

Lessons

Many areas in our country have undertaken waterfront or nearshore development. What lessons can we learn from their experiences? The following advice has been offered to us:

- We must require high quality and high standards, but provide flexibility.
- We have to stick to most of the plan. Certainty reduces risks, and is an incentive for investment.
- The planning process must be people-oriented; everyone must have an opportunity to speak before decisions are made, or else community spirit and pride will not surface.
- Planning takes time and patience. To do a good job and to have a quality product, we must do our homework.
- The lessons of Baltimore and other cities tell us that the waterfront project must be unique to the community and should not be a carbon copy of another area.
- Projects along the waterfront must be implemented in stages and should be broken down into small pieces so that they are manageable. Each project should be small enough to be "doable" and large enough to have an impact.
- To be properly implemented, a waterfront project requires joint action, joint expense and joint investment. Most communities combine the expertise and financial resources of their city government, state government, local university, housing authority, port commission, development foundation and private sector developers to produce a joint plan of action. No one public body or private entity can pull it off by itself. In our process, we have established a joint venture between the city, the port and the business community. We will need help from all interested neighborhood groups, and local, state and federal agencies that will be affected by the plan.
- In most cases, especially in Baltimore, celebrations and festivals preceded development. In other words, there was a cultural or emotional change preceding the actual physical improvements.
- Historic preservation and environmental protection can be compatible and even supportive of economic development, tourism, business and jobs.
- In Baltimore and Charleston, we learned that housing was strongly tied to their economy and quality of life. This was evident in other cities as well. The lesson here is that housing improvements must go forward simultaneously with economic development, or the overall well-being of the community suffers. In most communities, the housing authority is a key partner in the development planning and execution.
- Mixed uses can be compatible if suitable standards for design are implemented.
- Activity increases safety. In many waterfront projects which include residential developments there is a concern about security. But, security must be balanced with public access. If there is enough activity, it helps to solve or reduce the security problem.

Criteria

The experiences of Baltimore, Charleston, Norfolk, Pensacola, and other major waterfront developments and the perceptions of Biloxians concerning our own waterfront tend to support the basic criteria which we hope to follow in the development of this plan. These criteria are used by the Mississippi Bureau of Marine Resources as guidelines for development, redevelopment and preservation of urban waterfronts. They include:

- establishment of water oriented uses and activities;
- increased public access to the shorefront;
- increasing visual quality of waterfront areas and providing safer environments;
- encouraging appropriate land and water uses along the waterfront;
- encouraging rehabilitation and renovation of old structures near the waterfront as a means of preserving our coastal heritage; and
- encouraging concentration of urban development adjacent to the urban waterfront so that public facilities and coastal resources may be more compatibly utilized.

Lessons Learned

Biloxi civic leaders recently visited other cities to see what these communities have accomplished on or near their waterfronts.

In December of 1983, at the invitation of Mayor Gerald Blessey, seventy-five of Biloxi's local officials, business people and other interested parties made a fact-finding mission to Charleston, South Carolina, and Baltimore, Maryland. In January of 1984 a smaller contingent of the mayor and staff people from the city, the port commission and the development foundation attended a conference on waterfront developments in Norfolk, Virginia, and viewed their waterfront developments. In February, about 60 of the same people attended a fact-finding trip to Pensacola to study its historical and waterfront accomplishments. And last September, a smaller group visited Annapolis, Maryland, a historic waterfront town with a distinct marine orientation.

In **Charleston**, Biloxians were overwhelmed by the sense of history that pervades in the form of preserved traditional buildings, objects and artifacts. Many Biloxians came away with the feeling that there was an exceptional preservation program in Charleston, but were concerned that Biloxi doesn't have the critical mass of historic properties that Charleston has. The Biloxians felt that although we don't have as many historic properties, we do have enough to warrant a more comprehensive historic preservation program.

The major tool used in Charleston's preservation was that of an architectural review board. The review board has been in effect since the 1930's and monitors all changes in historic properties. In effect property owners have to go through this board before they make any structural or even cosmetic changes so that their remodeling efforts reflect the history and culture of the Charleston area. The review board is composed of seven members appointed by the city government. Minimal professional participation on the board includes at least one architect, one civil engineer, one builder and one planning commission member.

It is noteworthy that commercial uses, apartments, condominiums, townhouses, and detached single-family homes all exist side-by-side and are not prohibited by zoning in Charleston's historic districts.

Along with its architectural review regulations, Charleston promotes the federal income investment tax credit for historic properties as a tool to provide financial assistance to building owners. It also uses a state law for tax increment financing to provide infrastructure for new developments. Charleston's development strategy combines forces through joint efforts of the housing authority, port commission, city government, tourism commission, foundations, and chamber of commerce.

In Charleston, tourism is a big business; it's a diverse industry; it's their largest employer, with military employment being second. Charleston spends about a half million dollars a year on media promotions for tourism. They have found that it provides their economic base. For every 100 new jobs in the tourism industry, there's a spinoff creation of 40 service or support jobs.

Baltimore has one of the most exciting, innovative and impressive waterfront developments that has taken place in this country. The redevelopment area around

the harbor includes marketplaces, hotels, marinas, traditional boat and ship displays, museums and the national aquarium. These facilities are all tied together by a waterfront promenade that links all the major attractions and provides a large open space for festivals. In the Baltimore area they have over 700 festivals a year. This generates considerable pedestrian traffic in the inner-harbor area and the adjacent downtown area.

Baltimore's success did not happen overnight. It has been 25 to 30 years in the making. It all started in the late 1950's when the business community went to the mayor with a master plan developed by a planning consultant. The catalyst for the beginnings of the Baltimore redevelopment was a 33 acre project known as Charles Center. This project was in the heart of the central business district. The plan outlined a revitalization program that improved access to the downtown through walkways, plazas and a number of other major public and private improvements. Baltimore combines the financial resources of its city government, port authority, private sector, housing authority, federal and state funds, and private foundations.

As Charles Center developed, attention was then focused on the nearby harbor area, which was then at its worst. It was a conglomeration of rundown, derelict warehouses comprising an area of about 200 acres. A plan was developed for the inner-harbor and many public improvements were made. The public improvements generated over \$20 billion worth of private investment in the area.

The most noted feature of the remodeled inner-harbor is the festival marketplace ("Harborplace"), which encompasses two buildings designed, built and operated by the Rouse Company. James Rouse is a Baltimore native who lives in the Baltimore region. He is famous to planners and developers for his new town development of Columbia, Maryland. Rouse, in his new town development, has learned much about what makes a city work economically and has taken this knowledge and incorporated it into the popular "festival marketplace" concept.

The Baltimore harbor marketplace includes specialty retail shops, fresh food booths for produce, seafood, butchers, bakeries, and a host of unique fast food restaurants. These food booths are a major attraction to the local lunch crowd, as well as the many Baltimore visitors. Most of these outlets are owned and operated by local businessmen and women who expanded into the Harborplace with guidance by the Rouse Company and city agencies.

To Rouse and his associates, the waterfront is a great amenity, but its success as an urban development depends on its marketability and how it is oriented to the people-locals as well as visitors. Job opportunities, training, and marketing assistance are provided by the development company and the city to local small businesses and minority businesses.

It's noteworthy that before redevelopment began, the people of Baltimore had a low opinion of the city and themselves. Baltimore residents felt there wasn't much that could be done in the Baltimore area to improve the city's vitality or image. At that time it was common for nationally-known comedians to make jokes about Baltimore

and its residents. But with the catalytic development in the Charles Center and the subsequent improvements to the harbor area, people began to see what could be done if enough residents united in a spirit of community pride and partnership. The resulting waterfront and downtown redevelopment seen in Baltimore are the result of many years of planning, hard work and financial investment, and is something the people of Baltimore point to with pride.

Not only does Baltimore now get many visitors per year as a tourist attraction (which would have been unheard of in the 1950s and 60s), but many folks who live in the surrounding region are drawn in for the downtown festivals and cultural events. Tens of thousands of people can be found near the harbor on any given day.

Norfolk has undertaken waterfront projects similar to those found in Baltimore. They too have enlisted the services of James Rouse for their marketing efforts. The first phase of their Waterside mall is so successful that the second phase will be accelerated. Since opening June First of 1983, it is reported that 4 million people have visited, and after the first seven months city revenues were three times what were projected for the first year.

The second building for the mall, which will double the \$13.5 million market, will open in 1986 instead of 1988. And now the city is asking developers for proposals to construct a \$40 million waterfront project nearby which will include a hotel, marina, shops, housing and redevelopment of a landmark storage tank.

Norfolk uses a combination of local agencies to accomplish mutual goals: the Norfolk Housing and Redevelopment Authority, the port commission, the city government, local foundations, and business groups.

Pensacola is perhaps the best local example of what can be done with a Gulf Coast waterfront. Because of its similarity to Biloxi in size, climate, environment, history and economy, Pensacola provides another valuable lesson on what a community spirit can accomplish. Although much of the ground work for the Pensacola redevelopment was laid a decade or so ago, most of their accomplishments were undertaken and completed in a short period of time (during the last five years).

Redevelopment efforts in Pensacola started a dozen years ago when a number of private individuals began to set up an enclave of historic properties near their waterfront and downtown areas. The properties they acquired, redeveloped and/or moved into this location were not large historic mansions, but were the traditional cottages that have existed in Pensacola since the early 19th century. The architecture of these properties reflects a great deal of the history, culture and economy of Pensacola through the years. They are now used for specialty retail shops or as offices for personal and professional services.

Tourism officials in Pensacola note that people come to the Pensacola area not mainly for the beaches, but to see the historic preservation that's taken place near this downtown area. More recent waterside projects on publicly owned land near the Port of Pensacola include mixed use developments, multi-family residences, open spaces and promenades for public access.

Annapolis has always been a waterfront community. Located at the mouth of the Severn River, on the western shore of Chesapeake Bay, Annapolis is less than 40 miles from both Baltimore or Washington, D.C. With only 30,000 residents, the city has a distinct, small-town flavor. It also serves both as the capital of Maryland and home of the U.S. Naval Academy.

The city's entire geography revolves around its waterfront. The downtown area begins at the head of what's called the City Docks, a municipal canal that leads into a mooring basin along the river. The canal and basin serve as a staging area for the multitudes of visiting and working boats. Marine-related hardware stores, supply shops, dockside restaurants and nautical specialty stores surround the municipal docks where water-taxis, temporary berths, and "dinghy-docks" accommodate transient boaters. To the visiting Biloxians, it appeared that more people come to Annapolis by boat than by car.

Annapolis, like Newport, Rhode Island, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and other prominent boating centers, epitomizes the community that has achieved its true waterfront potential.

Local Perceptions

The visits to Baltimore and other cities provided Biloxians with insight into how other waterfront projects have been carried out. But how do Biloxians really feel about their waterfront?

The Waterfront Technical Advisory Council sought public opinion at the first public forum of the Biloxi Waterfront Policy Council in late March of 1984. People were asked to provide information on their thoughts, perceptions and concerns about the Biloxi waterfront.

A written perception survey was designed to solicit this information. The survey was intended to be completely open-ended. The T.A.C. didn't want to influence anyone's thinking with specific ideas or proposals. It wanted to find out, rather, how Biloxians really feel about their waterfront. Approximately 125 people responded to the survey and provided these basic thoughts:

- 1) The Biloxi waterfront should be cleaner. This pertains to all areas in general, and refers to such problems as litter, dilapidated structures, areas of polluted water, weeded, junk-filled lots, poorly maintained commercial establishments, and an absence of attempts to beautify industrial or commercial properties in some areas, particularly Point Cadet and Rhodes Point. Concern with cleanliness and appearance was the most frequently mentioned item among the responses.
- 2) The maintenance of a relatively unobstructed view of the natural waterfront is very important to those who answered the questionnaire. Many Biloxians place a high value on the opportunity to simply look at the water. They described the experience as enjoyable, calming, therapeutic, satisfying, and emotionally uplifting. The importance of maintaining the view of the waterfront is mentioned almost as frequently as the importance of cleanliness.
- 3) People who responded to the questionnaire are concerned with the possibility of overdevelopment of the water-

front, particularly in terms of condominiums and commercial strips south of Highway 90. These types of developments are seen as interfering with the view and are aesthetically displeasing or inappropriate uses of valuable land. Values expressed are not anti-development but rather anti-certain kinds of development or haphazard development that restricts public access to the water or the view of the water.

4) Persons attending the policy council forum were overwhelmingly in favor of planning for waterfront use. They think the study is a good idea and they hope that planned development of the waterfront will help to avoid the mistakes of the past and the mistakes of other cities.

5) Many persons want more public access to facilities on the waterfront. They mentioned piers, docks, boat launches, picnic tables, sun shelters and restrooms. They viewed the waterfront as a public recreation area. People attending the meeting indicated that they use the waterfront primarily for recreational rather than for economic purposes. (We must note here that commercial fishermen were not very well represented at the meeting).

6) People say that the seafood industry is economically important to Biloxi. Some say that the factory district of Point Cadet is culturally and aesthetically interesting. Others say that this district is potentially aesthetically and culturally interesting if it were cleaned up and made more accessible to visitors. Some people mentioned the homes on the north side of Highway 90 or in the neighborhoods adjoining the waterfront as very valuable and worthy of preservation.

7) Most people who responded to the survey do not have a clearly discernible opinion on the future of Rhodes Point, one of our focal areas. When asked about Rhodes Point and what they liked about it, they responded with one word: "nothing". This area is seen as ugly and underutilized. Some people say that it should be further developed for industries, while quite a few say that it should be cleaned.

Although the above responses provided an early indication of local perceptions, the public involvement process continued for the duration of the planning process. Four additional public forums and special follow-up meetings with local fishermen, businesses and other interest groups were held. Each of the forums was well-attended with an average of about 200 persons listening to alternative proposals and voicing their opinions, which in most cases, supported the waterfront planning staff recommendations. (See Appendix D - "Public Comment.")

