Charleston County Greenbelt Plan Supplemental Report

Approved by County Council July 24, 2018

OVERVIEW

This report is a supplement to the Charleston County Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan adopted by Charleston County Council on June 6, 2006 and incorporated in to the County Comprehensive Land Use Plan in January 2007. The purpose of this report is to provide amendments to the adopted plan that update the policies, direction, and actions of the Charleston County Greenbelt Program. This report is divided into sections that feature the specific updates and changes to each chapter of the adopted plan.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter One of the adopted Greenbelt Plan provides an overview of the plan and program, describes the formation of the Greenbelt Advisory Board (GAB), defines the methodology and process used to prepare the 2006 Plan, and offers a description of the Plan chapters. This supplemental report updates the accomplishments of the Greenbelt Program since 2006, and describes the new sales and use tax that was approved by voters in November 2016.

Accomplishments of the Greenbelt Program (2006-2017)

The Charleston County Greenbelt Program has been in operation for more than eleven years. Established in June 2006 with the adoption of the Charleston County Greenbelt Plan, the program has been one of the most successful and accomplished local government sponsored land conservation programs in the United States. The following is a list of accomplishments to date:

1) Thirty Percent Goal Achieved

The Greenbelt Program has met the goal to protect 30% of County lands. The 2006 Adopted Greenbelt Plan recommended a minimum conservation goal of 30% of the total Charleston County land area, equivalent to 200,000 acres. Prior to 2006, the County had protected approximately 160,000 acres. A goal of protecting and conserving an additional 40,000 acres of land was established in 2006. From 2006 to 2017, Charleston County and its partners conserved and protected approximately 38,000 acres of land. Bringing the total land conserved and protected in Charleston County to 198,000 acres, effectively achieving the minimum conservation goal established in the adopted 2006 Greenbelt plan. (See Figure 1: map of protected greenspace)



Figure 1: Total protected greenspace in Charleston County (198,000 acres) as of Sept. 2017

2) Diversity of Lands Protected

The County has protected land through the Greenbelt Program that falls within the desired landscape types defined by the 2006 Greenbelt Plan. Of the 38,000 acres protected since 2006, 17,000 acres were protected by partner agencies. The Greenbelt Program protected and conserved 21,000 acres of land in Charleston County. Lands protected through the Greenbelt Program include passive parklands/greenspace, natural resources, heritage landscapes, productive (agricultural) landscapes, natural infrastructure (including wetlands), active greenspace (parkland) and corridors (often referred to as greenways).

3) Public Access and Use Enhanced

Charleston County has substantially increased the amount of land available for public access and use since 2006. Of the 21,000 acres protected through the Greenbelt Program, more than 9,000 acres (44%) of land were purchased for public access and use. These public lands were purchased with nearly \$114 million (86%) of Greenbelt funds.

4) The County Leveraged Greenbelt Funds

Charleston County effectively leveraged the Greenbelt Funds to protect and conserve greenspace. Originally, \$221 million was set aside for the Greenbelt Program through the 2004 sales and use tax. Of this total, \$36 million was spent on Charleston County Parkland, \$66.5 million was dedicated to rural greenbelt conservation, \$28.5 million was dedicated to urban greenbelt conservation, and \$90 million was dedicated to debt service and program administration. More than \$121 million was provided as matching funds through landowner donation, use of grant funds from partner programs, and in-kind donations. This leveraging allowed for the protection of more than 21,000 acres at approximately a \$6,000 average cost per acre.

5) The Rural and Urban Grants Program is Successful

Charleston County effectively implemented a Grants Program to award Greenbelt Program funds to a variety of eligible entities for the purchase and management of greenbelt lands. Charleston

County does not purchase or manage any of the Greenbelt lands conserved under this program. Municipalities, other state and federal government agencies, non-profit environmental conservation groups, and non-profit community groups have teamed-up, or partnered, and worked in voluntary cooperation with **willing landowners** to conserve and protect greenspace across the County. Lands that have been conserved are managed by either municipal, state or federal governments, or by non-profit organizations.

Charleston County established a Grants Program to award Greenbelt funds to rural and urban projects. The grants were competitive, required that an application be filed, and all grant awards were approved by the Charleston County Council.

6) Greenbelt Lands in Compliance with Program Goals

Charleston County established a process to ensure that all lands, protected and conserved under the Greenbelt Program, are managed in compliance with Greenbelt guidelines. Annually, County Greenbelt staff conduct monitoring visits of greenbelt lands to ensure they are being maintained and managed in accordance with the deed restrictions placed on all greenbelt properties. A process was developed to ensure any non-compliance is addressed immediately and that the land is restored appropriately.

2016 Sales Tax

On November 8, 2016, Charleston County voters approved a sales tax referendum that provides a new source of revenue for the Greenbelt Program. The approved 2016 referendum provides an additional ½ of one percent sales and use tax to fund highways, roads, streets, bridges, mass transit systems, greenbelts and other transportation related projects. Specifically, for Greenbelts, the approved sales tax provides \$210 million of new funding, to be collected during a 25-year period. The sales tax was codified by Charleston County Council within ordinance # 1907 adopted by the County Council on August 9, 2016. Collection of the new sales tax went into effect on May 1, 2017.

CHAPTER TWO: DATA COLLECTION/SYNTHESIS

Chapter Two of the Greenbelt Plan describes the core concepts for greenspace planning, provides a summary of greenspace inventory (as of 2006) and contains a summary of the growth management plans related to greenspace conservation. This supplemental report provides an up-to-date, detailed inventory of lands conserved by the Greenbelt Program (2006-2017) and offers a summary of planning efforts completed since 2006 related to greenspace conservation.

Updated Greenspace Inventory

Charleston County and its partners have conserved and protected a significant amount of greenspace since the 2006 Greenbelt Plan was adopted. This has been accomplished in two ways: 1) through the expenditure of sales and use tax funding and 2) through land conservation efforts lead by municipal, state and federal agencies, landowners and non-profit land conservation organizations. The amount of conservation land added since 2006 is depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Approximately 38,000 acres of greenspace has been conserved and protected in Charleston County from 2006 to 2017, as depicted in this map.

Total Protected Since 2006	Total Acreage	2006 Target Acres	% of 2006 Target
Rural Greenbelt Lands	11,397	16,240	70%
Francis Marion Forest	11,438	10,275	111%
Lowcountry Wetlands	7,900	5,610	141%
CCPRC Regional Parks	5,933	4,675	127%
Urban Greenbelt Lands	666	2,000	33%
Greenway Corridors	155	1,200	13%
Totals	37,489	40,000	94%

Figure 3: Table illustrates the total acreage of greenspace conserved and protected since 2006 and compares with original Greenbelt Plan proposal.

Summary of Related Plans

The following provides a summary of new planning documents completed since 2006 that are in addition to plans, guidelines and strategies featured in the adopted 2006 Greenbelt Plan. The significance of these planning documents is either their reference to the protection and conservation of greenspace, or the furthering of the vision, goals and objectives of the Charleston County Greenbelt Program.

1) Charleston County People 2 Parks Plan (CCP2P)

The Charleston County People 2 Parks Plan, completed in 2016, envisions a future for Charleston County where all residents are connected to parks, schools, and other important destinations via an interconnected network of safe, comfortable, and convenient walking and bicycling infrastructure. At the center of this study is a proposed network derived from previous planning efforts (one of which is the 2006 Charleston County Greenbelt Plan) and refined through input from project stakeholders. This greenway network consists of a comprehensive interconnected system throughout the urban, suburban and rural areas of Charleston County. The recommended system consists of a prioritized bicycle and pedestrian network that will provide the greatest benefit to residents of the County in an equitable manner. This Plan also recommends establishing a "spine route" for the countywide system of greenways that would link seamlessly to urban and rural areas,

linking residents to popular destinations. A map of a proposed network of greenways across Charleston County is depicted in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Map of P2P proposed Greenway Network

2) Charleston County Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Master Plan (2013)

Charleston County Parks and Recreation (CCPRC) completed a new master plan in 2013 (see Figure 5). The purpose of the plan was to define a 10-year plan of action to address unmet needs and define a vision for future growth of facilities and programs.

CCPRC surveyed more than 3,000 residents during the preparation of the 2013 master plan. The key findings and conclusions of the survey were that the County park system is well loved and

heavily used. Improved water access and the need for an expanded regional trails network are the highest areas of need, and there appears to be support for future taxation that would improve the park system and address unmet needs.

This plan notes that Charleston County is naturally suited for an extensive, well-planned regional greenway and trails system. There is a need to improve access to greenways and trails from urban areas of the County, provide a diverse network of trails to suit different user groups, improve on accessible trails, and link municipal and county parks with an expanded trails network. Charleston County should make expansion of the existing trail system a higher priority, building on the existing system by adding new regional trails, interior park trails, and water based trails.



Figure 5: Charleston County Parks and Recreation PROST Master Plan 2013

CHAPTER THREE: NEEDS

Chapter Three of the Greenbelt Plan assesses the need for greenspace throughout the County and defines a level of service. This chapter also contains a summary of the public input process that was conducted in 2005 and 2006. This supplemental report updates the need for greenspace based on the Greenbelt Program accomplishments to date, stakeholder meetings, and new public input.

Greenspace Needs

The 2006 Greenbelt Plan defined the need for greenspace conservation and established a goal of protecting 30% of Charleston County's land. This need was derived primarily from two sources of information: 1) a technical analysis and comparison of Charleston County with other communities across the nation and 2) public input meetings and a public survey that was conducted during 2005 and 2006.

Results of Public Input Survey

During the fall of 2017, Charleston County conducted a citizen survey to gather input and feedback about the Greenbelt Program. The County elected to use an electronic format for soliciting input. To inform the public about the opportunity to participate in the survey, the County provided notification through the County's web site, posted the survey to several social media sites (Facebook and Twitter), and worked with the Post and Courier to feature the survey in an article about the program. Additionally, the County conducted direct email contact with more than 2,864 persons, and encouraged those people to share the opportunity for input with their contacts. The County also conducted an open house style workshop on the evening of November 2, 2017, and published two announcements of this workshop through the Post and Courier.

Approximately 1,487 Charleston County residents participated in the survey, with each person representing a unique response. Based on those responses, a majority (65%) of Charleston County residents who responded live in urban parts of the County, with the top responses coming from West Ashley, James Island, John's Island, Mount Pleasant, Charleston Peninsular and North Charleston. The survey had consistent responses from different age groups with no particular age range responding more than any other. The majority of respondents were familiar with the Greenbelt program and its accomplishments.

Citizens were asked, "Which of the following landscapes do you feel are most important for the Greenbelt Program?" They responded that: 1) Passive Greenspace, 2) Lowcountry Natural Resources, and 3) Natural Infrastructure were regarded as the most important.

Citizens were asked, "How do you currently use greenspace?" Most respondents said they use it for: 1) Walking and bicycling, 2) Enjoying wildlife and nature, and 3) Canoeing, kayaking or boating.

Citizens were asked, "Which of the following do you regard as the most critical areas of need for Charleston County?" They responded that the most important needs are: 1) Protection of wildlife habitat, wetlands, marshland, etc. 2) Walking and bicycling trails, 3) Rural greenspace protection and preservation, 4) Public lands for wildlife, nature observation and enjoyment, and 5) Addressing areas that frequently flood.

Citizens were asked, "What types of greenspace do you, your family and friends use most frequently?" They responded that: 1) Walking and bicycling trails, 2) Waterways for boating, and 3) Passive parks were the most frequently used.

Finally, citizens were asked, "Where should Charleston County direct most of the funding for the Greenbelt Program?" Their responses are listed below:

Other (please specify)	2.09%	31
Acquisition of lands for future recreation and sports fields	2.97%	44
Waterway access	3.31%	49
Acquisition of future passive parks	6.15%	91
Acquisition of frequently flooded properties	8.18%	121
Rural greenspace protection and preservation	16.89%	250
Acquisition of lands for walking and biking trails	17.30%	256
Protection of wildlife habitats, wetlands, marshland, etc.	43.11%	638

In addition to answering the questions of the survey, respondents were also asked to provide written comments. The majority of the written comments focused on the need to conserve land and water resources, the need to address the pace of urban development and loss of natural open space, the need for more walking and bicycling trails, and the need to improve access to parks.

A full version of the survey, which includes citizen comments, is on file in the Charleston County Greenbelt Program offices. The results of the survey were used by the GAB to formulate recommendations that are featured in this report.

CHAPTER FOUR: GREENBELT SYSTEM

Chapter Four of the Greenbelt Plan describes the Greenbelt System and its component landscapes. This chapter describes two components of greenspace: non-programmed and programmed lands. Chapter Four also defines the purpose of the Greenbelt Program which is to conserve and protect 1) natural resources, 2) historic and cultural property, 3) scenic landscapes, 4) recreation lands, and 5) lands that protect public health, safety and welfare. This supplemental report provides an update on the lands protected in six primary categories of the Greenbelt System.

In August 2017, Alta Planning + Design completed an extensive inventory of greenspace conserved and protected by Charleston County and its conservation partners since the Greenbelt Plan was adopted in June 2006. The following four charts illustrate the progress that Charleston County has made in the area of greenspace conservation between 2006 and 2017. The first chart shows the original goals for conservation according to categories of greenspace defined within the adopted plan. The two following charts provide a description of lands conserved by the County through the application of sales and use tax funds, and by partners of Charleston County through other means, including donation. The final chart provides a total amount of acres of land conserved, by category, during the time-period.

Original Goals of the Greenbelt System

Rural Greenbelt Lands	16,240
Francis Marion Forest	10,275
Lowcountry Wetlands	5,610
CCPRC Regional Parks	4,675
Urban Greenbelt Lands	2,000
Greenway Corridors	1,200
Totals	40,000

Lands Protected by Charleston County since 2006 via the Sales and Use Tax Funding

Rural Greenbelt Lands	7,262	45% of original target
Francis Marion Forest	4,813	47% of original target
Lowcountry Wetlands	3,857	69% of original target
CCPRC Regional Parks	4,651	99% of original target
Urban Greenbelt Lands	430	21% of original target
Greenway Corridors	0	0% of original target
Totals	21,012	53% of original target

Lands Protected by Partners of Charleston County since 2006 via other conservation tools and strategies, including donation

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Rural Greenbelt Lands	4,135	25% of original target
Francis Marion Forest	6,626	64% of original target
Lowcountry Wetlands	4,043	72% of original target
CCPRC Regional Parks	1,282	27% of original target
Urban Greenbelt Lands	236	12% of original target
Greenway Corridors	155	13% of original target
Totals	16,616	42% of original target

Combined efforts of Charleston County and partners since 2006

Rural Greenbelt Lands	11,397	70% of original target
Francis Marion Forest	11,438	111% of original target
Lowcountry Wetlands	7,900	141% of original target
CCPRC Regional Parks	5,933	33% of original target
Urban Greenbelt Lands	666	33% of original target
Greenway Corridors	155	13% of original target
Totals	37,628	94% of original target

A complete copy of the Alta Planning + Design inventory report is available at the Greenbelt Program Office. The following chart depicts graphically the accomplishments of the Greenbelt Program by category of Greenbelt System from 2006 to 2017 (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: Summary of Greenbelt lands conserved

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLEMENTATION

Chapter Five of the Greenbelt Plan addresses implementation of the Greenbelt Program. It includes recommendations for funding the program, the use of various conservation tools with strategies for protecting and conserving greenspace, the allocation of sales and use tax funds across rural and urban areas of Charleston County, and an organizational framework for the Program. It also defines a grant program for the distribution of sales and use tax funds. The allocation of the 2004 Greenbelt sales tax funds is based on a formula of 70% to the rural area and 30% to the urban area. This supplemental report provides revised recommendations on the key elements of Greenbelt Program implementation, including an amended allocation formula.

Sales and Use Tax Greenbelt Program Allocation Formula

The GAB is recommending that the 70% rural 30% urban allocation formula continue to be applied to any residual funds from the 2004 Greenbelt sales tax funds. Urban funds would continue to be allocated to the urban incorporated and unincorporated areas based on their populations. Those numbers are being updated in accordance with the 2010 U.S. Census data.

For expenditure of the 2016 Sales and Use Tax, the GAB recommends dividing the Greenbelt funds 50% each to the rural and urban areas of the County. For the urban areas, the GAB recommends using a formula based on the 2010 Census to allocate the funds to incorporated and unincorporated areas that are within the Charleston County Urban Growth Boundary. Below are tables showing the breakdown of funding for both rural and urban areas, all figures are approximate and will fluctuate based on revenues.

	2004 Sales Tax Fun (70% Rural 30%		2016 Sales Tax Revenues (50% Each)	Totals
Rural Funds	\$	21,000,000	\$ 100,000,000	\$ 121,000,000
Urban Funds	\$	9,000,000	\$ 100,000,000	\$ 109,000,000
Total	\$	30,000,000	\$ 200,000,000	\$ 230,000,000

Urban Allocation			
Municipality	Population (U.S. Census 2010)	Percent of Population	
Charleston	120,083	37.63%	
Folly Beach	2,617	0.82%	
Isle of Palms	4,133	1.30%	
James Island*	11,034	3.46%	
Kiawah Island	1,626	0.51%	
Lincolnville	1,139	0.36%	
Mt. Pleasant	67,843	21.26%	
N. Charleston	78,201	24.51%	
Seabrook Island	1,714	0.54%	
Sullivan's Island	1,791	0.56%	
Summerville	998	0.31%	
Unincorporated	27,930	8.75%	
Total	319,109	100%	

*The Town James Island was not officially incorporated until 2012. The figure above reflects the first year the BCDCOG has population estimates for James Island (2013).

The GAB recommends the urban funds be distributed on a merit based application process where each project will be evaluated against the updated criteria. Urban municipalities will not compete for their funds. A competitive process will be used to evaluate urban unincorporated projects for funding. For the rural areas, the GAB recommends distribution of funds on a merit based, competitive application process, also evaluated against the updated criteria.

Conservation Toolbox

The 2006 Greenbelt Plan contains a conservation toolbox that can be used as a quick reference of land conservation strategies and tools. The tools defined can be used independent of each other or in combination to conserve, protect and manage greenspace lands/water throughout the County. The County is encouraged to continue the use of these tools, in addition to the use of funds from the 2004 and 2016 sales and use tax proceeds, to conserve greenspace. The Greenbelt Plan does not recommend the use of tools of eminent domain or land condemnation for greenspace conservation. The Greenbelt Advisory Board recommends no changes to the Conservation Toolbox.

Greenbelt Program Implementation Budget

Charleston County will operate and implement the Greenbelt Program using remaining funds from the 2004 sales and use tax and from the new 2016 sales and use tax. The maximum amount of funding available from the 2016 sales and use tax is capped at \$210 million.

Organizational Framework Recommendations

The Greenbelt Advisory Board recommends that the decision-making framework regarding the implementation of the Charleston County Greenbelt Program become more streamlined and simplified. The GAB recommends eliminating both the Greenbelt Bank Board and the Urban Grants Review Committee, and replace these with a subcommittee of the GAB. The new subcommittee will have the responsibility of evaluating both rural and urban applications for funding, and making recommendations to the full GAB. The GAB will then forward its recommendations to the Charleston County Council for final action.

The GAB subcommittee will consist of 5 GAB members, selected by the GAB Chair or Vice-Chair. The GAB Chair or Vice-Chair may also appoint additional members with expertise in areas of banking, appraisals, etc. to assist in the review of Greenbelt projects.

Rural and Urban Grants Program

The GAB recommends replacing the criteria and process that was used to evaluate and rank applications for sales tax and use funding with a new set of criteria. The new criteria to be used is as follows:

1. Meets Greenbelt Definition – 8 points (Only one category applies to scoring)

- Passive greenspace 8 points
- Lowcountry natural resources 7 points
- Natural infrastructure 6 points
- Heritage landscapes 5 points
- Corridors 4 points
- Active greenspace 3 points
- Reclaimed greenspace 2 points
- Productive landscapes 1 point

2. Meets the Greenbelt Vision – 4 points (Only one category applies to scoring)

- Greenspace for public waterway access and use (fishing, crabbing, canoeing and/or kayaking) 4 points
- Linkage to a blue trail 2 points
- Trail/corridor connected to either a greenspace; trail/corridor; neighborhood; or retail/jobs center 2 points
- Greenspace connected to a trail/corridor; another greenspace; neighborhood; school; retail or jobs center 2 points

3. Meets Greenbelt System Components – 6 points (Score for all that apply)

- Greenway Corridors 1 point
- Urban Greenbelt Lands 1 point
- Rural Greenbelt Lands 1 point
- Francis Marion National Forest 1 point
- CCPRC Regional Parks 1 point
- Lowcountry Wetlands 1 point

4. Addresses public access and use – 5 points (Only one category applies to scoring)

- Greenspace with full public access 5 points
- Greenspace with partial public access (partial = land manager restricts days/hours of week) 2 points
- Greenspace with limited public access (limited = access by landowner invitation at least once annually) 1 point
- No public access 0

5. Protection of wildlife habitat – 5 points (Only one category applies to scoring)

- Protects wildlife habitat of endangered or threatened species 5 points
- Protects wildlife habitat of any species 2 points
- No wildlife habitat protection 0 points
- 6. Protection of Lowcountry Natural Resources and Natural Infrastructure 7 points (Score for all that apply)
 - Upland forests 1 point
 - Fresh water wetlands or forested wetlands 1 points
 - Saltwater marsh, marsh and/or marsh islands 1 points
 - Riparian zones 1 point
 - Floodplains 1 point
 - Land critical to clean water 1 point
 - Significant and/or grand trees (such as Grand Live Oaks, Long Leaf Pine) 1 point

7. Historical and cultural features – 5 points (Only one category applies to scoring)

- Culturally significant land, or contains existing structures, remains of structures, earthworks, artifacts, etc. of historical significance 5 points
- Documented historical event occurrence 4 points
- Oral tradition of historical occurrence 2 points
- No historical or cultural significance 0 points
- 8. Threat of Loss 5 Points (Only one category applies to scoring)
 - Protects lands under threat of loss 5 points
 - Project poses unique opportunity not likely to present itself again 2 points
 - No threat of loss 0 points

9. Consistent with Adopted Plans – 5 points (Score for all that apply)

- Greenbelt Plan 2 points
- County/Municipal Comprehensive Land Use Plan 1 point
- Regional Bike/Ped Plans 1 point
- Other 1 point

10. Project is ready for acquisition – 5 points (Only one category applies to scoring)

- Acquisition will take place within 6 months of approval 5 points
- Acquisition will take place more than 6 months of approval 2 points

11. Project is ready for public use – 3 points (Only one category applies to scoring)

- Property will be open to the public in less than 1 year 3 points
- Property will be open to the public between 1 5 years 2 points
- Property will be open to the public in more than 5 years 1 point

12. Funding and leveraging – 15 points (Only one category applies to scoring)

- Over 100% Match –15 points
- 75% 100% Match –10 points
- 25% 74% Match –6 points
- 5% 24% Match –4 points

13. Project Management – 5 points (Score for all that apply)

- Staff dedicated to land management, maintenance and deed restriction enforcement 2 points
- Financial resources for land management 2 points (include financial records as part of application)
- Staff experienced in financial management of land 1 points

14. Partnership and Coordination – Points Range (0 – 10)

• Provide written description of partnerships and coordination among those partners involved in the project. List all financial and non-financial partners and their role in the project. Describe how the work of the partnership addresses greenspace conservation as well as community issues regarding health, resiliency, mobility, and economic development.

15. Return on Investment – 6 points (Score for all that apply)

- Provides recreation and/or tourism income 1 point
- Provides economic benefit (such as timbering, farmland) 1 point
- Provides public health benefit 1 point
- Provides public services such as resiliency, natural infrastructure and resistance to flooding 1 point
- Provides ecological services (such as purification of air and water; decomposition of wastes; soil and vegetation generation and renewal; pollination of crops and natural vegetation; groundwater recharge through wetlands; seed dispersal; greenhouse gas mitigation; and aesthetically pleasing landscapes) 1 point
- Other (such as property will remain on the tax rolls) 1 point

16. Level of Public Support – 6 points (Score for all that apply)

- Support Letters/Emails from public 3 points
- Results of Public Hearing 2 points
- Other 1 point

Total: 100 Points

ACTION STEPS

The Greenbelt Advisory Board recommends that Charleston County Council adopt this report as an amendment to the Charleston County Comprehensive Greenbelt Plan.