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Hull's planners could learn lessons from our neighbors 'down east'...

To the Editor: The rush to develop the **HRA** property is ignoring important facts. In order for Hull to become a destination, and for our businesses to thrive, we need a focal point, a reason to come here other than the beach. Portland, Maine is a case study in point. In the 1980s, there were few restaurants, and new ones that opened did not thrive or survive. But then, the city sold an old, closed department store, right on the main street, to the Maine School of Art. The school began to attract students and their families, who wanted fine dining, great unique shopping, and a variety of hotels and other places to stay. The city began to attract cruise ships in the spring summer and fall. The years brought some failures, but many successful tourist-oriented businesses, and now many have garnered awards from Bon Appetit and other high-end magazines.

The development of the city was and is focused on attracting year-round visitors and showing them a great time. Instead of building more housing, individual real estate was and is being renovated into condos instead of building new. This approach to real estate development preserves the historic quality of the housing without adding strain to city infrastructure, while adding to city income from real estate taxes. None of the development threatened the existing environment. Public space, such as parks at both ends of the city and a very large central park complete with ice skating in winter and concerts in summer, has contributed to the success of what was once a sleepy little town with not many restaurants or hotels. There are places in Hull, such as the property across from XYZ streets, that need developing into affordable housing as well as upscale condos, if there is a market for them. Let the **HRA** land become a beautiful outdoor space for families to enjoy the ocean and bay, with places to breathe in the salt air, observe the seabirds, and sit and contemplate nature. And think up a smart idea to attract year-round visitors. How about an oceanographic school/ research facility on preserving coastal land from global warming and flooding? And not on the **HRA** land. Rachel Sager