



Development Plan For

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**The City of SOUTHPORT**

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URBAN DESIGN ASSISTANCE TEAM  
North Carolina Chapter • American Institute of Architects  
February 13 - 16, 1991

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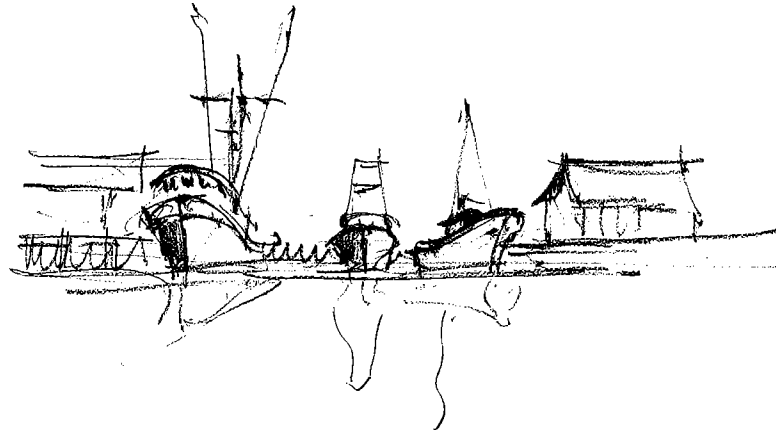
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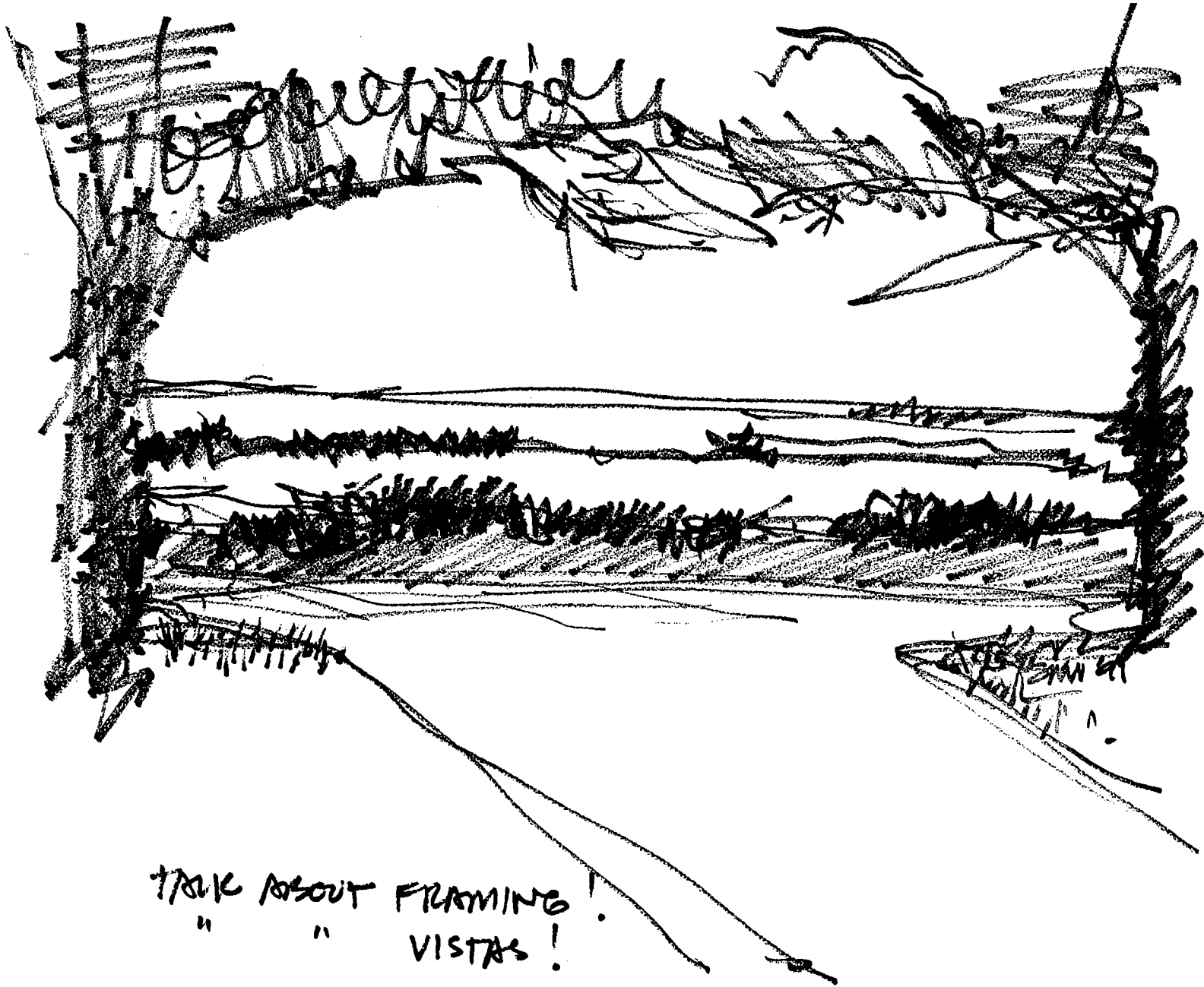
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■ The team was impressed with Southport's live oaks and water views

# I. The Urban Design Assistance Team and Southport

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## What is UDAT?

Urban Design Assistance Teams (UDAT) bring together a group of experienced design professionals for an intensive focus on the design needs and opportunities of towns and cities requesting assistance from the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Professionals from disciplines including architecture, landscape architecture, engineering specialties and planning are selected to be team members, according to the needs of the community to be studied. Team members are volunteers and receive no compensation for their services.

UDAT visits average three or more days of very hard work. Team members assimilate as much information as possible about the study-community and use that information, together with their collective expertise, to design high quality, comprehensive design and planning solutions to the problems and opportunities presented by the host community.

Information is gathered through a review of background information and existing documents, a visual survey through tours of the community, special focus on the study area and interviews with interested citizens. Community participation is important to the team process.

The goal of UDAT visits is to produce workable and innovative design solutions which can be implemented



■ *The Urban Design Assistance Team exploring Southport*

within a reasonable period of time. The inclusion of several design disciplines on the team helps assure that the solutions will be based on a comprehensive analysis of the study community.

## Why is UDAT in Southport?

The Urban Design Assistance Team visit to Southport comes as the city finds itself at a crossroads in its economic history.

Historically, Southport has been a riverfront village of

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commercial fishermen in rural Brunswick County, in southeastern North Carolina. Until 1978, Southport served as county seat to Brunswick County, housing the various offices of local government that drew commercial traffic to the area. By the mid 1980's, although a nuclear power plant had been built on the city's periphery and a chemical manufacturing plant had located just outside city limits, providing some new employment in the area, it became evident that Southport's economy had failed to recover from the removal of county offices and decreased commercial fishing activities. The city found itself not only in an economic malaise, but suffering the inconvenience and cost of a worn and frail infrastructure as well.

By the late 1980's, vacant storefronts and empty residential real estate began to stir Southport's concerned citizens to action. Debate began: Could the Southport economy be revitalized?

The political leaders of the city, too, realized the need for a concerted local government effort to manage Southport's economic affairs. In 1988 an urban assistance team of the N.C. Downtown Development Association visited Southport. After rounds of interviews with concerned citizens and physical inspection of the city, the DDA team offered what was then considered an ambitious outline for development of an economic revitalization program.

With those recommendations in hand, city aldermen

appointed a 15-member economic development commission — Southport's first. To date, the city's economic development commission has devoted nearly two years to developing community consensus regarding Southport's economic future.

It is hoped that the work of the AIA Urban Design Assistance Team, combined with the earlier effort of DDA and the ongoing work of the city's economic development commission and Southport 2000, a public-private revitalization corporation, will allow Southport to chart an integrated plan for the city's continued economic health as Southport approaches the next century.

### **The UDAT Process in Southport**

The UDAT maintained a busy schedule, which included many meetings with local residents, civic groups, and municipal officials, both elected and appointed.

On Wednesday, February 14, the first day of the team's visit to Southport, team members were given both walking and windshield tours of the city. Later in the day, members met with representatives of the directors of Southport 2000, a non-profit economic revitalization corporation, the city's planning board, its community appearance commission and representatives of the Southport Garden Club. By late afternoon, team members had toured the



■ A UDAT work session at a local church

Southport waterfront by boat and visited neighboring Bald Head Island. After additional interviews with interested citizens, the team members were toasted at "A Taste of Southport," an informal dinner party hosted by the city's economic development commission.

On Thursday, February 25, the second day of the team's visit, a breakfast meeting with members of the city's economic development commission was held and a slide presentation of city improvements was reviewed. Along with work sessions, the team met with leaders of a local theater group and other citizens who dropped by the studio set up in the church next to city hall.

Friday, February 16, was devoted entirely to production work and on Saturday, February 17, the final designs were presented to citizens gathered at Southport's City Hall. Citizens meeting with the team included people from a variety of backgrounds, such as:

- June Brown, a waterfront owner and painter;
- Stuart Callari, a waterfront owner and contractor;
- Mary Campbell of the Brunswick Little Theater;
- Richard Conrad, a dentist and musician;
- Tommy Doshier, a waterfront owner;
- Eugene Gore, property owner and former president of the Southport Branch of the NAACP;
- Orrie Gore, retired teacher and community leader;
- Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Hardee;
- James M. and Margaret Harper, owners of The State Port Pilot newspaper;
- Davey Herring, a waterfront owner, developer and river pilot;
- Lois Jane Herring, a waterfront motel owner;
- Norman Holden, former Southport mayor and a recreational sailor;
- Burt Meyer, a CPA and recreational sailor;
- Ed Oliver, retired restaurateur and former city alderman;
- Leila Pigott, owner of waterfront business property;
- Pat Pinkerton, president of the Southport-Oak Island Chamber of Commerce;
- Rev. Frank Ross, former rector of St. Phillips Episcopal Church;
- Dot Schmidt, owner of The Shell Shop and a member of the city's cemetery commission;
- Robert Thompson, a retired river pilot.
- W.R. Thorsen, a former alderman;
- Walton Willis, a marina owner;
- Grace Wilson.



## II. What Do the Citizens of Southport Say?

Southport's citizens have strong and often quite specific feelings about their city and its future. The following section is a collection of comments that were made during the many discussions with individuals and groups and are grouped according to the issues that emerged during these conversations. These issues, combined with the team's own observations, became the focus for the planning and design work that followed.

### ... About the Waterfront

"I believe Southport's waterfront is her most vital asset — and feel it should be improved greatly to create a more welcome and accessible attitude for the hundreds of boaters who travel the Intracoastal Waterway (especially each spring and fall), as well as tourists who travel by automobile."

"More should be done along Waterfront Park to allow the heavy I.W.C. traffic to pause at Southport and also spend time and money. Can some type of breakwater be built out parallel to the city pier to slow the murderous current so this can be done?"

"I think a "boardwalk" from The Inn at Southport to the marina would tie all the waterfront activities together if this is at all feasible. The visitors seem to enjoy walking along the waterfront, and early morning and late evening are both



■ *Citizens discussing Southport with UDAT members*

popular times for exercise walks for our local citizens."

- "Remove present unsightly concrete and slabs
- Very unsafe, especially for senior citizens
  - Many injuries have occurred here"

"Enhancement of Waterfront Park landscaping, etc."

"The waterfront park is an asset and is enjoyed by" visitors and locals. I would like to see an amphitheater in the vicinity of the river. Additional parking facilities could be

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located off East Moore Street — possibly where the Bald Head Island old ferry landing is located.”

### **... About Signage / Information**

“Put an attractive sign at end of Ft. Fisher Ferry Road listing area attractions like: antique shops, waterfront park.”

“We need a sign at the corner of Howe & Moore Streets pointing to Waterfront Park.”

“Possibly put a map at Waterfront Park showing what you see — Bald Head, Ft. Caswell, etc.”

### **... About Historic Southport**

“Southport is a small North Carolina city (3,000 population) at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, Southport is characterized by oak-lined streets and architecturally interesting homes.”

“Improvement and preservation of Franklin Square Park should be considered. The park could then be used more frequently for ongoing community events, as well as for those who would choose to stroll through the park or simply sit and enjoy the beauty. I envision the park — during the summer months especially — as a perfect means for providing entertainment for tourists and residents alike.”

“Preservation of heritage and historic Southport.”

“Create a self-supported welcome center.”

### **... About the Streetscape**

“Enhance the appearance of main business streets (Howe, Moore and Bay including the area of the Yacht Basin) — appearance of continuity of building facades.

“Underground utilities especially in the downtown business area and waterfront, attractive street lighting. Putting utility poles behind businesses would be a great improvement.”

“Utilize vacant lots by creating small parks or landscaping areas for appearance sake.”

### **... About Economic Development**

“We need “inn” type accommodations and restaurants on the river or inland waterway, specialty shops, and a store where boaters can buy grocery and fishing supplies.”

“Primary concerns for Southport and the working adult residents would be lack of hard dollar employment.”

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"Southport can, as it has in the past, attract more of the movie industry here for site shooting — perhaps to an even greater degree."

"Southport working with Brunswick County can do more to attract high paying clean industry to the nearby area to provide jobs for all of Southport's citizens."

"The benefits of increased revenue for Southport should be enjoyed by all of its citizens fairly — white, black, old and new families."

"We should strive to have opportunities that allow our young adults to become a part of the working community. "

### **... About Transportation and Tourism**

"Land based traffic is difficult, at best, to bring to Southport. To help bring more water traffic into town we need to look at the waterfront areas. Docking space on and off shore for pleasure craft and waterway travelers would be an asset. Shops, shower facilities and a grocery store within walking distance are needed near the waterfront area to entice the boater to stop and stay in Southport. Encouraging foot and bike traffic in town serves the aging residents and encourages people to participate in sound ecological practices.

"Southport should form a perfect relationship with the beach communities to increase tourism in the area."

"We must never forget that the tourists we depend on are judging us by their standards and not ours."

"Direct impacts of the Southport Maritime Museum will be the hiring of approximately 15 staff persons. Indirect impacts begin with expenditures by both museum staffers and visitors from complimentary and supplementary enterprises ranging from chandlers' shops to restaurants."

# III. Southport's Special Character

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Southport's history began in America's colonial era with the 1754 opening of Smithville Fort. The original military establishment slowly developed into a small community of river pilots, fisherman and tradesmen, and later changed its name to Southport. Over the past two and one-half centuries, these work traditions have changed and evolved, but remain today as a viable part of Southport's present. Along with the intracoastal environmental setting, maritime work traditions have been responsible for shaping the city's urban form.

## Basics: Southport's Fundamental Characteristics

There are five important aspects of Southport's character that should be woven into all future plans for the city: the water, trees, history, the quaint village character, and continued economic vitality. These features need to be described, protected and enhanced throughout the city.

### 1. The Water

The Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway converge on Southport to form the city's most important visual and economic resource. The waterfront is home to a wide variety of activities ranging from commercial fishing to recreational boating and these create a healthy mix of water-related uses. The water is also an important visual



■ *Southport's waterfront against a backdrop of live oak trees* resource for Southport's citizens and visitors. The small boats, large ships and the constantly changing nature of the currents, winds and waves, reinforce the special maritime character of Southport.

### 2. The Trees

The Live Oak trees share both history and space with the city's built environment. Southport has managed to "fit itself" into the vertical and horizontal web formed by the dense network of trees. Their large low-sweeping branches provide important shade during the summer, while at the same time framing views to the water and other landmarks.



■ *Some of Southport's historic houses*

### 3. History

Southport's rich history remains alive in the buildings, structures and activities of the community, these form an important link with the past that enriches the present community character. Citizens of Southport have recently begun to celebrate the literary aspect of the city's history with the Robert Ruark Festival.

### 4. Village Community

The City of Southport has retained the human scale typical of a village community. This village scale is combined with the fishing and boating activity along the

waterfront to create a special quality and atmosphere that needs to be an integral part of Southport's future.

### 5. Economic Vitality

The foundation of Southport's success has been — and must continue to be — a viable and diverse economy. For most of its history, Southport has been strongly tied to the fishing industry. In recent years this economic pattern has changed as commercial fishing has declined and other industry has come to the area. A healthy diversity has very recently entered the retail community with the opening of antique shops in the downtown.



■ *Southport's waterfront today*

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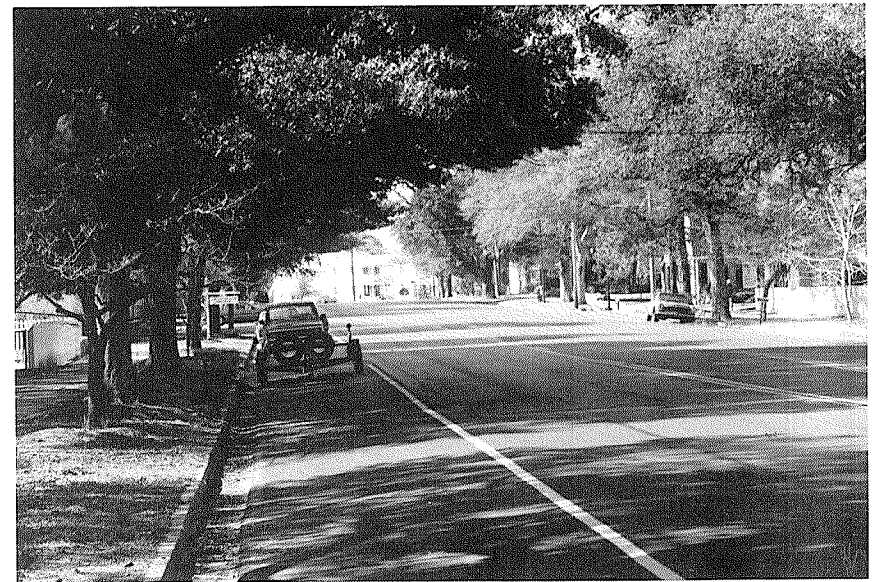
## Details: Design Traditions in Southport

Southport's buildings, landscapes and streets are tangible expressions of a design and planning tradition that has evolved over the years. These are the architectural, landscape and building material details that collectively form a type of visual language that is unique to Southport and

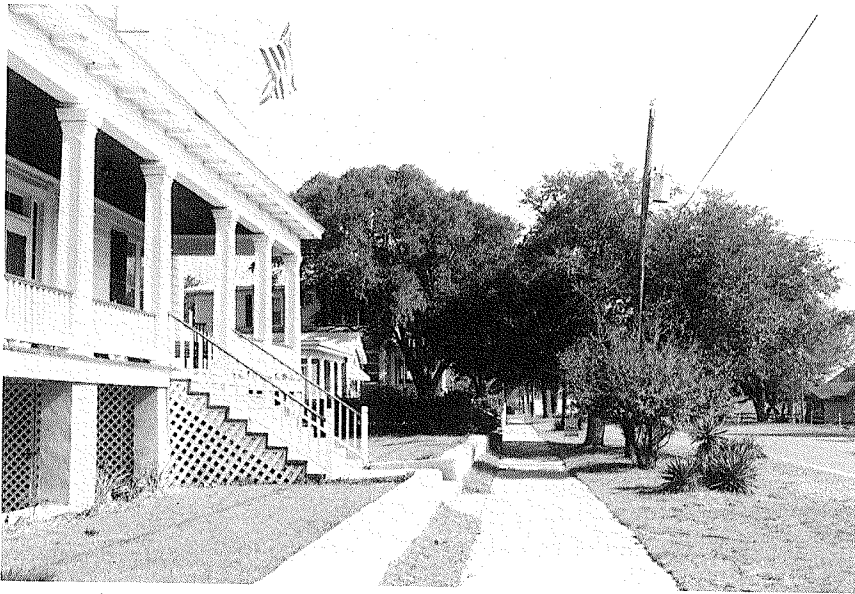


■ 1. A flexible street grid that bends to accommodate natural features such as the live oaks and the water.

contributes to the city's special character. These details should be considered part of Southport's heritage that needs to be maintained and incorporated into new development. The following should be considered an initial list of some of these traditions that should be conserved and expanded.



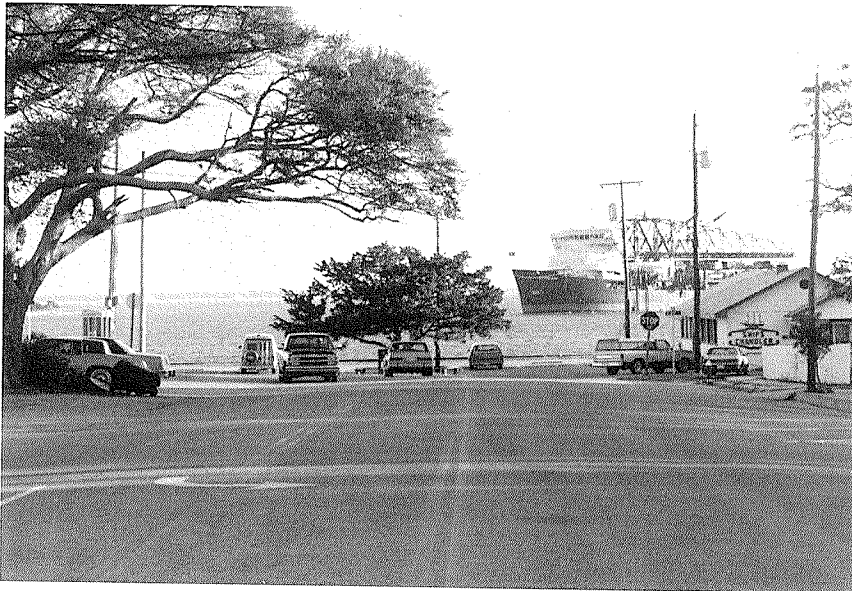
■ 2. Wide streets and right-of-ways



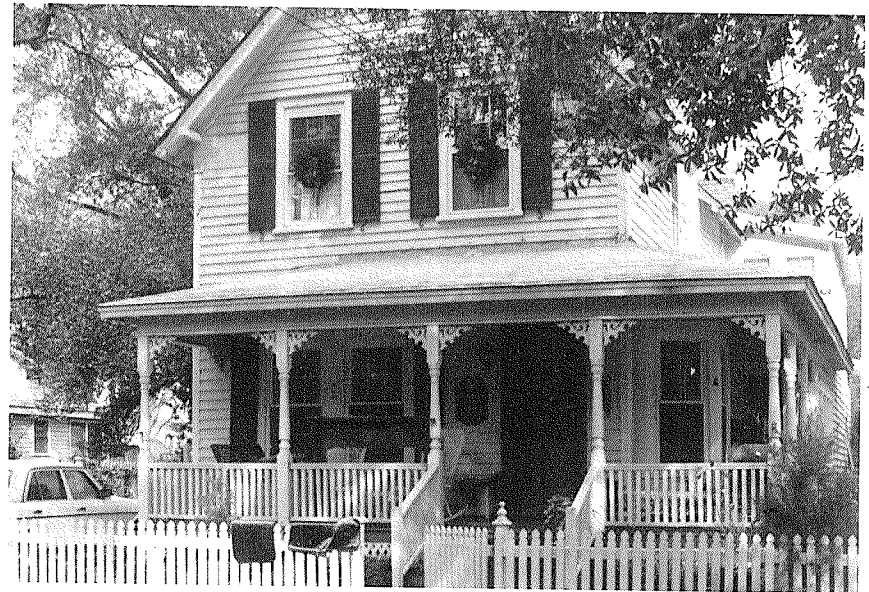
■ 3. *A hierarchy of public and private spaces*



■ 4. *A diverse historic district*



■ 5. *Waterfront views and access*



■ 6. *A distinction of residential and commercial buildings*



■ 7. Canopy of live oaks that shade and frame views



■ 8. Three story building height limit



■ 9. Indigenous paving and landscape materials



■ 10. Low fences and walls





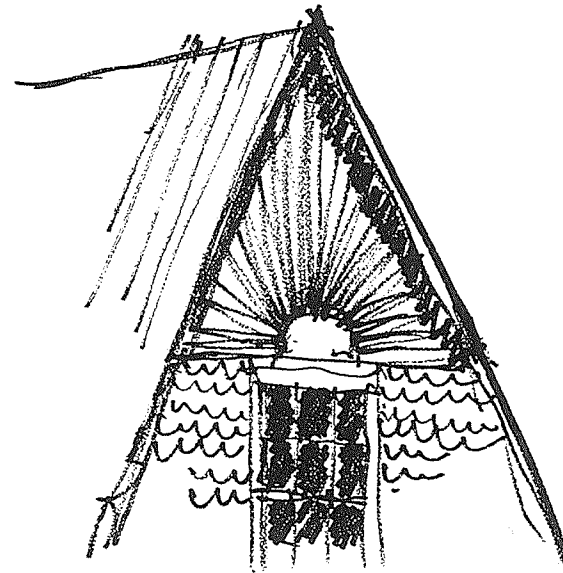
■ 11. Porches with simple squared railings

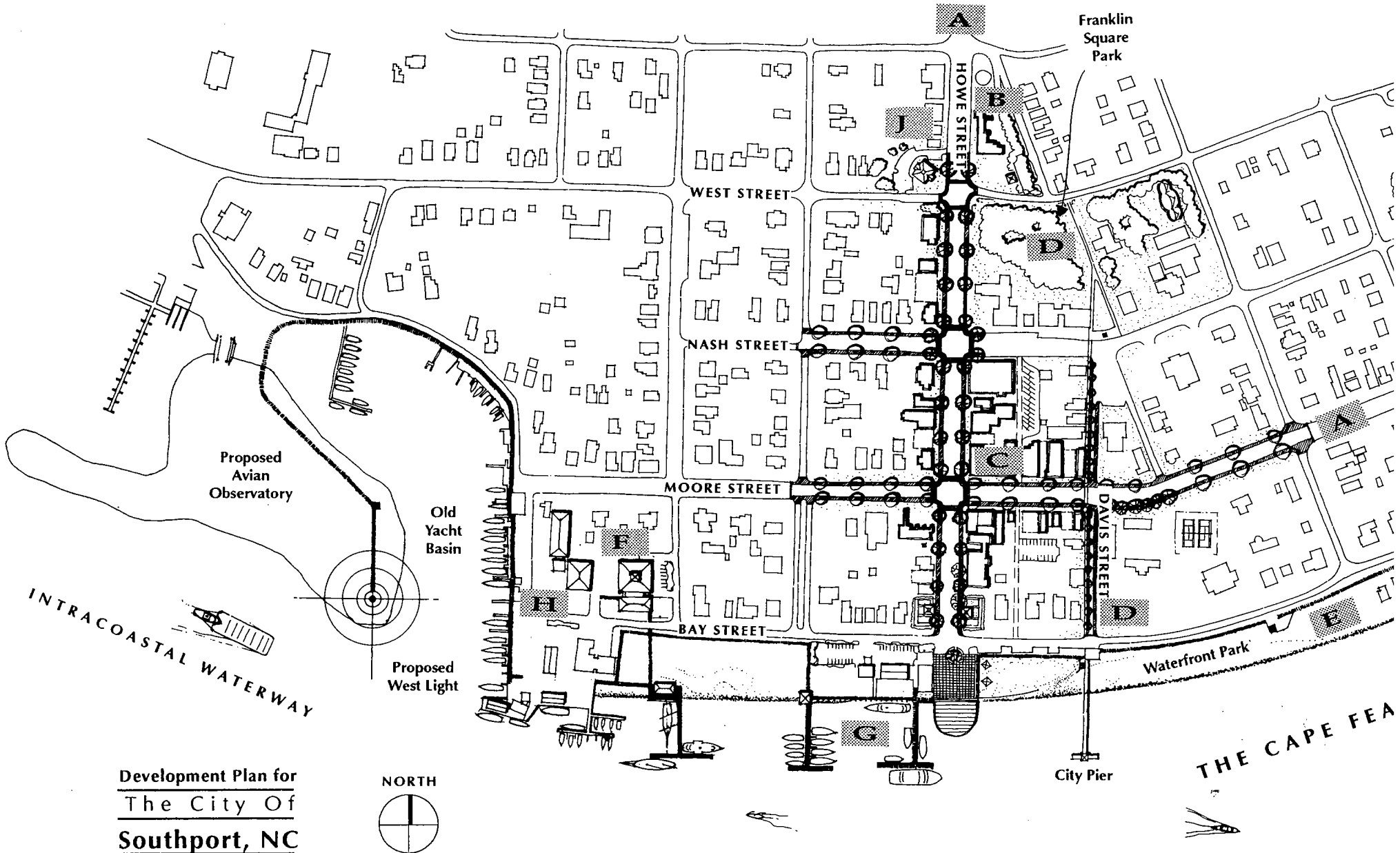


■ 12. Wood details and trim



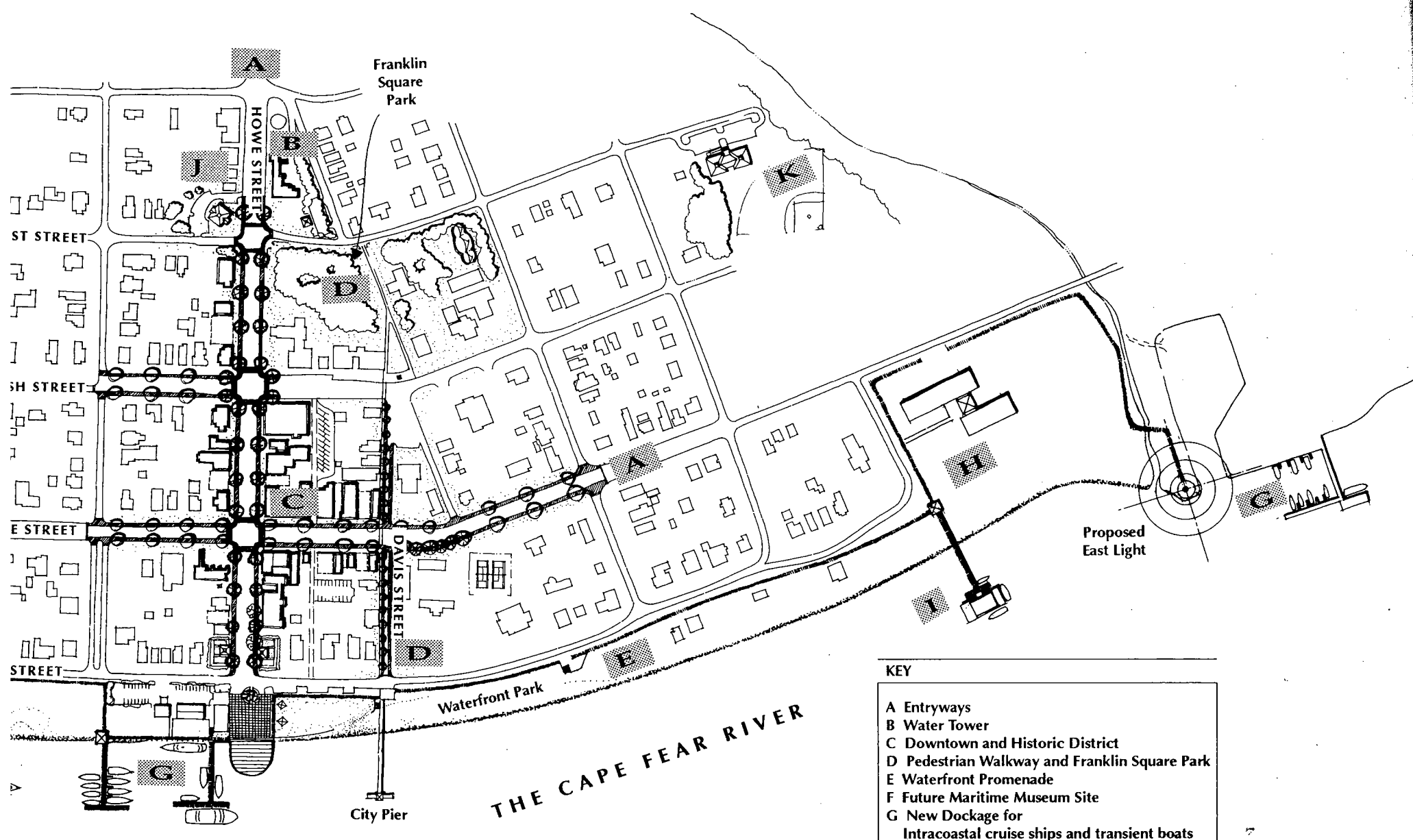
■ 13. Contrasting colors and materials in downtown business district





Development Plan for  
 The City Of  
**Southport, NC**  
 UDAT 1991





**KEY**

A	Entryways
B	Water Tower
C	Downtown and Historic District
D	Pedestrian Walkway and Franklin Square Park
E	Waterfront Promenade
F	Future Maritime Museum Site
G	New Dockage for Intracoastal cruise ships and transient boats
H	Future Inn Sites
I	Potential Floating Restaurant
J	Potential Visitor's Center Site
K	Proposed Community Facility

THE CAPE FEAR RIVER

City Pier

Proposed East Light

Franklin Square Park

Waterfront Park

HOWE STREET

DAVIS STREET

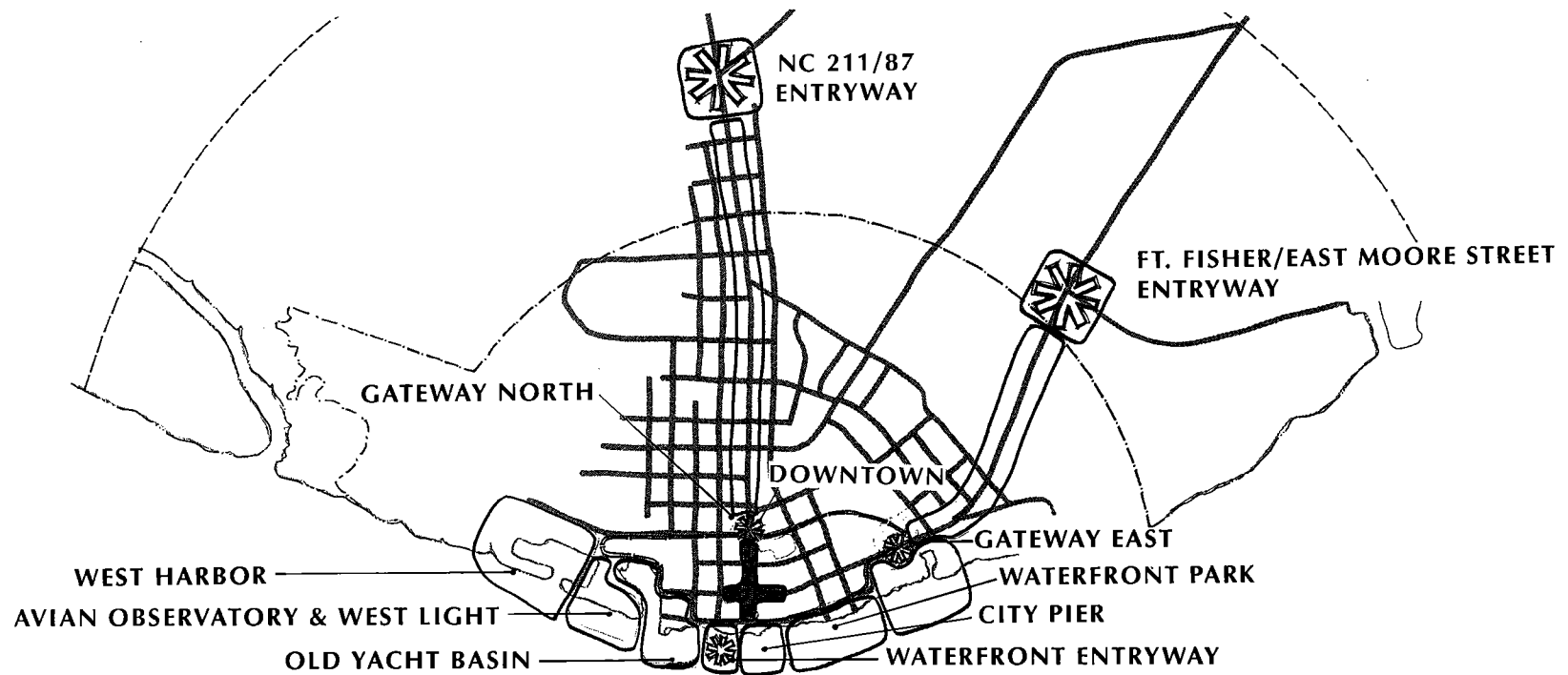
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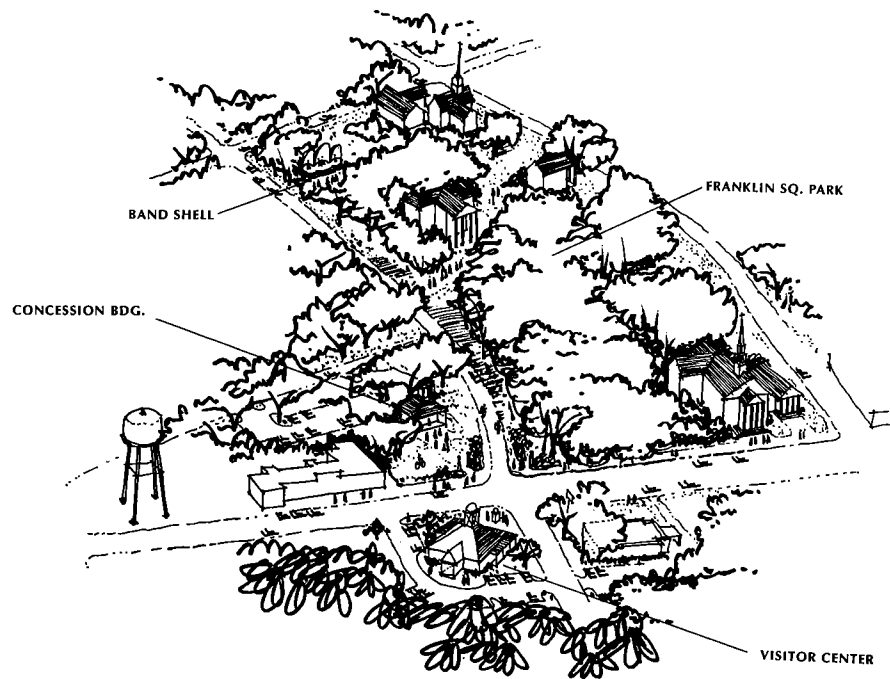
# IV. The Development Plan



■ *Area Influences*

■ *Foldout map of the City of Southport*

Southport is a well organized city of districts, sites and connections. This pattern of streets and buildings has changed over time in response to an array of forces and constraints but in ways that respect the basic character of the city as a village community of fisherman, river pilots and merchants. It is this fundamentally authentic urban pattern which forms the organizing framework for the development plan.



■ *Proposed improvements to Howe St. entryway and Franklin Square Park*

**Entryways**

To an outsider entering by land, Southport is similar to most eastern North Carolina towns. Primary thoroughfares are lined with an array of mixed commercial, professional and the occasional residential areas. Much of the new commercial growth is in the form of fast food restaurants and strip shopping centers. New growth, residential and commercial, has occurred on the periphery.

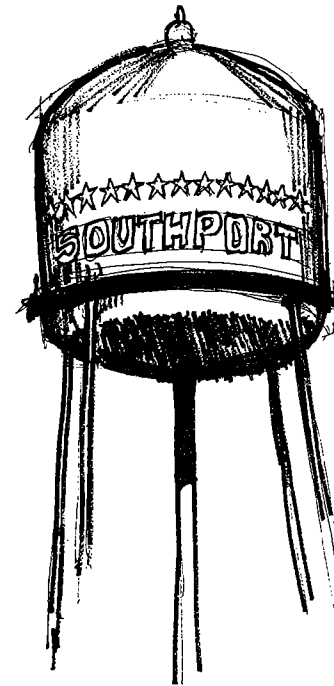
It is possible to arrive in Southport by land or water.

The arrival points to the city at the NC87/211 intersection, the Ft. Fisher landing access road intersection with East Moore Street and the waterfront docking area need to be attractive and informative, especially for the visitor. The introduction of positive landscaping and signage improvements, in keeping with fundamental characteristics and design traditions, will greatly enhance the appreciation of Southport by citizens and visitors alike.

Howe Street from NC211/87 intersection to the Downtown and Historic District consists of a rather confusing mix of businesses and signs, typical of highway commercial strips in many other cities. Although it represents a challenging set of problems, it is important that Howe Street be addressed in a rigorous and creative way, through landscaping, signage standards and limitations on driveway cuts.

As you enter Southport travelling south on Howe Street, there is no clear landmark that announces the special character of the downtown and Historic District. The intersection of Howe and West Streets seems to provide an excellent opportunity for a gateway into the downtown that could be established with the following actions:

- Acquire the land beside the frame shop for the construction of a visitors' center on the northwest corner of Howe & West Streets.
- Acquire the land beside the NAPA Auto Parts on the northeast corner of Howe and West Streets. This site can be developed as an extension of Franklin Square Park and could include a refreshment stand and bicycle rental.

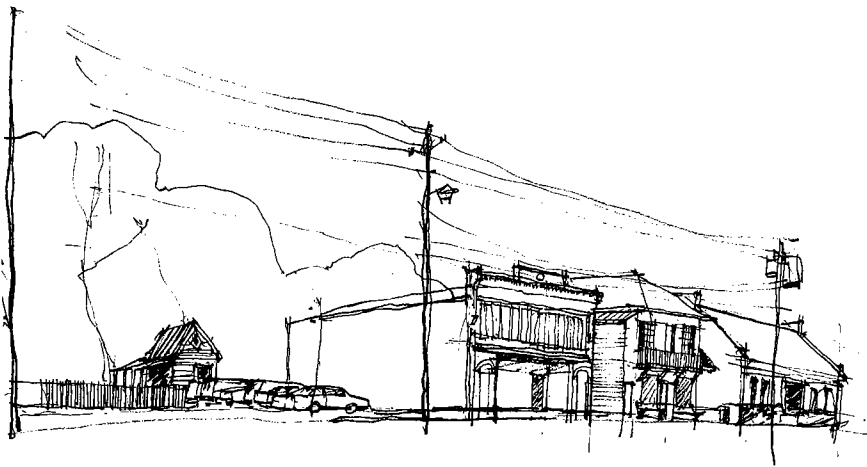


■ *Proposed design for Southport's water tower*

#### *The Water Tower*

The water tower is located on the main approach to town and is a significant visual attraction. It identifies the city from a distance on both land and water. Currently, it is a plain structure which contributes little to the image of Southport.

The water tower should be painted in such a manner that it becomes a landmark of the city. It is



■ *Existing Commercial Buildings on Moore Street*

proposed that the tank be painted Southport blue with the legs and the center pedestal white. The name "Southport" should be painted in white on both sides of the tank so visitors approaching from the water, as well as from the land, can see the name. Thirteen white stars could be painted above "Southport," to symbolize the existence of the city when the United States was formed.

**The Downtown and Historic District**

By preserving and enhancing the qualities which make historic Southport unique, the community will not only ensure its own quality of life, but likewise enhance its opportunities as a tourist destination.

The development of Moore and Howe streets should

occur with particular consideration given to the treatment of building facades and their relationships to each other and the street. A pattern is discernable in the original building styles. Typically, buildings are two stories or a single story with a high parapet with or without cornices and are constructed of red brick or covered with white-painted trim or white-painted wood siding. Numerous changes have been made to the existing facades of the buildings located in the downtown area, especially along Howe Street. The resulting design problems include the following:

- Materials have been introduced throughout the area on several buildings. Many building alterations "have been made with materials and forms incompatible with the architecture originally established. Many changes to the original styles of the buildings in the downtown are out of character with the essence of downtown Southport.
- A wide variety of business signage styles and locations are used in a confusing and discordant array.

*Recommendations*

- The owners of downtown buildings and lots need to be made aware of the original architectural character of the block on which they are located, so future construction, including renovations, can be more sensitive to the character of the area.
- In-fill construction on the vacant lots should be encouraged in the downtown area to increase the number

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of rental properties. In the interim, those lots that are used for parking should be screened from the street with landscaping using architectural elements like fences to provide visual continuity along the street.

- Parking should be provided either on the streets or behind the buildings using leftover spaces and existing alleys for access.

- All new buildings should maintain the same setback from the street as adjacent structures to maintain the street edge. Heights of new buildings should not exceed 3 stories.

- Display windows on the first floor should be

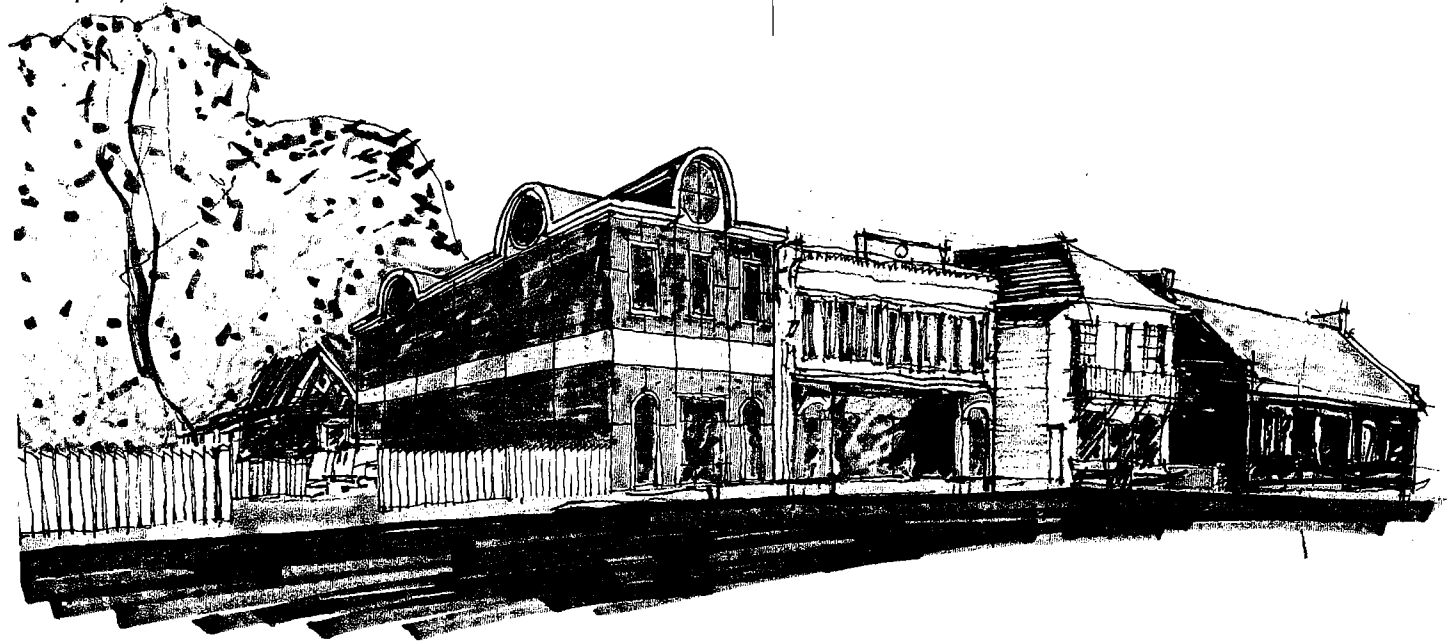
encouraged to promote the image of shopping downtown.

- A sign ordinance should be established for the downtown area to encourage quality and clarity.

- Storefront awnings should be installed to provide shade for pedestrian traffic until new shade trees grow to fulfill that need. Canvas awnings would be appropriate for downtown, perhaps using a roll-up style to avoid potential wind damage.

- As economic conditions allow, the city should encourage a general upgrading of downtown buildings perhaps by establishing a revolving loan fund for renovations

- Judicious planting should be undertaken in areas



■ *Commercial Development on Moore St. with Infill*



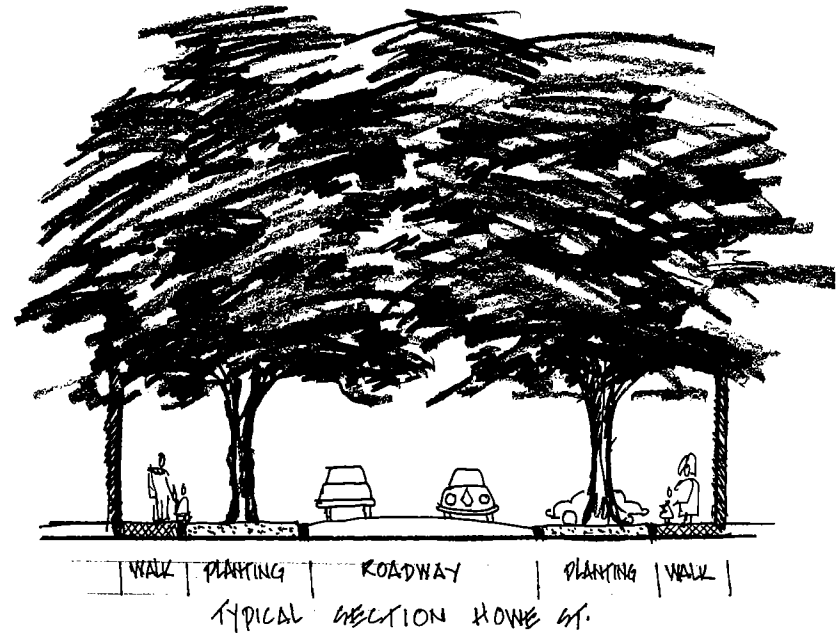
where it is not anticipated that a building or lot will soon be developed. The old ballpark, known as Taylor Field, at the west end of Nash Street is an opportunity to anchor this end of the Historic District with a new use that responds to Southport's recreational and meeting space needs. This five-acre tract could be the location of a multi-use indoor recreational/civic center facility that would replace the old gym next to Franklin Square Park. The civic center component would be a flexible space that could accommodate large gatherings, meetings and events.

- Zoning within the historic area should reinforce a distinction between commercial and residential areas. Retail and professional activities should not "bleed out" into residential areas. Instead, force a more densely developed urban core by establishing a clear boundary corresponding to the existing boundary between residential and commercial building types.

- The City should promote the development of hotels, bed and breakfast inns through appropriate zoning and using any other available incentives. Southport 2000 could actively recruit high quality development projects and assemble parcels of land in desirable locations for resale to prospective developers

### Streetscape

The downtown business district has no street trees of



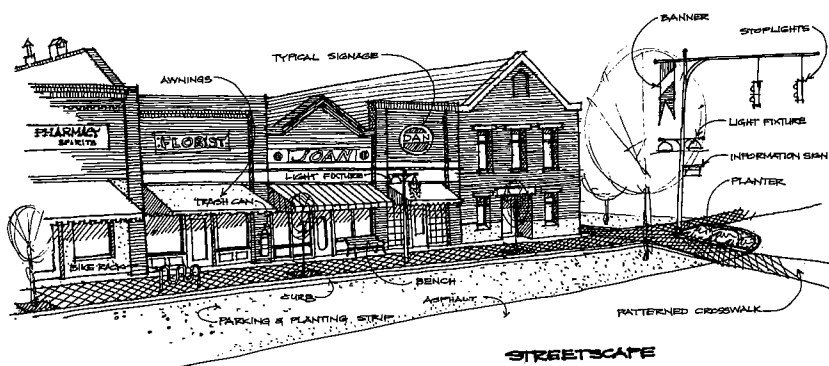
■ Proposed streetscape improvements with Live Oaks

significant size to provide a canopy over the streets, add shade-comfort in summer and evergreen color in winter.

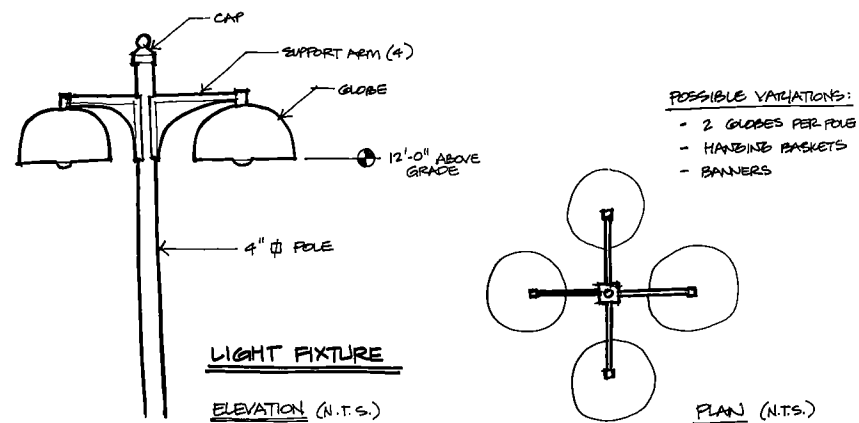
The vegetation where the forest meets the sea is peculiar and distinctive. Everyone who visits the coast will be sure to hear about the remarkable Live Oaks (*quercos Vivenniana*). It is one of the region's most beautiful trees with its small hard, gray-green and evergreen leaves held thickly over a low rounded crown. The trunk and branches are so twisted and bent that "crooked as a live oak limb" is a term used by some. The Live Oak is a majestic tree and is

considered by many to be the most beautiful tree in the South. The Live Oak Forest is very evident in Southport. Other trees that grow with it are dogwood, red bay, red cedar, yaupon, cherry laurel, and wild olive. We encourage the use of all of these trees as landscape plantings for Southport.

- Live Oak "street" trees should be planted on 100 foot centers from West Street to the north to Bay Street in the south.
- Cherry/laurel trees to be planted on 90 foot centers on Moore Street east and west of Howe Street.
- The street edge from the traffic lane to the sidewalk is to be excavated along Howe and Moore Streets and this strip should be filled with marl, an indigenous paving mate-



■ Streetscape Improvements on Moore Street

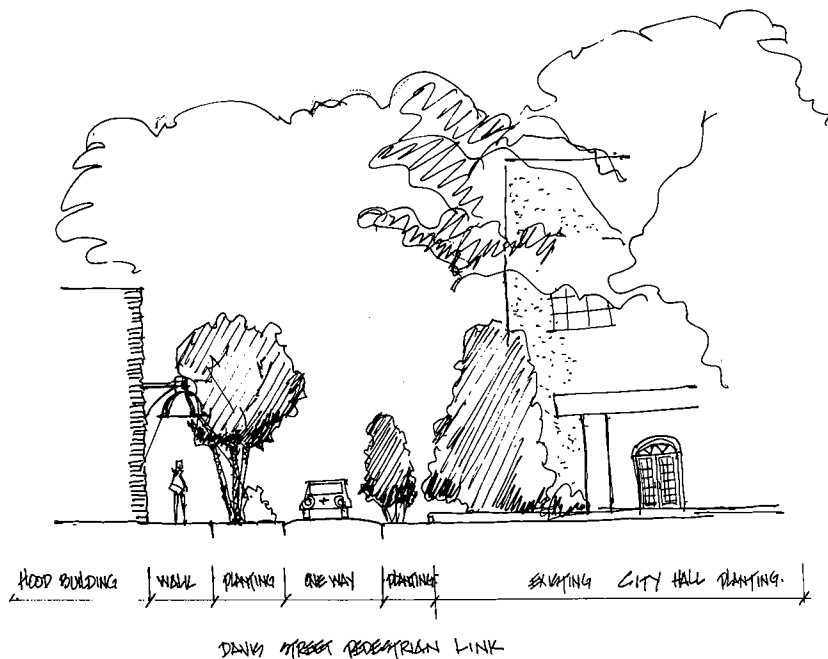


■ Light fixtures for pedestrian walkways

rial, to provide a defined, porous strip of ground for street trees and other plantings and for parking.

- All sidewalks in the downtown district should be replaced with scored concrete. The pattern should be 6-inch diagonal squares cut into the surface after curing. This sidewalk treatment should also be used for pedestrian crosswalks.

- Lighting fixtures which are designed to illuminate the walkways with pools of light should be installed along these routes and on the waterfront.
- Utility lines should be put behind the buildings where possible or beneath the streets where roofs of existing trees will not be damaged. Their presence competes with the building facades and circulation along pedestrian ways.



■ *Davis Streetscape with Pedestrian Link from Franklin Square Park to the City Pier*

### **A Pedestrian Walkway and Franklin Square Park**

Franklin Square Park, also known as the Town Commons, is the most important open space in the Historic District and is considered by many Southport citizens to be sacred space. Currently, the park is somewhat closed off and isolated from the downtown and waterfront. There is inadequate space for spectators in the vicinity of the bandshell.

- A pathway should be extended from the art gallery through downtown to the city pier along Davis Street. Suf-

cient right-of way exists for the path to be located on the west side of Davis Street while still accommodating one-way traffic and residential parking. A cupola could be constructed on the north side of Nash Street to serve as a focal point for pedestrians walking from the waterfront.

- The City should rebuild the first fifteen feet of the city pier to provide a larger platform for people and to provide safe access to the pier and waterfront promenade at the sandy beach.

- Only minor alterations should be made to Franklin Square Park. An entrance to the park from Howe Street should be constructed. In areas which are heavily shaded and grass is not growing, marl should be placed. All paths in the park should also be marl with an edge treatment. The diagonal entrance to the park should be maintained, as the proposed visitors center will be located diagonally across from this entrance.

- The old gymnasium adjacent to the park should be demolished as soon as it can be replaced by a new facility, and the band shell relocated adjacent to Atlantic Avenue.

- A contingency plan should be prepared for the closing of East West Street between Howe Street and Atlantic Avenue during large festivals at the Franklin Square Park.

- A good maintenance program for this park, as well as all city vegetation and properties should be implemented.

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## The Waterfront

Southport's waterfront has a rich and venerable history. Today older residents of the city recall the days when Southport's waterfront was a working waterfront, replete with three separate shrimp houses, their docks extending majestically out into the reaches of the Cape Fear. History books attest to Southport's role in the civil war and in colonial development. Perhaps the best stories of Southport's waterfront describe the pirates who roamed the city's shoreline.

Southport's waterfront is one of its most valuable assets, yet it is under-utilized by the general public, tourists and commercial and recreational boaters. While it has some access problems, the waterfront offers a wealth of potential for increasing recreational and commercial activities, and thereby, the economic vitality of Southport.

### Issue

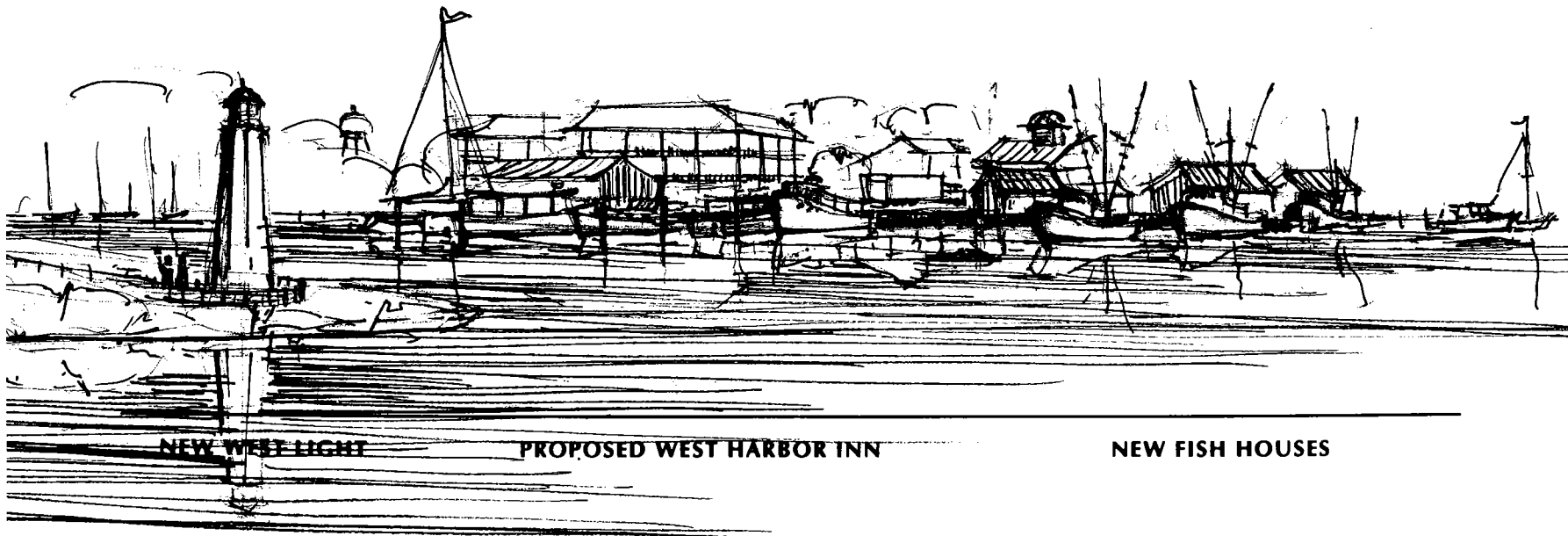
The activities along the waterfront are disjointed and a visitor cannot easily walk along the entire length of the shoreline.

### Recommendations

- Enhance Southport's image as a destination point for watercraft. The city government should take the lead in building the new docks and other waterfront improvements. The addition of transient dockage facilities along the water-

front to serve pleasure craft will allow the city to begin to control its own destiny concerning its image among boaters traveling the Intracoastal Waterway. The implementation of a water taxi service between the nearby beaches and Southport should be investigated. In order to direct maritime visitors to the many attractions in Southport, an information center catering to these visitors should be located in the proposed pavilion at the transportation pier. The city (or a licensed operator) should provide 24-hour top quality service catering to the needs of those boaters. A grocery store and other businesses which boaters typically frequent should be encouraged to locate in the downtown area.

- A waterfront promenade, constructed along the entire length of the waterfront, should provide a means of linking all the existing and proposed activities occurring on the waterfront. A stroll along the promenade would be a varied and interesting experience for both residents and visitors. Sections of it may be on existing ground surfaces, while other sections can be pile-supported. The walkway would be designed, so it is recognized as a specifically-defined pathway, distinctly different in character from the city sidewalk system. Low light fixtures along the walkway will provide illumination for night time safety and will be seen as a festive string of lights from the water. Public restrooms will be provided at selected locations along the



■ *Proposed Development of the Waterfront*

promenade for the public's convenience.

Issue

Many areas of marshland and other environmentally sensitive areas exist along the waterfront.

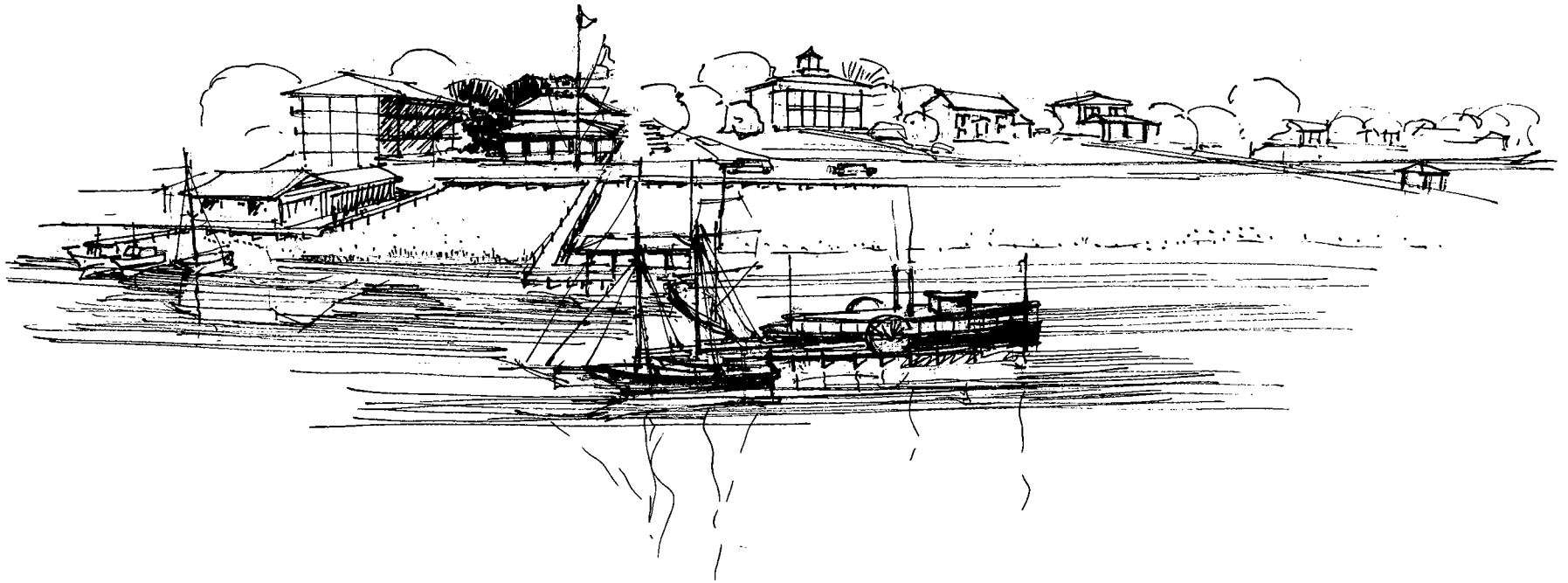
Recommendation

- All new waterfront facilities should be designed to minimize any adverse impacts on these environmentally sensitive areas and/or disruption to natural processes along

the shore. To allow the public to more fully experience these areas, elevated walkways can extend into the marshland between the old yacht basin and the Southport Marina and a bird observatory is proposed near the waterway in this area.

Issue

The Old Yacht Basin is the center of commercial fishing activity in Southport and provides the most obvious visual reinforcement of the city's image as a "quaint fishing



■ *View of Waterfront with Future Maritime Museum and Antique Boat Display*

village,” a major reason people visit or live in Southport.

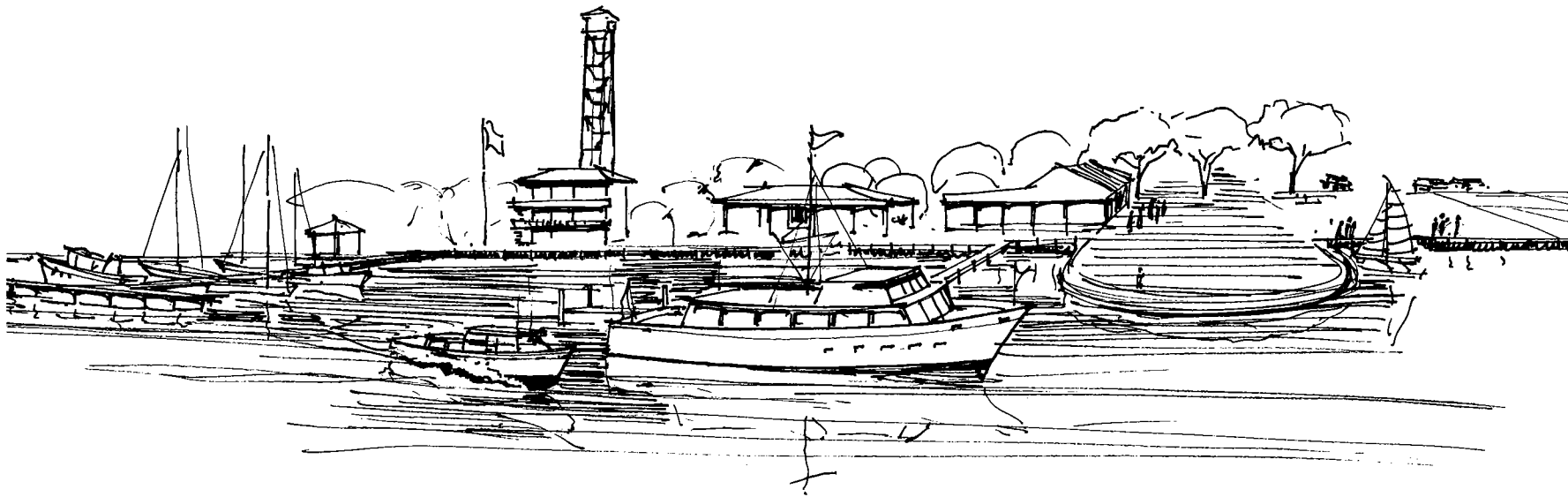
#### Recommendation

- The Old Yacht Basin and working waterfront are the essence of Southport’s “quaint fishing village” image which is loved by many of its citizens. This area should be conserved and enhanced. No significant changes are recommended, except the construction of a marginal walkway around sections of it to provide the public easier and safer access. Additionally, the maritime museum should eventu-

ally be located in this section of town so the “working waterfront” can be directly incorporated into the experience of a visitor to the museum. Additional boat slips for historic vessels affiliated with the museum could be provided along the waterfront adjacent to the commercial fishing dockage.

#### Issue

The city has limited land access to it and does not successfully attract visitors by means of the Cape Fear River and intracoastal waterway.

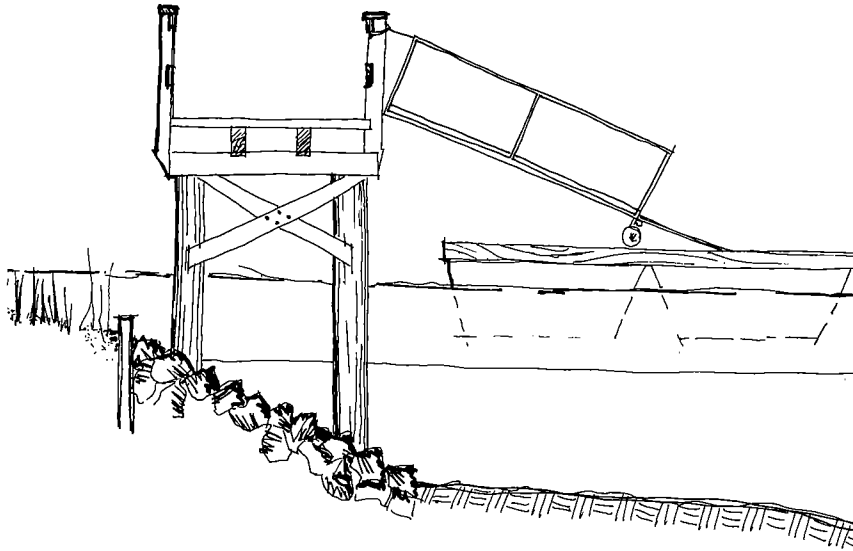


■ *Southport as a Popular Destination for Maritime Travellers with the Construction of New Dockage Facilities*

Recommendations

- Southport can be turned into a popular destination point for maritime visitors if new docks are constructed near the center of the waterfront to form a “water transportation center.” The docks should have the capability to berth intracoastal cruise ships, dinner boats, and water taxis which could serve Wilmington and the beaches. Also, slips can be provided for short-term stays by nearby recreational boaters and those travelling along the intracoastal waterway. Distinctive lights should be constructed at both ends of the waterfront to highlight where the city waterfront is located

for night visitors from the water and for observers on nearby islands. The new dockage creating the transportation center will allow Southport to become both an important point of origin and a destination point. Boat tours originating at the Southport waterfront should be established. They can cruise up the Cape Fear River with stops at such places as Orton Plantation, Brunswick Town, Historic Wilmington, and the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial. Dinner cruises have been immensely popular in other waterfront communities and such a cruise originating at Southport should be established.



■ *Walkway at New Floating Dock*

- The city should continue efforts to obtain control over the State Ports Authority yacht basin (The Small Boat Harbor) so its operation may be restructured to more fully serve the interests of the city.
- The image of Southport by boaters stands significant room for improvement. To be more attractive to transient boaters, a 24-hour service-oriented attitude should be present. Boaters require easy access to supplies and repair facilities. Hence, locating a grocery store near the downtown area which is easily accessible to visiting boaters as well as reliable boat repair yards would be desirable.

Issue

The proximity of the Cape Fear River channel and inlet, the intracoastal waterway, the tide range and the open expanse of water in front of the city combine to create significant currents, wind-generated waves and boat wakes along much of the waterfront.

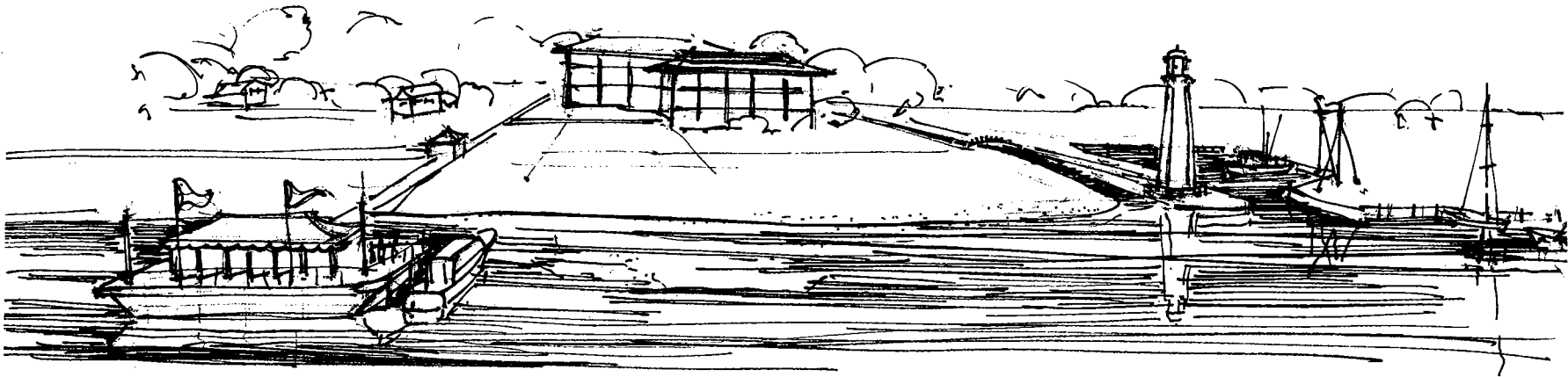
Recommendation

- The combination of wind, waves, and current can create difficulties in the safe docking and mooring of vessels along the waterfront. All new docking facilities should be designed to respect and minimize the effect of these forces. The main transportation pier can be designed to act as current deflector and as a breakwater. Additional protective structures (fixed and/or floating) can be incorporated into the new docking facilities as required. Structures such as these have been used successfully to create safe, protected boat basins at numerous other waterfronts with similar hydraulic characteristics.

Issue

Existing dockage at Southport is almost exhausted and a significant increase in demand for slips by recreational boaters and commercial fishermen can be expected.





■ *Waterfront View of the East Harbor area with Proposed New Inn, Floating Restaurant and East Light*

Recommendation

- The existing dock facility and boat repair yard at the east end of the waterfront (the Willis property) can be expanded to accommodate any increase in demand. An inn and restaurant (possibly floating) should be encouraged to be developed next to this basin so that this entire area can serve as a northern anchor for the waterfront and the terminus for the waterfront promenade.

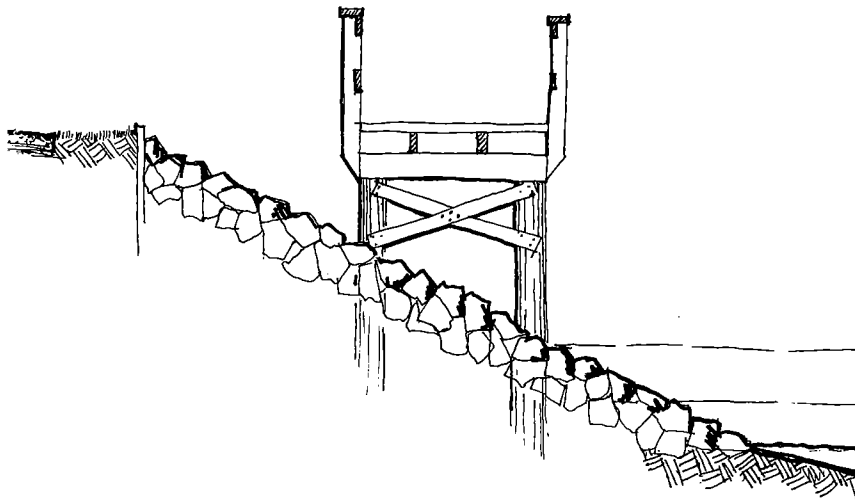
Issue

At lower tide levels a sandy beach is exposed along

the waterfront interlaced with large rocks and concrete rubble placed to inhibit erosion.

Recommendation

- In order to improve the appearance of the shoreline from the water and to promote safety, it is recommended that all the existing concrete rubble along the waterfront be removed along with the large rocks in certain locations. Safe access should be provided down to the sandy beach from the waterfront walkway at selected locations. Each section



#### ■ *Waterfront Walkway with Shoreline Protection*

of the shoreline should be evaluated to determine how it should be treated, based on both what exists behind and the planned use of the water area in front. The three shoreline treatments which would be predominant along Southport's waterfront are:

- Leaving the shoreline in its natural state, consisting of a sandy beach backed by marshland and/or fastland.
- Creation of a "perched marsh" by leaving intact existing marshland while constructing a submerged bulkhead/riprap revetment in front to allow a deeper basin for boats to be dredged closer to the shoreline than otherwise

possible.

- Construction of a bulkhead/riprap revetment in locations where roadways are immediately behind the shoreline. It is recommended that the waterfront walkway be constructed on piles over the riprap to minimize the visual impact of a riprap shoreline.

#### Issue

The view of the water from the shore is valued by all and should be enjoyed by as many people as possible.

#### Recommendation

- Dock facilities should not proliferate along the entire waterfront. The views of the water should remain relatively open from the streets leading down to the shoreline and the area in front of the existing Waterfront Park should not be obstructed. Depending upon the availability of suitable land, a second waterfront park could be established along the river between Fort Johnston and the northern dock facility and boat yard.

#### Special Projects

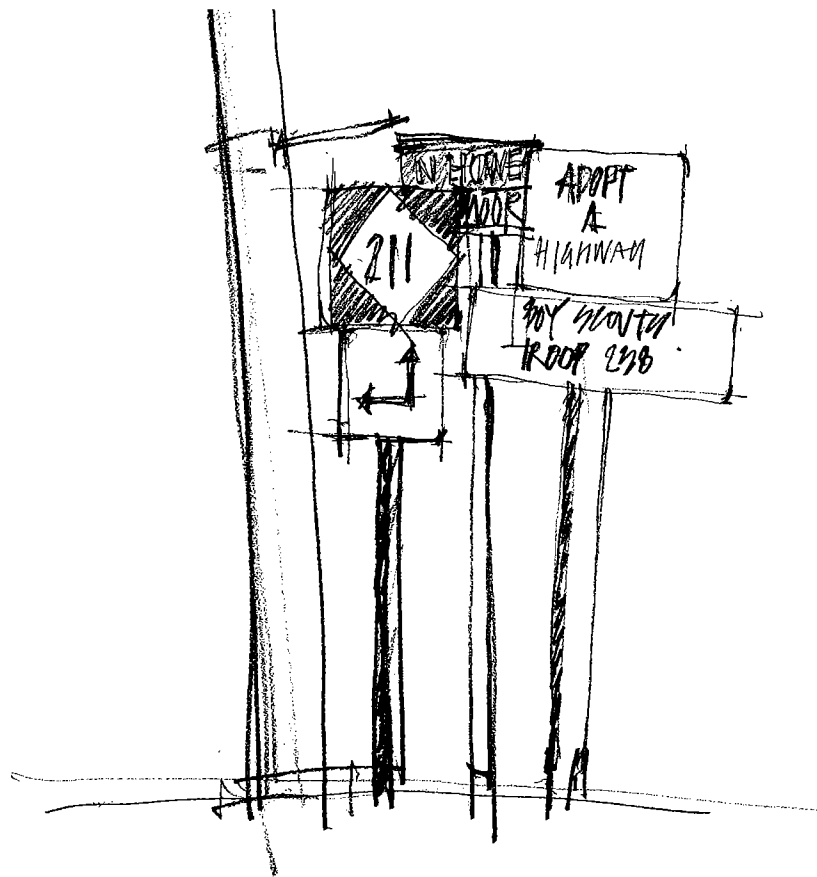
##### 1. *Performing and Visual Arts Center*

Southport's fledgling effort to establish a community theater at the Brunswick Community College campus should

be nurtured. This location reinforces the city's commitment to revitalize this area through the use of CDBG funds, in addition to supporting a grassroots effort that is bringing a new and interesting cultural activity to Southport.

The continued development of regional theater can be helpful in attracting vacationers from surrounding beaches as well as enhancing cultural opportunities for residents. His-

#### ■ *Confusing signage*



toric drama (indoors or out) should be considered as a way of drawing visitors to the area much as "The Lost Colony" does for Manteo.

#### 2. *Signage*

Other than street names, most of the road signs in Southport tell a visitor how to get out of the city rather than encouraging one to stop and visit. Southport is more than a place to pass through on the way to and from the Fort Fisher Ferry. The many attractions of Southport should be clearly pointed out with a well-designed system of signage. Consideration needs to be given to signage as a resource to be managed like any valuable asset. The recent completion of I-40 has the potential of bringing more traffic into the city with more people unfamiliar with the area and the following suggestions would help improve Southport's signage:

- A signage program should be developed and implemented in conjunction with NCDOT and to quickly inform and orient visitors. At its most basic level, roadway signage needs to have concise information, properly sized and located to ensure a smooth traffic flow. It should convey an image of Southport's heritage and waterfront activities, inform the curious and spark the interest of the casual observer.



■ *A Coordinated System of Signs is Needed to Provide Information for Visitors*

- All signage should be consistent with other graphic and printed material, both in terms of quality of information and visual style. It should be part of an integrated image program that includes maps, directories, marketing materials, design of public events, and the city's corporate image. It should also be consistent with the best architectural character of Southport -- its waterfront and streetscape development and its institutions.

- The purpose of the signage program is to engage the visitor to stay (and spend) and to encourage repeat visits. This can be done by exposing visitors to a variety of activities in Southport and presenting an image of an inviting and efficient city that cares about and celebrates its uniqueness.

*3. Economic Development*

In addition to income from tourism, a balanced economy needs industry which is not seasonal and which provides ample opportunity for young people wishing to stay in the area. Southport 2000 should consider some of the following approaches to actively attract new desirable employers to the area:

Recruit paying members (with annual dues) to provide working capital and a vested interest in the success of the organization. Assess Southport's advantages and disadvantages in recruiting industry. Enlist the involvement of the Department of Commerce, regional industry hunters (private) and existing industry representatives. Consider retaining a consultant to provide an independent appeal.



■ *Sign prototype for Southport*

Evaluate the above information and target industries which suit Southport—both in terms of what the particular type of industry is likely to need, what Southport can provide, as well as the type of industry which Southport deems compatible with other goals and objectives. Consider establishing an industrial park with streets and services in place. Also consider building a quality shell building as an attraction. A high percentage of industry looks for an existing building. For local government, this is an expense which becomes an additional asset. The investment is recovered when the building is sold. In the meantime, it serves as a basis for visits from potential industry, which may elect to

build its own facilities.

Develop promotional literature aimed primarily at industry. Distribute literature to industry hunters, industrial real estate developers, the Department of Commerce, and other pertinent entities. Advertise in trade publications and develop a promotional display and send a team, including the director, to appropriate industrial trade shows.

Develop an existing industry committee to serve as a liaison to monitor the needs and concerns of existing industry. A high percentage of industrial growth typically occurs from expansion of existing industry. Likewise, job loss and the associated impact will result from changes in existing industry.

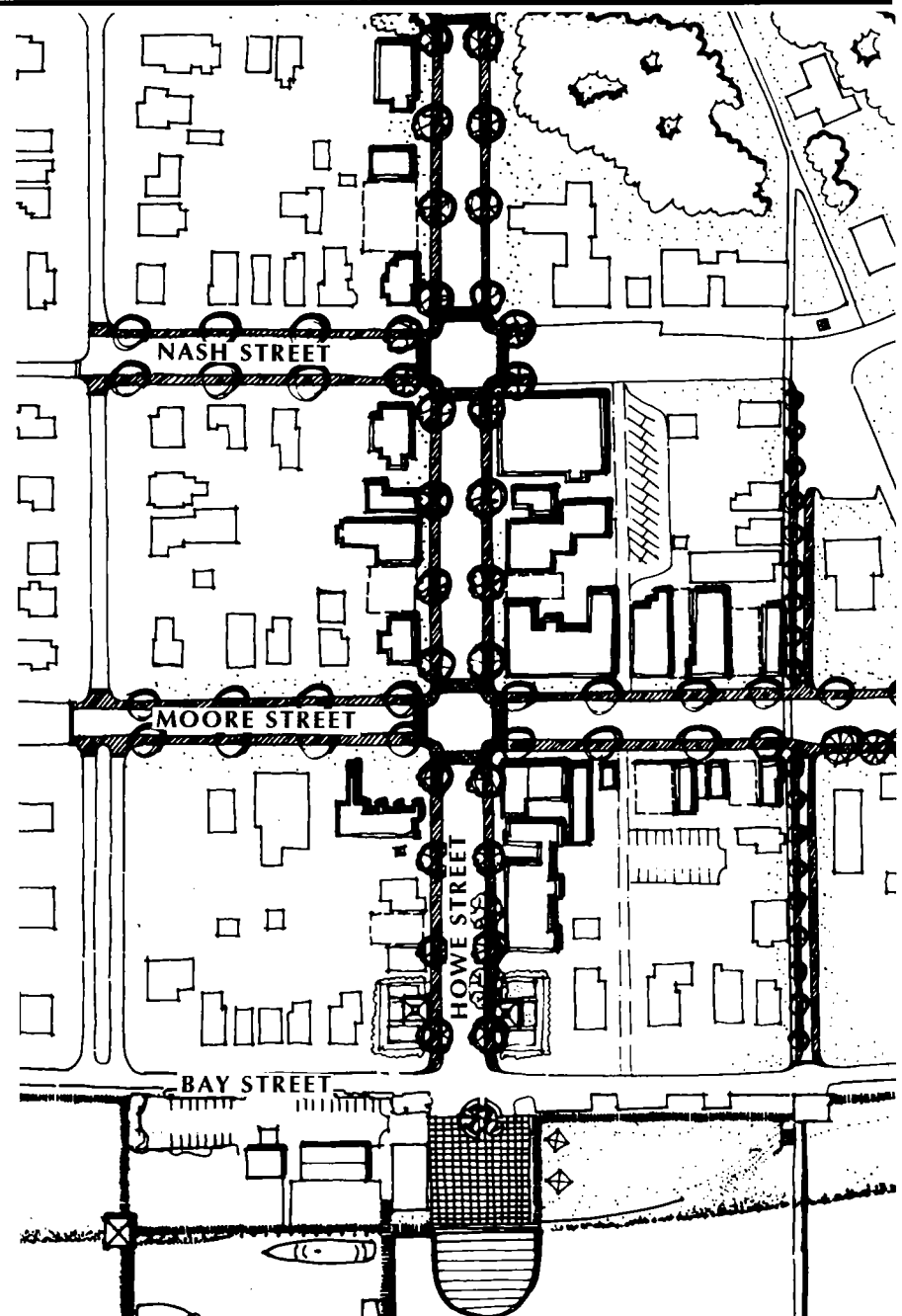
# V. Where to Go from Here

In order for a plan to become a reality, it must capture the imagination of the entire community and have the commitment of the community's leadership. Southport is fortunate to have a number of organizations that are actively working to secure a prosperous future while protecting those assets which make the city a special place to live and visit. The ideas and recommendations in this report are opportunities to tap the energy and creativity of Southport's citizens. However, any plan must be gauged against resources available so that priorities can be set.

This concluding section of the report begins with a list entitled "Some Things to Do Right Away." These are short-term projects or actions that require limited financial resources, but would demonstrate the city's commitment to carry forward the plans and recommendations made by the Urban Design Assistance Team. For the more complex design and planning recommendations, a longer-term perspective is needed - - "A Strategy for Involvement and Action."

## Some Things to Do Right Away

- Design and install City of Southport Entryway Signs at the NC211/87 intersection and at the Ft. Fisher Ferry Landing access road intersection with East Moore Street. Specific recommendations about the design of this signage is



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included in section IV The Development Plan (page 28.)

- Remove the small brick structure located at the intersection of Lord and Bay Street which covers an underground sewer pumping station. This action will open up an excellent view of the water from Lord Street and will help to reinforce the connection between the historic district and the waterfront.

- Repaint the city water tower using the graphic design concept described in section *IV The Development Plan* (page 15.)

- Begin the minor improvements needed in Franklin Square Park: build a pedestrian entrance from Howe Street; install marl with edge treatment on all paths, and define a pedestrian walkway extending from the Art Gallery along Davis Drive to the city pier. (See page 20 of section *IV The Development Plan*.)

### **A Strategy for Involvement and Action**

Without question, the most essential ingredient to successful action on the Development Plan is for individuals and groups to show leadership and enthusiastically take responsibility for specific projects and tasks. The following are recommendations by the Urban Design Assistance Team



#### ■ *Southport's beautiful live oaks*

for ways this work could be done. Ultimately, the citizens of Southport will have to decide on priorities and accept responsibility for the actions and projects recommended.

#### **1. *Southport's Special Character***

After the waterfront, Southport's live oak trees are the single most important natural feature that contribute to the City's character. City government should consider hiring an arborist or tree specialist to maintain the oaks and plan for the replacement of older trees before they die.

The Historical Society in partnership with city government and the newspaper should inform the public about

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Southport's design traditions described in this report. The newspaper could publish a special feature or series of articles about the design traditions and how they have evolved over decades of the City's history. Such educational efforts would be to encourage property owners and developers to creatively use these design traditions in renovations and new development.

## **2. Entryways**

The recommendations for improved signage, landscaping and more attractive development along entry corridors should be undertaken as a cooperative venture by the Planning Board, Appearance Commission and the Public Works Department.

New street trees should be planted in the right-of-way along the approaches to the City. This could be a long-range project for the Public Works Department, doing several blocks a year, as resources become available.

The land acquisition at the corner of Howe and West Streets for the purpose of creating a gateway into the downtown and historic district should be the responsibility of the City.

## **3. Downtown and the Historic District**

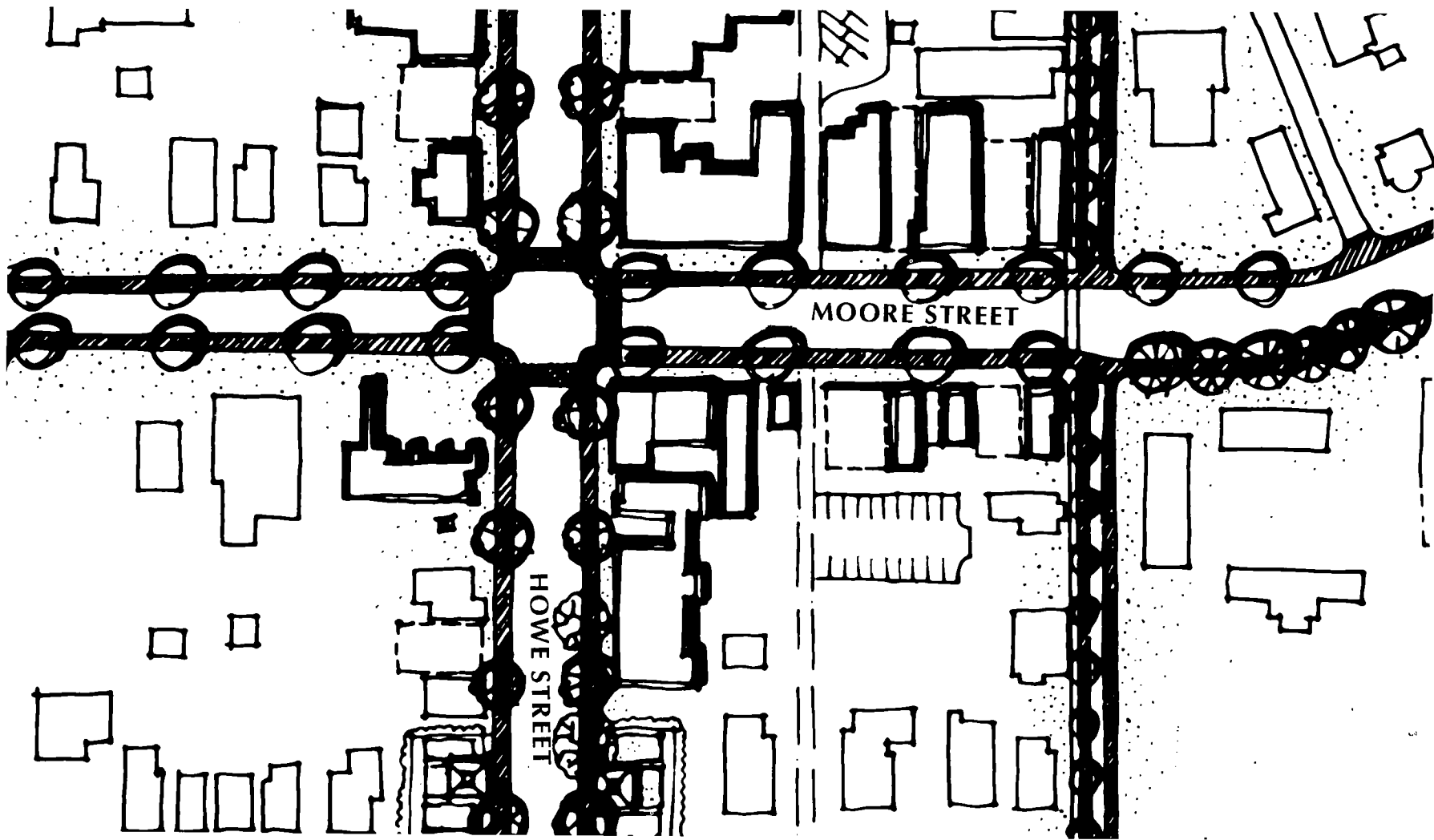
The Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with Southport 2000 should work to establish a downtown merchants association. The merchants association in partnership

with city government could then take on responsibility for the extensive improvements recommended for the downtown. The merchants association could also coordinate promotional activities for the downtown such as joint advertising and special events.

The City of Southport also needs to take initiative for the revitalization of the downtown and the preservation of the historic district. Public actions should include working closely with the merchants association on downtown improvements such as the relocation of overhead utility lines to the rear of buildings. The City will need to evaluate its zoning ordinance to ensure it supports and reinforces recommendations in the Development Plan such as the importance of establishing clear boundaries between commercial and residential areas.

The Historical Society should continue to develop a tour brochure for the area. Southport 2000 should provide funds to make this a quality hand-out. The Historical Society, along with help from The State Port Pilot, should develop a colorful "history" associated with the various sites. Retirees can serve as guides who lead tours and embellish local history. Likewise, carriage rides might couple local history with enjoyment of an open-air ride through oak-lined streets. Furthermore, the "stories" can be released to other newspapers and magazines as a way of generating interest in the area.





■ *Streetscape Improvements for Downtown Southport*

**4. Pedestrian Walkway and Franklin Square Park**

Because these projects involve public land or right-of-way, the City of Southport needs to assume responsibility for

the construction of the walkway and making the recommended improvements to the park.

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## **5. Waterfront**

Recommendations for improvements to the waterfront will require a high level of cooperation and team spirit among several organizations. The City should set an example by upgrading its dock facilities according to the Development Plan, including linking the improved pier to the downtown with the pedestrian walkway. This project would then become the model for extending the improvements along the entire waterfront. Public investment is absolutely necessary to encourage private investment. Likewise, a clearly defined and supported master plan is necessary to minimize risk—particularly for private developers. A project like the “public parking” dock is not intended to pay for itself directly. Return on a public investment such as this is received through increase in property values due to the success of public and private efforts in concert.

## **6. Special Projects**

### *Performing Arts Center*

The Brunswick Concert and Theatrical Society has demonstrated its commitment to providing musical and theatrical entertainment to citizens and visitors to Southport with the establishment of the Centennial Center on the old Brunswick Community College campus. Such efforts should be supported by Southport 2000 and the City to improve the cultural experiences available to both residents and visitors.

### *Signage*

Southport needs a sign ordinance to eliminate visual confusion along the approaches to the city. The Planning Board could take the lead in preparing a sign control ordinance for consideration by the Board of Alderman.

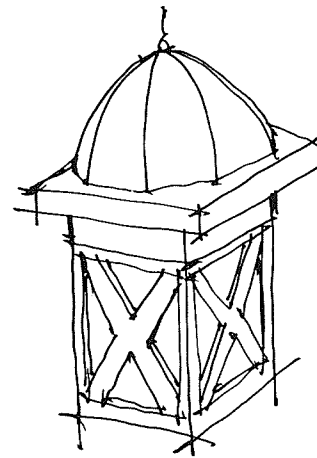
The Appearance Commission, with assistance from local artists or designers, should take responsibility for creating a Southport public information sign system. The signs could be installed and maintained by the Public Works Department. The use of wooden signs, all of which have a uniform logo design and color scheme, could identify Southport's interesting features and would make visitors feel welcome.

### *Economic Development*

Southport 2000 clearly stands in the leadership role for the City's comprehensive economic development activities. Recommendations in the Development Plan for industrial recruiting will require Southport 2000 to work closely with the North Carolina Department of Commerce to identify potential firms. City government will also need to be involved to assure that appropriate urban services are adequate to support any proposed new facility.

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Southport 2000, the Economic Development Commission, and the Chamber of Commerce must take an active role in recruiting new business to the core commercial area. They should begin by actively identifying the types of business which are needed to service the surrounding neighborhood and tourist traffic from both land and water. As an example, a food market will be needed to service boaters and residents. Likewise, more antique stores would create a strong association between a particular market which has already been identified, and the commercial area.



#### Conclusion

Southport has many positive attributes that can be strengthened to enhance its quality of life and economic vitality. The development plan proposes large and small projects which will effectively use resources to preserve and further develop Southport's special character.



■ *Urban Design Assistance Team members: (front row left to right) Brian Benson, Walter Vick, Greg Flynn, Jeff Sheldon, Angelo Abate, (back row) Seth Hiller, Lucy Davis, Stan Williams (not pictured: Kathryn Pfaltzgraff)*

# Visiting Design Team Members

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## **Angelo Abbate, ASLA**

Angelo is secretary/treasurer of Abbate & Co., Inc. in Durham, NC, and is also an Associate Professor of Design in the Department of Landscape Architecture at N. C. State University. He has participated in many North Carolina revitalization and planning studies, including the riverfront plan for Asheville, N.C., which received an award for excellence from the NCAPA. Prior to his work with NCSU, Angelo was president of his own design firm in New York and Philadelphia. He was recently awarded the Outstanding Extension Service Award from NCSU for his contributions to small town development.

## **Brian Benson, AICP, ASLA**

Brian is Director of Land Use and Development Policy with the Triangle Council of Governments in Research Triangle Park, NC. He has worked in North Carolina as a planner in Winston-Salem, Orange County, and Aurora, and was a member of the Laurinburg UDAT study. Brian was co-designer of the Aurora Land Use Plan, which won the ASLA Merit Award.

## **Lucy Carol Davis, AIA, Team Chairman**

Lucy is the principal of Lucy Carol Davis Associates, Architects, in Chapel Hill, NC, and is also President of Davis, Davis & Davis, Inc., which holds an unlimited general contracting license in North Carolina. Lucy was a participant in the Wake Forest and Laurinburg UDAT projects. Her firm has extensive experience in both custom residential and commercial design and renovation, and has published *Design Guidelines for Downtown Carrboro* which won the 1991 NCAPA Award for Small Community Planning.

## **Greg Flynn**

Greg is an architect who has recently relocated to Raleigh from New York. He is originally from Ireland and received his Bachelor of Architecture degree from University College Dublin. He has experience with a variety of building and urban design projects, both in Europe and the United States.

## **Seth Hiller, AIA**

Seth is an architect working in Beaufort and Chapel Hill, NC. His current projects include an 85,000 sq. ft. marine research facility for a consortium of universities and state/federal maritime agencies, a master plan for the town of Beaufort, and the historic restoration of a farmhouse in Virginia. Seth has designed numerous waterfront structures, including, as

associate architect, the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort and several private waterfront residences.

## **Kathryn Pfaltzgraff**

Kathryn is a graphic designer with Lucy Carol Davis Associates in Chapel Hill, and is currently working toward a M. Arch. degree at NCSU. Kathryn was Design Director for Isotechnologies in Hillsborough, N.C., and Creative Associate with Beber Silverstein & Partners Advertising in Miami, FL. Kathryn also served for two years as a Graphics Editor of *The Harvard Crimson*.

## **Jeff Sheldon, P.E.**

Jeff has served as a structural, civil and coastal engineer on a wide variety of projects. His background includes extensive experience with the design of maritime structures. He served as a marina consultant for a large project on the Potomac River near Washington, D.C., which included over one mile of shoreline. He has designed numerous other marine and waterfront structures. These projects have given Jeff extensive experience with marine-related engineering projects such as piers, bulkheads, shore protection, wind and wave loadings, dredging, and beach nourishment.

## **Walter Vick, AIA**

Walter Vick is an architect with The LSV Partnership, an architectural and planning firm in Fayetteville, N. C. Walter planned and designed the Arts Center in downtown Fayetteville, and has been very active with the Fayetteville Arts Council in a number of design-related capacities. He is currently involved with the Fayetteville Revitalization Commission and the Public Relations Committee of the NCAIA.

## **Stan Williams, ASLA**

Stan is a principal of LandDesign, Inc., a 72-person firm in Raleigh providing master planning, site design, construction administration, and civil engineering services. Prior to this, he was Project Manager and Park Designer for the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation in Raleigh. Stan was also co-chairman of the Asheville Riverfront UDAT project, and is a member of the Raleigh Downtown Urban Plan Caucus Committee.

# VI. Acknowledgements

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Peter Batchelor, FAIA  
*North Carolina State University*

Jay Campaign

Debi Coleman  
*The State Port Pilot*

Jay Dechesere  
*Synthesis Architects & Planners*  
*Wrightsville Beach, NC*

Hill Goodman  
*BHI Management*

Margie Herring  
*Bald Head Island Management*

Pam Lombardi

Betsy Kahn  
*Copycat Print Shop*

Doug Kerr  
*Economic Development Committee*

Diane McKeithan  
*The State Port Pilot*

Kent Mitchell  
*BHI Management, Indigo Plantation*

Richard Nubel  
*The State Port Pilot*

John Parker  
*Synthesis, Architects & Planners*

Emily Parker  
*The Turtle Cafe*

Fletcher Penn  
*Creative Computing*

Sea Captain Restaurant

Seaway Printing

Doug Smith  
*Island Computer Service*

*Southport Board of Aldermen:*

C. B. Caroon, Mayor

Rob Hites, City Manager

Nelson Adams, Jim Brown, Bill Crowe, Meezie Childs, Harry  
Gore, Paul Sweeney, Aldermen

*Southport 2000 Board of Directors*

*City of Southport*

*Planning Commission*

*Appearance Commission*

*Economic Development Commission*

*Recreation Commission*

*City of Southport (Staff)*

Robert Gray, Police Chief

Ed Honeycutt, Public Works Director

Sylvia Butterworth, Finance Director

Joe Medlin, Recreation Director

Mary Frink, Secretary to City Manager

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St. Phillips Episcopal Church  
Southport Baptist Church

John W. Thompson, Architect, P.A.  
Project Manager/Southport

Special Events Committee  
*"A Taste of Southport"*

Mike Agner  
*Southport Fish Market*

Mr. & Mrs. John Angemeyer  
*Southport Garden Club*

Regina Alexander

Jill Berry

Mr. & Mrs. C. B. Caroon

Teresa Conrad

Dr. Richard Conrad

Barbara Gray  
Betty Leggett  
Carol Milliken  
Ms. Carolyn Price  
Dot Schmidt  
Robin Schuster  
Southport Woman's Club  
Mary Tomlinson

Ms. Joanne Wesson  
*Executive Director, Southport 2000*

Brunswick Little Theater, Inc.  
*Southport Historical Society*  
*N. C. Fourth of July Committee*  
*Southport Maritime Museum*  
*Robert Ruark Foundation*

Mary (Meezie) Childs  
Mary Ann Russ

#### **FOOD & LODGING**

Harborside Restaurant

Party Pax

Port Charlie's Restaurant

Sea Captain Restaurant

The New York Deli

The Pharmacy Restaurant

Sea Captain Motor Lodge

Ship's Chandler Restaurant

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References

1990 Land Use Plan, City of Southport, NC, October 1990

Lounsbury, Carl. The Architecture of Southport, The Southport Historical Society, Inc. 1979.