

SUMMARY OF THE RETREAT ON SEPTEMBER 24, 2025

To: Mary Bunting, City Manager, City of Hampton
From: Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, Hon. ASLA
Date: October 2, 2025
cc: Eliza Monroe, AICP

On Wednesday, September 24, 2025, a retreat was held at the **Hampton Convention Center** for approximately 60 people from the **City Council, Planning Commission, School Board, Economic Development Authority, Housing Authority, other interested partners, and city staff**. The retreat was held from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and consisted of an icebreaker, a break, two presentations with Q&A sessions, lunch, two group exercises, and a recap.

The goal of the retreat was to engage Hampton leaders to offer strategic advice to help the city reach its full potential as a vibrant and thriving place to live, work, play, and visit. To achieve this goal, the retreat was designed to seek alignment among the leaders and offer guidance on the best path forward to support strategic planning, implementation strategies, placemaking, and community engagement.

The retreat started with an icebreaker to determine the “places” the participants were asked to tell us their ***favorite place to go to in Hampton and why***. This was a “Placemaking” exercise intended to understand and underscore the power of places that are meaningful to Hampton residents.

ICEBREAKER

About 16 of the 60 participants volunteered a response.

1. Fort Monroe – peaceful and quiet
2. Buckroe Beach – nice to park and look at the water
3. James P Wilson Fishing Pier – relaxing outdoor atmosphere
4. Gosnold Park – walking there with his wife
5. Sandy Bottom Nature Park – A place to collect my thoughts and plan
6. Woodlands Golf Course – Good exercise
7. Fort Monroe – a green, and quiet space with a lot of history
8. Fort Monroe – the architecture there is very nice

9. Grandview Nature Preserve – a peaceful, wonderful walk, where you can see all kinds of wildlife
10. Hampton City School Board meetings – because we advocate for kids
11. Paradise Ocean Club – “It truly is paradise.”
12. Phoebus – Former town and section of Hampton, with good street festivals, art galleries, and nice restaurants.
13. “In addition to the beaches, I like to get in a boat and ride along the shoreline.”
14. Buckroe Beach – Beautiful beach, family beach, and residential in nature
15. The VA – The area is really pristine and has a nice shoreline
16. North Phoebus Northeast Community Center

Summary of Results

- Fort Monroe was mentioned three times
- Buckroe Beach was mentioned twice
- Parks, natural or outdoor spaces, were mentioned five times

Icebreaker Key Takeaway and Alignment

Except for the VA Hospital, School Board Meetings, and the Phoebus Northeast Community Center, most of the favorite places were outdoor spaces due to their physical and mental health benefits, natural beauty, and tranquility. A key takeaway is that **places and placemaking** are valued in Hampton.

There is **alignment** among Hampton leaders. They see the value in outdoor spaces and places that offer physical and mental well-being and natural beauty. This is consistent with two themes in the strategic plan – Place Making and Living with Water.

GROUP EXERCISES

Exercise #1: Reach consensus on the Top 5 Implementation Challenges

Participants were asked to rank the top five implementation challenges Hampton faces today from a list of common challenges. They were also encouraged to write in a challenge that was not on the prepared list. We compiled the list from the groups and individuals. The top five implementation challenges they believe Hampton faces are:

1. There is a lack of staff, funding and resources to implement projects.
2. Master plans are outdated.
3. Reactive concerns compete with proactive planning.
4. Hampton has too many plans to track and implement.

5. Recommendations are not vetted through a reality-based test.

The list of “write-in” challenges:

1. Empowering staff to be proactive.
2. Focus on investment by the city that would attract development.
3. Not much real estate to work with.
4. Not taking advantage of the waterfront.
5. Code is outdated.
6. Not making use of the fact that we are on a peninsula.
7. Young people find there’s nothing to do in Hampton.
8. Too many hoops to jump through to establish a business in Hampton.
9. The vocal minority doesn’t represent the majority opinion.
10. Resistance to change or modernizing places into fun, attractive, vibrant places.
11. Lack of diverse input regarding priorities.
12. Disagreement on priorities.
13. Code is at times prohibitive and deters businesses from coming to Hampton.
14. Budget constraints for ongoing maintenance.
15. Confusion over codes and permitting.
16. Lack of communication between departments.
17. Lack of internal imagination.
18. The budget process favors those who get more opportunities for interactions with the council.
19. Lack of staff to implement projects. We obtain grants and outside funding, but there is a lack of capacity.

Group Exercise #1 Key Takeaways and Alignment

Hampton leaders **embrace the Strategic Themes** and are eager to implement plans and projects, while also being open to finding a new path forward.

The participants collaborated effectively in the group exercise and found **alignment** in the key challenges. The leaders seem open and willing to prioritize and right-size plans and projects. The top five challenges offer a clue as to how to find a path forward to help Hampton fulfill its strategic plan.

Staff felt heard and are eager to help move the city forward by seeing the potential for **alignment** with Hampton Leaders.

Exercise #2: Reach Consensus on Prioritizing Master Plans (Update or Retire)

Participants were asked to choose from a list of adopted plans and decide the top three plans to update and the top three plans to retire.

Results:

The top three plans to update were:

1. Buckroe (2005): **Unanimous agreement 43-0**
2. Downtown Hampton (2017): **Unanimous agreement 30-0**
3. Coliseum Central (2015): **35-2**

The top three plans to retire were:

1. Armistead Point Park (1998): **51-2**
2. Newmarket Creek Park (2007): **35-2**
3. North King Street (2007): **25-8**

Regarding the Zoning Ordinance, all participants agreed that doing nothing was not an option. The majority voted to rewrite the zoning ordinance.

Additional Feedback Provided:

Many respondents noted that they would combine Fort Monroe and Phoebus into a joint Master Plan by connecting the sites.

Master Plan	Update	Retire
Armistead Point Park (1998)	2	51
Buckroe (2005)	43	0
Kecoughtan (2006)	7	24
North King Street (2007)	8	25
Phoebus (2007)	28	2
Newmarket Creek (2007)	3	35
Fort Monroe (2013)	4	21
Coliseum Central (2015)	35	2
Downtown Hampton (2017)	30	0

Bonus Question: The Zoning Ordinance		
Rewrite	Amend	Do Nothing
37	16	0

Group Exercise #2 Key Takeaways and Alignment

The participants realized the number of active master plans and understood that it is **time to focus** on updating or retiring some. A few participants were unaware of some of the master plans.

Leaders were **aligned** with the plans to update and retire. They also understood that the zoning code needs attention, which could be achieved by rewriting the entire code or amending specific sections.

Conclusion

In summary, the retreat seemed to be a positive learning experience for the participants. The city should be commended for taking on this tough challenge of strengthening their planning and implementation approach and expectations. The seven strategic themes and the strategic projects implementation meetings and matrix are a great foundation to build from. The participants appeared to be energized and engaged. The questions after each presentation were insightful. It appears the participants understood the importance of balancing urgent matters with long-term commitments; being more sensitive to the number of recommendations in all the adopted plans; to be more focused on priority actions; acknowledging the challenges of implementing plans; and more understanding about updating and retiring master plans.

Next Steps

- **Meet** with City Manager to map out follow-up actions post-retreat.
- **Undertake** a field visit to understand the context of the city.
- **Offer** workshops for key staff. These workshops may include reality-based planning, framework planning, placemaking fundamentals, implementation strategies, public engagement and communication techniques.
- **Recommend** ways to improve alignment between City Council, staff, boards and partners to produce tangible outcomes.
- **Develop** a list of recommendations to advance the seven themes and 2040 Community Plan Update.
- **Discuss** the process to update and retire master plans, which may involve community input.
- **Offer** insight and discuss the process for rewriting a zoning.
- **Determine** if a follow-up meeting with the Council is required (not in the scope of work).
- (Optional) **Deliver** a keynote speech on the power of planning and placemaking, or a related topic. The event would be open to the public.