

Op-Ed: Hampton's strategic vision and priorities

By Mayor George Wallace and Vice Mayor Linda Curtis

Hampton is a vibrant waterfront community embracing 400 years of history and innovation to create an even more dynamic future. As the oldest continuous English speaking community in America, Hampton has always been on the forefront of big, bold ideas that have moved our City forward. In our recent past, with our strategic partners, our community has advanced such major initiatives as the National Institute of Aerospace, Hampton University Proton Beam Facility, Sentara Careplex and Orthopedic Center, the Hampton Roads Convention Center, the Boo Williams Sportsplex and the transformation of the Coliseum Mall to the beautiful Peninsula Town Center, to name just a few. We are also the home to some of the nation's fastest growing companies such as TE Connectivity (formerly known as Measurement Specialties) and start-ups such as Free Ping, a recent White House honoree.

Our 400 years of innovation means we never rest on our laurels. Indeed, our City Council has a continuous culture of strategic planning to ensure our community continues to have its share of major advancements and firsts. At almost every meeting, we take votes or make decisions that get us a few steps down the path. As such, it is too easy to see each of those decisions in isolation, and we don't always remember to connect the smaller dots to the big picture. Just this Thursday, for instance, Council reaffirmed its commitment to the strategic areas that will create that future. Editorial space does not permit a full examination of our initiatives, so a brief highlight follows (for more details, go to www.hampton.gov/council):

- **Growing our economic base.** It's our Economic Development Department's job to attract new businesses and to help our local businesses grow. We have invested in our business parks, and we have loan and grant programs to leverage private investment. That is business as usual.

Beyond that, on the strategic front, we are developing two new initiatives designed to boost jobs: a Science Park in Hampton Roads Center North that will grow high-tech jobs around the National Institute for Aerospace and just outside the NASA Langley Research Center; and, a downtown waterfront redevelopment that strengthens our nationally recognized seafood operations and research facilities.

Other major economic initiatives focus on improving Hampton's hotel stock and capitalizing on a booming sports tourism industry; working with private property owners to revitalize and redevelop older shopping centers; and, converting City-held property to higher value housing to attract more residents to our community.

- **Showcasing Hampton’s unique personality with “placemaking” activities and spaces.** So far, that has resulted in porch swings at waterfront locations; food trucks in downtown; our new interstate signage; and, a revamped special events permit process to encourage more frequent festivals. We are also committed to creating a new Central Park along which recreational and economic activities will occur. In the future, look for more “small but big” placemaking efforts such as boating on the Coliseum Lake when its retrofit is complete.
- **Living with the Water.** We have long been environmental stewards, but we are now internationally benchmarking and learning from the Dutch, who have the most extensive history in focusing on water challenges and opportunities. Our future efforts will look for solutions that offer multiple benefits, such as long-term efforts that reshape the area to reduce flooding, reduce pollution runoff and add quality of life and economic benefits as well.
- **Educating our students and ensuring an educated workforce.** Although the City Council isn’t responsible for the day-to-day operation of the public schools, we work closely with the elected leaders and administration of Hampton City Schools as partners. Council has supported funding for key initiatives, such as the 1-1 technology for students, high school academies and modernization of our facilities. We are excited about evolving plans of the HCS which emphasize every student, every day, whatever it takes.
- **Keeping the community Clean and Safe.** We shared our plans two years ago in this space when we kicked off this effort. This year, we have added the White House Open Data Initiative to increase transparency; are adopting 21st Century Policing models; and, are committed to local and regional efforts to reduce youth violence and create positive opportunities for young people.

These are just a few of the strategic initiatives we are undertaking to continue our heritage of 400 years of innovation. We hope our residents, businesses and regional partners will join us on this continuous journey to create an even more dynamic future!

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