BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

UNLIKE OTHER AREAS IN MAINE, Greater Portland continues to gain population and the City of South Portland is one of its fastest growing communities. Where this growth occurs — in the region and in South Portland — has major implications for our quality of life and the environment.

In the last several decades, much of our region’s growth has occurred in suburban and rural areas, away from job centers and services. This sprawling development pattern, which is difficult to serve by public transit, has contributed to a reliance on vehicle travel, traffic congestion, longer commutes, increased air/water pollution, the degradation of rural landscapes, and the weakening of town/city centers.

To counteract this trend and encourage growth in more appropriate areas — where jobs, housing, and services are in close proximity — the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) has identified over 50 “Priority Centers” in Greater Portland that provide the most promising opportunities for future population and job growth. The Maine Mall is one of six Priority Centers identified in South Portland.

TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE PLANNING INITIATIVE

THE TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE PLANNING INITIATIVE is an example of how PACTS is directing its resources towards Priority Centers. In 2018, PACTS issued a “call for nominations” for pilot sites to develop transit-oriented development concept plans.

Between 2000 and 2010, Cumberland County grew by over 16,000 people, while South Portland added over 1,600 new residents. The City’s Comprehensive Plan anticipates another 1,300-3,800 residents by 2022, which would boost South Portland’s population from 25,002 people (in 2010) to as many as 28,838 people. SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU, CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A map of all priority centers and corridors can be found in the PACTS Long Range Transportation Plan “Destination 2040.” Available at: www.gpcog.org/169/Destination-2040

MAINE MALL STUDY AREA

The focus for this concept plan is the area enclosed by Maine Mall Rd., Gorham Rd., and Philbrook Ave. The site is approximately 90 acres.

Transit-oriented development, known as TOD, is a type of development that maximizes the amount of residential, business, and leisure space within walking distance of a public transit hub. The goal is to promote sustainable growth by increasing walkability and usage of public transit, while reducing dependence on private vehicles.

The City’s Planning Department submitted a proposal for the Maine Mall site, which was ultimately selected. For the past year, PACTS staff have been working with municipal staff and a project stakeholder team to develop a visionary transit-oriented development concept plan for the Maine Mall.
**ABOUT THIS PLAN**

**THE MAINE MALL TOD CONCEPT PLAN** evaluates how the Mall is working today from a transit-oriented development perspective. It identifies the Mall’s strengths, and opportunities for improvement, in relation to best practices in placemaking and design. Finally, the Plan presents a vision for what the Mall area could look like in 10-20 years if redevelopment is guided by transit-oriented development principles.

The Plan is an attempt to reimagine the Mall and show what is possible. It is not meant to be a prescriptive development plan, but rather to serve as a conversation starter, and as a resource for South Portland, PACTS, and other municipalities for future planning and development efforts in Priority Centers.

**THE BENEFITS OF TOD AT THE MAINE MALL**

**THE MAINE MALL IS A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL SHOPPING CENTER**, but it does not currently support housing or many other uses beyond retail and food. The extensive parking lots, often at less than capacity, also create long walking distances and contribute to an auto-dependent atmosphere. TOD principles, when employed at the Maine Mall, could bring many benefits to the immediate area, the City, and the Greater Portland region, chief among them including:

- **A LARGER SUPPLY OF ADDITIONAL HOUSING OPTIONS** to help the City meet its residential housing demand and affordable housing goals.
- **MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE AND WORK IN CLOSE PROXIMITY.** With many jobs in the immediate area, it would be possible for many residents to live and work within walking distance or use public transit. (Particularly beneficial for low-income residents who may not have reliable access to a vehicle).
- **ECONOMIC RETURNS** to property owners and local businesses. Additional housing and mixed uses, such as office, recreation, and entertainment, will bring more people to the area at different times, and for different purposes, thereby boosting business.
- **AN ATTRACTIVE AND VIBRANT PLACE** that is safe, walkable, and interesting. This could serve as a transferable model for additional place-based improvements in other developed areas nearby.
- **AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY PLACE** that reduces the need for vehicle travel, decreases runoff into Long Creek Watershed, and preserves rural and agricultural lands by targeting growth in a focused area.
- **INCREASED TRANSIT RIDERSHIP.** Many of the above benefits also help to increase transit ridership and revenue as well as encourage people to drive their cars less.

If history is any guide, the Maine Mall will continue to evolve and change. The intent of this plan is to guide these changes in a manner that improves the area’s overall quality of place and builds upon its success as a prosperous regional center.

**MAINE MALL TOD CONCEPT PLAN**

**TIMELINE:** November, 2018 - April, 2020

**BUDGET:** $20,000 (no local match).

**DESCRIPTION:** The Plan evaluates how the Mall is working today from a transit-oriented development perspective. It identifies the Mall’s strengths, and opportunities for improvement, in relation to best practices in placemaking and design. The Plan presents a vision for what the Mall could look like in 10-20 years if redevelopment is guided by TOD principles.

**PURPOSE:** To create a shared vision for the future of the Maine Mall that identifies opportunities for compact, mixed-use development that supports and encourages transit use.

**TEAM:** PACTS, City of South Portland, Maine Mall management, Richardson & Associates (landscape architecture consultant), Long Creek Watershed Management District, and MaineDOT. (PACTS staff also met individually with all three bus transit providers, the West End Trails Committee, the Maine Turnpike Authority, and Portland Trails).

**DESIRED OUTCOMES:** The Plan will demonstrate the value of TOD planning and serve as a resource for South Portland, PACTS, other municipalities, and transit agencies for future planning/development efforts in Priority Centers.

**DELIVERABLES:** Final plan/presentation, conceptual site rendering and visualizations.
The project team met with the landscape-architecture firm Richardson & Associates on several occasions to develop the vision for the Maine Mall. The project team found consensus in a common desire to add more housing and mixed uses at the site, and to break up the large expanses of asphalt with more natural features (for example, “daylighting” the South Branch of Long Creek). The team also agreed on a vision to recreate a downtown-like atmosphere at the Maine Mall with a traditional Main Street, short blocks, and a well-connected street network.

**REIMAGINING THE MAINE MALL**

Maine Mall Conceptual Site Rendering

A large-format version of this rendering is available to view or download on the project homepage at: www.gpcog.org/305/Maine-Mall-Transit-Oriented-Development
The Maine Mall TOD Concept Plan is the first in a series of steps that would be needed to redevelop the Mall site. The “next steps” below are primarily written with City staff and elected officials in mind. They are intended to serve as a reference, outlining actions and strategies the City could take to coordinate with stakeholders, set priorities, and lay the groundwork for future transit-oriented development.

**CITY-WIDE TOD PLANNING & POLICY**

- **Adopt a city-wide TOD vision**
  Adopt a city-wide TOD vision to send a clear signal to developers and residents about future development priorities and to establish a mandate for other regulatory changes required.

- **Measure access to transit and set city-wide TOD targets**
  Evaluate existing access to transit and set quantifiable TOD targets. Example targets could include: percent of population (or new development) within a certain distance of transit; and/or percent of population living in TOD zones.

- **Establish TOD Overlay Districts**
  Establish TOD (or “Smart Growth”) overlay districts to provide incentives for appropriate development, or redevelopment, within areas identified for future growth by the City. In order to receive incentives (e.g., density/height increases, parking reductions), proposed developments would need to meet requirements related to affordable housing, walkability, and transit accessibility. Example requirements might include bus pull outs, bus stops/shelters, multi-use paths, public seating, and pedestrian lighting, among other improvements.

**SITE-SPECIFIC PLANNING**

- **Engage property and business owners**
  The City should continue to engage property and business owners in the Maine Mall area to understand their needs and future development desires.

- **Develop an area-wide master plan**
  Develop a master plan for the western side of the City in which the Mall is the primary anchor. A master plan would provide a detailed vision for the area that is more carefully calibrated with market realities, physical and environmental constraints, transportation logistics, costs, and local support. A master plan could also include a market analysis to determine what types of mixed-uses the market can support.

- **Amend zoning at the Maine Mall**
  Amend current zoning at the Maine Mall site to align land use regulations with TOD strategies. Zoning should allow for higher density residential and mixed-use development that supports active, pedestrian-friendly streets and careful transit integration. The Mall is currently in the Central and Regional Commercial District (CCR), which does not allow for residential or mixed-use development.

- **Acquire municipally-owned property**
  The City should seek to acquire property in, or near, the site to use for public purposes (parks, open spaces, parking garages, public buildings, etc.). If property costs are prohibitive, the City should consider requiring future large-scale development in the area to provide parks, open spaces, trail access, or similar contributions.

**TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY**

- **Develop corridor studies for all major roads in the Maine Mall area**
  Improve mobility, safety, and accessibility in the Maine Mall area for all users by developing detailed corridor studies for all major roads. Special attention should be paid to pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, buffering vulnerable users from the high volume of vehicle traffic, the location and design of bus stops and major crossings, road/intersection safety and design, and traffic signal improvements.

- **Improve existing transit facilities**
  Transit service could be improved in the short-term by providing more amenities at existing stops. At the main stop by JC Penney, benches and shelters could be installed and a real-time display provided inside the lobby. At other stops, benches could be installed and accessibility issues reviewed to improve the user experience. The City could also work with transit agencies and Mall owners to pursue funding for a transit-mini hub.

- **Coordinate transit improvements with new development**
  As the site evolves, conduct periodic transit level of service evaluations to explore the feasibility of increasing transit frequency, or, adding new routes (such as bus rapid transit or an internal Mall circulator) to ensure a high level of transit service is provided.

- **Review and revise parking regulations**
  Review, and consider revising, existing parking regulations so available parking is appropriate to average demand.

- **Improve and expand the trail network**
  Continue to partner with the South Portland Land Trust, Portland Trails, and other relevant groups to improve and expand the local trail network.

**ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING**

- **Explore South Branch restoration**
  Make initial inquiries to the Long Creek Watershed Management District, the MaineDEP, and other relevant agencies to explore the feasibility of restoring the South Branch of Long Creek to its original course.

- **Reduce environmental impacts**
  Continue to incorporate best management practices (BMPs) for reducing environmental impacts at the Mall and in the Long Creek watershed. Possible BMPs include piloting heated sidewalks (to reduce chloride concentrations from salt use) and pervious pavement in select locations, stormwater recapture, green infrastructure, and green roofs, among other projects. Coordinate improvements with the goals and actions identified in the City’s “One Climate Future” initiative and forthcoming final plan.

**FUNDING**

- **Review and update the Transit TIF**
  Review and update (if appropriate) the City’s existing Transit-Oriented Development Tax Increment Financing District (Transit TIF). The City’s Transit TIF captures 25% of the increase in the value of real property located in the TIF District.

- **Promote the Opportunity Zone incentive**
  Promote the Opportunity Zone incentive to prospective developers, as well as other state incentives and programmatic resources. The Opportunity Zones incentive is a community investment tool established by Congress to encourage long-term investments in low-income urban and rural communities nationwide. (The City’s western census tract is currently identified as an Opportunity Zone).