

South Portland SWOT Analysis



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Goals and Information Sources

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- Better understand internal and external factors shaping economic development strategy
- Connect strategy choices to specific assets, liabilities, opportunities and risks
- SWOT analysis informed by:
 - City and regional demographic and economic trends
 - Local and regional real estate market conditions
 - Interviews with diverse groups of residents, businesses, developers, real estate professionals and civic leaders
 - Consultant observations

Summary Analysis

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Strengths

Diverse economic base ; strong sectors
Educated workforce
Transportation infrastructure
Maine Mall
Access to downtown Portland and highways
Waterfront amenities and real estate
Attractive neighborhoods
Quality government services
Effective permitting processes

Weaknesses

Lagging job growth in past decade
Decline in several sectors
Little market ready land
Unattractive gateways and commercial areas
Outdated city image
Differing priorities on city's future growth
Distrust of development approval process
School system performance
Growing low-income population
Limited economic development capacity

Opportunities

Spillover growth from Portland
Growing regional industries
Demand for mixed-use districts
Tight industrial real market
Development of under-used land
Regional base of visitors
Southern Maine Community College
High income and baby-boomer population

Threats

Political climate /conflict over growth
Perception as a difficult city for businesses
Competition from other communities
Stagnation in property tax base
Growth in on-line/new retail formats
Tax base reliance on large properties

South Portland: ED Strengths

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- **Diverse economic base with strong retail, health care, corporate HQ and financial sectors**
- Educated workforce with diverse occupations
- **Multi-modal transportation infrastructure**
- Good interstate highway access on western side
- **Maine Mall: major regional shopping destination**
- Proximity to downtown Portland
- **Waterfront: amenities and underused real estate**
- Attractive neighborhoods, some with commercial areas
- **High quality of city government services**
- Effective development and business permitting process

South Portland: ED Weaknesses

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- **Job growth lags region, Scarborough and Westbrook**
- Lost jobs in many services sectors over past decade
- **Little market ready land for new development**
- Problem property owners not seeking highest and best use
- **Unattractive gateways and commercial areas**
- Poor quality and outdated industrial properties
- Outdated city image as blue collar and home of Maine mall
- **Differing priorities and views for city's future growth**
- Perceived lack of transparency/distrust of development approval process
- **School system rating and performance disparities**
- Growing low-income population
- **Limited economic development capacity**

South Portland: ED Opportunities

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- Spillover business growth from Portland
- **Regional growth: health care, professional & technical services, restaurants, corporate HQs**
- Demand for traditional mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented communities
- **Enhanced and expanded neighborhood commercial areas**
- Tight industrial real market: demand and limited supply
- **Development of undeveloped and under-used land**
- Regional tourism and large base of visitors
- **Educational resources at Southern Maine Community College**
- Growing higher income and baby-boomer population

Threats

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- **Political climate and conflicts over business growth and development**
- Perception as a difficult city for development and businesses
- **Competition for new businesses and development from communities in region**
 - Greater capacity and active economic development corporations in several communities
- Growth in on-line retailing and new retail formats may impact shopping center oriented retail base
- **Stagnation in city property tax base**
- Tax base reliance on large properties and companies

Economic Development Strategy Options

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- **Main Street Program:**
 - market, improve and attract enterprises to neighborhood comm. areas.
- **Business and Development Attraction:**
 - actively market South Portland for businesses and projects; maintain real estate inventory; assist new firms and projects to locate.
- **Develop Underutilized Sites:**
 - outreach and assist owners to plan for reuse; find partners to implement plans; brownfield cleanup; assemble and improve priority sites.
- **Entrepreneurial and Small Business Development**
 - connect entrepreneurs and firms to regional resources; effort to identify and foster resident entrepreneurs; youth entrepreneurship program.
- **Community Education, Engagement and Leadership**
 - Ongoing info on econ. development plans and projects; institutionalize community review of projects; civic leadership training with SMCC
- **Workforce and Employment Initiative**
 - Partnership to employ low-income residents; school career initiative with local companies; work with SMCC to address employer needs

SWOT Analysis: Strategy Options

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Strength
Weakness
Opportunity
Threat

Leverage historic neighborhood centers
Proximity to Portland
Effective business permitting & city services

Balance mall and strip centers
Shared vision
Helps attract young workers

Main Street Program

Improve image
More attractive gateways & centers
Reverse lagging restaurants
Add ED capacity

Demand for walk able mixed use areas
Leverage regional food sector and entrepreneurs

SWOT Analysis: Strategy Options

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Strength
Weakness
Opportunity
Threat

Effective permitting processes & city services
Proximity to Portland
Workforce assets
Build on existing centers

Respond to competition
Diversify economy
Grow tax base

**Business and
Development
Attraction**

Change city image
Create demand for vacant space & underused land
Lagging job growth

Attract growing regional industries
Cost & process advantage over Portland
Tap tight industrial market

SWOT Analysis: Strategy Options

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Strength
Weakness
Opportunity
Threat

Waterfront land
Effective permitting
process & city services
Workforce assets

Grow tax base
Diversify
economy

**Develop
Underutilized
Sites**

Address underused,
outdated properties
Engage problem
property owners

Attract regional growth
industries
Process advantage over
Portland
Create new economic asset

SWOT Analysis and Strategies Options

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Strength
Weakness
Opportunity
Threat

Educated workforce
Effective business permitting
& city services
Proximity to Portland

Diversity economy
“Grow your own”
response to
competition

**Entrepreneurial
& Small Business
Development**

Change city image
Address poverty &
raise income via
microbusiness

Leverage regional food sector
and entrepreneurs
Spillover from Portland
Regional tourism market
SMCC Entrepreneurial Center

SWOT Analysis and Strategies Options

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Strength
Weakness
Opportunity
Threat

Enhance civic capacity and government services via resident skills

Help address political conflicts
Improve perception of “business climate”

Community Education, Engagement and Leadership

Balance/resolve varied priorities
Build trust in permitting decisions

SMCC educational resources
Build on comp plan success
Engage increasingly active residents

SWOT Analysis and Strategies Options

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Strength
Weakness
Opportunity
Threat

Connect residents to
diverse local jobs
Enhance workforce assets
Expand city business
services

Address
competition via
workforce
services

**Workforce and
Employment
Initiative**

Address poverty &
raise incomes
Improve schools

SMCC resources
Expand mixed use areas
Leverage regional food
sector and entrepreneurs

Next Steps

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- Incorporate feedback from Economic Development Committee
- Complete resident survey
- October 1 community workshop to share analysis and engage residents to set priorities and inform decision on strategy options
- October City Council meeting to share analysis and review outcome from community workshop