

3.4.50 - Cultural Protection Overlay (CPO) Zone Standards

A. Purpose. The Cultural Protection Overlay (CPO) zone is established to provide for the long term protection of the culturally significant resources found on St. Helena Island. The CPO zone acknowledges St. Helena's historic cultural landscape and its importance as a center of Beaufort County's most notable concentration of Gullah culture. The Cultural Protection Overlay (CPO) District is established to preserve the rural character and to protect the cultural, natural, and historic resources on St. Helena Island.

St. Helena Island's most important cultural resource is the people themselves. While the Island's population is very diverse with residents who have been there for generations along with newcomers, St. Helena Island is home to one of the largest Gullah/Geechee communities on the southeast coast. The Gullah/Geechee people are descendants of enslaved people brought from West Africa and indigenous Americans from the Sea Islands. The historic isolation of the County's Sea Islands was crucial to the survival of this culture. This isolation created a unique culture with African roots that are clearly visible in the Gullah/Geechee people's distinctive arts, crafts, foodways, music, and language. While isolation was critical to the development of the Gullah/Geechee culture, the land and land ownership is critical to the survival of this culture into the present day. Shortly after the Civil War, many freedmen in the Sea Islands were successful in acquiring lands that were formerly located on plantations. Gullah/Geechee landowners were able to develop a self-sustaining economy based on small-scale cash crops, subsistence agriculture, and truck farming supplemented with fishing and harvesting shrimp and oysters. This land ownership remains to this day and has been critical in facilitating a stable and self-supporting community.

Beaufort County is undergoing extraordinary growth and development. Preserving the character of rural spaces in the unincorporated areas of the County promotes the health, safety, and welfare of the County's citizens. Large scale development, rapid growth, and otherwise incompatible development in rural areas can adversely affect the character of rural areas. St. Helena Island is one of Beaufort County's remaining rural spaces. It is a living, working landscape of forested lands, Gullah/Geechee family compounds, marsh vistas, family farms - large and small, and small tight-knit rural communities centered around places of worship, connected by two-lane canopy covered roads. The island is home to many historic structures, and sacred burial grounds including graveyards and cemeteries. It is one of the communities that participated in the *National Park Service's Low Country Gullah Culture: Special Resource Study & Final Environmental Impact Statement* which was published in 2005. (The study is incorporated into this Purpose statement.) As noted in the study, to talk about St. Helena is to talk about "life ways and traditions of a living culture in the Low Country and Sea Islands, a semi-tropical area filled with palmetto trees and live oaks draped with Spanish moss..." (*Low Country Gullah Culture: Special Resource Study & Final Environmental Impact Statement* p. 1) The study notes that "[t]he Gullah/Geechee story represents a crucial component of local, regional, and national history. Preserving ... Gullah/Geechee culture and its associated sites is significant to people of all racial, regional, and ethnic backgrounds and is vital to [preserving and] telling the story of the American heritage." (p.2). It is home to Penn Center, the nation's first trade, agricultural, and normal school for freedmen. The historical significance of the Penn Center area has been

formally recognized with a National Historic Landmark designation and comprises two of the four sites in Reconstruction Era National Park.

Beaufort County's 2040 Comprehensive Plan places great value in preserving the rural character of St. Helena and in continuing the natural, cultural, and historic qualities of St. Helena Island. The Comprehensive Plan identifies land development as the primary threat to the Island's rural qualities and its existing culture. It is important to note that the Comprehensive Plan supports steady incremental growth that enhances the Island's existing character and provides services and economic opportunities to the rural community. However, large-scale, rapid, and/or suburban growth, such as gated, master planned communities, golf courses and resort destinations, conflicts with the Island's character and presents the greatest threat to the character and stability of the Island community. Rapid suburban growth would not only change the character of the area and threaten the natural, cultural and historic qualities of St. Helena, it would likely bring with it disproportionate and unsustainable short and long-term demands for urban services and infrastructure and eventually lead to urbanization or suburbanization of the Island, the loss of natural qualities which have sustained generations of islanders and which has resulted in the culture and history of the Island. Therefore, the Cultural Protection Overlay District is designed to complement the underlying zoning districts on St. Helena Island by limiting large-scale development such as large master planned communities and resort destinations, that would substantially alter the rural character and natural landscape, would generate high traffic volume, and/or would otherwise be incompatible with the culture of St. Helena Island.

B. District Boundaries. The boundaries of the CPO zone on St. Helena Island are depicted on the Beaufort County Official Zoning Map. Where the CPO zone is applied, the permitted uses shall be limited to the base zoning, except where additional limitations are established within the CPO zone.

C. Site Design. Design features that restrict access to water and other culturally significant locations, and franchise design are prohibited.

D. Use Limitations. ~~The following specific uses are deemed to be incompatible with the CPO zone; and therefore, are prohibited:~~ Based upon the Purpose statement above, and in particular the National Park Service's Low Country Gullah Culture: Special Resource Study & Final Environmental Impact Statement, Beaufort County finds that golf courses, resorts, fences, beachfront development, boat landings, marinas, and the coastal population explosion are all encroaching upon and in some cases overtaking Gullah/Geechee Culture, it is the public policy of Beaufort County to protect St. Helena Island's rural, historic, and cultural heritage by prohibiting the following uses which are deemed to be incompatible with the Cultural Protection Overlay District:

Restricted Access (Gated Communities) ~~An intentionally designed, secured bounded area with designated and landscaped perimeters, usually walled or fenced, that are designed to prevent access by non-residents.~~ A residential neighborhood where accessibility is controlled by means of a gate, guard, barrier, or other similar improvement for the purposes of controlling the movement of traffic and people into

and out of the neighborhood and usually include common areas, amenities such as swimming pools, clubhouses, restaurants which are open only to residents, property owners, members and guests.

Resort This use includes lodging that serves as a destination point for visitors and designed with some combination of recreation uses or natural areas. Typical types of activities and facilities include marinas, beaches, pools, tennis, golf, equestrian, restaurants, shops, and the like. This restriction does not apply to ecotourism or its associated lodging.

Golf Course ~~This use includes regulation and par three golf courses having nine or more holes.~~ An area of land with improvements to the grounds on which the sport of golf is played. It typically consists of a series of holes, each consisting of a tee box, a fairway, the rough and other hazards, and/or a green with a cylindrical hole in the ground, known as a cup. Golf course accessory uses may include a clubhouse, restrooms, driving range, and shelters.