

the new  
American City

City of North Charleston  
Noisette Community Master Plan



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**“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing consistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.”**

— Daniel H. Burnham, FAIA 1846-1912



## Dewees Island

Dewees Island is a 1200-acre barrier island near the Isle of Palms, SC. The philosophy of development at Dewees Island was to limit the impact on the native environment and the ecosystems. The sustainable master planning principles used at Dewees Island have made it one of the most successful communities in the US. It has been nationally recognized, and it received the 2001 Urban Land Institute Award for Excellence.

The Noisette Project and this resulting sustainable master plan are part of an odyssey that started in December of 1997, when North Charleston Council member Kurt Taylor asked if the vision we had for a “Dewees in the City” could be brought to North Charleston. Dewees Island has received numerous awards and is recognized internationally as one of the leading sustainable communities in the U.S. The expression of this vision was:

*“Redevelop an existing portion of a City to create a tangible example, a place that incorporates the Principles of Sustainability in residences, commercial buildings, and public areas to improve the economy, quality of community, and the environment.”*

In March of 1998, Kurt Taylor invited Jim Augustin and John Knott, Noisette co-founders, to meet with Mayor Summey to discuss our ideas for a sustainable urban redevelopment. The Mayor and Kurt Taylor shared the City’s vision for a re-energized and revitalized North Charleston and the goals described in the City’s 1996 Comprehensive Plan. As a result of this meeting, the Mayor invited us to continue investigating the potential of implementing a vision that integrated both objectives.

Over the next three years, the Noisette co-founders, along with our nationally recognized design team, evolved this project, at the City’s request, from a 5 square block area to the present Noisette footprint of almost 3,000 acres. The City, recog-

nizing the uniqueness of the Noisette team, announced in March 2001 the formation of an innovative partnership with the Noisette Company. Accompanying this announcement was a City Pledge by the Mayor and City Council describing what the City was committing to accomplish. The City also outlined its desire and commitment to become a model for sustainable city redevelopment. The desired outcomes expressed for the City were:

- Rebreathe life into the historic city center
- Synergize all Quality of Life efforts within the City
- Catalyze economic growth
- Build the City’s financial Vitality
- Position North Charleston nationally as a sustainable urban center

## Core Beliefs

The master planning work of the Noisette Company is grounded in the principles of historic preservation and community redevelopment that have grown and matured for three generations starting with the founding of the Knott tradition in 1908. Our approach is embodied in the eight beliefs listed below.

### The Noisette Company’s Beliefs

1. Respect is at the core of every successful human relationship and endeavor.
2. All endeavors are approached with a forensic process that starts with observation and enquiry versus a formula orientation.
3. Successful problem solving starts upstream with systems thinking.
4. Community Involvement is essential to great planning and places equal value on the wisdom of the culture and the talent of the of the planning and development professionals.
5. All decisions will be made to serve the long-term health of the economy, ecology and social fabric of the community being directly developed as well as the larger community in which it participates.
6. All planning and decision-making favors collaboration and is based on “Sustainable Partnering of Resources.”
7. Successful City redevelopment requires a bold collaboration of Municipal leadership and Master Community Developers.
8. All resources are interdependent in natural as well as human communities.



## Fundamentals of Socially Durable Communities

As a community developer, we recognize that socially durable communities have two core elements that are essential to their long-term social and fiscal health:

- Each member of the community understands the unique history and heritage of their social community and physical place.
- Each member of the community holds in common a vision for the future to which they help contribute.

The dysfunction that we find in our cities, businesses and other organizations can always be traced to these core elements. It is this understanding that causes us to commit significant time and resources to the inventory of historic, economic, ecological and culture resources of a community over the course of time. This process informs our team and the community about the unique heritage of the community we now call Noisette. Our community involvement process is organized to achieve the creation of a common

vision and an ongoing process to evolve and mature that vision over time.

## Sustainable Funding of Cities

In addition, the failure to build our communities and manage them around these core elements for socially durable communities means that our cities are faced with a mounting financial crisis. This crisis is driven by competition for limited resources, the failure to connect the beneficiaries with the responsibility of creation and maintenance, and the lack of reserve funding for infrastructure repair and maintenance, as well as developing a social capital reserve.

One of the key beliefs outlined above is Sustainable Partnering of Resources. It has become very clear that we have too many narrowly

defined interests competing for too few resources both in the public and private sector. We believe that the issue is not a lack of money but how funds are allocated. We believe that all planning and resourcing should be guided by these principles:

- Eliminate silo thinking in funding of any community resource
- Increase the number of groups with a vested interest in any community resource as users and beneficiaries
- Leverage and combine the resources of Public, Private, and NGO entities in the creation of any community resource

- Align interests to build broader constituencies to support, long term, community resources
- Connect the capital and operating budgets when planning any investment
- Establish reserve fund mechanisms to handle future repair, maintenance, and replacement costs
- Design the community into the care and stewardship of each community resource

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Architecture

The character of the great places in the world is represented in their architecture, cuisine, and their artistic expression. Man, when confronted with the unique natural resource base and climate conditions of each area, develops a unique response in forming the economy, architecture, land plan, and cuisine for each of these

cultures. It is the fundamental reason that New England architecture is so different from the Low Country and Northern Italian cuisine is different from Southern Italian cuisine. The peninsula city of Charleston is one of those great places. It is the 18th and 19th century answer and response to climate and natural resource base.

The Noisette Company believes that the River Center at Noisette provides a unique opportunity to create a national center for architectural design that explores and develops the 21st century architectural equivalent of responding and respecting our unique climate and place.

## Measurement and Research of Outcomes

The development industry is faced with two problems. One is that there is not readily available core research that studies a concept from its inception, scientifically treats all the hypotheses and develops good science to back up recommendations for future planning and growth. In addition, we are all so vertically trained with our own languages and values by individual professions, there is very little common ground for problem solving and great dialogue as we evolve how our cities will be redeveloped or newly grown.

In order to ensure that the community of Noisette and our industry learns from this process and can translate the experience to effective models for sustainable planning and development, we are planning the creation of a Sustainable Graduate Internship Center with 25–30 positions annually representing the physical and social sciences with no repetitive positions during the year. Any University participating must agree to a minimum 30- year research effort in the specific discipline. This would be a resident

program for one year. This center would also oversee the measuring and monitoring of the principles and objectives set forth in the metrics of this plan as well as utilizing the Heinz Center for the Environment's Indicator System to measure the long term health and progress of the Noisette Community.

## Integrated Restoration

Renewal and restoration is an act of healing. This act is grounded in respect, which means “to see anew or to see again”. Beginning with Henry A. Knott in 1908, the Knott tradition, passed down to the current generation by my father John L. Knott and introduced to Noisette in my capacity as CEO, has been formed by the understanding that we are in the human habitat business serving the five basic needs of the communities we affect. We are responsible to integrate and serve the economic, functional, aesthetic, social and spiritual needs of those we serve. These needs cut across all economic levels and uses, and are the connection between restorative enterprise and restorative justice, which form the foundation for integrated restoration.

Storm Cunningham, the author of “The Restoration Economy”, has stated,

*“The restorative development has become the fastest growing sector of our economy. Integrated Restoration is the next big thing. Currently, the eight industries of the restoration economy are largely Balkanized. The professionals restoring a bridge, a watershed, a historic district, or deserted/exhausted farmland are generally unaware that they are parts of the same economic sector.”*

He goes on to say,

*“Community and regional agencies must learn to assemble and manage the multidisciplinary teams necessary to effectively master-plan the restoration of the natural and built environment.”*

Additionally, Cunningham says that the Noisette project is the best current example of Integrated Restoration and has the potential to become a real-world laboratory of restorative development that will be followed for decades.

The core competency of our team and family, and the leading position of Noisette in the new Integrated Restoration economy is the key catalyst for forming this region as the Silicon Valley for the restoration economy. The best result of this master plan and the core principles and directions outlined are best described by a Green Village vision written by Jim Augustin the co-founder of the Noisette Company:

— John L. Knott, Jr.

CEO & Co-Founder of the Noisette Company

### Green Village Vision

“We envision a re-invigorated area of the City:

Where people live, work, and learn...

That is inclusive of all the community’s people...

Where the built environment embodies respect for  
Individuals, community, and the natural environment...

That understands its place in the fabric of the larger community,  
And celebrates its connections with other City areas  
And their shared culture and history...

That restores and enhances the environment while harnessing natural systems...

That values beauty, and provides opportunities for  
Sanctuary, spiritual renewal, and inspiration...

That is a great place to GROW!!  
To grow families, to grow knowledge,  
To grow skills and jobs, to grow plants and trees,  
To grow friendships, to grow old...

That leads to improvement throughout the City.”

