

RESOLUTION

TOWN OF BLUFFTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

**A RESOLUTION TO ADOPT THE
“BUCK ISLAND – SIMMONSVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN UPDATE”**

WHEREAS, the Town of Bluffton (“Town”) approved the *Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan* on April 21, 2009; and

WHEREAS, neighborhood planning is a collaborative process between residents and the Town, with support from other entities, to examine existing social, physical and economic characteristics to assess neighborhood strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, and to identify goals and priorities to pursue for the future; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan (“Blueprint Bluffton”) adopted by Town Council on November 8, 2022 identified a neighborhood plan update (“*Neighborhood Plan Update*”) for the Buck Island – Simmonsville community as a high Land Use Element priority; and

WHEREAS, the Town’s Strategic Plan for Fiscal Year 23-24 identified a *Neighborhood Plan Update* for the Buck Island – Simmonsville community as a priority goal for its Economic Growth Strategic Focus Area; and

WHEREAS, the *Neighborhood Plan Update* will help to guide decision-making and allocation of resources relative to the areas of Community Involvement/Identity, Land Use/Zoning, Housing, Transportation/Mobility, and Public Infrastructure/Services; and

WHEREAS, an Advisory Committee was convened to guide the development of the 2024 *Neighborhood Plan Update* and to share knowledge, experience and perspectives, and

WHEREAS, the Town of Bluffton Growth Management Department held two neighborhood meetings to discuss the *Neighborhood Plan Update* and to obtain community input to inform and confirm plan priorities on April 25, 2023 and March 14, 2024, respectively; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Bluffton Planning Commission held a public meeting on April 24, 2024, to recommend approval of the *Neighborhood Plan Update*; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Bluffton Town Council approved the *Buck Island-Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan Update*, including all text, maps, graphics and appendices, attached hereto as Exhibit A;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDERED AND ORDAINED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF BLUFFTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, the *Buck Island-Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan Update*, is adopted in its entirety, including all text, maps, graphics, and appendices.

DONE AND ACCEPTED the _____ day of _____, 2024.

A public meeting was held on this Resolution on the _____ day of _____, 2024.

Larry C. Toomer, Mayor
Town of Bluffton, South Carolina

Marcia Hunter, Town Clerk
Town of Bluffton, South Carolina

Exhibit "A"

Buck Island – Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan Update

(See next page for plan)



BUCK ISLAND-SIMMONSVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN UPDATE



Town of Bluffton [Approval Date TBD] 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Town appreciates the assistance of all who contributed to this plan and attended associated meetings. Special thanks to those individuals who provided guidance throughout the plan development process.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL

Larry C. Toomer, Mayor

Dan Wood, Mayor Pro-Tempore

Bridgette Frazier

Fred Hamilton

Emily Burden

With assistance from:

Lisa Sulka, Mayor (2008—2024)

TOWN MANAGER

Stephen Steese

ASSISTANT TOWN MANAGERS

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TOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT

Joseph Babkiewicz, Chief of Police

TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION

TOWN GROWTH MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

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COMMUNITY PARTNERS

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING PARTICIPANTS

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Sharon Brown

Bridgette Frazier, Bluffton Town Councilwoman

Carletha Frazier

Renty Kitty

E. Jennifer Morrow

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With assistance from:

Fred Hamilton, Bluffton Town Councilman

Bertha Gadson

Rev. Gwendolyn Green

Buck Island-Simmons ville Neighborhood Plan Update

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FINAL DRAFT

Buck Island-Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan Update



Home c. 1930



Eagles Field



Night of Unity



2009 Neighborhood Plan



Buck Island & Simmonsville Roads Intersection



Bluffton Middle School Sign

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plan Purpose

Initially adopted by Town Council in 2009, the *Buck Island-Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan* was developed to address resident concerns related to inadequate infrastructure, land development pressures, and community safety. With the passing of 15 years and an updated Comprehensive Plan adopted by the Town in 2022 (*Blueprint Bluffton*), an assessment of the earlier plan provides an opportunity to determine if identified actions were achieved and whether unrealized actions should continue to be pursued with an updated plan. The update also allows for identification of present-day needs and goals. The Town's Fiscal Year (FY) 23-24 Strategic Plan identifies the Plan update as a priority for its community quality of life focus area.

Plan Overview

This update (*Neighborhood Plan Update*) is divided into three sections: Introduction and Background, Existing Conditions, and an Action Plan. An explanation of each section follows.

The **Introduction and Background** describes the neighborhood planning process and the Buck Island-Simmonsville community, including a brief historic overview.

The **Existing Conditions** section includes demographic, land use and zoning, housing, transportation and mobility, public infrastructure and services information, as well as other relevant data that provide a snapshot of the neighborhood's assets, challenges, and opportunities. An analysis of this data supports the development of goals and objectives.

The **Action Plan** includes strategies that can be undertaken to achieve the objectives that were identified through a series of meetings with the *Neighborhood Plan Update's* advisory committee, Town staff, and that were refined with community input. Responsible Town departments, potential partners and a suggested timeline for completion are included.

The acceptance or adoption of the *Neighborhood Plan Update* is not a guarantee or a commitment of Town resources, and Town Council may opt to re-prioritize strategies. Some or all of the identified action items and strategies, depending on their nature, will be considered by Town Council during the annual strategic planning process in which projects for the upcoming fiscal year are identified, prioritized and a budget established.

Buck Island-Simmons ville Highlights	
1	Community total square miles
2,157	Population (2020)*
15%	Population increase from 2000 to 2020
831	Anticipated number of new residents based on 2.77 people per household*
32.8	Median age of residents (2020)*
30.9%	Residents aged 17 and under (2020)*
34.5%	Residents who are Hispanic (2020)*
623	Number of individual lots
±94%	Residentially-zoned land in community
396	Residential dwellings planned for area as of April 2024
12	Workforce /Affordable dwellings to be constructed by Town public-private partnership
>\$8.3	Millions of dollars invested in community infrastructure
2.65	Total miles of sidewalk installed

* 2020 U.S. Census



INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the Neighborhood Plan Update was guided by a seven-person advisory committee, some of whom participated in the initial plan process in 2009.

A neighborhood meeting was held on April 25, 2023 at the Rotary Community Center at Oscar Frazier Park. The meeting provided an opportunity to update the attendees on the status of projects within the neighborhood, provide an overview of the plan update, and to ask questions of Town staff. Of the 52 people who signed-in, 23 completed a survey (18 of whom were unfamiliar with the 2009 plan). The majority of respondents were residents of the area for more than 20 years. Improvements cited as most needed included a playground and the completion of sidewalks, sewer lines and lighting installation. Vehicular speeding through the neighborhood was also mentioned as a concern.



Initial neighborhood meeting and presentation by Town staff, April 25, 2023.

The Advisory Committee met with Town staff on five occasions from May thru August, 2023. The series of meetings provided an opportunity to identify community needs and aspirations relative to the following areas: community involvement and identity, land use and zoning, housing, transportation and mobility, public infrastructure and services. Speakers included Bluffton Town Manager Stephen Steese, Bluffton Assistant Town Manger Heather Colin, Bluffton Police Chief Joseph Babkiewicz, Bluffton Township Fire Marshal Dan Wiltse, and Town of Bluffton Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience, Kim Washok.

The second neighborhood meeting was held on March 14, 2024 with a smaller attendance (33 people signed-in). Town Staff discussed the Neighborhood Assistance Program, provided an update of the status of development projects in the area, and presented an overview of the Neighborhood Plan Update, including the proposed recommendations. Most questions



Posted at the intersection of Buck Island and Simmonsville roads, signs in English and Spanish announced the second neighborhood meeting held on March 14, 2004.

asked of Town Staff related to development projects. With regard to the Plan recommendations, attendees were asked to share their own recommendations by adding them to a strategy board; however, no suggestions were received. Regarding the future Town park to be located at 140 Buck Island, only one suggestion as to possible park amenities was submitted. Opportunities to participate in planning the future park will be available.

The Neighborhood Plan Update was presented to the Planning Commission on April 24, 2024. The Commission recommended approval of the plan to Town Council as submitted by Town Staff. One commissioner expressed a desire to see safety improvements for school bus stops.

Town Council reviewed the plan at a public meeting held on May 14, 2024. **[COMPLETE WHEN TOWN COUNCIL DECISION FINALIZED.]**



Town staff was available to answer questions from community residents at both neighborhood meetings.

COMMUNITY LOCATION AND CHARACTER

Generally, the Buck Island-Simmons ville community is located between May River Road to the south and Bluffton Parkway to the north, approximately one mile northwest of Old Town Bluffton. The area is approximately 1.0 square miles. The community takes its name from the two main north-south roads through the community—Buck Island Road (extending from U.S. 278/Fording Island Road south to May River Road/S.C. 46) and Simmons ville Road (extending from U.S. 278 south to its intersection with Buck Island Road). Map 1 on the following page shows its regional location, followed by maps of the plan area (Maps 2 and 3).



The agricultural past of the community is still present in some areas of the Buck Island-Simmons ville neighborhood.

The area was settled by families, including Gullah descendants, who owned and operated small farms. Agricultural land use, however, began to decline in the 1980s as new housing was developed. Parcels of land were often subdivided into small lots to allow family members to build their own homes or were sold to new families or businesses. These changes have led to a diverse residential population.

The area is now characterized as mostly suburban single-family residential with stick-built and manufactured homes, with some large residential or undeveloped lots remaining. In the southern portion of the neighborhood near May River Road there is limited light industrial development and commercial development. Bluffton Middle School was developed in the center of the neighborhood in 2010. Known and anticipated future development at the time of plan preparation includes a single-family subdivision (development is underway), a multi-family apartment complex, and a brewery with associated retail and restaurant.

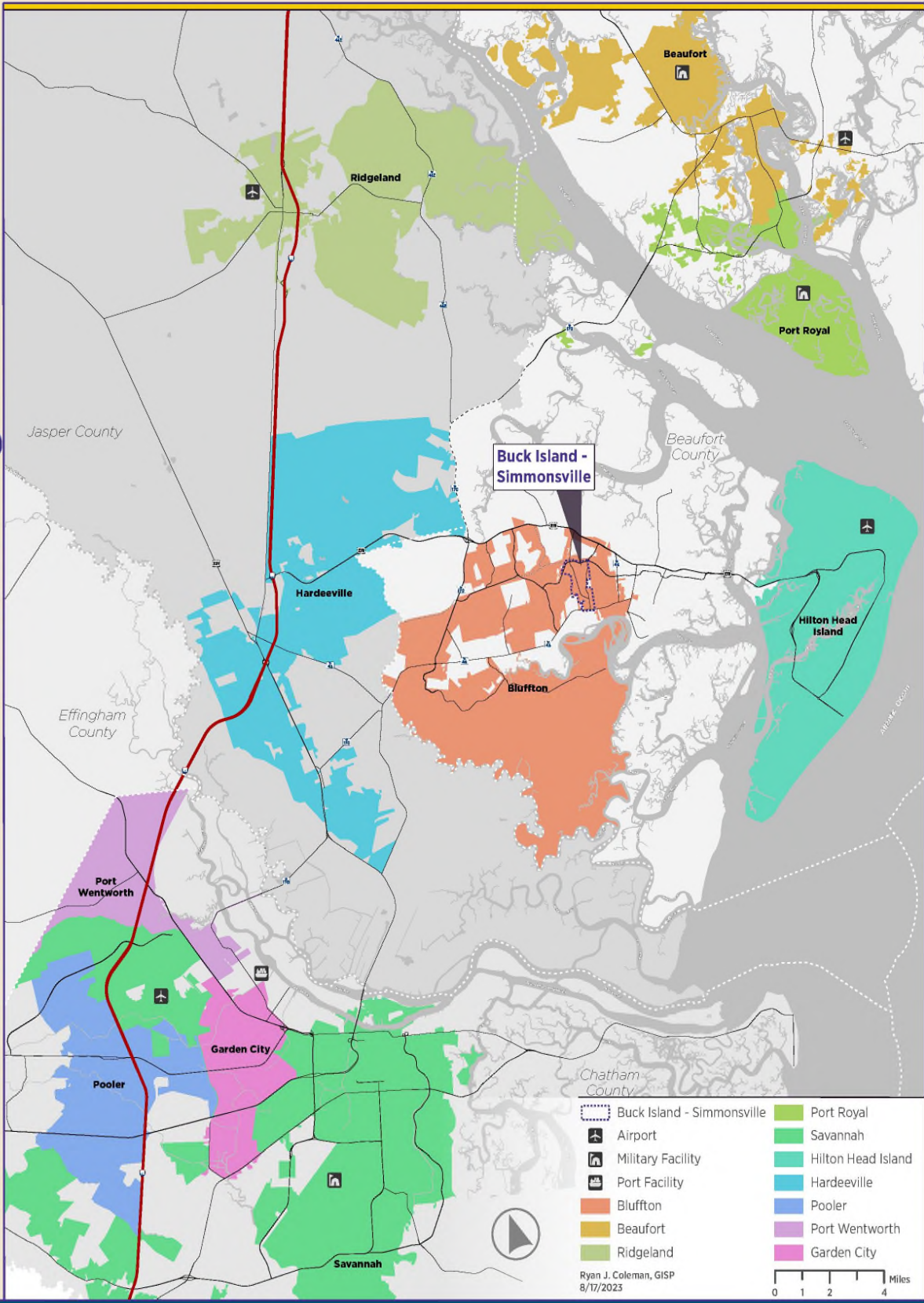
For the purposes of this Plan, boundaries of the neighborhood differ from the boundaries used in the 2009 neighborhood plan and may differ from the boundaries used by long-time residents. For this update, Windy Lakes residential subdivision is not included as it is not located within Town limits. Likewise, Hidden Lakes subdivision is not included as it is physically separated from the Buck Island-Simmons ville community with the exception of a street connection at Simmons ville Road. In addition, development of Bluffton Parkway and residential and commercial development—especially on Buck Island Road north of Bluffton Parkway—have changed the neighborhood and led to a physical separation.



Location

Map 1

Buck Island - Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan

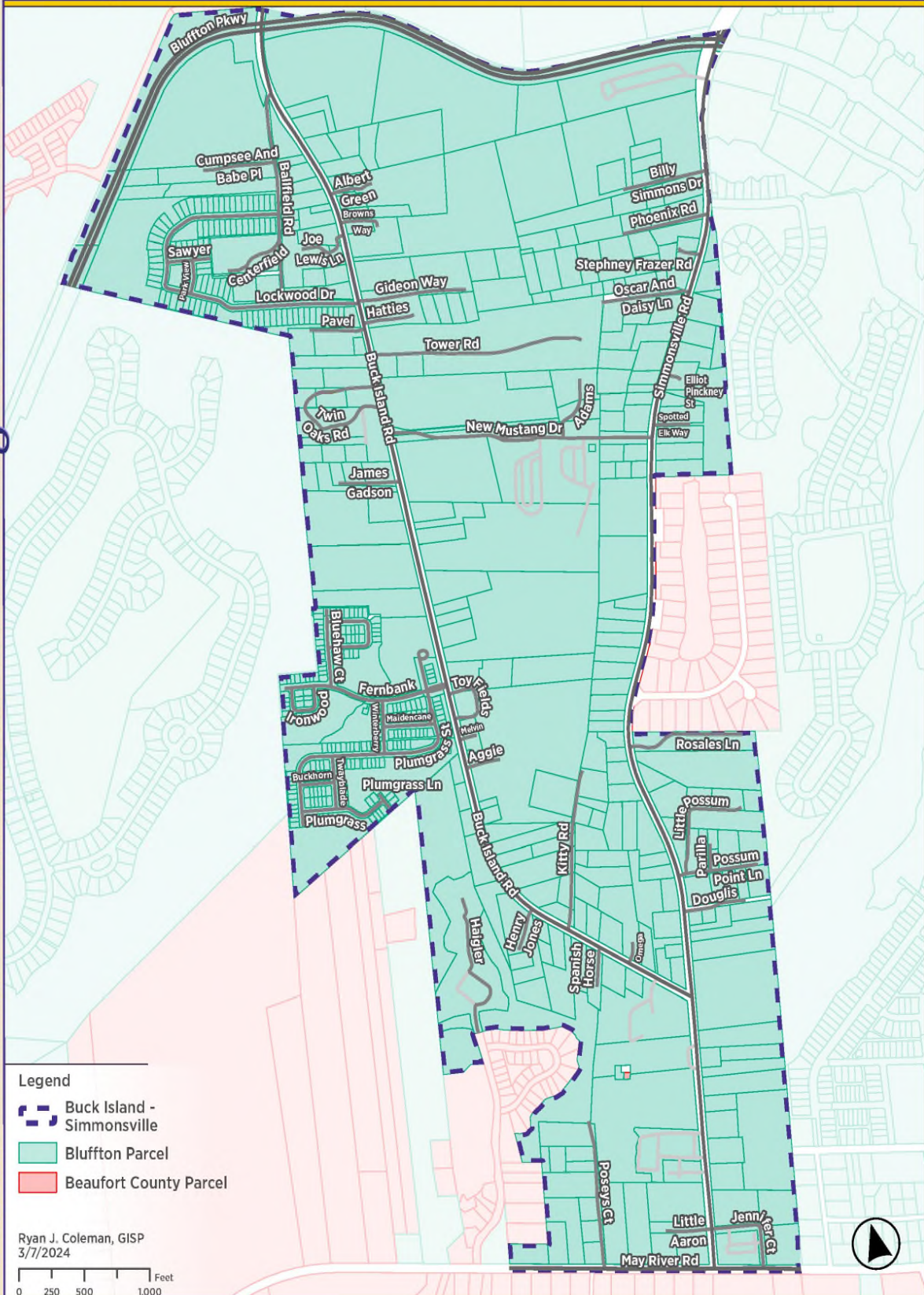




Neighborhood Plan Area

Map 2

Buck Island - Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan





Aerial Photography 2023

Map 3

Buck Island - Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan



Legend

— Buck Island - Simmonsville

Ryan J. Coleman, GISP
3/7/2024

0 250 500 1,000 Feet



HISTORIC OVERVIEW

The Buck Island-Simmons ville community takes its name from the two major north-south roads that transect the neighborhood. The road begins at the intersection of May River Road and extends north for approximately 0.3 miles at which point the road forks; Buck Island Road continues in a northwesterly direction and Simmons ville Road begins. Both roads cross Bluffton Parkway and terminate at US-278 (Fording Island Road).

Previously, the section of road from the Buck Island-Simmons ville fork south to May River Road was called “Simmons ville Road,” but it is unclear why the name of this section was changed to “Buck Island Road.” Development along these corridors is predominantly residential with some commercial, mostly in the southern portion of the neighborhood, and the majority of buildings have been constructed since the 1940s. Residential buildings are a mix of early twentieth-century cottages, ranch-style houses, manufactured homes, and modern infill.

The area is characterized by a tight-knit residential community with many long-time residents, some of whom are descendants of early property owners. Over the years, homesteads have been subdivided into smaller lots or sold. The physical evolution of the community is recorded with [historic aerial photography](#) that can be viewed on the Town of Bluffton’s website.

Written history of the community is not readily available and requires more extensive research that is beyond the scope of this plan. Oral histories— anecdotes from existing or former community residents— can also help to provide a fuller picture of the community. An oral history project was conducted concurrently with a historic resource survey completed for the Town in 2019 (*Town of Bluffton Historic Resource Update*) resulting in limited but valuable information, including some information provided in this section.

In 2018 the Town of Bluffton was awarded an **Underrepresented Community Grant** from the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct the before-mentioned historic resource survey of the Buck Island-Simmons ville community, the Goethe-Shults neighborhood, and Old Town Bluffton Historic District. According to the NPS website, the purpose of the grant is to be more inclusive of communities that are not well-represented in the National Register of Historic Places. While the historic resource survey concluded that not enough historic resources existed in Buck Island-Simmons ville neighborhood to establish an historic district, and that no individual structures or sites met the criteria for individual listing in the National Register, some structures and sites are notable, including Eagles Field and the First Zion Missionary Baptist Church Praise House. Information on each follows on the next page.



Eagles Field, as it is known today, has hosted community baseball games for nearly a century.

Eagles Field, located at the southeast corner of Buck Island Road and Bluffton Parkway, has hosted baseball games since the early 20th century. Albert Green first purchased this land in the 1920s and built a baseball field on 14 acres of the property. Green family members maintained and managed the field for more than 50 years¹. This historic baseball field is home to the Bluffton Eagles baseball team, which is linked to five local Black teams that played in the area beginning in the early 1900s. The Bluffton Eagles team formed when the Buck Island Hawks, Buck Island Eagles, and Troy's

Team combined in 1966 with Sam "Boise" Bennett, Jr. as manager. Bennett, who started playing baseball on a Simmonsville Road-area team when he was young, was the long-time coach and managed the team until he retired in the late 1990s. The related sports complex is named for him. In 1993, the Bluffton Eagles Community Action Committee was created to maintain and manage the field. In 2001, the owner of the property, Del Webb Corporation, deeded the site to the Committee to ensure it would remain the home of the Eagles. The Eagles Field complex includes a playground, basketball court, picnic shelter and is available for event rental.

While not in the boundaries of the plan area, the **Praise House** at 75 Simmonsville Road is associated with the Buck Island – Simmonsville community and is owned by First Zion Missionary Baptist Church, which is located in Old Town Bluffton on Robertson Street. Sited on a lot facing Simmonsville Road, the Praise House is a one-story, wood-frame, gable-roof building with weatherboard siding, standing seam metal roofing, set on a concrete block pier foundation. The west elevation that fronts Simmonsville Road has a central entry flanked by single replacement windows on either side. The building features exposed rafter tails, gable vents, and 2/2 double-hung, wood-sash windows on the north and south elevations. The resource was constructed c. 1850 and was moved here from its original location on nearby Rose Hill Plantation sometime between 1951 and 1958². As cited in the *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, Praise

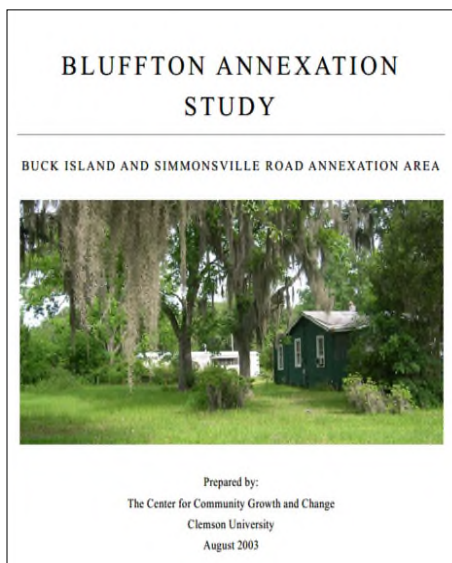


Relocated in the 1950's from Rose Hill Plantation, this Praise House (c. 1850) is located at 75 Simmonsville Road.

House was constructed c. 1850 and was moved here from its original location on nearby Rose Hill Plantation sometime between 1951 and 1958². As cited in the *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, Praise

Houses (also known as Prayers Houses), were constructed by those enslaved on plantations to provide them a refuge in which to practice their Christian faith. Praise Houses also served as a place in which to hold weddings, funerals, and other events. After the U.S. Civil War, some of these buildings later served as schools and meeting halls³.

Also notable is the **Buck Island Cemetery** at 1154 May River Road. While it is not within the *Neighborhood Plan Update* area and is located in unincorporated Beaufort County, it has an association with the Buck Island-Simmons ville community. Dating back to at least the mid-nineteenth century, it is one of several historic Black cemeteries for the greater Bluffton community, and most residents buried here were from the Buck Island and Simmons ville areas⁴.



The Buck Island-Simmons ville community was annexed into the corporate limits of the Town of Bluffton on December 29, 2005, as part of a petition that included nearly 500 parcels. As shown on the Annexation Map on the next page (Map 4), the 2005 annexation included parcels of land adjacent to U.S. Hwy 278, Bluffton Parkway and May River Road.

Anne Cooke of the **Bluffton Community Association**, also a former Bluffton Town Council member, presented the annexation petition to Town Council at its June 11, 2003 meeting. According to meeting minutes, the need for sewer, sidewalks, and police protection were among the reasons why residents wanted their properties to be incorporated into the Town of Bluffton. At the September 22, 2005 Town Council meeting, an annexation study prepared by Clemson University's Center for Community Growth and

Change determined that the Town of Bluffton could financially provide the needed services to the area⁵. At this meeting it was also recognized that the minimum number of property owner signatures needed to call a special election to vote on the annexation, 25%, had been obtained. The election was held on December 28, 2005. On December 29, 2005, the Town of Bluffton approved the annexation, which included approximately 1,142 acres, 473 parcels, 517 homes and 400 licensed businesses.



2005 Annexation Area

Map 4

Buck Island - Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan



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EXISTING CONDITIONS

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The Buck Island-Simmons ville community includes long-time residents. However, as younger generations leave the area and family property is sold, the community is, perhaps, experiencing its greatest period of change in the past century. Its convenient location in the heart of Bluffton and relative affordability in relation to greater Bluffton makes this area attractive for new residents and investors.

As of the plan date, several residential developments have been approved or are proposed within the area, adding nearly 400 new residential dwellings. Based on Bluffton’s 2020 U.S. Census average household size, 2.77 people, upwards to 831 new residents may be possible in the community as the result of these dwellings, continuing to add to its diverse population.

Available Demographic Data

An accurate demographic accounting of only the Buck Island-Simmons ville community is impossible because United States Census Bureau (Census Bureau) data boundaries do not coincide with the community boundaries identified for this plan. Additionally, boundary adjustments occur each census, which is undertaken in the first year of each new decade, thus making it impossible to accurately compare earlier data with the most recent data. The last census was held in 2020.

The neighborhood is located in Census Tract 21, the majority of which is within Block Group 21.07 followed by Block Group 21.06 (see Map 5). Block Groups are further broken down into Blocks. The Census Bureau also obtains data in non-decennial years through a process known as the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS data is collected yearly and published as a 5-year estimate, with the most recent being 2017-2021. This plan uses data from both the 2020 decennial census and the ACS.

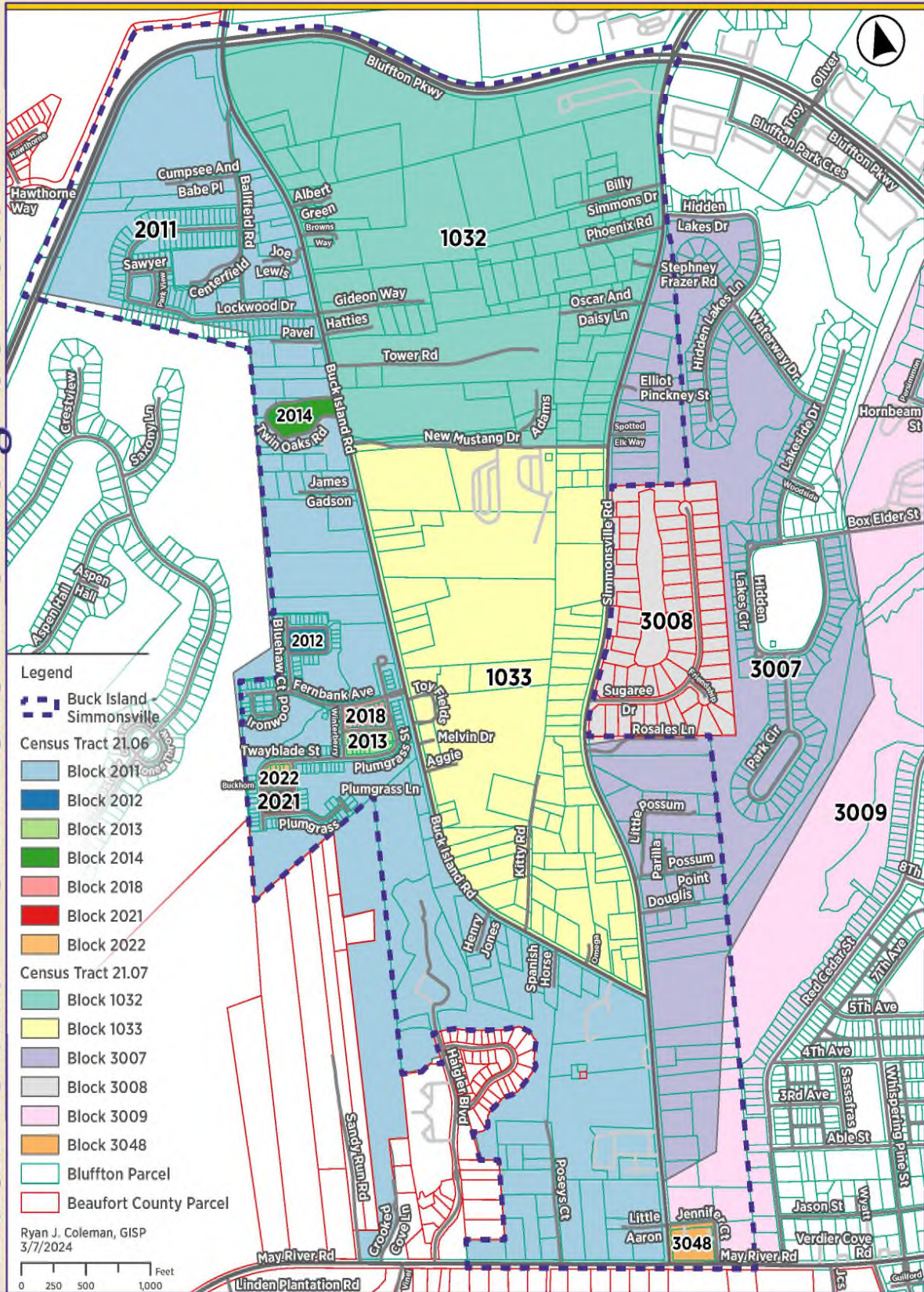
A Census Tract contains 1,200 to 8,000 people with a goal to keep the size at approximately 4,000 people. Furthermore, Census Tracts are intended to be somewhat homogeneous with regards to demographics and economics. A Census Tract is further subdivided into Block Groups that include approximately 250 to 550 dwelling units. Finally, Block Groups can be subdivided into smaller Blocks to provide demographic information at an almost city block level. The data obtained helps to tell the story of the community and its residents. While Block level data would provide the best demographic information, data is more limited than at the block group and tract level because some personal information may be identifiable given the smaller group of residents.



Census Blocks

Map 5

Buck Island - Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan



FINAL DRAFT

Buck Island-Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan Update

For Block Group 21.07, Blocks within plan area include: 1032, 1033, 3007, 3009 and 3048. Block 3007 includes portions of the Hidden Lakes subdivision and the Windy Lake subdivision, the latter of which is not located within Town limits. For Block Group 21.06, Blocks include: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2018, 2021 and 2022. Five of the Blocks (12, 13, 18, 21 and 22) are located in Wellstone at Bluffton townhome community. See the Census Map on the previous page (Map 5).

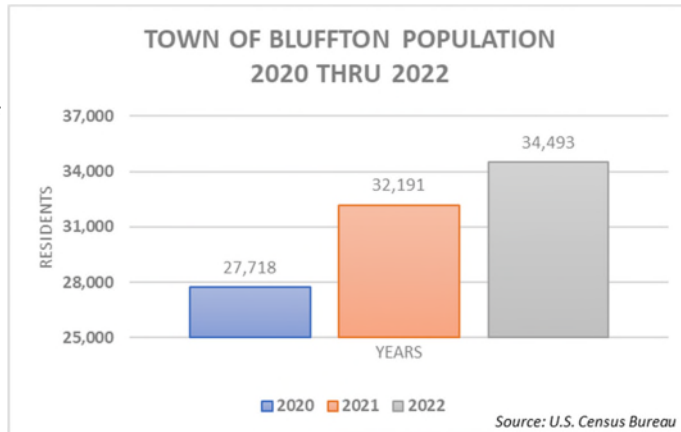
Table 1: Neighborhood Demographics				
Population	BIS 2000 Census	BIS 2020 Census	BIS Change 2000 to 2020	Town of Bluffton 2021 ACS 5yr
Total Population	1,817	2,157	(+15.8%)	27,716
Male	887 (48.8%)	1,066 (49.4%)	(+0.6%)	13,737 (49.8%)
Female	930 (51.2%)	1,091 (50.6%)	(-0.6%)	13,859 (50.2%)
White (alone)	934 (51.4%)	835 (38.7%)	(-12.7%)	21,633
Black (alone)	774 (42.6%)	559 (25.9%)	(-16.7%)	2,212
Some Other Race Alone	109 (6%)	418 (19.4%)	(+13.4)	1,990
Two or More Races	Not available	320 (14.8%)	n/a	1,761
Hispanic	212 (11.7%)	745 (34.5%)	(+22.8)	3,416 (12.3%)
Median Age	Not available	32.8	n/a	38.9
Largest Age Group	Not available	10-14 (10%)	n/a	10-14 (9.4%)

Source: 2000, 2020 U.S. Census, American Community Survey (2017-2021)

Population

As indicated in Table 1, the Buck Island-Simmons ville community had a population of 2,157 individuals in 2020—approximately eight percent (8%) of Bluffton’s population of 27,718—and grew nearly 15% from 2000 to 2020. As of July 1, 2022, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the population of Bluffton to be 34,493 residents, a 24.4% increase in just over two years. Figure 1 shows Bluffton’s population change since 2020.

Figure 1



Gender and Age

Buck Island-Simmons ville is a youthful community. Those aged 24 years or younger make up 39.1% of all residents. Of this percentage, children under the age of 18 are 30.9%, with boys in this group being the largest age group for the area at 366. The largest age group for women is the 35-49 age range. In comparison, those 24 years or younger are 32.2% of all Bluffton residents, with children under the age of 18 being 26.7% of the group. For both males and females, children aged 10-14 make up the largest age group. See Table 2 on the next page.

Overall, median age has increased in the community, town, and region. The 2020 Census identified the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton metropolitan statistical area among the top three locations in the United States for greatest increase in median age at 47.8 years; Bluffton’s median was 38.9 years. The average age for the Buck Island-Simmons ville community in 2000 was 28.5; in 2020, the median was 32.8. The median age for Hispanic residents in 2020 was one year younger at 31.8 years.

Race

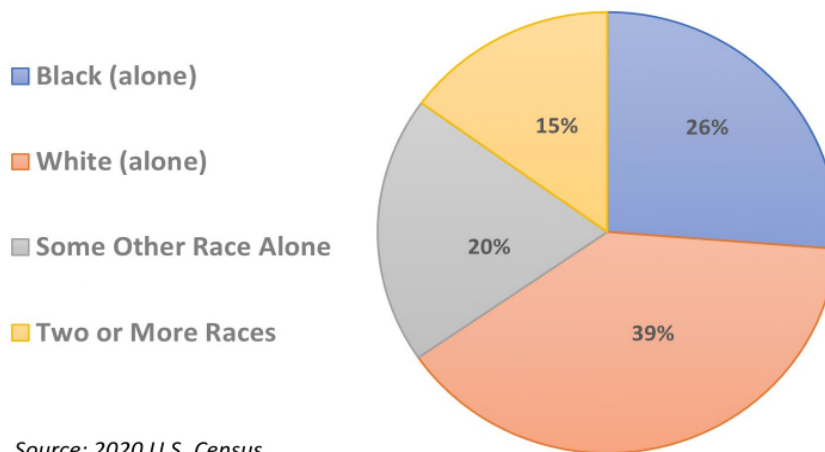
Racially, Buck Island-Simmons ville is an area of diverse residents. Residents who identified themselves as one race alone declined from 2000 to 2020. In 2020, as shown in Figure 2 on the next page, approximately 39% of community residents identified as White alone (835) and 26% identified as black alone (559). This decline may be due to the increase of residents who identified themselves as “Some Other Race Alone” (418) or “Two or More Races” (320). Together, these two groups are 34.2% of the overall Buck Island-Simmons ville population. “Some Other Race Alone” means those who did not identify with one of the five Census Bureau race categories, which include Asian, Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander in addition to White and Black.

Table 2: 2020 Residents by Gender & Age				
Age Range	Males		Females	
	#	%	#	%
17 & Under	366	17%	300	13.9%
18-24	63	2.9%	115	5.3%
25-34	137	6.4%	167	7.7%
35-49	275	12.7%	322	15%
50-64	156	7.2%	94	4.4%
65-74	53	2.5%	72	3.3%
75+	16	0.74%	21	0.97%
Total	1066	49.4%	1091	50.6%

Source: 2020 U.S. Census

Figure 2

RESIDENTS BY RACE



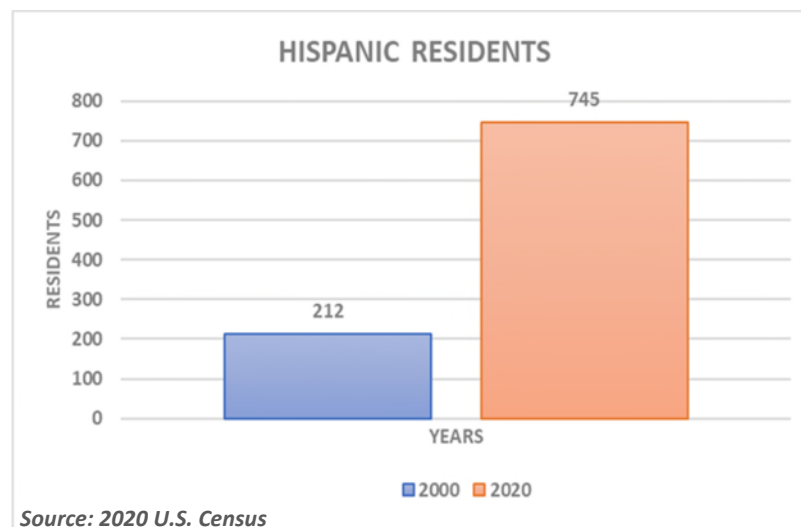
Source: 2020 U.S. Census

Hispanic and Latino Ethnicity

Hispanic and Latino residents may be any race. Hispanics are from or have origins in one or more Spanish-speaking countries, while Latinos are from or have origins in one or more Latin American countries (Mexico, Central and South America). The increase of Hispanic and Latino residents in Bluffton and the Buck Island-Simmons ville community has been considerable in the last 20 years. As shown in Figure 3, there were 745 Hispanic and Latino residents in the BIS community (34.5%) in 2020, up from 212 residents (11.7%) in 2000. Bluffton's total Hispanic and Latino population in 2020 was 3,416 (12.3%).

Despite the increase in Hispanic and Latino residents, these citizens are under-represented at community meetings and on Town boards and committees. Identifying and understanding why this is will assist the Town with improving engagement.

Figure 3



Household Types

There were 688 individual households in the Buck Island-Simmons ville community as of 2020. A household includes all the people living in a single dwelling unit who may be related or unrelated. As reported by the ACS 2021 5-year, 86.5% of all households include families with most having a married couple (72.1%). This is followed by non-family households (13.5%), households led by females (13.5%) and households led by males (1.6%).

Additional demographic attributes are available at the higher block group level but are not included in this plan as block groups extend beyond the plan boundaries. The inclusion of data from adjacent neighborhoods would not provide the most accurate portrait of the residents of the Buck Island-Simmons ville community.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND IDENTITY

Community Involvement

While there are individuals who work to better the Buck Island – Simmons ville community, there is no neighborhood association, a voluntary organization for residents. Such an association can advocate for its residents, identify neighborhood issues and work to find solutions and partnerships, share resources, and offer fellowship among other activities. Associations that are registered as a non-profit may also be eligible for certain tax-free benefits and grants. Guides to help form a neighborhood association are available on the Internet. In absence of an association, faith-based institutions can help to fill the void.

Additionally, as some concerns are specific to native residents, a task force could serve as a platform to address issues that are unique to this and that may include other areas of Bluffton. As an example, in Mount Pleasant, approximately a dozen native neighborhoods or “settlement communities” came together to create a Settlement Communities Task Force to develop a report and recommendations for these areas. The Town of Hilton Head Island has a similar standing group, Gullah-Geechee Land and Cultural Preservation Task Force, to identify and help resolve a variety of issues that are common and specific to native citizens. Gullah communities on Hilton Head Island are referred to as “native islander communities.” Similarly, Hispanic residents could join together to address matters that may be specific to their growing community.



Concern for the future of “settlement communities” within Mount Pleasant resulted in the development of a report and recommendations.

In 2023, a multi-jurisdictional and multi-agency initiative in Charleston and Berkeley counties called the Gullah Geechee Heritage Preservation Project was established to recognize, document and preserve Gullah Geechee communities with a grant from the National Park Service. A Beaufort County version could be a consideration.

A Neighborhood Watch group previously existed in the community but no longer functions. Advisory Committee members did not recall when meetings ceased. The purpose of a Neighborhood Watch is to bring residents and local law enforcement together to improve resident

safety and prepare for emergencies. Committee members expressed a desire to improve safety in the neighborhood and possibly reconstituting a similar group.

Community Events

Neighborhood meetings are typically held at Rotary Community Center at Oscar Frazier Park and have also been held in the cafeteria at Bluffton Middle School as there is no community facility within the neighborhood. Other community events within the neighborhood have been held at Eagles Field, a private recreational facility.

For seven years, National Night Out was held at Eagles Field. National Night Out is a nationwide event held each August to strengthen the partnership between the community, local law enforcement and other first responders. The Town of Bluffton retired this event in 2022 in favor of a Safety Spooktacular—a combination of a Halloween event for children and an opportunity to meet first responders and other local service agencies. Safety Spooktacular is held at Oscar Frazier Park.

While discussing community events, the Advisory Committee suggested that another event should be held to bring residents and the Bluffton Police Department together for fun and fellowship. Because resident interaction with law enforcement is too often the result of an unfortunate circumstance, the Advisory Committee felt that an uplifting celebration was in order. This discussion resulted in “A Night of Unity,” to be hosted by the Bluffton Police Department at Oscar Frazier Park. An evening of camaraderie, food, fun, and music from local church choirs was scheduled for September 14, 2023 but was canceled due to poor weather. Because of other already scheduled events, inaugural Night of Unity was held on January 11, 2024 at Buckwalter Place Park. Seven faith-based institutions participated and food and drinks were served.

While not a regularly scheduled event, the Town has also hosted a neighborhood-wide clean-up by placing roll-off dumpsters in the neighborhood to allow residents to remove bulk items and other materials from their property at no charge. Each April Beaufort County and Town of Bluffton employees honor Earth Day with the clean-up of roadside trash throughout the community, including the Buck Island-Simmons ville neighborhood.

Community Identity and Art

When the Advisory Committee discussed how the Buck Island-Simmons ville community could be recognized, opinions varied. Some questioned if the neighborhood had a real identity.

Community identity is formed by a variety of factors and are often based on land characteristics, how the land is or was used, and who settled the area. Over time, certain events, sites, culture, institutions and businesses, and residents can also factor into the formation of a com-

FINAL DRAFT

Buck Island-Simmons ville Neighborhood Plan Update

munity’s unique identity. Community identity is a collective identity that can “create pride, self-respect, unity, a sense of belonging, and social responsibility which [can lead] to participation in community activities⁶.” Ways in which community pride could be physically demonstrated follow.

Street Signage

Some communities and districts use signage that may or may not include a unique logo to identify the area. For instance, street entryways into the community or at the intersection of Buck Island and Simmons ville roads could include a welcome sign within the community’s name or some other identifier to recognize and announce the neighborhood.



The above street topper honors early residents of the New Quaker neighborhood of Denton, Texas. Source: cityofdenton.com

Street signs with a “topper” that include a district or neighborhood name and logo have become a popular, relatively inexpensive way to identify an area. The City of Denton, Texas, for example, has a street sign topper program with established guidelines and even issued a call to artists to assist with developing logos for participating neighborhoods.

As Buck Island and Simmons ville roads are both State-owned roads, permission would be required to use the right-of-way and for use of shared signage if residents wish to pursue a similar program. Private driveway signage erected by the Town of Bluffton may be another possibility.

Murals

Murals may also provide an opportunity to celebrate Buck Island-Simmons ville that could be explored.

The photo on the next page shows a building mural in North St. Louis, Missouri that is a “depiction of Black families controlling [their] own culture and food economy by planting, growing and harvesting food from the garden.” The website on which it appears notes that murals “...provide a vibrant visual rendition of [a] neighborhood’s history, its current revitalization projects, and its thriving future. Artistic and cultural revitalization projects like this bring beauty, pride, and cohesion...and point to the positive future to come.⁸”

Small structures, such as utility sheds and even baseball dugouts, can also depict community scenes and history. Recognition of community leaders, as shown in the second photo, could honor those who serve or have served Buck Island-Simmons ville and Bluffton.



A building mural in North St. Louis, Missouri celebrates the cultivation of agriculture and community..
Source: Blackpowerblueprint.org



This high school baseball dugout in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma depicts local educators, athletes, musicians, and authors. Source: KFOR.com

Construction Fence and Permanent Fence Murals

Historic images and murals painted or printed on fabric attached to temporary construction or permanent fencing may be another possibility to integrate art into the community. Some communities have developed formal programs for this type of display, such as the City of West Hollywood, California that has an “art on construction fence” program with basic guidelines. Guidelines specific to Bluffton could be established for a similar program through the Town’s Public Art Committee.



High school students in the Los Angeles area produced artwork for a public transportation project.

Utility Boxes

Another increasingly popular way to celebrate community is the painting or wrapping of utility boxes with art (see photos on next page). Utility box art programs can be found throughout the country and are in partnership with utility providers who must grant permission to use its equipment.

The City of Urbana, Illinois has a utility box mural program that is sponsored by the City’s Arts and Cultural Program and features local artists (see photos on next page)⁷. The Town’s Public Art Committee could explore this possibility.

Community Spaces

The City of Urbana has another notable program that incorporates art into community gardens (see photo on next page). The intent is to “...engage in creative placemaking and beautification...” Art is specific to each community garden and uses or supplements the gardens resources, such as seating, planting boxes, signs, walls, posts, and shade screens. Gardens can also serve as small gathering places for residents. While a community garden does not exist within the Buck Island—Simmons ville community, land donation, lease or shared space could be explored.

Urbana's
UTILITY BOX MURALS
SPONSORED BY
The Urbana Arts and Culture Program



FEATURING

SELECTED ARTISTS

- ① CONVERGENT EVOLUTION by EKAH
Crystal Lake Park Aquatic Center
- ② GREENHOUSE II by Megan Hinds
NE Corner of Race and Main Sts. Urbana
- ③ QUIET MEND 5 by Lisa Kesler
The Lake House in Crystal Lake Park
- ④ GUILT TRIP by BLACKMAU
NE Corner of Main and Illinois Sts. Urbana

Works of local artists are featured on utility boxes throughout the city of Urbana, Illinois.

Source: urbanaininois.us



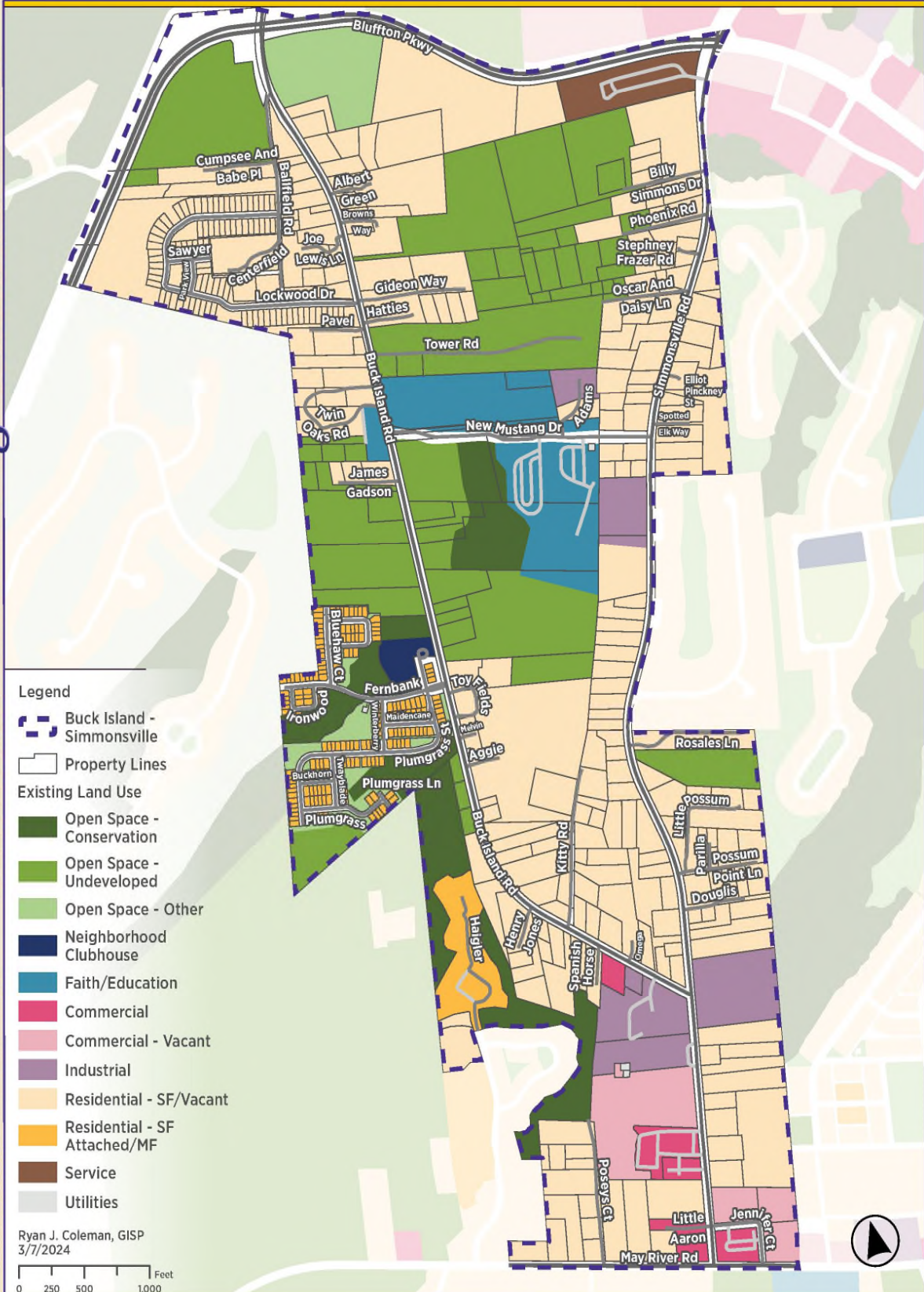
Community garden hardscape provides opportunities to showcase artistic expression.

Source: urbanaininois.us



Existing Land Use

Buck Island - Simmons ville Neighborhood Plan



LAND USE & ZONING

Existing Land Use and Development

Buck Island – Simmonsville has evolved from a mostly forested and agricultural community with homes on large lots to becoming a highly desirable location for increased residential density and, to a lesser extent, commercial infill development. In the past 20 years, Wellstone at Bluffton townhome development was constructed on Buck Island Road, Bluffton Middle School opened in 2010, and the southern portion of the community—just south of the Buck Island and Simmonsville road intersections—has experienced increased commercial development and includes Grayco Building Center (hardware and building supplies), Back to Nature natural foods and Parker’s Kitchen (gas, convenience store and kitchen). Year Round Pool (swimming pool contractor) and RSI Linen Services have been at their Buck Island Road locations even longer, and both serve regional clients.

More recently, new commercial and residential developments have been approved by the Town of Bluffton or are in the review process within or adjacent to the neighborhood. In August 2022, a preliminary site development plan for River Dog Brewing Company was approved by the Planning Commission for construction at the intersection of Buck Island Road and Jennifer Court. The 50,000 square foot brewery will include 20,000 square feet for a production brewery, with the remainder of the space for restaurant and retail tenants, offices, and a tasting room. Additionally, outdoor dining, a beer garden and an event space with a pavilion are proposed.

The following residential developments were approved within the last few years or are under review at the time of plan preparation:

- **Crowne at Buck Island Apartments:** A 200-unit apartment complex at 412 Buck Island Road located on approximately 10 acres.
- **Hamilton Grove (“Bluffton Assemblage”) Residential:** An 85-unit single-family residential development on an approximately 25-acre parcel located in the general vicinity of Ballfield Road. Land clearing began in September, 2023.
- **Indigo Cove Townhomes:** A 99-lot single family development on approximately 25 acres of land at the northeast intersection of Buck Island Road and Bluffton Parkway.

The Existing Land Use Map (Map 6) on the previous page shows the existing use of all lots in the community as of March, 2024. Of the 10 largest property owners in the area, two are government or quasi-government entities (Beaufort County School District and Beaufort-Jasper Water Sewer Authority), four are residential developments (existing and proposed), and four are private individuals. The School District owns the most property with 15 parcels, approximately 8% of the community.

Future Land Use

Development within the Buck Island – Simmons ville community is guided by the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) found in the Town’s Comprehensive Plan known as [Blueprint Bluffton](#) and shown on page 36 (Map 7). The Comprehensive Plan is the Town of Bluffton’s 10-year vision for the entire community for areas such as transportation, housing, natural and cultural resources, as well as land use.

As it relates to land use, the FLUM serves as a policy map to provide guidance for the generalized character of all land within Bluffton town limits, such as residential, commercial, and industrial. These categories are further distinguished to guide residential density (number of dwelling units per acre) and commercial intensity.

The Town of Bluffton’s FLUM consists of nine character areas or future land use categories, of which six are located in the community. Table 3 identifies the six categories with the percentage of overall land area in the community beginning with the largest category. An explanation of each category is provided in Table 3. The predominantly residential categories of Suburban Living and Lifestyle Housing make up nearly 94% of the community. Less than 30 existing lots are commercially-designated (i.e., Neighborhood Center and Town Center).

The Future Land Use Map and designations are implemented through zoning. Zoning provides specific details, such as permitted uses and development standards, including building setbacks and height. Uses and development standards vary by zoning districts, which is further explained in this section.

Land Use	Number of Lots	Percent
Suburban Living	370	59.4%
Lifestyle Housing	214	34.3%
Neighborhood Center	23	3.7%
Community Services	10	1.6%
Town Center	5	0.8%
Recreation	1	0.2%
Total	623	100%

Source: Town of Bluffton GIS

Zoning

Presently, there are four zoning districts within the Buck Island – Simmonsville neighborhood: Residential General (RG), Neighborhood Core (NC), Light Industrial (LI) and Planned Unit Development (PUD). The character and intent of each district, as described in the Town’s Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), is provided in Table 5 on page 39. The Zoning Map appears on page 38 (Map 8).

As previously noted, zoning districts identify the permitted land uses and provide the building and site development requirements that support the Future Land Use Map designations. These requirements are located in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). Building requirements are based on the various “lot types” permitted within a zoning district and include standards for lot width, building coverage, building setbacks, and building height.

For Buck Island-Simmonsville, most land is zoned as Residential General (RG) and consists mostly of single-family homes that are stick-built or manufactured. Limited non-residential uses are permitted as long as the residential character is maintained, including home occupations, short term rental units (leased less than 30 days), homestay rentals (the rental of one bedroom for less than 30 days in an owner-occupied home), bed and breakfast establishments (2-5 rooms), agricultural and institutional uses.

Building design is not regulated for areas not within Old Town Bluffton, some Planned Unit Developments and areas not designated Highway Corridor Overlay District, which is discussed later in this section.

Below are zoning matters identified by the Advisory Committee for future potential study by Town staff:

- *To ensure compatible building scale and residential density, an evaluation of existing zoning allowances should be undertaken to determine if Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) adjustments may be in order;*
- *The policy to allow multiple manufactured homes on one lot to support family compounds also appears to encourage opportunities for investors to create de facto manufactured home parks without typical regulations for this type of use; and,*
- *The sale of produce, seafood, and food products has been common practice in the neighborhood over the years; however, native residents would like to have more income-producing potential for their properties while maintaining the community’s character. Related to this, the home occupation use, as identified in the UDO, is vague and should be addressed.*



Future Land Use

Map 7

Buck Island - Simmons ville Neighborhood Plan

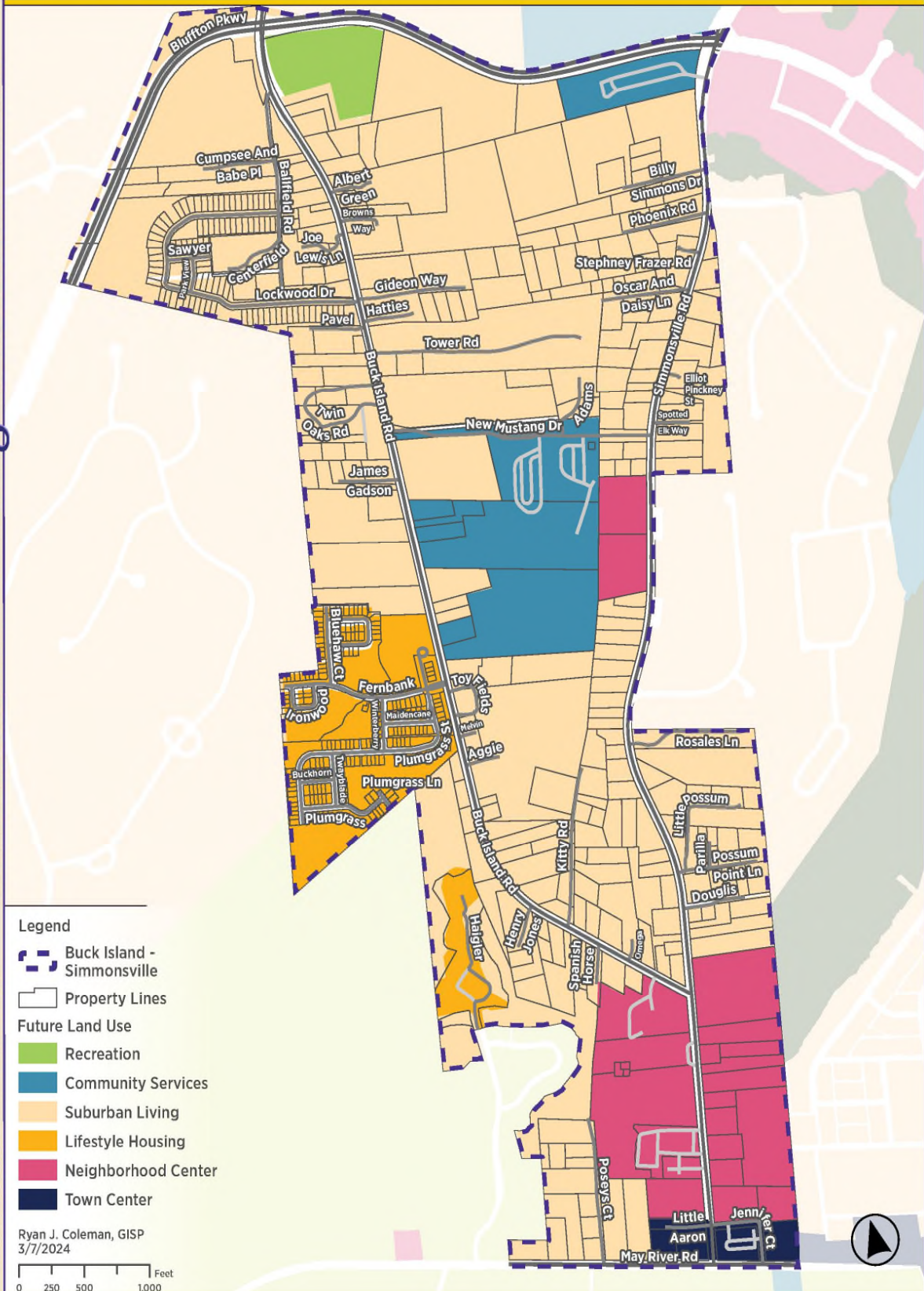


Table 4: Future Land Use Categories and Intent

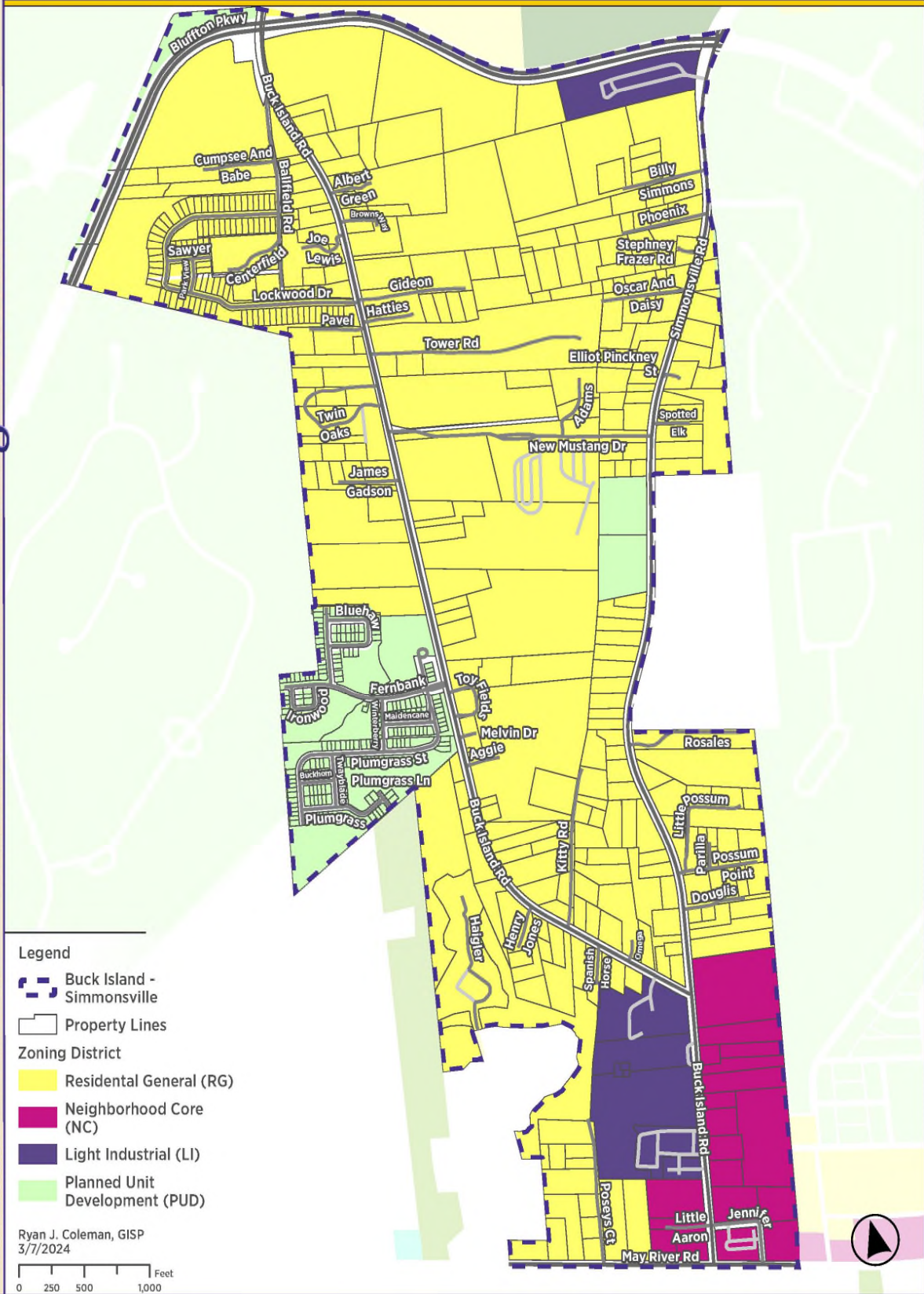
Future Land Use	Description of Intent
Suburban Living	The Suburban Living category is intended to include low density single-family neighborhoods. Much of this category includes portions of large Planned Unit Developments that are under active construction or are built-out. Allowable density is up to three dwelling units per acre and must be at least one dwelling unit per acre. Community amenities such as trails, parks, and centralized swimming pools are encouraged.
Community Services	The Community Services category denotes those facilities owned and operated by the Town of Bluffton or other public entities. These uses include, but are not limited to, libraries, schools, administrative facilities, police, fire / EMS and water production / treatment facilities. Uses within this category provide for the social, cultural, educational, health, physical betterment and administration of the community. Proposed changes in use to this land use category should be evaluated to determine compatibility with surrounding uses. Due to the varying nature of the uses within this category, there is not one set of defining characteristics to the category. Uses that are insular or campus-oriented should be properly designed to minimize any impacts to surrounding properties.
Neighborhood Center	The Neighborhood Center category is intended to guide emerging neighborhood-focused retail clusters throughout the community. These centers, such as Buckwalter Place, provide the opportunity for residents to be within walking distance of grocers, restaurants, retailers, and medical offices. These centers help establish neighborhood identity and are best served when supported by a mix of middle housing and single family residences within walking or biking distance.
Lifestyle Housing	The Lifestyle Housing category is intended to provide missing middle housing typologies within Bluffton. These missing middle products appeal to a wide range of residents in all stages of life. Inclusion of these housing typologies within the community will allow multiple generations to find affordable living in desirable, walkable environments. Connections to trails, parks, and commercial activity centers create enduring community assets. The Lifestyle Housing category is intended to provide missing middle housing typologies within Bluffton. These missing middle products appeal to a wide range of residents in all stages of life. Inclusion of these housing typologies within the community will allow multiple generations to find affordable living in desirable, walkable environments. Connections to trails, parks, and commercial activity centers create enduring community assets.
Recreation	The Recreation category designates properties used for the purposes of public recreation. This category includes parks, sports fields, and water access points at all scales throughout the community. This category includes both active and passive recreation areas.
Town Center	It is the intent of the Town Center category to support and enhance the existing mix of uses. Infill of additional residential at appropriate scale and density is strongly encouraged. Inclusion of missing-middle housing typologies (multiplexes, townhomes, condos) is encouraged, where appropriate, throughout the district. Commercial buildings are generally 1-3 stories in height and close to the sidewalk. Pedestrian scale and design are important components.

Source: Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan ("Blueprint Bluffton")



Zoning

Buck Island - Simmons ville Neighborhood Plan



- Legend**
- Buck Island - Simmonsville
 - Property Lines
 - Zoning District**
 - Residential General (RG)
 - Neighborhood Core (NC)
 - Light Industrial (LI)
 - Planned Unit Development (PUD)

Ryan J. Coleman, GISP
3/7/2024



Table 5: Zoning District Categories and Descriptions

Zoning District	Intended Character and Purpose
Residential General (RG)	
<i>District Character</i>	Moderate-density residential
<i>District Purpose & Intent</i>	The RG district is intended to provide for moderate density residential neighborhoods. This district will include a range of dwelling types in an integrated neighborhood setting with other civic and recreational uses. The regulations are designed to promote neighborhood character and accommodate a variety of dwelling types.
Planned Unit Development (PUD)	
<i>District Character</i>	Mixed use Master Plan Community
<i>District Purpose & Intent</i>	The PUD district is intended to achieve the objectives of the Town of Bluffton Comprehensive Plan and to allow flexibility in development than could otherwise be achieved through strict application of this Ordinance and that will result in improved design, character and quality of walkable mixed-use developments and preserve natural and scenic features of open spaces.
Neighborhood Core (NC)	
<i>District Character</i>	Moderate intensity, mixed use development
<i>District Purpose & Intent</i>	The NC district is intended to provide a compact, commercial environment with a mix of complementary and supporting services. The NC district will provide nearby residential areas with convenient access to stores, essential goods and services, and workplaces in close proximity to each other.
Light Industrial (LI)	
<i>District Character</i>	Primarily industrial-based employment centers
<i>District Purpose & Intent</i>	The LI district is intended to provide locations for light industrial, research and development, assembly, high technology production, precision manufacturing, and similar primary employment uses. This district can be used to integrate a number of mutually supportive uses within the district to create employment centers. The regulations of this district are designed to accommodate primary employment opportunities and support services that cannot readily fit into other mixed-use centers and/or may require special location considerations and buffering due to the nature or intensity of operations. The regulations are designed to prevent or greatly reduce impacts beyond the property lines.

Source: Town of Bluffton Unified Development Ordinance

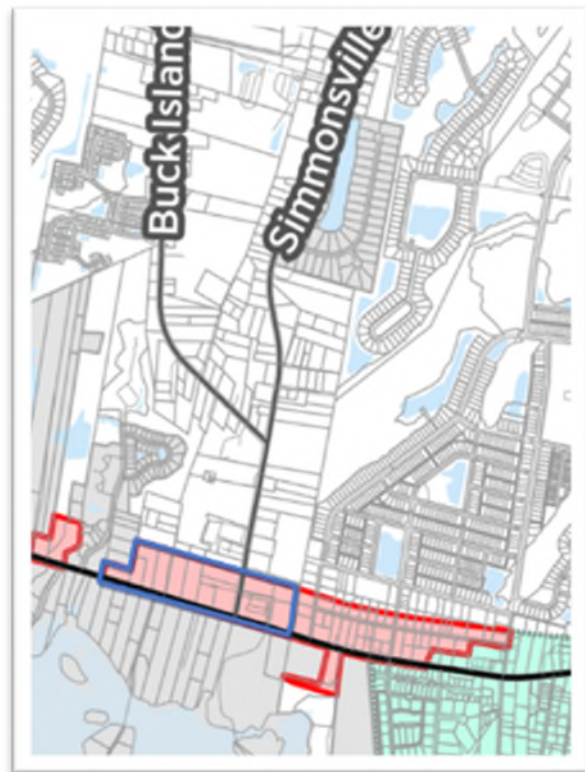
Neighborhood Character and Development Compatibility

Unlike Historic Old Town Bluffton and most developments zoned Planned Unit Development, architectural standards for residential or non-residential buildings do not presently exist for properties in Buck Island – Simmons ville with the exception of those adjacent to and within 500 feet of S.C. Hwy 46 (May River Road) and Bluffton Parkway. Both of these areas are within the Highway Corridor Overlay (HCO) District. The below graphic shows the HCO on May River Road.

As stated in the UDO, the HCO district is “intended to enhance the quality of development, protect and enhance the area’s unique aesthetic Lowcountry character and natural environment, reduce unnecessary visual distractions and to ultimately provide a consistent regional context for architecture, landscaping, and lighting provisions along regional roadway corridors.” New development on parcels within these areas, with the exception of single-family residential, must be approved by the Planning Commission who apply the architectural standards developed for the district.

The Town’s Comprehensive Plan identifies the southern portion of Buck Island Road as part of a “Gateway Area.” As stated in Blueprint Bluffton, the gateway is to Old Town Bluffton Historic District and is intended “to make a statement as to the importance of the district.” Recommendations for the gateway include establishing a character baseline to establish appropriate design standards that may include streetscape elements, such as sidewalks and lighting.

Additionally, the Town’s Growth Framework map, also provided in the Comprehensive Plan, notes that the southern portion of Buck Island Road has a “place type” designation of “hamlet.” According to the Comprehensive Plan, a place type is intended to have “varying ranges of land uses and residential density that are respectful of the surrounding character” to inform both the future land use and zoning. Place types are based on a variety of neighborhood attributes, including “natural re-



The blue outline shows properties within the HCO District located along May River Road and Buck Island Road.

sources, historic fabric, diverse housing, access to nature, mixed-use activity centers, street network and neighborhood structure.”

The Advisory Committee expressed a desire for new development to be compatible with the community without being a burdensome process for applicants. Compatibility can include architecture, and it can also include development standards, such as maximum building height and minimum yard setbacks required of the various lot types allowed in the community. An evaluation of the development standards for the various districts could be undertaken to identify any standards that may be incompatible with the neighborhood.

HOUSING

The extension of water and sewer lines to properties previously served by wells and septic systems or that were undeveloped has allowed for more housing units in the neighborhood. The most common type of new housing in recent years has been single-family manufactured homes, a relatively expedient and affordable way in which to create more housing. An overview of housing in the community follows.

Permitted Housing Types

A mix of housing types are permitted in the neighborhood and vary by zoning district (Table 6). All zoning districts permit single-family detached homes or dwellings, which is the most common housing type in the community. This housing type does not share a wall with another dwelling, can be a stick-built or manufactured home and is located on its own lot in most cases. There is an exception for manufactured homes, however, which is discussed later in this section.

Multi-family dwellings include at least two residential units located in the same building on the same lot, not on individual lots. Apartment developments are the most common type of multi-family housing type and are permitted only in the Neighborhood Core and Light Industrial zoning districts in the southern portion of the neighborhood. The number of units is determined by a variety of factors, which include but are not limited to permitted maximum building height and footprint, building setback requirements from the property line, required parking spaces and vegetative buffers, and stormwater detention area.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are permitted on the same lot as a larger single-family detached dwelling and are permitted by-right. An ADU can house family members or serve as a long or short-term rental unit for residents or visitors to Bluffton. Short-term rental units require a business license from the Town of Bluffton.

Table 6: Permitted Housing Types by Zoning District (except PUDs)

Unit Type	Residential General (RG)	Neighborhood Core (NC)	Light Industrial (IL)
Single-family detached	✓	✓	✓
Single-family attached	✓	✓	✓
Multi-family	--	✓	✓
Accessory Dwelling Unit	✓	✓	✓

There are two properties in Buck Island-Simmons ville that are zoned Planned Unit Development (PUD). A PUD is a zoning district that is created through negotiation with the Town and approved by Town Council after a recommendation by the Planning Commission. A PUD is typically requested to allow innovative development or flexibility that may not be permitted by the Unified Development Ordinance. There are two PUDs in the community: Wellstone at Bluffton Townhomes and Southeastern Property Development, LLC.

Wellstone at Bluffton Townhomes includes 114 attached townhomes and is a completed development.

The Southeastern Property Development, LLC PUD is located on the western side Simmons ville Road, approximately one mile south of Bluffton Parkway, and allows the following residential uses: single family attached, single family detached, manufactured homes, and residential over commercial spaces (or upper-story residential). The maximum density is up to six (6) residential units per acre but could be less due to site and development requirements, such as storm-water detention, vegetative buffers, and parking. The maximum of six units per acre is two more units per acre than is permitted by the predominant Residential General (R-G) zoning district, the most prevalent zoning district in the community. This PUD totals 6.88-acres and contains two lots. One lot is used for a landscape contracting business; the other lot has been cleared but is not developed. A variety of commercial uses would also be permitted by-right and are identified in its development agreement.

Manufactured Homes

In the Residential General (RG), Neighborhood Core (NC) and Light Industrial (LI) zoning districts, up to four (4) manufactured homes per acre are permitted without the requirement to establish a legal separate lot of record for each home, which is a requirement for stick or site-built homes. This policy was intended to support long-time property owners who traditionally have had family members live in separate homes on the same lot or plan to do so in the future. As this policy is not limited to families, investment property owners also benefit.

With the installation of water and sewer lines throughout the neighborhood, the number of manufactured homes has increased. This may allow for what is, in effect, small manufactured home parks without zoning regulations that are often associated with this use, such as home location on a site, orientation, and skirting requirements. A more formal approach may need to be considered.

Neighborhood Assistance Program

The Town of Bluffton initiated the Neighborhood Assistance Program in 2016 to assist qualifying Bluffton residents with certain home-related repairs and property maintenance to help preserve existing housing. The majority of applications received for FY22-23 were for homes within the Buck Island-Simmons ville community.

Income qualification is required for “safe and dry” home repairs, property clean-up, tree mitigation, private drive repair to facilitate access for emergency vehicles, and abatement or demolition of unsafe structures. Applicants cannot have a household income that exceeds a specified percentage of the Area Median Income (AMI) for Beaufort County for a given year. The percentage varies by program. Road sign/address posting and some septic system repairs and pump-out requests do not have income requirements.



Town staff, including the Workforce and Affordable Housing Manager, confer on an assistance project. Source: Municipal Association of South Carolina

Because the housing stock in the community is among the oldest in Bluffton, most requests for assistance are from this area. However, because funds are limited and because other factors may affect eligibility for some programs, assistance is not guaranteed by the Town of Bluffton.

For the 2022-23 fiscal year, the Town helped 54 households with a budget of almost \$223,000. To extend its reach and to address rising costs, the budget was increased to \$290,000 for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

The program earned the Town of Bluffton a 2023 Municipal Association of South Carolina Achievement Award for the Public Service category. The Town continues to seek ways in which to enhance and expand the program. For more information, contact the Town’s Workforce and Affordable Housing Manager.

Workforce-Affordable Housing Opportunities

In 2018, the Town of Bluffton purchased a 1.78 parcel at 1095 May River Road to develop the Town's second affordable-workforce housing development in partnership with Workforce State of Mind, LLC. This public-private partnership will produce 12 townhomes for purchase by income-qualifying households. Four units each will be available to households earning 60, 80 and 100 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) for Beaufort County.



To reduce the cost of each home, the Town will donate the land and provide the developer with reimbursement of fees related to planning, design, permitting and infrastructure expenses. Construction will begin in 2024.

"The May" is a public-private partnership to develop 12 townhomes for households with incomes between 60 to 100 of Beaufort County's Area Median Income (AMI). In 2023 the AMI was \$111,300.

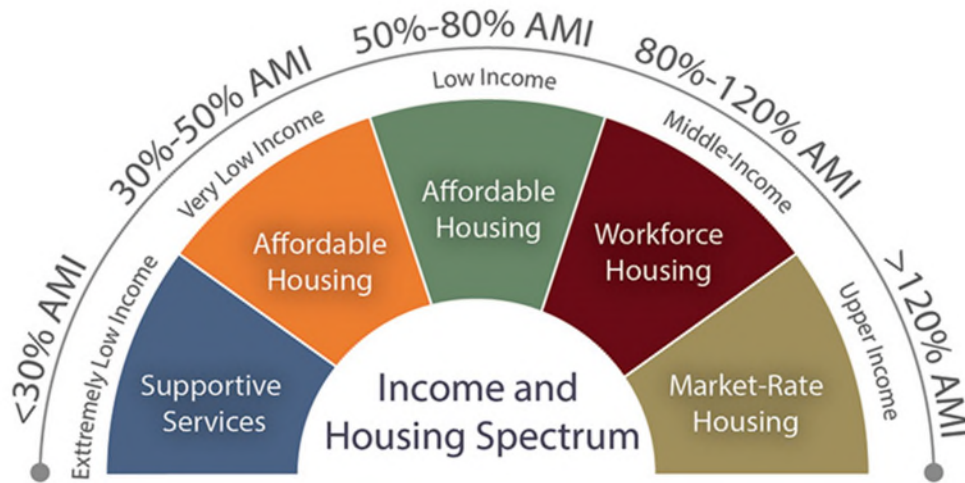
Workforce-Affordable Housing Challenges

While other housing developments are planned within the Buck Island-Simmons ville community, none are required or are proposed to have residential units that are "set aside" for households whose incomes would be considered in the affordable or workforce housing range. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the 2023 Beaufort County median income is \$111,300. This means that half of all Beaufort County households earn more than the median and half earn less than the median.

As shown in Figures 4 and 5, a household of four earning \$91,800 (110% AMI) would fall in the workforce housing range, while a household of four earning \$73,450 (80% AMI) would fall in the affordable housing range. Market-rate housing, nearly all of the existing and proposed housing in Bluffton, requires household income of at least 120% AMI or \$133,560 to avoid spending more than 30% of household income on rent or a mortgage.

While the Beaufort Jasper County Housing Trust was established to develop new residential units and rehabilitate existing units at or below 100% of the AMI, with the priority at 60% of the AMI, its efforts will not be enough to satisfy the need for housing. Likewise, other endeavors cannot fully meet the demand. Therefore, efforts to preserve existing housing may require

Figure 4



In Beaufort County, the 2023 median household income was \$111,300. To afford market rate housing without spending more than 30% of a household’s income, the household would need to earn \$133,560, more than 120% of the Area Median Income. Source: Camoinassociates.com

Figure 5

2023 Beaufort County Area Median Income Limits								
Income Limits	Number of Persons in Household							
	One (1)	Two (2)	Three (3)	Four (4)	Five (5)	Six (6)	Seven (7)	Eight (8)
30% <i>Extremely Low</i>	\$19,300	\$22,050	\$24,860	\$27,550	\$29,800	\$32,000	\$34,200	\$36,400
50% <i>Very Low</i>	\$32,150	\$36,750	\$41,350	\$45,900	\$49,600	\$53,250	\$56,950	\$60,600
60% <i>Moderately Low</i>	\$38,580	\$44,100	\$49,620	\$55,080	\$59,520	\$63,900	\$68,340	\$72,720
80% <i>Low</i>	\$51,450	\$58,800	\$66,150	\$73,450	\$79,350	\$85,250	\$91,100	\$97,000
100% <i>Median</i>	\$64,300	\$73,500	\$82,700	\$91,800	\$99,200	\$106,500	\$113,900	\$121,200
120% <i>Moderate</i>	\$77,100	\$88,150	\$99,150	\$110,150	\$118,950	\$127,800	\$136,600	\$145,400

The above chart shows the Area Median Income limits for Beaufort County based on the number of people within a household to determine qualification for various housing programs. Income levels are set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

more consideration, particularly for areas such as Buck Island-Simmons ville where housing stock is older and preventative maintenance has been deferred, which could diminish the long-term viability of some homes. Prevention may include re-evaluation the Neighborhood Assistance Program and, possibly, seeking partnerships to serve more residents. Additionally, some residents may be able to improve their housing by ensuring they have clear title to their land. Clear title to land may provide options, including subdivision, leasing and selling, to assist financially.

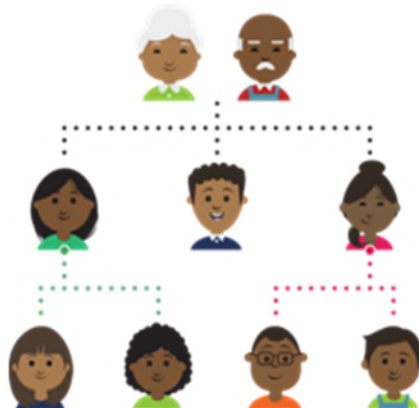
Heirs' Property and Legacy Planning

“Heirs’ property” refers to land that lacks clear title because the deceased property owner did not have a will or deed at time of death. This leaves the property in legal limbo for descendants.

Without clear title, descendants may have difficulty insuring, developing, redeveloping, or selling family property because legal ownership does not exist. This suspended status creates a variety of difficulties for heirs, all of whom may not be fully known without a genealogical search, live elsewhere and be unable to maintain the property, or who may be unable to afford property taxes, or agree how to resolve matters related to ownership, or some combination thereof.

While it is not known how many properties in the Buck Island-Simmons ville community may lack clear title, they do exist.

Those seeking guidance on this matter should seek an attorney who specializes in estate law or the [Center for Heirs' Property Preservation](#) located in North Charleston, South Carolina.



Estate planning can ensure that future generations of family benefit from generational wealth. Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

Community Roads

The Buck Island-Simmons ville neighborhood is connected by four main roads: Bluffton Parkway (L-1526), May River Road (SC-46), Buck Island Road (S-29) and Simmons ville Road (S-474). With the exception of Bluffton Parkway, these roadways are owned and maintained by the State of South Carolina. Bluffton Parkway is owned and maintained by Beaufort County.

Buck Island Road, a north-south two-lane undivided road, extends from U.S. Hwy 278 (Fording Island Road) to its junction with May River Road. The Beaufort County Road Functional Classification map designates Buck Island Road as a minor collector roadway from the U.S. Hwy 278 to its intersection with Simmons ville Road. Minor collector streets provide connections to major collector roadways (Simmons ville Road) and arterial roadways (U.S. Hwy 278, Bluffton Parkway and May River Road).

Simmons ville Road is an undivided two-lane road that extends from U.S. Hwy. 278 south to May River Road. The Beaufort County Road Classification map designates Simmons ville Road as a major collector roadway, providing connection to arterial roadways (May River Road, Bluffton Parkway and U.S. Hwy 278). At its intersection with Bluffton Parkway, a dedicated left turn signal was added in response to a request made by community members during the neighborhood planning process in 2009.

Constructed in 2007, Bluffton Parkway is an east-west four-lane divided minor arterial roadway. Within town limits, the parkway extends from Bluffton Road west to SC 170. Eventually, the parkway will extend to or near Interstate 95. In 2022, South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) recorded an average annual daily traffic count of 24,100 vehicles for the Bluffton Parkway segment between Buck Island Road and Simmons ville Road.

New Mustang Drive (previously known as Hyon Road) and Bluffton Parkway serve as the connecting routes between Buck Island and Simmons ville roads. Bluffton Middle School is located on New Mustang Drive. As part of the Town’s Capital Improvement Program, a multi-year project to provide safety improvements for pedestrian pathways is underway and includes Buck Island and Simmons ville roads (Phase 3). Phase 3 will analyze areas such as lighting, signage, walkways, traffic calming, and crosswalks to determine if improvements are necessary to improve safety, ensure compliance with the Americans with



Buck Island Road crosswalk to be evaluated for safety improvements.

Disabilities Act standards, and to increase the community's walkability score. A design and construction schedule will be developed after the analysis is completed. The analysis is scheduled for the fiscal year 2024.

May River Road is an east-west two-lane minor arterial roadway. Notably, since the 2009 Plan, a traffic signal has been installed at its intersection with Buck Island Road. Additionally, the portion of May River Road extending from the Beaufort-Jasper County line east to Brighton Beach in the unincorporated Alljoy Community east of Old Town Bluffton was designated as May River Scenic Byway by the State of South Carolina in 1987.

Traffic Data

According to SCDOT, the latest available data from 2022 shows that the average daily traffic on the Buck Island Road segment from May River Road to Simmonsville Road was 7,600 vehicles. In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the figure was slightly higher at 7,800 vehicles. Large vehicle traffic, including buses and dump trucks, has been consistent with 426 vehicles per day in 2022 and 410 in 2021. However, there was a significant drop in 2020, with only 212 such vehicles. This could potentially be attributed to the temporary closure of Bluffton Middle School due to the pandemic, resulting in a reduction in school bus traffic.

In community meetings, residents expressed concern with speeding and thru-truck traffic on Buck Island and Simmonsville roads. Since the 2009 Neighborhood plan, speed limits along these roads were reduced. In some areas, the previously posted speed limit was 45, where it is now 40. With regard to truck traffic, the Town does not allow medium and heavy trucks (dump trucks, tractor trailers and semi-trailers) to enter Old Town on May River Road unless drivers have proof of a specific reason. While east bound traffic is directed to use SC 170 to access Bluffton Parkway or U.S. 278, some trucks may travel or be located east of SC 170, thus using Buck Island Road as a connection to those streets. Any restriction of truck traffic would need approval from SCDOT.

Private Driveways

There are numerous private driveways throughout the community, most of which are unpaved or have a gravel surface. These driveways are mostly the result of land subdivision. Because many of these driveways were not identified with signage, the Town of Bluffton undertook a project in 2011 to install street signs and numerical addresses to both posts and homes. Clear and accurate address and street posting greatly helps emergency vehicles, (including fire, medical, and law enforcement) reach and assist community members as efficiently as possible. Some markers have gone missing since and need to be replaced. During Advisory Committee meetings, both the Bluffton Police Department and Bluffton Township Fire District

noted that replacements were necessary and that a joint effort could be undertaken to improve signage and addresses.

Because private drives are not owned by the Town of Bluffton, maintenance is the responsibility of the property owner. However, the Town can assist income-qualifying residents with maintenance when emergency vehicle access is impeded. To qualify, at least 51% of all residential units accessed by the road must have an annual household income that does not exceed 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) for Beaufort County. Table 7, on the next page, shows the private roads identified in the 2009 plan and their present condition, ownership, and maintenance status.

Public Transportation

Public transportation is available and offered by the Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority (LRTA). The Palmetto Breeze Transit system operates bus service in five Lowcountry counties and offers multiple routes throughout the Buck Island - Simmons ville neighborhood. Additionally, demand-response services are available, offering door-to-door service for those who are not able to access a bus stop.

As of this writing, commuter Route 804 is available in the neighborhood with three unsigned and unsheltered stops located at Parker's (6200 Jennifer Court), Resort Services Inc. (336 Buck Island Road) and the Beaufort County Convenience Center (103 Simmons ville Road).

This route serves commuters who travel from outlying counties to their jobs at RSI, Grayco, Bluffton Middle School, and other area businesses on the route including Publix, Kroger, and Walmart. LRTA approximates over 1,000 riders on this route every month. Additionally, Route 308 travels through the Buck Island-Simmons ville neighborhood on its way to transfer commuters who work on Hilton Head Island.

In 2021, Palmetto Breeze Transit launched the Bluffton Breeze, which is a year-round weekday fixed-route service serving the Bluffton community. Bluffton Breeze connects community members with workplaces, residential areas, and businesses located along Bluffton and Buckwalter Parkways. The westbound route includes a stop at the intersection of Bluffton Parkway and Simmons ville Road.

The Palmetto Breeze also includes Easy Breeze ADA paratransit which is a door-to-door service that complements the Bluffton route. Any person with a disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and who lives within three quarters of a mile of bus stop can be picked up at their place of residence.

As passenger demand, driver supply, and ridership increases over time, Palmetto Breeze and Bluffton Breeze can adapt to better serve the community.

Table 7: Status of Select Road Surfaces, Ownership and Maintenance Responsibility

Road	Condition 2009	Condition 2022	Owner	Maintenance Responsibility
Adams Place	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Albert Green Lane	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Ballfield Rd	Unpaved	Paved	Public	Beaufort County
Billy Simmons Drive	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Brown’s Way	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
Centerfield Lane	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
Charles Hamilton Lane	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Cumpsee & Babe Lane	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Douglis Lane	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
Gideon Way	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Hatties Place	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Henry Jones Drive	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
James Gadson Drive	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Joe Lewis Lane	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Kitty Road	Unpaved	Paved	Public	Beaufort County
Little Aaron	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
Little Possum Lane	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
Lotus Court	Paved	Paved	Private	Private
New Mustang Drive (formerly Hyon Road)	Unpaved	Paved	Public	Beaufort County
Oscar and Daisy Lane	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Pavel Street	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Phoenix Road	Unpaved	Paved	Public	Beaufort County
Poseys Court	N/A	Unpaved	Private	Private
Possum Point Lane	N/A	Paved	Private	Private
Ripp Rapp Road	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
Stephney Frazier Rd	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
Rosales Lane	N/a	Unpaved	Private	Private
Tower Road	Unpaved	Unpaved	Public	Beaufort County
Toy Fields Circle	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private
Twin Oaks Road	Unpaved	Unpaved	Private	Private

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

An effective bicycle and pedestrian transportation system has the potential to encourage alternative transportation and enhance neighborhood connectivity. During the neighborhood planning process in 2009, community members expressed concern for a lack of pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the neighborhood. These concerns highlighted the growing need for improved safety and convenience for pedestrians—including children walking to Bluffton Middle School—and cyclists alike. In response, the Town of Bluffton embarked on a series of multi-phase, multi-year projects to construct sidewalks along Buck Island and Simmons ville Roads through its Capital Improvement Program.



At the request of the residents, handrails were installed on this Buck Island Road boardwalk for additional safety. See cover photo for post-installation view.

Along Buck Island Road, from Bluffton Parkway to Simmons ville Road, a sidewalk was installed on the eastern side of the road. The sidewalk includes two boardwalks on Buck Island Road that span a ditch (adjacent to Eagles Field) and a low lying area where standing water is not uncommon. The latter boardwalk includes kick rails or plates, a safety feature designed to warn users of their proximity to the edge. Some residents expressed concern that the kick rails were not substantial enough to protect the safety of users, especially children. In response, the Town's Projects and Watershed Resilience Department installed a more substantial safety barrier that includes handrails.

In 2023, the Town completed construction of the final sidewalk phase, 6B, on Simmons ville Road from Sugaree Drive north to Windy Lake Court. This phase included approximately 2,000 linear feet of sidewalk and is the last segment to provide a continuous sidewalk connection from Bluffton Parkway to May River Road. Drainage upgrades for this phase were also completed and street lighting will be finalized by Dominion Energy in Fiscal Year 2024.

During the Advisory Committee meeting process, it was mentioned that the five-foot width of the installed sidewalks was too minimal and that a wider sidewalk would have been preferable. The narrow street right-of-way, drainage ditch, utilities, and desire to preserve as many trees as possible resulted in the construction of a five-foot wide sidewalk.

At completion, the total sidewalk linear footage for the Buck Island – Simmons ville community will be approximately 14,000 feet or 2.65 miles. This project was born from the 2009 neighborhood planning process and will be enjoyed by current and future generations of residents.

Additionally, the Town of Bluffton will conduct a pedestrian safety assessment along the Buck Island-Simmons ville corridors in Fiscal Year 2024 to determine if any improvements related to walkways, crosswalks, lighting, signage, and vehicular traffic calming measures are needed, as cited in Town of Bluffton *FY23-24 Strategic Plan*. This is in addition to projects identified in the *Sidewalk Accessibility Analysis and Traffic Calming Policy* adopted by the Town in 2021. The status of projects within the neighborhood and throughout Bluffton can be found on the [Capital Project Dashboard](#), which is located on the Town of Bluffton’s website.

While not in the study area, the one-mile segment of Buck Island Road north of Bluffton Parkway to U.S. Hwy 278 was cited in the 2021 *Beaufort County Connects Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (Connects Plan)* as one of the top six areas of the county most in need of new or safer bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The *Connects Plan* identifies this improvement as an immediate term project, or one that should be undertaken within five years from plan adoption. The estimated cost is \$500,000. This project also appears in the *2045 Long Range Transportation Plan for the Lowcountry Area Transportation Study (2045 LRTP)*, prepared by the Metropolitan Planning Organization. The Town of Bluffton applied for U.S. Department of Transportation RAISE grant in 2023 to help fund planning and design of pedestrian and bicycle improvements in Old Town Historic District, the Goethe/Shults and Buck Island-Simmons ville neighborhoods but was not selected. The acronym “RAISE” stands for Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity.



Approximately 2.65 miles of sidewalks have been installed in the Buck Island-Simmons ville neighborhood.

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICES

The Town of Bluffton began a multi-year process to make substantial infrastructure improvements within the Buck Island – Simmons ville community. Installation of new water and sewer lines, conversion of most septic tanks to public sewer, and construction of sidewalks and lighting have occurred in phased approaches and will be finalized in fiscal year 2024. To date, the investment in these projects has totaled approximately 8.3 million dollars. An overview of these projects follows. The status of these projects and all other any Town projects can be tracked using the [Capital Projects Dashboard](#) on the Town of Bluffton website.

Lighting

In the 2009 Neighborhood Plan, residents expressed a need for lighting in the neighborhood to improve visibility and safety. As of the date of this Plan, lights have been installed along Buck Island and Simmons ville roads by Palmetto Electric Cooperative and Dominion Energy in conjunction with sidewalk construction by the Town of Bluffton.

Existing utility poles are being used to support lights, and new poles have been or are in the process of being strategically placed throughout the neighborhood. Because the placement of some new poles must be on private property because of the narrow public right-of-way, collaboration with residents was necessary to obtain a utility easement. The Town anticipates completion of this project, along Simmons ville Road, in fiscal year 2024.

During Advisory Committee meetings, some members expressed concern with low illumination of some areas. Town staff explained that lighting installations are strategically designed to illuminate sidewalks, prioritizing pedestrian areas rather than the roadways. The use of existing utility poles may also cause lighting to be farther from roads. A change to LED (light-emitting diode) bulbs may improve light levels. Town staff will determine if this change may be possible.

Water and Sewer Facilities

The Buck Island - Simmons ville neighborhood water and sewer infrastructure is serviced by the Beaufort-Jasper Water & Sewer Authority (BJWSA); however, some private septic and well systems exist in the neighborhood.

In order to provide water and sewer services to Buck Island Simmons ville residents, a survey was conducted for each home in the neighborhood in 2008 to determine interest. One hundred percent of respondents indicated they desired connection to the new water and sewer

system. The positive responses to the survey allowed the Town to apply for federal grants to pay for the project.

The Town of Bluffton and Beaufort-Jasper Water Sewer Authority began a multi-year collaborative process beginning in 2016 to convert septic systems to public sewer. The new system allows for the treatment of wastewater and will help to avoid leakage that could contaminate the May River and Colleton River watersheds. The final phase, Phase 5, was completed in the summer of 2023. Phase 5 included more than 3,800 linear feet of eight-inch sewer main and over 1,000 feet of water main to serve approximately 38 homes. Thirty-three (33) septic systems will be abandoned in this process.

All homes within 300 feet of a sewer line must be connected. Connections made as part of the Capital Improvement Project were completed at no cost. Future connections may have partial or full reimbursement. Ideally, all homes within the community would eventually be served by public water and sewer.

Drainage

To reduce the risk of roadway flooding, two roadway culverts crossing Buck Island Road were removed and upgraded with new, larger culverts. These new culverts will better channel water and increase water flow capacity.

Additionally, the Town is pursuing funding for a comprehensive drainage study that will include portions of the neighborhood that drain to the May River (Crooked Cove basin).



The Buck Island—Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan Update Advisory Committee learns about a potential drainage study for a portion of the neighborhood from Town staff.

Public Schools

Bluffton Middle School is the only public or private school located within the neighborhood. [Bluffton Middle School](#), home of the Mustangs, was constructed in 2010 and serves 909 students as of September 19, 2023. Students come from Okatie, M.C. Riley, Red Cedar, Bluffton and Pritchardville elementaries.

The Beaufort County School District allows community groups to use public spaces on school properties, if available, for a fee. Such spaces may include athletic fields, auditoriums, gymnasiums, and media centers. School events take priority and availability may vary by school. Use requests must be made directly to the school.



Bluffton Middle School serves more than 900 students, including the community's fast-growing Hispanic population.

Public Trash and Recycling Center

Beaufort County operates a convenience center at 104 Simmonsville Road. The center allows Beaufort County residents to dispose of and recycle certain household items, such as yard waste, paint, appliances, and furniture, in addition to paper, plastic and glass. A full list of accepted items and hours of operation are provided on [Beaufort County's website](#).

Public Parks

While there are no public parks within the Buck Island-Simmons ville community, the Town of Bluffton recognizes the need, especially with the number of children in the area. In March 2024, the Town purchased 15.5 acres of land at the intersection of Bluffton Parkway and Buck Island Road to be used for a future park (140 Buck Island). Residents will be engaged in future planning of the park.

Fire Protection

The Bluffton Township Fire District (BTFD) provides fire and emergency medical service to the Buck Island Simmons ville neighborhood. Service is provided by Station 30, located at 199 Burnt Church Road. Station 30 houses Engine 330 and Beaufort County EMS 6.

BTFD responds to both emergency and non-emergency calls, dispatched from Beaufort County Dispatch. The non-emergency calls are typically services such as "lift and assist" to help immobile individuals, smoke alarms, or calls that are not considered life-threatening. Table 8 shows calls for service to the Buck Island Simmons ville neighborhood from 2019

through March 2023. Calls in 2020 and 2021 likely reflect more residents at home during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Table 8: BTFD Neighborhood Service Calls (2019 thru March, 2023)			
Year	Total Number of Calls	Emergency Calls	Non-Emergency Calls
2019	72	66	6
2020	137	113	24
2021	112	106	6
2022	100	79	21
2023 (thru March)	24	21	3

Source: Bluffton Township Fire District

The typical response time from Station 30 to the neighborhood is between three (3) to seven (7) minutes. However, this time can be greater when homes are located on unmaintained private drives that make maneuvering an emergency vehicle difficult, or when street signage or address is missing or not readily visible. While private drives are the responsibility of property owners, the Town of Bluffton can assist income-qualifying owners with maintenance through the Town’s Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) located in the Growth Management department. Additionally, the Town can also help with erecting new and missing street signage. Residents can contact the Town’s Public Services department or make an online report via [SeeClickFix](#).

As some residents speak only Spanish, communication difficulties have occurred when assisting residents. While not a complete solution to address this, BTFD is actively seeking Spanish-speaking recruits to improve its ability to serve Bluffton’s rapidly growing Hispanic-Latino population.

The Fire District has taken proactive steps to enhance safety within the Buck Island Simmons-ville neighborhood by updating or installing new smoke alarms. Recognizing the vital role that these alarms play in safeguarding residents, it is crucial to update them as they expire after 10

FINAL DRAFT

Buck Island-Simmons ville Neighborhood Plan Update

years. For homes with gas appliances, carbon monoxide detectors are imperative as it is a colorless and odorless gas that may be a lethal threat, making early detection vital. In partnership with the Neighborhood Assistance Program and the American Red Cross, BTFD installed 45 new smoke alarms and two (2) new carbon monoxide detectors free of charge in 12 homes in 2023. At an Advisory Committee meeting, the BTFD representative suggested that both the fire and police departments could join together to check and install detectors, as well as place addresses on buildings to increase safety.

Also, during an Advisory Committee meeting, some members expressed concern with the distance of fire hydrants in relation to some existing homes. A hydrant cannot be farther than 1,000 feet of a new structure, with the ideal location no more than 500 feet. As new homes are established in the neighborhood, especially those along private drives setback from Buck Island and Simmons ville roads, the distance may be greater. The neighborhood has some instances of the separation approaching 800 feet. To reduce the distance, collaboration between BTFD and the Beaufort County Jasper Water and Sewer Authority (BJWSA) will be necessary and may include the Town of Bluffton, and private property owners when a utility easement is required to extend a water line. Improving access to water can reduce property insurance premiums.

Police Protection

The Buck Island – Simmons ville community is served by the Bluffton Police Department (BPD). As of 2022, the BPD had 56 sworn police officers, a number the Town seeks to increase to, among other reasons, assign officers to specific neighborhoods to build and enhance relationships with residents and business owners. At present, each shift has one assigned officer per district in the Town.

BPD responds to a variety of types of service calls, ranging from general disturbances, trespassing, to noise complaints, and health and welfare. The Police Department also responds to vehicle collisions, reckless driving, and hit and runs. Between the months of January and July of 2023, the majority of neighborhood calls received by BPD related to activated alarms, noise complaints, domestic incidents, and traffic enforcement.

Bluffton Police also experience similar issues as the Bluffton Township Fire Department with vehicular accessibility and road signage and addresses that may be lacking or not fully visible. The BPD seeks to partner with BTFD to install or reinstall signage and addresses, which could be accomplished during a campaign to check, update, or install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

In an effort to break down the language barrier with Spanish-speaking residents, the Town employs and actively recruits officers fluent in Spanish. Two native Spanish-speaking chaplains are

available as needed. Additionally, BPD has a “Hispanic Hotline” to allow residents to leave a voice message or request that a Spanish-speaking officer return the call. The telephone number for the Hispanic Hotline is 843-706-7806.

During Advisory Committee discussion with the Police Chief, members expressed a desire to strengthen community relations with the department. As is common in other communities, staffing issues are hindering some efforts. To assist the BPD, the establishment of a neighborhood advisory group dedicated to aid in addressing neighborhood-specific concerns was mentioned. While somewhat similar to a “Neighborhood Watch,” members suggested another name to avoid the negative connotation that may be associated with the word “watch.” Community members can also engage with BPD by enrolling in its Citizens Police Academy. This 8-week, free program gives residents an opportunity to learn more about how the police department functions. The Academy covers topics such as the history of the department, traffic enforcement, radar operation, evidence collection, fingerprint recovery, defensive tactics, and firearms.



Advisory Committee members share their thoughts and concerns with Bluffton Police Chief Joseph Babkiewicz and Bluffton Township Fire Marshal Dan Wiltse.

Advisory Committee members also suggested that an event was needed to bring neighbors and the department together for fun and fellowship. Too often difficult or tragic circumstances may be the only interaction some communities have with their police department. In response, BPD planned the first Night of Unity event to engage residents and faith-based institutions to come together for an early evening of music, food, and comradery. This event was canceled in September, 2023 due to inclement weather and was held in January, 2024. BPD will have additional events for the community as resources allow.

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ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan includes strategies that can be considered to be undertaken to achieve the objectives that were identified in the development of this Plan Update. Responsible Town departments, potential partners and a suggested timeline for completion are included. The identified strategies are not listed in any particular order.

The acceptance or adoption of the *Neighborhood Plan Update* is not a guarantee or a commitment of Town resources, and Town Council may opt to re-prioritize strategies based on resources and current needs. Some or all of the identified action items and strategies, depending on their nature, will be considered by Town Council during the annual strategic planning process in which projects for the upcoming fiscal year are identified, prioritized and a budget established. It may be possible that additional strategies for the area may be identified after adoption of this plan update.

Abbreviations used to identify the various partners are as follows:

TOB = Town of Bluffton

GM = Town of Bluffton Growth Management Department

PIO = Town of Bluffton Public Information Office


SCDOT = South Carolina Department of Transportation


BJWSA = Beaufort Jasper Water Sewer Authority



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & IDENTITY

#	Strategy	Team	Timeline
1	Hold at least two community meetings per year and post signs in both English and Spanish.	TOB – Multiple Depts; Residents	1st meeting, March 2024; second, TBD.
2	Develop a logo for the community to help graphically express its identity.	TOB-GM and PIO; Residents	As desired by residents
3	Assist residents with the creation of a neighborhood association and provide support, as able, once established.	Residents; TOB – GM and Other Depts	As desired by residents
4	Include more information about the community on the Town of Bluffton’s Buck Island-Simmons ville webpage, including upcoming community events.	Residents; TOB – GM and Other Depts	June, 2024
5	Pursue engagement with Hispanic residents with the assistance of Hispanic community leaders and advocates to encourage participation in the community.	Residents; Hispanic Community Advocates; TOB	December, 2024
6	Strengthen relationships with faith-based institutions to promote Town programs to assist residents.	Places of Worship; TOB – Multiple Depts	Ongoing
7	Incorporate art into the community on both public and private property.	Residents; Businesses; Utilities; TOB-Public Art Committee;	April, 2025
8	Explore the creation of a task force to recognize, document, preserve and further native resident culture and needs.	Residents TOB	As desired by residents


 LAND USE & ZONING			
#	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeline
1	Identify ways in which flexibility in zoning could assist residents to earn income from their property.	TOB-GM Residents	Ongoing
2	Explore the possibility of rezoning two residentially-zoned properties with long-time commercial non-conforming uses on Buck Island Road to an appropriate commercial zoning district.	TOB-GM Property Owners	December, 2024
3	Explore the potential to purchase land and develop a community park.	TOB-Multiple Depts	Purchased by Town in March 2024
4	Evaluate if existing development standards in the community are appropriate for its character, such as maximum building height and minimum building setbacks, and determine if revisions may be in order.	TOB-GM	February, 2025
5	Provide regulations for home occupation use, such as permitted activities, limitation of employees and hours of operation.	TOB-GM	August, 2024
6	Explore the possibility of requiring some level of design review for non-residential and multi-family development, and possibly some minimal requirements for manufactured homes, such as site placement and skirting.	TOB-GM	February, 2025

 HOUSING			
#	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeline
1	Explore how to better promote and possibly expand the Town’s Neighborhood Assistance Program to assist income-qualifying residents with certain home repairs and maintenance.	TOB-GM TOB-Affordable Housing Committee Community Partners	Ongoing
2	Help guide residents who do not have clear title to their property to obtain legal assistance.	BIS Residents TOB – Growth Management Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation	Ongoing
3	Identify how affordable housing can be developed and maintained in the community.	TOB – Growth Management	Ongoing
4	Continue to improve efforts to cite illegal placement of manufactured homes and recreational vehicles.	TOB-Growth Management TOB-Police Department (Code Enforcement)	Ongoing
5	Review the Town’s policy to allow multiple manufactured homes per acre without subdivision of land when part of a family compound to avoid the possibility of de facto manufactured home parks.	TOB-Growth Management	December, 2024



TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

#	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeline
1	Ensure that private driveways to homes are readily accessible to first responders.	Residents; TOB-Multiple Depts; Bluffton Township Fire District	December, 2024
2	Explore the potential to develop bus stop locations and bus shelters in the area	TOB-Growth Management; Bluffton Breeze	March, 2025
3	Determine if a continuous sidewalk connection from Buck Island Road to May River Road is feasible and explore the possibility of additional gateway elements into the neighborhood, such as lighting, street trees and benches.	TOB-Projects	April, 2025
4	Improve street signage at intersection of Buck Island Road and Simmons ville Road.	TOB-Growth Management; Beaufort County	September, 2024

 PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE			
#	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeline
1	Complete installation of pedestrian lighting on Simmonsville Road. (Phase 5, 6)	TOB - Projects	COMPLETED
2	Complete construction of sidewalk on eastside of Simmonsville Road. (Phase 6)	TOB - Projects	COMPLETED
3	Continue regular maintenance of ditches to avoid overgrowth and flooding.	Beaufort County; SCDOT; TOB – Public Works	Ongoing
4	Install a pedestrian safety barrier to the existing boardwalk on Buck Island Road.	TOB – Projects	COMPLETED
5	Consult with Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority (BJWSA) and Bluffton Township Fire District to install fire hydrants in areas that are more than a 1,000-feet from the closest hydrant.	BJWSA; Bluffton Township Fire District; Beaufort County; TOB - Projects	Ongoing
6	Explore whether LED lighting is possible along Buck Island and Simmonsville roads to improve lighting levels.	BJWSA; Bluffton Township Fire District; TOB - Projects; Dominion and Palmetto Electric	Ongoing
7	Work to connect remaining homes with septic systems to public sewer to avoid potential watershed contamination.	BIS Residents; TOB - Projects	Ongoing
8	Conduct a comprehensive stormwater assessment for potential drainage improvements.	TOB – Projects; Community Partners	Underway



PUBLIC SERVICES

#	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeline
1	Plan an event for Bluffton Township Fire District (BTFD) and Bluffton Police personnel to install/update smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and install addresses on homes and businesses that are visible.	Bluffton Township Fire District; TOB - Police; TOB – Growth Management	Ongoing
2	Verify if previously installed road markers for private driveways remain in place; erect new markers where necessary.	TOB – Growth Management; TOB – Public Works; Residents	September, 2024
3	Re-establish a program similar to “Neighborhood Watch” with a revised name.	Residents; TOB - Police	As determined by residents
4	Establish a schedule to place a speed trailer on Buck Island and Simmons ville roads. Coordinate with SCDOT to consider other traffic calming methods to slow motorists.	SCDOT; TOB - Police	Ongoing
5	Plan at least one “fun day” neighborhood event with the Police Department and residents.	TOB – Police; Residents ; Houses of Faith	“Night of Unity” held January 11, 2024
6	Identify ways in which additional police presence can be provided in the neighborhood.	TOB - Police; TOB – Multiple Depts; Residents	December, 2024
7	Coordinate with IT/GIS Addressing department to determine if Google Maps can be updated to include missing road names in the community.	TOB – Growth Management	COMPLETED

NOTES

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- Table 8: BTFD Neighborhood Service Calls (2019 thru March, 2023), p. 57

Footnotes

1. Green family members. Interview, Conducted by Rachel Bragg, 9 March, 2019..
2. Kitty, Renty. Interview, Conducted by Rachel Bragg, 9 March, 2019.
3. South Carolina Encyclopedia, University of South Carolina, Institute for Southern Studies, June 20, 2016, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/praise-houses/>
4. Kitty, Renty. Interview, Conducted by Rachel Bragg and Lannie Kittrell, 4 February 2019; and, Frazier, Benjamin and Kitty, Jannie, Interview, Conducted by Rachel Bragg, 9 March, 2019.
5. *Bluffton Annexation Study: Buck Island and Simmonsville Road Annexation Area*, Clemson University, The Center for Community Growth and Change, August 2003.
6. Ratanakosol, Kulthilda, et al. "Learning Process for Creating Community Identity." SHS Web of Conferences 26, 01067 (2016), p. 2, https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2016/04/shsconf_erpa2016_01067.pdf
7. City of Urbana, Illinois, September 27, 2023, <https://urbanaininois.us/muralsonglass>.
8. Black Power Blueprint, September 27, 2023, blackpowerblueprint.org/projects/mural/.