

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is an increasingly important issue both in the entire Charleston region and on Johns Island in particular. The City of Charleston defines “affordable housing” as housing that is affordable to households making up to 120 percent of the area median income (AMI) for owner-occupied units and 80 percent of AMI for rental units, adjusted for number of persons in the household. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) publishes the area median income for the Charleston/North Charleston Metropolitan Statistical Area annually. “Affordable” is generally defined as housing that does not require a household to spend more than 30 percent of its monthly income on housing costs.

Increasing land costs, the desirability of the Charleston market, and the national and international interest in owning homes and real estate in Charleston all play a role in increasing the cost of housing. The low wages earned in most jobs in the Charleston area and the stagnancy of the area median income over the last several years lend to difficulty in many achieving the goal of homeownership or the necessity of providing larger subsidies to close the affordability gap. Given the complexity of the issue and the lack of definitive

information on complete housing affordability within the project area, thorough research is needed to fully document the level of housing affordability. The inclusion of affordable housing will ensure that Johns Island continues to be a diverse community representing various sectors of the citizenry in this area of the city.

Recommendations

The City of Charleston should adopt incentivized inclusionary zoning as part of the establishment of the form-based code Century V Plan amendment.

Incentivized Inclusionary Zoning is a legal tool which encourages the private sector to include a percentage of affordable units as part of a market rate development. The fundamental purpose of incentivized inclusionary zoning is to allow the development of affordable housing to become an integral part of new development taking place in a community. A typical incentivized inclusionary zoning ordinance will set forth a minimum percentage of units to be provided in specific development affordable households at a particular income level, generally defined as a percentage of the median household income. The goal is to establish a relatively permanent stock of affordable housing units provided by the private market. In many ordinances, the municipality provides some form of incentive to the developer in return for the provision of affordable housing. These incentives can take the form of

waivers of zoning requirements, including density, area, height, open space, use or other provisions; local tax abatements; waiver of permit fees or land dedication; fewer required developer-provided amenities and acquisitions of property; “fast-track” permitting; and/or the subsidization or provision of infrastructure for the developer by the jurisdiction.” (“Inclusionary Zoning: A Viable Solution to the Affordable Housing Crisis?”, Dr. Robert W. Burchell and Catherine C. Galley, the Center for Housing Policy)

The targeted percentage should reflect the current income distribution within the planning area, but the recommendation is for no less than 30% of new housing on Johns Island to be affordable/workforce. Exact levels of densities permitted for including affordable and/or workforce housing should be addressed/justified via a thorough housing strategy for Johns Island. This housing strategy should respect the location quotient aspect of affordable housing—i.e., analyzing from where employers are attracting employees from in a geographical sense. The opportunity to reduce commuting traffic, energy use, and unwanted congestion is a desire of the Johns Island residents as a whole.

The City should adopt a tiered set of incentives for affordable housing. Specifically, implementing ordinances for this plan should provide the strongest incentives for developers building homes, condominiums, and apartments for households earning annually 30% to 80% of the AMI, along with lesser incentives for households earning 80-120% of AMI. This tiered system would give more flexibility and perhaps permit more housing units depending on the income range to be targeted.

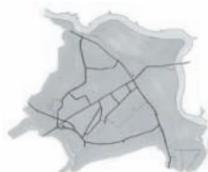
Establish a committee (Johns Island Affordable Housing Committee) that comprises City’s Department of Housing, Charleston Housing Authority, County housing authority, and non-profits charged with providing affordable housing (such as Sea Island Habitat for Humanity,

Lowcountry Housing Trust, Humanities Foundation) that will collaborate on locations within and outside the UGB for affordable housing, as well as share resources to further building construction, affordability, and home ownership. This group can be formed to do a more in-depth study of the need for affordable housing as well as implement the recommendations of this plan.

The Johns Island Form-Based Code should specify different levels and types of incentives that will be available depending on the proportion of affordable homes the developer commits to build or the extent of assistance the developer will offer to non-profit builders to construct these homes. Developers should be allowed to fulfill their affordable housing commitments in the planning area by partnering with non-profit builders. The City should continue to provide assistance to non-profit developers to build affordable housing. For instance, assistance could be in the form of absorbing infrastructure costs, offering financial assistance and/or land, providing City-administered federal and state housing programs subsidies, and other means. Some incentives to be considered are:

- (a) Expedited permitting;
- (b) Reduction or waiver of permit and other fees;
- (c) Reduction and deferral, reimbursement, or waiver of impact fees;
- (d) Incentivized density for the inclusion of affordable housing. Number of units would be determined by (i) the number of proposed units allowed under current zoning and (ii) the targeted homebuyers for the affordable units. Such units shall carry deed restrictions limiting the resale of the property to income-eligible buyers at a reasonable price within a given period of time.

During the calibration of the proposed form-based code, the City should examine the exemption of affordable units in the density count of proposed settlements within the study area on Johns Island. **These incentives may be refined based on the recommendations to be made by the Affordable Housing Incentive Taskforce.



JOHNS ISLAND COMMUNITY PLANNING WORKSHOP

The City of Charleston, Department of Planning, Preservation & Economic Innovation

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Affordable Housing

The Johns Island Form-Based Code should permit accessory dwellings in all zones. Accessory units can provide more-affordable housing for many more people than can be housed through stand-alone housing projects.

The City should consider expanding its current owner-occupied housing rehabilitation program to Johns Island. The program would assist low- to moderate-income homeowners to address maintenance and construction issues and allow them to remain in their houses and on Johns Island.

Rental Housing. As with homeownership, the provision of affordable rental housing for residents at various income levels is crucial to the life of a community. Currently, the City's Housing Authority owns and manages twenty-four rental properties on Johns Island. The City also works with both nonprofit and for profit housing developers to build rental housing in other areas of the City. The City should seek to enhance opportunities for rental through continued partnerships with developers to ensure that this segment of need is addressed. Further, the City should seek opportunities for acquisition of property to complement the affordable housing efforts being implemented by the private and nonprofit sectors.



Economic Opportunities

Johns Island, with its rural character and rustic charm, presents opportunities for economic development, which can provide for the creation of shops, businesses and commercial uses that allow the residents to work close to where they live as the evolution of the area within the UGB occurs. The UGB also maintains and protects the more agricultural, locally-based opportunities offered in the outlying areas. With its quaint, rural feel, this agriculturally-based economy can be supplemented by economic development opportunities that complement the allure of this great place. Johns Island has a strong sense of self and a tremendous sense of pride and protection for its unique agronomical and undisturbed character. Economic development visions for Johns Island must embody this temperament and help foster the creation of shops and other commercial activities that support these activities.

As reported by the Pearce Group in a Post and Courier special in the fall of 2007, large-scale farming may not be able to regenerate due to the exorbitant land costs across the greater metropolitan area. However, smaller, niche farming is growing in popularity and has a home-base awaiting on Johns Island. Furthermore, the study and subsequent report by the Pearce Group states that “remaining African-Americans on heirs property lands could be given specialized technical assistance to readapt their families’ historic farm skills to current practices and market demands, employing improved technology and far less grueling stoop labor than in the past.”

Furthermore, the Pearce Group reinforces the recommendations of the Johns Island Community Plan to support local growers, local seafood produce, and local businesses by establishing a Charleston-region food distribution system. The Pearce Group supports this recommendation by saying “Couldn’t the region lead America, not lag, in today’s strong movement toward fresher, more local and more nutritious foods? Great foods from one’s own sea and soils is a perfect fit to the themes poised to give the Charleston area its distinctive 21st-century brand: preservation, restoration, new technologies and inventive use of incredible historic resources. A sustainable Lowcountry future, we’d argue, depends on it.”

Johns Island’s strengths for economic development include: (1)

talent/skill based strengths; (2) geographical strengths; and, (3) logistical strengths.

Talent/skill based strengths include:

--The agricultural assets of the Island provide locally grown produce, local seafood, farm grown flowers and local artisan’s crafts. Engaging the non-profit, Lowcountry Local First, to help promote buying locally could further support these assets.

--Explore opportunities to further smaller, niche agricultural that will maintain the rural character of Johns Island while promoting economic development.

--The superb potential to expand upon the already existing talent base of craftspeople for fine luxury, custom home items such as cabinetry, countertops, landscaping, tile and stone work, pools and fountains, millwork, ironwork, etc. The owners of the many custom homes of Kiawah and Seabrook and the Johns Island area in general are potential consumers.

--The ability for Charleston area interior designers to easily build upon the businesses described above and develop showrooms, design studios and businesses for oriental rugs, gas lanterns, plantation shutters, woven natural shades, plumbing fixtures, decorative lighting fixtures, cabinetry accessories, custom built closets, etc.

Geographical strengths include:

--The natural beauty of the rustic environment, including beautiful landscapes, abundant live oaks and tree canopied roadways, all cradled between peaceful waterways.

--A strong sense of agricultural history, with many agriculturally-based businesses already in place. This could be expanded by greater marketing of locally grown products to Charleston area restaurants and markets and building upon the dynamic and explosive organic food industry. Natural farming products are highly sought-after. Farms where people can pick their own produce, educational field trips for children and hosting workshops on a variety of topics (such as growing organic fruits and vegetables, canning techniques, gardening tips, etc.) at local farms could be very enticing. Coordination with the SC National Heritage Corridor’s efforts to enhance Ag-Tourism should be explored on Johns Island.

--Support local growers, local seafood produce, and local businesses by establishing a Charleston-region food distribution system.

--The great location for corporate retreats. A high end resort such as Blackberry Farm in Tennessee would serve a unique niche.

--The ability to have equestrian based businesses (due to the nature of the secluded, rustic atmosphere of Johns Island).

--The environment for outdoor recreational activities that creates the inherent need for more businesses that embrace ecotourism and outdoor recreation such as a kayak rental business, boat sales and rentals, fishing, boat tours, bird watching, camping, hiking, etc.

--The Johns Island Executive Airport, which would support concierge-like businesses such as a small, gourmet market featuring fresh local produce, or a car-rental facility/gas station that will be provided for on the airport site.

Other strengths include:

--The Johns Island Executive Airport, with runways long enough for many varieties of jet aircraft (including modified 50 seat jets). This provides opportunities for easy travel in and out of this verdant retreat.

--The availability of water and sewer in much of the designated growth area.

--The potential future connection to the greater Charleston region via the Mark Clark Expressway Extension (I-526).

--The great potential for residential development along Maybank Highway.

--The visitors to Kiawah and Seabrook, as well as the wealth of many of the area residents.

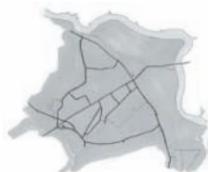
--The three planned mixed-use centers along Maybank Highway.

--Apply relevant principles from the SC Agriculture Commissioner’s marketing plan for in-state grown products – labeled ‘certified SC’ – to plans being generated by Johns Island business/farming coalition.

A befitting economic development plan for Johns Island must be mindful of the challenges of the area, including (1) the limited capacity of the existing road system; (2) the relatively high cost of land (because of the island’s beauty, waterfront access and rural charm); (3) the current lack of a broad base of industrial development; and (4) the need to improve the quality of local schools.

The residents of Johns Island have desires and wishes for the progression of the area, and these concerns are of the utmost importance. Their sentimental attachment to the character and unique nature of Johns Island is evident and duly noted. Furthermore, the residents have expressed a need for an increase in basic services such as a local market to sell locally grown produce, local seafood, farm-grown flowers and artisan’s crafts, grocery stores, pharmacies, office supply stores, hardware stores, other retail shops, restaurants (particularly those with a local flavor), childcare and preschool options and other services such as banking, legal, accounting, and employment services businesses. There is also a need for increased medical services, such as an emergency outpatient clinic that would likely fulfill a great need in the area. Other basic medical services such as pediatric care, family practice care and ob/gyn care are needed as well.

The Johns Island area should be the subject of a market study to carefully consider the area’s potential for economic development opportunities. The land use element of any such study should designate special “Work Zones” for two areas of Johns Island that have historically been work centers. The first area, located near the middle of Maybank Highway, abuts several light industrial businesses and an office/light industrial/flex space business park. The second area, located adjacent to the Johns Island Executive Airport, currently houses a few light industrial businesses and offers the potential for more job generating uses. The intent of these “Work Zones” is to conserve the land earmarked for economic development and to discourage residential housing in these areas.



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Economic Opportunities

Parks and Recreation Existing Conditions

The study area includes two key public park spaces, the City's Johns Island Park (located along Brownswood Road, near the intersection of Maybank and Main Roads) and the Angel Oak Park (also near the aforementioned intersection in the south-west quadrant). The Johns Island Park meets current population needs for park space for recreational fields and other active recreational activities - it is classified as a "Neighborhood Park" in the City's parks hierarchy. The Angel Oak Park is a passive "Civic" park, and hosts visitors to the world famous oak as well as special events.

As the population within the Urban Growth Boundary increases, green spaces and future park and recreational needs will become critical issues on Johns Island. Given Johns Island's unique Sea Island character, it is also important that these spaces reflect the character of Johns Island. For example, access to water is a key element of traditional Johns Island lifestyles. Thus, acquisition of public waterfront access should be a top priority for green space and parks planning. Waterfront access opportunities can be as simple as locations for crabbing docks and views of waterfront vistas or be more active places such as launching areas for canoes and kayak "blue ways" systems.

This plan recommends examining all new developments for opportunities to provide functional green space. Each new development that adheres to the recommended form-based code for Johns Island should have its design centered on such green spaces. Furthermore, this code should promote/educate developers/applicants on the various types of green spaces that are appropriate within each transect zone. These spaces may be small locations for just enjoying trees and sunshine or larger locations for basketball games or organized youth activities. But the key to the success of future developments on Johns Island involves proper inclusion of and planning around such green spaces. Lots may be made smaller to accommodate these spaces, but with proper design, the look and neighborhood character of the development will be valued more than the open spaces traditional large-lot-only developments have presented.

The City of Charleston Parks Plan anticipates the need for an additional neighborhood park of between 7 and 30 acres on Johns Island. Given that much of the new development within the UGB is occurring near the Maybank and River intersection, it is recommended that such a park space be located within a mile of this intersection.

Johns Island is filled with unique land features that would create unparalleled opportunities for parks and green spaces. Just as the new Whitney Lake development has centered its design on the beauty of Whitney Lake, future developments should also plan around these unique features and natural amenities. Manmade and natural lakes, creeks, wetlands, and, of course, waterfront properties should all be evaluated in this regard.

A number of tracts of land exist near the edge of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), or perhaps just outside of it, that could serve as future green space or for recreational needs. One such need the City of Charleston will have in its future is for an additional public golf course. It is possible that this course could be located in one of these "urban fringe" areas of Johns Island, helping to reinforce the Urban Growth Boundary and "surround the City with green" as the City's Century V City Plan directs. These fringe areas may also serve as preserved green spaces that could still contain active agricultural/forestry operations that continue to exist while the development rights have been acquired or transferred.

Recommendations

Acquire public access to water and waterfront areas. The City, via a thorough study, should identify the most appropriate and feasible locations for open space acquisition. The City should purchase key open space opportunities in the future that provide public access to amenities that typically take privatized form. In order to fund these acquisitions on a "forever" basis, the City should coordinate with all future developers to implement a real estate transfer fee on planned residential units at a percentage fee of .25% of the sales price. Instead of having the real estate transfer fee being discretionary with the South Carolina State Delegation, the City should recommend that the fee be via a contract with each future developer/development on Johns Island. The proposed contract should incorporate the following purposes:

- To acquire fee and less than fee interest in land while

it is still available to be held in perpetuity as wildlife preserves are believed to be needed by the public in the future for active and passive recreation uses and scenic easements to include the following type of land: ocean, harbor, and pond frontage in the form of beaches, dunes, and adjoining backlands; barrier beaches; fresh and saltwater marshes and adjoining uplands; land for bicycle paths; land protecting existing and future public water supply, well fields, highway buffering, and aquifer recharge areas; and land for wildlife preserves; land for future public recreational facilities.

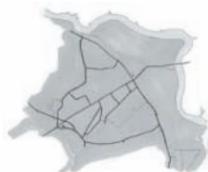
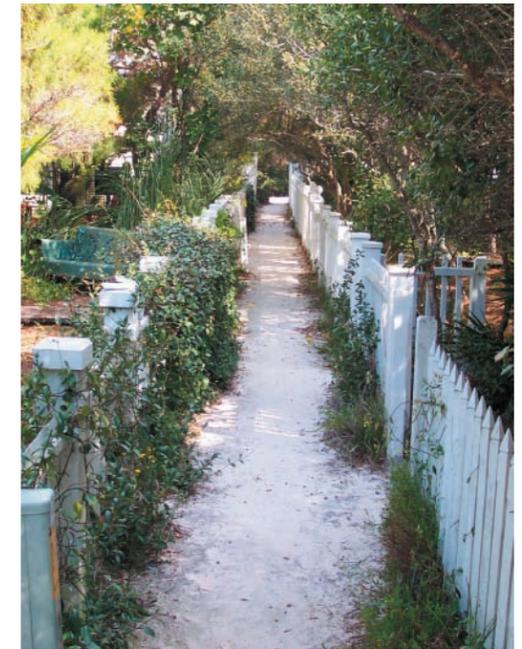
- To acquire already developed land or development rights in order to convert its use to a public use, to restore the property to open space, or to re-define that property in accordance with the City's current Comprehensive Plan and dispose of it as soon as possible.

The City should continue discussions with Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission to identify potential sites for water access that would allow opportunities for crabbing, shrimping, resting, and/or launching a kayak/canoe or boat into the surrounding water bodies, as well as to address other park needs on Johns Island.

Public parks and green spaces should be required in all new developments. Development standards tailored specifically to Johns Island should be developed to determine exact sizes and amenities needed for such spaces via the calibration of the recommended form-based code.

The City of Charleston should seek to acquire land within a one-mile radius of the Maybank/River Road intersection for use as an additional neighborhood park. This parkland could be assembled through cooperative arrangements with planned/proposed developments in this area and/or in conjunction with a new Charleston County School District school facility in this area. (Illustration 10).

The potential for larger green spaces/parks at the Urban Growth Boundary or just beyond should be analyzed. Study these areas for potential long range larger scale recreational needs, such as a new public golf course, or simply preserved green space in line with the goals of the Century V City Plan. This concept should also be studied and developed in conjunction with the SCDOT Roadside Management Standards to retain, restore, and enhance the visual quality of Johns



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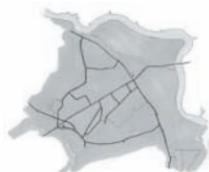
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Open Space & Recreation

Islands scenic roadways.

Explore opportunities for providing additional ballfields on Johns Island to serve growing population. This effort can be coordinated with Charleston County School District.

Investigate possibility of coordinating water access/blueways trail plans with the SC National Heritage Corridor program to further and share resources.



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Open Space & Recreation