



Comprehensive Plan

Guiding the future for a lasting Lowcountry.



ADOPTED BY CHARLESTON COUNTY COUNCIL

October 9, 2018

Ordinance No. 2034 as amended

Acknowledgements

The *Charleston County Comprehensive Plan* reflects a continued effort of citizens and County Officials 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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Special thanks to all of the County departments and regional agencies who participated in the 2018 Ten-Year Update planning processes.

County Departments

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

Photography Courtesy of:

Cathy Ruff, Director, Charleston County Greenbelt Program
Emily Crow, McBride Dale Clarion (*consultant for 2008 Update*)

Other Agencies

Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission
Charleston County Aviation Authority
Charleston County School District
South Carolina State Ports Authority
Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments
City of Charleston
Town of Mount Pleasant
City of North Charleston
Dorchester County
Berkeley County
Colleton 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. Senator Tim Scott
Former Charleston County
Council Chairman*

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 overarching 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 through intergovernmental 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 2023. 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.

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 landowners 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, overarching 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 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 next. The Plan dedicates a chapter section to each element that includes background and strategies/recommendations for that element of the Plan.

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



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

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 overarching 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.



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

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. Community planning projects undertaken by the County, such as adopted community plans and overlay zoning districts, are referenced in this Element.
- **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, including the two Half-Cent Sales Tax programs.
- **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. Community plans created with neighborhoods throughout Charleston County are located in this section.



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

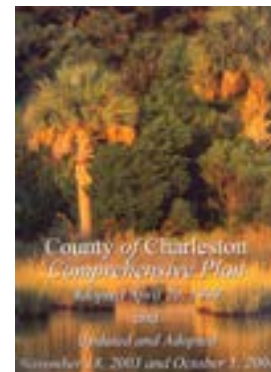
In 1994, the County was granted the authority to prepare and maintain a comprehensive plan through the *South Carolina Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act* (S.C. Code Title 6, Chapter 29). The Act consolidated formerly separate legislative acts regarding the local authority to create comprehensive 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 and full Planning Commission involvement.

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*, 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

During the *2008 Ten-Year Update*, a set of technical research documents that focused on the historic and anticipated future trends in population, housing, and non-residential growth were completed and served as the basis for the current Plan. The analyses were split into: 1) a demand based analysis (*The Demand Analysis*) which looked 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 reviewed the available land in the County and the potential buildout capacity of that land under current zoning and land use policies¹. Together these analyses provided a guide for where the County was heading under current policy and trends at that time.

Since that time, during the *2013/2014 Five-Year Review* and *2018 Ten-Year Update*, demographic trend data from the 2010 U.S. Census, five-year estimates from the American Community Survey, among other sources, has been utilized to understand the existing and potential future conditions of the County. This information is included in Part 3, Comprehensive Plan elements. The majority of data is contained in the Housing and Population Elements.

¹ Both documents are available in their entirety at the Charleston County Planning Department.



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.



Public participation is key to updating the Comprehensive Plan.

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 inter-jurisdictional 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.

2008 Comprehensive Plan Update Process

Phase 1
Data Collection & Analysis

Public Input Round 1

Phase 2
Policy Development

Public Input Round 2

Phase 3
Draft Plan Document

Public Input Round 3

Phase 4
Adoption

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 Planning 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 incorpo-

rated 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 on January 6, 2015.

A second Ten-Year Update was begun in 2017. Planning Commission formed subcommittees to focus on each of the ten Elements. The subcommittees met throughout 2017, and their findings were presented at subsequent Planning Commission meetings. Public comments were heard during these meetings. Planning Commission completed its initial review of the Plan elements in January 2018, and the proposed amendments were presented to the public in March 2018. Seven public workshops were held in different areas of the County, with 265 attendees. Citizens were asked to comment during the workshops; alternatively, a webpage and online form was also set up to allow citizens to submit comments electronically. The majority of comments (46) were provided during the workshops. Letters and emails were also submitted with suggestions. All of the public comments were provided to the Planning Commission and County Council and were considered in the adoption process. A public comment summary report is also included in Part 4, Additional Resources and References. Amendments to the *Comprehensive Plan* as part of the *2018 Ten-Year Update* were adopted by County Council on October 9, 2018.

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 subsequent reviews and updates. 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 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.

During Plan updates and reviews, public workshops are held in varying locations at different times to be most accessible for citizens. For those who cannot attend workshops, the information is available on the Charleston County website, where citizens can submit comments electronically.



Pictured above is the flier used to advertise the public workshops held for the 2018 Ten-Year Update.

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