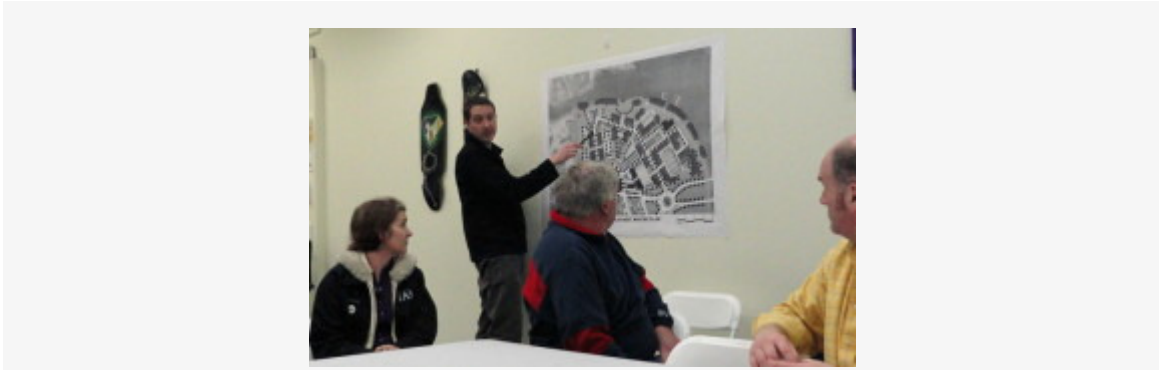


NashuaPatch

CrowdSourcing the Downtown

Visualize Nashua is revamping its website and building an online base of local "visionaries" to direct the city's potential.

- By [Carol Robidoux](#)
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"Potential" is a word we think we understand. But break it down and you will see that visualizing the potential something has – the city's downtown, for example –is all about harnessing the "potent" power a community has over its surroundings.

Given the proliferation of social media and its power to move just about everything currently happening on earth, it's really as simple a concept as "If you 'like' it, we will build it."

Enter Visualize Nashua, a grassroots online community working to harness the power of crowd persuasion as a way to help the city reach its potential.

A core group of about a dozen "visualizers" have been coming together monthly at Renaissance Downtowns Main Street headquarters, to map out something they're calling the Greater Downtown 400 Living Campaign.

"Basically we're taking ideas from people with a vested interest in the downtown, and we vet them through the process of 'crowdsourced placemaking,' and then we work on the feasibility of implementing the most popular ideas," said Neil Takemoto, founder CS Placemaking, (csplacemaking.com) a firm he's started with Renaissance Downtowns to focus on large-scale crowdsourced placemaking.

Takemoto is working closely with James Vayo, assistant project manager for Renaissance Downtowns, who happens to be leading the charge for community engagement.

Although his current pet project is development of the [Bridge Street Project](#), which will transform 26 city-owned acres of former brown fields situated along the river into a vibrant, sustainable neighborhood, Vayo is all in.

He's working toward launching a pilot community garden for the coming growing season, and would love to see some of the unused second-floor office space along Main Street become apartments. He's part of the Broad Street Parkway International Design committee.

He is a dedicated bicycle commuter who is constantly considering how to make the downtown more livable, and how to make that lifestyle more sustainable.

Through it all, his No.1 push is engaging the community in a virtual campaign to reinvent the city to fit our human 21st-century needs.

Needs that include more affordable housing options – the McMansion days are over; the future will be a place where people migrate to urban centers where they can work and play and live within walking distance of most everything they need.

So where and how does reinvention begin? It's a process both Vayo and Takemoto understand well. They point to how "crowdsourced placemaking" is transforming other cities around the country using a model of "[new urbanism](#)," including Bristol, CT., as chronicled in the [New York Times](#).

Crowdsourcing a community opens the planning process to residents before a single blueprint or site plan is penned, providing an investment in interest that developers can actually take to the bank, Vayo said.

"We initiated a housing campaign, the Greater Downtown 400 Living Campaign, and based on the results of that, we can literally take that information to the bank; it's a method that can help get funding for the project, if we can prove there's demand through achieving a certain number of preleases," Vayo said.

The "400" is the number of cumulative "likes" Takemoto and Vayo are hoping to get via their online tote board. Once that milestone is reached, the hope is to identify the "Founding 50," a community of 50 people ready to sign on to actually inhabit the spaces created, based on virtual demand.

Ultimately, the goal is to reach 400 "likes" by June 30, which means everyone who hears about the campaign should not only go to www.visualizenashua.com, sign up, and vote, but they should also share the information with their personal network of friends, through Facebook, Twitter and e-mail, said Takemoto.

"We want to get this off the ground, and the best way to do that is to spread the word," Takemoto said.

How it works:

Members create an account on www.visualizenashua.com and then are able to post ideas for prospective public/retail/residential amenities for downtown Nashua or the [Bridge Street Site](#). Some of the ideas have been local-minded restaurants, affordable housing downtown, a commuter rail from Boston to Nashua, a Riverfront Promenade, etc. These ideas need a certain amount of likes on our website for Renaissance Downtowns to initiate a feasibility study to determine the requirements for implementing that idea.

How you can participate

Share your ideas and comments by posting them to www.visualizenashua.com.

Like Visualize Nashua on [Facebook](#) and follow them on [Twitter](#).

Join them for monthly meet-ups to stay current on what's happening at [Visualize Nashua](#). Spread the word to other like-minded individuals to campaign for an idea, or post your own big idea and watch it grow.