

Dorchester County, South Carolina

SEPTEMBER 2019

Communities across the country have opted to introduce pedestrian-oriented zoning provisions into their zoning and land use regulations to foster increased community walkability. This study identifies best practices and lessons learned in adopting and implementing New Urbanist and pedestrian-oriented zoning. Information for each community was gleaned through key informant interviews with planning officials and documentary/Internet research. Fifteen communities across the United States were selected as case studies for this project from a larger, nationwide study of pedestrian-oriented zoning; profiles were developed for 13 out of the 15 communities and are presented herein.

Current Pedestrian-Oriented Zoning Provisions

The [East Edisto Overlay \(Master Planned Overlay Area Form District\)](#), adopted in 2012, seeks to achieve a landmark pedestrian-first development in Dorchester County. What was once an underutilized pine forest used for industrial paper production is now the site of a progressive vision for responsible and forward-thinking development. The Master Planned Overlay Area Form District was influenced by the [Smart Code](#) approach to urban development which prioritizes the design and function of buildings in order to facilitate compact and walkable neighborhoods.

East Edisto is a fifty-year development agreement with growth management as a key component. The first phase of development is referred to as [Summer's Corner](#) and spans approximately 6,000 acres of the development site. Drawing upon a traditional neighborhood design that will be implemented in subsequent phases, Summer's Corner provides a small-town feel with retail, on-street parking, pedestrian-connectivity, and access to open space, all interwoven amongst clusters of front-porch adorned homes. Summer's Corner allows for other non-traditional neighborhood design patterns, such as clustered land development (CLDs) and non-clustered development patterns, however, all development patterns must include required pedestrian infrastructure.

The project developers and county officials are excited about the prospect of employing a long-standing commitment towards walkable neighborhoods while sustaining access to open space and nature. As a part of the development agreement, [thousands of acres of land have been placed in conservation](#) to protect and balance its rural character as the area develops.



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Outside of the East Edisto Overlay, the county also has other pedestrian-oriented zones such as the Neighborhood Commercial and General Commercial districts which promote mixed-uses and pedestrian infrastructure.

The Catalyst for Implementing Zoning Changes

County leaders and developers in Dorchester sought to facilitate a unique, walkable, and pedestrian-oriented development that conformed with the surrounding area. Supporting that vision, community members expressed a desire for mixed-use, multifunctional neighborhoods where amenities could be easily accessed by foot.

Perceived Impacts Since Implementing Zoning Changes

Increased Pedestrian Infrastructure

New pedestrian-oriented zones like the Master Planned Overlay Area and the Neighborhood Commercial and General Commercial Districts include connectivity requirements. As a result, parts of the county have benefitted from increased pedestrian access to multi-use pathways and exercise loops for transportation and recreation uses.

Increased Planning Interest for Walkable Communities

As the county led community meetings to update their comprehensive plan, feedback from the community showed a stated desire to see more pedestrian-oriented and walkable developments like East Edisto throughout the county. The promotion of walkable and bike accessible communities is a "high priority strategy" of the [Dorchester County 2018 Comprehensive Plan](#).

DORCHESTER DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	
Total Population	156,456
Median Household Income	\$64,148
Median Age	37.2
% Households with related children <18	31.3%
% White (non-Hispanic)	67.6%
% Black (non-Hispanic)	26.5%
% Hispanic	5.4%
Average Temperature December/July	49/78°F
Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2013-2017); The Weather Channel, 2019	

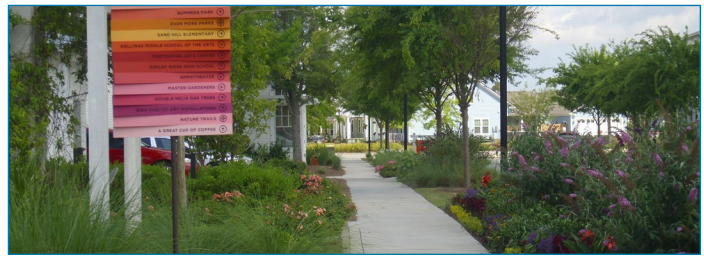


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Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Planning officials in Dorchester County identified key lessons learned in the process of adopting and implementing pedestrian-oriented zoning provisions, as well as over-arching recommendations for other communities who may wish to explore similar zoning provisions.

BENEFITS OF WARM CLIMATE

Pedestrian-oriented development features like bike paths and trails can be accessed through the winter months in Dorchester due to the warm climate in the region. From a budgetary perspective, this allows pedestrian amenities to be seen as a year-round investment.

WALKABILITY AS THE NEW DESIRED “AMENITY”

Citing national trends towards New Urbanist development, Dorchester County planners and developers recognize that the new attractive community amenity is a walkable neighborhood in proximity to daily needs, like the local grocery store, schools, parks, and restaurants. Implementing pedestrian-oriented zoning provisions will meet the changing desires of community residents.

KNOWLEDGEABLE IMPLEMENTATION STAKEHOLDERS

A critical recommendation for the implementation process of pedestrian-oriented zoning is to ensure that all stakeholders, from the developers, contractors, municipal staff, and beyond, are well-versed in the nuances of New Urbanist design principals.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THEM

Dorchester officials note that some developers in the community perceive New Urbanist development projects and form-based codes with higher infrastructure costs and more complicated development requirements. While SmartCode zoning challenges the mold of typical approaches to development and can feel unfamiliar to some development stakeholders, county leaders have consistently embraced Dorchester’s vision for responsible, pedestrian-friendly growth and continue to advocate for such projects.

Additionally, like many communities, the county has had to overcome a longstanding absence in sidewalk requirements which previously hindered community connectivity. The lack of pedestrian connections will be addressed as new zoning and land use provisions prioritize walkable community areas in the county.

Resources for Further Information

Dorchester County 2018 Comprehensive Plan

<https://www.dorchestercountysc.gov/home/showdocument?id=18969>

East Edisto Conservancy

<https://www.eastedisto.com/>

Section 11.6 Master-Planned Overlay Areas, Dorchester County Code of Ordinances

<https://www.dorchestercountysc.gov/home/showdocument?id=18816>

Summers Corner, East Edisto Phase 1 Development website

<http://www.summerscorner.com/>

Urban Regulations, Architectural Standards, and The SmartCode, DPZ Partners

<https://www.dpz.com/Initiatives/SmartCode>

SUGGESTED CITATION

A Reimann and JF Chiqui. Pedestrian-oriented Zoning in Action: A Community Snapshot-Dorchester County, South Carolina. Chicago, IL: Illinois Prevention Research Center, 2019. Available: <https://go.uic.edu/zoning-for-walkability-profile-DorchesterCounty>.