

**CHAPTER ONE | VISION**

**planning for  
integrated restoration**

# **The Vision of Noisette**

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## The New American City

The Noisette Community Master Plan creates a sustainable vision for the 3,000-acre historic center of the City of North Charleston, South Carolina. This land has a solid history of agriculture, industry, and commerce, and it includes about 350 acres of the former Charleston Naval Base, one of the nation's

oldest military facilities. This vision is based on the Triple Bottom Line – a balance among people, planet, and prosperity – embodying the belief that sustainable cities must be equally responsive to social needs, environmental responsibility, and economic vitality.

## Establishing a Shared Vision

**A vibrant, healthy city embracing its heritage and celebrating its role as community, ecosystem and marketplace.**

The New American City is built on a foundation of shared principles and values. Believing that no such endeavor can thrive unless those who seek to build it have a common vision, the City of North Charleston and the Noisette Company began by establishing the basis for their partnership.

The City of North Charleston set forth a pledge to its citizens, present and future, of what this community would become. The City's Pledge is a set of principles that underpins a future of prosperity, social harmony, educational excellence and ecological restoration, which respects the rich history of this place.

The Noisette Company, drawing on its founders' multi-generational history of community-building, brought forward the principles and values that form the basis for making great places. One key element is the Sanborn Principles, a set of goals which were established in 1994 by a diverse group of visionaries who described the attributes that would define sustainable communities of the future. These characteristics balance social, economic and environmental well-being, while recognizing the importance of beauty and the need for continuous evolution in a changing world.

A second fundamental component of this vision is the Values of Place, which is a set of statements embodying the essence of timeless design, human-centered building and personal responsibility. Great places around the world have incorporated these values for millennia.

Taken together, the elements contributed by these two partners will establish the Noisette Community as a living, interpretive, sustainable urban center, equivalent to Charleston's position as a national center for Historic Preservation.

### Sanborn Principles

Healthy Indoor Environment for Occupants

Ecologically Healthy

Socially Just

Culturally Creative

Beautiful

Physically and Economically Accessible

Evolutionary

### Values of Place

Value of Diversity

Value of Beauty and Aesthetics

Value of Accidental Meeting Places

Value of Surprise and Discovery

Value of Resource Efficiency

Value of Leaving Your Mark

Value of Human Form Emerging Naturally from Its Place

### The City's Pledge

To raise the bar for North Charleston's quality of life

To give North Charleston residents the support and resources for sustainable neighborhoods

To extend affordable housing to our residents to grow home ownership

To offer new opportunities to its citizens for participating in its economic development programs

To demonstrate that neighborhoods and industry can work side by side and in harmony

To rediscover and celebrate the histories of North Charleston

To restore and protect the ecological systems in North Charleston

To provide access to the waters of Noisette & Filbin Creeks and the Cooper River

To practice "no tolerance" for gentrification

To revitalize the fiber of family life in North Charleston

To build educational facilities as "centers of the community" in North Charleston

To showcase the artists in North Charleston

To open new venues for recreation and entertainment in North Charleston

To honor and pay tribute to the military and civilian workers of the former Charleston Naval Complex

To make our North Charleston neighborhoods safe, healthy and prideful

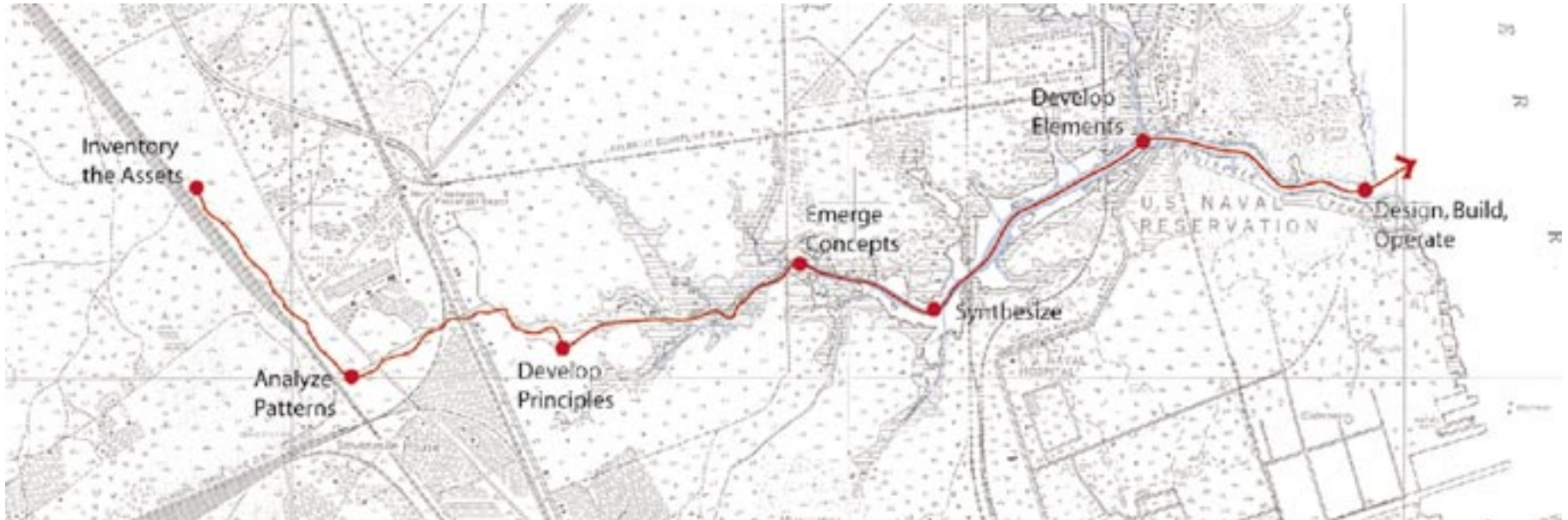


## Charting the Path to a Sustainable Future

A community-based master planning process takes a different path from that of conventional master planning. This process flows like a stream, seeking to find its roots in the past, to assimilate knowledge of the place, to understand the dreams of its citizens, and to synthesize concepts for the New American City.

**“Consult the genius of the place...”**

- Alexander Pope



The first step of this master planning process is to **inventory the assets**, seeking to understand the essence of what makes this place unique. Though the City of North Charleston has only been incorporated since 1972, it has been evolving over a much longer history. For centuries, Tidewater Indian tribes lived along the Etiwan (now the Cooper) River, thriving on the bounty of the low country. The arrival of the Europeans in 1670 marked the beginnings of an agricultural economy around Charles Town (later Charleston). By the time of the American Revolution, over 60 plantations were active in the North Charleston area. The port city of Charleston became an important trading and shipbuilding center for the South and depended on the natural resources from the “north area” between the Cooper and Ashley Rivers. The Cooper River emerged as a major economic force in the industry and the agriculture of the region. Through the middle of the nineteenth century, rice, lumber products, and valuable minerals such as phosphate from the North Charleston area provided the basis for growth in the low country. In 1871, Liberty Hill was established as an independent community of pre-Emancipation freedmen as well as former slaves. It is probably the oldest neighborhood in North Charleston and retains a special character that is important to preserve.

In 1896, the Olmsted Brothers designed a naturalistic recreational area, Chicora Park, making use of the varied topography around the Noiset Creek. Chicora Park provided a recreational escape from the City of Charleston, which had a public trolley linking the city and the park. Chicora Park was to be short-lived. In 1901, the US Government acquired almost 1,200 acres of the park and adjacent land and began the construction of the Charleston Navy Yard.

For the next century, this naval base had a profound effect on the natural systems, commerce, and growth patterns of North Charleston. Anticipating the need for an expanded city, in 1913 a group of Charleston business men developed plans for a new community north of the Noiset Creek. They hired W. B. Marquis, who was later associated with the Olmsted Brothers, to create a city plan based on the English Garden City movement, with Park Circle as its center. North Charleston developed a strong industrial base, many elements of which continue today. During World War II, the Navy Yard was a major shipbuilding center and spurred rapid growth in North Charleston. The majority of the commands at the base were slated for closure in 1993; final military operations ceased in 1996. Since that time, the base has undergone a transition from military to private uses over the ensuing years.

By **analyzing the patterns** of these developments, we can understand the significant changes that have transformed the land from an undisturbed ecosystem into an urban community. As with most cities that have developed in this same time period, many of the natural systems have been profoundly transformed, often with unintended consequences.

The Noiset Creek is a good example of this change. In the time when Indians lived on the land just south of the junction of the Creek and the Cooper River, it functioned as a tidal stream, rich in flora and fauna. The Marshlands and Turnbull plantations occupied this same land in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, changing the land and the Creek to accommodate rice and indigo farming. The Olmsted Brothers further modified this land as part of their creation of Chicora Park, creating recreational facilities, a plant nursery, roads, and a substantial wharf.

The US Navy profoundly changed the land over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dredging the river, filling much of the tidal marsh, and raising the lowlands to create more buildable land. Today, the creek is a channel for stormwater and wastes from the City. It is much less ecologically diverse, and less able to buffer storm events, increasing flooding potential. Intriguingly, in the few years since the Navy stopped maintaining the land around the Creek, the natural tidal forces have begun to reclaim the land, beginning the process of returning it to its natural condition, but much more work will be needed to complete this task.



Tributary of Noiset Creek near Quarterman Lake



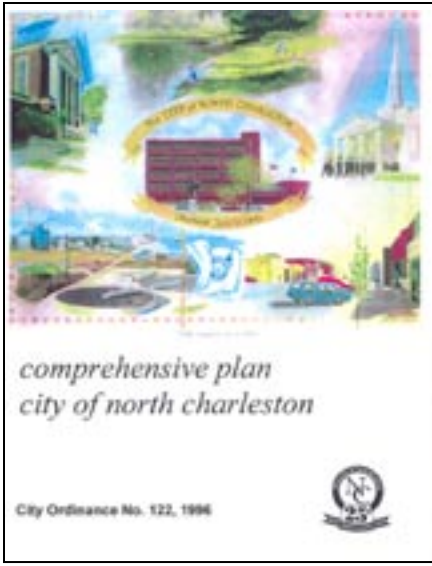
Noiset Creek with the Cooper River in the distance



Noiset Creek near Spruill Avenue



Pier Alpha at the junction of Noiset Creek and the Cooper River



The process of inventorying the assets and analyzing the patterns of prior land use, enables us to **develop the principles** that will guide future planning and development:

- Re-weave and strengthen the City tapestry
- Rekindle the City as a great place to grow
- Respect individuals, the community and the natural environment
- Restore and enhance the environment
- Rediscover opportunities for sanctuary, spiritual renewal, and inspiration
- Regenerate places for people to live, work, and learn

land use. These goals have formed a solid base for the concepts included in this master plan. This master plan is not intended to replace the Comprehensive Plan but rather to propose specific initiatives and guidelines for a “renewed sustainability center,” the implementation of which would accomplish the City’s goal of becoming a leader in sustainable redevelopment of an urban environment.

This community-based planning process has benefited from the insights and aspirations of the residents of the Noisette area of North Charleston, which were sought out through hundreds of community meetings and newsletter communications. Thousands of citizens described a strong, vibrant community but also identified needed improvements in their neighborhoods and the City as a whole. The North Charleston government officials provided invaluable guidance about the concepts that were the most viable and best synchronized with their planning objectives. These inputs led to the **synthesis** of the planning recommendations contained in this master plan. In some cases, these recommendations reinforce stable development patterns that exist throughout much of the planning area. In other cases, profound

changes are needed to realize these goals.

Over time, the City of North Charleston and the Noisette Company will jointly **develop the elements** of this plan, beginning the process of transformation to the **New American City**. In many ways, this master planning process has already contributed to the revitalization of the City, as seen in rising property values and the emergence of new businesses.

The following chapters in this master plan provide detailed recommendations for:

- Regenerative Land Use (Chapter 2)
- Restoring Natural Systems (Chapter 3)
- Restoring the Connections (Chapter 4)
- Neighborhoods as Catalysts for Change (Chapter 5)
- River Center at Noisette—transforming the Naval Base (Chapter 6)

This master plan includes a phased **implementation strategy**, using tax increment financing (TIF) as a key element to improve public infrastructure, bolstered by private investments (see Chapter 8 for further discussion of TIF funds). It also proposes a **measurement methodology** to establish standards for sustainable residential, commercial, and open space development.



Neighborhood planning meeting at the Felix Pinckney Center in Liberty Hill



Community planning meeting at the North Charleston High School



The master plan was presented to the North Charleston community in November 2003.



After the main presentation, there were break-out discussions with residents, such as this one for the Liberty Hill neighborhood



Many attendees offered valuable feedback about the master plan at this community meeting.

The initial planning **concepts emerge** from these principles and from the prior planning efforts of the City, County, and State. In particular, the City of North Charleston adopted a *Comprehensive Plan for the City of North Charleston* (City Ordinance No. 122, 1996), which sets forth specific goals for population, housing, economic development, natural resources, cultural resources, community facilities, annexation, and

|   | Liberty Hill | Old Village | NE Park |
|---|--------------|-------------|---------|
| <b>WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?</b>  |              |             |         |
| Community spirit                                  | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Strong sense of community                         | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Small town feel                                   | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Churches, faith-based                             | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Central location, good access                     | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| People know their neighbors                       | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Sense of security                                 | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Green space, open space                           | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Quiet   | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Parks and recreation                              | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Important history                                 | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Lots of existing trees                            | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Good housing stock, styles                        | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Walkable  | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| <b>WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?</b>                     |              |             |         |
| End rail crossing traffic disruption              | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Reduce truck traffic                              | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Improve streetscape                               | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Improve schools                                   | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Improve city image                                | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Reduce crime                                      | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| More code enforcement                             | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Improve public transportation                     | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Eliminate pulp mill smell                         | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Increase home ownership                           | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| <b>WHAT'S MISSING FROM YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?</b>     |              |             |         |
| Basic retail services                             | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Convenient emergency care                         | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Riverfront Park                                   | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Library   | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Recreation & entertainment opportunities for kids | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Walking and bike paths                            | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Job opportunities                                 | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Tourist destination such as <i>The Hunley</i>     | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Assisted living facility                          | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |
| Nearby Wal-Mart                                   | ✓            | ✓           | ✓       |