

1-2007

# Downtown Westbrook Revitalization Study Update

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# Downtown Westbrook Revitalization Study Update

Westbrook, Maine

January 2007



Prepared by

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# Downtown Westbrook Revitalization Study Update January 2007

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## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

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The City of Westbrook adopted its existing Downtown Revitalization Study in January, 1999. This plan was completed during a much different era in the city, as is clear from reviewing two quotes from the plan's Introduction:

- "Like many city centers in Maine and New England, Downtown Westbrook has seen better days."
- "The streets are more or less empty and there is little of the activity associated with Downtown life."

Eight years later downtown Westbrook faces a much more positive reality. Since the 1999 plan was completed the city and its downtown area have experienced major changes, mostly for the better. Among other things:

- the closure of the Sappi pulp mill has removed a longstanding odor problem from the city;
- rising real estate prices in Portland have driven many artists, artisans and young professionals to find studio and office space in the Dana Warp Mill, as well as housing in the city;
- the construction of the Disability/RMS office building and parking garage on the north side of the Presumpscot River has dramatically changed the face of central business district;
- a Riverwalk trail and related open space improvements have reclaimed the riverfront as an amenity for the downtown area;
- redevelopment plans are underway for the Saccharappa Park site;
- the completion of the Westbrook Arterial and a new Maine Turnpike interchange has greatly improved access to the downtown area; and
- several new retail and dining establishments have opened in the downtown area.

Despite all of these accomplishments, the City of Westbrook acknowledges that there is much more to do to continue. Since so much has changed over the past eight years, the City of Westbrook has committed to put forth a new direction for revitalization activities in its downtown.

This update is envisioned by the City of Westbrook as a framework for current and future redevelopment activities in the downtown area, and not a comprehensive implementation plan. As such, this update focuses on setting a new vision for downtown Westbrook and on broad initiatives for achieving the vision.

## SECTION II: A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

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### Vision Statement

We envision downtown Westbrook as a vibrant and culturally diverse center for living, working and playing.

### Overall Goals

1. To improve and enhance the downtown as Westbrook's center for commerce, community activities, culture and the arts.
2. To preserve and enhance the quality and vitality of neighborhoods adjacent to the Downtown.
3. To continue to improve the retail diversity of downtown's economy in activities, uses and businesses.
4. To encourage growth and development in the downtown area by redeveloping key sites to ensure their consistency with the larger area.
5. To continue efforts to improve and integrate the downtown riverfront.
6. To balance the requirements of motorists with the downtown pedestrian environment and the need to improve pedestrian connections between downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.
7. To restructure parking arrangements for commercial uses to ensure convenient access for customers.
8. To provide a desirable street environment that features well-designed buildings and storefronts, attractive and well-kept storefronts and a welcoming environment for pedestrians.
9. To encourage new and innovative planning and development efforts that improve downtown's image as both a local and regional destination.

### Westbrook's role in the state's Smart Growth agenda

State policy in Maine is on the verge of taking a sharp turn towards a Smart Growth agenda, a trend that will have very positive implications for historic service center communities like Westbrook. The basis for this policy shift is *Charting Maine's Future: An Action Plan for Promoting Sustainable Prosperity and Quality Places*, a Brookings Institution study completed in October, 2006. This report, which was commissioned by a partnership between state government and the advocacy group GrowSmart Maine, found that Maine's best path to future economic prosperity is to invest in initiatives that preserve the Maine "brand" identity. This not only includes the preservation and marketing of the state's spectacular wilderness, but also the revitalization of its historic villages and downtowns.

*Charting Maine' Future* found that, while Maine is growing, most of the state's growth is occurring in suburban areas, a trend that challenges both aspects of the Maine brand. Action steps recommended by

the report include a series of state and local governmental reforms combined with strategic investments in community and labor force development. The most intriguing aspect of the report for Westbrook is the recommendation to raise the state's lodging tax by three percent to establish a \$190 million "Maine Quality Places Fund." This proposal, which is likely to be introduced to the Maine Legislature in 2007, would provide funding for downtown revitalization efforts, land conservation, tourism development and recreational access projects.

Regardless of the outcome of this particular initiative, Maine's current leadership recognizes the importance of its historic downtowns and is likely to provide strong support for downtown revitalization efforts in places like Westbrook. With this in mind, Westbrook should think big about the future of its downtown, as state funding for major downtown improvements is likely to become available in the coming years.

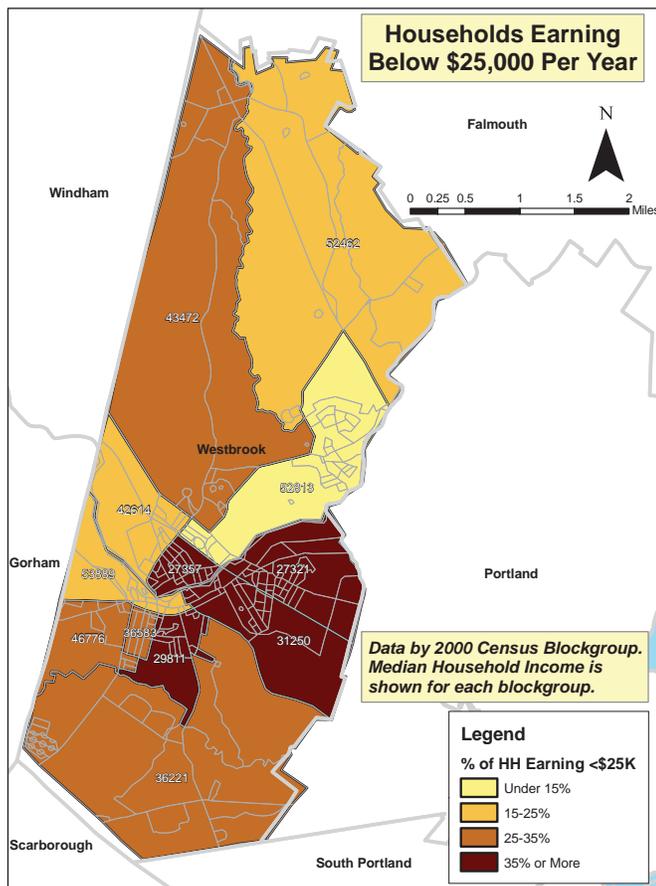
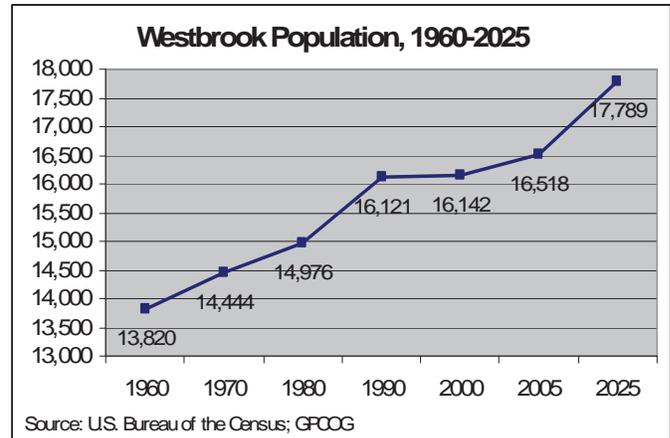
## SECTION III: INVENTORY UPDATE

### Demographic and Economic Profile

Downtown Westbrook strives to again serve as the primary retail, commercial and cultural center for the City of Westbrook. As outlined in Section IV, the City's base of residents and employees in fact serves as the primary trade area for Downtown businesses. For this reason, a review of demographic trends and a future outlook is needed to lay the groundwork for the subsequent Market Analysis.

#### Demographics

After experiencing virtually no population growth from 1990 to 2000, Westbrook has again begun to grow. According to estimates by the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG), Westbrook gained about 400 residents from 2000 to 2005. More promisingly, GPCOG projects that Westbrook's population will increase by more than 1,200 between 2005 and 2025, putting the city back on a growth track.



As of the 2000 Census, Westbrook remained a relatively working class community, particularly in its inner-ring neighborhoods. Data from the 2000 Census show that the city's Median Household Income was \$37,873, far lower than the Portland MSA median of \$44,707. Census data also showed that 31 percent of Westbrook's households earned less than \$25,000 per year.

The map to the left shows the distribution of households earning below \$25,000 per year from the 2000 Census. In Downtown and its surrounding Census blockgroups, more than 35 percent of households earned less than \$25,000, and the median household income levels were \$31,000 or less. By comparison, the median household income levels in outlying areas such as Pride's Corner and the Route 25 West corridor exceeded \$50,000.

Looking at Westbrook's age profile, about 25 percent of its residents are under the age of 20 and 15 percent are 65 or older. The population of children is heavily concentrated in close-in neighborhoods; 39 percent of

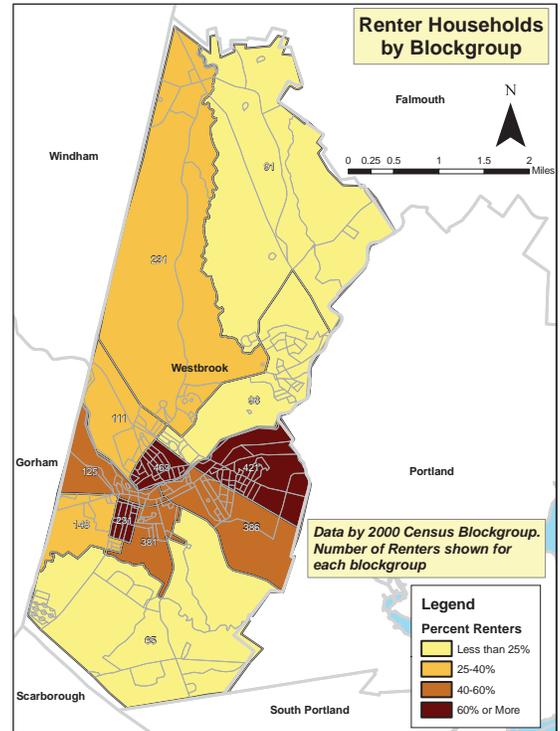
the population under 20 lives in these areas. Conversely, just 29 percent of seniors live in the downtown area. The highest share of seniors lives in the Methodist Road corridor and the area east of Cumberland Mills.

Westbrook has a very high share of renter households; 40 percent of all households rent their units. As the map to the right shows, renters are very heavily concentrated in downtown-area neighborhoods.

### Economic Profile

Westbrook has long been a secondary employment center in the Portland region, though its days as a paper mill town are largely in the past. Today Sappi Fine Paper, the successor to S.D. Warren, only employs 450 people at its facility in the Cumberland Mills area. Today's major employers in Westbrook such as IDEXX Laboratories, Disability RMS and UNUM are largely in professional and technical fields.

The following table shows Maine Department of Labor data for Westbrook for 2001 and 2005.

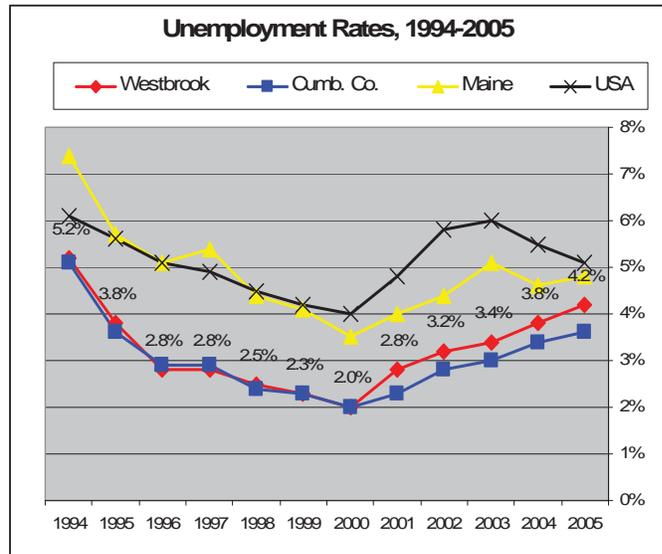


Industry Category	2001	2005	Num Chg	% Chg	% of MSA		Loc. Quotient	
					2001	2005	2001	2005
Construction	968	912	-56	-5.8%	9.7%	8.5%	1.69	1.39
Manufacturing	2,777	1,823	-954	-34.4%	15.6%	12.1%	2.72	1.99
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	3,003	3,702	699	23.3%	6.9%	8.3%	1.20	1.36
Information	143	221	78	54.5%	2.7%	4.5%	0.47	0.74
Financial Activities	824	865	41	5.0%	5.2%	5.5%	0.91	0.90
Professional and Business Services	818	1,219	401	49.0%	3.8%	5.6%	0.67	0.92
Education and Health Services	1,078	1,744	666	61.8%	2.6%	3.8%	0.46	0.63
Leisure and Hospitality	527	607	80	15.2%	2.8%	3.0%	0.49	0.50
Other Services	280	268	-12	-4.3%	5.5%	5.0%	0.96	0.82
Public Administration	125	124	-1	-0.8%	2.5%	2.4%	0.43	0.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,543</b>	<b>11,485</b>	<b>942</b>	<b>8.9%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>

Source: Maine Department of Labor

From 2001-2005 Westbrook added 942 jobs, representing an 8.9 percent increase. During this period, Westbrook increased its share of the Portland region's job base from 5.7 to 6.1 percent. Employment in Westbrook, as measured by location quotients (the comparison of the city's share of regional employment for each sector), is heavily concentrated in blue-collar sectors: Manufacturing, Construction and Trade, Transportation and Utilities sectors. Despite its high concentration Manufacturing employment in Westbrook dropped sharply from 2001-2005, as the city lost more than one-third of such jobs. In the meantime, location quotients for Information and Professional and Business Services both jumped considerably between 2001 and 2005, indicating growth in these white-collar sectors.

Westbrook's resident unemployment rate has historically tracked very evenly with that of the Portland MSA; both the city and region have been well below statewide rates for many years. Since bottoming out in 2000, though, Westbrook's unemployment rate has climbed each year, reaching 4.2 percent in 2005. This rate is well above the regional rate of 3.6 percent.



The fact that Westbrook has experienced rising unemployment in the midst of strong job growth suggests that most of the jobs being created in the city are filled by residents of other municipalities.

The most recent commuting statistics available for Westbrook are from the 2000 Census, and these figures bear out the disconnect between

Westbrook's resident labor force and its job base. In 2000, just 26 percent of Westbrook's working residents worked in the city while 50 percent commuted to jobs in either Portland or South Portland. Also, Westbrook residents only accounted for 21 percent of people employed within the city limits.

### Trends and Outlook

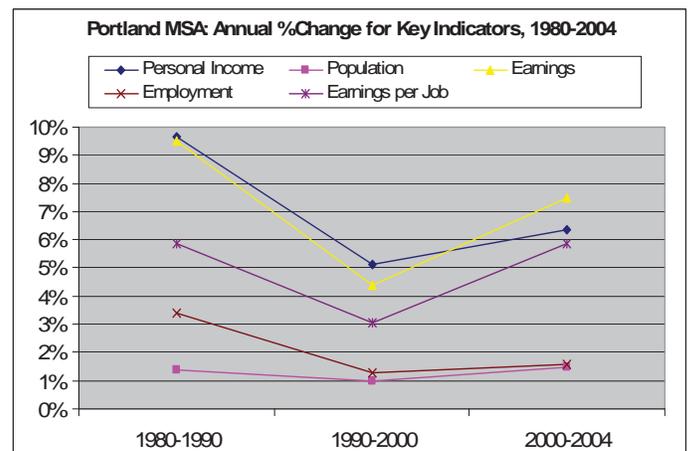
The City of Westbrook is in the midst of a residential and economic growth cycle that is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Unlike many other locations across the United States, the loss of manufacturing jobs in Westbrook has not been replaced with low-wage retail and personal service jobs, but rather with higher-paying professional and technical jobs. While this trend has boosted the city's economic base, it has not necessarily led to economic improvements for its resident population, the majority of which works outside of Westbrook.

## Market Conditions

### Regional Trends

Since 2000 the Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) has experienced a strong economic growth period, with personal income, employment and earnings all growing at much stronger rates than were experienced during the 1990s. The region's population has increased by 1.5 percent annually since 2000, a reasonably strong growth rate for the Northeastern U.S. On the downside, regional earnings per job have only shown a modest increase, a fact that is indicative of the regional shift to a retail and service economy.

On a regional level, both the housing and commercial real estate markets have shown strong expansion over the past several years. According to data compiled by the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG), there were 19,767 new housing units permitted



in Cumberland and York Counties between 2000 and 2005, an average of 3,294 per year. Home sale prices have climbed steeply over this period as well. The statewide median home sale price, as reported by the Maine State Housing Authority increased from \$109,900 in 2000 to \$184,000 in 2005, an increase of 67 percent. Cumberland County's median price for 2005 was the highest in the state at \$239,900.

The regional office and retail markets have also shown strong growth. Commercial broker RAM Harnden reports that, from 2002-2004, the net change in occupied office space in the region was 492,000 square feet. All of this growth occurred in suburban locations; Downtown Portland showed no growth during this period. RAM Harnden reports that the retail market has shown substantial growth as well, adding more than 300,000 square feet from 2001-2004, with several large new developments coming on-line since then in suburban locations.

### **Office/Professional Service**

Downtown Westbrook has experienced substantial growth in its office market in recent years, with growth driven largely by build-to-suit projects for anchor tenants. The most prominent new building is One Riverfront Plaza on Bridge Street. This building, which is anchored by Disability RMS, contains 125,000 square feet of space and is fully leased. Other recent developments include the renovation of 907 Main Street by Ethos Marketing and the new Maine Medical Partners building currently under construction at the corner of Cumberland Street and Harnois Avenue.

According to commercial brokers active in the market all of these developments have been driven, at least in part, by the lack of affordable space in Portland. Rental rates for new office space in Westbrook are in the range of \$14-15 per square foot, net of expenses, compared with about \$18-20 in downtown Portland. Though older office spaces in Westbrook rent for considerably less (about \$9-12 per square foot) these spaces tend to be very small and located in buildings lacking modern amenities. Brokers believe that future office growth in Westbrook will be driven by firms relocating from Portland (like Disability RMS and Ethos) and by medical offices, responding to continued population growth in the western suburbs.

### **Creative Economy**

Spurred largely by the success of the Dana Warp Mill, Westbrook has become a new center for creative economy activity. Ten years ago the 250,000 square foot mill was largely vacant and was home to a handful of mostly industrial tenants paying as little as a dollar per square foot in rent. Improvements to the building, combined with the lack of affordable space for arts and creative users in Portland, have driven demand from a variety of sources. Current Mill tenants include artists, woodworkers, specialty retailers, dance studios, photographers, graphic designers, nonprofits and a theater company's rehearsal studio.

Today the Mill is 90 percent occupied, with tenants paying about below \$10 per square foot in rent. With the Mill nearly out of space, there is very likely to be demand among creative economy users to find affordable space in other nearby locations. While Westbrook does not have any other mill spaces that are available for such uses, there are several industrial and commercial buildings in downtown that could prove appealing to these types of businesses. However, given the price sensitivity of these users, renovation costs will need to be kept low and/or subsidized to ensure the viability of developments aimed at creative economy users.

Another project on the horizon is the potential acquisition of the shuttered St. Mary's Church property by a non-profit group seeking to possibly convert it into a performing arts center. This use would spur significant interest in Downtown Westbrook and would likely drive demand for related arts, retail and residential uses.

## Housing

Due in large part to the demolition of many historic buildings during the urban renewal period in the 1960s and 1970s, traditional upper floor downtown housing is largely absent from Westbrook. There are, however, many residential units along Main Street's eastern stretches, between Stroudwater Street and Cumberland Mills. There are also very densely built residential neighborhoods located very close to Main Street that are physically separated from Downtown. The Frenchtown neighborhood sits just across the Presumpscot River from Main Street, but its two bridges at Bridge and Cumberland Streets are a mile apart, making access difficult. On the southern side of Main Street, William S. Clarke Drive presents a daunting barrier for pedestrians to cross.

Downtown area neighborhoods have, to date, remained remarkably stable. Many homeowners in these areas have lived in Westbrook for decades and turnover has been relatively modest, according to local realtors. However, as residents in these neighborhoods continue to age in place, there is likely to be much more turnover in the coming years and these neighborhoods' combination of historic charm and affordability will make them attractive to young households that cannot afford housing in similar neighborhoods in Portland and South Portland. Another driver of housing is the job base in Westbrook itself. As more professionals work in the city, there should be increased demand for housing located within walking or biking distance from downtown.

In addition several nonprofits have been actively building and renovating workforce and senior housing in the downtown Westbrook area. People's Regional Opportunity Program (PROP) has built or rehabbed 24 units for working families along Brown Street, and reports strong demand for more such units, especially for smaller one-bedroom units for childless couples or people living alone. The Westbrook Housing Authority has had several successful projects, including the re-use of the old High School as senior housing and a workforce housing development on Bridge Street across from the Dana Warp Mill. Both of these nonprofits are continuing to pursue workforce and senior housing developments in Westbrook.

## Retail and Dining

Eight years ago, much of downtown Westbrook's ground-level retail inventory was either vacant or under-utilized. Retail space on Main Street could be had for as little as \$2 per square foot. The 1999 Downtown Revitalization Study set very modest goals for retail, including attracting just one "quality" restaurant and trying to attract resale businesses.

With the arrival of many new employees in the downtown area and the improvement of surrounding residential areas, the retail market has far exceeded the hopes of the 1999 plan. Rents have climbed into the \$10-13 range. Hannaford opened a full-service supermarket on the former Weyerhaeuser site on the eastern edge of Downtown. Several new restaurants have opened, including Chicky's Fine Diner, Burrito, Portland Pie Company and Fajita Grill. Despite these successes, there are still many vacant storefronts in Downtown Westbrook and few new storefront retailers have come to the area.

With continued growth expected among office and creative economy businesses, as well as in the resident market, there should be additional demand for personal and business services uses, as well as from small, regionally-oriented boutiques. All of these activities support what Downeast Magazine recently trumpeted as "Westbrook's New Groove."

## Traffic and Transportation

Discussions with stakeholders, the Mayor's Economic Development Committee and city staff about traffic revealed that traffic and transportation issues in Downtown Westbrook present stumbling blocks, but not major obstacles to continued revitalization efforts. Concerns related to traffic and transportation that need to be addressed include:

### Parking

The parking shortage identified in the just-completed Westbrook Downtown Parking Study/Management Plan is not an immediate problem. There is support for the future construction of a parking garage, but only if it makes economic sense. The general consensus is that management of parking is probably sufficient for the short term.

The one problem spot in need of immediate attention is the area around the Dana Warp Mill, where parking and access issues have reached a critical point. Off-street parking is very limited in this area, causing many mill tenants and visitors to park on nearby residential streets. This problem is further compounded by the City's winter on-street parking ban, which affects both residents and businesses.

### Traffic

Only a few areas in Downtown Westbrook have traffic problems that are in need of addressing. First and foremost is the Bridge Street area, between Main Street and the Dana Warp Mill. The juxtaposition of the angled parking, narrow street, and volume of traffic make this a very difficult location. Another problem spot (though at particular times) is at Dana Court, when vehicles exiting the One Riverfront Plaza parking garage must turn left into traffic. Another spot in need of attention is the Cumberland Mills area, where the current configuration of one-way streets is acknowledged to be a problem, and currently under study by the Me. DOT.

### Transit and Pedestrian Access

The present transit system in Westbrook is very poor and few people use the Metro bus system today. The lack of bus shelters is a glaring need that Metro, together with the City needs to address. Another potential need is for express commuter bus service from Westbrook to Downtown Portland. Such a facility is only desired by stakeholders if it supports businesses that contribute to downtown's growth.

Pedestrian linkages between Main Street and surrounding areas are very poor. Better connections are needed to residential neighborhoods, both across William Clarke Drive and the Presumpscot River. The City is already pursuing a phased plan to enhance pedestrian access across William Clarke Drive, which should begin in 2007 and be completed by 2010. Residents of Frenchtown would very much like to see a pedestrian bridge connecting their neighborhood to Riverbank Park, but this is likely to be a very costly project.

## Urban Design Considerations

Urban design issues were considered by stakeholders, the Mayor's Economic Development Committee, city staff and the consultant. There is a consensus from all parties that Downtown Westbrook suffers from an image problem, both internal and external. Two particular items were cited:

- Visual image needs to be improved: streetscaping and parks are in need of investment and better maintenance;

- Stronger zoning/regulation is needed to ensure that new development occurs in a manner that reinforces the vision for downtown.

After conducting a walking tour of downtown, the consultant prepared a “photo essay” outlining urban design issues in need of consideration by the City of Westbrook. This essay is included as Appendix A. Its findings are as follows:

- Gateways into the downtown area are uneven from a design perspective and do little to announce to visitors that they have arrived in Downtown Westbrook. In addition to arrival and wayfinding signage, better regulation of development is needed at gateways to strengthen the arrival experience into downtown.
- Streetscaping is inconsistent and often poorly maintained. The presence of many continuous curb cuts blurs the line in many locations between pedestrian and vehicular territory. Also, the poor quality of many sidewalks presents a subpar image for Westbrook.
- Better pedestrian connections are needed both within Downtown and between Downtown and nearby neighborhoods. In particular, stronger connections are needed between Main Street and William Clarke Drive to allow for easier access to the Hannaford supermarket and to the neighborhoods across William Clarke Drive from Downtown. As well, the abandoned rail line along the eastern edge of Downtown could be an important connection that ties Westbrook into the regional trail network.
- The design features of existing sites and buildings in Downtown Westbrook do not fit with the typical notion of what constitutes a downtown area. Features like suburban-scale setbacks, parking in front of buildings, one-story buildings with no windows, unregulated edges and unattractive public spaces take away from Downtown’s potential.

These concerns can be addressed in a variety of ways, including zoning changes, design standards, public investments and regional cooperation.

## Recent Responses

Over the past few years the City of Westbrook has taken a number of actions that have contributed to the improvement of its downtown. This section briefly summarizes these responses.

### Capital Investments

The City of Westbrook has undertaken a number of recent improvements that have boosted both the appearance and functionality of its downtown. Most notable among these has been the city’s investment in its Riverwalk Trail. The boardwalk along the Presumpscot River has become an attractive amenity for the city, particularly among office workers and local residents.

Another significant investment was the public financing of the construction of the One Riverfront Plaza parking deck. The addition of this deck was absolutely essential to the completion of the new office building. However, due to agreements with the building’s primary tenant, this deck is now dedicated for private use.

Finally, the City of Westbrook has lent \$985,000 from its Revolving Loan Program to help businesses locate or expand in the city since 2001. Several of these loans have gone to support creative economy business ventures, including Bakery Photographic and Maine Dovetails.

## Regulatory Responses

As this plan was being prepared, the City of Westbrook was actively considering two changes to its zoning ordinance that would begin to address some of the urban design considerations outlined above. These two proposed zoning changes are summarized below.

- **Downtown Housing Overlay** – This overlay, which would only apply to the core area of downtown (between Spring and Saco Streets) would offer two significant incentives for high-density housing development: 1) a residential density of one unit per 500 square feet of site area (up to 87 units per acre); and 2) relaxed parking requirements that stipulate either one space per dwelling unit (on or off-site) or a fee-in-lieu to help the city fund a municipal parking structure in this section of downtown.
- **Village Overlay Update** – Proposed changes to the existing village overlay zone would strengthen the city's ability to help preserve historic downtown buildings and to further regulate the compatibility of new development with historic buildings.

## SECTION IV: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

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### Market Analysis

The 1999 Downtown Westbrook Revitalization Study identified three sources of customers for downtown Westbrook businesses: 1) residents of Westbrook plus Sagamore Village in Portland and part of South Windham; 2) downtown workers; and 3) workers in other sections of Westbrook. Since the 1999 plan was much more oriented towards reinforcing downtown's role as a community center for goods and services, it did not examine downtown's potential for capturing demand from the larger region.

In re-examining the current and potential future role of downtown Westbrook during this planning process, the Mayor's Economic Development Committee, agreement was reached that downtown Westbrook serves three distinct trade areas:

1. City of Westbrook residents
2. Downtown Commuters and Through-Commuters
3. Other Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area residents

Each of these three trade areas is analyzed below.

### City of Westbrook

Downtown Westbrook continues to fill its historic role as a destination for personal services, banking, professional offices and convenience goods for the population of the entire city. Most customers who use Westbrook for this purpose are residents of the city. As of the 2000 Census, there were 16,142 residents living in the City of Westbrook in a total of 6,863 households. Estimates by GPCOG state that the city's population increased to 16,518 in 2005. If the average household size remained the same as in 2000, there would now be 7,022 households in the City of Westbrook. GPCOG reports the city's median household income for 2005 as being \$42,219.

As illustrated by the map on Page 4, income levels are very unevenly distributed throughout Westbrook, with the northern portions of the city have far higher median household income levels than the central and southern portions. However, as housing units in older neighborhoods turn over, new residents tend to have higher income levels than those they are replacing.

Westbrook has a fairly even age distribution that more or less matches that of the Portland MSA. The only significant variation is that Westbrook has a slightly higher share of residents 65 or older than does the MSA and a correspondingly lower share of residents aged 35-54. Westbrook does have a much lower income structure than the region, though, as more than 63 percent of its households earned below \$50,000 in 2000.

### Age & Income Profile, 2000 Census City of Westbrook

	Number	Percent
<b>Age of Population</b>		
Under 18	3,765	23.3%
18-34	3,521	21.8%
35-54	4,904	30.4%
55-64	1,454	9.0%
65+	2,498	15.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,142</b>	
<b>Household Income</b>		
Under \$25,000	2,119	30.9%
\$25,000-49,999	2,233	32.6%
\$50,000-74,999	1,517	22.1%
\$75,000-99,999	613	8.9%
\$100,000+	373	5.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,855</b>	
<b>Median HH Income</b>	<b>\$37,873</b>	

Census data estimated Westbrook's aggregate household income in 2000 as \$311.1 million. Assuming that the average household will spend up to a third of its annual income on the purchase of all types of goods and services, the total buying power of the city's resident base is about \$104 million. Given downtown Westbrook's proximity to Portland, the Maine Mall area in South Portland and even the Westbrook Crossing power center, downtown is not likely to capture a majority share of resident spending. However, even one quarter of the resident spending base would represent \$26 million in annual sales. At a sales productivity level of \$250 per square foot (a good target for downtowns), the resident market would support up to 104,000 square feet of retail and service space.

### **Downtown Commuters and Through-Commuters**

This category includes both people employed in downtown Westbrook who patronize downtown businesses during the workday and those who simply pass through Westbrook twice each day. This latter category is mostly comprised of residents who live along the Route 25 and 237 corridors (mostly in Gorham, Windham and Standish) who commute to jobs in Portland or South Portland.

Though no official count is available to determine exactly how many people work in downtown Westbrook, it is reasonable to assume that at least one-third of the 11,485 people employed in Westbrook work in or around downtown. This would translate to about 4,000 downtown area employees. Considering the presence of two large employers (Disability RMS and Sappi Fine Paper), all of the businesses at the Dana Warp Mill, many professional employers, banks, retail stores, restaurants and government employees, this seems like a reasonable estimate. The profile of these individuals is decidedly mixed, with job types running the gamut from low-wage service jobs to six-figure management positions.

National research shows that the typical American worker, on average, spends about \$2,500 per year during the workday on retail goods and services. Thus, the total potential annual sales volume from downtown employees is estimated to be about \$10 million. Though this does not necessarily translate to purchases in downtown Westbrook, it is illustrative of the significant impacts that daytime workers can have on a downtown area.

Regarding commuters, Westbrook is situated along the Route 25 corridor, one of metro Portland's busiest commuter routes. At the present time, the best route for commuters from much of the western suburban region to Portland and South Portland is along William S. Clarke Drive to the Westbrook Arterial. The busiest stretch of this roadway, just to the west of Stroudwater Street, averaged 20,660 daily trips in 2005, according to MaineDOT. Main Street itself averaged 18,340 daily trips at its busiest point, just west of its intersection with Harnois Street.

A 2000 traffic study performed by DeLuca-Hoffman Associates for the new Hannaford store found that, between 4:45 and 5:45 PM on a given Tuesday in September, 1,030 cars traveled on Route 25 through the Spring Street intersection. If it is assumed that this peak hour represents half of all commuters, a total of 2,000 commuters would pass through downtown each day on the way to other locations. Though this is a conservative estimate, it still indicates a great deal of buying potential. If through-commuters averaged even just \$5.00 in purchases in Westbrook per day (which could include breakfast, dry cleaning, video rental, day care, dinner pick-up, etc.), over a 240-day work year, it would represent \$2.4 million in annual sales to the downtown area.

Combining these two groups, the total potential annual buying power of the commuter market is \$12.4 million. If downtown is able to capture 50 percent of this market, it would translate to \$6.2 million in annual sales, which would support about 25,000 square feet of space.

### Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area

Westbrook's recent emergence as a secondary center for the creative economy should continue in the coming years. As this population grows, more performances, concerts, art openings, festivals and other regionally-oriented events will take place in downtown Westbrook, enhancing the appeal of the city as a regional destination. With this in mind, the remaining population of the Portland MSA should very much be considered a trade area for downtown Westbrook.

The table to the right shows the Portland MSA's age and income profile. While the region's age structure is very similar to Westbrook's, the income profile is far stronger: more than 22 percent of all households in the region earn more than \$75,000, compared with just 14 percent of Westbrook residents. The region's median household income as of 2000 was \$44,707, about \$7,000 higher than Westbrook's.

### Age & Income Profile, 2000 Census Portland MSA

	Number	Percent
<b>Age of Population</b>		
Under 18	56,829	23.3%
18-34	53,911	22.1%
35-54	80,616	33.1%
55-64	20,859	8.6%
65+	31,329	12.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>243,544</b>	
<b>Household Income</b>		
Under \$25,000	25,154	25.2%
\$25,000-49,999	30,157	30.2%
\$50,000-74,999	21,929	22.0%
\$75,000-99,999	10,857	10.9%
\$100,000+	11,629	11.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>99,726</b>	
<b>Median HH Income</b>	<b>\$44,707</b>	

The implication of this income structure is that, as a whole, Portland area consumers have more buying power than do Westbrook's residents. Thus, as a target market, the regional market can be expected to be willing to spend more money destination goods and services (e.g., entertainment, dining, event tickets, art purchases, high-end personal services etc.) than would the resident market. The aggregate income for the Portland MSA in 2000 was \$5.81 billion, so the expected regional buying power is about \$1.94 billion. While Westbrook should not reasonably expect to capture even more than one percent of this amount, that still translates to \$20 million in annual purchases. This volume of sales would support at least 80,000 square feet of retail and service space.

### Trade Area Summary

Based on downtown Westbrook's competitive position in the region, it should currently be able to support at least 200,000 square feet of retail and service businesses. According to the profile of downtown usage produced for the 2006 Downtown Parking Study/Management Plan, downtown currently contains the following such space:

- 89,242 SF of retail
- 13,356 SF of restaurants
- 50,345 SF of general business uses
- Total: 152,943 SF of total retail/commercial uses

This total does not include the new Hannaford supermarket, which is located on the edge of downtown. This omission is very important as its inclusion would put the total supply of space over 200,000 SF. It therefore appears that, at the present time, downtown Westbrook has reached its potential for filling retail

and commercial space and that it will need to take steps to grow its resident and commuter markets and to work aggressively to enhance downtown's appeal to the regional market.

## **Economic Development Strategies**

Economic development strategies for downtown Westbrook are designed to support the overall vision statement of this revitalization study: "We envision downtown Westbrook as a vibrant and culturally diverse center for living, working and playing."

In order to achieve this vision, a three-pronged approach to economic development is recommended for the City of Westbrook:

1. Grow target markets
2. Continue to invest in downtown's livability
3. Establish a coordinated Main Street effort

Approaches for each of these strategies follow. Specific implementation steps to support the three strategies are outlined in Section V.

### **Strategy 1: Grow Target Markets**

The Trade Area Analysis demonstrated that downtown Westbrook is more or less serving the demand from its existing markets. Therefore, future expansion of downtown business activity will require growth in its target markets. Though each target market has very different needs, the viability of downtown as a "center for living, working and playing" depends on cultivating all three.

#### **City of Westbrook Residents**

While residential growth in all areas of the city should benefit downtown, attracting growth to outlying areas (particularly the Route 302 corridor) has not been a problem for Westbrook. The greater challenge in growing the resident market is to promote new housing development and rehabilitation of existing housing in downtown and in surrounding residential areas. Growing the resident base and improving these areas will have the added benefit of contributing to the revival of downtown's historic role as an "18-hour" activity center. The focus for growing the resident market should therefore be placed on building a stronger resident base in and immediately adjacent to downtown.

#### **Commuters and Through-Commuters**

There are two aspects to growing this market. The first is to continue to grow the population of daytime office workers in downtown. This strategy is linked very strongly to the need to identify and target redevelopment sites. Simply put, downtown Westbrook has no greenfield sites, so growing the base of office workers will require the redevelopment or re-use of sites already-developed sites.

The second piece of this strategy is to capture more spending from those who are just traveling through Westbrook twice each day. Downtown Westbrook does have an opportunity to become a hub for regional commuters both by investing in transit facilities and services and by offering businesses that specifically target through-commuters. Fairly quick action is needed on this strategy as a proposed spur from the Maine Turnpike to Gorham would undoubtedly result in altering the commuting patterns of residents of Gorham, Standish and other western suburban

towns. If these commuters become accustomed to using transit or services in Westbrook before such a spur opens, it would greatly enhance Westbrook's attractiveness for this market.

### **Portland MSA Residents**

While the Portland MSA continues to grow and is expected to add tens of thousands of new residents in the coming years, the sheer size of the regional market is not downtown Westbrook's prime concern. Rather, from Westbrook's perspective, growing this market will be much more about increasing the appeal of the downtown Westbrook "brand" to a larger segment of the region's population. More special events, arts and culture-oriented businesses and, most of all, a coordinated marketing effort, will all contribute to Westbrook's appeal to the regional market.

### **Strategy 2: Continue to Invest in Downtown's Livability**

To ensure the ongoing competitiveness of downtown Westbrook in the regional marketplace, the City of Westbrook will need to take steps to improve the livability of the downtown area for residents, employees and visitors alike. The results of recent public spending in downtown are evident, as the city's investment of \$16 million in the past few years on projects such as the Riverwalk Trail and the One Riverfront Plaza parking deck has produced \$27 million in private investment and created 750 new jobs in the downtown area. Future investments will need to be made to support a variety of projects, which could include:

- Gateway and wayfinding signage
- Public parks and open spaces
- Pedestrian improvements in downtown and connecting downtown with nearby neighborhoods
- Transit facilities
- Public parking improvements
- Property acquisition for redevelopment

These initiatives will require careful fiscal planning and coordination with other components of the overall economic development strategy.

### **Strategy 3: Establish a Coordinated Main Street Effort**

Downtown leaders acknowledge the need to bring together businesspeople, property owners, community interests and city government under one banner for the good of downtown Westbrook. This effort will need to encompass business development, marketing, promotion and urban design functions and will require financial support from all involved partners. This model is already well established in literally hundreds of similar communities around the United States via the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center. Closer to home the Main Street Maine program now has nine official communities, including Bath, Biddeford, Gardiner and Saco. Through this statewide and national network a great deal of information and support is available to Westbrook as it embarks on this effort.

## Key Redevelopment Sites

In a built-out downtown area like Westbrook's, planning for future growth necessarily depends on the redevelopment of buildings and properties. This section briefly describes the key redevelopment sites in downtown and suggested approaches for each property.

### Site 1: Saccarappa Park

The Saccarappa Park parcel is a 1.25-acre site located directly across the Presumpscot River from the Dana Warp Mill, fronting on Main Street. This parcel, which is owned by the City of Westbrook, is envisioned as a very high-intensity mixed-use development that will encompass retail, office and residential uses. Prospective developers have cited concerns about providing sufficient parking for this development, though better pedestrian access to nearby municipal parking would likely overcome the problem. The city is actively working with real estate developers to bring this project to fruition and hopes to sell the property for redevelopment in early 2007.

### Site 2: Maine Rubber Site

This industrial site includes several buildings and a parking lot located on 1.25 acres at the western gateway to downtown Westbrook, between Main Street, William S. Clarke Drive and Saco Street. The city hopes the property owners will raze the existing buildings and issue a developer RFP for a multi-level office building with ground-level retail space.

### Site 3: Westbrook Commons

This urban renewal area along Main Street just east of Bridge Street encompasses a public park and several privately-owned, one-story office and retail buildings around it. Though Westbrook Commons has long been targeted as a prime redevelopment area, little action has been taken to overhaul either its appearance or its function. In the coming years, the city should pursue a coordinated strategy to remake this area, including public investments in the park itself, new zoning regulations to require upper floor development and economic incentives to property owners.

### Site 4: Westbrook Housing Authority Site

This 1.45-acre parcel at 789 Main Street contains a 13-unit apartment building that was recently rehabbed by WHA, but has about an acre of unbuilt land running all the way down to the Riverwalk Trail. WHA has further plans to develop housing on the rear portion of this site but has concerns about providing sufficient parking to support this project. The city will need to work with WHA to ensure that this parcel's development is both feasible and will support the goals of this study.

### Site 5: Scattered Auto-Oriented Businesses

There are several businesses along the Main Street corridor that fall into the category of "automobile-oriented," including gas stations, convenience stores, take-out restaurants and service businesses. While these may not be the most ideal land uses for a vibrant downtown area, the city need not force these businesses out in the name of downtown revitalization. Rather, it should pursue a strategy of working with the owners of such properties to mitigate the impacts of their land uses on downtown's visual and pedestrian environment. A combination of stronger zoning/design standards for these and other auto-oriented uses and targeted public investments to improve curb appeal and pedestrian access can accomplish this goal.

## SECTION V: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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This section lays out specific implementation actions to support the vision and goals of the Downtown Revitalization Study as presented in Section II. There are a total of 16 implementation actions proposed, with actions organized into three priority categories:

- Short-Term Actions (2007)
- Medium-Term Actions (2008-2009)
- Long-Term Actions (2010 or beyond)

For each implementation action, the following information is presented:

- Description of the action
- Responsibility
- Revenue Source(s)
- Potential Partners

A matrix showing all actions is presented at the end of this section.

### Short-Term Actions (2007)

#### Action 1: Establish a Westbrook Main Street Program

Downtown Westbrook suffers from a leadership void. There has never been a sustained effort to bring together stakeholders from the business, real estate, community and governmental arenas for the betterment of downtown. With its stock of historic buildings and opportunities for positive redevelopment, Westbrook would benefit greatly from establishing a Main Street Program that follows the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Main Street Four-Point Approach," which includes: Design, Economic Restructuring, Promotion and Organization.

The typical model for establishing a Main Street program is to form a working group that includes stakeholders from all arenas and to determine what sort of issues need to be addressed by the group. Once this group is formed, a presentation should be scheduled by the Maine Downtown Center, which coordinates the Main Street program at the statewide level. The Center's Main Street website is: <http://www.mdf.org/downtown/msmprogram.html>.

Responsibility:	Mayor's Economic Development Committee
Revenue Sources:	City appropriation, private donations
Potential Partners:	Maine Downtown Center

#### Action 2: Strengthen City Center Zone Requirements

Westbrook's present City Center zoning district contains a number of features that contribute to reinforcing downtown identity, including no minimum lot size, no yard depth requirements, and no required parking for most use types. Also, the presence of a Village Overlay Zone provides for some historic preservation protections. Finally, the planned Downtown Housing Overlay would be very beneficial for stimulating downtown housing development.

Still, more should be done to ensure that future development and redevelopment activities are done in concert with village-scale building heights, setbacks, massing and design elements. Suggestions for improvements are:

- Establishing minimum building height of two stories (or three in priority areas)
- Establishing maximum building setbacks to ensure that development engages the street
- Offering density incentives for meeting planning goals (affordable housing, shared parking, etc.)
- Enacting design requirements for new buildings (massing, roof pitches, materials, etc.)

Responsibility: City Planner, Planning Board  
Revenue Sources: NA  
Potential Partners: Mayor's Economic Development Committee

### **Action 3: Develop a Gateway and Wayfinding Signage Plan**

Downtown Westbrook's gateways fail to provide visitors with a sense of arrival and there is little signage pointing motorists to public parking lots or to local landmarks. Attractive and consistent signage is needed throughout the downtown to raise its profile. The first step in this process would be to hire a physical planning contractor to prepare a gateway and wayfinding signage plan. Such a plan would include sign placement, landscaping recommendations, signage design, cost estimates and funding identification.

Responsibility: Economic Development Director, Main Street Program  
Revenue Sources: CDBG, PACTS, City appropriation  
Potential Partners: GPCOG, MaineDOT

### **Action 4: Implement Parking Management Program**

The Westbrook Downtown Parking Study/Management Plan, completed in October, 2006, presents a comprehensive program for managing and expanding downtown's inventory of parking. This action is simply meant as an endorsement of the parking program as it relates to the goals of this study.

Responsibility: Mayor, City Council  
Revenue Sources: City appropriation, parking fees, bonding, PACTS  
Potential Partners: Main Street Program

### **Action 5: Conduct a Cultural Planning Effort**

Westbrook's creative economy boom has occurred largely due to the availability of affordable space at the Dana Warp Mill. With the Mill now nearly full the city now needs to take action to ensure the long-term viability of its arts and cultural resources. A cultural planning effort would bring together artists, nonprofits, city officials and business leaders in a unified manner to ensure the continued development of Westbrook's creative economy. The city is already pursuing a Maine Arts Commission grant for this purpose. Even if the grant is not awarded, the effort can be launched immediately in a more informal manner.

Responsibility: Economic Development Director  
Revenue Sources: Maine Arts Commission, In-Kind Contributions  
Potential Partners: Warren Library, Westbrook Schools, GPCOG, Dana Warp Mill tenants

## Medium-Term Actions (2008-2009)

### Action 6: Institute a Downtown Marketing Program

Westbrook's emergence as a regional hub of the creative economy is hampered by the city's negative image. Once the Main Street Program is off the ground, one of its first initiatives should be to assemble a comprehensive marketing program for downtown Westbrook. This program would ideally incorporate the work of the Cultural Plan (see Action 5).

Responsibility:	Main Street Program
Revenue Sources:	Program budget
Potential Partners:	Economic Development Director, Maine Downtown Center

### Action 7: Pursue Targeted Transportation Improvements

Two areas of downtown, Bridge Street and Cumberland Mills, have been identified as having serious needs for transportation improvements. These areas need to be studied and subsequently improved to respond to these needs. Comprehensive engineering/planning work is needed at both locations.

Responsibility:	Mayor, City Council, City Engineer, City Planner
Revenue Sources:	PACTS, City appropriation, bonding
Potential Partners:	GPCOG, MaineDOT

### Action 8: Redevelop Public Space at Westbrook Commons

The 1970s-era Westbrook Commons urban renewal area is universally acknowledged as an eyesore in the heart of downtown. As a first step in overhauling this section of downtown, the city should remake the harsh public space as an inviting "pocket park" that serves the whole downtown core. Contractors will be needed for landscape architecture and engineering services for this purpose.

Responsibility:	Mayor, City Council, City Planner
Revenue Sources:	CDBG, Downtown TIF, City appropriation
Potential Partners:	Main Street Program

### Action 9: Stage Additional Special Events

There are presently very few special events that draw people into downtown Westbrook. With the presence of Riverbank Park, the Riverwalk Trail and, potentially, a remade Westbrook Commons, there are several locations where public gatherings could be held. A central role of the Main Street program will be to hold such events, which could include concerts, movies, kids events, art shows or sporting events. Such special events would introduce downtown Westbrook to wider audiences and would help raise the image of the entire community.

Responsibility:	Main Street Program
Revenue Sources:	Donations, event revenues
Potential Partners:	Recreation Department, Westbrook Schools

### **Action 10: Build Bus Shelters along Main Street**

One reason for limited transit use in Westbrook is the absence of bus shelters. As part of the larger effort to beautify downtown and to boost pedestrian accessibility, shelters are needed at key locations. Depending on budget, shelters could be built near the intersections of Main Street and Saco Street, Bridge Street, Stroudwater Street, Westbrook Arterial and Cumberland Avenue. Design and construction assistance may be available from academic sources such as the U-Maine Augusta architecture program or the Westbrook Regional Vocational Center.

Responsibility: City Engineer, Economic Development Director  
Revenue Sources: METRO, PACTS, Downtown TIF  
Potential Partners: UMA architecture program, Vocational Center, GPCOG

### **Action 11: Develop Efficient Mortgage Program**

Developed by the Institute for Locational Efficiency (ILE) and funded by Fannie Mae, the Location Efficient Mortgage® (LEM) model is designed to reduce homeownership costs for families living in locations with superior walkability and transit access. In such locations, households incur much lower transportation costs than in outlying areas, so the housing cost-to-income ratio used by lenders can be higher. A LEM pilot program has recently been launched in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle, with the intention of expanding it to other areas in the near future. If the official program is not expanded to metro Portland, Westbrook could pursue its own initiative to work with lenders to use a similar approach to boost homeownership opportunities in downtown Westbrook.

Responsibility: Economic Development Director  
Revenue Sources: TBD  
Potential Partners: Local Banks, Fannie Mae

### **Action 12: Develop Downtown Commuter Hub Facility**

Despite downtown Westbrook's prominent role in the region's commuter system, it lacks express commuter bus service to downtown Portland and has no park and ride facilities. Developing a commuter hub facility could offer several benefits to downtown: improved traffic flow, increased attractiveness of nearby residential areas, business opportunities and better accessibility. This facility could include several elements:

- park & ride lot
- express bus service to downtown Portland and/or to the USM Gorham and Portland campuses
- convenience and service retail (coffee shop, prepared foods, day care, dry cleaner, video rental, etc.)
- links to bicycle trails

Responsibility: Mayor, City Council, City Engineer  
Revenue Sources: PACTS, METRO, Downtown TIF  
Potential Partners: GPCOG, MaineDOT, USM

## Long-Term Actions (2010 or beyond)

### Action 13: Invest in Comprehensive Streetscaping Program

This action is envisioned as a continuation of the gateway and wayfinding signage program (Action 3) and Westbrook Commons improvements (Action 8), and is aimed at improving streetscaping throughout the downtown area. As shown in Appendix A, plantings, streetlights and sidewalks are all in need of improvements. This effort will be time consuming and expensive, but funding should be available from a variety of state programs (depending on state priorities at that time), as well as from local sources. Ultimately, the goal is to switch the street environment from being a liability into an asset.

Responsibility: Mayor, City Council  
Revenue Sources: Downtown TIF, CDBG, Various state programs  
Potential Partners: Main Street Program

### Action 14: Explore Additional Sidewalk and Trail Connections

Improvements in the William S. Clarke Drive corridor are planned over the next several years, with an emphasis on connecting neighborhoods to the south of this major thoroughfare to Main Street and the riverfront. In addition to these improvements, there are other needs for connectivity that should be explored:

- Use of the abandoned railroad corridor from Main Street to Riverside Street in Portland
- A potential pedestrian bridge from the Frenchtown neighborhood to Riverbank Park
- Pedestrian connections from Main Street to the Hannaford supermarket
- Better pedestrian accessibility in the Dana Warp Mill area

Responsibility: Mayor, City Council, City Planner  
Revenue Sources: PACTS, Downtown TIF  
Potential Partners: Portland Trails, GPCOG

### Action 15: Pursue Strategic Acquisitions of Redevelopment Sites

If priority redevelopment sites prove to be difficult to redevelop through regulation and incentives, the city should be prepared to acquire such properties to prepare and hold for redevelopment. This action is intended as a backup position if it becomes clear that less intrusive means are not bearing fruit.

Responsibility: Mayor, City Council, Economic Development Director  
Revenue Sources: Downtown TIF, bonding  
Potential Partners: NA

### Action 16: Plan for "Quality Places" Funding for Downtown Improvements

The State of Maine will be considering the establishment of a \$190 million "Quality Places Fund" in the near future. By 2010, this program may be in place, with funds available to support a variety of downtown revitalization activities. Should this fund be established, Westbrook should begin to assemble its "wish list" for downtown projects in preparation for future applications

Responsibility: Mayor's Economic Development Committee, ED Director  
Revenue Sources: NA  
Potential Partners: NA

## Matrix of Implementation Strategies

No.	Action	Responsibility	Revenue Sources
<b>Short-Term (2007)</b>			
1.	Establish Westbrook Main Street Program	Mayor's ED Committee	City, donations
2.	Strengthen City Center Zone Requirements	Planning Board, Planner	NA
3.	Develop Gateway & Wayfinding Signage Plan	ED Director, Main Street	CDBG, PACTS, City
4.	Implement Parking Management Plan	Mayor, City Council	City, parking fees, bonding, PACTS
5.	Conduct Cultural Planning Effort	ED Director	Maine Arts, In-kind
<b>Medium Term (2008-2009)</b>			
6.	Institute Downtown Marketing Program	Main Street	Program budget
7.	Pursue Targeted Transportation Improvements	Mayor, City Council, Engineer, Planner	PACTS, City, bonding
8.	Redevelop Public Space at Westbrook Commons	Mayor, City Council, Planner	CDBG, TIF, City
9.	Stage Additional Special Events	Main Street	Donations, event revenues
10.	Build Bus Shelters Along Main Street	ED Director, Engineer	METRO, PACTS, TIF
11.	Develop Efficient Mortgage Program	ED Director	NA
12.	Develop Downtown Commuter Facility	Mayor, City Council	PACTS, METRO, TIF
<b>Long Term (2010 and beyond)</b>			
13.	Invest in Comprehensive Streetscaping Program	Mayor, City Council	TIF, CDBG, State
14.	Explore Additional Sidewalk & Trail Connections	Mayor, City Council, Planner	PACTS, TIF
15.	Pursue Strategic Acquisitions of Redevelopment Sites	Mayor, City Council, ED Director	TIF, bonding
16.	Plan for "Quality Places" Funding for Downtown Improvements	Mayor's ED Committee, ED Director	NA