

# AWENDAW

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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*A Plan for Our Future & Our Way of Life*

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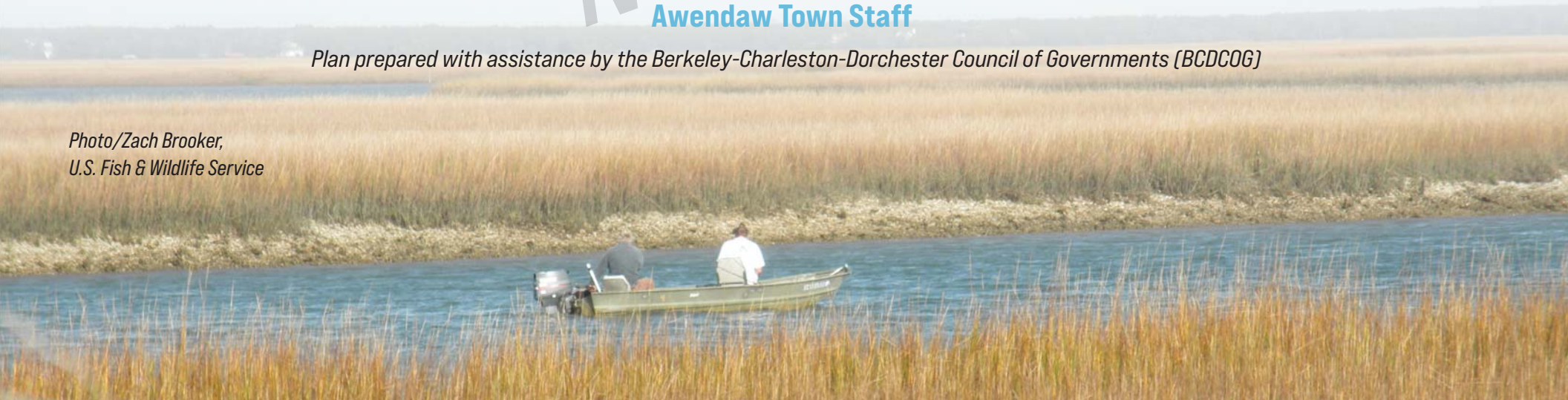
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*Plan prepared with assistance by the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG)*

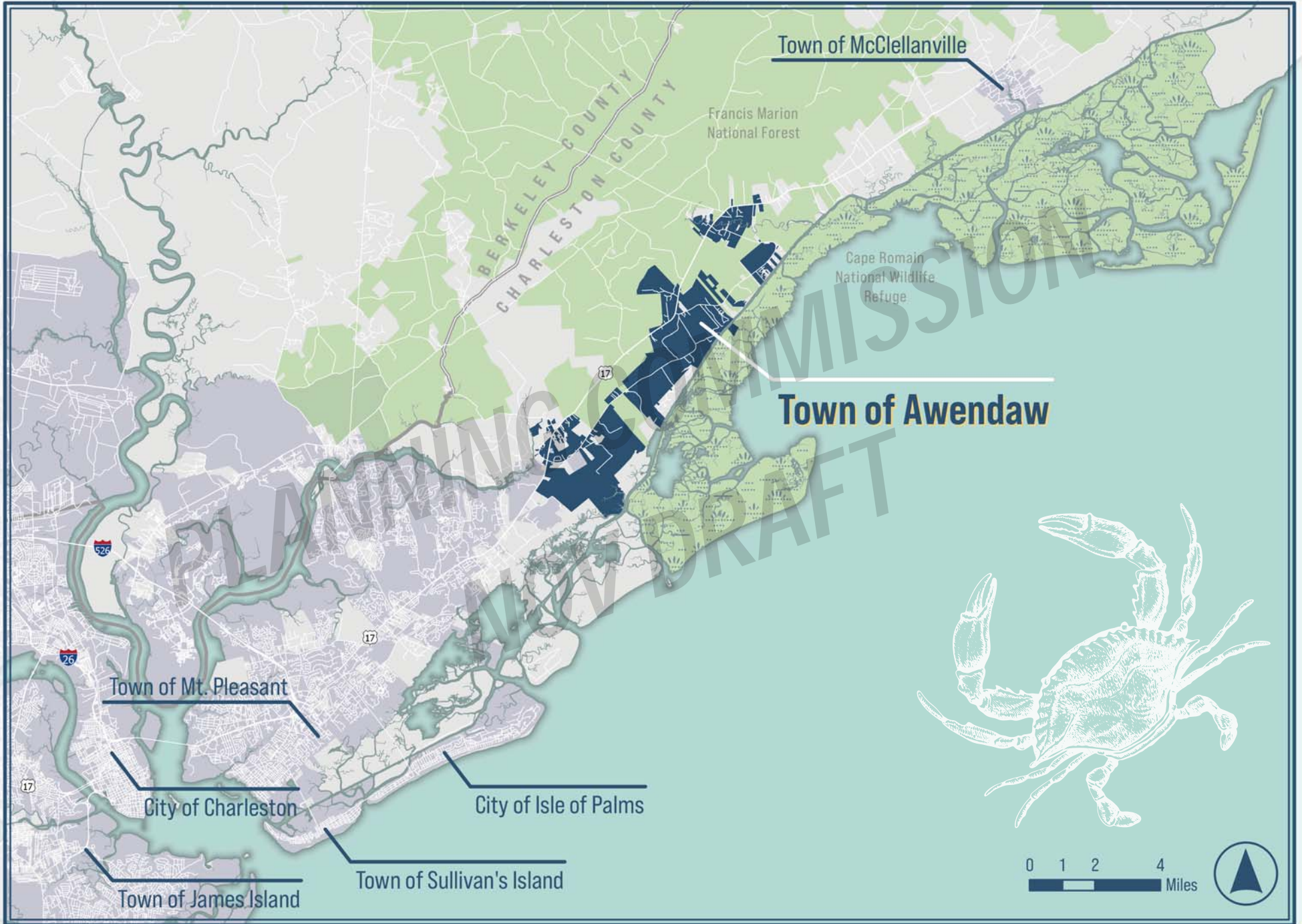
*Photo/Zach Brooker,  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*



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# SETTING THE SCENE

## LOCATION

The Town of Awendaw is a rural community located in Charleston County, South Carolina, approximately 18 miles northeast of the Charleston Harbor. Despite being one of the oldest settlements in the region (1696), the Town was incorporated in 1992 and is therefore one of the newer incorporated municipalities in the County. In 2020, Awendaw had an area of approximately 16 square miles, or about 10,200 acres, nearly doubling in size since 2000. Less than one percent of Awendaw's area is water, however, there are three primary waterways within or adjacent to the Town, those being the Atlantic Intercoastal Waterway, Wando River, and Awendaw Creek. US Highway 17 (US 17), which parallels the Intercoastal Waterway, is Awendaw's primary access point to other parts of the region. US 17 provides connections to nearby municipalities like Mt. Pleasant, the City of Charleston, and McClellanville. These municipalities, along with Awendaw and others, are all a part of the US Census-designated Charleston-North Charleston Metropolitan Statistical Area. This metro area comprises the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester tri-county region (BCD Region).

Lastly, one of the most important aspects of Awendaw's location is the Town's proximity to two of the most diverse and scenic natural areas in the Lowcountry – the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and the Francis Marion National Forest. The proximity to these natural areas is perhaps the most significant influence on future economic and land use policies and recommendations.



*Sewee Shell Ring Boardwalk. (Photo/U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)*



*Lila Managault and Berta Leary relocate a Loggerhead nest in Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. (Photo/U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Sarah Dawsey)*

## LOCAL HISTORY

Before the European settlement of South Carolina, the Awendaw area was inhabited by various tribes of Native Americans, namely the Sewee tribe. Most tribes followed a seasonal migratory pattern, residing near the coast during the summer months and moving inland during the winter months. While in the Awendaw area during the summer months, the Sewee people foraged land and water resources for survival, even using Bulls Island, then known as Oseiseau, as hunting and fishing grounds. The aptly named Sewee Shell Ring is one of several remnants in the Lowcountry of the local tribes' seasonal migratory patterns. Archeological evidence of the Sewee Shell Ring suggests that the shell mound dates back 4,000 years.

In 1696, 26 years after the founding of Charles Town, migrants from Salem, Massachusetts landed in the Awendaw area and began a small settlement originally known as Wappetaw. This name, however, did not stick as eventually the settlement was renamed Awendaw by the Sewee tribe. Shortly thereafter (est. 1700 +/- five years), on a naval expedition to reach England to establish better trading prices, most of the able-bodied Sewee men were either lost at sea or rescued and sold into slavery in the Caribbeans. The remaining Sewee people settled and integrated with the neighboring Wando tribe. According to Indians of the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1562-1751, the Sewee tribe was first mentioned in historical texts in 1670 and last mentioned in 1716.

Although the exploitation of Awendaw's water resources like fish and shellfish was the area's primary export, the cultivation of rice, indigo, and cotton also contributed to the local economy before the Civil War. It was common in the rural coastal areas, like Awendaw, for the enslaved African people to work and live in isolation on the plantations for several months of the year. Over time, this led to the creation of the Gullah Geechee culture, a unique Creole culture with deep ties to Central and West African heritage while also absorbing new influences from the Lowcountry. Awendaw, along with the entire South Carolina coast, is within the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, established by Congress in 2006.



Throughout the twentieth century, Awendaw remained a small rural community, experiencing little change. However, the area around Awendaw experienced two significant changes with the establishment of the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge in 1924 and the Francis Marion National Forest in 1936. Now sandwiched between two federally protected lands, this sets the foundation for Awendaw to become a recreational and environmental gateway for the Cape Romain and Francis Marion. Decades later, Awendaw gained national attention in 1989 as Hurricane Hugo, a Category 4 hurricane, made landfall ten miles south at Sullivans Island. Between the 140 mph wind speeds and the record-setting 20 ft storm surges along Sewee Bay, Hurricane Hugo nearly leveled the Town, destroyed millions of trees in the Francis Marion, and killed or displaced countless animals in Cape Romain and the Francis Marion.

After about 300 years of consistent inhabitation, the Awendaw community was officially incorporated in 1992 as the Town of Awendaw. The current Town Hall, built in 1939 after the original building was destroyed in a fire, has been the site for numerous community functions, such as for administrative offices, a meeting location for civic groups, a polling site for elections, and a local park and playground. Beginning in 1997, the Town of Awendaw hosts the annual Blue Crab Festival at the end of every summer. This is the largest Town event held throughout the year and since 2015, has been held at the recently acquired 300-acre Town Park located along Doar Road.



## INTRODUCTION

Awendaw's location has been one of the most influential factors in the history and formation of the Town. Various groups of people throughout history, including the Sewee Indians, European settlers, and Gullah Geechee people, have relied upon nature as a means for survival and a way of life. This synergy between man and nature has since been a calling card for the community as Awendaw's strength comes from the abundance and quality of natural resources in the area. Especially now, many of Awendaw's most unique and character-defining features and resources revolve around the rural nature of the community and the rural lifestyle of the residents.

However, the Town of Awendaw is currently at an inflection point. The Town's long-standing harmonious relationship between man and nature is under threat by the recent increase in urban sprawl and the adverse environmental impacts of urban and suburban-style development. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Town of Awendaw has experienced an unprecedented amount of growth. In 2000, Awendaw had an estimated population of 1,265 people. Fast-forward twenty years and the population increased by 38%, or by about 500 people to 1,744 people by 2020. Although Awendaw remains a primarily rural community, there were over 700 housing units approved for development in the Awendaw area between 2020 and 2022 alone.

Given these population and housing trends, the need for a unifying vision of the Town's future is crucial in maintaining the rural character, community identity, and natural way of life in Awendaw. This plan will help formulate this unifying vision and provide guidance on how community leaders and residents can work to achieve their desired outcomes.

*Note: Due to Awendaw's irregular shape, the resources and assets discussed throughout this plan may or may not be located directly within the incorporated Town limits but rather in the greater Awendaw area.*

## INTRODUCTION

# PURPOSE OF A COMP PLAN

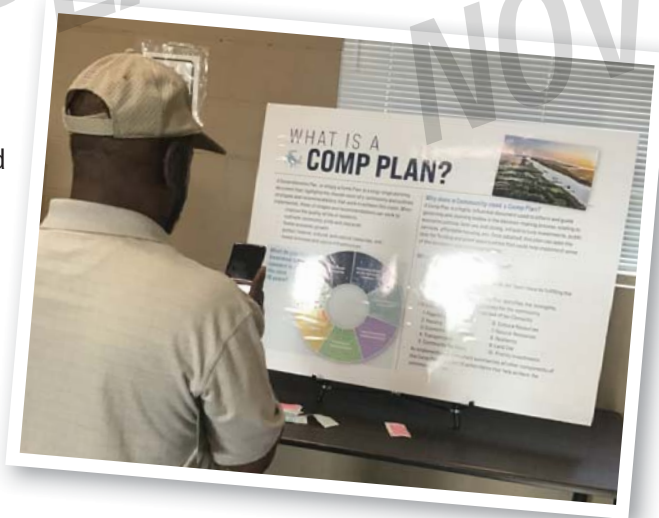
A Comprehensive Plan, or simply a Comp Plan, is a long-range planning document that highlights the shared vision of a community and outlines strategies and recommendations that work to achieve this vision. When implemented, these strategies and recommendations can work to:

- Improve the quality of life of residents
- Cultivate community pride and character
- Foster economic growth
- Protect historic, cultural, & natural resources, and
- Invest in human and capital infrastructure.

The 1994 State Comprehensive Planning Act, (S.C. Code §6-29-310 - §6-29-380) requires local municipalities to form a Planning Commission and facilitate a comprehensive planning process every ten years with updates recommended every five years. Awendaw's last comp plan update was in 2015.

# WHY DOES A COMMUNITY NEED A COMP PLAN?

A Comp Plan is a highly influential document used to inform and guide governing and planning bodies in the decision-making process relating to economic policies, land use, and zoning, infrastructure investments, public services, affordable/attainable housing, etc. Once adopted, this plan can open the door for funding and grant opportunities that could help implement some of these strategies and recommendations.



# WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A COMP PLAN?

Although state law requires certain components to be included in every comp plan update, the planning process allows for communities to impose their individualistic style and methodology to create a plan that embodies the vision and character of their community. Awendaw, being a primarily rural community, can have a plan focused on preserving and enhancing the rural character, identity, and lifestyle that the community has cultivated over time, while still addressing the changing demographics, housing affordability, and environmental concerns. A comp plan should include the following components:

- A vision statement that reflects the community's shared vision for the future
- A list of guiding principles that help focus the plan on a few top themes
- An inventory of existing conditions and trends which will help identify the strengths, weaknesses, and areas of opportunity for the Town to capitalize on.

The 10 required elements of a Comp Plan include:

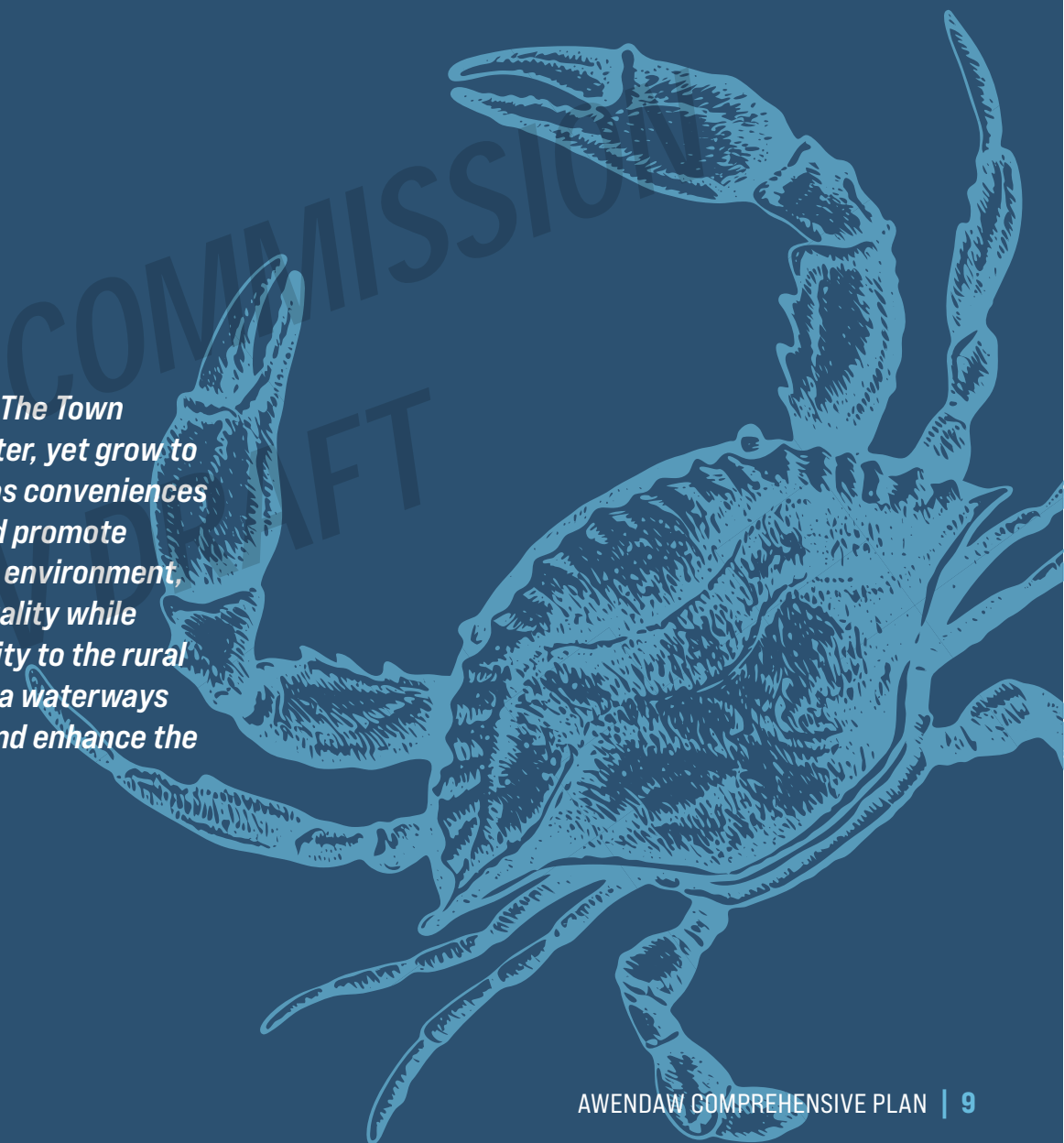
- Population
- Housing
- Cultural Resources
- Natural Resources
- Resiliency
- Community Facilities
- Economic Development
- Transportation
- Land Use
- Priority Investments
- An Implementation or Action Plan that will outline a list of strategies, policies, and other recommendations with the relevant stakeholders and timeframe
- Future Land Use recommendations, including future land use designations and maps, that are created using existing land use patterns and input from the general public, stakeholders, the Steering Committee, Planning Commission, and Town Council.



## TOWN VISION STATEMENT

IN 1998, THE AWENDAW TOWN COUNCIL  
ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING VISION STATEMENT:

*“Managed growth is the key to Awendaw’s future. The Town should strive to maintain the existing rural character, yet grow to a moderate-density residential community that has conveniences and some light industrial areas. This growth should promote compatible economic development, safeguard the environment, preserve open space, and protect the aesthetic quality while enhancing safe, healthy living conditions. Sensitivity to the rural character of Awendaw and the preservation of area waterways and forests will sustain the natural environment and enhance the quality of life of our citizens.”*



# 2023 COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Comprehensive Plan is based on Ten Guiding Principles that will protect and enhance the natural beauty and rural lifestyle of the Town. The Comprehensive Plan elements directly support and implement these principles:

## 1. COMMUNITY CHARACTER

The Awendaw Community is dedicated to preserving, enhancing, and restoring the Town's character as a rural, coastal, and forest community.

## 2. RURAL LIFESTYLE

The Awendaw Community recognizes and supports the fishing, wildlife, and forest lifestyles including the historic Gullah/Geechee people of the Town as unique and defining attributes.

## 3. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Awendaw Community seeks to preserve, protect, enhance, and restore the Town's riparian corridors, woodlands, and wetlands to protect its wildlife and natural habitat, and to maintain its scenic bay vistas and tranquil environment.

## 4. BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The Awendaw Community believes that the built environment should be subordinate, sensitive, and complementary to the natural environment, setting, and, specific site conditions to minimize disturbance to terrain, conserve visual resources, and protect open space. The Community supports low-country architectural and site design requirements that set forth community expectations and ensure quality.

## 5. RURAL DENSITY

The Awendaw Community strives to avoid the suburbanization of its Town by limiting rural residential density to a maximum of three units per acre in the densest locations at major roadway intersections called "village nodes" and then decreasing sharply as you move toward town peripheries. Planned communities will incorporate considerable open space and natural areas into their designs and will reflect the density of the underlying land use zoning.

## 6. CIRCULATION

The Awendaw Community promotes safe and convenient circulation for all modes of travel throughout the Town; on Town roads, trails, and paths.

## 7. COMMERCIAL SERVICES

The Awendaw Community desires commercial services and facilities that meet the frequently recurring needs of the residents and the occasional needs of highway travelers. The Community feels that a key economic driver for the sustainability of the Town will be eco-tourism and businesses that support this endeavor.

## 8. SAFETY

Awendaw strives to protect persons and property from unreasonable exposure to natural hazards, such as hurricane activity, fire, unstable terrain, storms, and flood, by continuously improving regulations, policies, and procedures to reflect current best management practices

## 9. COMMUNITY CULTURE

Awendaw favors a community culture that encourages citizen involvement, individual expression, and diversity, and recognizes the interdependence with neighboring communities and responsibility as good citizens within the region, State, and nation.

## 10. SUSTAINABILITY

The Awendaw Community seeks to be a good steward of the land. The goal is to promote the conservation of resources and utilize sustainable practices that recognize the connection to, and interdependence with, the natural environment.

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A major component of the comprehensive planning process was facilitating various participation and engagement opportunities for the public. These opportunities allowed for residents and stakeholders to share their experiences living within the community and voice their opinions on the current trajectory of the Town. Through three Steering Committee Meetings, an in-person public Open House, and an online public survey, input provided by participants was influential later when forming the strategies and recommendations outlined in this plan.



*Public open house – June 22, 2023.*

## STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Steering Committee, which was comprised of a diverse group of residents, was instrumental in the early stages of the planning process. These meetings were filled with constructive conversations about key issues facing Awendaw as well as brainstorming ideas and solutions to help achieve the vision of their community. It was through these conversations that the preservation of Awendaw's rural character stood out as one of, if not the top, concern facing the community.

The three Steering Committee Meetings were held in March, May, and October 2023.



## PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

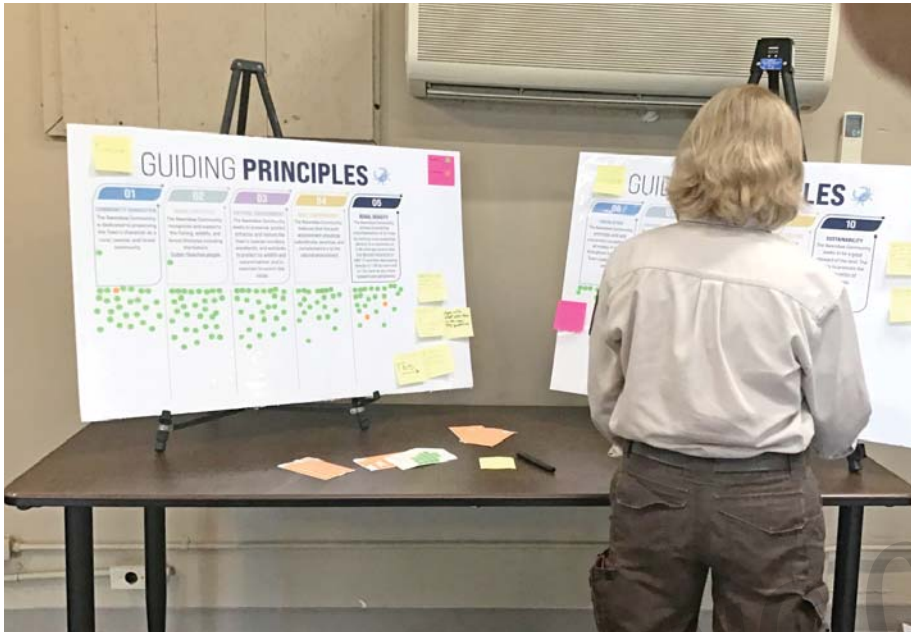
The public Open House, held on June 22nd 2023, was a turning point in the planning process. Up until this point, the extent of public participation was by residents selected to be involved in the planning process whether by applying to be on the Steering Committee Meeting, or by being members of the Planning Commission or Town Council. While input from these various groups is equally important, the public Open House was intended to expand public outreach to residents not otherwise involved in the planning process; for them to review the ideas, recommendations, statistics, and other content presented, ask questions, and provide feedback.

During the Open House, there were six stations, each presenting different topics either related to the current state of the Town (i.e., population, housing, natural resources), related to the future direction of the Town (i.e., land use and economic development), or related to the comprehensive plan and planning process itself. Attendees were able to interact with the boards at some of the stations by writing their comments on sticky notes, placing dots on ideas they agreed or disagree with, and commenting or asking questions to the Planning Staff. Furthermore, attendees were encouraged to participate in a small land use activity and exit survey which asked for their preferences on more specific land use topics while also providing a space for any additional thoughts or comments about their community. By the end of the evening, there were over 60 people who attended the Open House, allowing for a wide range of opinions and perspectives to be included in the plan.

TOP RESPONSES FROM PARTICIPANTS OF THE PUBLIC SURVEY WHEN ASKED "IN ONE OR TWO WORDS, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE LIVING IN AWENDAW?"



## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION



Public open house – June 22, 2023.

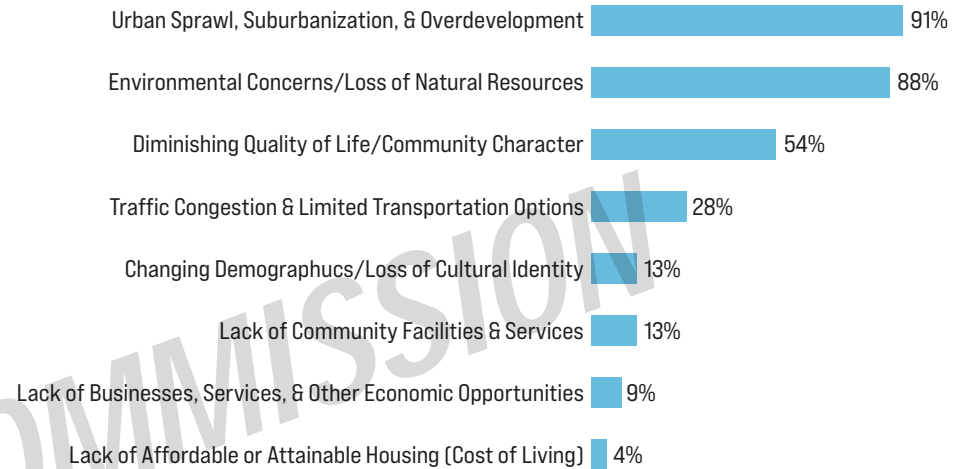
### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SURVEY

The online Public Survey was released at the beginning of the public Open House on June 22nd. This survey expanded on many of the topics and discussions presented at the public Open House, however, given the online platform, allowed for additional and more detailed questions and responses. Despite this plan serving as a roadmap toward the future, it was important for the survey to also include questions about the current state of the community rather than focusing solely on the future. Questions such as “How would you rate the current quality of life in Awendaw?” and “What do you like most about the Awendaw area and hope to see it maintained, enhanced, and/or protected in the future?” trigger participants to first think about the current state of the Town and their experience living in the area before later questions ask them to think more critically about their opinions and preferences across a variety of topics moving forward, such as the environment, future land uses and economic development.



The QR code for the online survey was available for scanning at the Open House sign-in table for attendees to participate followed by being posted on the Town’s website, available for scanning at Town Hall, and sent to various community leaders attached to a public participation memo for distribution. After 90 days, 112 people participated in the online survey, 94 (84%) of which were Awendaw residents while 16 (14%) either lived in the general area or owned property in Awendaw. A majority of respondents identified “Concerns with the future of the community” (55%) or “Concerns with recent decisions” (35%) as the top reasons driving their participation in the survey. Furthermore, given the near unanimity among survey

Figure 1: Which of the topics or concerns are more important to you?

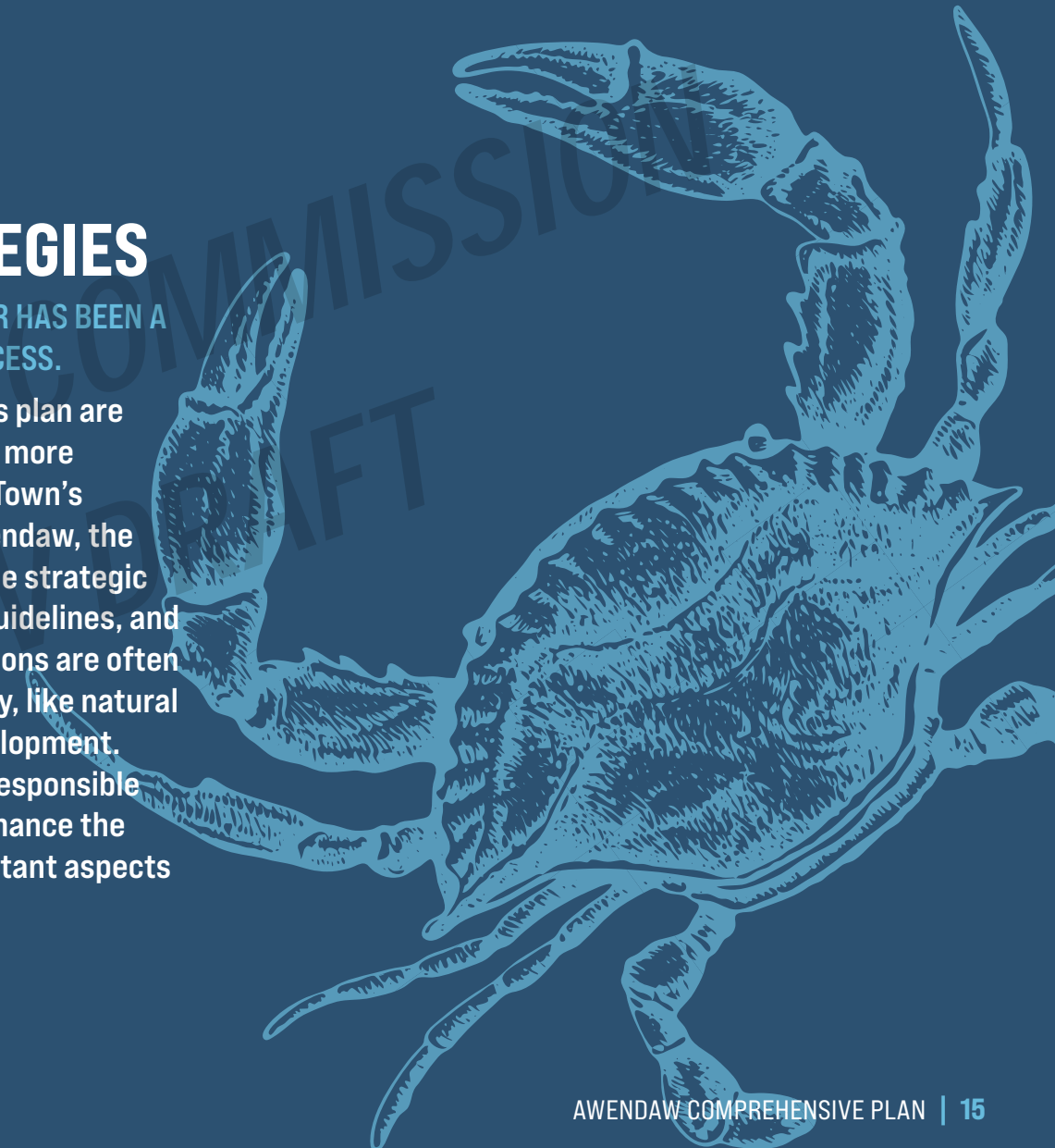


respondents that *Urban Sprawl, Suburbanization, & Overdevelopment* is a top concern (Figure 1) only reinforces the prior feedback and commentary from the Steering Committee and Council interviews that the preservation of Awendaw’s rural character is the top priority for this plan.

## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

THE PRESERVATION OF AWENDAW'S RURAL CHARACTER HAS BEEN A RECURRING THEME THROUGHOUT THIS PLANNING PROCESS.

The strategies and recommendations outlined in this plan are intended to steer policy decisions toward creating a more sustainable rural community while maintaining the Town's character-defining rural lifestyle. In the case of Awendaw, the primary method for accomplishing this is through the strategic use of conservation, land use, and design policies, guidelines, and regulations. However, land use patterns and regulations are often heavily influenced by other elements of a community, like natural resources, community facilities, and economic development. Therefore, identifying strategies that promote the responsible use and protection of natural resources and that enhance the existing assets and resources of the Town are important aspects of this plan.



## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Awendaw's proximity to natural resources has arguably had the greatest impact on the economic and cultural formation of the Town. Residents of Awendaw have capitalized on the diversity and quality of natural resources in the greater Awendaw area for centuries. Even today, the local aquaculture industry and Blue Crab Festival are but a few examples of how the rural nature of the community and the rural lifestyle of the residents continue to be important character-defining features of Awendaw. Therefore, protecting the surrounding natural resources through conservation efforts, best management practices, and resiliency planning will be crucial in maintaining and enhancing the Town's rural character.

One of the primary methods of environmental stewardship is through the conservation of land and resources. Considering Awendaw is located between two federally protected natural areas, the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and the Francis Marion National Forest, conservation has played a particularly important role in the Town's current and historical land use patterns and will likely continue to do so well into the future. Currently, about 30-35% of land within the Town of Awendaw is protected through various conservation methods.

Land dedicated to conservation not only helps protect the natural resources on-site but also protects the environmental functions that these resources provide as well as preserves any cultural and/or historic resources, and provides potential economic opportunities for the Town through eco-tourism and outdoor recreation.

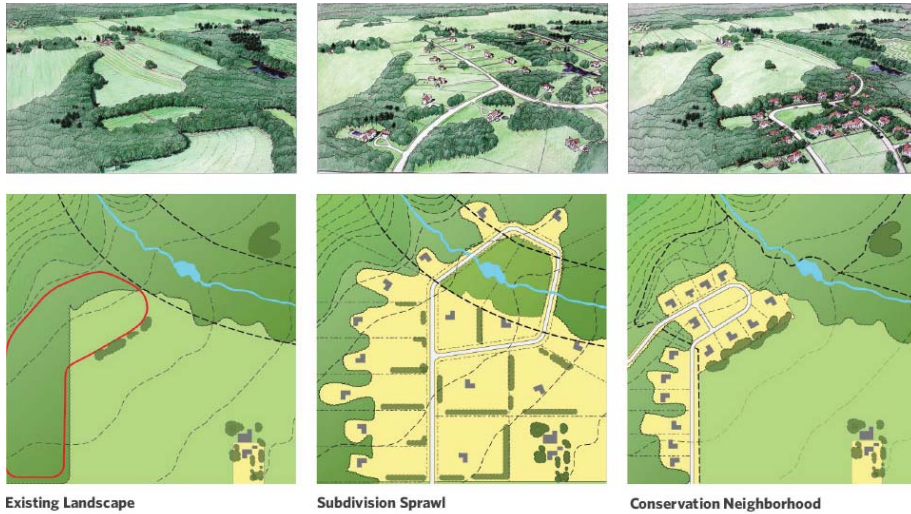
Based on the Public Survey, future conservation efforts are widely supported among respondents as nearly 60% would want local officials to spend a hypothetical \$10 million donation on the purchasing/protecting of environmentally sensitive lands in the Awendaw area. With that being said, several local, state, and federal grants that help local jurisdictions acquire lands for conservation and recreation purposes. Coordinating with various private entities, governmental agencies, non-profits, cultural or historical societies, etc. in protecting Awendaw's natural resources and important ecological habitats through conservation and restoration efforts should be an ongoing task for the Town. Conservation Subdivisions, or cluster development, is one of the most effective land use strategies used to prioritize conservation and open space while still allowing growth

### WHAT IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD?

The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) defines an Environmental Steward as the responsible use and protection of the natural environment for the enhancement of ecosystem resilience and well-being through sustainable action and practices.

*Boneyard Beach, Bulls Island, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge.  
(Photo/Coastal Expeditions)*





XXXX. (Illustration/Xxxx)

and development. Encouraging conservation subdivisions on properties with large areas of wetlands, a stream with a riparian buffer, or along the coast would allow for the conservation of those important natural areas, preserving the function and buffer they provide, while clustering development elsewhere on the property. Coupled with design guidelines that maintains the rural character, conservation subdivisions would be ideal in Awendaw as a way to gradually transition from the village nodes to rural countryside.

Being a good steward to the environment also requires the use of sustainable growth and development practices. In recent years, there has been a growing concern over the adverse impacts that overdevelopment may cause to the environment and important ecological habitats in the Awendaw area, particularly Bulls Bay and the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. As of 2022, there were little-to-no properties within the Town of Awendaw connected to a public sewer system, therefore, requiring on-site septic systems. According to the USDA's Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO), the entire Awendaw area has a "Very Limited" Septic Tank Absorption rating. Not only does this require major soil reclamation, special design, and/or expensive installation procedures to function properly, but high concentrations of on-site septic systems, like in a residential neighborhood, can have serious environmental impacts if not properly installed and/or maintained. This will be the most consequential environmental land use discussion in the coming decade if not soon proactively addressed.



Red Wolf at Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center. (Photo/Rob Johnson)



Red Knot bird in Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. (Photo/Felicia Sanders, S.C. Department of Natural Resources)



Awendaw Green. (Photo/Jennifer Cady Nielson)



Photo/Charleston Adventure Forest

## ENHANCE WHAT IS EXISTING

One of the most important methods in preserving Awendaw’s rural character and rural lifestyle is by enhancing existing community resources and assets. Oftentimes, these resources draw from the different elements of the community, like its natural resources, local history, and cultural identity. This is the case particularly in Awendaw as most of the Town’s existing community resources, like the Awendaw Town Park, Sewee Outpost, Awendaw Green, and Awendaw Creek Canoe Launch, are centered around or related to the natural environment and rural lifestyle of residents. However, the Town currently has several untapped or underutilized resources that if capitalized on, can expand access to parks & recreation facilities, provide additional services & amenities to consumers, bolster support for local community events, and protect historic, cultural, & natural resources, all while improving the quality of life of residents and quality of stay for visitors.

A high quality of life can ripple across all aspects of a community, improving the local identity, functionality, and sustainability of the Town. According to the Public Survey, the average star rating that residents gave the Town’s current quality of life was 4.3 stars out of five total. Some of the top responses provided on how to improve the quality of life were to improve access to parks & recreation facilities and programs, provide more/ closer businesses & services, ensure the affordability for lower- & middle-class families, and limit or slow down large-scale housing developments. These top responses will be important when formulating policy and future land use recommendations.

**QUALITY OF LIFE**

The average star rating that residents gave the Town’s current quality of life was 4.3 stars out of five total

Given the aforementioned Public Survey responses, the top priority for the Town moving forward should be the completion of the Awendaw Town Park and adjacent Wappetaw Trail. These projects could be a catalyst for future outdoor



*Dolphins within  
Cape Romain  
National  
Wildlife Refuge.  
(Photo/Coastal  
Expeditions)*

recreation opportunities as the 300-acre Town Park would become a passive recreation destination in the region while the Wappetaw Trail would provide a crucial connection to other tourism destinations in the Awendaw area, such as the Palmetto Trail, Sewee Shell Ring, Buck Hall Recreation Area, and the greater Francis Marion National Forest. Following that, Awendaw has the opportunity to begin a marketing campaign as an emerging outdoor recreation destination, focusing on the Town's numerous connections to the Francis Marion and Cape Romain and establishing the Town as a "gateway" to these major natural areas. However, it will be important for the Town to coordinate with Charleston County, the National Forest Service, and other public and private agencies in expanding the number and range of parks and recreation facilities in the Awendaw area.

Expanding the economic opportunities in Awendaw is another important aspect in improving the quality of life for residents and quality of stay for visitors. Quick and easy access to key goods, services, and amenities can play a crucial role in the quality of life in a community. As such, XX% of respondents in the Public Survey indicated that providing more/closer businesses & services would improve Awendaw's quality of life. Incentivizing the occupation of existing commercial buildings over new construction would help maintain the natural and rural environment as well as fill otherwise vacant buildings. Based on the Public Survey, 59% of respondents would like to see more service-based businesses in Awendaw while 54% would like to see more eco-retail and/or eco-tourism businesses. Given the importance of the aquaculture industry in Awendaw's local economy, supporting and promoting businesses, services, and other related uses within this crucial industry would further enhance the rural lifestyle of the community.



*Top: Buck Hall Recreation Area.  
(Photo/Recreation.gov)*

*Middle: Bird banding at Bulls Bay Nature  
Festival. (Photo/Lynn Parker)*

*Right: Students enjoy an owl demonstration  
at the Avian Conservation Center.  
(Photo/Avian Conservation Center)*



## STRATEGIC GROWTH

Throughout this plan, it has become clear through public feedback and interactions that Awendaw's rural character and rural lifestyle are key assets to the community. As evident by nearly 90% of Public Survey respondents indicating that Awendaw's rural lifestyle was a reason for living in Awendaw. Naturally, residents would want to preserve the rural character of the Town which helps protect their rural lifestyles. However, the preservation of Awendaw's rural character further increases the Town's desirability which paradoxically, attracts more development to the Awendaw area. Over the past several years, the Town has approved over 760 new residential units slated for development, effectively doubling the population and number of households in Awendaw by 2030. This likely has reinforced the recent opposition to land development as respondents from the Public Survey rated the quality of change that Awendaw has experienced over the past decade a 2.4/5-star rating. This is followed by 80% of respondents being "Very Concerned" about the Town's future and changes that are currently taking place. Given all of that, it is important as the Town moves forward to put into place strategic growth policies that creates a more sustainable rural community that preserves the rural character of the community while promoting quality development.

Preserving Awendaw's rural character and promoting quality growth are not mutually exclusive endeavors. Through the use of targeted architectural design guidelines and land use regulations, future development can draw upon the existing rural character of the community to enhance the Town's sense of place. A prime example being the Sewee Outpost which, when first built, was unpopular among residents but has since become a character defining asset to the community. These policies, guidelines, and regulations would prioritize compatible land uses, complimentary density, and quality design, allowing for the Town to have greater input in the preservation of the community's rural character. This approach may be concerning for many residents as over 90% of respondents from the Public Survey identified Urban Sprawl, Suburbanization, & Overdevelopment as a top concern(s). However, given Awendaw's current conditions, implementing strategic growth policies is a realistic, actionable endeavor that the Town can pursue to help mitigate the potential impacts that development can have on the rural character of the community without implementing a building moratorium that would likely result in costly litigation with uncertain outcomes.

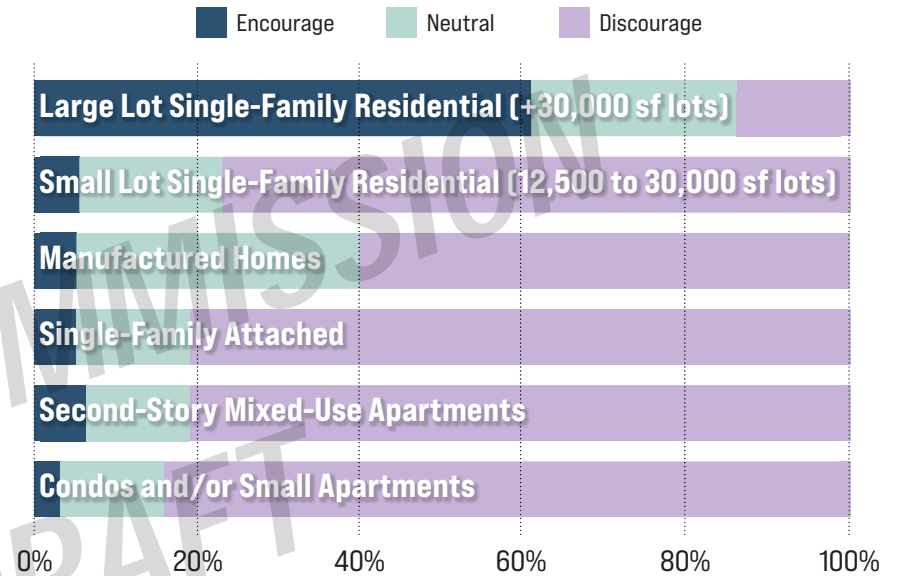
*Aerial image when the Awendaw Village neighborhood was under construction.  
(Photo/Awendaw Village)*



In addition to promoting quality design, it is important for the Town to consider modifying current land use and density regulations in all districts. Using results from the Public Survey, Figure 2 illustrates the respondents' preferences for future residential land use and density within the Town of Awendaw. Evaluating current zoning, land use, and density regulations is common practice following a comp plan, thus decreasing the density across the entire Town would be feasible. However, despite this likely being popular among residents, it could also spark conflict among certain property owners and developers which should also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, according to the Public Survey, 51% of respondents would support creating an environmentally sensitive residential district to help limit the impacts of development in those areas. Conservation Subdivisions, mentioned previously as an Environmental Stewardship strategy, would be ideal in these areas as it would preserve the natural resources on-site in exchange for greater density than what would otherwise be permitted. Additionally, limiting the use of Planned Developments to properties \_\_\_\_\_ should also be considered to limit the abuse of the lax land use and density regulations and to ensure quality development and design.

It is common planning practice that higher density development should be closer to a town center, commercial nodes, or along major roadways. In the case of Awendaw, most of the residential development is located along Sewee and Doar Roads while most non-residential development is along the US 17 corridor. However, respondents from the Public Survey were mostly split between wanting businesses/commercial development concentrated along US 17 (49%) or in a walkable Town Center (38%). Regardless of the final location, the Town of Awendaw has an opportunity to capitalize on the rural lifestyle of the community and proximity to natural resources to target eco-tourism-related businesses. Coordinating with Charleston County and other economic agencies in attracting these specific businesses will be crucial in establishing Awendaw as an outdoor recreation destination. Incentivizing service-based businesses, like restaurants, grocery stores, retailers, and bed & breakfasts', will not only be important for visitors but will also expand local employment opportunities as well as improve the quality of life of residents.

**Figure 2: Preference for Residential Land Uses**



**Awendaw Town Center Plan**

# IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The implementation element and action plan are some of the most important components of a comprehensive plan. The recommendations outlined in the action plan are intended to help address some of the concerns in the community, enhance the existing resources of the Town, and work towards achieving the vision of this plan.

## FUTURE LAND USE ELEMENT

The primary tool for preserving Awendaw's rural character is through strategic land use planning. Due to the oftentimes contentious nature of future land use planning, it is important that the Town's top priority – the preservation of rural character- is clearly reflected in both the name and description of the future land use designations. However, it is important to note that these designations are intended to simply provide recommendations on general land use activities that should be encouraged within those areas, rather than specific uses. Like most other recommendations outlined in this plan, future land use designations will work to help preserve the rural character of the community.

Future land use planning is heavily influenced by the different elements of the community, particularly its natural resources, community facilities, infrastructure, and transportation network. Using current land use patterns as a starting point (see Land Use Element in Appendix A), the future land use designations take into consideration the existing or current conditions of the community, input from the public, stakeholders, and various committees and commissions, modern planning practices, and the goals and strategies outlined throughout this plan. Based on these considerations, there were seven future land use designations identified, each focusing on different character defining features of the community.

**CONSERVATION/PROTECTED LANDS:** The Conservation/Protected Lands designation includes all properties owned by the National Forest Service, National Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Avian Conservation Center.

**PARKS:** The Parks land use designation includes the Awendaw Town Park site and the property owned by the Charleston Parks Foundation.

**CONSERVATION RESIDENTIAL:** This land use designation is intended to prioritize the preservation of natural resources and the community's rural character. Common land uses include single-family homes, manufactured homes, and agriculture. Conservation Subdivisions would be permitted in this district only. This would be the least dense residential district recommended in this plan.

**RURAL RESIDENTIAL:** The Rural Residential land use designation serves as a transitional district between the Conservation Residential and Village Residential. This land use designation comprises mostly of smaller parcels concentrated along local streets or driveways. The most common land uses include single-family and manufactured homes. Ideal lot sizes would be anywhere between 1 to 2 acres.

**VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL:** The densest residential land use designation, Village Residential includes areas along the periphery of the Town's Commercial Nodes. Most of the recently approved residential subdivisions were included in this district largely due to the density of the development. Ideal lot sizes would be anywhere between 30,000 sf to 1 acre.

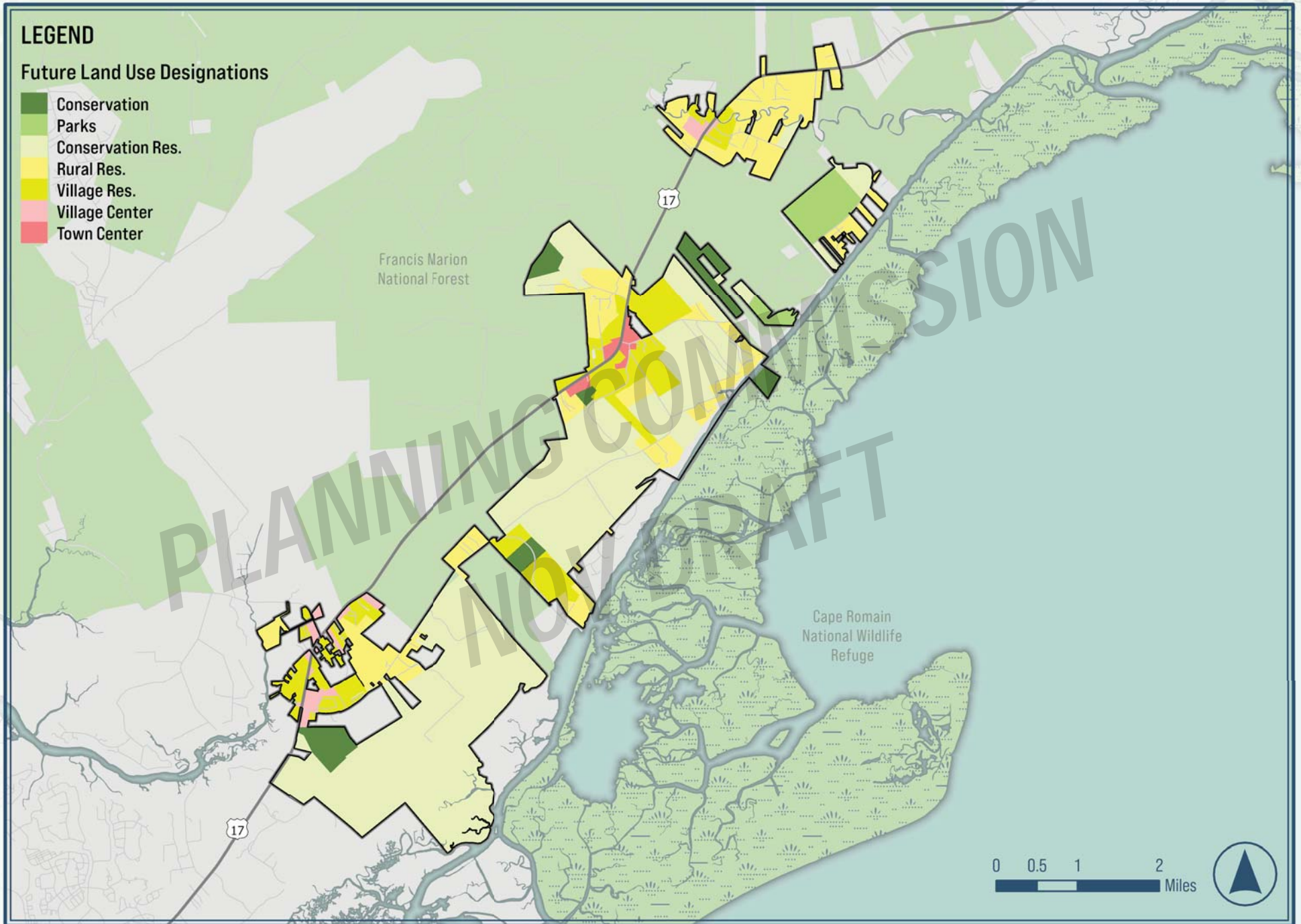
**VILLAGE CENTER:** This land use designation is primarily along US 17 and is intended to allow for certain commercial development that provide goods and services to residents and visitors.

**TOWN CENTER:** Similar to the Village Center, the Town Center area is almost entirely focused around US 17. It is recommended that permissible land uses be slightly different than the Village Center, with the Town Center focusing specifically service-based businesses.

**LEGEND**

**Future Land Use Designations**

- Conservation
- Parks
- Conservation Res.
- Rural Res.
- Village Res.
- Village Center
- Town Center



# PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

Awendaw has several areas of opportunity that if acted upon, can improve the quality of life of residents and help achieve the vision of the community. Due to the rural nature of the community and smaller population, the Town of Awendaw should focus resources towards enhancing local community assets like parks and recreation rather than regional or state infrastructure projects like roads and schools. However, Town Officials should continue coordinating with regional agencies like the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG), state agencies like SCDOT and SCDNR, or federal agencies like the National Forest Service, as those relationships are important to maintain as the Town continues to grow.

The SC Department of Parks, Recreation, & Tourism (SCPRT) has several funding opportunities that the Town of Awendaw may be eligible for to aid in funding some of these projects. Grants, like the Land & Water Conservation Fund could help the Town acquire land for conservation while the Parks & Recreation Development Fund could help finish the Awendaw Town Park. Furthermore, the Undiscovered SC Grant Program could help fund, develop, and market tourism-related opportunities in the Awendaw area. As discussed throughout this plan, the preservation of Awendaw's rural character is a priority for the community. Grants like the ones mentioned above would not only expand Awendaw's parks, recreation, and tourism opportunities but would also help preserve the rural character of the community and the rural lifestyle of the residents.





# ACTION PLAN

GOALS & STRATEGIES	STAKEHOLDER(S)	TIMEFRAME	GUIDING PRINCIPLE(S)
<b>Foster a strong sense of community pride and small-town character by supporting local community events, festivals, organizations, and lifestyles.</b>			Community Character Rural Lifestyle Community Culture
Modify the Town’s Tree Ordinance to include provisions focused on the conservation and restoration of the town’s diverse tree canopy.	Planning Commission & Town Council		
Work with the US National Forest Service to protect and maintain the tree canopy along US 17 and in areas near the Francis Marion National Forest.	Town Council & NFS		
Support and assist local organizations in coordinating festivals and other events that promote the rural coastal lifestyle of the community.	Town Staff		
Continue to hold the annual Blue Crab Festival as a character-defining event for the community.	Town Staff		
Improve the Town’s gateway and wayfinding signage to bolster the community’s sense of place as well as bring attention to the various community facilities and resources offered throughout the area.	Town Staff & Town Council		
Collaborate with other public and private entities in showcasing the Gullah Geechee heritage through the preservation of Gullah Geechee folklore, arts, crafts, and music.	Various Organizations		
<b>Broaden the number and range of cultural, historic, educational, natural, recreational, and community facilities and amenities offered throughout the area.</b>			<b>Community Character</b>
Continue to pursue grants to help fund and develop the Awendaw Town Park and Wappetaw Trail.	Town Staff & BCDCOG		
Maintain a healthy and communicative relationship with Charleston County to provide adequate public services (i.e., Police, Fire & Rescue, EMS, Recycling, Stormwater, etc.) to residents.	Charleston County & Town Staff		
Support the private and public investment in the local environmental, historic and cultural resources as a driver for economic development.	Investors & Business Owners		
Collaborate with other public and private entities in the acquisition and preservation of lands and resources important to the Gullah Geechee culture and heritage.	Town Council & CCPRC		
Evaluate the feasibility of establishing an Awendaw-McClellanville Parks & Recreation Department.	Town Councils		
Coordinate with local schools to allow shared access to school sports fields, courts, and related facilities when available (i.e., cooperative use agreement)	Town Council & CCSD		

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Evaluate potential locations for an outdoor recreation complex as well as possible funding sources.	Town Staff, Town Council, & CCPRC		
Conduct a Community Facilities Master Plan to take an inventory and assess the condition of the current facilities and resources in the greater Awendaw area.	Town Staff		
Require any redevelopment of property to preserve or restore any existing cultural or natural resources on site (i.e. riparian buffers, walls or fences, signs, landscaping, etc.)	Planning Commission		
<b>Expand economic services and opportunities offered within the Town by encouraging serviced-based businesses and enhancing workforce development.</b>			<b>Commercial Services</b>
Work with local businesses in Awendaw and McClellanville to reactivate the local chamber of commerce.	Town Council		
Identify areas appropriate for development of light industrial, warehousing, outdoor storage, and/or construction support service uses compatible with the Town's rural character.	Planning Commission		
Coordinate with SC Works and READY SC to promote the availability of workforce development services for local businesses and industries.	Town Staff, SC Works, READY SC		
Develop a comprehensive list with all commercial and industrial properties to include the property address, tenure, lot size, building size, owner information, etc. for reference as [re]development opportunities.	Town Staff		
Encourage and incentivize non-residential lot consolidation along arterial roadways, particularly US 17.	Planning Commission & Town Council		
Incentivize local small businesses that provide daily services to residents to locate in one of the three village mixed-use node areas of Town.	Town Council		
Support the development of a Town Center at the US 17-Doar Rd-Seewee Rd intersection.	Planning Commission & Town Council		
Focus primarily on the recruitment of local retail and service-based commercial businesses that serve residents with a secondary focus on businesses that primarily serve travelers and through traffic.	Town Council		
<b>Improve the quality and range of multi-modal transportation options to enhance the mobility and inter- and intra-connectivity of the community.</b>			<b>Circulation</b>
Coordinate with Charleston County and SCDOT on road paving projects and regular maintenance to improve the mobility and quality of the roadways.	Charleston County, SCDOT, Town Staff & Town Council		
Review the Town's zoning and land development ordinances to require minimum vehicular distances between access points, particularly on US 17, to limit turning movements and improve safety.	Planning Commission		

Encourage new developments to include multi-modal infrastructure and provide one or more potential connections to adjacent properties via reciprocal access agreements, multi-use paths, or trails.	Planning Commission & Town Staff		
Coordinate with TriCounty Link to better inform residents on the availability of public transportation, service, and stop locations.	TriCounty Link & Town Staff		
Assess the need for rural-oriented traffic calming infrastructure along Seewee and Doar Rd.	Charleston County, SCDOT, & Town Council		
Partner with the US National Forest Service in developing an integrated network of trails, parks, and open spaces to improve connectivity between the different parts of Town.	Town Staff & NFS		
Develop a Trails Master Plan for the community.	Town Staff		
Coordinate with SCDOT to annually assess the safety concerns and possible mitigation strategies at various intersections along US 17, including at Seewee Road, 15 Mile Landing Road, and Doar Road.	Town Staff & SCDOT		
Coordinate with SCDOT and Charleston County in assessing the need for an additional/halfway access point connecting US 17 and Seewee Road.	Charleston County, SCDOT, & Town Staff		
Begin and facilitate the negotiation between SCDOT, Charleston County, and private landowners in establishing a conceptual right-of-way near the central portion of Seewee Road.	Private Landowners, Charleston County, SCDOT, & Town Council		
<b>Capitalize on the Town’s proximity to and abundance of natural resources by promoting eco-tourism-related businesses, uses, and amenities.</b>			<b>Commercial Services Rural Lifestyle Natural Environment</b>
Promote small overnight accommodations (i.e., Bed & Breakfast) that would compliment the rural nature of the Town and expand the range of services offered in the community (NOT Short Term Rentals).	Planning Commission		
Use the abundance of natural resources and protected lands as potential connecting corridors to link the various recreational amenities in the area to one another via multi-use paths and trails.	Planning Commission, Town Staff, SCPRT, CCPRC, NFS		
Embark on a community branding campaign that highlights the Town’s rural lifestyle and synergy with the natural environment.	Town Staff, Town Council, & SCPRT		
Market Awendaw as the “Gateway” to the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and Francis Marion National Forest.	Town Staff, Town Council, NFS, & FWS		
Pursue grants through the SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT) to help market and advertise the Town as a natural outdoor recreation destination.	Town Staff & SCPRT		

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Boast the local aquaculture industry as a character-defining feature for the Town and support related businesses and workforce in expanding the industry.	Town Council		
<b>Strengthen current architectural design guidelines to ensure new development complements adjacent structures and the overall rural nature of the community.</b>			<b>Built Environment</b>
Build on the Town's distinct community identity and sense of place by requiring streetscaping, signage, and building design for all new developments to be complimentary to the Town's existing rural character.	Planning Commission		
Consider architectural design standards/guidelines for new development along US 17 to avoid franchise architectural practices.	Planning Commission		
Modify current Zoning and Land Development regulations to require additional vehicular access points if a development meets a determined density threshold.	Planning Commission		
<b>Limit the ecological disturbance from development by encouraging cluster development on properties with large areas of natural resources.</b>			<b>Natural Environment Sustainability</b>
Evaluate and amend district regulations to promote the use of cluster development or conservation subdivisions (smaller lot developments in exchange for more conserved lands) on properties with large areas of wetlands and intact habitat cores.	Planning Commission & Town Staff		
Consider the establishment of a Conservation Residential district with low density regulations that is intended for properties with large areas of natural resources.	Planning Commission		
Modify zoning and land development definitions so that wetlands and manufactured stormwater ponds are not included in open space calculations.	Planning Commission		
Consider increasing the amount/percent of open space required for new developments to maintain a healthy, convenient, and sustainable live, work, and play lifestyle.	Planning Commission		
Adjust zoning and density regulations in residential districts to better reflects the rural nature of the Town.	Planning Commission		
Promote the use of NexGen Community Septic Systems instead of traditional septic systems in developments over 100 acres through small density bonuses.	Planning Commission, Town Council, DHEC		
<b>Monitor and mitigate the adverse effects that existing and new developments could have on the environment, particularly on Bulls Bay and surrounding waterbodies and ecosystems.</b>			<b>Natural Environment Built Environment Sustainability</b>
Partner with DHEC to educate residents on the importance of and methods for septic system maintenance.	Town Staff & DHEC		
Adopt a Low-Impact Development Ordinance to minimize stormwater runoff.	Planning Commission		

Monitor the water quality within Bulls Bay, the ICW, and Awendaw Creek while partnering with Charleston County and DHEC in mitigating the possible environmental impacts.	NOAA, DHEC, SCEMD, Charleston County, & Town Staff		
Review existing land development regulations to ensure that all new major developments are required to conduct an environmental assessment of cumulative impacts.	Planning Commission		
<b>Enhance the resiliency of the Town by continuously updating building and development regulations that reflect current best management practices.</b>			<b>Safety</b>
Develop an easy-to-understand hurricane guide for residents and distribute annually at the beginning of Hurricane Season (June 1st).	Town Staff		
Update building and land development guidelines to require all new development be constructed using hurricane resilient infrastructure and best management practices.	Charleston County & Town Staff		
Utilize low-interest loans from the Resilience Revolving Fund to perform restoration activities and/or voluntary floodplain or coastal inundation buyouts of eligible or high priority properties.	Charleston County & Town Council		
<b>Encourage the preservation and restoration of riparian buffers, wetlands, and forested areas while coordinating with private developers and state &amp; national agencies on conservation efforts.</b>			<b>Natural Environment Sustainability</b>
Work with Charleston County on preserving the community's natural scenic vistas by limiting the deforestation of properties adjacent to residential areas.	Charleston County & Town Staff		
Continue the acquisition of land or easements to protect environmentally sensitive areas and prime open spaces.	Town Council		
Develop a 10-Year Annexation Plan that identifies potential properties that the Town could annex in the future.	Planning Commission, Town Staff, & Town Council		
Renew discussions with the US National Forest Service in annexing the protected forest lands along US 17 to preserve the rural character and scenic integrity of that corridor.	Town Staff, Town Council, & NFS		
Coordinate with public and private agencies on preserving and restoring important ecological habitats and the protection of rare, endangered, and threatened species.	Town Staff, SC DNR, & Various Organizations		
<b>Modify density and land use regulations to ensure adjacent land uses compliment one another, the natural environment, and the rural character of the community.</b>			<b>Community Character Built Environment</b>
Adjust land use regulations to limit highway-oriented businesses to along US 17 while focusing local retail and service-based businesses and uses in one of the three Village mixed use node areas of Town.	Planning Commission		
Modify density regulations in each district to preserve the rural density of the Town while limiting higher-density development to areas connected to the Town's public water system.	Planning Commission		

# AWENDAW

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

*A Plan for Our Future & Our Way of Life*



PLANNING COMMISSION  
NOV DRAFT