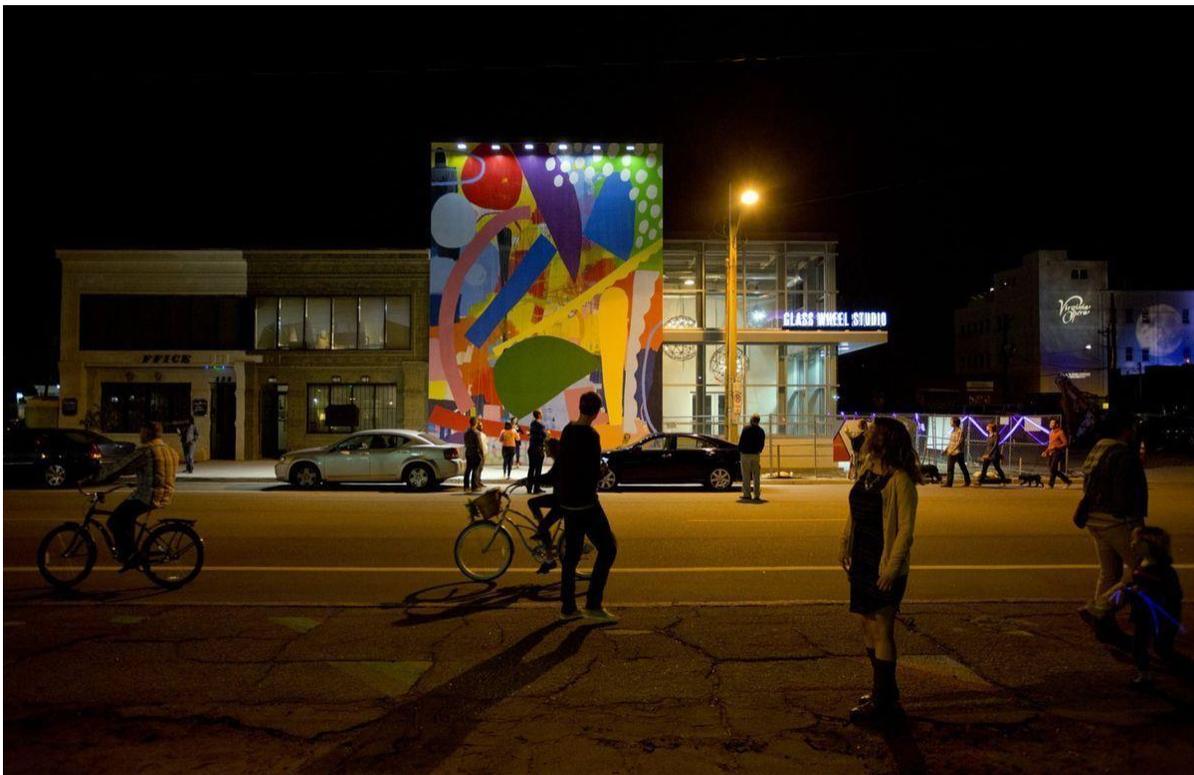


NFK Dreams: Listen to Virginia Beach, millennials. Norfolk is your home

- By Jesse Scaccia
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- Thé N. Pham | The Virginian-Pilot

A mural is seen on West Olney Road in Norfolk during the kickoff of the NEON Festival in October.

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One of the highest-ranking officials in Virginia Beach recently offered a crackerjack suggestion to millennials in his city: maybe you'd be happier in Norfolk.

And you know what? He's right. And it's advice millennials across the region should consider as well.

It was Virginia Beach City Treasurer John Atkinson who said, [as reported by The Pilot's Jordan Pascale](#), "millennials who want public transportation and dense living aren't a good fit for Virginia Beach and should move to Norfolk."

It reminds me of the scene in "The Big Lebowski" where the sheriff kicks the Dude out of Malibu.

"Stay out of Virginia Beach, millennials!" Atkinson may as well have said as he threw his coffee mug at their foreheads. "Stay out of Virginia Beach, deadbeats!"

Atkinson probably doesn't have to worry about millennials wanting to live at the Beach anyway. It's not the kind of place they think offers a high quality of life.

According to research cited by Pew Charitable Trusts, the neighborhood visions that most appeal to millennials -- who are usually defined as the generation born from the early 1980s to the late 1990s -- are "urban and described as dense, close-knit, lively and vibrant," while the least appetizing sound a whole lot like Virginia Beach: "suburbs they called uniform, faceless and cookie-cutter."

Mayor Sessoms, we have a problem.

Norfolk, we are the solution.

Downtown Norfolk is the urban core of Hampton Roads. With all due respect to Hampton, which verges on a city feel here and there, Norfolk is the only city in the region where you can feel small among all the big buildings. Coming home from a trip, the Norfolk skyline stands to greet you like soldiers at salute.

The Wells Fargo building is like a cyclops glowing with a mighty pink eye toward the heavens. The Bank of America building is like a contemporary sun dial, keeping time from street to street.

Why do we love that dense, urban, metropolis vibe? Because it inspires us to dream. You feel like something bigger than you is happening, but that's OK, because you're a part of it, too.

You see the logo of a Fortune 500 Company, Norfolk Southern, and you're reminded from here the ports and rail lines can take you anywhere.

You see the murals in the NEON and you're reminded our hearts are wild, no matter how much adulthood we pile over them.

In downtown Norfolk we keep a battleship docked nearby because we're tough like that, too. Deal with us, Atkinson.

"We have studied the trends and more and more young people are moving to urban core cities," said Lori Crouch, the city's corporate communications director. "We are in the running for ADP (jobs targeting millennials) because its leadership noted that Norfolk's light rail system, diversity, higher education institutions and vibrant, walkable downtown made Norfolk an attractive locale for its workforce."

It's about more than downtown, though. We've got a beach too, by the way, and one that is a whole lot more chill than the "Broceanfront," stretching from historic Willoughby, through gritty (and wonderful) Ocean View, and onto charming East Beach. We've got Ghent. We have suburban neighborhoods along rivers, creeks, and the Chesapeake Bay. We have an array of cultures living within the city limits. We've got history in these cannonballs.

Demographically speaking, Norfolk already belongs to millennials because there are far more of them in the city than any other generation. According to Norfolk Census data, 81,255 of Norfolk's residents are 20 to 34, which is double the number of people age 50 to 64.

Norfolk is where the activists of Hampton Roads find - no, create - a home. We fight for transportation. We fight for better schools. We fight for art. We fight to be heard. We fight because if being a millennial means anything, it means believing the world can be better, and that we each have a role in that.

What more exciting place for a world changer to be than Norfolk, which the earth is already changing through sea level rise?

"I can't imagine living anywhere else," said Erica Elder, a millennial who moved to Norfolk after being "miserable" in Virginia Beach.

Sooner or later my guess is that light rail will find its way from Norfolk to Virginia Beach. It will be arriving to take the millennials home.

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