The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset. The sun is a bright, glowing orb in the upper center, partially obscured by dark, horizontal clouds. The sky is filled with vibrant orange and yellow light that reflects on the surface of a body of water in the foreground. In the middle ground, a dark silhouette of a forest line is visible against the bright sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
BEAUFORT COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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

- CHARLES FRANKLIN KETTERING

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



Preserve the Natural Beauty of Beaufort County

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

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

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

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

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

- Maintain the pristine waterways of the region
- Maintain and improve the quality of surface waters
- Manage finfish and shellfish resources
- Protect the quality and quantity of groundwater resources
- Identify and protect areas of geological significance
- Conserve open space
- Conserve existing stands of mature trees

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

- Promote a public/private partnership to develop Special Area Management Plans for Port Royal and St. Helena Sounds
- Require a vegetative buffer along all waterways and tidal wetlands of the County, which:
 - provides effective flood control
 - protects the land from waterway erosion
 - removes sediment and man-made pollutants before it reaches the water
 - provides habitat for wildlife
- Create an integrated stormwater management program
- Develop County-wide standards that improve the quality of stormwater runoff to pre-development levels
- Reduce the amount of "impervious surfaces," such as roads, driveways, sidewalks and rooftops, which increase stormwater runoff
- Direct new development to Priority Investment Areas, serviced by public sewers

- Promote new and better ways of disposing of wastewater
- Develop a boating impact management plan, including educating recreational boaters about how to reduce their impact on the waterways of Beaufort County
- Develop septic system density standards for areas not served by public sewers
- Encourage open spaces and greenways that maintain existing vegetation
- Develop an inventory of existing live oaks and other hardwood trees and enforce efforts to preserve these trees
- Protect areas that are home to endangered or threatened wildlife species
- Strengthen the existing River Protection Overlay District County-wide to protect water quality
- Adjust for wetland areas in development density calculations
- Require permits for timber harvesting and provide incentives for maintaining land for forestry

Create New Industries and Jobs to Keep Our Economy Strong

The global economy of the 21st Century demands that areas with a limited economic base, such as Beaufort County, diversify in order to succeed.

Beaufort County's dependence on a few industries creates a potentially dangerous situation. While the number of jobs has grown significantly in the past several years, most of these jobs are low-wage positions in service and retail trade industries. The percentage of higher-paying manufacturing jobs has declined.

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

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

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

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

- Encourage expansion of existing businesses and the creation of home grown businesses in the rural business option
- Create an "incubator" program to help small start-up businesses succeed in Beaufort County by offering highly specialized and concentrated business planning services and training
- Preserve and enhance the tourism industry
- Aggressively recruit high technology and "clean" industries that do not compromise the quality of life enjoyed by County residents. Target industries include:

- wholesale trade	- electronics
- transportation and warehousing	- medical equipment
- light manufacturing	- information technology
- nursing and home health care	- biotechnology
- telecommunications	- film
- Encourage industry "clustering" that is accessible from residential areas
- Develop the skills necessary for the Beaufort County work force to meet the demands of the changing workplace by expanding programs with the Beaufort County School District, Technical College of the Lowcountry, USC-Beaufort, the Career Education Center and private businesses
- Revitalize selected existing commercial developments
- Encourage transportation programs that make jobs more accessible for workers
- Create a single public/private organization with broad representation to manage economic development and attract new businesses to Beaufort County
- Cooperate with neighboring counties and the State to attract new businesses and industries

Build Better Roads and Encourage Two-Wheeled and Two-Footed Travel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Preserve Our Rich Cultural Heritage

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

The County has a diverse wealth of historic resources including:

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

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

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



- Establish a system to evaluate and designate historic resources for future preservation planning
- Evaluate Beaufort County roads and work with the South Carolina Department of Transportation to designate any eligible road as a South Carolina Scenic Highway
- Monitor all development to determine where archaeological survey reports will be required
- Revise and update the Beaufort County Historic Preservation Ordinance
 - to reflect new information uncovered by the County-wide survey
 - to create a register for sites of local historic significance
 - to set policies for how the ordinance applies to development
- Enforce the Beaufort County Archaeological and Historic Impact Assessment Ordinance
- Expand efforts to involve the public in historic preservation through education
- Maintain the historic character of the Beaufort National Historic Landmark District
- Work with the County Emergency Management Department and Building Codes to develop a plan for protecting historic resources both during and after a natural disaster
- Protect the Sheldon Church ruins
- Establish a special Cultural Protection Overlay district on St. Helena Island

Create Parks and Preserve Open Spaces

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

The Comprehensive Plan will ensure that:

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

The Plan recommends the following actions:

- Develop The Burton Wells Central Park on Port Royal Island to include a recreation center; a wildlife preserve; operations, security and maintenance; and support facilities and services.
- Improve and maintain each of the County's municipal parks, County recreational facilities and school playgrounds, which include:
 - 40 parks and facilities
 - 30 ball fields
 - 4 gymnasiums
 - 8 community centers
 - 2 arts centers
 - 15 tennis courts
- Develop at least one new large County park for southern Beaufort County near Bluffton.
- Preserve greenways—natural areas that often follow linear landscape features, such as rivers, trail systems, streams, highlands or even abandoned railroads—to help protect waterways, wetlands and wildlife.
- Aggressively seek alternative funding sources for parks and recreational activities.
- Develop an additional 17 community parks and seven neighborhood parks to meet current needs.
- Establish a nature center centrally located in the ACE Basin.

Permit Development While Maintaining Beaufort County's Sense of Place

Beaufort County must preserve, protect and enhance the qualities and natural resources that foster a sense of community, make the County a valuable tourist destination and a desirable place to live, work and call home. In order to preserve our way of life, we must find a balance between our rights as private property owners and the rights of our neighbors and the community as a whole. The decisions we make now will have far-reaching implications. What we do will affect our children and our children's children. It is our responsibility to be good stewards of the land and waters of Beaufort County to ensure that the quality of life that we enjoy today will be enjoyed by our descendants many years from now.

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

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

Future Land Use Strategy

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

- Population growth trends

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

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

Priority Investment Areas

Priority Investment Areas are areas in which growth is encouraged in the County. These areas are less environmentally sensitive, and have a concentration of homes and businesses and can support development densities of up to 4-8 units per acre. Development is expected to occur within a five-year horizon in these areas.

Prioritizing capital investment in these areas will allow:

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

The Priority Investment Areas include:

- Community Preservation Areas—existing towns, communities and neighborhoods of the County that have a distinct character, quality and sense of place.
- Residential and Light Commercial Areas—areas of the County that can support new development through existing or anticipated infrastructure and services and have minimal impact on the scenic beauty of the County and its natural environment.

- Regional Commercial—areas of significant commercial development that will have a regional draw and impact.
- Research and Development Districts—areas of non-polluting, clean industries, high-tech industries and low- or no-waste producing industries.

Transitional Investment Areas

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

Rural Investment Areas

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

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to:

- Discourage widespread suburban sprawl and strip commercial development in rural areas
- Preserve water quality by improving the standards for septic systems on rural soils
- Protect wildlife habitat
- Protect mature forest stands
- Preserve scenic views and water access
- Preserve open spaces by clustering homes in new developments and requiring that at least half of each parcel of land be set aside as open space

Special Programs

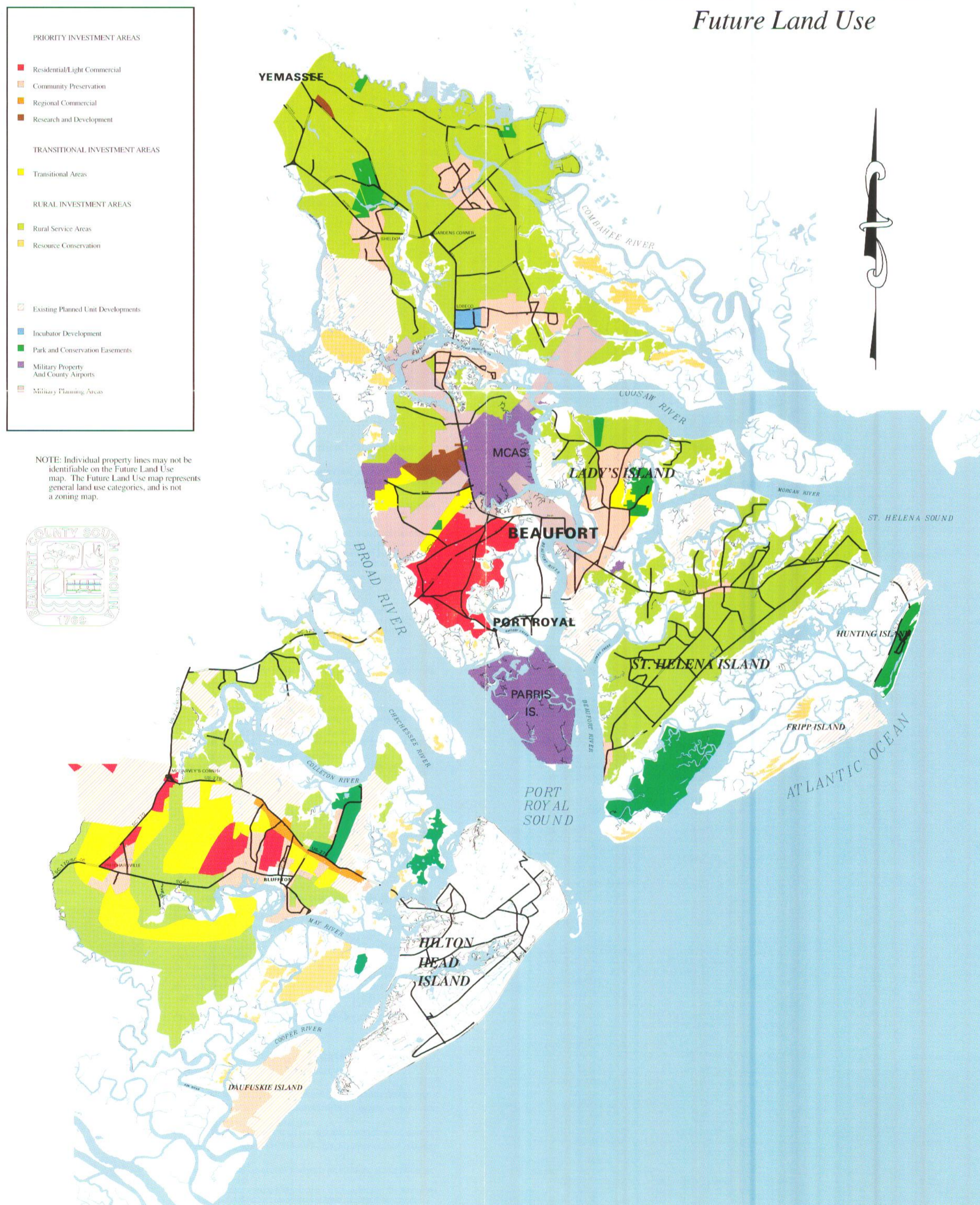
To ensure that we meet the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan as set forth by the people of Beaufort County, several special programs will be implemented:

- A Purchase of Development Rights Program will be pursued by the County to protect certain areas for the public interest. Conservation easements with attending tax breaks also are encouraged.
- A Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program will be investigated and adopted to that ensure development occurs where it is wanted and not where it isn't. TDRs enable a developer to build additional housing in Priority or Transitional areas, while transferring that density from land targeted for preservation.
- Family Exemptions will be offered to all land owners. This concept will help ease the housing issues associated with heirs property and continue to support family compounds across the County. Property owners will be able to:
 - subdivide their property for immediate family members through a simplified subdivision approval process
 - add up to two additional units to an overall density of more than one unit per acre, given additional approved percolation sites for septic systems
- Development agreements will be encouraged to enable landowners to develop their highland tracts of 150 acres or more according to existing laws, while lessening the financial impact of development on the need for public services and infrastructure. Any development agreements will be subject to public participation and review.
- Rural Business Options will allow rural residents to operate a business within their homes or on their property, subject to certain restrictions.
- A Cultural Protection Overlay will be established to preserve culture, landscape and way of life of St. Helena Island. As one of the last remaining locations of Gullah culture, language and customs, the island requires an additional level of development standards to protect this important resource.
- Military Planning Area. Land use near the Marine Corps Air Station must be carefully monitored to ensure that future development is compatible with base operations.

*All photographs in this Executive Summary were shot in Beaufort County ©Eric Horan

BEAUFORT COUNTY

Future Land Use



NOTE: Individual property lines may not be identifiable on the Future Land Use map. The Future Land Use map represents general land use categories, and is not a zoning map.

Ensure Affordable Housing for All Beaufort Residents

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

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

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

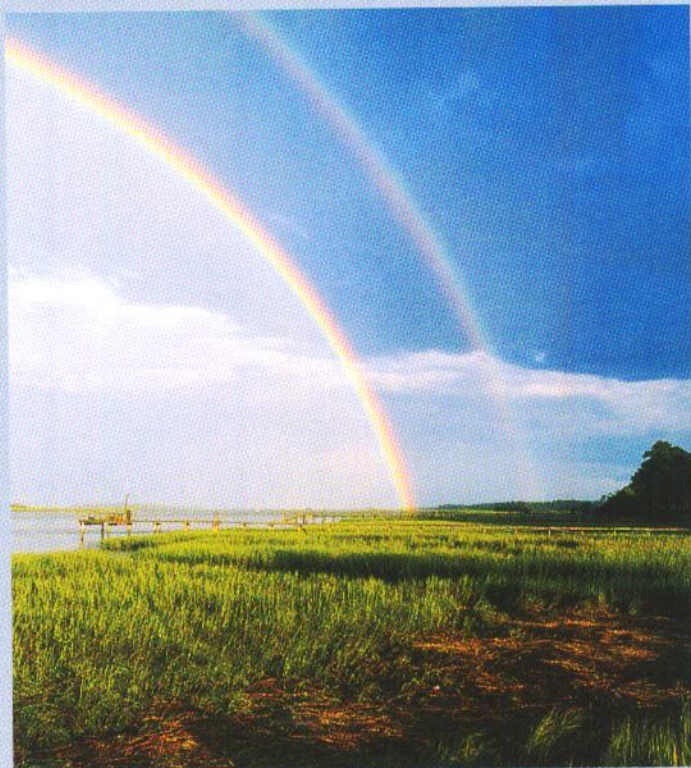
The need for affordable housing is an issue that must be addressed before this housing shortage seriously weakens the area's economic base.

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

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

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

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



Provide Public Services Without Breaking the Bank

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

Public facilities to support growth include:

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

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

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

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

Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment

- Make sure that all developments in Priority Investment Areas over one unit per acre that do not already have public sewer systems use public sewer systems as these systems become available
- Build dry sewer lines in all new developments in Priority Investment Areas where public sewer is not yet available
- BJWSA should find alternative and limited capacity waste water systems to serve areas that are outside the Priority Investment Areas which cannot be served by septic tanks due to public health or environmental problems
- To manage growth County-wide, new development should take place in the Priority Investment Areas. This will ensure that tax dollars are spent wisely during this time of rapid growth
- The County should work with BJWSA, SCDHEC, the Lowcountry Council of Governments (LCOG), and the municipalities within Beaufort County to create a water quality management program
- Strengthen the permitting process locally for septic tanks to keep septic systems from polluting our water

Solid Waste Management

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

Public Safety

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

Educational Facilities

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