



Town of Yemassee Foundations Planning Report

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Prepared by:

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A comprehensive planning process should be deliberate in its effort to gain input from the public and unify the community through visioning for the future. Visioning, although crucial to the process must be reinforced by robust data that lead to actionable strategies tailored for the community to bringing the public's vision to reality. However, prior to the development of the vision and the strategies a baseline understanding of the community must be developed. The Planning Foundations report is important to gain a sufficient understanding of existing conditions, but also to analyze past community planning efforts to understand how goals were developed, how were they measured, and if they have been achieved.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Town of Yemassee derives its name from a Native American Tribe, the Yamasee. The tribe was prevalent in the South Carolina Lowcountry and parts of Georgia and Florida and were involved in the Yemassee War of 1715 to 1717, which saw one of the most disruptive and transformational conflicts in Colonial America. Yemassee is surrounded by Revolutionary and Civil War historical sites, and has a rich history from these eras through the Reconstruction period. During the early 20th Century, Yemassee's train station and downtown hotel was famous for the U.S. Marine Corps cadets on their way to Yemassee via the CSX rail line. Through two World Wars, hundreds of thousands of Marines passed through Yemassee, this period is memorialized by the creation of the Marine Corps Tribute Park (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Art Installation at Marine Tribute Park

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Yemassee is a historically rich rural town that is strategically located along state highways and an active railroad line. During the project kickoff meeting with the Town, several key themes were discussed surrounding existing conditions and the potential future of the Town. It is important to highlight these themes, as they are valuable talking points when garnering input from the community on the vision for the Town. Examples of some topics that were brought up are as follows:

- Citizens to name and have ownership of the Comprehensive Plan
- Town's opportunities and challenges being within two counties
- Industry or other job centers to be supported by affordable workforce housing
- Retain Town's unique relationship with natural resources
- Utilize recreational and natural resources for minimum-impact tourism activities
- Emphasize responsible growth in terms of infrastructure access and surrounding natural areas
- Recent Annexations



These topics are comprised of complex elements, each with an interrelated relationship with one or more of the ten components of a Comprehensive Plan. These statements represent a baseline for the Town's vision that will be refined, and built upon during the public engagement phase and in working with Town Officials.

PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

The most recent amendment to the Comprehensive Plan for Yemassee was in 2007, however, one of the only available documents was a proposed annexation and zoning map (Figure 2). A high-level review of available documents was conducted including the 1999 Comprehensive Plan, mainly to analyze the data points and to understand past goals of the community. Generally, the past comprehensive planning goals emphasized the protection of cultural and natural resources, while promoting growth where infrastructure could support it. We can be sure that these sentiments survive today as they still broadly reflect best planning practices, however, the development of a new Comprehensive Plan allows citizens to be educated on the current state of the Town to refine these past goals, as they may have a better idea on what strategies have worked and what needs to be reimagined.

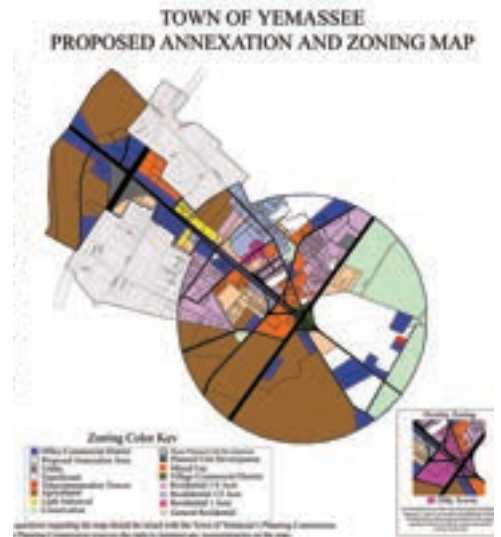


Figure 2: 2007 Annexation and Zoning Map

REGIONAL PLANS

Comprehensive Plans not only set a localized vision for the community but play in a role in the vision of the region and adjacent jurisdictions. Yemassee is split between Beaufort and Hampton County, but also within close proximity of Jasper County. Its positioning between these counties can present unique opportunities and challenges, as the visions of each County may differ. During the current update of Yemassee's Plan it is important to understand the vision and intent of surrounding entities within the region so as to work cooperatively with one another and to prevent conflicts. A Comprehensive Plan that memorializes this intent and pertinent information is a great tool for regional cooperation.



Figure 3: Beaufort County's Comprehensive Plan

Hampton County's Comprehensive Plan is currently in need of revision as it is over 10 years, as it likely reflects outdated data sets and projections. The County is currently considering options to update the plan. Beaufort County recently completed its "Envision Beaufort County" Comprehensive Plan (Figure 3) and references those included portions of Yemassee within the plan, specifically in the "Built Environment" section. Beaufort County's Plan



emphasizes coordinated visioning between the County and municipalities, specifically the Plan mentions the expansion of multi-modal transportation networks, preservation of natural resources, and annexation strategies. Specific to transportation, Hampton and Beaufort County both have pedestrian connectivity master plans, with Beaufort's being the most current (Figure 4). When Yemassee is considering projects such as capital improvements, development applications, and annexations, a portion of the review should be focused on how these areas can benefit from enhanced transportation improvements for not only vehicles but pedestrians and cyclists.

Being cognizant of the surrounding governmental entities is one aspect of cooperation, but an additional element is understanding the needs and goals of the quasi-governmental or local organizations is crucial to the function of a community, such as utility providers, school districts, and the regional council of government. As the Town is split between two Counties, it means the Town is split between two School Districts. Understanding how these districts are accounting for the current and future residents of Yemassee is an important element of the Comprehensive Plan.

The local utility, Lowcountry Water System, inherited the Town's water system in the past. There are ongoing efforts to expand and improve the water and sewer infrastructure, including the expansion of existing lines, manholes, and fire hydrants. However, due to its rural character the Town is still dependent on septic systems, as the current water and sewer network is not large enough for residents to connect. Septic systems are common in rural areas, but the quality of such systems is highly dependent on the user's maintenance of such systems. Failing septic systems discharge chemicals into the soil and in the drinking water, leading to negative health and environmental impacts, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

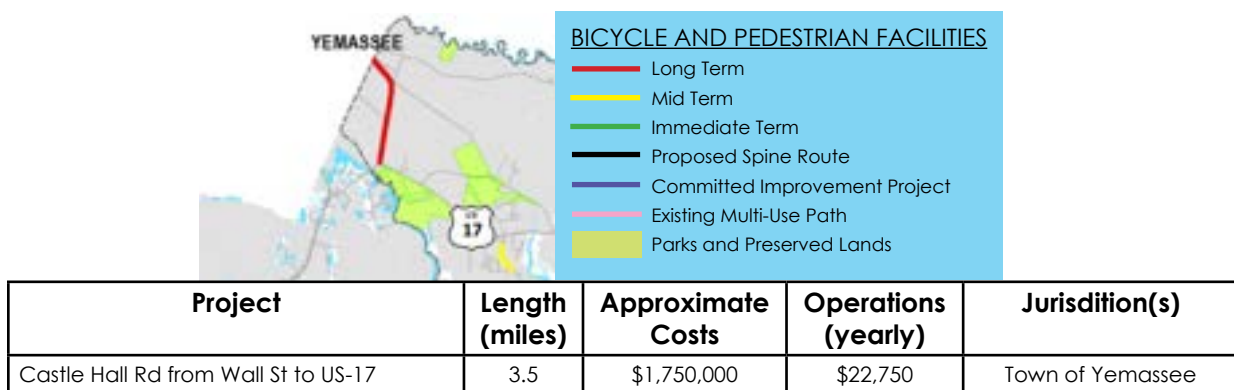


Figure 4: Excerpt from Beaufort County Connects, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan



COMMUNITY ASSETS

Located within downtown and a symbolic historic epicenter of town, the Yemassee Train Depot and Amtrak station is a major opportunity for the community, as it can act as a powerful tool for development. Attracting more visitors to the Town via the train station can lead to increased revenue for local businesses, this can be achieved by aligning community assets through a vision. An example of a potential goal is analyzing the current relationship between the Palmetto Breeze bus routes, and Amtrak train schedule. The Palmetto Breeze route currently stops at the Amtrak station, so the opportunity exists to directly support those visitors with final destinations along the Palmetto Breeze line. Supplementary assets that could support these transit and train services could be a small downtown hotel and a secure overnight or weekly parking lot at the station, either for local residents or those visitors that come through Yemassee on their way to Beaufort, Hilton Head Island, or Bluffton. Another method would be utilizing the station as a central gathering point, promoting local events and festivals. A well-maintained and functional station can also attract new businesses and industries to the area, as it serves as a signal to potential investors that the town is connected and committed to growth. By utilizing this historic and culturally significant rail station effectively, Yemassee can improve its economic standing and increase opportunities for its residents.

Growth can be interpreted in many ways, however, more communities are leaning toward a more deliberate and strategic approach due to the constraints of infrastructure and environmental factors. A challenge, or potential opportunity, for the Town of Yemassee is the large parcels of land (primarily within Beaufort County) that are either protected by private conservation easements or fall under state or federal protection. This can be seen as a barrier to growth and property tax revenue, however, towns that can successfully utilize environmentally protected land that surrounds them can benefit in several ways. Protected land acts as a natural buffer zone that can help to mitigate the impact of natural disasters such as floods. Additionally, protected land can provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike, such as hiking, fishing, and camping. These types of low-impact eco-tourism activities can be a draw for visitors and local residents and can help to boost the local economy. Finally, protected land can act as a natural filter for water and air, improving the overall quality of life for residents in the town. By utilizing and preserving environmentally protected land, towns can reap these benefits and create a more sustainable and healthy community.

Within the Hampton County portion of Yemassee, there is a desire to prepare land for industrial development, this initiative is supported by the water and sewer authority, as their current and planned improvements that will benefit the Town. In addition to infrastructure enhancement, Yemassee should consider other important factors. Transportation systems, including highways and railroads, facilitate the movement of goods and materials in and out of the area. Additionally, the town must have a sufficient pool of skilled and unskilled labor to meet the needs of the new industry. This may require investment in workforce development programs and training initiatives or partnerships with Hampton and Beaufort counties. Finally, the town must also consider the impact of the new industry on the local environment.



CONCLUSION

The documents and plans studied during this phase of the Comprehensive Plan provide a jumping-off point as we advance into the next phases of the project. By no means are inputs limited to those referenced in this report, as there is always the opportunity for input in the comprehensive planning process, whether it be in the visioning, strategy, or implementation portions of the plan. This report references areas where more input is needed from regional entities such as the Counties, utility providers, school districts, and others, and through additional information that is received will lead to the development of a unique and strategic approach.

Sincerely,

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