

Container eateries, parklets proposed for Norfolk

NORFOLK

Downtown Norfolk, it's time for a makeover.

City Manager Marcus Jones and his staff are pitching ideas to enhance the feel of downtown, its new arts district and other areas. They include mini parks, use of cargo containers for eateries or coffee shops and better lighting on Granby Street.

The ideas are “not new in the global perspective, but they certainly would be new to Norfolk,” said Mary Miller, president and CEO of the [Downtown Norfolk Council](#) [1]. “They just add another layer of vibrancy to a community.”

Assistant City Manager Ron Williams Jr. recently outlined some ideas for City Council members:

- Containers: Maersk Line donated cargo containers for the temporary [Plot park](#) [2] at Main and Granby streets, but The Plot will be dismantled for construction on a new hotel and conference center. The park will be relocated at the former Zedd's building lot in the Granby Street arts district.

Williams thinks our port city is a good place for containers housing temporary pop-up businesses while bigger development is planned. He cited a container coffee house in Austin, Texas, as an example, and also a container shopping district built in Manhattan after Hurricane Sandy damaged the seaport.

A container in the arts district could “keep that plaza active and build on the growth that we've already had,” he said.

The city would not get involved in construction of the projects but would encourage them, he said.

Miller said a container would allow a business to open quickly without overhead and provide flexibility in its look. New York has many of them.

“It activates a space that would otherwise be empty” she said.

- Parklets: In September, the city allowed five metered spaces downtown to be used as [temporary parks](#) [3] for sitting or dining. Williams said the little green spaces are attractive and the city should have a regular parklet program, perhaps modeled after San Francisco's. A group or business that wants a parklet might pay a fee to offset the loss of parking meter revenue.

- Lighting: City officials are talking to a Pittsburgh company about how to make Granby look more attractive. Lighting of trees and buildings would help, Williams said.

From 1909 to 1925, archways of light bulbs stretched across Granby Street. Duplicating that with LED lighting could create vibrancy, Williams said. Talks with Dominion Virginia Power are ongoing.

“If we want to set ourselves apart and we want Granby Street to have this really unique identifier, that just could be done beautifully with lighting,” Miller said.

The ideas come at a time of rapid residential development downtown and the emergence of vendors selling food

from trucks and carts.

Some of the ideas stem from the planning projects the city did last spring in the Granby arts district [4] and last fall on 35th Street. [5]

Dallas consultant Team Better Block helped lead a volunteer effort in each district to show what they would be like if they were home to more shops, galleries and entertainment. Part of the demonstrations included parklets and measures to slow traffic, encourage bicycles and make the areas friendly for pedestrians.

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[1] <http://www.downtownnorfolk.org/>

[2] <http://hamptonroads.com/2012/04/urban-park-be-temporary-fix-norfolk-eyesore>

[3] <http://hamptonroads.com/2013/09/temporary-parks-pop-place-parking-norfolk>

[4] <http://hamptonroads.com/2013/04/hundreds-attend-better-block-arts-district-norfolk>

[5] <http://hamptonroads.com/2013/11/better-block-attracts-attention-both-good-and-bad>

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