



**CHAPTER 8: LAND USE ELEMENT**

**HOW WE PLAN AHEAD**



In the Land Use Element, existing growth and land use patterns are researched and analyzed in order to guide the Town through the 20-year planning horizon established by the Comprehensive Plan. Even though the plan is required to be updated every five years, the 20-year planning horizon sets a standard for casting visionary goals and objectives, as well as sound projections. Analysis of the current land use patterns are conducted by developing existing and future land use maps. These maps are created to show any predicted changes, within the Town.

## TOWN CHARACTER

The planning process identified four major points that define the character of Sullivan's Island. These are:

- *Informality*
- *Openness of the landscape*
- *Residential and family oriented in scale and nature*
- *Small commercial area as a community focus.*



Source: Charleston Magazine

The importance of the informality of the Town has long been recognized by residents as well as Town officials. Some homes have a subtle landscape that utilizes native vegetation and wildflowers. The streetscape is informal, and there are only a few roads with curbs and sidewalks. In many areas of the Island, houses are set informally on large lots. In some areas, houses do not line up along a common setback.

Related to this informality is the openness of the landscape on the Island. Many yards do not have tall hedges or tall fences common in some other island communities. The Island exhibits a park-like appearance with expansive views and openness. In the past, the Sullivan's Island's landscape has been characterized by large expanses of spring and summer wildflowers on both public and private land. This feature added substantially to the concept of Sullivan's Island's special sense of place and informality.

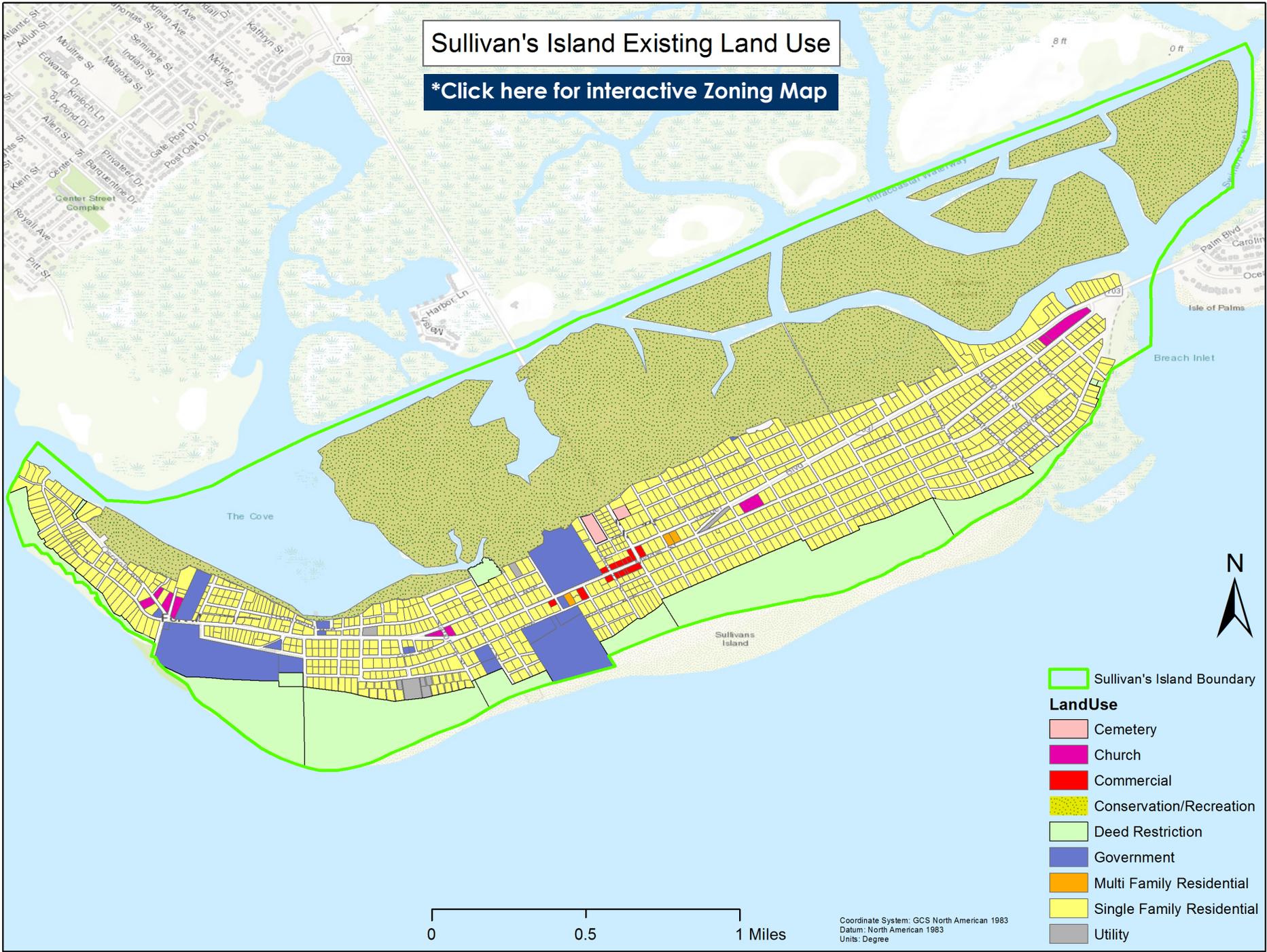
Sullivan's Island features a strong residential character. The Island's activities and mainly single-family housing create a family-oriented atmosphere. The small commercial district is built at a pedestrian scale that does not diminish the residential atmosphere of the Island. In addition, Sullivan's Island has protected itself from the development of hotels, including bed and breakfast businesses that would detract from the residential nature of the Island.

The small commercial district and the adjacent Sullivan's Island J. Marshall Stith Park acts as a primary community focus. The commercial area is centrally located near the Ben Sawyer Bridge entrance to the Island. The Sullivan's Island J. Marshall Stith Park is the location for many community events, as well as a nice recreational facility where residents can come together and visit with each other.



# Sullivan's Island Existing Land Use

[\\*Click here for interactive Zoning Map](#)



## EXISTING LAND USE

Since its transition from a military base to a residential island community more than sixty years ago, the evolution of Sullivan's Island's various land uses have changed very little. The current existing land uses on the Island include (in alphabetical order): cemetery, church, commercial, conservation, conservation/recreation, deed restriction, government, multifamily residential, single-family residential and utility. Below is a breakdown of the land uses and what constitutes each use:



*“Provide a zoning designation for Town-owned, non-residential property, as in front of Poe Library, Battery Gadsden, and maybe Stith Park, that provides for public areas to include non-profit fundraising, etc. with Town permit.”*  
- Anonymous resident (providing feedback at the November Open House)

**CEMETERY:** There are two properties on Sullivan's Island that are cemeteries.

**CHURCH:** Land that is used for religious activities, including a sanctuary and parish hall. Additionally, new churches are only allowed as a RS district special exception, per the Town Zoning Ordinance.

**COMMERCIAL:** Commercial property is land designated for office, retail or service businesses in the defined Community Commercial District (CCD). These uses continue to be restricted mainly to the business district located on Middle Street, between Station 20 ½ and Station 22 ½. The CCD consists of two Community Commercial Overlay Districts (1 & 2) that benefit Sullivan's Island by: (1) recognizing the unique nature of particular areas in the CCD; (2) allows the Town to be very specific with regard to construction, design and other criteria; (3) clearly differentiate the areas from the balance of the Island with regard to subdivision and development.

**CONSERVATION:** Town marsh that cannot be improved and should be maintained in its natural state.

**RECREATION/CONSERVATION:** Recognizes limited use of land for recreational purposes (i.e. docks where otherwise permitted by applicable laws and regulations), but otherwise envisions long-term preservation of the land without commercial activity or subdivision, with minimal impact on the view corridor. This land use pertains to both marsh and ocean front areas (RC1 and RC2).

**DEED RESTRICTION:** Property owned by the Town of Sullivan's Island and is subject to conservation easement.

**INSTITUTIONAL/GOVERNMENT:** Institutional/government property covers a broad range of government and public uses.

**SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL:** Residential land uses are defined as locations intended for occupants to live together as a single house-keeping unit. Single-family residential property is defined as one residentially zoned parcel with no more than one dwelling unit.

**MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL:** Multifamily residential land use is defined as more than one dwelling unit located in the same building or structure as a non-conforming use.

**UTILITY:** Property that is classified as utility is property with infrastructure uses on it. These include power substations and water.

More information pertaining to these terms can be found within the *Town's Zoning Ordinances*.



**TABLE 8.1: LAND USE BY PERCENT**

	2013	2018	% CHANGE
SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	21.4%	21.5%	0.5%
MULTI FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%
COMMERCIAL	0.3%	0.4%	33.3%
GOVERNMENT/INSTITUTIONAL	5.0%	4.9%	-2.0%
DEED RESTRICTED PROPERTY	11.4%	11.4%	0.0%
CHURCH	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%
CEMETERY	0.1%	0.2%	100.0%
UTILITIES	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%
VACANT	1.6%	1.5%	-6.3%
CONSERVATION/RECREATION	58.8%	58.8%	0.0%

In order to form the Existing Land Use Map, percentages of land used are determined in order to give a clear idea on how the Island is developing. Table 8.1 shows the breakdown, by percentage, of how much each land use takes up. The percentages have been compared with the 2013 Comprehensive Plan update below. Overall, the majority of the land uses experienced little to no growth. There were only two land uses that experienced decreases, which include government/institutional and vacant. Part of this decrease was under the government/institutional land use because of the Town’s sale of six (6) RS properties in the past five years.

## COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

The commercial land uses of the Town are relegated to a small area on the Island. This area, which runs along Middle Street, consists of commercial businesses and office space primarily for the benefit of Sullivan’s Island residents.

In 2008, the Town of Sullivan’s Island and a team of consultants (Seamon Whiteside + Associates, LS3P Associates Ltd, and Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc.) drafted and adopted the Sullivan’s Island Master Plan: Community Commercial District. As stated in the plan, the final goal statement is to “develop a master plan that promotes sustainable commercial activity while protecting the safety of residents and visitors, minimizing the impact of that activity on the surrounding residential neighborhoods and retaining the vernacular of island architecture.”

As a result of the 2008 design charrette, the plan proposed recommendations for the commercial district. These included:

- Create a Commercial Area Overlay Zone District
- Allow parking on one side of I’On Street only
- Resident/Guest parking permits only on I’On, Jasper, Atlantic, and Myrtle after 8 p.m. (or other reasonable time)
- Consider cabaret ordinance similar to the City of Charleston
- Require shared parking provisions for off-street parking at office/retail businesses
- Institute a “Livability Court” to handle issues of litter, lack of maintenance, etc.
- Develop guidelines for commercial parking, lot subdivision, height, massing and scale, and setbacks with Overlay District



- Modify split zoning to allow parking to support existing businesses while limiting expansion of current commercial uses
- Explore options for increasing police presence/code enforcement in the commercial area

The master plan was set up to be a “conceptual design study,” which means that the design is very “broad brush” and all concepts would be subject to further design exploration at a later time. However, the master plan does reflect, in a purely illustrative manner, how the main tenets of design approach could be achieved.



For more detailed information, the CCD plan is available on the Town's website.

## COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL OVERLAY DISTRICTS (CCOD)

As a result from the recommendations from the Commercial District Master Plan, two Community Commercial Overlay Districts were created. An overlay district is a regulatory tool that creates a special zoning district, which identifies special regulations and guidelines that are applied in addition to or above and beyond those in the underlying base zoning district(s). Where differences in regulations exist between base zones and the overlay zones, the regulations on the overlay zone prevail.

CCODs #1 and #2 has a defined area along Jasper Boulevard and Middle Street, between the blocks of Station 22 ½ and 2019 Middle Street. CCOD #1 consists of lots between Middle Street and Jasper Boulevard, from Station 22 ½ to Station 22. CCOD #2 consists of lots between I'On Avenue and Middle Street from Station 22-2019 Middle Street (currently Sullivan's Restaurant and other businesses) to 2120 Middle Street.



[\\*Click here for interactive Zoning Map](#)



## RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

Most of the Island is developed as single-family residential. Many desination beach areas face the threat of becoming commercial resort areas. In an effort to preserve the residential character of the Town, the Residential District (RS) uses are limited to the following:

- *One single-family detached dwelling (other than manufactured homes such as trailers and mobile homes or industrialized facilities) per lot*
- *Publicly-owned facility or land*
- *Non-commercial horticulture or agriculture, but not including the keeping of poultry or animals other than for family use or as ordinary pets*
- *Customary home occupation*
- *Accessory uses such as garages or tool sheds allowed as conditional use and Conservation Easement Uses*
- *Churches, private kindergartens, public utility substations, are allowed as a special exception in the Residential District*
- *Rental of rooms is not allowed in either the residential or commercial zoning districts*

Given the history of the Island, there are various structures that still remain within the Residential District, such as old churches or fortifications. Some of these have been adaptively reused for housing or other types of spaces. In 2004, a review of the Zoning Ordinance led to the creation of historic preservation overlay districts to protect properties that have been determined to be architecturally, archeologically, culturally and historically significant to the Town.

## FUTURE LAND USE

Given the Island's desired character and geographical constraints, existing land uses for the foreseeable future will undergo incremental and small changes, as are necessary. Therefore, the Future Land Use map, illustrates a continuation of the established land uses set forth in the previous Comprehensive Plan.

## LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

### Zoning Ordinance

The Sullivan's Island Zoning Ordinance, last amended August 15, 2017, aims to provide "a comfortable home at the beach, safe and friendly, where individuality and diversity are celebrated, neighborhoods are respected, Island resources are appreciated, history intertwined, and families and neighbors seek to thrive." This ordinance was a result of a substantial process of public involvement during 2002-2004, in response to residents' growing concerns over the increasing amount of residential construction that was incompatible in scale and mass with existing Island development. The Town's original ordinance was enacted in 1977.

Changes to the Zoning Ordinance occur as needed through a public process. One future change that should be examined is adding a zoning classification for Government uses that preserve and protect the historical institutions on the island.

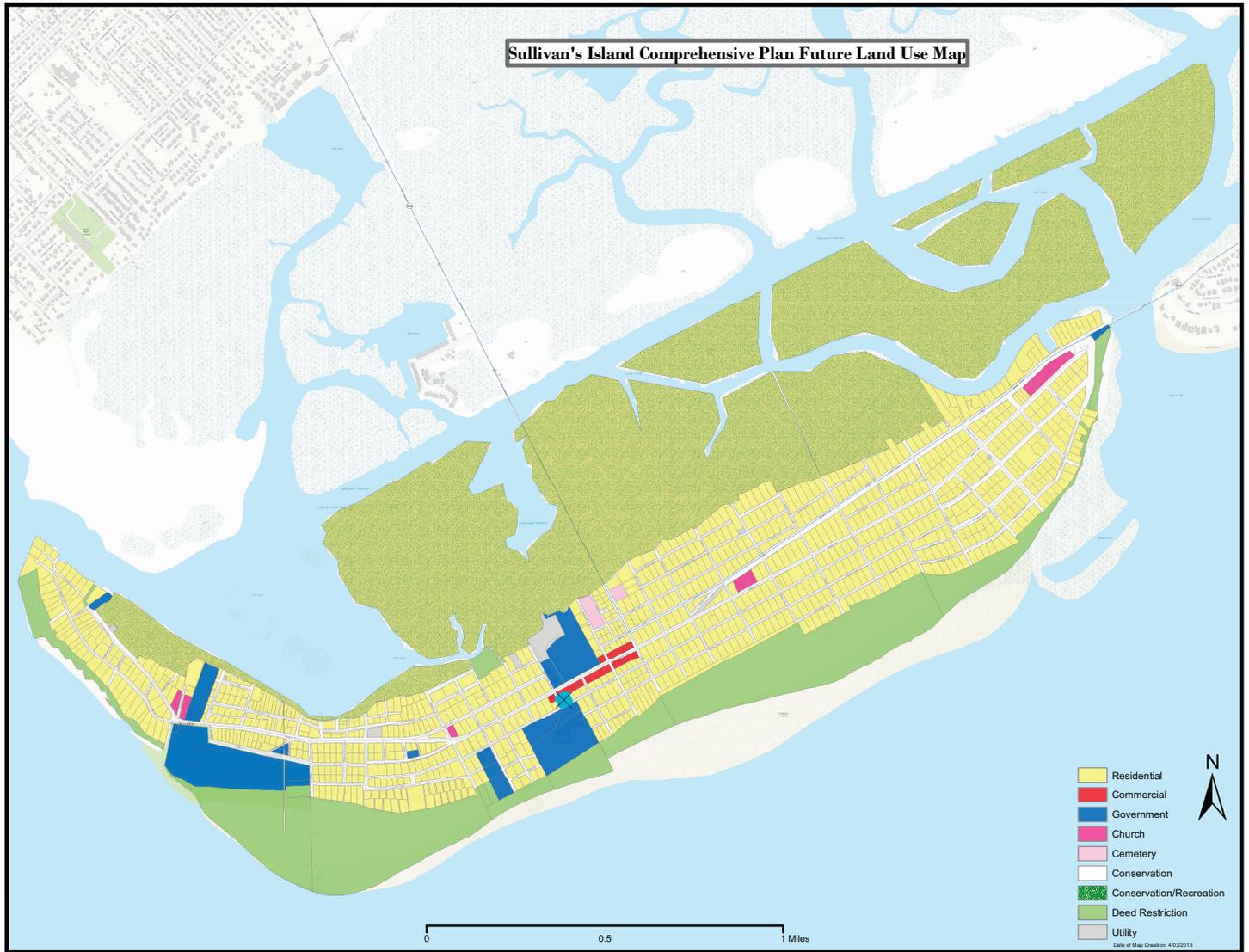
### Parking Plan/Ordinance

In an effort to promote public safety for Island residents and visitors alike, the Town of Sullivan's Island created a new Parking Plan. This newly enacted plan allows vehicular parking on only one side of the street, which will allow a clear and unobstructed path to homes and beach access for emergency vehicles.



## Historic District Overlays

In 2003, the Town of Sullivan's Island established three (3) historic overlay districts in the Town. The three districts are: Moultrieville Historic District, Sullivan's Island Historic District and the Atlanticville Historic District. These three distinct, separate areas comply with the Zoning Ordinance defining the district as, "architecturally, archaeologically, culturally, or historically significant to the Town of Sullivan's Island." Keeping oversight of the historic district is the Design Review Board, which guides new construction, alteration, demolition, moving and removal of structures within the historic overlay district.



[\\*Click here for interactive Zoning Map](#)

