



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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The Charleston Neck Area Partnership for Prosperity Master Plan presents a transportation and development planning framework that seeks to guide public and private investment in responsible, cost efficient ways that strengthen existing neighborhoods, solidify the area's economic vitality for lasting benefit, and attract appropriate new development that expands housing and travel choices. The Master Plan is a culmination of nearly three years of work focused on integrating various plans, projects and programs into a cohesive and clear strategy for a nearly 30 square mile area bounded by the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, the Charleston International Airport and the Ravenel Bridge in the Cities of North Charleston and Charleston, **Figure 1.1** shows the study area and its major transportation facilities and focal points.

OVERVIEW OF THE MASTER PLAN

The objective for the project is to produce an integrated strategic Master Plan that respects and knits together the various planning and engineering components of transportation, urban design, land use and economic development into a unified whole. This unified planning and design framework provides clear guidance to state and local agencies, community stakeholders, the general public and the private sector about the vision for the Neck area, and the strategies and priorities necessary to achieve desired outcomes that can transform the community toward a more sustainable, livable and economically vital part of the region.

The Neck area is located at the heart of a growing region that has made economic development a priority through ambitious organizations and innovative programs and facilities. The Charleston region is on the rise, and it is well-positioned to benefit from a recovering national and global economy. With its central location, multimodal accessibility, and concentration of employment and economic activity, the Neck area is poised to be a key engine for regional growth. With this context supporting it, the primary challenge for the Master Plan is to define opportunities and actions that can most effectively tap the area's potential and bring prosperity to its residents, businesses, and other stakeholders.

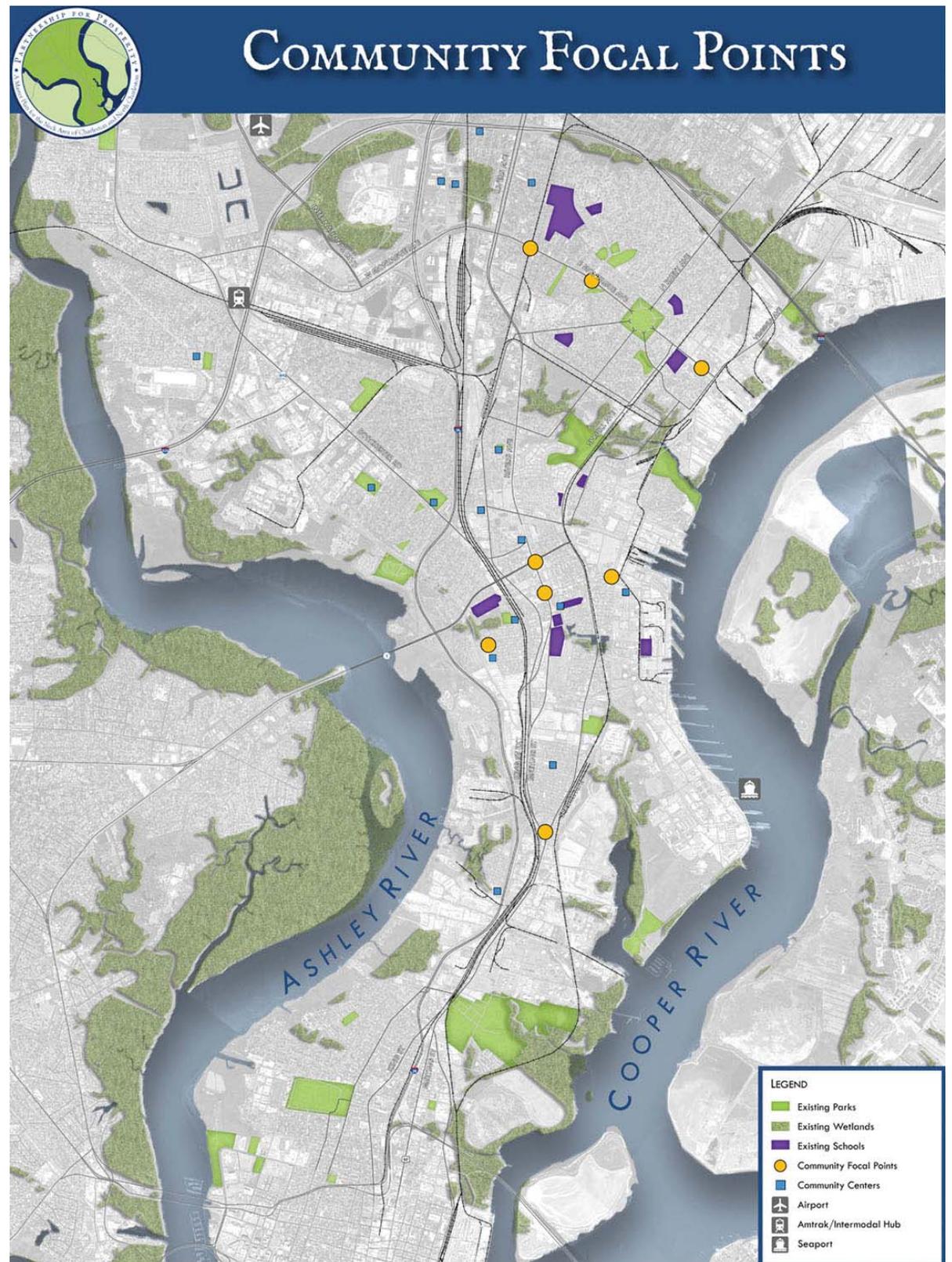


Figure ES.1 Community Focal Points (See Appendix A pg. 199)

The Master Plan presents a compelling vision for the Neck area's future that will guide investment. The developers, investors, companies, institutions, other stakeholders, and residents that will be participating in the area's revitalization will be looking for guidance and inspiration in conceiving and executing projects that will advance the vision. The Master Plan components provide a framework of catalyst area developments, transportation system improvements, land use and urban design principles, and details related to community structure, environmental issues, and goods movement that establish the "road map" for long-term redevelopment and revitalization of the Neck area. With this map available, participants will be more confident in taking actions that advance their own interests and collectively contribute to the realization of the Master Plan vision.

The Berkeley Charleston Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG) initiated work on the Charleston Neck Area Master Plan in close coordination with area local governments, state agencies and community-based organizations to ensure a well-coordinated and inclusive planning process. Thoughtful and innovative plans already exist for much of the Neck area, notably the Lowcountry Alliance for Model Communities' (LAMC) Community Profile and Final Plan and various transportation and land use plans developed or adopted by each of the study area's local governments or private entities, the Charleston Area Regional Transit Authority and the Charleston Urbanized Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

A primary objective of the planning process entailed using these prior plans as a foundation to create the area-wide Master Plan in a way that helps integrate the plans and position them to achieve their goals and objectives. Each of the plans has a different area of focus, and none of them address the full extent of issues, emerging trends and opportunities for the entire study area. Many have recognized that the Neck area is lacking a long-term land use, transportation and economic strategy that clearly maps out an organized approach to development and transportation to improve the quality of life, standard of living and shared economic opportunity for the area's existing and future residents, commerce and institutions. Thus, the Master Plan seeks to put in place a planning framework designed to support priority investments, target growth and redevelopment areas, and protect existing communities and eco-systems while enhancing their overall quality.

Through a competitive selection process the BCDCOG selected a consulting team led by Renaissance Planning Group to prepare the Master Plan from a fresh perspective unfettered by any involvement in prior planning activities for the study area or region. Team members providing special expertise and local knowledge include the firms CDM Smith, HDR, DesignWorks and Civic Communications.

The BCDCOG convened a steering committee comprised of the cities of North Charleston and Charleston, Charleston County, the South Carolina Ports Authority

and South Carolina Department of Transportation to guide the development of the Master Plan. Each of those entities has statutory responsibility for development of the study area's transportation network and its land use plans. An extensive community engagement process complemented the work of the BCDCOG and steering committee to support a community-based planning process that sought out the opinions, perspectives and desires from a diverse range of residents, businesses, organizations and land owners in the Neck area. Through a series of focus group discussions, small group meetings, large workshops and a week-long design charrette, those community participants helped to shape the Master Plan in many ways. They identified problems, suggested projects or programs as solutions, provided feedback on the consultant team's ideas and gave input into recommended strategies, priorities and their implications.

IT STARTS WITH A VISION

Resolution of issues in the context of the Neck area looked to build on the existing planning efforts completed or underway by various stakeholders, balance economic development and sustainability, balance regional mobility with community livability, and create a strong sense of ownership for the planning framework from the Neck area's diverse stakeholders. The Master Plan provides a shared vision and planning framework that reflects an inclusive process, regional influences, local conditions and strategic opportunities, and guides decision-making for short term actions from a long range perspective.

Early in the planning process a working vision emerged from prior plans and a fresh assessment of issues and opportunities to provide a strategy for better organizing and unifying the Neck area. The vision hinges on transforming so-called catalyst areas over the next 5, 10 or 20 years. The catalyst areas serve as transportation hubs, offering a higher level of regional and local accessibility through connectivity of a local street grid, introduction of higher performing transit networks and presence of good regional visibility and roadway access. Unlike much of the Neck study area, the catalyst areas offer the geographic location, transportation network and development potential to support substantial mixed use and complementary new development or redevelopment without burdening the existing transportation network or encroaching on established neighborhoods.

Taking the working vision concept to greater detail and ultimate realization of its outcomes requires a foundation of core values to guide future development plans. Those values entail:

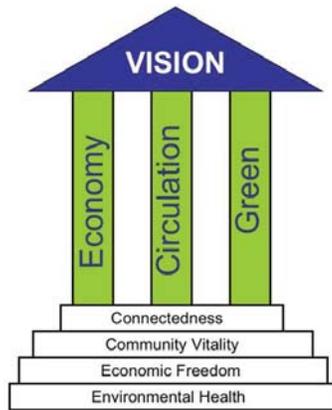
Connectedness – The identity of an area or neighborhood as a desirable place, with good transportation access for people of all ages and abilities to reach their destinations, socialize with friends and family, and enjoy a more livable community.

Community Vitality – A strong and resilient community that is welcoming to a diverse and growing population, with the housing, transportation and economic



opportunities to sustain the community long into the future.

Economic Freedom – The ability to make a living through access to education and training, transportation choices and affordable housing options, enabling residents and businesses in the Neck area to pursue their aspirations.



Environmental Health – The reduction of pollutants to air, land and water so that neighborhoods in the Neck area can prosper, while retaining their close-knit character with a renewed sense of civic pride and purpose.

CATALYST AREAS

Development of substantial new mixed use areas, or catalyst areas, represents a major economic opportunity for the Neck area. Simply attracting new construction and investment to the area would create economic benefits, but encouraging economic development and revitalization to take place in a form that connects the local community with an enhanced economy through better accessibility can open up opportunities for creating sustainable long-term prosperity. Both existing residents and new participants alike can benefit from this approach.

Building from the vision organization, the Master Plan identifies eight catalyst areas (see **Figure 1.2**). While some areas may transition to other uses over time, this general layout of districts will help guide catalyst development opportunities as part of an organized system. Each of the catalyst areas is listed and described below:

- **South of Mount Pleasant Street** catalyst area, located just north of downtown Charleston and the established residential neighborhoods and well-connected grid that surround Hampton Park, is a community gateway. The area should take advantage of the established marketing network of the Charleston Digital Corridor to promote and develop catalyst opportunities along both Meeting Street and Morrison Drive.

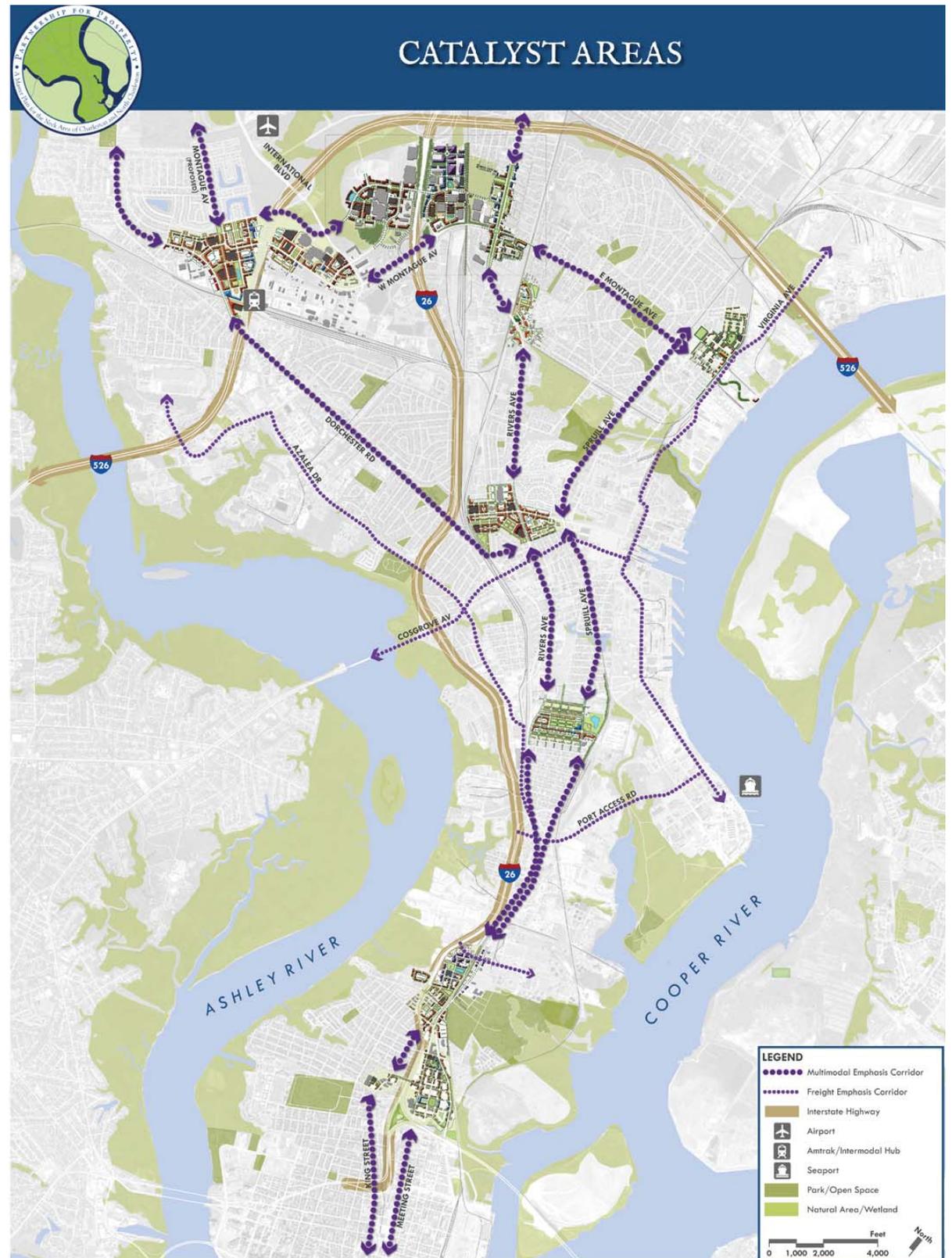


Figure ES.2 Catalyst Areas (See Appendix A pg. 215)

- **North of Mount Pleasant Street** catalyst area is a transitional district. While the southern fringe still contains remnants of the grid street network projecting north from downtown, this residential area soon gives way to commercial and light industrial uses. Catalyst opportunities should be oriented towards both residential and public uses to help promote economic opportunity and provide needed community services for the area residents.
- **Stromboli Corridor** catalyst area is a neighborhood center district. It consists now primarily of large lot industrial uses and container storage areas that separate the Five Mile and Windsor neighborhoods. With this area envisioned as a focal point offering neighborhood services, catalyst opportunities should be oriented towards civic uses such as a community center, open spaces, workforce training facility, or other uses to help promote economic opportunity and provide needed services for the area residents.
- **Shipwatch Square** catalyst area is a community core district. Centered along Rivers Avenue, this area once thrived as a result of growth and military activities at the Charleston Naval Complex and drew people from all parts of the Neck. A mixed use core that includes a grocery store, drug store, and open space can provide much-needed commercial activity and social interaction and help spur other retail and civic uses in the area.
- **Olde North Charleston** catalyst area is a neighborhood center district. This portion of North Charleston was laid out with Park Circle as the center and separate areas designated for residential, commercial and industrial uses. The catalyst area, situated between the residential lots and the growing industrial uses along the Cooper River, developed as the business district. New catalyst development along Montague Avenue can introduce vertical mixed uses to expand housing choices and provide needed goods and services.
- **Amtrak Station** catalyst area is a neighborhood district. Located off Rivers Avenue just north of Durant Avenue, this area is bordered to the north by the Liberty Hill neighborhood; to the east by the Mixson project; and to the west by CSX railroad tracks used by Amtrak's Silver Meteor service. The area also includes light industrial and commercial uses. Catalyst opportunities include preservation of the Amtrak station, creation of office and community incubator space, and mixed neighborhood uses. There may also be potential to locate the Intermodal Center at this location.
- **Mall Drive** catalyst area is a regional district. I-26, a regional roadway that not only serves the Neck peninsula but ties the Charleston area to I-95, bisects the catalyst area and intersects with I-526 directly to the north. Rivers Avenue, Montague Avenue, and International Boulevard, each with exits from either I-26 or I-526, create the framework for this area. With its regional visibility, this area presents an opportunity to become an urban center of the region, with offices, retail, residential and related uses.
- **Convention Center** catalyst area is planned to function as a gateway district. With three exits from I-526 and one exit from I-26, this gateway district is easily accessible from all parts of greater Charleston as well as regional destinations. The Charleston International Airport and Boeing plant are located directly to the north and west and are major economic drivers that

influence this catalyst area. The proposed Intermodal Center sets the tone for the entire catalyst area and begins the transformation of this area to a mixed use regional gateway.

CONCEPTS

Building from the core community values, the following principles help form the foundation for the overarching concepts in the Master Plan:

- Provide healthy, safe, lifelong communities and neighborhoods;
- Create community gathering spaces and destinations;
- Provide diverse economic and job opportunities;
- Develop multimodal transportation choices;
- Maintain air quality and environmental sustainability;
- Balance neighborhood needs with business and industry;
- Increase educational opportunities; and
- Provide housing choices and home ownership.

Specific examples of proposed projects include:

- Improving street connectivity to accommodate multiple forms of travel throughout communities. Good transportation access is a fundamental precept for successful industry and commerce. Vibrant business districts are destinations for shopping, dining, and gathering.
- Creating a linear, well-defined and high capacity spine network for safe, convenient and comfortable non-motorized travel that links historic downtown Charleston and surrounding areas with North Charleston's neighborhoods, employment locations and recreational opportunities.
- Constructing a commuter rail line along existing railroad tracks to provide an alternative to an increasingly congested and constrained I-26 while providing an anchor to support higher density mixed use development with a range of housing affordability, services and new employment opportunities.
- Transforming Rivers Avenue/US 52 using Complete Street principles and introducing higher capacity premium transit service (Bus Rapid Transit that can evolve into a light rail transit alignment) with station areas that will reinforce redevelopment of walkable, mixed-use places like Shipwatch Square, Stromboli Avenue and Huger Street.



IMPLEMENTATION

KEEPING THE FOCUS

The most important factor in successful implementation of long range plans is to have a central alliance or entity that is accountable for the ultimate outcome of the plan. Formation of a central will provide the framework for organizing all of the Master Plan implementation activities in the Neck area. For continuity purposes, it is recommended that this entity continue the name of the Partnership for Prosperity (the Partnership for short). Principal members would be expected to be the cities of Charleston and North Charleston, Charleston County, Chambers of Commerce, the South Carolina Department of Transportation, and the SC Ports Authority. A Memorandum of Understanding or similar document should be signed by all principals to define the mission and goals of the organization and establish commonly agreed-upon commitments, responsibilities, staffing, and funding. Other local and regional stakeholders, service providers, institutions and individuals would be invited as part of a broader stakeholder group to interact regularly with the Partnership with a goal of attracting a broad range of expertise and representation within relevant issue areas.

Critical to success of the implementation effort are several factors in the organization of the long term institutional framework for carrying out the Master Plan. These include:

Regular Communication. To promote the effective work of the Partnership it will be vital to establish protocols and agreements for regular communication and meetings. It is recommended that the current Steering Committee for this project be the basis for the establishment of a long term and standing implementation entity – i.e. to continue the Steering Committee as the long term “Partnership.”

Staffing. The Partnership will need dedicated staffing to ensure coordination of meetings, prepare progress reports and to help catalyze individual implementation actions and projects. Possible staffing approaches for the Partnership that share the responsibility among the key partners include using dedicated COG staff or using rotating staff members from each member entity on an annual rotation basis.

Action Plan. A detailed Action Plan should become the blueprint for implementation of short, mid and long term priorities and actions. An Action Plan is included in the report that cites specific projects identified in the planning process and sets forth specific objectives, tasks, priorities and timeframes for getting the plan done. The Action Plan is intended to be a living document and it will be critical at all times to keep the momentum on the Action Plan and to capitalize on unforeseen opportunities that may arise if they are consistent with the overall vision and Master Plan.

GUIDING THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND PUBLIC SECTOR

Besides establishing a guide for land use, transportation and environmental sustainability, the Master Plan also presents a compelling vision for the Neck area’s future that will drive both public and private investment. The developers, investors, companies, institutions, and other stakeholders that will be participating in the area’s redevelopment will be looking for guidance and inspiration in conceiving and executing projects that will advance the vision. The plan components described in the report provide a framework of catalyst area developments, transportation system improvements, land use and urban design principles, and details related to community structure, environmental issues and goods movement that establishes the “road map” for long-term redevelopment and revitalization of the Neck area. The approach is organized into three elements: development product, programs and organizing to implement revitalization over time.

Development Product. In order to capture new investment and attract new residents and businesses, the Neck area must be able to offer a supply of development “product” that is competitive in multiple market sectors at the regional, state, and even national levels. This product comes in many forms, such as mixed use development around transit, more and diverse housing, new employment catalysts and retail and local services.

Programs. Achieving and sustaining local prosperity in the Neck area will call for long term efforts to connect existing residents and businesses with the benefits and opportunities generated by the development that is taking place around them. New development product will create economic activity, but many residents will need tools, training and assistance to take advantage of the opportunities that emerge. Programs that address long-standing needs in the Neck area such as education, jobs and skills training and housing can equip residents to compete effectively in a revitalized local economy and succeed in one of the key economic centers of the region.

Implementing Revitalization over Time. Effective organization will be important to keeping the redevelopment of the Neck area on track over the long term. As discussed above, a standing partnership of the cities, port and other stakeholders should be established as the Partnership for Prosperity that has overall accountability for implementing the vision and master plan for the Neck. Under this umbrella entity, a number of new implementing agencies may need to be established. The exact structure, mission and composition of these agencies will need to be carefully developed and agreed to by all in the partnership. LAMC occupies an important place in the core of the Neck area and LAMC is already implementing some of its recommended capacity-building actions including the creation of two new entities focused on revitalization and housing development - the Community Development Corporation (CDC) - and the Community Land Trust (CLT). There is a potential opportunity for the CLT to expand its area of activity to encompass the entire Neck area. Alternatively, it may be desirable

to establish another CLT to address affordable housing needs in the non-LAMC portions of the Neck area.

There will be a wide range of issues on the Partnership for Prosperity's agenda, but one of the most important means of helping Neck area residents share in the benefits of redevelopment will be an emphasis on improving education and access to job training. To demonstrate the importance of this subject, an Education and Job Training Committee should be established that could work with key stakeholder organizations, service providers, and institutions such as LAMC, Trident Technical College, Charleston County Schools, Apprenticeship Carolina, and CURT. It would also perform an important liaison function with area employers, identifying the sorts of skills and employees they need and communicating those needs to the education and training providers.

MOVING FORWARD

The Partnership for Prosperity process has been an important catalyst in nurturing a multi-faceted coalition for the long term implementation of the vision. A key first step in implementing the vision will be to develop a coalition of partners that signs on to a Memorandum of Understanding. This agreement should form the framework for a consistent approach and plan of action for the gradual implementation of the Master Plan over time. The establishment of an ongoing and permanent Partnership for Prosperity that is staffed, funded and with an agreed upon action plan and communication strategy will be the ultimate platform for the realization of a new vision for prosperity in the Neck in the decades to come.

MESSAGES

Despite the challenges and complexity that revitalization will entail, the economic position of the Neck area within the Charleston region is very strong, and supports major redevelopment opportunities because of the value the market places on its excellent location, access, and assets. Equally important, this strong position means that the Neck area is relevant and important to the region's future.

The key elements that contribute to the Neck area's economic position are:

- Central location and regional accessibility
- Adjacent to a national/global logistics hub
- Heart of the region's employment corridor
- Adjacent to a major tourism and entertainment destinations
- Location of major employers and development projects
- Location in a business-friendly state and region

Taken together, these advantages mean that the Neck area should continue to be

one of the economic engines for the Charleston region, if not South Carolina as a whole. As the U.S. economy recovers from the Great Recession, national and global commerce expands, and local growth continues, the Neck area will be at the center of it all.

But residents of the Neck area historically have not shared in the economic growth that is taking place around them. As this growth benefits the entire region, but the business activities impose costs on local neighborhoods, there is a question of economic equity that should be addressed when planning for the Neck area's future:

- The median income in the Neck area compared to the region is 43 percent lower.
- In recent years only 11 percent on average of the 42,000 jobs in the Neck area have been filled by Neck area residents.
- Only 22 percent of employed workers in the Neck area live there, and the average employed Neck resident earns only 57 percent of the average wage of a Neck area job.
- 40 percent of the Charleston region's adult population (excluding the Neck area) holds at least an associate's degree. In the Neck area the share is only 20 percent.

Shrinking these gaps will require a process of helping Neck area residents access training, resources, and opportunities that allow them to share more in the region's economic development – growth that is anchored by employment and investment occurring near their neighborhoods.

The Partnership for Prosperity process has been an important catalyst in nurturing a multifaceted coalition for the long term implementation of the vision. The establishment of an ongoing and permanent Partnership that is staffed, funded and with an agreed upon action plan and communication strategy will be the ultimate platform for the realization of a new vision for prosperity in the Neck area in the decades to come.

Important messages and concepts relating to the foundation of the vision include:

Connectedness - Much of the development activity in the Neck area has been haphazard, piecemeal or a legacy of decision made long ago. Industrial uses and transportation activities have encroached on residential areas; roadways lack consistent accommodation for non-motorized users; and the historic gridded street pattern has been continuously interrupted by large-scale development activities. This Master Plan presents an opportunity to help define a more organized,



integrated and complementary land use and transportation pattern that clarifies expectations and desired outcomes among many different partners in the process.

Environmental Health - The neighborhoods in the study area care about air quality, noise and visual blight, especially issues that arise with industrial development. These neighborhoods have mobilized successfully in the past to challenge development that they felt would negatively affect the quality of life and hinder opportunities for reinvestment. Other issues related to environmental health involve keeping communities intact and not allowing them to be divided by transportation facilities, commercial vehicle routing and noise; environmental cleanup of contaminated sites, and buffering residential areas from objectionable activities.

Community Vitality - The neighborhood councils in Charleston and North Charleston are strong and active, taking pride in their communities and being involved in the decision-making processes that affect them. Several of the neighborhoods have undertaken a great deal of planning already for their future and are working to implement those plans. The neighborhoods in the study area generally want to be involved and are interested in the master planning process. Context-appropriate infill development can provide needed services and employment opportunities for existing neighborhoods, and create a new district with housing options and services.

Economic Freedom - Despite close proximity to the region's economic heart, people in the Neck area have found it difficult to improve their situations and tap into the economic strength of the place that they live in. The Neck area possesses demonstrated competitive advantages that can be promoted, expanded, and capitalized upon to create both neighborhood-level and individual prosperity. Therefore, the goal of economic freedom is to use these advantages to foster economic opportunities that permeate the Neck area and are attainable by its residents and local businesses.

While living in the Neck area gives residents proximity to the potential ingredients for prosperity, people must also have the tools needed to participate in the future growth. Achieving economic freedom in the Neck area means connecting people with the benefits and opportunities generated by the development that is taking place around them. New development and redevelopment will create economic activity, but many people will need tools, training, and assistance to take advantage of the opportunities that emerge. Programs that address long-standing needs in the Neck area such as education, job training, and housing can equip residents to compete effectively in a revitalized neighborhood economy and succeed in one of the key economic centers of the region.

The story of successful redevelopment and revitalization in the Neck area will be an evolving, iterative process involving many players acting in a coordinated and unified fashion. The key to success will rest in a diverse network of people working together toward the shared goals expressed in the Partnership for Prosperity vision and Master Plan. Long term realization of the vision for the Neck area will not be based on investments from only one major source, be it local, federal, or state government or a large private entity. A network of partners focused on a clear mission can effectively leverage resources and coordinate investments.

