Enhancing the Wilmington Experience



Wilmington Renaissance Corporation

Strategic Plan 2006-2008

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INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth strategic plan of the Wilmington Renaissance Corporation (WRC) since it was created under the name "Wilmington 2000" in 1993.

The planning process for this plan focused on creating small groups of constituents who met and discussed ideas around a specific topic. There were five groups who focused on issues related to business development, residential development, events and attractions, transportation and infrastructure.

After these groups met and created a framework for the plan, a WRC staff member then wrote the draft plan. The draft plan was emailed to the small group participants for feedback. Following their responses, all five groups were invited to attend a full group meeting to discuss the plan. Once the comments from the full group were vetted and any changes to the plan were made, the draft plan was put on the WRC web site and WRC's 1,500+ enews subscribers were invited to respond to the plan.

Once comments were received from all parties, a draft plan was submitted to the board of directors for review, comment and following any additional changes, approval at the September 29, 2005 meeting of the WRC and WRDC board.

The plan outlines the activities and initiatives that WRC will focus on in the next three years. Since WRC's last strategic plan was drafted some four years ago, there have been significant developments in and around the downtown.

The New Castle County Courthouse is complete, filling the void that previously existed at the corner of Fourth & King streets. More office space has been created and filled in the downtown and along the Christina riverfront, including new MBNA office buildings and a new headquarters building for the Buccini/Pollin Group. Other office buildings that are planned or under development include The Renaissance Center at Fourth & Market streets and the new WSFS headquarters at Delaware Avenue & Washington Street.

New restaurants have opened both in the downtown and along the Christina riverfront. As well, new retail stores have opened in the downtown, including shops in Ships Tavern District and downtown's first upscale fresh food market – The Corner Market at Ninth & King streets.

Three major downtown/riverfront residential projects – Residences at Rodney Square, Ships Tavern Mews and Christina Landing – have opened and are occupied by a melting pot of a new urban residential base. The Delaware College of Art & Design has also leased a building adjacent to their main building for students interested in living "on campus." Other downtown residential developments are planned, particularly along the Market Street corridor.

Major infrastructure improvements have been completed and continue along portions of Market Street, opening downtown's main artery to two-way traffic and on-street parking. A vehicular and pedestrian directional signage system has been designed, funded and is ready for installation in the coming months. This system will initially be installed in the downtown and along the riverfront with long-term plans for expansion along the major artery roads in and around the city. In assessing WRC's previous strategic plan, it appears that the direction set was appropriate, and significant progress was made, though not as much or as quickly as was anticipated. Accordingly, this strategic plan does not represent a major change in direction, but rather a fine-tuning of, and recommitment to, the direction set in the previous plan.

One major issue is the role of transportation in development of the downtown and its potential impact on the economic viability of Wilmington. As the downtown and riverfront areas continue to develop and become destinations for residents and visitors alike, it is important that WRC, working with the Office of the Mayor and other strategic partners, work toward transportation improvements that will make the city more comfortable for vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Now, as Wilmington is poised on the brink of truly achieving its renaissance, it is important to focus on the details that will enhance the Wilmington experience for everyone – workers, residents and visitors alike. The plan's three topic areas outline the focus going forward – Business Development, Transportation & Infrastructure, and Residential Development & Attractions.

As a small, privately-funded nonprofit with a modest annual budget, WRC can make a difference in Downtown Wilmington only through working closely with many partners, and through communicating effectively with the people who provide support and encouragement for its work. WRC's closest partner is the City itself, both the Administration of Mayor James Baker and the City Council led by President Theodore Blunt. WRC is grateful for the support we receive from the City for our activities and values the public-private partnership that has grown stronger each year.

WRC also works closely with a wide variety of public, private, community and nonprofit partners. Of particular importance are partnerships with development organizations, community associations and other organizations dedicated to improving the downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods.

This three-year plan has been developed to build on WRC's strength as an advocate for Downtown Wilmington and its development. A small staff, supported by a number of working groups, will work to achieve the goals set out in this plan. WRC's success, as always, will be greatly enhanced through its collaboration with public and private sector representatives, business owners, residents and persons generally interested in Wilmington's renaissance. These partnerships are at the core of any success that Wilmington Renaissance has had in the past or will continue to have in the future.

We appreciate the efforts of everyone who contributed to the development of this strategic plan. We welcome comments – please send them to us at wrc@bigplanet.com.

Carrie E. White Managing Director

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Wilmington Renaissance is to develop and implement strategies that will increase the economic vitality of Downtown Wilmington, strengthen its role as a center of educational, cultural and social activity, and enhance its reputation as an exciting place to live and visit by marketing Wilmington's unique history and character.

As a privately funded, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, Wilmington Renaissance's mission is only achievable when done in collaboration with key partners that support the development of Wilmington's downtown. Such partners include Wilmington's Mayor and City Council, State and County officials, the business community, other development organizations, cultural arts and historic organizations, neighborhood organizations, and any other private, public or not-for-profit organizations as appropriate.

Working with its development partners, Wilmington Renaissance will work to:

- Improve the downtown business experience for workers and business owners alike by supporting existing businesses and working to attract new businesses including retail, restaurants and entertainment venues that will support the downtown workers needs;
- Grow the current downtown residential community, through the marketing of existing downtown living spaces, recruitment of businesses interested in building more residential developments and the recruitment of businesses that serve the needs of downtown residents;
- Expand educational, arts and cultural activities and events to increase the number of people who visit Wilmington and support the economic growth of the city;
- Advocate for the development and implementation of infrastructure and transportation improvements that will create a more friendly, comfortable and easy-to-use city.

The downtown area is specified in the map at the end of this plan.

VISION STATEMENT

(The Vision Statement is meant to articulate what the reality will be, if the mission is achieved.)

Wilmington is a thriving center of commerce, education, tourism and culture. As a destination that is clean, safe and attractive, the city bustles with activity in the daytime, in the evening, and on weekends. People from throughout the mid-Atlantic region and beyond come to Wilmington to work, to live, to shop, and to be entertained.

Established businesses have continued to grow and new businesses have arrived. The employee base is strong and job opportunities have expanded for both skilled and unskilled workers. Increased employment and commercial activity in the downtown has strengthened the City's finances and allowed a high level of City-provided services throughout the city. Downtown has become a preferred business location because of its efficiencies, and its attractiveness to decision-makers and employees alike. The downtown employee experience is positive from the point of entry into the city, through walking around the downtown, to the completion of the workday.

A new generation of "city dwellers" has been attracted to a variety of downtown living opportunities in and around the city center. Wilmington's neighborhoods are flourishing and many collaborative projects link downtown businesses and organizations with community groups.

Contributing heavily to Wilmington's vitality is an impressive offering of cultural and social attractions and events. Many people, young and old, come downtown for cultural activities, to pursue their education, and to have fun at a wide variety of events. Visitors from near and far, traveling on business or for pleasure, are drawn to downtown's shops, restaurants and events, and add to its diversity and excitement.

It's easy to get to and around downtown, by car, bicycle, transit or walking. Entrances to the city and downtown are attractive, and a unique system of signs makes it easy for first-time visitors to get to any location. The city's infrastructure and appearance convey an inviting sense of pride and well-being.

Close collaboration and private/public partnerships among business, government, arts and education institutions and community associations continue to foster economic vitality. Word of the city's success is spreading and Wilmington is increasingly being perceived as a model for private/public partnerships in downtown redevelopment.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2006-2008

Enhancing the Wilmington Experience

Business Growth

A strong central core is the key to the city's prosperity. With the opening of Market Street to two-way traffic and the development of Ships Tavern District, work continues to create an unbroken corridor of economic activity linking the Christina and Brandywine rivers. The heart of the downtown runs from the Amtrak station to Rodney Square, with branches out along Delaware Avenue to I-95, and north to the Brandywine. A major weakness of the downtown, the relatively undeveloped area between 4th and 7th streets, will begin to change once The Renaissance Center opens in 2006.

For the central core to be successful, it must be able to compete with suburban locations to attract office, retail and other businesses. Suburban locations are typically less costly, so the city core must focus on its advantages: density of activities that bring efficiencies to business, its history and unique ambience, and a diversity of activities that are attractive to employees. These advantages can be maximized by providing a continuous, physically attractive corridor of strong and diverse activity between the Christina and Brandywine Rivers with emphasis on the Rodney Square area, particularly along Market Street, the historic heart of the city.

Working with strategic partners in real estate, development, small business development and government, Wilmington Renaissance Corporation will work on specific efforts related to the following areas:

Web-Based Retail/Business Development

- Continue to enhance & market the web-based retail space catalog that showcases the available retail and office spaces in the Central Business District; expand to include upper floor office spaces.
- Create a web-based economic development tracking system for Wilmington development projects that will be designated by neighborhood, available for public viewing and provides details of the projects in relation to size, scale and project contacts.

Streamline Permit Process

- Working with the City's Department of Licenses & Inspection (L&I), WRC will work to educate contractors, developers and small business owners on the L&I permitting process as a means of trying to improve the process for all involved.
- Create a special web page as part of <u>www.downtownwilmington.com</u> that will provide pertinent information for developers and small business owners in relation to:
 - City permitting process and suggestions for making it an easier process for the developer
 - Encouraging contractors/developers to engage in a preliminary plan review with L&I staff
 - o Provide estimated timing for permitting
 - Show a flow chart of the L&I process

Façade Improvement

- Working with the Delaware Economic Development Office, the Small Business Administration and the City of Wilmington, WRC will explore funding for façade improvements that can be provided to downtown Property Owners.
- Working with the City of Wilmington and Wilmington City Council, WRC will advocate for an ordinance to set a standard for vacant upper floors of properties. Particularly, this will address the use of plywood to cover upper floor windows, which gives the entire building an appearance of being vacant and creates a false sense of an unsafe neighborhood.

Amenities

- In an effort to recruit retailers that are especially needed in the downtown, WRC will put specific information on its web site listing the amenities that are needed in the downtown.
- Recognizing that there are a number of existing businesses that already provide certain amenities, WRC will work to market those to residents, workers and visitors through its web site, e-news and *CityLife* magazine. An example is the request for a downtown grocery store, however The Corner Market, although not as large as a grocery store found in the suburbs, does provide almost as much in terms of basic amenities.

Transportation & Infrastructure

The most important infrastructure elements from the perspective of downtown development are transportation (vehicular, public and pedestrian), parks and streetscapes. Transportation is critical to get people efficiently in and around the downtown area, while parks and streetscapes, are the largest element in the physical attractiveness of the downtown.

Together, these elements have a great impact on the economic viability of Wilmington. If vehicular traffic is frustrating for drivers, this gives commuters and visitors a negative impression of the city. If public transportation is not easy to use and readily available when needed, this creates a sense of an unfriendly city. If pedestrian travelers are unable to cross busy roadways, they begin to feel as though they are not welcome in the downtown area.

Although parks and streetscapes are often considered aesthetic finishing touches, they have a significant impact on the economic growth of an urban area. Parks that are well maintained and programmed frequently for special events make visitors and users feel welcome and creates an overall positive sense about an area. In the same way, streetscapes that are well maintained and attractive have the same impact.

Recognizing that these elements play an important role in downtown development and recognizing opportunities for improvements in the Central Business District, Wilmington Renaissance Corporation will focus on improvements that will make the downtown experience for vehicular and pedestrian travelers as comfortable as possible.

Moving People

- Working with key partners in the transportation industry such as DART, The Riverfront Development Corporation, City of Wilmington, the Transportation Management Association and others, WRC will work to create opportunities in the following areas of public transportation:
 - Advocating for better Trolley service that would include more or better routes and the lengthening of time between stops so as to discourage Trolley drivers from driving too fast along their route. As well the possibility of creating an express route during lunchtime that will take folks quickly between Rodney Square and the Riverfront area.
 - Working with DART to improve marketing of public transportation opportunities that will address issues such as easier to understand printed schedules, online schedules similar to a "mapquest" system (how to get from Point A to Point B and back) and a return of the downtown inset into the printed maps.
- Working with the City to create more pedestrian friendly enhancements such as:
 - A countdown crosswalk system that shows pedestrians the number of seconds remaining until the traffic light will change at the intersection they are crossing.
 - WRC will advocate the Central Business District as a priority zone for striping of the crosswalks
 - Working with the City and Downtown Visions, WRC will advocate that large planters that are placed on sidewalks by private owners be moved out of the middle of sidewalks so as not to squeeze pedestrian traffic.
- Working with the East Coast Greenways, Delaware Greenways and other key partners, WRC will continue to advocate for the establishment of greenways paths in the Downtown. In addition, WRC will suggest the creation of a brochure that highlights how to safely bicycle in the Downtown.

Drivable City

- In the last few years, WRC successfully advocated for the creation of a directional signage system for the downtown and riverfront area known as the Wayfinding Signage Program. In an effort to continue the promotion of downtown venues and make the city more easily navigable for vehicular and pedestrian traffic, WRC will seek to expand the already developed signage system beyond the downtown to the gateway roads that come into the city including major routes such as I-95, Rte. 13, Rte. 52, Rte. 202, Rte. 141, Rte. 41, and Rte. 9.
- Recognizing the impact that gateways have on vehicular traffic as it enters an urban area, WRC will work to identify gateway improvements needed, create a strategy for those improvements and a work-plan to see those improvements accomplished.
- As most people who drive into Wilmington will want to park their car easily, WRC will work toward the following goals as they relate to parking:
 - 1. Working with partners at DART, parking garages and City parking meters to institute a Smart Card system where one debit-like card can be used to ride public transportation, park in garages and park at meters.
 - 2. Improve marketing of parking garage hours and locations through web site and *CityLife Wilmington* publication.
 - 3. In relation to on-street parking, WRC will advocate for greater enforcement and penalty for double parking; the establishment of short term and long term parking zones; and possible marketing opportunities for small businesses on meter screens.

Streetscape Improvements

- With the work that has already begun on opening Market Street to two-way traffic, there has been a lot of discussion about the continuation of streetscape improvements in the downtown that address not only sidewalks, but also building architecture. WRC will work closely with the City's Design Review Commission and other partners to create a Design Policy for the Central Business District that will address the following issues:
 - Design should define sense of place
 - Encourage unique & diverse building architecture
 - Have continuity of sidewalks
 - Create a special streetscape where appropriate (ex: DCAD campus)
 - Encourage enforcement of building appearance standards
 - o Include benches and bike racks where appropriate

Marketing: Residential & Attractions

Establishing market rate residential communities and having events and programming that stimulate those residents and attract visitors, is the single most effective way to build 24-hour, seven days a week activity in the downtown, and thereby ensure the sustainability of redevelopment efforts.

Wilmington has made an impressive start in recreating a downtown residential community through residential developments at the Delaware College of Art and Design (DCAD), Quaker Village Apartments, Ships Tavern Mews, Residences at City Center, Residences at Rodney Square and Christina Landing. Future residential developments will include Justison Landing, The Renaissance Centre and a condo-development at 14th & Washington Streets. As well, Wilmington is well known for being a town that boasts wonderful special events and entertainment venues.

However, there is always room for growth. Recognizing an opportunity for growth, Wilmington Renaissance will work to create more residential and event growth that will draw even more residents and visitors. This will be achieved in the following ways:

Affordable Housing/Residential Development Growth

- Although Wilmington has seen a lot of growth in terms of high-income housing, it has not seen as much growth for moderately priced housing in the downtown. Knowing it is important to have a mix of both types of residential development, WRC will work to identify specific areas in the city that could be suitable for affordable housing developments. Specifically, the area from Fourth to Ninth and Shipley to West Streets would be a good area as it would provide a transition from lower income residential development in West Center City to the higher income residential developments in the downtown.
- Through its web site and publications, WRC will also work to help market the existing or growing residential developments that exist in the downtown.

Communication

- WRC's new *CityLife Wilmington* magazine has proven to be a great success in telling the positive Wilmington story. This magazine is currently published quarterly and is distributed directly to over 15,000 downtown employees. Building on the success of this publication, WRC will increase the publishing frequency to six times per year and include intermediate updates on the web site. To help generate ideas for content and the city overall, WRC and TSN Publishing will create a *CityLife* committee that will meet quarterly.
- WRC's web site, www.DowntownWilmington.com, has grown to be a known resource for information related to Downtown Wilmington. WRC will continue to critique the site's content and ensure that it is a helpful resource for anyone interested in living, working, doing business or enjoying themselves in Wilmington.
- WRC's weekly e-news has become a well-known resource for news and information related to the downtown. Working with WRC's board member companies and other downtown businesses, WRC will work to grow the readership, and therefore the impact, of the enews publication.

Branding Wilmington

• As Wilmington continues to grow and become a more popular place to live, work and visit, it will become increasingly important for the city to be identified through a theme or brand. Working with key partners, WRC will work to develop a brand or theme that will highlight the city's rich culture, history and identity.

Special Events, Programs & Use of Public Spaces

- Wilmington's public art program has been a unique and successful way to draw visitors to the downtown. WRC will explore the continuation of this program, or one similar, as long as sponsors and the public are excited and enthusiastic about the program. WRC will work to make the program more interactive with the community and will explore partnerships with city arts organizations where appropriate.
- WRC will continue to support events and special programs that draw visitors to the downtown and stimulate economic growth for the small businesses in the downtown (ex: festivals, city anniversaries, etc.). This will be achieved through marketing and public relations support, and where appropriate, participating in planning efforts.
- Public spaces in Wilmington are often underutilized, while being the most beautiful part of our city. In an effort to promote utilization of these spaces and continued enhancement of their beauty, WRC will work to address the following issues:
 - Create a catalog of public spaces that are available for use in and around the Downtown
 - Collaborate on programming the spaces, perhaps through a series of special events
 - Find public funding to create permanent public art pieces that reflect the Wilmington community
 - Collaborate with downtown employers on special program for their employees (ex: a lunchtime walking program for Brandywine Park)

Appendices

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Strategic Planning Participants

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p. 16 FINAL 12/15/05 Paul M. McConnell, McConnell Development Megan McGlinchey, Riverfront Development Corporation Judy McKinney-Cherry, Delaware Economic Development Office Marsha Meidling, Becker/Morgan Jeanne Mell, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce Will Minster, Downtown Business Association Thorpe Moeckel, Moeckel Carbonell Associates, Inc. William Montgomery, Office of the Mayor Stephen Nelson, Artisans' Bank Jim O'Hara, Jim O'Hara Realty Associates Joey Outten, Delaware Museum of Natural History Alexander Petrillo, Richard's Alley Association Robert Pierce, AIG Federal Savings Bank Richard Pryor, Wilmington Office of Economic Development John Rago, Office of the Mayor Doug Rainey, The Business Ledger Abby Ray, Wilmington Renaissance Corporation Geoffrev Rogers, The Glenmede Trust Company Lou Rosenberg, Mitchell Associates Keith Schuck, JP Morgan Chase Stan Soja, Wilmington Office of Economic Development Kash Srinivasan, Wilmington Department of Public Works Jeff Starkey, Wilmington Department of Licenses & Inspections Don Stewart, Volunteer Gary Stockbridge, Delmarva Power William Sullivan, University of Delaware Alex Sydnor, Winterthur Charlie Tomlinson, Northlight Advertising Dean Vietri, Downtown Visions Patty Vietri, Downtown Visions Brock Vinton, The Commonwealth Group Clint Walker, Juniper Bank Ronald Walker, New Castle County Chamber of Commerce Enid Wallace-Simms, Delmarva Power Bob Weir, Wilmington Department of Real Estate & Housing Duane Werb, Werb & Sullivan Sue Werb, Simply Elegant Events Carrie E. White, Wilmington Renaissance Corporation John L. Williams, The Williams Law Firm, P.A. James Wolfe, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce Joseph L. Yacyshyn, Wilmington Trust

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