

# THE PROTECTION OF CHATHAM COUNTY'S NATURAL RESOURCES - THE POLICY SIDE

SEA GRANT TIDAL CREEK SUMMIT  
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA  
DECEMBER 5, 2011



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Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

## Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission



- Since 1956 the MPC has served as the land planning and zoning agency for Chatham County and the City of Savannah. We also oversee long term planning for transportation, historic and natural resources protection.
- The MPC's Planning Commission consists of a 14 member board that includes six volunteer County representatives, six volunteer City representatives and the County Manager and City Manager.



# Chatham County, Georgia



- Northernmost of Georgia's coastal counties on the Atlantic Ocean. It is bounded on the northeast by the Savannah River.
- Approximately 440 square miles (69% land and 31% water).
- Average elevation is 20 feet.
- 2010 total County population of 265,128 (14% increase over the 2000 population figure of 232,048).
- The most populous Georgia county outside the Atlanta metropolitan area (8 jurisdictions).

## Recent & Current Planning Efforts

- Chatham County Resources Protection Commission
- Completion of the *Coastal Stormwater Supplement (CSS) to the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual in 2009*
- MPC/NOAA Workshop (March 2010) on Climate Change and Sea Level Rise
- Comprehensive Plan Reevaluation
- Chatham County-Savannah Unified Zoning Ordinance (UZO)



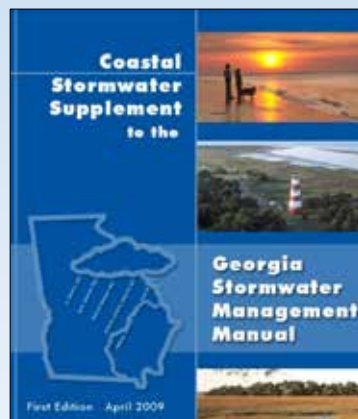
## Chatham County Resources Protection Commission (RPC)



- MPC staff began process in late 2004
- Purpose of the RPC is to identify sites within the county that are of ecological, historical, and/or cultural significance and to find ways to protect, conserve, or rehabilitate these sites.
- In April of 2008, the Chatham County Board of Commissioners officially established the Chatham County Resource Protection Commission (CCRPC) through the approval of the Resource Protection Ordinance. In addition to a board of commissioners, this ordinance created a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).
- Process and ordinance has become a model for the coast.
- Funding continues to be a challenge...

## Coastal Georgia's Natural Resource Protection

- The MPC along with Georgia DNR's EPD and CRD and the Center for Watershed Protection concluded a project in 2009 to assist area coastal communities in addressing their stormwater quality and quantity concerns.
- The CSS focuses post-construction stormwater management onto PREVENTION rather than MITIGATION of the negative impacts of land development.
- Provides comprehensive guidance on an integrated, green infrastructure-based approach to natural resource protection, stormwater management and site design.



## In the Past...

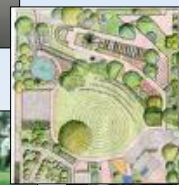
Traditional stormwater management relied upon the use of structural stormwater BMPs (pipes, curbing and gutter) to control and minimize impacts BUT...



They don't account for the water quality impacts.

INSTEAD...

The CSS presents green infrastructure and Low Impact Development (LID) in the site design that can address the water quality and quantity concerns



## Some CSS Concepts

- Site fingerprinting & natural resources inventory
- Better site planning & design techniques
  - ▣ Preserve conservation areas
  - ▣ Buffer protection and setback recommendations
  - ▣ Green roofs, rain gardens, swales, alternative materials and more

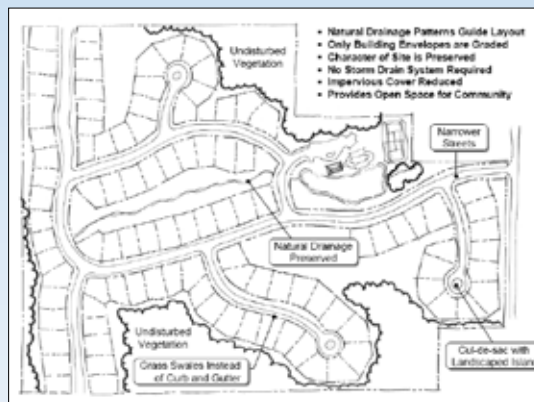


Figure 6.10: Stormwater Management Concept Plan that Incorporates a Variety of Better Site Planning and Design Techniques

## CSS Status

- Once voluntary – now mandated by GA EPD NPDES Stormwater permits. First-time LID/GI program also mandated as of 2012.
- All of the 8 municipalities within Chatham County's boundaries are currently in the process of adopting the CSS' recommendations into their stormwater ordinances and development processes.
- Education and implementation process has been positive
- Has become a model for the State and fully endorsed by GA EPD

## Chatham County's Roadmap For Adapting to Coastal Risks Workshop

- In March of 2010 worked with NOAA Coastal Services Center to develop roadmap for Chatham County to address public safety, infrastructure and environmental protection issues related to climate change and sea level rise.
- 1<sup>st</sup> community to do this type of workshop in Georgia





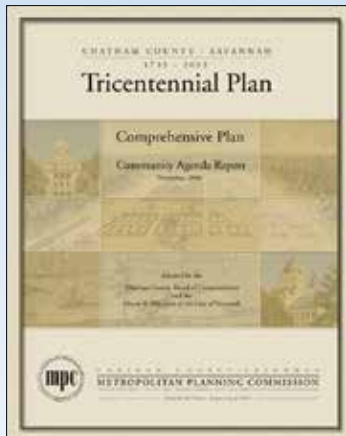
## Priority Hazards Identified for Chatham County

- ❖ Shallow coastal flooding
- ❖ Storm surge inundation
- ❖ Erosion
- ❖ Sea level rise impacts on above hazards

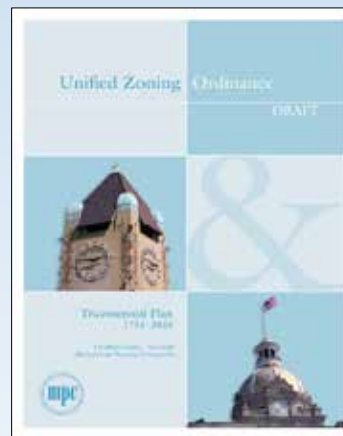
Broke out into 4 groups:

- Public Safety
- Planning & Development
- Environment, Recreation & Culture
- Transportation, Public Works & Capital Improvements

We took these findings and incorporated them into the Internal MPC Agency Action Plan and the...



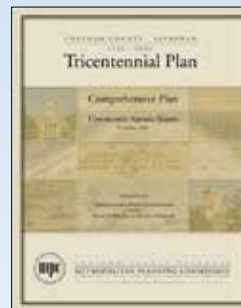
**Unified Comprehensive Plan**



**Unified Zoning Ordinance**

## Comprehensive Plan Background

- Comprehensive Plan establishes long range community vision and goals with regard to the following elements:
  - Land Use
  - Economic Development
  - Housing
  - Natural Resources
  - Historic and Cultural Resources
  - Transportation
  - Community Facilities
- Unified Comprehensive Plan must be updated every 10 years with a progress report due after the first 5 years





## Changes Since 2005

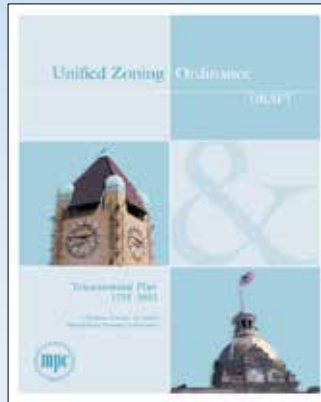
- The community is facing several challenges that were not clearly understood in 2005 when the Comprehensive Plan's Strategic Plan was developed.
  - The impact of planning decisions on community health;
  - The impact of climate change and sea level rise on development patterns;
  - The impact of the aging population on community resources; and
  - The impact of rising energy and food costs on community well-being.
- General agreement that an evaluation of the Strategic Plan would be useful in setting the goals for the next five years.

## Chatham – Savannah Comprehensive Plan

- Involved TAC groups and subcommittees:
  - Members included scientists and planners (SKIO, Georgia DNR-EPD, etc.)
- Sea level rise data was reviewed and findings were incorporated into the Plan to address natural resource protection (increased buffer protection, etc.)
- MPC Board has recently halted the process and has called for more information on sea level rise before approving changes and adoption of this key policy document.



## Chatham – Savannah Tricentennial Plan



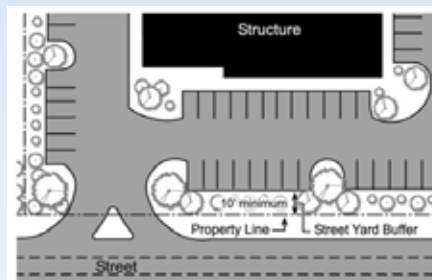
Part 2 of the Tricentennial Plan is zoning.

This is where the rubber meets the road...



## What is Zoning?

- Established in the early 20th century as a mechanism to protect and improve health, safety, and welfare.
- Establishes building setbacks, regulates the location of land uses (through zoning districts) and height and bulk standards such as lot size, lot width, and building setbacks.
- Zoning also regulates other
- aspects of site development
- such as parking, buffering,
- lighting, and signage.
- Can promote the preservation
- of natural resources.



## Chatham County-Savannah's Existing Zoning Code

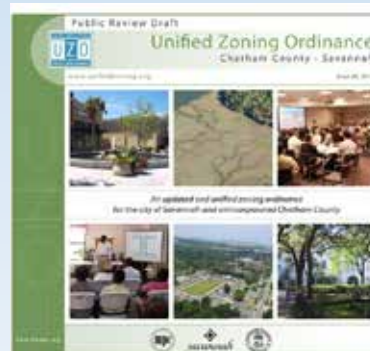
- Adopted nearly a half century ago
- Existing ordinances are showing their age in a number of areas which has led to inefficiency, confusing, and contradictory processes.



## Chatham County-Savannah Unified Zoning Ordinance (UZO)

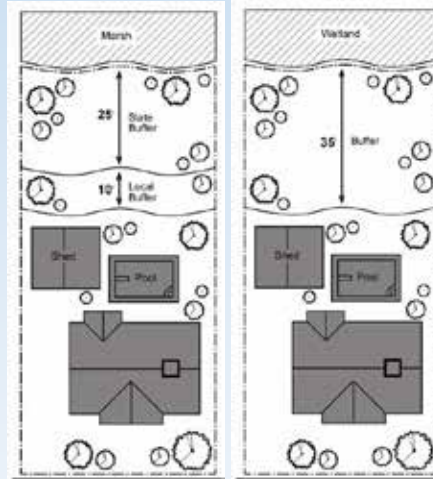


- The Unified Zoning Ordinance (UZO) will be the primary implementation tool as it will:
  - Determine how all land in unincorporated Chatham County and Savannah can be used;
  - Assist with the protection of natural resources such as marshes and wetlands; and
  - Improve site development standards such as buffering, lighting, and parking.



## UZO

- A number of the draft sections have been controversial with the development community
  - Natural Resources: Wetland and Marsh Buffers (Section 10.7) & Open and Recreational Space requirements (Section 10.2)



## UZO

- Again more information on sea level rise and buffer has been requested by the MPC Board.
- Currently planning an education session for January with the MPC , SKIO staff and key stakeholder members.
- Adoption is anticipated in late spring/early summer of 2012.....we hope!



## Questions



w of Savannah, as it stood the 29th March, A. D. 1734.

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*The above, the Plan for rebuilding the City of Savannah in 1734  
The Plan of the Town of Savannah as built, directed by the above  
and it should be a Guide. August 1734*