

A. Background

During the two weeks of November 30 – December 14, 2004, the process of identifying the Vision of the Ybor City Community consisted of a series of public meetings, small public group discussions, and the completion of written questionnaires by citizens. The objective of the process was to generate as much input and public discussion as possible, so that all groups could hear each others' opinions, reach points of consensus, and agree upon appropriate methods of solution to the acknowledged problems and issues.

The elements of community involvement can be described in two broad groups. The first component was the stakeholder/ key group discussions and written questionnaires, and the second was the more structured Charrette process. This chapter will describe in detail the meetings and results of both parts of the community effort. It should be noted that the Ybor City community is extremely engaged in shaping the future of the area, and thus a broad spectrum of participants contributed widely to the effort of identifying a Vision. This section will elucidate the consensus points of this Vision, and Chapter V of this Plan will present the necessary steps to implement this Vision

B. Stakeholder Meetings/ Community Group Discussions

The Ybor City Development Corporation and Civic Design Associates held five days of discussions with various civic, government, resident, business, educational, property owning, and tourism groups. Each discussion focused on either government input or the perspectives of the various interest groups, yet almost all were open to the members of the public, regardless of the discussion's topics of interest. Following is a list of the groups who participated in the discussions held on November 30th, December 1st, 9th, 10th, and 13th, 2004.

Tuesday, November 30
Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio

Wednesday, December 1

Members of Tampa City Council
City Tampa Staff Departments: Arts and Culture, Code Enforcement, Land Development Coordination (zoning, wetzoning), Tampa Police, Parks and Recreation(including Special Events), Legal Staff, Revenue and Finance/Budget, Tampa Fire Rescue, Parking, Stormwater, Water Department, and Transportation.

Thursday, December 9

Barrio Latino Commission and Staff
Tourism (TBCVB, Convention Center, Aquarium, Streetcar) and Special Events
Hotel, Restaurants, and Movie Theater
Bars, Clubs, and Night-time Entertainment Venues
Residents and Property Owners

Friday, December 10

Economic Development Organizations (YCCC/ YCDC, Hillsborough County, Tampa Chamber of Commerce)
Office, Retail, and Creative Artistic Industries
County Commissioner Ronda Storms (via conference call)
Cultural and Educational Institutions (HCC, Ybor Museum Society, Social Clubs)
Industrial and Heavy Commercial Businesses and Property Owners
Pat Bean, Hillsborough County Administrator

Monday, December 13

County Commissioners, incl. Mark Sharpe, Kathy Castor, Ken Hagan, Brian Blair

Wednesday, January 5 and Tuesday, February 15

Vision Committee workshops

C. The Vision Workshop

The Vision Workshop was conducted as a sequence of two related public meetings. The first meeting is used to introduce the project and the process, and to set the stage for the second meeting, where the public engages in an interactive planning exercise to envision the future of their community.

The first public meeting was held Wednesday, December 8 at 6:00 in the evening at the Children’s Board Building. This marked the beginning of the weeklong community input process. After an introduction by YCDC Staff, Jim Hill of Civic Design Associates conducted the two hour session. The purpose of the session was to assist the participants in thinking about the issues they would like to address in Ybor City and to present them with a toolkit of ideas to use in developing their own visions for the area.

Jim outlined the process for the all-day Saturday planning session and engaged the audience in a unique experience by conducting a “consumer preference survey.” The survey consisted of a presentation of approximately 40 photographic slides of housing, streets, sidewalks, retail stores, parks and open spaces, natural environments, architectural styles, and other subjects. The participants were asked to grade each slide on a scale that expressed their opinions or preferences for each condition. On Saturday morning Jim presented the results, discussed in Appendix A.

The main portion of Wednesday evening’s agenda consisted of a presentation to introduce the attendees to the issues to be addressed in the visioning process. Background information on Ybor City was presented as well as a discussion of some of the major elements to be considered in a successful revitalization plan. Issues such as land use and zoning, housing, transit, attractive street life characteristics, and parking strategies were presented by showing examples, both good and bad, from other communities. Approximately 45 citizens attended the Wednesday evening session

On Saturday, December 11, approximately 25 people attended the all-day workshop held at the Children’s Board. The session began by showing the participants the results of their community image survey. The results gave everybody an idea of the kinds of places the community as a whole liked and disliked. They were then able to refer to these images while creating their own new visions for Ybor City. Next, participants were broken into design teams of between 3 and 7 people, and each team was given a table, a large base map of the Ybor City project area, and drawing tools. Six teams were formed, and after several hours of discussing, deliberating, and drawing, each team presented its ideas for Ybor City (in written, and/or drawn form) to the entire group. After all of the team presentations, the entire group participated in a discussion to compile and a list of the consensus items identified by all teams. There was also considerable discussion of several topics about which there was no clear consensus.

The specific points discussed are enumerated below. The point are grouped into a number of broad categories, but are not listed in any particular order of preference or priority.



Figure 3.1 *The public at work during the Vision Workshop.*



Figure 3.2 *The public at work during the Vision Workshop.*

Elements of Consensus

7th Avenue:

7th Avenue must expand and enhance its activity cycle, especially during daytime hours:

- Diversify uses, especially street level tenants.
- Activate the frontage of night clubs to present a more varied and visually interesting face to the pedestrian.
- Police should be more actively engaged as welcome ambassadors.
- Offer the option of valet parking for selected locations.
- Improve and maintain the historic building fronts.

Residential

Support additional infill redevelopment of residential units, especially south of 6th Avenue and east of 22nd Street.

- Reinstate alleys as functional service and parking access elements.
- Encourage smaller, boutique hotels and bed-and-breakfast uses.
- Maintain mixed-use zoning throughout area.
- Facilitate rehabilitation of existing historic homes.
- Allow selective increases in height and density outside of historic core in exchange for certain public amenities.
- Actively enforce the existing noise ordinance.

Parks and Open Space

- Create more walkable streets by enhancing streetscape, introducing traffic calming measures, and reinstating brick streets.
- Provide additional park space, especially in predominantly residential areas.
- Improve Centennial Park and create a stronger connection to 7th Avenue.

- Provide additional public restroom facilities.
- Enhance landscaping along railroad corridor to mark the change in character to a quieter, more residential area.

Arts and Culture

- Target creative retail for recruitment.
- Provide incentives for studio and gallery space.
- Improve mix and balance of festivals and special events to focus on daytime use.
- Consider using some industrial space for “heavy” art studios.

Retail

Target specific retail markets for appropriate locations:

- Urban grocery, drugstore, and neighborhood service establishments such as dry cleaners should be located along Nebraska, Nuccio, Adamo, and 21st/22nd Streets.
- “Main street” unique retail and creative retail concentrated along 7th Avenue.

Transportation

- Work with downtown/convention center to encourage use of streetcar.
- Consider the addition of a lunchtime rubber-tire trolley shuttle between downtown and Ybor City.
- Monitor progress of crosstown connector; re-design 21st and 22nd Streets to be more neighborhood-friendly local streets.

Events

Shift focus and marketing effort for events to emphasize daytime activity and historic/cultural heritage.

- Hold earlier in the daytime and evening.
- Consider small-scale weekly events such as Jazz night, etc.
- Make more active use of Centennial Park for craft fairs, open markets, etc.
- Re-introduce street performers on a controlled basis.

Hillsborough Community College

HCC’s Ybor City campus has been very successful, experiencing strong growth and providing a positive influence in the community. Its future growth should be directed along lines that would encourage the students to circulate more widely into the community:

- Future expansion of facilities should be more integrated into the fabric of the community rather than insular and campus-like.
- Consider occupying vacant storefront space on an interim basis, particularly for more active uses such as art studios, coffee shop, or bookstore.
- Further concentrate creative and hospitality programs at the Ybor City campus.

Tourism

- Strengthen connections between Ybor and downtown/Channelside; promote Ybor as a viable option for the business traveler.
- Improve signage and wayfinding, add informational kiosks (on 16th).
- Encourage the development of additional hotels.
- Improve pedestrian/vehicular safety, especially at crosswalks and by providing additional traffic calming measures.
- Relocate Visitors Center, preferably on 16th between Centro Garage and 7th Avenue.

Marketing

- Consider centralized management/merchandising for the historic core/7th Avenue.
- Hire management specialist to improve tenant mix and visual interest of historic core.
- Branding: De-emphasize the image as an “entertainment district” and re-direct toward the historic and multi-cultural assets.

Technology

- Ybor City should be a continuously active Wi-Fi hot spot to encourage more business and student activity as a part of the everyday street life experience.
- HCC Radio = Ybor radio: Should be the voice of the community, broadcasting educational programs as well as information and marketing for the area.

Code Enforcement

Many existing codes are being unevenly and insufficiently enforced, including:

- Noise ordinance.
- Solid waste: location and staging of containers.
- BLC standards for façade treatment and appearance.
- Building and life-safety code violations.
- Loitering in parking lots.
- Minor parking infractions are too aggressively enforced, discouraging return visits.

Parking

- Build additional public garage on east side of district.
- Reduce the aggressive enforcement of parking infractions, increase the use of “courtesy” tickets.
- Consider re-structuring parking fares to encourage more use of garages and fairly valuing the on-street parking.

Urban Design

- Consider burying overhead utilities.
- Increase use of awnings and balconies for inclement weather.
- Improve lighting levels on side streets and parking areas.
- Improve crosswalk design for pedestrian safety.
- Restore brick streets wherever possible.



Figure 3.3 Public presentations during the Vision Workshop.



Figure 3.4 Public presentations during the Vision Workshop.

Elements of Disagreement

While the community was able to reach a consensus on a number of issues, there were clearly points on which no clear consensus emerged. Foremost among these was a range of issues that may be broadly grouped under the heading of wet-zoning, night clubs, etc. Several points were discussed:

Wet-Zoning

- Closure of 7th Avenue during peak times. There was disagreement about whether to do it at all; if so, at what times, and how best to administer it. Opponents of the closing cited the carnival atmosphere as one that promoted excessive drinking and at times intimidating crowd behavior. Proponents of the closing cited the ability to better control and distribute the crowds and the elimination of cruising as a traffic flow consideration.
- Admission of 18 to 20 year olds into wet-zoned establishments. Many thought that not allowing those under 21 would mitigate the unruly behavior of these youngsters, who seem to be the cause of much of the problems regularly reported. Opponents of the ban pointed out that this does not cause this age group to simply disappear, but that there would be even less oversight of their activities than would occur inside an establishment.
- Many of the aggressive marketing practices, such as hawkers and drink specials, were decried by some, but defended by others as legitimate exercises of free speech and commerce.
- Limitations on new wet-zonings. While it was generally agreed that there was an unusually heavy concentration of wet-zonings in Ybor City, many did not think that new restrictions would be appropriate. Some potential new uses, such as a hotel, would be welcomed, and would expect to have wet-zoned status in order to offer the full range of services.

Centro Ybor

While many thought that Centro Ybor provided an anchor of moderating and stabilizing influence to the district, others thought that the project did not fit in to the overall character. The project is having some difficulty financially, which raises the question of whether the support should be continued. The project represents a significant investment by both the public and private sectors, as well as anchoring a key location in the heart of the district, so that a viable strategy for its future has to be a key part of the overall vision for Ybor City.

Entertainment District

The term “entertainment district” is used by many to describe Ybor City. While this is clearly the case and the source of most of the visitor traffic to the area, it is also the source of most of its notoriety. Some feel that the term is too limiting, and de-emphasizes the wide range of daytime activities that occurs in Ybor City. A more inclusive and holistic image should be pursued that presents Ybor City as a diverse, mixed-use activity center, a neighborhood as well as a destination, that also includes a strong entertainment aspect.

D. Written Questionnaire

A written questionnaire was given to all participants of the public meetings on Wednesday evening, December 8 and the Charrette workshop on December 11. The purpose of this questionnaire was to allow individuals to identify personal issues of importance and to express their concerns and hopes for Ybor City, in a private and independent forum. The responses assist the consultant in understanding the opinions of the citizens and incorporating them into the overall Vision.

The results of the questionnaire revealed many concerns and issues for Ybor City. They are summarized below (not in order of priority, but rather grouped into categories). The statements may conflict with each other as they are expressions of many people with different points of view. A list of individuals who filled out the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix, along with a copy of the form.

Ybor's Strengths:

- National Landmark Historic District.
- Historical and Cultural Significance.
- Architecture.
- World renowned history.
- Diversity and “bohemian” culture.
- Cleanliness.
- Proximity to downtown, the airport, the Interstate.
- Pedestrian friendliness and pedestrian scale architecture.
- Urban/mixed use center.
- Small town, community atmosphere.
- Daytime atmosphere.
- Locally owned restaurants and businesses.
- Active nightlife.

Ybor's Weaknesses:

Wet Zonings/ Bars / Nightclubs

- Proliferation of wetzoned properties/ too many liquor only businesses.
- “Carnival midway” atmosphere creates a feeling of chaos, fueled by the alcohol driven businesses.
- Noise.
- Too many drink specials.
- Type of person attracted to the nightclubs.
- Too few wholesome events.

Seventh Avenue

- 7th Avenue looks vacant during the day because of closed bar storefronts and lack of retail.
- Limited daytime activities.
- Lack of unity among retailers and stakeholders.
- Lack of incentive program for retailers.
- Too many chain stores and franchises.

Negative Public Image

- Negative local image.
- Lack of media attention on the positive aspects of Ybor.

Parking

- Ticketing is too aggressive.
- Location is not convenient to destinations.

Safety and Crime

- Safety issues at night, perceived and real.
- Crime.
- Panhandlers and vagrants.
- Improper police deployment.

City Governance

- Lack of Code enforcement.
- Lack of vision on the part of the city.
- Over restrictive requirements to obtain outdoor café license.

Ybor's Opportunities:

History, Culture and Architecture

- Capitalize on National Historic District designation and rich history.
- Rehabilitate historic buildings.
- Ease BLC restrictions on historic buildings.

Economic Development

- Economic Development campaign is needed.
- Plenty of space for new uses.

Residential

- Opportunity for an increased housing market.
- Large loft buildings could be utilized.

- Unique opportunities for infill residential.

Wi-Fi City

- “Bathe” Ybor City in wireless network pickup to encourage a modern outdoor and community lifestyle.

Retail

- Opportunities for infill retail development.
- Give incentives to property owners to lease to independent retail businesses, but not chains – tourists are looking for unusual stores.
- Allow outdoor cafes.
- Attract a mix of age groups.
- Community and business mixture.

Marketing and Tourism

- Establish a marketing budget and rebuild image : run a “Myth/Reality” campaign.
- Media “blitz” to attract more tourists as well as new residents and businesses.
- Expand hotel/lodging business.

Hillsborough Community College

- Involve HCC physically and culturally in the Ybor Community as well as in planning for Ybor’s future .

Ideas for the future.

(Please note, these are not consensus items, but rather individual statements. The Consensus Vision can be found in Section IV.B. below.)

Neighborhood Lifestyle

- A village feel: mix of retail, offices, residences, restaurants, a safe playground for children.

- Mix of housing, businesses (including government offices, library, and shops), arts, nightclubs, and greenspaces.
- Improved residential options.
- Neighborhood facilities like small drugstore, grocery, bookstores.

Parks, Sidewalks, Streetlights

- Safe, green spaces within walking distance of residents.
- Create linear park along the north side of Adamo from 26th Street to Channelside.
- Residential areas need sidewalks and streetlights.

Café Society

- A Café Society: urban, mixed use and family friendly place to live.
- Remove street parking and widen sidewalks for outdoor cafes (allow wet zoning for outdoor cafes).
- Places to dine, dance, and shop in a well-lighted environment.
- Encourage artists and creative businesses.
- Street entertainers.

Capitalize on History

- Create greater awareness of National District status.
- Rehabilitate historic buildings to BLC standards.

Law enforcement

- Neighborhood “beat” police.
- Make panhandling and loitering illegal.
- Redeploy police as “Ambassadors of good will” who can assist visitors.

Special Events

- Weekly arts and crafts events – bring in families.

- Hold the “drink-ups” at the Fair Grounds.
- Have an annual music festival similar to South by Southwest in Austin.

Tourism

- Actively encourage tourism.
- Create outposts and informational kiosks manned by informed individuals.
- Ybor City could become the #1 place to visit in Tampa for tourists, residents, businesses because of its history and culture.

City Governance

- Get rid of nightclubs that only attract young people.
- Reduce noise at night to attract consumers with money to spend.

E. Additional Research and Initial Feedback

From Sunday, December 12 to Tuesday, December 14, the consulting team performed additional site research and analyzed the findings of the Saturday Charrette. On the afternoon of the 14th, an initial report was given in a public meeting to the Visioning Committee of the Ybor City Development Corporation. Following the meeting, the consultants returned to their offices in Delray Beach and Houston, TX to prepare the Vision Plan for a second public meeting with the Visioning Committee on January 5, and a Public Presentation on January 10.

The consultants met with the Visioning Committee and attending members of the public on January 5, 2005 to present their initial recommendations for Ybor City. Discussion ensued about the Vision Statement and other aspects of the recommendations in order to prepare for the Public Presentation.

F. Public Presentation and Follow-up

The Ybor City Vision Plan was presented to the public at the Children’s Board building on the evening of January 10, 2005. Attendance was high; over 100 people came out to see and hear how their suggestions and comments from the December 11 Charrette were incorporated into an overall vision. This presentation concentrated primarily on addressing the vision: Ybor City was depicted in its future ideal state to demonstrate how a successful execution of the plan might appear. An outline of the steps necessary to achieve this was presented in summary form; the main objective was to gauge the community’s reaction and affirm the general direction. The details of implementation were subsequently addressed in a series of YCDC committee meetings to discuss and respond to various aspects of the plan. The following committees met to provide commentary to the plan:

Arts & Cultural Affairs
Parking and Valet
Comprehensive Planning and Infrastructure
Seventh Avenue
Law Enforcement
Special Events
Marketing

Finally, the Ybor City Development Corporation Board met on January 25th to consider the recommendations of the plan and to offer their comments.

The cumulative commentary, as well as other public comments that were received, were incorporated into the preparation of the final plan, presented in Sections IV and V of this report. It should be noted that the substance of this report remains the consultant’s recommendations. While much of the commentary was incorporated into the final report, it was important to maintain this document as an independent analysis and recommendation. In some cases, the desires expressed by certain elements in the community were conflicting, and had to be resolved according to the consultant’s expertise and judgment.