

# **ISLANDS AREA COMMUNITY PLAN**

**Oatland, Talahi, Whitemarsh, and Wilmington Islands**

**Adopted June 8, 2001**

**by the**

**Chatham County Board of Commissioners**

**Chatham County – Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Purpose.....	1
1.2 Planning Process .....	1
1.3 Community Character.....	2
2.0 Inventory and Assessment.....	5
2.1 Existing Land Use.....	5
2.2 Community Demographics.....	12
2.3 Historic and Cultural Resources.....	16
2.4 Natural Resources and Greenspace.....	16
2.5 Recreation Facilities.....	20
2.6 Transportation Facilities.....	21
2.7 Other Public Facilities.....	29
3.0 Vision, Goals, and Objectives.....	33
3.1 Community Vision Statement.....	34
3.2 Land Use: Goals and Objectives.....	34
3.3 Historic and Cultural Resources: Goals and Objectives.....	36
3.4 Natural Resources and Greenspace: Goals and Objectives.....	37
3.5 Recreation Facilities: Goals and Objectives.....	40
3.6 Transportation: Goals and Objectives.....	40
3.7 Other Community Facilities: Goals and Objectives.....	43
4.0 Land Use Plan.....	45
4.1 Narrative.....	45
4.2 Future Land Use Map.....	52
5.0 Zoning Implementation Strategy.....	54
5.1 Process of Adopting and Implementing the Community Plan.....	54
5.2 Overlay Districts and Limited Uses.....	57
Glossary.....	60

### VOLUME II:

Zoning Ordinance Text and Map Amendments

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1-A. Map of the Islands Community.....	4
Figure 2-A. Existing Land Use Map.....	8
Table 2-A. Islands Community Existing Land Use Inventory.....	9
Table 2-B. Land Use Classifications and Definitions.....	10
Figure 2-B. The Concepts Of Density And Intensity.....	11
Table 2-C. Islands Community Population And Dwelling Units (DU) 1980 - 2020 By Island Subtotals.....	13
Table 2-D. Change In Dwelling Units 2000-2020 By Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ).....	14
Table 2-E. Population Change 2000 – 2020 By Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ).....	15
Table 2-F. Inventory of Historic and Cultural Resources.....	17
Table 2-G. Inventory of Natural Resources and Greenspace.....	18
Table 2-H. Inventory of Recreation Facilities.....	18
Figure 2-C. Traffic Analysis Zones.....	25
Figure 2-D. Planned Bikeway Corridors .....	26
Figure 2-E. Ten Best Transportation Practices For The Islands Community.....	28
Figure 2-F. Islands Public Facilities.....	30
Figure 2-G. Islands Water Service Area Map.....	31
Figure 2-H. Islands Sewer Service Area Map.....	32
Figure 3-A. The Comprehensive Planning Paradigm.....	33
Figure 4-A. Land Use Plan Policy Framework.....	49
Figure 4-B. Seven Land Use Principles For A Quality Community.....	50
Figure 4-C. Islands Community Town Center Concept.....	51
Figure 4-D. Future Land Use Map.....	52
Table 4-A. Islands Community Future Land Use and 2020 Estimates.....	53
Figure 5-A. Process of Adopting and Implementing the Community Plan.....	55
Figure 5-B. Islands Land Use Planning Strategy.....	56

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The County Commission and the MPC would like to acknowledge the work of many Islands Community citizens, whose contributions to this plan will make it an enduring and valuable document. In particular, members of Island Citizens for Logical Growth and the Land Use Advisory Committee were invaluable to a process that was, first and foremost, a citizen-driven effort.

## **1.0 Introduction**

The Islands Area Community Plan is primarily a land use plan with a planning horizon of 2020. It establishes a shared vision for the future of the community, based on extensive public participation, and identifies goals, objectives, policies, and strategies to achieve the community vision. The area addressed by the plan is shown in Figure 1-A.

### **1.1 Purpose**

The impetus behind the community planning effort that led to this plan was the desire of many Islands residents to update the 1985 *Islands Land Use Plan*. While the 1993 Chatham County Comprehensive Plan broadly addressed many community concerns, the need for detail at the community level remained. The MPC determined that new community plans should be prepared for the Islands area and for other communities in unincorporated Chatham County. The specific purposes of the Islands Area Community Plan are to:

- Preserve and enhance existing neighborhoods;
- Identify appropriate standards for new residential and commercial development; and
- Protect environmental quality.

The recommendations contained in the plan are primarily intended to be the basis for amendments to the Chatham County Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance.

### **1.2 Planning Process**

The Islands Area Community Plan was prepared by the MPC staff, working with a consortium of residents initially formed by the Islands Citizens for Logical Growth (ICLG) and later expanded. ICLG was established in 1994 and worked intensively with MPC staff through 1999 to develop this Plan. During the most intensive period of work, from 1996 through 1999, a Land Use Subcommittee was formed by ICLG to work with MPC staff. The Land Use Subcommittee consisted of members of ICLG and other groups as well as several interested residents. The expanded group was subsequently designated the Land Use Advisory Committee by the MPC. Since completion of the Advisory Committee's work in 1999, Advisory Committee has met as needed to review progress in drafting the plan, and to discuss new concerns within the community.

The public participation process leading to development of the plan was structured as a community needs assessment. It included a public opinion survey (*Islands Public Opinion Survey*, MPC, June 1996) and a two-part issues study facilitated by the University of Georgia's Institute for Community and Area Development (ICAD) that began in late 1997. The public opinion survey revealed several concerns relevant to the community planning process. First, a vast majority felt that land use controls are important for orderly growth (95 percent). Many, however, felt that such controls were undermined by frequent rezonings (71 percent). Most respondents (90 percent) felt that more multi-family development was undesirable. Small lot subdivisions were also seen as undesirable, with only two percent supporting smaller lot sizes. Public opinion about retail, service, and office development was more evenly divided between

those who wanted to see more and those who opposed more (with 52 to 55 percent opposed, depending on the type of development). A total of 79 percent of the respondents felt that growth in the Islands Community should be halted or slowed.

Results of the ICAD study were consistent with the public opinion survey. However, they provided greater detail, much of which is reflected in the recommendations in Section 5.0. The first part of the ICAD study included a public meeting at which facilitators administered a Community Preference Survey in order to identify issues of concern and desirable quality-of-life features. In the second part of the study, participants divided into Issue Focus Groups to develop specific recommendations to address identified issues. The product of the ICAD study was a final report entitled *Growth Guide for Wilmington, Oatland, Whitemarsh and Talahi Islands, Georgia: Community Study*, finalized in 1998.

In developing the community plan, staff and committee members also consulted relevant plans currently in effect, including the 1993 Chatham County Comprehensive Plan, the Countywide Open Space Plan of 1996, and the Islands Land Use Plan of 1985. The community planning process also took into account current, ongoing planning efforts, such as the Countywide Bikeway and Greenspace Plans.

The resulting plan is intended to mesh with the Chatham County Comprehensive Plan, and it is structured to be generally consistent with state comprehensive planning requirements. This paradigm was employed so that the MPC community planning process will also constitute a significant portion of the comprehensive plan update process.

While the plan is structured to inventory the needs of the community broadly and comprehensively, it is not structured to provide implementation strategies that address every issue. Sections 1, 2, and 3 discuss public concerns, assess those concerns, and structure them into goals and objectives. However, Sections 4 and 5 focus almost exclusively on the land use planning issues arising from the community needs assessment. It is in that area that the MPC has the expertise and authority to recommend land use policies and initiate zoning map and text amendments consistent with those policies.

### **1.3 Community Character**

During the planning process, participants have defined the character of the Islands Community in terms of community characteristics and natural resources widely considered as desirable and worth protecting. These include the community's natural island setting, which offers panoramic marsh and river views from numerous points throughout the four islands and a variety of marine-related activities. The location of the community in close proximity to the barrier islands offers convenient access to these islands and their Atlantic beaches and natural sanctuaries. The salt marshes, estuaries, rivers, beaches, and other ecologically sensitive areas and wildlife habitats of this rich coastal area are valuable natural resources that benefit the entire county and region, as well as Islands residents, businesses and visitors.

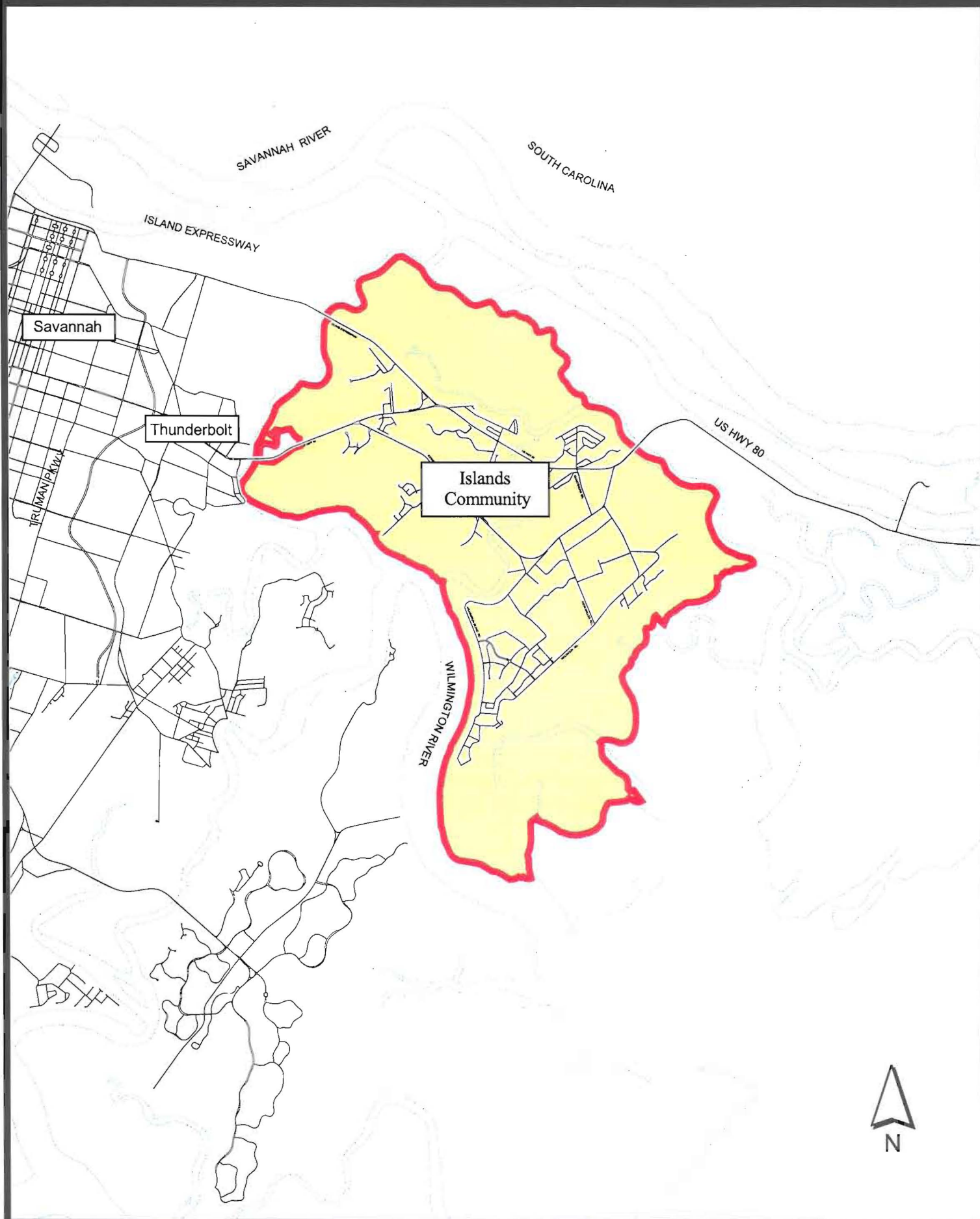
The Islands Community continues to maintain a fairly substantial tree cover, even in developed areas, that is highly valued by residents and visitors. Of particular concern are natural or

landscaped frontages along roadways such as US 80, vegetative buffers between residential and other types of land uses, large wooded residential lots, and tree-lined drives such as Johnny Mercer Boulevard. The community's upland open space, though no longer abundant, is considered the key feature that is perhaps the most threatened as development continues.

The small town atmosphere of the Islands Community has also been identified as a key feature of its unique character. When offered an opportunity to name the community's most-liked qualities, respondents to the 1996 public opinion survey identified its small town atmosphere more than any other single quality. Contributing to this atmosphere are such qualities as freedom from crime, quiet single-family neighborhoods, and the general remoteness of the area from the activity in major employment and business centers. The character and location of commercial development in relatively concentrated centers is also seen as contributing to the small-town atmosphere.

Islands residents have identified the erosion of the area's unique community character as a major issue. The community plan attempts to define community character and establish it as an integral part of the plan's foundation, along with land use planning, traffic management, transportation enhancements, and environmental protection. The Inventory and Assessment that follows in Section 2 is the first step in identifying elements of community character and incorporating them into the structure of the plan.

**FIG. 1-A ISLANDS COMMUNITY LOCATION MAP**





## **2.0 Inventory and Assessment**

The Inventory and Assessment section of the plan is intended to: a) provide both quantitative and qualitative information about the area's natural resources, infrastructure, and economy; and b) provide assessments of existing and future needs in each of those areas. These three areas are among the seven "planning elements" in the Chatham County Comprehensive Plan for which an inventory and assessment are provided. Two other elements in the Comprehensive Plan, the Population and Land Use elements, are treated in a different manner.

This section generally follows the State of Georgia "Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning." The structure is modified somewhat to reflect the practical needs of a community plan. Notably, the section entitled "Community Demographics" combines Population, Housing, and Economic Development elements, all of which are required elements in municipal and county comprehensive plans.

### **2.1 Existing Land Use**

The Islands area includes the northernmost inner islands of a barrier chain extending along the Georgia coast. It is surrounded by and part of a rich estuarine ecosystem that is habitat to hundreds of marine and land species. The ecosystem provides an important nursery to many species that later spend their adult lives in the open waters of the ocean. The Islands planning area is bounded on the north by the marshlands of Cockspur Island, on the west by the Town of Thunderbolt and the Wilmington River, on the south by the Wilmington River, and on the southeast and east by the extensive estuarine system extending to Tybee and other outer barrier islands. The area boundaries are shown in Figure 1-A.

Figure 2-A depicts existing land use, including natural and developed features. The map clearly depicts the remarkable physical setting of the community, completely surrounded by marsh and open water. The development pattern is predominately single family, shown in yellow. A nodal rather than strip pattern of commercial development is shown in red. Multi-family development, primarily along arterial roadways on Wilmington Island and Whitmarsh Island, is shown in orange. This pattern is generally logical and orderly, and it provides a sound spatial structure for future infill development. This existing land use pattern is discussed in greater detail in the remainder of this section.

The predominant single-family residential development pattern throughout the Islands Community consists primarily of detached dwellings at relatively low densities, averaging less than one unit per acre by all measures (see Fig. 2-B for an explanation of density terminology). Multi-family development located on Wilmington and Whitmarsh Islands exists at moderate densities. Few mobile homes are found in the Islands area, and additional ones are not permitted under current zoning. Existing mobile homes in the Islands area are therefore nonconforming uses.

The predominance of single family subdivisions is considered a strength; however, having a range of housing types in a community can contribute to long-term stability. A range of housing types is referred to by planners as inter-generational housing if it provides not only housing for

traditional families in their child-bearing years, but also alternative housing types for young adults as they move away from home and older parents and seniors who no longer require or desire large houses on expansive lots. Such a community is enriched by making it possible for three or more generations of a family to live in the same community if they choose to do so. Recent development appears to be achieving this effect without threatening the stability of the community.

Retail and office uses in the Islands area are concentrated on Wilmington Island and Whitemarsh Island. These are primarily retail convenience shopping areas with some professional offices (doctors, accountants, etc.). Some more intensive commercial uses are found on Wilmington Island. Public and institutional uses include a library, fire stations, public and private schools and a number of churches.

Linear or “strip” commercial development has thus far largely been avoided. However, pressures now exist and will continue to exist to extend commercial development along the community’s arterial roadways. Such roads appear to be especially vulnerable to strip commercial development because of the availability of vacant and under-developed land including Johnny Mercer Boulevard and Highway 80 East. Problems associated with this type of development include difficulty with traffic access management, increased single activity trip-chaining (a series of linked trips), and a lack of desirable aesthetic features. Alternative uses for these areas are discussed in Section 4.1, Future Land Use.

The Islands area has developed primarily since the 1970s, and no extensive blighted areas presently exist. Blight that often results from a strip development decay cycle has not occurred to any notable extent, and the Land Use Plan in Section 4.0 offers specific policies to prevent such a decay cycle.

The Islands Community has been fortunate to have more nodal, or centralized, forms of commercial development. This development pattern has been beneficial to the community by establishing the potential for those areas to evolve into “town center” mixed-use districts. A town center, because of its greater commercial value, is generally less prone to deterioration and blight than a conventional “strip” shopping center.

Marine uses were among the earliest types of development in the islands, and such uses continue to maintain a substantial presence. Approximately 10 yacht clubs and commercial marinas operate in the area, with ancillary restaurants, brokerages, boat rental businesses, and equipment dealers. Such uses are vulnerable to residential and other land use conversions that limit public access to the waterfront. For that reason, this plan provides special recommendations for marine uses.

There are no identified agricultural or forestry activities remaining in the Islands area, even though large parts of this area are wooded and truck farming was a historic industry in the Islands area. Wooded areas that are located within a conservation or recreation area, wetland, or other protected area are classified within those categories.

A significant amount of Chatham County’s recreation, park, and conservation areas are found in

the vicinity of Islands Community. Nearby areas include Little Tybee Island, Wassaw Island, and Fort Pulaski (including park, trails, and boat launching facilities at Lazaretto Creek, Cockspur Island, and McQueen's Island). Within the community itself, there is the Oatland Island Center, County property on Oatland Drive (donated by Union Camp), and a number of smaller parks. Chatham County's acquisition of the 188-acre Demere Tract in 2000 has added needed open space near the center of the Islands Community (see section 3.5 for an expanded discussion).

The Islands Community contains a disproportionately large share of the county's wetlands and marsh, primarily because of the presence of vast saltwater marshes between the barrier islands. This part of Chatham County also contains a disproportionately small share of the county's developable upland area. The greatest amount of undeveloped land is on Whitemarsh Island, followed by Wilmington Island. However, much of the undeveloped land on both islands has been planned for development and is included in master development plans.

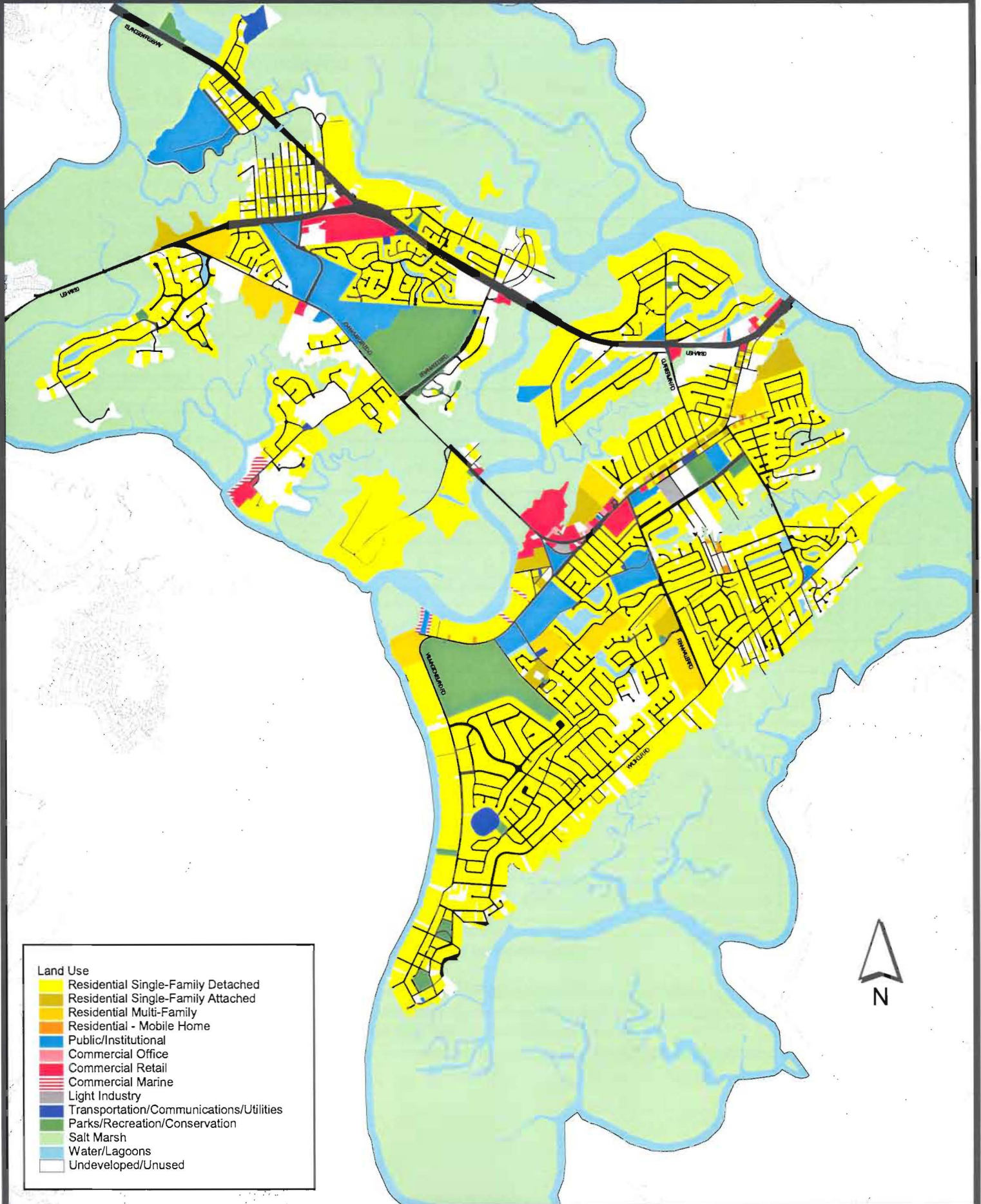
A detailed inventory of existing land use is provided in Table 2-A. The general categories of land use follow those adopted by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for statewide application. Subcategories of land use, such as commercial marine uses, are developed to portray the specific characteristics of the community. Commercial marine uses are identified on the existing and future land use maps but they are not separately inventoried in Tables 2-A and 4-A because of their relatively small acreage.

The table provides figures that correspond to the Existing Land Use Map. The total amount of single family area is 9588 acres, which constitutes 74 percent of the community's land area. Single family *attached* (e.g., townhouses, duplexes) and multi-family together account for only 390 acres, or less than 3 percent of developable area. Total residential area constitutes 76 percent of total area. By contrast, the City of Savannah has 34 percent of its area in residential land use, and the entire county has only 23 percent in residential land use (see chapter 2 in the 1993 City and County comprehensive plan land use elements). Commercial and public/institutional land uses account for 509 acres, or just under 4 percent of developable area. Areas designated for recreational use and greenspace (including the Demere Tract) total 590 acres, or 5 percent of the community's total area. There are an additional 953 acres of right-of-way in the Islands area that constitutes 7 percent of the total acreage.

These figures demonstrate that the Islands Community is a predominately residential area, or a "bedroom community" to use the popular term. While a greater balance among land uses is often desirable in a community (as a way of both minimizing traffic and distributing land uses throughout a metropolitan region), this community's fragile environment and hurricane susceptibility are valid reasons to maintain low density and intensity land uses (see Section 4 for additional discussion on this point).

At the current estimate of 9167 dwelling units on 9978 acres of residentially developed land, the current residential density of the Islands Community is 0.92 units per acre. The residential density relative to the entire community (i.e., all land uses) is the same 9167 dwelling units

**FIG. 2-A EXISTING LAND USE MAP**



**Table 2-A. Islands Community Existing Land Use Inventory<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Land Use Classification<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Wilmington Island Acreage Pct.</b>		<b>Talahi Island Acreage Pct.</b>		<b>Whitemarsh Island Acreage Pct.</b>		<b>Oatland Island Acreage Pct.</b>		<b>Total Acreage Acreage Pct.</b>	
Residential – Single Family Detached	6264	79	376	62	2889	67	59	25	9588	73
Residential – Single Family Attached	20	<1	0	0	18	<1	0	0	38	<1
Residential - Multi-Family	299	4	0	0	53	1	0	0	352	3
Public/ Institutional	112	1	16	3	91	2	84	35	303	2
Commercial-Office	6	<1	2	<1	0	0	0	0	8	<1
Commercial-Retail	51	1	4	1	82	2	0	0	137	1
Commercial-Marine	5	<1	0	0	19	<1	37	16	61	1
Transportation, Com & Util <sup>3</sup>	135	2	0	0	4	<1	14	6	154	1
Agricultural/ Forestry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Industry - Light	12	<1	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	<1
Recreation (Active)	185	2	2	<1	404	9	0	0	590	5
Greenspace <sup>4</sup>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Right-of-way	480	6	108	18	335	8	30	12	953	7
Salt Marsh <sup>5</sup>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Lagoons	34	<1	50	8	23	<1	1	<1	108	1
Undeveloped	315	4	47	8	380	9	13	6	755	6
<b>Total Islands</b>	<b>7918</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4298</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>13,059</b>	<b>100</b>

1.Existing acreage estimates are based on the predominant land use in a tract or subdivision; it is not a parcel-based calculation. Percentages in columns are percentages of the column total.

2. See Table 2-B for land use definitions.

3. This land use category does not include most right-of-way, which amounts to 953 acres in the Islands area.

4. Greenspace is not included because no land currently meets the State definition; once a conservation easement is placed on the Demere Tract and other properties, they will be shown as greenspace.

5. Marsh is not included in order to allow for comparison of developable areas; there is an estimated 8165 acres of marsh in the Islands area.

**Table 2-B. Land Use Classifications and Definitions**

Land Use Classification <sup>1</sup>	Definition
Residential – Single Family Detached	This category includes single-family detached dwelling units. A platted lot is normally associated with each dwelling unit.
Residential – Single Family Attached	This category includes single-family attached dwelling units, including duplexes and townhouses where a platted lot is associated with each dwelling unit.
Residential - Multi-Family	The predominant use of land within this category is that of multi-family dwelling units, including apartment buildings, garden apartments, and condominiums that are not on separately platted units.
Public/ Institutional	Government and institutional land uses, such as government buildings, police/fire stations, libraries, prisons, schools, military uses, churches, cemeteries, and hospitals. Publicly owned facilities more accurately placed in another land use category should not be included in this category (e.g., parks and/or recreational facilities, landfills, and general office buildings containing government offices, which should be in the office category).
Commercial-Office	Land dedicated to non-industrial business uses that are predominately offices.
Commercial-Retail	Land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, services, entertainment facilities, and commercial marine uses.
Commercial-Marina	Land dedicated to marina operations including those ancillary uses that are both marine-related and an integral part of the marina complex.
Transportation, Communication s & Utilities	Such uses as power generation plants, railroad facilities, radio towers, public transit stations, airports, port facilities.
Agricultural/ Forestry	Land dedicated to farming, agriculture, or commercial timber or pulpwood harvesting.
Industry - Light	Land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, or other similar uses.
Recreation (Active)	Land dedicated to active uses, which may be publicly or privately owned, and may include playgrounds, public parks, golf courses, recreation centers.
Greenspace	Land permanently dedicated for passive recreational uses, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, greenways, and similarly protected areas.
Salt Marsh	Estuarine tidal marshes of predominantly spartina grasses. Total acreage = 8165.
Undeveloped	Land not developed for a specific use or land that was developed for a particular use but that has been abandoned for that use. This category includes woodlands or pasture land (not in agricultural crop, livestock or commercial timber production), undeveloped portions of residential subdivisions and industrial parks, water bodies (lakes, rivers, etc.), and locations of structures that have been vacant for some time and allowed to become deteriorated or dilapidated.
<b>Total Islands</b>	

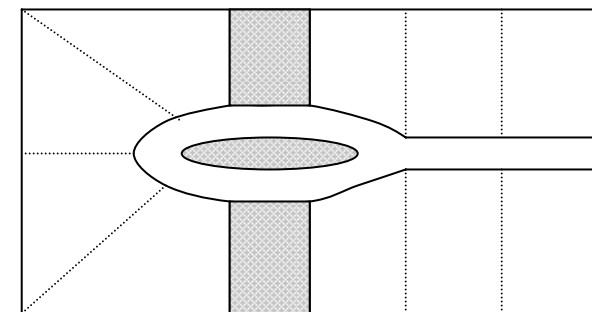
1.Land use categories and definitions are consistent with those published by the Georgia Dept. of Community Affairs.



## FIG. 2-B. THE CONCEPTS OF DENSITY AND INTENSITY

The term “density” is used in the field of planning to refer to the average number of dwelling units per unit of area (normally an acre). The term can sometimes be confusing because the area subject to measurement varies depending on how it is defined. Definitions relevant to this plan are provided below:

- **Area Gross Density:** The number of dwelling units in a geographic area (such as a zoning district) divided by the total acreage of that area.
- **Area Net Density:** The number of dwelling units in a geographic area (such as a zoning district) divided by the developable acreage of that area.
- **Site Gross Density:** The number of dwelling units on a site, typically a subdivision or multi-family tract, divided by the total acreage of that site.
- **Site Net Density:** The number of dwelling units on a site, typically a subdivision or multi-family tract, divided by the lot, recreation, and open space acreage of that site.



### DENSITY OF 10 UNIT SUBDIVISION

Sum of Lot Area = 5 acres  
Road Area = 2 acres  
Open Space = 3 acres (shaded area)  
Total Site Area = 10 Acres

Site Gross Density = 10 units/10ac. = 1 unit/ac.

Site Net Density = 10 units/8ac. = 1.25 units/ac.

Density does not apply to commercial and industrial development. However the “intensity” of such development is frequently measured by *floor area ratio*, or FAR.

Floor Area Ratio is defined as the ratio of net leasable floor area to total lot area. A commercial project with 30,000 square feet of leasable floor area on a one-acre lot therefore has a floor area ratio of,

$$\text{FAR} = 30,000 \text{ sf} / 1 \text{ acre} = 30,000 \text{ sf} / 43,560 \text{ sf} = \underline{0.69}$$

divided by 13,059 acres, or 0.70 units per acre. The latter figure, which includes 953 acres of roadways and other right-of-way, is referred to as area gross density as defined in Figure 2-B.

Hilton Head Island is a useful comparable since it is also approaching theoretical build-out and is located in a similar physical setting. With nearly 21,000 upland acres and a population of approximately 32,000, the island's area gross density is 1.50 units per acre, or more than double that of the Islands Community. With its additional seasonal and tourist population, Hilton Head has an effective density that is actually much higher. While Hilton Head accommodates a relatively high density through notably effective development standards and concepts of "nature blending," the effects are felt throughout the Bluffton area in terms of unmanageable traffic and a severe shortage of affordable housing. The two striking lessons from the Hilton Head comparison are, a) it is possible to accommodate higher densities while maintaining a peaceful ambiance with appropriate development standards; and b) the impacts of such growth are deceptive because they are displaced, with traffic and housing needs shifted largely to other areas. The implications of this are discussed in Section 4.

While land use in the Islands Community is predominately single family residential, there is also community support for additional office parks and commercial development (if done tastefully and integrated into the fabric of the community, perhaps in conjunction with establishing a town center). Such developments can have many benefits and few liabilities if well planned.

## **2.2 Community Demographics**

The Islands Community is among the most desirable places in Chatham County to live because of its unique character, location and natural amenities. The area continues to attract new residents, largely to master planned developments and subdivisions. As a result, it remains the most rapidly growing area within unincorporated Chatham County. The area is approaching build-out, however, and very little growth is anticipated to occur after 2020.

According to the most recent estimates, the four islands now contain a total of 9,167 dwelling units and a population of 22,200. As shown in Table 2-C, these figures are expected to increase by the year 2020 to 11,045 housing units and a population of 26,019, increases of 20.5 percent and 17.2 percent respectively. The difference in the two rates is explained by the national and regional trend toward smaller household size (i.e., population per dwelling unit).

Figure 2-D shows the division of the Islands Community into Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZ), which provides a geographic basis for estimating and projecting the socio-economic data used in transportation planning models. For convenient reference, these numbered zones are labeled to reflect community street or subdivision names. Combined, the TAZs provide data to analyze each individual island. Tables 2-C and 2-D show the projected growth in population and dwelling units through the planning time frame (2000-2020), by TAZ, with totals for each island neighborhood. The amount and percent change are also shown.

Population growth in the Islands community in recent years is characterized by: 1) densification of population in newer growth areas (e.g., Turner's Cove); 2) an increase of over 10% in mean age; 3) a large increase in the number of children (even with the higher mean age); and 4)



income levels increasing faster than the county average. While 2000 census data is not available to confirm the last three trends, the trend revealed by the 1990 census was sufficiently pronounced that it most likely continued through the 1990s.

Powerful social and economic trends drive suburbanization. The Islands Community has not been immune to those forces, which were discussed in the Existing Land Use section. Policy recommendations related to this trend are presented Section 4.0.

**Table 2-C. Islands Community Population And Dwelling Units (DU)  
1980 - 2020 By Island Subtotals<sup>1</sup>**

Area	1980 Census		1990 Census		2000 CUTS <sup>1</sup>		2020 Projection <sup>2</sup>	
	Pop	DUs	Pop	DUs	Pop	DUs	Pop	DUs
<b>Wilmington</b>	7,550	2,560	11,230	4,550	14,632	5,962	16,761	6,973
<b>Talahi</b>	910	300	1,260	480	1,369	520	1,510	570
<b>Whitemarsh</b>	1,750	650	2,830	1,250	5,822	2,535	7,315	3,322
<b>Oatland</b>	330	120	360	130	377	150	433	180
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10,540</b>	<b>3,630</b>	<b>15,680</b>	<b>6,410</b>	<b>22,200</b>	<b>9,167</b>	<b>26,019</b>	<b>11,045</b>

1. Forecasts are predicated on a continuation of current low-to-medium density development patterns. The potential exists for a much higher rate of growth associated with more intensive forms of development.

2. Metropolitan Planning Commission, 2000 CUTS Report.

**Table 2-D. Change In Dwelling Units 2000-2020  
By Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ)<sup>1</sup>**

General Location (TAZ Label)	TAZ Number	2000 Estimate <sup>2</sup>	2020 Projection <sup>2</sup>	Change	Percent Change
<b>Wilmington Island</b>					
Wilmington Park South	8130	687	700	13	1.9%
Wilmington Park North	8120	2,447	2,953	506	20.7%
Woodridge/Oemler Loop	8110	1,090	1,200	110	10.1%
River Oaks/Concord Road	8100	961	1,179	218	22.7%
Harbor Creek/Golden Isles	8090	777	941	164	21.1%
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>5,962</b>	<b>6,973</b>	<b>1,011</b>	<b>17.0%</b>
<b>Talahi Island (All)</b>	8080	<b>520</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>9.6%</b>
<b>Whitemarsh Island</b>					
Bradley Point	8050	264	280	16	6.1%
Long Point	8040	563	1,254	691	122.7%
Battery Point/Island Center	8060	1,054	1,088	34	3.2%
Riverside Drive	8070	301	320	19	6.3%
Gray's Subdivision	8010	353	380	27	7.6%
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>2,535</b>	<b>3,322</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>31.0%</b>
<b>Oatland Island</b>					
Oatland Subdivision	8020	90	90	0	0.0%
East Pines	8030	60	90	30	50.0%
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>20.0%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9,167</b>	<b>11,045</b>	<b>1,878</b>	<b>20.5%</b>

1. Forecasts are predicated on a continuation of current low-to-medium density development patterns. The potential exists for a much higher rate of growth associated with more intensive forms of development.

2. Metropolitan Planning Commission, 2000 CUTS Report.

**Table 2-E. Population Change 2000 – 2020 By Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) <sup>1</sup>**

<b>General Location (TAZ Label)</b>	<b>TAZ Number</b>	<b>2000 Estimate<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>2020 Projection<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
<b>Wilmington Island</b>					
Wilmington Park (South)	8130	1,820	1,820	0	0%
Wilmington Park (North)	8120	5,911	7,087	1,176	19.9%
Woodridge/Oemler Loop	8110	3,005	3,180	175	5.8%
River Oaks/Concord Road	8100	2,126	2,547	421	19.8%
Harbor Creek/Golden Isles	8090	1,770	2,127	357	20.2%
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>14,632</b>	<b>16,761</b>	<b>2,129</b>	<b>14.6%</b>
<b>Talahi Island</b>	8080	<b>1,369</b>	<b>1,510</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>10.3%</b>
<b>Whitemarsh Island</b>					
Bradley Point	8050	709	729	20	2.8%
Long Point	8040	1,337	2,483	1,146	85.7%
Battery Point Plantation/ Island Ctr.	8060	2,164	2,393	229	10.6%
Riverside Drive	8070	734	760	26	3.5%
Gray's Subdivision	8010	878	950	72	8.2%
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>5,822</b>	<b>7,315</b>	<b>1,493</b>	<b>25.6%</b>
<b>Oatland Island</b>					
Oatland Subdivision	8020	241	235	-6	-2.5%
East Pines	8030	136	198	62	45.6%
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>377</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>14.8%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>22,200</b>	<b>26,019</b>	<b>3,819</b>	<b>17.2%</b>

1. Forecasts are predicated on a continuation of current low-to-medium density development patterns. The potential exists for a much higher rate of growth associated with more intensive forms of development.

2. Metropolitan Planning Commission, 2000 CUTS Report.

3. The CUTS Report assumes that household size (persons per dwelling unit) is decreasing consistent with regional and national trends. In some cases, this has resulted in lower population estimates even the same number or more units.

## **2.3 Historic and Cultural Resources**

The 1993 Chatham County Comprehensive Plan identifies 193 sites within unincorporated Chatham County that contain historic resources. Of these, 18 are located within or adjacent to the Islands area. Some of the sites contain multiple resources. The Islands historic resources are listed in Table 2-F.

Except for various military fortifications, most of the resources are early residential structures that were built in the 1800s and 1900s, or the remains of these structures. There are no large areas of identified resources such as those that are found in the southeastern areas of the county. The lack of high-visibility sites that would warrant state and federal recognition or protection suggests that the County, and the community itself, has a greater responsibility to identify, monitor, and preserve the resources.

An initial step toward resource protection in the Islands area may occur as the County evaluates the additional sites in the context of the Community Greenspace Program. Residents have proposed various sites such as the Oemler farmhouse and Terra Firma for acquisition under the program's guidelines. The next step would be to formally nominate a site and place it on a countywide list of qualified sites, then to prioritize it for acquisition. Unless a site is acquired in fee simple interest, or the development rights are acquired, the site could be developed.

In some cases, historic resources can be saved, preserved, and even improved through "adaptive reuse." This is the practice of modernizing the use of a site or structure while retaining its original attributes. The Sheraton condominium project is an example. The historic hotel was saved and enhanced through redevelopment.

Some sites and roadway corridors in the Islands Community require protection and enhancement based on both historic and scenic attributes. They are discussed in the following section.

The Comprehensive Plan identifies a need for greater protection of identified, valuable historic resources, and the need to establish land use policies and development regulations for their protection. Loss of unprotected cultural and archeological resources to development is a continuing problem. This concern is addressed in Sections 3, 4 and 5.

## **2.4 Natural Resources and Greenspace**

Nature manifests its presence in the Islands Community with delicate force. The tides flow in and out over vast areas of marsh that can be seen from one vista or another. Its residents also treasure the community's scenic roads and river views. One of the principal purposes of this Community Plan is to preserve and protect the natural resources that are a defining feature of the Islands Community. Table 2-G provides an inventory of natural resources in the Islands area.

Table 2-G also lists sites that are proposed for protection as greenspace. Greenspace is defined

**Table 2-F. Inventory of Historic and Cultural Resources**

Area	Resource	Location	Summary Description
<b>Wilmington Island</b>	Historic structures or their remains from the period 1893 to 1930 located in the Wilmington Island Pleasure and Improvement Co. Subdivision.	1. 2226 East Boulevard 2. 2228 East Boulevard  3. 2309 East Boulevard  4. East Boulevard 5. 2122 Walthour Road 6. 2308 Walthour Road  7. 1806 Wilmington Island Rd  8. 1540 Wilmington Island Rd 9. 1530 Wilmington Island Rd  10. 1710 Wilmington Island Rd 11. 1728 Wilmington Island Rd 12. 1724 Wilmington Island Rd	1. 1938 temple front cottage 2. 1910 bungalow (orig. cottage, later winterized for yr-round use) 3. 1928 bungalow (orig. cottage, later winterized for yr-round use) 4. McGinty House 5. unknown structure 6. 1930, orig. summer cottage, later winterized for year round use 7. 1930, orig. summer cottage, later winterized for year round use 8. "27 Oaks", 1975 DNR Survey 9. 1895 possible outbuilding for Twin Oaks 10. 1975 DNR Survey 11. 1930 log construction 12. predates 1893 subdivision
	Stable	1320 Wilmington Island Road, ca. 1910	May have been part of 1893 complex.
	Early 20 <sup>th</sup> Century commercial structure	618 Wilmington Island Road, Sail Harbor	One of the older commercial structures on the island.
	Sheraton Savannah Resort and County Club (1975 Survey)	612 Wilmington Island Road	Hotel built in 1927 known as General Oglethorpe Hotel; typical 1920s resort hotel.
	Oemler Farmhouse – 19 <sup>th</sup> Century	47 Morningside Drive	Oemler was a physician, agriculturist, and promoter of the oyster industry.
	Silo	Dogwood and Wilmington Island Road	Agricultural artifact on the island.
<b>Whitemarsh Island</b>	Demere House	Turner's Rock	Early 20 <sup>th</sup> Century house.
	Confederate Civil War earthworks	Johnny Mercer and Saffold Field	Part of a second line of defense; a redan and redoubt.
	Gibson's Point Battery	Battery Circle	Part of first line of defense, 1861.
	Turner's Rock Battery	Turner's Rock	No information available.
<b>Talahi Island</b>	Bryan Cemetery	243 Falligant Avenue	Located on site of Nonchalance Plantation.
<b>Oatland Island</b>	Brotherhood of Railway Conductors retirement home 1927	711 Sandtown Road	Environmental Educational Center; from WWII to 1974 used as facility for mosquito control research.
<b>Other Sites in Islands Vicinity</b>	US 80 Palm Lined Hwy	McQueen's Island	4.5-mile segment
	Central of Georgia abandoned r/w	McQueen's Island	8-mile segment; now converted to trail.
	Fort Pulaski National Monument	Cockspur Island	Multiple resources on National Register
	Fort Jackson	Ft. Jackson Rd & Savannah R.	National Register
	Fort Bartow Confederate Battery	Causten's Bluff Subdivision	Part of a first line of defense; largest and most complete work on the entire coast.
	CSS Georgia	Savannah River	National Register

**Table 2-G. Inventory of Natural Resources and Greenspace<sup>1</sup>**

Resource	Location	Purpose or Description	Ownership	Acreage
Demere Tract/YMCA Camp Venture	Whitemarsh Island	Passive Recreation; YMCA facility	Chatham County	150 green-space of 201
Johnny Mercer Boulevard	Whitemarsh and Wilmington Islands	Scenic Roadway	Multiple owners	--
McCorkle Bikeway	Whitemarsh Island	Bikeway	County	--
Islands Elementary Wetland Education Area	Whitemarsh Island	Wetlands education	Board of Education	3
County Tract donated by Union Camp	Oatland Island Rd	Open space, future use undetermined	Chatham County	12
Oatland Island Education Center	Oatland Island	Environmental Education	Board of Education	100
Wilmington Island Marshview	Johnny Mercer Blvd	Scenic marsh view	Multiple owners	--
<b>Acreage</b>				<b>265</b>

1. Greenspace is protected open space where public use is generally limited to passive or non-intrusive activities. Greenspace that is located in recreation facilities is not listed in this table

2. The entire Demere Tract is 188 acres; 163 acres have been subdivided for dedication as greenspace.

**Table 2-H. Inventory of Recreation Facilities**

Facility	Location	Activities	Ownership	Acreage
Charles C. Brooks Park	Johnny Mercer Blvd	Active Recreation	County	20
Charles C. Brooks Park Annex (Soccer)	Concord Rd., Wilmington Island	Soccer Field	County	3
Grays Subdivision Park	Whitemarsh Island	Playground	Private	2
Frank Spencer Boat Ramp	Off Islands Expy	Boat Ramp	County	--
Jaycee Park	South Wilmington Isl.	Passive Recreation	County	1
Lazaretto Creek <sup>1</sup>	Lazaretto Creek	Historic Site	National Park Service	104
Lazaretto Creek Boat Ramp <sup>1</sup>	US 80 East	Boat Ramp	County	--
Robert McCorkle, Sr., Bikeway	Wilmington Island	Bikeway	County	--
Whitemarsh Park	Whitemarsh Island	Playground	Whitemarsh Island Com. Club Corp.	2
Wilmington Island Community Park	Cohen Ave and Walthour Rd	Picnic, Exercise	County	6
<b>TOTAL ACREAGE</b>				<b>138</b>

1. Lazaretto Creek is technically outside the community boundary, but included here because of its close proximity.

by the State and the County as areas that are permanently protected and remain primarily in their natural state. Table 2-G does not identify existing or potential active recreation areas such as playgrounds and ball fields. These are inventoried separately in Table 2-H.

Clear-cutting of vegetation on development sites is a continuing practice with adverse impacts on both natural resources and the semi-rural appearance of the community. Even though the area has transformed from a rural environment to a suburban community, its situation in an estuarine environment calls for new standards for site development. New practices that result in “low impact” development are well documented and widely practiced, and they are incorporated into the Islands Community Land Use Plan recommendations. Such practices result in reduced stormwater runoff (essential for environmental protection and flood control), buffering for adjacent neighborhoods, and enhanced community appearance.

Riparian buffers are of particular importance to the protection of water quality and habitat. The University of Georgia has reviewed the scientific literature on riparian buffers. Their recommendations for scientifically sound and legally defensible buffers can be found on the web at [www.ecology.uga.edu/outreach](http://www.ecology.uga.edu/outreach). The policies and recommendations found in Sections 3 and 4 attempt to follow the guidance in the documents on that website. The University documents cite many reasons for riparian buffers, including: a) to reduce the volume and velocity of stormwater runoff in order to protect hydrological profiles; b) to reduce the sediment and pollutants going into open water; and c) to provide upland wildlife corridors. The first two of these can be achieved with buffers ranging from 35 to 100 feet, whereas the third typically requires buffers of 300 feet. The first two can be implemented in the Islands Community, whereas the third is impractical due to existing development patterns. Minimal buffers of 35 feet will typically remove over 60 percent of sediment and pollutants before they enter the water.

Maintaining the natural profile of the shoreline is also important for stabilization and water quality. Bulkheads, seawalls, groins, and other structures alter wave energy and other natural processes resulting in property and habitat degradation. In addition to altering wave energy, such structures can channelize the movement of water during hurricanes, potentially causing more damage to the natural and built environment. The deflection of wave energy can disrupt ecosystems by removing or depositing new bottom material. Bulkheads are used in the Islands area to build up and define shore areas, and under normal conditions do not deflect wave energy. However, they do present a threat to water quality by eliminating the natural marsh buffer. Bulkheads enable property to be developed in closer proximity to the shoreline, which allows non-point source pollutants to run unfiltered into streams, rivers, and bays.

Citizens have identified a need to strengthen provisions of the Land Disturbing and Tree Protection Ordinance regarding protection of existing trees and replanting requirements. In particular, there is a need to establish a heritage tree program (similar to that adopted by the City of Savannah) to protect exceptional specimen trees. A related problem is the loss of trees to road widening and the adverse impacts on scenic roadways and sense of green open space. A possible solution is a program to protect scenic roads and to establish protective land development standards for such corridors.

Roadway corridors and specific sites in the Islands Community that require protection and enhancement based on historic or scenic attributes include: a) Johnny Mercer Boulevard from Bryan Woods Road to the commercial district on Wilmington Island; b) Johnny Mercer Boulevard from Penn Waller Road to Walthour Road; c) US 80 from the Wilmington River to the commercial center on Whitmarsh Island; d) US 80 from the Islands Expressway to Bull River; and e) sites at the approaches to the Turner's Creek (at Johnny Mercer Boulevard and at US 80) and Bull River bridges (at US 80).

Loss of open space with development of available land is now an acute problem. Acquisition of the Demere property has helped to redress this situation. The recently established Countywide Community Greenspace Program may identify other sites for fee simple acquisition or purchase of development rights. However, greenspace funds provided by the State are limited and they will need to be leveraged with other funds for any additional land acquisition.

## **2.5 Recreation Facilities**

Recreation facilities are listed in Table 2-H and shown on Figure 2-E. Residents believe that with increasing population growth and associated consumption of land there has been a decline in recreation level of service. Some of that need may have been addressed with the Demere Tract acquisition. The site will provide 150 acres of trails in protected greenspace and 52 acres for YMCA facilities, including ball fields.

With an estimated population of 22,200 in 2000, and applying the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) guideline of 6.25 to 10.0 acres per 1,000 people there should be at least 139-222 acres of recreation area at present. The range increases to 149-239 acres by the year 2020. Existing recreation acreage in 2000 falls only one acre short of meeting that need. The ratio in 2020 is expected to improve only slightly since little land will be available as the area approaches build-out.

Passive recreation facilities are not included in the ratios. However, the Demere Tract will add significantly to the community's recreation infrastructure because of its central location and the integration of its passive and active uses. Technically, the Demere Tract improves the ratio by adding as much as 52 acres (depending on the final allocation of public recreation area). Private recreation facilities such as the YMCA (the portion requiring membership) as well as golf courses are not included in the facilities calculation. Such facilities, as well as passive recreation facilities, private pools, and tennis courts do not address the active recreation facility needs of young families, in particular for new ball fields.

In order to meet the guideline of 6.25 to 10.0 acres per 1,000 residents, an additional 11 to 101 acres would be needed to meet the projected needs for the year 2020. Meeting the lower end of the range may be acceptable from a planning perspective because of the close proximity of many passive and active recreational facilities (e.g., Fort Pulaski, Fort Jackson, McQueen's Island trail, and a vast area of wildlife refuges). An additional 20-25 acres may well be sufficient if it is targeted specifically to ball fields, tracks, and courts. Since the Islands area is nearing build-out, land allocations for new facilities are not anticipated beyond



2020.

*The Islands Recreation Facilities Plan* (1993), found that the area's top two needs were bikeways and boat ramps. The Chatham County Bikeway Plan is discussed in Section 2.6. Boat ramps are limited and no plans currently exist to provide more. Other needed areas and facilities (listed in order of need) were tennis courts, natural areas, fishing piers, and jogging trails. Ball fields of all types were selected least often (although changing demographics may increase demand; see section 2.2). The Facilities Plan recommended expansion of the Charles C. Brooks Park and the development of a 50+ acre passive recreation natural area park. Acquisition of the Demere Tract, completed in 2000, will more than meet this objective. While a plan for the Demere site has not been finalized, preliminary plans call for 150 acres of passive recreational area on the 201 acre property. The remaining 25 acres will be part of the YMCA active recreation complex.

The 1996 *Chatham County Open Space Plan* analyzed the regional park needs of unincorporated Chatham County and the Islands area, based on NRPA Guidelines. The guideline for regional parks is 5.0 - 10.0 acres of parkland per 1,000 people. Because regional parks serve the entire county, the 1995 estimated county population was used in the needs assessment. The current population of 240,411 is used here to update the 1995 figure. Chatham County has four regional parks: L. Scott Stell (108 acres), Lake Mayer (75 acres), Kings Ferry (100 acres) and Tom Triplett (311 acres). These four parks give the county a total of 594 acres of regional parkland. Using the minimum guideline, there should currently be approximately 1,200 acres of regional parkland in the county, a deficiency of approximately 606 acres. This deficiency is partly due to the fact that regional parks in Chatham County are generally smaller than the national average. These parks are being linked to an extensive trails system that will effectively expand their area and accessibility. The trails are part of a countywide network that is being planned in conjunction with the Coastal Georgia Greenway system. Detailed information on this system can be found in the *Chatham County Bikeway Plan* (2000) and the *Chatham County Community Greenspace Program Grant Application Report* (2000).

The only section of the county lacking a regional park is the Islands Area. This area of the County has experienced one of the highest growth rates over the past 10 years, and the need for additional facilities has been evaluated by the County. The *Recreation Facilities Plan for the Islands Community* (1993) identified that a large passive recreation park was needed to address projected needs. This need has now been addressed with the Demere tract acquisition.

## **2.6 Transportation Facilities**

The Islands Community is linked to the mainland by two routes, Highway 80 East and the President Street Extension (Islands Expressway). The two arterials merge on Whitemarsh Island and continue eastward as Highway 80 East to Tybee Island. They both currently operate a level of service (LOS) A-B, or in free flow. Forecasts show that LOS C-D conditions will exist by 2025, with LOS E-F conditions in nearby Thunderbolt. Peak traffic and evacuation conditions are therefore a matter of concern to residents and public officials.

During the community planning process, numerous concerns and suggestions were put forward by residents. Many of these are addressed by the CUTS program, while others are addressed in the recently adopted Bikeway Plan. The following is an assessment of community concerns followed by an analysis of traffic flows on area roadways, a summary of the relevant portions of the Countywide Bikeway Plan, and finally an assessment of how land use planning might help to mitigate emerging congestion.

### **2.6.1 Transportation Concerns Reported by Residents**

During the community needs assessment process residents expressed a number of concerns about mounting traffic congestion, roadway improvements, and the need for bicycle and pedestrian facilities. This section recites those concerns, even though some have already been addressed and others are more properly resolved through other planning processes (e.g., public safety). As noted in Section 1, this plan contains a thorough review of public concerns, although not all those concerns can or should be addressed by the land use planning strategies that constitute the plan's implementation mechanism.

Specific intersections identified for improvements by residents include the following: US 80 at Publix, and Johnny Mercer Boulevard at Whitemarsh Island Drive. Residents cited dangerous conditions at these locations. Additional concerns that were identified in the *Islands Growth Guide* are listed below. Technical information related to these concerns is found in subsequent sections.

Wilmington Island Road at May Howard School is congested during peak periods, although traffic does not exceed daily capacity. Left turns from the southbound lane cross the highway and block traffic. The *Growth Guide* recommends re-routing traffic to provide access for vehicles from the rear of the school and widening a segment for turning lanes. Bicyclists ride in the street contributing to congestion. Residents feel that bicycle traffic should therefore be re-routed or better managed. Children are currently driven to school because it is not safe to ride bikes. Parking on the road should be removed and a traffic officer placed at the entrance. Technical comments on these recommendations can be found in Subsection 2.6.3.

Penn Waller Road is also reported by residents as over-capacity during peak periods (7:30-7:45 to 8:00-9:15 and 2:30-7:30). Traffic counts, however, do not reveal deficient capacity. Design issues such as the separation distance between intersecting roads and driveways may be contributing to the problem. Residents report that development did not always appear to make appropriate street improvements as a condition of their approval. Some residents suggested changeable direction lanes during peak hours in applicable locations as a means of alleviating congestion. They do not, however, feel that Penn Waller Road should be widened as a solution.

The west-bound lane of Johnny Mercer Boulevard at U.S. Highway 80 is perceived by residents to be over capacity; residents report that traffic backs up to Bryan Woods Road. Residents have opposed the planned flyover resulting in a de-prioritization of the project to "indefinite long range" status. Solutions that *do not* include the flyover or widening Johnny Mercer Boulevard out to U.S. Highway 80 should be pursued. Residents feel that use of other

routes such as back entrances to schools, apartments and condos should be encouraged. Such “backage roads” have been developed on Hilton Head and elsewhere as a means of alleviating congestion on major roads. Other suggestions are to foster carpooling and encourage different schedules to work and shop. Residents also report insufficient illumination for safe turning movements at Johnny Mercer Boulevard at U.S. Highway 80. Illumination is also poor at Cromwell Road and Wilmington Island Road. Residents feel the accident rate here might be unacceptably high, and better traffic control measures are warranted.

Residents report a great need for pedestrian, transit, and bicycle facilities. *The Chatham County Bikeway Plan* (2000) has identified several such needed improvements. Once identified in the Bikeway Plan, they are able to move through the approval process for federal funding.

Residents have suggested that bike path linkages and connections should be provided by developers as development occurs. Further, developers should indicate linkages on all new development plans prior to approval. Bicycle parking racks should be provided by both the County and private businesses. Residents have noted that poor roadway and bikeway maintenance discourages use; asphalt lanes become ribbed or deteriorated by heavy vehicular traffic and inhibit bicycle riding on edges of roads. On-road bicycle lanes should be striped, posted, and properly maintained.

Whitemarsh and Wilmington Islands should be connected with a bikeway via Johnny Mercer Boulevard. Children could go to the library and other destinations safely. Connections between Bryan Wood Road, Battery Point Plantation, Yacht Club, and Whitemarsh Island schools would be highly desirable. A bike path from Wilmington Island Road at Cromwell and extended to Deerwood off-road would be desirable because of the blind curve. The Penn Waller Bike Path should extend to Walthour Road as it is difficult to cross to Concord.

Sidewalks lack coherent specifications throughout the Islands, according to residents. There is a need to create standard specifications, both in public rights-of-way and in developments. Pedestrians and automobiles should be separated by requiring setbacks for sidewalks. Lighted links should be provided in neighborhoods from West Wilmington Park to Settlement to Olde Towne. The sidewalk linkage should be improved from Winchester along Walthour to Penn Waller to the old YMCA and Kroger. Some residents suggested that bikeway and pedestrian trails should be extended from East Penn Waller to Johnny Mercer Boulevard and up to US 80 to the proposed bikeway to Tybee; this is now partly in place (see Subsection 2.6.3). The Bicycle Plan currently recommends using McCorkle Path rather than Johnny Mercer Boulevard.

## **2.6.2 Traffic Volumes and Road Capacities**

The Georgia Department of Transportation in conjunction with the CUTS program bases decisions for road improvements on a variety of factors including traffic volumes, roadway capacity, congestion, and local priorities. For planning purposes, volume-to-capacity (v/c) ratios for Islands area roadways are used to determine levels of service (LOS); for example, a v/c ratio less than 0.75 equates to an assumed LOS A-B, or free flowing traffic conditions,

based on GDOT standards.

Only one major transportation facility improvement is scheduled for the Islands area. Four-laning of US 80 from Bryan Woods Road on Whitemarsh Island east to Bull River is under construction (Bull River to Lazaretto Creek is programmed for future construction). This improvement will relieve congestion, bringing the LOS up from E-F to C or better. No other major road projects are in the Transportation Improvement Plan, nor are they indicated by current levels of service. The Islands area is largely built-out and major right-of-way acquisition for any future improvements will be challenging.

The GDOT-CUTS transportation modeling program forecasts 2025 v/c ratios that are only slightly less than baseline data from 1992. This translates to declines in LOS from A-B to C-D in some areas, primarily on major arterial roadways. Highway 80 East from Thunderbolt to Johnny Mercer, and the first segment of Johnny Mercer off Highway 80 are expected to decline the most. Decline of LOS on the Islands Expressway and in a few other locations is forecast to be relatively small. In other instances LOS is forecast to improve, notably on Highway 80 from Bryan Woods Road to Quarterman Drive as a result of the current widening project.

While v/c ratios are often the primary indicator of the need for road improvements, other factors are also taken into account. The existence of a community plan, such as this one, that identifies specific concerns of residents is valid documentation that can be presented to the CUTS committees that prioritize transportation improvements.

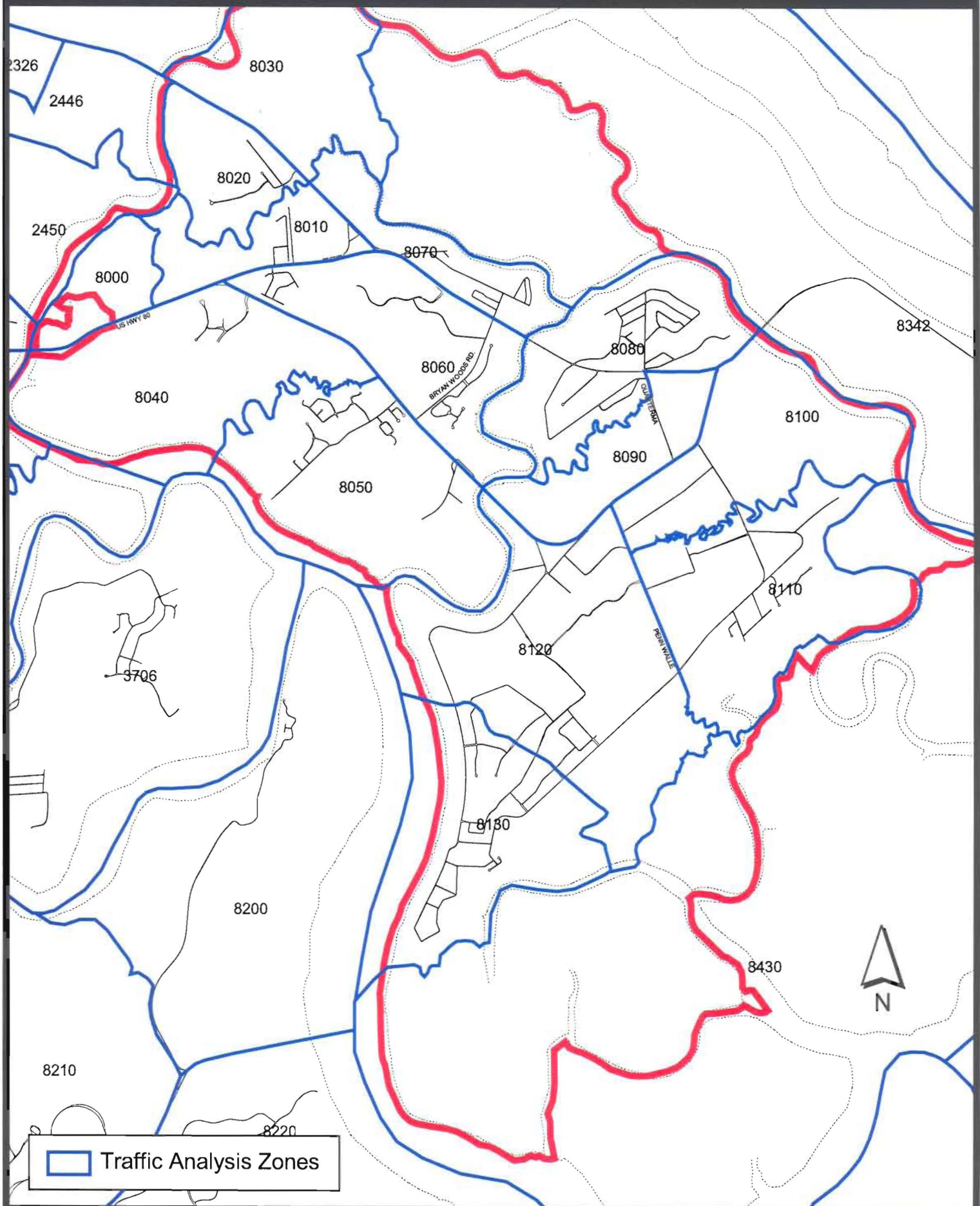
### **2.6.3 Chatham County Bikeway Plan**

The Chatham County Bikeway Plan was adopted in September, 2000. The plan was a continuation of work that produced the Countywide Open Space Plan, which was adopted in 1996. The Bikeway plan contains detailed information relevant to the Islands planning process; however, it does not constrain the Islands plan to predetermined design and location parameters. All such plans should be considered evolving and interactive.

The Bikeway plan identifies four types of facilities: 1) bicycle path/multi-use trail; 2) bicycle lane without parking; 3) bicycle lane with parking; and 4) paved shoulder. The first is an off-road facility, and the preferred design identified during the Islands planning process. The other three are on-road facilities.

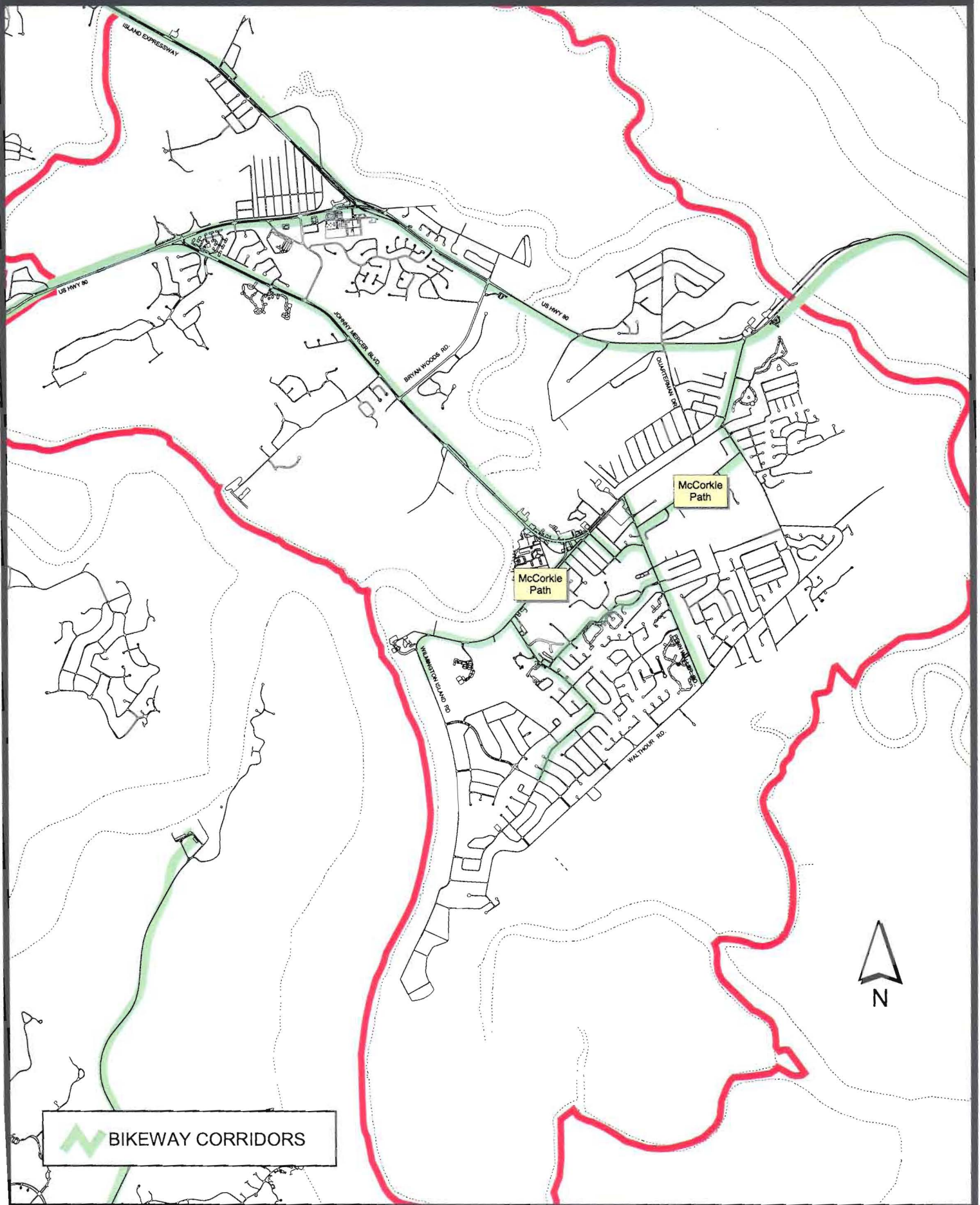
The plan identifies the McCorkle Bikeway as the only *existing* facility in the Islands Community. It also identifies five additional corridors for future bikeway development. They include on-road (types 2, 3, and 4) facilities on Highway US 80 East, the Islands Expressway, Johnny Mercer Boulevard, and connectors to the Robert McCorkle Bikeway on Wilmington Island.

**FIG. 2-C TRAFFIC ANALYSIS ZONES**





**FIG. 2-D PLANNED BIKEWAY CORRIDORS**



None of these proposed facilities (which are all on-road facilities) fits the preferred design profile suggested during the Islands planning process. Additional work will be needed to identify right-of-way and funding sources for separate facilities of that type. The McCorkle facility is the only bikeway among these with off-road segments. However, since the others are still in the planning stages there may be opportunities to reconsider their design.

#### **2.6.4 Land Use and Transportation**

Reducing auto-dependence is a central strategy of modern land use planning. Finer grained development patterns, mixed use developments, and provision of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities are the principal methods applied to this end. There are two basic scales at which this is done: on the site development level and on the area or zoning district level.

On the first level, a land use plan typically prescribes standards or incentives for new development and redevelopment that address transportation facilities. If the recommended standards or incentives are codified into the zoning and development standards ordinance(s), they will have a profound effect on transportation. For example, a shopping center might have to address access management (ingress and egress), bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and perhaps signalization and road improvements. The standards will determine the effectiveness of transportation management in and around the site.

On the second level, a land use plan is (or should be) the basis for zoning, just as a business plan is a basis for a marketing strategy. A properly planned mix of land uses can have the effect of minimizing the traffic impacts of development. For example, if a shopping center is designed with a mix of uses, with attractive pedestrian facilities, with pedestrian access to adjacent commercial uses, and with pedestrian access from nearby residential areas, it will generate far less traffic than a disconnected single-use center. The town center land use model in this plan will have the effect, over time, of reducing traffic generation by managing traffic demand, rather than adding lanes.

In 1996, Dr. Reid Ewing, one of the nation's leading transportation planning experts, published *Best Development Practices*, a review of new developments and traditional towns noted as quality places. Many of the transportation planning practices cited by Islands community residents in this plan are also cited as best practices in the Ewing book. Ten best practices discussed in the book are outlined in Figure 2-C. These best practices are among the principles followed in drafting the goals, objectives, and policies in this plan.

**FIGURE 2-E  
TEN BEST TRANSPORTATION PRACTICES  
THAT CAN BE APPLIED THE ISLANDS COMMUNITY**

**These principles can be applied to new subdivisions and  
redevelopment areas such as the proposed Town Centers.**

1. Design the street network with multiple connectors and relatively direct routes.
2. Space through streets no more than a half mile apart or the equivalent route density in a curvilinear network.
3. Use “traffic calming” measures to reclaim the rights of pedestrians and bicyclists.
4. Keep speeds on local streets down to 20 mph.
5. Keep speeds on community arterials and collectors down to 35 mph (excluding Highway US 80 and the Islands Expressway, which primarily serve through traffic).
6. Keep all streets as narrow as possible, and never more than four travel lanes wide.
7. Avoid using traffic signals wherever possible and always space and coordinate them for good traffic progression.
8. Provide networks for pedestrians and bicyclists as good as the network for motorists.
9. Provide pedestrians and bicyclists with shortcuts and alternatives to travel along high-volume streets.
10. Incorporate transit-oriented design features.

Source: Adapted from Reid Ewing, *Best Development Practices*, American Planning Association, 1996. The list includes 10 of 12 best practices discussed in the book and considered most relevant to conditions in the Islands Community. Mr. Ewing’s list of best practices is meant to be applied to specific developments, but some practices apply to community planning as well.



## 2.7 Other Public Facilities

The 1998 *Growth Guide* reports that Islands residents are generally satisfied with the level of service of their community facilities (see Figure 2-E). The Islands Community Center is an excellent venue for many types of activities and meetings. Residents have access to other County offices in Savannah, and the need for services to be localized has not been expressed.

The Islands library is an exception. It is one of the most used facilities in the county, and is classified by the Regional Library System as a general purpose, full service library. The library staff recommends a size standard of 1.0 square foot per capita for a branch library of this type. In order to meet this standard for a projected population of 24,058 in the Year 2020, a 24,000 square foot building would be required. Construction of a library facility of this size would require a site of approximately 96,000 square feet (2.2 acres), according to library standards. A draft Long Range Facilities Plan recommends that the existing 5,860 square foot facility be abandoned and that a new facility be constructed on another site that is highly visible, on or near a major arterial street, and geographically central within the Islands service area.

The Southside Fire Department maintains two stations in the Islands area, one located on Highway 80 East on Whitmarsh Island and another located on Wilmington Island Road on Wilmington Island. Both stations contain EMS units. The Fire Service Rating for virtually the entire Islands area is 3.

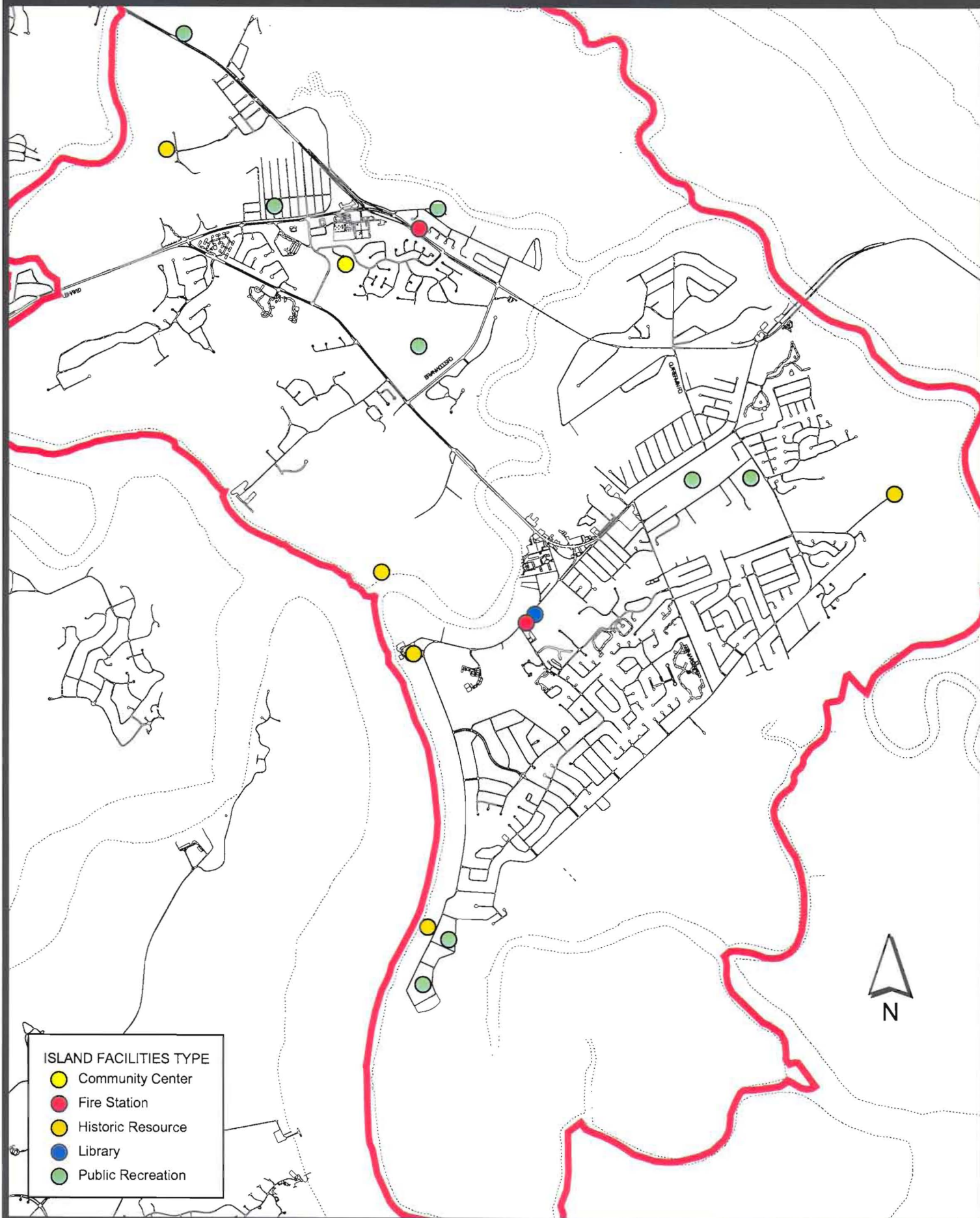
Most developed lots within the Islands Community are served by community water systems. The two largest systems are the City of Savannah Wilmington Island System and the City of Savannah Whitmarsh Island System. The other water systems within the community are owned by private utility companies. Figure 2-F shows the existing service areas of the Islands water systems.

The City of Savannah Wilmington Island System presently serves about 5,120 dwelling units. The projected number of dwelling units within a logically expanded service area by 2020 is about 5,800 units. An increase of 680 units would result in an additional water demand of 204,000 gallons per day (GPD), based upon a rate of 300 GPD per unit. The same analysis for the Whitmarsh Island System results in a projected increase in demand of 201,000 GPD per unit. The same analysis for the Whitmarsh Island System results in a projected increase in demand of 201,000 GPD by 2020, based upon an increase from 1,730 dwellings to 2,400 dwellings within the service area. The City of Savannah Water and Sewer Bureau has stated that the future water demand for both systems can be met.

Figure 2-G shows the existing service area of the City of Savannah President Street Sanitary Sewer System. All other areas are served by individual on-lot wastewater systems. The future service area for the President Street System includes the entire Islands Community. The City of Savannah Water and Sewer Bureau has stated that the President Street Wastewater Treatment Plant would have adequate capacity to treat the flow generated by the 10,140 dwelling units projected for the Islands Community by 2020.

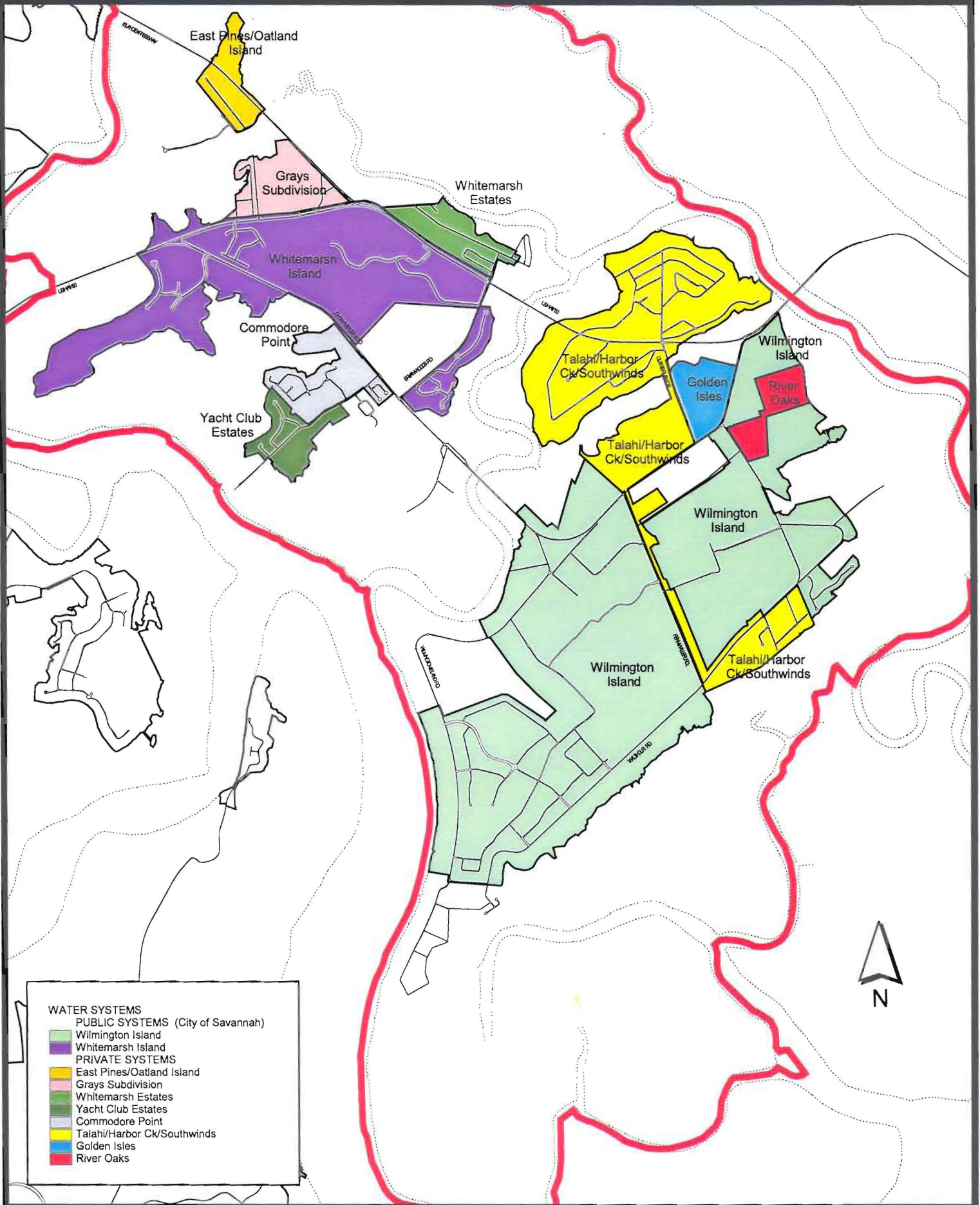


**FIG. 2-F ISLANDS FACILITIES**

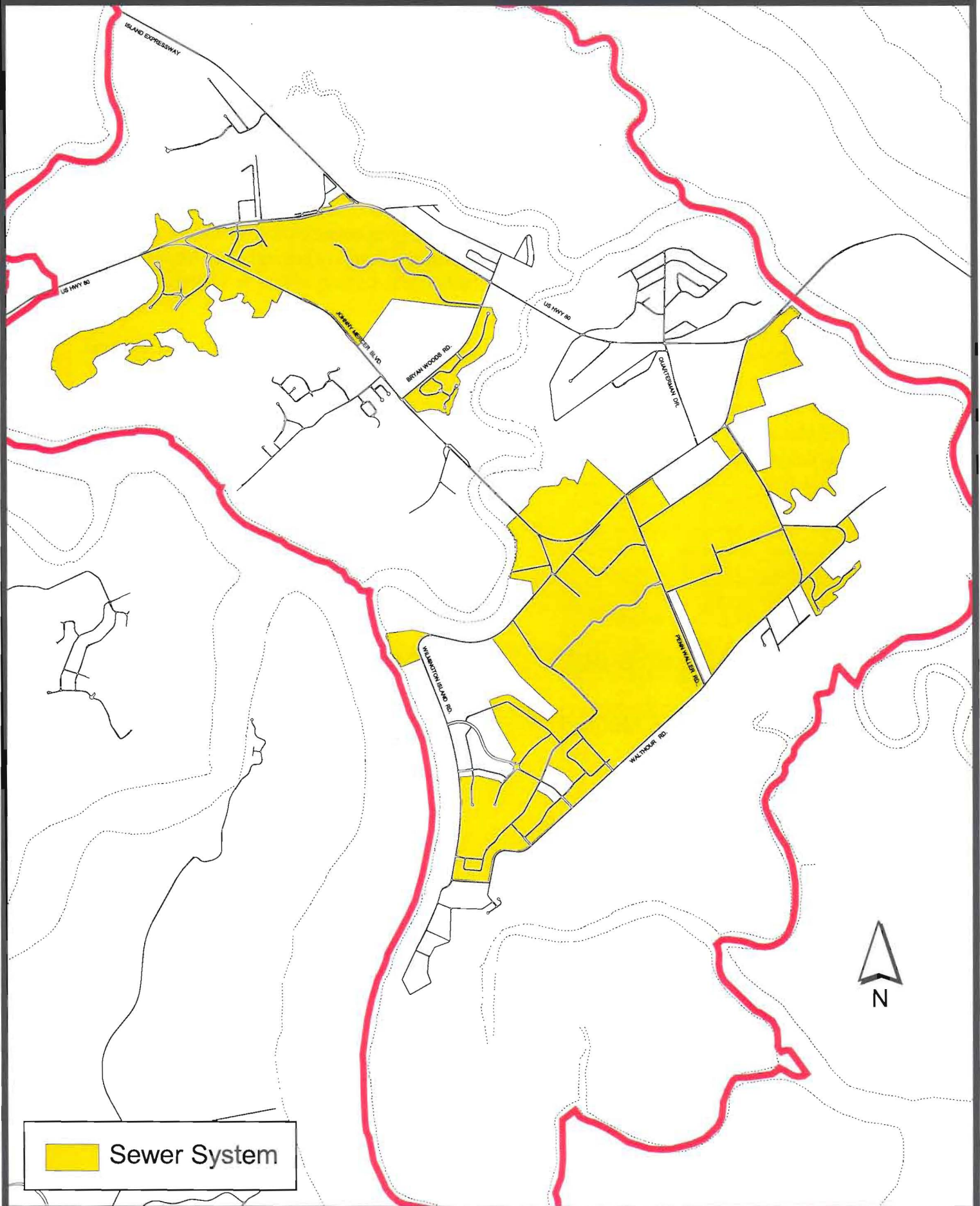




# FIG. 2-G ISLANDS WATER SERVICE AREA MAP



**FIG. 2-H ISLANDS SEWER SERVICE AREA MAP**



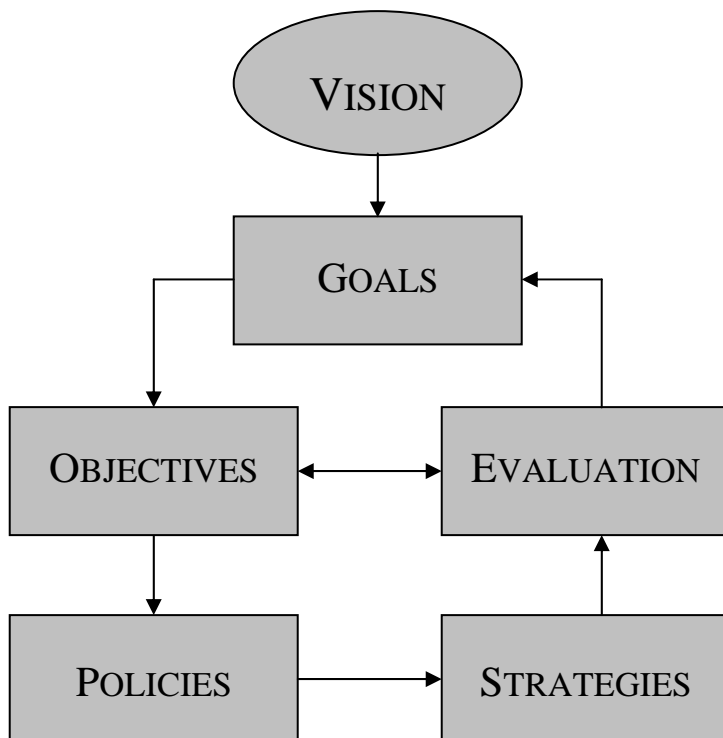


### 3.0 Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

This section contains three levels of statements about the desires and aspirations of the community. The first is a Vision Statement, or the broadest possible statement about the future character of the community. The second level is that of Goals, or statements about the community's aspirations in each area of concern addressed by the plan. The third level is that of objectives, or specific and measurable statements that can be used to develop strategies for implementation of the plan. Objectives also provide a basis with which to evaluate the success of the plan in achieving its stated Goals. Policies and Strategies are the means by which a plan is implemented. Evaluation programs are often established to determine the effectiveness of a plan and to revise it if necessary. Figure 3-A, below, depicts this planning paradigm graphically. The process is also discussed from an implementation perspective in Section 5.

This section is based largely on recommendations contained in the Islands Growth Guide, and modified through recommendations by the Land Use Advisory Committee, MPC staff, and the general public. For implementation purposes (see Section 5) the recommendations are stratified into three levels: Level 1: to be adopted immediately as part of zoning amendment submittal package; Level 2: to be completed as a high priority for second zoning amendment submittal package; Level 3: to require further study.

**Figure 3-A**  
**The Comprehensive Planning Paradigm**



#### Terms

***Vision:*** The guiding statement about the future of the community. Referred as a “Mission” in organizational planning.

***Goals:*** General statements about the approaches a community will take to achieve its Vision.

***Objectives:*** Specific statements about how the Goals will be achieved, usually written so that they can be measured or otherwise evaluated.

***Policies:*** Statements consistent with Goals and Objectives that are adopted by resolution or ordinance.

***Strategies:*** Administrative actions designed to implement Policies.

***Evaluation:*** Procedure to determine level of attainment of Objectives and recommend changes that may be needed for successful outcomes.

### 3.1 Vision Statement

***The vision shared by residents and businesses of the Islands Community is one of enduring, peaceful neighborhoods and small town character set in the context of an attractive and healthy natural environment.***

### 3.2 Land Use: Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

#### **3.2.1 GOAL: To achieve compatibility of new infill development with its neighbors and surroundings.**

Objective 1: Introduce performance-based zoning standards, either within the existing zoning system or in an updated zoning ordinance.

Implementation Strategy: Include specific zoning text amendments in Section 5 of the plan that address the compatibility of new development. Where further study may be required, identify a process in Section 5 leading to later text amendments. New standards should address land use and environmental buffers, building height, site design, and building design. Where appropriate, incorporate new standards into the proposed overlay districts.

Objective 2: Implement MPC staff recommendations for tracking of general and specific development plans; ensure that inactive plans are not left in effect beyond a reasonable time.

Implementation Strategy: MPC staff has provided recommendations for tracking. The cost associated with implementation is \$1400. General development plans that have been inactive for a year should be reviewed by staff for consistency with current policies, guidelines, and zoning standards, and staff should be authorized to renew approval of conforming plans for one year. Specific development plans should expire in two years if construction of infrastructure has not begun.

#### **3.2.2 GOAL: To make this Plan, the County's land use policies, and its zoning regulations meaningful through effective code enforcement.**

Objective 1: Improve zoning code enforcement through a review of enforcement needs and resources.

Implementation Strategy: The County should conduct a needs assessment in this area.

#### **3.2.3 GOAL: To strengthen nonconforming use provisions in the zoning ordinance to reduce adverse impacts of non-conforming uses on surrounding properties.**

Objective 1: Identify non-conforming uses that are incompatible with surrounding uses, and adopt standards for mitigation that can be phased in over sufficient time to allow a legal non-

conforming use to comply.

Implementation Strategy: MPC staff will need to complete a review that is currently in progress before recommending new standards.

**3.2.4 GOAL: To limit all future commercial development to existing commercially zoned areas or to planned town centers.**

Objective 1: Employ land use policies and performance standards to attract new commercial development into existing town centers and adjacent expansion areas, while making these areas more vital and attractive.

Implementation Strategy: Adopt a policy statement in the Land Use Plan to limit commercial development to existing commercially-zoned areas. Establish town center overlay districts on Whitemarsh and Wilmington Islands. Adopt overlay district incentives to attract quality development to the town centers.

**3.2.5 GOAL: To adopt a town center development plan for the Whitemarsh Island and Wilmington Island central commercial areas.**

Objective 1: Conduct a planning workshop on the future of the Whitemarsh Island and Wilmington Island town centers placing special emphasis on design, access management, pedestrian/bicycle connectivity, and incentives to attract quality development.

Implementation Strategy: Organize the workshop immediately following adoption of the Islands Community Plan. MPC staff should facilitate the workshop with assistance from local design professionals. The workshop should be open to all Islands citizens.

**3.2.6 GOAL: To maintain the overall density and character of established single-family neighborhoods.**

Objective 1: Inventory current development densities and establish a rational framework for future growth that will preserve community character.

Implementation Strategy: Adopt an area-wide density policy within the framework of the Future Land Use Plan. Expand the R-1-A zoning district to include all areas along the shoreline and several interior areas, thereby increasing minimum lot size to 10,000 square feet. Increase buffers, setbacks and open space in the Environmental Overlay to effectively reduce density.

Objective 2: Require vegetative buffers between higher density/intensity development and low-to-medium density neighborhoods.

Implementation Strategy: The Environmental, Corridor, and Town Center overlay districts will contain additional standards beyond those in the underlying districts. For greater detail see overlay district descriptions in Sections 4 and 5.



Objective 3: Ensure that population growth does not exceed the capacity for orderly hurricane evacuation.

Implementation Strategy: Section 4, the Land Use Plan, contains an analysis of density and policy guidelines for maximum area gross density. Following the density guidelines should limit growth to levels that are manageable for orderly evacuations.

**3.2.5 GOAL: To allow reasonable opportunities for multi-family housing that blends with current land use patterns.**

Objective 1: Recognize the need for a range of housing choices within the community including inter-generational and affordable housing.

Objective 2: Provide for a range of housing choices, including multi-family housing, while preserving the character of existing single-family neighborhoods.

Objective 3: Maintain current proportions of single family and multi-family land use area.

Objective 4: Adopt standards to ensure that multi-family development blends with the character of the community.

Objective 5: Establish incentives to attract well-designed multi-family housing into mixed-use town center developments.

Implementation Strategy: Identify current proportion of multi-family acreage and adopt a policy to maintain that proportion as a limit. Adopt locational, site design, and building design guidelines as part of the Environmental Overlay District and/or special use standards. Adopt incentives for multi-family components of mixed-use development in town centers.

**3.3 Historic and Cultural Resources: Goals, Objectives, and Strategies**

**3.3.1 GOAL: To increase County responsibility for identification, monitoring, and preservation of historic resources in the Islands area.**

Objective 1: Support the concept of a County or MPC staff position for preservation and development review specifically for historic and archeological resources in the unincorporated area.

Implementation Strategy: Fund a countywide historic preservation position by instituting a historic and archeological review fee, similar to other fees instituted by the County for development review, except that the fee would apply only on sites where historic or archeological resources have been officially mapped.

**3.3.2 GOAL: To increase protection of identified, valuable historic resources, and**

**minimize loss of unprotected cultural and archeological resources to development, as recommended in the Comprehensive Plan.**

Objective 1: Establish land use policies and development regulations for historic, cultural, and archeological resource protection.

Implementation Strategy: Following the creation of a County preservation planner position, establish historic, cultural, and archeological review procedures. Conduct on-going mapping and documentation of such resources, establishing an official database and resource map.

### **3.3.3 GOAL: To utilize the historic preservation provisions of the Community Greenspace Program to preserve and protect historic and archeological sites.**

Objective 1: Complete greenspace site nomination forms for any other historic or archeological sites that may have been identified.

Implementation Strategy: Prepare site nominations for all sites identified in this plan or subsequently identified by historic preservation staff. If required, present site nomination information to the Greenspace Advisory Committee for review and recommendation. Additionally, any person may submit a nomination. After a nomination is received by the County or the MPC, the same procedure for review, evaluation, and prioritization process will be followed.

## **3.4 Natural Resources and Greenspace: Goals, Objectives, and Strategies**

### **3.4.1 GOAL: To prevent the loss of or damage to trees and natural vegetation lining boulevards and roads.**

Objective1: Establish a local scenic or historic road (or site) designation that will provide protection for such resources. *Note: Standards for protection of canopied roads are currently under development; these standards and the roads to which they apply should be reviewed before this strategy is implemented.*

Implementation Strategy: Map scenic and historic roads. Roads currently identified are Highway US 80, Islands Expressway, Johnny Mercer Blvd., and Bryan Woods Road. Propose a prototype program for the County based on the Islands Community Plan recommendations. Implement the Islands prototype program with signage on identified routes, an adopt-a-scenic-road program, and specific limitations on development to protect scenic and historic elements.

Objective 2: Adopt corridor standards for all arterial roads and all scenic and historic roads. Create a strategy for administration of a Corridor Review Board or Procedure to review all site plans in designated corridors.

Implementation Strategy: See Corridor Overlay District summary in Section 5. Adopt draft

standards in summary statement with this plan. Refine standards as a Level 2 priority and adopt them into the Zoning Ordinance when finalized.

Objective 3: Create and maintain a buffer along U.S. Highway 80 between Bryan Woods Road and Bull River. Include buffer plan with any plans for road widening.

Implementation Strategy: Coordinate buffer plan with MPC transportation planning staff, who will develop recommendation for CUTS program.

**3.4.2 GOAL: To preserve existing trees to the greatest extent possible in existing developed areas, new developments, and public lands.**

Objective 1: Provide improved protection to existing trees and to prevent unnecessary clear-cutting by adding tree protection standards to the Environmental and Corridor overlay districts.

Implementation Strategy: Recommendations currently being developed in conjunction with canopied road standards. Establish procedure whereby County Arborist is notified of utility tree trimming and has monitoring authority. Also see subsection 3.7.5, which addresses utility lines.

Objective 2: Research and recommend appropriate “low impact” site development standards for adoption into the zoning ordinance.

Implementation Strategy: Recommendations currently being developed by staff on a Level 3 priority schedule.

Objective 3: Provide for stronger enforcement by training County enforcement officers in natural resource protection.

Implementation Strategy: Include the need for additional protection in the zoning enforcement needs assessment; see Goal 2.2.2 and associated objectives and strategies.

**3.4.3 GOAL: To encourage developers to set aside open space by structuring incentives in the zoning ordinance.**

Objective 1: Establish standards for cluster development that will provide incentives for developers who pursue this option, including higher density with appropriate design standards.

Implementation Strategy: Include standards for cluster development in the Environmental Overlay District and/or special use standards on a Level 1 or 2 priority schedule. See discussion in Section 4 and draft standards in Section 5.

Objective 2: Reduce open space requirements for developments adjacent to and linked with identified town centers.

Implementation Strategy: Include standards for reduced open space in the Town Center Overlay District on a Level 2 priority schedule. Section 5 contains draft standards.

#### **3.4.4 GOAL: To improve the coordination of environmental review of new development.**

Objective 1: Coordinate local development review with Corps of Engineers permitting process to help protect natural resources, including trees, required buffers, marshes, creeks, rivers and other wetlands and water resources.

Implementation Strategy: This recommendation from the Islands Growth Guide has already been implemented, and the effort now is to continue to improve upon such coordination.

#### **3.4.5 GOAL: To adopt an Islands Environmental Overlay District (in lieu of or in conjunction with a major overhaul of the existing zoning ordinance) for the purpose of protecting community character and environmental resources.**

Objective 1: Limit the impacts of development on environmental resources with setbacks, riparian buffers, and improved stormwater management.

Objective 2: Limit the massing of development on the shoreline and marshfront to preserve community character, prevent shoreline blight, and protect natural resources.

Objective 3: Limit the height of buildings in all zoning districts in the overlay district to a maximum of 36 feet (greater heights may be available in the Town Center Overlay once it is adopted).

Objective 4: Require an analysis of visual impacts to accompany the site plan of any development located in a viewshed identified in the Community Plan or the Community Greenspace Plan.

Objective 5: Develop recommendations for improved stormwater management including possible adoption of best management practices (BMPs) in the overlay district that will reduce the impact of runoff to a 10 percent or lower impervious cover equivalent standard.

Objective 6: Identify and protect traditional marine uses such as marinas, boatyards, and boat launching facilities by defining a “traditional marine use” land use category. Protection of this use would be provided through a combination of incentives for enhancement of such properties and disincentives for conversion to other uses.

Implementation Strategy (Objectives 1 through 6): These objectives constitute the basis for the Environmental Overlay District, proposed standards for which are in Section 5.

### **3.5 Recreation Facilities: Goals, Objectives, and Strategies**

**3.5.1 GOAL: To apply National Recreation and Parks Association standards in determining the recreation and greenspace needs of the Islands Community.**

Objective 1: Provide for an adequate recreation facilities level of service to meet the needs of existing and future populations of the unincorporated Islands area.

Implementation Strategy: Complete the Greenspace Plan, currently in progress, and begin implementation of the Bikeway Plan, then assess additional recreation needs as stated in Objective 2.

Objective 2: Implement the NRPA-based recommendations of the 1989 Recreation Facilities Plan for the Islands area, as amended by this community plan, the Greenspace Plan, or the Bikeways Plan.

**3.5.2 GOAL: To ensure that the Demere tract meets the recreation and greenspace goals stated as the purpose for its acquisition.**

Objective 1: Complete a master plan for the Demere tract that includes: a) an active park and recreation area; and b) a passive recreation and protected greenspace area.

Objective 2: Ensure that the master plan identifies and integrates other recreation, bikeway, and greenspace elements.

Implementation Strategy (Objectives 1 and 2): Determine the boundaries of each of the two uses; place a conservation easement on the greenspace portion of the site; place the draft master plan on Greenspace and CUTS committee agendas for coordinated planning.

**3.6 Transportation: Goals, Objectives, and Strategies**

**3.6.1 GOAL: To address traffic congestion through both transportation system improvements and land use planning.**

Objective 1: Make necessary operational improvements to address specific intersections in accordance with congested and dangerous conditions identified in the Islands Community Plan.

Implementation Strategy: This is being addressed by currently scheduled improvements.

Objective 2: Promote alternative transportation modes, such as walking, transit, and bicycling consistent with principles of “Smart Growth” and “Best Transportation Practices” as described in Section 4.

Implementation Strategy: A “transportation enhancement” element is being added to the CUTS plan, which will facilitate prioritization of pedestrian and bicycle facilities as well as coordinated land use planning.

Objective 3: Implement recommendations of the *Countywide Bikeway Plan* (2000) for the Islands Community, which are consistent with this plan.

Implementation Strategy: Include plan recommendations in the new “transportation enhancement” element.

Objective 4: Request that the CUTS program develop a “preferred design” for road right-of-way in the Islands area that includes adequate facilities for alternative modes of travel as well as desired landscaping.

Implementation Strategy: This is partially addressed in the Bikeway Plan, which shows typical cross-sections. Adopt “preferred design” as CUTS policy. Amend the Islands Community Plan and the Bikeway Plan to include the “preferred design.”

Objective 5: Ensure that sidewalks and bikeways are built in conjunction with all road improvements.

Implementation Strategy: Include such improvements in the new “transportation enhancement” element. CUTS, GDOT, and developers should follow the preferred design and location for sidewalks and bikeways for all improvements programmed in the Islands area.

### **3.6.2 GOAL: To create an integrated network of bicycle/pedestrian facilities.**

Objective 1: Provide bicycle path linkages and connections as development occurs. Make bike paths as universal as roads.

Implementation Strategy: Include design standards in the Environmental, Town Center, and Corridor overlays. Focus on implementation of the Bikeway Plan.

Objective 2: Provide loop linkages for Wilmington Island, including Walthour Road to Wilmington Island Road.

Implementation Strategy: Include plan recommendations in the new “transportation enhancement” element. Implement Bikeway Plan proposed improvements.

Objective 4: In new development and redevelopment reduce collector widths for “traffic calming” and allow sufficient right-of-way for 8-foot bikeways. Bike path width should be adequate to accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists.

Implementation Strategy: Include plan recommendations in the new “transportation enhancement” element and in “preferred design” (see 3.6.1, Obj.4).

Objective 5: Make McCorkle Path a continuous path. Incorporate bikeway improvements in road improvements.

Implementation Strategy: Include plan recommendations in the new “transportation enhancement” element. For greater detail Bikeway Plan Table 4-2, last page.

Objective 6: Evaluate all remaining segments in the system for right-of-way and design characteristics, then incorporate them in the Islands bikeway system.

Implementation Strategy: Include plan recommendations in the new “transportation enhancement” element.

### **3.6.3 GOAL: To improve facilities for pedestrians with the goal of making the Islands a walkable community.**

Objective 1: Create standard specifications for sidewalks, and require sidewalks in all new development and redevelopment.

Implementation Strategy: Establish a requirement for an average minimum separation distance of 6 feet between sidewalks and arterial roadways, except where on road facilities are the only feasible alternative. Apply the same standard as a guideline on collector roadways.

Objective 2: Separate pedestrians from automobiles by requiring setbacks for sidewalks.

Implementation Strategy: See “preferred design” in subsection 3.6.1, Objective 4.

Objective 3: Provide lighted links in neighborhoods from West Park to Settlement to Olde Towne and others.

Implementation Strategy: Determine who is responsible for street lights in areas of concern. Designate lighted links identified in this plan or in the Bikeway Plan on the all maps of pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the Islands area.

Objective 4: Improve pedestrian environment for shopping by incorporating amenities such as sitting areas, shelters, civic spaces, outdoor market space, fountains, and pedestrian-only areas.

Implementation Strategy: See proposed Town Center Overlay District standards in Section 5.

## **3.7 Other Community Facilities and Services: Goals, Objectives, and Strategies**

### **3.7.1 GOAL: To reduce the crime rate utilizing Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) and effective community policing.**

Objective 1: Review methods of reducing crime by introducing CPTED concepts into development review.

Implementation Strategy: Develop specific recommendations for the Environmental and Town Center overlays based on CPTED concepts as a Level 2 priority.

Objective 2: Review methods of reducing crime such as community policing, as requested by residents during the planning process.

Implementation Strategy: This issue should be handled as part of the County administrative review process.

**3.7.2 GOAL: To maintain adequate community activity facilities by providing new facilities in town center locations.**

Objective 1: Enhance the new YMCA facility on the Demere site with facilities for a complete range of community services.

Implementation Strategy: Not addresses by this plan.

**3.7.3 GOAL: To provide appropriate library level of service so that it meets level of service standards.**

Objective 1: The library facilities study conducted by the MPC in 1989 indicated a need to expand the facility to 10,500 square feet. The need has now increased to 15,000 square feet, and new plans should reflect the revised figure.

Implementation Strategy: Using CUTS population projections and NRPA standards, review and assess recreation and greenspace needs in the Islands Community on at least a five-year basis.

**3.7.4 GOAL: To convert drainage facilities to multi-purpose facilities that have recreational, greenspace, and aesthetic value, where feasible.**

Objective 1: Include drainage facilities in greenspace, bikeway, and recreational facilities plans.

Implementation Strategy: To be coordinated by MPC staff.

Objective 2: Coordinate with drainage engineers and maintenance supervisors so that they are familiar with greenspace, bikeway, and recreational facilities plans.

Implementation Strategy: Procedures to be developed.

**3.7.4 GOAL: To maintain optimum fire service ratings.**

Objective 1. Ensure that growth does not reduce fire service rating.

Implementation Strategy: Adopt and implement Islands Community Plan.



**3.7.5 GOAL: To adopt a requirement that utility lines will be buried in the Islands area.**

Objective 1. Adopt a requirement for burial of utility lines in all new developments.

Objective 2. Explore the feasibility of burying all existing utility lines.

Implementation Strategy: Establish a study committee of residents and utility representatives to develop alternative scenarios. Develop interim procedures whereby utilities coordinate tree-trimming with the County.

## 4.0 Land Use Plan

The Land Use Plan component of the Islands Community Plan integrates all of the material in the previous sections into a representation of where land uses may occur and how they may relate to one another. This depiction is only one method of forecasting the future. Others include econometric models, market demand forecasts, and trends analysis. There are two principal advantages to the future land use model. First, it is one that can be understood and visualized by most citizens because it uses such familiar tools as maps and other common graphics. Secondly, it is readily codified into law through such established legal instruments as zoning requirements and subdivision standards.

Another aspect of the land use model is that it allows the public and elected representatives to envision how the future should look, and then work back to the present, establishing policies and laws that will lead to the envisioned future. By contrast, an econometric model can forecast future conditions, but cannot describe a desirable future and then work back to the present to identify steps to achieve that future. This, of course, is not to say that statistical or mathematical models cannot be usefully employed in the land use planning process. They can be used to forecast certain economic consequences of land use decisions, and if the forecasts are presented in clear and concise language, the public and their elected officials can add that information to their decision-making process.

The policies defined in this section are the guiding principles of the Land Use Plan. They are derived from the goals and objectives identified by the community, as presented in Section 3. The purpose of these policy statements is to provide guidance in interpreting the intent of the goals and objectives and specific zoning amendments. The discussion that follows is intended to be a foundation, or rationale, for the land use policy framework.

This plan supports single family development as the predominant land use in the Islands Community. However, a community of this size benefits from a mix of other uses. An alternative to single family housing that will provide for greater diversity within the community is that of limited, higher-density residential development in specified locations. A range of housing types, including some multi-family housing, provides for an inter-generational community. That is, it provides not only housing for traditional families in their child-bearing years, but also for young adults as they move away from home and for older parents and seniors who no longer require or desire large houses on expansive lots. Such a community is enriched by making it possible for three or more generations of a family to live in the same community if they choose to do so.

Inter-generational housing can be achieved without creating conditions for explosive high-density growth. Higher density development can be limited in size and directed to areas adjacent to other more intensive forms of development or to mixed-use developments. Such limitations will prevent existing, lower density areas from being disrupted with high density development, while establishing some rational parameters for the amount of such development that can occur.

Most Islands residents are employed outside the community. While it is often an objective in

land use planning to promote fine-grained development patterns, thereby making it possible for those who choose to do so to live near their place of work, this is not altogether the case in the Islands Community. As discussed throughout this plan, an over-riding objective is to preserve the community's unique environmental resources and small town character. This plan, therefore, does not contain strong recommendations for "jobs/housing balance." The recommendations are for modest development of office parks and organic changes in the existing commercial centers that might include professional offices in the mix of uses.

One especially powerful force at work in the community is its current low-to-medium density residential development pattern. This pattern in combination with the amenities offered by the Island Community is a magnet for young couples seeking a comfortable environment in which to raise a family. This creates market forces that are easily recognizable by developers. The result is more subdivisions on less land and higher density development patterns. More houses, more people, and more infrastructure attract more development at an accelerated pace. Following the establishment of residential subdivisions, commercial development becomes viable, which then attracts more residential development in a reinforcing trend. As land becomes scarce, higher intensity development fills in remaining sites.

School systems also respond by building or expanding schools to meet the demands of growth. New schools attract new subdivisions, commercial development follows the resulting growth, and a growth cycle is established. Such a cycle can clearly have either positive or negative consequences for a community. Until recently, the effects have been largely positive, as attested to by the 1996 public opinion survey. Now the potential exists to go beyond an acceptable level of growth and undermine many of the community qualities that Islands citizens have said they want to protect. The only way to alter such a demographic trend is to adopt and enforce unambiguous development standards that are based on visionary plans.

Islands citizens have made it clear that high-density housing is inconsistent with their perception of the area. They perceive the community as one of low-density single family detached housing, defined as 4 dwelling units per acre and lower (site gross density) in the 1985 Islands Land Use Plan. Currently, 76 percent of the community's area (including right-of-way) is in residential land use; 74 percent of the total area is single family. While the single family share may decrease slightly, the land use plan proposes that it remain above 70 percent as a matter of public policy. Multi-family and single family attached land uses, now three percent of total area, should be planned for expansion to five percent and limited in height to 35 feet (except in town centers). With the greater development intensity allowed in town centers, the increased area will allow for a doubling of commercial square footage in the twenty-year planning horizon. Commercial development will continue to expand, but should exist primarily to serve the local population (with a possible exception in the Highway 80 East corridor). A limited expansion of commercial land use, such as office parks in pre-defined areas, appears acceptable to the community.

A strong market appears to exist for medium density single family housing (4 to 8 dwelling units per acre) and multi-family housing at slightly higher densities, but the community has resisted the higher densities, even developments such as single family attached housing (i.e.,

duplexes).

Earlier, in Section 2.1 Existing Land Use, the density of development on Hilton Head Island was compared to that of the Islands Community. It was noted that while Hilton Head Island has absorbed a much higher density of development, the effects of that development are felt to a greater degree in nearby inland areas. These areas have experienced dramatic impacts, including traffic congestion and housing shortages. The implications for the Islands Community are clear.

First, growing housing demand in the Savannah area coupled with increased tourism on Tybee Island will continue to generate additional traffic and to increase demand for higher density housing. The community may wish to address traffic mitigation through discussions with CAT and with Tybee officials about new public transit service. Housing demand, however, can be addressed through land use planning, and this plan does so by allowing for continued growth while ensuring environmental protection and community preservation.

While the Islands Community is and will remain an area of mostly single family development, a mix of higher density housing types is encouraged primarily to accommodate the community's intergenerational housing needs, but also to accommodate a reasonable proportion of the area's need for housing for an expanding population. This policy emphasis addresses the following points:

- The Islands Community is 94 percent spatially developed. Efforts should be made to ensure that development of the remaining land occurs in a way that accommodates the maturing sector of the population, such as “empty nesters” leaving their larger homes and desiring to remain in the community (e.g., in condominiums and other forms of housing that require less maintenance).
- Higher density housing is more appropriately concentrated inland, in areas that are less environmentally fragile and better able to be evacuated. This is especially important given that peak tourism season which coincides with hurricane season (in contrast to much of Florida where they occur at different periods).

Second, growth can be accommodated without having adverse consequences if the community is protected by appropriate development standards. The Hilton Head Island area gross density of 1.50 dwelling units per acre combined with a tourism load exceeding that of Tybee Island, is far greater than the Islands Community can accept. The community is 74 percent single family residential, and the goal of protecting its character as a quiet community would be threatened by growth approximating that of Hilton Head Island. An area net density of one dwelling unit per acre associated with an area gross density of 0.87 should provide for anticipated growth while retaining community character and maintaining adequate infrastructure. Table 4-A shows an area net density forecast of 1.03 units per acre and suggests an area gross density of about 0.87.

These limits are achievable given the Zoning Ordinance amendments proposed in this plan coupled with effective policies to govern rezoning decisions.

The desire of the community to enact such growth parameters is consistent with public policy. At the local level, two policies are clearly in place that support this objective. The first is the policy of limiting intensive forms of growth in the most environmentally sensitive areas. The Islands, which are located in sensitive estuarine habitat, are clearly located in an area that is sensitive to over-development. The second policy is maintaining the look and feel of unique areas. This occurs in the form of expansive marsh and river vistas, canopied or tree-lined roads, low-density developments, and extensive areas that were individually settled (in contrast to large subdivisions). The Natural Resources Element of the Chatham County Comprehensive Plan is the primary policy document covering these areas (see Section 3.4).

It is also state and federal policy, and arguably local policy as well, to limit growth in hurricane prone areas (federal policies are manifested in FEMA regulations and programs, which increasingly emphasize “mitigation,” a term that FEMA applies to limitations on development in flood prone areas; at the state and local level, policies that limit development on floodplains are stated in the Department of Natural Resources Environmental Planning Criteria, and reflected in regional and local plans). FEMA policy is predicated on three factors: maintaining adequate evacuation times; minimizing loss of life in the event of a major hurricane; and minimizing property damage associated with hurricanes. State and local policy is more oriented to resource protection.

Pursuant to its review of the Islands plan, the Chatham Emergency Management Agency provided the following statement: “Local policies should continue to adhere to the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s guidelines for development in flood prone areas. If the philosophy of low-density residential development is maintained, the Islands should not exceed the capacity for orderly hurricane evacuation.”

For these reasons, adoption of this plan establishes a general policy of limiting the primary form of development in the Islands Community to low density residential development, emphasizing the high quality (rather than quantity) of development as a means of increasing the tax base. The need for mixed-use centers and a range of inter-generational housing types is consistent with this policy if it respects two guiding parameters: an area gross density of 0.87 dwelling units per acre and a minimum single family land use area of 75 percent of the total developable area within the community.

As maintained in the preceding discussion, it is desirable for the Islands Community to take advantage of the fact that the two major commercial areas are centralized within the community. New development should be encouraged to locate within or adjacent to those centers. Over time, this will create true town centers with a mix of uses including higher-density residential development. The Land Use Plan (Section 4.0) establishes the policies to encourage this pattern for new development.

#### **FIGURE 4-A. ISLANDS LAND USE PLAN POLICY FRAMEWORK**

POLICY 4.1. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to place emphasis on the *quality* rather than the *quantity* of development in the Islands Community as a means of protecting community character and increasing the tax base.

POLICY 4.2. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to preserve the low-to-medium density residential character of the Islands Community, and to protect the ambiance that flows from its dense vegetation and island setting. Single family residential area should remain above 70 percent of total community area, while all other uses remain less than 30 percent collectively.

POLICY 4.3. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to permit higher density residential only in proximity to a town center and only with appropriate performance standards, thereby limiting area net density to 1.1 dwelling units per acre through 2020.

POLICY 4.4. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to encourage flexibility and creativity in site design in order to preserve natural resources, create an attractive living environment, and respond to the limited development opportunities remaining in the extensively developed Islands Community.

POLICY 4.5. It shall be the policy of Chatham County that commercial development will be limited to existing sites and to the Islands town centers.

POLICY 4.6. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to enhance the connectivity of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

POLICY 4.7. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to ensure that new roads and all road improvements enhance the safety of drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians, while improving accessibility, mobility, and evacuation times.

POLICY 4.8. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to identify, protect, and enhance historic and archeological resources.

POLICY 4.9. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to identify, protect, and enhance scenic views, tree canopy, and other natural elements that have established the Islands Community as an attractive and desirable place to live.

POLICY 4.10. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to prevent damage to habitat and water quality as a result of reckless or inappropriate development.

POLICY 4.11. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to develop and maintain all community (public) facilities at standards that are generally recognized as acceptable.

POLICY 4.12. It shall be the policy of Chatham County to strictly enforce its zoning ordinance.

**FIGURE 4-B.**  
**SEVEN LAND USE PRINCIPLES FOR A QUALITY COMMUNITY**

1. ***Mix of Land Uses.*** Strengthen the community through diversity of land uses. The challenge in doing so is to identify the location and components in the land use mix. In the Islands Community, two forms of mixed use development will contribute to long term quality and viability. First is the presence of adequate forms of housing for family members at all stages in their life cycle (e.g., young couples, families with school age children, empty nesters, and seniors). Second is the adequacy of commercial development in the community to provide basic goods and services.
2. ***Accessibility of Land Uses.*** Promote accessibility between land uses so that residents have an opportunity to walk or bicycle between subdivisions and to schools and commercial districts. Doing so increases exercise, reduces traffic, and puts more eyes on the streets (an established principle for crime prevention and public safety).
3. ***Design of the Built Environment.*** Include public and civic space in new development in order to have focal points of community activity; design distinctive places to increase civic pride and identity; create desirable places to spend leisure time in the community. Concentrate commercial development so as to increase opportunities for quality design and to make it profitable for developers.
4. ***Designation of Greenspace and Open Space.*** Ensure that new development sets aside adequate greenspace or open space to enhance community aesthetics, absorb stormwater, and provide passive recreation opportunities.
5. ***Application of Best Practices to Stormwater Management.*** Adopt established best management practices for stormwater management that include both natural buffers and filters as engineered drainage and detention systems. Design those systems to be amenities as well as utilities.
6. ***Preservation and Enhancement of Natural Beauty.*** Protect corridors and places that have vistas or scenic qualities that are valued in the community.
7. ***Preservation and Enhancement of Historic and Archeological Assets.*** Stabilize, protect, and restore such assets so as to engender a sense of history, civic pride, and distinctiveness.

For more information about other communities employing these principles, see the following publications: Reid Ewing, *Best Development Practices*, American Planning Association, 1996; Douglas Porter, Ed., *The Practice of Sustainable Development*, Urban Land Institute, 2000; *The Smart Growth Tool Kit*, Urban Land Institute, 2000.

**FIGURE 4-C.**

**ISLANDS COMMUNITY TOWN CENTER CONCEPT**

The purpose of a town center is to create or enhance the identity and attractiveness of a community while expanding its access to goods and services. Other benefits include minimizing traffic impacts of new commercial development and creating a more pedestrian and bicycle friendly environment.

A town center can be created over time in areas that are already largely developed. The Islands Community Plan is a 20-year plan, and it envisions a steady and orderly transition of its conventional commercial centers into more intense activity centers. The photographs shown below are example of commercial redevelopment resulting in a town center.



Meisner Park in Boca Raton, Florida replaced an older, conventional shopping center with a mixed use development. Streets were created in areas that were once a large parking lot. Parking was moved to the side and rear; parking garages were added to meet demand. Public spaces and covered walkways were an integral part of the design.

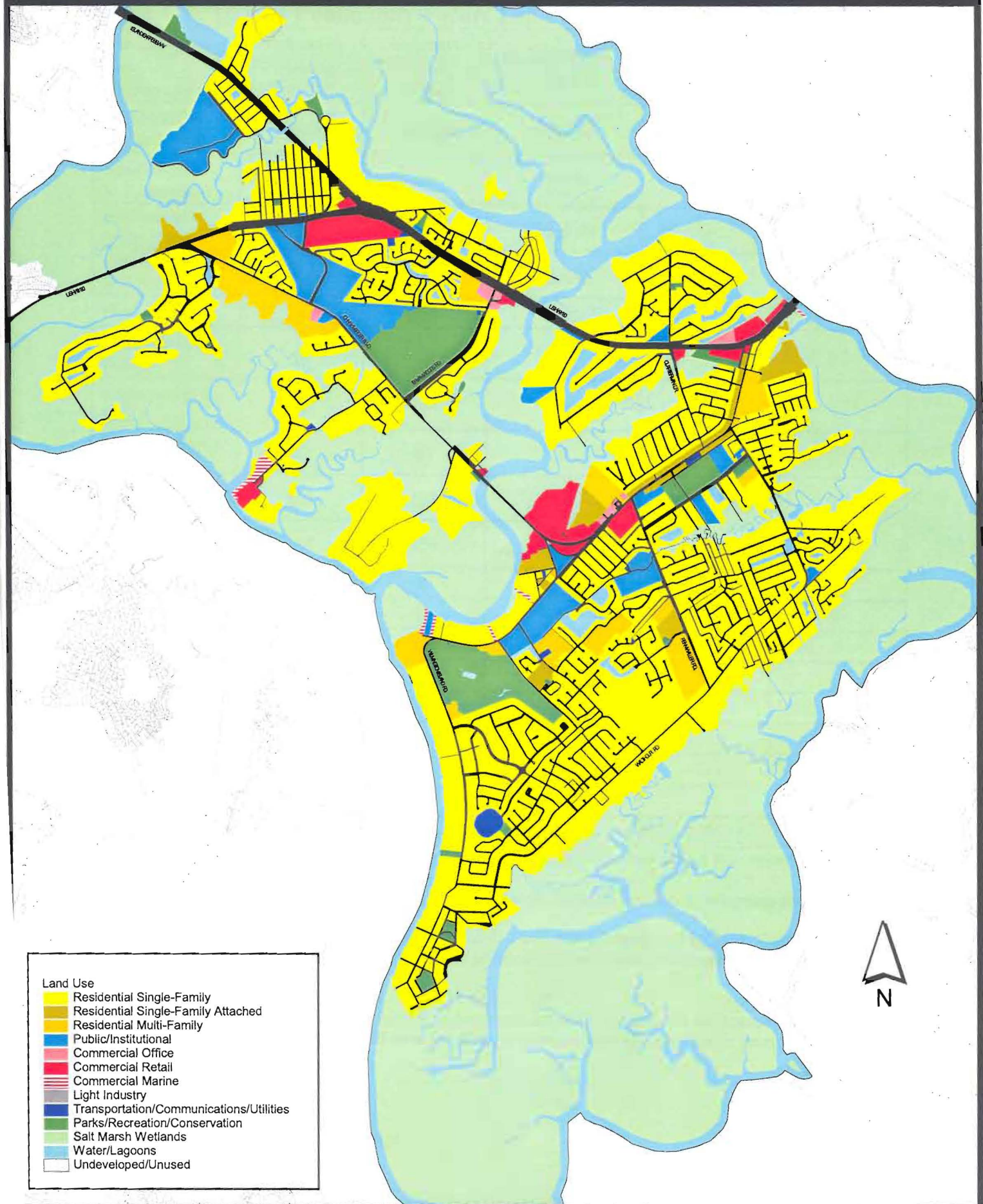


This redeveloped shopping center in Winter Park, Florida emphasized pedestrian circulation over cars and provided design features that made it a comfortable and attractive environment. The design elements that attracted consumers also attracted a wider range of businesses. The center reflects and builds on the character of Winter Park's nearby traditional town center.

Design guidelines for the Islands Town Centers will encourage more attractive design, a wider range of businesses, a comfortable experience for consumers, and incorporate features that relate to the surrounding community and natural environment.



# FIG. 4-D FUTURE LAND USE MAP



**Table 4-A. Islands Community Future Land Use and 2020 Estimates**

Land Use Classification <sup>1</sup>	Estimated Existing Acreage <sup>2</sup>	Estimated 2020 Acreage <sup>3</sup>	Residential Units 2020 <sup>4</sup>	Commercial Area, 2020 <sup>5</sup>	Density or Intensity of Use in 2020 <sup>6</sup>
Residential - Single-Family	9588	10,188	6884 du	--	0.68
Residential – S. F. Attached	38	90	727 du	--	8.01
Residential - Multi-Family	352	400	3434 du	--	8.59
Residential Subtotal	<u>9978</u>	<u>10,678</u>	<u>11,045</u>	--	<u>1.03</u>
Public/Inst.	303	303	--	--	--
Commercial-Office	8	20	--	55,757 sf	0.5
Commercial-Retail	137	164	--	1,902,766 sf	0.3
Commercial - Marine	61	61	0		
Commercial Subtotal	<u>145</u>	<u>184</u>	--	<u>1,958,523 sf</u>	<u>0.3</u>
Transportation, Com & Utilities	154	159	--	--	--
Agric/Forestry	0	0	--	--	--
Industry - Light	12	13	--	--	--
Recreation	590	200	--	--	--
Greenspace	0	400	--	--	--
Right-of-Way	953	953			
Salt Marsh	0	0	--	--	--
Lagoons	108	108	--	--	--
Undeveloped	755	0	--	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,059</b>	<b>13,059</b>	<b>11,045 du</b>	<b>2,578,752 sf</b>	<b>--</b>

1. See Table 2-A, Islands Community Existing Land Use Inventory, for definitions of land use categories.

2. Also see Table 2-A

3. Figures in this column are based on the assumption that all areas currently zoned for development are developed, as current trends suggest.

4. Figures are developed from the Islands Land Use Model. The model assumes that the Islands Community will reach 95% of theoretical built-out in 2020. This is near an actual build-out figure since communities seldom reach theoretical build-out.

5. Figures are developed from the Islands Land Use Model.

6. Figures are in terms of area net density (see Fig. 2-B) and are derived by dividing the 2020 residential and commercial columns by the 2020 estimated acreage column (converting acres to square feet in the commercial calculation).

## **5.0 Implementation Strategy**

The implementation strategy for the Islands Community Plan is modeled after the process established in Georgia and elsewhere for comprehensive planning. Figure 5-A depicts the process for adopting the plan.

### **5.1 Process of Adopting and Implementing the Community Plan**

Local Government planning requirements were adopted by the state of Georgia in 1992 and amended in 1997 as O.C.G.A. 50-8-1 *et seq.* The rules and regulations implementing this law are contained in Chapter 110-12-1 of the Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. This law provides for multi-level review and coordination, public participation, minimum content requirements, and a three-step planning process. The last item includes the following: inventory and assessment, statement of needs and goals, and an implementation strategy. This comprehensive planning paradigm was described earlier in Section 3.0.

The implementation strategy is required to have both a long-term strategy for addressing 20-year planning horizon goals and a short-term work plan for a five-year implementation strategy. This step also includes identifying the policies that the local government will adopt to implement the plan's goals.

Comprehensive plans in Georgia and most other states are adopted by ordinance, making them legal instruments as well as policy and planning documents. As such, they must be legally sound in order to provide a solid platform for zoning and land development regulations.

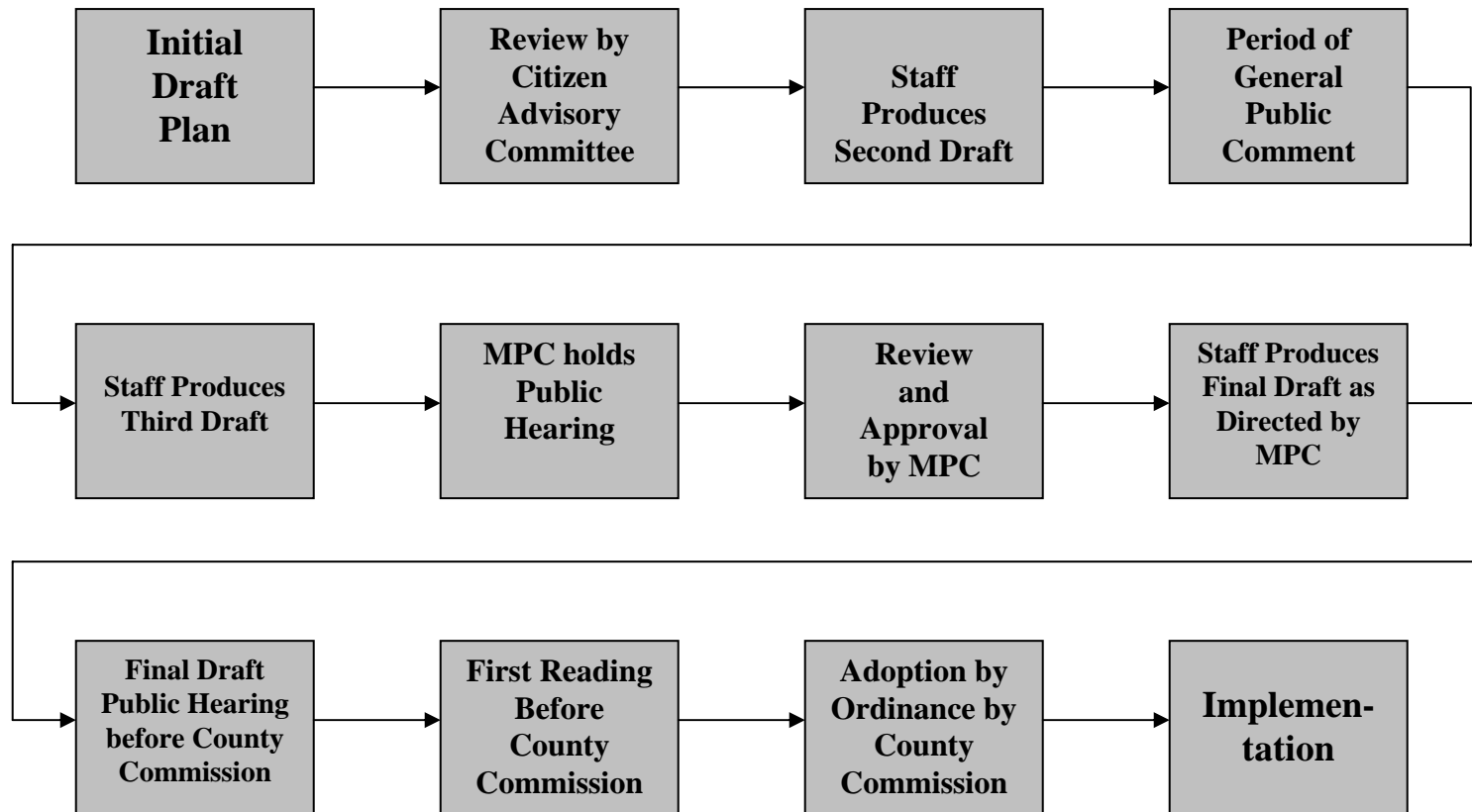
While there is much to consider in this regard, and it is prudent to have an experienced land use attorney review a comprehensive plan before it is adopted, there are some basic considerations that citizens, planners, planning commissioners, and elected officials should keep in mind as they draft or amend a plan.

First is the matter of property rights and "takings" (i.e., the taking of value of property through regulatory actions). Many comprehensive plans seek to reduce the densities or intensities of land use in certain areas in order to "prevent traffic congestion," "preserve character," "reduce urban sprawl," "protect natural resources," or "promote the preservation of open space." These are valid and generally achievable goals; however, they should not be achieved by stretching the takings envelope.

In some cases it may simply be necessary to prescribe a reduction in densities and intensities of development to achieve public policy goals, even though landowners of affected properties have legitimate concerns about diminished property values. In such cases, policy makers will have to decide the relative merits of the property owners' interest and the greater public



**Figure 5-A. Process of Adopting and Implementing the Community Plan**





interest. If they believe the greater public interest should prevail, a land use attorney should advise them on the extent to which the ensuing downzoning or regulation may invite significant litigation.

When a jurisdiction is considering such legislation, there is often great consternation over the prospect of takings lawsuits. In many cases, however, a new zoning or land development standard can actually enhance the value of property. This occurs through what has been termed “average reciprocity of advantage.” Property owners are burdened by standards or regulations, but the imposition of those same standards or regulations on others creates an overall situation of advantage. The effect is obvious in a historic district: restrictions affecting all property owners in the district benefit individual property owners.

A second major area of attention for those drafting comprehensive plans or amendments is “equal protection.” There is often pressure in drafting new planning and zoning ordinances to favor one interest over another. Long time residents of the area may desire rights that would not be available to newcomers, for example. They may want to be “grandfathered” with, say, more permitted uses or lesser environmental standards. It is crucial that comprehensive plans and implementing ordinances avoid unequal treatment except where it can be legally justified based on overarching community needs that are expressed as local government policy.

Remaining cognizant of these two important legal concerns, takings and equal protection, is essential to the comprehensive planning process. If these two areas of law are respected throughout the process, it is unlikely that a local government comprehensive plan will emerge with any major legal structural flaws.

## **5.2 Overlay Districts and Limited Uses**

An “overlay district” may be defined as follows: *“an overlay that provides for the possibility of superimposing additional requirements upon a basic use zoning district without disturbing the requirements of the basic use district. An overlay district may also provide incentives for alternative forms of development that advance the public interest. In the instance of conflicting requirements, unless otherwise specified the stricter of the conflicting requirements shall apply.”*

Overlay districts are frequently used in zoning ordinances to apply special standards to an area that has unique characteristics or is identified as having critical importance. Typical applications of this tool include historic preservation overlay districts, environmental overlay districts, and corridor overlay districts.

The two overlay districts in the Islands Community Plan are: the Islands Environmental Overlay District and the Islands Town Center Overlay District. The plan recommends applying the latter in two locations on Whitemarsh and Wilmington islands.

The purpose of the Islands Environmental Overlay District is to establish supplemental standards to bolster those currently in the Chatham County Zoning Ordinance in order to, a) protect and enhance community character; and b) protect environmental quality, especially the estuarine system that surrounds the community. The Environmental Overlay District applies to all zoning

districts within the Islands Community (see Figure 1), except that it will not apply to areas identified as Town Center Overlay Districts, once any such district is adopted.

The purpose of the Islands Town Center Overlay District is to provide for organic but orderly commercial development in two centralized hubs in the Islands Community. The overlay district provides for residential and commercial design standards, a system of performance standards, and pedestrian and bicycle linkages within the districts and between them and adjacent neighborhoods. The Islands Town Center Overlay District applies to the two areas identified in the Plan as the Whitemarsh Island Town Center and the Wilmington Island Town Center.

The overlay districts will be as Level 1 and Level 2 priorities. That is, portions of the overlays are intended to be adopted with the initial adoption of this plan (Level 1). Other portions that require additional work will be adopted by December 2001 (Level 2). Level 3 priorities include additional tasks that may require an additional six months; Level 3 also includes a time period for a “beta test” or review and evaluation of the new standards. The following chart summarizes the adoption schedule.

OVERLAY DISTRICT	District Definition	District Boundaries	District Standards
Environmental Overlay	Level 1	Level 1	Level 1
Town Center Overlay	Level 1	Levels 1 & 2	Levels 1 & 2

Finalizing the Town Center boundaries and standards will require an intensive public participation process involving residents and business interests. The process will be conducted as a design workshop, or “charrette.” The plan contains interim standards that will be in effect until the design workshop is completed. The interim standards are largely voluntary, and any development in the Town Centers will have the option of developing under the underlying district standards.

*Special use* and *limited use* standards (see definitions) are often incorporated into more “performance-based” zoning systems in order to accommodate certain uses in a district that might otherwise not be acceptable in that district. In the Environmental Overlay District, multi-family and institutional uses are proposed for either limited use review or similar special standards.

### **5.3.1 Rebuilding**

Section 5 of the Zoning Ordinance currently allows a lot of record to be built upon with a single family residence and it provides for administrative flexibility to accommodate setbacks where they create an unreasonable condition for building or rebuilding. The intent is to accommodate reasonable single family development on virtually all lots of record zoned for that purpose.

In addition, the right to rebuild is also protected by the existence of an approved site plan, which carries with it a vested right to rebuild in accordance with that site plan, subject only to laws



governing public health and safety. Where a building legally exists it is deemed to have an approved site plan. This carries with it a vested right to rebuild.

### **5.3.2 Vested Rights**

Where a property owner has made expenditures based on existing standards there may be legitimate expectations of being able to implement those plans which were developed prior to adoption of new standards. Vested rights may arise in cases where a building permit has been issued but construction has not begun or where significant expenditures have been made to develop plans prior to notification of pending changes and prior to the issuance of a building permit.

In the first case, it is County policy to honor the permit. In the second case, where an owner/developer can demonstrate vested rights under Georgia law the previous regulations shall apply.

## Glossary

**Affordable Housing.** Single family or multi-family housing offering at least 20 percent of its units at sales prices or rental rates certified by a county, state, or federal agency as affordable to households earning a maximum of 80 percent of the county median income.

**Attached Housing.** Duplexes and townhouses for which each unit is located on a separate parcel of land; also termed “single family attached” housing.

**Commercial Marine Use.** Parcels or tracts of land where the predominant use is one or more of the following: marinas, boat ramps, dry storage, dry docking and repair facilities, marine services, marine retail sales, and ancillary food and retail establishments.

**Cluster Development.** Development with a high percentage of greenspace, typically over 40 percent; some forms of cluster development are referred to as conservation subdivisions.

**Density.** See Figure 2-B.

**Floor Area Ratio.** The ratio of gross floor area of a development to gross site area.

**Greenspace.** Areas reserved for purposes of conservation or passive recreation (e.g., biking, hiking, and fishing).

**Hammock.** Small islands in estuaries and sounds.

**Intergenerational Housing.** Forms of housing that are complementary to the predominant form of single family housing. The category includes apartments, townhouses, patio homes, and neotraditional subdivisions; also known as “life cycle” housing.

**Limited Use.** A use permitted in a zoning district that is subject to special standards or review procedures, which may be approved by MPC staff.

**Marsh Line.** A line established by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to identify the place where marsh or open water meets land.

**Multi-family Housing.** Housing in which multiple units are located in a single structure and on a single parcel of land.

**Neotraditional.** A form of development that is modeled on community form that was common in the United States prior to World War II; also referred to as new urban development.

**Public/Institutional Uses.** For land use classification purposes, as distinct from zoning, these uses include government and institutional land uses, such as government buildings, police/fire stations, libraries, prisons, schools, military uses, churches, cemeteries, and hospitals. Publicly owned facilities more accurately placed in another land use category, should not be included in this category (e.g., parks and/or recreational facilities, landfills, and general office buildings containing

government offices, which should be in the office category).

**Riparian Buffer.** A natural vegetative strip of land which lies along a stream, lake, or estuary.

**Roof/Roofline, Articulated Structural.** A roof or roofline comprised of multiple components that are incorporated into the structure of the building as opposed to being attached for purely ornamental purposes.

**Special Use.** A use permitted in a zoning district that is subject to special standards, review procedures, and approval by the Board of Appeals.

**Specimen Tree.** Dogwood, Redbud, and Magnolia trees greater than four inches DBH; Bald Cypress, Black Oak, Cedar, Hickory, Live Oak, Palmetto, Southern Red Oak trees greater than 16 inches DBH.

**Viewshed.** An area of exceptional attractiveness that can be seen from specific locations and identified on an official map.