

Petersburg Parks

Phase I Variation

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Operation Bootstrap is an economic revitalization plan for the City of Petersburg, Virginia. The title was inspired by the term “bootstrapping,” which refers to a group of metaphors that share a common meaning: a self-sustaining process that proceeds without external help. The plan calls for us to do what we can with what we have and do it now.

The National Park Service has long wanted to utilize the Southside Railroad Station as a Central Virginia Civil War Museum. It is expected to attract a quarter-million visitors a year. However, the Park Service was unable to obtain the necessary federal appropriations.

This report sets forth a variation of the original Phase 1 plan modified to accomplish that goal. It moves things planned for later phases into the first phase so as to expand the drawing power of the National Park Service Museum by placing the initial emphasis on the city’s vast Civil War heritage. This variation also presents a bootstrapping plan for the park service museum.

The original Phase 1 plan called for most of the things listed below. A detailed description of it appears in *Introduction to Operation Bootstrap* which may be downloaded from Petersburg-Parks.com.

Southside Station

This is the only surviving Civil War train station in the South. It consist of a two-story structure with the passenger depot on the first floor and the railroad offices upstairs. It is flanked by two long freight stations. Each of these wings contains seven bays. The west wing is intact. The east wing was largely destroyed by the 1993 tornado. The details of the proposed reconstruction and improvements is set forth “Rebuilding Southside Station.” It calls for the west wing to maintain its historic interior and for the reconstructed east wing to have a more modern interior.

The National Park Service can begin its museum by using part of either wing and then expand it into additional bays in accordance with its own schedule. The unused bays would be closed off with a temporary interior partition that could later be moved. For example, it could start off with two bays and then add another bay every year or two. The Petersburg Parks would pay all renovation costs and provide the facility to the National Park Service rent free. It’s only cost would be its exhibits and staff, which can probably be covered out of current budgets. In short, it is bootstrapping too.

Although the current plan calls for one wing to be used by the National Park Service and the other for retail specialty shops, the value of critical mass cannot be overlooked. It’s a case of the bigger the better. The more that an attraction offers, the more people it will attract. Virginia was the primary theater of the Civil War and both wings of Southside Station could be used to expand the scope of what is being shown. This can result in a much larger Virginia Civil War Museum and even a National Civil War Museum.

Lake Petersburg

Operation Bootstrap calls for the former Petersburg harbor to be converted into a scenic lake. The goals of the American Adventures Theme Parks are to entertain and educate. Ways must be found to use the lake to accomplish those goals. It will be stocked with fish, so there can be a fishing facility. There can be rides on a batteau boat and canoes for rent.

Independence Park

The south shore of the lake will be a large park. It will extend from Southside Station about 75% of the length of the lake. The Appomattox Indian Village will later be built to the east of it. Earlier plans called for this to be named Lafayette Park, but it has since been changed to Independence Park, as it will focus on our revolutionary war heritage.

One purpose of this facility is to host large entertainment events, so there be a large bandstand, possibly next the lake as it will provide a nice background. The park must contain a building containing public bathrooms.

The east end of the park will contain a reconstructed tobacco warehouse of the 1750s, which will function as a snack bar and gift shop. The park should contain picnic tables and stone grills for cooking.

The master plan also calls for Miss Pitty Pat's Place, a small farm and farm store.

Walkways

Everything in the parks must look authentic. This precludes modern concrete sidewalks. The walkways must be crowned to permit rapid runoff of heavy rains and there must be a good drainage system. The walks can be heavily tamped dirt, covered with crushed oyster shells, stones and even pine needles.

Railroads

. The parks will eventually cover 25 city blocks and it will be necessary to provide a means to transport visitors between parks. Petersburg has an incredible railroad history. *Operation Bootstrap* calls for the city's early railroads to be reconstructed and used to provide the essential transportation.

Phase 1 called for a fully operational reproduction of the Petersburg Railroad, which was the third railroad in the United States, the first in the South and the nation's first interstate railroads. Later phases will substantially increase the number of visitors so other trains must be added as new parks are opened. The tracks will run around Lake Petersburg. This is the "inner loop" as Phase 3 calls for a much longer main line referred to as the "outer loop."

The American Civil War was the first in history to see the extensive use of railroads. When General Grant was placed in command of all Union forces in 1863, he tried to capture Richmond, the capital of the confederacy. He made several very bloody frontal attacks, but they were repulsed. He changed his strategy and decided to starve Richmond into submission by capturing the Petersburg railroads which supplied it. The so-called "Siege of Petersburg" lasted ten months, making it the longest battle of the Civil War. This revised plan calls for one of the Civil War railroads to be first actually placed in operation, rather the most smaller Petersburg Railroad of 1832.

Battle of Petersburg

This theme park was originally planned for Phase 2. Under this variation, it would be pushed forward into Phase 1. It would be expand in later phases. See the report "Battle of Petersburg" for details. The first site plan should simply allow room for it. Extensive research will be required to determine the details of this park.

Equestrian Heritage Park

It now appears that the most popular attraction in the parks will be horses. The Equestrian Heritage Park will be centered on the large triangular lot behind Southside Station. It will need stables, a blacksmith shop and corral. There must be a place to protect and display the many horse drawn vehicles

Infrastructure

The new 60,000 square foot building on the former Roper Lumber lot will be the park's service center. It will provide facilities to build and maintain the trains, horse-drawn vehicles and other things. The former Roper Office Building will be used by the parks for that purpose.

The Bottom Line

Phase I was originally budgeted at \$4.6 million. This variation will cost more because: (1) the original specifications called for only rebuilding the Southside Station structure. This variation calls for extensive interior work. (2) The Petersburg Railroad was very small and thus inexpensive to construct. The Civil War period locomotives weighed four times as much and pulled larger cars. This substantially increases the cost of the train. (3) Battle of Petersburg was to have been introduced in Phase 2. Earthworks are made of wood and dirt so it had a modest budget. In view of its importance under this plan, the budget should be substantially increased.

The original Phase I projected 120,000 annual visitors. The National Park Service projected that its Central Virginia Civil War Museum will draw over twice as many. Although under the bootstrapping plan, the actual museum may at first be smaller than planned, its drawing power is greatly increased by adding the other attractions, which complement it.

The combination of Central Virginia Civil War Museum, operating Civil War Railroad, the Battle of Petersburg historic theme park and other attractions provide a substantial critical mass - one not even remotely approached by any other Civil War site in the country. It is not inconceivable that the complex will attract as many as 500,000 visitors during its first year in operation.