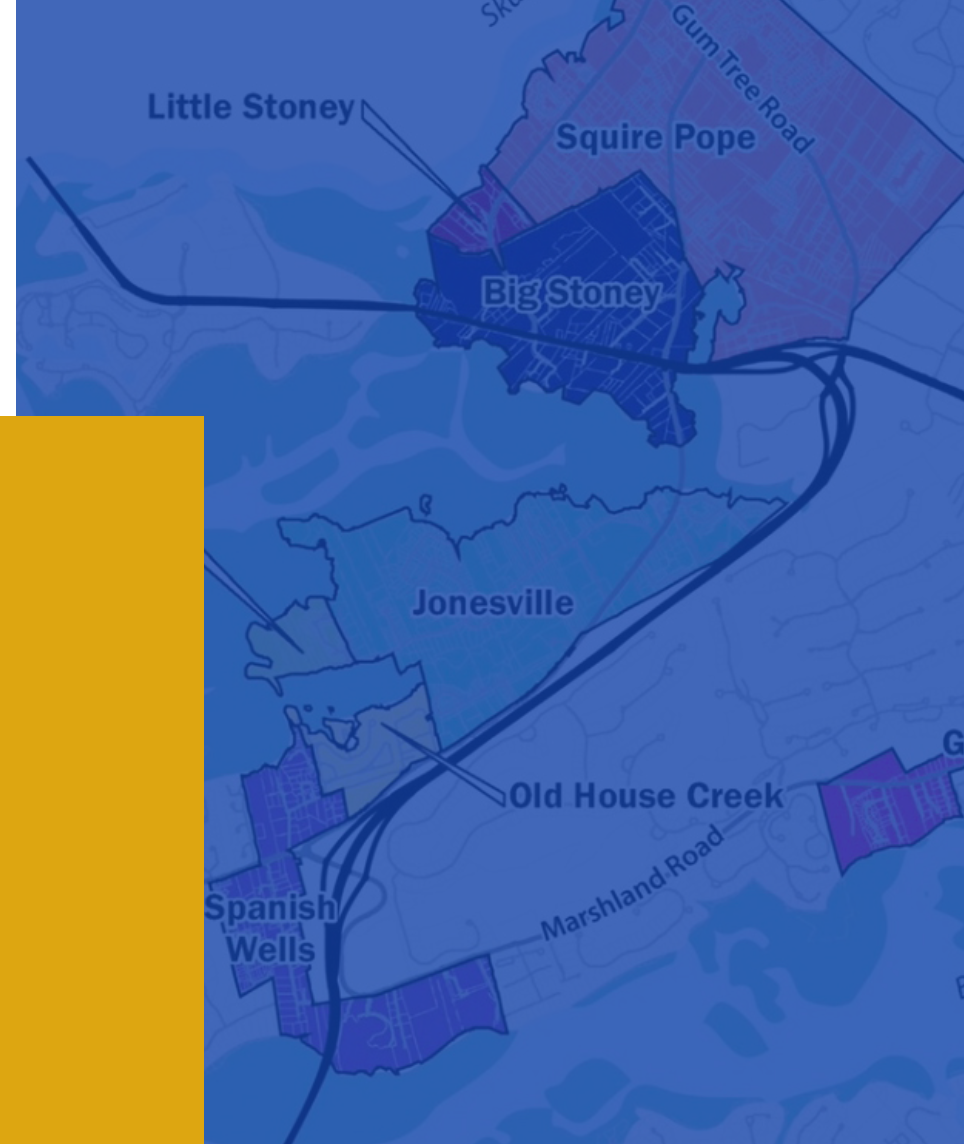


2024-2026



— Town of Hilton Head Island
*Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods
Community Development Corporation*

Strategic Plan



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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN



Shirley Peterson

Chairwoman

It is an exciting time to live in the Lowcountry. It is even a more exciting time to be of Gullah Geechee descent.

The Gullah Geechee community is characterized by a deep connection to the eastern seaboard of the United States and a direct lineage to West Africa. South Carolina represents the embarkation point for over 45% of all enslaved Africans globally. The history of the Gullah Geechee people is American history. Through efforts that have been underway in this region and specifically with the Town of Hilton Head Island, we are now well positioned to shed light on the history and triumphs of the Gullah Geechee community.

The establishment of the Gullah Historic Neighborhood Community Development Corporation represents an effort by the Town of Hilton Head Island to support it's Gullah Geechee community in a unique and sustainable way. This investment represents renewed growth for our most vulnerable population, one that has sacrificed immensely for the development of Hilton Head Island. Our work is complex yet simple: protect, serve, empower and grow the culture.

We invite your active participation in learning and supporting the rich Gullah Geechee culture of Hilton Head Island. Your continued interest will ensure that the culture continues to survive and thrive.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Thomas Boxley

Executive Director
843-341-3097

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Gullah Geechee community of Hilton Head Island, the Board of Directors of the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhood Community Development Corporation, the Hilton Head Island Town Council, the Mayor, and the Town Manager for entrusting me with the historic role of serving as the first Executive Director of the Community Development Corporation. The journey ahead promises to be fulfilling and will contribute to the Island's overall strength.

The Gullah people boast a profound history in the Lowcountry region—a narrative deserving of celebration and global sharing. Through the Community Development Corporation, our collective efforts will strive for economic sustainability, community stabilization and development, and crucial opportunities for Gullah Geechee youth to establish themselves on the Island amid economic challenges.

I invite you to explore the rich tapestry of Gullah Geechee culture on Hilton Head Island if you haven't already done so. It is a narrative encompassing the core elements of Americana—inequality, resistance, resilience, and triumph. I am confident that immersing yourself in the diverse stories of the Gullah Geechee will foster a newfound love and appreciation for Hilton Head Island.



MEET THE TEAM



Thomas Boxley

Executive Director



Cindaia Ervin

Assistant Town Clerk



Marc Orlando

Town Manager



Alan Perry

Mayor



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Shirley Peterson

Chairwoman

Terry Brubaker

Community Representative

David Ames

Town Councilman

Louis Johnson

Community Representative

Alex Brown

Town Councilman

Andre White

Community Representative

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE



The Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhood Community Development Corporation was established in 2023 as a South Carolina not-for-profit corporation to support the advancement and sustainability of the historic and culturally sensitive Gullah Geechee communities of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.





CORPORATE MISSION

In tribute to the Gullah Geechee ancestors, whose roots on Hilton Head Island trace back to pre-Civil War times, and whose resilient descendants endure and flourish, we pledge to amplify their voices, preserve their culture, honor their way of life, and uphold their legacy. Looking forward, we are committed to fostering collaboration across the Hilton Head Island community, working to establish, cultivate, and endorse fair financial, business, educational, training, and developmental opportunities. This commitment aims to empower present-day Gullah Geechee descendants and ensure that future generations actively engage in and benefit from the economic opportunities of the present and beyond.

SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis is a tool utilized in planning that identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats about specific study areas. The SWOT Analysis aims to identify the positive and negative forces that can impact desired outcomes. Our approach for gathering this information was a community-centric approach involving community members.

Two strategic planning sessions hosted in 2023 allowed community members to share information. The question posed to the board of directors and approximately 50 community members in attendance was, *"When considering the historic Gullah communities on Hilton Head Island, what do you identify as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats?"* A summary of the responses from both the board and the community members who chose to speak publicly is captured in the following narrative.

01

Strengths

- The people - the people give the neighborhoods character, the people are resilient. The people are the keepers of the heritage, are talented and are landowners.
- Connection – Gullah Heritage Corridor – nationally recognized
- The uniqueness of the culture – oral history, language
- Cultural Tourism Sites – Mitchelville, Fort Howell, cemeteries
- Financial position – ATAX funding

02

Weaknesses

- Communication across groups – breaking down the "silos"
- Barriers to political groups, public agencies, private groups and large businesses – some of which carry biases towards the Gullah people
- Trust – Gullah Community and the historic distrust of town government
- The negative impact of Planned Unit Developments on the Gullah community - gentrification and creation of a class and caste system among the broader Island community
- Lack of youth involvement and succession planning
- Education regarding Gullah history
- Administrative process for cultural awareness

03

Opportunities

- Town's current willingness to invest human, financial, and land resources
- Adjustment of town meeting times to create opportunities for broader community participation
- Civic engagement in the political process
- Public/private/institutional partnerships
- Entrepreneurial joint ventures in the areas of tourism, business formation, property stabilization, neighborhood infrastructure, contracting with the town
- Education – development of Gullah curriculum for youth and adult learners
- Collaboration with other Gullah Geechee corridor communities
- Further protection of the environment and mitigation of climate change
- Business development
- Tourism District Development

04

Threats

- Lack of affordable housing
- Territorial mentality of those living in the gated communities
- Gentrification – loss of land ownership for the Gullah people
- Controlling the narrative of Gullah history
- Political change



STRATEGIC GOALS

During November and December 2023, the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation hosted a series of meetings, engaging both the board of directors and community members. The primary objective of these gatherings was to collect information to inform and shape our strategic plan. Additionally, a survey was disseminated electronically and in hard copy among Gullah community members through diverse networks. The insights gathered from these meetings and surveys guided the development of our strategic plan.

1

Ensure the stabilization and preservation of Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, cultural sites, and history.

2

Develop and maintain strategic partnerships that will support the work of the Community Development Corporation.

3

Educate the Island community regarding the Community Development Corporation and the opportunities the organization presents.

4

Increase access to capital and financial education.

5

Support training and employment opportunities for Gullah Geechee youth.



Looking forward, we are committed to fostering collaboration across the Hilton Head Island community, working to establish, cultivate, and endorse fair financial, business, educational, training, and developmental opportunities.

Goal #1:

Ensure the stabilization and preservation of Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, cultural sites, and history.

- STONEY NEIGHBORHOOD

The proposed expansion of William Hilton Parkway (Highway 278) will significantly impact the historic Stoney neighborhood within the Gullah Geechee community as well as the broader Hilton Head Island community. The ramifications will be realized disproportionately in the historic Stoney neighborhood. The following summary represents input gathered from Gullah Geechee community members who own property or businesses in the Stoney community that will be directly impacted by the proposed expansion and the CDC's suggested mitigation recommendations:

1. Gullah Geechee people and communities have historically shouldered the disproportionate burdens of previous expansion projects, and they deserve comprehensive support to reap the benefits of their sacrifices. Property owners within the proposed expanded right-of-way should receive fair and mutually agreed-upon compensation for the land they are asked to relinquish. Compensation options may include an equitable financial settlement, a land swap, or a combination of both.
2. Funding to ensure appropriate access for property owners in the corridor (both residential and commercial), safe turning lanes, signage, safe access to and parking at the Jenkins Cemetery—a significant Gullah Geechee Heritage site.
3. All impacted land sites should receive infrastructure development support, encompassing water/sewer line connections, safe streets and roads, sidewalks, curb cuts, and drainage. This infrastructure should adhere to maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) standards to facilitate future development on sites owned by affected families and businesses.
4. Funding to support the further land planning and establishment of a business corridor in the Stoney neighborhood. This corridor should feature

safe ingress/egress, parking facilities, and water/sewer infrastructure, ensuring seamless access to the proposed expanded highway and fostering the development of a thriving commerce center. This should include funding in support of strategic land acquisition, land swaps with the Town of Hilton Head Island, and support of business growth and development.

5. Prominent public art displays showcasing Gullah Geechee heritage and culture should be installed at entry and exit points of the Stoney neighborhood.
6. Town Council crafts a formal statement requiring that Beaufort County, and South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) refrain from impacting Stoney when considering future expansion concepts. Options should include a comprehensive study of other transit modes and an alternate bridge location.
7. Revision of proposed right of way acquisition plan to include safer design strategy, minimization, and elimination of property acquisition requirements.
8. Funding in support of professional services and legal counsel for impacted property owners along the William Hilton Parkway corridor.

Goal #1: *Continued*



Ensure the stabilization and preservation of Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, cultural sites, and history.

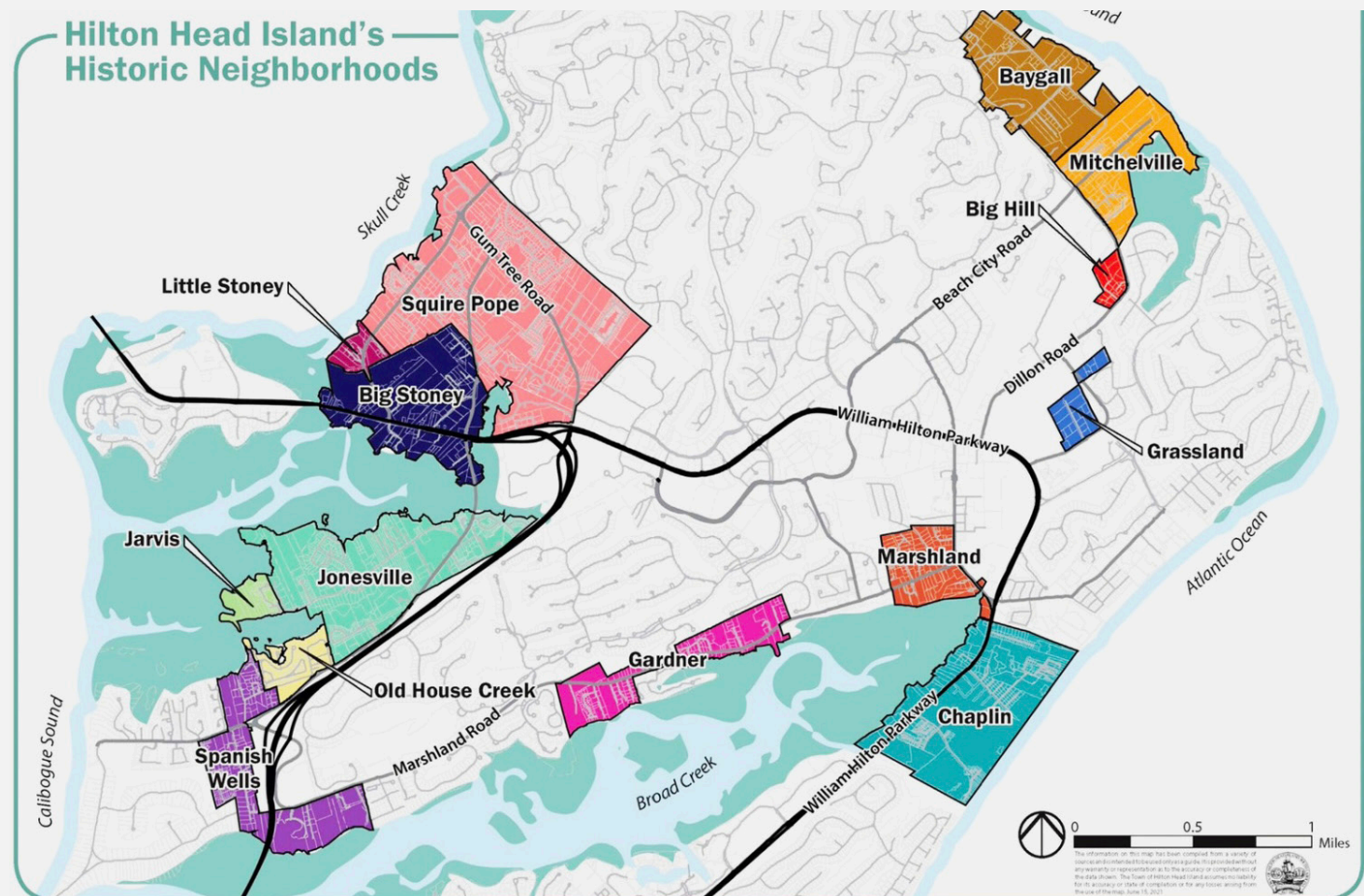


- Support the preservation of Gullah cemeteries
 1. Support the clearing of ownership and title related issues as needed.
 2. Establish right of way agreements with PUD communities for access to cemeteries that impedes future encroachment.
- Support increased tourism to Gullah landmarks and cultural sites through marketing and outreach efforts
 1. In collaboration with and support from the Destination Marketing Organization, develop a Gullah-centric advertising package that supports the growth and development of Gullah businesses.
 2. Secure prominent placement of Gullah-centric advertisements in the Hilton Head Island Airport.
 3. In collaboration with the Destination Marketing Organization, establish Gullah-centric marketing strategies for tourists point of origin.
 4. Develop wayfinding tools, including technology applications, to highlight Gullah historic sites and landmarks.

Goal #2:

Develop and maintain strategic partnerships that will support the work of the Community Development Corporation.

- Establish strategic alliances with business, community, and organization leaders on Hilton Head Island, Beaufort County, and the coastal region in support of the historic Gullah neighborhoods.
- Continue to grow and develop strategic alliances with federal and state congressional representatives.
- Create joint venture opportunities for partnership in the development of residential and commercial properties with property owners in the historic neighborhoods.



Goal #3:

Educate the Island community regarding the Community Development Corporation and the opportunities the organization presents.



- Host community meetings based on topics of interest identified via the community survey.
- Presentations to organizations across the region that introduce our organization and the role that we play.

- Support the Gullah Geechee Land and Cultural Preservation Task Force's recommendations regarding education and outreach including but not limited to:
 1. Development of on boarding training regarding Gullah heritage for new Town employees
 2. Property tax education
 3. Land Management Ordinance updates
 4. Support of landowners through development processes



Goal #4:

Increase access to capital and financial education.

- Secure funding to support the launch of a business loan program.
- Secure funding to support the launch of a real estate development loan program.
- Support and facilitate financial education and technical support for:
 1. Business development, growth and expansion
 2. Home ownership
 3. Commercial real estate development



Goal #5: Support training and employment opportunities for Gullah Geechee youth.

- Support the development of internship opportunities for youth with various departments at the Town of Hilton Head Island.
- Identify other community-based businesses, anchor institutions and employers that are willing to support youth employment opportunities.

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