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## Riverfront communities worth investing in

On Nov. 6, voters will have the opportunity to support a bond that invests in our great rivers and riverfront communities. In a first for the state, Question 4 on the ballot includes an investment specifically focused on riverfront communities: the Riverfront Community Development Program.

It is one of several reasons to support Question 4, which also will renew funding for land conservation and infrastructure for outdoor recreation, farmland, working waterfronts, and state parks and historic sites.

The riverfront community portion of the bond will provide state funding to leverage federal and private dollars in a 2-to-1 match to rebuild the economies of riverfronts around the state. That will mean at least \$15 million put back into the riverfronts. The funds will call upon the initiative, imagination and inventiveness of communities and regions to develop competitive proposals to restore mill sites, attract visitors, recapture history and support waterfront infrastructure in places that used to be the backbone of local economies.

Up and down the Penobscot River, communities are transforming their waterfronts to once again become a focal point for cultural and economic growth. No longer turning their backs to our rivers, people have returned to enjoying them for fishing, paddling, swimming, nature observation and increasingly, festivals and other community events that bring people to the waterfront.

People want and need riverfronts in their lives. Witness the tens of thousands who are attracted to Bangor's waterfront for what was originally the National Folk Festival and became the home-grown American Folk Festival. Some successful local events include winter festivals in Brewer and Bangor, numerous arts festivals, Old Town's Canoe Hullabaloo in the summer and Riverfest and parade in the fall and Orono's Festival Day. These kinds of events, which enrich our coffers and build our communities, are just the beginning of the opportunities that lie ahead.

People want riverfronts for jobs, too. Bit by bit, mills, power houses and other structures and their sites that were engines of the regional economy are finding new lives — for industry, housing, lodging and tourism. But

there are many more opportunities that today may seem too expensive and complicated to tackle but are possible with help.

People want to sustain and expand the community resources found along almost every riverfront: trails that connect neighborhoods and communities, wildlife habitat and scenic vistas and public access for fishing and hunting. An example is the landmark Penobscot River Restoration Project. Renewing opportunities to fish for American shad, Atlantic salmon, and river herring among others, creating new and different paddling opportunities for different skill levels, and enhancing public access along the river all add value to our riverfronts. And these activities will support the small businesses that serve them: river and fishing guides, lodging, fly and tackle shops and boat builders among many others. The Riverfront Community Development bond offers a new mechanism to invest in all of these things.

And people want to recapture history. It abounds along the riverfronts, which were the original transportation highways into the interior of the state. The bond funds can be used to reinvest in the historic structures along these waterways — for housing, mixed use facilities, river guiding services, community centers and venues for cultural or interpretive arts.

Take a look around — you'll see examples locally and in other parts of the state: the Penobscot River House, riverfront park and gazebo in Old Town, renovation of the Alamo Theater in Bucksport — now home to Northeast Historic Film — the Bowdoin Mill in Topsham, the Kennebec Rail Trail — a multi-use trail that connects Augusta, Hallowell, Farmingdale and Gardiner — the Hathaway Mill in Waterville, the Arsenal in Augusta and the Bates Mill in Lewiston. The riverfront community development bond will continue and expand this successful trend.

A yes vote on Question 4 provides Mainers with the means to keep reinvesting in our riverfronts. Let's harness the energy for revitalizing our communities and stimulating our economy by focusing on what drove growth in these communities in the first place — rivers.

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