



# Comprehensive Plan Guiding the future for a lasting Lowcountry.







### ADOPTED BY CHARLESTON COUNTY COUNCIL November 18, 2008

Ordinance No. 1567 as amended

## Acknowledgements

The *Charleston County Comprehensive Plan* reflects a year long effort of citizens, County Officials, and professional consulting team to update and refine the future vision for the County. Special thanks to the citizens of Charleston County for their dedicated participation in the Comprehensive Plan Process.

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#### **2008 PLAN UPDATE**

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Facilities Management
Consoiidated 9-1-1 Center
Economic Development
Public Works
Environmental Management
Community Development
Building Services
Transportation Development

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South Carolina State Ports Authority
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Town of Mount Pleasant
City of North Charleston
Dorchester County
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Part 1: Introduction and Background

"If there is a time for you to understand and appreciate the necessity of your involvement—the time is now. It is critically important for the citizens of Charleston County to have an opportunity to have input into this plan. This plan will be the guide that we use between now and 2020. Many changes will happen and without your involvement we will not have done our jobs as good as they could have been done."

– U.S. Rep. Tim Scott Former Charleston County Council Chairman

Chapter 1.1 Introduction

### **Chapter 1.1 Introduction**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The Charleston County Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) is the future vision for preservation and development in Charleston County (the County) for the next five to ten years. The Plan establishes strategies for the County to pursue to maintain and enhance its high quality, unique landscapes with a focus on strategies that the County government can directly influence and achieve.

The comprehensive planning process identified a series of over arching themes that serve as the primary guidance for the recommended strategies and implementation initiatives. These themes are:

- 1. The major policies and direction of the 1999 Comprehensive Plan, the subsequent 2003/2004 Comprehensive Plan Review, 2008 Comprehensive Plan Update, and 2013-2014 Comprehensive Plan Review are still largely valid and accurate. All future Plan updates and reviews should stay the course and build on the past success of the Plan.
- **2. Rural preservation** is very important. The Plan needs to place emphasis on the protection of the unique Lowcountry character. The Urban Growth Boundary needs to be institutionalized though intergovern-

- mental agreements and/or working relationships in order to direct higher intensity growth to the Urban/Suburban Area where adequate infrastructure and services are in place, allowing for preservation of the rural character of the majority of the County.
- **3. Fiscal responsibility** is essential to success for the County. New development needs to generate revenue equal to the cost of providing new services and infrastructure so that existing residents and businesses do not pay a disproportionate share of the cost of growth.
- 4. The broad nature of comprehensive planning is important for a successful future, however, there are areas in the County where more detailed land use study and planning will be necessary.
- 5. The County is but one of many players in the region that can influence the preservation of resources, form of development, and provision of services and infrastructure. It is vitally important that the County recognize its ability to manage its destiny and establish working relationships and/or formal agreements with other jurisdictions and agencies that contribute to the quality of life.

6. The Plan places an emphasis for growth to occur within the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) where public infrastructure and services exist. Additionally, the Plan recognizes the need for mixed-use development and a diversity of housing types that are affordable to County residents and located near existing infrastructure while preserving and protecting the Rural Area for future generations. A commitment to balance social, economic and environmental considerations is required to achieve the objectives set forth in the Plan. The integration of these three basic areas of concern into all development processes with broad public participation in decision making is important for achieving sustainable development in Charleston County.

The following purpose and intent statement defines the broad role of the Comprehensive Plan.

#### **Purpose and Intent**

The County of Charleston Comprehensive Plan will guide public decision-making affecting the quality of life in Charleston County through the year 2020. The Plan identifies the community's Vision for the future. The Vision articulates the essential components of the

quality of life in Charleston County, as identified by the community, and serves as the touchstone for the Comprehensive Plan. The various elements of the Plan are designed to accomplish this Vision by articulating goals for the future regarding the pattern, quality, and intensity of land uses, the provision of public facilities and services, economic development, availability of housing, and preservation of natural and cultural resources. The Plan also establishes strategies or actions and implementation tools to enable the County to achieve the Vision set out in this Plan. The components of the Plan focus on real actions the County can achieve given the appropriate time and resources. The strategies of the Plan elements are tied together in a comprehensive manner and are executed through both the land use and priority investment strategies.

The following section provides guidance on the structure of the Plan and the various elements.

#### **GUIDE TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

#### Using the Plan

As stated in the Purpose and Intent, the Plan is a guide for public decision-making. Specifically, the County's elected and appointed officials should use the Plan to evaluate future proposals or policy changes to ensure consistent decisions are made. Furthermore, the Plan should provide guidance to land owners and developers on what is appropriate in the County.

This Plan contains a few terms that will be used to describe the various policy recommendations:

- *Vision:* the comprehensive, over arching statement of the desired future of the County. The ultimate set of ideals to which the County should aspire.
- *Goal:* a statement of desired end-state or target. Tied very closely to the vision statement and focused on a specific element of the Plan. Provides particular guidance for where the County should be in the future, and sets the tone for the individual strategies

for each element.

- *Strategy:* a recommended course of action or task the County or its designated agency could undertake in pursuit of a Goal and the Vision. Provides focused and achievable guidance on specific topics under the Plan element headings. Ties the implementation of the Plan to the Goals and Vision.
- *Initiative*: a specific set of tasks or a coordinated effort to be undertaken in the pursuit of implementation of the Plan.

While all of the various recommendations of the Plan are intentionally interwoven, it is possible to glean information from a particular section or set of recommendations within the individual elements of the Plan. The Plan is provided as a comprehensive guide for the County but specific recommendations may apply more in one circumstance than another. The elements of the Plan are listed below. The Plan dedicates a chapter section to each element that includes background and strategies/recommendations for that element of the Plan.



The scenic views along many of the County's roads are a key component to the vision and character of the County.

#### Plan Structure

Following these introductory chapters, the Plan is divided into the Vision (Part 2), Comprehensive Plan Elements (Part 3), and Additional Resources & References (Part 4). The following lists the various sections of each chapter and provides a brief overview of the contents.

#### Part 2: Vision

• *Chapter 2.1 Vision Statement* is the articulation of the components of the quality of life in Charleston County, as identified by the community. This is the



Coordination with both the large and small municipalities in the County is important in the long-term success of this Plan.

- over arching statement of what is important and what the County desires now and in the future.
- *Chapter 2.2 Goals* is the ten specific targets for the elements of the Plan, which tie the specific strategies for each element to the Vision Statement.

#### Part 3: Comprehensive Plan Elements

- Chapter 3.1 Land Use Element is the history of land use development and strategies to shape the future of the Charleston County landscape and geographic distribution of preservation and development. This element includes strategies for location, quality, and quantity of land uses.
- Chapter 3.2 Economic Development Element is the overview of the economic environment and strategies to influence employment and business growth in the County to support the population.
- Chapter 3.3 Natural Resources Element is the recognition of the diverse natural assets in the County and additional strategies beyond those in the Land Use Element to protect and preserve these features. This Element includes, through reference, the strategies and information in the Charleston County Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan.
- Chapter 3.4 Cultural Resources Element is the recognition of the diverse historical and cultural assets in the County and additional strategies beyond those in the Land Use Element to protect and preserve these features.
- Chapter 3.5 Population Element is the assessment and inventory of population and demographic data to establish existing conditions, forecasts for planning purposes, and strategies to stay apprised of the continually changing needs and preferences of the population.

- *Chapter 3.6 Housing Element* is the assessment of housing conditions and needs in the County and strategies to ensure adequate and affordable housing supply is available in the future.
- Chapter 3.7 Transportation Element is the overview of transportation data and efforts in the County and region as well as a list of necessary and bonded improvements to the road network. This Element includes, through reference, the strategies and information in the Charleston County Comprehensive Transportation Plan.
- Chapter 3.8 Community Facilities Element is the inventory and status of the various facilities serving the population of Charleston County, and strategies to ensure continued quality service provision in the future.
- Chapter 3.9 Priority Investment, Implementation and Coordination Element is the element that prioritizes the investment of County resources into the various strategies of the Plan and lists the major initiatives the County should undertake in pursuit of the Plan strategies/recommendations.

• *Chapter 3.10 Energy Element* identifies steps that need to be taken to prepare for a changing style of living through conservation and renewable energy.

#### Part 4: Additional Resources & References

- *Chapter 4.1 Definitions* is the glossary of specific terminology used in the Plan.
- Chapter 4.2 Index of References is the index of data sources, and documents influencing the creation of this Plan which are not included as part of the Plan and a listing of the Appendix Documents included through reference as part of this Plan.





Charleston County has established communities, areas where development will take place, and areas that will remain in a natural state.

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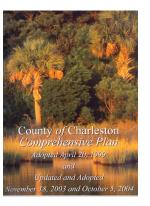
### **Chapter 1.2 Planning Background**

#### **AUTHORITY FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

In 1994, the County was granted the authority to prepare and maintain a comprehensive plan through the South Carolina Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act (S.C. Code Title 6, Chapter 29). The Act consolidated formerly separate legislative acts regarding the local authority to create comprehensive plans. Chapter 29 has since been updated to include additional sections regarding educational requirements for local planning officials, vested rights, and the Federal Defense Facilities Utilization Integrity Protection Act. In 2007, The General Assembly enacted the The South Carolina Priority Investment Act thereby amending sections of the Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act to require local jurisdictions to include discrete transportation and priority investment elements in their plans and enhancing the requirements for the housing element of plans and zoning codes.

#### PLANNING IN CHARLESTON COUNTY

The Comprehensive Plan is adopted by County Council as an ordinance. Before adoption, the Planning Commission must make a recommendation and County Council must hold a public hearing, giving the public a minimum of thirty days public notice of the hearing. The Plan must be reviewed once at least every five years to determine if changes are needed which require additions or amendments. The Plan must be updated at least every ten years.



#### **History of Planning in the County**

Charleston County adopted its first *Comprehensive Plan* in 1999 after a two year long planning process. The 1999 plan was the first prepared under the *1994 Comprehensive Plan Enabling Act*. The Plan was subsequently reviewed in 2003, updated in 2008, and reviewed again in 2013-2014. The 1999 Comprehensive Plan process was overseen by the Planning Commission and the Council-appointed Joint Planning Policy Committee composed of 25 individuals. Prior to the 1999 *Comprehensive Plan*, planning in the County had been done based on geographic subareas of the County.



The adopted 1999 County of Charleston Comprehensive Plan superseded the area plans and replaced them as the effective planning document for the unincorporated portions of Charleston County. Although no longer in effect, the legacy of these area plans is carried forward through the vision and direction of this updated Plan. The area plans included:

- 61 Corridor Growth Management Plan (City of Charleston and Charleston County 1986);
- James Island Land Use Policy Recommendations (James Island Study Committee 1988);
- Johns Island Plan 1995 Land Use Update (Charleston County 1995);
- Edisto Island Land Use Plan (Edisto Island Land Use Committee 1993); and
- Wadmalaw Island Land Use Plan/Planned Development Guidelines (Wadmalaw Island Planning Committee 1988).

#### Updating the Plan

This Comprehensive Plan is the result of the state mandated five year review and ten year update cycle, the need for the County to conform to the new state statutes (The Priority Investment Act) requiring additional elements in the Comprehensive Plan, and a response to changing economic and growth trends. The County took a very comprehensive approach to updating, amending, and reviewing the Plan including extensive public participation, full Planning Commission involvement, and a team of consultants who assisted in evaluation of trends, and creation of the 2008 Plan Update.

#### The County's Role & Other Players

On the surface it may appear that the County should be able to manage growth and provide services as an independent and wholly functioning entity. However, the truth is that Charleston County is but one major player in a dynamic regional context. The County is responsible for several functions and services delivered through the County such as Emergency Medical Services (EMS), the Consolidated 9-1-1 Center, Public Safety (Sheriff's Office and Detention Center) and Environmental Management. Services that Charleston County Government does not directly manage include:

- Schools Charleston County School District;
- Parks Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (CCPRC);
- Bus system Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA);
- Water resource management and water access permitting Office of Ocean & Coastal Resource Management (OCRM);
- Municipal garbage and trash pickup;
- Sanitary sewer services; and
- Water services.

The division of responsibility requires the Charleston County Government to work in coordination with agencies to provide services. It also compounds the importance of inter-jurisdictional and inter-agency cooperation to achieve the growth management intent of this Plan.

The County has the primary role in the preparation of the Plan. The implementation of this Plan lies with County Council, the Planning Commission, the Planning Department, the *Zoning and Land Development Regulations Ordinance*, the Half Cent Sales Tax Programs including the *Greenbelt Plan* and the *Transportation Comprehensive Plan*, the Public Works Department, the Office of Economic Development and other County departments. The

Priority Investment and Land Use Elements are the pivotal components for the Plan, tying together the various recommendations into a form that the County can and should implement.

The County must focus on coordination and agreements with other agencies to implement the Plan. Because the County does not have the ultimate policy-making authority or management abilities of such services as sanitary sewer, water, and water resource management, the County must defer to the respective agency. While this Plan outlines a vision for the future, it is necessary to also recognize the importance of the other agencies outside the direct control of the County. The County can not autonomously manage growth without the cooperation of these other agencies which provide vital services to the community.

#### **INFLUENCING TRENDS**

The 2008 Comprehensive Plan Update planning process started with a set of technical research documents that focused on the historic and anticipated future trends in population, housing, and non-residential growth. The analyses were split into: 1) a demand based analysis (The Demand Analysis) which looks at the potential growth of the population and the demand for new housing and businesses that would be generated by that growth; and 2) a supply side analysis (The Capacity Analysis) which reviews the available land in the County and the potential buildout capacity of that land under current zoning and land use policies1. Together these analyses provide a guide for where the County is headed under current policy and trends the discussion of what may need to be adjusted in the 2008 Plan Update.

The following sections describe the findings of the *Demand and Capacity Analyses* performed as part of

<sup>1</sup> Both documents are available in their entirety at the Charleston County Planning Department.

the 2008 Plan Update; however, more up to date demographic trend data from the 2010 U.S. Census, 2007 - 2011 American Community Survey, and other sources, is included in Part 3, Comprehensive Plan Elements, as part of the 2013 - 2014 Comprehensive Plan Five-Year Review.

#### The Demand Analysis

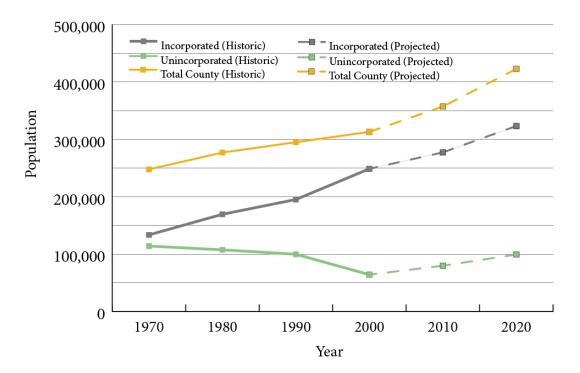
The *Demand Analysis* conducted as part of the *2008 Plan Update* looks at local, regional, and national trends to attempt and calibrate a local projection that is truly reflective of the economic climate in which the County is operating. The *Capacity Analysis* conducted as part of the *2008 Plan Update* looks at the natural constraints to development and the development regulations and policies that protect or permit development to create an

estimate of just how much growth can be accommodated.

Figure 1.1.1. shows the historic and projected population growth for the County from the 2008 Plan Update Demand and Capacity Analyses. The data is split between the unincorporated portion of the County, and the areas within municipal boundaries. These projections were based on the assumption that annexation trends would continue in a similar manner to the historic pattern. The assumption is that municipalities would continue to annex to a certain degree thereby increasing the land area of municipalities and decreasing that which is in the unincorporated County. The summary findings of the 2008 Plan Update Demand Analysis include:

• Assuming an annual growth rate of 1.7 percent, Charleston County can reasonably expect 85,000 new residents during the projection period resulting in a 2020

Figure 1.1.1: Charleston County, Historic and Projected Population Growth



Note: 2007 population estimated based on analysis of available recent population estimates. 2010 and 2020 population forecasts are based on 1.7 percent annual growth rate. Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1970-2000; Miley, Gallo, & Associates, LLC, 2007.



Public participation was key in the 2008 update for the Comprehensive Plan.

population of 425,000.

- Based on the municipal population capture analysis, 70 percent, or 60,000 people, will live in the incorporated areas of the County, and 30 percent, or 25,000, will live in the unincorporated areas.
- Population growth of 1.54 percent a year is expected for the municipalities and a relatively higher rate of 2.24 percent a year is projected for the unincorporated areas. However, if annexation activity increased significantly, these estimates will shift accordingly.
- Population growth will stimulate housing demand in Charleston County. In total, the County will need approximately 42,000 new housing units by 2020. Growth in the municipalities will drive housing demand for 30,000 units. In the unincorporated areas, 12,000 new housing units are anticipated through 2020.
- Assuming product-type preferences are consistent with recent County trends, the majority of the new units, 30,000 or 70 percent, will be single-family residences. Within the municipalities approximately 21,000, or 69 percent, are expected to be single-family units. However, in the unincorporated areas, ap-

- proximately 9,000, or 77 percent, are expected to be single-family homes, with five percent multi-family, and 18 percent mobile homes.
- Although Charleston County's annual employment growth rate is projected to be 1.9 percent, our research indicated that the majority of the demand for new commercial space is likely to occur within the municipalities. However, special land assemblages along with targeted economic development efforts could directly affect employment estimates for the unincorporated areas.

#### **Capacity Analysis**

The companion, supply-side analysis (*The 2008 Plan Update Capacity Analysis*) looks at the capacity of the unincorporated land area to support new development under current policies. The unincorporated areas were targeted because these are the areas in which the County is responsible for planning. This analysis started with a current update of existing land use. The land identified as vacant, large residential lots, and agricultural land was assumed to have some potential development capacity. Any land with environmental constraints or protections was removed from the pool of land. The development densities from 1999 Future

Land Use Plan and the subsequent 2003/2004 Review and existing zoning were applied to the available acreage to yield the number of potential homes that could be built on the land. The summary findings of the 2008 Plan Update Capacity Analysis included:

- Zoning provided for a mid-range buildout closer to the high density recommendations of the 1999 Future Land Use Plan which was reviewed in 2003/2004. At these densities there is capacity for 50,000-58,000 new homes in the unincorporated parts of the County.
- The estimated buildout of 50,000-58,000 new homes
  does not account for any future annexations or
  changes to existing zoning designations. The way
  cities annex land will alter the capacity for growth
  and the unincorporated capture rate. If land were
  rezoned to a higher density the capacity would also
  increase.
- In addition to the capacity in large parcels of land there is that capacity in currently approved Planned Developments, which is approximately 3,360 acres.
- Between 30 and 50 percent of the residential capacity is located within the Urban/Suburban Area, based







on municipal boundaries existing at the time of the study and depending on the density scenario used.

- The unincorporated County has adequate capacity under current zoning regulations to accommodate anticipated growth through 2020 and beyond, even while maintaining a density of 1 home per 25 acres in large portions of the County. *Figure 1.1.2* shows the relationship between the demand for 12,000 units and the capacity under the three density scenarios examined.
- The unincorporated County has adequate capacity under existing zoning to absorb projected non-residential economic development. However, with a special sites/land assemblages and proper marketing, additional demand and capacity could open up.

The findings of these two reports, in addition to the public comments on the Plan, support the theme that the existing policies are on track and the County should stay the course during the *2008 Update*. The planning process and public outreach are outlined in the following section.

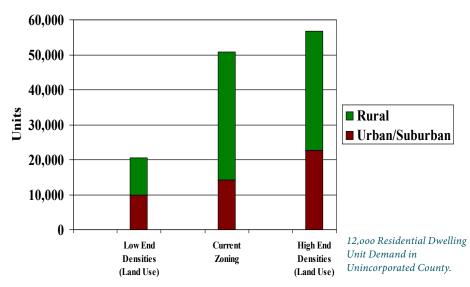


Demand for housing in the unincorporated County is mostly for single-family homes. However, accessory units like the one shown here offer affordable options in the more Rural Areas of the County.



The County has adequate capacity to accommodate growth while still preserving much of the rural character. Current regulations go a long way to set appropriate development densities.

FIGURE 1.1.2: RESIDENTIAL CAPACITY COMPARED TO DEMAND (UNINCORPORATED COUNTY)



**Density Capacity Scenario** 

#### THE PLANNING PROCESS

#### **Overview of the Planning Process**

The County and consultant team completed the *2008 Update* to the *Comprehensive Plan* over a period of one year starting in September of 2007. The process included four key phases with a public participation element between each phase: 1) Data Collection and Analysis; 2) Policy Development; 3) Draft Plan Document; and 4) Adoption.

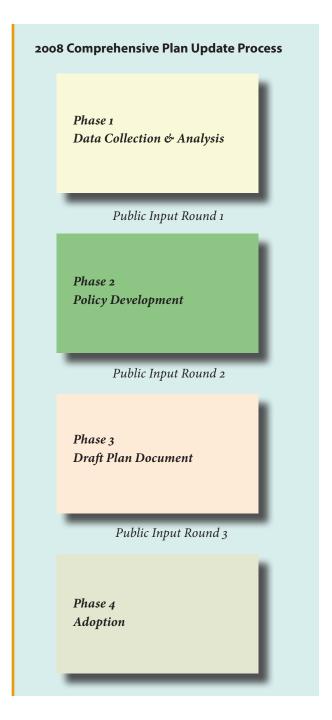
Phase one included data gathering and technical research. The planning team collected extensive data, prepared the demand and capacity analyses, and conducted interviews with various agencies, departments, and stakeholders to evaluate the planning climate and assess key data. The first round of public workshops was held in October 2007. An additional workshop was held with the Charleston County Citizens Academy in November 2007. This first set of workshops was structured as a fact finding effort. Four separate workshops were held in different locations throughout the county to introduce the public to the planning process and solicit opinions and concerns regarding strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in the County that should be addressed in the Plan update. The information gathered at these workshops was evaluated by the Planning Commission and the consultants and influenced the early development of policies in phase two. The documentation on both the technical analysis and public input is included in appendices to the Plan.

In Phase two, the planning team combined input from Planning Commission, the public, and the technical analysis to begin shaping the goals for the Plan. These goals along with the existing land use objectives and a draft land use plan were presented to the public in a second round of public workshops held on February 25-26, 2008 for comment and discussion. The comments from Planning Commission and the public led to a reworking of the land use approach, the goal state-

ments and the existing land use strategies included in this Plan. Following the approval of the goals by Planning Commission and additional work on the Land Use Element, the planning team began drafting the other elements of the Plan. The materials presented at these workshops and the public input gathered are available in the appendices to the Plan.

In Phase three, the draft of the updated Plan stays the course of the 1999 Plan and 2003/2004 Plan Review by carrying forward many of the original plan objectives and policies. The intent of the updated Plan is to strengthen those recommendations by focusing on the quality of growth in the County, increasing interjurisdictional coordination, and ensuring that future development contributes its fair share to the costs associated with growth and does not negatively impact current residents. The elements of the Plan were drafted using input from the various departments and agencies engaged in the provision of facilities and services. Following the review of the strategies of the various elements by Planning Commission, the Draft Plan was presented to the public on July 14-15, 2008. This series of workshops was intended to present a relatively complete version of the Plan to the public and solicit another round of comments before the final review by Planning Commission and before the Planning Commission recommended the Plan to County Council. The comments from the public at these workshops are included as an appendix to the Plan.

In Phase four, following the recommendation by Planning Commission, through a resolution, the Plan was forwarded to County Council, which held a public hearing. County Council considered public comments on the Plan and then adopted the updated *Charleston County Comprehensive Plan* by ordinance.



#### Plan Amendments, Reviews, and Updates

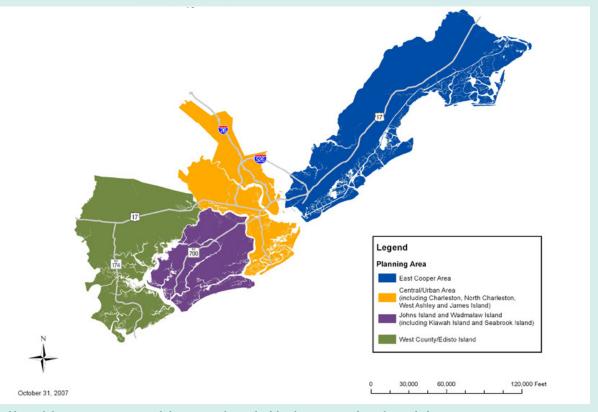
In accordance with the provisions of the South Carolina Local Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act, the Planning Commission must review the Comprehensive Plan at least every five years, and update the Plan when appropriate, or at least every ten years. The Planning Commission adopted a resolution on October 14, 2013 completing the Five-Year Review of the Charleston County Comprehensive Plan pursuant to the Planning Act. The resolution stated that the Planing Commission would implement the findings of the Five-Year Review through amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning and Land Development Regulations Ordinance to be completed as part of the annual work program. The findings of the 2013/2014 Five-Year Review, which are incorporated into this document, were subsequently vetted by the public, recommended for adoption by the Planning Commission on October 13, 2014, and adopted by County Council. This process included five public workshops held in different areas

of the County to gather public input. The information presented at the workshops was also posted on the County's web site for citizens to view and provide feedback. All public comments were provided to the Planning Commission and Council and were considered in the adoption process.

As this document is intended to be a proactive policy document for the future development of the County based on sound technical merit and extensive public participation, amendments to the Plan should not be viewed lightly. Any amendment to the Plan, even those recommended in the future work plans for specific areas, should be held to the same high standard and comprehensiveness as the creation of the 2008 Update and 2013/2014 Five-Year Review. Because of the coordinated intent of the elements of the Plan, deviation from one element in an amendment should be weighed against potential impacts on the achievement of other goals, strategies, and implementation measures. Each amendment should be evaluated comprehensively to ensure that proposed changes are consistent with

The public work sessions included as part of the 2008 Plan Update and 2013/2014 Five-Year Review were designed to provide locations for participation that were convenient to the various planning areas of the County. In each round of public input, meetings were held in four location over two nights. The map to the right shows the planning areas of the County. A meeting location was chosen in each area. The turn-out for the meetings was consistent and the input from the participants contributed strongly to the resulting Plan.





Public workshops were set up to provide locations within each of the planning areas for each round of meetings.

the spirit of this Plan, can be supported by public facilities and services, and are supported by all elements of the Plan; amendments should not be considered solely as an amendment to the Future Land Use Map. The overarching Vision and Goals for the Plan are presented in Part 2 and should be interpreted as the "Spirit" of the Plan.

As part of the 2013/2014 Five-Year Review, five public workshops were held in five different areas of the county. Over 160 citizens attended the workshops.









