

# **The Ashley River Historic Corridor Resource Manual**

A community planning initiative for “whole place  
preservation”

2013 January

# Introduction

**The Ashley River Corridor Resource Manual** is an Historic Charleston Foundation initiative to provide preservationists, conservationists, community leaders, and property owners with information about implementing “whole place preservation” by using the historic Ashley River Corridor as a case study. Whole place preservation is built upon the principle that historic preservationists, land conservationists and other activists are more effective when they work together to save and protect our special places.

“The professionals involved in historic preservation, land conservation, and smart growth today share a focus on protecting community character and the aspects of the environment, natural and man-made, that are critical to quality of life. These professionals work to protect historic, scenic, and natural habitat from adverse development. Although conservation and preservation interests work in different ways, they have similar purposes for the public (Hutson, 18).

The Ashley River Corridor, stretching north for approximately twelve miles along the Ashley River from Church Creek in Charleston County to Bacon’s Bridge Road in Dorchester County, is a special place in the South Carolina Lowcountry. The corridor includes historic plantations and gardens, rural landscapes, churches, residences, archaeological sites and historic properties. These individual components are divided among a number of governmental jurisdictions, but are all connected by a scenic road, a meandering river, and a shared past. The Ashley River Corridor is part of the region’s past and future, and efforts to protect it are entering their fourth decade. Despite its appreciation by residents, landowners, conservation and preservation groups, suburban growth pressures continually threaten the unique character of the Corridor.

In 2007, Historic Charleston Foundation received a grant from the Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelly Foundation to expand the Ashley River Historic District, which was originally listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. The expanded district was designated in 2010 and now encompasses more than 23,000 acres. The area that was most recently added to the National Register lies to the west of Ashley River Road (Highway 61). This area is significant for its association with the inland rice culture that dominated the landscape, economy, and society of the Lowcountry in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century and for the phosphate mining industry that helped the region recover from the agricultural and economic upheaval during the Reconstruction era.

For over forty years, land owners, preservationists, conservationists, politicians and the larger community have used every tool and approach at their disposal to protect the Ashley River Corridor. We have learned that whole place preservation requires constant vigilance and never-ending advocacy. It takes an enormous investment of time and effort but the result—a protected area that is recognized as significant by a broad swath of the community—is worth it.

# Planning for “whole place preservation”

- Understand the area’s history and educate the public about its significance
- Identify existing threats
- Collaborate with conservation community and property owners, and support grassroots campaigns
- Realize the importance of political support
- Be proactive and flexible in ongoing preservation and conservation efforts
- Utilize current technology to inventory resources
- Acknowledge land use patterns and infrastructure investment as critical elements

# Understand the area's history and educate the public about its significance

When fully understood, the historical and natural significance of a particular place can guide efforts to safeguard it for the future. The expansion of the Ashley River Historic District involved an informed understanding of the lives, associated events, activities, and developments that were important in the corridor's past. The following represents the depth of research related to this special place.

## *History of the Ashley River Corridor*

From its headwaters in the cypress swamps of lower Dorchester County to its confluence with the Cooper River in Charleston Harbor, the Ashley River runs for less than 25 miles. Historians have frequently observed that this physical characteristic of the river is in inverse proportion to its historical importance, as the district through which the Ashley River runs is closely associated with the history of Charleston and with the foundation of the Carolina colony in 1670.

Indeed, it was along the banks of the lower Ashley River that the initial settlement of the Carolina Colony was located beginning in 1670. Upriver from this settlement (called Albemarle Point), was Ashley Barony, the 12,000-acre land grant on the upper Ashley River that was formally made to Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury, in 1675 by the Lords Proprietors. From this location and others established along both banks of the river, early settlers pursued the raising of livestock and a flourishing deerskin trade with local Native American tribes. They also worked to convert natural materials into the key commodities and naval stores that secured the colony's economic future. Early town sites, such as the Town of Dorchester, were laid out along the frontier. The town, now Colonial Dorchester State Park, was settled by a group of Congregationalists from Massachusetts in 1697 and it flourished until the 1750s. Frontier settlements like Dorchester and early Native American footpaths, which later became roads such as the Ashley River Road, created a network that helped lay the foundation for the new colony.

The political and religious foundations of the colony were laid in 1706 with the establishment of the Church Act that established the Church of England as the official church for the province. Saint Andrew's Parish was one of 10 parishes created by the act. Construction of the church now known as Old St. Andrew's Church, located on the Ashley River Road at Church Creek, began that same year, making it the oldest surviving church in South Carolina. The original rectangular church was enlarged in 1723, giving it its present cruciform shape. Old St. Andrew's Church is one of the only colonial parish churches to remain in active use and is listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places. For generations, Old St. Andrew's Church was the church of the Ashley River's plantation elite. Their rice plantations defined the district's material and social culture.

Proximity to Charleston and the ability to reach the port city by either water or road advanced the district as a desirable location for properties that evolved from modest residences into fashionable and architecturally sophisticated country seats for the colony's emerging agricultural aristocracy. Initially, it was the water access and the demand for riverfront that resulted in a pattern of linear tracts running inland from the banks of the Ashley River. This historic pattern of development still survives in much of the district today.

Lands along the river were reserved more for pleasure and display than agricultural productivity due to their sandy soils and high marl content. These properties typically served as administrative centers for the planter elites that had vast landholdings throughout the southern colonies. Some of the extant plantations that were positioned along the southern bank of the Ashley River are Drayton Hall, Magnolia Plantation and Middleton Place. These plantations and others featured prominent structures and extensively landscaped gardens along the river while their "working areas," including plantation rice fields, large slave settlements, agricultural areas, and later mining operations were usually positioned further inland. These inland areas of the district ran across savannas and the freshwater marshes of Rantowles Creek, and provided the essential economic support for the showplaces along the river.

The mixture of wet and dry lands in this inland portion of the Ashley River district facilitated the colonists' exhaustive pursuit to identify and establish staple crops that could sustain the long-term economic viability of the colony. Indigo was a major crop for the colonists with successful production beginning in the 1740s. A bounty or financial incentive was placed on indigo by the British Parliament shortly thereafter but it ceased to be grown on any large scale in the area after the American Revolution. However, for a while, the profits made from the processing of the indigo plant for its rich blue dye were second only to rice.

By 1700, the cultivation of rice was the most significant agricultural activity in the region and the wealth it ultimately created was staggering. Largely because of the success of rice, large tracts of land were purchased in the Ashley River region, extensive plantation complexes were built and huge investments in human labor were made. The inland savannas and swamps of the district provided the reliable source of fresh water necessary for rice crop cultivation long before the elaborate tidal irrigation systems were engineered. Slave settlements were located in these inland areas, close to the rice fields, as they provided the critical labor force for the successful production of rice. Commercial rice production in the region, once the most lucrative crop in South Carolina, declined sharply after the Civil War.

Following the Civil War and its dismantling of the slave-based agricultural economy throughout the South, the phosphoric marl that lay beneath the land adjacent to the banks of the Ashley was extensively strip mined for use as chemical fertilizer. This vital industrial endeavor briefly restored many of the plantation-based fortunes destroyed by the war. Small African-American communities developed from former slave settlements located throughout the district, and former slaves and their descendants supplied the labor force required by the phosphate industry. The local phosphate industry was eventually eclipsed by more profitable sources of the mineral in Florida and Tennessee beginning in the 1890s, but the canals, roads, rail lines and other infrastructure designed for phosphate extraction still cover the landscape.

Slave descendants likewise supplied the majority of the labor needed for the commercial timber industry that succeeded phosphate mining, and which today remains the most significant agricultural activity in the district. The region embraced the timber industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as companies sought to convert wood pulp into paper and board lumber. In order to supply their mills, these timber companies purchased thousands of acres of land within the Ashley River area. Today, the largest of the remaining timber tracts in the district is slated to become a series of clustered residential developments with conserved woodlands between.

Another crucial economic and cultural development emerged in the district during the 1870s in the form of heritage tourism. By restoring, expanding or recreating the designed landscape features of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century plantations, and through the stabilization, preservation and interpretation of the architectural remains of that period, the area was popularized as a tourism destination. Indeed, the opening of Magnolia Gardens to the public in the 1870s pre-dated the establishment of downtown Charleston's substantial tourism industry. The gardens of Middleton Place were opened to the public in the 1920s. Heritage tourism, which greatly augmented the financial viability of several large historic tracts of land along the south bank of the Ashley River, provided an important incentive to retain land use patterns in the district based on those that had been established in the previous two centuries. Combined with Drayton Hall, which opened to the public as an historic site in the mid-1970s, these plantations now draw hundreds of thousands of visitors every year.

Today, the Ashley River Historic District is well known for its historic plantations and gardens along the river. Lesser known but no less valuable, are the large privately owned plantations and lands that contain remnants of old rice fields, dikes, and canals. These features survive alongside the vestiges of former slave settlements, phosphate mining camps and numerous archaeological sites. All attest to the pivotal role the Ashley River Corridor has played in the history and development of Charleston and South Carolina.

# Identify existing threats

## *A History of Preservation and Conservation*

In order to identify the tools required to preserve a large-scale rural area, a thorough knowledge of the multidimensional threats to the area must be structured. Also essential is a thorough understanding of the history of conservation and preservation efforts within the area.

The survival of important historic and natural resources within the Ashley River Corridor is due in large measure to over a century of hard work in historic preservation and conservation. The opening of a couple of historic plantations and gardens to the public in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and later efforts by some of these same properties to have their properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places, laid the groundwork for wider recognition of the area's historical significance. Beyond the development of some of the Ashley River plantations for heritage tourism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many area landowners diversified their interests beyond farming and mining. The retention of large tracts under single ownership throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and employing traditional land uses such as commercial timber production and hunt clubs also helped foster a commitment to conservation of the natural landscape. Throughout the centuries, area landowners have been dedicated to conserving the area's special qualities.

## *Suburban Growth Pressures*

Those same special qualities attracted others to the area as well. Suburban development in the Ashley River Corridor increased throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as Charleston's population and land area were greatly expanded. The large amount of open land, the physical beauty of the area, along with its relative proximity to downtown Charleston and Summerville made it an attractive prospect for developers and new residents, starting in the 1960s and 70s.

In 1940, Pierpont and Magnolia were the two main subdivisions located along Ashley River Road. By the 1980s, however, "there were approximately fifteen subdivisions, ten multi-family developments and some strip commercial developments" (City of Charleston 1986, 54). According to Charleston's 2008 Preservation Plan, the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the population of the City of Charleston nearly double while "the land area increased fivefold to more than 100 square miles" (City of Charleston 2008, 7).

Beginning in the 1960s and ramping up over the next two decades, manifestations of the new development pressures in the corridor were noted by residents and planners. The large moss-draped oaks lining the two-lane Ashley River Road were seen by some as impediments to future development and by others as a defining natural characteristic of the area. In 1964, the South Carolina Department of Transportation announced plans to expand the two-lane Ashley River Road to four lanes. Plans for the removal of the oaks for road widening generated passionate debate and several organizations, including Historic Charleston Foundation and the National Trust, worked to have those plans halted. These organizations and many others in the community felt that the aesthetic character of the road was a critically important feature of the area and worked towards preservation of the historic road.

The historical significance of the Ashley River Road was fully articulated in 1983 with the listing of the road itself on the National Register of Historic Places. Highway 61, as it is also known, actually began as a Native American trading path and it was one of the earliest (if not **the** earliest) roads in the colony of South Carolina. An act in 1690-91 established a road along the south side of the Ashley River to provide better communication between Charles Town and outlying plantations and settlements. Interestingly, colonial roads were prized for the shading potential of their tree canopy. A statute of 1721 directed that new roads should leave “such trees standing on or near the line of each such road or path, as shall be most convenient for shade ...” (McCord 1841, 56). Utilized strategically in both the American Revolution and the Civil War, as well as by the 19<sup>th</sup> century phosphate industry, the Ashley River Road was first paved in 1939 to make it more accessible for residents and tourists to the plantations and gardens.

### *Managing Growth 1980-1990*

Even as the Ashley River Road was acknowledged for its historical and aesthetic significance, the area through which it runs was experiencing phenomenal growth. The tri-county area comprised of Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester was identified in the 1980s as the fastest growing metropolitan area in the state. The *Ashley River Study* authored by the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCD COG) in 1980 was the first planning document for the Ashley River Corridor. It analyzed the upper area of the corridor in terms of land use, transportation, the environment, archaeology and agriculture. The authors presciently noted that:

“The combined effect [of new development] acts as a magnet to additional residential development. If allowed to go unchecked this process will soon intrude into the more sensitive segments of this area and, by the year 2000, will surround the historic/ plantation areas” (BCD COG 1980, 41).

In June of 1985, Charleston County adopted a moratorium on all re-zonings in the Ashley River Corridor until a comprehensive study was made to address growth. Building on the *Ashley River Study*, the *Highway 61 Growth Management Plan*, also authored by the BCD COG, was drafted and adopted in 1986 and 1987 by the three counties. The study area included approximately 67.5 square miles, bounded generally by Highway 165 to the north, Highway 7 to the south, the Ashley River to the east and Rantowles Creek to the west. At this time, the developed area along Ashley River Road was from Sam Rittenberg Boulevard (Hwy. 7) north to the newly developed Shadowmoss Neighborhood. The major goals of the study were, “to preserve and protect areas north of Church Creek and to restore and enhance areas south of Church Creek” (City of Charleston 1986, 6).

The *Highway 61 Growth Management Plan* made recommendations relating to land use, transportation, scenic and aesthetic character, and environment. While the Management Plan did not result in extensive protections through government regulations, it did result in the adoption of some mandated vegetative buffers along Ashley River Road and a lower zoning classification for the area that fell into the Charleston city limits. It also focused public attention on the area and got the attention of state agencies.

In 1990, The South Carolina Department of Archives and History made a formal request to the South Carolina Coastal Council (now the Office of Coastal Resource Management, or OCRM) to partner on a comprehensive plan for the sustainable management of the Ashley River watershed. The resulting *Ashley River Special Area Management Plan* (SAMP) was begun in 1991 as part of the larger Charleston Harbor Project and was finalized the next year.

A SAMP is defined as “a coastal management planning process that allows modifications to general coast-wide policies where local conditions or circumstances call for special measures” (SC Coastal Council 1992, 2). The Ashley River SAMP was developed in partnership with many other groups including Dorchester County, Charleston County, the Town of Summerville, the City of Charleston, the City of North Charleston, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Soil Conservation Service, South Carolina Department of Parks Recreation and Tourism, South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department, landowners, interested citizens, and nonprofit organizations. It studied the area along the Ashley River Road running northwest from the Atlantic Coast Railroad Trestle just south of Drayton Hall in Charleston County to Bacon’s Bridge Road in Dorchester County, and along the western side of Dorchester Road. Citing the importance of the Ashley River and its environs, the authors noted, “Indeed it is difficult to imagine another river in America, within close proximity to a city, with comparable resources of unblemished natural beauty and of national historical significance...But pressures of untrammled growth threaten its natural beauty and the very foundations of its historical resources” (SC Coastal Council 1992, 1).

The identification of those historic resources was a major component of the Ashley River SAMP. After surveying the area, the staff of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) identified and documented nearly fifty separate historical and archaeological resources. Of these, Drayton Hall and Middleton Place had already been listed as National Historic Landmarks and Magnolia Plantation and Gardens, the Ashley River Road and Old Dorchester had been individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to these important places, the SHPO considered a significant portion of the Ashley River SAMP study area eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district and announced plans to nominate it as such. Their determination for eligibility also meant that the area became a GAPC, or Geographic Area of Particular Concern, and as such it became entitled to “the special attention and consideration of the S.C Coastal Council in its evaluation of applications for direct permits as well as projects requiring its certification” of state and federal permits (SC Coastal Council 1992, 22, 46).

The SAMP cited as broad issues of concern for the area: increased population, residential and commercial development pressures and myriad issues created by having a number of separate and distinct jurisdictions throughout the area of study. Specific issues addressed in the SAMP were bank and shoreline erosion, increased boat traffic, visual and noise pollution, degradation of water quality, flooding, and the loss of scenic vistas. The plan contained provisions to prohibit or limit dock construction in view corridors of historic plantations.

The Ashley River SAMP’s emphasis on dock proliferation and the negative impacts of development on historic view sheds across the Ashley River had a major and immediate impact on conservation and preservation battles. Based on recommendations in the SAMP, the Coastal Council successfully fought against five docks proposed directly across from Magnolia Plantation. Plans by

the Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission for a large public boat ramp to be located across the river from Drayton Hall were scuttled in the face of broad public opposition. A “no-wake” zone was also established within 500 feet of National Historic Landmarks and National Register listed properties by South Carolina House Bill 4242. This mandated a slowing of motorized boats that reduced noise and riverbank erosion.

Galvanized by these conservation successes but mindful of other threats, Drayton Hall began taking on the role of principal advocate for the Ashley River Corridor. In 1993 and 1994, Drayton Hall began working with landscape architects and lawyers to make recommendations and draft ordinances for the City of Charleston regarding mandatory vegetative buffers along the Ashley River Road. In February of 1994, City Council approved a new ordinance requiring vegetative buffers from 50 to 200 feet along the Ashley River Road, the planting of understory trees and evergreen shrubs, and the protection of trees with a diameter of more than six inches. At the same time, Drayton Hall began a fight to protect its views across the river. George McDaniel, Director of Drayton Hall, noted that there was urgency to raise funds and act quickly, “because if the land had been developed, no amount of money could have bought it back” (Langley 1996). In 1996, the National Trust for Historic Preservation purchased 17 acres of land across the river from Drayton Hall. Because of that purchase, visitors experience the unspoiled views that would have been in existence when the house was constructed in 1738.

In 1994 the Ashley River Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The historic district included fifty-one historic, archaeological, and cultural properties and encompassed approximately 7,000 acres, roughly the same area as the Ashley River SAMP. The nomination, drafted by staff at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, was based upon three of the four criteria set forth by the National Register of Historic Places: the district’s association with historic events, because of the excellence of architecture and construction of various properties, and because of the district’s great potential to reveal through archaeology information important to the history of the area (NPS 1994).

The listing of the Ashley River Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places was an acknowledgement of the area’s national significance, and its designation brought property owners some financial incentives. The district designation also provided limited protections through Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This section is invoked if federal money or a federal permitting process is involved on any project that impacts a listed property or district. Section 106 requires the federal agency involved to assess the effect of its actions on historic resources and to arrange for mitigation of those effects. Listing did not (and does not), however, restrict private property owners from using their properties as they see fit.

The listing of the Ashley River Historic District in the 1990s was certainly a positive step towards preservation and conservation of the area, but some worried that it gave the public the false impression that the district was protected from any and all threats. Because of lingering and substantial pressures on the area, the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed the Ashley River district on its list of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 1995. The National Trust was certainly familiar with the challenges faced by properties in the area since it has owned and operated Drayton Hall since 1974. In addition to operating museum properties, the Trust has long been engaged in preservation advocacy. It has used its 11 Most Endangered List as a powerful

alarm to raise awareness of the threats facing the nation's greatest treasures. Within the Ashley River Corridor, the 11 Most Endangered designation galvanized local groups to work cooperatively towards its protection.

# Collaborate with conservation community and property owners, and support grassroots campaigns

Some 65 percent of America's land is still held in private ownership; therefore, the bulk of conservation work must be initiated by private landowners. It is crucial to engage with these landowners and educate them about the benefits of conservation and preservation. For community planning efforts to be effective, allied groups working to protect natural and cultural resources need to have real diversity of experience and commitment to the process. They also need access to expertise in best practices, and they need to involve the public to get input and buy-in specifically on resource protection goals (Lane, 43).

The establishment of the Ashley River Conservation Coalition (ARCC) was a major step towards a collaborative approach to Ashley River Corridor preservation and conservation. The ARCC was established as an outgrowth of a public forum and workshop in 1996 entitled, *Envisioning a Future for the Ashley River Corridor: Questions, Strategies, Solutions*. Sponsored and attended by a wide array of non-profit and public entities, it was the first real opportunity for stakeholders to network and actively discuss challenges and desired outcomes within the Ashley River Corridor. Calls for a collaborative approach and the subsequent establishment of a coalition in 1997 marked a new phase in the conservation and preservation of the area. Until this time, progress was made by individual entities whose various efforts were uncoordinated and piecemeal. The Ashley River Conservation Coalition was made up of staff from Drayton Hall, Historic Charleston Foundation, the Lowcountry Open Land Trust, Middleton Place Foundation, S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, and Westvaco Corporation. Drayton Hall's Executive Director, George McDaniel, was appointed as the group's chair.

From the outset, the coalition intended their work to result in greater communication, coordination and effectiveness. According to the Coalition's 1997 Fact Sheet, it sought to "help create a vision for the future of the Ashley River Historic District and to facilitate the development of strategies to achieve that vision." It intended to accomplish this goal and dissolve within a few years. The idea was to meet monthly and to provide an organizational forum for the assembled groups to discuss upcoming projects, funding, and progress until the group was no longer needed. The organizational make-up of the coalition with non-profit preservation and environmental groups, plantations and historic sites, a state agency and the corporate sector all represented, bespoke a commitment to promote partnerships that could have a wide ranging impact.

The ARCC worked on securing a partnership with the National Park Service through its Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program and also nominated the Ashley as a State Scenic River, a program administered by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The Ashley River was designated as one of only five state scenic rivers in 1998. The scenic designation begins at Highway 17-A near the Town of Summerville and extends towards Charleston for 22 miles (ASRAC 2003, p.iii). The purpose of the Scenic Rivers Program is to "protect unique and outstanding river resources throughout South Carolina." The designation

called for “a voluntary, cooperative community-based process which allows landowners, advocates of community interests and the SCDNR to work toward common river conservation goals” (SCDNR 1998). It thus required a local advisory council, so the Ashley River Scenic Advisory Council (ASRAC) was created in 1999.

The Ashley River Conservation Coalition hired a full time staff member in January of 1998 and offices were donated by Drayton Hall. Funding for the staff position and day-to-day operations were made possible by grants from the National Trust and the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation. Additionally, a cooperative agreement between the Coalition and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service resulted in a grant to assist with planning efforts that integrated wetland conservation into an overall management plan for the corridor. The Fish and Wildlife Service was particularly interested in partnerships to aid in their North American Waterfowl Management Plan, of which the protection of wetlands as critical nesting sites was a key component. This overlay between the preservation of natural and historic areas continues to be a strength of the Ashley River conservation efforts.

In the late 1990s, in addition to the Scenic River designation, the Ashley River Conservation Coalition also tackled one of the biggest challenges facing the area- the need for coordinated regional planning among the numerous jurisdictions within the Ashley River Corridor. The General Assembly required that all South Carolina counties update their comprehensive growth management plans by May of 1999 and the Coalition worked with Charleston and Dorchester Counties on including recommendations for the Corridor in their plans. All five of the local jurisdictions created comprehensive plans that recognized the unique and special qualities of the area and each included some special provision for their portion of the Ashley River corridor. Most were in the form of allowing for implementation of flexible ordinances and zoning to encourage more responsible development practices. Each plan contained language allowing for the creation of a “Transitional Overlay District” (or similar terminology) that could facilitate stricter, more consistent regulation within the bounds of the Ashley River Historic District. Within these overlay districts there could be development standards using best management practices such as environmentally site planning, signage restrictions, buffers, clustering of housing densities, retention of open spaces and reduction of impervious surfaces. This language has since proved useful in the realization of a historic overlay for Dorchester County.

Also in the late 1990s, the Coalition worked with another municipality, North Charleston, on amending their zoning ordinance to prevent new subdivisions across the Ashley River from negatively impacting the scenic qualities of Landmark and National Register listed properties. This included new mandates for setbacks and heights of new construction, and the establishment or retention of opaque vegetative buffers. These efforts relating to developable tracts in North Charleston facing the Ashley River were brought about by several potential developments comprising over 500 acres of river frontage within the viewshed of Middleton Place.

In addition to the actions taken by North Charleston, one of the Coalition’s member organizations – the Lowcountry Open Land Trust (LOLT) – also negotiated with the developers to secure protections on the land and opened a dialogue on how the developers could successfully integrate conservation into their land development and marketing. The fight to preserve Middleton’s view shed was just one of the earlier efforts by the Lowcountry Open Land Trust to secure conservation

easements within the upper Ashley River area. The LOLT currently holds 300 acres of land under conservation easement in the corridor, thus protecting it from development in perpetuity. A ten-mile stretch of the Ashley River Road was designated a State Scenic Byway in 1999 and as a National Scenic Byway the next year. These designations brought together a number of policy makers who pledged to work cooperatively and also required the production of a detailed and updated corridor management plan. The Coalition worked to generate public input through a number of planning charettes and worked to engage citizens through a publically generated photographic study. The resulting images and information were used to underpin a new management plan entitled, *The Ashley River Road Scenic Byway Management Plan*, finished in 2002.

Another management plan was prepared in 2003 by the Ashley Scenic River Advisory Council. *The Ashley Scenic River Management Plan* detailed the “public values, concerns, and desires for the river” and laid out the challenges and opportunities facing it (ASRAC 2003, 111). As noted previously, the Ashley Scenic River Advisory Council (ASRAC) was created in 1999 after the Ashley’s designation as a state scenic river. Made up of around twenty stakeholders including landowners, conservation organizations and concerned citizens, its purpose is to advise the SC Department of Natural Resources on the river’s protection and management. The Council’s management plan sought to address water quality, recreational use and access, preservation and conservation, land management and development with findings, goals and recommendations. The Scenic River Plan also recognized a variety of conservation and financial incentives for landowners such as deed restrictions, conservation easements, and the purchase of development rights as valuable tools.

Too often, the natural resource conservation realm remains disconnected from historic preservation efforts in the United States. As a result, significant resources are lost because an integrated approach is not taken. Conversely, in the late 2000s, the Ashley River Historic District initiative sought to build on the successes of both conservationists and preservationists and partnered with many of those same groups.

Historic Charleston Foundation’s objective in expanding the Ashley River Historic District was to assist the community in identifying appropriate land use planning solutions and strategies that protect both heritage and natural values that were threatened by unmanaged growth. By working collaboratively with a large group of partners early in the process, HCF was able to help raise the community’s aspirations for their plan. Key partners included: Drayton Hall and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Magnolia Plantation and Gardens, Middleton Place Foundation, Colonial Dorchester State Park, the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League, and key property owners in the corridor. As a result, the proposed expansion of the District became a process that uncovered and realized a shared, cohesive vision for sustaining quality of life within the Ashley River Historic District over time.

In order to protect properties and places, historic preservationists and land conservationists sometimes utilize different approaches to achieve success. Preservationists commonly employ regulatory protections and historic designations at the local, state, and federal levels to secure the protection of properties and places. The easement, or conservation restriction, is the conservationist’s most often-used land protection tool. In any event, the preservationists and conservationists bring specific toolkits to the protection of a place that do not overlap in many

instances. Thus, the question becomes, “What can preservationists and conservationists learn from each other to effectuate whole place preservation?”

Preservationists and conservationists each have complementary knowledge and tools that advances the concept of whole place preservation. Each has developed specialized expertise—and that specialization results in the tendency to operate with distinct approaches and goals. Frequently, a successful conservation project will conclude but leave historic features on the land unprotected. Similarly, a preservation project will end without adequate consideration of permanent land protection. Sometimes preservationists and conservationists may even independently work to protect the same piece of real estate without knowing the others’ interests and actions.

The expansion of the Ashley River Historic District exemplifies how each profession can enhance and complement the collective toolkit. Historic Charleston Foundation’s knowledge of the National Register process was unique to those working to expand the district’s boundaries. HCF’s understanding of the National Register’s guiding principles of age, integrity, and significance became one tool to realize the preservation of the Ashley River Corridor. Equally, Coastal Conservation League’s knowledge of community organizing, engaging in the political process and the Conservation Bank complemented the preservation ethos in protecting this historic corridor. The complementary nature of the preservation and conservation philosophies allowed the partners to venture out of their respective arenas and work together to generate support in the broader community for protecting the corridor.

## Realize the importance of political support

The Ashley River Corridor has certainly benefitted in that it was identified early on by local government planners as a place worthy of land-use planning and preservation. Several planning documents were initiated in the 1980s and adopted by the cities and counties that made up the Corridor. This created momentum for additional actions by state agencies such as the South Carolina Coastal Council (now OCRM) and the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and others. Along the way, conservationists and preservationists have navigated the local, state and national political landscapes and have worked with policy makers on a variety of issues.

Within whole place preservation initiatives, politics count. Personal faith in a proposed policy or ordinance will not produce the preservation of a place unless the respective governing body adopts the policy.

In the 1990s, efforts by Drayton Hall and others resulted in protective measures such as a no-wake zone along the river near the plantations and local ordinances for vegetative buffers along Ashley River Road. Additionally, the Ashley River Conservation Coalition worked with planners from all the local governments within the corridor to ensure that they included language that addressed the special qualities and unique needs of the area in their long-range plans.

Even though efforts towards coordinated regional planning have been ongoing, the Ashley River Historic District expansion was challenged by a balkanized political landscape. The Ashley River Historic District included lands within five different jurisdictions, entangled in this one relatively small area. These include Charleston County, City of Charleston, City of North Charleston, Dorchester County, and the Town of Summerville.

Specifically, in 2007, Dorchester County established a Historic Overlay District for the Ashley River Historic District, protecting 32,000 acres from high-density zoning and sprawl. The intent of the overlay district was to promote responsible development and to mitigate the effects of new construction within the Ashley River Corridor Overlay District, so as to safeguard the local heritage, natural beauty, and economic and recreational resources; to conserve wildlife habitat; to stabilize riverbanks and to protect water quality and marine nursery resources.

The affected lands are 500 feet landward on either side of the Ashley River starting from the Charleston County boundary on the east and extending to Slands Bridge (US 17A) crossing on the west, and 300 feet to each side of the rights-of-way of Dorchester Road (S-18-642) on the north and Ashley River Road (SC 61) on the south. This overlay district establishes additional control requirements that must be met by a developer of property contained within the corridor. An overlay zone is yet another tool for whole place conservation. In 2008, Dorchester County adopted this Comprehensive Plan to direct infrastructure and new growth. These policy decisions were enacted along a parallel track to the expansion of the Ashley River Historic District. Winning political support required long-term political engagement, an education campaign to inform the public about alternatives to conventional suburban sprawl and the related costs of unmanaged growth, and efforts by nonprofit preservation organizations such as Historic Charleston Foundation to build and sustain a constituency for whole place preservation.

## Be proactive to and flexible in ongoing preservation and conservation efforts

Despite victories in conservation and preservation, issues have continued to emerge with regards to new development pressures within the Ashley River Corridor. Indeed, the controversy surrounding the first intensive development plans for a large piece of land referred to as the Watson Hill tract served as a catalyst for another major preservation initiative starting in 2004.

Historic Charleston Foundation began working in 2005 to expand the original 7,000 acre National Register-designated Ashley River Historic District. The original district focused on previously known sites located to the northeast of Ashley River Road, from the CSX train trestle on the south in Charleston County to Bacon's Bridge Road twenty miles to the north in Dorchester County. That first district nomination grew out of an earlier conservation effort in the area. The document was researched and authored by staff from the State Historic Preservation Office and included nearly fifty individual contributing resources such as buildings, structures, gardens, and archaeological features from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In July of 1991, architectural historians and archaeologists from the SHPO conducted a four-day field survey of the area. Combining that trip with additional research, they identified sixteen historic properties, and thirty-three archaeological sites. Of these, both Drayton Hall and Middleton Place had already been designated as National Historic Landmarks, and Magnolia Plantation, Colonial Dorchester and the Ashley River Road had been listed individually on the National Register. Thus the 1994 district was shaped by the SAMP, public input, the SHPO survey and additional research.

This first Ashley River National Register District included the showplace plantations and gardens located along the banks of the Ashley River, as well as some privately owned plantations and several other 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century sites. Central to the district were the Ashley River and Ashley River Road. These important transportation routes enabled the construction of the buildings and structures that formed the foundation of a vital plantation economy. For the 1994 nomination, the primary historical narrative was centered on the properties that fronted the Ashley River.

The nomination document for the Ashley River Historic District was the first time such an inventory of the area's historic resources had been compiled and a case made for the national significance of the area. However, this 7,000-acre district did not include all of the area's resources, nor did it tell the full history of the Ashley River Corridor. By the mid-2000s, Historic Charleston Foundation and others were increasingly worried that intensive developments like Watson Hill might erase the undocumented portions of the cultural landscape before it could offer up its stories.

Historically, the Ashley River plantations were not just located along the riverfront; they also included considerable land holdings stretching south and west from the river across Ashley River Road. The largely wooded areas "on the other side of the road" have not typically been considered by the general public as a part of the plantation landscape. However, the savannas and wooded

lands southwest of Ashley River Road were where the working parts of those showplace plantations were located.

Historic Charleston Foundation conducted research and submitted a preliminary draft for a larger Ashley River Historic District to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in 2005. The SHPO agreed that a larger area was potentially eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places but they believed that HCF would need to make this a major project. This would need to include a new field survey to look at new areas of interest and a completely new inventory of the entire area to confirm which resources from the 1994 survey work were still intact and what was changed and altered within the original boundaries.

Importantly, the SHPO staff also noted that between 1994 and 2005, there had been substantial changes to the process used by the Department of the Interior in reviewing and evaluating nominations to the National Register. In particular, they determined that the 1994 nomination document did not meet the updated standards as it did not adequately address the area's archaeological significance and potential, and did not address the importance of the cultural landscape.

The SHPO staff recommended that any boundary increase to the Ashley River Historic District should focus heavily on the area to the south and west of Ashley River Road as a cultural landscape, documenting landscape features like historic inland rice fields, dikes and canals, roadways, and the remains of phosphate mining trenches. The SHPO also noted that the location and documentation of additional archaeological sites would bolster the argument for expansion, and suggested that HCF use its previous nomination of the Cooper River National Register District as a model for a large rural historic district. The use of maps, too, would be key in helping to document and understand the layers of history in the landscape.

In order to best accomplish this mandate, Historic Charleston Foundation applied to the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation for a land conservation grant in 2007. In the application, Historic Charleston Foundation noted that the expansion of the existing district was an ongoing project and one through which the Foundation sought to better understand and document portions of the Ashley River Corridor, bring attention to its important resources and to enhance the level of regulatory review it received. Historic Charleston noted that the SHPO's recommended scope and the large-scale nature of the project meant that preservation and archaeological consultants were necessary.

The outcomes of the project were: to have the Ashley River Historic District formally expanded in the National Register, to facilitate additional protections of the rural historic landscape and raise awareness about its significance, to generate more in-depth archaeological data and more information on understudied topics such as the phosphate mining industry, to fully document the history and traditional land-use patterns in the area, and to make all this documentation available for future research and action. The Foundation noted that for this to be successful, community forums should be held and that the many conservation and preservation entities working in the area for decades should be actively engaged. These "partners" included Drayton Hall, Magnolia Plantation, Middleton Place Foundation, Colonial Dorchester State Park, other prominent landowners, the Lowcountry Open Land Trust, South Carolina Coastal Conservation League, The Ashley Scenic River Advisory Board, and interested elected officials and citizens.

## Utilize current technology to inventory resources

The sheer size of rural historic areas can be an impediment to action because it can be so difficult (and prohibitively expensive) to survey the significant cultural and natural resources in the area one is trying to protect. To compound this challenge, access to private property is also a major issue. However, new advances in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping tools allow for a more feasible and cost-effective approach to surveying large tracts of rural land. In order to document the historic landscape of the Ashley River corridor, large tracts of land to the south and west of Ashley River Road were surveyed using a combination of computer mapping with overlays of historic maps and targeted field surveys. Additionally, previously unknown archaeological sites were investigated and incorporated into the expanded district.

The land conservation grant was awarded in late 2007 and consultants were hired. Historian and preservationist Lissa Felzer of Felzer Consulting, was hired to spearhead the research and field survey necessary to revise and expand the existing National Register district. Brockington and Associates was hired for the archaeological component. Theirs was an especially challenging undertaking since the area that required the most study and survey was comprised of thousands of acres of privately owned, forested and swampy land. These large parcels, located to the southwest of Ashley River Road, were comprised of portions of Millbrook Plantation, Uxbridge, Middleton Place, and others.

At first, Historic Charleston Foundation envisioned that the archaeological process would include extensive archival research to locate potential archaeological sites within that study area. This would be followed by selection of five to ten of those on which to conduct archaeological investigations. Archaeologists would conduct research into previously identified archaeological sites within the enlarged district as well. The Foundation anticipated that these known and potential sites could be identified through research and some limited physical survey. Some representative sites would be selected for excavations and then all would be mapped using GIS. However, concerns were soon raised by the SHPO that there needed to be a systematic survey of the entire area since a handful of sites could not realistically be used to make a case for the integrity of the whole. Since direct archaeological survey of thousands of areas would likely cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and take many years to complete, HCF and Brockington worked to come up with a new approach.

Instead of a more traditional archaeological survey that involves physically walking the area and testing the ground through a series of spaced, small shovel test pits, Brockington archaeologist and GIS specialist, Gwendolyn (Inna) Moore proposed the creation of a GIS database. She argued that, using GIS, potential archaeological sites could be identified by overlaying historic plats and maps onto aerials and current topographic maps. Field survey could then confirm or negate their presence and integrity. Eventually, we could generate maps that would include the locations of old roads, long-lost structures and settlements, inland rice fields and canals, earthen property boundaries, phosphate mining ditches and more.

To test the proposed methodology, in 2007 Brockington began collection of all the pertinent GIS data to be used including USGS topographic maps, parcel data from Charleston and Dorchester counties, and aerial photos. Moore also collected information on previously recorded archaeological sites and other known architectural resources. Moore and consultant Lissa Felzer compiled maps ranging in date from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These were then geo-referenced with the current views and maps. This involved locating and coordinating key intersections, and landform features such as earthen boundary lines and water lines that appeared on both, and then overlaying them so that these features lined up (Moore 2009).

A field team met first at Millbrook Plantation with a sample of the overlay to test its accuracy and potential. The team soon confirmed that this method would yield superb results. Upon reaching a location or site that appeared on historic maps, the surveyors fanned out within the immediate area to look for any visible remains of cultural or landscape features. These could include brick foundations, brick fragments, aboveground artifact scatter, as well as landscape features like canals, ditches, ornamental plantings and more. Moore took the information gleaned from the extensive survey work and generated an impressive number of maps documenting the landscape (Moore 2009).

This broad-based approach allowed the consultants to create, for the first time, a view of the overall cultural landscape located within the forested lands across the road from the showplace plantations situated along the banks of the Ashley River. This allowed the broader history of the area to be told. These lands were critical to the everyday workings of the plantations, of which they were part. On these lands inland rice cultivation and production took place and enslaved African American settlements were located. It was also the place where the economically important postbellum industries of phosphate mining and timbering were principally located.

As crews were discovering and deciphering this cultural landscape, preservation consultant Lissa Felzer was conducting research and a completely new inventory of the historic, architectural and archaeological resources on the properties fronting the Ashley River. Some properties had seen significant changes since the original district survey in 1991 and some properties were found to include more resources than originally thought. For example, Runnymede Plantation, whose late Victorian plantation house was destroyed by fire in 2002, accounted for three contributing resources in the 1994 district. Felzer's survey included not only the ruins of the house, the surviving plantation schoolhouse, and a late 17<sup>th</sup> century archaeological site, it also took into account the importance of the historic entry road and phosphate-era mining ditches. Overall, Felzer made the case for the inclusion of some 133 contributing buildings, sites, structures, and objects; almost triple the number from the original district. The overall district boundary was increased from approximately 7,000 acres to more than 23,000 acres of land.

In addition to discovering and documenting the cultural landscape and re-surveying the area, the Foundation was also interested in locating some additional archaeological resources that might be located within the expanded area at the north most boundary of the historic district. One of the most exciting new discoveries was that of the Lord Ashley site.

During her field survey, consultant Lissa Felzer talked with a property owner near the northern end of the proposed district expansion. She learned that their property had been surveyed in 1983 by archaeologists Stanley South and Michael O. Hartley as they travelled by boat along the Ashley River in search of 17<sup>th</sup> century archaeological sites. At that time, the archaeologists thought the site could be associated with Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, one of the original Lords Proprietors of the Carolina colony. Excited by the prospect of successfully locating the site of Lord Ashley's plantation, HCF prepared to undertake archaeological testing at the site. With the approval and permission of the property owner and a generous grant from Magnolia Plantation Foundation, HCF hired Brockington and Associates to do the testing.

In late January 2009, a small crew worked for several days, laying out a gridded survey and testing a likely portion of the property. Based on the artifacts recovered, it was soon clear that the fortified frontier site was only occupied between 1675 and 1685. It thus presents a pristine archaeological environment and one that is on par in importance with Charles Towne Landing, the site of the first Carolina settlement by the English.

Archaeologists found a number of early artifacts from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century including rare Indian trade beads, various types of Native American ceramics and arrowheads, European ceramics, smoking pipes, lead shot and other military objects. Also found was a portion of an early brick foundation. The brickwork found at Lord Ashley's plantation site seems to be the oldest English brickwork yet found in South Carolina and the site is the only one directly associated with one of the original Lords Proprietors of Carolina. The Lord Ashley site testing in 2009 yielded some remarkable finds and set the stage for additional excavations that took place in the summer of 2011. This two-week excavation was funded by MeadWestvaco and was part of the College of Charleston's summer field school in historical archaeology.

In sum, archaeologists found evidence of cultures from three different continents that came together at the Lord Ashley Settlement site for different reasons, and ultimately different ends—planters, owners, managers, and indentured servants from Europe, Native Americans from Carolina, and enslaved Africans. Since these dynamic characters lived and worked at the Lord Ashley Settlement from only 1675 to 1685, there was a unique window of time to investigate and understand the first years of the establishment of South Carolina. This site and others underscore not only why the Ashley River Historic District should be listed at the national level of significance in the National Register, but why it must be preserved and protected.

Part of the overall process of re-survey and expansion of the Historic District was to promote a broader dialogue about the future of the Ashley River corridor. As part of the process, HCF and its partners hosted two Community Forums to explain the designation process and receive input from the public, including property owners. The first session was held at Magnolia Plantation and the second was held at Middleton Place.

At these informational sessions, HCF staff and consultants described the project, asked for needed assistance with survey and research, and explained the effects of listing on the National Register. Feedback from the public about the district expansion was overwhelmingly positive.

The expanded Ashley River Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on October 22, 2010 at the national level of significance. (NPS 2010)

# Acknowledge land use pattern and infrastructure investment as the most important elements

Mismanaged and unmanaged land and infrastructure investment represent the greatest threat to whole place preservation. During the second half of the 20th century, governments at all levels have embraced an automobile-centric development philosophy. This resulted in unprecedented public expenditures on new roads, water, and sewer lines deeper and deeper into the countryside. Cheap land, booming economies, a growing population, and the widespread advancement of policies favoring the automobile over all other modes of transportation have set the stage for a pattern of growth unique to the United States—suburbia. Spread out, with enough room for each single family's privacy and the safe upbringing of children, the suburbs promised to be the undisputed answer to the American Dream. However, as the suburbs continued to consume more land, move further beyond city limits, and increase dependence on cars, the privacy people once cherished has turned into a feeling of isolation and governments are left struggling to balance their budgets.

Over the last five decades America has had a choice in its growth, expansion, and progress. In conjunction with the rise of the automobile, that choice has consistently resulted in conventional suburban development. Conventional suburban development is low-density, greenfield development with single uses and limited connectivity within or between neighborhoods (Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. 2002). Consequences of conventional suburban development include longer commute times, social fragmentation, and growing dependence on the automobile for transportation.

As growing pains increase and municipalities are faced with the challenge of providing services for more and more people, the first step urban planners advise is to “admit that growth will occur (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Speck 2000).” Instead of defying growth, cities, towns, and regions have to accept that it will come and then attempt to channel it into the best possible form.

Across the country developers and city planners are returning to the traditional development patterns of our oldest cities and towns. These developments are walkable and have easy access to public transportation. They maintain a balance between jobs, houses, shops and open space. These walkable, connected, mixed-use developments are oftentimes referred to as “complete, compact, connected neighborhoods.” They provide a mix of land uses—residential, commercial, civic—and provide access to convenient public transportation alternatives, all while demonstrating an appreciation for community character, neighborhood structure, and context (Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Wisconsin, 2000).

Conventional suburban developments stretch over large tracts of land, paving over wetlands and green space as they are developed. The resultant expansive impervious coverage leads to increased stormwater runoff, carrying oil, gasoline, heavy metals, and other pollutants often flows directly into natural waterways (Santiago & Bandurovych, 2010). Complete, compact, connected neighborhoods, on the other hand, actually help to limit stormwater impacts by developing higher

densities on less land. Due to their more compact design, resources such as water and energy can be used more efficiently.

Indeed, the Charleston Metropolitan area is no exception and sits poised on the precipice of tremendous growth. In spite of the 'Great Recession,' Charleston grew more in the second half of the decade from 2000 to 2009 than it did in the first. As a result of a "less overheated housing market and more diversified economy" (The Brookings Institution, 2010), more growth can be expected as the national economy recovers.

A number of existing and planned developments in the vicinity of the Ashley River Historic District can serve as case studies for best management practices in the development of complete, compact, and connected neighborhoods.

#### *Poplar Grove*

The development of the Poplar Grove tract should be seen as a case study for how a layering of tools can be utilized towards the protection of open land and historic and natural resources. After sale of the 4,500 acre parcel by timber company MeadWestvaco in 2004, the subsequent developers of the Poplar Grove announced plans to build 3,500 homes on the former rice plantation.

Residents of lower Dorchester County who were concerned about the proposal formed a committee in 2005 to study alternatives. They hired an attorney and asked Dorchester County to stand by its comprehensive plan that had designated the area as "conservation/ preservation" but had not codified that designation. Also galvanized by the threat of intensive development in the area, a coalition led by the Coastal Conservation League (which included Ducks Unlimited, the Donnelley Foundation, the Lowcountry Open Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund and private landowners), worked to permanently protect thousands of acres within the Ashley River Corridor, including Poplar Grove.

A total of \$14 million was raised from a variety of foundations and groups, including \$2.2 million from the South Carolina Conservation Bank. The Conservation Bank had been created in 2002 by the General Assembly as a public funding source for land conservation via purchase of easements and direct land purchase. With the vital funding supplied by these sources, the coalition was able to purchase conservation easements at Poplar Grove and Middleton Place and secure voluntary easement donations from the private owners of Uxbridge and Millbrook Plantations. This far-reaching collaborative effort to conserve lands in the Ashley River Corridor was widely recognized as one of the most innovative and highly effective in the nation.

Today, Poplar Grove successfully markets itself as a "Conservation Community" because of its low density development (450 homes instead of 3,500), its employment of low-impact and sustainable building practices, and its overarching commitment to historical and natural resources conservation. More than half of the 4,500-acre tract is under conservation easement.

#### *Watson Hill and East Edisto*

At about the same time that Poplar Grove's future was being shaped along a conservation-oriented path, another large tract owned by MeadWestvaco was sold for residential development. The Watson Hill Tract, located south of Hwy 165 in the upper Ashley River Corridor was purchased in August 2004 by developers from Beaufort, South Carolina who initially intended to put up to 5,000 residential units, a hotel and golf course on the 6,600-acre property. Concerns were soon raised about the lack of county services and infrastructure, the impact of the development on cultural and natural resources, and increased traffic since the most direct route to Charleston, the historic Ashley River Road, would be completely overwhelmed. Amidst great opposition by county residents and by preservation and conservation groups, Dorchester County Council responded by considering in December of 2004 a historic overlay district that aimed to limit development in the part of the Ashley River Corridor located in Dorchester County, including Watson Hill.

Due to the public pressure, the initial developer subsequently sold Watson Hill to another group of developers. These developers, in turn, sought to negate Dorchester County's historic overlay district by seeking annexation to the City of North Charleston. North Charleston annexed King's Grant golf course on the North Charleston side of the Ashley River as the developer sought, through an intermediary, to purchase a key tract of land between Watson Hill and the golf course across the river. This connecting tract of land, owned by the Barry Family, and several other strategic purchases of parcels by municipalities, became the subject of several lawsuits involving the Town of Summerville and the City of North Charleston. By late December of 2008, most of these lawsuits had been dropped and the owners of Watson Hill were in foreclosure.

MeadWestvaco announced plans to re-purchase the Watson Hill tract in June 2009. This strategic decision would allow MeadWestvaco to comprehensively plan for the future of their extensive land holdings in this area, which are now referred to as East Edisto. According to MeadWestvaco President, Ken Seeger, the decision was also motivated by the company's desire to aid those who were concerned about the future of the Ashley River Corridor.

By the time MeadWestvaco re-purchased Watson Hill, the Dorchester County Council had given final reading to the historic overlay district that was started in 2005. This county overlay remains in effect on the property whether it is within Summerville or North Charleston and verbal commitments from MeadWestvaco indicate that the company plans to be consistent with the low-density zoning that is mandated in the overlay.

The East Edisto Region Master Plan, developed by MeadWestvaco, represents the community's vision for economical, sustainable, and responsible growth for more than 78,000 acres in the Charleston area on land that has been managed for agriculture and timber production for over 300 years. The East Edisto area, which includes Watson Hill, is an enormous rural area located between the Ashley River Road and the Edisto River. Guided by the community's desire to preserve and enhance the character of the Lowcountry, the plan prioritizes areas for clustered growth in a range of community types as well as areas to be preserved as natural or maintained as rural for the next 40 years. Future growth is located along lines of existing infrastructure, including highways and rail lines, in the pathway of existing growth. A network of walkable communities, ranging in scale from rural crossroads to more urban villages and, ultimately, towns, accommodates a wide range of uses and activities including housing, office, retail, light industry, institutions, recreation, and mixed-uses. Spanning two counties, preservation and growth will be

guided by a form-based code for the entire plan area. Conservationists see this huge swath of land as a critical link between the ACE Basin to the southwest and the Francis Marion forest to the northwest. The combination of conservation and low-scale development in this rural area would help to strengthen a regional greenbelt around the tri-county area that has been envisioned for many years.

### *Long Savannah*

Long Savannah, located in the West Ashley portion of the Charleston region, is formed by several parcels of land totaling approximately 3,300 acres, including a proposed 1,628-acre Charleston County Park and a 203-acre City Park. The site is between Savannah Highway (US 17) and Ashley River Road - both important arterial connections in the Charleston region. Long Savannah strives to build on the planning lessons of the Charleston peninsula and other historic Lowcountry examples, while incorporating a 21st century respect for the land and environment. The project is envisioned as a new community consisting of a series of neighborhoods that follow a set of prescribed rules based on traditional neighborhood design (TND). The new neighborhoods are to be compact, pedestrian-oriented, and mixed-use, in contrast to the single-use conventional suburban development that is prevalent in West Ashley. Creating whole neighborhoods and towns, rather than pockets of suburban development, is a vital step towards creating a sustainable development footprint. The development concept involves the movement of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) to help solidify the Greenbelt for the Charleston County Region in the West Ashley area. The revised UGB is located along the edge of the proposed 1,800-acre regional park, which is twice the size of Central Park in New York City, and will forever provide a finite edge to Charleston's urbanized area. This park also abuts the Ashley River Historic District and will serve as a critical buffer.

Local officials must decide what kind of growth to promote and where this growth should go. Instead of continually extending the urban edge, the local governments should accommodate and plan for future growth by exploring all available options. When you account for the outrageous "hidden" costs of permitting conventional suburban sprawl, these more integrated approaches become much more attractive.

### *Infrastructure Investments*

Planners and engineers during the past fifty years have often focused on the conventional transportation solutions of freeway building and road widening in order to improve the quality of our cities and suburbs. The results, however, have more often been corrosive to neighborhoods and to the effort of creating places worth caring about. The result of exclusive transportation-based transportation planning (in which lane-widening projects result) becomes the inevitable strip of commercial/non-residential land use and zoning (typically, as soon as one hears that a highway is being widened, the rezoning applications to commercial flood the local planning office).

It is now apparent that because settlement patterns depend more than anything else upon transportation systems, it is impossible to discuss one without discussing the other. Land use and transportation are inextricably linked and to ignore one is to fall into the same traps we have in the past. Critical to the success of whole place preservation is the goal to integrate the role of land use and transportation in realizing the community's overall vision. A proactive vision for the area's future land use needs to be in place in order to control and guide development in appropriate locations and assure that transportation infrastructure is compatible rather than letting

transportation decisions dictate land use decisions. This represents a merging and leveraging of the private sector's investments (land development) and the public's investments (roads, sewer, schools) to create a whole that neither could accomplish alone. The results will be improved quality of communities, higher financial returns for landowners and taxpayers and a more sustainable travel pattern. This realization was a key element in Dorchester County's adoption of the groundbreaking Ashley River Historic District Overlay Zone.

The proposed expansion of the Glenn McConnell Expressway from Bee's Ferry Road to Highway 174 remains a threat to the Ashley River Historic District unless it is coupled with best management land use practices as illustrated in the planning of East Edisto and Long Savannah. If the extension does occur, its design will be crucial as it essentially bisects the Ashley River Historic District. Because that area is now included in the National Register-designated historic district, the transportation project would receive environmental review through Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act.

Every development type has its costs and benefits and the ability to influence local economies.

The initial infrastructure costs of development, including the construction and maintenance of roads, utilities, and individual dwelling units, vary. Complete, compact, connected neighborhoods have the potential to reduce these costs for developers and city service providers because their smaller footprint requires less maintenance.

The fact that both the private and public sectors have begun to realize that the historic, rural character of the Ashley River Corridor is actually an asset for rather than an impediment to development highlights the success of the longstanding conservation efforts in this area.

# Conclusion

**While the Ashley River Corridor Resource Manual** aims to inform leaders and concerned citizens about the value that whole place preservation could bring to their communities and landscapes, it also demonstrates the challenges to preserving large rural areas under significant development pressures. These challenges include, but are not limited to, quirky annexation laws, inappropriate infrastructure expansion, zoning standards that promote conventional suburban forms, and the outright absence of land regulation in rural areas. Moreover, the short-term horizon for making decisions about development by local leaders conflicts with the long spans of time needed to develop and implement creative, large-scale conservation policies and projects.

The Ashley River Historic District validates that whole place preservation is possible. It is important to remember that whole place preservation is not a “one size fits all” exercise. Those involved in this realm of preservation should calibrate their toolkit to the respective context in which they are operating. Also, the tools are not sequential; they should be layered, integrated, and applied at the appropriate time in the process. The use of multiple conservation tools at one time suggests that the government must achieve an unprecedented level of coordination in how it uses its influence and resources. Due to many decades of success stories in whole place conservation, positive trends are being realized such as: the smart growth movement, land preservation as an asset, and creative conservation development approaches.

Patience plays a key role in conservation as well. It takes time to reach the kind of long-term consensus building about the desired future condition that communities are trying to achieve. Successful, creative preservation and conservation projects extend over decades, not years. At last, remember that advocacy does not have an end and therefore we must constantly remain vigilant and monitor the situation at hand even once we believe we have “arrived” at success.

# Case Study

## Conservation Preservation Chronology

- 1960s – 70s: Significant growth of residential development begins along Ashley River Road.
- 1960s – 80s: Oak trees lining Ashley River Road are threatened by road widening.
- 1980: Berkeley Charleston Dorchester Council of Governments (BCD COG) generates the *Ashley River Study*.
- November 1983: Ashley River Road is listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places.
- June 1985: Charleston County adopts a moratorium on all re-zonings in the Ashley River Corridor until a growth management plan is adopted.
- 1986/87: *The 61 Corridor Growth Management Plan*, authored by the BCD COG, is adopted by Charleston City, Charleston County and Dorchester County as a ten year planning document.
- 1990: The SC State Historic Preservation Office makes a formal request to the South Carolina Coastal Council (now the Office of Coastal Resource Management, OCRM) asking it to undertake the development of a special area management plan for the historic Ashley River Corridor.
- February 1992: The Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) for the upper Ashley River is approved by the SC Coastal Council. The SAMP sets the foundation for subsequent conservation actions taken along the Ashley River.
- 1993-94: Drayton Hall helps to produce and pass an ordinance for the City of Charleston mandating vegetative buffers of increasing depths proceeding north along Ashley River Road from Village Green subdivision.
- September 1994: The first Ashley River Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- 1995: Ashley River Road is listed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in America.
- 1997: The Ashley River Conservation Coalition is established.
- 1994-97: Drayton Hall acquires three parcels of land totaling 105 acres across the river from the plantation and house, successfully preventing the development of condos and ensuring that the Drayton Hall view shed remains unobstructed in perpetuity.

- 1997: BCD COG and Clemson's Strom Thurmond Institute track the rate of growth within the tri-county area. The Institute's study predicts that the region's urban footprint will likely expand to more than 800 square miles by the year 2030.
- 1998: The Ashley River is designated a State Scenic River by SC DNR.
- 1999: The Ashley Scenic River Advisory Council (ASRAC) is founded and includes stakeholders, including riparian landowners, conservation organizations, and concerned citizens
- 1999: The Ashley River Road is designated a State Scenic Byway by SC DOT
- 2000: The Ashley River Road is designated a National Scenic Byway
- 2002: A comprehensive management plan, *The Ashley River Road Scenic Byway Management Plan*, is authored by Ashley River Regional Coordinator Allison Bello.
- 2003: ASRAC produces the *Ashley Scenic River Management Plan* to protect and guide the future conservation of the river.
- 2004: Mead Westvaco sells 4,500 acres known as Polar Grove for residential development
- August 2004: The 6,600-acre tract known as Watson Hill is sold by Mead Westvaco for residential development.
- 2005-2008: The Watson Hill development is held up by a series of annexation fights and subsequent lawsuits.
- 2007: The Dorchester County Ashley River Historic District Overlay ordinance is passed, limiting density and providing for buffers in the three districts of the overlay.
- 2009: Mead Westvaco re-purchases the Watson Hill Tract with the intent of pursuing a more conservation-friendly development concept.
- October 22, 2010: The existing Ashley River National Register District is expanded in size from roughly 7,000 acres to nearly 24,000 acres.

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