

The purpose of the Cape Charles Railroad & Harbor Ideas Competition is to encourage Americans to develop innovative and creative ideas that provide vision to the master plan framework that is being developed for the harbor in historic Cape Charles, Virginia. Cape Charles is a typical American town on the Eastern Shore that grew out of the railroad and shipping industry along the Chesapeake Bay. Over time, the railroad was replaced by a highway and a 17.6 mile bridge-tunnel at the southern tip of the Eastern Shore. As a result, Cape Charles went through a decline. In 2020, Covid changed the way the world works, and this idyllic beach town on the Chesapeake Bay now draws professionals who can now work remotely on a full or part-time basis. The train tracks and buildings along the harbor have been removed, and the town is working with the Berkley Group to develop a master plan for a new development. This competition is intended to create ideas and test-fits for the master plan. The competition will spur public interest in this typical American town. It will join legacy and the future, historical context and contemporary thinking, and engage in a lively debate about how to shape railroad towns that no longer have a railroad.



1925 Cape Charles Harbor from the south

eligibility

The competition invites participation of individuals 12 and older. Submissions are welcome from students, artists, critics, historians, educators, architects, landscape architects, planners and anyone who has a good idea for this civic space.

awards

All entrants will be eligible for inclusion in the catalogue that will be published online.

It will be up to the discretion of **Stage 1** jurors to distribute \$10,000 of prize money to semifinalists who will continue to Stage 2.

The five finalists from **Stage 2** will be awarded a stipend and will be eligible to proceed to Stage 3.

In **Stage 3**, Cape Charles citizens will review the test fits and cast their vote for the People's Choice for 2 Honor Awards and 3 Honorable Mentions.

schedule

May 1, 2026 – Registration opens and online materials are available on the town's website at <https://www.capecharles.org/planning-zoning/page/railroad-harbor-area-master-planning> to educate the public about the history of Cape Charles and this development opportunity.

September 18, 2026 – **Stage 1** submissions will be due to the Town of Cape Charles by 5 pm EST.

September 25, 2026 – A distinguished jury composed of professors from the region's universities will meet in Cape Charles and select up to 20 semifinalists to enter Stage 2 of the competition.

October 10, 2026 - All submissions will be displayed in Cape Charles, and semifinalists will be recognized as part of the town's Fall Festival.

Spring 2027 – In **Stage 2**, the semifinalists will translate their ideas into preliminary demonstration proposals. A jury will select 5 finalists.

Summer 2027 – In **Stage 3**, the five finalists will be asked to further refine their idea and make a presentation to the Town Council. They will develop their ideas into comparable test fits for the master plan, suitable for public vote.

September 2027: Cape Charles citizens will have the chance to vote for the People's Choice.



2025 Cape Charles aerial from the north, harbor in center

submissions

The Competition entrants must be registered in order to be eligible for review and award. Registrations opens on May 1, 2026 at <https://www.capecharles.org/planning-zoning/page/railroad-harbor-area-master-planning>

Entries must be submitted electronically, using Adobe Portable Document format (PDF) and uploaded at ccideas@capecharles.org

Stage 1 submissions must be no more than three pages sized at 8 ½ x 11 inches, landscape format. The submission must begin with an abstract of no more than 50 words. Minimum font size is 10 point. Only electronic submissions will be eligible.

Registration fee:

- \$100 / entry for individuals
- \$25 / entry for students
- \$50 / entry for Cape Charles Residents



Above: 2025 View of the site from the “hump”- Mason Avenue - Cape Charles’ main street is to the right and the Chesapeake Bay is in the distance.

registration introduction

Registration and fees for the Cape Charles Railroad & Harbor Ideas Competition covers Stage 1 as well as Stages 2 and 3, if selected. Registration will be open starting on May 1, 2026.

Competition entries are to be submitted to the town clerk at ccideas@capecharles.org at any time after registering and paying the fee for the competition. Registration will close on September 14, 2026.

Entries must be submitted electronically, using Adobe Portable Document format (PDF).

Anyone 12 years of age or older can participate, including those affiliated with the jurors or the town. See the competition brief for additional instructions.

Please submit questions about the competition to Jim Clark, Competition Chairman, by e-mail at kralcmij@mtfa.net

registration

Name of Team Leader:

e-mail Address:

Phone Number:

Mailing Address:

Organization or University (if any):

Team Member Names and e-mail addresses (if more than one per submission):

I agree to hold harmless and indemnify the Town of Cape Charles, its organizers and jurors from any and all claims, actions, or damages brought by myself, my team or any third party as a result of participating in the competition, including legal fees. Further, I, along with my team members, grant the Town of Cape Charles the right to use our submissions, name, and likeness for development, master planning, promotional, educational, and marketing purposes without compensation.

Signature:

Date:



Above: Cape Charles historic overlay - Contributing buildings to the historic district are indicated in black. Mason Avenue and the northern edge of the railroad site are indicated at the bottom of this image.

how to submit

Registration may be submitted in one of two ways:

- 1) Fill out this registration sheet and submit to the town clerk through the following e-mail address: ccideas@capecharles.org Then call the town treasurer at (757) 331 3259, extension 23 to provide credit card information for the submission fees.
- 2) Fill out this registration sheet and send it by mail with a check covering the registration fees to the following address:
Town of Cape Charles
Attn: Town Treasurer, Ideas Competition
412 Tazwell Avenue, PO Box 191
Cape Charles, VA 23310

Registration fees:

- \$100 / entry for individuals or team
- \$25 entry for a student or team
- \$50 / entry for Cape Charles Resident



sponsors & contributors

Town of Cape Charles

Cape Charles Mayor and Town Council
Planning & Zoning Administrator: Katie Nunez
Town Treasurer: Marion Sofield
Town Clerk: Libby Hume
Planning & Zoning: Jack Steinmayer

Competition Chairman

James P. Clark, FAIA

DONATIONS TO SUPPORT COMPETITION:

Visionary Sponsor - \$2,500

Catalyst Sponsor - \$1,000

Creator Sponsor - \$500

Enthusiast Sponsor - \$250

Call the Cape Charles treasurer at (757) 331 3259, extension 23 to provide donation and submit credit card information

stage 1 jury

**College of William & Mary
College of Arts and Sciences**
Edwin Pease
Emeritus Senior Lecturer of Art

**George Washington University
Sustainable Urban Design & Planning**
Sandra Whitehead, Ph.D.
Director

Howard University
John Odhiambo Onyango, PhD
Chair of Architecture

**James Madison University
School of Art, Design and Art History**
Jori Erdman, AIA, NOMA
Assoc. Director & Professor of Architectural Design

**The Catholic University of America
School of Architecture & Allied Arts**
Jason Montgomery NCARB CNU
Associate Professor and Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

**University of Maryland
School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation**
Brittany Williams, AIA LEED AP
Associate Clinical Professor

**Virginia Tech
Washington Alexandria Architecture Center**
Susan Piedmont-Palladino, Architect
Director, Professor of Architecture

Additional Programs Supporting the Competition
Corcoran School of the Arts and Design
Columbian College of Arts & Sciences, GW



1930 Cape Charles harbor and terminal building

supporting materials index

Section 1:
Site Plans

Section 2:
Site Photography

Section 3:
Historic Photos

Section 4:
Selected Sections from the Master Plan Framework by the Berkley Group

Section 5:
Frequently Asked Questions

See the town of Cape Charles' website for more information on the ongoing development of the Railyard and Harbor Master Plan. Competitors can use the master plan framework to develop their idea, but it is not a requirement for this competition.

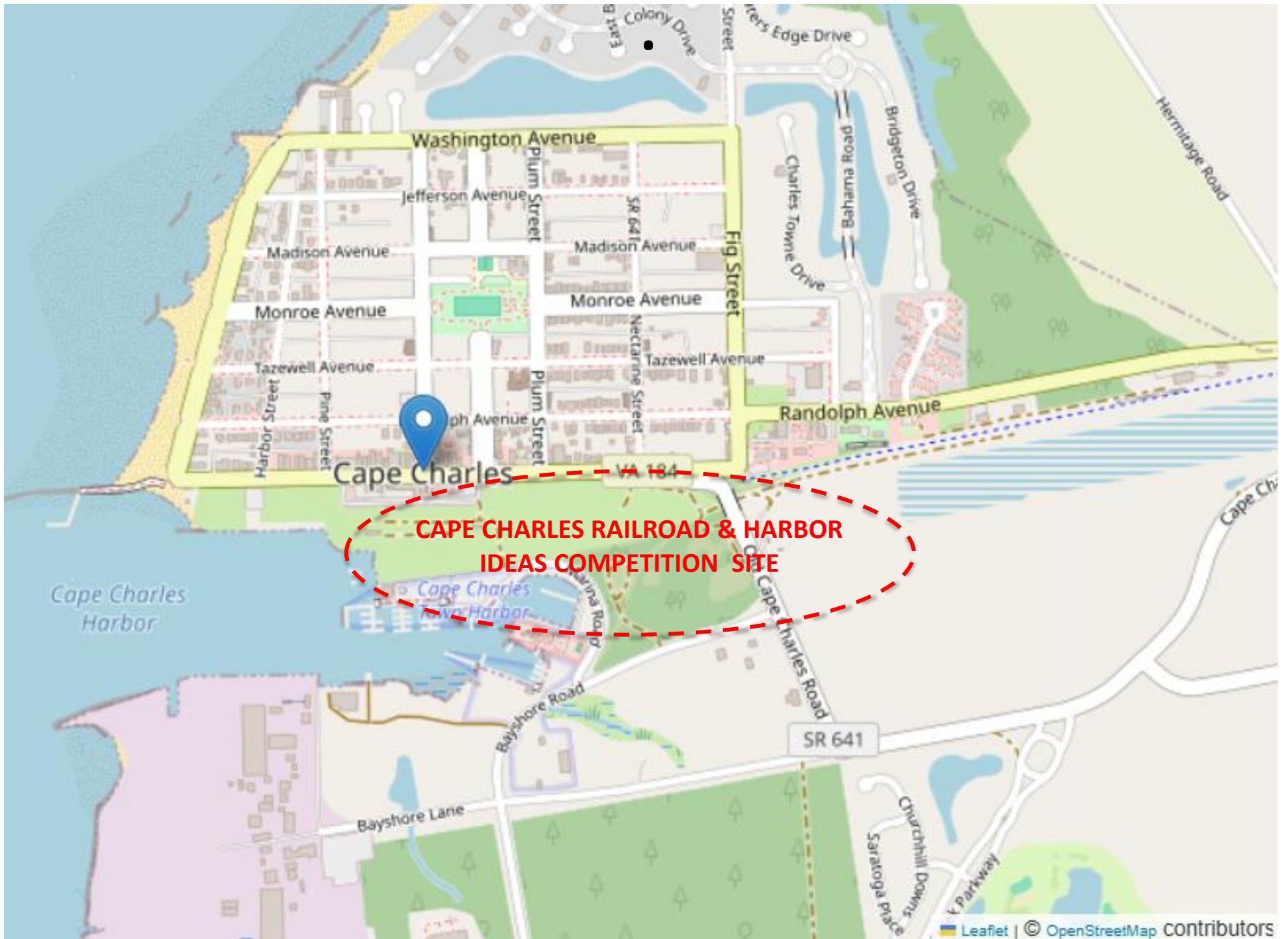


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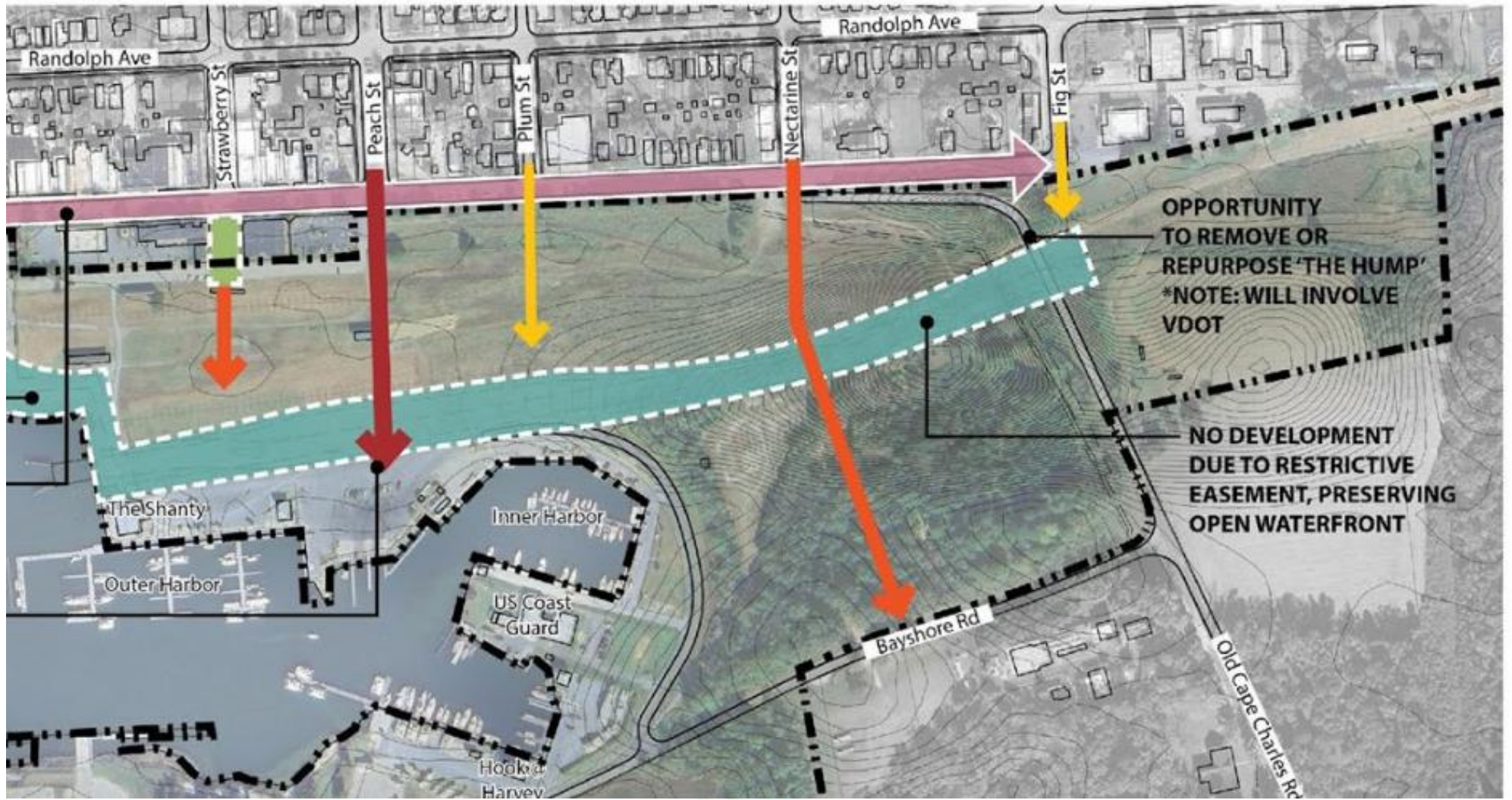
**CAPE CHARLES RAILROAD &
HARBOR IDEAS COMPETITION**

**Supporting Information
Section 1**

Site Plans



**CAPE CHARLES RAILROAD & HARBOR
IDEAS COMPETITION SITE**





IDEAS CAPE CHARLES RAILROAD & HARBOR IDEAS COMPETITION

**Supporting Information
Section 2**

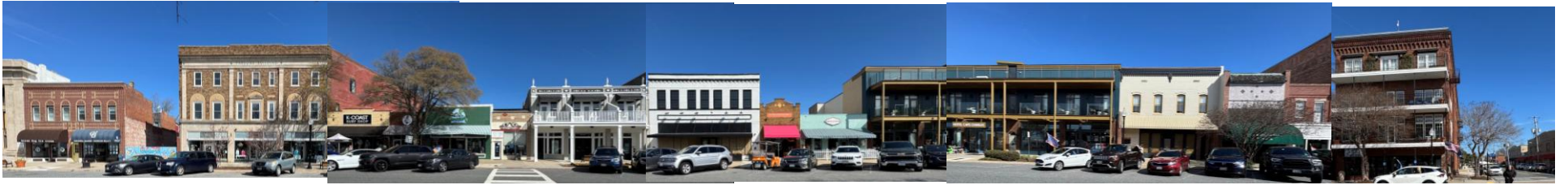
Site Photos



1. Mason Avenue, south elevation, between Bay Avenue and Harbor Avenue



2. Mason Avenue, south elevation, between Harbor Avenue and Pine Street



3. Mason Avenue, south elevation, between Pine Street and Strawberry Street



4. Mason Avenue, south elevation, between Strawberry Street and Peach Street



5. Mason Avenue, south elevation, between Peach, Plum and Nectarine Streets



1. Mason Avenue, north elevation, between Nectarine, Plum, and Peach Streets



2. Mason Avenue, north elevation, between Peach and Strawberry Streets



3. Mason Avenue, north elevation, between Strawberry and Pine Streets



4. Mason Avenue, north elevation, between Pine Street and Harbor Avenue



5. Mason Avenue, north elevation, between Harbor Avenue and Bay Avenue



Old Cape Charles Road peels off Mason Ave. near Nectarine St. and bridges over the site



View of site toward Cape Charles Harbor

View of site from the bridge



View of site toward Old Cape Charles Rd.

View of site toward Mason Avenue



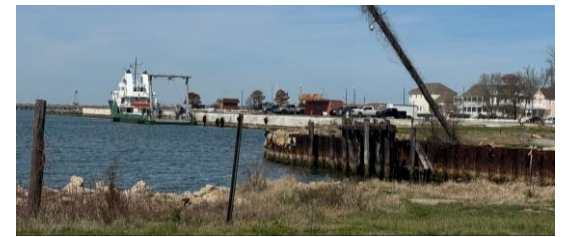
Views of the north side of Cape Charles Town Harbor facing the Chesapeake Bay



View of the south side of Cape Charles Town Harbor



View facing south side



View from Cape Charles Harbor toward the western end of Mason Avenue



Historic residential neighborhoods - Craftsmanship - Colorful porches greet the streets



Municipal buildings - library, Town Hall, and post office - are decentralized and scattered



The gazebo in Central Park - Double lane streets from park - Colorful landscaped gardens



IDEAS CAPE CHARLES RAILROAD & HARBOR IDEAS COMPETITION

**Supporting Information
Section 3**

Historic Photos

Cape Charles Historic Sources

for reference in the ongoing

Railroad & Harbor Area Master Plan Development

Cape Charles has a rich history as a port and railway town, with abundant historical documentation. As progress is made toward the development of a Master Plan for the harbor and railway areas, referencing the available historical documentation can help pave the way for development that is cohesive with the town and highlights its unique and vibrant history.

The Master Plan will be integral to designing the future of this vital area in Cape Charles. The ways in which future development integrates with the adjacent townscapes, particularly along Mason Avenue, are crucial to maintaining and complementing the historic character of the Town.

The attached photos present interesting opportunities for understanding the history of the town and letting that understanding inform plans for the future:

1) The Master Plan area is directly adjacent to the Cape Charles Historic District, and a small area along Mason Avenue is within the boundaries of the Historic District. Will the portion of the Master Plan area that is within the Historic District be addressed differently from the rest? How will the master plan put strategies into place to ensure that the south side of Mason Avenue, which directly faces the main historical streetscape, will be developed in a way that is sensitive to the historically designated area?

2) Aerial photos of the harbor, town, and Mason Avenue from the late 1800s and early 1900s show a carefully composed flow from the town and Mason Avenue to the railyard and harbor, with public areas and parks near the termination of Pine Avenue. Could this inform a future strategy for the area?

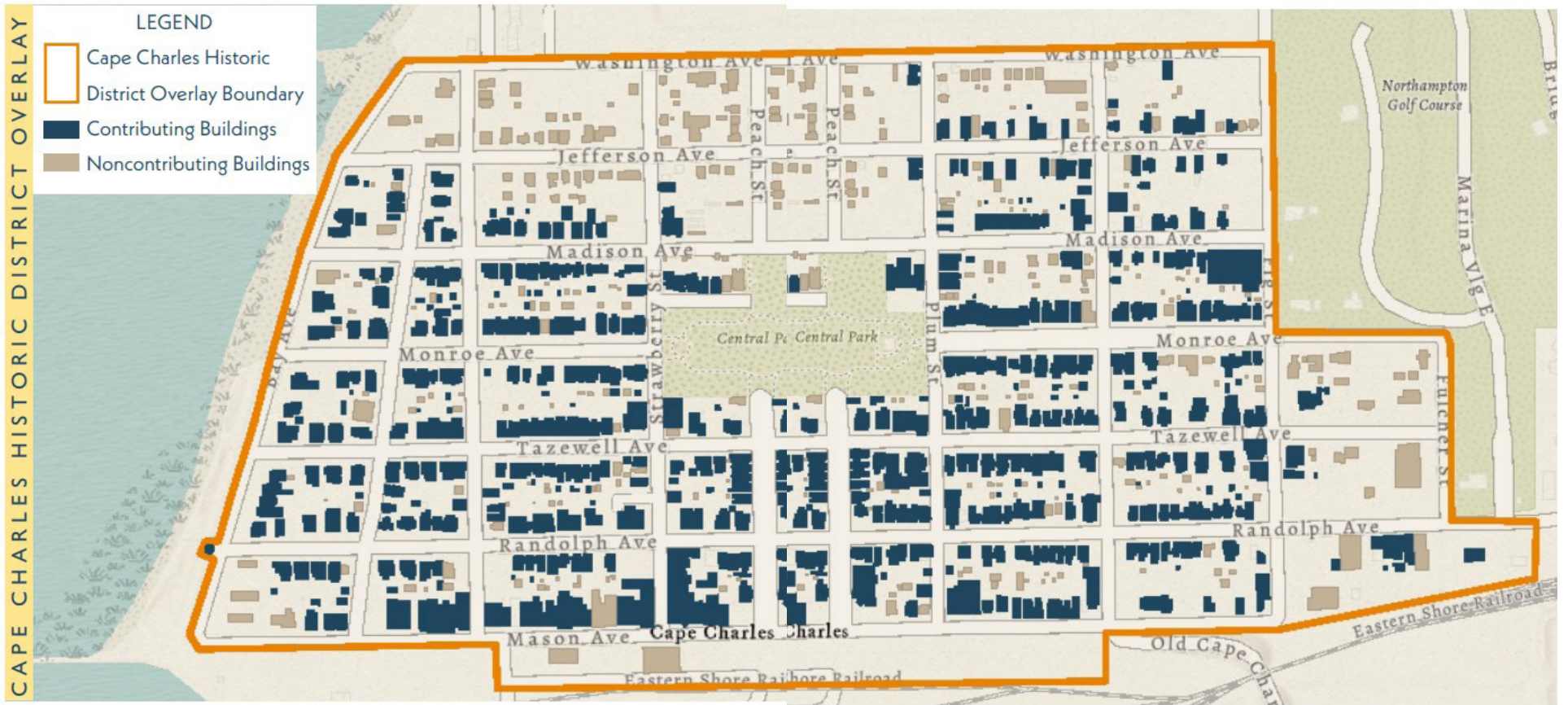
3) The character and scale of historic harbor buildings were integral to the development of the town. Could these be referenced or considered in the planning for this area?

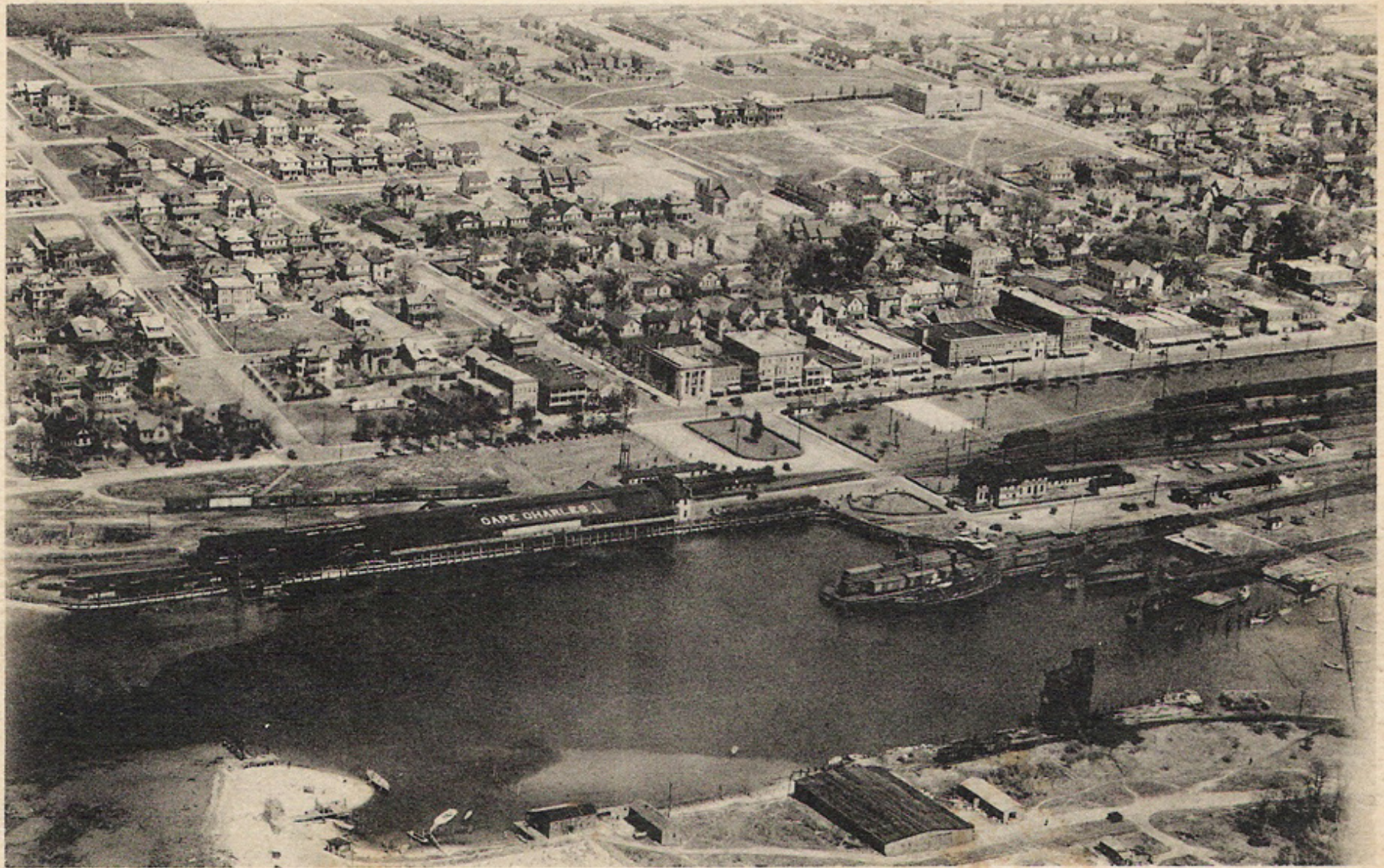
4) Cape Charles is a railway town without a railway. In what ways could the Master Plan give life to that history in a way that will both preserve the heritage and accomplish the needs and desires of the community?



Cape Charles Harbor Terminal Building, 1911.

Proximity to and overlap with the Cape Charles Historic District:





AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF CAPE CHARLES, VIRGINIA

Image 1: Cape Charles Aerial, 1925. This image and several other historic photos give a striking view of what portions of the master plan area adjacent to Mason Avenue looked like historically, and how the town/rail/harbor connection was addressed. Elements from this early/historic layout might help inform visioning for the Master Plan area, and help create a plan that will cohesively integrate new development with existing and historic buildings and spaces.

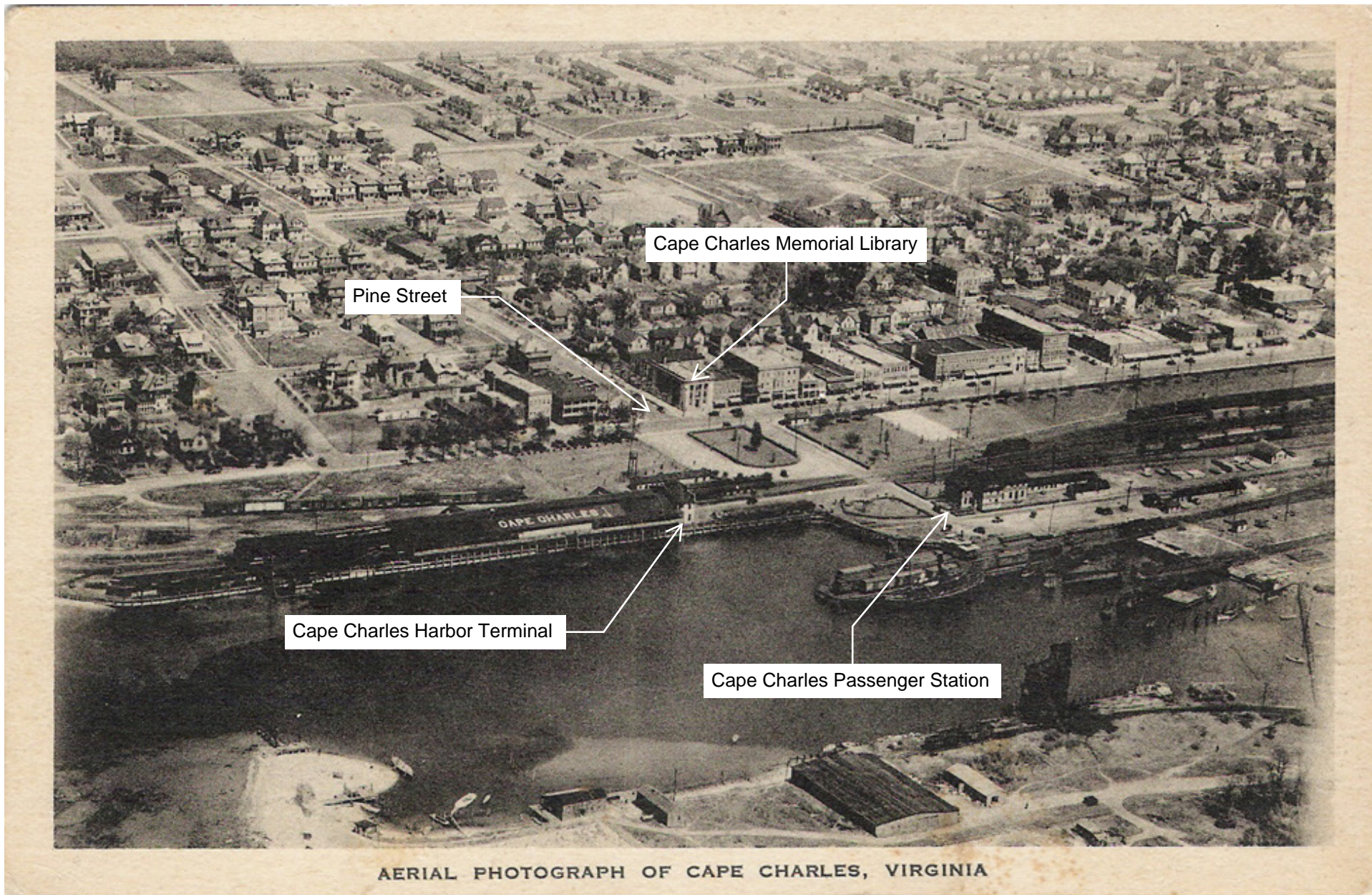


Image 1: Cape Charles Aerial, 1925, annotated.



Image 2: Cape Charles Harbor and Mason Avenue 1927. This view provides insight into the historic flow from the town across Mason Ave and into the railyard/harbor area. Public space extending from Pine Avenue functioned as a central axis. The axis and associated public parks and open spaces provided viewsheds and pedestrian access, with industrial-related structures built up along the harbor to the west, and along the railway to the east (see images 1, 5, and 11).



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Image 3: Cape Charles Mason Ave, 1925. The area across Mason Avenue opposite Pine Street was the central connection between the Town and the industrial railway and harbor areas.



Image 4: Cape Charles Mason Avenue and Harbor, 1925. The overlap of public space, recreation, and industry is fascinatingly evident in this snapshot of a time of transition between the horse and carriage, and motorized vehicles.

7— Penna. R. R. Terminal and Ferry Dock, Cape Charles, Va.



OB-H2208

Image 5: Cape Charles Mason Ave, 1950. This relatively late image shows public/open green space that retains and highlights views from the town to the harbor, creating a transition between town and industry.



MONROE AVENUE,
CAPE CHARLES, VA.

Image 6: Cape Charles, Monroe Ave, 1930. Understanding the character and feeling of historic Cape Charles, as seen in this image of Monroe Avenue, may help inform a plan for integration and flow between the town and the Master Plan area.



Image 7: Cape Charles Harbor and Terminal Building, date unknown. The Cape Charles terminal building was formidable with a careful design that highlighted the status of the town and functioned as the hub for the center of the town's economy, connecting rail and ferry transportation. This architecture, and other historic architecture associated with the harbor and railway, while no longer extant, may help give a vision of the character of the town historically and how future development and planning can honor or reference that history. The terminal building is also visible in images 1, 4, and 5.

VIRGINIA LEE
AT P. R. R. DOCK, CAPE CHARLES, VA.



Image 8: Cape Charles harbor and terminal building, 1930.



Image 9: Cape Charles harbor activity, 1885. This early photo of the harbor area shows the integration of town, commercial architecture, and harbor area in the foreground.



Image 10: Cape Charles Passenger Station, 1885. As with the Harbor Terminal building, the Passenger Station was central to the primary economy of the Town. This building was located east of the harbor terminal building, slightly inland along the tracks from the harbor.



Image 11: Cape Charles steam locomotive, 1885. The railway was integral to the founding and development of Cape Charles, and the town has a rich heritage connected with both commercial and passenger transportation. How can this help inform the Master Plan and future development directions?



Image 12: Cape Charles Harbor and Railway, 1927. This view, looking east from the harbor, shows more of the Master Plan area, with Mason Avenue, green space, railways, and the harbor are all visible



IDEAS CAPE CHARLES RAILROAD & HARBOR IDEAS COMPETITION

**Supporting Information
Section 4**

Master Plan Framework

Guiding Principles for Master Plan Development



Extend the
Historic Town
Pattern with
Compatible
Design



Support
Balanced, Small-
Scale Mixed Use
that Reflects
Cape Charles



Create a
Connected
Network of
Open Spaces,
Trails, and Plazas



Prioritize Public
Water Access
and Protect the
Working
Waterfront



Serve as the
Town's
Connector and
Economic
Catalyst





IDEAS

**CAPE CHARLES RAILROAD &
HARBOR IDEAS COMPETITION**

**Supporting Information
Section 5**

**Frequently Asked
Questions**



Sunset on the shore of Cape Charles

frequently asked questions

What is the goal of the competition?

The competition seeks innovative and forward-thinking design ideas that balance historical context, community identity, and future development opportunities.

Is an idea for a portion of the site acceptable?

Yes, ideas can focus on the overall development of the entire site or a smaller area or feature of the site.

Does the idea need to comply with the master plan framework?

No. Portions of the master plan framework is provided for information and background of what has been studied.

Will the ideas from the competition impact the master plan?

The town is pausing the master planning process during Stage 1 of the competition so that good ideas can be integrated into the final master plan. The master plan is expected to be completed by the end of 2026, and so Stage 2 and Stage 3 submissions should consider the master plan.

Is collaboration allowed or are individual submissions preferred?

Teams or individuals can submit an idea. There is no preference.

Will the bridge that traverses the site be removed?

The bridge is called The Hump, and it signifies what was the point of separation between the historic town of Cape Charles and what was the Black Community to the south of the town. The Competition Steering Committee encourages some ideas to consider how to retain or interpret the injustice that is symbolized by The Hump.

Can an idea be programmatic or does it need to be architectural?

Any idea that impacts the development of the land will be considered. It can be architectural, artistic, programmatic, stylistic, environmental, social, etc.

Will there be cash prizes provided in Stages 2 and 3?

Prizes for Stages 2 and 3 will be announced at the beginning of each stage.

Are semi-finalists from Stage 1 required to participate in Stages 2 and 3?

No, but semi-finalists are encouraged to do so.

Can Stage 1 semi-finalists expand their team in Stages 2 and 3 in order to get additional support?

Yes, as long as the team leader remains the same.

Can I participate as part of a team?

Yes. Individual and team submissions are both welcome. Teams may include members from different disciplines.

Are international participants allowed?

Yes. The competition is open to participants worldwide.

How detailed should my proposal be?

Submissions should clearly communicate the core idea and vision. Technical drawings are not required, but the submission should include sufficient information to convey feasibility and intent.

Should proposals be realistic or visionary?

Both are welcome. Proposals should be imaginative but grounded enough to demonstrate that they could be implemented over time. Don't be afraid to be bold!

Is there a preferred architectural style?

No. The competition encourages creativity and does not prescribe a specific style. However, designs should be sensitive to the character and history of Cape Charles.

How important is sustainability?

Sustainability is encouraged. Consider environmental resilience, especially given the waterfront location.

Can I submit more than one proposal?

Yes. Multiple submissions are allowed, but each must be registered separately.

How will submissions be evaluated?

Entries will be reviewed based on creativity, clarity of vision, responsiveness to the site, feasibility, and overall impact.

Will feedback be provided?

Due to the volume of submissions, individual feedback may not be guaranteed. However, general feedback or highlights may be shared publicly.

What happens after the competition?

Selected entries may be displayed publicly and could help inform future planning discussions for Cape Charles.

IDEAS CAPE CHARLES RAILROAD & HARBOR IDEAS COMPETITION



Who owns the railway?

The railway in Cape Charles is owned by the Canonie Atlantic Company, a private company owned by the Accomack-Northampton Transportation District Commission. The railway operation ended in 2018, and the tracks have been replaced to create a recreational trail with a lease to the Eastern Shore Rail Trail Foundation.

Who owns the intellectual property?

By submitting, entrants grant the town and the competition organizer the right to display, publish, and use their proposals for promotional, educational, and development purposes.

What is the minimum submission?

A statement of not more than 50 words.

What graphic techniques are permitted?

Any type of graphic technique is permitted, including sketches, drawings, collages, photographs, renderings, paintings, perspectives, plans, elevations, sections, aerials, and even just a diagram.

Are AI-generated submissions acceptable?

No. AI-generated submissions are not allowed. Submissions must be the work of the submitting individual / team.

Will the winning design be built?

The competition is focused on ideas. While there is no guarantee of implementation, proposals may influence future master planning and development decisions.

Will there be a site visit?

Participants are encouraged to visit the site independently if possible. Virtual resources are provided in this competition package.

Will the public be involved?

Yes. Community engagement, including public voting in Stage 3, is part of the competition process.

How did Cape Charles originally grow?

The train, harbor, and ferry were part of the original economic engine for growth. Simultaneously, an innovative and yet simple town plan allowed the growth to be controlled architecturally. Today, there is a need for a master plan for the railroad and harbor site that will allow the town to grow in a controlled and beautiful way around that economic engine. The town needs big, bold ideas for the economic engine as well as for the associated railyard and harbor master plan.

What are some economic issues with the site?

How can the development of the site be attractive when facing the post-covid building costs? What ideas will attract developers to invest capital in the projects? How can the short tourist season of Cape Charles be expanded to afford any developer or investor to invest in the site?

What can be gained by the competition?

The competition is not a superficial beauty contest. The goal is to dig deeper into issues and provide solutions for this amazing site in Cape Charles.

