

AN ACT TO INVEST IN MAINE COMMUNITY VITALITY: *BUILDING A 'PLACE' BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY*

Broad Vision:

Maine has a strong 'brand,' based on our beautiful landscape, historic downtown & villages, and high quality of life. Protecting and enhancing the special character of this state is a key part of our economic development strategy. This investment should be sustained over a significant period of time in a deliberate, strategic way. In order to accomplish this goal, we need to build a broad coalition that includes advocates for community revitalization *and* landscape protection – the business community, the preservation community and the environmental community working hand in hand toward a common goal.

Short term priority:

In 2009, we will focus on creating the best vehicle to make strategic investments in Maine's towns & cities, including infrastructure such as streetscape improvements, parks, walkways, building facades and historic buildings in danger of demolition. The Land for Maine's Future program serves as a model for what Maine can accomplish in a 'sister' program for community capital investment: The Community Investment Fund. This Fund could be part of a combined bond package that includes other quality-places-related funding proposals.

Objectives:

- Establish community revitalization as a state policy priority that is a part of a broad economic development strategy based on quality of place
- Increase overall investment in Maine communities
- Streamline existing investment programs and better coordinate capital investment efforts

Draft Concept November 2008:

What do we propose?

- Statewide community capital investment program housed at DECD. Funds will be locally matched one-to-one.
- Collaboration between DECD Staff and a Board of Directors, like the Riverfront Bond, which evaluates and makes decisions on proposals. This Board shall include representatives from all relevant state agencies, including the historic preservation, planning and transportation agencies.
- Criteria adopted from existing programs, such as the Municipal Investment Trust Fund, Riverfront Community Bond, & CDBG. Focus investment in key areas:
 - Community center improvements: sidewalks, bike lanes, landscaping, public restrooms, visitor centers, parking, pocket parks, lighting, façade improvements and public-and non-profit-owned buildings rehabilitation.
 - Emergency Fund to purchase endangered buildings listed in or eligible for the National Register or locally historically designated and secure easements for resale.
 - Community Design Assistance for town centers/downtowns as well as town edges/entrances.

Proposal by Maine Downtown Coalition, November 20, 2008
Not Administration Policy

- Use the Municipal Investment Trust Fund as a vehicle: Change the name to Community Investment Fund, make it more flexible for the uses described above, and infuse it with criteria and process from the Riverfront Community Bond. De-prioritize investment in new business parks, and stress economic development in rehabilitated buildings in downtowns, villages or Main Streets. Remove the service center grants restriction; all communities may receive grants. Encourage projects that further community comprehensive plans, strategic plans and employ ordinances that reflect best practices.
- Build in a review for effectiveness, based on the independent third party review such as that Maine Technology Institute has adopted. Require an annual report to the BRED Committee in the Legislature.
- Keep sewer & water infrastructure separate; it's important, and expensive – and if it were included it has potential to balloon so much that it drowns out other investments.
- Foster collaboration between LMF, the Community Investment Fund, CDBG and New Century Fund so that proposals which include both land and community investments could leverage additional funds – emphasizing the link between the natural landscape and building community vitality.

How much do we propose to capitalize the fund?

- \$27 Million: \$25M for public infrastructure, \$2M for endangered revolving fund.
- Current thinking is a general obligation bond is the best strategy. Dedicated, sustained funding is needed in the long term, and a strategy that will link LMF, New Century & Community Funding together.

Ideas for a larger bond package that will be explored:

- Include New Century Fund: cultural investments in libraries, cultural and art centers, granges and other public and non-profit buildings that are an integral part of town centers & downtowns. The Cultural Affairs Council already collaborates and these investments are complementary. The CAC is proposing \$10 million bond this year.