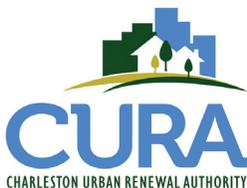




AN OVERVIEW OF THE CITY'S REDEVELOPMENT PLAN





A Message from Mayor Danny Jones



Thank you for taking time to review this summary of Imagine Charleston. I was very pleased with the community response to our efforts to create a new comprehensive plan for our entire city and a revitalization plan for our downtown. In the pages that follow, you will have a chance to explore the highlights of our planning efforts and some of the vision for the future that we share.

Charleston has been blessed with many people who have looked at existing situations and asked questions that started with "What if ...?" What if we were to try something new? What if we were to do things differently?

What if we could learn from successes in other places and apply those lessons here?

In the past 12 years, that kind of thinking has led to the creation of FestivALL Charleston, the opening of Appalachian Power Park, free Friday evening concerts "Live on the Levee," the creation of the Schoenbaum Stage and renovation of Haddad Riverfront Park, renovation of much of our city's affordable housing, nine years – and counting – of the region's largest classic car show, a greater emphasis on arts and culture, and much, much more.

Imagine Charleston invited people to ask more "What if ...?" questions. I am grateful that people from every neighborhood of our City shared their dreams for our future together. You will find in these pages lots of creativity and a shared vision for what our community and individual neighborhoods might become. I hope you will join me in following up on the imagination and vision included here so that Charleston will continue to grow as a vibrant and vital place for people to live, visit and invest in the future.

Mayor Danny Jones

City Council's Vision for Charleston:

Charleston is the recreational, cultural, and business capital of the Appalachian Mountains.

Planning for Charleston's Future

Why a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is a document created by the City of Charleston Planning Department and adopted by the City Council to guide decisions on land use, development, and capital improvements. A sound Comprehensive Plan helps ensure that Charleston remains a highly desirable place to live, work, learn, or visit.

The Comprehensive Plan identifies and analyzes the city's physical elements to create a set of goals, policies, and recommendations to direct decisions regarding future land use, neighborhood and transportation improvements, and special strategies for key areas in the city. This plan strives to balance the interests and rights of individual private property owners with those of the entire community.

In looking at the cumulative and long-term impacts of individual decisions, this plan will assist city leaders in making substantive, thoughtful decisions for the next 10 to 20 years.

The Process

Individuals from a broad cross-section of the community's agencies, organizations, and businesses provided background information and ideas throughout the process. The Comprehensive Plan brought together these efforts, projects, and plans for the city and strived to develop a single set of prioritized recommendations into a unified vision.

The process began with a six member executive committee that worked daily with the consultants and an 80-member advisory committee that met with the consultants throughout the process. In gathering data and public input, city staff and the consultant team met with a variety of stakeholder groups; conducted one on one interviews;

held technical committee meetings on Neighborhood and Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure, Quality of Life, Downtown Business, and Downtown Living; conducted two community open houses; and used social media including a web page, Facebook, and Twitter. Based on comments received through the public involvement process, draft vision statements and goals were developed for each topic area and presented to the Advisory Committee and the general public. The consultant team then further developed the concepts and participated in a two-day design charrette with the Executive Committee. Upon agreement on the direction of the plan, the consulting team developed a draft plan which was reviewed by the Advisory Committee and general public. After consensus was reached, the Planning Commission held a public hearing, recommended adoption to the City Council, who in turn held a public hearing and adopted the plan in accordance with the West Virginia Planning Enabling Act.

Demographic Highlights

- Charleston's population peaked in the 1960's and has gradually declined since then.
- Baby Boomers are aging, impacting the need for affordable and accessible housing, medical services, and good public transit.
- There has been a slight increase in young adult age groups.
- The percentage of family households has decreased and the percentage of single and non-family households has increased.
- More than a third of Charleston residents over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Overall Goals

- Strong and sustainable neighborhoods
- Efficient and collaborative government
- Community events and recreational opportunities
- Sound and adequate infrastructure
- Business development and attraction

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Neighborhoods and Land Use

Overall Goals

- Rehabilitate and maintain existing housing stock
- Emphasize home stewardship
- Continue beautification efforts
- Promote appropriate infill development
- Reuse vacant or underutilized properties
- Maintain appropriate, safe traffic speeds
- Provide housing for varied needs and income levels
- Continue to build neighborhood identity

Neighborhoods are the heart and soul of Charleston. They are diverse and dynamic places with unique characteristics, recognized by both residents and the community at large. Each has a strong identity that helps define Charleston as a desirable place to live and invest. A neighborhood includes not just houses, but schools, parks, and businesses that combine to make each neighborhood unique.

Healthy neighborhoods do not come about by accident; maintaining healthy sustainable neighborhoods takes conscious, proactive decisions by non-profit organizations, community leaders, government, private sector partners, institutions, and the public. By examining current trends and character patterns, we can plan for a Charleston that builds upon neighborhood strengths and enhances them for future generations. Charleston's neighborhoods are a key asset: each one is special, with a character that its residents wish to protect and enhance.

Having this diversity is important because a resident can choose to live in Charleston, yet move from one neighborhood to another as their or their family's needs change over time. Public workshop participants overwhelmingly supported Charleston's strong neighborhood identities and broad consensus was reached to preserve and enhance Charleston's quality of life and livability through a vision for its neighborhoods, highlighted at right.

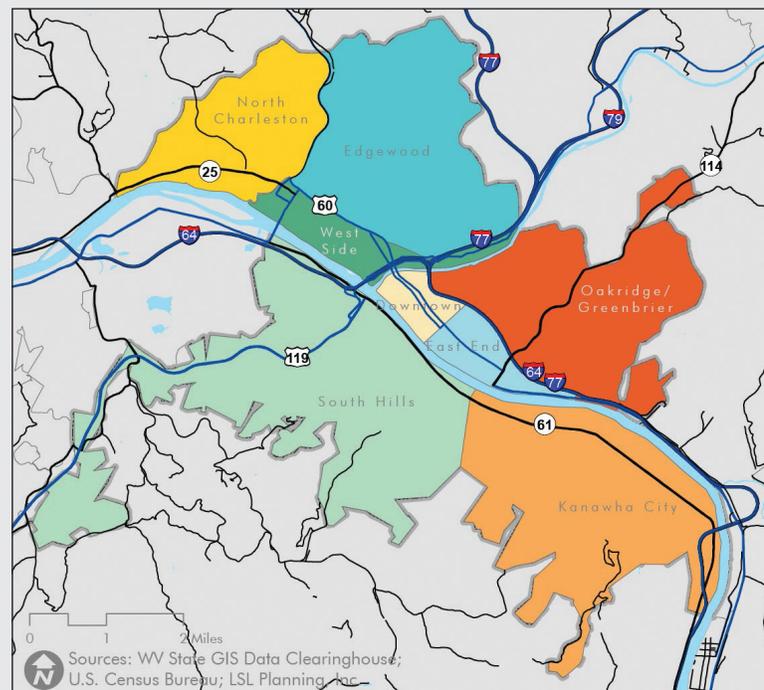
The differences between Charleston's neighborhoods are a strength; however, to remain vital they must continue to accommodate residents at varying stages of life and income levels. In order for some neighborhoods to prosper, they must adapt to remain appealing places to live. This section addresses the challenges Charleston's neighborhoods face and what can be done to support their unique character and ensure long-term viability.

Key strategies include:

Preserve, Enhance, Transform

While Charleston's land use patterns are well established, certain adjustments and improvements are needed. However, these actions must be considered within the context of neighborhood and district character. To that end, Charleston's character was analyzed using such indicators as street configuration, block size, building location and form, parking, and lot size. Along with public input received throughout the process in the form of mapping exercises, this analysis has led to a framework for recommendations based on the concepts of preserve, enhance, and transform.

That process helped identify features that shape a positive image of Charleston, not only for



residents, but also visitors. These are the features that must be preserved or enhanced to make Charleston an even more desirable place. Other less desirable characteristics were also identified and have a much different impact on community perceptions. These are the areas or area characteristics that must be either significantly changed or completely transformed.

Provide **safe, walkable, vibrant neighborhoods** with **distinct identities**, and **strong connections** between commercial districts, residences, and green spaces.

- Dealing with vacant properties by creating a land bank, pocket parks, and side lot programs;
- Exploring temporary uses for vacant property such as community gardens, neighborhood open space, and infill development;
- Creating infill housing guidelines and applying appropriate density standards for each neighborhood;
- Encouraging home stewardship and holding absentee landlords accountable;
- Supporting and partnering with non-profits to strengthen and expand current programs that provide hands-on education and training for home maintenance and repairs;
- Enforcing local property maintenance, building and zoning codes;
- Encouraging mixed-use development that combines residential and commercial uses whose functions are physically and functionally integrated;
- Creating diverse housing options for all generations and for a variety of income levels;
- Commercial rightsizing by decreasing the amount of available commercially zoned land that takes into account population loss and the revolutionary changes that the “big box” retailers have had on the smaller independent stores;
- Increasing commercial site design requirements to upgrade the aesthetic appeal of the built environment and to adhere to best practices in urban design relating to building placement, lighting, landscaping, buffering, parking, and pedestrian walkability;
- Creating an adaptive reuse ordinance that streamlines processes and reduces timeframes, and cost savings to developers looking to adapt older buildings for new uses and land preservation through conservation easements, planned unit developments, and greenway master planning.

Residents celebrate the fact that Charleston’s neighborhoods are varied and those characteristics help define areas to preserve, enhance, or transform.

One Potential Development Concept: Patrick Street Gateway



Transportation and Infrastructure

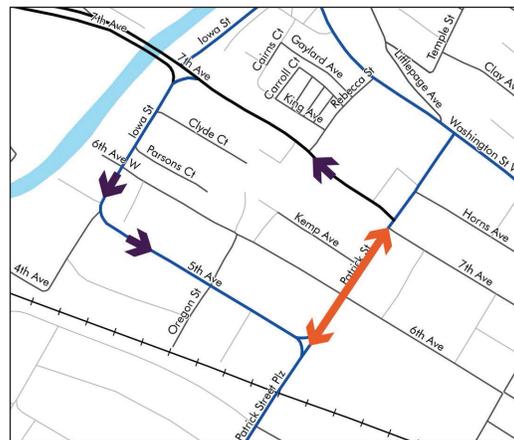
Overall Goals

- Improve wayfinding for visitors and ease of circulation downtown
- Improve and promote public transit as a more viable alternative to driving
- Provide a network of bike trails and routes to make it comfortable and easy for people of all ages and abilities to walk or bicycle throughout the city and link with neighboring communities
- Provide a comfortable and well-maintained sidewalk and trail system, where physically practical, especially to access downtown, institutions, and schools
- Improve safety through adequate street lighting that complements the character of the street
- Continue efforts to reduce the severity of flooding impacts
- Upgrade sewer system to separate sanitary from stormwater, as funding permits, to increase capacity and reduce negative environmental impacts
- Be a regional leader in technology, promoting citywide WiFi and a centralized GIS database
- Enhance safety and flow for vehicles and trucks

Charleston's residents and businesses must have reliable transportation and basic public services in order to work and live. This includes roads, walks and transit, as well as services such as water, sewer, stormwater and solid waste removal.

Our streets are also among the most important physical features defining our city, determining how we and our visitors perceive our commercial and residential areas. Many of our streets are not attractive and that affects each of us more than we realize. It also helps determine the value of property and the ability of our city to attract residents and businesses.

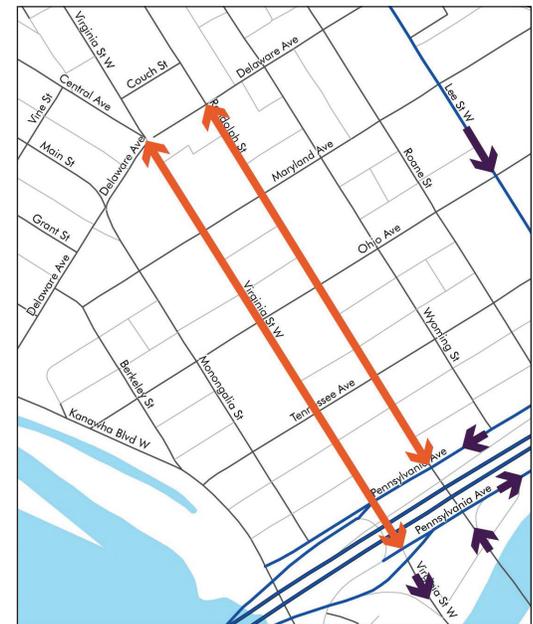
The Comprehensive Plan calls for us to "Provide a safe and convenient transportation system that offers travel choices and balances the needs of all users and provide quality infrastructure, gradually upgrading the system



One-way streets are bad for the businesses along them because customers can only come from one direction and have difficulty planning their route. It is confusing. Also, the emphasis on moving traffic results in speeding and many more left turn movements – actually increasing traffic in dense areas such as downtown.

to reduce negative impacts on the environment and public health."

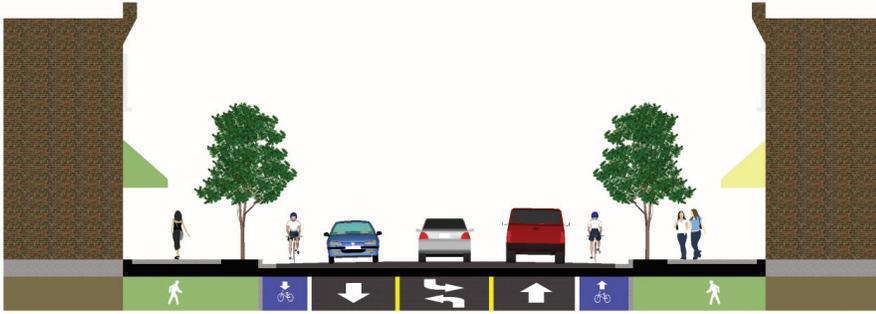
Cities across the country are taking a "complete streets" approach to improving their roads, providing room for walkers, bikers and landscaping as well as automobiles. The key to this approach is making our streets feel safe for all forms of travel, including the pedestrian. The City has begun to implement this approach by designing pedestrian and bicycle improvements on Kanawha Boulevard West from the Elk River to Patrick Street. MacCorkle Avenue in Kanawha City is also being designed for a more balanced corridor, one that is safer and more attractive.



Park and Ride

One way to to reduce congestion and the demand for parking, especially downtown and at the capital complex and other institutions, is to implement a park and ride system. Key employers can map the locations of their employees' residences to see if there are patterns where a park and ride service could capture those riders. Sometimes large retailers with excess parking are willing to advertise their lots as carpool or park and ride locations.

The Complete Street approach



Complete Streets is a transportation policy and design approach that requires streets to be planned and designed to enable travel and for users regardless of their mode of transportation. Complete Streets allow for safe travel by those walking, bicycling, driving automobiles, or riding public transportation.

Kanawha Boulevard, West Pedestrian and Bikeway Improvements

The City of Charleston has completed the conceptual design for a new bike and pedestrian improvement along Kanawha Boulevard, West from the Elk River to Patrick Street. By simply reducing the width of each overly wide lane, enough room is created to add a two-way bikeway and pedestrian path. This is another example of a “complete street.”



The city is commissioning a bicycling master plan with the goal of providing a safe and attractive non-motorized network for walking and bicycling for people of all ages and physical abilities.

Provide a **safe and convenient transportation system** that offers **travel choices** and balances the needs of all users; provide **quality infrastructure**, gradually upgrading the system to **reduce negative impacts** on the environment and public health.

Quality of Life



Overall Goals

- Plan and promote changes that lead to healthy foods and physical activity opportunities
- Promote access to local foods
- Ensure high-quality municipal services
- Support greenway development and use
- Promote active lifestyles in safe, attractive recreation facilities
- Proactively market Charleston's many assets
- Promote lifelong learning and a highly skilled workforce
- Reinforce the city's reputation as an entertainment and cultural destination
- Build on existing successful social services
- Make the most of Charleston's rich history as the state's capital

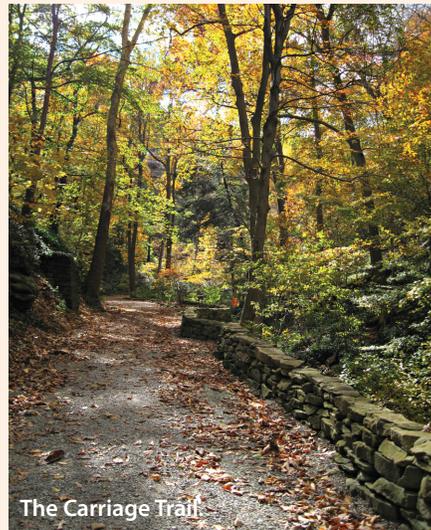
Quality of life can be described as how satisfied an individual is with their community and how well it fits their "happiness needs". Cities perceived to have a good quality of life are typically safe, have available jobs and good schools, plenty of access to parks, a clean environment, and abundant cultural and entertainment opportunities.

Those types of quality of life indicators are important to the future and stability of

Charleston. A high quality of life in Charleston will help attract businesses and potential residents to sustain the vitality and diversity of its economy.

Throughout the planning process, residents consistently commented on how much they like living in Charleston for its small-town yet big-city charm, close proximity to nature, and quick commute times around the city.

Planning for Green Infrastructure



The Carriage Trail

"Green infrastructure" means connecting natural resources and linking them to human activity zones, increasing property values and recreation opportunities as well as improving air and water quality.

The Imagine Charleston Plan recommends additional mini and neighborhood parks to serve residents, ball fields and play courts for organized sports, upgrades to playgrounds to meet national guidelines, trail development, and reuse of vacant commercial property for recreation and open space.

The plan also recommends developing an overall park plan with recommendations for improvements and replacement of park and recreation facilities.

Charleston appeals to a wide range of people to **live, visit, do business, learn, and have fun** because of its offerings in culture, education, tourism, recreation, and **public/private/institutional collaboration** as the region's anchor.

Downtown Livability



Charleston EDGE will be an impact incubator that simultaneously cultivates new leadership, reinvigorates our urban center and provides area businesses and institutions with a competitive edge in recruitment and retention. Participants will live in the complex at affordable rents and be guided through a structurally dynamic program over a three year period that is designed to: introduce them to our community's current leaders, institutions, and conditions; guide them to identify and formulate solutions that will make significant social, economic, or civic impacts in our community; identify resources to implement their creative solutions; and mentor them through execution of their plans.

This effort will not only result in early impact "wins," but will provide the experience, competencies, credibility, and confidence to remain engaged as effective leaders of transformative change in our community long after the initial program commitment is concluded. To facilitate the proposed program, the facility will need to include collaborative and social spaces to draw the participants out of their individual residential units. These spaces will include fitness space, conference space, and social spaces (a club room and an amenity deck).



Live on the Levee



FestivALL Charleston



Capitol Market

Downtown

Overall Goals

Business

- Coordinate efforts for marketing and management
- Preserve character and rich historic assets
- Establish niche districts
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections with adjacent neighborhoods
- Enhance roadways to promote alternative modes of transit
- Improve access by enhancing parking

Livability

- Promote downtown housing mixed-use development
- Enhance public spaces with new green spaces, improved lighting, and traffic calming measures
- Encourage riverfront development, including living, shopping, dining, entertainment, and recreational opportunities
- Implement a public relations campaign to inform the public of downtown safety and livability

The Downtown Redevelopment Plan is a long term vision for downtown, building upon prior initiatives and taking into account ongoing and future planned developments. It focuses on two main overarching goals:

1. Downtown Business – Bring a progressive business culture to Downtown Charleston through strategic real estate development, public/private partnership, professional management, business retention and targeted business recruitment.
2. Downtown Livability – Create an exceptional living environment in the urban core of Charleston through significant improvements to the quality of public spaces and the perception of safety while incentivizing investment toward renovated and new housing development.

Using the Master Plan

The Downtown Redevelopment Plan is organized into Six Big Ideas. Big Idea One focuses on committing local resources for a successful downtown redevelopment program. Efforts to pull together the key stakeholders and funding sources are currently underway and will continue throughout the life of the plan.

Big Idea Two is focused on reshaping the built environment of downtown Charleston

by creating niche districts, context-sensitive urban design standards, elevating the architectural character of new buildings and adopting the “complete streets” approach to enhancing the street network and supporting pedestrian zones and activity areas.

Utilizing Charleston’s impressive history and river city location to leverage economic development is the main focus of Big Idea Three. It encourages embracing historic preservation, re-engaging with the Kanawha and Elk Rivers and promoting sustainable development practices.

Big Idea Four embraces a district identity system for the downtown and continuous retail and entertainment destinations including an emphasis on Slack Plaza and Brawley Walkway.

Treating the urban core as an important Charleston neighborhood is Big Idea Five. This promotes the downtown’s livability, exploring opportunities for housing and mixed use development such as the proposed EDGE project.

Finally, establishing an urban core management authority through the creation of a Business Improvement District is Big Idea Six. The Business Improvement District will be a quasi-public organization formed by property owners who have agreed to an assessment on their property to generate revenue for services and capital improvements within a defined district.



Downtown Charleston is **active** as a center of government, commerce, culture, and entertainment; **creative**, with a variety of cultural activities; **appealing** to expanding or relocating businesses; **inviting** to residents and visitors; **historic; accessible**; and **close to nature**.

Success by Degrees: Using a Phased Approach to Implement the Redesign of a Target Area

Capitol Street is one of six target areas chosen for major downtown redevelopment opportunities. The other five are the Appalachian Power Park area, the Lee and Quarrier Street area, Slack Plaza and Brawley Walkway, the Civic District, and Kanawha Boulevard. Following a Master Plan, each target area achieves its full potential over time, with step-by-step improvements progressively contributing to Charleston's overall vitality and livability.



The photo to the left shows Capitol Street as it exists today.

The view below shows potential infill development in existing off-street parking areas, enhanced sidewalk paving, parking lot screening, light poles with energy-efficient lighting, banners, outdoor dining areas, and pedestrian walkways. This illustrates Capitol Street's potential in the intermediate phase.



Completed development, below, includes full potential build-out with commercial spaces on ground floor level and office/residential space above, parking behind buildings, outdoor dining and pedestrian areas, added greenspace, and a potential bike lane.



Best Practices

Urban Parks

Connect urban parks with sidewalks and trails and provide them with a variety of amenities. Keep them well maintained, safe and secure and signed appropriately.

Retail

Focus on building design and materials, landscaping and ground floor storefronts.

Housing

Higher density housing mix is preferred using quality design and materials. Connectivity to sidewalks, trails, recreation and retail are key.

Parking

Improve architectural detail to parking garages and encourage first floor as retail uses. Landscaping, signage and screening must be considered.

Streets

Streets must be designed for pedestrian activities within a vibrant mixed-use environment – including lighting, amenities, and signage for all forms of traffic.

Riverfront

Connecting to downtown and area trails and bike paths is ideal. Activities offered for both daytime and nighttime uses will create excitement along the riverfront.

Green Infrastructure

Sustainable stormwater management system, including rain gardens and bioswales, should be encouraged.

Signage/Wayfinding

Consistent signage should be used for placemaking and branding of districts.



IMAGINE CHARLESTON

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