

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF MASTER PLAN PROCESS

This chapter describes the planning process that was used to engage the public and stakeholders in an exploration of values and concepts that helped identify the community's vision of the future.

Planning and Organization

GENERAL

Understanding a community's history, its current conditions, and where it wants to go are key ingredients of good planning that create a lasting legacy for future decision-making. Storytelling brings these pieces together and illuminates the visioning and master planning path through the identification of economic opportunities, development of catalytic projects, and revision of existing policies. The story about the Partnership for Prosperity project evolved through community dialogue and prior plans that identified key themes and messages. Supporting analytical evidence related to these key themes and messages was developed through subsequent evaluation, research and data analysis. The elements of the vision and Master Plan were developed by the community and agency staff, which brought a diverse range of perspectives to the table.

These representatives developed consensus on study area vision and goals that were mutually desirable, and where and why other goals and priorities were not shared. The value of this approach was that it brought all stakeholders along in the process of narrowing down a wide range of possible outcomes to a single set of Master Plan recommendations.

VISIONING STEPS

The Partnership for Prosperity vision emerged through a multi-phase planning process (see **Figure 2.1**) that allowed stakeholders to tackle complex planning challenges facing the Neck area. The process led stakeholders through an iterative exploration of different design and story concepts as a way of better understanding context, issues and opportunities. Reactions of stakeholders to these concepts helped identify what mattered to the community. Values are an important part of the story of the Neck area and directly influence the community's vision of the future, which will guide actions by the BCDCOG, the cities of Charleston and North Charleston and other important agency partners with a stake in the future of the Neck area.

The first component of the vision and master planning process established the context for the plan. The context, or background story about place, guided the development of the plan and laid the groundwork for establishing goals and recommendations in areas such as economic development, neighborhood revitalization, and community connectivity. This first step of the process answered the question *"Where are we now?"* Understanding the context required not only

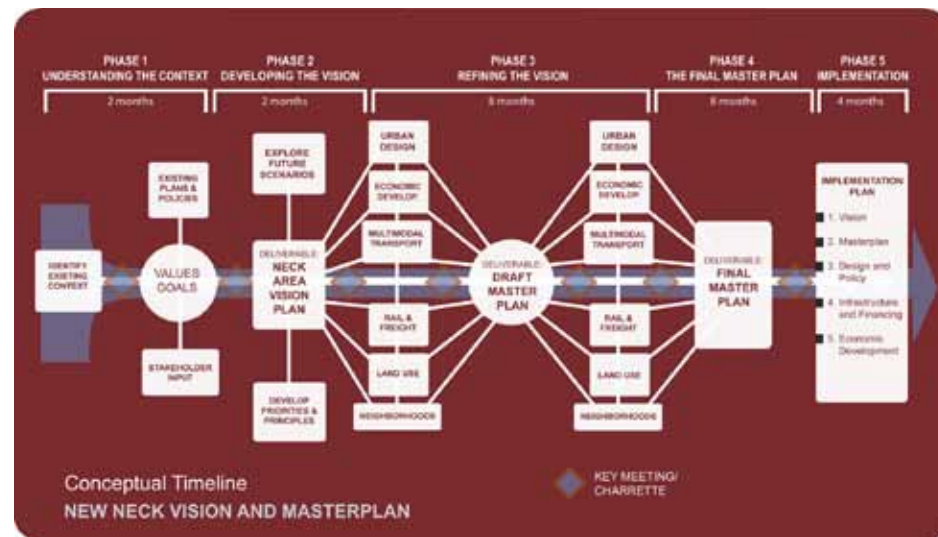


Figure 2.1 Planning Process

an understanding of the physical conditions within the Neck and surrounding areas, but the policy, social, market and financial opportunities and limits as well. Initial research and exploration expanded the stakeholder's understanding of the context and helped identify future possibilities.

The second component of the visioning process answered the question *"Where are we going?"* A working vision map and analysis were used to present ideas to the community and explore options that helped generate enthusiasm, interest and support for a more diverse and economically viable community.

The third component of the visioning process answered the questions *"Where do we want to be?"* and *"How do we get there?"* Achievable outcomes, supported by evidence, were developed along with design, policy and program solutions that support the outcomes. Community design concepts making it through the initial explorations of this study became the scenarios that were developed in more detail and compared in the analysis task of the study process and during the community design charrette.

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

Several formats were used to keep stakeholders informed about the planning process. While they were also a way to gather information from the community, their primary purpose was for sharing information during the course of the project.

WEB SITE

Information on the project was posted on the Partnership for Prosperity web site, www.neckprosperity.org, which was launched at the outset of the process and managed by the consultant team staff. The web site included general



Partnership for Prosperity web site

information about the project and visioning process, as well as contact information for managers and notices of upcoming meetings. It also provided interested parties with project progress, links to surveys, meeting summaries and presentation materials, and opportunities to provide comments and to sign up to receive communications and announcements about the project and the visioning process.

PLAN INFORMATION NETWORK

At the beginning of the project, the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG) staff and

the consultant identified an extensive list of community groups and interested citizens with whom to share information about the visioning process. These contacts became part of the Plan Information Network (PIN) that served as a key means of communicating with the community. This list of contacts was updated throughout the project as more people expressed interest in the plan. The PIN served as a two-way conduit of information and increased participation in the planning process by cultivating contacts who were in a position and agreeable to share information with their own networks. PIN contacts were encouraged to communicate the concerns and ideas of their networks with the BCDCOG and consultant team.

The PIN was used to announce public meetings and direct people to the project web site when substantive updates occurred. The PIN grew over the course of the study as contact information was added from various community events and from people who requested information through the web site sign-up form. However, the size of the contact list was of less importance than the quality of those contacts. A core group of PIN contacts committed to sharing information with their own networks proved more valuable than a large list of people who do not help distribute information or share feedback with the BCDCOG. The PIN was supplemented as a means of communication and outreach by mailing lists maintained by the BCDCOG, press releases, signage, flyers, and other means of communication.

NEWSLETTER

Information and updates on the project were presented to the community through a project newsletter, which was distributed in print, web and email formats. Updates and links to the project web site were also included in the monthly BCDCOG e-newsletter.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation was a significant component of the vision development process and occurred throughout the planning process. The consultant team worked with BCDCOG staff to create a comprehensive public engagement process that fostered a broad conversation about the future of the Neck area, set a foundation for a vision with a lasting legacy, and clearly blended the public process with analytical work.

The tools described below were used to engage the community and develop a set of plan recommendations based on their desires for the future of the Neck. Public input was incorporated into the master plan process each step of the way, leading to a truly community-based vision.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The BCDCOG established a Steering Committee comprised of representatives of various boards and commissions, business and civic organizations, and homeowners' associations to ensure that a broad-based perspective guided the visioning process. The Steering Committee was able to understand cross-over issues and assess tradeoffs as the vision was developed and capital project priorities were identified because of the diverse representation from geographic areas and interests within the Neck area. In addition to providing guidance, the Steering Committee served as a group of "champions" for the process and resulting vision who were able to both share important information and ideas to their respective boards and constituencies and also help broaden the base of participation and support for the vision.

The Steering Committee met approximately 10 times during the process to review analytical information and proposed vision and Master Plan elements, and provided guidance regarding the desirability of various suggestion, before they were presented to the community at public meetings. The Steering Committee also served as a sounding board for design concepts and philosophies that were being considered by the consultant team as a result of public input at various presentations and open houses.

FOCUS GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

A series of individual stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions with various organizations and interests in the Neck area were held to establish the foundation for the visioning study. These interviews and focus group discussions supplemented data collection and review of existing plans and policies. They were designed to obtain perspectives and observations from a diverse array of interests with a defined role in shaping the future of the Neck area. The meetings helped to set the stage for a broader community dialogue (through public meetings and a charrette) about growth and development needs, challenges, and opportunities facing the Neck area over both the short and long terms.



Focus group meetings help to establish the foundation for the plan.

The purpose of the focus group discussions was to listen and gather the community's values, and learn about issues and opportunities from the perspectives of different interests within the area, including merchants, property owners, neighborhoods, boards, and special interest groups. The discussions provided an opportunity to generate ideas and feedback on various policy and development-related issues. Each meeting typically involved seven to 15 people and lasted between one and two hours, entailing a free-flow discussion facilitated by the consultant using a discussion guide. The meetings were not formally recorded, but a written summary of each discussion served as the official minutes of the meeting (summaries are included in **Appendix B**).

The stakeholder interviews entailed more informal conversations with key property owners in the Neck area who are not members of a local board or interest group. These one-on-one conversations offered an opportunity to hear their perspectives on development related issues in the Neck area, and were used for overall context, similar to the focus group discussions. A summary of the key themes, community values, and issues and opportunities that arose in the focus group meetings and interviews is provided later in this report.

PUBLIC MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Three public meetings and a five-day community planning charrette were held during the visioning process to give the public opportunities to provide input. These events served as key milestones in the visioning process, allowing the consultant team to present ideas and draft work, receive feedback, and modify project activities based on the input received. The public's input was incorporated into subsequent vision concepts and elements and was provided to the Steering Committee to assist with its discussions. An overview of each event is provided below, and detailed results for each are included in **Appendix B**.

COMMUNITY FORUM

The Community Forum workshop was held May 19, 2011 in the Military Magnet Academy cafeteria. The purpose of the meeting was to familiarize the community with the visioning process, the project objectives and schedule, background data regarding the project, current



Community Forum participants identify their vision for the future of the Neck.

local planning efforts, and to get feedback from participants on their ideas, concerns and vision for the future of their community.



Group working together to identify issues and opportunities within the Neck area.

After an overview presentation, participants were divided into small groups for facilitator-led activities. The Community Values exercise asked each participant to identify their vision for the future of the Neck area in regards to economic freedom, community vitality, connectedness, and environmental health. The Mapping exercise asked each participant to identify places in the Neck area that provide opportunities for change. On maps of the study area, participants were asked to highlight important

community places, pathways that connect people and places, and barriers and/or problems to transformation and change. At the end of the exercises, each group identified their most important ideas and presented their findings to the larger group.

The results of these exercises guided the consultant team in identification of key areas on which to focus for further discussion and conceptual design advancement.

Key ideas voiced by the community, if the values listed below were achieved, included:

- Economic Freedom
 - Greater home ownership and a variety of affordable housing choices/types;
 - Job training and job opportunities; and
 - More transportation choices.
- Community Vitality
 - Outdoor gathering opportunities;
 - Historic/cultural preservation; and
 - Increased access to community services.
- Connectedness
 - Additional east/west corridors;

- Well defined signage and wayfinding; and
- Walkable streets with a mix of uses.
- Environmental Health
 - Redevelopment of brownfield sites;
 - Environmental conservation; and
 - More green spaces in neighborhoods.

Key areas of community interest and concern listed in the mapping exercise included:

- Important Community Places
 - LAMC neighborhoods;
 - Downtown old North Charleston; and
 - Schools and Community Centers.
- Key Connections and Pathways
 - Rivers Avenue;
 - Shipwatch Square; and
 - Spruill Avenue
- Barriers and Problems
 - Environmental health concerns;
 - Railroad lines; and
 - Industrial uses adjacent to residential neighborhoods.
- Additional Comments – Community Places
 - Reynolds Avenue;
 - Stromboli Avenue; and
 - Naval Yard.
- Additional Comments – Community Concerns
 - Safety and lighting;
 - Access to Ashley and Cooper Rivers; and
 - Noise and light conflicts between industry and residential.

Detailed results of these exercises are included in **Appendix B**.

COMMUNITY DESIGN CHARRETTE

The Community Design Charrette was held September 26-30, 2011 in Sterett Hall, located in the heart of the Neck area near the former Navy Base. The weeklong planning exercise included a series of public workshops, meetings, and design sessions, affording the community the opportunity to provide input on both big picture ideas and more detailed design concepts.

Each day of the charrette built from the previous day's work and input received from the public and stakeholders. People who attended multiple events during the week could see the progression of work and how their input had been incorporated. An overview of the charrette activities is summarized below:

- Day One (Monday, Sept. 26)



Consultant team site tour of key locations within the Neck area.

The charrette began in the afternoon with a site tour of community locations including Shipwatch Square, Chicora Elementary School, Gussie Greene Community Center, Stromboli Corridor, Joseph Floyd Manor and the area of Morrison, Meeting, Mount Pleasant and Huger Streets. A kick-off public session was held in the evening that included an overview presentation on the design process, the charrette process, anticipated outcomes, and work products. Issues and

Opportunities maps of the study area were on display for public comment and attendees were also asked to participate in a "Talking Wall" exercise, where questions or comments could be left regarding the results they would like to see come out of the charrette and/or Master Plan.

- Day Two (Tuesday, Sept. 27)

The consultant team spent the day creating concept plans for both study-area wide systems and site specific urban designs, utilizing information from the Community Forum exercises, the "Talking Wall" comments, current plans and projects, field data, and the draft vision map. A stakeholder feedback briefing was held from



Consultant team discusses the economic generators within the Neck area.

11:00 AM to 1:00 PM and an informal public drop-in session was held from 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM where the community was invited to view concepts and share their thoughts. Representatives from South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) Office of Public Transit, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC), Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA), Charleston Digital Corridor, Low Country Local First, Creative Corridor and Low Country Housing Trust were in attendance during the sessions and the consultant team was able to speak with them about current projects and how the Neck area Master Plan could work with those projects. The day ended with an internal pin-up session where the different design groups within the consultant team were able to share information and ideas and coordinate work efforts.

- Day Three (Wednesday, Sept. 28)



The consultant team and City officials discuss possibilities of catalyst site designs.

Work continued on refinement of the study-area wide and site specific plans, building from both the internal and external discussions and feedback from the previous day. There was also a stakeholder feedback session in the morning. Several representatives from the trucking industry stopped in to discuss freight and goods movement in the Neck area and the associated challenges of balancing transportation needs with community livability. Representatives from the

City of Charleston and Metanoia (Chicora renewal project) also dropped by to discuss the project and share their thoughts. The day ended with a public pin-up session from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM, where the public was able to review and comment on the work-in-progress plans. Study-area wide plans illustrated the major framework systems throughout the Neck area. Site-specific plans illustrated catalyst areas, which are places where change can best catalyze future opportunities for the Neck area.

- Day Four (Thursday, Sept. 29)

The consultant team spent the day and evening working on plans based on feedback from the previous night's public pin-up session. Although there were stakeholder feedback and informal public drop-in sessions in the morning in which more valuable comments were provided, the majority of the



The consultant team listens to feedback from a stakeholder group.



Local residents attending the closing presentation at the Open House.

time was spent refining and revising designs, coordinating multimodal systems, and creating graphics to illustrate design intent and urban form. Several members of the team spent time in the field looking at specific site conditions in an effort to address community comments and concerns. The day ended with another internal pin-up session to share information and ideas across disciplines.

- Day Five (Friday, Sept. 30)

The last day of the charrette started as a continuation of the previous day, with designers working to complete plans for the Open House, scheduled for 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM. All draft maps of study-area wide framework systems and catalyst sites were displayed at the Open House, as well as an economic framework diagram that identified regional economic anchors, community business centers and neighborhood centers. The closing presentation provided an overview of these draft documents, the results of the charrette work and next steps for the project.

The charrette gave the consultant team multiple opportunities to present initial design concepts to the community for their comment. Based on the interaction and responses during the week, the consultant team left the charrette needing to further research and refine catalyst area concepts, develop a list of potential projects, and evaluate different improvements to the area, including:

- Freight and livability strategies for highly conflicted areas;
- Freight mobility strategies;
- Transit strategies, including station spacing;
- Street assessments, including proposed cross sections;
- Street connectivity options; and
- Program refinement for catalyst areas.

Detailed results from the charrette mapping exercise and community comments are included in **Appendix A**.

NEIGHBORHOOD UPDATES

Several neighborhood update meetings were held in December 2011 and January 2012, including meetings with the North Charleston Planning Commission, with LAMC representatives, and with neighborhood representatives at the Burke

High School Media Center. These meetings were designed to bring the public up-to-date with the project progress, current concepts and strategies being developed, and next steps toward completion of the Master Plan. The target audience included neighborhoods in the southern part of the Neck study area, although people from all over the study area and region were invited.

COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

The Community Open House was held March 1, 2012 in the Military Magnet Academy cafeteria. The meeting featured the unveiling of the draft recommendations for the Neck area and all elements of the Master Plan were on display for the public to view and comment on. Study-area wide systems framework plans included:



Attendees rank potential project priorities for each catalyst site.

- Circulation,
- Thoroughfares,
- Transit,
- Transportation/Goods Movement,
- Parks and Open Space, and
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Networks.

The catalyst plans included conceptual short, intermediate and long term phasing plans to illustrate the possible transition from existing to future urban forms. Site-specific catalyst areas included:

- Intermodal Station/Convention Center,
- Gateway District,
- Amtrak Station,
- Olde North Charleston,
- Shipwatch Square,
- Stromboli Corridor, and
- King and Meeting Streets (both north and south of Mount Pleasant Street).

After a short overview presentation, attendees were asked to participate in two exercises. The first was a survey that asked for comments on the Master Plan recommendations and an overall rating (from “plan exceeds expectations” to “plan does not meet expectations”). The second asked which projects in the

Master Plan were the most important. A list of projects was posted next to the associated plan map and attendees were given colored dots in which to indicate project priorities (from “most important” to “don’t like”). Detailed results of these exercises are included in **Appendix B**.

The results of these exercises guided the consultant team in their determination of final project and policy priorities. For the Master Plan recommendations, the community provided the following input:

- Draft Master Plan
 - Exceeds Expectations: 29%
 - Meets Expectations: 54%
 - Partially Meets Expectations: 17%
 - Does Not Meet Expectations: 0%
- Ranking of Individual System Elements Receiving Positive Responses (Exceeds Expectations and Meets Expectations, per X of responses)
 - Bicycle/Pedestrian Network: 87.5%
 - Transit Network: 87.5%
 - Freight Movement: 83.3%
 - Catalyst Areas: 79.2%
 - Parks/Open Space Network: 79.2%
 - Roadway Network: 75.0%

In terms of individual projects, Catalyst Areas were paired based on proximity. The following proposed concepts received the highest number of “Most Important” or “Important” marks:

- Network Systems Concepts
 - Create a bicycle and pedestrian spine and connected network; and
 - Provide a layered network of transit systems to serve different travel markets.
- Intermodal Center and Mall Drive Catalyst Areas
 - Establish mixed use activity centers as catalyst for new development; and
 - Provide multiple transportation options to a variety of destinations.
- Amtrak Station and Olde North Charleston

- Create enhanced pedestrian connections to adjacent neighborhoods; and
- Provide community access to the Cooper River.

- Shipwatch Square and Stromboli Corridor
 - Establish grocery and drug store catalyst sites; and
 - Revitalize Shipwatch Square as a community focal point.

- North of Mount Pleasant and South of Mount Pleasant
 - Develop a “Creative Corridor” along Meeting Street; and
 - Redesign the Mount Pleasant Street/Meeting Street intersection.

Detailed results of these exercises are included in **Appendix B**.