

# OUR TOWN

A Newsletter of the Town Of Hilton Head Island  
 Brought to you by the Town of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina  
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MAYOR JOHN J. MCCANN

## Mayor's Update

For several years now, the Town has worked on preserving Hilton Head Island's Gullah Geechee culture, a rich, vibrant part of the Island's history. Residents in the Island's native communities have tirelessly advocated for protection of their culture, including their land, their language, their history and much more.

I was first exposed to the Gullah Geechee culture when I started visiting the Island more than 30 years ago. Over time, I've learned how deeply important the culture is to our native Islanders, whose roots stretch back four or more generations, and how much the culture has shaped our Island. The Town Council stepped up its efforts two years ago by placing Gullah Geechee land and cultural preservation among its top priorities. We're reminded of this each time we step into council chambers and see the list of priorities on the wall. Here is what we have done thus far:

In 2017, we appointed the Gullah

Geechee Land and Cultural Preservation Task Force as an extension of our Planning Commission. Lavon Stevens, a member of the Planning Commission, has led the task force and worked on concerns such as zoning, heirs' property, rights to property development, sewer access, identifying Gullah communities with landmark signs, property taxes and cultural education. While we still have a long way to go in addressing some of these issues, we have made some strides.

Last fall, the Town hired The Walker Collaborative to develop recommendations for preserving Gullah culture. After a series of focus group sessions with residents in the Island's Gullah community and public meetings, the consultant presented 37 recommendations to us. From those, Town staff and the Task Force selected the top 13 recommendations (see page 2) they felt would address immediate concerns raised in those meetings. Town Council approved those recommendations in September, giving Town staff the green light to move forward. We will provide updates

on those priorities as specific tactics are rolled out.

The Town hired Sheryse DuBose as its Historic Neighborhoods Preservation Administrator in May. Hiring Sheryse met the Task Force's goal of having an individual dedicated to serving as a liaison between the Town and Gullah communities. Her role is to help break down barriers some Islanders feel are roadblocks to them getting direct assistance from Town Hall.

A few months ago, I had the opportunity to meet with some community leaders and residents from the Gullah community. I wanted to hear first-hand from them what their expectations are of the Town Council and staff, and what legacy they wanted to leave for future generations. What an insightful meeting. It is the hope of these leaders to keep the Gullah culture and communities intact. They would like to make sure future generations have access to the same opportunities for economic growth, land development and quality of life as all other Islanders. I have pledged my support to ensure they do.



TOWN MANAGER STEVE RILEY

## Town Manager's Update

transportation and other state-mandated elements. In 2018, Town Council agreed that it was time again to prepare a Parks and Recreation Master Plan for the Island. It became one of our top priorities for 2019.

We hired Lose Design of Nashville, Tennessee, to help us with our new plan. Consultants will make recommendations for a parks and recreation system including facilities, programs and funding. The consultant team kicked off the project in August by conducting a series of stakeholder interviews, focus group meetings and open houses to gather input from Island residents. At the open houses, participants shared their opinions on the top programs and facilities they felt were important to our community.

Concerts, nature programs, swimming lessons for youth, pickle ball league, and programs for people with special needs emerged as the top five programs. The top ten facilities identified were recreation swim

facilities, pickle ball courts, splash pad or spray park, piers, farmer's market, synthetic turf fields, outdoor stage/amphitheater, sand volleyball, a large community park, and passive open space.

Stakeholders weighed in on how they would allocate a budget for parks and recreation facilities. The majority of participants cited maintaining and improving existing parks and facilities and building new parks as top funding priorities.

Additionally, Lose Design surveyed residents to get their input on parks and recreation facilities and programs that are important to them. If you missed the survey opportunity, you can still offer your input at committee meetings. Our Parks and Recreation Commission meets at 3:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month. Our Parks and Recreation Task Force, which is helping us with the rewrite of our comprehensive plan, meets twice each month. Our community will be well-served by your feedback.

Residents of Hilton Head Island appreciate recreation almost as much as they appreciate the protection of our natural resources. The Town is currently undertaking a Parks and Recreation Master Plan to guide the planning for our parks and recreation facilities and programs on the Island for the next 20 years.

The last Recreation and Open Space Plan was prepared in 1995. Since that time, we've included recreation as a standard component in our Comprehensive Plan, giving it the same attention as housing,

# Fire Hydrants and How Access to Them Works on Hilton Head Island

The location of fire hydrants play a critical role in firefighting tactics and has also been a concern for some local property owners. "In an effort to alleviate concerns, we want the public to fully understand how our fire hydrant system works," said Fire Chief Brad Tadlock of Hilton Head Island Fire Rescue.

On Hilton Head Island, fire hydrants must be installed within 500 feet of all new structures, and property owners are responsible for the cost of installing the hydrants and water mains that bring water to their property. Commercial and large residential developers building five or more structures are required to pay for water mains and fire hydrants as part of their development project.

"By law, the Town is prohibited from committing public tax money to benefit any one local property owner. This includes installing water mains or fire hydrants on private property and not on a public road or right-of-way," Tadlock said.



## Here are facts you should know about the Island's fire hydrant system:

- » The three public service districts (PSDs) on the Island - South Island Public Service District, Broad Creek Public Service District and Hilton Head Public Service District - approve, own and maintain all fire hydrants on their systems.
- » The International Fire Code, which the State of South Carolina has adopted, outlines the requirements for adding fire hydrants. Hilton Head Island Fire Rescue enforces the requirements of the property code.
- » The Fire Code requires all new buildings to be within 500 feet of the nearest fire hydrant. If a new structure is located beyond 500 feet, as measured by the approved travel route for emergency vehicles, the property owner or developer must provide fire hydrants and mains on the land where the structure sits.
- » An exception in the Fire Code exempts single family homes from the 500 feet requirement if there is no available water supply for connection of new fire mains and fire hydrants.
- » Fire Rescue officials have used the exception to allow property owners to add small residential structures within 1,000 feet of the nearest fire hydrant, particularly when they may incur significant costs for adding fire hydrants and water mains and benefit adjacent property owners not contributing to the costs.
- » The 1,000 feet distance is based on each fire department pumper truck being equipped with a thousand feet of five-inch supply hose and having 500 gallons of water on board the truck for initial firefighting operations.
- » Since all three PSDs provide water for fire protection through water mains to all areas of the Island, the Town developed a waiver form that explains the variance a property owner is receiving for the required 500 feet requirement. The owner must sign this form, thus acknowledging the variance, before approval is given to add structures beyond 500 feet. However, signing the document has no bearing whatsoever on emergency response.
- » The Town and the Hilton Head Public Service District have a joint agreement to split the cost of installing new fire hydrants in areas where existing buildings are more than 1,000 feet from the nearest hydrant. These hydrants can only be installed along public roadways for the greater good of the community.

## Top 13 Priorities for Gullah Geechee Culture Preservation Identified

To fulfill its goal of preserving Gullah Geechee culture and communities, the Hilton Head Island Town Council recently approved recommendations to address land preservation, economic opportunities and Town regulations.

### Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District Recommendations

1. Designate a Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District, including providing greater flexibility for right-of-way and drainage easements, fast tracking the development review process, and adding a family compound provision to the Town's Land Management Ordinance.
2. Encourage the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation in Charleston to open a satellite office on Hilton Head Island.
3. Leverage local, state and national organizations to address heirs' property.
4. Promote the use of the Heritage Library to research history and genealogy.
5. Use the Heritage Library as a first step to clear land title.
6. Encourage the Native Island Business and Community Affairs Association and the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry to create a fund to clear property titles.
7. Create a fund for delinquent taxes in order to help preserve remaining Gullah properties.



### Property Regulations Recommendations

1. Educate Gullah residents on policies related to taxes, land use and development.
2. Work with Gullah property and business owners to assist with navigation of Town regulations.

### Economic Opportunities Recommendations

1. Establish an open-air market to sell food, arts and crafts tied to Gullah culture as an economic development initiative.
2. Establish a program for temporary or seasonal signs to promote economic opportunities for Gullah businesses and residents.

### Other Recommendations

1. Recognize Gullah churches as an important facet of Gullah culture, especially as a source of leadership and communication.
2. Educate Town officials, teachers and others on Gullah history and culture.

For more information on the Town's Gullah Geechee initiatives, visit [hiltonheadislandsc.gov](http://hiltonheadislandsc.gov) or contact Sheryse DuBose, Historic Neighborhoods Preservation Administrator, at [sherysed@hiltonheadislandsc.gov](mailto:sherysed@hiltonheadislandsc.gov) or (843) 341- 4683.

# U.S. 278 Corridor Improvements: Project Overview and Status



In recent weeks, area residents have had an opportunity to learn more details about the U.S. 278 Corridor Improvements project that the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) has proposed. The project runs along the U.S. 278 corridor from Moss Creek Drive in Bluffton to Spanish Wells Road on Hilton Head Island. The purpose of this project is to address structural deficiencies at the existing eastbound Mackay Creek bridge, and to increase capacity and reduce congestion within the project limits.

The eastbound Mackay Creek bridge, constructed in 1956, is nearing the end of its service life and is scheduled for replacement. Additional studies for potential improvements within these project limits include:

- Modifications of the remaining three bridges.
- Improved access to Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge and to the C.C. Haigh, Jr. Boat Ramp.

In association with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Beaufort County, SCDOT will develop an 'Environmental Assessment' (EA) document for the proposed project. The EA will include a review of all proposed alternatives and will evaluate potential impacts to the natural and human environment. SCDOT will complete the EA process prior to acquiring any right-of-way or beginning construction for the proposed project.

Efforts have been focused on community involvement and communication to ensure the successful development of the environmental process. Due to the major roles state and federal resource agencies play, the project team will work closely with them in completing the environmental review process. The project is to be financed using federal, state, and local funds. Right-of-way acquisition for this project is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2021.

## THE NEPA PROCESS | US 278 CORRIDOR



## WHERE SCDOT IS IN THE PROCESS

SCDOT is taking this important project through an Environmental Assessment (EA) as part of the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, process. Project managers just wrapped up step five of this process - the second public information meeting. The project team is evaluating public input it received at the meeting and will incorporate it into the development of the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative will be presented at the public hearing, tentatively scheduled for late 2020.

## REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES FOR CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS

The SCDOT has shared six reasonable alternatives that may be used for the U.S. 278 Corridor Improvements project. These alternatives were determined

based on the projected number of properties that may be impacted, as well as potential impacts to neighborhoods, protected lands and wetlands. To view visual images of these alternatives, visit [www.scdot278corridor.com](http://www.scdot278corridor.com) or [www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov](http://www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov).

## STAY INVOLVED

Community feedback is an integral part of the alternatives analysis process. Comments may be submitted online at [www.scdot278corridor.com](http://www.scdot278corridor.com) or mailed to the:  
 South Carolina Department of Transportation  
 Attention: Craig Winn  
 955 Park Street, Room 401  
 Columbia, S.C. 29202

# U.S. 278 Gateway Corridor Committee Develops Guiding Principles for Project



Staying focused on the road ahead can be a daunting task, especially if you're dealing with the highway and bridge projects. So the Town Council-appointed U.S. 278 Gateway Corridor Committee developed a set of principles to guide its discussions and community engagement process for the U.S. 278 Corridor Improvements project.

For the project, the South Carolina Department of Transportation is proposing to make improvements to the U.S. 278 corridor between Moss Creek Drive in Bluffton and Spanish Wells Road on Hilton Head Island.

"As we meet and have interactions with the public, we want to make sure we are addressing the core issues," said David Johnson, chairman of the committee. "We ultimately want improvements to the bridges and roads that meet the needs of our community and enhance the quality of life for all of our residents. These principles will ensure we stay focused on this mission."

The guiding principles have been officially adopted by Hilton Head Island Town Council and Beaufort County Council. They are:

- 1. Fix the transportation issues in the corridor in a way that improves the safety and quality of life for all residents, workers and visitors to Hilton Head Island:**
  - Address transportation needs for natural disasters and resiliency of Island access.
  - Consider future transportation alternatives.
- 2. Improve the safety and quality of life for the residents of the neighborhoods and businesses directly impacted by the U.S. 278 corridor:**
  - Stoney
  - Neighborhoods on Jenkins and Hog Islands including but not limited to Windmill Harbour.
- 3. Have a gateway to and from Hilton Head Island that the region will be proud of:**
  - Aesthetically pleasing and reflecting the Hilton Head Island/Lowcountry values.
  - Safe and functional pathways for pedestrians and cyclists.

## Meet Our Honored Islanders

Islanders make a difference and we want to say thank you and congratulations to our local citizens who help make our community a better place. These individuals received the Mayor's Honored Islander Award in recognition of their contributions. Honorees so far this year include:



### JOHN LANG

John is involved with multiple organizations including the Greater Island Council of Hilton Head, the Hilton Head College Ethics Symposium, the Van Landingham Rotary Club, the Hilton Head American Legion, the Hilton Head Power and Sail Squadron, and the Yacht Club of Hilton Head Island.



### FRED AND DONNA MANSKE

Fred and Donna designed and funded the cost of the Coastal Discovery Museum's Camellia Garden, and give garden tours. Donna also serves as president of the Women's Association of Hilton Head Island while Fred maintains a position on the Coastal Discovery Museum Board of Directors.



### BRYON SEWELL

Bryon, founder and owner of Native Son Adventures, is known for the "Welcome Home" sign he created and displayed at the base of the Hilton Head Island bridge, greeting Islanders as they returned home after Hurricane Matthew in 2016.



### GEORGE WESTERFIELD

George is a retired educator and master gardner who started a plant rescue program. He takes discarded plants from local communities and brings new life to them by replanting them at the Hilton Head Island High School campus and at Habitat for Humanity homes.



### JERRY W. CUTRER

Jerry has served with numerous community organizations and Town committees including the Hilton Head Property Owners' Association, the Greater Island Council, the Boys & Girls Club of Hilton Head, St. Andrew by-the-Sea United Methodist Church usher board and U.S. 278 Gateway Corridor Committee.



### PAULINE ROSS

Pauline is a registered nurse at the Volunteers in Medicine Clinic on Hilton Head Island. She is enthusiastic about the clinic's mission and genuinely cares about the patients, whether she's treating them for a cold or something more serious. She sets the example for other volunteers, especially medical and nursing student interns.



### PAT KENWORTHY

Pat has volunteered as an interpreter for the Volunteers in Medicine Clinic and chaired Deep Well's Children's Committee that organizes drives for school uniforms and supplies and coordinates the annual Santa Shop toy program. She's active with the United States Tennis Association and has led the Hilton Head Plantation InterClub tennis team.



### RICHARD "SKEET" WILLIAMS

A Hilton Head Island native, Richard promotes and preserves the Island's Gullah culture by maintaining the historic Braddock's Point Cemetery at Harbour Town. With his church and family ties, he created a biographical sketch of each of the deceased and mapped all of the grave sites at the cemetery. They are published in a composition booklet, "Braddock Point Cemetery."

Anyone or any organization may nominate individuals for the award. Visit [www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov](http://www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov) for more information or nomination forms.

## Mural brings color to Pope Avenue and Lowcountry Celebration Park Site



You may notice a lot more color along Pope Avenue thanks to a mural designed by local artist Jessie Renew. The mural, which stands seven feet tall and is 450 feet long, incorporates themes of Hilton Head Island's local ecology to tie to the themes of the Lowcountry Celebration Park rising behind the fence it covers. "Since the site will be under construction during peak tourist seasons, the idea was presented to cover the fencing around the construction site with a mural to make it more aesthetically pleasing to guests and residents," said Jenn McEwen, Director of Cultural Affairs for the Town of Hilton Head Island. The Park will have a large lawn and stage to accommodate festivals, concerts and other gatherings; a destination playground with an iconic ship playground; the Sandbox Children's Museum; walking trails and boardwalks; exercise stations; additional parking and improved access to beach parking. It is scheduled to open late next summer.

## Town Fire Rescue replaces fleet of ambulances



Hilton Head Fire Rescue has a fleet of new shiny, red ambulances that replaced its older models.

"Most ambulances are on a 10-year replacement cycle or less. As you treat patients, you want to have vehicles that are well-equipped for advanced life support and rescue work, and that function safely," said Fire Rescue Chief Brad Tadlock.

The newer ambulance models have a 14-foot patient compartment that sits on a 2019 Ford 450 chassis, and meet the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS) - Ground Vehicle Standard for Ambulances. After the trade-in of ambulances from the previous fleet, each new ambulance costed \$176,676.

Manufactured in Houston, Texas, the 10 newer ambulances are a Type I Frazer vehicle. They are also identified as a "remount," a process where the module or "box" is removed from the existing chassis that has reached the end of service and is mounted onto a new chassis. This process saves money since a remount is much less expensive than buying a brand new ambulance when the chassis has reached a high mileage limit.

The remount process allowed Fire Rescue to re-use eight out of the 10 ambulances. The other two ambulances in the fleet were 11 years old and had reached 100,000 miles.