

IMPLEMENTATION

REALIZING THE VISION

Implementing the Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan will require leadership on the part of Charleston County and a dedication to stewardship of critically important natural resources. The Charleston County Greenbelt Bank, a conservation organization established by Charleston County Council, will administer the Rural Program, while the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) will administer the Urban Program. Additionally, the PRC has been approved by County Council to use \$36 million in Greenbelt funds for land acquisition. In order to maximize land conservation objectives, the plan outlines steps necessary for Charleston County to leverage the majority of greenbelt funds up-front (within the next five years). The Greenbelt Plan has defined a bold vision for the County for the next 25 years: to grow the economy of Charleston County while conserving and protecting the Lowcountry resources that make the County such a wonderful place to live.

THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Another tool for achieving the goals of this plan focuses on land use. The Greenbelt Plan includes an analysis of existing land use regulations for local governments in the Charleston County region. The analysis defines elements of the codes that could be modified to encourage the conservation of natural and cultural resources. The modifications to existing county and municipal codes are consistent with applicable land use principles and South Carolina laws.

THE GREENSPACE TOOLBOX

The Greenbelt Plan also contains a toolbox that provides Charleston County and its member communities with a quick reference of land conservation strategies. Many of the tools defined can be used together or separately to conserve greenspace throughout the County. This toolbox defines 32 individual strategies, divided into distinct sections: regulatory, acquisition, land donation and management strategies. For each strategy, advantages and disadvantages are listed to help define the most appropriate strategy for a given opportunity. The Greenbelt Plan does not encourage the use of the tools of eminent domain or land condemnation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to these strategies, and tools, the Greenbelt Plan also includes several other implementation resources. A greenspace glossary defines common terms and provides examples of various types of greenspace. Persuasive arguments for the benefits of greenspace are summarized. Finally, a list of funding sources is included to help maximize the Greenbelt funds and encourage local, regional, state and federal-level participation in the success of this plan.



RURAL & URBAN GRANTS PROGRAM

The first step in implementing the Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan was its adoption by Charleston County Council on June 6, 2006. At the time of adoption, County Council requested that the Plan be incorporated into the County's Comprehensive Plan along with a provision that any change to the 70% Rural/30% Urban allocation requires a super majority vote (two-thirds) by Council. Following the adoption of the Plan, the County began to develop the Rural and Urban Grants Program to distribute the Greenbelt portion of the Transportation Sales Tax proceeds in the form of financial grants to urban and rural areas of the County. The Greenbelt funds will be divided based on an allocation formula of 70 percent to rural areas and 30 percent to urban areas. The Rural and Urban Areas are consistent with the adopted Charleston County Comprehensive Plan and follow the Urban Growth Boundary that was established within the Comprehensive Plan. Grants are to be used primarily for the conservation of land, however some grant funds can be used to support the development of related minor improvements that in essence provide for public access and use of conservation lands.

All potential recipients of grants funds (municipalities, conservation organizations, landowners, businesses, etc.) will be required to complete and submit grant applications that define need and intended use of the proceeds for greenspace conservation and related minor improvements. Rural grant applications will be evaluated using a merit-based scoring system. Urban grant funds will be distributed based on population. Urban grant applications will be evaluated against a set of criteria to ensure that they meet minimum requirements of the Greenbelt Program Recommendations for the award of Greenbelt funds will be submitted to the Charleston County Council for review and approval.

For more information, please visit:

www.smallchangeforbigchange.org

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COMPREHENSIVE GREENBELT PLAN

CHARLESTON COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHARLESTON COUNTY AT A TURNING POINT

SEPTEMBER 2006

Charleston County has been growing at an accelerated rate during the past decade. According to the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University, the County can expect its growth rate to remain steady for the next 25 years, transforming much of the rural character of the County into urban and suburban land uses. The County's updated and adopted Comprehensive Plan (2003 and 2004) was specifically crafted to anticipate this growth and guide in a manner that balances resource conservation with land development.

In November 2004, Charleston County voters approved a historic referendum for the protection and promotion of the health, safety, welfare and quality of life for the County. The voters not only approved the financing of transportation-related projects, but also greenbelts.

After the Transportation ("half-cent") Sales Tax referendum passed, the Greenbelt Advisory Board (GAB) was appointed by Charleston County Council to provide input to the Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) on the expenditure of \$221 million over the next 25 years. Since July 2005, the GAB, with assistance from a private consultant, gathered public input to develop a comprehensive greenbelt program.

Based on an inventory of greenspace, a review of existing plans, public input, and a needs analysis for Charleston County, the greenbelt program consists of the following:

- A 30 percent goal for Open Space Conservation, yielding a targeted need for an additional 40,000 acres of land to conserve and protect over the next 25 years.

- A Greenbelt System consisting of six components, which together would fulfill the 40,000-acre conservation goal. The components of the system represent major land conservation needs defined by County residents: Rural Greenbelt Lands; the Francis Marion Forest; Lowcountry Wetlands; PRC Regional Parks; Urban Greenbelt Lands; and Greenway Corridors.

- A Rural/Urban Grants Program that awards projects for the Greenbelt System, using criteria. Grants for the purpose of greenspace conservation and related minor improvements shall be allocated to the urban and rural areas based on a formula of 70 percent for the rural areas and 30 percent for the urban areas.

These components of the plan are explained in further detail on the following pages.

FINDING THE BALANCE:

GROWTH AND CONSERVATION IN CHARLESTON COUNTY

GREENSPACE CONCERNS

Charleston County voters approved the funding of Greenbelts in large measure because they believed that it would help offset growth from an expanded road network. Voters clearly indicated a strong preference to conserve as much greenspace as practical for future generations. The plan aims to address these concerns by balancing growth with conservation in Charleston County. The goals of the program are primarily based on an inventory of existing greenspace; a review of existing plans and policies; public input; and a countywide needs analysis.

INVENTORY OF GREENSPACE

More than 40 organizations, agencies and local governments were contacted and asked to provide Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data that was relevant to the County's existing greenspace resources. As each greenspace data layer was collected, it was added to a GIS database to create a current greenspace inventory. Currently, there are approximately 161,384 acres of greenspace in Charleston County that have been conserved by federal, state and local governments and private sector land trusts.

EXISTING PLANS

Numerous plans, guidelines and strategies have addressed issues related to greenspace in Charleston County. They have addressed land use, alternative transportation, open space, parks and recreation, conservation, and other greenspace initiatives on municipal, county, regional, state and private levels. All of these documents represent important efforts, provide valuable insight and background, and have influenced the development of this plan. Collectively, the various concerns over issues of resource protection, environmental quality and rural character found in existing plans convey a clear message: action needs to be taken in order to preserve the quality of life and environment in Charleston County.

PUBLIC INPUT

The County, GAB and their consultant, Greenways Inc. included the involvement of the following stakeholders: residents; representatives of user groups; local, state and federal agencies; and others who shared their ideas, aspirations, concerns and suggestions. The public process consisted of bi-monthly meetings between the GAB, the consultant, and County staff. Additionally, there were a series of public workshops where participants shared verbal and written comments and sug-

gestions. At each public open house, response forms and maps were provided, and participants were invited to write down their thoughts. For example, in September 2005, nearly 400 County residents identified passive greenspace and Lowcountry natural resources as the most important parts of a greenbelt program. Additionally, the participants expressed that they would most like to use the protected greenspace for wildlife habitat protection, walking and biking.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Over the past several decades, the National Recreation and Park Association has recommended standards for the provision of open space, as well as park and recreation facilities in communities. Using these and other standards, planning professionals often conduct level of service or "LOS" studies to calibrate how well the needs of a community are being met by existing and planned greenspace and facilities. Both the South Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan and the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission have completed comprehensive studies that analyze level of service. The results echo those of the September public workshops because they both have determined that conservation of natural resources and trail facility development are among their top priorities.



ESTABLISHING A GOAL:

GREENSPACE PROTECTION + TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

Based on public input, technical analysis, national standards, and an examination of other exemplary open space systems in the Southeastern United States, the plan establishes a goal of conserving 30 percent of available land resources as protected and conserved greenspace, including a 200-mile comprehensive, interconnected system of bicycle, pedestrian and greenway trails.

A 30 percent standard for open space in Charleston County requires approximately 200,000 acres of the County's 669,311 acres of land be protected as greenspace. With 161,384 acres of existing protected greenspace in Charleston County, this translates into a total target of 40,000 acres. This is a minimum goal in order to meet the needs of the community 25 years from now (Fiscal Year 2031). This 40,000-acre goal is broken down as follows, into Greenbelt System Components.

GREENBELT SYSTEM COMPONENTS

This plan includes six greenbelt component goals that, if realized, will conserve 30 percent of Charleston County's available land resources, including 200 miles of bicycle, pedestrian and greenway trails.

RURAL GREENBELT LANDS

16,240 acres (41% of total greenbelt goal)

Typical uses for Rural Greenbelt Lands include rural parks, cultural/historic sites, productive lands, and water access. Specifically targeted lands include high priority areas identified as "Resource Management Areas" in the Future Land Use section of the Charleston County Comprehensive Plan.



THE FRANCIS MARION FOREST

10,275 acres (25% of total greenbelt goal)

As a pristine habitat for many species of plants and animals, the Francis Marion National Forest is one of the most diverse ecosystems in the United States. Currently, there are approximately 10,275 acres of unprotected land in the Forest.



LOWCOUNTRY WETLANDS

5,610 acres (14% of total greenbelt goal)

County wetlands are habitat for many endangered or threatened species at the federal, state and regional level. This goal represents a supplement to currently protected wetlands across Charleston County.



PRC REGIONAL PARKS

4,675 acres (12% of total greenbelt goal)

Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission's Open Space Analysis indicates that an additional 4,675 regional parkland acres are needed to meet the recreation needs of the projected population for 2015.



URBAN GREENBELT LANDS

2,000 acres (5% of total greenbelt goal)

Specifically targeted lands include priority areas identified by North Charleston, Mount Pleasant, Charleston, and other communities within the urban area.



GREENWAY CORRIDORS

1,200 acres (3% of total greenbelt goal)

The 1,200-acre goal for Greenway Corridors is based on a 200-mile system of greenways with 50-foot wide corridors. They will create regional connections for rural and urban residents, using sustainable forms of transportation: walking and biking.

