

## 2 DATA COLLECTION AND SYNTHESIS

### 2.1 Overview

This chapter first frames and defines core concepts in greenspace planning: greenbelts, greenways, and open space. After providing examples of how these concepts are applied in communities across North America, a definition is provided for greenbelt planning in Charleston County.

The next section features the inventory of greenspace in Charleston County (p. 2-4). The process to assess the County's existing resources is described in terms of the mapping process and the field review.

The first two elements of this chapter (defining and assessing greenspace) are then supplemented by a review of current growth management plans that relate to greenspace in Charleston County. In addition to the many policies and objectives laid out in current and long-range planning, the regulatory framework for greenspace is also analyzed.

### 2.2 Types of Greenspace

Terms such as “greenbelts”, “greenways”, “open space” and “greenspace” are often used interchangeably to describe a variety of landscapes that community residents feel are worthy of conservation and protection. Definitions and examples are provided below.





Examples of greenspace are shown above: (from left to right) Greenbelt, Greenway, and Open Space.

### 2.2.1 Greenbelt

- 1) An extensive area of largely undeveloped or sparsely occupied land that is associated with a community and set aside to contain development, preserve the character of the countryside and community, and provide open space.
- 2) Any stretch of park, open space or other natural setting in a community.
- 3) A continuous area of open land at the edge of a housing or commercial development. Greenbelts are often part of a natural creek, river or storm water drainage path, and as such are flood prone and ill-suited to development. In their natural state, they provide a habitat for wildlife and native plants, and may include nature trails for walking and biking during normal weather.
- 4) A wide band of countryside surrounding a city on which building is generally prohibited, usually large enough to form an adequate protection against objectionable uses of property or the intrusion of nearby development.

#### **Greenbelt Example: Boulder Greenbelt, Boulder, CO**

In 1967, Boulder became the first city in the country to pass a sales tax of 0.40% for the acquisition and management of open space lands. In 1989, an additional 0.33% was approved by the voters to supplement the program. Boulder citizens recognized the value of preserving open lands as early as 1898, when

Chautauqua Park was purchased as mountain backdrop. More than 43,000 acres of land has been preserved and protected through the open space program, which today is also known as the Boulder Greenbelt. Wildlife habitat, unique geologic features, greenways and 130 miles of trails are all part of Boulder Greenbelt. These lands provide scenic enjoyment and passive recreation for area residents. To date, over \$150 million have been spent on the acquisition of greenbelt lands. Acquisitions are approved by the Open Space Board of Trustees and City Council, with extensive opportunity for public input.

### 2.2.2 Greenway

- 1) A corridor of undeveloped land, as along a river or between urban centers, that is reserved for recreational use or environmental preservation.
- 2) A 'greenway' is a linear open space which (a) is green in the environmental sense (b) serves as a route.
- 3) Networks of land containing linear elements that are planned, designed and managed for multiple purposes including ecological, recreational, cultural, aesthetic or other purposes compatible with the concept of sustainable land use.
- 4) A 'greenway' is defined as "...a linear space established along a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley, or ridge line, or over land along a railroad right-of-way converted to recreational use, a canal, a scenic road, or other route; any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage; an open





*West Ashley Greenway shown above.*

space connector linking parks, nature reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and populated areas; or a local strip or linear park designated as a parkway or greenbelt.” (Florida Statute Chapter 260, Section 13)

#### ***Example: West Ashley Greenway, Charleston, SC***

The West Ashley Greenway is the best Charleston example of what greenways can and should be. This off-road, flat and easy 10.5-mile trail is built on top of an abandoned rail corridor in southwestern Charleston County. The greenway has been developed within a 100-foot wide, mostly hard-packed dirt right-of-way that begins at a residential and commercial area, then parallels US 17 and travels adjacent to neighborhoods, schools, parks, and a marsh before reaching Johns Island and the current terminal point.

#### ***2.2.3 Open Space***

1) An area of land that is valued for natural processes and wildlife, for agricultural and sylvan production, for active and passive recreation, and/or for providing other public benefits.

2) Any parcel or area of land or water that is improved or unimproved, and devoted to an open space use for the purposes of (a) the preservation of natural resources, (b) the managed production of resources, (c) outdoor recreation, or (d) public health and safety. Open spaces include functional open space, agriculture, retention/detention areas, floodways and floodplains. Open space may be publicly or privately owned and maintained.

3) Land set aside and permanently restricted for conservation, agriculture or recreation purposes by a municipality, nonprofit conservation organization or land trust, homeowners association, or person. Open Space may include woodlands, wetlands, pastures, parks, walking and riding trails, and similar areas as appropriate to the site, but shall not include golf courses, tennis courts, buildings, swimming pools or other impervious areas. Open Space may be open for public use or access to such areas may be restricted.

#### ***Example: Francis Marion National Forest, Charleston, SC***

Francis Marion National Forest (FMNF), South Carolina’s second largest national forest, covers 252,201 acres of blackwater swamp, bald cypress and tupelo forests, and strangely unique wetland habitats called Carolina Bays. Named for the famous Revolutionary War hero, the Swamp Fox, Brigadier General Francis Marion, the Forest is located north of Charleston. A variety of wildlife inhabit the forest, including barred owls, red-shouldered hawks, wood ducks, bald eagles, carnivorous plants, and even panthers by some accounts.

Ample hiking and mountain biking trails offer excellent means to enjoy the backcountry, as do bridle paths for horses and rough roads for motorcycles and ATVs. Rivers, lakes, and ocean beckon fishermen. Buck Hall Recreation Area, situated on the grounds of an old plantation along the Intracoastal Waterway, features campsites, picnic sites, and boat ramps and attracts wildlife viewers, anglers, and crabbers. The Francis Marion National Forest boasts four wilderness areas. They range in size from 1,800 to 5,000 acres. Visitors will find scenic blackwater swamps highlighted by majestic bald cypress and water tupelo trees, teeming with wildlife from mystical barred owls to curious raccoons and flighty wood ducks. Wambaw Creek Wilderness area features a canoe trail. Wambaw Creek Wilderness Canoe Trail is 9 miles of tidal, blackwater creek. It is one of the most scenic places on the forest.

For more information on terms used for the Charleston County Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan, see Appendix A: Greenspace Glossary and Appendix G: Benefits of Greenspace.



### 2.2.4 The Definition of Greenbelts

Drawing upon many of the functions and benefits of greenspace, the following definition of ‘greenbelts’ was approved on October 25, 2005 by the Greenbelt Advisory Board, with input from the public:

#### *Greenbelts Defined for Charleston County*

“For the purpose of the Charleston County Greenbelt Plan, the term greenbelts will be used to describe a variety of land types. Greenbelts may include lands in rural, suburban and urban settings. Access to greenbelts varies with the types of land acquired and type of use desired. The various types of greenbelts are listed below. They may include, but are not limited to, their subcategories:

**Passive greenspace:** Trails, greenways, interpretive parks, and access points for water activities, such as fishing, crabbing, boating, etc.

**Active greenspace:** Play fields and parks with low environmental impact

**Lowcountry natural resources:** Upland forests, swamps, bogs, brackish and freshwater wetlands, Carolina bays, marsh islands, and cypress, backwater, and saltwater marshes

**Productive landscapes:** Lands used for agriculture, silviculture, and mariculture

**Heritage landscapes:** Irreplaceable cultural and historical landscapes unique to the County

**Corridors:** Scenic roadways, abandoned rail lines, utility corridors, and scenic waterways

**Natural infrastructure:** Floodplains, wildlife habitat, riparian zones, and lands critical to clean water

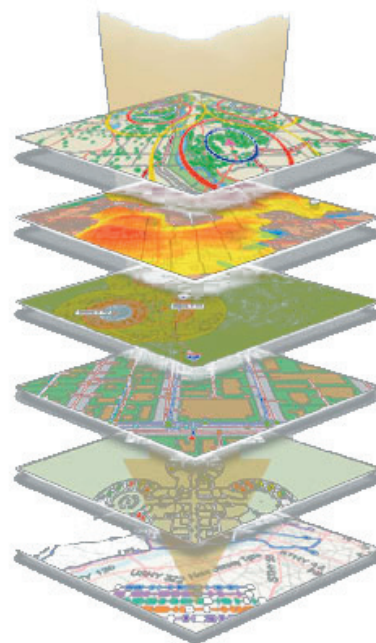
**Reclaimed greenspace:** Brownfields, abandoned sites, and other green infill projects

These greenbelts collectively form a protected living system of landscapes that serve the residents, businesses, visitors, and future generations of Charleston County by preserving and improving the health and quality of life for all.”

## 2.3 Inventory of Current Greenspace

### 2.3.1 The Inventory Mapping Process

The first step in hard data collection was gathering information about the current status of greenspace in the County. More than forty 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.



*GIS data is compiled in layers; when combined, they collectively form a map with information from each layer included.*

### 2.3.2 Current Greenspace Maps

The map on page 2-5 was created by combining Municipal, County, State, Federal, and private greenspace resource maps into a single inventory of current greenspace resources within Charleston County.

### 2.3.4 Field Review

As part of the inventory process, the project consultant investigated a number of Charleston County’s significant landscapes, open spaces, parks, trails and recreation facilities. Tours of various landscapes within the county revealed several challenges. For example,



INSERT “CURRENT GREENSPACE RESOURCES MAP”



INSERT “PLANNING AREAS MAP”



many greenway systems across the country use a “hub and spokes” model to link greenspace (hubs) along various types of corridors (spokes) (see Section 4.2.1: The Importance of Hubs and Spokes). In Charleston County however, this model for a greenspace system will be challenging due to the high value placed on waterfront landscapes, which might otherwise serve as the ‘spokes’ of the system. Other challenges for the Greenbelt Plan noted during the field review include, but are not limited to, the following issues: availability of public access to the waterfront; scenic roadway protection, scenic waterway protection; and finding a balance between development and conservation throughout the County.

## 2.4 Current Growth Management 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.

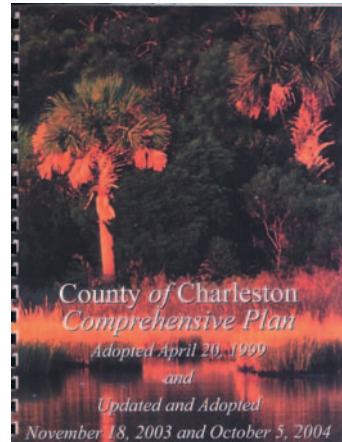
The current plans are reviewed and summarized below only as they relate to existing conditions and future needs for greenspace within the County. For further information on each plan, please consult the reviewed document in its entirety.

### County Plans

#### 2.4.1 The County of Charleston Comprehensive Plan (2004)

The Comprehensive Plan was created through a public process representative of the different communities and the various interests throughout Charleston County. There are a total of seventy-eight objectives for the Comprehensive Plan (Comprehensive Plan, p. 2-4 to 2-13). Of these, thirty-five relate directly to greenspace issues. In the opening vision statement, the Plan’s objective to balance the two principle themes of growth and preservation is evident:

*“While striving to enhance our quality of life, a balance must be maintained between fostering growth and development and preserving our natural and cultural resources always respecting the rights of the individual, including private property rights”* (Comprehensive Plan, Vision Statement).



*The Charleston County Comprehensive Plan helped to identify many concerns related to greenspace.*

Land use concerns within Charleston County are summarized in the Existing Land Use section of the Comprehensive Plan. Land use issues found in prior planning studies, such as municipal plans, are also taken into account in this section. Some of the many greenspace concerns identified in the eight County subareas are highlighted below (the City of Charleston is a ninth subarea, but was not included in the County’s Comprehensive Plan).

#### North Charleston, Lincolnville

The Comprehensive Plan for the City of North Charleston and the Ashley River Special Area Management Plan helped to identify, among other concerns, the following greenspace concerns:

- In the restoration and enhancement of established neighborhoods, “possible alternative transportation options are of primary concern”
- Along the Ashley River, “the major preservation focus should be development of a community-based program to work with landowners and conservation organizations to secure conservation easements on lands within the designated scenic view corridors of historic sites and within buffers along the Ashley River.” (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-5 to 3-1-6)





*While James Island County Park (above) provides a regional attraction, neighborhood parks are still desired on James Island.*

### ***West Ashley***

The 61 Corridor Growth Management Plan, Charleston 2000, the Ashley River Special Area Management Plan, and the Ashley Bridge District Plan helped to identify, among other concerns, the following greenspace concerns:

- Manage future growth, “with particular emphasis given to the rural forestry lands located north of Bees Ferry Road and within the Ashley River Road Corridor.
- A program is needed to “work with landowners and conservation organizations to secure conservation easements on lands within the designated scenic view corridors of historic sites and within buffers along Ashley River Road and the Ashley River itself.
- A lack of recreational facilities has been identified in the Ashley Bridge District and other older neighborhoods in West Ashley. (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-10 to 3-1-11)

### ***James Island***

The Land Use Element of the proposed Town of James Island Comprehensive Plan helped to identify, among other concerns, the following greenspace concerns:

- “Innovative site planning techniques should be encouraged to achieve quality development that is sensitive to the environment.”
- There is a perceived need for community and neighborhood parks with recreation programs. (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-14)

### ***Mt. Pleasant/East Cooper***

The Town of Mt. Pleasant’s Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan helped to identify, among other concerns, the following greenspace concerns:

- “The Town of Mt. Pleasant has proposed establishment of a Suburban/Rural Edge Boundary, located approximately one-half mile east of the east Cooper Airport.”
- Regarding the appearance of the built environment, “There is pressure to expand tree preservation and landscaping requirements.”
- Residents of Snowden and other older communities in unincorporated Charleston County do not have free access to recreational programs. (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-18 to 3-1-19)

### ***Johns Island***

The Johns Island Plan, Charleston 2000, and the Johns Island Plan 1995 Land Use Update helped to identify, among other concerns, the following greenspace concerns:

- Protect existing mature trees and retain buffering and landscaping in the Maybank Highway Corridor
- Issues related to growth and the rural character of the island include a) the changing character of the scenic rural roadways, b) the changing character of the waterways and salt marshes, and c) the water quality impacts of new development in close proximity to saltwater wetlands and waterways. (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-22 to 3-1-23)



***Edisto Island and Wadmalaw Island***

The Edisto Island Land Use Plan and the Wadmalaw Island Planned Development Ordinance both have the expressed purpose of preserving rural character, preserving farmland, and protecting water quality (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-25).

In *Edisto Island*, the Edisto Island Land Use Plan helped to identify, among other concerns, the following greenspace concerns:

- Strong planning tools are requested to protect the Island's rural character: set backs and buffers, protection of farmland and open space, and improved tree preservation and protection standards.
- Protect the waterfront by establishing a shoreline buffer in which structures would be severely limited.
- Document Rural historic landscapes and draft guidelines for their preservation.
- Implement an agricultural preservation program that uses land use regulations and provides incentives to landowners to preserve farmland.
- Use buffers, setbacks and tree preservation standards to protect scenic and historic rural roadways. (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-26 to 3-1-27)

In *Wadmalaw Island*, the Wadmalaw Island Planned Development Ordinance helped to identify, among other concerns, the following greenspace concerns:

- Rigidity of the Wadmalaw Island Planned Development Guidelines are not allowing for adequate preservation of significant open space, farmland, and waterfront buffers.
- Establish a farmland preservation program to maintain the viability of agriculture.
- Protecting the waterfront by encouraging the clustering of lots. (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-27 to 3-1-28)

***West County***

Plans for the communities of Hollywood, Meggett, and Ravenel each helped to identify, among other concerns, that efforts should be made to preserve farmland (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-31).

***East County***

The Town of Awendaw Comprehensive Plan, the Town of McClellanville Comprehensive Plan, and the Sewee to Santee Economic Forum helped to identify, among other concerns, the following greenspace concerns:

- Establish sustainable growth levels through “zoning controls and subdivision standards that enable ‘conservation subdivisions’”.
- “There is local support for the use of conservation easements as a means of preserving rural character as well as for the continued federal appropriations for land acquisition in the Francis Marion National Forest.”
- Recreational boaters have an adverse seasonal impact on the East County, particularly in the vicinity of public boat landings and in Bull Bay.
- Additional residential development in the East County will be detrimental to the ability of the US Forest Service to fulfill its management mandate (Comprehensive Plan, p.3-1-33 to 3-1-34).



*Much of the open space within the western portion of the County is characterized by the region's signature wetlands landscape. There are concerns within many of the planning subareas regarding wetland and waterfront regulations, and water quality issues.*





### **2.4.2 Open Space Analysis (2002, Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission)**

This open space analysis will guide the Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) in its decision making process for the purchase of land for future public parks. The

analysis provides the basis for parkland expansion through the year 2015. The purpose is to determine the quantities as well as the general locations of additional parkland acres needed, relative to population growth projections and national recreation standards. The goal is to acquire land while it is attainable, then to program and plan the facilities according to the specific needs and opportunities of the site.

#### **PRC Open Space Recommendations Summary**

##### ***Regional Park Needs:***

East Cooper: 1,380 acres  
 West Ashley: 1,240 acres  
 North Charleston: 1,104 acres  
 Charleston Peninsula: 630 acres  
 James Island: 428 acres  
 West County: 270 acres  
 East County: 110 acres

##### ***Special Use Facility Needs:***

- Boat landings: 24 launch lanes and 760 vehicle/trailer spaces
- Beach/Water Access: More are needed... SC is nation's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest beach destination!
- Cultural/Historical Parks: Acquire and protect significant properties...seek partnerships for preservation
- Bikeways/Greenways: Partner to facilitate expansion and create linkages. Charleston County needs nearly 200 miles of trails!

*Park needs were determined using National Park & Recreation Association (NRPA) standards of 20 acres per 1,000 people. (CCPRC Open Space Analysis 2002-2015 )*

## **Municipal Plans**

### **2.4.3 Charleston Century V City Plan 1670-2015 (2002, City of Charleston)**

The first of the 'Key Goals and Recommendations' in this plan is in a section entitled: "*Urban Growth, Surrounding the City with Green*". This section presents the following two goals:

- Preserve the physical qualities and way of life in rural areas of the city, and
- Protect and improve our natural resources and maintain a lush, green environment in urban and suburban areas of the city.

According to the Century V Plan, ninety-two percent of respondents to the city's citizen survey said they support or strongly support some development restrictions to protect forests, farmland, creeks, and rivers (Century V Plan, p. 28).

The Century V Plan also states,

*"In order to protect the natural environment and preserve the unique quality of each area, urban growth should be managed. This means urban and suburban development should not spread throughout rural areas and nature should be protected in suburban and urban sections of the city...Residents of the city consistently express opposition to continued urbanization of rural areas in the lowcountry." (Century V Plan, p.27)*

The City of Charleston recognizes that its parks play a unique role in the life of city residents and that they should be available as daily retreats for all citizens. The city's various parks, such as Hampton Park, Mall Park, Hampstead and E. Hampstead Parks, Brittelbank Park, and the West Ashley Greenway, are good examples of what the city needs as it continues to grow. The City identified needs for larger parks attached to several neighborhoods that combine active recreation and quieter places like nature trails. The City also needs smaller neighborhood parks within a ten-minute walk of every home; parks that serve unique purposes; and parks that connect neighborhoods, schools and other parks.





*The City of Charleston's Comprehensive Plan calls for larger parks attached to several neighborhoods that combine active recreation and quieter places like nature trails.*

The City's Comprehensive plan also states that residents should be given access to waterfront areas throughout the city. The city's efforts on the Peninsula will ultimately provide public waterfront from Joseph P. Riley Baseball Park on the Ashley River to the new Aquarium on the Cooper River.

Off the Peninsula, Plymouth Park on James Island provides convenient access to the Intercoastal Waterway for residents of Riverland Terrace. Also on James Island, city owned property on the Charleston Harbor will become Sunrise Park. In 1999 the City acquired land along the Ashley River in the Ashley Bridge District of West Ashley. Similar efforts should ensure all residents access to waterfront areas near their homes. Finally, the City also intends to improve and extend the West Ashley Greenway so it connects all of West Ashley with the Peninsula, including additional greenways and bikeway's following abandoned rail or utility corridors (Century V Plan, p. 35).

#### **2.4.4 Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2012 (Draft, City of Charleston)**

This Plan is not included at this time, due to the fact it is not officially adopted.

#### **2.4.5 Comprehensive Plan (1996, City of North Charleston)**

According to the Natural Resources element of this plan, the City of North Charleston adopted the following goals, among others, related to greenspace preservation:

- Preserve the natural scenic shoreline, beauty and historic heritage of the Ashley River for future generations.
- Preserve and protect the City's canopy trees.
- Protect natural resource areas in positive natural settings.

Recreational facility needs were evaluated within the Community Facilities element of the plan, revealing a parkland deficit for the city. However, the results are unreliable today since the plan determined minimum park land needs by using the 1983 national standard of 13 acres per 1,000 residents (compare to today's National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) standards of 20 acres per 1,000 residents). Using the new standards for analysis, the Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission's 2002 *Open Space Analysis 2002-2015*, reveals a 1,104 -acre park land deficit for North Charleston.



The following goals were stated as a result of the deficit found in the 1996 Comprehensive Plan:

- Develop a geographically equitable citywide system of parks, recreation facilities and programs to meet the diverse needs of the community,
- Increase park-to-population ratios in each of North Charleston's five planning areas, and
- Develop a "signature" city-wide park, centrally located, with maximum visibility to the traveling public.

One greenspace-related goal within the Land Use Element states that the City of North Charleston should improve the environment. The plan states:

*"Much of the development in place today has taken a toll on local environmental conditions, producing heavy traffic, air and water pollution, physical degradation, and loss of wetlands. And there is potential for even more environmental exactions unless care is taken to guard against misuse in the development and redevelopment process" (City of North Charleston, 1996 Comprehensive Plan).*

The following policies are directed at these concerns and are outlined in the North Charleston Comprehensive Plan:

- Avoid the use of wetlands where possible, and better integrate such areas into the city's urban fabric; they are an environmental asset and should be treated accordingly,
- Continue to implement plans and regulations to protect the natural environmental qualities of the Ashley River,
- Continue code enforcement efforts and use of financial assistance programs to upgrade structural and environmental conditions
- Initiate tree planting programs along major arteries to soften such areas and add to the "greening of the city".

#### **2.4.6 Greenspace for the City of North Charleston (2005)**

This document outlines specific greenspace projects that the City of North Charleston considers to be top priorities in terms of balancing future growth with the greenspace goals, policies, and objectives stated in its Comprehensive Plan (see summary in Section 2.4.6 above).

The City of North Charleston has a very active and diverse recreational program including over a dozen sports, ranging from football to senior programs. The City is growing at a rapid pace and the park facilities have not kept pace. There are numerous open space initiatives the City is interested in undertaking in the future. The top eleven initiatives are listed below, but not in ranked order:

##### **North Charleston Open Space Initiatives**

- Tank Farm Park
- Boat Ramp and Parking
- Noisette Preserve
- Filbin Creek
- City Center Open Space
- Undeveloped PRC land w/in the City
- Mead Westvaco Park
- Michaux Property
- Open Space and Recreation Facilities in Midland Park Area
- Blue House Swamp
- Palmetto Parkway

*(City of North Charleston, 2005)*

The City of North Charleston desires to connect its greenspace and population centers by creating a citywide system of bikeways and greenways. Furthermore, the City wishes to coordinate this effort with the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission. The City of North Charleston also believes that it is important to develop quality green space in urban areas, as it allows for additional density where infrastructure exists, ultimately diminishing sprawl and thus protecting the rural areas of the County.



### 2.4.7 Comprehensive Plan Update (2003, Town of Mount Pleasant)

According to this plan, the grand total of park and public use facility acreage in Mount Pleasant is 471.05 acres (Comprehensive Plan, 2003, pp. 40-41). This figure is comprised primarily of active recreation facilities, including a 150-acre golf course. When applying the National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) standards of 20 acres per 1,000 residents, the Town fares poorly with a ratio of only 8.2:1000 (based on a 2002 population of 57,344). The ratio diminishes further when the golf course acreage is subtracted and the latest population increases are included.

The Charleston County Comprehensive Plan also identifies other related greenspace strategies. One is the unique resource of the Sweetgrass Basket Stands. In recent years, the health of this tradition has been compromised as development along the waterways has destroyed much of the sweetgrass habitat. Additionally,

continued development along Hwy. 17 has forced the removal of the basket stands.

Another greenspace-related strategy identified by Mount Pleasant's Plan is focused on alternative transportation. The Plan states the following goal: "Encourage use of alternate means of transportation where appropriate to minimize the number of vehicular trips using the roadway network" (Comprehensive Plan, 2003, p.102). The steps suggested to implement this strategy include linking residential, commercial, and public areas with a bicycle/pedestrian system; encouraging pedestrian links between developments; and conducting a Town evaluation of trail/bikeway system opportunities.

Finally, the plan also identifies land use categories for existing and proposed urban conservation, rural conservation, natural/undisturbed areas, open space, and recreation areas. See the document in full for specific definitions and accompanying maps (Comprehensive Plan, 2003, pp.46-51).

#### Town of Mount Pleasant Implementation Strategies Related to Greenspace and Natural Resources

- I. Maintain the quality of the waters in and around the Town of Mount Pleasant to acceptable standards, and work to improve the level of water quality to the extent possible.
- II. Ensure that proposed new developments will not degrade the quality of nearby bodies of water.
- III. Continue the floodplains management systems already in place and augment them as necessary.
- IV. Support and encourage the continuation of farming activities in the Mount Pleasant Area.
- V. Identify sensitive and valuable natural areas within the Town and establish standards and guidelines to protect them for their value as wildlife habitat.
- VI. Promote public awareness of the value of protecting open lands within an urban setting for use by birds and other wildlife.
- VII. Encourage new construction to occur in areas that are already degraded and no longer in use as wildlife habitat, while requiring this development to come into compliance with current buffer and planting standards.
- VIII. Protect scenic sites and vistas for the use and enjoyment of the citizens of Mount Pleasant.
- IX. Maintain the health and aesthetic appeal of the local environment by protecting, in perpetuity, undeveloped properties which serve to preserve the local quality of life.
- X. Maintain undeveloped public green spaces to be used as passive parks in close proximity to and easily accessible from neighborhoods.
- XI. Design and construct active recreational sites so as to mitigate adverse impacts on the development on adjacent habitat areas.

*See the Town of Mount Pleasant Comprehensive Plan Update, 2003, pp.93-110, for detailed steps identified for the implementation of each strategy listed above.*



### **2.4.8 Mount Pleasant Ad Hoc Committee on Open Spaces (2001)**

The Mount Pleasant Town Council adopted the findings of the Ad Hoc Committee on Open Space in July of 2001. The Committee supported the open space goals outlined above in Section 2.4.8, but also included two additional goals:

- Establish a greenways and trail system for the Town, which will provide connectivity among residential areas, and with nearby open spaces, parks, schools, and other public sites; and
- Initiate an Open Space Program. The Committee identified 63 sites as non-protected open space, 17 of which were either developed or partially developed by the time the report was completed in 2001.

To address the goals of the Committee, the Town of Mount Pleasant created an Open Space Foundation. The Mission of the Mount Pleasant Open Space Foundation is to enhance the quality of life for all East Cooper residents through education and preservation of open space by promoting protection, acquisition and stewardship. Further information about this organization can be found at [www.mountpleasantopenspace.org](http://www.mountpleasantopenspace.org)

## **Regional Plans**

### **2.4.9 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) (2005, The Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester Council of Governments) (BCDCOG)**

The purpose for the LRTP is to address federal and state planning requirements while building upon the community vision for the future multimodal transportation system. Some recommendations of the LRTP that relate to greenspace issues include:

- Support additional bike lanes and trails to parks and activity centers;
- Create interconnected bicycle and pedestrian networks;
- Rankings for projects in terms of environmental impacts include, but not limited to: wetlands, parks, historic resources, and protected lands;

- Proposed bicycle/pedestrian routes are shown on maps, though not prioritized; and
- Integrate land use and transportation to create communities and neighborhoods that are designed for walking and cycling. These transportation recommendations show that adequate bicycle and pedestrian connectivity is a priority for the region.

The alternative transportation goals within the LRTP relate to greenspace as they often refer to trails. The goal of the LRTP regarding bicycling is to develop an interconnected system of trails and bikeways that would allow the user to safely travel between major destination points in the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Area. Funded and unfunded trails and bikeways are delineated in the LRTP, but facility types were not specified. It should be noted that several of the bikeways and trails also follow the alignment for the proposed East Coast Greenway.

### **2.4.10 The Berkeley Charleston Dorchester Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Action Plan (2005, BCDCOG)**

The BCDCOG formed Lowcountry Connections to generate long term sustainable progress toward increasing active living. Lowcountry Connections is a local partnership that relies on the cooperation between the health and transportation professions and also includes nonprofits, residents, and representatives from local jurisdictions. The partnership guided the creation of the Action Plan and identified programs, policies and projects that will be implemented to promote active living.

Like the LRTP, this plan relates to greenspace as it recommends, among other things, passive recreation through trails and greenways for cyclists and pedestrians. Coordination between the Charleston County Greenbelt Plan and the Berkeley Charleston Dorchester Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Action Plan, could allow for more viable connections between future parks, greenspace, and residential/commercial population centers.





*A popular portion of the East Coast Greenway (above) runs directly over the Cooper River. Both the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan and the East Coast Greenway Master Plan support additional trails to parks, activity centers, and along the proposed East Coast Greenway route.*

***2.4.11 East Coast Greenway Master Plan for Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties, SC (2004, BCDCOG & the Citadel)***

This study describes a trail proposed for the East Coast Greenway route through Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties. This 95 mile long trail will link many neighborhoods, communities, local, state, and national parks (including the Francis Marion National Forest, the Santee Coastal Reserve, and the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge), trails, schools, health care centers, and shopping nodes for local users. Furthermore, the greenway will highlight the national and historic significance of Coastal South Carolina.

The report identifies opportunities to link the east Coast Greenway to existing greenway and trail systems, and key destinations and venues. Aside from an alternative transportation plan, the document also addresses

reforestation opportunities along the proposed route, covering four distinct reforestation environment types. The recommendations also include specific tree species for the various areas on the trail.

***2.4.12 A South Carolina Regional Trails Plan (2001, Palmetto Conservation Foundation)***

Sponsors of this plan include the Palmetto Conservation Foundation, Family Riders, the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce, the South Carolina Department of Parks and Recreation & Tourism, Santee Cooper, and Dorchester Chamber of Commerce. This plan describes a network of existing and proposed trails within the Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester County (BCD) Region, with the goal of developing a regional network of trails by the end of the year 2010. This plan should be viewed as a part of a larger statewide framework for coordinated trail planning and development.



## State Plans

### ***2.4.13 South Carolina Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) (2002, South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism)***

The SCORP is used as a guide for the distribution of State and Federal funds for various recreation and conservation programs throughout South Carolina. Such funds include, but are not limited to, the Recreation Land Trust (RELT) Fund, the Parks and Recreation Development (PARC) Fund, and the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Additionally, the SCORP is used by Federal, State, regional and local agencies and organizations to identify recreation needs and resources under their purview.

#### **Top Three SCORP Priority Issues**

Issue 1: Protect significant lands for natural and cultural resources allowing public recreational use.

Issue 2: Manage and expand trail resources (trail mileage, availability, and facilities) for: Equestrians; Off-highway vehicle users (4x4 vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles); Urban hikers/bikers/walkers (including greenways and on-road bicycling); Rural or backcountry hikers/bikers; Canoers and kayakers; All trails (general).

Issue 3: Maintain and improve existing parks and recreational facilities. (SCORP, 2002)

#### **Existing Hiking/Biking Trails in Charleston County**

Blue Loop (2.2 mi.) James Island County Park  
Green Loop (1 mi.) James Island County Park  
Leisure (2 mi.) Wannamaker County Park  
Nature Walk and Bike (5 mi.) Magnolia Plantation  
Orange Loop (0.8 mi.) James Island County Park  
Paved Bike (1.2 mi.) Palmetto Islands County Park  
Red Loop (1.4 mi.) James Island County Park  
West Ashley Bikeway (2 mi.) Charleston Co. PRC  
Yellow Loop (1.5 mi.) James Island County Park  
Needlerush Parkway (1.2 mi.) Palmetto Co. Park

(SC State Trails Plan, 2002)

### ***2.4.15 South Carolina East Coast Greenway: Transportation Safety, Route Location & Facility Needs Study (2004, The Citadel, Clemson University & South Carolina State University)***

This study examined route conditions and planning issues that would affect the development of a preferred East Coast Greenway alignment (see review of the East Coast Greenway Plan above). The information was compiled into a Bicycle Compatibility Index Level of Service procedure and a preferred route was developed based on this information. The route proposed is virtually identical to the alignment documented in the *East Coast Greenway Master Plan for Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties* by BCDCOG.

### ***2.4.14 The South Carolina State Trails Plan (2002, South Carolina Department of Parks Recreation and Tourism and the Palmetto Conservation Foundation)***

This Plan begins with broad goals for how to provide new and better trail experiences to the public. The Plan includes an inventory of existing trails in South Carolina, containing basic information for building a state trails database. Following the existing trails inventory is a list of proposed trails in South Carolina, forming a comprehensive overview of where trail development will likely take place in South Carolina. Finally, the State Trails Plan addresses major challenges and opportunities in reaching the vision of an expanded trail experience for every South Carolinian.

## **2.5 Regulatory Framework**

This section analyzes and provides recommendations for the modification of existing County and municipal codes that are consistent with applicable land use principles and South Carolina jurisprudence. The analysis was undertaken in order to define elements of the codes that need to be modified to encourage the conservation of natural and cultural resources within the County.



### **2.5.1 Existing Municipal Zoning and Land Development Codes**

Local codes were reviewed for the following jurisdictions: Awendaw, Charleston, Folly Beach, Hollywood, Isle of Palms, Lincolnville, McClellanville, Meggett, Mount Pleasant, North Charleston, Ravenel, Seabrook Island and Sullivan's Island.<sup>1</sup> The municipal zoning and land development regulations were systematically reviewed for provisions dealing with open space, greenways and greenbelts, mandatory dedications, cultural resource requirements, and administrative provisions.

### **2.5.2 Findings and Recommendations**

The review reveals potential issues associated with parks and open space dedication requirements. In seven jurisdictions, the parks and open space requirements are expressed as percentages of gross area or lot size. One jurisdiction has competing dedication requirements, while five municipalities have no requirements for dedications of open space at all. Only one municipality has adopted an incremental formula for determining dedication requirements. However, the basis for the formula should be reviewed if the ordinance is revised in response to this Greenbelt Plan.

### **2.5.3 Natural Resource & Cultural Resource Protection**

The regulatory review includes zoning or land development regulations dealing with the conservation of natural and cultural resources. While 6 of the 13 jurisdictions reviewed have local provisions for the preservation of historically significant structures and geographic areas, none have specific regulatory protection for cultural preservation. Most of the historic preservation ordinances took the form of a Historic District or Overlay Zone. Eleven of the 13 jurisdictions have tree preservation ordinances. In addition, most of the jurisdictions protect coastal areas and saltwater wetlands through the Office of Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) Critical Line setbacks.

### **2.5.4 Connectivity**

Four municipalities address the issue of connectivity relative to pedestrians and streets. No municipality currently addresses the provision of human or ecological connectivity between significant parks, natural or historic areas and/or corridors.



*While less than half of the jurisdictions reviewed have local provisions for the preservation of historically significant structures and geographic areas, none have specific regulatory protection for cultural preservation. Interpretive parks, like the one shown above on Edisto Island, offer opportunities for historic, cultural, and environmental preservation.*



### **2.5.5 Administrative Ease and Maintenance**

Open space requirements are established and administered in several ways: First, the requirements can be ministerial. Ministerial requirements are established as standards that are enforced through a permitting process that does not require a public hearing or involve the exercise of discretion. An example of this is the issuance of building permits.

Second, administrative decisions involve the application of standards, and typically a public hearing. The standards are often looser than ministerial standards. An example of this process is subdivision plats.

Third, legislative procedures involve review by the governing body (such as a City Council or the County Council), and are entitled to deference by the courts.

The advantage of ministerial review is that it is relatively quick and provides landowners a fair amount of certainty about what is expected. However, there is less room for negotiation than a legislative or discretionary procedure, and the local government may lose opportunities to obtain larger or higher quality open space. The disadvantage of a legislative process is that it affords less certainty for developers, and applies only to those projects that require legislative review (such as a rezoning).

The open space requirements in the County currently range from those that are legislatively established through PD rezoning (as in Charleston County) to clear, non-discretionary standards that are established in the subdivision approval process. The development community typically prefers a uniform procedure that does not vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. However, each jurisdiction currently retains the flexibility to establish its own procedures.

The land development regulations in the County incorporate a variety of approaches to the issue of open space maintenance. Some jurisdictions have clear provisions dealing with the formal legal requirements for dedication and acceptance of open space and public lands, while others have scant or no maintenance requirements.

### **2.5.6 Conclusions**

To comply with legal standards, local regulations that implement the Charleston County Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan must comply with various legal principles, including essential nexus and rough proportionality, as set forth by State and Federal case law.

The consultant's analysis reveals that seven of the thirteen County municipalities establish minimum percentages of gross area or lot size for required open space dedications. However, many do establish either a percentage or a formula to calculate the amount of land to be set aside as open space. No jurisdiction in the County expressly addresses cultural preservation, although many have historic preservation requirements.

Clear, uniform administrative provisions should be incorporated in the local ordinances concerning how and under what circumstances the County or local jurisdictions accept dedications of public land. Specific consideration should be given to the private ownership and maintenance of open space and greenways where possible.

<sup>1</sup> Research data for two municipalities, Kiawah Island and Rockville, was unavailable and these jurisdictions are not included in the review of local ordinances.

