

INTRODUCTION

While several buildings are historically associated with Roanoke, Virginia, only one has continuously provided service for *all* its citizens for more than a century, and stood steadfastly as a central hub of public commerce and trade, assembly, and growth. The City Market Building, the mother structure, who nurtured our beloved Farmers' Market, afforded healthy exchange of meats and other sensitive food, grew ancillary businesses and an effervescent downtown around her, and established a solid bond among the founding fathers of the city, is hobbled. The rapid deterioration of the building has reached a critical level, with only bold and immediate gestures deemed suitable resuscitation for our oldest, constant architectural presence: the City Market Building.

Much to the disappointment of its subsequent generations, the City Market Building has not experienced the progressive and complete renovations as those buildings now hosting economic destinations of tourism, such as Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center, Center in the Square, which have, and will, revitalize downtown Roanoke. While perfunctory improvements have been made to the Market Building, and efforts have been made to adapt its use to the trends within a "market" concept, its function and splendor has been diminished from the vibrant public market of the past, to a local food court of today—yet with inadequate facilities and product offerings to produce the memorable and impressive dining destination that tourists and citizens will seek, after the November 2008 opening of the dynamic Taubman Museum of Art. Gone also is the grand banquet facility, fallen into a dismal state of disrepair. Only a few local food vendors remain inside the building, as unsightly vacancies showcase the worsening and depressive interior conditions.

In spite of its darkened mood and interior, the City Market Building still hosts disheartened visitors, and remains one of the City's most treasured places to gather, though loyalty accounts for frequenting the landmark, whose days seem numbered. Repeated press coverage about the gloomy conditions of the Market Building keep the issue raw in the public eye, as it supports the pleas of the food vendors, who are grasping for survival inside the shell that once was the city's public marketplace. The

prevailing question on the lips of residents and tourists alike is, “What will become of our Market Building, which is the place that holds our heritage?”

At a pivotal juncture in the fate of the City Market Building, the occupancy, conditions, management, and morale have plummeted to a low point. The City of Roanoke, owner of the City Market Building, has made an effort to salvage the supervision of a local food court and management of the tenants; however, with a dearth of expertise in food service management, and recognition of the tremendous significance of iconic building, the City of Roanoke acknowledges the Market Building must receive tremendous physical improvements, new and innovative structure, and proper management, in order to be successfully salvaged.

THE COALITION FOR THE ROANOKE CITY MARKET BUILDING

The Market Building must be carefully and fully restored, in order to reflect the heritage and environment of our downtown “market experience,” of enticing fresh food and local produce, an accommodating and inviting center to eat and shop, with an exciting interior, which hosts bustling merchants, and eager customers. There is a national renaissance, not only of downtowns, but also of core city public markets. Our historic City Market Building, while still a beloved element of pride and heritage for Roanoke, should restore its integrity as a regional hub of local produce, food, trade, and congregation. The City Market Building should proudly display the distinctive flavors of the region, which earned its original acclaim.

For the goal of its restoration to an even brighter beacon for the City of Roanoke, and to enhance its service to accommodate the progressive growth of the market area surrounding it, *the Coalition for the City Market Building* was formed. The mission of the Coalition is as follows:

To strategically research, partner, plan, develop, and implement an optimum and transformational design, operational structure and management, and a vibrant new approach for the Roanoke City Market Building, which will characteristically complement the cultural and economic momentum of Downtown Roanoke, and will become a self-sustaining hallmark of the heritage and quality of life of the Roanoke Valley.

With the citizens of the region in mind, in accordance with the skeletal master plan for a downtown renaissance, a “best use study” was conducted, with recommendations for an extensive and comprehensive makeover of the Market Building. The Coalition for the City Market Building believes the plan, as outlined below, will provide a proud and complementary destination for the beloved icon of downtown Roanoke: the City Market Building.

PROPOSED GOALS OF THE REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

- Restore the historic character of the City Market building, and make full use of all its facilities, including the third floor public hall
- Make Market Square a usable, active public space that enhances the visibility of Center in the Square and becomes a venue for a wide range of public events
- Re-establish the historic food focus of the City Market, expanding the potential for the local food economy and for locally-owned and operated businesses
- Build on the growth of the existing outdoor market and link the outdoor market activities directly to the market building
- Leverage the market as a catalyst for downtown revitalization and as a venue for promoting community health and economic development
- Expand the food buying opportunities for the Roanoke region, especially downtown residents
- Support affordable, entry level businesses, especially for low income and immigrant entrepreneurs, and help existing businesses grow and mature
- Achieve financial self-sufficiency after three years

Without the central gathering hub of the Market Building, the excitement and experience of the enhanced downtown destinations will be diminished. What would anchor the market area and its attractions, if not the Market Building itself? In order to capitalize on the destinations that Roanoke has strived for so many years to create and improve, there needs to be a place to linger, a place to relax, a place to await, replenish, shop, and retreat. The time has arrived for the Market Building to reinstate itself as the pillar of

downtown Roanoke, and to again command the dignity and the presence that made Roanoke proud.

1: CONCEPT PLAN

A. PROPOSED FACILITY USE BY FLOOR

Overview of Proposed Layout for Market Hall

GROUND FLOOR

The central area of the market is the area of the recommended concentration of fresh and prepared foods, with the corners for restaurants/retail, and the arcades along Wall Street and Market Street for farmers, day stalls and crafts. Tenants needing larger spaces could also use the arcades.

Permanent stall spaces would be less deep than they currently exist, allowing for racetrack circulation for the Market Hall. A seating, day stall, and demonstration area would be located in the center of the Hall. A proposal to remove the existing mezzanine would open up the space to its original full height, and create once again a bright, light-filled space. Seating areas are clustered around the perimeter of the market stalls and extending to the wings, as well as to a smaller mezzanine, reached by elevator or by two new staircases, and, which have small rest rooms under them, mainly for the use of adjacent restaurant customers.

The perimeter of the market, including all retail and restaurant spaces, would have doors that largely open the interior of the market to the sidewalk. This space would have the feeling of an open-air arcade, which would not be heated or cooled in the same way as the market hall. However, doors could be opened and closed, according the season.

Little Market Street and Wall Street are proposed as one continuous level, from building to building, with bollards and trees providing protection from traffic. This treatment will allow maximum flexibility in using these streets for parking, as well as for farmer/vendor trucks, which can line up, as they used to, on both sides of the market. Additional stall space will be available in the arcades, by opening the doors that face to