

**CHAPTER OVERVIEWS
&
IMPLEMENTATION SECTIONS**

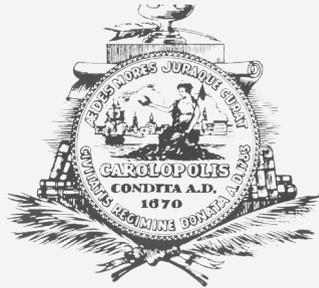
PLAN WEST ASHLEY



CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA



Prepared for:



City of Charleston, SC

**West Ashley
Revitalization Commission**

**West Ashley
Community Members**

Charleston City Council

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Ratification
Number 2018-016

A N O R D I N A N C E

TO AMEND THE CITY OF CHARLESTON CENTURY V 2010 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE, ADOPTED BY CHARLESTON CITY COUNCIL ON FEBRUARY 22, 2011, TO INCORPORATE THE CHAPTER OVERVIEWS AND PLAN IMPLEMENTATION SECTIONS OF PLAN WEST ASHLEY, DATED DECEMBER 28, 2017, SAID OVERVIEWS AND IMPLEMENTATION SECTIONS BEING ATTACHED TO THIS ORDINANCE AS EXHIBIT A. (AS AMENDED)

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBERS OF CHARLESTON, IN CITY COUNCIL ASSEMBLED:

Section 1. The City of Charleston Century V 2010 Comprehensive Plan Update, adopted by Charleston City Council on February 22, 2011, is hereby amended by incorporating therein the Chapter Overview and Plan Implementation Sections of Plan West Ashley, dated December 28, 2017, said Overviews and Plan Implementation Sections being attached to this Ordinance as Exhibit A and incorporated herein by reference.

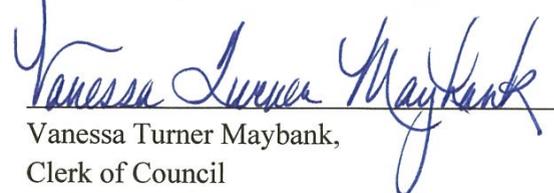
Section 2. This Ordinance shall become effective upon ratification.

Ratified in City Council this 26th day of
February in the Year of Our Lord, 2018,
and in the 242nd Year of the Independence of
the United States of America



John J. Tecklenburg, Mayor

ATTEST:



Vanessa Turner Maybank,
Clerk of Council



2

COMMUNITY DESIGN & LAND USE

EXISTING CONDITIONS	2.4
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IMPLEMENTATION	2.46

UPGRADED

Community Design & Land Use

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- The vast area “west of the Ashley” includes land within the City of Charleston, Charleston County, and St. Andrews Public Service District (PSD). City and County boundaries in West Ashley are intermingled and confusing, presenting planning and service challenges.
- Settlement in West Ashley dates to 1670 (Charles Towne Landing). Development has generally progressed from the east to the west. The Post-War period saw rapid expansion of suburban bedroom communities and small businesses. In the 1970s, West Ashley’s commercial corridors became lined with shopping centers and strip malls.
- West Ashley’s aging commercial corridors contain building sites with the greatest opportunity for change and improvement.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- The West Ashley community wants to preserve its unique neighborhood character.
- West Ashley’s community character and identity is weakened by vacant strip malls, generic and aging shopping centers, and lack of identity at entryways.
- Many residents commute to work outside West Ashley, which contributes to traffic problems and decreases to quality of life.
- Many residents also are required to drive for shopping, dining, entertainment (particularly west of 526).
- There is a strong community belief that growth, particularly high density growth, happened in West Ashley without full regard to the infrastructure needed to support the growth and how this growth would impact the existing residential character.

VISION

Grow in the right places, in the right ways:

- Preserve neighborhood character; focus new development in clear, identified areas.
- Enhance community brand and identity.
- Reuse vacant commercial sites, and improve the character of those sites.
- Shorten trips with new work, entertainment, and recreation destinations.
- Provide better infrastructure to support the growing population.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Formally adopt the *Plan West Ashley* vision.
- Coordinate implementation activities with Charleston County, Regional and State planning bodies.
- Develop community engagement strategies to improve communication, education, and participation for residents around locally important community design and land use issues.
- Develop a set of urban design principles for key sites and corridors.
- Establish a joint City/County Design Review Board (DRB) for key commercial corridors.
- Establish a West Ashley Community Brand & Identity Committee.
- Pursue neighborhood preservation.
- Draft and adopt mixed-use regulatory standards to replace and modernize existing zoning, to guide new development on commercial corridors, entryways, and other focused priority progress areas.
- Enhance and beautify West Ashley gateways with appropriate signage and landscaping.
- Add streetscaping (landscaping, lighting, sidewalks, etc.) along key commercial corridors.
- Evaluate progress.

IMPLEMENTATION

The following steps can be taken to implement the vision for UPGRADING community design and land use.

Implementation should integrate data collection and analysis in all future project studies and improvements. Types of data may include traditional data and/or more sophisticated analytics as available.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *Formally adopt the Plan West Ashley vision.* The Plan West Ashley document establishes a vision to guide future infill, redevelopment, and preservation. A next logical step would be for the main ideas of the vision to be adopted, in concept, by the City of Charleston. This will send an important message to residents, property owners, and investors that the City and community support the vision and intend to implement the main concepts. This report can be used as a tool to evaluate new development proposals, future budgets for public improvements, and rezonings for consistency with the community vision.
- *Coordinate implementation activities with Charleston County, Regional and State planning bodies.* Regular Plan West Ashley meetings should be established between the City, County, Regional (Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments) and State planning representatives. The purpose of meetings is to review development proposals for consistency with the Plan vision, coordinate on public infrastructure improvements, implement stormwater/drainage recommendations, and coordinate other implementation activities.
- *The City and County should develop community engagement strategies to improve communication, education, and participation for residents around locally important community design and land use issues.*
- *Develop a set of urban design principles for key sites and corridors.* Based on the illustrative vision depicted for key sites in *Plan West Ashley*, a set of principles can be established to inform new development and public improvements. For example, new buildings on key sites and

corridors should contain a mix of uses, and front sidewalks, trails and open spaces, with parking located to the rear. Building setbacks, height and other design details should be calibrated based on context and location (for example, sites in outer West Ashley should have standards different from those east of I-526). Street improvements on key corridors should include connected sidewalks, street trees, appropriately-scaled lighting (pedestrian-scaled fixtures in walkable mixed-use centers), landscaping, and crosswalks at intersections. The principles can be used to inform and guide development and public improvements until new regulatory codes can be adopted.

- *Establish a joint City/County Design Review Board (DRB) for key commercial corridors.* The City has a DRB for commercial and multi-family projects but the County does not. Establishing consistency in regulation is key to predictable results. The joint DRB can use Plan illustrations as well as the urban design principles for key sites and corridors to inform decisions, until such time that new zoning standards can be put into place. A streamlined and improved approval process can be established, to provide more predictability for developers as well as community members.
- *Establish a West Ashley Community Brand & Identity Committee.* The purpose for this committee is to recognize and celebrate West Ashley's historic charm and quality neighborhoods as a unique area within the greater City of Charleston, and to work to improve community image and perception. This task can be undertaken as a coordinated effort of the Chamber of Commerce, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and other regional agencies, and be coordinated with other City efforts. In the near-term, this task will include enhanced public and private clean-up efforts along commercial corridors. Guidance and other potential immediate and near-term action steps can be found in the opportunities and recommendations identified in 2015 *Community Perceptions Survey*, such as creating interactive maps of parks, greenways, and destinations, and establishing a merchant's association. Over time,

other goals such as implementing streetscape/beautification improvements, attracting diverse uses and services to West Ashley, and instituting design standards at entryways can be undertaken.

- *Pursue neighborhood preservation.* Some areas in inner West Ashley are eligible for historic designation. Pursuing official designation can provide additional protections for neighborhood form, character and architectural appearance.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Draft and adopt mixed-use regulatory standards to replace and modernize existing zoning, to guide new development on commercial corridors, entryways, and other focused priority progress areas.* The vision for West Ashley’s future land uses is for preservation of neighborhoods, and for strategic, focused land use interventions to create more areas similar to the existing neighborhood center for Avondale.

By establishing clear standards that support plan goals and provide a visual guide to design criteria, people can be assured that new development will be beneficial to community character.

As the first step, the City can create a detailed map of parcels/areas that would benefit from new regulatory standards; this can be based on the map found on pages 2.22 – 2.23, and include the areas of the Citadel Mall and West Ashley Circle. New standards for these areas should implement the urban design principles established for key sites and corridors. Future growth can be directed to these areas through new zoning standards that provide incentives for higher-density, mixed-use development in specific, targeted locations. Development rights at these targeted sites could include earned incentives similar to the Upper Peninsula Eco District zoning with entitlements earned by the developer.

Specific standards for Lowcountry architectural details and character (materials, proportions, scale, etc.) should be included. Further description of potential elements to include as part of new design standards is provided on page 2.30.

Street and public space design in new mixed-use centers should also be addressed as part of regulatory updates. Requirements and standards for new streets to subdivide large parcels, and for new community open spaces to accompany future development should be included. In addition, desired pedestrian-friendly street design elements for key corridors (sidewalks and crosswalks, street trees and landscaping, lighting and other streetscape elements) can be codified through adopted public realm standards.

This plan is not recommending a wholesale change of West Ashley’s suburban development form. Much of West Ashley is envisioned to remain the same as it is today: quality single-family neighborhoods, served by auto-oriented commercial corridors. Inserting pockets of mixed-use, walkable development can change commute patterns (for at least some trips), providing jobs and other destinations closer to homes. Focused areas for new development, located based on study of existing built form and environmental systems, can strengthen economic development. The key is to map specific areas where a different urban form is desired, write land use regulations to guide private investments as they occur over time, and implement public investments (street design, public spaces) to support the changing built environment.

- *Enhance and beautify West Ashley gateways with appropriate signage and landscaping.* Gateway entries are along Savannah Highway, Ashley River Road, Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Old Towne Road, St. Andrews Blvd., and Folly Rd Blvd.
- *Pursue implementation of other transportation, green infrastructure, housing and economic development recommendations.* Important implementation ideas are found in other chapters of this document that relate to land use and community design. Implementation of these concepts can start in the near term and continue over the long term.
- *Transportation (Chapter 3):* Ideas to rethink street design on key corridors, including streetscape design (sidewalk, trees, medians)

- and intersection crossings. Also, actions are recommended for connecting West Ashley Greenway to the Peninsula.
- *Green infrastructure (Chapter 4):* Requirements for green infrastructure should be incorporated into regulatory codes, to make each new development that occurs more resilient. Utilities should be undergrounded as part of redevelopment and streetscape improvements.
- *Housing choice (Chapter 5):* As part of new neighborhood centers, a mix of housing types is advocated, to give choices to residents and increase affordability.
- *Economic development (Chapter 6):* Ideas to encourage the reuse of vacant sites with a complete mix of uses, including workplaces.

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Add streetscaping (landscaping, appropriately scaled lighting, sidewalks, curb and gutter, mast arms, etc.) along key commercial corridors.* Key corridors include Savannah Highway, Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Folly Road, Old Towne Road, St. Andrews Blvd., and Ashley River Road.
- *Evaluate progress.* At regular intervals (perhaps every 3 to 5 years), an evaluation should be conducted to check implementation progress, successes and failures. This evaluation should be led by the City, with participation from the County, BCDCOG, neighborhood councils, and other key stakeholders. The immediate and near-term strategies should be evaluated for effectiveness and re-prioritized for the next term. All aspects of the Plan, including community design and land use, transportation, infrastructure and sustainability, housing, and economic development, should be evaluated within the same timeframe. Members of the planning team could be invited to participate in the evaluation. New strategies can be developed, informed by experience and progress to date. The Plan West Ashley vision should be a “living” plan that is updated and used to guide future growth in sustainable forms for years to come.



3

TRANSPORTATION

EXISTING CONDITIONS	3.4
COMMUNITY CONCERNS	3.16
VISION	3.18
IMPLEMENTATION	3.42

CONNECTED

Transportation

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- The street network in West Ashley is characterized by several large multi-lane state-owned thoroughfares that carry significant amounts of vehicle traffic, supplemented by local neighborhood-scale streets that are either state-, county-, and city-owned. The system is constrained in that there are limited river crossings (Ashley and Stono Rivers), with major employment centers located across the rivers outside of West Ashley. It is also physically constrained on many corridors from further widening due to lack of available right of way.
- CARTA provides several transit routes; with the exception of Route 2 (the express route) all routes operate on 60-minute headways, which may be inadequate to encourage a mode shift to transit during peak travel times or in high density areas. Frequency of service is also currently limited due to budgetary restraints.
- In 2008, Charleston City Council passed a Complete Streets Resolution geared toward creating a network of streets that allows all modes of transportation (bicycle, pedestrian, public transit and automobile travel). Currently, West Ashley's multi-lane highway corridors are inaccessible and unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists, creating barriers to mobility between neighborhoods and to parks, schools and services.
- West Ashley offers opportunities related to active transportation and increased transit usage, including moderately dense residential neighborhoods with nearby commercial districts, and the West Ashley Bikeway and Greenway trails.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Participants at community input workshops expressed congestion and traffic as top concerns for residents in West Ashley today.
- The West Ashley community wants more/enhanced connections: complete I-526, extend Glenn McConnell Parkway, connect the neighborhoods.
- West Ashley needs more/enhanced water connections, which could include a pedestrian/bike bridge and/or a water taxi.
- The West Ashley Bikeway and Greenway should be connected.
- Pedestrian/bike facilities need to be upgraded to be a viable option: connect sidewalks/crosswalks, create separated bike lanes, make safety improvements.
- Transit needs to be upgraded to be a viable option: explore premium service (rail, LCRT, PRT), park-and-ride, express service, shuttle.

VISION

- West Ashley is envisioned to be **CONNECTED**: connected to the region and neighborhoods, connected to jobs and schools, connected to recreational activities, and connected to goods and services.
- The plan has two major areas of focus: addressing vehicular traffic congestion; and then, just as importantly, providing enhanced mobility options to stem the growth in car trips by getting a larger percentage of future trips to occur using shorter car trips, walking, biking and transit.

IMPLEMENTATION

- The vision of a better-connected West Ashley where residents and visitors can actually choose among varying modes of mobility is comprised of a multitude of specific projects and policy measures for vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and transit system improvements. Some of these initiatives have been in process for many years, including the completion of I-526, and are reiterated in this plan as part of the regional network enhancements that are being moved forward by multiple jurisdictions and entities.
- Detailed implementation recommendations are described on pages 3.40-3.46, including projects and policy recommendations. Many initiatives are coupled with land use changes to create more walkable mixed-use nodes. The nexus of a walkable, mixed-use land use pattern coupled with supporting transportation network can help realize the community vision.

IMPLEMENTATION

Transportation Plan Elements

The vision of a better-connected West Ashley where residents and visitors can actually choose among varying modes of mobility is comprised of a multitude of specific projects and policy measures. Some of these initiatives have been in process for many years, and are reiterated in this plan as part of the regional network enhancements that are being moved forward by multiple jurisdictions and entities, such as many of the Charleston County Sales Tax projects. Other initiatives are new services entirely, such as premium transit services (LCRT, LRT, PRT), new transit circulator services, new express bus services, and new water taxi services. Many initiatives represented in this plan are “tweaks” on existing corridors: initiatives such as the addition or completion of a shared use path along a major traffic artery, filling missing gaps in the pedestrian or bicycle network, or providing better intersection configurations for all modes of travel. This plan also seeks to add definition to ongoing initiatives; for instance, there is currently a sales tax project to retrofit complete streets elements along Savannah Highway, and this plan defines what set of enhancements should be included to give Savannah Highway more of a complete street character.

The plan elements are summarized in the following manner: projects and policy recommendations according to timeframe anticipated to accomplish (immediate, near-term, and longer term). Projects are summarized by a description, interim and eventual outcomes, and the process for implementation. Many initiatives are coupled with land use changes to create more walkable mixed-use nodes, as community participants expressed, more “little Avondales” throughout West Ashley. The nexus of a walkable, mixed-use land use pattern coupled with supporting transportation network can help realize this community vision. Proposed improvements (complete streets, landscape islands, land-use) are meant to provide mobility options, and should not significantly increase congestion.

Implementation should integrate data collection and analysis in all future project studies and improvements. Types of data may include traditional data (counters, surveys, demographics), mobility analytics, predictive analytics, and/or future analyses not yet developed.

below: Potential streetscape and crossing enhancement between the Greenway and the Bikeway.



Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

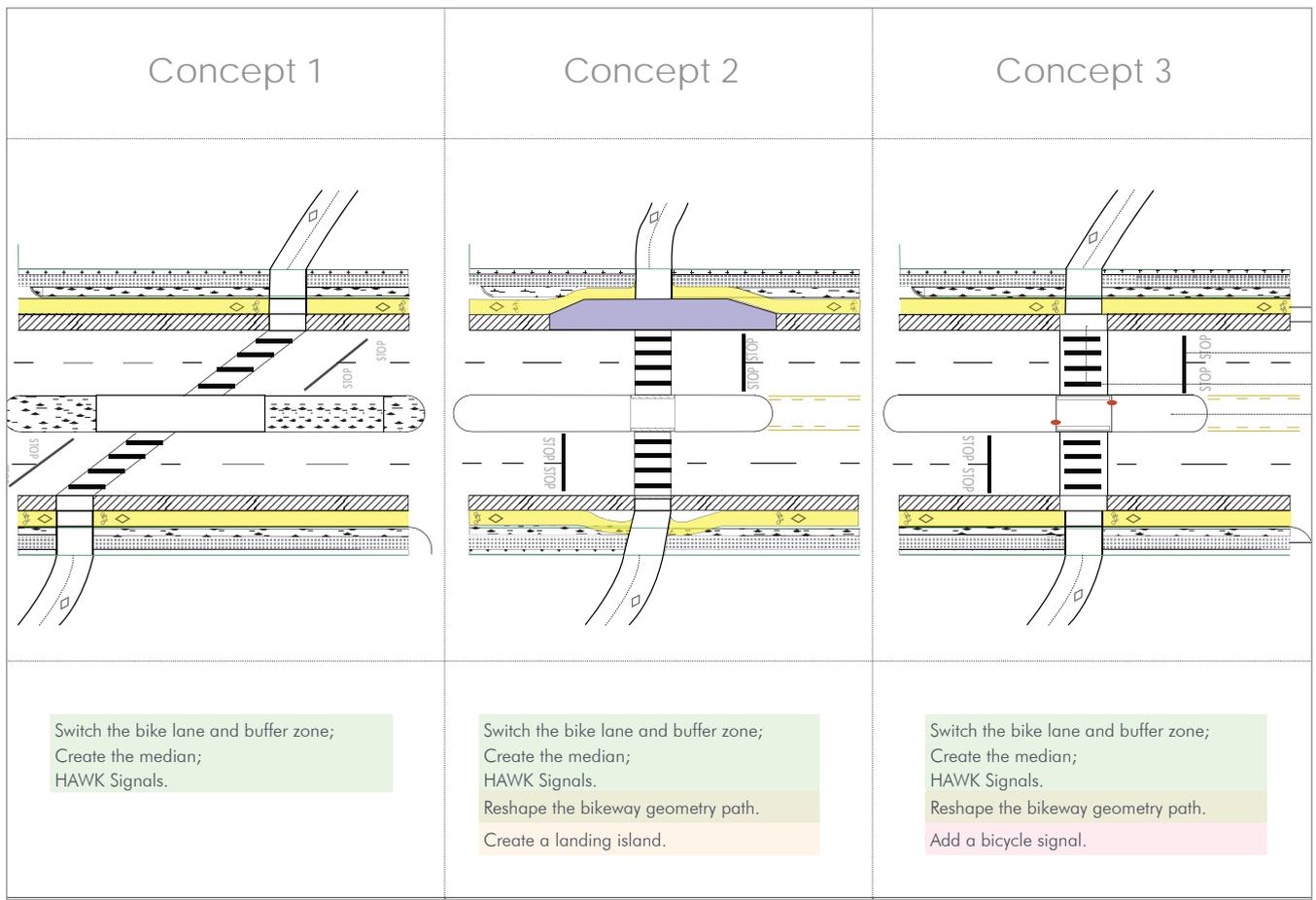
These initiatives could happen in the very near term, and certainly within an 18-24 month timeframe maximum, depending on funding and regulatory constraints.

Immediate Policies/Studies:

- Develop design guidelines for the West Ashley Greenway and West Ashley Bikeway to provide guidance in amenitizing and expanding the system to allow it to become a transportation facility in addition to a recreational facility.
- Prepare a feasibility study for potential federal grant projects, such as Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants.
- Evaluate access management strategies to include strategic consolidation and/or elimination of driveways and medians along major arterials/roadways (i.e. US 17, St. Andrews Blvd., Sam Rittenberg Blvd., etc).
- Develop community engagement strategies to improve communication, education, and participation for residents around locally important transportation issues.

Immediate Projects:

- Install amenities at all current bus stops such as benches, shelters, and signage.
- Implement St. Andrews Boulevard shuttle circulator service.
- Conduct a data driven feasibility study to determine the viability of a private water taxi service to connect West Ashley to the Charleston peninsula. If warranted, initiate an RFP process for the water taxi provider.
- Provide enhanced high visibility pedestrian and bicycle crossings on St. Andrews Blvd. for the West Ashley Bikeway.
- Provide enhanced high visibility pedestrian and bicycle crossings on Folly Road Boulevard for the West Ashley Greenway.
- Install crosswalks where they are missing at all signalized intersections, all four approaches (include accessible ramps, where needed).
- Evaluate the need for midblock pedestrian crossings (where signalized intersections are more than 1/2 mile apart) and the demand is evident based on complementary land uses, schools, places of worship, trailheads or transit stops.
- Reduce speed limits to no more than 35 MPH on arterial streets and 20 MPH on residential streets and provide traffic calming on streets with a demonstrated safety problems. (Prioritize Savannah Highway, Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Old Towne, and St Andrews Blvd.)
- Evaluate and optimize signal timing to provide for consistent pedestrian phases and achieve target speeds within the West Ashley boundaries; re-evaluate on an annual or biannual basis.



above: Proposed designs for crossing of the West Ashley Bikeway at St. Andrews Boulevard developed by the City of Charleston.

below: Potential Water Taxi crossing / landing areas for the interim/immediate bike/pedestrian river crossing.



Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

The set of near-term initiatives are items that could be implemented within the next 2-5 year timeframe, contingent on funding availability and other constraints. Some of these initiatives would require additional study as noted; those studies could be conducted in the interim timeframe.

Near-Term Policies/Studies:

- Gather local and regional commuter data and analyze. By understanding the travel patterns of commuters in West Ashley and the environs, decision-making for commuter-gearred enhancements such as premium transit services such as LCRT/LRT and PRT can be effectively evaluated and the appropriate services chosen.
- Complete a Regional Transit Feasibility Study and Regional Transit Framework Plan. A study of transit needs and demands for West Ashley and the surrounding areas can help determine new regional (LCRT/LRT/PRT) services and the appropriate technologies as well as set these initiatives up for federal funding through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).
- Evaluate potential for dedicated high occupancy vehicle and transit lanes (Liberty Lanes) on existing major corridor roadways such as Savannah Highway and Sam Rittenberg Blvd. (also known as LCRT light, City of Toronto uses these lanes in downtown to maximize effectiveness of the street system). Study the impacts of converting an outside lane to an HOV or transit lane at some point in the future by monitoring not only traffic volumes but also transit ridership and bicycle and pedestrian counts within the corridors, and determine at what point in time consideration could be given to converting a lane to this type of use.
- Develop and adopt land use and zoning code modifications that allow for mixed-use land uses and intensification of land uses along critical transit streets/corridors (see Chapter 2).
- Develop and adopt design guidelines and development regulations that require livable development principles.
- Develop and adopt parking regulations that minimize auto dependency by mandating travel demand management techniques be applied prior to increasing additional parking on any given site.
- Develop and adopt a Vision Zero policy that targets the elimination of all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.
- Integrate data collection and analysis in all future project studies and improvements. Types of data may include traditional data (counters, surveys, demographics), mobility analytics, predictive analytics, and/or future analyses not yet developed.

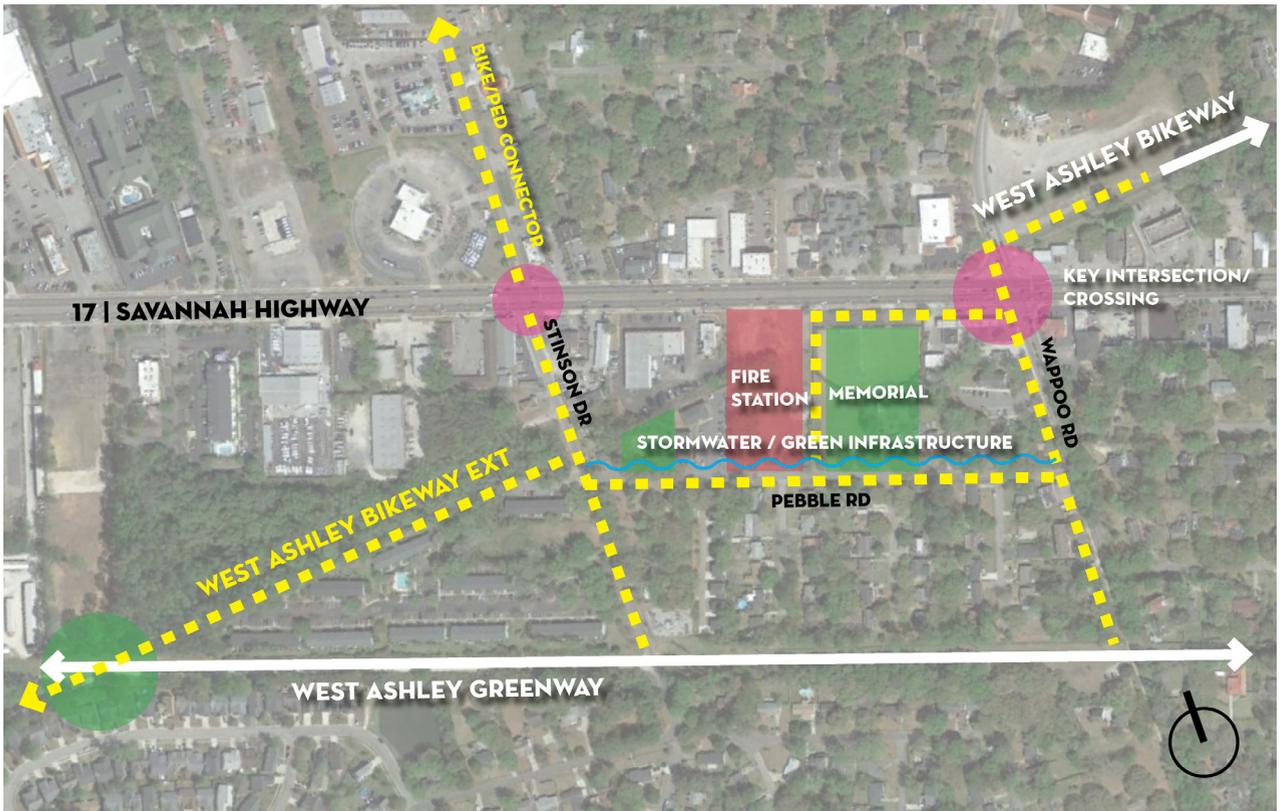
Near-Term Projects:

- Implement Charleston County 1/2 cent sales tax transportation projects.
- Evaluate/provide a physical connection between West Ashley Greenway and the Peninsula via a bridge, using existing infrastructure, a cantilevered structure, or a new standalone facility.
- Reconfigure intersection of Sam Rittenberg and Old Towne Road. A Charleston County study to determine the configuration of this intersection is just starting, and the redevelopment proposal for the Piggly Wiggly site which was recently acquired by the City and studied during this process should drive the ultimate configuration of the intersection reconfiguration.
- Reduce headways on CARTA express routes from 30 to 15 minutes in the peak hours; reduce regular headways from 60 minutes to 30 minutes on regular routes as travel demand, funding, and land use densities allow.



above: Potential improvements to the West Ashley Bikeway related to developing design guidelines for the West Ashley Greenway and West Ashley Bikeway. Improvements may include wayfinding, site furniture, green infrastructure, lighting, trail dimensions, etc.

below: Potential connectivity options for the West Ashley Greenway to the West Ashley Bikeway at Wappoo Road.



Near-Term Projects (Continued):

- Install or complete continuous shared use paths on major corridors: Savannah Highway, Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Old Towne Road, St. Andrews Blvd., Ashley River Road, Glenn McConnell Parkway, Bees Ferry Road, and Folly Road Blvd.
- Connect West Ashley Greenway to West Ashley Bikeway at Wappoo Road. As the West Ashley Greenway and Bikeway become a true transportation corridor for West Ashley beyond simply a recreational facility, it is important to close the gap that currently exists between these facilities. This connection includes the Savannah Highway crossing enhancements as well as on and off-road connectors between the two facilities in the area.
- Create a mobility hub at Citadel Mall; enhance transit services and connections at this location. A redevelopment illustration for this area is in Chapter 2, and can guide the street network configuration in this location. It is anticipated that this mobility hub would include stops/transfers among express bus, local bus routes, and the proposed shuttle circulators. It would also include an enhanced park-and-ride facility, shared mobility providers such as bikeshare, carshare opportunities, curb space for Uber/Lyft drop zones, and eventually connections to any premium transit services such as LCRT/LRT/PRT.
- Create mobility hub at West Ashley Circle; enhance transit services and connections at this location. The approach here would be similar to that at Citadel Mall.
- Implement express bus service to Boeing/Airport and Leeds Avenue. A study of the travel patterns of commuters should be conducted to determine the feasibility of expanding the existing express bus service.
- Implement a pedestrian/bike scale destination based wayfinding system to connect residents and visitors to major commercial destinations, parks, greenways, schools, and civic destinations.
- Install spot center medians and/or consolidate driveways for access management, streetscape enhancement, crossing enhancements (high visibility crosswalks, smaller curb radii and elimination of high-speed slip/turn lanes), sidewalk enhancements, and access management on roadways slated for Complete Street and Beautification Projects through the Charleston County Sales Tax program: Savannah Highway, Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Ashley River Road, and Old Towne Road. St Andrews Boulevard and Folly Road Boulevard should include similar improvements.
- Install adaptive controls for real-time adjustments (or current state of the art technology at the time of implementation) to signal timing along major corridors. In addition to being responsive to changing traffic conditions to aid in reducing congestion during peak times, the installation of this technology will allow transit to operate more efficiently and allow more premium services such as express buses to utilize signal preemption and queue-jumping. Similar technology is already in use in the region on Johnnie Dodds Boulevard in Mount Pleasant.
- Reconfigure intersection of 5th Avenue and St. Andrews Boulevard to provide safe vehicle and pedestrian access and crossing opportunities.
- Provide a canal walk pedestrian/bike crossover of Tiger Samp (see page 4.52).

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

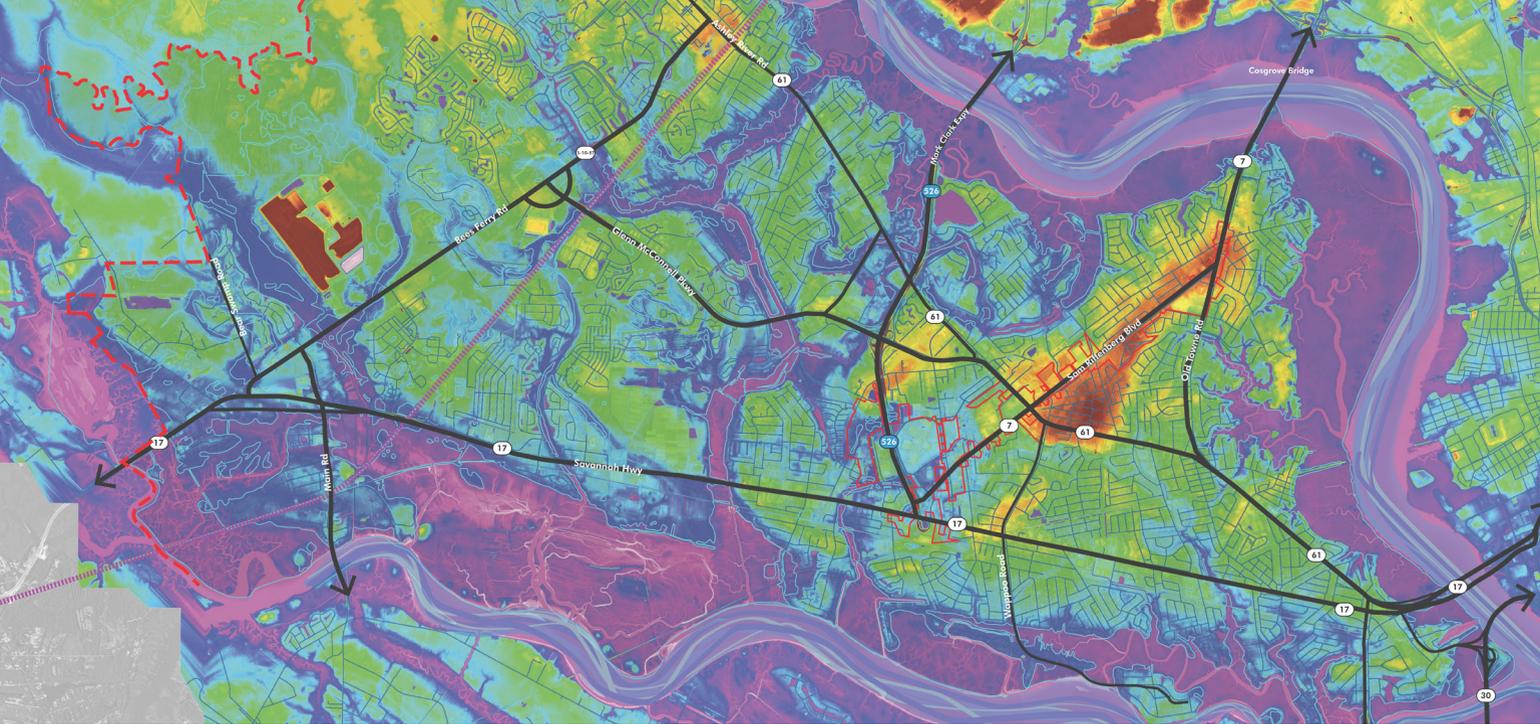
These initiatives are much longer-range in scope and unlikely to be implemented within a 10-year timeframe due to constraints related to funding and regulatory controls. Projects in this group are much higher cost but also greater impacts and benefits.

Longer-Term Policies/Studies:

- Complete a District-Wide (to include West Ashley, Johns Island, and Johns Island) Traffic Management Study. Develop a scenario-based study focused on current and future trends related to traffic in the West Ashley Area and the impacts of implementation of various mobility-focused measures such as enhanced transit, premium transit such as LCRT/LRT/PRT, regional roadway initiatives such as I-526 and the Glenn McConnell extension, and an enhanced bike/ped network such as the connection of the West Ashley Bikeway and Greenway and connections across the rivers via either one or both of the existing bridges and water taxi. The study would also measure the impacts of various land use scenarios such as a continuation of the existing trend of auto-oriented isolated single use developments, a scenario where mixed use walkable nodes were located in strategic locations as envisioned in this plan, and any other applicable scenarios.
- Complete a District-Wide (schools serving West Ashley residents) School Accessibility and Circulation Plan. Develop a plan to determine what access enhancements are needed for schools within West Ashley and how they are served by the transportation elements of *Plan West Ashley*. Improvements may include staggering school start times, improved bus services, survey of school transportation needs, analyze school attendance, school origination and destination traffic modeling, or other enhancements to address school impacts to congestion.

Longer-Term Projects:

- Regional network additions with the I-526 completion and Glenn McConnell Parkway Extensions. Support the construction of these two pieces of regional network in a context-sensitive manner that accommodates multi-modal transportation such as premium transit (LCRT/LRT/PRT) and active transportation.
- Support the inclusion of a multi-use path and the ability of the proposed Glenn McConnell Parkway widening to accommodate a future dedicated transit/HOV/autonomous vehicle lane.
- Support intersection improvements at Sam Rittenberg Boulevard/Ashley River Road, Savannah Highway/Carolina Bay Drive, and Ashley River Road/St. Andrews Boulevard and Old Towne Road to resolve vehicle operational and safety issues while enhancing the ability of the intersections to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists, lessening the current barriers these intersections pose to the active transportation modes.
- Support the proposed reconfiguration of Main Road and Savannah Highway intersection, and insure that access to developed or potential development parcels is not compromised by the design for any mode of transportation.
- Support the installation of sidewalks and/or shared use paths throughout West Ashley along streets where sidewalks currently do not exist.



4

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE & SUSTAINABILITY

EXISTING CONDITIONS	4.4
COMMUNITY CONCERNS	4.26
VISION	4.27
IMPLEMENTATION	4.64

RESILIENT

Green Infrastructure & Sustainability

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- West Ashley’s low, waterfront terrain and historical development patterns are integral to what makes West Ashley unique and special to residents and visitors alike.
- At the same time, terrain may be the most significant challenge to West Ashley’s future. Conversion of natural “sponge” wetlands to impervious surfaces and development in the floodplain over time have reduced the land’s natural capacity to handle storm events, and have resulted in more and more flood-prone public and private investment. The Lowcountry Land Trust and South Carolina Conservation Bank are focused on land conservation, and will be important partners moving forward.
- West Ashley is increasingly vulnerable to more frequent and intense coastal storm events as well as the daily stresses of nuisance flooding and projected sea level rise.
- Multiple infrastructure projects and studies are underway, including drainage studies and improvement projects, water and sewer infrastructure upgrades, open space and recreation investments, and numerous City and County investments. At the scale of West Ashley as a whole, West Ashley is lacking a holistic and comprehensive vision to align actions and funding priorities with a long-term vision for the future.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Neighborhood flooding is affecting safety, value, and quality of life in West Ashley’s neighborhoods. The community reports worsening conditions over the past decade.
- Many of West Ashley’s existing neighborhood parks need revitalization, and many residents lack safe access to nearby park and recreation resources.
- Burying existing overhead utilities would add value by improving the quality and character of West Ashley’s streetscapes.

VISION

- Plan West Ashley establishes a framework for resilient growth consistent with the community’s vision for its future, enabling stable economic development while minimizing risk from external economic and environmental forces. The vision for a resilient West Ashley is a combination of policies, strategies, priorities, guidelines, toolkits, prototypes, and demonstration projects spanning from the watershed and neighborhood scale down to the block, street, and individual building. The following over-arching elements guide the infrastructure vision:
 - **Where should West Ashley prioritize investment?**
Direct investment to higher, safer ground | Protect & heal natural resources | Connect natural and built systems
 - **How should West Ashley become more resilient?**
Reduce local flooding impacts | Prioritize infrastructure maintenance | Encourage green infrastructure (GI) | Provide high-quality, useful, convenient open spaces

IMPLEMENTATION

- The implementation plan provides a matrix of actions to achieve these goals; see detailed implementation recommendations pages 4.64-4.71.
- Some recommended actions (such as inclusion of green infrastructure, flood control, and undergrounding of overhead utilities into the Fire Station and Memorial design) are immediate and may provide near term results to build awareness and momentum.
- Some recommended actions are long-term in nature (such as regulatory and policy actions to limit and heal development in the floodplain) requiring further study and monitoring of results over a long period of time.

IMPLEMENTATION

Regulating the “Big Picture”

The maps showing West Ashley’s Priority Progress Areas, Adaptation areas, and those areas to Protect and Heal illustrate a broad, systemic view of West Ashley that is more sustainable from a land use perspective. Identifying areas that are better suited for increased levels of development obviously implies that there are areas deemed less suitable...areas that should be either protected or returned to a natural state. As discussed throughout this plan, local terrain and drainage patterns are the primary drivers for determining those areas that are poorly suited for new or increased development.

This is an urgent issue in several neighborhoods as localized flooding regularly causes property damage and can cut off access to specific areas of residential development, creating a serious public safety issue. Part of the solution for West Ashley is to have as much of the remaining developable land in the less suitable areas remain in a natural state. This can be accomplished through a variety of growth management tools designed to compensate land owners for their development rights and/or incentivize them to enter into these arrangements. Tools are described to the right and on the following pages.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) or Fee-Simple Acquisition

Successful PDR programs are often run by local governments by establishing a dedicated “open space” fund. These funds are then used to purchase development rights from land owners, placing permanent conservation easements on the land. One of the obvious core questions for this type of program is how to establish the fund—where will the money come from? Elected officials should explore options for West Ashley to consider:

1. **Public funds:** Seeding a PDR fund with a one-time investment of public money (e.g., bond, budget line item, etc.) can help to get these programs off the ground while other tools are used to maintain the fund over time. In Charleston County, the half cent sales tax approved in 2004 was used to create the Greenbelt Program.
2. **Real estate surcharge:** Other jurisdictions have adopted an innovative financing tool through real estate transaction surcharges.
3. **Impact fees:** Impact fees are enabled through state law in South Carolina and are assessed as part of development activities of a certain scale as determined by the permitting authority. For example, the Charleston Water System assesses fees to finance maintenance and expansion of water supply and sewer infrastructure. Based on flooding issues with existing infrastructure and potential future impacts, Charleston could consider an impact fee that would fund drainage improvements and acquisition of open space in West Ashley, potentially purchase of land if it were demonstrated it would be used for flood storage even if the primary purpose were a park (see Stormwater Design below). Further legal analysis is required.
4. **Partnering with non-profit organizations:** In any effort to increase the purchase of development rights or fee-simple acquisition of land, local governments should look for opportunities to partner with land trusts. The most notable land trust operating in West Ashley is the Lowcountry Open Land Trust. This non-profit organization is “focused on protecting ecologically, agriculturally, and historically significant

Lowcountry lands.” Where the City and the trust have mutual interest in a particular tract of land, resources can be pooled—including financial, legal, administrative, and management.

Another important potential partner is the County Greenbelt Program, which is funded exclusively by the “half-penny sales tax” increase. The program began in 2004 when voters passed the first half-penny sales tax increase. At the outset, the program borrowed money against project revenues and then divided the borrowed funds among jurisdictions. Seventy percent went to rural areas (outside the growth boundary) and thirty percent went to urban areas (inside the growth boundary). Of the urban communities, Charleston received the largest guaranteed allocation at approximately \$10M.

At the time this plan was developed, the County was revising its Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan and discussing several important administrative issues. Examples include whether to borrow against future revenues in order to provide substantial funds at the outset of the program. If borrowing does not occur, the program will require several years to build up significant resources. Another important policy decision is how to split money between rural and urban areas. For example, will urban areas receive thirty percent of the funds again, or could there be a larger percentage allocated to communities inside the growth boundary? Representatives from West Ashley should find opportunity to insert themselves into the Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan update process to ensure that their preferences on these policy and administrative decisions are heard. The Lowcountry Land Trust and South Carolina Conservation Bank are both focused on land conservation and protection of ecological, agricultural, and historically significant resources in West Ashley and beyond, and their success can serve as a foundation for future efforts.

South Carolina Code of Laws

Section 6-1-70. Prohibition on real estate transfer fees; exceptions.

(A) Except as provided in subsection (B), the governing body of each county, municipality, school district, or special purpose district may not impose any fee or tax of any nature or description on the transfer of real property unless the General Assembly has expressly authorized by general law the imposition of the fee or tax.

(B) A municipality that originally enacted a real estate transfer fee prior to January 1, 1991 may impose and collect a real estate transfer fee, by ordinance, regardless of whether imposition of the fee was discontinued for a period after January 1, 1991.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)

Another tool that can help alleviate growth pressures on sensitive land is TDR. This tool, generally offered as an optional incentive, removes the development rights from sensitive areas (such as flood prone lands) but moves those development rights to other areas where growth is desirable. For West Ashley, sending areas could include almost any residentially zoned land outside the areas targeted for growth during the charrette. The targeted growth areas could become the receiving areas depending on the ultimate scale of development needed. Importantly, TDR is a complex land use management tool that combines preservation, density bonuses, government administration, and an understanding of market forces that can change from year to year. West Ashley would probably require at least a full year of pre-planning before adopting a program that would include a professional consultant. Questions that need to be answered include:

- Where would the sending areas be? It is important that this be clearly defined and it should be able to be easily read on a map.
- Which growth areas would be receiving areas? The areas with the highest market pressure to grow will be the most successful.
- In receiving areas, what will developers be allowed to do with TDR, and what will they be allowed to do without TDR? In other words, how much development get they get “by right”, and then how much can get get with TDR?
- What is the financial relationship between single family development in the sending area and multi-family development in the receiving area? How many bonus units will make it worthwhile to buy the development rights in sending areas?
- Are design standards needed to accompany bonus development in the receiving areas?

These core questions, and others, will be part of the planning process leading up to the adoption of TDR in West Ashley. In terms of research, local officials should look at the Beaufort County program as a potential starting point (Division 2.10 of the Community Development Code). Critical differences include the fact that it is administered at the county level, and the planning objectives are very different from West Ashley. Despite those differences, the program is more sophisticated than most other in the country and shows promise because it includes:

- A certification process for sending area land owners that allows them to certify the number of available development rights they have and make those available to property owners in the receiving area more easily.
- A “fee-in-lieu” process that allows developers to pay cash into a TDR Bank instead of buying actual certified development rights if those rights may be unavailable for any reason. This money is then used by the County at a later date to purchase development rights.

West Ashley should communicate with Beaufort County about the successes and failures of that program then begin to map out their own pre-planning process for TDR. As of July of 2017, the County had not yet calculated the dollar value for the fee-in-lieu payment, but were moving forward with a consultant to do so.

Regulating Site Specific Conditions

Wetlands

The ACOE model of regulating wetland impacts is not serving West Ashley well under current conditions, and the City may wish to consider adding local controls to the wetland permitting process. Options to consider might include:

1. Use zoning or local wetland regulations to establish additional local jurisdiction and review wetland impacts as part of local review procedures.
2. Prohibit the fill of any wetlands or disturbance of any upland area within 100 feet of a designated wetland area. Under this approach, off-site mitigation would not be an option.
3. Prohibit the discharge of stormwater to areas inside of the 100-foot protective buffer.
4. Restoration requirements for properties where the protective buffer is already disturbed.
5. Flexibility for redevelopment opportunities that can create a “net improvement.”

Importantly, the standards for buffers listed above are examples of what other jurisdictions do across the country. However, standards will differ from one jurisdiction to another for things like a protective buffer. Some examples across the country are as low as 50 feet while others are as large as 300 feet. Also, in some cases, limited activities are allowed in some buffers while others are treated as “no disturb.” West Ashley will need to consider carefully how the individual elements of such a program would be fashioned to best meet its needs.

Finally, the City may wish to administer these new requirements in conjunction with provisions of a new TDR program. For example, this local control may only apply, or may be strongest in designated sending areas. Further, the protective wetland buffer would apply for proposed development activity, but could be ignored when calculating development rights. Allowing the buffer to count as “developable” when certifying development rights would therefore incentivize participation in the TDR program. As an example, if a 10-acre site contained three acres of wetland, only seven acres could be considered developable. However, if the property owner wished

to sell development rights, he/she could sell the rights for the entire 10 acres.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater management continues to be a major focus for several agencies in West Ashley. Both the County and the City are at different phases of revising stormwater management standards, and intensive hydrologic/hydraulic studies are ongoing—the most recent is the ongoing study of the DuWap area. West Ashley has taken an aggressive approach to how stormwater management is regulated with these intensive studies. For example, a previous study on the Church Creek area resulted in a special management district that has more intensive requirements related to flood prevention. Moving forward, amendments to stormwater management standards for development applications should be consistent with the findings of these studies, and local and county standards should be consistent.

The following actions should be undertaken as part of a comprehensive West Ashley regulatory initiative:

1. Increasing the requirements for matching predevelopment and post development discharge rates to the 100-year storm frequency.
2. Increasing the design storm frequency for pipes, culverts, and other features in areas where doing so would alleviate flood pressure. Sensitive areas would be identified through the results of ongoing study.
3. Incorporating requirements for retention of small storm volumes (e.g., 1-year, 2-year event, or water quality volume) where this would be beneficial for mitigating downstream flooding or in areas identified for protection in this plan.
4. Review downstream analysis requirements for West Ashley at the watershed scale to ensure regulatory requirements are comprehensive and properly calibrated.
5. Continue to refine the recently adopted standards for stormwater management on redevelopment properties to allow for more site-specific numeric targets and to make redevelopment in growth areas easier than in low-lying areas designated for protection.

6. Using fee-in-lieu options to build funds that can be used to update infrastructure in public areas and/or establish neighborhood scale solutions in the form of open spaces and parks that can periodically flood when needed.
7. Investigating creation of a state drainage authority that establishes a formal process for multi-jurisdictional coordination with regards to watershed planning, stormwater management, and drainage system operation and maintenance.

Flood Plain Development

As discussed earlier (Page 4.13) flood plain areas are of particular concern in West Ashley as they play a critical role potentially mitigating post-storm impacts from flood waters. As is common practice, West Ashley requires one foot of freeboard over the 100-year flood elevation (top of the lowest floor level of the lowest floor) for new construction. Development is allowed in flood plain areas using a general set of development criteria including “All new construction or substantial improvements shall be constructed by methods and practices that minimize flood damage.” (Sec 27-16.3.) More stringent and specific criteria are applied to specific uses (e.g., manufactured homes) and areas of special flood hazard (e.g., floodways, V-Zones, etc.). As storm intensity, storm surge, and sea level rise are expected to become more

challenging over time, West Ashley could consider changes to flood plain development requirements:

1. Increase freeboard requirement for residential and non-residential development from one foot to two feet. Pursue and encourage adaptive solutions for retrofit of historic structures, potentially including raising, floodproofing, or relocation.
2. Provide a more detailed description of the type of analyses (e.g., downstream flooding) and measures (e.g., compensatory storage) that will be required to determine there will be no increase in impacts from a development proposal.
3. Apply select standards from areas of special flood hazard to the 100-year flood plain. Specifically: “No encroachments, including fill, or new construction or substantial improvements or any other developments shall be had until and unless certification (with supporting technical data) by a registered professional engineer is provided to the city engineer or his designated agent demonstrating that such activity shall not result in any increase in flood levels during occurrence of the base flood discharge.”



Implementation Actions

Implementation of the vision to make West Ashley more resilient will include physical improvements/projects by the public and private sector, as well as policy actions by the City, County, BCDCOG, and others. Enhanced coordination at identified focus areas and as part of immediate action items will be critical to build a stronger pattern for successful collaboration.

Recommended immediate, near term and longer term actions to pursue are outlined on the following pages. Additional details, including estimated cost and parties responsible for each, is included in Chapter 7. Implementation should integrate data collection and analysis in all future project studies and improvements. Types of data may include traditional data and/or more sophisticated analytics as available.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

Immediate Policies/Studies:

- Pursue mechanisms and funding to purchase property for the purpose of reversion to wetlands and addition of floodplain.
- Seek authorization from the General Assembly to allow local real estate transaction surcharge to seed open space acquisition.
- Strengthen tree protection and tree planting requirements for new development and redevelopment.
- Advocate for the Greenbelt Program to borrow money against future revenues on the half penny sales tax in order to provide immediate funding.
- Raise community awareness of sensitive environmental concerns, green infrastructure, and open space preservation.
- Develop a West Ashley Recreational Needs Assessment.
- Develop a West Ashley Open Space, Parks, and Recreation Master Plan.
- Strengthen requirements for undergrounding of overhead utilities for new development and redevelopment, and pursue alternative sources and partnership models to acquire implementation funding.
- Develop community engagement strategies to improve communication, education, and participation for residents around locally important green infrastructure and sustainability issues.
- Develop incentives to encourage developments to include green infrastructure practices. If more restrictive stormwater standards are implemented to address drainage issue and open space preservation, more flexible zoning standards may be needed.

Immediate Projects:

- Perform a storm drainage system inventory (including condition assessment) and maintenance schedule with cooperation between the City, County and State DOT. Cross train City staff (i.e. sanitation, inspection, zoning, police) to recognize and report blocked drains or other drainage issues requiring maintenance.
- Integrate neighborhood scale flood control, with traditional stormwater management improvements as well as Lowcountry appropriate green infrastructure practices (such as bioretention, rain gardens, created wetlands, and depaving), and undergrounding of overhead utilities into upcoming infrastructure investments such as streetscape, park, drainage basin, and open space projects.
- Include green infrastructure and local neighborhood drainage improvements as part of the Fire Station and Memorial design.
- Plant trees

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

Near-Term Policies/Studies:

- Pursue mechanisms for transfer of development rights (TDR).
- Increase budget for inspection, operation, and maintenance of drainage infrastructure.
- Pursue mechanisms for purchase of development rights (PDR).
- Pursue green infrastructure maintenance workforce training programs.
- Strengthen local wetlands regulations and jurisdiction (see Wetlands Preservation details on page 4.48).
- Prohibit the fill of any wetlands or disturbance of any upland area within a fixed distance of a designated wetland area. Consider 100 feet as a potential distance.
- Prohibit the discharge of stormwater to areas inside of a 100-foot protective buffer.
- Promulgate restoration requirements for properties where the protective buffer is already disturbed.
- Implement flexible wetland protection measures for redevelopment opportunities that can create a “net improvement.”
- Include green infrastructure requirements/guidelines reflecting the Master Plan vision for West Ashley in the updated City stormwater management standards.
- Increase the requirements for matching predevelopment and post development discharge rates to the 100-year storm frequency.
- Increase the design storm frequency for pipes, culverts, and other features in areas where doing so would alleviate flood pressure. Sensitive areas would be identified through the results of ongoing study.
- Incorporate requirements for retention of small storm volumes (e.g., 1-year, 2-year event, or water quality volume) where this would be beneficial for mitigating downstream flooding or in areas identified for protection in this plan.
- Include requirements for downstream analyses in identified flooding areas to ensure that new measures do not exacerbate and can even improve existing problems.
- Increase freeboard requirement for residential and non-residential development from one foot to two feet.
- Provide a more detailed description of the type of analyses (e.g., downstream flooding) and measures (e.g., compensatory storage) that will be required to determine there will be no increase in impacts from a development proposal.
- Apply select standards from areas of special flood hazard to the 100-year flood plain.
- Explore ways to assist coordination efforts from federal programs such as FEMA and SBA to assist homeowners within flood plain that are impacted by recurring flooding.

Near-Term Projects:

- Partner with the Citadel Mall and other private developers to implement depaving, floodplain restoration, wetlands protection/restoration, tree planting, and pilot GI improvements.
- Incorporate “Water Smart Park” concepts into the next park construction or retrofit as a pilot. Opportunities include the Citadel Mall redevelopment, Church Creek Basin, Fire Station and memorial, Sam Rittenberg redevelopment at Old Towne Road or elsewhere, the Greenway, DuWap area, and many others.
- Increase wetland preservation/restoration and floodplain management as part of West Ashley Circle development.
- Implement the findings of the Church Creek and DuWap Drainage Studies.
- Implement a green infrastructure retrofit into an existing West Ashley street.
- Implement flood control and drainage improvements with traditional stormwater management techniques coupled with green infrastructure practices.
- Plant more trees

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

Longer-Term Policies/Studies:

- Incorporate resiliency, sea level rise considerations, and adaptive design strategies into long-range infrastructure/transportation planning and policy other features in flood prone areas.
- Investigate incentive programs offering tax abatements for open space preservation.
- Set a specific goal for open space preservation of remaining developable land.
- Identify and protect existing cultural and landscape assets for preservation.
- Create new neighborhood parks in underserved areas - to be determined by the Open Space, Parks, and Recreation Master Plan.
- Support evolution and implementation of the West Ashley Greenway Master Plan.
- Enhance connections between the West Ashley Greenway, Bikeway, and adjacent neighborhoods - including the Peninsula and Johns Island.

Longer-Term Projects:

- Partner with the Citadel Mall to construct pilot depaving, wetlands enhancement, and floodplain improvements.
- Fund undergrounding of overhead utilities as part of redevelopment and streetscape improvements.
- Build a “Water Smart Park” with green infrastructure as part of West Ashley Circle neighborhood development.
- Pursue the “Tiger Swamp Canal Walk” as part of neighborhood scale Citadel Mall, Sam Rittenberg, and I-526 extension transportation planning and drainage infrastructure improvements.
- Plant more trees

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5 HOUSING

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AFFORDABLE

Housing

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- West Ashley’s value as a residential community is, and always has been, its centrality within the region and easy access to the Peninsula via early bridges and, later, I-526.
- Housing in West Ashley is becoming increasingly expensive, endangering its longtime status as a community affordable to middle income households.
- As rising home prices place homeownership out of reach for more West Ashley households, demand for rental properties is also increasing from a wider range of demographics and household income levels.
- Most recent and planned new single-family and multifamily residential development in West Ashley is occurring at previously-undeveloped greenfield sites in the outer West Ashley area west of I-526. As a relatively affluent area of planned growth, outer West Ashley is in need of additional amenities, services, infrastructure, and traffic solutions to support this growth.
- Rising housing prices are driving rapid change in many inner West Ashley neighborhoods – particularly in historically affordable neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are increasingly desirable due to the comparatively low prices of their housing stock, convenient proximity to existing shopping, services, and commute routes to jobs throughout the region, and locations adjacent to long-desirable neighborhoods.
- Increased housing prices are also threatening the physical “community character” of West Ashley’s oldest neighborhoods as new homes are built and older homes are changed.
- Rising housing prices increase the need for attainable, affordable, and workforce housing at all income levels. While Charleston and other agencies already offer programs and policies to address these needs, a variety of additional public policy and funding tools can be deployed or refined to expand affordability.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- The community does not offer enough variety of housing choices to meet needs and preferences.
- Housing is becoming too unaffordable, which also creates a risk that seniors and lower or middle income residents could be displaced.
- Community character, scale, and cultural legacies are threatened by new development and change.
- The Citadel Mall property needs reinvestment – possibly including housing.
- Any taller housing should be limited and targeted for appropriate locations.

VISION

- Preserve community character
- Maintain affordability
- Add more housing options and supply to meet market demand and need.
- Provide supportive and equitable infrastructure for housing at all income levels, including multimodal transportation options (pedestrian, bicycle, automobile, and transit), parks and open space, and community facilities.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Implementation actions at the end of this chapter directly support achieving each component of this vision. See more detailed implementation recommendations pages 5.18-5.24

VISION | AFFORDABLE

To achieve the community vision for housing in West Ashley, the following goals shall be pursued:

1. Preserve community character.
2. Maintain affordability.
3. Add more housing options and supply to meet market demand and need for all income levels.
4. Provide supportive and equitable infrastructure for housing at all income levels, including multimodal transportation options (pedestrian, bicycle, automobile, and transit), parks and open space, and community facilities.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation actions on the following pages directly support achieving each component of this vision. Implementation should integrate data collection and analysis in all future project-specific studies and improvements. Types of data may include traditional data and/or more sophisticated analytics as available.

Community Engagement

The City and County should develop community engagement strategies to improve communication, education, and participation for residents around locally important housing issues, existing programs (rehabilitation, homeownership, affordable rental units, etc.), and future programs.

Maintain Affordability

Maintaining affordability in West Ashley represents a significant, large-scale challenge that requires numerous individual solutions at a variety of scales. The following implementation projects focus primarily on opportunities to assist residents of West Ashley who are likely to suffer the greatest consequences of declining affordability. The strategies represent a variety of scales of intervention, from advocacy for changes at the state level, to local City and County programs and funding resources. Many of the actions provide policy direction on pursuing and adopting tools or policies that are already under consideration. These actions represent adoption of or appropriate modifications to fundamental time-tested changes/programs that provide basic funding, capacity, and tools to address affordability needs. An additional “near-term” action focuses on studying – at the citywide level – additional tools that the City of Charleston could adopt if deemed appropriate, including recently-adopted innovative programs from other areas of the country and other ideas raised in conjunction with this implementation item. Implementation of this policy shall avoid gentrification of communities.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *Pursue passage of a citywide housing bond, and use resulting funds to expand subsidized income-restricted housing in West Ashley.* The City of Charleston is currently pursuing passage of a citywide bond that would provide funding to support income-restricted affordable housing in the City. Efforts should be made to ensure that funding is distributed to projects in West Ashley. Given the scale of need, future housing bonds should be considered.
- *With public input, elected officials should explore passage of an inclusionary housing enabling law at the state level.* Such a law would allow communities to require inclusion of income-restricted housing units in multi-unit housing development projects; similar laws already exist in cities across the United States. If enabling legislation is passed, Charleston should pursue passage of inclusionary housing requirements for the City.
- *With public input, elected officials should explore changes to state enabling law and city ordinances to allow for incentivized affordable housing programs.* Develop local voluntary incentive programs that encourage developments to incorporate affordable and workforce housing. Explore potential for incentives such as real estate tax abatement, density bonuses, height bonuses or other mechanisms that incentivize developers to voluntarily include levels of affordable housing.
- *Adjust zoning and land development regulations to further support development of affordable housing, including prioritizing and incentivizing affordable housing, streamlining and expediting the review and approval process for affordable housing, and enabling staff level approvals for affordable housing.*
- *Pursue changes to state criteria that negatively impact the ability of income-restricted affordable housing developers to obtain adequate LIHTC funding allocations.* Feedback from developers of income-restricted affordable housing indicates that the current state-level scoring system for LIHTC funding allocations tends to favor projects in rural locations. Given growing unaffordability within the Charleston region, the City and County should advocate for modifications to LIHTC criteria that recognize the metropolitan area's increasing needs. By directing additional LIHTC funding allocations to urban areas, a broader network of non-profit affordable housing developers are likely to emerge in Charleston and other South Carolina communities.
- *Expand application of Mixed-Use Workforce Housing zoning districts, and pursue modifications to increase the program's effectiveness.* The City of Charleston's "mixed-use workforce housing" zoning districts provide voluntary incentives for developers to incorporate income-restricted affordable housing units into large multifamily housing projects. The districts currently exist in limited locations and have not generated significant quantities of income-restricted housing units; recent modifications strengthened the duration of affordability requirements and allowed payment of an in-lieu fee rather than provision of on-site housing units. The current incentive structure should be studied to determine further appropriate modifications, and the districts themselves should be expanded wherever appropriate – likely in areas of West Ashley targeted for future infill growth, such as along major corridors in inner West Ashley.
- *Maintain and expand homeowner rehabilitation assistance programs and funding.* The City of Charleston's low-interest loan programs to low-income homeowners for major housing repairs and roof replacement help to ensure that residents stay in their homes and maintain control of their most valuable asset.
- *Explore the potential to offer expedited review of income-restricted affordable or mixed-income housing development projects.* Expedited review accelerates the timing before development can proceed, thus reducing developer risk and reducing carrying costs for land.
- *Provide assistance to residents through the Center for Heirs Property Preservation, and pursue modifications to state heirs property laws that harm the ability of families to maintain control of properties.* Assistance through the Center for Heirs Property Preservation can help

- address the needs of today’s residents, including counseling with older property owners who do not currently have wills in place. Changes to state law would create greater certainty for future inheritors of property while expanding opportunities for families to retain their homes across generations.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Explore adoption of pre-approved housing designs/plans – compatible with the existing character of targeted areas – to reduce development costs and time.* The City should assess the advantages, drawbacks, and practicality of adopting neighborhood-specific pre-approved housing designs that could potentially lower costs for developers by eliminating challenges to construction approval.
- *Ensure housing is well-served by multimodal transportation options that allow residents to reduce their travel costs.* Affordability in West Ashley goes beyond the cost of housing itself, with residents also impacted by transportation costs – typically a household’s second-highest category of costs. The City and County should ensure robust transit, pedestrian, and bicycle transportation options are available to West Ashley residents so they can access employment and shopping needs at a lower relative cost compared to automobile ownership and use.
- *Target use of affordable housing in-lieu fees collected in West Ashley to support development and retention of income-restricted affordable housing in West Ashley.* When West Ashley developers choose to pay affordable housing “in-lieu” fees rather than provide required or agreed-upon on-site affordable housing, these fees should be dedicated to use in West Ashley rather than other parts of the City. While fee revenue is limited today, it may grow as a source over time if the Mixed-Use Workforce Housing zoning districts are expanded or if inclusionary housing legislation is approved.
- *Inventory all land currently owned by a public agency, determine if any properties could be used for housing in the future, and prioritize these*

sites for subsidized income-restricted housing development. Publicly-owned sites can provide the greatest flexibility to pursue affordable housing development through partnerships with affordable housing developers.

- *Study potential adoption of additional tools deployed by other communities to address affordable housing needs.* The prior actions represent a potential major expansion of Charleston’s funding capacity and legal requirements for providing workforce and affordable housing. This is merely a first step, however, and the City should continue to study and consider adopting other tools – both common and innovative – deployed in other communities.
- *Explore creation of a “Staying-Put Initiative” when new developments occur within vulnerable communities to assist in finding ways for long-term residents to remain as property values and taxes increase.* A similar initiative was utilized with the proposed Magnolia development in the upper peninsula area of downtown Charleston. The City, in conjunction with the Magnolia developers, addressed local residents’ concerns that property taxes would force them to leave by creating the ‘Staying Put Fund’, a public-private partnership designated to assist residents in paying increased property taxes. Similar funds should be considered for future developments in West Ashley sited near existing vulnerable neighborhoods.

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Enhance capacity to grow income-restricted subsidized affordable housing by increasing public land purchases and by pursuing development/land banking via the community land trust and collaboration with third-party non-profit affordable housing developers.* Charleston’s new community land trust creates an additional opportunity to dedicate land for affordable housing development. Deploying this land and any publicly-owned land for affordable housing may also require expansion and attraction of non-profit affordable housing developer capacity.

Other Tools to Explore for Supporting Housing Affordability in West Ashley

Solutions for maintaining and expanding the supply of attainable, affordable, and workforce housing fall into three primary categories. These are 1) finding sources of funding, 2) increasing the capacity to deliver lower-cost housing, and 3) increasing capacity to manage affordable housing. Success requires a broad range of responses within each of these categories; for example, development of additional subsidized, income-restricted housing units requires layering of multiple sources. Given these challenges, efforts to address affordability in high-cost regions across the country do not focus on single big ideas, but about combining and tailoring solutions. Charleston should explore the following ideas for addressing housing affordability as part of its own tailored approach.

Third-party comprehensive evaluation of tools and approach: In response to rapidly escalating housing costs, Durham, North Carolina and Oakland, California retained Enterprise Community Partners to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of their affordable housing policy tools and then provide a roadmap of changes and additions to improve coordination and efficacy. Charleston could potentially pursue a similar study in conjunction with any future affordable housing bond revenue.

Additional tax revenue sources: Communities across the country have increasingly recognized the need for additional funding sources to assist development of affordable housing, and have pursued new revenue sources. Examples include impact fees on new development, sales taxes dedicated to housing production, and real estate transfer taxes.

Employer-assisted housing: Major institutional employers may be willing to individually or collectively create an employer-assisted housing initiative to reinvest in their communities and improve worker access and productivity. For example, the City of Charleston offers assistance to employees as part of the City's First Time Homebuyer Program. Other examples referenced in a Harvard University white paper include:

- Phoenix, Arizona: Downtown Phoenix Home Ownership Program where four major employers set aside \$150,000 to fund their employee assisted housing programs.
- Portland, Oregon: Emanuel Hospital/Legacy Health System Neighborhood Home-Ownership Program where the hospital provides forgivable grants for down-payment assistance.
- New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Homebuyer Program provides home ownership grants to employees for up to 10 years.
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Harley Davidson Walk-to-Work Home Purchase Program that provides forgivable loans to cover closing costs and down payments.

Programs to permanently preserve affordability at small rental properties: Preventing displacement of current lower income residents in market rate housing can be especially difficult. Using affordable housing trust fund revenues and developer fees, the City of San Francisco provides subordinate loans on favorable terms to affordable housing development partners to acquire and rehabilitate buildings of between 5 and 25 units occupied by lower income renters.

Expanded renter protections: Popular options include measures such as tenant eviction protections, requiring tenant relocation payments for no-fault evictions, and rent review programs that include mandatory notices of rent increases by landlords and mediation between landlords and renters.

Accessory dwelling unit financing assistance: Accessory dwelling units represent a major potential source of additional housing that also provides additional revenue to homeowners. However, obtaining a construction loan from a traditional mortgage lender is challenging since future rents are typically not incorporated into calculations of income. Some cities have addressed this issue through low-interest loan programs and reduction of costs through relaxed land use regulation and provision of fee waivers.

Preserve Community Character

The “character” of West Ashley’s different neighborhoods includes both their physical appearance and the people and history that make up residents’ lived experience. Plan West Ashley has begun the process of defining this character and addressing changes to support it. The recommended implementation projects will complement this work at an even more local, granular level. The following strategic implementation approach to preserving community character focuses on a multi-step process that begins with first using local outreach and resident engagement to define the character, contributing assets, affordability issues, and community concerns present in each of West Ashley’s neighborhoods. Based on this information, the implementation projects then focus on adjusting land use regulation and project approvals processes to ensure that reinvestment and future development respect existing community character while also welcoming new residents. Finally, the outreach and education projects provide an opportunity to build capacity for future grassroots action by West Ashley’s neighborhoods. These outreach efforts must be inclusive to empower all community members across all demographics.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Reach out to and work with individual neighborhood councils to provide resident outreach and education to better understand and address concerns, and to explore acceptable ways to accommodate newer housing types.* Given that concerns and needs vary from neighborhood to neighborhood in West Ashley, the City and County should play a role in building the capacity and empowering of neighborhood organizations to represent local interests, as well as provide communication and education to residents around locally-important issues. For example, neighborhood groups in West Ashley’s historic African American neighborhoods can potentially expand their roles in leveraging community networks to connect residents with information about programs and opportunities for homeownership and home retention within these neighborhoods. Outreach to the Maryville/Ashleyville community during the development of Plan West Ashley allowed residents to express concerns around gentrification, rising costs and

neighborhood change, and also provided an outlet to share information about property tax relief programs.

- *Align zoning, design review, and land use control regulations and processes to ensure new housing development can proceed while also respecting the character and design of existing neighborhoods.* This implementation project should ensure that land use regulation and permitting processes appropriately control demolition activity and replacement of existing housing with new housing. New regulations should have a focus on building design and character, to ensure adherence to community design standards.
- *Identify and preserve historic community assets and character in West Ashley.* Within inner West Ashley’s oldest neighborhoods, the neighborhood descriptions and recommendations of the City’s Preservation Plan and the subsequent “Area Character Appraisals” completed for Byrnes Downs and Old Windermere provide a resource for understanding physical character and historic assets, and tools for preserving these assets.⁹ The City should implement pre-existing recommendations from the Preservation Plan. This understanding of assets and priorities should also be updated based on other historic community assets identified by West Ashley residents subsequent to the adoption of the preservation plan and Area Character Appraisals. The City should also engage with neighborhood and other local organizations to help contribute to any future Area Character Appraisals, with this process also used as an educational and capacity-building exercise for neighborhood residents.

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Complete detailed assessments of key issues, affordability needs, unique demographic and physical characteristics, and appropriate housing options of individual neighborhoods.* These neighborhood assessments will require resident outreach and participation.

⁹ *Vision, Community, Heritage: A Preservation Plan for Charleston, South Carolina*, authored by Page & Turnbull for the City of Charleston, January 2008. Subsequent Area Character Appraisals were completed for Byrnes Downs and Old Windermere in August 2009 by Robert and Company.

Add more Housing Options

Expanding the overall housing supply and diversifying West Ashley's mix of housing – beyond today's largely consistent mix of single-family homes and low-rise condominiums and apartments – would allow West Ashley to compete for attracting regional housing demand by appealing to new market segments of households while still serving existing market segments. At the same time, some new housing products could provide more affordable options by offering efficient designs. While some of these housing products may be more dense than West Ashley's traditional development pattern, higher-density housing products provide the added benefit of potentially providing an efficient use of existing infrastructure – such as roads and sewers – that results in lower public service costs compared to lower-density single-family communities. The following implementation projects focus on revising land use regulations and approvals processes to allow and encourage development of diverse housing products in West Ashley.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *Explore the potential to offer expedited review of townhome and multifamily housing projects in locations where such housing is allowed by right, particularly targeted to infill locations that already have the infrastructure to support additional housing.* As described in other chapters of this document, many locations in inner West Ashley are appropriate for infill housing development, both to support the emergence of walkable community nodes and to make use of existing infrastructure more efficiently. Expedited review can help incentivize the development of preferred housing products in targeted locations by reducing the developers' holding costs and risks.
- *Prioritize expansion of senior housing options for households of all incomes.* The City and County should set forth a policy of prioritizing senior housing in West Ashley as a means of helping residents stay in their community as they age.
- *Explore other tools for supporting housing affordability in West Ashley as noted on page 5.21.*

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Adjust zoning and land use regulations to allow and support development of “affordable by design” housing products, including prioritization of enabling and incentivizing accessory dwelling units.* Examples of other affordable by design products include small-lot single-family homes, townhomes, and smaller multifamily units. Efforts should be made to ensure that any changes are sensitive to protecting the character of existing neighborhoods. Allowing and incentivizing accessory dwelling units should be prioritized since these secondary units result in minimal impacts on the visual character of neighborhoods; production of these units requires adjustments to zoning (including review of on-site parking requirements).
- *Promote “green” energy-efficient homes that are less costly to maintain and operate. Homes that integrate energy-efficient design can reduce long-term operating costs for owners, thereby improving overall affordability.* Programs and incentives that promote the use of energy-efficient features should be explored.
- *Based on the Community Design and Land Use recommendations, revise zoning to allow/encourage a diverse set of housing product types in appropriate locations.* These housing products include townhomes, multifamily housing targeted along significant corridors, and mixed-use housing with retail/commercial uses in targeted neighborhood nodes at intersections of major streets. Given that increases in overall housing inventory will also help to reduce costs, this process should also identify sites for West Ashley's more typical single-family homes and one- to three-story apartments and condominiums.

Provide Supportive Infrastructure

The functionality and desirability of housing in West Ashley are ultimately determined by the public amenities/facilities, basic infrastructure, and transportation access that support each neighborhood's residents. Examples of public amenities include parks and recreation facilities. Examples of basic infrastructure include stormwater, sewer, electrical, and communications access. Transportation options include all transportation modes that can enable residents to access neighborhood amenities – including public amenities and private amenities such as retail, restaurants, and day-to-day services – as well as employment and other destinations throughout the region. In addition, acknowledging that aging and low-income Americans are more likely to use transit, bike and walk as means of traveling, it is imperative that the new vision for West Ashley provides the appropriate infrastructure and equitable opportunities for all residents, including under-served populations, to reside in livable communities.

While other chapters provide detailed coverage of infrastructure and public amenities/facilities, the following implementation projects focus on policy priorities and infrastructure needs that are critical for improving affordability in West Ashley, allowing housing growth to proceed in targeted locations, and ensuring all residents enjoy easy access to amenities that support a high quality of life.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Provide and ensure access to effective, low cost transportation options, including public transit and safe, comfortable walking and biking infrastructure.* The Transportation chapter of this plan describes locations of major transportation improvements, including improvements to transit service in the inner West Ashley area. Lower-cost transportation access, to both local and regional destinations, enables residents to reduce their overall cost of living in West Ashley while also benefitting from greater access to economic opportunities.

- *Fund and implement infrastructure to address flooding issues in the Church Creek and Tiger Swamp areas to support existing housing and enable housing growth.* Flooding in these areas must be resolved to stabilize impacted neighborhoods and to remove a constraint on future development and reinvestment in West Ashley.
- *Cross-train City field workers to identify and report blocked drains and other drainage issues that can exacerbate flooding and constrain housing investment.* Existing and future stormwater infrastructure can be operated more effectively by ensuring all City workers note and report any drainage issues that can lead to flooding.

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Implement land use and transportation recommendations of this report to ensure all neighborhoods enjoy equitable access to parks and public/private amenities and services.* The land use and transportation recommendations help ensure that all West Ashley residents have easy access to parks, recreation, and day-to-day shopping and service needs.
- *Target development and retention of mixed-income and affordable housing to locations in close proximity to community amenities and transportation.* In order to reduce barriers to opportunity for West Ashley's most vulnerable residents, mixed-income and affordable housing should be targeted to locations closest to robust multimodal transportation options and local amenities.



6 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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FOCUSED

Economic Development

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- West Ashley historically functioned as a bedroom community that supported job centers elsewhere.
- There are now about 30,000 jobs in West Ashley, yet 84 percent of employed West Ashley residents commute elsewhere for work.
- A fundamental mismatch exists between the type of jobs in West Ashley and the types of jobs held by West Ashley residents. The majority of West Ashley jobs are in industries focused on household consumption, such as retail, restaurant, personal services, and medical businesses. Yet West Ashley residents are more likely to work in office-based professional jobs and manufacturing/warehouse jobs.
- One opportunity to diversify West Ashley's economy is to reposition the area to better attract growth of businesses/sectors that are tied to the regional export-based economy. The One Region Global Competitiveness Strategy identified five "high impact clusters," (groups of industries that are driving the regional economy). These include: aerospace, information technology, life sciences, advanced logistics, and automotive.
- West Ashley is well-positioned to begin addressing this office shortage for these high impact clusters; it already provides a range of housing choices to support a future diverse workforce. Second, extension of I-526 will make West Ashley much more accessible to all parts of the region.
- Much of West Ashley's retail space suffers from a popular perception of poor performance, but many of West Ashley's formerly grocery-anchored shopping centers are experiencing re-investment, with property owners optimistic about West Ashley's long-term growth and evolving demographics.
- Certain historic retail nodes have also made a "comeback" in West Ashley, such as Avondale. In the future, other nodes could emerge at locations in which major streets intersect with each other.
- Inner West Ashley likely has more retail space than the market will be able to support, especially in coming years as more retail activity shifts to the internet. Some commercial property owners will need to consider repositioning their property such that they can still take advantage of West Ashley's central location within the region. Housing and some office space are likely to emerge in the near- to mid-term to drive this process.
- Despite its ownership challenges, age, and vacancies, Citadel Mall represents an outstanding opportunity to rethink the mall concept, including adding new uses such as high-density housing and class A office space.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- West Ashley will lose its character if new development does not accommodate small local businesses.
- There are too many vacant or visually blighted commercial properties along major arterial corridors.
- There are no small community-scale retail and services in outer West Ashley.
- Future jobs and economic development efforts should address the needs of residents at all skill levels.

VISION

- Attract a wider range of businesses so more people who live in West Ashley can also work in the community.
- Allow and encourage transformation of Citadel Mall into a mixed-use "town center" for the entire community. Also encourage the redevelopment of other key nodes and focus areas such as those shown on the map *Opportunities for Future Change/Improvements* on page 2.22-2.23.
- Cultivate a West Ashley where all kinds of small and local businesses can thrive.
- Offer a full range of recreational, cultural, and civic facilities to support both residents and workers.
- Facilitate refreshing/refurbishing shopping centers and commercial properties that have vacant spaces and/or a blighted appearance, including introducing a new mix of uses (such as office, housing) to create new nodes.
- Support more small-scale community shopping opportunities in outer West Ashley that look and feel more like Avondale in inner West Ashley.
- Improve plan review and permitting processes and work with local and regional economic development groups to entice revitalization and attract new businesses and employment centers.
- See more detailed implementation items on pages 6.17-6.26.

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IMPLEMENTATION

The following implementation priorities and actions were identified by considering West Ashley’s competitive strengths and challenges regarding economic development, the specific community concerns related to economic development, and by considering available tools that directly address economic realities and community concerns to fulfill the community’s vision.

Implementation should integrate data collection and analysis in all future project studies and improvements. Types of data may include traditional data and/or more sophisticated analytics as available.

Community Engagement

The City and County should develop community engagement strategies to improve communication, education, and participation for residents around locally important economic development issues.

Permitting Process

Simplify and accelerate the permitting process for projects in West Ashley

While the permitting process itself is not part of the “community vision” for economic development in West Ashley, the pace, complexity, and uncertainty associated with gaining City approvals for development projects do create overall constraints on the ability to fulfill the vision. Not only was this issue frequently raised by West Ashley’s developers and property owners, but it also echoes throughout concerns raised the broader community: a challenging and uncertain development approvals process constrains the ability to attract reinvestment in properties, which in turn affects the ability to grow office space for jobs and businesses, transform dated commercial areas, and replace or transform vacant and blighted properties. Limitations on development activity also negatively impact the ability to raise public revenue and use infrastructure more efficiently, as described earlier in this chapter.

This implementation strategy focuses on ensuring planning efforts, land use regulations, and approvals processes are proactively simplified, clarified, and made internally consistent. The goal is to ensure that future development projects still meet strict community expectations – including those described in the Design and Land Use chapter of this document – while also ensuring a developer or property can clearly understand those expectations before pursuing a project.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Review all land use and design regulations and permitting processes – including the Design Review Board Process – applicable to property development in West Ashley, and modify to ensure clear guidelines and expectations exist for development projects.* The City of Charleston and Charleston County should both undertake this review process, which could also result in a better alignment between their expectations and processes. The review should include examining and modifying the City of Charleston’s Design Review Board process to create guidelines and predictability for development applicants, in line with recently completed changes for the Board of Architectural Review. An audit of and improvements to the City’s Technical Review Committee process should also be completed. The review processes will require input from developers, brokers, and City staff with direct experience and understanding of existing challenges. Ultimately, the goal should be to provide clear expectations of both zoning and design, and to streamline the process by coordinating and minimizing the number of approvals required.
- *Establish a new incentivized redevelopment zone designation to encourage the revitalization of underutilized sites.* Create development standards that incentivize sustainable mixed use redevelopment, similar to the Upper Peninsula zoning district, and establish a finite review process.

Citadel Mall

Allow and encourage transformation of Citadel Mall into a mixed-use “town center” for the entire community

The Citadel Mall and surrounding area represents a tremendous opportunity for redevelopment into a true mixed-use district with higher density employment opportunities, a range of housing types, and more entertainment and recreational activities. Although any changes will be undertaken by private investors and owners, the following projects form a strategy that leverages the crucial role the City and other public agencies can play in this process by working with property owners, setting up the right policy/regulatory framework, and offering any available incentives as appropriate. Over the long term, the transformation of the Citadel Mall area could allow West Ashley to compete for high-skilled and young workers by offering a vibrant, mixed-use employment and housing district with convenient multimodal access.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *Ensure zoning and design regulations promote the town center vision.* As described in the Design and Land Use chapter of this document, this could include zoning that allows for vertical mixed-use development (i.e. mixing uses within a single building) and setting design standards for high quality green space, good connectivity to the surrounding community, and working with the various infrastructure and transportation providers (including CARTA) to ensure that this location can serve a 21st century economy.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Determine whether to pursue construction of a facility that could support regional or national athletic tournaments in the area.* Such a facility could potentially serve the community as well, while also attracting a new mix of activity to the Citadel Mall area.

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Direct proceeds of the West Ashley Redevelopment Project Area and TIF District to construct supportive public improvements within the Citadel Mall area as an incentive for private investment.* TIF proceeds could be used to construct necessary infrastructure that supports private development activity, and to potentially subsidize an affordable or work force housing development demonstration project that, through its built form and location of a residential use in the area, contributes to fulfilling the vision of the town center.

Range of Businesses

Attract a wider range of businesses to West Ashley so that more people who live in the community can also work in the community

Adoption and implementation of Plan West Ashley serves as a signal to businesses and developers that the area is ready for transformation and is a focus for investment in Charleston. Starting with this momentum, West Ashley should be repositioned within the region so that it is considered a viable office node and home of innovative businesses, in addition to continuing its role as a retail destination and medical hub.

The following implementation projects form a strategy focused on aligning the messages and efforts of numerous entities engaged in economic development and workforce development efforts. This should become a major undertaking within the City's newly formed Department of Economic Development, but will also require close coordination with many other partners such as Charleston County, Charleston Regional Development Alliance, Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce, Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority, the state Department of Commerce, and the commercial real estate brokerage and development community.

Elevating West Ashley to take a more significant role in the regional economy by supporting office based jobs should be viewed as having a long-term benefit for the entire region, rather than setting up West Ashley to compete with other office locations. West Ashley offers a unique opportunity to bring more jobs closer to a highly-skilled local work force in an area that is well-situated to foster a regional multi-modal transit strategy. Both of these attributes are attractive to businesses looking for locations that appeal to young, highly-skilled members of the work force.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *Develop specific goals for targeting industries and business activities for growth in West Ashley, and refine strategies for achieving these goals.* While Plan West Ashley is a first step in understanding West Ashley's competitive strengths and weaknesses for attracting regional economic activity – including West Ashley's potential strengths in attracting business activity related to regional industry sectors concentrated nearby, such as aerospace, information technology, and health care and life sciences – further study and outreach will be necessary to craft specific goals related to industry clusters and activities to be targeted for growth. Those goals will in turn drive customization of the following actions of this implementation strategy and determine the direction of future policy changes and studies.
- *Promote West Ashley's specific strengths through the region's economic development promotional materials and networks.* These strengths include: regional accessibility, proximity to the airport, lower costs than other competitive locations, easy access to other major job centers, and access to a large and educated workforce.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Work across all City departments to create a clear and coordinated message regarding equitable economic development priorities and efforts in the West Ashley area.* This kind of coordination will be an essential first step towards re-envisioning the area's role both in the City and the region.
- *Adopt the mixed-use regulatory standards per this plan's Community Design and Land Use Chapter, with an emphasis on allowing office growth at key nodes and arterials, such as Citadel Mall, the intersection of Sam Rittenberg Boulevard at Old Towne Road, and the Ashley Bridge District.*
- *Facilitate better connections between economic development, workforce development, and K-12 education.* This will ensure that all West Ashley residents are equally prepared to benefit from the area's expanding employment base, but will require participation from a large cross-section of institutions. An example of such a program is the Youth Apprentice Program funded and administered by the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce. West Ashley High School is included in this program, in which students are paid apprentices at businesses – including Hendrick Automotive Group – while receiving a scholarship to attend Trident Technical College.

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Map business assets and infrastructure in West Ashley to identify areas better positioned for private investment versus areas requiring upgrades.* Such assets could potentially include high speed gigabit internet service, commute access, freight access, easily developed or redeveloped sites, worker amenities, and proximity to an existing employment concentration.
- *Explore the introduction of a business license fee reduction as an incentive for investment in West Ashley.* The City should examine whether a business license fee reduction program for businesses new to West Ashley would successfully incentivize additional business growth in the area.

Small and Local Businesses

Cultivate a West Ashley where all kinds of small and local businesses, ranging from retail to tech start-ups, can thrive

Although the Citadel Mall area offers a prime opportunity to build more Class A office space that could serve both West Ashley and the region, there are many more small-scale opportunities throughout West Ashley to provide creative office space and affordable commercial space to a wide range of businesses. Such business include small tech companies, locally-owned retailers, and other kinds of businesses that could serve and support West Ashley's resident population, and/or serve other businesses in the area.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *Better integrate West Ashley within the efforts of the Charleston Digital Corridor initiative.* These efforts could include the opening of the business incubator, promotion of West Ashley's excellent assets for growing businesses, and hosting of more events targeted to West Ashley residents, workers, and businesses.
- *Prepare informational materials highlighting West Ashley's locational advantages for small businesses.* Such information could include an inventory of buildings and property that are available for reuse or redevelopment. This effort must be jointly coordinated between the City and County, since not all commercial property in the West Ashley area is currently within the City, and some important sites remain in unincorporated areas. This effort will likely require dedicated City staff time, but could potentially be incorporated into other citywide efforts.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Pursue the creation of a business incubator targeted to tech start-ups and small businesses.* An incubator in West Ashley could potentially be targeted to the Citadel Mall area to contribute to the emergence of the town center concept, although other locations with low cost spaces and/or easy access to the region should also be opportunistically considered.
- *Create a small business assistance program targeted to West Ashley, based on existing resources.* Such a program could connect small businesses with existing resources and incentives, and promote the benefits of West Ashley locations. The City should partner with other organizations targeting small business development, such as its ongoing partnership with Lowcountry Local First. A City staff person or a non-profit partner could potentially serve as a partner for implementing a program that targets use of existing resources in West Ashley.

Range of Facilities

Offer a full range of recreational, cultural, and civic facilities to support both residents and workers

The projects below support an overall strategy of enhancing recreational, cultural, and civic facilities in West Ashley to provide desirable amenities and attract new residents and businesses, while also better-serving current residents and businesses. Access to these facilities, and the services they offer, will allow West Ashley – and its individual employment districts and neighborhoods – to better function as a self-contained community that can fulfill all resident and worker needs.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *Promote existing community activities and facilities, and work with community members to create new community activities.* Existing activities and facilities include the Farmers Market, events at the private Schoolhouse office facility, the bikeway, and other outdoor amenities that make West Ashley special.
- *Identify ways to link West Ashley to existing cultural events in Charleston.* Charleston already has several signature cultural events, but these are focused in the peninsula areas. There may be opportunities to hold events associated with, or that spin off from, these events, but held at West Ashley locations including Citadel Mall, the Farmer’s Market location, and the high school, which has a performing arts facility.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Consider opportunities to locate City offices/facilities within the new “town center.* City facilities would act as an additional activity anchor and provide a stronger civic presence in West Ashley.
- *Coordinate services such as emergency response, garbage pick-up, drainage maintenance, street maintenance, lighting, etc* between City, County, St. Andrews PSD, and SCDOT to increase efficiency and decrease duplicity.

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Target future capital improvement plans to include the creation of additional parks and facilities.* New parks and community facilities should be prioritized when developing Charleston’s future five-year Capital Improvement Plans.

Refresh Existing Shopping Centers

Facilitate refreshing and refurbishing the existing shopping centers and commercial properties that have vacant spaces and/or have a blighted appearance, including introducing a new mix of uses such as office space and housing

The following implementation projects support a strategy of encouraging reinvestment in commercial properties through a mix of financial incentives and expansion of allowable uses within a consistent framework of design expectations. The goals of this strategy are to ensure existing commercial centers are attractive and updated, while encouraging reuse and new development at commercial properties that may no longer be viable.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *As appropriate, allow flexible conversion or development of retail and other commercial properties into other uses.* As described in this chapter, some of West Ashley's older retail and commercial properties may be outdated or no longer needed for retail use. Where appropriate, as described in this plan, land use regulations should allow property owners to convert and develop their sites with alternative uses such as housing or different commercial space.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Provide grants or tax abatements for façade rehabilitation and other visual site improvements.* Matching grants and/or tax abatements for façade rehabilitation, landscaping, and other relatively inexpensive visual site improvements will encourage property owners to reinvest in the appearance of properties. A first step in implementing this program will require identifying a funding source for grants, or an abatement method that would provide sufficient revenue to incentivize property owners to use the program. Business license fee abatement should be explored.
- *Align County and City design expectations for all unincorporated commercial areas within West Ashley.* West Ashley consists of a patchwork of incorporated and unincorporated properties, with different design standards and land use regulations applied to each. The County and City should undertake a concerted effort to align design expectations for commercial properties in unincorporated areas; the Wappoo Community Plan is an example of such collaboration.

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Examine potential to establish additional TIF districts at mixed-use nodes and office growth locations identified in Plan West Ashley.* Based on the nodes and corridors identified in Plan West Ashley, the City should monitor and examine opportunities to establish additional TIF districts to fund supportive capital improvements and other assistance.

More Shopping like Avondale

Support more small-scale community shopping opportunities in outer West Ashley that look and feel more like Avondale in inner West Ashley

The following projects seek to address community desires for small-scale shopping options in outer West Ashley that are easily accessible and function as neighborhood gathering locations. The projects form a strategy of changing land use regulations to encourage the creation of such spaces, while also providing multimodal transportation options to provide residents choices for easily accessing these commercial amenities.

Immediate Steps (first 2 years):

- *Ensure zoning in outer West Ashley requires/ incentivizes location of community shopping centers or commercial buildings near new housing. Zoning should be updated to require – or at least allow – small commercial nodes located in close proximity to current and future housing, as appropriate based on this plan’s Community Design and Land Use chapter.*
- *Evaluate the feasibility of adding a parking structure to Avondale.*

Longer-Term Steps (5 years – ongoing):

- *Provide convenient pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile access between housing and shopping opportunities in outer West Ashley. Based on the principles of this plan’s Transportation and Community Design and Land Use chapters, residents of outer West Ashley should be provided convenient multimodal options for accessing shopping and community amenities.*

Attract New Industries and Jobs

Develop incentives and work with other local and regional agencies such as Charleston County Economic Development, Charleston Regional Development Alliance and the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce to attract new industries and jobs to West Ashley.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Create and attract more Class A office product.* To attract One Region targeted sectors, it will be necessary to increase the Class A office product. The vast majority of white collar recruitment opportunities typically require substantial space (e.g. 25,000 sq. ft. or more).
- *Encourage the redevelopment of under-used land areas.* The undeveloped areas (parking lots, etc) potentially available on the Citadel Mall property for Class A office construction would benefit from the I-526 access and proximity to the airport, and could be appealing to any aerospace, automotive medical or IT entity or a back-office operation.
- *Work with property owners and help provide digital infrastructure needed to attract tech businesses.* Smaller IT projects, whether home-grown or recruited from elsewhere - could possibly be incorporated into converted retail space as occurred recently at Ashley Landing. This takes an open-minded shopping center owner with a fair amount of financial latitude with regard to the lease. A mixture of restaurants, coffee shops, and services nearby are examples of the right amenities that attract tech interest. This is also true in Avondale, and the revitalization of each of these shopping nodes creates similar amenities that may appeal to tech start-ups. In all of these areas, improvements for pedestrians and cyclists (such as crosswalks and traffic-calming measures) will be necessary for success. Tech companies may have more interest in West Ashley in the future as downtown Charleston tech becomes more saturated, and parking issues and rent continue to rise.
- *Utilize vacant shopping center space for back office projects such as call centers, which can have high employment.* These operations typically need a “plug and play” scenario where the telecommunications are already in place. Additionally landlords need to be open-minded and have a fair amount of financial latitude to attract these businesses. This again requires the open-mindedness and financial latitude described for smaller IT projects. Many times these vacant grocery store spaces are in play, unmotivated owners may be relatively content to let the space sit empty.
- *Work with local hospitals to explore the possibility new offices and medical facilities in West Ashley.* MUSC has blazed the trail with the recent announcement of their relocation of several functions to Citadel Mall. These workers now become part of the nucleus for other activities – with their demand for meals, services, etc. nearby. To the extent that they are also outgrowing their current locations, perhaps other medical facilities would also have this interest. Roper St. Francis, for example, recently consolidated their multiple back-office functions in Palmetto Commerce Park.

Support *Plan West Ashley*

Develop an integrated funding and financing strategy to facilitate the many improvements that support Plan West Ashley

Although the City already has a wide-range of options available to fund and finance many of the improvements identified in this plan, deploying these tools in a strategic manner will require an ongoing effort of identifying new sources, new opportunities for expanding funding and financing tools, and incorporating major projects in the City's budgeting process and Capital Improvement Plan. This work would include evaluating in greater detail what funding/financing options might already be available, and where various actions need to be taken to open other opportunities.

Near-Term Steps (2 years – 5 years):

- *Complete a comprehensive review of the potential existing funding sources that could be best deployed for a variety of capital projects and services (including expanded transit service) in West Ashley.* Examples could include: district based financing assessment tools, tax increment financing, a general obligation bond, federal grants, state tax credits, tax abatements, expenditures of accommodations tax revenue, storm water fees, and a parking enterprise fund. Each of these sources has particular restrictions on use and are better or worse aligned with particular investments. For example, accommodations tax revenues can only be applied to capital projects and operating costs related to tourism. Therefore, these revenues – some of which are generated by hotels within West Ashley itself – are a potential funding source for events programming, promotion of West Ashley, and the streetscape and beautification recommendations in Plan West Ashley.
- *Investigate any funding/financing mechanisms not currently allowed by state law for which legislative changes might provide better opportunities for West Ashley.* The City has already begun to study this issue, but further investigation will likely be required as specific tools and constraints are identified. The City can leverage its membership in the South Carolina Municipal Association to assist with changes to state law and other policy challenges.