City of Saco
Downtown Plan
Adopted November 26, 2007
Amended September 16, 2013
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City of Saco
Downtown Plan

Adopted by City Council
November 26, 2007
Amended by City Council
September 16, 2013

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(Graphics and Chapter 3)
Chapter 1
Introduction

"VISION: Downtown Saco in 15 to 20 years can grow to become a busy regional commercial hub with a vibrant mix of businesses, services, retail stores, offices, and residences."

So began the downtown revitalization chapter of the 1998 "A Revitalization Plan for Saco Island and Downtown Saco." How far has Saco gone toward achieving that vision and how can it go the remaining distance?

This report updates progress on the strategies of that study, explores unfinished and new issues, and provides the course adjustment needed after 10 years. It goes beyond that report's scope by drawing on new information and on a tentative look into the future.

The measure of any plan's success is the extent to which its recommendations were implemented and continue to guide current actions. The major recommendations from 1998 plan:

- Encourage mixed use redevelopment of Saco Island using TIF and other incentives
- Create organization to manage downtown using National Main Street approach (Saco Spirit)
- Connect west side parking
- Add parking near Pepperell Square
- Improve parking, parking signage, parking management
- Build train station
- Rehab Main Street – Pepperell Square
- New signage, orientation signage

Substantial progress has been made on all but the west side parking. Saco Island is being redeveloped. Saco Spirit coordinates much of the activity in the downtown. Parking has been added and improved. Main Street and Pepperell Square have been rebuilt beautifully and the Main Street section from City Hall to Beach Street is being bid in November 2007. New signage and orientation signage has been designed and installed.
The 1998 plan contained an 11 page table of specific projects and strategies, along with time frames, project responsibility, and funding information. That table has been updated with a new column on the strategies’ current status, and is reproduced as Appendix A. In summary, huge progress has been made on implementation of most of the study strategies.

The 1998 report began with several observations on Saco’s current state:

For well over one hundred years Saco Island and Downtown Saco have played a vital role in the City's economy. The Island's huge textile and tanning mills employed thousands, and many of these workers lived out their lives in and around downtown - in apartments and modest houses. Downtown was the retail, business, and banking center, boasting many fine brick buildings, steepled churches, and beautiful, carefully crafted homes.

The last thirty years, however, have brought about significant change. With the demise of the domestic textile industry, successive owners of the Saco Island properties have sought to pump new life into the massive, brick mill buildings. Today, these efforts are beginning to show signs of success; but there remain several vacant, under-utilized mill buildings.

Downtown is likewise in transition. Suburban growth, the dislocation of industry from urban areas, an increasing reliance on the car, and the emergence of regional shopping centers and single superstores, have all had a negative impact on Main Street; however, while the retail base has diminished, downtown remains a strong banking and business center with a strong public and private office base.

The vacant mills on Saco Island were a chief focus of the report, which was funded, in part, by a State Planning Office grant to address that issue. While the project was initially designed to address the mill district, the city quickly broadened the outlook to include the downtown business district as a whole.

This study will address Saco Island more briefly, cataloging the progress and detailing the $100 million Island Point plan, construction of which has just begun. Remaining issues will be addressed. The remainder of this study covers the same downtown area as ten years ago, but extends that consideration with brief looks into nearby areas and Biddeford’s mill district.

**STUDY PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to identify strategies for continued improvements in the downtown, based on updating the 1998 strategies, new discussion with city officials, Saco Spirit and other stakeholders, and on new research into current conditions.

The 1998 plan stated the following purposes:

1. plan for new uses and improvements on Saco Island, including circulation and parking;
2. plan for a possible new Amtrak station on the Island;
3. unite the Island and Downtown, physically and economically, as part of greater downtown Saco;
4. guide the infrastructure upgrades over the long term;
5. reinvigorate downtown’s "streetscape" and parking lots; and
6. pump new life into the historic Downtown.
These goals continue to have relevance today. The first goal, related to Saco Island, specifically notes traffic issues, which continue to be a major concern and were identified as such in discussions of this report with the City Council.

The second goal, developing a new Amtrak station on the island is at the forefront of the city's current agenda. While the Downeaster began service between Boston and Portland in late 2001 and began serving Saco's platform in early 2002, the Saco Transportation Center has been designed but not yet built, as of this writing. Plans call for the construction of a 6,000 square foot building, with geothermal heat, a wind generator, and many other sustainable features. The building would house the train station function along with the Biddeford Saco Chamber of Commerce, which would staff the station as a tourism center. The third goal, to unite island and mainland, will be largely accomplished through the Transportation Center development and through the Island Point Development, which will provide sidewalks and streetlighting that will help unify the rehabilitated island buildings with the already rebuilt portions of Main Street.

The fourth and fifth goals, to guide infrastructure upgrades and reinvigorate the streetscape and parking lots, are areas of significant progress in the last decade but also require continued improvements and will be revisited herein. The final goal, to pump new life into the historic downtown, continues to be a major focus, with new retail challenges at Route 111 in the forefront of concerns.

This plan updates those purposes and adds additional purposes, as follows:

- Integrate for new uses and improvements on Saco Island with the Saco downtown and Biddeford’s mill district and downtown, and plan for traffic and circulation, with special attention to pedestrian circulation;
- Complete construction of a new transportation center and help to improve service to public transportation users and visitors;
- Identify infrastructure upgrades over the long term;
- Continue to reinvigorate downtown's "streetscape" and parking lots;
- Pump new life into the historic Downtown;
- Develop city goals for inclusion in the Saco Spirit work plan;
- Develop projects and funding sources suitable for improvements outside of the normal general revenues;
- Consider encouraging a downtown restaurant district and expanding the commercial district into one of the following areas: Thornton Avenue; Storer Street, north on Main Street and North Street;
- Plan a pedestrian bridge to Biddeford, mill district to district
- Plan for a wireless downtown, with WiFi or WiMax serving major areas;
- Plan for housing expansion and improvement in the downtown;
- Plan for Saco and Biddeford’s role in the Creative Economy, which has led the revitalization of many downtowns;
- Plan new housing in downtown;
- Green City – Sustainable City - Plan for Saco to expand its role as an environmental and energy leadership.
In addition to the specifically planned strategies, there were many other successes in downtown Saco in the last decade. These include:

- Major renovations of the Smith Elliot building, and the Atkinsons building, and many others;
- A major addition to Saco and Biddeford Savings Institution, and the reconstruction of the Congregational Church;
- Major additions at the Wardwell Retirement Neighborhood;
- Saco Spirit’s management of events, including Pumpkin Fest and the Saco Sidewalk Art Show;
- The Riverwalk Trail;
- The renovation of the Saco Valley Shopping Center, with a major new Shaw’s supermarket and the Reny’s department store;
- New public parking at City Hall, Post Office, Amtrak, and private parking at Pepperell Square;
- New strength at the Dyer Library and especially the Saco Museum, with strong programming and such community outreach as the Saco Museum Main Street Trail;
- New retailers such as Community Pharmacy and retailers in sectors previously unserved, such as two new jewelry Stores.
Chapter 2
Saco Island to Island Point

The 1998 Vision

The 1998 plan called for a vision "which builds upon the modest successes to date." The plan called for a mixed use development with residential, commercial, and retail space and extensive parking, for over 800 vehicles. The plan proposed improved access, a signalized intersection on Main Street, and a new Amtrak station. A marina, a regional coastal park, and other recreational facilities were mentioned as potential enhancements to create an attractive, livable environment.

Planning Decisions, part of the consulting team on the 1998 plan, prepared a market assessment of Saco Island which identified four potential market areas:

- **Offices** (professional, business services, governmental, and "back offices");
- **Retail** (restaurant and brew pubs, retail furniture, antiques mall, fitness facility, and convenience, specialty and "value" retailing);
- **Residential** (condominiums, rental, and retirement housing all appear to be marginal);
- **Manufacturing and Warehousing** (light manufacturing, a small-business incubator, and warehousing).

The 1998 plan identified these and other ideas that could transform the island:

- All stakeholders must focus their energy on the major ideas and improvements and work together to achieve the vision of a revitalized and vibrant Island.
- A cooperative "can-do" attitude must prevail; the stakeholders (the City and all the landowners) must work in unison; TIF (Tax Increment Financing) monies, land trades, and other creative means must be found to make the plan components work together to benefit all;
- A major initiative to kick-start the revitalization should be undertaken quickly...
- Redoubled efforts to expand parking, promote intermodal access, improve the streetscape and, generally, pay attention to details that make the Island environment attractive, livable, and an important part of Downtown Saco.

The Vision Today

Much of Saco Island was sold to Mattson Development on October 1, 2007, and construction began on October 15, on the $100 million Island Point project. This mixed use project includes 72 condominiums and 100,000 sq. ft. of new office space and conforms to the 1998 vision in large part. The new development joins 90 existing condominium units and 125,000 s. f. of office space.

The project includes the following:

- Rehabilitation of Mill 4 into 42 condominiums and 80,000 sq. ft. of office space, along with 98 indoor parking spaces. The condos will be in the front half of the building, the offices in the rear half. Some 309 additional surface parking spaces will be built on land purchased from the city.
- Rehabilitation of the 33,300 s.f. Mill 3 with 8,325 feet devoted to a restaurant/brew pub, a similar amount to office and professional space, and 16,650 s.f. to five loft condominiums.

![Diagram of the mill complex.]

- Rehabilitation of the 10,000 s.f. Mill 7 as office space.
- Construction of 30 duplex condominiums and a clubhouse on the undeveloped east side of the island.
- Renovation of large portions of the 125,000 s.f. of existing office space.
- Extensive environmental remediation.
- 69 boat slips.
- Parking for over 1000 vehicles.

The vision for the project is quite similar to that outlined in the 1998 plan, although the idea of manufacturing uses and a more extensive open space component are not present in the current design. The project did, in fact, require the extensive land exchanges and city TIF financing anticipated in the plan.

Mattson Development of Winthrop is the developer. The company describes its niche as restoring historic and landmark properties for residential and commercial purposes. It leases over 1 million s.f. to state government and other users. The company also emphasizes sustainable, mixed-use development.
The company is undertaking the project after three years and $4.8 million of due diligence, including extensive marketing focus groups. The site’s access to the Saco River and Atlantic Ocean, as well as the urban amenities and transportation available within walking distance emerged as keys in the marketing research, according to company executive Bob Martin. He calls the site, “...the only undeveloped piece of real estate in York County with access to the ocean.”

“...The Amtrak station is an absolute key to making this project viable,” according to Martin, who thinks that the project is closer to an Amtrak Station than any other residential mill in the entire country. The company is emphasizing the sustainable development perspective on the mill conversion in its marketing and offers a green option for interior finishes of the condominiums. The company is working to obtain intercity bus service and a Zip Car service.

"The amount of Class A office space coming to Island Point will most definitely have an impact throughout southern Maine and beyond," Martin said. "This project will be a highly visible example of a sustainable re-use of existing infrastructure, a living, breathing example of smart-growth principles and mixed-use development."
The company’s marketing materials describe the vision for the residential units.

The craft of the past. Design to last forever.

Every home at Island Point begins by honoring the past and then building for tomorrow. Historic buildings are preserved and new homes become special places of contemporary luxury. As you would imagine, the diversity of Island Point calls for a choice of homes, from loft-style residences to riverfront town homes. Building materials are environmentally-friendly, sustainable, and the focus is on energy efficiency.

There are extensive options to choose from allowing you to personalize your home, from traditional to modern—or a meeting of both. Island Point is a sustainable village that is thoroughly modern, with high-tech living features offering unmatched comfort, convenience, and security.

The condominiums in the mills will be priced at $200,000 and up. The duplexes on the eastern side of the island are in the range of $600,000 to $800,000. The company plans to fit up the commercial space before building most of the condominiums. A three to five year construction schedule is planned.

Extensive excerpts from Island Point’s market research and marketing effort are included in this report to present an alternative to our quotidian vision of Saco—to show at least what some people see when they look at the city. If the vision is accurate, or if it is on the cutting edge of a new vision emerging, it may indicate that Saco’s regional role will increase and its demographics will change.

According to Mattson Development’s market research, urban amenities and the proximity of natural resources for recreations are big draws for Saco and Saco Island. Market research also finds that the twin cities’ emerging restaurant and arts scene, traditional buildings, institutions and upgraded streetscape are attractions to the downtown. Another excerpt from Island Point marketing materials:

Stroll down Main Street in Saco, with its historic homes, museum, library, and selection of shops and restaurants. Within minutes of your Island Point home or office, you can savor a bucket of clams or steamed lobster on a dock where the Saco River meets the sea. Walk to a sushi bar, Mexican restaurant, French bistro, or sample the authentic cuisines of Vietnam, India, China or Japan. Or enjoy one of New England’s best microbreweries and restaurants located in the heart of Island Point. Upon your return home you may anticipate taking your boat out from its slip for a short sail... or perhaps just a quiet kayak run upriver will do.

In addition to the Island Point project, the city is planning a 6,000 s.f. transportation center adjacent to the Downeaster platform on the island. The signature building will also house the Chamber of Commerce, which will manage the station and provide tourism related services. Ridership of the Downeaster has increased steadily as gasoline prices and Boston parking prices have increased. With the higher profile of the station and the Island Point Development, growth in the number of passengers and in parking demand is highly likely.

While the Island Point project goes much of the way toward implementing the 1998 vision, a few issues related to Saco Island remain:
1. **Mill 108** – This 55,000 s.f. mill at the end of Gooch Street is subject to a lease purchase agreement with Mattson Development. The company plans to use the building for storage during the construction phase, and may consider longer term uses. The City and the developer should work to integrate the building into the mill district project. A hotel use should be explored.

2. **Maine Energy** – The Saco City Council has worked diligently in recent years to close this incinerator, just across the river from the Island Point project. The development team, which includes political veterans, is engaged in a statewide process of exploring trash disposal options with a goal of closing the local incinerator. The cities of Saco, Biddeford, and all mill district interests should work to close the Maine Energy plant.

3. **Train Station** – With the assistance of federal funding, a platform and parking areas were constructed in 2001-2002. The City Council authorized a new transportation center in late 2007.

4. **Traffic** - Traffic estimates indicate that 2,286 trips per day will be generated as a result of the new project, an approximate 10 percent increase. Island traffic, especially left turns, have been difficult since the first stage of the island’s rehabilitation in 1987. The current project includes a traffic light at Gooch Street and a traffic light at the lower driveway. The subject of internal circulation, which was the subject of great debate in the 1998 planning effort, has been resolved between the Island Terrace Condominium
Association and the developer in a way that will allow much of the existing middle-driveway traffic to exit at Gooch Street. The traffic situation should be monitored and public transportation and pedestrian improvements should be considered as traffic increases.

5. **Pedestrian Access** - The developer will build 750 feet of sidewalk along the east side of Main Street and a sidewalk along the south side of Gooch Street. Biddeford’s redeveloping mills and emerging downtown arts district will also be a strong pedestrian magnet. The two cities should work to make the pedestrian experience the best possible.

6. **Pedestrian Bridge** – Part of improving the pedestrian experience may include the construction of a pedestrian bridge between the two mill districts. Advocates say that a beautiful pedestrian bridge between the two mill districts could help mill district revitalization on both sides of the river and could help unite the two cities. Some have suggested that the best alignment for the bridge would be the old alignment of the Gooch Street bridge, a small scale bridge which existed into the early 20th century. Others have suggested that the bridge is needed only if some of the promise of the Biddeford mill district is achieved, and if Maine Energy departs. Regardless, the cities and the mill district stakeholders should study where and whether a pedestrian bridge should be built between the two mill districts, which is strongly supported by the Saco Planning Board.

7. **Mill district study** – The cities of Biddeford and Saco have convened mill owners and other mill district stakeholders to commence a joint planning process. Biddeford has received a federal Economic Development Grant Administration grant to retain consulting assistance for the report. The City of Saco and Saco mill interests should work closely with the City of Biddeford and Biddeford mill interests on this important study.

8. **Parking** – The increased activity on the island and the improving economics of train travel are likely to increase parking demand on the island. While this should be inconsequential for the next two to three years, longer term planning, monitoring and management of parking will be needed.

9. Consider a Saturday Farmer’s Market on Saco Island.
Chapter 3
Market Analysis

Some important trends in the current market for downtown:

- Strong new competition from the Route 111 area, especially in the restaurant sector, not anticipated in 1998.
- Strong occupancy trends for downtown retail.
- The downtown Saco Valley Shopping Center is much stronger than previously with a new Shaw's Supermarket and a Maine owned Reny's Department store, an improvement on the previous Ames Department store.
- Large scale new activity on Saco Island and in the Biddeford mill district will help provide additional local market supports for downtown businesses.
- Improved image for downtown Saco noted by Saco Island developers and many others. “Saco” is a better “brand” than a decade ago to those who do not live or work here.
- Living downtown is now perceived favorably and developers have noticed, not just on Saco Island but also in the approximately 300 condominiums built in a ring around the downtown in the past seven years.
- There is a high level of interest in green or sustainable development locally.
- The “creative economy” is active locally in Saco and Biddeford and may provide opportunities for business development.

In the 1998 Downtown Plan appendix, the Intown Market Analysis defined the trade areas of the two major business districts, Main Street Saco and the Saco Valley Shopping Center. The study identified and profiled these areas using a combination of license plate and customer spotting surveys. It went on to assess the shopping habits of the consumers and devised an analysis of the areas competitive environment, which focused on specialty retail, local retail and services, restaurants, and professional services. The findings of this report, in the form of a license plate survey, indicated that roughly 70% of local business traffic came from residents living in the Saco-Biddeford-Old Orchard Beach primary trade area (PTA). The customer surveys done at the time of this report reflect these numbers, in that the majority (75-90%) was shopping for groceries and household items.

1 1998 Summary Market Analysis of Intown Saco, pg 17
In 2005, Planning Decisions conducted an update of this information to assess changes - if any - in retail habits throughout the Saco trade areas. This research found that the major share of customers (over 85%) still came from the Saco-Biddeford-Old Orchard PTA, with 60% from Saco alone (Table 1). Customer impacts from communities outside the PTA are significantly lower and focused more on specialty store offerings than local retail needs. These customers typically make up little more than 6% of the specialty market share.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Local Retail &amp; Service Groups</th>
<th>Specialty Retail &amp; Service Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of Customers by Category</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>High End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Trade Area</td>
<td>80-90%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saco</td>
<td>55-60%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biddeford</td>
<td>18-22%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Orchard Beach</td>
<td>3-5%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside PTA</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennebunks-Wells</td>
<td>3-4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Communities*</td>
<td>3-5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>2-3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Portland</td>
<td>2-3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These numbers are further explained by the updated license plate survey, which found that roughly 70% of cars in both the Downtown and Saco Valley Shopping Center were from within the primary trade area (Table 2). In general, slightly more cars from surrounding communities were recorded in the downtown lots than in the shopping center. This may indicate that the Main Street area speciality stores are more of a draw than the shopping center retailers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Summary of 2005 License Plate Survey</th>
<th>On-Street &amp; Downtown Parking Lots (2005)</th>
<th>Saco Valley Shopping Center (2005)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Trade Area</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saco</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biddeford</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Orchard Beach</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrounding Communities</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buxton-Hollis-Limington</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the time of the 1998 study, there was one major threat to the Saco business climate: Maine Mall. The chains and big box stores in and around the mall were seen as “category killers” as they took a large share of the comparison goods potential away from the downtown. In addition, the Saco Valley Shopping Center’s trade area was seen as relatively small when compared with surrounding area retail centers that offered similar goods and services for local populations.

On November 15, 2006, a Boston developer organized the grand opening of The Shops at Biddeford Crossing. The 500,000 s.f. complex on Route 111 includes 24 stores and five restaurants, and is now the largest retail center in northern York County. It joined shopping centers anchored by an existing Walmart, and then Home Depot and Target, which opened in 2001.

The 1998 plan did not foresee the development of Biddeford Crossing and the other giant national chains that located in Biddeford and have changed the region’s retail dynamics. Where individuals used to go to the Maine Mall, they now can find similar goods and services along Route 111. This will influence the shopping habits of residents throughout the Saco trade areas. As the Biddeford Crossing opened in the fall of 2006, no detailed statistical data of its impact are available. However, general trends can begin to give a picture of the development’s impact.

Consultant Planning Decisions feels the Shops at Biddeford Crossing have attracted a portion of the Maine Mall’s customer base. This is demonstrated in Table 1 below, which illustrates the increase in business sales within the Biddeford ESA and the simultaneous decrease within the Portland ESA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 - Business Sales in Biddeford &amp; Portland ESA’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biddeford ESA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retail Sales</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1/00 thru 10/31/01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1/01 thru 10/31/02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1/02 thru 10/31/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1/03 thru 10/31/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1/04 thru 10/31/05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1/05 thru 10/31/06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1/06 thru 10/31/07*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Maine State Planning Office

The table demonstrates that prior to the construction of the Shops at Biddeford Crossing the Maine Mall was receiving a large percentage of business sales from the Biddeford ESA, including Saco. Presumably, sales that historically were leaving the Biddeford ESA for the Maine Mall are now retained within the ESA. In addition, it can be assumed by the marked increase in sales that surrounding communities are adjusting their travel habits and it can be
assumed that consumers, particularly to the south and west of Biddeford are now shopping at Biddeford Crossing rather than traveling to the Maine Mall.

As Saco is part of the Biddeford ESA, to estimate the impact off the new mall on Saco an analogous ESA must be used for analysis. The Kennebunk ESA’s year-round population in 2005 was 19,574\(^2\), which is very similar to Saco’s (18,230). Both areas are made up of small privately owned businesses including restaurants, clothing and specialty retail stores that would be impacted with new competition from Biddeford Crossing.

Over the past year, the per capita drop in business sales in the Kennebunk ESA is estimated to have been $357.62. Applying the $357.62 per person figure to Saco’s population, it is yields an estimated $6.5 million in annual retail sales. Could Saco residents have transferred this much of their purchases from the Maine Mall and Saco to Biddeford?

Biddeford Crossing’s impact will most likely be felt in Saco’s Downtown. The impact will be within local retail and service groups in particular where these services are also provided at the mall, including pharmacy, clothing, and household good supplies. Consumers from some surrounding communities who have predominantly come to the area to patronize specialty shops will most likely continue to do so; in particular those from points north as they were already bypassing the Maine Mall to shop in Saco. However, local retail spending from communities to the west and the south (if Kennebunk ESA numbers are any indication) will presumably decrease as they have access to more services closer to home. This may influence in particular secondary impulse spending habits in the downtown such as restaurants.

An analysis of the use of space in downtown Saco late 2007 found these trends:

Over the last decade the number of businesses located in Downtown Saco has increased substantially. Much of this growth has occurred in service businesses reflecting an important shift in Downtown Saco’s economic role. During this period, the retail and restaurant sectors have remained about the same in terms of the number of businesses.

It is difficult to characterize the stability of businesses based upon this type of analysis but it is very clear that service businesses have been much more stable. Most of the service businesses identified in 1998 continue to be in business in downtown. In contrast, there has been a significant level of churning in the retail and especially restaurant sectors. While the total number of these types of businesses remains about the same, a number have gone out of business and have been replaced by new businesses. Some of this turnover can be attributed to the nature of small, independent retail businesses, but some of it is probably also indicative of the market situation.

In 1998 data was collected on the occupancy of buildings in Downtown Saco and the Elm Street corridor including the Saco Valley Shopping Center. In the Fall of 2005 Planning Decisions, with the help of Saco Spirit, updated the inventory of businesses to see how the downtown is changing.

Businesses were again informally surveyed by the City in the Fall of 2007. The results indicate that the makeup and number of businesses has changed over the decade as follows:

**Retail Businesses**

The number of retail businesses along Main Street has increased by 5 since 2005 with a slight decrease in the number of retail businesses along Elm Street (-2). Overall, retail levels are equal to retail levels in 1998 with a shift in retail focus from Elm Street and the Saco Valley Shopping Center to Main Street. The change in the number of businesses near Elm Street is not a

reduction in retailing. The reconstruction of the Saco Valley Shopping Center led to the loss of three shops, but the square footage was incorporated into the new Shaw’s supermarket. In fact there was a slight gain in square footage.

**Restaurants—Food Service**
The number of restaurants in the downtown area has been relatively stable over the period; there have been the usual changes in locations, concepts, and ownership is this very competitive business. Competition is expected to increase as chain restaurants proliferate at Route 111. Currently, upscale restaurants appear to be flourishing in the Pepperell Square area. The number of eating establishments in the Elm Street Area is also increasing. Overall, there are more eating establishments in downtown Saco in 2007 (15) than there were in 1998 (13) and 2005 (13).

**Financial Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE)**
The number of FIRE related services in the downtown has decreased by 1 since 2005 and the number of FIRE related services in the Elm Street Area has increased by 1 since 2005. For downtown overall, the number of FIRE related services remains constant.

**Other Services**
Both the Main Street and Elm Street Area increased between 2005 and 2007 in the number of services other than professional, resulting in a significant increase for the downtown overall (+6).

**Other Businesses**
The number of other businesses in the Main Street area has decreased since 2005 from 15 to 14, but is still higher than 1998 number of 6. Elm Street has no businesses in this category, so the overall number for the downtown tracks with the Main Street Area.
The downtown Saco trade area

Recent research reveals little change in the downtown Saco trade area identified in 1998. From 70 to 80 percent of downtown's trade originates from the Primary Trade Area (see map below) while 10 to 15 percent of the customers come from the Secondary Trade Area. Some specialty retail businesses and some professional and financial services draw from a yet larger area, the Trade Area Fringe. Different businesses draw customers from different trade areas, all are important to downtown's future.

Figure 1
INTOWN SACO TRADE AREA

Saco Downtown Plan – 2007
Chapter 3 - 8
**MARKET OPPORTUNITIES IN DOWNTOWN SACO (1998)**

- Market downtown as a specialty retail center; emphasize: specialty books, crafts, children's clothing, camera and photo supplies, bridal shop, hobbies, specialty jewelry, "funky" clothing, antiques, and art galleries.

- Expand downtown's role as a convenience/service center; focus on these apparent gaps: mini food market; drug store (serving primarily elderly residents); and a coffee/donut/bagel shop.

- Expand opportunity for professional and financial services.

- Promote downtown as a restaurant center; stress good quality, family style, and specialty foods.

- Retain Saco's role as a local government service center.

The major findings of the 2005 license plate survey are:

1. Almost 40% of the vehicles surveyed in both areas are registered to residents of Saco.

2. The traditional Saco-Biddeford-Old Orchard Beach market area is the primary source of customers for downtown businesses. Around 70% of the vehicles surveyed in both areas are registered to residents of the three town area.

3. Approximately 5% to 6% of the vehicles are registered to residents from the communities to the west and southwest (Alfred, Waterboro, Lyman, Sanford/Springvale, Shapleigh, etc.). Customer draw from the communities to the northwest (Buxton, Hollis, Limington, etc.) is limited with 2-3% of the vehicles registered to residents of those communities.

4. Over 6% of the vehicles surveyed in Downtown are registered to residents of Kennebunk-Kennebunkport-Wells. This dropped to about half at the Saco Valley Shopping Center.

5. Customers from Scarborough are a small share of the overall customer base with 2-3% of vehicles registered to Scarborough residents.

6. Almost 4% of the vehicles surveyed in Downtown are registered to customers from Greater Portland while over 6% of the vehicles at Saco Valley Shopping Center come from Greater Portland.

7. There is a high degree of consistency between the customer bases at the two locations with no significant differences. Downtown businesses appear to draw Portland area consumers somewhat better than the shopping center based upon the license plate data.

The major findings of the 2005 customer spotting are:

1. Most Downtown businesses draw a major share of their customers from Saco. About two-thirds of the businesses draw 40% or more of their customers from Saco with a number of the
more local businesses drawing more than 60% of their customers from the community. Only four businesses, all in the Specialty group, draw less than 30% of their customers from Saco.

2. The traditional Saco-Biddeford-Old Orchard Beach market area is the primary source of customers for most downtown businesses. Fifteen of the 21 businesses draw more than three quarters of their customers from the three town area with a number drawing 85% or more of their customers from this area. Almost all of the businesses in the Local Retail and Services group draw most of their customers from the three town area. Businesses in the Specialty group draw a slightly lower percentage of their customers from the three towns. Only one business reported drawing less than 60% of its customers from Saco-Biddeford-OOB.

3. Many downtown businesses draw customers from the communities to the west and southwest (Alfred, Waterboro, Lyman, Sanford/Springvale, Shapleigh, etc.). A number of businesses draw 5-10% of their customers from this area. A few of the specialty businesses draw more than 10% of their customers from this area. Customer draw from the communities to the northwest (Buxton, Hollis, Limington, etc.) is limited and varies with the business but is typically a maximum of 2-3% of the customer base.

4. Customers from Kennebunk-Kennebunkport-Wells are a very minor share of the customer base for most local businesses (typically not more than 3-4%) but are a significant share of customers for some specialty businesses. Five businesses in the Specialty group draw more than 10% of their customers from this area.

5. Customers from Scarborough are a small share of the overall customer base and account for 2-3% of customers in the typical Downtown business. A number of businesses saw no customers from Scarborough.

6. Customers from Greater Portland also are a small share of the overall customer base and account for 2-3% of customers in the typical Downtown business. A couple of specialty businesses draw more than 10% of the customers from the Portland area.

7. People who work in Downtown Saco are an important source of customers for some Downtown businesses. Among the Local Business group, Downtown workers typically account for 25-35% of their customers with some businesses seeing this share be even higher. Among the Specialty group, Downtown workers are a much less important source of customers, typically 10-15% of their customer base.

8. While there is a fair degree of consistency within the groups, the customer base varies for each store. This is more true for the businesses in the Specialty group where one business may draw well from Greater Portland and get few customers from the Kennebunk's while another does well in the Kennebunk's but gets few, if any customers from the Portland area.

Essential to these promotional ideas is a strategy. The Chamber of Commerce’s current branding program for the cities of Saco and Biddeford should be of great assistance in implementing such a program.

Housing

The Saco Island project, several condominium projects, the Wardwell Retirement Neighborhood projects, and the Park Street Lofts have identified downtown Saco has an attractive place for new housing. Projects like the Temple-Pleasant-Green rehabilitation project will make larger parts of the downtown attractive for new housing and the rehabilitation of older housing. New sites might be identified, particularly in the area west of Main Street.
### Condominium Approvals 2001 – 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Street</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Stonegate</td>
<td>Shadagee Road</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sawyer Brook</td>
<td>North Street</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>None approved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Amber Brook</td>
<td>Corner of Bradley and Forest Street</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willows</td>
<td>Tasker Street</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stonegate</td>
<td>Shadagee Road</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Braley Estates</td>
<td>North Street</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Park Street Lofts</td>
<td>Park Street</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garfield Commons</td>
<td>Garfield Street</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Winfield Commons</td>
<td>238 North Street</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Oak Grove</td>
<td>26 Garfield Street</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>122 Common Street, LLC</td>
<td>122 Commons St</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magnolias</td>
<td>50 Old Orchard Road</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ross Ridge</td>
<td>Ross Road/Woodman Ave</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Birches</td>
<td>76 Franklin Street</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saco Island LLC</td>
<td>Saco Island</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Park North Development</td>
<td>941 and 1031 Portland Road</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>393</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL '01-'07</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>612</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The code enforcement office is working this year to inspect older housing in the Pleasant-Temple-Green area, and will move on to other areas in coming years.
Market Opportunities 2007:

1. The downtown Saco Valley Shopping Center is much stronger than previously with a new Shaw’s Supermarket and a Maine owned Reny’s Department store, an improvement on the previous Ames Department store. Joint marketing with the shopping center tenants and full integration with the downtown promotional efforts should be a goal.

2. The competition from the Route 111 area, especially in the restaurant sector, might be addressed by an emphasis on quality and joint promotion of downtown restaurants and downtown Biddeford restaurants, perhaps in the form of a nascent restaurant district.

3. The strong occupancy trends for downtown retail should lead to consideration of where new retail might go. The options:
   a. Very near where it now is on Elm, Main, and Pepperell Square
   b. North on Main and North
   c. Thornton Street
   d. Storer Street
   e. Saco Island
4. Large scale new activity on Saco Island and in the Biddeford mill district will help provide additional local market supports for downtown businesses. Traditional downtown businesses and landlords should work closely with these new stakeholders.

5. Continue to improve Saco's downtown image with strategic infrastructure investments, promotions. Heritage tourism efforts may now find fertile ground.

6. The Island Point developer perceives an opportunity for housing in downtown Saco. Other opportunities for housing in all income levels should be identified and pursued.

7. Housing deficiencies in multi-family units should be addressed cooperatively after a program of code enforcement.

8. The Island Point development is emphasizing the smart growth principles which the mill redevelopment incorporates, and is providing a “green” finish option for buyers. The city has also taken a leadership role in sustainable development. Further projects with this focus should be encouraged.

9. The Park Street Lofts in Saco and new activity in downtown Saco and especially downtown Biddeford shows that the Creative Economy has some strength as a revitalization agent for downtown. This take on revitalization should be monitored and encouraged. Community wireless internet access might be advantageous to this and other sectors.

10. The Chamber of Commerce branding of Saco and Biddeford initiative should be supported to assist in these promotional efforts.
Chapter 4
Organizing for Success

The 1998 Revitalization Plan for Downtown Saco called for the organization of a downtown committee to advance organizational, marketing, design and business development goals for the downtown area. Saco Spirit was formed in 1999 as a direct result of the Downtown Revitalization Plan by the Saco Business Association, with assistance from the City. Committee members were made up of downtown businesses, several businesses outside the downtown and representatives from the City. In 2001 Saco Spirit was named one of the four original Main Street Maine Community programs by the Maine Downtown Center, and in 2004 was named a National Main Street Community by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Saco Spirit worked closely with the City to pursue many of the action steps outlined in the Revitalization Plan including:

- Saco Business Association leaders established a new downtown committee as outlined in the plan, later to become Saco Spirit.
- Established a promotions committee
- Established an economic restructuring committee (to promote business development)
- Established a design committee
- Adopted a consistent logo and theme
- Developed and published a business directory and map
- Established a schedule of promotional and downtown events
- Organized joint promotional and advertising programs
- Developed direct mailings targeting potential new downtown customers
- Publicized local successes

Several action steps recommended in the Revitalization Plan have yet to be taken or have only been taken to a minimal degree. The following action steps need to taken or revisited:

- Develop ongoing fund-raising mechanisms
- Develop a tourist attraction program
- Distribute factual information about the trade area
- Target and recruit new owners and tenants

Saco Spirit serves many purposes and has had many successes since its inception in 1999. Saco Spirit:

- Aids the city in upgrading the downtown streetscape and parking situation by providing input and representing downtown businesses
- Improves downtown appearance through volunteer flower planting, seasonal decorations and clean up efforts
- Attracts people of all ages to the downtown with community events including Pumpkin Fest, Sidewalk Arts Festival, Spring Fashion Show, and Holiday Fest
- Provides a critical link between the City, downtown businesses and the community
- Fosters a sense of pride among downtown businesses
- Hosts periodic business training programs

Saco Spirit/Saco Island

The Maine Downtown Center provides Maine’s Main Street communities with periodic resource team visits, bringing outside expert eyes to local issues. In 2002 a team of four assessors identified the redevelopment of Saco Island as a potential major focus of Saco Spirit. By 2003 Saco Spirit Executive Director, Bonnie Pothier, played a critical role in identifying and attracting the developers who would ultimately be responsible for the revitalization of Saco Island. She and Saco Spirit were credited with this important effort at the October 11, 2007, kick-off party for the $100 million Island Point project.

Although Saco Spirit has had many successes and a vibrant, attractive downtown has resulted from the efforts of committed board members and volunteers, as well as executive directors and city cooperation, Saco Spirit has had its ups and downs as an organization. The 2002 Resource Team visit recommended a renewed commitment to board training in the
National Main Street approach. The executive director position was reduced to part time in 2006 which resulted in Saco Spirit’s designation as a National Main Street Community being rescinded. Funding and fundraising challenges have plagued the organization for a number of years. The lack of funding has resulted not only in the rapid turnover in the director’s office, but an inability to attract a strong pool of applicants for the position. The organization has not been able to offer a professional-level salary.

In 2007, Saco Spirit renewed its commitment to fundraising with the goal of again hiring a full time executive director to help the organization increase its effectiveness. In order to reenergize the board members and focus on the mission, Saco Spirit with the help of the City, developed a work plan based on an interactive meeting process. Board members and city staff reviewed all goals from the 1998 plan, and decided which of those items are still relevant for Saco Spirit’s goals. Later board members were asked to express individual goals for Saco Spirit which were then prioritized and categorized. The process resulted in the 2007-2008 Saco Spirit Work Plan. Saco Spirit’s Plan will be updated based on the 2007 Downtown Revitalization Plan. The work plan:
SACO SPIRIT

2007 – 2008 Preliminary Work Plan

Mission Statement:
Saco Spirit’s mission is to make Saco a better place to live and work by enhancing the vitality of our downtown.

Design Committee
Visual/Seasonal Appeal
- Acquire four sets of banners (w/City)
- Acquire and install holiday lights (w/City)
- Continue work on Riverwalk Trail (Phase 1): Grant writing, etc.
- Purchase flower planters (w/City)
- Explore public art as an enhancement to downtown

Parking and Transportation
- Improve perception and awareness of available parking
- Develop business district directional signs (w/City)
- Work w/City on parking lot connectivity (west side)
- Pursue parking lot acquisition near Pepperell Square (w/City)
- Investigate w/Saco, Biddeford, Heart of Biddeford & mill owners a pedestrian bridge between cities

Organization Committee
Increase Capacity to Strengthen Downtown
- Develop a reliable funding & fundraising program to allow Saco Spirit to be effective
- Train board on roles and responsibilities
- Write grants to fund specific projects to enhance downtown experience

Community Links with Saco Spirit
- Attract new members and strengthen existing member relationships
- Determine how to improve relationships
- Involve community through improved communications about downtown Saco’s offerings and its contribution to quality of life (w/Promotions Committee)
- Work w/City to complete Downtown Plan update
- Organize business and community socials
- Develop comprehensive marketing materials (w/Promotions & Economic Restructuring Committees)
- Update and improve Saco Spirit website (w/Promotions Committee)
- Strengthen relationship w/Heart of Biddeford and Chamber of Commerce

Retail Growth and Development
- Consider extending boundaries to Upper Main and Elm (w/ER Committee)
Economic Restructuring Committee
Retail Growth and Development

- Inventory downtown businesses, spaces and employee numbers (w/City)
- Make downtown Saco attractive to consumers by encouraging and maintaining the best possible business mix
- Coordinate store hours
- Help make downtown Saco a shopping/restaurant destination (w/Promotions Committee)
- Consider extending boundaries to upper Main and Elm (w/Organization Committee)
- Capitalize on and work with the Saco Island project to attract businesses beneficial to downtown (w/City)
- Consider developing occasional business-training programs

Community Links with Saco Spirit

- Develop comprehensive marketing materials (w/Organization & Promotions Committee)

Promotions Committee
Events

- Manage and promote community events such as Pumpkinfest, Saco Sidewalk Arts Festival, Spring Fashion Show and Holidayfest
- Determine what other events have sufficient volunteer and financial support and attendance

Community Links with Saco Spirit

- Involve community through improved communications about downtown Saco’s offerings and its contribution to quality of life (w/Organization Committee)
- Publish consistent e-mail newsletter and send to broadest possible community
- Develop comprehensive marketing materials (w/Organization & Economic Restructuring Committees)
- Update and improve Saco Spirit website (w/Organization Committee)

Retail Growth and Development

- Help make downtown Saco a shopping/restaurant destination (w/ Economic Restructuring Committee)

Board members agree that the work plan will be revisited and updated after city adoption of this downtown plan.

A new interim Downtown Director was retained in late 2007 and trained in the Main Street Approach for four days at the National Main Street Center. An entry work plan has been developed to identify priority projects and to organize the transition.

The work plan for the interim Director focuses on communication, assessment and ways to move forward. One of the first goals for the interim Director will be to access how fundraising, budgeting, volunteer recruitment and promotions has been handled in the past, and to develop procedures that will aid in the organization and effectiveness of these programs. Another goal will be to either continue or establish effective relationships with businesses, other
non-profits, community members and the City, and work with these organizations to achieve common goals.

Saco Spirit has had its ups and downs over the past few years. It is the goal of the organization and the City to reenergize Saco Spirit through continued aesthetic upgrades, good community relationships, events, promotions, and business retention and recruitment. Saco Spirit needs to recognize and build on its role as a vital part of the Saco community and the quality of life in the area.

With a new work plan, new staff, new board members working with experienced ones, the city expects Saco Spirit to continue to play the important role it is played throughout much of the last decade.

Recommendations
1. The City should continue the public/private partnership with Saco Spirit to manage and improve the downtown.
2. Saco Spirit should continue to operate with its four committee structure, modeled after the National Main Street program,
3. Saco Spirit should focus on implementing the items in its work plan and revise that work plan after the adoption of this downtown plan.
4. Develop an ongoing funding mechanism. Saco Spirit should work to develop its fundraising capacity.
5. Saco should work to remain certified by the Maine Downtown Center and to become recertified by the National Main Street Center.
6. This will require a firm volunteer and financial base, and will require retaining a full time director.
7. In order to overcome the frequent turnover of directors, Saco Spirit must offer a professional-level salary for a qualified director.
8. Develop a tourist attraction program coordinated with the Chamber of Commerce. Include joint advertising in tourist publications, Cable TV spots in Old Orchard Beach and Kennebunk-Kennebunkport, and placement of Downtown Saco business directories and maps in tourist information centers and area motels. Heritage tourism and “quaint downtown image” should be part of the effort.
9. Undertake joint advertising and sales promotions at key times of the year where shoppers are rewarded for multiple purchases on the same day.
10. Develop a direct mail and email marketing effort to target customers who patronize specialty retail stores in downtown.
11. Undertake a targeted business attraction business program to attract new business to the area. (1) Prepare package highlighting the location, the existing business mix, and characteristics of the trade area, (2) Work with regional commercial real estate brokers, (3) Recruit business people to make contacts with prospects, (4) Develop a list of businesses that may relocate to Downtown Saco, contact them and follow-up. Publish useful marketing information on the Web.
12. Promote Downtown Saco in a frequent email newsletter as a "good place to do business" with positive press/media stories.
13. Distribute factual information about the Saco Trade Area.
14. Developer marketing efforts which target and recruit new homeowners and renters.
15. The 2002 Resource Team visit recommended a renewed commitment to board training in the National Main Street approach.
16. This training should extend to individual committees, where each should be reacquainted with its role on an annual basis.
Chapter 5
Design, Infrastructure, and the Physical Condition of Downtown

"In order to remain competitive, retain existing businesses, and grow new businesses Downtown Saco stakeholders must undertake a number of actions. Without bold, new initiatives and positive public/private action downtown could lose the opportunity to spark downtown's revitalization... The design of the physical environment must welcome and attract while providing essential services."

Thus began the “Revitalization Plan” section of the 1998 downtown plan. The plan called for the following list of improvements (annotated and edited for clarity and length):

1. Provide a superior parking system that is easy to find, well designed and managed, well lit, safe and convenient for all users. (Partially done)
2. Make "streetscape" improvements, especially on Main and Thornton, to include: better signage, new street lights and street trees, improved sidewalks. (Mostly done)
3. Treat the area immediately west of Main Street (between Water Street and Thornton) as a whole, with a consistent design theme, generous landscaping, and a pedestrian-way behind the Main Street buildings. (Not done)
4. In the long term, consider new development (retail and/or offices) west of Main Street adjacent to new parking areas. (Not done. Bank only.)
5. Improve links to the Saco Valley Shopping Center, with streetscape improvements to Thornton and the Elm/Scammon/Thornton "gateway" intersection; (Partially done.)
6. Improve links to Saco Island, by way of Main Street and, ultimately, a pedestrian bridge from Poore's Island to Saco Island; (Partially done)
7. Improve links to Riverfront Park, by way of Pepperell Square, with a broadened sidewalk, and new lighting. (Done)
8. Embark on a stormwater separation program on upper Main Street (from Pleasant Street north to Beach Street). (Done with modifications)
9. Place overhead utility wires underground. (Done in large part)
10. Improve Pepperell Square, to make it a destination and focal point, with new paving, planting, narrower travel lanes, and new lighting. (Done)
The community has made great progress on the list, with only two unaddressed items of eleven. The most important items center around the reconstruction of Main Street sidewalks with new lighting and the redesign of Pepperell Square, which have been completed (or are about to be undertaken north of City Hall). Two areas where more progress can be made in the next few years are coordinating private parking on the west side of Main Street, streetscape improvements along Thornton Avenue, and connectivity to the Saco Valley Shopping Center. This report recommends dropping the idea of a second bridge to Poore's Island (Jubilee Park), but retains the other recommendations which have not been completed, although in revised form, in some cases.

In addition to those improvements sought in the 1998 plan and achieved since, many other physical improvements occurred since 1998, including:

- Riverwalk Trail
- City Hall new parking lot (2000)
- Post office parking (2000)
- McCallum parking at rear of Pepperell Square
- Mark's Park
- Private renovations by Going, Gaines, Poulin, Johnston, Gaudreau (Smith-Elliott) and others
- Pleasant, Green and Temple reconstruction
- New entrance at library
- Wardwell expansion
- Wind generators at treatment plant (and York Hill)
- Saco Museum Main Street Walk

The remainder of this chapter will consider the issues of parking; signage; traffic, pedestrians, and bicycles; design and lighting; parks and trails; public buildings; and planning for new development.

Parking

In 2007 Saco Spirit listened to merchants express concern about the parking situation in the downtown. Design Committee Chair Laurie Mooney and Public Works Deputy Director Mark Lorello gathered information about parking and reviewed it with Saco Spirit and the city's Traffic Safety Committee. The assessment found that parking was available in most places at most times, and concluded that parking education may be more of an issue than an actual parking problem. The assessment concluded that parking may be more difficult for out-of-town visitors than for local residents.

The assessment suggests several actions to improve the situation for customers and other downtown users.

- Ensure employees/tenants park vehicles in less convenient spots (side streets, train station) so that customers and clients have spaces conveniently available
- Educate stakeholders on where to direct customers to park as they call for directions or complain about parking
- Improve mapping and signage for parking
- Large unused capacity exists at Amtrak lots, just three minutes to Pepperell Square walking at brisk pace.
Although not highlighted in the recent analysis, Pepperell Square remains one area where additional nearby parking could be helpful. The city and merchants should pursue parking lot acquisition near Pepperell Square, as well as improving the perception and awareness of available parking.

While the downtown parking issue may be one of perception, the convenience of parking is a major consideration as shoppers and other clients and customers make buying decisions. This report adopts and extends many of the parking improvement recommendations first outlined in 1998.

In particular, if public and private parties can cooperate, large improvements in parking can be made west of Main Street. Between Water and Storer Streets, parking can be consolidated to improve customer traffic, vehicular parking areas and access, as well as pedestrian circulation and aesthetics. The improved circulation of unifying these rear parking lots will make Main Street shops more accessible to customers, and mitigate the impact of the one way Water Street pattern and the back-ups at the Pepperell Square traffic light.

Similar opportunities exist between Storer and Pleasant Streets, and Pleasant and Thornton Avenue. Similar opportunities may emerge between Thornton and Cutts. The city will need to work with Biddeford-Saco Savings and many other private land owners to consolidate existing parking areas and construct connected parking areas, with improved circulation and aesthetics.
AVAILABLE PARKING – DOWNTOWN AREA

Main Street  79 spaces
RR Tracks to Water St.  6 spaces
Water St to Storer St.  10 Spaces (3-15 min.)
Storer St. to Pleasant Ave.  6 spaces
Pleasant Ave. to Thornton Ave.  6 spaces
Thornton Ave to Cutts Ave.  6 spaces (1-15 min.)
Cutts Ave. to Credit Union  8 spaces
Pepperell Sq. to Free St.  13 spaces
Free St. to School St.  15 spaces
School St. to Gift Shop  9 spaces.
Side Streets  97 spaces
Storer St.  8 spaces
Thornton St.  2 spaces
Cutts Ave.  32 spaces
Pepperell Sq.  24 spaces (4-6 @ Group 1 Realty)
Common St.  10 spaces
Free St.  3 spaces
School St.  18 spaces
Municipal Lots  51 spaces
Notre Dame Church  18 spaces
Saco Biddeford Savings  3 spaces
Free St.  20 spaces
Saco PD  10 spaces
Train Station  206 spaces

Total Available Parking 433 spaces
Signage

Public signage in the downtown has improved greatly in the last decade with the installation of three gateway signs, new street signs with a historic theme, and new regulatory signs with an improved design. A few directional and orientation signs have been installed, as well.

Improvements should be made with orientation signs directing people to parking areas, rest rooms, the Main Street district, and the shopping center district. In addition, internal parking lot signage warrants improvement. The transportation center warrants a major orientation sign.

Traffic, Pedestrians, Bicycles

While daily traffic counts on Main Street have actually fallen over the last two decades since the closure of the mills, the perception is that traffic has worsened. The light at Pepperell Square has been a particular choke point with traffic backing up northward beyond City Hall, and southward to 110 Main Street on a daily basis. The timing of this light should be evaluated and the number of movements permitted should be reevaluated.

The redevelopment of Saco Island will add two additional traffic lights on Main Street at Gooch Street and the lower island entrance. The 1998 downtown plan committee spent many hours on Saco Island’s traffic situation. One of the major interests of that study will be achieved with the redevelopment. Island Terrace condominium owners have agreed to exit from Gooch Street. During daytime hours the association will allow commercial users to pass through their parking lot and behind the rear of the mills to exit on Gooch Street. This should help significantly with the delays at the 110 Main Street driveway.

In addition, as the mill district in Saco and the mill district in Biddeford redevelop, there will be increased traffic between the two. In the last year there has been frequent talk of the possibility of a new pedestrian bridge between the two mill districts. The two cities and the mill owners and stakeholders should cooperatively investigate a pedestrian bridge over the Saco River.

The “Saco Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan,” August 2004, took a citywide look at bicycle-pedestrian issues, and developed a series of recommendations, some of which are important to the downtown, as follows:

1. Develop a safe and welcoming environment for pedestrians and bicyclists in the Downtown area that links with upper Main Street
2. Work with property owners to develop a landscaped bike/pedestrian path from the downtown to upper Main Street behind the shops
3. Develop bike lanes on less traveled streets parallel to Main that provide safe downtown travel with access to Main Street
4. Develop signage to steer bicyclists to these lanes on less traveled streets
5. Develop signage to alert drivers to be aware of bicyclists

In addition Saco Spirit has recommended bicycle parking racks be placed in Pepperell Square, along the walkway in back of Main Street, near the bike shop on Main Street and in the Saco Valley Shopping Center.

One frequently mentioned approach to mitigating the traffic issues is to improve the pedestrian environment to encourage people to walk on the numerous short downtown trips which occur. A number of actions might improve the likelihood of success, including a sidewalk
improvement program to upgrade those sidewalks in poor condition, and improved pedestrian safety at Main Street crosswalks with the use of plastic signs in the center.

**Streets, Sidewalks, Sewers**

While the Main Street and Pepperell Square reconstruction has been widely noticed, many other street improvements have been made in the downtown in recent years, including Cutts, Park Ave., Middle St. Ext., Water Street, and the large Temple-Pearl-Pleasant-Green project, which is now nearing completion.

Projects planned for the near future include Main Street sidewalks and lights from City Hall to Beach Street, including an upgrade to the turning radius, Middle Street, where sidewalks will be regarded and curb reset, Cross Street, where the road will be rebuilt along with the sidewalk, and Scamman Street, where the road and sidewalk will be rebuilt. A pavement overlay is planned for Free Street and Front Street. By comparing the accompanying map with the list of work to be performed (above) it is clear that most of the downtown core will have sidewalks in reasonably good condition in the near future. A new sidewalk will be constructed on the east side of Saco Island by the Saco Island developer.

The City has made huge progress in addressing combined sewer overflows in the downtown since the 1993 CSO plan. In the downtown, work is planned in the High Street and Middle Street areas near the Wardwell.
**Design and Lighting**

The reconstruction of Main Street and Pepperell Square establish a high quality pattern for lighting and design in the downtown. That pattern is about to be extended northward on Main Street from City Hall to Beach Street with a voter-approved project. In addition, the Saco Island project will make improvements to Main Street and Gooch Street following the same pattern. Recently the credit union at the corner of Main and Elm Street constructed its parking lot improvements with the same attractive light fixture. This theme should continue to be used as the west side parking lots redevelop and as other areas redevelop downtown.

There are numerous additional downtown improvements that could improve the downtown’s market appeal. However, it is not expected that all can be funded. Among the larger projects which should be evaluated are:

- Street lighting and tree planting on Main Street to Thornton Academy to improve the visual connection between Main and Elm
- Beautification at Scamman’s corner
- Re-establish street edge on west side of Main Street on Saco Island
- Explore public art as enhancement to downtown

Some low cost efforts which should be implemented include:

- Acquire four sets of banners
- Acquire and install holiday lights
- Purchase flower planters

**Parks and Trails**

Parks development has taken some interesting twists in downtown Saco. One of the most popular parks is nicknamed Mark’s Park for owner Mark Johnston, who maintains a small unbuilt lot at the corner of Main and Storer. It now includes two of the interpretive panels from the Saco Museum Main Street Walk, a gazebo, and an attractive painted lighthouse. Another commemorative marker is planned. The park has become a downtown attraction.

The local business promotion organization, Saco Spirit, has taken a lead role in trail development, through its stewardship of the Riverwalk Trail. It led the construction of the trail from Front Street to the foot of the hill at Hall Avenue. The next phases of the work involve extending the trail to Hall Avenue and rehabilitating the trail and park on Front Street at Riverfront Park, now two decades old.

The Saco Island development includes a fishing access trail on the east side of the island and a linear park along the river on the west side. The renewed focus on the river is consistent with the findings of the 2002 Resource Team Visit from the Maine Downtown Center, which stated, “The Saco River is a huge asset that is underutilized.”

On Water Street the Saco River is eroding its bank. The Public Works Department plans to propose to the Council that a portion of the bank be stabilized and that the pavement be narrowed, allowing the construction of a trail on the south side of Water Street from Main Street to the Poore’s Island (Jubilee Park) covered bridge.
Public Buildings

Four major public buildings exist in the downtown: City Hall, Central Fire Station, the sewer treatment plant, and the police station. Three of those buildings have seen substantial investment in the last two decades. The Central Fire Station has not been modernized and has long been considered a priority project. The city earlier purchased a site on North Street to relocate Central Station. But in 2007 the Fire Department, using the city’s GIS mapping system to perform an extensive study of call locations and response times, determined that locations quite near the existing Central Station on Thornton Avenue will serve the community better. That report’s conclusion:

"Recommendation: After examining all the data, it is the recommendation of the current department staff, that it would be a mistake to move the Central Station from the downtown area. We would recommend securing new properties on Thornton Avenue or Cutts Avenue so the fire department could continue to take advantage of the Scammon’s corner intersection to access the major travel routes. The advantages gained by the larger North Street site would not be offset by the increased travel times to what we consider higher hazard occupancies. We also believe that the best way to protect Saco would be to locate a manned substation with direct Rt. 1 access in the area of the Millbrook Industrial Park.

Our view is that the inadequacies of the current Central Station would be cost prohibitive to correct and in order for a new station to serve the city’s needs for its 60+ year life expectancy it should be designed incorporating all the available new technologies and efficiencies. If the city accepts the 2-manned station concept, Central Station would be designed to hold less apparatus because some of the Central apparatus would be relocated to the Millbrook Station.

The construction of a new station in the crowded downtown area would present special design challenges due to limited site size but would better protect the citizens and their property."

Recently the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland announced that churches in the Saco Biddeford area would be consolidated. The Notre Dame parish church on Cutts Avenue and Thornton Avenue has expressed an interest in a land swap that would exchange the planned fire station location on North Street for church property on Cutts and Thornton. The city is actively exploring this proposal, which offers many benefits to the department and the downtown.

Plan for New Development

Downtown Saco enjoys high levels of business occupancy, with the exception of Saco Island, which is addressed by the Island Point project. The City should investigate locations for business expansion in the downtown.

The west side parking project and the Central Fire Station relocation might both provide the opportunity for new building sites just west of Main Street, between Thornton and Water Streets. Other opportunities may exist along Storer Street, in the redevelopment of Elm Street, which has already occurred on two corners of Scamman’s Corner, and on Main Street north of City Hall. Rezoning might be needed if this were considered. The Catholic church consolidation
might eventually lead to opportunities at Most Holy Trinity Church, which is still active, and at its rectory, a historic building which is now unoccupied.

Downtown residential sites should also be developed. Some of the sites which may emerge for business development should also be considered for residential development or combined development.

Recommendations

Parking
1. Continue improvements to downtown parking system. Work with all stakeholders to determine parking lot users, time limits, phased improvements, and public/private cooperative agreement needs. To succeed it is essential the major stakeholders "buy-in" to the parking system.
2. Initiate parking improvements on the lots behind the west side Main Street buildings between Water Street and Storer Street, Pleasant Street, Thornton Avenue, and possibly
Cutts Avenue; Negotiate agreements with key owners so that the connections and improvements needed can occur and so that they benefit all.

3. Develop as part of the west side parking improvements a pedestrian walkway plan next to the parking lots and throughways, in cooperation with building owners; provide for new, rear entrances, paving, park-like landscaping, trash collection, deliveries and lighting; implement the plan, block-by-block, in phases.

4. Negotiate with the owners of lot 51 (Town House) on the north side of Storer Street for public parking. Work with Saco and Biddeford Savings to integrate their parking areas and to provide for a small park in the center of the property.

5. Consider parking opportunities created by fire department relocation.

6. Pepperell Square continues to have need for additional parking. Options should be developed if there are opportunities nearby.

7. Monitor the enforcement of parking regulations and time limits, and work with landlords and merchants to manage the best parking for customers and clients; ensure employees/tenants park vehicles in less convenient spots (side streets, train station) so that customers and clients have spaces conveniently available.

8. Educate stakeholders on where to direct customers to park as they call for directions or complain about parking.

9. Improve mapping and signage for parking.
**Signage**

1. Continue to improve the informational sign program for downtown Saco to include orientation welcome information and parking lot information. Encourage private businesses to model their informational signs on the City design to establish a consistent and attractive image in downtown.

2. Place directional signage on both ends of Thornton and Storer Streets to public restrooms so visitors can find restrooms at City Hall and the Police Station. Direct motorists to parking lots, the police and fire stations, and other key downtown destinations.

3. Place orientation signs on the outskirts of downtown so as to direct visitors to important locations in downtown; these signs should be on numbered routes.

4. Place parking lot signs, all designed along the same theme, at each lot so motorists can see what kind of parking (i.e., public/private/short term, etc.) is available.

5. The transportation center warrants a major orientation sign.

6. Wayfinding signage should be installed in appropriate locations downtown and elsewhere in the City to direct people to the downtown.

**Traffic, pedestrian, bicycle**

1. Invetigate with Biddeford and mill district stakeholders the possibility of a new bridge across the Saco River, mill district to mill district.

2. Improve pedestrian safety at Main Street crosswalks; use plastic cone signs in the center of the street to mark crosswalks, but use tougher, larger markers; maintain the bold crosswalk striping.

3. Embark on a sidewalk improvement program to upgrade those sidewalks in poor condition; provide concrete sidewalk paving on all streets other than Main, Thornton, Cutts, and Pepperell Square. Maintain a high level of maintenance and sanitation on sidewalks.

4. Place bicycle parking racks in Pepperell Square, along the walkway in back of Main Street, near the bike shop and in the Saco Valley Shopping Center.

5. Review timing of traffic light at Pepperell Square.

6. A new pedestrian bridge over the Saco River, from mill district to mill district, should be studied and constructed if warranted.

**Streets, Sidewalks, Sewers**

1. Complete construction of sidewalks and lighting on Main Street to Beach Street, including improved turning radius to Beach Street.

2. Complete reconstruction of Cross Street and Scamman Street.

**Design and Lighting**

1. Install new street lights on Main Street north of City Hall to Beach Street in 2008, and beyond to Thornton Academy when funding becomes available. As part of the Saco Island redevelopment street lighting will be replaced in 2009. Utilize the same fixtures used in Main Street and Pepperell Square.

2. Extend the street lighting scheme along Thornton, from Main to Elm and place these same fixtures at the Scamman Corner intersection - as part of a "gateway" to downtown. Use this same lighting style and theme elsewhere in Downtown.
3. Ensure a consistent design theme for all major off-street parking areas, i.e., lights, trees, signage, and landscape elements should be the same; specifically, require that trees be planted throughout the improved parking area west of Main Street - to provide shade and break up large paved areas.

4. Make the Elm/Scamman/Thornton intersection into an attractive "gateway" within downtown; develop landscape and visual improvements to make the intersection a suitable "front-door" to downtown.

5. Improve the visual connection to Saco Island from Main Street. Re-establish street edge on west side of Main Street on Saco Island.

6. Create three memorable, attractive gateways to downtown at the Elm/Main/Beach intersection, at Scamman Corner, and on Saco Island near the Main/Gooch intersection; design each to fit its setting and incorporate signs, lighting, gardens, landscaping, and benches (where appropriate).

7. Re-establish the street edge on west side of Main Street on Saco Island by creating a brick wall or other hard edge.

8. Explore public art as enhancement to downtown

9. Some low cost efforts which should be implemented include:
   • Acquire four sets of banners
   • Acquire and install holiday lights
   • Purchase flower planters

Parks and Trails
1. Continue to work with Saco Spirit and the Riverwalk committee to rehabilitate Riverfront Park and extend the Riverwalk to Hall Avenue.

2. Consider a Water Street trail to Jubilee Park.

Public Buildings
1. Work to establish a new Central Station on the current site of Notre Dame Church.

2. A local history exhibition should be developed for the new train station, for the Saco Museum, and for the schools.

Plan for New Development
1. Plan for new commercial construction in downtown by making development sites available. These may include areas near the consolidated west side parking, along Storer and Thornton Streets, at Scamman's Corner, along Elm Street.

2. Consider opportunities for new office, retail, and residential development in the Thornton-Cutts area in light of the pending departure of Notre Dame Church and the contemplated relocation of the Central Fire Station to the Notre Dame site.

3. Residential sites should also be considered in these areas.
### Chapter 6

**Implementation of Revitalization Strategies**

This table gathers the recommendations from the previous chapters of the report in one place, and identifies the responsible parties for each action, and gives a preliminary indication of potential timing for the action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SACO ISLAND</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Timing/Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complete construction of the Saco Transportation Center,</strong> which will serve as the station for the Downeaster Amtrak service, for bus service, and as a regional information hub.</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saco, Biddeford, and mill district interests should work to close the Maine Energy plant.</strong></td>
<td>City, all</td>
<td>On-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cities of Saco and Biddeford and mill district stakeholders should work closely together on a mill district planning study already initiated by the two cities.</td>
<td>Two cities</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mill 108, the 55,000 s.f. mill at the end of Gooch Street, should be considered for integration with the remainder of the development. Commercial uses or a hotel might be considered in the short term. Housing might be considered when Maine Energy is shuttered.</strong></td>
<td>Island developer, City, Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Saco Island traffic situation should be monitored</strong> and public transportation and pedestrian improvements should be considered as traffic increases.</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>On-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long term monitoring, planning and management of nearby parking</strong> is necessary with the emerging uses on Saco Island Consider a Saturday Farmer’s Market on Saco Island.</td>
<td>City, Island developer</td>
<td>On-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOUSING</strong> The Island Point developer perceives an opportunity for housing in downtown Saco. Other opportunities for housing in all income levels should be identified and pursued. Housing deficiencies in multi-family units should be addressed cooperatively with a program of code enforcement. The city should continue its focus on green and sustainable development projects, especially in the downtown. Locations for new housing in the downtown should be considered, whether for housing alone or as mixed use projects.</td>
<td>City, developers, non-profits</td>
<td>2008, on-going</td>
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Saco Downtown Plan – 2007
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The City should continue the public/private partnership</strong> with City, Saco Spirit to manage and improve the downtown.</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit should continue to operate with its four committee structure</strong>, modeled after the National Main Street program.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop an ongoing funding mechanism.</strong> The City should continue its long term support of Saco Spirit, and Saco Spirit should work to develop the organization's fundraising capacity.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit, City</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit should work to remain certified</strong> by the Maine Downtown Center and to become recertified by the National Main Street Center.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retaining certifications will require a firm volunteer and financial base</strong>, and will require retaining a full time director</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit's 2007 – 2008 work plan</strong> should be the focus of its efforts.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The 2007 – 2008 work plan should be updated</strong> based on this downtown plan.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit should offer a professional-level salary for a qualified director</strong> in order to overcome the frequent turnover of directors.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit board members should be trained in the National Main Street approach</strong> each year as recommended in the 2002 Resource Team visit. This training should extend to individual committees, where each should be reacquainted with its role on an annual basis.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Chamber of Commerce branding of Saco and Biddeford initiative should be supported</strong> to assist promotional efforts.</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce, City, Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<tr>
<th>Marketing and Promotion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop a tourist attraction program</strong> coordinated with the Chamber of Commerce. Include joint advertising in tourist publications, Cable TV spots in Old Orchard Beach and Kennebunk-Kennebunkport, and placement of Downtown Saco business directories and maps in tourist information centers and area motels. Heritage tourism and “quaint downtown image” should be part of the effort.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit, Chamber</td>
<td>On-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop a direct mail and email marketing</strong> effort to target customers who patronize specialty retail stores in downtown.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heritage tourism promotions</strong> should be developed for Saco and the region.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit, City</td>
<td>On-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joint marketing with the Saco Valley shopping center tenants</strong> and Main Street area businesses and full integration with the downtown promotional efforts should be developed.</td>
<td>Saco Spirit</td>
<td>On-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undertake joint advertising and sales promotions</strong> at key times of the year where shoppers are rewarded for multiple purchases on the same day.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> On-going</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Promote Downtown Saco in a frequent email newsletter</strong> as a &quot;good place to do business&quot; with positive press/media stories.</th>
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<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> On-going</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Develop marketing efforts which target</strong> and recruit new homeowners and renters.</th>
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<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> On-going</td>
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### BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Undertake a targeted business attraction business program</strong> to attract new business to the area. (1) Prepare package highlighting the location, the existing business mix, and characteristics of the trade area, (2) Work with regional commercial real estate brokers, (3) Recruit business people to make contacts with prospects, (4) Develop a list of businesses that may relocate to Downtown Saco, contact them and follow-up. Publish useful marketing information on the Web.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> 2008</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Encourage and promote a downtown restaurant district</strong> in Saco, either with Biddeford or alone.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> 2008-2010</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Traditional downtown businesses and landlords should work closely</strong> with these new stakeholders whose large scale new activity on Saco Island and in the Biddeford mill district will help provide additional local market supports for downtown.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> On-going</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Creative Economy has some strength as a revitalization agent</strong> for downtown. Saco and Biddeford should monitor and encourage this sector.</th>
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<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> On-going</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Community wireless internet access</strong> (wi-fi, wi-max) should be pursued in the downtown and might give an advantage to certain economic sectors, such as the creative economy.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> 2008-2010</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Distribute factual information packages</strong> about the Saco Trade Area.</th>
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<td><strong>Saco Spirit</strong> 2008</td>
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### PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

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<td><strong>Continue improvements to downtown parking system.</strong> Work with all stakeholders to determine parking lot users, time limits, phased improvements, and public/private cooperative agreement needs. To succeed it is essential the major stakeholders &quot;buy-in&quot; to the parking system.</td>
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<td><strong>City, private owners, Saco Spirit</strong> On-going</td>
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<th><strong>Initiate parking improvements</strong> on the lots behind the west side Main Street buildings between Water Street and Storer Street, Pleasant Street, Thornton Avenue, and possibly Cutts Avenue. Negotiate agreements with key owners so that the connections and improvements needed can occur and so that they benefit all.</th>
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<td><strong>City, private owners, Saco Spirit</strong> 2008-2010</td>
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Develop as part of the west side parking improvements a pedestrian walkway plan next to the parking lots and throughways, in cooperation with building owners; provide for new, rear entrances, paving, park-like landscaping, trash collection, deliveries and lighting; implement the plan, block-by-block, in phases.

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<tr>
<th>Negotiate with the owners of lot 51 (Town House) on the north side of Storer Street for public parking. Work with Saco and Biddeford Savings to integrate their parking areas and to provide for a small park in the center of the property.</th>
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Consider parking opportunities created by fire department and Notre Dame church relocation.

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<tr>
<th>Pepperell Square continues to have need for additional parking nearby. Proactive and opportunistic opportunities should be developed.</th>
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<th>Monitor the enforcement of parking regulations and time limits, and work with landlords and merchants to manage the best parking for customers and clients and ensure employees/tenants park vehicles in less convenient spots (side streets, train station) so that customers and clients have spaces conveniently available</th>
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<th>Educate stakeholders on where to direct customers to park as they call for directions or complain about parking</th>
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<td>City, Saco Spirit</td>
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<tr>
<th>Improve mapping and signage for parking.</th>
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<tr>
<td>City, Saco Spirit</td>
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**Signage**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Continue to improve the informational sign program for downtown Saco to include orientation, welcome, information, and parking lot signs. Encourage private businesses to model their informational signs on the City design to establish a consistent and attractive image in downtown</th>
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<th>Place directional signage on both ends of Thornton and Storer Streets to public restrooms so visitors can find restrooms at City Hall and the Police Station.</th>
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<th>Place orientation signs on the outskirts of downtown so as to direct visitors to important locations in downtown.</th>
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<th>Place parking lot signs, all designed along the same theme, at each lot so motorists can see what kind of parking (i.e., public/private/ short term, etc.) is available</th>
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<tr>
<th>The transportation center should have a major orientation sign</th>
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<tr>
<th>Wayfinding signage should be installed in appropriate locations downtown and elsewhere in the City to direct people to the downtown.</th>
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<tr>
<td>City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traffic, pedestrian, bicycle</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improve pedestrian safety at Main Street crosswalks</strong>; use plastic cone signs in the center</td>
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<tr>
<td>of the street to mark crosswalks; maintain the bold crosswalk striping.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Embark on a sidewalk improvement program</strong> to upgrade those sidewalks in poor condition;</td>
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<tr>
<td>provide concrete sidewalk paving on all streets other than Main, Thornton, Cutts, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepperell Square. Maintain a high level of maintenance and sanitation on sidewalks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place bicycle parking racks</strong> in Pepperell Square, along the walkway in back of Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street, near the bike shop and in the Saco Valley Shopping Center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review timing</strong> and movements permitted by the traffic light at Pepperell Square.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A new pedestrian bridge over the Saco River</strong>, from mill district to mill district,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should be considered by the two cities and the mills district stakeholders and constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if warranted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Complete construction of sidewalks and lighting on Main Street to Beach Street, including</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improved turning radius to Beach Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complete reconstruction</strong> of Cross Street and Scamman Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design and Lighting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Install new street lights on Main Street</strong> north of City Hall to Beach Street in 2008,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and beyond to Thornton Academy when funding becomes available. As part of the Saco Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>redevelopment street lighting will be replaced in 2009. Utilize the same fixtures used in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street and Pepperell Square.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extend the street lighting scheme along Thornton</strong>, from Main to Elm and place these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same fixtures at the Scamman Corner intersection - as part of a &quot;gateway&quot; to downtown, at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use this same lighting style</strong> and theme elsewhere in Downtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensure a consistent design theme</strong> for all major off-street parking areas, i.e., lights,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trees, signage, and landscape elements should be the same; specifically, require that trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be planted throughout the improved parking area west of Main Street - to provide shade and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break up large paved areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Make the Elm/Scamman/Thornton intersection</strong> into an attractive &quot;gateway&quot; within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>downtown; develop landscape and visual improvements to make the intersection a suitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;front-door&quot; to down-town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improve the visual connection to Saco Island from Main Street.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Re-establish street edge on west side of Main Street on Saco Island.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A local history exhibition should be developed for the new train station for the Saco Museum and for the schools.

Create three memorable, attractive gateways to downtown at the Elm/Main/Beach intersection, at Scamman Corner, and on Saco Island near the Main/Gooch intersection; design each to fit its setting and incorporate signs, lighting, gardens, landscaping, and benches (where appropriate).

Explore public art as enhancement to downtown

Low cost beautification efforts should be implemented, including:
- Acquire four sets of banners
- Acquire and install holiday lights
- Purchase flower planters

PARKS

Pepperell Park should be considered for skating in winter.

Build a Water Street trail to Jubilee Park.

Continue to develop the River Walk Trail, by continuing the private-public partnership with Saco Spirit and trail advocates. Work to rehabilitate Riverfront Park and extend the Riverwalk to Hall Avenue.

PLAN FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

Work to establish a new Central Fire Station on the current site of Notre Dame Church.

Plan for new commercial construction in downtown, as a result of strong occupancy trends. The options:
- Very near where it now is on Elm, Main, and Pepperell Square
- North on Main and North
- Thornton Street
- Pleasant Street
- Storer Street
- Saco Island
- Scamman Elm

Consider opportunities for new office, retail, and residential development in the Thornton-Cutts area in light of the pending departure of Notre Dame Church and the contemplated relocation of the Central Fire Station to the Notre Dame site. Residential sites should also be considered in these areas.

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1. A local history exhibition should be developed for the new train station, for the Saco Museum, and for the schools.
2. Wayfinding signage should be installed in appropriate locations downtown and elsewhere in the City to direct people to the downtown.
Chapter 7
Housing and Community Revitalization (2013)

"Without bold, new initiatives and positive public/private action downtown could lose the opportunity to spark downtown's revitalization..." 1998 Downtown Plan

Previous downtown plans (1998, 2007) have focused on improving city infrastructure, redeveloping Saco Island, and managing downtown business development through the National Main Street program in partnership with Saco Spirit. Community revitalization was mentioned, but downtown housing development and downtown housing rehabilitation were not adequately emphasized.

Since the adoption of the Downtown Plan on November 26, 2007, the City has renewed its traditional emphasis on housing. The City developed the Saco Housing Strategy (Council adoption, Nov. 19, 2009), and the 2011 Comprehensive Plan (Council adoption, March 7, 2011), both of which emphasize the City's commitment to housing, especially in the downtown. The Saco City Council has adopted a vision in its 2006 Strategic Plan that emphasizes the provision of a "high quality of life" for Saco citizens, and sets as its first goal the revitalization of downtown.

In the 1970s and 1980s the City utilized the UDAG (Urban Development Action Grant) and CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) programs to address blighted housing and industrial sites in the Water and Storer Street areas. More recently the City has utilized its zoning powers to increase densities to improve the economies of housing creation in the downtown.

Projects include two elder housing projects at the Wardwell Retirement Neighborhood, the Park Street Lofts, and two nearby projects by the Volunteers of America.

The recently abandoned Saco Central Fire Station on Thornton Avenue is also being deployed in the housing cause. Housing Initiative of Northern New England will build four housing units in that future mixed use building. A closing is schedule in mid-September.

The Boilerhouse Lofts project on Saco Island (right), scheduled to begin construction next month, will add 37 units of housing adjacent to the Amtrak Station.

The City Code Enforcement Department for some five years has focused on blighted buildings in the downtown. Most of these building are three to five family older rentals with poor upkeep and maintenance. Called the Neighborhood Blight Prevention Program, the project has focused on the Storer Street and other nearby...
neighborhoods. The project has been guided by the following statement:

**Quality of Life:**
- Providing a safe environment for citizens and visitors.
- Protecting and preserving our historic resources by not allowing blight to gain a foothold in those neighborhoods where these resources exist.

This objective:
- Promotes diverse, affordable, safe and sanitary housing.
- Promotes infill development by requiring building owners to upgrade or remove marginal and blighted properties into safe and desirable living units.
- As many of these buildings are located in the downtown area, this objective also supports a vibrant downtown.

The *Neighborhood Blight Prevention Program* has achieved good results in remediying substandard conditions of 25 downtown properties. These results are outlined in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street Address</th>
<th>Map</th>
<th>Lot</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th># of units</th>
<th>date l.d.'ed</th>
<th>date complete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 Cleveland St.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>accessory</td>
<td>12/27/2010</td>
<td>6/6/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 Storer St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11/2/2010</td>
<td>11/30/2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54-56 Storer St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/18/2011</td>
<td>7/1/2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140 Pleasant St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>rehabilitated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/22/2010</td>
<td>7/31/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 Lincoln St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>stalled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 Beach St.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>just initiated (V)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Deering Ave</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>167-1</td>
<td>Rehabilitated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3/28/2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sheppard Ave</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Being foreclosed/rehabed (V)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/11/2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112 Elm St.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Being foreclosed (V)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11/10/2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Market St.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2nd complaint 7-5-13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6/7/2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>57 Laurel St.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>rehabilitated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/25/2011</td>
<td>12/21/2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>276 Lincoln St.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>in progress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/13/2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Pleasant St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>commercial</td>
<td>4/2/2012</td>
<td>5/1/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Elm St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>stalled</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>90 Temple St.</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>condemnation proceedings(V)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/9/2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Market Street</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>rehabilitated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11/30/2011</td>
<td>4/13/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87 Forest St. #2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>21-1-1</td>
<td>rehabilitated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/29/2011</td>
<td>12/10/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 School Street</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>rehabilitated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5/8/2012</td>
<td>9/26/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 Common St.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>demolished</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5/10/2012</td>
<td>6/25/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 Free Street</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>demolished</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/2/2012</td>
<td>6/12/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179 Lincoln St.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>accessory</td>
<td>7/20/2012</td>
<td>6/21/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122 Temple St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td>3 &amp; warehouse</td>
<td>10/17/2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127 A Buxton Rd.</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>45-6</td>
<td>condemnation proceedings(V)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10/9/2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Dyer St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>just initiated (V)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6/5/2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72 Pleasant St.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>just initiated (V)</td>
<td>accessory</td>
<td>6/3/2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(V) = vacant

Saco Downtown Plan - 2013 Amendments

Chapter 7- 56 -
It's not just the smaller buildings whose condition has declined. In the 30 years since some of the previous revitalization efforts were undertaken, some of the larger complexes from that era have become old and worn.

The Riverview Apartments on Water Street began life as a 19th century industrial complex, and saw new life 30 years ago as a community revitalization project. This 61 unit rental project is located in the former Garland Manufacturing buildings along Water Street and the Saco River. Originally developed in the early 1980's via the MSHA 60/40 Rental Program, this project was the centerpiece of the revitalization of Water Street, which accomplished the following goals through a UDAG Grant awarded to the City:
- Relocation of Garland Manufacturing to the newly created Saco Industrial Park.
- Re-use and rehabilitation of the former Garland Manufacturing facility (an historic mill) into 61 market rate rental apartments and 6000 SF of commercial office space.
- Street, sidewalk and landscaping improvements in the public R.O.W. along Water Street.

In total these improvements significantly changed the former industrial section of Water Street into an integrated mixed use portion of the downtown.

The owner is now seeking to replace exterior windows, replace the old siding with new, rehabilitate two handicapped units, and repair porches and exterior trim. These improvements,
along with street improvements planned by the City, will provide a needed boost to the Water Street area.

The City’s Comprehensive Plan notes that a substantial share of the City’s rental housing stock is in older multifamily buildings of varying condition. The City should consider efforts to work with the owners of these properties to assure that they are well maintained and offer desirable housing. The Comprehensive Plan also states that the City should continue to work to maintain and upgrade the City’s older housing stock and intown neighborhoods, and that the City should continue to seek state funding to provide financial assistance to property owners to maintain and improve their property and to upgrade the infrastructure such as weatherization and similar programs. The Riverview Apartment project may be an ideal example of such a project.

**Water Street Improvement Project**

The City of Saco has been wrestling with parking, speeding and riverfront stabilization issues along the river on Water Street over the last few decades. Large storm events have eroded the river bank and severely damaged the roadway, which the City’s Public Works crews have temporarily restored. As part of the future planning of the city’s capital improvements planning, the City of Saco has prioritized this stabilization project and secured funding for Phase 1 of the project. In addition, due to the configuration of this 2-lane, one-way street, there is opportunity for the City to slow traffic down, improve pedestrian safety, and increase parking along this 1,300 foot long roadway. Key elements in our proposed project are:

- Stabilization of the embankment slope along a 400 linear foot section adjacent to the Saco River.
- Relocation of three CMP utility poles within the slope stabilization area.
- Narrowing Water Street roadway section to maintain a single lane of one-way traffic from Main Street to Elm Street with designated on-street parking along the northerly side of Water Street.
- Extension of the pedestrian sidewalk along the southerly side of Water Street to link Main Street to Elm Street.
- Creation of an esplanade between the sidewalk and the roadway curb along the southerly side of Water Street in front of the Riverview Apartments building (Tax Map 38, Lot8).
Also, this area will benefit from a Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) project which will be designed within FY14/15 and constructed in FY16. This PACTS project will include the upgrades to the traffic signals at the intersection of Elm Street and Water Street, including ADA accessibility upgrades, pedestrian signal upgrades, and coordination of the Route 1 corridor traffic signals.

Recent Plans

The 2009 City of Saco Housing Strategy notes that almost a quarter of Saco’s owner occupied housing units were built before 1939; almost half (46%) were built before 1970. Saco’s rental stock is even older than its owner-occupied housing. One third of rental housing was built before World War II. It also notes that the city assessing department rated 87 properties in Saco as “poor quality.” Of those, 23 are multi-family buildings mostly in the downtown core.

The 2011 Comprehensive Plan notes that while most of Saco’s housing stock built in the last two decades is in relatively good condition, there are issues with some of the older housing stock (built before 1960). Deterioration and sub-standard housing conditions are a concern.

It states:

- Saco has a large number of older houses. The cost for heating these houses is high. The City should consider expanded opportunities for weatherization programs.
- Very little conventional rental housing has been built in the City in the last decade. The City should explore ways to enable the private market to develop additional market-rate rental housing especially in intown locations.
- (The City should) maintain the existing housing stock in the City and assure that it provides safe and sanitary housing.
- The current efforts of the Code Enforcement Office and Fire Department to regularly inspect multifamily buildings should continue. In addition, the City should actively enforce City codes in these neighborhoods to assure that the quality of the housing stock does not diminish and that any problems properties are addressed in a timely manner.
- Continue to support private development efforts to revitalize Downtown and Saco Island, as well as the maintenance and improvement of older residential neighborhoods.
- (The Downtown Residential Mixed Use Area, including Water Street should evolve) as a mixed use neighborhood…with a mix of housing types, the reuse of the existing buildings. The neighborhood is more attractive as a result of public investment in streetscape improvements and tree planting to complement private investment in buildings.

The 2011 Downtown West Historic Preservation Report suggests that the City consider a neighborhood conservation district, and adds that the public welfare of the city will be promoted by encouraging conservation, preservation, and revitalization of these distinctive residential neighborhoods and their unique environments.
The 2007 Downtown Plan stated that, "Downtown is attractive for new housing and rehabilitation of older housing particularly in the area west of Main Street," and it remains so. Based on that analysis the plan calls for the community to:
- Develop projects and funding sources suitable for improvements outside of the normal general revenues;
- Plan for housing expansion and improvement in the downtown;
- Treat area immediately west of Main Street (between Water Street and Thornton) as a whole, with a consistent design theme, generous landscaping, and a pedestrian-way behind the Main Street buildings.
These remain valid goals.

Recommendations

1. Plan for housing expansion and improvement in the downtown.

2. Promote diverse, affordable, safe and sanitary housing.

3. Continue to seek funding from state and federal sources to address poor housing conditions in downtown neighborhoods.

4. Continue the Code Enforcement Office's Neighborhood Blight Prevention Program, including the multifamily inspection program, in the downtown area.

5. The Water Street Improvement Project developed by the Saco Public Works Department should be pursued in order to preserve the street from eroding, to curb speeding traffic, and to improve parking.

6. The City should continue to seek state funding to provide financial assistance to property owners to maintain and improve their property. The Riverview Apartment project may be an ideal example of such a project.

7. Continue to support private development efforts to revitalize Downtown and Saco Island, including the maintenance and improvement of older residential neighborhoods.

8. The City should actively enforce City codes in downtown neighborhoods to assure that the quality of the housing stock does not diminish and that problem properties are addressed in a timely manner.

9. Develop projects and funding sources suitable for improvements outside of the normal general revenues.

10. Develop a Revolving Loan Fund oriented toward downtown revitalization.
11. Promote infill development by requiring building owners to upgrade or remove marginal and blighted properties into safe and desirable living units.

12. Treat the area immediately west of Main Street (between Water Street and Thornton) as a whole, with a consistent design theme, generous landscaping, and a pedestrian-way behind the Main Street buildings.

13. Expand opportunities for weatherization programs.

14. The City should explore ways to enable the private market to develop additional market-rate rental housing especially in downtown locations.