



Does it include a second term as big challenges loom large in 2012?

Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling says he has the best job in the world. Being mayor of his hometown beats all, says the man locals refer to simply as Mayor Billy. It's a first-name-basis kind of a job, one he has imbued with openness, enthusiasm and a large measure of communication. The *Lowcountry Weekly* editorial staff recently sat down with Hizzoner for a candid conversation about the year just ended and what lies in store for the year ahead.

Among the broad list of topics some details remain guarded. The mayor hinted at efforts he's exploring to strengthen local economic diversification and workforce development. And while it's too soon to talk specifics, he says he's ready to "make a couple of long passes" in 2012. He'll also have to make a decision on whether he wants to keep the best job in the world for another term.

Mayor Billy's Master Plan

Written by Mark Shaffer

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Lowcountry Weekly: 2011 was a milestone year for Beaufort, the tri-centennial year. Other than that



what stands out in retrospect?

Billy Keyserling: During 2011 a lot of the thinking that a number of people have been doing about the past began to really crystallize in terms of a future which was based on the foundation of the past – how we lived physically in Beaufort, the importance of the military, which we tend to overlook. There was the desire by many to see if we can make some of our traditional industries like farming and fishing relevant again. Over three years ago we framed a comprehensive plan, and based on what we learned, I think we filled in a lot of the blanks and the product is the civic master plan – a long-term plan to essentially double the size of the city within our own footprint.

What's really exciting is that real estate demographics have sort of aligned with what Beaufort was and what Beaufort can be again. It's evident in the revitalization of the old City Hall to become a market and the ongoing transformation of Carteret Street. Down the street, the university's finally getting a focus on how to grow that campus by taking a narrow niche that they could cut out so it wouldn't compete with, but complement, the south campus. By March, some 90 individuals or families will have contributed partial four-year scholarships to help create this art college.

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LW: USCB Chancellor Jane Upshaw has big plans for this arts campus, but she tells us a key aspect is keeping the neighbors happy – a dicey prospect in a historic district where change comes slowly or not at all. We've already seen concerns raised over proposed housing for just 16 students, and the eventual goal is 400.

BK: This is going to be one step at a time. It's showing that 16 students can live responsibly in a dormitory. We all want to change things, but some of us don't want that change happening in our own backyard. Well, we've got 5,000 backyards in Beaufort. If no one's willing to accept a little change in their backyard, then nothing's going to happen and we're going to die. We've got to grow. Development has to be incremental and you have to convince people that the goal is to add something to Beaufort, not take something away.

LW: If this plan works, what does its long-term success mean for Beaufort?

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