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COMMENTARY

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Long Savannah: Development plan based on principles

BY VICTOR DOVER

During the first week of December, our firm set up an on-location studio and conducted a public planning workshop, or charrette, to draft initial designs for development of the Long Savannah tract and its environs.

The people of West Ashley as well as all those involved from the city of Charleston and Charleston County deserve thanks and applause. The public involvement during the charrette process was extremely productive and has laid the foundations for an enduring plan.

The charrette week began with tours of the site and well-loved local neighborhoods, followed by a public Friday night kickoff presentation. On Saturday morn-

hands-on groups to draw their vision of the master plan for Long Savannah, and then compared results. Many strong design ideas were articulated during this process.

Our design team then spent the next several days working to consolidate the suggestions of the citizen groups and technicians into a single draft master plan. Our studio was open to the public, and we received dozens of drop-in visitors who offered additional feedback. We had a good turnout for a Tuesday night open house where the first rough sketches were displayed.

The charrette week concluded with a Thursday night work-in-progress presentation with over a hundred attendees. A series of draft maps, illustrations, architect-

presented. At the heart of that work are some fundamentals that we call the "first principles":

Some of the "first principles" embodied in the draft plan are:

- 1) A meaningful line and a vast preserve: The plan for Long Savannah will reposition the Urban Growth Boundary, based upon the ecology and land characteristics instead of ancient parcel lines. All of the Long Savannah property that falls outside of the line will be permanently preserved, forming a distinct boundary between the built environment of the city and the sensitive environmental and cultural resources beyond. This preserved area will take the form of a 1,568-acre Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) regional park and a 207-acre city of Charleston park. These parks will ensure perpetual public

access to some of the region's most unique natural landscapes.

- 2) Care of the natural systems: The site (and the greater Charleston region) will be treated with respect through the latest techniques in wetland and habitat connectivity, green building and sustainable stormwater management.
- 3) Complete neighborhoods: Residential neighborhoods (not mere subdivisions) are the building blocks of the plan. They will be more urban at the east end of the site near the completed Glenn McConnell Boulevard and more rural at the west end of the site.
- 4) Connectedness: An interwoven network of traffic-calmed streets will distribute car trips, and the whole settlement should be designed as a place where neighbors will meet and come to know one another, in contrast to isolated or

introverted subdivisions.

- 5) A walkable environment: A fine-grained pedestrian and bicycle network will provide alternatives to vehicular trips. The needs of pedestrians — like shade from street trees and slow motorist speeds — must be the first consideration in every street design.
- 6) Mixed uses: A blend of appropriately-scaled commercial, employment and civic uses within the neighborhoods will provide places to walk close at hand, and capture car trips within Long Savannah for errands that might otherwise have to be handled farther away. This will save energy and help air quality, and will help manage traffic congestion, too.
- 7) Variety: A wide range of housing types at various price points should be included, catering to the region's evolving households,

which are already very diverse and growing steadily more so.

- 8) Landmarks: Important focal sites will be reserved for civic purposes and architectural anchors — buildings like places of worship, the firehouse and public institutions.

As we fine-tune the design for Long Savannah, we look forward to receiving and incorporating more input from the people who live in the area today. The goal is to ensure that this important place gets the best possible plan. The new neighborhoods, planned with your help, will have a positive impact on the quality of life in Charleston for many generations.

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