



# OLD TOWN MASTER PLAN

June 30, 2006

# THE OLD TOWN MASTER PLAN

*was created by:*

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*and Hundreds of Bluffton Citizens*



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## **The Covenant for Bluffton**

As citizens of Bluffton, South Carolina, we hold the following to be true:

That social, cultural and economic diversity and inclusiveness are the essence of our community;

That we bear responsibility for the stewardship of nature's blessings entrusted to us in Bluffton and along the May River;

That freedom and civic duty work hand-in-hand to create a culture of individuality and a sense of community;

That our natural, physical and cultural history are worthy of our protection as trustees in order for us to embrace our future.

Acknowledging these truths, we aspire to the following goals:

To build upon our historic foundation a future that celebrates diversity, nurtures neighborliness and ensures a future of opportunity for generations to come;

To enhance the natural beauty and the quality of the May River and its watershed;

To protect the architectural heritage of Old Town Bluffton;

To enhance the canopy of trees and natural landscape throughout Bluffton;

To engage the creative human spirit and the arts within Bluffton;

To protect and enhance the oyster, shrimping and fishing opportunities of the May River;

To provide housing opportunities for all citizens that are decent, affordable and Bluffton beautiful.

To nurture a respect for each citizen.



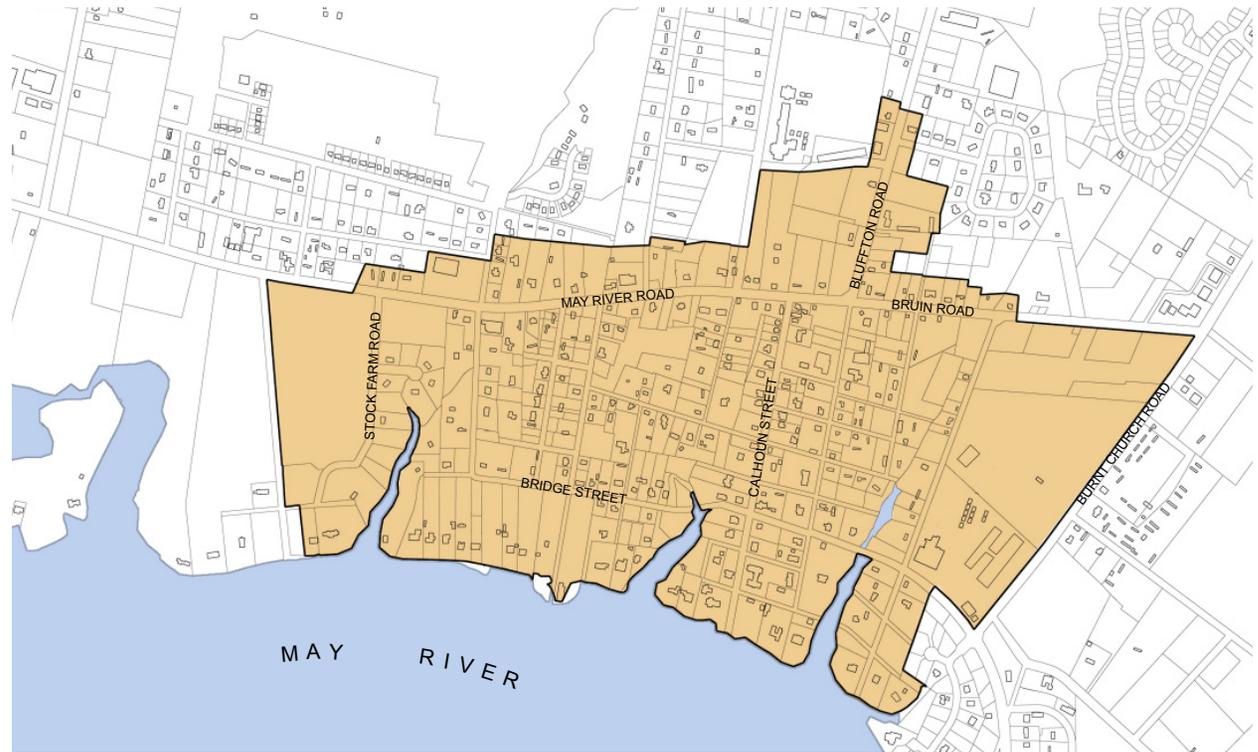


# research and observations 1

## *What do you want your community to be when it grows up?*

Nestled along the banks of the May River, the Old Town of Bluffton is treasured by residents and visitors alike for its natural beauty and unique physical character. Once a summer retreat, Bluffton has truly come into its own as a well-established community with a storied past. During the past five years, the Town of Bluffton has experienced tremendous growth and prosperity, having expanded its territory from one square mile to approximately fifty square miles through the annexation of large parcels of undeveloped land. The Town strives to achieve economic vitality through development and redevelopment while ensuring that Bluffton's community character and historical heritage are preserved. Given recent growth and development pressures in the Town and region, the Old Town Master Plan is intended to provide a blueprint for future infill development in the Old Town that reflects the eclectic character of the area and a sustainable pattern of settlement.

Starting in October of 2005, the Town government and local citizens, along with the town planning firm of Dover, Kohl & Partners, worked together to create the plan. The planning process began with a review of all previous plans and studies and a thorough evaluation of the study area. This chapter details the analysis of Old Town; the chapters following describe the design charrette and resulting plan.



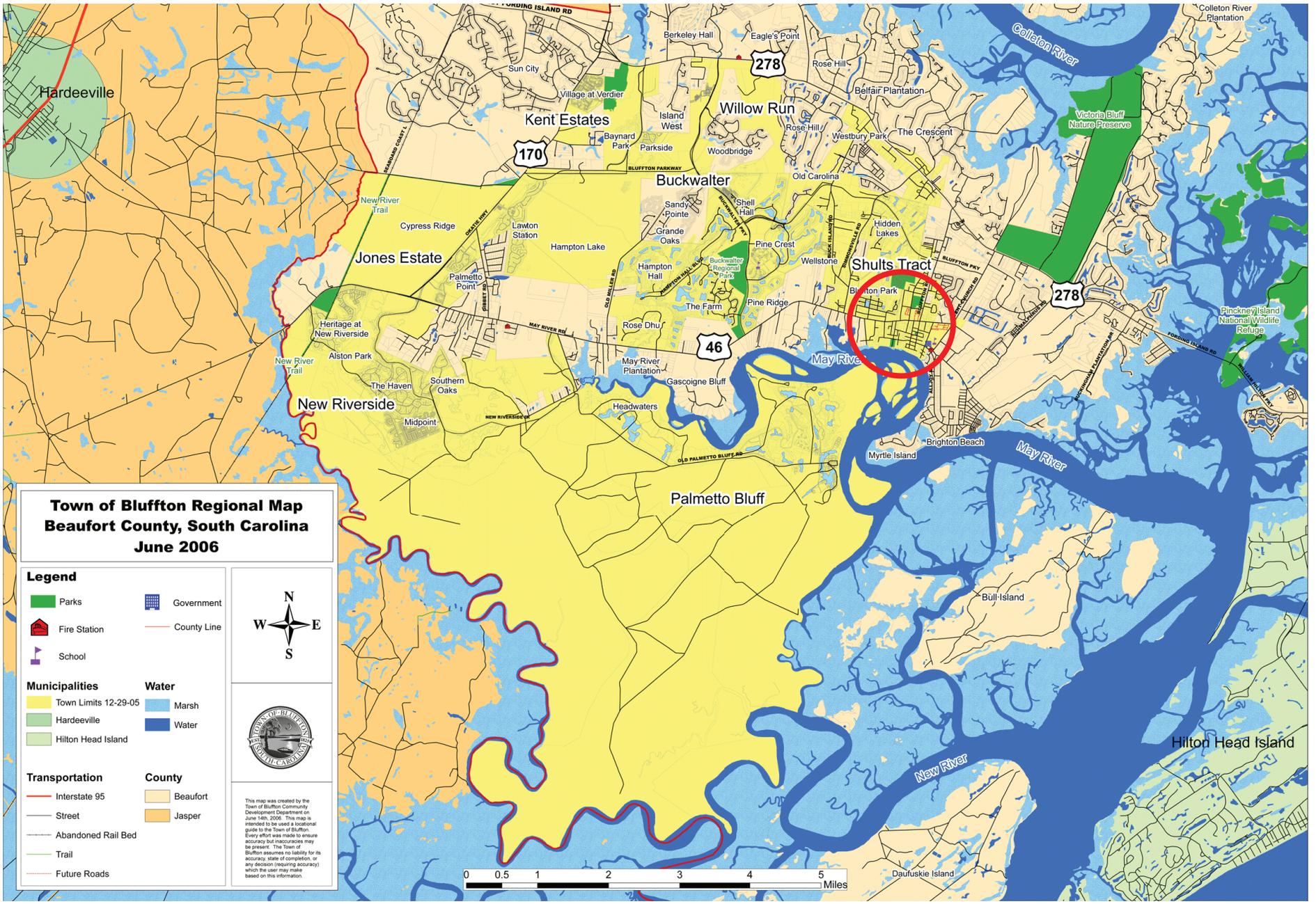
Old Town Bluffton – Study Area

### **OLD TOWN ANALYSIS**

The Town of Bluffton is located in Beaufort County, the southernmost coastal county in South Carolina. It is situated on a high bluff overlooking the May River, a pristine waterway that has strongly contributed to the Town's history and continued success. Bluffton is located just twelve miles west of Hilton Head Island, SC, and approximately twenty miles northeast of Savannah, GA. In 1852, the Town of Bluffton, comprised of approximately one square mile, was officially incorporated by an act of the South Carolina General Assembly. This original one square mile of Bluffton is referred to as Old Town.

The study area defined for the Old Town Master Plan consists of the original one square mile of the Town. The area is bounded by the property known as Stock Farm to the west, Burnt Church Road to the east, Dr. Mellichamp Drive to the north, and the May River to the south. The Old Town is the historic core of the Town and the area was granted National Historic Register District designation in 1996.

The thorough collection of background information; whether through photographing existing conditions, talking to citizens, or analyzing base maps; helped the planning team to better prepare for creating a workable plan for Old Town.



Regional map – Old Town is circled in red

Source: Bluffton Regional Map Project

## STUDYING THE PAST\*

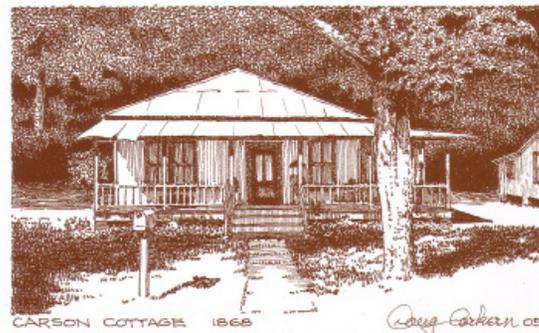
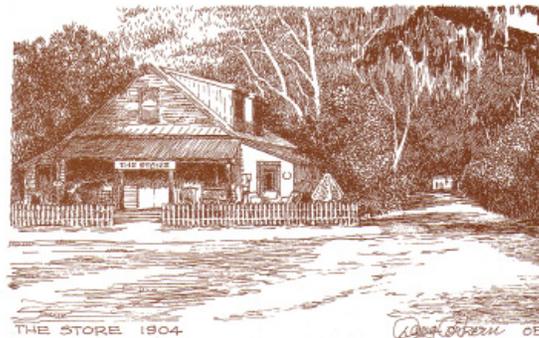
The first homes in Bluffton were constructed during the early 1800s by area plantation owners seeking the high ground and cool summer breezes from the May River. Its prime location along the river offered easy water access for residents and visitors and the natural beauty of the river and tidal coves offered prominent locations for residences. The first streets were laid out during the mid-1800s, forming an informal grid of streets interwoven amongst the coves. A steamboat landing was constructed at the end of Calhoun Street in the 1850s, which allowed the Town to be a stopover for travelers between Savannah and Beaufort or Charleston.

Within one year of the capture of Fort Sumter, Bluffton became a safe haven for residents fleeing Union occupation of the South Carolina barrier islands. Bluffton was a headquarters for Confederate forces until Union forces on Hilton Head Island ordered the Town's destruction in 1863. Approximately 60 structures stood in the Town before the attack; only fifteen residences and the Town's two churches remained following the attack.

The Town did not experience a true rebuilding until the 1880s, when the Town emerged as a commercial center for Beaufort County. The Town remained a commercial center until the Coastal Highway (US 17) and the bridge at Port Wentworth over the Savannah River were completed in the 1920s, making riverboat trade and travel less attractive. The Great Depression, beginning shortly thereafter, compounded with the building of the US 17 bridge, caused an inherent decline in the Town's prosperity and commercial importance.

*\*The information included in "Studying the Past" is from the Town of Bluffton. For more information on Bluffton history, please visit [www.townofbluffton.com](http://www.townofbluffton.com).*

While over time the Town became less dependent on commerce along the May River, Calhoun Street (which runs north-south from May River Road to the river) still acted as the Town's "Main Street". At one point in time, at least five general stores lined the street. Today there are one hundred contributing historic structures in Old Town. The Oyster Factory, located at the end of Wharf Street, remains a strong reminder of Bluffton's long history and dependence on the May River.



Sketches by local architect, Doug Corkern



Photos courtesy of Emmet McCracken

## ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

A variety of physical conditions exist in Old Town today. Ranging from stately homes along the river to the unique shops along Calhoun Street, Old Town Bluffton embodies a diverse community character. The area along May River Road (SC Highway 46) includes both suburban and urban buildings as the road changes character from a rural to more urban feel. Several new mixed-use development projects are proposed for the corridor. Wharf Street and Calhoun Street run north-south from May River Road to the river and Pritchard Street runs north-south from Bruin Road to the river. These streets offer public access to the water at the terminus of each.

Homes in Old Town range from mobile homes to cottages to large estate homes along the river. Homes are typically set back from streets and are arranged in organic patterns along fairly large blocks. Lots are an average of one-third of an acre due to septic system requirements. Many of the homes are now connected to the Town's sewer system, yet some homes in Old Town remain on septic. The area south of Bridge Street is the quieter part of town, comprised primarily of single-family homes and places of worship.

Walking every street in Old Town, the planning team photographed the range of building types, variety of architectural styles, open spaces and prominence of civic buildings that contribute to the character of Old Town.

Calhoun Street



Wharf Street



Pritchard Street



Calhoun Street



May River Road

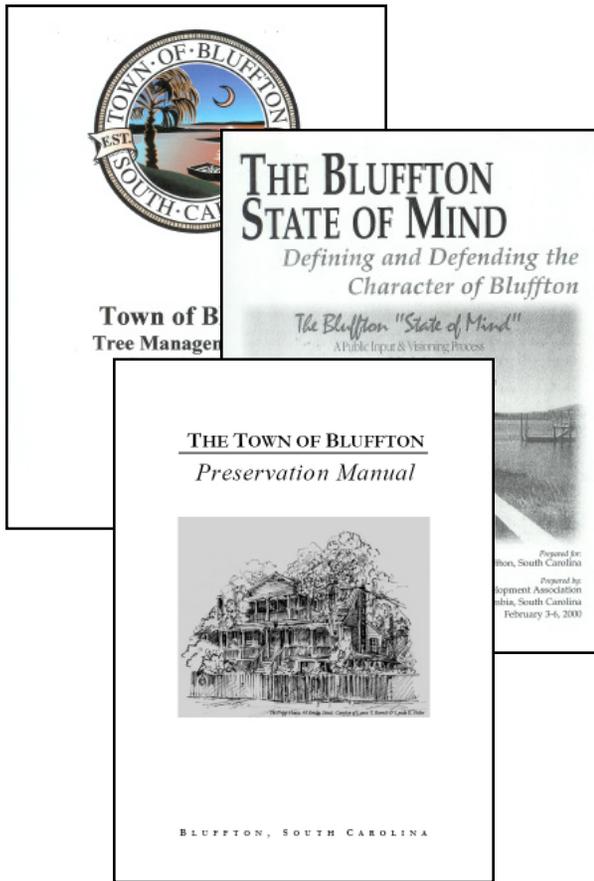


Bridge Street



**ANALYSIS DIAGRAMS\***

In addition to photographing the study area, the team reviewed past studies of Old Town, the Town's Zoning Ordinance, Design Standards, and Preservation Manual, recent development proposals, and other relevant background information. The reports and plans helped the team to better understand recent efforts relating to infill development and proposed redevelopment in Old Town. Using the Town's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data, the team created a series of analysis diagrams to better understand the dynamics of the planning area.



The team reviewed all previous studies and regulations relating to Old Town.



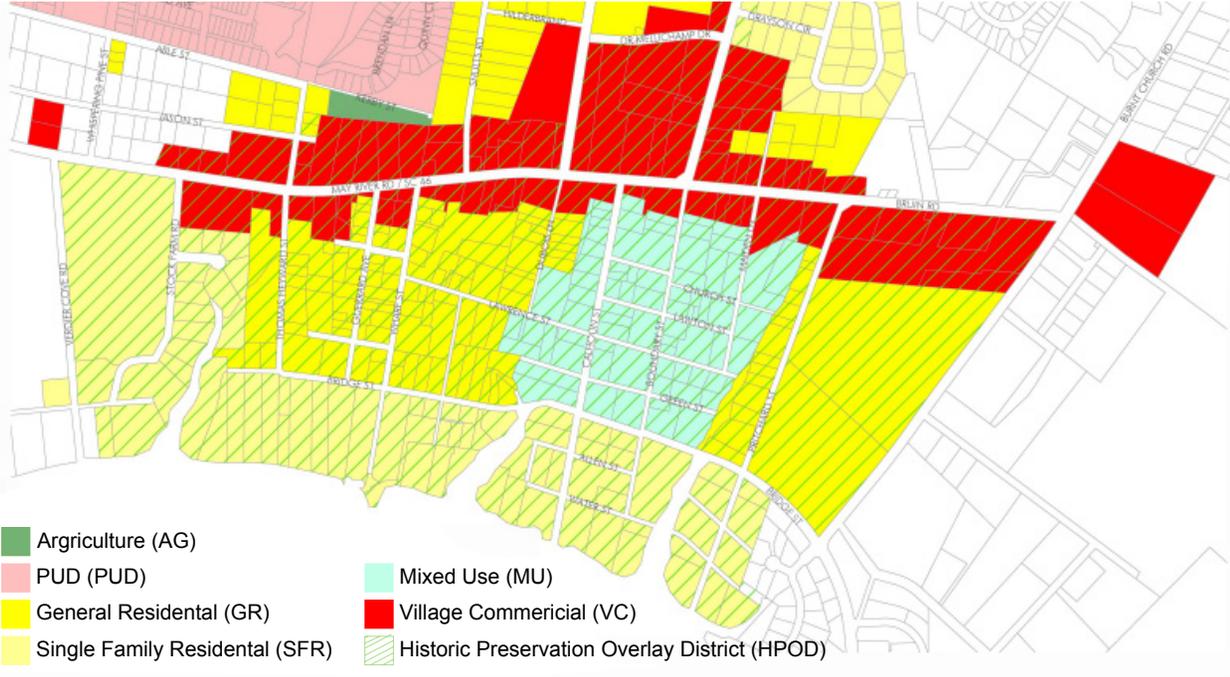
Aerial photo of Old Town, 2005



Figure Ground

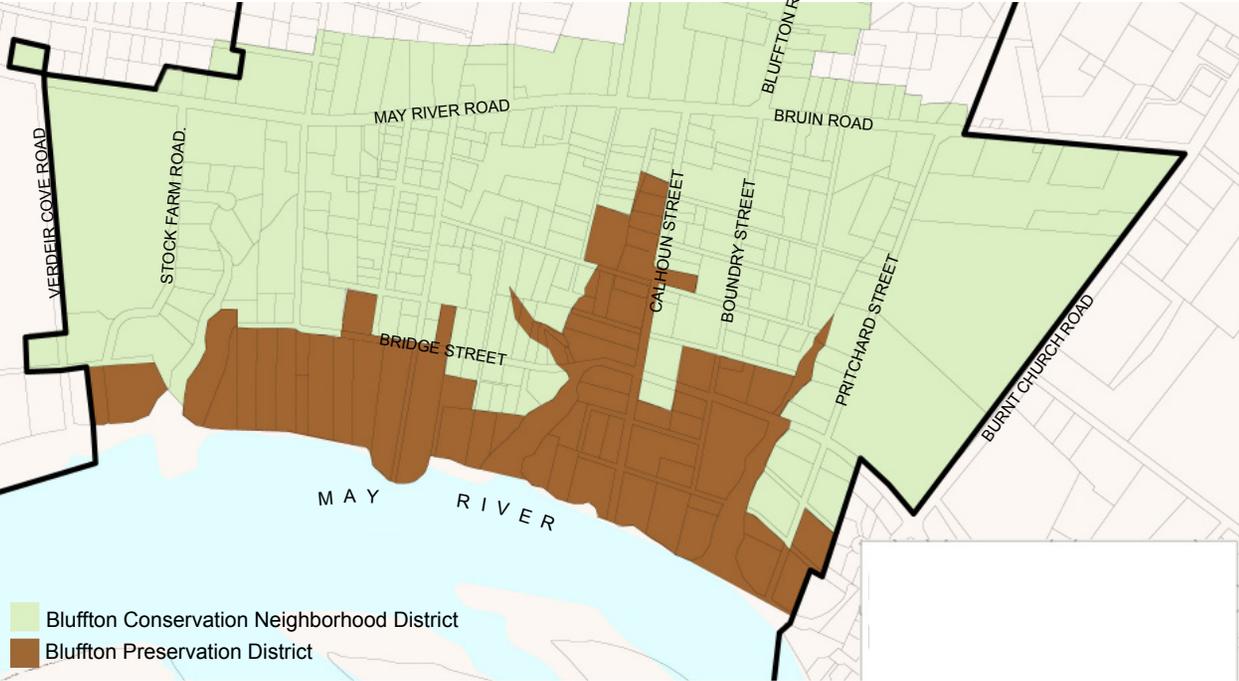
**Zoning District Map**

The zoning designations for Old Town include Village Commercial along May River Road and Mixed Use in the center of Old Town. The remaining properties are zoned residential; the area south of Bridge Street is zoned exclusively for single family residences.



**Historic Preservation Overlay District**

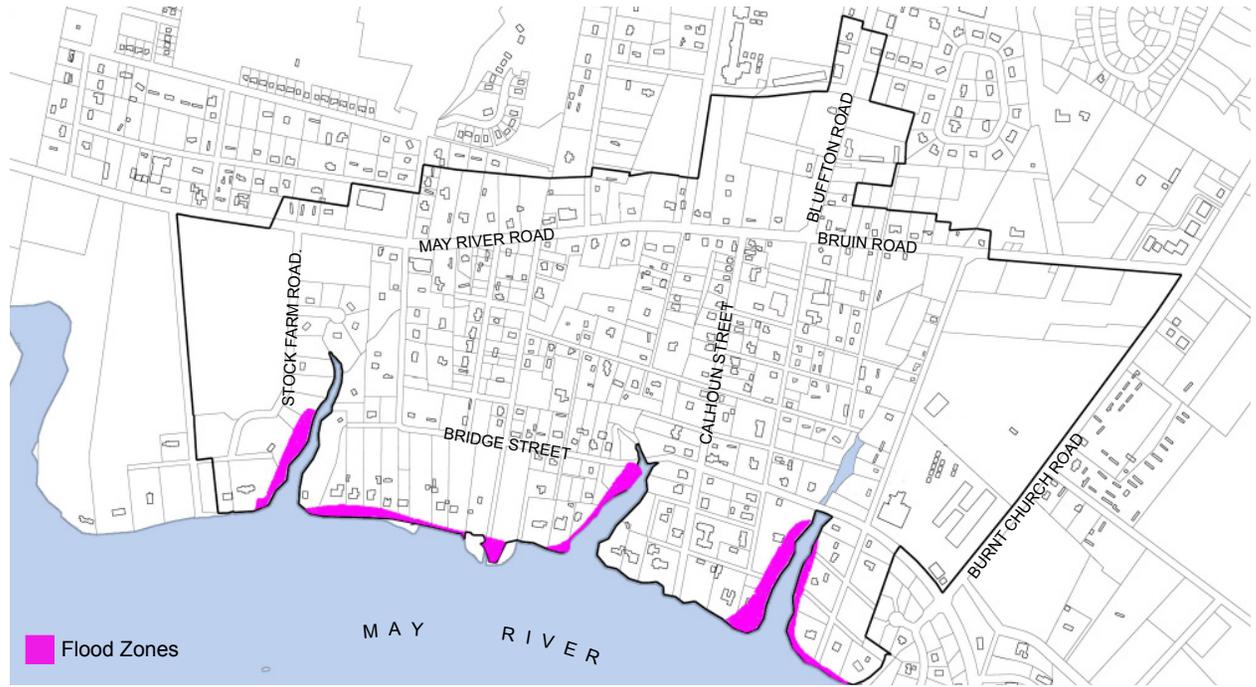
The Historic Preservation Overlay District includes those properties located within the National Historic Register District (Bluffton Preservation District) and adjacent contributing structures in the Conservation Neighborhood District. The Historic Preservation Commission, with guidance from the Preservation Manual, reviews proposals for new construction or modifications to existing structures in the District.



*\*The analysis diagrams are based on December 2005 GIS information provided by the Town of Bluffton; any inconsistencies with this data should be brought to the attention of the Town by calling (843)706-4500.*

### FEMA Designated Flood Zones

Situated high on a bluff, almost all of Old Town is safe from flooding by the May River. Those areas designated as flood zones (shown in purple) are confined mostly to the low-lying coves, which traditionally do not contain any buildings or infrastructure.



### Drainage Patterns

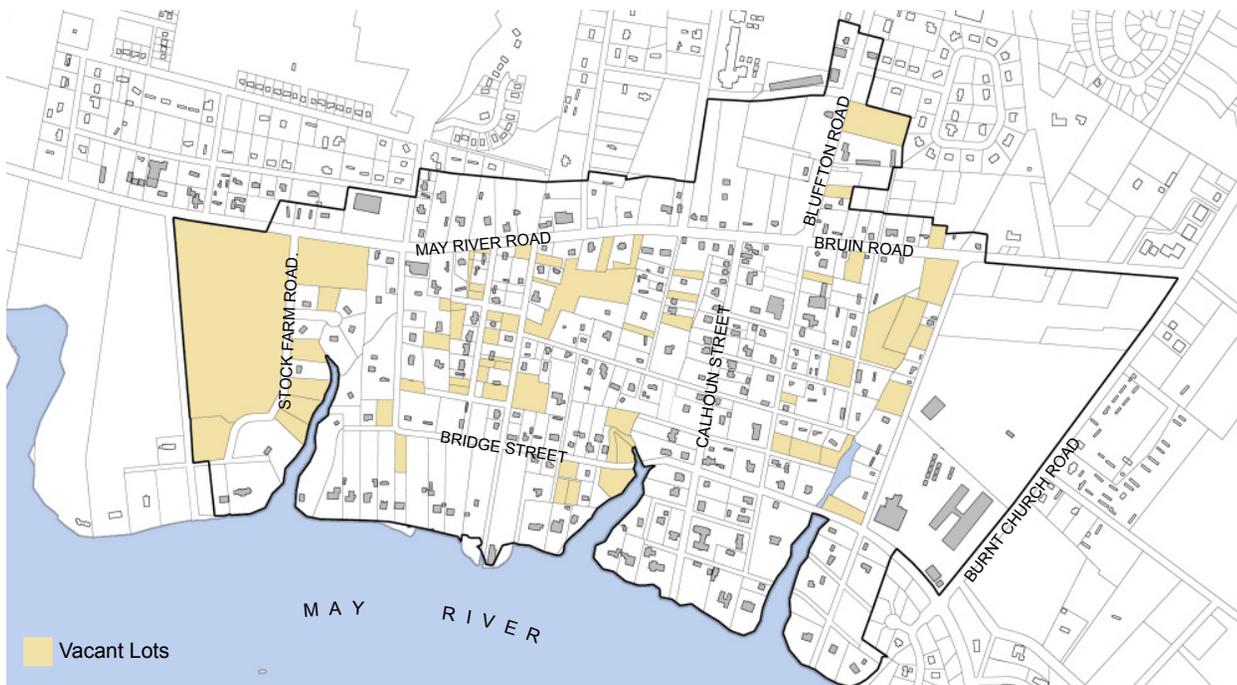
The analysis of how water naturally drains into the May River is crucial to understanding the impact of current and future building patterns on the landscape. Numerous dry creek beds exist in Old Town which all connect into one of the three main coves, and in times of heavy rain, channel water directly into the river. Consideration must be given to water quality and maintenance of natural drainage patterns.





### Parks and Civic Buildings

Parks and open spaces are scattered throughout Old Town and linked together by tree-lined streets. Civic buildings, including Town Hall and numerous churches, are dispersed within the neighborhood.



### Vacant Parcels

Through the thorough analysis of base information, the vacant parcels diagram illustrates possible opportunities for infill development. In conjunction with an understanding of other conditions, many of these properties could serve as perfect locations for responsible new additions to the neighborhood.

## SCALE COMPARISONS

Scale comparisons helped the planners and community participants to better understand the scale of Old Town in relation to other great places in the South. To the right is Old Town at the same scale as other well know towns in the Lowcountry and beyond. The scale comparisons demonstrate the large, rural blocks found in Old Town and the informal network of streets.



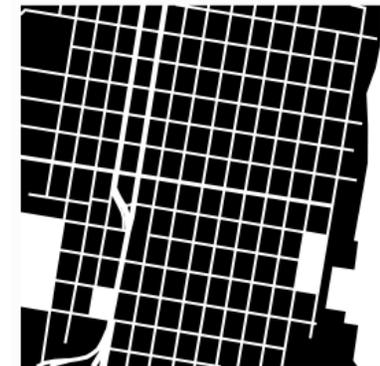
Old Town Bluffton, SC



Historic Downtown Beaufort, SC



Village of Mount Pleasant, SC



Old Town Alexandria, VA



The Peninsula of Charleston, SC



Historic Savannah, GA



Traditional Town of Port Royal, SC



## creating the plan 2

Community involvement was an essential component in creating a workable vision and plan for the future of Old Town. The visualizations, plans, and recommendations found in the Old Town Master Plan are the result of extensive public input from Bluffton residents, business owners, and leaders in the community. In January 2006, Blufftonians came together in an open planning process to identify the ideas, needs, and concerns regarding the future of Old Town. “Designing in public,” Bluffton residents and stakeholders were offered the opportunity to give continual input on the plan. Organized as an intensive design event called a charrette, the community and team of design professionals worked to create the plan over the course of seven days. Over 300 interested residents and stakeholders participated in the planning process, including property owners, neighbors, business people, developers, elected officials, Town staff, and community leaders.

## The plan for Old Town was created through teamwork and collaboration.

### CHARRETTE PREPARATION

Prior to the charrette, the Dover-Kohl team focused their efforts on gathering base information and studying the existing physical conditions of the study area. This included learning about local history, reviewing previous plans and studies, examining existing Town ordinances and land development regulations, and analyzing the physical, social, and economic characteristics of Old Town. A more detailed overview of the team’s review of background information can be found in Chapter 1.

Members of the team visited Bluffton throughout the fall of 2005 and met with Town officials, Town staff, property owners, business owners, residents, and other local stakeholders in preparation for the charrette. The meetings and interviews helped the team to better understand the dynamics of Old Town and gain full appreciation for the evolution of the Town. Team members met with Town staff to review previous planning efforts and met with Town officials to better gauge the leadership’s vision and ideas for the future of Old Town.

A key element in preparing for the charrette was generating public awareness. Town staff spread the word about the Old Town planning process by including ads in the local newspaper, posting public notices, generating extensive mailings, and by creating an informational brochure detailing the components of the process.



#### What Is A Charrette?

*Charrette* is a French word that translates as “little cart.” At the leading architecture school of the 19th century, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, students would be assigned a tough design problem to work out under pressure of time. They would continue sketching as fast as they could, even as little carts, *charrettes*, carried their drawing boards away to be judged and graded. Today, “charrette” has come to describe a rapid, intensive and creative work session in which a design team focuses on a particular design problem and arrives at a collaborative solution. Charrettes are product-oriented. The public charrette is fast becoming a preferred way to face the planning challenges confronting American communities.



**bluffton**  
old town master plan

**save the date**

town of bluffton

**old town master plan**

january 19-26, 2006

At the start of the new year, the Town will embark on an exciting design process led by Dover, Kohl & Partners to create a plan for the future of the Old Town. Community involvement is essential to this process and we look forward to seeing everyone in January.

for more information, please contact amanda burke, community preservation planner, at 843.706.4510



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**WHAT IS A CHARRETTE?**

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**Letter from the Town Manager**

Dear Blufftonians,

It is with great pleasure that I invite the Bluffton Old Town Master Plan Committee to create this plan for the town with plenty of community involvement. The public charrette is a unique opportunity to give you a voice in the future of our town. I encourage you to look forward to seeing you there.

Respectfully,  
John Martin, Town Manager

**Bluffton Old Town Master Plan**

The Town of Bluffton is located in Beaufort County, the southeastern coastal county in South Carolina. It is situated on a high bluff overlooking the May River, a pristine waterway that has strongly contributed to the town's history and continued success. Bluffton is located just 12 miles west of Hilton Head Island, SC and approximately 20 miles northeast of Savannah, GA. The town limits consist of the original one-square-mile (Old Town), four primary arterial roads of land (Shiloh Tract, Palmetto Bluff Tract, Blackwater Tract, and Jones Estate), and a number of auxiliary annexations (Bluffton Village, Village at Nestle, Shiloh-Goshoe Road Area, and Willow Run).

During the past five years, Bluffton experienced tremendous growth and prosperity, having expanded its territory from one square mile to approximately fifty square miles through the annexation of large parcels of undeveloped land. The community strives to achieve economic vitality through development, redevelopment while ensuring that Bluffton's community character and historical heritage are preserved. In this regard, the goal of the Old Town Master Plan is to ensure that public participation and community involvement preserves historic integrity while laying out a vision for the future.

The Master Plan will be used as a guide for establishing a set of rules for Bluffton's residential and business. It will incorporate elements such as a Land Use Schematic, Zoning and Academic Plan, Development and Land Use Development and Redevelopment Strategies, a Directional and Location Signage Plan, a Parking Plan, Pedestrian Access Plan, and associated policies and guidelines.

After receipt of twelve responses from local and world-renowned land planners, the firm Dover Kohl and Partners was selected for the project.

The consultants have prepared for the charrette process by reviewing all previous planning efforts, documents and maps provided by staff and through a number of site visits. The initial site visits allowed consultants to meet with staff and community members to gather data and experience Bluffton. As we all know, Bluffton can not be described in a few words. These visits to Bluffton al-

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June 30, 2006

OLD TOWN MASTER PLAN

## Study Tours

In order to place Old Town Bluffton in the planning context of its surroundings and the region, the team arrived a few days prior to the start of the charrette to allow time to study and tour the Old Town and its surroundings, including Palmetto Bluff, Savannah, Port Royal, Downtown Beaufort, Beaufort County, and the SC Hwy 278 corridor. The study tours offered insight into the tremendous amount of growth and development in the region and provided examples of how other southern towns are reviving their town centers and accommodating infill development.

Team members walked and photographed every street in Old Town, noting building form, building placement, architectural character, street design, and natural features. With base maps in hand, the planners and designers examined the existing urban fabric, analyzing the network of streets, blocks and lots, building types, and building forms found in Old Town. Team members documented potential areas for infill development, street improvements, and unique conditions and characteristics of Old Town, such as the magnificent views to the May River and the historic homes and buildings scattered throughout the original square mile.



Savannah



Palmetto Bluff



Beaufort



Habersham



The public dock at the end of Calhoun Street



May River at sunset

## THE CHARRETTE

The charrette began on Thursday, January 19 as over thirty residents gathered at the Heyward House to lead the planning team on a tour of Calhoun Street and surrounding areas of Old Town. On this bright, sunny day participants shared stories of Bluffton's past and their hopes for Bluffton's future. The group meandered down Calhoun Street to the Church of the Cross and discussed the need for additional public access to the May River. From there, the group walked past Seven Oaks and other family homes south of Bridge Street and entered into the shopping and arts district of Calhoun Street.

Accompanied by Kennedy Lawson Smith, previous director of the National Main Street Center and now principal of Community Land Use and Economics (CLUE) Group, the group visited the variety of shops and galleries along Calhoun Street. Shop owners shared their experiences of being located in Old Town and described their vision for the future of a more complete Calhoun Street with the addition of shops, homes, restaurants and galleries lining the street. While expressing their visions for Calhoun Street as the "main street" of Bluffton, residents and business owners shared the common goal of preserving the eclectic and quirky charm of the street.

While pleased with the recent addition of pedestrian-scaled street lights, community members pointed out areas of concern with regard to the overall streetscape. The wide lanes of the street and discontinuous sidewalks do not make walking along the street easy. The wide lanes also encourage vehicles to travel at higher speeds. As residents voiced their concerns, planning team members marked on base maps specific areas for further examination.

As the group neared May River Road there became a heightened awareness of speeding cars and loud truck traffic. Standing at the southwest corner

of the intersection, the group observed how the wide curb radius encourages cars and large trucks to speed around the corner. While noticing the vehicular traffic, participants also noted that people passing by on the busy corridor do not realize that Calhoun Street is a unique destination of shops and galleries; often people traveling along May River Road do not realize that they have even entered into the Old Town of Bluffton.

The walking tour concluded with an evening presentation by Kennedy Smith. Ms. Smith shared with participants her initial observations and recommendations for enhancing the market and economy of Old Town. Ms. Smith shared experiences of what other communities, similar in size to Bluffton, have done to encourage and support smaller shops and main street shopping environments. In particular, Ms. Smith reviewed the core principles of creating successful Main Streets (established by the National Main Street Center) – design, organization, promotion /marketing, and economic restructuring. For Bluffton, Ms. Smith stressed that the community should use its historic charm and architectural elegance to attract additional businesses and people to the area.



Citizens and design team members met at the Heyward House to start the walking tour.



During the walk, Kennedy Smith talked with business owners and residents about their vision for Calhoun Street.



On Friday, January 20 Bluffton residents, Town leaders, and local stakeholders came together at the Shults Park Community Center for a Community Kick-off Presentation and Oyster Roast. Neighbors gathered together along long tables filled with oysters and shared in a memorable experience that is part of Bluffton's heritage – shucking oysters. With oysters from the May River and plates of barbeque, attendees enjoyed a historic event in the life of the Town as the charrette officially began.



Mayor Henry “Hank” Johnston welcomed the crowd of over 150 people and stressed the importance of community participation throughout the planning effort. Victor Dover, principal of Dover, Kohl & Partners and charrette leader, then outlined the challenge for participants during the charrette week. He reinforced the importance of citizen involvement throughout the process to ensure the creation of a plan truly representative of community ideals. Victor emphasized that the plan for Old Town would be created with the community, for the community. He provided background information on traditional town building, infill development, and preserving community character. At the end of the presentation attendees were able to ask the consultant team questions about the process and project.

ONE WORD that comes to mind about the Old Town:

NOW: eclectic

IN THE FUTURE: eclectic!

ONE WORD that comes to mind about the Old Town:

NOW: funky

IN THE FUTURE: charmingly-  
(In my vision) vibrant



Citizens share their concerns and hopes for the future of Bluffton.



On Saturday, January 21, approximately 85 community members returned to the Shults Park Community Center for the Hands-on Design Session. The event began with a short introduction and briefing by Victor Dover to further explain the challenge for participants, orient participants to base maps, and set ground rules and goals for the session. Working in small groups of approximately eight people per table, participants gathered around tables to draw and share their varied ideas for the future of Old Town. Each table was equipped with base maps, markers, scale bars, and aerial photos of the Old Town. A facilitator from the Dover-Kohl team or a local planning volunteer was assigned to each table to assist participants in the design exercises.



Residents worked together, sharing their ideas for the future of the Old Town.

During the first part of the table sessions, participants identified the important issues associated with the future of Old Town and discussed their ideas in small groups. Participants then began to draw and write on base maps to illustrate how they might like to see Old Town evolve in the future by describing the land uses, open spaces, building design, landscaping, road design, parking, signage and services for the area.

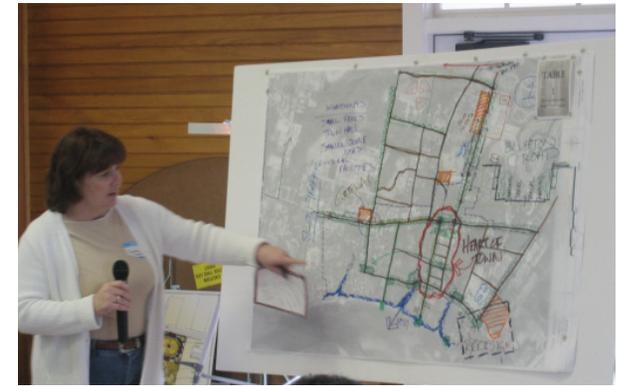
At the end of the workshop a spokesperson from each table reported the findings and major points to the entire assembly. Common themes began to emerge quickly, as the important goals for Old Town were identified. Of the many ideas heard, some of the most widely shared ideas included:

- Maintain the uniqueness of Old Town;
- Increase park space and access to the water;
- Protect the May River;
- Keep Town Hall in “Old Bluffton”;
- Slow down traffic on May River Road;
- Increase walkability in Old Town; and,
- Encourage a variety of housing types and architectural styles.

The goal of the hands-on session was to forge an initial consensus and develop a long-range community vision for the future of Old Town. In addition to the group presentations, each participant filled out an exit survey at the end of the session. The surveys allowed the planning team to gain more detailed insight into the ideas of the many individuals that participated.



Table representatives presented ideas discussed in their groups.



A sample of the drawings produced during the hands-on session



From Sunday, January 22 through Thursday, January 27 the design team continued to work with the community in an open design studio at the Shults Park Community Center. Citizens and local leaders were encouraged to stop by the studio throughout the week to check the status of the plan, provide further input, and to make sure the design team was on the right track. Over 150 people visited the studio throughout the week. The table drawings and plans from the Saturday design session were placed around the room for easy review as new people became involved.

While community members visited the studio, the design team continued to analyze the information gathered at the hands-on session and site analysis in order to formulate the initial concepts for the plan. The team was tasked with synthesizing the many ideas heard from the community throughout the week into a single cohesive master plan. The planners and designers created lists, computer visualizations, diagrams, drawings, and plans, working to combine and refine the ideas. Working in Bluffton allowed the design team ready access to the study area during all hours and on different days of the week. The planners observed day-to-day traffic

patterns, visited local businesses, and experienced other details of everyday life in Bluffton.

In addition to the open design studio, members of the design team met with specific stakeholders and experts in scheduled technical meetings. The meetings were used to answer design questions, discuss the draft plan, and further gain input in regards to current and potential infill development opportunities. The scheduled technical meetings included sessions with Town staff, Town Council members, Planning Commissioners, members of the Historic Preservation Commission, South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), the Old Town Merchants Society, environmental groups, local developers and architects, property owners, and others. Team members also met with Seamon Whiteside & Associates and WMTH Corporation, who were hired by the Town for the May River Road / Bruin Road streetscape project, to facilitate a coordinated effort in the planning and implementation of improvements to the roadway. The technical meetings helped to further shape the detailed elements of the plan and to ensure that the ideas being processed were consistent amongst many viewpoints.



Meetings during the week helped to shape the details of the technical plan.



Representatives from the South Carolina Department of Transportation participated in the charrette.



Residents and interested citizens stopped-by the design studio to check the progress of the plan and share ideas.



On Tuesday, January 25 an Open House was held at the design studio. Participants toured the studio, met with members of the planning team, and received an update from planning team member Rick Hall of Hall Planning & Engineering on the various transportation aspects included in the draft plan. Mr. Hall offered background information on the importance of livable transportation and walkable communities, and stressed the importance of creating a better balance of vehicular and pedestrian safety along Old Town's major roads. The evening concluded with an active discussion of both short- and long-term goals to better pedestrian safety on Old Town streets and how to accommodate traffic flow while not destroying community character.



*"We should design the town the way we want it as our place to live, and then visitors will like it."*  
 – Bluffton resident

The charrette week ended with an evening “Work-in-Progress” presentation on Thursday, January 27 at the Ulmer Auditorium in Bluffton Town Hall. Over 125 citizens gathered for the presentation, eager to hear and see how the planners and designers were able to synthesize the community’s ideas into the vision for the future of Old Town. After an introduction by the Mayor, Victor Dover began the presentation with a summary of the week’s events, then presented sketches and plan diagrams illustrating the idealized build-out of Old Town. Renderings showed “before and after” illustrations of possible infill development scenarios. Transportation and roadway improvements were illustrated, demonstrating how balance can be reached between traffic capacity and walkability. At the end of the presentation, a new survey was distributed to gauge the community’s opinion on the ideas presented that evening. Of the surveys received, 100% of the respondents said that yes, the plan is on the right track.



## AFTER THE CHARRETTE

At the conclusion of the week-long charrette, the design team departed Bluffton and returned home to their offices. Over a period of three months the illustrative master plan produced during the charrette was refined and this report was created. Bluffton residents were asked to continue to give their input on the draft plan; the plan and corresponding images were available for review at Town Hall as well as on the Town of Bluffton website. The following report represents a synthesis of the community’s desires and goals for the future of Old Town and a workable framework to achieve such goals.

**Old Town Master Plan**  
 Work-in-Progress Presentation  
 January 26, 2006

What events did you participate in during the charrette week?

Community Kick-off Presentation Friday, January 26	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Hands-on Design Session Saturday, January 27	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Open House Sunday, January 28	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Design Studio Monday, January 29 - Thursday, January 30	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Of the many ideas you heard tonight, which idea should be made a top priority?

*Walkability, bikeability, street traffic discussion, historic water quality protection*

Are there any elements of your vision for the future of Old Town we might have missed?

*green historic preservation park area, modern town, open space, canopy*

Do you think the plan is generally on the right track?

*Yes*

Please write additional comments on back of sheet. Thanks for your help and your ideas!  
 Please leave this on the table at the door on the 21st at 7:00-8:15.

Sample exit survey response



Bluffton Today, February 5, 2006



# first principles 3

Through the charrette process, the community and design team arrived at a series of basic urban design and policy principles to guide appropriate infill development in Old Town. Shaped from input by Bluffton citizens during the charrette, the “First Principles” embody the citizenry’s vision for the future of Old Town. The principles summarize the results of the public planning process and promote responsible growth, planning, and development. While the specifics of each principle are reflective of Bluffton’s needs, overall, these principles are essentials for good planning in any historic town.

This chapter presents the broad scope of the community’s vision for Old Town; specific design components of each principle are further described and illustrated in Chapter 4. General guidance on implementing each principle is included in this chapter; detailed implementation strategies can be found in Chapter 6.



The Illustrative Master Plan was created during the charrette. The plan synthesizes community ideas and depicts the idealized build-out for Old Town. This map is for illustrative purposes and is not a regulating document. The Illustrative Master Plan identifies key opportunity parcels for infill development, redevelopment, conservation, and preservation. A larger copy of the plan is on display at Town Hall.

## FIRST PRINCIPLES

1. *Preserve & protect your legacy.*
2. *Foster connectedness in all things.*
3. *Nurture your memorable streets.*



Diagram showing existing buildings and infill in appropriate areas



Appropriate infill on Wharf Street should preserve the tree canopy and existing community character.



Historic properties in Old Town must be preserved.

### PRESERVE AND PROTECT YOUR LEGACY

The natural and physical characteristics of Old Town are what make Bluffton special. Residents treasure the quality of life and community character of every day life in Old Town. As Old Town continues to grow and evolve, it is crucial to preserve and protect the legacy that so many Blufftonians treasure. What the Town does now will effect generations of Bluffton residents for years to come.

The natural and built environment of Old Town needs to be properly preserved and protected. The waters of the May River and the lush tree canopy found throughout Old Town need to be taken care of now, so that future Blufftonians can enjoy their natural beauty. The built environment, in particular the historic structures scattered throughout Old Town, should be protected and enhanced. While it is of great importance to save and restore historic structures, it is just as important to add to the built environment in a way that makes Old Town more complete.

Preserving and protecting your legacy is important, not just because it feels good, but because it affects the economic bottom line. Your trees, your river, and the character of your town, given off by your beautiful historic buildings and the new ones that relate to them, is actually the franchise - the key to your economy. Your environment is your economy. Decisions made now, and in the future, should be driven by preservation and protection. It is good for maintaining the community character and quality of life that makes Old Town what it is today, and it contributes to the economic success and stability of the Town.

## FOSTER CONNECTEDNESS IN ALL THINGS

Strong communities are well-connected in many ways. There are the physical connections, such as streets, but there are equally important psychological connections, like the relation of people to one another and to their environment. Fostering all forms of connectivity helps to build a better community and improves the quality of life within a neighborhood.

Having an interconnected web of streets is the most basic and effective form of bringing a neighborhood together. Old Town already has in place a grid of streets which could be enhanced through additional connections. Streets are more than just conveyances for cars. Great streets are also great *places*, with trees and comfortable, connected sidewalks which provide for attractive building addresses. Buildings come and go over time, but streets will last through many generations.



Proposed Green Network and Open Spaces

People-to-people connectedness and neighborliness comes from creating a built environment which allows people to come in contact with one another. During the charrette, many citizens shared stories about the loss of contact which came as a result of the Post Office being moved out of Old Town, for example. By living in town, close to each other, and by having everyday destinations within close proximity, residents will come into contact more in their daily lives.

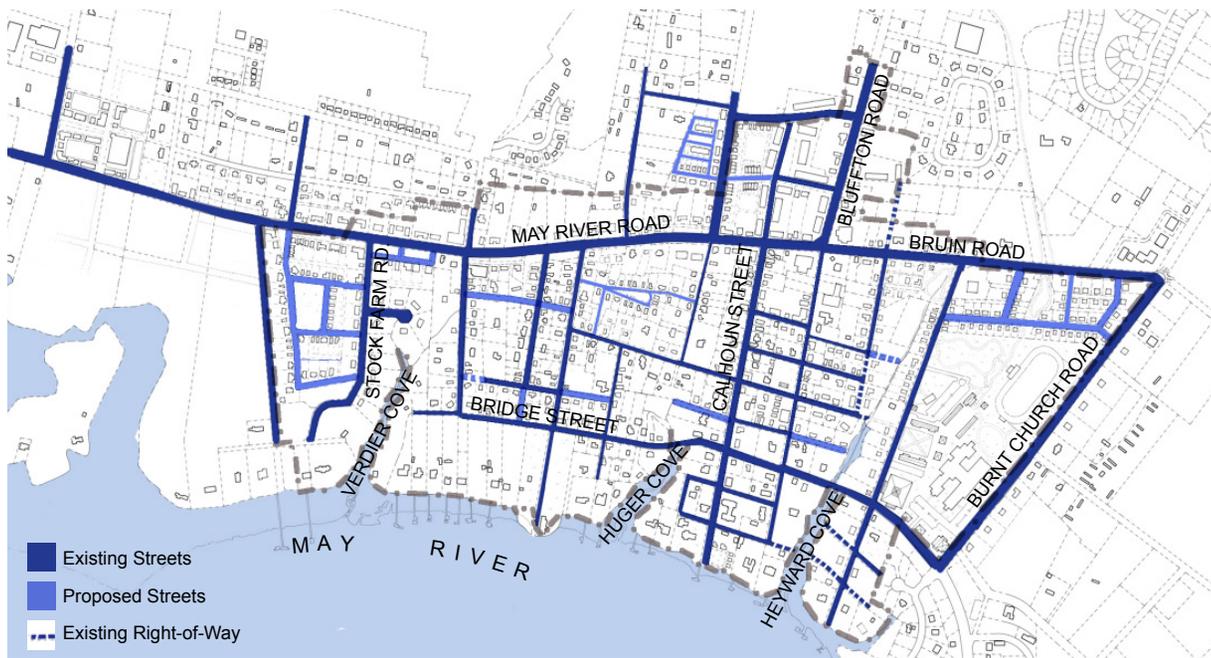
Old Town's location along the May River and its setting amongst a thick canopy of old trees also demands a connection with the natural environment. Many of the streets terminate directly on the river and provide wonderful views. Homes and civic buildings are oriented towards the river, taking advantage of natural breezes and the beauty of the river. All great river towns have great connectedness with their waterways and that psychological connection is one of the many assets of Old Town Bluffton. Open green spaces and parks should be connected visually by well planned trails and pathways.



A park at the end of Calhoun Street would provide the public with a connection to the waterfront.



The Town currently has plans to improve Dubois Park.



Proposed Street Network

### NURTURE YOUR MEMORABLE STREETS

A network of interconnected blocks and streets are present in Old Town. The historic urban fabric of the Town allows for a series of intimate public spaces and streetscapes. Over time, however, the traditionally walkable streets have been affected by road widening and automobile dominance. In the future these streets must be reclaimed, creating a healthy balance between vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

More than any other feature, streets define a community's character. "Great streets" are those that are walkable, accessible to all, interesting, comfortable, safe, and memorable. While great streets accommodate vehicular and pedestrian travel, they are also *signature public spaces*. Great streets showcase high-quality buildings; mixed-use streets provide good addresses for sustainable commerce while residential streets are key to livability in neighborhoods.



Boundary Street

Streets are the public living rooms in a community. In the center of a town, the spaces between the buildings matter even more than the spaces within. Buildings located along streets sell for great addresses, street scene, and the convenience to walk places. Street-oriented architecture does not turn its "back" to the street; doors, windows, balconies, and porches face the street, not blank street walls. In this way, a level of safety is reached by creating "eyes on the street." In a thriving town, street-oriented architecture makes the public realm between buildings satisfying.

Every street in Old Town is important. Within the network of streets, there are certain streets that should be showcased, protected, and thought about with even more care. These streets include Calhoun Street, Boundary Street, May River Road, Bridge Street, Wharf Street, and Pritchard Street. Each street is identified as a signature connection within Old Town. These streets should receive priority in regards to investment and a careful examination of the rules. In addition, the Town should endeavor to assemble a complete street network. For this reason, the Town should undertake efforts to establish clear title to the existing rights-of-ways that exist in Old Town.

## STRATEGIES FOR DESIGNING GREAT STREETS

### 1. Design for pedestrians first.

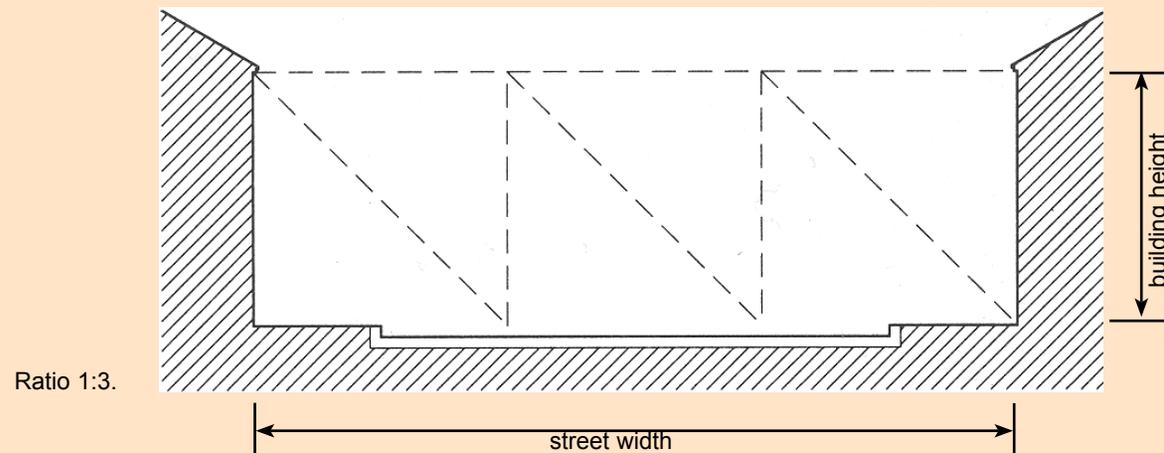
The configurations of great streets consistently provide a high-caliber experience for pedestrians as a baseline obligation, and go on from there to accommodate all other required modes of travel.

### 2. Scale matters.

A street should function as a three-dimensional outdoor room, surrounding its occupants in a space that is welcoming and usable, especially for pedestrians. A ratio of 1:3 for building height to street width is often cited as a minimum benchmark of success, although even more narrowly proportioned street spaces can produce a still more satisfying urban character.

Although pedestrians are invariably more comfortable on narrower streets, great streets vary in size and shape and are successful in many different configurations. Width is only part of the recipe. Streets need to be sized properly for their use and matched in proportion to the architecture and/or trees that frame them. For example, intimate residential segments of Church Street in Charleston have a right-of-way only twenty-two feet wide—just seventeen feet curb-to-curb, plus a sidewalk—and the houses that line both sides are two or more stories tall. Classic streets in American streetcar suburbs feature shallow front yards,

broad planting strips for trees, and relatively narrow pavement; the trees on both sides enhance the spatial definition. The designed ratio of height-to-width is followed on most great streets around the world, and the concept is very applicable in Bluffton.



Excerpted from  
*AIA Graphic Standards*

### Proportions of Street Space

*The height-to-width ratio of the space generates spatial enclosure, which is related to the physiology of the human eye. If the width of a public space is such that the cone of vision encompasses less street wall than sky opening, the degree of spatial enclosure is slight. The ratio of 1 increment of height to 6 of width is the absolute minimum, with 1 to 3 being an effective minimum if a sense of enclosure is to result. As a general rule, the tighter the ratio, the stronger the sense of place and, often, the higher the real estate value. Spatial enclosure is particularly important for shopping streets that must compete with shopping malls, which provide very effective spatial definition. [emphasis added]. In the absence of spatial definition by facades, disciplined tree planting is an alternative. Trees aligned for spatial enclosure are necessary on thoroughfares that have substantial front yards.*

### 3. Design the street as a unified whole.

An essential distinction of great streets is that the whole outdoor room is designed as an ensemble, including utilitarian auto elements (travel lanes, parking, curbs), public components (such as the trees, sidewalks, and lighting) and private elements (buildings, landscape, and garden walls). As tempting as it may be to separate these issues, all the public and private elements must be coordinated to have a good effect. For example, the best streets invariably have buildings fronting the sidewalk, usually close to the street. In some cases, minimum height of buildings should be regulated to achieve spatial definition, almost impossible to attain with one-story buildings.



Church Street, Charleston, SC

### 4. Include sidewalks where possible.

One of the simplest ways to enhance the pedestrian environment is to locate the walkway at least 5 or 6 feet away from the curb, with the street trees planted in between. Pedestrians will be more willing to utilize sidewalks if they are located a safe distance away from moving automobile traffic. The width of the sidewalk will vary according to the location. On most single-family residential streets, five feet will usually suffice, but more width is needed on rowhouse streets to accommodate stoops. On Main Streets, the sidewalk must never fall below an absolute minimum of eight feet wide.



King Street, Charleston, SC

### 5. Shade!

Motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists all prefer shady streets. Street trees should be placed between automobile traffic and pedestrians, for an added layer of psychological security for pedestrians. Street trees with fairly continuous canopies that extend over the travel lanes and the sidewalks should be the norm. Main Streets are a special case, in which excessive tree plantings can interfere with clear views to signage and merchandise. In areas like these where continuous plantings of street trees are undesirable or inappropriate, architectural encroachments over the sidewalk like awnings, arcades and colonnades, and cantilevered balconies can be used in place of trees to protect pedestrians from the elements and shield storefronts from glare. The taller buildings and tighter height-to-width ratio on Main Streets also produce some shade.

*It is not surprising that, given their multiple roles in urban life, streets require and use vast amounts of land. In the United States, from 25 to 35 percent of a city's developed land is likely to be in public right-of-way, mostly streets. If we can develop and design streets so that they are wonderful, fulfilling places to be, community building places, attractive public places for all people of cities and neighborhoods, then we will have successfully designed about 1/3 of the city directly and will have an immense impact on the rest.*

- Allan Jacobs, *Great Streets*

## 6. Plant the street trees in an orderly manner.

Great streets are not the place to experiment with random, romantic, or naturalistic landscaping. Urban trees, like those along Calhoun Street, should be planted in aligned rows, with regular spacing, using consistent species. This will not appear rigid or mechanistic, for trees do not grow identically; rather, the power of formal tree placement is that it at once shapes the space, reflects conscious design, and celebrates the intricacy and diversity within the species. More importantly, the shade produced by the trees will be continuous enough to make walking viable, and the spatial impression of aligned trees also has a traffic calming effect. In less urban environments, like many of the residential blocks and streets in Old Town, a non-regimented placement of trees can occur as long as a similar end result is achieved with regards to forming a lush tree canopy and pedestrian-friendly environment.

## 7. Use smart lighting.

Streets should be well lit at night both for automobile safety and pedestrian safety. Pedestrians will avoid streets where they feel unsafe. "Cobra head" light fixtures on tall poles spaced far apart do not provide for pedestrian safety. Shorter fixtures installed more frequently are more appropriate, and can provide light under the tree canopy as street trees mature. For example, the newly installed street lights along Calhoun Street provide for appropriate lighting for both pedestrians and vehicles. The street lights are lower in height than suburban cobra head lights, yet at key intersections taller lights are found to help with pedestrian wayfinding and orientation.

## 8. Resist parking lots in front of buildings.

The bulk of a building's parking supply should not be up against the sidewalk or facing the street, but should instead occur behind the building (or in a few cases, beside the building). The acres of surface parking between storefronts and the street are responsible for the negative visual impact of the typical commercial "strip." Such a disconnected pedestrian environment is in part due to bad habits on the part of auto-oriented chain stores, but also reflects the large setbacks and high parking requirements in conventional zoning. If the rules are changed to provide "build-to" lines rather than mandatory front setbacks for commercial buildings, it is possible to grow streets with real character.

## 9. Demand on-street parking in suitable locations.

On-street parking provides further separation between pedestrians and moving cars and also serves as a traffic calming device because of the "visual friction" and alertness it triggers. Parallel parking is often better than head-in or diagonal parking because it requires less space, although diagonal parking is acceptable in exceptional cases on shopping streets if the extra curb-to-curb width is not achieved at the expense of properly sized sidewalk space. Parking near the fronts of buildings also encourages people to get out of their cars and walk, and is essential to leasing street-oriented retail space.



Bluffton

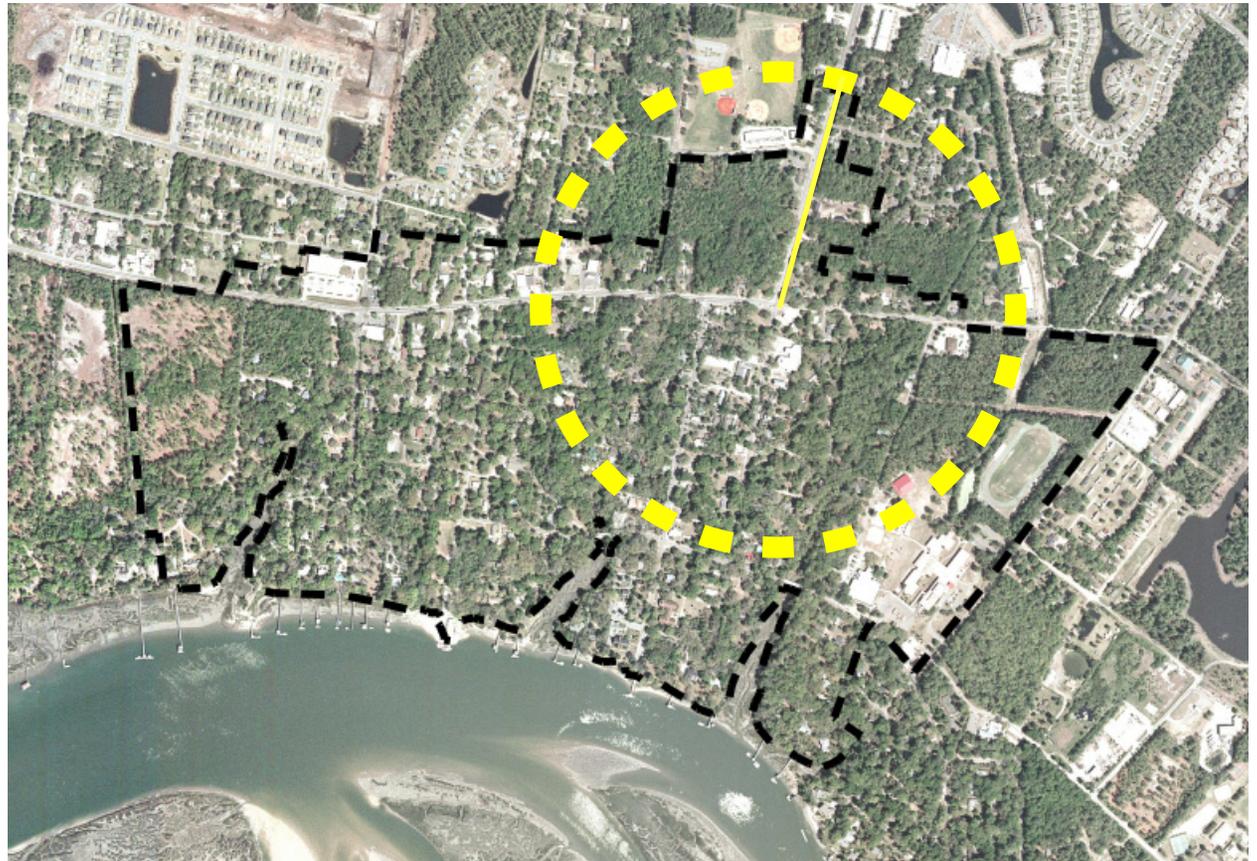


Beaufort



Palmetto Bluff

If streets are walkable, most people will walk a distance of approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile (1320 feet) before turning back or opting to drive or ride a bike rather than walk. This dimension generally constitutes a five minute walk. Most neighborhoods built before World War II are  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from center to edge. This dimension is a constant in the way people have settled for centuries. This distance relates to the manner in which people define the edges of their own neighborhoods. Of course, neighborhoods are not necessarily circular in design, nor is that desirable. The  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile radius is a benchmark for creating a neighborhood unit that is manageable in size and feel and is inherently walkable. Neighborhoods of many shapes and sizes can satisfy the  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile radius test. The Illustrative Master Plan shows how to reinforce the identity and completeness of the Old Town neighborhood with infill development and preservation.



The yellow circle on the aerial indicates a walking distance of 1/4 mile from center to edge, or approximately 5 minutes.

## FIRST PRINCIPLES – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to achieve the first principles of the plan:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan.
- b. Adopt the Old Town Form-Based Code.
- c. Promote the Old Town Master Plan and continue to build public support for appropriate infill development in Old Town.

Additional Implementation Strategies are included in Chapters 4 and 5.



# details of the plan 4

The plan for Old Town sets forth a coordinated strategy to guide appropriate growth and infill development that is reflective of Bluffton's unique character and heritage. The plan illustrates the idea of gradual infill development over time, understanding that the complete build-out of Old Town will take decades to complete. The plan is intended to serve as a guide and organized community vision, for the long-term evolution of Old Town. The First Principles capture the community's ideals and vision for the future of Old Town; the "Big Moves" are the main ideas that are used to implement the First Principles described in Chapter 3. The Big Moves are noted below and are further described throughout this chapter.

### BIG MOVES

- *Restore & transform May River Road/Bruin Road*
- *Maintain the tranquility South of Bridge*
- *Demand robust, complete neighborhoods*
- *Enhance the connections to the May River*
- *Cluster retail in the heart of the Town*
- *Require the inclusion of affordable housing*
- *Shift into a higher gear with adaptive reuse*
- *Require stewardship of historic resources*
- *Trees, trees, trees: invest in the canopy*
- *Reform zoning: adopt form-based code*
- *Design for walkability first*
- *Minimize pavement & keep the water clean*



The above concept drawing, created during the charrette, served as the foundation for summarizing the Illustrative Master Plan into the "Big Moves".

# Illustrative Master Plan



-  Existing
-  Proposed
-  Civic
-  Green

The western gateway to town can become a mixed-use center serving local and regional needs.

A new neighborhood at Stock Farm Road

Oyster Factory and Oyster Factory Park

A park at the end of Calhoun Street would allow additional public access to the river.

Calhoun Street Promenade

The existing Town Hall site could be rebuilt as a substantial civic building.

Town Hall could be relocated to the four-way stop.

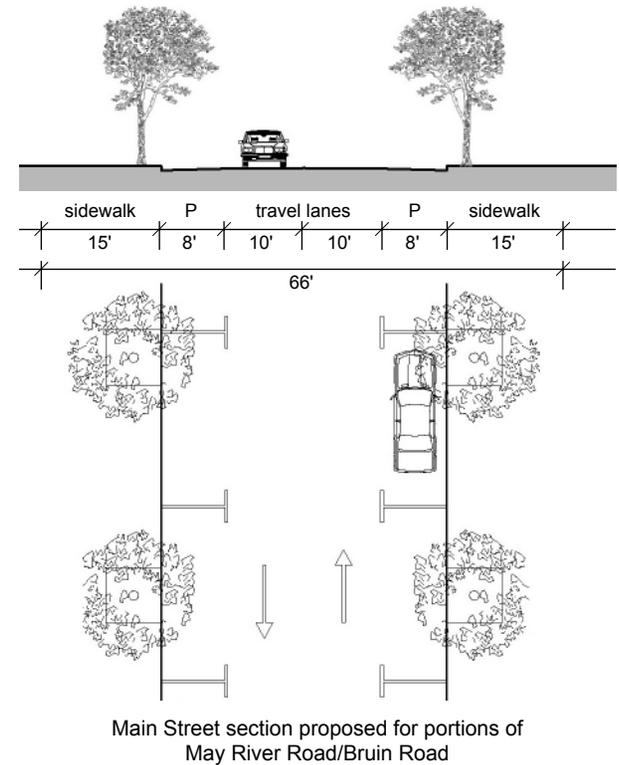
A trail would connect the Tabby Roads development and areas north of Old Town to M.C. Riley Elementary School.

A roundabout at the intersection of Bruin Road and Burnt Church Road could serve as the eastern gateway to town.

## Restore & Transform May River Road/Bruin Road

Central to the community's vision for Old Town is the section of May River Road/Bruin Road (SC Hwy 46) between Buck Island Road and Burnt Church Road (approximately 1.5 miles). May River Road/Bruin Road is an important transportation corridor that runs through the heart of Old Town, connecting Hilton Head with Savannah. The roadway is essential for moving vehicles on the regional road network, yet the physical condition and character of May River Road/Bruin Road are not conducive to walking or biking. Pedestrians are not comfortable due to a combination of factors, including higher speeds and traffic volumes and a lack of pedestrian-oriented destinations. May River Road/Bruin Road, in its current configuration, forms a physical barrier between Old Town and the areas north of the corridor. The historic, walkable Old Town character should be extended along a redeveloped network of streets, while simultaneously continuing to serve the automobile function of May River Road/Bruin Road (SC Hwy 46). As Old Town continues to evolve, May River Road/Bruin Road must be transformed from a high-speed thoroughfare to a restored destination of the Bluffton community.

In order to encourage an improved balance between pedestrians and vehicles utilizing May River Road/Bruin Road, the street should be redesigned to support lower vehicle design speeds, as well as lower posted speeds. The addition of crosswalks and other streetscape improvements will assist in driver awareness of entering into a highly walkable area, but perhaps the most important element to increase awareness will be modifications to the built environment. Design matters, and design matters most importantly when creating safe environments for pedestrians. Buildings setback and separated from streets by large expanses of surface parking do not stimulate a walkable environment. Multi-story buildings brought closer to the street, with doors and windows facing the street and on-street parking, help to shape the street space and alert motorists that they are entering into an area of walkability. To help stimulate a walkable environment along May River Road/Bruin Road, appropriate street sections should be applied to transform the varied roadway characteristics into a pedestrian-friendly street.



May River Road/Bruin Road, between Buck Island Road and Burnt Church Road

To accommodate projected traffic increases, the regional transportation strategy must include the enhancement of the thoroughfare network north of May River Road/Bruin Road and south of US 278. By increasing opportunities for longer distance trips to be accommodated on the regional network, the May River Road/Bruin Road and Bluffton Road intersection (the “four-way stop”) could begin to operate as a “Main Street” section.

The most urban thoroughfare type, "Main Street", has 15 foot wide sidewalks with trees in tree wells. Parallel parking, essential to business success and resident convenience, is at the curb and is 8 feet wide. The design speed and posted speed are both 25 mph. Two 10 foot lanes complete the Main Street section to insure adequate vehicular mobility and yet, moderate, safe travel speeds from the pedestrian viewpoint. Bicycle travel is in the slow travel lanes for proficient cyclists and on sidewalks for younger and amateur cyclists. In this segment the narrowness of the main travel lanes is critical; separate bicycle lanes of 5 or 6 feet would add to street width and encourage motor vehicle speeds much higher than the desired 25 mph.

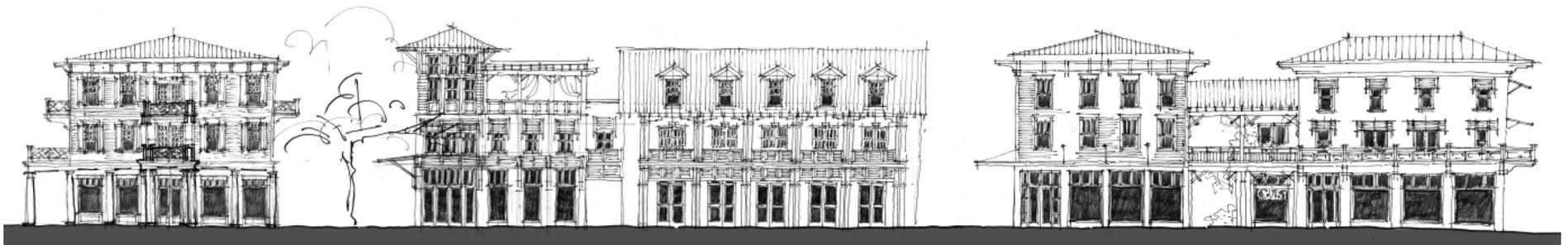
As new buildings are built to complete the street both north and south of May River Road/Bruin Road along Calhoun Street and at the four-way stop, a vibrant street scene will emerge. If buildings are built up to the street to face May River Road /Bruin Road with front doors and proper sidewalks, the built environment will help to transform this area into the walkable center of town.



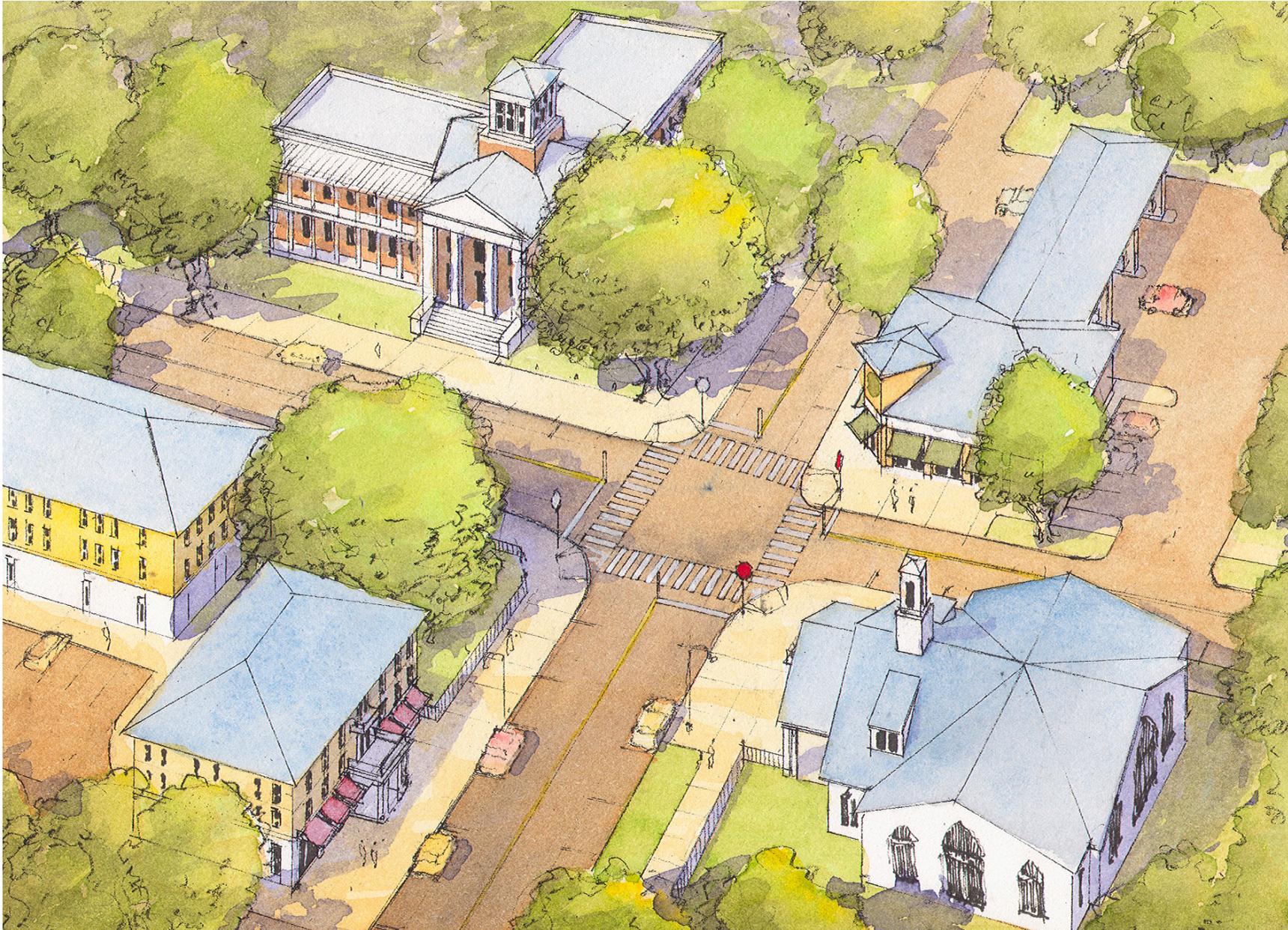
Calhoun Street Promenade

Four-way stop

Possible site for new Town Hall



Proposed elevations for Calhoun Street Promenade

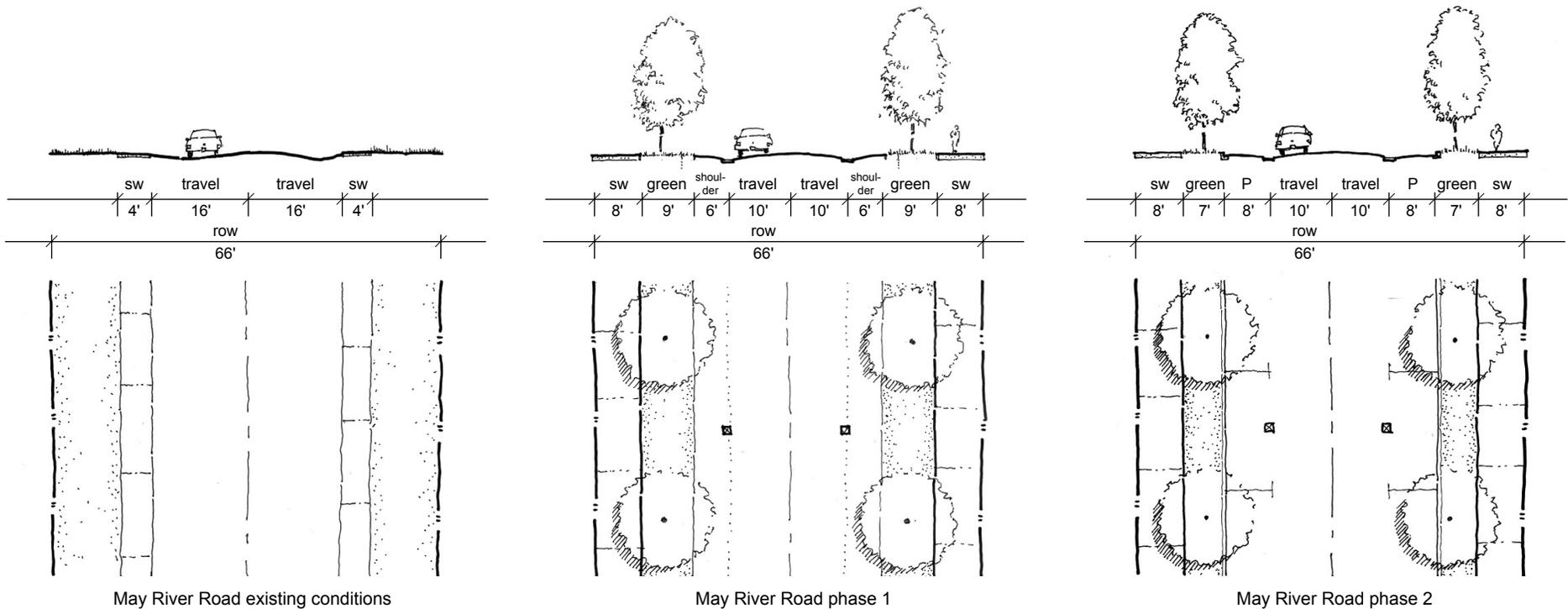


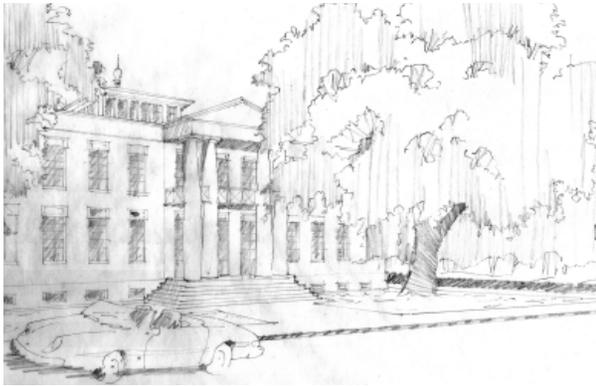
May River Road/Bruin Road is transformed into a walkable street and the four-way stop becomes the center of town, with street-oriented architecture framing the street scene.

A new concept in staged thoroughfare construction is proposed for portions of May River Road. When mixed-use centers emerge adjacent to the thoroughfare over time, in locations that can not be accurately predicted at this time, the street design can smoothly change to include parallel parking and curbs. The concept has been termed the “Bluffton Convertible” based on its ability to convert to a cross section with parallel parking, serving commercially oriented mixed-use centers at a later time.

The concept of the Bluffton Convertible is demonstrated in both the segment of May River Road from Buck Island Road to Goethe Road as well as Bruin Road. For the segment of May River Road from Buck Island Road to Goethe Road, construction is staged so that Phase 1 adds sidewalks, street trees, new storm drainage and narrower 10 foot wide travel lanes to help manage motor vehicle speeds. This same staged construction is recommended for Bruin Road. From the four way stop (May River Road / Bluffton Road intersection) eastward, only 40 feet of right-of-way is available. As infill development occurs along the corridor, property owners should donate to the Town the

appropriate right-of-way for the roadway. Phase 1 should provide parallel parking on the south side of the street, two 10 foot wide travel lanes, drainage improvements and sidewalks on both sides. Phase 2 can be constructed as soon as land development regulations emerge on the north side of Bruin Road that would require parallel parking and curbs. For example, if the corner of Bruin Road and SC 46 is selected for a new municipal complex, this action would provide the catalyst and justification for expansion of the roadway to 66 or 70 feet, with parallel or angle parking on the north side of Bruin Road.





Sample Town Hall sketches

As the town continues to grow, there is the need for a new Town Hall. There has been much discussion about moving the Town Hall out of Old Town, but it is recommended that the Town retain some form of government activity in Old Town. It is recommended that a new structure be built in Old Town to house Town Council and the day-to-day operations of town government. The building should proudly reflect the character, quality, and ideals of the Bluffton community. The structure should not be made cheaply; the building should be long-lasting, and the investment should be made with long life-cycle costs in mind, not just initial construction costs.

The Illustrative Master Plan highlights several locations for civic buildings, including the possible location of a new Town Hall at the four-way stop. The location of the Town Hall at the four-way stop would serve as the gateway into Old Town and be a proud representation of Bluffton's civic heritage.



### RESTORE & TRANSFORM MAY RIVER ROAD – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to restore & transform May River Road/Bruin Road:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Coordinate planning and design for roadway improvements with South Carolina Department of Transportation, Beaufort County, and adjacent property owners.
- c. Implement the recommended Main Street Section and Bluffton Convertible Section.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.

### Maintain the Tranquility South of Bridge

The area south of Bridge Street is the most tranquil part of Bluffton. Its quiet, tree-lined streets that terminate onto the May River and stately residences on larger lots make this area of Old Town special. While part of its history is its great predominance of single-family homes, the area South of Bridge has not always been single-family homes along the May River. In previous decades there was a boarding house on Calhoun Street and a dance pavilion along the water. Today, there is a small park at the end of Pritchard Street and there are several churches, the Oyster Factory, and a public dock located South of Bridge. Additional public spaces and civic buildings would be appropriate in this area. However, if infill development is to occur, it should be done with a careful hand that reflects the character and peacefulness of the area. Where appropriate, efforts should focus on historic preservation and restoration of older structures in need of repair. From the analysis of the area and community comments, the area South of Bridge should be protected as the most tranquil part of Bluffton.



Pritchard House



Seven Oaks

### MAINTAIN THE TRANQUILITY SOUTH OF BRIDGE – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to maintain the tranquility South of Bridge:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Promote the preservation and restoration of historic structures.
- c. Initiate increased tree plantings and preserve open views to the May River.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.



View to the May River from Bridge Street

## Demand Robust, Complete Neighborhoods

As towns grow, it is natural to add or fill-in existing neighborhoods and to build new neighborhoods. Whether completing an existing neighborhood or creating a new one, it is important to keep the entire neighborhood unit in mind – meaning, you don't just create a single subdivision, but that you create a place that has more of the things that people need every day. A neighborhood contains not just houses, but a mix of uses that are adaptable for change over time. And the houses that are included are not just one type; they are a range of housing types that occur on a variety of lot sizes.

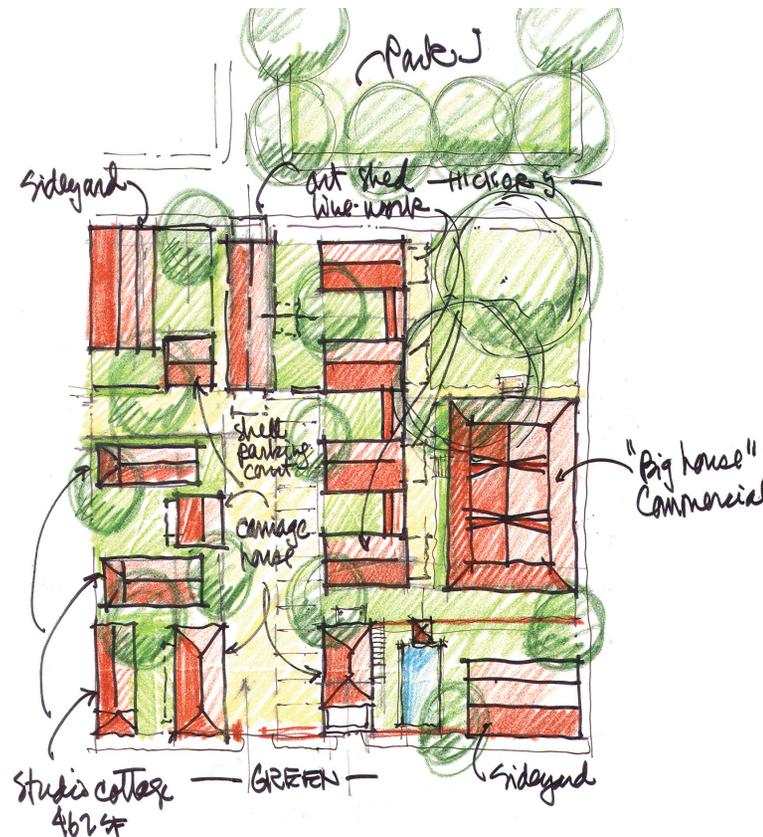
A variety of uses within a neighborhood creates the ability to live, work, shop and have daily needs and services within walking distance. As we look to the future of Old Town, it is important to encourage and provide more opportunities for people to live and work in the area. Encouraging a balance of people living and working in Old Town has several benefits, including: less daily trips that rely on the regional road network; increased support for local businesses; and, new and historic housing can provide a greater variety of housing options for Bluffton. The Illustrative Master Plan identifies specific sites for residential and mixed-use infill development.

### Traditional neighborhoods:

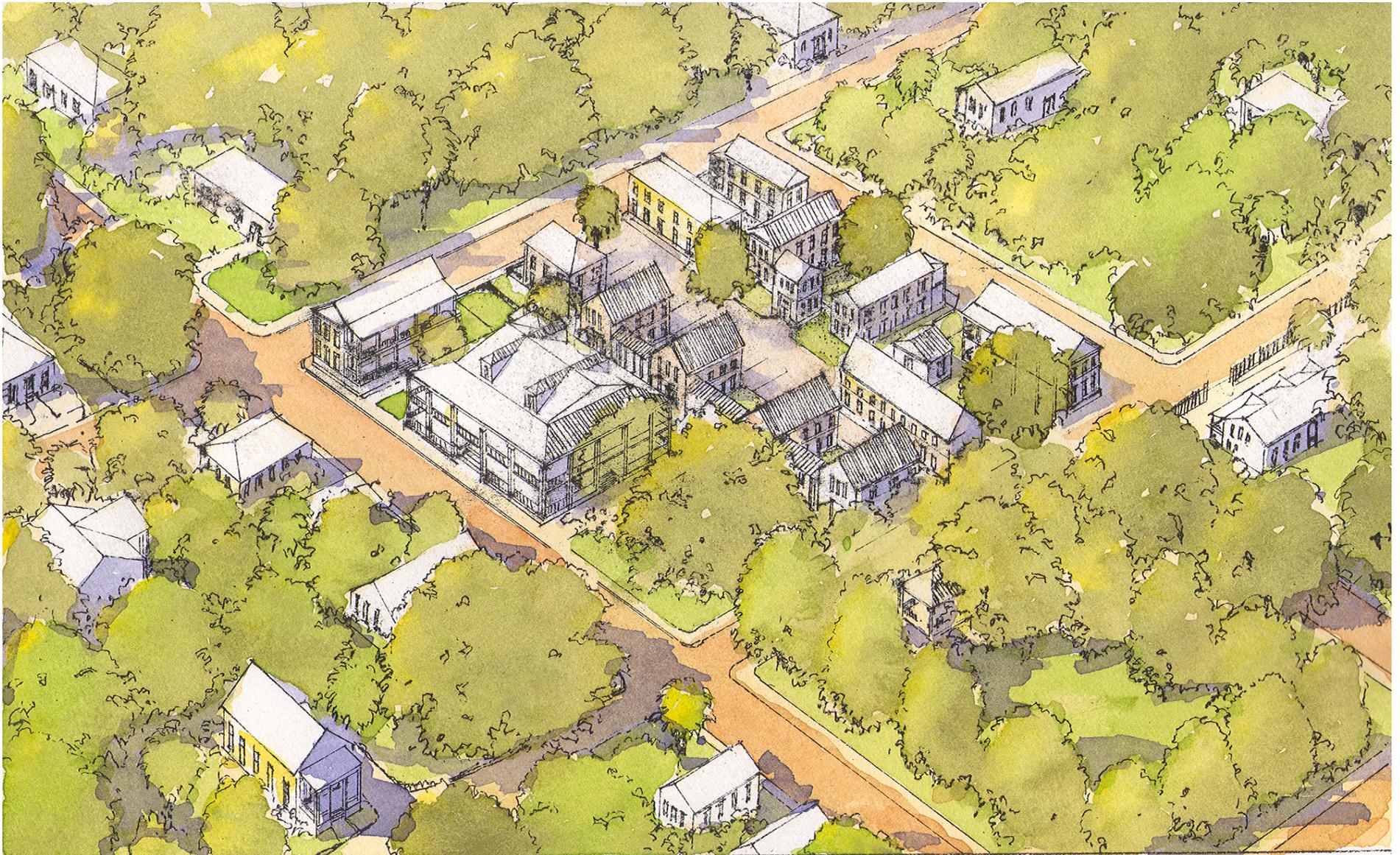
1. Have an identifiable center and edge.
2. Are of a walkable size.
3. Include a mix of land uses and building types.
4. Have an integrated network of walkable streets.
5. Reserve special sites for civic purposes.

Housing for a mix of incomes must be provided in Old Town. A variety of building types allows for a diversity of family sizes, ages, and incomes to live in the same neighborhood. Old Town should not be just a place for the richest of the rich and poorest of the poor. It is a place for everyone, and should support a diverse population from every income level. To reach the best possible spectrum of residents, Old Town living should be promoted simultaneously to all incomes – modest, middle, and high incomes. This mix of incomes is essential to securing a socially and economically balanced community.

The current housing stock in Bluffton should be expanded to encompass a wider range of building types. While new housing types should be added, these housing types should be reflective of the diverse architectural character of Bluffton. Based on architectural traditions in the region, it is recommended that duplex units, rowhouses, sideyard houses, and live-work units be added to the mix. A sampling of recommended building types are included in the following pages, illustrating how a wide variety of housing types can fit seamlessly within a Bluffton block.



Sample Bluffton Block



A block in Old Town is made complete with a mix of building types.

## BUILDING TYPE DEFINITIONS

**Studio Cottage**



small single family dwelling on small lot often with outdoor workspace

**Carriage House Apt.**



small dwelling often at back of a lot, with garage on the first floor or the entire structure may be living space

**Small House**



small single-family dwelling typically 800 - 1400 square feet, with either a front or a side porch

**Sideyard Home**



mid-size single-family dwelling, with minimal front setback and side porch fronting yard

**Live-Work Cottage**



small two-story dwelling with living space above a studio/work area

**Vernacular Home**



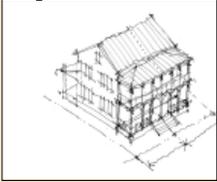
mid-size single-family dwelling, deep front porch and architectural features reflecting local building traditions

**Large Home**



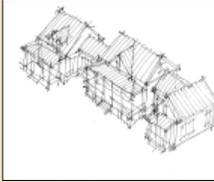
large dwelling designed for one or more families, typ. larger than 2000 sf. Front or side porch required

**Duplex**



two dwelling units on a single lot, front or side porch required

**River House**



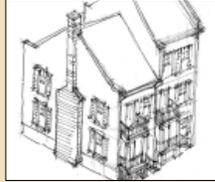
large single-family dwelling sometimes composed of several structures (i.e. breezeways, porches). typ on lots fronting the River

**Live-Work Rowhouse**



dwelling attached to abutting dwellings by masonry partition walls; office or commercial use on 1st floor

**Rowhouse**



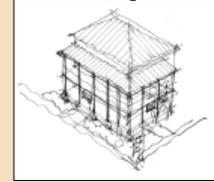
dwelling attached to abutting dwellings by masonry partition walls with living space on both the 1st and 2nd floors.

**Commercial Cottage**



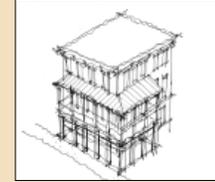
small commercial structure containing retail, commercial, or office space, front or side porch required

**Mansion Apartment**



apartment building with appearance of large single family house

**Main Street Building**



typ. mixed-use: retail/office on ground floor, res. or office above, bldg could include front porch, colonnade, arcade, balcony, marquee, or awning

## DEMAND ROBUST, COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOODS – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to achieve robust, complete neighborhoods:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Develop an infill development strategy to target properties for redevelopment.
- c. Initiate a townwide housing strategy, include inclusionary zoning provisions in the Town's ordinance, and institute housing programs to promote mixed-income communities.
- d. Promote the rehabilitation and adaptive re-use of structures.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.

### Enhance the Connections to the May River

The May River is a large part of the reason why people love, and care so much for, Old Town Bluffton. For a coastal town experiencing high growth pressures, the love and appreciation for the natural assets of the community come as no surprise. While protecting the natural environment and heritage of Old Town, residents and visitors alike need more opportunities to connect with the May River.

Recent efforts to locate public spaces at the terminus of Old Town streets have been successful in making people more aware of the natural beauty of the river. The public dock at the end of Calhoun Street allows for small boat docking and fishing, while the park at the end of Pritchard Street allows a place to sit along the bluff and watch a sunset. The Oyster Factory at the end of Wharf Street is a constant reminder of the town's history and economic dependence on the river. In addition to enhancing the areas at the end of Old Town streets, improvements should be made to Bridge Street to allow for public viewing areas along the bridges that cross Huger and Heyward Coves.

While the existing community spaces are an asset to Bluffton residents, there remains the need to increase and enhance connections to the River. For this reason, it is recommended that a riverfront park be created at the terminus of Calhoun Street (across the street from the Church of the Cross). A public waterfront space at the end of Calhoun Street would encourage a more pedestrian-friendly environment and further strengthen the attraction of Calhoun Street as a local and regional gathering place. The lot at the end of Calhoun Street contains a historic guest house and kitchen, but the main house is no longer standing. The buildings on the site should be restored and a park space should be added.



An option for the Calhoun Street Park, showing a civic building fronting the park and May River.



View out to the May River from the end of Calhoun Street



An alternative option for the park, showing homes along the park.

There are several ways for the Calhoun Street park to become a reality. One way is for the Town to gently approach the property owner to see about purchasing the property. It is not recommended that the Town use eminent domain to acquire the property, but rather approach the owner when the time is right and the funds are available. Understanding that land along the river is highly valuable, the investment that the Town makes now will have a great payback and impact on community life for hundreds of years to come.

Another option would be for a private party to purchase the land and work with the Town and community to realize the ambition for a public greenspace on the water. One consideration in doing so would be granting the property owners permission to build smaller houses on smaller lots. The homes would front the park, offering natural surveillance, and the community could have a riverfront park in Old Town.

The Town should also involve the Beaufort County Open Land Trust to preserve view easements in the Old Town. The Beaufort County Open Land Trust has been very successful in preserving views in the Old Point area of Beaufort and this model should be explored for Bluffton.



A dance hall or open pavilion could be placed along the edge of the park, offering a place for community members to gather.

## ENHANCE THE CONNECTIONS TO THE MAY RIVER – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to enhance the connections to the May River:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Establish a parcel assembly program and land bank to acquire key parcels for a community park along the river.
- c. Acquire green space to further complete the green network through Old Town.
- d. Pursue funding for parks and open spaces through the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.

### Cluster Retail in the Heart of the Town

Old Town's physical retail environment – detached commercial buildings (many of them converted from houses, and many of them historic), mature trees and broad tree cover, proximity to the River – is very unique, providing a distinctive marketing identity for the district that distinguishes it from other commercial districts in the region.

Old Town's role as Bluffton's retail center has shifted significantly over the years. Throughout history, communities have built their centers of commerce at the intersection of the two busiest thoroughfares in town. Old Town is no exception; historically, its two busiest "streets" were Calhoun Street and the May River. Today, May River Road is Old Town's busiest street, but the roadway does not function effectively as a retail center or entryway into the Town, due to high travel speeds and the lack of buildings framing the street.

Retail energy should be focused into a tighter core in Old Town. It is recommended that Calhoun

Street (and the extension north of Calhoun Street) and its intersection with May River Road become the center for retail activity. Focusing retail uses, particularly dining, in a tighter core will enhance the attractiveness of Old Town to residents and tourists alike. Doing so allows visitors to take in multiple retailers, choose between several restaurants or enjoy multiple opportunities more easily in a park once environment. The extension of Calhoun Street north of May River Road and the upcoming development of Calhoun Street Promenade will help to create a centralized cluster of activity. The proposed location for a motor coach drop-off area at Calhoun Street Promenade should be implemented to encourage the ease of group tourism to Old Town.

On a smaller scale, the continued increase of retail activity along Boundary Street will help to further create a specialized market in Bluffton focused on arts and speciality goods. Calhoun Street, Calhoun Street Promenade, Boundary Street, and street-ori-

ented retail along May River Road/Bruin Road will create a unique shopping experience and a park-once environment for both residents and visitors of Old Town.

Given Bluffton's need for a recognizable retail core, policies and regulations should be put in place that emphasize the growth of these uses in a tighter area. The current zoning encourages the scattering of retail uses over a broader area of Old Town. While the tighter core of Old Town should focus on retail uses, the core should also include residential in its mix of uses.

As in all commercial districts, Old Town Bluffton's physical characteristics will have a direct impact on the sales performance and fiscal health of its retail businesses. Building contiguity, lively merchandise displays, and shallow setbacks from the curb, for example, would all send subtle but important cues to shoppers that they are welcome to browse and encouraged to move from store to store along the street. Even if shoppers visit the district because of one specific store, the physical environment of Calhoun Street should facilitate browsing, thus boosting sales for the overall district. While some of its physical characteristics successfully encourage commerce, many of the important design features that typically stimulate retail sales in other historic commercial districts are weak or lacking in Old Town. Chief among these are:

- *Lack of an "entryway" into the district:* There are no visual cues at the intersection of Calhoun Street and May River Road informing motorists (or pedestrians) that this is the primary entrance into the Old Town shopping district;



Calhoun Street today

- *Low density and weak storefront continuity:* There are significant gaps between some of Calhoun Street's commercial buildings, making it difficult for visitors to understand the location of businesses along the street;

- *Lack of sidewalks:* The lack of sidewalks presents detracts from the safety and convenience of visitors to a commercial district; and,

- *Irregular street setback:* Like Calhoun Street's weak storefront continuity, the in-and-out rhythm of the street – some

buildings close to the curb, some set farther back – makes it a little difficult for shoppers to understand the scope of the shopping district. Coastal Chic's recent building, with its shallow setback, establishes a good precedent for new construction, consistent with the setback of the street's original commercial buildings (such as the Planter's Mercantile building, near the intersection of Calhoun Street and May River Road).

The district's current commercial buildings should be preserved – they are unique to Old Town and

speaking volumes about the community's history and evolution. It is of utmost importance that any new development (particularly commercial development) that takes place north of May River Road and around the intersection of May River Road and Calhoun Street respect the architectural traditions of Calhoun Street – not necessarily imitating the architectural style of Calhoun Street's historic buildings, but respecting and reflecting Calhoun Street's basic design elements (scale, materials, building massing, color, streetscape rhythm, personality, etc.).



New buildings along Calhoun Street, and the extension of Calhoun Street to the north, should have buildings of appropriate character and size to complete the street scene.

## RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES

If the district is to serve both residents, as well as visitors, then it is essential that it recapture their attention and involvement by offering goods, services and experiences of interest to them. The market for low- and moderately-priced general consumer goods and services in Bluffton and environs appears to be relatively saturated. But there are some niches – demographic pockets in which local demand appears to exceed local supply – which might represent good retail market opportunities for Old Town.

Beaufort County households with annual incomes above \$100,000, for example, are likely to collectively spend about \$30 million annually on furniture and home furnishings, \$34 million on groceries, and \$38 million on dining out. Capturing just five percent of this demand would make it possible (assuming good business management, marketing, etc.) to support a couple of restaurants and a small upscale grocery store (or grocery section in a larger store), for example – and this does not include potential purchases made by tourists and by residents of Bluffton itself or of counties adjacent to Beaufort County.

Good retail ‘starting point’ choices for older and historic commercial districts tend to be those:

- With a market foothold already established in the community or region;
- With little regional competition; and
- In which the amount and type of space available in the district is a reasonably good match for the minimum amount of commercial space supportable. [Note that some types of retail businesses (shoe stores, for example) do best when located near similar businesses, as shoppers like to comparison-shop for these items in several stores before making a purchase. In these instances, a district needs to be able to support a cluster of several businesses selling similar things, not just one business – so there has to be substantial unmet market demand available.]

Old Town has established a promising market foothold in home furnishings and gifts, and this retail category has relatively little competition within the region, making it a good candidate for growth. It is recommended that the district continue to expand this retail category by encouraging related businesses in the region (window and floor treatments, household textiles, interior design services, garden accessories, etc.) to relocate to Calhoun Street and by gradually developing additional furniture and home furnishings businesses. By doing so, a distinct Design District could be formed.

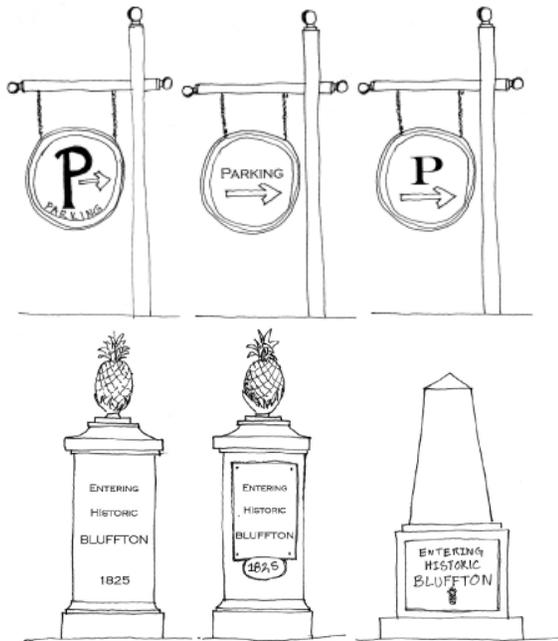
In addition to expanding Calhoun Street’s cluster of furniture/home furnishings businesses, it is recommend that the district diversify its retail mix by adding some businesses that would complement the furniture/home furnishings cluster. Some possibilities might include:

- a. Restaurants (mid- to upper-market);
- b. A small upper-market inn;
- c. A specialty grocery store; and,
- d. A high-end fishing and outdoor gear shop and adventure outfitter.

Some of these product lines might be bundled together – for instance, the inn might include a restaurant, and the grocery store and outdoor outfitter might be bundled together in an upscale general store.

There are many other possibilities. For example, given the power of the Internet to attract global sales, good retailers can thrive even in districts with little regional market demand for the products they sell.

While the character of Old Town is unique and eclectic, the variety of signage found throughout the area should be consolidated. Uniform way-finding signage should be put in place to direct residents and visitors to shopping, parking, historic properties, and other areas of interest. General locations for wayfinding, or directional signage, are illustrated in the diagram on this page. Sample designs for the wayfinding signage are included below. The signs should be simple and user-friendly to both pedestrians and motorists. Gateway signs are intended to mark the primary entry points into the Old Town. The gateway signs should reflect the architectural heritage of Bluffton, yet should not dominate the experience of entering into the historic Old Town. The entrance into Old Town should be known by the physical change from a rural to urban setting, with slower vehicular travel speeds and street-oriented architecture.



The sketches above show a sample of ideas for a consolidated signage program in Old Town.

### CLUSTER RETAIL IN THE HEART OF THE TOWN- GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to cluster retail in the heart of the town:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Promote the Old Town Master Plan and celebrate the unique characteristics of Old Town.
- c. Create and update a detailed list of the businesses and services to target for locating (or relocating) to Old Town.
- d. Provide technical assistance for businesses and retailers.
- e. The Town, Old Town Merchants Society and Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, and Chamber of Commerce should work together to create a wayfinding signage program.
- f. Consider forming a Municipal Improvement District or Small Business Investment Corporation for Old Town.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.



The above two images show a smaller, more affordable unit adjacent to a larger, more expensive unit. The two can be placed within the same block and the overall quality of the affordable home is not less than others in the area.



Well designed factory built houses are an option for increasing affordable housing in Old Town.

## REQUIRE THE INCLUSION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to shift into a higher gear with adaptive reuse:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Adopt an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance.
- c. Prepare and implement a comprehensive Town-wide housing strategy.
- d. Institute housing programs to assist homeowners.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.

## Require the Inclusion of Affordable Housing

As Old Town continues to grow and evolve, and as its neighborhoods are made more complete, it is important for the Town and community to work together to provide housing options for a wide range of income levels. For this reason affordable housing should be included in the mix of housing types found within Old Town. In order to provide a mix and range of housing opportunities it is essential to insure that low-income units and moderately-priced homes will be included among market rate housing. The Town should create an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance and look Town-wide at the current housing market to analyze the overall need for affordable housing.

To accommodate affordable housing in Old Town, the Town should prepare and implement a comprehensive housing strategy. The strategy should include financing and subsidies from private and public sources. As part of the strategy, the Town should also add to the Town's Zoning Ordinance "inclusionary zoning" rules that:

- mandate a percentage of affordable units in every new development and redevelopment project in Old Town;
- provide for payment of a fee in-lieu of units, for the Town to fund financial components of the housing strategy; and,
- insure long-term affordability, and provide incentives to the developer that may include a reduction in minimum unit square footages, less interior finish requirements, a reduction in required parking spaces, and height or density bonuses for exceeding the number of affordable units.



Since its construction in 1890, the Planter's Mercantile building has served several generations and many purposes.



The Eggs'n tricities store is another example of re-use on Calhoun Street.

### Shift Into a Higher Gear With Adaptive Reuse

Bluffton's economy now revolves around its sense of place, and that includes its historic built environment. Preservation efforts have been successful over the years, but more needs to be done to preserve and maintain Old Town's historic character. Historic structures in Old Town should be preserved and restored to their original use or, adapted to new uses when appropriate. For example, the Planter's Mercantile on Calhoun Street has gone through a number of uses in its lifetime. It is an example of a building of solid construction and lasting, albeit modest, architectural style that has withstood the test of time. Building upon the awareness raised in the Old Town Master Plan planning process, it is time to increase historic preservation efforts and recognize the economic benefits of preservation. The Town and community together need to strategize on specific funding mechanisms and incentives to encourage the stabilizing and refurbishment of buildings. In the immediate future, the Town can work to adopt smart building codes to make adaptive reuse more feasible.

### SHIFT INTO A HIGHER GEAR WITH ADAPTIVE REUSE – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to shift into a higher gear with adaptive reuse:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Adopt a Demolition by Neglect Ordinance.
- c. Adopt Smart Building Codes.
- d. Implement a local property tax abatement program for the rehabilitation of historic structures in Old Town.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.

## Require Stewardship of Historic Resources

Designated as a National Register Historic Districts in 1996, Old Town Bluffton today has 100 historic buildings. While many buildings in Old Town have been preserved and restored, it is disturbing that some of Bluffton's most treasured historic structures– even some owned by the Town, like the Garvey House (c.1865) at the Oyster Factory Park– have been allowed to decline, fall down and even burn down. Such structures are noticeable in Old Town and send a mixed message to residents and visitors about the community's feelings for historic preservation. If the Town and Bluffton community are serious about history, then it is time to adjust the code of ordinances to include a demolition by neglect ordinance. Demolition by neglect is defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as the process of allowing a building to deteriorate to the point where demolition is necessary to protect public health and safety. By adding a demolition by neglect ordinance to the Town's rules, the regulation would make it not quite so appealing to a property owner/investor to hold onto deteriorating buildings until they fall down. It should be made a requirement through the new ordinance that if a historic property is part of the Town's historic franchise, then there is nothing wrong with sending a crew, stabilizing the building and sending the bill to the property owner.

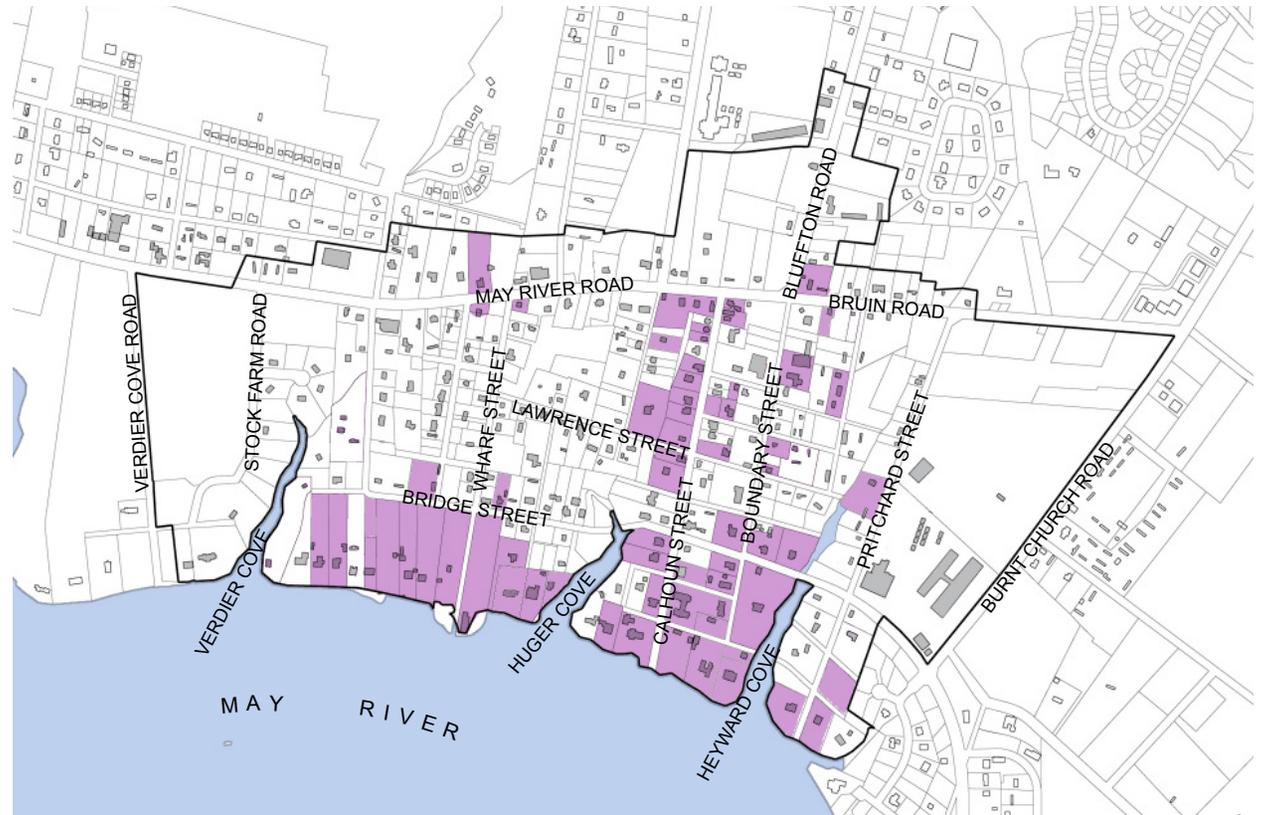


Diagram showing historic properties

### REQUIRE STEWARDSHIP OF HISTORIC RESOURCES – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to require stewardship of historic resources:

- Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- Adopt a Demolition by Neglect Ordinance.
- Educate the community on the use and applicability of State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits and Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.



Old Town Bluffton has a great tree canopy that needs to be preserved and enhanced.

### **Trees, Trees, Trees: Invest in the Canopy**

Trees, historic buildings, and the May River are why people come to Old Town and fall in love with the Town. Tree-lined streets offering a thick tree canopy emulate a peacefulness and strong sense of connection to the natural environment. The range and variety of native plants and trees are constant reminders of a cherished Lowcountry landscape that is quickly disappearing in many parts of the region. The grand trees that residents and visitors enjoy today were planted decades ago. In order to continue the legacy of tree-lined streets, the Town must plan more trees on an annual basis. If more trees are not planted in the coming years, then in the next fifty years Old Town won't be the same as the place people love and cherish today.

For the next 5 years or more there should be a sustained investment in the Town's annual budget to restoring and maintaining Old Town's tree canopy. It is recommended that the Town increase its funding for tree maintenance and preservation from \$50,000 to \$100,000 for the first year and a minimum of \$50,000 per year for the subsequent 4 years. The Town needs more maintenance equipment and more trees. The Town cannot afford to not invest in its tree canopy. If you lose the trees you lose so much of the Bluffton people cherish.

#### **TREES, TREES, TREES: INVEST IN THE CANOPY – GETTING THERE**

The following steps are necessary to invest in the canopy:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Initiate increased funding for tree plantings.
- c. Apply a range of funding mechanisms to secure grants and other funding sources for the preservation of the tree canopy.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.



A view of Wharf Street, showing new homes carefully placed amongst the existing trees

### Reform Zoning: Adopt Form-Based Code

It is important in the implementation of the Old Town Master Plan that the Town update their land development regulations so that they are more user-friendly and more specific in their outcomes. The current zoning in Old Town is a mixture of General Residential, Single-Family Residential, Mixed-Use, and Village Commercial. Lot dimensions, setbacks, and building requirements found in the current regulations limit infill development.

Previous efforts to encourage infill development included the Town's adoption of a Density Bonus Ordinance in 2004. The intent of the ordinance was to encourage housing type diversity by providing for increased residential densities. In October 2005 the Town Council revoked the Density Bonus Ordinance. The reason for such action was that the Town Council and Bluffton community did not feel that the ordinance was satisfying its original intent. It is recommended that the Town adopt a Form-Based Code to further the objectives of the intent of the Density Bonus Ordinance, therefore eliminating the need to reinstate the ordinance.

Appropriate regulations that are supportive of community-endorsed planning policies can encourage development by providing clarity and certainty. A zoning process that requires additional hearings and variances increases the risk of time and money to developers but has not proven effective in guaranteeing the desired results. By establishing clear standards that support the Town's vision and provide a visual guide to design criteria, investors can be certain that their project will be approved if they follow the rules. Neighbors can also be assured that what will develop will be desirable, not harmful, to Old Town.

A Form-Based Code is a land development regulatory tool that places primary emphasis on the physical form of the built environment with the end goal of producing a specific type of "place". Conventional zoning strictly controls land use, through abstract regulatory statistics, which can result in very different physical environments. The base principle of form based coding is that design is more important than use. Simple and clear graphic prescriptions for building height, how a building is placed on its site, and building elements (such as location and configuration of porches, windows, doors, etc.) are used to control development. Land use is not ignored, but regulated using broad parameters that can better respond to market economics, while also prohibiting incompatible uses.

The Town's land development regulations should be amended to include a Form-Based code that will support appropriate infill development of Old Town over time. A Form-Based Code for Old Town would allow by-right development of property in congruence with standards set forth in the code. The new code would streamline the process of getting projects approved because of the investment in public process and consensus that the Old Town Master Plan incorporates. As a first step in the implementation of the Old Town Master Plan, the Town is working with Dover, Kohl & Partners to create a Form-Based Code for the area.

#### REFORM ZONING: ADOPT FORM-BASED CODE – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to reform zoning:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Adopt a Demolition by Neglect Ordinance.
- c. Create specific parking requirements for Old Town, lessening the impact of parking requirements in the historic town core.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.

## Design for Walkability First

The community vision for Old Town focuses on a diversity of land patterns and travel modes where pedestrians set the scale for future development. Future land development regulations implementing this approach will guide citizens and developers toward a specific, planned context consisting of different building types and thoroughfare designs that, together, yield desired community character. Many components of the urban fabric, including transportation, combine to yield that special “sense of place” – that qualitative sense of comfort and value one feels in a given urban setting. The street is central to this experience as it forms the public realm within which we move, live and play out our daily lives. Proper street sections should be applied to support continued walkability in Old Town.

To achieve urban places that encourage (and thrive with) pedestrians, bicycles, and transit vehicles, the patterns of proposed development must be specified first, during the community planning stage. Then, transportation plans for balanced mobility can be crafted with walkability considered first and vehicle mobility second. This is not to imply that motor vehicle mobility will be dramatically reduced; vehicles will continue to use the thoroughfares. However, pedestrians, being exposed to the open environment, are more vulnerable than drivers, and solutions for their comfort are more complex. Often, greater walkability usually yields only small reductions in vehicle capacity, even though vehicle speeds are lower.

Generally more streets per square mile result in a more open network and drivers can avoid the degree of peak hour congestion that occurs when a limited number of large streets become congested.

Pedestrians are especially sensitive to the quality of public space, since they move through it without the usual protection afforded by home or auto. This protection/separation from the outdoor environment, experienced by auto occupants, is often viewed as the safe mode of travel. The downside is the limited potential for healthy exercise, interaction with friends, enjoyment of nature, freedom from parking and other benefits central to the pedestrian experience.

Travelers with a choice of riding or walking therefore must have an excellent “street” experience to encourage them to venture forth from modern automotive comfort. Captive walkers, those unable to afford a car or operate a vehicle, although less sensitive to street walkability, deserve the best experience the public can provide. Walkers at the workplace can accomplish many daily tasks on foot if the setting and scale are right. The classic walk to work is rare today and is considered icing on the cake for walkable communities; i.e. the last component to evolve for mature pedestrian places.

Additional strategies to increase walkability in Old Town are included in Chapter 3



Crosswalks and stop signs have helped to improve walkability in peer communities.



Bringing stores closer to the street increases retail visibility and creates a pleasant environment for pedestrians.

### DESIGN FOR WALKABILITY FIRST – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to design for walkability:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Enhance Old Town streets through physical improvements, street modifications, and infill development.
- c. Concentrate retail in a central location to create a "park once" environment so that patrons can walk to many shops and stores rather than having to drive to each location.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.



Roadway runoff at the outfall at Bridge Street and Heyward Cove



Storm drain at the end of Green Street



Bluffton Management Practices

### Minimize Pavement & Keep the Water Clean

The health of the May River is of great concern to Bluffton residents as Old Town and its surroundings continue to grow and develop. Recent development and poorly functioning stormwater management systems have led residents and local officials to ask for a more workable solution to balance development in Old Town while improving the water quality of the May River.

The historical drainage pattern for Old Town, and its immediate surroundings, was through infiltration. Intermittent and perennial streams, along with drainage canals that were dredged to improve farm and silviculture operations, continue today to carry water to the May River tributaries. Improvements could be made to the water quality and water resources if infiltration into the shallow groundwater was made possible. The Town and Old Town residents should work together to enact a riparian buffer along the coves and streams in an effort to preserve water quality and the tree canopy.

The local and regional road networks are important components of the Old Town stormwater network. Ownership and the management responsibility of these important networks needs to be examined and a solution reached to improve upkeep of the roadways to lessen their impacts on the River. The road-side drainage swales, curb and gutter networks, and large drainage canals create a patchwork of ownership and responsibility making comprehensive management difficult.

Specific best management practices unique to Bluffton's special setting are needed to continue improvements to the May River.

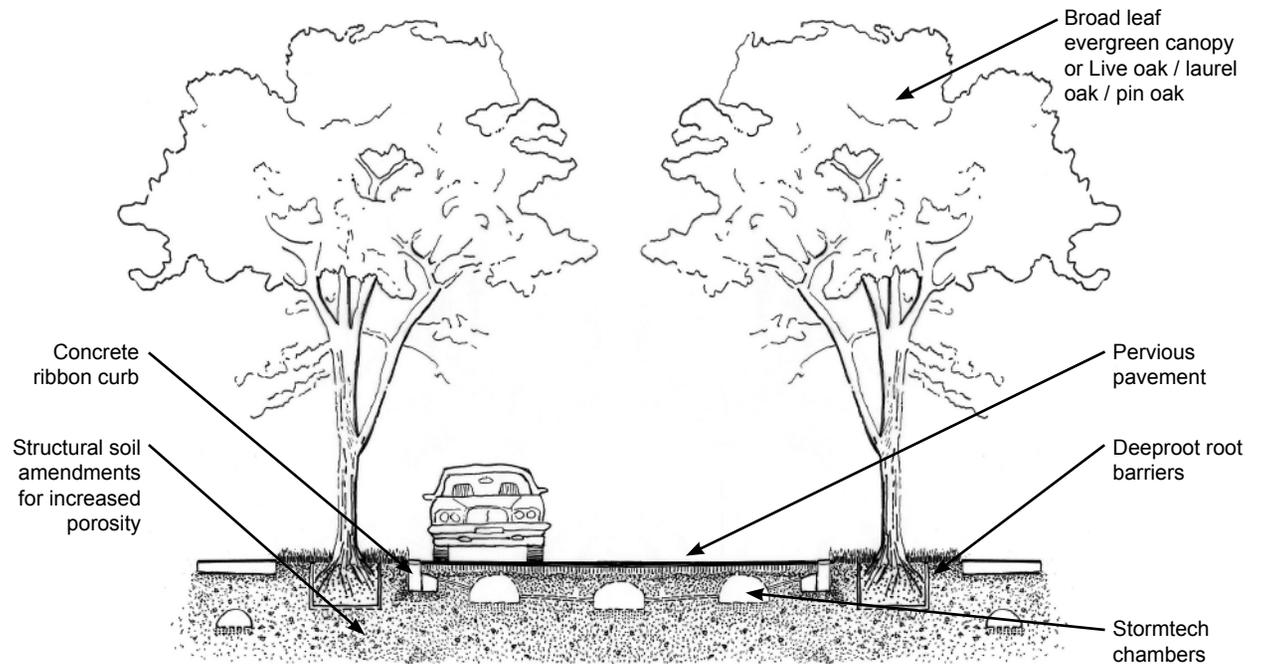
With each incremental unit of infill development or redevelopment, stormwater best management practices should be incorporated into each lot. For larger developments, it will be necessary for the property owner to dedicate more space on the lot for the best management practice, or work with the Town to design stormwater networks within public rights-of-way. At the same time, the Town should work to find ways to improve the drainage systems along the public rights-of-ways in order to create more opportunities for water quality improvement.

One such opportunity exists in the creation of an infiltration street. While some limitations do exist due to seasonal water table elevations, the infiltration street is a design that uses the paved area and the subsurface area to capture, store, treat and release stormwater runoff. This is accomplished through the use of pervious pavement, infiltration trenches, porous pipes, and a reconstructed sub-soils and base course that work as an integrated stormwater facility in and of itself. These best management practices, like treating stormwater on individual lots or creating an infiltration street, would be specifically designed for usage in Bluffton and would become a standard Bluffton Management Practice.

**Steps to minimize pavement and keep the water clean:**

- a. Use impervious surfaces in moderation to prevent water from leaving sites too quickly.
- b. Supplant impervious materials with pervious materials (i.e. shells, crushed gravel, sand, stone dust, etc) wherever possible.
- c. Build more densely so that buildings are able to share pavement needs and impervious resources.

lot type	scale	bluffton management practice
cottage	on-site	rain gardens, pervious paved areas
rowhouse	community or block	underground pipe storage, sunken greens
house	on-site	cistern
commercial building	off-site	underground pipe storage, regional facilities
large house	on-site	rain garden, cistern, bioswales



Sketch of a design for an infiltration street

## STORMWATER: TOOLS & TERMS

- Pervious green – a backyard that has not been compacted during the construction process so that maximum infiltration can occur within a lot's boundary.
- Curtain drain – interception drainage systems used in terrain where a water table is permanently located or “perched” above and separated from the normal groundwater table. The curtain drain is designed to intercept the lateral movement of the water table and direct the groundwater to a location where it will not affect the continued operation of the subsurface wastewater infiltration system.
- Rain garden – a strategically located low area with plants that intercept stormwater runoff. Water is slowed down in order to discourage erosion and allow for absorption into the ground. In many cases the plants are chosen for their ability to remove pollution and toxins. Rain gardens are usually dry 72 hours after a storm event. Native plant should be used in the rain garden.
- Recessed green – an area designed to collect stormwater runoff from adjacent streets during period rain events but which can be used for passive recreational activities during dry periods. Recessed greens can be made up of pervious materials, amended soils, and water resistant turf to aid in collection and filtration of stormwater runoff.
- Pervious driveway – a parking / vehicular access area that is made up of pervious materials such as crushed stone, shell, or sand, or pervious paving blocks that can collect, store and treat stormwater runoff from a structure. A ribbon driveway is an acceptable form of a pervious driveway.
- Bioswale – landscape elements designed to remove silt and pollution from surface runoff water. They consist of a swaled drainage course with gently sloped sides (less than six percent) and are often filled with vegetation
- Filter path – a pedestrian connection specifically designed to capture, store, and treat stormwater runoff through the use of soil amendments, increased soil porosity, and pervious surfaces.
- Infiltration Street – a street specifically designed to capture, store, treat, and release stormwater runoff through the use of pervious surfaces and/or an underground piping systems.
- French drain – refers to a ditch filled with gravel, rock or perforated pipe that redirects surface and ground water away from an area. They are commonly used to prevent ground and surface water from penetrating or damaging building foundations.
- Bio-Retention cell – a shallow depression, typically 3-4 feet wide, with specific plantings chosen for the ability to remove nutrients and pollutants from stormwater runoff. Bio-retention cells are usually dry 72 hours after a storm event.
- Cistern – a receptacle for catching and storing rainwater. A rain barrel can be used as part of a cistern system to capture rainwater from the downspouts of homes. A cistern can be above ground or buried.
- Wet Well – an unlined buried receptacle filled with a porous media such as clean gravel, or sand, and pervious floor that serves as a storage facility for stormwater runoff from small houses or buildings and drains into shallow groundwater.

## MINIMIZE PAVEMENT AND KEEP THE WATER CLEAN – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to minimize pavement and keep the water clean:

- a. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan and Form-Based Code.
- b. Institute Bluffton Management Practices.
- c. Establish a stormwater utility fund.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 5.





# getting there 5

The community vision for Old Town has been documented in the preceding chapters of this report through plans, illustrations, and text. This chapter identifies the necessary steps for realizing the place depicted in the imagery, transforming the community vision into a built reality. The following steps address policy recommendations, regulatory changes, planning strategies, priority capital improvement projects, economic development goals, and funding options.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND REGULATORY CHANGES**

### **1. Adopt the Old Town Master Plan**

The Town of Bluffton should adopt the Old Town Master Plan, giving the plan official standing. Adopting the plan sends an important message to property owners and residents that the political decision makers support the Old Town Master Plan. The plan should be adopted by the Planning Commission and Town Council and included in the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

### **2. Adopt Old Town Form-Based Code**

The Town of Bluffton's Zoning Ordinance should be amended to include a Form-Based Code that will support appropriate development in Old Town. A Form-Based Code would allow by-right development of property in congruence with standards set forth in the code, and eliminate the guessing game often associated with conventional zoning. The Form-Based Code would replace the existing Old Town zoning. Understanding that a Historic Preservation Overlay exists, the Form-Based Code would include the Historic Preservation Commission review and approval process. The new code would streamline the process of getting projects approved because of the investment in public process and consensus that the Old Town Master Plan incorporates.

### **3. Appoint a Town Architect**

The Town should create a Town Architect staff position to begin the implementation of the Old Town Master Plan. This person should have a full understanding of the principles and intent of the plan. The Town Architect would oversee the application of the Form-Based Code and the streamlining of the permit processes in Old Town. This person would also work with developers and property owners to strategize on proper development plans for the area.

### **4. Streamline Development Procedures & Approvals Process**

Part of attracting quality development consists of making the process of approvals transparent, responsible, and reasonably expeditious. This is typically done through the application of a form-based code and appointing a lead person for each application to guide it through the process. A variety of mechanisms have been used elsewhere: allowing development by-right for projects that meet specific plan objectives; one-stop permitting shops that eliminate the need to visit different agencies; development checklists that specify the exact requirements for permit approval; application scorecards rating a development's success in meeting community goals and allowing priority treatment for those that do; use of Geographic Information System (GIS) or other technology to instantly provide information on permits, zoning and many other regulations. It is recommended that the Town undertake all appropriate methods for streamlining development procedures and the approvals process and that a Town Architect position be created to oversee the process and ensure that reforms are successful.

### **5. Adopt a Demolition by Neglect Ordinance**

Since the Town and Bluffton community are serious about history, it is time to adjust the code of ordinances to include a demolition by neglect ordinance. Demolition by neglect is defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as the process of allowing a building to deteriorate to the point where demolition is necessary to protect public health and safety. Other communities, like Charleston, have adopted a demolition by neglect ordinance and have seen successful results in the increased preservation and restoration of its historic structures. Using Charleston's ordinance as a model, the Town should refine and adopt a Bluffton-specific demolition by neglect ordinance this calendar year. In addition to adopting the ordinance, the Town should also establish a Building Official position to administer the ordinance and other building improvements in Old Town.

## **PLANNING STRATEGIES**

### **6. Confirm Physical and Regulatory Conditions**

The Old Town Master Plan was created with limited information and accuracy regarding rights-of-way, property lines, existing building locations, easements, utility limitations, and covenants tied to individual properties. As site-specific applications come forward and Town improvements are undertaken, modifications will be necessary due to accurate surveys and specific site analysis. Part of the process of carrying out the Old Town Master Plan should involve regular updates to the Town's GIS system with information on the physical conditions of individual properties as development occurs.

## 7. Develop an Infill Development Strategy

A strategy should be developed to target vacant, underutilized or "soft" properties that detract from the quality of Old Town. Vacant land and derelict buildings offer opportunities for change and redevelopment. In order to seize these opportunities it is necessary to inventory and map the locations of vacant land and derelict buildings and then target new users and promote the inventoried opportunities to new investors. The Town can use its extensive GIS system to begin to identify a list of properties that might benefit from infill development; this can be done as a part of the annual inventory of land use.

## 8. Parking

When planning for the future of Old Town, we must be sure to plan for an adequate supply of parking to accommodate future growth and development. Appropriate management is necessary; parking is handled differently in the historic center of town. Old Town is not a mall, strip shopping center, office park, or apartment complex. Old Town is a unique center of activity where parking, while important, is not the most important feature. In fact, inappropriately designed surface parking lots can blight the very character that is Old Town's calling card. Old Town must have parking, but the Town must handle parking in smart ways so that it does not dominate the entire environment.

On-street parking must be encouraged wherever possible, and private and/or public parking facilities must be located behind buildings, to the interior of blocks, making parking compatible with pedestrian-oriented streets. On-street, parallel parking is the most pedestrian-friendly form of

parking. It provides direct access to the adjacent commercial establishments and provides a traffic calming effect on urban streets.

Parking should not be placed on corner lots at key intersections. Surface parking lots on corners disrupts the urban fabric. Parking needs to be located near the middle of the block, so that the valuable street edges can be recaptured for urban architecture or green space. Where possible, parking lots should be lined with buildings or otherwise screened so that parking does not visually dominate the street scene. Lining parking with habitable space along the street edge is crucial to natural surveillance and street character. These "liner buildings" provide an opportune location for affordable housing, offices, and small business. Liner buildings are particularly well suited for live-work units or artist studios.

An efficient method for handling parking in Old Town is through the coordinated use of shared parking. Businesses and churches may be able to use certain parking spaces during the day while these same spaces are then used by residents at night. Why build two spaces when one will do in a shared parking scenario? Shared parking works in a mixed-use, park-once, pedestrian-friendly environment, all of which are key elements in the Old Town Master Plan. The Town should identify sites for shared parking and meet with property owners to set the terms of use. Such sites could occur on either Town lots or on private property, if the property owner is willing to participate in the program.

In the Town's Development Standards, special considerations are currently given to on-site parking spaces along Calhoun Street. Specific parking requirements for the entire Old Town area should be included, lessening the impact of parking requirements in the historic town core.

## 9. Establish a Parcel Assembly Program

The Town has the ability to consolidate parcels of land for the purposes of redevelopment and economic development. One strategy for encouraging new development is the identification of opportunity sites and the consolidation of parcels to allow development at a scale that offers feasibility to the type of use desired. Alternatively, the Town could establish a land bank with funding from local business owners. The land bank would then use revolving funds to acquire and assemble key sites and solicit preferred development alternatives. It is suggested that the Town and other economic development partners collaborate on the formation of a land bank to acquire key opportunity parcels in Old Town to preserve them for appropriate and supportive development. A top priority for the use of funds in the land bank should be for the realization of the Calhoun Street Park. The Town should use its GIS capability to identify additional opportunity sites.

## 10. Institute Bluffton Management Practices

The health of the May River is of great concern to Bluffton residents as Old Town and its surroundings continue to grow and develop. Recent development and poorly functioning stormwater management systems have led residents and local officials to ask for a more workable solution to balance development in Old Town while improving the water quality of the May River. The Town should institute Bluffton Management Practices, which are specific best management practices unique to Bluffton's special setting along the May River. Bluffton Management Practices should be included in the Town's Development Standards Ordinance.

## 11. Acquire Green Space

The Town should actively work to acquire properties for green space to further complete the green network through Old Town. Properties to acquire include those with historic, scenic, wildlife, or recreational values, among others. The Town should allocate money in its general fund and seek private sources to acquire land as depicted in the Illustrative Master Plan for additional trails, greens, and park space. The Town should work to implement a real estate transfer fee or work with private developers to increase the amount of green space in Old Town. The first priority for allocating funds should be for the acquisition of land to form the Calhoun Street Park.

## 12. Promote a Rehabilitation / Adaptive Re-use Strategy

Associated with an infill strategy, this strategy should provide policy and guidelines for the adaptive reuse of buildings that have become functionally or economically obsolete and facilitate the permitting process. The adaptive reuse of buildings is one of the ways to create housing and retail opportunities within Old Town. Infill development is often times less expensive than greenfield development, since infrastructure is already in place, while offering residents the amenities of the town core. Code requirements should be clarified and arbitrary requirements eliminated to avoid the need of frequent variances and limit the legal obstacles to building improvement or renovation. The Town should therefore adopt a “Smart Building Code”.

To further encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse, the Town should implement a local property tax abatement program for the rehabilitation of historic structures in Old Town, in addition to those offered by the state and federal government. The abatement program would allow the Town to

## Smart Building Codes

“Smart building codes” is the term used to describe building and construction codes that encourage the alteration and reuse of existing buildings. Building codes have generally been written to apply to new construction. As a result, it is often much harder for developers to comply with building codes when rehabilitating existing buildings than when undertaking new construction. For this reason, “smart building codes” are being developed with increasing frequency in states and local jurisdictions across the country to encourage adaptive reuse and the rehabilitation of older structures. New Jersey, Maryland, Minnesota, and Rhode Island, Wilmington, Delaware, Wichita, Kansas and others have adopted legislation designed to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of existing buildings. The New Jersey Rehabilitation Subcode has reduced building rehabilitation costs by as much as 50 percent -- generating a dramatic rise in historic preservation and downtown revitalization projects.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has recently published a document entitled Nationally Applicable Recommended Rehabilitation Provisions (NAARP). The NAARP is a model for state and local jurisdictions that want to develop “smart building codes.” For more information, please contact the Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development Research at [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov).

place a temporary ceiling on the assessed value of a historic building (residential) that has been substantially rehabilitated according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. This means that property owners would continue to pay property tax on the pre-rehab value of the property, but would not pay tax on the increased value due to the rehabilitation during a set time period. This set time period is established by the Town and has a twenty year maximum.

## 13. Townwide Housing Strategy

In order to address the issues inherent in providing a mix of housing for a range of incomes, a townwide housing strategy is necessary. The housing strategy should evaluate how and where to increase housing and the types of housing needed to accommodate the current and future housing market. Such a strategy should provide market-feasible locations for a mix and range of types that will attract a diverse range of residents and help to stabilize Bluffton neighborhoods.

## 14. Affordable Housing Strategies and Inclusionary Zoning

Every neighborhood in Bluffton should bear some responsibility for meeting the social need for affordable housing. Indeed in Old Town, attainably-priced housing is part of the Old Town Master Plan. In order to provide a mix and range of housing opportunities it is essential to insure that low-income units and moderately-priced homes will be included among market rate housing. There are many benefits to having a mix of incomes living in Old Town, including providing for housing of the workforce in a location that will not force long commutes on the workers, with all the energy savings, congestion management, and positive family impacts that living close to work implies. A major advantage of mixing variously-priced units is that the quality of the building will not be less than others in the area, eliminating one misconception about low-income housing.

The Town recently established an Affordable Housing Subcommittee, comprised of Town and Beaufort County officials, local financiers, and local non-profits. The subcommittee will work to

## Inclusionary Zoning

Inclusionary zoning is a legal tool which encourages the private sector to include a percentage of affordable units as part of a market rate development. The fundamental purpose of inclusionary zoning is to allow the development of affordable housing to become an integral part of new development taking place in a community. Inclusionary zoning ordinances vary widely. They are tailored to each community's specific needs and housing market, and are just one component of a larger housing strategy. A typical inclusionary zoning ordinance will set forth a minimum percentage of units to be provided in a specific development affordable to households at a particular income level, generally defined as a percentage of the median household income. The goal is to establish a relatively permanent stock of affordable housing units provided by the private market. In many ordinances, some form of incentive is provided by the municipality to the developer in return for the provision of affordable housing. These incentives can take the form of waivers of zoning requirements, including density, area, height, open space, use or other provisions; local tax abatements; waiver of permit fees or land dedication; fewer required developer-provided amenities and acquisitions of property; "fast track" permitting; and/or the subsidization or provision of infrastructure for the developer by the jurisdiction.

Source: "Inclusionary Zoning: A Viable Solution to the Affordable Housing Crisis?", Dr. Robert W. Burchell and Catherine C. Galley, The Center for Housing Policy, 2000.

create affordable housing programs and provide access to financing strategies for affordable housing.

To accommodate affordable housing in Old Town, the Town should prepare and implement a comprehensive housing strategy. The strategy should include financing and subsidies from private and public sources. As part of the strategy, the Town should also add to the Town's Zoning Ordinance "inclusionary zoning" rules that:

- mandate a percentage of affordable units in every new development and redevelopment project in Old Town,
- provide for payment of a fee in-lieu of units, for the Town to fund financial components of the housing strategy,
- insure long-term affordability, and provide incentives to the developer that may include a reduction in minimum unit square footages, less interior finish requirements, a reduction in required parking spaces, and height or density bonuses for exceeding the number of affordable units.

### 15. Institute Housing Programs

As part of maintaining stable neighborhoods, many communities offer assistance for homeowners. As part of continued neighborhood revitalization in Bluffton, the Town or a local non-profit may want to consider new programs successful in other municipalities. Some strategies include assistance and education for homeowner maintenance with tax exemptions for the improvement value of renovations. Fargo, North Dakota offers down payment assistance as part of a first-time buyers program; other cities commonly assist with securing low interest mortgages for first-time buyers. In addition to local initiatives, there are several federal programs available to homeowners.

First-time homebuyer program– Funding is available from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for first-time homebuyers.

Mortgage guarantee programs– The federal government has a series of grants for guaranteeing mortgages on single-family and multi-family housing in order to reduce local lender risk.

The Town should be commended on its recent efforts to increase affordable housing in Old Town through the Bluffton Historic Small Home Program and the Density Bonus Ordinance. Both the program and the ordinance have similar objectives for creative ways of achieving a better mix of housing prices in Old Town, yet both lack the regulatory mechanisms to maintain affordability. The Bluffton Historic Small Home Program should be revisited and the Town should work with a local non-profit to enable financial controls to maintain affordability of the homes. For example, by offering homes at a lower price, a time frame could be put in place in which you would not be able to turn around and sell your home for a higher price.

In terms of the Density Bonus Ordinance, Town Council revoked the ordinance from the Town of Bluffton Zoning Ordinance in October 2005. The reason for such action was that the Town Council and Bluffton community did not feel that the ordinance was satisfying its original intent. It is recommended that the Town adopt a Form Based Code and inclusionary zoning regulations to further the objectives of the intent of the Density Bonus Ordinance, therefore eliminating the need to reinstate the ordinance.

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

As described in previous sections of this report, the Old Town Master Plan includes a wide variety of improvements to infrastructure. These improvements will be phased over several years, with some relying on coordinate private-sector development activities. The Town's current Capital Improvements Program for 2006 - 2011 includes budget allocations for pathways and trails, drainage improvements, roadway improvements, park development, new facilities, planning initiatives, and land acquisition in Old Town. The following are general descriptions of key capital improvement projects that will be required to realize the implementation of the Old Town Master Plan. The following descriptions should be incorporated in upcoming capital improvement project funding.

### *Reconstruct May River Road/Bruin Road*

As Old Town continues to evolve, May River Road/Bruin Road must be transformed from a high-speed thoroughfare to a restored centerpiece of the Bluffton community. The Town is currently undergoing a plan for streetscape improvements to the roadway and construction is scheduled to begin in 2006. The Town should continue to work with the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) to tame the street and create a more livable balance between vehicles and pedestrians. The Town should work with SCDOT to implement the street sections included in the Old Town Master Plan.

### *Infrastructure Improvements*

The sewer system should be expanded to service every structure in Old Town.

### *Initiate Increased Tree Plantings*

In order to continue the legacy of tree-lined streets, the Town must plan more trees on an annual basis. If more trees are not planted in the coming years, then in the next fifty years Old Town won't be the same as the place people love and cherish today. For the next 5 years or more there should be a sustained investment in the Town's annual budget to restoring and maintaining Old Town's tree canopy.

### *Acquire and Improve a Waterfront Park*

It is recommended that a riverfront park be created at the terminus of Calhoun Street (across the street from the Church of the Cross). There are several ways for the Calhoun Street park to become a reality. One way is for the Town to gently approach the property owner to see about purchasing the property. The Town should establish a parcel assembly program and land bank to reserve funds for the purchase of the land.

### *Improve Pedestrian/Cyclist Facilities on Bridges*

To provide improved connections to the river, pedestrian and cyclist facilities along the existing bridges on Bridge Street should be added. Such facilities could include improved sidewalks and an area for walkers and cyclists to stop on the bridge and take-in the magnificent views of the marshlands and May River.

### *Upgrade the Town Dock*

The Town Dock at the end of Calhoun Street could be further enhanced as part of the implementation of the Calhoun Street park.

### *Build a New Town Hall*

As the town continues to grow, there is the need for a new Town Hall. There has been much discussion about moving the Town Hall out of Old Town, but it is recommended that the Town retain some form of government activity in Old Town. It is recommended that a new structure be built in Old Town to house Town Council and the day-to-day operations of town government. The Illustrative Master Plan highlights several locations for civic buildings, including the possible location of a new Town Hall at the four-way stop.



## **PROMOTE OLD TOWN**

### **16. Promote the Old Town Master Plan**

Continuing to spread the word about this plan and successful initial projects is vital for implementation. A variety of media should be used: brochures, websites, or television are some common methods. Promote the plan so that it will take on a life of its own and continue to work for Old Town for years to come. The Town should host its own promotion efforts, as well as work with the Chamber of Commerce, Old Town Merchants Association, and Historical Preservation Society.

### **17. Celebrate**

It is important to celebrate Bluffton's uniqueness and discover ways to promote Old Town's strengths. With a high degree of community input in the charrette process, the message is clear that Bluffton citizens are proud of their community. The Old Town Master Plan should serve to fit all the pieces together to continue to make Bluffton a first-rate town. The City, Chamber of Commerce, and other local organizations should promote the high quality of life of living, visiting, and shopping in Old Town through various media techniques, both on a regional and national scale.

### **18. The Bluffton Historical Preservation Society**

The Bluffton Historical Preservation Society plays a significant role in the preservation of historic assets in Old Town and in the promotion of Bluffton as a prime destination for heritage tourism. The Preservation Society should continue to promote Old Town and its historic resources, and should work with the Old Town Merchants Society to better increase awareness of retail establishments and art galleries along Calhoun Street. The Preservation Society, in coordination with the Town, should pursue a revolving fund program similar to that of the Historic Savannah Foundation.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

### **19. Conduct Annual Inventories of Land Uses**

An annual inventory of land use allows prospective developers and businesses to understand the supply and thus the need or demand for various land uses. The inventories should include housing, retail, and office uses, among others. The inventories would show opportunities in the market as well as trends of current development in Old Town. The Town should conduct annual inventories of its land use using the Town's Geographic Information System (GIS) system, and make the results available on the Town's website.

### **20. Business Location**

As each component of the Old Town Master Plan is implemented, the Old Town Merchants Society should create and update a detailed list of the businesses and services to target for locating (or relocating) to Old Town. Bluffton should look for local tenants that will open a second location in Old Town. For example, perhaps a local outdoor sporting goods store or successful restaurant would be willing to open a second location in Old Town. These successful business owners could ride the popular support for their current location into a new venue.

### **21. Old Town Merchants Society**

The Old Town Merchants Society should continue to promote Old Town as a regional destination for arts, shopping, and culture and should work with the Town, Chamber of Commerce, and Bluffton Historical Preservation Society to strengthen visitor awareness. The society should collaborate with the Town on the implementation of economic development programs and should assist new and existing businesses in creating a more complete retail center of Old Town.

### **22. Technical Assistance for Businesses and Retailers**

Small startup retail businesses typically need expert assistance in areas such as store layout, lighting design, inventory controls and information systems for understanding consumer preferences. Programs could also include assistance with design and permitting to redevelop property in accordance with the proposed Form Based Code.

Business assistance is a task to be undertaken through a Small Business Investment Corporation (SBIC), Municipal Improvement District (MID), or the Chamber of Commerce. It is recommended that the Town, Chamber, and local businesses collaborate in formation of an SBIC to handle this function. Because of its ability to leverage federal funding, an SBIC could potentially have a greater effect for the same amount of local funding.

### **23. Promote Retail, but not Everywhere**

Old Town retail is a proxy for the vitality of the local economy. The retail core must have enough concentration of use that it is worthwhile for people to visit and to stay. For example, retail isolated and scattered throughout town loses some of its ability to draw people based upon the liveliness of the district. Retailers move to an area in the expectation of support in the form of nearby shops and the foot traffic they generate. The Old Town Master Plan should be used as a guide for locating retail along Calhoun Street and its intersection with May River Road.

## FUNDING MECHANISMS

### 24. Initiate a Wayfinding Signage Program

The Town, Old Town Merchants Society, and local business owners should work together to implement a wayfinding signage program for Old Town. The community should create a unified vision through signage to promote Old Town. Existing signs should be consolidated into a uniform, user-friendly pattern of signage. Wayfinding signage will assist residents and visitors with the location of shopping, parking, historic properties, and other areas of interest.

To achieve the goals of the Old Town Master Plan, funding will be necessary. Public funding mechanisms for infill development and redevelopment include allocating Town funds in the General Fund and Capital Improvement Program, grants from public and private sources, general obligation bonds approved by the public, donations, and general fund expenditures. The Town has recently instilled a Tax Increment Financing district and a Municipal Improvement District. Funding assistance for private development and economic development includes New Market Tax Credits, Historic Tax Credits, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, Federal Loan Guarantees to financial institutions, federal funding to assist local Community Development Corporations, revolving loan funds set up by local financing institutions for redevelopment and business, and, last but by no means least, standard financing for market rate development. The following descriptions provide additional detail about potential financial assistance for both public and private development projects.

### 25. Tax Increment Financing

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a way of dedicating the new revenue that comes from rising property values in a designated redevelopment area to fund redevelopment costs in that same area. This is based on state legislation. After a base year during which the redevelopment district is established, as property values rise during subsequent years, any tax collected in excess of the base year's revenue (the increment) is placed into a special fund. The monies in the special fund can be used to pay debt service on revenue bonds. The funds can be used as a revenue stream for issuing and paying bonds that finance projects within the defined district that are consistent with a redevelopment plan. Revenue bonds funded by tax increment do not constitute a portion of the pub-

lic debt secured by the general fund, and are tax exempt for state and municipal tax purposes.

A TIF district was recently approved for Bluffton by the Town Council. In the allocation of funds generated from the TIF district, the Town should prioritize infrastructure improvements in Old Town and provide funding as appropriate.

### 26. Municipal Improvement District

A Municipal Improvement District (MID) is a special taxing district created with the consent of its property owners that allows the Town to levy a tax to pay for specific services and improvements agreed upon by the Town and property owners. MID's are used to pay for such things as street cleaning and maintenance of special features, programs such as planters and street furnishings, maintenance of parking areas, etc. A MID is just one of the options for the Town to pursue should special funding be necessary for the realization of the initiatives.

### 27. General Obligation Bonding

According to South Carolina general statutes, a municipality can issue general obligation debt up to a level not exceeding 8% of the total assessed taxable value of property. Unlike tax increment financing, general obligation bonding is not restricted to a specified area and does not require the approval of Beaufort County or the Beaufort County School Board. Because the security for general obligation bonds is the full faith and credit of the municipality, local decisions to use general obligation bonding are significant. It should be considered that Old Town is of critical importance to many aspects of the Town's long term prosperity and the Town's general obligation bonding capacity should be used to foster redevelopment, preservation, and public improvements.

## 28. Revolving Fund

A Revolving Fund is a low-interest financing pool set up by local lenders or a local non-profit. Revolving funds can be used for a variety of purposes, yet perhaps most applicable for Old Town is historic preservation. The Historic Savannah Foundation's Revolving Fund is a model for the establishment and success of a revolving fund. Like most traditional revolving funds, Historic Savannah Foundation purchases endangered historic structures and holds them for resale to a new owner committed to restoration. Historic Savannah Foundation retains a restrictive covenant on the property to assure its future preservation and maintenance. The Town should meet with local lenders and the preservation community to assess the potential for a revolving fund to assist with historic preservation efforts in Old Town.

## 29. Small Business Investment Corporations

Small Business Investment Corporations (SBIC's) are business development venture funds for business creation and development that are regulated by the Small Business Administration. The federal government will match local funding at a three to one ratio. What this means is that if local investors, banks and others form a SBIC with \$1 million in start-up funding, it may be possible to get grants of up to \$3 million to match. The formation and operation of an Old Town SBIC could be a means for creating and retaining business in the area. SBIC's are allowed to use funds for investment in small business and to act as an advisory resource. This means that the SBIC employees could fund and advise businesses on issues such as effective use of information technology, effective retailing practices, financial management, employee management, efficient use of resources, etc.

It is suggested that the Town, the Chamber of Commerce, Greater Beaufort-Hilton Head Economic Development Authority and local busi-

nesses collaborate in the formation of an SBIC. Because of the Federal program offering three-to-one leveraging of local funding, SBIC's can be more effective in using local funds than business assistance organizations that do not have access to the program.

## 30. Tax Credits

Tax credits can be very powerful funding incentives for private development. There are three basic credits available now that have application in redevelopment: New Market Tax Credits; Federal Historic Rehabilitation tax credit; and Low-Income Housing Tax credits. The rules for tax credit investment are laid out in the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. Tax credits allow a dollar for dollar reduction in tax (not income) and thus are of use to anyone with a need for tax reduction. Tax credits are often sold (securitized) to investors, allowing non-profits and project owners unable to use them to gain funding for construction and other allowable project costs.

There should be a designated person on Town staff to manage grants and tax credit programs, and to educate the public on the variety of funding sources available for investing in the Old Town.

### *New Market Tax Credits*

New Market Tax Credits permit taxpayers to receive a credit against Federal income taxes for making qualified equity investments in designated Community Development Entities (CDEs). The credit was authorized by Congressional House Bill 12392, which outlines the availability and terms of use for the tax credit (more information can be found at [www.cdfifund.gov](http://www.cdfifund.gov)). New market tax credits require the designation of eligible census tracts by the federal government. Old Town does

not include any census tracts designated as being eligible for these credits. If deemed a viable option for funding, the Town could pursue the designation of Old Town as an eligible location for New Market Tax Credits.

### *Low-Income Housing Tax Credits*

Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC's) can be used for providing housing to households at or below 60% of median income and provide either 4% or 8% credits. The median household income by household size is calculated every year by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. It is not necessary for all units in a building to be affordable to receive the tax credit; the credit applies only to those units that are eligible. To receive the credit, the units must be kept affordable for fifteen years to receive ten years of tax credits. Old Town projects that include housing should be encouraged to contribute to the goal of a mixed-income community, and the use of LIHTC's can help to make it financially feasible to include affordable housing.

### *State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits*

State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits require that the property be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as a contributing property in a historic district. The Rehabilitation Tax Credits are dollar-for-dollar reductions in income tax liability for taxpayers who rehabilitate historic buildings. Credits are available from both the federal government and the State of South Carolina. The amount of the credit is based on total rehabilitation costs. The state credit is 25% of eligible rehabilitation expenses. In some cases, taxpayers can qualify under both programs, allowing them to claim credits of 45% of their eligible rehabilitation expenses.

#### *Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits*

Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits require that the project be in a historic district as a contributing structure or that the structure is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Rehabilitation tax credits can be applied to 20% of eligible project costs. The Bluffton Preservation District includes those parcels and properties contained within the existing National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) District, plus several additional parcels adjacent the NRHP District.

Historic rehabilitation tax credits and LIHTC's can be applied on the same project. This means that for affordable housing units in Old Town, a credit from 45 to 48 percent could be achieved in redevelopment.

#### *Conservation Credit*

South Carolina allows a tax credit for taxpayers who voluntarily convey land, or interests in land, to a qualified conservation organization. The credit may be up to \$250 per acre of qualifying property, not to exceed a total credit of \$52,500 per year.

An information program to familiarize developers and property owners with tax credit opportunities should be undertaken by the Town. This could be performed effectively as an addition to the Town web site, which is already an excellent resource. Elements would include explanations of the credits, links to credit websites, and downloadable information and application forms. Pro forma templates for calculating tax credits would also be useful for those not familiar with credits.

### **31. Grants**

Private grants from foundations are available through application by the Town, community development corporations and other community oriented non-profit organizations. Finding grants can be daunting as there are literally thousands of foundations and grant givers; most organizations that rely upon such funding hire what is termed a "development specialist" to research grants and write proposals.

Foundation grants are more commonly available for purposes such as greenspace preservation and parks development than for infrastructure development. Organizations such as the Trust for Public Land, for example, are often able to purchase land in time-sensitive circumstances and transfer ownership to a city or redevelopment agency under circumstances that the land will remain as permanent greenspace.

It is suggested that the Town train a staff member in grants research and writing, and to research and apply for private foundation opportunities as well.

### **32. Stormwater Utility Fund**

The Town should establish a Stormwater Utility Fund. This fund would account for the proceeds from a special property tax assessment restricted for making stormwater drainage improvements. In the long term, the stormwater utility fund could provide assistance to Old Town capital improvements that involve storm water infrastructure.

### **33. South Carolina Department of Commerce**

The South Carolina Department of Commerce oversees awards of Federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) funding to local governments for purposes ranging from commercial revitalization to community infrastructure to neighborhood revitalization. The purpose of the CDBG program is to provide decent housing, economic opportunities, a suitable living environment primarily for people with low to moderate incomes.

Grants are awarded to local governments for projects that meet one of three objectives:

- Benefit low and moderate income persons
- Aid in the prevention or elimination of slums and blighted conditions
- Meet other urgent community development needs where existing conditions are an immediate threat to the public health and welfare and where other finances are not readily available to meet such needs.

Bluffton is a CDBG recipient and in the past has received funds for neighborhood revitalization and community infrastructure. The Town should continue its efforts to secure CDBG funding for neighborhoods and infrastructure; in addition, the Town should work to secure funding for commercial revitalization for streetscape and façade improvements. The Town should explore eligibility of Old Town for similar grant opportunities in the future.

### **34. South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism**

To achieve the goals set forth in the First Principles and Big Moves with regards to the preservation of the natural environment, the Town should pursue funding for parks and open spaces through the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. A list of applicable funds and application deadlines are included below.

#### *Park and Recreation Development Fund*

The Park & Recreation Development Fund provides technical assistance and administers grant programs for development of public recreational opportunities throughout the state. All grant programs administered by this office are reimbursable funds from various sources with specific qualifications and restrictions. The nature of the fund is a non-competitive program and funds are available to eligible local governmental entities within each county area for development of new public recreation facilities or enhancement/renovations to existing facilities. Projects need endorsement of a majority weighted vote factor of the County Legislative Delegation Members. Grant awards can cover up to 80% of a project cost and require a minimum 20% local match. The grant cycle for new project consideration is monthly and the application deadline is the 10th of each month. Eligible entities are notified of new fund allocation amounts each July.

#### *Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)*

The Land & Water Conservation Fund provides technical assistance and administers grant programs for development of public recreational opportunities throughout the state. All grant programs administered by this office are reimbursable funds from various sources with specific qualifications and restrictions. LWCF is intended for land acquisition or facility development for outdoor recreation. Awards are on a competitive basis and applications are graded using an Open Project Selection Process reviewed by a grading team. Grant awards can cover up to 50% of a project cost, requiring a minimum 50% local match. The grant cycle is annual, and eligible governments are notified in December of each year.

#### *Recreational Trails Program*

The Recreational Trails Program provides technical assistance and administers grant programs for development of public recreational opportunities throughout the state. The Recreational Trails funding is intended for trails development for motorcycles, ATV's, mountain bikes, equestrians or hikers. Awards are made on a competitive basis to qualified private organizations, local government entities, and State or Federal agencies. Applications are graded using an Open Project Selection process. Grant awards can cover up to 80% of a project cost and require a minimum 20% local match. Applications are solicited annually in September and are due on October 31.

#### *Recreation Land Trust Fund*

The Recreation Land Trust Fund provides grant funding that can only be used for the acquisition of land for the purpose of public recreation. Awards are made on a competitive basis to eligible governmental entities. Applications are graded using an open project selection process. Grant awards can cover up to 50% of the cost of a land purchase and require a minimum 50% local match. Eligible government entities are notified of the opportunity to apply for funding each December and applications are due annually in March.



street sections



appendix **A**

## OLD TOWN STREET SECTIONS

Appendix A documents the recommended street sections for Old Town. The street sections are based on existing great streets found in Old Town, as well as great streets located throughout the region. During the planning process the planning team walked every street in Old Town and recorded the existing conditions of each. Planners noted the width of the rights-of ways, as well as the width of travel lanes and sidewalks. The team studied tree placement, existing streetscape elements, and building placement along each street. From this analysis a series of street sections were created.

The physical location of streets and street types are identified in the Old Town Street Atlas. The corresponding street sections identify the necessary right-of-way, pavement width, street use, parking, sidewalks, tree plantings, and other streetscape elements. All utilities should be placed underground; existing overhead utilities should be removed and placed underground.

It is recommended that the Town adopt the Old Town street atlas and street sections into its Development Standards Ordinance. Any proposed roadway improvements must maintain the integrity of the Old Town street types and corresponding street sections. In regards to street width, the right-of-way widths and street section specifications found in the following street sections shall apply.



May River Road



Calhoun Street



Water Street



Boundary Street

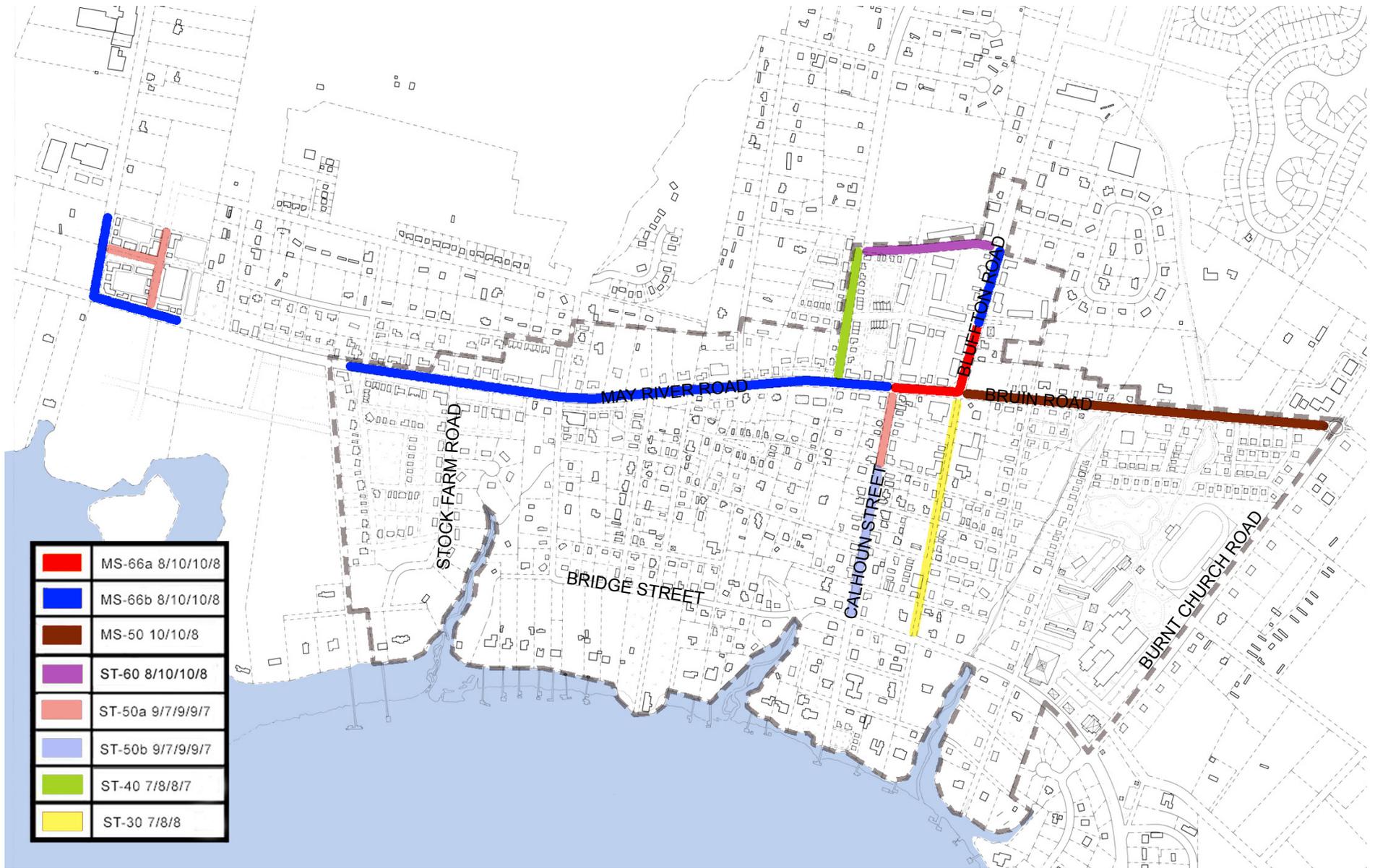


Wharf Street

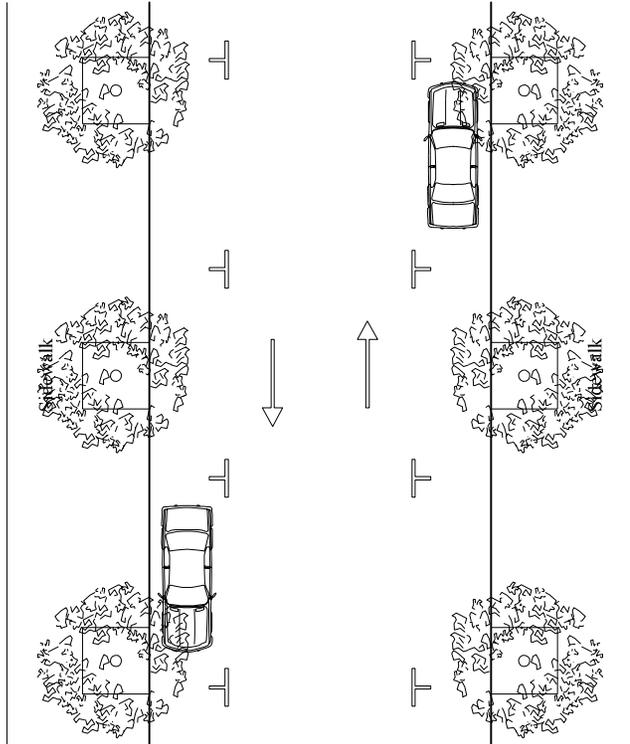
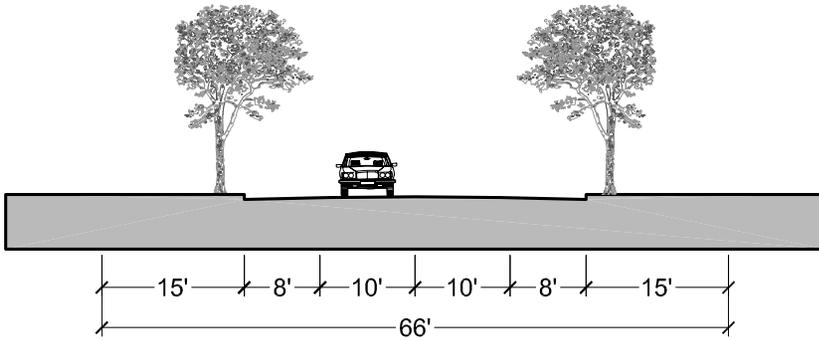


Bridge Street

Old Town Street Atlas

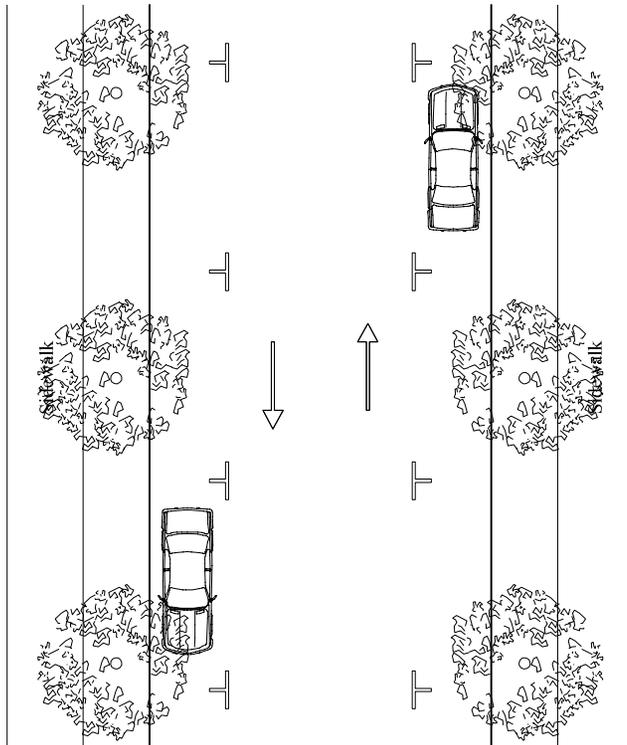
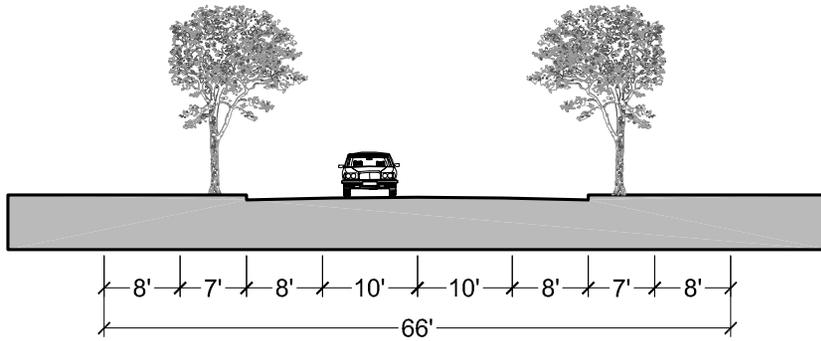


Main Street (MS) - 66a 8/10/10/8



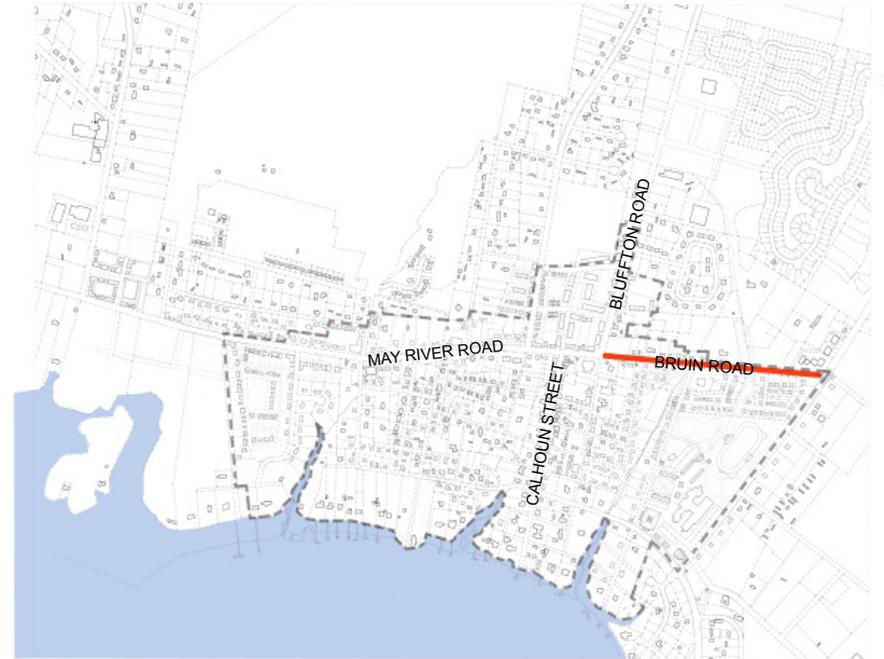
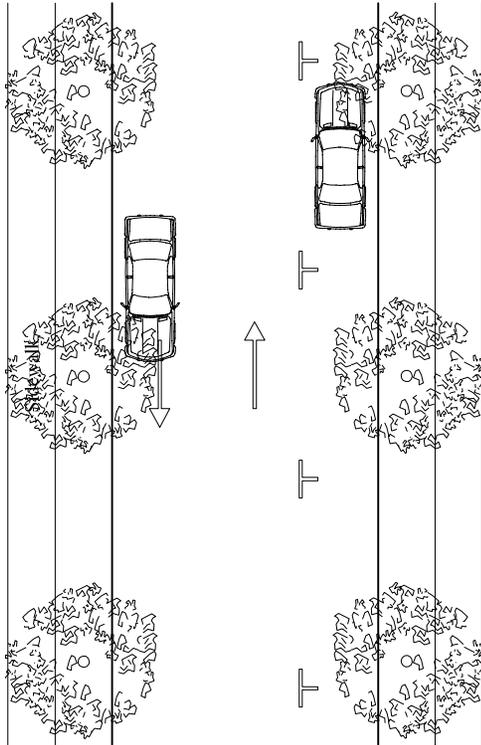
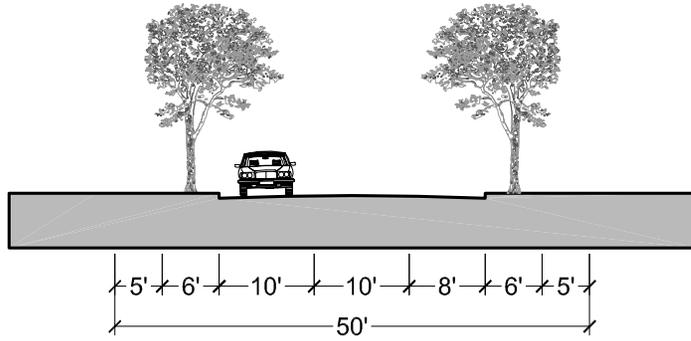
Street Name	MS-66a 8/10/10/8
Street Type	Main Street
R.O.W.	66 feet
Paved Area	36 feet
Intended Movement	Slow Movement
Lanes	2 Lanes
Parallel Parking	Both Sides
Travel Lane Width	10 feet
Walkway Type	8' Sidewalk
Planter Type	7' X 7' Tree Wells
Landscape Type	Trees at 30' o.c. Avg.

Main Street (MS) - 66b 8/10/10/8



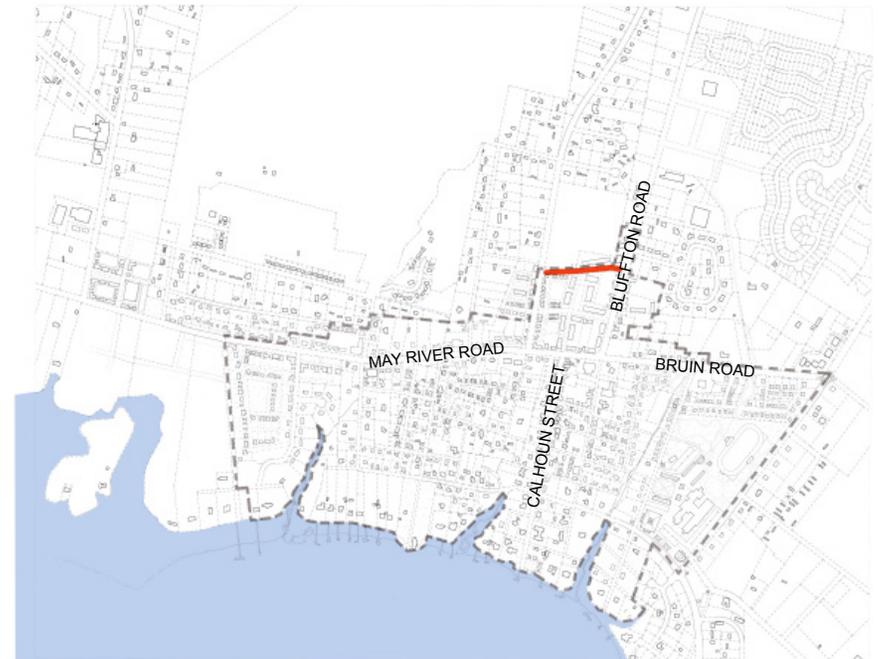
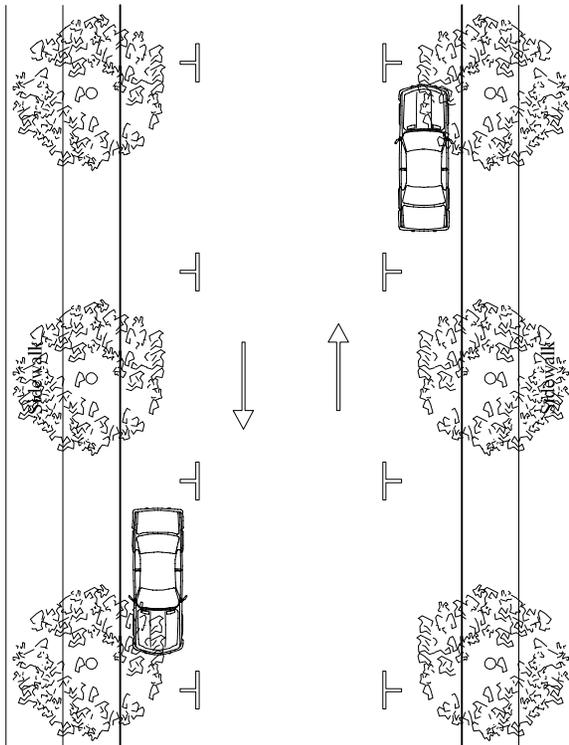
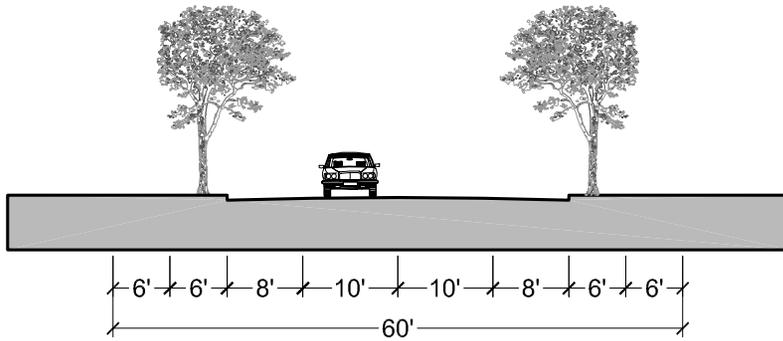
Street Name	MS-66b 8/10/10/8
Street Type	Main Street
R.O.W.	66 feet
Paved Area	36 feet
Intended Movement	Slow Movement
Lanes	2 Lanes
Parallel Parking	Both Sides
Travel Lane Width	10 feet
Walkway Type	8' Sidewalk
Planter Type	7' Planting Strip
Landscape Type	Trees at 30' o.c. Avg.

Main Street (MS) - 50 10/10/8



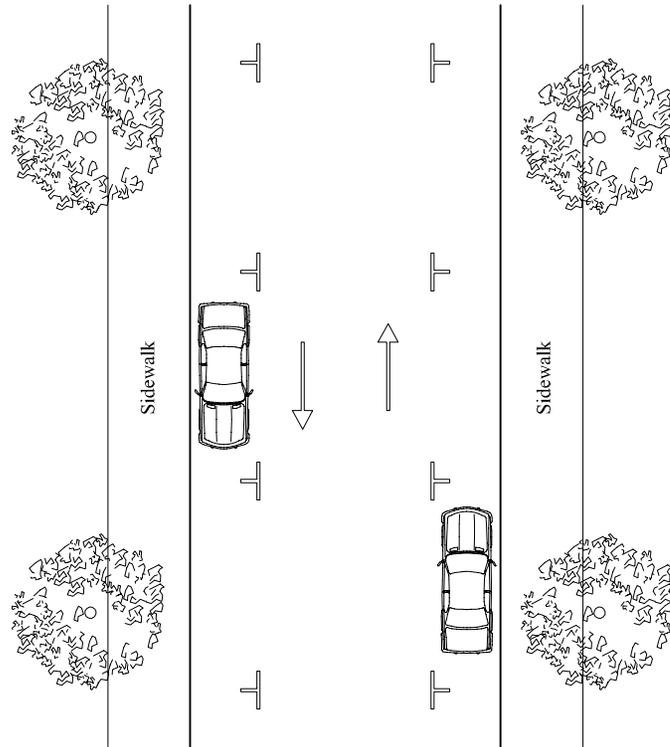
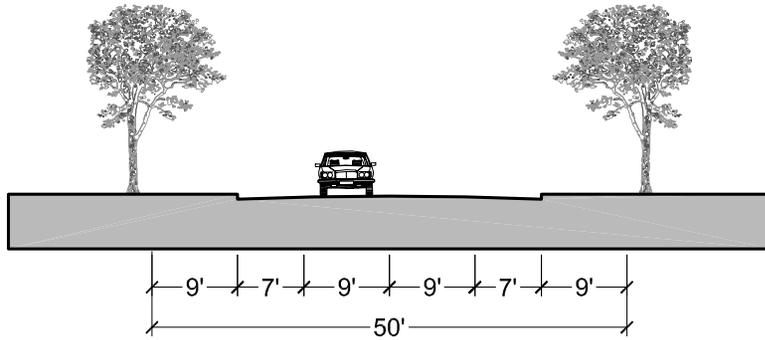
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Street Type	Main Street
R.O.W.	50 feet
Paved Area	28 feet
Intended Movement	Slow Movement
Lanes	2 Lanes
Parallel Parking	One Side
Travel Lane Width	10 feet
Walkway Type	5' Sidewalk
Planter Type	6' Planting Strip
Landscape Type	Trees at 30' o.c. Avg.

Street (ST) - 60 8/10/10/8



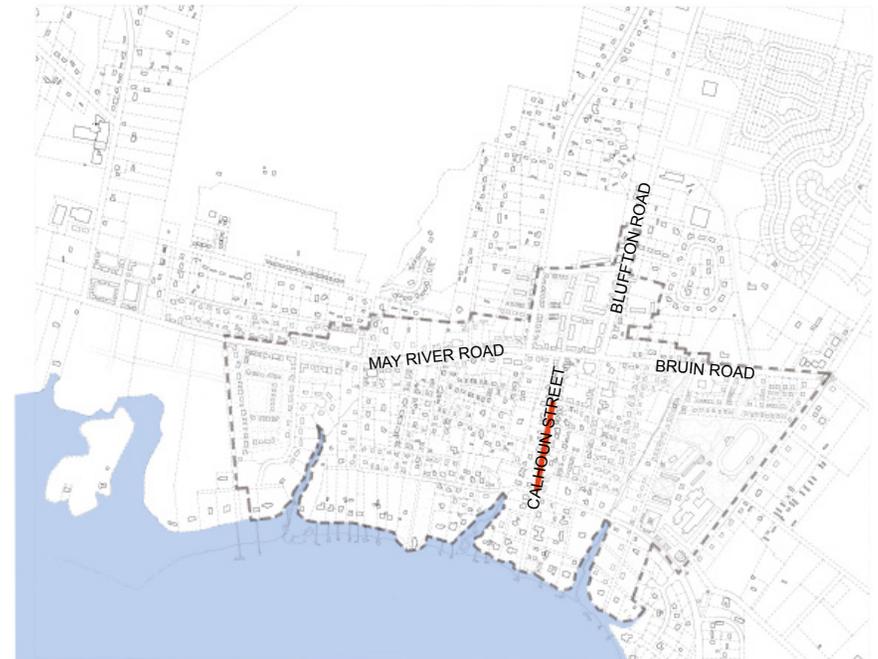
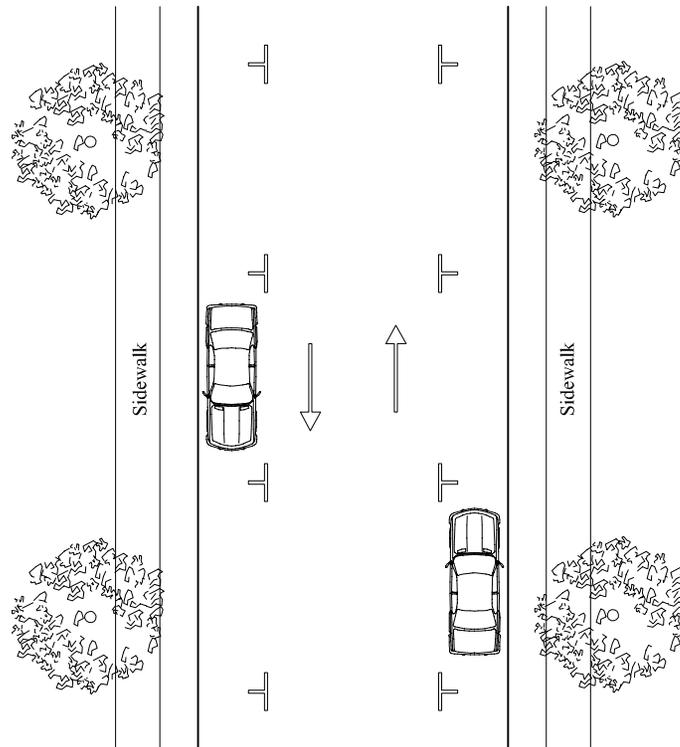
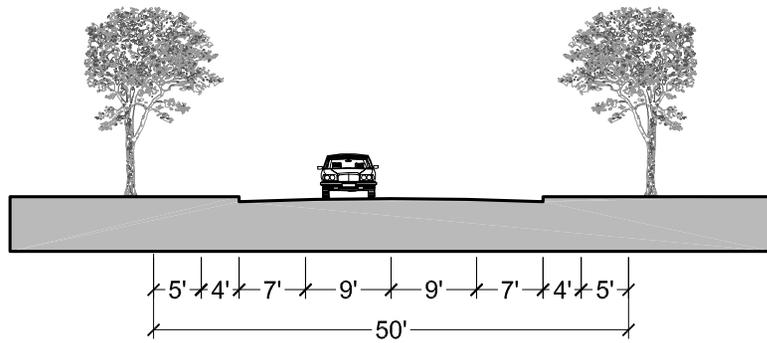
Street Name	ST-60 8/10/10/8
Street Type	Street
R.O.W.	60 feet
Paved Area	36 feet
Intended Movement	Slow Movement
Lanes	2 Lanes
Parallel Parking	Both Sides
Travel Lane Width	10 feet
Walkway Type	6' Sidewalk
Planter Type	6' Planting Strip
Landscape Type	Trees at 30' o.c. Avg.

Street (ST) - 50a 7/9/9/7



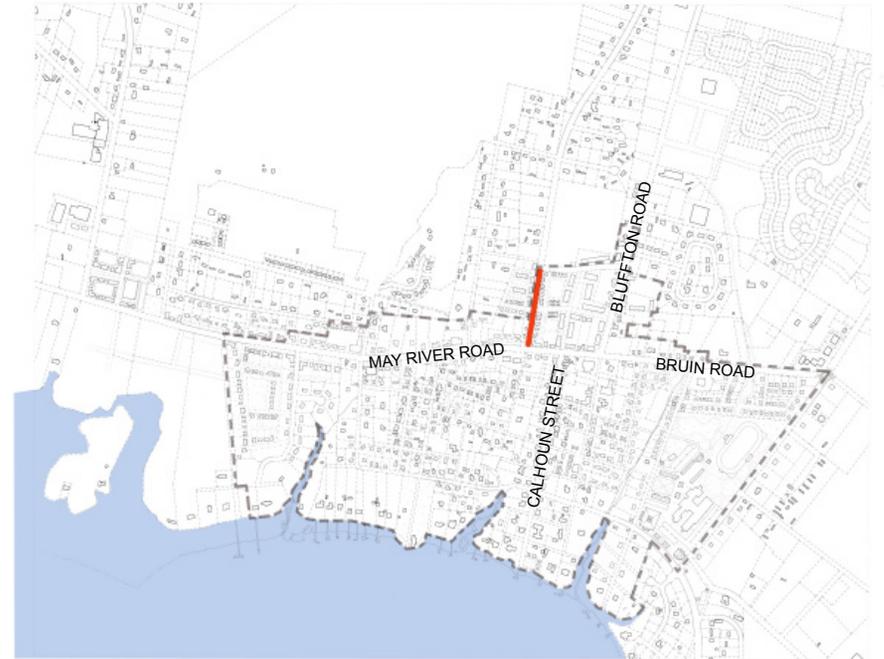
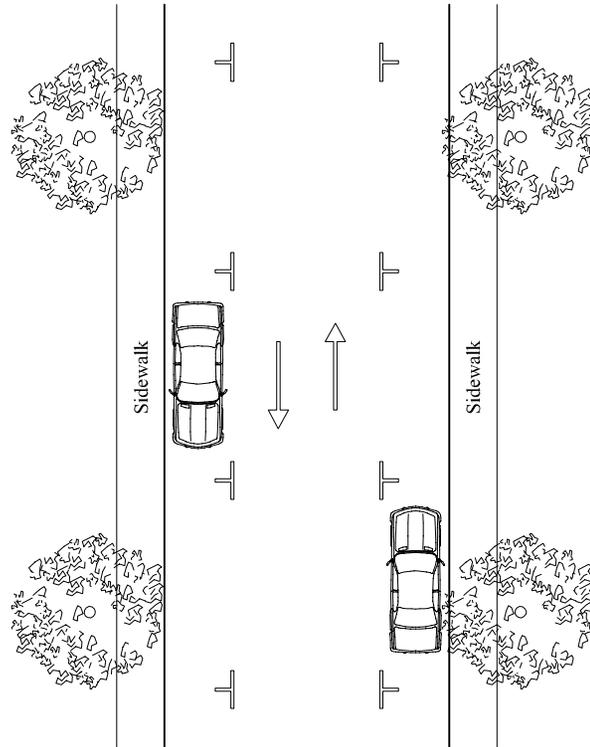
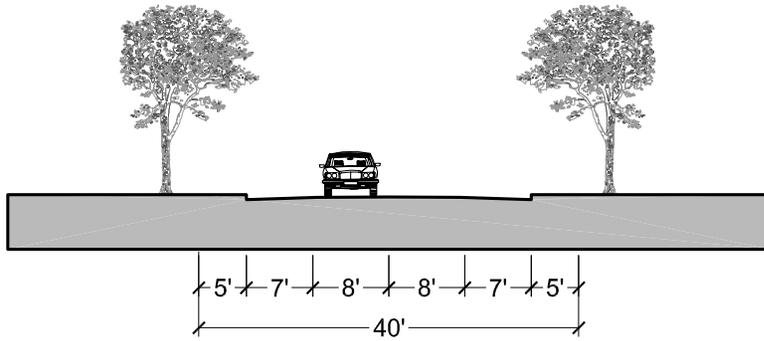
Street Name	ST-50a 7/9/9/7
Street Type	Street
R.O.W.	50 feet
Paved Area	32 feet
Intended Movement	Slow Movement
Lanes	2 Lanes
Parallel Parking	Both Sides
Travel Lane Width	9 feet
Walkway Type	9' Sidewalk
Planter Type	None
Landscape Type	Trees at 30' o.c. Avg.

Street (ST) - 50b 7/9/9/7



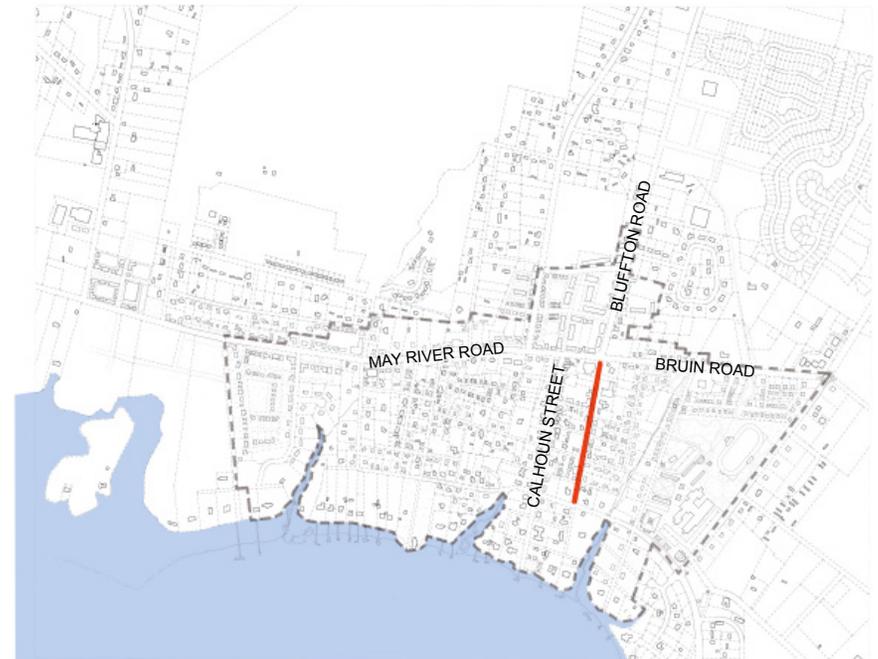
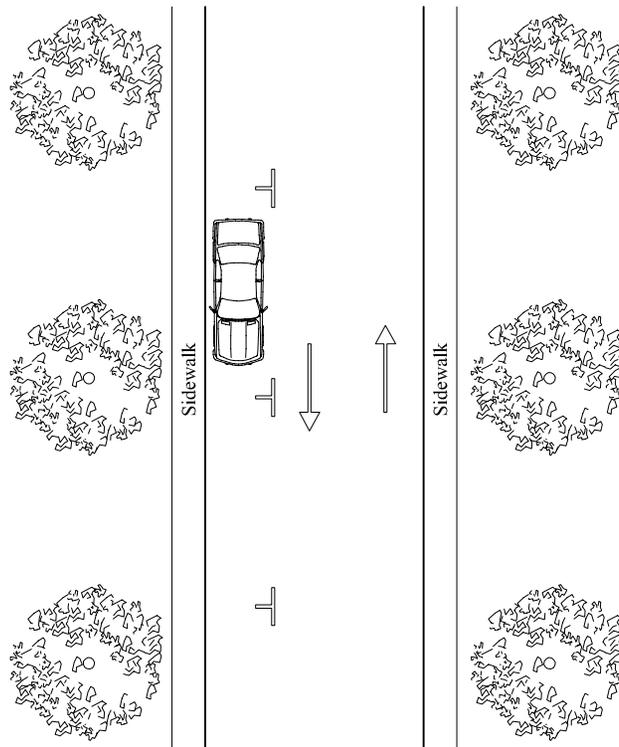
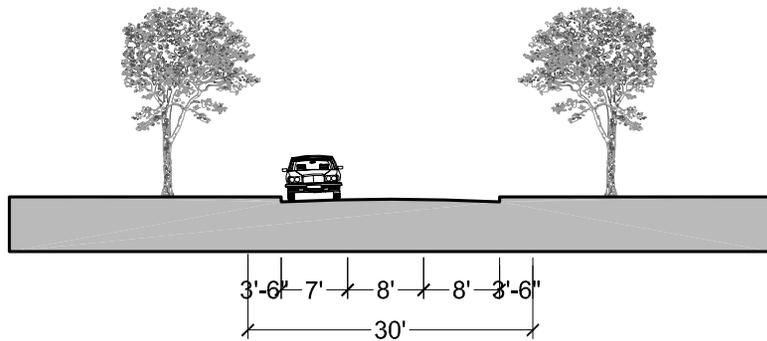
Street Name	ST-50b 7/9/9/7
Street Type	Street
R.O.W.	50 feet
Paved Area	32 feet
Intended Movement	Slow Movement
Lanes	2 Lanes
Parallel Parking	Both Sides
Travel Lane Width	9 feet
Walkway Type	5' Sidewalk
Planter Type	None
Landscape Type	Trees at 30' o.c. Avg.

Street (ST) - 40 7/8/8/7



Street Name	ST-40 7/8/8/7
Street Type	Street
R.O.W.	40 feet
Paved Area	30 feet
Intended Movement	Slow Movement
Lanes	2 Lanes
Parallel Parking	Both Sides
Travel Lane Width	8 feet
Walkway Type	5' Sidewalk
Planter Type	None
Landscape Type	Trees at 30' o.c. Avg.

Street (ST) - 30 7/8/8



Street Name	ST-30 7/8/8
Street Type	Street
R.O.W.	30 feet
Paved Area	23 feet
Intended Movement	Very Slow Movement
Lanes	2 Lanes
Parallel Parking	One Side
Travel Lane Width	8 feet
Walkway Type	3.5' Sidewalk
Planter Type	None
Landscape Type	Trees at 30' o.c. Avg.