

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Sullivan's Island is in Charleston County, South Carolina and the community is located on a barrier island at the mouth of Charleston Harbor. The town is part of the Charleston metropolitan area and had a population of 1,891 residents in the 2020 census. The island is noted for its role in military history and for its development in the 19th century as a summer resort for residents of Charleston and the region. The island is approximately 4.3 miles in length and is in the form of a shallow L-shape facing the Atlantic Ocean on the south and southwest. To the north the island is separated from the mainland by marshlands and the Intracoastal Waterway. On the oceanfront side of the island are beaches and sand dunes and the rest of the island is largely flat in character. There are also a series of 19th and 20th century man-made mounds erected as part of coastal fortifications. The island is noted for its lush vegetation such as palmetto trees and a variety of oak species and other trees.

The island's location at the entrance to the Charleston harbor resulted in the construction of a series of fortifications beginning in the 1770s. During the Revolutionary War, Fort Moultrie was completed and an attack by British forces was repulsed by the Patriot army. A more formidable fort of masonry construction was completed in the early 1800s and is now a site managed by the National Park Service. Additional fortifications and other military buildings were completed by the Federal government in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and many of these remain extant.

The majority of the historic resources on the island date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries when it became a seasonal summer resort for residents of Charleston and the region. With its ocean breezes and beaches, the island provided a pleasant retreat for those who could afford to build summer homes. Hundreds of one- to two-story dwellings of frame construction were built on the island along with the communities of Moultrieville and Atlanticville. The island's character as a resort community continued into the mid 20th century.

The historic resources of the island were severely impacted by Hurricane Hugo in September of 1989. The island was the subject of an architectural survey in 1987 and after the hurricane it was discovered that 84 of the previously recorded 360 historic sites had been lost. The decades of the late 20th century also saw the island emerging as one of the most popular residential areas in the Charleston region. With an influx of new residents moving onto the island many of the older one-story historic homes were replaced with larger dwellings. In other cases, the original smaller homes were expanded and enlarged to the point where they no longer retained integrity of their original construction.

Due to the continued loss and alterations of its historic resources, the Town of Sullivan's Island enacted a Historic Preservation Ordinance in 2003 and created a Design Review Board (DRB) to assist in protecting the island's historic and architectural character. The intent of these actions was to guide future development to be consistent with the island's traditional development and preserve the community's historic architecture. Since its creation, the DRB has conducted its design review consistent with standards set forth by the National Park Service. This manual is based on those standards and provides guidelines along with additional information, photographs and illustrations for rehabilitation and new construction projects. Property owners are encouraged to review these guidelines prior to any actions affecting historic properties or constructing new buildings in the Town's historic overlay districts.

Benefits of Preserving Sullivan's Island's Historic Character

Historic Preservation Contributes to Quality of Life

Historic buildings embody a community's past, contributing to a feeling of distinctiveness. Where residents feel a strong sense of place, they are more engaged in and aware of civic activities. Historic preservation encourages commitment to existing infrastructure, including the historic buildings that house cultural and leisure opportunities, such as museums, theaters, libraries, restaurants, and specialty stores.

Historic Preservation is "Green"

The greenest buildings with the least impact on the environment are those that are already built. Historic buildings embody energy that was expended in the past - the energy used to make the bricks, lumber, and details. Preserving and reusing an existing historic building has less negative impact on the environment than new construction.

Historic Preservation Supports Taxpayers' Investments

Economic development of older neighborhoods encourages responsible use of existing resources and infrastructure. Commitment to revitalization and reuse of historic buildings may be the most effective act of fiscal responsibility a local government can take. Studies have proven that the cost of infrastructure required in new suburban development often exceeds the tax revenue returned by the development.

Historic Preservation Increases Property Values

Studies across the country show that National Register or local historic overlay district designation stabilizes and often increases property values. Historic designation consistently demonstrates benefits to property owners through higher property values and house sales.

Historic Preservation Creates Jobs

Rehabilitation of existing historic buildings creates thousands of jobs each year. Rehabilitation projects are more labor intensive than new construction. In new construction, costs of labor and materials are generally split in half. Labor costs of a typical historic rehabilitation project, however, account for 60-70 percent of the total expenditures, which keeps more money in the local economy.

Historic Preservation Encourages Tourism

A community's distinctive history, culture, and built landscape attract visitors to a unique experience. Heritage tourism, or tourism that focuses on historic buildings and sites, is a rapidly growing sub-group of the tourism industry. The quality and quantity of the historic architecture in Sullivan's Island provide opportunities to enhance tourism in the city.

(This data comes from *The Economics of Historic Preservation* by Donovan D. Rypkema first published in 1994 and updated in 2005. Since 2005, many other studies across the country have documented the importance of historic preservation to neighborhood and downtown revitalization and overall economic development).



Fort Moultrie is a major tourist destination on the island and there are numerous historic buildings, structures and sites associated with the National Park Service property.

