



Rockland

Shaping the future through its past.

Above: Looking toward Rockland from the breakwater.

Rockland has experienced land development typical of most mid-coast Maine communities. Birthed by village settlement that looks toward the ocean for sustenance, commerce and culture, parts of the town seem timeless although, upon further investigation, there are signs of change.

Analysis by Urban3 of Rockland has produced data with relatively few extremes, mostly because land development patterns have not been aggressive. This analysis shows considerable opportunity especially in the preponderance of structure needing renovation rather than replacement. Unlike many communities elsewhere that grew more vigorously and rapidly (as, for example, in the sun-belt and Rockies), Rockland maintains a story of its past that provides evidence of lasting community value.

The slow growth that is typical of Maine has not produced the failures typical of most US markets, but it also means that projects are slower to evolve and absorb within the community. There are pros and cons to this pattern. On one hand it's harder to affect the balance of a community as alterations aren't rapid enough to create as dramatic an impact. But on the other, incremental changes that may be detrimental may have an effect that takes longer to notice.

Like most North East coastal towns, much of Rockland's core economic activity is focused on the harbor although like many coast towns the Main Street has turned its back on the harbor until very recently with the harbor walk and promotion of waterfront events and festivals. The entire town is within a walkable ring of development radiating out of the intersection of Main and Tilson Avenue. Buildings in and around Main Street, at the center of town, date back a couple centuries, and overall, the form hasn't changed shape since the 1800's. There has been a change of use. Though the industrial and working port nature is still there, the scale of that industrial operation has moved toward a more picturesque main street feel with shops that cater toward tourists, and the addition of cultural assets



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Left: The Farnsworth Museum's public face on Main Street is a retrofitted mixed-use structure, with the overall campus expanding westward past the original Farnsworth House (right) and converted church that houses additional exhibit space.



like the Farnsworth Art Museum. The museum is a tremendous anchor to the downtown, bringing over 60,000 visitors a year to Rockland and its campus spans clear from Main Street to the west side of Union. As the economy has transitioned, it has left opportunities for infill in the core, and particularly at the edges of Main Street. There are new opportunities to build upon the successful heart, and expand the downtown experience eastward to the docks. Opportunity may be found in thinking more efficiently about parking, and creating new development opportunities to expand the pedestrian experience of Rockland. The downtown core is clearly the most value producing area of the community, and it would be a sound return to the community to continue to grow this type of wealth.



Drawing of downtown Rockland in "figure-ground" style to note buildings in black and parking lots in red. Main Street has stronger framing by buildings than that of Union. Also, there exists opportunity to consolidate parking into more efficient forms and seek opportunities to build more infill and build a stronger streetscape on Union.

Opportunities and challenges

Beyond the core, the urban fabric breaks down considerably after a short walk. The Main Street area quickly turns to an auto-centric environment. This is most readily noted in the community's figure-ground. This isn't to suggest that these shops and uses are not necessary to the community; it's more to point out their development pattern stunts the walkable asset of the community. There are opportunities, through design, to have both the use and continue the Main Street pedestrian realm which is producing significant cultural and financial return to the community. This could be done with buildings with parking behind the building and additional stories above for flexible uses of office, residential or hospitality. Another value consideration for capitalizing on the multi-story/multi-use development of the downtown is that it helps reinforce the density demands of downtown, as well and spreading the market risk from any one land-use class. Rockland has learned adaptation and efficiency from its history, what was once a hotel is now an office, or what was once a house is now an internet proprietor. The development patterns left by their ancestors have bestowed a flexibility for Rockland to continue to be productive. The form, placement and adaptability of downtown buildings lend themselves to reuse, where single use, single story, suburban and strip development buildings very often are harder to re-occupy and re-inhabit. Finally, the split of US 1 into a one-way pair should be reconsidered. Though this street type efficiently moves large volumes of traffic, Rockland may desire the traffic to flow slower through the heart of town, rather than quickly flushing traffic through town like a kidney. In addition to the traffic flow change, the streetscape of Union is far inferior to

Main Street and the buildings don't give the same sense of place that one feels on Main Street. A tourist heading south through Rockland on Union Street would not recognize the attractive vitality of the downtown without seeing Main Street previously.

Lessons Learned

The edge of Rockland tells a much different story of land-use. In this, we see the finger-prints of trends that are more national and typical of an average American town. The post WWII development pattern is a refined product of national financial practice and policy, rather than local whims. The easiest way to see this is in the revenue return difference between the Hannaford shopping plaza and the Walmart property. As many residents would acknowledge, the building of new retail usually cannibalizes the existing retail, as is evident in the Walmart producing about \$7,247/acre in city property taxes while the Hannaford shopping plaza has fallen to about \$2,165/acre respectively. Rockland area consumer demand is somewhat finite, thus cannot support additional capacity offered by large scale retail. Also, this development pattern has a limited life-cycle. Unlike the lessons of Main Street, this architectural type is less flexible for reuse because of the size, but it is also not designed with longevity in mind. Community leaders concerned about the future of Rockland should consider this when thinking through all the impacts of this development pattern. Additionally, the infrastructure demands for this typology are greater overall, and they should be weighed against the revenues generated on this land-use.

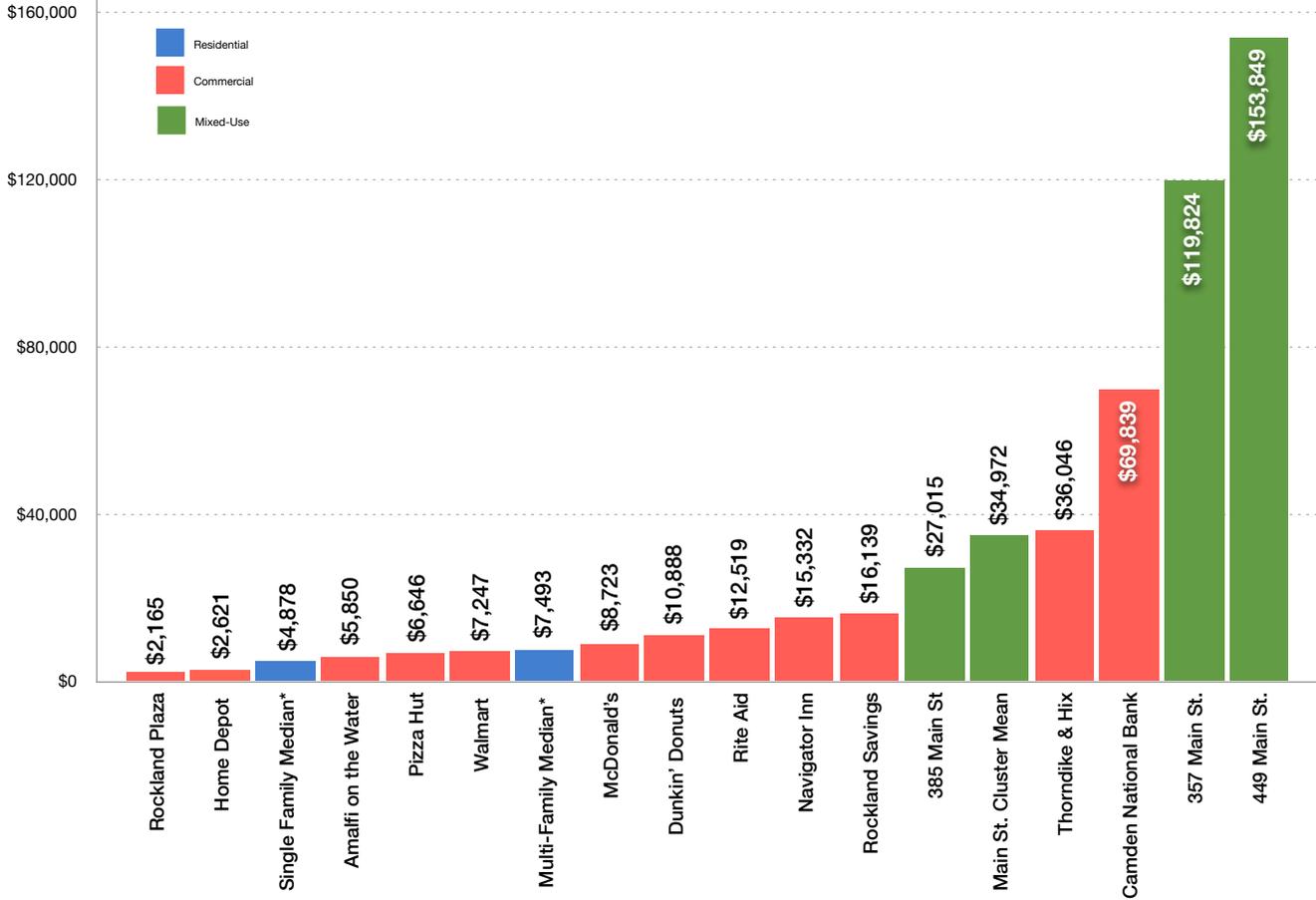
To some degree, the Hannaford shopping plaza is on its way to obsolescence (as is the Walmart site from the imminent relocation of the store to Thomaston). Consideration should go toward anticipated redevelopment of the property, as Rocklanders are already thinking. This is an opportunity to reconstruct this area in a way that complements the historic town and adds to it a compatible development product that expands the cultural feel of the community. As for the edge of Rockland, consideration should be given to what will happen if more of the current trends of post WWII-styled land-use development continue. What will happen to the character of Camden Street? In 15 years, will this area experience the same retail erosion experienced by tenants of the Hannaford plaza, despite the activity focused on grocery-shopping next door? Will citizens of the community be left with new problems and new infrastructure demands placed in other parts of town?

As newer large scale retail continues along Camden Street, the future of older retail strips should be a priority to ensure Rockland's fiscal balance.



The Hannaford shopping plaza

City of Rockland Property Tax Revenue Profile: 2012 Tax Yield per Acre



Avg. Acre = \$828/acre (8128 acres producing \$6,734,579 over \$757,289,900 total value)
*Median values per City of Rockland

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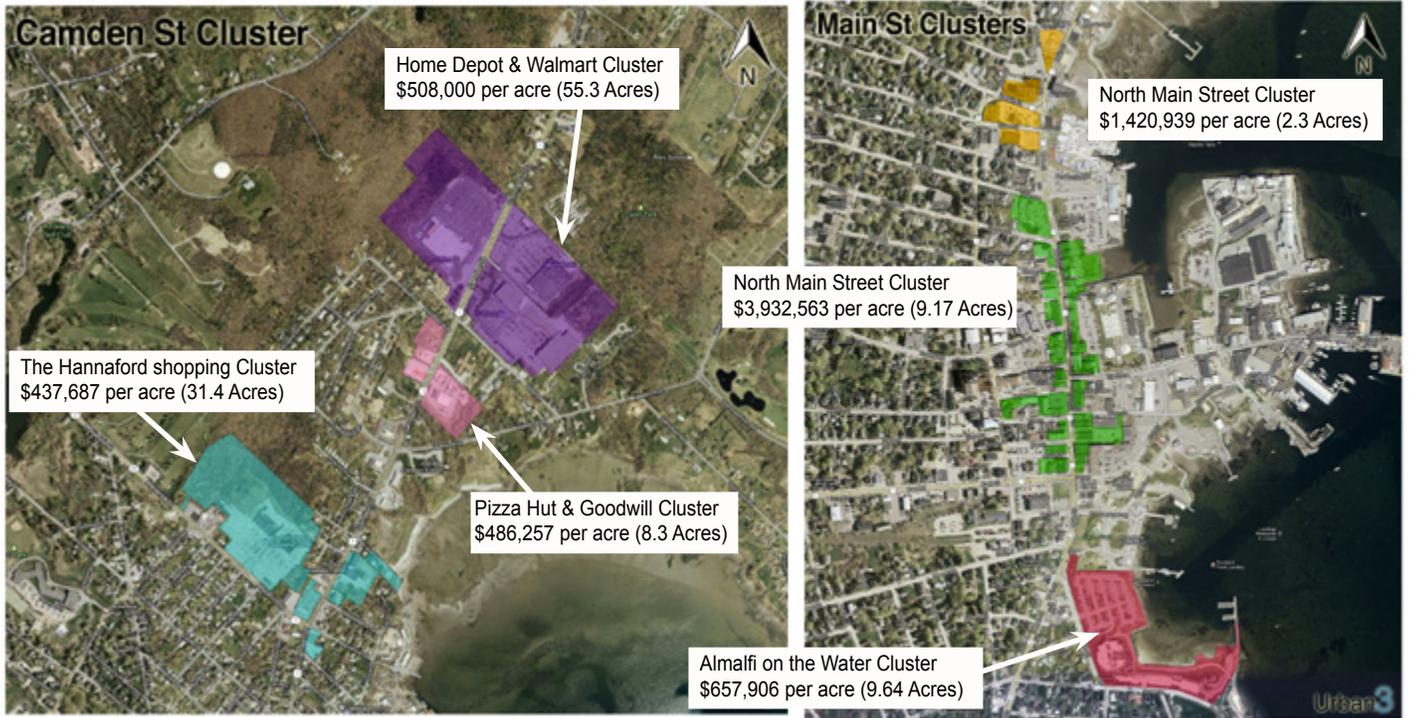
Property Tax Yield Chart for Rockland Demonstrating Property Tax Production for Various Properties

One of the greatest lessons from Rockland has been the ‘tale of contrasting value’ beyond the production value of the study. When considering the component of time, the numbers become enormous. The post WWII pattern demonstrates that the construction of one-storey, large boxes surrounded by extensive and isolating parking contributes a very short “life” of value. Particularly in the scale of time for Rockland, it is relatively short. Contrasting the return on investment for public infrastructure (even without considering the dilution of Rockland’s economic center) of the plazas built outside of downtown, with the



Originally called the Thorndike Hotel (left), 385 Main has continued to produce significant economic value to Rockland. As times have changed, so has the building. Re-purposing its uses within the same architecture to adapt to changing times. The Urban3 study has shown that this property is producing \$27,015 in Rockland property taxes per acre.





Value Averages

For the study, several areas were 'clustered' as a way to average out the effective value of the area. This type of study helps lend a better understanding of how larger development patterns consume land and its impact on value. The suburban patterns (left) max out around \$0.5M/acre, while the areas around downtown (right) peaked out around \$3.9M/acre. It should be noted that the Main Street Cluster does not take in the surface parking lots. They were set aside for this part of the study, because consideration should be given to making the lots more efficient in order to open up new parcels for redevelopment and infill.

contributions of the Old Thorndike Hotel Building and the old Thorndike and Hix Building (across the parking lot from the Post Office), these structures in the center of the downtown have not only contributed a higher revenue at a per acre level (even measured annually) to the community, but they have done so for over a century, and will continue to do so well beyond the useful life of development pattern out Camden Street.

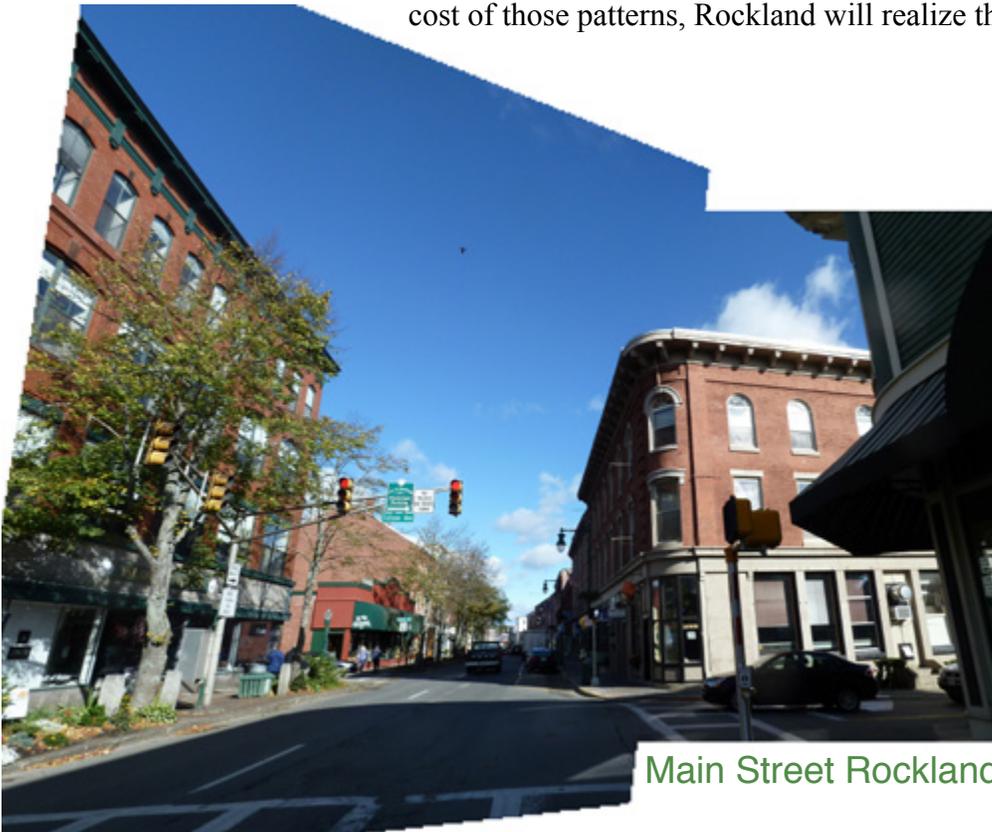
Other lessons and opportunities may not be so obvious or large. In fact, a lesson for redevelopment could be found in the 'art of the small'. Do not expect solutions for the downtown to follow similar "big bang" approaches in scale and investment that happen in the suburban environment. Opportunities exist for community leaders to seek out local entrepreneurs for growth and development of the local economy. Be it access to capital investment, business training, or even as simple as connection to real estate rental or sale opportunities, local entrepreneurs should be cultivated if Rockland is to succeed in renovation and future growth. In fact, a community's success depends upon its differentiation and growth. Not just any growth, but growth that comes from within Maine, by Rocklanders, cultivating unique businesses and reinforcing Rockland's sense of place. This type of economy will not only build wealth (in capital investment and in efficient use of municipal infrastructure as well as in keeping a larger portion of each expenditure within the community), but properly directed will attract sought-after tourism of the kind that can reinforce sense of community, rather than dilute it. This takes time, but it creates a more resilient base for the local economy. As mentioned earlier, what is clear from the study is the opportunity between Main Street and the water. A re-think of the relationship to the water is in order. The landscape adjacent to the water is Rockland's connection to the sea, but the land between this area and Main Street is Rockland's most fertile soil for opportunity.

Like a farmer considers his crop production as a unit of “per Acre” cost and yield, should Rockland do the same, it will realize a higher level of efficiency and local Gross Municipal Product. For example, 0.8 acres of buildings like the 449 Main Street Building would produce as much property tax as is produced by the 31.4 acre Hannaford Shopping Plaza. To continue the metaphor of the farmer, should some tending of the downtown ‘crop’ be utilized, to say, “grow the upper stories” through renovation into something that is occupied with residential or office, it will increase Rockland property tax production from \$34,972/acre to well over \$40,000/acre. By comparison, the Hannaford Shopping Plaza is producing \$2,165/acre in Rockland taxes and expectations for that area’s future revenue should exceed area infrastructure costs.

“What’s good for downtown is great for Rockland.”

Joseph Minicozzi, AICP
Principal
Urban3, LLC

Our study has found that ‘what’s good for downtown is great for the City of Rockland.’ As downtown currently stands, it is achieving the highest amounts of value on a per acre analysis. Overall, new structures at the city’s edges may be more valuable in aggregate, they also consume considerably more real estate to achieve that value and the value is lost over time. Using a per acre analysis is critical, as it baselines the fact that land, although plentiful, is not replaceable. Additionally, as the community is stretched out, it takes more infrastructure to service less development, which makes communities more costly to service. Land use patterns have a direct relationship to community cost. After all, a mile of pipe in the ground is a mile of pipe. The more units of development that are on that mile, the lower the unit cost of the pipe. It is in the best financial interest of Rockland to continue its efforts to revitalize its core and build off its assets downtown. By diversifying its development pattern and tracking the math of value and cost of those patterns, Rockland will realize that, in the end, downtown pays.



Main Street Rockland