

Noisette: Project to generate \$20.2M for North Charleston

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North Charleston stands to gain more than \$20 million from land sales and other payments associated with the Noisette Co.'s 3,000-acre urban redevelopment project once land-transfer issues are resolved, according to a Noisette expenditure analysis released Jan. 14.

The land sales would translate into an enormous economic development boost for North Charleston, says Mayor Keith Summey. The money would be used to improve city infrastructure, upgrade schools and other facilities, spruce up commercial corridors and renovate the Navy base.

These efforts would attract more businesses, including knowledge-based industry, to North Charleston, Summey explains.

“When the Navy base fills out with new businesses, that would lead to the arrival of ancillary businesses like hotels, restaurants and retail,” Summey points out. “Everything benefits.”

The \$20.2 million would come from separate land transactions. The city would get \$9.6 million for selling 350 acres of the old Navy base, which is the heart of the Noisette urban revitalization plan, to Noisette. (The company has already paid North Charleston \$1.5 million for 178 of the 350 acres.) Additionally, the city would get \$10.6 million by selling the former shipyard to Charleston Marine Manufacturing Corp. and three Navy base buildings to Neal Brothers Inc., an international shipping and packing company. Both Neal Brothers and the CMMC are located on the Navy base.

However, North Charleston will not see the multi-million-dollar gain until land-transfer issues, which for several years have slowed the Noisette project, are finally resolved and the city gets the land to sell.

In 2002, North Charleston and the State Ports Authority agreed to divide the 1,600-acre Navy base. Some 500 acres owned by the federal government remain to be deeded over to the city and to the SPA. The hold up, the latest in a line of Navy base land acquisition snags, is due to disagreements concerning how the remaining acres should be decontaminated and who should do it. The problem involves the Navy, the state's Budget and Control Board, the Department of Health and Environmental Control and Gov. Mark Sanford.

Last July, North Charleston city officials and executives from the SPA and the Charleston Naval Redevelopment Authority, which controlled the Navy base, asked Sanford to request a deed from the Navy on land that included the shipyard and a 110-acre landfill. The issue is still being decided.

Meanwhile, Summey says the highly publicized Noisette project already has sparked the beginning of a North Charleston rebirth. Home buying upsurges in the Park Circle area and other neighborhoods within the Noisette footprint have helped the city see overall home ownership rise 10% during the past decade. The average cost of a home in the Park Circle vicinity has jumped from \$54 per square foot in 2001, the year the Noisette project was announced, to \$97 per square foot in 2004, according to the Multiple Listing Service.

Summey emphasizes that a project as massive as Noisette takes time. Noisette held numerous neighborhood meetings from which the project's master plan was conceived. Working with state government is a slow process, he points out.

He adds that the slow progress has been "on Noisette's dime."

The project's master plan cost Noisette \$2.5 million. North Charleston has paid Noisette \$297,550 for the company's management of the Century Oaks residential redevelopment project off East Montague Avenue and for rental fees for city offices on the Navy base, according to Noisette's expenditure analysis.

Summey acknowledges there is still a long way to go before the project blossoms.

"A lot of people would have given up by now," he says. But we (Noisette and North Charleston) have been persistent. "We see a light at the end of the tunnel, and it's not a freight train."

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