

The RAFT: Maintaining Progress in Coastal Virginia

Grant # NA23NOS4190255 Task 91.02

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Coastal Zone Management Program

The RAFT | Crater 2022-2024 | **Petersburg Final RAFT Implementation Summary**

Checklist Item	Summary, Status, and Next Steps
<p>(1) Incorporate All Residents of The City of Petersburg into Resilience Planning Efforts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be intentional about incorporating all neighborhoods and residents in the City of Petersburg into an engaged resilience and comprehensive planning process that improves community health and well-being. Participation should include individuals from across diverse income and education backgrounds and also leverage perspectives from local businesses, university faculty, as well as regional experts. 	<p>Summary:</p> <p>The City of Petersburg sought to incorporate residents into the ongoing resilience and comprehensive planning process underway during the RAFT Implementation process in Petersburg from 2023-2024. In terms of RAFT support, this included coordinating with the City of Petersburg's existing Comprehensive Plan Update, encouraging RAFT participant and city residents to attend the Planning Commission's Comprehensive Plan Update work sessions, especially those relevant to resilience, and exploring additional opportunities for broader community input. Opportunities for engagement centered around the City Planning Commission's Comprehensive Plan Update Work Sessions, where attendees could hear progress on the planning process and provide feedback.</p> <p>Status:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The City Planning Commission held several work sessions to review community facilities/parks and recreation, mobility/transportation, and environmental stewardship aspects of the draft comprehensive plan. The Planning Commission also created online Idea Walls and Comment Forms for residents unable to attend in person to share their thoughts. On November 28, 2023, City Council and the Planning Commission hosted a workshop on land use.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On January 12, 2024, the Planning Commission held an engagement opportunity for residents with the Petersburg Art League. The Petersburg Comprehensive Plan, known as PetersburgNEXT, was adopted on May 21, 2024. <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Petersburg to continue to explore opportunities for broad participation in future resilience planning efforts and implementation of the PetersburgNEXT Plan.
<p>(2) Develop Landscape Plans and Standards to Protect and Expand Urban Green Spaces While Mitigating the Water Quality, Air Quality, And Heat Impacts of Development.</p> <p>This goal includes initiatives to protect, manage, and expand green spaces throughout Petersburg, including areas along the Appomattox River or in large parks. Specific activities to achieve change might include developing new zoning codes or development standards that prioritize resilience for new or updated properties. Additionally, green infrastructure and stormwater</p>	<p>Summary:</p> <p>When The RAFT process began in Petersburg, the City of Petersburg and RAFT partners noted the lack of comprehensive green infrastructure plans to inform the strategic siting of new green infrastructure projects and tree planting projects. This was identified as a critical first step to realizing the broader resilience goal of developing landscape standards and policies to protect and manage urban green spaces, as well as ensure that existing tree plantings and other green infrastructure projects are done in a coordinated way. To address this need, IEN facilitated a relationship between Professor Karen Firehock, who also directs the Green Infrastructure Center, and her graduate students in the University of Virginia’s Masters in Urban and Environmental Planning program who conducted pro bono design work for the City as part of their Fall 2023 Green Cities class and Spring 2024 Green Sites course.</p> <p>Building on this work and relationships with Petersburg formed through RAFT, the GIC collaborated with the City to secure a Virginia Department of Forestry</p>

management projects, greenfield development initiatives, and easements along tributaries will be explored as creative incentives to guide appropriate development.

(VDOF) Community Forestry Revitalization Grant to conduct a tree canopy assessment of the City, support the development of a Strategic Tree Canopy Plan with input from the community, and draft a Tree Ordinance to advance urban tree canopy coverage and its multitude of health, economic, and social benefits for the public. Once the funding was secured in spring of 2024, IEN and RAFT provided a list of community organizations and nonprofits to the GIC to advance its community-engaged tree planning work with the City, and continued to facilitate relationships between the City, GIC, and RAFT partners.

Status:

Since June 2024, IEN has been supporting the City of Petersburg’s strategic tree canopy planning work with the GIC and other RAFT partners by planning and co-organizing an in-person public workshop and educational event on street trees and urban greening that was held on September 23, 2024. This event, entitled *Greening Petersburg: Healthy Trees, Healthy Lives*, was formally hosted by the City of Petersburg with organizational and planning support from IEN’s RAFT Team and the GIC. Over 30 individuals and members of the public attended the in-person event held at the Petersburg Public Library Event Center. The *Greening Petersburg* Open House was an opportunity for various Petersburg community members to educate themselves on the benefits of urban trees, provide feedback, and vote on proposed initiatives for the future of Petersburg’s tree canopy.

The feedback collected at the open house will play a crucial role in shaping Phase 2 of the City of Petersburg and GIC’s work on the Petersburg Strategic Tree Canopy Plan. After the conclusion of The RAFT implementation process

in October 2024, the GIC will continue to provide technical assistance and support to the City on green infrastructure planning as well as education and capacity-building for City staff and partners.

Over the course of implementation, IEN also facilitated several meetings with and presentations by the staff of the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional (CBLP) Program to City staff and RAFT partners on training opportunities related to stormwater infrastructure, riparian buffers, and green infrastructure project installation more broadly. As a result, the City invested in sending two of its stormwater inspectors through the CBLP training program to complete their certification. This will allow the City to have multiple trained staff capable of planning, installing, and managing green infrastructure projects in the City. This capacity building of City staff is critical to ensure the success and sustainability of green infrastructure investments in the community.

Next steps:

- **City of Petersburg** and **GIC** to continue to partner on the Community Forestry Revitalization Grant to develop a Strategic Tree Canopy Plan for the City.
- **GIC** to get additional feedback from the public at events this fall to inform the City's Strategic Tree Canopy Plan.
- **City of Petersburg Stormwater inspectors** who are CBLP certified will continue to be a resource for green infrastructure projects in the City.

(3) Diversify The Economic Base for the Petersburg Community

- Diversify the economic base for the community with multiple industries so that the workforce and tax base for the community remains stable as the larger global economy changes. This might include expanding outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities, redeveloping old warehouses for small businesses, and/or expanding telework options through broadband.

Summary: Originally, the vision of the Petersburg RAFT Implementation Team was to establish a certificate program developed explicitly for minority businesses and local entrepreneurs in the Tri-Cities region at Virginia State University's Center for Entrepreneurship (VSU CE) based on the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professionals (CBLP) successful program that has been offered in other cities. The purpose of this proposed certificate was to plan for the long-term sustainability of projects by investing in a pipeline of educated and capable City staff and local contractors who will be able to install and maintain green infrastructure BMPs.

Status: After convening multiple meetings, including an in-person session on January 12, 2024 at VSU CE to explore a partnership and potential plan for establishing a certificate program, the partners determined that due to differences between the formats of VSU and CBLP's programming, a GI certificate program based at VSU CE is not the best fit for advancing the City's resilience goal at this time. However, a goal would be to build the demand for green infrastructure projects' installation and maintenance so that contractors and landscape professionals in the City and region can benefit from associated economic opportunities.

Next Steps:

- **City of Petersburg** to invest in training their staff in CBLP certificate program and building demand City-wide for GI projects.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future opportunities for workshops and trainings for local contractors and businesses will be explored by the City, CBLP, and RAFT partners coming out of discussions facilitated by the IEN RAFT Team
(4) Connect People to Goods and Services, As Well As Critical Infrastructure Through Transit and Broadband <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for pedestrian movement within the City of Petersburg to connect people to businesses, employment opportunities, recreation, and services downtown. This effort will also consider regional transportation planning and ways to foster greater connections between the City of Petersburg and nearby counties through regional transportation. Additionally, broadband connectivity and internet access for residents, government offices, schools, health care providers, and others will be considered as its own 	<p>Summary:</p> <p>During the first months of implementation, the City of Petersburg and RAFT partners worked to identify specific transit and broadband needs requiring technical assistance and support related to planning. Throughout the past 18 months, the IEN RAFT Team has worked to match those requests with faculty expertise at UVA, ODU, and other implementation partner institutions. In Fall 2023, for example, IEN secured support from Professor Bev Wilson in the UVA Urban & Environmental Planning Department to structure his Civic Technology class around several of the City's most important transit and broadband needs. Outcomes of this class were detailed in the last Progress Report, and the micro-mobility map, equitable broadband map, and healthy food/greenspace access map are available at the embedded links.</p> <p>Building on Professor Wilson's student work, the IEN RAFT Team worked with the City of Petersburg and partners to develop a public survey and support route planning for a free trolley service connecting underserved residents of Petersburg with green spaces and healthy food access sites across the City. Over summer 2024, IEN developed a public survey assessing residents' preferences regarding healthy food access locations (farmer's markets, grocery stores, etc.) and parks and green spaces that they would most desire access to through the proposed free trolley service. The online survey was launched in August and was open until October 1, 2024. The online surveys</p>

form of critical infrastructure providing connectivity. This checklist item is expected to be tied closely to the checklist item “Diversify the Economic Base for the Community.”

were administered via the ArcGIS Survey123 platform, while printed in-person surveys were distributed at several key locations within the City of Petersburg, including the River Street Market, YMCA, Petersburg Public Library, and Petersburg Youth Oasis Farm. In addition to priority parks and food access locations, survey questions queried residents about their preferences for trolley service hours and barriers that may prevent them from utilizing the service that can be considered in route planning.

Status:

IEN collected the in-person maps and processed this data with the online survey results in October 2024. The survey results were also shared with the City and partner organizations at the final Petersburg RAFT Implementation Team meeting held on October 17, 2024. These results, including a ranked list of parks/greenspaces and food access locations, will be shared with Professor John Miller and his students in the UVA Department of Civil Engineering Transportation Planning GIS class on October 31, 2024. Naomi Siodmok with the City of Petersburg and Sierra Gladfelter and Rose Freeman with IEN/RAFT will attend the class to provide additional context on the survey results and the City’s desire for support on route planning and cost estimates for a free trolley route based on the findings.

Next Steps:

- **Sierra/IEN RAFT and Naomi/City of Petersburg** to present to John Miller’s class on trolley survey data and route planning request on October 31.
- **John Miller’s UVA class** to provide trolley route analysis and cost

	<p>estimates to City of Petersburg to inform their funding application(s) by mid-December.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naomi/City of Petersburg to apply for VA Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) Demonstration Project funding to support trolley pilot.
<p>(5) Incentivize Capital Improvements for Public Infrastructure, Including Petersburg City Public Schools and Public Safety Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the City of Petersburg and RAFT Implementation Team partners in reviewing and prioritizing capital improvement and public works projects for resilience and share updates on existing initiatives. 	<p>Summary: This goal requires constant sharing of updates on ongoing capital improvement projects in the City.</p> <p>Status:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City hopes to expand the Appomattox River Trail system across the railroad tracks. • The city government is exploring how to coordinate with rail companies to get permission to cross the tracks. • The City is looking to apply for a Safe Streets and Roads for All grant to make safety improvements and develop a design plan for the ART connectivity project over the railroad. <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ron/Crater PDC will connect Naomi to a contact at VDOT for accident/crash data and other numbers that may be helpful for applying for Safe Streets Roads for All grants. • Heather will connect with Naomi to share contact at railroad for funding next steps.

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