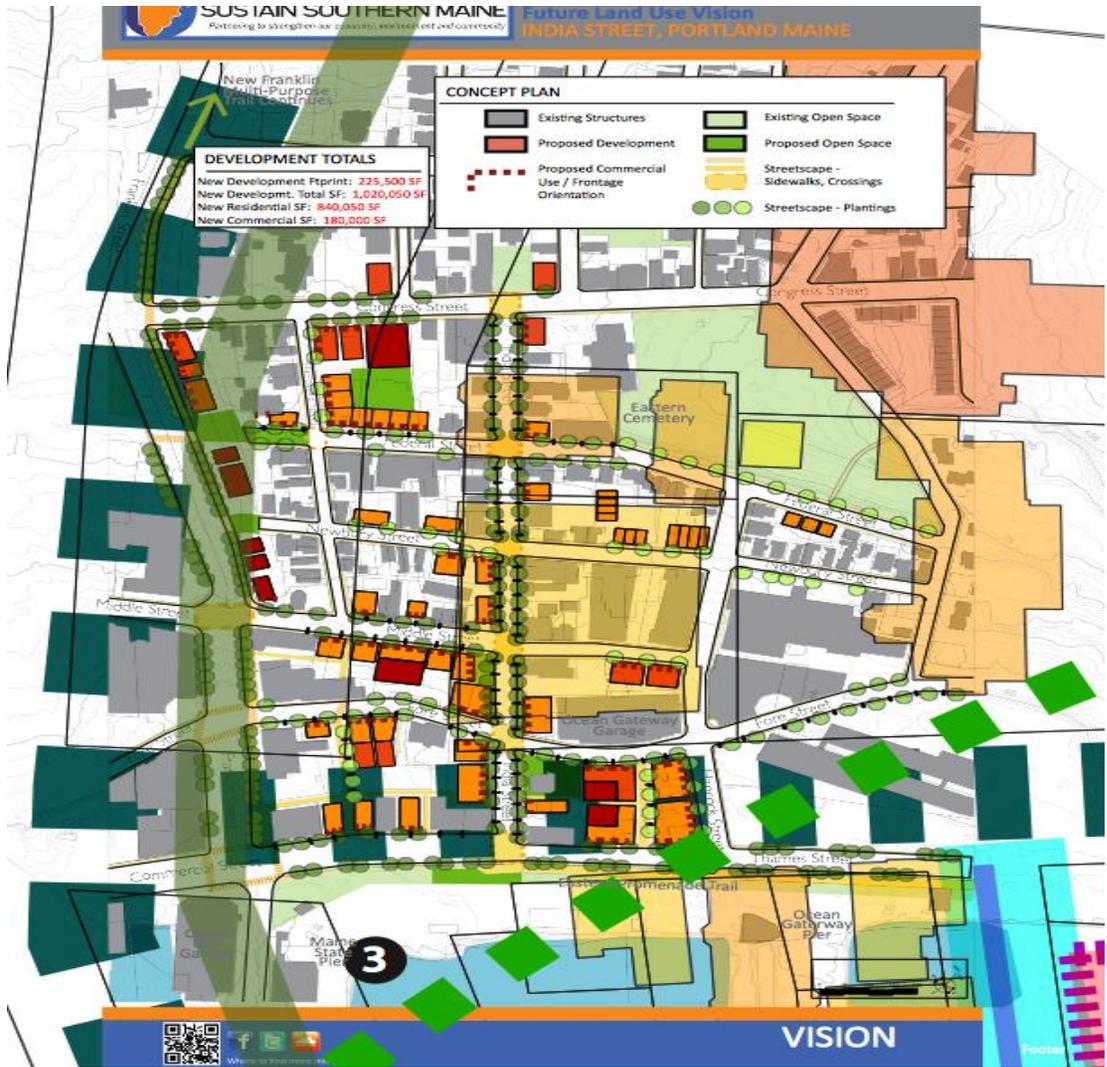


Finally, here is an artist's rendering of the new Main Street, showing how attractive and pedestrian-friendly such a development could be, while still side-by-side with busy Route 1.

India Street Neighborhood in Portland: An Urban Convenience Center



Here is an aerial of the India Street neighborhood showing its adjacency to the Old Port, the waterfront and Munjoy Hill. Also note the relatively large amount of vacant space available.

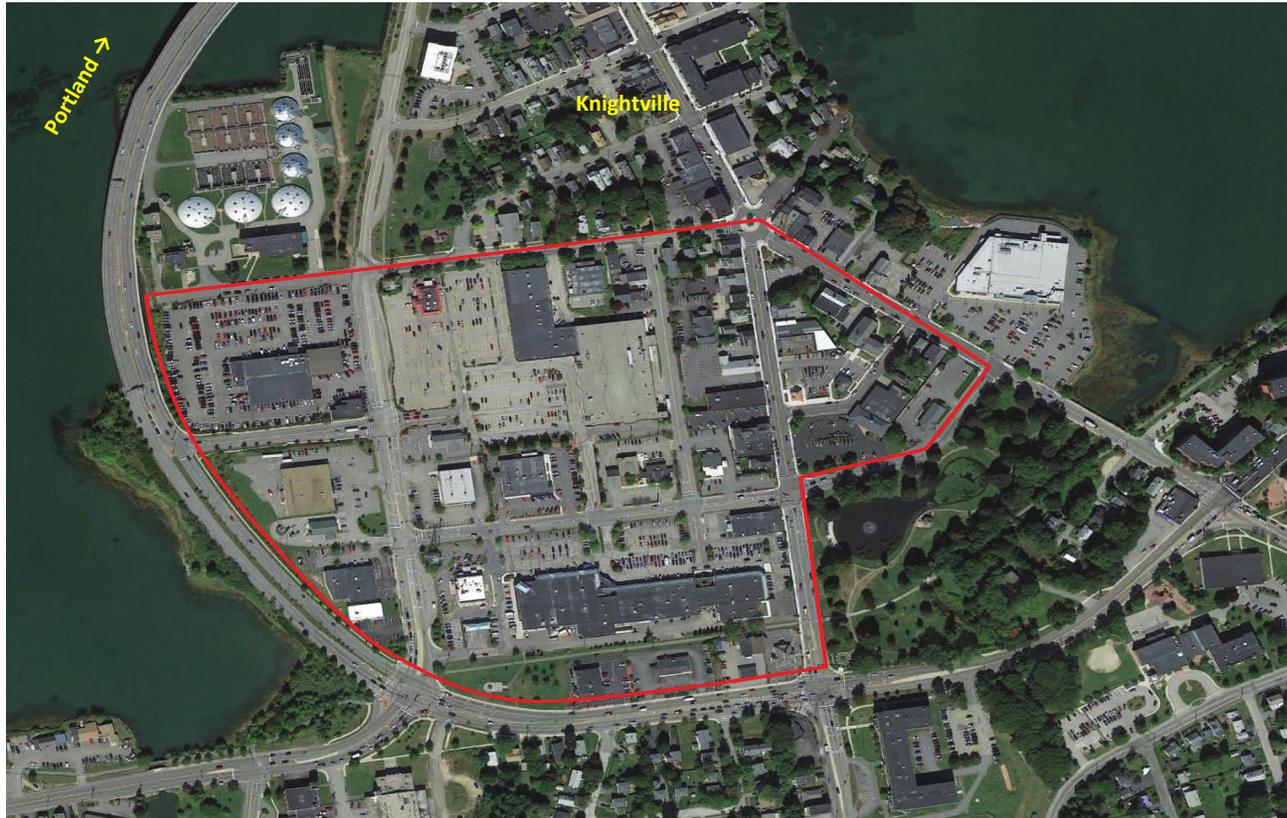


Here is an overhead plan view of how new infill development, green space and better pedestrian access could make this neighborhood come alive as a sought-after transition area between the Old Port and Munjoy Hill.

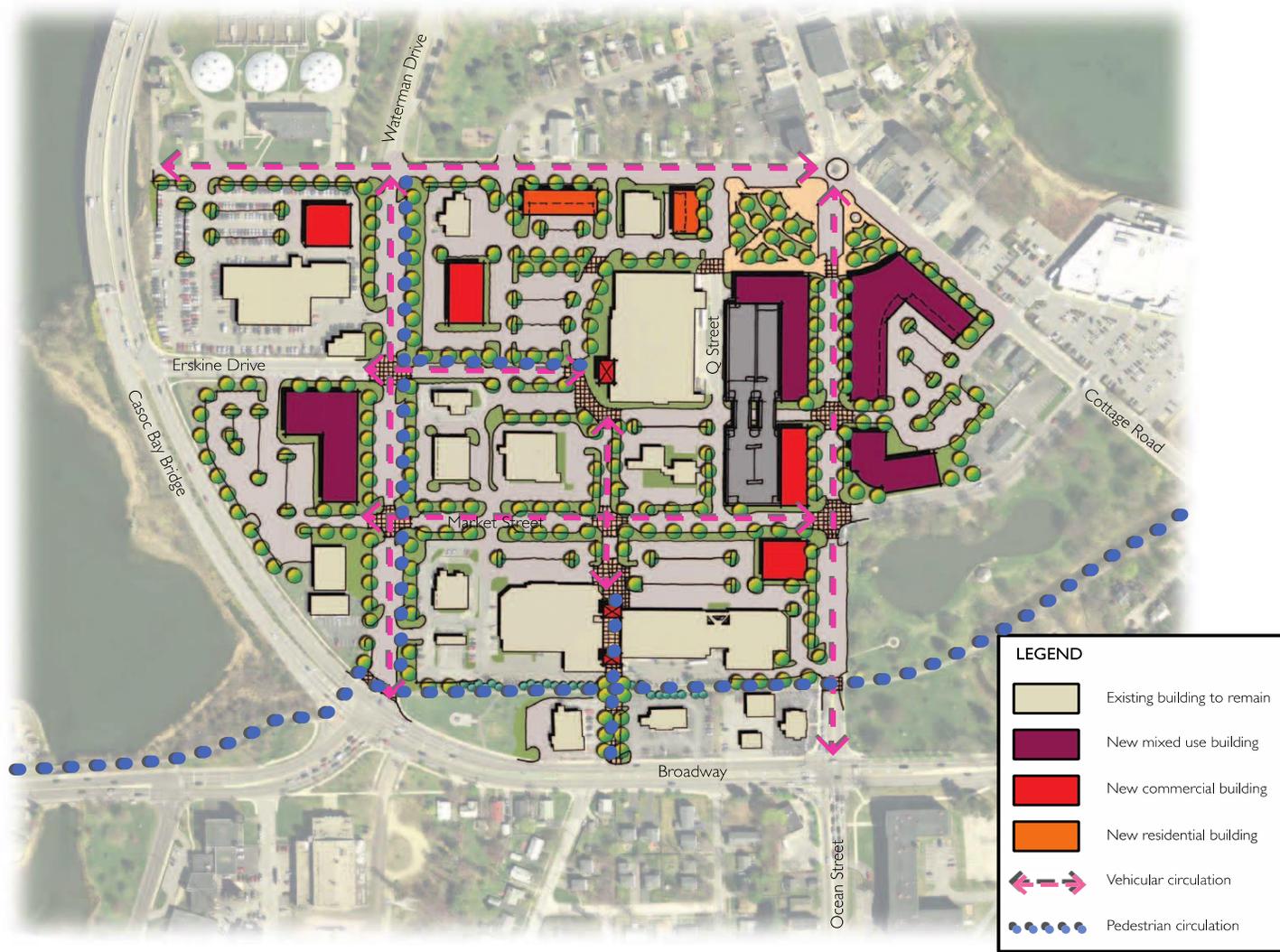


Finally, here is an artist's rendering looking down India Street towards the harbor, showing how simply adding infill buildings close to the street, pedestrian bumpouts and small parklets could make this hidden neighborhood a showplace for a range of businesses and new residents.

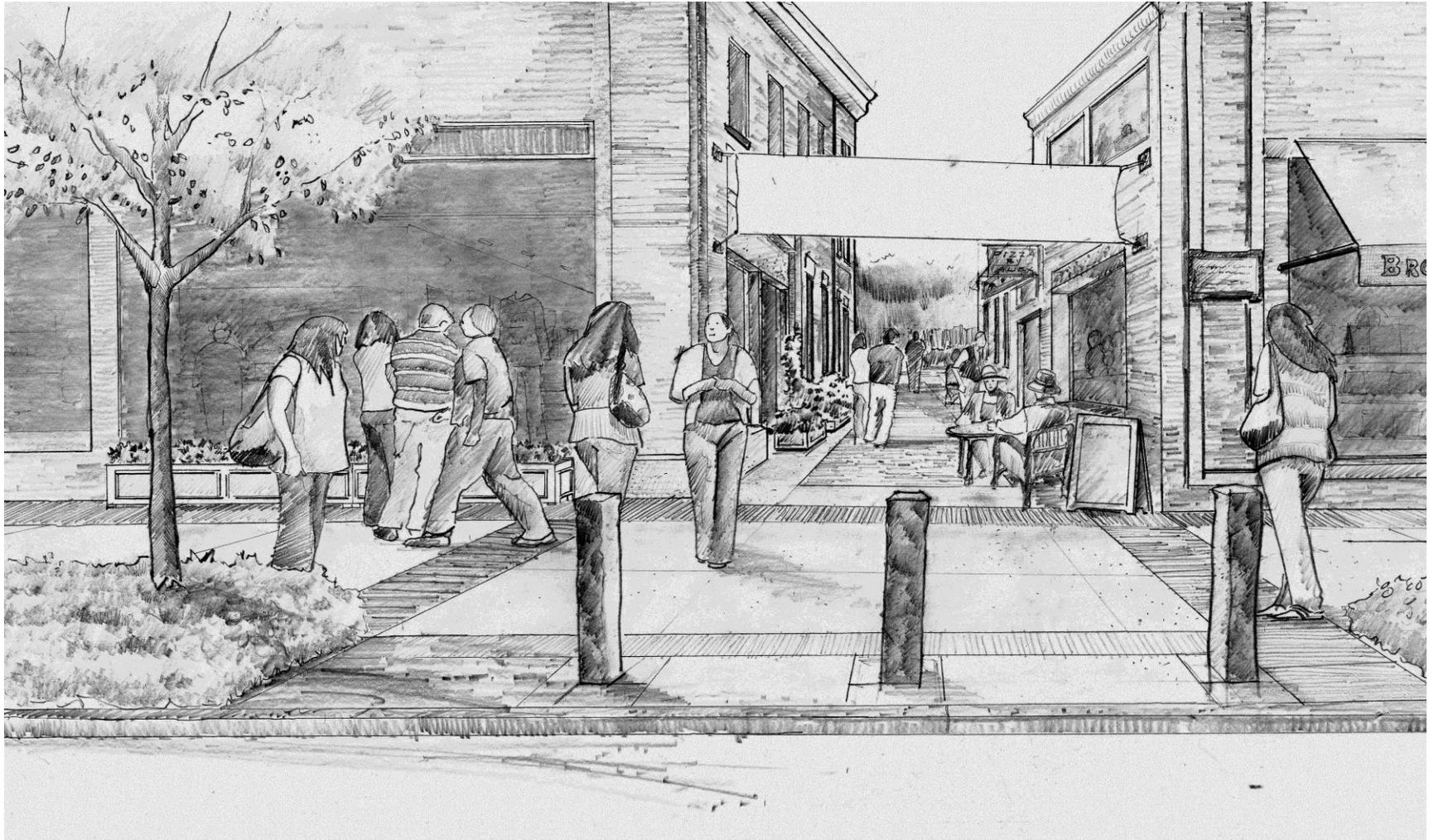
Mill Creek Plaza: A Neighborhood Center



Here is an aerial of Mill Creek Plaza in South Portland. Adjacent to Knightville and just a bridge away from Portland, this area already has transit service and is on a well-used trail system, but is currently dominated by underutilized parking lots.

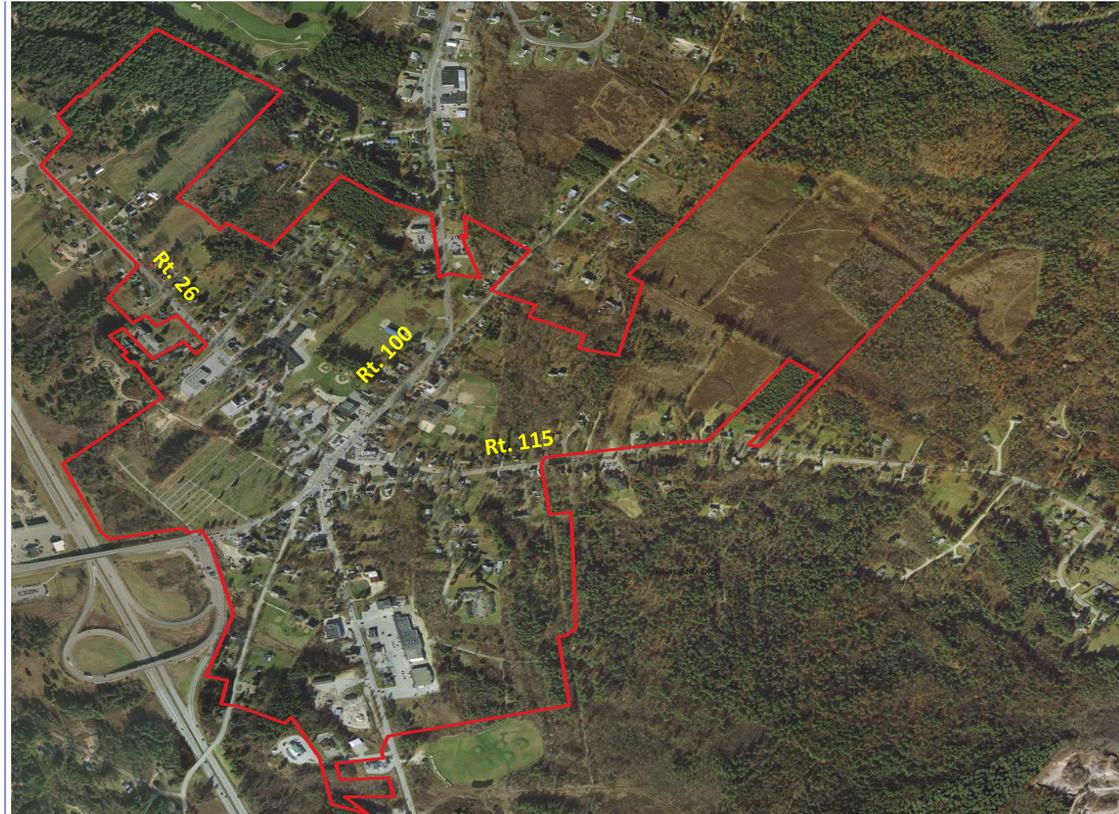


Here is an overhead plan view of how new retail and residential infill development, pedestrian walkways and street trees could turn an underused shopping center into an oasis of activity.

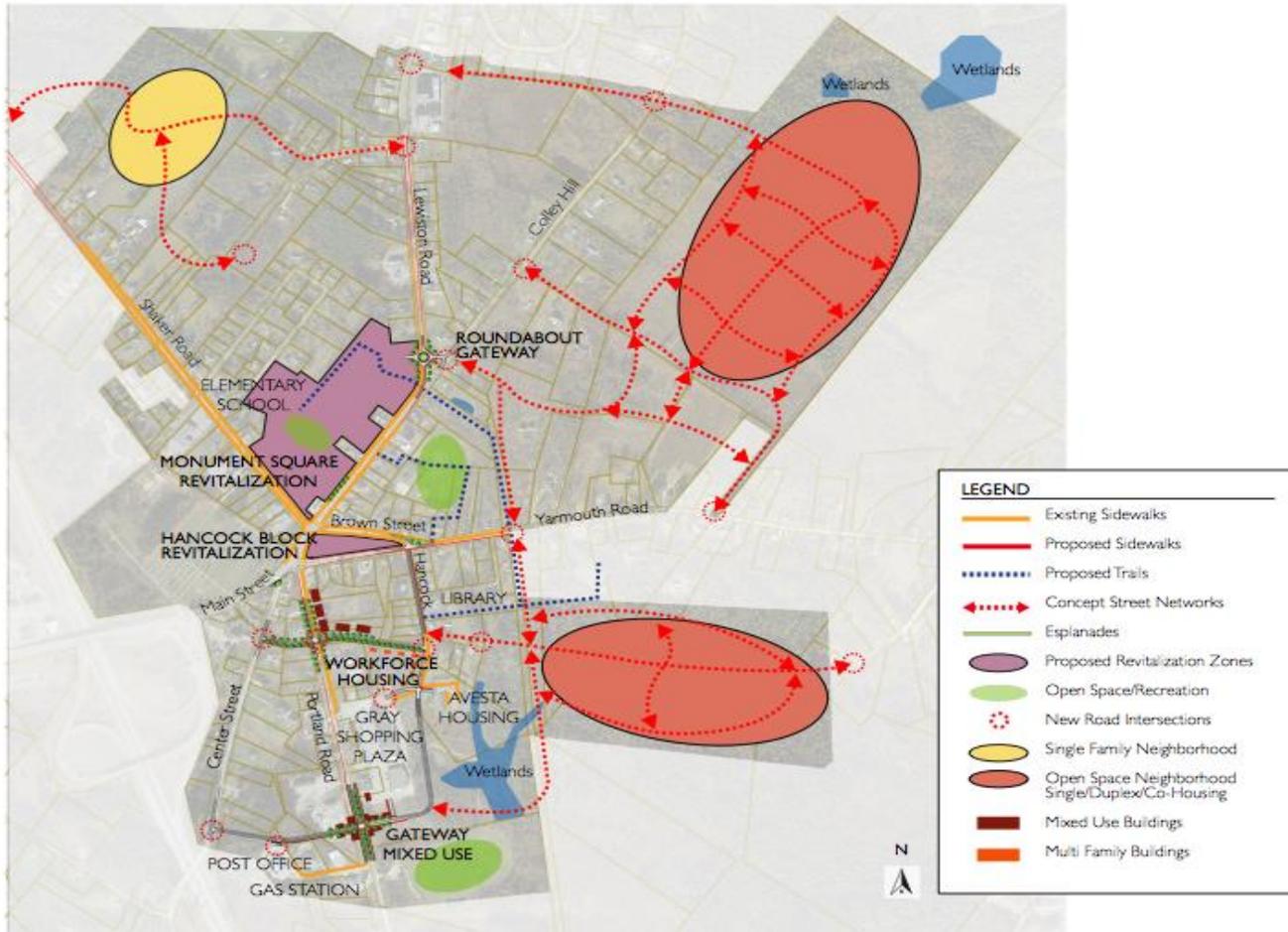


Finally, here is an artist's rendering of how new retail space and pedestrian-friendly amenities could create a more human scale within the plaza, attracting students from SMCC as well as retirees looking for reasonably priced urban living in an area that boasts an impressive number of close-by recreational and shopping amenities.

Gray Village: A Downtown Center



Here is an aerial of Gray Village, an older downtown at the junction of Routes 26, 100, and 115. Significant through-traffic and insufficient bike and pedestrian amenities have stopped this attractive downtown from realizing its potential.



Here is an overhead plan view of how new residential infill development, better pedestrian access and traffic calming could transform Gray Village into a thriving and active downtown for families and other residents.



Finally, here is an artist's rendering of how new retail space and better bike and pedestrian access could enhance the existing architecture to make the downtown an attractive and vibrant destination.