

Challenge of Change: Are We Loving Portland to Death?

Saturday, October 3, 2015 | University of Southern Maine

Presented by Creative Portland, Portland Society for Architecture & GrowSmart Maine

Afternoon Break-out Session #1 NOTES

Portland's Peninsula: From East to West Everything is Changing

Panelists:

1. Hilary Basset - Greater Portland Landmarks

Lived in Portland 22 years, Portland different then - economically depressed

Munjoy Hill dangerous, No cruise ships, Historic preservation ordinance in 1990

Fabulous bones and infrastructure, walkable, Architalx, Strong trades, civic engagement possible

development is often redevelopment, cities used to be dirty places no longer, Portland has personality Maine College of Art, Portland Museum of Art Maine Youth Center Repurposing - community effort housing/office space/transportation

Be proactive - do research to get ready for development / bring players together / public & private development

2. Bill Needleman - Portland Waterfront Coordinator

Life long Portland resident, Proud Denison of East Deering, wants his kids to live here

Current waterfront development, Thompson Point

Portland Yacht Services -bigger than a bread box!

IMT - container services - most exciting opportunities - regional scale efficiencies in our transportation systems

JB Brown - Bridge to Bennie's

Waterfront Maine

Portland Fish Pier - future development

Maine Wharf - new building in decades

Union wharf - office and retail development

Casco Bay terminal renewal

Maine State Pier - more concerts & development / public & private collaboration

Amethyst lot - Promotes connection to sea

Gravel lots - development to come

Developments we planned for and asked for and they are coming into being - a great moment

Question: We need more help at the planning department

There is going to be a backlog which will diminish resources for long range planning efforts

3. Chuck Lawton - Chief Economist at Planning Decisions

In Maine since 1969

Income tax and UMS created in 1969

Assumed to part of Maine culture

Who is the "we" - developer / city / community / long time residents / the way life ought to be / insight of those with varying perspectives coming together

Provide a format of information for informed decision making

Compare what is with what is proposed to determine value - \$7 million to \$85 million

Plan meet what the city wants to happen

Gives money to pay for all the things we want

It is like a family meeting all involved - not just a few who think they know what it ought to be pays for what we want and need

4. Alan Kuniholm – Architect at PDT

1983 - economy better here than in Massachusetts

Cat with hot dog in mouth

water edge / historic fabric / Victoria Mansion

Lens of historic fabric - new construction

Need balance in the lens through which we see development

Can we stay connected to vision with the cycles of the economy

Who provides the leadership we need to move forward

India Street Plan - best practice research / Form based Code

How do we support the “we?”

Paint & repair it don't change it

Stop tearing things down - Union Station a travesty

Need more people of color

More in taxes than in mortgage payments

Be a good neighbor

Average attendee 29 years at events - mind set really matters

A process that welcomes people and is open to new ideas

Diversity - need to reach out

Regionalism - How are we working together?

Maine Mall created decline in Portland - how do we work together

How is Portland going to be perceived in the future

What is the definition of Portland

What is our legacy - broaden the conversation beyond Portland

Who gives a shit if you are from away - it doesn't matter

Who runs the city? Seems an unresolved question.

What opportunities that don't happen that become fortunate future opportunities

1987 referendum about employment identity as a community

The we is changing all the time

The we has changed over time
Need to update master plans - plan by a different we
Bayside Plan by another we - how do we fix that
Change is complicated - development is regional in nature not just a local issue
Infrastructure problems not being adequately address by the city
Pension obligation bonds weighing on our future
Competence and leadership not there to support development
Revenue and expense needs to be looked at for development
Can we support the development we want to happen?
Develop or not develop - keeping things the same is not an option we need more revenue
90% conversation about the waterfront
Portland at a tipping point - issues in the neighborhoods need attention
If we grow too much these conversations may not be possible
The we is always changing and the plans are 20-30 year old plan
Need a reevaluation process to continually update plans - the missing piece
Not enough affordable housing for young people
No inventory in Portland
Need new development
Next generation we need to help them stay here
We need to be thoughtful and helpful and move forward as community
Five year plan renewal requirement like in Vermont
Legitimacy of the plan - look at other communities for best practices
Continual referendum not a good thing
Congress Square an example of citizen improvisation
Need better media coverage of controversial issues - hard to be informed
Uninformed citizens deciding the outcome of complex issues
Is the referendum process a bad idea - yes
The issue of trust - there is not enough trust in community
Decay in trust nationwide issue
Successful projects that engage community and are celebrated
Process that results in nothing decays trust
No talk about homeless and indigent here today
No way to move forward to help these people
Help those who need help the most

Afternoon Break-out Session #2 NOTES

Intersection of Growth and Quality of Life: Can we find the sweet spot?

Listening exchange

1. What's key issue to focus on for you?
2. Key solutions or next steps from where you are?
3. What's your best idea if money is no object?
4. What's your personal expertise/perspective?

Jennifer Hutchins introduced Creative Portland, gave history and why quality of life/equity is a focus issue.

Panelists:

1. Caitlin Cameron, urban designer in Portland planning office. City is a living organism that should be responsive, part of an ecosystem. Believes (personally) Portland should grow. Her job is to think about the built environment, especially public realm. Transportation, broadband, housing.

2. Joe Malone, commercial real estate. President of neighborhood association, lifelong Portland resident. Pro-growth, growth is the only way to keep the city vibrant. Doesn't believe development is really such a big issue, we have bigger problems. Need stable housing, that's affordable for workforce. Airbnb is a scourge for downtowns and cities like Portland that have a tourist economy. It's a real piece of our housing problem.

3, Tony Cox, small business owner, prez of Buy Local. Can find employees but can't find space = less stability. PBL = 400 members, their big concerns are minimum wage referenda, commercial rents increasing, influx of national chains, parking, lack of support from the city, finding qualified workers who can afford to live here. Small independent businesses are a big part of why people come and want to be here, makes us unique. City is doing more local sourcing, USM locally sourcing food.

4. Pious Ali, Ghana native, board of ed, Portland Empowered through Muskie, lots of work with young people. Getting immigrants/minorities involved, outreach is difficult. You have to have people who understand how to communicate effectively in those communities. How can we support their participation in conversations like this? A lot of people want to give back because this has been a supportive welcoming community. Surprised nothing came up this morning about young people since we're talking about the future. How can we disrupt the school to prison pipeline? Challenge to City Council, zero youth incarceration. Restorative justice. Issues facing immigrants: Rent, jobs, understanding how the culture works.

5. Christian Milneil, PPH and chair of PHA board of commissioners. Housing biggest issue facing Portland. Became interested in housing issues as an environmentalist. Being priced out to Windham etc. is wasteful, walkable neighborhoods are better. Can families afford to live here affects schools. Fundamental barrier is people moving here who don't share egalitarian values,

imposing their values on us through pr, legal action. PHA doing aggressive work to create new housing, transit-oriented neighborhoods. Need neighbors who embrace new housing, not fight against it.

6. Liz Trice, owner Peloton Labs. Muskie grad, worked for the County for 9 years, cares about neighborhood stuff. Peloton members are early stage entrepreneurs, freelancers, remote workers. 2-3 people/week moving to Portland, and they really want to get connected to local community. Biggest concern is equity. If you work in Aspen you have to enter a lottery to get affordable housing. No way you can afford market rate, otherwise you're commuting 45 minutes. Make sure we're thinking regionally and putting \$ into good affordable education. Walkability/car-free options. Preserving affordable housing. Airbnb brings wealth into our community so mixed blessing. Develop the remote worker economy; we need to get good at understanding and also preparing for it. ME and VT have highest % of self employed people. Not as good at working together as being resourceful and independent. Portland has been its own economic center, but remote working is going to become the new norm and we have to prepare for that to change.

What you heard that's also important to you (in one word)?

Egalitarianism

Regionalism

Life cycle housing

Change

Youth advocacy

Connecting diverse populations

Don't waste anybody

Economic development

Improved broadband infrastructure

Cannibalism (Ralph Carmona's comment, not sure what he meant)

Affordable housing and outmigration of young people

Duality of gentrified and gentrifier

Resiliency

Inclusiveness

Comprehensive vision

Opportunity

Offering choices, you have options

Broad range of changes in workforce patterns (immigrants, remote workers, etc.)

Process people can trust

Taming car culture

Multi-modal transportation

Community health

Taller buildings

Equity

Sustainability

Compromise

Civility, civil discourse

Transparency

Prioritize. No issue is “more important” but how can we tackle things for maximum leverage?

Cohesive execution.

Communication

Collaboration

Creating an environment that is equitable and not divided. People can choose to have a car. Live on peninsula. Whatever. It’s not out of reach.

Democracy is inefficient.

Create thought map from the word list?

Questioning the concept that Portland needs to grow. Who do we want to come? More retirees? More immigrants? More people who need social services? Who are we going to lose if we won’t grow?

Egalitarian yes but comprehensive vision should include neighborhood plans. Each is distinct. We don’t have strong City-supported neighborhood plans/visions.

Comprehensive vision: need more affordable housing, multi-modal transportation. Has proposal to build housing in the heart of the West End, you’d think we were proposing a toxic waste dump. We don’t decide who comes here. Plan to build senior housing in Deering Center. You’d think we were trying to site a nuclear waste dump. NIMBYism. The only thing Mainers hate worse than sprawl is density. There are limits to what City govt can do. We have to be looking at what other elements can start to accomplish.

Shouldn’t have to be up to city to defend vision, should be up to the community. Build collective energy, identifying/endorsing values that are in the comprehensive plan.