

Mark Clark Extension Community Assessment Recommendations Map



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Mark Clark

Community Impact Assessment Charleston County, South Carolina

In April 2006, the Charleston County Council requested a study of the likely impacts of the proposed I-526 Mark Clark extension on the communities of Johns Island and James Island. The study assumes that the Mark Clark extension will follow the alignment indicated on the Recommendations Map. The study does not evaluate the transportation aspects of the project, but instead focuses on indirect impacts, such as changes to the community's residential and employment base and overall character.

This study firmly concludes that Johns Island will experience significant increases in the number of households and residential-serving uses in the years ahead. Two components contribute to expected development changes on the island: regional growth; and improved interstate access.

The likely impacts of the Mark Clark extension should first be viewed within the broader context of growth in the Charleston metropolitan area. In recent years, the Charleston area has shown steady employment and population growth of about one percent annually, and this trend is expected to continue or increase. Clearly, regional growth patterns will bring more people to Johns Island with or without the Mark Clark extension.

The Mark Clark extension, however, will also shift land use and development patterns within the three county region. More growth typically occurs in areas with improved interstate access at the expense of other parts of the region. As a result, Johns Island can expect to capture a higher share of future regional growth than communities without enhanced interstate connections. While expected population growth will be less pronounced on James Island, which is mostly built-out, the extension is likely to spur redevelopment at higher densities to capitalize on improved access.

An accelerated rate of change poses physical, social, and economic challenges for any community. This study, however, represents an excellent opportunity to guide the coming growth and to make informed land use choices that protect the island's valued character and identity.

This summary describes trends shaping growth on the island, defines community character, assesses the likely impacts of the Mark Clark extension, and outlines policy actions to maintain the quality of life on Johns Island and James Island in the years ahead.

Community Character

To assess the likely impacts of the Mark Clark extension on the study area, the planning team gathered feedback from community groups, including the Johns Island Growth Committee and the Johns Island Council, and various stakeholders representing property owner, conservation, economic development, recreation, and transportation interests. Stakeholders identified a common set of island characteristics that they valued, including:

- Rural landscape and agricultural heritage
- Serenity
- Tree covered scenic corridors
- Views of wetlands and marshes
- Inclusiveness and a sense of community and family

Conversely, when asked what possible impacts from the Mark Clark extension most concerned them, participants cited the loss of the qualities noted above, including:

- Traffic congestion and visual clutter on the roadways
- Disruption to natural views
- Loss of trees
- Displacement of long-time residents
- Changes in the relaxed, friendly atmosphere of the community

This shared vision of the stakeholders forms the basis of study recommendations. The policy steps described in this summary seek to protect the island's distinctive qualities, while shaping inevitable growth into attractive development that reinforces the desired quality of life.

Community Impacts

Even without improvements to the interstate system, Johns Island will grow over the next two decades. The Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments projects that the Coastal Islands West planning area (Johns Island and Wadmalaw) will add 12,651 people and 4,073 jobs by 2030. Projected population increases are particularly high for those areas along the Maybank Highway and River Road corridors.

The extension of the Mark Clark interstate will accelerate and strengthen this existing trend. Highway planning research consistently demonstrates a link between transportation improvements, higher land prices, and increased development densities. New highways lower the cost of commuting to jobs and therefore tend to generate new residential and office development.

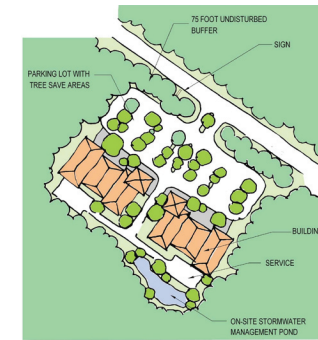
To help determine the increase attributable to the Mark Clark extension, the planning team forecast population growth with a model that allocates households to an area based on access to employment. The model's results show that the Mark Clark extension is most likely to divert growth from the eastern and central sections of the region to western communities, particularly the Coastal Islands West planning area. Overall, the results of the model suggest that Johns Island will see 20 to 40 percent more population growth than current regional forecasts.

Population increases produce a range of physical, economic and social impacts on the community. The presence of more households creates higher demand for public amenities, such as schools, parks and recreational facilities. More households will also support a larger base of retail and personal services, though the island is unlikely to become a major employment/office center. The island's main corridors, such as Maybank Highway and River Road, could be vulnerable to the emergence of strip commercial development.

An influx of new residents will alter the character of the community as well as its size. The typical future resident of Johns Island will be a primary homeowner who commutes to a job within the region. Given the tendency of land prices to rise in correlation with better employment access, future homeowners are also likelier to come from higher socio-economic backgrounds than current residents. The median price of houses sold on Johns Island has already increased by over 160 percent during the previous decade. Continuing upward economic pressures will adversely affect the high regional share of long-time residents, family households and minority residents drawn to the island's relatively affordable housing.

Mitigation Strategies

Charleston County, the City of Charleston, and the Johns Island and James Island communities have a strong tradition of planning and have developed a series of documents, such as the Johns Island Plan 1995 Land Use Study and the Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan to protect quality of life. The following recommendations build on existing policies to preserve the qualities most valued by community stakeholders and to lessen the impacts of development and land use and socio-economic change resulting from the Mark Clark extension.



COMMUNITY DESIGN OF CORRIDORS

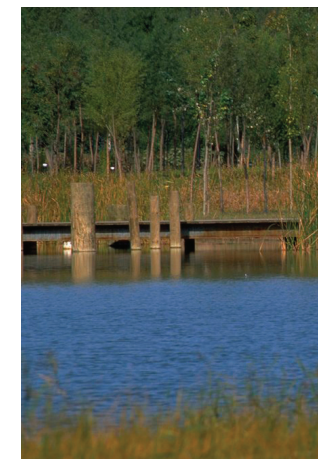
This strategy would enhance the existing corridor overlay to accommodate a possible four lane widening of Maybank Highway and include new provisions for

River Road. Elements would include access management, protection of visual character using landscape buffers and pedestrian amenities.



COMMUNITY DESIGN OF INTERCHANGES

This strategy would promote a highway interchange design that minimizes visual impact, including preservation of existing vegetation and the use of landscaping and open space elements to create "green gateways" into the community.



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

This strategy would develop an integrated network of green spaces, trails, and recreational/natural assets, including protected agricultural landscapes, wetlands, marshes, greenways, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and scenic corridors.



CUSTOMIZED RURAL DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

This strategy would emphasize a set of standards for quality site design, environmentally sensitive building envelopes, and compatible architecture and building scale that reinforces the

predominant rural character of Johns Island.



PROMOTE GATHERING PLACES

This strategy would direct new development, particularly commercial and retail uses into identifiable, pedestrian-oriented activity centers at strategic points along the main corridors.



PROMOTE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

This strategy would promote opportunities for developers to set aside a portion of housing units as affordable or to contribute

funds to the acquisition of land for affordable development. The strategy would also conduct community outreach to raise awareness of heirs' property issues.