

COMMUNITY UNITY
A White Paper from the Vision Steering Committee
of the Greater Island Council
December 2020

At the core of the Vision Steering Committee's thinking about Community Unity is the notion that we want to make progress toward a more just and equitable society in our region. We want our regional society to be one in which all people have a fair shot for achieving a good life, and one in which all cultural elements of society are respected and valued.

Education, skills, individual effort and opportunity are and will remain essential elements of our conceptual thinking. We want to ensure that the playing field is level. Our region is blessed in that there are many desirable attributes already in place. Our intent is to continue the journey of improvement in our community.

We believe there are two major aspects in achieving Community Unity. One is structural, and involves, in collaboration with others, identifying and then working to remove obstacles and impediments which inhibit or preclude disadvantaged segments of our society from having a full opportunity to pursue education, economic participation, and advancement. This includes ensuring that the processes of government, business and education are such that the issues affecting each segment of society are adequately brought forth and fairly considered in reaching equitable decisions. The second major aspect is aspirational - that people on all sides of any issue will be recognized and can come together to discuss their differences in a rational, respectful and amicable manner without fear of intimidation, retribution or disparagement.

We propose that our initial efforts focus on three elements of our regional society. These are: 1) The Gullah-Geechee/Native Islander community; 2) The Hispanic-Latino community; and, 3) The underserved elements of our non-minority population. With this focus we anticipate keeping the initiative manageable while realizing the most meaningful early impacts. However, it is certainly our aim that ALL residents in ALL segments and neighborhoods of our community will be treated fairly and without discrimination, now and in the future.

Our next step will be to identify and refine a set of impactful issues and tasks which are achievable within the resources of the Greater Island Council and others in the community. We contemplate working to validate potential issues with affected segments of the community, along with groups already involved in community improvement such as community organizations, government agencies, academics and relevant businesses and professionals. We will seek support, guidance, coordination and participation with the Chamber of Commerce to ensure that our efforts are supportive of and consistent with community business interests.

While we see this as a regional initiative, we will reconcile our efforts to align with and support achievement of those elements of Our Vision and Our Plan which call for community unity, as developed by the Town of Hilton Head Island. Again, this process is intended to define and prioritize issues and tasks in support of Community Unity to be taken on by the Greater Island Council and other relevant entities. We want an agenda and work plan that is both meaningful and within the ability of the Greater Island Council and our community to achieve.

Vision Steering Committee of the Greater Island Council Initiatives Contributing to Community Unity

Continuing Works in Progress...

Complete the Highway 278 corridor project in a way that is aesthetically pleasing, is respectful of the community, and achieves the goals of reducing congestion and improving safety

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if 278 improvements permitted tourists and workers to efficiently reach their destinations, Islanders were proud of their new gateway, and affected residents were satisfied with solutions to their specific concerns?

Foster and promote the creation of historical and cultural attractions

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if visitors and residents alike were thrilled with the cultural opportunities here, and all segments of our population were proud of our history?

Fully support and implement the Parks and Recreation Plan

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if additional parks, trail amenities, and recreation assets were embraced by and attractive to all islanders?

Implement a highly coordinated and effective COVID-19 Response

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if testing, vaccines, and treatments were readily available to all Island residents and visitors, and our local response was recognized nationally for its effectiveness in fighting COVID-19?

Potential New Initiatives...

Identify economic factors and modalities which will enhance the continued viability of the Island's unique Native Islander/Gullah community

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if the opportunities and policies on Hilton Head encouraged Native Islanders to stay and allowed them to thrive?

Marshal volunteer resources to enhance educational opportunities

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if a major community effort, perhaps based on the VIM model, brought large numbers of capable volunteers into our schools to help students succeed?

Make state of the art technology available to all parts of the community

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if widely accessible connectivity attracted new business and work-from-home residents, while also improving academic performance of all students?

Create high quality affordable workforce housing

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if the Town planned and facilitated several pods of housing for employees, and in the process reduced commuter traffic, attracted and retained good employees, and gained wide recognition for the Hilton Head model for workforce housing?

Repurpose and redevelop declining commercial areas into viable community assets

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if the Town had an islandwide plan to identify blighted areas, create alternative use plans, acquire property or re-zone where appropriate, and encourage viable redevelopment that meets community needs?

Implement a sustainable plan for re-cycling and solid waste

Community Unity Aspirational Aim: What if the Town and County worked together to create a mutually beneficial waste collection and transfer system that preserved resources, protected our sensitive environment, and saved taxpayer dollars?