

the neighborhood

04-01-2009 DRAFT

background and study area context

The Buck Island Simmonsville (BIS) Neighborhood is located within a mile of Old Town Bluffton. Residents of the neighborhood petitioned the Town of Bluffton for annexation and a special election was held on October 26, 2005. A majority of registered voters voted in favor of the proposed annexation and on December 29, 2005, approximately 500 parcels were annexed into the Town of Bluffton. See Figure 6 for the annexation area.

According to the 2000 census, approximately 1,817 people reside within the BIS annexation area. (Note the annexation area is larger than the BIS study area.)

A strong sense of community exists within the Neighborhood; however, the community's identity is not as easily recognized by Greater Bluffton as it is in the Neighborhood. The majority of the study area's population consists of long-time area residents who are descendants of original property owners. Because of this, the area is characterized by a tight-knit community comprised of large family property lands.

Despite large scale development pressures and outward growth from the Town of Bluffton and southern Beaufort County, the BIS Neighborhood has largely been able to maintain its unique neighborhood characteristics.

While the majority of the study area is zoned General Residential, there are several large tracts of land suitable for development and some property owners are interested in re-zoning their properties to increase their value and land use options. These outside development pressures threaten to undermine and change the BIS Neighborhood's community identity.

The introduction of the Bluffton Parkway through the northern portion of the BIS Neighborhood has also contributed to these pressures, as these frontage properties are much more attractive to developers due to increased accessibility, high traffic volumes, and the creation of major intersections at Buck Island Road and Simmonsville Road. In response to this growing concern for a potential loss of community identity within the BIS Neighborhood, it has been determined that a comprehensive neighborhood plan must be devised in order to aid in guiding future decisions as they pertain to the BIS Neighborhood.

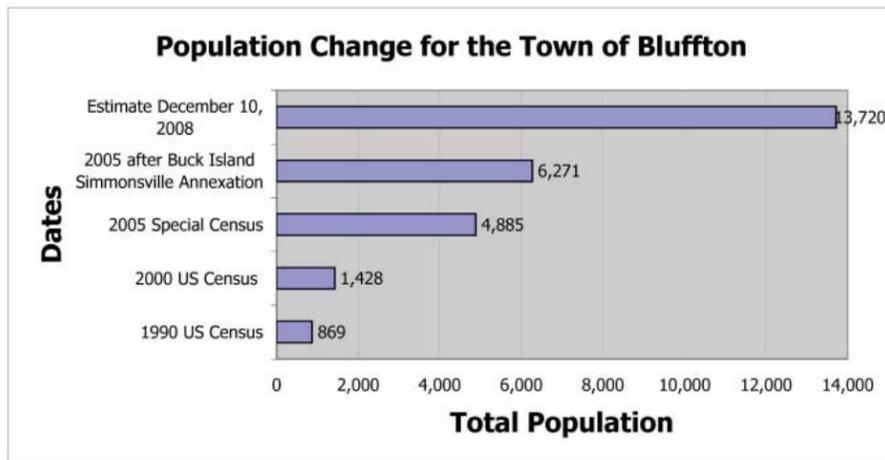


Figure 5: Town Population Projection.

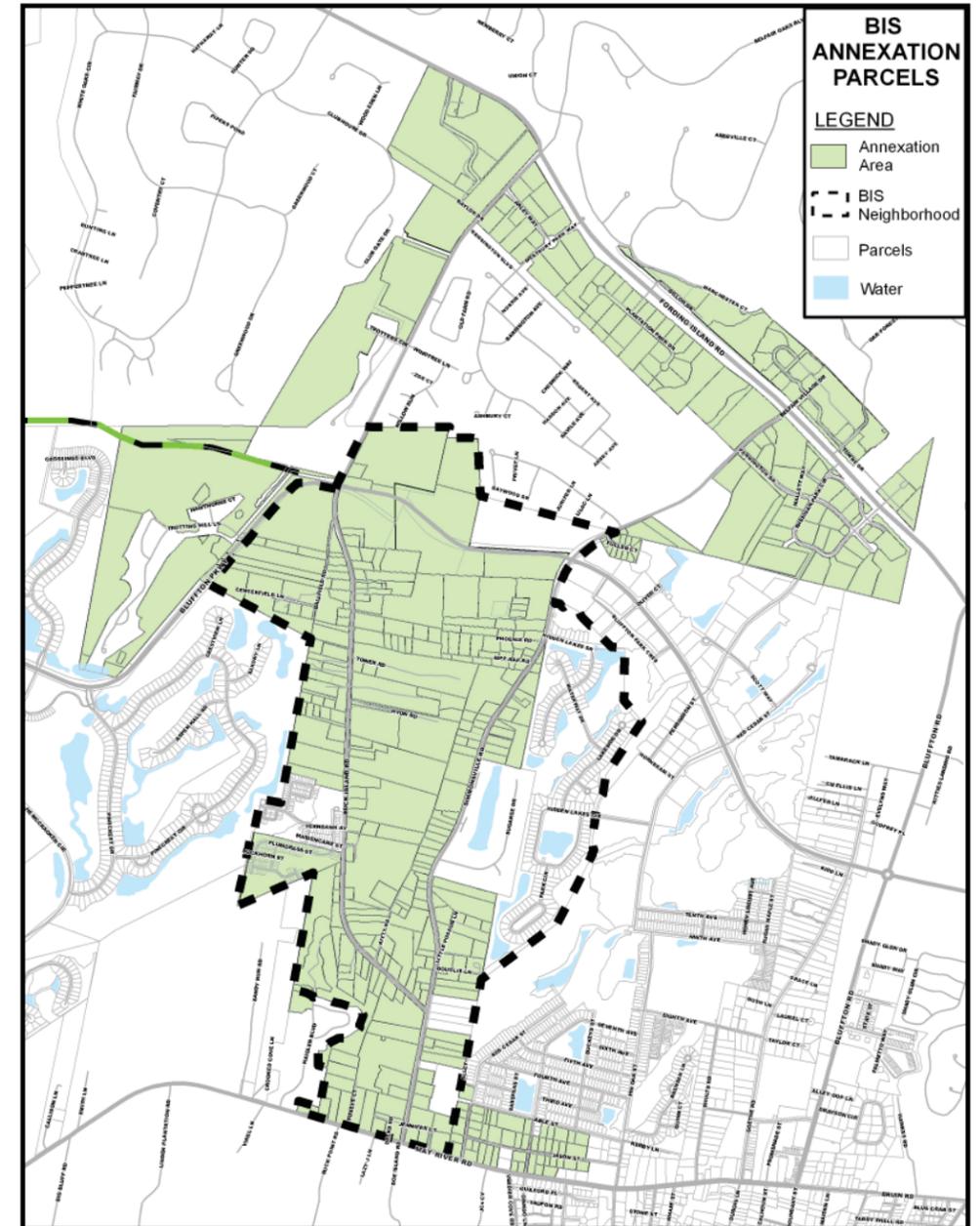


Figure 6: 2005 BIS annexation area.

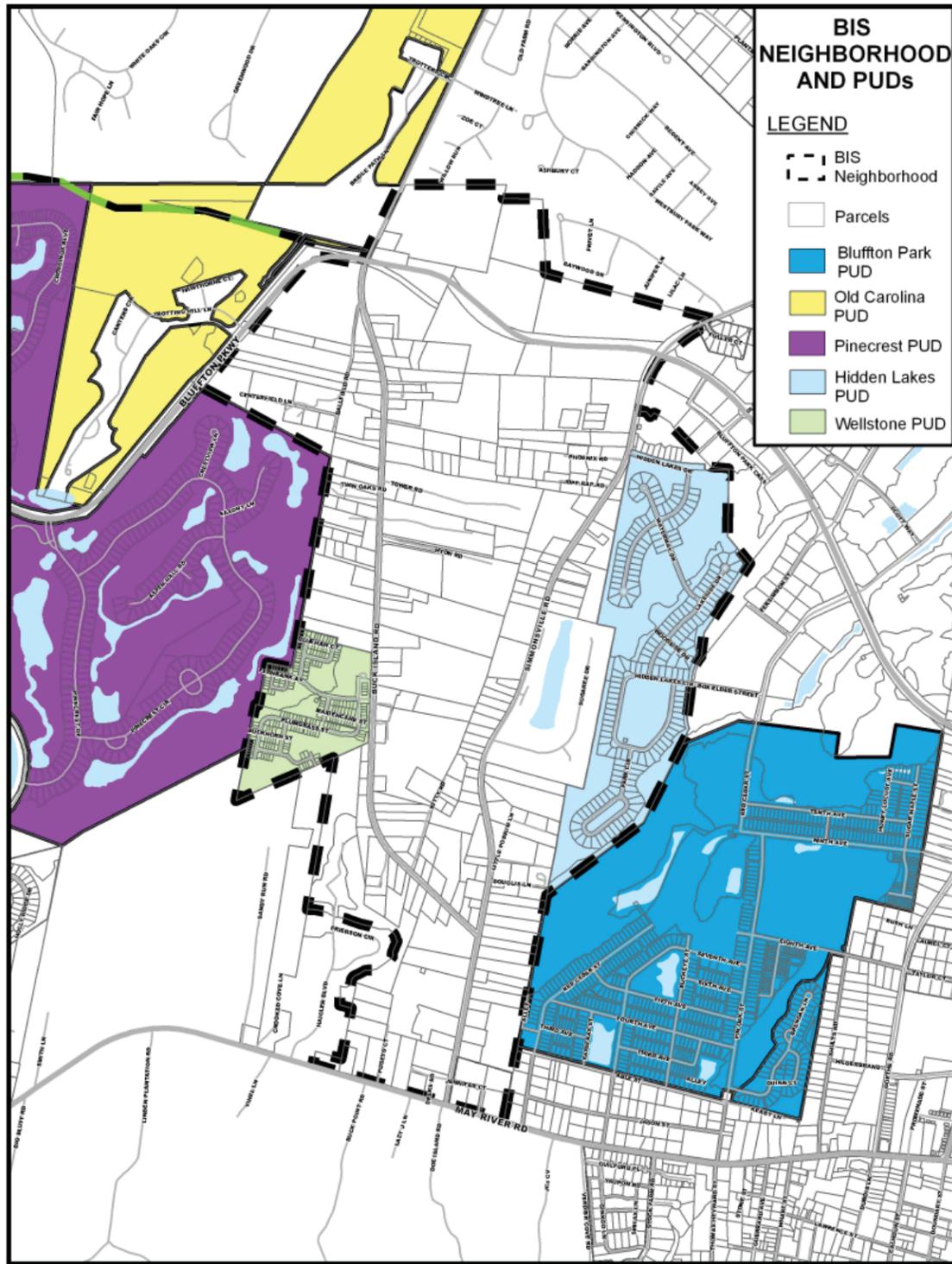


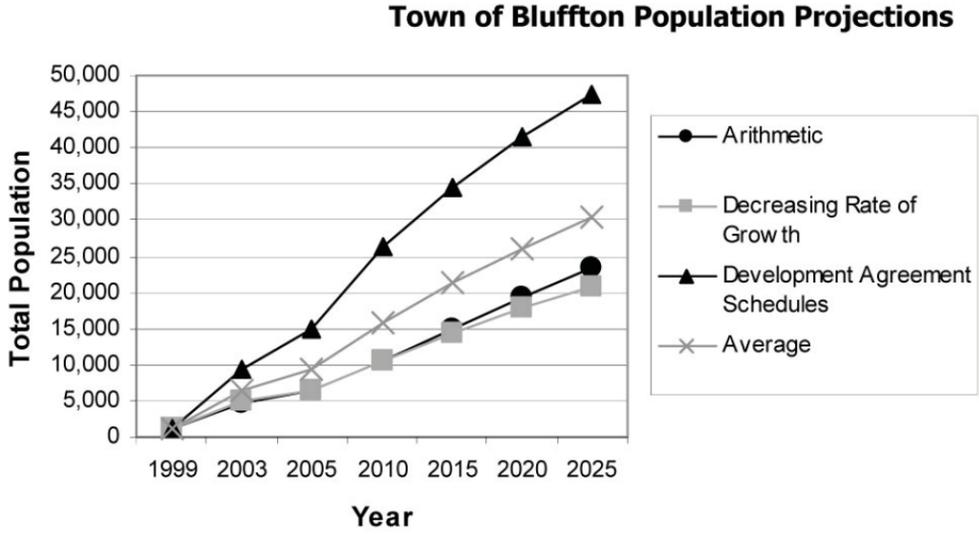
Figure 7: BIS Neighborhood study area and adjacent PUDs.

For the purpose of the neighborhood planning effort, the study area includes only 855 acres of the original annexation area. The BIS Neighborhood boundaries are roughly those properties on or within the Bluffton Parkway to the north, Simmonsville Road to the East, May River Road to the south, and Buck Island Road to the west.

The study area includes all the property that was zoned something other than PUD upon annexation, with the exception of the Sheridan Park commercial center on 278.

The residential communities of Hidden Lakes, Windy Lakes, Vista View Phase III, and Wellstone are also located within the community; however, for the intent of this neighborhood plan, specific recommendations for these areas are not emphasized herein. See Figure 7 for the study area and adjacent residential PUD communities.

Population projections from development agreement schedules estimate a Town of Bluffton “build-out” population of 47,310 by 2025, as shown in Figure 8.



Source: Town of Bluffton Planning and Growth Management Department

Figure 8: Town Population Projection through 2025.

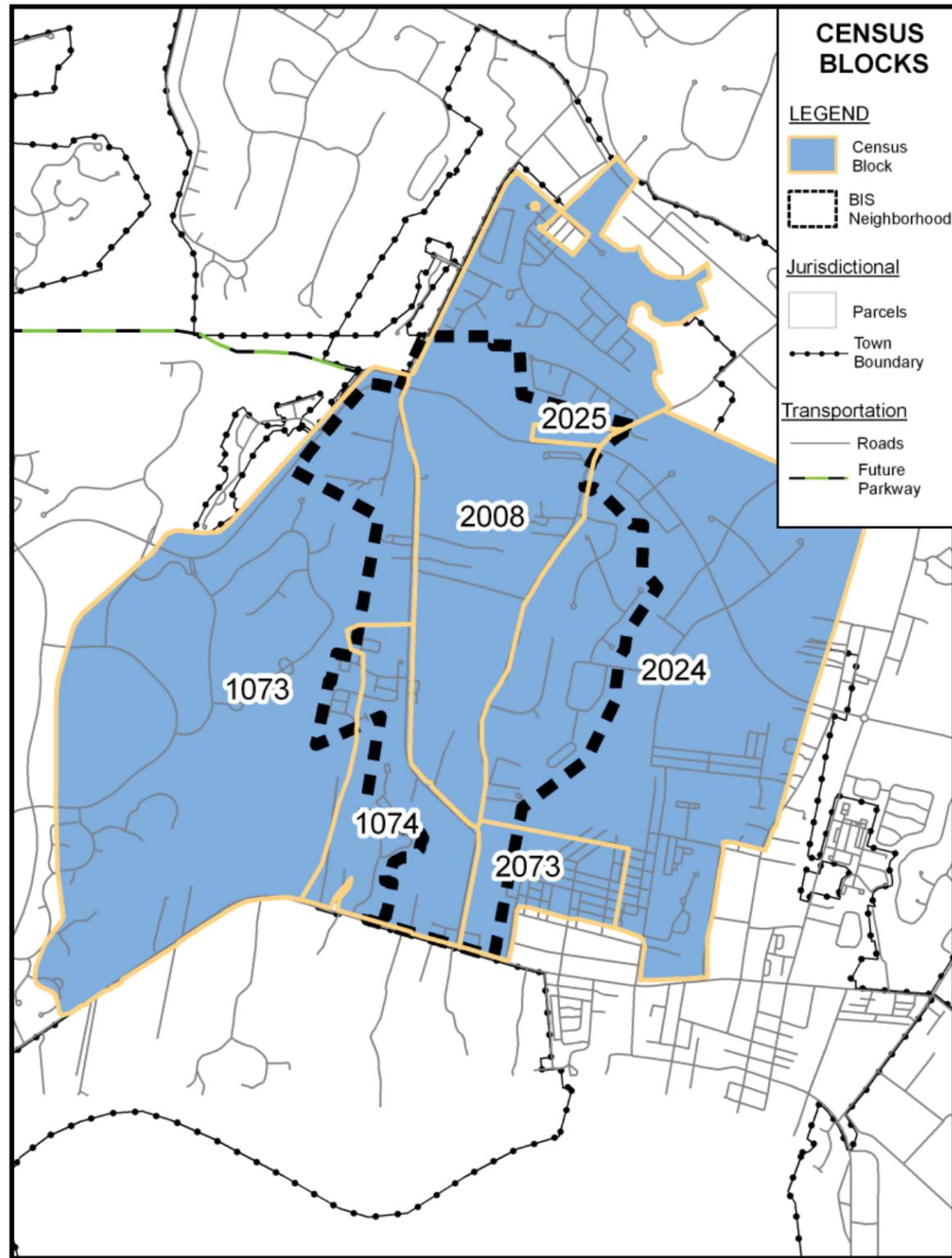


Figure 9: US Census Blocks that comprise the BIS study area.

demographics

The Census data provides good insight about the people and households in the Buck Island Simonsville Neighborhood. However, the data does not provide an exact match for the Neighborhood, as the Census Blocks include some of the surrounding areas, as well.

According to the 2000 Census, the BIS annexation area has approximately 1,817 residents with a median age of 28.5 years. The population is approximately 53.5 percent non-white, which is much higher than the Town average of 36.8 percent non-white.

The Census information was gathered from the 2000 Census and from the following blocks:

- Census Tract: 21
- Block Group: 1, 2
- Block: 1073, 1074, 2008, 2024, 2025, 2073

Figure 9 shows the BIS Census Blocks.

The 2000 Census also lists 614 households in the area, of which, 25 are vacant and 589 are occupied. Of the 589 occupied households, 444 are owner occupied and 145 are renter occupied. See Figure 10 for the summary results.

Census data also shows that the average household size for the area is 2.98 persons, while the average family size is 3.4 persons.

By comparison, these are higher than the figures for the Town of Bluffton as a whole, which averages 2.74 persons per household with an average family size of 3.16.

2000 CENSUS DATA FOR BIS	
Total Population	1,817
White	934
Black	774
Other	109
Ethnicity- Latino	212
Male	887
Female	930
Average Age	28.5
Total Households	589
Families	463
Average Family size	3.4
Housing Units Total	614
Housing Units Occupied	589
Housing Units Vacant	25
Owner Occupied	444
Renter Occupied	145

Figure 10: Results from the 2000 Census.

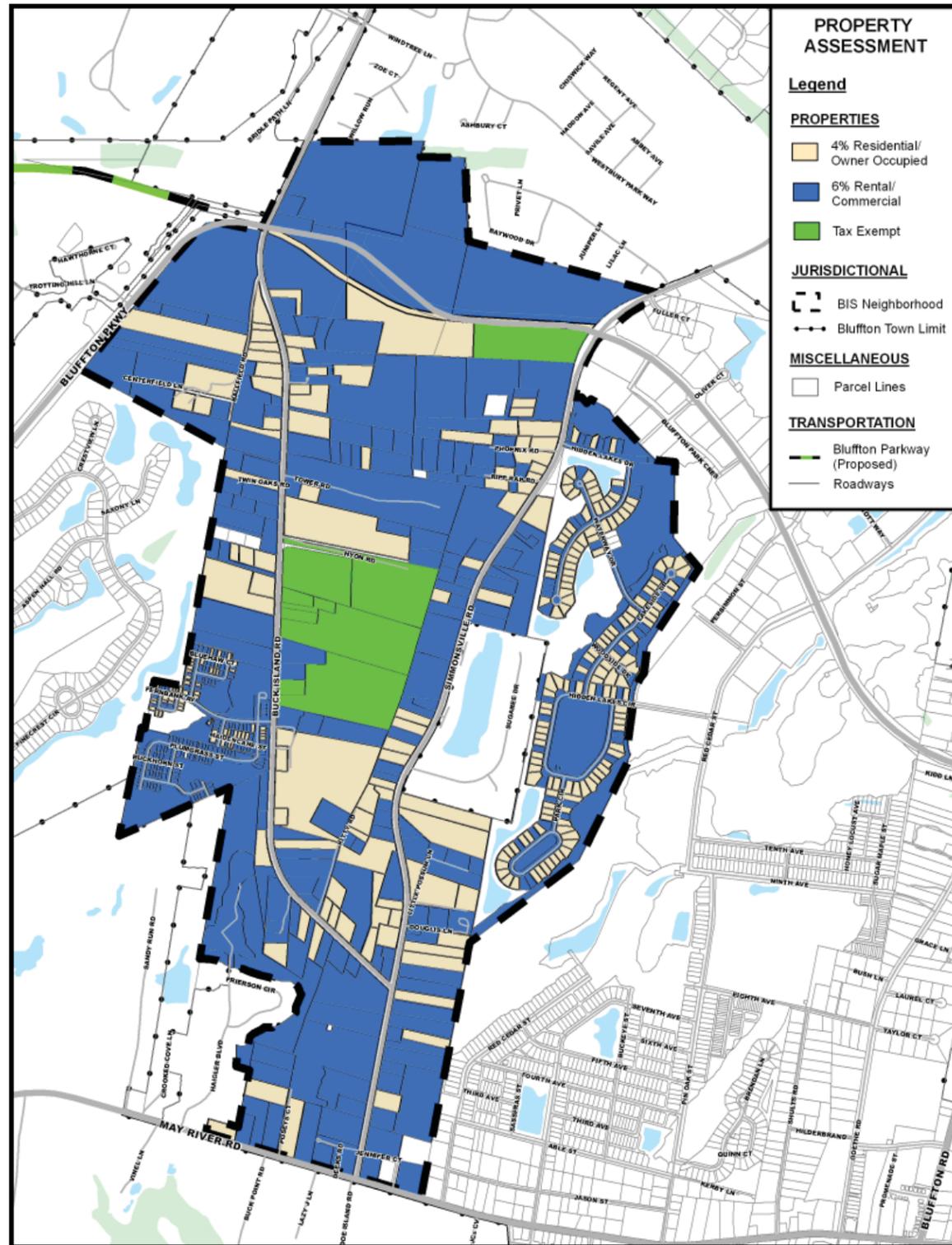


Figure 11: Map of Owner Occupied and Rental Occupied Properties.

According to the Beaufort County Assessor's Office, 33% of the BIS Neighborhood is owner-occupied residential property. See Figure 11.

2007 tax assessor's data shows that the 636 properties paid a total of \$118,010.48. Of those 636 properties, 608 properties (95.6%) were listed as residential and 28 properties (4.4%) were classified as commercial. The 2007 property taxes from residential properties in the BIS Neighborhood were \$86,425.76. The taxes collected by the Town of Bluffton in 2007 from the commercial properties in the Neighborhood were \$31,584.72.

There are 34 licensed businesses in the Buck Island Simonsville Neighborhood, employing more than 450 people. The two largest employers are RSI and Year-Round Pool. Together they employ over 270 employees in the BIS Neighborhood. The majority of neighborhood businesses are operated out of homes. Over 70% of the businesses throughout BIS employ only one or two people.

In 2008, the Town of Bluffton and Lowcountry Council of Governments conducted a Local Income Survey to determine grant eligibility for installation of a new sanitary sewer system. The survey gathered information on the size, economic status, and eligibility of each household for free sewer hookups, as well.

The survey was given to residents along Buck Island Road, south of the Bluffton Parkway, and to residents on secondary roads off of Buck Island.

The survey results found that the majority of people benefitting from the upcoming sewer project are in the low-to-moderate income limits (less than 80% AMI), thus allowing the Town to apply for the federal grant for this project.

Survey results included:

- Two hundred and sixty (260) respondents;
- Two hundred and twenty-four (224) of the respondents earn less than 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) for Beaufort County, SC.

Of those two hundred twenty-four (224) respondents:

- Sixty-nine (69) respondents fall within the Low Income Limits (between 50% & 80% of AMI);
- Seventy-six (76) respondents fall within the Very Low Income Limits (between 30% & 50% of AMI);
- Seventy-nine (79) respondents fall within the Extremely Low Income Limits (less than 30% of AMI).

See Figure 12 for HUD's income limits in Beaufort County.

Area Median Income (AMI)	FY 2008 Income Limit Category	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 Person	5 Person	6 Person	7 Person	8 Person
\$61,500	Low Income Limits (50%-80%)	\$35,300	\$40,300	\$45,350	\$50,400	\$54,450	\$58,450	\$62,500	\$66,550
	Very Low Income Limits (30%-50%)	\$22,050	\$25,200	\$28,350	\$31,500	\$34,000	\$36,550	\$39,050	\$41,600
	Extremely Low Income Limits (less than 30%)	\$13,250	\$15,100	\$17,000	\$18,900	\$20,400	\$21,900	\$23,450	\$24,950

Figure 12: US Department of Housing and Urban Development income limits.



Figure 13: Occupied structures next to abandoned structures.



Figure 14: A manufactured home park in the BIS Neighborhood.



Figure 15: Overgrown lots and abandoned structures were commonly found during the community inventory.

community inventory

A community inventory was performed in the months of February and March 2008, gathering information on all areas in the Town of Bluffton not currently located in a Planned Unit Development (PUD). Over 300 residences were surveyed.

The purpose of the inventory was to verify addresses for the 2010 local census update. In addition, Town staff was able to use the opportunity to gather other data while out in the field.

Field observations, as well as data gathered through the community inventory, show substandard housing, environmental issues, and inadequate infrastructure around and within the Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood.

Manufactured housing is the most common type of residential unit within the area, occupying over 46% of the properties. Manufactured housing is not viewed as appropriate affordable housing by federal or state standards due to the fact that they lose value very quickly. In addition, manufactured housing is not built to withstand the extreme weather conditions that Bluffton faces from hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods. **See Figures 17 and 18 for the types of structures in the Neighborhood and the year in which they were constructed.**

Of the 146 manufactured houses in the subject area, 17 were either in fair or unsafe condition and 11 of those are believed to be currently occupied. There were a total of 90 single family detached homes inventoried.

Not all properties were accessible during the community inventory and thus may be missing from the community inventory data.

Some of the properties were inaccessible because they are located on private property and because of trespassing regulations. Others were impassible due to roads being blocked by debris or rough terrain.

Between February 2006 and October 2008, the Town of Bluffton issued 18 building permits in the Neighborhood. Eleven of these building permits were for manufactured homes. The others included a demolition permit and miscellaneous repair permits.

More than 40 properties in the BIS Neighborhood were found to be overgrown and/or to contain substantial yard debris or bulk trash. Thirty of these properties were residential.

Drainage problems were also found during the community inventory, with 56 properties experiencing some level of standing water. Problems such as inadequately maintained roadside and property line ditches and dilapidated or failing culverts have been observed within the BIS Neighborhood. These problems cause flooding on both roadways and property, and increase the likelihood for pollution to enter wetlands and watersheds.

There is a need for public infrastructure investment and a strict schedule for maintenance of this infrastructure to help alleviate many of these drainage issues.



Figure 16: Drainage problems are frequent in the Neighborhood.

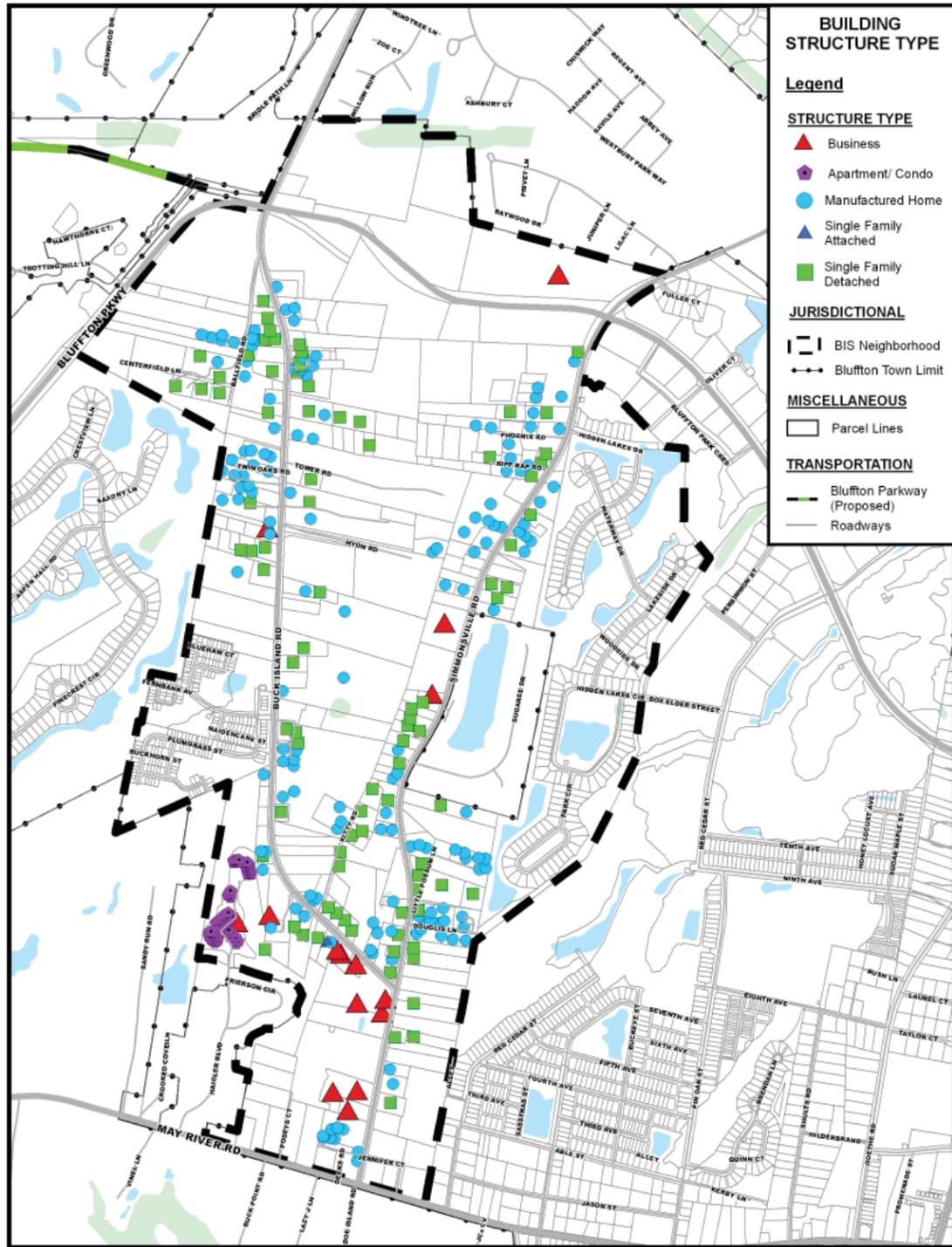


Figure 17: A variety of building structures exist in the community.

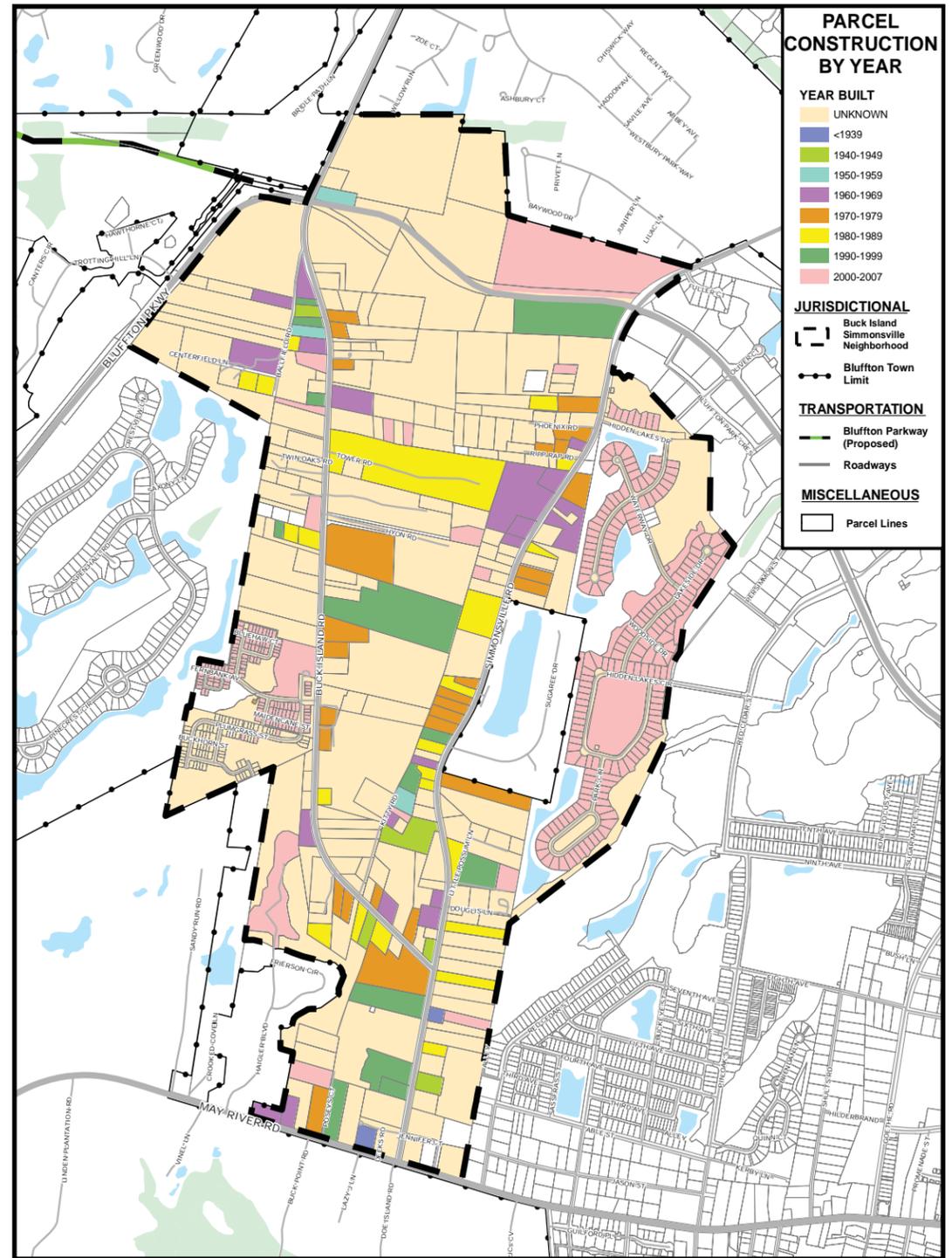


Figure 18: Year of construction by parcel.