



**FEBRUARY 2019**

## **SUMMARY OF OUTREACH EFFORTS**

The City of North Charleston initiated a 10-year update of its Comprehensive Plan in Fall 2018 with a comprehensive program of activities to engage community groups, stakeholders, residents and public officials in the process. Their input will guide development of Prime North Charleston.

Prepared by:



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## SUMMARY OF OUTREACH EFFORTS

### PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES

Five open house events were held over a two-week period in strategic locations throughout the City. Each open house was attended by dozens of residents who were given an opportunity to explore data and maps depicting a snapshot of existing conditions in the City and to share their thoughts and ideas.

### STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

In addition to meetings with leaders of City Departments and outside government agencies, several group meetings were held with stakeholders representing community advocates, economic development specialists, educational and health institutions, development investors, and neighborhoods.

### WEBSITE AND ONLINE SURVEY

The project website – [www.primenorthcharleston.com](http://www.primenorthcharleston.com) – was established with an Online Survey that residents could complete 24/7. Over a thousand surveys were completed and submitted to the project team, including 933 via the website, over an eight (8) - week period. Approximately 84% of respondents to the online survey were North Charleston residents.

### COMMUNITY INTERFACE

The project team interacted with residents at a number of community events, spreading the word about Prime North Charleston and where to find information. Hundreds of bookmarks and stickers with the project website were distributed while the project team engaged and encouraged participation in the planning process during these occasions.

## PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES

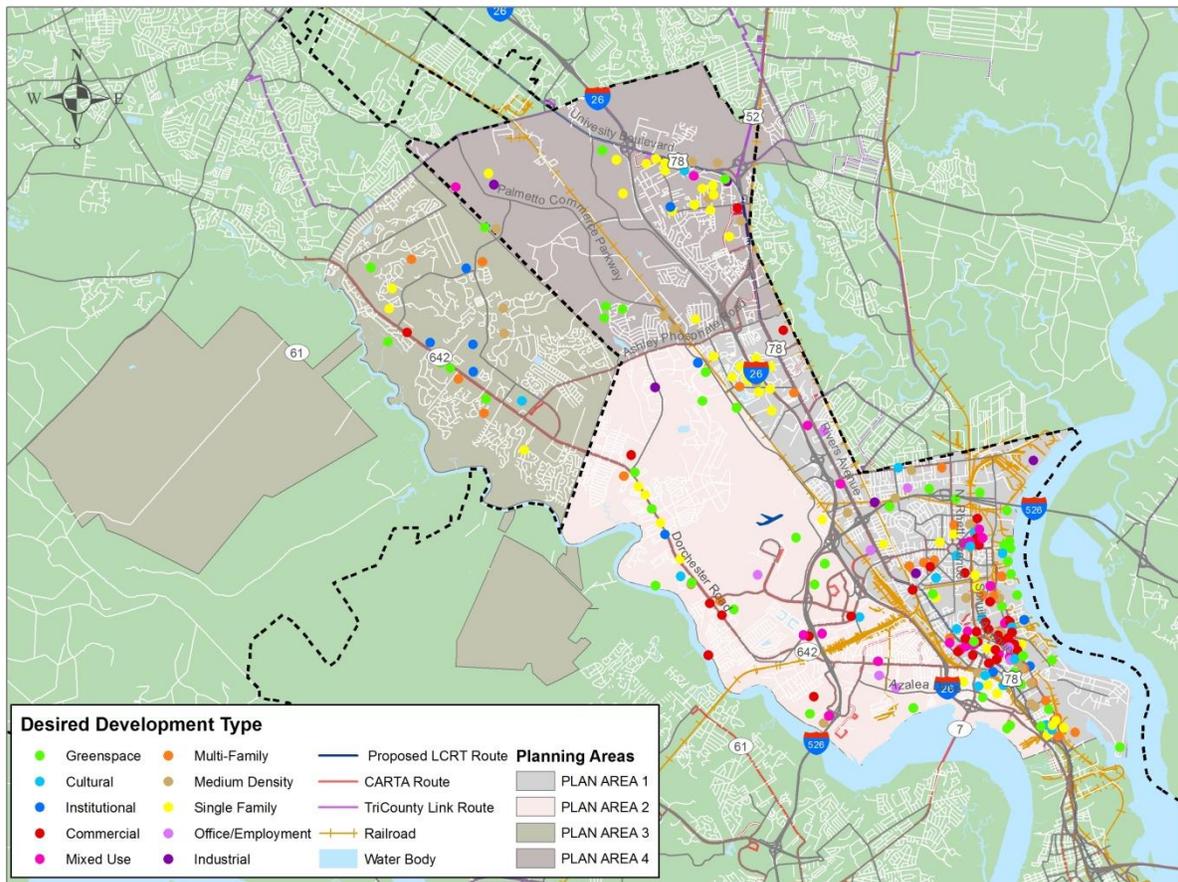
Five public open houses were held during the latter part of October (2018) at the following locations:

- The Senior Center on Dorchester Road (Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>)
- Wescott Park (Oct. 16<sup>th</sup>)
- The Gussie Greene Community Center (Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>)
- The Senior Center at Northwood (Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup>)
- Felix Davis Community Center (Oct 25<sup>th</sup>)



Over 90% of attendees at the Open Houses were North Charleston residents. A majority (54%) of attendees work in the City of North Charleston.

Input on how the City should accommodate growth varied by meeting location. In general, most attendees indicated that future growth needs to be accommodated and that it can be accommodated in a variety of ways. Attendees at almost all meetings ranked encouraging development of vacant and under-utilized property as the preferred means of accommodating growth. The option to “do nothing” was ranked high only at the Dorchester Road Senior Center. The following map depicts where attendees indicated certain types of development should be located:



## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The project team hosted a series of meetings with select Stakeholder groups. At each of the seven meetings, attendees were asked to provide input on the City's strengths, challenges or concerns, and opportunities. Attendees were also asked how the City could accommodate growth, and how they envisioned the proposed Lowcountry Rapid Transit line along US78 and US52 would impact the City.

 Many participants were quick to point out that the City has great opportunity for the future based on its location within a growing region with a strong economy. The City is ideally located at the "heart" of the region.

 The City was praised by several groups on its positive attitude towards growth and change. The City was commended for being pro-business and its consistency in being customer and solution oriented.

*"Having (City) Staff that is solution-oriented makes it easier to sell the City to new investments that create jobs and provide opportunities for its residents."*

 The City was also commended on its success in revitalizing the East Montague/Old Village area and encouraged to replicate the neighborhood commercial area while fostering the City's original theory of sustainable communities or neighborhoods.

### Key concerns expressed by every group included:

- Increasing challenges to affordability both for housing and commercial spaces threatens livability.
- There is a need to "right size" the City's ordinances, particularly parking requirements, and to evolve from the original code that promotes suburban development.
- Combatting crime, or the perception thereof, should continue to be a priority for the City.
- Collaboration is needed with the school districts to ensure schools within the City do not discourage those employed in the City from living within the City, while providing curriculums that generate a future labor force to support the growing economy.
- Last, but not least, TRAFFIC. Like most of the region, too many of the City's arterials are congested stemming from the City's ideal location at the heart of the region. Better infrastructure planning to foster connectivity between neighborhoods, better transit services, safe pathways for cyclists and pedestrians, and creation of more walkable nodes/corridors (similar to Park Circle) should be a focus in the Plan.

A matrix on the following page identifies many of the common key issues discussed at each of the Stakeholder meetings.

Stakeholder Group/Concerns	Development Investors	Community Advocacy	Economic Development	Institutional Agencies	Outside Government Agencies	Metro Chamber Advisory
• Housing affordability	X	X	X	X		X
• Affordable commercial spaces	X		X			X
• Ordinances out of sync with needs	X					
• Planning for diverse land uses/preservation of open space					X	
• School programs and site programming	X		X	X		
• Access to needed goods and services		X				
• Traffic/mobility of goods and residents/public transportation	X			X	X	X
• Preservation of existing neighborhoods		X				
• Flooding		X		X		
• Infrastructure conditions/capacity		X			X	X
<b>Suggested Solutions</b>						
• Create walkable nodes of development opportunities	X	X	X	X	X	
• Destination neighborhood commercial areas	X	X				X
• Encourage infill development			X	X		X
• Incentivize affordable housing			X	X		
• Ordinance right-sizing	X	X				
• Enhanced/promoted mass transit system	X					X
• Multimodal connectivity between housing - jobs - education		X	X		X	
• Sound and safe infrastructure through public/private partnerships		X			X	
• Conscious consideration of existing neighborhoods		X	X			
• Adopt policies and plans to promote resiliency		X	X	X	X	

## CITY LEADERS AND DECISION MAKERS

The project team also sought input from the City’s department leaders and held one-on-one interviews with each Councilperson.

Concerns of those with day-to-day responsibility for services in the City were very much aligned with those of Stakeholders and the general public:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Affordability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services keeping pace with growth and being accessible</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in rail traffic and potential impacts on emergency response times</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vacancies in retail space (due to the growth of e-trade)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preservation of existing neighborhoods</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance of infrastructure owned by other entities (e.g. SCDOT)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of secure recreation and cultural facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of skilled labor force</li> </ul>

Not only did these leaders note opportunities for the City to address these concerns in the future, those participating in the discussion provided the team with internal strategic plans to include and align with in the Comprehensive Plan itself.

Discussions with decision makers revealed that they are in touch with constituent concerns and aligned with each other’s priorities. In each individual interface, the project team asked Council representatives to name the City’s strengths and three main issues facing the City and their districts.

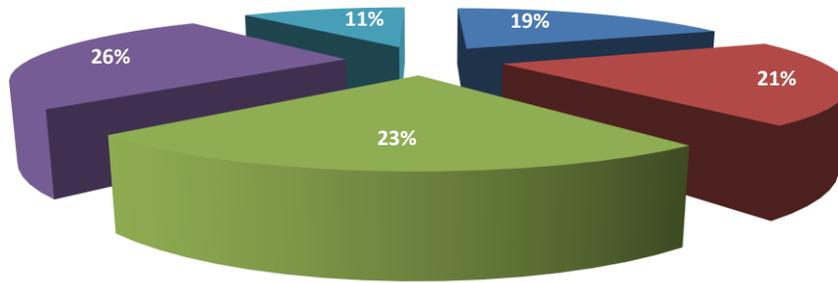
Strengths	Challenges
City’s location within the region	Infrastructure (primarily transportation)
Availability of green space and undeveloped land	Housing (Affordability and Conditions)
Availability of employment space	Crime
Opportunities that the proposed bus rapid transit system will afford businesses and residents	Public Transportation and Connectivity and reduction in conflicts with traffic and rail
Success in Economic Development – Open for Business attitude	Resiliency and Sustainability to both natural environments and industry challenges
Collaboration to provide needed services and quality of life for residents	Sustainable growth patterns - Balancing the interface between growth and existing uses
Consideration and concern for residents	Labor force availability and wages
	Food Deserts
	Engagement of all populations

## ONLINE SURVEY

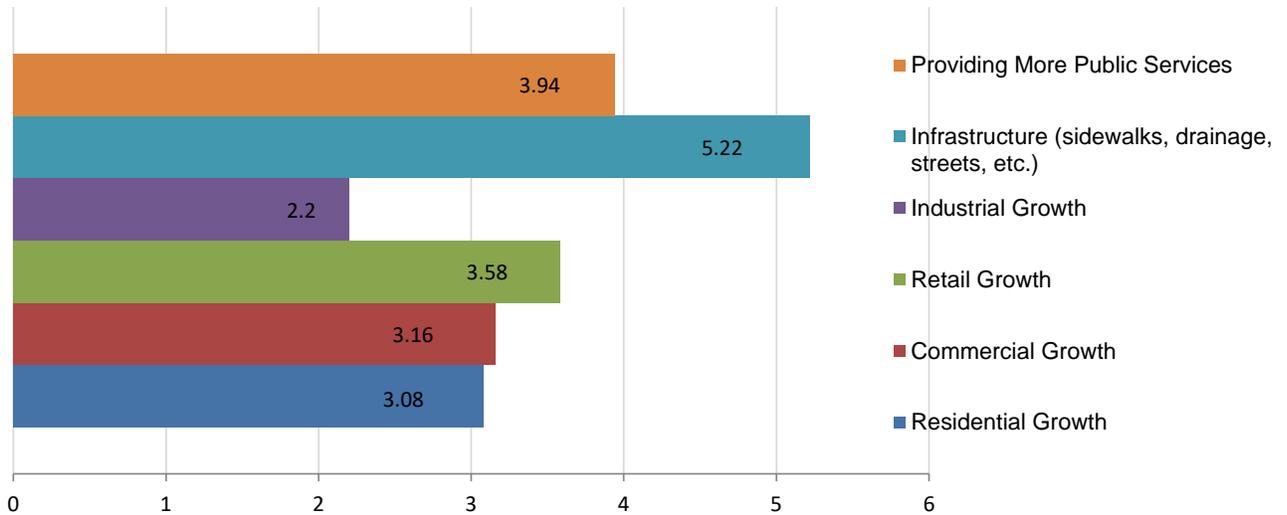
933 individuals completed the online survey posted on the project website as a component of community engagement. Two key questions asked respondents how they envisioned the City accommodating future growth.

### Average Ranking (1-5, with 1 Being the Highest Preference) of Ways North Charleston Can Accommodate Future Growth

- Increase housing or multi-family units within neighborhoods
- Increase multi-family units in specific zoned areas
- Allow Mixed-Use development (business and residential) along high speed major corridors, such as Rivers Avenue
- Encourage Development of Vacant and Under-Utilized Property
- Do Nothing



### Average Ranking (1-6, with 1 Being the Highest Preference) of What Respondents Would Prefer to See More of in North Charleston



## BOILING IT DOWN

Input gathered during the initial community engagement activities was comprehensive and diverse. However, input received can be categorized into a handful of key topics: Transportation and Infrastructure; Housing; Growth; and Access to Resources.

**“The City (of North Charleston) should be an attractive, livable community where people can live and work within close proximity, reducing the number of cars on the roads.”**

### Transportation/Infrastructure

Input – Infrastructure is not up to date, or adequate for the growth that is occurring. Infrastructure improvements should reflect the growth that the City is experiencing.

1. North Charleston needs safer, cleaner walking and biking infrastructure that provides improved connectivity to housing, jobs, schools, and recreation, expanding options alternative to automotive transportation.
2. Public transportation is an extremely important component to managing growth and transportation issues. The use of public transit should be encouraged by making it reliable and safe. A mass transit culture should be developed by improving amenities and creating intentional first and last mile connections.
3. The City should consider strategies to pay for infrastructure improvements to support development before it occurs.

**“Housing in the City should be affordable, but first the City needs to define what the term “affordable” means for North Charleston.”**

### Housing

Input – Housing diversity should be maintained to ensure there are affordable housing options for all residents.

1. There is a continued need to address dilapidated and deteriorating housing through code enforcement.
2. Increasing rents and housing prices are a challenge in many of the existing neighborhoods, raising greater concerns about gentrification.
3. More high density, mixed use development should be encouraged around nodes of the proposed bus rapid transit system and transit hubs to provide affordable housing options.

**“The City of North Charleston needs to carefully plan how to manage growth.”**

### **Growth**

Input – The City should identify special nodes and/or corridors throughout where higher density/mixed use development can be implemented, addressing housing and transportation issues.

1. The proposed bus rapid transit alignment provides an opportunity for higher density/mixed use developments to increase connectivity and reduce the reliance on automobiles for transportation.
2. Adding high density residential and commercial development should be done carefully to mitigate the impacts they can have on infrastructure and traffic.
3. The City needs a sustainable growth pattern/plan with adequate infrastructure to support increasing growth.
4. Infrastructure (roads, water, sewer and transmission lines) are in need of upgrades to keep up with growth.

**“Natural Resources, cultural resources, and city services all make the City more livable for residents.”**

### **Access to Resources**

Input – The City needs to carefully plan how to protect and increase natural resources, cultural resources and city services.

1. Green space should be a priority in every neighborhood, so people of all ages have access to safe places to play and relax.
2. The City needs more parks, trails, greenspaces, and waterfront access for the public.
3. Preserving existing green space will contribute to protecting natural resources and make North Charleston a more desirable place to live.
4. The City needs more grocery stores in general. Better access to healthy food, particularly near transit hubs, is an important consideration.
5. Cultural resources should be protected and increased throughout the City.

*All public input received will be used in conjunction with research and statistics to guide development of the Prime North Charleston Plan.*