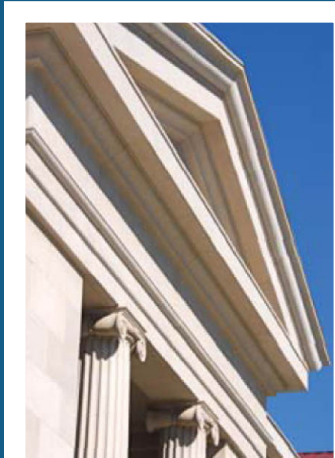


PLAN INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

Beginning in mid-2009, the citizens and leaders of the City of Florence began to address the question of how best to plan for the long-term future of the community. While there have been many recent and intentional community investments, Florence is now presented with an opportunity to coordinate these efforts in a unified fashion to maximize the overall benefits of these individual actions. The community decided to pursue a course of action that offers the greatest likelihood of continued success.



To accomplish this, a shared vision of the desired future is required to guide citizens and their leaders over the next 20 years and beyond. This plan acknowledges the value of cooperation and consensus-building among residents, elected officials, City and County agencies, public benefactors, and other stakeholders.

ABOUT FLORENCE

Florence is one of South Carolina's regional centers, strategically positioned at the junction of Interstates 95 and 20. The City

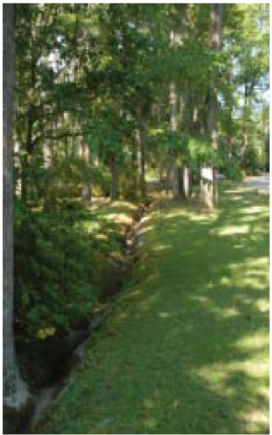
was established and gained stature with the 19th Century development of the railroads and the later growth of the textile industry. As the significance of these factors diminished, Florence was able to diversify its regional economy to remain strong.

Nevertheless, much of the regional growth over the past 50 years has bypassed much of the area within the City's municipal boundary, resulting in the shrinkage and deterioration of its downtown and some neighborhoods. While substantial investments are now being made to reverse past trends, much work remains to restore Florence's vitality and unique identity.

Florence is a community that firmly embraces its past, yet looks to its future with a sense of optimism, keen determination, sound recognition of the facing challenges, and the ability to channel its resources to meet them. Citizens are intent on retaining and enhancing their prized "small town" character in a way that will foster greater community identity, renewal, and the continued expansion of opportunities for all.

Comprehensive Plan

What is a Comprehensive Plan? A Comprehensive Plan is designed as a framework for guiding future development, redevelopment, and community enhancement in the City and its planning area over the next 20 years and beyond. The purpose of this plan is to establish a vision, along with realistic goals and achievable strategies, that residents, business and land owners, major institutions, civic groups, members of advisory committees, and public officials prefer – and will support with action – in the years ahead.



Florence has many tree-lined streets that provide an ideal living environment.

Florence is located in a gently rolling upland area, 70 miles west of the Atlantic coastline and midway between the Pee Dee and Lynches Rivers. Much of the land is wooded, and favorable climate and soil conditions promote lush vegetation and opportunities for abundant landscaping and planting of shade trees.

The City was established in the mid-19th Century at a strategic rail junction serving much of the Southeast and was laid out in the typical fashion of railroad cities of that time. The original business district and surrounding area were laid out in a gridiron pattern that was mainly oriented to the railroad tracks. Later development that proceeded south and west of the original platted area occurred in a more curvilinear fashion in response to topography, drainage patterns, and market preference for a more “suburban” form of residential development.

Florence’s original economic significance was as a transportation hub for agricultural products. Early rail-oriented industries included the production of paper, manufacture of textiles, and locomotive repair. During the mid-20th Century, City and County leaders succeeded in transforming the local economy to become the major biomedical and financial center of the region. Many financial institutions, medical centers, and medical service providers are located in Florence, including over a dozen national or regional banks,

two major hospitals, and two significant pharmaceutical companies. Other important industrial categories include ATV manufacturing, metal fabrication, and I-95/20 oriented logistics/distribution facilities.

While located approximately 10 miles east of the City’s center, Francis Marion University (FMU) is a significant cultural and economic asset to Florence. With an enrollment of 5,000 students and employing over 500 faculty and staff members, FMU is an integral part of the City’s fabric.

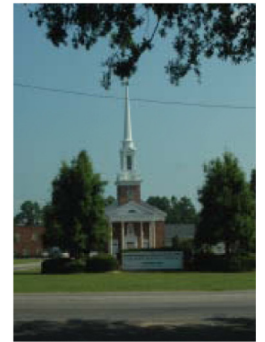
OBJECTIVES

The decision to conduct a comprehensive planning process was made primarily to establish better control over the destiny of the community rather than reacting to change. Adopting this plan is a deliberate action taken to proactively manage future growth and development as opposed to passively acquiescing to development or redevelopment proposals on a case-by-case basis without consideration of community-wide issues, established goals and policies, and extensive citizen input. It serves as a framework for promoting and accepting future public and private initiatives within the City.

Purpose and Need

At the beginning of the planning process, a series of key “stakeholder” listening sessions were conducted to solicit the input of residents. This was an important step toward understanding the underlying issues and needs of the City and, specifically, the values and priorities of those who know best — the citizens. The planning process also involved the regular input of a Citizens’ Delegation composed of knowledgeable and respected City of Florence residents. Early on, these participants identified several reasons to undertake this plan:

- ◆ To maintain or enhance Florence’s “small town” atmosphere, quality schools and parks, cultural activities, and attractive living areas.
- ◆ To improve the appearance of the City, particularly its entryways, and enhance its status as a regional center.



One of Florence’s distinctive churches

- ◆ To reinvest in declining neighborhoods in order to restore their integrity and provide safe, desirable living areas with adequate public amenities for all Florentines.
- ◆ To define the appropriate role and breadth of the downtown area in order to channel continuing redevelopment efforts in the most effective way possible.
- ◆ To ensure the continued provision of adequate and efficient community facilities, services, and infrastructure that are necessary to support new development and redevelopment.
- ◆ To make wise and fiscally-responsible decisions relating to the management of future development and utility extensions.
- ◆ To establish the framework for updating and adopting a new City zoning code.

Impetus

In recent years, citizens and local officials have recognized the urgency for reinvestment in the central areas of Florence. Substantial improvements have been made, and more are in various stages of planning or implementation. The City, which represents less than 20 percent of the Florence Transportation Metropolitan Area's total population, has recognized the need to determine its future destiny rather than relying on the planning guidance of the nonresident Florence County majority. For this reason, the City has re-established its own planning responsibilities.

As the City pursues its own courses of action, it becomes important — now more than ever — to maintain area-wide coordination of these efforts in order to leverage these developments and provide a unified design response in order to gain the maximum benefits. A successful outcome will benefit the City and County alike.

Guidance of Other Plans

This planning effort draws significantly on the contributions of other plans and studies. The following is a partial list of previous or ongoing planning efforts.

- ◆ The Florence County Plan is an ongoing program, undertaken by the County's planning staff with a consultant providing technical input on the

Previous Planning Efforts

- *Florence County Plan – Ongoing*
- *Florence Downtown Revitalization Plan (Hunter Interests) – Ongoing*
- *Florence 2010 Downtown Master Plan (HDR) – 1999*
- *Florence Tourism and Assessment Plan – 2007*
- *Florence Museum of Art, Science and History Feasibility Study – 2008*
- *Multi-Modal Transportation Center Development (Hunter Interests) – 2009*
- *Floodplain Map Updates and Digitization*
- *Federal Building Reuse Feasibility Study – 2009*
- *Sewer System Lift Station Upgrading and Instrumentation Enhancements*
- *Florence Area Transportation Study, Long Range Transportation Plan*
- *Development (Master Plan) scenarios produced as part of the brown field clean up*

Transportation Element. As it approaches completion, this comprehensive planning effort provides substantial resource information on County planning issues, including economic and demographic projections, natural resource and cultural inventories, housing, and growth management issues.

- ◆ The Florence Downtown Master Plan formed the initial case and physical guidance for downtown revitalization. It was updated and supplemented by the more recent and targeted Downtown Revitalization Plan, which pinpoints specific implementation projects. These two studies, along with the ongoing activities of their sponsors, have been pivotal in attracting new investment into the City's downtown area including:
- ◆ The new FMU Performing Arts Center, which is currently under construction with anticipated completion in 2010.

- ◆ A proposed multi-modal transportation center (site to be determined).
- ◆ The proposed replacement for the Museum of Art, Science, and History in the downtown core area.
- ◆ The recently completed Florence Little Theater building.
- ◆ The Florence Area Transportation Study, when completed, will provide guidance on the elimination or reduction of bottlenecks and future improvements of the major arterial streets that serve the City and provide connection to the interstate highways and outlying areas.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process, as summarized in the diagram (see page 1.5), is a series of steps taken to evaluate existing conditions, identify community needs and goals, and prepare a unified vision statement of Florence's future — and how to bring it about. At critical points along the way, various planning concepts and challenges have been introduced to the Citizens' Delegation and the public for discussion and guidance. The process culminates with a formal adoption procedure that involves additional public input, an official public hearing, and adoption by the City Council.

Outreach and Public Participation

Public involvement is an essential ingredient to a successful planning process. Accomplishing effective community outreach and participation has involved interactions through the following means:

- ◆ **Focus Group Interviews:** Group interviews were conducted at the beginning of the process to solicit specific input on various topics affecting the long-range planning process. There were seven focus group meetings involving between four and 10 people in each session. For example, one group consisted of local business leaders and bankers; another one was made up of persons interested in cultural activities and historic preservation.
- ◆ **Citizens' Delegation:** A 15-member Citizens' Delegation was assembled to provide ongoing input and guidance. Specific activities of the Delegation are listed in the planning process diagram (see page 1.5).
- ◆ **Community Workshops:** Three open community workshops are being conducted for citizens to come together and discuss pertinent issues

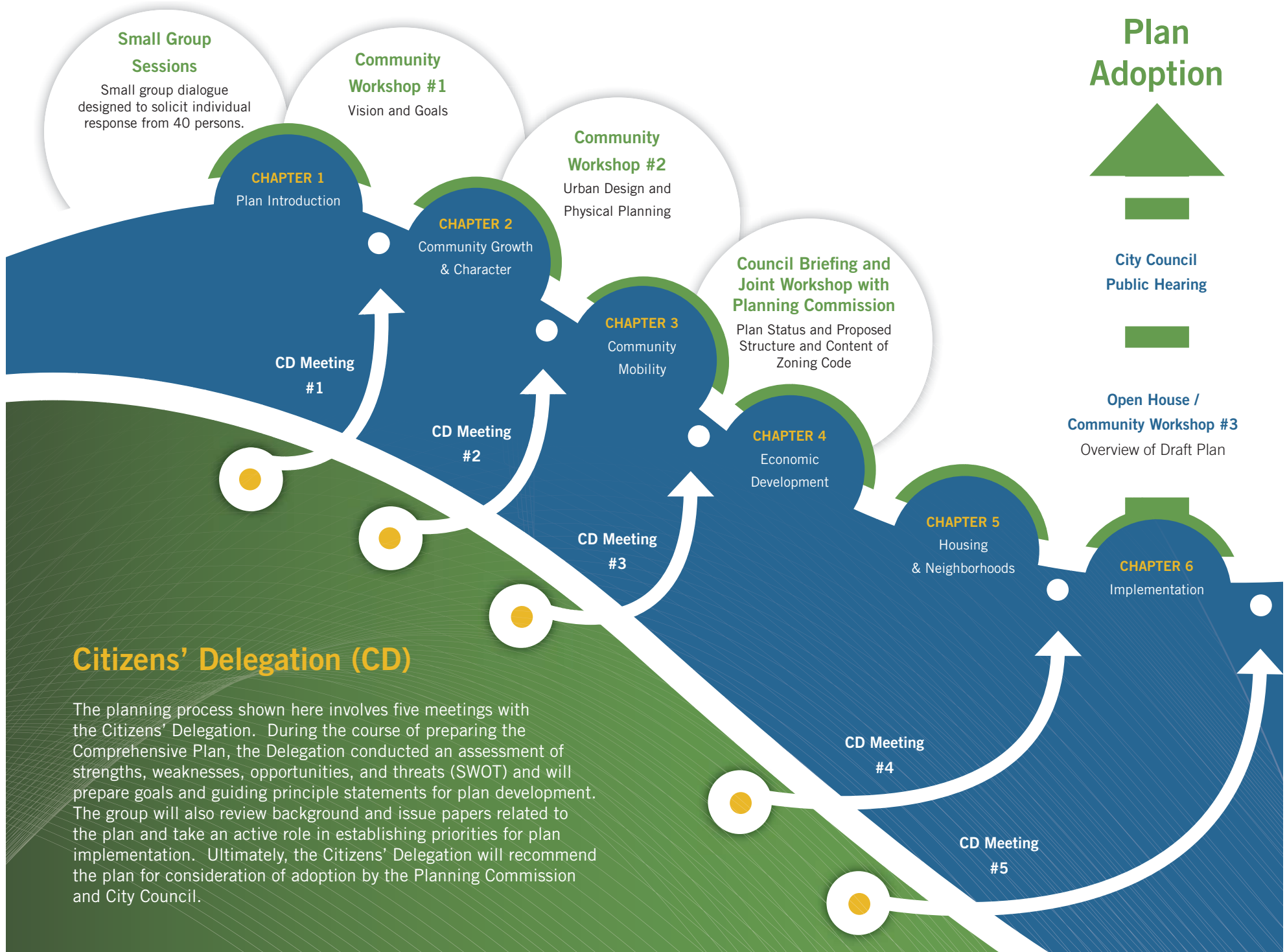
of the plan. Each meeting is to begin with the presentation of issues or recommendations, followed by smaller discussion sessions where participants can choose any of the individual topics being presented. The community dialog is then used to prepare the goals, objectives, and strategic directions of the plan.

- ◆ **Other Agencies:** The process has involved considerable interaction with other agencies whose missions relate to long-range planning issues. Examples of these agencies include the Florence County planning staff, the Florence Area Transportation Study (FLATS), the Florence School District, and the Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority. A complete listing is provided in the section of this Chapter titled, "Representation of Groups and Agencies."
- ◆ **Elected and Appointed City Officials:** The Florence Planning Commission and City Council, under South Carolina Statute, have ultimate authority over the adoption and maintenance of the Comprehensive Plan. These two bodies have been integral to the planning process, particularly during the adoption stages.

Representation of Groups and Agencies

The following is a list of the other agencies and groups that have participated in focus group meetings and other input sessions. Their contributions are extensively reflected in this document.

- ◆ Florence Area Transportation Study (FLATS)
- ◆ Florence Little Theater
- ◆ Florence County Economic Development Partnership
- ◆ Florence County Planning and Building Inspections
- ◆ Florence Downtown Development Corporation
- ◆ Florence School District One
- ◆ Francis Marion University
- ◆ Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority



Plan Adoption



City Council
Public Hearing



Open House /
Community Workshop #3
Overview of Draft Plan

Citizens' Delegation (CD)

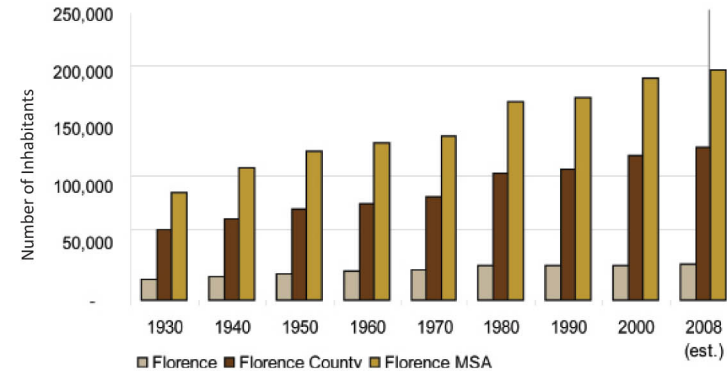
The planning process shown here involves five meetings with the Citizens' Delegation. During the course of preparing the Comprehensive Plan, the Delegation conducted an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) and will prepare goals and guiding principle statements for plan development. The group will also review background and issue papers related to the plan and take an active role in establishing priorities for plan implementation. Ultimately, the Citizens' Delegation will recommend the plan for consideration of adoption by the Planning Commission and City Council.

AREAS OF FOCUS

At the outset of planning activities, four specific areas of focus were identified and addressed in greater depth:

- ◆ **Urban Growth:** As shown in *Figure 1.1, Population*, and *Table 1.1, Population*, regional growth has continued, while the City's population and level of development have remained stable. This topic addresses opportunities for the City to promote infill and redevelopment and to expand its boundaries in order to strengthen its stature as the center of the Pee Dee Region. This topic also takes into consideration the necessary sewer, water, drainage, and transportation infrastructure components needed to support growth in a responsible fashion.
- ◆ **Community Character and Appearance:** Initial focus group meetings indicated a common concern for maintaining and enhancing the appearance and image of Florence, particularly the highway entrances leading into the downtown area. This topic will address the long- and short-term strategies needed to upgrade troubled areas and enhance the character of development and overall beauty of Florence.
- ◆ **Neighborhood Renewal and Rehabilitation:** It is important that all neighborhoods in Florence, irrespective of demographic characteristics or housing costs, be regarded as good places to live. This topic addresses the complex issues of neighborhood deterioration, housing conditions, affordability, condition of public improvements, and accessibility to public facilities, shopping, and social services
- ◆ **Community Livability:** This broad category includes the provision and enhancement of parks and trails, cultural facilities and programs, historic preservation, and other amenities that distinguish Florence as a unique and special City.

Figure 1.1: Population



The City of Florence's population has remained stable for many decades - while the County and Metropolitan Area's populations have grown. The City has been constrained by its borders, allowing the bypass of growth and development to the unincorporated areas.

Table 1.1: Population

Currently, the population of the Florence MSA (Florence and Darlington Counties) is expected to increase by another 10% by the year 2030. The City's share of this future growth will be determined by the plans and policies that are now under consideration.

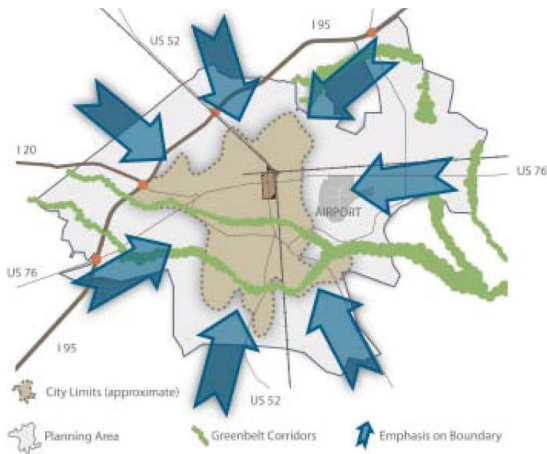
| Year | 1930 | 1940 | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2008 * (est.) |
|-----------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------------|
| Florence | 17,581 | 20,396 | 22,435 | 24,722 | 25,997 | 30,062 | 29,913 | 30,248 | 31,500 |
| Florence County | 61,027 | 70,582 | 79,710 | 84,438 | 89,636 | 110,163 | 114,344 | 125,761 | 133,000 |
| Florence MSA | 94,063 | 115,780 | 129,726 | 137,366 | 143,078 | 172,880 | 176,195 | 193,155 | 200,350 |

* 2008 estimate

INSIGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

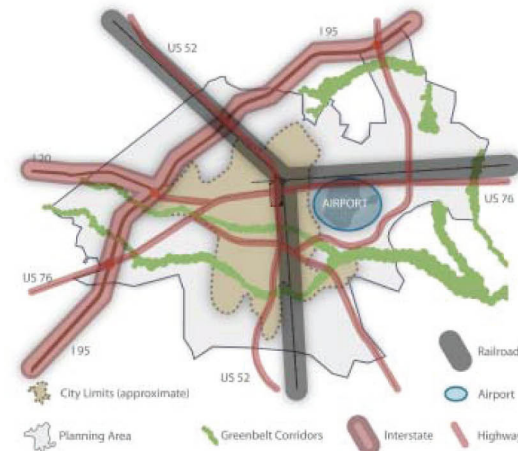
The following map diagrams summarize the major challenges observed in the planning process. The maps themselves depict the overall planning area with major highways and railroads, the approximate City limits, and the wooded “greenbelt” corridors associated with the streams and waterways that traverse the area.

Figure 1.2: City Limits



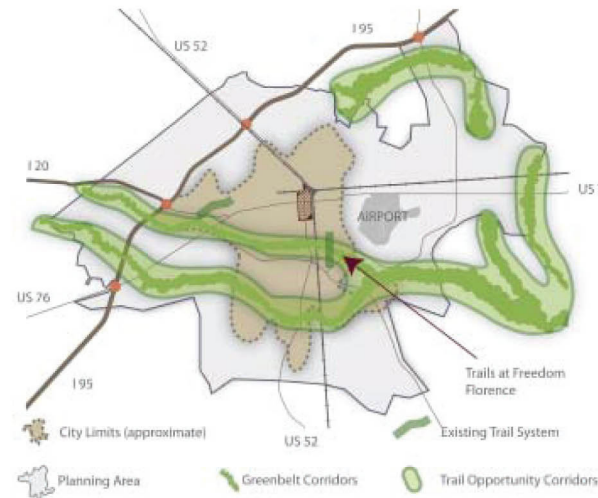
Florence is hemmed-in by rigid municipal boundaries, mainly due to statutory restrictions. The City has no control of development outside of its jurisdiction, yet faces the responsibility of providing many infrastructure services to these outlying, unincorporated areas.

Figure 1.3: Regional Transportation Linkages



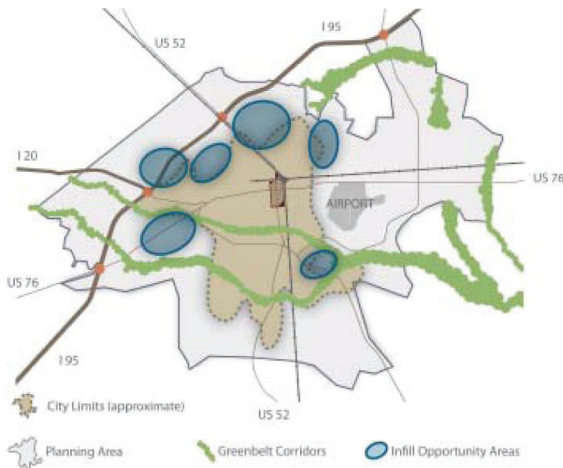
Florence has superb regional transportation linkages, which have helped sustain a robust area-wide economy.

Figure 1.4: Trail System



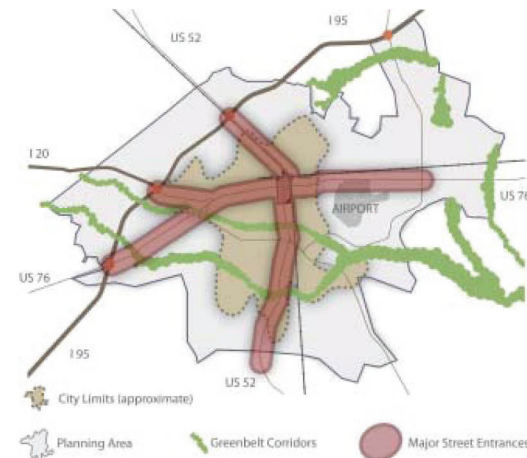
The wooded stream and vacated rail corridors present a tremendous opportunity to enhance the existing non-street trail system, offering improved linkages and access to existing parks.

Figure 1.5: Infill Opportunities



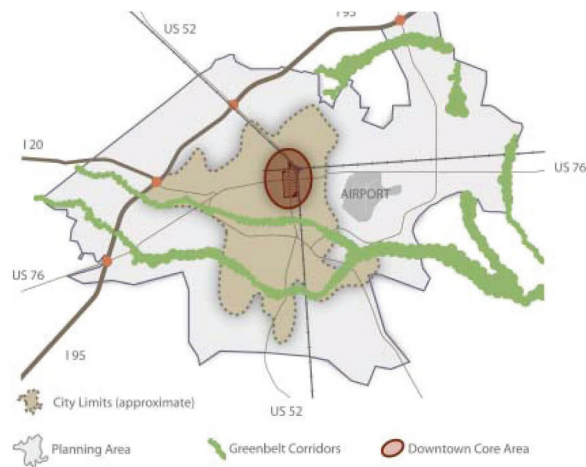
Florence has many infill opportunities for accommodating future development within or immediately contiguous to already developed areas, which may be readily and efficiently served with facilities and services.

Figure 1.6: Major Street Entrances



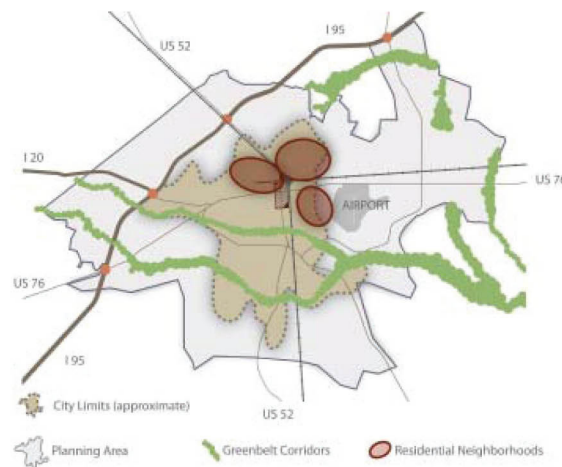
The image of Florence is detracted by its major street entrances. They are in need of major reinvestment and enhancement.

Figure 1.7: Downtown Core



In spite of many recent reinvestment activities, Florence still faces many challenges in defining and planning the future of its downtown core.

Figure 1.8: Central Residential Neighborhoods



Several residential neighborhoods in the central area of Florence are in advanced stages of deterioration and in need of redevelopment and facility improvements.

Table 1.2: Comprehensive Plan Elements

This Comprehensive Plan has been organized to include all plan elements required by statutes. The table below indicates the location of subject material for these required elements within the context of the Florence Comprehensive Plan document.

| Florence Comprehensive Plan | Required by South Carolina Statutes |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Introduction | |
| 2. Community Growth and Character | — Population — Natural Resources — Land Use |
| 3. Community Mobility | — Transportation |
| 4. Housing and Neighborhoods | — Housing — Community Facilities — Cultural Resources |
| 5. Economic Development | — Economic Development |
| 6. Implementation | — Priority Investment |

COMPLIANCE WITH SOUTH CAROLINA PLANNING REQUIREMENTS

This Comprehensive Plan has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the South Carolina Priority Investment Act of 2007 and the South Carolina Local Government Comprehensive Planning Act of 1994. (See **Table 1.2, Comprehensive Plan Elements**.) These legislative acts establish the required elements to be included in a Comprehensive Plan document and further mandate that the plan be reviewed by the City Planning Commission “as often as necessary, but not less than every five years” and that the plan, including all elements, “must be updated at least every 10 years.”

Plan Content

- *Chapter 1 – Plan Introduction (this chapter).*
- *Chapter 2 – Community Character & Growth. Provides a commentary on existing land use and community character with strategic recommendations concerning the policy and regulatory changes needed to realize the desired paths of future community development and urban growth patterns.*
- *Chapter 3 – Community Mobility. Focuses on all modes of transportation and provides recommendations relating to improvement needs and standards.*
- *Chapter 4 – Economic Development. Presents data and information on the local economy and employment conditions, providing recommended strategies for sustainably growing the local economy.*
- *Chapter 5 – Housing & Neighborhoods. Provides descriptions of the adequacy of existing housing conditions and neighborhoods and recommends strategies for improving them.*
- *Chapter 6 – Implementation. Includes a comprehensive listing of project and program initiatives needed to bring this plan to reality with recommendations on funding, priority, and organizational responsibility.*

STATEMENTS OF VISION

The following vision statements have been identified as being critical to the guidance of this plan over the next 10 to 20 years. They will be subject to revision and expansion as the process continues.

- ◆ High quality neighborhoods — in which any citizen of Florence would be proud to live—with great accessibility to commercial facilities, employment opportunities, trails and parks, schools and public facilities, and having a variety of housing options for individuals and families of all income levels.
- ◆ A re-established City Center that is distinct to Florence—one that is true to the community’s history and commercial roots; realistically sized; offers increased opportunities for local businesses and choices in living;

and embraces both local and regional sustainability objectives through improved mobility and responsible development practices.

- ◆ Attractive entrances to the City that reflect its status as a regional center, its history of cultural pride, and its commitment to excellence in the future.
- ◆ Protection of the City's abundant natural areas, woodlands, and stream corridors.
- ◆ Ease and efficiency in travel within and outside the City using a variety of modes, including walking, bicycling, transit, and automobiles.
- ◆ Continued economic vigor and employment opportunity.
- ◆ Adjustment of the City's borders to resemble the full urbanized area and the extent of the utility services it provides.