

Appendix 4-B

St. Helena Corners Area Community Preservation Plan

History

“In the 1520’s a ship from Spain traveled up the marsh strewn coast of the Atlantic and the crew breathed in the clean salt filled air. As Francisco Gordillo looked out over the land and sea, his eyes captured a scene of beauty. This reminded him of a saint, Santa Elena, so he decided to name this place for her, ‘Punta de Santa Elena.’ This area went from Edisto, South Carolina to Savannah, Georgia and was surrounded by St. Helena Sound, the Combahee River, the Savannah River, and the Atlantic Ocean.” (Goodwine p. 1-2)

The beauty of St. Helena Island continued to impress visitors for many years as they arrived on this Sea Island, which is the last of the viable Gullah/Geechee communities in the Sea Island chain. This island is well known as the home of many historic people and places. From some events on the island, visitors have often heard these words:

*“Oh, none in all the world before
Were ever as glad we!
We’re free on Carolina’s shore,
We’re all at home and free.*

*Thou Friend and Helper of the poor,
Who suffered for our sake,
To open every prison door,
And every yoke to break!*

*Bend low Thy pitying face and mild,
And help us sing and pray;
The hand that blessed the little child,
Upon our foreheads lay.
We hear no more the driver’s horn,
No more the whip we fear,
This holy day that saw Thee born
Was never half so dear.*

*The very oaks are greener clad,
The waters t smile;
Oh, never shone a day so glad
On sweet St. Helena’s Isle.*

*We praise Thee in our songs today,
To Thee in prayer we call,
Make swift the feet and straight the way*

Of freedom unto all.

*Come once again, O blessed Lord!
Come walking on the sea!
And let the mainlands hear the word
That set the island free!*

[Saint Helena Hymn by John Greenleaf Whittier]

Freedom has been something that people long sought on St. Helena Island. The first days of freedom when the Cusabos, Dataws, and others had this island as their homeland. They later shared this homeland with enslaved Africans who would later be known as “Gullahs” and “Geechees.” Yes, but these who were enslaved would also know this as a place of freedom and make it home!

The guns sounded for the beginning of the Civil War sending the European people that had enslaved the Africans on these islands to seek refuge in other places. “Since the ‘owners’ of the land had abandoned St. Helena and the surrounding area, they were not around when it came time for land to be auctioned due to unpaid taxes. After much ado over whether or not former ‘slaves’ should be allowed to bid and what price would be reasonable for the Gullahs and Geechees. ‘On March 9, 1863, exactly one year after the arrival of the Gideonites at Beaufort the first land sales took place.’ (Rose 214) 76,775 acres were put up for sale of which 16,479 were bought by individuals and the rest was allotted to the government.

The average price that individuals paid was \$1 per acre. ‘Several plantations, about 2,000 acres of land, were purchased cooperatively by Negroes, who by pooling their small savings were able to preserve their right to live and work on their own places.’ (Rose 215) This was the beginning of ‘true’ independence for St. Helena’s Gullahs and Geechees.” (Goodwine p. 38-39)

In seeking to protect such independence and culture and to encourage its continued existence, a Cultural Protection Overlay District (CPO) was established as a part of the Zoning District Standards Ordinance. This district serves to:

“The Cultural Protection Overlay (CPO) District is established to provide opportunities to protect natural and/or natural resources found on St. Helena Island. The Comprehensive Plan provides “actions” to be undertaken, which would prevent rural gentrification and displacement of residents. The intent of the CPO District is to protect St. Helena and the Gullah culture from encroaching development pressures. Rapid in-migration would substantially alter the traditional social and cultural character of this area, as new residents represent different values and customs. The gentrification of the island would result in a greater demand for urban services and eventually to the urbanization of the island. This can be particularly acute on St. Helena Island where maintaining the traditional lifestyle becomes cost prohibitive because of the value of land for development.

The CPO District provides additional zoning and development standards based on meeting the following criteria:

- The omnipresence of an ethnic heritage
- Historic structures, settlements, and land use patterns
- Archeological sites
- Significant cultural features and sites”

Many now come to St. Helena Island to dwell there and appreciate its natural and historic beauty. The uniqueness of St. Helena is in its community. “Anyone can live on land, but it is different when the spirit of the land lives in the person. Those who are proud Gullah/Geechee islanders of St. Helena have the land in them along with ‘Gawd.’ They celebrate the land, the language, the heritage, the community, the family, ‘ourstory,’ and their survival on a daily basis.” (Goodwine p. 51)

One place that St. Helena Islanders have always celebrated their culture and community is the Corner Area Community of the island. In this area exist a number of historic buildings that have changed ownership over the years, but have never ceased from being major points of gathering and community empowerment. Thus, the Corner Area is definitely a place that should be preserved.

The Corner Area Community Preservation District encompasses the Corner Community, the eastern portion of the Fuller Community, and the western portion of Indian Hill. Hence the name “Corner Area” instead of simply the “Corner CP District.” All three of the communities have unique stories of their own. Indian Hill has its name due to the Native American mound that many St. Helena Island natives recall playing on as they grew up. The Fuller Community was one of the many rice plantations on St. Helena Island in its hey day.

The Corners Area is seen by all that venture to St. Helena Island. However, even as many journey through it to head to the Penn Center Landmark Historic District which is next to the Corners Area Community Preservation District, they are not aware of the history that they drive by, through, and over. In the Corner Community there are several National Historic Register Sites including:

- Dr. York Bailey’s House
- The Green which has been renamed “Dr. Martin L. King Memorial Park”
- Packing Shed
- Knights of Wise Men Hall
- Corner Store
- Bishop Store

The stories of these buildings and grounds and what they mean to the community cannot be truly felt from the written text. Why the old oak trees have their long Spanish beards and why Old Polowana Road serves as a community landmark can be felt in the interactions of the people of St. Helena. Thus, the Corners Area Community Preservation District has been designed to encourage the continued sustainability of the story of this rich island and to have it always be told through the people.

The Corners Area Community Preservation District is designed as a pedestrian friendly district with a Public Market District in the center of it. As visitors journey to St. Helena Island, the Corners Area Community Preservation District is a place where they will have a chance to interact with the people that actually preserve the community through history, business, crafts, and the unique heritage of the Gullah/Geechee community.¹

Written by Marquette L. Goodwine

Purpose

The Corners Area Plan is designed to serve as a general guide for the development of the community. It addresses land use, historic and cultural preservation, recreational opportunities, traffic circulation and design. As a policy document, appended to the County's Comprehensive Plan, this plan is to be used to guide zoning, subdivision, facilities funding and design, and community development decisions made by government officials and agencies. The Corners Area Plan serves as a foundation and the structure upon which more detailed policies, standards and master plans may be developed.

Process

In 1999 The Corners Area Community Preservation Committee of 12 members, representing the St Helena community was charged with reviewing planning issues; defining a vision; formulating standards for residential and commercial development and developing techniques for historic and cultural preservation for the Corners Area. Significantly, this group provided a critical sounding board for proposals and contributed countless hours of input over the course of about 140 meetings. The solutions to the issues, which this plan analyzes, have emerged as a result of a continuing dialogue with a wide range of participants. To assist the Corners Area CP Committee in its deliberations during its 2-1/2 years of involvement, the Committee sponsored a series of community forums and organized a community workshop. The goal and activities represent the creativity of St Helena residents.

Listed below are the goals and actions derived from the many issues debated during the development of the Corners Area Plan. The Plan reflect what residents believe will help to build the community and preserve the areas culture. Through the planning process the committee identified several important issues to be addressed, each related primarily to the issue of growth and land use.

The fundamental question was how to accommodate growth while maintaining the character of the community and preserving the culture, especially as this process relates to the CPO District. Specifically the Committee had concerns about the following:

- What mix of land uses and development densities are desirable?
- What kinds of businesses are most appropriate and where should they be located?

¹ Gullah/Geechee: The Survival of Africa's Seed in the Winds of the Diaspora Volume I: St. Helena's Serenity ©1995 by Marquette L. Goodwine; Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment ©1976 by Willie Lee Rose
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- What improvements should be made to MLK Park?
- The nature of Highway 21 through the Corners Area
- How to preserve the history of the Corners Area

These issues were all addressed within the framework of keeping in line with the rural character of St. Helena Island and preserving the Gullah/Geechee culture.

Goals and Actions

Community Identity and Design

GOAL: *To make St. Helena's unique cultural heritage central to the development of the Corners Area and ensure that new development respects the rural and historic character of the area.*

Actions:

- Integrate, rather than isolate, housing, shops, workplaces, and public uses that are all essential to the daily life of St Helena's residents.
- Establish design standards that visually and functionally enhance the Corners Area and promote walkable roads for interaction amongst community members and island visitors.
- Develop standards that prevent new buildings from dominating the community's historic structures. The footprint of new buildings visible from Highway 21 can be no larger than 5,000-sq. ft., excluding porches; building height can be no greater than 35 feet and two stories.
- Preserve valuable natural features and scenic features, such as oaks, waterways and canopy roads within the Community Preservation Area.
- Clearly, define the CP boundaries to distinguish between commercial areas and the surrounding rural and agricultural areas.
- Develop appropriate building design and parking strategies. Shared or community parking areas are encouraged.
- Encourage building design and architecture that create visual interest and public open space along roads, maintain an attractive rural environment, and promote informal surveillance of public spaces by building occupants.
- Encourage building design and architecture that emulate the Corners Area building traditions.
- Develop unique sign standards for the Community Preservation Area

General Land Use

GOAL: *To reinforce the Corners Area's importance as the community's historic, cultural, and civic heart, by proactively encouraging a mixture of compatible commercial, residential, civic, and recreational uses to increase community interaction and gathering opportunities.*

Actions:

- Verify that proposed development standards advance the goals of the Cultural Protection Overlay District.
- Limit permitted commercial use size, scale and type to encourage service mainly to St. Helena residents.
- Establish a minimum setback standard that permits buildings to be built close to the road. This slows traffic and creates a pedestrian friendly public space.
- Develop a Public Market District within the Corners Area Community Preservation District. Its purpose is to create a pedestrian-friendly commercial center that retains the character of a rural crossroads, with open green spaces, scenic vistas, a minimum of asphalt paving, preserved historic structures, and community gathering places.
- Limit the amount and visibility of parking from Highway 21.
- Limit residential use to single-family units, duplexes and commercial apartments. Allow accessory dwelling units.
- Acquire land within the Public Market District suitable and sufficient for the development of a public library and additional public service facilities.

Economic Viability

GOAL: *To create conditions that allow and promote programs that foster entrepreneurial opportunities for St. Helena residents.*

Actions:

- Broaden the diversity of goods and services offered to and by St. Helena residents to prevent local sales from "leaking" to surrounding communities.
- Provide an open and inviting business climate for local businesses.
- Promote the retention of existing businesses and the attraction of new local businesses that will serve the St. Helena Community.
- Promote the expansion and enhancement of economic informational resources.
- Promote diverse employment opportunities that support local residents and enable residents to live and work on St Helena.
- Reserve adequate land to accommodate commercial development, sufficient to meet the needs for goods and services for the island and to create jobs.
- Support efforts and investment to upgrade the physical appearance of the Corners by:
 - 1) Developing design criteria to unify the Corners;
 - 2) Promoting pedestrian circulation through the area;
 - 3) Establishing standards for walking paths; and
 - 4) Defining standards for attractive and adequate parking facilities.

Road Design

GOAL: *Develop guidelines for road designs that meet travel demands but also create a safe and pleasant walking environment.*

The road design should "calm", or slow, traffic in the Corners Area through a variety of techniques that have the effect of slowing through traffic, without compromising safety, emergency access, and reasonable flows. Examples of traffic slowing techniques include narrow traffic lanes, changes in road texture to reduce speed and pedestrian crosswalks.

Actions:

- Encourage proper planning for movement of goods to commercial properties. Connector roads that provide access to commercial development shall be designed to accommodate commercial vehicles.
- Retain certain roads as unpaved roads in order to preserve their particular character and beauty. Specifically, preserve the vista down Old Polawana Road, all buildings there must be set back an appropriate distance, with a vegetative screen that makes them invisible from U.S. 21.
- Monitor conditions at key intersections and identify needed improvements to maintain acceptable levels of service and/or safety.
- Provide opportunities for St. Helena residents, visitors and employees to circulate about the Public Market without total reliance on the automobile.
- Develop design criteria for road crossings, signage, building material and building placement.
- Develop design standards for the enhancement of parking lots, which should include (but are not limited to):
 - 1) Placing parking lots away from streets;
 - 2) Requiring landscaping and shade trees; and
 - 3) Defining appropriate heights and design of lighting along pedestrian walkways and roads, and adjacent to residential uses.
- Modify existing ordinances and develop design standards to minimize the size of parking lots. Strategies that should be considered include, but are not limited to:
 - 1) Sharing parking among nearby uses; and
 - 2) Designing for regular parking demands rather than peak periods (e.g. Heritage Days events).

Historic Preservation

GOAL: *Preserve the cultural resources of the Corners Area.*

Actions:

- Identify and preserve significant cultural or historical sites or structures within the Corners Area.
- Promote public awareness of and support for historic preservation, and encourage both visual and physical access to historic properties, whenever appropriate.
- Continue to encourage efforts, both public and private, to preserve the Corners historical and cultural heritage. Property owners should be encouraged to nominate eligible properties for listing in local, state, and federal registers of historic places. As part of this program, owners of eligible historic properties should be informed of State and federal preservation programs and ways to participate in tax incentive programs for historic restoration.

- Encourage the reuse of architecturally interesting or historical buildings in a manner that preserves their historic architectural merit.
- Encourage programs that advance public education efforts regarding the history and heritage of St. Helena.

Implementation Programs

The time and effort spent in producing this Plan is worth nothing without implementation. It is implementation and agreement on methods of implementation that will bring the Plan to life and initiate an evolution of activity that will move the Corners Area community toward the fulfillment of its goals. This section outlines the activities that must be pursued to carry out the Plan.

Preparation and adoption of the Plan is a beginning step in its implementation. Its basic purpose is to provide a guide for specific action. The Implementation Plan identifies techniques, strategies, and methods for carrying out the recommendations contained in the Corners Area Plan. The major implementation processes described include the Corners Area Community Preservation Land Development Standards, the County's Capital Improvement program, the annual review and update process, general plan update and specific implementation program.

Corners Area Community Preservation Land Development Standards: The Corners Area Community Preservation Land Development Standards is a regulatory tool used to define districts within the Community Preservation Area for the purpose of controlling and guiding land use and development. These standards are the primary instrument for implementing land use policies. The County's review and adoption of the land development standards are important first steps in plan implementation.

Capital Improvements Program: Another tool for implementing the plan is the Capital Improvements Program (CIP), which establishes schedules and priorities for all public improvement projects within a five-year period. The County first prepares a list of all public improvements that will be required in the next five years, including transportation and community facility projects. Then all projects are reviewed, priorities are assigned, cost estimates prepared, and potential funding sources identified.

The CIP typically schedules the implementation of a range of specific projects related to the Comprehensive Plan and Community Plans, particularly the restoration and upgrading of existing utilities and infrastructure facilities. Construction of public facilities and infrastructure is an important link between the development of Corners Area and the implementation of the Corners Area Plan. Based on an annual review, the CIP shall be reexamined for consistency with the goals and actions of this Plan. The CIP shall also be revised to include projects identified within the Corners Area Plan. In this way, the CIP serves as a financial planning document as well as a physical-planning document. It permits the construction of improvements identified in the Corners Area Plan.

The five-year CIP shall be used to enable the implementation of the Corners Area Plan policies in a manner which is consistent with the goals and actions identified. The CIP can also be used to implement growth strategies in the Corners Area Plan by locating and programming public facilities and infrastructure for lands within the approved

Corners Area Community Preservation area. Finally, by stipulating the desired community projects and improvements, the Corners Area Plan provides the guide for desirable public facilities and services.

Annual Review: To insure timely implementation of the Corners Area Plan, it shall be reviewed annually in accordance with Section B.3. of the Comprehensive Plan (pp. 13-14). The annual review process provides an opportunity to update and refine the policies expressed in the Corners Area Plan and to monitor and evaluate the progress of the implementation strategies and programs incorporated therein. This process is the vehicle by which the county, private property owners, developers, community groups or individual citizens request changes to the goals and actions of the Corners Area Plan. The review and amendment process includes citizen participation, through community meetings to familiarize Corners Area residents with the amendment proposals and at formal public hearings before the Planning Commission and County Council. The county's administration department along with the lead departments identified in Table I is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Corners Area Plan.

General Plan Update: The Corners Area Plan reflects a ten-year planning period. This period allows for the systematic implementation of desired projects, land use patterns, and installation of required public improvements. To provide for flexibility and responsiveness to change, the Plan also should be comprehensively reviewed and revised, if appropriate, at four-year intervals. This periodic update enables the Plan always to maintain at least a 10-year time frame.

The update of the Plan is not synonymous with total revision. Once adopted, the Plan establishes a basic policy framework that must be followed over time. The purpose of reviewing the Plan at intervals is to allow it to adjust to changing conditions, the availability of more recent planning data, and shifts in community values. When revisions to the Plan are proposed, Corners Area residents and property owners should be invited to participate in the formulation of the changes.

Implementation Actions

I. **Identify Grants:** Federal and State grants-in-aid are available to assist with land use planning, facility improvements, historic preservation and other services and improvements. Coordinating grant proposals with the Plan directives is a positive step toward accomplishing the Plan's goals. Most grants require matching funds for the receiving municipality. The County's contribution may be met by in-kind contributions from various departments and also through departmental budgets. Additional sources for funding are:

- A. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): The Community Development Block Grant Program is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban development and provides assistance for programs and projects directly aimed at the type of projects identified in the Corners Area Plan. The Community Development Block Grant funding is allocated on an annual basis and can be used for a variety of projects contemplated in The Corners Area Plan.

- B. Beaufort County Transportation Committee(C Funds): This funding source is generated from gasoline sales tax funds appropriated to the county from the state and administered by the Beaufort County Transportation Committee. Permitted projects include road paving, sidewalks, curb improvements, walking paths, bus shelters and road signage. Projects other than road paving projects require a “special project application” which are accepted once every three years.
- C. The Beaufort County Tree Fund: Funds generated from projects where the Development Review Team determines that the required replacement of trees is not feasible or not desirable, such reductions are subject to a general forestation fee. The funds collected through this forestation fee may be used by the County to plant trees and other landscaping in roadways medians such as those identified in the Corners Area Plan.
- D. The Land Preservation Board: This advisory board was established to protect rural and critical lands through the Purchase of Development Rights, voluntary programs and other mechanisms. The Board is mandated to establish criteria and ranking system to rank land parcels, which are approved by County Council. Beaufort County currently levies and designates 2 mills in ad valorem taxes in order to acquire land for conservation, farmland protection and open space preservation. The County Council has authorized the County to issue 40 million dollars in general obligation bonds to acquire lands for preservation and retire the bond debt.
- E. A-Tax Funds: These are the tax accommodation funds, which are granted to various projects once per year. These funds are taken from the money spent on hotels and restaurants and then used for community projects in the county. The funds can be applied for through Beaufort County.
- F. Survey and Planning and Development Grants: The "Survey and Planning Grant" as well as the "Development Grant" are available once a year through the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. The first grant is provided to historic buildings for projects involving surveying, restoration, and maintenance of them and their grounds. The latter is provided for community projects that focus on developing a particular project for a community in South Carolina. The project can include producing a report or pamphlet for the community. Given that historic structures in the Corners Community are on the National Register of Historic Places, projects that relate to them are eligible for these two grants.

II. Prioritize Projects and Add to CIP: Table I summarizes the implementation actions recommended in The Corners Area Plan. In addition, the projects are prioritized, a responsible department is assigned and the timing for implementation of the specific action is noted.

- III. Schedule Implementation:** The implementation of the Corners Area Plan will be monitored. Some items are expected to be completed quickly. For others, especially those items that need additional funding, it may be harder to schedule a firm completion date. Nevertheless, the status of every item proposed in the Plan will be tracked. A check date, if not a completion date, will be set for each item. This tracking chart will be updated regularly, as more information becomes available and as the status of each project changes. An update report is scheduled for the Fall of 2002 to summarize the overall implementation status of the plan's recommendations.
- IV. Commitment and Support:** While the Corners Area Plan provides the framework for community development, the everyday action of the County shapes the community. The manner in which the Plan is implemented is the real test of the County's commitment to the goals, objectives, and policies.

By adopting the Plan, the County Council will demonstrate the County's commitment to the implementation of the Plan. However, every action item listed in this plan will require separate and specific implementation. Adoption of the Plan does not begin the implementation of any item. The implementation will require specific actions by the Corners Area community, the County and other agencies. The Plan will be supported and implemented by:

- County Boards, Commissions and Staff: The numerous boards and commissions of the County will look to The Corners Area Plan when they need guidance about the neighborhood. The Planning Commission will already know if a proposed zoning change in the Corners Area CP area is appropriate and supported by the residents and businesses of the community. Additionally, County staff will use the Plan as a guidance document for review of projects and programs.
- Department Budgets: Each year every County department puts together a budget that states the department's priorities for the coming year. By bringing the strengths and desires of the community to the attention of County departments, the Corners Area Plan will help them prioritize those projects that help safeguard the community's assets while addressing its needs. Allocating dollars to certain programs and activities inevitably results in setting policy priorities which are critical to the implementation of the Corners Area Plan. The budget instructions to department heads shall require that proposed expenditures include reference to items in the Plan that will be implemented with the funds.
- Capital Improvement Projects: There are many projects in the community that require major capital expenditure. In these instances, the guidance provided by the plan will be critical to guarantee the project will proceed in a fashion that keeps in mind the overall long-term interests of the community.
- Other Agencies and Organizations: Other agencies and organizations outside County government will play an essential role in the implementation of the Plan. As these agencies look for public input, the Corners Area Plan will be available as a clearly articulated vision of the direction the community desires to go.

- Community Monitoring of Implementation: The Community Planning Process has established a healthy dialogue among local residents concerning the future of the community. A number of citizens have thus far been involved in planning discussions. Corners Area has always been characterized by active citizen involvement, and this should continue to be standard policy. The planning process will affect everyone in the community, and everyone should contribute to planning decisions. The Corners Area Plan Implementation Tracking Chart (Appendix A, included in the back pocket) provides a way to easily check the status of the implementation of the plan. For each action proposed in the plan, the chart lists the contact, the estimated cost, the current status and comments. This chart will be updated by the Corners Area CP group, as the status of the projects change and as new information is available.

Conclusion

The purpose of planning is implementation. The Corners Area Plan identifies the overall development needs in the Corners Area. The tasks involved in addressing them, the various parties who should perform these tasks, and the level of participation sought from these parties. The Corners Area CP committee should continue to advocate for themselves, their community and the plan. The ultimate success of the Corners Area plan will be determined, in large part by the collective efforts of this group, along with Beaufort County Council, the county administrator, the planning department, and concerned citizens in general.

Table 1

THE CORNERS AREA IMPLEMENTATION PLAN						
Activity	Priority	Time Frame (To begin implementation of item from adoption of Plan)	Cost Estimate	Implementer	Executive Response	Possible Funding Source
Land Acquisition for Library	H-1	0-1 year	\$800,000			
Entry Signage	H-2	0-2 year	\$5,200 (4 signs at \$1,300 each) (Design & Professional fees) \$728.00			
Historical Markers	H-3	0-2 year	\$4,600 (4 signs at \$400 & 2 at 1,500 each) (Design & Professional fees) \$644.00			
Improvements to Martin Luther King Jr. Park						
Community Board	M-4	0-3 years	\$15,000 (Design & Professional fees) \$2,100			
Flagpole	M-5	0-3 years	\$3,000 (Design & Professional fees) \$450			
Gazebo	L-6	0-5 years	\$35,000 (Design & Professional fees) \$4,900			
Bust of MLK Jr.	L-7	0-5 years	\$13,000 (Design & Professional fees) \$1,450			
Total High Priority	\$811,172					
Total Medium Priority	\$20,550					
Total Long Term Priority	\$54,350					
Contingency 15%	\$13,291					
TOTAL	\$899,363					