

# Noisette—the future of North Charleston is finally under construction

Six years have passed since Noisette Co. CEO John Knott gave me a sneak peek at a map of North Charleston displaying the outlines of a project to redevelop 3,000 acres in the heart of the city. John could barely contain his excitement about the opportunity to work with Mayor Keith Summey, city council and the citizens of North Charleston on one of the most ambitious redevelopment projects in the nation.



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Finally, after years of efforts and countless hurdles, the vision of a new North Charleston is starting to be transformed into reality. Key mileposts were reached last year with the presentation of the project's master plan to the community and the transfer of key parcels of land to the Noisette Co. The company will directly develop only about 10% of the 3,000-acre project, but the Noisette master plan provides guidance and planning for the entire 3,000 acres.

The master plan document is a marvel to behold (and to hold, since it weighs several pounds). The only way to appreciate the breadth and depth of the plan is to spend time poring over its oversized but well organized and illustrated pages. But now there's also a window onto those pages via the company's new web site, [www.noisettesc.com](http://www.noisettesc.com).

You can visit the site and download PDF files of the master plan to take a closer look, but the easiest starting point is simply to browse the site, which is deftly color coded—the blue section gives you the vision, the green delivers the detail and the orange section provides the “community roundtable” that invites comments about the project and posts community news.

## Not just in cyberspace...

Of course the real action is taking place on the ground in North Charleston. Real estate activity is up. Developers are putting their money down in anticipation of new opportunities. Young professionals are doing the same, seeking out affordable housing and placing their own bets on the prospects for finding the good life in an old community that is still rough around the edges.

That's the same kind of faith and vision that brought preservationists, developers and Charleston Mayor Joe Riley together to turn a dilapidated Charleston peninsula into a showcase of restoration and urban vitality.

As with Charleston's historic district, the changes in North Charleston will take time. But big things are happening. Work should begin soon on Riverfront Park on the old Navy base, with an opening ceremony planned for next summer. Visiting the site, it still takes a little imagination to see what a remarkable venue this is going to be for the people of North Charleston, but that's what vision is all about. Charleston's popular Waterfront Park was at one time a dirt parking lot and is now an outstanding public space that serves visitors and residents alike.

## Mastering the master plan

Appropriately, the master plan begins with a famous quote from Chicago's legendary city planner Daniel H. Burnham:

*Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing consistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.*

I can't do justice in this column to the scope and vision of the Noisette master plan, so I hope you will spend time on the web site and make your own connection

to the work that went into this document and the work that's underway in North Charleston.

I wonder how many people will really grasp the essence of the plan, the “Triple Bottom Line—a balance among people, planet and prosperity—embodying the belief that sustainable cities must be equally responsive to social needs, environmental responsibility and economic vitality.”

Taken alone, these high-sounding words might be dismissed as a New Age fantasy. But as you dig into the parts and pieces of the master plan, you'll find that the core vision is backed up by a coherent and very detailed roadmap for dealing with a multitude of issues, such as restoring the natural environment, using sustainable “green” building practices and preserving existing neighborhoods. Respect for the history of the area and its citizens is addressed along with more mundane but vitally important issues such as transportation, utilities, open space and recreation facilities.

And if this weren't enough, the Noisette Co. recently announced the formation of the Noisette Urban Alliance, a national network of manufacturers that will assist with sustainable redevelopment in the 3,000-acre Noisette District. Alliance members include some pretty big names like Anderson Windows, Carrier, Herman Miller, Kohler, Owens Corning and Whirlpool. (See Dennis Quick's article on page 39).

These are exciting times for North Charleston, and by extension, for the entire Charleston region. I really hope that city and county planners, developers, environmental groups and citizens from around the region will take a close look at Noisette's master plan and consider how they might make use of the plan's concepts and overall approach to urban redevelopment.

Like Chicago's Daniel Burnham, Mayor Summey and John Knott have “made no little plans” for the city of North Charleston, and we'll all be better off for their efforts. 