

Our Town

A Newsletter of the Town of Hilton Head Island
 Brought to you by the Town of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina
www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov (843)341-4600

Mayor's Note



Mayor Drew Laughlin

For many years, the Town has desired to make public improvements in the Coligny Area District to enhance the experience of residents and visitors as well as serve as a catalyst that would spur private sector redevelopment and investment in the District. A draft Conceptual Master Plan was prepared that focuses on a destination park and playground, surface parking, children's museum, streetscape improvements, roadway and intersection improvements, and pedestrian improvements.

On March 4, 2014, Town Council passed a resolution directing staff to engage a consultant to prepare a concept plan

for the Coligny area and directing the Planning Commission to develop a recommendation to Town Council on the plan. On April 2, 2014, the Planning Commission convened a Public Workshop for the purpose of gathering input regarding a destination park and playground, surface parking, children's museum, streetscape improvements, roadway and intersection improvements, and pedestrian improvements. The results of the public workshop were presented at a follow-up meeting on April 23, 2014.

Based on the public and Planning Commission input and in conjunction with the traffic and parking assessments, the consultant team prepared a Conceptual Master Plan (see Page 4 of newsletter) for improvements within the Coligny District. Improvements are focused on;

- ◆ roadway and intersection improvements including Nassau Street extension, Lagoon Road signalization and extension, realignment of the parking lot entrance, and the addition of a signal on South Forest Beach Drive;
- ◆ surface parking including +/- 553 permanent parking spaces in the parking lot and on-street parking which represents an increase of +/- 137 permanent usable parking spaces;

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- ◆ the creation of a destination park and playground, including a central event space for passive and event use, a perimeter trail network with exercise stations and interpretive signage/experiences, a bandshell/pavilion, restroom/shelter with drop-off, and an adventure playground that is lowcountry and nature themed with separate areas for different age groups;
- ◆ a children's museum with +/- 3,500 sf indoor museum space and +/- 1,500 sf outdoor play space adjacent to dedicated parking;
- ◆ streetscape improvements on Pope Avenue and South Forest Beach Drive;
- ◆ and pedestrian improvements including new leisure trails and enhanced pedestrian crossings.

There have been countless public meetings regarding Coligny plans and the Town Council appreciates everyone's input. For further information, go to the Town's website at www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov then click on Major Initiatives/Coligny Redevelopment/Coligny Redevelopment Conceptual Master Plan.

Town Manager's Note



Steve Riley

Town Council adopted a new Land Management Ordinance (LMO) and Official Zoning Map on October 7, 2014. A new LMO was listed as a Town Council goal during the 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 Strategic Planning Workshops. These documents were the culmination of three plus years of work by the LMO Rewrite Committee. The Committee, which was appointed by Town Council in March 2011, met nearly 100 times in an effort to comprehensively review

and rewrite the LMO. The Committee encouraged public participation at every step during the process and in addition to their public meetings also held several public workshops during which time the public was invited to comment on proposed revisions to the LMO. The new documents, which reflect the needs and expectations of the Town's residents, business community and visitors and ensure that the Town will remain a viable and attractive place to live, work and visit, were reviewed by Planning Commission at four public hearings and by Town Council at three public meetings.

Highlights of the new LMO and Zoning Map include:

- ★ An easier to read format, with many tables and flowcharts;
- ★ Board and Commission submittal times have been shortened up to allow applicants to get their projects through boards and commissions in a quicker timeframe;
- ★ All of the information (allowed uses, conditions, parking requirements, height, density, impervious coverage) for each zoning district can be found in a 2-3 page summary sheet for each district;
- ★ Applicants have the option to choose a narrower buffer with more plantings or a

- wider buffer with fewer plantings;
- ★ Buffers are no longer required between similar uses;
- ★ More flexibility has been provided for nonconforming sites;
- ★ Applicants can reduce vehicular parking if more bicycle parking is provided;
- ★ Density has been increased in:
 - ☆ Areas that are targeted for redevelopment (Coligny Resort, Resort Development and Waterfront Mixed-Used zoning districts);
 - ☆ Some areas along the Port Royal Sound and Skull Creek waterfronts;
 - ☆ In some areas near the schools and along the Cross Island Parkway;
 - ☆ Nearly all uses are allowed by right or by condition; special exception review is only required for 4 uses (major utilities, waste treatment plants, liquor stores and adult entertainment).

This was a huge undertaking with significant public participation. You have heard the U.S. Constitution is a "living" document, flexible enough to change with the times. So too is our LMO.



The Gullahs of Hilton Head Island 1862-1956

By Lou Benfante for the Heritage Library

At a recent ceremony naming a bridge after Charlie Simmons, Sr. (right), residents requested the Town provide more history stories for residents. The Heritage Library provided the following "history lesson" and we will consider more stories in the future.



On November 7, 1861 a fleet of about 75 Union Navy ships, consisting of gunboats, troop transports and supply ships, attacked the Confederate Fort Walker on Hilton Head Island. The Battle of Port Royal Sound was over within 5 hours. Not only did the Confederate soldiers at Fort Walker evacuate to the mainland, but so too did the Plantation owners on the island. Union army forces of over 12,000 troops occupied the island and took command of Fort Walker, which was promptly, renamed Fort Welles. The Union Navy, under Commodore Samuel Francis DuPont, established Hilton Head Island as the base for its South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, whose purpose was to blockade the Southern ports of Savannah and Charleston. Fort Welles was to become the headquarters of the Union Army's Department of the South with over 30,000 troops eventually being stationed there.

Once the Union Army was encamped at Fort Welles, slaves whose owners had fled to the mainland and other escaped slaves from the mainland began arriving at Fort Welles to seek protection from the Union Army and, hopefully, their freedom. Many of them were employed by the Union Army as carpenters who would help erect the Army's buildings around the fort, or as field hands who began harvesting the Sea Island cotton crop. Women served as cooks and laundresses. The men helped to construct barracks buildings which would serve as housing for their families. The barracks buildings had communal facilities with no privacy being afforded to any of the families who resided there. After being appointed Commander of the Department of the South in 1862, General Ormsby McKnight Mitchel sought to improve the living conditions of these former slaves, who were now considered "contrabands" of war because they had still not been granted their freedom. General Mitchel confiscated some of the land at Confederate General Thomas Fenwick Drayton's Fish Haul Plantation which was adjacent to the fort. The contraband families were each given a quarter acre lot and sufficient lumber to build a home on their lot. Streets were laid out and the former slaves elected their own officials, passed their own laws, and actually enacted the first compulsory education law in the state of South Carolina. The Freedmen's village would be called Mitchelville in honor of General Mitchel, who unfortunately passed away from yellow fever in October of 1862. Mitchelville would become home to over 1,500 former slaves by 1865.



The residents of Mitchelville had founded and built two churches by the end of 1865. The First African Baptist Church was founded in 1862, with the Reverend Abraham Murchinson as its pastor. He also served as the first Mayor of Mitchelville. In 1865, the Queen Chapel African Methodist Church was erected.



These former slaves, who today we call Gullahs in South Carolina, had been able to maintain their culture throughout the Plantation era. Very few of the plantation owners actually lived on the island. They hired overseers to manage their plantations. The African American slaves in the Lowcountry worked under the task system of slavery where they were assigned tasks by the overseer. When their task had been completed their time was their own to use for gardening, socializing, or religious pursuits. Since the slaves had very minimal interaction with any whites they continued to enjoy the culture that they had brought with them from West Africa. It is possible that the term Gullah either came from the Angola region of West Africa or was a carryover and derivative from the name of the Gola tribe.

The Union Army maintained a presence on Hilton Head Island until early in 1868 when they dismantled the buildings that had been built around the fort and departed. Many of the residents of Mitchelville relocated to other areas of the island. Without the income they had received from working for the military they could no longer feed their families with what they could grow on their quarter acre plots. Homes in Mitchelville were taken apart and the lumber was reused at the families' new home sites. The economy of the Gullahs quickly became one of subsistence farming, shrimping, fishing, and hunting on open lands. They depended on their marsh tacky horses for plowing their fields and for transportation. Dr. Emory Campbell, in his book *Gullah Cultural Legacies*, states that in the 1940's and 1950's there were still probably 50 marsh tackies in his neighborhood of Spanish Wells. Different sections of Hilton Head Island were known for specific services and trades: Jonesville was known for its wheelwrights and carpentry; Marshland for boat construction; Grassland for sweet potatoes, watermelons and beans; Spanish Wells for crabbing and fishing; Squire Pope for shrimping; Chaplin for net making and basket weaving.



Both the 1870 and 1880 U.S. Censuses list the population of Hilton Head Island at about 2,500 black residents and only 40 whites. The Great Sea Island storm of 1893 would claim over 2,000 lives in Beaufort County. The Gullahs who survived were even more isolated. This isolation would continue until the mid-20th century. By 1940 the population of Hilton Head Island had dropped to 944 black residents and 36 whites.



There were one room schoolhouses on the island, and one still stands today. The Cherry Hill School on Beach City Road was built in 1937 and operated until 1954. For most Gullah students seeking higher education, the next step was to travel to St. Helena Island to attend the Penn School, which would become the Penn Normal, Agricultural and Industrial School in 1901. Among other subjects students were taught harness-making, wheelwrighting, blacksmithing, basketry, carpentry, and cobbling.



Babies were delivered by midwives. Some of the midwives received their certification at Benedict College in Columbia after attending a two week certification workshop. The workshop stressed two important qualities necessary for a midwife- patience and cleanliness.

During this period of time the native islanders were still worshipping at praise houses, as well as at their churches. The last praise house on the island was torn down in the 1960's. Praise houses were usually one room whitewashed wooden buildings and were used three times per week (Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday) for spiritual worship. The sexton would ring a cow bell thirty minutes in advance to call the neighborhood to service. The service would typically last about an hour and would include hymns, scripture readings, spiritual songs and the prayer for mourners. Service was concluded with a circular or ring shout followed by handshakes. The ring shout entailed a melodious chant and rhythmic dancing in a counterclockwise circle.



Also important in the community were root doctors who treated natural ailments with various remedies made from plants such as mint, jimson weed, sassafras, and milkweed. Root doctors had their origins in the folk beliefs of West Africa.

From 1930 until the swing bridge was erected in 1956, most of the commerce between the island and the mainland was conducted by Charlie Simmons, Sr., who was known as "Mr. Transportation." He owned the first motor boat on the island and later the ferryboat, Alligator. He not only transported people to Savannah, but also carried produce for island farmers to be sold there as well and returned the sale proceeds to the farmers.

According to Dr. Emory Campbell, juke joints became popular on the island in the 1940's. They could be found in many Gullah neighborhoods. Native islanders began buying radios and phonographs, but their playing time was rationed to maintain battery life. Juke joint customers could practice their dance steps to the juke boxes that were located there. The largest juke joint on the island was Simmons Fishing Camp which opened on Broad Creek in the mid 1950's.

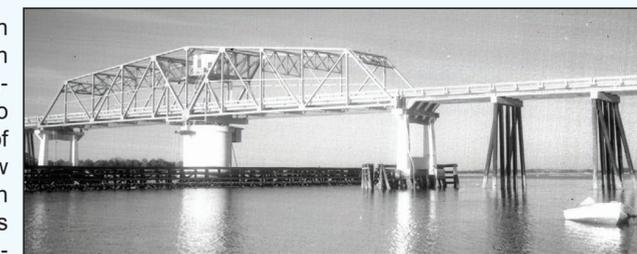


Electricity was not brought to Hilton Head Island until 1950.

The first public ferry service began in 1953.

The James F. Byrnes swing bridge was opened in 1956.

Through all these years, the Gullah language has been maintained by native islanders. It is based on English with strong influences from West and Central African languages. In November of 1989, Dr. Emory Campbell journeyed to Sierra Leone in Western Africa. In his words, the people of Sierra Leone "are proud, friendly and industrious. We saw their smiles, spoke to them in our common language-Gullah and Krio, which are very similar...We shared their delicious rice dishes, fish and vegetables at every meal. Not surprising anymore, their food and recipes were very much like ours in the Gullah community."



The Gullah people and the Gullah culture have survived 200-300 years of separation from their homeland. We should treasure the Gullah culture and help to insure that it continues.

Heritage Library Upcoming Events

Speakers Series presented by the Heritage Library and Coastal Discovery Museum
"Hilton Head in the Modern Era"

Tuesday, November 18, 2014 – Robert Onorato will speak on "Developing 2,000 Acres in the Middle of Paradise," the story of the development of Palmetto Dunes and Shelter Cove.

Tuesday, December 9, 2014 – Lois Masteller, Susan Woods, Nelle Smith, and Mary Coleman will tell "The Stories of the Sea Pines Wives."

Both events are held at the Coligny Theater, Coligny Plaza, and will begin with a wine reception at 5:30 and the talk at 6:00. Admission is \$25 per person and \$40 per couple.

Reservations may be called to The Heritage Library at 843-686-6560 or Coastal Discovery Museum at 843-689-6767, ext. 223.



Coligny District Redevelopment Conceptual Master Plan



A Coligny District Gateway

- New Entry Monumentation
- Accent Pavement
- New Landscaping
- Start of District Streetscape

B Nassau Street Improvements

- Eliminates Tight Curves
- SCDOT Road Standards
- Enhanced Streetscape with ± 21 On-Street Parking Spaces and Sidewalk

C Pope Avenue Improvements

- Enhanced Streetscape
- Dedicated Right Turn Lane into Beach Parking Lot and Left Turn Lanes onto Lagoon Rd (North) and Lagoon Rd Extension

D Lagoon Road Extended/Pope Avenue Intersection Improvements

- Signalized Intersection with Pedestrian Crossings and Activators
- Creates Alternate Traffic Route - Tying Pope Ave to Tanglewood
- Provides ± 69 New On-Street Parking Spaces

E Multi-Modal Drop-Off / Pickup

F New Coligny Park

- Central Open Space for Passive & Event Use
- Open Space Could Provide Seasonal Overflow Parking, ± 125 Spaces
- Visually Connected to Pope Avenue
- Ties to Perimeter Trail Network
- Arbor Swings and Ample Landscaping

G Bandshell / Pavilion

H Restroom / Information Center / Multi-Modal Shelter With Drop-Off

I Children's Museum ($\pm 3,500$ SF)

- Lighthouse Entry
- Screened Porch ($\pm 1,500$ SF)
- Fenced Outdoor Play Area with Shade
- Adjacent To ± 35 Space Parking Lot

J Adventure (Destination) Playground

- Captain William Hilton Ship Play Structure
- Separate Small Child Play Area with Treehouse Theme
- Water and Sand Exploration Area
- Lowcountry and Nature Themed
- Lagoon Overlooks; Including Pier
- Ample Seating Areas for All Ages
- Fenced Enclosure

K Enhanced Lagoon

- Surrounds Play Areas to Create "Island"
- Exercise Stations Along Trail System
- Perimeter Trail System with Aquatic and Environmental Experiences

L Improved Town Beach Parking Lot

- Standardize Space Widths to Comply with L.M.O. and Improve Circulation
- Direct Pedestrians to New Signalized South Forest Beach or Pope Avenue Crossings
- New Pedestrian Refuges at Lagoon Road and South Forest Beach Intersections
- Provides ± 428 Spaces
- Aligns South Forest Beach Ingress / Egress with Beach House Resort Entry

M South Forest Beach Improvements

- Signalized Intersection at Beach House Resort / Town's Beach Lot with Pedestrian Crossings and Activators
- Pedestrian Refuge Areas on Each Side of Signalized Intersection
- New Leisure Trail on East Side of South Forest Beach Drive

N Potential Town Services Parcel

Total Permanent Parking Spaces ± 553
 Temporary Grass Parking Spaces ± 125
 Total Potential Surface Parking: ± 678