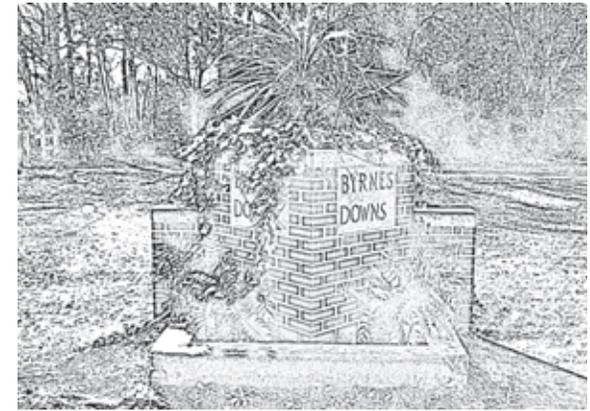


AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL
BYRNES DOWNS

PREPARED FOR:
THE CITY OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA
AUGUST 2009

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Neighborhood Background	7
Chapter 3: History	12
Chapter 4: Urban Form	21
Chapter 5: Architecture	38
Chapter 6: Landscape	54
Chapter 7: Preservation & Integrity	71
Chapter 8: Adjacent Conditions	79
Appendix A: Bibliography	84

AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL BYRNES DOWNS



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- William Hamilton, Chair - Byrnes Downs Historic Preservation/Zoning Committee

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This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U. S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington DC 20240. Federal funds were administered by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.



Chapter 1: Introduction

Most planning studies tend to focus on land use rather than the actual physical development patterns of a community. This often results in a lack of attention given to the overall characteristics and qualities of what makes a community or neighborhood unique.

It is important to define the urban design elements that make up a particular neighborhood so that any future development will be compatible with and strengthen the established context. This is particularly important in historic neighborhoods expected to undergo future developmental pressure.



FIGURE 1.1. POST-WORLD WAR II VICTORY HOUSING STILL INTACT THROUGHOUT BYRNES DOWNS.

Purpose

Area Character Appraisals (ACAs) are one method of assessing and documenting the physical characteristics of a place. By assessing and understanding the patterns of development and their unique components, character defining elements that make a neighborhood special can be documented for future generations.

Not only does it serve a planning function, but also an educational and outreach function as well. ACAs should also be accessible to lay citizens to explore how each neighborhood fits into the historical and architectural development of Charleston and the elements that make it special.

Charleston's recent annexation policies give it many of the qualities and diversity of a large city: very different areas within a short distance of each other, a large and growing land area, and significant development prospects. Balancing historic preservation with development pressure makes Area Character Appraisals for many neighborhoods an exercise that is especially worthwhile and relevant,

ACAs broaden the view of preservation from specific buildings to the fabric of the surrounding community. It is a neighborhood-based approach to preservation, in which elements that make up neighborhood character are articulated and preserved. ACAs describe the context of a neighborhood and the key components that characterize a place. This includes the scale, mass, and rhythm of structures, as well as streetscape and landscape elements. In addition, the current uses and historic and cultural elements are defined in the community.

Area Character Appraisals will help ensure high-quality development in the City of Charleston, especially areas under heavy development pres-



FIGURE 1.2. BYRNES DOWNS STREET SIGNS.

sure. Although some neighborhoods may not be regarded now as particularly historic, it is important to document the character of an area before substantial change renders it unrecognizable. The first Area Character Appraisals are being conducted for the historic neighborhoods of Cannonborough and Elliottborough on the Charleston peninsula and Old Windemere and Byrnes Downs in West Ashley.

Most resources are encompassed in the houses, winding roads, and street trees of the residential neighborhoods. Though not typically recognized as historic, many of the older West Ashley neighborhoods such as Byrnes Downs and Old Windemere illustrate Charleston's growth in the early to mid-twentieth century. Development west of the Ashley River after World War II represents unique historic periods of idealism and growth. Development patterns testify to the rise of the automobile and pro-growth policies after World War II. These representations of relatively recent history (pre-1960s) should be recognized and preserved as part of an increased effort to recognize the ongoing history of the entire city of Charleston—not just the history of the Lower Peninsula.¹

How Area Character Appraisals Work

Area Character Appraisals (ACAs) are not a road map for how a place should look, but rather a reflection of what exists and a guide for continuing established development patterns. ACAs have the ability to provide a neighborhood-specific framework for citizens, developers, BAR members, and City staff to ensure that new development strengthens the established context.

Once completed, ACAs will provide a neighborhood-specific framework within which to evaluate new development. The information gathered from the ACAs will serve as a resource for future surveys and survey updates and as a basis for

evaluating current zoning regulations. The ACAs produced for these neighborhoods will provide guidance for potential zoning ordinance revisions governing new construction and may eventually serve as justification in establishing a future Conservation District for those areas.

The ACAs for Byrnes Downs will be a vital resource for the neighborhood by providing guidance for City staff and architectural review boards. The Byrnes Downs neighborhood currently has no design review oversight, except for commercial properties which front along Savannah Highway.

An immediate result of the ACA will be a comprehensive documentation of neighborhood characteristics that will guide City staff when reviewing projects and renovations in the neighborhood.

To be effective, ACAs must adapt as areas change. City staff should initiate periodic updates to the Area Character Appraisals as needed. ACA updates might be conducted in conjunction with survey updates. The appraisals should be succinct and straightforward, enabling easier updates.

ACA's Purpose

- ARTICULATE A HISTORIC CONTEXT AND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE STUDY AREA
- DESCRIBE THE URBAN DESIGN OF THE AREA
- IDENTIFY CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES (BUILDING HEIGHT, SCALE, MASS, SETBACKS, ETC.)
- DEFINE NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES
- IDENTIFY AREAS ARE INTACT AND TRANSITIONAL
- EVALUATE THE UNIQUE QUALITIES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Process

The Byrnes Downs Area Character Appraisal has been prepared by Robert and Company, an Atlanta-based engineering, architecture, and planning firm. In December 2008, Robert and Company was selected by a panel of City of Charleston staff and local preservation professionals to prepare Area Character Appraisals for three neighborhoods. Included on the Robert and Company team was Glenn Keyes Architects. Glenn Keyes Architects is an architecture and historic preservation firm located in Charleston.

Between January and July 2009, Robert and Company made five trips to Charleston to complete field work and research, conduct public meetings, collect community input, and consult with local experts. Throughout the development of the Area Character Appraisals, close and regular communication with the client group has helped ensure that the research and final product reflected community concerns, priorities, and visions.

Robert and Company initiated the project by collecting relevant studies, historical maps, and photographs of Byrnes Downs. Guided by the Charleston Department of Planning, Preservation, and Sustainability, Robert and Company reviewed

copies of major surveys conducted in Charleston and plans prepared for specific areas of the city and the city as a whole. Robert and Company also obtained copies of relevant National Register nominations and researched local archives, including the South Carolina Room at the Charleston County Public Library, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, the South Carolina Historical Society, and the Charleston Library Society.

In January 2009, the consultant team conducted a walking tour of the Byrnes Downs neighborhood with City of Charleston Council member Yvonne Evans, City of Charleston staff, community residents, and stakeholders of Byrnes Downs. Robert



FIGURE 1.3. PUBLIC WORKSHOP WITH RESIDENTS OF BYRNES DOWNS AND OLD WINDERMERE.

and Company staff also conducted extensive field survey work of the Byrnes Downs neighborhood throughout the process. Staff photographed and took field notes to gather information on existing conditions and significant cultural resources in the neighborhood. This included a detailed inventory of land use, roadways, open space, historic resources, and architecture.

As community involvement is the key to developing successful Area Character Appraisals, a public meeting and workshop was held for both Byrnes Downs and Old Windermere (Figure 1.3). The first public workshop was held on February 17, 2009, at St. Andrews School of Math and Science along Chadwick Drive in South Windermere. This meeting's purpose was to explain the intent of Area Character Appraisals and provide a framework for the completion of this study. This meeting focused on what the residents of the study area value about their neighborhood, the project team's initial thoughts about the existing conditions and surrounding context, and determining what urban design and cultural elements contribute most to the neighborhood's character.

Drafts of the Area Character Appraisals were presented at a public meeting in June 2009, with subsequent opportunities for public feedback, review, and comments. The final Area Character Appraisal document for Byrnes Downs was presented to the City of Charleston in August 2009.

Endnotes

1 Page & Turnbull, *Vision, Community, Heritage: A Preservation Plan for Charleston, South Carolina*, 2008.

Chapter 2: Neighborhood Background

Byrnes Downs lies to the west of downtown Charleston, across the Ashley River. The neighborhood is situated adjacent to Savannah Highway (Highway 17), approximately three miles west of downtown. It is within walking distance of Avondale Point and St. Andrews Center. The West Ashley Greenway runs through the neighborhood and connects it to Old Windermere and South Windermere. The boundaries of Byrnes Downs are shown in Figure 2.1.

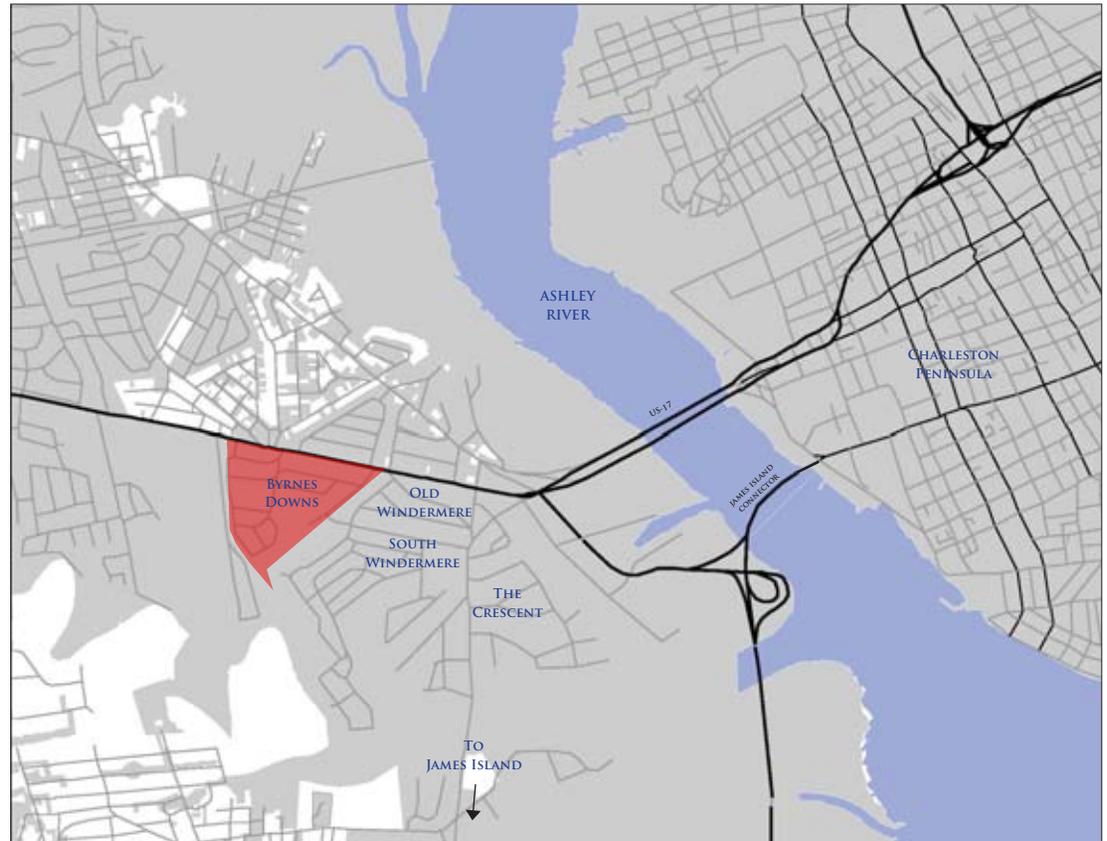


FIGURE 2.1. REGIONAL LOCATION MAP.

General Context

Byrnes Downs is one of several West Ashley residential neighborhoods that developed in the mid-twentieth century. Over the decades, this neighborhood of tree-lined streets, original homes, and wide sidewalks has continued to retain a unique community feel (Figures 2.2-2.4). With its prime location and convenience to shopping and local amenities, Byrnes Downs continues to attract new residents to the neighborhood. Many individual homes have been altered or expanded, yet the neighborhood's character is still very much intact over sixty years after its inception.



FIGURES 2.2-2.4. BIKE TRAILS, WELL-MAINTAINED HOUSING STOCK, AND LOCAL ESTABLISHMENTS HELP TO CREATE A UNIQUE WEST ASHLEY NEIGHBORHOOD.

Planning Studies

Ashley Bridge District Plan (1997)

In the mid-1990s the neighborhoods that make up the Ashley Bridge District began to work with the City of Charleston to develop a plan to protect and enhance the livability of the District's residential areas and improve the quality of its commercial centers. The residential neighborhoods included in the study were Albemarle Point, Byrnes Downs, the Crescent, Moreland, Old Windermere, South Windermere, Wappoo Heights, and Westwood.

Several focus areas were identified in the Ashley Bridge District Plan, including the South Windermere Shopping Center. Other priorities are to create signage and beautify the busy arterial streets that flow through the area, including Savannah Highway, St. Andrew's Boulevard, and Folly Road (Figure 2.5).

City of Charleston Century V Plan (1999)

The *Century V Plan* is a comprehensive development plan for the City of Charleston. This plan presents a picture of Charleston today and recommends five areas of emphasis for the future. The *Century V Plan* is drafted as a working document for the citizens of the city. The Department of Planning, Preservation, and Sustainability will present an update of this report in 2010.

The *Century V Plan* will become more comprehensive over time as the city studies specific issues in more detail. Future plans conducted by the City of Charleston will represent additions to the *Century V Plan*. The goal of this effort is to make city planning more accessible and easier to understand for the citizens of Charleston.

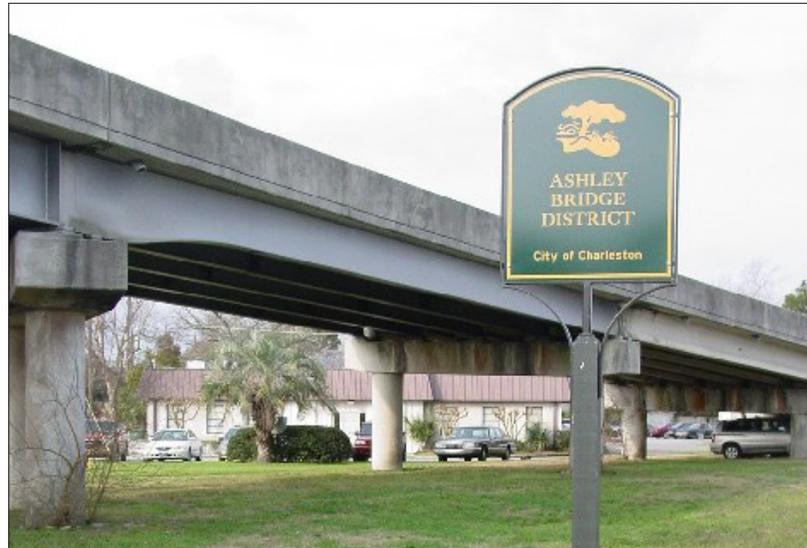


FIGURE 2.5. THE FIRST ASHLEY BRIDGE DISTRICT SIGN.

*Vision/Community/Heritage - A Preservation Plan for Charleston, SC (2008)*³

A new Preservation Plan was developed to address emerging preservation issues in the City of Charleston (Figure 2.6). The first preservation plan was developed in 1974 and a majority of that plan's recommendations have been implemented. The updated Preservation Plan is an extremely comprehensive document created with extensive public involvement and input.

Over 600 recommendations are included in the Plan, covering a wide range of issues from traffic concerns to expansion of the historic districts to the issue of affordable housing to the importance of cultural preservation. As the new Plan is intended to guide the City into the next 40 years, the recommendations are categorized as Immediate, Intermediate, Long Term, and Ongoing.



FIGURE 2.6. CHARLESTON'S MOST RECENT PRESERVATION EFFORT.

Endnotes

- 1 Hanson, Taylor, Inc., et al, *Ashley Bridge District: The Emergence of a Traditional Village*, 1997.
- 2 Charleston County Roadwise Program: http://www.ccroadwise.org/hwy_17.html.
- 3 Page & Turnbull, *Vision, Community, Heritage: A Preservation Plan for Charleston, South Carolina*, 2008.

Chapter 3: History

Byrnes Downs is representative of an important time period not only in the City of Charleston, but in American history as well. Despite the major changes that have occurred in West Ashley, Byrnes Downs maintains a sense of community that has made it a desirable place to live for almost seventy years. But to understand the present day neighborhood, there should first be a review of the foundations of the region.

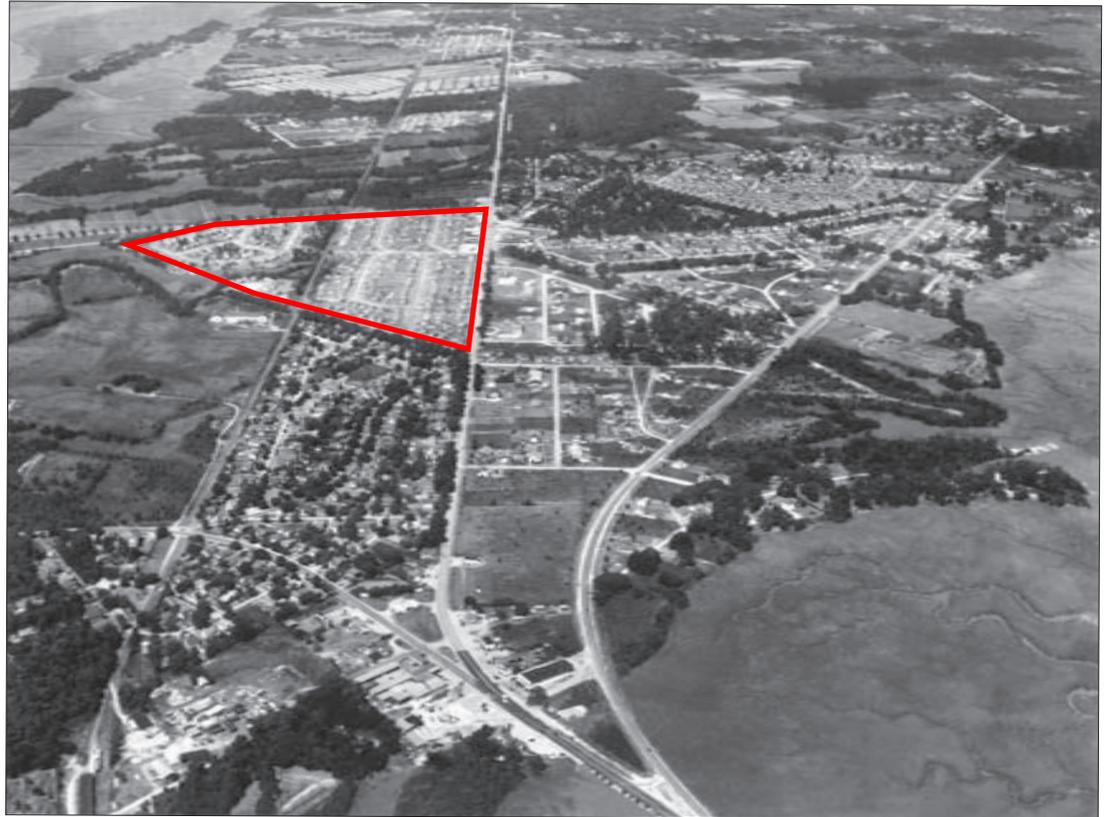


FIGURE 3.1. AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF WEST ASHLEY IN 1951. BYRNES DOWNS IS SHOWN IN RED (COURTESY OF CANTEY HARE).

Chapter 3 Summary

General History

- Area west of the Ashley River is historically known as St. Andrews Parish, founded in 1703.
- Agriculture was the primary economic source for 200 years.
- A new bridge was constructed in 1926 from the peninsula, making West Ashley more accessible and ushering in a decade of new development.
- St. Andrews Elementary School, now known as St. Andrews School of Math and Science, was built in 1950. Today it serves as the community gathering spot for many of the surrounding neighborhoods.
- In 1943, a water line was extended to West Ashley and opened the area for new housing development.

Development History

- The Byrnes Downs subdivision was developed by the Victory Housing Corporation, headed by Vincent Chicco and Leonard L. Long.
- House construction by the Long Construction Company began in 1944, with the first house completed in April 1945.
- Byrnes Downs was first designed as rental properties for Charleston Naval Shipyard workers, but the homes were sold to veterans and their spouses after the war ended.
- The Byrnes Downs subdivision included 374 detached single-family homes.

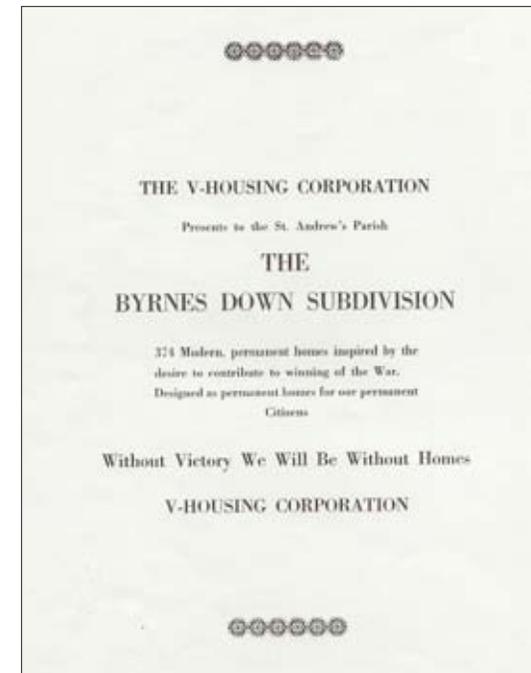


FIGURE 3.2. 1945 ADVERTISEMENT OF HOMES FOR SALE IN BYRNES DOWNS (COURTESY OF BILL WALLACE).

General History

In 1670, the first European settlers of Charleston arrived at the present site of Charles Town Landing, then known as Albemarle Point. After a short time in the area, the settlers moved to the area of present-day downtown Charleston to construct a better fortified settlement and to take advantage of the riverfront's commercial opportunities. The area west of the Ashley River, known as St. Andrews Parish, became one of 10 colonial parishes established by an act of Parliament in England in 1703. King Charles I of England granted the charter of Carolina to eight Lord Proprietors, whose names decorate the state's counties, towns, rivers, and streets. Byrnes Downs has several streets bearing the names of colonial governors of the state whose heritage dates back to some of these original Lord Proprietors, for example, Campbell, Yeamans, Lyttleton, Nicholson, Craven, Sothel, Broughton, Ludwell, Colleton, and Tynte.¹

With ideal conditions for growing crops, St. Andrews Parish remained agriculturally based for over two hundred years. This was due to the excellent soil conditions and accessibility to irrigation. In the late 1800s, the large agricultural producers in the

area began to break up the plantations, subdividing the area into smaller parcels. Also, dairy and beef cattle started to become more prevalent and replaced several of the crop farms.

St. Andrews Elementary was the only school in the district in the 1920s. It was a three-room wooden building on Wappoo Road. A new elementary school was built in 1930 and became a high school in 1950. The elementary school was relocated to a new building that year along Chadwick Drive in South Windermere (Figure 3.3). Today, St. Andrews is a magnet school, the St. Andrews School of Math and Science.

The area west of the Ashley River became more accessible for residents from the peninsula with a new bridge that was built in 1926. A concrete and steel bridge, known as the World War I Memorial Bridge, replaced a wooden bridge constructed in 1886. The area west of the Ashley River was now more accessible and ready for development. By 1930 developers had laid out Wappoo Heights (1924), Windermere (1926), The Crescent (1926), St. Andrews Heights (1928), Stono Park (1928), and Pinecrest Gardens (1929) in St. Andrew's Parish.



FIGURE 3.3. ST. ANDREWS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, BUILT IN 1950 (COURTESY OF TRICIA PEACOCK).

Development History

In 1943, the Victory Housing Corporation advertised the sale of “374 modern homes” in St. Andrews Parish. The new neighborhood was called Byrnes Downs. Formerly a cabbage field owned by the Harrison family, the land was developed by the Victory Housing Corporation. The Victory Housing Corporation was headed by two individuals, Vincent Chicco and Leonard L. Long.

Byrnes Downs was first designed as rental properties for Charleston Naval Shipyard workers, but the homes were sold to veterans and their spouses after the war ended. House construction by the Long Construction Company began in 1944, with the first house completed in April 1945.

The Byrnes Downs subdivision was completed a month before the war’s end in 1945. Byrnes Downs lots averaged 55 by 135 feet and held compact cottage-style brick homes with one-and-a-half stories (Figure 3.4).



FIGURE 3.4. HOMES ALONG YEADON AVENUE IN THE LATE 1940s (COURTESY OF MARGARET THORNE SEIDLER).

The neighborhood included paved sidewalks and streets, storm drains, sewers, and city water. It attracted middle-class home buyers who could afford the \$6,500 average asking price. By 1955, the homes were selling for as much as \$15,000.²

The houses in Byrnes Downs were built with various colors and textures of brick. Legend has it that every eighth house was built using leftover bricks

from already constructed homes. Homes built with the mismatched bricks were painted and are still seen in the neighborhood.

Two-thirds of the homes were built with five rooms (two bedrooms). The remaining third of the homes had six rooms. All of the homes came with large attics for storage; many of the attics today have been renovated as living spaces.

The neighborhood is characterized by civic involvement. The Byrnes Downs Garden Club was formed by fifteen women in January 1948. The Garden Club's impact on the neighborhood's character can still be seen today. This included raising funds for the community's first street signs. Also, the club organized neighborhood boys into the Little Helpers Club to help keep grounds hoed, raked and cleaned (Figure 3.5).³

The Garden Club worked on landscaping Byrnes Downs gateways, repairing entrance columns, and erecting lights at entrances. The club planted 107 live oak trees in the neighborhood in the late 1940s and 1950s. This remains one of the largest contributions to the aesthetics of the neighborhood.

The Byrnes Downs Garden Club scrapbook, created by May Rossiter, documents the club's events and accomplishments in the neighborhood. This elaborate scrapbook provides an amazing snapshot of life in Byrnes Downs in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Photos, newspaper clippings, and drawings fill the scrapbook, which was recently donated to the College of Charleston's Library of Special Collections.

Although the Garden Club no longer exists, the organization's community spirit and beautification projects live on through the Neighborhood Association. Neighborhood Association projects have included helping the City of Charleston beautify the West Ashley Greenway, which runs through the neighborhood. The association has also helped repairing and replacing entrance columns, cleaning street drains, planting trees and shrubs, landscaping public areas, purchasing entrance signs, and getting street signs upgraded.⁴

Over the decades, the neighborhood of curvilinear streets and tree-lined edges has evolved. In the late 1980s, Byrnes Downs was rediscovered by young professionals who were looking for a starter home in the West Ashley area. Today the community is a mix of people from seniors to couples and young families.



FIGURE 3.5. THE LITTLE HELPERS CLUB WORKING ON A LANDSCAPING PROJECT (COURTESY OF THE POST AND COURIER).

Byrnes Downs continues to be one of the most sought after neighborhoods in Charleston due to its prime location and convenience to shopping and local amenities. This is reflected in the resale value of homes, with prices typically higher per square foot than other West Ashley neighborhoods.

As floor space needs increased, many homes in the neighborhood have expanded. This included remodeling attics into second stories, typically converting a hall closet into a stairwell. The additions have boosted home sizes from 800/1200 square feet to as much as 2,000 square feet.

Homeowners have completed interior renovations such as constructing new fireplaces, installing carpet, and modernizing kitchens and bathrooms.



FIGURE 3.6. GENE'S HAUFBRAU RESTAURANT.

Important Landmarks

The nearby stretch of Savannah Highway began to develop as a vibrant commercial area as West Ashley's population increased. The Avondale Point Business District is located immediately adjacent to Byrnes Downs and centered along Savannah Highway. Although it was in a state of decline for some time in the 1980s and 1990s, today it is a thriving business district with several retail stores and restaurants.

Gene's Haufbrau is considered a community landmark and important social gathering space for the Byrnes Downs neighborhood (Figure 3.6). Established in 1952, the restaurant and bar has long served as the local watering hole. In fact, it claims to be Charleston's oldest bar. Earlier in its history it was a private club where people paid a membership fee to obtain a membership card and an entry key for the locked front door. In 2000, new owners renovated the interior and restored the façade to its original appearance.



FIGURE 3.7. RODENBERG'S GROCERY STORE UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

The Rodenberg family built a grocery store in the Avondale Point business district in the late 1940s (Figure 3.7). Rodenberg's grocery store is on Savannah Highway, close to the corner of Daniel Street. Today the building is a secondhand thrift store.

There is a unique story about Rodenberg's and how it changed the surrounding urban fabric. The family purchased homes on Craven Avenue directly behind the store, with plans to tear them

down to make way for a larger parking lot behind the building. The plan was met with opposition from residents and instead most of the backyards were transformed into asphalt for access and parallel parking. This is why Alycia Alley is wider at the south end and several homes on the south end of Craven Avenue have high fences and small backyards.⁵

People

The Byrnes Downs neighborhood was named in honor of James F. Byrnes, a native Charlestonian with an extensive political history in federal, state, and local government. James Byrnes served in the US House of Representatives from 1911 – 1925 and in the Senate from 1931 – 1941. He also served as Secretary of State under President Truman in 1945. James Byrnes was a good friend of J.C. Long, who supported Byrnes in his bid for governor of South Carolina in 1951.

The Hanckel family has been an important part of the history of Byrnes Downs and West Ashley. In 1921, Francis S. Hanckel Jr. and I.D. Auld established a dairy on Coburg Road. The dairy played a strong role in the community and residents continue to feel a strong connection with the Coburg Dairy. The distinctive cow and sign at the corner of Coburg Road and Savannah Highway is a gateway reference for the area and date back to 1959 (Figure 3.8). In addition, the Cookhouse located on the Coburg property was a popular place for community events for many years.



FIGURE 3.8. COBURG DAIRY SIGN ALONG SAVANNAH HIGHWAY.

Endnotes

1 Donna F. Jacobs, *Images of America: Byrnes Downs*, Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008. 7.

2 Janice Schumake, "Byrnes Downs marked by friendly spirit," *The Post and Courier*, 2 November 1995. 2.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Jacobs, 118.

Chapter 4: Urban Form

The pattern of streets and lots have a greater impact on a city than any other element of its arrangement. Street blocks are also a key element of urban design, and the size and pattern play a major role in the travel patterns and movement of a neighborhood or community.

Prevailing Character

- SMALL, WALKABLE BLOCKS WITH A VIL-LAGE-LIKE CHARACTER
- PREDOMINANTLY SINGLE-FAMILY DE-TACHED HOUSES
- MANY OF THE ORIGINAL FORMS OF HOUSES REMAIN, ALTHOUGH SOME AL-TERATIONS TO FOOTPRINTS HAVE OC-CURRED OVER TIME



FIGURE 4.1. AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE INTERIOR OF BYRNES DOWNS.

Chapter 4 Summary

Neighborhood Form

- Byrnes Downs was originally constructed as a post-World War II subdivision and continues to reflect that style today.
- Byrnes Downs is defined by Savannah Highway, natural marshland, Coburg Road, and the Old Windermere neighborhood.
- There are several landmarks in or near the neighborhood, the most notable being St. Andrews School of Math and Science and Gene's Haufbrau.

Streets and Blocks

- Curvilinear streets are used rather than a strict rectangular grid of streets and blocks.
- Blocks are scaled appropriately for pedestrian movement within the neighborhood.

Lots

- Byrnes Downs is far less dense than downtown Charleston, but more compact than modern suburban development.
- Average lot sizes are approximately 55' wide by 135' deep (7,425 sf).
- The size of the houses compared to the lot size provides for very little lot coverage.
- The average lot coverage by homes is approximately 15%.

Setbacks

- Front setbacks are consistent and average approximately 30 feet.
- Driveways define the side setback.
- Rear yard setbacks depend on the lot size, house size, and location on the lot.

Buildings

- There is a relatively consistent fabric of dwellings throughout the neighborhood.
- The result of the design is a greater amount of private open space.

Land Use and Zoning

- Single-family uses predominate with some commercial at the northern edge of the neighborhood.
- All but a few parcels are zoned SR-2.

Comparison of Zoning & Existing Development

- Zoning categories are in line with existing development patterns in Byrnes Downs.
- Detached garages or other ancillary structures are located to the rear of primary structures.

Recommendations will appear at the end of this chapter and are denoted in the text by this symbol. **R**

Neighborhood Form

Byrnes Downs was originally platted in the 1940s, and its neighborhood form is reflective of suburban development of that era (Figure 4.2). Because the neighborhood was developed at one time, the urban form of Byrnes Downs remains remarkably consistent and true to the original design of the neighborhood. This includes the street layout and design, landscaping, lot layout, and location of buildings.

Figure 4.3 on the next page displays the continual development of Byrnes Downs over time. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps are an invaluable resource for researching historical development – as a result of these maps, we are able to see where buildings and lots existed during different periods of time. Sanborn maps are available for this area for 1951 and 1955 – although this is not a truly comprehensive timeline of development, each of these years can be compared plus existing development (Figure 4.4). The dark gray buildings are those that existed by 1951; blue buildings were built between 1951 and 1955; and purple buildings represent more recent structures. Each of the smaller map graphics displays only new buildings that were added in each time period.



FIGURE 4.2. PHOTOGRAPH OF NICHOLSON STREET AT CRAVEN AVENUE (1950).

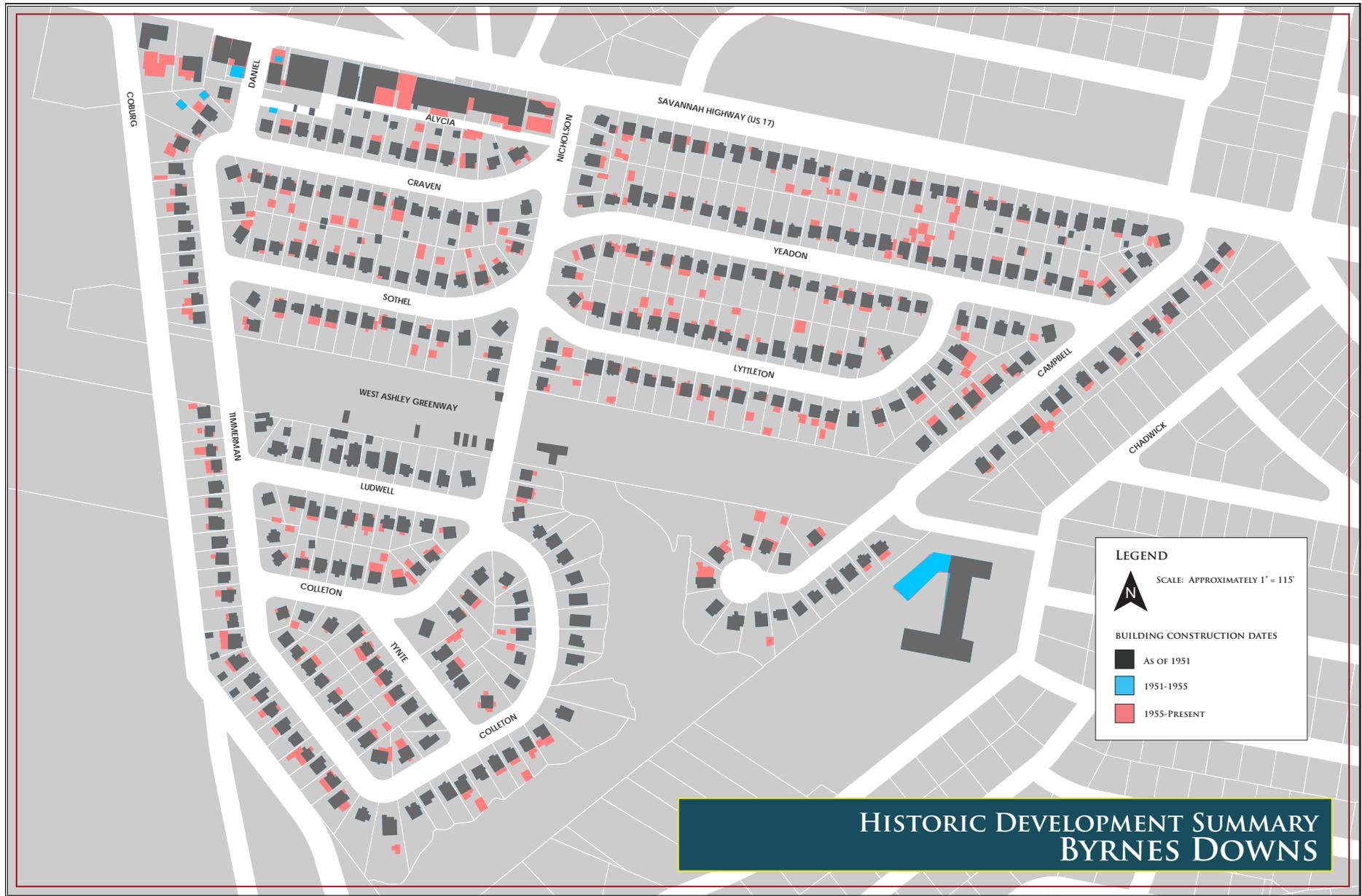


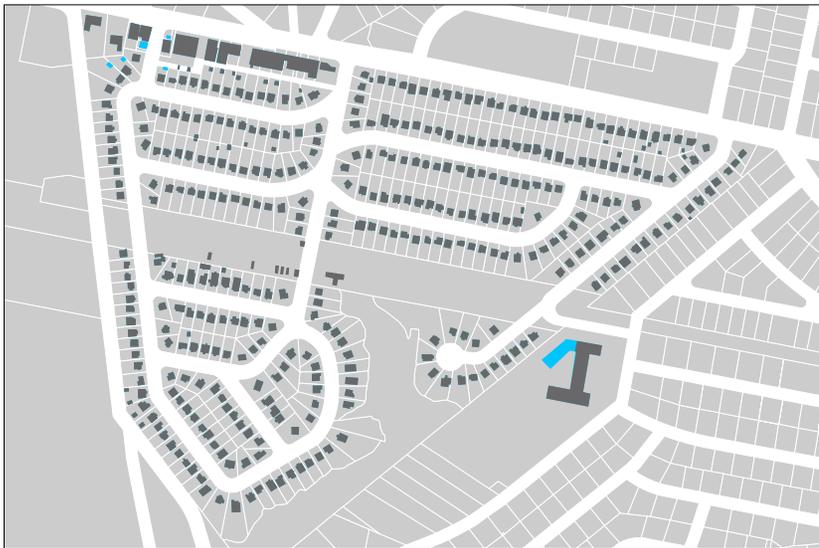
FIGURE 4.3. CURRENT BUILDING FOOTPRINTS OF BYRNES DOWNS SUMMARIZING ITS HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT.



BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES AS OF 1951



BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES CONSTRUCTED FROM 1955-PRESENT



BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES CONSTRUCTED FROM 1951-1955

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT
BYRNES DOWNS

FIGURE 4.4. HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT MAP OF BYRNES DOWNS

Edges **R**

Northern Edge

The northern edge of the neighborhood is Savannah Highway, forming a clear boundary between Byrnes Downs and other neighborhoods to the north. Although some would like to consider the commercial areas across Savannah Highway as part of the neighborhood, they are functionally separated by the expanse of road, despite the fact that their retail and services are supportive of Byrnes Downs.

Southern Edge

The south edge is marshland, a natural barrier to further development behind Byrnes Downs.

Western Edge

Coburg Road forms the western boundary of Byrnes Downs (Figure 4.5). Land transitions from Byrnes Downs' single-family character on the east side of the street to commercial areas and Coburg Farm, a large undeveloped property stretching from the commercial property along Savannah Highway to the marsh.

Eastern Edge

The eastern boundary is the least obvious, but the transition from Byrnes Downs to Old Windermere takes place between Campbell Drive and Chadwick Drive.

Gateways

The primary gateways, or entries into the neighborhood, are:

- Timmerman Drive from Coburg Road
- Culbertson Drive onto Campbell Drive
- Nicholson Street from Savannah Highway (Figure 4.6)

Nodes and Focal Points **R**

- St. Andrews School of Math and Science
- The West Ashley Greenway
- Avondale Point
- Gene's Haufbrau
- Fire Station #10, Nicholson Street
- The Wisteria Tree- Old oak near intersection of Campbell and Savannah Highway
- "Timmerman/Greenway Park" on the west side of Timmerman where the Greenway crosses the street



FIGURE 4.5. COBURG ROAD FORMS THE WESTERN EDGE OF BYRNES DOWNS.

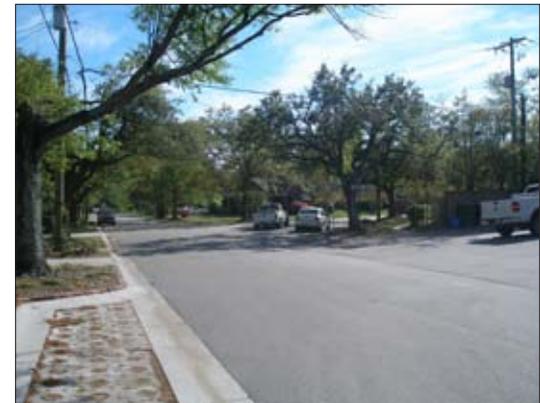


FIGURE 4.6. GATEWAY INTO NEIGHBORHOOD ALONG NICHOLSON STREET AT SAVANNAH HIGHWAY.

Streets and Blocks

Streets

Although not a traditional grid pattern, Byrnes Downs has a connected pattern of streets within a village-like setting. The streets in Byrnes Downs are curvilinear and feature a compelling road intersection design. No streets within the subdivision have 90 degree intersections with one another, but rather meet with a curving arc. This forms interesting vistas throughout the neighborhood. The street layout gives more of an “organic” feel than typical residential subdivisions. **R**



FIGURE 4.7. VIEW ALONG YEADON AVENUE .

The typical street width in the neighborhood is twenty-one feet. Streets include a rolled curb gutter with planting strips separating sidewalks from the pavement, as shown in Figure 4.7. Sidewalks are present along all streets, providing excellent pedestrian connectivity throughout the neighborhood.

Blocks

Street blocks are a key element of urban design, and the size and pattern play a major role in the traffic patterns and pedestrian mobility of a neighborhood or community.

A neighborhood with small, frequent blocks organized in a rectangular grid pattern usually have a higher potential for becoming a walkable community. Frequent blocks help break up a walking trip into small parts, helping to ensure that multiple routes can be taken between two points. Large blocks (those over 1,000 feet in length) provide less travel choice and often create the need to walk extra distances to get to a destination.

Block sizes are relatively mixed within the Byrnes Downs neighborhood, but are generally medium-sized blocks. Daniel Street is the shortest block in the neighborhood, approximately 300 feet in length. The longest block size is along Campbell Street, which is over 1,000 feet in length.

Lots

Byrnes Downs has kept its original placement of lots since the neighborhood's inception. A typical parcel in Byrnes Downs is rectangular and approximately 55 feet wide by 135 feet deep, which is a total lot area of 7,425 square feet (Figure 4.8). Most parcels located along straightaway sections of a road are this size. However, many lots in the neighborhood vary in size and shape to adjust for the curvilinear pattern of roads and their end sections. This is especially true along Colleton Drive. Here, the road is not only curved most of the way, but the outer ring of parcels is adjacent to marshland, creating back lot lines that are irregular rather than straight.

Along Campbell Drive, lot sizes are a bit wider (60 feet) to make up for the much shallower depth of the lots, which are approximately 100 feet. Homes along Campbell Drive back up against homes on Chadwick Avenue in Old Windermere on the east side of the street.



FIGURE 4.8. TYPICAL LOTS ARE NARROW AND LONG (55' X 135') WITHIN BYRNES DOWNS.

Setbacks

Front Yards

Front setbacks average approximately 30 feet from the front property line, which is adjacent to the public sidewalk. There is some variation in the front yard setbacks in the neighborhood, but most fall between 25 and 35 feet (Figure 4.9). A typical lot with building setbacks are shown on Figure 4.14.

Side Yards

Side yard setbacks are typically nine feet in the neighborhood. Driveways, when present, are typically located on one side of the lot and the setback is approximately 13 feet in width.

Rear Yards

Rear yard setbacks vary depending on lot sizes, size of homes, and their disposition on the lot. Existing rear setbacks are typically anywhere from 40 feet to as much as 80 feet in the neighborhood.



FIGURE 4.9. TYPICAL FRONT YARD SETBACK IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

Buildings

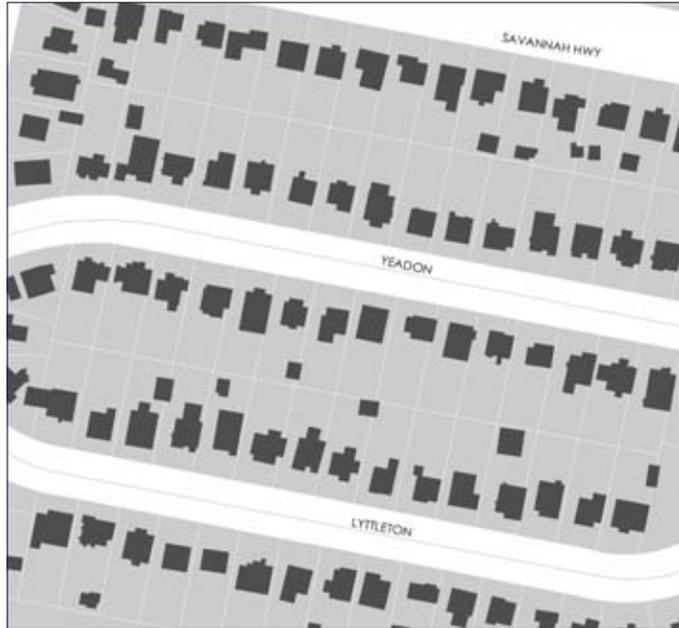
A good way to illustrate the spatial relationships of buildings in Byrnes Downs is to look at the figure ground plane of the neighborhood. This is an analytical tool used by urban designers to understand the pattern of uses and placement of buildings and structures, both commercial and residential. The figure ground diagram of Byrnes Downs depicts the minimal space that buildings occupy, although there is a relatively consistent fabric of dwellings (Figure 4.10).

The size of the houses relative to the lots in the neighborhood provides for very little lot coverage. An example would be a home with a building footprint of 1,200 square feet on a lot size of 7,425 square feet, resulting in approximately 15% of the total lot area – a very small amount of building coverage on the lot. As a result, there is a good amount of greenery within the neighborhood and a minimal amount of impervious surfaces.

The development density in Byrnes Downs is much lower than on the Charleston peninsula. The neighborhood has smaller homes and smaller lots than Old Windermere, its immediate neighbor to the east. As a comparison, the diagrams in Figure 4.11 display the lot configuration and building densities in four areas: the early 20th century neighborhoods of Byrnes Downs and Old Windermere, downtown Charleston (Elliottborough neighborhood), and the late-twentieth century subdivision of Coosaw Creek in North Charleston. Each area is shown at the same scale with an area of 836 feet x 836 feet (16 square acres). Although Byrnes Downs is less densely developed than downtown Charleston, it is more compact than modern, conventional suburbs such as Coosaw Creek.



FIGURE 4.10. EXISTING BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES IN BYRNES DOWNS (FIGURE GROUND PLANE).



BYRNES DOWNS



OLD WINDERMERE



ELLIOTTBOROUGH



COOSAW CREEK, NORTH CHARLESTON

FIGURE 4.11.
DEVELOPMENT
COMPARISONS.

Land Use and Zoning

Land Use

Single-family residential is the dominant land use in the Byrnes Downs Neighborhood (Figure 4.12). There are some commercial uses fronting Savannah Highway, as well as some internal commercial uses spilling into the neighborhood at the corner of Daniel Street and Savannah Highway.

Zoning

The majority of parcels in Byrnes Downs have SR-2 zoning, which is a single-family residential district that allows for detached dwellings only (Figure 4.13). Parcels fronting Savannah Highway between Coburg Road and Nicholson Street are zoned GB, General Business, except for two small parcels located on either side of Daniel Street at Savannah Hwy. These parcels are zoned LB, Limited Business.

SR-2 allows detached single-family residential development up to a maximum density of 7.3 units per acre. This is achieved through a minimum lot area of 6,000 square feet. Other lot regulations in the SR-2 district include:

- Minimum front yard setback of 25 feet
- Minimum rear yard setback of 25 feet
- Minimum side yard setback of nine feet
- Maximum lot coverage by buildings of 50%
- Maximum heights of 35 feet and two-and-a-half stories

LB (Limited Business) allows for a limited range of commercial uses associated with neighborhood retail and services. The height limit is 55 feet.

GB (General Business) allows for a broad range of commercial uses and activities. The height limit is 55 feet.

The following uses are permitted by special exception (subject to approval by the Board of Zoning Appeals): automotive repair shops, gasoline service stations, veterinary clinics, and stables. **R**



FIGURE 4.12. EXISTING LAND USES IN BYRNES DOWNS.



FIGURE 4.13. EXISTING ZONING IN BYRNES DOWNS.

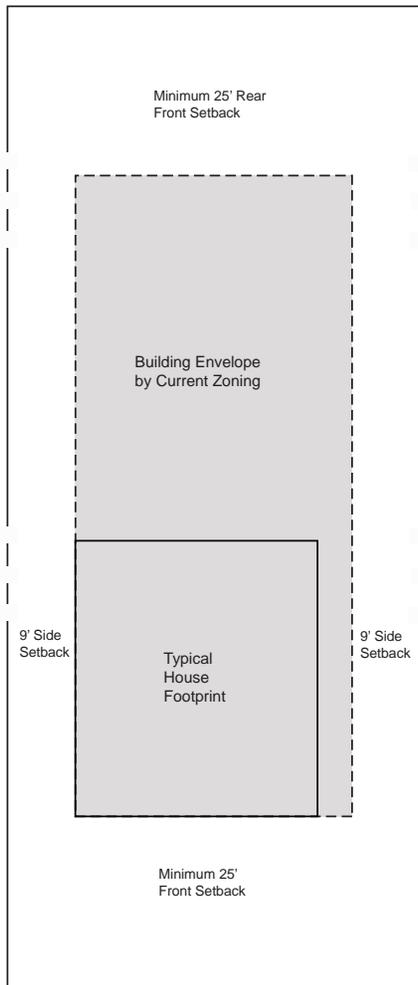


FIGURE 4.14. EXISTING DEVELOPMENT IN BYRNES DOWNS IS IN LINE WITH CURRENT ZONING REQUIREMENTS.

Comparison of Zoning & Existing Development

The current zoning does not create new development that is out of scale with the existing form of development in Byrnes Downs. The rear yard setback requirement in the zoning code is the only difference from what currently exists. The rear yard setback of 25 feet required is much smaller than the existing typical 50+ foot setbacks that are in Byrnes Downs today.

Chapter 4 Recommendations

- Byrnes Downs' current layout is historic and should remain intact.
- Efforts and policies should continue to encourage distinct edges bordering Byrnes Downs.
- Focal points in the community such as St. Andrews Magnet School of Math and Science should continue to be preserved as such.
- Definable gateways denote entry into the neighborhood and efforts should be taken to better define these gateways through improved signage, lighting, and vegetation.
- Future development should maintain lot sizes, setbacks, and building orientation.
- Accessory structures and additions should continue to be built to the rear of existing units.
- To help protect the village character of Byrnes Downs, automotive repair shops and gasoline service stations should be permitted by special exception only on any land zoned GB (General Business) or LB (Limited Business) within or adjacent to Byrnes Downs.



FIGURE 4.15. ACCESSORY STRUCTURES AND ADDITIONS SHOULD BE BUILT TO THE REAR OF EXISTING STRUCTURES.

Chapter 5: Architecture

As a planned suburb of the City of Charleston, the residences of Byrnes Downs exhibit a uniformity not found in other areas on or off peninsular Charleston. The fact that each house was built from one of five model plans makes it possible to identify the various modifications that have been undertaken since their construction in the 1940s. Even the few commercial structures on the edge of the neighborhood are modest and have undergone few changes since they were initially built.

Prevailing Character

- MANY OF THE ORIGINAL HOMES REMAIN TODAY WITH LITTLE EXTERIOR CHANGES
- A CONSISTENT AND HOMOGENEOUS HOUSING STOCK
- “COTTAGE” STYLE ARCHITECTURE WITH MODEST DETAILS



FIGURE 5.1. A WELL-PRESERVED HOUSE IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Chapter 5 Summary

Types & Forms

- Single-family residences are the most dominant use with the exception of neighborhood commercial buildings along Savannah Highway and a portion of Daniel Street.
- Since houses in Byrnes Downs were built by one developer, there is a consistent and homogenous housing stock.
- Original houses in the neighborhood are one and-a-half stories. Commercial buildings are one or two stories.
- All the homes contain two or three bedrooms, combined living and dining areas, and a kitchen.
- The entry is either centered, offset, or perpendicular to the street.
- All roofs are 6:12 pitch.

Styles

- An appropriate term for Byrnes Downs homes would be “cottage” style.
- The commercial buildings have Art Deco elements but are not high-style.

Architectural Features

- Architectural details are modest, rather than highly ornamental.
- Brick veneer siding is the most common exterior material used in Byrnes Downs.
- 6-over-6 or 8-over-8 lites are the most common window configurations.
- Solid wood panel doors are common.
- Many homes have a street-facing gable or screened porch. Rarely are these enclosed.
- Garages and carports were not original to the neighborhood and have been added over time.
- Porches, dormers, and additions that are out of scale or do not match the original portion of the home detract from the neighborhood character; this is also true of enclosed front porches that were originally open.



FIGURE 5.2. WINDOW DETAIL OF A HOME IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Types & Forms

At its inception, Byrnes Downs was characterized by brick dwellings that ranged in size from 800 to 1200 square feet. Most of the original forms of these houses remain, although alterations to the footprints have occurred over time. Stores built to serve the Byrnes Downs and other West Ashley neighborhoods are still used by residents and contribute to a vibrant small-scale “village center” area.



FIGURE 5.3. COMMERCIAL DISTRICT ALONG SAVANNAH HIGHWAY.

Types/Uses

Residential

Given the small footprint of the homes, use as a single-family dwelling is the norm. Some properties are used as rental units.

Commercial

Two streets in Byrnes Downs contain uses other than residential: Daniel Street, at the west end of the neighborhood, and Savannah Highway. Daniel Street is one block long, between Craven Street and Savannah Highway. It contains several small businesses housed in structures contemporary with the neighborhood. Uses are varied and within walking distance from Byrnes Downs and neighboring areas.

As development grew west of the Ashley, the Avondale stretch of Savannah Highway became the main shopping thoroughfare. Commercial uses along Savannah Highway considered to be part of the Byrnes Downs neighborhood include a neighborhood bar, boutique, fire station, office and wine and cheese shop (Figure 5.3). A few storefronts are empty or in transition. What was the neighborhood grocery is currently a thrift store. It is the largest structure in the Savannah Highway stretch of Byrnes Downs.

Typical Height/Number of Stories

Residential

The original houses of Byrnes Downs have one- or one-and-a-half story facades (Figure 5.4). Ceilings are typically eight to nine feet. Finished floors are often at least three steps up from the sidewalk that leads from the street to the front door. There is a vented crawlspace under the houses.

Most owners have constructed additions to homes to the rear of the original homes. Although most renovations are one story additions, some full two story additions in the neighborhood have been built. **R**

Commercial

Buildings along Savannah Highway and Daniel Street are one or two stories, and vary in depth. Building heights range from 12 to 25 feet.

Size

As built, homes in Byrnes Downs were either one, two or three bedrooms with a bathroom, combined living and dining area, and kitchen. The house model was indicated by the bathroom tile color scheme. Originally, each home sat on a generously sized lot and occupied less than a quarter of its total lot acreage.

Lot widths of the commercial spaces fronting Savannah Highway are equal to those in the neighborhood. However, the shopfront buildings occupy the entire width of the lot, with a firewall separating one building from the next.



FIGURE 5.4. FRONT FACADE OF A TYPICAL HOUSE IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Floor Plan

The original interior layouts of houses were developed with the small family in mind. Floor plans are compact and functional, efficiently balancing public and private space (Figure 5.5). The entry is in one of the following locations:

- Centered on facade
- Offset
- Perpendicular to street (front door not visible from right-of-way)

Eight-inch thick block walls and steel roof structures allow the commercial spaces to be built with an open floor plan. Any added interior partition walls are not load-bearing.

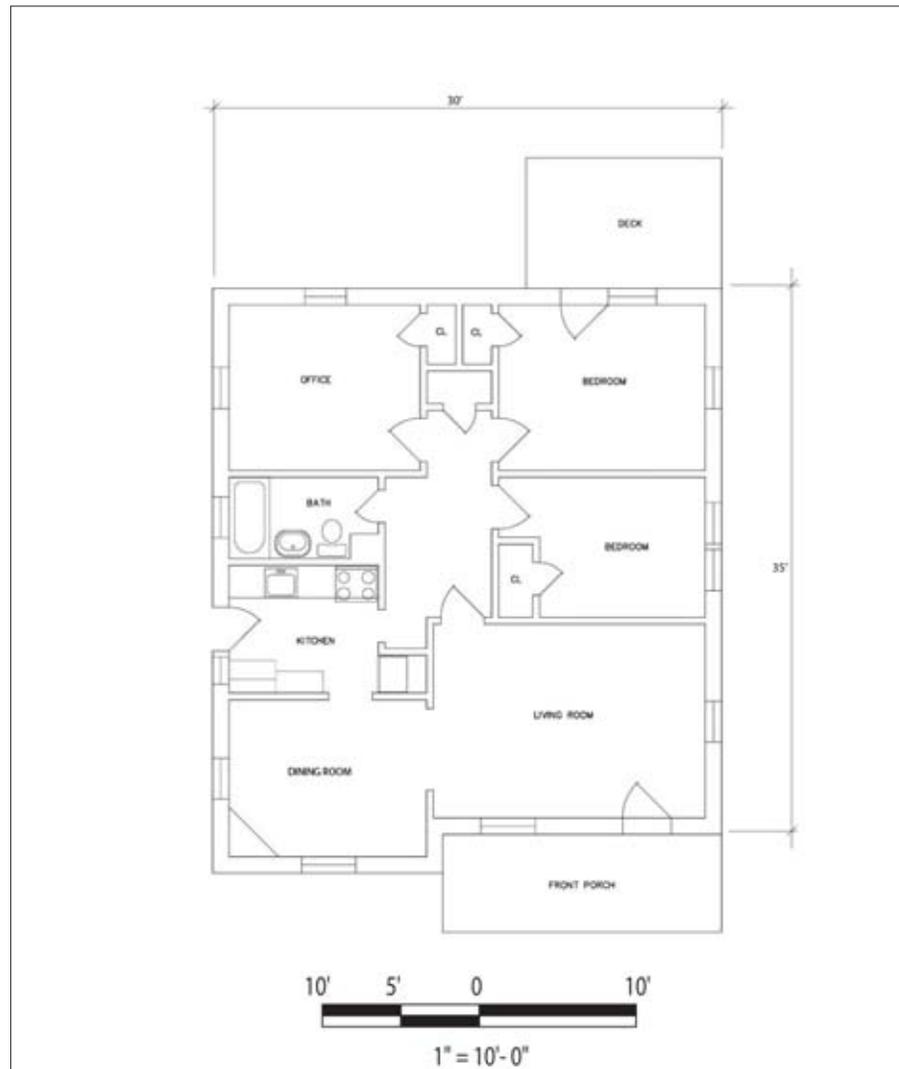


FIGURE 5.5. FLOOR PLAN OF 5 TYNTE STREET (TWO BEDROOM HOUSE).

Styles

The homes of Byrnes Downs were designed and constructed by a single developer within a ten-year frame. As a result, the neighborhood differs from other areas that evolved over time. The aesthetic of most historic neighborhoods is derived from the architectural styles popular at the time each home is built. As a planned suburb, the look of Byrnes Downs is not dependent on named architectural styles of various time periods, but rather the repetition of materials and details that contribute to a familiar, traditional appearance.

Residential Architectural Styles

The suburb of Byrnes Downs sought to maintain a familiar look in which most homebuyers would be comfortable, and which would always be in style. An appropriate description of the residences in Byrnes Downs is “cottage.” The overall composition is traditional, with divided lite windows, wood doors, simple detailing and moderately sloped roofs. Where facades are not symmetrical, there is a rhythm to door and window locations that maintains balance.

Commercial Architectural Styles

The commercial businesses along Daniel Street and Savannah Highway exhibit more modern features than the residences. The windows in Gene's Haubrau are clear glass set in glass block surrounds. Other stores have large plate glass windows that run the width of the sidewalk façade, and are as tall as eight or nine feet (Figure 5.6). On the north side of Daniel Street are three identical painted masonry storefronts that have Art Deco details, and on the south side is a more modern one-story brick structure adjacent to a two-story stucco and coursed ashlar modern medical building (Figure 5.7).



FIGURE 5.6. LARGE PLATE GLASS WINDOWS ON A COMMERCIAL BUILDING.



FIGURE 5.7. MODERN MEDICAL BUILDING ON DANIEL STREET.

Outstanding Examples

Homes in Byrnes Downs generally have been well maintained; the most outstanding examples are either closest to how they looked when built or have most successfully incorporated changes (Figures 5.8-5.10). The addition at 2 Ludwell Street significantly increased the size of the house, but the form, scale, and materials are all compatible and do not compete with the original form. **R**

Although not original to the neighborhood, 5 Daniel Street is a good example of a modern medical facility. The fire station at the corner of Savannah Highway and Nicholson Street also replaced an earlier structure, but is a well-executed mid-century modern design. What is now a thrift store was the area grocery, and is the largest store along the commercial strip. The design is distinctly modern and includes a four-story tower which once accommodated the business sign, oversized storefront windows and a diminishing width horizontal awning.



FIGURES 5.8-5.10. OUTSTANDING EXAMPLES OF HOMES IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Architectural Features

Materials

All of the original houses are brick veneer, some of which are painted. Additional materials include wood or vinyl siding, either in gables, on additions or enclosed porches. Roof material is either asbestos or asphalt shingle. Exterior porches or stoops are brick. **R**

Inside, the flooring consists of hardwoods. Walls are drywall partitions, not plaster. Doors and windows feature wood trim. Bathrooms have tile floors and wainscot.

According to a 1955 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, commercial structures are painted concrete block, brick or stucco on block and feature steel truss roofs. A current survey of the street illustrates there buildings have not changed.

Details

Trim

On Byrnes Downs homes, window and door trim is simple and frequently flat, composed of one piece of wood without a beaded edge or any profile (Figure 5.11). The trim at the eaves is generally a fascia board and six-inch trim that includes an ogee profile. Trim at the window head is at the lower extent of the house trim; there is no visible brick course between the tops of windows and the bottom of trim on houses.



FIGURE 5.11. TRIM DETAILS IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Windows

The most frequently seen window configurations are either 6-over-6 or 8-over-8 lites (Figure 5.12). Where windows have been replaced, the substitute is sometimes the same configuration, but with simulated, as opposed to true, divided lites. The original windows were wood, but replacements are frequently vinyl or aluminum clad. **R**

Fenestration patterns on the street façade are one of the following:

- Two separate windows
- A compound window (two windows that occupy the same opening)
- A tripartite window (a large window in the center flanked by two narrower windows)
- Three windows equally spaced
- Windows of various shapes can also be found in the gable end of homes. For example, on some houses, round or semi-circular windows occupy the same location as round or square louvered gable vents

Shutters

Louvered shutters are common, but are found on the street-facing elevation only. Some shutters have two panels rather than louvers. Both types are generally not operable, and are used for aesthetics rather than functionality. Shutter dogs are not present.



FIGURE 5.12. WINDOW DETAILS IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Awnings

Original aluminum awnings are still present on some of the houses (Figure 5.13). Some fabric awnings are present on Daniel Street and Savannah Highway storefronts. Awnings effectively increase cooling efficiency in warm weather and maintain the character of Byrnes Downs' post-WWII style. With cleaning and maintenance, this original feature may often last the lifespan of the house itself.¹ **R**



FIGURE 5.13. ALUMINUM AWNINGS.

Doors

Solid wood paneled doors, stained or painted, are common (Figure 5.14). In some cases, glass storm doors have been added to protect the door and provide additional sound and weather insulation. Other houses feature screen doors, so that the front door can be left open to increase cross-ventilation when windows are opened as well.

Patterns found on front doors include:

- Standard six-panel wood
- Wood panel below, three lites of glass above
- Special exceptions, such as a single door with sidelites

Doors on businesses are typically glass with an aluminum frame.



FIGURE 5.14. SOLID WOOD PANELED DOOR.

Porches

Many homes have a street-facing gable with an open or screened porch, or more rarely, an enclosed porch. Porches may fall under one of the following configurations:

- Integrated into the form of the house
- Centered on the facade
- Offset

If a porch is integrated, it is typically offset and occupies half of the façade (Figure 5.15). Porch roofs are often supported by brick piers, round or square wood columns or, less frequently, open metal supports with scrollwork. In some cases, iron handrails have been added later. Many homes still have no rails at their front stairs.

A unique element of the houses relates to the colors of the porches. Floor tile colors on porches differ based on the location of back doors. Where the back door is located on the back of the house, blue and white tile exists on the front porch. If the back door is located on the side of the house, black and white tile is used on the front porch. The

difference in tile color also denotes the difference between two- and three-bedroom houses. Blue and white tile was laid on the porches of two-bedroom houses and black and white tile was laid on the porches three-bedroom houses.²



FIGURE 5.15. SCREENED FRONT PORCH.

Roofs

All roofs on Byrnes Downs homes have equal pitches of 6:12, shallow eaves and similar detailing. Roof planes are interrupted by brick chimneys; also visible are small, louvered dormer vents. Louvered gable vents are also present and are either circular or square in shape. Some of the larger homes have one or two dormers on the street elevation (Figure 5.16). If gutters are present, they have been added at a later date.

Commercial roofs along Savannah Highway are typically flat and hidden behind parapets.



FIGURE 5.16. TYPICAL ROOF WITH DORMERS.

Signs

Four types of business identification appear on the commercial streets of Byrnes Downs:

- Right angle signs
- Business names painted on the building
- Decals in storefront windows
- Stand-off lettering applied directly on the building

Signs themselves are not usually lighted; lights are mounted on Gene's Haufbrau to illuminate its painted lettering, since it currently is the only business open late.

Garages/Carports

Garages were not part of the original homes that were built in the subdivision. They were built subsequently as detached structures and vary in size and width. Garages are placed on one side of a house and generally are set back farther than the house on the lot (Figure 5.17).

Carports can be seen throughout the neighborhood and their quality and craftsmanship vary. Some neighborhood residents have expressed concern of their visual impact to the character of the neighborhood (Figure 5.18).



FIGURE 5.17. DETACHED GARAGES ARE SET BACK FROM THE REAR OF THE HOMES IN BYRNES DOWNS.



FIGURE 5.18. CARPORT IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

Unique features

The most unique aspect of the Byrnes Downs neighborhood is its preservation of sense of place. Individual homes have been altered, but despite its nearly 70 years of existence, the area is immediately recognizable.

A few subtle differences in architectural elements (color, materials and sizes) help differentiate individual homes from others on the street. Metal awnings remain on a number of the homes. Various patterns of siding have been added in the gable ends facing the street. Window boxes, stair railings and new or painted front doors allow a house to stand out. Finally, various shapes and sizes of gable vents or windows give homes a unique character.

The commercial sections along Daniel and Savannah Highway also incorporate distinguishing features. The 40-foot tower on the former grocery serves as a beacon to the neighborhood. The colors and painted signs of Gene's Haufbrau and other stores are one-of-a-kind. The bright colors on the stores on Daniel Street's east side make the buildings stand out from the more monochromatic residences (Figure 5.19).



FIGURE 5.19. COMMERCIAL USES ALONG DANIEL STREET.

Chapter 5 Recommendations

- Given that the houses are virtually identical in height, roof pitch, materials, and placement on the lot, new structures should respect these characteristics and be designed in such a way as not to detract from this defining character.
- Non-contributing architectural alterations should be limited to the rear sides of houses or other areas out of view from the public right of way.
- Vinyl siding, mismatched windows, and other replacements that differ from original features are non-contributing, and should be avoided.
- Additions of inappropriate materials or that are out of scale have a negative impact on the neighborhood's consistency of style and quality and should be avoided.
- Original aluminum awnings contribute to the character of the neighborhood and should be retained.
- Satellite dishes and exposed air handling units detract from the neighborhood aesthetic and should be screened or located in less visible locations.



FIGURE 5.20. HOUSES ARE VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL WITH SLIGHT VARIATIONS OF ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS.

Endnotes

1 Chad Randl, *NPS Preservation Brief 44: The Use of Awnings on Historic Buildings; Repair, Replacement & New Design*, Washington, D.C.: Preservation Assistance Division, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2009.

2 Donna F. Jacobs, *Images of America: Byrnes Downs*, Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008.

Chapter 6: Landscape

Byrnes Downs' most unique feature is its state of completeness and intactness. As a post-World War II subdivision, it is an iconic neighborhood that boasts a strong sense of community. These qualities extend beyond the buildings and into the landscape, as Byrnes Downs exhibits consistency throughout much of its landscape. When new amenities are added, it incorporates these features into the existing landscape fabric.

Prevailing Character

- CONSISTENT, MATURE STREET CANOPIES CREATES VISUALLY ATTRACTIVE STREETSCAPES
- DIVERSITY OF TREES AND PLANTS EXIST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.
- UNIQUE ENTRY SIGNS PROVIDE LANDMARKS AT KEY GATEWAY LOCATIONS



FIGURE 6.1. WELL-MAINTAINED PRIVATE SPACES SUCH AS FRONT YARDS ADD TO THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF BYRNES DOWNS.

Chapter 6 Summary

Public Space

- Byrnes Downs has clearly defined public space, whether it be residential streetscapes or community gathering spaces. The neighborhood articulates these spaces by using natural and human-made features consistent with its early development.
- There are three types of streetscapes in Byrnes Downs: Highway/Major Road, Local Business, and Residential.
- The West Ashley Greenway serves as a passive park space, as well as a connection to adjacent neighborhoods.
- There are a number of streets with mature street trees and other streets where trees have been lost.
- Byrnes Downs has unique entry signs, dating to the original development of the neighborhood, which should be preserved.
- Sothel Street and Yeadon Avenue have intact tree canopies and represent some of the finest streetscapes in the neighborhood.

Private Open Space

- Most front yards consist of lawns with a mix of trees and shrubs.
- Concrete slabs are the most common driveway type but there are others that have parallel strips of hardscape separated by grass or oyster shell.
- The need for privacy and a separation of public and private space has led to several different types of fencing and walls within Byrnes Downs.

Viewsheds

- There are two distinctive viewsheds in Byrnes Downs: Sothel/Yeadon Streetscape Viewshed and the Wetland Viewshed.

Floodplains

- Most of Byrnes Downs falls within the 100 year floodplain zone.
- There are also areas of the neighborhood that fall within a 100-500 year floodplain or wetland zone.

Recommendations will appear at the end of this chapter and are denoted in the text by this symbol. R

Public Space

Byrnes Downs is a mostly residential landscape (with the exception of businesses along Savannah Highway and Daniel Street) with clearly defined public spaces. Generally this public space is associated with roadways or is linear in nature, with little traditional passive open space within the community.

Streetscapes

Byrnes Downs has three distinct streetscape patterns:

- A strip commercial center layout along Savannah Highway
- A neighborhood commercial design along Daniel Street, serving as a gateway into the neighborhood
- A residential street pattern, prevalent throughout the neighborhood

Figure 6.3 on the next page shows the street types and gateways in Byrnes Downs.



FIGURE 6.2. TREE CANOPY ALONG YEADON AVENUE.



FIGURE 6.3. STREET TYPES AND GATEWAYS IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Highway/Major Road Streetscape

Savannah Highway (Figure 6.4) serves as the northern border of the Byrnes Downs community. The south side of Savannah Highway and Daniel Street contain the only commercial land uses within the neighborhood. Its restaurants, businesses, and services (such as the fire station) provide opportunities for residents to interact and socialize. The quality of the built environment promotes pedestrian activity.

There are four 11-foot wide travel lanes and an 11-foot turning lane along Savannah Highway. The pedestrian zone is separated from the travel lanes by on-street parking (8' parking lane). The on-street parking minimizes the feeling that pedestrians are walking along a five-lane highway. A 10-foot wide sidewalk includes street trees (palmettos) and street lighting (Figure 6.5).

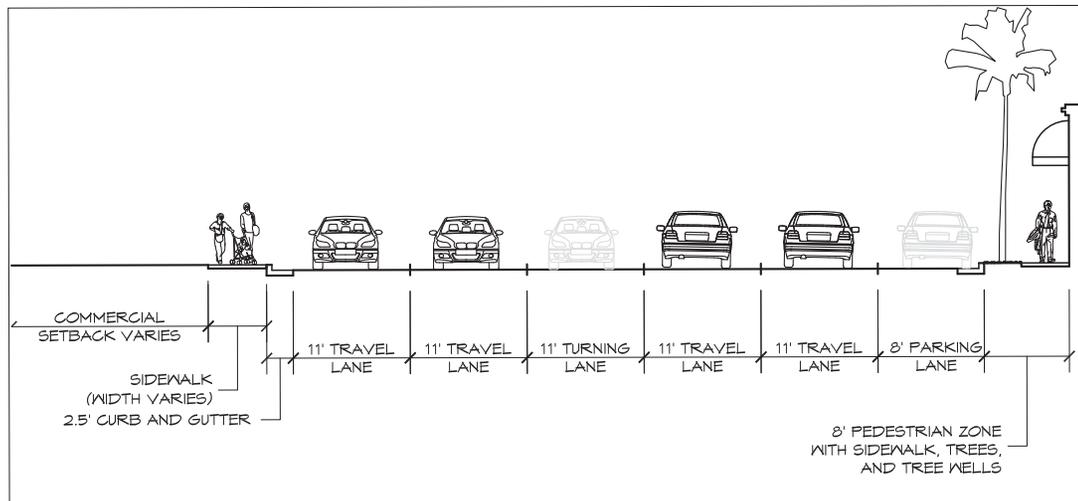


FIGURE 6.4. SAVANNAH HIGHWAY STREET SECTION (LOOKING EAST).



FIGURE 6.5. PALMETTOS ALONG SAVANNAH HIGHWAY.

Local Business Streetscape

Daniel Street is a clearly defined gateway into the community, with its access to Savannah Highway and the Byrnes Downs monument signs on either side of the road. The section of Daniel Street nearest Savannah Highway offers neighborhood commercial stores with angled parking spaces (Figure 6.6). The sidewalks are smaller than those of Savannah Highway and are consistent with sidewalks throughout the neighborhood. There are no street trees or vegetation along this portion of Daniel Street.



FIGURE 6.7. STREET VIEW ALONG DANIEL STREET.

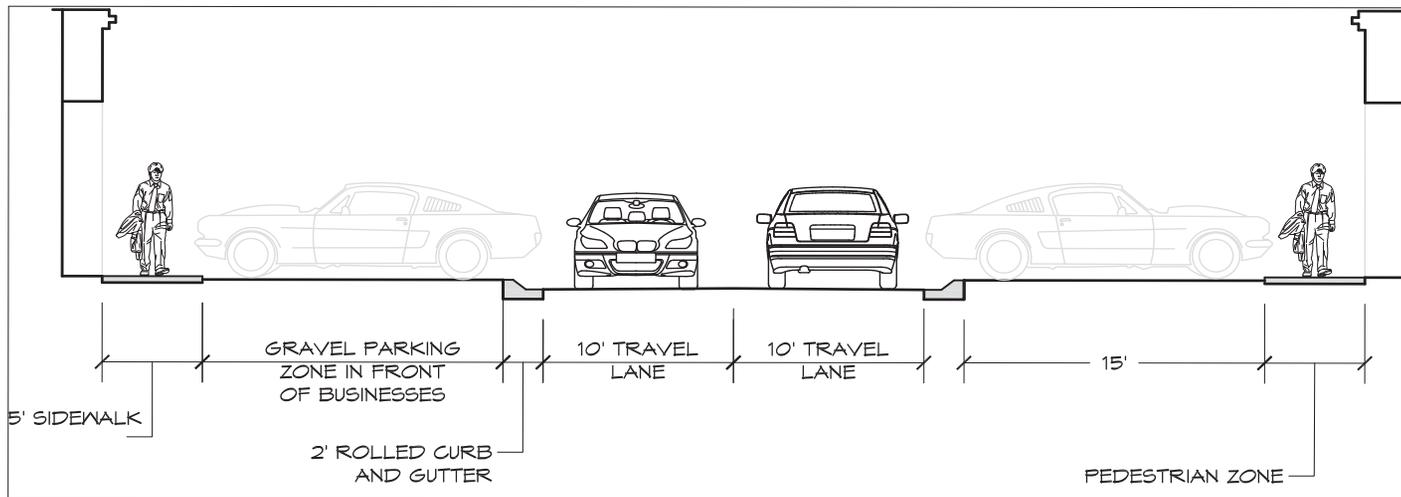


FIGURE 6.6. DANIEL STREET SECTION (LOOKING NORTH).

Residential Streetscape

Byrnes Downs is composed almost entirely of residential land uses, and its streets are consistent with this land pattern. All streets conform to the same design:

- Two-way road lanes
- Rolled curb and gutter
- Vegetated buffer strips 13 feet wide with street trees
- Four-foot wide sidewalks
- Setbacks to house fronts ranging from 30-35 feet



FIGURE 6.8. PLANTING STRIP AND SIDEWALK.

On-street parking occurs regularly throughout the neighborhood with speed bumps located on Nicholson, Campbell, and Yeadon Streets (Figure 6.10).



FIGURE 6.10. PAVED PARKING AREA ALONG PROPERTY ON NICHOLSON STREET.

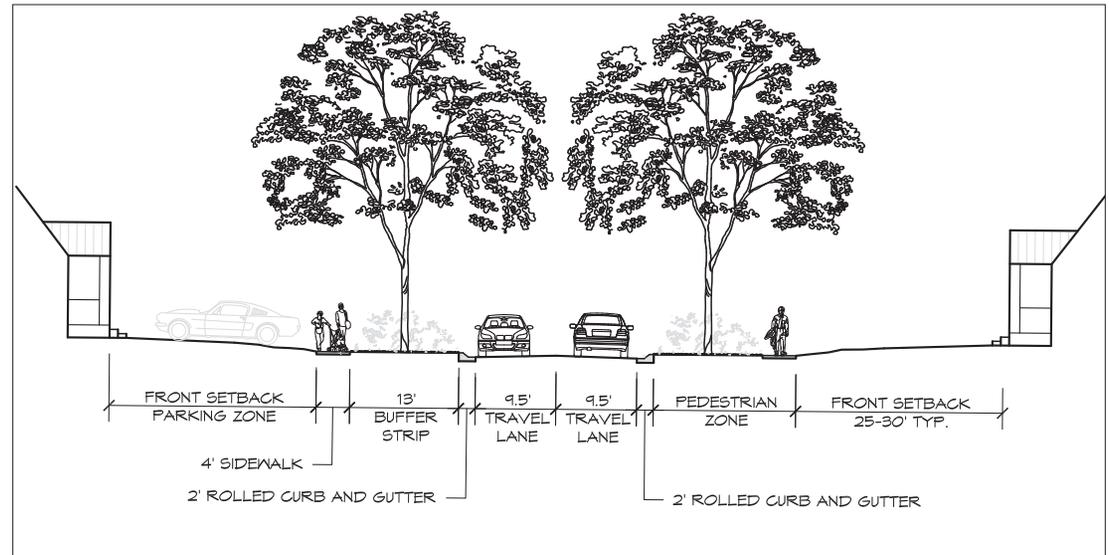


FIGURE 6.9. TYPICAL RESIDENTIAL STREETScape.

Open Space

Byrnes Downs has no official active recreation space. The West Ashley Greenway is incorporated into the neighborhood and there are community gathering spots. **R**



FIGURE 6.11. WEST ASHLEY GREENWAY.

West Ashley Greenway

The West Ashley Greenway is a ten-mile long rail-trail that is part of the larger East Coast Greenway trail network. The eastern portion of the trail runs through several West Ashley neighborhoods, including Byrnes Downs (Figure 6.11). The greenway is a multi-use trail that is mostly unpaved, generally very flat, has multiple entry points, and has varying degrees of right of way/open space. The ten-foot wide path offers opportunities for two-way traffic and it crosses multiple roads, many of which are residential streets.

In Byrnes Downs, the greenway backs up against the rear of properties and crosses a wetland area. In certain locations, the greenway right of way is fairly extensive, providing significant amounts of open space. One location is used by residents of Byrnes Downs for community gatherings and social events.

"Timmerman/Greenway Park"

The west side of Timmerman Drive at the intersection of the West Ashley Greenway is used at times as an unofficial gathering spot for community events, social gatherings, etc. It is an open lawn space adjacent to the greenway that backs up to a fenced lot. The amount of space is sufficient for neighborhood-sized gatherings and holds special significance to members of the nearby community. Byrnes Downs residents hold special outdoor events and holiday gatherings here.



FIGURE 6.12. PARKS AND OPEN SPACE IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Trees and Plantings **R**

Perhaps the most striking feature of these streetscapes, beyond their consistency, is the mature street trees found throughout the neighborhood (Figures 6.13-6.15). These primarily include willows, oaks, palmettos, and crepe myrtles. There are also other species within the public right of way including magnolias, red oaks, and red cedars. Some streets, such as Sothel Avenue and Yeadon Avenue, have retained a consistent tree canopy which provides shade for a majority of the street and front yards. Other streets have not been as successful in retaining their street trees due to disease and weather. In recent years, a few residents have planted azaleas, wisteria, and oleander in the buffer strips. Generally, however, these buffer strips have remained lawn space.



FIGURES 6.13-6.15. A RICH VARIETY OF TREES AND PLANTS CAN BE FOUND IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Sidewalks

Poured-in-place concrete sidewalks are present throughout Byrnes Downs. Their four feet width is somewhat small, and often pedestrians are seen using both the sidewalk and roadway.

Drainage and Utilities

Byrnes Downs is typical of many post-World War II subdivisions in having concrete rolled curb and gutter, providing a smooth transition between the roadway and buffer strip. Stormwater and sanitary sewer are on separate systems throughout the neighborhood.

Overhead utilities provide electricity, telephone, and telecommunication service throughout the neighborhood. Utility poles run the length of one side of each residential street within the buffer strip.



FIGURE 6.16. ENTRY MONUMENT SIGN ALONG TIMMERMAN DRIVE.

Signs R

Byrnes Downs has entry signs dating to the original development of the neighborhood. These signs are character-defining landscape features. Their unique design consists of a brick base and concrete coping with a square pier on top turned 45 degrees. Concrete signs reading “Byrnes Downs” are inset on two sides with brick wing walls emanating from either side (Figure 6.16). The complex design forms voids used for planting with many overgrown by shrubs and vines.

The signs are located in the following places:

- Daniel Street at Savannah Highway (two signs)
- Timmerman Drive, south of Sothel Avenue, adjacent to greenway
- Campbell Drive at Culbertson Drive, adjacent to greenway
- Nicholson Street at Savannah Highway (two signs)
- Campbell Drive at Savannah Highway (two signs)

Private Open Space

The Byrnes Downs community takes pride in its private spaces such as front lawns, rear yards, and drives. The Byrnes Downs Garden Club was a large presence in the neighborhood for a number of years and its members were responsible for recording the history of the community.

Designed Landscapes

Designed residential landscapes are a common feature of Byrnes Downs and have played a significant part of the community's character over the years (Figure 6.17). These landscapes consist of front yards with a mix of trees and shrubs. Foundation plantings consist of a variety of shrubs such as camellias, azaleas, and boxwood. According to local historians, the Formosa azalea is the most common type of azalea in the neighborhood. These themes are often continued into the rear yard, where back decks and patios are a common amenity.



FIGURE 6.17. HISTORICAL PHOTO OF A LANDSCAPED BACKYARD SPACE WITH TERRACE (COURTESY OF MARGARET THORNE SEIDLER).

Driveways

As with other features in the neighborhood, driveways in Byrnes Downs are also consistent in design. The dominant driveway material and design is concrete slabs. A second common type of drive incorporates parallel concrete lanes separated by an area of grass (Figure 6.19). This driveway design is present throughout the Charleston region. A few driveways are more ornate and incorporate brick and concrete pavers in both the drive and the driveway apron.

The driveways have varying lengths. Some are long enough for only one car; others extend to the rear of the property, sometimes to a detached garage or to a fence.

Walkways & Entries

Most houses have concrete walks in line with the front door or which connect to the adjacent driveway. Some are constructed of brick or concrete pavers. These front walks have varying lengths, some extending to the curb, others stopping at the sidewalk. These walks all lead to a series of two or three brick and concrete stairs connecting the walkway to a front stoop or covered porch and front entry.

Fences/Walls R

The need for privacy and a separation of public and private space has led to the construction of several different types of fencing and walls within Byrnes Downs (Figure 6.18). Many are consistent with the building setback and encompass the rear yard. Chain link and wood privacy fences are the most common.

Several properties include fences surrounding the front lawn; these are constructed of wood pickets or brick (Figure 6.20). In addition, some front yards feature small brick retaining walls running along the front property line adjacent to the sidewalk. These are used when there are changes in elevation of six inches or more.

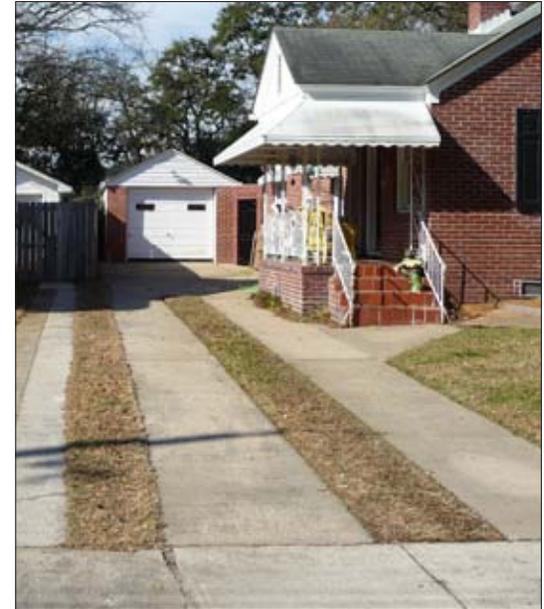


FIGURE 6.19. DRIVEWAYS.



FIGURE 6.18. TYPICAL BRICK WALL.



FIGURE 6.20. BRICK COLUMNS WITH IRON GATE.

Water Features

The most significant water feature within the Byrnes Downs neighborhood is the wetland marsh bordering the West Ashley Greenway and twenty-six properties within the community (Figure 6.21). The northern side of the greenway is lower land with a high water table. As a result, concrete drainage canals have been constructed to drain stormwater and groundwater away from these properties to the marsh area, just to the south of the greenway. The water then travels through a culvert under the greenway into a larger area of wetlands. Chemical and biological environments have caused algae to grow on the north side of the culvert, with clear water on the south side. The drainage canals and greenways include protective railings.



FIGURE 6.21. WETLAND AND MARSH ALONG THE WEST ASHLEY GREENWAY.

Viewsheds

Sothel/Yeadon Viewshed

Sothel and Yeadon Avenues are tree-lined streets running east-west through the neighborhood with an intact tree canopy and consistent building setbacks (Figure 6.22). As a result, the view down either street provides an aesthetically pleasing viewshed that represents the historic legacy of the community.

Wetland Viewshed

26 properties in the Byrnes Downs neighborhood back up to the wetland marsh. These properties are valued because the views include natural settings which provide a screen from properties across the marsh.

Floodplains

Floodplains are the flat bottomlands adjacent to river channels. Floodplains naturally support riparian corridors and provide important natural habitats.

Most of Byrnes Downs falls within the 100 year floodplain zone (Figure 6.23). The area shown in dark green is subject to 100-year floods (flood insurance required and flood management standards apply). The northern area of the neighborhood (shown in light green) closest to Savannah Highway is not in the 100-year flood zone, but between 100 years and 500 years (subject to 100 year flood w/ average depths less than one foot). Wetlands (shown in blue) exist to the southern edge and only cover a small amount of area within the neighborhood's boundaries.



FIGURE 6.22. YEADON AVENUE VIEWSHED.



FIGURE 6.23. EXISTING FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS IN BYRNES DOWNS.

Chapter 6 Recommendations

- Establish a consistent tree maintenance plan and/or a supplemental tree planting plan to enable the canopy to continue to develop.
- Chain link fences are non-contributing and should be avoided.
- Fences located along the front property line are out of character with the historical landscape pattern of the neighborhood and should be avoided.
- More active park space is needed within the neighborhood, including a community playground.
- The unique entry signs date to the original development of the neighborhood and should be preserved.



FIGURE 6.25. ENTRY MONUMENT SIGNAGE IN BYRNES DOWNS.



FIGURE 7.1. YEADON AVENUE STREET SIGN WITH BYRNES DOWNS NEIGHBORHOOD SIGN.

Chapter 7: Preservation & Integrity

The most unique aspect of the Byrnes Downs neighborhood is its preservation of sense of place. Many individual homes have been altered, but after nearly 70 years of existence, the neighborhood is immediately recognizable. The neighborhood character is remarkably intact, primarily because of restrictive covenants that were put in place from the beginning. The covenants prevented homeowners from building garages up close to the street or establishing home businesses.

Chapter 7 Summary

Character/Integrity

- Lack of maintenance of the houses is a threat to the quality and character of the neighborhood.
- Although additions have been made to some homes in the neighborhood, the general scale and character are still very much intact.
- Character elements most important to preserve in Byrnes Downs include neighborhood form, architectural details, and trees.
- Areas along Savannah Highway are the most threatened in the neighborhood.
- The Coburg Dairy Farm is one of the largest undeveloped pieces of property in West Ashley. Its future development will directly affect Byrnes Downs.

Preservation Efforts

- The Commercial Corridor Design Review Board (CCDRB) oversees the development of and has review over demolitions along Savannah Highway.
- There are currently no properties on the National Register of Historic Places in Byrnes Downs.

Recommendations will appear at the end of this chapter and are denoted in the text by this symbol. R



FIGURE 7.2. TRANSITION BETWEEN COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL USES ALONG DANIEL STREET.

Character/Integrity

For the most part, Byrnes Downs's historic character is very much intact. Properties fronting Yeadon Avenue, Craven Avenue, and Sothel Avenue are viewed by residents to have well-preserved character. These streets and blocks have maintained a good stock of homes exemplifying historic character. Well-preserved tree canopies on Yeadon, Craven and Sothel Street make these among the best preserved streetscapes in Byrnes Downs.

Campbell Street and Ludwell Street also exhibit good streetscape qualities, although not as much as Yeadon Avenue. Ludwell is considered to have good sidewalks and trees and is seen as a pleasant, quiet street.

Areas With Transitional Qualities

There are some areas in Byrnes Downs that are threatened or susceptible to loss of character (Figure 7.3). The area shown in red indicates areas of the neighborhood observed to have the most loss of character. The biggest threat to maintaining a cohesive neighborhood character is the width and traffic volumes of Savannah Highway.

Mobility within the Byrnes Downs neighborhood is not a problem, but moving between adjacent neighborhoods and local destinations can sometimes be difficult. With new businesses opening in the St. Andrews Shopping Center by summer 2009, the area may be impacted with additional automobile traffic. **R**



FIGURE 7.3. THREATENED AREAS MAP.

Preservation Efforts

Charleston's Historic Preservation Plan, adopted in 2008, recognizes the importance of Charleston's non-peninsular neighborhoods. It was through that plan that this Area Character Appraisal was recommended to document the historic resources of Byrnes Downs, Old Windermere and other neighborhoods west of the Ashley River.

Commercial Corridor Design Review Board (CCDRB)

The purpose of the Commercial Corridor Design Review Board is "to protect and enhance the visual character and economic value of the City's major commercial corridors." Savannah Highway is currently under the purview of the CCDRB. This requires review before any demolition of structures over 50 years old fronting these roads, and for any exterior work permits for non-residential structures or multi-family residential structures. This includes new construction as well as exterior repairs, additions, alterations, and painting. Properties along these corridors must also conform to basic signage standards required by the CCDRB. This applies to all new and existing development.

National Register Properties

Currently, there are no properties in Byrnes Downs that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are also no historic easements or covenants on any properties within the neighborhood.

Some properties identified in the Architecture chapter serve as outstanding properties, but no residential structure would be under individual consideration for the National Register at this time. However, there is an excellent stock of housing in Byrnes Downs that may be eligible someday.

The Coburg Dairy Sign is a distinct community landmark and may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (Figure 7.4). R



FIGURE 7.4. COBURG DAIRY SIGN WILL BE ELIGIBLE IN 2009 AS A HISTORIC OBJECT IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES.

Conservation Districts

The Charleston Preservation Plan recognizes the historical and architectural importance of Byrnes Downs, Old Windermere, and other Charleston neighborhoods located off the peninsula. Without some sort of protection in place, these neighborhoods could be particularly susceptible to character loss. **R**

The Plan recommends the use of conservation districts in order to help preserve neighborhoods like Byrnes Downs. Conservation districts are those areas recognized to have historic value, but with slightly less priority than historic districts. Design Review of these districts, therefore, should be less strict and should focus on major character-defining elements, while being more relaxed in other areas compared to an historic district.

The recommended conservation district for Byrnes Downs is shown by the boundaries on Figure 7.5. Areas of the neighborhood along Savannah Highway are under the purview of the Commercial Corridor Design Review Board, and should continue to be.¹



FIGURE 7.5. RECOMMENDED CONSERVATION DISTRICT.

Included in the potential Byrnes Downs Conservation District are parcels fronting the following streets:

- Yeadon Avenue
- Craven Avenue
- Sothel Avenue
- Ludwell Avenue
- Lyttleton Avenue
- Daniel Street
- Nicholson Avenue
- Timmerman Avenue
- Campbell Avenue
- Colleton Avenue
- Tynte Avenue

Chapter 7 Recommendations

- Code enforcement of properties will help ensure maintenance and upkeep of properties.
- The implementation of a conservation zoning overlay district will help preserve the character of the neighborhood. The conservation district should at minimum, provide review over demolitions. Other consideration should be given to review over new construction and/or significant alterations to character-defining features.
- Submit an application to the National Register of Historic Places to add the Coburg Dairy Sign as a national historic object.
- Efforts should be undertaken to improve pedestrian safety in this area, especially intersections where pedestrian crossings occur along Savannah Highway.

Endnotes

1 Page & Turnbull, *Vision, Community, Heritage: A Preservation Plan for Charleston, South Carolina*, 2008.

Chapter 8: Adjacent Conditions

Byrnes Downs is located in the heart of the West Ashley community. It is surrounded by other thriving residential neighborhoods, commercial areas, undeveloped land, and natural areas. Understanding the surrounding conditions will allow Byrnes Downs to better plan its long-term preservation.



FIGURE 8.1. AVONDALE POINT BUSINESS DISTRICT AT THE INTERSECTION OF MAGNOLIA ROAD AND SAVANNAH HIGHWAY.

Chapter 8 Summary

Adjacent Neighborhoods & Districts

- Byrnes Downs is adjacent to Old Windermere, South Windermere, and Westwood neighborhoods.
- There are two main shopping areas near Byrnes Downs: the Avondale Point District and St. Andrews Center.
- The commercial areas are thriving and some are being redeveloped. This will affect traffic and transitional areas in Byrnes Downs which sit along Savannah Highway.

Relations With Neighboring Communities

- The Ashley Bridge District Association represents Byrnes Downs and others in West Ashley.
- St. Andrews Center’s recent renovation will impact Byrnes Downs residents.
- The Coburg Dairy Farm remains one of the largest undeveloped tracts of land in West Ashley.

Recommendations will appear at the end of this chapter and are denoted in the text by this symbol. R

Adjacent Neighborhoods & Districts

Byrnes Downs is directly adjacent to both the Old Windermere neighborhood to the west and South Windermere to the south. All three neighborhoods abut at St. Andrews School of Math and Science. Directly across Savannah Highway to the north is Westwood. There are two main shopping areas located at the edges of Byrnes Downs: the Avondale Point District and St. Andrews Center.

Byrnes Downs is one of several neighborhoods in West Ashley that will face growth pressure as the Charleston region prospers. Some key issues that face Byrnes Downs include the following:

- Slightly transitional areas occur at the edges and along major thoroughfares.
- Redevelopment of St. Andrews Center may impact local traffic along Savannah Highway and some streets within Byrnes Downs.
- The Coburg Dairy farm is one of the largest, undeveloped pieces of real estate in West Ashley and will be a prime target for future development.

The Avondale Point business district is located immediately adjacent to Byrnes Downs and centered along Savannah Highway (Figure 8.1). Although the area was in a state of decline for several years in the 1980s and 1990s, it is now a thriving business district with retail stores and restaurants. Other stretches of Savannah Highway in close proximity are seen by Byrnes Downs residents as attractive with good amenities and tree preservation.

St. Andrews Center is located at 901 Savannah Highway, just west of Byrnes Downs at the corner of Savannah Highway and Coburg Road. The

shopping center was built in 1959 on sixteen acres owned by Parish Realty Corporation, then operated by the Hanckel Family (Figure 8.2). It cost \$1.25 million to build the shopping center, which boasted 27 stores and 1,000 parking spaces.

The 146,200 square foot retail center is a typical strip commercial center. The L-shaped complex now consists of 18 retail stores and restaurants. None of the original tenants remain; the closest parallel is Mooney's Barber Shop, which is in the same location that Hudson's Barber Shop occupied 50 years ago.



FIGURE 8.2. SAINT ANDREWS CENTER IN 1959.

Relations With Neighboring Communities

Ashley Bridge District Association **R**

The Ashley Bridge District includes the neighborhoods of Albemarle Point, Byrnes Downs, The Crescent, Moreland, Old Windermere, South Windermere, Wappoo Heights, and Westwood. Each neighborhood has its own association, but all of the involved neighborhoods joined forces in the mid-1990s to implement the Ashley Bridge District Plan. Since then, the communities have worked together as a district to tackle implementation of traffic improvements, pedestrian safety measures, landscaping, and appearance improvements.

Area Character Appraisals

As part of this study, workshops were held to solicit community input on the process and to gain valuable insight from residents about important aspects of the neighborhood. Because an appraisal was also being done for Old Windermere simultaneously, joint public workshops were held for both communities.

New Developments

There is one recent redevelopment project that may directly affect Byrnes Downs. The St. Andrews Center received a \$13 million makeover and was completed in 2009. A 52,000 square foot Harris Teeter supermarket now anchors the shopping center (Figure 8.3).

The redevelopment included new construction and tearing down part of the existing structure, the old Kerrisons department store facade. New trees, landscaping, and lighting were also added to the center.

Potential Character Issues

The Coburg Dairy Farm is one of the largest, undeveloped pieces of real estate in West Ashley (Figure 8.4). Its prime location and amount of land could make it very desirable for new development in the years ahead. If the land is developed with more intensive uses, this could dramatically change the area. Viewsheds from the back of homes along Colleton Street would be affected. **R**



FIGURE 8.3. HARRIS TEETER GROCERY STORE.



FIGURE 8.4. ENTRANCE TO COBURG DAIRY.

Chapter 8 Recommendations

- The Ashley Bridge District Association should continue to promote the long-term physical and economic improvement of the West Ashley region.
- Establish a conservation easement on the Coburg property to help preserve open space and viewsheds in West Ashley.

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