



# Comprehensive Plan

Executive Summary  
Beaufort County  
South Carolina

# Preserve the Natural Beauty of Beaufort County

Preserving and protecting the natural environment is a principal concern of Beaufort County residents. What is surprising to many residents is the fact that land well removed from shoreline still has a direct impact on the water quality found many miles downstream.

Preserving water quality in Beaufort County should be our number one priority. More than half of the County is covered by tidal wetlands, estuaries or open waters.

Already, these waters are threatened by pollution. Sections of Broad Creek and the New River are closed to shellfish harvesting due to a significant increase in fecal coliform. Many other creeks and rivers suffer negative impacts due to urban, agricultural and timbering runoff.

These waterways are not only what give the County its sense of place, but they are also the home of one of our oldest and most important industries. Protecting the environment is key to protecting our economy.

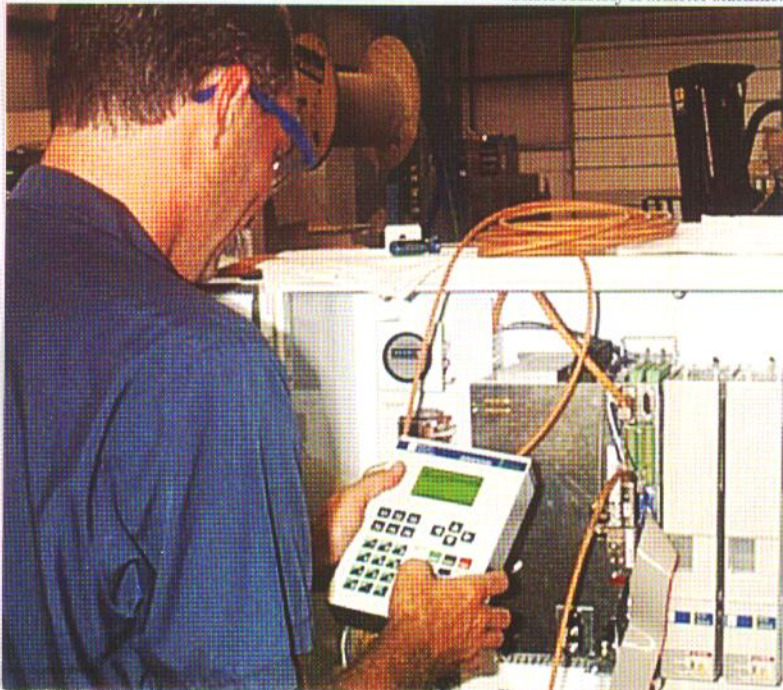
To achieve the vision of preserving, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and fisheries, Beaufort County must:

- **Maintain the pristine waterways of the region.**
- **Maintain and improve the quality of surface waters.**
- **Maintain the quality of wetlands.**
- **Manage finfish and shellfish resources.**
- **Protect the quality and quantity of groundwater resources.**
- **Identify and protect areas of ecological significance.**
- **Conserve open space.**

*The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the following actions be taken to prevent future damage to the natural environment:*

- Require a vegetative buffer along all waterways and tidal wetlands of the County which:
  - ... provides effective flood control.
  - ... protects the land from waterway erosion.
  - ... removes sediment and manmade pollutants before they reach the water.
  - ... provides habitat for wildlife.
- Implement integrated stormwater management program.
- Reduce the amount of "impervious surfaces," such as roads, driveways, sidewalks and rooftops, which increase stormwater runoff.

Photo courtesy of Minster Machine.



- Direct new development to Priority Investment Areas serviced by public sewers.
- Develop a boating impact management plan, including educating recreational boaters about how to reduce their impact on the waterways of Beaufort County.
- Develop septic system density standards for areas not served by public sewers.
- Encourage open spaces and greenways that maintain existing vegetation.
- Develop an inventory of existing live oaks and other hardwood trees and enforce efforts to preserve these trees.
- Protect areas that are home to endangered or threatened wildlife species.
- Create a River Quality Overlay District County-wide to protect water quality.
- Adjust for wetland areas in development density calculations.
- Encourage the use of forest Best Management Practices and provide incentives for maintaining land for forestry.

## Create New Industries & Jobs to Keep Our Economy Strong

Since adopting the Comprehensive Plan in 1997, Beaufort County has participated in the creation of the public-private Greater Beaufort-Hilton Head Economic Partnership and has provided support that has successfully converted the University of South Carolina Beaufort from a two-year university to a four-year university. Both of these steps are essential to form successful economic diversification. Additionally, Beaufort County has begun to measure success in achieving economic diversity and will continue to develop tools to measure our success. Beaufort County will continue to support economic diversity that will improve the quality of citizens' lives and provide economic opportunity by enacting policies and procedures to position Beaufort County to take advantage of all available opportunities. With this update of the Comprehensive Plan, it is time to build on the progress to date.

*The first step is the adoption of a new vision:*

**All residents of Beaufort County will have the opportunity to realize their economic potential.**

*To achieve this vision, the Comprehensive Plan establishes the following economic goals:*

1. Continue support of the Greater Beaufort-Hilton Head Economic Partnership, Inc. (the "Partnership") and its assigned mission as Beaufort County's designated representative to increase economic opportunities for Beaufort County residents.
2. Support economic diversity by implementing policies and procedures recommended by the Partnership to improve Beaufort County's capacity to compete for higher-wage jobs that will benefit its citizens.
3. Cooperate with the Private Sector to support existing businesses and attract new businesses that pay wages above the Beaufort County average.
4. Periodically review policies and procedures and delineate a clear work plan to guide the modification of these policies and procedures to ensure that they support the objective of economic diversity and increased wage rates for its citizens.
5. Cooperate with the Partnership to lead the development of regional economic development strategies with the surrounding counties and the Lowcountry Council of Governments.
6. Support the creation of conditions that allow, and programs that enable, the expansion of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for citizens.
7. Support economic growth that will increase Beaufort County's total business property tax base to support essential County services.
8. Continue to encourage increased cooperation among all municipalities and areas within Beaufort County.

9. Continue to encourage improved public, higher and vocational education and training opportunities to assist citizens in securing higher-wage jobs.
10. Encourage and assist the Partnership's efforts to be fiscally self-sufficient.
11. Support the Partnership to continue its emphasis on expanding and attracting businesses that are compatible with and appreciative of Beaufort County's outstanding quality of life with emphasis on value-added business as the Partnership's priority. Some examples of value-added businesses appreciative of our quality of life include software development, consulting, medical, light manufacturing, light assembly, fabrication, warehousing and distribution, and satellite office facilities.
12. Support the Partnership's effort to improve the relationship with the South Carolina Department of Commerce and other State agencies, appropriate Federal and international agencies, and organizations directly involved in profit-seeking capital investment.
13. Support the Partnership's efforts to expand opportunities to involve Beaufort County's Federal and State elected delegations in encouraging increased economic opportunities for Beaufort County citizens.
14. Enable the Partnership to compete effectively by authorizing the Partnership to utilize economic development tools and incentives commonly used by competing communities. Examples of these incentives would include but not be limited to: designating certain parcels of property as being "multi-county business parks" so that businesses located in these areas could take advantage of State and Federal incentives at no expense to Beaufort County taxpayers; delegating authority for use of unused water and sewer capacity available to Beaufort County for economic development; and creation of a "fast track" process for reviewing building permits for appropriate economic opportunities.
15. Receive from the Partnership, at least annually, a "State of the Economy in Beaufort County" report.

## Build Better Roads & Encourage Two-Wheeled & Two-Footed Travel

The main roads of Beaufort County are already carrying more cars every day than they were built to handle, causing traffic jams and safety problems for County residents.

Building new roads is expensive or impossible because large areas of the County are covered by water or marshland. The shortest distance between two points is never a straight line in Beaufort County.

Building new and better roads is important, but these construction projects must be well planned to prevent sharp tax increases and damage to the environment. Citizens have often rejected tax increases for road improvements. Thus, good planning is the only option.

Additionally, commercial and residential access to main roads must be carefully managed in the future to discourage increasing urban sprawl and bigger traffic jams.

Every effort should be made to build bikeways and pedestrian walkways into future road plans so that not every trip has to be by car.

The recommendations of the Lowcountry Regional Transit Authority should also be considered to enable commuters who cannot afford cars to have access to efficient, low-cost transportation to and from work.

*The Beaufort County Comprehensive Plan seeks to implement a roadway improvement program that will:*

- **Make streets safer.**
- **Make it easier to get from Point A to Point B.**
- **Preserve the fragile environment of Beaufort County.**
- **Encourage smart development that controls road access and reduces traffic jams.**

The Plan seeks cooperative ventures with the State of South Carolina, Jasper County, and the Federal Government to find new ways to finance road construction and improvement projects, in an effort to ease the tax burden on Beaufort County residents.

*This plan will deliver the following benefits for the citizens of Beaufort County:*

- **Safer and more convenient access to main roads from new developments.**
- **Swifter and safer hurricane evacuations.**
- **Safer and more convenient commutes for workers.**
- **Sufficient long-term highway capacity during peak tourism seasons.**

In addition to specific roadway upgrades, beginning with major highways and roads in Priority Investment Areas, the Comprehensive Plan recommends that:

- A regional transportation planning process be established in cooperation with the County's municipalities and surrounding counties to examine the transportation system as a whole.
- Computer modeling software called TRANPLAN be used to determine the impact of new commercial and residential developments on regional roadway capacity.
- Alternative modes of travel such as bus service, light rail, water taxis, ferry service, ridesharing, bikeways and walking trails be identified and developed.
- The scenic quality of the County's roadways be protected and enhanced.

## Preserve Our Rich Cultural Heritage

Beaufort County's attractiveness as a place to live and work, as a destination for visitors, and consequently its economic well-being are directly related to its historic character and unique quality of life. The County has a diverse wealth of historic resources including:

- Two of the three National Historic Landmark Districts in South Carolina: the Beaufort Historic District and Penn Center.
- 56 properties and districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- Hundreds of other buildings and sites of historic and architectural importance.
- Gullah culture.

In 1996, The City of Beaufort, Town of Port Royal, and Beaufort County were awarded a matching grant from the South Carolina Department of Archives and History to survey the County and identify our cultural resources. The entire County, with the exception of Hilton Head Island, the military installations at Parris Island and the Marine Corps Air Station, and the town of Bluffton (which was surveyed in 1994), has now been surveyed.

*To preserve the cultural landscape of Beaufort County for future generations, the Comprehensive Plan recommends the following actions that stem from the 1996 survey data:*

- Establish a system to evaluate and designate historic resources for future preservation planning.
- Evaluate Beaufort County roads and work with the South Carolina Department of Transportation to designate any eligible road as a South Carolina Scenic Highway.
- Monitor all development and require archaeological survey reports when appropriate.
- Revise and update the Beaufort County Historic Preservation Ordinance to create a register for sites of local historic significance.
- Enforce the Beaufort County Archaeological and Historic Impact Assessment Ordinance.
- Expand efforts to involve the public in historic preservation through education.
- Maintain the historic character of the Beaufort National Historic Landmark District.
- Work with the County Emergency Management Department and Building Codes to develop a plan for protecting historic resources both during and after a natural disaster.
- Establish a special Cultural Protection Overlay District on St. Helena Island.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends the following actions be taken to meet these goals:

#### Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment

- Make sure that all developments in Priority Investment Areas that do not already have public sewer systems use public sewer systems as these systems become available.
- BJWSA should develop alternative and limited-capacity wastewater systems to serve areas that are outside the Priority Investment Areas which cannot be served by septic tanks due to public health or environmental problems.
- To manage growth County-wide, prohibit the expansion of regional sewer service outside the Priority Investment Areas. This will ensure that resources are spent wisely during this time of rapid growth.

The County should work with BJWSA, SCDHEC, the Lowcountry Council of Governments (LCOG), and the municipalities within Beaufort County to create a water-quality management program.

- Strengthen the permitting process locally for septic tanks to keep septic systems from polluting our water.

#### Solid Waste Management

- Study trash disposal services to eliminate duplication of service and lower the cost of these services.
- Continue to encourage recycling through education.

#### Public Safety

- Provide equal fire protection for all Beaufort County citizens through regular review and construction of new fire stations and equipment as needed.
- Achieve five-minute EMS response County-wide.
- Make sure that we have enough law enforcement officers throughout the County.
- Develop emergency evacuation plans in conjunction with developers, municipalities and neighboring counties.

#### Educational Facilities

- Give our children the opportunity to learn by:
  - ... building four new schools (one elementary school, one early childhood center, two high schools).
  - ... expanding or renovating seven existing schools.
- Make library services and information accessible to all County residents near home or work:
  - ... relocate and expand the libraries at Bluffton, Dale and St. Helena Island.
  - ... place a new facility in the Shell Point/Burton/Broad River/Chechessee area.

## Permit Development While Maintaining Beaufort County's Sense of Place

Beaufort County must preserve, protect and enhance the qualities and natural resources that foster a sense of community, make the County a valuable tourist destination and a desirable place to live, work and call home.

In order to preserve our way of life, we must find a balance between our rights as private property owners and the rights of our neighbors and the community as a whole.

The decisions we make now will have far-reaching implications. What we do will affect our children and our children's children. It is our responsibility to be good stewards of the land and waters of Beaufort County to ensure that the quality of life that we enjoy today will be enjoyed by our descendants many years from now.

The Future Land Use Plan seeks to achieve six specific goals:

- Keep rural and developing areas in the County separate.
- Protect the character and quality of existing communities and ensure that new developments share the characteristics and quality unique to Beaufort County.
- Define and perpetuate an ethic of quality growth.
- Foster smart economic development.
- Manage the cost of growth to the taxpayers by directly linking infrastructure to new development.
- Understand the limits on growth, such as soil quality, wetlands and coastal geography, and the presence of military installations.

#### Future Land Use Strategy

To meet these goals, the Comprehensive Plan recommends a two-stage growth management strategy that calls for a base density of one unit per three acres throughout the County, paired with a system of flexible performance standards and incentives, to achieve higher and lower densities in locations appropriate for denser development or preservation. This strategy is based on five considerations:

- Population growth trends.
- Accommodating growth and preservation interests.
- Encouraging quality development.
- Respecting the natural environment.
- Planning for and assessing the impact of growth.

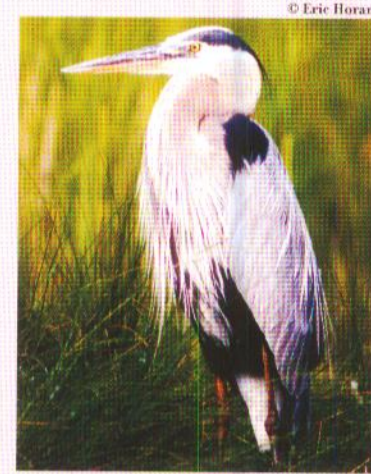
To guide Future Land Use in Beaufort County, the County has been divided into three main designations: Priority Investment Areas, Transitional Investment Areas, and Rural Investment Areas.

#### Priority Investment Areas

Priority Investment Areas are areas in which growth is encouraged in the County. These areas are less environmentally sensitive, have an existing concentration of homes and businesses, and are expected to further develop within a five-year horizon.

Prioritizing capital investment in these areas will allow:

- The County to make efficient use of tax dollars by targeting where and when services will be provided.
- The County to catch up or get ahead of development and the need for new infrastructure and services.
- The County to phase capital outlays for expenditures such as roads, schools and fire stations.



- County Council to approve development plans based on the availability of infrastructure and services.

The Priority Investment Areas include:

- Community Preservation Areas – existing towns, communities and neighborhoods of the County that have a distinct character, quality and sense of place.
- Residential and Light Commercial Areas – areas of the County that can support new development through existing or anticipated infrastructure and services and have minimal impact on the scenic beauty of the County and its natural environment.
- Regional Commercial – areas of significant commercial development that will have a regional draw and impact.
- Research and Development Districts – areas of non-polluting clean industries, high-tech industries, and low- or no-waste producing industries.

#### Transitional Investment Areas

Transitional Investment Areas are areas within the County that are likely to become Priority Investment Areas in the next 10 to 15 years and will eventually support densities available in Priority Investment Areas. Until then, these areas will receive moderate capital investment. Developers and property owners may accelerate development by financing the cost of their own infrastructure and service needs.

#### Rural Investment Areas

Outside the developed areas of the County lies the rural countryside that gives Beaufort County much of its character and sense of place. Rural lands should be given every advantage to stay in their present state.

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to:

- Discourage widespread suburban sprawl and strip commercial development in rural areas.
- Preserve water quality by improving the standards for septic systems on rural soils.
- Protect wildlife habitat.
- Protect mature forest stands.
- Preserve scenic views and water access.
- Preserve open spaces by clustering homes in new developments.

#### Special Programs

To ensure that we meet the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan as set forth by the people of Beaufort County, several special programs will be implemented:

- A Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program along with the outright purchase of critical lands will be pursued by the County to protect certain areas for the public interest. Conservation easements with attending tax breaks also are encouraged.
- Family Exemptions will be offered. This concept will help ease the housing issues associated with heirs property and continue to support family compounds across the County. Property owners will be able to:
  - ... subdivide their property for immediate family members through a simplified subdivision approval process.
  - ... receive a density bonus, given additional approved percolation sites for septic systems.
- Development agreements will be encouraged to enable landowners to develop according to existing laws, while lessening the financial impact of development on the need for public services and infrastructure. Any development agreements will be subject to public participation and review.
- A Cultural Protection Overlay will be established to preserve culture, landscape and way of life of St. Helena Island. As one of the last remaining locations of Gullah culture, language and customs, the island requires an additional level of development standards to protect this important resource.
- Military Planning Area. Land use near the Marine Corps Air Station must be carefully monitored to ensure that future development is compatible with base operations.

DISCLAIMER: This information has been reviewed by responsible agencies and departments of the County Government, but some errors may exist. Therefore, the Beaufort County Planning Department should be contacted for confirmation of any specific Comprehensive Plan information.

# Beaufort County Future Land Use Adopted August 23, 1999

### Legend

**PRIORITY INVESTMENT AREAS**

- Community Preservation
- Regional Commercial
- Research and Development
- Residential/Light Commercial

**TRANSITIONAL INVESTMENT AREAS**

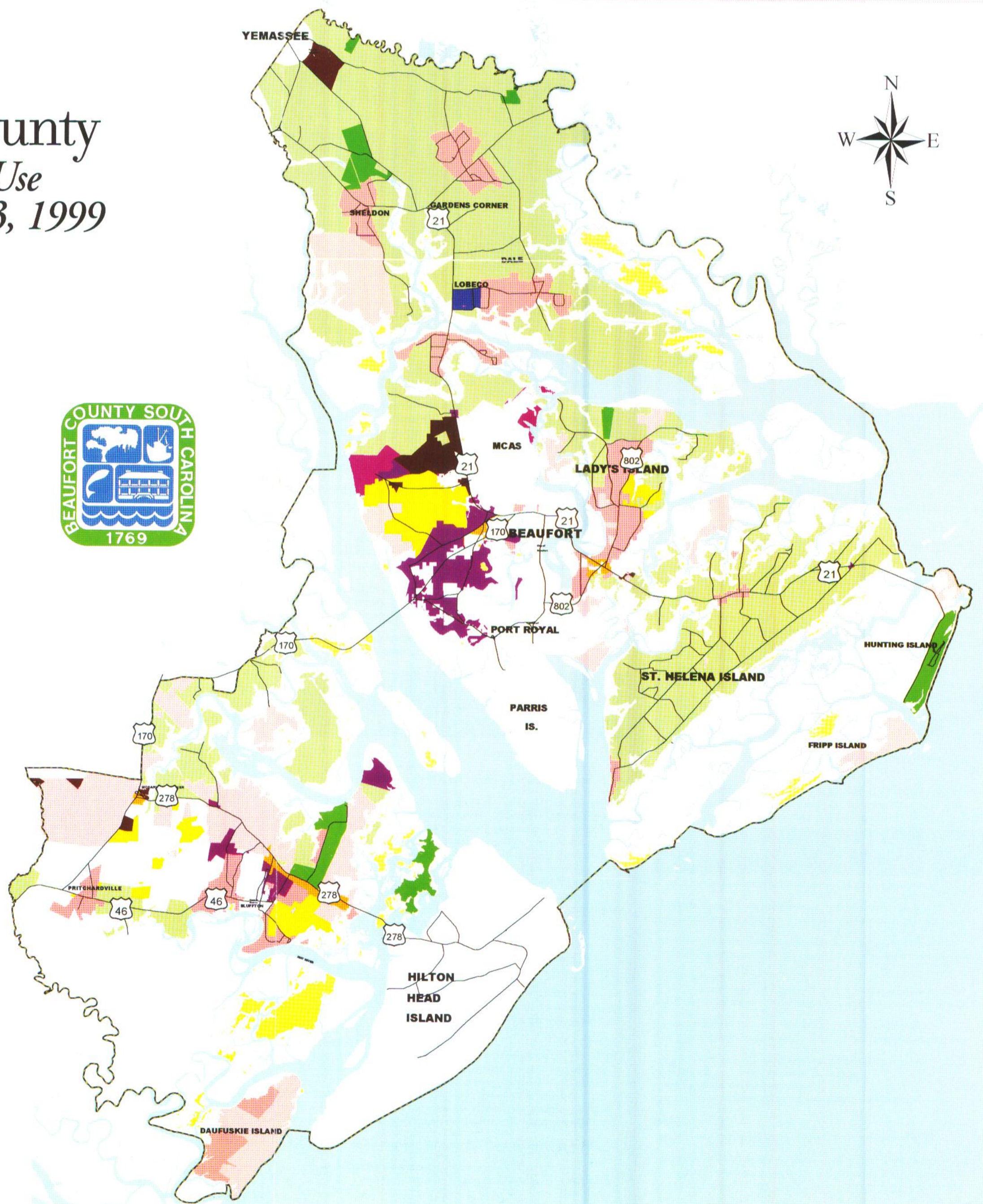
- Transitional Areas

**RURAL INVESTMENT**

- Resource Conservation
- Rural Service Areas

**CLASSIFICATIONS**

- Incubator Development
- Park and Conservation Easements
- Military Property and County Airports
- Military Planning Areas
- Existing Planned Unit Development



# Create Parks and Preserve Open Spaces

The natural environment of Beaufort County should enhance the physical well-being of her citizens.

*The Comprehensive Plan will ensure that:*

- Existing park land is developed to provide a complete range of recreational facilities.
- New parks are constructed to meet the demands of our growing population.
- New and enhanced recreational activities are made available for all citizens.
- Pristine open spaces are preserved.

*The Plan recommends the following actions:*

- Develop the Burton Wells Park on Port Royal Island to include a recreation center; a wildlife preserve; operations, security and maintenance; and support facilities and services.
- Improve and maintain each of the County's municipal parks, County recreational facilities and school playgrounds, which include:

...40 parks and facilities

...30 ball fields

...4 gymnasiums

...8 community centers

...2 arts centers

...15 tennis courts

- Develop the Buckwalter Park in southern Beaufort County.
- Preserve greenways—natural areas that often follow linear landscape features such as rivers, trail systems, streams, highlands or even abandoned railroads—to help protect waterways, wetlands and wildlife.
- Aggressively seek alternative funding sources for parks and recreational activities.
- Develop an additional 13 community parks and seven neighborhood parks to meet current needs.

# Ensure Affordable Housing for All Beaufort County Residents

The rapid growth of the County and influx of wealthy second homeowners and retirees is driving up the cost of housing and restricting the ability for many residents to afford homes near where they work.

Lower-paid workers are finding it necessary to live farther and farther from work; more than 600 members of the military and their families are on waiting lists for on-base housing; and the rural poor are often unable to afford decent housing.

Losing any of these population groups would severely cripple Beaufort County's economy. The tourism industry could not function without service workers; the military payroll accounts for one-third of the County's total annual payroll; and the rural poor, living for generations in family compounds, represent the history and diversity of the County and should not be displaced.

The need for affordable housing is an issue that must be addressed before this housing shortage seriously weakens the area's economic base.

The residential real estate market is very strong, and there is no market-driven incentive to build affordable housing. Mobile homes currently represent a significant amount of "affordable housing" in the County. Compared to other examples of affordable housing, such as apartments, townhouses and bungalows, mobile homes:

- Experience rapid depreciation, which prevents the owners from gaining equity over time.
- Offer poor protection from hurricanes or severe storms.
- Have higher than average vacancy rates.
- Rely on septic systems that can pollute our groundwater if not properly maintained.

*The Comprehensive Plan recommends the following action steps to ensure a range of affordable housing opportunities for all:*

- Create a community-wide consensus on the importance of developing affordable housing.
- Encourage the construction of affordable housing through incentive programs.
- Leverage Federal and State programs to build affordable housing.
- Encourage a variety of housing types in new developments to suit all incomes and lifestyles.
- Promote affordable housing to meet the growing needs of the military.
- Foster a variety of affordable housing opportunities near job centers and community facilities.
- Be sensitive to aesthetics, open space and natural resources in developing affordable housing.

# Provide Public Services Without Breaking the Bank

Our growing community needs safe roads, clean water, fire protection and other public services. Proper planning will ensure that these services are available and that we can pay for them without big tax increases.

*Public facilities to support growth include:*

- Water treatment and distribution.
- Sewer systems and wastewater treatment.
- Solid waste collection and disposal.
- Fire protection and law enforcement.
- Emergency medical services.
- General government facilities.
- Schools and libraries.
- Emergency evacuation.

*The Comprehensive Plan will save money for Beaufort County taxpayers by ensuring that:*

- Growth is encouraged in areas that already have the proper public services.
- New infrastructure is constructed where it is most appropriate.
- Duplication of certain public services is eliminated.
- All citizens have equal access to fire, emergency medical and law enforcement protection.
- Schools and libraries are constructed and improved.
- The natural environment is preserved.

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