

# VIRGINIA

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Virginia Municipal League

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# Hampton turns 400

Anniversary celebration  
highlights historic past



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CONFERENCE

HAMPTON





**About the cover**

*Peninsula Town Center, the centerpiece of the rejuvenation of the Coliseum Central Business District, is immensely important to Hampton's quest to reposition itself for the next 20 to 30 years as a vibrant and attractive community for living, working, shopping, dining and entertainment. Photo by Buddy Norris.*



**Oct. 3-5, Hampton**

*"Hampton offers plenty to meet your needs and enjoyment, whether it's dining, lodging or shopping ... Our friendly residents, outstanding municipal services and community partnerships make Hampton a great place to live and visit. We want you to feel at home from the moment you arrive."*

*... Hampton Mayor Molly J. Ward*

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The magazine of the Virginia Municipal League

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**Welcome to Hampton**

**City in midst of 400th anniversary celebration**

Hampton, the Civil War site where Union General Benjamin Butler asserted people enslaved were contraband of war, founding site of NASA, and training ground for America's first astronauts, has a compelling history inextricably aligned with that of the nation. North America's oldest, continuous English-speaking settlement is celebrating its 400-year anniversary in 2010. Welcome to Hampton, host for the 105th Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference.

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**Virginia Municipal League Annual Report**



After a very busy and very productive year of representing the interests of local government, the Virginia Municipal League pauses to reflect on its many accomplishments. From the state capitol in Richmond to the halls of Congress in Washington, VML continues to be an essential voice in the debates surrounding some of the most important public policy issues of the times.

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# Mall gave way to new town center with help of public-private partnership



ANTHONY PRATER

**The \$276 million Peninsula Town Center is the largest economic development project in the history of Hampton.**

**M**IKE DOWNES MOVED away from Hampton 20 years ago, but he likes the changes he saw this summer while visiting the new Peninsula Town Center, with its 1.1-million square feet of retail space, offices and luxury apartments.

“This part of Hampton has changed for the better,” Downes said, while watching his 3-year-old daughter, Sofia, frolic in one of the center’s outdoor fountains. “Someone had a good vision.”

That “someone” was a collaboration between Hampton city planners and the private developers of the cutting-edge Peninsula Town Center, an open-air, mixed-use complex that took the place of the worn-out Coliseum Mall that was razed in 2007.

“This is, by far, the largest economic development project in the history of Hampton,” said James Eason, the city’s economic development director.

But dollar figures – \$276 million in development costs and a projected

\$225 million annual tax yield to the city, when the center becomes fully leased – make for only part of the story.

The Peninsula Town Center, the centerpiece of the rejuvenation of the Coliseum Central Business District, is immensely important to Hampton’s quest to reposition itself for the next 20 to 30 years as a vibrant and attractive community for living, working, shopping, dining and entertainment. The center also is expected to create more than 2,000 jobs.

“Added importance is where the town center is located – right at the center of the city, the Hampton Coliseum area, adjacent to Interstate 64, very visible to thousands and thousands of cars every day,” Eason said. The Peninsula Town Center “also replaced a mall that was clearly on the decline. If that mall had continued to decline, it very well could have gone dark, and the ramifications of that could have been very, very significant to Hampton.”

Instead, Hampton boasts a new regional destination that not only is making the rest of Hampton Roads take notice but also may stimulate more private investment nearby and across town. For example, Eason foresees the Peninsula Town Center inspiring the refurbishment of the adjacent 60-acre Riverdale Plaza Shopping Center, augmenting the upscale momentum that has attracted a cluster of medical and high-tech facilities to nearby office parks, and sparking new energy for downtown revitalization.

“The image, the attitude, the positive thoughts that the Peninsula Town Center is generating about Hampton are things that cannot be measured precisely but are very, very real,” Eason said.

Part of the luster of the Peninsula Town Center is, of course, its newness and its array of fashionable stores, specialty shops and restaurants – trendy places, such as Bensi Ristorante Italiano, Chico’s, shoeWoo,



**The Peninsula Town Center is the centerpiece of the rejuvenation of Hampton's Coliseum Central Business District.**

The Limited, Jo Jack's Espresso Café, Build-A-Bear Workshop, Charming Charlie, H&M, Cinebistro, dELiA\*s and Frank Beamer's American Grill.

But the "positive thoughts" that Eason talks about also come from the "new urbanism" design and energetic operation of the center.

The center was created by Steiner + Associates of Columbus, Ohio, and Mall Properties Inc. of New York City, the original developer of the Coliseum Mall in 1973. The more than 50 shops and eateries that have opened so far are laid out on an urban street grid, with stores and restaurants mixed in with each other as would happen in a traditional downtown. There are sidewalks, open spaces, benches, trees, shrubs shrubbery and flowers and frequent activities, such as music and other free entertainment.

Or, as developer Yaromir Steiner said of the place-making design and activities at the Peninsula Town Center, they promote "social gathering as well as shopping."

The convivial concept was so appealing to Greg and Cindy Conley that they signed up for one of the 158 luxury apartments – in The Chapman building – while the Peninsula Town Center was still just an architect's model on display at the old Coliseum Mall. Now that they've moved in, the Conleys say they go out for a drink, a meal or to people-watch almost every evening.

"We came from a small town where everything was on Main Street," said Greg Conley, a retired

Air Force sergeant who grew up in Salem and came to Hampton in 1983. "This is a nice return to Main Street."

Cindy Conley agreed, saying: "It feels like Main Street is right at your back yard ... You don't even have to drive, you just get on your shoes and walk right on out."

Steiner, who has designed town centers in other communities, may have found some of his design inspiration from traditional downtowns. But now downtown Hampton may be borrowing back, as the city's nonprofit Downtown Hampton Development Partnership has hired Steiner as a consultant to help formulate a revitalization strategy for the city's old core. Steiner's initial role is to identify the stakeholders and bring them together to exchange ideas.

"I want to find out what the community values about downtown and how they dream about it for the future and then build a consensus for achieving the vision," Steiner said. "I want to make sure that everyone's voice is heard. The more open we are, the more valuable the outcome will be. When a consensus is widely shared, it is more effective."

"This is a great opportunity to bring a fresh perspective, a fresh set of eyes," said Terry O'Neill, the city's community development director. Steiner "is one of the leading practitioners in mixed-use development. Everybody involved is very excited about having him involved."

But a key difference between creating a strategy for downtown and

developing the Peninsula Town Center, O'Neill said, is that downtown has dozens of property owners while the town center's ownership is centralized.

"But we still think there are some lessons to learn from the town center ... some fundamental principles that apply to downtowns and to the new town centers."

For example, Steiner, O'Neill and Eason, the city's economic development director, noted that Hampton's master plan work some years ago set the stage for the successful development of the Peninsula Town Center.

"When we approached the city, we found out that the city already had a master plan, an overlay," Steiner said. "So doing strategic planning efforts ahead of time is a good lesson for other cities."

For Hampton, the early planning included looking at the street patterns in key areas. "In most towns, the strip shopping centers are linear and one-block deep. We recognized that we wanted something more than that for the Coliseum Central area," O'Neill said. "We started with a grid that connected the streets in multiple ways ... and that would allow logical growth and expansion in organic ways."

But forging a development strategy must go beyond the physical planning, Eason said. "It's very important to understand the financial guts of your city and ask yourself questions like, 'If we don't do anything, where will you likely be in three, four or five years?' ... And then once you form a strong plan, you have to have the will and commitment to do what's necessary."

Such multidimensional planning is necessary in Virginia, Eason said, because localities are severely restricted in what they can do to generate new revenue without permission from the state.

"That's the essence and guts of what it really is about," Eason said. "You have to know where you are as a city, make your choices and have the will to carry them out."

And as shopper Mike Downes said, "It's nice to see that someone took the time to really think this out." 