



Study sees residential growth for Petersburg

As Fort Lee expands, five areas could attract 124 to 201 households a year

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PETERSBURG -- This wouldn't seem to be the most prudent time to engage in speculative building, but a consultant thinks that's just what the city needs to spur residential growth.

"It's not demand. It's creating the kind of housing that would appeal to the people moving in a given market area," Laurie Volk said while presenting an overview of "An Analysis of Residential Market Potential in the City of Petersburg."

The 86-page document was created by Zimmerman/Volk Associates, a Clinton, N.J., company that has conducted more than 350 similar surveys during the past 20 years. It focused on five inner-city neighborhoods: Blandford; Halifax; Rome Street/Westview/Birdville; Battersea; and Downtown/Old Towne.

The study was commissioned by Virginia LISC, the Richmond-based affiliate of the national program that studies urban areas with the intent of increasing residential and commercial development.

"Our nonprofit development partners needed to know there was a market for what they were doing," said Ford Weber, the executive director of Virginia LISC. "For-profit developers needed to know that, too."

Volk's plan centers on an area's "capture rate." The number represents a likely percentage of people moving within a given area who might settle in a specific place. It includes people moving from outside the area -- a prime concern locally as Fort Lee expands -- and people moving within the city and in surrounding localities.

According to the study, the five neighborhoods could attract between 124 and 201 new households per year.

"Our method doesn't look at supply and demand," she said. "It would be very difficult to project any kind of demand in the city of Petersburg."

Instead, the method focuses on creating the types of neighborhoods most likely to appeal to movers. In Volk's experience, that means creating three things:

- environments that appeal to a mix of income levels;
- a diversity of housing types mixed together, including apartments, town houses, condominiums and detached single-family homes; and
- critical mass, or tackling projects a block at a time.

Building houses on scattered lots, she said, "never does anything to transform a neighborhood."

Tackling neighborhoods as a whole, she said, is key.

"You have an enormous opportunity to transform these markets," she said.

She also presented the proposal to the City Council last night and is sharing it today with a variety of civic groups.

"My goal is to show people there really is a market," she said.
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