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## **Downtown Norfolk Council Announces New Strategic Leadership Positions**

*Rachel McCall Promoted to Vice President*

*Laura Wood (Habr) Joins as Director of Business Engagement*

NORFOLK, Va. – (August 2022) – Downtown Norfolk Council (DNC) is pleased to announce two leadership changes for the organization.

Rachel McCall has been promoted to vice president to lead the organization’s operational and strategic initiatives. Previously serving as director of strategic initiatives, McCall has been with Downtown Norfolk Council since 2014. In her various roles, McCall has advanced the NEON District, Norfolk’s first arts district, supported Downtown’s Vibrant Spaces initiatives and advocated for a pedestrian and bike-friendly urban environment.

“Rachel is a valued employee of the Downtown Norfolk Council, and we are thrilled to promote her to this position,” said DNC President & CEO Mary Miller. “Her initiative and tenacity will continue to serve the organization well in this new leadership position.”

“As a native and a resident of Norfolk, I’m grateful to spend every day working toward a more vibrant, inclusive, walkable and beautiful Downtown,” said McCall. “I’m thrilled to take on a larger role with DNC and share the incredible impact this organization has on our city.”

As vice president, McCall will manage placemaking for the organization, oversee DNC operations and continue to spearhead efforts in the NEON District, including public art, event planning and business development. She will also assist with annual planning, accounting and fiscal controls for the organization. And, she will serve as the secondary leader with the Board of Directors and associated committees.

A founding board member of the Elizabeth River Trail Foundation, McCall serves as chair of the foundation’s events committee. McCall is also a graduate of the International Downtown Association’s Emerging Leader Fellowship and a contributing author to *A History Lover’s Guide to Norfolk*. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in art history from the College of William & Mary.

Laura Wood Habr (now Laura Wood) has joined the organization as director of business engagement. This new position will support programs, services and initiatives that sustain and grow Downtown Norfolk’s economic development.

Wood has worked in the restaurant, tourism and hospitality industry for nearly 25 years as the co-owner of Croc's on 19<sup>th</sup> Street in Virginia Beach. She is also a co-founding board member of the ViBe Creative District, Old Beach Farmers Market and the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast.

"Laura brings talent and experience to Downtown Norfolk through her successful ventures in recruiting and growing the ViBe Creative District," said Miller. "She has demonstrated how partnerships and business engagement are key ingredients for economic growth."

As director of business engagement, Wood will support the implementation and tracking of adopted economic development strategies for Downtown Norfolk Council. She will develop partnerships to support business retention and recruiting, implement innovative retail strategies, support Selden Market and oversee an expanded initiative that will include outreach to restaurants and late-night entertainment venues. Ultimately, Wood will gather success metrics for these initiatives and develop economic data to communicate the value of Downtown Norfolk and the DNC to the overall economic development efforts for the City of Norfolk.

"I see my role at DNC as a bridge builder, and I am excited to be an advocate for the little guys, the small biz and creative communities," said Wood. "I have lived and breathed community building and placemaking for several decades and am humbled to play a part in my new role to meet existing business owners in Downtown Norfolk and recruit new ones. Additionally, my experience with law enforcement and all levels of government makes me well suited to support a safe and vibrant Downtown."

Wood serves on several local, regional, state and national boards including the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, FBI Norfolk Citizens Academy Alumni Association, Virginians for Offshore Wind Energy and the Virginia African American Cultural Center's Advisory Council. She has served as a policy associate for the Virginia League of Conservation Voters, an appointee to the Governor of Virginia's Virginia ABC Enforcement Expert Review Panel and on the Light Rail Now committee to extend The Tide from Norfolk to the Virginia Beach oceanfront. Wood has received numerous accolades for community building initiatives including a 2021 Human Rights Commission Award in Virginia Beach. Wood studied at the Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale and received an Associate degree in interior design from Tidewater Community College.

[Downtown Norfolk Council](#) is a private, not-for-profit membership organization comprised of businesses and individuals working toward a dynamic, attractive and prosperous Downtown. DNC also manages the Downtown Norfolk Improvement District, a 50-block special services district with enhanced services that keep Downtown friendly, safe and spotless. Connect with Downtown Norfolk on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) or visit [DowntownNorfolk.org](http://DowntownNorfolk.org).

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