Portland, Maine
Direct Technical Assistance Final Report
March 1, 2017

Client: Greater Portland (Maine) Council of Governments (GPCOG)
Project: EPA-funded East Bayside Brownfield Area-Wide Planning (BF AWP) Project
Focus Area: East Bayside neighborhood - Portland, ME
Scope: Design, Delivery, Support of “Neighborhood Voices” Community Engagement Strategy

Overview
In late 2016 and early 2017, GPCOG partnered with local community based non-profit Cultivating Community to support the engagement of a teen cohort who gathered input from stakeholders in the East Bayside neighborhood on behalf of the East Bayside Brownfield AWP project team. In response to the grant management team’s request, the cohort sought community input on how and in what ways cleanup and reuse of brownfield sites could benefit the East Bayside community most. The teen cohort reported out their findings from these pop-up encounters with a presentation to the East Bayside Brownfield AWP Advisory Committee, which GPCOG convened on January 26, 2017.

Methodology & Approach
In late fall 2016, following Groundwork USA’s coaching and support of a partnership development process, the “Neighborhood Voices” teen cohort of 7 Portland teenagers was trained and coached, by staff at Cultivating Community and members of the Groundwork USA Direct Technical Assistance Team, to lead a series of “pop up” community engagement encounters that took place at 7 high-traffic locations across the neighborhood during December 2016 and January 2017. A total of 12 questions developed by the East Bayside Brownfields AWP Advisory Committee formed the basis for short conversations with East Bayside stakeholders about opportunities and needs present in and around East Bayside. Armed with these questions, cohort members used an “interactive game” methodology to ensure each interviewee was offered a random selection of 3 of the 12 questions, in keeping with federal requirements tied to EPA funding. 103 people were interviewed by cohort members in short 5-minute feedback conversations, each of which consisted of an interviewee answering no more than 3 questions total. All interviewees were offered the option to “pass” on a question they did not wish to answer, and those who opted to “pass” were invited to randomly select and answer an alternate question (of the original 12) instead.

Because this community engagement work was funded by an EPA Brownfields Area Wide Planning grant, the Technical Assistance team and the teen cohort were unable to design or utilize a formalized, statistically significant survey methodology. Rather, this work was more of an environmental scan designed to help provide qualitative context to any future survey work. Also, to ensure robust participation by a variety of desired and oft-marginalized populations, all community feedback activities were designed to be short (5 minutes or less), “light touch” and informal. As such, the raw data results, and similarly the “top trends” gleaned from those results, are to be considered informal and qualitative in nature, offering a broad snapshot of East Bayside sentiment regarding how and in what ways brownfield cleanup and reuse could address and/or take advantage of community needs and opportunities. Additionally, because the interview methodology was “light touch”, teen cohort members...
did not confirm the affiliation of each interviewee (i.e., whether they were a resident, a business owner/employee, or visitor). Future community outreach and engagement efforts that discern such affiliations—perhaps by meeting people at their door—would likely be insightful.

Results & Analysis
A sheet containing all raw data responses gathered during each of the 103 interviews by the cohort members is attached. Following completion of all 103 interviews, the Technical Assistance team studied the raw data contained on this sheet to ascertain the phrases and concepts most frequently conveyed, discussed and recorded during the interviews. The left-hand column highlights those words, phrases and concepts appearing with the greatest frequency across all interview responses. The TA Team noted and accounted for some variability in interviewees’ phrasing of certain concepts. A possible related factor in this noted variability in phrasing may have been the teens’ choice of phrasing for capturing and succinctly summarizing at times complex and lengthy interviewee responses in the moments that data was gathered.

Another way to glean insight from informally gathered data like this is to utilize an online application called a Word Cloud Generator, which is a simple program that employs a “layout algorithm” to generate a visual representation of text in terms of frequency; the higher-frequency the word, the larger it appears in a Word Cloud, while lower-frequency words appear in smaller text. To the right is a Word Cloud generated from all raw data the teen cohort gathered, comprising answers from 103 East Bayside stakeholder interviewees.

Discussion
Based on study of the raw data and the Word Cloud above, it seems clear that interviewees love the East Bayside neighborhood—the people, the diverse cultures and identities, the businesses, its location and proximity to the ocean and downtown Portland, its walk- and bike-ability. At the same time, interviewees expressed anxiety about possible threats to the very neighborhood they love: loss of affordable housing, rising rents, and gentrification. It would be interesting to see whether there’s a split between how East Bayside residents view their community, its assets and its changing landscape compared to those who visit and/or work there, as teen cohort member Adam Taddia conjectured in his remarks at the Advisory Committee meeting on January 26. Indeed, gathering responses from East Bayside residents explicitly might allow for a clearer understanding of how people living in East Bayside truly feel about what’s going on in their community, and about what’s to be gained and lost in response to brownfield redevelopment and new investments there.
Conclusion
It would seem the East Bayside Brownfield Area Wide Planning project poses a real opportunity to set intentions and create an action plan that involves more than brownfield assessment, cleanup, reuse and new construction. A core vision that asserts intention and tangible plans to preserve, celebrate and bolster these beloved, must-keep aspects of East Bayside—through projects, programming and partnerships—is a tangible way to ensure Portland and all of its stakeholders leverage the best of East Bayside while making it better still for all.