

7 July 2011

City Market Task Force Remarks
Jeffrey Plank, Task Force Chair

Members of the City Council and staff.

On behalf of the Task Force I want to express our thanks for the opportunity to assist you, the Market vendors and their devoted customers, Market Central, and the Charlottesville-Albemarle community.

Each of us accepted your invitation to serve on the Task Force because we believe that the production and exchange of local food is an important cultural and economic enterprise. Each of us brought to the Task Force one piece of experience or expertise in that enterprise. We are entrepreneurs, lawyers, architects and planners; nonprofit, local government, university, and social service agency administrators; some of us are vendors and Market managers, all of us are customers of local markets.

Before joining the Task Force we did not know each other, and in the process of sharing information and perspectives we taught each other a great deal about the wide range of factors associated with this City Market. So our recommendations represent an extended series of careful and energetic discussions of our charge to find a permanent location for the City Market.

As Brian has reported we started with a consideration of location, and “location” prompted us to itemize location criteria, to visit many sites, to compare their strengths and limitations. By our criteria, no site was perfect; each site presented opportunities and challenges.

But as we considered changing the Market location to another site we began to consider other changes as well.

If the Market changes location, will it change its size? Its frequency? Its physical appearance? How does a Saturday morning markets grow? What is the growth potential for this Market? What is the supply and what is the demand for local produce? How can the Market better serve diverse constituencies? Should it become a year-round market? How could these kinds of changes—that is, of Market growth—impact adjacent economic development and community quality of life?

In sharing information we noted that there are as many vendors who want to participate as can be accommodated on a Saturday morning, so we probably do not have a good measure of supply and demand. We noted that, because the current location has always been a temporary location, there has been no investment in signage, in vendor and customer amenities, or in physical infrastructure that would support market growth.

In fact, except on Saturday mornings, the Market is invisible. What is the significance of that? If the Market is invisible, then, so is the vital, the fundamental Market business: the exchanges by which a community draws nourishment from its land and from its labor. This process is a powerful symbol of community health, and its regular repetition at a public market enables our community to celebrate basic truths about our lives, about the place where we live. Made permanently visible, this activity, our public City Market, we suggest, can contribute even more to our community than it does now, and can stimulate development of a Market District.

Because we have thought of the current location as a temporary location for so long, perhaps we have come to think that the market should only be a Saturday morning market and not grow and change, so that any location will do as long as it is available on Saturday mornings.

Our research shows that many towns and cities think differently and have made the expanded in-town public market an essential part of community development and its success an indicator of quality of life. In these cases market growth typically is enabled by a shift in market management, as city governments unburden themselves of complete oversight of their markets, and begin to share functions with independent nonprofits; expanded public markets cover operating expenses and generate additional revenue, but cannot cover capitalization costs; financing for expanded market infrastructure, including site acquisition and development, involves private investment or private philanthropy and public-private collaboration; and the timeframe for this evolution from a Saturday market in an unimproved parking lot to an expanded market under nonprofit management is ten years.

In sharing these thoughts with you, I want to give you some sense of how the Task Force processed a charge to change the location of the market to consider other kinds of market changes, the distinctive cultural and economic values associated with markets, and the potential for leveraging these values to stimulate related economic growth.

Rather than change the location, we recommend that the City change the Market in its present location. Our recommendations provide steps for making these changes, and they suggest how these changes can enable the City to expand the resources and community support for achieving them.