

West Ashley Strategic Plan



The purpose of this endeavor is to create a vision for West Ashley to make it a better place to live and to work, the way people want to live and work today...to make it a visibly economically sustainable part of the City...to define its natural role in the region.



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City of Charleston Councilmembers Representing West Ashley

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CONTEXT

In the Fall of 2013 several issues impacting West Ashley’s commercial landscape led residents, business owners, public officials and other stakeholders to voice public concern regarding the future of West Ashley. These issues included, but were not limited to, the uncertain future of Citadel Mall, several vacant big box stores, high retail vacancy rates, and the inconsistent quality and appearance of key highway corridors. Acting on these concerns, the City hired market research firm, Permar Inc. to work with city staff to craft a market-driven strategy to address West Ashley opportunities.

The City’s Role

The base of all economic development is investment. When private investment fails to meet a community's particular needs—or, in the case of West Ashley is unable to see existing market opportunities—public investment is necessary. The West Ashley Strategic Plan represents the first phase of this public investment. Through this strategy the City of Charleston intends to:

- Establish a strong vision for the future of West Ashley.
- Provide leadership and direction for critical projects and initiatives.
- Create momentum around and excitement about a new identity for West Ashley.
- Track progress and be accountable for expected outcomes.
- Use the West Ashley Strategic Plan to guide the City’s focus in working with residents and businesses to create a better future for West Ashley.

Expected Outcomes

Suburban revitalization is a dynamic and long-term endeavor. While substantive positive change will not be achieved over night, we expect the West Ashley Strategic Plan to realize the following outcomes.

- Attract new, high quality retail tenants and create better retail experiences.
- Attract professional jobs and high quality professional office development.
- Attract infill residential development.
- Demonstrate demand for better quality retail and public spaces and incentivize private sector investment.
- Encourage the redevelopment of vacant big box stores and fill vacant retail storefronts.
- Stimulate market demand.
- Encourage new thinking about West Ashley’s redevelopment opportunities.
- Inspire individual property owners to participate in revitalizing the area.



STRATEGY #1

Create community partnerships & reactivate civic spaces

The term “tactical urbanism” is used to describe inexpensive, temporary or individual projects that make underutilized places more lively and enjoyable. These programs are usually volunteer-led and address suburban design challenges such as how can large areas of surface parking be better-utilized, how can intersections be made safer for pedestrians and bicyclists, and how might vacant retail and office spaces be filled with temporary, civic-oriented uses.

Building on this idea of bottom-up, experience-based public involvement, the City will craft a community engagement strategy around a series of demonstration projects designed to:

- Reimagine the potential of suburban commercial areas.
- Foster neighborhood & resident interaction.
- Provide guidance & support to residents, volunteers, and project developers.
- Support local businesses.
- Enhance pedestrian safety & resident activities.

This bottom-up, experienced-based public involvement is an approach that is:

- Neighborhood / people-driven
- Action-oriented
- Temporary, transitional, incremental
- Low-cost, economical
- Open to all—merchants, community organizations, business owners, residents
- Creative, reflects diversity
- A proving ground for more capital-intensive endeavors
- Relatable, relevant (not abstract)
- Social, fun



NEXT STEPS

Hire a West Ashley Project Coordinator in the City Planning Department to facilitate projects and initiatives.

Establish an Advisory Board of residents and stakeholders to direct initiatives and community efforts.

Initiate a communication strategy using online and social media tools to share information with the community and gather resident ideas.

STRATEGY #2

Strengthen West Ashley's image and identity

How people think of a place is less tangible but as important to value enhancement as more tangible elements. A positive image elevates real estate values, garners better rental rates, attracts high quality tenants and visitors to the area, and leads to higher occupancy rates for retail and office space. Improving West Ashley's image is both a specific component of the West Ashley Strategic Plan as well as an expected outcome of the other strategies. Projects and policies specifically designed to improve West Ashley's image include:

Public Visioning & Brand Identification

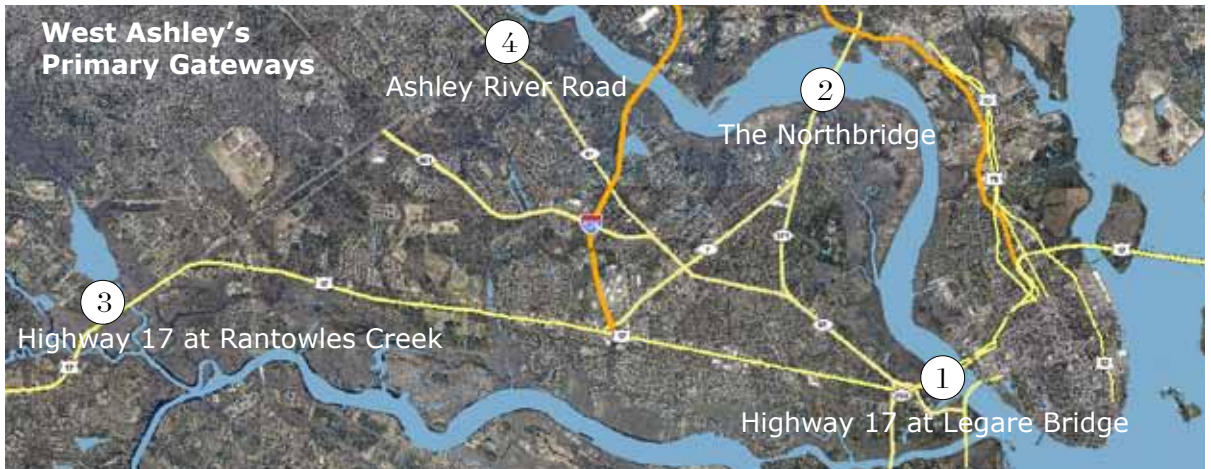
In order to better understand what residents of West Ashley consider its unique attributes, the City will solicit public input in a variety of ways—online, in-person, at public meetings—about what makes West Ashley a unique place to live, residents' pride points and what would make it better. Community input will contribute to the creation of ways to communicate West Ashley's unique points of differentiation and aspirations and a new visual identity for West Ashley.

Identify & Enhance Gateways

Because West Ashley is not an incorporated municipality but rather a large area within the City of Charleston, its boundaries are indistinct. Identifying and enhancing West Ashley's gateways will help define West Ashley's limits and specific geography.

Signage & Landscape Improvements

The City will update and strengthen signage, landscape and building form guidelines/ordinances along West Ashley's key highway corridors.



NEXT STEPS

Coordinate a community-driven visioning and branding process to establish a new visual identity for West Ashley.

Physically enhance gateways with landscaping, parks and signage.

Work with SCDOT and FHA to improve West Ashley signage along major arteries.

STRATEGY #3

Encourage and assist in the redevelopment of Citadel Mall

Redevelopment of the Citadel Mall property as a mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented center represents an unusual opportunity to create a quality destination for West Ashley residents, workers, and visitors to the area. The successful redevelopment of this property will create meaningful momentum in establishing a new identity for West Ashley, induce subsequent, like-kind development in the surrounding area and become a significant catalyst for change along the entire Sam Rittenberg Corridor.

Conceptual Plan

To inspire new thinking about this important West Ashley landmark the City Design Division has proposed a new vision for Citadel Mall. This reimagined Citadel Mall retains the existing footprint—including four of the five anchor tenants and a similar inline retail square footage. This conceptual plan replaces interior retail with an outdoor, pedestrian-oriented streetscape, transforming the mall into a Main Street-style shopping experience. The addition of three stories of apartments and offices above ground floor retail will give 24/7 life to the street.



Civic uses are a key element of the reimagined Citadel Mall. Public facilities like a West Ashley Town Hall, public squares and plazas, a natatorium, and a perimeter walking and biking trail make the area inviting and useful for residents well beyond the single-purpose retail spaces.

A new entrance on Orleans Road aligns with West Ashley Shoppes across the street and creates the opportunity for a more prominent entry and a safer, signalized intersection.

Citadel Mall Conceptual Redevelopment Program

Retail

Anchor Stores	620,500 square feet
Inline Retail	327,400 square feet
South Park Retail	71,900 square feet
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,019,800 square feet</i>

Residential

Citadel Mall	330 Units
South Park	80 Units
<i>Total</i>	<i>410 Units</i>

Office

Citadel Mall	96,000 square feet
South Park Existing	143,500 square feet
South Park New	118,600 square feet
<i>Total</i>	<i>358,100 square feet</i>

Hotel

160 Rooms

Additional Uses

Civic/ Town Hall	10,000 square feet
Grocery Store	54,000 square feet
Natatorium	140,000 square feet
<i>Total</i>	<i>204,000 square feet</i>

Public Spaces

4 acres



NEXT STEPS

Complete conceptual design work.

Continue to engage developers and property owners to work towards implementation of a comprehensive redevelopment plan.

Consider creative financing and zoning tools to attract private sector interest in the Citadel Mall property.

STRATEGY #4

Facilitate the revitalization of the Sam Rittenberg Corridor

Sam Rittenberg Boulevard functions as West Ashley's de facto Main Street. The corridor includes over 1 million square feet of commercial space. Nearly 10,000 employees work in this area and approximately 10,000 residents call it home. Yet with limited pedestrian facilities, design standards or landscaping, the boulevard is not consistently inviting nor does it facilitate, enable or take advantage of the social connections and community life that happens around it. A Sam Rittenberg Corridor Revitalization Plan will establish a vision for this important West Ashley corridor and provide a framework to market opportunities that are not visible today.

The following sequence of existing development transitioning to intermediate and complete redevelopment demonstrates how introducing residential and office uses to the existing retail would create a fully functioning main street, provide more places for public events and neighbors' chance encounters, and enhance real estate values.



Existing Development

This typical Sam Rittenberg block, located at the intersection of Ashley Hall Road and Sam Rittenberg Boulevard, is an example of under utilized strip retail with significant redevelopment potential. Redevelopment that introduces residential and office uses to the existing retail would create a fully functioning main street, provide more places for public events and neighbors' chance encounters and enhance real estate values.



Intermediate Redevelopment

New and mixed use buildings can be added while keeping many existing buildings in place by using existing surface parking. New public squares on Sam Rittenberg can be created to provide better entrances into residential neighborhoods and align entry streets with streets across the boulevard.



Complete Redevelopment

Parking structures hidden within the block can be added to support mixed-use development at higher densities. Two, three and four-story buildings surrounding interior park spaces are good places to live and work.

Remaking the Corridor

Today roughly 29,000 cars travel the Sam Rittenberg corridor daily. The six- to seven-lane road is built to carry approximately 45,000 cars a day. Given this excess capacity, Sam Rittenberg and its ample right-of-way provide an opportunity to

add pedestrian and bike facilities, beautify the corridor and fix key intersections. The regained space could be used to improve the look and function of the street with less asphalt and more plantings.



Before (left) and after (right) images of Bridgeport Way in University Place, WA



Before (left) and after (right) of La Jolla Boulevard in San Diego, CA

NEXT STEPS

Work with public sector partners to identify funding for a design/engineering study.

Elevate Sam Rittenberg improvements to the City's #1 priority and showpiece for the next round of public funding for road infrastructure projects.

Develop creative financing tools and zoning changes to attract / induce private sector investment in properties along Sam Rittenberg Blvd.

STRATEGY #5

Facilitate the evolution of the West Ashley Greenscape

“No single park, no matter how well designed would provide citizens with the beneficial influences of nature; instead parks need to be linked to one another and to surrounding neighborhoods.” – Frederick Law Olmsted

Working with partners and alliances, the City will focus on completing a fully-interconnected open space network and strategically target areas of West Ashley for additional park development and connecting infrastructure.



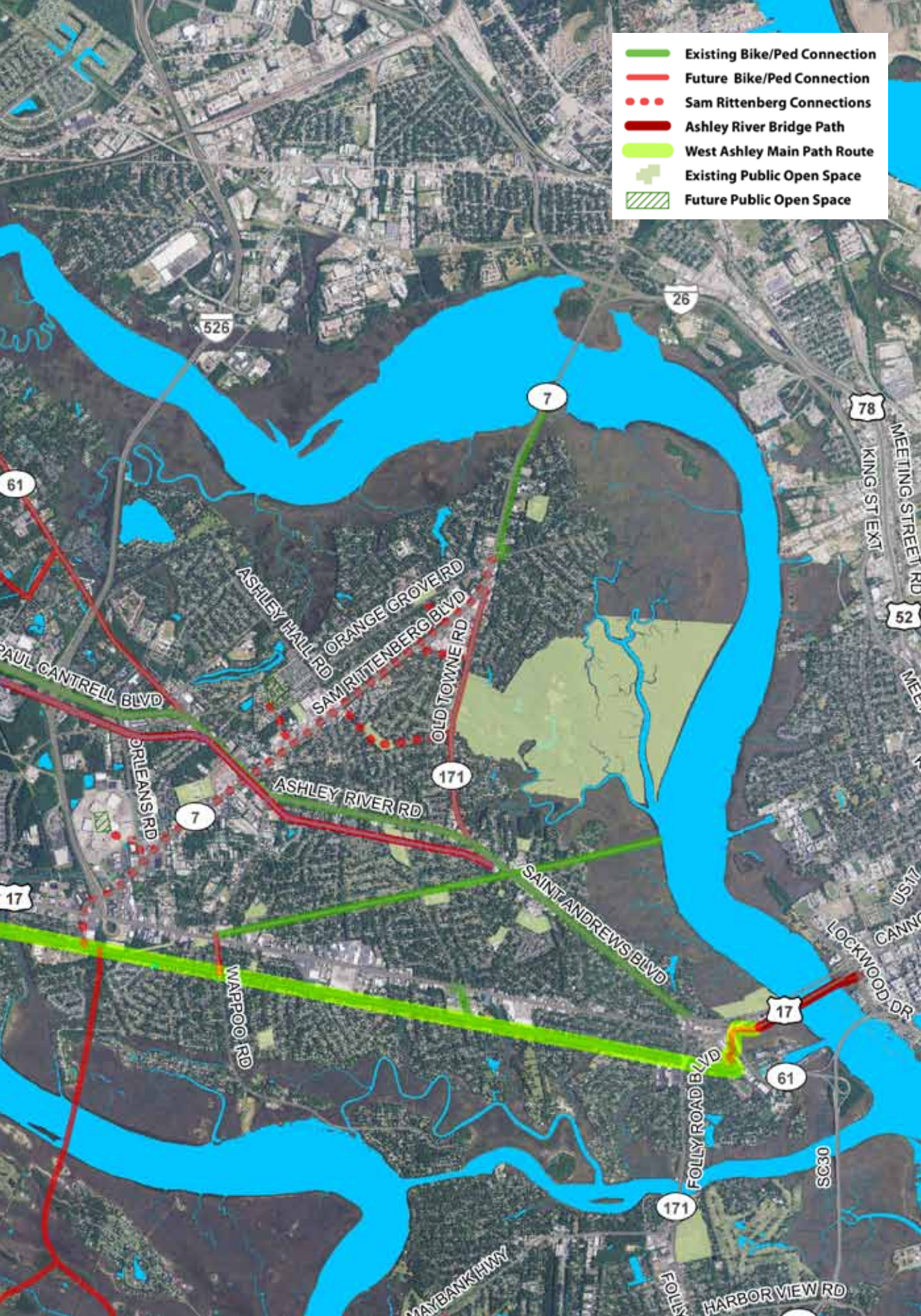
NEXT STEPS

Leverage private sector development projects—both commercial and residential—to create and finance new open spaces and bike/pedestrian connections.

Invest public funds to improve open spaces and create new bike/pedestrian infrastructure and connections.

Coordinate a community-driven branding and wayfinding campaign for the West Ashley open space system.

- Existing Bike/Ped Connection
- Future Bike/Ped Connection
- Sam Rittenberg Connections
- Ashley River Bridge Path
- West Ashley Main Path Route
- + Existing Public Open Space
- Future Public Open Space



NEXT STEPS

Strategy 1 - Create community partnerships and reactivate civic spaces

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Strategy 2 - Strengthen West Ashley's image and identity

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Strategy 3 - Encourage and assist in the redevelopment of Citadel Mall

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