

2013 Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan Review and Progress Report

Introduction

Adopted in the 2008, the Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan contains Principles, Policies and Actions that will help guide the County in decisions that influence regional development, involve inter-governmental cooperation, and affect the quality of life in neighborhoods and communities. This plan creates a vision and goals for Dorchester County through the year 2030.

The content of the Comprehensive Plan was developed from issues citizens identified as critical during the plan's development in 2007. It describes existing conditions, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and outlines strategies that can inform decision-makers at all levels of government, both within the County and those coordinating with the County.

This document is a status report of how 2008 Comprehensive plan is progressing and reference guide for significant changes that have been made since the plan, such as the adoption of new plans and construction of new public facilities, as well as changes in the overall environment of Dorchester County since 2008.

The Comprehensive Plan includes seven foundations: **Future Land Use, Infrastructure Concurrency, Transportation, Economic Development, Workforce Housing, Priority Investment Areas, and Community Design**. These planning elements generally align with the nine elements of comprehensive planning required by State Code: population, economic development, natural resources, cultural resources, community facilities, housing, land use, transportation, and priority investment. Each foundation addresses multiple elements; for instance, Future Land Use considers population.

Since the 2008 update of the comprehensive plan, the County has adopted other plans that address several of these planning elements within the county with greater specificity. For example, in the spring of 2010, Dorchester County adopted a **Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan**, and in 2009, the County adopted a **County Park and Recreation Master Plan**. Each of these documents constitutes an update of one or more comprehensive planning elements upon Planning Commission's recommendation.

Plan Foundation 1: Future land Use

Future land-use planning provides a framework into which towns, communities, and neighborhoods are built, to include jobs, services, infrastructure, and amenities in Dorchester County. The more Dorchester County grows, the more important it is to set guidelines for land use. Such guidelines promote predictability and efficiency of service provision with respect to infrastructure, utilities, and emergency response, and other public services. These guidelines are commonly known as "zoning."

Dorchester County's continued growth comes with a changing landscape. New development such as that planned within the East Edisto project boundaries will transform areas now rural. While growth did slow down with the downturn of the economy, the county continues to grow in population and remains one the top 100 fastest growing counties on the country.

East Edisto represents the one significant broad change to the County's zoning map since 2008. Elsewhere, there have been few changes, and many of the rural areas remain under "Absence of Controls" (AC) zoning districts. This classification originally intended no limits on use of land or intensity of development; however, regulations have been added incrementally, over time. Currently, every commercial and industrial use proposed in AC zoning districts is subject to special exception approval. This process involves a public hearing and extensive documentation regarding the use's compatibility with the surrounding area.

The requirement for commercial and industrial special exceptions was originally envisioned as a temporary solution, developed while the Planning Commission studied permanent guidelines calibrated for rural areas. The County has not reached conclusions for new guidelines.

Current Land Use

The 2008 Comprehensive Plan included a depiction of existing land uses in Dorchester County, aggregated into broad classes (e.g., residential, commercial, vacant). The underlying data set, dating to 2006, was prepared to calculate stormwater fees. More current data is needed to update this map. These data will be collected through the County's tax reassessment process, analyzed, and mapped for use in long-range planning and zoning exercises. The Assessor's office needs up-to-date land use information to monitor areas of the county that have nonconforming land uses as well. Accurate information will improve property assessment and inform future zoning updates, thereby streamlining permitting.

Population Growth

According to the 2010 US Census, Dorchester County has grown faster than any other county in South Carolina. Using the census numbers, Dorchester County's population rose from 96,413 in 2000 to 136,555 in 2010, which is an increase of 41.6%.

The growth rate may not have been this high due to a suspected undercount of Dorchester County during the 2000 Census. Based on County data, the census bureau undercounted by omitting entire subdivisions like Westcott Plantation. County data thus show significantly higher population numbers than what those reported in the 2000 US Census. This being said, it does appear that the Census Bureau did a better job counting Dorchester County's population in 2010, with a minimal difference between the Census Bureau's count and county data numbers.

The Census Bureau's recent estimates continue to show Dorchester County growing at a rate that is a little more than twice the rate of the rest of South Carolina. These estimates show Dorchester County

increasing from 136,555 in 2010 population to 142,496 in 2012, which is a rate of 4.4%. The statewide population of South Carolina, meanwhile, grew at a rate of 2.1%.

The relevance of the suspected Year 2000 undercount is in population projections documented in the 2008 Plan. The Office of Research and Statistics (ORS) most recently projects a Dorchester County population of 190,200 in the year 2030. This is a much more probable estimate than the previous, conservative projection of 160,640 ORS released before 2010 Census. The disparity between these two population projections reflects ORS's belated appreciation for the significant growth rate of Dorchester County population. The 2008 Plan reported not only the ORS projection, but also a trend-line projection exceeding 200,000 by 2030.

In this light, the current population projection of 190,200 by 2030 appears very reasonable. This figure fits well in to the 2008 Plan's Future Land Use Map, which identifies areas of Dorchester County to accept future population growth and thereby receive improvements to systems of infrastructure and public services.

This document includes the map "2010 Population Density of the Lowcountry Region." A similar map appears in the 2008 Plan, depicting 2000 census data. The newer map clearly reflects growth of the last two decades in southeastern Dorchester County. Of note, the population density depicted in the census tract including Wescott Plantation is noticeably denser, now over 1500 persons per square mile versus fewer than 500 as of the year 2000.

Dorchester County Zoning

Revising zoning in rural Dorchester County – those areas zoned "Absence of Controls" – was a key point of action in the 2008 Plan. Five years on, revisions to restrictions on commercial and industrial uses and residential use of heirs property remain pressing needs.

The Planning Commission has learned further that zoning challenges exist in the fringes of urbanized areas through the experience of rezoning requests. One such request expanded to envelop a large section of a semi-rural community along Butternut Road. The area – not unique in character or zoning classification – changed from Multi-Family Residential zoning to much lower density single-family residential zoning. County elected and appointed officials initiated the change at the behest of several landowners, including one operating a cattle ranch on 60 acres – a then-legal, non-conforming land use. The rezoning request that triggered this event revealed that sanitary sewer service necessary to support multi-family residential development was unavailable.

Conservation

Dorchester County is an area rich with both, natural and historic resources that enhance the quality of life for residents and enhance visitors' experience. As a way to conserve the valuable resources that the County has to offer, Dorchester County approved an ordinance creating the Dorchester County Conservation Commission on January 18, 2011. Language from the ordinance follows.

Dorchester County Council recognizes the importance of the conservation of natural resources to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of the county and promote economic development and tourism. With this understanding, the Conservation Commission was created to:

- A. Identify, conserve and protect natural resources
- B. Identify, develop and preserve historical resources
- C. Make recommendations to Dorchester County Council for the expenditure of funds received by virtue of the referendum conducted on November 2, 2010, authorizing the issuance of \$5 Million General Obligation Bonds for the purposes set forth in the referendum, save and except recommendations for parks and/or recreation
- D. Promote tourism, emphasizing the natural, cultural and historical resources of Dorchester County
- E. Educate the public as to the benefits of conservation
- F. Undertake such studies, plans, activities, and projects as may, from time to time, be assigned to the Commission by the County Council

County Council appoints seven people to the Commission. The commission members have backgrounds in land conservation, historic preservation, and other related fields. Members meet monthly and serve without pay.

Parks and Recreation Master Plan

In 2009 County Council adopted a Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The purpose of the plan was to evaluate recreational facilities, activities, and programs offered in Dorchester County, gather input from county residents on various recreational issues, and guide the establishment and provision of complimentary recreation services. This Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan includes an inventory and assessment of all existing park facilities and programs; an evaluation of the residents' satisfaction with those facilities and programs; and recommendations for the establishment and growth of county facilities, programs, and staff. This master plan aims to help meet the current and future recreational needs for the people of Dorchester County.

The goals of the Park and Recreation Plan include:

- A. Establishing a permanent Parks and Recreation Department for Dorchester County.
- B. Identifying and exploring annual funding sources for the establishment, short and long-term maintenance, and growth of the Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department.
- C. Maintaining and expanding various recreation partnerships to provide county residents with diverse recreational opportunities.
- D. Outlining a strategic plan for the planning, development, and maintenance of Dorchester County Parks and Recreation facilities and programs.
- E. Providing environmental protection for natural resources within Dorchester County.
- F. Enhancing the quality of life for Dorchester County residents through recreation programming and partnerships.

The plan further provides several recommendations to meet these goals. This section of the document is divided into a policy plan as well as an action plan. The Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan is hereby adopted as an update to the Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan by reference.

Plan Foundation 2: Infrastructure Concurrency

Every community faces the challenge of providing its citizens with high-quality public services in a timely manner. This is even more of a challenge in fast growing areas such as Dorchester County. This section updates some of the major infrastructure improvements and where in the county they are taking place.

Roads

The map “Transportation Master Plan Status Update” is based on a map found in the Dorchester County Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan. (More information about this plan appears in the following section.) The map prepared for this Comprehensive Plan Review and Progress Report documents recent improvements to the road network in Dorchester County, including those accomplished since preparation of the transportation plan.

Recently completed road projects include the segment of Highway 78 through the community of Dorchester. A two-way left-turn lane and a sidewalk now serve the post office in addition to residential and commercial properties here. (The stretch of US-78 from Dorchester to St. George, while greatly improved by repaving and wider shoulders, does not appear on the map because it is a project for safety and maintenance rather than an operational or capacity improvement.) The recent completion of the Palmetto Commerce Parkway, located in Charleston County, is also depicted because it serves Dorchester County commuters by intersecting Patriot Boulevard.

The map also shows ongoing capacity improvement projects. Road widening is taking place on Bacon’s Bridge Road/SC-165 from Trolley Road to Ashley Ridge HS and on Dorchester Rd from Trolley Road to Boone Hill Road (US-17A). New road construction is taking place from Old Fort Drive to Ladson Road at Limehouse Road, thus providing a new link to alleviate congestion in the Oakbrook commercial district.

Schools

As was stated in the comprehensive plan, two school districts operate in Dorchester County. Each has its own governing authority, a school board, and operates almost completely independently of Dorchester County Government. Out of the two districts, Dorchester 2 is in faster growing part of the County and includes areas incorporate by the Town of Summerville and City of North Charleston.

Since the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, Dorchester County District 2 added two new schools. Three others are currently in the planning stages. Ashley Ridge High School, which was mentioned in the comprehensive plan, is now fully operational, and Joseph R. Pye Elementary School, located at 9701 Patriot Boulevard in Ladson, is in its second academic year of operation.

Of the planned new schools, three are elementary schools while the other is a middle school, expected to replace the Rollins Middle School of the Arts with a larger, more up-to-date facility.

Despite the facility additions, Dorchester School District 2 schools continue to operate above capacity.

SCHOOLS, CLASSROOMS, CURRENT ENROLLMENT, ENROLLMENT CAPACITY OF DORCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT 2			
	# OF	CURRENT	DESIGN
<u>SCHOOL</u>	<u>CLASSROOMS</u>	<u>ENROLLMENT</u>	<u>CAPACITY</u>
Beech Hill Elementary	54	1,225	900
Eagle Nest Elementary	48	903	800
Flowertown Elementary	58	1,076	950
Fort Dorchester Elementary	60	1,174	900
Knightsville Elementary	66	1,399	875
Newington Elementary	49	823	825
Pye Elementary	n/a	823	1,000
Oakbrook Elementary	47	803	785
Spann Elementary	41	825	700
Summerville Elementary	41	745	675
William Reeves Elementary	47	1,085	800
Windsor Hill Elementary	51	823	900
Alston Middle	58	918	825
Gregg Middle	67	1,078	1,150
Dubose Middle	51	1,035	800
Oakbrook Middle	57	966	800
River Oaks Middle	69	985	850
Rollings Middle	31	665	475
Ashley Ridge High	106	2,146	2,000
Fort Dorchester High	88	2,028	1,900
Summerville High	148	2,839	2,750
Givhans Alternative	9	128	100
TOTAL	1246	24,492	21,760

Source: Dorchester School District 2

In 2009 the state passed a bill that would allow Dorchester School District 2 to levy impact fees on all new homes. The district charges \$2,500 per dwelling unit on all new homes within the boundaries of the district. Currently, these impact fees are being challenged in court by the metropolitan and state Home

Builders Associations on the basis of whether or not these impact fees are constitutional. The district is holding all of the funds that have been collected so far in a reserve fund until the case is settled.

While Dorchester School District 4 has not constructed any new facilities, it has realigned existing facilities. Clay Hill Middle School changed from a middle school to an elementary school. Harleyville-Ridgeville Elementary added a middle school to their campus, with the elementary school being called just Harleyville Elementary and middle school named Harleyville-Ridgeville Middle School. Woodland High School, St George Middle School and Williams Memorial Elementary School remain unchanged.

Water and Sewer

Water and Sewer Service in Dorchester County Communities

Community	Water	Sewer
Brownsville	DCWA, SCPW	DCWSD
Harleyville	N/A	HARL
Jedburg	DCWA, SCPW	DCWSD
Knightsville	DCWA, SCPW	DCWSD
North Charleston	DCWSD, NCSD	DCWSD, NCSD
Reevesville	REEV	N/A
Ridgeville	RIDG	DCWSD
Rosinville	N/A	DCWSD
St. George	STG	DCWSD
Summerville	SCPW	SCPW

Key: N/A = not available, DCWA = Dorchester County Water Authority, DCWSD = Dorchester County Water & Sewer Department, HARL = Town of Harleyville, REEV = Town of Reevesville, RIDG = Town of Ridgeville, SCPW = Summerville Commissioners of Public Works, STG = Town of St. George

Since the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, there has been a significant change in regard to sanitary sewerage. Dorchester County Water and Sewer Department, which was separated from the Dorchester County Public Works Department, has taken over sewage treatment for the town of St. George and vicinity. The County expanded the wastewater treatment plant and extended service to the Winding Woods Commerce Park east of town.

Although the 2008 Comprehensive plan stated the St. George treatment plant did not have the ability to increase its capacity, new technologies and decreasing costs of those technologies created an opportunity for improved service in western Dorchester County. An upgrade is almost complete increasing the St. George treatment plant’s (now referred to as the Upper Dorchester Wastewater Treatment Plant) capacity from 800,000 gallons per day to 1,800,000 gallons per day.

The Lower Dorchester Reclaimed Water System is nearly complete with improvements to the Lower Dorchester Wastewater Treatment Plant and a main extension to provide reclaimed water to the Bosch facility on Dorchester Road. Reclaimed water lines may be extended to more of the county in time.

Dorchester County Water and Sewer is also adding a reclaimed water system to other industrial areas, such as Winding Woods. The reclamation process takes wastewater and recycles it for industrial use as a means to save potable water.

Winding Woods Pump Station and Force Main project was completed Autumn 2013 to provide sewer service to the Winding Woods Commerce Park. Reclaimed water pipe was installed in anticipation of adding a reclaimed water system at the Upper Dorchester WWTP for use at future Winding Woods manufacturers.

Lake Marion Regional Water Agency's (LMRWA) Mt. Holly to Harleyville Reach is part of a sustained effort to provide potable water to rural areas throughout eastern South Carolina. This water main will get water from the Lake Marion water system to the town of Harleyville. Funding for the project is provided by the Army Corps of Engineers, South Carolina Rural Water Association, and Dorchester County. Water main extensions from Harleyville are planned to provide Lake Marion water to more of western Dorchester County including St. George and the I-95/Highway 178 interchange.

In the last couple of years, Dorchester County completed significant sewer upgrades on the south side of the Ashley River to serve future growth. The improvements include regional pump stations at Ashley Ridge High School, Summer Road near Beech Hill Road, and Pine Hill Commerce Park. A regional pump station near Legend Oaks will be upgraded in 2014.

The Dorchester County Water and Sewer Department is also increasing sewer system capacity in the Jedburg and Ridgeville areas. The specifics of this project include (a) the Highway 27 Sewer Diversion project that will divert the Ridgeville area to the sewer in Pine Hill Commerce Park and (b) an upgrade of Pump Station 5, which is on Highway 78 in Jedburg. A new force main from this station will run parallel to an existing gravity sewer main. The DCWS will divert flow from the Brownsville area to Summerville CPW until these projects are complete.

Emergency Services

One of the challenges that come with a growing population is providing vital emergency services that protect both citizens and visitors of Dorchester County. There have been several improvements made since the 2008 Comprehensive Plan regarding improved emergency services.

Since the 2008 Plan, Dorchester County Emergency Medical Service has three new stations with plans to build three new stations in the near future. The new Medic 1 station located on 821 West 5th North street serves as its new headquarters and covers much of the town of Summerville. The other new station is located at 200 Hundred Oaks Parkway in The Ponds community, thus improving the level of service to a fast growing region of the county. There is both a new fire and medic station located behind the new courthouse complex in St. George.

The new stations being planned in other areas of the County include:

- A new Ridgeville Station which will be located at the entrance of the Bridlewood neighborhood;

- A new station located in the Oakbrook area which would replace the current location of Medic 6; and
- A new station close to East Edisto development, near the intersection of Summers Drive and Beech Hill Road.

Fire services are also in the process of expanding with two new stations opening within the next year. One of the new stations is located on Taylor Pond Road just north of Interstate 26 and will serve the northeastern portion of the county. The other new station is located at the intersection of Wire Road and Smoak Road almost equidistance from the crossroads communities of Grover and Givhans.

Just recently the county took control of all fire stations in county jurisdiction with the exception of the Old Fort Fire stations and the Ashley River Fire Stations. These stations will be undergoing a new Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating process in the near future. With some of changes being implemented, such as the building of two new fire stations, the ISO ratings should improve, allowing for cheaper insurance rates, particularly in rural areas of the county.

This document includes the maps, Dorchester County Medic Districts, 2013, and Dorchester County Fire Districts, 2013, that identify the locations of stations recently constructed or planned.

Community Facilities

A growing County demands larger community facilities of many types. Since the adoption of the 2008 Plan, Dorchester County has completed or initiated the following new or expanded buildings: Dorchester County Public Library at 506 N. Parler Avenue in St. George (one of two County libraries), Dorchester County Courthouse at 5200 E. Jim Bilton Boulevard in St. George, and a county jail proposed on Hodge Road.

Plan Foundation 3: Transportation

One of the major changes in the County's planning program since the adoption of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan was the preparation of a **Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan** in 2010. In this document, Dorchester County is looking to its future.

As part of a successful regional center, Dorchester County is experiencing steady community growth and economic prosperity with an influx of residential and commercial development and a desire to attract quality industry and employers. With this success come the challenges associated with growth. These challenges include the need implement a transportation plan that addresses the topics of traffic congestion and regionalism. Traffic congestion is the unwanted byproduct of community growth while regionalism is the competitive process of obtaining resources to address congestion.

Effective transportation planning is crucial to continuing the successful growth of the County. Conventional transportation improvements such as highways and major roads keep goods moving and allow better access and mobility for freight operators and daily commuters. Measures such as bicycle,

pedestrian and transit improvements allow the region's residents and visitors their choice of traveling by foot, bicycle, and bus, or modes other than driving alone.

The Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan focuses on all modes of transportation and addresses freight as well as passenger travel patterns. In order to achieve balance, this study examined the role of land use decisions on the transportation network. The primary objective of the transportation plan is to develop a set of recommendations that address congestion issues and promote the use of alternate modes of transportation that are financially within reach.

Based on public outreach efforts, several issues emerged and were brought up during the process. Current shortfalls that were brought up in these outreach meeting included the following (excerpted):

- **Connectivity** — we need to find ways to enhance connectivity among existing streets and ensure new roadways have adequate connections.
- **Congestion Management** — we need to find strategic ways to improve access and mobility along our most heavily traveled corridors.
- **Multimodal Accommodations** — we need to provide realistic alternatives that allow people to access homes, schools, parks, and businesses without using personal automobiles. We need to provide safe facilities for recreational users.
- **Cost-Effective Roadway Improvements** — we need to be diligent in choosing locations for new or widened roadways given the limited funding for such projects.

The purpose of the *Dorchester County Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan* is to inventory and assess the existing transportation system and develop a multimodal plan with policies and system recommendations that accommodate automobiles, transit, pedestrians, and bicycles and guides future transportation decisions in Dorchester County.

The goals of the *Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan* are as follows (excerpted):

- **Create a system of interconnected streets** – provide better choices while improving mobility and distribute traffic efficiently and appropriately by purpose and function.
- **Develop a plan that maximizes benefits to the transportation system while minimizing costs involved** – improve existing roads and corridors and implement creative strategies to better manage congestion.
- **Provide a safe transportation system for all users** – develop safety projects to reduce crashes at high-collision intersections and provide better facilities for pedestrian and bicyclists.
- **Encourage context-sensitive design elements that integrate all travel modes into roadway designs** – develop street design standards that cater to more than the automobile by providing provisions for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit and incorporate streetscape and traffic calming elements such as street trees and pedestrian level lighting.
- **Develop a plan compatible with land use** – balance transportation and land use by establishing equilibrium between access and mobility and incorporating previous and concurrent planning efforts to establish transportation solutions that support and sustain land use decisions and policies.

- **Identify transportation improvements that will promote economic development** – pursue transportation recommendations that serve areas with high development potential, areas targeted for employment growth centers, and areas suitable for mixed-use development.
- **Promote a pedestrian-friendly environment** – fill in gaps, improve interconnection in the sidewalk system, and enhance pedestrian connections between key activity centers.
- **Support construction and designation of bicycle and greenway facilities** – provide better connections to destination points and create a network that serves all types and skill levels of bicyclists.
- **Improve freight mobility and access to industrial centers** – enhance connectivity and improve safety of key corridors serving the freight community.
- **Provide viable transit alternatives to decrease dependence on the automobile, in turn decreasing the demand on the existing transportation system** – provide a more comprehensive transit system that encourages more riders through attractive and convenient amenities.
- **Minimize environmental impacts of the transportation system** – utilize planning tools to avoid or mitigate impacts to environmentally or culturally significant areas.
- **Consider innovative funding sources** – analyze alternative transportation funding sources such as impact fees and consider their applicability for Dorchester County.

The *Dorchester County Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan* is a collection of tools, policies, and programs designed to guide decision makers in the implementation of a balanced transportation network. The plan represents the collective vision of a safe, multimodal, and interconnected transportation system that supports continued economic development without compromising the natural, cultural, and historic resources vital to the area's sustainability.

Many of the components of the 2010 transportation plan align with the concepts brought up in 2008 Comprehensive Plan, yet provide more defined and detailed strategies than the older, broader study. The **Dorchester County Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan** is hereby adopted by reference as an update to the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Transit service in Dorchester County has expanded in the past five years. Two bus services operate in the tri-county area: CARTA in urbanized areas and Tri-County Link in rural areas.

The latter most recently added service between St. George, the County Seat, and Summerville. The route links several Dorchester County government facilities standing along or very near US-78. Due to demand associated with the US-78 line, additional service was extended to a regional commercial node at the interchange of US-17A and I-26 from the middle of Summerville.

Tri-County Link also provides service between Summerville and Moncks Corner. CARTA, meanwhile, connects Summerville and Oakbrook with the metropolitan area, including points in North Charleston and Charleston.

Plan Foundation Progress Report 4: Economic Development

County staff has worked to advance recommendations found in the Economic Development and Priority Investment Elements, as well as complementary plans and studies commissioned since the adoption of the 2008 Plan. Because of these advancements, it is advisable to revisit the long-term objectives found in the Plan to maintain their appropriateness. Advancements and updated objectives are summarized in the following sections:

Major Advancements:

- First jurisdiction in the Charleston Region to participate in the SC Department of Commerce Certified Industrial Site Program.
- Leveraged resources to assemble and extend infrastructure to the Winding Woods Certified Industrial Site.
- Dorchester County Industrial Council (DCIC) established to allow greater networking among industries as well as to disseminate information on business retention, expansion, and workforce training resources.
- A digital inventory of available sites and buildings, feeding directly from the SC Commerce Locate SC database, embedded in the website, www.dorchesterforbusiness.com.
- An existing industry Business Retention and Expansion program created to provide frequent visitation of and coordinate resources on workforce training and development, business retention and expansion, and infrastructural capacity improvements for area industries.
- Launched a Work Ethic high school certification pilot program to further cultivate the “soft skills” and competitiveness of our workforce.
- Developed collaborative partnerships with other county departments to provide low-cost safety training to employees of Dorchester County industries.
- **Retail Market Study and Marketing Strategy for Dorchester County** commissioned in 2010, highlighting potential niche markets, opportunities, and strategies to grow the commercial base.
- First **Economic Development Strategic Plan** adopted in 2012, identifying explicit strategies to recruit target markets by improving product inventory, workforce training, and marketing strategies.
- Partnered with the SC National Heritage Corridor to create the *Villages of Dorchester* marketing campaign for Dorchester County’s outdoor recreation amenities.
- Helping to facilitate the redevelopment of Heritage Square.
- Partnered with the Town of St. George to facilitate a grassroots revitalization initiative, *Team St. George*.
- Actively coordinating with Charleston and Berkeley Counties in hosting the Region’s first *Tricounty Career Expo* for the fall of 2014.

These advancements address not only economic development, but also cultural and natural resources, future land use, and the population of the county with respect to education and training. The **Retail Market Study and Marketing Strategy for Dorchester County** and **Economic Development Strategic Plan** are hereby adopted by reference as updates to the Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan.

Long Range Objectives:

- Continue to leverage state and federal resources and establish partnerships with Trident Technical College and area businesses to further workforce training opportunities.
- Collaborate with Charleston and Berkeley Counties in an annual *Tri-County Career Expo*.
- Continue to improve the availability of marketable sites and buildings through land assembly, infrastructural adequacy improvements, and the development of spec buildings.
- Continue to coordinate with SC Commerce to maintain the digital inventory of available sites for industrial and office development.
- Maintain current demographic and marketplace data to actively pursue and recruit supported commercial retail and services.
- Devise a recruitment strategy to facilitate Class A Office development.
- Coordinate with municipalities and varying county Departments to attract investment [and reinvestment] within *Priority Investments Areas* by coordinating resources and leveraging incentives.
- Coordinate with Area Chambers of Commerce in the implementation of the *Villages of Dorchester* outdoor recreation marketing campaign and similar initiatives.
- Leverage resources to facilitate the development of workforce housing throughout the county, particularly near *Employment Growth Areas* and in *Priority Investment Areas* and rural communities.
- Leverage available resources to help stabilize central business districts of towns and communities in rural areas of Dorchester County.
- Coordinate with local agencies, municipalities, varying county departments to leverage resources for eco-tourism product development.

Plan Foundation 5: Workforce Housing

The 2008 Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan was prepared at the tail end of a dramatic boom in residential construction. Lower Dorchester County is similar to many Sun Belt communities in that it enjoyed high growth during a nationwide phenomenon. Higher prices and escalated demand accompanied this growth. Eventually, a series of events that drove the entire nation into recession exposed an oversupply of houses in Dorchester County. Of all 46 counties in South Carolina, Dorchester County led in the inauspicious statistic of foreclosures. Also like similarly situated Sun Belt communities, lower Dorchester County experienced a significant downward correction in home prices.

While such a correction may seem a silver lining to lower income earners in the workforce, those in starter homes were among the hardest hit by the recession. For this reason and others, Dorchester County is joining neighboring jurisdictions in a **Tri-County Housing Needs Assessment**. This assessment

will examine current conditions and trends in household incomes and job growth. The assessment will further consider the types of housing units and communities that can best shelter this workforce and make recommendations as to how participating jurisdictions can encourage fulfillment of housing needs.

Plan Foundation 6: Priority Investment Areas

“Priority Investment” differs from the other elements of comprehensive planning in that it is not a field of study, but rather an area in which considerations of the other elements should overlap. For example, the major advancements listed below acknowledge the interrelationship between infrastructure and economic development.

Major Advancements

- Coordinated with the Town of Summerville to recruit an outdoor outfitter to the Heritage Square Site.
- Coordinated with Planning Department to address infrastructural needs in the recruitment of a commercial development to the Bacons Bridge/Dorchester Roads Gateway District.
- Improved the marketability of available industrial sites within Employment Growth Areas by coordinating resources to address infrastructural needs, conduct due diligence, and pursue SC Department of Commerce Industrial Site Certification.

Long-Term Objectives

- Study need to designate additional Priority Investment Areas to reflect recent infrastructural improvements as well as include “redevelopment areas” and consider adopting a *Priority Investment Area Ordinance*.
- Devise local incentives to encourage investment [or reinvestment] within *Priority Investment Areas* in a mixed use context and allow for greater development flexibility through a Form-Based Code floating zone.
- Use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or other similar mechanisms to fund additional infrastructural and beautification improvements

Plan Foundation 7: Community Design

As noted in the 2008 Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan, quality design is an important aspect of quality growth. A well designed transportation corridor functions better. An attractive commercial property generates more business. A beautiful neighborhood strengthens property values.

The County has budgeted funds to prepare commercial design standards in 2014. Currently, commercial development along arterial roads need only meet landscaping, tree protection, and other site-based aesthetic considerations. The 2014 project may consider materials, massing, and fenestration, among other aspects of new commercial projects.

County staff is meanwhile studying existing, largely built-out commercial areas, for business retention, site reinvestment, and public improvements, as discussed in the preceding topics, Economic Development and Priority Investment Areas. While the 2008 Plan focused on opportunities in new growth, the economic conditions of the past five years have encouraged County leaders to more strongly consider protecting communities in place.

Conclusion

Under South Carolina law, Dorchester County's minimum comprehensive planning requirements include a ten-year plan update cycle with intermediate reviews. The law envisions, however, an ongoing comprehensive planning program rather than a static document. Dorchester County is living up to that vision with the amount of planning in which it has engaged in the past six years. This Comprehensive Plan Review and Progress Report highlights that effort and documents the County's ongoing planning program. This document meets and exceeds the legal requirement for an intermediate review.