

THE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

RESHAPING PORTLAND

From sky-high condo buildings to gleaming mixed-use citadels to a whole new waterfront neighborhood, ambitious new developments are altering the skyline (and perhaps the character?) of the Forest City.

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BAYSIDE

On the heels of a commercial surge, a residential one.

At the end of 2021, there may be no Portland neighborhood more changed than Bayside. Covering two-tenths of a square mile along the south side of Back Cove, Bayside is set to welcome 180 new mixed-income apartments and condo units this year, more than any other neighborhood in the city, as residential developers follow the commercial energy that's lately taken root in the heart of the neighborhood.

Bordered roughly by Marginal Way, Forest Avenue, Franklin Arterial, and Cumberland Avenue, Bayside ("West Bayside," to some, to differentiate it from the other side of Franklin) has in recent history been a checkerboard of aging single-family homes, low-slung warehouses, and affordable-housing buildings, along with some 30 of the city's social-service programs, including the Oxford Street Shelter, Portland's largest shelter for the unhoused. Over in East Bayside, a boom in restaurants, indie shops, and taprooms has attracted swish new apartment and condo developments. (The most recent is the 16-unit,

32,000-square-foot Hammond House, slated to open in May.) Meanwhile, Bayside's renaissance has been more limited.

"People say look at all the amenities you have, Trader Joe's and Whole Foods, but those have all been on the fringes of the neighborhood," says Sarah Michniewicz, a resident since 1997 and president of the Bayside Neighborhood Association. "We don't have a complete neighborhood in the way many people would define it, meaning that you can have a little bit of everything that you need within the neighborhood. We haven't had a core."

But a core may be coming, thanks to the city's 2017 and 2018 sales of parcels from a former public-works property at the center of Bayside. That's where Portland's largest apartment development since 2015 is scheduled to break ground this spring. Spearheaded by developer Tom Watson, of Port Property Management, 52 Hanover Street will be a three-tiered structure topping out at eight stories, with 171 mixed-income apartments, first-floor commercial space, and a courtyard with a pool. It's next door to four other former public-works lots just recently developed: Parris Terraces, a 23-unit, middle-market condo development opened in 2019;

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Units at the Daymark condo development will run \$450,000 to \$750,000, the developer has predicted. After Portland's Planning Board approved details of the development last November, Mike Procopio, of Massachusetts-based Procopio Properties, told the *Portland Press Herald*, "It's almost like there's this sudden realization that Portland is not far from Boston."





Above: The vision for Bayside's 52 Hanover Street development, where a former city fleet garage now stands, includes 8,000 to 10,000 square feet of street-level retail. Below: The 16 condo units at East Bayside's nearly completed Hammond House were nearly sold out when this issue went to press.

a coworking and event space by developer Rob Barrett that also houses Barrett's design-build firm, Barrett Made; Watson's 82 Hanover Street, a commercial space with tenants that include Wilson County Barbecue, CycleBar exercise studio, Batson River Brewing & Distilling, and the Yard burger bar; and the towering Furman Block, which had its ribbon-cutting in January and offers 51 mixed-income units for tenants 55 and older, along with street-level commercial space.

Two former public-works parcels remain, neither with imminent development plans: a parking lot also owned by Barrett, for which he eventually envisions an apartment building, and a lot owned by the nonprofit Preble Street, which is in the process of converting its former daytime resource center, a couple blocks away, into a 40-bed overnight shelter for those experiencing homelessness. As development in Bayside has progressed, Preble Street's plans have been a source of tension, as has a long-simmering proposal to relocate the city-run Oxford Street Shelter, which has operated in the heart of Bayside since 1989. That shelter may soon have a new neighbor — around the corner, a Massachusetts developer has announced plans to break ground on Bayside's first luxury condo project, a \$20 million, 54-unit, seven-story tower called Daymark. — S.A.D.

EASTERN WATERFRONT

From a 19th-century industrial site to a 21st-century neighborhood.

At the foot of Munjoy Hill, the former Portland Company Complex is the keystone of the eastern waterfront and an artifact of the days of steam, built in the 1840s to manufacture locomotives and rail cars and, later on,



ships and automobiles. These days, the 10-acre site on Fore Street is once again alive with heavy equipment, as construction workers man steamrollers, backhoes, and front-end loaders to erect a new office building, the first in a series of phased construction projects to turn the former industrial complex into a sprawling mixed-use district called Portland Foreside.

"My vision since 2009," developer Casey Prentice says, "has been to develop this property as part of the dense urban fabric and to own it for a long time."

Prentice, who grew up in Yarmouth, was just a year out of college in 2009. Since 2010, he has co-owned the Chebeague Island Inn with his parents, and his Prentice Hospitality Group owns Evo Kitchen + Bar, in Portland's Old Port, where he now lives. Prentice was among a group of investors who purchased the Portland Company Complex in 2013 for \$15 million, and he and partner Kevin Costello have been working since to transform the cluster of derelict brick train barns into a brand-new neighborhood filled with apartments, offices, and retail stores, not to mention a hotel, public market, and marina. He likens the project to Seattle's vibrant Pike Place Market district.

"We are about creating an extension of the Old Port," Prentice says.

The revitalization of the eastern waterfront — crudely, everything along Fore Street and the waterline east of Portland's Franklin Arterial — got off to a halting start in 2008 with the construction of the Ocean Gateway Ferry Terminal and an associated 750-car parking garage. Then came the economic collapse and Great Recession, which put a multi-year damper on new builds. Portland's hotel boom reached eastern Fore Street, first with the Residence Inn Downtown Waterfront, in 2009, then with the AC Hotel, in 2018. In 2019, the payment-processing firm WEX opened a sleek, 105,000-square-foot new headquarters in the neighborhood, bringing some 400 employees to the eastern waterfront every weekday, prior to COVID. Right now, construction is underway on a five-story headquarters for the veterinary-technology firm Covetrus, designed to house 1,500 employees, part of a mixed-use development on the site of the Shipyard brewery that will include a 102-room, craft-beer-themed Cambria Hotel.

"It used to be that people wouldn't cross over India St. from the Old Port," city planner Christine Grimando says, "but that has changed, and it will continue to change."

The vision for Portland Foreside involves six "blocks" hosting a boutique hotel, office space, an event center, a marina, 638 units of housing, and some 200,000 square feet of retail space, including a "market hall" full of food vendors. The district's first big-ticket tenant, Sun Life Financial, broke ground in December on what will be a 77,000-square-foot office.

Thus far, the only element completed is the \$27 million Fore Points Marina, which features 150 slips protected by a wave-attenuation system. When Portland Harbor is wild and choppy, the marina is as calm as a farm pond, thanks to a perimeter of 32 floating concrete



Above: Plans for the Shipyard Brewing Company site on the eastern waterfront include a new headquarters for Covetrus, a redeveloped Shipyard brewery, a "brewtel" run by Cambria Hotels, and several residential buildings. Below: Portland Foreside, on the site of the former Portland Company Complex, seeks to maintain a link to the city's heritage while creating a new neighborhood out of whole cloth.



dock sections manufactured in Sweden, each weighing 227,000 pounds.

Early architectural renderings of the development — still on the Portland Foreside website — depict a Cubist skyline of glass boxes, but Prentice says this was an artist's interpretation meant to suggest scale and mass, not what things will actually look like. Portland Foreside Development Company has commissioned the Boston office of the global architecture firm Perkins & Will to design the complex in what Prentice calls a "post-industrialist" style.

"We want it all to be very rooted in Maine culture," Prentice says, "with nods to our site's industrial past, as well as nods to our site's nautical past and present."

Critics of the project have raised concerns about its immense scale, proposed building heights, and historic-preservation commitments, as well as about the potential use of tax dollars to subsidize infrastructure. In 2015, an advocacy group called Save the Soul of Portland, largely motivated by the Portland Foreside project, put forward a ballot measure that would have placed limitations on development in order to preserve views. Portland residents resoundingly rejected the proposed ordinance. Prentice and Costello's LLC was the largest donor to the PAC opposing the measure.

Attorney Barbara Vestal, who lives across Fore Street, not far from the Portland Company site, wrote the rejected 2015 ordinance and has been an outspoken critic. Her latest concern is the prospect of Portland Foreside seeking tax increment financing from the city to help pay for roadways. Prentice estimates road construction and other infrastructure improvements will cost \$55 million, and he argues that public investment in those improvements will help develop Portland Foreside to where it ultimately generates \$10.4 million a year in property taxes. Tax increment financing from the city, he says, will also help Portland Foreside realize its vision for housing, which includes 220 market-rate apartments that Prentice says the city desperately needs.

In an email to the Portland City Council, Vestal recently pleaded, "Please do not entertain giving away public tax dollars to enable them to produce something

that is massively out of scale for the site.” When she looks at what has so far been built around the eastern waterfront, Vestal says, it seems “really generic and not really Portland. You have a red-brick marine passenger-ferry terminal that has become a wedding venue.”

“There’s a lot of life that isn’t happening here,” she goes on. “Buildings are built to take advantage of the views but are not knit into the fabric of the neighborhood. It just seems more like a suburban office park than an extension of the Old Port.”

Prentice doesn’t necessarily disagree. The hotels and office buildings so far built in the eastern waterfront, he says, “don’t give pedestrians a reason to come here.” But this will change, he insists, once Portland Foreside is completed.

“It will be transformative,” Prentice says. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to impact the community. Looking back on this 15 years from now, this will be a whole new district where people can visit, work, and live. It’s going to be a whole new neighborhood down here, and that’s exciting.” — E.A.B.



OAKDALE

New buildings — and new brio — at the University of Southern Maine.

In a lot of ways, the Portland neighborhood between St. John Street and Back Cove feels like a college district lite. Forest Avenue has cheap eats, good coffee, and craft beer. Runners, bikers, and bladders flow amiably alongside Baxter Boulevard. The University of Southern Maine campus has a terrific library and a planetarium and a few cool gallery spaces. What it doesn’t have is students living on campus — but this is poised to change.

In November, Portland’s municipal planning board approved a \$100 million expansion of USM’s Portland campus that would include a striking 41,000-square-foot Career & Student Success Center, an acre of campus

The corrugated metal elements and timber-framed portico of USM’s envisioned Career & Student Success Center are intended to salute the state’s maritime and forest-products industries. The center will be built to LEED standards of energy efficiency.

green, and an eight-story residence hall with 580 beds, the campus’s first dormitory. The project — which, when this magazine went to press, was awaiting final approval from the University of Maine System Board of Trustees — could break ground as soon as springtime and has an estimated completion date of June 2023.

The 216,000-square-foot Portland Commons residence hall will be open to third- and fourth-year students (as well as law and grad students) and built to Passive House sustainability standards, one of the most energy-efficient dorms of its size anywhere in the country. In a wing facing Back Cove, floor-to-ceiling glass panels will face the water and the city skyline. Housing fees will be below market rates, says USM chief operating officer Alec Porteous, to keep residence hall life affordable for students and staff.

How might the campus glow-up affect the surrounding blocks? “Ideally, USM’s aspirational growth will be value added for the neighborhood,” says Annie Leahy, a member of Woodford-Oakdale Neighborhood Association, who has lived near USM with her family for eight years. Oakdale has always been a mix of town and gown, Leahy says. “Part of the neighborhood’s draw is its history and the deep community built by our neighbors, many of whom have lived here for decades,” she explains. “Part of the charm and vibrancy are the students and professors who live here.”

“We definitely invite the neighbors to spend time on the campus,” Porteous says. He expects the new quad will be a gathering place for community members as well as students and faculty, and first-floor facilities in the Career & Student Success Center — including a 300-seat dining area and a cafe/brewpub — are likewise open to all. The more interesting question, though, is how the



Above: The Aloft Hotel at Hobson’s Landing is one of three new hotels tentatively set to open in Portland in 2021. Below: The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Portland Community Based Outpatient Clinic broke ground last summer, one of several high-visibility new developments along the western waterfront.

presence of hundreds of students just a block off Forest Avenue might catalyze businesses there. “It will add considerable vibrancy,” Porteous predicts. “Adding 580 beds to lower Forest Avenue can only be a good thing in adding energy to the area.” — A.H.



CENTRAL AND WESTERN WATERFRONT

Cold storage and hot real estate.

When the Rufus Deering Lumber Company opted to sell its Commercial Street lumberyard to developers in 2016, execs at the 162-year-old Portland company told reporters the land was just too valuable to sit on. Two years later, construction began on the site for Hobson’s Landing, the nearly complete first phase of which involves a seven-story condo with 85 luxury units, plus 6,000 square feet of office and retail space. The first buyers — who paid between \$415,000 and \$3 million for water views, private decks, concierge service, and more — move in this spring. A brochure describes the condominium as “a place where the border between business and pleasure is happily lost in the heart of a seaside city that’s become one of America’s fastest rising stars.”

Maintaining the balance between business and pleasure has, of late, been the challenge of redeveloping the city’s central and western waterfront. In 2010, city officials relaxed rules limiting non-marine uses in the central zone, the heart of Portland’s fishing industry, and recent years have seen new restaurant, retail, and office spaces sharing the wharfs at the foot of the Old Port. Hobson’s Landing sits at the juncture of that increasingly mixed-use area and the still marine-industrial western waterfront. According to Sandy Johnson, a broker for Town & Shore Real Estate, which manages the development’s residential sales, that transitional

location is a selling point for well-heeled buyers who want to feel knitted into Portland’s fabric.

“They’re not seeing themselves as a species apart,” says Johnson, who describes most buyers as baby boomers and empty nesters, about half of whom are from away. “They want the waterside to remain marine-use while they also love the restaurant scene.”

Marine use is prompting its own new development. Last fall, the city approved construction of a \$30 million, 107,000-square-foot cold-storage facility on the western waterfront, which advocates say will lure shipping traffic. Next door to that site, marine engineering firm Navatek, a new tenant at the Portland Co. Marine Complex, recently announced plans to build 15,000 square feet of new office space by the end of summer. And just across the road, though not a marine facility, construction is underway on a nearly 69,000-square-foot medical center to house services for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which the VA expects to open in early 2022.

Some West End neighbors have objected to the new developments, decrying the proposed 74-foot height of the cold-storage facility and the inevitable surge in car and truck traffic. “Change is always challenging,” city waterfront coordinator Bill Needelman concedes. “This was an area with uninterrupted views of the water, where you get into town quickly and easily. When things like that change, everybody feels it.”

But preserving the working waterfront, Needelman says, means carefully balancing the needs of commuters and nearby residents with those of, say, a freight operation or a shipyard.

“We all have to be good neighbors and make sure no one takes away from another’s needs,” he says. “But whenever I’m there and see the number of people working at the shipyard and all the activity, I think we can take great pride that, as a community, we’ve kept that working port as an economic engine driving commerce in our city.”

All that activity will be visible from the upper stories at Hobson’s Landing, where phase two, a 155-room boutique hotel, is well underway, and phase three, another 80-something condo units in another mixed-use tower, is in the planning. — A.H.

