

**FEEL** / **CREATING** **TAMPA**

by David Davisson

Re/Creating Tampa  
101 Ideas for a Better City

David Davisson

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*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,  
committed citizens can change the world.  
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”*

—(attributed to) Margaret Mead

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## Introduction

Welcome to *Re/Creating Tampa*. This collection grew out of a blog by the same name. The blog is composed of all sorts of items that catch my attention, but one overarching theme has always been an interest in ways to improve urban life. In between link round-ups, funny videos, and carping about local and national politics you'll find posts about bench design contests, desalination projects, and urban gardens. Some of the ideas in this book first appeared in the blog, but more than 90% of what you'll read here will appear in the book first and the blog second. My twin interests are recreational (entertainment) and re-creational (making again).

In science-fiction circles there's a concept called "steam engine time." Steam engine time is a catch-all phrase to explain why things happen at a certain time rather than before. There's no good historical explanation for why steam power waited until the eighteenth century to take hold. The Roman Empire had steam powered toys, but never made the conceptual leap to steam-powered tools. Similarly, the Incan empire used wheels for toys, but never for tools.

In the last few years Tampa has seen the launch of the Swings Project, Awesome Tampa Bay, Slow Food Tampa Bay, Tampa Free Skool, Tampa Urban Farm Forum, and Green Artery. We've seen huge advances in bicycle acceptance and the local food movement is seriously taking root. There have always been isolated dreamers in Tampa working to create a better city, but in the last year it seems we may be reaching a tipping point. The 21<sup>st</sup> century city will not be like the 20<sup>th</sup> century city, and we're seeing the new style of urban living blossoming all around us.

All of these mini-movements have me wondering if it's steam engine time in Tampa. All the elements have been in place for years,

but they are connecting in new ways, and taking on new meanings. Not everyone is on board with embracing new ways of thinking about the city, but there are more every day.

I love Tampa and think it's a great place to live. I also think it can be better. One of the results I'm looking forward to most with the release of this book is learning how ignorant I am about the ideas presented here, and learning about how many wonderful ideas I've overlooked. I have a feeling some of you are already implementing ideas I mention in the following pages, or pursuing dreams I never imagined. I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

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R/CT

## 001: Innovative Neighborhood Designations

I like historic district neighborhoods, and I appreciate the struggles the residents go through to maintain a certain aesthetic integrity. However, officially recognized historic district neighborhoods are by their nature overprotective and resistant to change. For those unfamiliar with the concept, a historic neighborhood is an officially recognized neighborhood with some claim to historic importance. Historic neighborhoods often exhibit a unified architectural aesthetic, and thus new buildings, as well as improvements to already existing structures, are expected to maintain allegiance to that architectural integrity.

Historic neighborhoods are great, but before everything downtown and in the surrounding areas becomes saddled with the burdens of the historic neighborhood designation, perhaps it's time we found some neighborhoods willing to accept the designation of Innovation Neighborhoods.

Innovation Neighborhoods allow creative designs, novel architecture, and experimental housing. Innovation Neighborhoods are the first place to try new ideas before deploying those ideas to the rest of the Bay Area or shelving them for impracticality. An Innovative Neighborhood designation is like a historic neighborhood designation, but creates space for innovation.

So, who wants to be the first Innovation Neighborhood?

According to the National Register of Historic Places, the following neighborhoods in Tampa are considered Historic Districts: Hampton Terrace, Hyde Park, North Franklin Street, Seminole Heights, Tampa Heights, West Tampa, and Ybor City.

A historic district is a group of buildings, properties, or sites that have been designated on the federal level, state level, or local level as historically or architecturally significant.

## 002: Chamber of Cooperation

Just as a Chamber of Commerce promotes commerce, a Chamber of Cooperation promotes cooperation. Consider this type of institution a Chamber of Commerce for nonprofits, libraries, and educational institutions. City, county, state, and federal government agencies can participate. A Chamber of Cooperation represents the unified interests of any agency participating in or encouraging cooperative behavior.

Nonprofits can benefit from cooperation, so each group doesn't have to reinvent the wheel when applying for a grant (for example).

An important part of the Chamber of Cooperation's mission will be to communicate the views of the cooperative community to elected officials. The Chamber will lobby to ensure cooperative ventures are not ignored or immediately ruled out as possible sources of solutions for problems facing neighborhoods, the city, or the region.

If I were starting a Chamber of Cooperation today, one of the first things I'd do is contact the organizations in the running for *Tampa Bay Business Journal's* Nonprofit of the Year.

One key role/purpose of the Chamber of Cooperation is to connect nonprofits. A second, equally important purpose is to educate those interested in starting, or expanding, their own nonprofit.

### **003: Fake It Before You Make It: Mock Urban Design**

Mock urban design has found some success in San Francisco. Large coalitions like cities or neighborhoods are understandably wary of change. The larger the investment, the more hesitancy there is about implementing any new project. San Francisco's city government has decided to reframe some of its urban improvements as “pilots” or “reversible trials.”

Rather than investing time and money into an urban redesign project that might not work, San Francisco has created faux plazas (for example) by painting the area where designers intend to place the plaza walk, and putting in some potted plants where they want to plant new trees.

This is like a sketch or a cartoon for an artist, or a storyboard for a filmmaker. You don't want to invest too much time, energy, and money into something that won't work, but you need something you can see and experience to help you make a decision. Mock urban design projects can be quickly “sketched out” to learn if they are viable and desired by the community.

Imagine you are considering widening the sidewalks downtown at a particular intersection. In addition to having meetings and showing the artist's rendition of the space after completion, a mock design is set up in the space, temporarily narrowing the roads at the intersection and dropping in some planters and benches to demonstrate what the new intersection might look like.

Not only does fake-it-'til-you-make-it mock urban design offer a visceral way to understand the changes being considered, but it also serves as an announcement that changes are being considered. The mock design most greatly impacts the people who will be affected by any potential changes, alerting them that changes are in the planning stage. Mock urban designs aren't possible for every change in the urban environment but are a great tool for educating the public.

## 004: Better Restaurant Web Pages

For a couple of years I maintained *Eating Tampa*, a foodie and restaurant review site. During those years I perused many restaurant websites. What I learned from this experience is that, almost universally, restaurant websites suck.

There is much about the restaurant business that baffles me, but what I find most baffling are the establishments that put extra energy into driving people away.

Bad service or lack of cleanliness might be temporary, and the owner might not know such a thing is happening. I can accept that. But every owner should know what's happening on their own web page, and they need to make certain key pieces of information easily accessible.

First, stop with the Flash introductions. We don't care about fancy web graphics. We want to eat your food. Flash intros take up time we could use to find your address, phone number, menu, and hours of operation. Just. Don't. Do. It.

Quit freaking out that someone is going to steal your menu. I guarantee you your menu is not that precious. Stop with the images of menus and PDFs of menus. A PDF is fine as an extra, but it shouldn't be the only way to read the menu. I want to copy and paste the descriptions of vegetarian dishes into the email I'm sending my vegetarian friend when we're trying to decide on a place to eat. If you make it difficult for me to promote you, or share information about you, I won't do it. I'll go somewhere else.

Don't hide key information behind cutesy names. The menu should be labeled “menu,” not “paradise,” “you'll thank us,” “awesome deliciousness,” or anything else. On your front page you should have your hours, address, menu (or a link to your menu), phone number, and anything we might want to know—no credit cards, bands every night, breakfast served all day, etc.

Pictures of the interior of the restaurant and images of the dishes are also good. And please tell us where to park. Parking can be tricky in Tampa, and if I can't figure out where to park, I'll end up somewhere else. Do yourself and us a favor and make eating out in Tampa easier and better.

## 005: More City Government Social Media

The city of Tampa needs to hire a full-time social media coordinator and idea wrangler. This city would be much better off if it had a full-time social media staff to create crime portals providing maps of arrests like they have in Chicago, or accountability portals providing information about every dollar spent like they do in Missouri.

Here's a secret about Web 2.0, aka *social media*. Web 2.0 is not about computers or the Internet. Web 2.0 is about people, and that is why it's called *social* media. The method of connecting and communicating with those people is novel, but it doesn't mean diddly-squat if there's not a person to connect with another person.

More technology is not the solution to every problem. In fact, misused technology often makes the problem worse. Web 2.0 technologies are simultaneously deeply misunderstood and wildly popular. Every business and government agency understands it needs a blog with an RSS feed and a Facebook page, but they don't really understand why, other than "everyone is doing it." The city of Tampa needs to invest in hiring someone who understands the deeper purpose behind these technologies. Ultimately Web 2.0 isn't about making information easier to access (though it does do that). It's about helping people stay in touch with each other. It's about sustaining and maintaining weak social ties. Social media representing a department or a building fundamentally misunderstands the "social" element of social media. Web 2.0 is not about technology. It's about people.

Web 2.0 can help build social capital, strengthening the connections between local governments, neighborhood organizations, interest groups, and other organizations.

## 006: Open 311

First, what's 311? Launched in 1996, the 3-1-1 number was supposed to serve as a nonemergency side of 911. NYC adopted the 311 standard in 2003, and it's now used in nearly 50 cities in the US and Canada.

311 is meant to be a simple, easy-to-remember way to get in touch with the city without having to know what department to phone. Dead animal in your street? Call 311. Large branch in the intersection? Call 311. Someone burning trash during the dry season? Street light not working? Sinkhole opened up? Call 311.

In fact, the 311 (if implemented) would work for just about everything on Tampa's difficult to use and locate "Citizen Action Request" page.

Open 311 is a 311 system with the information available for public use. If Tampa were to adopt Open 311 as our platform, civic-minded coders could create applications that allow people to text in information to 311. Or, create web pages that show the stream of complaints. Or, even better, connect the 311 to a social platform, so people could find others who are having similar problems, or who have found solutions in their neighborhood.

# Open311

*A Platform for a Participatory Civic Infrastructure*

## **007: Scalable Trash Service**

If you recycle, compost, and only take your trash container to the curb when it's full, you may find yourself taking it to the curb only once a month or so.

Why do we have only one size trash container? Shouldn't those who use less waste be able to opt for a smaller container at a reduced cost? Other municipalities have this option. Why not Tampa?

Alternatively, if someone could figure out a reasonable way to calculate how many times a month you have your trash picked up, that might be another way to make the cost scalable. If you only put your trash out once a month, why pay for eight trash pick-ups every month? Scalable cost might have the added benefit of discouraging wastefulness and encouraging people to reduce, reuse, and recycle (e.g., compost).

## **008: Increase the Population Density**

We need a denser population downtown. Not enough people live in the urban core. And we need housing for all income levels, not just high-priced condos. This doesn't mean we need a higher population, just one that lives closer together.

Another way to increase density is to build condos/apartments along the major urban corridors. Florida Avenue needs to be re-created.

In my neighborhood, Seminole Heights, I wouldn't mind seeing some condos/apartments going in along Nebraska.

If we're going to get walkable areas, we need places that have enough people living in one place to support businesses they can walk to.

Institutional buildings (like state, federal, and city government buildings) need to be built with spaces for street-level retail. Otherwise, they create pedestrian dead zones. (See Tampa's Convention Center downtown.)

Tax breaks can be given to grocery stores, restaurants, and shops interested in opening downtown. Planning needs to emphasize pedestrians and green spaces over cars. The past decade of urban development in the downtown has been an improvement, but there's still more to do, and plenty to improve on.

You need to be able to live downtown without ever using a car if that's the life you want.

Another way to increase density is to loosen the rules on backyard building. We need more apartments and lofts in people's backyards and garages, especially in the neighborhoods around USF.

## **009: Expand Cypress Beach**

I was under the impression for several years after moving here that Tampa had no beaches. This simply isn't true. Cypress Beach park is a little underdog of a beach that we need to encourage to grow and expand. With a little help we can expand Cypress Beach to make a pleasant and popular beach spot for Tampa.

I'm not certain what the logistics of beach building are, but if we can build Davis Islands, then we can build beaches. This is one of those ideas that costs big money. I've tried to shy away from big-ticket items, but sometimes you have to spend big to think big. In this case the city needs to buy (or eminent domain) the failing business parks near Cypress Beach. Let's stop sending tourist dollars across the bay and encourage some of them to stay right here on Tampa's finest beaches.

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## **010: Microparks**

Houses burn down or fall into disrepair and need to be demolished. These empty lots sometimes remain empty for years. Let's turn them into microparks with a few benches, a few trees, and a few swings. Maybe even a horseshoe pit, a bocce court, or a basketball hoop.

This is a project I see as being more in line with a nonprofit instead of a City Parks & Recreation project. I understand the gripe about taxes, and I think it's perfectly reasonable for a project like this to be funded out of foundational grants generated by a nonprofit, rather than a new tax.

While this might seem to contradict the desire to see Tampa's interior become more dense, I think the two can actually go together well. We can have more density AND more green space with a little judicious planning.

## 011: Sign Posse

The longer you live in a place, the less you need signs to know where you are or where you're going. Visitors, however, need clear and adequate signage. Tampa's street and destination signage isn't as bad as some places I've lived, but every city can improve its signage.

For Tampa what this might mean is a volunteer group traveling about the city regularly pretending to be from out of town, or touring out-of-town guests, to get feedback on signs. This “Sign Posse” needs to know who to contact and what sort of signing problems can easily be taken care of.

So, what does good citywide sign redesign look like? Well, that's too much to cover in a single page, but we could start with better address signage for businesses. Make street addresses visible from the street when you're flying by at 40–50 mph.

On the other hand, small addresses on residential streets can help calm traffic. We want people on residential streets moving slowly instead of flying quickly to their destination.

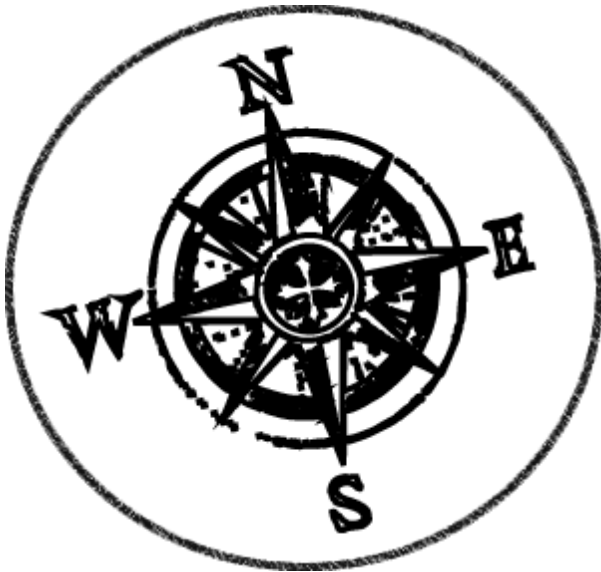
Perhaps we could game-ify the Sign Posse with badges for keen-eyed participants and special accolades to ingenious ideas or sign makers.

## 012: Compass Tagging: A Guerrilla Graffiti Project

I know fancy cars have compasses built into the mirror, and plenty of people can point north without hesitating. I do not have one of those cars, nor am I one of those people. Directions are not my forte. For people like us perhaps some civic-minded graffiti artists can start spray-painting directions on lampposts and streetlight posts and the backs of stop signs and anywhere else a driver can see. This is also great for pedestrians.

I suspect I'm not the only person who is directionally challenged, and spray-painted tags showing the compass direction would be a boon for helping us find our way around the city. And it will help everyone who knows their directions without second thought, by allowing us directionally challenged folks to keep pace with traffic instead of slowing down to read the impossibly tiny script on street signs.

Along this same line, but slightly more expensive, would be to embed compasses directly into the concrete of sidewalks at corners.



### **013: Upgrade the Desalination Plant**

While Tampa deserves kudos for its visionary efforts to build North America's largest desalination plant, it is already woefully out-of-date, and its snakebitten history has led to an underachieving boondoggle. Since its inception, advances in reverse osmosis (the process for removing salt from saltwater) have made the desalination plant a Jurassic relic. Small, power-efficient, networked reverse-osmosis panels are the next iteration in this technology. Rather than abandoning desalination because of the long and painful history of our local desalination plant, it is time we reinvigorated our ambitious efforts to get our drinking water from the bay.

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### **014: Housing First**

The cheapest way to help the chronic homeless, those who are alcoholic and drug addicted and perhaps not all there mentally, is to give them a house. Just give it to them. It pays for itself in reduced prison and emergency room time.

Don't believe it? It's been tried and it saves money. If we were really interested in saving money, with the extra bonus of helping people and making our streets safer and more enjoyable, we'd give homes to our chronically homeless.

Will we?

Perhaps. If a conservative city like Dallas in a conservative state like Texas can start a successful Housing First project like The Bridge, then perhaps other cities will start to follow their lead. It's had success in more progressive cities like Minneapolis, Denver, San Francisco, Chicago, and Seattle.

## 015: Become a Transition Town

Let me state upfront that I am not a proponent of Peak Oil. We have had a century of people forecasting that we will exhaust our oil supplies within the next decade or two. A century later we still have more oil than we know what to do with.

I do, however, support the idea that a virtually oil-free energy system is a fantastically better idea than an almost completely oil-dependent system. So, while I disagree with the underlying impetus for transition towns, I agree with their goals and a substantial portion of their philosophy.

A transition town is a city or region making a substantive commitment to transitioning from oil dependency to oil-free living. The central transition town site pulls ideas from the various communities involved and presents these ideas so all the cities can learn from each other. The more people and places participating, the better this site becomes as a resource.

Right now the transitions town website is a little thin on ideas. But what the website does have is a global network of people with a shared interest in creating sustainable cities. Becoming a transition town is more about finding ways to create networks and new tools to communicate and establish social networks. Explaining why ecological balance is necessary is the first step to designing towns and cities that can sustain themselves.

Transition towns are rooted in the concepts of permaculture. Permaculture rose out of the environmental movement of the 1970s and anticipated many of the design ideas now often associated with sustainability. Permaculture designers advocate creating urban and semiurban spaces that work with the local ecology instead of abolishing it or attempting a wholesale replacement. Rather than growing until the soil is depleted, a permanent agriculture nourishes the soil just as it draws out nutrients. An excellent example of this kind of agricultural philosophy can be found at Polyface Farms, as popularized by Michael Pollan in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Transition towns are an attempt to take some of the ideas generated by the permaculture movement and apply those ideas to more urban settings.

## **016: Indoor Energy Measurement Appliances**

You know what would be nice? If TECO gave you an indoor energy measurement appliance when you started an account. Of course, TECO might not like the idea because such a device could prompt people to use less power. On the other hand, freely giving away energy measurement appliances might serve TECO well as a great PR strategy.

If TECO's not going to give these gadgets away, we should still have them easily available at Home Depot, Lowe's, and even Publix and Sweetbay.

Electricity monitors can tell you how much energy you're using in kilowatts or in dollars. By analyzing the energy used so far, they can predict how much your bill will be at the end of the month.

Being able to see the cost of your electricity helps make electricity use salient, and helps reduce its use.

The Black & Decker EM100B Energy Saver Series Power Monitor is available at Amazon for about \$40. Black & Decker describes its product like this: "This compact, easy-to-install device lets you track the amount of electricity that your household uses—and the costs of that usage—in real time." One knock on the B&D Power Monitor is that it only goes down to about 100 KW, so it's difficult to track small but persistent power leaks.

There are appliances like the Kill A Watt EZ Electricity Usage Monitor which monitor energy usage per appliance. You plug your appliance into the Kill A Watt, and the Kill A Watt into the outlet, where it monitors the usage and cost.

Someday seeing your electricity usage and cost will be a default in new houses. We'll eventually see better tools like the Black & Decker Power Monitor. Until then it's important to educate the population that tools like this are available. What better way than a public service educational program by the local electric company?

## 017: The Occupy Tribune

The City of Tampa City Council recently decided that people selling water on the median to help themselves in a time of crisis should be banned, but people selling newspapers to increase the bottom line of a multi-million dollar corporation should be allowed.

Perhaps the Occupy Tampa protesters could take it upon themselves to create a newspaper for the panhandlers to sell. Street newspapers to help the homeless have been an element of the US newspaper industry for over one hundred years.

In addition to the precedent set by a century's worth of weekly newspapers helping the working poor, the Occupy Wall Street group launched the Occupy Wall Street Journal shortly after moving into Zucotti Park. They raised money on Kickstarter and have published three issues by the time of this writing.

The ban by the City Council is a clear example of what the Occupy movement is protesting. There is one set of laws for the poor and middle class and another set of laws for the wealthy. Marshall N. Morton, the CEO of General Media (owners of *The Tampa Tribune* and WFLA - News Channel 8) receives bonuses while asking his employees to take furloughs. Then he hires the impoverished to sell his newspapers on the medians. Why is it OK for the rich to profit, but not the poor?

### **trib·une**

1. An officer of ancient Rome elected by the plebeians to protect their rights from arbitrary acts of the patrician magistrates.
2. A protector or champion of the people.

## **018: Electrical Transmission Tower Wind Turbines**

One way to harvest wind power is to install wind turbines into our infrastructure. An ingenious space for wind turbines is in electrical transmission towers.

Electrical transmission towers are those towers carrying electricity across the region.

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## **019: Re-created Tampa: Bring Back the Front Porch**

Waive the building restrictions and offer tax credits to anyone who wants to add a front porch to their house. Porches are good for the community and make neighborhoods safer.

Front porches put eyes on the street, reducing chances for crime and improving neighborhood safety. We can't make everyone use a front porch, but we can reduce the hurdles for those who want to engage a little more in their community.

Porches were once common, especially in the South, as a way to get out into the cool night. As air conditioning became essential to new homes, porches vanished and windows shrank. Suburban developments began isolating neighbors from each other. Eventually, with the advent of attached garages, backyard decks, and privacy fences, neighbors no longer had to meet or even see each other.

That's perfectly fine if that's the way you want to live, but it became ingrained in our building codes. We should have a choice. Let those of us who want to build porches build porches.

## **020: Lunar-Resonant Twilight**

It's time for the next generation in streetlights. Lunar-resonant streetlights measure how much ambient light is provided by the moon and adjust themselves accordingly. If it's a full moon and a clear night, then the streetlights don't need to be as bright. If it's a new moon and cloudy, then the streetlights can shine at full power.

Tampa doesn't need to replace every streetlight immediately with lunar-resonant streetlights, but this should be the sort of thing that goes into new developments and that replaces broken streetlights.

As it is now, there are too many places where the light simply doesn't work. By making our streetlights less power hungry, we can make them more affordable and more efficient.

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## **021: Tampa Free Skool**

This one already exists, but I wanted to flag it because I think the principle is important regardless of the name used.

Community education can be tremendously valuable. And I don't mean the community college class you take in algebra to transfer the credit to USF. I mean free classes taught by people in the community. There is a burgeoning movement across the nation for peer-to-peer education. The participants of this unique form of cooperative schooling call themselves "free skools." One branch has started in Tampa and I recommend looking it up to learn more about teaching or taking a class (<http://tampafreeskool.wordpress.com/>).

Projects like Tampa Free Skool can help bring the communities together. What is taught is less important than people in the community helping each other learn.

## **022: Deliberative Democracy Meetings**

While coffee parties or tea parties are too ideological for a neutral city organization to embrace, their sudden rise demonstrates an interest in politics and governance. It is in the city's best interest to promote forums where citizens can debate the issues of the day. Some form of structured debate helps create a better-informed citizenry.

Skilled moderators help to make sure contentious issues are discussed without shouting, name calling, or boorish behavior.

These debates can be distributed on the Internet and on local access TV. This might be a good project on which the political science departments in the different colleges, high schools, and universities can collaborate.

Tampa would be well served if it had an ongoing citizen education platform to ask, reask, and debate the question “What is democracy?”

The Deliberative Democracy meetings can move from library to library or school to school (or both). They can include guests, special debates, panels, etc. While traditionally Deliberative Democracy meetings have been held to answer specific questions or to address specific regional or municipal problems, a regular Deliberative Democracy meeting does not need to focus on concrete problems but can focus on abstract issues and problems in democracy (the rights of minorities, for example, or the limits of reasonable taxation).

To be successful the organizers of the Deliberative Democracy meetings would have to embrace neutrality. Perceptions of bias will corrupt one of the core attributes the organizers must maintain. The discussion would also benefit from the addition of certain “experts” who are willing to provide the arguments for positions with which they personally disagree. For example, if it seemed reasonable to hold a Deliberative Democracy meeting about the value of repealing the Affordable Healthcare Act, and no advocate for repeal could be found willing to participate, then a neutral advocate can be appointed to make the argument without being compelled to personally embrace the policy side he or she has been assigned.

## **023: Monthly Voter Registration Drives**

Why do voter registration drives only seem to happen in the months before presidential elections? Generally these drives are pursued by volunteers for their preferred candidate, and these volunteers have little interest in civic education. It's always important to reach out to citizens to encourage them to vote, and doing so when the emphasis is not on a political horse race only improves the chances of some real civic education taking place.

So, who will do these voter registration drives? Well, all political parties could incorporate these drives into their volunteer efforts. Local businesses could make small info packets and voter registration cards available. Libraries and post offices could make these materials available. Schools like the University of South Florida Saint Petersburg that have courses with civic engagement elements could incorporate voter registration into their courses. Blogs and websites could promote the monthly drive.

In addition to getting more people to participate in electing their representatives, another benefit of monthly voter registration drives is to help dispel some of the myths surrounding voting. A persistent education campaign is needed to remind people they will not be turned away if they are wearing buttons or shirts for the candidates they support, and they will not be turned away if their house is in foreclosure or if the address on their driver's license does not match the address at the voting precinct. Homeless people can vote, and there's no way for the volunteers at the voting precincts to know if there's a warrant out for your arrest.

This is even more important now since in 2011 the Florida legislature passed a law making voter registration even more difficult.

## 024: Annual Election Day Holiday

Every other year we set aside the Tuesday after the first Monday in November to vote. Given the importance of voting and citizen participation in government in this democratic republic of ours, why don't we do something on the odd-numbered years to promote civic mindedness?

I propose that Tampa adopt an Annual Election Day Holiday. On even-numbered years we give people time off to vote, to help get out the vote for their favorite cause, and to watch the returns in the evening. On odd-numbered years we have citywide nonpartisan government education days in parks and libraries across the city.

I don't know if turning election day into a holiday will increase voter turnout, but that's not really the point. The point is to create another space to educate people about the importance of participating in the thoughtful choice of their political representatives.

We don't have to wait for this to become a national holiday. What do you say, Tampa? Let's become leaders in celebrating our civic duties.



## **025: Free Membership in Your Neighborhood Association**

The neighborhood associations in Tampa are underused. While some, like the Old Seminole Heights Neighborhood Association (OSHNA), may be active in advocating for their neighborhood, they still do not have a high percentage of the neighborhood as members. One way to overcome this hurdle is to offer free membership. This can be offered to people either as they move in or at a particular time every year.

Hurdles to participation don't need to be very high to stop people from participating. There are many reasons people are not involved in their neighborhood associations, many out of the associations' control. However, those hurdles that are within the control of the NA should be removed to allow more people the opportunity to participate.

It's easy to understand why NAs need money, but there's probably a better way than membership fees. Bake sales, yard sales, etc. can help promote the funding for a newsletter or website.

You can find a list of Tampa Neighborhood Associations at the City of Tampa Website:  
[http://www.tampagov.net/dept\\_Neighborhood\\_and\\_community\\_relations/](http://www.tampagov.net/dept_Neighborhood_and_community_relations/)

## 026: The Candidate Candor Sash

Politics needs its own Steve Mann.

Mann is a pioneer in wearable computing. He constantly records his environment with tiny cameras and audio recording devices. He has glasses that allow him to browse the Internet and monitor the network of computers surrounding him. Cyborg politicians might not need to go as far as Mann, but they will need to adopt his “always-on” philosophy. Sporadic recording does not accomplish the radical transparency suggested by this idea.

The wearable computing item might look like a sash. In fact, it will look like the mayoral sash worn by Mayor Quimby in *The Simpsons*. While you’re wearing the sash, embedded gizmos will record all of your speech and stream it to the Web. Multiple cameras on the sash will record the people around you and record what they say to you. The sash will be warning enough that what you are about to say to us is public.

Will a politician wearing this sash become a pariah in the halls of power? I say it’s time we found out. If we can’t find a single candidate who will do this, perhaps we can find two dozen who are willing to wear the sash one day each. An experiment like this could go a long way to educating people about what goes on inside their own government.

## **027: Children's Parliament**

Let's create a central location where children can gather from across the city to discuss issues important to them.

Tampa can sponsor an annual (at first) Children's Parliament allowing children to debate, lecture, learn, and help plan the future of the city. This gives children a chance to speak and the adults an opportunity to listen. In the Children's Parliament only the children decide which ideas are good and which are not. The adults listen and work to understand instead of lecture and pontificate.

It is important to know how children see the world. When we ignore children, we are contributing to our ignorance instead of increasing our knowledge.

Tampa wouldn't be the first city to institute a Children's Parliament, and with any luck it wouldn't be the last.

Scotland has a Children's Parliament providing civic education to kids under the age of 14. What would our primary school citizens recommend we do about the problems facing us all?

## 028: Tax Facts with QR Codes

A recent study showed that over half of the people who have used some form of government-funded public service say they have never used a government-funded public service. One way to increase knowledge about what our municipal, county, state, and federal government does is to provide information. I say everything needs a web page that breaks down the cost and indicates where the money came from. One way to do this is to use QR codes, those weird-looking digital splotches (see below). Take an image of a QR code and get directed to a web page that gives you information.

That bus you ride, for example, should have a QR code that explains how much it cost, when it was purchased, how much it has depreciated, who paid for it, and how much it would cost to replace. Everything that is publicly funded needs its own page telling us everything we might want to know, including who to contact if it isn't working correctly.



## 029: Tool and Lawn-Care Library

Why do libraries only share books, CDs, DVDs, and videos? Why not chain saws (for example)?

A tree fell in my back yard, and I needed to cut it up. I priced chain saws and thought they were too expensive, so I asked a neighbor, but his had been stolen when someone broke into his garage last year.

Why isn't it possible to borrow one from the library?

Or how about borrowing a bicycle? Or a ladder, or a leaf blower, or . . . Well, I think you get my point. There are things we might want to use but don't want to own. I don't do so much that I need to own a wall of power tools, but I often find myself in a situation where a certain tool would come in handy for a project. Do I really want to spend hundreds of dollars on a tool I'm only going to use once?

Libraries could charge extra for the card allowing you to borrow power tools and appliances. I'd pay ten bucks a year to have access to power tools I'd rather borrow than own.

What if someone steals an item? Everything is tagged with RFID chips to allow tracking.

What if someone is injured? You sign a waiver of personal responsibility when you check out an item.

To go along with this new program libraries could offer shop classes.

### **030: Tampa's Traveling Kitchen**

*(Inspired by Jamie Oliver's Huntington Kitchen in Huntington, West Virginia.)*

Chef Jamie Oliver has dedicated much of his professional life to changing the diet of schoolchildren. Recently he created a community food center teaching people how to cook. The lessons are free, and there's room to teach up to 12 students at a time. The kitchen is paid for by donations, including substantial funding from the local hospital. The board of the hospital saw the connection between healthy eating and preventing illness and considered supporting the venture a wise investment in the community's health.

Tampa could benefit from something similar. We need better food and nutrition information if we want people to stop shoving poisonous crap into their mouths and learn how to eat healthier.

But where would we put such a kitchen?

Downtown may be too far away and too difficult to access for many of the people most likely to use Tampa's kitchen.

Hmmm, maybe a traveling kitchen? Perhaps this traveling kitchen can be a part of the monthly information parties (pg 30) or can travel regularly between libraries. Consider it a food truck for healthy eating tips and information.

Maybe local chefs can volunteer. If the event is monthly and you have 12 chefs, each only has to volunteer once a year.

## 031: Defend Yourself!

Here's an idea for a show on cable access.

This show will be called *Defend Yourself! Defend Yourself!* is an issues-oriented debate taking place in a faux courtroom. A prosecutor leads the prosecution of an idea, and a defender defends the idea. They each marshal arguments, call witnesses, cross-examine, etc.

Each topic lasts a week. So, for example, one week the topic might be “Is Obama a Socialist President?” On Monday we’ll hear the prosecution’s side, on Tuesday we’ll hear the defense, on Wednesday we’ll get prosecution rebuttal, and on Thursday we’ll get defense rebuttal. On Friday we’ll get the decision.

The judge will be a television/computer monitor, and flickering across the monitor will be images that people have sent in of themselves. The judge is the American people! Or at least those signed up at the website to participate. Friday’s show will break down the vote: “Overall viewers thought prosecution/defense made the better case. Obama is/is not a socialist. Self-identified Republicans thought . . . Self-identified Democrats thought . . . Independents . . .”

Over the course of the week the topic is also debated in moderated forums and chats online, and material from those forums is discussed at the end of the week. The Friday hosts can be the prosecutor/defender from the earlier days.

They could tackle big issues like abortion, gun rights, bailouts, tax reform, marijuana decriminalization, same-sex marriage, etc. *Defend Yourself!* is a show based on facts, evidence, and argument, part reality show and part court-room drama. It would have a strong online social element. Having people’s images on the monitor would prompt people to watch for their 15 seconds of fame. It’s a winner!

## 032: Meeting Tampa Series

Need a community-themed blog idea? How about a video blog called *Meeting Tampa*.

When I started *Eating Tampa*, I decided I'd have spin-offs similarly named. And so for awhile I ran *Greening Tampa*, *Screening Tampa*, *Reading Tampa*, and, of course, *Re/Creating Tampa*. I always imagined I'd expand if I ever had the time (I haven't yet) and eventually have a video blog called *Meeting Tampa*.

*Meeting Tampa* would be short five-question interviews with people around the city. Our city is more than streets, buildings, weather, and problems. The most important part of the city is the people who live here.

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## 033: Local Government/Civic Education Playing Cards

What would you do with playing cards that featured elected officials in our city and county, including cards for resources, boards, nonelected people with power, etc.?

A deck of cards with the names and responsibilities of local government would be a terrific method of civic education.

I've thought about doing this as a promotional item on the blog, but I haven't gotten around to it yet, so I'm offering up the idea for free.

A set of cards might include the city council, the county commission, state representatives, and federal representatives. Who else should be included?

### 034: City Paid Introducers: Return of the Welcome Wagon

What if “introducers” stood in front of grocery stores (and other public places) introducing themselves and people to each other?

What happened to welcoming committees? Did they ever exist, or is this a cultural moment conjured up by Hollywood? Regardless, the welcoming committee is a good idea. Having a person to contact when you're new in town is far superior to having a random number or an address to an office.

But how would a welcoming committee work? Who would be involved? How could it be paid for? How can we distinguish the newcomers from the natives moving to a new part of town?

Perhaps instead of seeking out newcomers, we could make a welcoming committee available to those who ask. Library grad students might make good volunteers to send out as the welcoming committee.

I suppose the best way for this to work is to promote the idea but only respond to people that request it. Introducers will be able to answer questions about utilities, religious institutions, city codes, local libraries, child care, etc.

Along these same lines, a welcome packet could be made available to newcomers, and I don't just mean those fat bundles of coupons for the local pizzeria that you get in the mail when you move.



### **035: Monthly Information Parties at Neighborhood Parks**

One of the best ways to improve a city is to create ways for neighbors to meet each other. How about monthly civic information get-togethers at local parks? There are many different official organizations that could band together and hold monthly information services parties at local parks. Imagine a coalition of librarians, historians, teachers, professors, city officials, local politicians, etc., establishing “park hours” that get them out in the community to answer questions. Plus, a program like this gets neighbors walking to their local parks. Consider it a type of community think tank, a way to incubate neighborhood-specific ideas.

To be successful a project like this must happen regularly. Regular location and time is essential to attract those who might not find time for a one-shot event. Incorporating so many different information workers helps distribute the event. Ideally, most people will be able to walk to these events since they will be held in local parks. Since there will be one every month, people like the mayor will be able to visit multiple neighborhoods over the course of a year.

There are 146 parks in Tampa. For the first year let's say we select 12 parks across the city. This means for the first year we'd only need a minimum of 24 people each month. And, just to make thing easier, we could do only six months the first year, October through March.

### **036: More Civic Responsibility from Local Broadcast News**

I would love to see local broadcast news deeply and sincerely embrace civic-mindedness. I'm especially referring to WFLA, WTSP, WTVT, and WFTS. Other than weather, sports, and crime, none of these stations or their websites offers information about what is happening in the city. Or what they offer is minimal and it's not easy to locate. Try visiting any of their websites to get information on city council meetings, voter registration, planning commission meetings, etc.

There's some good community information buried in those websites, but none of these stations emphasizes information valuable to neighborhoods.

Why isn't it easier to locate information about my local neighborhood association or homeowners association? Why can't I easily find minutes, neighborhood issues, and plenty of maps?

I suppose what I'm asking for is for major media outlets covering local issues to adopt hyper-local information architecture.

The distribution of knowledge is essential for creating a thriving city. Our local information infrastructure is poor at distributing the knowledge citizens need to make informed decisions.

### **037: Reduce Television Watching**

TV reduces community participation. We need a citywide education effort teaching people how television hurts their health and their community.

The evidence is overwhelming: Television is bad for the health of our people, our communities, and our democracy. This doesn't mean television is bad per se, but like refined sugar and fast food, we abuse it. Probably the single best thing we could do to improve the civic-mindedness of Tampa's residents is to get them watching less television.

The only way I can see to do this is with a massive education campaign on billboards, newspapers, radio, and, yes, television (maybe even door-to-door proselytizing). The result, however, would pay for itself many times over.

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### **038: ISP Alternative**

There is a real chance Tampa will be hit by a hurricane. If that happens, we want to make sure we have a robust and reliable Internet to provide us with access to communication. We're hurting ourselves if we rely on one or two commercial interests to provide us with Internet access in the case of an emergency. We need an alternative to our current Internet Service Providers.

Freenets exist, but I'm not exactly sure how to build and maintain one. This is an area that definitely needs some more research.

### 039: City Complain Game

Jane McGonigal has a vision of using games to change the world for the better. She wants to harness the energy, commitment, thought, and fun that go into game play and use them for the betterment of humankind. (Check out her book *Reality Is Broken*.)

My idea for a City Complain Game is not quite so grandiose but is guided by the principles McGonigal writes and lectures about.

Imagine a Facebook game application that asks people to find complaints about the city. These complaints can be something you want to complain about or something other people complain about. Complaints can be voted up or down by other players. And complaints are awarded points for novelty or originality. For this game, we're not interested in solutions. We just want complaints.

I'm not a game designer, but the idea here is to create a fun, safe place where people can complain about their city. A space where complaints can be brought up without the pressing weight of trying to find a solution. People love to complain! Let's give them a space where they can indulge in complaining to their hearts' content and maybe even have a little fun.

## 040: City Government Game

For this game we list all of the job positions in the city (or county) government and present problems for each position. You win by solving a problem for every position in city (or county) government. By working your way through this role-playing game you get a sense of what kinds of problems city workers face, from the truck drivers to the mayor. This game provides city workers with a way to communicate what they do and what kinds of problems they face, either on a regular basis or uniquely, but particularly difficult problems.

Ideally this would be an online game, hosted by either a university or a nonprofit, and it would allow for a social media element to give the citizens of Tampa a place to converse and debate the issues facing city workers and to generate possible solutions.

The good thing about a game like this is that it brings transparency to the inner workings of the city. The bad thing is that it might create discomfort among city workers who feel like their work is given short shrift by the constraints of the game, and they have to endure unwanted (and perhaps even unnecessarily, or incorrectly, critical) attention.

Perhaps it's a fad and will fade away in a few years to a hazy memory, but right now I'm fascinated with the possibilities of gamification.\* Whether it works or not, I'd love to see an experimental site that gamifies city government.

*\*Gamification:* (noun) The act of turning something into a game.

## **041: Connect City with Greenery, Not Roads**

Imagine the city as a park interrupted by roads instead of a grid of roads interrupted by parks.

This idea is really about shifting emphasis more than anything else. It is possible to shift the emphasis in our built world from asphalt and concrete to green space and trails. Imagine a city built for humans instead of cars. As it is now, an alien visiting our city might conclude that cars were the superior form and we humans were merely their enslaved servants.

Emphasizing people over motorized vehicles will create profound and tremendous changes throughout the city. Some of these changes may make things worse. But it's better to make mistakes while aspiring for something better than to err because we're afraid to make any changes.

This does not mean banning cars. It means that corridors of parks and conservation spaces will take precedence over corridors of automobile traffic. Rather than pedestrians stopping for cars, cars need to stop for pedestrians. People will have the primary right of way, not machines.

The state of Florida already has an Office of Greenways & Trails working to connect Florida's existing greenways and trails. Tampa needs to embrace the municipal version of this, creating pedestrian- and bicycle-safe connections between city parks. Not every park needs to connect to every park, but wouldn't it be great to walk or bike from park to park within the city?

The first step for a project like this is a map with all the parks marked and suggested trails highlighted for public debate. We may never see a time when all the city's parks are connected in one giant network that also hooks up with the Upper Tampa Bay Trail and Pinellas Trail (etc.), but we could create multiple smaller networks of green infrastructure with what we have now, without too much dislocation or cost.

The Ross J. Ferlita Greenways & Trails System is an initiative to do the work described above, but it needs more attention and more input from the public. There is also a group in Tampa called Green Artery that is working for a similar goal.

## **042: 10,000 Benches Project**

In the 1970s architect Gordon Matta-Clark realized that New York City had quite a few unusable parcels of land. He found slivers, corners, and odd spots that had been “lost” when parcels were redrawn. One of the eccentricities of urban design. He began cataloging these spots and worked out a deal with the city to use them for various art projects. Gordon Matta-Clark died before this idea gained much traction.

Matta-Clark invested a substantial amount of research time to locate these parcels. Today, thanks to the Internet and widespread digitization of public information, these odd parcels are easier to find. Let's find these spaces in Tampa and use them to start the 10,000 Benches Project. A walkable city is a sittable city. Benches create more pedestrian-friendly spaces.

The 10,000 Benches Project could be a nonprofit effort to locate and purchase these unusable parcels from the city and use them to install novel and creative bench designs. Hosting an international bench design contest would put Tampa on the radar of designers for urban spaces.

Benches don't have to top each other in novel design; normal benches, sturdy benches, and historic benches are perfect for a project that needs to reflect so many different elements of society.

Once these spaces are located, the 10,000 Benches nonprofit organization can purchase or lease them from the city and maintain them. In addition to raising money to acquire the benches, the nonprofit organization maintains the turf and flora of the bench spaces. In addition to lost parcels, the 10,000 Bench project could use any small space for a micropark: medians, converted parking spots, right-of-ways, etc. Some of this space could be used for urban gardens.

The 10,000 Benches Project is the sort of thing that would distinguish Tampa as a leader in urban design and sustainability issues.

## **043: Get Bum Bars off Benches**

You may have noticed that public benches often have an arm rest in the middle. This is not for your comfort. This is a design element to deter people from sleeping on the bench. Remove the bum bars on benches. Let's show a little compassion for our fellow humans.

## 044: The Copenhagen Wheel

Tampa police already use bicycles to patrol, and with any luck we'll find more ways to get government employees out of cars and onto bicycles.

And thanks to projects like the Copenhagen Wheel, we could, if we wanted, collect important environmental information from those riding around on city bikes.

The Copenhagen Wheel is a project created at MIT's SENSEable City Lab. The Copenhagen Wheel takes microclimate readings, samples pollution, and collects information about traffic and road conditions. By collecting temperature readings and sampling exhaust and carbon monoxide levels, the Copenhagen Wheel helps provide much needed information about the health of a city.

In addition to the urban informatics a smart-object like this can provide, the Copenhagen Wheel collects energy used while cycling and braking to power the bike when you switch it to electric power. The Wheel also locks and unlocks the bike, and cyclists can use the stored energy for an extra boost when needed.

The Copenhagen Wheel needn't only be used by city workers. Wheels will be available for individual purchase as well. Wheel owners who don't work for the city can still upload their own information about the urban environment. Eventually users could construct an in-depth and detailed environmental map about our city, allowing us to make smarter decisions about how to best use our dwindling financial resources.

The Wheel works with regular bicycles like the ones used by the city. Initially projected for a 2011 commercial release, the Wheel is still under development as of this writing.

## 045: Wi-Fi Enabled Bus Shelters

We're going to need a better bus system.

And if we're improving our bus system, we need more bus shelters to shield people from the daily summertime showers. And if we're going to have bus shelters, they might as well have screens showing where the GPS-enabled buses are on their routes and an information scrawl predicting the amount of time before the bus arrives. And if they're going to be wired and networked, they might as well be Wi-Fi enabled.

Bus stops recently proposed for Salt Lake City, Utah, in a bus stop design competition include solar panels to power the bus stop, sloping sides that hold greenery (turf, flowers, or microgardens), interactive displays for waiting passengers, bicycle racks, recycling centers, as well as benches and protection from the rain. These bus stops are also Wi-Fi enabled for passengers to use while waiting for their bus.

The biggest hurdle for a project like this is locating the money. In the 2010 elections the citizens of Hillsborough County overwhelmingly voted against more money for Hillsborough Area Rapid Transit (HART).

My suggestion is to do a fund-raiser to build a single prototype ideal bus stop. Perhaps, if we built one and demonstrated its value, some of the population might be swayed to vote for HART funding in future elections. Florida, Hillsborough County, and Tampa will benefit greatly from a well-considered, thoughtful public transportation infrastructure plan. Our current ad hoc strategy is short-sighted and will ultimately end up costing taxpayers more money.

## 046: Take Turns Signs Instead of Four-Way Stop Signs

The TED conference (TED stands for Technology Entertainment Design) is a great source for Big Ideas. One of those presented in February 2010 by Gary Lauder is the Take Turn sign as a replacement of the four-way stop sign. Lauder's talk actually focuses on three-way stops, but the principle is the same.

If Tampa had an “innovative neighborhood” (pg 1), we could install signs like this as an experiment (as well as roundabouts and other intersection innovations).

Lauder's research shows that 50% of accidents take place at intersections, and simply asking people to be polite and alternate reduces the number of accidents found at the ubiquitous four-way stop. Take Turn signs also save tremendous amounts of money. Don't we all want neighborhoods that are safer and cost less?



## 047: Re-created Tampa: Ferries

If we want to move away from a car-dominated city, we need to think creatively. How about some ferries running between Pinellas and Hillsborough?

Ferry travel used to be common along the Gulf Coast, but it faded away as our car culture took over and bridges found their way across the bay. More than just getting across the bay, ferries are also ideal for traveling up and down the coast.

The big problem with introducing ferries back into the transportation ecosystem is ridership. An attempt to relaunch ferries in 2003 folded within a year of its launch because of lack of ridership. Of course, it would help if this is only one part of changing the way Tampans move around the bay area. In the meantime the question remains, how do we convince people to take the ferry? Tourism, restaurants, bars—can we think of other reasons to ride beyond just moving your car from one side of the bay to the other?



## **048: A Weekend of Car-Free Streets**

While the downtown area seems the most logical spot to hold a car-free weekend, different neighborhoods might consider likely spaces in their neighborhood to create car-free streets for a weekend.

Car-free weekend could be a rotating street fair roaming from neighborhood to neighborhood throughout the year.

The idea behind a car-free street is to remind ourselves how much space cars take up in our urban lives. Streets aren't just shut down and not used, but cars are blocked access and the streets are taken over for pedestrians, bicycles, games, music, and general neighborly congeniality. Think of the car-free street as a permanent ever-moving block party working its way around Tampa over the course of a year.

Blocking off streets for a car-free weekend has had some success in Vancouver, Gloucester, Mass., London, and New York City, and the car-free movement has been going strong for 16 years. Bogota, Columbia, had the world's largest car-free day. For one day every year the entire city is blocked to automobiles. There's no reason for Tampa to go that far, but car-free weekends can be a powerful educational tool to remind us how much we take automobiles for granted.

Establishing car-free streets for a weekend, especially if the streets chosen change over time, may help Tampa locate choice spots to create pedestrian malls, similar to what was done with Franklin Street downtown. And by restricting car-free streets to a weekend, there's no permanent damage if no one uses the street for walking, biking, games, socializing, etc.

Along these same lines it might be nice to have some streets designated as "slow lanes." These are pedestrian-friendly streets, but cars can still use them. However, there should be many impediments to ensure that cars travel slowly in order to interact more safely with bike riders and pedestrians.

## 049: Permeable Pavement

We get heavy rains in the summer months. And because that rain falls on impermeable spaces like asphalt and concrete, we have short periods of flooded streets. One way to start alleviating the rapid flooding of our local roads is to sharply increase the city's use of permeable pavement.

Most parking lots and lightly used roads can be covered with permeable surfaces allowing water to soak into the earth rather than run into our overloaded gutters.

Not every space needs permeable pavement. Pavement is solid, sturdy, even, and necessary for high-traffic areas. But there is a nontrivial amount of space in the city that does not need to be impermeable. Tampa already uses this strategy in parking spaces for cars in public parks, but it can be greatly expanded.

Perhaps if we had an Innovative Neighborhood (pg 1), we could learn what a neighborhood with permeable-paved sidewalks and alleys and driveways looked like.

Mall and store parking lots are perfect places to start implementing permeable paving, especially along the outer edges. New sidewalk construction can also be considered for permeable paving.

Perhaps the most easily recognizable permeable pavement is the cross-hatched infrastructure you may have seen, with tufts of grass and weeds sprouting in between the paving materials. However, there are several different materials and designs that can be used, including pervious concrete and porous asphalt.

Pervious concrete is widely available and bears up well under traffic. Porous asphalt is made almost the same way as regular asphalt, only the smallest aggregate is left out of the final product allowing porous holes to be part of the infrastructure, which allows water to run through rather than run off.

Sidewalks and parking lots around schools and libraries are exceptionally well suited for switching over to permeable pavement. This doesn't have to be done at an additional cost. These new materials and methods can be implemented as repairs are needed, instead of resorting to the impervious materials now widely used.

## **050: Kitty Billboards to Reduce Road Rage**

We've all seen those speed-monitoring contraptions on the side of the road telling us how fast we're going. It's time we updated that technology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We could combine the speed-monitoring device with a digital billboard. If traffic is moving at the speed limit, the billboard shows images of kittens or puppies playing. If people are speeding, the billboard shows something horrific, like, say, scenes from the first season of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

It doesn't have to be kitties, but one of the things I hope to highlight in this book is that our world doesn't have to be institutional, boring, and bland. Cell towers don't have to be painted gray, electricity-transmission towers can have an artistic flair, sewer lids don't have to be an afterthought, and we can point out people's speed in ways other than bulky machines with flickering numbers. A little creativity and art can make this a better world for all its citizens.

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## **051: Re-created Tampa: Return the Trolley**

Simply returning the trolley to where it existed 70 years ago would be a tremendous boon to increasing urban density, reducing traffic jams, and improving neighborhoods.

At its heyday the Tampa streetcar system covered 53 miles of track, and ran 190 streetcars along 11 routes. The only time the streetcars didn't run was between 2 and 4:30am. In 1926 the streetcar system carried almost 24 million people.

Bringing back the trolley isn't a cry for something new or untried. It's simply the good and reasonable act of returning to a system that once worked well for the city. Tampans used to be much better at public transportation. There's no reason we can't do the same today.

## **052: Many Public Restrooms**

A walkable city is a poopable city.

If we are going to have a more pedestrian-friendly city, we need more public bathrooms. This is a real challenge, because we don't want to create unsafe or unclean spaces, and we also don't want to create a financial burden on the city by constructing bathrooms that need cleaning regularly by city staff. So what's the solution?

The automatic public toilets in New York City have space for advertising and are pay toilets. However, this means you need someone to collect and count the money and someone to sell advertising, which increases the cost of the public toilet system. On the other hand, if there are enough of them, they may generate enough income so no tax dollars are necessary to pay for cleaning. In fact, if the city is willing make the space available, a private company may be willing to create a public toilet system.

Nonetheless, automatic public toilets are worthy of serious consideration to help make Tampa a more walkable city. I hope someone will start the Tampa Toilet Association, modeled after the British Toilet Association, which campaigns for better public toilets.

These sorts of public restrooms would serve Tampa's park system well. Some parks have permanently locked their bathrooms for security and sanitation purposes.

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## **053: Disabled and Elderly Friendly City Sidewalks**

There's more we could do to make our city disabled friendly. Textured sidewalks can help blind people. Our walk/don't walk signs at crosswalks could speak to us. We'd be a better city if we constantly made an effort to improve our access.

To accomplish this we need low curbs, hand rails, clean public restrooms, and plenty of shade, and everything needs to be wheelchair and scooter accessible.

## 054: Traffic Calming

What's your hurry? You're already in Tampa.

Cars are awesome. Without cars the US wouldn't be what it is today. We wouldn't have drive-in restaurants and their attendant roller-skating carhops. We wouldn't have drive-in theaters, we wouldn't have backseat necking or road movies, and we wouldn't have the call of the open road to influence a generation of beatniks and hippie hitchhikers. We wouldn't have Nascar or Hell's Angels. We wouldn't have the middle class that has been sustained by car production.

Cars aren't perfect, and it's easy enough to create a catalog of how much they suck. But the reality is that cars are not going anywhere for a while. We can't get rid of cars, but we also shouldn't allow them to dominate our city. We need a city that works for cars, bicycles, and pedestrians, and maybe even for unicycles, strollers, and wheelchairs. And in some places that means more traffic calming. Fortunately Tampa has been increasing the presence of traffic-calming measures on our streets.

Here are some traffic-calming ideas for Tampa to adopt:

**Roundabouts** – Studies show most collisions occur at intersections, and roundabouts reduce collisions. Building more is a no-brainer. Why wouldn't we want to reduce the number of car accidents in our neighborhoods? I'm not suggesting roundabouts at every intersection, but there are many neighborhood intersections that can benefit from them. To find out more about roundabouts drive down 40<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Positive reinforcement on digital billboards** – I wrote more about this idea on page 43.

**Take Turn signs** – Find out more about Take Turn signs on page 39.

One of the biggest hurdles in traffic calming is finding something emergency responders can live with. None of us wants our ambulance ride to be slowed by speed bumps. Nor do we want fire trucks slowed down by awkward navigation through roundabouts or speed circles. So, while traffic calming is not an appropriate solution for every road in Tampa, there are spaces where the roads are wide and straight and almost everybody tends to speed, endangering the pedestrians and bicyclists in the neighborhood.

## **055: Free Bicycle Program**

Why aren't bicycles as ubiquitous as cell phones?

There have been a variety of efforts to launch bicycle-sharing programs in the Tampa Bay area. I'm familiar with one attempt in St. Pete and another at the USF-Tampa campus. Both ran up against the intractable problem of bicycle theft.

Here are two possible workarounds.

First, rather than leaving bicycles lying around for people to take and trusting their altruistic instincts, why not give individuals free bicycles? Or maybe charge folks a buck per bike to provide them the psychological sense of investing.

Fund-raisers and grants from nonprofits will pay for the Free Bicycle program. We don't have to give a free bicycle to everyone all at once, but with some dedicated effort over a longish period of time, there could be a real impact made on how many people have bicycles to ride around their neighborhoods.

The second possibility requires a commitment from the city, the county, or the state, to create a program based on the B-Cycle bicycle sharing program, similar to the one in Denver, Colorado.

The B-Cycle program has bicycle stations keeping the bicycles secure, and you must be a member to check out a bicycle. So if you don't return the bicycle to a station, the B-Cycle program knows who checked it out last. B-Cycles are also equipped with GPS tracking devices to help reduce theft.

This type of program matches up well with something like the Copenhagen Wheel (pg 37).

The more people there are who both bicycle and drive, the more people there are who will understand the particular needs of each group.

## **056: Human-Powered Carnival Rides in Public Parks**

Cyclecide is a San Francisco–based bicycle club that ingeniously uses bicycles for more than getting around town. For instance, they built a two-seater, pedal-powered ferris wheel and a bicycle-powered carousel.

Imagine if Tampa built off this creativity and started including bicycle-powered rides in our parks. You've seen merry-go-rounds powered by someone pushing. Why not rides powered by people pedaling?

Renaissance Fairs and urban carnivals like Cyclecide in San Francisco have been inventing, designing, and rediscovering people-powered rides. Since the rides only move as fast as the people who power them can manage, they're safer than motor-driven rides. They produce less waste and noise and don't need gasoline or electricity.

Adding some of these new park ride designs adds a unique characteristic to Tampa.

### **057: Hotels to Offer Free Meal for Pedal Power**

I love the idea of stationary bicycles to help create power. Using these bikes is a way to stay healthy and to pitch in on energy production.

As a way of promoting Tampa's (imaginary) commitment to pedal power, local hotels could promote the stationary bike power program by offering a free meal to hotel guests generating X amount of energy.

Imagine if all the health clubs and gymnasiums in Tampa had their stationary bikes hooked up to the power grid. What a great way to help the community.

To be perfectly up-front, these sorts of stationary bicycles don't generate much energy. They're more an educational gimmick than a serious alternative energy source.

### **058: Homeless Energy Production Plants**

Let's give the homeless jobs! Or at least make jobs available if they want them.

Since we're going to need many different sources of energy to offset the oil and natural gas we don't want to use anymore, let's put stationary bicycles around town that help generate electricity. If you bike enough, perhaps a meter system can provide you with a moderate stipend. Rather than begging for change, Tampa's homeless can ride a stationary bike, create energy, and make enough money to get something off the dollar menu, a pack of smokes, and a couple of forties.

## 059: Flat-Rate Parking Garages

No more jacking up the price of parking in parking garages after 10 pm. This is a hurdle. Eliminate hurdles.

One night I was out later than usual and parked in a parking garage in Ybor City. I've parked there many times and know the rate. It turns out that if you park after 10 pm, the parking garage hits you with a super-duper special expensive rate. Guess what this does? It makes me think the rates are not predictable and keeps me from returning to spend my money in Ybor.

Make a flat rate for all parking, regardless of time or place. You need to reduce the cognitive hurdle; otherwise pricing is too arbitrary, and it feels like you're trying to trick people and rip them off. Public and parking don't have to be adversaries, they can be allies.

This is one of those points that researching this book has changed my mind on. When I started this project, I was a strong advocate of free parking.

However, after doing my research and reading through works like *The High Cost of Free Parking* by Donald Shoup, I'm no longer convinced that urban parking should be free. On the other hand, I'm not convinced that it shouldn't be.

Regardless of the debate over fee or free, and the debate over how much, there should be better predictability to the rates.

## 060: More Shade

I'm not exactly sure how to do this. Any ideas?

Planting more trees along sidewalks can help (though palm trees provide little relief). Lining city streets with awnings can help. But we're going to need a lot more than that to provide more shade to our city walkers.

If we want a city that's more walkable, we are going to have to do a lot for the comfort of the walkers. In other places in this book I've addressed making the city more sittable and making public restrooms more widely available. We're also going to have to make the city more shaded.

I've also recommended sunscreen stations, more hats, and bus shelters that shelter people from the rain, but the sun can be brutal during the summer months, and if we expect more people to walk, we're going to have to look after their health by providing more shade in walkable areas.

The alternative to tree shade is “constructed shade” or “engineered shade.” Constructed shade can be permanent (a building), semipermanent (awnings), or temporary (umbrellas) until the tree canopy rises high enough to provide natural shade.

The two biggest hurdles for increasing the amount of shade in Tampa are the cost and making sure that shade structures can safely withstand major storms during hurricane season.

## **061: Sun Screen and Hats**

It wasn't that many years ago that bottles of Purell hand sanitizer were only found in pharmacies and grocery stores. Now, they are on almost every counter across the city. If we all pitch in to make sure people use hand sanitizer for their health, maybe we can do the same thing with sun screen.

Especially if we want this to be a more walkable city, then we need to help people out by making sun screen available everywhere. Parks should have sun screen dispensers near trails and parking lots. Baseball and football fields, public swimming pools, street corners down town—all of these places should have sun screen dispensers.

And, while I'm on the topic, Floridians need to wear more hats. I'm not sure why there isn't more hat usage here, but I'm constantly amazed at how few people I see walking around wearing a hat.

Dear Tampa, get yourself a good hat with a wide brim. See all those people in historic images of Tampa? They're all wearing hats. And not some hipster hat with a vestigial brim, but a serviceable hat with a brim that can keep the sun off your face and protect your bald head from harmful UV light.

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## **062: Re-created Tampa: Repair Friendship Bridge**

It should be to every Tampan's and Saint Petersburgian's shame that the Friendship Bridge is closed. Let's collect the money and repair it. We need a way for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross the bay without worrying about their safety or their lives.

Reports from 2008 estimated it would cost \$30 million to repair the bridge. The same report also noted that it was used by 500,000 people every year. So, if each of those people paid \$10 every year for six years, then it'd be paid for. Hell, there might even be a few people willing to pay more than \$60 to help out. Why is our only choice to close the bridge? Couldn't we have a Friendship Bridge bake sale or something?

### 063: Augmented Reality Spectacles

Re-photography is taking pictures of the same space at different times. Re-photographing has long been used in ecological surveys and urban studies, but the ubiquity of camera phones and the increasing quantity of historical images available online have created a booming hobbyist culture of re-photographers locating archived images and superimposing contemporary images.

In a similar trend augmented reality is hot right now. Perhaps we could combine the two. History departments in local colleges, high schools, and universities could initiate an augmented reality cooperative to add a layer of metadata to the Tampa Bay area.

Augmented reality software, like Layar, uses a smart phone's camera and image recognition software to recognize objects at which you point your camera. Combine it with GPS and it's easy enough to create a software that recognizes the city as you walk around.

Some historical sites have used handheld recorders to guide visitors on walking tours. The augmented reality function on your phone could recognize any part of the city of Tampa you point your phone at, and offer historical or informational tips.

While you might think local media outlets would be all over developing augmented reality applications for mobile phones for tourists and residents, you'd be wrong. Nor are historians or libraries interested in saturating our world in metadata. This means that adding layers of information to our world is up to any enterprising entrepreneur willing to invest the time and effort.

These sorts of apps are mutating and developing so rapidly that by the time you read this you'll probably have a re-photography app on your smart phone.

With any luck soon there will be ways to expand and formalize these historical laminations. A crowdsourced people's history of Tampa could be a great deal of fun, almost certainly better than any institutional, official history.

These augmented reality spectacles are only one of the slew of history appliances we might see in the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 064: Small-Batch Manufacturing

Part of a city's vision is deciding which businesses to emphasize. Industry is emphasized by tax breaks and recruitment. One of the growing industries of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is small-batch manufacturing.

Small-batch manufacturers are able to quickly shift from producing one kind of product to another. This kind of flexibility makes small-batch manufacturers perfect for supporting boutique designers.

Formerly, manufacturers constructed companies to do one thing and to do it for a long time. Switching over to manufacturing a new item took significant time and money. Now, using fabricators, smarter software, and just-in-time manufacturing, companies will be known broadly as general manufacturers instead of manufacturers of a specific object.

In order to promote this 21<sup>st</sup> century manufacturing model Tampa needs to support projects like 100,000 Garages, “a community of workshops with digital fabrication tools for precisely cutting, machining, drilling, or sculpting the parts for your project or product, in all kinds of materials.”\* The Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative needs to coordinate with USF Libraries and other university and high school libraries to provide access to 3D fabrication tools. Groups need to work together to host an annual Makers Faire.

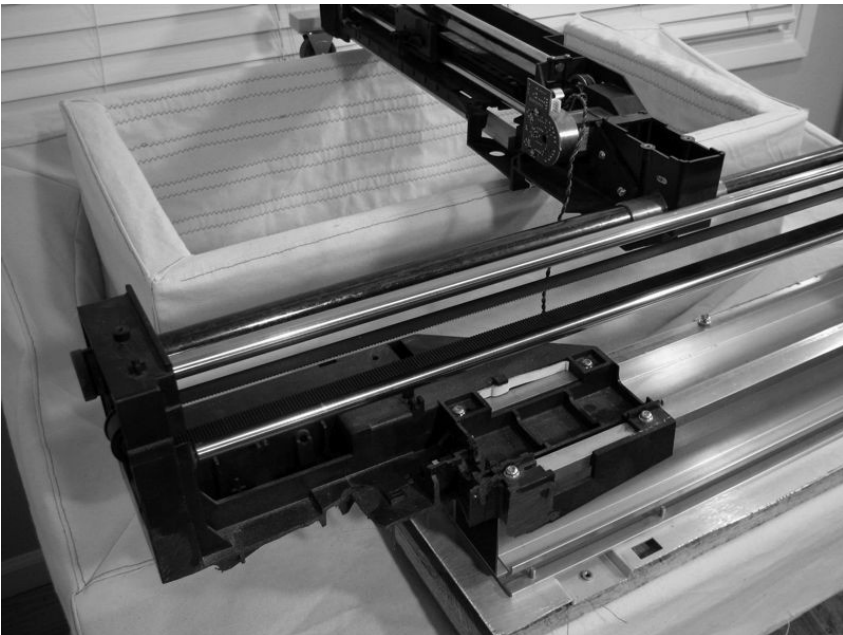
With a little coordination, aspiration, and perspiration the Tampa Bay area could be leading the nation in creating a manufacturing model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

\* See: [www.100kgarages.com/our\\_big\\_idea.html](http://www.100kgarages.com/our_big_idea.html)

## 065: Fabrication Machines at the Library

Libraries have struggled for decades to reimagine themselves, while retaining their core principles of providing high-quality information to the communities they serve. Libraries are the universities of the people and the community source for reference and information. But, as the Internet offers reference for nearly everyone and a significant portion of the population and their political representatives are asking for more austerity, public libraries find it more difficult to convince non-library-users of their value. Library patrons recognize the value of libraries, and every year in Florida they swamp the legislature in Tallahassee with emails, letters, petitions, and personal visits to urge the politicians to add back the funds which have inevitably been cut.

There is no one quick fix for libraries in Tampa, but one path is to incorporate tools beyond those traditionally used for the arts and humanities. Libraries could loan tools as well as books (pg 25). One important tool that may very well change the shape of 21<sup>st</sup> century manufacturing is the 3D printer, or fabrication machine. A fabrication machine may be too big to loan, but librarians could make one available in the same way they make computers and printers available.



## 066: Health 2.0

The recent national debate surrounding our antiquated health care system had very little positive going for it.

The media debate focused so much on death panels, the size of the bill, etc. that no room existed to discuss truly novel and beneficial ideas. One of these neglected ideas is a health 2.0 system suggested by Jay Parkinson at Hello Health.

Hello Health is an online social network for patients and doctors. Wouldn't it be nice to have a doctor answering questions by email or posting information on a Facebook thread? Imagine how much more satisfying health care would be if a doctor answered your questions while you were at home rather than your having to make an appointment, drive to the doctor's office, and wait in the waiting room (where the doctor will almost certainly be late in seeing you).

Dr. Parkinson's new initiative, The Future Well, argues for a redesign of the health care system. What we have now grew haphazardly and was more often for the benefit of the insurance companies than of the patients. It's time for a patient-centric health care system. This new health care system should make it easier to find a doctor, share your health records, arrange a meeting time, get advice on nonemergency questions, and keep track of your own health records.

Tampa could easily be a leader in this field. Revamping health care doesn't have to take place everywhere at the same time. We need local leaders to chart the path to create networked health systems that make sense from the patient's point of view.

## 067: South by Southeast Festival

I open this work with a perhaps overused quote attributed to Margaret Mead:

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”*

It was a small group of people in Austin, Texas, in the late 1980s and early 1990s that started South by Southwest (SXSW). Those early years were a testament to the accuracy of Mead's statement. Through diligence and hard work that small group of people, centered around the weekly alternative *Austin Chronicle*, built the foundation for what is now one of the premier arts and entertainment conferences in North America.

There's no reason a small group of dedicated workers couldn't do the same here, creating a South by Southeast (SXSE) event. We already have multiple movie festivals, Tropical Heat Wave, Gasparilla, Guavaween, etc. We're only a few steps away from the tipping point that brings a monthlong festival/conference into our city every year. Imagine Gasparilla as the centerpiece for an annual movie/tech/music festival.

In my re-created Tampa we would have a SXSE every February. What better time to escape wintry wastelands for the spectacular weather of the Florida west coast in the dead of winter?

## 068: Krampusnacht Celebration in Ybor

Tampa and Ybor City already have some great celebration events, from Gasparilla to Guavaween. Why not another? As far as I'm concerned, we need as many excuses to play dress-up and wander from bar to bar as we can find. To that end I recommend that Tampa adopt Krampusnacht as a local celebration.

Krampus is Santa's evil twin and is celebrated in some Scandinavian countries. There's almost no cultural reason for Tampa to adopt Krampusnacht, but that shouldn't stop us from joining in on the fun and creating our own Krampus-by-the-bay legend. Just as community leaders created Gasparilla out of whole cloth, I give you . . .



## **Interlude: The Legend of Krampus in Ybor**

Once upon a time Santa had a helper. Not like an elf working in the toy shop, or one of his reindeer, but someone who traveled with him and visited boys and girls around the world. His name was Krampus.

For many years Santa gave toys and treats to all the good little girls and boys, and Krampus gave coal to all the bad little children. Krampus wasn't handsome and jolly like Santa but looked more like a scary monster. Sometimes he would frighten the children.

Santa and Krampus both felt it was important to remind bad little children that no good would come from their wickedness. There are no treats for the naughty.

And after Christmas both Santa and Krampus would take a vacation. Christmas is hard work!

For many years Krampus would take his vacation in Ybor City. Krampus loved palm trees, cigars, and the warm winter weather of Florida.

Though Krampus looked like a scary monster, he was good friends with Vicente Martinez Ybor, and Mr. Ybor always made sure his friend was welcome when he arrived. Even though Krampus looked scary, he never did really liked scaring the children. He did it because he hoped it would teach them to be good little boys and girls.

After Krampus's first few visits, seeing that people were still afraid of him even though he was actually very nice and friendly, Mr. Ybor had an idea. If everybody looked like a monster, nobody would mind Krampus. And so began Krampusnacht in Ybor City.

In the week leading up to the day after Christmas, in addition to the Christmastime parties, Ybor began holding Krampus arrival parties. These parties were for grown-ups since it was good for children to remain scared of Krampus. At these parties everyone would wear their scariest masks and drink and smoke cigars in anticipation of Krampus's arrival.

And then, when Krampus arrived on December 26, they'd hold a huge party to welcome him to Ybor City.

For many years Krampusnacht was famous in Ybor City for its revelry and fun. Some old-timers remember their parents talking about it, but very few people alive today remember Krampusnacht since children weren't allowed to attend. If a child learned that Krampus was

a nice and gentle old elf, he or she would never be afraid of him and wouldn't stop doing naughty things throughout the year.

Eventually Krampus got tired of being the bad guy. While he still thought it was important to remind naughty children that their wicked ways would have consequences, it was hard for someone so kindly to be constantly scaring the children who actually delighted him so.

And so after a final Krampusnacht in 1919, Krampus decided to retire. He built a home in the Andes mountains, where he still lives today. He no longer scares children and secretly gives them many gifts of toys and candy.

After Krampus retired there were a few more years of parties, but they just weren't the same without him, so they eventually stopped. Regardless, there are some of us who still believe we should celebrate Krampusnacht on the night after Christmas to remind us all that sometimes monsters aren't as scary as they seem.



## 069: Pay People to Recycle

Is there a profit in recycling? What happens to our recyclables that are picked up from the bins outside our house? Is this done out of altruism? Is stuff really recycled, or does it just go to the dump? Is this costing the city money or making the city money?

On the Frequently Asked Questions page about curbside recycling the City writes,

“Markets for recyclables fluctuate a great deal. Depending on market values, the City may receive some revenue for materials, which will then be put towards the overall program cost.”

The city could stand to be more transparent on this issue. More information about the market should be shared with the citizens of Tampa. What happens when the market is way down? Do recyclables get dumped into the landfill? Would the program benefit if it involved more people?

And, finally, how much revenue is created? Is it possible to reimburse those who recycle? If so, then let's pay the people who recycle. What better way to promote participation in the recycling program than by cutting participants in on the profit?

Alternatively, we could turn recycling into a game. Just like people compete to become the “mayor” of a place in Foursquare (a social app game for smart phones), simply for the joy of playing a game, we could give ranks and badges to people who excel at recycling.

## **070: Neighborhood Fruit and Vegetable Trucks & Carts**

In this era of “buy local” I'm surprised some enterprising entrepreneur hasn't adopted the ice cream truck model for selling fruits and vegetables from local producers, especially now that food trucks are back in vogue.

Perhaps there aren't enough people at home during the day to make this venture worthwhile. On the other hand, there is a high percentage of retired people in my neighborhood. And, if my own neighbors are any example, people work odd hours, and many households are forced into becoming single-income families, leaving at least one person at home much of the week.

These neighborhood fruit and vegetable trucks could travel around like ice cream trucks, selling and buying fruits and vegetables and local products, juices, sauces, etc.

If a truck selling local produce traveled around your neighborhood in the morning, would you buy your dinner ingredients fresh off the truck?

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## **071: More Street Food Vendors**

Where are our street food vendors? Where are the hot dog and taco stands? There are occasional BBQ places outside gas stations and grocery stores, but why aren't there more? I suppose this is the kind of thing that will arise if we get some serious pedestrian areas. We need to make sure now that the policies and regulations in place support and encourage these businesses, instead of inhibiting and unnecessarily restricting them with too much red tape.

There has been a rise in food trucks and BBQ stands in the area in 2011. What we need now is a map of where these trucks and stands can be found. Also, we need more of them downtown, and campuses need to open themselves to some of these vendors instead of perpetually relying on corporate franchises such as Chick-fil-A.

## **072: Biz-in-a-Box**

Everything you need to know (and forms you need) to start your own business should be available in a single box.

How do you start your own business? What's an LLC? How do you figure out taxes for a new business? How much will incorporating cost? Can you run your business out of your house? What about zoning? How do you find the owner of an abandoned storefront? What's the difference between a business and a nonprofit? How do you get a small business loan?

The city of Tampa benefits if it encourages small businesses and entrepreneurs. One way to help is to make an easy-to-use do-it-yourself packet for starting your own business.

Ideally this could come from the Chamber of Commerce, but perhaps the Chamber of Cooperation (pg 2) is a better venue for preparing and sharing this information.

And, if it's coming from the Chamber of Cooperation, there should also be a nonprofit-in-a-box.

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## **073: Citywide Wi-Fi**

I haven't tried to use the citywide Wi-Fi, but I have heard that downtown Tampa has free Wi-Fi between the Port of Tampa and the Hillsborough River. With any luck this will soon be expanded to surrounding neighborhoods and then to the whole metropolitan statistical area of the bay.

Really, the only way this is going to work is if we turn over some of the spectrum once used by broadcast television to local governments for the express purpose of establishing a municipal Wi-Fi.

## 074: Tax Plastic Grocery Bags

Plastic bags are a luxury. We have a long history of taxing luxury items, so why don't we start including plastic items like the plastic bags you bring home from the grocery store? These bags are polluting our world: They are nonbiodegradable, and their production relies on hydrocarbons.

Let's put a nickel-per-bag tax on plastic bags and use that money for . . . anything.

Who else has taxes like this?

San Francisco bans plastic bags, Santa Monica bans plastic bags, Australia is moving toward a ban, Washington, DC, has a plastic bag tax of five cents per bag, Ireland has a plastic bag tax, Canadian stores charge customers extra for supplying plastic bags, and California briefly considered a statewide ban.

Plastic doesn't go away. Plastic falls apart and breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces, but those small pieces never deteriorate into something nature will reabsorb. Because of our love of plastic, we've created a truly stunning amount of plastic trash in the oceans, and because fish are stupid and will eat whatever they find in the water, we've turned our fish into plasti-vores. And, by the way, we then consume these plastic-fed fish.

Plastic doesn't go away; it becomes part of our diet.

We can help reduce the amount of plastic we get in our diets by making plastic more expensive to use.

While we're at it, we can tax plastic bottles.

## **075: Tampa IPO**

What would happen if we incorporated the city of Tampa and made all its citizens shareholders?

Have any cities tried this? What was the result? We should, simply by being citizens of the city, feel like we own a share, but perhaps something more tangible is needed to encourage people to participate in the decisions and planning necessary to create an awesome vision for the city.

I don't even know if I like this idea or not (I suspect I don't). Nonetheless, I'd love to hear a debate on the topic and learn more.

But maybe it wouldn't have to be the whole municipality that's offered as an IPO. Perhaps Tampa can develop some civic startups, individual components of city administration that can be run like a business, but with some citizen oversight as part of the DNA.

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## **076: Billboard Reappropriation Project**

While I'm not particularly a fan of billboards, they're going to be a part of our urban fabric for the foreseeable future. Too many people have invested too much for them to be removed purely on my aesthetic complaints. Fair enough.

But there are too many blank billboards. Blank billboards act the same as shuttered buildings: they indicate neglect. We need to put these blank billboards to community use with a community-oriented nonprofit buying space to promote local events and projects. In addition to supporting local charitable and nonprofit causes, these ad purchases can help support local businesses (if the billboard is run by a local company).

More art on billboards would also be nice, as well as more civic education information. I'll probably never live in a billboard-free urban environment, but maybe we can find a way to diversify the ecosystem of commercial signage.

## 077: Maker Faire Tampa

Tampa needs multiple ways to foster creativity. The more pathways we create to innovation, the more we increase the chances of maintaining innovative and inventive subcultures in the greater Tampa Bay area. It's time Tampa hosted a Maker Faire for Florida.

Maker Faires are hosted by *Make* magazine and designed to connect regional hobbyists who like to build things with their hands. *Make* magazine hosted their first Faire in 2006 in San Francisco. In the past half decade Austin, Detroit, New York, Rhode Island, Ann Arbor, Nairobi, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Brooklyn have all held Faires. Sarasota, Florida, hosted a mini Maker Faire in the middle of January 2011. A Maker Faire is like a 21<sup>st</sup> century combination of a science fair and Renaissance fair. In addition to booths of makers demonstrating their wares, there are also exhibitions and competitions.

One of the most important reasons to hold a Maker Faire is to get innovators and creators in a space where they can meet face-to-face. It's one thing to know there are others like you; it's something else to actually see them gathered together in one place. A Maker Faire is also a kid-friendly activity that shows Florida's children that there's more to life than video games, classrooms, and malls. An event like this reflects well on the state of Florida when new businesses are considering places to launch, expand, or relocate.

People attending county fairs in the early to mid 1800s would immediately recognize the philosophy behind the Maker Faires. Those early days of the American republic saw a deep and substantial interest in agricultural innovation. The *mechanical arts* played an important part in early regional fairs. In addition to making items to help improve agricultural output, early county fairs embraced other core elements of the current maker culture: crafts, baking, sewing, knitting, woodwork, inventions, games, and innovative strategies for entrepreneurs and innovators.

Finally, if Tampa doesn't take the lead on this, Sarasota will. Sarasota's makers have already shown themselves to be early adopters for this sort of maker community creation. Is it time for a little municipal competition? Does Tampa really want to see Sarasota emerge as the regional leader in innovation and creativity?

**UPDATE:** Good news, everybody! Since I wrote this, I learned that a mini Maker Faire is in the works for 2012 in Tampa. One idea adopted; 100 more to go!

## **078: Decorated Cell Towers**

Cell towers are ugly. We've become too much of a cell phone culture to consider getting rid of towers, but we could make them more attractive.

Why not paint the towers with festive, bright colors? Let local artists paint our cell towers and let their imaginations go wild.

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## **079: More Public Statuary**

May we have more statues please? Isn't there some nonprofit or city beautification organization or art program or something that will help us get more statues up in parks and public spaces around town? They don't have to be anything fancy, and I'm perfectly happy with representational art instead of high-priced abstract pieces.

I bet raising money for the art isn't even the hard part. I bet the hurdle is in getting the city to grant permission. Perhaps if we promise to build statues of the committee members, we'll get approval.

How much is a concrete statue?

And, to add an element of whimsy, we can paint them in unique, vibrant colors.

## **080: Tampa Buzkashi League**

The best way to understand another culture is to play its games. Let's take a leadership role in understanding Afghans and the Afghan culture. There's going to be a lot of healing to do after this interminable war is over, and we can start the healing by creating a Buzkashi league here in Florida.

Buzkashi is a traditional Afghan sport invented on the steppes of central Asia. Traditionally Buzkashi is played with a goat carcass, but we can replace the carcass with something man-made in consideration of Americans' delicate sensibilities.

The game is played on horseback. People on horseback ride full gallop, pick the goat carcass off the ground, and then attempt to work their way through other players to hurl the carcass across a goal line or into a vat. Everything short of tripping the horse is legal to stop the carcass carrier. Whips and boots are used liberally, and it's generally considered a good idea to wear thick coats and head protection.

Are you ready for some Buzkashi? Of course, we'll have to play it in the "winter" here in Florida, given the high likelihood of heat stroke among those wearing thick coats in the summer.

## **081: Manhole Cover Art Project**

Here's a way to bring attention to Tampa's sewers. Sewers, sewage, wastewater, gray water, and all the associated problems are easily one of the top out-of-sight-out-of-mind problems in municipal infrastructure. Who wants to think about where their flush goes after they're done?

The Manhole Cover Art Project is a way to bring attention to how much Tampa flushes and what happens to our water and waste after we flush. How much water flows through our sewers? What kind of shape are the sewers in? Where does our sewage go? Can our sewers handle an increase in population? What about an increase in just the downtown population if we densely populate a small area downtown? Who pays for all this?

Tampa already has several great manhole cover designs. The Manhole Cover Art Project isn't an attempt to replace those designs or to come up with permanent new designs. It's an art competition designed to bring attention to an easily ignored issue.

Artists, both amateur and professional, students and adult will design alternatives to our current manhole covers, and we'll promote the competition and display the candidates in an art gallery. The winner will get his or her design made and placed on a single manhole in the city.

## **082: Seed Bombing and Guerrilla Gardening**

There are some vacant lots we just can't help. They are private property, and we mustn't trespass on private property. But what do we do if they're an eyesore? How about bombing lots with flower seeds?

A seed bomb (or seed grenade) is a mixture of soil, seeds, and fertilizer that is composed especially to thrive in inhospitable terrains. Urban park activists first used seed bombs in the early 1970s in New York City to improve the look of empty lots.

However, the seed bomb is only one type of guerrilla gardening. Guerrilla gardeners have taken over city right-of-way spaces and derelict spots near highways and major intersections. Florida and Tampa do a reasonable job in making sure public property looks halfway decent, but budget cuts are taking their toll. And the places in impoverished neighborhoods are the first to see the neglect.

The mild civil disobedience of throwing flowers on abandoned properties and around shuttered businesses makes Tampa more attractive. While we really need more substantial solutions to these problems, in the meantime perhaps we can make the space a little less depressing by adding some flowers.

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## **083: Cigarette Machines That Sell Art**

Repurpose cigarette machines to sell little pieces of art for a dollar or two. The money might not be much, but the promotional value of the repurposed cigarette machine and the goodies inside would be great for any small art co-op or gallery.

I can't remember where I first saw this idea, but it's not original with me. Used cigarette machines run about \$300–\$500 on eBay.

## 084: Candy Machines That Sell Seed Bombs

Here's a guerrilla art project I'd like to see. Candy machines popping up around Tampa selling seed bombs instead of candy (see page 79 for more on seed bombs).

These would go perfectly with the cigarette machines selling art. Perhaps the two should be combined.

Here's a recipe for seed bombs from *A Tree Grows in Bushwick*:

1. Combine 2 parts mixed seeds with 3 parts compost or potting soil.
2. Stir in 5 parts powdered red or brown clay (you can get this at a craft store or online).
3. Moisten with water until mixture is damp enough to mold into balls.
4. Pinch off a penny-sized piece of the mixture and roll it between the palms of your hands into a tight ball (maybe 1 inch in diameter).
5. Set the balls on newspaper and allow to dry for 48 hours. Store in a cool, dry place until you're ready to throw them.
6. Toss 'em over the fence!

## 085: Front Yard Farms

Rather than maintaining a front yard that is merely decorative, whether with nonnative turf and lawn grass or xeriscaping with native plants, why not put your vegetable garden in the front?

For some of us using the front yard makes better growing sense. There is a patch right in the center of my front yard that gets sunlight all day long. This spot is the perfect spot for a vegetable garden.

I've never put a garden in my front yard, and when I first wondered why not, I immediately imagined someone might steal my vegetables. And then I thought, so what?

First, I sincerely doubt there are roving bands of vegetable thieves wandering through neighborhoods waiting for someone to conveniently move their garden to the front yard. Second, if they steal some vegetables and eat them, then I have helped someone, and that's a good thing. Any vegetables grown in my backyard are liable to get eaten by one of my dogs, anyway, so what's the difference?

Keeping a garden in the front yard also serves two other purposes. It blazes a trail to encourage others to follow, and it puts you in a position to see, meet, and greet your neighbors. The more aware you are of your neighborhood, the more you notice when something is out of place. If you know your neighbors, you'll spot the roving bands of vegetable thieves slowly cruising through the streets with their hoes and rakes.

This idea could include a band of front yard farmers who farm front yards for people who like the idea but don't have the time, energy, or knowledge. The space rented out can be as small as one square foot. And the payment can be a weekly basket of vegetables, fruits, and flowers.

This type of distributed urban agriculture isn't only about growing fruit and vegetables. Individuals, collectives, or corporations can grow ornamental, annual, and decorative flowers and plants. There's no reason this has to be a cooperative, collectivist endeavor. Some young entrepreneur can harvest these microfields and pay rent on the property used. If the microfield model is successful, she or he can expand into shuttered businesses and vacant lots, renting out these places and paying a staff to plant, fertilize, and harvest.

## **086: Tampa Glean Map**

I have citrus trees in my backyard. Around December and January I have more citrus than I know what to do with. I eat and juice and give as much away as I can to neighbors and friends but still end up with a lot of wasted grapefruits and oranges.

Surely there are people in the city who might want some free fruit but just don't know where to get it, just as I don't know where to get rid of it.

A Tampa glean map can help people with citrus find those without it, and vice versa.

A glean map can also show interested people where there's fruit available in public spaces.

Gleaning is the practice of taking the fruit that the machines miss. Urban gleaning is the practice of picking fruit that appears in public spaces. In many cities the fruit on the bough that extends over the public space of a sidewalk is fair game, even if the trunk of the tree is on private property. It would be nice if we had an easy way to share this information.

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## **087: Local Churches and Community Gardens**

I've often wondered why more churches don't get involved in urban farming. Many have large lawns full of nonnative grasses, and people who show up regularly who might be willing to turn that space into something healthful and helpful to either the people in the neighborhood or the people in the congregation.

A cooperative of local churches turning their lawns into community gardens could go a long way toward feeding the hungry. Just like Jesus taught.

## **088: Shuttered Businesses as Urban Hydroponic Gardens**

One of the more intractable problems for any neighborhood is what to do when businesses close and are not replaced with new businesses. If shuttered businesses stay vacant too long, these empty spaces fall into disrepair. They become red flags to new businesses looking for a home that this neighborhood is not a desirable area.

The problem is complicated because these unleased properties are often owned by banks or large companies that don't actually live in the neighborhood. These commercial owners have little interest in maintaining the property or finding creative ways to utilize the vacant building.

If the absentee owners did care, or if there were community funding or nonprofit funding for leasing these spaces, then some of this property could be turned into urban hydroponic farms.

Anyone who has tried to grow vegetables in the sandy soil around the Tampa Bay area knows it's often best to use beds with nutrient-rich soils rather than place the seeds directly in the ground. It's not a far step from this to hydroponics.

Combining grow lights and hydroponic techniques allows plants to be grown inside buildings without filling the building with soil. Setups like this can be quickly dismantled and moved if the owner sells or leases the building.

A small business embracing urban hydroponic gardens might sell the produce directly to people in the neighborhood or to grocery stores and restaurants interested in buying local. Small neighborhood co-ops could rent out these empty spaces and grow fruit and vegetables for their members.

Acquiring or leasing these properties is a significant hurdle, one I'm not exactly sure how to overcome.

## **089: Tax Credits for Xeriscaping**

Xeriscaping is landscaping with native plants. In order to help alleviate some of the pressure on our dwindling water supply, let's offer a tax credit for anyone willing to remove the extra-thirsty nonnative grasses from their lawn and replace them with native plants and grasses that do not need extra watering.

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## **090: The Tampa Oral History Project**

Because we don't know what will interest future historians, archivists collect and catalog as much of the present as possible.

The value of history is too often neglected. Urban renewal developers bulldozed the rich history of Ybor City in the 1960s. A quarter century later people started to recognize how deeply that urban renovation scarred the city. Attempts have been made to bring back some of Ybor City's history, but the new version is only a tourists' simulacrum. History is too important to be left to the historians. We need to start preparing now to help with the work historians will be doing decades from now.

One project we can take toward this end is the Tampa Oral History Project.

This project probably needs a leader and someone to organize it. Once a few standards are put into place, then we start interviewing people about themselves and about their experience living in Tampa. Eventually the archive can be turned over to the county or university library, where it can rest until a future historian goes looking to conjure up the past.

## **091: Re-created Tampa: Return Mutual Aid Societies**

Reading through Tampa's history, I am struck by the importance of mutual aid societies in helping the immigrants who built this city (and the cities of Ybor and West Tampa).

Germans, Italians, Spaniards, and Cubans all created mutual aid societies to help new immigrants. These societies helped with job placement, education, and insurance when needed. The new members, aided by the society, in turn supported it as a cause. These societies built substantial buildings, several of which remain important elements of Tampa's architectural personality. These societies and the buildings housing them were places for members to socialize for dinner, drinks, lectures, and adult education. Members could use the gym or see live music shows and dance. Members dropped in for coffee in the morning and for a beer after dinner. The society buildings housed small libraries, and the society employed teachers. Mutual aid society buildings were places built by specific communities to watch out for the people in those communities. The societies were especially important for providing health care. Membership dues helped cover the cost of health care when members became ill or were injured.

The mutual aid societies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries weren't perfect. Part of their widespread acceptance in immigrant communities was a result of bias against immigrants by the white citizens. Race and ethnic expectations defined the societies.

I'm not sure what the best categorization might be for creating a vibrant place for mutual aid societies in 21<sup>st</sup> century Tampa. Perhaps we can randomly assign everyone a color or an animal or a tree name and let them build the mutual aid societies as they will.

The mutual aid society is an important part of Tampa's history. They were a good idea then, and they're a good idea now. They are an element of the past we might consider finding a way to bring back—a re-created Tampa.

## **092: Free Porch**

You may already follow Freecycle, an email list where people can give away stuff they don't want, and others can pick it up for free. Or you may follow the free section on Craigslist. We've all probably got some junk lying around that we don't want or don't need but that someone else might actually use.

One way to deal with this is to take it to Salvation Army or try to sell it yourself at a garage sale or on eBay.

Another alternative that's been growing in popularity is to set up a free porch. Generally housed in someone's yard, porch, or garage, a free porch is a way to circulate goods through the community. If you don't want it, drop it off at the free porch. See something you like? Take it, it's free.

The rules are flexible, but generally you can't take something until you've left something. And you should show a little respect. Don't dump off your trash and expect to take home that barely used vacuum cleaner. It's also not cool to drop off your unwanted kittens, puppies, or children.

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## **093: Tampa Documentary Project**

We need multiple documentaries about Tampa, and they need to be freely available on the Web. I remember watching the documentary about Seminole Heights a few years ago, but what good is it now that it's locked away where no one can see it? And whatever happened to that documentary about Charlie Walls? Perhaps these documentarians are too ambitious. We need to find a way to streamline the process so a group of volunteers can start churning them out.

## 094: More Ghost Bikes

Perhaps you've seen them around town: white bicycles parked on the corner, sometimes with a plaque, sometimes with flowers, sometimes alone. These white bicycles, or ghost bikes, are silent testimonials to bicyclists who died when hit by a motorist.

Each ghost bike is a reminder of a tragedy, and it may seem callous to ask for more of them, but I think they are powerful reminders that motorists need to share the road and that failure to do so can have tragic consequences.

A few days' search through the newspaper archives could probably help find more spots for these iconic memorials.



## **095: Playgrounds for Adults**

Why do kids get to have all the fun? Why not a playground with swings and slides big enough for adults to use?

Many of the Tampa parks have jogging paths and some rudimentary exercise equipment, but that's too much like work. I want a place where I can have some fun while I work out. Not that sliding down a slide is strenuous exercise, but at least it might get me out of my easy chair and into the park.

I also wouldn't mind swinging in the cool evening breeze. As it is now, however, I'm hesitant to go anywhere near a public swing set for fear my lack of accompanying children might set off someone's paranoia. What would you put in your adult playground?

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## **096: Playscaping in the Dog Parks**

I suppose this would take the work of a foundation. Not many people who don't use the dog parks would want to fork over the tax dollars to improve them.

However, it would be nice if we could spruce up the dog parks around Tampa. We have some great, underappreciated parks in this city, but there's always room for improvement. Let's incorporate some small pools and short tunnels and a few hills into our dog parks to break up the monotony.

### **097: Change the Name of Lois Ave.**

Can we please change the name of Lois Ave. to Lois Lane?  
Please?

\*\*\*\*\*

### **098: A Zip-line Park**

Somewhere along the Hillsborough River there's got to be a good spot for a zip-line park. A zip-line is a rope on an incline, high enough so you can use a pulley to slide on it.

I actually have a place in mind for this, but it involves buying some substantial properties near the river. Since I don't foresee that happening anytime soon, let me ask you, Where's a good place to install a zip-line park along the Hillsborough River?

## **099: Tampa Busking League**

Given the weather, a Busking League might be able to exist only between October and March. But that's OK.

What is a Busking League you ask? Buskers are people who play their instruments on street corners for money. A Busking League is a coordinated effort to bring local musicians out onto the streets. A Busking League might also help others learn to play instruments. We'd probably be a lot less cranky with our local homeless if they were producing some tunes on the street corners.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **100: Burgert Brothers Day**

Tampa is remarkably lucky to have had the Burgert Brothers photography firm documenting the growth and history of Tampa and the surrounding areas for nearly a century. The “brothers” actually span three generations and more than a half dozen members of the Burgert family and an untold number of photographers.

To celebrate their tremendous contribution to our city's history we should hold a Burgert Brothers Day where amateur and professional photographers document the city over the span of 24 hours. Not only will this bring attention to a great resource, but it will add to that resource for the future.

## **101: What's Your Idea for Re-creating Tampa?**

And now for the beginning. What's your idea for re-creating Tampa? I wrote this book to start a conversation, not to provide all the answers. I hope you'll write to tell me your ideas. I also hope you'll tell me which of the ideas mentioned in this book are already underway, or why they won't work.

Visit me at Re/Creating Tampa at [www.recreatingtampa.com](http://www.recreatingtampa.com) or send me an email at [davissondave@gmail.com](mailto:davissondave@gmail.com). I look forward to hearing from you!

**ARE  
YOU  
RE/CREATING  
TAMPA?**

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There are probably a thousand ways to make any city better. Here are 101 ideas for Tampa.

Ranging from the practical to the impossible Re/Creating Tampa blogger David Davisson has collected one hundred and one ways to improve the city.

This book is part of the conversation the citizens of Tampa have been having with each other for the last one hundred and fifty years. It's a conversation that will continue (we hope) for at least one hundred and fifty more. The ideas presented here are meant to be a launch pad for discussing what is possible. While Tampa might be a better place if many of them came to pass, the larger purpose is to remind us that we can design the city to reflect our aspirations. But in order to do so we must first have aspirations. We can ignore the future or create it.

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