

Petersburg's **DOWNTOWN HARBOR INITIATIVE**

WHAT IS IT?

The Downtown Harbor Initiative is a citizen project with the intention of supporting the goals and objectives of the City of Petersburg's Comprehensive Plan and Agenda for Progress for the redevelopment of our Downtown and waterfront area.

WHY IS IT NEEDED NOW?

Our city is turning a corner.

New businesses are here. More are coming. The Arts are bringing life back into our community. Seward is coming on line and other developers are looking our way. BRAC will surely bring significant changes to Petersburg and the region. We want to ensure that we create a rich environment for development without displacing our own culture and residents. We want a downtown that is open, accessible, affordable, safe, fun, and inspiring; a downtown that strengthens our soul and serves our needs. On January 31st, 300 people came together in support of these ideas.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR?

For the past six months, a group of interested and enthusiastic Petersburg residents have started meeting to discuss how to move forward with the public planning process that is recommended in the Comprehensive Plan. After careful study of similar processes and projects, a program known as a R/UDAT was selected as the model for the initiative and the downtown harbor area was chosen as the project focus area. We have formed a steering committee that meets weekly, and a host of subcommittees to take care of the business of managing the R/UDAT. We have held our first public meeting with 300 people in attendance, and have scheduled our next public meeting for March 28th. We have begun meeting with citizens and stakeholders to encourage participation. Upon a favorable review of our letter of intent to the Cameron Foundation, we have submitted a proposal for funding for the R/UDAT and the development of Downtown Petersburg Incorporated over the next three years. We have over 200 people signed up to participate in the process, many of them already donating considerable in-kind services and support.

WHAT IS A R/UDAT?

The Regional Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) planning process was developed by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) over 40 years ago to help support and strengthen the



idea of citizens playing an active and integral role in planning for the future of their communities. The program was developed by architects and planners from across the country and has been used in over 200 towns, cities and counties throughout the United States. The basic idea is to for the R/UDAT team from the AIA to work with an active community group that builds citizen participation and interest in a revitalization project. We have chosen the harbor redevelopment as our project focus. For the first 6 to 8 months a citizen steering committee puts together the structure necessary to 1) galvanize the public and citizenry to action, 2) bring all the key stakeholders into the process, 3) establish the necessary partnering relationship with the City, and 3) to raise the money necessary to implement the R/UDAT program. The R/UDAT is a 4–5 day charrette (intense design process) where the community, the city, key stakeholders, and local design professionals hold all-day and sometimes night meetings to get issues on the table and come to a consensus about the direction of the project. The AIA brings a team of design professionals with a range of expertise to town for the process. These men and women bring their years of experience working with communities and public design processes to Petersburg offering objective insights and observation on our situation and process.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

At our first public meeting in January, with invitations going out on such short notice, we were expecting about 30–50 people. Over 300 people from throughout the community came. Over 300 people came ready to be energized, ready to work (almost all of them signed up to support the initiative), and ready to voice their shared support for the project. The AIA recommends that a local organization act as the sponsoring organization through which money can be managed and communications can be handled. Most importantly, the AIA likes to see that there is a staffed local organization that can work with the City, after the R/UDAT process, to implement the initiatives outlined in the plan. We have been working with Downtown Petersburg Incorporated to build their capacity and prepare them to be a fully functioning and staffed organization that can provide the continuity necessary to help the City successfully revitalize the downtown. We have been working to build the communications network required to inform everyone that is now involved in the process.

THE R/UDAT PRODUCT

At the end of the weeklong design charrette, a planning document is produced that defines both short and long term initiatives and the strategies for pursuing them. This document represents a Shared Community Vision supported by all that have participated. It is for this reason that we are working so hard to broaden representation from the entire community in the process.



PARTNERSHIPS

WITH THE CITY: In order to make this initiative a success, we will need to work in partnership with the City at all levels to insure that all our citizen interests are heard and that our City leaders stay informed and involved as we move our City forward.

WITH LISC and PHOENIX PROJECT: We have met with the leadership of both LISC, the Local Initiative Support Corporation, and the newly established Phoenix Project of the University of William and Mary. The potential synergy that could be created between these initiatives was an exciting topic of conversation. Greta Harris, the Executive Director of LISC, thought the two initiatives were very compatible and was excited about the potential to energize the public and increase community participation in these initiatives.

WITH LOCAL CITIZENS AND ORGANIZATIONS: We have begun taking the show on the road by presenting to local organizations and civic groups and talking about how they can be a part of the process. We will continue to meet on a regular basis with local citizens, residents, business owners, property owners, organizations, and leaders to grow the public support necessary to make this initiative an ongoing success.

IN CLOSING . . .

HOW WILL THIS BENEFIT PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE CITY?

As the Randall Tourism Study has stated, Downtown Petersburg is the heart of the region. They recommend that the regional tourism initiative operate under the name "Petersburg Region" Our Downtown is the heart of our community. It belongs to everyone in the city. We want our families and our children to identify with our city, its architecture, institutions and culture. Downtown is the heart of this place. The shape of our downtown will shape our community, its neighborhoods, its streets, its parks, and its suburbs. The benefits of revitalizing our downtown will ripple outward through the region, bringing in new businesses, strengthening existing businesses, creating jobs, and building pride in the community as more and more citizens play an active role in its future.

