York's Wild Kingdom: A Development Proposal
by
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B.A., Fine Arts 1991
Colgate University

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Real Estate Development at the
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ABSTRACT
York’s Wild Kingdom is a privately held zoo and amusement park in York, Maine. Berkshire Development, a Massachusetts based shopping center developer and investment company currently controls the Wild Kingdom and the 150 acres that surround it. The community is culturally divided between York Harbor and York Beach, which is relevant to the entitlement process. The site is uniquely positioned to provide a new public road to York Beach directly from the highway, thus alleviating a longstanding traffic congestion problem for York Harbor. This may be a point on which both groups can unite, to the benefit of the developer. This thesis examines the potential of the site in a concept level development plan. To do this, I used four assessment criteria for each programming option. 1. Enhancement of community identity. 2. Balance seasonal resort uses with year round uses. 3. Broad community support. 4. Economic feasibility to the developer. Uses explored are a retail center with a ‘New England Village Green’ theme, an expansion of the zoo, the addition of a non-seasonal indoor waterpark, the addition of a spa which draws on the nineteenth century theme of ‘coming for the cure’, and an extension of the existing downtown retail area into the site. I argue that in order to initiate this development, the above concerns must be addressed.

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Here’s to imagination.

“The development of York as a tourist destination began in earnest in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the war was over and the search for personal fortune was renewed. People were more free of the burden of wartime taxes, and the class differentiation allowed privileged people to travel for the pleasure of views, climate, leisure activities and social gathering.”

sunrise at short sands beach, union bluff hotel to the right, fun-o-rama and bowling center, goldenrod's and york beach square left. york beach, maine
Preface

‘If it is to be accepted as an axiom that all wars
create poverty and desolation, if Maine history
had repeated itself, then the civil war of 1861-65
should have ruined York completely. There was the
same ruinous disruption of business and the same
burdensome taxation which followed every war. The
young veterans were just as restless and eager to
seek greener fields. The opportunities for profit in the
cities had so outdistanced the chances in the rural
districts that the prospect of spending a lifetime on
a farm held little appeal. There was no market for
what York had to sell. The land which the Puritans of
Massachusetts had coveted for its natural resources
could no longer compete in the industrial world,
which was constantly inventing new machinery and
labor-saving devices.’

However, even before the civil war came to a close, a
new era began, at first almost unnoted, like a modern
miracle. Summer visitors came to town to board
at farmhouses. A ‘back to the land movement’ had
started which was to revolutionize the New England
economy. Perhaps it could be traced to the natural
instincts of man, to nostalgia for the scenes of one’s
childhood, or the sentimentality bred in the hearts of
children by the reminiscences of their elders. Many
city dwellers who had gained a competence had
gone to the metropolis from small farms where life
had seemed hard, dull and unrewarding, but had left
the homestead with full intention of returning to buy
back the ‘old place’ after they had won fortunes in
the city.

Poets, landscape artists, and song writers kindled
the longing to return. ..

Massachusetts again found Maine’s resources
irresistible, but this time they were resources which
must be cherished at the source of supply and could
not be carried away.

The first hardy visitors were artists, authors,
college professors, and professional men who
could contrive long vacations in a day when
extended holidays were luxuries to be enjoyed by
a favored few. The problem was transportation;
as their numbers increased, those who provided
means for getting from one place to another saw
fit in establishing scheduled services. Better
accommodations stimulated an increase in demand;
the peak seemed unattainable.

By the nineties the means of transportation had
improved from buckboard and stagecoach to steam
railroad and electric car line. During a few summers,
around 1887, steamers made daily stops at York
Harbor and York Beach on a scheduled run which
also included calls at Newburyport, New Castle and
Portsmouth.

The two rivers in York, with their harbors for the
loading of vessels, lost their prominence as ‘York’s
front doors’ and were superseded in importance by
vistas of rocky headlands and sandy beaches. York
now faced an open ocean. Land by the seashore,
which if employed at all, had been barren, rocky
pasture, was now prized for house lots, provided they
afforded a distant view, or maybe a juniper bush.1

1 Ernst, George. New England Miniature: a History of York, Maine. Freeport,
the bear that greets all who pass by the entrance to york’s wild kingdom on route one, york, maine
weekday coupon for admission to york's wild kingdom
the map of the region at www.yorkzoo.com
the potential development site, reaching from route one to york beach square
the directions to york’s wild kingdom
Opportunity

Large land assemblage
Just over an hour from Boston
On the coast
On I-95
In Maine
Cute town
Beaches
Zoo

geraniums in a windowbox at york beach square
Villages are full of stories. York, Maine has a story about a zoo, a shopping center, a beach, a downtown, a village — and all its people. In 2004, Oscar Plotkin, the principal of Berkshire Development secured a site for a neighborhood shopping center in a community that is underserved with retail. The site happens to include a zoo and a small amusement park. What began as an idea of a familiar grocery anchored shopping center development on Route One has evolved into a possible 200 acre master planned development.

The site spans one mile from Route One to York Beach Square, which has a small downtown at Short Sands Beach. There are two beaches, Long Sands Beach and Short Sands Beach, but the area is called ‘York Beach’, which is different from ‘York Harbor’ or ‘York Village’ or ‘York Corner’ or ‘York Cliffs’. There are many Yorks. Lore has it that you can’t throw a rock without hitting a post office in ‘The Yorks’. York Beach is between York Harbor and York Cliffs, with no connection from the highway. The traffic congestion that its visitors generate is burdensome to the other Yorks.

The Developer

Oscar Plotkin is an entrepreneur. He grew up in the Berkshires, the son of a real estate developer. He strayed into Shakespearian acting, after which
he returned to found Berkshire Development, LLC, a shopping center investment and development company which has been in operation for thirty years. Mr. Plotkin’s ebullience dominates the mood of the company.

Plotkin attended high school in the Berkshires with Kevin Frasier, who is now a resident of York and who works in the produce packaging business. For Plotkin’s 50th birthday, Frasier brought him a framed aerial photo of the York Wild Kingdom property, which currently operates as a zoo, arcade and amusement center. A conversation began which culminated in Plotkin securing a Purchase & Sale agreement for both the Wild Kingdom property and four parcels surrounding it. That was in 2004.

Today, Plotkin controls all of the parcels, and he is seeking to control more parcels with the hope of assembling a site of over 200 acres which will reach from Route One to York Beach Square. He has held a series of open meetings in which citizens have expressed a variety of views, and ideas for the potential development. The comments are always passionate with a strong commitment to the York community. Plotkin has repeatedly heard that people do not want just a big box shopping center. He has heard that they do not want the character of their town changed. He knows they want something special. He commissioned architect Rick Joy to create a planned vision for what could be – responding to community sentiment yet offering value to potential customers and the likelihood of profit for the developer and his investors. On July 25, 2008 that ‘What If’ vision was presented to the community first in a sketch review before the Planning Commission, and the following day in an open public meeting at the bingo hall above the fire station. The reactions ranged from ‘over my dead body’ to ‘will you please’. The newspaper recounts that most people were, ‘stunned to near silence’ by the scale of the proposal.¹

The site is not currently owned by Mr. Plotkin or Berkshire Development. As is customary, the developer and the seller enter into a Purchase and Sale agreement which gives the developer the right to complete the sale within a pre-specified period of time. The fee paid by the developer for this ‘right to close’ typically reflects the length of this period of time. The developer currently has Purchase & Sale agreements for about 150 acres.

The Architect
Rick Joy grew up in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine where he attended the Old Town High School and later the Portland School of Art. He first made his living as a jazz drummer and carpenter, but at the age of twenty-eight he decided to become an architect. At that time there were no such programs in the State of Maine and the story goes that he was sitting by his woodstove in the deep of winter looking at a brochure for a program in Arizona, and became enchanted by the photographs of the desert, or maybe just by the warm weather.

Rick Joy continues to be held captive by the Tucson desert, and is now an internationally recognized architect, working on projects from Africa to Mexico to Vermont. He is known for his work in fragile and sensitive landscapes. He views the site’s buildable land as an archipelago among valuable wetlands. ‘Beach, ocean, snow, leaves, slush, mud, mosquitoes’ are images he has used to describe the land. Mr. Joy believes we can ‘build advanced buildings, with recognizable forms, without faking it’. Use of local materials and minimization of energy and environmental impact will guide his design.
site map by rick joy architects
The site of the future project slopes gently from US Route One to the sea. It includes a combination of upland, brook, pool, boardwalk, bridge, scrappy pine, weedy greens, high tension power line, zoo and carnival amusements. A narrow, newly tarred driveway bisects the site, from the highway to the zoo parking lot. There are sheds, and a few rusty trailers along the road.

The highway entrance to the site is wide and circular, in the center of which is a ‘York’s Wild Kingdom’ billboard and a larger-than-life stylized bear sculpture, regional landmarks which are well are known by visitors to Maine. Four million northbound cars pass by that entrance every year. Two hundred thousand people enter the zoo every year.

At the edge of a municipal parking lot, close to the sea there is a bright blue awning announcing the zoo and amusements. Fifty yards from the site is the resort retail shopping area along Railroad Avenue and York Beach Square. Getting people to go back and forth between downtown and the amusements has been a challenge.
featherfoil, an endangered plant that will require protection on the site
wetland pool in interior of site

york's wild kingdom parking lot

vegetation typical of site

wolff's gift shop at the kingdom

entrance road from route one to the kingdom

castle ticket booth and long line

old bridge in wetlands

covered bridge on access road when you are almost there

potential retail site on route one
CAR

York is located at Exit 7 of the Maine Turnpike (I-95). The drive takes and hour and ten minutes from Boston. The site is two miles north of the interstate exit, on Route One.

Road Mileages:

Boston, MA    70 miles
Portland, ME   42 miles
Manchester, NH 53 miles

TRAIN

The Amtrak “Downeaster” between Boston and Portland stops at Wells, Maine (15 miles north of York on Route One).
Locally, the site can be accessed by the Shoreline Express Trolley Service which connects York with the Amtrak station at Wells, as well as several other communities of southern coastal Maine.

**TROLLEY**

York Trolley Company

Within York, the York Trolley Company operates seasonally.
Maine Travelers:

- Maine travelers spend their time visiting small towns and villages, and going to the ocean or beach.¹

- Maine travel is highly seasonal: 70% of leisure visits take place in spring and summer.

- Maine travelers are professionals, rather than blue collar workers. That holds true for day trippers as well as overnight visitors.

- Maine overnight travelers are overwhelmingly from Boston (36%).

- Maine visitors are mostly day trippers, with a modest trend toward overnighters (76%).

¹ ‘Maine Highlights, Executive Summary for 2006 Visitor Study Fact Sheet’, Longwoods, 2006
In York, 'what was' is still alive in the present and needs to become part of a successful project. Vacationers first came on the train after which the automobile brought day trippers in search of carousel rides and a day at the beach. Today, as in times past, York Beach is a place for uncomplicated fun. This is the story of how the summer people came to York.

The First Visitors

In the nineteenth century, with the industrialization of American cities came both the need to get away, and the means to do so. People needed fresh air and water to escape from the heat of the city and the disease that spread through cities in the summer. Summering for one's health became common by the late nineteenth century; the first wave of summer people going to their private seaside estates was established. Wealthy urbanites came to York Harbor for the summer, often with servants in tow. Initially they came by horse and carriage from Concord, Manchester and Boston. The very desirable York Harbor had an exclusive social cohesion, which some say is still felt today.

The democratizing impact of train travel brought middle and working class vacationers, and led to the development of summer hotels along York Beach- which became a place for the rest of us.
These middle-income vacationers found themselves mingling with people working for the growing community of wealthy York Harbor summer people, both locals and servants of specific families. The spatial separation between the servicers and the served reproduced class relations of the 19th century, and defines the two sections of York to this day -- blue blood in York Harbor, blue collar in York Beach. The class status of York Beach is nicely prefigured in its very ground: York Beach’s land mass is in good part composed of debris from South Boston, dumped by the Boston & Maine Railroad in the 1880s.

Post WWII

If the train began the democratization of leisure in southern Maine, the automobile finished the job. As the urban workweek was shortened, and consumer spending broadened, ‘droves of daytrippers and weekenders’ came to York in search of popular amusements. With the coming of the automobile, the small coastal highway became a destination in its own right. Quick and inevitably superficial visits by car predominated. Quantity became a new kind of quality. Repetitive branding, symbolic homogenization, and the race toward rapid turnover (of restaurant seats, of retail inventory, of clientele) became dominant. Where there once had been immense hotels the road gave rise to roadside motels, diners, campgrounds and roadside cottages and cabins. These were all geared toward simulating travel days of old, within the context and the pace of automobile travelers and their notoriously short attention spans. Amusements became a way to capture the information overloaded daytrippers. The carnival amusements which form part of our project symbolize this era vividly.

Today

York Beach remains in part a museum of bygone popular beach culture. Everywhere in the architecture and retailing are commercial reminiscences of the nineteenth century vacation. The 1868 Union Bluff Hotel sits above the sea at Short Sands Beach, the 1896 Goldenrod Luncheonette is crowded with tourists who stand at the window watching taffy being pulled. York’s Wild Kingdom is amusing its third generation of families with games, rides and exotic animals. Beach town wares fill the shops along Railroad Avenue and York Beach Square.

There has been little high-end investment in York Beach since the 1960’s. What remains is partly tacky and touristy, but at the same time charming. Many of the shopkeepers stay in York only May through September, when their shops are open. The seasonal nature of both ownership and tourism have greatly limited the cohesion of year-round leadership. In 1978, York Beach dissolved as a

municipality and joined York Harbor as one government entity, both for combined leadership and as a means of capturing available federal grant money.

The resulting mixture of residents from York Beach and York Harbor creates quite a lot of tension: York Beach generates enormous tourist traffic which makes it difficult to move through York Harbor. Many people feel aggravated by the invasion. The town is littered with driveways displaying ‘NO TURNING’ signs, or even, ‘TURNS $.25’ with a jar next to them. The tension among neighbors has created an opportunity to solve a local problem, and it has become a key element of the development proposal which is to create access from Route One and Interstate 95, directly to York Beach attractions – reducing traffic in York Harbor.

For the last four years, the ‘York Beach Renaissance’ Committee has inspired new energy and enthusiasm in York Beach. A group of deeply committed citizens have had public discussions, encouraging new visions, prioritizing issues and proposing solutions. ‘York Beach Renaissance’ flags wave on the flagpoles. This effort produced a proposal for new zoning ordinances for the York Beach area. However, the proposal never got accepted outside of York Beach, and has now been watered down into a document which no one feels responsible for. There is a wish for renewed leadership and representation within the larger York community. Conflicts about change are nothing new to York, Maine. All of the opinions aired, regardless of point of view are based on passionate and often polarizing convictions.
The development proposal for the Wild Kingdom site will include:

1. **New England (highway) Village Green**
   Retail: a grocery anchored shopping center in a ‘Village Green’ setting, featuring an inn, a ‘wayside tavern’, bookstore café, and high quality handcrafted goods retailer. This proposed retail center reflects the unique character of the New England landscape, establishes a non-seasonal anchor, meets local retail needs and contributes to making the project as a whole feasible for the developer.

2. **Amusements**: preservation and expansion of York’s Wild Kingdom, and the addition of a themed, year-round indoor waterpark. The key is to build on an existing success and add an attraction which will balance the seasonal nature of York Beach and answer the cold water objection.

3. **The Cure**: A spa concept drawing on the nineteenth century search for ‘the cure’. The Spa will feature a unique collection of healing treatments, like a stone acupressure walk, labyrinth, indoor/outdoor deep soaking tubs and a Turkish steam bath. Spas are an expected vacation amenity, broadening the appeal of the project and attracting more overnight visitors rather than day trippers.

4. **Link to Beach**: Provide York Beach with its own access, alleviating the burden of traffic congestion on the other Yorks.

5. **Beach Retail**: Extend the fabric of the existing downtown into the site along the newly created roadway, making a mutually beneficial connection between downtown and the site.
Use Suitability Criteria

The ideas for the development are big. Uses that have been considered include an aquarium, a music venue, workforce housing, and a cultural center. A wide range of outcomes remain open, one of which is that Berkshire Development and the community each will walk away. The more likely and desirable outcome is a partnership built upon an agreed set of common goals. This thesis will propose a conceptual development plan for this sensitive and unique property, constructed around four closely linked objectives:

1. To enhance the character of York, Maine through a development that creates value for community, consumer and developer.
2. To gain broad community support for that development.
3. To address the seasonal nature of Maine.
4. To be economically feasible for the developer and sustainable.
1. New England Village (highway) Retail

Historical Background

The York Harbor Reading Room was constructed by a prominent group of summer residents from Boston, New York and Philadelphia in 1892. It served as a Men’s Club more than a reading room, and was a place where citizens met for the kind of talk that might go on in an old country store. The conversations that took place there led to the creation of the York Harbor Village Corporation which instituted one of the first zoning ordinances in New England, and certainly in Maine¹. York Harbor has remained an orderly, well kept, uncommercialized village with only the necessary stores. A Cumberland Farm convenience store seems to be the only oversight. The remnants of this conservative zoning persist and affect both York Harbor and York Beach, which are now one municipality sharing a town planner, zoning ordinances and selectmen. All zoning changes must be made through referendum, which serves as an effective constraint to development.

Retail Context

Exiting the Interstate at York, one is greeted by an attractive Chamber of Commerce building and the headquarters for Stonewall Kitchen, a well-known manufacturer and retailer of specialty foods like

Maine Blueberry Jam. Stonewall Kitchen has regionally consistent architecture, and is built off the road behind grass, wetlands and trees with the parking, entrance and loading area all obscured from the road. Inside there is a breakfast and lunch café with samplings of the products, as well as kitchen gadgets of every description. A Memorial Day tent sale boasted lines that wrapped around the tent. Stonewall jams, jellies and sauces are ‘hand made’, which is part of the Maine mystique. Each year 350,000 people visit the Stonewall Kitchen.

The York community contemns national chains. The area is devoid of names such as Dunkin’ Donuts, McDonald’s, Wendy’s, Starbucks, Subway, Wal-Mart and the like. The Roast-n-Crumb can be found in place of Subway, and the Daily Grind Cafe in place of Starbucks. Some of the exceptions are Hannaford’s Supermarket, Econo Lodge, True Value Hardware and a Rite-Aid Pharmacy, which are primarily clustered around York Corner and Meadowbrook Plaza, which is one mile north on Route One towards the site. Small independent retail shops, restaurants, service stations and banks are dotted throughout the community. Throughout the community one will find charming shops selling antiques, handcrafted good and specialty foods. ‘Pie in the Sky’ has been making deepdish, homemade pies at the corner of Route One and River Road for twenty-seven years. People come to Maine for the quaint small town and village shops.

Site

Eleven irregularly shaped acres of upland, with 780 feet of frontage on US Route 1, form the site for the proposed shopping center. The shape of the retail site is constrained by wetlands, highway and high voltage power lines. Across the street from the site is a screen-printing and embroidery business as well as York Fitness Center.
At the entrance to the site is a gaudy and cartoonish billboard and giant stylized bear sculpture which together announce ‘York’s Wild Kingdom’. They are valuable icons of roadside Americana and are well known to Maine travelers. They must remain. This is one of the last billboards in Maine as they have been prohibited for over thirty years. Considerable care would have to be taken not to disturb this sign. Were it to be removed even for construction, it could not be replaced with more than a four by eight foot sign.

Another example of preservation of Americana is the neon bunny sign in Steamboat Springs, Colorado which announces the ‘Rabbit Ears Motel’ and has been given an historical designation.

**Proposal**

The proposal is to build about 100,000 square feet of retail space along Route One at the existing highway entrance to the site. In order to be economically feasible, the site will require two...
‘credit’ anchor tenants, each using between 20,000 and 40,000 square feet. A hotel, tavern and several small format village retailers will use the balance of the space.

The proposed development should make credible reference to a deeply embedded ‘New England landscape’ image, such as the village green, which has been iconic for well over three hundred years. Maine travelers report ‘visiting small towns and villages’ as their most frequent activity when visiting Maine. One constraint will be the degree to which a national chain grocery store will deviate from their format for the sake of an appealing design. Securing a long term lease with a national credit tenant is essential to the participation of a lender in a development such as this. The design proposal must be seamlessly understood by the lender and the tenants.

One possible plan clusters the two larger tenants on one side of the entrance road and a New England
'Village Green’ on the other side. Clustering the two distinct groups of stores at the corners of the entrance road and placing parking in the rear is the easiest way to avoid the feel of a traditional suburban shopping center.

The tenant mix should reflect the following concerns:

1. Identity – does it reflect local identity and imagery?

2. Seasonality – does it counterbalance the seasonal nature of York Beach?

3. Community – is it likely to have broad community support?

4. Developer – how economically feasible is it to the developer?

The assessment criteria will be addressed in bubble diagrams appearing adjacent to the brand suggestion for each store in the discussions of tenant and programming options below. The strong orientation of each particular tenant to a particular customer segment will also be indicated with an icon.

Customer Segments

It is important to remember that York is situated at a convenient location off I-95 and in the center of a tourist destination, which creates an opportunity to capture such customers.

The retail village will rely on a combination of four regional and local market segments:

1. Drive-By Tourists

Four million cars head to Ogunquit and points north every year. Many of the travelers have driven by the site year after year and many of those will remember the ‘York’s Wild Kingdom’ billboard and the bear statue. Only a few of these passers by find a reason to stop. A convincing modern New England village retail center with wedding quality gifts crafted on site, organic food, good books and coffee,
outdoorsy clothing and supplies, a recreation of an 18th Century Tavern featuring York Beer and a village inn for the travel-weary, would be cause to pull over.

2. Destination Visitors

More than 200,000 tickets are sold for York’s Wild Kingdom every year. On busy days the visitors are undeterred by having to walk one mile to reach the entrance to the zoo, because of parking capacity. With the addition of a year-round indoor water-park, an expansion of the current zoo and amusements, the number of annual visitors passing through the retail village and spending at least a day on the site will be well over half a million. Visitors to the spa, hotels and cultural attractions will bring the number of destination visitors close to a million per year.

3. Beach Tourists

The beach is typically reached by US Hwy 1A. Thus beachgoers are proximate to the York Beach Square entrance to the site. Development of the retail there will bridge the current perceived disconnect of about 150 feet between the York Beach Square visitors and the Wild Kingdom visitors. As we move York Beach Square parking into our site and provide an agglomeration of activity, some of these visitors will take the shuttle to the Village retail and many will visit the Beach retail extension into the site.

4. Locals

There are about 13,000 residents of York for whom life is primarily centered on York Village, where their children attend school, where many work at the hospital, go to the bank and attend church. There are a number of goods and service establishments available in York Village close to residential neighborhoods, although Route One at York Corner and north toward the Wild Kingdom site is the main retail area for The Yorks. These will be very important customers for the project’s retail component. Much of the existing retail along Route One holds limited appeal, and judging from the historic aesthetic of the town, a New England (highway) Village Green may be a welcome consumer respite.

Medium Box Stores

1. Grocery

Currently, York has a 58,000 square foot Hannaford’s located in a traditional suburban shopping center format at York Corner, which is about three miles away from the site. Hannaford’s is a Maine-based supermarket chain serving mostly New England and New York. The store is an updated, relatively new grocery store with a broad range of products which appeals to a middle-market, price-sensitive consumer, albeit one who is constrained by having only one local supermarket option. Many locals travel the nine miles to Portsmouth for groceries, with complaints of high prices, overcrowding of summer tourists and lack of
The shopping center would accommodate a small format Stop & Shop or a Philbrick's Fresh Market, each at just under 40,000 square feet. Stop & Shop is a Massachusetts based food retailer which operates more than 360 stores in New England, New York and New Jersey. Philbrick's is an independent, family-owned and operated shopping 'experience'. Philbrick's would have more synergy with the rest of the shopping center and serve the large number of affluent locals and visitors. ‘Feel-good’ grocery stores are more likely to capture leisure travelers for supplies, while a large mid-market chain, like Stop & Shop may feel like a chore. The community may also be more open to a family-owned local business.

York’s entitlement process poses an enormous barrier to the entry of a large grocery store. Local zoning forbids stores larger than 20,000 square feet without a referendum. Berkshire Development, however, has established relationships with grocery store chains, who place a lot of value on a developers ability to navigate the local political and regulatory landscape. Eventually, local market forces will bring a grocery store alternative to the community. Incorporating this market need into a broader development approval gives the town strategic advantages they would not otherwise have if negotiating permits for a highway shopping center alone.

2. Outdoor Goods

Maine is a camping, hiking and outdoor recreation mecca for the entire New England region and beyond. An outdoor clothing and equipment retailer would broaden the appeal of York beyond the jams, antiques and handcrafted goods. L.L. Bean would be an appropriate tenant for the proposed 20,000 square foot site adjacent to the grocery store. L.L. Bean is a privately held, Freeport, Maine based retailer of outdoor clothing and goods which serves a middle to upper middle
class, well educated, value consumer. One concern would be the degree to which this may cannibalize the flagship store which is just an hour north of York, in Freeport. Alternative tenants might be Cabella’s, REI and Eastern Mountain Sports.

**Village Green**

The other proposed highway retail could be a modern retail interpretation of a New England village green with a modern inn, a reproduction of an eighteenth century tavern, a bookstore café, a quality handcrafted goods retailer and other village necessities. The site will be accessed by the main entrance road with parking in the rear. The cobbled trolley access road will encircle the village green, stopping in front of the inn for passengers. Consideration will have to be made for obscuring and separating loading, trash removal and recycling functions which typically take place on a service access behind stores.

1. **Inn**

The proposed sixty-key, limited-service inn would head the village green, with clear visibility and access from the highway, serving touring travelers. A large front porch would open onto the green, with an adjacent tavern. Leisure travelers are motivated by attractions, the southern Maine coast being a powerful one. There is a modest upward trend toward overnight visits to Maine rather than daytrips, which are in slight decline. An inn at this highway location would capture that traveler.

There are many charming, historic, distinctly New England inns in Maine. Bar Harbor has a particularly rich collection, and they serve as an attraction in and of themselves. This image of ‘Maine’ lodging is attractive but leaves a question in the mind of the consumer about predictable formatting with elevator access, private baths, well-lit hallways, and casual continental breakfast routines which are all required by modern travelers...
York has approximately 2,400 hotel rooms in York proper which are members of the Greater York Region Chamber of Commerce, and there are 3,000 rooms in York altogether. The average daily rate is estimated at $125 during the summer and well under $100 in winter. The peak season is between Independence Day and Labor Day, during which time it is often difficult to find a room available. The shoulder seasons are May and October. Union Bluff Hotel reports weekends as busy all year, with February having the lowest occupancy. The newest lodging in York is the Econo Lodge at York Corner, which meets the basic needs of some of the road weary. Along Route One there is a mixture of older strip motels, larger Bed and Breakfasts and 1930’s style motel cabins. York beach has a historic hotel and mid-century motels as well as an abundant number of efficiency cottages.

2. Tavern

In the 1760’s York became the ‘County Seat’, and with that distinction came all the colorful political and legal contests, along with those engaged in resolving such disputes. Although legal business takes place in a court of law, matters are sometimes settled at the local tavern, then as now. Taverns sprang up, each having a following and reputation, providing groupings and associations required by all communities.

Jefferd’s Tavern was constructed in 1750 in Wells, Maine along the ‘King’s Highway’ which goes from Portsmouth to Portland. In 1959 the tavern was moved to York Village, where it stands as part of the Museums of Old York today and serves as a museum and education center. Sturbridge Village has such a tavern which primarily serves ticketed guests and groups. A reproduction of a similar ‘wayside tavern’ could greet modern travelers on the site’s ‘Village Green’.

Hotel and tavern would provide off-season stability. Attracting an established hotel operator and
restaurateur will be important for the developer in reducing the financial risks associated with an independent, on-off operation.

3. Handcrafted Goods

Simon Pearce is a high end, handcrafted goods retailer. Their carved salad bowls, blown glass and thrown pots of heirloom quality are an attraction in and of themselves. Children have a room for clay building, which is a refreshing break from a long car trip. Some, like the one in Quechee, VT, make the goods on-site in demonstrations, and include a restaurant with an elegant, local, organic, comforting menu in a rustique sophisticated dining room. The Vermont location draws devoted customers five miles off Interstate 91 for both its food and wares. Like Vermont, Maine is closely associated with things organic and handcrafted. Whether Simon Pearce is too ‘Vermont’ needs to be determined. A brand like this may be antithetical to the zoo and amusement visitors to York Beach. But it would serve to broaden the market segments to which our site would appeal as Maine has a much greater number of leisure travelers who fit the demographic for Simon Pearce rather than York’s Wild Kingdom. Adding a specialized attraction for an upper tier market segment would add a remarkable amount of texture and dimension to the project, while not discouraging the market segment that the project as a whole is targeting.

4. Bookstore Cafe

A bookstore with a café would attract both residents and the Maine visitors. Brigg’s and Carriage Bookstore with the attached Ball & Chain Cafe in Brandon, Vermont is an excellent example of a charming, well-run bookstore which meets local as well as leisure traveler needs. A well-funded, experienced local or regional operator would provide year-round services and stability. The addition of an attached lunch and breakfast café
would serve as a rainy day destination for the many tourists, and be an everyday hangout and informal meeting place for the local community.

Identity

One of the key strengths of the proposed shopping center is its ability to reflect the local character of Maine, while it meets the modern consumer's expectations. The only tenant unlikely to specifically address this need is Stop & Shop. Philbrick’s and L.L Bean are locally known, and L.L. Bean is a larger format retailer which is intimately associated with Maine. The ‘Village Green’ would be a good example of placemaking in a retail setting, drawing on the iconography of the New England landscape.

Seasonality

The new shopping center will balance the more seasonal nature of York Beach. A grocery store is not seasonal, while the handcrafted goods are probably the most seasonal, but they will all serve
both local and tourist needs. The shopping center is the least seasonal part of the entire project.

Community

Larger format retail is a very controversial topic in York. There is an aversion to ‘ending up like Kittery’, with its outlet centers and consumer traffic. However, I think a tastefully done, well-planned shopping center that addresses a variety of unmet local needs and captures tourist dollars will be welcomed by the community. The investment in a ‘Village Green’ format may alleviate some of the community’s concerns.

Developer

The inclusion of a Stop & Shop would make it economically viable and a huge benefit to the project as a whole. Furthermore, it would meet a very important local community need given the rising cost of food and challenging economic environment of 2008. L.L. Bean would serve a similar function as a national credit tenant providing long-term, low-risk contractual cash flow needed to finance the project.

Apart from the Inn which should attract an experienced, stable regional hotel operator, the other tenants would be more local, independent entrepreneurs. While the cash flow to the developer will be contractual, the smaller tenants will not have a credit rating recognized by the lender. The developer will bear more risk.
Background and Context
York’s Wild Kingdom is kitschy and wonderful — its spirit should be both preserved and expanded with care. Families stand in long lines at the ticket castle to enter the Kingdom which is full of monkeys, tigers, butterflies, paddle boats, ducks, billy goats, chocolate covered bananas, and a dedicated, tireless, thoughtful team who care for all this. The Kingdom has been operated as a family amusement business since 1949, and has been through major expansions in 1960 and 1980, when it was named York’s Wild Kingdom. About two thousand people per day pay to enter the gates. Only the elephant heads south for the winter, and ducks go back to the ‘duck man’. All of the other animals are here during the winter, waiting for summer.

Mika Nurmikko, the zookeeper has created elaborate feeding devices which simulate some of the natural struggle for food, and which combat boredom for the animals. The monkey feeder is like a three-dimensional puzzle. After a few days the monkey looks triumphant at feeding time, until he realizes that Mika has rearranged the puzzle.

By his own account, Joe Barberi, one of the two owners of the Kingdom has never earned a dollar
1960's "funland" postcard, as york's wild kingdom used to be called
anywhere else. When he was twelve years old he knocked a golf ball through his Mom’s window, so she took him by the ear and told him if he wanted to play golf he ought to go down to Funland, as it was then called. After playing miniature golf, he popped three balloons with three darts and won a shark toy. It was 1975, the summer the movie ‘Jaws’ was released. He inquired about a ‘Help Wanted’ sign, and apart from leaving to earn his college degree, he never left.

The other owner is Nat Golzbein. His family had a business in York Beach Square as far back as the 1890’s, at the current site of ‘Bill and Bob’s Jewelry’. He runs the Kingdom gift shop, and spends much of his time in the back office, when he is not playing a live mummy at the Haunted House. He tells a great tale about having to hire someone just to catch the ladies after he jumps out of the coffin. A tiny plastic armadillo sits on his desk, nearest to the door, by his late wife’s chair. The armadillo says a lot. If it is upright, it means things are well, enter the office freely. If it is on its side, enter with caution. If it is upside down . . .

Almost every evening, these three and the others who have been working together for nearly twenty years close the gates to the Kingdom and head to the Chinese restaurant in Meadowbrook Plaza, where the owners know just what they want.

Site
The Kingdom is built on twenty acres of swampy land at the eastern edge of the site and is adjacent to Wood’s Trailer Park. The carnival rides extend toward the entrance, at the head of Railroad Avenue. From downtown, pedestrians are greeted by the batting cages and a bright blue awning gateway to the site, which looks as if admission would be required to enter the carnival area. Creating a more ‘park like’ area at the entrance would be more inviting to newcomers. More attractions will dramati-
cally increase demand for parking on the site and more should be made available. Keeping parking proximate to the Kingdom entrance is important, as many families are travelling with small children in strollers and elderly grandparents. A ‘choo-choo’ ride of some kind shuttling attendees into the site is a possibility, however, it would need to be fun in order to not feel like a nuisance.

**Proposal**

1. Preserve the zoo in its current location and expand it by four to eight acres to the west. Keeping the zoo in its existing location will avoid a long period of getting a permit for operation on another swampy (or possibly wetland) location in the site. Its current proximity to York Beach is appropriate and will become more valuable as development of the downtown extension into the site progresses.

2. Add to existing rides with a representative collection of high quality, nostalgic rides that please a variety of age groups. Consideration has been given to locating these rides throughout the site and York Beach. Game booths should remain, and be extended and stay as close to the downtown as possible, as they attract a lot of interest and are a good introduction to the site for non-ticketed customers. There is something evocative about the operators calling out for customers, P.T. Barnum style.

3. Add a year round themed indoor waterpark. One good example and potential operator is Great Wolf Lodges. They have been trend-setters in blending 80,000 square feet of state-of-the-art water features with amenities such as a spa for tweens, a new laser tag technology, and national brand food and retail tenants. The entertainment component is surrounded by 400 family suites, the price for which includes use of the waterpark. Guests have to stay to play, and the typical length of stay is 2-3 days. Some of the common objec-
tions to waterparks, such as long lines and safety issues that result from overcrowding are mitigated. Their resorts are full for the 180 days when school is not in session. Their growth focus is in cultivating their conference business in the 30,000 square foot facilities attached to each property. Great Wolf locates their lodges in easy drive-to locations from major MSAs, advertising vacations on less than a tank of gas.¹

Community
The entire York community is united in the desire to preserve the Wild Kingdom. Residents raised their children going to the Kingdom, and some say they marvel every year that it is still there. ‘Wednesday Nickel Night’ at Funland (as it was then called), was a highlight of the week for many local families in the 1950’s. During its season, York’s Wild Kingdom provides the ultimate activity which comes from the convergence of rides, people, animals, cars, retail and games. Animation is still its force of attraction.

Feasibility
York’s Wild Kingdom generates enough income to sustain itself. It is unclear where the capital for an expansion would originate.

The zoo is operated by a fiercely loyal and determined group on a budget that corporate management may find difficult to replicate. There is a lot of very careful tinkering that keeps the ship afloat, and none of it is in an owner’s manual. The lure of free parking, free picnicking, cheap video games and reasonably priced tickets give the Wild Kingdom a tremendous amount of appeal to a broad audience of price sensitive young families on summer vacation. Their loyal customer base may be price inelastic. A new owner could quickly make a laundry list of ways to improve revenue,

¹ Presentation to 8th annual Consumer Growth and Family Lodging and Leisure Conference, July 10, 2008, Four Seasons Hotel Boston, MA.
and before he knew it he might be wondering where all his fans went. On the other hand, an entirely new, broader and more affluent market will open up with the variety of other attractions on the site. If a major renovation of the zoo and rides significantly predates the development of the site, it will need to be done carefully so as not to alienate its existing, loyal customer base.

York’s Wild Kingdom has a tremendous amount of value on which to build. Their television ads air in the region every summer and have remained largely the same for twenty years. The billboard erected on Route One has been there for nearly thirty years. What York’s Wild Kingdom’s marketing material lacks in sophistication, it has in tireless consistency. Between the ads and the billboard, the familiarity to millions of travelers is impressive.

Apart from zoo entrance fees there are tickets for rides and funhouses, many of which appeal to young children and include carousels, tiny trains and rockets, a Ferris wheel, bumper cars and go-carts. Game booths line the walks with attendants calling out the likelihood of a win. There is a large video game arcade, batting cages and henna tattoos. Guests exit the zoo through Wolff’s Gift Shop. The food and beverage on the site is a mostly low end collection of popcorn, hot dogs, nachos, fried dough and the like. New this year was chocolate covered bananas, peddled by a man on a bicycle-driven cart.

**Seasonality**

The addition of an indoor waterpark is one way of addressing the seasonal nature of Maine tourism. This may also be a way to address travelers’ cold water objections when considering a trip to Maine. Apart from winter sports like snowboarding, New England lacks unique winter destinations for families and a state-of-the-art indoor waterpark would entice crowds on the days school is out, year round.
York’s Wild Kingdom season lasts about 100 days, although the animals are there all year (except the ducks and elephant). Extending the season may be feasible only in coordination with other programming. Other zoos have holiday light shows and educational programming in the off season. In the 1980’s a Halloween hay ride and haunted house (with a harrowing mix of live and stuffed mummies) was operated at capacity. It proved difficult to attract reliable help at that time of year and thus it was eventually closed.

‘The Comet’
There were amusement rides in York as far back as the 1890’s when ‘The Comet’ was first launched into the ocean on rails off Short Sands Beach. The water ride cost ten cents for the top tier and a nickel for the cheap seats below. The photo to the right shows an 1893 church outing. There are locals who remember hearing their grandparents talk with fondness about the ride.
Bathers at York Beach, Maine.
3. The Cure

Background and Context

Although Victorian resorts are often portrayed as the haunts of rich hypochondriacs, they actually treated a wide variety of urgent medical problems—physical, mental or both. ‘Change of scene’, or sea or mountain air, might be prescribed for diseases ranging in seriousness from hay fever to ulcers to tuberculosis.

The road to Atlantic seaside villages for respite and healing is well worn. People living in urban areas suffered the health effects of industrialization, and the fresh air and water of places like coastal Maine were prescribed as the cure. Local historical lore has it that bathing at Old Orchard Beach, Maine on June 26 could stimulate healings such as are said to have taken place in the biblical pool of Siloam. Others ‘took the waters’ at famous thermal water spas, like New York State’s Saratoga Springs. In the 19th Century, health was a primary motivator for travel. The development of a spa and hotel on the site could recreate the sense of the healing power of a place. People would come for ‘the cure’.

‘The happy marriage of modern spas and historic places is being driven by the demographics of the aging post-World War Two generation’, according to Joe Goldblatt, who teaches at Temple University’s

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School of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Philadelphia. Spas with connections to historic places provide two things to aging boomers: a way to heal physical maladies, and an antidote to what he called ‘rootlessness’.

Disney World’s version of this is Saratoga Village, a reference to upstate New York retreats of the late 1800’s. The village features a hot springs inspired water slide, spa services, rocky landscaping and nineteenth century inspired architectural details. The 65 acre resort is currently under construction and upon completion will be one of the largest Disney vacation clubs with 840 guest rooms and villas.

**Site**

The proposed site for the spa is a roughly five acres island of upland which is surrounded by a brook and its wetlands. Water should be made into an amenity throughout the site, especially near the spa which will have a water theme. The water should flow down shallow stone stairs into pools, both animating the site and masking noise. The related hotel would be located a short boardwalk away from the spa setting, to provide seclusion from the more active family-oriented uses on the site. A limited number of parking spaces will be available at the spa and trolley service will be available.

**Proposal**

The proposal includes a unique spa attraction which reflects historical and regional character while it borrows from unique healing experiences in different cultures.

The spa would fit loosely into the category of attraction, rather than be an exclusive refuge for the luxury class traveler. Many spas are decidedly feminine, but this spa should avoid that. The treatments should feel health oriented, rather than beauty oriented and should not alienate male...
consumers who will provide for the future growth in the spa industry. It would need to be viewed as a ‘great place to go’ for a ‘girls weekend’, or a couples retreat. Fitness equipment may increase its male appeal.

On the following pages are some possible themes from various parts of the world that could form the basis for a new, healing spa concept.

**Historic regional character**

‘The Cure’ Spa would enhance the historical character of the area and the development by drawing on the history of people visiting seaside villages in search of wellness.

**Community**

The spa will produce minimal traffic, and it will encourage overnight visitors. It is unlikely that there would be strong community objections to this use.

**Seasonality**

The Cure is another non-seasonal destination on the site. During the tourist off-season other resorts have been successful at attracting capacity crowds through special programming. Kripalu, a sprawling yoga center in an unattractive building in the Berkshires, stays busy all year with multi-day events centered around a specific author, guru or teacher who already has an established forum. They are very successful at attracting health-conscious consumers seeking personal change.

**Feasibility**

Women typically make the travel decisions, and ‘The Cure’ will entice them to York. Spas have become a necessary and expected component of travel. The current demographic could be extended to include a more typical Maine traveler.
Sacred Interactive Object

Although 19th century spas were not places for religion or superstition, greeting guests with an interactive object of some kind would be both memorable, and a way to set the tone. Perhaps a water feature with instructions for guests to toss a stone simulating a casting of cares, would be the spa equivalent of a coin toss in a fountain. Alternately, there might be a place to light a candle in order for guests to express their intention, devotion or gratitude about something. Places of worship are rich with healing rituals. This could be religiously suggestive, without being offensive.

Labyrinth Garden

Participants walk in a labyrinth focusing on the journey, rather than the destination. This would serve as a meditative outdoor landscape experience.

Stone Acupressure Walk

Poseidon Thermal Springs Resort on the Island of Ischia off the Italian Amalfi Coast is an oasis of thoughtful luxury and leisure. Pictured above is the stone acupressure walk. This nubby stone walk has very cold water on one side, two stairs, and very hot thermal spring water on the other side. Guests march around together while running their hand along the edge of the center fountain which has been worn smooth.
Deep Soaking Tubs
Private deep soaking tubs with a retractable glass wall for outdoor bathing in the summer and closed with a view of a winter garden during the cold seasons. Tubs are typically hired by the hour. They are a departure from the more communal or semi-private hot tubs available at most resorts. Guests can steep with a giant chamomile teabag, or with salt and other minerals.

Turkish Bath
Turkish communal baths, also known as hammams are like steam baths. In Turkey, the experience would be something like this: Lie on a stone slab, which is heated from below, in the center of a large round room for twenty minutes. Watch the colored light flow on the ceiling above while listening to soothing music. Now sit on the step below while your hair is being washed. Lie again on the stone slab as you are covered in a two foot deep mountain of bubbles and then scrubbed. Go back to the spigot and rinse off. Moisturize. Go back to the stone slab, sleep. Finish with hot apple tea. Living in a country with this service may cause one to never shower in the conventional way again.
map showing access to york beach only by route 1a
At York harbor, where Howells and his friends stayed, a cluster of opulent architect-built cottages surrounded a small private beach and a luxury hotel, the Marshall House. Those who vacationed next door at York Beach, or Long Sands, as it was called, were in a different world — the world as Howells called it, 'of people several grades of gentility lower than ours'. York Beach was 'lined with rows of the humbler sort of summer cottages… supposed to be taken by inland people of little social importance.' Down even farther on Long Sands were the excursionist, who came to the beach by trolley to spend ‘long afternoons splashing among the waves, or in lolling groups of men and women in the sand’.

Background
York Beach is still an 'excursionist' beach where families spend time 'splashing in the waves' for the day, although the trolley no longer is their mode of transportation. Historic buildings line narrow two lane roads which carry tourists as they slowly make their way to York Beach. The traffic congestion is a colossal aggravation to the citizens of the other Yorks. York has been a summer destination since the 1870’s. Two distinct types of summer people have developed. ‘Blue bloods’ clustered around York Harbor and ‘blue collars’ have gathered at York Beach. Those distinctions largely remain today.

detail map of the route 1a ingress and egress roads, as well as the way cars circle (shown in yellow). The railroad avenue downtown area meets York’s wild kingdom at the municipal parking lot in the center of the picture above.
At York Beach, traffic comes to a halt as a result of automobiles circling and queueing for a very limited number of parking spaces close to the beach. Public parking in downtown is limited to about 300 metered spaces at the beach and 70 spaces in the metered lot at the entrance to the Kingdom, plus parallel parking on the downtown streets. Driveways and yards with handpainted signs reading ‘Parking All Day $5’ are common.

Access to York Beach is by Route 1A, which originates at Route 1 at York Corner and terminates at Route 1 near River Road, looping through the York Beaches. The intersection of Railroad Avenue and Ocean Avenue forms the heart of the Square. The main pedestrian retail area extends on Railroad Avenue toward the Wild Kingdom site, but never reaches it. Railroad is a one way street with metered parallel parking on either side of the street. Pedestrians further the congestion, and are encouraged to cross only at the crosswalks. Peak traffic days are untenable, both for tourists and locals.

The proposed new road would accomplish several goals:

1. Provide York Beach with its own ingress/egress, which would reroute more of the traffic from the York Harbor neighborhoods.

2. Supply new public parking on the site.

3. Create a new road intersection, from which an extension of the existing fabric of the downtown could grow.
view of york wild kingdom's entrance from downtown. a municipal parking lot divides the kingdom from downtown.
Some people believe that updating York Beach downtown means dismantling the ‘tacky’ remnants of its past, and making it a ‘nice’ place. The rusty Ferris wheel, Fun-O-Rama, and oversized Bowling sign are all part of the area’s unique character. Both the Bowling alleys and Holland Theatre were constructed in 1913. The Theatre operated from 1928 until recently as York Beach Cinema. Bowling opens onto Short Sands Beach, with antique candlepin bowling, mini-golf, arcade games, ice cream, sweat shirts, and beach toys.

York Beach and York’s Wild Kingdom each attract a vast number of destination visitors. Parking for the Wild Kingdom is inside the site and many of the over 200,000 annual visitors come and leave from the parking lot without venturing into downtown York Beach. There is little to bring the two groups of visitors together besides the metered municipal parking lot that separates them.

Extending the York Beach retail area to the newly formed intersection would be one way of connecting the different groups of tourists in a common area, resulting in increased flow of people to each place.
possible plan for the beach extension
Goals of Beach Retail

1. Create an additional square at the new intersection in order to bridge the perceived division between downtown and the site.

2. Add second story housing to contribute to year round animation.

3. Add a venue for off season events and conferences.
salt water cafe and wonder bar, asbury park, new jersey
Berkshire Development has proven that they can impress the community with a vision for what the future can be in York Beach. To make this vision work, they, in partnership with the community, must be its curators. We must remember the icons that matter. Rick Joy and Oscar Plotkin are poised to be stewards of the past while carving a bright path toward the future.

The best example of a major re-development that has genuinely reflected its past is Asbury Park, New Jersey. The community and the developer, Madison Marquette, have been both archaeologists and curators of its artifacts, while allowing progress and change. The process of deciding what matters has sometimes been contentious, as is inevitable. Great expense is going into the restoration of the formerly glorious Paramount Theatre and other buildings like the Carousel Building. A fortune teller shack still stands on the boardwalk.

‘We cannot move forward without respecting the past,’ said Larry Fishman, Asbury Partners chief operating officer. ‘Asbury Park has a rich history that its residents are proud of and this is the heart of what makes rebuilding the oceanfront so exciting. This history must be incorporated in the city’s revitalization to retain the great character of Asbury Park.’

The iconic Wonder Bar had its grand re-opening.

Conclusion
July 11, 2008. Although it is now owned by Madison Marquette, former owners were asked to return as the operators.

The buildings alone do not keep the character alive, but the people who have lived, worked and played in the buildings do. Taking care to include the people in the future of the place will require a conscious effort.

The development must be economically sustainable both in the short term, to raise the capital needed, and in the long term in order to be successful. This will likely require that the project be phased, and the retail stores will need to stay open year-round, supported by adjacent residential development. In York Beach, there is an opportunity to include residences and offices above the retail in the downtown extension, as well as holiday events, concerts and conferences which will animate the space in the absence of beach-goers.

The preservation and expansion of York’s Wild Kingdom should be Berkshire Development’s first step toward honoring the history of York Beach. The bear statue must continue to greet visitors at the Route One entrance to the site. A carousel and Ferris wheel should continue to offer uncomplicated fun to families at the beach. These, in combination with the proposed development have the power to attract people for the next generation and bring York Beach into its next glory day.