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Overview

The goal of this planning process is to provide a framework for collaboration among the City of Norfolk, various arts and civic organizations, property owners and private investors in order to create a lively, dynamic and sustainable Downtown Arts & Design District.

The planning process builds on a series of recent events that are having a positive impact in the area, including:

» The Chrysler Museum expansion program and an Art Walk along Grace Street;
» The NEAD (Norfolk Emerging Arts District) initiative led by Hannah Serrano and Jesse Scaccia which generated great interest in creating an arts district;
» Modifications to the zoning ordinances to permit art district uses in the area and to simplify the process for starting new ventures in the area;
» The Better Block Demonstration project which tested a series of ideas for revitalizing the area such as parklets, changing traffic patterns, pop-up retail uses and many others which have been adopted as recommendations of this plan.
» New uses on Granby Street such as Alchemy NFK, “an open source office, studio, music space and a tool for [the] community to get more involved in visual arts and the creativity of sound while giving those that enjoy creative endeavors a platform to the broader community.”

The process actively engaged a wide range of people and interest groups to define the goals for the area, to identify its strengths and weaknesses, to establish goals and criteria for design. It has three phases: (1) Analysis and identifying strengths, weaknesses and opportunities; (2) developing a series of design ideas and testing them in a charrette; and (3) deciding on a course of action.

This report documents the charrette which was the central event in the second step.
In the course of the charrette five geographically defined initiatives were identified. Each is a separate “address” within the district and has its own constituents.

» **Granby Street:** Build on the Better Block Program to create a lively pedestrian and bike-friendly street between Brambleton Avenue and Virginia Beach Boulevard as the heart of the district.

» **Olney Road:** Create a green art walk between the Museum and Granby Street as part of re-establishing an east-west, bicycle friendly connection through the city.

» **Virginia Beach Boulevard:** Transform a bleak, high-speed road into a green civic address with parking for the district between St. Paul’s Boulevard and Olney Road.

» **Magazine Street:** Transform a back alley into a lively small scale market street and central square for the district between Brambleton Avenue and Virginia Beach Boulevard.

» **Monticello Avenue:** Transform an under-utilized highway into a destination address with parking for the district.

Each initiative has a series of actions that can be implemented in three phases:

1. **Immediate Actions:** Small-scale projects that can be implemented within the next 90–180 days with the goal of changing the function and form of streets without major construction in order to create an appropriate urban scale environment.

2. **Mid-Term Actions:** More permanent improvements to be implemented over the next two to three years that will further establish each of these addresses as viable urban place.

3. **Long-Term Programs:** Finding ways of developing and building the facilities that will serve the Arts & Design District in the long term.

Each initiative includes a combination of public investment, private improvements to buildings and properties, and opportunities for new businesses and cultural activities. The initiatives are conceived as a “shopping list” of efforts to be implemented as funding, financing, and other resources become available. Some are small-scale efforts, such as a sculptural installation to deal with roof rainwater drainage or the installation of “parklets” in the parking lane of the street. Others are large-scale efforts, such as permanent streetscape improvements or new artist housing development.
The charrette also produced a “kit of parts”: a long list of ideas, techniques and designs that can be used in each of the three phases.

This report is a brief summary of these ideas and is intended to be useful to those who will begin the process of implementation. These ideas will be tested with the groups interested in each initiative with the goal of establishing priorities for each of the three phases.

The next steps will be to test the initiatives and ideas that were developed in the charrette. First, the summary will need to be reviewed by all participants. The process will include asking participants to identify the recommendations they like best, those that they think are not appropriate and those that are the most important to implement as soon as possible.

Once the list of recommendations has been prioritized, it will be possible to look for sources of funding and financing for each. Again, some will be public investment, some will be private initiatives by individuals or organizations and others may be supported with Foundations and other sources of grants.

There is a clear need for an entity of some type that will be the central organizer of the activities in the district. The form and staffing of this should become clear in the course of the next phase of the planning process.
Participants included representatives of arts organizations, property owners, business owners, public officials, artists, downtown civic groups, business associations, and residents of the area. Therefore, it is no surprise that such a diverse set of interests would not always agree on the areas of strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. The following lists identify those items about which there was the most consensus. In some cases, an aspect of the area is viewed as an asset by some and a liability by others, e.g., the Greyhound Station.

**STRENGTHS**

**Location**
- Proximity to downtown, Ghent, and Freemason
- Gateway into downtown
- Bridge to Ghent
- Proximity to public transit
- Major routes in and through the district
- On the way to many places
- A crossroads

**Diversity of Uses**
- Institutional anchors: Chrysler Museum and Glass Studio, Harrison Opera House, Norfolk Scope Arena, Chrysler Hall
- Big employers: The Virginian-Pilot, Channel 3-WTKR
- Residential buildings

**Usability**
- Availability of easy to use parking
- Pedestrian friendly in some areas
- Walkable and close to many destinations

**Potential**
- Area is empty canvas
- Empty buildings and lots

**Character**
- Authentic, eclectic, gritty
- “Endearing hodgepodge”
- Lots of old buildings worth preserving and rehabilitating: Texaco Building
- Architectural gems and hidden architectural gems
- Modern buildings worth preserving: WTKR, bus station
- Comfortable scale of buildings
- Some interesting spaces
- Sense of history
- Small scale next to downtown

*Green Dot Exercise* Participants placed three green dots on the places they thought were the best in the area. The greatest number are concentrated on the Chrysler Museum (1), Chrysler Museum Glass Studio (2), Harrison Opera House (3), several buildings and uses on Granby Street (4) including the Texaco Building (4), Bob’s Gun and Tackle Shop (5), Exotic Home Furniture (6), Amazing Grace Hair Styling (7), and Alchemy NFK (8).
WEAKNESSES

Barriers
» Brambleton still feels like highway
» Flooding of streets
» Large buildings and major streets
» Poor E-W connections
» Poor gateways

Image
» Too much vacant land and parking lots
» Empty storefronts and buildings in disrepair
» Decaying infrastructure
» Some ugly buildings (divided opinions)
» Hotel seems empty

Not Walkable
» Not pedestrian friendly: narrow, broken, and discontinuous sidewalks
» Lack of landscaping and green space
» No real public space or plaza
» Poor or no lighting
» Buildings with blank facades

Uses
» Few restaurants and no good entertainment
» Employers are 8 to 5; nothing after hours
» ABC store, cash service, Greyhound Station
» High percentage of social service functions, eg: parole offices

Public Safety
» Perception of crime, danger, desolation
» Lack of police presence
» Homeless issue
» Nearby public housing
» No “eyes” on street

Impediments
» Flooding of some properties
» Parking not organized
» Built on fill
» Overvalued properties
» High tax district
» Lack of awareness of incentives to spur rehabilitation

Red Dot Exercise  Participants placed three red dots on the places they thought were the worst in the area. There are several clusters of red dots, including: the areas with the worst flooding around Olney and Boush Street (1) and along Olney Road (2); along Virginia Beach Boulevard (3) for its bleak character; intersections along Brambleton Avenue (4) because it is a barrier; the Greyhound Station (5); some of the large parking lots (6), including Cedar Grove and the Norfolk Plaza Hotel Downtown (7).
ASPIRATIONS

A Diverse, Dynamic, and Lively District
» Mixed-use, 24/7 place: more housing, retail, restaurants, cafes, food trucks, places to eat, and daily services
» Utilize large spaces and parking lots: flea markets, fairs, farmers markets
» Keep it eclectic, gritty, organic, and alternative
» Small, affordable apartments: middle product to complement higher in downtown
» Allow interesting and unconventional things
» Arts-focused: studios, galleries, places to be creative
» Tie-in with Glass Studio, e.g.: Seattle-Tacoma
» Live/work spaces for artists
» Small performance venues and rehearsal spaces
» Educational uses

Overcome Barriers and Create Gateways
» Fix flooding problems creatively
» Connect to adjacent areas through pedestrian and bike routes
» Fix Brambleton Avenue
» Improve E-W connections
» Improve Llewellyn/Virginia Beach gateways

Walkable, Pedestrian-Scaled Spaces
» Bike and pedestrian-friendly
» Create a public space
» Use creative public sculpture and art in public spaces
» Distinctive streetscapes and interesting treatments for parking lots
» Use dead-ends and alleyways to create intimate, unique urban spaces
» Infrastructure improvements such as WiFi hotspot and undergrounding of utilities
» Rebuild Olney Road
» More green, more trees
» Tame through-traffic

Other
» Better parking system
» Animate hotel property
» Improve and clean up city-controlled buildings and lots
» Better organize city functions
» Incentives and support for affordable retail and housing
» Move the bus station

Blue Dot Exercise  Participants placed three blue dots on the places to make improvements; these include: Granby Street to build on the Better Block program (1); Along Olney Road, especially in areas with flooding and vacant building (2); Virginia Beach Boulevard (3) to provide a gateway and connect the parking to the District; Magazine Street to take advantage of interesting spaces (4); improvements to the hotel and Monticello Avenue (5).
Process Step 2: The Charrette

ISSUES AND THEMES
In preparation for the charrette, the design team summarized the issues and themes that had emerged in the discussions in Step 1.

1. Connections: Gateways, bike and pedestrian-friendly streets, and animated public spaces

2. Response to Water and Flooding: Solutions combining landscape, streetscape engineering and art, e.g. Seattle

The flooding in the area was described by participants as the most fundamental problem to be solved. It blocks access and makes some buildings unusable. It is caused both by a combination of tidal flooding, underground water, and rainwater runoff. Because of its location over a stream bed and at the edge of the Hague, the area is one of the most flood-prone in city. It also has the most impervious surface any part of the city, approximately 80%. The x-ray to the right indicates surface parking lots in the Arts District and adjacent areas. The largest concentration is in the Arts District, especially in the area of greatest flooding. These include the publicly owned Harrison Opera lot and Cedar Grove lot as well as privately owned lots like The Virginian Pilot lot and a combination of lots along Granby Street. The total impervious surface in parking lots is 45% of the total district land area. Therefore, it is clear that a creative solution is needed to reduce impervious surface and to introduce a wide range of means of mitigating stormwater. There are precedents around the country in which artists collaborated with civil engineers and landscape architects to create unique solutions. This concept was endorsed at the beginning of the charrette.
3. Image and Personality: Water, art, glass art, painting, gritty, organic and alternative

4. Image of Public Safety: Design, management, and programming of publicly used spaces

5. Parking Strategy: A solution for the whole district

6. Existing and New Building Stock: How to use and provide affordable studio, retail, work, and living space
Initiatives

The discussions and working sessions in the charrette were organized around the issues and also around specific geographic areas. The result was to define the five initiatives.

Each of these initiatives include improvements to be made by the city (C), the private sector (P) (property owners, developers, and business owners), civic organizations (O), institutions (I), and others which will require the collaboration of both the public and private sectors (B).

**GRANBY STREET**
Build on the Better Block program to create a lively pedestrian and bike friendly street between Brambleton Avenue and Virginia Beach Boulevard as the heart of the district.

**OLNEY ROAD**
Create a green art walk between the museum and Granby Street as part of re-establishing an east-west, bicycle-friendly connection through the city.
VIRGINIA BEACH BOULEVARD
Transform a bleak, high speed road into a green civic address with parking for the district between St. Paul's Boulevard and Olney Road.

MAGAZINE STREET
Transform a back alley into a lively small scale market street and central square for the district between Brambleton Avenue and Virginia Beach Boulevard.

MONTICELLO AVENUE
Transform an under-utilized highway into a destination address with parking for the district.
Granby Street Initiative

Mission: Build on the Better Block program to create a lively pedestrian- and bike-friendly street between Brambleton Avenue and Virginia Beach Boulevard as the heart of the district.

Early Action and Testing Phase
A. Install pedestrian-scale lights (C)
B. Create gateways at Brambleton Avenue and Virginia Beach Boulevard, each integrating art projects (B)
C. Re-stripe crosswalks, add new crosswalks, and install sharrows (C)
D. Continue to encourage food trucks and pop-up retail shops (B)
E. As a demonstration in the Better Block area, install planters to define parking spaces, parklets, and bike corrals; commission artists and designers to create special elements (B)
F. Tame traffic to 15 mph to make safe for pedestrians and cyclists (C)
G. Provide facade improvement programs that include artists dealing with water management (C)
H. Continue to encourage diverse uses to move into area, especially creative fields (B)
I. Provide amenities that create places that support a lively urban experience (B)

Mid-term and Long-term Actions
A. Translate planters and other devices into permanent infrastructure (C)
B. Extend demonstration to Brambleton Avenue (B)
C. Continue to support efforts to use vacant properties (B)
D. Develop and implement a parking strategy (C)
E. Identify sites for development (B)
F. Continue to integrate artists in design of streetscapes and architecture (B)

Conceptual sketch for new gateway into district from Downtown at Brambleton Avenue

A bike-friendly street with stormwater mitigation
Stormwater management integrated with architecture
Olney Road Initiative

Mission: Create a green art walk between the Chrysler Museum and Granby Street as part of re-establishing an east-west, bicycle-friendly connection through the city.

Landscaping and rain gardens help reduce impervious surfaces and mitigate flooding.

Art installations can enliven the area at night.

Art installations that highlight a connection to water are encouraged.

Early Action and Testing Phase
A. Extend Museum Art Walk to Olney Road (I)
B. Install sharrows for bikeway (C)
C. Install planters to create parklets, define parking, and provide bike storage (C)
D. Encourage landscape on private parking lots, eg: Virginian Pilot improvements (B)
E. Install skateboard sculpture on Wilson Avenue (B)

Mid-term and Long-term Actions
A. Demolish Cofer building, develop and build artist live-work units (P)
B. Create park and link to Virginia Beach Boulevard (C)
C. Create link to Olney Road from the museum through parking lot (B)
D. Create the East Olney Gateway at Monticello Avenue and develop artist live/work units (P)
E. Extend bikeway to Norfolk State University (C)
F. Infill development along Olney Road (P)
G. Develop artist live/work units at Olney Gateway (P)
Virginia Beach Boulevard Initiative

Mission: Transform a bleak, high-speed road into a green civic address with parking for the district between St. Paul’s Boulevard and Olney Road.

Early Action and Testing Phase
A. Striping and planters along both sides of Virginia Beach Boulevard to define parking and tame roadway (C)
B. Normalize major intersections by closing highway-like turn lanes at Llewellyn and Monticello Avenues (C)

Mid-term and Long-term Actions
A. Reconfigure Harrison Opera House parking to create green edges and break up parking (I)
B. Along Virginia Beach Boulevard edge, create linear bio-detention system as naturally landscaped, linear element leading to water feature (I)
C. Develop artist housing at Granby Street and Virginia Beach Boulevard (P)
D. Modify Llewellyn/Virginia Beach/Olney Space and add sculpture to create axis between the opera and the museum (B)
Mission: Transform a back alley into a lively small-scale market street and central square for the district between Brambleton Avenue and Virginia Beach Boulevard.

Early Action and Testing Phase
A. Develop Olney Square using pop-up dining rooms, food market, and retail shops (O)
B. Develop studios in building at corner of Wilson and Magazine Streets (P)
C. Landscaping along edges of Virginian Pilot parking (P)

Mid-term and Long-term Actions
A. Re-configure Virginian Pilot parking to allow for district parking (B)
B. Magazine Street improvements (Brambleton Avenue to Olney Road): multi-use pavement, farmers market, pop-up shops (B)
C. Create Magazine Square: improved paving, new lighting, landscaping, introduce active uses (B)
D. Translate short-term planters to permanent streetscapes and lighting (C)
E. Implement new development on large parking areas (P)
F. Acquire land to create pedestrian link from Magazine Square to Virginia Beach Boulevard (C)
Monticello Avenue Initiative

Mission: Transform an under-utilized highway into a destination address with parking for the district.

Early Action and Testing Phase
A. Close Monticello Avenue between Wilson Road and Olney Avenue (C)
B. Re-stripe pavement and add planters to define parking configuration (C)
C. Promote a farmer’s market and pop-up retail (B)
D. Integrate the parking into a district-wide parking program, including collaboration with privately held parking lots (B)

Mid-term and Long-term Actions
A. Translate planters into permanent streetscapes with new lighting and appropriate signage (C)
B. Work with the hotel owner to explore ways of creating active frontage along Monticello Avenue (B)
C. Develop and build artist live-work building at the gateway (P)
The vision for the Arts & Design District will be realized through the implementation of many small-scale, incremental improvements that combine to make a large-scale impact on the district. The various agents of change in the district can start to make an immediate impact through attainable efforts with minimal investment. As the momentum of the Arts & Design District builds, additional long-term actions will ensure the district reaches its full potential. The following Toolkit, developed during the design charrette, outlines some near-term and long-term improvements that will help the Arts & Design District succeed.

**Immediate**
- Sharrows
- Bike racks
- Bike corrals
- Bike-friendly business program (created by business association)

**Long-Term**
- Bike lockers
- Tune-up station

**PUBLIC SPACE TOOLS**
- Parklets
- Planters with trees
- Murals
- Wayfinding/signage
- Crosswalks
- Sculpture
- Seating
- Temporary shading devices

**BIKE TOOLS**
- Street lighting
- Sculpture
- Cisterns
- Seating
- Stormwater infrastructure
- Permanent shading devices

The vision for the Arts & Design District will be realized through the implementation of many small-scale, incremental improvements that combine to make a large-scale impact on the district. The various agents of change in the district can start to make an immediate impact through attainable efforts with minimal investment. As the momentum of the Arts & Design District builds, additional long-term actions will ensure the district reaches its full potential. The following Toolkit, developed during the design charrette, outlines some near-term and long-term improvements that will help the Arts & Design District succeed.
Immediate
» Food trucks
» Farmers markets
» “Town Hall”
» Open streets
» Art-All-Night
» Park(ing) Day
» Art competitions for bike racks and cisterns
» Car show
» Temporary art installations and outdoor performances

Long-Term
» Gallery crawl
» Workshops/open studios
» Street fairs
» Festivals: food, wine, beer, coffee, art, etc.

Immediate
» Facade improvement program (Downtown Norfolk Council)
» Pop-up retail
» Bike-related infrastructure
» Green walls
» Adaptive reuse with active ground floors
» Building cisterns
» Exterior building lighting
» Green roofs

Long-Term
» Strategic, flexible new construction (ArtSpace)
Growing the Bike Network

The Arts & Design District lies at an important intersection of existing east-west and north-south bicycle routes within the city’s bicycle network. The area should be better-integrated into an expanded network that establishes the District as an important hub within the bike system. Opportunities exist to link the District to the Elizabeth River Trail, to Norfolk State University by filling in a couple gaps, and to improve connections to Freemason and Downtown.

As the area becomes more bike-friendly and bike ridership continues to grow, the businesses of the Arts & Design District would benefit from establishing a Bike-Friendly Business program or district. People who use bikes as their preferred means of transportation are likely to stay closer to home and support small and local businesses. To capitalize on the economic and health benefits of promoting biking, local business should commit to encouraging their employees and customers to cycle, create discounts for bicyclists, integrate biking into their marketing and promotions, and support bicycle infrastructure and programs.
Finding the Parking Strategy

The current parking situation in the Arts & Design District is an obstacle to its growth and success. There is an excess of surface parking in the area, but it is disorganized and dedicated to specific properties. A visitor arriving by car is presented with something of a paradox: there is plenty of parking, but nowhere to park. In order for the district to flourish, the district needs an overall parking strategy.

1. Surface parking x-ray: The black tones indicate surface parking in downtown, the Arts & Design District, Freemason, Ghent, and other adjacent areas. The largest concentration is in the Arts & Design District.

2. Existing parking is inefficient, dedicated to specific properties, and confusing.

3. Use city-owned and leased resources to improve parking situation.

4. Cedar Grove Parking and nearby downtown garages become parking reservoirs for the district.
5. Improve pedestrian connections to and from Cedar Grove and downtown, move city parking needs to Cedar Grove

6. Increase accessibility and capacity by adding on-street parking, re-configure Opera House lot, and open former city-leased lot to public

Early Action and Testing Phase
A. Update parking regulations (in progress)
B. Program incentive parking times of week/day where it is free to park
C. Decant, where possible, the city’s parking needs to the Cedar Grove Lot
D. Test on-street parking on Virginia Beach Boulevard and Monticello Avenue

Mid-term and Long-term Actions
A. Study further the creation of parking district
B. Permanently install on-street parking along Virginia Beach Boulevard and Monticello Avenue
C. Smart metering of spaces
The strategy that emerged in the charrette identifies five initiatives, each with a shopping list of items to be implemented. The “Tool Kit” includes a wide range of elements that also emerged in the course of the process. In the final session of the charrette, the participants were asked to evaluate the various items on the shopping list and to prioritize them. There was strong consensus that the initiatives were correctly defined and that the shopping list elements were well worth pursuing. There was also consensus that Granby Street was top priority because of the momentum that was already underway. In the time since the charrette, the three artists in Summer Art Program have been creating their works in Alchemy, the very innovative and creative studio that has been set up on Granby Street and street lights have been installed.

The proposed strategy includes large efforts, medium scale efforts and small individual ones. It is constellation of many efforts by different individuals, organizations, agencies and companies. For it to succeed there needs to be an organization that represents the various constituencies, just as they were represented in the charrette. Therefore, the next step is to establish such an entity to first reevaluate the proposed strategy and then identify those elements which should be implemented over the course of the next few years.

In this time of tight budgets, creative approaches are needed to be able to implement the larger projects. Fortunately, just as the charrette was being completed, the city learned that it had been selected by the Rockefeller Foundation to be one of eight cities to received assistance in this type of project. The goal is to integrate solutions to tidal and stormwater flooding with the creation of economic development and programs that improve the quality of life in the community. The Arts & Design District has been selected as one of the areas to be worked on. This will make it possible to move some of the large efforts forward.

**Next Steps**

Participants of the final charrette session evaluated the master plan (above) and the Tool Kit (right), placing blue dots on the areas of highest priority.