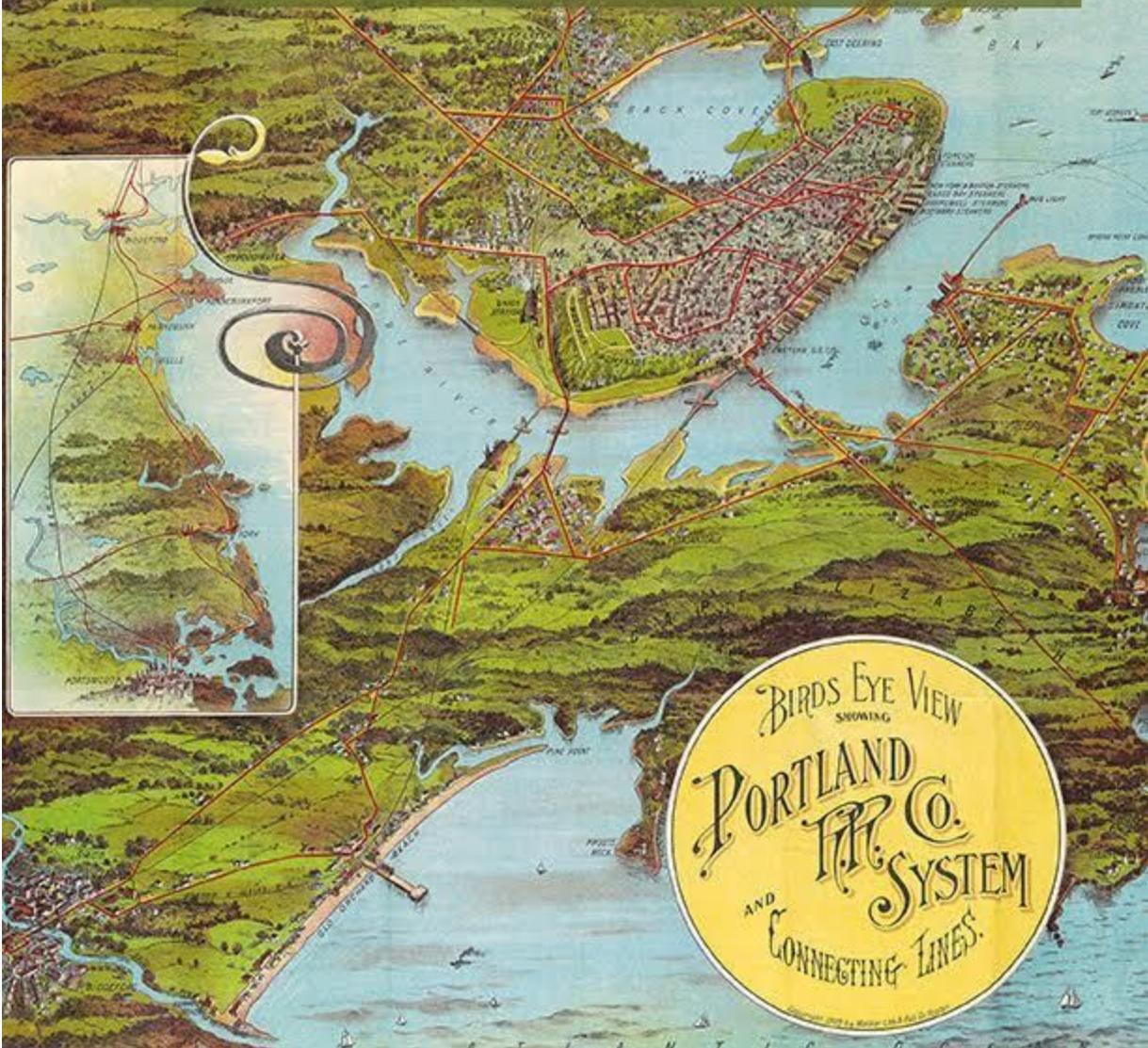


Greater Portland Tomorrow: Choices for Sustained Prosperity

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Greater Portland Tomorrow: Some Lessons for Greater Bangor

Remarks by Richard Barringer to the Greater Bangor Chamber at the
Bangor Daily News

October 26, 2017

Opening Remarks: Thanks to the Chamber and to Todd Benoit of the BDN
Congratulations to Erin Rhoda and Matt Stone
My two previous talks to the Bangor Chamber in the
late '70s, almost cost me my job!

The following excerpt from a *Bangor Daily News* editorial of September 4, 2015, is the very touchstone of my work over the past year, and of my remarks this evening:

Cities are the way of Maine's future. Maine must embrace this reality. Maine's rural character might distinguish us from other states, but its urban areas will more likely than not drive its growth. These urban areas need strong advocates who can make the case for policies that help it along.

Over the past year, my colleagues and I at USM's Muskie School were asked to define the needs and challenges to sustain today's prosperity (1) in Portland and (2) throughout the Greater Portland region. I would like to report on these efforts and try to draw a few useful lessons for the Greater Bangor region.

Last winter we published our first report, *Growing Portland: Not Whether but How*.¹ There, we found that *if* Portland is to sustain its current prosperity and fulfill its vital economic role for *all* of Maine, it must:

1. Grow its workforce, given an aging population;
2. Broaden its property tax base, given an aged infrastructure;
3. Strengthen its schools, given the demands made on them today;
4. Expand its public transit, given the 50-75,000 commuters each day;
5. Given an aged housing stock, create more workforce housing and commerce along major thoroughfares and in select neighborhood centers on and off the peninsula; and

¹ At <http://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/muskie/7/>

6. Pay the most careful attention *throughout* to matters of good urban planning, design, and investment, learning from other *successful* cities.

We were then asked to apply this framework to the Greater Portland region as a whole. (For date-gathering purpose, we identified the region as Cumberland County – even though its economic reach extends well into both York and Sagadahoc counties.)

Ten Key Findings to Share from the recent report, *Greater Portland Tomorrow: Choices for Sustained Prosperity*.²

1. Cities drive national and regional growth today, world-wide. Cities and their surrounding metropolitan regions now have dominant and enduring influence over the world economy. Just 600 such cities world-wide account for three-fifths of all global GDP. Kennedy School economist Edward Glaeser notes that, “(They) are now the nodes that connect our increasingly globalized world.”³
2. Greater Portland is Maine’s dominant engine of economic prosperity, now and for the foreseeable future. (1/30 of the land, 1/5th the population, 1/4th the jobs, and 1/3 of all ME General Fund revenues).
3. Portland and its surrounding region co-exist in a strong and *mutually* beneficial economic relationship; this needs to be better and more fully understood, appreciated, and acted upon.
4. Economists agree that a growing population is essential to sustained economic development. Meanwhile, Greater Portland’s workforce will decline by some 5,000 workers by about 2030, due to its aging.
5. Greater Portland can sustain its growth if and *only if* it attracts enough *new* workers of the *right* kind (youthful and educated).
6. Foreign immigrants represent a potential pool of needed workers *if* their identified challenges are addressed (that is, language, transportation, discrimination, and knowledge of the U.S. culture)
7. Greater Portland lacks both depth and critical mass in many if not most economic sectors, compromising its future (in most all, save for Eds and Meds, professional services, tourism, and food/beer).

² At <http://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/muskie/8/>

³ See Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier*. Penguin Books, New Youk, 2012.

8. Current efforts to address workforce development issues are fragmented and inadequate to the challenge.
9. Most Portland residents support higher-density housing next to neighborhood centers and villages *if* traffic and parking are addressed.
10. Regional efforts to address the challenges to sustained prosperity – while numerous – are highly fragmented and in need of greater coordination, leadership, and direct public accountability.

And Five Recommendations: Based on these findings (and others), we offer these recommendations to sustain the region’s current, peacetime prosperity that is unprecedented since pre-Civil War days:

1. Creation of a *Center for Workforce Development* at USM’s Muskie School, to undertake needed workforce research and program evaluation, and to create greater alignment between employer needs and educational outcomes.
2. Creation of a *Center for Good Urban Design*, a partnership among UMA, USM, and the Portland Society for Architecture, to help local Maine communities with good urban design principles and practices.
3. Establishment of a *0.5 percent county-wide, local option sales tax* for investment in regional public infrastructure, including broadband, public transit, workforce housing, trails development, and public greenspace.
4. That *Cumberland County expand its service portfolio and take the lead in combining the capacities* of the Greater Portland Council of Governments, the Greater Portland Economic Development Council, the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System, and the Greater Portland Metro. And,
5. A *public information campaign*, conducted by the Portland Regional Chamber, to build greater awareness of the need for *sustainable* development and the long-term, civic advantages of economic growth and good urban design.

SOME LESSONS FOR BANGOR:

So, what have we learned that is of interest to you, here in Greater Bangor?

First and foremost, that cities and their surrounding regions are the drivers of prosperity all across the developed world, in today's global, information and technology-driven economy.

And what tends to help successful city/regions to grow prosperity on a sustainable basis? Our research indicates the following:

1. Depth in selected economic sectors (as, for example, forest products, bio-medical research, and tourism);
2. A nearby military base;
3. A major airport;
4. Strong educational and medical institutions (the "Eds and Meds");
5. A growing population; and
6. Careful and continuing attention to needed public infrastructure, public transportation, and civic amenities such as its waterfront(s), trails, parks and greenspaces.

Just as Greater Portland today is the economic driver of southern Maine, so Greater Bangor is the dominant economic driver of the north, and will increasingly be so:

- It has air/land/and sea transportation connections, well-established distribution facilities, great depth in its "Eds and Meds" (UMaine, Beal, Husson, EMCC, and EMMC and St. Joe's), and in its R&D capacity at the University of Maine and the Jackson Labs. It is a gateway to both coastal and inland Maine, has eastern Canada nearby, and the magnificent Penobscot River at its very doorstep. *All* of these you *must* honor, safeguard, and invest in!
- At the same time, because of their cost and their necessity to growth, public service efficiency, consolidation, and regionalism are increasingly and critically important . . . more so all the time! (For examples, see Denver, where city and county services have been consolidated; and Fairfax County VA, home to Arlington and Alexandria, that delivers local municipal services).

Finally, if I may, let me close with this quote from my long-time friend and colleague, Charlie Colgan: *The whole notion of an "urban Maine" is unsettling, in part because it so conflicts with the mental images we all carry around, about what it means to be in Maine and not in Massachusetts or some (other such) place. We are a state where the vast majority of us now work in cities, live in cities or the*

*suburbs, and everyone thinks they're in the middle of the country. It is also unsettling because (of) a paradox: that to retain Maine's special character as a place that feels closely connected with the natural environment, Maine people will have to pay much, much more attention to the built environment. Put another way: to keep what is special about Maine and its natural environment, Maine must decide how best to become more urban.*⁴

Thank you very much for this opportunity. Questions?

⁴ See "Maine's Changing Economy: The Rise of 'Urban Maine'" in Richard Barringer, ed., *Changing Maine, 1960-2010*, Tilbury House Publishers, Gardiner ME, 2004