

THE TOWN'S BLUEPRINT

A VISION & CODE FOR HISTORIC CHARLOTTE AMALIE

Charrette Executive Summary — January 2011 **DRAFT**



THE TOWN'S BLUEPRINT CHARRETTE: BIG IDEAS

REAFFIRM & PROTECT THE TRADITIONAL WAY OF BUILDING

Incentivize and require respectful infill

TRANSFORM THE WATERFRONT INTO THE FINEST PUBLIC SPACE IN THE CARIBBEAN

Pedestrian-friendly, beauty first, reconnect town to waterfront

CONNECT

Multi-modal: pedestrians, bicyclists, taxi, transit, and harbor transportation; step streets and guts provide greenway connections; new waterfront public spaces connect people to the water

MAKE WALKABILITY THE FIRST PRIORITY IN DESIGN

Smart street design, architecture, and parking solutions

CONTROL THE SCALE; SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Code; promote building preservation/revitalization; 100% models

BRING TOWN TO LIFE AT NIGHT & FOSTER OVERNIGHT STAYS

Improve parking, public safety, transportation; bring a diverse mix of residences, entertainment and services to town

EMBRACE OUR DIVERSITY & IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL

Make town a place for all islanders to work, live, and play

THE VISION SHAPES THE RULES & DIRECTS THE INVESTMENT

The BIG IDEAS describe the general roadmap for revitalization and regulation in the historic core of Charlotte Amalie. The vision comes first, and the rewriting of the land development laws and budgets for public infrastructure follow that vision. To realize these goals:

MEND & IMPROVE THE NEIGHBORHOODS: SAVAN / KRONPRINDSENS QUARTER, DRONNINGENS QUARTER, & KONGENS QUARTER

FILL IN VACANT LOTS TO COMPLETE THE NEIGHBORHOODS

Infill on vacant lots will spark pride and reinvestment along every street. New buildings will follow standards to ensure they contribute to neighborhood character. In the interim, vacant lots can be utilized for other community purposes, including parking (with landscaping), pocket parks, or community gardens.

RESTORE & REOCCUPY VACANT BUILDINGS

Complex ownership and heavy regulation have resulted in a large number of vacant buildings, a safety concern as well as an eyesore. The existing vacant building program (in the Savan Enterprise Zone) can be enhanced to include initiatives for fix-up and re-habitation. To maintain the historic integrity, rules and procedures must make it more feasible to rehab buildings and less financially attractive to neglect them.

CREATE HIGH-QUALITY NEIGHBORHOOD OPEN SPACES

The historic neighborhoods have prime opportunity sites for public open spaces. The “guts,” or drainage ditches that separate each neighborhood can be cleaned, replanted and enhanced to become green walkway connections. The step streets should be restored to be cultural, historic and recreational resources. Pocket parks and community gardens can be built on vacant parcels, for residents as well as tourists.

SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

The strong tradition of neighborhood schools should be resumed. The vacant lot reserved long ago for a school in the Upstreet neighborhood should be utilized for a school at last. Community centers in each neighborhood can provide after-school education for children.

PROVIDE SMART PARKING SOLUTIONS

A parking permit program should be established to give residents and businesses certainty. Common lots can provide efficient parking for neighboring users, relieving the constrained parcels.

CREATE WALKABLE, LIVABLE STREETS

When rebuilt, streets should have a pedestrian-friendly scale maintaining the best features of the traditional street design. Re-establishing sidewalks and removing obstacles (such as utility poles) will make it easier to walk through town. Placing utilities underground will upgrade aesthetics and boost pride. Vehicle sizes and types can be limited on certain streets at certain hours, to increase livability.



Hypothetical view of General Gade in the Savan neighborhood (in the future), with the undergrounding of the overhead utilities and infill of a vacant lot. The new building follows precedents established by other cherished buildings and traditional streets in the neighborhood; it is set back from the corner to provide a small courtyard space for the community to enjoy.



The restoration of a neighborhood step street. The step streets are a tremendous underutilized asset, unique to St. Thomas. Businesses and/or residents can be encouraged to adopt a street, to facilitate restoration. Marketing of the step streets (including new step street events, such as a 10K race) can further create appeal and identity.



Veterans Drive: Improvements can include street trees and on-street parking to replace waterfront parking lots. This efficient configuration of parking provides space for wider sidewalks, community greens and outdoor dining.

ENHANCING DOWNTOWN & THE WATERFRONT

INTEGRATE PARKING AND TRANSIT

Common parking areas (including structures, appropriately “lined” with inhabited spaces and screened from view) should be explored to manage the parking crunch. Parking should be linked with transit, including a trolley/circulator and/or enhanced taxi service to serve downtown businesses.

ATTRACT MORE RESIDENTS

If parking, safety, and transportation concerns can be solved, then downtown will become a desirable place for additional residential units (for households of many income levels). A larger residential base can support stores offering a variety of goods, open into the evening. This will increase the allure of downtown for both locals and tourists.

PROVIDE WATERFRONT GREENS AND GATHERING SPACES

Small greens or plazas can be reclaimed at the water’s edge. Redesign waterfront parking lots as parallel or angled parking along Veterans Drive for traffic-calming benefits to lure back pedestrians; the more efficient use of land will provide space for wide sidewalks, greens, and outdoor cafes in front of waterfront buildings. The aesthetics of highly-visible Vendors Plaza should be elegant and reflective of the best of St. Thomas and the USVI; a new design should be conceived for the vendor structures, which could be a combination of temporary and more permanent features.

MAKE VETERANS DRIVE A CATALYST FOR WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION

The planned redesign of Veterans Drive will have tremendous impact to the appearance and function of the waterfront, and act as a catalyst for revitalization. This road needs to have the capacity to move vehicles more reliably, especially during rush hours, and it must become the public space that introduces visitors to the aesthetic refinement, polish and dignity of the Territory. But more than anything else, it needs to be welcoming to pedestrians. Travel speeds must be managed to encourage comfortable walking along and crossing to the esplanade. On-street parking, orderly tree plantings, pedestrian-friendly road dimensions, and short blocks with frequent signalized crosswalks will achieve this. The planned improvements should also include HOV or dedicated transit/taxi lanes to further aid the movement of passengers, at least during critical time periods. These improvements to Veterans Drive can be implemented almost immediately. A critical detail of this revitalization project is the travel movement near the historic fort and legislature. Two design options for this area that attempt to meet the goals outlined above were explored during the charrette (a Network Option and a Bypass Option). Key ideas, some of which could be staged for later implementation, include:



The Network Option



The Bypass Option

- A** Fort Christian (existing)
- B** Legislature Building (existing)
- C** A new compact two-lane street north of the fort would provide an additional two lanes of capacity. It could be either a one-way street (functioning as a pair with the existing street between the fort and legislature) or a two-way street.
- D** Emancipation Gardens (existing)
- E** Vendors Plaza could be enhanced with new structures (temporary or permanent) that are appropriate for the character of St. Thomas.
- F** A parking garage, shielded from view by liner buildings, provides additional parking in an efficient and aesthetically pleasing form.
- G** A reflective pool could be added west of the fort, replicating the historic relationship of the fort to water.
- H** A large, formal community green space can replace the existing parking lot, enhancing views to Fort Christian and serving as a gathering space for community events.
- J** The legislature building and its relationship to the waterfront, including the harbor views, remain as is (*Network Option only*).
- K** The two-lane street between the fort and legislature remains; this could be a one-way street, acting as a pair with a new street to the north (C) or two-way street (*Network Option only*).
- L** A new four-lane street is provided on a bridge around the edge of the legislature point; this provides additional capacity but changes the waterfront experience for pedestrians (*Bypass Option only*).
- M** The area between the fort and legislature could become pedestrian-only (*Bypass Option only*).

The Town's Blueprint is a special component in the USVI's Zoning and Subdivision Code Revision initiative: a pilot project to demonstrate and test the application of a "Form-Based Code" in historic Charlotte Amalie. A Form-Based Code is a type of zoning intended to encourage, preserve and restore high-quality public spaces, with a primary emphasis on the physical form of the built environment. The code prescribes key physical details that define a community's character.

The first step to creating a Form-Based Code is to confirm the community's vision for a specific area. This vision will then be translated into new form-based regulations. The vision and code together, when adopted, will be used to guide future development in the selected study area (in this case, the historic core of Charlotte Amalie).

On December 3 - 9, 2010, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) and the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) invited the community to participate in a series of public events, called a "charrette". Residents, property/business owners, and government staff and officials attended the week's presentations and design sessions, and visited the open design studio at the Grand Hotel, where each day's progress was displayed. Participants shared their goals and ideas through open microphone sessions, by drawing and writing ideas on base maps, through exit questionnaires, interactive keypad polling, and through one-on-one meetings and conversations with members of the planning team.

NEXT STEPS

Following the charrette events, the planning team is synthesizing the ideas generated with additional input received, and creating a first draft of the Form-Based Code. The team will return to the territory for a presentation of the refined vision, and to conduct a public workshop to gather input on the draft code in March 2011. Please visit thetownsblueprint.com for updates on meeting times and locations.

This planning effort will result in a new Form-Based Code (FBC) District that can be carefully applied in selected areas throughout the territory. Charlotte Amalie was selected as the first "pilot" area to test this approach; if desired by the community, similar visioning processes and Form-Based Code districts could be applied in other areas in the future.



The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, with the generous support of the Richard H. Driehaus Charitable Lead Trust and in coordination with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, is sponsoring this planning and Form-Based Code writing effort for Charlotte Amalie and the USVI. CFVI has contracted a team led by Dover, Kohl & Partners to work with the community to establish the vision and draft the Form-Based Code. For more information, please contact:

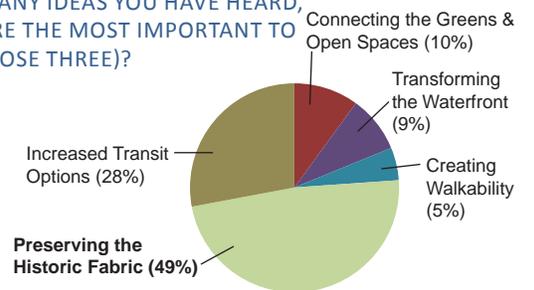
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town planning

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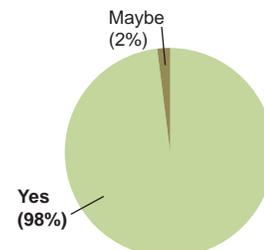
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COMMUNITY RESPONSES AT THE WORK-IN-PROGRESS PRESENTATION (DECEMBER 9, 2010):

OF THE MANY IDEAS YOU HAVE HEARD, WHICH ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU (CHOOSE THREE)?



HAS THIS PROCESS BEEN HELPFUL AND WORTHWHILE?



DO YOU THINK THE VISION (THE TOWN'S BLUEPRINT) IS GENERALLY ON THE RIGHT TRACK?

