

Good Morning,

I'm Peter Thomson, Chairman of the Committee of 100 in Elizabeth City and one of Nick Didow's regional helpers. I've been asked to say a few words about:

- The impact of fast ferries on the culture of the region
- How The Harbor Town Project enables connectivity in the region and
- The impact it could have on the future of the region, such as introducing the region to people who might choose to retire here.

Your time is valuable so I've condensed it as much as possible.

We'll start off with the impact on the culture. Once there were ferries on the Albemarle Sound and towns were connected in common cause. Since then, with less commercial interaction, people here tend to identify with their towns and their state, not with the region: they are from Hertford, or Columbia not the Albemarle. The reason? Most towns around here have great community spirit but few resources, they do the best they can with what they have, then compete with each other for state or federal funds. So while there's talk about working together it really comes down to "Can we get something needed for us?" And folks from another town are simply not part of "us". The Harbor Town Project does not just provide communication and connection, it monetizes them. With connection, a festival in Edenton can make a difference to B&B rooms in Columbia. Re-invigoration of Somerset makes a difference in Elizabeth City. The Project will, over time, have direct benefits to everyone in the region so that the Albemarle becomes, not simply that large wet thing in the middle, but an economically viable tourism area that people in five towns belong to and help govern. We and they becomes a monetized us. People in every town work together to a common commercial goal: and THAT is a big change in regional culture.

How the project enables connectivity is more straightforward. Here in the North East our buying habits are partially dictated by where we can find things nearby, or who we know that is going up to Virginia this week. A fast ferry system changes this. Firstly it introduces the towns' attractions to each other and, like any other rapid transit system, connects businesses to customers, makes doctor appointments in other towns more palatable and provides friends a simple way to visit. A secondary effect is the growth of downtown business: commercial enterprises locate where there is traffic: the towns of the Albemarle have business districts Near the water. Nuff said, I'm sure you get it.

Now on people coming to live here: first a few numbers. A retirement couple is worth 2.8 good factory jobs. They bring on average \$840,000.00 to their new town along with continuing disposable income and insurance, and no kids to educate. Our area has many of the attributes retirees are looking for, (good weather, affordability, historic downtown, good medical, accessibility, sense of community, fitness opportunities, walkable neighborhoods and so on.) That's why In Elizabeth City we actively recruit them with www.RetireInEC.com. If we can get 20 retired couples move to our town, it's the same as a new manufacturing plant.

One major problem: folks almost always retire to a place they have visited before. The Harbor Town Project tourism program, connected by a fast ferry system, can for the first time, attract older travelers to the area in numbers. Selling them to come back to somewhere they know and like is a much, much easier job. Same is true for work-at-home millennials. Once they've visited and we can offer 100 megs everywhere, we'll have the ability to attract that segment as well.

The Harbor Town Project pulls towns and counties together: connecting and communicating through an organization that's locally controlled. It's an initiative that grows the historic downtowns and by synergy creates a brand new regional industry. Towns will find that when

visitors can stay in one town and spend the day in another it benefits both, and, once the value of working together is understood, it will cross-pollinate ideas in commerce and art.

The towns of the Albemarle are full of great people who love their towns, their unique way of life, and their history and who, like all of us, want something better for their kids. I'm sure they'll include their friends and neighbor in their aspirations, once they understand we're all in the same boat...and that boat IS a fast ferry.

The Harbor Town Project will put a region, unconnected now for a century, back together once again.

Thank you