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## **CRE Consulting Corps - Making a difference - by Michael Harrington**

April 09, 2021 - Appraisal & Consulting

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I'm often asked what does it mean to be a CRE? Followed up by what is a CRE and what are the goals of the organization? These are all good questions and they're questions I've asked myself when going through the selection process to become a CRE member. Pondering a response, I thought it would be best to answer those questions by highlighting a unique service provided by CRE's across the globe known as the CRE Consulting Corps.

One of the most rewarding aspects of being a CRE is being asked to use your experience, knowledge and expertise in the field of real property advisory services. This is no more apparent than volunteering your time to The CRE Consulting Corps, a public service program created and managed by The Counselors of Real Estate (CRE) that provides municipalities, not-for-profits organizations, educational institutions, government entities and other owners of real property the answers that not only solve their real estate problems but invariably enhance the property's performance.

The advisory services are provided by members of CRE's, an invitation-only group comprised of individuals recognized for their highest level of expertise and achievement in the field.

I recently attended a Webinar hosted by CRE team members who recently completed an assignment at the Naval Air Station, Oceana, Virginia Beach, VA. The CRE team members who volunteered for this assignment included Jerry Turner, Skip Preble, Kirk King, Reid Wilson, Casey Kemper and CRE New England chapter member, Bill Norton.

Working on behalf of the U.S. Navy, at the request of base commander, Capitan Hewitt the CRE team mission was to help the Navy create a vision for future base design with a specific focus on approximately 510 acres of nonessential real estate. And, identify the implications/impact of developing this real estate to the city of Virginia Beach community. To help define their mission the

team was asked complete five tasks, defined below.

1. Data collection/assessment/stakeholder interviews;
2. Analysis of the data collection;
3. Present potential ownership/lease/risk structure for development;
4. Recommend strategies to ensure quality of life at a reasonable cost; and
5. Create a strategic plan report for short and long-term actions.

Below is a quote from Brian Soils, special projects manager, office of the city manager, city of Virginia Beach relative to the outcome of the report.

“The CRE report really provided tangible and useful recommendations for moving forward from a real estate development and economic development standpoint. It even provided advice to address Navy operating expense challenges and operating shortfall issues.”

I invite anyone reading this article to visit the link below to view the free webinar to view a behind the scenes look of this project.  
<https://www.cre.org/event/making-a-difference-consulting-corps-assisting-naval-air-station-oceana/>

In all, CRE Consulting Corps have completed 53 assignments throughout the country and few international projects as well. A sampling of other assignments include:

**Featured Project: Preston Riverwalk:** The town of Preston, CT purchased 390 acres of the abandoned Norwich State Hospital and the CRE Consulting Corps were engaged to provide a strategic analysis of the property. The Preston Redevelopment Authority wanted a “fresh set of eyes” to test the validity/sustainability of the vision outlined in their conceptual management plan. The CRE’s were also asked to create a “road map” outlining the sequence of appropriate actions needed for successful implementation.

A quote from Robert Congdon, first selectman, Preston, sums-up the service provided by the CRE Consulting Corp. - “The CRE team exceeded my expectations. They hit the ground running and didn’t stop running for a week. They were exceptional professionals providing a very balanced and broad base of expertise. I only wish we had done it sooner.”

**Economic Development: City of Chicago Heights:** The CRE Consulting Corps were asked to develop a strategy to repurpose portions of a vacated hospital campus for the needs of new users and as a catalyst for additional community and economic development.

**Downtown Revitalization: Fairborn, Ohio:** The CRE Consulting Corps examined the city’s real estate process and recommended a path to align it with the city’s vision; framed a redevelopment plan for a

declining 17-acre shopping center affected by increased competition, changing traffic patterns, and lack of private sector investment.

These are just a few examples of the many projects completed by The CRE Consulting Corps. I recommend contacting Samantha DeKoven, director of public service initiatives ([sdekoven@cre.org](mailto:sdekoven@cre.org)) or visit the CRE Website ([www.cre.org](http://www.cre.org)) for more information. You can leverage this trusted resource to benefit your community.

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