

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND GROWTH

Chapter 2

This overview of existing physical characteristics provides insight into the community's urban form, current uses of land, and supporting infrastructure and public facilities. This chapter and Chapter 3, Community Mobility, illustrate current and future land use patterns and identify issues for analysis.

Planning for future land use and community character is based, in part, on how Florence has grown and evolved in the past and where it stands today as a small City that still retains its stature as a regional center. Community leaders and residents should appreciate the importance of guiding future development in the most efficient way possible. This may be accomplished through a series of recommended programs, ordinance changes, and capital projects, as well as through implementation of the Future Land Use Plan. This chapter provides a link between ideals and action so that the vision of future changes in the development pattern expressed by residents can become a reality.

INTRODUCTION

In many ways, residents seek to retain the small city atmosphere that has characterized Florence throughout its history. There has always been a sense of "place" associated with Florence as a City and a regional center in Northeastern South Carolina. A significant number of Florence residents still identify with the City's historic downtown and its different neighborhoods.

There are many urban design and land use elements that combine to create this perception of Florence. Streets with extensive tree cover and local parks help to complete the picture. Likewise, Francis Marion University and the two regional medical centers assist with "place-making" by creating destinations that draw residents and visitors alike. Lastly, the major businesses and industries that employ local residents are also landmarks and contribute to the overall impression of the City. The issues that relate to land use, development and redevelopment, community design and appearance, downtown, and historic preservation are addressed in this chapter.

Nearly all of the City's existing land area is developed, so the protection and improvement of existing neighborhoods is a significant issue for many residents. This is such a critical issue that it occupied a majority of time for voicing resident opinions at Community Workshop #1 held in September 2009. Many of the housing and neighborhood issues fall into this category of addressing the already built-out areas of the City that are in need of improvement and, in some cases, restoration or even redevelopment.

A second major opportunity is addressing new development, the so-called “greenfield” development on the City’s edges (and just outside its edges). Zoning for new development needs to encourage quality outcomes and protect neighbors from the encroachment of conflicting land uses. Lastly, future redevelopment plans of the downtown area need to focus on the re-creation of appropriate urban forms and walkable spaces that effectively interface with the recently constructed cultural buildings. The opportunity for downtown redevelopment has become more ripe than ever. This opportunity needs to be leveraged with the injection of proper financial and zoning incentives.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the necessary policy guidance to enable the City to plan effectively for its future growth, redevelopment, and character enhancement while respecting the existing land use pattern. Sound planning will ensure that community growth occurs in harmony with the natural environment, transportation pattern, public services, employment opportunities, and existing infrastructure. Sound planning is also needed to enhance the character and appearance of the City. Consider these issues and opportunities:

- ◆ Land use and its context with the natural environment are integral components of this Comprehensive Plan. Florence is located in a beautiful, wooded setting that, when correctly protected, provides the opportunity for the highest quality, sustainable development.
- ◆ Florence has a highly-developed transportation system. The City needs to pursue future growth and redevelopment in a fashion that optimizes the use and operating efficiency of current roadways and minimizes the need for costly new arterial and collector streets.
- ◆ Florence’s water distribution and sewer systems serve a wide area of dispersed development within both the incorporated City limits and the unincorporated periphery. Future growth should occur within the boundary that has already been defined by existing “urban-level” water and sanitary sewer service areas, which largely coincides with the designated planning area. Containing growth will allow the City to operate these systems more efficiently and invest in strengthening and enhancing their reliability rather than extending them further outward.

- ◆ Outward growth of businesses, shopping centers, and other forms of nonresidential development over the past 50 years has resulted in a dramatic and highly visible decline in value of once-enviable commercial areas. The City’s downtown and its traditional commercial highway corridors have been virtually “left behind” to a fate of “tired,” lower-value uses and abandonments.

This element of the Comprehensive Plan is intended to address these and other issues. The goals of this element are as follows:

- *Effectively manage future growth toward a more compact and fiscally responsible pattern of development.*
- *Strengthen the integrity and livability of existing neighborhoods through appropriate infill development and reinvestment.*
- *Preserve the community’s rich and valued open spaces and environmental resources while adopting more sustainable development practices that use these resources to advantage.*
- *Develop and redevelop downtown to regain its stature as a local and regional destination of living, culture, entertainment, and community gathering.*
- *Preserve community heritage through historic preservation/restoration and neighborhood integrity improvements.*
- *Enhance the character and aesthetic attractiveness of the community and its neighborhoods, districts, and approach corridors.*

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Natural Environment

This plan puts forward a vision related to overall livability and a high quality of life. Florence has flourished for many years, in large part, due to its rich and plentiful environmental resources. The spirit of sustainability intends to preserve or improve these environmental resources for future generations. Decisive action at this time fulfills the shared responsibility of all residents to permit future generations the ability to enjoy continued environmental opportunities.

Sensitive areas, stream corridors, and forest cover remain core values, but this summary also introduces contemporary concepts such as energy conservation, building design, and alternative transportation policies. A sustainable City requires that each of these issues receives attention, but also more importantly, that these policies, lead to action. In the context of a complex city such as Florence, this plan must focus on topics such as jobs, housing, streets, education, municipal finances, and culture. At the same time that growth and impacts occur in these areas, an effort must be made to limit the negative environmental effects.

Summary of Existing Natural Environment Conditions

The following paragraphs summarize the conditions and issues facing Florence with respect to the natural environment.

- ◆ Florence enjoys a gentle topography that adds to its environmental character without the constraints of steep slopes to pose development problems or severe land erosion.
- ◆ The natural amenities offered by the gently rolling terrain, mature forests, streams, and abundant groundwater resources are highly desirable as a living environment. These natural areas are depicted in **Map 2.1, Natural Areas**. There is an attraction to this open, rural landscape that, without deliberate planning, may be further eroded by scattered and short-sighted development patterns.
- ◆ Much of the undeveloped land surrounding the City is split almost evenly in forest, low-lying scrubland, or cropland that was cleared many years ago. Typically, the cost of developing woodland is higher, as even minimal clearing raises the price of land development and is also undesirable. Development on agricultural cropland, though basically less expensive, should require the introduction of sufficient trees and other landscaping materials to maintain a community appearance that is consistent with the remainder of the City.
- ◆ As a riparian community with several significant stream corridors, such as Jeffries and Middle Swamp Creeks, certain areas of Florence can be particularly susceptible to drainage issues and localized flooding. (Note the floodplains shown on **Map 2.1, Natural Areas**.) The City has developed storm sewers and has implemented a legal mechanism that reduces or eliminates stormwater management fees for developments that

provide their own on-site stormwater reduction measures. Newer forms of development and surface runoff management practices are now available that are less costly and reduce the need for extensive storm sewers.

- ◆ The City has acquired substantial areas of land along the Jeffries Creek corridor (see **Map 2.2, Park Service Areas**). These acquisitions result in benefits including habitat preservation, recreational and nature-education opportunities, permanent protection from inappropriate development, and aesthetic advantages to nearby neighborhoods.
- ◆ The following federally threatened or endangered species are found in Florence County and may be present within the study area. (See **Table 2.1: Florence County Species**.)
- ◆ The City enjoys a substantial tree canopy, which provides desirable summer

Table 2.1: Florence County Species

Genus/Species	Common Name
Haliaeetus LeucoCephalus	Bald Eagle
Oxypolis Canbyi	Canby's Dropwort
Picooides Borealis	Red-Cockaded Woodpecker
Schwalbea Americana	Chaffseed

Source: SC Department of Natural Resources

shade and significantly contributes to its community character. Many of the streets are tree-lined, with stands of native vegetation within the City and throughout the planning area. It is important that plans for landscaping and maintenance of the street canopy be provided for all neighborhoods in Florence.

- ◆ The intensively developed, auto-oriented commercial areas are largely impervious and, therefore,



One of Florence's many pleasant, tree-lined residential streets. Note the two separate directional lanes and boulevard-style median.

warrant improvements to avoid flooding and damage to local waterways. The City should seek ways to incorporate sustainable practices into all new development projects such as the preservation of open space, stormwater retention, and the use of natural drainageways.

Land Use and Community Character

This chapter examines the basic use of land, together with the standards and elements of design that affect the appearance of neighborhoods, commercial areas, and corridors – and the compatibility among and between them. This includes such factors as density (units per acre), intensity (building coverage and floor area), building setbacks, height and lot coverage, amount of open space, and vegetation. Since the zoning and subdivision regulations direct the design of individual sites, they warrant special attention.

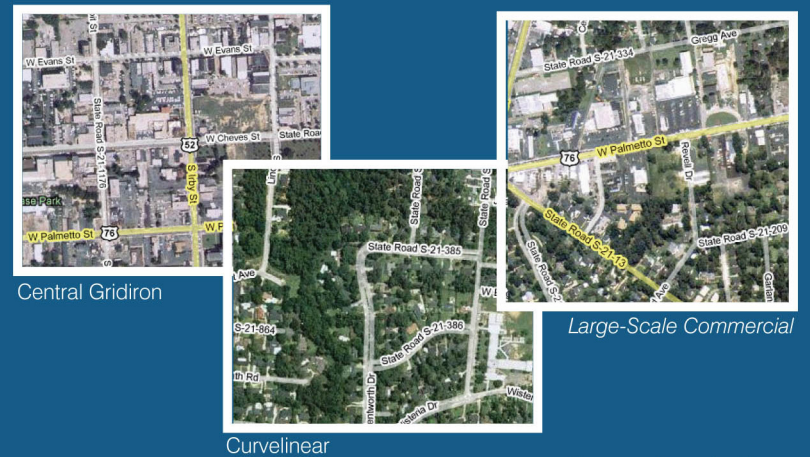
However, there are other implementation measures that can be employed to bring about appropriate development and encourage attractive redevelopment where needed. These tools include street access management, placement of park and recreational facilities, provision of other neighborhood amenities, housing rehabilitation, and other investment strategies. They must be fully exploited so that future development reflects the aspirations of Florence residents, as presented in *Chapter 1, Plan Introduction*.

The term “land use” literally relates to the use of land. However, it is the design of individual uses, districts, and neighborhoods that influence the “look and feel” of development more than the use itself. Therefore, the “character” of an area is more distinctly defined by the intensity (height and scale) of development, the arrangement of buildings and parking areas, the preservation and use of open space, and other aesthetic design features.

For instance, downtown and the originally settled portions of Florence have a grid street pattern, buildings mostly positioned close to the street, and sidewalks. This traditional form of development differentiates the older areas of Florence from the more auto-oriented nature that occurred after 1950 in the outer parts of the City. These later-established areas are largely characterized by greater setbacks and expansive parking areas, larger-scale buildings and out-parcels, and towering signs in the commercial areas. While also commercial in use, the outlying shopping malls and large-scale buildings produce a much different character of development than downtown or the

smaller commercial strip centers, such as along South Irby St. (See *Figure 2.1: Example Development Forms*.)

Figure 2.1: Example Development Forms



Source: Google Maps

It is this combination of land use and design that determines the compatibility and quality of development. Aesthetic enhancements such as attention to building scale, abundant landscaping and screening, sign control, and site amenities also contribute to the appeal of a neighborhood or commercial area. It is each of the above considerations that, collectively, are responsible for the community’s character and appearance and the impressions left on visitors and passers-by.

Examples of how design influences character within different land use types include:

- ◆ A single-family home situated on a large lot with mature trees and separated from neighboring homes versus a detached single-family home on a small lot with minimal yard space and vegetation;
- ◆ A master-planned business park in a campus-like setting versus an office building on an individual site surrounded by a parking lot;

- ◆ Storefront shops and small cafes in a walkable, neighborhood setting versus “big box” stores and pad-site restaurants and retailers in a large-scale shopping center with expansive surface parking and minimal landscaping; and
- ◆ A manufacturing facility that is nestled on a large site and among broad open space and mature trees and landscaping versus a more intensive industrial operation with outdoor activity and unscreened equipment storage.

Above are examples of the same land use (and often zoning) categories that may assume much different characters depending on their layout, design, and environmental context. Each of these character/use types can be considered as desirable to a community when situated in an appropriate location and developed to standards that minimize their potentially negative impacts.

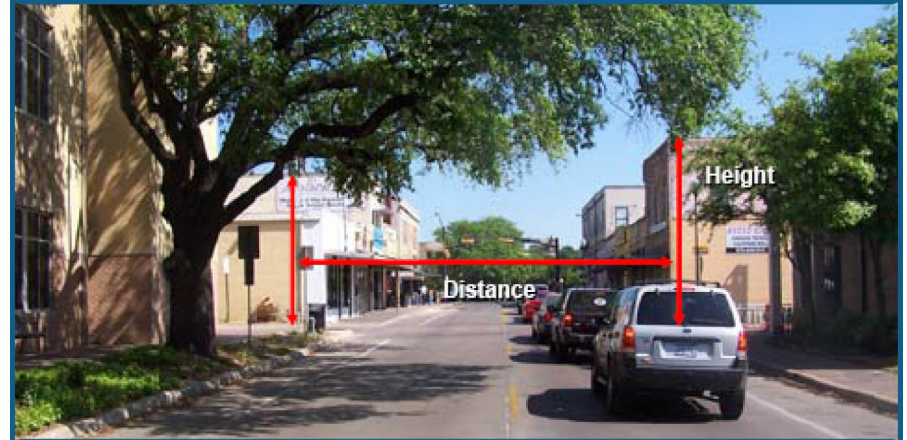
Mixing character types is usually disruptive. For instance, constructing a standalone store or office building with on-site parking in the front yard in the midst of a downtown block can damage the visual integrity of that block. This practice breaks the storefront façade “enclosure,” thereby creating an undesirable gap for pedestrians. Conversely, siting a small home close to the street within an estate residential area can break the continuity of front lawns and disturb the park-like setting of a suburban neighborhood. Plans, policies, and regulations must be mindful of neighboring development.

The zoning ordinance plays a significant role in establishing and protecting the physical character of the community. After all, this ordinance determines the types of use and delineation of districts, together with the height and area requirements and standards for landscaping, open space, and signage. As a result, the zoning ordinance largely directs the development outcomes. This is important since it provides a regulatory context in which local land use decisions may be made to foster a sustainable environment, a prosperous economy, and a high quality of life. The City’s development ordinances (zoning, subdivision, stormwater management, and building codes) represent the primary tools for implementing this policy document. A number of key recommendations are presented later in this chapter that are intended to reconcile the zoning districts and their intended character.

Existing Land Use Inventory

Existing Land Use Character is presented in [Map 2.3, Existing Land Use](#). The inventory reflects both the use of land (delineated as vacant, natural, agriculture, residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and parks), as well as its character. (See [Figure 2.2: Urban Character](#).)

Figure 2.2: Urban Character



Urban character is defined by the relationship of the buildings to the street, even if the buildings are only one or two stories tall. The sense of enclosure is defined by the buildings.

Florence can be divided generally into eight character classes as follows:

- ◆ **Urban** is unique to the downtown Florence area by virtue of the intensity and form of development.
- ◆ **Auto-Urban** reflects the more densely developed single- and multiple family neighborhoods; as well as the commercial uses along each of the main corridors, shopping centers, and the two large medical centers.
- ◆ **Industrial Uses** are composed mainly of individual manufacturing/storage buildings, industrial parks, railroad operations and switching yards, and campus-like industrial parks. Many of the standalone industrial sites within Florence resemble auto-urban development because of their large employee parking areas.

- ◆ **Suburban** includes the larger lot neighborhoods primarily on the fringes and outside the City, as well as nonresidential sites with liberal open space and vegetation.
- ◆ **Rural** makes up the natural and agricultural areas around the periphery of the City, including a few farmsteads and large-acreage estates.
- ◆ The **Special Use** category is comprised of miscellaneous uses or character types that cannot be readily characterized. The most significant use of this type in Florence is Florence Regional Airport.
- ◆ **Institutional Development** includes City- and other publicly-owned parcels/buildings, including schools.
- ◆ The **Parks and Open Space** class is composed of public parks and undeveloped areas that will remain permanently vacant or reserved as future parks.

Currently, U.S. 52 (Lucas/Irby Streets), U.S. 73 (Palmetto St.), W. Darlington St., N. Cashua Dr., Hoffmeyer Rd., David McLeod Blvd., W. Evans St., and portions of 2nd Loop Road (SC 51/Pamplico Hwy.) make up the major thoroughfares that traverse the City, attracting a large majority of “Auto-Urban Commercial” development leading into downtown.

Development in the northwestern sectors of the City and planning area is heavily influenced by Interstates 95 and 20, which serve as both barriers to development and as attractors to commercial development at their interchanges.

Industrial sites are scattered throughout Florence, though larger concentrations of manufacturing and storage operations are located in the northwestern sector of the City, at the far northwest edge of the planning area north of I-95, and at the I-95 and Williston Rd. interchange.

Surrounding downtown are a variety of higher-density residential uses, including largely “Auto-Urban Single-Family,” with some “Auto-Urban Multi-Family.” “Suburban Residential” uses are located in the outer portions of the City and in the unincorporated portions of the planning area. In many instances, “Auto-Urban Multi-Family” uses are co-mingled in the Suburban areas, mainly near arterial street intersections.

Much of the area surrounding the City limits is comprised of “Agriculture” and “Natural” (mainly woodland) land uses, with scattered lower-density residential development dispersed throughout. The quantities of the individual land use designations are exhibited in [Table 2.2, Existing Land Use and Character](#).

Findings and Issues

- ◆ Land development within the planning area totals approximately 60,000 acres (93.6 square miles), as shown in [Map 2.3, Existing Land Use](#). This acreage excludes water bodies and rights-of-way. The area outside of the City limits is predominantly comprised of “Natural” (21,474 acres) and “Agriculture” (9,740 acres) land uses with pockets of Estate Residential (1,760 acres) and Suburban Residential (4,484 acres).
- ◆ According to [Table 2.2, Existing Land Use and Character](#), approximately 57 percent of the land within the City and unincorporated planning area is “Natural” (40 percent) or “Agriculture” (17 percent).
- ◆ “Suburban Residential,” “Auto-Urban Single-Family Residential,” and “Auto-Urban Commercial” comprise the next three largest categories, altogether totaling nearly 47 percent of the calculated land area within the City. “Vacant” (1,030 acres) and “Parks” (4845 acres) together, account for roughly 14 percent of the total acreage within the City limits.
- ◆ The scattering of single industrial buildings throughout Florence is unusual and, while accommodating relatively “light” manufacturing operations, nevertheless represents an incompatible intrusion to nearby residential neighborhoods. Often, these operations can also create unusual amounts of traffic congestion during employee shift changes. The undesirable effects of this pattern can be mitigated by enhanced landscape buffering and the establishment of highway turning lanes where needed, as well as provisions to effectively transition these uses over time.
- ◆ The two large medical centers represent a vital asset to the community. They occupy large, monumental campuses, but have developed these sites through vastly different means. Carolinas Medical Center chose to develop on a large tract of vacant land at the southeastern edge of the City into a suburban form of development; McLeod Medical Center established its campus immediately east of downtown through the gradual acquisition and redevelopment of a once-residential area into an auto-urban site

using the original grid street pattern. Both institutions have campus plans that will play significant roles in future City zoning decisions. (See **Figure 2.3: Industrial Site Locations.**)

- ◆ Francis Marion University's main campus location at the far eastern edge of the planning area, nearly eight miles from downtown Florence, creates the natural tendency of reducing its importance as a part of the City's urban fabric. FMU's pastoral campus site, a former plantation, is now

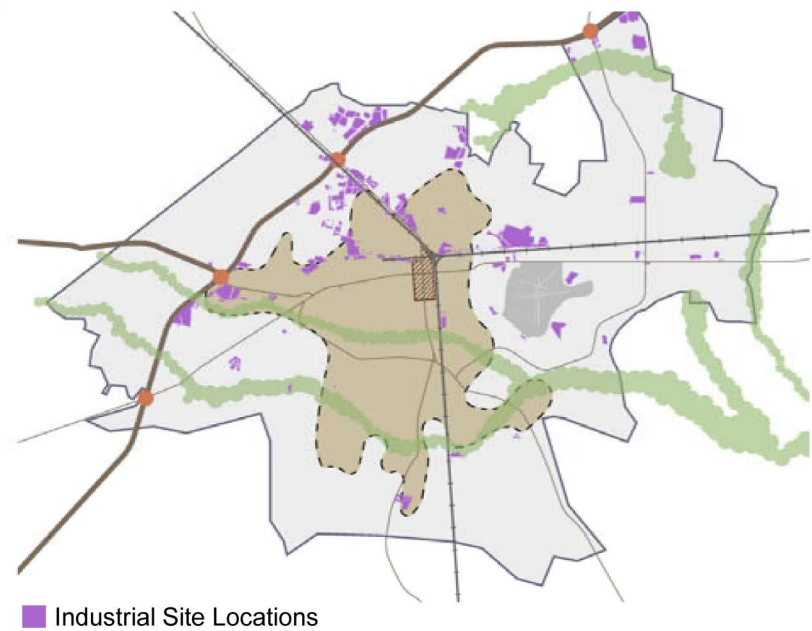
Table 2.2: Existing Land Use and Character

Existing Land Use/ Character	City of Florence		Unincorporated		Total Planning Area	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
Vacant	1,032.4	9.3%	2,448.2	5.0%	3,480.6	5.8%
Auto-Urban Single-Family Residential	2,105.6	18.9%	2,457.3	5.0%	4,562.9	7.6%
Suburban Residential	1,760.5	15.8%	4,483.9	9.2%	6,244.3	10.4%
Estate Residential	95.1	0.9%	1,755.9	3.6%	1,851.0	3.1%
Auto-Urban Multi-Family Residential	470.3	4.2%	455.6	0.9%	925.9	1.5%
Auto-Urban Commercial	1,216.1	10.9%	814.2	1.7%	2,030.3	3.4%
Urban	20.0	0.2%	0.0	0.0%	20.0	0.0%
Industrial	136.7	1.2%	2,227.3	4.6%	2,364.0	3.9%
Public / Institutional	905.9	8.1%	944.1	1.9%	1,850.0	3.1%
Office	81.0	0.7%	25.2	0.1%	106.1	0.2%
Special Use	0.0	0.0%	1,170.4	2.4%	1,170.4	2.0%
Mobile Homes	2.0	0.0%	12.9	0.0%	14.9	0.0%
Natural	2,464.8	22.1%	21,474.1	44.1%	23,938.9	40.0%
Parks & Open Space	483.5	4.3%	733.9	1.5%	1,217.4	2.0%
Agriculture	363.3	3.3%	9,743.0	20.0%	10,106.4	16.9%
Total	11,137.3	100%	48,745.9	100%	59,883.1	100%

built out. Its isolation has been offset to a great extent by the University's forward-thinking decisions to locate its new Performing Arts Center in the midst of the downtown core, site offices and other activities within the City, and promote an increased array of "in-town" student activities.

- ◆ Florence Regional Airport and its runway approaches occupy a significant area east of the downtown and McLeod Medical Center campus. While conveniently situated for travelers and supporting businesses, its large extent of open land has been perceived as a barrier to eastward development. This perception as a deterrent to growth, while partly correct, was overshadowed by the construction of I-95/20 northwest of the City over 40 years ago. The interstate highways radically altered the pattern of development, pulling most growth westward.
- ◆ The outward development of shopping malls, clustered hotel/restaurant complexes, convention facilities, and large and large-scale big-box

Figure 2.3: Industrial Site Locations



Industrial site locations are scattered throughout the Florence planning area, particularly in the unincorporated parts.

facilities has contributed to the gradual deterioration of older commercial areas. There are many instances of vacant buildings, abandonments, and marginal commercial enterprises in the highly visible approach corridors to the City. The City needs to adopt policies and regulations that will effectively prevent any further over-extension of commercial development. It also needs to ensure that vacated and abandoned structures are appropriately reused or removed in a timely fashion.

- ◆ The City's corporate boundary is excessively complicated, due mainly to the combination of unfavorable State legislation that hampers orderly annexation and the pattern of sewer/water service areas that span the City limits. There are many instances of large clusters of unincorporated areas – in some cases individual – lots that are surrounded by the City. These two factors, plus the practice of individual-lot annexations, block much of the City's ability to require or incentivize annexation. The resulting boundary pattern creates confusion regarding the City's tax base, the provision of public services, and the consistency of development regulations and the quality of development.

Water and Wastewater Utilities

Water supply and distribution, along with wastewater collection and treatment, are essential services that will enable Florence to continue growing and developing over time. Along with maintaining the physical components of these utility systems, the City must also attend to the public policy objectives for fiscal responsibility in providing water and wastewater connections to new developments. In both respects, Florence is pursuing positive end goals:

Investing in system maintenance and improvements while attempting to live up to its legacy policies of servicing both incorporated and unincorporated areas. Nearly all development within the planning area, both in and out of the City, is provided water supply and wastewater collection services by the City Utilities Department. The unincorporated area, which was once less intensively developed, was originally served by rural-standard water systems operated by Florence County and private, on-lot septic tanks or small-scale sewage collection and treatment systems. The City acquired the County's water and sewer systems through a Joint Services Agreement in 2002; this agreement extended the City's franchise area to include a substantial amount of rural area that is far outside the City's zoning and subdivision regulatory jurisdiction.

Given this dissonance between authority and responsibility, the City must diligently investigate and deliberately pursue a future course of action that will lead to a more fiscally sustainable outcome. Additional detail on the current status of Florence's water and wastewater systems are described below:

Summary of Existing Conditions:

Water Supply and Treatment

The City of Florence relies on groundwater as its primary supply source, from deep wells drilled into the Middendorf and Black Creek aquifers. The City provides drinking water for approximately 75,000 people and more than 2,990 businesses. Approximately 70 percent of Florence's water is provided by the groundwater well system. The City of Florence also operates the Pee Dee River Regional Surface Water Plant. This plant, which utilizes the Pee Dee River as its source, provides the remaining 30 percent of Florence's water supply.

Water Distribution and Storage

The service area for the City's drinking water supply system includes all areas within the City limits and much of northern Florence County, with the exception of Timmonsville. There are approximately 30,100 system connections (2010). The Comprehensive Planning study area includes areas contiguous to the existing City limits that are anticipated as potential areas for future development and annexation. Components evaluated for this analysis included water distribution and water storage.

A computerized modeling assessment of the City's water distribution system revealed a few isolated locations within the study area that currently have low pressures. The Water and Sewer Master Plan developed in 2005 (CDM, BP Barber, Davis and Brown) recommended several system upgrades to address these low pressure areas. These include the following:

- ◆ 30-inch transmission main along 301 Bypass to Pamplico Highway;
- ◆ Extend 12-inch line along Francis Marion road south of Old Wallace Gregg Road;
- ◆ Extend 12-inch line on John C. Calhoun Road and Williamson Road;

- ◆ Install 24-inch line on John Paul Jones road from the intersection of Third Loop Road and Highway 52/301, and
- ◆ Install 18-inch line in the Sumter Road / Pisgah Road area

When these modifications are incorporated into the model, the system is expected to meet the South Carolina water pressure standards for both average day demand and peak day demand conditions within the study area. Areas further outside of the study area will require additional modifications to alleviate future pressure problems.

According to South Carolina Department of Environment and Health Control (SC DHEC) guidelines, the system-wide storage capacity for emergency conditions should be 11.6 million gallons (MG). Acceptable storage for emergency conditions includes elevated storage and ground storage with auxiliary power for pumping (per SC DHEC). Actual elevated storage in the system is 5.1 MG, but this storage is augmented by the City's treatment facilities that have auxiliary power. Because auxiliary power has been provided, the City has an emergency supply capacity of 27.9 million gallons per day (MGD).

Wastewater Collection and Treatment

The service area for the wastewater (sewer) system is the same as that for the water supply system, but the infrastructure (collection system) is not as expansive as the water system (approximately 19,500 connections, 2010). The 2005 Utilities Master Plan included an evaluation of five major subsystems that comprise the City's collection system. As is the case with many municipal sewer collection systems, the report concluded that each of the City's subsystems experienced a significant volume of infiltration and inflow (I/I) related to rainfall. This was attributed primarily to the age of the systems. Most of the older parts of the system are located within the study area. To address the issue, recommendations were provided for inspection and rehabilitation of the older portions of the collection system.

In addition to the utilities plan, a separate study was undertaken to address specific sewer system capacity, management, operations, and maintenance issues. Recent projects implemented by the City to address the issue of I/I have included:

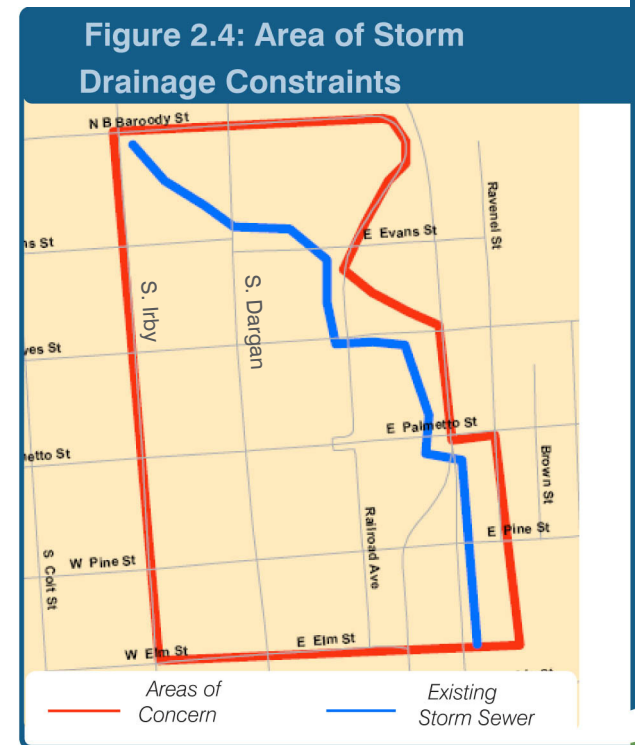
- ◆ Raising the manholes on the Middle Swamp gravity line (upstream of the pump station located on Pamplico Highway) and
- ◆ Adding a force main downstream of this pump station to increase discharge capacity.

The utilities plan also considered the need to accommodate future growth through the year 2025 and extrapolated to 2030. System improvements were recommended in the utilities plan to handle new flows related to anticipated growth. Florence is also embarking on the construction of a new \$120 million wastewater treatment facility on the site of the existing plant.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater management service for Florence is restricted to the City limits. The collection and drainage system has issues related to the age of the system. The City has recently completed several large drainage projects to help alleviate specific drainage issues in areas of Florence, but in the downtown area there are still some flooding and capacity issues that need to be resolved. (See **Figure 2.4: Area of Storm Drainage Constraints.**)

A large portion of the downtown area consists of impervious surfaces that contribute to stormwater runoff. This runoff is typically discharged to the SC DOT's right-of-way, and, in general, there is no more capacity for additional runoff in this area. During heavy rainfall events, flooding can occur in low lying areas, such as bridge underpasses.



In addition to stormwater quantity, the City is rated as an “MS4 Community” (municipal separate storm sewer system) that is regulated by Phase II of the U.S. EPA’s NPDES (national pollutant discharge elimination system) stormwater requirements. The City has developed a stormwater management plan that identifies best management practices (BMPs) that will be implemented to improve and enhance the quality of stormwater runoff within the City. The implementation of the BMPs from the Stormwater Management Plan will need to be incorporated into the evaluation of drainage issues to ensure that the City maintains compliance with the NPDES Phase II regulations.

Findings and Issues

Following is a summary of the findings and growth management issues pertaining to the City’s utility system infrastructure:

- ◆ Water System
 - » Based on a review of the water distribution and storage system, there are no significant constraints within the study area to accommodate future land development and redevelopment.
- ◆ Wastewater Collection
 - » Potential constraints for the wastewater management system include infiltration / inflow into older portions of the system.
 - » A priority for expanding the City’s wastewater management system is to extend the system into the pockets of undeveloped areas that are within the current system’s overall boundaries.
- ◆ Stormwater Management
 - » As downtown redevelopment continues, the inadequacy of existing stormwater facilities will present a potential constraint requiring future projects to provide on-site stormwater detention.
 - » The inadequacy of stormwater handling capacity in low-lying areas and bridge underpasses needs to be further evaluated in detail to determine the most effective measures to alleviate these problems.

Successful resolution of these stormwater capacity issues will require continuing input, cooperation, and coordination between the City, Florence County, and SC DOT.

Parks and Recreation

Parks and recreation facilities are an essential part of a healthy, quality, and vibrant community environment. They provide the necessary components for events outside of the home and after work and school activities. Whether for passive or active use, parks and recreation facilities are an important part of everyday, active living – providing health benefits for children, adults, and seniors alike. The park system enhances the community’s “quality of life,” boosting economic development efforts to recruit and retain a skilled workforce; build a strong tax base to finance system expansion, facility enhancements, and maintenance; and attract new families and retirees alike.

The mission of the Florence Parks and Leisure Services Department is to enhance the quality of life in Florence by providing quality parks, facilities, programs, and services in the City. It is responsible for addressing the availability, quality, type, size, and location of recreation opportunities to meet the needs of Florence’s residents and visitors to the community. In recent years, the park system has grown to about 600 acres of land (both developed and undeveloped) in 16 locations throughout the community, an extensive trail system, 17 ball fields, 24 tennis courts, and 10 playgrounds. The City has also recently completed development of its Tennis Complex in the northern part of the City, which includes 30 tennis courts (4 clay courts) and other recreational amenities. Locations of these parks are illustrated in [Map 2.2, Park Service Areas](#) and in [Table 2.3: Park Classification System](#).

Pocket, Neighborhood, and Community Parks

The Department’s function has to be able to respond to new and emerging community desires and taking advantage of opportunities for new land acquisitions. While the identification of park projects, sites, and priorities are under the guidance of the Department, there are opportunities for the City to remain engaged. For example, through this process, residents identified a new tennis complex as a priority (along with many other park improvements).

Linear Parks and Trails

A system of parks and recreation areas is not complete without linear linkages between park facilities, neighborhoods, schools, and other public facilities. Such linkages may boost accessibility to parks and other public spaces,

Table 2.3: Park Classification System

Park Type	Description	Size	Service Radius	Standard
Community Park	Large-scale facility providing a variety of activities for the full community	Min. 5+ Acres	1 Mile	5.0 Acres per 1000 People
Neighborhood Park	Serves neighborhood residents within walking distance. Provides playground, picnicking, play courts, and other basic activities	Min. 2+ Acres	1/4 Mile	1.0 Acres per 1000 People
Pocket Park	Serves residents in the immediate area. Provides extremely limited facilities, such as a tot lot	0.25 to 1.0 Acre	1/8 Mile	2.5 Acres per 1000 People
Linear Park	Serves the broader community with activities such as bicycling, walking, and jogging. Used to interconnect other parks and school sites	Typically, 1 Mile	Available to All Persons	No Minimum Standard
Special Facility	Serves the broader community or region with specialized activities, such as a senior center or a stadium	No Minimum	Available to All Persons	No Minimum Standard
Open Space	Undeveloped land acquired for environmental protection, nature study, or limited activities. Often used as a reserve for future parks	No Minimum	Not Applicable	No Minimum Standard

- ◆ On-street designated bicycle routes;
- ◆ A two-mile “rail-trail” path developed on an abandoned railroad right-of-way;
- ◆ A system of hiking paths within the Freedom Florence Recreational Complex, then linking it with the National Cemetery and Levy Park; and
- ◆ A hiking trail along Jeffries Creek near the newly established Veterans Park and Civic Center at the western edge of Florence.

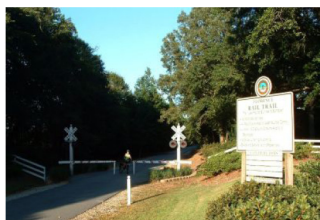
There will be many future opportunities to expand and enhance the trail system with additional land acquisitions along Jeffries Creek and Middle Swamp Creek, possible extension of the existing rail-trail, a new rail-trail along the existing rail line that parallels Lucas Street, widening and further improvement to the Veterans Park trail, and the designation of specific bicycle lanes for the on-street trails.

Park Service Areas

Evaluating service areas is an effective means of determining if the parks are well-located relative to their users. While some communities have sufficient, or even an abundance of, parkland, the location of these opportunities plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of the entire park system. This analysis

allows identification of those areas of the community that have sufficient park areas available and, more importantly, those that are in need of parks and recreation areas and facilities in closer proximity. (See **Table 2.4: List of Parks in Florence.**)

Depicted in **Map 2.2, Park Service Areas**, are service area buffers around all existing parks. The service areas are shown separately to emphasize the difference in service area coverage based on the classification of park. In some cases, such as the Freedom Florence Athletic Complex and Timrod Park, parks are multi-use destinations, serving as both a community park and a neighborhood park for nearby residents.



Florence's Rail-Trail Pathway is an example of a linear park.

thereby expanding the effective service area coverage of these existing parks. This, in turn, reduces the amount of public investment necessary to locate and construct parks densely throughout the community. In this planning process, residents expressed a desire for parks and other amenities to be within walking distance of home. Florence has established a trail system that is comprised of:

Table 2.4: List of Parks in Florence

Park Type	Size (in acres)	Ball Fields	Basketball Courts	Tennis Courts	Play-ground	Picnic Areas	Trails	Additional Features	Classification
Freedom Florence Recreational Complex	100	13	0	0	1	1	yes	Lake, gymnastic center, tournament softball, football and soccer fields	Community
Levy Park	13.6	2	6	2	1	1	no	Community center	Community
McLeod Park	51.5	5	6	0	0	multiple	yes	Two volleyball courts and skateboarding facility	Community
Timrod Park	18	0	0	11	0	multiple	yes	Gardens and two fitness courses	Community
Veterans Park	6	0	0	0	0	0	yes	Pathways with monuments and memorials; includes a wall of honor, an obelisk, as well as an amphitheatre	Neighborhood
Iola Jones Park	7.5	1	4	0	1	0	no	None	Neighborhood
Jeffries Creek Park	55	0	0	0	multiple	1	no	None	Neighborhood
Lucas Park	12	0	0	2	1	1	yes	Gardens	Neighborhood
Northside Park	7	2	0	0	0	0	yes	Swimming pool and community center	Neighborhood
Northwest Park	8.42	1	7	2	1	1	yes	Community center	Neighborhood
Friendship Park	3.5	2	0	0	0	1	no	Clubhouse and concession stand	Pocket
Legion Stadium	4	1	0	0	0	0	no	Baseball, press box; seats 1,500 people	Special Facility
Lester Park	1	0	0	0	1	1	no	Skating path	Pocket
Maple Park	4	2	0	0	1	0	no	Community center, two shuffleboard courts, four paddle tennis courts	Pocket
South Park	3.5	1	2	2	1	1	no	Skating path	Pocket

Source: City of Florence

From a purely locational standpoint, the analysis indicates that, within the City limits, the developed areas of the eastern side of the community are fairly well served by the existing neighborhood parks system. On the west side, there is an availability of community level parks that serve the local neighborhoods. However, some of the older neighborhoods near the City core and the fringes of the community, especially in the northwest, are deficient in park resources.

Findings of the service area analysis for each park type include:

- *Community parks have a primary service area of one mile, meaning that a majority of persons utilizing these area-wide parks generally reside within this radius. As illustrated by Map 2.3, Park Service Areas, Florence currently has four community parks. While their associated service areas cover most of the City limits, the far north and south areas of the City have limited coverage.*
- *Illustrated in Map 2.3, Park Service Areas, are the one-half mile service areas of the six neighborhood parks, as well as the one-quarter mile service areas of the pocket parks. The intent is to have well-distributed and evenly spaced neighborhood parks proximate to residentially developed areas. As displayed, the current array of neighborhood and pocket parks leaves many parts of the City uncovered, particularly in the original core and in the newer subdivisions at the edges.*
- *Natural areas, golf courses, and other specialized facilities do not have designated service areas. While these parks tend to benefit a relatively limited population, they provide an additional form of recreation for nearby residents. These passive park areas complement the Department's more active recreation holdings.*

Findings and Issues

- ◆ Many residential areas of the community and downtown Florence appear to be underserved by nearby neighborhood parks. The City should continue to pursue opportunities to acquire and develop these types of facilities, or further extend trails and bikeways to provide access to other nearby facilities.
- ◆ In Community Workshop #1, held in September, 2009, residents expressed the concern of imbalance in the quality of parks. Timrod Park is considered to be a highly valued asset that draws disproportionate usership because

other parks are perceived as less pleasant. Efforts should be made to upgrade landscaping, equipment, and other amenities to the point that all parks are thought of as having equal value.

- ◆ Neighborhoods in the unincorporated portions of the planning area are virtually unserved by any public parks, as there is only one Florence County park within the area. While some limited needs can be satisfied by the semi-public parks provided by subdivision or housing complex developers, there will be a continued need additional neighborhood and community parks in the currently unincorporated areas.
- ◆ Further, as new residential development occurs throughout the unincorporated planning area, there will be a need for additional neighborhood parks, but most especially in the already developed areas.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

During Colonial and early U.S. history, most development in the original 13 States took place in coastal areas, along canals and navigable river corridors, or along a handful of inland roads that followed original Native American trails. Inland areas such as Florence were unpopulated or lightly settled, mainly with subsistence agriculture, until the coming of the railroads in the mid-19th Century. Florence was established at the junction of three intersecting railroads serving the Southeast, with the first railroad station established in 1853. As railroad-related commerce increased, the original City was later laid out and platted by the railroad company as a speculative venture to sell real estate by attracting new residents. Florence was chartered in 1870 and incorporated in 1890.

The Civil War was the main historical event that shaped Florence. Because of its importance as a railroad center, the early township that eventually became Florence was the site of a military logistics and railroad maintenance center, stockade, medical center for wounded Confederate soldiers, and garrison for



The Florence National Cemetery is a historical landmark.

captured Union troops. The burial grounds adjacent to the stockade eventually became the Florence National Cemetery and continues to be a national burial ground for veterans of all wars, as well as a site for military commemorations.

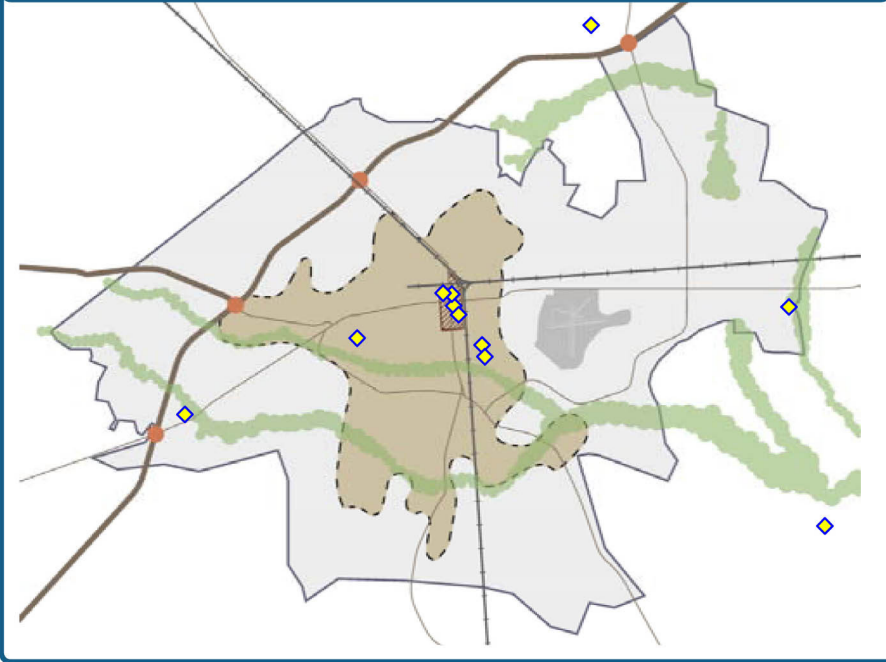
The City's ascendancy as a regional center started in the early 20th Century with the establishment of regional highways, manufacturing, and the establishment of supporting schools and cultural institutions. This progression has continued with the construction of Interstate highways, establishment of Francis Marion University, development of an airport supporting commercial airline traffic, continuing expansions of two major medical centers, and formation of a modern industrial base. Although Florence is highly optimistic about its future, it remains important to respect the past and work diligently to preserve its significant vestiges.

Florence has several organizations that have ardently worked to document and preserve the City's historical and cultural resources. (See **Figure 2.5: Sites Listed in the National Register of Historic Places**.) These include the Florence City/County Historical Commission, Florence Heritage Society, Florence Museum of Art and History, and the Mars Bluff Society. Additionally, Florence has 11 sites or structures listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including the following:

- ◆ Blooming Grove (Mandeville-Rogers House)*
- ◆ Bonnie Shade (currently the Mr. & Mrs. Mark Buyck Jr., residence)
- ◆ Christ Episcopal Church
- ◆ Claussen House*
- ◆ The former Florence Public Library (1925)
- ◆ Florence Downtown Historic District
- ◆ Florence National Cemetery
- ◆ Florence Stockade
- ◆ Poyner Junior High School
- ◆ Slave Houses of Gregg Plantation (Hewn Timber Cabins relocated to the Francis Marion University Campus)
- ◆ The former U.S. Post Office
- ◆ Young Farm

* Sites are located immediately outside planning area.

Figure 2.5: Sites Listed in the National Register of Historic Places



Further details on these buildings or properties, along with other Florence County listed sites can be found in the Florence County/Municipal Comprehensive Plan, prepared in 2007 by the Florence County Planning Department. In addition, there are many early 20th Century residences, churches, and institutional buildings, neighborhoods, and a portion of the remaining downtown area that are worthy of preservation and should be afforded further recognition.

In 2007, Florence County Progress commissioned the professional preparation of the "Florence Tourism Assessment and Plan" for the area. This report presents an assessment of existing historical resources and a series of recommendations that are both detailed and comprehensive. It focuses on the area's significance in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, early settlement, and its significance in the early 20th Century. Recommendations presented in the report focus on stimulating tourism by taking advantage of these historical

and cultural opportunities such as the exploits of Revolutionary War hero, Gen. Francis (“Swamp Fox”) Marion, the nearby Darlington Raceway, and the more recently developed downtown cultural facilities.

These and other historical resources are important assets to the community, both in terms of defining its heritage and character and as opportunities for economic development. Strategies are presented later in this Chapter that will assist in their preservation.

PLAN FOCUS AREAS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the planning process, a number of issues and concerns were expressed related to land use compatibility, coordination of infrastructure with community growth, entry corridor design and appearance, and downtown and neighborhood redevelopment. These discussions formed the basis of the following focus areas, along with analysis of existing conditions; review of the current plans, ordinances, and practices; and examination of the planning and development process – all within the context of recent development patterns. Following the identification of the focus topics is a series of strategies and their rationales, along with the advisable implementation actions and initiatives.

Focus Area 2.1 Managing Future Growth

Until the 1960s, most development in Florence was compact and followed the original grid street systems or a modified grid system having a few curvilinear streets and a more suburban character. These developments utilized existing or minimally extended sewer, water, and storm sewer infrastructure, and the City limits were expanded in an orderly fashion as growth proceeded. With construction of the I-95/I-20 corridors, most of Florence’s new development was pulled westward. Development also proceeded southward with the construction of new arterial streets and establishment of the Carolinas Medical Center campus. These newly developing areas were served by privately owned or City- or County-operated utility systems, avoiding any vital need for

annexation. Also, lower land costs and the County’s more lenient zoning and subdivision standards served as an additional attractor to rural subdivisions and suburban development. Ultimately, development became overextended in many areas, leaving undeveloped gaps and a highly inefficient pattern of growth and infrastructure.

Strategy 2.1.1: Accommodation of Development and Redevelopment

Rationale

The amount of undeveloped land needed to accommodate future growth in Florence is expected to be between 1,500 and 2,000 acres. This takes into consideration the current supply of platted, but undeveloped, lots. Selection of future growth areas should be based on the optimization of existing streets and utilities, taking advantage of the many remaining enclaves of undeveloped land that have been bypassed by earlier developments.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Employ the City’s zoning policy to prohibit any further leap-frog development by refraining from premature rezoning decisions. Instead, utilize the adequate infill areas that exist within the City’s current water and sanitary sewer service areas for accommodating a variety of new forms of development.
- ◆ In those exceptional cases where development of “raw” land is determined to be appropriate, the City should continue its current policies that require developers to provide adequate water distribution line and sewer extensions as a part of any new subdivisions or land development project.
- ◆ Establish an intergovernmental relationship with Florence County that assures that zoning policies and land development standards within the planning area are uniform, regardless of whether the area is inside or outside the City limits. This may also be achieved by way of development and pre-annexation agreements for those unincorporated properties requesting City utilities.
- ◆ Clarify and, if necessary, redefine the City sewer/water franchise area boundaries that were expanded in the 2002 City-County Joint Services Agreement. Revise the “economic feasibility assessment” provisions to place greater emphasis on the need for effective growth management and compatibility with this Comprehensive Plan.

- ◆ Establish a firm policy as to when the City will and will not participate in utility line oversizing. Participation should conform with the policies of this Comprehensive Plan.
- ◆ Define primary (one to 10 years) and secondary growth areas with policies and criteria as to development timing.

Strategy 2.1.2: Provide additional attention and resources to promote infill development and redevelopment and to reinvest in the established neighborhoods.

Rationale

A tenet of growing smart is maximizing the efficiency of the development pattern. This means promoting contiguous development and land use patterns that capitalize on the availability of existing infrastructure, wherever possible. There are many sizeable undeveloped and underdeveloped areas around Florence that provide opportunity for infill development where existing streets and utilities may be readily extended at minimal cost. There are also many individual lots that may be developed or redeveloped, particularly in the central and north-central neighborhoods of Florence. It is important to recognize, however, that only a part of Florence's future growth can be accommodated by infill; the market will continue to demand the continuation of urban expansion. A second tenet is improving the integrity and desirability of existing neighborhoods. Specific strategies and implementation measures are outlined in [Chapter 5, Housing and Neighborhoods](#). As related to land use, there are also initiatives pertaining to the compatibility of adjacent and nearby uses, preservation of neighborhood character, and convenient access to goods and services.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Determine the appropriate zoning classification of infill development tracts and initiate rezoning as appropriate. In doing this, ensure that the neighborhood character is preserved and compatibility with existing uses is strongly observed.
- ◆ Study the infrastructure needs of the infill opportunity sites and prepare a proactive schedule of capital improvements, including the timing and methods of funding the improvements.
- ◆ Incorporate bonuses or incentives into the zoning provisions whereby increased height and/or floor area may be achieved (in appropriate

settings) for meeting certain prescribed development standards. This may help to make infill development more feasible.

- ◆ Consider an infill incentive program whereby building permit fees may be reduced, infrastructure improvement costs may be shared with the City, and approval processes expedited as methods to encourage infill and redevelopment. Also, establish criteria and procedures to simplify and streamline development approval.
- ◆ In accordance with [Chapter 5, Housing and Neighborhoods](#), define the boundaries of redevelopment areas, possibly including them in the existing downtown redevelopment district. Subsequently, work with the residents of these neighborhoods to prepare a redevelopment plan to determine the type and general form of development, which may serve as a basis for design and implementation.
- ◆ Review and amend the City's zoning ordinance to identify and resolve any regulatory impediments to infill development and redevelopment that might exist. Incorporate standards that are unique and applicable to these sites versus undeveloped areas.
- ◆ Solicit interest among the landowners and charitable interests to partner in establishing individual redevelopment authorities to establish a transition plan and the means of financing and implementation.

Strategy 2.1.3: Direct future growth to occur in areas that are most suitable for development.

Rationale

The greater Florence planning area is projected to grow by approximately 20,000 persons by 2030. Assuming similar development patterns and densities, there will be a demand for an additional 1,500 to 2,000 acres to accommodate the projected population. This amounts to roughly between two and three square miles. The areas that are most suitable for future growth include several infill and development tracts that were identified by participants in the second Community Workshop held in October, 2009.

- ◆ Create and adopt a long-term annexation plan that reduces the complexity of the City's boundary, eliminates the "donut holes" of unincorporated

lands, and eventually brings the entire study area into the Florence City limits.

- ◆ Develop and use a robust fiscal impact model that considers facilities and services beyond just sewer and water utilities, e.g., fire-emergency response, police protection, parks, and schools. ◆ Employ development and pre-annexation agreements to initiate annexation of the properties within the study area when they are improved.
- ◆ Undertake a coordinated strategy with other South Carolina municipalities to modernize State legislation that regulates annexation.
- ◆ Amend the Zoning Map to rezone the preferred future growth areas to be consistent with the future land use plan. This would be done in advance of any development applications as a means of incentivizing development in the desired areas. Such “by-right” zoning should allow flexibility as to the development type, provided the development character is compatible with the surrounding area. This practice will attract development to desired areas, as developers will not be required to undertake rezoning actions.
- ◆ Develop a municipal infrastructure service plan to establish the timing and means of infrastructure provision to the future growth areas.
- ◆ Coordinate the capital improvement program (CIP) to provide streets, public facilities, and municipal services to the future growth areas.
- ◆ Adopt utility extension and public services policies subject to the following criteria:
 - » The subject parcel or development site is within a preferred growth area and will not create obstacles to successful implementation of a suitable roadway network consistent with the City’s Community Mobility Plan.
 - » The land is proposed for annexation and abuts the City’s existing utility service areas and can be immediately and efficiently served – or readily served with manageable and affordable capital improvements.
 - » The land can be adequately served by and funded for municipal police, fire, and emergency medical services, and the City can readily assume the fiscal responsibility for the maintenance of existing roads, street lights, parks, and any publicly-owned facility, for which the fee structure will optimize – or at least minimize – the fiscal costs to the City.

- » All public improvements necessary to serve the area proposed for service extension will be constructed and financed in accordance with City standards and policies.
- » There is sufficient capacity of the infrastructure systems, i.e. roads and utilities, to accommodate the added development.
- » There is a written finding on behalf of Florence School District One that there are or are planned to be requisite capacities of school facilities to accommodate the added enrollment.
- » As determined by the City, the actual fiscal impact of expanding the incorporated area and then providing basic services, maintaining public facilities, and making other necessary public improvements is favorable and sufficiently offsets the associated costs to the City, both near- and long-term.

Strategy 2.1.4: Continue to renovate and replace aging or inadequate infrastructure components.

Rationale

The City has invested wisely for many years to provide high quality and reliable water distribution and sanitary sewer services. As with all capital investments, these facilities wear out and eventually require refurbishment or replacement.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Complete the planning and construction of proposed water system components to strengthen the distribution system’s capacity and pressure:
 - » Transmission main along 301 Bypass to Pamplico Highway;
 - » Water main extension along Francis Marion Road south of Old Wallace Gregg Road;
 - » Water line extension on John C. Calhoun Road and Williamson Road;
 - » New 24-inch line on John Paul Jones Road from the intersection of Third Loop Road and Highway 52/301; and
 - » New 18-inch line in the Sumter Road / Pisgah Road area

- ◆ Continue the practice of requiring land developers to provide adequate water distribution facilities, sanitary sewers, and stormwater management facilities in their development projects.
- ◆ Promote infill development in those pockets of unsewered land that are within the boundaries of the City's broader sanitary sewer service area.
- ◆ Incorporate on-site stormwater detention and improved drainage collection facilities into future downtown redevelopment planning efforts and individual project site plans.
- ◆ Continue addressing and correcting site-specific stormwater management needs for low-lying areas and bridge underpasses.

Strategy 2.1.5: Upgrade service levels in areas currently served by rural water supply facilities.

Rationale

The rural-type water systems that were acquired from Florence County were never intended to accommodate the requirements of urban and suburban residents. Generally, the components of a rural water system are designed to provide minimum-cost water supplies over a wide geographical area. These include small-diameter, non-looped distribution lines that cannot accommodate fire protection demands. The absence of a water system that was built for fire protection within the City places added burden on the City Fire Department, requiring specialized equipment and firefighter training. It also can potentially reduce the City's fire rating, thereby increasing the cost of property owner's insurance for all residents.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Require all new development within the study area to provide urban-level water services, including fire hydrants.
- ◆ Replace inadequate water lines in the existing rural subdivisions that are located within the study area.

Strategy 2.1.6: Continue to work with City and County parks' officials on improving the quality of existing parks and expanding the park system through cooperative land acquisition agreements.

Rationale

The needs and desires of the citizens of Florence justify continued development of parks and recreation facilities and preservation of open space to meet the specific needs and requirements of the community. A variety of types and sizes of parks and recreation facilities and associated activities are recommended to satisfy the diverse interests of the population, to ensure adequate and equal opportunity for all persons, and, ultimately, to encourage use by all population groups.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Update the City's park, recreation, and open space master plan in coordination with this Comprehensive Plan. Include the entire planning area – adding the unincorporated areas – to the master planning study, and, if annexation does not occur, coordinate with Florence County for the provision of neighborhood and community parks needed to serve these citizens. Plans need to ensure that all portions of the City and planning area are provided adequate facilities.
- ◆ Ensure that the City's and County's development regulations include provisions for formal parkland dedication, structured to encourage employment of a "fee in lieu of dedication" option.
- ◆ As an alternative, use the City's powers as a mechanism for levying park improvement impact fees on new development.
- ◆ Coordinate with Florence Public School District One and FMU to address potential joint acquisition of land, improvement and maintenance of park land and facilities, and management of areas and buildings that would contribute to the supply of public recreational areas. As future schools are replaced or relocated, consider opportunities for converting their sites to parkland. One immediate opportunity for this is the new high school to be sited in West Florence, resulting in the sale of the West Florence High School buildings and site. A portion could be reserved for the City to provide parkland. Possibly, it could be part of the conveyance to the new

owner as a specified amount of land, thereby allowing them to master plan their property.

- ◆ Improve accessibility to parks for disabled and handicapped users by adding sidewalk curb cuts and ramps and wheelchair-accessible sidewalks and trails and providing accessible facilities such as play equipment, drinking fountains, and restrooms. Consider approaching national or regional philanthropic organizations, which concentrate on disabled persons' needs, for funding assistance.
- ◆ Improve the identification of on-street bicycle trails and their linkages with parks, schools, cultural facilities, and the off-street portions of the trail system. Develop a plan for educating the public about these options and locations.
- ◆ Continue the policy for the potential conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors and other rights-of-way and easements as trails and walking connections. Consider the acquisition of the rail line that parallels Lucas Street as a prime candidate.
- ◆ Regularly submit grant applications to State and Federal programs and other available resources to leverage funds for trails and bikeway planning and development.
- ◆ Expand planning for the City's trail network into the unincorporated portions of the planning area. Establish requirements for the dedication of easements or rights-of-way from new developments that adjoin or overlap the planned trail network. Rights-of-way must be dedicated for main trail segments and easements dedicated within the development to provide direct access points to the system. Design standards must also be established for segments of the trail and other connections to ensure long-lasting construction and minimized maintenance.

Strategy 2.1.7: Provide a “sense of freestanding entry” to Florence by preserving the remaining rural character of the City's periphery.

Rationale

The pattern of land use along the major approaches to the City has gradually become cluttered by spots of commercial development and nearby scattered subdivisions. Continuing this pattern will eventually deny the opportunity to

establish a strong identity for Florence as a distinctive, high-quality community. It will also will burden the rural environment, resulting in an inadequate road network, urban-rural land use conflicts, degradation of natural resources, and increased costs of public services.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Coordinate with Florence County to adopt rural zoning standards that limit the types, intensity, and location of non-urban growth and development. Alternatively, explore the possibilities of adopting an intergovernmental agreement that would extend the City's zoning and subdivision approval authority into the unincorporated parts of the planning area. Implementing this would include the addition of representatives from the extraterritorial area on the City's Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals.
- ◆ Establish decision criteria regarding the appropriateness for rezoning and annexation requests for land that is outside of the preferred future growth areas.
- ◆ Modify the provisions of Attachment F of the 2002 City-County Utilities Consolidation Agreement to expand the feasibility assessment procedures to include all municipal services (police, fire, schools, parks, etc.), not just sewer and water. Also, amend the feasibility point system to increase the weighting of compatibility with the Comprehensive Plan.
- ◆ Adopt a fiscal impact model to evaluate the feasibility of and warrant for annexation and future development. Adopt a policy to determine the fiscal threshold warranting development approval.
- ◆ Prohibit future development that would interfere with the airport expansion and flight paths. While the noise contours have not been designated for the Florence Regional Airport, there remain important considerations regarding building heights and uses in the surrounding area. Consider the implementation of airport approach zoning to protect these areas.
- ◆ Acquire natural areas and other open space at the outer entrances to Florence in order to create a natural visual gateway. Where lands are not available, create structural gateways and other means to enhance Florence's appearance as a special place.

Focus Area 2.2 Quality, Sustainable Development

The Northeastern South Carolina region is well-known for its rich environmental assets and the quality of its natural environs. With a mix of agriculture and woodland, Florence enjoys both the views of wide open spaces across the landscape and beautiful natural scenery by way of its woodland stands and its many creeks, wetlands, and low-lying areas. These qualities significantly contribute to the aesthetic and character of the community. Residents greatly value the environment and expressed their desire to see it preserved and protected.

The potential areas for future growth are reasonably well defined by way of the natural drainageways (Jeffries Creek, Middle Swamp Creek, Black Creek, and their associated wetlands and floodplains), and major land holdings and uses (such as the medical centers, railroads, airport, National Cemetery, and South Carolina State institutional properties), as well as the limits of municipal utility services. There are significant natural areas and corridors throughout the City and planning area, particularly in the southern portions, that should be protected. Therefore, as growth and development occurs in or near these areas, the harmony of development and the environment will be essential to preserve community character, promote environmental sustainability, and enhance the overall community image of Florence.

The City's current zoning standards provide few or no incentives for the preservation of open space, resource protection, or the use of alternative development forms such as clustering. Other than through the application of the traditional lot size, setback, and density standards, there are no minimum open space requirements. To preserve environmental resources and to achieve sustainable outcomes, additional regulatory options should be considered in future revisions to the zoning ordinance. A system of zoning incentives should be adopted that rewards good design and responsible development practices with density bonuses, streamlined approval, and increased certainty of project approval for complying proposals.

While the pattern and form of development may greatly influence environmental conditions, so, too, may the design of buildings and sites. Green building practices may reduce energy consumption, reuse and save precious resources (e.g. water recycling), and mitigate off-site impacts such as stormwater runoff and flooding.

Strategy 2.2.1: Protect and preserve environmental resources.

Rationale

The natural environment is a significant contributor to the character and beauty of Florence. This City has made strides in the area of resource protection, yet there is more that can be done. Between environmental protection and development, the City may be best achieved through the use of incentives and increased development flexibility, with a goal of encouraging better protection and more efficient development.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Modify the structure of the current zoning districts to allow increased flexibility through more development options that are each permitted by right. This approach would allow development in harmony with the environmental features of a site.
- ◆ Review and amend, where necessary, the nonresidential districts to require a minimum landscape surface, which would be for the purpose of preserving site resources, meeting landscape and buffering requirements, and providing improved site drainage.
- ◆ Incorporate site development capacity provisions into the zoning regulations to control the amount of development that may be accommodated on sites that have identified environmental resources worthy of protection. With the above outlined approach of allowing development options within each district, there would be flexibility to allow feasible development of heavily constrained sites, e.g. those partially within the floodplain, heavily wooded sites, etc.
- ◆ To maintain the economic value of properties having sensitive resources, consider the adoption of "transfer of development rights" provisions to other suitable properties within the City's defined future growth areas or allow a transfer of density to the developable portions of the same site.

- ◆ Amend the zoning ordinance to strengthen provisions that preserve and enhance the existing tree canopy, including tree protection and replacement standards, moderation of clear-cutting development practices, and the preservation of large trees.
- ◆ Maintain current stream buffer provisions and consider increasing the distance of structures from designated streams from the current requirement of 50 feet in sensitive areas.
- ◆ Maintain Florence's status as a "Tree City," continuing steps to protect, trim, preserve, and restore the urban forest, particularly in those neighborhoods that have been experiencing deterioration. This may include a preservation ordinance for heritage trees and/or tree protection requirements.

Strategy 2.2.2: Adopt a community agenda for energy conservation.

Rationale

Cities throughout the U.S. are becoming more committed to conserving energy and are seeking ways to lessen their potential impact on carbon emissions. Many initiatives are available that will have a collective, positive impact.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Adopt a long-term municipal strategy to include an energy plan that enumerates reduction goals based on current energy usage.
- ◆ Seek alternative transportation solutions at the local and regional levels to preserve air quality. Nonpoint source transportation impacts represent up to 40 percent of the pollution levels. Measures that may help reduce vehicle emissions include, but are not limited to the following:
- ◆ Continue to increase opportunities for bicycling and walking by way of trail expansions, implementation of "complete streets," and construction of sidewalks and other pedestrian improvements throughout the planning area. Require new developments to be integrated with existing or planned trail system expansions.
- ◆ Gradually replace the City's vehicle fleet, as appropriate, with alternative-powered and hybrid vehicles that are more energy efficient and produce lower emissions.

- ◆ Reduce congestion at local intersections by making Transportation Systems Management (TSM) improvements, such as dedicated left and right-turn lanes, traffic signal synchronization, and transit vehicle pull-out bays, among others.
- ◆ Conduct an audit to evaluate the effectiveness of the current building code with regard to building energy efficiency. The City may consider encouraging higher levels of energy and water efficiency by encouraging voluntary best management practices and incentivizing such practices in site and building design.
- ◆ Conduct a pilot energy efficiency project or seek LEED certification for future schools and public buildings. ("LEED," or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a rating system established by the U.S. Green Building Council.) Given the long lifespan of municipal facilities, the operational cost savings over the long term would outweigh any additional upfront green building costs. This effort should be coordinated with the County, school district, and other governmental efforts.
- ◆ Consider a City-wide policy to retrofit existing public buildings in order to meet an established energy efficiency standard or achieve LEED certification.
- ◆ Create an Energy Task Force to identify energy saving measures, such as building lighting, street lights, building heating/cooling, building/window shading, and water usage/recapture. As work progresses, techniques and successes achieved by this group should be disseminated to other agencies and businesses throughout the community and region.

Strategy 2.2.3: Pursue more sustainable development outcomes through bonuses and incentives.

Rationale

In recent years, there is a renewed awareness and emphasis on sustainable development practices, which is now supported by a national environmental agenda. There are many approaches to seek improved sustainability, one of which is in the design of building sites and developments. Infusing best management practices and providing incentives for good design will move the City toward more responsible development outcomes. This also has the benefit of enhancing community character.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Amend the development ordinances to integrate sustainability standards in the design and planning of sites, which may include, among others:
 - » Mixed-use development by-right in select districts.
 - » Permitted on-site energy generation, e.g. solar and small wind turbines as accessory uses.
 - » Allowance for accessory and live/work units in appropriate locations.
 - » Reduced parking requirements coupled with alternative transportation provisions.
 - » Incentives and compatibility standards for infill development.
 - » Density/height bonuses for LEED certified buildings.
 - » Tree preservation and reforestation standards.
 - » Dark sky lighting standards.
 - » A program for recycling of demolition waste.
 - » On-site stormwater management options such as naturalized detention.
 - » Improved pedestrian and bicycle access.
 - » Improved transit site access and amenities.
 - » Better street connectivity in outlying development areas.
 - » Carbon budgets for new development.
- ◆ Incorporate sustainability concepts in the site development standards such as:
 - » The use of bio-swales and on-site water features, collection systems for stormwater management, and water quality purposes.
 - » Use of green roofs as a method of stormwater mitigation, as well as reduction of the urban “heat island” effect.
 - » Reduced stormwater runoff through on-site retention, micro-storage such as water gardens and rain barrels, and pervious pavement.
- ◆ Incorporate low-impact development provisions into the development ordinances. This approach uses site design techniques to store, infiltrate, evaporate, and detain runoff, which address runoff volume, frequency, and water quality. Site design elements can include on-lot micro-water storage, functional landscaping, open drainage swales, use of new less pervious paving materials, minimal grades, and depression storage.

- ◆ Continue the sponsoring and support of programs to educate citizens and community groups on the ways to reduce water consumption and waste, including do-it-yourself, low-cost measures such as residential water catchment (gutter collection) and water-efficient fixtures. Note: This is also a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II requirement.
- ◆ Add trash disposal and recycling options in each park and other public facilities throughout the City.

Focus Area 2.3
Downtown Renaissance

The ***Florence Downtown Master Plan (2010 – 2015)***, included as **Appendix A**, will be adopted in conjunction with, and as a component of, this Comprehensive Plan, ensuring community-wide support and complementary visions. The Master Plan encapsulates a body of planning work spanning approximately 10 years beginning with Vision 2010 adopted in 2001. Since that time, downtown Florence has undergone a number of notable changes that can be credited, in large part, to the generous investments in major cultural institutions by the Doctors Bruce and Lee Foundation. Several landmark projects have radically transformed portions of downtown and solidified its role as the civic and cultural hub of the region. Elements of the Master Plan have been included in **Figure 2.7, Florence Downtown Master Plan Executive Summary**, at the end of the chapter.

Historically, downtown Florence was once the region’s center of commerce and community activity. Across the country, the role of small-city downtown areas has shifted away from retailing to more offices, services, cultural and entertainment venues, restaurants, and government activities. This has occurred over many years and is the result of the following key factors among others:

- ◆ The establishment of I-95/I-20 outside the City, which reduced downtown through-traffic and lowered Florence’s significance as a destination City.

- ◆ An increased reliance on the automobile, establishing a market for auto-oriented strip shopping centers and shopping malls. This drew retail business adjacent to the primary access corridors – and to the fringe of the community – and along the corridors approaching downtown.
- ◆ New residential development in outlying areas, with many businesses leaving downtown behind as chain retailers displaced locally-owned stores. The once-popular mainline retailers were gradually displaced by marginal or lower-intensity, neighborhood-oriented businesses as property values and rental costs declined.
- ◆ The emergence of “big box” stores and power centers (a collection of big box stores) attracting fast food restaurants and small retailers to nearby sites – and away from downtown.

After many years of deterioration and continuing attempts at cosmetic rejuvenation, downtown Florence is beginning to make the transitions that other, similar downtown areas of the southeast have made. With the establishment of the new library, Florence Little Theatre building, the FMU Performing Arts Center, and other substantial investments, there is now a great opportunity to redefine the role of downtown. It will never be what it once was, but it may be re-established as a destination for culture, entertainment, and community gathering, with a healthy compliment of local shops and eateries. Doing so will require a continued commitment to restore the market attraction, redesign the environment, and reintroduce an urban fabric at an appropriate size and scale.

Therefore, it is apparent that the community seeks to expand the renaissance of downtown. The vision of downtown and the general policies and directions are expressed by this plan.

Strategy 2.3.1: Strengthen downtown as an economically viable place to conduct business.

Rationale

Presently, the downtown core has contracted in size and lost much of its previous identity as a cohesive district. With its many gaps of abandoned, vacant, or torn-down buildings, much of the area has evolved into a collection of individual businesses without the strong synergy that was once present. This is now changing. As the renaissance of downtown continues, the impediments

for locating and operating long-standing and stable, economically viable businesses will gradually be overcome as the area regains its appeal. As current investments continue, there will emerge a reason for deliberately choosing downtown Florence as a place to invest.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Implement the design and policy recommendations contained in the Florence Downtown Master Plan (2010-2015).
- ◆ Continue the Mayor’s recent initiatives for the creation of a Demolition Fund Requirement, where a percentage of any fire damage settlement is held in escrow until damage repairs are actually completed. Provide immediate board-up and prompt removal of damaged or abandoned structures.
- ◆ Leverage amenities and programs within the established Redevelopment District to create incentive packages or outright donations of land to attract the identified target businesses to locate – or relocate – in downtown. This may be to lease vacant space, infill development on vacant or underutilized sites, or to redevelop buildings or properties. Incentives within the District could potentially include tax and fee abatements on new improvements, reduction of sales tax on building materials, a waiver of building permit fees, and also an assortment of State tax incentives.
- ◆ Create a revolving loan fund specifically for downtown businesses and downtown developers. The fund would be used to provide “gap” financing for viable businesses where the owner/investor can demonstrate commitment, competency, and capacity and can bring a significant amount of their own equity to a project, as well as some conventional bank financing. The fund could potentially be capitalized with CDBG and foundation grants, SBA funds, pooled bank loans, and TIF funds.
- ◆ Assist with land assembly through direct purchase, assignable options, tax foreclosure, syndication, donation, and, in extreme cases, involving severe blight. These efforts will need to be matched with creative use of the City’s TIF powers; specifically in packaging low-interest financing that can be passed on to developers.
- ◆ Facilitate the use of Private Activity Bonds (PABs) to raise debt capital for private development. PABs allow cities to issue tax-exempt bonds on

behalf of private investors that are paid back directly by the investors. The two types of PABs that may be available to the City are Qualified Redevelopment Bonds and Enterprise Zone bonds. Both types of bonds are designed to fight blight and can be used for commercial development and housing.

- ◆ Look for creative ways to use TIF including “reversible,” or developer financed, TIFs whereby a developer basically fronts the cost of development and a percentage of a project’s annual tax increment is reimbursed back to him (or used to offset property taxes) and developer-backed TIF where TIF bonds are used to provide project financing directly to the developer and are personally guaranteed by the developer. The City’s legal counsel will need to check State statutes to determine any applicable restrictions on how TIF-financing is used.
- ◆ Work with foundations and charitable organizations to acquire and redevelop strategic properties and establish a revolving fund for low-interest (or interest forgiveness) programs for building rehabilitation and adaptive reuse.
- ◆ Continue City policies and programs to invest in streetscape and other public-realm improvement projects.
- ◆ Collaborate with McLeod Medical Center to establish improved access between its facilities and downtown to enable businesses to take better advantage of the market opportunities afforded by nearby hospital patrons and medical staff. Coordinate with PDRTA for special lunchtime transit runs to downtown restaurants, perhaps leaving every 15 minutes.
- ◆ As the array of businesses, cultural opportunities, and restaurants increases, motivate shoppers to patronize downtown through increased promotional programs such as the successful “Florence After Five!” events.
- ◆ Incorporate nighttime shopping events and historic programming that can bring life to downtown after 5:00 p.m., thereby encouraging a vibrant, multicultural “24/7” nightlife. This type of activity will be particularly attractive to students, young adults, and families who seek such amenities and cultural attractions in their community, leveraged by the new FMU Performing Arts Center venue.

Strategy 2.3.2: Position downtown as a unique local and regional destination.

Rationale

The circumstances of downtown have changed dramatically over the years. The nature of business has shifted away from its traditional primary retail role to one of government, institutions, and offices, combined with a lesser amount of retail services. Since the retail focus has relocated, it must position itself so as not to compete for the typical retail outlets, instead targeting a niche market with an orientation toward culture, entertainment, and community gathering. This will naturally attract complimentary retail uses such as restaurants, coffee shops, and unique local retailers.

Since downtown has retained its role as a governmental center and is situated near McLeod Medical Center and proposed FMU performing arts education facilities, it is well-situated to cater to local business people, as well as regional visitors and future students. The nature of businesses and the types of activities and attractions must appeal to all sectors.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Update earlier studies that define the market potential of downtown as to its regional economic capture, saleable/leasable square footage, and likely rate of absorption. Identify the range and preferred mixture of use types, along with a retention and attraction strategy and target marketing approach.
- ◆ Through the adoption of this Comprehensive Plan, establish a design theme for the downtown district. This may include parameters of architecture, signage, lighting, enhanced streetscape, professional public art, and other amenities. The theme should allow individual expression while ensuring a semblance of design cohesiveness. This is addressed with greater detail in the Florence Downtown Master Plan (2010-2015).
- ◆ Encourage residential and mixed-use development in and around the downtown and cultural districts.
- ◆ Based upon the design theme and branding studies, create new street signage that is unique for the downtown district.

- ◆ Design and install distinct monuments and gateway treatments at the primary entries to the downtown district (particularly Palmetto and Irby Streets, along with unifying design elements like vegetated walls, decorative lighting, street and sidewalk patterns, and other unique design treatments.

Strategy 2.3.3: Re-establish the traditional urban character of the downtown core.

Rationale

Over time, the pattern of buildings and parking lots has dramatically shifted the character of downtown from an urban to auto-urban character, particularly at its edges. Abetted by the exceedingly large scale of the originally platted blocks (800 feet square), this was caused by the placement of newer buildings back from the street and the increasing percent of highly valued downtown area street frontage that is devoted to surface parking. With the exception of a few blocks, the pedestrian orientation of downtown has declined in favor of the automobile.

If the City is to re-establish downtown as a destination and seize its economic opportunities, among other strategies, it must reconsider the form and design of development and specifically how parking is handled and treated.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Implement the design and policy recommendations contained in the Florence Downtown Master Plan (2010-2015).
- ◆ Adjust provisions of the City's zoning ordinance as they relate to downtown development, redevelopment, reuse of buildings, allowance of residential and mixed-uses, parking, and signs.
- ◆ Develop design standards to guide the construction of new and improvement of existing buildings to ensure compatibility of the architecture and cohesiveness with the historic integrity of downtown. For example, floor area ratios and build-to line requirements should be adjusted to prohibit the intrusion of suburban or auto-urban character types into the downtown core.

Strategy 2.3.4: Strengthen the organizational leadership and financial capacity of the Florence Downtown Development Corporation (FDDC).

Rationale

The Florence Downtown Development Corporation (FDDC lacks the human and monetary resources to mobilize downtown revitalization. As the City seeks a competitive advantage, it should:

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Hire an FDDC executive director who will be responsible for both initiating and managing projects; business retention, expansion, and outreach; advocacy and recruitment activities; and coordinating with City and County planning and economic development staff. The person will need to be highly entrepreneurial and capable of handling business development services, as well as unconventional real estate development projects involving tax credits and other subsidies.
- ◆ Seek funding and program support through various economic development programs offered through the State, County and Federal governments, as well as programs and resources available through local educational institutions.
- ◆ Form a merchant's association independently managed, but supported by the FDDC.
- ◆ Consider re-structuring the FDDC board into a smaller, working board made up of contributing members with applicable expertise in real estate, banking, fund raising, and business management. Alternatively, the board could be organized into special subcommittees around specific functions or action items such as organizing and managing a revolving loan fund.
- ◆ Sharpen the FDDC's organizational focus and move it toward some degree of financial self-sufficiency with potential revenue streams from rents, loan administration fees, special events, and earned developer fees.

Focus Area 2.4 Preserve Community Heritage

Local history is an important part of a community's fabric and attractiveness, both as a source of local pride and as an opportunity for economic development. In fact, heritage tourism is the fastest growing product type in the United States with 92.5 million adult Americans visiting a museum or historic site or district while traveling that's 46 percent of the 199.8 million trips taken over 50 miles from home. The Travel Industry of America reports that this \$61.5 billion market grows at an average of 10 percent, while the tourism industry as a whole is growing at a rate between four and six percent.

Strategy 2.4.1: Preserve the historic character and integrity of the community.

Rationale

In recent decades, Florence has lost (or is facing the possible loss of) several significant historical structures due to owner neglect or the lack of financial resources needed for their care and rehabilitation. In recognition of this, the community has become well-organized to facilitate the preservation and restoration of historic landmarks and buildings. Historic preservation needs to be further integrated into the policies and procedures of development approval.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Solicit the help of local architects, historians, and preservation organizations for input toward the drafting of applicable historic preservation guidelines and/or standards.
- ◆ Establish, through official designation and amendment of the zoning ordinance and map, the foundational elements for historic preservation requirements that would apply to all zoning districts. Subsequently, draft the alteration, construction, and demolition standards that may be applicable to each individual district.
- ◆ Amend the zoning ordinance to accomplish the following:
 - » Clarify the procedures that are individually appropriate for the designation of landmarks, historic districts, and neighborhood

preservation districts, as each warrants unique consideration. Also, simplify the process for nominations of landmarks, historic districts, and neighborhood preservation districts and streamline the steps of review and acceptance. Also, revisit the provisions related to the support needed to establish a landmark or district.

- » Establish general City-wide standards pertaining to the procedures for alteration or demolition of potentially architecturally significant structures whether or not they are officially designated as a landmark or included in a historic district or neighborhood preservation district.
- » Upon designation of any district, strengthen the organization of historic and neighborhood preservation districts through a centralized and official historic preservation organization for which technical preservation assistance may be offered and resources may be available. In this way, a professional staff person may serve as an advocate for preservation efforts who may provide assistance to owners in complying with the procedures and preservation standards.
- » Conduct an examination of the zoning regulations and building code to correct any unintended impediments to rehabilitation, redevelopment, and/or preservation.
- » Publish educational resources to make information readily available as to appropriate preservation and modification techniques and the use of appropriate materials to allow neighborhoods to be historically reclaimed.
- » Supplement the materials already provided on the City's and County's websites to include other historic preservation library materials.

Focus Area 2.5 Enhance Florence's Community Character and Image

Florence was settled on an open landscape and nestled amongst a beautiful natural environment. Its location and environmental juxtaposition contribute to its overall character – that is, its identity and recognition within the broader regional context. As we zoom into the City and surrounding unincorporated planning area, different neighborhoods and areas exhibit their own individual characteristics. The differentiation of neighborhood character is due to:

- ◆ The integration with and treatment of the natural environment;
- ◆ The patterns and form of development;
- ◆ The aesthetics, scale, “sense of place,” amenities, and quality of urban design; and
- ◆ The condition in which these areas have been maintained.

The proximity of these areas and districts to one another and to the City’s primary entrance corridors is what forms the community’s overall character.

The term “community character” relates to how the community is viewed by visitors and passers-by at the overall scale, as well as (at the neighborhood scale) its contextual and functional relationships between districts and areas. In short, it relates to the compatibility between adjacent uses.

The City’s zoning ordinance is based on the use of land, meaning that the delineation of zoning districts is driven by lists of permitted, conditional, and special uses, as well as building height and lot area standards. In the case of the residential districts, the densities are determined by a minimum lot size. Other than building heights and setbacks in the standard districts (excluding planned developments and master planned areas such as the medical centers), there are no other standards that affect decisions as to minimum or larger lots, amount of open space, distances between houses, placement of garages and lot access, on-site parking, etc. As a result, the character of neighborhoods in the same zoning district, which are each allowed by-right, may be wary different. The outcome is commonly either uniformity (or monotony by reason of equal lot sizes, identical setbacks, and similar-appearing buildings) or, in many other cases, too much undesirable variation in structures.

Through the course of the initial phases of public involvement, participants in Community Workshop #1 made known their views of the City and its character, as well as the designs of sites, buildings, and neighborhoods. Their first and foremost concern was the clutter and deterioration of the major traffic corridors approaching downtown Florence. The presence of dilapidated or abandoned buildings, overgrown vegetation, marginal businesses, and unneeded or abandoned signs along the highly visible entrance ways stigmatizes the community’s image. The concern for solving this issue was compounded by jurisdictional issues, as most of these areas are outside the City’s present jurisdiction.

Citizens also spoke of the need to beautify railroad rights-of-way, the lack of green space in development, the value of preserving natural character, and the importance of rehabilitating the downtown area. While these concerns must be balanced with those of economic development and private property interests, this Comprehensive Plan and its implementation strategies offer the opportunity to reevaluate policies and practices, making sure that reasonable adjustments are made to current approaches and standards.

Strategy 2.5.1: Refocus the zoning ordinance to emphasize the character and form of development.

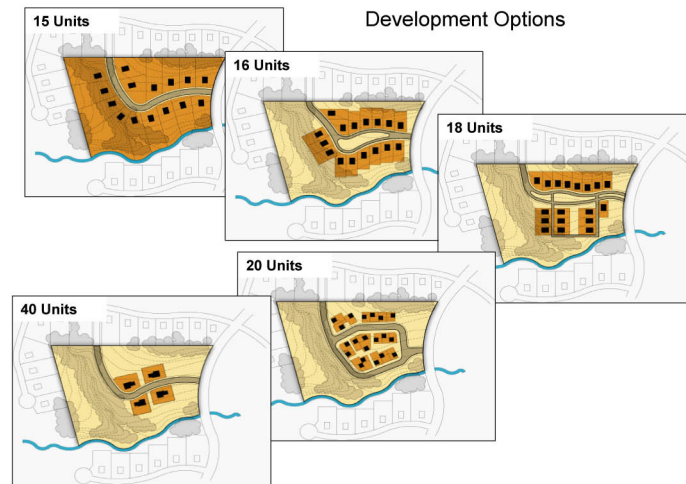
Rationale

The City’s zoning ordinance includes many of the elements necessary to achieve good development outcomes. However, there are many opportunities to adjust the districts to achieve the intended character of development without placing as much emphasis on land use. While use should remain an important consideration, the form and design of development and intensity of activities are more important if the City is to achieve enhanced character. At the same time, the zoning ordinance may allow procedural streamlining for good projects, increase market flexibility (subject to better or more deliberate standards), and improved certainty (for neighbors, the City, and the developer).

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Revise the district purpose statements to define the intended character of the various zoning districts. Rather than basing zoning requirements on general use types (e.g. low-density residential), define the density or intensity of development as urban, auto-urban, suburban, or rural. (See **Figure 2.6: Development Options.**)
- ◆ Recalibrate and consolidate, where possible, each of the existing districts. Revise the dimensional standards to produce the intended character. For instance, many of the districts have the same setbacks although the use types and densities (and potential impacts) are quite different. The dimensions should be changed accordingly.
- ◆ Review and revise the lists of permitted and special uses in each district. Include development and performance standards that relate to the district character, such as increased open space in the suburban district or increased building height and lot coverage in the urban district.

Figure 2.6: Development Options



Basing development decisions on community character rather than use or density requirements offers greater opportunity for design flexibility

- ◆ Provide for by-right allowance of commercial development where there are explicit standards as to location, scale, and design. Similarly, provide a by-right mixed-use district that includes all the applicable standards to assure good and compatible design.
- ◆ Adjust the zoning districts to be more flexible with respect to housing types. Include provisions that would allow mixed housing types in planned and mixed-use developments subject to district density restrictions and appropriate buffering.
- ◆ Amend the current landscaping requirements to tie them to the character of development, with variations as to their width, opacity, and means of buffering based on the density (residential) or intensity (nonresidential) of development. In this way, the buffers are commensurate with the impacts between abutting developments.

Strategy 2.5.2: Enhance the appearance of development and the compatibility between districts.

Rationale

The appearance of the City is, perhaps, the single most evident glimpse of the City's development standards and its pro-activeness. As the saying goes, you don't get the second chance to make a good first impression. The perceptions of the community are largely driven by the physical environment. As a result, decisions are made to live, work, or shop here; to invest in the community; or whether to return for another visit. For this reason, the quality of development is essential to the community's ongoing and future success. While many good standards are already in place, there are warranted changes and improved provisions to enhance the appearance of the City's districts and corridors and the compatibility between them.

Actions and Initiatives

- ◆ Consider the establishment of approach gateways, with more significant monuments, enhanced landscaping, and lighting at the locations of greatest visibility, such as between the airport and downtown along East Palmetto Street.
- ◆ Integrate gateway and other street enhancements such as lighting, signage, landscaping, street furniture, and paths into capital improvement projects. Enhancements may include pavement colors and patterns at intersections, crosswalk textures (particularly approaching downtown), ornamental street fixtures (signal poles and mast arms), unique signage, green space, land contouring, street trees, and pedestrian paths and amenities. Coordination with SCDOT will be required along designated U.S. and State highways.
- ◆ Require plantings along all public and private parking and vehicular use areas having frontage adjacent to public street rights-of-way, as well as major entrance drives. This screening may include shrubbery, earthen berms, walls, or a combination thereof. Existing sites should comply with these standards upon any improvements warranting review or a permit.
- ◆ Amend the zoning ordinance to require that subdivision walls and solid fences be complemented by landscaping to soften the buffer between adjacent uses to avoid the creation of "fence canyons." In some instances,

fences may be replaced by berms and a landscape buffer, which may enhance their effectiveness and appearance.

- ◆ Require site design standards for temporary uses. Specify the percentage of site area that may be used for these uses and the display of outdoor merchandise, as well as their location on the site, means of defining the space, and the height of stacked materials, among other applicable requirements.
- ◆ Establish basic commercial design standards for all zoning districts. Necessary standards include scale limitations, an increased landscaping surface area, improved buffering, pitched roofs to match the adjacent residences, comparable building heights, care as to the location of site access and parking, site lighting, and the placement of service areas.
- ◆ Adopt building standards for “big-box” commercial and/or large-scale industrial buildings exceeding 50,000 square feet. Standards should address the building size, roof, and skyline; materials and design elements; loading and storage placement and screening; open space and streetscape areas; landscaping; signage; and the adaptive reuse or removal of the building if it becomes vacant or dormant for an extended period of time.
- ◆ Prepare and adopt design standards for multiple-family developments, which should include building and parking lot siting and proximity to adjacent properties, variable building heights and façade setbacks, sustainable building and roofing materials, site lighting, landscaping and screening, and other applicable standards.
- ◆ Establish industrial development standards that differentiate between those that are on the site’s periphery and in public view and those within the interior of an industrial park. Standards relating to building façade enhancements, blank walls, building materials, and screening of outdoor storage areas should apply to those within public view, with lesser standards for those generally out of the public view.
- ◆ Rewrite the sign regulations to restrict the number of signs, require a master sign plan for multi-tenant developments, establish clearer electronic message board standards related to animations, create a permit process or prohibit temporary and portable signs, and enumerate more definitive standards for the removal of nonconforming signs.

- ◆ Strengthen and clarify enforcement language in the zoning ordinance relating to issues such as pedestrian and bicycle compatibility with parking lot design. The bike parking standards can be improved to include best practices in bike parking design, location, and access. Likewise, the parking lot design standards should include pedestrian accessways and crosswalks that lead to the main entrance. Walkways should be continuous from the building entrance to different areas of the parking lot.

FUTURE LAND USE AND URBAN DESIGN: PLAN AND POLICIES

The essence of land use planning is a recognition that Florence does not have to passively wait and react to growth and development. Rather, it can determine where growth will occur and what character this new development will reflect. Through active community support, this plan will ensure that development meets certain standards and, thus, contributes to achieving the desired pattern of development and community character.

Florence Future Land Use Plan

As a guide for land development and public improvements, the plan depicted in [Map 2.4, Future Land Use Plan](#), captures and incorporates into the City’s policies the community’s values regarding how, when, and where the City will grow over the course of the next two decades. This is significant since the findings and recommendations contained in this plan provide the basis for the City’s development ordinances as the primary tools to implement this plan. The analysis included in the preceding sections of this chapter result in the policy direction embodied in the Land Use Plan. The land use categories are reflective of character and each relates directly to a zoning district that will be applied to properties in the future as the Zoning Ordinance and corresponding Zoning Map are approved. The categories and future zoning districts are shown in [Table 2.5, Florence Zoning Districts](#), with the intended character and description of each. The Downtown Central category is unique to the core area and is further detailed in the Downtown Master Plan, attached to this chapter as [Appendix A](#).

Future Land Use	Zoning District Name	Character	Description
Residential Uses			
Real Estate	Estate Residential (RE)	Estate	Single-family development with an estate character.
Residential Sub-Urban	Suburban Residential (RS)	Suburban	Single-family development with suburban character.
Residential Auto-Urban	General Residential (RG)	Auto-Urban or New-Urban	A variety of residential products with auto-urban or new-urban character.
Residential Urban	Urban Residential (RU)	Urban	A variety of residential products with urban character that is more intensely developed than the General Residential district.
Neighborhood Conservation	Neighborhood Conservation (NC(x))	Varies by Sub-category	Protects the character and function of established neighborhoods depending on the existing size. The resulting districts will be divided into six different sub-types.
Business and Commercial Uses			
Residential Transition/ Commercial Suburban	Commercial Re-use (CR)	Suburban	Low-impact commercial uses in appropriate residential settings and the adaptive re-use of residential buildings for low-impact commercial uses along major corridors.
Public and Institutional and Business Parks	Campus (CA)	Suburban	Campus settings for general, professional, and medical offices; educational and institutional facilities; hospitals; research; and high technology industries.
Auto-Urban Commercial	General Commercial (CG)	Auto-Urban or New-Urban	A broad range of region-serving retail, restaurant, entertainment, office, institutional, and service uses. Sites and buildings are relatively large-scale.

Future Land Use	Zoning District Name	Character	Description
Mixed Use			
Downtown Central	Central Business District (CBD)	Urban	Development, redevelopment, and reuse of residential, commercial, and mixed-use buildings downtown. Zoning regulations will include design standards for specific sub-areas referenced in the Downtown Master Plan as Cultural Campus, Irby Street Financial, and Cheves Street Hospitality.
Sub-Urban	Activity Center (AC)	Suburban	Areas for easy pedestrian and bicycle access to retail, restaurant, service, amusement, and recreational activities within close proximity to residential areas. In certain instances may include residential uses.
North Point	Destination / Select Use (DS)		Flexibility of uses (office, parks, entertainment venues) that will support nearby businesses by attracting people to the area.
Industrial Uses			
Industrial	Light Industrial (IL)	Auto-Urban	Non-polluting industrial and personal storage uses.
Industrial	Heavy Industrial (IH)	Auto-Urban	Heavy industrial uses.
Agricultural and Open Space Uses			
Parks and Open Space	Open Space and Recreation (OSR)	Natural or Rural	Public open space and recreation parcels and land that is subject to conservation easements that ensures its continued use as open space.
Rural	Agricultural / Rural (AR)	Rural	Agricultural and rural uses.