

The background of the cover is a photograph of several woven baskets. The baskets are made of light-colored, natural fibers, possibly bamboo or reed, and are stacked on top of each other. The focus is sharp on the baskets in the foreground, showing the intricate weaving pattern. A thin, vertical blue line is positioned on the left side of the page, extending from the top to the middle. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Town of Mount Pleasant  
Settlement Community  
Task Force  
Report and Recommendations

Settlement Community Task Force  
12-9-2021



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**Appendix 1 – Settlement Community Histories**

**Appendix 2 – Suggested Discussion Topics (from 1/7/2021 meeting)**

**Appendix 3 – Community Resource Information**

**Appendix 4 – Meeting Powerpoints and Handouts**

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## Background

Remnants of the area’s agricultural past still exist in plain view within and adjacent to 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. But now many worry that their continued existence may be in jeopardy. Throughout Mount Pleasant, development pressure has chipped away at their edges, undermining the communities’ historic character, integrity, and threatening their survival. This has long been recognized as a challenge, but no lasting solutions have been found.

To this end, the Mount Pleasant Town Council has established a Settlement Communities Task Force to discuss issues affecting the various settlement areas within or adjacent to town boundaries. Council appointed 17 individuals from over 40 applications to serve on this Task Force at their meeting on October 12, 2020.

The Task Force has worked throughout 2021 to put together this report as set of recommendations for Council’s consideration.

The Task Force members\* are:

- Pearl Ascue – Ten Mile
- John Carson – Four Mile
- George Freeman – Two Mile
- Cheryl German – Old Village
- Jacquelyn Gore - Scanlonville
- Patricia Graham - Phillips
- Charlotte Jenkins – Ten Mile
- Lillie Johnson – Hamlin/Six Mile
- Cassandra Johnson-Davis - Hamlin
- Edward Lee - Scanlonville
- Theodesa Lyles – Seven Mile
- Laura Peirano - Hamlin
- Kathy Smalls - Phillips
- Rhudine Washington - Snowden
- Kim Williams – White Hall

\*Two others who were initially appointed were unable to participate

This “Settlement Community Task Force Report and Recommendations” was finalized on December 9, 2021

## Communities

The following Mount Pleasant area Settlement Communities are among those recognized by the African American Settlement Community Historic Commission.<sup>1</sup> Several have very little information published about their specific histories, but where available, a summary has been provided.

African American Settlement Communities are originally residential and agricultural communities where the population is comprised primarily of African American residents, whom are the descendants of freed and non-freed slaves. These residents inherently adhered to a culture, thoughts, and practices not familiar to the mainstream existence.

Most residents living in the Settlement Communities are living on land purchased as a result of the devastating conditions experienced in the South due to the Civil War. Many of the residents are at risk of losing their land because the property is jointly owned as heirs property. Heirs property ownership patterns originated in response to the predatory land acquisitions common to the Jim Crow Era. In addition to heirs property, the viability of the Settlement Communities is further threatened by over 100 years of Exclusionary Zoning, racially Restrictive Covenants, "Residential Security Maps", Red Lining, and a host of disparities in education, health care, wealth and common everyday activities.

Although it may not be possible for this Task Force to directly address and correct these generational conditions, it is a large positive step to acknowledge and accurately define the root causes.

The communities represented within the Mount Pleasant area are:

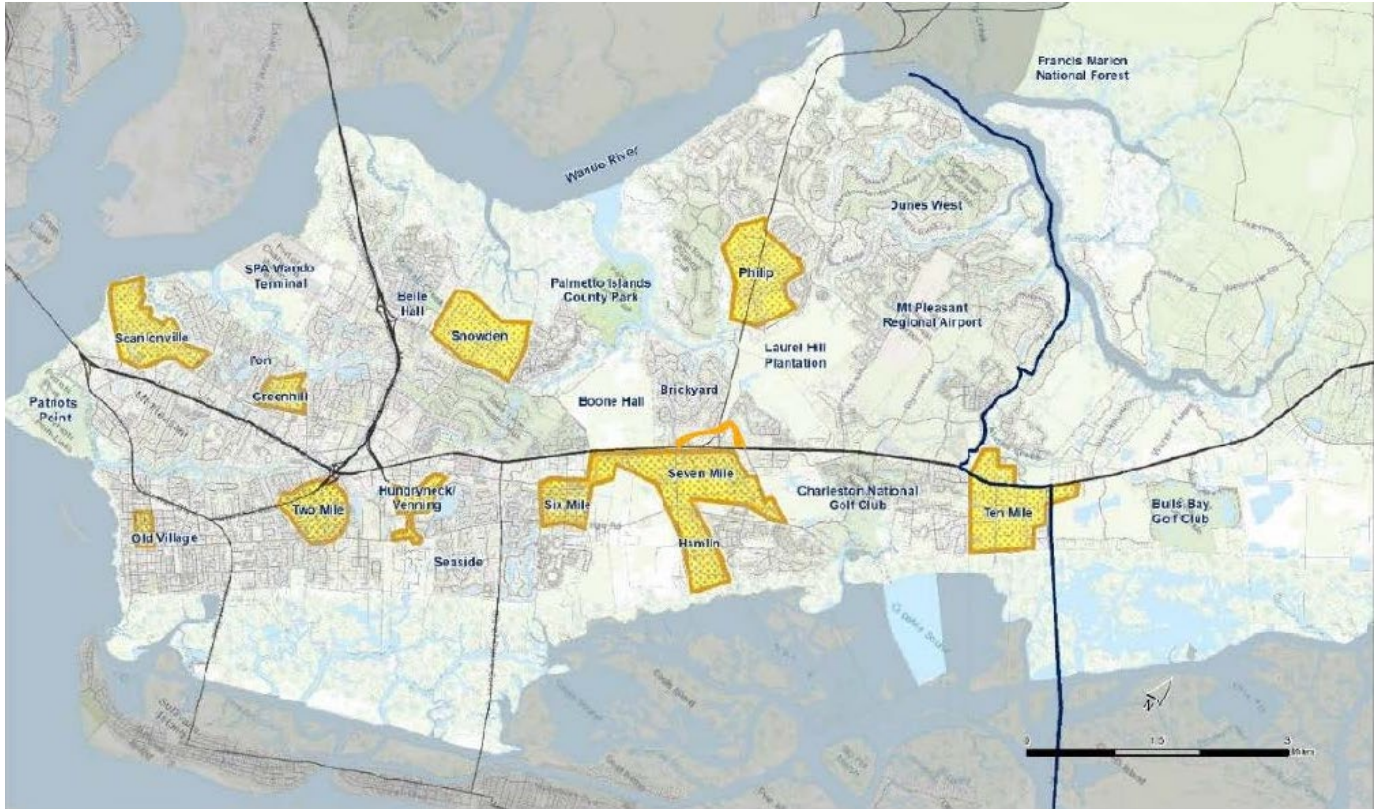
- Old Village
- Scanlonville
- Snowden
- Six Mile
- Phillips
- Two Mile
- Greenhill
- Four Mile
- Seven Mile/Hamlin
- Ten Mile

Basic historical information on each of these Communities can be found in Appendix 1

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<sup>1</sup> "History." *African American Historic Settlement Commission*, African American Historic Settlement Commission, <https://mushroom-harp-ldc4.squarespace.com/history>.





**Figure 1: Current general size and extent of remaining Settlement Communities. (Note: Seven Mile Community should extend north of Highway 17 in the vicinity of Highway 41, as indicated)**

## Identification of Issues and Problems

At their initial meeting on January 7, 2021, the Settlement Community Task Force brainstormed many concerns and issues to serve as starting points for their subsequent discussions. (See *Appendix 2 for full list of issues and concerns identified.*) Many of the topics identified closely related to each other and lent themselves to discussion within the context of a larger theme.

The main issues could be grouped into several categories:

- Infrastructure
  - Drainage -Maintenance
  - Sewer - Lack of Investment
  - Transportation Infrastructure
- Economic Disparity
  - Housing Costs
  - Denial of Investment Opportunities for Private Property and Community Spaces
  - Local Business Support
- Cultural Integrity
  - Community Preservation
  - Zoning Decisions
  - Community Coordination
- Property Ownership
  - Titles
  - Taxes

To ensure that staff and community members had accurate information about the various topics, the original discussion points were grouped into themes for information gathering purposes. Over several months, the Settlement Community Task Force held meetings with experts from relevant fields to inform discussion on various topics. These meetings typically involved a presentation by the area expert, followed by questions and discussion of relevant topics. (Chart on next page)



## Settlement Community Task Force Report and Recommendations

<b>Date</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Presenters</b>	<b>Points of Discussion</b>
2/11/2021	Property Ownership	Center for Heirs Property	Property ownership, maintaining title, building generational wealth, investing in community
3/11/2021	Property Value/Taxes	Charleston County Assessor; Mount Pleasant CFO	Tax rates AG valuation, Homestead Exemption
4/8/2021	Public Infrastructure	Town/County/SCDOT stormwater and roads staff	Maintenance of drainage systems and roadways, stormwater issues, roadway improvements
5/13/2021	Property Investment	Center for Heirs Property (Forestry Initiative), SC Association for Community Economic Development, Housing for All Mount Pleasant	Community investment, economic development, wealth building, grants, financing
6/10/2021	Water & Sewer	Mount Pleasant Waterworks	Water & sewer expansion and service, impact fees, grants
6/17/2021	Mt Pleasant Way/Six Mile Cultural Heritage Trail	Town Staff	Teams meeting to discuss Six Mile Heritage Trail
7/15/2021 & 8/12/2021	Zoning, Land Use & Transportation	Charleston County and Town staffs	Zoning regulations, lot sizes, restrictions
9/16/2021	Review of Draft Recommendations	Town Staff	Review of Draft
10/14/2021	Charleston County Community Services Dept. & Operation Home	Charleston County staff and Operation Home staff	Grant opportunities and home repair opportunities
11/10/2021	Review of Draft Report	Town Staff	Review of Draft
12/9/2021	Final Review of Draft	Town Staff	Final Review of Draft

\*Summary of Resources/Contacts identified in these meetings will be found in Appendix 3

\*\*Presentations and handouts will be attached in Appendix 4.

## Context and Recommendations

Following the information gathering sessions, the Task Force began a process of synthesizing this information into relevant recommendations to ultimately be forwarded to Town Council for consideration. The following recommendations are grouped by theme and many are appropriate for coordination with other legislative/governmental bodies beyond the local government of the Town of Mount Pleasant.

### Infrastructure –

Our Settlement Communities are historically rural communities, existing now in a suburban setting. This is clearly illustrated by the lack of investment in “modern” public infrastructure in these areas. Many of the residents want to protect the historic rural qualities of the community while gaining access to the same suburban services as neighboring suburban developments.

#### Findings:

##### *Drainage - Maintenance*

- Much of the stormwater drainage within Settlement Communities is handled by open ditches.
- These ditches may be owned and maintained by multiple agencies – the Town of Mount Pleasant, Charleston County, or SC Department of Transportation.
- Often, a ditch owned by one agency flows into a ditch owned by another agency, so coordination is necessary to create an effective maintenance schedule.
- Frequently, older ditches do not have drainage easements associated with them, so the agencies are unable to perform needed work until that is acquired.
- Senator Sandy Senn established a program for all residents within Charleston County to coordinate stormwater maintenance between the various relevant agencies. This program, called the Countywide Intergovernmental Flood Prevention Taskforce Committee, is open to all residents of Mount Pleasant and our unincorporated areas.

##### *Sewer – Lack of Investment*

- Mount Pleasant Waterworks is the State-designated water and sewer provider in the Mount Pleasant Area.
- Town of Mount Pleasant requires contiguous properties to annex in order to connect to available sewer. If properties are not contiguous, an affidavit is required, stating that the property will annex when it becomes contiguous.
- Mount Pleasant Waterworks currently has approximately 42,000 accounts. Of these, 2,321 are in the County; 918 water only, 1,403 water and sewer.
- There are also 748 Septic systems in the greater Mount Pleasant area – 91 in the Town and 657 in the County.
- Septic systems in some areas of the community are affected by climate change and rising sea level; therefore, they do not function properly.
- HUD grants cannot be used for projects (e.g. sewer line extension) where annexation is a requirement, according to County staff.

- Demographics information specific to the Settlement Communities is non-existent due to the relatively small size of the Communities and the way that Census data is collected and tabulated.

### *Transportation Infrastructure*

- Within Settlement Communities there is a general desire to stop building of new roads and prevent widening of existing ones.
- Of recent concern to several Settlement Communities is the proposed project to address traffic concerns on Highway 41. On August 24, 2021, Charleston County Council voted 9-0 to move the Compromise Alternative forward through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and further into design. The Compromise Alternative consists of two travel lanes in each direction from the Wando River Bridge to Dunes West Boulevard/Rivertowne Parkway, one lane in each direction with a center turn lane/median through Phillips Community, two travel lanes in each direction from south of Joe Rouse Road to Highway 17, and adds a two lane southern parkway from Highway 41 to Park West Boulevard along the edge of Laurel Hill County Park. The Compromise Alternative also includes changes from earlier alternatives to reduce right-of-way impacts at the Highway 17 intersections with Highway 41 and Winnowing Way.<sup>2</sup>
- The Mount Pleasant Way project is a proposed network of connected multi-use paths intended for non-motorized users that will link key portions of the Town including recreation facilities, parks, schools, neighborhoods, commercial zones, etc. The intent of this network is to provide safe and efficient infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation for our residents and visitors to use for both recreation and commuting purposes to noteworthy attractions within the Town. This project is a multi-phased endeavor that will take years to fully implement: Phase 1 of this project consist of the development of a Master Plan for the multi-use network which will define the proposed routes, help create a vision for the path both aesthetically and functionally, develop implementation strategies and outline potential funding opportunities. This phase will include several public meetings, development of stakeholder groups, charrettes and will be a fully inclusive process for all interested parties to provide their comments and input on the direction of the project. Phase 2 will involve the implementation of the path defined within Phase 1. Segments will be constructed based on a prioritized project ranking matrix which will include items such as ease of construction, availability of funding, connectivity to existing attractions and existing infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>

## Recommendations :

### *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.

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<sup>2</sup> "Highway 41 Corridor Improvements." *Highway 41 Corridor Improvements*, Charleston County, <http://www.hwy41sc.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Mount Pleasant Way: Mount Pleasant, SC - Official Website." *Mount Pleasant Way | Mount Pleasant, SC - Official Website*, Town of Mount Pleasant, <http://www.tompssc.com/1179/Mount-Pleasant-Way>.

### *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

Subsistence farming, fishing, oystering, sweetgrass basket weaving, and small business operation have historically provided settlement community members their livelihoods. These jobs provided opportunities for a good life, but not necessarily excess funds to allow for re-investment in the community. While many other employment opportunities exist now for Settlement Community residents, the communities still suffer from a long-term denial of capital investment opportunities, compared to nearby areas. In situations where outsiders have come in to purchase land and invest in the area, the new developments are typically out of the price-range of the long-time community families.

Racial Disparities in income, investment, education, and environmental hazards are found throughout the greater Charleston community. In fact, even single family home loans tend to be denied at a greater rate for African American applicants, regardless of income level<sup>4</sup> As homeownership remains a principal means of building wealth, this impact on families, particularly over generations, is staggering.<sup>5</sup>

Finding opportunities and capital to support local independent businesses is also a challenge in this era of retail chain stores. Improving opportunities for new local business creation could also provide employment opportunities for local residents.

## Findings:

### *Housing Costs*

- Housing prices in the Charleston Metro area rose 44.5% in the 5 years between January 2014 and January 2019. In that same timeframe, per capita income rose only 23.2%. Housing prices have continued to rise, increasing another 19.3% since early 2019.<sup>6</sup>
- Households face a financial burden when housing costs (including utilities) exceed 30 percent of household income. As of 2019, 1 in 3 households in Charleston County pay more than 30% of their household income on housing costs, causing a financial burden for their families.<sup>7</sup>
- The Charleston County Affordable Housing Task Force found that 78,000 additional housing units are needed in the County between now and 2030. This study shows that 2,600 units that are affordable based on income level are needed each year in the Charleston metro area.<sup>8</sup>
- The Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce forecasts that home sales in the region will increase 3.5% and 1.5% respectively for the years 2021 and 2022, and that the continued demand will elevate the median sales price over \$300,000, and the average above \$430,000.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The State of Racial Disparities in Charleston County, South Carolina 2000-2015*. College of Charleston, <https://rsji.cofc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-State-of-Racial-Disparities-in-Charleston-County-SC-Rev.-11-14.pdf>. p. 39

<sup>5</sup> Clarke, Kristen. "Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke Delivers Remarks Announcing a New Initiative to Combat Redlining." *The United States Department of Justice*, 22 Oct. 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/assistant-attorney-general-kristen-clarke-delivers-remarks-announcing-new-initiative>.

<sup>6</sup> "All-Transactions House Price Index for Charleston-North Charleston, SC (MSA)." *FRED*, 30 Nov. 2021, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/ATNHPIUS16700Q>.

<sup>7</sup> "Attainable Housing Resource Guide - CMCC." *Charleston Chamber of Commerce*, Charleston Chamber of Commerce, Mar. 2021, [https://www.charlestonchamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Attainable-Housing-Resource-Guide\\_March-2021.pdf](https://www.charlestonchamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Attainable-Housing-Resource-Guide_March-2021.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> "Agenda - Charleston County Government." *Charleston County*, Charleston County, 7 May 2019, <https://www.charlestoncounty.org/departments/county-council/packets/2019/5-7-19-Special-Finance.pdf?v=539>.

<sup>9</sup> "Economic Outlook." *Charleston Chamber of Commerce*, Charleston Chamber of Commerce, Mar. 2001, [https://www.charlestonchamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/EOC-2021\\_Forecast-Book\\_DIGITAL.pdf](https://www.charlestonchamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/EOC-2021_Forecast-Book_DIGITAL.pdf).

- Workforce housing opportunities in the Town are extremely limited. This classification would include housing affordable by those earning less than 120% of the area median income - \$57,000 for an individual; \$82,000 for a family of four.<sup>10</sup>
- Local zoning within the communities allows mainly single family detached residences, on 12,500 square foot lots. Town CC zoning currently allows single family dwellings, Accessory Dwelling Units, and mobile homes. There is an allowance for family compounds, with restrictions. Charleston County's S-3 zoning allows single family homes and replacement manufactured housing units, as well as Dwelling Groups.
- Single family residences on large lots may not be the most cost-effective method of development, if housing costs are a concern.

### *Denial of Investment Opportunities for Private Property & Community Spaces*

- Lenders are not always willing to lend on properties in the communities. Whether due to redlining or other factors, this limits the investment potential of these areas, and thus the landowners' ability to build family wealth.
- Lands owned as heirs property are particularly difficult to find financing for, due to requirements for a clear title.
- Funding is needed for construction, maintenance, and management of community centers. Community members would like to be able to reliably use these properties for after school tutoring and for event space that could be rented out, creating an income stream to maintain the center in the future.
- The Community Reinvestment Act was enacted by Congress in 1977 to encourage banks to help meet the needs of the communities where they operate, including low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. Under the CRA, insured banking institutions are evaluated periodically to assess their efforts to support their communities. The CRA outlawed redlining.<sup>11</sup>
- Currently, American Rescue Plan funds are being distributed to Counties and Municipalities, but it is unclear how smaller communities (such as Settlement Communities) might be able to access these.

### *Local Business Support*

- Timber is the #1 harvested crop in SC – with over \$800 million sold each year.<sup>12</sup>
- With as little as 10 acres of land, the Center for Heirs Property will help landholders create a Forestry Plan to manage their property for timber, which can provide future income for property owners.
- Agricultural use of property can allow owners to qualify for agricultural valuation of the land for tax purposes, while also providing an income stream.
- The local restaurant community can be a market for locally farmed vegetables, with its focus on farm-to-table menus.
- Settlement Communities historically were very self-sufficient, with local residents running a variety of small businesses within the community to meet local needs.

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<sup>10</sup> "Resources." *Housing for All Mount Pleasant*, <https://www.housingforallmtp.com/resources>.

<sup>11</sup> McKenzie, Treasure. "Funding Sources for Getting Ahead: Community Reinvestment Act." *Aha! Process*, 13 May 2021, <https://www.ahaprocess.com/funding-sources-for-getting-ahead-community-reinvestment-act/>.

<sup>12</sup> Patterson, Steve. "Center for Heirs Property - Forestry Services." Settlement Community Task Force. Settlement Community Task Force meeting, 13 May 2021, Mount Pleasant, Municipal Complex.



## Recommendations:

### *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

With the rapid growth of the Mount Pleasant area, these historic African-American communities have experienced tremendous development pressure. In many cases, individual properties from within the communities have been sold for subdivision development, resulting in a jarring difference in land development patterns, diminished continuity for the historic community, and increased land prices and pressure on nearby parcels to sell. In addition, the juxtaposition of some properties being within the Town, while the majority remain in the County, creates confusion about who is responsible for work being done in the area. A lack of clear lines of communication adds to this uncertainty.

Settlement Community residents recognize that future development within their communities should be compatible with their existing community. Future residential densities should remain low and new development should reflect and respect the continuation of existing land uses, such as agriculture, forestry, churches, cemeteries, schools and cultural historic buildings. Allow for a limited selection of appropriate businesses, office services and employment opportunities for local residents. Settlement community building scale, lot coverage must be compatible with the existing community and remain consistent with the historic African American settlement community.

## Findings

### *Cultural Preservation*

- Communities being surrounded and diminished. Overdevelopment is the root of these issues.
- The Settlement Communities have been thriving communities in the East Cooper area for over 150 years.
- Current boundaries of Settlement Communities as shown on town maps should be refined and modified with information from community members.
- Many resident families have ties to the land that extend back to the earliest days of the Communities.
- Many of the younger generation leave the Communities for work and housing opportunities elsewhere.
- Sweetgrass basket weavers face challenges to the continuation of their craft due to lack of raw materials, as well as accessibility to local markets.
- Sweetgrass varieties used in landscaping are often not pliable enough for use in weaving. A native variety known as *Muhlenbergia serica* provides better fibers for basket weaving, yet local availability has sharply declined with ongoing development.<sup>13</sup>

### *Zoning Decisions*

- Recent land development within the Settlement Communities often has been developed at smaller lot sizes, and therefore is out of character with the community and does not comply with the Comprehensive Plan's Land Use designation, or the requirements of the Sweetgrass Basket Overlay District (As applicable).
- The Sweetgrass Basket Overlay District has not uniformly been applied to all properties within its designated boundaries. This was a result of ambiguous language in the Town ordinances, which was recently addressed with an ordinance amendment.

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<sup>13</sup> Bennett, Kennedy. *Sewn Histories: An Examination of Sweetgrass Basketry and Sweetgrass Plant Habitats in the South Carolina Lowcountry*. Yale University, Oct. 2021. p. 8.

*Community Coordination*

- Communication & public engagement with members of the Settlement Communities is lacking.
- Members of Settlement Communities are not well represented on bodies that make decisions affecting their communities.

<b>Demographics for Various Boards/Commissions 2011-2021</b>					
<b>Standing Boards/Commissions</b>	<b>% Male</b>	<b>% Female</b>	<b>% Caucasian</b>	<b>% African American</b>	<b>% Other</b>
Board of Zoning Appeals	82%	18%	100%	0%	0%
Design Review Board	86%	14%	100%	0%	0%
<b>Historic District Preservation Commission/Old Village</b>					
Historic District Preservation Commission/Old Village	65%	35%	100%	0%	0%
Historical Commission	60%	40%	92%	5%	3%
Planning Commission	78%	22%	89%	11%	0%
<b>Select Special Committees</b>					
Settlement Community Task Force	29%	71%	13%	87%	0%
Housing Task Force	62%	38%	92%	8%	
<b>Shem Creek Advisory Committee</b>					
Shem Creek Advisory Committee	60%	40%	100%	0%	0%
Open Space Board	71%	39%	100%	0%	0%
TOMP Demographics 2015	48.10%	51.90%	91.7%*	4.6%*	2.2%*
Data based upon Town records and personal observation/recollection.					
Boards and Commissions are typically appointed by Town Council from among applications received from Town residents.					
* Make up 98.5% reporting only one race.					

Figure 2: Demographics of Town Boards and Commissions

Recommendations

*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.<sup>14</sup>
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)

<sup>14</sup> “Charleston County Historic Resources Survey Update.” Home | SC Department of Archives and History, New South Associates, 12 Sept. 2016, [https://scdah.sc.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/Historic%20Preservation%20\(SHPO\)/Research/CharlestonCounty2016.pdf](https://scdah.sc.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/Historic%20Preservation%20(SHPO)/Research/CharlestonCounty2016.pdf). p. 8.

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

Within these historic African-American communities, a substantial number of properties are what is considered “Heirs property” – property passed to family members by inheritance, usually without a will. This practice was intentional on the part of the community, as it resulted in multiple owners for the property, thus protecting the family’s hold on the land as it would be more difficult to coerce the sale of property with multiple owners. This creates a challenge long-term, however, as all heirs are considered “tenants in common” – they all have an ownership interest in the land – and no one person has clear title to the property. This makes it difficult to obtain loans or even sell the property, as each “owner” has a say in the transaction. It can also threaten the long-term retention of the property as no one person is responsible for paying the taxes, making the property vulnerable to tax sale if not paid.

### Findings:

#### *Titles*

- Property held in common by a group of heirs can be more susceptible to loss by forced sale or tax sale, due to lack of coordination or cooperation among heirs.
- Settlement Communities are looking for opportunities to create wealth for their families from their land within the community.
- Heirs property often cannot qualify for typical loans or mortgages, due to lack of clear title.
- Lack of clear title can also prevent owners of heirs property from receiving certain grants or federal funds, though FEMA regulations have recently changed to allow heirs property to qualify for disaster aid.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Taxes*

- Primary legal residences have the most favorable tax rate of 4%, but citizens must apply for that rate.
- Homeowners over age 65, or on total disability, whose residence qualifies for the 4% assessment may also apply for a Homestead Exemption to further reduce the taxable value of their property.
- Properties being used for agricultural (10 acre minimum) or commercial timber operations (5 acre minimum) can qualify for an Agricultural Use exemption, which can dramatically decrease taxes. However, if the use changes, rollback taxes are charged for prior years.
- Reassessment of properties is limited, per State Code, to a maximum 15% increase.<sup>16</sup>
- There are concerns within the Settlement Communities about the effect of expensive homes being built within the community that would raise the appraised value of the homes of long-time residents, which would in turn cause their taxes to increase, causing hardship or an inability to keep the property.
- There is also a perception that annexing into the Town would cause a large increase in property taxes. However calculations indicate the difference is more subtle, based upon which County Tax District the property was previously in.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Dreier, Hannah. “FEMA Changes Policy That Kept Thousands of Black Families from Receiving Disaster Aid.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 2 Sept. 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/09/02/fema-policy-change/>.

<sup>16</sup> Glennon, Toy. “Presentation to Settlement Communities Task Force.” Settlement Community Task Force. Settlement Community Task Force meeting, 11 March 2021, Mount Pleasant, Municipal Complex.

<sup>17</sup> Cotov, Marcy. “Presentation to Settlement Communities Task Force.” Settlement Community Task Force. Settlement Community Task Force meeting, 11 March 2021, Mount Pleasant, Municipal Complex.

Settlement Community Task Force Report and Recommendations

Comparison Mt Pleasant v. County Taxes					Same property, Annexed into Mount Pleasant				
Tax Year 2020	Appraisal	Same Appraisal Value			Tax Year 2020	Appraisal	All in Incorporated Town		
		Mount Pleasant	County East Cooper	County Awendaw			Mount Pleasant	County East Cooper FD	County Awendaw FD
Assessment	4.0%	10,900.00	10,900.00	10,900.00	Assessment	4.0%	10,900.00	10,900.00	10,900.00
	Mills					Mills			
County - Operating	41.2	449.08	449.08	449.08	County - Operating	41.2	449.08	449.08	449.08
County - LOST tax credit factor	0.00075	(204.33)	(204.33)	(204.33)	County - LOST tax credit factor	0.00075	(204.33)	(204.33)	(204.33)
<b>County - Operating</b>		<b>244.75</b>	<b>244.75</b>	<b>244.75</b>	<b>County - Operating</b>		<b>244.75</b>	<b>244.75</b>	<b>244.75</b>
<b>County - Bonds</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>66.49</b>	<b>66.49</b>	<b>66.49</b>	<b>County - Bonds</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>66.49</b>	<b>66.49</b>	<b>66.49</b>
CCSD - Operating	118.6	1,292.74	1,292.74	1,292.74	CCSD - Operating	118.6	1,292.74	1,292.74	1,292.74
CCSD - Bonds	28.0	305.20	305.20	305.20	CCSD - Bonds	28.0	305.20	305.20	305.20
Parks & Rec - Operating	4.0	43.60	43.60	43.60	Parks & Rec - Operating	4.0	43.60	43.60	43.60
Parks & Rec - Bonds	1.8	19.62	19.62	19.62	Parks & Rec - Bonds	1.8	19.62	19.62	19.62
Trident Tech - Operating	1.8	19.62	19.62	19.62	Trident Tech - Operating	1.8	19.62	19.62	19.62
Trident Tech - Bonds	0.7	7.63	7.63	7.63	Trident Tech - Bonds	0.7	7.63	7.63	7.63
State Property Tax Relief Benefit	0.1186	(1,292.74)	(1,292.74)	(1,292.70)	State Property Tax Relief Benefit	0.1186	(1,292.74)	(1,292.74)	(1,292.74)
Residential User Fee	\$99.00	\$99.00	\$99.00	\$99.00	Residential User Fee	\$99.00	\$99.00	\$99.00	\$99.00
Stormwater User Fee MP/Co	\$60/\$72	\$60.00	\$72.00	\$72.00	Stormwater User Fee MP/Co	\$60/\$72	\$60.00	\$60.00	\$60.00
East Cooper FD	16.1		175.49		East Cooper FD	16.1		-	
Awendaw FD	35.4			385.86	Awendaw FD	35.4			-
Mt Pleasant - Operating	34.7	378.23			Mt Pleasant - Operating	34.7	378.23	378.23	378.23
Mt Pleasant - LOST tax credit factor	0.00028	(76.28)			Mt Pleasant - LOST tax credit factor	0.00028	(76.28)	(76.28)	(76.28)
<b>Mt Pleasant - Operating</b>		<b>301.95</b>			<b>Mt Pleasant - Operating</b>		<b>301.95</b>	<b>301.95</b>	<b>301.95</b>
<b>Mt Pleasant - Bonds</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>50.14</b>			<b>Mt Pleasant - Bonds</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>50.14</b>	<b>50.14</b>	<b>50.14</b>
		<b>1,218.00</b>	<b>1,053.40</b>	<b>1,263.81</b>			<b>1,218.00</b>	<b>1,218.00</b>	<b>1,218.00</b>
					<i>Difference from current district</i>			<b>164.60</b>	<b>(45.81)</b>

Figure 3: Comparison of Town and County Tax Costs<sup>18</sup>

Recommendations:

*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.

<sup>18</sup> Cotov, Marcy. "Presentation to Settlement Communities Task Force." Settlement Community Task Force. Settlement Community Task Force meeting, 11 March 2021, Mount Pleasant, Municipal Complex