

chapter 5: community development

Situated in the middle of “new Bluffton” and its thousands of new homes, the Buck Island Simmonsville (BIS) Neighborhood appears poised for improvement and revitalization. Although optimistic about the future of the Neighborhood, many property owners are concerned that physical improvements could leave many long-time and elderly residents vulnerable. This concern underlies many of this Plan’s recommendations, which offers strategies to assist these susceptible residents wishing to remain in the BIS Neighborhood.

With the large amount of vacant land and rental manufactured homes in the Neighborhood, a great opportunity exists to introduce new, owner-occupied, affordable housing in the community. The neighborhood goal is to have a geographic balance of quality, affordable housing without creating a large concentration of any one income level in a particular development or area.

Increased housing costs, coupled with relatively low wages, make home buying difficult for lower income families, young couples, and single persons. These households are often concerned with saving money for down payments and closing costs, as well as other monthly incidentals for such items as taxes, insurance, and maintenance.

For some previous homeowners, life cycle changes may also bring about decisions to rent rather than own. Therefore, to fulfill the housing needs of all residents, Bluffton will need an adequate supply of housing for all incomes and lifestyles, with emphasis placed on the development of affordable housing.

Town codes relating to zoning and community maintenance are a means of ensuring that the community’s land uses are compatibly located to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the Town. Minimum safety and sanitation levels for property owners and tenants are critical to the health and quality of life for all neighborhoods.

Investors or potential property owners may not want to spend money in neighborhoods that look unkempt. The results may

include decreased property values and a continuation of more irresponsible property owners buying into the community. This cycle will continue without proper code enforcement.

The community inventory for the BIS Neighborhood indicated a large concentration of manufactured homes in the community. Seventeen of these were identified as either in fair or unsafe condition. Another 40 properties had severely overgrown vegetation and dozens of others had significant debris accumulated.

During the public workshops, residents continued to ask the Town for assistance in housing rehabilitation and neighborhood cleanup efforts. Similar requests were made for redevelopment and infill incentives, home ownership assistance, and overall code compliancy aid. As a result, the Town has drafted a community development program dubbed R3 to begin to fulfill these requests. R3 stands for Remove, Renovate, and Rejuvenate. While this program will ultimately be available to all TOB residents, the initial launch of these services will occur in the BIS Neighborhood.



Figure 66: Example of cleared, vacant land located in the BIS Neighborhood that provides an opportunity for new housing development.



Figure 67: Abandoned manufactured housing is prevalent in the BIS Neighborhood.



Figure 68: A condemned home in the BIS Neighborhood.



Figure 69: Vacant and abandoned houses can be found throughout the BIS Neighborhood.

Specifically, the Town's R3 program, if adopted, would provide financial assistance to LMI residences for the following:

- Junk/derelict vehicle removal - Property owners would sign over the car title to the Town. If a title is not available, property owners would sign a hold-harmless agreement with the Town prior to the vehicle being removed.
- Bulk trash/debris removal - The Town would pick up accumulated bulk items from residential properties including: appliances, household hazardous waste, boats, campers, motors, tires, debris, and other unsanitary materials.
- Structure demolition and removal - The Town could assist with the demolition of unsafe, abandoned or uninhabitable structures (a detached residential one-or-two-family structure or accessory structure, including manufactured homes).
- Septic maintenance - The Town could provide grants to assist with the maintenance, repair, or replacement of substandard septic systems.
- Home inspections - The Town could reimburse residents for professionally administered home inspections.
- Down payment towards home purchase - The Town could provide a portion of closing costs for residents that make less than 80% of the area median income (AMI). The new residence would be within the Town limits and the applicant would attend a home buyer education program.
- Mortgage interest rate/term reductions - The Town could help lower monthly mortgage payments for qualified residents by buying-down interest rates and/or better payment terms.
- Heirs property clearance - The Town could pay for mediation services and associated legal fees to help residents gain a clean title or dispose of their property.
- Home repairs - The Town could provide financial assistance to help residents remedy code violations and make repairs to single family homes. Funds would be used to address items that may pose a threat to the health and safety of the occupants prior to addressing items that are solely cosmetic in nature.



Figure 70-A: A typical house before renovation.



Figure 70-B: The same house after financial assistance for home repairs.



Figure 71-A: A typical house before renovation.



Figure 71-B: The same house after financial assistance for home repairs.



Figure 72: Demolition assistance can remove unsafe conditions from the Neighborhood, while also providing redevelopment opportunities for additional housing.

The BIS Neighborhood has several large pockets that are ideally suited for redevelopment (see Figure 64). These properties currently house multiple rental manufactured homes or are family compounds with numerous dwellings for large families. These properties are not being maximized to their highest and best use and represent a great opportunity for the owners to improve community conditions, make money from their land, and improve their quality of life. Similar redevelopment opportunities exist on smaller parcels throughout the Neighborhood. Small scale infill construction can have a significant impact on the community and leverage additional investment in the BIS Neighborhood, as there is a proven “domino effect” with this type of infill strategy.

Some of these larger redevelopment sites include Twin Oaks (5.0 acres), the Douglas Road and Little Possum properties (13.7 acres), Tower Road (18.3 acres), and the area surrounding Ballfield Road (38.0 acres). The Town should work with these property owners to determine their interest in redeveloping their property and can help solicit investors seeking to joint-venture with the property owners.

Figure 73 shows detached residential infill off of Kitty Road. Figure 74 shows a 34-unit townhouse development tucked into the woods on Tower Road. The images in Figures 75 and 76 represent single-family attached houses that would provide attractive and affordable housing for the Neighborhood.



Figure 73: Conceptual residential infill on 5.72 acres of Kitty Road property provides for 15 new, single-family homes and could also include a new pedestrian pathway between Buck Island and Simmonsville roads.



Figure 75



Figure 76

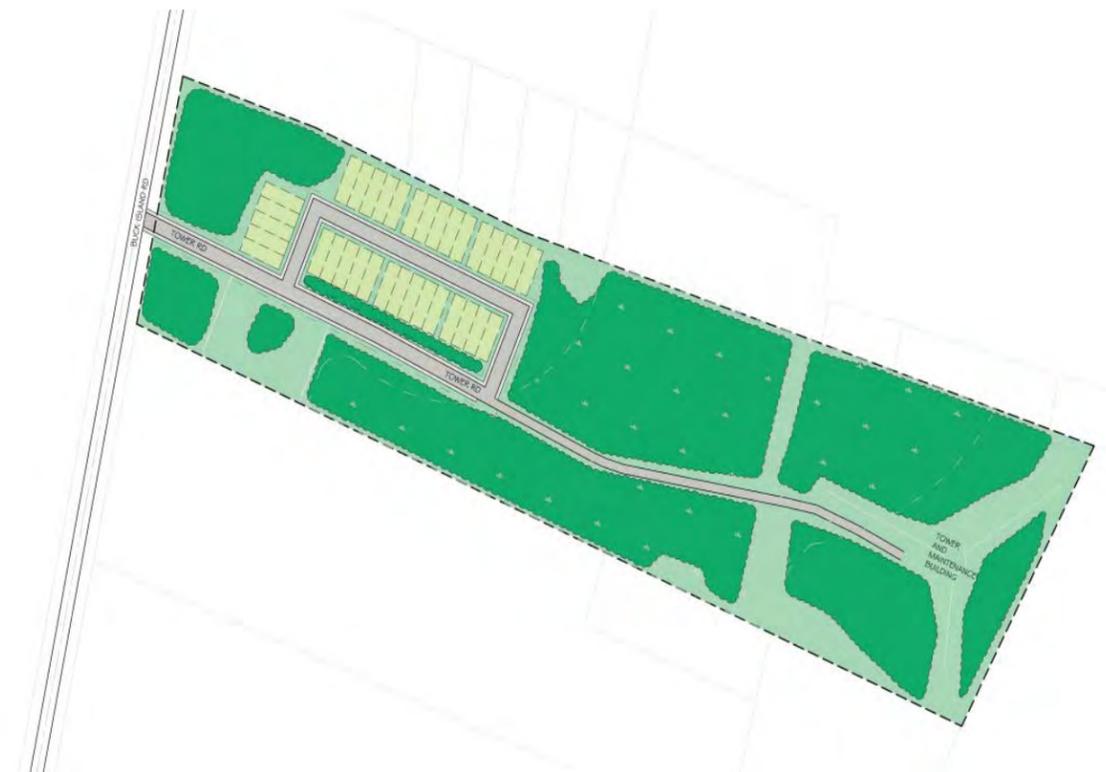


Figure 74: Conceptual infill residential on Tower Road shows 34 new lots tucked in an 18.3 acre property. The existing woods, wetlands, and significant trees are all preserved.

As an established neighborhood, there is a need for reinvestment in the BIS Neighborhood to maintain existing housing stock. The condition of many manufactured homes in the BIS Neighborhood are clearly substandard, yet many appear to be occupied. The Town Construction & Compliance Division needs to inventory each of these properties to properly evaluate the conditions of the dwelling units. Financial assistance and/or redevelopment incentives can then be tailored on a case by case basis.

It is important to note that the redevelopment goals outlined in this Plan are not intended to gentrify the community or remove any particular price point or dwelling unit type. BIS Neighborhood residents need affordable and safe housing. It is the joint responsibility of the property owners and the Town of Bluffton to ensure that such housing opportunities exist. Specifically, the goals are to promote and encourage a mix of housing types, styles, and prices to ensure that the BIS Neighborhood can accommodate a variety of household incomes and lifestyle choices. Further, the goal is to promote home ownership and discourage activities on properties which may lead to a detriment to the property owner or Neighborhood, while offering education and assistance for cleanup and repair opportunities to residents and landlords to prevent the displacement of families from their homes.



Figure 77

community development recommendations

Sponsor/provide educational workshops focusing on housing options and home ownership	TOB, BC, NO
Review property maintenance standards and enforcement provisions to ensure that properties are safely maintained; improve regulatory enforcement as needed	TOB
Conduct community awareness programs on blighting influences, regular refuse collections, and comprehensive code enforcement efforts	TOB, NO
Enforce Town ordinances and building codes focusing initially on junk cars, illegal dumping, and dilapidated/abandoned structures	TOB
Provide financial assistance to help LMI property owners repair their homes	TOB, NO
Remove/ demolish structures that are unsafe and abandoned/ uninhabited	TOB
Remove bulk trash and refuse from residential properties (including appliances, boats, tires, and motors)	TOB
Remove the abandoned automobiles, machinery, equipment, and boats from properties that pose environmental risks by providing financial assistance to help property owners remove unsafe and hazardous conditions	TOB
Offer a neighborhood clean-up program that provides two curb-side clean ups per neighborhood per year	TOB
Adopt an inclusionary zoning ordinance, workforce housing ordinance, or moderately priced dwelling unit program	TOB
Establish an “affordable housing fund” that would fund affordable housing efforts. Funds could come from “fees in lieu of” providing affordable housing from future inclusionary zoning	TOB
Evaluate providing rebates for or exemptions to affordable housing units from impact fees	TOB, BC
Identify and inventory a list of available land and/or redevelopment lots available for new housing units and seek out joint venture opportunities between the property owner and local builders	TOB, PO
Encourage infill projects by waiving/rebating development fees and property taxes	TOB, BC
Encourage public and private developers to explore new design concepts, such as row houses, and to provide quality, affordable housing opportunities in an aesthetically pleasing manner	TOB
Establish new incentives and financial assistance programs to fill in the gaps	TOB

KEY:
 AC-Advisory Committee; BC-Beaufort County; BCSD-Beaufort County School District; NO-Neighborhood Organization; PO-Property Owners; SCDOT-SC Department of Transportation; TOB-Town of Bluffton

chapter 6: public utilities & infrastructure

water and sewer

Beaufort – Jasper Water & Sewer Authority (BJWSA) is a public, non-profit organization which provides water and sewer services to the Town. Currently, the sewer is located on a forced main, a piping system that uses electrical pumps at a nearby pump station to allow for the movement of wastewater. However, many of the older residential properties in the Buck Island Simmonsville (BIS) Neighborhood currently do not have access to adequate sewer facilities and operate on septic tanks. The Town should seek ways to extend both sewer and water lines to supply all residents with public services.

In order to provide water and sewer services to all BIS residents, a survey was sent to each home in the project's target area, which totals 88 homes. One hundred percent of the respondents said that they would like to be hooked up to the new sewer system. In addition to the survey, an infrared aerial survey was taken in order to determine how much sewage, stormwater, and/or septic systems were leaking into the watershed. The aerial survey found 27 areas of concern, which will need to be verified in the field. Many septic systems fail without notice, causing a threat to human health and to the environment. Some failed systems cannot be repaired and require new drainage fields for proper functioning. When lots are small, finding a replacement field can be difficult or impossible.

The Town of Bluffton, Lowcountry Council of Governments, and Beaufort County, in cooperation with BJWSA, are working together to provide a high-quality sewer system to the Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood.

To support the effort to provide citizens with better sewer service and protect the area's natural resources, the Town of Bluffton has secured grant funding for the construction of additional sewer service within the target area. The

\$500,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), in conjunction with contributions from the Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority, Beaufort County School District, and a Town investment of \$750,000 will provide sewer service to approximately 300 people along Buck Island Road.

The first phase of the sewer project runs along Buck Island Road from Hyon Road north toward Eagles Field. Connections will be made to properties adjacent to Buck Island, including the Ballfield - Centerfield area and Twin Oaks. Depending on the timing of contract finalization for the construction of the sewer and the acquisition of easements, construction is slated to begin in the first quarter of 2009 and conclude in 2010.

The installation of this sewer line will help to improve quality infrastructure and environmental problems in the target area by eliminating the need for septic tanks. Subsequent phases of this sewer extension are anticipated for the entire BIS Neighborhood. The Town will explore grant and other funding options to make these extensions possible.

Phase 1 of the sewer project is shown in Figure 78.



Figure 78: Phase 1 of the sewer project along Buck Island Road

stormwater

An inadequate stormwater control system can have negative impacts on citizens and the environment by causing stagnant water in ditches, ponding on roadways, transportation of pollutants into receiving waters, and erosion and/or flooding.

Recently, the Buck Island Simmonsville (BIS) Neighborhood has been prone to such issues as they pertain to its stormwater control system. One of the primary problems observed within the area include the ponding of water on roadways due to either under constructed ditches and swales or the presence of a significant amount of debris within these features that has restricted the flow of stormwater through them.

Because the roads and drainage ditches are the legal responsibility of the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), the Town has requested that the state provide the necessary maintenance to these ditches and culverts. However, because of the importance of this project, the Town has already begun many of these improvements and has budgeted an additional \$100,000 to complete these required projects. Hopefully SCDOT will reimburse the Town for this work so that these funds can be respent for other projects.

Areas where this work has either taken place or is scheduled to take place include the large north-to-south primary channel that lies between Buck Island and Simmonsville roads, which has been cleared of restrictive vegetation from the southernmost point of the channel to the power line easement north of Bluffton Parkway, the channel to the north of Eagles Ballfield, the lateral channel south of Wellstone, and roadside ditches along both Buck Island Road and Simmonsville Road.

In addition to the clearing of these channels, the Environmental Protection Division will be monitoring the construction of the primary stormwater ditches that are either being discharged into by or constructed in conjunction with Bluffton Middle School to ensure proper design and mitigate any additional drainage problems that may arise from the construction of this facility. The Town has also conducted inspections on culverts located underneath driveways or roadways to assess their structural integrity and recommend replacement pipes as needed.

One such location where inspections have been completed is Kitty Road, which is scheduled to be replaced by Beaufort County to ensure proper stormwater flow underneath the road. It is imperative that the Town of Bluffton and Beaufort County continue to monitor stormwater flow and drainage patterns within the study area to further protect environmental assets and quality of life for the citizens within the Neighborhood.

Figure 79 shows the current drainage projects in the Neighborhood.

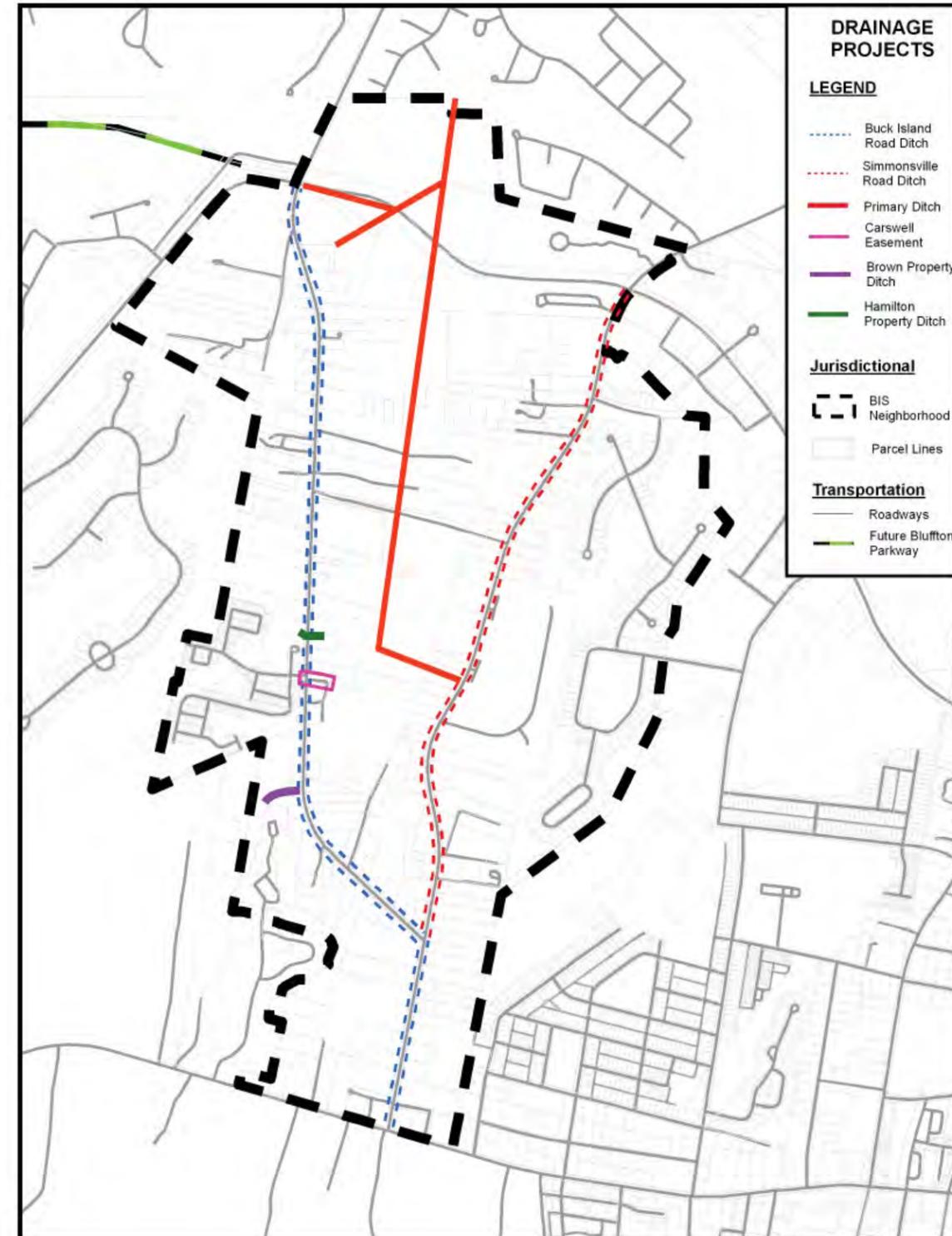


Figure 79: Current drainage projects in the BIS Neighborhood.



Figure 80: Typical clogged culvert found along the roadways.



Figure 81: Primary ditch that has been cleaned out and is functioning properly.

public utilities & infrastructure recommendations	Complete Phase 1 of the sewer installation project in coordination with the middle school road improvements (Buck Island from Ballfield to Hyon)	TOB
	Identify appropriate Phase 2 and Phase 3 project areas for sewer installation	TOB
	Coordinate subsequent sewer phasing with other utilities and pathways plan	TOB
	Apply for grants and other methods of funding for additional sewer extension phases	TOB
	To foster community accountability, storm drains should be marked with statements to remind residents that stormwater drains into valuable watersheds	TOB
	Continue CIP funding in full for the BIS stormwater projects in FY 2009	TOB
	Establish an annual maintenance budget to keep these ditches clear and culverts unobstructed	TOB
	Provide public water for all residents	TOB

KEY:
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 PO-Property Owners; SCDOT-SC Department of Transportation; TOB-Town of Bluffton

chapter 7: traffic & transportation

A visual field study of the Buck Island Simmonsville (BIS) Neighborhood was made during the planning process to evaluate the condition of the Neighborhood's infrastructure. This assessment focused on the existing infrastructure including the evaluation of public sidewalks and streets.

streets & circulation

Both the State and County classify roads based on the national function classification system. These classifications categorize roads based on the primary intended use and function of the road, the types of travel accommodated, and physical factors such as length, travel speeds, and number of lanes.

In Bluffton, roadways are further distinguished by their corridor character (see the Land Use Chapter in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan). Together, functional classification and corridor character describe road "typologies." Roads are classified into the following categories:

- **principal arterials:** Move vehicles over relatively long distances, such as across town. Principal Arterials typically have the highest traffic volumes and speed limits, and more lanes than other roads. Since the emphasis is on through traffic, these roads typically have more signal green time at signalized intersections than side streets, and access points should be spaced far apart to limit disruption of traffic flow. US 278 is a Principal Arterial.
- **minor arterials:** Interconnect and augment the principal arterial system. Roads in this classification typically accommodate shorter trips than those associated with Principal Arterials, and thus have lower traffic volumes, lower speed limits, and fewer lanes. Compared to Principal Arterials, these offer a balance between through traffic and access to adjacent land uses. Bluffton Parkway is a Minor Arterial.
- **major collectors:** Connect arterial roads and local roads. This type of road serves locally oriented traffic, such as circulation between residential neighborhoods and commercial areas. Buckwalter Parkway is a Major Collector.
- **minor collectors:** Connect local roads to major collectors and arterials. Buck Island Road is a Minor Collector.
- **local roads:** All the other roads, public and private, in Bluffton. Small, residential streets, such as Ballfield Road, are Local Roads.

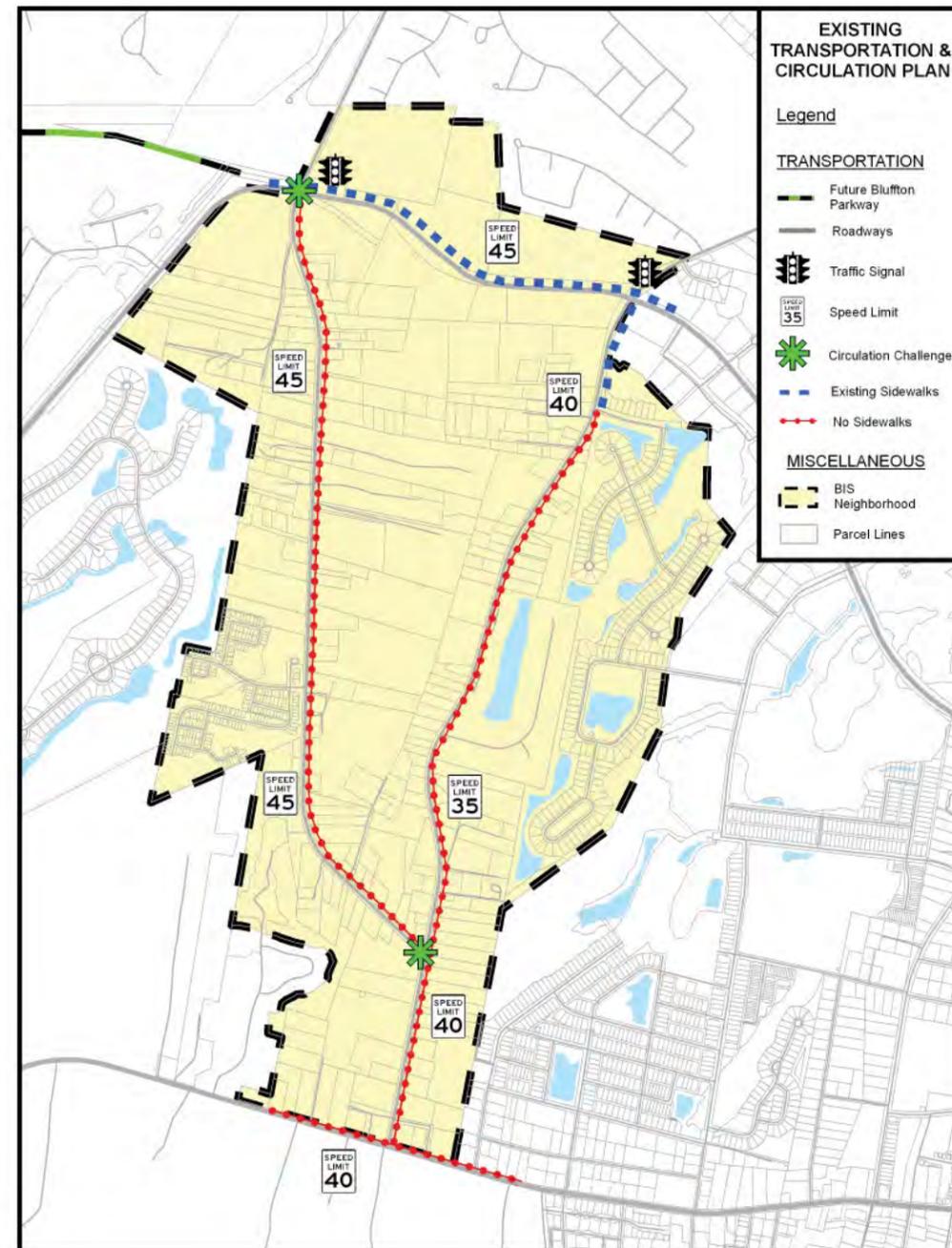


Figure 82: Existing transportation conditions.

The BIS Neighborhood has a wide range of roadways. From private drives to public thoroughfares, paved to unpaved, the roadways vary considerably. The major streets serving the Neighborhood are Bluffton Parkway, May River Road, Buck Island Road, and Simmonsville Road. It should be noted that approximately 26% of the streets in the Neighborhood are unimproved, dirt roads. **Figure 83 shows the type of roadways and their lengths.**

Bluffton Parkway is a 4-lane, median divided highway and is classified as a Minor Arterial with a posted speed limit of 45 mph (see **Figure 87**). The Parkway borders the northern part of the Neighborhood and was opened to traffic in 2007. Under the jurisdiction of Beaufort County, the road parallels US 278 and was constructed to relieve US 278 and provide local traffic with improved mobility options. Traffic signals exist at both Buck Island Road and Simmonsville Road intersections.

SC 46/May River Road borders the Neighborhood to the south, and is a two-lane street that is classified as a Minor Arterial (see **Figure 86**). May River Road provides access to Bluffton and runs east-west, and is under the jurisdiction of SCDOT. Currently, this intersection is not signalized and is controlled by a stop sign on Buck Island Road. May River Road has a posted speed limit of 40 mph.

Buck Island Road is a two-lane street that runs north-south between May River Road and US 278, crossing Bluffton Parkway, and is classified as a Minor Collector (see **Figure 85**). Under the jurisdiction of SCDOT, a stop sign controls the intersection with May River Road, and the intersection at Bluffton Parkway is controlled by a traffic signal. Residents have requested a left turn arrow for north bound traffic. This street has a posted speed limit of 45 mph (see **Figure 87**).

street type	length	percent of total
paved	47,335 Feet	72.77%
unpaved	16,998 Feet	26.13%
planned/future	714 Feet	1.10%
TOTAL	65,047 Feet	100%

Figure 83: Street type and length.



Figure 84: Buck Island Road.



Figure 85: May River Road.

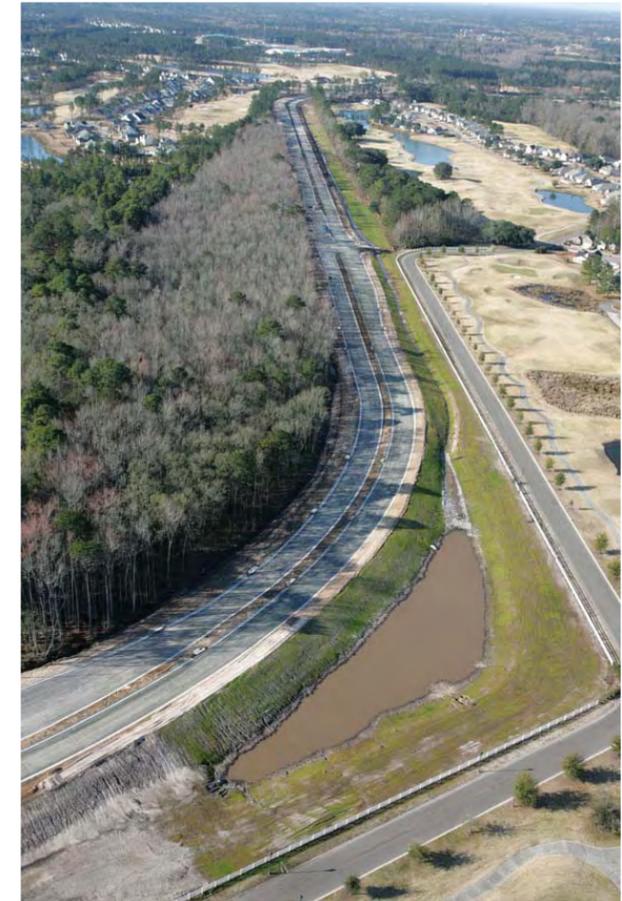


Figure 87: Bluffton Parkway.



Figure 87: Buck Island Road posted speed limit.



Figure 88: There are several speed reduction signs along Buck Island Road and Simmonsville Roads.

Simmonsville Road is a two-lane street that also runs north-south between Buck Island Road and US 278, crossing Bluffton Parkway. Similar to Buck Island Road, it is also under the jurisdiction of South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and is classified as a Minor Collector. At its intersection with Bluffton Parkway, a traffic signal controls traffic. Residents have requested a left turn signal for north bound traffic.

New residential and commercial development in and around the Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood has led to the increase in traffic on the street network. Because of the residential character of the Neighborhood, the Town should consider requesting that the SCDOT restrict truck traffic from Buck Island and Simmonsville roads. Restricting through truck traffic would lessen the traffic on the roads, as well as improve pedestrian safety.

Many of today's neighborhoods, shopping centers, and other developments are built with cul-de-sacs and looping streets so that there is only one way in and one way out (see Figure 90). Everyone must use the same street to enter and exit a development. This creates pockets of isolation and limits the choices people have to travel, forcing them to use certain streets and travel greater distances to get to their destination. In turn, this results in more traffic on our arterials and other streets, including both Buck Island Road and Simmonsville Road.

In the BIS Neighborhood, many new developments such as Wellstone and Hidden lakes are examples of new development with only one point of entry and exit with cul-de-sacs, looping roads, and dead-ends.

Historically, older neighborhoods and cities used a street grid, such as those seen in Old Town and Bluffton Park, as well as cities such as Beaufort, Charleston, and Savannah. This gives people many ways to travel to and from a location and makes travel easier and more time efficient. The street grid is also more efficient and has more capacity than a typical suburban street network that exists in Bluffton, reducing traffic on any one road.

The concept of connecting destinations and improving accessibility is commonly referred to as interconnectivity. Interconnectivity can be accomplished in many ways, such as discouraging neighborhoods with cul-de-sacs and encouraging a gridded street network. Another way is to build or connect developments with streets and pathways, extend streets or pathways from a cul-de-sac and connect to nearby development, use utility easements or go alongside easements, and build new connector roads such as Hyon Road that will connect Buck Island Road and Simmonsville Road. Another example is the proposed frontage road system parallel to US 278 that will connect adjacent properties.



Figure 89: Bluffton's abundance of cul-de-sacs result in poor circulation and have negative traffic impacts.

unimproved streets

Within the Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood are 14 public and private streets, which are unimproved - meaning they are unpaved, dirt roads (see Figure 91). These unimproved streets are either maintained by the property owners themselves, or by the Beaufort County Department of Public Works.

Some of these private dirt roads represent a potentially dangerous situation because of their condition. The surfaces of these roads are so uneven or narrow that a fire truck or ambulance would have a difficult challenge getting to a house during an emergency. Fortunately, Beaufort County is improving three of the four public dirt roads in 2009: Ballfield, Kitty and Phoenix roads.



Figure 90: Unimproved dirt roads are difficult to maneuver, particularly for emergency vehicles.

STREET OWNERSHIP & MAINTENANCE RESPONSIBILITIES			
street	condition	ownership	maintenance responsibility
Ballfield Road	Unpaved	Public	Beaufort County
Brown's Way	Unpaved	Private	Private
Centerfield Lane	Unpaved	Private	Private
Douglis Lane	Unpaved	Private	Private
Henry Jones Drive	Unpaved	Private	Private
Hyon Road	Unpaved	Private	Private
Kitty Road	Unpaved	Public	Beaufort County
Little Aaron	Unpaved	Private	Private
Little Possum Lane	Unpaved	Private	Private
Lotus Court	Paved	Public	Beaufort County
Phoenix Road	Unpaved	Public	Beaufort County
Ripp Rapp Road	Unpaved	Private	Private
Sugaree Drive	Paved	Public	Beaufort County
Tower Road	Unpaved	Public	Beaufort County
Toy Fields Circle	Unpaved	Private	Private
Twin Oaks	Unpaved	Private	Private
Windy Lake Court	Paved	Public	Beaufort County

Figure 91: Street ownership and maintenance responsibilities.



Figure 92: Private road signs are indicated in blue.

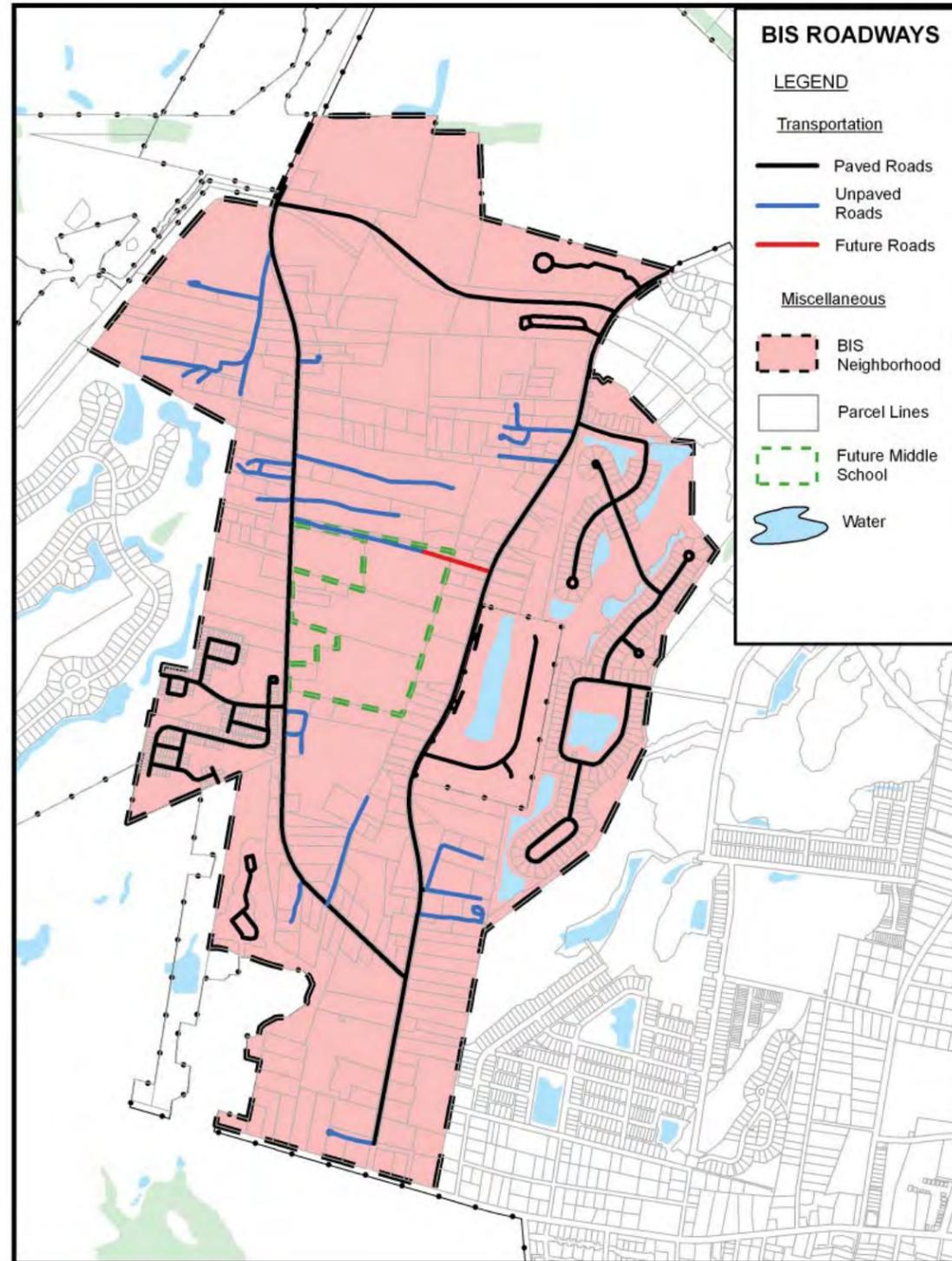


Figure 93: Overall street type in the BIS Neighborhood.

traffic volumes

As part of the BIS Neighborhood Plan, traffic counts were conducted to determine how much vehicular traffic is on Buck Island Road and Simonsville Road. These counts will assist staff and other agencies in various transportation and land use planning efforts for the BIS Neighborhood.

Study results indicate that the section of Buck Island Road between the Buck Island-Simonsville intersection and north of the May River Road intersection is the busiest section of street in the Neighborhood with an average of 6,500 vehicles per day. Simonsville Road between Buck Island Road and Bluffton Parkway carries approximately 4,500 vehicles per day, and Buck Island Road between Bluffton Parkway and Simonsville Road carries approximately 2,500 vehicles per day. Weekend traffic was noticeably lower on all both roads. **Figure 94 summarizes the results of the traffic counts.**

BUCK ISLAND RD. & SIMMONSVILLE RD. TRAFFIC VOLUMES		
Location	Weekday Average (vehicles per day)	Weekend Average (vehicles per day)
Buck Island Rd. (South of Simonsville Rd., near Resort Services, Inc.)	6,500	4,600
Buck Island Rd. (South of Wellstone Neighborhood)	2,500	1,800
Simonsville Rd. (North of Buck Island, South of Hyon extension)	4,500	3,750

Figure 94: Traffic volume.

planned roadway improvements

Just north of the Neighborhood, Simmonsville Road from US 278 to Bluffton Parkway is scheduled to be widened from a 2-lane street to a 4-lane street with a median. The project is scheduled to start in spring of 2009 (see figure 103) and take one year to complete. The project is estimated to cost \$6 million.

Bluffton Parkway Phase 5B is proposed to extend from Buck Island Road to Buckwalter Parkway. This project is intended to create a continuous roadway from US 278 near the Hilton Head Island bridge to SR 170 and relieve the jog that overlaps with Buckwalter Parkway.

Bluffton Parkway Phase 5B consists of a 4-lane median divided highway with 8-foot wide pathways along each side and will be approximately 2.5 miles in length. The project is currently on hold due to other priorities and a lack of funding. **Figure 95 shows the realignment of Bluffton Parkway.**

Beaufort County Public Works is planning to pave Kitty Road, Ballfield Road, and Phoenix Road in the spring and summer of 2009 (see figure 97). Proposed improvements include paving an 18-foot to 20-foot wide street without curb and gutter. Driveways would then be tied into the new street with drainage culverts underneath the driveway. Instead of curb and gutter, drainage swales with rock check dams paralleling the newly paved street will collect and manage stormwater runoff from the street.

Typically, in order to pave unimproved streets, Beaufort County Public Works must first obtain right-of-way and/or easements from adjacent property owners, permission from all utility companies to either cover or relocate the individual utility, and obtain permits from South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC). Upon obtaining the necessary right-of-way, easements, and permits, the project must then go out to bid and be awarded to a contractor to perform the actual work. This process can easily take between one to two years.

With all new residential developments in and around the BIS Neighborhood, it is becoming increasingly more important to determine the transportation impacts of additional projects on the street system and prior to approving any more large developments.

Various computer simulation models are used to evaluate traffic operations. These models can analyze intersection operations and street networks along a corridor and include the network for a town, county and region.

These models can identify immediate and long term capacity deficiencies and evaluate alternative solutions such as adding turn lanes to intersections, new street connections, and new roads.

Both Beaufort County and Hilton Head Island use a network model (TRANPLAN) to estimate future traffic volumes on the road network based on current volumes and expected development. Bluffton planning staff provides information on approved new developments so the model can be updated to reflect changes. This enables the Town and County to identify where improvements may be needed to meet projected demand and plan for road projects in a timely manner.

In order to provide access to the northern interior portions of the Neighborhood, a north-south road from the Bluffton Parkway to Hyon Road has been discussed. If such a road were installed, it would help eliminate excessive future curb cuts and private drives that may have an adverse effect on the community. However, it is unlikely that public dollars could be justified for building this half mile road, and the property owners do not seem to support this project. If a developer were to assemble a critical mass of this vacant land, then the Town should negotiate the construction of this north-south road to serve the development, thus limiting impacts on Buck Island and Simmonsville roads.

Street	Length	Estimated Cost
Ballfield Rd	0.2 miles	\$120,000
Kitty Rd.	0.2 miles	\$120,000
Phoenix Rd.	0.1 miles	\$60,000

Source: Beaufort County Public Works

Figure 96: Proposed street improvements.

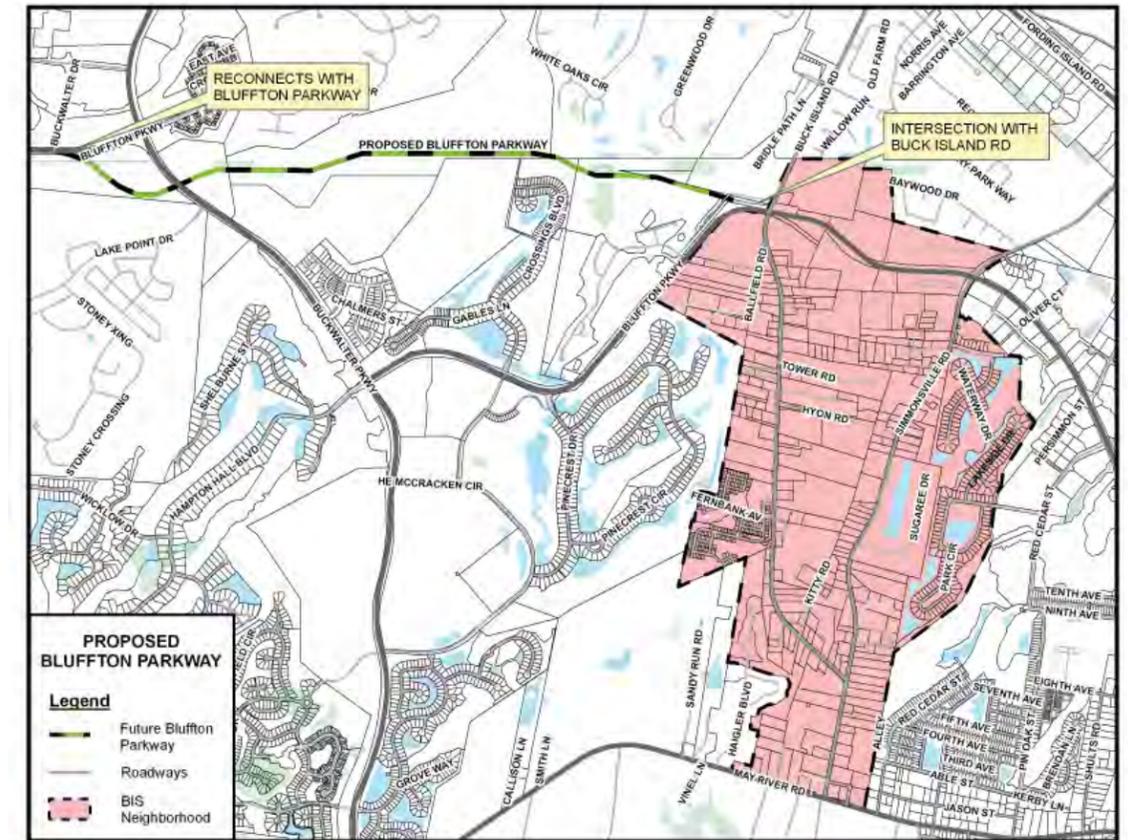


Figure 95: Future realignment of Bluffton Parkway.



Figure 97: Existing Bluffton Parkway.

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Having multiple roads for drivers to use helps create a safer, more walkable community by lowering the traffic volumes and vehicle speeds. Connector roadways not only spread traffic onto more streets, thereby lessening the burden of any one or two streets, but they also provide more efficient access throughout the Neighborhood. Emergency vehicle access will also be enhanced, allowing faster response times for emergency personnel.

The Town of Bluffton, in cooperation with Beaufort County and the South Carolina Department of Transportation, should set up a system to respond to neighborhood traffic that could include evaluation of traffic calming measures where conditions may be improved.

The intersection of Buck Island and Simmonsville is not the safest or most functional due to its angled orientation. Old Carolina, as part of its traffic mitigation associated with the impacts caused by Old Carolina Apartments, is required to improve this intersection with a northbound dedicated left turn lane on Buck Island; however, the BIS neighbors have requested that the Town evaluate the feasibility of a roundabout at this location. The roundabout might provide a gateway element and also reduce traffic volumes and speed. Conceptual drawings indicate that a roundabout would require additional right-of-way from adjacent property owners, but this could be incorporated into the redevelopment site on the east. Of course, any changes to the intersection will have to be approved by SCDOT. **Figure 98 shows the existing intersection, while Figures 99 and 100 show conceptual upgrades.**



Figure 98: Current Buck Island Road/Simmonsville Road intersection.

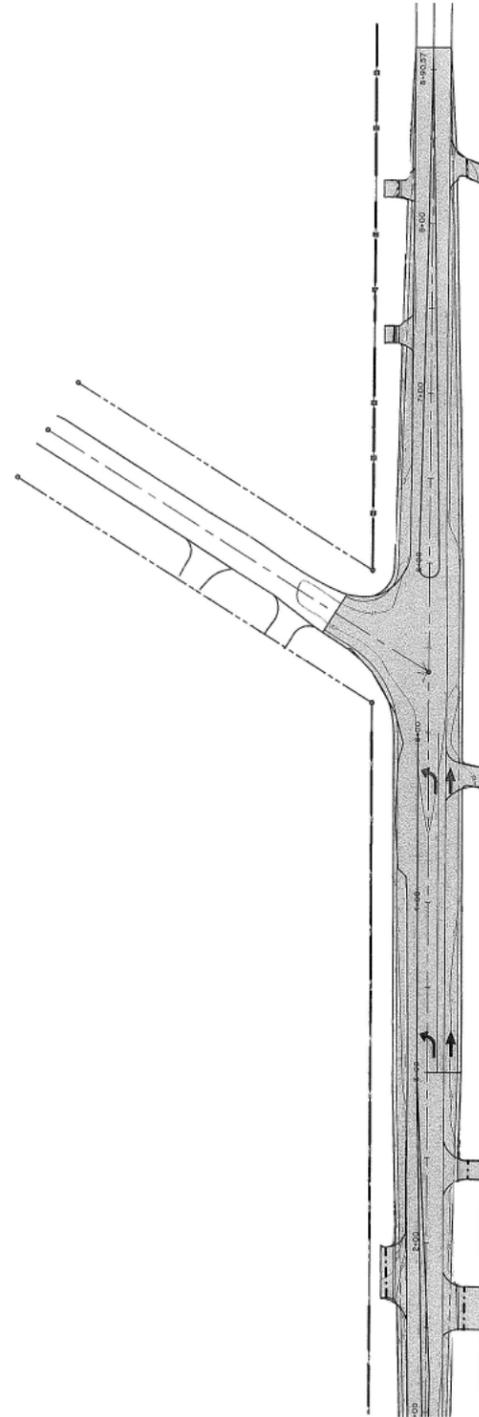


Figure 99: Conceptual left turn lane at the Buck Island Road/ Simmonsville Road intersection to be installed by Old Carolina.

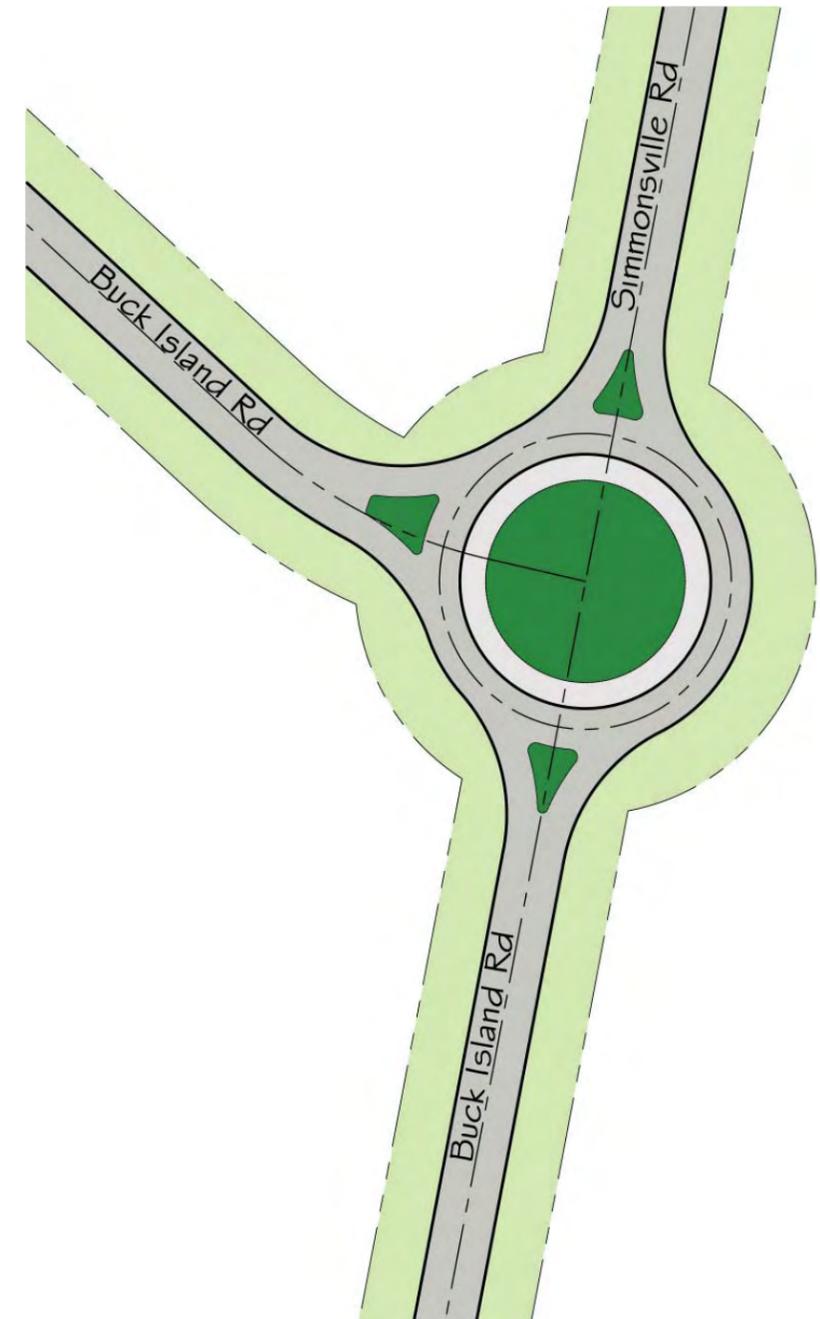


Figure 100: Conceptual roundabout at the Buck Island Road/ Simmonsville Road intersection.

sidewalks & pathways

During the planning process, a large volume of pedestrian traffic was observed throughout the study area despite the absence of sidewalks. Pedestrian traffic often occurs within the roadways and along the edge of roads where no sidewalks exist. This is obviously a highly unsafe practice but is one of necessity for many BIS residents. The only existing sidewalks in the community are along the Bluffton Parkway and along the northern portion of Simmonsville Road.

Walking and bicycling are viable modes of transportation. For many of the residents, walking and bicycling may be their primary mode of transportation. When compared to driving a car, walking and bicycling reduce pollution, reduce wear and tear on the roads, and are more environmentally friendly.

Figure 101 indicates walking distances to local school and parks via existing and proposed routes.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 4,654 pedestrians in the United States were killed in traffic crashes in 2007, of which 106 occurred in South Carolina. Most pedestrian fatalities occurred in urban areas, at non-intersection locations, at night. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, "Pedestrians are the second largest category of motor vehicle deaths, after occupants." An unfortunate pedestrian fatality occurred in September 2008 when a Bluffton resident was walking near her home along Buck Island Road just south of Simmonsville Road and was struck by a car. No sidewalks exist along the street for pedestrians, nor is there any street lighting to improve visibility at night.

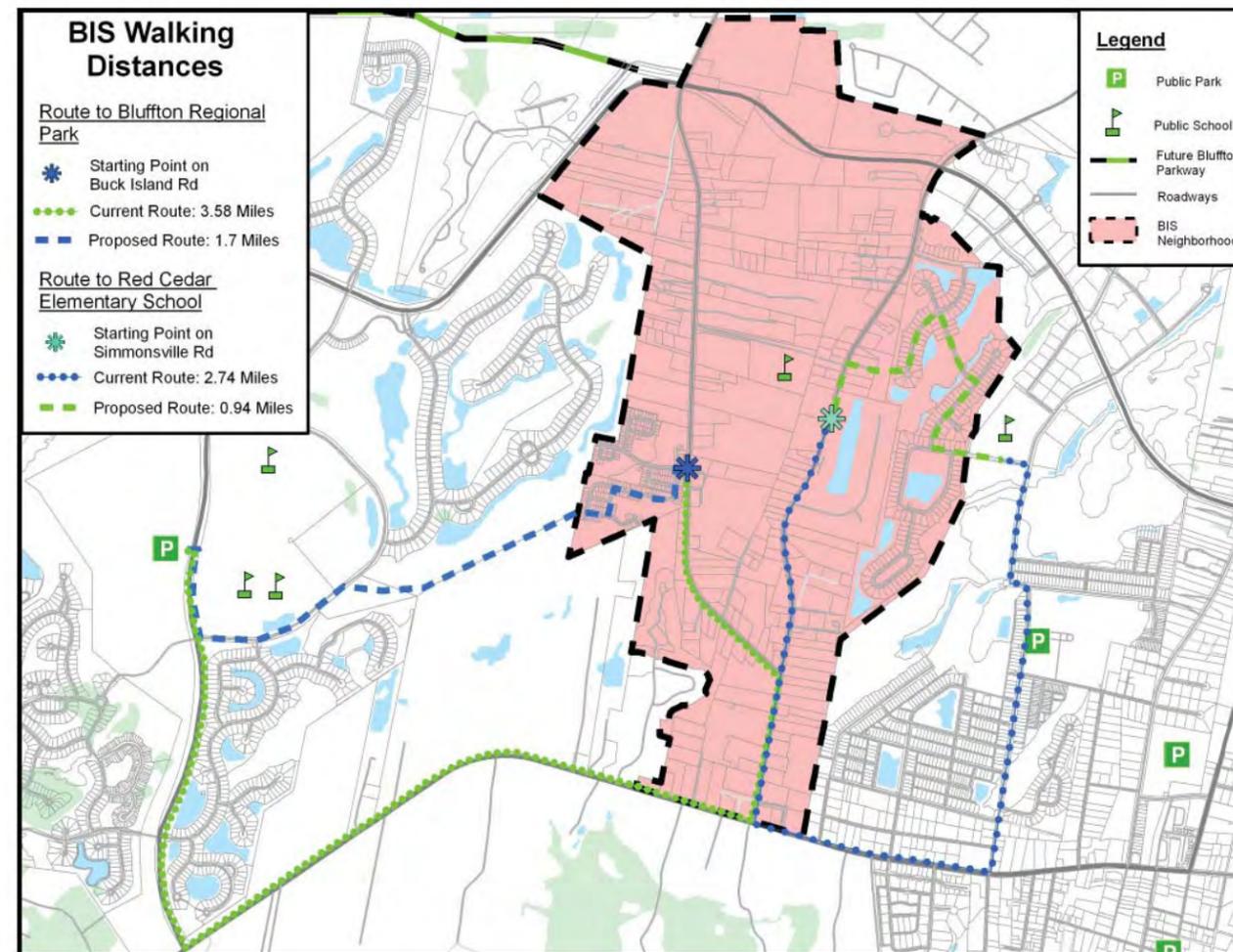


Figure 101: Current and proposed walking distances from the BIS Neighborhood to adjacent amenities.

Pedestrians must walk in the street or dangerously close to moving vehicles on what little shoulder exists within the BIS Neighborhood. This problem is further compounded by the roadside drainage ditches that accommodate water but are difficult to traverse. At nighttime, driver visibility is considerably shorter than daytime because vehicle headlights only provide visibility for a few hundred feet in front of the car.

Streetlighting would improve driver nighttime visibility and increase driver perception and reaction to the conditions ahead, including the opportunity to see pedestrians, bicyclists, and other objects in or along the road.

A bicycle and pedestrian transportation system that effectively serves the needs of cyclists and pedestrians, encourages alternative transportation, and provides a continuous network of attractive pathways throughout the BIS Neighborhood, is a priority for residents.

Planning for pathways along Buck Island and Simmonsville roads is critical to accommodating pedestrians and cyclists. On one side of the street, Buck Island Road would need approximately 10,225 linear feet and Simmonsville Road would need approximately 5,800 linear feet.

Installing sidewalks could require additional right-of-way or easements, possible utility relocations, cutting down trees, driveway reconstruction and other challenges associated with construction of sidewalks. However, if the property owners, Town, and

County work together, appropriate pathway locations can be built in the near future.

Figures 102 and 103 show conceptual street sections and pathway placement options.

The Beaufort County School District, as part of the new Bluffton Middle School, will be installing 970 linear feet of sidewalk on Buck Island Road, 50 feet of sidewalk along Simmonsville Road, and 2,000 linear feet along Hyon Road. However, these limited sidewalks will not provide adequate safe routes to the school. The School District does not normally provide bus service within a 1.5 mile radius of a school, but in this case, the District is committed to busing students to the school until pathways are installed (see Figure 105).

If funds are available, as part of the Phase 1 Buck Island Sewer project, the Town of Bluffton will also be installing pathways on top of the sewer as it runs along Buck Island Road. This sidewalk measures approximately 3,325 feet in length and will connect to the sidewalk that leads to the new middle school. With these improvements, a total of 9,750 linear feet remains to be built on both Buck Island and Simmonsville Roads.

Figure 104 shows current and proposed future pathways in and around the BIS Neighborhood.

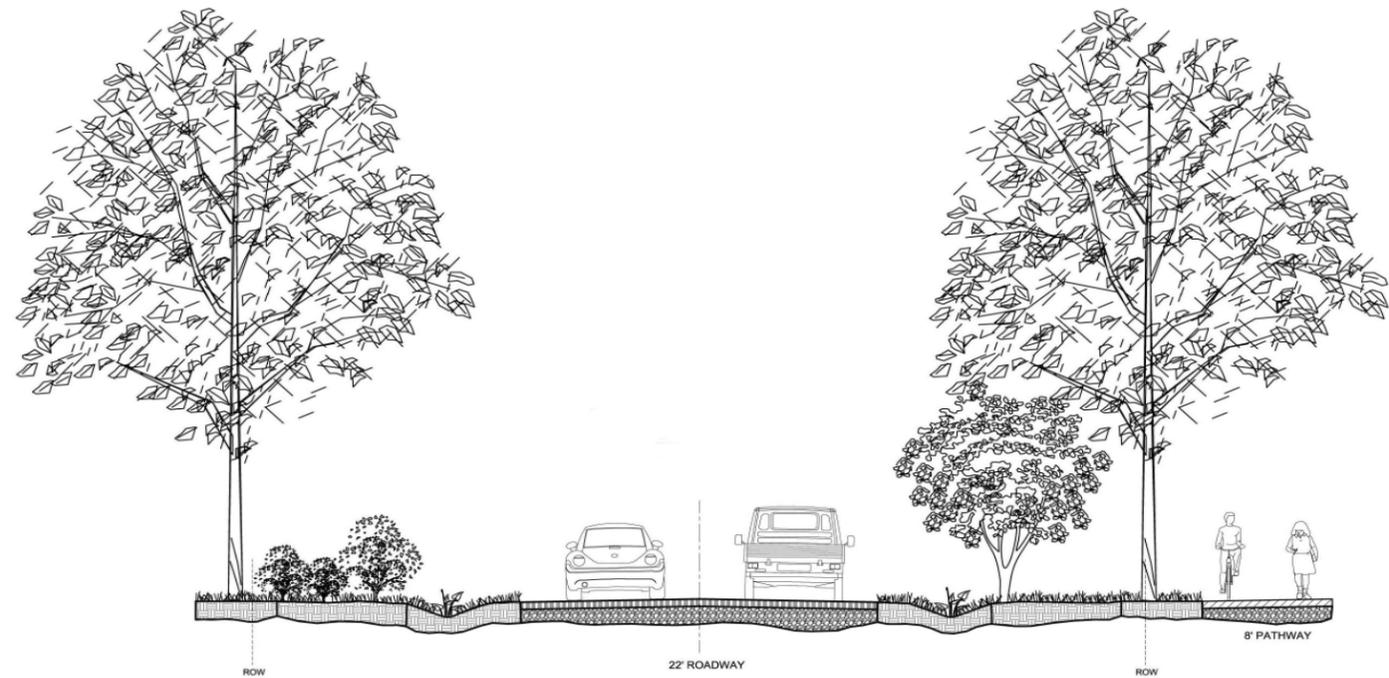


Figure 102: Conceptual streetscape with safety separation between road and pathway. Pathway is located on private property with an easement.

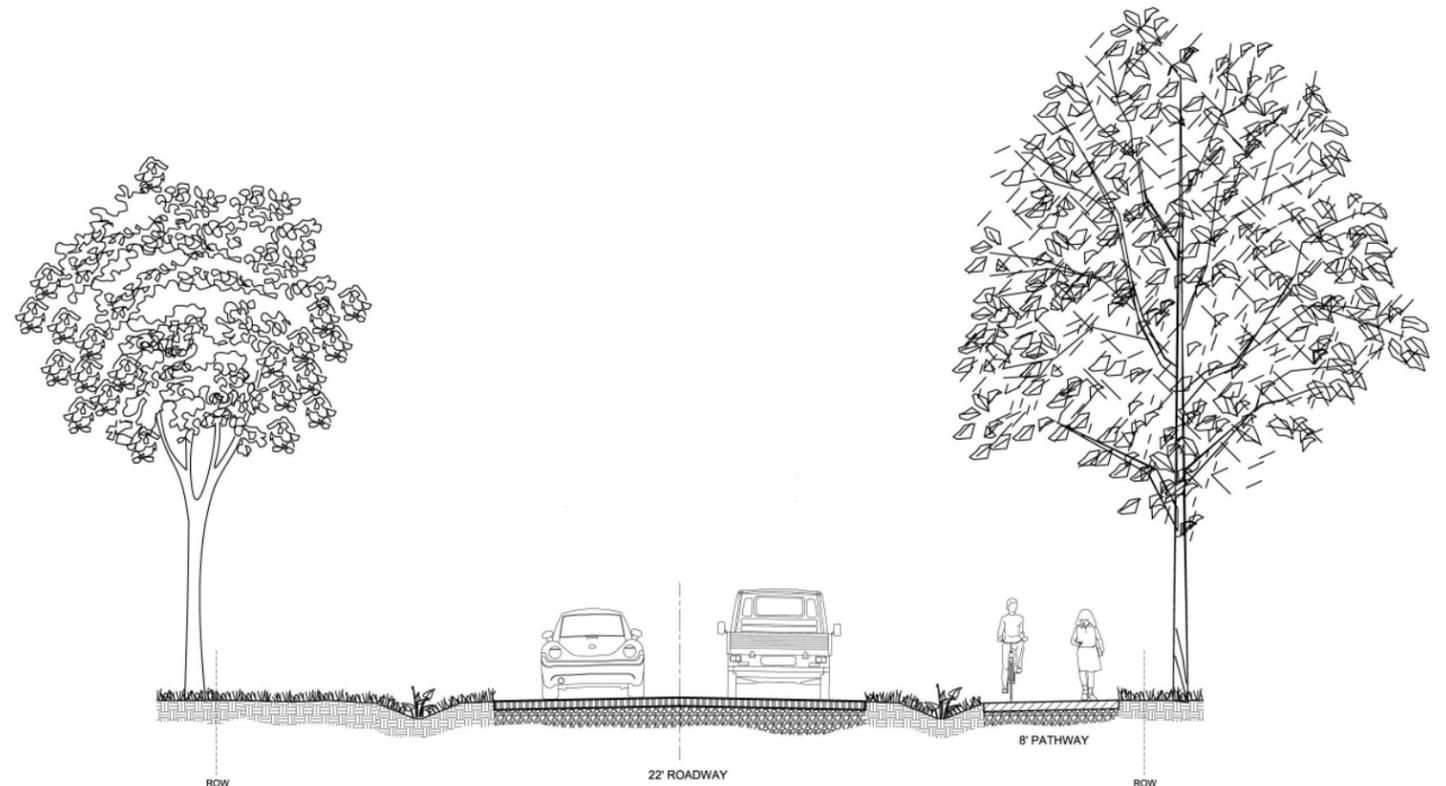


Figure 103: Conceptual streetscape with pathway adjacent to roadway.

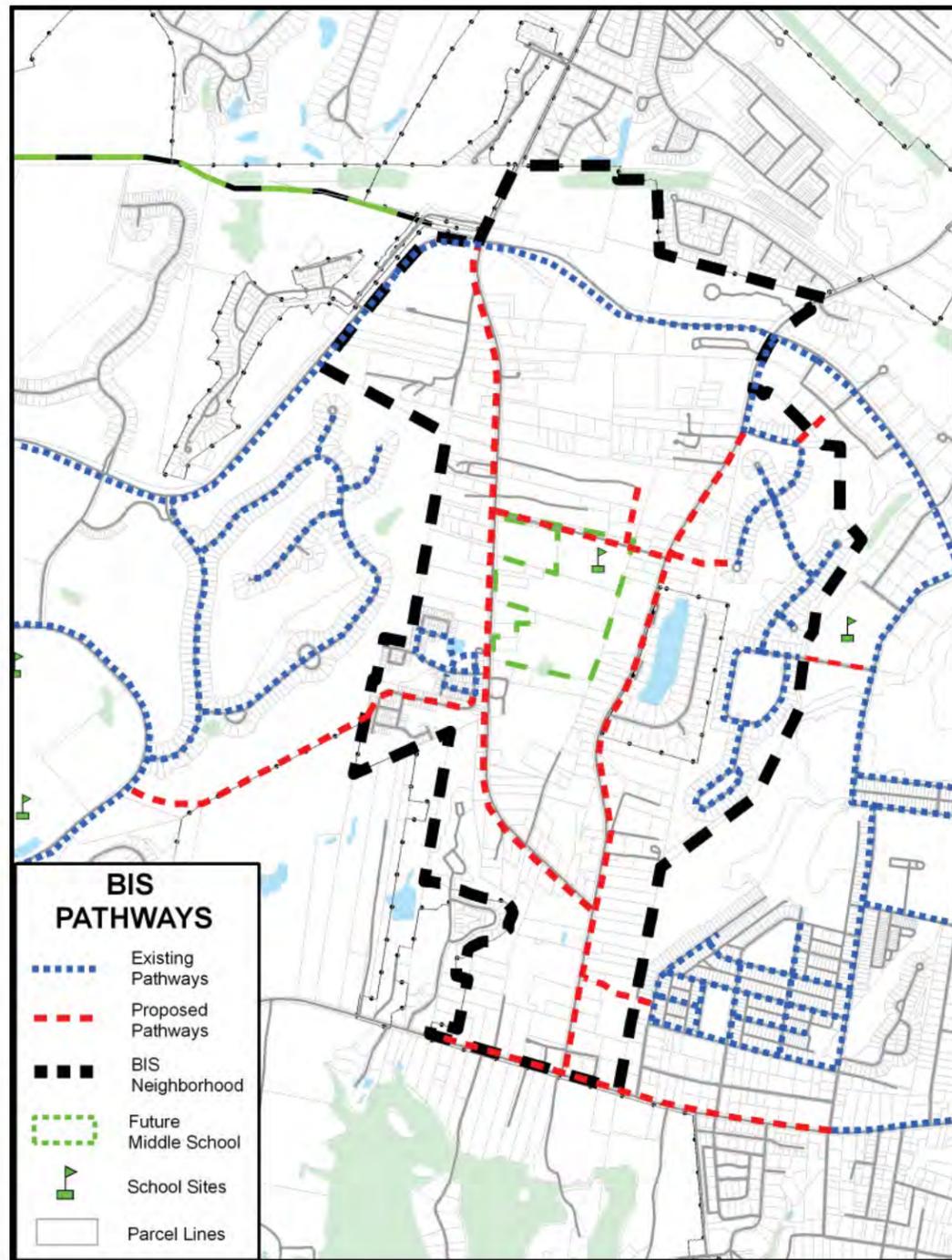


Figure 104: Pathways in and around the BIS Neighborhood.

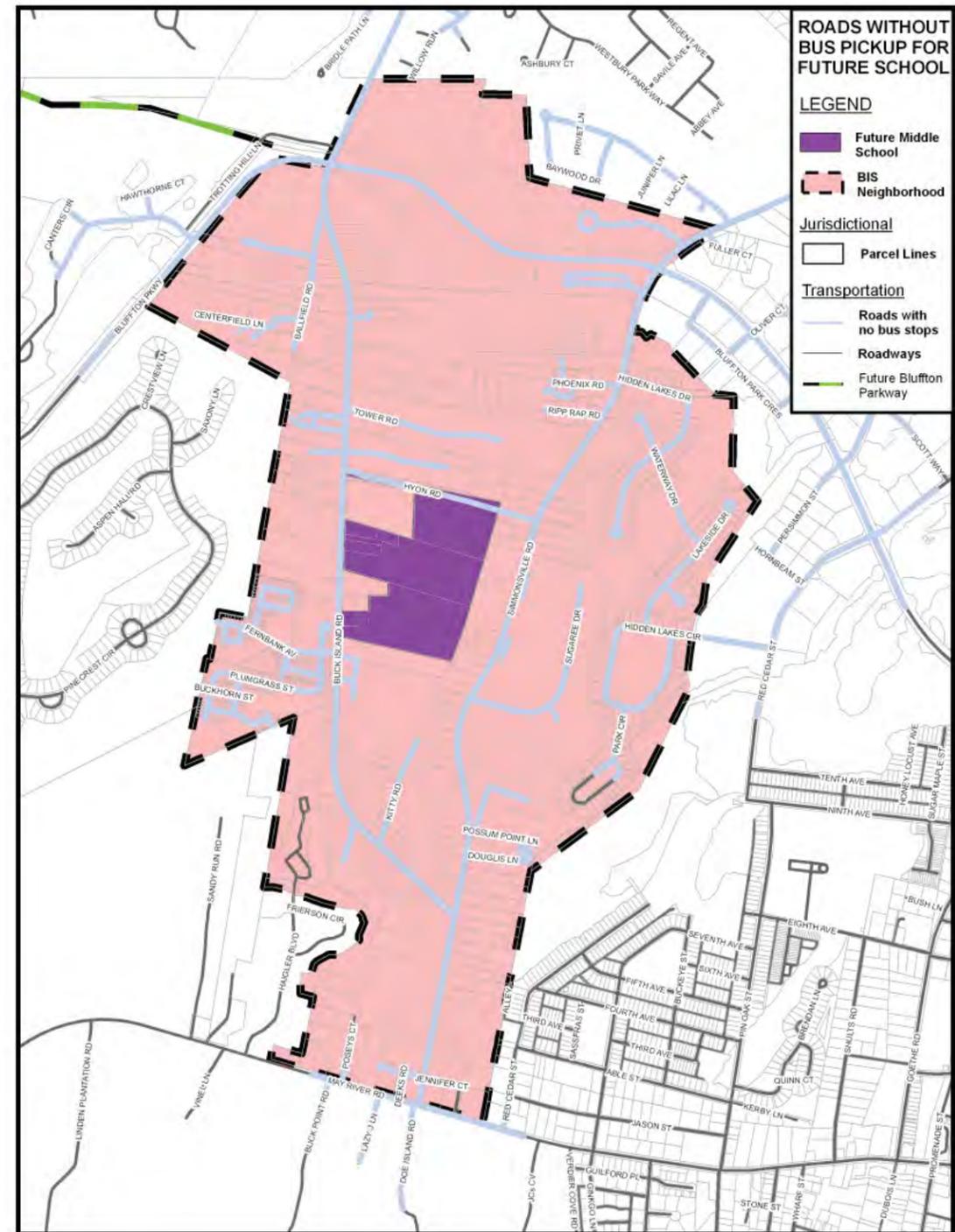


Figure 105: BCSD policy does not provide for bus service within 1.5 miles of a school if sidewalks and other safety considerations are in place.

public transit

The Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority (LRTA), established in 1978 under the Regional Transportation Authority Law, provides transit service for people commuting to various jobs on Hilton Head Island and points in between. Additional services provided by LRTA include Medicaid transportation, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) transportation, vanpooling, and human service agency transportation. The public busing system established is called the Palmetto Breeze.

Today, Palmetto Breeze provides an alternate mode of transportation. It provides fixed route and demand response or “dial-a-ride” services, where patrons can call and schedule to be picked up and dropped off at various locations. Additionally, riders may flag-down a bus at any time, giving people more access to bus service than the typical transit system. Additional transportation services include contract services with various social welfare service agencies and resort hotels and a medical transportation service which utilizes volunteer drivers.

Route 503 runs through the Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood, and Route 308 stops at Resort Services, Inc., where an estimated 20 to 30 people regularly use Palmetto Breeze for their transportation to and from work. Some common stops in the Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood area include:

- Roses Day Care—Buck Island Road
- Resort Services Inc.— Buck Island Road
- Bluffton Eagle Field— Buck Island Road
- Vista View Apartments— Haigler Boulevard

As demand increases over time through increases in ridership, Palmetto Breeze can adapt and add stops where needed to serve the community.



Figure 106: Palmetto Breeze buses

traffic & transportation recommendations

Create better street signage for road identification	TOB, BC
Provide streetscaped entry ways into the BIS Neighborhood (Buck Island from May River to Simmonsville, Simmonsville from Bluffton Parkway to Hidden Lakes, and Buck Island from Bluffton Parkway to Ballfield)	TOB, NO
Enforce maintenance standards for private roads to ensure EMS efficient access and proper stormwater management	TOB, BC
Conduct quarterly detailed traffic counts on Buck Island and Simmonsville to monitor changes resulting from school, traffic calming, and other road improvements	TOB
Ensure interconnectivity by extending Box Elder between Hidden Lakes and Red Cedar Elementary	TOB
Determine a pathway phasing plan in conjunction with sewer and school project and adopt in CIP, as well as establish a pathways phasing plan for the remaining portions of BIS that include financing options (including SCDOT, impact fees, CIP, and other funding sources).	TOB, PO, BCSD
Acquire sewer and pathway easements for construction	TOB, PO, BCSD
Establish an annual maintenance budget for pathways	TOB
Install a roundabout or signal at Buck Island Rd and May River Rd intersection	BC, TOB
Install a roundabout at Buck Island Rd and Simmonsville Rd intersection	BC, TOB
Adopt an interconnectivity ordinance to address pathway easement acquisition and vehicular connections	TOB
Restrict truck traffic on Buck Island and Simmonsville	TOB

KEY:

AC-Advisory Committee; BC-Beaufort County; BCSD-Beaufort County School District; NO-Neighborhood Organization; PO-Property Owners; SCDOT-SC Department of Transportation; TOB-Town of Bluffton

police

Currently the Bluffton Police Department has a department of 38 staff. During each shift there is at least one officer assigned to each district and one officer who is able to assist each district as needed.

Based on data received from the Police Department, there were 847 calls for service within the BIS Neighborhood from January 1, 2008 to October 6, 2008. These calls for service were for Buck Island Road, Simmonsville Road, Wellstone, and Hidden Lakes. There were 429 total offenses for these areas in the same time frame.

The Bluffton Police Department responds to a variety of types of service calls. They respond to alarm calls, including both residential and business alarm activations. They also respond to vehicle collisions, noise complaints, and other disturbances. Disturbances include calls for disorderly conduct and other general behavioral issues that do not necessarily result in criminal charges. They also respond to calls for Domestic Disputes and other Criminal Domestic Violence cases. Domestic Disputes do not result in criminal charges, while Criminal Domestic Violence cases do result in criminal charges.

The top five types of crimes in the Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood have been identified as:

- Assault and Battery, including Criminal Domestic Violence, and any other physical disturbance calls. The statistics combined both Simple Assault & Battery and Assault & Battery that may involve a weapon (High and Aggravated).
- Vandalism, including fired gun shots.
- Larceny, including thefts, illegal use of credit cards, and financial frauds.
- Unlawful Communication, including phone and internet based harassment complaints.
- Burglary.

In the meetings and discussions that have taken place with community residents, the issue of Criminally Reckless Behavior was the number one issue that made the residents feel unsafe. Drugs, potential gang activity, alcohol, and gun culture are the issues that are causing fear for the residents of BIS.

Specifically, the residents have voiced concerns about:

- Drugs
- General Disturbances
- Traffic concerns (speeding, reckless, DUI, crashes)
- Property Crimes
- Alcohol Crimes

A large percentage of the criminal activities that take place can be linked to drug-related crimes. Many arrests that were made in burglary cases were found to have drug connections. Many of the disturbances, particularly shots fired or shooting complaints, were concentrated in areas with high drug activity.

Much of the information gathered through interviews by law enforcement closely aligns with the concerns of BIS Neighborhood residents. Officers specifically spoke about the drug culture that has invaded the BIS area and the fear that it causes among the majority of residents. The officers mentioned that the jurisdictional holes cause a problem in policing because many of the criminals escape into those areas or come from those areas. In addition they mention poorly marked roads and dirt paths as areas that are difficult and dangerous for police to access.

Quality policing requires a strong partnership between police and the communities they serve. It is critical that regions or areas develop advisory groups to help police address specific issues. This group would help identify issues and communicate with affected citizens.



Figure 107: Police presence is a major factor in reducing crime.



Figure 108: Police officers on bicycles can access more areas than those in cars.



Figure 109-111: After school activities are proven to keep kids safe and offer educational opportunities.

The long term plan for the Bluffton Police Department calls for the establishment of a neighborhood services/community services division. This division would be responsible for working hand in hand with neighborhoods to eliminate long standing or complicated problems. Some of the services offered would be residential safety checks, the establishment of a crime free housing zone (this technique is used widely in Savannah, GA with great success), provide crime prevention assistance, and would provide continuity to the neighborhood organization. The BIS Neighborhood should be the first zone to receive a neighborhood services officer.

The Bluffton Police Department has relied on the Beaufort County Drug Task Force for its drug operations for over three years. While some impact has been made, it is critical that the Town's Police Department assume responsibility for this function and focus its efforts on assisting Town residents. The department has established the Problem Solving Team to begin tackling this effort. The team will focus on the elimination of areas where drugs, drug dealers, and drug users feel safe in conducting their illicit activities. The team will also look to partner with other entities that may assist in this task. Finally, the drug enforcement plan for the BIS Neighborhood should be reviewed with the above mentioned committee so that all citizens are aware of the Police Department's activities.

It has been shown that an area which appears to be abandoned or rundown attracts a criminal element. This theory is commonly called the "broken windows" theory. It is critical that the BIS Neighborhood clean up and remove all debris, trash, abandoned vehicles, and dilapidated residences. Once criminals realize that this area is valued and cared for, they will understand they cannot hide there.

The police department believes that the new middle school will provide a good opportunity to establish after school programs that keep kids safe and engaged. Studies have shown areas with boys and girls clubs, police athletic leagues, and other safe education based programs have significantly lower violent crime numbers than similar areas without those programs. It is a matter of public safety priority to provide places and activities for juveniles, so that they do not fall prey to criminals.

On a number of occasions, officers' response to criminal activity has been delayed due to poorly marked roads in the BIS Neighborhood. In addition to poorly marked roads, there is a series of unnamed and unmapped dirt paths that allow criminals avenues of travel outside of public view.

The rate of traffic crashes in the BIS Neighborhood is quite high, and Simmonsville Road was recently cited in a state report as one of the deadliest roads.

The Bluffton Police Department must develop traffic control strategies that include aggressive enforcement but also some traffic calming measures to decrease speeding violations along thoroughfares. This is essential with the opening of the new middle school. Unfortunately, the narrow road and lack of shoulders do not lend themselves to traditional traffic enforcement so alternate strategies should be developed. These could include the use of bikes or motorcycles to monitor speed.

Crime typically occurs in the dark, making it critical to get adequate street lighting on Buck Island and Simmonsville roads. This will not only make the area less inviting for criminal activity, but the lighting will increase traffic safety. This could be incorporated with the sewer and pathways projects as each phase is completed.



Figure 112: Police also help at traffic accidents.

fire

The study area is within the service coverage jurisdiction of two fire stations, each with varying response times and dispatch personnel. The response times listed below are given from the shortest time it takes a responder to reach a point of access within the Buck Island Simmonsville (BIS) Neighborhood to the longest time it may take for a responder to reach the approximate point of transition:

- Station 30 (located at the corner of Burnt Church Road and Bridge Street): Dispatch of Engine 320 – Response time: 3-7 minutes
- Station 35 (located along Highway 278): Dispatch of Engine 325, Truck Company 275, service/support unit, and Battalion Chief – Response time: 4-7 minutes

The fire department is operating under an ISO classification of 3 for locations within 1,000 feet of a fire hydrant for the Neighborhood. ISO classifications measure a community’s ability to provide public protection in the event of a fire, with a scale ranging from Class 1 (exemplary public protection) to Class 10 (fire-suppression program does not meet ISO minimum standards).

Specifically focusing on the BIS Neighborhood, local fire officials have taken note of several complications and issues that are currently impeding the department’s efforts to provide the most complete fire coverage possible for the area. The department has found that the Neighborhood possesses a large amount of unimproved, narrow driveways with numerous potholes, ruts, and other problems that make it either very difficult or nearly impossible to operate a fire apparatus. Many of these driveways were allowed through the subdivision of land parcels under the purview of Beaufort County.

As a result of these subdivisions, many structures do not have a posted address and street lighting has been noted as being inadequate in locations, making it difficult for responders to locate a property in the event of an emergency. Fire officials also cite the presence of deep drainage ditches along roadways and within property boundaries as factors that restrict their ability to properly attack a growing fire situation and access buildings. Piles of debris and abandoned vehicles located throughout the Neighborhood also impede the department’s ability to fight fires and can become fire hazards in and of themselves



Figure 113: Bluffton fire station

public safety recommendations	Decrease the speed limit on Buck Island Rd and Simmonsville Rd to 35mph	SCDOT, TOB
	Utilize speed monitors to create driver awareness of posted speed limits	TOB
	Evaluate the use of bicycle and motorcycle officers to enforce speed limit (lack of shoulder for traditional enforcement)	TOB
	Ensure that the Bluffton Middle School and Eagles Field are built/redeveloped with CPTED strategies	TOB
	Provide free exterior lights or motion detectors to residents	TOB
	Addresses on all structures for EMS	TOB
	Establish a neighborhood public safety advisory committee	TOB, NO
	Establish a Neighborhood Services Division	TOB
	Establish a Drug Enforcement Plan	TOB
	Assist in the creation of after-school programs (seed money)	NO, BCSD
Map and sign all pathways and roads	TOB	
Install street lighting on Buck Island Rd and Simmonsville Rd	SCDOT, TOB	

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