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Georgetown County's Office of Planning and Zoning and The Future Land Use of Georgetown County

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Georgetown County's Office of Planning and Zoning and The Future Land Use of Georgetown
County

Building a Sustainable Community

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Introduction

Land use is the groundwork for determining how sustainably Georgetown will develop because it affects a wide range of elements including natural resources and housing. Rapid growth can have a negative impact on a community if not planned for accordingly. This is what makes Georgetown County's Comprehensive Plan so valuable. Updated every 10 years, this plan is made up of several different elements that help to ensure Georgetown is able to maintain a community with a broad and healthy economy. The goal of my specific research is to assist the improvement of both the "Land Use Element" and "Housing Element" based on collected public input. According to the previous Land Use Element, its fundamental principle is to achieve sustainable development for Georgetown County. By actively seeking community input on the policy making of future land use, the county of Georgetown is working to make the Comprehensive Plan and its elements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable for all.¹

From interning with the Office of Planning and Zoning (OPZ), I am able to actively incorporate elements of sustainability, from the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), directly into the policies that affect Georgetown County.² By updating Georgetown County's Comprehensive Plan, I am fulfilling the UN SDG #11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Additionally, from my office's work collecting and analyzing public input on future land use, I am able to assist the amendment of policies to better suit the needs of all demographics. This means I am fulfilling the UN SDG #10: Reduced Inequalities.

¹ "Georgetown County, SC: Official Website." Georgetown County, SC | Official Website. Office of Planning and Zoning, September 2, 2010. <https://www.gtcounty.org/>.

² "Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals - United Nations Sustainable Development." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

More specifically, these amendments worked intensively towards influencing the future structure of our affordable housing policies. In doing so, I am directly helping Georgetown fulfill UN SDG #9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure. Lastly, throughout my research, writing, and mapping for the county, I was required to communicate with many local communities, fulfilling the UN SDG #17 Partnerships. Specific targets and indicators were used to help promote the implementation of each UN SDG in Georgetown County.

Relation to SDGs

Goal 9: The UN SDG #9 states that we must promote, “inclusive and sustainable industrialization...with innovation and infrastructure”. Throughout the research I have been conducting for the OPZ this summer, I have directly worked to promote Target 9.1. This target works to develop sustainable infrastructure, with a focus on its affordability. Georgetown is also looking to include aspects of neighboring counties/cities affordable housing programs into our own Housing Element. This will indirectly meet the needs of Target 9.2 as well. As a plan that is updated every ten years, this target will be accomplished with its plan to promote inclusive industrialization by 2030.³

Goal 10: The UN SDG #10 works to reduce inequalities, “ensuring that no one is left behind”. A large portion of the work I completed this summer for my internship worked to solve this issue, through my research on affordable housing. Targets 10.2 and 10.3 were met by promoting economic inclusion and equal opportunities for housing options within Georgetown County that are able to meet the needs of all community members. Additionally, target 10.4 was met through

³ “Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals - United Nations Sustainable Development.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

my research of neighboring counties affordable housing policies. By adopting similar policies from the City of Greenville, the Housing Element will be working to, “progressively achieve greater equality.”⁴

Goal 11: The UN SDG #11 acknowledges many common issues that communities can face, such as rapid urbanization, slum dwellers, inadequate infrastructure, air pollution, and unplanned urban sprawl. While updating Georgetown’s Comprehensive Plan, the OPZ is working to support many of the targets of Goal 11. Firstly, target 11.3 states that Georgetown County must, “enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization...and sustainable human settlement planning.” Georgetown accomplishes this by maintaining/updating the Comprehensive Plan every ten years, allowing for improvements to be made from previous years as well as the integration of newly discovered sustainable developments. The next target we work to improve is 11.4. This target explains that there must be efforts to protect/safeguard the cultural and natural heritage of the world. By collecting and analyzing public input from the Land Use Element, the OPZ directly targets which cultural aspects of the community are valued the most and works to preserve them. The last target associated with Goal 11 is Target 11.7, which promotes, “access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces”. The Land Use Element reflects the counties input on the protection of natural resource’s being the most important thing to them.⁵

⁴ “Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals - United Nations Sustainable Development.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

⁵ “Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals - United Nations Sustainable Development.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

Goal 17: The UN SDG #17 states that, “the SDGs can only be realized with strong global partnerships and cooperation”. The OPZ has worked with various organizations to better enhance the sustainable development of Georgetown County. Target 17.7 promotes the development of environmentally friendly technologies. In a recent project to build a new sustainable solar powered energy field, the OPZ had the opportunity to partner with HDR and Silicon Ranch.⁶ Together, we all worked to present a convincing argument for why its development should be approved at the County Council’s Planning Meeting. Additionally, Targets 17.13 and 17.14 enhance policy coherence for sustainable development through policy coordination. These targets were met through the conversations about affordable housing, development, and Transfer Development Rights that I had with neighboring counties Planning Departments. Lastly, Target 17.19 states that we must, “build on existing initiatives to develop measurement of progress on sustainable development.” The OPZ accomplishes exactly this through providing measurable goals at the end of each element of the county’s Comprehensive Plan.⁷

Georgetown County and Future Land Use

The Land Use and Housing Elements of the Comprehensive Plan are two key deciding factors for the sustainability progress in Georgetown County. Updated every 10 years, these two elements are able to provide measurable goals for the County to abide by much like that of the UN SDGs. This helps to create a sense of accountability for departments with power to implement sustainable policy and for community members to follow. Additionally, these

⁶ These are two innovative environmental companies. More information can be found here:
<https://www.hdrinc.com/>
<https://www.siliconranch.com/>

⁷ “Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals - United Nations Sustainable Development.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 27, 2022. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

elements assist in educating community members on how important it is to plan and develop Georgetown County sustainably.

These two elements are also reviewed by members of the community and are integrated with pieces of their input. This allows for the community to have a say on how they expect/desire their own community to develop. Without the support of the community, Georgetown County would have no realistic way to achieve the goals set in each of these two crucial elements. By working to accomplish Georgetown's own localized sustainability goals, Georgetown is directly assisting the world in meeting the UN SDGs.

Global Solutions for Future Land Use

The sustainable development of future land use has become a pressing concern for growing cities around the world. This is due to the constant dilemma of being able to find appropriate land for development that meets the ever-changing needs of consumers. According to a study done on global Land Use Change (LUC), changing consumption patterns can cause environmental and social impacts within communities.⁸ Especially communities facing densification, such as Georgetown County, which is constantly fighting to stop urban sprawl in the Waccamaw Neck area. This is what makes Georgetown County's Comprehensive Plan beneficial. By updating it every 10 years and receiving public input, the county is able to directly adapt to the changing needs of their citizens. The Institute of Geography and Center for Regional Economic Development (CRED) states, “if city authorities do not succeed in providing

⁸ Rosa, Michele De, Marie Trydeman Knudsen, and John Erik Hermansen. “A Comparison of Land Use Change Models: Challenges and Future Developments.” *Journal of Cleaner Production*. Elsevier, December 17, 2015. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652615018284?casa_token=xcO5yk-iMjkAAAAA%3AUR0sgHuCyMub8IsZanU5N0VkNTZ-PgeFvMitIKKMphg--KujB0zpthhHKVqAbqb-eHGswomHDQ.

affordable housing in densifying cities, the preservation of urban social qualities...are in acute danger”.⁹ As a community that prioritizes its cultural heritage so highly, Georgetown County would suffer greatly from a lack of properly planned affordable housing projects.¹⁰ In order to allow for the sustainable development of more projects, while still maintaining both the cultural heritage and natural resources of Georgetown County, new policies are looking to be set in place in the near future. Transfer Development Rights (TDR) aim to protect natural resources by redirecting development to areas that are able to support growth.¹¹ TDR Programs have been a global solution for land use planning for well over forty years. If approved in a Planning Commission meeting, a TDR program would work well in the County’s Natural Resources Element. It is promising for a program like this to be potentially implemented into Georgetown County's future Comprehensive Plan, guiding Georgetown towards a more innovative future.

Empirical Evidence

Affordable housing is defined as, “one that is appropriate for the needs of a range of low- and moderate-income houses...so that households are able to meet other essential basic living costs.”¹² In many cases, governments have stepped in to provide assistance financially for developing new housing. One global example of a solution comes from Korea, where their

⁹ Debrunner, Gabriela, and Thomas Hartmann. "Strategic use of land policy instruments for affordable housing – Coping with social challenges under scarce land conditions in Swiss cities." *Land use policy* 99 (2020): 104993.

¹⁰ A recent public survey found that the protection of cultural heritage is of high importance to community members. More information can be found here:
<http://www.gtcounty.org/396/Comprehensive-Plan-Update>

¹¹ “Transfer of Development Rights.” *ConservationTools*. Accessed July 27, 2022.
[https://conservationtools.org/guides/12-transfer-of-development-rights#:~:text=Transfer%20of%20Development%20Rights%20\(TDR,an%20area%20planned%20to%20accommodate](https://conservationtools.org/guides/12-transfer-of-development-rights#:~:text=Transfer%20of%20Development%20Rights%20(TDR,an%20area%20planned%20to%20accommodate)

¹² Abelson, Peter. “2009 - Wiley Online Library.” *Affordable Housing: Concepts and Policies*, April 21, 2009.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1759-3441.2009.00001.x>.

government has developed a Housing Finance Corporation, which is able to provide credit for lower income families.¹³ This program is revolutionary for its time, because UN SDG #9, Target 9.3 seeks to promote the use of increased access to affordable credit. Similarly, Canada has a government funded program that provides quality affordable homes.¹⁴ According to Enterprise's report on the impact of affordable housing on communities, "affordable housing helps to create a stable environment."¹⁵ By analyzing the needs of their citizens, Georgetown County is directly supporting UN SDG #10: Reduced Inequalities. Additionally, Georgetown County is directly working to fulfill UN SDG #9: Industries, Innovation, and Infrastructure, by developing plans to build more affordable housing. This chart, created by results from a recent survey, indicates that affordable housing is of high concern for many Georgetown citizens. Further adopting affordable housing policies allows all demographics of Georgetown to achieve greater equality and sustainability.¹⁶

¹³ "Republic of Korea | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed June 2, 2022. <https://sdgs.un.org/statements/republic-korea-9314>

¹⁴ "Canada | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed June 2, 2022. <https://sdgs.un.org/statements/canada-9429>.

¹⁵ "Impact of Affordable Housing on Families and Communities." Accessed June 2, 2022. <https://homeforallsmc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Impact-of-Affordable-Housing-on-Families-and-Communities.pdf>.

¹⁶ Chart was found directly on the survey results from updating Georgetown's Land Use Plan. More information can be found: <http://www.gtcounty.org/396/Comprehensive-Plan-Update>

Figure 1: Topics of Importance to Georgetown County citizens

	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	TOTAL
Quality Affordable Housing	43.55% 794	38.40% 700	18.05% 329	1,823
Commercial opportunities (shopping, restaurants, etc.)	49.70% 903	24.33% 442	25.98% 472	1,817
County Services and Public Safety (Public Works, Fire, Sheriff's Office, etc.)	25.60% 469	72.98% 1,337	1.42% 26	1,832
Culture, History and the Arts	46.52% 848	47.50% 866	5.98% 109	1,823
Parks and Recreation	43.04% 785	53.18% 970	3.78% 69	1,824
Infrastructure (Roads, other modes of transportation)	26.82% 491	70.40% 1,289	2.79% 51	1,831
Job Opportunities/Better paying jobs	42.46% 774	44.71% 815	12.84% 234	1,823
Open Space/Conservation/Wetlands and Natural Resource Protection	22.37% 410	74.63% 1,368	3.00% 55	1,833
Preserving agricultural land and maintaining rural character	31.62% 578	59.90% 1,095	8.48% 155	1,828
Maintaining the character of existing neighborhoods	31.21% 572	62.19% 1,140	6.60% 121	1,833
Maintaining and improving hurricane evacuation routes	36.84% 675	57.26% 1,049	5.90% 108	1,832

Neighboring cities and counties of Georgetown are working to solve similar affordable housing dilemmas. The City of Greenville's affordable housing model demonstrated many of the ideas implemented in Georgetown's updated Land Use Element and Housing Element.

Greenville is unique due to its commitment towards a set percentage of required affordable housing for new developments. For every \$25,000 the city invests into development, at least one affordable unit must be offered. Additionally, Greenville offers flexible financing to help the county meet their affordability goals of 3,000 affordable homes and 10,000 affordable housing units over the next decade.¹⁷ This city goal aligns directly with UN SDG #9: Industries, Innovation, and Infrastructure, Target 9.2 of increasing affordable housing by 2030. This chart is

¹⁷ "Incentives." Incentives | Greenville, SC - Official Website. Accessed June 1, 2022. <https://www.greenville.sc.gov/1640/Incentives>.

beneficial to Georgetown because it provides information of nearby county’s affordable housing programs based on their citizens' incomes.¹⁸ By collecting information from neighboring areas, we are able to establish the importance of incentivizing affordable housing to Georgetown County. This also allows Georgetown to work toward UN SDG#17: Partnerships for the Goals. By working together, Georgetown and its neighboring cities/counties can work together to achieve their goals set within the Comprehensive Plan.

Figure 2: Incomes of Greenville Renters (2000 – 2014)

Incomes of Greenville Renters, 2000-2014

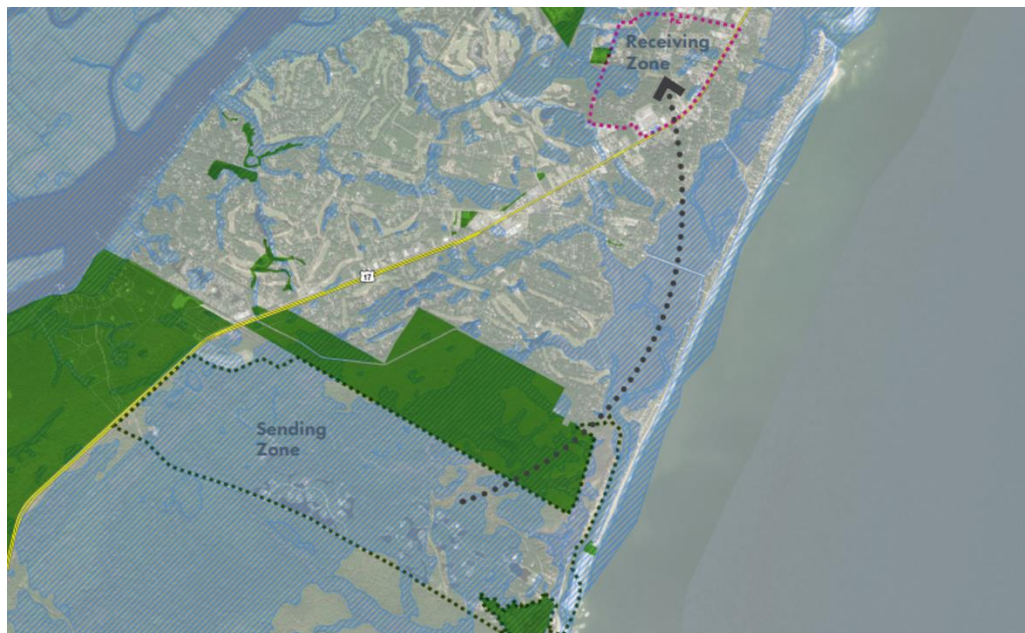
	2000	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
All Renter Households	12,960	13,013	13,037	13,601	13,641	14,086	14,749
<\$20,000	5,127	5,241	5,090	4,962	4,972	5,100	5,385
\$20,000 - \$24,999	1,329	1,423	1,223	1,371	1,406	1,383	1,198
\$25,000 - \$34,999	2,260	1,946	1,934	2,165	1,940	2,001	2,132
\$35,000 - \$49,999	2,032	1,766	1,763	1,694	1,837	1,835	1,942
\$50,000 - \$74,999	1,391	1,469	1,413	1,565	1,608	1,709	1,979
\$75,000+	821	1,168	1,614	1,844	1,878	2,058	2,113
<\$20,000	40%	40%	39%	36%	36%	36%	37%
\$20,000 - \$24,999	10%	11%	9%	10%	10%	10%	8%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	17%	15%	15%	16%	14%	14%	14%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	16%	14%	14%	12%	13%	13%	13%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	11%	11%	11%	12%	12%	12%	13%
\$75,000+	6%	9%	12%	14%	14%	15%	14%

As mentioned previously, Transfer Develop Rights (TDR), works to preserve agricultural

¹⁸ “SC-Greenville2.Civicplus.com.” Affordable Housing Steering Committee, September 2016. <https://sc-greenville2.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/11456/Balancing-Prosperity-and-Housing-Affordability-in-Greenville>.

land while promoting the development of areas that can support growth. A model example of the number one nationally ranked TDR program comes from Montgomery County, Maryland. Montgomery has preserved over 50,000 acres through TDR's and saved their county a projected \$65 million in development costs.¹⁹ As seen in "Figure 4", the protection of natural resources of various types ranks "very important" to its community members.²⁰ By implementing a TDR program here in Georgetown County, the OPZ would be working towards UN SDG #11 by simultaneously tackling issues in rapid urbanization and natural resource protection. This is demonstrated in "Figure 3" through the protection of natural resources in the sending zone and supported growth within the receiving zone. If implemented here in Georgetown County, this solution could function as a model sustainable community for others to follow around the world.

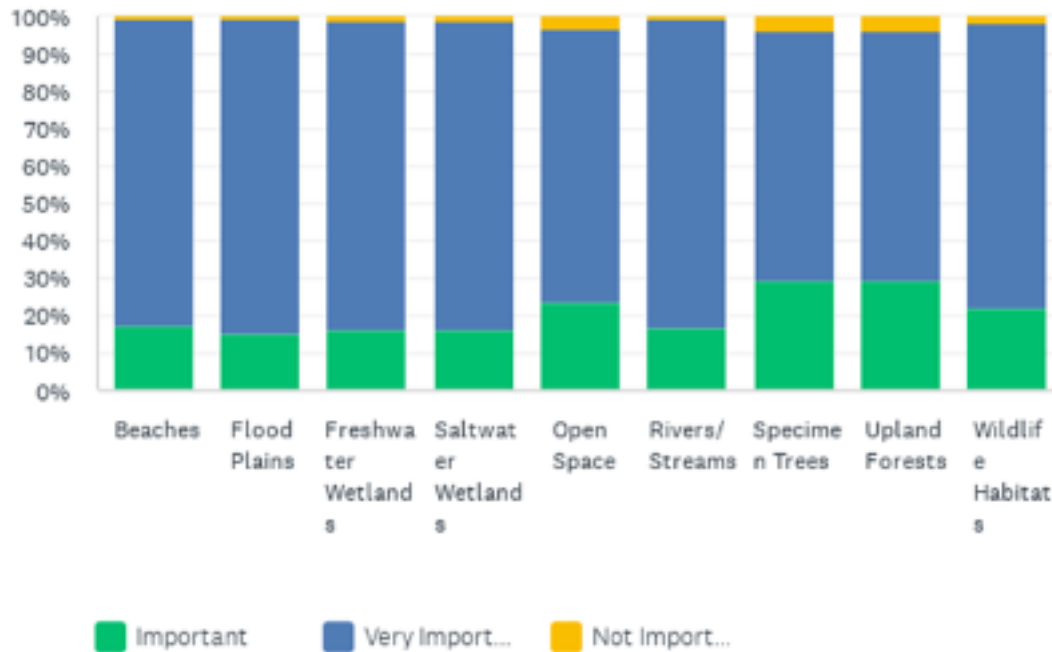
Figure 3: Potential Sending/Receiving Zones for New TDR Program



¹⁹ Walls, Margaret, and Virginia McConnell. "Transfer of Development Rights in U.S. Communities." Transfer of Development Rights in U.S. Communities. Resources for the Future, September 2007. https://media.rff.org/documents/Walls_McConnell_Sep_07_TDR_Report.pdf.

²⁰ Taken directly from the Land Use Survey Report feedback. More information can be found here: <http://www.gtcounty.org/396/Comprehensive-Plan-Update>

Figure 4: Importance of Protecting Natural Resources



Recommendations:

During my time with the Georgetown County Office of Planning and Zoning, I noticed that our policies are a few years behind that of neighboring counties and cities. For example, a majority of the affordable housing items that were updated in Georgetown’s Comprehensive plan came directly from policies already in place from areas such as Greenville or Spartanburg. Additionally, one of my assignments was to explore options to begin controlling growth within Georgetown County. However, the solution I found, called Transfer Development Rights (TDR), has been in place in Beaufort County for over 10 years now. Since these comprehensive plans are required to be updated every 10 years, increased communication with local Planning Departments may help to improve the document. By promoting effective public partnerships, Georgetown County would be following under target 17.7 with goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

Conclusion:

Georgetown County is comprised of several types of land, ranging anywhere from public to private. Any development or agricultural use of land can have potential effects on both environmental and human health. The Comprehensive Plan for Georgetown County allows the county to better prepare for the sustainable development of its land. Even more so, the Land Use element and Housing Element allow for public input on what aspects of the County are most important to its residents, such as affordable housing. Additionally, these reports help to properly educate its residents on ways to continue to help Georgetown's economic and cultural activities thrive. This helps to create a community that residents can be proud of. By combining viable future land use policy, alongside the county's input, The Planning and Zoning Department is working towards cultivating a sustainable model for Georgetown County and the rest of the World to follow.

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