

Permanent City Market Location Recommendations
City Market Task Force
July 6, 2011

Executive Summary

As directed by City Council, the Task Force evaluated potential sites for a permanent location for the City Market and recommends that the present location be the permanent location. This recommendation takes into consideration best practices drawn from examples throughout the country about the economic, cultural, and public health values of markets to communities. These best practices include market location, but also market management and financing, growth and development, and, especially important for Charlottesville, the complementary relationship between urban markets and rural land use.

At the June 7, 2011 Task Force meeting, staff reported that Council desired three location alternatives as a recommendation. Following our primary recommendation, we offer alternative downtown locations. In our analysis of potential locations, none of these alternatives has the benefits of the present City Market location. Expanded to include the adjacent parking lot and street, the present location can support a City Market that can better serve its diverse constituencies and anchor a Market District. Our survey of City Markets in comparably sized communities suggests that vibrant markets now are important indicators of quality of life. At the present site, our community can capitalize on the valuable asset developed by vendors and customers and create a facility and infrastructure for local food that can distinguish Charlottesville from its competitors.

City Market Location Recommendations

This Task Force originally was directed by City Council to evaluate potential sites for a permanent market location, including its present site, and to make a recommendation to City Council for such a location. The Task Force identified key criteria for assessing individual locations, visited sites, and assessed their viability as a potential permanent location. We also were guided by a very helpful presentation of the principles that make great markets successful, provided by David O'Neill, an invited international expert on public markets sponsored by Market Central.

The criteria that guided the evaluations were (in priority order):

- Permanence
- Vendor Access
- Vehicular Access and Parking
- Topography & ADA Accessibility
- Visibility
- Close to Downtown
- Pedestrian Access
- Provide for Flexibility
- Public Transit
- Minimize User Conflicts

In response to its original charge by City Council, the Task Force recommends that the permanent City Market location be the present location. Because a permanent City Market at the current location can spark City Market improvements and expansion as well as the establishment of a Market District that will provide additional economic and cultural benefits for the City, we also recommend that the scope of the Task Force charge be expanded to include Market and Market District implementation plans over a multi-year period. These implementation plans will include modest immediate improvements to current Market facilities, data collection, a new strategy for Market management and funding, and a Market District plan that will accelerate City economic and cultural development.

Recommendation: City Market in the Present Location as an Anchor to a New Market District

The Task Force recommends that an area that incorporates the current downtown Market site and its surroundings become a designated mixed-use Market District, anchored by the permanent City Market site. The new Market District will balance an expanded City Market “public space” and its commercial activities with financially viable, private development and parking in a cohesive and mutually supportive mixed-use district. The District can expand to the east, south, and west along side streets that connect with the Downtown Mall, and even along the Main Street corridor towards the University.

The merits of this location consistently exceeded those of all the other sites considered based upon agreed upon criteria, as well as criteria and comparables documented by market expert David O’Neill.

The expanded City Market site is located between 2nd Street SE and 2nd Street SW, including 1st Street S, between Water Street and South Street. It incorporates the existing market site, the First Street ROW, and the CPC parking lot. The City owns most of the existing market site and the First Street right-of-way, while the eastern site is owned by the City Parking Center, a for-profit corporation.

To capture the great potential of the City Market for commercial and cultural benefits it is critical that the two parking lots parcels be unified. Overlapping public and private interests suggests this should be a true public/private partnership under the aegis of the city.

Great local markets now are recognized as indicators of community and regional quality of life. While great markets vary in size and infrastructure cost depending on local factors, they share several distinguishing features: they represent deliberate community efforts to optimize a local asset for public benefits; they build on private sector entrepreneurship and management; and they sustain and extend a local agriculture heritage for next generations.

Failure to coordinate a vision-driven development plan for the Market District could result in independently developed parcels with few of the many possible mutually beneficial qualities of a Market District, including the continued growth of the City Market as a public space as important to regional quality of life and economic development as sites recently established for music and sports, such as the Pavilion (City) and the baseball facilities (County). For our region especially a great local food market can become larger and more diverse than the regional wine and beer industry.

The City Market District can emerge as a great asset that is mature, of high quality, culturally diverse, economically viable, well-recognized destination in its own right. It could stand with the Mall, Pavilion, Court Square and The Lawn as defining features of our city. It can draw more local residents and tourists, add vitality, and become part of our community heritage and identity.

Strengths of a City Market District

1. The value of a long-standing, well-known location for the market, supported by many residents and the downtown business community for its economic value.
2. The value of highly visible downtown destination that is walkable and tightly connected to the Mall. It is also well served by transit.
3. It can expand the concept of a free-standing market location to a market that is integrated into a Market District with other mutually beneficial and compatible activities such as retail, offices, and residences that serve as a catalyst, benefiting not only the market, but as a value-added asset to related development—as is the case in so many great markets around the world.
4. The City Market space can coexist with considerable new development and be considerable larger than at present. It can also be flexible in use patterns such as multiple days, hours of operation, or expanded seasons. And it can be expandable, utilizing street front and side street vending, particularly on connector streets to the Mall. Quality amenities such as shelters, eating areas, and public art can also be incorporated.
5. The city Market area also can serve multiple uses in addition to vending. It can serve as a public park or square when not in use—especially important as there are presently no parks south of the Mall.
6. Parking for the market, private development, and the general public may be provided much more efficiently and conveniently when developed together rather than the less efficient, and in a probably more costly manner on individual sites.

Immediate Steps

Establishing a permanent City Market at its present location is the first step in creating a Market District. Improving the present Market will be a multi-year process that will involve many of the processes that the Market District will require, including new plans for growth and diversity, independent management, and capitalization.

Here are our recommendations/actionable items for immediate work on the City Market:

Recommendation 1: As directed, we reviewed potential sites for a permanent location for the city market, including the present location. We recommend that the current location be the permanent city market location.

Actionable item 1: The City provisionally designate the current location as the city market location for three (3) years (through 2014), with permanent designation provided there is an enhanced market vision, a conceptual development plan, management plan, and financing.

Recommendation 2: To signal its commitment to the market as a critically important economic and social institution the City should make immediate improvements in the market's physical infrastructure, such as: including bathrooms, office space, seating, and covered parking spaces (to provide shelter to vendors and retain parking use at other times) . These small but significant first step improvements can be undertaken as a public-private partnership to test and demonstrate community support for an expanded market function.

Actionable item 2: The City write grant proposals to USDA, other agencies and private foundations for awards that will fund improvements for 2012 and future market seasons. (USDA grants are cost-share awards that reduce public expenses.)

Recommendation 3: To inform decision making about the market and to speed public support, we need data about the economic and social value of the market to our community. Data about the market will establish benchmarks about the contributions of a local food system to the local economy; it will reveal the close ties between urban lifestyle and rural land-use; it will enable market managers to prioritize growth to improve public health.

Actionable item 3: The City establish a research partnership with the University of Virginia for the purpose of collecting, correlating, and visualizing data for decision-making and assessment. Projects can be community-based and involve research-based classes in a wide range of fields.

Recommendation 4: A three (3) year location commitment will enable the City, Market Central, community leaders, investors, and donors to make and implement plans for a market that provides the community with an expanded resource that indicates high quality of life, public health and community vitality, and sustainable economic development. We recommend that the City, Market Central, community leaders, donors, and investors start a three-year process of management and financing transition.

Actionable item 4: The City develop a three-year plan for market capitalization and financing, with particular attention to an economic development plan that will cover the capital costs of site acquisition for Market operations and development of a Market District.

Expanded Original Task Force Charge: From Market to Market District

We recommend that the City undertake a Market District master plan and design process to develop a long-term vision and strategic action plan.

Alternative City Market Locations

The City Market District is the Task Force's sole recommendation for the City Market's permanent home: it best meets the criteria for a vital market among the numerous options considered. When compared to the present City Market location, all other locations fall considerably short. Although assembling the expanded City Market site at the present location may be a complex undertaking, the City should commit to create a vibrant, mixed-use, highly visible, and well-connected urban center here. The Task Force recommends that the City should work toward a public/private partnership effort, using the full range of the tools and resources needed—and available—to the task. This effort should be the primary concentrated effort toward a permanent market, not as a delaying effort to buy time to explore alternative locations.

If, after a concerted and creative effort, this option cannot be realized, several locations have been identified that might serve as alternate market sites. These other sites possess fewer of the vital characteristics essential for a truly great Market location and Market District. Each of these alternatives may present equally, or even more, complex site assembly issues, than the recommended location.

The alternative locations are:

Frank Ix Property

A large, privately owned development site in moderate proximity to downtown, without an existing development plan. If the owners see the value of the City Market in their development plan, the City Market could become a major component in a mixed-use complex.

Pros:

- Unified private ownership
- Moderate proximity to Downtown
- Reasonable pedestrian access
- Potentially adequate parking
- Multiple use potential

Cons:

- Development plan in flux with an unknown future.
- Much of the site not visible from adjacent streets

Martha Jefferson Hospital Site

A large, privately owned former hospital site and facilities planned for adaptive use, in moderate proximity to downtown. The development plan is in transition (and recent published reports suggest that this site may not be available for a City Market). If there is adequate space and if the owners see the value of its presence, the City Market could become a major component in this mixed use complex.

Pros:

- Unified private ownership
- Good proximity to Downtown
- Good pedestrian and vehicular access
- Highly visible
- Multiple use potential

Cons:

- Development plan in flux with an unknown future.
- Adequate space unknown

Ridge/McIntire Site

These centrally located, highly visible, and contiguous sites at the corner of Ridge/McIntire and West Main Streets include various private, individually owned properties, some of which have existing warehouse and commercial use buildings. The City Market could be included on the corner sites..

Pros:

- Good proximity but poor accessibility to Downtown
- Highly visible, gateway to Downtown
- Adequate parking

Cons:

- No specific development plan in an area with an unknown future.
- Complex private ownership
- Good proximity but poor pedestrian accessibility to Downtown
- Topographic barriers
- Minimal multiple use potential
- Historic structures limitations
- Potential conflict with potential intense commercial, mixed-use development at key gateway to Downtown