

Then and Now: Manchester by Amelia Wehunt

When was the last time you ventured across the river to visit the Manchester area? If it's been a while, you may be surprised by how much is going on in Dogtown! New apartment complexes and office buildings are popping up regularly and restaurants, breweries, and shops are opening their doors to cater to the influx of new residents. Let's dive in and take a look at the area's history and the potential for the future of this Southside neighborhood!



Located just across the river on the south bank of the James, Manchester has a rich history as a port, rail, and commerce center. Manchester operated as an independent city for many years and residents used ferries and toll bridges to cross the river into Richmond. Once the two cities merged in the early 1900s, a free bridge was constructed to connect the two hubs. Landmarks like the Southern States silos (the tallest structures south of the river) and Hull Street Station still stand as relics to the area's industrial past.

Since the early 2000s, a steady stream of adaptive-reuse and new construction projects have transformed former factory and warehouse buildings into new housing, commercial, and mixed-use centers. Some of the recent developments include Plant Zero, New Manchester Flats IX, City View Lofts, Old Manchester Lofts, The Terraces at Manchester, Manchester Green, and 7West. According to Richmond.com, more than 1,000 apartments are currently under construction in Manchester.

The new residential and commercial amenities in the area created a need for a bridge that would allow for pedestrian access across the river. In 2016, the T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge was completed, providing a necessary bike/pedestrian link between Manchester and Downtown Richmond. Sitting about 20 feet over the James River, the bridge offers stunning, panoramic views of the City's skyline while providing an ADA-accessible route to pedestrians and cyclists 24 hours a day. Now, Manchester residents can access the attractions of Downtown without a vehicle. The bridge has also increased foot traffic to the Manchester neighborhood, with pedestrians crossing the bridge at Brown's Island to visit popular Southside businesses like Legend Brewing.

The increased accessibility and popularity of the Manchester area has also caused a boom in new restaurants and commercial spaces in the area. Neighborhood markets like Manchester's Table and The Butterbean opened to provide grocery and food options to residents and employees of nearby offices. Neighborhood restaurant favorites like Croaker's Spot and Plant Zero have been joined by new ventures including Brewer's Café, Iron Clad Pizza, Dogtown Brewing, and Hot Diggity Donuts. Earlier this year, the Pamunkey Indian Tribe announced plans to open a \$350 million casino on Manchester's outskirts. The development would include a 275-room hotel and 1,000 space parking garage.

It's clear that the growth potential of the Manchester neighborhood, and Southside as a whole, seems exponential. With the City of Richmond growing and changing so rapidly, it only makes sense that the impacts would extend across the river as well. It will be interesting to see how this unique neighborhood continues to transform across the river!