



The Story of St. Stephen:

How Community Engagement Can Bring Change to Small-Town Communities

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October 23, 2024

Introducing St. Stephen

Town of St.
Stephen,
Berkeley County,
South Carolina



St. Stephen
Episcopal Church



Amos Gourdine Landing | Lake Moultrie



Town Center | St. Stephen



TABERNACLE OF PRAYER
FOR ALL PEOPLE
CHURCH

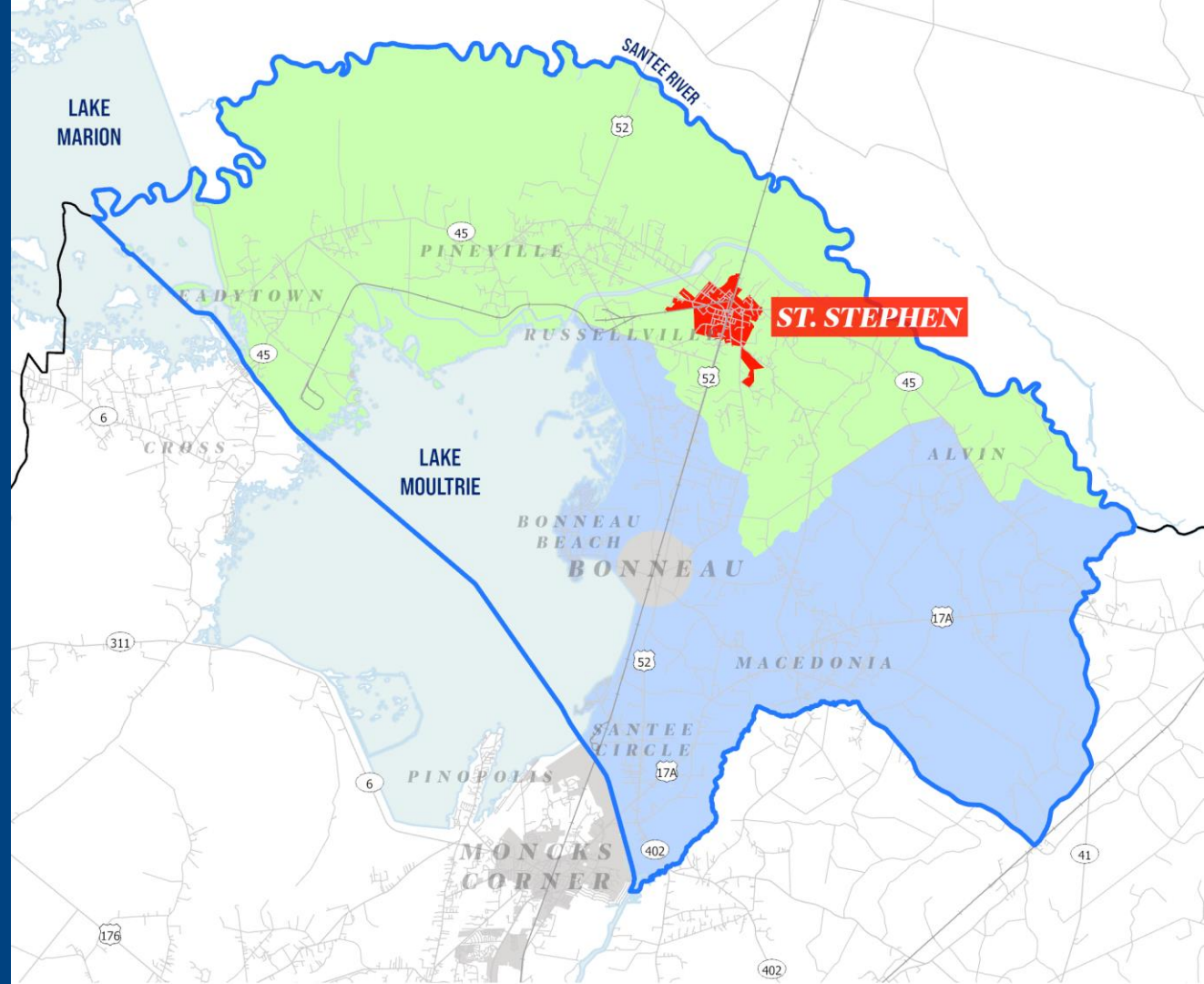
ANTIQUES
GIFTS
USED
FURNITURE

ONE WAY

SPEED
LIMIT
25

Project Geography & Area of Interest

St. Stephen draws spending and investment from a broad geographic area, referred to as the **Greater St. Stephen area**.



State of St. Stephen

Reviewing the recent
challenges and
current conditions of
the community.



Old Keller Hotel | St. Stephen Town Center

Challenges Emerge

- Manufacturing and industrial plants closed
- Former Hardware Store and community gathering place destroyed by fire
- New employment opportunities are limited and/or far away



*Former Georgia Pacific Site.
(Photo/BCDCOG)*



*Hardware Store Fire.
(Photo/Santee Circle Rural Fire Dept.)*

Challenges Emerge

Rapid, primarily suburban development spreading from the urbanized area of Charleston



Photo/Berkeley County

Challenges Emerge

- Lack of investment has led to blight community-wide
- Community moral, pride, and optimism has diminished overtime

**Current Economic
State of the Town**

2.2★
average rating



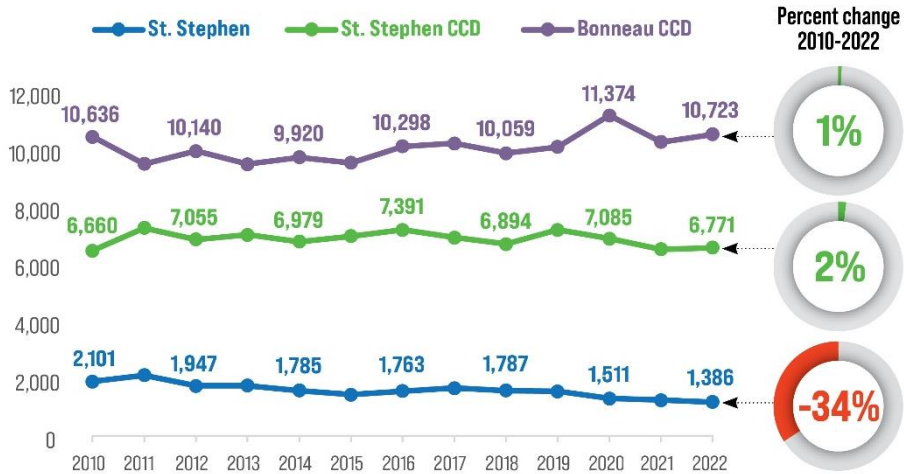
**Optimism on the
Future of the Town**

2.8★
average rating



Current Conditions

Population change, 2010-2022



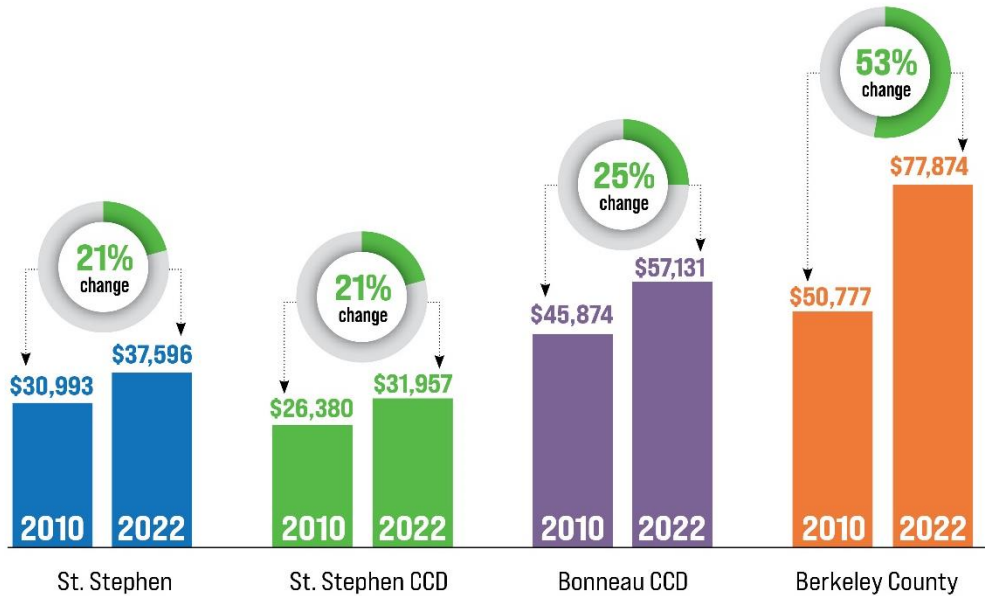
Over this same time period, Berkeley County was one of the fastest-growing counties in S.C. growing 36% to a total population of 231,419 in 2022.



Photo/BCDCOG

Current Conditions

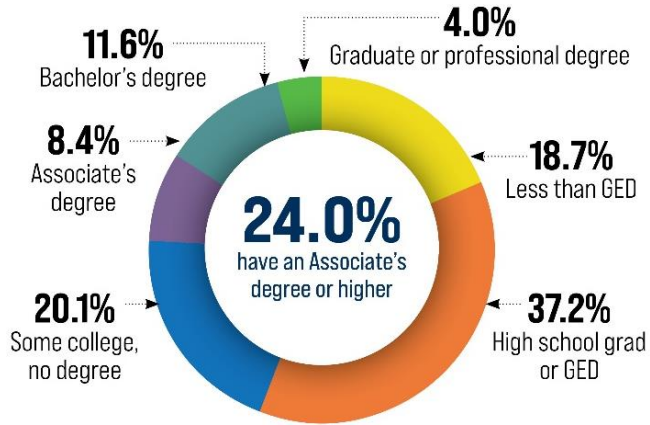
Change in median household income, 2010-2022



Photo/BCDCOG

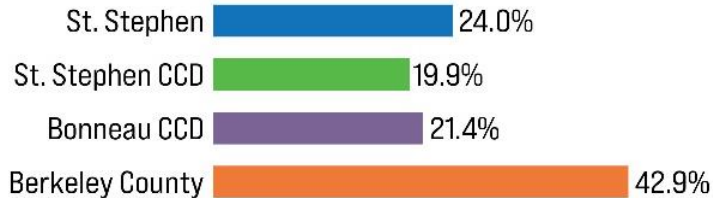
Current Conditions

Educational attainment, Town of St. Stephen for population 25 years and older, 2022



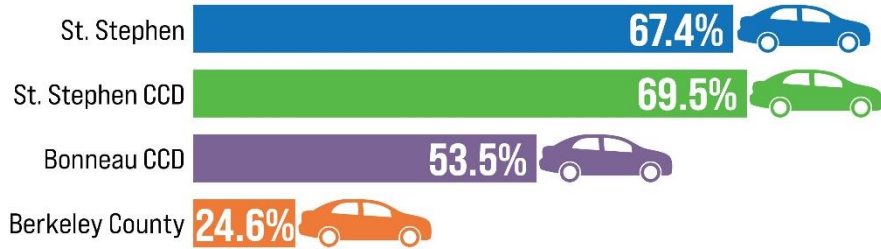
Photo/BCDCOG

% of pop. 25+ with Associate's Degree

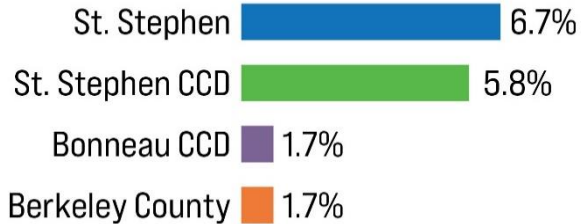


Current Conditions

Percentage of resident's who commute 25 miles or more for employment, 2021



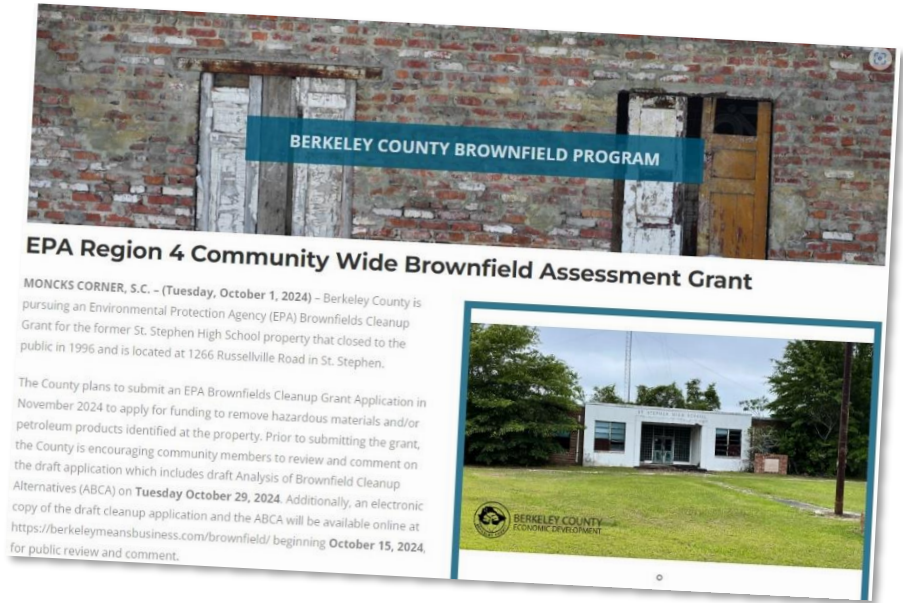
Percentage of households with no vehicle available, 2022



Photo/BCDCOG

Signs of Momentum Building

- Sept. 2022, Berkeley County was awarded a \$500K EPA Brownfields Assessment grant for the St. Stephen/Russellville area.
- Residents turned out in large numbers during community engagement, that EPA officials said exceed events in major metropolitan areas.
- Nov. 2024 they will apply for EPA Cleanup Grant for the former St. Stephen High School.



Signs of Momentum Building

Two prominent industrial sites are now available:

Berkeley Rail Park



- Former location of Georgia-Pacific's 500-acre industrial site in neighboring Russellville
- Conceptual plans depict sites for seven industrial buildings ranging from 180,000 to 1,000,000 square feet and direct rail access to Camp Hall Industrial Park, home to major companies such as Volvo and Redwood Materials.

Turner Mill Tract

- 85-acre industrial site within the Town of St. Stephen and owned by Berkeley County, also includes direct rail access.
- Conceptual site plans show either seven sites, with buildings ranging from 45,000 to 112,500 square feet, or one 500,000 square foot building.



Signs of Momentum Building

New locally-owned businesses

- Lowcountry Coffee Co.
- Ole Towne Feed & Supply
- LowCountry Munitions
- The Harmony Cafe
- The Capital Seafood & Grille



Signs of Momentum Building

St. Stephen Development & Growth Inc. created opportunities for the community to gather:

- Community Appreciation Day Festival
- St. Stephen Farmer's Market
- Bingo Night



ST. STEPHEN GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT, INC.
PRESENTS

**COMMUNITY APPRECIATION
DAY FESTIVAL**

CARNIVAL

113 RAVENELL DR.
ST. STEPHEN, SC
29479

Rides
start at
11am on
Saturday
and 1pm
on
Sunday

**OCT. 12TH (10AM-9PM)
OCT. 13TH (1PM-6PM)**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

2024

**ALL RIDES
ARE FREE!!!!!!**

Contact
ssgdnorg@gmail.com
to be a vendor or for
any questions.



Made with PosterMyWagon

Collaboration



BERKELEY
COUNTY SC

RICH HISTORY.
BRIGHT FUTURE.
One Berkeley

BCDC  G

BERKELEY-CHARLESTON-DORCHESTER
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

PLANNING, PARTNERSHIP & PROSPERITY



santee cooper®



St. Stephen

Pathway to Prosperity

2024 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Draft for Town Council: October 7, 2024



PREPARED BY

BCDC 

BERKELEY-CHARLESTON-DORCHESTER
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
PLANNING, PARTNERSHIP & PROSPERITY



St. Stephen

Empower | Revitalize | Prosper South Carolina

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

PREPARED BY

BCDC 

BERKELEY-CHARLESTON-DORCHESTER
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
PLANNING, PARTNERSHIP & PROSPERITY

Draft for Town Council:
October 7, 2024

Referred to as the EDS

Planning Process

Collaboration

- Established mutually agreed upon schedule amongst varying projects
- Discussed how to bridge updating the Comp Plan with developing an Economic Plan

Participation

- Engagement from residents & stakeholders
- Participation from Greater St. Stephen area offering wide range of opinions and perspectives

Vision

- Encourage community to think beyond the here and now and approach plans with a wider, long-range vision
- Have a shared vision for economic revival and reinvigorated community pride which encouraged residents to engage and participate in the visioning process

Vision

St. Stephen envisions a future where sustainable economic growth thrives through diverse investments in the community that are accessible to all residents, fostering prosperity while safeguarding its small-town character, natural beauty, and cultural heritage.

This vibrant community will ignite residents' pride and serve as a catalyst, attracting investment and prosperity for generations to come.

Community Engagement



Public Survey



Public Open House



Leadership
Engagement

Public Engagement

Initial Partner and Community Engagement

Initial discussions with project partners, business owners, community leaders, and public officials provided insight on likely top concerns, issues, and priorities facing the community.

Employment Opportunities

Economic Development

Community Character

Revitalization

Community Facilities/Amenities

Quality of Life

Identifying Key Stakeholders

This initial engagement revealed:

- A few members of Planning Commission and Town Council are very active and influential in the community.
- We identified them to be **key stakeholders** early in the project.
- Capitalizing on their influence in the community was vital for engaging a wider range of people.

Public Survey

- Was accessible online with print out copies available at Public Open House
- Utilized geo-targeting ads on social media to increase awareness and maximize participation potential

201 Total Participants

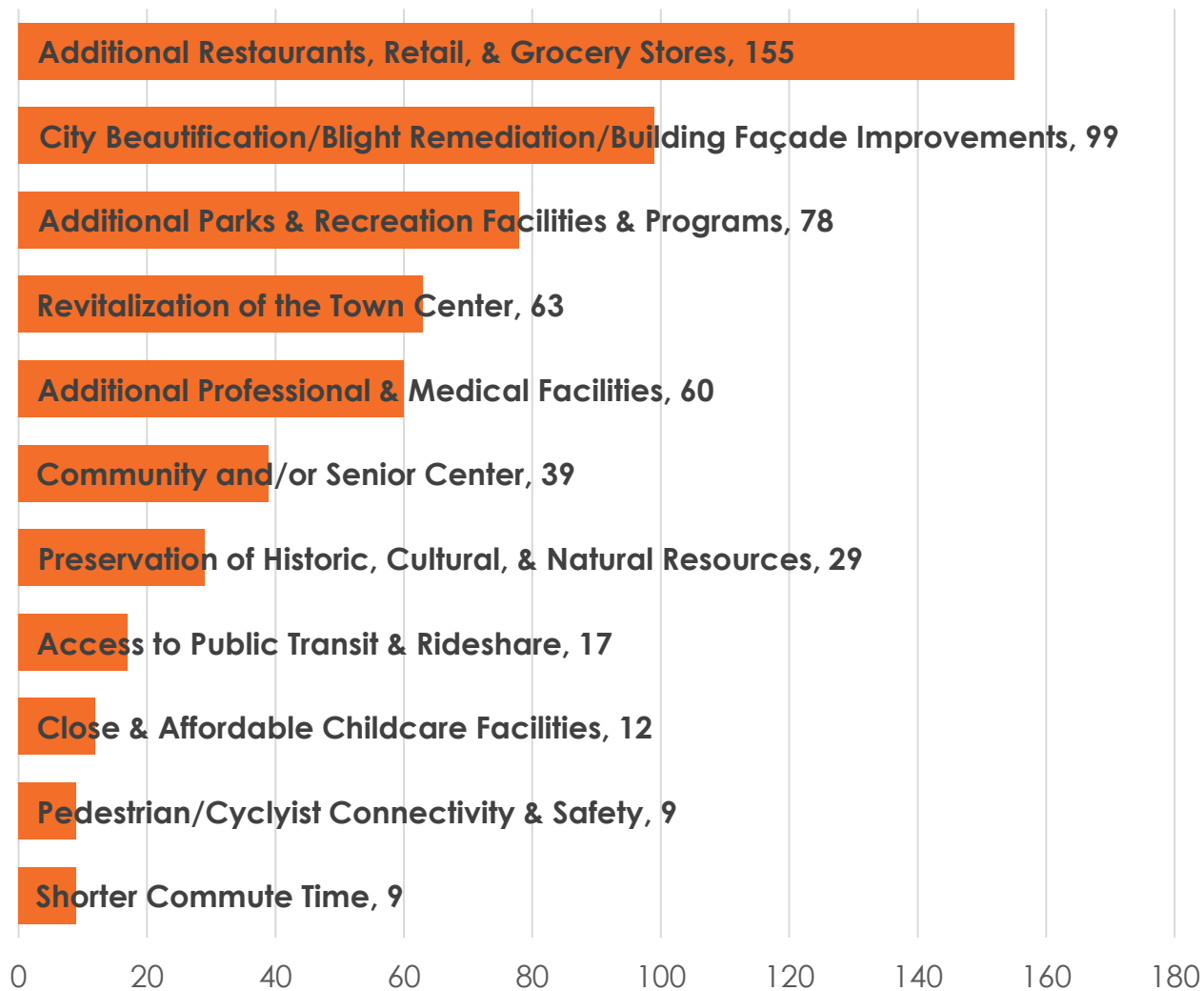
≈90% lived within St. Stephen Zip Code (29479)

≈40% actually lived within the Town of St. Stephen

Town Participation Rate of 6%

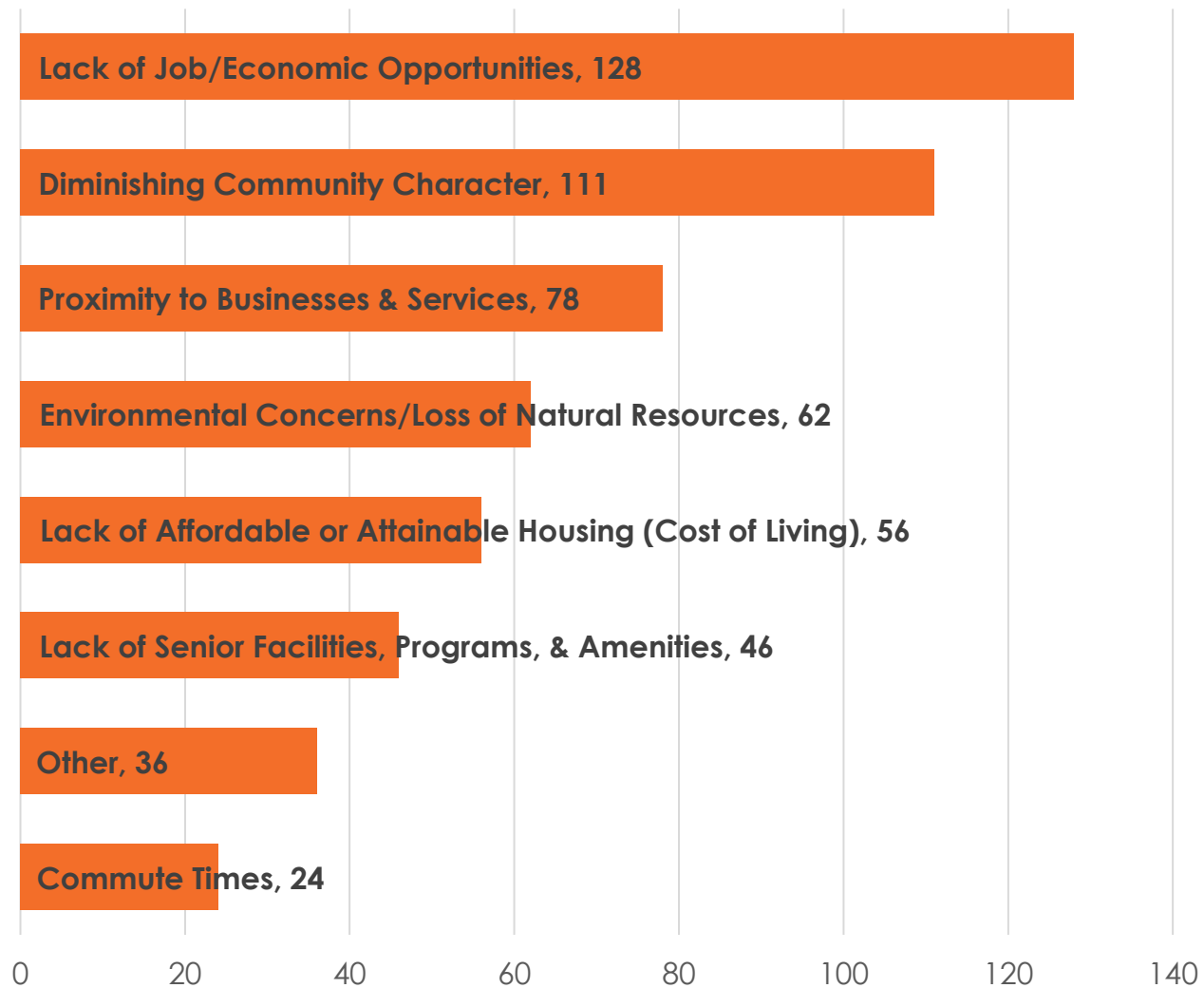
Quality of Life

Question: Which of the following do you think would improve your quality of life the most in the future?
(Choose top three)



Top Topics or Concerns

Question: Which of these topics or concerns are most important to you?
(Choose top three)



Public Open House

- Advertised alongside the public survey
- All **key stakeholders** attended and participated
- Interactions focused on either the lack of or potential for economic growth and development



The Town is currently developing its
Comprehensive Plan and Economic Development Strategy.

**JOIN THE CONVERSATION
AT THE PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE.**

See how these plans aim to create a prosperous future for all residents while safeguarding St. Stephen's rural character, natural beauty, and cultural heritage.

**May 16, 2024
5:30-7:00PM**

AMERICAN LEGION HUT

180 Ravenell Drive | St. Stephen, SC 29479

We want your input!
Scan the QR Code
to take the survey anytime,

or go to: www.surveymonkey.com/r/NVYRWML



Public Open House

Lessons Learned

- Coordinate with other public outreach efforts to avoid conflicting dates and community fatigue
- Clearly set engagement format and expectations beforehand



Stakeholder Influence

- Outreach by those key stakeholders increased project awareness and public participation.
- Attended the Public Open House and engaged with other members of the community.

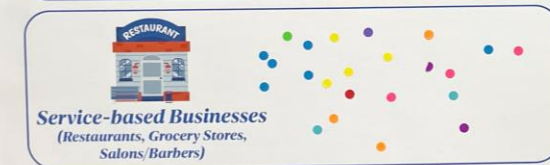
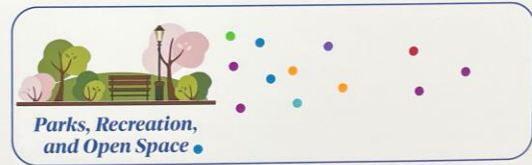
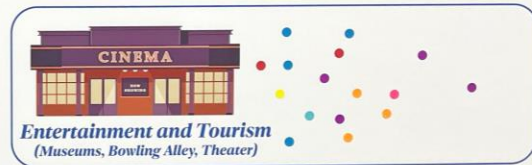


Deviating from Norms

Typically, smaller towns prefer the “No Growth” scenario, however, participants during the community engagement process consistently expressed interest in economic change, growth, and development.

What types of land uses would you support in the Town of St. Stephen?

Place a dot by the land uses that you think should be the top priorities of this Comprehensive Plan.



Focusing on the Economy

With the state of the economy being a focal point of both plans, much of the community engagement was framed toward economic growth and gaging the top priorities of the public.

Economic Development Strategy

Vision: St. Stephen envisions a future where sustainable economic growth thrives through diverse investment, accessible to all residents, fostering prosperity while safeguarding our rural character, natural beauty, and cultural heritage. This vibrant community will ignite residents' pride and serve as a catalyst, attracting investment and prosperity for generations to come.

Three key economic priorities of the strategy:

Empower

Eliminate barriers to employment, education, and training fostering a sustainable and equitable economic future that is accessible and beneficial to all.

WHICH WOULD IMPROVE YOUR ECONOMIC WELL-BEING THE MOST?

Affordable quality childcare



High-quality educational and workforce training opportunities



Reliable transportation/public transit options



Entrepreneurial/small business resources



Revitalize

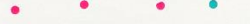
Attract commerce, residents and visitors back to the Town Center through targeted public investment, a supportive small business environment, zoning for smart growth and activating vibrant communal spaces.

WHICH IS MOST IMPORTANT IN THE REVITALIZATION OF TOWN CENTER?

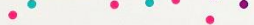
Attraction of new businesses, job opportunities, and investments Town Center



Preservation of the identity and character of Town Center



Creation of vibrant, beautiful, public spaces and safe pedestrian access



Higher-density residential in Town Center to create live work play atmosphere



Prosper

Bring high-wage, employment opportunities to the area by investing in the supportive infrastructure, while attracting new residents, retirees, tourists and remote workers to an ideal destination to live and work.

WHICH WOULD HELP ST. STEPHEN'S LONG TERM PROSPERITY THE MOST?

Improved infrastructure (including utilities, broadband internet access and transportation network)



Preservation of the rural landscape



Recruitment of wide variety of industries and jobs



Attract new residents, retirees, tourists, and remote workers.



London good
Hickwell
St. Stephen
West Stone

Having
prosperity

Empowering
our community
to prosper

Our Aid
by old
having down
houses
maxed for visitors

A village
community

Focusing on the Economy

Certain goals and strategies were essential to include in the EDS, however, community engagement was a driving force behind the prioritization of those goals and strategies.

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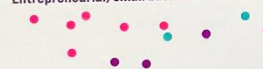
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Revitalize

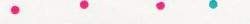
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needed

Setting the Stage

Input received from the community provided the framework for the draft economic and land use priorities presented later at the Joint Planning Commission (PC)/ Town Council (TC) Workshop.

Top Priorities

What do you think should be the Town of St. Stephen's top priorities for the next decade?

Place a dot under the topic(s) that you think should be the top priorities of this Comprehensive Plan.



Leadership Engagement

Joint PC/TC Workshop

- Focused on land use and economic priorities
- Many of the results from the public engagement were reaffirmed by leadership.
- Pivotal moment in the planning process.



Community Engagement led to Plan Priorities

Town of St. Stephen Top Priorities

PRIORITY 1:

Quality of Life

Goal: Improve community facilities and infrastructure to better the quality of life for residents.

PRIORITY 2:

Community Character

Goal: Enhance the character of the community by reinvesting in existing resources, neighborhoods, and the Town Center.

PRIORITY 3:

Mixture of Uses

Goal: Encourage a mixture of complementary uses and densities to strengthen the economic resiliency and maintain the affordability of the community.

PRIORITY 4:

Economic Investment

Goal: Collaborate with public and private entities to create an attractive and sustainable economic environment.

Community Engagement led to Plan Priorities

Economic Priorities

Three key economic priorities will be focused on to achieve the vision set forth by the community

Empower

Eliminate barriers to employment, education, and training faced by St. Stephen's residents, fostering a sustainable and equitable economic future that is accessible and beneficial to all

Revitalize

Attract commerce, residents and visitors back to the Town Center through targeted public investment, a supportive small business environment, zoning for smart growth and activating vibrant communal spaces

Prosper

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Implementation through Land Use

- Next steps following adoption of a comp plan and FLUM include modifying zoning and land development regulations to implement the strategies.
- Many of the strategies recommended in the Economic Development Strategy rely on updating the FLUM
- Embrace the **Vision** component of the planning process is essential.

Visioning Process

During the Joint PC/TC Workshop...

- Discussing the relationship between current zoning/permitted uses and ideal “future” land uses was a pivotal moment during the land use discussion.
- PC & TC were then able to better visualize what types of uses they want to see in their community in 5-10 years.



**Outdoor Storage Sheds
Current Permitted Use in Town Center (TC)**



**General Commercial
Current Permitted Use in Town Center (TC)**



**General Commercial
Current Permitted Use in Highway Commercial (HC)**

Turning Ideas into Strategies

PC & TC
considered...

Existing Conditions

Community Input

*Expected Growth and
Development, and*

Vision and Top Priorities

...when discussing
the FLUM



Turning Ideas into Strategies

The proposed FLUM
balances the
different desires to:

Foster economic growth

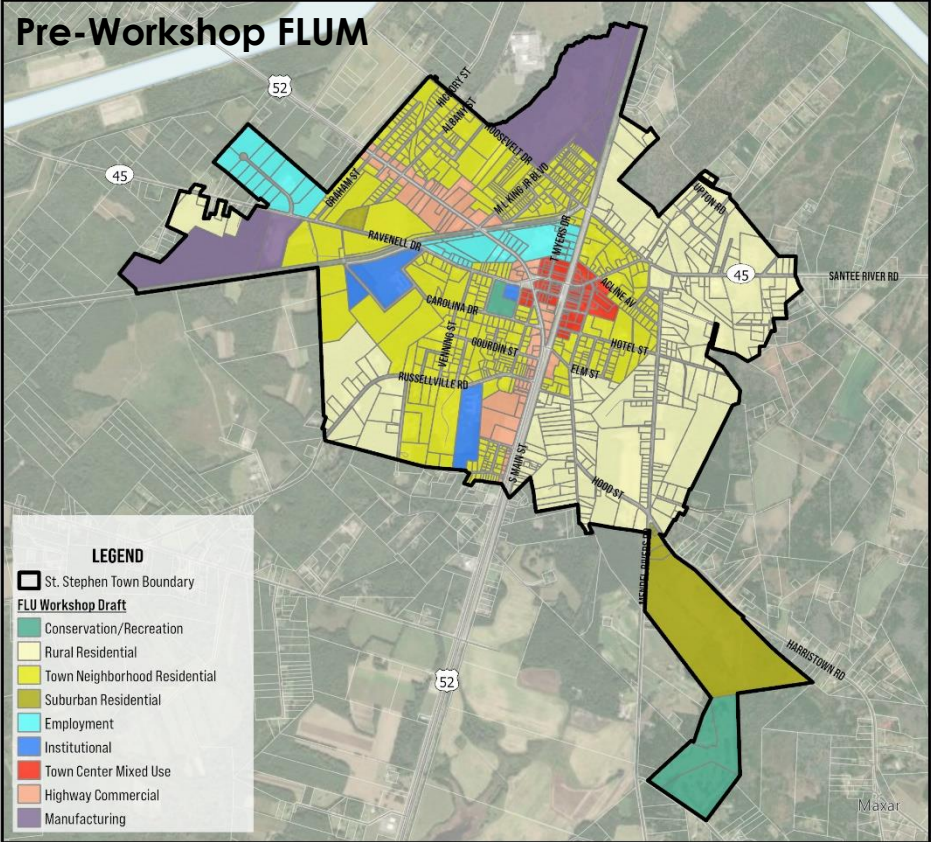
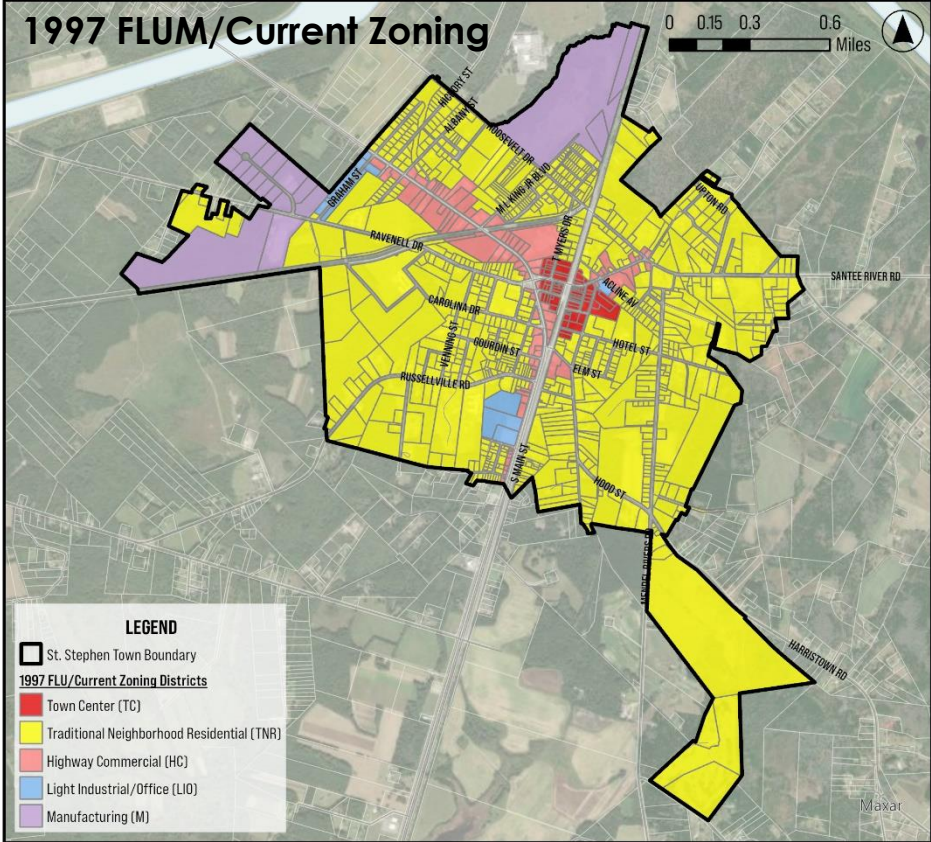
Revitalize the Town Center

*Preserve Community
Character, and*

Improve quality of life

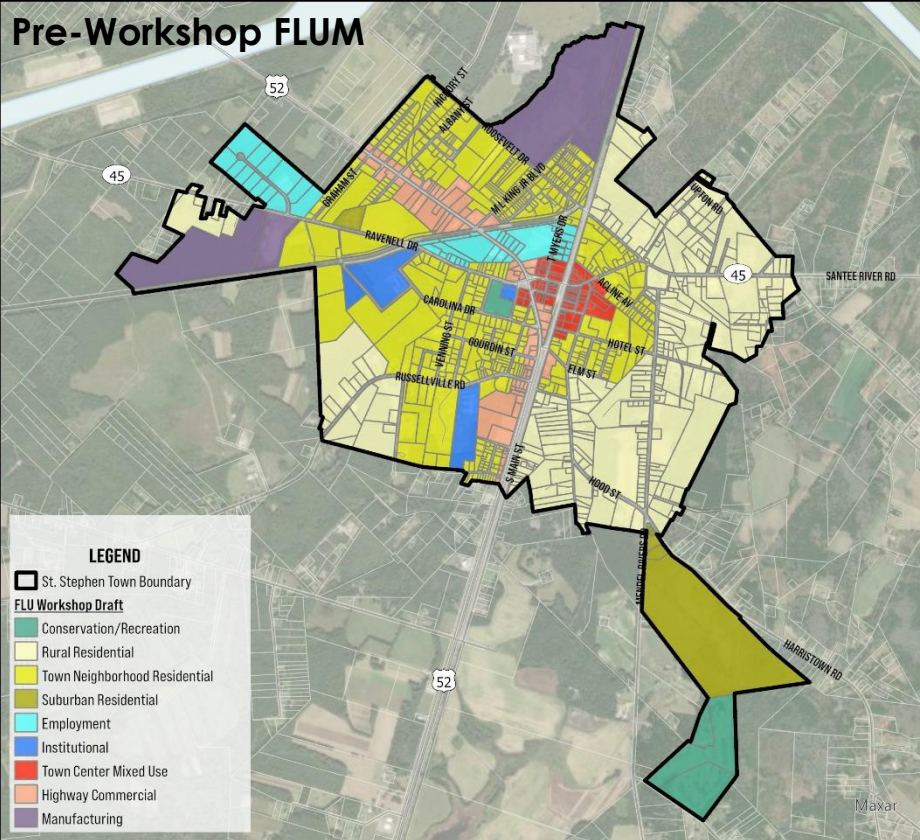


Re-Envisioning St. Stephen

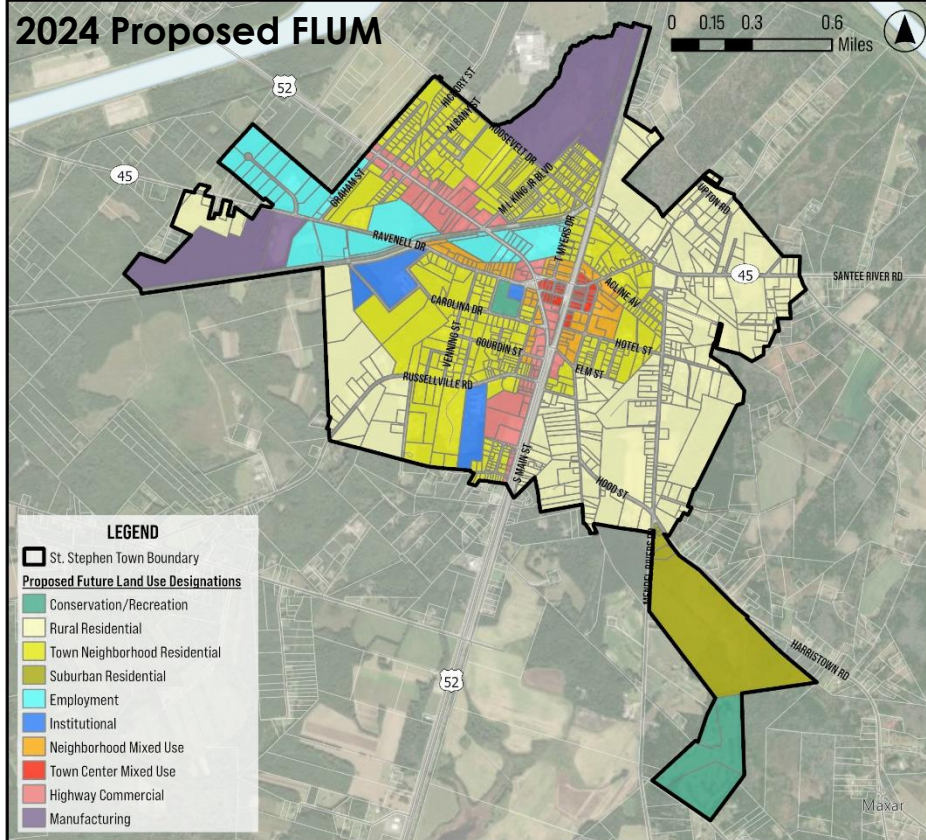


Re-Envisioning St. Stephen

Pre-Workshop FLUM



2024 Proposed FLUM



Stakeholder Influence

- Expanding the non-residential areas on the FLUM was led primarily by those key stakeholders.
- Their optimism about the future of St. Stephen influenced many of the land use and implementation strategies.
- Stakeholders were pivotal when envisioning a revitalized Town Center comprised of compatible and appropriate land uses.
- Conducting community engagement for the comp plan in conjunction with the EDS reinforced the Town's commitment and vision for economic prosperity.

Recap

- The community is eager for growth, but history has made them skeptical that change is going to happen
- The Participation and Vision were crucial components of the community engagement
- Stakeholders were key to encouraging public participation and envisioning a future beyond the here-and-now
- The decisions made by the PC/TC at the Workshop show how effective and impactful key stakeholders can be in implementing the vision and desires of the community.

What Key Stakeholders have you identified/utilized in the past?

Questions and Open Discussion

BCDCOG

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