



Horry County Planning and Zoning Department County Council Adopted

#### INTRODUCTION TO AREA PLANS IN HORRY COUNTY

In an effort to keep pace with the changes that are occurring throughout Horry County, County Council has authorized the creation of Area Plans for a number of communities. This Plan has been developed to address a community located in eastern Horry County; the Bennett Loop Community.

Area Plans are designed to give members of the community the opportunity to discuss the direction that growth, revitalization and development should take in their area. Area Plans also allow citizens to make recommendations to County Council on how questions regarding development in their community should be approached. They can be used to cover elements of the Horry County Comprehensive Plan, such as the Land Use element, in greater detail; they can also address issues that community members feel are important which are not discussed in the Comprehensive Plan.

The Plan can then be revised and additional comments sought. Once an Area Plan has been finalized and accepted by County Council, it becomes a component of the Comprehensive Plan that may be referenced when decisions that affect the specified area are made.



## THE BENNETT LOOP COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS

At the request of Horry County Council the Planning Department has undertaken a study of the Bennett Loop Community; this Plan represents the culmination of the planning effort.

Input was solicited and received from a multitude of individuals and groups within the Neighborhood over an extended outreach period including several community meetings during calendar year 2014. During this time, a survey was conducted soliciting responses from the neighborhood. Teams from Horry County Departments including Planning & Zoning, Community Development, Police, Stormwater, and Engineering visited the community and met with the citizens during the Plan formation. From citizen responses and site visits, this Plan was developed.

#### THE BENNETT LOOP PLANNING AREA

The Bennett Loop Planning Area (Appendix A) is an unincorporated area of Horry County, just outside the City of Loris near the Twin City Airport. Bennett Loop is a County owned and maintained street, although the planning area of "Bennett Loop" also includes parcels fronting Airport Road between Bennett Loop and Trotter Ridge Road, as well as all the property on Trotter Ridge. The inclusion of properties on Airport and Trotter Ridge in this Plan is the result of shared issues that have been identified in this larger geographic context.

While the Plan is named "Bennett Loop", the planning area extends beyond the individual road.

There are 103 parcels in the Bennett Loop Planning Area totaling 153 acres. Parcels range in size from a mere 928 square foot SC Department of Transportation remnant from the US Highway 9 widening, to parcels larger than 20 acres in size. Most of the parcels (86) are over 20,000 square feet in area. The area is exclusively zoned Forest Agriculture (FA) and Single Family (MSF-20), allowing for manufactured homes (Appendix B).

The FA zoning district allows for single family dwellings, including manufactured homes on lots larger than ½ an acre. The zoning district also allows for some commercial uses including golf courses, veterinary offices, churches and farms. Parcels used for commercial activities must be greater than 1-acre in area. The MSF-20 zoning district only allows for residential uses on lots greater than 20,000 square feet. Dwellings can be site built, commonly referred to as "stick built", or manufactured. The term

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"manufactured" refers to mobile homes.

The Planning Area has a mix of both stick built and manufactured homes, the majority of which are in a state of disrepair. Dilapidation of the housing stock is apparent, although there are several instances of well-maintained homes. Nonetheless, the Bennett Loop Planning Area is considered "blighted". This designation will be discussed in detail later in the Plan.

Although Bennett Loop is called a "loop", in reality it is a dead-end street. It is not known if the road was ever intended to be a loop. It is paved and ditched on both sides, with several unimproved dirt roads gaining access to the street including SDA Church Road, Shaw Lane, and an unnamed right-of-way that is inaccessible. Shaw Lane is an easement, not a platted right-of-way, although it is maintained by the County.

Trotter Ridge is a dirt/coquina road with ditches on both sides. It is approximately 1,900 feet in length and has no roads accessing it. It is also a County maintained road.

A large recycling operation, Watt's Recycling, is located on Trotter Ridge and has been in operation for decades. Additionally, row crops are abundant throughout the community, and residents tend to small farm animals including chickens and goats.

The Bennett Loop Planning Area is home to two churches; Emmanuel Seventh Day Adventist and New Simpson Creek Holiness both are internal to and access Bennett Loop. They act as both church and places for community gathering. This Plan recommends that the churches have an expanded role within the community. The churches provide spiritual guidance for many in the community, but they can be used for secular purposes as well including neighborhood watch meetings, hosting a playground or basketball court for youth in the community, or scheduling community barbeques and hosting a community "Night Out" event.

The community cannot rely solely on Horry County Government to implement the

strategies detailed in this Plan. While some of the strategies will clearly involve County government, some do not. County government cannot form a Neighborhood Watch. County government is not the sole choice for providing a playground or basketball court. The County can't fill out the paperwork for home rehabilitation. The success or failure of this Plan hinges on the all stakeholders involved, including non-profits, citizens, and the churches.

#### **HISTORY**

Many of the parcels located in the Bennett Loop neighborhood trace back to lands once called the D.L. Gore Tract in the 1930s. Parcels of land that can be directly documented to this owner touch on all four sides of the Bennett Loop Community and are scattered throughout. Much if not all of the land that now forms this subdivision once came from the Gore Tract. The family names of Bellamy, Herring, Watts, Hughes and Grate appear on these deeds as the families who bought the Gore land. From here it can be traced that these owners continued to subdivide the land

and sell it to various owners. The name of Bennett appears on deeds of land sold by I. J. B. Herring.

As shown on older plats the main road in was called Bennett Road. Minutes from the Planning Commission show that on May 2, 1991 it was officially named Bennett Loop.

Some of the families that are still in the Bennett Loop community have had the property handed down from one generation to the next. This has left "Heirs Property" parcels with increasing property title confusion. This type of parcel prevents the owners from being able to sell the property, receive Federal Aid or obtain building permits.

#### **POPULATION TRENDS**

The United States Census Bureau lacks in-depth demographic data at the Block Group level, the smallest geographic unit that would capture statistics within the Bennett Loop Area, due to the rural location of the community. However, Staff was able to capture some demographic data from a sample of the population.

While what follows is a sample only, it begins to paint a picture of the community and its demographic characteristics.

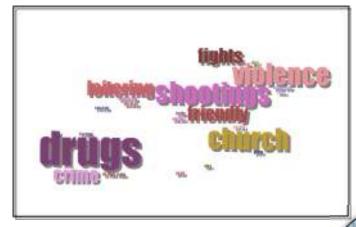
#### **BENNETT LOOP WORDCLOUDS**

A part of the survey given to the community asked three questions. From these questions, Planning staff created Word Clouds, a useful tool that gives weight to words based on the frequency in which they are used. The larger the word, the more it was used as a response to the question. The point of this exercise was to determine if the community is "on the same page". It also forces people to take an honest look at the community around them, visualizing a shared feeling about the place they live.

#### What is your community like?



### What is your community known for?



#### Describe problems that need to be fixed.



Poverty and dilapidation of the housing stock combined with criminal activity (drugs and violence) make for an environment in which citizens are not safe in their homes or the community. Nonetheless, a sense of community exists. Faith plays a large role in the lives of many, as does generational entrenchment (i.e. multiple generations of common ancestry residing in the community). These qualities lead to acts of kindness and caring. However, they are not enough to combat the negative elements that have steadily gained footing in the community,

and at this point it is crucial for the County to play a larger role in order for conditions to improve.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT OPTIONS

The Bennett Loop Planning Area falls within a Federally designated Low to Moderate Income (LMI) area. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) determines LMI areas based upon family median income. The median family income for Horry County is \$51,400. LMI areas are those locations falling below 80% of the County's median family income, \$41,850. For the Census Tract that includes Bennett Loop, the median family income is \$37,988. A map showing all LMI areas in Horry County is attached as Appendix C.

Because Bennett Loop falls within an LMI area it is eligible for Federal funding for a variety of projects within the community. Each year Horry County receives Federal funding from Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to develop viable communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and

expansion of economic opportunities, principally for low and moderate income persons. Horry County's Community Development office distributes this money to programs and projects in LMI areas through an annual competitive grant program.

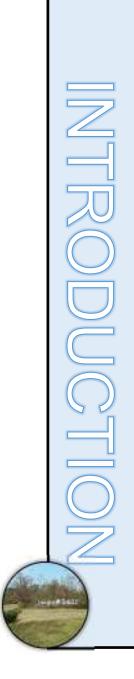
Unfortunately, CDBG money cannot be used for any major repair, renovation or upgrade of mobile and manufactured homes. This policy, mandated by a Federal government agenda that looks to replace the National mobile and manufactured housing stock with stick built homes, prohibits curing major deficiencies in these homes. Many of the manufactured homes in the Bennett Loop Planning Area are in dire need of repair and rehabilitation, however Federal policy prohibits the County from addressing any major deficiencies utilizing CDBG monies. As a result, many future repairs in the community will be little more than a "band-aid", and long term durability will remain elusive until mobile and manufactured homes are replaced.

Similar to the CDBG funding, the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) is Federal funding targeted at LMI areas and is designated for the creation of affordable housing for low income households. HOME Funds can be used for major repairs of stick-built homes and even complete replacement. These funds may provide much needed improvements to those homes within Bennett Loop that qualify. HOME Funds also provide for Elderly Transport Units (ETU's) which provide temporary housing on site for the elderly who meet the necessary requirements of the ETU program.

Another program currently utilized by the Community Development Department is the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG). This program assists citizens with finding durable and safe housing alternatives. Community Development uses this grant to subsidize housing for low income individuals currently occupying dilapidated structures. The funding is used to move individuals out of their current home and into subsidized housing so that the structure can be demolished using CDBG funding.

It must be noted however that ESG relocation will result in residents leaving the community as currently there are no rental units available that would meet the stringent requirements of the program. This is concerning from the standpoint of keeping residents in the community, although safety and security outweigh the negatives that result from dislocating residents from the community.

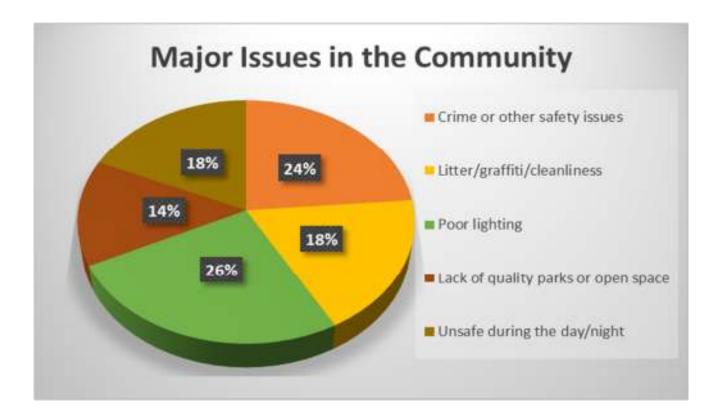
Together CDBG and HOME may allow for significant investment of money into the Bennett Loop Community, while ESG funding ensures residents have safe and durable housing.



The Bennett Loop Neighborhood Revitalization Plan addresses four broad topics:

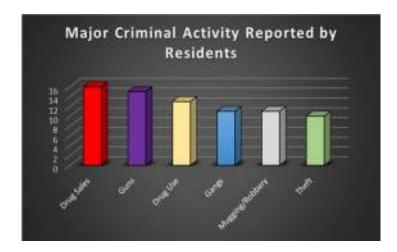
Community goals are outlined under each topic and strategies for implementing these goals are detailed in the sections that follow.

- Public Safety
- Zoning & Code Enforcement
- Housing
- Public Infrastructure



#### PUBLIC SAFETY EXISTING CONDITIONS

The first focus of this Area Plan is Public Safety. There is an ever growing threat of violence and drugs in the Community according to residents.



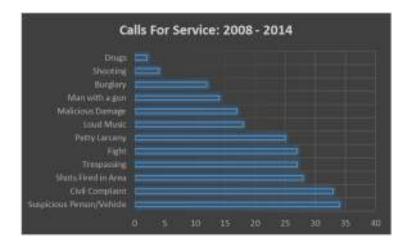
The feedback received from residents in regards to public safety is that there really isn't any. Police are responsive when called, and police drive through the area daily. However, crime happens at all hours of the day, and when police show up, it is reported that criminals scatter, only to return once the police leave.

The residents of the Bennett Area do not feel safe in their own community. Drug dealers, violence and substance abuse are a perceived threat, day and night.

Crime incident data supports the claim by residents that criminal activity is a constant in the community. While it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which gang activity (major criminal activity reported by residents) is fuelling overall criminal behavior, or whether said activity is endemic to the residential population, the call for service data clearly indicates a major criminal element exists in the community.

The neighborhood feels that they have a good relationship with the police, and that the police are respectful, helpful, fair, reliable and responsive. Responses indicate that overall the community has a positive relationship with the police. Nonetheless, there simply isn't enough policing in the community to overcome the criminal element that currently exists.

PUBLIC SAFETY



Although the primary focus of this Plan must be to address the safety of the residents of this community, a secondary objective must be to empower the residents of the neighborhood to self-police and take care of their community. To that end, public safety goes beyond policing, it also includes taking care of property and removing blight. While these issues are addressed fully in other areas of this Plan, there are strategies herein that also address the issues from a public safety standpoint.

#### **COMMUNITY GOALS**

- Increase the police presence in the Bennett Loop Community.
- Encourage more community presence to combat negative elements.
- Encourage policy decisions that make Bennett Loop a less inviting location for criminal activity.

#### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Increase the police presence in the Bennett Loop
Community.

- Increase patrols throughout the community.
- Increase drug investigations and enforcement in the Bennett Loop Community.
- Consider the installation of video cameras to assist in enforcement and prosecution of drug and violent crimes.
- Assure that a representative of the Horry County Police attend all community meetings.



Consider adding additional police staff to more fully cover the Bennett Loop neighborhood.

Encourage more community presence to combat negative elements

- Work with the community to develop a Neighborhood Watch Program focused on reporting and removing criminal and other suspicious activity from the neighborhood.
- Work with the community to organize litter cleanups to reduce the negative appearance of the neighborhood and foster community pride.
- Adopt and support the National Night Out platform for the neighborhood.
- Continue to support the efforts of the established Neighborhood Committee.
- Consider holding quarterly community meetings.
- Develop programs to celebrate neighborhood accomplishments.

Encourage policy decisions that make Bennett Loop a less inviting location for criminal activity.

- Utilize drug seizure and nuisance laws to seize and remove structures that are associated with drug and other criminal activity from the community.
- Encourage policy decisions that displace the criminal activity from the neighborhood.
- Work with private property owners to underbrush vacant lots to eliminate areas of criminal activity.
- Coordinate with the Horry County Court system to assign pretrial and probation community service workers to litter cleanup efforts.



## ZONING & CODE ENFORCMENT EXISTING CONDITIONS

within Zoning "non-conformities" exist community. Zoning non-conformities apply to uses, structures and lots. In the case of Bennett Loop, the non-conformities mostly deal with uses and structures. There are parcels within the Community that have too many structures or structures that don't meet setbacks. In the case of too many structures, subdivision of property can alleviate this problem in some instances (i.e. where multiple homes are on large lots that can legally be subdivided). These non-conforming parcels are problematic in that they create issues with building permitting and code enforcement. It is difficult to receive building permits if the lot is legal non-conforming (emergency repairs replacement are exempt). Horry County requires the parcel be compliant with zoning through the removal of structures and/or subdivision.

Abandonment of structures is also problematic for the community. In some instances, said structures were simply moved out of the way to make room for a new manufactured unit. In other cases, outright abandonment of the structure and parcel



has resulted in hollowed out buildings surrounded by overgrown vegetation. In all cases, these structures pose a threat to the property owners and the community as a whole. These structures are no longer considered homes for several reasons. First, they are unoccupied. Second, the cost to bring them up to current residential building codes exceeds the cost of replacement. They are simply dangerous structures at this point.

Abandonment has serious consequences to the value of surrounding properties,

although this community wide economic disinvestment pales in comparison to the public safety issues that abandoned structures pose. They become havens for pests, fire hazards, and places of refuge for those engaged in illicit activities. Removal of abandoned structures is a pressing issue in the community.



#### **COMMUNITY GOALS**

- Consider the enforcement of existing policies and regulations that assist the community in resolving their existing zoning nonconformities.
- Encourage Code Enforcement to coordinate efforts with the community to resolve any code violations in a manner that does not result in displacement.
- Encourage the demolition of uninhabitable structures throughout the community.



#### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Consider the enforcement of existing policies and regulations that assist the community in resolving their existing zoning nonconformities.

- Work to prevent the dislocation of residents of the community from occurring due to zoning violations.
- Encourage rezoning to residential zoning districts that match the current density of the neighborhood, while simultaneously allowing for smaller legal lot sizes.
- Encourage residents to pursue subdivision of property to achieve zoning compliance.
- Encourage the removal of multiple structures where subdivision is not a legal option.

Encourage Code Enforcement to coordinate efforts with the community to resolve any code violations in a manner that does not result in displacement.

Work with the community to identify potential code violations so that homeowners can work

- to address those problems before their homes become unsafe.
- Coordinate code enforcement with funding sources such as CDBG to address possible violations without resulting in citations or potential condemnation.
- Consider waiving or reducing permitting fees to repair homes within the community.

Encourage the demolition of abandoned structures throughout the community.

- Identify uninhabitable structures and work to remove or demolish them.
- Identify a means to fund the demolition and removal of uninhabitable structures in the community.



#### HOUSING EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Housing Element of the Horry County Comprehensive Plan, Envision 2025, makes clear that housing is essential. Housing is the basis of health and prosperity. It is usually the biggest financial investment a person makes, although the financial investment pales in comparison to the safety and security a house offers.

Many homes in the Bennett Loop Community do not meet current building codes. Although assistance programs are available to financially help residents bring their homes up to code, noncompliance with zoning may prevent them from being able to receive building permits to repair or rehabilitate their homes. There is an exception in the case of emergency repairs, but full rehabilitation and/or replacement is problematic when a parcel or structure is deemed nonconforming.

#### Do you have problems with your house?



The survey conducted with residents in the neighborhood highlighted the widespread dilapidation of the housing stock. Respondents made clear that roofs are crumbling, floors are rotting, windows are leaking, and plumbing and electrical are failing. Some of these issues constitute emergency repairs. However, a Windshield Survey conducted in June, 2014 found widespread blight as defined by South Carolina State Statute 31-10-10.

Properties were evaluated for their structural conditions, their compliance with Building and Zoning Codes as well as their layout and livability. The results of this survey showed that a third of the housing stock in the Planning Area met the "Blighted" definition of the South Carolina Community Development Law (§ 31-10-10) due to:

- Age
- Dilapidation
- Obsolescence
- Deterioration
- Below Minimum Code Standards
- Abandoned; or,
- Lacking adequate ventilation, light or sanitary facilities.

According to State definition, a "Blighted Area" is one where 5 or more of 14 factors are present in the community. That is the case with a third of the housing stock in Bennett Loop. The survey found that the majority of parcels meet the State definition for blight and/or "Conservation", which only requires 3 of 13 factors be met.



The dilapidation that is occurring in many homes is beyond the scope of emergency repair. This creates a conundrum for County government. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding is very specific in regards to emergency repair versus rehabilitation. Federal law does not allow for the rehabilitation of manufactured homes, meaning the majority of issues that residents face cannot be cured with CDBG funding. Only emergency repair work can occur...a "band-aid" approach at best. Emergency repairs cannot replace a roof, gut an interior, or replace all the fixtures. The long term solution to blight and dilapidation is

replacing the manufactured housing stock with stick-built homes, and utilizing CDBG for essential and substantial repairs to blighted stick-built homes. The Horry County Community Development Department is currently using this approach in other neighborhoods, and a strategy herein is intended to bring the programs to Bennett Loop.

Additionally, the lack of adequate legal and/or regulatory transfer of property rights has resulted in ownership issues due to the many heirs' properties in this community. Proper legal advice and the resolution of inadequate records and deeds could help solve the deadlock with many of these heirs' properties and could make lots developable for much needed new housing units. Simply put, it is in the best interests of all parties to resolve heirs' property.

Despite the issues present in some of the homes and on some of the parcels, Bennett Loop also has a number of well-kept houses and properties. These mostly stick-built homes can be found peppered throughout the community. A

challenge and goal of this Plan is to ensure that owners will continue to maintain these homes and prevent further dilapidation in the community.

Horry County has a role to play in the revitalization of the housing stock in the Community. Zoning districts may be considered which would allow for a wider variety of new housing stock without altering the density of housing currently allowed. The development of duplexes, apartments and other residential housing options may improve the likelihood of new investment within the Bennett Loop Neighborhood. Emergency repairs can occur, and rehabilitation of the stick-built homes in the community can move forward.

#### COMMUNITY GOALS

- Encourage the repair, rehabilitation, and replacement of dilapidated housing.
- Improve the quality and durability of housing stock in the Bennett Loop community.
- Resolve heirs property issues in the Benn Loop community.
- Create a Priority Investment Zone



#### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Encourage the repair, rehabilitation, and replacement of dilapidated housing.

- Coordinate CDBG and HOME funding to identify houses in need of emergency repair, essential and substantial rehabilitation, and complete replacement.
- Coordinate ESG funding to move residents into safe a durable housing, allowing for the demolition of dilapidated structures.

Improve the quality and availability of housing stock in the Bennett Loop Community.

- Encourage the development of a variety of permanent housing types in the neighborhood.
- Replace mobile and manufactured homes with more durable housing options.
- Facilitate opportunities for home ownership.

Resolve heirs' property issues in the Bennett Loop Community.

Coordinate with SC Legal Services to assist community members with their heirs' property issues.

#### Create a Priority Investment Zone

- Create a Priority Investment Zone for Bennett Loop to ensure demolished structures are not replaced with substandard housing.
- Utilize a Priority Investment Zone wherein subdivision is required in instances where multiple structures are on one lot, prior to replacement of dilapidated housing.





#### INFRASTRUCTURE EXISTING CONDITIONS

Infrastructure investment in the Bennett Loop community has fallen short over the years. There are currently no sidewalks or streetlights in the neighborhood. Stormwater systems are plagued by overgrown vegetation and garbage, with many ditches holding water at all times. Some roads remain unpaved, others are completely inaccessible. In one instance, a platted right-ofway exists to access lots off of a cul-de-sac, but access to said parcels is blocked off and the road is non-existent. There are several parcels that are landlocked, meaning legal riaht-ofno way/easement exists to access said parcels. Trotter Ridge Road is an improved coquina surface that needs to be paved. In all, infrastructure needs are apparent throughout the study area, and this Plan seeks to address deficiencies.

Infrastructure maintenance and improvements will improve the quality of life for its residents. Coordinating roadway, pedestrian and stormwater improvements would result in an

immediate positive impact to the safety and aesthetic needs of the community.

Survey responses indicate the community is interested in some form of recreational space within the neighborhood. A playground and basketball court are at the top of the list of recreation the community desires. Basketball courts and playgrounds do not have to be owned and maintained by County government, so there is an opportunity for the churches to step up and provide recreation for the community.

The majority of the stormwater issues in the community are the result poor maintenance coupled with localized blockage caused by improperly discarded debris and litter. Additionally, many of the ditches throughout the community do not drain properly, and instances of standing water are prevalent in the system. With water comes stagnation standing mosquitoes. Maintaining the existing stormwater system is crucial to curing these issues.

Bennett Loop, along with several roads internal to the community, are County owned and maintained. Additionally, Trotter Ridge Road and an unnamed access fronting Airport Road are County owned and maintained. It is imperative that regularly scheduled maintenance occur on these roads. Additionally, responses to surveys regarding the need for sidewalks was overwhelming. This Plan specifically calls for sidewalks.

A large percentage of the community walks within the neighborhood. Several survey responses indicated dangerous conditions that result due to pedestrians walking in the roadway. Vehicular speed and a lack of sidewalks in the community both need to be addressed. Streetlights would assist in low light conditions.

There is a stated desire for a school bus shelter in the community. It would also be beneficial to widen the Bennett Loop right-of-way where the school bus currently picks up and drops off students. As of the writing of this Plan, the bus must make a series of backing motions onto private property in order to turn around. This could be cured with a bubble cul-de-sac or by extending Bennett Loop from its terminus to Airport Road, thereby making it an actual loop.

A comprehensive approach to infrastructure improvements should be undertaken. Sidewalks, street trees, street lights, drainage, roads, and recreational space need to be part of a phased capital investment plan to revitalize the Community.

#### **COMMUNITY GOALS**

- Assure that adequate park and community space are provided within the Bennett Loop community.
- Provide a safe and functioning stormwater network.
- Work towards providing a road system that is complete, up to Horry County standards, and meets the needs of the travelling public.
- Provide infrastructure for pedestrians.



#### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Assure that adequate park and community space are provided within the Bennett Loop community.

Consider locating and purchasing land for a park to provide for community gatherings, a playground, and a basketball court, within the Bennett Loop community.

Provide a safe and functioning stormwater network.

- Coordinate with Horry County Stormwater Department to assure that proper drainage systems are installed and maintained within the Community.
- Assure that stormwater and proper drainage is considered in any public infrastructure project in the Bennett Loop community.
- Coordinate with SCDOT on all stormwater/drainage improvements.
- Work to resolve Heirs' Property issues to allow for proper drainage easements.

Work towards providing a road system that is complete, up to Horry County standards, and meets the needs of the travelling public.

- Coordinate with CDBG to improve roads within the community.
- Identify a long term funding source to maintain, improve, and extend the current road network.
- Consider extending Bennett Loop to Trotter Ridge Road.
- Assure that any new roads are constructed with sidewalks and street trees as a consideration.
- Consider placing a school bus shelter in the community.
- Identify a means to provide road access to all properties.
- Assure that the streets are pedestrian friendly and safe by adding sidewalks to the current road inventory.
- Install streetlights throughout the neighborhood to reduce criminal activity at night.



The Bennett Loop Neighborhood Revitalization Area



