

DOWNTOWN WATERFRONT STRATEGIC PLAN

Portsmouth, Virginia

URBAN DESIGN ASSOCIATES

FEBRUARY 2006



Downtown Waterfront Strategic Plan

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Overview

URBAN DESIGN ASSOCIATES WAS COMMISSIONED by the City of Portsmouth to develop a strategic plan for publicly owned properties adjacent to the Downtown Waterfront. The Strategic Plan will provide a framework within which the City will be able to evaluate development proposals for these sites. It will also be used to attract investment and economic development to the City.

The Plan was conducted in a public process with a series of focus groups, public meetings, and interviews in order to understand the perceptions and aspirations of the community. A series of concepts were developed and then tested in working sessions with a broad cross section of stakeholders.

The Strategic Plan provides key recommendations for both public improvements to create an effective framework of streets and open spaces and a series of development initiatives.

Upon build out of the Master Plan Downtown Portsmouth will have 240,000 additional square feet of office space and retail space, 1,300 additional housing units, and 3,500 additional off street and mid-block parking spaces. In addition, the entire downtown community will be better connected and better served with amenities, open spaces, paths, trails, and parks.

Key Recommendations

- 1 **A New Gateway** A realigned entry road from the Freeway will create an entry appropriate for a downtown waterfront. The new entry will be marked by a new landmark : Crawford Circle, and a Central Park along the North Pier. The Central Park will complement the Amphitheater by providing festival space and pre-function space.



Proposed view looking south toward a re-aligned Crawford Street, Crawford Battery and new development with views to downtown Norfolk.

- 2 **Re-Establish Middle Street** -High Street Retail will be revitalized by improved access granted by a re-established Middle Street. Olde Town South will become a new residential District in the Downtown offering condominiums and townhouses for purchase and rent.
- 3 **A Waterfront Promenade** A new, continuous, consistent waterfront Promenade will extend, seamlessly, from North Pier to the Medical Center. It will be accessed via new streets extending from Olde Towne and Water Street. In the Spring time, the promenade will blossom brilliantly with flowering trees, creating a spectacle on par with the Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington DC.
- 4 **Crawford Battery** Crawford Boulevard will be narrowed to create a linear park and a new address for development. The park and new development will have dramatic views of Downtown Norfolk. The Battery will be a place for walking, strolling and watching the big ships. Throughout the summer, the Battery will be a destination for boaters and boat watchers.
- 5 **Waterfront Residential Community** Key parcels east of Crawford Street will be developed with mid rise and high rise buildings containing residential condominiums. The slender towers will create a skyline composition while the mid-rise buildings will maintain a pedestrian scale in concert with Olde Towne. The new residents will create a strong market for retail and other neighborhood services.



Proposed view looking north towards the South Inlet, and the Crawford Circle

Process

Step I

The first phase of the planning process included analysis of the site and its context, and a series of focus groups and community meetings. In each meeting, participants were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the area and of the site itself as well as their visions for the future.

Step II

The second phase of the planning process included an intense three-day working session in which the design criteria determined in the first phase were translated into a series of design alternatives. Participants were asked to describe what they liked and disliked about each. These comments were then incorporated into a preferred alternative which was presented in a public meeting.

Step III

The third phase included developing a preferred plan and an implementation plan which identified sources and uses of funds and phasing. The input from the charrette confirmed the preferred alternative presented at the charrette with amendments.



Strengths and Weaknesses Summary

The first phase of the planning process identified the strengths and weaknesses of the study, and set the of goals and criteria for the Plan.

- 1 The Waterfront** Participants were unanimous in selecting the waterfront as a major asset for Portsmouth. The waterfront properties are the most valuable and it is a great benefit that the City owns so many of the key properties. It is not, however, well connected to the streets and activity of the City. It is underutilized and seems inaccessible to many people.
- 2 Waterfront Views** The most admired aspect of the waterfront is the view from the city looking across to Norfolk and to the Shipyard. The least admired aspect is the view of the Portsmouth waterfront from Norfolk or from the water. It is chaotic, disorganized, and unimpressive.
- 3 Waterfront Promenade** The sea wall provides a walkway along the waterfront, but it is inconsistent in character and in many places is too limited to be effective.
- 4 Historic Character and Scale** Olde Towne, parts of High Street, and the many landmarks are much admired for the human scale and character of the buildings and streets. Most of the development since 1945 has been described as “50 years of bad architecture” lacking the traditional Portsmouth character and scale. However, there is great interest in a bigger scale of development along the waterfront.
- 5 Access** While Downtown’s location at the entrance to the tunnel has many advantages, the system of access is confusing, with no clear sense of entry.

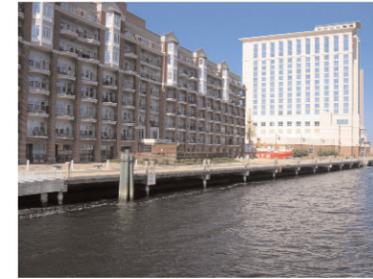
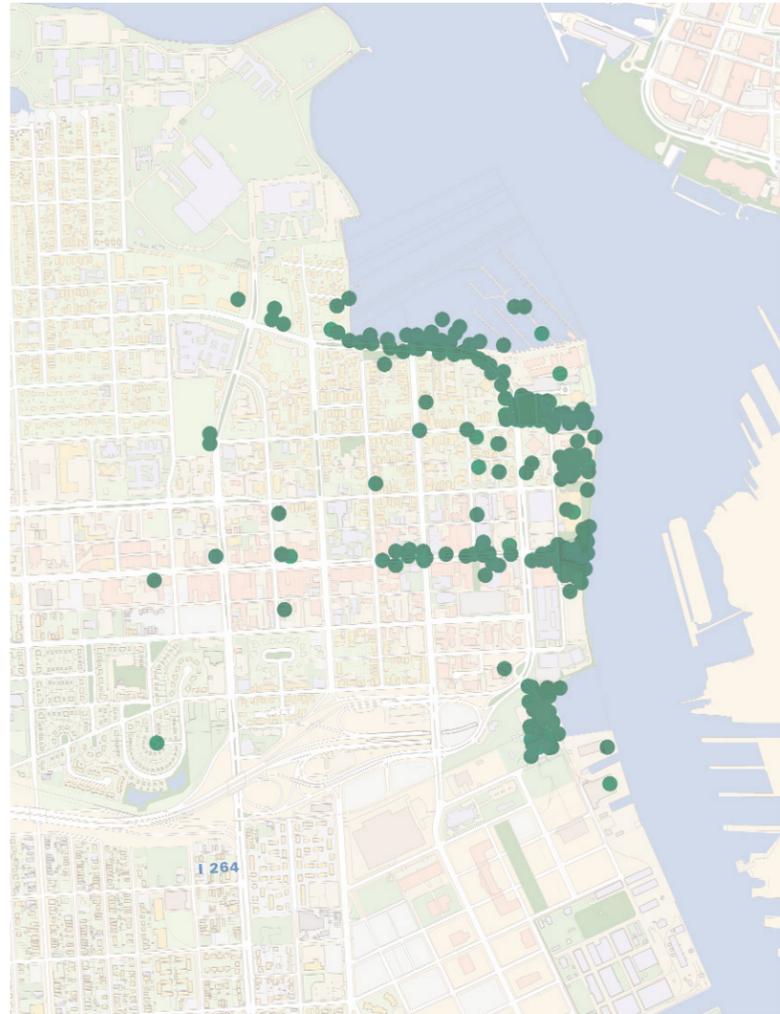
- 6 Amenities and Activities** The Downtown has many attractive buildings, restaurants, museums, and public spaces, in a relatively small area. These, however, are not linked together with a coherent pattern of pedestrian or vehicular circulation.
- 7 Development Interest** There is a great deal of community interest in the development of the waterfront. Proposed developments include office, hotel, and residential with some retail. Proposals have been made for each of the sites, but none have been completed within an overall vision or framework for the waterfront as a whole and its role in the economic future of the city.

Criteria and Goals for the Plan

- 1 Coherence** The plan must find a way of coordinating the many diverse, often discordant elements along the waterfront to create an harmonious whole, from three different perspectives. The first is the view from the water. The City must find a way of integrating the diverse architectural character of existing buildings with new ones and with some element that links them. The second perspective is the view from the City. It must be ensured that a clear pattern of public space lead directly from the spaces of Olde Town, High Street, Olde Towne South, and Industrial Park area. The third perspective is along the waterfront. The City should work to create a visual coherence for the experience of walking from the Shipyard to the Naval Hospital, integrating the trail of history.
- 2 Scale** Part of Portsmouth’s appeal is its small scale. Participants encouraged the preservation of these patterns, and to grow the area with a friendly atmosphere and an architecture that builds on Olde Towne’s character. However, there is much interest in high

rise condominiums on the waterfront, and in transforming the image of the waterfront into a dramatic skyline. The integration of these two images will be a challenge for both the plan and for the architecture of each development.

- 3 Access to Downtown** The entrance and approach to downtown is confusing and inappropriate for a waterfront destination. This is due in part to the current lack of activity, the circuitous approach to the waterfront from the freeway, and the lack of an effective gateway. Therefore, modifications to the street network, particularly at the entrance way are critical to the over-all experience of the area.
- 4 Access to the Waterfront from Downtown** Although there is much admiration of the sea wall and the three inlets, they are not fully utilized and inactive much of the time. They are not as psychologically accessible as a great waterfront must be to become an integral part of the life of the city. Therefore, innovative planning is needed to create a greater sense of public access. This includes widening the public way in some places, introducing vehicular access in others, and improving perpendicular access to the waterfront.
- 5 Block Dimensions** The optimum block dimensions for a walkable downtown are similar to the traditional Portsmouth blocks. However, current development practices in which parking structures are incorporated into development blocks tend to require larger blocks. The existing parking garage adjacent to the Children’s Museum blocks a street, and creates a double sized block. This super block has been detrimental to Downtown development. The Plan must balance the traditional Portsmouth



STRENGTHS

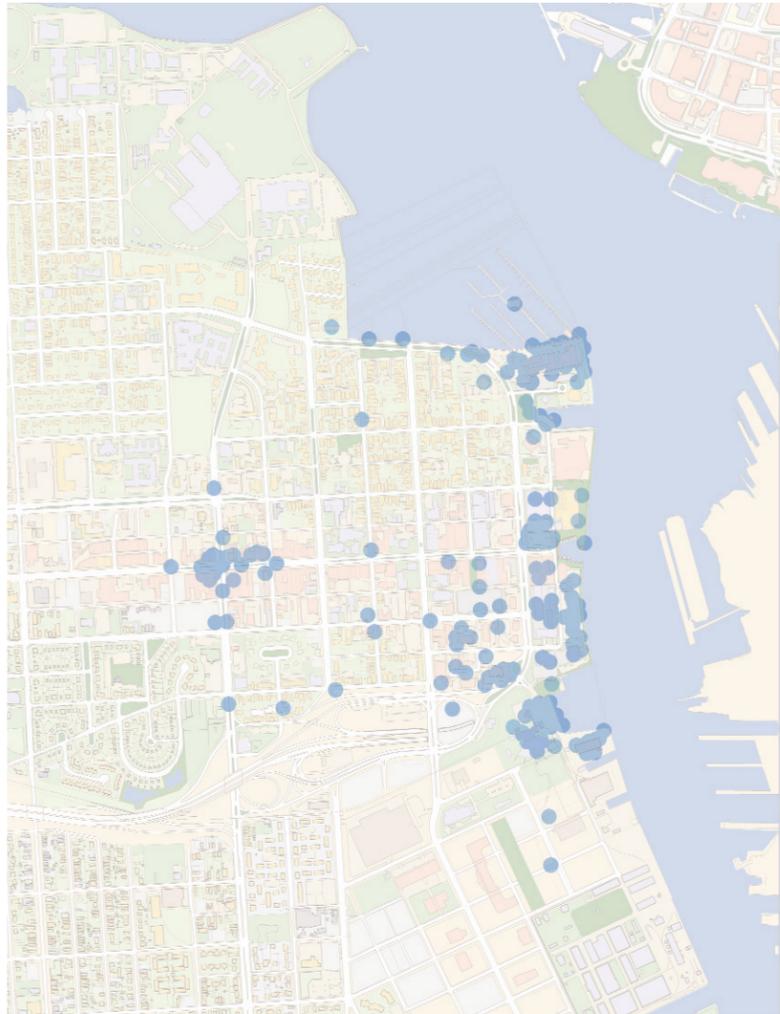
- The waterfront
- Views from the waterfront
- Water front as open space with three inlets
- Publicly owned waterfront properties
- Olde Towne, and historic character and scale of Downtown
- Downtown attractions museums, restaurants, theaters
- Open Vista from Crawford Parkway



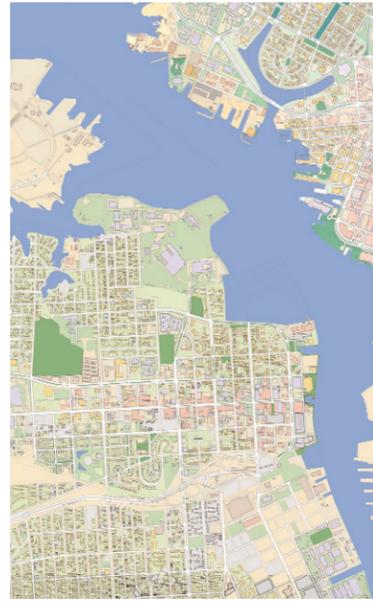
WEAKNESSES

- View of the waterfront from the water
- Design of waterfront experience
- Hodge-podge of architecture along the waterfront
- Visually and psychologically inaccessible parts of the waterfront
- Inappropriate uses of the waterfront
- Confusing gateways to downtown and the waterfront
- Lack of pedestrian connectivity
- Insufficient Downtown housing and retail
- Portsmouth's continuing negative image

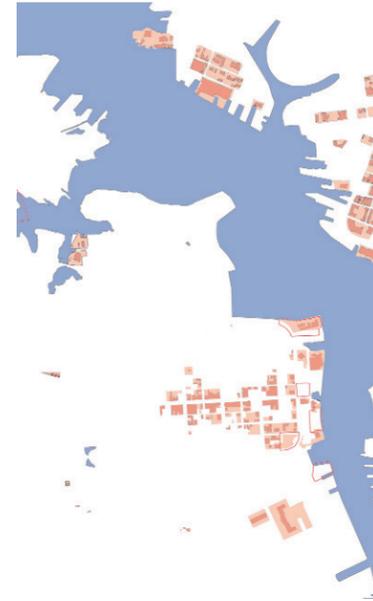




PORTRAIT Existing conditions in the project area and surrounding neighborhoods



COMMERCIAL Commercial uses are concentrated along High Street



RESIDENTIAL The residential uses on the waterfront are scattered and do not create a neighborhood



BUILDING FOOTPRINTS High street and the waterfront contain larger buildings than are found in the neighborhoods

STREETS Streets create small urban blocks, but do not extend to the waterfront

PARKS & INSTITUTIONS Valuable waterfront property is used by non-tax-generating uses

VISIONS

- Pedestrian scale, family-oriented Downtown
- Connections to the waterfront from all of Downtown
- New skyline for the waterfront-high-rise condominiums
- Good gateways into Downtown
- Organized and coordinated development patterns
- More people living downtown and on the waterfront
- More diverse retail
- New image for the City



block with the need for larger blocks for urban development.

Charrette Summary

These summaries were presented in the second phase of the planning process. In the course of a three day process, a series of designs were developed for the various parcels and a framework of streets and open space was designed. This was presented on the last evening of the charrette and subjected to the same evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. The following is a summary of that process.

- 1 Vision for the City** It was agreed that the proposed Master Plan established a bigger vision for Portsmouth. The phasing and development guidelines can be tested against proposals for the most valuable property owned by the City.
- 2 Gateway to Portsmouth** Participants were in unanimous agreement that the Crawford Circle and Central Park designs provided a much needed gateway into Portsmouth. This new gateway can not only be used by visitors traveling by car, but also those that travel by boat and dock at the South Inlet.
- 3 Tower Image** The slender form, composition, and height of the of the pin towers was well received. The topology was appreciated for several reasons. The most important was that a transition is provided from the scale of the historic architecture of Olde Towne and parts of High Street and the towers, and because the garages are hidden behind architecture.
- 4 Crawford Battery** The alignment and reduction of cart way on North Crawford Boulevard in order to gain a public amenity and green space was well received.
- 6 Connections of Streets** Connecting existing roads to the waterfront was well received. It was clear that this was a move that the public understood that tied the waterfront initiatives back to the rest of Portsmouth.



The proposed view looking north presented at the charrette



The proposed view from across the Elizabeth River presented at the charrette



The proposed view towards the south presented at the charrette



MASTER PLAN The charrette Plan

7 **Jail and Courthouse** There was overwhelming support in the removal of the Jail and Courthouse from the waterfront. It was agreed that a better use could be developed for this site.

Public Evaluation

Following the charrette, the designs were modified to respond to those comments.

- 1 The proposal to add to the Crawford One property, always an optional part of the planning process was eliminated. However, by straightening the north end of Crawford Street there is sufficient land to build small townhouses on city owned property without interfering with the Crawford One property.
- 2 The form and shape for the Mile Zero Tower on the Holiday Inn site has been restudied to better integrate it into the skyline. Three of the present high rise buildings at the north end of the East Coast are rotated 45 degrees to the street grid and they are of varying heights. The plan suggests two towers on the Holiday Inn site of different heights with a smaller footprint to create an overall composition with the existing towers.
- 3 The development south of the new Gateway includes two options. One incorporates the existing rail lines to be used by the railroad museum. Another eliminates the rail line and creates an additional development block.



POSITIVE COMMENTS OF THE CHARRETTE PLAN	
• Plan provides a bigger vision for the city	• for boating and swimming
• Entrance to the city: Crawford Circle	• Central Park
• Towers: Slender, Composition, and Height	• People Friendly. Focus on Pedestrian access
• Creation of more green space	• Re-opening Streets
• Crawford Battery: Landscaping, reduced lanes, and opportunities	• Removal of Jail and Courthouse
	• Straightening Crawford
	• Hidden Garages

NEGATIVE COMMENTS OF THE CHARRETTE PLAN	
• Views from Crawford One blocked by tower on Holiday Inn site, new development on Crawford Battery, and Trees in new parks	• Where do you move the Jail, City Hall, and the Courts?
• Concerns about the Central Park and its connection to the waterfront	• Not Enough Office and Retail

EARLY ACTION ITEMS OF THE CHARRETTE PLAN
• Getting the Vision Completed
• Develop the south gateway and the Crawford Circle
• Crawford Battery and public park

The Strategic Plan

FRAMEWORK OF STREETS AND OPEN SPACES

The framework includes a series of changes to the existing pattern of streets and additions to the inventory of public open space. This framework provides clear access to Downtown. Re-establishing the historic grid pattern of the city, it will link all parts of Downtown and Olde Towne.

1 A New Gateway to Downtown

The proposed modifications to the entrance roads from I-264 will transform this confusing area into a grand boulevard leading to a monumental circle on the waterfront. The view on entering Downtown will include a large park, new development, the circle, boats in the marina in the South Inlet and the river with views of the shipyard across the water. Three streets will radiate from the circle: one to the south connecting to North Pier, another to the east connecting to the waterfront. Existing Crawford Street will be re-aligned to the north to be on axis with the circle.

2 Middle Street

Middle Street will be re-established, over time, between the new boulevard and High Street. It will align with the existing approach drive from I-264 westbound. The northern end of this will be modified to re-align with Middle Street. The result will provide access to parking and will serve High Street retail.

3 Columbia Street and County Streets

Columbia street will be extended to the waterfront. In later phases, if the Jail and Courthouse can be relocated, County Street will be extended to the waterfront.

4 Waterfront Lanes

A new type of small scale street will be created along the waterfront adjacent the sea wall. It will be treated as a pedestrian space but permit cars to move slowly along it, thereby providing waterfront addresses for the current parking lot and City Hall.

A similar lane will be constructed around the current Holiday Inn property and connect with the existing access to Harbor Towers.

5 Crawford Parkway

The northern end of Crawford Street will be realigned to lead directly to the waterfront. The Parkway will be transformed into a waterfront park with a two lane road

This framework provides clear access to Downtown. Re-establishing the historic grid pattern of the city, it will link all parts of Downtown and Olde Towne.



PERSPECTIVE Aerial view of proposed development at the South Inlet.



PRECEDENT Examples of Open Space and Pedestrian Networks



PRECEDENT Sampling of housing types appropriate for the Waterfront



PRECEDENT Examples of street types



FRAMEWORK Open Space and pedestrian network



FRAMEWORK Re-development sites



FRAMEWORK Proposed street network

DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The framework of streets and public open space also creates a framework for development parcels. The Strategic plan recommends types of development that are appropriate for each parcel depending on its context. The development types include: (consider small crops from the perspective to go with these)

A Urban Blocks

Parcels west of Crawford street should be developed as urban blocks with parking structures in the center and four- to five-story buildings around the perimeter. Potential uses include residential, hotel, or office. The architecture should be compatible in scale and character with High Street and Olde Towne.

B Crawford Street Frontage

The buildings at the new Circle and along Crawford Street should have four story base, but they could have taller elements of up to 12 stories. The ground floor should include retail and public uses. The architecture should also be compatible in scale and character with High Street and Olde Towne.

C Downtown's East Coast

This waterfront is currently a collection of high rise and mid-rise buildings with no coherence. Therefore, we recommend a consistent design for a collection of tall, slender towers which will preserve open views on the ground plane and create a dramatic skyline. Between them, the four-story character of the other development should provide urban continuity. Parking should be in structures as an integral part of the development. This architecture can provide a contrast with the traditional, but the buildings should have common elements and similar profiles.

The Strategic Plan proposes the following development scenarios for development blocks which are either currently publicly owned or which should be consolidated for unified development.

- 1 Crawford, Boulevard, Middle, Columbia Block;
- 2 Middle, Boulevard, Court, Columbia Block
- 3 North Pier
- 4 Municipal Parking Lot
- 5 City Hall and Office Building
- 6 Crawford, Columbia, Middle, High Block
- 7 Middle, Columbia, Court, High Block
- 8 Jail and Courthouse Block
- 9 GSA Block
- 10 Holiday Inn Site

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND PHASING

This plan represents a large amount of development for Downtown. It will need to be managed in an orderly manner over the course of the next ten to fifteen years in a series of phases. The phasing should be done strategically, in order to use public and private investment to enhance the value of the all of Downtown. Therefore we recommend the following phasing for both the Framework of Streets and Open space and Development Blocks:

Phase One Framework

New Gateway to the Downtown, including a Boulevard from Interstate 264, the extension of Crawford Street to the South Pier, and Crawford Circle ; New Middle Street from the Boulevard to Columbia Street; Extension of Harbor Center to Crawford Circle; and improvements around Interstate 264 into a unified Central Park

Phase One Development

Addition to the Children's Museum; Additional housing at the High Street inlet to the complete the corner; Crawford, Boulevard, Middle, Columbia Block; North Pier

Phase Two Framework

The termination of Crawford Boulevard and the creation of the Crawford Battery: Columbia Street extension to the waterfront; the Waterfront Lane between Columbia and Water Street; and Park improvements around the Fresnel Lens

Phase Two Development

Captured right of way from the striating of Crawford Boulevard; the Holiday Inn Site; The Municipal parking lot; Crawford Boulevard, Court, Columbia Block; and the blocks south of Interstate 264

Phase Three Framework

Middle Street connected from Columbia to County; Increasing the diameter of the Crawford Circle; and waterfront lane extension from Crawford along the south inlet

Phase Three Development

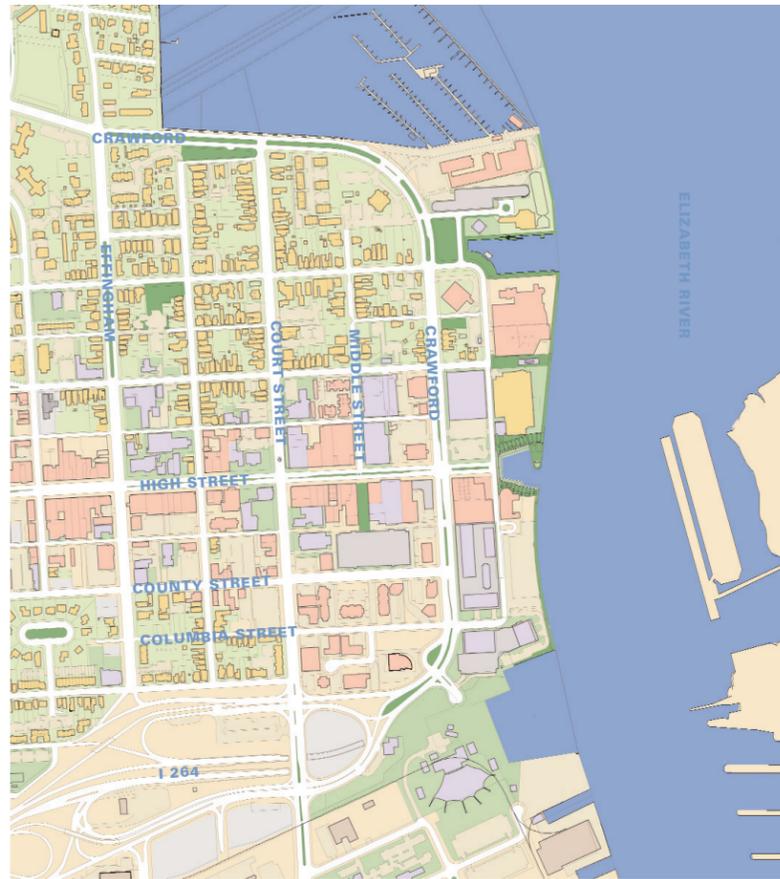
Court, County, and Crawford Boulevard Blocks; City Hall and Office building is redeveloped

Phase Four Framework

Extension of County to the waterfront; Middle Street Municipal Garage removed

Phase Four Development

GSA Block redevelops; Courthouse and Jail redevelops; and Municipal lot straddling County is redeveloped



Existing Conditions



Illustrative Master Plan

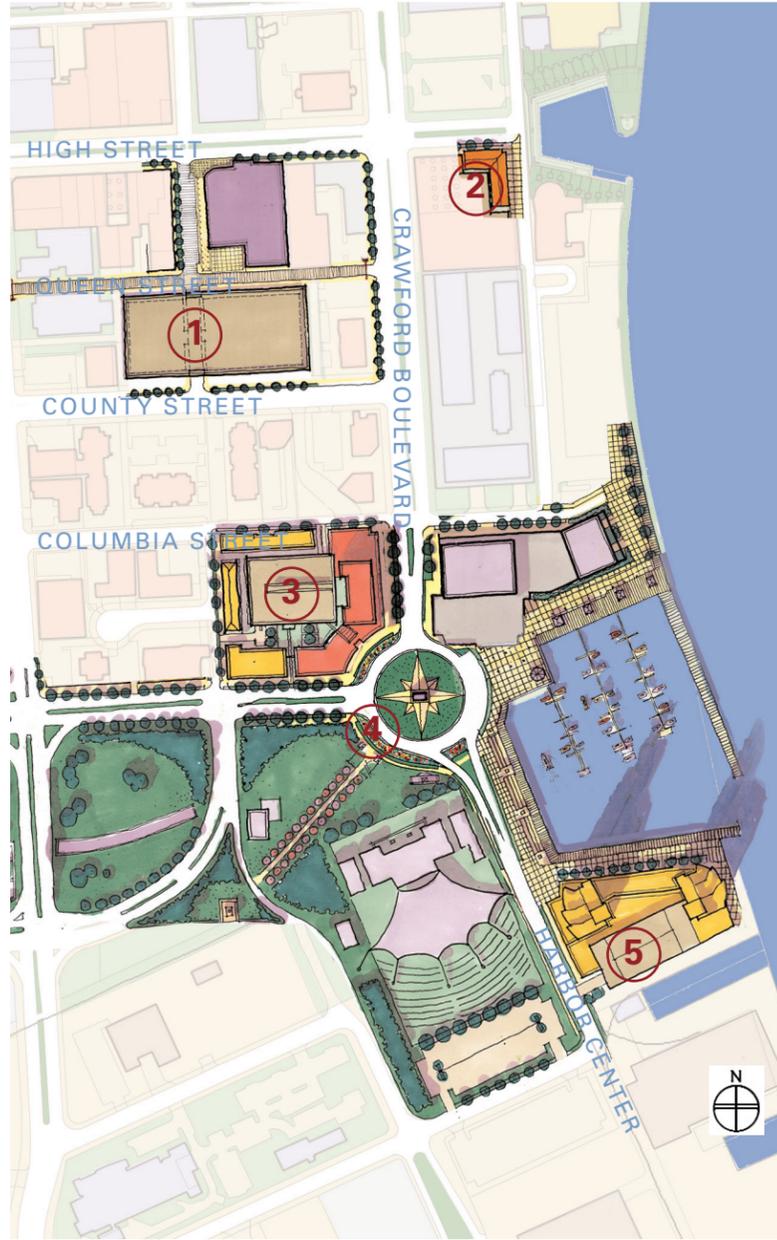
FRAMEWORKS	DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES
A New Gateway to Downtown	1 Crawford ,Middle, Block
B Middle Street	2 Court, Columbia Block
C Columbia and County Streets	3 North Pier
D Waterfront Promenade	4 Municipal Parking Lot
E Crawford Parkway	5 City Hall and Office Building
	6 Columbia, Crawford Block
	7 Court, Columbia Block
	8 Jail and Court House Block
	9 GSA Block
	10 Holiday Inn Site

Phase 1

DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND PROGRAM	
1 MIDDLE STREET	Expanded Children's Museum, Queen Street improvements, and pedestrian path connection through Municipal Garage
2 HIGH STREET LANDING	Extension of Crawford Square or compatible development to complete corner
3 MIDDLE STREET AND COLUMBIA STREET BLOCK	250-400 Parking spaces, 50,000 - 100,000 sq ft commercial office, 100-150 housing units
4 NEW GATEWAY TO DOWNTOWN	Crawford Circle and Central Park
5 NORTH PIER	275-450 Parking spaces, +/- 10,000 sq ft of retail, 125-250 housing units



PERSPECTIVE Proposed view of the Crawford Circle



PHASE 1



MODEL Proposed view towards the south



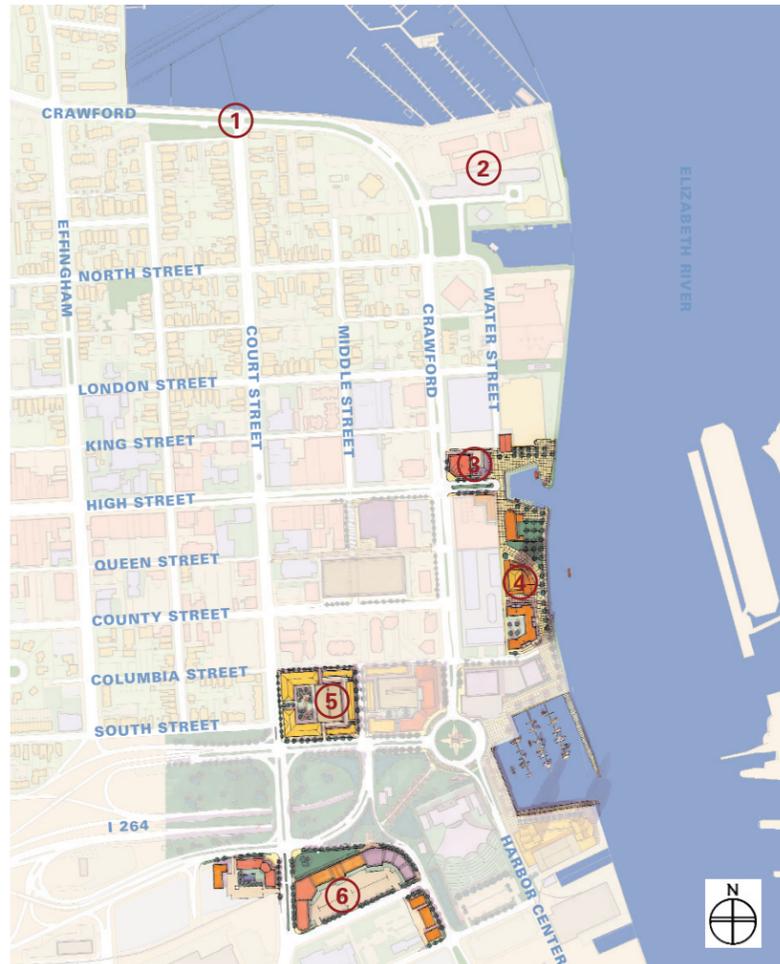
WATERFRONT LANES Pedestrian waterfront lanes along the Elizabeth River.

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Phase 2

Phase 3

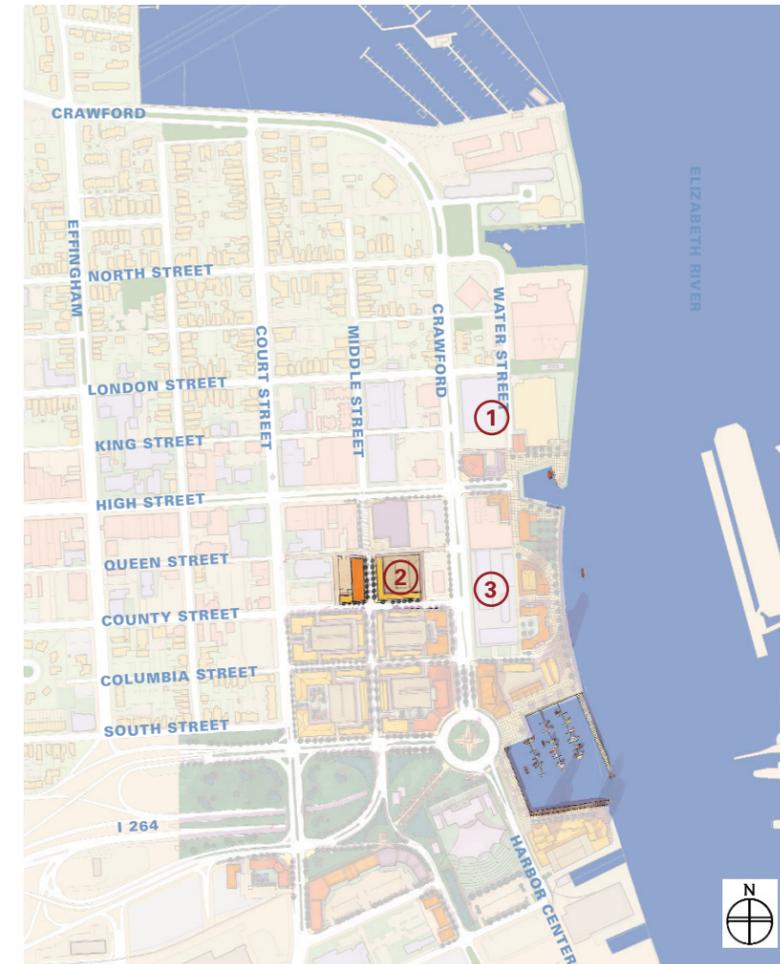
Phase 4



DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND PROGRAM	
1	CRAWFORD BATTERY 20 housing units, self parking
2	HOLIDAY INN SITE 700 parking spaces on five floors, up to 460 housing units
3	HIGH STREET LANDING 10 Surface spaces, 50,000 sq ft of commercial, 15 housing units
4	MUNICIPAL PARKING LOT 130 Spaces, 85-130 housing units
5	COURT STREET & COLUMBIA BLOCK 240 Spaces, 160-240 housing units
6	SOUTH OF TUNNELS 60,000 sq ft of development, site preserved for public use



DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND PROGRAM	
1	COURT STREET AND COUNTY BLOCK 240 spaces, 160-240 housing units
2	MIDDLE STREET AND COUNTY BLOCK 240 spaces, 16,000-20,000 sq ft commercial, 160-200 housing units
3	CITY HALL AND OFFICE BUILDING 120 spaces, 80-120 housing units
4	CRAWFORD CIRCLE Planting verge is removed to widen Crawford Circle



DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND PROGRAM	
1	GSA SITE 384 spaces, 10,000 sq ft of commercial, 80-120 housing units
2	MIDDLE STREET GARAGE 480 spaces, 10,000-12,000 sq ft retail, 70-100 housing units
3	JAIL AND COURTHOUSE SITE 240 spaces, 150-220 housing units

note: development programs are preliminary. Final development program will be determined upon further study.



Existing view looking north



Proposed Phase 1



Proposed Phase 2



Proposed Phase 3



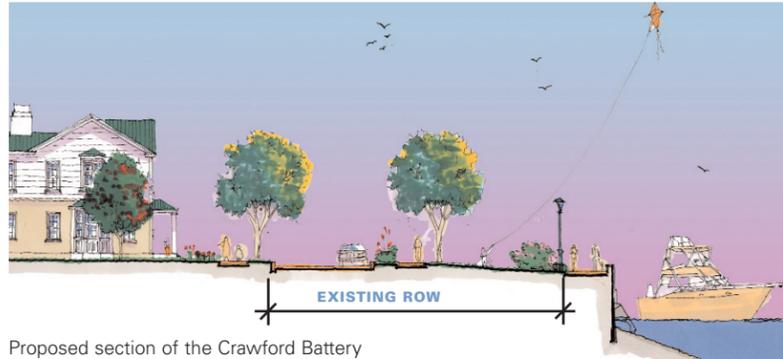
Proposed Phase 4



Proposed rendering of Phase 4



Proposed perspective looking north from above the North Pier



Proposed section of the Crawford Battery



Proposed section of the Waterfront Lane



Proposed perspective looking south from above the proposed Crawford Battery



Illustrative Master Plan