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Sustainable Tourism Recommendations: Southern Maine

Charlotte Aucoin

University of Southern Maine, charlotte.aucoin@maine.edu

Taylor Freehan

University of Southern Maine

Jennifer Hatch

University of Southern Maine

Ginny Majka

University of Southern Maine

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Sustainable Tourism Recommendations: Southern Maine

TAH 432 Students: Charlotte Aucoin, Taylor Freehan, Jennifer Hatch, Ginny Majka
 Faculty Mentor: Tracy Michaud, Assistant Professor of Tourism and Hospitality

Abstract

Through the lens of sustainable tourism one can assess the impacts and benefits of economic, environmental and social variables on communities and the landscape in order to manage them and create responsible tourism opportunities. In this poster, data from economic development and tourism practitioners in the Greater Portland region is aggregated into suggested tourism policy and planning strategies for Southern Maine.

Background

Tourism: Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world. It provides more employment in Maine than any other industry. Tourism is important for local communities as an economic development tool and it provides amenities for locals. When the government, private sector, and non-profits are all dedicated to the same broad set of sustainable policies for tourism, there are environmental and social benefits as well as a higher quality of life for its citizens.

Sustainable Tourism: Sustainable tourism meets the needs of the present industry without compromising the ability of the future to meet their needs. It respects the integrity of communities and improves the lives of locals. Tourism can be sustainable through establishing green design principles and environmental management systems. These are but not limited to: using recycled building materials, energy efficient windows, lighting and insulation; composting and other recycling systems; and adherence to local vernacular architecture (Weaver, 2008).

Tourism Policy: Tourism policy can be defined as a set of rules, regulations, guidelines, directives, and development/promotion objectives and strategies that provide a framework within which the collective, as well as individual decisions directly affecting long-term tourism development and the daily activities within a destination are taken (Stainton, 2020).

Tourism Planning: Tourism planning is described as the process of making decisions for the future, and not simply the physical preparation of a plan. Planning involves implementing decisions and monitoring the outcomes (Stainton, 2020). If policies and planning are poorly carried out it can devastate the environment it relies on. It can disrupt the local economy, causing inflation and negative effects to the community. Therefore sustainable tourism relies on good policy and planning.

Objective

The objective is to present sustainable tourism strategies for Southern Maine communities based on data collected about tourism policy and planning issues and solutions in the Greater Portland region. Tourism planning and policy is the key to sustainable tourism.

Methods

- First-person Interviews with Tourism/Economic Development Leaders
- Literature review: Government docs, news articles, scholarly articles
- Communities involved: South Portland, Portland, Westbrook

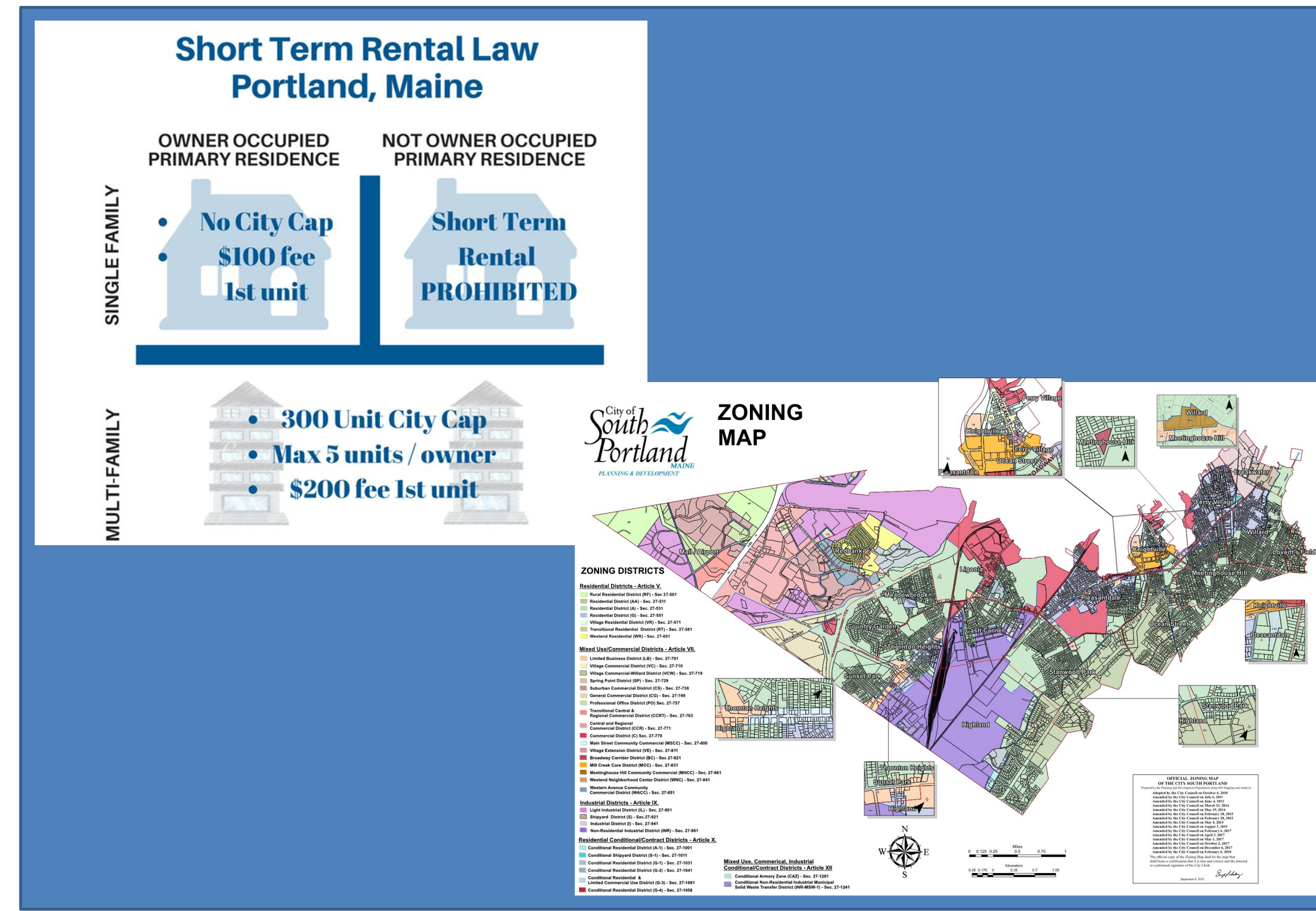


Figure 1. Portland Short-Term Rental (STR) Law
 South Portland zoning – STR unhosted home stays restricted in residential zones and allowed in commercial zones

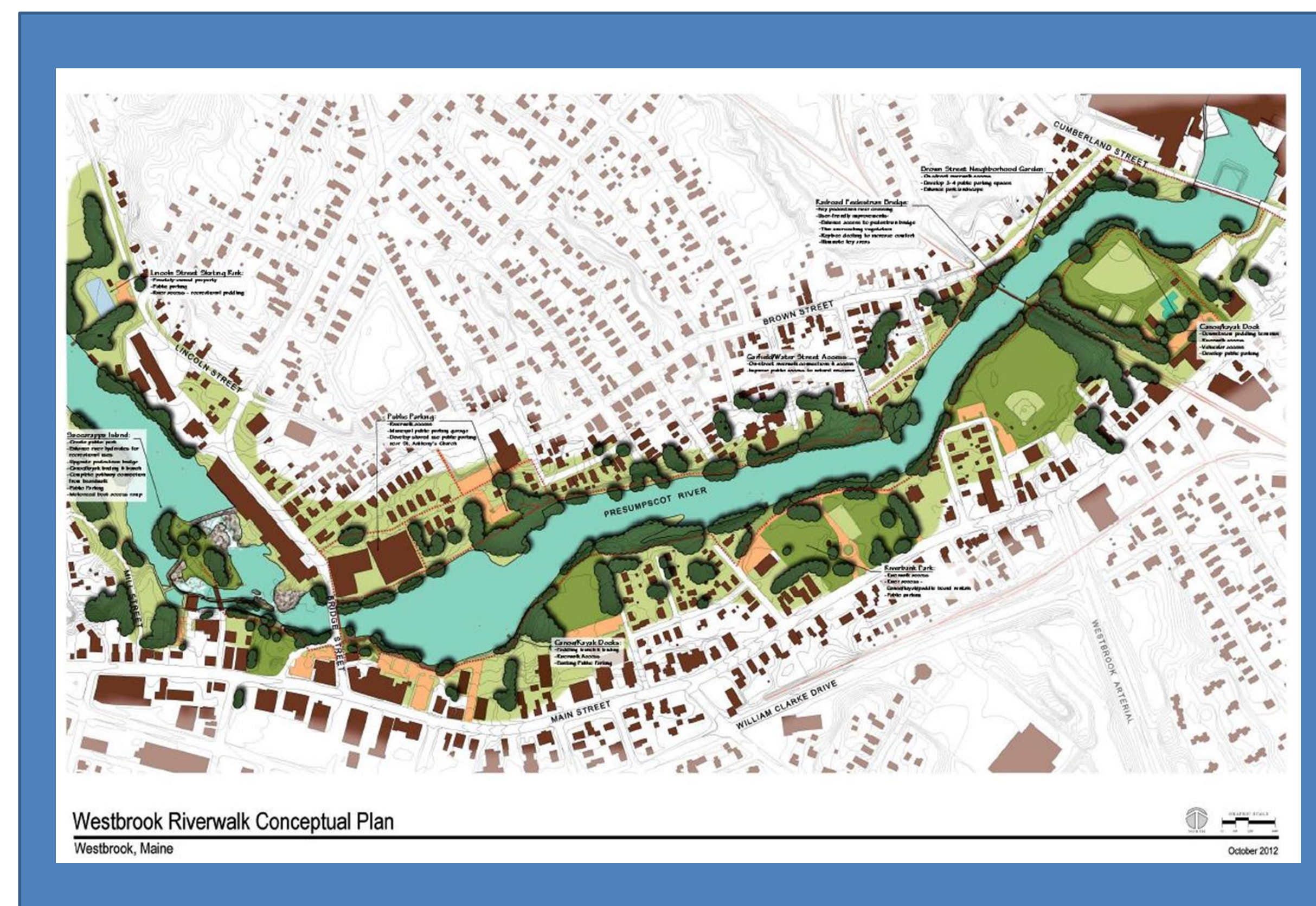


Figure 2. New Attractions-Westbrook River Walk



Figure 3. Safe & Clean Program (Downtown Portland)

Results-Discussion

Short term Rentals: The increase in short term rentals like Airbnb in Southern Maine has not come without consequences; some negative and some beneficial. Josh Meltzer, head of public policy for Airbnb in the Northeast, emphasizes how much home-sharing benefits small businesses and communities, luring consumers into cities and boosting their economies (McGuire, 2020). Although this is true, Airbnb has become a component of the housing shortage in the Greater Portland area. South Portland and Portland have begun enforcing limits to short-term rentals through city codes and zoning-based ordinances (Figure 1).

New Natural Attractions: Westbrook’s downtown river walk is a new attraction (Figure 2) and links the environment with downtown, benefiting residents and tourists (Westbrook City Hall, 2015). People are able to utilize this path for walking, running, riding their bike, walking their dogs, and much more. This is a boost to small local businesses along the path. A complimentary facade project makes the businesses along with river walk more attractive. Plans for a sculpture garden, a commons area, a four-season pavilion, a new dog park, a bridge of Flowers, and a downtown Boutique Hotel could have a positive economic effect by bringing more tourists and creating happier community members.

Infrastructure-Clean and Safe: Portland’s downtown and waterfront attract many visitors with cruise ships, fishing, sightseeing tours, retail, other businesses, and condos. It takes significant investment in infrastructure to maintain. Portland Downtown has put in place a program titled “Clean & Safe” which maintains and cleans infrastructure and creates a safe environment through public safety volunteers on the street greeting people and answering questions (Figure 3). Portland is also trying to reduce cruise ship pollution.

Destination Academy: Maine’s Office of Tourism has a program that works with communities through a series of workshops to determine what they have to offer visitors and how they should work together to develop attractions.

Sustainable Tourism Recommendations

Successful sustainable tourism development needs to build close relationships within the local community in its planning and strike a balance between society, community, economy, politics, and the natural environment in its policies. Recommendations below do just that.

1. Southern Maine communities should adopt codes to limit and regulate Short Term Rentals like South Portland and Portland. This supports the social aspect of sustainable tourism.
2. Southern Maine Communities should focus on their unique natural assets, protect them, make them accessible, and beautify them like in Westbrook. This supports the environmental aspects of sustainable tourism.
3. Southern Maine Communities should implement clean & safe programs like Portland. This supports community infrastructure.
4. Southern Maine Communities should participate in Destination Academies with the state or modeled on the state program in order to figure out how to best implement recommendations for sustainable tourism.

References

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 Guest speakers/interviews: Maine Office of Tourism, Portland Economic Development, Westbrook Economic Development, Portland Downtown