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Chairperson’s Letter

Dear Mayor Hughes,

On behalf of the Steering Committee I am pleased to submit The Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan for consideration by the City Council as the third neighborhood plan to be adopted by the City as part of the South Portland Comprehensive Plan.

The Steering Committee would like to thank the residents, business owners, consultants and city staff who helped in the creation of the Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Plan. It would not have been possible without the work of many willing and talented people.

We are satisfied that the planning process produced sound recommendations. We feel that the design workshop/strategic plan approach, which produced a neighborhood plan in less than a year, is one that may serve as a model for future neighborhood plans in the City.

The future is bright for Knightville Mill Creek, South Portland’s “downtown.” If adopted, the Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan will positively influence future growth, maintain a vibrant civic core, foster prosperity for businesses in the area, and preserve the quality of life for residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Cordially,

Rommy Brown
Chairperson of the Steering Committee
Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan
Council Order

CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

JAMES E. HUGHES
Mayor

JEFFREY K. JORDAN
City Manager

MARY KAJIL
Corporation Counsel

IN CITY COUNCIL
ORDER #62-05/06

ORDERED, that the 1992 Comprehensive Plan be and hereby is amended by the inclusion, by reference, of "The Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan. If any portion of the existing Comprehensive Plan conflicts with the new Neighborhood Master Plan, the policies and recommendations of the Neighborhood Master Plan shall control.

Fiscal Note: Less than $1,000

Dated: October 17, 2005

Passed 7-0
Vision Statement

Knightville Mill Creek has both significant assets and considerable potential. It is a community with an extensive waterfront, a rich blend of residential neighborhoods, regional shopping centers, and a traditional downtown with a civic core. There is easy walking access to shops, services, and amenities as well as to a variety of parks, open space, and trails. It is also in close proximity to the markets and infrastructure of Maine’s largest metropolitan area.

The vision expressed in this Plan recognizes the great qualities already present here and imagines taking Knightville Mill Creek to a distinctly higher level of business prosperity and residential quality of life. The Plan aims at a Knightville Mill Creek that is well-known as a place where one can live comfortably, if one chooses, without a car. A place where a tradition of mixed uses continues to create a diverse, thriving, and vibrant downtown. A place where several centuries of history are recovered, preserved, and/or enhanced in neighborhood architecture, land use patterns, character, and human scale. A place where new parking solutions, including multi-level structures, create the possibility in some areas for taller and denser commercial and residential development patterns. A place where a village-in-the-city means people out on errands are likely to spend a few minutes chatting with friends they encounter along the way. A place where people from many different walks of life can feel welcome and can find affordable as well as market rate housing. And a place where the library, schools, public safety center, post office, and City Hall remain and are improved in a complementary fashion to form a cohesive civic core that makes South Portanders—the owners—proud of their city and its accomplishments.

This vision is within reach, and, using this Plan as an organizational tool for action, it can be achieved by residents, businesses, developers, and the City working together.
Introduction and Summary

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan is to serve as a guide for the growth and redevelopment of the Knightville Mill Creek district of South Portland. It is intended to be adopted as an official neighborhood plan and incorporated into the City's Comprehensive Plan. As such, it also is meant to serve as a program for action to give direction to resident volunteers, business leaders, and City staff for continuing improvement and revitalization efforts in the area.

About the Name

Prior to the 1960's all of the peninsula between Pleasantdale and Ferry Village was known as "Knightville." Then, with the development of the shopping centers on either side of Market Street, a need arose for a name that was specific to the new retail area—hence, "Mill Creek."

Given that many people in South Portland and neighboring communities continue to consider Knightville and Mill Creek to be two different areas, this Plan uses both names. The convention chosen is to combine them into one term—"Knightville Mill Creek"—without an intervening hyphen or slash. This is less cumbersome, and it symbolizes the integration of Knightville and Mill Creek that this Plan hopes to achieve.

Past Planning

Knightville has been the focus of planning and revitalization efforts for some thirty years. In the 1980's a $2 million CDBG grant coupled with the efforts of a non-profit housing improvement organization accomplished sidewalk, street light, and other infrastructure improvements as well as providing grants and technical assistance to homeowners and businesses for façade and other building upgrades.

In the 1990's the City prevailed upon MaineDOT to design the new Casco Bay Bridge so that it brought traffic around the neighborhood instead of through it as had been the case with the Million Dollar Bridge. This created a number of challenges and opportunities for the neighborhood that were the subject of an extensive planning effort. Two-way streets, a roundabout, the pedestrian ramp off the bridge, and Thomas Knight Park were some of the results of that project.
Last year the City of South Portland became a Community Development Block Group (CDBG) entitlement community, and Knightville Mill Creek is in one of the census tracts eligible to compete for a share of the annual CDBG funds now coming to the City.

The development of the Knightville Mill Creek Master Plan represents a pause in an active and ongoing revitalization endeavor to take stock and plan ahead. Projects currently underway in Knightville as a result of recent planning efforts include:

- Waterman Drive Improvement Project
- Legere Park Playscape
- Thomas Knight Park Public Boat Facility
- Gateway Project

**Zoning**

The working vision for this area has been to maintain and improve Knightville as an amenity-rich, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly urban village with a balance between residential and business uses such that businesses have a built-in base of customers and residents are able to find a satisfying range of goods and services within walking distance. (See the Vision Statement section below.)

Toward this end an incremental approach has been taken since the mid-1990’s to adjust the zoning for Knightville. These include:

- **1997** Created the Knightville Design District which included basic architectural requirements for properties along a portion of Ocean Street and a prohibition on parking lots being placed in front of buildings.
- **1999** Prohibited new buildings in the Design District from having ground floor residential units; created an overlay zone for the Ocean Street business strip to decrease by half the off-street parking requirements for retail, service, and restaurant uses.
- **2001** Increased in the Design District the maximum building height from 35’ to 50’ and instituted a minimum building height of 24’; increased the maximum allowed net residential density in the business overlay zone from 12.4 to 24 units/acre and halved the off-street parking standard for office uses; created an overlay zone for the residential portion of Knightville and reduced the front yard setback and the off-street parking standard.
- **2003** Researched a zone line location and determined that it had been incorrectly mapped on the zoning map.
- **2004** Replaced two overlay zones with a Village Commercial zone and a Village Residential zone; removed most non-residential uses from the list of permitted uses in the residential zone.

These zone changes have been successful in enabling such new development in Knightville as the Bowdoin Medical Clinic, Beale Street BBQ, a duplex, and two mixed-use buildings with offices on the ground floors and residential units above.
**Related Plans and Documents**

Plans and documents on file at the Planning Department related to this project include:

- 1980  A Growth Plan for the Eighties (the municipal comprehensive plan for the 1980's)
- 1983  Cavendish Partnership Design Study
- 1992  South Portland Comprehensive Plan
- 1995  Report and Recommendations of the Knightville/Mill Creek Advisory Committee
- 1999  Project PLAN Final Report and Recommendations
- 2000  (City of South Portland) Neighborhood Planning Guidelines
- 2002  Ferry Village Neighborhood Plan
- 2004  City Council/Dept. Heads Strategic Planning Retreat Report
- 2004  Willard Neighborhood Plan
- 2004  S. P. Code of Ordinances, Ch. 27 Zoning (Design District and the VC and VR Zones)

**Style of the Plan**

The style of the *Knightville Mill Creek Master Plan* is different in several ways from the City's previous neighborhood plans. In the first case it is more design-oriented. This is due to the downtown, urban village aspect of Knightville Mill Creek in which architectural and landscape character takes on added significance. A second difference is the process used to develop the Plan. Rather than using a survey to assess community desires for the neighborhood, the Steering Committee used a Design Workshop in which a large group of people spent a day analyzing the district and producing maps, drawings, and reports with recommendations for improvement (see the *Design Workshop Final Report* inserted as an appendix in the back pocket). Last, this Plan, as with the City's very successful Project PLAN, is written in the style of a strategic plan. This was done because the tautness inherent in advancing only the highest priority recommendations appears to give people a firm grip and focus in implementing the proposals.

**Process Used to Develop the Plan**

There are three main stages in this planning effort for Knightville Mill Creek:

I.  Visioning
II.  Developing the Plan
III.  Implementation

A considerable amount of effort went into involving a large number of area stakeholders in generating and building consensus on a vision for the future of Knightville Mill Creek. This was accomplished through a Knightville & Mill Creek Community Design Workshop that was held on April 9, 2005, at the Main Library. Several months of concentrated preparation paid off when more than 100 people participated in this seven hour planning activity. The effort was directed by Alan Holt, a consulting professional with the firm of Holt & Lachman. The purpose was to evaluate Knightville & Mill Creek from a land use planning perspective and to generate ideas for its improvement. The people attending were divided into ten teams; each team was assisted by a Muskie graduate student facilitator and two Maine architects (all of whom were volunteers). A three-dimensional computer model of Knightville Mill Creek developed by Michael Charek for the Steering Committee was useful in
helping people to visualize scale and the relationships between buildings. Funding for the event was provided generously by area businesses and a CDBG grant from Jim Gailey, Community Development Director, and the City’s Community Development Advisory Committee.

Following the workshop the Steering Committee’s consultant for the visioning stage, Alan Holt, produced a report that pulls together the common elements from the work of the ten teams and summarizes them into a list of emerging principles and ideas. This report, which is included here as an appendix, was presented on May 25, 2005, at the South Portland Library in public meeting attended by over 50 people—a number of whom are now on the expanded Steering Committee.

A partial list of the activities involved in developing the Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan includes:

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fall, 2004</td>
<td>Rommy Brown obtains CDBG grant for neighborhood planning.</td>
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<td>Fall, 2004</td>
<td>Group of neighborhood residents and business leaders forms the Steering Committee and begins work on the plan with the assistance of Planning Director Tex Haeuser.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter, 04/05</td>
<td>Steering Committee hires Alan Holt to guide the planning for a community design workshop and Michael Charek to create a 3-D computer model of Knightville Mill Creek.</td>
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<td>Spring, 2005</td>
<td>Steering Committee meets weekly and generates many volunteer hours in raising money, securing a venue, providing publicity and doing outreach, arranging for food, setting up the workshop schedule, and many other event planning activities. Research and other assistance is provided by students of Alan Holt’s graduate planning class from the Muskie Institute (see the Briefing Book in the Appendices). Jim Minott, the Principal at Brown Elementary School, offers the use of Brown for the workshop and provides considerable assistance to the Committee in figuring out how to use what turns out to be an outstanding facility for the workshop.</td>
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<td>April, 2005</td>
<td>Community Design Workshop held on 4-9-05.</td>
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<td>May, 2005</td>
<td>Public forum discussing the common themes and ideas of the workshop held on 5-25-05.</td>
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<td>Summer, 2005</td>
<td>Expanded Steering Committee meets and develops the Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan based on the visioning accomplished by the Design Workshop. Plan is posted on the City’s web site and comments are incorporated into the Plan after a mailing is sent out to all area property owners, along with other publicity.</td>
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## Knightville Mill Creek Master Plan

**Steering Committee**

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<th>Member</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rommy Brown</td>
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<td>Rosemarie De Angelis</td>
<td>City Councilor</td>
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<td>Lee Auchincloss</td>
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<td>Kathy Bernard</td>
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<td>Sherry Cavallaro</td>
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<td>Jim Hendry</td>
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<td>Elizabeth Hunter</td>
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<td>Colleen Jones-Turner</td>
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<td>Terry Morrison</td>
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<td>Philip Notis</td>
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<td>Robert O’Brien</td>
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<td>Susan Raye</td>
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<td>Jack Reckitt</td>
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<td>David Soule</td>
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<td>Mary Strnad</td>
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<td>Pat Webber</td>
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<td>Tex Haeuser, Planning Director</td>
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Assets & Liabilities

As part of the Community Design Workshop participants were asked to identify what they liked best about their neighborhood and what they liked least. There was general agreement among all teams on the following:

**Five most important positive qualities to build on:**
- Abundance of parks and open space.
- Critical mass of civic buildings.
- Traditional mixed-use character and scale of the downtown.
- Traditional residential neighborhood pattern and scale.
- Connection to the Waterfront.

**Five most serious problems to overcome:**
- Broadway creates a barrier between the civic assets, and isolates Knightville Mill Creek from adjacent neighborhoods.
- The Mill Creek “Box” Commercial development is unattractive, hostile to pedestrians, and does not link well to Knightville.
- The Green Spaces are not well linked to each other.
- Key parcels are underutilized, or should be used for a greater public purpose.
- Access to and development of the waterfront needs assessment and improvement.
Emerging Urban Design Principles

From the Design Workshop a number of recurring themes emerged (see Design Workshop Report). These principles informed the subsequent discussions of the Steering Committee and helped to form a basis for the Strategies for Improvement presented in the next section. Some specific ideas from the Design Workshop are included as examples.

**Bridge the Broadway Barrier**
- Redesign the road/intersections to be safe, pedestrian friendly, and visually attractive.
- Strengthen the streetscape to draw pedestrians along Cottage and across Broadway.

*Workshop Ideas:* Ideas included a “Big Dig” tunnel, pedestrian bridges, boulevard medians, and/or curb extensions.

**Link Open Spaces**
- Develop pedestrian links (trails, boardwalks, streetscapes) between existing green spaces.
- Develop attractions in key open spaces to encourage pedestrian linkage.

*Workshop Ideas:* Connect trail or boardwalk along the eastern shoreline; strong streetscape connections along Ocean and Waterman to connect green spaces; new, public use for the current Hannaford’s site; add an attraction to Thomas Knight Park and landscaping down Waterman Drive.

**Integrate Mill Creek**
- Increase landscape buffers on parking lot edges.
- Encourage new development along street edges in existing parking lots.
- Place parking behind buildings in the interior of the blocks.
- Introduce new roads to reconnect the street grid to the historic Knightville block pattern.

*Workshop Ideas:* Raise standards for landscaping parking lots; break up “superblocks” with new roads to reduce scale; new street edge, mixed-use development along existing parking lots; parking in the interior of new blocks, or structured parking; continue Erskine Drive through to Ocean Street.

**Strengthen Civic Identity**
- Relate potential designs and siting of City Hall to the context of the Civic Core.
- Develop a streetscape plan to link all civic buildings and give the district an identity.

*Workshop Ideas:* Design new City Hall in location and character to help knit the civic core together.
Preserve and Enhance Knightville’s Downtown Character

- Infill key parcels along the traditional downtown “main street”—Ocean Street.
- Expand the downtown development pattern to Upper Ocean Street.
- Design streetscapes and encourage uses that enliven street life.

*Workshop Ideas:* Increase building height and intensity; enliven street life with sidewalk cafes, coffee shops, galleries and artists’ studios.

Capitalize on the Waterfront Location

- Develop regional attractions on key waterfront sites.
- Develop more housing on the waterfront.

*Workshop Ideas:* Parcels such as the CMP site, Southport Marina, and Thomas Knight Park were identified as having redevelopment potential; a hotel with an expanded marina is a possibility at the CMP site; housing on waterfront locations could provide a bigger residential base for the neighborhood.
Strategies for Improvement

Keeping in mind the principles and ideas that emerged from the Design Workshop, the Steering Committee generated, evaluated, and prioritized a set of strategies for action. Listed in order of priority, they are:

1. Improve Pedestrian Flow and Enable Alternative Transportation
2. Enrich the Area’s Aesthetics
3. Amend Zoning Provisions (Strategies #3 & #4 were a tie)
4. Establish a Downtown Tax Increment Financing District
5. Ensure Parking Capacity Meets Projected Needs
6. Create a More Dynamic Civic Core
7. Capitalize on Waterfront Opportunities

1. Improve Pedestrian Flow and Enable Alternative Transportation

A successful urban village is one in which visitors want to get out of their cars and walk around and residents can get along well without a car.

This strategy consists of making it easier to walk, ride a bicycle, take a bus, or use some other alternative to the automobile for transportation in Knightville Mill Creek. The goal is to create an area in which it is easy to drive and park an auto while making non-auto use once one is in the district more viable.

One of the key opportunities in this strategy, as identified in the Community Design Workshop, is bridging the Broadway barrier so people can more easily cross between the neighborhoods and civic buildings to the south and the shopping, amenities, and civic buildings to the north.

In addition, the implementers of this strategy will be looking at improving existing sidewalks, improving crosswalks (including those at crossings of the Greenbelt Walkway), creating curb extensions, adding bicycle facilities, creating pedestrian-only areas, investigating the possibility of a trolley or shuttle service, and a variety of other techniques to improve pedestrian flow and enable alternative transportation.

2. Enrich the Area’s Aesthetics

Improving the overall appearance and attractiveness of Knightville Mill Creek is important for generating higher economic activity as well as for enhancing the area’s quality of life. Knightville Mill Creek also represents an appropriate starting point for the City to begin addressing impacts on quality of life from offensive odors and excessive behavioral noise.

A part of this strategy will be to encourage the use of design techniques and materials that enhance the charm and character of some of the more historic structures in the neighborhood. One of the opportunities for the future is to transform the retail areas of Knightville Mill Creek to be in keeping with an urban village aesthetic. Another will be to review the architectural design standards currently in place for the Design District—an area consisting primarily of properties fronting on Ocean Street in Knightville—and to consider expanding them to cover a wider geographic area. Starting with an architectural survey, historic preservation will be researched and pursued.
Whatever the motif, this strategy includes exploring the potential to use design standards and/or preservation/restoration techniques to create a more cohesive and unified appearance within each of the three main sections of Knightville Mill Creek—Traditional Downtown, Civic Core, and the Mill Creek Shopping District.

Complementary and coordinated improvements to the appearance the area’s streetscapes will also be considered. This includes adding more trees, in keeping with South Portland’s former designation as a “Tree City”, as well as attending to street lights, signs, bus stops, waste receptacles, curbs, and other landscaping.

3. Amend Zoning Provisions for Increased Density and Height

In order to create a critical mass to support village-type businesses and to achieve a successful mixed-use environment, more people need to live in Knightville Mill Creek. Residential growth has been occurring here, but the process has been slow, and it is inhibited by the existing zoning regulations. Revised zoning rules would enable creative housing solutions of the type imagined by some of the teams in the Community Design Workshop.

The main element of this strategy would be to allow higher residential density and taller buildings in more areas of Knightville Mill Creek. One way to do this would be through the creation of a “floating zone.” If one of the shopping centers, for example, wanted to redevelop part of its property with condominiums, it could, by meeting various criteria, “pull down” the floating zone and to use its standards for the creation of the new housing.

Encouraging affordable housing, a diverse population, use of the highest architectural standards, and owner-occupied units are four principal goals. Allowing taller office and commercial buildings is also a consideration of this strategy.

This strategy is another one that is dependent to a degree on implementing a parking plan.

4. Establish a Downtown Tax Increment Financing District

Adequate funding is a critical factor in the success of any project. While much of the revitalization of Knightville Mill Creek has been and will continue to be accomplished by the private sector, other parts of this Plan will need municipal leadership.

Knightville Mill Creek is fortunate to be an area that is eligible to apply for the City’s CDBG grant funds annually. Other State and the federal grant programs are also available. However, a key tool available to the City—and one that is recommended here—is a downtown tax increment financing district.

In this context, a tax increment financing district, or TIF, is a mechanism that permits a municipality to capture the incremental taxes from new development to fund eligible economic development activities. Funds generated from the program are used for a variety of possible improvements or projects within the district (Knightville Mill Creek), and the City is sheltered from adverse adjustments to state education and revenue sharing subsidies, and county taxes, by not having to count the incremental tax revenue as part of its tax base.

A particular benefit of downtown TIF’s, in Maine, is that they provide a waiver on the statutory limits that would otherwise apply to TIF district size and value. In addition, local bonds used to support this type of TIF district do not count against the county limit.
Proposed rule revisions for TIF districts indicate applications by municipalities for Downtown TIF districts must be submitted to the Department of Economic and Community Development by March 1 of the property tax year in which the municipality designates the TIF.

5. Ensure Parking Capacity MeetsProjected Needs

Additional parking is going to be needed in Knightville Mill Creek in order to: support more commercial floor area; free up precious surface area so that there is room for some of the taller, creative types of development pictured in the Design Workshop; and, provide for “park-once-shop-many” pedestrian opportunities.

Implementing this strategy will involve assessing future parking needs based on planned growth patterns and moving forward with a variety of methods for meeting that demand.

The list will include the possibility of one or more centrally located private, public/private, or municipal multi-level parking structures. This would likely need to be associated with a significant private development proposal and leveraged with funds from the Downtown Tax Increment Financing Program.

Other ideas that will be evaluated are: surface parking underneath buildings (rear access); subsurface parking; shared parking arrangements; and connecting existing parking lots.

The need for heroic solutions to the parking problem will be decreased to the extent that the strategy for improving pedestrian facilities and use of alternative modes of transportation can be achieved.

6. Create a Dynamic Civic Core

This strategy involves two key themes of the Design Workshop: strengthening the civic identity; and enhancing Knightville Mill Creek’s downtown character. Taken together, creating a dynamic civic core means having a recognizable and complementary relationship between the district’s municipal buildings—anchored by a remodeled or new City Hall—along with an improved downtown.

As explored at the Workshop, there is a “Civic Triangle” formed by the Post Office, City Hall, the Library, Brown Elementary School, and Mahoney Middle School (Broadway being the base of the triangle and Cottage and Ocean the sides with the Post Office and City Hall at the apex). The first part of this strategy is to strengthen the civic core by ensuring that any future siting and design of a new civic building, or any addition to existing civic buildings, will be done in such a way as to bring the buildings closer together and/or to link them through design or in other ways. In addition, the City should actively seek interests in properties near or abutting City Hall to improve the potential for viable development in case the existing site is chosen as the preferred location.

The second part of the strategy, enhancing the downtown character will include infilling key parcels along Ocean Street north of the Roundabout (Knightville Mill Creek’s traditional “main street”), expanding the downtown development pattern to Ocean Street south of the Roundabout; and improving the streetscapes with designs and uses that enliven street life. The latter could include, for example, sidewalk cafes, coffee shops, galleries, and artist studios. From another point of view, hanging flower baskets, new windows, new streetlights, and similar façade improvements are enhancements that area businesses can make to spruce up the appearance of Knightville Mill Creek.
7. **Capitalize on Waterfront Opportunities**

The peninsula that forms Knightville Mill Creek has approximately two miles of shorefront, much of it providing scenic views of river activity, the Portland skyline, and Casco Bay. As valuable real estate, both for private development and for public access, opportunities exist along some parts of the waterfront for achieving a higher and better use for both sectors.

As indicated in the Design Workshop Report, a hotel with an expansion of the existing marina at the northern end of the peninsula is one of several possibilities for creating more of a draw to lower Knightville Mill Creek. A public market and an amphitheater are other ideas. Additional housing to help meet the need for a bigger residential base can also easily be imagined there as well as on other parts of the shorefront. Being sensitive to the water views enjoyed from existing residential properties needs to be a high priority of any waterfront development proposal.

Another area that will receive attention is the often overlooked and undervalued Mill Cove Preserve. This 35 acre area of tidal flats and a small woods between F Street and Hannaford’s protects Mill Cove from development and has valuable functions as a waterfowl and wildlife habitat. Work needs to be done to restore these functions and to take advantage of the opportunities they present for education, passive recreation, and environmental protection.

The public pier now being constructed at Thomas Knight Park is a direct result of the planning done in advance of the replacement of the old Million Dollar Bridge. Similarly, implementing this strategy will involve staying alert to opportunities for increasing public access to the waterfront and developing relationships with waterfront property owners to bring out the best in Knightville Mill Creek’s waterfront opportunities.
Implementation

Following adoption of the Plan by the City Council, the Knightville Mill Creek Steering Committee will proceed to the third phase of the master planning effort—implementation.

In the past, much had been accomplished in Knightville Mill Creek by an ongoing Revitalization Committee that consisted of representatives of the neighborhood and business associations working through one project after another. With the Neighborhood Master Plan as a guide, this process can now continue.

The primary units for implementing the seven strategies will be subcommittees of the Steering Committee. As appropriate, these teams will seek to include additional business, City, and other stakeholders according to the needs of the project.

The South Portland Planning Department will continue to provide assistance for these efforts. This support could be increased with outside professional assistance if grant or TIF funds are obtained.

The target year for making significant accomplishments in implementing each of these strategies is 2010.