

Smithfield 2020 Notes from project team meeting of March 10th, 2010

Present:

Jim Abicht	Trey Gwaltney	Lisa Perry
Rick Bodson	Sheila Gwaltney	Connie Rhodes
Margaret Carroll	Mark Hall	Peter Stephenson
John Edwards	Russell Parrish	Judy Winslow

The revitalization effort of 1987-1997

John Edwards provided insights into the original downtown revitalization effort. Key points:

- The impetus was the loss of business from the core downtown area.
- A Virginia Tech architectural student project was the basis of the streetscape effort.
- Funding for the construction work was launched by Mr. Luter's challenge grant and matched by private donations and fundraising efforts.
- The project spanned 10 years and involved two full years of construction projects.
- Personal involvement by the project team (ultimately organized formally as Historic Smithfield) in all aspects of the effort communicated to merchants and residents a strong sense of commitment to its success.
- One project objective that was not achieved was a long term commitment to a formal economic development program, ironically due in large measure to the project's success in filling 100% of Main Street storefronts by the end of the project.
- Virginia Main Street, a state community development and revitalization program, was approached twice for support, but the strong private financing that had been secured by Historic Smithfield was cited by VMS as a reason for not considering the project.
- A major point: Community and business support was achieved by proposing and executing the project not as an economic development effort, but as a legacy / securing our hometown for future generations initiative.

Chamber of Commerce-hosted round table discussion with South Church Street merchants

Trey Gwaltney reviewed highlights of a February meeting chaired by Vinny Carollo. Thirty South Church Street merchants were invited, eight attended.

- The discussion did not focus on what others can do to improve business on S. Church Street, but rather on how the South Church Street merchants can attract more businesses to the area...a perspective that successful individual businesses engender a successful commercial area which in turn contributes to the success of the participating businesses.
- External support that is of value puts more businesses on Church Street. Support for initiatives such as co-op advertising is not perceived as having material value-add.
- The Historic District and S. Church Street were contrasted. The former is a "sidewalk", destination, visitor-drawing area, the latter a drive-to, service, local shopper area.

The South Church Street merchants' observations and perspective were discussed; the consensus of the 2020 team is that our early focus needs to remain on getting traction on Historic District-centric projects, but that many projects, especially in commercial support efforts, can be and are applicable to the South Church Street businesses. Certainly, dialog can and will remain open.

Board of Historical and Architectural Review relationship

Russell Parrish, a member of the BHAR, addressed the Sanford-Holshouser report's recommendation re: reconciling the BHAR mission with business needs and noted that its processes and responsiveness are receiving positive reviews from applicants, due in large measure to the review preparation guidance provided by Town Planner Bill Hopkins. No specific issues need to be addressed. Russell was requested to brief other BHAR members about Smithfield 2020's objectives.

Project 026 – Arts & Cultural District designation

Project remains In Development. The Town Council Finance Committee concurs with the proposal. Peter is meeting with Town staff to draft the enabling ordinance. Outside target date to present to Town Council for ratification: July 1st.

Project 044 – Business Resource Center

Project remains In Development. A Business Resource page is active on Chamber's Website and was reviewed by six Project Team members. Feedback was submitted to Connie Rhodes requesting that content be more specific, e.g., hyperlinks to a specific page vs. a site's home page. The requested changes are in the maintenance queue for a future revision to theisle.org.

Project 045 – Commercial Property Registry

Project remains In Development. A slow start-up with our pro bono resource for data collection is to be addressed this week and will be resolved by the April meeting.

Project 051- Façade Improvement Grant Program

Project promoted to In Development. A proposal from Frazier & Associates is in hand which commits two deliverables: A site visit to brief interested property owners on the mechanics and benefits of façade improvements, and the development of drawings that outline proposed improvements, including colors and materials, for targeted properties. John Edwards will approach Historic Smithfield to solicit financial support for this initial Frazier Associates project. A 2020 task team will be formed to develop a matching grant program through which building owners could qualify for financial support to affect the façade improvements. To be resolved: Securing an allocation of the proceeds from Project 052 to fund the matching grant program.

Project 052 - North Church Street development

Project promoted to In Development. Town Council has agreed to put the 113 and 117 N. Church Street properties for sale and authorized Peter Stephenson to issue an RFP to solicit bids. The RFP will specify that conforming usage is an evaluation criterion. Target date to

advertise the RFP is end of March. To be discussed: An allocation of the net proceeds for a façade improvement matching grant program.

Project consolidation

After a review and consideration of the next wave of inventoried 2020 projects, Rick Bodson proposed pursuing the Virginia Main Street's Affiliate Option to gain access to the program's revitalization best practices and resources. The "Main Street Approach" should be applied as the construct to address the Smithfield 2020 initiatives.

Motion was made, seconded and carried by unanimous consent that Rick is authorized to submit an Affiliate Option application to Virginia Main Street and that he is authorized to request from the Town Council an endorsing resolution, as required by the application.

Next meeting: Wednesday, April 7, 8:30 AM, The Arts Center @ 319 classroom.

These meeting notes submitted by Rick Bodson.