

Settlement Community Task Force Report and Recommendations –

Executive Summary

Remnants of the area’s agricultural past still exist in plain view within and adjacent to the Town of Mount Pleasant. Known as “Settlement Communities,” about a dozen historic African American communities have sought to hold on to their history and character in the face of Mount Pleasant’s unprecedented growth.

To address these concerns, the Mount Pleasant Town Council established a Settlement Communities Task Force to discuss issues affecting the various settlement areas within or adjacent to town boundaries. Council appointed Community members from a pool of over 40 applicants to the Task Force on October 12, 2020.

The Task Force has worked throughout 2021 to put together this report as set of recommendations for Council’s consideration. They finalized these recommendations at their meeting on December 9, 2021.

Communities

The following Mount Pleasant area Settlement Communities were represented in this process:

Old Village	Two Mile	Scanlonville	Greenhill	Snowden
Four Mile	Six Mile	Seven Mile/Hamlin	Phillips	Ten Mile

Task Force Recommendations

Infrastructure

Drainage - Maintenance

- 1) Utilize the Countywide Intergovernmental Flood Prevention Taskforce Committee to improve intergovernmental coordination and to document and resolve drainage complaints and problems in a timely manner.
- 2) Improve communication channels with local neighborhoods and settlement communities, particularly regarding timing and design of local infrastructure projects.

Sewer – Lack of Investment

- 3) Work with Town and County governments to get stimulus funds for maintenance of existing systems and installation of other needed public infrastructure.
- 4) Develop surveys or mine other data to identify demographic information based on settlement community boundaries.
- 5) Recommend that Town Council review and change Town ordinances requiring annexation for access to sewer service (or at very least allow existing water customers to be able to receive sewer service without annexation).
- 6) Recommend that MPW establish their proposed Clean Water Coalition to enlist settlement community members support in the process of identifying, prioritizing, and pursuing grants for the extension of public sewer within these unsewered areas. The Town and County should partner in this process as requested, and appropriate.
- 7) Partner with MPW and organizations such as the US Water Alliance to promote access to clean water and pursue grants to improve water and sewer infrastructure in unsewered areas.
- 8) Consider utilizing alternate waste management systems where sewer service is not feasible or is cost prohibitive. Procure grants to pay for conversion for residents.

- 9) Request that MPW consider establishing a sliding scale for tap-in fees that would adjust fees for lower income households, including those in settlement communities.
- 10) Public water, as well as public sewer, should be available to all residents of the Settlement Communities.

Transportation Infrastructure

- 11) Roadway proposed at 17/41 south into Seven Mile (41 Extension/NA6) should be removed from the Comprehensive Plan per the Task Force (?) recommendation.
- 12) If new roads are designed to cross multiple jurisdictions, the planning/permitting process should be handled by the BCDCOG.
- 13) Coordinate local roadway, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure with community members earlier in the planning/design process. Plans shall not be modified without community input and support.
- 14) Make the Mount Pleasant Way segment in Six Mile a Quiet Street segment, bike path should go around and quiet street go through Six Mile and complete sidewalk from Six Mile Road north to the traffic circle (funds allocated from Liberty Hill Farms).
- 15) Continue coordination with Ten Mile Community regarding Gadsdenville Road sidewalks.
- 16) Require sidewalks within all new subdivisions in settlement communities – including along frontage of community on accessing road.
- 17) Stop building new roads or widening roads within settlement communities.

Economic Disparity

Housing Costs

- 18) Recommend that Town Council consider making changes to the CC (Community Conservation) zoning district to allow greater flexibility of housing types in appropriate areas by special exception.
- 19) Work with Housing for All Mount Pleasant to develop community-compatible types of affordable housing within the Communities to meet both affordable housing needs as well as to create an income stream for local residents, to include opportunities for long term land leases or land trusts.
- 20) Work with local non-profit organizations to provide housing maintenance (particularly for elderly) to maintain affordable housing stock.
- 21) Consider changes to Town ordinances to require that new residential developments include at least a certain percent (20%) of workforce housing units. (Comp Plan)
- 22) Harness support of business community to provide affordable housing opportunities for ALL workers in the Mount Pleasant area.
- 23) Consider off-grid utility options to allow for reduced infrastructure costs, as well as a more resilient lifestyle.

Denial of Investment Opportunities for Private Property & Community Spaces

- 24) Work with the Seven Mile and Hamlin Communities to create a community center to use for local gatherings and events.
- 25) Work with CAGE to attract investors or win grants to develop an economic development project on their land next to Jennie Moore.
- 26) Identify grants and other funding sources to support maintenance, as well as recreation, education, and after school programs at all area Settlement Community community centers. Charleston County should add staff dedicated to helping Settlement Communities with getting grants for desired programs.
- 27) Work to combat redlining practices through local government influence and by making community-supporting investment choices within Settlement Communities.
- 28) Reach out to local banks to support communities through Community Reinvestment Act grants.

Local Business Support

- 29) Business promotion for local African American businesses - Recommend closer coordination between the Town of Mount Pleasant, Mount Pleasant Chamber, and local Black-owned businesses to improve business promotion opportunities within the Mount Pleasant area.
- 30) Encourage Mount Pleasant area Black-owned businesses to participate in programs sponsored by the Opportunity Center, SC Association for Community Economic Development, the Charleston Chamber's minority business accelerator program, and other entrepreneurship organizations.
- 31) Develop business incubator program for black owned businesses in the Mount Pleasant area.
- 32) Consider changes to the Community Conservation zoning and/or Sweetgrass Basket Overlay District to facilitate and allow appropriately scaled neighborhood businesses.
- 33) Review the Sweetgrass Basket Overlay District provisions that specifically deal with criteria for commercial development and revise if necessary.
- 34) Harness support of the local business community to provide opportunities for local workers from the Mount Pleasant area.
- 35) Revisit the recommendations of the Town's Local Food and Farm Assessment, completed in 2011. This document highlights opportunities for local food production and recommends drawing on the area's agricultural roots to create local food guides, experiences around Local Food, and Farm to Chef programs, among others. (report: <https://projects.sare.org/wp-content/uploads/946191mount-pleasant-final-report-12-14-2011-ls.pdf>)
- 36) Work with local landowners and restaurants to develop an East Cooper Farm to Table program, potentially also incorporating local shrimpers and other commercial fishermen.
- 37) Coordinate with local landowners to cultivate and/or provide access to wild growing sweetgrass for harvesting by local basket sewing community.
- 38) Investigate opportunities to improve safe access to sweetgrass basket stands along Highway 17.
- 39) Investigate opportunities to provide community access to local waterways with SCDHEC.

Cultural Integrity

Cultural Preservation

- 40) Consider pursuing designation by the Department of the Interior for the Gullah Geechee people as a protected cultural group (similar to Native Americans), to clarify rights and allow access to Federal funding opportunities.
- 41) Update the Town's 1988 Cultural Resource Study. (Action Item CE15 from the 2019 Comprehensive Plan)
- 42) Complete work on settlement community historic research begun by Cari Goetcheus through work with the National Park Service. Utilize this information to create educational materials for the public.
- 43) Identify and preserve Gullah-Geechee sites and data for the benefit and education of the public and to help that community be economically sustainable. (Action Item PC9 from the 2019 Comprehensive Plan)
- 44) Improve public support for local traditional communities and promote educational, historical, and cultural efforts in the area, including: promoting and protecting the art of sweetgrass basket making and selling; creating Gullah history, culture and culinary programs in local schools; promoting Gullah cuisine; promoting and expanding local Farmer's and Seafood Markets; and facilitating programs to connect local farmers/fishermen with local restaurants. (Action Item PC13 from the 2019 Comprehensive Plan)
- 45) Support the Town's Culture, Arts & Pride Commission in their efforts to beautify and repair sweetgrass basket stands. Work with basket weavers to ensure continued use and maintenance.
- 46) Work with landowners and basket weaving community to protect local sources of sweetgrass for harvesting and encourage wild sweetgrass planting opportunities to increase these local sources.
- 47) Undertake creating a special area plan of the Cultural Core (Boone Hall, Hamlin Farms, Six Mile, Seven Mile). This study should identify opportunities within this area that would simultaneously protect the essential character of the Core, promote local history, and create economic and other opportunities to strengthen the community. (Action Item CE2 from the 2019 Comprehensive Plan)

- 48) Investigate and utilize Community Benefits Agreements to address community concerns related to development, and to document and formalize any mitigation measures agreed upon between the community and the developer.

Zoning Decisions

- 49) Adhere to the Comprehensive Plan when making land use determinations and approving development plans/rezonings.
- 50) Reiterate language in Town and County Codes to ensure that properties within the boundaries of the SBOD cannot opt out of the requirements of the SBOD.
- 51) Recommend that Boards/Commissions/Councils consider the impact of new development projects equally on nearby communities – whether Settlement Communities or newer developments.
- 52) Adopt historic preservation ordinance to match that adopted by Charleston County for the protection of the settlement communities, with members of the settlement communities serving on the associated historic preservation commission. (Action Item RG19 from the 2019 Comprehensive Plan)
- 53) Encourage all Settlement Communities to request inclusion within designated historical districts.
- 54) Modify the Sweetgrass Basket Overlay District (SBOD) to better meet current needs, to include
- a. verifying that the minimum lot size shall remain 12,500 sf.,
 - b. defining areas for appropriate commercial uses,
 - c. creating opportunities for limited commercial and alternate residential uses within residential areas,
 - d. creating framework map to identify appropriate use, transportation, community features, etc. within the settlement community,
 - e. defining whether the SBOD should be expanded to cover other settlement communities.
 - f. SBOD criteria cannot be waived within boundaries of defined overlay district.
- 55) Reconcile differences in recommended density for properties in the Ten Mile Community that are on opposite sides of the Urban Growth Boundary line. (1 u/acre v 4 u/acre)
- 56) Work with members of the Settlement Communities to refine Town maps of the communities as they currently exist for use in future land use activities, plans, and/or rezonings.

Community Coordination

- 57) Host an Open House at Town Hall to connect community members with local organizations and resources to address a variety of community needs (affordable housing, home maintenance, drainage issues,)
- 58) Develop better communications network involving community leaders and local churches. Include Settlement Community representatives in any list of community group/HOA contact information.
- 59) Improve notification procedures to include areas within 300' radius for new development projects.
- 60) Designate representatives of the Town to participate with various local cultural organizations to improve coordination and communication. (Action Item PC19 from the 2019 Comprehensive Plan)
- 61) Appoint Settlement Community representatives to Town/County Boards and Commissions.
- 62) Establish a working group with both the Town and Charleston County to facilitate and ensure implementation of recommendations in this document.

Property Ownership

Titles

- 63) Create opportunities with the Center for Heirs Property to assist Settlement Community landowners with receiving legal (and other) support to protect family inheritance.
- 64) Support changes to qualifications for grant funding to allow heirs property to qualify for appropriate funding, as opportunities present.

- 65) Support work of the Heirs Property Study Committee proposed by Joint Resolution H. 3926 for the 2021-2022 Session of the SC General Assembly, to find lasting solutions to addressing the challenges presented by the heirs property system.
- 66) Explore opportunities to work with State officials to identify and adopt beneficial changes to State law to address concerns of Heirs Property owners.

Taxes

- 67) Consider opportunities to change State tax laws with regards to agricultural exemptions to make it easier for Settlement Community members to qualify. Also consider changes to the associated rollback provisions for qualified Settlement Community members.
- 68) Help older residents afford to stay in their homes by promoting changes to State tax laws to raise the amount of the Homestead Exemption and to allow a younger spouse to keep the exemption if the older (qualifying) spouse dies.
- 69) Support changes to State laws governing property reassessment to freeze property values/assessments on real property until such a time as the property changes hands or is substantially redeveloped.