

## **Smart City Technology to Be Prototyped and Tested in VEF Neighbourhood**

**To develop VEF neighbourhood as a pilot area for smart cities, where the latest technological solutions are tested and introduced, the local companies have joined an innovation movement VEFRESH. Today, having signed a memorandum with the Ministry of Economics and Riga City Council, members of this movement have committed to transform this neighbourhood into a local, national and regional innovations centre for urban environment.**

“Due to rapid technological development and free access to global markets, economic growth largely depends on the ability to create technological innovations. This is the path that Latvia should take. We have all the pre-conditions to capitalize on this possibility to leap forward. Pilot areas for smart solutions are a widely used method to develop the local potential for innovations and exportable technologies. Thus, I am really happy that local technology companies have joined forces with their partners to create this innovation platform in Latvia. I am convinced that this approach will pay off and bring many successes,” claims Ralfs Nemiro, the Minister of Economics.

Historically, VEF neighbourhood has served as a home for technological innovation and a strong driving force behind the growth of national economy. Thus, it is just logical that 100 years after the launch of the once largest technology company in Latvia, this area yet again houses technology leaders. This time, of the 21st century. In total, they employ more than 4000 IT specialists, producing 43% of the Latvian IT exports and paying more than 85 million euro in taxes.

A smart bus stop or a smart pedestrian crossing, a mobility hub with bicycles for travelling to more distant districts of Riga, green areas and parks with picnic spots, playgrounds and public workstations for open air office space, as well as a well-developed pedestrian and cycling infrastructure are just some of the solutions that members of the innovation movement VEFRESH intend to implement together with technology companies LMT and Accenture, the real estate developer New Hanza Capital, city in a city ‘Jaunā Teika’ and VEF concert hall and culture centre.

Viesturs Celmiņš, head of VEFRESH and a socioanthropologist, explains that during the prototyping and introduction of smart solutions in the VEF neighbourhood, user friendly and green infrastructure will be considered a priority. The LMT will introduce connected car and drone solutions, as well as other 5G opportunities for the improvement of urban environment. Accenture prototyping studio ‘Liquid Studio’ will implement IoT, AI and mixed augmented reality projects.

At the moment, ‘Jaunā Teika’ is the most advanced residential estate and business area in Riga, where more than 700 families and dozens of companies reside. However, in the future, it will be able to house more than 6000 professionals. ‘New Hanza Capital’ will help to transform the historic buildings of former VEF factory into a convenient and attractive environment for technology companies. It will also landscape the historic inner courtyard and the park of the VEF quarter. VEF concert hall and culture centre will find new formats for traditional values, becoming a space for co-creation and most important events of the local technology industry.

“There is no doubt that Riga is a modern city and the economic hub of the Baltic region. However, our ability to create and offer an attractive and comfortable environment for

businesses and local residents will determine if it maintains this position even after ten or twenty years. Development strategy of Riga City includes several activities that would allow to achieve this goal, however, it will be possible only if the public and businesses are actively engaged. Thus, we greatly appreciate the initiative and the commitment of innovation movement VEFRESH to retrofit and landscape the historic VEF neighbourhood transforming it into a pilot area for smart city solutions.

VEFRESH, which is open for other companies, aims to support businesses from VEF neighbourhood that develop innovative and potentially exportable solutions, and, as far as possible, to reduce the administrative burden to receive official permits for their testing. Furthermore, to promote innovations and contribute to a larger number of IT specialists in Latvia and to bring innovators and education institutions together, VEFRESH intends to advance STEM and IT education.