



Richland County Council
LOWER RICHLAND TOURISM PLAN WORK SESSION
AGENDA
May 26, 2022 – 4:00 PM
Council Chambers
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

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| 1. <u>CALL TO ORDER</u> | The Honorable Overture Walker,
Chair, Richland County Council |
| 2. <u>ADOPTION OF AGENDA</u> | The Honorable Overture Walker |
| 3. <u>PRESENTATION</u> | |
| a. The Lower Richland Tourism Plan [Pages 2-36] | |
| 4. <u>ADJOURNMENT</u> | The Honorable Overture Walker |

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LOWER RICHLAND TOURISM PLAN

JUNE 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lower Richland Tourism Plan is a vision for a sustainable, inclusive tourism economy in Lower Richland that builds on and strengthens local nature and heritage assets.

Lower Richland has an incredible wealth of natural and heritage resources. The region's history and culture are deeply intertwined with the Congaree bottomlands along the Congaree River, which are a world-class natural environment that features the Congaree National Park and large amounts of additional preserved bottomland habitat on private and county-owned properties. The Wateree River and Cook's Mountain represent additional opportunities to connect Piedmont and Lowcountry resources for visitors and residents of the Lower Richland area.

Meanwhile, Lower Richland residents and organizations maintain a deep interest in and knowledge of local history and heritage. Local historians have worked to uncover histories of African-American communities and inventories of local historic assets. As the newly-opened National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center demonstrate, there is a deep interest nationwide in ensuring that stories of African-American enslavement, resistance, community, resilience, and progress can be shared and interpreted by visitors and residents of communities across the U.S. Lower Richland's historic resources and deep-rooted community present an ideal opportunity for telling the story of the African-American experience locally, but these resources must be connected, interpreted, and available to visitors in order to truly capture the power of the history that has shaped today's community.

This plan seeks to bring these natural and heritage resources to the forefront, while ensuring that Lower Richland residents are in the driver's seat -- meaning they are the

builders of local businesses that reap the dollars from increased visitation; they are the force and leadership behind the interpretation of local historical sites and heritage resources; and they are beneficiaries of increased open space, access to the natural environment and community services that also benefit visitors to the area. The measure of success for this effort is not simply increasing visitation to Lower Richland, but creating the connections to ensure increased tourism will help the local community thrive.

An Urgent, Sustainable, and Inclusive Vision for Lower Richland Tourism

This plan builds on and supports several other ongoing planning initiatives, but most notably the Richland Renaissance, a multifaceted plan that seeks to leverage county-owned assets to improve the quality of life for county residents. The plan also comes at a time of incredible opportunity for Lower Richland to build its tourism market. In 2017, Congaree National Park attracted more visitors than in any previous year; over 160,000 people came to Lower Richland to visit this natural asset. Yet there are few services for these tourists either at the park or in the Lower Richland area. The large amount of designated wilderness area within the national park restricts its ability to provide more than basic boardwalks, limited paddling opportunities, and primitive camping facilities. Lower Richland contains no lodging options and few retail, restaurant, and dry goods options for residents or visitors. This situation offers immediate openings for recreational and tourism options that can complement the national park's offerings, and for new, locally-owned businesses to serve existing visitors as well as the increased visitation generated by new tourism options in the area.

Opportunity to grow local tourism also stems from two new publicly-owned assets in the area: Richland County recently acquired two large conservation sites in the Lower Richland area, the Cabin Branch and Mill Creek tracts.



The Lower Richland Tourism Plan provides a comprehensive framework for a sustainable tourism economy built around existing natural and cultural heritage.

Cabin Branch is a 680-acre tract located on a number of former agricultural tracts just below the intersection of Garner’s Ferry Road and Lower Richland Boulevard. Mill Creek is a 2555-acre tract located directly on the Congaree River, close to the Congaree National Park, with access from Old Bluff Road. The county intends these tracts to serve multiple functions: as mitigation banks for stream and wetland restoration and conservation, as well as for the development of recreation, lodging, and sustainable tourism-oriented uses. Mill Creek, in particular, presents a major opportunity to showcase the Congaree bottomlands in an environment that can incorporate more creative and wide-ranging tourism uses than Congaree National Park and that can complement the amenities available at the national park, driving more tourism to both sites. Both the Cabin Branch and

Mill Creek sites are featured throughout this plan document, although the plan covers all of Lower Richland and includes many hubs, corridors, and natural and heritage assets in addition to these county-owned properties. Richland County and its residents are united in advancing the idea that tourism must be sustainable, meaning that it must leverage, support, and enhance local natural and heritage assets rather than harming these assets through overuse or highly intensive development. The plan also takes as a core principle the idea that tourism assets, and the economic opportunity they generate, must be inclusive and provide economic, recreational, and quality-of-life benefits for Lower Richland residents as well as enhancing visitation. Both of these ideas are explored further in the “Key Themes” section below.



Framework Plan

The Framework Plan responds to the basic dictates of tourism planning: visitors need to have clear destinations that offer programming and resources to connect them to additional sites of interest; they need clear branding, wayfinding, and connections to be able to fully find and access local heritage and nature assets; and they need resources such as lodging, food, and retail that can serve their needs. The Framework Plan recommends overall infrastructure such as a shared, branded identity to attract visitors, a wayfinding system of signage to direct them once they arrive, and mobility improvements to alleviate potential traffic impacts and accommodate bicyclists as well as motorists.

The Framework Plan also responds to the desire of Lower Richland residents to clearly define and establish a path for tourism development that is located in the heart of the community, but still preserves large portions of the area for rural and agricultural uses rather than placing development haphazardly across

the region. The Framework Plan map therefore identifies certain places that can serve as hubs for tourism development. These hubs serve as primary tourism destinations and include:

- Mill Creek:** Mill Creek is the primary hub for nature tourism (in addition to Congaree National Park). It features a nature center, elevated boardwalks and canopy walk trails, lodging options including RV and river lodging, paddling opportunities on the Congaree and Goose Pond, and more.
- Hopkins Village Green:** The Hopkins Village Green is proposed as the primary hub for heritage tourism. It features a branch of the Richland Library which will function as a supportive asset for a heritage center and a small business incubator and will include a community porch and event venue. The Village Green also features a commercial kitchen, a simple structure to house a farmers' market, and a band shell that can be used for local events and festivals.



Places of Lower Richland (clockwise from top left): View of the Congaree River from the Mill Creek tract; Eastover; Gadsden Park Community Center; Cabin Branch tract; Hopkins

- Gadsden:** Gadsden is the “gateway to Congaree National Park.” Much like park gateway communities across the country, Gadsden will house lodging, restaurant, and retail resources that will be utilized by visitors and community members alike. Careful design standards as established through a proposed new zoning district will help define the character of development to fit the rural character of the community.
 - Cabin Branch:** Cabin Branch offers opportunities for hiking and biking trails that allow visitors and residents to experience agricultural lands; as one of the first sites that tourists will encounter as they drive out of Columbia and down Lower Richland Boulevard, it also offers an opportunity to site initial kiosks, maps, and other local tourism wayfinding elements that can be used to orient visitors to the region.
 - Eastover:** Eastover serves as the historic commercial center of the Lower Richland area; its existing historic commercial corridor is ideal for historic preservation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings into restaurants, community-serving retail, and specialty retail such as antique stores. Connecting residents and small business owners with tax credits and tax abatement opportunities can help move opportunities forward in this corridor.
- The hubs provide connections to the many and diverse other sites of interest in Lower Richland. Existing recreational assets including Congaree National Park, Pinewood Lake Park, and the Wateree River Heritage Preserve Wildlife Management Area; heritage assets like the Harriet Barber House, Kensington Mansion, and numerous historic churches; and, many other sites of interest will be tied into the tourism framework through shared wayfinding, mapping, and clear mobility networks.

Key Themes

The plan carries forward several key themes related to its existing conditions analysis and recommendations. These themes were identified through site analysis, research, and deep community and stakeholder engagement that included hundreds of local participants in community meetings and interviews with almost 200 stakeholders who are engaged in numerous sectors of Lower Richland.

Theme 1:

Lower Richland needs to develop tourism infrastructure - a shared identity for branding and wayfinding, a system of key hubs and corridors, and provision of essential services to enable targeted, thoughtful tourism growth. Tourism functions best when there are clear, accessible core destinations that offer concentrated attractions, as well as clear wayfinding systems, maps, and guides that help them explore the rest of the region. Tourists also need access to resources including lodging and retail options - few of which are available in Lower Richland today. Creating a clear network of tourism assets will help visitors clearly understand and appreciate the story of Lower Richland, and will focus development in certain areas in order to ensure that new development does not overwhelm the prized rural character of the community.

Theme 2:

Residents of Lower Richland must benefit and participate in the economic growth and new amenities that result from this plan. The plan does not envision tourism as an end goal in itself - rather, the goal of increasing tourism is to increase quality of life, economic opportunity, and environmental benefits for the entire Lower Richland community.

Theme 3:

A successful tourism plan for Lower Richland is a three-legged stool that involves nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development. A stool with only two legs will not stand - and all three of these areas are crucial to achieve residents' vision of a sustainable, inclusive future that builds on the local community's strengths and assets.



- Nature tourism capitalizes on the world-class environmental assets of the Congaree bottomlands and existing attractions like the Congaree National Park, and envisions the county-owned Mill Creek site as offering a diversity of complementary uses to the national park that can attract visitors and local residents alike.
- Heritage tourism celebrates the history and landscape of Lower Richland and enables visitors to access a core Heritage Center before traveling across the landscape to visit agricultural and historic sites of interest.
- Small business development reflects the need for Lower Richland residents to take the lead in building businesses and creating wealth within the growing tourism economy. The lack of businesses in Lower Richland today is a problem but also an opportunity; there is space for local businesses rooted in community tradition, knowledge, and resources. A Small Business Incubator will assist Lower Richland residents to understand the opportunities for tourism-serving businesses, take incremental steps that minimize risk and maximize reward, and access education, financing, and resources that will enable them to grow successful and sustainable businesses.



Lower Richland Heritage Center precedent



Mill Creek Nature Center precedent



Small Business Incubator precedent

Major Projects

Each of the plan's three core pillars of nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development feature a "major project" that will help support the Lower Richland community to grow the tourism economy. These major projects include:

- Mill Creek Nature Center:* Mill Creek Nature Center will be located at Mill Creek and will serve as a visitor center for that site that provides educational programming and recreation; an administrative facility for the lodging uses on the site; and a hub that will connect visitors to the other nature and heritage assets of Lower Richland by providing maps and tours. It should also incorporate a cafe or quick-serve restaurant that can serve visitors and local residents.
- Hopkins Heritage Center:* Co-located in the same building with a proposed branch of the Richland Library and the proposed Small Business Incubator, the Heritage Center offers oral histories, exhibits, special library collections, and video tours of Lower Richland heritage assets. It also offers maps and tours of heritage resources throughout the area, including historic buildings, churches, historic sites, cemeteries, and other heritage resources.
- Small Business Incubator:* Co-located with the Richland Library branch and the Heritage Center at the Hopkins Village Green, the Small Business Incubator includes meeting spaces and computer labs that will offer coordinated trainings by local university partners, agricultural specialists, lodging specialists, and more, and will bring in bankers, investors, and others for networking activities with local business owners. It also includes separate facilities (also on the Village Green site) for a Farmers' Market and a Lower Richland Commercial Kitchen.

Implementing the Plan

The *Major Projects* are significant but by no means the only way of implementing this plan. In the Recommendations chapter, this plan offers numerous other specific recommendations to grow the “three-legged stool” of nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development that defines a successful tourism economy for Lower Richland. These recommendations include projects, programs, and policies that can help move forward the *Framework Plan* and *Key Themes*, and can leverage the proposed major projects to craft a strategy for long-term success.

The Implementation chapter includes a comprehensive matrix which organizes the many recommendations by theme and time frame, along with resources, needs, and potential partners.

The Plan is conceived to be implemented in phases over time, as resources become available. However, it is critical that the plan maintain momentum, and the best way to achieve this is through incremental steps that show that the county and stakeholders are making progress and residents are positively impacted at each step.

The following offers a summary of the immediate next steps to help maintain momentum on implementing the plan over the next two years especially in regard to the *Major Projects*.

As the *Major Projects* in particular will require the most resources over time, the following next steps provide a means of acting on these ambitious initiatives through incremental efforts intended to build interest and support in the short term.

Short-term Recommendations (2018 - 2020)

General Recommendations

1. Form a committee of local resident stakeholders to oversee the development of a brand identity for Lower Richland Tourism.
2. Work with a branding consultant to develop the brand identity and website for Lower Richland tourism in collaboration with a committee of local resident stakeholders.
3. Conduct a feasibility study for all proposed Mobility Improvements in coordination with Richland County Planning Department, Richland County Public Works Department, as well as the Richland County Conservation Commission.
4. Coordinate with the Richland County Recreation Commission to ensure that all upcoming park and trail projects in Lower Richland County are aligned with the goals of this plan.
5. Investigate the available and underutilized right-of-way adjacent to the both the CSX and Norfolk Southern rail lines as feasible for potential rail trail segments.
6. Coordinate with Palmetto Conservation Foundation on ways to improve the conditions, access, and connectivity along the Palmetto Trail through Lower Richland.
7. Work with the Richland County Planning Department to apply appropriate zoning designations throughout Lower Richland in order to permit the proposed uses and character of development.
8. Develop and promote a range of interpretive trails to connect Lower Richland nature and heritage sites.

Lower Richland Heritage Center

1. Explore and establish a partnership with the Richland Library System to help develop Heritage Center vision, archival collections, and temporary cultural programs.
2. Launch an oral history initiative in collaboration with the Richland Library System.
3. Create a Lower Richland Heritage advisory committee comprised of representatives of existing heritage organizations and local scholars to advise on Heritage Center projects and associated programs.
4. Explore potential sites for the Heritage Center in collaboration with the other Richland County Renaissance Plan initiatives.
5. Consolidate support for Lower Richland to be included in the existing South Carolina National Heritage Corridor (SCNHC) and advocate for this legislation.

Mill Creek Nature Center

1. Develop design scope and identify sources of funding for full park and Nature Center development.
2. Introduce the project to all potential public and private funders and clarify opportunities and interest for funding various aspects of the project.
3. Work with key stakeholders including National Park Service, Richland County Recreation Commission, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Friends of Congaree Swamp, and others to host event-based programs such as tours and environmental education to introduce the property to local residents and begin to activate the site.

Small Business Incubator

1. Formalize an agreement with a partner institution such as the Richland Library System or Clemson University Cooperative Extension to establish and operate a small business incubator program in Lower Richland in a dedicated space and begin to offer educational resources to local residents prior to an established program.
2. Formalize agreements with a variety of other project partners to offer educational, networking, and financial support to emerging entrepreneurs.
3. Identify potential temporary locations for the Small Business Incubator that could be utilized until a more permanent space can be identified and developed.

Lower Richland Tourism Plan (LRTP)

County Council Work Session
May 26, 2022



Timeline

- ▶ Engaged Asakura-Robinson - 2016
- ▶ November 2016, January 2017: Public input sessions at Hopkins Park
- ▶ January 2017: Public input session at Lower Richland sheriff substation
- ▶ Nov 2016-Jan 2017: Coordination with steering committee, stakeholders (interviews), elected officials
- ▶ June 2018: Final Draft
- ▶ July 2018: LRTP approved by Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC)
- ▶ February 2019: Request for motion to approve plan
- ▶ December 2021: Development and Services Committee, request for approval
- ▶ February 2022: RCCC LRTP Drop-in



Missed Opportunities

- ▶ In 2017, Congaree National Park attracted over 160,000 people
- ▶ The premise of the LRTP is to take advantage of the \$9.643 million per year spent within a 60-mile radius of Congaree National Park by these visitors
- ▶ The LRTP creates a framework to keep visitors in the area longer with additional camping, lodging, dining, shopping, and recreational options
- ▶ Producing income for Lower Richland and other County residents from our natural, cultural and historical resources will provide for their preservation.



Visitor Spending in Gateway Communities



Visitor Spending Effects

In National Parks

In 2020, visitors secured lodging, bought food, and purchased gear for trips to some of America's most iconic landscapes. Visitor spending effects demonstrate the importance of national parks to the country's economy.



237 million visits made to National Park sites in 2020

\$14.5 billion spent by visitors in communities near parks

234,000 jobs supported by visitor spending

Top Three Sectors:



Lodging
\$5 billion spent, supporting 43,100 jobs



Restaurants
\$3 billion spent, supporting 45,900 jobs



Gas
\$1.6 billion spent, supporting 2,950 jobs



Blue Ridge Parkway
14.1 million visitors spent an estimated \$1.1 billion

Golden Gate National Recreational Area
12.4 million visitors spent an estimated \$685 million

Blue Ridge Parkway, Golden Gate National Recreational Area, and the Great Smoky Mountains welcomed the most visitors in 2020.

Plan Themes

Theme 1. Lower Richland needs to develop tourism infrastructure

Theme 2. Lower Richland residents must benefit and participate

Theme 3. A successful tourism plan for Lower Richland is a 3-legged stool:

Small Business Development

Heritage Tourism

Nature Tourism



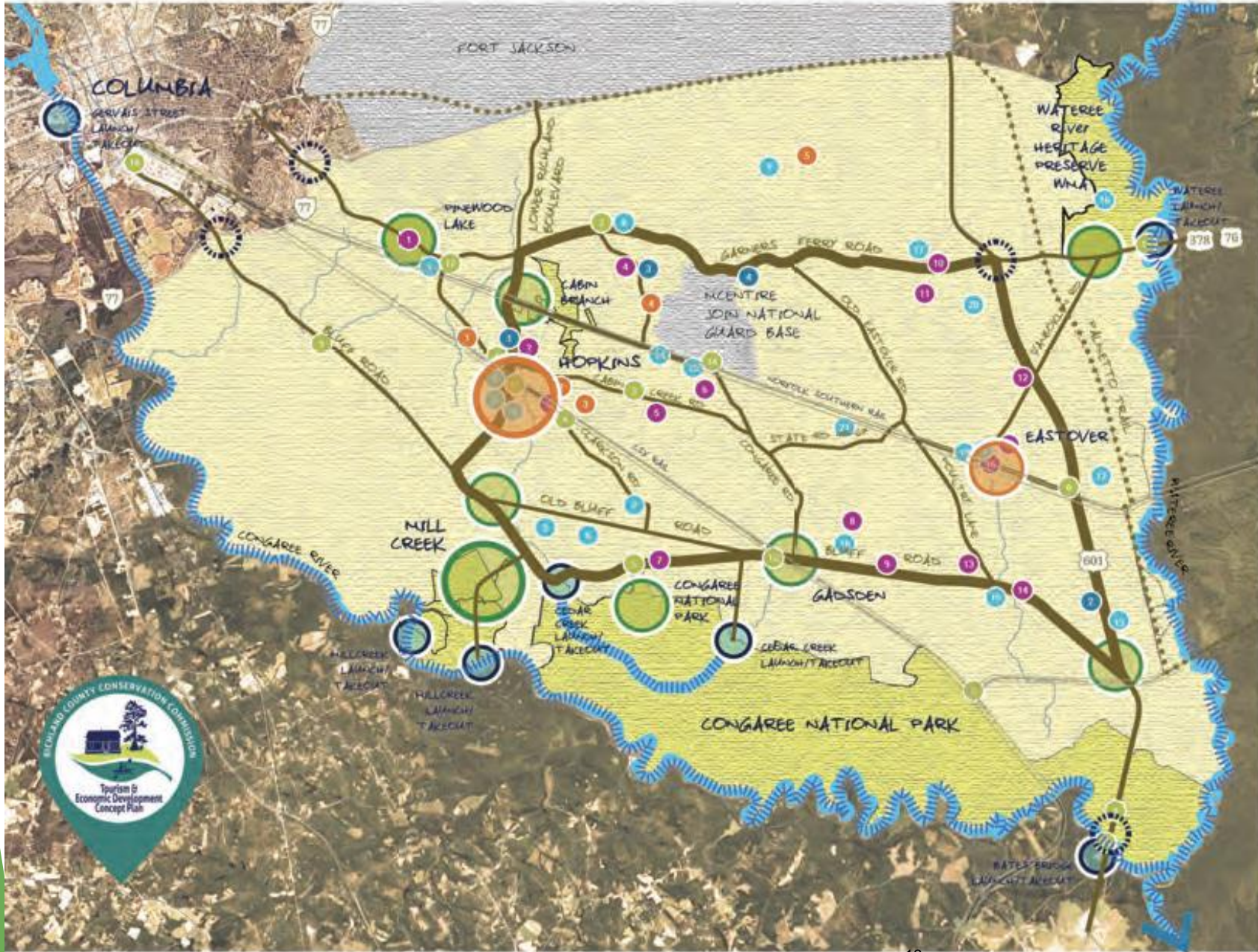
NATURE
TOURISM



HERITAGE
TOURISM



SMALL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT



FRAMEWORK PLAN

LEGEND

- HUBS**
 - NATURE TOURISM HUBS (MAJOR & MINOR)
 - HERITAGE TOURISM HUBS (MAJOR & MINOR)
 - WATER ACCESS HUBS
- CORRIDORS**
 - PRIMARY CORRIDORS
 - SECONDARY CORRIDORS
 - BLUE TRAIL
 - PALMETTO TRAIL
 - POTENTIAL RAIL TRAIL
- POINTS OF INTEREST**
 - BUILDINGS
 - CEMETERIES
 - CHURCHES
 - SCHOOLS
 - SITES / LANDSCAPES



Nature Tourism

- ▶ Minor nature tourism hubs (Gadsden, Old Bluff Road/Bluff Road intersection, Pinewood Lake Park)
- ▶ Interpretive courses for guides and outfitters
- ▶ Develop interpretive trails linking nature and heritage sites
- ▶ Mill Creek Nature Center complements Congaree National Park
- ▶ Blue Trail access at Mill Creek and Wateree HP/WMA
- ▶ Improve Palmetto Trail

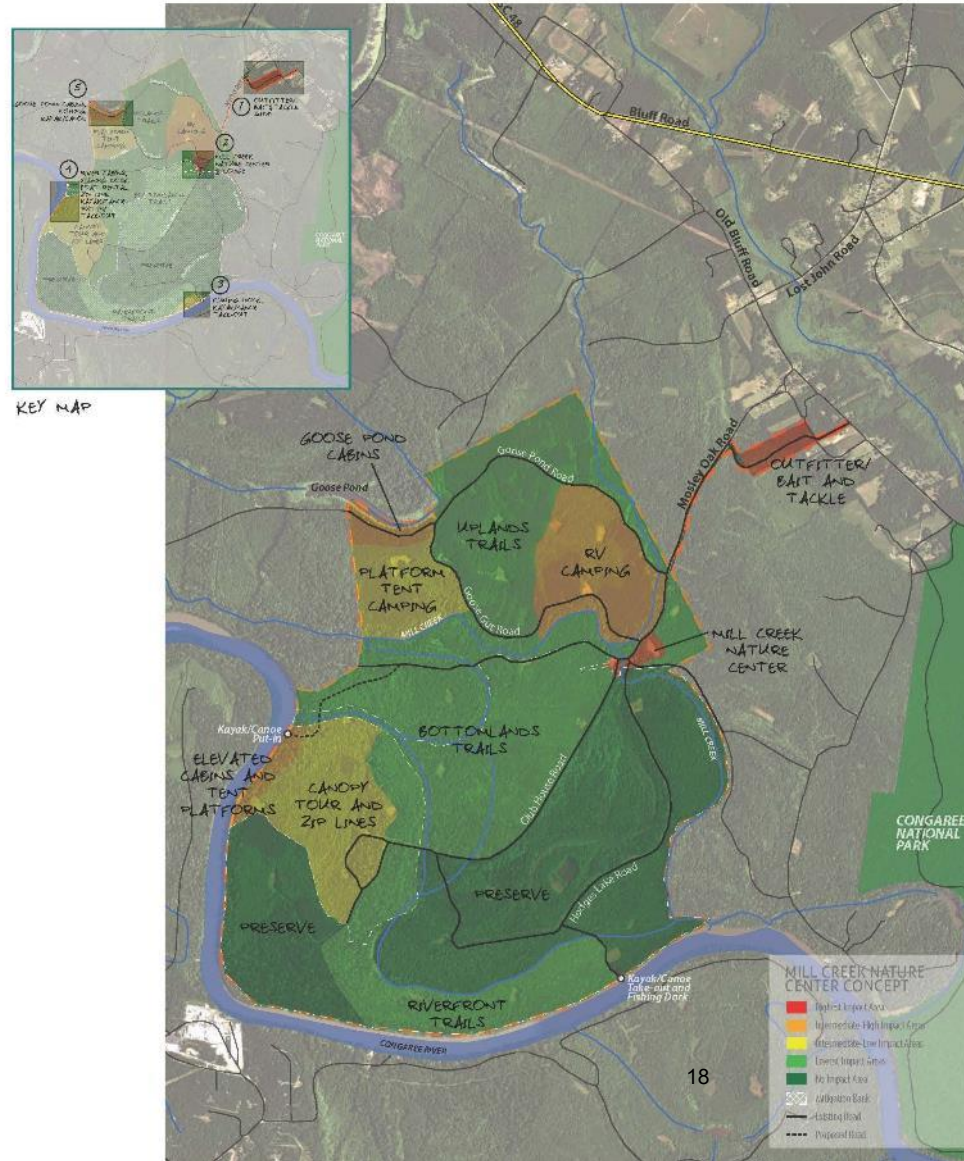


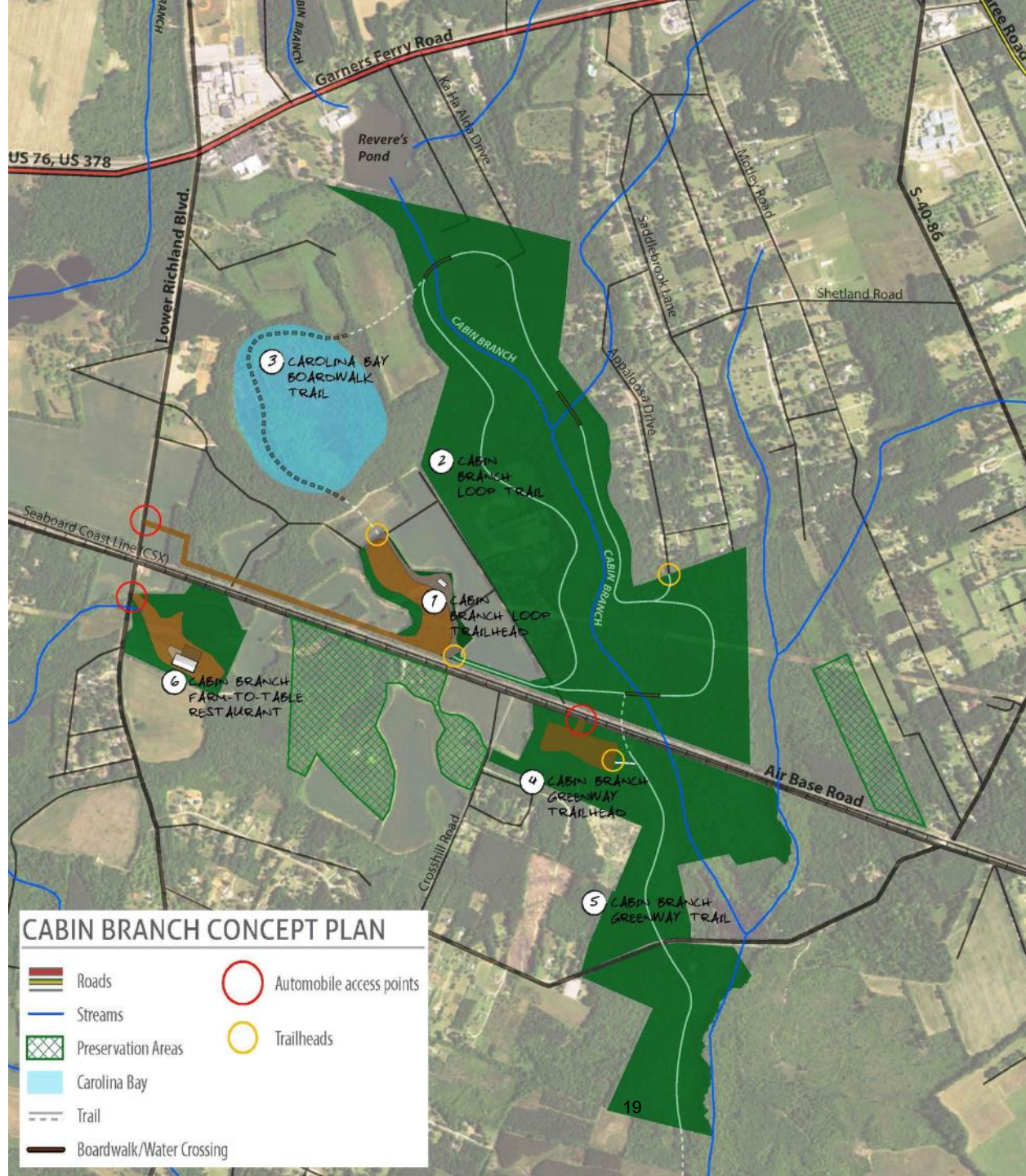
NATURE TOURISM

RECOMMENDATIONS



MILL CREEK PARK





Heritage Tourism

- ▶ Include Lower Richland in SC National Heritage Corridor
- ▶ Leverage existing resources (SERCO and COWASEE guides) to improve interpretive trails
- ▶ Help existing non-profits with development
- ▶ Wayfinding system
- ▶ Rails to trails (or rails with trails)/Palmetto Trail improvements
- ▶ Lower Richland Heritage Center at Hopkins Green (library/heritage center/green)
- ▶ City of Eastover historic building rehabilitation/adaptive reuse
- ▶ Lower Richland oral history project



HERITAGE TOURISM

RECOMMENDATIONS



HOPKINS VILLAGE GREEN / PINWOOD LAKE PARK



FARMERS MARKET & VENDOR SPACE



HERITAGE CENTER & COMMUNITY PORCH



BANDSHELL



Small Business (Economic) Development

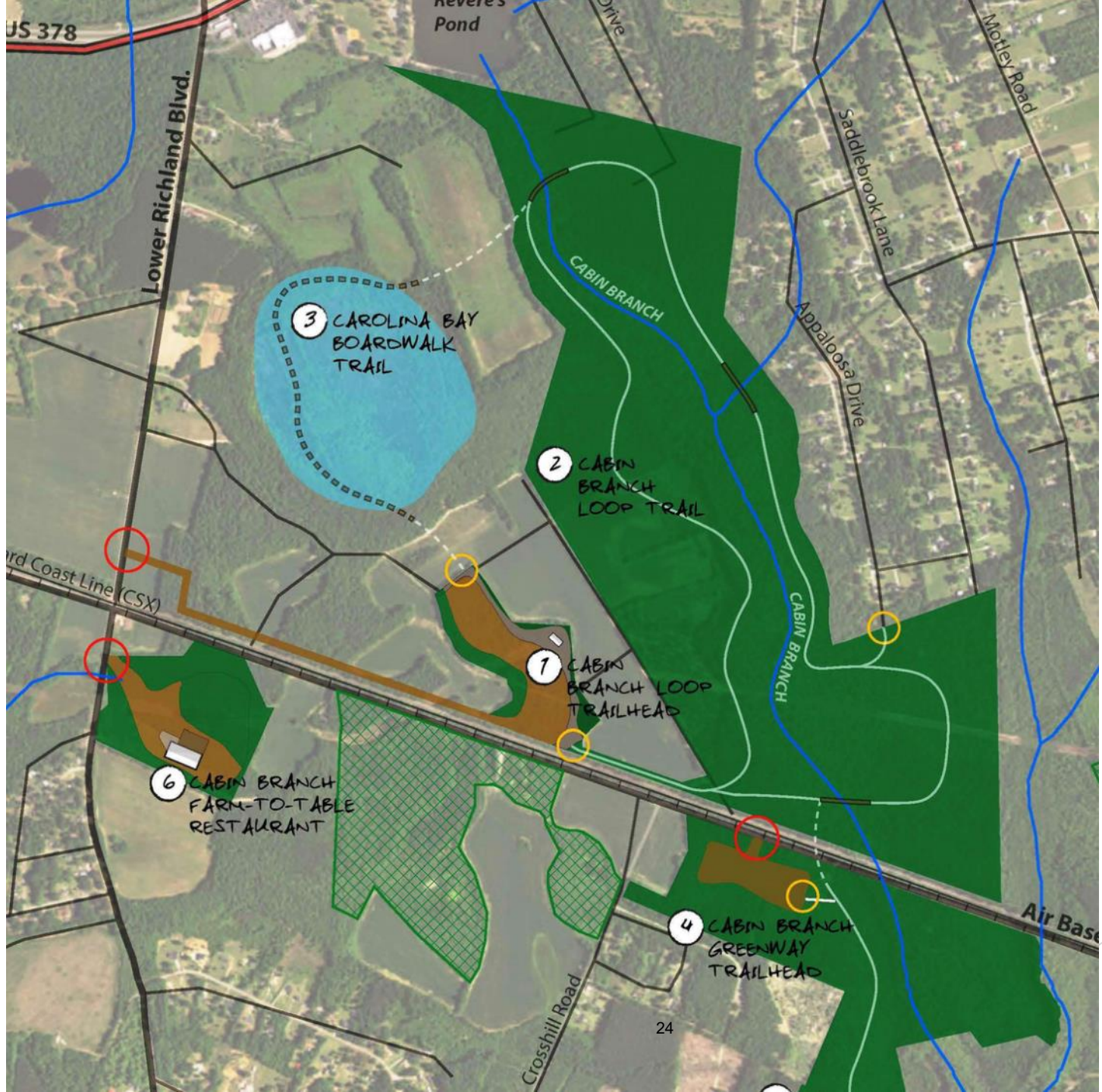
► Lodging and Accommodations



Small Business (Economic) Development

► Food Service and Production





Small Business (Economic) Development

► Agriculture and Food Production



HOPKINS VILLAGE GREEN / PINewood LAKE PARK



FARMERS MARKET &
VENDOR SPACE



HERITAGE CENTER &
COMMUNITY PORCH



L RTP Implementation

The L RTP includes detailed recommendations to promote sustainable tourism utilizing existing resources.

- ▶ Funding and phasing of proposed projects
- ▶ Resources and partners for major tourism and small business development projects
- ▶ Estimated costs for the entire L RTP are \$17 to \$24 million over 10 to 20 years for build-out. Projects will be implemented based availability of funds and necessary approval.



Committed to the future of rural communities.



SOUTH CAROLINA
Community
Loan Fund
Investing in Community

L RTP Implementation - 5-Year Plan

Year 1 - FY21-22	
Design and obtain ACE 404 Permit for Bridge Replacement	\$250,000
Procure and begin implementation of Heritage Tourism Marketing Plan	\$125,000
total:	\$375,000
Year 2 - FY22-23	
Begin implementation of Small Business Incubator related to tourism	\$60,000
Begin implementation of Heritage Tourism Marketing Plan	\$225,000
Create Long-term Master Plan for Cabin Branch (CB) and Mill Creek (MC) properties with cost estimates	\$150,000
MC - Replace damaged bridge	\$1,250,000
total:	\$1,685,000
Year 3 - FY23-24	
Continue Implementation of Small Business Incubator related to tourism	\$60,000
Begin implementation of Heritage Tourism Marketing Plan	(see above)
Implement Long-term Master Plan for Cabin Branch (CD) and Mill Creek (MC) properties	(from Master Plan)
Anticipated items from Master Plan listed below:	
Upgrades to Lodge and maintenance sheds	\$36,000
MC - Entrance Road to Lodge (gravel one lane with pullouts)	\$300,000
MC - Entrance Road to Goose Pond (gravel one lane with pullouts)	\$300,000
MC - water/sewage treatment upgrades	\$300,000
MC - Camping Platforms	\$36,000
MC - Parking	\$108,000
MC - lodge to river down stream (gravel one lane with pullouts)	\$360,000
MC - concession huts (2)	\$90,000
MC - restrooms/bath house (2)	\$240,000
MC - signage/wayfinding	\$120,000
MC - boat ramp/launch	\$240,000
total:	\$2,190,000

Mill Creek Bridge replacement in progress with RCCC funds

Heritage Tourism Marketing Plan vendor selection in progress with Hospitality Tax funds

Long-term Master Plan will provide better cost estimates and planning for each initiative in the 5-year plan.



L RTP Implementation - 5-Year Plan

Year 4 - FY2021	
Continue Implementation of Small Business Incubator related to tourism	\$60,000
Anticipated items from Master Plan listed below:	
CB - additional roads (gravel one lane with pull-outs)	\$400,000
CB - loop trail, bridges, signage and wayfinding	\$350,000
MC - river cabins 2 person	\$150,000
MC - river cabins 4 person	\$200,000
MC - Primitive trails	\$50,000
MC - Fishing Pier	\$400,000
MC - boat rental facility	\$100,000
total:	\$1,710,000
Year 5 - FY2022	
Anticipated items from Master Plan listed below:	
MC - RV Camping spaces and hook-ups	\$250,000
MC - Camping office	\$120,000
MC - Wayfinding and signage	\$50,000
total:	\$370,000
Sum Total:	\$6,330,000
15% contingency	\$949,500
Grand total:	\$7,279,500

All projects are subject to change based on availability of funding and necessary approvals.

These cost estimates do not represent the actual cost of these projects at the time of their implementation.

Actual costs will not be determined until they are procured and a vendor selected.



Progress since 2019

- ▶ Request for Council approval of LRTP
- ▶ RCCC bridge improvement design work
- ▶ Palmetto Trail improvement(s)
- ▶ Land Development Code
- ▶ Hopkins Magistrate Office
- ▶ Pinewood Lake Park pollinator garden
- ▶ Congaree Biosphere Region planning
- ▶ Southeast Sewer and Water Expansion
- ▶ CIP requests



L RTP Implementation Process

- ▶ Conservation Commission - approved
- ▶ Development & Services Committee - forward to County Council for acceptance as a completed plan
- ▶ County Council - accept the L RTP as a completed plan and forward to the Planning Commission
- ▶ Planning Commission - may recommend adoption of the L RTP in its entirety by reference and as an appendix to the Comprehensive Plan
- ▶ County Council - amend the Comprehensive Plan to add the L RTP. The County Council has the final decision as to how and when the L RTP is adopted.

Once these steps are completed, staff can begin the process of implementing the L RTP through a series of projects and programs.

Depending on the size and scope of each project, additional approvals from the Council and other agencies may be necessary.

These approvals/requests could include (but are not limited to): Annual budget allocations, grant acceptance, property acquisition, construction contracts, and professional service contracts.

L RTP Implementation Process

- ▶ All L RTP projects will follow RC Procurement processes
- ▶ Any land purchases or agreements would require County Council approval
- ▶ Any projects \$100,000 and over will require County Council approvals

Most projects listed for implementation in the L RTP will require County Council approvals.

Thank you for your time!

Questions?

John Grego, Chairman
Richland County Conservation Commission
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jmgrego2003@gmail.com

The complete
Lower Richland Tourism Plan
is available to read or download on the
Richlandcountysc.gov
website.





2020 Hampton Street • Room 3063A
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(803) 576-2083

Frequently Asked Questions about the Lower Richland Tourism Plan (LRTP)
February 10, 2022

Question: How many visitors currently visit Lower Richland, and what is their economic impact on the local and regional economy?

Answer: Congaree National Park (CNP)—South Carolina’s only national park—is one of the major tourist attractions in Lower Richland. The National Park Service (NPS) reports 215,181 people visited CNP in 2021, an increase of 74% (91,736 visitors) from 2019.

In 2019, visitors spent \$9.643 million within a 60-mile radius of CNP¹. The City of Columbia is approximately 18 miles away and is the largest metropolitan area within a 60-mile radius of CNP. We currently do not have the ability to estimate how much of the \$9.643 million was spent in Columbia vs Lower Richland. However, since there are many more opportunities for spending in Columbia (on dining, hotels, shopping, other tourist attractions, etc.) than in Lower Richland, we can assume the percentage spent in Columbia was much higher compared to Lower Richland.

CNP is far from the only tourist attraction in Lower Richland. In addition to natural assets such as the Wateree River Heritage Preserve, Cooks Mountain, Congaree bottomlands, and the Palmetto trail, Lower Richland has a wealth of heritage resources including the Harriet Barber House, Kensington, Kingville area, and many other sites. While we do not yet have data to quantify the impact these sites have on the Lower Richland’s tourism economy, these sites represent important natural and cultural resources whose importance is only expected to grow in the coming years.

Question: What is the history of the plan and its approval process?

Answer: The LRTP² was contracted in 2016 and completed in June 2018 as an outcome of the Lower Richland Master Plans’ recommendations. During LRTP development almost 200 local community stakeholders were engaged in community meetings and interviews. After the completion of the LRTP the Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC) requested County Council acceptance. However, due to other priorities such as the Richland Renaissance, the Covid-19 Pandemic, and ongoing flood recovery efforts, it was not considered by Council until this time.

Question: What are the next steps?

Answer: First, County Council accepts the LRTP as a completed plan and forwards it to the County Planning Commission for consideration. The Planning Commission may recommend the integration of part or all of the LRTP directly into the Richland County Comprehensive Plan, or it may recommend adoption of the LRTP in its entirety by reference and as an

¹https://www.nps.gov/nature/customcf/NPS_Data_Visualization/docs/NPS_2019_Visitor_Spending_Effects.pdf

²https://www.richlandcountysc.gov/Portals/0/Departments/Conservation/Commission/Docs/RCC1601_Final%20Report_2018_06_15.pdf

appendix to the Comprehensive Plan. The County Council has the final decision as to how and when the LRTP is adopted.

Once these steps are completed, staff can begin the process of implementing the LRTP through a series of projects and programs. Depending on the size and scope of each project, additional approvals from the Council and other agencies may be necessary. These approvals/requests could include (but are not limited to): Annual budget allocations, grant acceptance, property acquisition, construction contracts, and professional service contracts.

Question: What does adoption of this plan obligate the County to do and to spend?

Answer: Adoption of the LRTP does not obligate the County to spend any funds. The adoption of the LRTP (as with the adoption of any plan) merely allows the County to begin seeking ways to implement aspects of the plan. The level of funding dedicated to a project would be shaped according to the scope of work necessary for its implementation. An estimated amount of funding in the plan does not a guarantee the County has to provide implementation funding.

Question: How can the LRTP adapt to future public input, County priorities, and changes in the master plan?

Answer: The LRTP was developed to comply with existing County priorities, public input, and the master plan. As County priorities change, public opinions shift, and the master plan changes, the individual elements and recommendations of the LRTP could be modified before they are implemented. Likewise, as projects are implemented, they can be brought back to the public for stakeholder input, as applicable.

Question: How do we encourage inclusiveness and opportunity for Lower Richland residents?

Answer: This vision was supported enthusiastically by Lower Richland residents in the LRTP stakeholder meetings. The LRTP seeks to promote a sustainable, inclusive tourism economy in Lower Richland by ensuring Lower Richland residents are in the driver's seat—meaning they are the builders of local businesses that reap the dollars generated by increased visitation; they are the force and leadership behind the interpretation of local historical sites and heritage resources; and they are beneficiaries of increased open space, access to the natural environment, and community services that also benefit visitors to the area. The measure of success for this effort is not simply increasing visitation to Lower Richland, but creating the connections to ensure increased tourism will help the local community thrive.

Question: Where does Pinewood Lake Park fit into the LRTP?

Answer: Pinewood Lake Park (PLP) is one of the many existing recreational assets which can be tied into the LRTP's tourism framework through shared wayfinding, mapping, and clear mobility networks as proposed in the LRTP. Because PLP has the potential to be more than just a community park, but also a hub strategically located on a primary corridor where visitors can gain broader information about the region, the LRTP recommends investing in PLP's amenities and wayfinding signage from Garner's Ferry Road. As proposed, PLP could then serve as a major gateway for the LR area and connect with additional projects and programming identified in the LRTP, such as the Hopkins Green, wayfinding signage, and potential trails.

Question: What can the Mill Creek property offer in the future? How does that differ from Congaree National Park (CNP)?

Answer: The Mill Creek property would provide more local options for lodging, principally campgrounds for RVs and tents, in order to encourage CNP visitors to stay longer in the Lower Richland area. Longer visitor stays will support economic enhancement for local businesses. As these investments mature and funding is identified, additional services could be added to the Mill Creek property such as horse trails, river lodges, a nature center for conferences, paddling and boat concessions, canopy trail, and many other attractions. As a National Park, the CNP operates under very severe restrictions on the types of development which can occur within its boundaries. The Mill Creek property does not

operate under the same restrictions and can complement the CNP with other activities that cannot be offered within a National Park.

Question: Are there examples of successful and sustainable tourism growth around other National Parks or other natural destinations?

Answer: Yes. National Parks resulted in a \$28.6 billion contribution to the nation's economy and supported 234,000 jobs in 2020, according to an economics report prepared by the U.S. Geological Survey and National Park Service³.

Examples include:

- In Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, located a few miles from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, tourist related industries account for 44.7 percent of the town's business sales and revenues⁴.
- Zion National Park in Utah, where 3.6 million people visited in 2020, spending an estimated \$208 million in its gateway communities. Visitor spending supported 3,460 jobs, \$81 million in labor income, \$143 million in value added, and \$277 million in economic output for regional economies⁵.
- Bryce Canyon National Park welcomed 1.5 million visitors in 2020. Travelers spent about \$125 million while visiting Bryce Canyon, supporting a total of 1,810 jobs, \$47 million in labor income, \$83.3 million in value added, and \$151 million in economic output⁶.

Question: Does this plan need any updating since its completion in 2018?

Answer: The LRTP was developed to comply with existing County priorities, public input, and the master plan as they existed in 2018. This area of the County has not significantly changed since that time. However, it is anticipated that the area will change over the next 5-10 years as utility infrastructure and services are added to Lower Richland.

As County priorities change, public opinions shift, and the master plan changes, the individual elements and recommendations of the LRTP can and should be modified. Likewise, as projects are implemented, they should be brought back to the public for stakeholder input, as appropriate.

³ <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/fort-collins-science-center/news/national-park-visitor-spending-contributed-286-billion-us#:~:text=Visitor%20spending%20in%20communities%20near,Survey%20and%20National%20Park%20Service>

⁴ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2016/08/national-parks-and-the-economy-of-their-gateway-towns.html>

⁵ <https://www.cedarcityutah.com/news/archive/2021/08/28/ajt-gateway-communities-illustrate-the-economic-impact-of-southern-utahs-national-parks/#.YgKc3t MKUk>

⁶ <https://www.cedarcityutah.com/news/archive/2021/08/28/ajt-gateway-communities-illustrate-the-economic-impact-of-southern-utahs-national-parks/#.YgKc3t MKUk>