



## “Activate Atlantic Avenue” Six Priorities proposed by the Atlantic Avenue Association



If we agree that Atlantic Avenue is the front door-step to Virginia Beach for millions of visitors every year and that it is in need of revitalization, then it stands to reason that the Activate Atlantic Avenue plan deserves much attention. Presently, the area is outdated, devoid of charm and has sadly become a bit like the old west town of Tombstone, at times a place for outlaws to air out grievances with guns, knives and fists. What could be less attractive! We Virginia Beach citizens - and Coastal

Virginians - deserve much better. After all, these are our streets and sidewalks.

Despite this unsafe situation, the Atlantic Avenue Association sees a big blue ocean of untapped potential along our busiest pedestrian street. Specifically, the area most critical to improve, if not totally transform, is from wherever the proposed Pier is located (15th or 17th St) to 25th Street, and from the Boardwalk to the east side of Pacific Avenue. For the purposes of this proposal, we will call this area the Atlantic Avenue zone.

“Fixing” or “changing” this area will not accomplish the goal of creating anything meaningful or sustainable. The area needs **TRANSFORMATION**. For this to happen, there needs to be a fresh new look in contrast to what’s there now, which is in many ways bland, grey and lifeless (streets, sidewalks, pavers, plantings, lighting, building facades, no piped music, etc).

We envision this transformation a bit like Atlantic Avenue went to Vegas, with spectacular lights, music, art, and live shows. After all, this was the original vision hatched by resort leaders and stakeholders 25 years ago (by what was then the Resort Leadership Council) for BeachStreet USA; however, this wonderful vision, for some unknown reason, was lost. AAA intends to help carry on that vision now, with free public entertainment programming known as **LIVE! ON ATLANTIC** as the centerpiece.

*AAA Board of Directors believes the following 6 priorities would be important first steps to transform the Atlantic Avenue zone into a safe, active, attractive, exciting, original place locals and visitors will love. Details are forthcoming as to exact locations, specific actions, cost estimates and graphic presentation of concepts.*

### **1. Parking: Think LOCAL.**

Public parking needs to be analyzed broadly from a “what people really want” perspective - in other words, not just through the lens of the specific parking budget, but rather through the wide lens of the economic vitality of the entire resort, the desires of visitors (local and tourist) and increased tax revenues. For us to be competitive locally and nationally, and to encourage a better retail and restaurant mix, nothing is more important to us. Here are 3



aspects to the parking piece of the Activate Atlantic Avenue initiative we would like to see happen very soon.

First, parking on Atlantic Avenue is critical to making the Atlantic Avenue district competitive and vibrant. We are grateful the City plans to add parking on Atlantic Avenue this fall, and we feel the start date should be no later than October 1 and continue at least until May 1, maybe with a few busy, crowded weekends excluded. On rainy days, cold days, windy days, etc curbside parking is a huge benefit. Handicapped guests, the elderly and families with small children also appreciate the convenience. Merchants love it.

### *Free 2-Hour Parking for VB Locals*

in City garages is the second parking component we are championing. This special VB locals' deal will generate much goodwill and "show the locals some love."

We see all over social media that locals feel unwanted at the resort and loath having to pay to park to go to their beach. The Northern Beaches of Sydney Australia offer **FREE** parking privileges to locals, and a recent South

African Study shows that **FREE** parking is not only very well received by the local community but is critical to the success of retail areas. This gesture would start to shift the very negative conversation about parking at the resort and would encourage locals to make the resort a part of their lifestyles again. This program would tell locals **WE WANT THEM**. Locals could simply go online to acquire/apply for a locals card. In the process, the City could mine locals' demographic/psycho-graphic data.

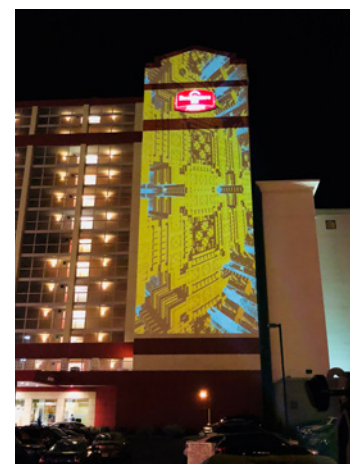
The third component relates to parking garages - present and future. Public parking garages need to be well marked with easy to read **BIG** signage and accessible for beach goers. For example, the parking garage at 25th Street and Pacific is very poorly marked. People drive by and never know it is there. In general, multi-level parking garages are not desired by beach goers carrying beach gear, and if you add in poorly marked garages, beach visitation gets stifled, as is the case at 25th Street.

## *2. Lighting: Think BIG.*

Projected, artistic lighting on building facades is a high-impact way to begin the process of transforming the atmosphere in the Atlantic Avenue

zone and making a unique sense of place people will enjoy and talk about. Let's be first with this. We feel transforming the ambient environment this way might very well encourage better behavior and make the police's job easier, too.

**LIVE! On Atlantic** needs to be wide open and huge. Gateway lighting in strategic areas will designate a special zone in which good things (not bad thugs!) are happen-



ing. **LIVE! On Atlantic** should be in big lights, as if Virginia Beach went to Vegas. Make shows centered on musical arts. Whenever possible, music should be original and local - a reflection of Virginia Beach musical culture. These acts will hopefully attract local followers, not just entertain families who happen to stumble on an act.

Two impressive lit gateways for the LIVE! On Atlantic zone would start at the Pier and end at 25th St, both on Atlantic Avenue. Where possible, string lights along and across the street would make for a very festive atmosphere, like they do in the historic arts district of Scottsdale, AZ.

Side-street lighting needs to be uniform - especially in the heart of the resort between 15th and 25th Streets - with the ability to turn them up in the later hours. Now, in many places there's a "dark alley" feel.

### ***3. Sidewalks: Think BRIGHT.***

The sidewalks and pavers look terrible along Atlantic Avenue and side-streets. Pavers are badly faded and concrete is cracked and uneven everywhere. However, rather than replacing the pavers and concrete, which would be very expensive, we are getting an estimate from a company that has a relatively inexpensive and quick process that can brighten pavers and concrete back to new. Make needed repairs of broken and uneven, dangerous concrete.

Street art that reflects our beach culture and history would add a wonderful, interactive element to designate this area. Get kids and local artists to paint sidewalks and crosswalks. There could be fun contests, great photo ops and PR here. Very low cost.



### ***4. Bike racks, benches and urban art: Think COOL.***

Atlantic Avenue is practically void of art. Cool, hip and functional bike racks on the east and west side of Atlantic Avenue, side streets and connector parks would be a start and would encourage local bike-enthusiast visitation and would again show local folks we want them. Consider bike repair stations, artistic but function-

al bike racks, and modern covered bike areas.

Benches can mimic rocks or modern art for people to enjoy and photograph. These artful touches should not impede pedestrians and would be designed so people could not sleep or stretch out on them - just a place to "take a load off" for a little while - maybe two per block.

Urban art can be anything anywhere. Sprinkled whimsically throughout the **LIVE! On Atlantic** area, artistic touches would further transform the area, reflect local beach culture/history and make for fun photographic moments.



## 5. More clean, modern, managed public restrooms:



### *Think FIRST CLASS.*

People judge a place by its restrooms. This is just as true with public facilities as it is with restrooms in restaurants and malls. Local public surveys tell us this should be a top priority. Please

recognize that what we have is not nearly enough. The public restroom outside of DQ doesn't even have a sign saying it's for the public.



## 6. Incentives and grants: Think NOW.

Consider citywide incentives to spur private investment. We believe Councilman Uhrin is receptive to exploring this. Essentially, what we are asking for is a public/private partnership for small businesses. Here are 2 possibilities:

Incentivize landlords and potential top operators to buy out leases of “deficient” businesses and upgrade with



new, better tenants. Incentives could be based on the following issues with a property: past crime records, code violations, ABC violations, failure to address needed repairs, trash and litter violations, etc., or maybe just the desire of the landlord and under-performing operator to part ways. In any case, a proposed new project to upgrade the site/product must be approved by the City as a distinct fixed improvement, with possibly an added incentive for originality and uniqueness.

This program would encompass

the entire City of Virginia Beach. There could be a 3+/- year window to apply, first come first served. Consider real estate tax reduction incentives.

Secondly, incentivize capital investment by merchants and property owners. There could be a 3+/- year window-tax reduction incentive.

## *Conclusion:*

Transforming Atlantic Avenue would be a big win for everyone. This means making Atlantic Avenue - the front porch to Virginia Beach and the first and last impression millions have of our city every year - a uniquely attractive place locals can love. Proposed developers of the Dome and Pier sites agree that a safe, vibrant Atlantic Avenue would help them succeed. New visitors drawn by the Sports Center deserve an attractive, fun Atlantic Avenue area to make a part of their vacation. The Vibe District deserves a better neighbor.

Finally, we have a distinct advantage over other resorts nearby: an untapped market of 1.5 million “local tourists” within a 45 minute drive of us! Isn't this a big blue ocean we have yet to distinguish and market? Ocean City doesn't have this year-round population density of potential customers. OBX, no. Myrtle Beach, no.

Why not capitalize on our durable competitive advantage here (Warren Buffet concept) and create unique resort attractions (widgets) people want and will positively talk about? Don't we Coastal Virginia locals, and especially we Virginia Beach locals, deserve an attractive "staycation" place to be proud of that is a reflection of our unique surf-side culture and a fun place we would want to make a part of our lifestyles?

These 6 priorities are just a beginning of the process of giving potential customers compelling reasons to be attracted to and buy the Virginia Beach resort product. If we start now, the Atlantic Avenue Association Board of Directors believes it is reasonable to project that all 6 priorities can be accomplished by summer 2019.



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*Helping To Build  
A Great Community Asset*

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