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## Portland chamber keys on growth ; The community group sets economic development goals, including a task force with the city.

KELLEY BOUCHARD Staff Writer. *Portland Press Herald* [Portland, Me] 02 Mar 2006: pp. B.7.

### Abstract (summary)

PORTLAND CHAMBER IDEAS Establish a joint task force of chamber leaders and city officials to promote economic development. Amend city ordinances to encourage redevelopment of existing buildings. Sell or reuse city-owned properties to generate jobs, property... [Show all](#)

### Full Text

PORTLAND CHAMBER IDEAS Establish a joint task force of chamber leaders and city officials to promote economic development. Amend city ordinances to encourage redevelopment of existing buildings. Sell or reuse city-owned properties to generate jobs, property taxes and/or affordable housing. Promote pay incentives for city employees who identify cost- or time-saving measures. Evaluate development opportunities on the western waterfront.

The Portland Community Chamber wants a more active role in attracting new business and more jobs to Maine's largest city, and Portland officials are glad for the interest.

The chamber proposed a slate of economic development initiatives at its annual dinner meeting with the City Council Tuesday. The goals range from establishing a joint task force on economic development to looking for ways to reduce taxes through regional public services.

The initiatives are based on several months of focus groups and interviews with local business leaders conducted by the chamber's city affairs committee, which has made economic development its goal for the next two years.

Chip Harris, president of the Portland business group, said his organization is trying to fill a leadership void in the business community and negotiate a new working relationship with City Hall.

"This is a very collaborative approach that we're talking about," said Harris, who is a principal at Kilbride & Harris Insurance Services in Portland. "The council can make the changes on (many of the proposed initiatives) and we want to be at the table."

Mayor James Cohen said the chamber's effort dovetails with his desire to build partnerships in the community, particularly around Portland's so-called "creative economy," which attracts highly skilled professionals in fields such as health care, marketing and the arts.

Cohen met with chamber leaders early in his one-year term, which started in December, and shared some mutual interests in developing a better working relationship between city officials and the business community.

Cohen noted that some of the chamber's goals, such as streamlining Planning Board reviews so they're easier and more predictable, are already being addressed.

One goal - to attract a new discount airline to Portland International Jetport following the demise of Independence Air in January - will be accomplished with JetBlue's anticipated arrival in May.

"There seems to be an alignment of goals," Cohen said.

Councilor James Cloutier, chairman of the council's community development committee, said he is pleased to see the chamber developing expertise on a variety of economic issues and offering concrete goals to address with the city.

Cloutier said he believes the experience will give business leaders a better appreciation of what Portland officials face in trying to promote economic development and maintain a high quality of life in the city.

"I think it will help them understand what the city's up against," he said.