EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
BEAUFORT COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

“We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.”

- CHARLES FRANKLIN KETTERING
A summary of the Comprehensive Plan goals, policies and recommended actions, developed through an extensive process of citizen participation, is provided below:

- Promote new and better ways of disposing of wastewater
- 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
- Strengthen the existing River Protection Overlay District County-wide to protect water quality
- Adjust for wetland areas in development density calculations
- Require permits for timber harvesting and provide incentives for maintaining land for forestry

Create New Industries and Jobs to Keep Our Economy Strong

The global economy of the 21st Century demands that areas with a limited economic base, such as Beaufort County, diversify in order to succeed. Beaufort County’s dependence on a few industries creates a potentially dangerous situation. While the number of jobs has grown significantly in the past several years, most of these jobs are low-wage positions in service and retail trade industries. The percentage of higher-paying manufacturing jobs has declined.

Beaufort County must create jobs that preserve our environment and quality of life by targeting the high technology, clean manufacturing and distribution industries.

The Comprehensive Plan has been developed with the following economic development goals:

- Create 5,000 new jobs in the next 10 years
- Increase the number of high-paying jobs available to County residents
- Provide residents with the skills to fill these jobs
- Diversify the economy
- Preserve the quality of life enjoyed by Beaufort County businesses and residents
- Preserve the natural environment that has contributed to our existing economic base
- Preserve and enhance the traditional economic sectors of farming and fishing

The Beaufort County Comprehensive Plan recommends the following action steps to reach our economic development goals:

- Encourage expansion of existing businesses and the creation of home grown businesses in the rural business option
- Create an “incubator” program to help small start-up businesses succeed in Beaufort County by offering highly specialized and concentrated business planning services and training
- Preserve and enhance the tourism industry
- Aggressively recruit high technology and “clean” industries that do not compromise the quality of life enjoyed by County residents. Target industries include:
  - wholesale trade
  - transportation and warehousing
  - electronics
  - light manufacturing
  - medical equipment
  - nursing and home health care
  - information technology
  - biotechnology
  - telecommunications
  - film
- Encourage industry “clustering” that is accessible from residential areas
- Develop the skills necessary for the Beaufort County work force to meet the demands of the changing workplace by expanding programs with the Beaufort County School District Technical College of the Lowcountry, USC-Beaufort, the Career Education Center and private businesses
- Revalorize selected existing commercial developments
- Encourage transportation programs that make jobs more accessible for workers

Preserve the Natural Beauty of Beaufort County

Preserving and protecting the natural environment is a principal concern of Beaufort 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.
- These waters are not only what give the County its sense of place, they are 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
  - Manage finfish and shellfish resources
  - Protect the quality and quantity of groundwater resources
  - Identify and protect areas of geological significance
  - Conserve open space
  - Conserve existing stands of mature trees

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

- Promote a public/private partnership to develop Special Area Management Plans for Port Royal and St. Helena Sounds
- 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 man-made pollutants before it reaches the water
  - provides habitat for wildlife
- Create an integrated stormwater management program
- Develop County-wide standards that improve the quality of stormwater runoff to pre-development levels
- Reduce the amount of "impervious surfaces," such as roads, driveways, sidewalks and rooftops, which increase stormwater runoff
- Direct new development to Priority Investment Areas, serviced by public sewers
Build Better Roads and Encourage Two-Wheeled and 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 not 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. Consideration should be given to the possibility of maintaining the existing road network by only improving the worst sections.

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 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:

- Five-lane roadways without median striping be discouraged. These roadways tend to encourage strip malls and left turns in front of oncoming traffic, which contribute to accidents and traffic jams.
- Computer modeling software called TMODEL 2 be used to determine the impact of new commercial and residential developments on roadway capacity.
- Future development near major intersections is anticipated and planned for in advance to ensure that roads can carry additional traffic.

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 and Beaufort County were awarded a matching grant from the South Carolina Department of Archives and History to survey the County and identify historic resources. The entire County, with the exception of Hilton Head Island, is a vital part of the Nation's history, having played a significant role in the development of African-American culture.

To preserve the cultural landscape of Beaufort County for future generations, the Comprehensive Plan recommends the following actions:

- 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 to determine where archaeological survey reports will be required
- Revise and update the Beaufort County Historic Preservation Ordinance
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- Enforce the Beaufort County Archaeological and Historic Impact Assessment Ordinance
- Establish a special Cultural Protection Overlay district on St. Helena Island

Create Parks and Preserve Open Spaces

The natural beauty of Beaufort County should be enjoyed by and enhance the physical well-being of its citizens.

The Comprehensive Plan will ensure that:

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

The Plan recommends the following actions:

- Develop The Burton Wells Central Park on Port Royal Island to include a recreation center, a wildlife preserve, a preschool, a school playground, and baseball fields; and
- Improve and maintain each of the County's municipal parks.
- Develop at least one new large County park for southern Beaufort County near Bluffton.
- Preserve greenways—natural areas that often follow linear landscape features, such as rivers, railroad and 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 17 community parks and seven neighborhood parks to meet current needs.
- Establish a nature center centrally located in the ACE Basin.
Ensure Affordable Housing for All Beaufort 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.

Loss of 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 a market-driven incentive to build affordable housing. Mobile homes currently represent the only real example of "affordable housing" in the County. Compared to other examples of affordable housing, such as apartments, townhouses and high-rises, mobile homes:

- Experience rapid depreciation which prevents the owner from gaining equity over time
- Offer poor protection from hurricanes or severe storms
- Have higher than average vacancy rates
- Rely on septic systems which 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 waste water 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 are 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

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 over one unit per acre that do not already have public sewer systems use public sewer systems as these systems become available
- Build dry sewer lines in all new developments in Priority Investment Areas where public sewer is not yet available
- BJWSA should find alternative and limited capacity waste water 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, new development should take place in the Priority Investment Areas. This will ensure that tax dollars 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 and neighboring counties

Educational Facilities

- Give our children the opportunity to learn by:
  - building eight new schools (four elementary, three middle schools, one high school)
  - expanding or renovating three existing schools
  - repairing or completing six existing schools
- Make library services and information accessible to all County residents near home or work:
  - expand the libraries at Bluffton, Dale and St. Helena Island
  - build an additional library at McGary's Corner by 2005
  - place a new facility in the Shell Point/Burton/Broad River/Chesapeake area